

# KONOTOP

Jews Past and Present

History of the Jewish Community  
of the Town of Konotop

2001

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<sup>1</sup> Permission of the translator has been given to distribute this article among our family and friends.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

## Preface

For the Benefit of the Cherkinsky and Halperin Family Descendants  
In America, Canada, and Israel

By Robert Sherins, M.D.

Today, editing and proof reading of the English translation of the publication, “KONOTOP, Jews Past and Present - History of the Jewish Community of the Town of Konotop,” was completed. It is a milestone article because no other publicly available text about this Jewish community has been found in my research. Thus far, only one paragraph of general information has been printed about Konotop among the major world encyclopedias, including Encyclopedia Judaica Jerusalem, The Great Soviet Encyclopedia, Encyclopedia of Ukraine, Encyclopedia Britannica, or by using search engines on the Internet.

Our Cherkinsky ancestors emigrated from Konotop beginning in the 1890s. My research has confirmed that our earliest ancestors dispersed to several locations. Among them, Louis Cherkinsky and his sisters, Miasha (Mariashya), who arrived in New York in 1896, and Ida, whose arrival date is yet unconfirmed, were the earliest arrivals to America. Joseph (Yehuda) Cherkinsky, son of Alexander, arrived in Canada early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They first lived on the east coast of Canada, but later settled in Windsor, Ontario. After obtaining visas, many of their children later moved to Michigan. Chaya-Ita Cherkinsky immigrated to Israel in 1907, and her brother, Reuven Cherkinsky and his sister, Chana, immigrated to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in the 1940s. In addition, I recently discovered a death record in the Belarus-SIG website, Russian Jewish Encyclopedia, which listed Samuil Naumovich Cherkinsky, a physician, who was born in 1897, but who died in Moscow in 1988. Samuil’s genealogical relationship to our family is unproven, but highly likely to be a distant cousin who survived the Russian wars, Communist Revolution, and the freezing winters in the Soviet Union to become a highly educated physician in Moscow.

As far as family sizes were concerned, Cherkinsky families were not exceptionally large, as shown by the family records recently discovered in the regional archives by Angela Semakova. Angela discovered our ancestral documents in Sumska (Sumy) Oblast, because Konotop, which was

originally located in Chernigov Gubernya, was relocated to Sumy Oblast after the provincial borders were altered.

As of the date of this English translation in 2003, the oldest Cherkinsky ancestor so far discovered was Eselj Cherkinsky, which is the regional Yiddish nickname, similar to Iosel or Yossel, which also means Josef/Joseph. Among his presumed other children we know that Eselj/Joseph Cherkinsky had at least one son, who was named Berko Ioselevich, which translates as Berko/Boris, son of Joseph. Berko Ioselovich Cherkinsky owned a farm in Konotop where Eselj lived, while Berko's son, Mordukh Berkovich, managed the farm. Mordukh<sup>3</sup> Berkovich means Mordecai, son of Berko. Mordukh also owned a textile manufacturing business in Konotop, which was listed in the text of this article. From other archival records obtained by Angela Semakova, we learned that Mordukh also owned a hotel, a café, a barbershop, and two fruit markets. However, the specific names of those businesses remain unknown.

Our family records now include many names of the descendants from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Those records have included Rachel Cherkinsky, who married Max Yeselson, parents of Abe Yeselson, who knew our grandparents in New York. We have confirmed that our grandfather, Louis Cherkinsky, was the son of Abraham Cherkinsky from Konotop. Probably, Abraham was Rachel's sibling or a cousin.

Chaya-Ita Cherkinsky immigrated to Israel in 1907, while other members of her family, such as Binyamin Cherkinsky and his family arrived in America in 1920; Shmuel Cherkinsky went to Israel; and Reuven Cherkinsky and his sister, Chana, migrated to Tashkent, Uzbekistan, presumably in the 1940s. Other Cherkinsky ancestors died in the wars and still others later immigrated to America, but please review the family tree chart and register report for those details.

What can be stated about our ancestral name is that Cherkinsky seems to be a Polish ethnic surname. Many of our ancestors told of their origins from Minsk. Possibly they meant towns that were located within Minsk Gubernya

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<sup>3</sup> Mordukh was the principal God of Babylon. After the Persian conquest of Bablyon, there was a saying, "Mordukh lives" or Mordukh Chai. The name, Mordecai, comes from Mordukh Chai.

(Province), because they all reported that they were “White Russians.”<sup>4</sup> Minsk is located in Belarus, which translates as “White Russia.” In 1772, Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, annexed the eastern portion of Lithuania-Poland and thereby inherited about three and one-half million Jews within the newly expanded Russian Empire. After the second and third annexations of 1794 and 1795, “Imperial Ukases (Decrees)” were issued that evicted Jews from Russian cities. Jewish families were forced to migrate to many small villages within the restricted region known as the “Pale of Settlement.” It is quite possible that Cherkinsky ancestors migrated from the Minsk region after those decrees were issued and ended up in the region of Konotop, where we located their records. It is important to note that the archives proved that the Cherkinsky ancestors lived in several towns, all of which were located within Konotop Uyezd or district. That is why our initial correspondence among the cousins seemed confusing because we did not know that the names of the various towns of origin were in fact within the same district.

It is hoped that this article about the origin of the town of Konotop and its Jewish community will be incorporated into the foundation of your family history. Please share this legacy of our family history with all of your children, grandchildren, and cousins. I am very proud to be part of the process of discovery of this history, but in so doing I must acknowledge my deepest gratitude for the invaluable research assistance of Angela Semakova in Kiev, and for the English translations written by her, as well as my friend, Robert Fineman, in Santa Monica, California.

With warmest affection and love for each of you,

Robert

Pacific Palisades, California  
October 30, 2003

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<sup>4</sup> The origin of the term, “White Russia,” appears to be related to the old designation of that region of Russia, which remained white, clean, and untouched by the invading Mongol armies, and therefore “White.”

We want to believe that this brochure will not be the last page in the history of the Jewish community of Konotop, which used to be the very largest and friendliest Jewish community of Konotop many years ago,” Chairman of the board of the Jewish community town of Konotop, Editor of newspaper, Lebn, Grigori Eisenstat. “I am glad that I have participated in the revival of Jewish people in independent Ukraine,” stated by Executive director of the Jewish Community Konotop Center Ester, Grigori Petrushenko.

This brochure was published because of the material support of the [city of] Kharkov division of the American United distribution committee, “Joint.”<sup>5</sup>

### For What?

I have heard the question on which I want to answer “Why do we need this history about the Jews of Konotop?” The topic of the discussion was about the rationale of returning to our roots – it meant revival of Jewish traditions, customs, and holidays.

For me, this question didn’t arise until I recognized that I was a Jew. This happened not at once. To know your nationality and identify yourself with it – are different things. Thanks to genetic memory, I strived and strive to repeat what my predecessors used to do in spite of all persecutions and tortures.

