

Mašřov is a small town on the border of counties Chomutov, Louny and Karlovy Vary. I live in Radonice but I went to elementary school in Mašřov and I go to high school in Kadaň. I found traces of the holocaust at all three of these places. Some of them I would now like to talk about.

In Mašřov, we often went on field trips to the park surrounding the local château, to the park surrounding the local château, to the ramparts of the Mašřov castle, to the chapel of the Mladotas from Solopysky and other interesting places.

Sometimes we wandered all the way up to an old Jewish cemetery. It's placed just outside the town on a prolonged meadow on the other side of the creek. There is a stone wall around it. Until last year, it was utterly overgrown with weeds, thorny bushes, rosehip and barberry. The shrubs were thick and the thorns so big and sharp that one could not pass through them.

Last year, the mayor, Mr. Sluněčko, had the whole area cleared of the undergrowth. The old bushes were cut and burned, the sticks and waste cleaned away. Beneath the shrubs, we found tombstones but the letters on their front sides were nearly erased.

When I found out about the projects Holocaust and Neighbors Who Disappeared, I decided to learn more about the traces left behind by the Jewish residents of Mašřov and nearby villages. And that I might record the fate of at least a few of the people who lived here and had first-hand experience of the horrors of the war, racial hatred, murdering and the holocaust. I call these stories Testimonies.

Author
Petr Veselý

Tutor
Vladimír Valeš

NEIGHBOURS WHO DISAPPEARED

Six testimonies on those who disappeared, Mašřov



33 kids of the Primary school in Mašřov, Josef Fantl is in the third row, the second from right (next to the teacher)

Richard the only one of the family who returned home. The Fantl family lived in a small house, number 134, near the synagogue. The house was beneath the château close to Zámecká alley. Heinrich and Julia Fantl had five children: Richard, Ernst, Josef, Helena and Frieda. Josef, who was slightly over twenty, is said to have been killed by SS-men in Karlovy Vary. Then the family went through Terezin and then the concentration camps Mauthausen and Auschwitz. Both parents were killed in gas chambers and the girls' fates are unknown. The only one who survived and also got back to Mašřov was Richard. He survived the concentration camps only thanks to - as he later remembered - the fact that in the camp he led a pony pulling cart and shared oats with the horse. In the summer of 1945 he returned to his native town Mašřov with broken health. He was 26. After six years of concentration camp, cold and starvation he suffered from advanced tuberculosis. Mrs. Fantl came from a mixed marriage as her father was Czech and her mother was German.

She had known Richard since their school years and he always used to joke he would marry her one day. He kept his word. She already had her luggage packed and was waiting to be transferred to Germany with her family. She spent six weeks in Podbořany where all Germans were concentrated before the transfer. Richard came for her and later they got married.



Wedding photograph of the Fants in 1952. There is Mr. Fantl, a Jew who due to his origin and religion went through a concentration camp, next to him his wife Anna Paulovna, a German from an mixed Czech-German family. Her witnesses: Mr. Václav Šimek, a Czech who escaped from Mašřov with his parents after Munich 1938 and who came back again and next to him Mr. Hrubec, a Czech from Votava who fought against the Nazis in Polish Army Krajana and who returned to Bohemia, a country his relatives had left long time ago. In one photograph there is an international company of people who understood each other.



Most of all I was interested in the story of Elisabeth, who came here in February 1940. She only spent three months here and then she disappeared. For me she remains a neighbour who disappeared. I was fascinated that she was an orphan. Her parents probably died in the concentration camp of Auschwitz.

The story of Elisabeth resembles an Elizabeth in just all very beginning. We know she left in May 1940 but we do not know her life story. We are interested in investigating whether she lives somewhere in America or Israel. She would be 69 years old today.



Letters from Bené. In his letter from 7. October 1999 Mr. Axel Axel told me that he is searching for his family who lived in Mašřov before the war. The local authority was helpful and they gave me a copy of the letter. It is written in German but fortunately accompanied by German translation, which they helped me with.

