

“Kałuszyn” - Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Poland, Volume IV (Kałuszyn, Poland)

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Kałuszyn, Poland
(County of Minsk Mazowiecki, District of Warsaw)

Translated by **Miriam Bulwar David-Hay**

Year	Population	Jews
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1765	?	346
1827	1,819	1,455
1857	4,234	3,667
1897	8,428	6,419
1921	6,122	5,033
1931	~8,800	~5,200

The first information about Kaluszyn is from the 15th century. In the middle of that century the settlement developed into a center of commerce and trade. In 1673 the number of residents was about 200. Until the beginning of the 18th century, Kaluszyn was a village under the ownership of the noble Opacki family. In 1718, one of the Opacki family members received permission from King Augustus II to turn Kaluszyn into a city. After some years, when Kaluszyn had established regular market days, the Opacki family sold the settlement, together with the surrounding villages, to the Rodzinski family. After the Third Partition of Poland, in 1795, Kaluszyn was given to the rule of Prussia. In 1807, the city was included in the Duchy of Warsaw, and from 1815 until the First World War it was in the area of the Kingdom of Congress Poland. Kaluszyn developed in the 19th century when it was under the ownership of General Rodzinski and the Duchess Josefa Zamojska.

In 1889, a fire broke out in Kaluszyn and many houses that were built of wood went up in flames. In 1902, even before the residents had finished rebuilding their houses, another fire broke out. Also in that year many residents of Kaluszyn perished in a typhus epidemic. During World War I, Kaluszyn was conquered by the German army, which remained there from 1915 until it withdrew in 1918.

A Jewish settlement existed in Kaluszyn even when it was still a village. In 1714, even before Kaluszyn was granted the status of a city, the Jews of Kaluszyn paid the kehilla [*Jewish community council*] of Wegrow, to which it belonged, 500 “goldens” [*zlotys*] head tax. In 1717, 1718 and 1719, Kaluszyn continued to belong to the Wegrow kehilla. In the 1760s, Kaluszyn became an independent community and covered several rural settlements. According to partial figures from the 1765 census, the number of Jews in the community that year reached 566 souls [*346 in the city and a further 220 in the surrounding villages*]. The community had a rabbi, a cantor [*chazan*], and three beadles [*shamashim*]. In 1787, the Jews of Kaluszyn paid 600 “goldens” head tax. The Jews of Kaluszyn were occupied in the forestry industry, in the production and distribution of alcoholic drinks, and in trades. Tradesmen mostly worked in traditional Jewish occupations such as tailoring, hat-making, fur-making, and shoemaking. In the 18th century several of Kaluszyn's Jews managed large-scale commerce in metals, and at the end of that century they supplied metal to the weapons and arms factories in Warsaw.

The Jewish settlement in Kaluszyn grew especially because the Jews were not placed under limitations on their places of residence or employment, and they were also permitted to purchase immovable assets. In the days of the Duchy of Warsaw, the Jews of Kaluszyn owned 101 houses.

Already in the first half of the 19th century many craftsmen had large workshops; especially in the cases of tailors, furriers, shoemakers and the various professionals in the wood industry. They would bring their products to fairs in the neighboring towns and sell them to the peasants.

A special branch of Jewish trade was the weaving factories for tallitot [*prayer shawls*]. The weavers specialized in their work and at the end of the 19th century the tallitot they produced had a name across Poland. The tallit trade developed in time into an industry. At the end of the 19th century the town had three tallit factories that employed more than 400 workers and apprentices. In 1869, the value of their production reached 5,620 rubles.

In the same years, many small factories were also established in Kaluszyn, among them two tanneries (in 1870 the value of their production reached 3,300 rubles), an oil factory (in 1869 the value of its production was 2,816 rubles), a vinegar factory, two flour mills, and a factory for the production of pots and pans (established in 1916).

