

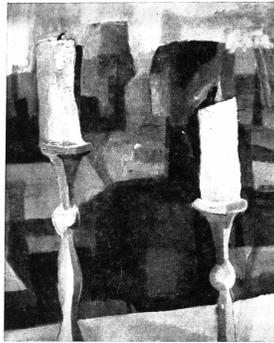
Baranovich

בארנאָװיטש

The Trilogy

ספר זכרון בארנאוויטש

The Baranovich Memorial Book



הרות לנירתי" טהם יעקב רוזנבוים

A Trilogy Comprised of

The Baranovich Yizkor Book, Tel Aviv 1953

Baranovich in Martyrdom & Resistance, Joseph Foxman, Editor, New York 1964

The Struggle to Stay Alive by the Jews of Baranovich, Nechama Zukerman, Publisher, Israel 1992

English Translation Prepared and Published by

Jacob Solomon Berger



Mahwah, New Jersey, USA
2012

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Other Books by Jacob Solomon Berger

The Zelva Memorial Book
The Book of Remembrances
The Dereczin Memorial Book
The Volkovysk Memorial Book: A Trilogy
The Zamość Memorial Book
The Szczepreszyn Memorial Book
The Cieszanow Memorial Book
The Tomaszow-Lubelski Memorial Book
The Belica Memorial Book

Published in the United States
by Jacob Solomon Berger
Mahwah, New Jersey

Printed in the United States of America

DEDICATION

These I shall remember...

אלה אזכרה...

I remember those who came before me, who had an important impact on my life, my thinking, and sense of family values, and who have, over the past decade, gone to their eternal rest. The images are taken from those happy moments, when we came together at family weddings.

My mother **Sarah Freed Berger** (1913 - 2006), who, as a two year-old infant during the first months of the First World War, lost her hearing, but survived a typhus epidemic, in her birthplace of Zelva in Eastern Poland (today Belarus), that killed her six year-old brother Boruch. She would live to come to America as a young girl, though her life would be fraught with personal frustration and lack of fulfilment. She brought me into this world, lived to dance at her granddaughter's wedding, and saw the birth of many great-grandchildren.



Sarah Freed Berger

From Left to Right:



"Aunt Bea," "Uncle George," Moshe

Beatrice Melnick (1920 - 2011), daughter of my Great-uncle Isidore Freed, who was responsible for extracting our family from Eastern Europe in the early 1920s. "Aunt Bea" emerged as a true Family Matriarch, who graced our lives with her kindness and love. At times, in my youth, when I felt alone and unwanted, she was my Guardian Angel, who let me know that I also counted for something. She extended this caring and maternal oversight to my children and grandchildren, who will forever cherish her memory.

Dr. Jacob Melnick (1908 - 2001), "Aunt Bea's" benevolent and gracious helpmeet through life. The span of his medical career is best characterized by the fact that he offered medical care to six generations of our family, beginning with my great-grandmother Genendel, all the way down to my granddaughter Daryn Javer. "Uncle George" as he was called, was an ever-present mainstay in our lives, bestowing on all of us, the attributes by which we have come to remember him: wise, gentle, kind.

Moshe Freidin (1928 - 2010), a scion of the family of the late Yitzhak (Itchkeh) Freidin, that fate decreed would find refuge for himself and his family in the Holy Land. In Moshe, I found the counterpart kindred spirit, who was tireless in his dedication to assure that our families would remain forever entwined, despite the geographic distances that lay between us.

Supporters Honor Roll

The following members of our extended family of landsleit, friends and well-wishers, provided financial contributions to help make the publication of this book possible. Their generosity assures the preservation of this heritage for future generations, by which they have earned a large measure of our collective gratitude.

Abe Meyer & Carmel Alperstein

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Foreword to The Trilogy ¹

There is an expression often used in works on Jewish history to describe certain major Jewish population centers: "A city and a mother in Israel" (taken from II Shmuel 20:19). The question is, in what sense can a city be referred to as a "mother"? A popular explanation given is that such large centers nourished the spiritual needs not only of their own inhabitants, but those of the surrounding communities as well. This description aptly describes the Jewish community that thrived in Baranovich before World War II.