Mr. Axel is searching for the family who lived in Mašřov. He writes that his grandfather was born in Mašřov and his father is buried there. Part of the family left for Vienna at the beginning of the century when his grandmother is buried. Other relatives died in the Holocaust.

... Maybe it will be possible to complete a report on the fate of another family that disappeared in the Holocaust and of those who have survived scattered throughout the whole world and looking for each other...



A sketchmap of the Jewish cemetery in Mašřov drawn by Petr Veselý in April 2000

Our cemetery in Mašřov was, as well as the other Jewish sites and monuments in the western Czech lands and destroyed after the Nazis came in 1938. The municipal authority in Podbořany ordered in the letter of 22 August 1942 to raise the cemetery to the ground and to place the bones in a disused quarry. The letter is not so one took into account the cemetery as a historical monument with bones. It is said that for a certain period the cemetery was used as a overnight storage for grain cattle. The lower part of the cemetery is almost without tombstones. About 60% of them are made of granite. Some markers disappeared from about a fifth with Barbara Gerasimová but from them they grabbed themselves to give them back but they did not. We found out that they are destroyed by the rest of the Jewish cemetery.

During the night of 9 November 1938 called the Kristallnacht in Germany and the first to many synagogues or demolished them in other sites. They broke windows of Jewish flats and destroyed objects. They did not set the synagogues in Mašřov on fire, it might have been caused because the flowers in the windows were too close to the building and there was a threat of the fire spreading over. The last house near synagogues was destroyed during the Kristallnacht and during the night of 9 November 1938. After the war the synagogue was not established but because a survivor and grandfather 1940 as a building of his son, it was pulled down. At the spot where the Jewish school and synagogue used to stand, no remembrance of them can be found today.

I have described everything my grandfather, who has been working since before the war and who has a lot of documents and notes in his archive, told me about. Mr. Fantl from Mašřov, who came here with his family from Votava in 1945, has no and wrote a lot. His brother, who was a soldier in World War I, now lives in Canada and he knows a lot of people. I am awaiting news. Bené was searching, she also had me and photographs. The school lost a lot of things and the municipal authority provided me with them. I learned a lot from the magazine published by the Jewish Fighters in Chomutov last 6 to 10. I photographed the articles in Magyar Called the Kristallnacht and by the way, Axel I also checked the lists of people killed in the Holocaust on the Internet. I found that the same names as in Mašřov but the place of their residence is not recorded there.

Bene Davidovici, Jewish from Carpathian Ruthenia, is leading the marching troop. In 1935 the Carpathian Ruthenia, that was a part of Czechoslovakia, was occupied by Hungary and Bene had to commence his military service in the Hungarian army. The Hungarians put the Jewish, considered to be unreliable, into labour fronts that were fighting on Hitler's side. He had to endure outsts, bad clothing and starvation. All the time he thought about escaping and deserting to Soviet side. Finally he succeeded. But he was disappointed. Against a camp and starvation. Just at that time he learned about a Czechoslovak corps being founded. In the 1938, he signed up. According to his narration Bene Davidovici and his brother were the only ones of the whole family who survived. The parents and the others disappeared during the Holocaust. At the end of the war they were in an unknown small town called Mašřov in the North-west of Bohemia. He settled here in house number 123 next to our school together with his brother and his cousin Col. Then Ester with her siblings came to join them. The wedding of Bene and Ester took place in Mašřov. Richard Fantl was their wedding witness. Then the year of 1948 arrived and all the changes followed. The State of Israel was being founded and the Jews believed it was the Promised Land. The Davidovici's decided to go there. The people living in Mašřov and Israel have not known anything about each other for 40 years.

Petr Veselý
Kadaň Grammar School

The First Testimony: What became of the old synagogue

The stream that flows through my village is called Dubá. On its left shore, there used to be three houses: a Jewish school, a synagogue and a house. These are marked on a map of the village from 1901 (Jud. Schule, Jud. Tempel, Goldhahn). After the annex of the border territory in the Autumn of 1938, the Nazis targeted the Jews in the first row. On the night of November 9, the Crystal night, the Nazis burned down a substantial number of synagogues, broke the windows of Jewish apartments and destroyed shops.