Most workers and clerks (accountants, storemen) who worked in the industrial factories were Jews. Jewish contractors would supply the army stationed in the area with commodities manufactured in the factories and

workshops of Kaluszyn. The Jewish community in Kaluszyn was also known for having, until the First World War and even afterwards, a high proportion of workers in the building trade -- among them builders, plasterers, carpenters, welders, locksmiths, glaziers, and more. In the food business worked several dozen butchers and bakers. Among the Jews of the city there were also cobblers, rope-makers, watchmakers, barbers, book binders, and photographers. Similarly, there were also in the city carters, porters and Jewish day workers. The music of the klezmerim [*traditional musicians*], who were a family group, was also in demand in other towns in the area.

Ever since Kaluszyn became an independent community, traditional Jewish institutions had existed in it. In the 1830s, the serving rabbi in Kaluszyn was R. Chaim Yehuda Epsztein, who arrived in 1834 from Sokolow. He served in Kaluszyn for 40 years (and passed away in Kaluszyn in 1874). His name is known to many for his essays "Birkat Chaim" [*"Blessing of Life"*] and "Pri Chaim" [*"Fruit of Life"*].

In 1852, R. Shlomo Zalman Altshuler took the rabbi's seat in Kaluszyn. We have more detailed information about the term of R. Yechiel Michal Michelson, known to the people by the nickname "the rabbi of Minsk." He served at the same time in Minsk Mazowiecki and in Siennicka. His regular seat was in Kaluszyn, where he served from the 1870s. R. Yechiel Michal was one of the patriarchs of the well-known Michelson family that led the Kaluszyn community until the last years of its existence. R. Yechiel Michal passed away in 1913.

In the 1880s and 1890s, the rabbi of Kaluszyn was R. Moshe David of Kuzhnitz [*Koziniece*]. He also managed the court of the Admor [*the head of a Hassidic stream*] in the city. In 1896-1902, the community was served by R. Meir Shalom Rabinowicz, author of "Nahar Shalom" [*"River of Peace"*] and grandson of the "Holy Jew" of Przysucha [*Rabbi Yaakov Yitzhak Rabinowicz*]. After his death, R. Yehezkiel Sztulman, who had previously served in Stanislawow, was appointed the city's rabbi. Rabbi Sztulman passed away in Kaluszyn in 1911. The last rabbi to serve in Kaluszyn was R. Shmuel Kopel Hachohen Kligberg. In the 1880s R. Shmuel Kopel had been appointed a dayan [*rabbinical court judge*] and a moreh tzedek [*"teacher of justice," a halachic decisor*] in Kaluszyn, and in 1913 he was chosen as Kaluszyn's rabbi and served as such until 1935.

With the growth of Hassidism, different Hassidic streams penetrated Kaluszyn. In the first decades of the 19th century, the influence of the Hassids of Vorki [*Warka*] was especially strong. One of the Hassids of Warka in Kaluszyn was Mottel Michelson, grandson of R. Yechiel Michal. Mottel Michelson was a forestry merchant and in charge of the city's revenues. He stood at the head of the community and during his term the divisions grew between the Hassidim and the Mitnagdim in the city. In 1844, Mottel Michelson was among those who supported the program to bring Jews into agricultural work. Toward the end of the 19th century, there were in Kaluszyn shtiebelech belonging to the Hassids of Warka, Koziniece, Strykow, Ger [*Gora Kalwaria*], Parysow, Kolbiel, and others. Kaluszyn was at that time, and until the Second World War, the seat of the Admors of the Mogielnica dynasty: R. Elhanan and his son Zeligel, known as the Admors of Kaluszyn; R. Naftali Shapira, son-in-law of R. Zeligel (and grandson of the rabbi of Ropczyce) filled the place of rabbi and head dayan in the last days of the community and went through all the torments that befell the community of Kaluszyn in the years of the Holocaust (he perished in the Shoah).

In the second half of the 19th century, the Jewish community of Kaluszyn became involved in numerous activities in the fields of social and public life. In those years welfare and mutual assistance societies were formed in Kaluszyn: Bikur Holim [*"Visiting the Sick"*], Linat Hatzedek [*medical assistance*], Gmilut Hasadim [*"Acts of Kindness"*], Hevrat Bachurim [*Torah study for boys*], Hevrat Mishnayot [*Mishnah study*], and others.