**By The Renown Gaon Rabbi Leib Baron זצ"ל
A Principal Disciple of R' Elchanan Wasserman**

I make this statement from first-hand knowledge, having had the privilege of studying for five consecutive years in Baranovich's famed Ohel Torah Yeshiva, under the auspices of the *Rosh Yeshiva*, the saintly Torah luminary, R' Elchanan Wasserman, ז"ה, and the sagacious and pious *Mashgiach*, R' Israel Yaakov Lubczansky ז"ה. I spent three of those five years under the system of 'essen teg,' whereby yeshiva students were hosted for their meals on a regular basis by the local populace. It was through this contact with the 'ordinary people' that I was able to witness and come to appreciate the unique character of the town's population.

More than two hundred of the yeshiva's three hundred students were sustained through this "teg" system. There was almost no Jewish family in Baranovich that did not host at least one yeshiva boy for at least one day a week (on a yearly basis). It was through this extraordinary generosity on the townsfolk's part that the yeshiva was able to function during its peak - the final twenty years. During this time, the institution served thousands of students, many of whom went on to become some of the greatest leaders of Torah Judaism.

The yeshiva, which catered to younger students (*Yeshiva Ketana*), was originally founded by laymen. In particular, there was R' Chai'kl, who was known throughout the community for his extraordinary energy and dedication to public affairs. Together with the saintly Mrs. Kaplan, ז"ה, (her oldest son, R' Henoah, ז"ה, was one of R' Elchanan's foremost disciples and was known as one of the most righteous men in town; R' Mendel ז"ה, her second child, subsequently made his way to America via Shanghai, and became a well-known *Rebbe* at the *Yeshiva Gedola* of Philadelphia, Pa.), he undertook the herculean task of setting up and organizing the yeshiva. Starting from scratch, he built a truly magnificent edifice. Not only was R. Chai'kl the institution's founder, but he subsequently became one of its main administrators, in charge of organizing 'teg' for all the boys. He was beloved by the entire community; it was said of him that he never once raised his voice to any person, and always spoke in the kindest and gentlest manner. Twice a year, he used to take a group of

¹

This Foreword is an adaptation of the original, written for the English translation of *The Baranovich Haggadah*, and appears here through the kind permission of the author's son, Rabbi Elchanan Baron of Jerusalem, Israel. We were saddened to learn that this venerable sage, passed away on 5 Tishri 5772 [October 3, 2011] and did not live to see the appearance of this work.

about thirty boys - once after *Sukkot* and again after *Pesach* - and walk with them down the streets of the city. As he passed a Jewish home, he would knock on the door, and every woman who answered the knock and saw Reb Chai'kl with his group of students would greet him warmly. Knowing immediately what he wanted, she would enthusiastically undertake to host one of the boys with 'teg' for the entire year. In this manner, Reb Chai'kl managed to make arrangements for every student who required this service. I might add that not one of the boys ever complained that his hostess for 'teg' did not undertake the task with love and generosity.

Many Torah students of the pre-war era began their studies at the Baranovich yeshiva, and subsequently continued their studies at various *Yeshivot Gedolot* (yeshivas for older boys). They adjusted to their new places of study, and eventually were numbered among the leading students in these institutions. In this manner, the *Yeshiva Ketana* of Baranovich indirectly became one of the major spiritual benefactors of the greatest European yeshivas.

