

**MUNKÁCS:
A JEWISH WORLD THAT WAS**

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Declaration

I certify that the contents of this thesis have not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

The extent to which I have availed myself of the work of others is acknowledged in the text of this thesis.

Abstract

Prior to World War II an estimated 11 million Jews lived in hundreds of communities throughout Europe. The rural Subcarpathian city of Munkács was one such place with a strong and vibrant Jewish presence – a Jewish community which constituted some 40% of its population.

Munkács had experienced a long history of ethnic, religious and cultural diversity. These different ethno-religious groups managed to live, if not in close friendships, but certainly for the most part, in reasonable harmony until the Hungarian occupation in 1938.

The city was well known as a major centre of Jewish life in all its varieties, from the ultra-Orthodox *Hasidim* to the completely secular Zionists, communists and assimilationists. It was also well known for the internal frictions between some of these factions.

In Munkács the ethnic cleansing of the Holocaust happened within a few short weeks in May 1944. The entire community was destroyed, mostly deported to Auschwitz, where some 85% of them were murdered.

My aim in this thesis is to contribute to the historiography of The Jewish World That Was by reconstructing a picture of daily Jewish life in Munkács in the period between the two World Wars. My perspective was a grassroots one – a bottom up view of daily life, utilising archival and scholarly secondary sources as a backdrop for the memories of some of those who lived it. I have, through their authentic voices, drawn a word picture of how they lived, learned, worked, prayed and played.

In doing this, my contention has been that, to understand the full devastation of the Holocaust, it is imperative to reconstruct the rich, dynamic and colourful fabric of daily life of pre-Holocaust Jewish Europe. It is also my view that it is urgent to do this while there are still those who can help us do so.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the vibrant Jewish community of Munkács/Mukačevo that thrived there pre World War II, to those who survived the terrors of the Holocaust and to the blessed memory of those who did not.

In particular, it is dedicated to the memory of my parents Csibi (Cecilia Fixler) and Jidu (Juda Kahan), who survived the Holocaust and to their large, extended families, most of whom did not.

To those admirable survivors who so generously gave of their time to share with me their memories, both joyous and painful, I extend heartfelt gratitude.
Their strength and optimism is awe-inspiring.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, to Professor Konrad Kwiet, my thesis supervisor, my sincere thanks for his guidance, remarkable erudition and persistence throughout this entire project.

My thanks also to Associate Professor Suzanne Rutland and to Dr Michael Abrahams-Sprod for their good counsel and support whenever I needed it.

My research necessitated my travel to Israel, New York and Los Angeles both to locate source materials and also to conduct cassette taped interviews. The warm welcome and assistance I received from the 20 Munkács survivors spread across those locations, as well as Sydney, made my work easier.

I am particularly indebted to Tuviya Klein, chairman of the Subcarpathian Jewry Association, who introduced me to other Munkácsers and gave me access to valuable relevant documents and other materials.

There were others who were helpful, generously sharing their knowledge and connections, as well as their support. In particular, in Israel, Zvi Hartman, who spent many hours with me, my cousins Ilan and Shai Sole, for whom nothing was too much trouble and Raz Segal who generously gave me copies of his theses on Huszt and on Munkács.

In Los Angeles, my thanks to Margaret Goldblatt for her generous hospitality. She not only welcomed me into her home but accompanied me to my interview appointments all over Los Angeles.

Finally, I thank the wonderfully efficient Janice Bevan for her secretarial assistance under difficult linguistic and technical circumstances.

1. Introduction

Aims of this Thesis

The purpose of this study is to contribute to the dwindling store of available information about The Jewish World that Was prior to the Holocaust in Eastern Europe. The Holocaust has been the focus of much historical research. The victimisation, dislocation and maltreatment of Europe's some 11 million Jews and the murder of over half of them was an event of such magnitude that describing and analysing it has become a major scholarly preoccupation. There seems to be a growing awareness, however, that the historical interest needs to become broader to include exploration of pre-Holocaust Jewish life.

There is also a growing awareness of the urgency of reconstructing The Jewish World That Was, a consciousness that time is running out for gathering eyewitness narratives. This is the first study of the Jews of Munkács to reconstruct the minutiae of their daily life, allowing the story to be told in the authentic voices of those who lived it. Notwithstanding all the difficulties presented by oral histories, I have built this reconstruction by interweaving remembrances 70 years on with more scholarly writings and historical concepts.

The Nazis' war against the Jews was not only aimed at the eradication of the Jewish 'race', it was also intended to eliminate all traces of Jewish culture – the *Jüdischer Geist*. Political concepts such as Democracy, Capitalism, Communism; modern art and music movements such as Impressionism; psychoanalysis and other new philosophies and sciences could all be shown to have Jewish antecedents. In fact, Hitler saw Modernism as degenerate corruption and viewed himself the Saviour, the Redemptive Spirit of the 'Aryan' People destined to destroy the 'bacteria' of the Jews.

In this he almost succeeded. The Yiddish-based Ashkenazi Eastern European communities of rural cities like Munkács all but disappeared, as did the communities of smaller towns and *shtetls* where Jews had lived in significant numbers for generations.

By the time the war in Europe ended in May 1945, not only had some 6 million Jewish men, women and children been murdered, but their whole way of life and an entire cultural sub-system had been destroyed. It is essential to understand the diversity of Europe's Jewish communal, cultural, religious and political life prior to World War II to comprehend the full significance of the Holocaust.

All over Europe not only the people and their physical 'bricks and mortar' presence were made to vanish, but there are often almost no primary sources to be found to detail their pre-Holocaust lives and communities. In these instances, their story can only be reconstructed as a composite of the testimonies of eyewitnesses to 'what is destroyed'.

My interest in exploring the story of the Jewish community of Munkács was sparked by a conversation I had in April 2003 with Professor Yehuda Bauer, who was in Sydney on a speaking tour. On hearing that both my parents came from that city, he commented that the story of the Jews of Munkács had not yet been fully documented. He found this particularly surprising given the size, diversity and rich texture of that community and also the enormity of the catastrophe that befell it.

I started on a personal journey to learn more about my own family history. As my research progressed, the stories my parents told me in my childhood of their young years became more contextualised. They became intermeshed with those of the survivors whose memories contributed to the narrative of this thesis. It became clear that my parents and their extended families typified the life of what had been the vibrant Jewish world of Munkács/Mukačevo and that it warranted documenting.

There has certainly been work done in this area since my meeting with Professor Bauer and I have referred to this recent body of scholarship in this thesis.

2. Methodology

This study attempts to reconstruct, in a thematic way, the daily life in the period between the World Wars of the Jews of Munkács/Mukačevo, a significant community that was destroyed in May 1944. I have used documented information from the available literature as a backdrop for the words of the 20 people who provided their recollections for this work, in the hope of capturing the *'ruach'* (Hebrew – spirit) of place and time in the voices of those who lived it, while still possible.

Since my emphasis has been on everyday life, my approach has been descriptive rather than analytical. I have taken a 'from below'¹ approach to paint a word picture rather than relying on more elaborate theoretical concepts.

There are aspects of the life of a community not covered in this work, as they were not mentioned in any of the interviews. Among them are Munkács's Jewish orphanage, or foundlings home, its burial society and other welfare organisations.

Searching for sources

"The practice of history begins with evidence and with sources"². My search for primary sources – unpublished, original, often private or even intimate documents such as letters, diaries or memoranda – brought very little success. I had better luck with published material, such as newspaper articles, biographies³ and autobiographies⁴, official reports of government or private institutions. There are also some published academic works based on research rather than personal accounts, to which I have referred in this thesis.

Since commencing my search for sources, I have visited the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York and the Simon Wiesenthal Centre and the Shoah Visual History Foundation in Los Angeles. In Israel I went to Yad Vashem's library and archive and the Central Archive of the Jewish People, both in Jerusalem, The Ghetto Fighters' Museum in the Western Galilee and The Memorial Museum of Hungarian Speaking Jewry in Safed. The very few primary or secondary source references I found to Munkács/Mukačevo either focused almost entirely on the Holocaust or dealt with the city as

¹ Term coined by E. P. Thompson in *The Making of the English Working Class* to describe his humanist, Socialist approach to social historiography. Victor Gollancz Ltd London, 1963.

² Black and MacRaild, *Studying History*, Second Edition, Macmillan, London 2000, 87.

³ Martin Gilbert, *The Boys: Triumph over Adversity*, Douglas & McIntyre, Vancouver, BC 1997.

⁴ Gabriella Auspitz Labson, *My Righteous Gentile: Lord Wedgwood and Other Memories*, KTAV, Jersey City, NJ 2004.

part of Subcarpathia; that is, as a small part of the larger story of Hungarian or Czechoslovak Jewry. Those few volumes specifically relating to Munkács/Mukačevo tended to be, with a few exceptions, mostly Holocaust survivors' autobiographies, pages of testimony or lists of names of Jewish victims of persecution, deportation, forced labour or murder.

A visit to Beit Hatfutsot (the Museum of the Diaspora) on the Tel Aviv University campus produced the same result when it came to written works but did yield some wonderful photos of life in Munkács, mostly taken before the Holocaust but also of the ghettoisation⁵.

A work of fiction, in the social realism style, originally published in 1937 and set in a predominantly Orthodox Jewish village near Munkács provided useful background 'colour' of the pre-Holocaust period⁶.

The Internet is another, obvious place to look for source material. There has been a veritable explosion in the number of sites in the recent years, most of the newer sites promoting tourism to Ukraine. The numbers in April 2009 were 124,000 for 'Munkács', 75,000 for 'Mukačevo' and 240,000 for 'Mukachevo'. Many are duplicates and triplicates. They are in various languages, many not of particular Jewish interest or relevance and span topics as diverse as history, geography, tourism, genealogy, politics, religion, sex and Holocaust denial. There are also some autobiographies by Holocaust survivors. Writings by non-Jews about other sub-cultures have been quite informative, especially those few by descendants of Rusyn/Ruthenian ancestry and now resident in the USA. Although the centre stage of these writings and researches was not Munkács's Jews, the communities were integrated enough in various aspects of their lives for them inevitably to provide detail, context and colour to this narrative.

I also came across an amazing movie made in 1933 by a professional American movie news crew who went to Munkács specifically to film the wedding of Frime Chaye Rivke Shapira, only daughter of the Munkácser Rebbe, to Baruch Rabinovich⁷. The movie starts with a large crowd of Munkácser *Hasidim*, some on foot, some riding bicycles, greeting the groom as he descends from the train. The next scene is the actual wedding, with the bridal couple under the canopy. In response to the invitation by the film maker to say a few words to his co-religionists in the USA, Rabbi Shapira obliged, exhorting American Jews to keep the *Shabbat* observance. Apparently,

⁵ See this thesis P. 95 - 99

⁶ Ivan Olbracht, *The Sorrowful Eyes of Hannah Karajich*, translated Iris Urwin Lewitová. Central European University Press, 1999.

⁷ Held by the National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Md. © USHMM, Washington, D.C.

there was still extra film left, so the movie crew took the opportunity to film other scenes of Jewish life in the city, of both *Hasidim* and Zionists.

About a decade ago Yeshayahu Jelinek of Tel Aviv University sent two researchers to Budapest and Prague to search for source materials on the Jewish communities in Subcarpathian Ruthenia in general and Munkács in particular. They also went to Berehovo (Beregszasz), the regional capital of Bereg County, in which Munkács is situated and where the historical source materials are believed to be archived. The difficulties they encountered led him to observe:

“Despite an energetic search, I could locate no more documents about the city of Mukačevo than about other cities or regions in Subcarpathian Rus”⁸.

The dearth of sources relating to Munkács, a regional city in a remote rural district, is not really surprising. It could well have been exacerbated during the post World War II communist era, with the little documentation that did exist being either destroyed or shipped off to some distant archive, where it may lie buried today.

While it is not uncommon in Europe for regions, and sometimes entire countries to experience changes of government and shifting borders, Subcarpathian Ruthenia was one of those border regions that actually changed countries five times during the first half of the Twentieth Century. Munkács is now the Ukrainian City of Mukacheve. This is one of the factors making the location of relevant archives and documents repositories more complicated. It is also clear that each successive government considered Subcarpathian Ruthenia as an unimportant annexure, impoverished, underdeveloped and far from their capital cities, its history not being worth specific documentation.

The problem was perhaps best described by Ágnes Ságvári:

“The main reason of the shortcomings of research work should be looked for in the historical adversities of this geographic and administrative unit. Up to 1920 the region was part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, regarded even there as a poor, peripheral area. From 1920 up to 1938 it belonged to the Czechoslovak Republic – without autonomy. It enjoyed the achievements of parliamentary democracy but did not receive special material and moral support in order to step on the road of development and attain equal chances. For many reasons, Hungarian rule applied the policy of plundering.

⁸ Yeshayahu A. Jelinek *The Carpathian Diaspora*, East European Monographs, No. DCCXXI, Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, 2007, Preface xiii

Finally, after 1944 it was attached to the Soviet Union as a frontier area of the Ukraine, Russianized, without any hope of at least partial restitution of stolen Jewish property and wiped-out Jewish culture. At present, it is the suffering object of great Ukrainian nationalism⁹.

Published material

In general, it appears that the history of the Jews of Munkács has been treated as a sub-section of a footnote to the larger story of Hungarian or Czechoslovak Jewry or, at best, as part of the region of Subcarpathian Ruthenia rather than a subject in its own right. There are recent notable exceptions to this, especially Jelinek's¹⁰ very helpful work, finally translated from the original Hebrew into English in 2007. Unfortunately, Raz Segal's thesis¹¹ has not yet been rendered into English.

The subject of education in Subcarpathian Ruthenia has been extensively covered by Aryeh Sole¹². Sole's interest in this area is hardly surprising since he himself had been a student and then young teacher at the Munkács Hebrew Gymnasium. While his focus is on Zionist education, his writings place it clearly within a more comprehensive and useful description of its wider social context.

Apart from a limited amount of source material, the fact is that for decades most of the focus of scholarship to do with the Jews of the Subcarpathians has been on the 'big picture' of the Holocaust. Major catastrophic aspects of Jewish victimisation such as the ghettos, the deportations and the horrors of the concentration and death camps understandably received almost all the attention. The desire to investigate and reconstruct The Jewish World That Was is quite a recent phenomenon, which has inevitably shifted attention to more rural and regional areas where Jews had lived for centuries and where these communities were totally destroyed.

⁹ Ágnes SÁgvári 'The Holocaust in Carpatho-Ruthenia'. Preface to Speech given Jerusalem, February 17, 1999. <http://www.zsido.hu/tortenelem/holocaust.htm>. Accessed May 2005.

¹⁰ Jelinek *The Carpathian Diaspora*.

¹¹ Raz Segal 'A Past Forever Becoming: The Jews of Munkács between the World Wars and During the Holocaust', Master of Arts thesis, Tel Aviv University, 2006.

¹² Aryeh Sole, *Light in the Mountains: Hebrew Zionist Education in Carpatho-Russia from 1920 to 1944* The World Association of Subcarpathian Jews and Hebrew Schools – Israel & Hebrew Gymnasium of Munkács Alumni Association – USA. Tel Aviv 1994.

There are also several entries in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia: Historical Studies and Surveys*, 3 vols. The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia; Society for the History of Czechoslovak Jews, New York. 1968.

There has been some work already done of this type, for example, on the *shtetls* of Galicia and of rural France. It is certainly the direction Yehuda Bauer¹³ seems to be taking.

Oral histories and Survivor testimonies

My interest was in depicting some of the historical, sociological and cultural aspects of the life of a particular sub-group in a defined location and in a defined period of time, namely the pre-World War II Jewish community of Munkács/Mukačevo. To this end, I sought personal recollections from people who had been part of that community, to supplement primary sources. 20 people told their stories specifically for this work¹⁴.

Oral histories and written memoirs, although not unproblematic, serve to provide a human perspective as well as to cross-validate information, particularly if several people independently describe similar experiences. Narratives of personal experiences and memories of events and people also provide the texture and dimension of remembered minutiae and emotions – details that would otherwise not find their way into the written accounts.

Such testimonies and autobiographies certainly do not truly constitute a complete, accurate and objective study of the history of Munkács. It is rather a reconstruction from the remembered history, 70 years on, of some survivors of Munkács. The issue of how history engages with memory has produced much useful discussion¹⁵. There is also a growing body of literature dealing specifically with Holocaust testimonies.¹⁶

¹³ Yehuda Bauer's forthcoming book on the history of the Jews of Kresy, Eastern Poland.

¹⁴ See this thesis P.86-88

¹⁵ Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, eds. *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, 2003; Alessandro Portelli 'What Makes Oral History Different' in *The Oral History Reader*, eds. Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson. 1988; Paul Thompson *The Voice of the Past: Oral History*, 1988

¹⁶ Judith T Baumel and Tova Cohen, eds. *Gender, Place and Memory in the Modern Jewish Experience: Replacing Ourselves*. London/Portland OR. Vallentine Mitchell 2003; C.W.W. Bigsby, *Remembering and Imagining the Holocaust. The Chain of Memory* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006; Geoffrey H. Hartman, *Holocaust Remembrance. The Shapes of Memory*. Oxford 1995; Steven T Katz and Alan Rosen, eds. *Obligated by Memory: Literature, Religion, Ethics*. Syracuse University Press, Syracuse 2006; Lawrence L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*. Yale University Press, New Haven 1991; Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust*. University of Massachusetts Press, Boston 2005; Zoe Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust. Identity, Testimony, Representation*. Oxford University Press, New York 2006; Yosef Yerushalmi, *Zakhor: Between Jewish History and Jewish Memory*. 1982

In addition to the normal problems relating to oral histories and personal memoirs, there are two other issues that need to be considered for the purposes of this thesis.

Rutland describes oral history as a way to “*bridge the span between the use of written records and oral tradition so that the two can intermesh to produce a clearer historical picture*”.¹⁷

Individual recollections of personal family and home life before the rise of Nazism are especially helpful in reconstructing a picture of The World That Was. So, personal narratives serve as a helpful barometer in understanding the magnitude of the effects of the Holocaust and, in this case, its destruction of the Jewish community of Munkács.

Of the 20 people who consented to be interviewed for this research, 3 lived in Sydney, 6 in Israel, 7 in Los Angeles and 4 in New York¹⁸. Ten men and ten women, they ranged in age at the time of their interviews from 77 to 92 years of age. In the context of the history of Munkács, 5 of them were born under Hungarian sovereignty and 15 were born in Czechoslovakia. In 1939, at the time of the outbreak of World War II and the reincorporation of the Subcarpathian region into Greater Hungary, the youngest was 10 and the eldest, who by then no longer lived in Munkács, was 25. Most of them were juveniles, whose memory of life before the Hungarian occupation was necessarily limited by their youth, although two of the women married quite young and each, by the time of ghettoisation, had an infant child.

The interviewees were predominantly from middle class to affluent backgrounds. A few were less well off but none had been totally poor or indigent. In a location of quite widespread poverty, this sample is somewhat skewed, but I have balanced this from other sources.

Another important factor colouring their narratives was that each one was a Holocaust survivor, some managing to escape or hide, others suffering the worst atrocities, such as the murder of a child. Inevitably, because of the immensity of these events on their young lives, they returned time and again to their Holocaust experiences throughout our interviews. Talking about their pre-Holocaust lives tended to focus them on their lost families and their own suffering. Each of the 20 interviewees reflected on his or her life almost in three separate parts – pre-World War II, the Holocaust and then making a new life after Liberation, with the drama of the second and third of these overshadowing the simpler tale of their pre-Holocaust youth. Each remembered a childhood of large, extended family and of a rich Jewishness to their daily life. However, subsequent events were so overwhelming that it sometimes became difficult to focus on the earlier picture. It is possible that the terrors they faced during the war years and the hardships of

¹⁷ S.D. Rutland, *Intermeshing Archival & Oral Sources: Unravelling the Story of Jewish Survivor Immigrants to Australia in Speaking to Immigrants – Oral Testimony & The History of Australian Migration*. Eds. A.J. Hammerton & E. Richards. School of Social Sciences, ANU, Canberra 2002, 129.

¹⁸ See this thesis. 86-88

migration and rebuilding a life afterwards were in such stark contrast to their younger years as to make them perhaps seem more idyllic than they really were, although some respondents did describe poverty and hardship, either in their own childhood circumstances or as observed in others around them.

The extent to which the descriptions of geography, infrastructure, events, town identities and customs of several of these respondents coincided was significant, even between those who didn't know each other or had had no contact for over 60 years.

There are several memoirs written by survivors from Munkács. There are also those written by people not originally from Munkács but who found themselves there, either in the ghettos or in some other way beforehand. They are in various languages. Some have been translated into English. Although not quite as immediate as personal interviews, they still provide useful pieces to Carr's "*enormous jig-saw with a lot of missing parts*",¹⁹ especially as some of the authors have since died. In addition, there has been considerable audio and audio-visual recording of survivor testimonies²⁰, most famously by the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation²¹ and the Twelfth Hour Project conducted in Sydney in the early 1990s²². The Sydney Jewish Museum's Project 120 has resulted in a movie, 'Stories of Survival', which screens continuously for visitors to the museum²³.

The process of obtaining oral histories

The Jewish population of Mukačevo in 1939, just prior to World War II, was 13,488²⁴. Over 85% perished in the Holocaust, leaving an estimated 2,000 survivors. In the 60 years between the

¹⁹ E.H. Carr, 'What is history?' *The George Macaulay Trevelyan Lectures*, Macmillan London, 1962, 7.

²⁰ See Björn Krondorfer 'Whose Memory is it Anyway? Reflections on Remembering, Preserving and Forgetting' in *Testifying to the Holocaust*, eds. Pam Maclean, Michele Langfield, Dvir Abramovich, Australian Association of Jewish Studies, Sydney 2008 for a catalogue of testimonial archives and an analysis of the process and value of keeping them.

²¹ *Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation* established by Steven Spielberg in 1994 to videotape and preserve testimonies of Holocaust survivors and other witnesses before it was too late. Originally housed on the back lot of Universal Studios in Los Angeles, it is now part of the University of Southern California's (USC) College of Letters, Arts & Sciences and is known as USC Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education.

