

FOUNDATION FOR
THE PRESERVATION
OF JEWISH HERITAGE
IN POLAND



FUNDACJA
OCHRONY
DZIEDZICTWA
ŻYDOWSKIEGO

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Rymanów

THE CHASSIDIC ROUTE

Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland was established in March 2002 by the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO).

Our mission is to protect and commemorate the surviving monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland. The priority of our Foundation is the protection of the Jewish cemeteries: in cooperation with other organizations and private donors we saved from destruction, fenced and commemorated several of them (e.g. in Zakopane, Kozienice, Mszczonów, Kłodzko, Iwaniska, Strzegowo, Dubienka, Kolno, Iłża, Wysokie Mazowieckie). The actions of our Foundation cover also the revitalization of particularly important and valuable landmarks of Jewish heritage, e.g. the synagogues in Zamość, Rymanów and Kraśnik.

We do not limit our heritage preservation activities only to the protection of objects. It is equally important for us to broaden the public's knowledge about the history of Jews who for centuries contributed to cultural heritage of Poland.

One of the most important educational activities of our Foundation is the "To Bring Memory Back" program (www.pamiec.fodz.pl) directed to students, with over 130 schools from all around Poland participating in it, and the multimedia Internet portal POLIN – Polish Jews Heritage (www.polin.org.pl), meant to present the history of the Jewish communities from 1,200 places in the country.

One of the major undertakings by the Foundation is the Chassidic Route project.

More information about the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland:

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Dear Sirs,

This publication is dedicated to the history of the Jewish community of **Rymanów**, and is a part of a series of pamphlets presenting history of Jews in the localities participating in the Chassidic Route project, run by the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland since 2005.

The Chassidic Route is a tourist route which follows the traces of Jews from southeastern Poland and, soon, from western Ukraine. 20 localities, which have already joined the project and where the priceless traces of the centuries-old Jewish presence have survived, are: Baligród, Biłgoraj, Chełm, Cieszanów, Dębica, Dynów, Jarosław, Kraśnik, Lesko, Leżajsk (Lizhensk), Lublin, Przemysł, Ropczyce, Rymanów, Sanok, Tarnobrzeg, Ustrzyki Dolne, Wielkie Oczy, Włodawa and Zamość.

The Chassidic Route runs through picturesque areas of southeastern Poland, like the Roztocze Hills and the Bieszczady Mountains, and joins localities, where one can find imposing synagogues and Jewish cemeteries with gravestones dating back to the 18th, 17th or even 16th c. Many of those cemeteries have still been visited by the Chassidim from all over the world.

Within the frames of the Chassidic Route project the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland supports local authorities and non-governmental organizations to protect and promote multicultural heritage of their communities. It also stimulates establishing firm partnership between sectors in favor of the development of profiled tourism, based on Jewish cultural heritage.

The Chassidic Route gives many places the opportunity to appear on the map of tourist attractions of Poland; apart from well-known Zamość, placed on the UNESCO list of World Heritage Sites, there are many places on the Route, which are often omitted by tourists, unaware of their attractions.

We cordially invite you to join us on the Chassidic Route!

Monika Krawczyk | CEO



Why the “Chassidic Route”?