The voice of blood told me the necessity not just to remember but also to revitalize the things that our ancestors were not afraid to do until their death the traditions of the ancient (and not only) Jews.

In general, it seems that people don’t want to look at their past, who are ashamed about belonging to one nationality due to some exclusively subjective causes, such as upbringing, personal views, and so on. That is why in historical records there is no objective basis for this retrospectively for Jews to be ashamed. Frightened - yes it was, but ashamed – never.

The Jews have given to the world the Book [Bible], which brings in itself

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<sup>5</sup> “Joint” was formed originally by several philanthropic organizations, which united to assist persecuted Jews in Europe. “Joint” was extremely active before, during, and after World War II.

the basis of human morality and ethical values for all and forever.

There were Jews, who assumed the culture and religious practices of the people among whom they used to live. It was several thousand years ago in times of Antioch the 4<sup>th</sup> - it happened under the reign of the Russian tsars. “But there always comes a minute when the call of blood, not the one which flows in our veins, but that which flows out of our veins” (as was said by Uri Tuvim). But there were times when the call of blood of the nation united into one nation despite any differences of culture and religion to which they belonged. You must not be the Jew, who is frightened by the soldiers. The flame of the Holocaust burns in the biggest part of our past. Our past history was troubling those non-humans. And, that is why we must exist not only to be a part of the global population, but also as a people, who are united together by spilled blood.

That was exactly what world-famous Steven Spielberg felt. He grew up in the immigrant’s country where all the Chinese, Italian, Spanish, and Jews were simply called Americans. When Spielberg decided to learn the details about the history of the Second World War, he suddenly remembered his roots and now the foundation, which was organized by him, does everything to make it all possible that the memories of the Holocaust survivors will be known for the future generations and that there will be no room for theories of racial supremacy. And that is why we must remain Jews, who remember who they were and from where they came.

Yes, “citizen of the world” has everything, cities and villages, countries, and continents, but he doesn't have a place where people always come when they feel bad. He doesn't have the spiritual motherland, his national family, which can calm him down and be side-by-side forever.

I understand that we are all people of different nationalities and different colors of our skin. We all are just a small part of the Universe. We live in different countries; we love the land on which we were born and work for its prosperity. We are interested in the spiritual and cultural life of nations in which we live, without taking into consideration their nationality. And that is for me why we must look backward in order to move forward.

By Amelia Eisenstat

She is a member of the National Union of Journalists of Ukraine

We can discover the historical roots of Konotop from the time of the Kievan Rus. There is a lot of historical research, which proves that it is true. Some historians think that it was the center of the Lipeckr [Lipetskova] principality and it was called, Lipovetsk. It was fully destroyed by Mongol troops for disobedience.<sup>6</sup>

The town was rebuilt again under the name Konotop in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The first written reference that mentioned the fort of Konotop was dated in 1638.

Konotop is a local center, which is situated on the left bank of Ezuch River, 129 kilometers from the city of Sumy. Today Konotop is one of the biggest railway centers with a population more than 100,000 people.

The first mention about Jews in Konotop appeared at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when few people lived there. But the Jewish symbolic was found in 1782 in the Coat of Arms of Konotop. On the Coat of Arms there is depicted the details: “in a red field a golden cross, on the bottom the silver half-moon with the inner side facing upwards, and on the top a six-cornered star of David.” By 1847, the Jews who lived there increased to 521 people. According to the information provided in “Materials for Geography and Statistics of Russia,” compiled by officers of the general headquarters of Chernigov Gubernya, it was written that 1206 Jews lived in Konotop in 1861 – 566 males and 640 females. The population of Jews significantly increased in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a result of the migration of Jews from the northwestern regions to the southeastern territories for permanent residence and achieved 4425 Jews (25.3% from the overall population in Konotop in 1897).<sup>7</sup>

Konotop was a typical town of the Pale of Settlement. Its social structure was defined by the lack of rights for the Jewish people. There were no peasants, predominantly merchants and craftsmen. Most of them used to live in poverty. The increase of the Jewish population occurred as a result

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<sup>6</sup> 14<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>7</sup> Following the three Partitions of Poland (Grand Duchy of Lithuania-Republic of Poland) in 1772, 1794, and 1795, Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia, annexed a large portion of Eastern Lithuania-Poland. By so doing, Russia inherited 3.5 million Jews within its new territories. Imperial Ukases (Decrees) were issued that evicted Jews from the larger cities. This resulted in mass migration of the entire Jewish population in Russia. Most of the Jews had to relocate within the Pale of Settlement. Very likely our Cherkinsky ancestors were relocated to the Konotop district at that time.

of the building of the railway lines from Kiev to Moscow and from Kiev to Voronezh. Konotop was one of the main stations in this railway line. The economical relations with Eastern Prussia were conducted from that place from the west. Also, there were relations with the central regions of Russia in the north and with the southern regions of Russia.

There were a lot of fairs and markets. Gogol wrote about such fairs in Konotop in his novel "The Lost Deed." Jews played a main role in the trade life of Konotop. There were several Jewish firms. Among them the biggest firm was organized by the merchant of the second guild (whose name was German), who exported bran and other agricultural products (residue of sunflower oil and seeds) to Germany. The biggest textile shops belonged to *Novik and Cherkinsky*,<sup>8</sup> shoe stores- *Ainbinder*<sup>9</sup> and Feldman. Numerous food shops belonged to Rubin, Klichin, Nosovicky, Meskhin, and by other Jews. The majority were small shops and the owners of which barely made ends meet. Chemists<sup>10</sup> were organized by Logun, Bernstein, and Sheinikin. Factories, mills, oil producing, and grain production belonged to Alotin, Kozlovsky, Narinsky, and others. They processed grain, oil, seeds, and other raw materials, according to the orders of natural payments for their services. A lot of small trade agents were occupied in buying in villages the agricultural and food products for merchant-exporters and processing factories.

The famous historian, Y. Poletika, wrote about the life of the Jewish

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<sup>8</sup> Ukrainian land records and merchant records from Konotop listed my 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Grandfather, Berko Ioselovich Cherkinsky. Apparently, he owned a farm in the region of Konotop Uyezd (district), which was managed by his son, Mordukh Berkovich Cherkinsky. Berko's father, Eselj (Iossel or Joesph) Cherkinsky lived on the farm with the grandson, Mordukh. Berko Ioselovich Cherkinsky also owned a hotel, a barbershop, a café, and fruit markets in Konotop.

<sup>9</sup> My granduncle, Louis Halperin, married Genesha (Jennie) Einbinder (Ainbinder) in Kozelets, Ukraine, which is located about 60 miles north of Kiev. Konotop is located about 60 miles east of Kiev. Both towns were also equidistant from Nezhin, which was apparently the center of the regional Jewish community. Possibly the Ainbinder individual identified in this history was related. Jews from the region identified themselves as "Nezhiniks." They said that they came from Nezhin Gubernya, however, there never had been a political region of Nezhin Gubernya. Very likely they were referring to the regional Jewish authority in Nezhin, which was part of the Kahal system of self-governance of the Jewish communities within the Jewish regional territories of the "Five Lands."

