

The Jewish Hartford European Roots (JHER) project was accepting applications for educators to become Thomas J. Dodd Research Center for Human Rights fellows to study Jewish life before the Holocaust. I was honored to learn that my fellowship application had been approved. I would now have the opportunity to take a trip of a lifetime to visit and study in Eastern Europe with the eminent scholar Professor Samuel Kassow. The following is a daily blog about this trip. But first a little background on the project.

A couple of years ago the University of Connecticut Vice Provost for Global Affairs Daniel Weiner, Ph.D. envisioned a project that would focus on the European Jewish civilization that was destroyed by the Holocaust. In conjunction with Glenn Mitoma, Ph.D. the Director of Thomas J. Dodd Research Center for Human Rights at the University of Connecticut they sought out academic experts and community partners to launch a series of informative and enriching cultural programming. One of the primary goals is to convey the richness, vitality, and diversity of Jewish life so that educators, students and the community at large can get a glimpse into this world that was centered in Eastern Europe. The project strives to connect us with the everyday lives of the Jewish people, their culture, achievements, and challenges. This history is bittersweet and begs a number of large questions. Who gets to define it and what is its impact on contemporary Jewish life and the Western world? It also gives us greater insight into Jewish agency to respond to the catastrophe of the Shoah and how Nazi perpetrators used Jewish communal institutions to control and murder Jews en masse. In the following daily blog I hope to address these questions and many others.

The trip would not have been possible but for the Coppa Konover Fund. I met Jane Coppa a few years ago and learned that we had some relationships in common. I also learned firsthand about her deep seated commitment to studying Jewish life, preserving the memory of a people and culture that has given so much to human civilization, and honoring the memory of her father Simon Konover. I also had the pleasure of meeting her father Simon Konover on a couple of occasions. He was a man devoted to human rights and making this world a better place for all of its inhabitants. I am deeply grateful for their generosity and spirit to make this project a reality.

Alan Berkowitz

July 10th 2019:

The Jewish Hartford European Roots trip will visit a number of cities in Lithuania and Poland from July 15 to July 26th. Being so close to our father's home towns in present day Western Belarus (formerly Eastern Poland) my wife Lois and I thought it opportune that she join the trip and that we would then leave a few days early to visit the places of our father's youth. Both of these men survived the Holocaust in different ways under dire circumstance. Their experiences speak to the timing and randomness of death and the ability of one to resist their oppressor along a spectrum of what was possible. As with many other Survivors their experiences can only be described as extraordinary. I could write for days about their struggles for life in an area that can be described as the epicenter of the Holocaust 1941-1945. This is in no way intended to diminish the individuals and communities that suffered greatly during the War years across the vast expanses of Europe and North Africa. It is intended to identify this region of Eastern Poland as one that experienced persecution from the Soviet Union, Nazi Germany, and their neighbors that resulted in the appalling annihilation of its Jewish population. If I remember correctly Leonid Smilovitsky, Ph.D., Leonid Rein, Ph.D., and Martin Dean, Ph.D. have estimated these losses in the range of 95 to 98 percent. It should be noted that a number of these Polish citizens did survive the war as a result of Soviet deportation of Jewish leadership from September 1939 and June 1941 and those who retreated with the Soviet army as a consequence of German-Soviet war that commenced on June 22nd 1941.

This trip was intended to explore Jewish life before addressing Jewish disenfranchisement and destruction. However on arriving in Belarus it was clearly evident that separating the two would not only be difficult it would not do justice to the latter. It would also prove to be a daunting emotional challenge to make this separation as the status of Jewish memory in Belarus was suppressed by the Soviets before, during, and after the War. It included the disappearance or alteration of Jewish contributions to the communities in which they lived and even the sites where they were murdered. At this point it should be noted that a small number of dedicated individuals have worked diligently for many years with little resources or recognition to preserve and uncover the realities of Jewish life in this region. We arrived in Minsk on the July 11th and were met by one such individual who is committed to this history, our guide Alexander Biely.