In the first decade of the 20th century, the first trade unions were established in the city. These unions had a social-religious character. The first social-professional union in Kaluszyn was the Union of Tradesmen For the Production of Tallitot. Several of the union members became wealthy and established their own larger factories, but despite this continued to belong to the society and to pray in the union's prayer house. Another important society that operated in the field of mutual assistance and welfare was Hevrat Ahim [*"Society of Brothers"*]. In the first year of its founding (1909), it had 30 members. The society founded the Gmilut Hasadim Fund and one of its members donated 50 rubles to it. Hevrat Ahim granted loans to its members and also to the needy who were not members. In the same years, Hevrat Ahiezer was also established, which assisted the poor to obtain medical care. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the community maintained its traditional-religious character. As an industrial city with a proletariat, Kaluszyn had comfortable conditions for the development of an extensive workers' movement both in the general

population and in the Jewish one.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Polish social-democratic party SDKPL bought influence among the Polish workers' public, while among Jewish workers and tradesmen the Bund strengthened. The Bund's branch in Kaluszyn was founded in 1905 and some of its members took part in the revolutionary events in Kaluszyn that year. Strikes broke out in the factories and workshops in the city, accompanied by demonstrations. Poles and Jews alike took part in the demonstrations.

A strike began in Kaluszyn by employees, most of them apprentices of the tailors and shoemakers. The work day in these trades lasted 14 to 16 hours and the wages were not paid on time and were even cut arbitrarily. The strikers demanded that their employers shorten the work day and pay the apprentices full wages. The strike was joined by the workers from the two leather processing factories (about 80 people), the two fur factories (about 200 people) and the workers of the tallit factories. The demonstrations in Kaluszyn were dispersed by the police, and many Bund activists were arrested.

In the period of the Reaction, after the 1905-1906 revolution, the revolutionary groups in Kaluszyn crumbled due to persecution by the authorities. In the years before World War I, a fall in the Jewish population of Kaluszyn was noted; many, especially young people, emigrated from it because they could not see their future there. Most left for Western countries and the United States.

With the outbreak of the First World War many Kaluszyn Jews were conscripted to the Russian army and many families of conscripts lost their breadwinners. A committee to help the families of conscripts was established in the city. The economic situation worsened even further after the conquest of the city by the German army in 1915. The Germans imposed heavy taxes on the populace and confiscated property. Unemployment grew among the workers from day to day. Against this, the war years gave a boost to the social life in the city. The political parties and public organizations renewed their activities. Newly re-established were branches of the Bund, of the S.S. [*Zionist Socialist*] party, and of Poalei Zion (1917). A number of Jews were members of the Polish social-democratic party SDKPL. At the same time, a number of trade unions and educational and cultural associations were founded. The workers' parties established a grocery and a kitchen where unemployed workers received hot meals.

Until the beginning of World War I, most Jewish children [*boys*] studied in chadarim and in the Talmud Torah. In 1916, at the initiative of the Zionist organizations, a modern Hebrew school was established. Several years later the school was transferred to the supervision of Tarbut [*Hebrew Zionist educational network*]. A kindergarten was also established in the city.

The cultural activities surrounded the adults too. Next to the Hebrew school evening classes for the study of the Hebrew language opened. The Bund branch in Kaluszyn held evening classes in Yiddish. In 1916, at the initiative of the Tzukunft cultural and educational society of the Bund, a library was established, and next to it a reading hall. After some time the library split into two libraries, one belonging to the Bund and the other to Poalei Zion.

During this period, relations between the Jews and the Polish population in the city were generally proper. In 1916, for the first time in the history of the city, a local council was elected. Eight out of the 12 members were Jews -- representatives of the merchants, industry owners, and the educated. A Pole was elected as mayor and a Jew, Moshe Czernicki, was elected as his deputy. Members of organizations and branches of parties in Kaluszyn were in constant contact with their friends in neighboring towns. In 1917, a fire broke out in the town of Kolbiel; the Jews of Kaluszyn immediately organized help for those affected. The members of Poalei Zion especially stood out. The drama club that operated in Kaluszyn performed in Minsk Mazowiecki and in other places, and its earnings were dedicated to the needy in Kolbiel.