<sup>10</sup> Pharmacists.



community in his memoirs, “The Seeing and the Emotional Experiences.”

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the population of the city was fifteen thousand people. Ukrainian merchants formed the largest part of its population, a few members were among the Russian officials, and forty workers worked in the railway workshops.

There was a big Jewish community in Konotop, nearly two or three thousand people lived there. That community lived separately from others. The greater part of the community was formed by the owners of the small shops, doctors, craftsmen, workers, merchant’s employees (salesmen, shop assistants and shopmen), and poor people, who often didn’t know how to feed their families. The community had a religious school, Heder, where Jewish boys were taught God’s law, and the synagogue, where all of the people gathered to pray. Jews, who were more prosperous, sent their children, who graduated from Heder to study abroad.<sup>11</sup>

In spite of any animosity of Ukrainians towards Jews, Konotop’s Jewish community used to live in relative peace. There were no pogroms (massacres), neither at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> nor at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. There were some cases of hooliganism<sup>12</sup> exercised by market boys and schoolboys, who were not Jewish.<sup>13</sup> It was very popular to come into Heder or synagogue and scream wildly in order to interrupt the lessons or prayers. The fights between Jews and Ukrainian children were often. But Jewish youths could defend themselves.

A significant group of the Jewish population consisted of intelligentsia, such as the doctors, lawyers, and pharmacists. Most of the doctors were Jews, Marshov, Shapiro, Zimeev, and Apperbaum. Those were prosperous parents, who had the capability to give their children an education abroad. The Russian universities were closed to them. Jewish children didn't have the right to study in the universities. The same situation was applied to the lawyers, Paritskiy, Khrahovskiy, and Lazarev. Only Lazarev finished Odessa University and after that he was included in the rank of the honor citizen. In

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<sup>11</sup> Under the Kahal system, girls were usually schooled at home by their mothers. Heder was for boys, who were taught religious subjects. The brightest of the boys were promoted to the Yeshivot.

<sup>12</sup> Anti-Jewish gangs or gangsters.

<sup>13</sup> Street kids.

Konotop artists lived, worked, and contributed significant input to the cultural history of Ukraine: Alexander Imilievech Gofman (1861-1939) and Mark Grigorievich Vainshtein (1894-1952). But the majority of Jews were burghers [burghers].<sup>14</sup> Merchants were the exceptions. They and honor citizens (people, who graduated from Russian universities or institutes) were free from some of the nationalistic lawful limitations for the first time from the prohibition to live outside of the “Pale of Settlement.”

The above-mentioned category of prosperous people was only a minority of the town's Jewish population. The majority were the poorer people: craftsmen, workers in small shops, helpers of qualified workers, and lesser merchants. There were people of air,<sup>15</sup> who didn't have stable earnings and they worked from time to time or resold the goods of others. There also were the professional beggars.

The Jewish elementary education (literacy and knowledge of the Tanakh) was within everybody's reach. There were four Heders in the town, where the teacher (melamed) sometimes with assistants conducted the lessons from morning until evening prayer. The owner of the Heders, (Baransky, Slobodkin, Kalmanov, and Hazanov) were hard workers and desperately poor. They taught discipline, memory, and attention. One such teacher was Nahman Baransky. There were three Heders for thirteen boys, where melameds, Zalman Evselev Fainickly, Leiba Evselev Komisarov, and Kusiel Evdeev Zavadsky, taught school with certificates from the Jewish school's committee of Nezhin. And one school where twenty-five girls were educated and were taught by petit bourgeois, Donna Goldberg.<sup>16</sup> She had the certificate of the private elementary teacher from the Teacher's Council of Konotop's two-class town's college for teaching of the Jewish children. The Talmud-Torah school for fifty boys was taught by melameds: Movsha [Moishe] Leibow Kozlovsky, having a certificate from the Nezhin Jewish College Commission; and Izrail Aron Goldenfarb – certificate of elementary private teacher from the School Board of Konotop, two-class town's college.

The next stage of education including professional education was not

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<sup>14</sup> Burgher is an inhabitant of a borough or town; a member of the middle class; a prosperous and solid citizen.

<sup>15</sup> The use of the term, “air,” was taken from the German word, “Luftmentch,” which meant a man of the air without economic stability.

<sup>16</sup> This was atypical and advanced for Jewish communities of that era for girls to receive an education outside of the home.

accessible to the majority of Jews.

The so-called industrial proletariat was insignificant. Until the revolution,<sup>17</sup> there were workers in the factories that were owned by Jews, who hired them. In the other factories and government services, they were not allowed to work. Businessmen and workers were in opposition to each other only in small workshops. The so-called class fight, which tried to ignite in this environment was the Party “Bund.” The class fight could not be achieved because of two reasons. First of all, the Jewish worker was interested in the stability of the factory, which because of economical weakness could suffer from any conflict, especially a strike. And secondly, in such a hostile environment, they only could hope for mutual aid and national solidarity, excluding any conflicts.

Such solidarity was shown even in paradoxical situations. For example, when the merchant or other entrepreneur became bankrupt, his colleagues, even competitors, gathered some money, which could help the businessman to overcome his difficulties without the need of returning any of the money. But if everything became normalized, that loan of mercy/charity, called “dmilaskhesed,” was always repaid. It happened with the owner, who grew sugar beets. Due to bad weather conditions a part of the yield was destroyed and he couldn't pay his debts, which he had previously borrowed from the bank. Nine Jewish businessmen provided the money.

Charity for professional beggars was given in the form of excluding even a shadow of humiliation. Those were people with physical and psychological handicaps. There were twenty professional poor people that didn't ask for alms. Alms were given in such a way - the poor people visited every house of prosperous Jews once each week. Each housekeeper established his own special day and she put some coins on a dish, 3 or 5 kopecks. The visitor took his coin without saying a word. The plate with money was at the entrance to the kitchen. Poor men could buy a French roll with the money. In one week he spent about a ruble. Others may have spent less, 60-80 kopecks. Once a strange act of charity happened. Among the poor people was a beautiful, but a blind girl, and a crippled man. Those heartfelt people decided to express their pity. They collected the money to buy a small dwelling and utensils, and celebrated their wedding. They delivered and brought up two sons.

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<sup>17</sup> Great Soviet October Revolution in 1917.

As a rule, members of the community were moderately religious. The synagogue was being visited only during big holidays and fasts. Saturday liturgies were visited by only a few people. Of course, there were some atheists.

