

## Appendix 1

### History of Nemirov: Factual and Anecdotal



I have not searched in libraries for published materials, that is the scholarly sources pertinent to the history of Nemirov. The truth is, I am not interested in presenting a history of Nemirov from remote times past down to the present in the late twentieth century. The history of Nemirov which concerns me, and you too, is a history that reaches back to the early 1800s. It is not a history based on archival or printed sources subjected to scientific criteria and skeptical scrutiny. It is, instead, an oral history the sources of which are the living memory of my forebears conveyed to me and which I now transmit to you.

The land and the history of Nemirov in Russian Podolia is the stage setting, the mise-en-scene so to speak, where the protagonists of this memoir of memories have had their moment on the stage. It is in Nemirov, government or province, goobehnyia, of Podolia, where the oral history I relate took place from about 1815 to about 1910 or so.

The oral history begins with some recollections of my maternal grandmother's grandmother dating from the early nineteenth century, during the time of Tsar Nicholas I, and ends in the first decade of the twentieth century when all the members of both my mother's and my father's immediate, nuclear, families had left Nemirov for good and were living in New York.

It is mainly for "academic reasons" that I outline, quite briefly indeed, the history of Nemirov in general terms, from before the nineteenth century, especially of the dreadful times in the seventeenth century when almost all the Jews of Nemirov were annihilated by the murderer Bogdan Chmielnicki, OKhmelneetsky. What happened after the my mother's and my father's families left Nemirov during the first decade of this century, is not directly pertinent to the stories I related in the chapters above. In other words, the history of Nemirov for me begins with the stories of my grandmother's grandmother who remembered how little Jewish boys were kidnapped during the time of Nicholas I beginning in 1825 or so. The story ends with the arrival in 1905 of my mother's mother, Sooreh Dintsyeh, and the rest of the children and also, in the same year, with the arrival of my father, followed by his father, my grandfather Yahnkel Bahlaboos, about a year later and then, finally, by the arrival of the rest of the family about 1906-07 at the latest.

The history of Nemirov and Podolia I give below, that is the setting where the oral history unfolds, is derived entirely from two published sources. The first source I relied on is the 11th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. XXI, "Payne to Polca," published in 1911, the article, "Podolia," p. 875; and in the same 11th edition, vol. 5, "Chaoun to Chatelaine," published in 1910, the article "Chmielnicki, Bogdan," pp. 257-58.

The reason I used such an "old source," doubtlessly outdated if I were interested in present-day conditions, is precisely because it is out-of-date and treats of matters no longer relevant today. But it is most relevant, indeed, for my purposes because it deals with matters contemporary with the time that both my mother's and father's families were still living in Russia.

I missed out on a very important source for the history of Nemirov with information dating from the time of my parent's departure for America. In the summer of 1959, while in New York before embarking for Spain, I went to O'Malley's second-hand bookstore on Fourth Avenue to buy a guide book of Spain. While in the store, I chanced upon a copy of Baedeker's *Russia* dated from about the turn of the century. I, of course, read the entry on "Nemirov" and was struck with the fact that the city had slightly less than 6,000 inhabitants and that more than 50% were Jews. The price was \$10 which I could not afford having to pay as much for the Spanish guide book. I have regretted ever since not buying that Baedeker, especially now when it is so difficult to find maps of Tsarist Russia where Nemirov appears.

The second source for the information given below— *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem: Keter Publishing Co., Ltd., vol. 12, pp. 946-47, article "Nemirov;" vol. 5, pp. 479-83, article "Chmielnicki." Also articles; "Kiddush Ha Shem," Heller, Yom Tov Lipmann; Nahman of Bratslav— are more recent sources and has material of contemporary import, especially what happened in Nemirov and to its Jewish inhabitants under the Nazi terror in the Second World War.

Unless otherwise specified, all citations regarding Nemirov and Podolia below date from before the First World War. The use of the present tense, therefore, is not anachronistic.]

My personal comments about the facts I cite from the sources mentioned above, are enclosed between square brackets preceded and followed by two asteriks, thus \*\*[...]\*\*.

Podolia is located on the west bank of Dniester River and borders with Bessarabia.

\*\*[As a child I heard many stories how easy going the people (Jews of course) of Bessarabia were. Their favorite dish was *mamaliga*, corn meal, with a soft sharp cheese called *brindzeh*, something like Italian Parmigiana. My mother served *mamaliga* quite often, especially during the summer. She always boiled the yellow cornmeal with some sugar in addition to salt. We ate it hot with melted butter and with either cottage cheese or farmer cheese. I also heard quite frequently that the best wine consumed in Nemirov came from Bessarabia, actually not distant and just across the Dniester River. Very good grapes, plums, melons and fruit in general also came from Bessarabia.