We hit the ground running and made our way from Minsk towards to town of Mir. In hindsight it was an appropriate first stop in our journey that would set the tone for what we would see and experience in Belarus, Lithuania and Poland. Subsequent posts won't be as lengthy. Mir was the home of one of the most important learning centers for Jewish communal and religious leadership from the early 19th to mid-20th century. The legacy of the Mir Yeshiva continues today. It maintains its commitment to Jewish orthodoxy and the Musar (Jewish ethics) movement with Yeshivot in Jerusalem, Israel and in Brooklyn, New York. However most Jewish residents of the town of Mir did not survive the Holocaust. The Yeshiva survived through the extraordinary efforts of individuals such as Zerach Warhaftig with assistance from the Joint Distribution Committee and the unforgettable courage of Japanese diplomat (and spy) Chiune Sugihara. They assisted the entire Yeshiva student body and leadership to escape to the open city of Shanghai, China. Warhaftig would go on to sign the Israeli Declaration of Independence, serve in the Knesset (Israeli parliament), as Minister of Religions, and teach law at Hebrew University in Jerusalem.



This memorial dedicated sometime after the year 2000, located on the Mir Yeshiva building states:

“Memorial Plague In Honor Of The Righteous Among The Nation, Mr. Chiune Sugihara, A Japanese Diplomat That Saved Six Thousand Jews From the Holocaust.”

July 11th 2019, continued

Entering the town of Mir one can see the Soviet era monument to its Jewish inhabitants that were murdered at this mass grave. Notice the Red Soviet Star atop this monument to the 1,600 Jewish victims.



The inscription makes no mention that the victims were Jews. It simply states: "Here rests peaceful Soviet Citizens Murdered by the Fascists." These details are significant in that for the most part these people considered themselves Polish citizens that were occupied by the Soviets. After the War Survivors who felt themselves to be Polish or wished to exit the Soviet Union were given the opportunity to do so and repatriate with Poland. Due to Polish antisemitism and a

series of deadly "incidents" and pogroms the overwhelming majority of these Jewish individuals made their way west to Displaced Person Camps in Austria and Germany. A number of them were assisted in their flight by the Palestinian (Israeli pre-state immigration arm known as Mossad Le'aliyah Bet) and Polish Bricha movements. This monument and hundreds of others that are similar are important for a number of reasons. They speak to the fact that in most cases it is the victors of war who get to write the history of events and thus how history is preserved and committed to memory.

We thought we would round out an exceptionally long day with a visit to the Mir Castle dating to 1534 that was commissioned by Duke Jerzy Iwanowicz of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania.



We had a lovely dinner across the street from the castle at a restaurant that served traditional local fare. Alexander asked if we wished to see the cemetery and we made the short drive to see its deplorable condition. That being said there would be a couple of things to be positive about. First, the cemetery and a number of very old headstones continues to exist. As we will see later on in our trip many Jewish cemeteries were stripped of their markers for “other” uses, built upon, or made into parks. Second, shortly after our visit a group of 80 local high school students had volunteered to clear some of the brush covering the graves.

Before and After:



We were walking the small village streets of Mir around 8:30pm when Alexander made a phone call. Five minutes later a middle aged man arrived on a bicycle and opened a building that housed a museum he had established from items he had collected over the years. What we saw was remarkable for its depth and breadth of historical artifacts dating from the early Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth (1565) to the multiculturalism of the region to Holocaust era items. The photos left to right show the museum; Victor Sakiel owner of the museum, Alexander Biely our guide, and Lois. Someone had to take the picture and I was elected; the next photo is a story from Yiddish writer Solomon Naumovich Rabinovich better known by his pen name Sholem Aleichem (means peace to you). The fourth picture is a photo of an early 19th century Tartar (Muslim) prayer book; and the final photo is of a canister of fabric that was buried during World War Two. The contents were extremely valuable since the material was very scarce during the war years.



