



80th ANNIVERSARY OF THE DESTRUCTION
OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF CHEŁM





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That I may mourn the slain day and night, daughters of my people.
(Jer. 8:23)

On November 6, 1942, the last „Action” in the Chełm ghetto began, concluding its existence. Carried out as part of the „Reinhardt” operation it ended with the deportation of thousands of Jews to the Sobibór extermination camp.

The Holocaust ended the existence of the centuries-old Jewish community of Chełm, existing since the 15th century (one of the oldest Jewish communities in Poland) and constituting half of the town’s inhabitants in the interwar period. On November 4-7, 2022, 80 years after the tragic events, we will be together again in the same place to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust.



1942 | 80th ANNIVERSARY THE DESTROY
2022 | CHEŁM'S JEWISH COMMUNITY

Organizers:

4 Floors Foundation in Chełm
Chelmer Organization in Israel
Baptist Christian Church - Church in Chełm

Event partners:

State Primary and Secondary Music School Ignacy Jan
Paderewski in Chełm
Chelmska Public Library Maria Paulina Orsetti
Museum of the Chełm Land Wiktor Ambroziewicz in Chełm
Social Committee for the Construction of a Monument Commemorating the Victims
of the Holocaust in Chełm

Honorary patronage:

Jakub Banaszek Mayor of the City of Chełm

PROGRAM

Friday – 4/11/2022

17:00 Shabbat Evening – we will welcome Shabbat with a traditional ceremony, accompanied with Shabbat songs by "Shalom Chelm" Klezmer Band.

Venue: State Music School of Chelm, 102 Hrubieszowska St.

Saturday – 5/11/2022

10:00 Traces of Memory – a walk through Jewish Chelm with Zbigniew Lubaszewski. Meeting point: Historic Kiosk "Pod Aniolami", The Łuczkowskiego Square.

15:00 Opening ceremony – "Together again" –

Survivors' testimonies.

Lecture by Dr Adam Pulawski – "Polish - Jewish relations in the 20th century in Chelm".

Music – Marek Dyjak.

Venue: Chelm Public Library, 40 Partizantow St.

Sunday – 6/11/2022

10:00 Opening of a temporary Outdoor Exhibition – "The Life and Extermination of Chelm Jews on the 80th anniversary of the liquidation of the Chelm Ghetto" – prepared by Chelm Museum.

Organizer: Chelm Museum. Author of exhibition – Dorota Bida.

Venue: Szmul Zygielboim square, Mickiewiczza 6 St.

11:00 Religious commemoration ceremony at the Jewish Cemetery.

Venue: The Jewish cemetery, Kolejowa St.

12:00 Symbolic March from the Jewish cemetery to the railway station.

13:00 Sobibor Death Camp – visit to the Sobibor museum and the camp.

Venue: Sobibor Death Camp.

Monday – 7/11/2022 – commemoration events

10:00 83 Anniversary of the first Death March Chelm – Hrubieszów – Sokal (1/12/1939).

Venue: 1 Kopernika St., near the commemoration plaque.

10:30 March of commemoration – from the commemoration plaque to the Monument for the Chelm Jews, at the former Ghetto area.

Route: Kopernika St, - Krzywa St. – Szkolna St. – Swietego Mikołaja St., – Lubelska St., – Zamojska St., – Partyzantow St., – Siedliecka St., – Poczтова St.

12:00 Official commemoration ceremony - unveiling of the Monument for the Chelm Jews, laying wreaths, candles.

Venue: 37 Poczтова St.

Meetings will be held in Polish / English

Translator - Mariusz Klimczak.

Memories that have been retained in the memory of Chełm's Jewish descendants

Shlomit Beck

FAMILY ROZENKNOPF, SAFIANLEDER

Both my grandparents from my mother's side, Ester Zajderman nee Safianleder, were born in Chełm. Both in large, traditional families, as it used to be common before the Second World War. Grandma Perla came from the Rozenknopf line, grandfather Dawid Mordko from the Safianleder family. In these two families there were no highly educated people, neither politicians, nor particularly wealthy ones. Only good, ordinary people, working hard, caring for their families and preserving traditions. When I think about my family from Chełm, I realize that it is a reflection of the Jewish community of Chełm and that the fate of the entire community can be found in it.

Perla Prostak, my grandmother's aunt, left Chełm in the 1930s for Argentina. The same goes for Froim Goldberg, my grandfather's brother-in-law, who went to Brazil to work.

