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The Felshtin Society: Copyright 2015

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I am very happy to be sending you this newsletter because a considerable amount of activity has taken place for the Society in recent months.

First, I am pleased to announce that Sid Shaievitz has completed the translation of the Yisker Book. It is in the process of being proofread, getting an ISBN and then a copyright.

He is also collecting brief biographies for all of the book’s authors. If you have a relative who made a contribution to the book, please help us with a short biography and a picture of that person. We are making every effort to move this project along so your prompt help would be most appreciated. Thanks to all who have already responded.

Secondly, our website has now been completely revised and is available on the internet for your use and for our future. We would like to expand the picture collection so, the pictures that we get of the authors will be posted on the website. If you have others that you that you feel may be of interest to the members or others, please send them. The ones we have received have been great. Thanks to Mel Werbach for agreeing to help archive these.

The website project has taken much longer than we originally anticipated. First, we thank Eric Baizer for his tireless dedication as the original webmaster. Then, as you may be aware, Sarah Schneider made an enormous contribution

by putting our original website on Wordpress. The new site is very efficient, beautifully done, and will serve us well into the future. Additionally, it is quite adaptable. Thoughts about possible enhancements are welcome.

The site has the capacity for collecting information from people who visit and also for storing members’ emails for communications such as this. With this capacity, we now have our own mass mailing capability built into the website. Together, these tools will help us to build our audience as we go forward toward our 2019 centennial memorial.

The centennial memorial project has made a beginning. We have made a number of contacts with a wide range of academics, organizations, and governmental entities. While we are in the very beginning stages of this effort there are several things that we feel comfortable about discussing at this time.

First, we are making a serious effort to reach out to governmental agencies. Fortunately, we have Dr. Stephen Zweig as the chairperson of our Governmental Outreach Committee. It is understood that these efforts will take time, however, we feel sure that in the end we will be able to make important connections to both our own government agencies as well



The new Felshtin Society website is at the same address
www.felshtin.org

as those in the Ukraine. If you know anyone who might be able to help in this effort, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Next, we are planning to launch an oral history project. This project is being designed to record first generation memories of Felshtiners' arrival and adaptation to their new home. Many of us have memories of our parents, grandparents, and other relatives making a new life for themselves in a strange land. We are thinking that it may be of great value to record our collective memories of this process. In addition to its importance to your immediate family and for the Society's collective memory, after having spoken to a number of scholars it seems that our efforts, should they be studied, might yield some interesting information that could be helpful in the resettlement process for the many refugees we see in the world today. Beyond this, however, we are also interested in having these memories available online for friends and family and others who have interest in our communal past.

In addition to celebrating our Yiskor Book and the oral history project, we are hoping that our centennial might also include celebration of our culture and we are thinking of ways to share literary, culinary, musical, and other threads of our heritage that may be revisited at this time.

For instance, on page 6 you will find is a recipe handwritten by my grandmother, Rose (Oksman) Uberman. This was written by her in the 1960's and found among my mother's

papers. Since we were not a family keen on maintaining a careful archive of these types of memorabilia, finding this was a fluke. However, we are hoping that, among us, there are families who have kept various treasures like this and are willing to share them.

A good friend of mine, not a Felshtiner, plays klezmer music and has agreed to bring his ensemble to whatever venue we may find ourselves in.

We have among us families whose members have contributed the artwork to the Yiskor Book. Therefore, we are interested in having a display of the type of iconography that is depicted in the book on display.

We are actively seeking discussants who have expertise and knowledge in the area of Shtetl literature. We are hoping to have at least one presentation discussing literature created prior to the era of the pogrom. Our own Yiskor Book is a prime example of what has come from these talents. If you have any examples of this kind of work, published or unpublished, this will be an opportunity to share them.

Overall, we understand that this is an ambitious agenda. However, we have time to prepare, talk, and plan for an event that we feel will be meaningful.

We have also connected with other organizations. Our page on the JewishGen website is now active and our Kehilalinks page will be active shortly. These things were done to broaden the interest in our ef-

fort. We are hoping to have other towns join us in this project and to raise more public awareness about the importance of this observance. We are also hoping that you and your family will lend a hand as we go forward with our plans. Please help if you can and spread the word.

I'm sure that many of you heard about or even participated in the recent centennial memorial of the Armenian Genocide. That event brought much attention to the horror of that period in history for them. I am hoping that we can do at least as well despite our smaller numbers. As always, we look forward to hearing your thoughts and welcoming your contributions to this effort.

Lastly, but not least, we have bills to pay and costs to maintain the Society so please remember to help with contributions. Send them to Sid Shaievitz.

Sincerely Yours in Friendship,
Alan Bernstein

The next newsletter will discuss the need for the Society to have a succession plan in place.

What follows is an anecdotal family history that my recently deceased mother, Charlotte Bernstein, had written over the years at various times. This is offered as a beginning example of what we hope to gather through our oral history project. Please feel free to forward your family's stories.

