

The Shule in Kuźniczka

The Jewish community in Kuźniczka (one kilometre away from Krzepice) had, behind it, a long history as a Jewish settlement.

The *Jewish Encyclopaedia*, in Volume 9 [Еврейская Энциклопедия: Том 9; 1908-1913], says that already in 1765 – viz. exactly 198 years ago – there was a Jewish synagogue in Kuźniczka.

The Kuźniczka Shule, which was built directly on the banks of the Liswarta [River], to the left of the road leading from Krzepice to Kuźniczka, was tall and built of stone.

The length of the synagogue was 25 metres and its width - 15 metres. It is not known whether it was built on the location of a previous synagogue. Every spring, when the river overflowed its banks, the synagogue was flooded and the water literally got inside.

The Torah Scrolls, in the Holy Ark of the Kuźniczka Shule, were ancient and stemmed from generation upon generation. The scrolls were of different sizes, girded with sashes and wrapped in mantles embroidered with different decorations. The books [prayer-books etc.] were also well-thumbed and were several centuries old.

Services were only held there on *Shabbosim* and holidays, during the months of winter and summer, in the spring and in the autumn. The shules had no heating and, in the winter, an intense cold prevailed there on *Shabbosim*.

The *shoichet*, Reb Hersz-Mojsze Filip, was the last prayer-leader to pray there at the pulpit. Prior to his being appointed *chazzan-shoichet**, he had taught the Talmud to the older lads in Krzepice and Kuźniczka and his voice was not one of the excellent ones. Nevertheless, seeing as how he was one of the town's "holy vessels" [viz. religious figures], they laid the cantorial burden upon him also, his son helping him with the singing.

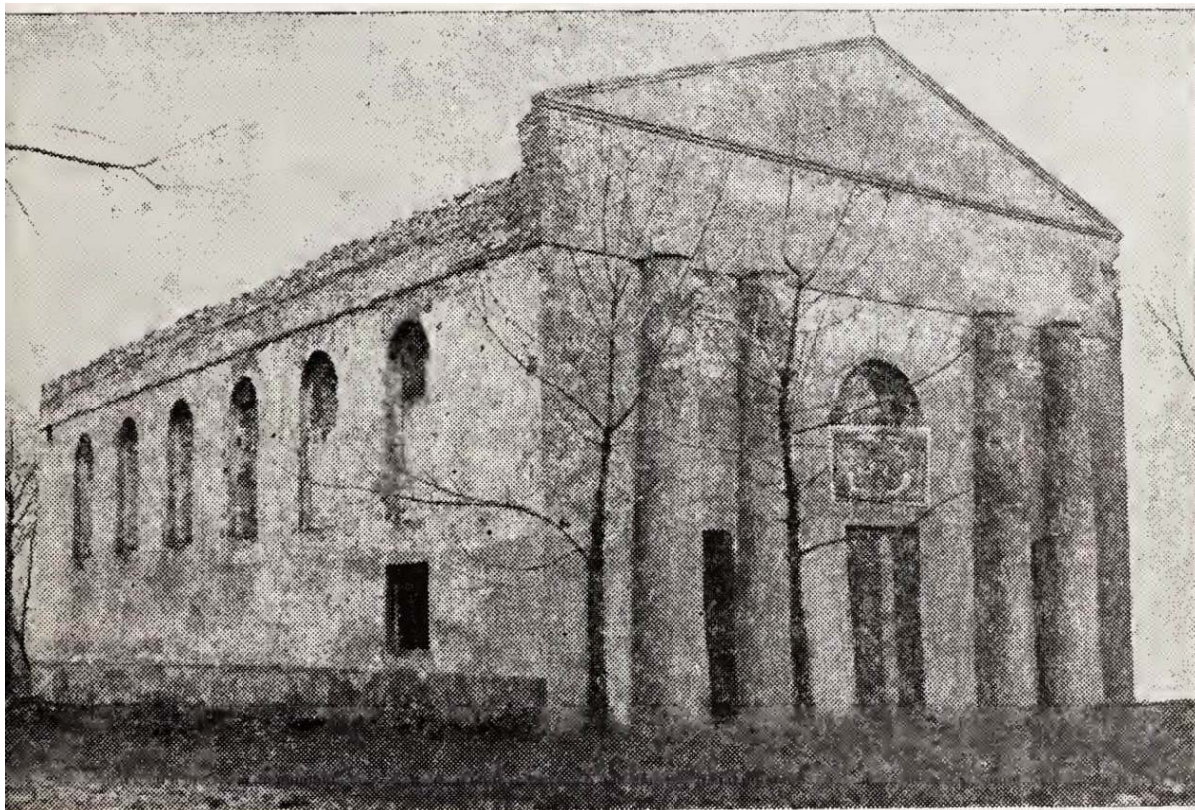
Preceding Reb Hersz-Mojsze, the *shoichet* in Kuźniczka was Reb Lajbisz, whom Jews referred to as "*Der Wieluńer Shoichet*". He, too, was an excellent *shoichet* and served as cantor in the synagogue. With a pleasant voice, he was a high-level cantor; several worshippers accompanied him, aiding him with the singing.

Already, during the First World War in 1914, the Kuźniczka shule was desecrated and laid waste by the then still "good" Germans. Following the retreat of the Russian military, the German invaders set up a stable for the horses of Kaiser Wilhelm's army in the Kuźniczka synagogue. The German soldiers then devastated the shule, smashing the floors, tables, benches and other fittings. Generally speaking, the German troops always had a propensity for defiling that which the Jews hold sacred. Only in Independent Poland was the synagogue rebuilt and restored, and the Jews could pray to God [there once again].

On the horrific day of 7th Tamuz 5702 (22nd June 1942), Hitler's murderers decided to make our town and the vicinity *judenrein* [clean of Jews], and to send all our own nearest to annihilation. The Nazis gathered all the Jews from Krzepice, Kłobuck, Przystajń, Truskolasy and most of the other surrounding villages inside the then already ruined synagogue.

On 22nd June, our families were held under horrendous conditions inside the synagogue all day long and, only in the morning, were all led to the train and from there – to Oświęcim, where the Germans murdered everyone in the gas chambers.

* [TN: Especially in smaller Jewish communities, the offices of Head Cantor and Ritual Slaughterer were habitually given to one individual who performed both duties.]



The ruins of the Shule in Kuźniczka, next to Krzepice