We check into our hotel while our dinner was being prepared. This hotel was actually the former main synagogue in Mir. I can honestly say that I was uneasy with the whole thing and didn't sleep well. Our room was called the "Honeymoon Suite" a notion that I considered tragically hilarious. We had a beautiful courtyard attached to our room and the access was very easy since the door leading outside barely closed and didn't lock. I woke up at around 2am and meandered around the courtyard listening to crows in the trees and the occasional barking of dogs. I couldn't clear my head of the centrality of this town and its importance to global Judaism, what life must have been like, and how the vast majority of town's people being Jews suffered humiliation, cruelty, extortion, shock, and fear before their premature death at the hands of an evil ideology.



JHER Blog day two July 12th2019

We started our day with a hearty breakfast that included some type of cabbage salad that I found delicious. Perhaps it was hundreds of years of connection to this type of food or there was simply enough of a familiarity to satisfy my American pallet. In any event we would need to fortify ourselves for a long day that would bring me to my father's home town of Voronovo (Woronowo, Polish). Both Lois and I had researched the towns of our father's birth, their history, and how they were destroyed. Every photo we have ever seen of the towns of their youth was in black and white. So too was the story of their early years as it was presented to us. Now we would be experiencing firsthand what these places looked like in color and to get a glimpse into their worlds.

Alexander had prepared a number of stops in advance which he didn't always share with us. We were so focused on getting to our family towns that we didn't bother press him on our itinerary. I was preoccupied taking in the sights and the pulse of what we had seen and experienced these past 24 hours. I had done my homework but I was not prepared for what the day would bring. My thoughts were centered on the reality that we were seeing the consequences of genocide not life as it once existed. Some movies show events in chronological order. It was clear this trip would be about flashback scenes to a time that once existed.

We finished our breakfast and went to the great Mir Yeshiva building. Half of the building is now a post office and the other half is an auto parts store. To say it was difficult to see such an important center of learning and culture reduced to the mundane would be an understatement.



Alexander told us about the story of Daniel Stein. The real life story of Oswald Rufeisen depicted in the book by Lyudmila Ulitskaya. Daniel was raised Jewish and he survives the war as an interpreter for the Germans. He has many brushes with death as he does all that he can to assist Jews and undermine the Germans. Daniel becomes a priest and eventually moves to Israel. This is how day two started. This account certainly confronted any notions of parochialism that we may have harbored.

July 12th continued

After 18 hours of travel time, an evening with the ghosts of Mir, and a lifetime of inquiry I was finally on my way to Voronovo. Our first stop would be the town of Novogradok and the Museum of Jewish Resistance. The town gained some notoriety from the movie Defiance about the Beilski Partisans based on the book by Professor Nechama Tec. What wasn't depicted in the movie is the amazing drive for survival of the Jewish prisoners of the town and their ingenuity to engineer their escape to the Naliboki forest and join the Beilski Otriad.



The photo above (left to right) shows the entrance to the Museum of Jewish Resistance that was established and curated by Tamara Vershitskaya. The photo is of Michle Sosnovski, a young girl in a Purim costume that shows her optimism and zest for life. She is a real life symbol that represents all of the Jews of Novogradok. She was murdered in 1943. The menorah in the background is fashioned to symbolize the tree of life. There are palm trees on the inlay of the menorah that were copied from the original synagogue in town and adapted by the artist was Sergie Koval. The two pictures on the right show the opening to the escape tunnel dug by the ghettoized Jews of the town. The escape took place on September 26th 1943. Two man teams dug out the humid clay to complete the tunnel over a 4 month period that was over 250 meters long and 70x70cm wide. Oxygen had to be pumped in and electric rigged up for lighting. Two hundred and twenty seven people escaped in this way including Jared Kushner's grandfather. One hundred and twenty four would survive the war. Sixty seven were killed, and the fate of the remaining 36 is unknown. The escapees then faced a perilous two day trek to get to the forest. I was overcome by the magnitude of their accomplishment under the direst of circumstances. They even had to find ingenious ways to hide the dirt from the dig from authorities. When I saw the pictures of

the faces and names on the walls I recognized a few of them and broke down in tears. My father, grandfather, grandmother, and cousins were part of the 1,200 Jews to survive the war with the Beilski Partisans. It was a remarkable accomplishment to protect and care for that many people. The next largest partisan group was that of Shalom Simcha Zorin outside of Minsk with approximately 800 people. Most partisan groups were significantly smaller numbering a few dozen people that mostly excluded women and children. On July 8th 1944 the Soviets liberated Novogrudok. The next day retreating German soldiers attacked the Beilski camp killing eight people. They were the last Beilski Partisans to fall prey to the Nazis. The amazing thing is that the Germans suffered 43 dead and many more wounded. Below is the monument to the escape tunnel at Novogrudok. Notice the two raised boxes. One is a view into the tunnel and the other is the tunnel exit.



