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THE HISTORY OF THE JEWS OF WIELKIE OCZY AS SEEN THROUGH POLISH EYES

Once Wielkie Oczy was a place, where people lived like brothers, irrespective of their origin or belief. One could see here the Jewish, Polish and Ukrainian children playing together in one place.

In the period between the world wars in Wielkie Oczy there were 297 Ukrainians, 768 Poles and 487 Jews living here. The mutual relations were good. There were no big conflicts. People helped each other.

Jews in Wielkie Oczy were mainly traders. For example Mr Weiss had a shop with cloths; the Giecel family, the richest in the village, traded horses and meat, they lived on the crossroad close to the old school. Both these buildings burned lately. Where we now have a bakery, there once was a tobacco shop. In the house where the Cichy family lives there was once Jewish bakery. Both Poles and Jews loved the bread and the bun-rolls that were baked there. These bun-rolls were sold at the entrance to the school. In the market place, where today stands the Niebieski Bar there once lived and worked a tailor Israel August, called Srul. Peddling was popular. The peddlers sold sewing needles and pepper.

A family of poor Jews named Budulce lived on Lukawiecka street. They were one of few Jewish families working in farming. They had a field on Lysa Gora heights. During the war they emigrated to Canada.

In 1925 a primary school was established that provided seven levels or classes. About 200 Polish, Jewish and Ukrainian children studied there. Every child attended five compulsory levels. One had to pay for the last two levels, so they were attended mainly by Jews and a small group of Poles.

My interlocutor completed all seven levels of the primary school. He attended the class together with Mr. Majus and Mr. Frenkel and the son of the rabbi. He claims that they respected each other and that no quarrels existed between them. He remembers one story from his childhood: "Once, when I played in winter with my friend I threw unintentionally a snowball in the eye of my Jewish friend. A couple of days later I got spanked from his parents."

The relations between Poles and Jews were good. Only before WWII there were some people that wrote on the fences: "Beat Jews. Who beats a Jew lives a long life", etc. There were also incidents of breaking window panes in Jewish houses.

However the real persecution of the Jewish community started when the Germans entered Wielkie Oczy. Half of the Jews escaped east before the Germans. Those who

stayed escaped to the woods or were placed in ghettos in Jaworow and Lwow.

One woman remembers the death of two young Jewish girls. "Both were very beautiful, black-haired. One day Germans came, captured them and took to the cemetery. There a hole was dug. They told them jump into the hole and buried them alive, without any mercy".

Jews were persecuted in many ways. In the market place there was a column. Jews whose children escaped eastward were bound to the pillar and beaten cruelly. The oppressors were mainly Ukrainians. In this way the tailor Srul was murdered.

Apparently, not everyone turned their back on the Jews. Some Poles helped them to hide themselves in barns and other places. My great grandfather, Michal Hawryluk, was Ukrainian. He provided a hiding place for two young Jewish girls without the knowledge of his family. When the Germans left Wielkie Oczy both girls left Wielkie Oczy with others.

The Palczak family concealed two young boys in Horysznie. Unfortunately they were captured by Germans when they left the hiding-place, and were shot. Probably also Mr Nawarol concealed some Jews without the knowledge of his wife.

After the war all Jewish survivors left Wielkie Oczy.

In Wielkie Oczy is the evidence of the enormous harm done to this nation. Only the cemetery and the synagogue remain from the rich Jewish culture that was treated so cruelly.

PS. We will never know what really happened here during the war. People, that I talk to, knew much more, but what indeed happened here in June 1941 will be never be revealed by them.