In Mašťov, the synagogue was not affected. Perhaps it was saved because it stood close to houses on the public square and there was the danger of the houses catching fire. Local Nazis were content to break the furniture and throw out the appliances and close the quarters down. The Jews were forbidden to enter the school or the synagogue, then they were barred from public places and, finally, they were deported on forced labor or concentration camps. The Mašťov synagogue was given to a local carpenter who set up his workshop in it. The synagogue was not restored after the war and continued to be run as a carpenter's workshop and storage house. Around the year 1960 it was declared useless and torn down. The place where the Jewish school and synagogue used to be is left without a single trace of them.



Questions:

- Which of the five Fantl children survived the Holocaust?
- What is the story of Anna Fantl on the wedding picture?
- What happened with the Mašťov cemetery during World War II?
- Anna Fantl came from a Czech-Jewish family. Why was she transferred as a German after the war?

The Second Testimony: The old Jewish cemetery

In Jiří Fiedler's book called *The Jewish Monuments in Czech Republic and Morava* it is said: "Mašřov (Maschau), a town situated 8km SWW, last synagogue built in 1830, torn down after 1960, remnants of two Jewish streets, remnants of a Jewish cemetery from the fifteenth century, destroyed by the Nazis, approximately fifty tombstones transported to the museum in Teplice."

However, there used to be many more Jewish cemeteries and synagogues in our region. Last year, we visited the synagogue in řatec, for instance. There is a ghetto in řiroké řřebřice we often pass by. There is also a mention of other Jewish monuments in Podbořany, Kryry, in Podbořanský Rozhozec. Some cemeteries have disappeared without a single trace. Some villages in the Doupovské hills, where used to be Jewish communities, do not exist at all. They have been destroyed in the military training area. This is what afflicted řďár (Saar), a town not far from ours, where used to be a Jewish quarter with a prayer house that must have been built not later than in the eighteenth century.

Our cemetery in Mašřov has been closed and destroyed after the arrival of the Nazis in 1938 when they annexed the border territory of Czechoslovakia. They turned over most of the tombstones in Mašřov and took away the most precious ones. They pursued all the Jewish residents according to their Nazi laws.

There is a short entry in the village archive and in the chronicle that on July 15, 1940, the solicitors Wilhelm Kreislin and Karl Strunz reported to the "Landrat" in Podbořany that a Jewish community operated in Mašřov before the war. The Municipal house in Podbořany sent a letter with orders to obliterate the cemetery and store the tombstones in a place designated for the purpose.

After the war, the cemetery was unkempt and became slowly covered with shrubbery. For a period of time, farmers used to keep cattle there for the night. What wasn't overgrown with weed was brutally destroyed by people who had nothing better to do. In 1984, an American-Czech I was shot not far from my town. It was about a Jewish girl from Galizia who dressed up as a boy in order to be admitted to a university. The film-makers borrowed several tombstones from the cemetery in Mašřov for a scene in the movie and promised to return them after the scene was finished. However, the tombstones never returned back to Mašřov. Mr. Fiedler reports that they are stored in the regional museum in Teplice but as we had found out, this is not true. The tombstones are lined up along a wall of the Teplice cemetery and the lower part of the cemetery in Mašřov remains empty.

What does the cemetery look like? I measured it and found that it's about a hundred meters long and fifty meters wide. It rises from the South to the North and the gate is in the Southeastern corner. The wall is built from basalt stone, plentiful in the surrounding fields, because the Doupovské mountains are of volcanic origin.

I learned from a book that the Jewish tombstones take a special shape, called stellae, and what they are typically decorated with. Several times I noticed the motive of hands. These are the blessing hands of Cohenim. They were forbidden to enter the cemetery through the main entrance and had their own side door. This is a possibility because in the upper part of the wall, there is an opening on several places. Also, there are the remnants of a morgue.

