

Frieda Portnaya's Grandfather Yankel Mandemberg



This is my maternal grandfather, Yankel Mandemberg. The photo was taken in Makarov, near Kiev, at the beginning of the twentieth century. My grandfather was a a rabbi in the synagogue in Makarov. He was a widower when he married my grandmother, Frieda (after whom I am named). He had four children from his first wife. I knew three of them well -- Rivka, Berl and Pinia. We knew each other before the Second World War. My mother's stepsister Rivka was much older than my mother was, but I don?t know when she was born. She was married and her last name was

Wainshtein. Her husband died before the war. During the Great Patriotic War her daughters were in the evacuation, but Rivka didn't go with them. She was killed at Babi Yar near Kiev along with thousands of other Jews. The way they put it at that time was that she 'left for Babi Yar'. My mother's stepbrother Pinia Mandemberg and his wife and son Yakov also perished at Babi Yar. Boria, Berl Mandemberg, was in the evacuation. He came to Kiev after the war and died there some time in 1950. My grandparents had a private house in Makarov; it was a good house, built of stone with two floors and eight or nine rooms -- very appropriate for a rabbi. It was surrounded by a garden and fruit trees. My grandfather and grandmother were well-to-do people. On Saturday they had a Ukrainian housemaid to do all the housework, as my grandmother didn't do any work on Saturday. My mother told me that all religious Jews in town used to go to her father. They came on the eve of Judgement Day (Yom Kippur) and he swung a rooster over their heads. That was the ritual of purification on the eve of [Yom Kippur]. At Pesach my grandfather conducted a seder in the synagogue. My mother and her brothers always attended it. People did not only go to my grandfather during holidays or to pray. He was a very wise man and people came to ask his advice. He found words of support and consolation for every Jew. He had a good piece of advice for each of them (how to bring up children, how to conduct relations with their wives, how to follow a household budget). He taught his children a lot of things, too. My grandfather died in 1912 in Makarov and my grandmother Frieda died in 1916 .