²² *The Twelfth Hour Project* of the Australian Institute of Holocaust Studies recorded oral testimonies, from 1988 till about 1990, of Holocaust survivors living in Australia. They are currently housed at the State Library of New South Wales.

²³ The testimonies of 36 Survivors who were volunteer guides at The Sydney Jewish Museum in 2000 were videotaped for *Project 120*. The tapes have been digitised and are kept at the museum.

²⁴ Randolph L. Brahm 1994 *The Politics of Genocide: The Holocaust in Hungary*, Revised and Enlarged ed. NY: The Rosenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies distributed by Columbia University Press, 136.

end of World War II and the commencement of my research at least half of them have died. Post war immigration brought to Australia several dozens of Jews originally from Munkács. By the time of this study, there were only 3 left in Sydney, each of whom agreed to assist me with this research. A few descendants have also provided some material. In Melbourne, I could locate only one survivor of the post-war immigrants but was told that he was not well enough to be approached.

Several survivors I traced overseas were also too old or infirm to be interviewed. In addition, there were several who did not wish to relive their experiences and their wishes were, of course, respected. This left a pool of only a few hundred potential interviewees, scattered all over the world, some of whom would be willing to tell their story on the record.

Because of shared experiences, both before and during the Holocaust, many of the Munkács survivors have tended to stay in touch with each other, often across continents. Louis⁽²⁰⁾ explained it in this way:

“Oh, there’s nothing nicer than youth memories of Munkács...It was a wonderful place to live, with friends. Even today, we maintain all the friendships all around the world with other Munkács people”.

There are quite active *Landsmannschafts* groups in Los Angeles, New York and Israel. With their help I was able to contact 17 Holocaust survivors from Munkács, 6 in Israel, 4 in New York and 7 in Los Angeles. The 3 in Sydney were through my own connections.

Following initial contact with potential interviewees and obtaining their oral agreement to take part in this project, arrangements were generally confirmed by letter, on University of Sydney letterhead²⁵. This ensured that there would be no misunderstanding about what was expected of them. It also served to reassure subjects of the legitimacy of my approach to them as well as provided them with contact details, should they wish to make any enquiries or complaints at any stage of the process.

Pre-interview contact was generally by telephone, although on a few occasions it was face to face. Interviewees were asked to provide basic biographical information as detailed in the *Pre-Interview Questions*²⁶. The pre-interview was intended to establish a trust relationship with interviewees while assisting them to collect their thoughts about an emotional topic, without

²⁵ See Appendix 2. For his advice and assistance with this documentation, thanks go to Michael E. Abrahams-Sprod

²⁶ See Appendix 3.

subjecting them to the cold and sometimes difficult process of doing it in writing. At this point, two people who had previously agreed to participate decided not to proceed.

Two testimonies given to the Twelfth Hour Project²⁷ were also made available. Both of the respondents had died before the commencement of this study, one of whom was my late mother. The purpose of the Twelfth Hour Project was to record eyewitness testimonies of Holocaust survivors. In addition, the son of a Munkács born man, now deceased, provided a copy of the transcripts of a series of interviews he had conducted over a period of time with his late father. As none of these interviews was specifically designed to gather the information sought for this particular study, they were interesting in adding 'colour' but otherwise were of limited use.

Despite debate among Oral Historians about recording of interviews, those done for this research were recorded on cassette tape. This was based on the belief that "*interviewers (are) creating historical records every time they conduct interviews*" and that these recordings then become "*verifiable source material*",²⁸ especially as they are spoken in the eyewitnesses' own voice and words. This was done, of course, with the written permission of my subjects²⁹. They were then transcribed. I also translated those that I had conducted in Hungarian. In putting together this 'word picture', I have used extracts from these transcriptions more or less verbatim, particularly since my aim has been to tell the story in the actual voices of those who lived it.

Ethics Committee approval was required prior to undertaking the interviews as a matter of standard procedure, the purpose being to protect all parties involved – the interviewer, the respondents and Sydney University, under whose auspices the research was done. Part of this process entailed acknowledgement of the particular delicacy and extra sensitivity needed, since the interview subjects were Holocaust survivors, all over 75 years of age.

The process of gaining permission was quite a complicated one, requiring completion of a 25 page questionnaire plus addenda for Committee consideration, responding to requests for further explanations and preparing responses to further requests for even more information. I don't intend to detail this saga. Suffice it to say that I was able to undertake my Oral History interviews with the Committee's approval.

²⁷ *The Twelfth Hour Project* op. cit.

²⁸ B. M. Robertson, *Oral History Handbook*, Oral History Association of Australia Inc., South Australian Branch, 2002, 2.

²⁹ See Appendix 2, 2nd page

3. Munkács: A brief history

Munkács is situated in Subcarpathian (literally 'Under the Carpathian Mountains') Ruthenia. This region has an area of a little under 13,000 square kilometres of beautiful, picturesque, lushly green, densely tree-covered mountainous terrain. Lying on the inner slopes of the East Beskids' extension of the once volcanic Carpathian Mountains, it is intersected by river valleys, with a small strip of adjacent fertile plain. The mountains themselves are high and rocky, their peaks covered in snow in winter and colourful wild field flowers in summer. They form a visible distant backdrop to Munkács's cityscape.



(Maps ©USHMM, Washington, D.C)

Subcarpathian Ruthenia sits on the extreme tip of Slovakia at the point where Hungary, Slovakia, Polish Galicia, Transylvania and Ukraine meet. This geographic location has long been a major catalyst for its history. The modern concept of a multicultural, multi-ethnic society could well claim this region, pre-1938, as one of its forebears.



(Maps ©USHMM, Washington, D.C)

The region has had a long history of shifting borders, with 17 recorded changes of statehood, including two brief periods as an independent republic. No less than five of these changes of sovereignty occurred in the first half of the 20th century. This peripatetic history is reflected in the multiplicity of its place names. It is known variously as Subcarpathian Ruthenia, Subcarpathian Rus, Carpaten, Podkarpatskaya Rus, Carpatho-Ukraine, Karpatalja and Zakarpatskaya Oblast. It was also part of what was known as *Felvidek* or Upper Territories by the Hungarians, and still is by the irredentists of today.

The mix of national and ethnic minorities also made it multi-lingual, as reflected in the various names by which its cities, towns, villages, districts and geographic features have been known throughout its history. **Uzhgorod** (Czech, Ukrainian), in Ung County, also known as **Ungvar** (Hungarian) is the region's administrative capital, while its main commercial centre, located on the banks of the Latoritsa River in Bereg County, has been known by various names including:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Mukacheve (Ukrainian) | Mukaczewo (Polish) |
| Mukachiv (Ruthenian/Rusyn) | Munkács (Hungarian) |
| Mukachevo (Russian) | Munkatsch (German) |
| Mukačevo (Czech, Slovak) | Minkach (Yiddish) |
| Mukacov (Czech – historical) | Muncaci (Romanian) |

depending largely on who was in power at any given time. I shall refer to it here by its Hungarian name, Munkács, the name most familiar to its pre-World War II Jews.

During my visit to the Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation in Los Angeles,³⁰ I found, framed on a wall, a few sentences which perhaps humorously but accurately encapsulate the 20th century history of Munkács:

**It is possible to:
Have been born in Austria-Hungary,
Have been married in Czechoslovakia,
Have given birth in Hungary,
Have lived with your family in the Soviet Union,
Reside currently in Ukraine,
...And never have left the city of Mukacheve**

There are many variations on this story in circulation, but each with the same punchline. My parents were born in different countries but the same city – Munkács/Mukačevo.

Historically significant changes of Subcarpathian Ruthenia sovereignty which, of course, included Munkács, were not all without some inter-ethnic or inter-national opposition and upheaval, sometimes violent. It is not unlikely that some of these resentments came to have residual effects during the mid 20th century, especially when encouraged by government sanctioned racism and exacerbated by the emotional turmoil of war. However, it is significant that, for the most part, people of various ethno-religious backgrounds had lived there for centuries, perhaps not as close friends, but certainly in relative harmony. The Holocaust was the first real *pogrom* experienced in the region.

From the 9th to 11th centuries Munkács was part of the Kievan Rus state. In 1018 it became the centre of power of the kings of Hungary. In 1397 the Hungarian King Sigismund granted the town and its surrounds to the Ruthenian prince, Theodor Koriatovich, who settled many of his fellow Ruthenians in the territory. The town again reverted to Hungary in 1445, with the status of an Hungarian Free Royal Town, changing during the 16th century once again, when it became part of the Transylvanian duchy.

Despite anti-Habsburg sentiment and riots, Mukačevo came under the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the 18th century. In 1726 the Habsburgs granted ownership of the town and its surrounding district to the feudal Schönborn family, who brought in many German settlers, mostly as expert foresters, expanding both the town and its economy.

30 *Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation*, op. cit

As part of Greater Hungary, the region was under the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy from 1867 to 1918. From the late 1800's a capitalist system had been evolving in Hungary with an emerging middle class but these developments didn't reach the Upper Territories. Economically the Subcarpathian region remained underdeveloped, primarily rural-agrarian with a high degree of poverty, especially in the areas outside the major towns. Even though serfdom had officially been abolished under the 1848 Constitution, poverty was prevalent in eastern Hungary across all the minority populations and most of the rural population constituted a peasant class. Although economically things were a little better in Munkács, the region's major commercial centre, financial hardship was still the order of the day for many of its inhabitants. This situation did not change substantially with its subsequent move from Hungarian to Czechoslovak sovereignty.

Between the two World Wars, Munkács twice changed its nationality under successive power re-alignments in Europe. On 4 June 1920 following a period of unrest at the end of World War I, the region was carved up under the treaty of Trianon. Ung and Bereg Counties were part of the territory annexed to the newly created state of Czechoslovakia. Under President Tomáš G. Masaryk's remarkable humanitarian liberal rule, the Jews of Munkács were granted official minority status. Masaryk had been so revered by the grateful Jews of Czechoslovakia that when he died on 14 September 1937, he was deeply and publicly mourned.

In October 1938, under the right-wing government of Emil Hácha, Czechoslovakia became a loose federation of its various ethnic regions and Subcarpathian Ruthenia was granted autonomous status. In March 1939, following Germany's total dismemberment of the now so called Czecho-Slovakia, Carpatho-Ukraine gained independence under the Ukrainophile Premier, Monsignor Augustin Ivanovych Voloshyn, leader of the Ruthenian National Christian Party. Only Nazi Germany recognised this new independent entity³¹, which lasted only one day until the Hungarian army invaded on 15 March, 1939 and the region fell under German-Hungarian occupation, once again becoming part of Hungary.

When the Soviet Army liberated the region in October 1944, the government of Edvard Beneš expected it to become part of Czechoslovakia once again. The Russians had signed an agreement in May of that year, stating that all Czechoslovak territories liberated by the Soviets would revert to Czechoslovakia. However, it wasn't long before they reneged and the region became part of the Soviet Union, annexed in June 1945. In 1991 it became the Zakarpatskaya oblast of the independent Republic Ukraine, its current nationality.

³¹ Paul Robert Magocsi and Ivan Pop, eds. *Encyclopedia of Rusyn history and culture*. Toronto; London: University of Toronto Press, 2002, 61.

Several of these changes of hegemony also brought about changes in the ethnic make-up of the region. The censuses of 1910 (Hungarian) and 1921 and 1930 (Czechoslovak) give the following figures for Ruthenia³²:

	1910 (maternal language)	(nationality)	1921	1930
Ruthenes	319,361	Ruthenes, Russians and Ukrainians	372,500 103,690	446,911 109,472
Magyars	169,434		10,326	13,249
Germans	62,187		10,810	12,641
Romanians	15,387	Czechs and Slovaks	19,775	33,961
Slovaks	4,057	Jews	79,715	91,259
Others	1,062	Poles	298	
		Gypsies		1,357
		Others		278
	571,488		595,114	709,128

The differences between the Hungarian and Czechoslovak figures are partly due to population growth and partly to differences in definitions. In 1910 the Hungarians based their figures on language, or ‘mother tongue’, and had no category for Jews. They treated 53,942 Yiddish speakers as Germans and a further 30,680 Hungarian-speaking Jews as Magyars. It is noteworthy that the census of 1941, once more under the Hungarians, again had no category for Jews. This was particularly significant at a time when Hungarian anti-Jewish laws required the registration of all Jews of all ages, including new-born babies. SÁGVÁRI describes this as “statistical fraud”³³.

The 1921 Czechoslovak census gave Jews official standing as a separate minority group for the first time and those Jews who classified themselves as Hungarians faced imprisonment³⁴. The Hungarians had counted as their own much of the Jewish population by giving them no

³² C. A. Macartney: *Geography, Population, History: The Ruthene Question in Hungary and Her Successors*, Oxford University Press 1937 203ff: www.hungarian-history.hu/lib/macartney2/4Ruthenia.pdf. Accessed June, 2007.

³³ Ágnes SÁGVÁRI "The Holocaust in Carpatho-Ruthenia", 8.

³⁴ András S Benedek, *Gens fidelissima: The Rusyns A pocketbook*, published in the Rusyn language, for the benefit of the people of Rusynsko, especially the students and teachers of history. Matthias Corvinus Publishing. Pre-publishing copy for the Corvinus Library Homepage 2001, 67. www.hungarian-history.hu/lib/rusyns/rusyns.pdf. Accessed March-April, 2009.

alternative other than Hungarian as their 'mother tongue', Yiddish not being an option, thereby giving a skewed picture of the population makeup of the province. This was a particularly sensitive issue for the Czechoslovak authorities, whose interest it was to increase the number of people identifying with a wider range of minorities, thereby decreasing the number of Magyars and any on-going irredentist Hungarian claims to the territory.

From the figures above it is clear that the majority ethnic population of the province was Ruthenian-Ukrainian, also known as Rusyn, although this was by no means an homogeneous group, being split mostly along lines of religion and across at least a dozen dialects. Other significant minorities were Hungarians, Romanians, Jews, German Schwabs, Poles and Gypsies. After the end of World War I there was also an influx of Czechs, Slovaks, Bulgarians and Yugoslavs, despite the relative poverty of the district. In 1930 the population of Subcarpathian Ruthenia represented at least ten major ethnic communities, each one a significant minority. Some 91,000, over 12%, registered as Jews, of whom about two thirds were living in villages, making them the highest proportion of Jewish rural dwellers in Europe.

4. The Jews of Munkács

Jews arrived in the town in significant numbers probably in the early second half of the 17th century. There is, however, some evidence to suggest that individual Jews had lived in the district for much longer.

In 1711, when the noble Schönborn family acquired ownership of the town, they authorised the growth of the Jewish population on payment of special taxes and levies, and permitted their participation in certain commercial activities, such as timber and flour milling. By the mid 1700s the Jewish community began to expand. Official documents from 1736³⁵ recorded 9 Jewish families resident in Munkács. By 1741, this figure had grown to 80 families and a synagogue was established.

The Austrian Queen, Maria Theresa, decreed a tolerance tax in 1746, causing great hardship, especially to those Jews in rural areas. This onerous impost was not lifted until 1848 – over a hundred years later.

The 1768 Pogroms by the Haidamak Cossacks, in which thousands of Jews were massacred in Ukraine, particularly the city of Uman, saw another wave of migration to the less volatile side of the Carpathian Mountains. This trend continued following the October 1781 Edict of Toleration promulgated by the Holy Roman Emperor Joseph II of Austria, which granted limited freedom of worship to non-Roman Catholics, regularising the status of Jews in the Habsburg territories and removing some of the discriminatory restrictions under which they had previously been required to live.

The 'normalisation' of the status of Jews was further advanced in 1829 when legislation was passed permitting Jewish ownership of land, enabling the Jewish community to purchase land for a new synagogue in Munkács.

By 1830 the population had risen to 651, mainly with new arrivals from Galicia who were either escaping harsh conditions at home or were attracted by the strength of *Hasidic* life and education which had developed in Munkács. Although the Jewish community became extremely diverse as it grew, it continued to be known for its extreme *Hasidic* form of piety. Knowledge of Yiddish was almost universal among the Jewish population, religious or not.

³⁵ *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust*, Volume II. Yad Vashem, Jerusalem: NYU Press, 857.

In 1851 the Munkács Yeshiva was founded, attracting students from far afield by its high standards of piety and learning. It reached its zenith under the leadership of the ultra-conservative, anti-Zionist Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapira from 1913 until his death in 1937.

In 1871 a Hebrew press was established by Rabbi Pinchas Bleyer, publishing many Hebrew and Yiddish books used throughout eastern Central Europe. By 1907 Munkács boasted 5 such printing houses, making the city noted as a major supplier of Jewish texts. There were also 4 Yiddish language papers supporting varied but strong political positions. Although they were all in the same language, they each spoke with a different voice. The Munkácser Rabbi's *Hasidim* read the *Yidishe tsaytung* (Jewish Newspaper); Zionism was represented by the *Yidishe shtime* (Jewish Voice) and *Yidishes folks-blatt* (Jewish People's Paper) which was strongly hostile to the Munkácser Rebbe. The satirical *Der Humorist* was also popular.³⁶

By 1921, one year after the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Jewish population of Munkács had risen to 10,012 and to 11,241 by 1930, with 88% registering their nationality as Jewish. The possibility of electing Jewish nationality happened for the first time under the liberal government of Tomáš Masaryk. Throughout the rest of Czechoslovakia only some 54% of Jews chose to do so, compared to 88% in the Subcarpathians.

By the time the region was annexed by Hungary in 1939 the Jewish population of Munkács had grown to 13,488, an astonishing 42.7%³⁷ of the town's population. This made it the largest centre of Jewish population in both actual and percentage terms of all the 26 major population centres in all of the pre-Trianon Territories reclaimed by the Hungarians, including parts of Transylvania, Slovakia and the rest of Subcarpathian Ruthenia.

Although the beginnings of the Munkács Jewish community were deeply rooted in *Hasidic* ultra-Orthodoxy, this by no means continued as the universal identification of all of the city's Jews. In addition to its yeshivas, several *battei-midrash*, *kloyzen* and religious elementary schools and kindergartens, the town also boasted the first secular Zionist Hebrew elementary school in Czechoslovakia opening in 1921 and a Hebrew high school or Gymnasium, opened in 1924 under the gifted directorship of Dr. Chaim Kugel. In fact, Zionism thrived and flourished alongside *Hasidism*, as did non-*Hasidic* Orthodoxy, albeit not with quite the same numbers of adherents³⁸. Movements from the leftist *Hanoar Hatzioni* (*Hashomer Hatzair*) to *Betar* on the right attracted large numbers of young people. While the bulk of the population was not

³⁶ <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005792>, Accessed 11 October 2004 and thereafter.

³⁷ Braham, *The Politics of Genocide*, 136.

³⁸ Jelinek *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 148.

particularly politically active, the Zionist *Židovská strana* (Czech – Jewish Party) of Czechoslovakia attracted a not insignificant membership. There were even those who supported communism as well as a small degree of support for Neolog theology³⁹. A considerable amount of friction existed, not only between the *Hasidim* and the more secular Zionists, but also between the followers of different forms of *Hasidism*, especially between the followers of the Munkácser and the Belzer Rebbes⁴⁰.

Munkács cityscape

The Latoritsa River runs through Munkács, dividing the city. A bridge joins *Oroszvég* (Hungarian) or *Rosvegovo* (Czech) (literally Russian End) with the central part of the city.

The city skyline is dominated by the well-fortified 14th century Palanok Castle on Lamkova Hill, rising to a height of 68 meters on Munkács's outskirts. It was once the seat of the Ruthenian 'Prince of Mukačevo' and used at different times as a fortress and a prison by successive rulers. Two other significant architectural landmarks are a monastery, also dating back to the 14th century and a Ukrainian style church built in the 18th century.

Rose⁽¹²⁾ recalled the place of her birth as

“Beautiful, really and truly a beautiful city. Beautiful city. Can you imagine a city, you know, surrounded with huge mountains, a river in the middle... we were surrounded with these mountains, vineyards, foliage, green...streets with really and truly just trees, flowers... there were always beautiful flowers...”

Other landmark buildings were City Hall, the triple spire Orthodox church and the *Kohner Kastély*, a villa bequeathed to the Jewish Burial Society by a wealthy Jew, confiscated by the city and later used by the Hungarians as a place to torture prisoners, especially suspected Communist sympathisers, my mother's brother among them.

³⁹ 'Neolog' is a movement started in the 19th century, mainly in Hungary, seeking to 'modernise' Judaism and viewed by Ultra-orthodox and more traditional Jews as anathema. Today most closely comparable to Conservative Judaism, it is spread world wide.

⁴⁰ The Yiddish designation 'Rebbe', derived from the Hebrew 'Rabbi', is used to indicate a highly respected leader and mentor of Hassidic Jewish movements.

The main synagogue or *Beis Hamedrash*, was on Munkács's High or Main Street. There were also some 30 other well frequented synagogues and Jewish *shtibelach* or prayer houses of varying sizes and different adherences, including those of the Munkácser, Belzer, Spinka, Vizhnitz and Zidichov Rebbes. A few of these *shtibels* belonged to individual large, well-off extended families, such as the *Vizhnitz shul* owned by my father's extended Kahan family.

The buildings in the centre of Munkács were predominantly well-maintained 2 and 3 storey solid brick constructions, stucco covered and painted in pastel colours. Most were residential, often a mixture of residences and small businesses, such as street level shops or with light industry or artisans' workshops in the basement. Some were free standing buildings; many were adjoined to their neighbours. For the most part, they were built around a central courtyard, called a '*hoyf*' in Yiddish, *udvar* in Hungarian, where children could play, creating something of a mini-community of neighbours. Many also had long back yards, often used by the residents for cottage agriculture purposes, such as growing vegetables or fruit trees, raising poultry or other livestock. Most people lived in rented apartments in multi-dwelling buildings, owned by wealthier townfolk, some of whom were Jews. Helen⁽¹⁰⁾ recalled that:

"our landlord was a German. He owned 4 houses, not apartment houses, like regular houses and he sold it. He went back to Germany, so all the tenants there had to move out (after 1938, with the advent of the Hungarians)...and we had a smaller apartment".