The cases when people converted to Christianity or other religions practically didn't have a place in the town. Even that act automatically freed them from lawful limitations. People didn't mention the fact that if they became Christians they automatically became free from any limitations that had restricted the Jews. Mixed marriages were prohibited, because it touched upon religious changes. The situation changed only after the Soviet revolution, but in the first years after the Revolution, they were still very seldom. For example, when a Jewish girl married with a Ukrainian boy, the whole [Jewish] community stopped any relationships with that family. It happened in 1921 and both young persons were members of the Komsomol organization. Another case happened in the same year. A Jewish girl married a Russian and she made him change his religion. He had to become a Jew and be circumcised. There were a lot of rich Jews at their marriage.

They followed the custom of circumcision. Seldom-cases of refusal were a sensation. Such a unique case took place in Konotop in 1923. One of the leaders of the town's party instead of circumcision arranged for arranged a so-called "Red Christians."<sup>18</sup> Without any intention for the circumcision, the man's penis became inflamed and there was a necessity for surgical circumcision, which was performed by a surgeon. Almost all the population, including Christians, gloated, seeing in this event "God's finger in it."

In 1922, during a bad harvest and hunger in part of Russia, the Jews from Konotop's community expressed solidarity towards the people of the same faith but different nationality. The group of Subotniks, i.e. Russian people, from Veronish Gubernya, came to Konotop. It meant Russian people following the Jewish religion. There were Russian peasants, but they had Jewish names. The youngest of them was Haim. Aron was the name of the

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<sup>18</sup> After the Revolution, it was inappropriate to have a circumcision and follow any religious customs. So they arranged for a mixture of old tradition and Communism, by calling the cutting a "Red Christian."

ravine.<sup>19</sup> That ravine was given the right to hold some religious prayers in the synagogue and those people lived in the best Jewish houses and got one echelon of grain.

The Jewish community had legal status before the Communist revolution. That community had the elements of self-government. They had their own resources developed by means of self-taxing. They enacted decrees of civil status, such as birth, death, marriage, and divorce. The heads of such communities were ravine [rabbis] and the civil governor, who was called a public ravine. The public ravine was elected by the community and was approved by the local power [Kahal authority]. The ravine was hired by the community from the number of persons receiving higher religious education (in Yeshivot).

Jews from the time of the 14<sup>th</sup> century didn't have centralized religious leadership, such as a patriarch or a senedrian. The "government" ravine usually was the most noble person in town. The spiritual ravine in the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was Semanovich. A quiet man, kind and fair. In cases of conflict, people came to him as a public judge, even in cases when the conflict developed between Jews and Christians.

Another very distinguished personality was "Kazyoni"<sup>20</sup> Rabbi Aron Marshov, famous public figure and physician. He was an orphan and he was raised by the Jewish community. He achieved the highest Jewish education. He went through all stages of religious education, including Heder, Talmud-Torah, and Yeshivot, as per the established schedule and was preparing himself to become a spiritual ravine. But when his education was coming to the end, a rich Jew came to the Yeshivot in Konotop and asked the governors of the Yeshivot for the name of a groom for his daughter and he should be one of its best pupils. The future son-in-law was promised freedom in choosing his endeavors up to continuation the Talmud study. Marshov was recommended to be the groom. The marriage took place, but Marshov made a decision that was unexpected by the father-in-law. He started to study the course of sciences in the Gymnasium<sup>21</sup> with the goal to pass the examinations and receive his diploma as an external student

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<sup>19</sup> Rabbi.

<sup>20</sup> In Russian, the word, "Kazyoni," refers to the concept of belonging to or in association with the government or public domain.

<sup>21</sup> Secular high school rather than the religious Yeshivot.

(student, who was allowed to take the courses, but without the need to regularly attend the lectures).

Thanks to his natural abilities and outstanding memory allowed him to achieve this goal within three years. Later, he went to Germany for study at the University of Bonn and returned to Russia with a diploma of physician. He combined his professional work with public service and as head of the Jewish community in Konotop and leader of the Zionist organization. He became the most popular man in the town. During the civil war of 1918-1920, he conducted negotiations on the behalf of the town with multiple changing [political] powers taxing the community. During rigorous political discussions of that time, he invented the famous expression, "Bolshevism - this is the socialism of wild men." Bolsheviks didn't forgive him that expression and he was compelled to leave the town in 1924. Later, he moved to Palestine. The power in town changed many times during the war: Denikin's,<sup>22</sup> Petlura's,<sup>23</sup> Soviet power, German occupation troops, and Ukrainians, who were headed by Hetman Skoropadskiy.<sup>24</sup> There was a wave of robberies and small pogroms at that time. Fortunately, there were no massive killings.

The most successful time for Jews was during the German (Kaiser) occupation. There were a lot of Jews, such as officers and Division Ravines [rabbis], in the German army.

Later, the Soviet power created conditions of safety for Jews, but from the economical point of view that was a hard time for Jews. Private enterprises were nationalized and trade was stopped. The attempts of illegal trade were cruelly punished and sometimes even the people were shot for such kinds of activity. One of the functions of the Cheka (Soviet police) of that time was the struggle with speculation, the meaning of which was stretched too far.

During the new economical program (NEP), they reestablished the economic activities of Jews (shops, rent of plants and factories, and tradesman), but on a lesser level than before. The main difficulties were the high repressive taxes. In 1923-1928, the illegal activities of Zionist's organizations were revived and the mass emigration to Palestine occurred

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<sup>22</sup> General of White Russian Tsar.

<sup>23</sup> A bandit, anti-Semitic gangster, who killed Jews.

<sup>24</sup> Ukrainian leadership was called Hetman.

during that time, which was organized by Gehalutca. In 1924, the Zionists-Socialist's Party (CZSP) and the Union of Youth (CC-Yugend Ferband) distributed leaflets calling for migration to Palestine.

At that time under the influence of the Jewish section of the Communist Party began the movement for the migration to Birobidjan.<sup>25</sup> And the first arresting of Zionists began. But the real economic catastrophe for Jews began in 1928-1930, when [Stalin] started to thwart the activities of the NEP. Private trade, industrial, and artisan's enterprises became bankrupt under the pressure of the high level of taxation. Their owners, who couldn't pay, ran away from the town. In 1929, tradesman, harness maker, and saddle maker, Gorinskiy, hung himself from the window of his shop. As a rule, Jews moved to Russia to their children and relatives living there. Numerically, the community shrank significantly. The composition changed as well, predominantly government clerks, factory workers, and poor people. The relationship with the synagogue weakened. The Jewish community received the final blow during the Second World War. Some part of the population moved to the other parts of the USSR.<sup>26</sup> The other part was killed. After the victory only a small segment of the Jews came back to their native town. The community fell to pieces. One of the three synagogues was occupied by town archives [a collection of records and documents]. Two others were given to the tailoring factories. A small group of Jews tried officially to organize the prayer house, but the local power forbade it. Then they gathered a sum of money and bought the house in the name of one of the active members and they began to gather together on Saturdays. However the fictitious owner decided himself to take advantage of his status and embezzled the house. The case was given to the local court. The Court decided that the house was without an owner and it was decided to confiscate the house. The surname of the man was consciously not recorded. That was the tragic end of the most powerful, numerous, and well organized Jewish community [of Konotop]. Filing a suit didn't have the expected outcome.