In the upper part of the cemetery are inscriptions only in Hebrew, whereas in the middle they are bilingual (Hebrew and German). And all the way down there are exclusively German inscriptions. We measured everything up and I drew a map.

I mustn't forget that when we came to the cemetery I laid a small pebble on one of the tomb stones. This is an old Jewish custom; instead of flowers people bring little stones.

The Third Testimony: Richard, the only one who came back home



It's very unlikely that anyone could ever put together a complete list of the names of Jewish people who lived in Mašřov before Second World War. Some of my information is from Mr. Kytř for whom they were written down by Mrs. Edith Enzian. More details have been given by Mr. Erhard Weiss who often comes to visit from Germany. And I found out a lot from Mrs. Anna Fantlová.

All of these people remember that there used to live a Mr. Neumann. His name was possibly Franz or Josef, they do not agree on this subject. He was supposed to leave for Palestine before the war broke out and hopefully he survived.

In house no. 94 lived Mr. Otto Fischer and he was expecting to be married at the time when the war began. They were both sent to concentration camps. Mr. Otto did not survive but Mrs. Wilma did and later married Leo Holzar. They are said to have met in Terezín.

Neither did Mrs. Heller survive the war and the murdering of Jews. Contemporaries say that when local Germans drove the Mašřov Jews to the fountain on the square, one of them reportedly thrust a flag-post into her anus.

Then there was Mr. Bruno Lóbl and his sister Ella, who was called Mitzi. They managed to escape before the war and so evaded certain death. The Lóbls still come to Mašřov and pay visits to Mrs. Fantl and always go to the cemetery where their ancestors are buried.

The destiny of two Mašřov Jewish girls or women remains a mystery. They literally disappeared. Esel Hirsch was very poor. It is said that when the Germans began to collect local Jews on the square, she turned in the other direction and walked away. Nobody ever saw her again. The fate of Jelly Iser is very similar.

A written record is kept in the chronicle about the existence of Gabriela Löwy. The chronicle says that her property and her house no. 188 had been confiscated on March 4, 1943.

Many names have been definitively lost after so many years but we can be sure that there used to be many other families that disappeared or are still being searched for. They are the Neighbors who disappeared.

In a house near the synagogue, no. 134, lived the Fantl family. It was not far from Zámecká ulička (Chateau street). The parents, Heinrich and Julia Fantl, had five children: Richard, Ernst, Josef, Helena, and Frieda. All members of the family ended up like most other Jews. Both parents died in the gas chambers. What happened to the girls isn't clear.

The only member of the family who survived was Richard. He survived the concentration camps, as he himself later recalled, thanks to the fact that he was a horse driver and shared oats with the animal. In the Summer of 1945, he returned to Mašřov with a ruined health. He was 26 years old. After six years of concentration camp conditions, cold and hunger, he had an advanced case of tuberculosis. The former Fantl's house under the chateau did not survive. During the war a German family moved in from somewhere in the East and, in an unlucky turn their child girl fell out of the window and died. The German family then left the house and after that it remained empty for a long time until people took it apart and left nothing standing there.

The Fourth Testimony: The Photograph from 1946

On July 6, 1946, a celebration to commemorate the burning of Master Jan Hus took place on the Mašťov square. There is a photograph of marching Czech soldiers from this period. The marching unit was commanded by Bene Davidovič, a Jew from Subcarpatian Russia. He was born in 1919 in the village of Kalinka. He was from a poor family and he came into the family of his future wife as a horse driver. Then the year 1938 came. Subcarpatian Russia which belonged to Czechoslovakia, was annexed by the Hungarians and Bene was forced to fight for Hungarians.