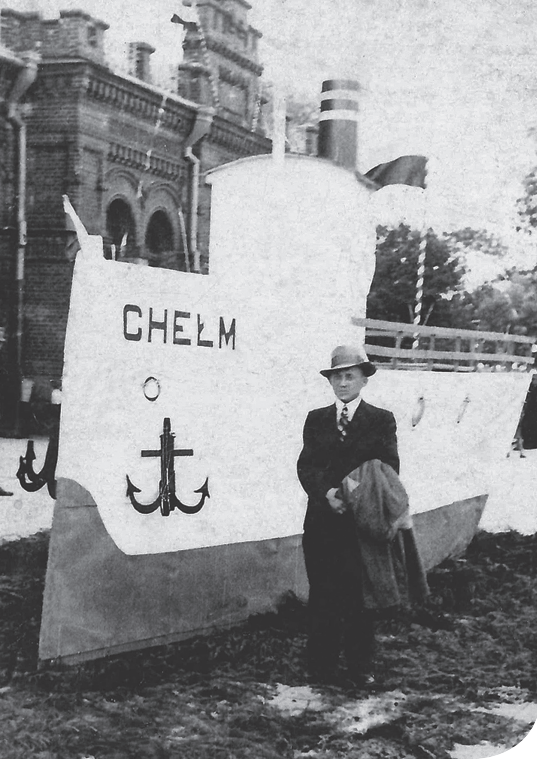
The period of war and the Holocaust begins with the story of Fajwel Rozenknopf, my grandmother's father, who at the age of 55 became the victim of the Death March of 1 December 1939. An eyewitness later said that he saw a German soldier who shot Fajwel in the back and his body, which was left lay in the bloody snow. Fajga Rozenknopf, my grandmother's grandmother, was shot while sitting on her balcony at Szkolna 13, and Eliahu Safjanleder, my grandfather's younger brother, also died from a bullet at the beginning of the war. Kalmen

Safianleder family, 1930

From the right: Ester, Sara, Jakub
Seated from the right: Elijahu, Arie Lejb
with his grandson Elias, Dawid Mordko

Collection: Shlomit Beck





Dawid Mordko Safianleder,
Chełm, 1930
Collection: Shlomit Beck

Varda Meidar

Varda Meidar belongs to the „second generation”. Her mother - Tauba Schulklaper was a Chełmwoman for many generations. She lived at Hrubieszowska Street with her parents Josef and Lea and her four siblings: Elizer, Jakob, Malka and the youngest Chil. They formed a happy family, religious and kosher. Tauba (Tola) remembered her grandmother, Szyfra née Greber Wagenfeld, who baked challah for a Shabbat dinner every Friday. They were one of the few Jewish families in the area and had good relations with their Catholic neighbors. Most of the children attended public Polish schools, with the exception of Chil, for which a private, religious Talmud-Torah school was selected. When the war broke out on September 1, 1939, Tauba was 14 years old and did not yet understand what had happened. This carefree time came to an end, the struggle for survival began. The subject of the Holocaust became the subject of the artistic works of her daughter - Varda Meidar born and living in Israel.

Wewryk, brother of my grandmother’s sister-in-law, was deported from the ghetto in November 1942 to the death camp in Sobibór. He managed to escape thanks to the organized uprising in October 1943. He joined the partisans in the forest and this is how he survived until the liberation. He left Poland in 1956. Izaak Rozenknopf, my grandmother’s younger brother, joined the Anders Army, came as a soldier to Palestine and stayed there. The history closest to me is the fate of my grandfather, grandmother and her two sisters (Leia and Chana). They escaped from Chełm with the Red Army by train to the USSR in September 1939 and miraculously survived the war. They returned to Poland in 1946, with my mother, then a 6-year-old girl, and her two younger sisters: Fajga and Masha. In 1950, they decided to emigrate to Israel. Their entire family - parents, siblings, aunts and uncles, cousins, nephews and many others - were murdered, some in the streets of the Chełm ghetto, others in the extermination camp in Sobibór.