I could have stayed in this small museum for hours. I thought our visit was over when Tamara said we have to come to her office that is located in a small museum in the center of town. When we arrived she introduced me to Leslie Bell who was visiting from New York. Leslie is the daughter of Yehuda and Lola Beilski from Novogrudok. Leslie and her cousin Aaron Bell (the youngest Beilski brother) were visiting for a reunion a few days earlier. Of course we asked to be included in any future gatherings. Tamara then asked me to sit down and she handed me a book titled "We Stood Shoulder to Shoulder." It was about the Jewish Partisans in Byelorussia from 1941-1944. In 1944 the Soviets flew in General Vasily Chernysheve better known by his

codename General Platon to coordinate partisan activity. He also renamed all the partisan groups including the Beilski Otriad. They would now be known as the Kalinin brigade and Zorin's group was renamed to Unit 106. When liberation came the Soviets attempted to interview and compile a listing of all partisans. This listing included Name, Year of Birth, Home Town or region, Brigade, and Detachment. I thumbed through the names and there they were, my father, grandfather and grandmother.

See listing below:

Berkovich Lazar Moiseyevich born 1928 (Eleazar Berkowitz son of Moses, Father),
 Berkovich Moisei Aronovich born 1898, (Moses Berkowitz son of Aaron, Grandfather),
 Berkovich Rakhil Lazarevna born 1900, (Rachael Berkowitz daughter of Eleazar,

JEWISH PARTISANS IN BELORUSSIA 1941-1945

Berkovich Benyamin Berkovich	1922	v. Nikolasy	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Berko Aizikovich	1892	Mir	Baranovichi	Chkalov	
Berkovich Boris Gdalevich	1925	Novogrudok	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Viktor Gdalevich	1914		Baranovichi	Oktyabr	
Berkovich Galina Yosifovna	1923	Gomel	Gomel	Bolshevik	Bolshevik
Berkovich Genya Berovna	1928	Iuratszhinski district	Baranovichi	Stalin	Stalin
Berkovich Genya Moiseyevna	1922	Korelichi	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich David Aronovich	1885	Radun	Baranovichi	Lenin's komsomol	Lenin's komsomol
Berkovich David Meyerevich	1913	Lida	Baranovichi	Kirov	Iskra
Berkovich Dasha Gdalevna	1913	Novogrudok	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Yeakhim Gdalevich	1921		Baranovichi	Oktyabr	
Berkovich Zalman Aronovich	1924		Baranovichi	Oktyabr	
Berkovich Izrail Yefimovich	1906	Baranovichi, from home	Baranovichi	Grizodubova	Matrosov
Berkovich Yosif Moiseyevich	1922	Korelichi	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Isaak Gdalevich	1915	Novogrudok	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Isaak Zelikovich	1913	Kopyl	Minsk	Chapayev	Ponomarenko
Berkovich Itsko Leizerovich	1926	Rubezhovich	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Kunya Mordukhovna	1913	Lida	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Lazar Volfovich	1924	Korelichi	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Lazar Moiseyevich	1928	Voronovo	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Leizer Mikhailovich	1883	Rubezhovich	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Meyer Borukhovich	1912	Novogrudok	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Mikhail Leibovich	1909	Baranovichi	Baranovichi	Leninskaya	Borba
Berkovich Movsha Mordukhovich	1923		Baranovichi	Oktyabr	
Berkovich Moisei Aronovich	1898	Voronovo	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Mordukh Girshevich	1900	Novogrudok	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Mott'ya Davidovna	1935	Lida	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Nokhim Yakovlevich	1927	Novogrudok getto	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Rakhil Yevseyevna	1910	Baranovichi, from home	Baranovichi	Kirov	Ordzhonikidze
				Grizodubova	Matrosov
Berkovich Rakhil Lazarevna	1900	Voronovo	Baranovichi		
Berkovich Samuil Meyerovich	1920	Slonim	Brest		
Berkovich Seva Borukhovich	1921	Kopyl	Minsk	Sikorski's headquarters	
Berkovich Sema Mikhailovich	1927	Minsk		Chapayev	Ponomarenko
Berkovich Taiba Moiseyevna	1902	Novogrudok	Baranovichi	detachment ? 106	
Berkovich Todis Berkovich	1911	Iuratszhinski district	Baranovichi	Kalinin	
Berkovich Khaim Davidovich	1922	Radun	Baranovichi	Stalin	Stalin
Berkovich Khaim Sholomovich	1926	Radun	Baranovichi	Lenin's komsomol	Lenin's komsomol
Berkovich Khanna Berkovich	1917	Iuratszhiki, getto	Baranovichi	Lenin's komsomol	Kotovski