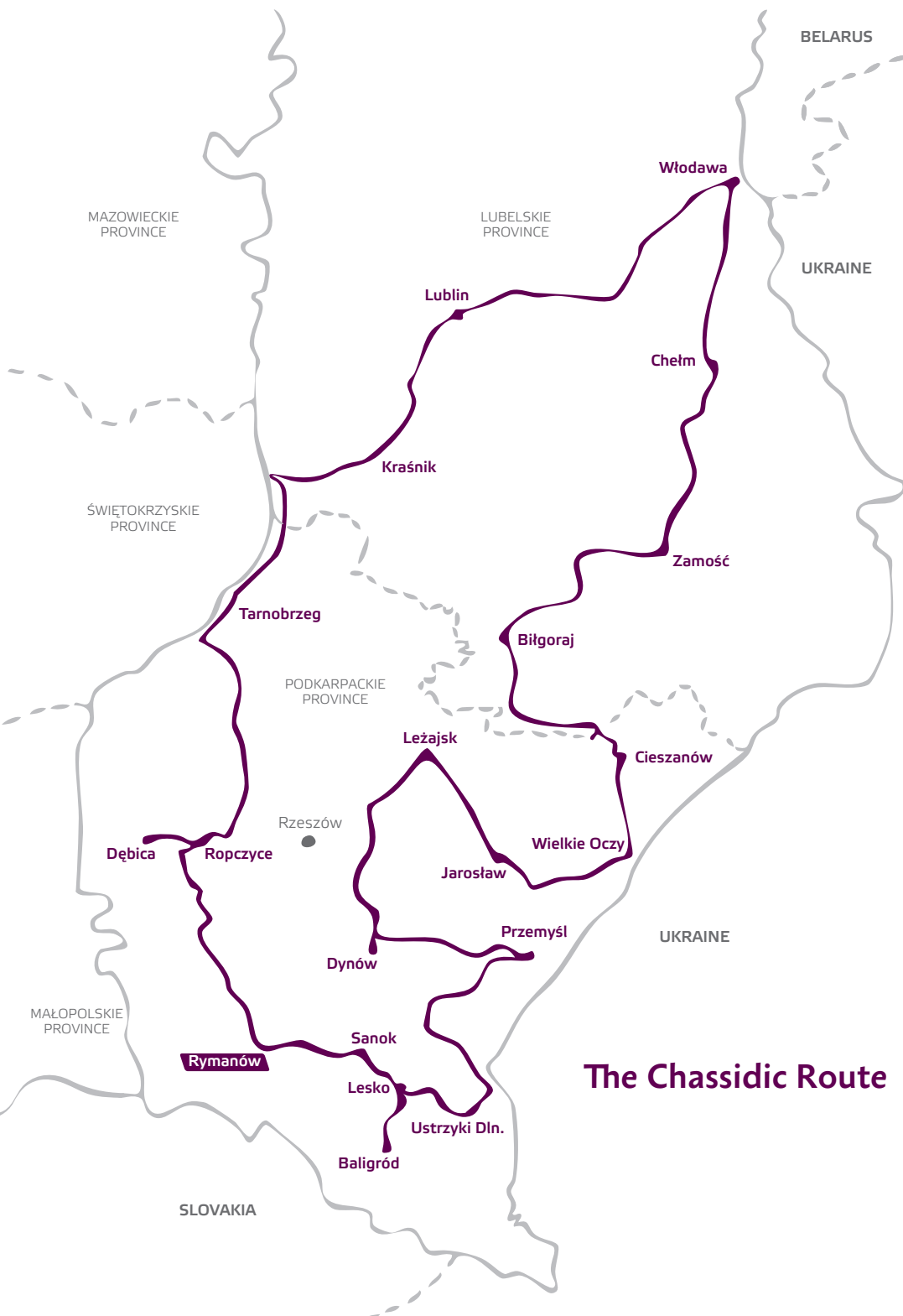
For centuries Poland used to be the homeland to many generations of Jews. An unprecedented development of Jewish culture, as well as religious thought and writing, took place in this country. Here in the 18th c. emerged Chassidism, one of the most important currents in Judaism ever. It gained particularly many supporters in eastern Poland, among others on the territories through which the Chassidic Route runs today.

It is traditionally believed that the creator of Chassidism (*chassid* stands in Hebrew for “pious”) was Israel Ben Eliezer of Międzybóž (Medzhybizh) in the Podolia region (today in Ukraine), known as the Baal Shem Tov. The Chassidim believed that religiousness could not be limited only to strict observing of orders and bans of Judaism, and even that obeying of them in a too restrictive way could distance the man from God. Therefore they strongly emphasized the spiritual dimension of religion and the emotional experience of faith.

