Tovste

Name in Polish: Tłuste

Name in Ukrainian: Товсте, Tovste

Name in Russian: Толстое (Tolstoye)

Name in Hebrew: (Tlust) טלוסט

Remarks:

From the site: History of Tluste

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at: http://www.tovste.info/JewishHistory.php**)**

The Polish Era

The existence of a Jewish population in Tluste can be documented at least as far back as the early part of the eighteenth century, and probably much earlier. Though few, if any, Jews live in Tovste today, this belies the fact that from at least the middle of the nineteenth century until well into the first few decades of the twentieth century, Tluste was predominantly a Jewish town.

Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer chose to settle in Tluste, around 1734, and to reveal himself there as the Ba'al Shem Tov. His mother is buried in Tluste's Jewish cemetery, where her tombstone could be found until the time of World War II.

A census conducted in 1764, three decades after the Besht's revelation, indicated that there were then 355 Jewish residents of Tluste and surrounding villages (1).
Under Austrian Rule In the nineteenth century, the Jews of Tluste traded in agricultural produce, timber, cloth, and beverages. Hasidism was preponderant in the town. The wealthy members of the community (estate owners, contractors and merchants of forest products and hides) were followers of the zaddik of Chortkov (a town 20 km to the north), whereas shopkeepers, grain merchants, brokers and scholars adhered to Viznitsa Hasidism, and the artisans were followers of the zaddik of Kopychintsy (2).

Between 1880 and 1930, the population of Tluste grew steadily from 3,285 individuals to a peak of about 4,000; while that of the town and the suburbs together grew from 6,000 to just over 8,000. What is most remarkable about these figures is the clear indication that, during this period, Tluste was predominantly a Jewish town. Jews consistently made up approximately two-thirds of the population, while Ukrainians constituted about 20-30% and Poles only 11-12%. Contrasting the composition of Tluste proper, the smaller surrounding villages were made up primarily of Ukrainians (roughly three-quarters) and Poles (20-25%). Jews constituted less than five percentage of their population and virtually all of them were tradesmen, shopkeepers and their families.
This clear tendency for the Jewish community to concentrate in towns, rather than smaller villages, was common elsewhere in Galicia. The 1764 census of Polish Jewry, mentioned earlier, indicates that there were already 251 Jews living in Tluste alone. At that time, a relative large proportion of the total Jewish population (about 30%) lived in surrounding villages, but over the next one hundred years there was an obvious migration towards Tluste proper.
The prominence that the Jewish community had attained in Tluste by the mid-nineteenth century is revealed in the earliest known map of the town, a precise Austrian document dating from 1858. The central market area of town – surrounding the Catholic church – was comprised mainly of Jewish-owned shops and businesses, selling food, fabric and other household goods.

A synagogue stood on the opposite side of the main road through town, close to the northern end of the reservoir. All of these buildings appear again in another Austrian map prepared in 1899. By that time, the Jewish population of Tluste had grown to nearly 2,500 residents.

The 1891 Galician Business Directory lists the occupations of about 70 individuals engaged in commercial activities in Tluste towards the end of the nineteenth century (3). Most of the family names in the list appear to be of Jewish, Polish or German origin; the list contains few if any Ukrainian-sounding names. Members of the Jewish community were involved in all facets of the town's livelihood – in the food and service sectors, as dealers of raw materials and hardware, in retail establishments, and as tradesmen and professionals.
Notwithstanding the relative prosperity that they evidently enjoyed, Tluste's Jews also took part in the wave of emigration from Ukraine to America that occurred around the turn of the century. In New York, in 1898-99, Jewish immigrants from Tluste established and incorporated a fraternal mutual aid society, known as a Landsmannshaft. A number of these Landsmannshaften were created by immigrants from Tluste/Tovste, and at least one - the Young Tluste Society - continues to operate today. (One can observe in Wellwood Cemetery, Pinelawn, New York, a memorial erected by the Tluste Society in remembrance of families who perished in Tluste and vicinity.)
With the onset of the First World War, Russian soldiers occupied Tluste in the second half of 1914. Jews suffered at the hands of the Russians during the wartime occupation. According to Pawlyk, local people were frightened and wary of the arrival of the Russians, and expected them to be cruel – to murder Ukrainians, especially Jews, many of whom fled to Vienna. Local people decided to put icons in the windows so that the Russians could see that they were not Jewish. The occupiers forced Jews to work to maintain order and to keep the town clean but soon, through bribing, the Jews began to co-operate with them (4).
Tluste and surrounding areas changed hands a number of times during the war. Some time in the winter of 1914-15, the Austrians managed to drive out the Russian army. Pawlyk reports that in the summer of 1915 the front line was further along, on the Dniester river. There, the Austrian army used bacteriological weapons, which killed first the soldiers and then people in villages and towns along the river. Many soldiers sick with cholera were brought to Tluste hospital, which was located close to the railway station. Those sick soldiers usually died within several hours. They were buried in a separate "cholera cemetery", which was established near the Jewish quarter. Soon, many local people – especially Jews – were infected, and a sanitary service was organised.
Having been driven out of the area in the autumn of 1915, the Russians returned in June 1916 and remained in the Tluste through July 1917. The war ended in 1918 with the downfall of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.