Grandmother)

To say the least I was stunned and continued looking to find friends and family members. I was completely overwhelmed and it was only midmorning. I needed some time to clear my head before taking our short drive to Voronovo. Fortunately Alexander had planned a few more stops before we reached my father's home town. These

interim stops would mostly be a blur. Tamara and others believe the bold escape from Novogrudok could only have been possible where the conditions and environment were conducive for such an attempt. The Jews and Judenrat were a well-organized and cohesive group. The local population had a long tradition of cooperation with their Jewish neighbors and provided much need support. Finally the topography with its dense forests allowed partisans to operate in this region.

I am very grateful to Tamara for all of her hard work over the years to collect, preserve and educate about this important aspect of Jewish survival during the Shoah. It takes a special person to care about the heritage and memory of a people that are not one's own. She has also given me an important reminder that it is essential to communicate personal narratives when teaching about the Holocaust. Teaching students about genocide is more than facts and figures. It's about the people and their lives that intimately connects us with this history.

Below is a photo of (left to right) Lois Berkowitz, Alan Berkowitz, and Tamara Vershitskaya at the Museum of Jewish Resistance in Novogrudok, Belarus.



We had been on the move early and had done so much and it wasn't even lunch time. I was ready to take a break and have coffee somewhere. Something a bit stronger would have been ok too! But Alexander pushed us onward and I'm glad he did. We only had three and half days in Belarus and each of us were determined to make the most of it. We stopped at a small museum in the town of Iyve and viewed the monument to the four faiths, Roman Catholicism, Russian Orthodoxy, Islam, and Judaism. Western Belarus where Iyve is located was part of prewar Eastern Poland. Today demographically Poland is made up of roughly 94 percent of ethnic Poles who identify as Roman Catholic. In the prewar years Poland, and especially Eastern Poland, was made up of roughly 40 percent of other ethnic and religious minorities including various Christian faiths, Jews, Muslims, Scots, Greeks, Armenians, Germans, Czechs, Slovaks, Belarussians, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians among others. These people managed to live together despite their ethnic and linguistic differences. The photo below (left to right) show a Tartar women on her way to Friday prayers, the monument



to the four faiths, and the mural adjacent to the Iyve Heritage Museum.

We took a break for lunch and then we were on our way to Voronovo. I was somewhat apprehensive since I was unsure what we would find. The prewar town had a population of roughly 2,500 people and it was mostly Jewish. My research had turned up much about the prewar and war years but scant information about the post war period. Being located behind the Soviet "Iron Curtin" from 1945-1990 and then part of Communist Belarus I shouldn't have been surprised that little contemporary information was available about this town or what remains of its Jewish past. What I did know was that this was a town that predated the establishment of the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth (1565) and like communities all across Poland the Jews provided the