My Family's Story

As Written by Charlotte
(Uberman-Oksman) Bern-
stein

My parents were born in the small town of Felshteen in the Russian Province of Podolia Gebernia. My father (Abraham) was born in 1888 around Passover. My mother was born in 1890 around Chanakah. In their tradition birthdays were counted on the Jewish holidays. This was the way many occasions were remembered. My mother's name was Rochel (Rose). My father's father was named Shlomo and his mother's name Chana (Anna) (Uberman).

My father's parents had a lumber and roofing business. My father worked for them and when he was young he fell off a roof. He hurt his hip which was never properly taken care of and he suffered all his life from pain in his hip and a sever limp when he walked.

My mother's parents names were Khayim and Sarah. My father's siblings were named Toby, David, Charles, and Rose. My mother's siblings were Lizzie, Izzie, Khakel, Joseph, and Hershel, in descending order. My mother's parents had a feed and grain business.

My mother was the oldest child. In 1902, when my mother was 12, her father, who was 30 years old, became ill with pneumonia and died. They had no treatment for that disease at that time. She had learned to sew and began to make blouses (or shirtwaists as

they were called) to sell to make some money to help support the family. The rest of the children were very young but they all helped out their mother and continued their grain business.

When my parents were growing up in Felshtin, their lives were not so bad. They lived in a rural area. There were many farms in the countryside and the people who lived in the town mostly made a living from the farmers. They had feed and grain businesses or sold the produce from the farmers. The winters were very cold and they did not have any fresh produce. If



they had an orange or a tomato they would put in on the window sill as a decoration. In the summer it was easier to live. They used to go swimming in a lake or a pond right in the town. Of course, the boys and young men were busy going to Cheder (Hebrew School) but the girls went also. My mother had a good education in Hebrew.

The land was governed

by the Czar and the Czarina, although they weren't just figureheads. There were many underlings that actually were the people who made the laws and ran the government. The laws were very repressive. People were not allowed to live where they wanted to or work any job or profession they would like to. These people included Jews, Gypsies, and radicals (who wanted to overthrow the government).

The Jewish people were forced to live in Southern Russia, or as it was called, The Pale. This part of the country was near the border of Poland and extended as far as the Black Sea. Most of the Jewish people lived in this part of the country. But there were many who lived in the part of Russia that was forbidden to them. They went to live where there were Universities and Medical Schools, as many of them wanted to be educated and wanted professional careers. The Jews always had a love of knowledge and were always interested in learning. They already have a foundation of learning since they had to go to Cheder. Many of them (mostly young men but some women also) were unhappy living in the small towns. They went to live in the big cities, changed their names so they wouldn't be recognized as Jewish. This was also the reason that many Jewish people fled the country. They wanted a chance to live free as they heard many stories about the United States. They heard that it was a free country with no restraints

on where they could live or what they could do. Also, they wouldn't have to serve in the Russian Army and would get away from repression.

When my father and mother were 16 they became engaged to be married. But no date was set. When my father became 19 he got a notice from the Russian Army that he had to enlist. At that time the Russian Army had conscription (or the Draft) and all young men who became 18 had to serve in the Army for 25 years. For most Jewish young men this was a hardship as they could not get kosher food in the Army and they had great difficulty with that and other restrictions. A lot of the Gentiles also did not want to serve because it was for such a long time. Many of the young men who were conscripted usually ended up deserting from the Army.

My parents decided that they would run away to America. When they told this to their parents they were told that they could not leave if they were not married. So the next day a wedding was performed and they made preparations to leave. They left within two days and made their way to Holland to get on a ship. They must have encountered many difficulties as they made their way through foreign countries but they prevailed and left for this country in 1908.

It is rather inconceivable to imagine the travails they encountered going through different foreign countries, not know-

ing any of the languages. Getting to a ship in Holland, going to steerage (which was the bottom deck) is very hard. My mother would tell me that the only food they were given was a barrel of salted herring and bread for everyone to eat. They were given very little water and had to go on deck to beg for water. My father was very seasick and most of the time he could very seldom go up on the deck. Many years later we used to tease my mother about when they consummated their marriage. She used to say, "Oh, not for a long time."

And, so, my parents arrived in the U.S. Most newly arrived immigrants made arrangements to go to family that was already in the country (Misepochah). Some of them had no family here and would have to look for friends. It was very difficult coming here if one didn't have anyone here.

My parents had an aunt and uncle. The aunt was a sister of my mother's mother. Her name was Dina. Her husband's name was David. When my parents came here in 1911 they had no children as yet. Eventually they had two children who were Mildred and Max. Anyhow, "Tante" Dina and Uncle Dave had a laundry business. They lived in an apartment that was located in the back of the store. Uncle Dave began showing them what to do in the laundry and they helped out with the work. The clothes were sent out to big laundries to be washed but the pressing was done in the store.

My father learned how to press clothes and other laundry which mostly consisted of bed clothes and outer wear. This work paid for their room and board. Tante Dina and Uncle David were very good to them, as, at that time, they were the only relatives they had in this country. They missed their family very much. Letters took about four weeks to arrive.

My mother was a very good seamstress and knew how to make ladies blouses as that was what she did in Russia. Soon after arriving, she began to do sewing and make what were called shirtwaists. Many women wore them with skirts and they were very popular. Most women wore long skirts and shirtwaists. So, she began to build up a clientele in the area.