\*\*[My maternal grandmother, Sooreh Dintsyeh was especially fond of cantaloupes, *dihnyeh* in Yiddish. She often ate cantaloupe with bread. And

my father was an expert in the selection of watermelons, *vawdermelyon* as he would pronounce it. Back in Nemirov watermelons were very popular, *hahrbooz*, and as a young boy my father acquired a strong liking for them. During the summer months he frequently would bring home a huge and succulent watermelons traditionally sold by Italian vegetable and fruit vendors either in front of their stores or from wagons as they canvassed the neighborhood in East New York where we lived at the time. Cherries, apples, pears and plums were all part of my parents' diet when they were children in Nemirov. My father would jokingly relate that in America one was advised not to swallow the pits when eating cherries to avoid getting appendicitis. But in Nemirov one ate cherries including the pits and one never got appendicitis. Curiously enough, apples did not seem to be as common as melons and other fruit. My father was especially fond of pears, as am I, as a matter of fact. Plums were especially plentiful in Nemirov.

\*\*[My paternal grandfather, Yahnkel Bahlaboos, as a public service to neighbors and friends, not, only supplied the planks on which to roll out the matzos for Passover, but also had a number of enormous copper cauldrons in which pitted plums were slowly cooked, literally in their own juice to make jam, *pawdvihdleh*, which was eaten all winter smeared on bread and washed down with scalding hot tea from the samovar. When we lived on Essex Street, my mother and father not only pickled cucumbers, tomatoes and cabbage for the winter, but my mother also prepared a good store of *pawvidleh* which I remember eating with good "corn bread" as a snack with a glass of milk on arrival from school in the afternoon. Malvina's grandfather Sender, as I have related above, was an expert in the production of prunes which he made by drying the plums he used to buy from the farmer while still in blossom on the trees.]\*\*

According to the article in the EB [Encyclopedia Britannica], Podolia is rather low-lying country. \*\*[My father always spoke of the area around Nemirov as being flat. When he drove out to California in 1932 or so, he felt at home on the plains in the mid-west with wheat fields stretching as far as the horizon.] There Are some low hills in Podolia, the highest of which is about 185 feet. The Bug River [der Beeg in Yiddish] runs parallel to the Dniester.

\*\*[I used to assume that the Bug River ran past or through Nemirov because a body of water was frequently mentioned in some of the stories I heard. For example, my paternal grandmother, Bahsyeh, fell through the ice in the dead of one winter when she was a young girl with the result that the fingers of both her hands remained curled up as if frozen all her life. Also, the members of the Zionist and/or revolutionary club held secret meetings, Zionism was proscribed by the Tsar, out in the middle of a body of water— I always thought it was a lake— in boats where they would sing Zionist and also revolutionary songs without fear of being overheard by the police. These meetings took place during my father's childhood, probably in the

1890s. I once mentioned something about the Bug River being in Nemirov to which he replied, "S'iz nisht doo keyn Beeg in Nemirov." There is no Bug River in Nemirov.

\*\*[This bit of information that the Bug River was not in Nemirov left me confused. I suppose I might search out a large scale map of the area and see just where the Bug runs and if it does indeed not run through or by Nemirov. Perhaps a tributary of the Bug runs by Nemirov. The problem rests on the fact that the Yiddish word *takh* is used for lake and for river. A small stream is called a *reetchkeh*, very likely a Russian or Ukrainian word.

\*\*[The story of the priest and holy water drawn from a cross cut in the ice leaves me wondering whether a frozen river or a frozen lake was the source of the holy water for use in the church. The story is as follows: One winter the priest (a Russian orthodox priest, a *gawlekh* as opposed to a Roman Catholic, a *k'sawnyts*) cut a cross in the ice from which to draw holy water only to find it had been defiled with human excrement. The Jews of Nemirov may have been amused and at the same time awed by the daring of the scoundrel who had committed such a sacrilegious act, but still feared government retribution against the whole Jewish community. If they laughed, it was in private and with *yahstehrkeh's*, convulsions. It was boded about this must have been a prank of Boorikh Yakhets, a framing carpenter, *plawtrnyk*, and the town "shtahrker" who once beat up a young Ukrainian, a Vahskyeh by name, to a pulp when he got drunk and started shouting "Bahreh Zheedee" (kill Jews). Vahskyeh was very careful afterwards, drunk or sober.]\*\*

At an rate, according to the EB article, the Bug River runs parallel to the Dniester in a high valley and so has some rapids which are made use of to run some flour mills.

