“Yurovichi,” Kalinkovichisky News. 06/12/2011

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Subterranean Passages

In 2007 archaeologists and employees of district department of emergency services were trying to clear Yuravichi’s mystery of hidden subterranean passages to Mozyr and Kiev as never before. They dig the ground under the arches of being restored Catholic church and collegium and also around them manually either with excavator. Volunteers from Pollesky agricultural college and Kalinkovichesky lyceum, students of Belarussian and Polish universities helped them to do it. To make the search more effective they used the gadget invented by scientists of Belarussian Ministry of emergency services – infrared imager. It can define voids in the ground from a bird’s eye view. But the search was made in vain. They have not found anything around stone buildings of collegium and the church, though it seemed the subterranean passage was about to show up.

So are there Yuravichi undergrounds which are expected to have connection with Mozyr and even with Kiev? They are haven’t still founded yet. Why still? Because according to sources of information they do exist. There goes the evidence. When I was reading the decription of Yuravichi in the article “Opisanie cserkvei i prihodov Minskoi Eparhii. IV. Rechickiy V’ezd (Minsk, 1879) I payed my attention on the next lines which had not been noticed before: ” Long long ago on the Yuravichi’s mountains there was Yuriev – the town with fortress Vidolichi and Orthodox Cloister with Mother of God miracle-working icon“. According to the legend this icon appeared in Yuravichi and the date of appearance is also known so we can believe that the authentic miracle-working icon appeared in Yuravichi Orthodox Cloister.

During the disasters which Tartar invasion brought to Russian lands the town and the Cloister were razed to the ground. Only their names were left in folklore: Vidolichi and Cserkovishche mountain. A lately founded subterranean passage in the mountain is the evidence of the legend certainty. This finding was mentioned in the document which was printed 130 years ago so it is logical that the archaeologists and posse picked out the wrong place to dig out. Cserkovishche and the church and collegiums are divided by the ditch which used to be the riverbed of Pripyat in subglacial period. Nowadays it is the road from Yuravichi to Hoyniki. The distance between them is some hundred meters. Historically Cserkovishche is more ancient than the church and collegium. According to the previously mentioned article the construction of Yuravichi Catholic Church was finished in 1715 while the Orthodox Cloister near Yuriev and Vidolichy fortress were ruined and burnt out during the Tartar invasion which started in the beginning of XII century and lasted for the next 3 centuries. Exactly at that time people built subterranean passages in their fortresses to escape from treacherous enemies.

In the XVIII century when the stone Catholic Church was built on the adjoining mountain opposite

Cserkovishche there was no need of subterranean passages because the church was defied with 3-metre-high stone walls with loopholes towers. This is why the archaeologists should find the subterranean passages at the site of Cserkovishche which is situated in Yuravichi mountain behind the early man site in Vidolichi street. The legends about Yuravichi subterranean passages have been existing since the Tartar invasion and based certainly on the facts.

On the Eve of the Storm (Напярэдадні буры)

In 1834 Yuravichi consisted of town(51 homesteads) and village(66 homesteads). Yuravichi was the center of Yuravichesky parish in Rechitsa district of Minsk province. Bagumila Harevich was the owner of Yuravichi at that time and Yuravichi also was a country estate of Askery. The peasants of Bagumila Harevich were reduced to poverty so they were ragged and ate orach and nettle. And then they had to do corvee work for 123 days a year and do labor conscription for 20 days a year(the duties were building and maintaining roads, bridges, weirs and landowners' projects. The peasants were also supposed to pay metayage which included 3 pounds of dry mushrooms, three fourth of dry bilberries, one fourth of dry nuts, geese and chicken. They also paid quitrent for using landowner's land and hayfields. Some of the serfs had the privilege to bark lime-trees for making bast shoes, dig clay for making tableware and cut down pine stubs for making torches of splinters. In 1836 the wooden Orthodox Church of St.Mary was built in Yuravichi In 1846 Yuravichi became an ancestral land of Askery. The town and the village numbered 115 homesteads at that time.