After a while her business grew and they opened a small retail store where she sold her shirtwaists and hats, stockings and other ladies apparel. My father continued to work in Uncle Dave's laundry doing pressing. They saved their money and were able to get themselves a small apartment across the street from where Tante Dina lived.

On August 11th my sister Millie was born and that was the start of their family. This was 1911. Her name on her birth certificate is Mary but eventually it was changed to Mildred. I do not know when they decided to change the name on her birth certificate but when Tante Dina gave birth to a girl about a year later who was also

named Mildred, maybe that was when Millie's was changed.

My father continued working for Uncle Dave but the store my parents opened to sell her shirtwaists was making enough for them to be able to support themselves. This was the beginning of learning the retail business which they eventually did to make a living.

They still remained in the same apartment as it was across the street from Tante Dina and they were very close. The immigrants liked to stay close to family. Everything was not easy for them. They had to get used to living a completely different lifestyle.

They had come from a small town where everyone spoke the same language and everyone knew everyone else. In the Bronx, although it was a Jewish neighborhood, there were many languages spoken, most of which they didn't understand. Of course, in time, they learned enough to get by. They both, eventually, went to school at night to learn enough to be able to read and write. As you can imagine they had a lot of adjustments to make just like every immigrant.

Some Notes on the Immigration of the Oksman Family

The following was researched by Heber MacWilliams. This is offered as an interesting sidelight to the above story, written by my mother, Charlotte Bernstein. While the dates do not match exactly, they approximate the real events and shed light on the idea that it should be understood many memories will be hazy and imprecise. However, what we are looking for in our oral history project are the broad strokes of these wonderful stories that we look forward to reading.

According to the 1910 U.S. Census, Rose Oksman and Abraham Uberman arrived in 1908. They married in 1909. (I have not been able to find passenger manifests or a marriage record. I'm still working on it.) In 1910 they were boarding with David Upcher and his wife on Broome Street in Manhattan. Abraham was working in David's laundry business. In 1915 they were living at 256 East 3rd Street in Manhattan. He was running his own laundry. Rose's siblings, Isador and Lizzie were living with them. In 1917 Abraham and Rose and two children were living at 720 Cauldwell Avenue in the Bronx. He had his own laundry business at 732 Cauldwell Avenue.

Liza (Lizzie) Oksman arrived on the *S.S. Nieuw Amsterdam* from Rotterdam on January 12, 1914. She was 20, single, and gave her occupation as seamstress. She

gave her last residence as Felstin, Podolia, and her nearest relative there as her mother, Sure Oksman. She was to meet her sister, Mrs. Rose Uberman. She married Jacob Rosenbaum in the Bronx on July 30, 1917.

Itzig (Isadore) Oksman arrived aboard the *S.S. Neckar* from Bremen on January 23, 1914. He married Sonia Bayewsky (Sarrah Bajevskaja) in the Bronx on November 24, 1929.

In 1920 they were all living at 733 East 152nd Street in the Bronx. They were running a ladies 'waist store' at that address.

Sure Oksman and her son, Joseph, arrived aboard the *S.S. Finland* from Antwerp on November 25, 1920. They gave their last residence as Felstyn, Poland. Joseph married Sylvia Kitzes in Manhattan on March 13, 1927. Sarah (Sure) Oksman died in the Bronx on February 26, 1930.

In 1930 they were all living at 1609 East 172nd Street in the Bronx. Jacob Rosenbaum was working as a dress cutter. Abraham Uberman was running a dry goods store. Isadore and Joseph Oksman were running a fruit and vegetable business.

Rogelach

1 cup unsalted butter softened
2 packages 3 oz cream cheese
2 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups unsifted flour
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon salt
1 cup sugar
 $\frac{1}{3}$ seedless raisins chopped
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped walnuts
2 teaspoons cinnamon
1 egg yolk slightly
beaten
cream butter cream cheese
until light and fluffy
add flour and salt and
mix until well combined
wrap + chill dough
for 2 hours

Handwritten by Rose (Oksman) Uberman

Divide dough into
9 equal pieces at a time
work with 1 piece at
a time

Roll dough into an
8-inch circle,
sprinkle with
sugar mixture

cut into 8 pie wedges
start at base
of each wedge

and roll to the point
place point-side
down on ungreased
cookie sheet

Brush with egg yolk
+ sprinkle remaining
cinnamon + sugar



CHAPTER 28
HELP IN TIME OF NEED
Khayim Royzenman

A. HOW FELSHTIN HELPED THE REFUGEES OF SATANOV AND TARNARUDE

On a fine summery Friday night in the year 1914, when the people were still in *shul*, the sad news arrived from Satanov and Tarnarude that the Jews were being driven out and must leave those towns within three days.

The Satanov and Tarnarude Jews telephoned their Felshtin relatives and friends asking to send them wagons because there were not enough means of transport in their towns to move all the Jews in such a short time.