Baranovich was different from most other yeshiva towns in Europe. In most other places, the yeshiva had little influence upon the lives of the city's local inhabitants. The yeshiva was usually housed in a large building or complex, and for all intents and purposes, functioned as a self-sufficient, independent community. The fact that there was a large concentration of Torah scholars in that immense, remote 'ivory tower' had little, if any effect upon the town's spiritual life. In Baranovich, however, due to the townsfolk's extensive contact with the students, and their personal acquaintance with the institution's founders and directors, they were profoundly influenced by the intensity of the Torah study that took place there. As a result, the city became a true *Makom Torah* - a 'place of Torah' through and through. It is no exaggeration to say that as a result of the yeshiva and its spiritual leaders, R' Elchanan (who was famed and respected for his piety and scholarship even among the *Hasidic* community) and R' Israel Yaakov (who was known throughout the yeshiva world as both a genius and as one of the most righteous men of the generation), Baranovich as a whole became a Torah community on a level that was unique in the Jewish world.

Among the population of the city there were several distinguished *balebatim* (laymen). Reb Pinia Kaplan, the most eminent among them, was the brother-in-law of the *Afikei Yam* (R. Yekhiel Mikhl Rabinovich), and was also a brother-in-law of Rabbi Zalman Walkin, the brother of Rabbi Aharon Walkin, ר"ח, the famed last rabbi of Pinsk. There were several well-known Torah scholars among the populace as well, such as R' Sholom Dereczin, ר"ח, one of the wealthiest men in town, R' Mendl Goldberg, ר"ח, who was a distinguished student of the *Chafetz Chaim* and served as the president of the large local synagogue known as the 'Orlansky Schul,' and R. Yekhiel [Mikhl] Rabinovich, the most prominent local supporter of the yeshiva. There were also several eminent families in town, such as Vigodsky, ר"ח, and Yosselewicz, a wealthy family that included a well-known son-in-law, R' Yaakov Mavshovich, who had studied in the famous Slobodka yeshiva. This R' Yaakov was the brother of the saintly R' Daniel Mavshovich, ר"ח, the last Dean of the Kelm Yeshiva. He served as the editor of one of the foremost Torah-oriented newspapers of the day, *Dos Vort*, which was published under the guidance of R' Chaim Ozer Grodzhensky, ר"ח. Another outstanding member of the community was R. Shmuel Zakheim, ר"ח, who through his connections with the Pilsudski government, was able to prevent the Polish government's deportation of R' Elchanan who was a Latvian citizen.

It is interesting to note that in Baranovich, the entire Jewish community consisted of *Shomrei Shabbat* (at least in public); it was absolutely unheard of for a Jewish store or business to open on *Shabbat*. R' Elchanan and R. Israel Yaakov themselves, would walk around the market streets every Friday afternoon to remind the store owners that it was time to close their businesses. When the shopkeepers saw these noble figures coming, they would hasten to shut down their businesses before they arrived. [In] that way, the saintly men would be spared the trouble of having to walk the extra few steps down the street to issue their reminder.

I remember that one time a Jew from Vilna moved to Baranovich, and set up a business that he kept open on *Shabbat*. The news reached the yeshiva during the *Shabbat* morning prayers. R. Israel Yaakov was shaken to the core upon hearing the report, and urgently approached R' Elchanan to confer with him. They felt that it was vital for them to act swiftly, and unequivocally protest the blatant sacrilege, for there was a grave danger that others might be quickly influenced to follow suit. Due to the gravity of the situation, they decided to interrupt the services and immediately proceed to the scene of the *Shabbat* desecration.

Accompanied by the entire student body, they set off on their mission. On the way, they passed the *Bet HaMedrash* of the Slonim *Hasidim*, where the services were also interrupted so that the congregants could participate in the protest. R' Mendl Goldberg of the Orlansky Schul was also informed of the events, and he, too, stopped the prayers in order to join the protest with his congregants.

Altogether, over two thousand people gathered shouting, '*M'khalel Shabbat* - Shabbat desecrator! Close down your shop.' But the merchant stubbornly held his own, and, instead of expressing regret, summoned the police. Audaciously, he complained that the crowd was committing the crime of staging a demonstration without a permit. As a result of his impudence, R' Elchanan and R' Israel Yaakov were placed under arrest. (They were soon released, thanks to the efforts and connections of R' Pinia Kaplan.) Before leaving the scene, however, R' Israel Yaakov did have the chance to declare to the sacrilegious store owner, 'You will see! You will close the store in any event.' And so it was - some two weeks later, the man went bankrupt. The news quickly spread around town that R' Israel Yaakov's curse had miraculously been fulfilled. In a sense, though, it was a fore-gone conclusion, for R' Israel Yaakov was so beloved and respected by the townspeople that no one would even think of buying from an establishment that had aroused the saintly man's ire. Thus the store quickly went out of business, at that site, for lack of customers.