Furthermore, sometimes the events were developing by inertia. During this past long period of time, there were now changes in the life of the Jewish community. There were still religious old men, who gathered together in

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<sup>25</sup> Jewish Autonomic Region, where Stalin planned to relocate all Jews in the Soviet Union.

<sup>26</sup> Reuven Cherkinsky and his sister, Chana, migrated to Tashkent.

apartments for Sabbath prayer, the last of which took place in the home of Ziama Feldman's house in 1982. The last sheikhed<sup>27</sup> was Shapirkin Gilia, who had the special religious education. He died in 1976. The last britmilla<sup>28</sup> was made by Shapirkin in 1952. Hupa<sup>29</sup> also was in that year. The last funeral with old Jewish traditions was in 1965.

Only in the environment of democratic Ukraine after independence, Jews got the possibility of reviving their former traditions and language.<sup>30</sup>

In August 1990, the first Jewish family was able to move to Israel. In December 1991, an American genealogist, Miriam Weiner, visited our town. The result of that meeting was obtaining a census of the Jewish population. On 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1993, there was a meeting, where the society "Lebn" was created. In 1994, during the holiday when people celebrated Pesakh,<sup>31</sup> the members of the Community got matzos. In June 1994, Israeli singer, Jenia Fireman, with her consort established the beginning of communication of Konotop people with citizens of Israel. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of December 1994, the first issue of the newspaper, "Lebn," was published. On the 16<sup>th</sup> of March 1995, the religious Community of Konotop was registered. The monument to Konotop's victims of the Holocaust was opened on the 14<sup>th</sup> of July 1997. The Konotop Jewish Community welfare center, "Hesed Ester," was opened on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1999. And, this center has become the real Jewish house.

#### KONOTOP COMMUNITY CENTER, "HESED ESTER"

The Konotop town charity fund (Jewish Community Center, Ester) was founded on the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 1999 with support from "claims conference" and American Jewish Distribution Committee "Joint." Beside them as co-founders were Konotop Jewish community Lebn and Konotop Judaic religious community. The Jewish community Ester represents a beam of light for all elderly Jews and is the center of Konotop's Jews and Jewish community life. This center provides all the needy with produce

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<sup>27</sup> The Russian or Ukrainian word for shochet, the person, who follows the rules of kashrut and performs the kosher slaughter of animals and fowl.

<sup>28</sup> The Russian or Ukrainian word for Jewish ritual circumcision.

<sup>29</sup> Marriage performed under the chupa or religious canope.

<sup>30</sup> Yiddish.

<sup>31</sup> Pesach - Passover.



parcels, dinners at home, and in the canteen. This center helps with medical care, rehabilitation equipment and medicine, and everyday services. Many groups work there. Also, there are a lot of cultural and educational programs. But the main aim of this center is to remind the most vulnerable members of the community that they are not alone.

The Center is functioning in two big directions, social and community work. To the social programs belong the patronage programs of care under which there are forty invalids and single people. Pensioners in need of medicines are provided for free.

They give help in repair of shoes, clothes, watches, small repairs of household equipment, and provide barber services. Functioning SOS (Save Our Souls) is financed by personal resources of U.S.A. citizen, Leon Sragovich. Urgent help in outstanding cases is given, such as emergency operations, natural disaster, and etc. The special community distributes this help. And this help is given within forty-eight hours after the adoption of the decision.

The activities of the “Day center” and the “Warm house” are functions of the social program. Accordingly, the programs in the “Day center” are four times each week. They bring elderly people with difficulties in independent movement. They provide the conditions for communication and work (occupational) therapy. In the “Warm house,” they take care of elderly people living nearby and under different circumstances not having the possibility to attend the Community Center. Those people gather two or three times each week for two to three hours. There is a program called, “Mazel Tov.” This program is for mothers, who have children not older than three years and for pregnant women. The program of this club includes interaction and consultations with the doctors and the psychologist, and guarantee of children’s clothes, pampers, vitamins, providing of children’s bathes and beds etc. Great attention is paid to the revival of Jewish traditions in the family.

To community programs belong the following: class for Jewish traditions, class to study Yiddish and English, and the musical ensemble “Shtetl,” piano class, choreographic class, and class for handymen, club for veterans of the Great Father’s War (World War II), prisoners from concentrations camps and ghettos, youth’s and children’s clubs.

Every Friday in the center, members light Saturday night candles and all people, who want to can meet on Shabbat together.

The workers of this center see their task as to revive the Jewish traditions and not to live without attention to any single person. Every member of this center feels that he is needed by the community and can by active participation become useful to his comrades of the same age, children, and grandchildren. He is not a poor person. He doesn't need to be given a handout. He receives what he deserves and the society expects from him help in establishing the community with rebuilt Jewish traditions, in developing a spiritual life for Jewish people in sovereign and independent Ukraine.

While reviving Jewish traditions, we don't forget about the life of our native town. We have relationships with other social organizations and agencies of local self-government.

### The Newspaper “Lebn”

The Jewish community's newspaper in Konotop is named “Lebn.” It means “life” and began to be published in December 1994. It is the first and only one public resource in the region of the national minorities, which is distributed free of charge in the cities and towns of the Sumska region.<sup>32</sup> This newspaper is read in the entire territory of the Ukraine, Israel, USA, Germany, Australia and in the CIS<sup>33</sup> countries. The newspaper is published in Russian and Ukrainian. The slogan of this newspaper is, “all people are brothers.”

The published periodical of this newspaper has always tried to follow this slogan because it is promoting peace and mutual understanding in society. The information about Jewish life and the work of Hesed Ester are published in it.

We can also read about events in the region and in Ukraine. Also readers are informed from letters from former compatriots about how Jews live in Israel and other countries. Some common newspaper editions were published

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<sup>32</sup> Sumy oblast or province. Gubernya is the old term, which is no longer in use.

<sup>33</sup> Union of Independent States of former USSR.

together with the old city newspaper, “Konotopskly Kray.” This fact shows the cooperation between the Jewish community and local self-government agencies. In the newspaper there are columns, “Our Holy Places,” “Conversation with Wise Men,” “Famous Jews,” “Creativity of Our Readers,” “To Be Remembered,” and others.

They describe the returning to the roots of our nation, about people, who were influential in the history of our town, and about people, who gave their lives in the First and Second World Wars. Readers liked the newspaper. This was shown by the great number of letters to the editor received. Thanks to its thematic diversity and attraction of a wide circle of readers, the newspaper, *Lebn*, has a consolidating character and organically fits informational space of *Sumshene*.<sup>34</sup>

TV Program, “Ale Eneinem”<sup>35</sup>

Together with “*Lebn*,” the public life of Jews in Konotop is described in the TV program “Ale Eneinem.” This is a monthly program of the local television station. The main aim of this program is to describe the activity of the Jewish community “*Hesed Ester*,” its clubs, about the leaders of the Jewish movement, and about the national religious holidays. The author of this program, Yulia [Julia] Glanz, together with cameraman, Dmitriy Glanz, familiarized the audience how Hanukah and Pesach were celebrated, about the visit of our friends from Skokie (near Chicago, Illinois), USA, to Konotop, and about the celebration of the Victory Day.<sup>36</sup> They were introduced to the board of the Center and they also informed the audience about the music group, “*Shtetl*.”