economic engine that allowed the owners of larger estates to thrive and prosper. These owners were mostly Polish Aristocrats (Magnates). However, Jews did manage estates of lesser Nobles and they even administered Church lands. The structure of the Jewish community in Voronovo was consistent with their sister communities all across Eastern Europe. They elected a Kehila (community council) that oversaw communal institutions and services; religiously they were g-d fearing, traditional and tied to the Jewish community in Vilna (Vilnius); and they would describe their native language as speaking Jewish. Many of us know this language as Yiddish. They lived in close proximity with their non-Jewish neighbors and regularly interacted with them. By the final partition of Poland in 1795 the town would become part of the Russian empire known as the Pale of Settlement and the established communal and social structures would be altered but not erased. During the 19th and early 20th century the Jews of Voronovo would become increasingly impoverished and second class citizens of Czarist Russia. Jumping to the interwar years between World War One and World War Two Voronovo would once again become part of the reestablished Poland. The Poles and Ukrainians would fight a war against the Bolsheviks (Soviets) 1919-1920 to define territory and it would wreak havoc for the Jewish communities throughout these regions. For their part the Jews attempted to remain neutral and in doing so were persecuted by all of the combatants. In Voronovo Polish Military Officers wanted to demonstrate their newly won dominance over this territory. They created false accusations against Mayor Isaac Olkenitski (Staroste) and Moshe Zhabinsky. The Mayor was a highly respected member of the community and was honored for his ability to provide for and protect the town during Russian and German occupations during WW1. Both men were quickly convicted and thrown into the street as Polish horsemen unscabbarded their sabers and cut off their heads. Mayor Isaac Olkenitski was my great great uncle. His was one of the graves that I had only seen in pictures and wanted to visit and say Kaddish (memorial prayer) to honor and memorialize this man.



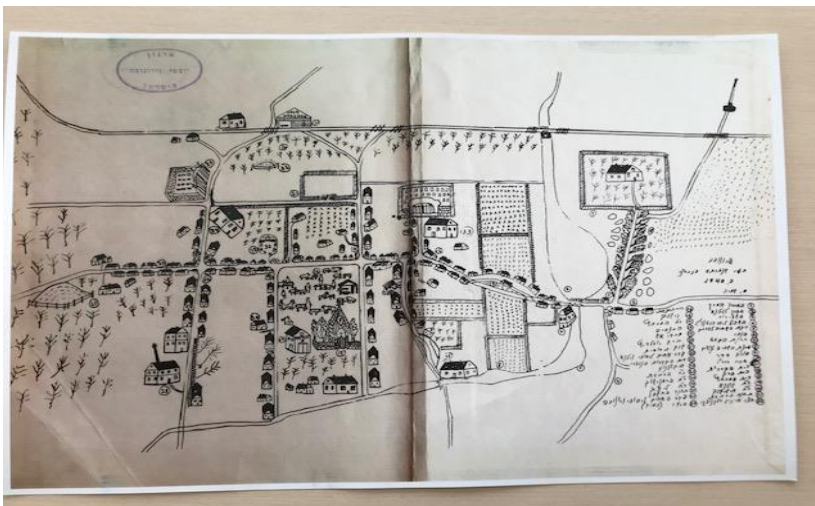
The photos above photos (left to right) are of the mass grave of 800 people murdered by the Einsatzgruppen death squads and their Lithuanian auxiliary police collaborators in early spring 1942. The middle photo shows grave of Mayor Isaac Olkenitski located in the Jewish cemetery that was adjacent to the synagogue. On the right is the mass grave of 1834 Jewish men, women, and children who were murdered by the Einsatzgruppen on May 11th 1942.

We parked the car and made our way to the library to see what we could find. The first thing to catch my eye was the market square where so much of everyday life had taken place and how it had become a place of tragedy and unimaginable brutality and suffering. As in so many of the shtetl towns the section of Jewish homes was directly adjacent to the market place. The direction of the two photos below is a little confusing. The before picture on the left would be to the 10 o'clock of the photo on the right which shows the section of Jewish homes in the background.