The Sabbath calm in Felshtin disappeared right away. The war scare² that had somewhat been forgotten when the Russian army started penetrating deeper into Galicia suddenly overwhelmed everyone. What will become of the Satanov and Tarnarude Jews? How far is Tarnarude from Felshtin? What will become of us? What is to be done? Everyone understood that something had to be done. But no one could quickly advise what should be done.

The next day, the more [socially] conscious Felshtiners proclaimed an answer to the question: "What shall we do?" The answer was: "To help the refugees as much as possible. And if we are driven out, then others will help us." This was the only logical way under those circumstances, to prevent a catastrophe since there was nothing else we could do. I don't know who was the first to come up with this slogan. I heard it first from Eliezer Beyzer but the Felshtiners adopted that slogan and stayed with it for a long time.

The first thing to be done was to determine the details of the evil decree. To do so, we telephoned Dr. Gurevitch, of blessed memory. Whoever remembers Dr. Gurevitch from Proskurov will not be surprised to learn that he was fully informed. He told us that in accordance with an order by the Commander of the Southern Army, the Jews of Tarnarude, Satanov and Husyatin were banished from their homes to as far as *Nizhni* [Lower] Novogorod. It was understood that protesting or pleading against this decree was impossible. But the Proskurov community leaders tried to use various means with the local powers to mitigate the decree.

The Proskurov community leaders were very eager to have the Felshtin youth help with the approaching difficult relief work and promised to stay in contact with us. As soon as the first refugees arrived from Satanov, some representatives of a quickly-established Relief Committee arrived from Proskurov. They had permission from the regime for a certain number of persons, not Satanover Jews, to stay in Satanov one extra day in order to take possession of, and list, the remaining belongings and goods that the exiles had not had the opportunity to take along.

A number of young people from Felshtin, myself included, traveled along to help out with the work there. The refugees that we encountered on the road made a terrible impression on us. With bowed heads and broken spirits, the men walked alongside the wagons filled with the remnants of their household possessions. The women and children sat in the wagons. With eyes filled with grief, they gazed upon their familiar neighborhood as if bidding it farewell forever.

The worst impression made on us was the empty, deserted town itself. It is hard to imagine such stillness. The empty houses exuded darkness. We were all seized with a strange sense of fear. In this extraordinary stillness, it was as though we did not dare to speak among ourselves and we were all happy to learn that we would not be staying there long. We found nothing in the abandoned homes. The residents did not leave anything behind. If anything was left behind, it was broken. In some of the homes, we found goods that were soaked in kerosene. After roaming through the dead town for a few hours, we decided that there was nothing for us to do in Satanov and we returned home.

The next day, when we arrived back in Felshtin, we hardly recognized our own town. It was tumultuous. The Proskurov Committee informed Felshtin that the evil decree was about to spread to surrounding towns and they advised us to keep as many refugees in Felshtin as possible and not to let them flee farther.

Without any plan and without any leadership, relief activity was quickly organized in Felshtin for the refugees. In the small, poor town of Felshtin, with no more than 1,800 residents, around 600 new refugees found a place. Of course, there were no miracles involved; the homes did not suddenly expand. However, the refugees did not remain in the streets. In one way or another, we accommodated and made space for the homeless. Yehuda Ber, the sexton, moved out of his house and it was soon converted into a kitchen for the homeless. The Felshtin girls prepared meals; I have no idea from what. The men brought in produce; I have no idea from where. Nevertheless, from the very first moment, the refugees received free meals. It is simply amazing how quickly it was accomplished – and without significant means. And also amazing is the perseverance that the Felshtiners demonstrated. Many refugees remained in Felshtin for many months and it took great efforts to keep maintaining them.

After a while, the more affluent refugees were able to settle in and reestablish themselves and some of them traveled to neighboring towns and *shtetlekh* [villages]. Very few, however, went into the innermost parts of Russia where the government wished to send them. The poorest (a few hundred) remained in Felshtin and had to be taken care of.

It was difficult for small, poor Felshtin to support so many refugees. Perhaps not enough was done for the homeless. But, given the limited means and forces that Felshtin possessed, a great deal was accomplished.

At the beginning, everyone in town found it necessary to do something. With time, however, it was only the youth who continued on in the relief effort. At first, Rabbi Moyshe's son, Zisye, was very active. He, however, wanted to do everything without supervision and indeed he assumed responsibility for doing some things on his own. He traveled to the neighboring villages to raise money without even asking anyone. All he had was a letter from his father, the rabbi. He also felt that the only one he had to answer to was his father. We, who collaborated with each other, wanted no part of such leadership and organized a committee which did the work in an orderly manner and under the supervision of the public.

Rabbi Mordkhe Kitiver, who was beloved for his profound wisdom by the Felshtin youth, then joined us in the relief work. He was of great help in the relief work because he engendered deep respect for the Felshtin committee in Proskurov and with the Kiev committee who would send representatives to Felshtin to observe our work.

Even though we provided only two meals a day for the needy at first, Felshtin could hardly raise the means by itself. We asked for support from Proskurov but the Proskurov Committee itself lacked sufficient funds. We had to travel to the neighboring *shtetlekh* [villages] to raise funds and that was the most difficult undertaking.