\*\*[There was a *gehweer* (rich man, magnate), Doovid Finkel by name, who owned a flour mill, (or was it a sugar mill ?) in Nemirov. He was a very stern man of whom it was said he hung one of his daughters who had fallen in love with a *shygehts*, non-Jewish man or boy. I believe the ballad about Khahnstyeh composed and sung in Nemirov, the words of which I included some where above, dealt with this story. Whether the story is true or not that Doovid Finkel killed his own daughter rather than see her marry a gentile, he must have been a man who was feared more than respected. At least, so it seemed to me when my mother or my grandmother repeated the story. How cruel he must have been to hang (murder) his own child! Intermarriage was extremely rare, and frowned on to say the least. Conversion to Christianity was viewed as the worst sort of betrayal of one's family, but even worse because it was also a cowardly and treasonable act of joining the enemy against *Kol Israel* (the Jewish people).

\*\*[The conversion of Christians to Judaism was not unknown in Nemirov. According to my father, there was a neighborhood in Nemirov inhabited solely by families of *gerim*, converts. He often mentioned one highly respected woman whom used to refer to as *dee gerkeh*, the convert.]\*\*

The soil of Podolia is perhaps the most fertile in all of Russia, the famous black soil, *tchnawmyeh zhawm*, as my father pronounced it, the "chernozem" soil dubbed by agricultural scientists and geologists. About fifteen per cent of the area of Podolia is also covered with forests.

\*\*[My grandfather Yahnkel Bahlaboos used to buy undressed timber or logs which he then had sawn into various sizes for use as construction lumber. The lumber was then stacked in the yard behind the house to air-dry, to season, sometime for a few years, especially oak which was used for floors and for furniture. My father used to earn some spending money sawing logs for a lumber merchant at the rate of "finif kopkes a shnit," five kopeks a cut.

\*\*[He sometime would get a job from an painter of church icons to prepare a panel for him. This was a most painstaking job. The panel would be made of three or more plies of small strips of extremely well-dried, knot-free oak glued together with hot glue and held in a vise until set. The plies of strips would be laid at right angles to each other to make sure the finished panel would not warp. After the panel was firmly set and the strips bonded so that the panel was solid and even stronger than a simple board, the surface was planed smooth and delivered to the icon painter. Icon painters were very poor. It took a very long time to paint an icon, months and months my father told me. No matter how much the artist was paid for his work, he never earned enough to compensate him for the time spent in producing the painting. My father used to say of the icon painter "Er ehst awf a gawntzen khawzer eydehr ehr makht a gawt." He eats up an entire pig before finishes making a god.

\*\*[Is it not an irony then, that a Jewish carpenter's son painstakingly prepared the oak panels for the creation of Christian icons and that his father, a boss-carpenter-builder, constructed village churches, the crosses of which were set in place by a Jewish tinsmith?]\*\*

In 1906 the population of Podolia was 3,543,700, most of which was "Little Russian," Ukrainians. Poles numbered 3-1/2 per cent and Jews 12 per cent. There were some Armenians, Germans and 50,000 Moldavians.

\*\*[Moldavians were apparently considered to be uncouth people, judging from the fact that if someone was gross and vulgar and cruel and violent he was referred too as a "Mawldahvahn" or a Mawldahvahntichk.]\*\*

The city of Tulchin (Tooltcheen) according to the EB was the seat of an archbishop and a center for propaganda.

\*\*[The author of the EB article does not say what type of propaganda, but since he mentions the archbishop, I suppose it was religious propaganda. Time and time again I hear that there was a "stoop" (an obelisk or a tall pillar) in Tooltcheen. It must have been an Egyptian obelisk, probably installed there when Podolia was under Turkish domination from 1672 to 1699. It was usually called "der

Tooltcheener stoop," the Tulchin pillar or post. To be referred to as a "Tooltcheer stoop" meant that one was tall, that is as tall as the obelisk in Tulchin.]\*\*

After the government (department, province, state) of Moscow, Podolia is the most densely populated in all of Russia, except for Poland. The chief town or capital is Kamenets Podolsky, Kahmehnyets Pawdawiskyee as I heard my parents pronounce it. Other important towns are Bratslav.

