

Jews from Skępe

Before the war, approx. 250 Jews lived in Skępe. Trading and handicraft were their main occupations. I can list such craftsmen as butchers: Gutman living at Sierpecka 6, Kotlarz living at Piaski 10, Burtke living at Dobrzyńska 3, bakers: Adler Gitla – Rynek 5 and Chiel Podrygał living at Sierpecka 5, watchmaker Szpigiel living at Piaski 6, barber Goldman living at Piaski 4, tailor Więczarek living at Dobrzyńska 16 and photographer Borensztein living at Rynek 20, who stamped his photographs as follows: “artistic photography”.

We know little about the Jews from Skępe. What I especially remember are reminiscences of my mother and sister about our neighbor. It was Podrygał, the baker, who, together with his wife and 10 children, lived at a house near our house. There were no disagreements between our families. Children played with each other at the farmyard. The life was passing by peacefully. However, during the war, our neighbors, as well as many Jews from Skępe, were taken to the ghetto in Warsaw. One winter day, a several-year-old daughter (Raszka) of Podrygał's family came to Skępe. She knocked on our house's door. We were listening with emotion to her story about the horrible conditions of living in the ghetto and hunger. (Raszka) was a famished girl with lice in her hair who came from Warsaw to ask for food for her family. After spending a night at our house on two combined chairs, she took the food, according to her mother's instructions, which consisted of mixed peas and grits and hidden bread and was packed in a rag backpack. She was sure that nobody would take from her the food packed in such a way. My father accompanied her on her way to the train station and from that time on any signs of her disappeared. After the war, we did not have any information about our neighbours. That's why it was a very emotional and wonderful time when in the 80's an average height woman came to our house. It was Naomi Wasserman from Jerusalem, Podrygał's daughter. It was only her who survived the war. She came to Poland with four children on a tour to see Oświęcim, which is a cemetery for her family.

She was very touched when after about fifty years she came to her old house at Sierpecka 5. She was crying aloud while listing the names of all the members of

her family. It was as if she believed that the old walls had preserved a part of her close relatives. She was talking with my sister Irena about their joint childhood, the taste of Passover bread baked by her mother. Naomi wanted to take a memento from the past years but there was already nothing in the house. The only thing she took from Poland was the stamped number on her forearm. As a symbol of sympathy Mrs. Teresa Małkiewicz gave her a big, ornamental plate, manufactured in Włocławskie Zakłady Fajansowe. In the rim of the plate there were Hebrew words and inside was a picture of a sheaf, scythe, rake and flail.

Only a few Jews from Skępe survived the war. One of them (I don't know his surname) paid a visit to Irena Sobocińska, who gave him a school picture. In the picture was his sister. Mrs. Maria Jankowska was visited by Jew the Rywan Rywanowicz, with whom she sat at the school bench. In another town in close vicinity of Skępe there was a farmer's family who hid a Jewish child during occupation. A mother who survived by a miracle took the child after the war. Also a son of Rabin survived the war. He was friend with Antonii Kamiński living at Dobrzyńska street. At the home of Sobieckis a book entitled "Almanach gmin żydowskich" (*Almanac of Jewish Communes*) was found, and a part of the book, concerning Jews from Skępe, is included in my book (*Zyta's book*).

Only a few photographs of Jews from Skępe are left. By courtesy of our town it was possible to collect the photographs. These are mainly school photographs. They show pupils from a common school attended by children from Skępe, regardless of their origin. They are often a proof of deep friendship. This is proved, among other things, by a picture given to Zofia Czarnecka by her Jewish friend. In the picture she included an inscription beginning with the following words "Najlepszej Zosieńce" (*For the best Zofia*).

Zyta Wegner

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The book was found at Dobrzyńska street in the former flat of Rabin Józef.

[a fragment of the book “Almanac of Jewish Communes] (1938), p. 224

SKĘPE (Lipnowski district), Warszawskie province

The Jewish Commune in Skępe belongs to the youngest Jewish estate in Poland. The first information about the Commune appeared in 1852, when in Skępe the Synagogue and mikvah were built and a Jewish cemetery was formed.

The first Rabbi of the Jewish Commune in Skępe was błp. r. Abraham Naftali Herc, the author of “Bikure Naftali”. The second Rabbi was a well-known Talmudist, błp. r. Berisz Blumberg. It was his school where a lot of educated Talmudists graduated from in Poland.

When the war (WWI) broke out, many epidemics broke out in Skępe due to the march-past of many armies. One of the victims was Rabbi Blumberg. After his death, Rabbi Bencijon Blumberg took over his position. After some time he moved to Żuromin.

When a new bill of the Republic of Poland on Jewish Communes came into force, an election to the management board took place. Four members made the management board. After receiving opinions from the Jewish population, the new management board elected Rabbi błp. r. Jechiel Halewi Zontag, who, despite his young age, received general recognition among the whole Jewish community. After his death, the new management board responsible for managing the Commune, chose a well-known Talmudist, Josef Gelernter, was elected as Rabbi and who has

stayed at his position until now and is considered a spiritual, social and religious leader of Jews in Skepe. Thanks to his skills and devotion to work in all aspects of life, Rabbi Gelernter achieved great recognition and the gratitude among the whole Jewish population in Skepe, regardless of their political convictions. Also the activities of a member of the management board, Abraham Jicchak Cydkiewicz, were very beneficial and useful.