Baranovich was home to a large *Hasidic* community as well, and in particular, it served as a prominent center of the Slonim variety of *Hasidism*. There were approximately five hundred families in Baranovich who belonged to this community, which was initially headed by R' Avrem'eleh Weinberg (the grandson of the '*Yesod Ha'Avodah*'), ר' אב"ר, and then by his son and successor, R' Shlom'eleh, ר' שלום, who was killed by the Nazis, ר' ש"ל. The Slonim *Hasidim* formed an integral part of Baranovich's community. There was no sense of tension or divisiveness between the *Hasidic* and non-*Hasidic* congregations. Indeed, the opposite was true; their respective members fully cooperated to serve and strengthen the overall Jewish community of the town, especially when it came to religious matters such as *Shabbat* observance. One of these Slonim *Hasidim*, R' Zaydl the Baker, ר' זיידל, used to accompany R' Elchanan and R' Israel Yaakov on Friday afternoons to the town's marketplace to remind the store owners to close their shops.

The Slonim *Hasidim* also had a yeshiva in town, in which a good number of students were enrolled. The *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Hirszowicz, was a member of the famed Bloch family of Telz. One of the members of the Slonim community, R. Moshe Midner, had been a student of R. Chaim Soloveitchik. I myself saw R' Elchanan visit this great *Talmid Khakham* several times, and listened to them engage in lengthy, erudite discussions regarding various Talmudic topics.

Thus, the Slonim *Hasidim* played an important role in shaping Baranovich's character as 'a city and mother in Israel.' The Slonim connection to Baranovich persists even to current times. The previous *Rebbe* of Slonim, who recently passed away, was a native of Baranovich.

The following story bears witness to the extent to which Baranovich was held in esteem by the Jewish world at the time: While I was studying in [the Yeshiva] *Ohel Torah*, a student of the Mir Yeshiva became engaged to a girl from Baranovich, a member of the Abramowicz family who owned a local meat-packing business. The famous *Mashgiach* of Mir, R' Yerucham Levovitz, made a special trip to Baranovich to participate in the engagement celebration - something that was quite rare for him to do. As he

addressed the guests, he quipped, 'To marry a girl from Baranovich - now that's already half a dowry!' We see from this that even in the eyes of the greatest Torah leaders of Israel, Baranovich was considered an unparalleled and unique community.

Once heard an explanation from a great Torah scholar concerning an anecdote related in the final chapter of *Pirkei Avot*:

R' Yossi ben Kisma was once approached by a man, who asked him, 'Rabbi what town are you from?' 'I am from a great city, where there are many scholars and teachers' he replied. 'Rabbi,' the man continued, 'would you like to live in our town, and I will pay you millions of dinars, in addition to precious stones and pearls?' R. Yossi turned down the offer without hesitation, explaining, 'Even if you give me all the money in the world, I will not live anywhere except in a place of Torah...'

The question has been asked, why did R' Yossi not accept the man's generous offer? With such a fortune at his command, the great sage could have built many new *yeshivot* and *Battei Medrashos*! The answer, however, is quite simple: one cannot build a 'place of Torah' with money alone; he can build only lifeless buildings for Torah! Of all the towns in Europe where Judaism and Jewish life thrived, it was perhaps Baranovich - where the entire community was permeated with the spirit of Torah - that has most suitably earned for itself the titles of distinction: 'place of Torah' and 'a city and mother in Israel.' It was in this environment steeped in Torah, that the Torah luminary R' Elchanan Wasserman, along with the saintly *Mussar* luminary R. Israel Yaakov Lubczansky developed their students at the Baranovich yeshiva.