\*\*[Brawsliv, not far from Nemirov, some Brawslaver lawntslaht were members of the Nemirover Independent Benevolent Society, and if so are buried on the Nemirover cemeteries in Cyprus Hills, Queens]\*\*, also Gaisin

\*\*[Gaisin was very near Nemirov, in fact Moishe Gaisiner lived in Nemirov and had a daughter, Mahtyeh, who according to my mother, had a reputation in Nemirov as being "a hot number." She was said to have "had a shine" for my father when he was in his teens in Nemirov. My mother, who was too young to have been her friend or had direct contact with her in Nemirov, still had heard enough about her to warrant referring to her as "Mahtyeh dee bawmerkeh," (Mahtyeh the bum). I once met her and her daughter in my aunt Goldeh's house when they came for visit from Pittsburgh. I remember the daughter, perhaps a year or two older than me, as dark haired with a very pale white complexion and dark black eyes, a younger version of her mother.]\*\*

Other important towns in Podolia are Letichev, Litin, Mogilev-on-Dniester, Novaya-Ushitsa, Olgopol, Proskurov, Vinitza and Yampol.

\*\*[I heard many stories about Vinitza where my father once ran away after his father gave him a good hiding for some unjust reason or other, according to my father. He went to live in an aunt's house, whose sister she was I do not know, but he came home soon afterwards because she did not give him enough to eat.]\*\*

The chief occupation in Podolia is agriculture.

\*\*[My father often described the wheat fields around Nemirov. The wheat stalks, "zahngen," were taller than the average man, much taller than the wheat he saw out west, probably in Kansas in 1931 or 1932.]\*\*

Podolia is also famous for its cherries, mulberries, melons, gourds and cucumbers.

There are railways in Podolia which run parallel to the Dniester. One line goes from Lemberg to Odessa. There are two branch lines that run to Kiev: one from Zhmerinka and Poltava and another from Balta.

Podolia was inhabited from as far back as neolithic times.

\*\*[I believe I already related the story my father told me that when they were excavating the site for a new market, many human skeletons and bones were discovered in burials on the site.]\*\*

Herodotus mentions the country as the seat of the Graeco-Scythian Alzones and the Scythia Neuri. Dacians came in later.



The Romans were in Podolia too. There was a stretch of a wall of Trajan running through Kamenets, Ushita and Proskurov. During the Age of Migrations, many people passed through Podolia.

The Mongols plundered the country in the thirteenth century. One hundred years later, Olgierd, prince of Lithuania, freed Podolia from the Mongols and annexed the territory giving it the name Podolia, a word meaning *ponizie*, lowlands. After prince Vivort of Lithuania died in 1430, Podolia was annexed to Poland, except for the eastern part, the province of Bratslav which remained under Lithuanian control until it was joined to Poland in 1501. Podolia remained in Poland until the Third Partition of Poland in 1793 when the region was taken over by Russia.

The one published source for the history of the city of Nemirov which I use is the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, EJ. The author of the article apparently does not seem to have ever been in Nemirov itself and was himself depending on the secondary published sources. The result is, that in a sense, all my references are based on a tertiary source. The advantage I have, however, is that of having heard stories about Nemirov, oral history sources to flesh out the information from EJ. From EJ I learn that after the 1793 and the last partition of Poland, Nemirov was "...incorporated in the district of Podolia until the Russian Revolution. Under Polish rule it was a fortified city of considerable importance. A Jewish settlement is first mentioned in 1603.

\*\*[What the author obviously means is that the first published or other reference to Jews dates from 1603. This does not preclude the very real possibility that a Jewish community existed in Nemirov before 1603, that is in the sixteenth century when the region was still very sparsely urbanized.]\*\*

In the 1630 Yom Tov Lipmann Heller held rabbinical office there for a while.

\*\*[This is the first time I have ever heard of this man. At least he did not live on in the Nemirover folk memory, otherwise I would have heard something about him.]\*\*

"During the Chmeilnicki persecutions of 1648 thousands of Jews sought refuge in Nemirov; however, the city fell to the Cossacks, who massacred the Jews. The slaughter at Nemirov, one of the worst of that period, created a profound impression, becoming a symbol of all the terrible massacres the Jews suffered at the hands of cruel rioters. Reports and legends spread about the heroic acts of the Jews of Nemirov, who chose martyrdom (see *\*Kiddush ha-Shem*), and rabbis, *paytanim*, composed special *kinot* and *slikhot* on the destruction of the community."