At the beginning of the [World] War, the Jews in our vicinity were in a material crisis. There was a moratorium on all credit. Business was at a standstill and even the small storekeepers did not have anyone to sell their merchandise to. I recall that in the villages I visited with Yisroyl Shteynshleger, we were regarded as a nuisance although we always managed to arouse the higher feelings among the depressed small-town Jews and we always received no less than they could afford to give.

We were not able to travel too far from home and there were not many travel volunteers in Felshtin. The roads then were not very safe for Jews to travel on. We were ambushed twice on the short journey from Proskurov to Mezhibizh. The first time, our hard straw hats protected our heads from the stones that highway workers threw at us. The second time, we were saved by the horses of our drayman that ran faster than the horses of the peasants that were chasing us. They chased us like a pack of howling wolves and had they caught up with us, we would never have escaped alive.

Traveling through villages had to stop quickly and we had to depend only on our own resources. The situation had grown very dire; more than once we thought that the refugees would not find any food in the communal kitchen the next day. But each time, someone turned up to help out at the critical moment.

I recall Avrom Zhishkovitser: once a week or sometimes even twice a week, he would provide all the makings of a complete meal. More than once the refugees would have gone hungry if it were not for the good heartedness of Avrom Zhishkovitser.

It is also important to mention Avrom-Moyshele's two daughters, Shifra and Pesi, who worked in the kitchen beyond their strength preparing tasty meals for the homeless.

Once, when the situation was very critical, all our resources having been depleted and everyone was tired, a representative of the "Kiev Committee For Refugees," H. Guminer, arrived. He brought some money and promised to send support monthly.

With time, the refugees became acquainted with the town. Some settled down little by little and did not

wish to come to the kitchen for meals. The number of needy steadily grew less but those who remained were entirely helpless.

We decided to help the refugees with goods and to give them medical aid. Each week, we collected money and goods in town. From time to time, we received a little support from the Kiev Committee.

I consider it worth mentioning what Mr. Guminer, the Kiev Committee representative, told us: namely, that the greatest share of the funds distributed by the Kiev Committee to help the refugees from the border towns was not obtained from wealthy Jews but from the Jewish intelligentsia. Kiev Jewish doctors, lawyers and other professionals gave away the major share of their earnings to help the Jews that had been driven from their homes.

Along with those in Kiev, Felshtin Jews may also say that they did their duty when other Jews were victimized, because, with great effort and exertion, they helped the Satanover wait out the storm until they could return to their homes.

B. Aid work in Felshtin for our own — for the needy in Felshtin.

It did not take long, only a few years, for the Satanov Jews to get the opportunity to thank the Jews of Felshtin.³ Right after the terrible pogrom, the survivors in Felshtin were in such a state of depression and fear that they were unable to do the least things for themselves. Many of the wounded waited for medical help but only very few Felshtiners, after such terrible experiences, were capable of doing anything for the sick or for themselves. Many were so shocked that they became unconcerned about everything and everyone and roamed about like shadows. In addition, from time to time, some Petlurist soldiers would ride into town and throw fear into the shtetl. It was as though they did not want us to forget what had happened on that terrible day — as though something like that could be so quickly forgotten.

In that terrible time, when Felshtin was in such dire need, the neighboring villages responded warmly. I was not in Felshtin at that time but I was told that young people from Satanov, Greyding and Kuzmin helped Felshtin in a great way.

I do not know the particulars as to how the surviving orphans were gathered. I also do not know how quickly the temporary hospital in Monish Brenman's house was converted into an orphanage after the wounded either recovered or died. When I came to Felshtin — three months after the pogrom — the orphanage had already been organized and the entirely impoverished and totally helpless pogrom victims sometimes received bread from the meager aid sent by the neighboring *shtetlekh*. There was no representation other than Peysekh Aron Lando and Anshel Braver, who emerged from the pogrom not entirely depressed. They managed to obtain bits of aid somewhere and distributed it as they best understood. Some spats arose between them and this drew the attention of the Felshtin youth.

We talked it over and decided that we should not sit around mourning the dead while forgetting the living who needed the help of the more energetic young people. We took to the aid work with a plan. First, we revived the *kehile* [community organization]. Understand, only a handful of its members remained but it was still an organization. The name itself was something. The *kehile* organized a relief committee consisting of its members and others who were co-opted. The committee answered to the *kehile*. The members of the first committee were: Mayer Foygel, Mekhel Krakmalnik, Shmuel Yisroyl Steynshleger, Anshel Braver and this writer. Anshel Braver, after some time, resigned from the committee, leaving four. We four continued the aid work until the beginning of 1921 when any aid activity became impossible, as it was forbidden by the Soviet regime.