It is for this reason that I and my son R' Elchanan - named after my *Rebbe*, R' Elchanan Wasserman - have founded the Yeshiva *Ahavat Torah Baranovich* in Jerusalem, in memory of the community of Baranovich, and its famed yeshiva with its saintly leaders. As we are taught in *Baba Kama* 16a, this is the most fitting tribute one can make to a deceased Torah scholar. Although relatively new, the yeshiva has already earned itself an outstanding reputation.

Last year we published a commentary (in Hebrew) on the *Haggadah* entitled, "*The Baranovich Haggadah*" which is based on the teachings of the great masters who disseminated Torah knowledge in the Baranovich yeshiva.

The publication was received with enthusiasm and earned much praise within the Torah community.

This year my son has undertaken to have it translated into English, so that these precious teachings may be made available to those who are not able to read them in their original language. I extend to him my heartfelt blessings, and wish him success in this and in all his endeavors to further the study of the Torah. May he merit to fulfill the maxim of the Sages: 'When one starts to do a mitzvah, he is told: Since you have started it, see it through to its completion.'

Translator's Foreword

In approaching this, my ninth endeavor, I was anticipating doing 'yet another book,' and then moving on. Curiously, and interestingly, the initiative took on a different character, and blossomed in an unexpectedly gratifying way. First and foremost, it evolved, that not only one *Yizkor Book* deserved consideration. Accordingly, this endeavor became the second time, in ten years, for the end product to emerge as a *Trilogy*, encompassing three separate, if overlapping works, that addressed the subject at hand: preserving the memory of the Jewish history of the city of Baranovich, which is in modern-day Belarus.

As a socio-geographic phenomenon, Baranovich is a relative newcomer to the world scene. It was spawned in the middle 1870's as a consequence of the expansion of railway systems in what was then the Czarist Russian Empire. In this respect, it has a great deal in common with such Western American cities like Wichita and Denver. In contrast to the United States, where the 'push' of the railroad was primarily East-to-West, Czarist Russia had the additional imperative to create links that would tie North to South. The intersection of these two undertakings is where Baranovich came into being.

The tragedy of the Holocaust meant that the Jewish community in Baranovich only existed, as such, for about seventy years. However, this belies deep Jewish roots, that succored and nurtured its Jewish community. That community drew its founding human capital from the ancient Jewish settlements of nearby Mys and Ljahavičy, which had been in place for many centuries. In no small measure, this foundation enabled Baranovich to achieve prominence as a 'City and Mother in Israel,' an appellation awarded to those locations, that provided cultural, religious and scholastic leadership to world Jewry.

The exceptional nature of its role in Torah scholarship is best evidenced by the fact, that its survivors, in Israel, have labored assiduously to establish and maintain the *Yeshiva Ahavas Torah* in Jerusalem, as a successor to the renown Baranovich Yeshiva, *Ohel Torah*, headed by the eminent Scholar and Teacher, Rabbi *Gaon* R' Elchanan Wasserman, ד"ר.

In its fleeting existence, the Baranovich Jewish community went through the full gamut of joys and sorrows experienced by all of its sister Jewish communities. It was subject those same winds of change, that buffeted both the Jewish and secular world, as Western Civilization began the painstaking, and often tortuous emergence, from medieval into modern times. It bore the brunt of all the waves of anti-Semitic predation, visited on the Jews of Eastern Europe, from the outbreak of Czarist pogroms in the 1880's through the terrors of the Holocaust itself.

Yet, in this bubbling stew, of multi-hued perspectives and persuasions, a tranquil *modus vivendi* existed between the likes of *Hasidim* and *Mitnagdim*, where antagonism and tension was more the norm, that existed on the fault line between the ascetic scholarship of the Lithuanian north, and the more mystically-oriented Galician south.

While, again, it is true that the tragic outcome of the recounting of this city's history is known in advance, the record is enriched by the endeavor of these writers, to tell this tale from their own unique perspective.

