

Berezino: Recollections of Matthew Elkin

Submitted by his daughter, Frances A. Bock, Ph.D.*

I was born in the small town of Beresn (present day Byerazino, Belarus), in the region which used to be known as White Russia. It was a very nice little town during the summer and during the winter, but in the spring there was so much mud in the streets that you had to have boots to go from one side of the street to the other, although we had sidewalks made out of wood.



Main street, Byerazino. It must be spring - notice the mud.

We had the Beresina River running alongside of the town and we were surrounded by woods. The woods were known by the name of *Yebushchina* and they belonged to a Polish count by the name of Potocki. Lumber rights to the forest were leased to a wealthy Jewish family named Zeldovich, who were related in some way to my family.

My oldest brother, Folya, worked in the forest. He had a hatchet and he used to mark the trees that were supposed to be cut down, and then the lumberjacks would cut the trees, take off the branches and take them down to the river. Then they would build them into rafts - about five or six layers high - build a nice big house on top, and my brother, with about 100 peasants, sailed the rafts down the Beresina and the Dnieper to the southern part of Russia (Ukraine) that didn't have any woods.



Potocki Manor on the Beresina River

The river was very famous. Napoleon in the War of 1812 was defeated right there in my hometown. How do we know about it? Because they were digging a

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Byerazino/>

basement for a fellow who had an ice cream parlor and needed ice for the summer to keep his merchandise fresh and ice also for the sodas. So they found French coins and sabres and some remains of bones, human or animal.

I suppose in this country they would take it to a museum but in my home town, whoever felt like grabbing it, they grabbed it. That's how we know that Napoleon was defeated in my home town. As a matter of fact, in the Second World War, the German Army also was defeated in my home town on the river front.



**Market square with small shops in
Byerazino**

*Reprinted with the author's permission. Originally published in ROOTS-KEY, The Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles, Summer 2008.