

Berdichev,

Town in Zhitomir Oblast (district), Ukrainian USSR, known to have been in existence since the fourteenth century. Jews lived in Berdichev from the sixteenth century. The town became a center of Hasidism, the seat of the renowned rabbi Levi Yitzhak of Berdichev, and, in the nineteenth century, a center of Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment).

Immediately prior to World War II, Berdichev had a Jewish population of over 30,000, out of a total population of 66,306. When the town was taken by the Germans on July 7, 1941, the Jewish population numbered 20,000. Three days later the military governor imposed a collective fine on the Jews of 100,000 rubles, in cash and valuables. Jews were harassed, some were murdered in groups, and synagogues were set on fire with the congregants inside at prayer.

On August 25, the Jews of Berdichev were ordered to move into a ghetto that had been set up in the poorest part of the town (if they did not live there already), which thus became unbearably congested. On September 4, on orders of the Hoherer SS-und Polizeiführer (Higher SS and Police Leader) of the Ukraine, 1,500 young Jews were seized and taken out of town to be shot to death. A force of German and Ukrainian police surrounded the ghetto on September 15. Four hundred skilled craftsmen and their families, a total of 2,000 people, were set aside, and the rest, 18,600 persons, were taken out of town to pits that had been prepared in advance, to be shot to death.

Two thousand more Jews were murdered on November 3, leaving only 150 craftsmen alive. The following spring, on April 7, 1942, 70 Jewish women, who were married to non-Jews and lived outside the ghetto, were murdered together with their children. On June 16, the number of craftsmen was reduced to 60; and at the end of October 1943, when Soviet forces were approaching, those Jews who were still left alive were also murdered. When

Berdichev was liberated, on January 15, 1944, 15 Jews were found in the town.