So that it would not seem as if we had taken over the committee leadership and were doing everything on our own responsibility, we would often call meetings of the *kehile* and provide reports. When the responsibility became extraordinarily great, such as when we received large sums of money or, on the contrary, when the treasury became totally empty, we prevailed upon the *kehile* to co-opt new members to the committee. The committee was always an institution, so to speak, open to inspection. Everything was done in a manner to avoid any suspicion over anything. In order to always assure constant control, an official system of bookkeeping and documentation was established. Lots of energy and effort was devoted to this. Many a night, Mayer Foygel did not sleep because of this. But all the effort was worth it. The good order of the bookkeeping was very useful to the entire aid work. I must mention here Dovid Goldman who was a huge help in our work. We never had to worry about a secretary. Dovid Goldman was always ready to do the work.

The work of the committee began in the middle of the summer of 1919 when the Petlurists regained control

over our area. Wanting to be the equal of other governments, Petlura's regime, then located in Kamenets, let it be known that they were willing to compensate for the material damages of the pogrom. As our town was very poor and the need very great, the *kehile* and the committee decided that we had to agree to take money from those bloodied hands to at least enable us to support the orphans and to maintain the lives of the impoverished and of the many who were sick.

Laden with lists of victims and plundered belongings and goods, names of the murdered, the wounded, and the surviving orphans, Anshel Braver and Shmuel Yisroyl Steynshleger traveled to Kamenets to negotiate with Petlura's ministers. After some tormenting days in Kamenets, they returned with some self-printed Petlurist banknotes with which the murderers hoped to gag Jewish mouths. With such terrible poverty that then dominated Felshtin, every trifle helped. But how long did Petlura's aid last? Within a week nothing remained of the Petlurist money.

Help, however, was unconditionally needed. Many old people were left without any means to live because even the younger ones were unable to take care of themselves. Many of the sick lacked medical assistance and even a piece of bread. Felshtin itself was unable to raise any funds because the survivors were in such a state of fear and apathy that they were unable to help themselves. It was necessary to travel to the nearby luckier *shetlekh* to look for support. Not much could be expected and it was not easily obtained. I remember when Mekhtsi Rubinshteyn went to a few *shtetlekh* and was not able to return for a couple of weeks because those villages were captured by the Bolsheviks. Our area was still under Petlurist rule.

When a particular power ruled in our area, we would receive funds from that regime. However, our area changed hands from one regime to the other so often that there was not enough time to actually obtain the funds. There were times when the committee's treasury was completely empty and the relief work had to totally stop. However, the orphanage had to be supported. What was to be done with about fifty orphans, one smaller than the other? It was not at all an easy feat.

I remember one cold winter day being informed that Shakhne Fayerman, who managed the orphanage, had resigned from his office. That is, he just abandoned everything and did not show up at the orphanage for two days. There was nothing for which to blame Mr. Shakhne Fayerman. Since there were no supplies and all the shopkeepers refused to extend further credit to the orphanage, and he had already provided more funds of his own than he was able, he was forced to drop everything with the hope that the town government would care for the orphanage in his absence.

I will never forget the picture I saw when I entered the orphanage. It was freezing outdoors and no warmer within. There was no light, not even a piece of wood with which to light a fire. When I lit a match to illuminate the room, I saw little children wrapped in their blankets, writhing from cold and hunger. The hands of many were swollen from the cold. The older children who were still able to stand on their own feet and the aides began to tell me how bad their plight was. But I was unable to hear what they were saying: I was so astonished...

There was no time to think for long. It was already night. I could not leave the children in the dark and cold, without food all night long. When I told the children that I would take over management of the orphanage, they grew happier. Would that be a minor cause for rejoicing [a *simkhe*]? An adult promises to take care of them! Two days without a caretaker caused them to freeze and go hungry.

The older boys found a sleigh somewhere and we harnessed ourselves up and went from house to house collecting pieces of firewood. We did not need to speak at length to the Felshtin Jews, although wood was not a cheap commodity, even for the richest people. As soon as they saw us dragging the sleigh they forgot about the high cost of wood. I was able to trick a few shopkeepers into giving me bread, sugar and kerosene. When I left the orphanage at ten o'clock at night, the children were sleeping, sated, in a bright, warm house, certainly dreaming of a full meal or, who knows, perhaps even of their destroyed homes.

I endeavored to raise funds in the shtetl for the orphanage, but to whom could I go for money? Certainly, ninety percent of the population of Felshtin were totally ruined and the remaining ten percent were almost paupers. Nevertheless, as poor as Felshtin was, they did not allow the orphanage to fail.

Only now do I really comprehend how much was done in Felshtin to support the orphanage and what a difficult task it was under those conditions.

However, who knows what it might have come to were it not for the aid from America! That aid arrived precisely at a critical time.

I once traveled to Proskurov to ask the relief committee there for support for the Felshtin orphanage and when I was about to return home with their assurance of aid when times got better, I was told in strictest secrecy that Americans had arrived with money.

A meeting was held by the Proskurov *kehile* [organized Jewish community] in honor of the American representatives and even though it was a closed meeting, I was invited to attend as a representative of the Felshtin Committee. The Americans were Judge Fisher of Chicago and Max Pine. I assume that they came from the "People's Relief." The chairman of the Proskurov community welcomed the Americans. In his speech, he noted that the Ukrainian Jews expected not only material support but American Jewry needed to exert its influence on the American and European governments to put an end to the pogroms. Max Pine responded to the welcome. He brought very good greetings from the American Jews. In closing, he said that the American Jews had done everything they could to stop the pogroms and if that had not helped it was only because the Jews did not have enough influence.