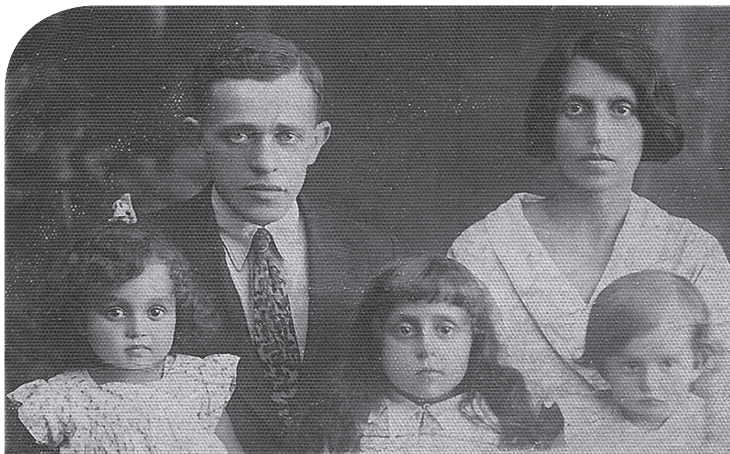
Tauba Schulklaper,
Germany, 1942
Collection: Varda Meidar

Henia Rottenberg

My mother, Rywka Mastbaum, was born on Jordana Street in Chelm in 1931. Her father Szloma, a baker by profession, and her mother Henia Mastbaum (nee Diamant) had three children besides my mother. After the fourth "Action" in Chelm, on November 6-7, 1942, in which my grandmother Henia and her children were murdered, my mother wandered alone. She did not know the fate of her father. She wandered in search of him and when she found him, they started hiding together. When it was no longer safe, her father handed her over to Mrs. Babiarz (a pre-war bakery worker). Mrs. Babiarz hid my mother in her home for about seven months! During this time Rywka looked after Babiarz's daughter, who was about five

years old. Mrs. Babiarz was unstoppable, even when the neighbors started whispering that Rywka was Jewish, or when one of them repeatedly threatened to hand her over to the Germans. One day, Mrs. Babiarz quickly put Rywka into the chest, covered it with a board, put two buckets of water on top of it, opened the door of her house and shouted to the neighbors – "come see if there's a Jew here". After this event, Mrs. Babiarz placed her daughter

in the care of one of the neighbors, and despite the danger, she continued to hide my mother. One day the Gestapo unexpectedly entered Mrs. Babiarz's house, and my mother did not have time to hide. The neighbors crowded by the windows shouting at her: "Jew". Rywka opened a back window, jumped out and managed to escape, despite the fact that the neighbors were chasing her. She hid in the field all night and returned to Mrs. Babiarz the next morning. From then on, the basement became Rywka's new hideout. Over time, even this turned out to be insufficient. The Neighbors were relentless, and Mrs. Babiarz had no other choice. She oxidized my mother's black hair, brought her clothes, and told her to run away. After that Rywka found a shelter in a convent in Rymanów-Zdrój. Using a false identity (Maria Wiśniewska) she stayed there until the end of the war, corresponding with her Polish school-friend Fredka Hadacz using her new name. In September 1946, she was brought from the convent by members of the Jewish Committee and emigrated to Palestine with a group of surviving children.



Henia (nee Diamant) and Szloma Mastbaum
with their daughters, 1939

Collection: Henia Rottenberg

Ana Mandelbaum

Mandelbaum. That was the name of my father's family. Before the war, they lived in Chełm. Unfortunately, I don't know the exact address. The attached photos show my grandfather - Toivi Mandelbaum. Apart from my father, there were three other children. My grandfather widowed at a young age and remarried a woman from the Nankin family. It was my grandmother's sister. They lived together in Chełm and Ruda Huta.

My father, Henoeh Mandelbaum, fell in love with my mother, Rachela Firer, who came from Ruda Huta. My father used to say that he would walk about 40 km to see her. They had known each other for a long time. The parents left Poland in the interwar period. My father left first and went to Cuba, soon my mother joined him.

They told me how difficult it was to live in Poland at that time. There was a lot of anti-Semitism and moreover, they were both considered members of the left, so they decided to leave the country.

During World War II, my grandmother Fradla Nankin and her family went over to the Soviet side. This is how they managed to survive (except for one of their children). My mother had a large share in getting her siblings out of the country, obtaining visas for them. After the end of the war, they returned to Poland, but not for long. Soon they all left for Israel.