Between the two world wars

With the renewal of Polish rule in 1918, many young men were conscripted into the Polish army. At the time of the war between Poland and Soviet Russia, in 1920, the Red Army conquered Kaluszyn and held it for eight days. On

the eve of the conquest of the city, after the Polish army had left the city and there was no one in control, a self-defense militia organized in Kaluszyn, in which both Jews and Poles took part. With the entry of the Bolsheviks, a revolutionary committee was established and Poles and Jews were appointed as members. At the same time, the Bolsheviks arrested some of the city council members and some of the militia members, Jews and Poles. The local priest was also arrested. Those arrested were accused of activity on behalf of the Polish army, and were transferred to the prison in Siedlce. They were released only after the rapid withdrawal of the Red Army.

After the retreat of the Soviets from the city, soldiers from the units of General [Jozef] Haller and local thugs began to riot against the Jews. The rioters also turned their hands to looting the shops and bakeries. Many Kaluszyn Jews who left the city at the time of the withdrawal of the Red Army were murdered on the roads by Polish soldiers and rioters. Not far from the city the bodies of a Jewish couple were discovered. They were brought to Kaluszyn for burial. In a village close to Kaluszyn, 23 Jewish residents of Kaluszyn who had left their houses at the time of the Red Army's withdrawal were murdered. The Jewish parliamentarian Noach Prylucki appeared in the Sejm (the Polish parliament) and demanded that the crime be investigated. An investigative committee came to the place and the bodies of the murdered were brought to the Kaluszyn cemetery for burial. But even after the investigation, the persecutions did not cease. The authorities accused many of Kaluszyn's Jews of cooperating with the Bolsheviks. Quite a few Jews were arrested by the secret police and were brought to the prison in Siedlce. On the 20th of August, 1920, in accordance with a judgment by the military court in Warsaw, Kaluszyn residents Shlomo Popowski, Shmuel Szternberg and Shaul Gryziak were executed.

As well as the persecutions and riots that were their lot, many of Kaluszyn's Jews also suffered from the fire that broke out in the city that year; 60 houses went up in flames. Housing conditions for most of Kaluszyn's Jews were in any case poor. Almost all the houses in the city were built of wood and the apartments in which most Kaluszyn Jews lived comprised two or three rooms. There was no water supply system in Kaluszyn and no sewerage system. The fires that frequently broke out made the residents' situation worse. In 1937, tens of families remained without a roof over their heads because of a fire that broke out in March that year.

The war between Poland and Soviet Russia caused significant destruction to the city, but with its end the Jews of Kaluszyn were able to keep up economic activity. Most of the industrial factories and workshops were under the ownership of Jews, and between the two world wars most of Kaluszyn's Jews continued to make a living from their work in industry, building and trades. With the renewal of economic activity, organizations and institutions for economic assistance and mutual help were established. The workers and tradesmen organized under a united professional association that contained divisions for the different branches of employment. The first to organize in a professional union were the wood carvers, and they were joined by the carpenters. The union was established in 1924. Most of its members supported the Poalei Zion party. Against this, the workers' union in the branch of the needle [tailors] and furriers were given to the influence of the Bund. In 1929, the Union of Workers in the Textile Branch was formed and was joined by the employees in tallit production. The workers in the leather processing workshops, stitchers, and shoemakers organized in their own unions, as did workers employed in the production of brushes, transportation, and more. All these unions were bound together in a central professional union.

In 1921, the Einikeit [Unity] cooperative was established in Kaluszyn, where workers could buy groceries at cheaper prices. In 1924, the Jewish professional union held a strike by shoemakers employed in the workshops and also by furriers working in the factories. The strikers demanded that the workshop and factory owners shorten their work day from 12 to eight hours. In 1929, the union held a strike of workers in tallit production; their demands were that the factory owners pay the workers their wages at fixed times.