We were all disappointed that American Jewry could not help us politically. But their thousands [dollars] came in time and brought much benefit. All of the money was assigned to the Proskurov Relief Committee, which was to be distributed to the small towns. In the meantime, I received 100,000 Czarist rubles [approximately \$1,000] for Felshtin and I was promised to receive more money at a later date. When I arrived home, the work began at once.

At a joint meeting of the Felshtin *kehile* and the Relief Committee, it was decided that the money should be used to help the entire shtetl rather than only the poorest population. I was told in Proskurov that a lot of money would be available. So we began to organize the relief work on a broader scale.

It was before *Peysekh* [Passover]. A number of merchants announced that they would bake *matses* [matzohs] for sale. It was expected that the price of *matses* would be very high and the Felshtin Jews began to worry where would they get money for *matses*.

The first thing we did was to open a *matse* bakery for the entire shtetl. The community was divided into four categories. In the first category were those who were able to take care of themselves, more or less; they received *matses* at the selling price. The second category paid half of the price. The third category paid a fourth of the price and the fourth category received *matses* gratis.

Thanks to the American funds, everyone had *matses* that *Peysekh*. It was the only *Peysekh* in Felshtin that no one had to go around town with baskets collecting *matses* for the poor. Everyone received *matses* very honorably. There was no need to beg. To the contrary, some people came to demand that they be placed in a higher category.

The next matter was medical help for the poor. The only doctor in town, Dr. Fenyorov, received a salary from the committee and took care of all the sick poor people for free. He also supervised the orphanage. The third matter was rapid assistance. The elderly, sick and simply people in need would turn to the committee seeking aid. After a short investigation, the applicants would receive cash assistance. In addition, a [secular Yiddish] school was established.

Understandably, under the prevailing conditions, Felshtiners could not pay any tuition. It had already been over a year since the children of Felshtin attended any school. When the committee decided to open a school for all the children in town, there was a celebration. The Proskurov committee did not want to provide the funds that the school required so easily but it had to do so.

The last, but most important, thing to address was the orphanage. The orphanage was to be managed in such a manner that there would no longer be a danger that the children would suffer hunger or cold.

This went on for a long time. Whatever difficulties we had in our work, even when we had enough funds, reminds me of the following fact:

It was just before one of the frequent [Civil War] changes of regimes over our shtetl. The Poles were about to withdraw from our area and the Bolsheviks were to take over. During such a transition period, we might expect robbers and even a pogrom.

At that time, I held a large sum of communal money. Only the active members of the committee knew how much money I had. They were: Mayer Foygel, Shmuel Yisroyl Shteynshleger and Mekhel Krakhmalnik. The others did not happen to know any details at that time. We were afraid to have too many people know that I had the money, because at a time of pogroms, the robbers would threaten death and demand money or that someone would reveal where money could be found. And what would a person not do to save his life?

In short, we were unable to advise what to do with the money. Each wanted to give it to the other and no one wanted to take it. In the end, we buried the money in Shakhne Fayerman's house, even though Shakhne Fayerman was not then a member of the committee. We were all certain that Shakhne Fayerman would never redeem his life with the orphans' money. Actually, no pogrom occurred then but before we hid the cash, we relived the fear of a pogrom more than once.

The Jewish community, the Relief Committee and everyone in town lent a hand to assure that the best possible aid be provided to those in need, and especially to the pogrom victims.

The Felshtin residents always showed themselves to be better than might have been expected of them. It seems that the great tragedy forged brotherhood and sympathy among them.

I remember only one time when Felshtin did not act properly in my opinion and the opinion of some young men involved in the relief work. This happened when Moti Kerdman came as a delegate from America and brought relief funds. I will endeavor to tell this story of the relief funds in brief because I think it would be of great interest to the Jews who were then in America, even though it is no great honor to the Felshtiners.

When the news came to Felshtin that Moti Kerdman was coming from America as a delegate, and the news spread, the town became excited. Everywhere, people spoke of America and their American relatives. Everyone hoped that this delegate would bring some [personal] news. When Moti Kerdman arrived, the Felshtin population literally besieged the house he was staying in. Everyone wanted to be the first to see him and to ask about relatives in America. They somehow felt that a door had opened and that through that door aid would come. They felt themselves bound to a big, strong world that would liberate them from constant fear and affliction. Even children ran to see the delegate and get regards from America. Even the children of the orphanage, who were more disciplined than the other children of the shtetl, did not await permission from their overseer and they all ran out of the house to see the delegate from America...

When the first great tumult was over, I turned to Mr. Kerdman to determine what kind of help he brought to the shtetl other than individual aid, and how he proposed to arrange this help. He told me unofficially that he had brought cash but he would announce it officially after he became familiar with the situation.

