

NEIGHBOURS WHO DISAPPEARED

Six testimonies on those who disappeared, Maššov



1-3 level of the Primary school in Maššov. 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 chateau 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 Maššov 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 a cart and shared oats with the horse. In the summer of 1945 he returned to his native town Maššov 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.



A sketch-map of the Jewish cemetery in Maššov drawn by Petr Veselý in April 2000

Our cemetery in Maššov was, as with all the other Jewish sites and monuments in the empire, closed down and destroyed after the Nazis came in 1938. The municipal authority in Podbořany ordered in the letter of 21 August 1942 to leave the cemetery to the ground and to place the tombstones at a designated spot. After the war no one took much care of the cemetery. It slowly became overgrown with bushes. It is said that for a certain period the cemetery was used as an overnight enclosure for grazing cattle. The lower part of the cemetery is almost without tombstones. About fifty of them are missing. American filmmakers borrowed them to shoot a film with Barbara Streisand not far from here. They pledged themselves to give them back but they did not. We found out that they are deposited by the wall of the Terezin cemetery.

During the night of 9 November 1938 called the Kristallnacht the Nazis in Sudečan set fire to many synagogues or demolished them in other ways. They broke windows of Jewish flats and destroyed shops. They did not set the synagogue in Maššov on fire, it might have been saved because the houses in the square were too close to the building and there was a threat of the fire flashing over. The local Nazis were satisfied with damaging and scattering the furniture and closing down the building. After the war the synagogue was not re-established but became a workshop and warehouse and around 1960, as a building of no use, 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 to my grandfather, who has been telling about history of our region and who has a lot of documents and notes in his archive, but he about Mr. Rířt from Maššov, who came here with his family from Volyn in 1845, told us and wrote a lot. His brother, who used to be a soldier in World War I, now lives in Canada and he knows a lot of people. I was present when Mrs. Faltová was narrating, she also lent me old photographs. The school lent us old maps and the municipal authority provided us with old letters. I have narrated a lot from the magazine published by the Jewish Museum in Prague, Mr. Nemeš from the Union of Freedom Fighters in Chomutov lent it to us. I photocopied the articles Program Called the Kristallnacht and To Pay for a Jew. And I also checked the lists of people killed in the Holocaust on the Internet. I found there the same names as in Maššov but the place of their residence is not recorded there.



Wedding photograph of the Fantls of 1951. There is Mr. Fantl, a Jew who due to his origin and religion went through a concentration camp. Next to him sits his wife Elena Faltová, a German from a mixed Czech-German family. Two witnesses: Mr. Vladav Šima, a Czech who escaped from Maššov with his parents after Munich 1938 and who came back again and next to him Mr. Růžička, a Czech from Volyn who fought against the Nazis in Polish Army Korpses and who returned to Bohemia, a country his forefathers had left long time ago. In one photograph there is an international company of people who understood each other.



Petr Veselý with his grandfather PhDr. Vladimír Voleš

Most of all I was interested in the story of Elisabeth, who came here in February 1946. She only spent three months here and then she disappeared. For me she became 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 Alžběta Feldmanová or Elisabeth is just at its very beginning. We know she left in May 1946 but we do not know her life story. We are interested in investigating whether she lives somewhere in America or Israel. She would be 89 years old today.

Letters from Tel Aviv. In his letter from 7 October, 1999 Mr. Ariel Aniel is searching for his family who lived in Maššov before the war. The local authority was helpful and they gave me a copy of the letter. It is written in Yiddish but fortunately accompanied by German translation, which they helped me with. Mr. Aniel is searching for his family who lived in Maššov and his father is buried there. Part of the family left for Vienna at the beginning of the century where 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...



Photograph from year 1946

Bene Davidovič, Jewish from Carpathian Ruthenia, is leading the marching troop. In 1938 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 troops that were fighting on Hitler's side. He had to endure oaths, bad clothing and starvation. All the time he thought about escaping and deserting to Soviet side. Finally he succeeded. But he was disappointed. Again a camp and starvation. Just at that time he learned about a Czechoslovak corps being founded in the USSR. He signed up. According to his narration Bene Davidovič 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 Maššov in the Northwest of Bohemia. He settled here in house number 123 (next to our school) together with his brother and his cousin Čvi. Then Ester with her siblings came to join them. The wedding of Bene and Ester took place in Maššov. 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 Davidovičs decided to go there. The people living in Maššov and Israel have not known anything about each other for 40 years.

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