

Tzaddik Avraham Mordechai Alter's Prayer House In Gora Kalwaria



This is a photo of Tzaddik Alter's prayer house in Pijarska Street in Gora Kalwaria. It was taken before the war. There were two synagogues in Gora Kalwaria. One belonged to the kahal, the Jewish community, a progressive one, and the other belonged to the tzaddik, Rabbi Avraham Mordechai Alter, or Imrei Emes, 4th rebbe of the Ger dynasty, the last of the dynasty to live in Poland. The tzaddiks came to Gora Kalwaria from Przysucha and Kock. Since their arrival the inflow of Jews increased, most of them Orthodox. The Gora tzaddik didn't have many followers in Gora itself, though. The Gora Jews recognized the tzaddik from Koziencice rather than the one from Gora Kalwaria. [Editor's note: there were no tzaddiks in Koziencice between the two world wars; Mr. Prajs refers to the tradition of the Maggid of Koziencice, or Israel Yitzchak Hofstein (Hapstein), 1733-1814.] His followers were mostly outsiders. They came from all over Poland, from every city except maybe for the Poznan district, from all of eastern and southern Poland: Cracow, Rzeszow, Lodz, Warsaw, Lublin, all the small towns. They came to him on High Holidays. On New Year - or Rosh Hashanah in Hebrew, on Yom Kippur, and on Shavuot - or Pentecost, I'd say 2,000 Jews would come to Gora Kalwaria. They rented rooms from the local Jews. My Mom, for example, used to rent them a room to earn an extra zloty or two. The tzaddik was well-known. I saw him a few times. Just an ordinary bearded Jew. I've never been one of his followers. In my opinion he was no sage, just a man knowing the Torah really well. Surely, there had to be something about him, since he had so many followers and everyone thought of him as a miracle-worker. Even the Poles respected him. There was a telling moment, when Cardinal Kakowski came to Gora Kalwaria in 1933 or 1934. They built a triumphal arch and everyone welcomed him, including the Jews with the rabbi. But the tzaddik did not come to greet the cardinal, and received him in his house instead. They exchanged gifts.