\*\*[All through my childhood I heard the tales about Kiddush ha-Shem, the Sanctification of the Name, that is the massacre of the Jews of Nemirov. The exact date when this happened was never mentioned, nor do I believe that my grandparents or parents knew when this tragic event occurred. A Yiddish play called "Kiddush ha-Shem" was staged in the 1920s or early 1930s in one of the Yiddish theaters on Second Avenue in New York. I had no idea that the play dealt with the

massacre of the Jews of Nemirov. The story of Kiddush ha-Shem was part of the folklore of Nemirov which my mother and father were aware of in a distant sort of way making no fuss at all that it took place in their own town.

\*\*[The story that I heard, mainly from my grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh, was of a bride and groom standing under the marriage canopy, khupah, just outside of "dem awlten bes Mederesh," the old synagogue, as was customary because marriage ceremonies were traditionally celebrated outdoors in the open air. At that moment, Khmelnyeetski and his "khoodigahnes," hooligans – a good Russian word along with pogrom – came into town and slaughtered the bride and groom as they were standing there. The "khoosen-kawleh," the bride and groom, were buried right there next to the entrance to the old synagogue. From what I gathered from my grandmother, their grave was still there and it was a sort of shrine and a memorial. Jews never forget, they always remember, they tell their children to remember that once we were slaves to Pharaoh in Egypt and to remember what Amalek did to us as we wandered in the desert. The Jews of Nemirov never forgot the tragic event that took place long ago. My grandmother could not tell me the date when Khmelnyeetskee's men slaughtered the Jews of Nemirov any more than she could give me the date when we departed from Egypt. That it happened is *what* is important, not *when* it happened. When I heard the story for the first time, I took it for granted that my grandmother had been present and witnessed the murder of the bride and groom.]\*\*

The article in EJ says that many Jews chose martyrdom and died for "Kiddush ha-Shem" the Sanctification of the Name (of God), which is to say the chose death rather than conversion to Christianity.

\*\*[I do not know if my father inherited this trait of "stiffneckedness." He certainly was far from being a pietist or even observant. Except for Rosh ha Shonah and Yom Kippur, the only time I ever knew him to attend synagogue on a daily basis was when he was saying Kaddish for his mother and later for his father. He was far from being a "professional Jew," so to speak. One day, I remember for some reason I no longer remember, probably while I was still in high school, I asked him what he would have done during the days of the Inquisition in Spain when the Jews were given the choice of having their throats cut or accept conversion to Christianity. Without even looking up from the newspaper he was reading, and in an offhand fashion as if answering a question the answer of which is obvious, he instantly replied, "I'd let them cut my throat," and continued reading the newspaper. I believed him then and, after reading about the bravery of the Jews of seventeenth-century Nemirov, I believe it now even more now.]\*\*

There is a photograph of a synagogue in the EJ article given on page 748 of volume 12. The legend under the illustration reads "The Great Synagogue of Nemirov, erected in the early eighteenth century."

\*\*[The old synagogue, "der awlter behs mehdrehsh, where the Kkmelnyeetskee khooligahnes murdered the bride and groom, must surely be a different building than the one in the photograph, which according to legend under it was built in the early eighteenth century. The main section of the plan, probably the prayer hall itself, appears to be a tall, two or three-story structure covered with a double-pitched roof ending with a "Dutch gable" on the main front. The slope of the pitch as described by the gable is broken. The upper section of the rafters nearer the ridge is very low, perhaps 1:4, while the lower half resting on the wall is steep, 1:6 or even 1:8. There is a lower two story segment of the building attached to and projecting from the taller prayer hall. The ground floor of this section must have served as a vestibule and an access to the women's gallery inside the main hall. The roof-line of the projecting two-story segment of the building is hidden by an undulating false gable or finial, quasi-baroque in style. The finial, really a third story like an attic, has two dormers with windows spanned by semicircular headers and flanked by pilasters topped with pyramidal merlons. Three windows on the second story are visible in the photograph and about four more as well as a large door on the first story.

\*\*[Judging by my father's description of the old synagogue, that is "der awlter bes medresh," as well as taking into account the date of the massacre, the "Great Synagogue" in the EJ photograph is not the one where the bride and groom are buried. My father described the old synagogue as having walls so massive that it was possible for a man to stretch out athwart the thickness of the wall. It seem that the walls must have been at least five or six feet thick. And if so, the old synagogue must have been one of the buildings that led the author of the article to say that "Under Polish rule it (Nemirov) was a fortified city of considerable importance.]"\*\*

After the Poles retook the city from Khmelnyeetsky, the Jews supposedly returned to settle and continued living in good conditions there including the brief period when Podolia was under Turkish control from 1672 to 1699. The Great Synagogue was built at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Early in the nineteenth century, Nemirov became a center for the Chasidim of \*Na[k]hman of Bratslav.