The life of Jews in Konotop is widely described by this program. “Ale Eneinem” helps to revive the Jewish traditions.

The Music group “*Shtetl*”

Together with the community “*Lebn*,” the music group was organized. The aim of this group was to make Jewish music popular and to revive Jewish musical traditions. But as the group didn't have money for a building and

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<sup>34</sup> Sumy oblast or province.

<sup>35</sup> Translates as “All Together.”

<sup>36</sup> 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the victory after World War II.

was under the pressure for other reasons, it was closed.

In November 1999, with the help of the community and with the help of the representatives joined in Kharkov, this group got its second birth. This group was named with the nostalgic title, “Shtetl.” In this ensemble came musicians, who accumulated enough performance mastery on an amateur scene. The members of the group are: drums, Dmitriy Glanz; the violin, Tatiana Raeva; the keyboard instrument, Igor Tabachov; clarinet and alto saxophone, Baleriy Sakun; bass guitar and bayan,<sup>37</sup> Dmitriy Zilbershtein (he is the leader of this group); and singers, Gregoriy Petrushenko and Svetlana Tabakova. The group diligently works on national Jewish repertoire. The group plays music from people around the world.

This group successfully performs on the stage of our native town, of the regional center in Sumy and other towns and cities of this region. At the first regional Jewish art festival, which took place in the city of Kharkov, this group became the laureate and the soloists became diplomants.<sup>38</sup>

We hope that our group, “Shtetl,” will take over the glorious tradition of Klezmers of the past. Even as Shalom Alei hem in his novel, “Shtempenu,” mentioned the talented musicians from Konotop. Shtempenu: in times Shtempenu defeated all other orchestras, Konotop musicians, who also were popular.

### Let's Remember

In Konotop as in any small or big town there is a place where every man involuntarily thinks about the sense of life, about the relationships among the people, about the human's memory, and the significance of which we leave after us on the earth.

The reader can guess that I mean cemetery. And every time when I come to this sacred place on Virovskiy Street, I remember people who found eternal peace here. I knew that the majority of the Jews from Konotop were buried here. He<sup>39</sup> knew almost a thousand, who were buried on the Jewish map.

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<sup>37</sup> Russian instrument similar to harmonica.

<sup>38</sup> Winners of the festival contest, who received diplomas and different degrees.

<sup>39</sup> The author.

About many of them, I heard different life stories, interesting “maise.”<sup>40</sup> With many of them I was very close. Each of them in his time was his own unique and unrepeatable life.

On Yom Kippur, according to the tradition, at my parent's grave we came to put a stone on the tombstone monument of the person with whom we had been friends for more than forty years. From the photo, I saw my dear friend, Efim Bunich looking at me. He was a great life lover, humorist, a man with encyclopedic knowledge, talented engineer physicist. He was telling me, “tell everybody living now about us. Let them remember about us. We loved our town; we used to live in it.” And I felt obligated to remember and tell the story.

I must remember David Gregorovich Udler. He was a teacher from God, a real teacher, who never felt angry even when the life was harsh for him. He always found words for everybody who was in trouble and who really needed them and needed his support. How many Konotopians taught for decades working in school number 4, this real “Tsaddik.” And, Olga Matveevna Braginskaya, gave her whole life to the Jewish school. She was the first, who began to find information about the Heroes of the USSR, Ephim Zitovskiy and Nadezhda Volkova. Just to mention, parents of both heroes were buried on Konotop soil. And, about Volkova's mother, Sofia Lvovna<sup>41</sup> Silina, a whole novel could be written about her life. She deeply believed in the communist idea. She also was impressed by her meeting with Lenin and she had been all her life a member of the Communist party starting before the October revolution. We must mention popular historians, Jakov Zelinskiy and Semen Belinskiy. They fought during the Second World War. They worked for our country and had a great influence in the town.

It is impossible speaking about teachers not to mention Methodist historian, Yakov Zilberstein and Semeona Belenkogo. They fought bravely on the front, where they damaged their health. They honestly worked and enjoyed their deserved respect by many many Konotopians. I am asking for an apology from the reader for a lot of names, which are a small part of the people who

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<sup>40</sup> The word, “maise,” was taken from the old Yiddish word, “Bubbamaise,” which meant something like “tales from the grandmother.”

<sup>41</sup> Lvovna was named after the father. It means Leo. Similarly, Lvov, the town, was named after King Leo.

deserve to be written about.

I will continue my list, reminisces by professions, physicians and medical workers. Now let's speak about doctors. I want to know, who didn't know the doctors: Sagalevich, Valavik, Pevsner, Narinskiy, and Spivak. I must mention the military doctor, Maria Gregorievna Aizenshtadt. When she was a prisoner of war in the concentration camp, she helped wounded people and she remained faithful to the Hippocratic Oath. Before the Second World War doctor assistant, Isay Krasovitzki, began his work in our city. He was a doctor assistant with a kind heart and the knowledge of a professor.

I walked slowly along the graves looking at the photographs and remember, remember, remember...yarmulka, yarmulka, and the beard of Iosif Volovika, and the grave of Berinski, directed my remembrances to those old Jews, who even in difficult times remained loyal to ancient Jewish traditions, respected the Torah, prayed, used only Kosher food, and communicated in the mother's tongue.<sup>42</sup> In spite of the building of three synagogues that were confiscated - one hundred year old Rabbi Tilman, Moshe Luboshitz, Zama Elinson, Lev Feller, Zama Feldman, and obviously all of the minion coming together at Shlensky's, where the shammes was Hersh Tzitovskiy, or at Zama Feldman and Ermonenka's place and felt themselves to be Jews. At the same time, they had a lot of friends of different nationalities with whom they lived heart to heart and respected each other. Those wise elders taught us how to be a man and how to be a Jew.

I want to remember some leaders of industry, brothers Anatoliy and Alexandr Zvenyiatzky, Mikhail Perelubskiy, Anatoly Glanz, Zinovi Yudovich; workers of the biggest factory, KEMF,<sup>43</sup> Semona Seraykova, Mordkhay Poliakov, Isaak Erenburg, and Felix Milshtein; and some good women: Alfimov and Furman.

And what about Jewish women! What beautiful women were Sara Shalita and Liza Strelnik. They died so young. What respect is deserved by the small frail old woman, Mondrus, who lost three sons during WWII, Elya, Zinovi, Naom, and Gregori, who became an invalid.