Those who were better off owned their own single dwelling houses. Alice⁽⁹⁾ described her family home as:

"...adjoining and it had four families. It was a four-family house...On the street, yeah...We had a garden and a yard where my father used to love to plant tomatoes and vegetables and my mother planted flowers. And across the street at one time there was an empty lot and then they built up another building. They were I think brick with stucco covered. They had pastel colours. Ours was pink, next door's was yellow, the one adjoining us was mint green. It was all very pretty".

Even today, many of the city's buildings are colourfully painted. The town hall is pale green.

Footpaths were brick paved and the actual roadways were made of cobblestones. In the more affluent areas, according to Tuvia⁽²⁾, better off residents were expected to maintain them and failure to do so could incur a fine. The best way to avoid a fine was not only to maintain the area outside one's home but also, he explained, with regular 'gifts' to the Inspector:

"The street is not cleaned, (he) give you a report, you have to pay. Your

light is not on in the street after 10 o'clock...we were responsible for the City. He got it from the City Mayor and every Section fixes the street, Everything...Between 10 and 12 o'clock has to be light on...Because everybody was responsible for the footpath outside their own house, and if it was snowing, you had to clean it. If it's not enough clean for his eyes, or not enough money, then it's not clean; you get a fine".

Reflecting their wide socio-economic range, Jews lived all over the city, from up-market *Kertváros* (literally Garden City) to the almost slum-like poor *Yehuda Halevy* Street, more commonly known as *Zsidó utca* (Jewish Street). Rose⁽¹²⁾ described this as “*lang vi di gules*”, literally ‘as long as the Exile (diaspora)’, to indicate it’s considerable length, running from *Rákóczi utca* near the city centre all the way to the bank of the Latoritsa River. The street contained not only the homes of poorer Jews, but also some exclusively Jewish businesses. It was here that Jews could find a wide range of goods and services, from shops selling Jewish religious books, prayer shawls and other necessities for religious observance through to *Shochtem* – religious slaughterers for their poultry – located at the riverbank end.

The prestigious district of *Kertváros* was also described by Rose⁽¹²⁾:

“It was on the water side, water frontage, you know, beautiful villas, but Jews lived there too. But mostly, you know, the rich Hungarians”.

In other parts of the city, the diversity was also visible in other every-day ways. Jews also owned most of the city’s up-market shops, engaged in both retail and wholesale trade, and even some manufacturing. These included hardware, textiles, clothing, crockery and porcelain, food and drink, books, stationery and other printed material. They sold a lot of imported goods, largely from the more developed industrial parts of Czechoslovakia.

A large, open air market, known in Hungarian as *Fa Piac* (Timber Market) was situated behind the *Baka Corso* in the city’s centre. Despite its name, this was a place for trade in all manner of domestic and household necessities, including fruit, vegetables and other food, clothing, cooking utensils, firewood, cheap costume jewellery, toys and other goods, all displayed on outdoor street stalls, with vendors loudly calling their wares.

Later on, this large area became the *Appell* or assembly place from where the Germans took the Jews to the brick factory ghettos.

Both shoppers and vendors were a mixture; better dressed townsfolk blended with religious, bearded and *peyes* (side curls) sporting Jews in their long black kaftans and wide-brimmed black hats, alongside peasants in their colourfully embroidered traditional clothes, sheepskin

jackets and felt boots, who came from the surrounding countryside to sell their produce. Several of my interviewees talked about the best and freshest vegetables brought to market by the *Bulgar* farmers, rural peasants from nearby villages, seemingly of Bulgarian ancestry. The air was filled with the sounds of geese, chickens and other livestock adding to the general cacophony of languages, as vendors shouted their wares and haggled with their customers, although Yiddish seemed to predominate. Apparently even some non-Jews spoke Yiddish, because of the significant Jewish proportion of the city's population. My respondents spoke of almost all commercial enterprises being closed on both Saturday and Sunday, the latter by law in deference to the Christian Sabbath and the former because Jews didn't work on their Sabbath. This meant that there was very little trade to be had as Jews neither bought nor sold anything on Saturday, so there was no point in most non-Jewish businesses being open.

According to Nick⁽¹⁸⁾, Monday was a very busy day:

“the Russian peasants, the Russian farmers brought in their goods on Monday mornings and there was a special place where they lined up. It was a market, something like a farmers’ market in a primitive way and I remember I used to go with my mother out there, I used to carry the things and she used to do the shopping on Mondays. That was the busiest day in Munkács because the whole neighbourhood, the peasants came in and they sold their goods and they bought whatever they needed. They spent their money. It was the busiest day as far as traffic in Munkács is concerned”.

Family life

Family structure and relationships served very important functions in the social fabric of Jewish communities of the day. In this regard, Munkács was not unique. Jewish families tended to be large, close-knit and widely dispersed, not only throughout Subcarpathia, but as far afield as cities, towns and villages in Transylvania, Hungary, Slovakia and Galicia in Poland. My maternal grandmother's father had lived in Vienna; my father's mother came from Galicia. Certainly for the *Hasidim*, but even amongst those who considered themselves 'religious but not fanatic' as well as the more secular Zionists, it was usual to have several children. Benzi⁽⁵⁾ described the high rate of child mortality:

“My mother had 14 children but when they deported her there were 7. Sadly there were epidemics and children died very young”.

Many succumbed to typhoid fever, tuberculosis, scarlet fever and other epidemics.

My father and mother were the youngest of 7 and 8 children respectively. Of my 20 respondents, only one was an only child. Two others had one sibling each and the rest varied from being one of 4 to one of 14 children. It was not unusual for them to have grandparents living with them.

Their parents also tended to have multiple siblings, often not living in Munkács. Either a parent had come to Munkács to marry or had siblings who moved away from Munkács to their spouse's home. My father's eldest brother and sister both married in Marmarosh Sighet in Transylvania. Close relatives living some distance apart within Munkács or even at quite a distance away from the city came to visit or were visited regularly, if not too frequently.

These contacts were critical factors in family cohesion. Ties of kinship were usually very strong and very warm, unaffected by distance or ease of transport, as shown by Ilonka⁽¹¹⁾:

“My father's parents lived near Svaljova, more up towards the Carpathians and they came often to the city. They brought us potatoes, corn, everything they had in the garden. My grandmother came once when I had a cold. She didn't care if it was school time or not, she took me home to the country. I don't know how far it was but we travelled by horse-drawn wagon”.

The belief in family unity encompassed even extended family members and traversed the generations, as described by Ze'ev⁽⁶⁾:

“My father had an aunt, who raised him. His mother died when he was 4, in childbirth. His father remarried and the family didn't want him raised by a step-mother. So he was raised by her and I, if I knew that there'd be something to eat at home that I didn't like, I'd go to her. She'd do anything for me and the other children because her grandchildren came later. We were her grandchildren”.

Helen⁽¹⁰⁾ shared the responsibility of caring for her grandmother, who had Parkinson's Disease:

“...for 9 years I was sleeping there...I finished dinner at home – supper – took my books, did my homework at my grandmother's, and in the morning I went to school from my grandmother. And at night, if I had to get up and help her, we changed off with my aunt...”

Certainly there were families some of whose members quarrelled but this was not the norm. More commonly, family could be relied on to come to the rescue in times of hardship. This was especially true when the persecution of Jews became greater and more widespread throughout Europe. Sometimes the help needed was difficult and even personally dangerous, but was still given. One didn't turn one's back on family. Ze'ev⁽⁶⁾:

"...had an aunt in Holland who didn't survive. She wrote to us in '41 or '42 asking us to send her Hungarian citizenship papers because 'if not, then I'll soon be with my parents'. My mother travelled to Budapest to arrange everything for her, but it didn't help".

Several of my respondents survived Auschwitz in the company of relatives – parents, siblings, cousins and even in-laws – and often did so because of mutual moral sustenance these close relationships gave them. This remained true after liberation, finding their ways onwards, either back home to Munkács or elsewhere and doing so not alone, but in company with those with whom they shared both their recent horrors and losses, and a life history and familiarity.

The roles of various family members were, for the most part, quite clearly defined along the same very traditional lines as other religious Jewish communities throughout Eastern and Central Europe of the day. The community did, after all, trace much of its ancestry back to Galicia, the heartland of *Hasidism*.

Fathers were responsible for all aspects of the family outside the home. They were expected to be the breadwinners, supporting the family either by running a business, practising a profession or earning a wage in employment. They concerned themselves with any issue relating to money, such as housing the family and educating their children, especially their sons. They were also generally in charge of dealings with officialdom, be it in local communal matters or broader government ones. These could be issues to do with the *Kool*, the organisation of the local Jewish community, or more everyday official matters, such as paying taxes or obtaining certain business licences.

Mothers, on the other hand, were in charge of the home. They were responsible for preparations for *Shabbat* and the various festivals, as well as running the household, managing the shopping, cooking and cleaning, sometimes with the help of a maid and often of their own children as well.

In the more religious homes, young boys went to *cheder* to study Judaism. Mothers were in charge of their daughters' Jewish education, teaching them not just to cook, but to do so within

the rules of *Kashrut* and to prepare particular foods pertinent to the various festivals. They taught their daughters to pray, using the *Tsene-rene*,⁴¹ the rules of ritual cleanliness, how to light the *Shabbat* candles and how to clean the house of any unacceptable foods for *Pesach* (Passover). In my mother's *Hasidic* family, this went as far as actually whitewashing the kitchen – a chore for both mother and daughters. In wealthier homes, much of this was done by maids.

Even though she lives in Israel and reads Hebrew fluently, Gaby⁽⁴⁾ still warmly remembered:

"I always said that I want a prayer book that I can understand what I'm reading. I want to understand. My mother was always reading the Tsene-rene and I had one wish – to have a Hungarian Tsene-rene, and now I have one...I read it in Hungarian...now it's the memory of my mother telling us about everything...when it was Tisha b'Av she sat on the floor and told us the whole history..."

Of those interviewed for this project, 18 described their mother as a housewife, at home looking after the family. Three had lost their mother at a very young age. Only one of their fathers had remarried; his second wife was also a housewife, as were both of my own grandmothers. There were, however, women working outside the home, mostly in their husband's or family's business. Helen's⁽¹⁰⁾ father had a non-kosher butchery. Her mother

"was part-time in the store, because we also delivered meat to restaurants".

Margaret⁽¹⁶⁾ grew up in very well off circumstances. Several of her relatives worked in the family's textile stores:

"My grandfather, my grandmother, my mother, my father, and when the two boys of my grandparents grew up they also worked there and apart from that we had a few employees".

Not only did generations of families work together, they often lived in the same house, as did Margaret's⁽¹⁶⁾:

"It was normal. It was very pleasant habit because we were in touch with each other. We were a very close family and it was just nice to see them every day".

⁴¹ A rendering in Yiddish of the Pentateuch, the *Megillot* (Five Scrolls of the Bible) and the *Haftarot* (portions from Prophets read in synagogue after the Sabbath reading from the Torah). Written in 1622 by Rabbi Jacob ben Isaac Ashkenazi to enable both men and women to "understand the word of God in simple language," it became the main religious text among Ashkenazi Jewish women. <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/zeenah-u-reenah>, Accessed 20 May, 2009.

Children were expected to be very respectful, obeying the Fifth Commandment, enjoining them to honour not only their own parents, but all their adult relatives.

Making a living

Despite the remarkable diversity and richness of Jewish life, the Jews of the region around Munkács were among the poorest in Europe, engaging largely in manual and agricultural labour. In a 1935 parliamentary speech, Dr. Chaim Kugel, Jewish Party delegate to the Czechoslovak Parliament, reflected the extreme poverty of the region:

*“...It is completely impossible to adequately describe the poverty in the area. The Jews...are affected equally along with the rest...I strongly wish to protest any attempt to blame the poverty of the Subcarpathian Ruthenian peasantry on the Jews...”*⁴²

Despite assistance from external agencies, such as WIZO⁴³ and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, apparently not much had changed since the early 1920s reports by the latter of the widespread abject poverty of Subcarpathian Jewry⁴⁴.

For the most part, Jews lived similar lives to their non-Jewish peasant neighbours in the country villages and farm districts, except for the spiritual sustenance most of them derived from their religious piety.

In Munkács itself, Jews were a little better off, the majority being involved in petty commerce, trade and crafts. They were tailors, dressmakers, shoemakers, carpenters, printers, wig makers. It seems that even one of the city's prostitutes was the daughter of very prominent Jewish parents. Some were wealthier landowners or merchants trading timber and other exports for imported manufactured goods from Budapest, Vienna and other large cities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Prague in the Czechoslovak era. A high percentage of professionals – doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, engineers, journalists, teachers, intellectuals, musicians and artists – were Jews. Driving, be it the horse-drawn wagons, drays or fiakers earlier on, or taxis with the arrival of motor cars, was a predominantly Jewish occupation. Some were employed in the town's official administration and also as waiters in the city's restaurants, pubs, cafes and

⁴² Aryeh Sole, Subcarpathian Ruthenia, 1918-1938, in *The Jews of Czechoslovakia*, vol. 1, 132.

⁴³ Women's International Zionist Organisation.

⁴⁴ Jelinek *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 119-124.

hotels. Jews also worked in the very few larger industries in the city, including the tobacco and beer factories and brick-kilns, although many were unemployed or living on precarious subsistence level incomes, relying heavily on the community's charity. Charitable support for its most needy came both through the *Kool* (Yiddish – Jewish communal organisation) and by those who were better off, making sure that they had enough food for their families for the Friday night Sabbath table, *matzos* for Passover, medicine and other necessities. Nevertheless, life was still a struggle for many families.

Several of those I interviewed spoke of the poverty in the community, not just in the countryside but in Munkács itself. Chaim⁽¹⁾ remembered:

“there was a lot of beggars, not just in Munkács; they came from the villages; mostly Jews, shnorrers (Yiddish – beggars)...there were non-Jewish beggars, but few...non-Jews were beggars who sat on the footpath...Jewish beggars went house to house”.

Sam⁽¹³⁾ described how widespread and deeply rooted were the problems of poverty for many Jews:

“there were lots of people that struggled in order to make a living. It was a very, very major issue, a major problem to make a living...so what they did is, a lot of people went away to Moravia, to Slovakia to shnor and then send money home and they came back. They went door-to-door for money, raising money for their families, raising money to marry off a daughter, raising money for being able to move into a decent room or somewhere decent...they would go out all over the country and shnor and they would leave on Monday and come home on Friday for Shabbes. And if they were lucky enough, they brought enough money to keep the family for the week...our area was...the largest exporter of shnorrers in the world. We sent shnorrers to the whole world because people simply couldn't make a living...”

Miriam⁽¹⁷⁾ recalled an event that showed how some better off members of the community shared good fortune with the poor:

“I remember we had on Thursdays, all the poor people came for nedove, a contribution and somebody had to stand in the window just giving them the money, all day. All day they came...and when my sister got married... my father made a party for them and they were served in the factory and I remember maybe 50 people came to have dinner...they were very poor, very, very poor”.

Sam⁽¹³⁾ managed to find a later advantage to this adversity:

“It was a very hard town to make a living and I think that that gave us a certain edge in life and also enabled more of our people, or youngster, to survive than say, people who came from Budapest who were selyem gyerekek (Hungarian – Silk or pampered children) and didn’t have any hardship. They didn’t know what hardship means, so when they came to the camp they couldn’t make it because they immediately started talking about not being able to survive it and the moment you adopted this attitude you – were obviously a candidate. So we, in our instance they were pretty tough boys, whether they went to yeshiva and had to go for days (without) eating, or whether they didn’t go to yeshiva. Even if they lived at home, parnosah (Hebrew/Yiddish – livelihood) was a very big item in our town. There were very few affluent people. There were a few, but very limited number”.

Despite their internal differences, the Jews of Munkács maintained the tradition of supporting its poor and of honouring the *Shnorrer*. This is highlighted by Susan's⁽⁸⁾ story of when her mother died:

“it was a very, very big levaye (Yiddish – funeral). There were so many people I didn’t even know. You know, people were crying ‘Who will give me for Shabbes?’ My mother had a whole list to grocers where that they come to Shabbes that they should... given that food that they needed for Shabbes... Which she paid for. Yep”.

Tsdoke (Yiddish – charity) was considered an obligation amongst those who could afford to give. Anonymous charity was most honourable, so as not to shame or obligate the receiver.

There were also some better off Jews. Commerce, according to the literature, was largely in Jewish hands. Of my 20 interviewees, almost all had fathers who ran their own business, sometimes inherited from their grandfather. Some were retailers covering a wide range of products including grocers, a non-kosher butcher, women’s wear, house wares, textiles, stationery and school items, shoe leather and paint. Some were also wholesalers, trading their wares right across the country, and even beyond. One ran his own *cheder* which, although not actually affiliated with the Munkácser Rebbe, seems to have had his approval since his own grandson was a pupil there. Gaby's⁽⁴⁾ father was a freelance accountant, looking after the financial affairs of a number of different businesses in the city. He was also a German translator and letter-writer, essential for international business correspondence.

Close family relationships often extended beyond the domestic and into the realm of business, sometimes run by, and supporting, several relatives. Louis⁽²⁰⁾ described how, in his father's case:

“Four brothers inherited the store of my grandfather. The 4 brothers managed the store. We had wholesale china, crystal, house ware wholesale and retail stores”.

However, as Gaby⁽⁴⁾ explained, even for middle class, educated professionals:

“It wasn't easy. You had to work very hard. For instance there were 5 of us and a maid and a large household and all that money had to be earned”.

Susan's⁽⁸⁾ family had several inter-related but diverse business interests:

“We had our own wineries also, and they...had a korcsma (Hungarian – a pub)...and we had a few restaurants...they were rented to somebody but in our houses...and playrooms, we had kuglizó – gambling place. And that everything was rented out. We didn't manage. Everything was rented out”.

Munkács, and indeed the whole Subcarpathian region, had very little in the way of large manufacturing industry. There were, however, Jewish manufacturers of various products and varying sizes. Timber was by far the most important industry. Those involved were amongst Munkács's most successful and wealthy residents, right across all the national groups – Schwabs (ethnic Germans), Hungarians and, of course, Jews.

Both Ze'ev⁽⁶⁾ and Benzi⁽⁵⁾ described their fathers' similar forestry and timber production enterprises: Ze'ev's father:

“bought a section of forest. The Carpathians had large forests and every year they sold a particular part – 150,000 trees, 200,000 trees, beech trees – that was expensive timber. Usually 2 or 3 Jews got together and bought it and then they logged them. There were tree loggers who cut the trees down and laid them down...”

Benzi⁽⁵⁾ told a similar story. His father:

“...used to, alone or with partners, buy a section of forest in Carpatho-Rus 60, 80, 100 kilometres from Munkács”.

His partners were invariably other Jews. My paternal grandfather, Dovid Kahan, was also successful in the timber industry until the Hungarian regime. Like many others, including some of

his own brothers, he had followed his father into the family business.

There were also the Sojovits and the Kallus brick factories, very successful manufacturing concerns owned by successive generations of the families for whom they were named. Trudy's⁽¹⁹⁾ grandparents owned the former. Because the heavy weight of their products made shipping difficult, it was usual to have a railway line running right into the brickyards. In May 1944 these two businesses became far more infamous enterprises. The size and openness of their grounds made them ideal for conversion to ghettos. The easy access to the train line made them very easy deportation points. That Jewish premises were used to collect and deport most of the Jews of the city and its surrounds to their death is a bitter irony.

Another reasonably sized factory was owned by Miriam's⁽¹⁷⁾ father:

"...Paper products. He made like bookkeeping papers and copy books...Cut and bound and printed and also paper bags for companies with their names printed on them. That was a very big thing, had 100 workers. It was a big place...They were all Jewish. With beards and peyes and you name it...There were a lot of girls who did gluing work, papers and we had a big printing press also...the paper sacks you know, they had to be glued and I really don't know exactly what they did but quite a few girls and a lot of men, with printing and we were shipping and we had a shipping department, a shipping clerk with a long red beard".

This was a successful business and Miriam's father seems to have been quite enterprising in introducing modern technology of the day – the telephone:

"...our phone number. First it was 24 and then it became 124 and we also had an intercom from the apartment, from our house to the factory".

Chaim's⁽¹⁾ father had a smaller manufacturing business:

"In the Czech time he had a rope factory with employees from Munkács, from Czechoslovakia. The ropes were used for the cows, for clotheslines, they were used on the sea or to tow things. But under the Hungarians rope wasn't needed any more. They had motor vehicles. There were about 10 workers".

Susan⁽⁸⁾ spoke of her father's wine business, among other related concerns he had:

"Podhering was a suburb of Munkács and he had all the imports what

came in, it came through him you know. He had the licence of the Podhering brewery...mainly it was from Czechoslovakia but from Hungary and, all kinds”.

My maternal grandfather, Avruham Fixler, ran a small mixed business, mostly groceries, but also cheap clothing like long johns – one piece men's underwear – sewn at home by his daughters. My mother considered the business a success because, although the family had very little money, there was always enough to feed the family of ten; they ate all the profits.

In a region known for its under-developed economy, it was necessary to be not only hard working but also very creative to make a reasonable living. Perhaps one of the most extreme examples of this was Tuvia's⁽²⁾ father who, under the Czechoslovak regime, even sourced materials for his business from as far away as India:

“He went to India to buy raw materials as a Jewish Orthodox man with a long beard, could not eat anything, took food from home. Couldn't eat anything that wasn't kosher; not eat, not drink – 5 weeks...Train to Venice, to Trieste and from Trieste he went by boat”.

During this period, it wasn't only businessmen from Munkács travelling to bring goods into the city. Major retail firms from more commercially developed parts of Czechoslovakia also seemed to see the potential of new and undersupplied markets. Names such as *Isbor*, a well known men's ready made clothing chain, and *Bata Shoes* opened stores in Munkács. Although a possible promise of much needed future commercial growth, these newly opened stores caused something of a problem for local traditional bespoke tailors and cobblers, who generally had just been getting by financially. Ready made clothing and shoes were cheaper. Those who could afford to pay for better quality continued having their clothing made to measure.

This period of growing commerce came to an abrupt halt when Czechoslovakia was replaced by Hungary. Not only did Czechoslovak businesses leave, but the Hungarians imposed rationing and various prohibitions on Jews According to Alice⁽⁹⁾:

“There was a Bata shoe store where we bought until we could buy them. Later on I remember once I outgrew my shoes, I had galoshes that were, you know, the rubber boots. I would line it with newspaper and wore that because I couldn't get proper size shoes. I was still growing at the time”.