The Mandelbaum families: left to right: Betty, Rachel and Heinrich (Henoeh).
Second row: Helen. Three siblings are children of Toivi Mandelbaum: Harry, Rut and Rose.
Collection: Ana Mandelbaum



Michal Shargil Ben Sira

My mother, Bilha Shargil, was born in 1934. The home-birth took place in the house of her grandmother, named Bela, in 36 Lubelska st. Three years later my mother's only sister, Zvia (Tchorz), was born. Her birth took place in my grandparents' small family house in Kolejowa st.

My Grandmother – Channa Shargel was born in Chelm to a religious family. Her father, Naftali Hersz Tepper, had a bakery where he would sell Challahs for Shabbat.

My Grandfather – Shmuel Abraham Shargel was born in Chelm, also to a religious family. His father was an accounting manager in the food warehouse of Rachel Palevski. My grandfather followed in his father's footsteps and became an accounting manager as well. He later became a tax collector for the city of Chelm.

Channa and Shmuel met in the Left Labor Zionist Movement; Shmuel was a youth guide and Chana was a young member. They fell in love and in later years gradually moved away from religion.

On September 1st, 1939, a bomb fell in the backyard of my grandparents' house on Kolejowa st., which was located close to the train station. The whole house shook and my grandparents wisely agreed that the situation was too dangerous and that they must flee from what apparently became a war zone. Thus began a long and grueling journey that consisted of 13 stops around Eastern and Central Europe, during which they wandered without a home as refugees, hungry and destitute for 8 long years until they finally arrived in Israel.

In Israel my grandparents and their two daughters - my mother and my aunt - have managed to build a new life for themselves, alongside the several family members that have survived and were reunited after the horrors of the war and the Holocaust.

And so, here I am, following the unique path left by my mother, my aunt and their parents, commemorating my family and their extended family of brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and grandparents – probably close to 120 people who stayed in Chelm and found their death in the 2nd World War, in the ghetto, as Polish soldiers, in the death march, and mainly in the Sobibor death camp.

Chana, Shmeul, Sima (cousin), Bhila, Zvia
in the back yard, at Kolejowa st, where the bomb fell
Collection: Michal Shargil Ben Sira



Sonia Elster (nee Binsztok)

I was born in 1921, the eldest child of Itta Pearlmutter and Mottle Binstock. Itta's family came from a small village near Chelm named Krobonosz, a family of peasants. Mottle's family lived in Chelm for many years. Until the beginning of the war, my life consisted of my home, family, friends, school, and a general feeling of safety. This was the golden age of the Jewish community - economically and spiritually.

About half of Chelm's population was Jewish people, most of whom occupied positions in commerce, banking and industry. Among them were Hassidic Jews, rabbis, academics, artists and politicians. Whole streets and areas were populated by the Jewish community, living in complete autonomy.

Everything changed on Friday, September the first, 1939. The loud noise of airplanes and bombs blasting around us. I ran with my younger brother to a nearby field and protected him from the bombs with my own body. When we were certain that the bombing has ended, we went back home. Buildings were destroyed and there many casualties. The very next day we left Chelm and went to gentile acquaintances who lived in a village located 40 km from Chelm. We came back home after a few days.

In the wildest imagination no one could predict what happened next. My father also did not believe that the Germans would murder innocent people. There was fear that young people will be sent to forced labor in order to assist the war efforts. My father insisted that I should leave. There was a belief that it would be a short war "blitz krig", which would end in a couple of months and then we would be able to come back. Of course, it was a terrible mistake. Together with a group of young people, among them Shmuel Elster, my partner, we crossed the border to Ukraine. That's what saved our lives. One night my father came to us and told us what happened in Chelm after we left. By the end of November 1939, the Nazis issued a statement ordering all Jewish men between the ages 16 and 60 to come to the city center. My sister Fella stopped my father from going and that is what saved his life. The men that arrived at the city center were taken to the "death march" and only few survived. Together with my father we made a plan to bring my entire family to Lobamel. Following a conversation with someone who came back from Russia, in which he told us about the difficult living conditions, poverty and hunger in Russia, my father decided to stay with the family in Chelm, a decision that sealed their destiny.

(..) We were wandering from one city to another, we were sent to labor camps in Siberia, we suffered from hunger and diseases. Towards the end of our stay in Russia, we moved to Uzbekistan, during this time we had no idea what was happening in Poland. We came back to Chelm after six long and difficult years, both physically and mentally. I met Shmuel, my husband (we got married in Siberia), and he told me the tragic story of the Jewish community in Chelm. Only then I understood the magnitude of the disaster. The "final solution" was also my private disaster. None of family members survived.

