

Boyerka Lives On

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Boyerka, a small town, surrounded by tall mountains so that the road coming in runs downhill and the road leaving climbs upward.

The population – 140 families is composed for the most part, of working people. The rest draw their living from trade. It is not a town rich in material goods. Indeed, some inhabitants are very poor.

It is the self-appointed responsibility of Gershon the Schochet and certain good wives of the town to relieve the worst of poverty, at least on Sabbath. Every Friday, they go from door to door, collecting fresh chalohs and soliciting money to distribute among the poor. They do this to insure that their poorer neighbors will partake of the Sabbath feast like other Jews.

There is joy in the life of the town. It is like one large family. When one celebrates a joyous occasion, all celebrate with him. When another has troubles, all help to bear the,

World War I breaks out on August 1, 1914, and all men up the age of 35 are called up. Boyerka's share in the war effort is greater than her size would warrant. She loses many men on the fields of battle.

At home, fear lives with every family. Through three years of war, Boyerka suffers. Hunger, and the continual fear of pogroms are ever present.

Suddenly, a ray of light appears. October, 1917 - the Revolution - brings hope to the Jews of Boyerka. All the peoples of the Ukraine begin to pray that the day of brotherhood, love, and peace will finally come for all.

In a few months, the Bolsheviks are in power, and now the Civil War begins. The Jews of Boyerka - like all Jews in small towns - are victims of every bandit group that passes through the area. Every morning the sun shines on the horror of the previous night - Just murdered from the crime of being Jews.

Never will Boyerka forget the day when a band came to the town, gathered all the Jews together and drove them to a village where there was a lake called Semenovka. With coarse jests and laughter, the bandits drove everyone into the lake, shooting and shouting, "Where is your God?"

On that day a great many Jews are killed. Those who are left live in terror. Each day they prepare for death. Each night they sleep in a different house. For weeks they daily wait for death.

Finally, the day came that ended the existence of Boyerka.

The bandits came like wild demons - without any semblance of humanity. They asked no questions. Every Jew that was found was slaughtered. The streets ran with Jewish blood. Fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, all met the same death. Only the dead remained in the town when the torch was set to her dwellings.

Two heroes must be remembered. Mendel Reuben Hertz, and Leib the Rabbi's son rushed into the houses of worship to rescue the Torahs.

When this day of horrors finally ended, the few survivors came together to bury their dead. Each had to dig graves for his own beloved. It took a week before the victims were brought to their eternal rest.

Thus died the small town of Boyerka, which had endured for 300 years.

The pitiful handful of survivors decide to leave the land. They began a long wandering from one place to another. Little by little, most of them arrive in America - a land which welcomes us with open arms. For the first time, we taste the freedom we had never known.

In a short time, we of Boyerka decide to replant our town in our new homeland under the name of the Boyerker Benevolent Society. The aim would be to help all who are in need both in America and abroad.

After several years this new "town" of Boyerka in America takes its place in the forefront of Jewish organizational life.

When Israel was born, we Jews honored our vows to remember Jerusalem. With all our might we were and still are ready to help the land which is the mighty defender of all Jews.

Our Society has been enriched to two new organizations, The Boyerker Heimisch Ugent and the Boyerker Emergency Fund. Together we have the great fortune to be able to celebrate the Forty-Fifth Anniversary of the Boyerker Benevolent Society - forty five years of hard labor in defense of the Jewish people and of Israel.