The Inter-war Years

In Tluste, the Jewish population maintained itself, reaching a peak of 2,600 by 1930, the last year for which complete census data are available. According to Encyclopedia Judaica (5), "all the Zionist parties were active in the town and there was a Tarbut Hebrew school"

Tluste and the Holocaust

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, the Jewish population of Tluste had already declined to less than 1200, fewer than half the number of residents recorded at its peak in 1930.
With the fall of Poland in September 1939, Soviet forces occupied Tluste and neighbouring towns. They remained there until June 1941, when Nazi Germany commenced hostilities against the Soviet Union. Tluste was captured by the Hungarian army, which was an ally of Germany. Groups of Jewish youth attempted to escape to the USSR with the retreating Soviet army, but only a few succeeded (6).
Tluste was the last city in Eastern Galicia to undergo the process of total extermination, so it contained those Jews who had survived earlier "Aktions" in the neighbouring towns. Out of the three thousand Jewish residents of Tluste and the thousands of refugees from the neighbouring towns, less than five hundred survived at the end of the Second World War.

The Beginning of the End

In June 1941, in the face of the German advance, the Soviets pulled out of Tluste amidst incessant air raids. Pandemonium and uncertainty reigned, as a Ukrainian mayor was installed and a "settling of accounts" began. In Tluste and in other villages and towns, rioting mobs of vengeful Ukrainians looted houses and murdered Jews. After some time, soldiers of the Hungarian army, allied with the Germans, arrived in town and continued the plunder (7).
In July-August 1941, a German officer became military governor of Tluste; and the organised and systematic persecution of Jews by the Nazis began in concert with a local Ukrainian committee appointed by the occupying force (8).
A nightly curfew was imposed in Tluste and freedom of movement of Jews was curtailed. Around August 1941, the Germans set up a Judenrat (Jewish council) under chairmanship of a Dr. Aberman, together with a Jewish police force, in order to impose order, persecute the Jewish community and facilitate mass deportations.
Anti-Jewish edits were issued (imposing forced labour, wearing of the Star of David, restricting movement etc.) and periodic joint Gestapo-Ukrainian police raids begin, characterised by searches of houses, beatings, arrests, murders, and confiscation of property (9).
Similar scenes of persecution perpetrated by German soldiers and Ukrainian collaborators were repeated in nearby towns. In July, the killing of Jews and looting of homes began in Czortkow, less than 20 km north of Tluste (10). A Gestapo headquarters was established there, from where control over Tluste would be exerted throughout the Nazi occupation. From time to time, the Gestapo would travel to Tluste in a black vehicle that came to presage arrests, extortion and murder (11).
Beginning around March 1942, a ghetto was established in Tluste to which the remnants of Jewish communities from neighbouring towns and villages were brought, prior to systematic deportations. The Holocaust Chronicle website documents these expulsions with photographs from the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Photo Archive: Photo 1 and Photo 2. At some point, there was a forced influx of stateless Jews expelled from Hungary and elsewhere. Arriving over a two-week period on columns of trucks under the guard of Hungarian soldiers, the refugees were robbed of their possessions and many were killed when in the process of trying to return home (12).

