

Our Yiddish Club's Arrival in Chelm and the Garden of Eden

By Philip "Fishl" Kutner

Members of our Yiddish Club from Yenemsville journeyed to Chelm to learn about their ancestral hometown. In the last issue the tired but eager group had pulled into the Chelm train station. Actually there are 2 stations in Chelm—the Chelm Miasto Station and the Central Train Station.

First to greet us were the taxis to take us to the Kamena Hotel—the most exclusive hotel in Chelm. The cabbie told us that Chelm was the site of the original Garden of Eden. He assured us that:

- only perfect people on the earth live in Chelm.
- there are at least two mosquitoes, two rats, two mice, two toads and two snakes. Those were the reasons he gave us to prove the argument that Chelm is truly the original site of *gan eydn*.

Driving to the hotel we noticed men, women and children lining the streets and waving flags, it made us feel like conquering heroes.

Our convoy stopped at the Chelm Convention Center for the ceremonies. We were met by the Chelm City Council, the Chelm Chamber of Commerce and the Chelm Chinese Checker Champs. Meanwhile the Chelm Children's Cadet Corp played music.

Mayor Krzysztof Grabcguk (Prezydent Miasta Chelma) was the main greeter. He was elected in 2002 and told us a little about Polish Politics. He told us there are 8 major parties, and almost a 100 parties altogether. They are divided into Populist, Left, Center and Right.

Just before we left the honorable mayor told us that the world thinks that Chelm is populated by fools; however, he assured us to the contrary that it was all a hoax contrived to get the city on the international map. Everyone knows that *Warszawa*, Lodz, Krakow, Wroclaw, Poznan, Gdansk, Szczecin, Bydgoszcz, Lublin, Katowice, Bialystok and Czestochowa are the dozen largest cities in Poland. Even Slupsk 40th in size has over 100,000 people, and that is almost twice the size of Chelm. What could they do to bring notoriety and not cost them anything? You and the entire world know the answer.

After all the greetings, ceremonies and speeches, we were glad to get to the hotel, relax and go to dine. The *matre de*, Czeslaw, handed us the menu. He said that the chief chef, Cyprian, cooked the best cuisine in Chelm. We were handed the menu. Since no one spoke Polish, we asked Czeslaw to suggest Cyprian's specialties. Czeslaw said it would be better if he just translated the menu.

Chef Czeslaw's Chelm Cuisine.

Entrées

Capon Cutlet Casserole
Carp in Chrain
Chilled Couscous
Cholent Chowder
Corn Chicory Chicken
Cubed Calf Calves

Vegetables

Candied Carrots
Carmelized Cabbage
Chopped Chickpeas
Chunky Crudités
Cream Cheesed Celery
Creamed Cauliflower
Cucumber and Chives

Dessert

Cashew Cookies
Challah
Cheddar Cheese Crepes
Chocolate Cheese Cake
Chremslach
Compote
Cranberry Cinnamon Custard

Beverages

Cherry Cordial
Coconut Cream
Colombian Coffee

After dinner we viewed a slide show. The speaker told us that Chelm is on the Lublin Upland by the Uherka River, and is the left tributary of the Bug River. It is on the towering mountainside of a cretaceous hillock.

Chelm has two public colleges—one is a branch of the Medical Academy from Lublin, with a nursing department. Then there is the Teachers Training College and two private colleges. A branch of Catholic University in Lublin (KUL) is planned.

The political system changed in 1990. At first the privatizing of commerce and service advanced most rapidly. But now there has been an increase in service companies and manufacturing. Today the mineral industry leads the economy. Its growth started with the founding of the Chelm Cement Works in 1960.

Tomorrow morning we finally shall visit the Chelm Garden of Eden. Be prepared to read about it in the next issue of *Der Bay* as our Yenemsville Yiddish Club travelers continue their visit to Chelm.