\*\*[I heard about Nakhman of Bratslav, but not from any member of my family. The name of the town was always pronounced without the "t" as Brawsliv or sometimes more Russian-like as Brahslahv. My father had a friend from whom he bought his ship's ticket for America whose name was Jake Brahslahvsky, the name with which my father entered "di Gawldehneh Medeeneh." Reading the EJ article I realized for the first time that Nemirov had also once been the seat of a famous Khasidic rabbi, Nakhman of Bratslav.

\*\*[Neither my maternal nor my paternal grandparents were followers of Khasidim. There were some khasidic rebbes in Nemirov. In fact, my grandmother

Sooreh Dinstyeh once went to "dem geeten yeed," the pious or good Jew, for help and advice about having a son. He assured her she would conceive and give birth to a son whom she would name "Behn'tsee'on," Bentsion, adding a blessing, so to speak, based on a play of words with the name, "Zawlst eem greeng ehortseehen." May you raise him easily, without travail.

\*\*[My mother's father shaved, took part in amateur theatricals and even went ice skating in Nemirov. He was from a later generation than my father's father who was more observant, but in no case was he a fanatic about religion. He said his prayers, which he knew by heart, every day. On those days when he happened to be visiting us and the afternoon light was ebbing, I still remember him positioning himself at the ice box, as if it were a lectern, and recite first the *minkha* service and, when the first star appeared, *maariv*. He wore a beard, grey tinged with red, which he trimmed. But he did not allow his "payehs," sidelocks, to grow nor did he wear an "ahrbekawnfis," a short cotton cloth with a hole for the head to fit through and bordered with ritual fringes, *tsitsis*, prescribed for all Jewish men to wear as a reminder of all the Commandments, the *mitsvoth*.

\*\*[In Nemirov my father's father belonged to "doos kleyneh litvisheh sheelekhl," the little Litvak synagogue and, as such, it is hardly likely that it was khasidic in orientation. Litvaks were opposed to Khasidism, that is they were *misnahgdim mitnagdim*. By chance, my father once dropped into a khasidic synagogue in Brownsville to say kaddish on his way home from some job or other. He was amused that "...inmit'n dehrinehn hawbn zey oogehfahnghehn tawnzen vee nishehgoo'im," right in the middle of the evening service, all of a sudden, they (the congregants) began to dance like lunatics.]"\*\*

In 1765 there were 602 Jewish poll tax payers.

\*\*[This number probably represented as many heads of families. If multiplied by a factor five, the probable average number of persons in each family, there were perhaps about 3,000 Jews in Nemirov at that time.]\*\*

According to the same article in EJ, in 1847 there were 5,287 Jews in Nemirov.

\*\*[I can safely say, that among them were my grandmother's grandmother, as well as my great grandfather Shmeel Libes for whom I am named, certainly Sahn'yeh Sawldawt, the man who raised my father's father, Yahnkel Bahlaboos, and possibly Yahnkel himself who may already have been born by that time. My father's maternal grandparents had probably recently arrived from "di Lite" or soon after as a young married couple whose three children, my grandmother among them, were born in Nemirov.]\*\*

By 1897, the Jews of Nemirov numbered 5,287, representing 59.3 per cent of the total population.

The account in EJ ends with a brief paragraph outlining the tragic history of twentieth-century Nemirov. "In 1917 a democratic community headed by Zionists

was established, but with the consolidation of the Soviet regime it was liquidated. During the Russian Civil War, the Jews also suffered,

**\*\*[One of my grandmother Sooreh Dintsyeh's brothers, I believe his name was Moishhe, was killed by the Bolsheviks]\*\***  
but partly because of good relations with their Christian neighbors, they were spared from massacres."

**\*\*[In past times, in the nineteenth century, many local gentile craftsmen, especially carpenters and tailors, worked for Jewish master craftsmen. Some even learned to speak Yiddish. For example, a young gentile tailor worked for my maternal grandfather Shaiyeh. When someone sneezed, it was customary to say among other blessings and imprecations, "Zawl fawllen ahf a kawp fin a goy" (may it fall on the head of a goy). By way of an amen and a counterpoint, he would sing out "Zawl fawlen ahf a kawp fin a yeed" (May it fall on the head of a Jew). Both my grandfathers, one a boss carpenter and builder and the other the high-class ladies' tailor, worked almost exclusively for the Polish and Russian landed gentry, rarely for Jewish clients. Both spoke, of necessity the languages commonly used in Nemirov: Russian with the government official; Ukrainian or "goyish" or Khakhlatskee with the peasants, Polish with many of the local landowners, Yiddish with other Jews and Yiddish with the few Germans who had factories in Nemirov. Of course, all could read the Hebrew prayer book as well as Yiddish language books and newspapers.]\*\***

Continuing with the article in EJ. "There were 4,176 Jews (57.2 per cent of the population) living in Nemirov in 1926. After the German occupation during World War II (1941), the Jews of Nemirov, as well as the Jewish refugees from Bessarabia, were deported for extermination in three 'actions' which took place in November 1941, June 1942, and May 1943."