The Chassidim gathered around the *tzadikim* (*tzadik* stands in Hebrew for “righteous”), charismatic spiritual leaders, each of whom proposed a special way of coming closer to God, concrete methods of studying of the Torah and other religious writings, as well as celebrating of rituals. In the 19th c. the rank of a *tzadik* became hereditary, which led to establishing entire dynasties of the *tzadikim*, taking their names from the towns, where their courts were located.

On an anniversary of death of a *tzadik* (*yortzeit*), the Chassidim gather around his grave with belief that on such a day the soul the *tzadik* visits the place. They pray and leave at the grave *kvitlech*, small pieces of paper with written requests. This tradition is still vivid and the Chassidim from all around the world still come to the graves of *tzadikim* in Lizhensk, Lublin, Dynów, Ropczyce or Rymanów.

There were courts of *tzadikim* in Cieszanów, Dębica, Dynów, Lesko, Leżajsk (Lizhensk), Lublin, Przemyśl, Ropczyce, Rymanów and Tarnobrzeg (or, more precisely, in nearby Dzików). The most important center of Chassidism in Poland was Lizhensk, where the famous *Tzadik Elimelech* lived. In other localities of the Route only small groups of the Chassidim, affiliated to *tzadikim* from other towns and villages, used to live. This, however, does not downgrade the appeal of the relics of Jewish heritage located there.



The Chassidic Route

The Chassidic Route – Places of Interest:

BALIGRÓD – a cemetery established at the beginning of the 18th c.

BIŁGORAJ – a cemetery established in the 19th c.

CHELM – a so called “new synagogue” from the beginning of the 20th c.; a cemetery established in the 15th c., one of the oldest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe.

CIESZANÓW – a synagogue from the end of the 19th c.; a cemetery established in the 19th c.

DĘBICA – a synagogue erected probably at the end of the 18th c.; a cemetery established at the turn of the 17th and 18th c.

DYNÓW – a cemetery from the end of the 18th c. with the grave of Tzadik Zvi Elimelech Shapiro of Dynów (1785–1841).

JAROSŁAW – two synagogues from the 19th c. and a cemetery established at the beginning of the 18th c.

KRAŚNIK – a complex of two synagogues from the 17th and 19th c.; a so called “new cemetery” established around 1850.

LESKO – a synagogue erected in the 17th c. and a cemetery from the 16th c., one of the oldest surviving Jewish cemeteries in Europe.

LEŻAJSK (LIZHENSK) – a cemetery established in the 17th c. with the grave of Tzadik Elimelech of Lzhensk (1717–1787), a place of pilgrimages of the Chassidim from all over the world.

LUBLIN – the *Yeshivat Chachmei Lublin* (the School of the Wise Men of Lublin) erected in 1930 as the biggest Jewish religious school in the world; a so called “old cemetery” established in the 16th c., with the grave of Tzadik Jacob Isaac Horovitz, called “The Seer of Lublin” (1745–1815); a so called “new cemetery” established at the beginning of the 19th c.

PRZEMYŚL – a so called “new synagogue” erected at the beginning of the 20th c.; a so called “new cemetery” established at the beginning of the 19th c., the biggest Jewish cemetery in Podkarpackie province.

ROP CZYCE – a cemetery established in the 18th c.

RYMANÓW – a Baroque synagogue and a cemetery with the grave of Tzadik Menachem Mendel of Rymanów (1745–1815).

SANOK – a synagogue of the *Yad Charuzim* society, build in the 19th c.; a synagogue erected in the 1920’s; a so called “new cemetery” established in the 19th c.

TARNOBZEG – a cemetery established at the beginning of the 20th c. with the grave of Tzadik Eliezer Horovitz of Dzików.

USTRYKI DOLNE – a cemetery established in the 18th c.