After World War I, almost all the political parties that operated at that time in Poland established branches in Kaluszyn. The Zionist Federation was represented in all its streams: General Zionists, Poalei Zion-Right, Poalei Zion-Left, Mizrahi (whose branch was established in 1920). The Poalei Zion-Right branch, which was established in 1928, numbered hundreds of members. Both the S.S. [Zionist Socialist] party, [and] the Palestinian Workers party had a hold on the workers.

The increasing impoverishment of the Jewish workers and tradesmen and the quarrels and conflicts between the various Zionist party branches in Kaluszyn caused many members to begin abandoning the Zionist movement and joining the non-Zionist left-wing parties. This trend gained particularly in the 1930s. In that period cells were

established in Kaluszyn of Hashomer Hatzair (in 1920), Hehalutz Hatzair (which united with Hashomer Hatzair in 1928), and Freiheit (Dror, in 1933).

In 1920, a hachsharah [*training prior to making aliyah*] group of Hashomer Hatzair organized at the farm of Reuven Michelson near the city. In 1924, a branch of Hehalutz opened in Kaluszyn, and established a hachsharah center in the city; it was joined by 30 members. In 1935, a Gordonia hachsharah kibbutz was organized. But even among the ultra-Orthodox there were several lovers of Zion. Yehezkiel Hendel, of the Hassids of Jablonna, made aliyah to Eretz Israel and was one of the founders of Kfar Hassidim in the Zebulon Valley.

It is possible to learn about the balance of power among the different streams of the Zionist movement in Kaluszyn from the results of the elections to the 21st Zionist Congress, which were held in 1939. In 1939, 318 shekels were purchased in Kaluszyn [*acquisition of membership in the Zionist Congress and the right to vote required the purchase of one "shekel"*]. The votes were distributed as follows: Eretz Israel Haovedet 92, Poaeli Zion-Left 92, Mizrahi 73, General Zionists 32, Et Livnot 26, Hanoar Hapoel 3.

Among the non-Zionist parties in Kaluszyn was a branch of Agudat Israel, based mostly on the shtiebelech in the city, and the branches of the Bund and the youth Bund, organized in the movements Tzukunft and Skif (1926). In 1935, Tzukunft had about 200 members. In the summer the Bund organized activities for children. Many youths were drawn to the Communist party, which operated illegally.

Until the period between the two world wars most Jews in Kaluszyn lived traditional-religious lifestyles. In the 1924 elections to the community council, comprising 12 members, Agudat Israel received six mandates, Mizrahi (together with the union of tradesmen) received five mandates, and the General Zionists one mandate. The Bund did not take part in the elections that year. In the elections that took place in the 1930s, representatives of the Bund also won places on the community council.

In the first elections to the city council after World War I, held in 1927, the Jews of Kaluszyn received 17 out of 24 mandates: Agudat Israel 5, General Zionists and Mizrahi 4, Bund 4, Poalei Zion-Left 2, tradesmen 2, unaffiliated 1, Communists 1. It is important to note that in 1921 the suburbs of Kaluszyn were appended to the city and in the wake of this the number of Poles in the city grew. In the city council elections held in 1935, 10 Jews were elected out of 16 representatives: Agudat Israel received 4 seats, Bund 4, tradesmen 1, Communists 1. The United Polish List received six seats. Despite the majority the Jews had in the city council, a Pole was elected for the job of mayor.

Between the two world wars, the Jews of Kaluszyn exhibited great activity in the field of education. As well as the ultra-Orthodox and the Talmud Torah, an elementary school founded by Tarbut [*Hebrew Zionist educational network*] continued to function. The Agudat Israel branch established a school for boys with the name Yesodei Torah; the girls studied at Beit Yaakov. There were also three kindergartens in the city -- Tarbut, Agudat Israel, and the Kinderheim (children's residence) founded by CYSZO [*the Central Yiddish School Organization*].