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<sup>42</sup> Yiddish.

<sup>43</sup> KEMF, possibly Konotop Electromotor factory.

Simple Jewish women and men, young and old, of different professions, barbers, plumbers, engineers, salesmen, believers in atheism... The first member of the Komsomol was Mikhail Galperin and the first vendor of the cinema from Chernigov Gubernya, who died when he was 91.<sup>44</sup> The baker, Solomon Zhesmer, and the cameraman, Lev Rudnik, book specialist Isral Pritikin, and photographer, Leib Glozshataen, and lawyers, Pismenny and Shargorodsky.

Some people can still remember what it meant, “Judovich shop,” such as “At Maniak,” and “At Gutman.” But those were not their private shops in Konotop. Those people put their love and heart into their work.

Do you remember the restaurant “Uncle Misha,” the owner of which was Mikhail Hotin or Moishe Raeva, when I was a boy, who told me about the speaking mastery of Trotsky, which he heard many times in the far past. And what about the tailors: Solomon Raev, Tzaley Vinigradov, and Moisei Raibenbakh. They were famous people of Konotop. I would like to name all of them by name, but it is impossible. Let's remember Mendl Sterenzon. He was a very skillful mechanic. What a kind person was Avraam Atkin. We must remember two brothers, twins, named Bogachki living through German capture in 1914, Levitan and Felzenshtain, running away from fascists in Austria, and Robert Leer. With difficult lives, Jan Hubner and fiddler virtuoso, Lev Levantovskiy, and other musicians, Iosif Apterman. Lea Zolotarova didn't learn how to speak Russian. She, trying to escape the pogroms of Denikin<sup>45</sup> and ended up in Konotop. Those kinds of people used to live in our town.

I was walking along the graves and when I saw unknown ones. I suddenly remembered that in Israel there are no graves of unknown soldiers...

A married couple, who came from Germany, was standing near one grave. When I saw them I remembered that thousands of people came from Australia, America, Canada, and Israel to that place. I was thinking about how in the past, a big Sumska' Jewish community of Konotop became

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<sup>44</sup> Possibly Mikhail Galperin was related to the Halperin ancestors of Robert Sherins' grandmother, Nechie Halperin (Ghalperin). Mikhail Galperin was probably born before 1900, in time to join the newly formed Komsomol about 1930.

<sup>45</sup> Denikin was a general of Tzar's army, who used to fight Communists during the civil war in the 1920's. At the same time he created pogroms to kill Jews.

smaller and smaller. A lot of people moved all over the world, but graves were still here...

I walked along the whole Jewish cemetery. The monuments with notes in Jewish ended. And the monuments with stars and crosses began...

All those monuments reminded us of who lived in our native Konotop, worked here, fell in love, joyful, created and dreamed, disappointed, and hoped for a better life, and believed...

Let God be with them! We must remember them because while we remember, we are living...

From “Lebn” to “Ester”

The 23<sup>rd</sup> of October 1993 is a special day in the history of the Jewish community in Konotop. That day in the house number 47 on Volochaevska Street, apartment 3, the family of Sofia Abramovna Raibembakh the people gathered for whom the destiny of Konotop's Jews was not indifferent. Those people still remembered that time when everyone could hear Jewish language, the Jewish holidays were celebrated, religious people could pray, matzos were prepared on Pasakh, and Jews knew very well what was a mitzvah, tzadeka, and tallis. On that day seventy people gathered for the purpose of uniting the community in order to help each other in difficult times, to study their ancient history, and languages, Hebrew and Yiddish, to revive our great culture and spirituality.

The initiators of this unification deserve to be mentioned here. First of all they were old persons: Mikhail Fedorovich Kerelikh, Semen Mikhailovich Peisakhovich, Alexander Ilich Pundik, David Naunovich Plaper. Elected to the first governing board of the community named, “Lebn,” were Arkadiy Sorin (religious affairs), Viacheslav Karpachevskiy (youth affairs), and Mark Karlin (general affairs), vice-chairman of this council were Gregoriy Petrushenko. Gregory Aizenshtat was elected as chairman of the board.

It is necessary to mention one more name, Leonid Volovik. He used to be the chairman of the board of the Jewish Community of Orla, a former inhabitant of Konotop, who shared his experience, which was very useful for us in our work.



It is a pity that life gave its own order and many of them are no longer with us in Konotop. The Kelerekh family moved to the USA, the Pesakhovich family went to Australia, Plapers moved to Russia, and the Sorins, Karlins and Karpachevski families moved to Israel, where five hundred Jews from Konotop are still living. But even from abroad all those people continue to be interested in the life of Jews here in Konotop. They write letters, call us, and visit and help us. They help us as much possible as they can.

Each year new active people were involved, who helped to revive the Jewish life in the town. Among them, the first chairman of the Jewish religious community, Robert Semenovich Agranovskiy. He was one of the initiators to immortalize the memory of the Konotopian victims of the Holocaust, first Hebrew teacher in Konotop's ulpan.<sup>46</sup> After his immigration to Israel, Arkadiy Veniaminovich Koniavskiy became the president of the Jewish community. He took the responsibility to put the cemetery in order, which he successfully accomplished. Nowadays he combines the community's principle responsibilities with the work for coordination of the social programs in the community center "Ester."

Emilia Azenshtat brings to people the knowledge of Jewish traditions and history. Esfir Rozenfeld was a teacher of the Yiddish class where members of the class try to revive their knowledge of our forgotten language. A lot of energy was given to the community, Lebn, and continue working successfully at the center, Ester, such as spouses Bella and Ruvim Bomshtein. Former chairman of the trustee council, Alexandr Levita, exercised a great deal of care for the people. Unfortunately, he died.

The director of the center, "Ester," tries to involve young people who, as he hopes, will continue the noble cause of revival of Jewish life in Konotop. One of them is Yuriy Golubkov, the head of religious programs, who is studying ancient Jewish religion and wants to bring it to others; and Margareta Stoyanova successfully manages patronage services.

Especially, we want to stress the new programs in the center, "Ester." The programs are: "Warm house" under the guidance of Mark Levita and "Day center" headed by Acia Levit. Acia Levit, even before the opening of the

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<sup>46</sup> Ulpan Akiva is a non-profit Educational Center, where modern Hebrew is taught is taught to new immigrants.

community center, granted her house for the needs of Konotop's Jews. Her house is very old, one hundred years, and it is situated on Shevchenko Street, where, the parcels had been distributed. In this house the guests, who visited the town, were accommodated and the board of the “Lebn” community met and conducted Shabbat services.

After six years from the time of the creation of the community “Lebn,” the Jews of Konotop have established the house-community center, “Ester,” where it is always warm and quiet for those who come to visit. Jewish life never stops over here.

There were...us, and there are...us.