Adam Puławski

Polish-Jewish relations in Chełm in the 20th century

Let me start with the most difficult phenomenon: anti-Semitism in Chełm during the Second Polish Republic. At that time, weekly magazines appeared in Chełm, which, with varying degrees of intensity, contained texts that were unfavorable to Jews or were directly anti-Semitic in nature. In 1923 it was "The Chełm News", then in the years 1923–1932 "The Mirror" ("Zwierciadło") by Kazimierz Czernicki. At first, using anti-Semitic phraseology, Czernicki conducted - as he called it - "an economic struggle with the Jews". However, even then, "The Mirror" was convincing readers that Jews were alien, their customs and culture were alien - it immediately went beyond the paradigm of economic anti-Semitism. When Jews joined the City Council in Chełm (elections in 1927), this newspaper included purely political demands and requests: denying the right of the Jewish population to develop their national identity, calling for the so-called emigrationism or forced assimilation or exclusion of Jews from the civic community. After the collapse of the "Zwierciadło" magazine, Czernicki published the Chełm version of the nationwide weekly "Echo" entitled "Echo Chełmskie". There were anti-Semitic threads, especially in connection with the elections to the City Council in 1934. However, the leading weekly published in Chełm in Polish in the years 1933–1939 was replaced by "Kronika Nadbużańska", published by the local Sanacja community. The newspaper became interested in the Jewish community at the turn of 1935 and 1936, which was related to the election of the president of Chełm. When in 1936 the newspaper backed a new political initiative of the Sanacja, i.e. the Camp of National Unity (OZN), anti-Semitic articles began appearing in it, first related to the "repolonization" of trade, then to political ideas for resolving the "Jewish case", including a call for mass emigration Jewish population from Poland. Even in 1939, when German aggression against Poland was expected, anti-Semitic articles were still published in "Kronika Nadbużańska".

In the interwar period, anti-Semitic monographs were also published in Chełm. The author of one of them entitled "In the fight against Israel. On the sidelines of the events of the psychiatric hospital in Chełm" 1937 was Kazimierz Czernicki. Racial anti-Semitism had already appeared in it. In 1938 Czernicki published a brochure of Jan Krystyjańczuk entitled "Damned lairds". Czernicki used this story of a folk writer to propagate the myth about ritual murders committed on Polish children by Jews. He was put on trial for this. It should also be added that in the years 1929–1939, eleven anti-Semitic one-off papers were published in Chełm. Five of them were published by Kazimierz Czernicki. However, the most important one-off papers, saturated with the greatest extreme political anti-Semitism, were issued by the Chełm branch of the Association for Supporting

the Polish Ownership, i.e. the Polish Association. The photographer Marcin Kupś, who came to Chełm from West Poland in 1936, received enormous "merits" in this field. In September 1938 he published, inter alia, a one-off paper under the unequivocal title "Antisemite", where he called directly: "Down with the Jews". It seems that Marcin Kupś was, next to Kazimierz Czernicki, one of the most well-established anti-Semitic inhabitants of Chełm. After World War II, surviving Chełm Jews wrote about the latter in yizkor book: "Paper "Zwierciadło" was published by an anti-Semite, Kazimierz Czernicki". By the way, I would like to add that from 2018 we have a monument to Kazimierz Czernicki in Chełm.