Not all Jews owned their own businesses, however. Many were employed, often by other Jews, like Tuvia's⁽²⁾ father:

“Yes, there were jobs. We had in our store 8 or 10 employees, Jewish people, mostly men. Packaging, trading and transport to deliver the goods to the stores. Most people worked. My family, all the men were yeshiva bokhers (Yiddish – student) had to work...As soon as they got married, you had to work...In services, most in stores, services; not manufacturing. There weren't industries in Munkács. There were one or 2 small factories. A tobacco factory and there was a beer factory; it wasn't Jewish factory, and maybe some paper factory, Jewish factory. The town wasn't that big...didn't have big companies. Most of them were services...

The women – Jewish women were mostly housewives...”

My father, Jidu Kahan, being the youngest child in his family, sought employment outside his father's timber business. On finishing business school, he was employed by Maria Klein and Son's hardware company. Starting as a junior, he quickly rose to the position of manager and heir apparent of the Widow Klein's manufacturing, wholesale and retail concern.

The entrepreneurial spirit started quite young in some, such as Benzi⁽⁵⁾:

“Yes, my mind was always on business...with Sam⁽¹³⁾...I started manufacturing. I was 13, 14 years old and had 12 employees, all friends of mine...When they make furniture and they...glue. There's warm glue made from bones, which needs to be heated to thicken it and there's cold gluing. The advantage is it doesn't need to be warmed all the time and that's from cheese, cow curd cheese...I made it...And my older brother, poor guy, studied a lot and knew a lot, but when he heard, he came too and everyone. At home they didn't know. If my father had known –whew!!”

Surprisingly his customers were: *“Furniture factories – serious concerns...”* Despite his youth, he was extremely enterprising – not always successfully:

“I went to Szombathely, to Budapest and bought items that were hard to get; by then there was also wartime rationing. I had friends – so... Cow's curd cheese...and I had the Ackerman family, my grandfather, my mother's parents; they had a big mill in Strebichov near Munkács and near that mill was an oil press...sunflower seeds, and there were machines over the mill so that they could press oil. That was a big business. The whole village worked for the mill. Even today, that mill is working in Strebichov, near Munkács, to this day. We got nothing for it, of course, because governments kept changing.

And I needed these metal racks where I could dry the curd, because cheese has something like 85% water...I made the whole press milchik (Yiddish – kosher only for non-meat dairy foods). My uncle asked me 'Benzi, please, I don't want anything from you, except go away'".

The home

Even in quite spacious homes the kitchen, not surprisingly, often doubled as sleeping quarters. They tended to be large, well heated rooms, especially in winter and families usually had several children. Ilonka⁽¹¹⁾ was one of six siblings, 4 boys and two girls. She had very fond memories of her family's home and of the efficient way they used their space:

"In our flat we had a very big kitchen with a built-in wood-burning stove with an oven and a chimney. There was a bed in the kitchen where 2 of my brothers slept. There was a high attic where we kept all the Pesach things and old schoolbooks. We put a big ladder on the table to get up there. In winter we dried the washing in the attic. It was so cold that the wet clothes froze rigid. We had a big hall with a very long table and benches on either side, and chairs for my father and mother at either end.

There was one bedroom for my parents and then there was a very, very big room with a bed, a folding bed, 2 wardrobes, a dressing table with a marble top, drawers and a basin and a very big table, so on Friday night and yomtovs we had dinner in that big room. Otherwise we ate in the kitchen".

Internal plumbing was a fairly recent phenomenon in much of Eastern and Central Europe in the 1930's. Certainly it existed in Munkács, but usually only in the homes of the wealthier residents, Jews and non-Jews alike. It was still common to draw water in buckets from a well, to be heated on a wood fired stove in the kitchen, and to have an outhouse toilet.

Helen's⁽¹⁰⁾ family shared an internal bathroom with the neighbouring flat:

"...a bathtub, a toilet, a sink; running water, but we had running water in our own apartment, too. The faucet was in the foyer. We took the water which we needed for cooking, or just washing ourself from the foyer. We had a tap...a sink. But it's not for washing...dishes or things like that. You

know, we washed our dishes in a big basin...The running water was in the hallway...in the bathroom the floor was tiled. In the apartment we had parquet floors. We had huge windows which inside was white shutters. We closed them up... which came very handy for the bad times, because when they threw rocks at the windows, we didn't get the rocks in the windows because...protected us... white wood...”.

Pantries big enough to store a large amount of food were the norm. For those who had them, cellars also provided useful storage space, especially for food that needed to be kept chilled. Winters in the Carpathians were bitterly cold and basements, unheated, were ideal to store vegetables and preserves for those months when fresh produce was not available. Gaby⁽⁴⁾ talked about this practice:

“...in the cellar. They took the food down there – it was cold...Meat. And you know what else? They bought vegetables – potatoes, carrots etc. they needed to stock up for winter. They bought sacks of potatoes; they bought carrots and put them in the ground. There were also larders – big larders with preserves – tomatoes, all sorts of other things. I went there to nosh...My mother was a very able person. She pickled cabbage – that was a whole festival; they invited the whole family. Everyone where there was cabbage pickling, they would inspect them to see if there was anything wrong, and they'd prepare a good lunch and that was a nice occasion. These things don't happen any more; with today's cans, life is so much easier”.

My mother used to talk of all manner of fruit and vegetables stored in very large jars in their cellar, which she had helped her mother preserve, including plums she's helped pick from trees in their own back yard.

The labour intensive nature of domestic chores combined with usually large families made running a household difficult. Cooking and cleaning, especially for *Shabbat* and various *hagim* (Hebrew – festivals), washing clothes, bed linen, curtains etc. by hand were physically arduous. In poorer households, such housekeeping was done by the mother, helped by her daughters.

Those who could afford it employed maids, washerwomen, woodchoppers and nannies, among others. The extreme poverty, especially in the country districts, but also in Munkács itself, led many to seek such work, especially under-educated women whose only real skills were domestic ones. Some, like Alice's⁽⁹⁾ family could employ a number of household staff:

“We were relatively well off. We had a woman who cleaned and a woman that took care of the children...The one that was with the children lived in. And then they had the separate woman that came to do main washing and came back ironing...I think she came like once a week...I don't know where she lived but I know she was a Jewish woman and we loved her because she used to tell a lot of stories. So as children we always gathered around her to listen to her stories. And Fräulein was I think from Slovakia...Not Jewish.

The one that cleaned the house was Jewish and I think there was an agent that would get. We had one Christian woman, Ilona, that even said (a Jewish prayer) with us.

We had a special room for the maid. She was a live-in, cleaning woman also. Off the kitchen there was a room for her, the cleaning woman”.

Jewish households often preferred to hire Jewish maids, especially if they were expected to help, unsupervised, with the preparation of food, because they knew the rules of *Kashrut*. In Ze'ev's⁽⁶⁾ home, the maid came to be considered one of the family:

“we had a maid, a Jewish girl from a village, from a poor home. She came when I was about 3 or 4 years old and stayed with us for years. She was called Henchie, Auntie Henchie”.

Non-Jewish maids could also help with kosher food preparation, under supervision. Gaby⁽⁴⁾ remembers accompanying the non-Jewish maid taking chickens to the kosher slaughterer:

“I went with the maid. She wasn't allowed to go on her own because she was a Russian maid...young Russian girls who wanted to move in to the city and there were flats and it was good for them...Ruthenian village girls, because circumstances in the villages were very hard...They came into town, they slept there...

She lived in with us, she got a wage and she got food and she got a bed...in the kitchen. There were really big kitchens with a pull-out bed and bed linen stored on it. We kept each one for a long time and then they'd get married and we'd get another”.

Such arrangements were mutually beneficial in important ways. Young women, usually Jews or Rusyns, from very poor circumstances were able to find employment so they could send money home to their families, often being provided with a place to sleep. Even those who didn't 'live in' were provided with regular meals and sometimes hand-me-down clothing.

Helen⁽¹⁰⁾ described how these relationship could become mutually long-term:

“We had a maid but not live-in. Ruthenian. She was from Verchovina, but they came in because they needed a job and this is how they made a living. So we used to have 2 sisters, or 3 sisters, one after another; not strangers...until they got married...They would have not a full apartment; they rented a place and some of them were full maids. While we were in Havrichkova (street) we had a bigger apartment and we had a sleep-in, but once we moved we couldn't get one because we had no room. That was already the Hungarian regime”.

The prospect of marriage was extremely difficult for young Jewish women from poor homes. It was traditional for the bride to bring a dowry to the marriage to set up a home and help establish her new husband in some sort of work or business, so that he could support his new family. The lack of means to do so had implications for the future of these young women, serious enough to send their fathers some distances, in some cases, to *shnor* the funds to provide daughters with a 'wedding portion'. A few Jewish girls were fortunate enough to find exceptionally generous, caring employers, like Susan's⁽⁸⁾ family, who concerned themselves with their future:

“you know, every Jewish girl who was working by us as a Jewish maid, the cooking, and, my father married them off. All of them...Dowry. There was a shnayder, a tailor, a shoemaker (bridegrooms). If they didn't have something to start with they couldn't get married at all”.

Doing the laundry was perhaps the most difficult job, done by washerwomen who went from house to house of their regular clientele, who could afford them. In better off families, this was a weekly event. For others, the mother and daughters did the laundry, at least the washing of smaller items.

Laundry was not only hard work, but also complicated and time consuming, especially in larger families with several sets of bed linen, tablecloths, clothing etc. Rose⁽¹²⁾, the daughter of a sickly mother, who died quite young, gave a very vivid description of how she helped the washerwoman. This was expected of her as the only daughter in the family:

“...the washing itself, the big wash went three monthly. Then a woman from the village, the poor women, they came in, she came in on Sunday and she started with the collars and the cuffs, soaping. So Sunday, she was preparing for the morning and then she soaped what she had to soap and she had the beautiful dinner. My mother said, 'hungry people can't

work good'. And then she went to sleep...mostly, we could keep the same...and they drank what is it called here? Spiritus. Methylated spirits. They were illiterate, they couldn't read or write. I think there were women who that was their business, like an agency. One brought the other one. If she was happy, she brought her whole half village. And the neighbours, you know, they shared them.

That was the big wash. Three months' sheets. And the curtains I think were separate or my mother did them by herself. And we had no bathroom, you know, no laundry. She collected it from the pump, you know, she collected the water and she rinsed...The wash was warm water...Imagine that – she was washing the white clothes. And then the towels separate. The kitchen things, tea towels, separate and so on and so on and so on.

But we in our region, we had a barrel on three legs, standing, big...Open on the top. It had a hole on the bottom, and that hole, they took a stick with a rag...that was the outlet. But it had to drip, not let it out right away, you know, in one go. So that was in the evening. They put the sheet or two around that, like lining, that barrel and then they folded the things and put inside there. On the stove there was a huge I don't know how many litre...a pot...and we had to collect ashes from the neighbours. When this one had the washing week and then they came to collect, from the ovens and the stove...and that made that water soapy; there was no such thing as disinfectant. So the ashes went in a linen sack and it was hanging half in the pot. It was tied to the handle, not to fall in, and the water boiled. So when everything was packed into that barrel – I think people will laugh when they hear that, because it was only in our region – then that was my job. Then the woman went to sleep.

And me – the young girl...and that was a whole night. But I was so happy to do it, because I read a whole book that night...I had 'night shift at the office'. And in the morning when she woke up, we started to go rinsing to the river. My mother packed her a big basket, which she put it on her back and she had a praynek – like a cricket bat, but shorter...she had to break the ice in the winter...and she took each thing from the basket on her back and...she rinsed and she hit it, rinsed and she hit it. And on that, you know, all the soap went out".

Stoves for heating and cooking were wood fired, so having enough timber cut and stored for winter was absolutely crucial to sustain the family through the freezing cold months. Tuviya⁽²⁾ remembers men looking for physical work where they could get it:

“They came to us to get a job. They wanted to make some money. They didn’t work by us, they asked one day to cut the trees, the wood for winter... They came to ask and we gave them something to do and then we gave them one day, two days and then we paid them and then they went back...because they didn’t live there. They lived in the villages around Munkács. Very poor, but even Jews there were very poor, very poor”.

Shabbat and Jewish Festivals

The life of Munkács Jewry was regulated by the rhythm of Judaism’s cycles of festival and other observances, and Rites of Passage events such as Barmitzvahs, weddings and funerals. All of these required considerable and time consuming preparation and, of course, Jewish homes kept *Kashrut*.

The prime event of the week in every Jewish home was *Shabbes* (Yiddish – *Shabbat*). Shopping and cooking for the Friday night dinner and organising hot food for Saturday – a day on which cooking was prohibited – was a major undertaking and a worrying preoccupation for those of scant financial means.

The prohibition against Jews doing any work on *Shabbat* – the Day of Rest – and other holy days was quite widely obeyed, certainly by all *Hasidim* and the more religious families. Because of the size of the Jewish community, even non-Jewish institutions accommodated this. For instance, although Saturday was a normal school day and Jewish students were officially required to attend, they were exempted from writing. Similarly, observant Jews everywhere do not turn on lights, nor start their stoves or fires. However, since this prohibition applies only to Jews, non-Jews known as *Shabbes Goyim* (Yiddish – Sabbath Gentiles) are commonly employed to performing these tasks. The religious Jews of Munkács were no different. Younger people, especially the more Zionistic, secular students of the Hebrew Gymnasium, like Irene’s⁽¹⁴⁾ sister, often obeyed these traditions more out of respect for their parents than from conviction:

“You know, and there was a lady, a Christian woman in our town, who came wintertime to make the fire and turn off the light and everything ...On Shabbat. How many times my sister said, my sister called out ‘Anna néni tessék jöni’ (Hungarian – Auntie Anna, please come here)...My sister turned the light on. You think that my father and my mother didn’t know it? They knew”.

Because of the sanctity of *Shabbat* as a day of rest, everything from setting the table to all the cooking had to be finished before sunset on Friday night. Miriam’s⁽¹⁷⁾ description of her mother’s efforts reflected those of many Jewish families:

“Oh, it was a big preparation. The smells from the kitchen, you know, it was very nice...I went with my mother always to buy the fish for Shabbat and the fish was still alive and they just hit it on the head, you know, somehow and we carried it home in a piece of newspaper and sometimes the fish was still moving.

...I remember the meat; there was some special roast...It was very nice, very nice. And Saturday noon we had ayer mit tswible (Yiddish – a traditional dish of egg and onion), I don’t know if you know; and sholet (Yiddish – a stew of meat, potatoes, beans and barley), everything, and salad...Next door neighbour, there was a big bakery and we had to carry over the sholet...It was huge fireplaces and they shoved it in, you know, and it stayed there overnight and the next day we had to pick it up and it always came out very good, very nice...And my mother, yes, she baked, she baked...very nice things she baked. Hungarian seven-layer cakes, I don’t know, she was good at baking. She liked to do that. She didn’t like cooking but she liked to bake.

...we were very observant with holidays. Very much observed everything, everything”.

Synagogue attendance was predominantly the duty of the men of the family while women saw to it that everything in the home was done to support religious observances.

After services on *Shabbat*, as well as on all other holy and festive occasions, the streets of Munkács were filled with groups of men walking home to partake in the family meal that would be awaiting them. The *Hasidim* in their long black *Bekishes* (kaftans), a wide-brimmed black hat or fur covered *Shtreimel* on their heads and their long side curls and full beards shared the footpaths with other Jews in more modern attire, all bound homeward from *shul*. Non-*Hasidic*

Jews tended to sport short, neat haircuts, beards and moustaches or to be clean shaven. While they covered their heads, they did so with less distinctive, more fashionable hats. Despite being quite modern thinking Zionists, Chaim's⁽¹⁾ family:

"...went to synagogue on Shabbes...not my mother; the men, the boys and my father. We went to synagogue and we came home on Friday night. Dad made Kiddush...the prayers lasted a good hour. And we went home and there was a festive dinner. Dad said Shulem Aleichem and Shabbat prayers that you're supposed to say at that time".

Chaim's⁽¹⁾ mother, like many of the Jewish women in Munkács, wore a *sheitl* (Yiddish – wig), although wearing a wig did not necessarily mean looking drab. In Margaret's⁽¹⁶⁾ words:

"My grandmother wore a wig, and she was always very neatly dressed and she liked jewellery and she had a fur coat. She liked to be decently dressed...And stylish, yes. And my grandfather was also dressed in a Bekishe, Shabbes in a Shtreimel".

Irene⁽¹⁴⁾, one of eleven children, recalled her loving family's rituals:

"And Shabbat, Shabbat. Friday night was a very important thing for us. Friday night my mother lit the candles and my father, before he went to synagogue, he blessed each child separate. Each child. And then he came home and we had our dinner and after dinner we used to sit and sing. All the Hebrew song. I have here, I still have a little song book. All the old songs that we used..."

In the homes of better off Jews, it was usually not only their own family seated around the table partaking of *Shabbat* meals. The important role of *Tsedaka* – charitable deeds – showed in behaviour of those who could afford it. Sometimes these were regular guests, as Susan⁽⁸⁾ described:

"It was a very festive meal. And there was never, never a Friday night or Saturday that...father should come home without a few people to come to eat with us. Never. He always take some and always we had one bachelor, older man already. For years, since I am a child, he was always Friday, Saturday, holidays at our table...He was a neighbour's son. He himself was already an elderly person, never married and my father had sympathy, pitied him that he was alone...Wasn't poor...Just that he should feel that he belongs to someone. That every Holyday, Saturday,

everything. Then we had, another elderly man who was like my mother's father's brother. Also a Hasid."

Andy⁽¹⁵⁾ recalled this Jewish tradition of hospitality extending to strangers, not only on *Shabbat*:

"Usually she baked her own challah but took it to baker, you know, where they had an oven to bake it, and prepared fish and soup and meat and fruit and we had a lot of times guests for Shabbes and also there were boys that went to yeshivas and would come different days to have meals with us..."

Religious practice was not limited merely to *Shabbat* and significant festivals. It was completely woven into the pulse beat and psyche of the Jews of Munkács. Judaism was an everyday matter for most of the community, as remembered by Ze'ev⁽⁶⁾:

"...100% Orthodox because my mother was raised in a Belzer Hasid home. My father was a Zionist but there was no way that he wouldn't pray in a minyan three times a day. Me too".

He also recalled his daily donning of *tfilin* (phylacteries), along with his father.

Strict observance of other Jewish festivals and Holy days was also widespread in Munkács, regardless of degree of religiosity. *Purim*, *Pesach* (Passover), *Shvues* (Hebrew – *Shavuot*), *Rosh Hashanah* (New Year) and *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement), *Sukes* (Hebrew – *Sukkot* – Feast of Tabernacles), *Chanukah* were all observed in the Ashkenazi tradition.

Pesach preparations are particularly difficult for observant Jews everywhere. Not only does all food need to comply to especially strict rules to ensure that they contain no leaven, but homes must be cleaned of the last possible morsel of bread and all other foods prohibited on Passover. Several of those interviewed spoke of the amount of effort required for *Pesach*.

Chaim⁽¹⁾ recalled:

"Pesach under the Czechs still, there was very strict observance of Pesach; not a crumb at home and everything needed to be cleaned ...They did everything themselves...my parents and we children helped...they bought matzes".

Rose's⁽¹²⁾ mother had to work very hard to provide adequate quantities of appropriate food for her family for the 8 days of *Pesach*. Although it falls in the northern Spring, during March or April, provisions needed to be gathered over a period and stored:

“First of all it wasn’t so easy, you know, by not rich people...eggs were really a luxury during the winter because the chicken is not laying eggs when it’s cold...I remember only one thing with my mother would say, ‘Thank God, we have already the potatoes, we have already the geese, and we have everything’. And we had eggs, you know, I think 120 eggs when she had for six people, was I don’t know how much. She had to prepare fat, you know, schmaltz (Yiddish – rendered goose or chicken fat used in cooking)”.

Despite the effort required, these were occasions that brought families together and which were remembered with great fondness by several respondents, including Gaby⁽⁴⁾:

“They were really pleasant. We really liked the festivals; mainly we really liked Pesach, there were beautiful Seders but everybody did it at home; they didn’t go like here, several families together. Everyone’s family was large enough to make the Seder. We had a really lovely Seder...They bought the matzes and there was Shmire matze – that was special...I don’t remember where they bought it but we had everything. And on the first days we didn’t eat anything dunked so kneidl (Yiddish – matzo dumplings) was out of the question so they made lashka out of eggs and potato starch. They were like really thin pancakes sliced and they were delicious. We really liked them...served in the soup. Kneidl came later, not at the Seder. We had two Seders...and my mother sang beautifully and we sang all the songs beautifully.

(Father) put on a kitl⁴⁵ and everything as required; and we all got new dresses – we even lifted up our skirts to show our new panties as little children; and patent leather shoes, little sailor dresses. New clothes were bought at Pesach and Rosh Hashanah...”

Purim needed far less arduous preparations and was remembered as a festival of fun, of pranks and roaming acting groups, usually itinerant amateurs looking to earn some much needed money, either for themselves or for other needy people. *Purim* is a time of dressing up, disguising oneself, causing light-hearted confusion, as well as of *Tsedaka* – charity. Again, from Rose⁽¹²⁾:

“The (Munkácsér) Rebbe had an open house and the people came from all over, even the non-religious, you know...the Schoenborn, the beer

⁴⁵ A white robe used as a burial shroud by Jewish men, providing simple dress that assures equality for all in death. In the Ashkenazi tradition, it is also worn by men on special religious occasions.

factory and all came with a donation for the Rebbe. But as he had no idea of monetary things, he didn't know the money; the people came with the envelopes and then came the other, very poor people who went every day shnorring and he gave it away. We were always told that nothing was left for him but everybody went there paying respect to the Rebbe and there were cakes and I don't know what, full tables, long tables with all goodies.