At the beginning of XIX [19<sup>th</sup>] century there were living several Jews in Konotop. In 1847, 521 people lived in Konotop. In Konotop's Uyezd,<sup>47</sup> in 1861, had been living 1206 Jews, 566 men and 640 women. According to the census in 1897 among the 18,770 population in Konotop, there were 4425 Jews (25.3%). After the end of the Second World War, more than 2500; 1989, about 900; 1992, 750; 1995, 550; and 1999, about 300.

### **In Konotop I Saw Love** [Translation from Hebrew by Khia Ori, Israel,]

Konotop met me by sunny streets and nothing beckoned about what would happen after several minutes.

A special little walking excursion to the notable places of the town was organized for me. I saw a green park, streets that were asphalted and not asphalted as well, modern and decrepit houses. Even signs on the walls, posters, and street banners, were talking with me.

On one of the streets, where on both sides were standing one-story houses, stooped from age, wrinkles on the walls, strange things began to happen. Something hit me on the head. At the beginning, I thought something was falling from the mulberry trees growing on both sides of the road. But the hits became more frequent and it happened that it was hail accompanying the drizzle. We couldn't run anywhere and that's why we stood under the tree, which sheltered us from the hail, but not from rain. That rain added the

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<sup>47</sup> District.

sweet taste of mulberry to the taste of rainwater.

Soon the rain was over and the sky became clear. Everywhere was flooded with the streams of the sunshine. We were standing wet as if we took a bath in the river and the moisture on our faces was sweet.

I was taken to the building, which in a month was going to be a new community center. You ought to have a good imagination for seeing ulpan classes full of life where there was now only noise and dust of the construction.

When I came for the second time, some weeks later, the house was almost ready. One of the classrooms was ready to greet pupils. Other rooms were light and clean. And you didn't need any imagination to see that place full of people, young and old, who came there to study and have a rest, to get a consultation, and to be entertained, people arguing and listening. You know my heart is with them. I saw them all, although they hadn't come yet, because the building, which was being repaired for them, would be officially opened in only two weeks when I would be so far from that place.

And my heart was turned towards the people, who came to open the new classroom of ulpan. I was treated in their houses and they accompanied me to the places of the former pain and sorrow of the Jews of their town.

I saw two monuments to people killed by Nazis. Both of them were located on the territory of the military unit. We were followed by a Ukrainian officer. I saw stones that were crying. On the one of them I read the name in Hebrew of a Jewish woman, who died a long time ago. But that gravestone became the monument to all those who were killed. I couldn't find another one. I saw another stone full of silence. It was also a monument on an old grave maybe from some cemetery, which was destroyed by people and time. It was without a note. I saw the monument to all who were killed during the war on the territory of the aviation base.

A great dinner was prepared for us. Outside that house looked like a man with flabby shoulders and blind eyes, but inside it was full of light and love.

I had been in Konotop two times, but at the same time I felt that I had always been there. I felt myself as if I were at home, although I didn't know the language and was not acquainted with the people in an unfamiliar city.

The air around me was full of love. I experienced everything in my life: sorrow, merriment, and fear of the unknown disturbed me also. In that cemetery my ancestors were in peace. In those ditches of death were killed my relatives. And that loss was mine, too.

My parents, who belonged to the Zionist youth of the beginning of the century, left their houses and their families. They created the State of Israel for me. This was my own personal happiness. I didn't choose it. It chose me. It fell upon me from the hands of the sky. I thought I could have been born in Konotop, because I saw myself looking at the faces which were around me. Because I saw love there.

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Righteous of the World, Tetera, Melania Alexyevna.

On 26 June 2000, the decision of the special commission of the “Righteous of the World” of the Institute of Yad Vashem.

The decision of Yad Vashem, our countryman, Melania Alexyevna Tetera, as a sign of deepest gratitude for the health and for the help to Jewish people during the years of the Second World War, given the honorable title, “Righteous of the World” posthumously. In the period of the occupation of Konotop by German fascistic forces, she saved the life of two boys born of Jewish women. The mother of those Jewish children was shot by the fascists.

Photographs and titles:

Page 3: Konotop. End of the XIX century

The Jewish Cheta-Leguda Leib and the main street of Konotop.  
Berta Menahim- Rablans, Pevsner's clock, repairing workshop.

Page 4

Page 5: Building of the former synagogue on Yarmarochna Street. There is a department of the standardization and metrology nowadays.

Photo, which was made in Konotop in 1920. Second from the right side is Sima Denkovska, who is living in Chicago now. She is 90 years old.

Page 6: Pupils of the Jewish school No.5 in Konotop - one of the last graduations. There was a school No. 4 in that building after 1938.

Page 7: School No. 4. There the Jewish school No. 5 had been built by 1938

Page 9: Konotop's family of Slabodkin

Page 10: This building is called "Palestine." After the War it became a shelter for 400 Jews. There are only three of them living.

Page 12: Heads and participants of the program, "Day center"

Page 14: The director of the Community Center, Gregoriy Petrushenko, the coordinator of the social programs, the head of the board of Jewish religious community, Arkadiy Koniavskiy, and the head of the community programs, Ruvim Bomshtein, (from right to left) with Hanuksha, the present from the friends of Konotop's community, Temple Beth Israel synagogue in Chicago.

Page 15: Our holidays:

The candles light in our center weekly and talk a blessing above the wine  
and chal. We meet Shabbat.

In the photo: the teacher of the Jewish traditions, Emilia Aizenshtat, and the head of the religious programs, Yuriy Golubkov.

We celebrate the Jewish holidays Purim, Ahashverosh, and Ester

Often the representatives of Lubovich's Rebe attend our community. For two years Konotop's Jewish community has supported the friendship's ties with Temple Beth Israel synagogue, (Skokie, Illinois, USA). Ravine Michael Vainberg presents to Konotop's Mayor, G. Vasilenko, the message from the Mayor of Skokie.

Page 21-22: Partisans and Under-grounders:

Soldiers, who were killed during the liberation of Konotop and buried in the brotherly grave (423 people) in the Virovske cemetery.

Soldiers, who were killed in the concentration camp and buried in the brotherly grave in the Uspensko-Troicka St.

The Jews of Konotop, who were killed by fascists during the occupation.

The Jews who were killed by fascists and buried in the Virovskoe cemetery.

Jews who outlived the occupation.

Heroes of the Soviet Union.

Every year on the Victory Day the delegation of Municipal Council pays a tribute of respect to the victims of catastrophe.

Kaddish to the killed read by the main [rabbi of Kiev's synagogue] ravine of Kyiv's synagogue, Brodskly Moshe - Reuven Asman.

Page 21: Uspensko-Troicka Street. One of the sacred places in Konotop, grave and the monument to 257 Jews, who were brought from the other places and killed during the period of occupation. The monument was erected by the relatives just after the ending of the war. There is only one exact surname, Levitan, daughter of ravine [rabbi].

Page 23: Cemetery on the Virovska Street. Jewish map. The representative of "Joint" from Jerusalem, Doctor Aron Vais, (the third from the right) during the visit to the Jewish cemetery.