Dozens of the community's sons, and also those from other cities, studied at the yeshiva headed by R. Zvi Danziger (perished in the Shoah). In addition to this, the children studied at a Polish state school. The workers' parties were also concerned with education and culture among the adults. In 1923, there were in Kaluszyn evening classes for adults run by Poalei Zion and by the Bund; the Hehalutz branch held courses for the study of the Hebrew language. In the same year, two libraries operated in the city: one belonging to Poalei Zion and the other to the Bund. The libraries were also used as a meeting place for party members and to hold literary and drama activities, lectures, and literary balls. In 1926, the Bund established a sports club called Morgenstern, and within its framework gymnastic and soccer groups operated.

The anti-Semitism that increased in the environment in the 1930s made its mark in Kaluszyn too. The economic boycott announced on Jewish trade and commerce weighed on the Jews of Kaluszyn. Many of the merchants and tradesmen who used to sell their products to the peasants on market days that were held in the towns and villages in the area suffered severe damage, and in the wake of this the number of needy relying on the public purse grew. There were also cases of attacks by hooligans on Jews found walking in the town park and outside the city.

In the time of World War II

In the first days after the outbreak of the war, the first refugees from Warsaw began to appear in Kaluszyn, hoping to pass the days of the war there. On the 10th of September, 1939, the Germans bombed Kaluszyn. In the bombing 42 people (mostly Jews) perished, and many were injured. They were the first victims in the city. The next day, September 11, the vanguard soldiers of the German army entered the city. They set a number of houses on fire, and the blaze spread quickly and took hold of almost all the houses in the city. Residents who did not manage to escape from their homes were burned alive. The number of Jews who perished in those first days was around 1,000; among them were many refugees. On the same day, there was a battle next to the city between a Polish army unit and the invaders. Participating in the battle was a group of soldiers who had organized on the spot at the initiative and under the command of a Pole named Krauze, the commander of the firefighters in Kaluszyn. Among the fighters were also young Jews who had completed army service: Judel Kalikowicz, Matys Laufer, the son of the tailor Rozenberg, and others. The battle continued for several hours. With the fall of night, the Germans were forced to retreat. They had many losses. But the next day, September 12, the Germans returned with increased forces and this time conquered the city.

Immediately upon their entry to the city, as revenge for resisting and for their heavy losses, the Germans began persecuting Jews. They concentrated all the Jews in the market square and led them along Warszawska Road in the direction of the church that stood outside the city. Among those arrested was the elderly Admor R. Naftali Shapira, the last rabbi of the Kaluszyn community. The soldiers stood on both sides of the road with sticks, whips and rifles in their hands, and beat those who passed by them. Anyone who fell was shot on the spot. For three days and three nights the Germans held the Jews imprisoned in the church without food and almost without water. Inside the church were also some Poles who had been arrested by the invaders. The Germans robbed the Jews of all the valuables and money they found in their possession. Those days were the days of Rosh Hashanah 5700. On the second day of Rosh Hashanah, the prisoners were freed.

In the first days of the war, as stated, most of the houses in the city were burned, including the Beit Midrash, shtiebelech of the Hassidim, and other public buildings. The Jews tried to collect the bodies of the victims that were scattered around the city, and to bring them to burial. The Germans forced the Jews of Kaluszyn to also bury the bodies of the Polish soldiers who had fallen in the battle in the fields around the city. To the carts loaded with bodies the Germans tethered Jews instead of horses, and lashed them with whips.

In the winter of 1939-1940, there were some 4,000 Jews in Kaluszyn. Because most of the houses in the city had been burned, everyone was forced to crowd into the few that remained whole. These houses were in Warszawska Road at the edge of the city. The Jews were also concentrated in a portion of the Beit Midrash that still stood, in the Bund clubhouse that remained undamaged, in the Talmud Torah house, in the leather processing factory, and in a number of other buildings. All the rooms were packed with Jews (according to testimonies, 15 to 20 people were squashed into every room). Because of the severe crowding and the poor sanitary conditions, a typhus epidemic broke out. Jewish public figures established a hospital, but it was not enough to help the needy, and many died of diseases that did not let up until the last days of the community's existence.