Judenrat policemen collected money to buy food for the ghetto prisoners – cheese, bread, milk, meat, onions, and even vodka (34). People were crowded into small houses assigned by the Judenrat, sometimes with as many as four or five families living in a single room.The sanitary conditions were appalling, and food was scarce (13). Stars were placed on the doors of houses where the Jews lived; this way the entire Jewish population was controlled. At some point during this period, the mostly Jewish-owned shops in the centre of Tluste were torn down and the wood used for scrap.
In Spring-Summer 1942, Jews were sent to labour camps in vicinity of Tluste, such as the one at Lisowce (Lisivtsi). Many were engaged there in the manufacture of synthetic rubber from the plant called kok-saghys (14).
The first major, overt Aktion in Tluste took place in August 1942, apparently intended to make up the shortfall in a neighbouring town's "quota" of Jews to be deported (15). On 27 August, the Germans ordered the

Judenrat to round up 300 people, who were then dispatched to Belzec (16) by train. Smaller Aktionen followed repeatedly in the coming months, in which armed Gestapo men would surround the Jewish quarter and, helped by the Judenrat, rouse people from their homes. Those who were not shot on the spot for resisting or trying to flee were then assembled and crammed onto trains, which carried them to their fate (17).

On 20 September 1942, the Germans expelled Zalishchyky's Jews to neighbouring ghettos; and most were sent to Tluste (18). Similarly, in Horodenka, a 3-day Aktion ended with the town being declared Judenfrei (free of Jews) and any survivors were ordered to leave within 24 hours (19). The following month, on 5 October, there was a second major Aktion in Tluste and nearby villages. According to Baruch Milch, who had been forewarned about the impending raid, 1000 Jews were deported from Tluste and 120-200 or more were killed in town (20). It was said that the horrific scene of death and looting resembled the aftermath of a pogrom. During the winter of 1942-43, periodic expulsions from surrounding towns continued, and Jews were increasingly concentrated in ghettos. Amidst conditions of congestion and starvation, typhus epidemics broke out in the ghetto of Tluste and elsewhere, claiming 6-8 lives daily (21). I]

The End

Amidst rumours of bloody Aktionen in nearby towns, the third major Aktion in Tluste began in the early hours of the morning of 27 May 1943. This horrific event would effectively bring to an end the centuries-long presence of Jews in Tluste. The Germans, supported by Ukrainian and Jewish police, deployed around 1:00 or 2:00 a.m. For the next 20 hours, a contingent of about 300 men went from house to house, rounding up Jews and slaughtering those who resisted. Ironically, some who hid in improvised hideouts survived, whereas those in more elaborate bunkers were discovered.
People were led to the town square where they were forced to hand over their valuables. Able-bodied men were taken to the Jewish cemetery to dig pits that would ultimately serve as mass graves for the victims. Later in the afternoon, beginning around 4:00 p.m., the captives were led in groups of 100 to the cemetery. It is said that a Jewish musician in town by the name of Stupp, who lived in the house pictured here, led the slow processions to the cemetery while playing solemn music on his violin (22).
In a 2004 interview, an elderly resident of Tovste, who would have been in her mid-teens at the time, described the massacre as others — who had witnessed it first-hand — had recounted it to her. She said that the Jews were ordered to stand on planks of wood above the pits, into which they fell after being shot. Not all of them died instantaneously. It was said that the earth in which they were buried was seen to move, as though some poor souls had been buried alive. The woman recalled the villagers being perplexed as to why the Jews did not attempt to escape from the ghetto, as would have been possible, at least for some. She claimed that, in response, one old man said that they were resigned to their fate, being of God's will, and that "our blood will be on you and on your children".
When the shooting finally ended around 9:00 in the evening, it is estimated that from 2,000 to 3,000 Jews had been murdered. A Gestapo officer was reported to have directed the whole operation, and personally took part in the shootings at the cemetery (23).

For Tluste, the last act of the 'Final Solution' played out around 6 June 1943. That morning, Gestapo men and Ukrainian surrounded the ghetto, and proceeded to shoot or bludgeon to death many of the Jews who had survived the Aktion ten days earlier. By this point, their hiding places were insufficient, having been detected during previous raids. The following day, the order came to purge Tluste of Jews and declare the town Judenrein within two days (24). It is reported that 1,000 Jews were killed or deported from Tluste at that time (25).

Jewish life was never reconstituted in Tluste after the war. A memorial to these tragic events can be found in what remains of the town's Jewish cemetery. The Hebrew inscription, translated into English (56), reads:
"In memory of the martyrs of Tluste and surroundings who were annihilated by the Nazis in the years 1942-1943 and to remember all the martyrs who are buried in this cemetery. Erected by the survivors from Tluste."

