

Piotrkow Trybunalski

Central Polish town 16 miles south of Lodz; the site of the first Ghetto in Nazi Europe. In 1939 there were about 18,000 Jews in Piotrkow Trybunalski.

The Germans occupied Piotrkow in September 1939. The Nazis treated the Jews to cruel beatings, murdered many, and pillaged their property. They imprisoned Jews in forced labor camps. They also broke into the town's beautiful synagogue, stole its ritual objects, beat the worshippers, and destroyed the building. About 2,000 Jews were able to escape, while many refugees from nearby towns streamed in, inflating Piotrkow's population.

On October 8 the city's commander ordered the establishment of a ghetto-the first in Poland. The town's Jews were commanded to move into the specified area with none of their personal items except bedding. All Jews were compelled to wear the Jewish badge on pain of death (see also Badge, Jewish). Next, the Jews were subjected to a number of decrees, soon to become the norm for all of Poland. They were not allowed to own more than 2,000 zlotys; they had to give up all their silver and gold; they were not allowed to work in industry or in public service; Jewish doctors were not permitted to treat Aryans and vice versa. No Jew was allowed to leave Piotrkow without permission. The Germans also set up a Judenrat which, among its other responsibilities, had to hand over workers daily and build lodgings in the ghetto for 4,000 Jews from nearby towns.

The Piotrkow Trybunalski Ghetto was liquidated on October 13-21, 1942. Local collaborators surrounded the ghetto, while SS soldiers assembled the Jews into two lines: one for those 2,000 Jews with work cards (who were allowed to stay), and one for the 20,000 Jews without cards, who were deported to Treblinka. About 500 Jews escaped to the forests, while some Jews hid, only to be rounded up and murdered.

By July 1943 all remaining workers had been moved to other labor camps or to Auschwitz. At that point Piotrkow was declared "cleansed of Jews." Only 1,400 Piotrkow Jews survived in the forests or in the camps.