Events with hidden or open anti-Semitism also took place in Chełm. One of them was an accusation in 1938 that in one of the schools in Chełm (Secondary School No. 1) "Jewish teachers taught Polish children", the other was a "scandal" in a psychiatric hospital in Chełm. In the latter case, an ordinary labour conflict was used to conduct an anti-Semitic campaign in the years 1937-1939 against the director and at the same time the Chełm councillor, Dr. Ignacy Fuhrman. In the 1930s, anti-Semitic leaflets also appeared in Chełm. Young Poles accosted Jews resting in parks or walking along the main Lubelska street. In 1937, one of the Jewish councillors in Chełm even asked the president of the city for help, because "the perpetrators unknown to him beat the Jews and chased them out of the garden." There were also cases of throwing stones at the Jewish population on the so-called Nowy Cal, a street inhabited mainly by Jews. On the other hand, the "repolonization" of the economy, that is simply economic anti-Semitism, was also reflected in everyday life. For example, some Polish cab drivers wore hats with the words "Christian carriage". The mentioned Marcin Kupś, in a one-off papers from July 1939, boasted that his company (i.e. a photographic studio) from the beginning of its operation (from 1937) had "no Jewish customer". At the beginning of 1939, the Association of Real Estate Owners in Chełm introduced the so-called Aryan paragraph - from that moment on, only Christians could be its members, and the association itself changed its name to "Christian". It is worth adding that the vice-president of Chełm, Stefan Umiński, entered the authorities of the association during this meeting. The scale of support for or professing anti-Semitic views by the Polish inhabitants of the city remains to be examined. We know that in 1938, 356 members belonged to the Chełm structures of the Association for Supporting the Polish Ownership. There is no doubt that "Zwierciadło" and other publications by Kazimierz Czernicki found many readers who shared anti-Semitic views. Likewise, readers of "Kronika Nadbużańska" probably identified themselves with the anti-Jewish views of the OZN. I would like to add that Tadeusz Tomaszewski, that is simply the mayor of Chełm, was at the head of the OZON structures in Chełm from 1937. However, it must be assumed that "Zwierciadło" and "Kronika Nadbużańska" were read not only because of anti-Semitic "inserts".

Of course, anti-Semitism in Chełm in the interwar period should be placed in the context of broad Polish-Jewish relations in the city. In spite of these circumstances, Jews were primarily able to exercise their civil rights. They won seats of councillors in local elections, their representatives sat on the Chełm City Board to mention Mordko Iwry and Abram Szajn. The latter was even a member of the Provisional City Board in the first weeks of World War II. One of the last decisions of this board, dated September 20, 1939, was to expand the number of members of the Civic Guard "to include citizens

of the city, regardless of religion or nationality." Throughout the interwar period, the Jewish population, gathered in various organizations, petitioned the city authorities in defence of their various rights. I will mention the Jewish protest letter on the renewal of the grant of subsidies to the "Talmud-Torah" religious school of June 1928. Appeals were also made by Jewish councillors. They concerned various matters of the Jewish population, as well as the city-wide ones, such as feeding poor children in schools (1935). Important personalities of the Jewish community, the aforementioned Abram Szajn and Anszel Biderman (councilor and chairman of the Jewish community in Chełm) sat in the City School Council of Chełm (although mentioned Kazimierz Czernicki was also there). These two Jews and the third Chaim Himelfarb were members of the Municipal Committee of Labour Funds in Chełm (although most of the members were Poles). The town hall also positively dealt with dozens of individual cases of Chełm Jews. There are many examples of this.

The Second World War was undoubtedly a turning point in the fate of the Jewish community in Chełm. During the so-called ghettoization, i.e. in the years 1939-1941, the Germans introduced a number of ordinances limiting the rights of Jews. In the context of Polish-Jewish relations in Chełm, I will focus on the issue of the takeover of Jewish property by the Germans. The list of real estate to be seized at the order of the Germans was prepared in 1940 by the pre-war president of Chełm, Tadeusz Tomaszewski, at that time *Der Bürgermeister*, subordinate to the German *Stadtkommissarz* (in mid-1940, Tomaszewski was shot by the Germans). The first *Treuhänder* in Chełm were advocate Stefan Baran, and from December 20, 1939, advocate Józef Wierzbowski. Later, these functions were occupied by the Germans, among them also Chełm inhabitants with German nationality (some considered to be Poles before the war). We have examples of Poles applying to takeover various Jewish properties under the German receivership. For example, in 1941, one of the parish priests in Chełm asked *Treuhänder* to demolish one of the Jewish buildings, as it blocked the view of the church. The property seized from the Jews was received by the Polish Police (Blue Police). From bricks from the demolished wall around the Jewish cemetery, the Germans built, among others, a toilet (*sic!*). Sidewalks and storm ditches were laid out of *matzevot*.

