Remembering the Jewish Community of

Zabludow, Poland

Remembered by Alan Kaul

Alan Kaul's mother's mother, Shanna Szmusz (Jennie Smith), was born in Zabludow, the fifth of eight children of Julius, born about 1862, and Anna Blumberg, born about 1867. Julius was the son of Lazer and Annie Schneider, both born in Russia. Anna was the daughter of Abraham Blomberg, who was born in Russia and had 4 or 5 children. Julius Szmusz and Anna Blomberg and all their children safely emigrated to the U.S. through NYC at the turn of the 20th century.

Zabludow is located in Bialystok province, Poland. The town is located at 23.21 longitude and 53.01 latitude, and is 28 km from Bialystok. The first Jews settled in Zabludow as early as 1522. Jewish settlement in the town took root and began to develop toward the end of the 15th century. Zabludow, an important commercial center, was the venue of the meetings of the Council of Lithuania in 1664 and 1667. The Russian conquest in 1660 caused great suffering to the community. The Jewish population was 2,621 by 1897 or 68% of the total population of the town. Many were peddlers and shopkeepers. During the 19th century weaving and tanning industries developed in the town. Due to deteriorating economic conditions, many Jews immigrated to the United States and other destinations between 1905 and 1925. Zabludow became part of the Independent Polish Republic after World War I.

The Zabludow wooden synagogue, one of the best examples of its type in Poland, was likely built about 1638 of larch wood without the use of nails, and had a remarkable three-story roof. It was renovated and enlarged in 1765. It was widely considered to have a high place among the Jewish cultural treasures of Poland. Many consider the Ark of the Law to be its most beautiful feature. The ark was built of oak and pine. Its
width was 1.5 meters, and its height was 9.5 meters. Many photographs and drawings have survived. Until the 1920s, it was a local custom that when a hole appeared in the wall of the very old synagogue, it would be stuffed with an old tallit. It was considered an honor for a Zabludow Jew when his tallit was chosen to be used in this manner. The practice was banned and the tallits removed by order of the Preservation Bureau due to the increased danger of fire.

The Zabludow synagogue was burned by German Wermacht troops along with most of the town on Thursday, June 26, 1941. The last Rabbi of Zabludow was Rabbi Joachan Mirsky. He was severely beaten by German troops on one of the first days of the German occupation. He and his family were deported from the Bialystok ghetto to the Pruzany ghetto, then to Auschwitz, where they were murdered in February 1943.

In 1939, the community numbered about 2,000 Jews. During World War II, the Jews of Zabludow were mobilized by the Germans for work in the tanneries and as slave laborers on the roads. The Nazis used tombstones from the Jewish cemetery to widen the road by three times from Bialystok to Moscova. On November 2, 1942, 1400 Jews were deported to the Treblinka death camp. Four are known to have survived. Today people with roots in Zabludow live in America, Israel, Argentina, Mexico, Canada, and elsewhere. The present town population is 5,000-25,000 (2,153 in 1993) with no Jews.

Alan would like to acknowledge Tilford Bartman of Holden, MA and his Zabludow Memorial Web site. You will find a lot of information there about this community including a link to the partially translated Yizkor book. Read this story about a model of the synagogue built as a project at the Mass College of Art. Alan’s interest in the story of his family led to his membership in the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston, which just celebrated its 25th anniversary.