...came Shushan Purim, then there was a show. I'm telling you, I have never seen a theatre more enjoyable, more beautiful presented than on this – the yeshiva bokherim, you know. Say with the Belzer, they made the fun of the Belzer...made a comedy out of it and...The girls came ...dressed like boys and that they didn't know who they are, with peyes ...they didn't have a job as actors but they were perfect as actors...it all was done on the tables; there were hundreds and hundreds of people”.

Life-cycle events such as Barmitzvahs and weddings, were usually celebrated with much joy. Barmitzvahs seem to have been mostly simple family and *kehilla* (Hebrew – congregation) occasions. Girls, of course, did not have a Batmitzvah, even in non-*Hasidic* families.

Alice⁽⁹⁾, in speaking of her brother's Barmitzvah, talked of grandparents making the trip to attend and of how understated it was compared to today's custom:

“...my brothers went to shul. My brothers, beside the public school they went to cheder. One of my brothers had Barmitzvah...By that time it was already, it was quiet. My grandparents managed to come in from Ungvar ...it was in shul. And I don't think the boys leyned. They didn't have boys leynen in Munkács – Reading the Torah. But an aliye (being called up to the synagogue pulpit) – my two sons, they read the whole Torah. They would have an aliye but they didn't read the Torah parsha. And then they had a meal. It was a quiet Shabbat”.

Almost all of those interviewed either came of Barmitzvah age during the 1930's or had male siblings who did. Chaim⁽¹⁾ celebrated his entering manhood against a backdrop of political uncertainty:

“Very quiet. It was in 1932 and the situation was getting very bad. In Germany they were waiting for the election and they knew about Hitler – that he would come to power. He'd regularly been threatening. They didn't expect what eventually happened but they feared for their

*livelihood...it was at home. There was food offered around, that was it.
Not many people – relatives. It wasn't big”.*

Tuviya⁽²⁾ remembered quite a different experience, reflecting the animosity between some of the *Hasidic* Rabbis:

“Oh. It was a big Barmitzvah. I had a speech of 1½ hours...in Yiddish, of course, only in Yiddish...about the Talmud, about Yiddish things; a drosha. It was at home by us, I remember...Minimum 150 people. Men and relatives...Belzer Hasidim, or Spinka, Vizhnitz but not Munkács...”

Susan's⁽⁸⁾ well-to-do family could put on a lavish wedding:

“My oldest sister was a very big wedding. There at the wedding was the Munkács Rebbe and Rebbetzen and his only daughter was the best friend of my older sister and it was a very, very, very elaborate wedding. All Munkács was there. Not only Munkács, from all over...It was very big... Thousands really...It was a very, very big, big, big place. That was part of the great Temple's that really they had that for that purpose, for big affairs... You know, must have been at least for the supper at least five, six hundred people.

It was catered... You know what, it wasn't a catering like here they cater or in Australia...the caterers got all the food, all the ingredients what he needed and he...made the food and the baking. And there was a separate baker, a separate cook...

A white dress. White dress with a veil...”

Very religious families used the services of a *Shadchan* (Matchmaker) to find suitable marriage partners for their children. This was, and still is, the practice among *Hasidim* everywhere. Family legend has it that my maternal grandmother came from Vienna to Munkács with her parents to meet her future groom under the watchful eye of the Matchmaker. The next time she saw him was under the wedding canopy. The following day, she packed her bags and fled back to Vienna, where she stayed for a year before being persuaded to return to him, and to what became a loving, respectful marriage, producing eight children, ending only in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.

It was not unusual for marriage matches to be made across quite some distances. Communities, especially rural ones, were quite small and often could not provide a bride or

groom of suitable religiosity, scholarship, family standing or financial circumstances. Tuviya⁽²⁾ described his brother Hershey's wedding:

"A Jewish Orthodox wedding in Dés (Transylvania). He was 22 years old, she was 21, I guess, Shaindl. It was a Shiduch, of course. The wedding was a typical Orthodox Charedi wedding with shtreimel etc. The chuppah was outside under the sky. That was normal. Lots of people, hundreds of people. Shya Klein marries (off) his first son – a rich wedding...They took buses to go, not with the train because they were afraid. They hired buses from Munkács and came there with lots of friends and invited all the family. There was the Klein family and the Wertenstein family".

Despite tradition, however, young Jews in Munkács often found each other without any help, especially those who studied at the Hebrew Gymnasium or belonged to any one of the many youth groups. Tuviya himself first met his wife-to-be, Olga, through his youth movement activities.

Transport

For travel outside Munkács, there were inter-city bus lines going to Ushorod (Ungvar), Berehovo (Beregszasz), Svaljova and other neighbouring cities and towns. There were also regular trains to Prague, Budapest or other more distant destinations, which were frequented by people doing business either from or with Munkács. When David⁽⁷⁾ left Munkács in 1936 after finishing business school to take a job in Ushorod at the Slovak *AltalosHitel* (Hungarian – General Credit) Bank, he caught an intercity bus to get there, and also for return visits to his parents.

Ilonka⁽¹¹⁾ talked about her father's business travels working for the Mermelstein's porcelain business:

"My father was a buyer for them to Czechoslovakia, to Carlsbad, Marienburg, by train, to buy and he'd bring samples home, the most beautiful cups with 'For my little girl' and 'for my little boy' on them... He always bought lots of things, delivered by the suppliers. They were beautiful things. I tell you, Munkács was like Little Paris".

Helen⁽¹⁰⁾, forced to leave school when the Hungarians took over, was able to give a first hand account of long distance transport of goods:

“I got a job, an office job for transportation...I made out the orders and made the schedules for transporting the goods for the trucks, and I worked there. That was '39. I worked there about 3 years till '44...Goods, clothing...trucks from one city...from Beregszasz to Munkács, from Munkács to Ushorod and so on...A few people worked there. I wasn't alone...It was the Fisher Company...We had about 8 trucks, big trucks and it was quite a lucrative business...The Fisher family from Munkács ...Jews...Some of the truck drivers were not Jewish, some of them, but most of the employees were Jewish”.

Within Munkács itself, there was no public transport. People travelled around the city mostly on foot, although many men of all ages rode bicycles. When asked how far something in Munkács was, respondents answered in terms of how long it took to walk there. Irene⁽¹⁴⁾ gave a colourful description of her morning trips to school:

“when I went out from the house I went alone. It took us, maybe I should say about ten, maybe fifteen blocks to get to my school. By the time I got to my school there were about 20 people already because everybody, from every house somebody came out and joined, joined, joined. We went to the school. We were in school eight o'clock in the morning...”

Susan⁽⁸⁾ had a different experience travelling to school in winter:

“it was about a twenty minutes walk from home. And you know what? Munkács was so cold winter we used to have snow until April and we used to go with sleds. The maid used to schlep us with the sleds to school...Only two were able to go...we had older sisters and younger sisters so we didn't go to the same school all of us. They were different schools”.

A non-Jewish school friend of Gaby⁽⁴⁾ lived on the city's outskirts:

“towards Palanka, towards the castle. The better off tended to live in the city centre. There were no cars back then...The castle was a long way away and we always walked there. Podhering was also far and we went on foot; everywhere. The Latoritsa, where we swam, was also not close. We walked...If you needed to go to the station, there were carriages”.

According to Chaim⁽¹⁾:

“there were fiaker drivers...many of them were Jews. Two horses and an open carriage. Sometimes there was an emergency on a Holyday, on Saturday – a doctor or something – then they closed the carriage so that they couldn’t be seen...it wasn’t very dear”.

“ ’36, ’35 started to be taxis”. remembered Tuvia⁽²⁾. “The people of Munkács would hire them. I think in Munkács were 5 or 6. They went to Beregszasz, they went to the railway station...Adler had a taxi, a Skoda... Dr. Schonfeld drove a car. Dr Schreiber; medical doctors”.

Irene⁽¹⁴⁾ talked of taxis also taking passengers out of Munkács:

“...when I was a young girl, every year my mother went to a summer resort and she took me because I didn’t want to eat, to make sure that I will gain at least one ounce...Polyana...It’s, I don’t know how far; not far from Munkács. I know that we went with a taxi”.

Social life of the city

The prime venue for socialising other than in people’s homes was The Corso, a main walkway through the centre of town, lined by several elegant fashion shops, many Jewish owned. This was frequented on weekend afternoons or weekday evenings by people, many of them the more secular Jews, walking around in groups or in courting couples as well as families. Many marriages came from courtships on The Corso. Margaret⁽¹⁶⁾ remembered the signals of young courtship:

“it was a lovely, lively city. I always think of it with full of life...and when we started already dating we had a circle where to go to the Corso. There was a main street and we went around and we took a book along and the boys, let’s say a boy asked for a book or asked in the company that we went around and talked and we were at home in time... we had to be at home not later than 9 o’clock...we had to have something in our hands”.

If no young man asked to look at the book a girl was carrying:

“Then we just walked with our friends until they asked or they just joined without the book. But it wasn’t kind of a dating system...as far as I

remember, we just walked and they joined. And then there was a time when there was music, army music. We went there and we listened on the Corso. But there was a youthful life...we didn't do anything. We didn't even kiss each other. We just walked and looked at each other... Sometimes these were lasting...some people ended in marriage, and some couples didn't end in marriage.

Well, everybody had work to do at home, study or so. We finished studying, let's say about six o'clock. We went whenever we could. Or when we had a date even if we couldn't. Sometimes he said well, am I going to see you tomorrow? I don't remember exactly these things. It was many years ago but we went sometimes, around sixish, we dressed and we went out".

Munkács had various cafes and restaurants and hotels, the best known of which was the non-kosher *Csillag Szálloda* (Star Hotel). In addition to its hotel rooms and restaurant, the *Csillag* also had a bar which saw some gambling action. Men, many of them Jews, often young and unmarried, met there in the evenings to play cards or billiards for money and drink.

Kosher establishments, such as the very elegant and popular Moskop Restaurant downstairs in the Town Hall building and another, the Haupt Restaurant, in *Rákóczi utca*, served traditional Ashkenazi Jewish dishes such as *gefilte* fish. The Handelsman restaurant and reception hall was the venue for many Jewish weddings. On Saturday night, after the conclusion of *Shabbat*, Jewish families, including the more religiously observant, gathered at the kosher Sternbach Café.

The non-kosher Homdi Café on the Corso was the favoured afternoon gathering place for 'the elite' – wealthier ladies who would meet there elegantly dressed in hats, gloves and Persian lamb coats. In summer the Homdi had tables on the Corso footpath where coffee, cake, ice cream were served. Summer was also the time of year of long twilights when the café was beautifully lit up and became a place for a younger crowd in the evenings.

The Corso itself had 2 parts, reflecting the prevailing class distinctions. The *Úri* (Genteel) *Corso* was frequented by the better off, the self-employed, the professionals, the educated populace. This included the Jews. Then there was the *Baka* (Soldiers') *Corso*, where young soldiers, maids, unskilled hired 'help' strolled. As with the *Úri Corso*, this was a venue for young groups and courting couples to meet, stroll and talk. The two parts were separated physically by a strip of park with flowerbeds and a bench, and mentally by an awareness of one's 'place', a class distinction left behind from the previous Hungarian era.

More romantic trysts happened under the bridge to *Oroszvég*, away from the bright lights of The Corso.

The *Hasidim* avoided walking anywhere near The Corso area. Most of their social life seems to have revolved around their synagogues, their homes and their large extended families⁴⁶.

The Jewish population also had some eccentric characters. Gaby⁽⁴⁾ recalled:

“...poor Meyer Tsits...came from a very decent family. He wasn’t normal; he went out onto the street and the non-Jewish boys would have a go at him”.

In my childhood, my parents referred to someone whose behaviour was eccentric as Meyer Tsits. It was many years before I came to know that Meyer Tsits had been a real person.

And then there was someone nicknamed *Hershele Kokosh* (Hungarian – Hershele the Rooster). According to Helen⁽¹⁰⁾:

“Yeah, we had a character...He was called Hershele mit der Schecken. He... was a short guy, he had big pockets stuffed with all kind of papers and he said those are the papers from the Duna (Danube) Bank, you know – he’s a banker...a nebbish” (Yiddish – poor, unfortunate person).

Several of those interviewed talked of these unfortunates freely roaming the streets. They were certainly teased and taunted but apparently not in any real danger. Until 1938 Munkács seems to have been quite a safe city for all its various communities, Jews included.

The Latoritsa served as a source of entertainment and activity. In warmer weather, swimming in the river, at a spot called *A Strand* (Hungarian – the beach), was a popular pastime, especially for children of all backgrounds, as shown by the experience of Miriam⁽¹⁷⁾, who had been withdrawn from the Hebrew Gymnasium by her father under instructions by the Munkácser Rebbe:

“We went swimming at the river and then later on they built a swimming pool there which was already very much advanced for Munkács. And we used to go there...We were allowed to swim but my father always said not deeper than waistline, that’s how far you can go, you know”.

Andy⁽¹⁵⁾ described how widespread swimming was in Munkács:

“Swimming, we had a choice. There a popular swimming place upstream

⁴⁶ This ‘word picture’ was constructed from a variety of sources and includes recollections from several of the interviews of life in Munkács during the 1930’s.

of that river, Latoritsa...the other side there was a monastery...It's Russian Orthodox. Russian Orthodox and it's still there. But at that time we used to go into the monastery swimming, the cloister. That's what we called it, cloister, that's where we went, one place.

Later on somebody, I don't know how they did it, they rented an approach, sort of call it a walk, to river further downstream, which was a lot closer to us, and we the had to pay; there were cabins, and everything. You had to pay a certain amount and that was it.

The third choice was a regular swimming pool. Beautifully built, modern. It was built under the Czech regime but it was expensive, you know. But very clean and it was so well organised, you undressed in a cabin. When you were done you hung your clothes onto a hanger or something and there was a bar. You pushed on the bar, which meant, I'm here, take my clothes. They took...the clothes, gave me a tag on an elastic band. And when I'm ready to go then I pushed the bar again and they took the number and brought the things.

Nicely organised, and there was the low end, you know, and then the high, deep end and there was a lot of diving and stuff. It was very nice”.

Irene's⁽¹⁴⁾ story showed that adults also went swimming:

“My father...Although he was a religious man, he wouldn't go over there where there the boys and girls were – they called it Strand, where we were swimming. He used to take us to a special place where not too many people were there, to the river and he was teaching us how to swim. He made, and later on sold it in the store, from cork pieces, square cork pieces and he made holes in it and he put a string on it and he put on our waist and this held us on the top. Floating, and we loved it, we loved it. I remember him wearing long pants, like long underwear, like long johns they call it, but he, not my mother. He took us to the river to teach us how to swim and in the river it's easy to swim because the water carries you but he taught us how to keep ourselves on top of the water and I remember him saying 'Jewish religion teaches us that you must teach the children everything to save their lives, and that's why I'm taking you to the river to learn how to swim' ”.

The river also provided a venue for activity in winter, which was extremely cold. Ice skating was popular amongst several of the respondents. In David's⁽⁷⁾ words:

“Very, very cold. You got used to the cold weather. Matter of fact when we were young children the parents forced us to go out to skating and to play a little outside. We got used to the cold”.

Irene⁽¹⁴⁾ was also a skater:

“Wintertime it was for us, after school, after we finish homework, we had ice skating rink. We went ice-skating. Some of my friends, I went only once skiing in the mountains but once I went and I came home black and blue and I said “Not for me”. But ice-skating I went...In fact the best skaters were Trudy and Lou...in Munkács” (wife⁽¹⁹⁾ and husband⁽²⁰⁾ in Los Angeles who were also interviewed for this project).

“Games in Munkács were the same games for all kids”, according to Tuviya⁽²⁾, “didn’t matter if they were Yiddish kids or not Yiddish kids. They played with cards and they played with balls – football; and I went to the cinema, which was forbidden – Hungarian movies, romances, all sorts of things. My mother – our house was exactly opposite the cinema so my mother sometimes stood there under the windows and saw me when I came out, so I went around so she didn’t see me but I think she had some feeling”.

Tuviya’s⁽²⁾ mother’s disapproval of her children’s movie-going was typical of the ultra-religious Jews. As for the rest of Munkács Jewry, live theatre and films were a popular pastime. Amongst the shops on the Corso there was a well-patronised, Jewish owned cinema which showed imported films. There was also a theatre. Jewish theatre groups sometimes came from Poland, as well as well known, popular actors bringing stage productions from Hungary.

Chaim⁽¹⁾ recalled:

“...the actress Karády Katalin and Jaros Pal. Sometimes the Hebrew Gymnasium celebrated and put on a play in Hebrew. The theatre was on the corner of Fő utca (Main Street) opposite the cinema”.

Even among the ultra-religious, attitudes varied. Rose⁽¹²⁾ was raised in an extremely religious home. Her father ran a *cheder* for sons of *Hasidic* parents. The grandson of the Munkácser Rebbe was one of his pupils, yet he

“...went to the theatre and the Polish – the Jewish group came, because they travelled from place to place, the Yiddish theatre from Poland and he always went and let me go too...Not with Dad. He went and then he came home and he said, ‘I bought you a ticket, you’re

going'...Yeah, I was allowed to go to the movies and I was allowed to read books. My brothers didn't come to that, because a boy they send away to yeshiva".

This leniency did not extend to his sons, who were expected to take their religious piety far more seriously than his daughter, although even she could go only to productions once her father had seen and approved them.

Youth groups

Much more acceptable and general a way for young people to spend their time were the various youth groups. These catered for a wide range of ages, from children to young adults. They included the sports based Maccabi Athletics Club and also the whole gamut of politically oriented ideologies ranging from the left wing Zionism of *Hashomer Hatzair* to the *Mizrachi Benei Akiva* religious Zionists, through to the rightist *Betar* based on Jabotinsky's Zionist philosophy. None of these were segregated; girls and boys played, studied, sang and danced together. For girls from very religious homes, there was *Beis Yakov*, which focused on teaching the girls significant aspects of a woman's role in Judaism and in Jewish religious observance. Rose⁽¹²⁾ had fond memories of it:

"and came a Shabbes afternoon where we girls, we came together. When we were younger we played; later on we played Beis Yakov school which wasn't allowed to have in Munkács, because the Munkácser Rebbe was against it, I don't know why; and we had a beautiful life".

Religious non-Zionist boys had no time for such activities in their study-filled schedules. Nor did they need separate youth group activity to teach them their particular brand of Jewishness, since they were already spending many hours a day learning just that. Tuvia⁽²⁾ described this diversity of activities this way:

"I guess in Munkács was approximately 3,000 youth. All of them were organised. A lot of them were organised Orthodox, some of them were in yeshiva, some of them were in Mizrachi, some of them were in Betar, some of them were in Hashomer Hatzair. They made their work on the weekend. They met together. They asked their parents, of course. We played together, we sang together, we went on the street together, pick up some nice girls..."

Ilonka⁽¹¹⁾, another *Betar* member, expressed typically fond memories of her youth movement experience:

"It was very good for young people to get together. Every Saturday you went to Betar, or wherever you belonged, and learned Hebrew songs and a bit of Jewish history presented by a Madrich, one of the older children. I liked it. We went dancing and we put on shows. I went dancing a lot. I loved dancing and I was a very good dancer. My mother was strict – she wasn't like my father...My mother didn't allow me to go dancing, only in the afternoon, never in the night time".

Such warm memories were common, regardless of to which group people had belonged. They often became the source of life-long friendships amongst those who survived the Holocaust.

Several of the respondents talked of some of their siblings belonging to different, often antagonistic groups. It appears that, except for the *Hasidim*, youngsters were more likely to join a youth group based on their peer group rather than on their parents' preferences. Again from Ilonka⁽¹¹⁾:

"I was in Betar and I remember when Jabotinsky came to Munkács... Maybe 12 years old and stayed as long as it existed. My brother took me to Betar and then he changed and went to Poal Hatzion (from right to left wing) so we fought about it. We fought so much that we didn't talk for a year. That's my brother Yossi, who's now in Israel. He went to the Hebrew Gymnasium and the teachers were all very left wing".

Irene's⁽¹⁴⁾ motives were much simpler. Despite attending the Hebrew Gymnasium, which was the natural recruiting ground for the Zionist left wing *Hashomer Hatzair*, she found *Betar* more appealing because the boys were good looking.

"...My brother introduced me to his friends so I went to Betar. The Shomer Hatzair where my sister...we used to tease each other...Jacov Weiss was one of my school mates who went to Israel with one of the groups that my brother took to Israel, and he was working in the Hagannah and he was the one who the English hung him in Acco. And there is a picture and I'm in the picture with him. Jacov Weiss. He was in the Betar and I had a crush on him."

The *Hasidim*

Munkács was well known as a centre of *Hasidism*. Certainly a large percentage of the Jewish community could be easily identified as such, dressed as they were in traditional *Hasidic* garb, the men in their long black *Bekishes* (kaftans), black brimmed hats or fur covered headwear, full beards and long side curls; the women dressed modestly, wearing a *sheitl*.

Like *Hasidism* everywhere, their religious services followed the *Nusach Sefard*⁴⁷, a blend of Ashkenazi, Sephardi and Kabbalistic liturgical rituals and orders of prayer introduced by the *Baal Shem Tov*, *Hasidism*'s founder. Yet, despite their shared *Hasidic* origins, Munkács Jewry was far from a united community. Even within its ultra-Orthodox members, it was fractured and fractious. The variety of *Hasidic* congregations, each based on the dynastic 'court' of a Rebbe of great Jewish learning, wisdom and piety, included the followers of the Spinka, Belzer, Vizhnitz, Zidichov Rebbes and, of course of the Munkácser Rebbe, the most powerful of them all. Nick⁽¹⁸⁾ referred to them as fiefdoms.

Chaim Elazar Shapira, known as a *csoda rabbi* (Hungarian – Miracle or Wonder Rabbi), bore the title of Munkácser Rebbe from 1918 until his death in 1937, following his grandfather, Rabbi Shlomo Shapira and his father, Rabbi Zvi Hirsh Shapira to the dynastic position. His prodigious six volume work '*Minchas Elazar*' is still studied in *Hasidic* circles today. So widespread was his renown that, when his only daughter married in 1933, over 20,000 guests attended, some coming from as far away as the U.S.A. The streets of Munkács were festooned with banners⁴⁸ and news crews from all over Europe and America came to film the event. Sam's⁽¹³⁾ father was one of his followers:

"The Munkácser Rebbe... The tremendous influence that this man had over a large area of our place there. I mean people used to come to him from Beregszasz, from Ungvar, from everywhere, so there were many people that he greatly influenced and of course, there were many people that would do nothing without consulting the Rebbe at the time. I remember the Rebbe gave me a bruche (blessing) once. When I was perhaps ill, my father took me to him for a bruche and he said that I will be a source of joy to him eventually".