WIELKIE OCZY – a synagogue from the beginning of the 20th c.; a cemetery established in the 18th c.

WŁODAWA – a Baroque synagogue complex from the second half of the 18th c.

ZAMOŚĆ – a famous Renaissance synagogue erected at the beginning of the 17th c.; a so called “new cemetery” established in 1907.



The synagogue's condition before 2005



The synagogue's interior before 2005



The synagogue

Rymanów is a town in Podkarpackie (Subcarpathian) province (14 km from Krosno), located on the Tabor River (a tributary of the Wisłok River) and inhabited by about 3,700 people. The location deed of Rymanów was issued in 1376, when the town was called Ladislawia. The name "Rymanów" first appeared in a document from 1415.

The First Jews in Rymanów

It is estimated that Jews settled in Rymanów in the middle of the 16th c. The first known by name Jew of Rymanów was a merchant called Michał, mentioned in documents from 1562. The tax register of 1567 says that there were seven Jewish families in the town, which made an estimated number of about 40 Jews living in the town. As of 1577, eight Jewish families inhabited Rymanów. In 1589 there were 112 houses with 560 people in the town. At the time, an organized Jewish community (a kehilla) existed there, owning a synagogue and a cemetery. Jews from nearby localities were also members of that community. The earliest reference to the Rymanów synagogue dates back to 1593 and concerns the first, probably wooden building, followed by the still-existent brick one, erected presumably at the turn of the 16th and 17th c. At the time, a Jewish cemetery existed in the town as well.

Judicial documents, issued between 1591 and 1631, mention the names of 27 Rymanów Jews. Information on the Jewish community of Rymanów became more frequent in the 17th c. It says among others that from 1640, Jews were obliged to pay a special tax for building of a local parish church. Numerous sources from that time say about a very high position of Jewish merchants who traded in spices and iron imported from Hungary.

Dramatic political events, which struck Poland in the 17th c. (the Hetman Khmelnitsky uprising, wars with Sweden), strongly affected the fate of Rymanów and its Jewish residents. The scale of devastations was backed up with a diminishing number of inhabitants: as of 1648, there were 834 people and 116 houses in the town, while in 1673 – only 370 people and 41 houses. In the end of the 17th c., the Jewish community of Rymanów was forced to take out big loans secured by the properties of the kehilla, including the synagogue.

The Development of the Jewish Community in Rymanów

In the 18th c., the Jewish community of Rymanów revived and the situation of the town improved. It is worth noticing that as a result of a progressive depopulation of the town in the second half of the 17th c., the right imposed on Jews to settle only in the northwestern part of Rymanów was lifted. They were also allowed to buy and build houses in the areas previously reserved for Christians, including the Market Square. However, still up to the middle of the 18th c., the whole community had to provide for the upkeep of altars in the Rymanów church.

In 1700, the councilmen of Krosno, in defense against the competition of the Jewish merchants, prohibited Jews to enter the town and announced that killing of a Rymanów Jew would not be punished. The resolution by the townsmen of Krosno shows distinctly that the power and the importance of the Jewish merchants of Rymanów strengthened. They did not cease fighting for the opportunity to sell goods at fairs in Krosno, and omitted the resolution banning their entrance into the town by paying for the local parish. It was not until 1787 that such payments were lifted in the entire Austrian Empire (into which Rymanów was incorporated in 1772 after the first partition of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria).



The synagogue



*The cemetery with the ohel
in the background*



The interior of the ohel

As of 1764, there were 245 Jewish residents in Rymanów. The local kehilla was the third biggest community in the Sanok district, after Lesko and Dynów. The town became one of the most significant commercial centers of the region. The number of Jews in Rymanów rose up to 563 people (which made 41% of the population's total) already before the first partition.

Chassidism

At the turn of the 18th and 19th c., Rymanów became the most important center of Chassidism in the entire region of Subcarpathia, and the tzadikim of the Rymanów dynasty enjoyed common fame and respect.

