

## **Report on Visit to Baryshivka, Ukraine**

By Jonathan J. Rikoon

On Monday, September 12, 2011, I attended the dedication of an updated memorial marker at the mass grave site in Baryshivka. I was accompanied by Steven Page of the U.S. Embassy in Kiev, as well as a translator and a driver supplied by the Embassy.

By the end of the nineteenth century there were almost five hundred Jews living in Baryshivka. By 1939 there were only 134 left, with some Jewish institutions closing through the 1920s. Many sources say that, on September 21, 1941, 90 Jews were shot at a site which is now the Baryshivka Cultural Center, and the bodies were subsequently moved and buried at the current location of the monument. On the other hand, the post-war Soviet-era memorial states that 126 people were buried here after shootings on November 21. It is argued that both mass executions took place, and the victims from both were buried in the same location.

The site is well-maintained and consists of a walled-in rectangle located on the grounds of a leather factory. Since the war, the administrators of the leather factory have maintained this site. Under Soviet auspices, they erected a monument to the Ukrainians killed there by the Nazi invaders. As was typical under the circumstance, there was no mention that the victims had been killed due to their Jewish religion. It reads as follows: "The mass grave of the elderly, women and children cruelly killed by the fascist invaders on 21 November 1941. 126 people are buried here. Your memory, innocent victims of fascism, is eternal." The new memorial marker corrects that and acknowledges the support of the Commission for the project.

The ceremony was coordinated by the executive director of the Ukraine VAAD (Association of Jewish Organizations and Communities of Ukraine), who spoke first. One of the local officials spoke next and said that many hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians and Red Army soldiers had died in an effort to repulse the German invasion in the Fall of 1941. Hundreds of thousands of Germans died as well.

In addition to my remarks, other speakers included Philip Carmel, Executive Director of the Lo Tishkach Foundation. The Foundation's recent survey of mass graves and cemeteries in Kiev Oblast led to the memorialization and dedication. Mr. Carmel responded to the local official's remarks by observing that even though the Red Army only delayed the Nazi advance that may have been enough time to allow some to escape who otherwise would have perished. I put the discussion in the larger context of one and a half million Ukrainian Jews who were killed by the German death squads following the front lines, out of six million civilian Jews killed by the Nazis throughout Europe.

There were also remarks from local officials and, in some of the most moving remarks of the trip, the relatively young administrator of the leather factory. He spoke last, and observed that recognition and preservation of the site was the only decent thing to do, and that anyone would have done it. I approached him afterwards and agreed with him only on his first point. I added that far too many others, in the Ukraine and throughout Europe, had failed to preserve the memory of Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust.

There was a significant turnout of perhaps two dozen local citizens. Many brought bouquets of flowers and laid them on the memorial after the ceremony was concluded. There was also a reporter from a local newspaper, which had been arranged by the VAAD. The Executive Director of the VAAD handed out award plaques to the factory administrator, local officials and local Jewish community.