

Elkhonen Saks In First Grade At School



This is a picture of the pupils and teachers of the Valga Jewish elementary school. I am sitting in the first row, second from the left. I am a pupil of the first grade. In the third row second from the right is our director Bahmat, second from the left is the chairman of the Parents' Board, Doctor Polyakovsky, a very respected resident of our town. The photo was taken in 1934. I started school in 1934. It was the Valga 6-year elementary Jewish school. The curriculum in our school was the same as in other comprehensive schools, but the teaching was conducted in Yiddish. Besides, we intensively studied Hebrew from the 1st grade, as well as the Torah. We also learned Estonian. The school was sponsored by the state, and the Jewish community helped to rent a gym and supported children from poor families. Besides, the school was under the authority of the Board of the Jewish Cultural Autonomy. The school had no premises of its own, so at first a house was rented and then only a semi-house. Jewish holidays were always cheerfully celebrated at school, especially Chanukkah and Purim. We prepared performances and made suits. And on Pesach we had a vacation: this holiday was celebrated at home. When I entered that school, there were about 60 pupils, and after four years only 25 remained. The school was closed in 1938. The reason was that having become independent states, Estonia and Latvia divided our small border town in half. Almost immediately problems with trade and employment arose. Gradually, the Jewish youth began to leave for Tallinn, Tartu and Riga to study and work.