

**Kamil Kopera**

## **History of Jews in Markowa Village**

"Markowa was a densely populated village, almost a town, where 25 to 29 Jewish families lived. There was a *Schul* (Yiddish place of prayer) in our house. Jewish families would come to our house which was a kind of community center for a part of Markowa." This was the image that Joseph Riesenbach, one of the Jewish survivors retained in his memory. Riesenbach, born in 1928 and a Holocaust survivor, represented the last generation of Markovians of Jewish denomination and was a member of the community of Jews that had existed in Markowa for more than 200 years.

In the interwar period, a legend was known in Markowa to explain the origin of the village's name. According to this legend, the meeting place of local peasants was supposed to be an inn run by a Jew - Mark Markenhoff. The inn was supposed to be run by his wife - known as "Markowa" (i.e. Mark's wife) and meetings at the tavern were referred to as meetings "at Markowa". Elements of village history can be found in this legend. Indeed, the inns in the village were leased by Jews. Probably their first families came to Markowa from Łańcut shortly before 1719.

Galician Jews at the end of the 18th century were forced by the Austrian partition authorities to adopt German-sounding names. Hence, a growing group of Jewish Markovians bore surnames such as Goldman, Schiffman and Landau. This also caused their Christian neighbors to use rather pseudonyms derived from the names of Jewish family heads - such as Tochymy (from the name *Tanhum*), Hoimy (from *Chaim*) or Mechele (from *Mechel*).

In the middle of the 19th century, less than 50 Jews lived in Markowa among more than 2,300 Christians. In 1910 there were already 174 Jews living in the midst of 4,480 Christians. The 19th and 20th centuries showed growing emigration. In search of a better life, a number of Markovian Jews chose to leave their home village. They opted to settle in neighboring towns, such as Łańcut, Kańczuga or Rzeszów, and in the surrounding villages as well. Some emigrated out of this part of central and eastern Europe altogether. A number of Jewish Markovians settled in the United States, Argentina, Austria, Italy and Germany. Naturally, they maintained ties with the families they had left in Markowa.

The Jews of Markowa were engaged in petty trade and agriculture. Their small houses sometimes also served as stores or warehouses. Jewish children attended the local school. Their parents tried to provide them with additional education. To this end, they employed a dedicated teacher who took care of the cultural and religious aspects of Judaism. There were at least three houses of prayer in the village. These took the shape of separate chambers in private homes and provided gathering centers for local residents. The *Schul* was located in the Muller house in Markowa's Kazimierz district (so named for its similarity to its Krakow counterpart in terms of Jewish inhabitation); in the house of the Goldmans in the village center and in the Riesenbachs' house, as mentioned earlier.

In the final days of the Polish Second Republic<sup>1</sup>, about 120 Jews lived in the village. When the war broke out, some of them fled east as they knew what could await them from the Germans. The threat was far from abstract: the news of the first Nazi victim coming from Markowa had reached the village. The person was Markus Goldman Rosengarten, who was murdered in Dachau early in 1939.

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<sup>1</sup> This independent Polish state (1918-1939) was conquered by the German nazis and Soviet communists in September 1939. Some English language historians of Poland use *Republic* and *Commonwealth* interchangeably, as the Polish word *Rzeczpospolita* shares semantic features with these two English terms. (Translator note by Bartosz Liczbiński)

The Germans did not create ghettos in the occupied Jaroslaw district, so the Jews of Markowa lived in their own homes until August 1942. However, just like in other parts of occupied Poland, they were subjected to further harassment by the German nazi occupation authorities. The Jews were ordered to wear armbands with the Star of David. Jewish children were expelled from schools and Jews suffered from confiscations and forced labor. Beatings and unpunished murders became a sad daily reality for the Jewish inhabitants of the village.

In early August 1942, the Germans ordered the Jews to leave Markowa. They were to be *resettled*. Importantly, thanks to information reaching the village from the neighboring counties of Rzeszów and Przemyśl, the Jews knew that leaving meant certain death. The Germans were directing the *displaced* to the Bełżec extermination camp, so the Jews of Markowa went into hiding with the hope of surviving near their home village.

The group of Jews fighting for survival initially numbered several dozen. Jewish Markovians hid in the fields and forests around the village. As time passed, some could not stand it physically and mentally and reported to the local police station of the Third Reich's General Government, manned by Polish policemen, in Markowa. From there they were taken by the German gendarmes who transported the Jews to the city of Łańcut and murdered them at the Jewish cemetery there. In Markowa itself and in the surrounding areas, the Germans organized searches for people who were in hiding, at times forcing Christian Markowa residents to do so. Victims of such roundups were most often killed at the so-called "Trench." - More than 30 people were murdered there. Executions were also carried out by the German gendarmerie in Kazimierz (where seven people were killed) and in the house of Jozef Ulma who, together with his family, was murdered along with the eight Jews, whom he and his wife had been trying to save.

From August 1942 until July 1944, over 20 Jews found either permanent or periodic shelter in Markowa. The sheltered families included Markovian

families such as Bezems (Weltzes), Lorbenfelds and Riesenbachs, as well as strangers to Markowa, who arrived in the village seeking shelter.

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*(This article was edited for the English version by Bartosz Liczbiński)*

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