Throughout this time the persecutions and the abuses continued to grow. Forced labor, the plucking of beards, looting, were all daily phenomena. The anti-Semitic Poles also joined the conquerors and together with the Germans looted everything that came to hand. In these conditions many Jews tried to flee to the area that was under the control of the Red Army. In this way many Kaluszyn residents arrived in other cities and towns, such as Minsk Mazowiecki, Wegrow, Mrozy, Dobrze, Rembertow, and also to various villages. The wanderings of Kaluszyn's Jews continued until the summer of 1940. At the same time, refugees arrived in Kaluszyn from other places that had been conquered by the Germans.

At the end of 1939, the Germans brought more than 1,000 Jews to Kaluszyn who had been expelled from Pabianice and from Kalisz, and the housing crisis worsened even further. In November 1939, the Germans ordered Mayor Plywaczewski to appoint a Jewish council (Judenrat) numbering 12 people. Most members of the Judenrat were past members of the Jewish community council. Among them were Reuven Michelson (head of the community), the dentist and Zionist businessman Avraham Gamzu, and Moshe Kisielnicki. At the same time a Jewish police force was established. To head the police, a refugee from Lodz, Rabinowicz, was appointed. The police were forced to

carry out all the orders of the Germans. Next to the Judenrat a sanitary department was established whose job was to maintain cleanliness in the city and manage the Jewish hospital.

The Judenrat's main job was to meet all the demands of the Germans, and along with this its members did their best to protect the local Jews in times of danger. In winter 1940, the Gestapo arrested 10 Jews and demanded that they pay 10,000 zlotys [*ransom*]. The Judenrat handed over the money and thus prevented their execution. During the interim days of Passover in 1940, the Germans took 38 young Jews from Kaluszyń to forced labor drying out swamps next to Biala Podlaska. Only after great efforts was the Judenrat able to arrange the release of these people, who had reached the point of zero strength. In 1942, deportations of the Jews of Kaluszyń to the extermination camps began. The doctor [*dentist*] Avraham Gamzu, who was then head of the Judenrat, refused to deliver lists of Jews to the Germans, and because of this he was shot and killed by the Gestapo. It has been said that the Germans demanded of Reuven Michelson that he give them the synagogue so they could stable their horses there. Michelson refused to do this and replied proudly: "I built this synagogue myself and as long as I am alive you will not turn it into a stable."

The first order that was given to the Judenrat was to supply the German gendarmerie, which was housed in Mrozy, with apartments and to equip them with furniture, blankets, and various items. This was how the Germans behaved every time they opened new offices; the Jews were forced to supply them with everything demanded in furniture and equipment. In December 1939, all Jews aged 12 and up were ordered to wear white ribbons with a blue Star of David on them.

Although no Gestapo station was established in Kaluszyń, the German command was stationed in Mrozy and from there the Germans would come to Kaluszyń. But Kaluszyń had a Polish police station that cooperated with the German conquerors. The Gestapo people and the gendarmerie who came to Kaluszyń every week imposed heavy fees on the Jews of the city, took hostages, and even executed people. They always found Polish informers who assisted in persecuting Jews and even in acts of murder.

In the summer of 1940, a group of Kaluszyń Jews was taken to forced labor in the area of Janow Podlaski. Many of them came back several months later sick and broken. At the end of the summer in 1940, the Kaluszyń ghetto was established. In the beginning it was an open ghetto, but not for long. At the beginning of 1941, when the Germans started intensive preparations ahead of the planned attack on the Soviet Union, there was an increase in the frequency of abductions for forced labor, and leaving the ghetto was prohibited. Every day men and women were forced to present themselves for work digging ditches and felling trees in the forests. Germans and Poles supervised the work and frequently abused the Jews, and more than once beat them to death with murderous blows. There were also cases of Jews being shot while they were working.