It is not my intention to preserve the name of the murderer Bogdan Chmielnicki (Khmelnyeetskee) for posterity or for you to pass his memory on to later generations. I say of him, "Er hawt nit vehrt az dee ehd troogt eem." He is not worth that the earth bear him. Or shall I utter the pejorative of pejoratives, pronounce the curse of curses, "Zawl eem dee ehnd arois vahrfen." May the earth cast him out, may the earth vomit him up.

According to the EJ article "Chmielnicki

**\*\*[the "c" in Polish is pronounced "ts"— one of my art teachers in a watercolor workshop at NCMA was Marlene Loznicka from Kittrell, N. C. I suppose I am one of the few people who knew that the name was pronounced "Loz-nits-kah,"]\*\*** was born in 1595 and died in 1657. He was "leader of the Cossack and peasant rebellion against Polish rule in the Ukraine in 1648 which resulted in the destruction of hundreds Jewish communities; later hetman of autonomous Ukraine and initiator of its unification with Russia."

"...Chmielnicki's followers acted with savage and unremitting cruelty against the Jews"...and he ..."was bent on eradicating the Jews from the Ukraine.....His

activity brought destruction and ruin to the land and did not assure its independence. Nevertheless the members of the Ukrainian national movement in recent generations have come to see him as a symbol of the awakening of the Ukrainian people." There is a photo of an equestrian statue on the top of page 482, the legend of which reads, "Statue of Bogdan Chmielnicki in Kiev. This seventeenth-century butcher of Jews is still regarded as a Ukrainian national hero."

"The Jewish population of Ukraine had been an active factor in colonizing the steppes before the massacres. Many Jews settled in villages and were occupied as lessees (see *arenda*) or administrators of the estates of the nobles; they also played a role in developing the towns and in their armed defense in times of danger. However, as agents of the Polish nobles and Polish rule, they incurred the hatred of the Ukrainian serfs."

"It was during the months of May to November 1648 that most of the massacres took place. At the beginning of the uprising, the communities east of the Dnieper were immediately destroyed. Those Jews who did manage to escape or join the Polish army of Wisniowiecki on its retreat westward met violent deaths: some converted to Christianity to save their lives; many were seized by Tatars and sold into slavery.

\*\*[Those who are cruel or merciless were said to have the heart of a Tatar,"ah hahrts vee a tooter.]\*\*

"During the summer, the persecutions spread to the western bank of the Dnieper, and by the middle of June there were no more Jews in the villages and the open cities."

"The first large-scale massacre [west of the Dnieper] took place in Nemirov, into which the Cossacks penetrated in the disguise of Polish soldiers. Jews died in their masses as martyrs when faced with the demand they convert to Christianity." The article cites an unidentified source saying that 6,000 souls were massacred and that they drowned several hundred in the water

\*\*[Could this have been the Bug River or a tributary of it?]\*\*

"and by all sorts of cruel torments. In the synagogue before the Holy Ark, they slaughtered with butchers' knives...." They destroyed the synagogue

\*\*[Could this building then have been 'der awlter besmedresh?]

"and tore up the Torahs which were trampled on, and they made sandals from the parchment."

"It is impossible to determine accurately the number of victims who perished, but it undoubtedly amounted to tens of thousands; the Jewish chronicles mention 100,000 killed and 300 communities destroyed."

Many women were ravished by the Cossacks and an unknown number of Jews were forcibly converted to Christianity. When the Poles resumed power, Jewish settlement west of the Dnieper continued and "The Polish king authorized the forced converts to return to Judaism." The "Councils of the Lands," a Jewish self-governing

institution, "concerned themselves with the redemption of the captives and the salvation of the converts."

"Jews began to return to their localities in Volhynia at the end of 1648, and short while later were again living throughout the territory up to the Dnieper."