Operation Reinhardt in Chełm began in May 1942; then the Germans deported 4.3 thousand people from the ghetto to the death camp in Sobibór. In October 1942, 3,000-3,300 Jews were deported, and on November 6-15, 1942, 2,000 were deported. According to the memories of the surviving Jews, some of the non-Jewish inhabitants of Chełm welcomed the action. There are also accounts of different reactions: some observers were "on the verge of mass insanity." Based on the internal bulletin of the Home Army General Headquarters, we know that after the action some of the inhabitants took part in catching Jews in hiding. In the "Current Information" of December 2, 1942, it was written: "The so-called "Street children", whom the Germans train to become catchers, for each caught Jew such a street urchin receives 50 zlotys. Many such little criminals appeared on the streets in Chełm". The last deportations of Jews from Chełm to the Sobibór camp were carried out in January (500 people) and at the end of March 1943 (300 people), the rest were shot on the spot. Even after the complete liquidation of the Jews, some non-German institutions applied for the so-called post-Jewish property, for example by the District Dairy

Association. We also have examples in which, for example, ordinary residents of Chełm were interested in empty shops "in a post-Jewish building".

Of course, there were also the Righteous Among the Nations among the Chełm inhabitants. We have 5 Righteous.

The Jewish Committee was established here almost immediately after the liberation of Chełm by the Red Army. In August 1944, there were 150 Jews in Chełm. - as members of the committee wrote: "We are a small handful". In May 1945, there were 350 people, and after the Kielce pogrom in July 1946, 249 Jews. Contrary to popular belief, the property restitution to the Jewish population was rather easy. However, there were such bizarre cases when a Jew, after returning from the Soviet Union to Chełm, was not able to regain his property, as it became the seat of the secretariat of the communist party. In August 1945, there was a pogrom against the Jewish population in Chełm: Jews were beaten and plundered. We know that there were also murders of Jews; in 1946, there were 15 such cases in the Chełm County. At that time, the Jewish committee in Chełm informed the Provincial Jewish Committee in Lublin about the threat to the safety of the Jewish population in the city. All this meant that until the end of the 1950s, large emigration of Jews, also from Chełm, continued. In 1950, The Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ) was established, at that time one of the members of the TSKŻ in Lublin came from Chełm. The branch of TSKŻ in Chełm was established in May 1956 - there were eight people at the founding meeting. A small number of Jews survived in Chełm until the events of March 1968, when some left Chełm. Single Jews graduated from Secondary School No. 1 in 1967 and 1969.

In the years 1994-1996, on the initiative of the descendants of Chełm Jews, the Jewish cemetery was tidied up and fenced. President Chelmski made a speech at the opening ceremony.

I will end my speech with the present. In recent weeks, Szmul Zygielbojm's square has been opened in Chełm. His famous farewell letter before he committed suicide in May 1943. is muralled on the wall of a building facing the square. At the beginning of October 2022, someone added: "Poles were also murdered, you Szmul".

Gitla Libhaber

Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, File No. 301/2192

In the spring of 1942, the Germans deported Jews from the small towns round Chełm (Dubienka, Wojsławice, Siedliszcze, Sawin and others) to Włodawa. They all passed through Chełm. I saw how the Germans abused them, I saw their terrible poverty and misfortune. In Chełm rumour had it that only the working people would be able to stay here. In May 42 there was the first action. The Jewish and navy blue militia kept walking with the SS men around the apartments and taking older people, mostly Slovak Jews. The action was led by Teimer SD. The Jews were sent by train to Włodawa, but some were unloaded in Sobibór, where there was already a death camp, but we did not know about it. Letters from those who had been deported there came from Włodawa, and we were sure that they had suffered the same fate as people from small towns. Meaning that they were relocated, but we didn't think most of them went to their deaths.

Joel Ponczak

Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, File No. 302/104

Before Pesach 1942, mass deportations of Jews began. In many towns and cities around Chełm, the Jewish settlements were completely liquidated. Now it was our turn. On the last day of Pesach, the murderers liquidated the neighboring town of Rejowiec. 800 victims died in the city, and the remaining ones were taken to Sobibór. In order to avoid the slaughter, the Judenrat started negotiations with the administrative authorities. They proposed 7,000 Jewish workers for water management. The inspector of this branch, Heldhamer, gave his consent and Jewish men and women worked on drying the marshes and wet meadows around Chełm. (...) On the eve of the Shavuot holiday, the action against the Jews began. The murderers went from apartment to apartment, dragging women, children and men out. They were chased to the railway station. 300 victims died in the city. 2,000 local Jews were transported to Sobibór. Apart from them, there were also 2,000 Slovak Jews. After this action, our town looked like a cemetery. The survivors hid in various hiding places. Nobody showed up on the street. (...)