The first and the most renowned tzadik of Rymanów was Menachem Mendel (1745–1815), the follower of, among others, Elimelech of Leżajsk (Lizhensk). His fame attracted not only Jews from the entire Europe, but also representatives of other religions and nationalities, as he was considered both as a wise man and a miracle-worker. The most outstanding works by Menachem Mendel (all published after his death) are: *Menachem Cijon* (a collection of sermons for Shabbat and other holidays, 1851), *Diwre Menachem* (a collection of advices by the Tzadik, edited by his student Ezechiel Panet of Karlsberg, 1863), *Torat Menachem* (a collection of instructions concerning everyday life, 1876), *Ateret Menachem* (a collection of useful advices and interpretations of the Law, 1910).

Many pupils followed Menachem Mendel, and the most outstanding were Naftali of Ropczyce (1760–1827) and Zwi Hirsch Kohen (1778–1844 or 1847). There is no information concerning the leader of the Rymanów Chassidim between 1815 and 1827; it could not be, however, a charismatic personality, as no sources about him have remained. In 1827 Zwi Hirsch Kohen became the Tzadik of Rymanów.

He enjoyed fame and respect, and the Chassidim used to call him "Hirsch the Guide". He was followed by his son Joseph Friedman, who headed the Chassidic community of Rymanów until his death in 1913. The next leader of the community was Isaac Friedman, the great-grandson of Yisroel of Ruzhyn, the founder of the Sadiger dynasty. He was the last of the Rymanów tzadikim; after he died in 1929, it was Rabbi Moshe Alter Horowitz (deceased in 1939), the great-grandson of Joseph Friedman, who became tzadik. All the Chassidic leaders of Rymanów were buried on the local Jewish cemetery.

Under Partitions

The three partitions of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria (1772, 1793, 1795) halted the development of Rymanów, due to which the town transformed from a dynamic border center of international trade into a provincial locality on the edge of the Austrian Empire. The partitions did not affect the number of the Jewish inhabitants of Rymanów in a serious way, although the entire Galicia (part of the Austrian Empire where the town was located) met a sudden depopulation of Jews (from 225,000 people before 1772 to 144,000 people in 1776). It was a result of Austrian directives, which forced many Jews to emigrate. Jews made at the time 22.3% of the population's total in the Sanok region; it was the highest rate in the whole Galicia. As of 1780, there were 1,543 people living in Rymanów, out of which 600 were Jewish.

The situation of Jews in the Austrian Empire was much more complicated than under Polish rule. New taxes were introduced (e.g. on kosher meat), Jews were also subject to compulsory enlistment into the army. They needed a permission of local authorities to get married. The ban on their settling in villages, if they were not farmers or craftsmen, was fraught with consequences. This directive harmed Jews leasing



The cemetery



The cemetery



The cemetery

inns and their employees. At the same time, the worshippers of Judaism were being urged to convert into Christianity. It is worth noticing, however, that some legal changes were favorable for Jews, like the above mentioned decree of 1787, lifting imposed charges for the opportunity of trading in the town.

In 1788, an order by Emperor Joseph II came into effect, forcing Jews to change their names into the German ones under threat of a fee or even expulsion from the Empire. One year later, following another Germanization directive by the Austrian authorities, a compulsory school with German as the lecture language was established at the kehilla in Rymanów.

Little is known about the fate of the Rymanów Jewish community in the first half of the 19th c., as only a few pieces of information on that period have remained. However, references to the town history say about numerous natural disasters and epidemics, and this may lead to the conclusion that living in Rymanów was very hard at the time. According to the census of the Rymanów Jews of 1852, they were owners of 95 out of 313 houses in the town, including 22 out of 25 houses located at the Market Square. The kehilla owned also six buildings: a synagogue, a cheder, a hospital, an asylum for the poor, a pre-funeral house and a mikvah.