During a couple of days, the Relief Committee acquainted Mr. Kerdman with all of the aid activities and also with all the great needs of the many unfortunates and pogrom victims. Mr. Kerdman was very enthusiastic about our work, especially with the good bookkeeping system and documentation, which was accessible to all, and which provided a clear accounting and documented every expenditure. Yet, he did not want to officially negotiate with us and said it would be against the directives he had from America.

After becoming well acquainted with everyone, Mr. Kerdman assembled some people of the shtetl as well as the members of the committee and reported that he brought a large sum of money for the needy and he wanted to divide it according to the American Felshtin committee's directives. He asked us to assemble all the Felshtin residents in the *shul*, there to select people who would divide the money. The Relief Committee was opposed to a division of funds. We understood that in America they could not know what was going on in Felshtin, so that, therefore, they gave Mr. Kerdman orders to divide the money. We endeavored to demonstrate that dividing the money among the entire populace would bring very little benefit. We demanded that all of the money be given to the committee which was already leading a broad-based relief effort. We showed him a list of sick people who were under the supervision of the committee but who could not obtain enough aid because the means were insufficient. We also showed him a list of the poor, whom we could help get back on their own feet had we the means to do so. We pointed to the orphanage where the children were not starving but who lacked enough shoes and clothing, even not enough underwear and bedclothes. We pointed out that if the money were to be divided, it would fall into the hands of those who were not in need of anyone's help.

But Mr. Kerdman had his directives to select people in the synagogue to whom he was to give the money to be divided and he wanted to fulfill those directives. To satisfy him, we proposed that people in the *shul* should be selected to receive the money for distribution but that those people should join the Relief Committee and cooperate with it and that the enlarged committee use the money for the ongoing relief work.

But that was to no avail. An assembly was called and the assembly decided to divide the money. The committee declined to participate in the grand division. At that time, the Felshtiners were not at their usual high level of behavior.

I do not know what happened to the people: First, recently they had given me their best piece of bread for the orphanage! Suddenly — everyone wanted a share of the aid money! Just recently, they had been haggling with

me: everyone wanted to pay a higher price for the *matses* that the committee sold. And suddenly-everyone wanted relief money! It appears that the dollars had such power. The Felshtiners heard “Five Thousand Dollars,” so everyone thought that at least a couple of hundred dollars would come to them as their share — what a dream!

Very few people declined money or failed to demand their share. Those who declined were either too proud or wealthy. When all the money had been disbursed, everyone agreed that it was no great benefit to them.

For those who truly needed the aid, the few Polish marks that they received as their share was of negligible help. And those who were not very much in need of aid could have very well done without the marks. A very small sum was earmarked for the orphanage. That small sum was held for so long that the orphanage was unable to get the use of it. The committee received the Polish marks a few days before the Bolsheviks regained control of our area and the marks then had little value.

I do not consider that anyone wanted to bring harm to the orphanage. But the people in charge of the money were not sufficiently capable to manage such a matter.

Each time the Bolsheviks occupied our territory, the general relief activity in Felshtin would stop and we only endeavored to maintain the orphanage and the school. This was possible, thanks to the Proskurov Cultural Society which received money for us from the Soviet government for the school and for the orphanage. When the Bolsheviks left the area, we renewed contact with the rest of the world and received new support from the American “Joint” [Joint Distribution Committee] and began the relief work anew. But since the Felshtiners had divided up the money that came from their own *landslayt* [townsmen], we no longer had the opportunity to obtain funds for the general relief work. Supporting the orphanage remained as the sole function of the Relief Committee. And that task was not an easy one under Bolshevik rule. It was extremely difficult to obtain from the Red Power a few supplies or some Soviet rubles that had almost no value. But, nevertheless, they made great demands of us.

They demanded that the population itself sustain the orphanage. I recall that a few weeks before I left Felshtin, a Communist comptroller came to visit the orphanage and at once took me to task. He wanted to know why Monish Brenman, in whose home the orphanage was located, lived in three well lit rooms, while one of the bedrooms where the orphans slept did not have any windows at all.

Perhaps he was right but I was accustomed to the idea that the house belonged to Monish Brenman.

It is understood that Monish immediately gave up two of his three rooms. A command was immediately issued to requisition from the shop owners, the bourgeoisie, sufficient whitewash and, also, that the bourgeois daughters be mobilized to come and whitewash the orphanage. When I refused to manage the orphanage in such a manner, he accused me of sabotage before the higher authorities in Proskurov. Were it not for [the intervention of] the Cultural Society in Proskurov, this thing would not have gone well with me.

When the Soviet regime drove out the last of the White Guards [Czarist loyalists] from our area and negotiated peace terms with Poland, the Felshtiners felt that this was their last opportunity to leave Russia and take to the road toward America. Whoever had the slightest hope of making it to America escaped to Poland. Many of the children from the orphanage were also taken to Poland with the help of Mr. Moti Kerdman, who had then arrived for the second time from America.

This writer, too, was among the many fleeing Russia. Therefore, I must now end the history of the Felshtin Relief Society.

¹ Translated by Hershl Hartman and Sidney Shaievitz.

² The Great War (World War I) started in August, 1914

³ The Felshtin pogrom took place about four and a half years after the Galician expulsions.



The orphanage in Monish's apartment