At the same time, civilian Germans appeared in Kaluszyń, workers from the Wolff und Goebbels company, which had been tasked with repairing the road and bridges between Warsaw and Brisk [*Brest*]. To this work were taken all the Jewish men, including the elderly aged over 70. On one of those days, around 600 Kaluszyń Jews, young and old, including some Judenrat members, were taken 11 kilometers from the city and ordered to clean the road between Minsk and Dobro of heavy snow. As they worked, the Jews were beaten without pause and there were some cases of murder. During those same days, the Admor R. Naftali Shapira and the yeshiva head R. Zvi Danziger, together with their families, arrived in Kaluszyń from Minsk Mazowiecki. R. Naftali died after a short time; R. Zvi Danziger perished in the liquidation of the ghetto in Minsk Mazowiecki, on August 21, 1942.

In the spring of 1941, a squad of German soldiers arrived from Janow, next to Minsk Mazowiecki. The German soldiers began destroying the ruins that had remained in the city since the fire in September 1939. The stones were taken to Janow and used in the building of an airport that the Germans had begun constructing there, and also to pave roads over the border with the Soviet Union. On May 5, 1941, the Germans bombed the Great Synagogue in Kaluszyń, and its stones too were used in paving roads. Headstones taken from the Jewish cemeteries, the old one and the new, were used for the same purpose. Some of the stones were ground into pebbles. For these jobs the Germans used the Jews who remained in Kaluszyń, the elderly, women, and children aged 10 and up. In June 1941, there were about 4,000 Jews in Kaluszyń, 324 of them refugees or Jews expelled from other places. On November 7, 1941, 300 young women and several dozen men were taken to work in Zaleszczycki, and what their fate was is unknown. In winter 1942, the Jews were ordered to surrender all the furs that remained in their hands.

On the eve of Yom Kippur, as evening fell, gendarmes arrived in Kaluszyń and ordered Judenrat member Moshe Kisielnicki to immediately gather 500 men aged 14 to 60 who destined for expulsion. But when only 300 presented themselves (the rest being employed in German factories) ghetto commander Schmidt shot and killed Moshe Kisielnicki.

On September 25, 1942, the eve of Sukkot, it was the turn of the Kaluszyń ghetto to be liquidated. Hundreds of German gendarmes and Polish police surrounded the ghetto. More than 3,000 Jews were taken out of their houses and concentrated in the market square. Those who were too ill to walk were shot in their apartments; everyone who tried to flee was shot on the spot. The Jews were led to the Mrozy train station, crammed into freight carriages, and transported to the Treblinka extermination camp. For a short time the Germans kept 30 tradesmen alive in Kaluszyń, most of them furriers who worked in Alter Moshe Guzik's fur factory, which was transferred to the ownership of the Volksdeutsch [*ethnic German*] Szardzinski. After a short time, when the work was finished, the German [Szardzinski] gave the 30 Jewish workers over to the hands of the Gestapo, and they too were destined to be sent to the extermination camp, as their families had been before them. Among them was also the son of factory owner Guzik. As they were being transported to Treblinka, several of the Jews jumped from the fast-moving train, but only six of them survived.

According to an order the Germans published on October 28, 1942, Kaluszyń was included among six cities in the Warsaw district intended for use as a place of housing for Jews (the cities were: Warsaw, Kaluszyń, Kosow, Sobolew, Siedlce and Rembertow). In the Kaluszyń ghetto that had been emptied of its inhabitants and "rehabilitated," the Germans concentrated the Jews who remained in forced labor camps in the villages near the city – Biazork^[1], Lenki, Sucha, Mienia and Kopylow.

On December 1, 1942, around 2,500 Jews found themselves in the new ghetto. On December 9, 1942, the ghetto was surrounded by the Gestapo and gendarmerie, Polish police, and Ukrainian and Latvian squads. The Jews were brought to Mrozy and from there sent to Treblinka. Many of them were shot on the way.

From the Kaluszyń community, very few remained alive: those who succeeded in escaping to the Soviet Union, and a few who found places to hide in the villages, with Poles who placed their own lives in danger in order to save them.

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Translator's note

1. Could not confirm place name [Return](#)



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