Notes:

(1) Stampfer, S. "The 1764 Census of Polish Jewry" in Bar-Ilan / Annual of Bar Ilan University Vol. 24-25. p. 135.
(2) Encyclopedia Judaica. Jerusalem, 1972. Last accessed via the Museum of Tolerance Multimedia Learning Center, http://motlc.learningcenter.wiesenthal.org/text/x32/xr3263.html on 18 August 2005.
(3) The 1891 Galician Business Directory (Kaufmannisches Adressbuch für Industrie, Handel und Gewerbe, XIV. Galizien, published by L. Bergmann & Comp., Wien IX, Universitutmetr.
6): http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Poland/galicia1891.htm;last accessed on 14 August 2005
(4) Pawlyk, J. History of Tovste. Chortkiv, 2000. p. 48-50.
(5) Encyclopedia Judaica. Jerusalem, 1972. Last accessed via the Museum of Tolerance Multimedia Learning Center, http://motlc.learningcenter.wiesenthal.org/text/x32/xr3263.html on 18 August 2005.
(6) Encyclopedia Judaica. Jerusalem, 1972. Last accessed via the Museum of Tolerance Multimedia Learning Center, http://motlc.learningcenter.wiesenthal.org/text/x32/xr3263.html on 18 August 2005.
(7) Milch-Avigal, S. (ed.). Can Heaven be Void? Jerusalem, 2003.p. 73-5
(8) Milch-Avigal, S. (ed.). Can Heaven be Void? Jerusalem, 2003. p. 75.
(9) Lecker, M. "I Remember: Odyssey of a Jewish Teenager in Eastern Europe". In Memoirs of Holocaust Survivors in Canada. Volume 5. http://migs.concordia.ca/memoirs/lecker/lecker.html; last accessed on 14 July 2005.
(10) Milch-Avigal, S. (ed.). Can Heaven be Void? Jerusalem, 2003. p. 88.
(11) Szechter Schneider, T. "A Horodenka Holocaust Memoir". http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Gorodenka/html/holocaust_memoir.html; last accessed on 9 February 2010.
(12) Milch-Avigal, S. (ed.). Can Heaven be Void? Jerusalem, 2003. p. 79-80.
(13) Schneider, T. pers. comm.
(14) Milch-Avigal, S. (ed.). Can Heaven be Void? Jerusalem, 2003. p. 89.
(15) Ibid. p. 97.
(16) See also http://www.deathcamps.org/belzec/galiciatransportlist.html
(17) Ibid. p. 98-100.
(18) Pinkas Hakehillot Polin: "Zalishchyky" - Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities, Poland, Volume II (Ukraine), pages 195-199. http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/pinkas_poland/pol2_00195.html; last accessed on 18 August 2005.
(19) Szechter Schneider, T. "A Horodenka Holocaust Memoir". http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Gorodenka/html/holocaust_memoir.html; last accessed on 9 February 2010.
(20) Milch-Avigal, S. (ed.). Can Heaven be Void? Jerusalem, 2003. p. 102-3. (See also http://www.deathcamps.org/belzec/galiciatransportlist.html).
(21) Ibid. p. 105-6.
(22) Pawlyk, J. History of Tovste. Chortkiv, 2000.
(23) Milch-Avigal, S. (ed.). Can Heaven be Void? Jerusalem, 2003. p. 121-131.
(24) Ibid. p. 138-41.
(25) O'Neil, R. Unpublished Manuscript and Introduction: "A Reassessment: Resettlement Transports to Belzec, March-December 1942". http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/belzec/belzec.html; last accessed 18 August 2005.

Coordinates: 48°50′47″ 25°43′31

Historical-cultural region: Eastern Galicia

Items relevant to the community

Title	Type of item	Years
(?) Daughter of David	People	to 1678
- Wahl von Rabbinern und Bewerbern zur Gemeinde...	CAHJP Cards	1834
...	People	
1. Okólniki, sprawozdania, korespondencja i inn...	CAHJP Cards	1898
1. Okólniki, sprawozdania, korespondencja i inn...	CAHJP Cards	1898
Aba David Hausfeld	People	to 1932
Aba Faivish Son of Haim	People	to 1915
Adel Daughter of Yehuda	People	
Aharon	People	
Aharon Asher Anshel Son of Zvi	People	to 1741

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