Part of the directives limiting freedom of the Jewish community was lifted in the Austrian Empire in 1859. The authorities withdrew from the former need of an official permission to get married, choose a profession, be a member of a guild, or employ Christians. The constitution of 1867 gave Jews rights equal to those of the representatives of other nations and religions in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Rymanów was inhabited at the time by 2,331 people, including 1,084 Jews. There were 364 eligible voters among the town residents, however, only 127 of them were Jews.

A Jewish elementary school existed in Rymanów already in 1860. It functioned until the 1890's, when two primary schools for boys and girls were established. 1,183 Jews from four towns and 39 villages belonged to the Rymanów community in 1870, making it the second biggest kehilla of the region (after the Sanok community), and the 106th among all 237 Jewish communities in Galicia.

In the end of the 19th c., Rymanów met a period of a dynamic development and increase in the town population, which was connected with establishing of a nearby spa named Rymanów-Zdrój in 1879. In 1886, Rymanów was inhabited by 3,264 people, among them 1,391 Jews. As of 1900, the local kehilla had 2,861 members. After that, the number of the Jewish population shrank in Rymanów as well as in the entire Galicia due to the popularity of economic emigration (mainly to the United States), starting in the last quarter of the 19th c. and growing systematically until 1914.

World War I

Mobilization, announced during World War I, was valid for all the citizens of Austro-Hungary, including Jews. The war did not spare Rymanów: yet in 1915, the Russian troops plundered the town and burnt most of it. Rebuilding began almost immediately afterwards and lasted for nearly 15 years. In 1918, a group of people from nearby villages attacked Rymanów, pillaging mainly Jewish shops. After the end of the war and the rebirth of the Polish State, Rymanów found itself again on the territory of Poland. According to the census of 1921, the town was inhabited by 3,546 people, including 1,412 Jews (992 of whom declared their nationality as Polish, and 420 as Jewish).



The cemetery



The cemetery



The cemetery

The Interwar Period

After 1918, the Jewish community of Rymanów encountered a significant boom of social activity. Political parties (*Agudat Israel*, *Bund* and *Hitachdut*) started to gain supporters, numerous youth organizations and sports clubs were established, as were many other institutions: the Isaac Leib Peretz Jewish Workers Library, the Jewish Craftsmen Society *Yad Charuzim*, a branch of the Jewish Craftsmen Union in Poland, the Jewish Merchants Association, and the Jewish Cultural Society. Several dozen of Rymanów Jews, influenced by the Zionist movement, left for Palestine in 1935. The economic emigration lasted too. At the same time, views promoting the need for emancipation of the Jewish community reached Rymanów and gained many supporters there. More and more Jews resigned from the traditional clothing and sent children to lay schools.

Anti-Semitic incidents occasionally took place in Rymanów, like in all parts of Poland, throughout the whole interwar period (1918–1939). There was an action of boycotting shops run by Jews in 1938. It seems, however, that the relations between the Polish and the Jewish communities in Rymanów were relatively good, as registered anti-Semitic acts of vandalism occurred rarely. Just before the outbreak of World War II, the town was inhabited by almost 2,000 Jews.

World War II and the Holocaust

The Nazi troops entered Rymanów on September 9th, 1939. In the very first weeks of the occupation, Germans ordered Jews to leave the town and go over the San River, which was the border of the Soviet occupation zone. The majority of the Rymanów Jews left the town in those days, but part of them, having spent a few months on the territory of the Soviet Union, came back to the areas captured

by Nazis. A ghetto was established in Rymanów, to which Jews from nearby villages and part of the Jewish residents of Krosno were relocated. The number of people imprisoned in the ghetto would reach 1,600.

The Operation “Reinhardt”, the German plan of exterminating Jews in the General Government (part of the Polish territories incorporated into the Third Reich), struck Rymanów in the summer of 1942. On August 1st, all the healthy men aged from 15 to 35 were taken away to the camp in Płaszów. On August 13th, the people remaining in the ghetto (500–800 prisoners) were rounded up in the Market Square and divided into three groups. About 100 men able to labor were kept in the town, where they worked at building streets and roads for several months more. Women, children and the elder (another 100 people) were transported to a forest near Barwinek and shot. The remaining largest group was taken away to the death camp in Bełżec.