He often remembered how many insults and how much humiliation he had to bear, how bad their clothes were and how little food they had. The Hungarians wore furs while they had to wear old uniforms, and suffer from frequent exposure to the wet and cold. Meanwhile, he kept thinking about how he would escape and defect to the other side of the front. In the end, he did succeed but was simultaneously deeply disillusioned. On the other side was just another camp and more hunger. When he was utterly exhausted, a Jewish doctor helped him and saved his life. At the same time, he heard that a Czechoslovak corps was being formed in USSR. He volunteered.

Bene's friends from his unit said that he was a good and brave soldier. During one attack, the Germans broke through the front and panic threatened to give way. Bene reportedly gave out commands, they aimed the guns, and diverted the attack. He received the War Cross and the rank of sergeant.

Bene Davidovič and his brother were the only ones left from the entire family. The end of the war met them in an unknown small place called Mašťov in Northwestern Czechoslovakia where they settled in house no. 123, Bene, with his brother Bernard and his cousin Cvi. They were followed by Ester and her siblings. The wedding of Bene and Ester took place in Mašťov soon thereafter, their best man was Richard Fantl. All of them survived the war, the concentration camps, and the Holocaust. Their fates, however, intertwined in many ways even after the war and many of them disappeared. Bene Davidovič and his wife moved to Kadaň in the Autumn of 1946 and set up a transport company.

Then the year 1948 came with all the related changes. Israel was founded and the Jews believed it was their promised land. The Davidovič family decided that they would go there. On the photograph depicting a celebration of Master Jan Hus in 1946, there are 16 soldiers. In 1989, eight of them were not alive anymore. Three of them went abroad after 1948. One to Canada, one to the USA and one – Bene Davidovič – to Israel.



The Fifth Testimony: Where did Elizabeth come from and where has she gone?



In an old report from the school in Radonice, we read this entry for the year 1945/46: February 1, 1946, Alžběta Feldmanová (Elisabeth Feldman), born July 6, 1932, in Barkosov, district of Mukačevo, Czech nationality, Czechoslovak citizenship, Jewish religion, began to study in the third grade. She started her first grade in Barkosov, Subcarpathian Russia. Alongside, there is a note saying: Both parents died in the concentration camp in Auschwitz. She is an orphan. And another note: May 5, 1946, went to the USA.

Who was the girl who spent three months of her life in the school in Radonice? Who took custody of her? With whom did she leave to the States? What else happened to her?

We asked if anybody has any information because there never were any Jewish residents in Radonice. Perhaps we did find a hint. In a group of Jewish immigrants who came to Mašťov from Subcarpathian Russia (Ruthenia), there was a married couple, Alex and Eliška Feldman. Allegedly, they had a small girl and they moved abroad very early on. Some say they went to the States, some that they went to Israel. It is possible, that the war orphan Alžběta was adopted by them and she lives to this day somewhere. She would be 68 years old.

The Sixth Testimony: Letters from Tel Aviv

It would be a great thing if Elizabeth was be found. Perhaps she will contact us just like Mr. Ariel Avriel from Tel Aviv did. At the communal office in Mašťov I've been kindly given a copy of his letter from October 7, 1999. It's written in Yiddish but fortunately a translation into German is attached to it. Mr. Avriel is looking for his family that lived in Mašťov before the war. He writes that his grandfather was born in Mašťov and that his father is buried there. He asks for information about the Hirsch family. He writes that part of his family moved to Vienna at the beginning of the century and that his grandmother is buried there. The other members of the family died in the holocaust. Mrs. Klíma, the register officer of the Mašťov municipal office, found out in the archive materials from 1890 that there used to live four families by the name of Hirsch in the town: in no. 88 it was Aloisia Hirsch, in no. 119 Ludevít Hirsch, in no. 146 it was Josef Hirsch and in no. 175 Matys Hirsch.



In January 18, 2000, Ariel Avriel was wrote to the municipal office one again. This time the letter is written in Czech. It says that Aloisia Hirsch from no. 88 is his great-grandmother, mother of Ernst Hirsch, his grandfather, who was born in Mašťov in 1890. Mr. Ariel Avriel asks for more information about the people from house no. 88. Might we succeed in putting together a record about another family that disappeared?