My grandfather's manuscript had provided a fair amount of information about the town and its history. In fact it was referenced by Martin Dean, Ph.D. about the town for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's two volume compilation of Camps and Ghettos during the War. I had read parts of the Yizkor book (memorial book) Seyfer Voronovo (Yiddish for book) written by Survivors from the town, I read some of the post war trial information about the perpetrators, and had an amazing chance meeting many years ago with Mayor Isaac Olkenitki's name sake who survived the War by being banished to Siberia. The marketplace was surrounded by plain Soviet era buildings. All I could see was a mass of humanity forced on their knees with their faces on the ground and their hands behind their backs. The days of the Nazi Aktion's where horrific scenes that rivaled the sights of a battlefield. Only the dead were not combatants they were innocent civilians who happened to be Jewish. Those who tried to escape were mercilessly torn apart by machine gun fire. Bodies littered the square and the surrounding ghetto area. People pleading for their lives and hoping upon hope that they would somehow be able to save their children. For almost a year these people were tormented by their occupiers and a number of their neighbors; they were humiliated and dehumanized by Nazi edicts, they were starved, brutally tortured and shot in cold blood; they were used and abused for slave labor; their entire community was extorted to enrich their perpetrators; and now in their final hours death would not be swift. It would be tormenting and brutal. Most remarkably as these killers went from town to town they would take pleasure in their deeds. Non Jewish men had been conscripted to dig the killing pits. They would be paid for their work by the Germans. Many other men from town volunteered to dig knowing they would be rewarded with clothing from the victims and perhaps find some hidden valuables. They would also stake their claim to Jewish

belongings and property once their owners lie dead sardine packed intertwined men with men and women with women and children. After the second massacre it was said that the ground moved for two days. Those few who were selected to “work for the Reich” would be relocated to the ghetto in Lida. Each family member that had been spared was required to prostrate themselves in front of the white glove clad KDS Security Police Commander Leopold Windisch to thank him for the honor of becoming a slave laborer of the Reich. My grandfather’s words were ringing in my head as he described the September 17th, 1943 liquidation of the Lida ghetto where its inhabitants were sent to be murdered by gas at the Majdanek concentration and death camp. “Thus perished our holy Voronovo Jewish community. May the G-d of our fathers avenge their blood!” I walked into the library with Lois and Alexander.



The staff in the library was very helpful but they didn't have a lot of information. The photos (left to right) show the outside of the library which was much more ornate than

the inside. They did have a book listing those that had perished during the war years. Listed were my great grandparents; great aunts and uncles; and many cousins. They also had some historical pictures and drawing of the Shtetl from 1944. I had seen this drawing before and it has recently been translated from Hebrew into English by the Jewishgen Yizkor Book Translation Project.

Below is the picture of the synagogue which is now a dilapidated sports club. The middle photo is the inside of the synagogue building. It is difficult to judge from the picture but if you look carefully the sides of the building are collapsing. The marketplace was to the right of the synagogue and the Jewish cemetery would be on the right across the street from the Catholic cemetery. As you can see the Jewish cemetery no longer exists along with the graves from over 600 years of Jewish existence including that of Mayor Isaac Olkenitski.



There didn't seem to be any official knowledge where the Jewish mass graves were located in this small town. So Alexander asked a few people. Some didn't have any idea what he was talking about. With a little local assistance we found both sites in short order.

In just this small town over 2,600 Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. Similar to other Soviet era memorials they don't mention that the victims were Jews, only patriotic Soviet citizens. We laid stones on the markers at both memorials to signify our visit. Tears of sadness and a mixture of emotions enveloped us as we said Kaddish for those who were known to us and especially for those who have no one to remember them. I told Alexander that I wanted to walk around the former Jewish



homes. He wasn't thrilled with the idea and tried to talk me out of it. He correctly sensed I was going to walk these Shtetl streets and discussing it with me was a waste of precious time. Alexander was simply concerned that we might have an unpleasant encounter with an occupant of one of these former Jewish homes. We could have just as easily run into someone who remembered the Jews of Voronovo or even a family member, neither happened. Lois and I went down a couple of these streets walking and wondering if we had passed my father's home.