World War II brought the total extermination of the Jewish community of Rymanów. Thus, an entire era of the town history, lasting for nearly 500 years, was ended. Not only people were annihilated, but also the culture which they created. The after-war turmoil led also to the destruction of the material heritage of the Rymanów Chassidim: the court of the tzadik and the mikvah were demolished, and the synagogue suffered major damage.

Traces of Presence

Today, the synagogue (on the corner of Rynek St. and Bieleckiego St.) and the cemetery (Słowackiego St.) are the most significant mementoes of the Jewish community’s presence in Rymanów. The output

of the Rymanów religious leaders also survived World War II and their works have still been reissued and read by Jews from the entire world.

The synagogue in Rymanów was erected in the Baroque style at the turn of the 16th and 17th c. or in the beginning of the 17th c. In the northwestern edge of the building there is a small round tower, partially set into the wall of the edifice. Wall paintings with four symbolic representations of animals (a tiger, an eagle, a deer, and a lion), a view of Jerusalem and inscriptions decorate the interior. Berl Fas painted the polychromes between 1920, when a complete refurbishment of the building was carried out, and 1935, when the artist emigrated to Palestine.

During World War II, Germans plundered and closed the synagogue, and established a storeroom of the robbed Jewish properties in it. At the time of the military operations of 1944, the synagogue was subject only to some minor damage, however, after the war, the metal roofing was removed, which hastened the deterioration of the abandoned building. It was decided in 1957 that the synagogue would be demolished and dismantling of the main hall walls began, but, happily, the work stopped in the very same year. The walls of the synagogue dilapidated until 2005, when the building became the ownership of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, which started its reconstruction.

The Jewish cemetery in Rymanów was severely devastated during World War II. It was not until the 1980's that the setting of the tzadikim graves was cleaned up and new ohels were erected over them. The groups of the Chassidim started again to visit the graves of their spiritual leaders, and the number of pilgrims is getting bigger by the year.

Rymanów has recently become again the center of the Jewish life, and despite the fact that one cannot revive its prewar character, the restoration of the synagogue and frequent visits of the Chassidim have made the town reappear in the memory of the Jewish community worldwide.

Activities for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage

Thanks to the successful cooperation between the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, Jewish organizations from abroad and the local authorities, the surviving monuments of the Jewish culture in Rymanów are today in a relatively good condition. Hopefully, the remaining traces of the Jewish community will remind the future generations about the multicultural past of the town for many years.

At the time of transferring of the Rymanów synagogue to the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland in 2005, the building was in ruins, with trees growing on the top of the 17th c. walls. The Foundation, in cooperation with the Congregation Menachem Zion from New York, immediately began restoration work: until May 2005, rebuilding of the upper part of the walls was completed, the roof was reconstructed, and new windows and doors were installed. Restoration work in the interior of the building is currently being carried out. The funds for the renovation of the synagogue were raised mainly thanks to the activity of Rabbi Avraham Reich.

Thanks to the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, the synagogue of Rymanów serves again as a sacred place: its current hosts are the Chassidim gathered at the Congregation Menachem Zion, consisting of the followers of Menachem Mendel. Although there is no turning back to the times when the worshippers filled up the building of the synagogue thrice a day, the groups of the Chassidim that frequently visit Rymanów can pray again in the house of their ancestors and spiritual leaders. After the restoration work is finished, the preserved synagogue will serve for years as a house of prayers and a place of reflection.

We hope that soon there will be other activities carried out in Rymanów, aiming to remind the inhabitants and tourists about the history of Jews who for centuries co-created the social character of the town and contributed to its cultural and economic development.



← The cemetery

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