I have often maintained, that the 'Jewish World' is a small one, and the 'degrees of separation' between people of our ethnic origin is much less than the span of our current operating cognizance. This project has highlighted one such 'relationship,' and surfaced three others. Closest in these instances, is my connection to Abraham H. Foxman, the Executive Director of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). In fact, the second book of this *Trilogy*, is edited and published by Abe's late father, Joseph Foxman ז"ל. I am comfortable in

using a familiar address in referring to him, because, many years ago, Abe and I attended high school together, with him graduating the year after I did. To compound this connection, my good friend and high school classmate Samuel (Shmuel) Blumert, today, living in Jerusalem, is one of the people who keeps me 'honest' in matters of Hebrew language, when I need the occasional help. He too, is a schoolmate of Abe's. Abe's forbears before Baranovich, came from the nearby, and more ancient, Jewish community of Mys.

It was interesting to discover that the last Attorney General in the administration of President George W. Bush, is also a scion of Baranovich. AG Michael B. Mukasey, has forbears who came to Baranovich from Ljahavičy.

In my participation in the International Association of Yiddish Clubs (IAYC), I chanced to meet Vivian Felsen of Toronto, who is a scion of Baranovich. And finally, in circulating information about the Baranovich émigrés to South Africa, I was elated to discover that my daughter-in-law Dana Spanger's (Berger) aunt, in Toronto, Mrs. Aura Greenberg, was born a Bilczyk (Bilchik), from Baranovich.

Fostering such connectivity is an important extra dividend that comes from this work, and engenders no small amount of satisfaction among those affected.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the very fine support that I receive from certain key people, who help me to assure the highest level of integrity and accuracy in my translation work. I am indebted to Tomasz Panczyk, in Poland, and Leon Szyfer of Vancouver Canada, for their assistance in assuring that my rendition of Polish names and places, transliterated from Yiddish into English, were done correctly. Leon also deserves an extra vote of thanks for clarifying Russian usage, and for rendering such Russian, in Cyrillic script, on my behalf. As already noted, a special vote of thanks goes to my classmate, Sam (Shmuel) Blumert for his insight into some esoteric Hebrew. A special vote of thanks goes to Rabbi Eli Baron, in Israel, for his moral support, and making the time and talent of his assistant, Yoram Raz, available to scan in all the images from the original Yizkor Book. This makes it the first time the text in one of my works has been enriched by pictures. Last, but by no means least, my thanks also go to Yeshaya Metal, the reference desk librarian at YIVO in New York City, who, as usual, was ever ready with a suitable insight regarding the occasional esoteric word that would surface from time to time, and whose absolute command of the formidable resources there, assures that no question goes unanswered.



WINTER 2012

Jacob Saloman Berger

Maps of Interest

(In Overview, and In Detail)

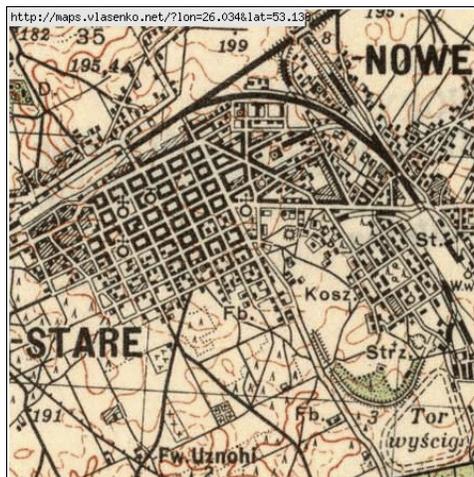
1. Geographic Map



Location in Belarus

Coordinates: 53°08'N 26°01'E

2. City Map



3. Ghetto Memorial



The Holocaust memorial in Baranovich, Belarus commemorates the Jewish ghetto that existed in the town from 1941 until 1942 when it was emptied and the Jews killed.

The text reads "During 1941—1942 there was a Jewish ghetto in the town; 12 thousands citizens became victims of it."