⁴⁷ Yosef Eisen, *Miraculous Journey: A Complete History Of The Jewish People From Creation To Present* Targum Press. 2004, 147.

⁴⁸ See this thesis P. 96 photograph

However, despite his brilliance and the loyalty of his followers, Rabbi Shapira was not universally liked. Toward those who did not fit into his view of the Judaism, he was a belligerent, unrelenting enemy.

The rivalries between the various congregations were not helped by the arrival of the Belzer Rebbe, Issachar Dov Rokeach and his followers in 1918, fleeing from the turmoil of war and revolution in Galicia. Their arrival in Munkács was frowned upon by the Hungarian authorities and certainly not welcomed by Rabbi Shapira. Uzi⁽³⁾ explained:

“the Rebbe of Munkács resented that when the wars came to Carpatho-Rus, the World War First, all the Rebbes from Poland moved down south from the Ukraines – the Belzer Rebbe, the Visnitser somehow ended up in Munkács. The Spinker Rebbe ended up in Munkács. And of course they were upset. He was upset. He was the Chief Rabbi, chosen by the Kehilla, held his accreditations. He didn’t want them in this place”.

The temperature rose considerably in 1926 when the old Belzer died and was succeeded by his son, Rabbi Aharon Rokeach. The new rabbi became known as a saintly wonder worker, believed to be able to effect miracle cures through his blessings. His popularity became a threat to the supremacy of Rabbi Shapira, who turned to secular law for a solution.

The Hungarians had sought to simplify communal administration by legislating that in every town, each religious stream could only be represented by one community⁴⁹. This policy continued on in the Czechoslovak era, making Rabbi Shapira the single official representative of Orthodox Jewry in Munkács and giving rise to an almost surreal situation. In the words of Tuvia⁽²⁾:

“Very Orthodox, Hasidim from Belz who was in very hard conflict from the Munkácser Rebbe...Belzer Hasidim was a middle class community – not the poorest and not the richest. Most of them were either rich or middle class, so this was the reason they had a lot of power...in the old Hebrew language, the Belzer Hasidim wrote to the government that they want to establish a separate community in Munkács. It was one community – was Orthodox Jewish community, was official majority the Munkácser Rebbe, Rabbi Shapira.

They wanted to make another community, so they got a letter back ‘you can’t call yourself Orthodox because it can’t be two Orthodox communities in the same town’. So what they did, they called themselves

⁴⁹ Jelinek *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 160

'Jewish Neolog According to Torah' because only if they change the word from Orthodox to Neolog they could get the permission to be a separate community in Munkács. My father wore a shtreimel, but the name was Neolog".

When this didn't solve Rabbi Shapira's problem, Tuvia⁽²⁾ continued:

"...and with that, the Munkácser Shapira Rebbe wrote a letter to hundreds of Rabbis all over Galicia and Hungary and asked them to write a letter back to condemn the Jews who called themselves Neolog. Neolog was Christian – even worse than Christian. 70 letters from Rabbis in Hungary and Galicia, they wrote for Rebbe Shapira against the Belzer Hasidim...Neolog was their official name but they were Orthodox more than Shapira.

There were officially more communities in Munkács. There was Visnitse, Spinka – official, big communities. A large community from Chaim Eliezer Shapira and a smaller community of Belzer but they were strong because they had a lot of money".

The animosity between the groups was known well beyond the borders of the city. Curses and threats sometimes even turned physical, occasionally requiring police intervention to break up street brawls and, at one point, led to charges being laid against Rabbi Shapira.

This schism had more practical effects on the daily lives of adherents, for instance, in the matter of *Kashrut*. Nick⁽¹⁸⁾ recalled the difficulties it created for his mother:

"My father was a Belzer Hasid. My mother was a Munkács Hasid, so they were two very opposite views. But my mother loved her parents and her Beregszasz family. The Munkácser Rabbi put a ban on the slaughterhouse of the Belzers. The Belzers in their turn put their ban on the slaughterhouse of...That means that this wasn't kosher according to them and so, my mother, the poor mama, she didn't know what to do because her father visited from Beregszasz so she was cooking two different set of dishes".

In 1934 a truce was eventually brokered between the Belzer and the Munkácser Rabbis which effectively gave Rabbi Shapira a victory by declaring his supreme leadership of Munkács's Orthodox community. The agreement lasted until the end of Munkács Jewry in 1944. As for Rabbi Isaac Weiss, the spiritual head of the Spinka *Hasidim*, Rabbi Shapira's machinations forced him to leave Munkács.

When Rabbi Shapira died in 1937, leaving no sons, his mantle passed to Rabbi Baruch Yehoshua Yerachmiel Rabinovich, husband of his only daughter, Frime. That Rabinovich did not share his father-in-law's virulent anti-Zionist views was fortunate, making it possible for him and his family to survive the Holocaust. He died in 1999 in Israel, his final post being Rabbi of a small *shul* in Petah Tikva. The dynasty lives on, however, through his son, Moshe Leib Rabinovich, Rabbi of the current congregation of Munkács *Hasidim* in Boro Park, Brooklyn, New York.

Jewish communal governance and general politics

The *Hasidim* were undoubtedly a large and powerful segment of the Jews of Munkács and certainly the most visible. However, not only were they not unified amongst themselves, they did not represent the entire Jewish population of the city. In addition to the Orthodox community, the Czechoslovaks authorised other streams. One, based on the relatively new Reform philosophy, managed to win over only a small number of Munkács's traditionally religious Jews. In Sam's⁽¹³⁾ words:

"...we had one 'secular' synagogue which they called the Liberal shul. They were a minority, the Neolog shul. The majority of people were, if not orthodox-Orthodox, but called themselves Orthodox, so I would say the majority were definitely Orthodox...I think they (the Neolog) would, yes, be compared to what we call today the Modern Orthodox".

Orthodox non-*Hasidic* Jews – a sizeable portion of the Jewish population – was yet another, officially designated the *Status Quo Ante* community. They were *Shabbat* and *Kashrut* observant. Some were Zionists, others not. Like Helen's⁽¹⁰⁾ family, they mostly attended the Great Synagogue or *Beis Hamedrash* on Munkács's High or Main Street:

*"They belonged to the main shul, the Munkács *shul*. It wasn't the Shapira shul, and it was Orthodox – I wouldn't call it Hasidic. My father did not have a beard. My father did not wear a black hat, or black clothing...he wore a kippah and he shaved and he wore regular clothes ...my brother had no peyes...we weren't allowed to go to a movie on Shabbes and we weren't allowed to go bathing on Shabbes".*

Andy's⁽¹⁵⁾ family preferred somewhere closer:

“We had a neighbourhood synagogue...about a half a kilometre away from our place...there were several synagogues in Munkács. This was one of them, that people who lived in the neighbourhood were members. We had permanent seats...Paid, but there was also a founder’s fee which, before I was born, my father bought two seats, one for the men and one, exactly a duplicate, for women though there was a separate vaybershil they called it, ladies’ section...That was upstairs. And we went there, you know, usually on Friday nights and Saturdays and of course on holidays, on Holyday eves”.

The overarching communal body was the *Kehilla* or *Kool*, which was concerned with the administrative and governance matters of the Munkács Jewish community in all its shades. It had a President or *Rosh Hakool*, a Board and an office. Uzi⁽³⁾ got a job there when he finished his business studies:

“The Kehilla from the city, from the Jews. There was a house, there was a selected Rosh Hakool. This has nothing to do with the Hasidim and their Rebbes etc. No.

...insisted to have somebody who has at least high school education and he knows Hungarian and he knows shorthand. And in those days...they taught us to type and do shorthand (in Business school). That’s the way I became the undersecretary of the Kehilla. This gives me the privilege to sit in the meetings of the kehilla presidium where all the factions, the Zionist, the non-Zionist, Hasidim...”

He went on to describe some of the work of the *Kool*:

“The salaries for the people, and there was a place where shoachim (Yiddish – kosher butchers) and it’s clean and not clean and things. There were politics...There was a Beis Din (Rabbinical Court)...The Chief Rabbi was a person who got some salary; I don’t know what. And didn’t last long. Was in ’43, in August. I finished the school in July and in March the Hungarians were there...You had to give hekhshers (seal of Kosher certification). There was...a department of hekhshers...”

General elections were held in Czechoslovakia in 1924, 1929 and 1935, contested by a range of newly created parties covering a wide spectrum of views, including the Jewish Party, with strong Zionist underpinnings. Despite active opposition by the Munkács Rabbi Shapira, two of its representatives were elected to parliament in 1929, followed in 1935 by the election of Dr.

Chaim Kugel, the founding director of the Munkács Hebrew Gymnasium. So anathema was it to Rabbi Shapira that he exhorted his followers to vote for the Agrarian Party, despite its overt antisemitism⁵⁰.

Not one of my respondents seemed to have any particular recall of the wider national or local politics, perhaps a symptom of community-wide disinterest due to physical remoteness from Prague. It could well also be a function of their ages. At the time of the last pre-World War II Czechoslovak election in 1935, the eldest was 21 and the youngest just 6, with the majority in their teens and too young to participate in these major political events.

Zionism

The end of World War I brought about the death of the 'old order' in much of Europe and introduced a period of modernism and liberalism, especially in major cities like Budapest and Prague. Zionism grabbed the imagination of Jews, who embraced the philosophy of a 'Homeland', a heresy in the eyes of ultra-Orthodox Jews and especially so for the *Hasidim*.

In Munkács, Rabbi Chaim Elazar Shapira viewed Zionism with particular loathing and spared no amount of vitriol speaking about it, particularly when it came to education⁵¹.

Despite Rabbi Shapira's best efforts, modern ideas began to infiltrate the religious fortress of the Carpathians. Zionism came to flourish in Munkács, so much so that it became a major centre for the various versions of the ideology for the whole of Carpatho-Rus. The Hebrew Gymnasium in Munkács soon became the model for one in Ushorod. Its graduates were zealous idealists, quite a number of them going on to study and work throughout Czechoslovakia, spreading their ardour widely.

Chaim⁽¹⁾ was particularly involved, from a young age:

"...Hashomer Hatzair, a left wing group. My family didn't belong to any party or group but they were Zionists, mainly my father...He came back from WWI and there he met Jews who talked about Zionism starting up ...Most of them were from the Hebrew Gymnasium – that was the group I

⁵⁰ Jelinek *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 146-147, 171.

⁵¹ Sole, *Light in the Mountains*, 99-100.

belonged to. There were people not from the Hebrew Gymnasium but they were a separate group. They attended Hungarian or Czech high schools etc.

Our Madrichim would talk to us about Eretz Israel, about kibbutzim, about building. We had outings, usually on Saturdays. There were about 300 – 400 members in all Munkács, Hashomer Hatzair, about 20 in my group. I joined in 1931-32 at the age of 12, before Barmitzvah and stayed until the end.

...I went to Hachshara in Budapest – preparation for going to Israel. That was allowed under the Czechs but not under the Hungarians. Under the Czechs everyone there lived together; there was a communal kitty; everyone who worked put their earnings into it. Some people cooked, some washed, everyone had an allocated job... Young people left Munkács to go to these places with a view to continuing to Eretz Israel, but they didn't go on; they didn't have the necessary documents allowing them in there from the British. There were some given out but these had to be shared across all the movements and there weren't many...so they were distributed according to the sizes of the various movements... We all took whatever work was on offer. I went to Budapest in August 1941”.

His training and his Zionist focus contributed to his escape through Budapest and Switzerland to Palestine, arriving in 1945.

Education

It is both fascinating and informative to watch two Jewish survivors from Munkács meet for the first time. After preliminary greetings and introductions, they begin to ask the usual questions of first meetings, details such as age, where they'd lived in the city, etc., but inevitably they move on to "where did you go to school?", to which the answer can be quite varied. Since each of the people whose narratives I've used attended school during the Czechoslovak era, they had experienced a most liberal education policy, exceptionally inclusive of the major ethno-linguistic groups in the city's population. Any 'national' group that constituted 20 percent or more of the population was recognised in that short-lived period of democracy as an official minority with the right to run its own educational institutions, teaching and advancing its own culture and history, and doing so in its own language. The Hungarians had enacted a similar Law of

Nationalities as long ago as 1868, but it took more than half a decade for these rights to be enforced and it took the Czechoslovaks to do it. However, by the 19th century Hungary had made elementary education compulsory from age six throughout its dominions, laying the foundations for the growth of the number and range of schools under the Czechoslovaks.

Jews had long had a tradition of learning, especially the study of religious texts and promising young *Talmud chochems* – gifted yeshiva scholars – were much prized as bridegrooms for the daughters of wealthy families. *Cheders* and yeshivas were plentiful throughout the religious Ashkenazi world of eastern and central Europe and the Munkács Yeshiva was held in high respect internationally. Helen⁽¹⁰⁾ expressed the value Jews placed on knowledge, not only of formal education:

“My mother used to say ‘the more you know, the better you’ll be off in life. Knowledge never hurts anybody’...nothing was too much for education”.

Irene’s⁽¹⁴⁾ father’s advice reflected the longstanding insecurity of Jews gained from centuries of persecution in the Diaspora. His advice sadly proved to be prophetic:

“I want to tell you something very important and what I tell you I will tell you again and again and again”, and he constantly repeated it. “I have to teach you to work with your hands. I’m going to teach you to take the nail and hit it with a little hammer.” And I said, “But why do I have to learn this?” My father said, “Life will teach you that whatever you do with your hand nobody can take it away from you”. “But I’m going to school.” “Ah”, my father said, “there’s a second thing I want to tell you. Whatever you have here (pointing to her head) nobody can take away...Jewish religion teaches us that you must teach the children everything to save their lives, and that’s why I’m taking you to the river to learn how to swim”.

The introduction of compulsory secular education was not popular with everyone. The Rusyns did not want to send their children to school. They needed them to work to help support the family, especially in the poorer rural districts. Despite their reverence for study, *Hasidic* Rabbis were also not in favour of it. They viewed the additional requirement of government-run secular education as not only onerous, but philosophically alien, introducing secular ideas threatening to Jewish identity. To protect them from this, Jewish boys were not only obliged to attend school but they had the extra burden of religious studies, before formal classes and often afterwards as well.

Uzi⁽³⁾, whose family were followers of the *Hasidic* Munkácser Rebbe, described how punishing it was to manage the two parallel streams of education, religious and secular:

“...it was her (his mother’s) strong conviction that every one of the 12 children has to have at least a közép iskolai (Hungarian – middle school) education...Everybody went to school and never mind Hungarian, whether it’s Czech, whether it’s Russian, they had to go...it’s only natural that I go to yeshiva simultaneously. I used to get up at 5 in the morning and go to the place to study in the cheder; cold in winter, summer heat; learning was an essential and a vital part of our life”.

Ze’ev⁽⁶⁾ had similar experiences:

“...My daily schedule as a bigger child – 8, 9, 10 years old – was cheder...My father woke me at 5.30am, winter and summer. I had to be in cheder at 6am until 7am...We had a good teacher. 8 fathers brought from somewhere a good teacher, very strict, which we needed because we were wild animals, almost all of us; 12 children and then it became 14 ...7am to 7.30 was prayers; at 7.30 I ran home – not walked, ran – to have breakfast at home, grab my case and run to school. Breakfast was a glass of milk, 2 slices of buttered bread, sometimes some cheese, sometimes eggs. My mother was home, she didn’t work. The 3 of us gobbled breakfast and raced to school. We had to be at school strictly by 8 am...

We had to polish our own shoes; my mother wanted that to teach us a bit of independence. We made our own beds, not so well but that was OK. School was from 8am to noon or 12.30 in the afternoon. I went to the Hebrew school from the very beginning, from kindergarten...We had lunch and at 2 pm we had to be back at cheder. Lunch was fresh every day – cooked food”.

The combination of large numbers of children and limited facilities and teacher numbers made it necessary to divide classes into a morning session and an afternoon one. Children took turns at each, according to Andy⁽¹⁵⁾:

“...there was a shortage of schools, so they had morning sessions and afternoon sessions...I liked it when I went afternoon to school and morning in cheder because morning in cheder went from nine to twelve; then I had to leave earlier than twelve because I had to be home for lunch so I can be in school by one o’clock. So the whole session lasted less than three hours. If it’s in the afternoon, the session started at two and ended up at least till six and sometimes longer. And I hated it”.

Up until the return of the Hungarians in 1938, it had been possible to undertake one's schooling in Russian (in the Uhro-Rusyn language), Czech, Hungarian, German and, most surprisingly, Hebrew. In addition, there was a well-established parallel Jewish educational structure for more religious children, mostly boys. There were also business colleges, with a lot of Jewish students, especially in the Hungarian one, and a teachers' college. Other tertiary schooling meant moving to a larger city. Ilonka's⁽¹¹⁾ brother studied law in Prague. Margaret's⁽¹⁶⁾ family had a successful textile business:

"And my uncle wanted to know more about textiles and so he went up to Brno, some place also to study in a textile school, so the boys were allowed to get away and to do something more professional, but I think the girls, some of the girls must have been, but the Hasidic religious girls were not usually sent away for a profession".

Those wanting to pursue a religious career also left Munkács to study. Chaim⁽¹⁾ talked about his brother who:

"left in 1928 to study in Germany and then to do his doctorate in Prague. He found a job as a Neolog Rabbi". He eventually "published 28 books in Israel on philosophy, on religion".

Of the 20 people I interviewed, 7 had gone to Czech schools, 3 to what they referred to as Russian, 4 were Hebrew Gymnasium students and 2 were home-schooled. These were both sons of well-to-do religious fathers concerned about their secularisation. They studied general subjects, mainly in tandem, first with cheder, and then yeshiva studies. The 4 others had attended different schools at different times. The diverse and well developed school system in Munkács served the entire district. In Margaret's⁽¹⁶⁾ words:

"...Munkács had a large surrounding. And Munkács had many schools, German schools, Russian schools, Ukrainian, Hungarian schools so when you went out to school you saw many students come from the train station – and Hebrew school – to their schools, to the schools where they were registered and it was just a wonderful experience to see so much youth coming and studying".

The choice of school was influenced by a number of factors, one major reason being financial since the Ruthenian, Czech and Hungarian schools were government funded, making them accessible to families of more limited means. The Hebrew school was fee-charging and therefore limited to those who could afford to pay.

Another major influence on school choice was ideological. The Hebrew Gymnasium was Zionist in orientation, which rendered it totally anathema to the *Hasidim*. Even those ultra-religious Jews who could afford to pay their children's school fees chose not to do so, if only to avoid the ire of their Rabbis, especially of the Munkácser Rabbi Shapira. Jewish Orthodoxy was firm in its belief that the return of the Jews to Israel would come about only through Messianic redemption. Zionism, the belief that the return of the Jews to Zion was in their own hands, was simply an abhorrent heresy to them.

Chaim⁽¹⁾ remembered his school days:

"The school was Zionist and was educating us to go to Palestine. All the factions were there – Hashomer Hatzair, Tsionit klalim, Mizrachi, Betar – leftist, rightist. Everyone got on. By then I had no non-Jewish friends".

Trudy⁽¹⁹⁾ also attended the Hebrew Gymnasium:

"I went to the Hebrew school from 1st elementary school to the 8th Gymnasium. My class was the last class that matriculated but we only had the written exams. By the time it came time for the oral exams we were already in the ghetto and there was no more school – '44...Well, after the war we came back and we found one of our teachers in Munkács who gave us certificate that we did matriculate because we did do the written test. I never used it because times were such that I couldn't go to college".

Schools ran on a 6 day week, the Hebrew Gymnasium's from Sunday to Friday and all other schools from Monday to Saturday. Yet the ultra-religious viewed their children's *Shabbat* attendance at school as preferable to having them exposed to the abomination of Zionism.

Margaret⁽¹⁶⁾ remembered:

"...on Shabbat, we did go to school. There was an eruv⁵² – took our books with us but we didn't make any tests, we didn't write, but we were allowed to go to school".

The Jewish ultra-Orthodox establishment was ironically joined in its condemnation by assimilated Jews as well as by Ruthenians and Hungarians. Despite their best efforts however, they could not prevent the opening of Hebrew schools throughout Subcarpathian Ruthenia. In

⁵² An eruv is a symbolic representation of the walls surrounding 'private' space, which makes it permissible for religious Jews to carry items on *Shabbat* – usually considered an act of work and therefore forbidden on that day.

Munkács, the Hebrew elementary school opened in 1921 and was extended to a high school in 1924. Its most virulent opponent was the Munkácser Rebbe, Chaim Elazar Shapira, who actually invoked a curse on it and those who attended it. Miriam⁽¹⁷⁾ remembered with some sadness how her father's decision affected her and her siblings:

“He was a big fan of the Munkácser Rebbe...Rabbi Shapira...we all started out to go to Hebrew school and then he put a curse on...Hebrew Gymnasium. Well, I went only to the elementary school because the curse came on it. He took us all out. We all had to go to different schools ...I went to a German school first and then to a Hungarian school and that's where I finished – in Hungarian school...1942”.

The Rebbe's ban caused problems in Ze'ev's⁽⁶⁾ family, which unusually coupled *cheder* education with studies at the Zionist Hebrew school:

“grandfather...was observant, so much so that when he learned that my father sent his 3 children to the Hebrew school, he didn't talk to him for two years...he was a Munkácser Hasid. My father was an ardent Zionist ...my father was a modern man, religious, strictly religious, but without a beard, his sons without peyes. He wore a cap and he sent us to the Hebrew school because there we had to wear a cap and we didn't go to school on Saturday”.

Some families went to extraordinary lengths to avoid sending their children to the Hebrew school, as in Alice's⁽⁹⁾ case:

“...Jewish Hebrew Gymnasium but they didn't want to send me there because of the Zionists...They sent me to...a Catholic school, because they figured, Catholic, I'm not going to become. So when they had their religious lessons and they gave out as prizes, pictures of Mary or whoever, so they would give me pictures of a lamb. They knew that I was Jewish but, strangely enough, I went there first four years”.