Gitla Libhaber

Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, File No. 301/2192

(...) Less than two months after the first action in July, I remember that it was Friday then, the second action suddenly broke out. It was run only by the Germans with the blue police. They took people from institutions (from the magistrate, from the Wasserwirtschaft and others). They tied them in rows of 5-6 and rushed them, beating towards Włodawa. A dozen or so people escaped on the way, the remaining ones were taken to Sobibór, no one came to Włodawa. Then we knew that they had gone to death and we knew it was wrong. (...)

WITNESSES' ACCOUNTS

HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS' TESTIMONIES

Gitla Libhaber

Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute, File No. 301/2192

In the first days of November 42, various deportations began (...) only the most required specialists are to remain in Chełm, all others will be "sent away". On November 6, Teimer himself and the SS officer Raschendorfer (he was the worst executioner of Chełm Jews) came to the apartment of those professionals who were to stay and wrote on their door with chalk that they should be left with their employees and family. Half an hour later, the SS men came and took me with everyone sparing my husband, who hid at the last minute. Neither my protests nor the reference to the writing on the door helped. They took me to the square at Kopernika Street (...). There were already several thousand Jews in the square near the Russian church. The Germans beat them with whips, killed and tortured. The walls of the church were red with blood. (...) about 6,000 Jews were taken. Many children's corpses as well as a few adult ones remained in the square. The inhabitants of Chełm stood across the street and shouted: "Good for them, long live Hitler." Carts were taking out the dead bodies. They were thrown on carts like sacks with sand. Our group was also surrounded by the SS and told to go. On the way, we met those Jews. They went to the carriages and we went to the camp at Kolejowa Street. In front of our eyes, they were loaded into wagons.

Aurelia Jaworska

Memories from Chełm in 1940-1943, File No. 302/119

A few hand grenades broke the wall, behind it a narrow corridor appeared, and in it a dozen or so people who were incredibly crowded (...), a passage to further shelters was found under the floor. During that day, the windows in our houses trembled constantly from the explosions of grenades. From almost every crumpled house, which had been emptied before - now people of terrible appearance were leaving. Women with disheveled hair, barely clothed, children barefoot, men. (...) The weak ones and those unable to walk were killed on the spot. The whole procession was headed outside the city (...). In the morning we went out into the street, every few steps there were dead bodies in pools of blood.

(...) Although the ghetto is already open, people avoid this district, it is a cemetery not only of people and houses, but part of the city with its tradition is buried here. Old books, prayer books, candlesticks stuck in the mud, smeared with clotted blood, scattered on the sidewalks and on the street (...)

Marek Dyjak

„Miriam”

The author of the text: Robert Kasprzycki

Composer: Zygmunt Konieczny

2019

Rumble, wheels rush into the steamy night. The train has entered the forest, darkness, I am calling your name in the narrow window to caress me with your taste on my lips, your whisper in my ears. Black dawn is about to come, sweetheart. I am holding your name to my lips. Our wedding was only yesterday, sweetheart. The wine, a veil, a crowd of guests. In your dance you shone as light as a whirlwind of happiness. And look - today shattered glass shines in the stony sky of stars. It's gonna be a misty dawn, my dear. I am cuddling your name, Miriam. Go to sleep, go to sleep, squint your eyes, my dear. Jasmine smells, hawthorn blooms, you were dawn, the world and my light until the very end. The bride of the night, the dawn of my day. Soon a bright dawn is going to wake up, sweetheart. I'm carrying your name in my heart.

מרים

על פסי הרכבת עם רדת ליל
בחשכת יער אפל אקרא את שמך
שמך פה נישא מהחלון הצר
ללטפני
טעמך על שפתי
לחישתך באוזני

השחר הכהה כמעט ומפציע
שמך על שפתי
רק אתמול, ביום חתונתנו
הינומת הארגמן בהקה מול הקהל
בסופת ריקוד, קלה כאושר
- וראי היום
נוצצת בשמי האבן
ככוכבי זכוכית שבורה

ובקרוב יפציע שחר ערפילי
אחבק אותך, את שמך, מרים
הרדמי, סגרי עיניך, יקירתי
ריח היסמין ריחך, פריחת העוזרר
השחר הוא עולמי ואורי
בבוא הזמן, בסוף
כלת הלילה, שחר יומי
באור השחר הבהוק, יקירתי
אשא את שמך בליבי



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