Geographic Map

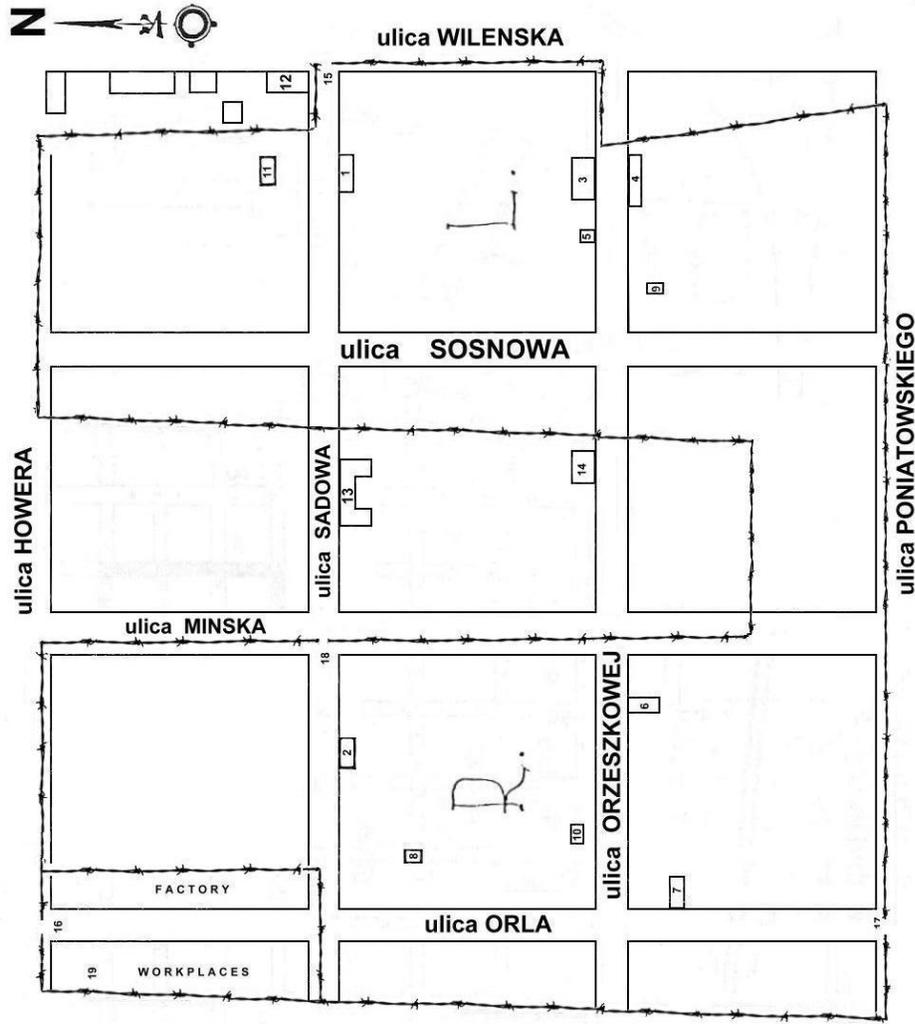


Ghetto Map

The Baranovich Ghetto Map

תוכנית גיטו ברנוביץ', לפי צילום ועדה מרכזית היסטורית במינכן

17.12.1942 - 12.12.1941



Ghetto Map Legend

1. *Judenrat* I and II
2. *Judenrat* III
3. The General Hospital
4. The Hospital for Infectious Diseases
5. The Mental Hospital
6. Old Age Home & Orphanage
7. Public Kitchen
8. Public Lodging (*Bund* HQ)
9. Ghetto Laundry
10. Fire Fighters
11. The Ghetto Police
12. The Ghetto German Guard
13. The Municipal Bath House
14. The Bakery
15. Principal Ghetto Gate at *ulica* Sadowa
16. Side Gate on *ulica* Orla
17. Gate to the (Jewish) Cemetery
18. The Last Exit Gate from the Ghetto
19. Workplace Factories