Those who attended Czech school, like Susan⁽⁸⁾, tended to describe the experience with affection:

“Because we were Czechoslovakia and we were proud Czechs, you know. The Czechs were very good to the Jews”.

Her studies included:

“...language of course. The Czech language. And geometry and... geography, and history and we had, those that went to Czech school, had

to learn a little bit Russian too, because it was Carpatho-Rus so we had an hour Russian...At home, ya. We had German lessons...

All the teachers and everybody was Czech...in our school, because... there were all kinds of schools. Munkács had Russian, German, Hungarian, Czech...my parents wouldn't have minded if we stayed in Hungarian school but the young people didn't want to stay. They wanted to be Czechs".

The choice of school was often based on other, more pragmatic, reasons of survival, as Uzi⁽³⁾ illustrated:

"So we went to school – the Jews always tended to be loyal to the government, so we went to Czech school and the end when, after '38 or '39 the Czechs went out, the parents were a bit more careful and I had a sister who went to Russian schools..."

Given the region's history of shifting borders and changing hegemonies, it isn't surprising that Ilonka's⁽¹¹⁾ father tried to protect his daughter by second guessing Munkács's future:

"My father sent me to Russian school because he didn't believe the Czechs would stay. 'What do the Czechs have to do here? There aren't Czech people here'. But the Czechs put Czechs into every big office. They had a Czech school, a Czech Gymnasium. My sister-in-law went in Munkács to Czech Gymnasium.

I went to Polgar School – like a junior high school – 2 years and my Russian teacher lived not far from us and I went to school with him and we spoke Hungarian all the way but at school we spoke Russian and again Hungarian on the way home. That was funny.

The school was big. There were lots of children. Every class was 2 and there were about 40 – 60 children in one class. The classes were mixed until I went to Polgari. Then it was only girls. There was also a boys' school. Then I went to Business school, again Russian".

Gaby⁽⁴⁾ also studied at what she called Russian school:

"Latin, French, German. Russian in elementary school – only in elementary".

Adding on a more humorous note:

"I went to a Ruthenian kindergarten and I thought I could speak Russian and it turned out that I was speaking the local dialect, closer to Ukrainian; and I sang all the songs".

High school matriculation age was usually 18. Many didn't stay beyond the compulsory age 14, for a range of reasons, financial being a major one. Less affluent or academically able children left school to find jobs or apprenticeships. Dressmaking, corsetry, millinery and midwifery were popular occupations for Jewish girls. In Rose's⁽¹²⁾ case, family circumstances seem to have gained her some leniency:

"I even didn't finish 15 because my mother was a very sickly woman and I had to stay at home, so I made one exam for the whole year. And they let me pass. I was I think, 13".

Religious boys whose parents could afford it left to continue their studies in yeshivas.

Margaret⁽¹⁶⁾ followed Czech high school with:

"Hungarian business academy, and there I learned bookkeeping and shorthand and other Hungarian subjects...subjects that are regularly taken. Nothing selective. In fact, one subject was selective – Esperanto. And I, because I liked languages, it was not compulsory, I took Esperanto, and even today I know the hymn of the national anthem".

Knowledge was so highly valued that better off families hired private teachers of musical instruments, languages and religion to supplement their children's education. Miriam⁽¹⁷⁾ and her siblings grew up with a succession of nannies teaching them German. As Margaret⁽¹⁶⁾ explained:

"All Jewish mothers were very anxious to have their children educated decently. For instance I had private lessons. French private lessons. I learnt French and I read Maupassant quite a bit".

As with all other aspects of their lives, the Hungarian occupation dramatically altered education for Jews throughout their territories – and not for the better. Irene⁽¹⁴⁾ remembered some of the changes to the Hebrew Gymnasium in Munkács:

"in fact when we became Hungarian, they said that the life is going to change and the first thing they took away the name of Hebrew Gymnasium and they made the board to put on Zsidó Gymnasium – 'Jewish Gymnasium', not Hebrew Gymnasium. And then in 1938, most of our teachers, the principal, Dr Kugel...left".

Hungarian nationalism was strong. The diversity and liberalism that had so elevated Munkács's educational opportunities disappeared, replaced by Hungarian institutions. It seems that those who had chosen otherwise before, like Helen⁽¹⁰⁾, were now paying a price for it:

"I applied to the Hungarian Business school in '39 already, and I was rejected because I had Czech school..."

The Czech schools were closed and Jewish students were thrown out of the remaining schools, forced to move to the newly renamed 'Jewish School'. Again from Irene⁽¹⁴⁾:

"...in 1938 there were, like my husband, many students who came from different schools where they...didn't know one word Hebrew but they were...accepted in my Hebrew school but...they had to learn the Hebrew language basic...Until 1938, every subject, every subject was taught in Hebrew language. So, '38 on we had to learn Hungarian. We knew how to speak Hungarian but not literary Hungarian. The Hungarian language became the main language in the school and we had to learn Hungarian and we learned it".

As for tertiary studies, these became a thing of the past. Irene⁽¹⁴⁾ continued:

"...when my husband graduated school was in 1940. In 1940 he wanted to go to study but there was already Numerus Clausus⁵³, Numerus Nullus, they wouldn't take him".

⁵³ A law enacted in 1920 in Hungary, ostensibly to maintain the relative proportions of members of ethnic groups in the professions, but it was clearly aimed at limiting the number of Jewish students permitted into institutions of higher learning. It came into effect in Subcarpathian Ruthenia with the Hungarian occupation in 1938.

5. Inter - ethnic relations

For the most part, the various ethnic and national minorities tended to live side by side quite peacefully, in the main. However, these relationships were certainly influenced by the nationality and ideology of whoever was in power at any given time. The extreme poverty of the region created an environment into which it was quite easy to import the nationalistic predisposition of the rulers. Jews tended to try to accommodate these changes as best they could. The more secular members of the community made every effort to be 'good citizens' while still, for the most part, remaining part of the Jewish subculture. Jewish desire for acceptance and equality had led some 247 Jewish men from the city to join in the Hungarian revolt of 1848-49 against the Habsburgs, led by Lajos Kosuth, in the belief that this would lead to a better deal for their communities. In the period of Czechoslovak rule, this desire manifested in the way Jews made schooling choices for their children.

It is significant that pre-1938, Jews felt sufficiently secure to stand up to antisemitic slurs. From Helen's⁽¹⁰⁾ experiences:

"The natives, whether it was Hungarian, Ruthene or the Schwabs – the Germans. So of course we heard these words but not to the extent that you had to be afraid. So you threw back words at them – 'You say I stink? You stink.' But among schoolmates, no, I did not experience".

The Orthodox, observant *Hasidim* tended to prefer a more isolationist approach to such changes, as far as this was possible. They lived as much as they could within their own communities and often didn't venture more than necessary outside the sub-community of their own particular Rebbe's following. Their main language remained Yiddish, resorting to Hungarian, Czech or 'Little Russian' (Uhro-Rusyn Ukrainian) only when business or bureaucracy necessitated. Some *Hasidic* men never fully mastered another language but relied on their wives or children to act as interpreters. The womenfolk seem to have been more likely to be multi-lingual to enable them to be able to converse with servants, tradesmen and shopkeepers.

Intermarriage rates, even among the more secular Jews, were very low – 'a paltry 0.09 percent'⁵⁴, quite remarkable when compared to 5% of the Jews of neighbouring Slovakia, demonstrating the considerable strength of Jewish identification in the region.

⁵⁴ The demographic data used in this section are based largely on Abramson, Henry: *Collective memory and Collective Identity: Jews, Rusyns and the Holocaust*, in *Carpatho-Rusyn American*, Vol. XVII, No.3, Pittsburgh, 1994, 4.

It is significant that, although antisemitism was well entrenched in the region under the Habsburgs, Munkács had never experienced any major pogrom-like violence prior to the Holocaust.

Jewish - Rusyn relations

Ruthenians, or Rusyns, are Ukrainian speaking mountain people of Slavic descent, almost all of whom belonged to the Eastern Rite Uniate Greek Catholic Church, although there was a sizeable membership of the Orthodox faith. They were both the largest and the poorest group⁵⁵. The competition between Rusyns and the only marginally better off Jews for a share in the scant economic 'pie' certainly caused friction between the two groups. This situation worsened after 1920, with incorporation into Czechoslovakia, when the Jews, for the most part, did not support Ruthenian secessionist aspirations.

The rancour that had lain dormant in the breasts of the Rusyn population for the lack of Jewish support for an independent Ruthenian state quickly surfaced. Previous harmonious co-existence had given way to resentment and competition as both groups began to become more upwardly mobile, thanks in part to greater secular education. Increased Rusyn discontent with Czechoslovak rule led to the rise of Ukraine-leaning nationalist political movements with significant antisemitic undertones. This growing Rusyn animosity towards Jews was promoted and exploited by the Nazis, with implicit promises of autonomy, although they had no intention of granting this. It was commonplace during the Holocaust for Rusyns to betray Jews, often families who had been their neighbours for generations. This was the experience of my mother.

David⁽⁷⁾, who had attended Russian school, remembered how it started:

“Until '38 everything was together. Our friends were Russian, they were non-Jewish...But they changed. 1938. November. From one day to the other... They didn't want to know us already...we knew what is going on...the newspapers wrote against the Jews”.

As with all the nationalities, there were also cases throughout the region of Rusyns helping Jews and even hiding them, at considerable personal risk.

⁵⁵ Abramson, Henry op. cit 4

Jews, Hungarians and Germans

Hungary's kings ruled the region for nearly a thousand years. Hungarian culture was firmly entrenched up until the end of World War I. Munkács had its Budapest-style café life and its Hungarian language schools, to which many non-*Hasidic* Jews sent their children. As can be seen from the 1910 census, the Hungarians did not consider the Jews a separate national group⁵⁶.

Many of Munkács's older Jews welcomed the news in 1938 of the return of Hungarian rule. They were remembering the days of the Emperor Franz Joseph, of a society based on, *Gemütlichkeit*, gallantry and egalitarianism. They were to be sorely disappointed.

This was a different Hungary, a Hungary with a supremacist fascist agenda, committed to excluding and removing Jews and other 'undesirables' from their territory. The almost zealous brutality with which the Hungarian police and gendarmes went about doing this surprised not only the Jews. Even Adolf Eichmann is quoted as saying, albeit somewhat cynically, "In some cases my men were shocked by the inhumanity of the Hungarian police"⁵⁷.

That they did so while many of the Gentile citizenry of Munkács stood by, often smiling and cheering them on, was described by some of my respondents as particularly wounding.

The German population had arrived in numbers in the late 18th century as artisans and skilled foresters. Many continued to live in their own villages, although a sizeable number gradually found their way to the larger towns of the region, often becoming *Magyarised* in the process. In Munkács they tended to live in close proximity to each other, apparently quite insular and known for the neatness and cleanliness of their districts. Gaby⁽⁴⁾ remembered them as:

"...the Germans were Schwabs; they were very diligent. They embroidered bed linen...(the Schwabs) were German villagers. They were in Transylvania too, They lived on the Várpálanka, close to the castle...I only knew those who did the embroidery".

While both of these groups looked down on the peasant Rusyns, their lives were intermingled with those of the Jews, especially economically. Their contacts tended to be economic or professional, rather than personal, cultural or social. For the most part these nationalities got on

⁵⁶ See this thesis. P.16

⁵⁷ National Committee for Attending Deportees (Deportáltakat Gondozó Országos Bizottság - DEGOB). Founded 1945. Chapter on 'The Gendarmerie'. <http://www.degob.hu/english/index.php?showarticle=2011>. Accessed June 2009.

with each other, despite widespread underlying dislikes and bigotries. It was not until the rise of Nazism that these attitudes came to the surface, fanned by the rise in nationalistic pride and antisemitism from both Berlin and Budapest.

Each of my respondents reported dramatic changes to their daily life once the Hungarians took over Munkács. Jews lost their businesses and often their livelihoods. The education structure became *Magyarised*, to the detriment of Jewish students. Jews were harassed in the streets, usually by Hungarians, sometimes people they knew. The worst such incident described was by Ze'ev⁽⁶⁾:

"...there's one that I can still see in my mind. We were walking home from synagogue one Friday night. In Munkács there were lots of Jews, many of them wore shtreimels and beards. There was my father and me with two friends. Suddenly we hear terrible shouting. We ran towards it and saw three Jews who'd been walking together. Two Nyilás (Hungarian – Arrow Cross Party member) had grabbed them, had taken their belts and tied them together and tied them around the three Jews facing each other and set fire to them while they danced around them in joy. The three Jews burned to death. Whenever I walk home from synagogue on Friday night, I see this. And there were lots of these sorts of incidents".

The Schwabs also changed. Empowered by Hitler's rise, many young men took to wearing Nazi outfits and roaming the streets to terrorise Jews.

Jews and Gypsies

Roma, commonly known as Gypsies, lived mostly in the rural areas in what can only be described as wretched, barefoot poverty. Their number was so small that they were counted in the 'Other' category of the various censuses. In Munkács, they tended to live in squalor, in small groups throughout the poorer parts of the city, such as under the bridge, close to the rubbish tip. They did the dirtiest, most menial labouring jobs such as cleaning outhouses. They were viewed as thieves by the population at large and most Jews saw them in the same way.

Beyond that, I found almost nothing on their relations with Jews in the literature, indicating that their interactions were very limited. Of those I interviewed, only Susan⁽⁸⁾ made any mention of them, describing a very moving experience with a cleaner at one of her father's restaurants:

“You know what?...When we came back from, we had a Gypsy who used to clean the closets there from the restaurant – the toilets and gardens there, the yards. And that Gypsy came, when we came back home, she cried bitterly ‘And where is Weiss úr?’(Hungarian – Mister) ‘Hol van Weiss úr?’ And she looked in her pocket; she had a few coins and went to give us the coins when we came home from Auschwitz”.

Music is one area in which the two populations were known to collaborate. The streets, taverns, and restaurants of Munkács often resonated to the sounds of Gypsy music. Throughout the Carpathians, Gypsy and Jewish musicians often formed roaming bands together, which were for hire. With a repertoire including a lot of *klezmer* music, they regularly played at Jewish weddings and other celebratory events.

The picture, however, is fairly mixed. There are reports of Gypsies joining in the public mockery of the Jews during the deportations in 1944 and in the looting of their property⁵⁸. Ironically, they themselves were slated for deportation as ‘Asocials’ not long after, although, once again, the literature on this is surprisingly almost silent.

Jewish - Czechoslovak relations

In line with normal, age-old, practice, the Czechoslovak government sent a number of its own people to Subcarpathian Ruthenia as administrators and officials of its newly acquired territory and population. Although many went to Ushorod, the region’s new capital, a sizeable number were posted to Munkács. They came with their families to take up official positions. What they found in Subcarpathian Ruthenia was quite different from their previous experiences. Much of the rest of Czechoslovakia comprised provinces of reasonably uniform ethnic and religious populations, with a few, quite small minority populations. In their newly acquired Podkarpatskaya province, however, the Czechs and Slovaks were a newly arrived minority, while the rest of the population was a colourful mixture of religions, ethnicities, languages and customs.

Among the new arrivals were teachers for the recently opened Czech school established for the children of the newly imported civil servants and police officers, which had a cohort of Jewish

⁵⁸ Jelinek, *The Carpathian Diaspora*, 303 ff

pupils, two of my interviewees among them. Some of these officials initially clearly showed by their behaviour that they harboured antisemitic views. However, as time passed and the government in Prague made clear its policies of democracy and interethnic and inter-religious acceptance, their behaviour is reported to have modified. As Ze'ev⁽⁶⁾ explained:

“The Czechs were also antisemites but they were intelligent and knew not to show it. If there had been any incident, the police intervened immediately. You could always hear about some incident or other. I never saw any, I only saw them under the Hungarians”.

As Susan⁽⁸⁾ found, antisemitism was not always blatant and physical. Discrimination could be subtle enough to pass under the law's radar:

“There was a (Czech) gym. Sokol was very famous. We went to Sokol but, you know, at one time it got so crowded – I spoke too fast that Czechs were not antisemites. It got so crowded they couldn't manage anymore so they made the lessons for Friday night and you know a Hasid Friday night ...but you know, what my mother...she tolerated...she didn't tell my father ...she let us go...That was already Shabbes. My father went to shul. By the time...he came back from shul we were home...for a long time my father didn't know what's happening and then he knew so we had to stop going... And they did it on purpose because they had too many people; they couldn't manage to have everybody...for the classes”.

Many of the Jews of Munkács welcomed their incorporation into the new Czechoslovak nation. They tended to support the government of the day as loyal subjects, but in this new arrangement, they were allowed to create and join Jewish-oriented political parties, openly support Zionism and identify as of Jewish nationality. Trudy⁽¹⁹⁾ remembered her youth in Mukačevo warmly:

“Under the Czechs it was called ‘Little America’ because freedom was freedom. There was no difference between Jews and non-Jews”.

However, this was short-lived. In 1938, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's agreement with Adolf Hitler led to the Munich Pact, dismembering much of Czechoslovakia, eventually delivering the region to Hungarian rule. It quickly became apparent that the Hungarians neither forgot nor forgave what they considered the Jews' disloyalty.

6. Death of a community

As Premier of Carpatho-Ukraine, Monsignor Augustin Ivanovych Voloshyn assured the Jewish population of the region that their equal status was not threatened: (Jews) “... are regarded on an equal footing with the rest of the population”. Later, he modified this statement by alluding to “certain evils with which some Jews are connected”.⁵⁹ In the political arena, no candidates with Jewish names were permitted to stand in the January 1939 elections to the regional Diet. More serious antisemitic action was yet to come, left in others’ hands.

On 15 March 1939, the Hungarian army entered Subcarpathian Ruthenia, taking over that part of the region not already ceded under the previous November’s First Vienna Award. Prime Minister Teleki forcibly annexed the rest of Subcarpathian Ruthenia and, along with the Transylvanian part of Romania, reconstituted most of the pre-Trianon territories of Greater Hungary. On 20 November 1940, Hungary signed the Tripartite Pact, effectively entering the war on Germany’s side.

The situation of the region’s Jewish population, deteriorated rapidly and dramatically, ushering in the beginning of the end.

A series of anti-Jewish laws were introduced very quickly, as Louis⁽²⁰⁾ described:

“We were involved. Certainly everybody was affected... There were various laws under the Hungarian occupation and restrictions and commercial restrictions, and social restrictions. You were not allowed to have a telephone, you were not allowed to have a radio, restrictions of that sort, the Jews. Our family business survived until concentration camp”.

Andy⁽¹⁵⁾ added his memories of even more restrictions:

“Later on, you know, when the Hungarians – we couldn’t go to school, we couldn’t shop and even though they had rationing, our rationing was very limited, how much bread or how much flour we can have, and we had – we couldn’t walk on the sidewalk; we had to walk in the kerb (the gutter). People made difficulties”.

⁵⁹ American Jewish Yearbook Vol. 46 *REVIEW OF THE YEAR 5699* (1 July, 1938 to 30 June 1939) *PART II: Foreign Countries*; Moses Moskowitz. Based on reports in the Jewish and general press of the United States and a number of foreign countries. Ed. Harry Schneiderman. The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia 5705 - 1944, 42.
http://www.ajarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1939_1940_5_YRForeign.pdf. Accessed May-June 2009.

Next came the deprivation of any civil rights and of non-Hungarian or 'eastern' Jews. In the summer of 1941, these Jewish 'foreign nationals' were expelled. Their families may have lived there for generations but hadn't bothered with the formalities of Hungarian citizenship prior to World War I, nor with documents showing family residency in Hungary prior to 1850. Some 18,000⁶⁰ Jews were deported from Subcarpathian Ruthenia to German occupied Eastern Galicia. The deportations were eventually stopped, but not before most of them were murdered by the SS, mainly in Kamenets-Podolsk and Kolomea⁶¹.

Rose⁽¹²⁾ and her brothers grew up bearing their mother's maiden name. Her parents had married in a religious Jewish ceremony, without the formalities of civil registration:

"In 1941 there was a knock on the window, the police took him...and we didn't know where. It was three days before Pesach, everything was already finished, you know...because he was Polish. And the Hungarians said that they have enough...Hungarian Jews, they don't need Polish Jews. There were terrible lot in Munkács, Polish Jews and they all collected them all".

There were a few successful rescues, most notably of Rabbi Baruch Rabinovich, who had become the Munkácser Rabbi. Irene's⁽¹⁴⁾ brother was involved in these dangerous efforts, not just for the rescuers, but also for their families:

"In 1942 two private detectives came to our store and asked my father where is Oscar. My father says, "I don't know – somewhere". Oscar was in the meantime helping my father also in the store. They took my father to the Kohner Kastély, they called it, where they asked. They were torturing people there. They wanted to find out where my brother Oscar is, and that's when we found out when he went with that Wieder Mendu with the taxi, they went to Kolomea which was the border of Poland and Hungary because in 1941 they took away all the Jews from my home town who didn't have Hungarian citizenship. And these two boys were working underground with some people, Jewish people, in our home town, who gave them money to help them to go to Kolomea and if they find somebody on the border they brought them back, they gave them papers, they sent them to Budapest and from Budapest they sent them to Israel..."

⁶⁰ Sole, *Light in the Mountains*, 215

⁶¹ Randolph L. Braham, 'The Kamenets Podolsk and Délvidek Massacres: Prelude to the Holocaust in Hungary', *Yad Vashem Studies*, vol. 9, 1973. 133-156

And finally they saw that they can't get nothing out of my father, after two or three weeks they let him out. My father never wanted to talk about it, what happened to him, but we knew".

Jewish businesses were 'Aryanised', limiting the economic activities and possibilities of Jews, excluding them from some professions altogether and generally creating enormous hardship. Jews, by their appearance and dress, were easily recognisable, like Tuviya's⁽²⁾ father, making them an easy target for physical attack:

"Under the Hungarians, they made him kaput. They took his licence and he was very upset. He made business under the Hungarians. I was his business manager because he didn't travel any more. He was afraid to travel to Budapest because he was a Jew and there were a lot of trouble makers on the train and they beat him, so he sent me. They beat him so he was afraid to go, so he sent me. I was 16,17 year old. I never had a beard".