The EJ gives more space to the story of Khmelnyetkee than to the history of Nemirov. And even in the EB he merits a page or so, dispassionate with true British scientific impartiality, but even then the author could not retrain himself for passing judgement on Bogdan Chmielnicki saying he permitted "...the committal of unspeakable atrocities on the Jews and the Roman Catholics." The author ends the article thus, "With all his native ability, Chmielnicki was but an eminent savage....He could destroy, but he could not create."





Appendix 2  
History of Opole



There is a short entry, two paragraphs in length, in the E.J. The official name of the town appears as "OPOLE LUBELSKIE." But this may possibly not have been its name during Russian rule and the one given it after Poland's separation from Russia.

Opole Lubelskie is a small town in Lublin province in south eastern Poland. The earliest reference to the town is about a silver merchant, Manasseh, who operated there in 1626.

In 1765 there was a scant total of 487 Jews living in Opole. The Jewish community increased during the nineteenth century so that by 1856 there were 1,799 Jews living there, about twice the number of gentiles. Malvina's paternal grandfather, Sender, was probably born just about this time and was one of the Jews numbered among the 1,799 individuals.

The Jewish population continued to increase during the rest of the nineteenth century and grew to a total of 3,323 individuals by 1897, representing 60.15 per cent of the total population. In 1921, just about the time Malvina's parents went to Cuba, the Jews numbered 3,766, or 66.7% of the total population.

\*\*[It appears from these figures that the rate of growth of the Jewish population had slowed during the first quarter of the twentieth. I would venture to ascribe this phenomenon to the tide of Jewish emigration that swept the whole of the Russian Pale of Settlement beginning in the 1880s lasting up to the outbreak of the First World War. There was, and probably still is, an Opoler Fahrai'n in New York, just as there were hundreds of others from as many Jewish shteytlekh including two from Nemirov. After the doors to America were closed to Jewish immigration from Poland (also from Russia where they were prohibited from leaving), many Jews from Poland went to Cuba and almost all the other countries of Latin America. There are quite a few Opoler living in Rio de Janeiro and in Sao Paulo, Brazil, some of whom I met.

\*\*[After Poland was separated from Russia and the doors to America were closed, many Jews from the small shteytlekh moved to major cities of Poland, Warsaw in particular. Others emigrated to Germany settling, for the most part, in Berlin. There were also many Polish Jews living in Paris when I was there in the summer of 1939. I used to go to Kantorowicz's restaurant near the Place de la Republique to eat kreplach and where I heard Yiddish with additions of French not unlike New York Yiddish tinged with English. I still remember a woman saying as she and her husband entered the restaurant, "Zawlen mir zikhh zets'n la bas?"

\*\*[The reason for the slow growth of the Jewish population of Opole in the early part of the twentieth century must be that many Jews left to go to America and, right after the First World War, to Latin America and western Europe.

I have come to this conclusion based on personal observations during the years I lived in Panama and travels in Latin America. It is not for nothing that so many of the immigrant Jews in Central America were dubbed "Polacos," just as the Near Eastern Jews were called "Turcos," why much earlier in the century Jews in Argentina were all known as "Rusos," my grandfather Yahnkel Balaboos among them during his short sojourn on the pampas of the Jewish colonization area in the province of Entre Rios.]\*\*

The rest of the article is a terse account of the annihilation of the Jews of Opole. On the eve of the war in 1939 there were about 4,000 Jews in Opole. This number was doubled when 2,500 Jews from Pulawy and 2,000 from Vienna were deported there in December 1939 and in February 1941. More were sent to Opole in 1942 from some small towns in Slovakia. On three occasions Jews were sent to the death camps: March 31, 1942 to Belzec [pronounced Belzhets] and May and October of that same year to Sobibor.

\*\*[There was an eye witness who saw Malvina's grandfather Sender Noodelman carried off in a truck to his death, probably on March 31, 1942. The man who related this incident to Malvina's parents when they were in New York in 1946 or so visiting the Opoler Fahrai'n said that Sender along with many of the old men were supposedly taken to Belzec. If so, then according to the EJ article this took place on March 31, 1942. But the site where Malvina's grandfather met a dreadful end could have also been Sobibor. The question of just when and in which death camps the rest of her aunts, uncles, cousins and other members of Malvina's parents' families were slaughtered is moot now. The "bottom line," the sum total, the destiny, the final of finals is that blameless souls were erased from the face of the earth and no one knows for certain where their ashes were cast to enrich the foul earth of Sodom-Poland.]\*\*

The EJ item ends with these sad words, "The community was not revived after the war."

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*GLORIA DEO*  
15 February 1995  
Completed the first draft.  
HALLELUJAH