Jewish men aged between 18 and 60 were drafted into Hungarian army's forced labour battalions – '*Munkaszolgálat*'. Many of them, including my father and my maternal uncle, were sent towards the Russian front to assist the advance of the German army and their Hungarian allies to 'victory' against the Russians by building roads and fortifications and clearing minefields. By 1942 some 100,000 young and middle-aged Jewish men had been sent east as forced labourers, about one third of them from Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Many of them died of starvation, illness, accidents, exposure and frostbite. Others were murdered by their Hungarian Gendarme guards.

Throughout the period of Hungarian rule, there was some activity by the *halutz* Zionist underground, smuggling Jews to Palestine, usually via Budapest. However none of this activity lasted long. There were also efforts made to get other countries, especially the British, to assist in Jewish emigration, but these were also unfruitful.

On 19 March 1944, the Germans invaded Hungary, entering Munkács the following day, taking control of the entire region and transferring the fate of the Jewish population directly into the hands of Adolf Eichmann.

On 12 April, the order for the ghettoisation of the Jews of Subcarpathian Ruthenia was issued. So as not to alarm the rest of Hungary's Jews, this was widely promoted as essential for security reasons, with the region being declared a war zone to help sustain the charade. By this time the Jewish population of Munkács had risen to nearly 15,000, augmented by migration

from rural areas where conditions had become extremely impoverished and anti-Jewish feeling among the non-Jewish population had become dangerously high.

A ghetto of just a few streets was established for the collection and concentration of the Munkács Jews.

“It was terrible” recalled Gaby⁽⁴⁾. “From one day to the next, you had to leave everything behind and just take a rucksack... We moved in to the home of friends. It was very hard. For shopping, I had a Russian girlfriend who sometimes brought something or took something away and then returned it. There was the story of the typewriter; under the Hungarians it was not permitted for Jews to have a typewriter and my father had just bought a really good, modern little typewriter and he had others, so there was a Christian young man, a dental technician, who lived opposite the pharmacy. He offered ‘Matzuka, I’ll hide anything away for you’, so Matzu gave him the typewriter...

When he returned, he brought us the typewriter and gave it back to us...”

Conditions were cruelly overcrowded and unsanitary. Food was in short supply and medical services virtually non-existent. Serious diseases broke out among the inhabitants, including typhus, and were virtually untreated through lack of facilities and medicines.

Jewish homes were ransacked and taken over as soon as the Jews left them. Some 30 synagogues and prayer houses had thrived in the city. All of these, along with other Jewish communal buildings, were vandalised and mostly destroyed. Jews were humiliated, brutalised and beaten, often to death, by the German units stationed in the town and by their Hungarian supporters. Helen⁽¹⁰⁾ described wilful acts of looting and victimisation in the ghetto by local Hungarians:

“And they also conducted raids. When everybody was home, they knew that people are in their quarters, so the military – actually it was the military Szabad Csoportosok (Hungarian – Volunteer Corps). It wasn’t an order; they could do it on their own...like, they got together, I don’t know, 50 or 100, and they went into the ghetto to each apartment and they were robbing. They came in 4, 5 at one time and they told us ‘go to the window, keep your hands up’ and they were searching the apartment and took whatever pleased them, whatever they wanted to; opened the cupboards and took out clothing and sometimes we got a few beatings too; and they laughed and the apartment was in shambles after they went. So those raids were very, very dangerous”.

At the same time the Sajovits and the Kallus Brickyards were converted to ghettos to collect some 14,000⁶² Jews of the rest of Bereg County from the smaller towns, villages and rural areas around Munkács. Conditions here were even worse than in the main ghetto. Many inhabitants were forced to live out in the open without any shelter.

Subcarpathian Ruthenia was designated Deportation Zone 1 of the 6 into which Hungary had been divided. The deportations of the Jews from Munkács began at dawn on 15 May 1944. First to go were the rural Jews concentrated in the Sajovits and Kallus Brickyards. The main ghetto was then liquidated and its inhabitants relocated to the brickyards to await their turn, which came on 19 May and ended 9 transports later on 24 May.

“The Jews will be transported in 110 trains to the station at Kassa where the transports will be taken over by the German Police. Marking (on the trains): ‘D.A. Umsiedler’ [German Worker Resettlement].

Each train will transport 3,000 persons. It will consist of 45 cars, each with 70 persons plus baggage, and two C cars at the front and the back of the train for the guards⁶³”.

On 30 May 1944, Munkács was declared officially *Judenrein*. By then over 27,000 Jews of Munkács, its surrounding villages and rural settlements had been deported to Auschwitz.

In Auschwitz the Jews of Munkács suffered the same fate as all the other Jews. Many, mostly the elderly, the very young and those who appeared infirm, went directly from the trains to the gas chambers, not even stopping to be properly registered and tattooed, so great was Hitler’s urgency to eradicate the ‘Jewish Race’, even in the face of certain imminent defeat. Those able to work became slave labourers in a variety of enterprises.

It is estimated that at least 85% of the Jews of Subcarpathian Ruthenia perished in the Holocaust.

⁶² Ágnes Ságvári, ‘*The Holocaust in Carpatho-Ruthenia*’.

⁶³ Randolph L. Braham, ‘Confidential Instructions for the Mayors of the Ghetto Centers Concerning the Deportation of the Hungarian Jews: Message from the German and Hungarian Dejewification Authorities at a Conference at Munkács, May 9, 1944’ in *The Politics of Genocide* Vol. I, New York, 1981, 667-669.

Post Liberation

An estimated 2,000 Munkács Jews survived the Holocaust, of whom “merely 1,200 people returned”⁶⁴ in 1945 to Mukačevo, as it then became known again. Following the annexation by the USSR and the confiscation of the synagogues, many left, migrating all over the world, especially to Israel and the Americas.

In the late 1960's, there were between 1,000 and 2,000 Jews living in the now Ukrainian/Russian city of Mukacheve. After 1969, when emigration became easier, most of the remaining Jews, certainly the younger ones, departed, many going to Israel. The Jewish community of the city was reduced to about 300 elderly people, only a handful of whom had been born there pre World War II and survived the Holocaust. A documentary was made in 1994 titled '*A kövek üzenete: Kárpátalja*' (The Message of the Stones: Subcarpathia) and shown on Hungarian television. It followed the path of the Latoritsa River, stopping at the major population centres to see the remnants of Jewish life there 50 years after the deportations. By then, only 70 or so of the original Munkács Jews still lived there. The film showed a small group of mostly elderly men praying in its one small, remaining, somewhat dilapidated synagogue.

Today the city is in the Zakarpatskaya Oblast (province) of Ukraine and is known as Mukacheve. The Jewish community has grown considerably larger, augmented by Jews from Russia and Ukraine. It is experiencing a resurgence of Jewish culture, with free kosher soup kitchens, a *mikvah* (Jewish ritual bath) and a Jewish summer camp, largely driven and funded by Rabbi Moshe Leib Rabinovich, grandson of the Munkácser Rebbe, Chaim Elazar Shapira and today the spiritual head of Munkácser *Hasidim* in Boro Park, Brooklyn, New York. In July 2006 a new synagogue and community centre were opened. Sadly, the rich and complex tapestry of the pre-Holocaust Jewish community of Munkács cannot be replicated or resurrected. It has simply disappeared.

⁶⁴ Tamás Stark, *Hungarian Jews During the Holocaust and After the Second World War, 1939 -1949: A Statistical Review*. East European Monographs, No. DLI. Boulder: distributed by Columbia University Press 2000, 107.

7. Conclusion

It is clear that time is running out for the availability of eye witness reports for the historiography of important pre-Holocaust Jewish communities such as Munkács. Since I commenced this research, some of the survivors I interviewed have died. Both of my parents are long gone – I missed the opportunity to tape their testimonies.

Inevitably, there will come a time when there are no longer living eye witnesses to the Holocaust and the Jewish world that was destroyed by it. Future historians could well find themselves needing to rely almost entirely on published or archived scraps of primary and secondary sources, supplemented by written or recorded autobiographies and testimonies. It is now a matter of pressing urgency to record the testimonies of as many of the diminishing number of these survivors as are still able and willing to do so.

In undertaking this study, I hope to have helped to preserve a small but important part of the memory of The Jewish World That Was.

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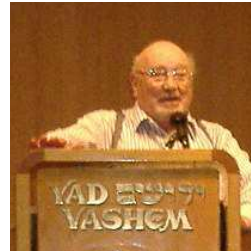
The Interviewees

ISRAEL:

1. Chaim Sole on 16th March 2004 in Petah Tikva and on 29 May 2006 in Tel Aviv, (translated from Hungarian by AB)



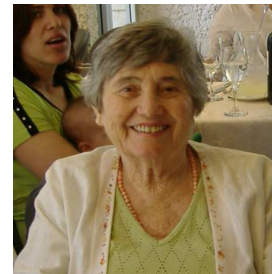
2. Tuviya Klein in Ramat Gan, on 11th June 2006



3. Uzi Steinberg in Tel Aviv, On 10th July 2007



4. Gaby (Gabriella) Bruckstein née Weiss in Givataim, 30th June 2007 (translated from Hungarian by AB)



5. Benzi Klein in Tel Aviv, on 10th July 2007 (translated from Hungarian by AB)



6. Ze'ev Koenigsberg in Ramat Gan, 12th June 2006 (translated from Hungarian by AB)

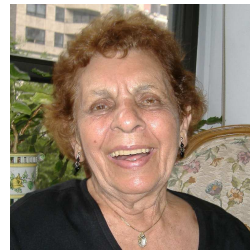


NEW YORK:

7. David Berger in New York City, 3rd July 2006



8. Susan Gador née Weiss in New York City, 5th July 2006



9. Alice Bodner née Kornfeld in Queens, NY, 28th June 2006



10. Helen Rupp née Rosenberg, in Queens, NY, 2nd July 2006



SYDNEY:

11. Ilonka Jucovic née Sternbach, 26th October 2004



12. Rose Ruchi Zoldan née Lazocky, 21st February 2005

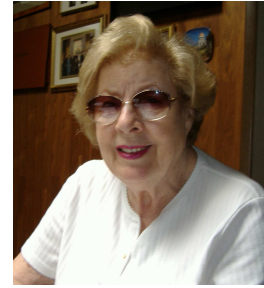


13. Sam Moss, from 9th November 2004 to 3rd March 2005

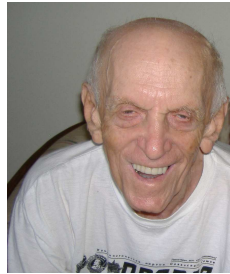


LOS ANGELES:

14. Irene Markley née Schonfeld, 12th July 2006



15. Andy Meisels,
18th July 2006



16. Margaret (Magda) Goldblatt née Seidman, 15th July 2006



17. Miriam Goldstein
née Roth, 11th July 2006



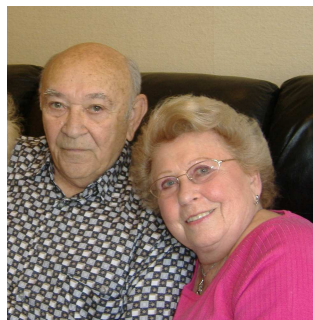
18. Nicholas (Nick) Mermel né Mermelstein, 19th July 2006



19. Trudy Kestenbaum
née Kallus

and

20. Louis Kestenbaum,
24th July 2006



Appendix 2

SAMPLE LETTER TO POTENTIAL INTERVIEWEES



The University of Sydney

Department of Hebrew,
Biblical and Jewish Studies

Professor Konrad Kwiet
Adjunct Professor for Jewish Studies
Roth Lecturer for Holocaust Studies

Post: Building A14
The University of Sydney, NSW
2006
Telephone: +61 2 9351 3172
Facsimile: +61 2 9351 6684
Email: konrad.kwiet@arts.usyd.edu.au

Dear ...

Thank you for speaking with me on _____ about my Holocaust era research into the city of Munkacs. The object of the study is to document the story of the Jewish Community of Mukacevo/Munkacs, with special focus on the period 1938 to 1945. The study is being conducted by *Mrs Anna Berger* and will form the basis for the degree of *Masters* at the *University of Sydney* under the supervision of *Professor Konrad Kwiet*.

As promised, I have enclosed the following documents. I would very much appreciate if you would:

- read the enclosed form,
- complete the Special Conditions section
- sign and date the form
- return the completed form to me in the envelope provided.

As a participant in this project you will be asked to complete a pre-interview questionnaire. I would be happy to help you do this, should you require it. This will be followed by a face-to-face tape-recorded interview and may be followed by further interviews, with your consent. Each interview should take in the order of 2 hours each at a time convenient to you and will normally take place in your home, unless you prefer otherwise.

As you may be aware, it is a necessary requirement of Sydney University that I have your formal, written consent to interview you and to use that material in my research project. Although you have consented orally, it is most important that the attached form is completed and returned to me as soon as possible.

Participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and you may, of course, withdraw from it at any time. In addition, should you indicate on the enclosed form that you wish to remain anonymous, this will be respected. Your identification details will not be made public in the written report of my research, or any subsequent publications, without your consent.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me on (02) 9327 1863. Also, as part of university practice, please note that:

'Any person with concerns or complaints about the conduct of a research study can contact the Manager for Ethics Administration, University of Sydney on (02) 9351 4811.'

Once again, please accept my sincere thanks, in anticipation, for your valuable contribution to my research and for your warm support for my project. I look forward to our next meeting.

Best wishes

Anna Berger

Pre-Interview Questions

posed before the first interview, usually by telephone

- What was your full name given at birth?
- When and where were you born?
- Where were you:
 - before 1939?
 - between 1939 and 1944?
 - between 1944 and May 1945?
 - since May 1945?

(Please give all addresses and location details, camp names etc that you can)

- With whom did you live? Give details of your family and anyone else living in the same residence with you.
- When did you leave Munkacs permanently?
- With whom did you leave, where did you go and by what route?
- Where did other members of your immediate family go? How? Why?



Appendix 3



The University of Sydney

Department of Hebrew,
Biblical and Jewish Studies

Professor Konrad Kwiet
Adjunct Professor for Jewish Studies
Roth Lecturer for Holocaust Studies

Post: Building A14
The University of Sydney, NSW 2006
Telephone: +61 2 9351 3172
Facsimile: +61 2 9351 6684
Email: konrad.kwiet@arts.usyd.edu.au

CONDITIONS OF USE FOR ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS

(Please strike out what may be irrelevant)

I, the informant, _____ give my permission for my taped interview/s for the research project '*The Jews of Mukacevo and the Holocaust*' made (date)_____ with Interviewer Anna Berger:

1. to be used as a primary source for this research project conducted by Anna Berger
2. For the tape/s or parts of the tape/s to be broadcast or for a transcript, or parts of a transcript, of the interview/s to be published
3. For the tape/s of my interview/s to be placed in the Sydney Jewish Museum, or some similar repository at the discretion of Anna Berger, for the purpose of research and education.

4. Special Conditions:
(Please circle your preferences)

(i) when referred to in any published form I wish to be identified as:

- (full name)_____ OR
 - (first initial and surname)_____ OR
 - (initials)_____ OR
 - (other –please specify)_____.
- OR

(ii) when referred to in any published form I do not wish to be identified.

Signature:_____

Address:_____

_____ Postcode:_____

Telephone:_____ Date:_____



SAMPLE INTERVIEW FORMAT AND QUESTIONS

These are more accurately 'talking points', more in the nature of 'guidelines'. Clearly not each question will apply to every interview subject. Similarly, it is anticipated that some interviewee answers will take the discussion into a different direction and these questions will need to be modified.

Introduction to Interviewee:

1. Explanation of project – aims, structure, expected outcomes etc
2. My background, family etc

Interviewee's personal and family particulars

1. Full names – current, previous names, nicknames.
2. DOB, place
3. Names of parents; maiden name of mother; siblings' names
4. Addresses in Munkacs/Mukacevo
5. Profession of father
6. Background of maternal and paternal family and roots
7. If married in Mukacevo, name of spouse, in-laws, children if any
8. Describe the wedding – religious or civil?
9. Affiliations with Mukacevo communal organisations – religious, Zionist, political etc?
10. Was family actively part of the Jewish community? If so, describe. If not, why not?
11. What interaction did family have with non-Jews? Describe – positive? Negative
12. Population breakdown of Mukacevo – Jews, other ethnic/religious groups; describe their relationships, languages spoken?

School experiences

13. Names and nature of schools attended in Munkacs/Mukacevo
14. Life at school - positive/negative experiences?
15. Attitude to school? Teachers? Co-students?
16. Non-Jewish friends? At school? Generally?
17. Attitude to Jews by non-Jews at school and vice versa? Describe incidents.
18. Bar/bat mitzvah
19. Youth group membership?
20. Describe leisure activities – did these include non-Jewish friends?

Post school experiences

21. Describe employment situation – general; for Jews; any differences. Personal experiences?
22. Describe economic life of Munkacs/Mukacevo Jewish/non-Jewish businesses, professions etc
23. Jobs found – type of work; length of employment; relations with fellow workers/bosses
Jews/non-Jews

24. General standard of living – for Jews, non-Jews, different ethnic backgrounds?

War and Post-war experiences

25. Memories of Munkacs/Mukacevo 1933-1939 – Jewish communal life, social structures, relations between communities, effect of rise of Nazism in Germany, etc.
26. Experiences after 1939 – Hungarian annexation, anti-Jewish laws, prohibitions etc; behaviour of non-Jews towards Jews.
27. Effect of war on the population – Jews; non-Jews; their relationships?
28. Memories of changes after German invasion.
29. Personal wartime experiences – ghetto? Forced labour? Deportation? Hiding? Give details.
30. Where were you 'Liberated'? By whom?
31. Your family's experiences?
32. Memories of how non-Jews acted ie: blatantly or reluctantly anti-Jewish? Immediate/gradual?
33. Did you return to Munkacs/Mukacevo at end of war? What happened?
34. Where did you go afterwards? With whom? Your family? Why?
35. When and how did you leave? Describe that experience.
36. What did you do when you got there?
37. What do you know of the fate of the Jewish community of Munkacs/Mukacevo?
38. Describe the best and worst things you remember about Munkacs/Mukacevo.



Appendix 4

Munkács/ Mukačevo Photographs



Beth Hatefutsoth
The Nahum Goldmann
Museum of the Jewish Diaspora
incl. the Abraham & Edita Spiegel Family Bldg.

14 March, 2004
Our file no. lend1465.doc

Mrs. Anna Berger
19 Cooper Park Road
Bellevue Hill
NSW 2023
Australia
e-mail: anna@idx.com.au

Dear Anna,

I hope you had a safe journey back home. Following please find captions for the seven low resolution images you chose in our Visual Documentation Center during your visit to Beth Hatefutsoth.

Wishing you all the best with your project,

Sincerely,

Zippi Rosenne
Director, Visual Documentation Center

Addresses of copyright holders:

Family Gross collection:
Mr. Bill Gross
45 Yehuda Hanassi Street, Tel Aviv, Israel
Tel: +972-3-6428179, Fax: +972-3-6419844
e-mail: collectr@netvision.net.il

Hashomer Hatzair Archive
Givat Haviva
D.N. Menashe 37850, Israel
Director: Dalia Moran
Tel: +972-4-6309232 Fax: +972-4-6309305
E-mail: yariarch@inter.net.il

Ghetto Fighters' House in Memory of Yizhak Katznelson
Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot
D.N. Oshrat 25220, Israel
Tel: +972-4-9958080
Photo Archive: Mr. Zvi Oren
Tel: +972-4-9958025 Fax: +972-4-9958007



2078000 Decorated gate erected in the street for the wedding of the daughter of the Rabbi of Mukačevo, Czechoslovakia, 1930.

© Beth Hatefusoith Photo Archive, courtesy of Tomas Kavitt



16222 Funeral of Rabbi Hayyim Eliezar Shapira, Mukačevo, Czechoslovakia, 1937.

Rabbi of Mukačevo from 1913, Shapira was vigorous opponent of Zionism, including religious Zionism.

© Beth Hatefutsouth Photo Archive, courtesy of Emanuel Frieder, Natanya



16436 Entrance to Mukačevo Ghetto, Czechoslovakia, 1944.
Some 15,000 Jews from Mukačevo and area were assembled in two factories. The first were sent to forced labour camps, the rest to death camps. In April 1944 brutal deportation began. By May 30, 1944 the city was declared "Judenrein."
© Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot, Ghetto Fighters' House in Memory of Yitzhak Katznelson



16438 Deportation from Mukačevo, Carpathian Ruthenia, Czechoslovakia, 1944.
© Kibbutz Lohamei Hagetaot, Ghetto Fighters' House in Memory of Yitzhak Katznelson



2019313 Brick factory in Mukačevo, Czechoslovakia, 1930's.
During World War II the Jews of Mukačevo were gathered in this place before being transferred to concentration camps.
© Giva't Haviva, Hashomer Ha'tzair Archive



2019311 Foundation ceremony of the Hebrew Gymnazium in Mukačevo, Carpathian Ruthenia, Czechoslovakia, 1931.
© Giva't Haviva, Hashomer Ha'tzair Archives



14868 The Hebrew Gymnasium in Mukačevo, founded in 1920, Czechoslovakia, 1922. Postcard, printed by Lichtig. © Tel Aviv, Gross Family Collection



March, 1941 – Two Weddings in Munkács, Hungary



Csibi Fixler and Jidu Kahan



Henry (Hellus) Fixler and Hugo Karpel



Erno Ungar with motorised bicycle, Munkács 1930's
(Photo provided by his grandson, Eran Lapid, Israel)

Staff standing outside Erno
Ungar's Goldsmith shop.
Munkács 1930's
(Photo provided by his grandson,
Eran Lapid, Israel)



Fischl Lasocky's private cheder; children of wealthy families in private education
Munkacs c.1937- 1938 (Photo provided by his daughter, Rose Zoldan, Sydney)



Juda Kahan's Czechoslovak Army Invalid certificate, awarded Prague, 1 December, 1945.



Yad Vashem Valley of the Communities Memorial to Munkács/Mukačevo and surrounding villages