On the 19th of February 1862 the tsar emancipation manifesto was proclaimed from the Yuravichi church's ambo. It proclaimed the emancipation of the serfs on private estates and of the household serfs. Vladimir Isaenko describes this event in his book "Yuravichi nad Pripyatiy" : " The peasants were amazed. They gathered, clamoured and made plans. Free soil is good, but it's still shared and it's going to be divided from time to time. Freedom is even better but quit rent remains and new taxes imposed. Nevertheless the peasants write and signed the paper to the Tsar where they promised to serve forever and expressed their gratitude. Soon after it the January uprising broke out. The dignity of peasants awoke but they were lack of deliberateness.



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The governor-general M.Muravyev suppressed the uprising in a tough way, established martial law, carried out measures to undermine the influence of nobility and church. Later it led to further split between nobility and orthodox peasants. The parochial priest described the event in his complaint: "A hundred of Cossacks came to Yuravichi to cut down the altars in the Catholic church, break the statues of twelve apostles and the organ costing more than 6 thousand rubles.

In 1864 in the building of local Catholic church Orthodox church started to work. Egan Shencs from Barbarova started to serve there. From 1866 till 1916 minister Aleksander Birukovich was serving there. The reconstruction of church to an orthodox one was conducted under the direction of province architect S.Ivanov from 1872 till 1874. The document of acceptance was signed on the 18th of September 1876 and the church was called "Cserkov Presvyatoi Bogorodicsi"(the Most Holy Mother of God Church). Ignatii Melej(grandfather of popular Belarussian writer Ivan Melej) was the chairman

of council in Yuravichi at that time. He was concerned about education of local inhabitants. Due to his effort a public college for men opened there in 1865. A public college for women opened in 1875. In 1874 the lands of Yuravichi were set out on sale. Many peasants were dreaming of buying a part of it. D.I.Lucskevich the old resident of Uravichi describes that event in the book “Pamyat.Kalinkovicheskiy rayon” (Minsk., Yrojai, 1999): “When the lands of Yuravichi were set out on sale representatives of peasants went to landowner Soltan. They argued for a long time because they had little money. It seemed they came to an agreement to buy 1000 dessiatinas (measure of land = 10,900 sq. metres or 2.7 acres) for less than 40 rubles per one. They also bought 3 fields, market gardens near Vidolichi , the forest near Litvin and the pasture. One unsophisticated peasant who was pointing the chairs asked the landowner if he could take them. The landowner turned red and told them to get away. The peasants bended down and jumped out of the place.

In 1874 the estate went to Bakunenok for 20 rubles per dessiatina. But for peasants it turned into a long struggle for their rights with the landlord to pasture cattle, to mushroom and berry and harvest wood…” A rich peasant from Radul Ivan Bakunenok became the owner of Yuravichi lands (3950 dessiatinas). Reapers who worked on Bakunenka got 15-20 kopecks working 14-16 hours a day; mowers got 25-30 copecks. According to the 1897 population census the population of the town was 1,320 and there were 201 homesteads, the church, a chapel, 2 prayer schools, 40 stores, 4 leather workshops, 2 taverns. The village was inhabited by 600 people and there were 108 homesteads, a chapel, 2 public schools, a postal-telegraph office, a pharmacy, a bread store, 2 wind mills, a horse mill and a tavern. A farm of the same name was located between the town and the village.

The old resident of Yuravichi A.I.Kozlovsky describes the prerevolutionary town in the book “Pamyt. Kalinkovicheskiy rayon” : Yuravichi was different at that times. Things were humming and there were more people. You could see a lot of stores, mills, workshops. Potters, blacksmiths worked here. In the end of the ditch which was popularly called “Na Libedi” behind Kavalchykov there was a windmill. Its owner was Fedor Lucskevich. The other windmill’s owner was Olka Karchava. A horse mill’s owners were Esel Katcsen and his son Girsh. Three blind horses turned millstones. They made cereals, fine-ground and coarse-ground flour and vegetable oil. The vegetable oil was produced with a special roller to get oilcake. There were three kinds of cereals and barley was grinded to white flour. Many people gathered near the windmill so a kind of a house was built there for those who were waiting in line. The house of Vladimir Ivanenko is located at that place now.

The brickworks was located at Haudarovski ditch. Yankel Fridman and Pinya Kofman burnt bricks there. Zyama Zilbershtein owned several stores. One of them was a dining hall during Soviet times. Ilya Kofman also had a store. The train that transported goods from Pripyat was owned by Zus Mikulicski. Elka Buhman owned a pharmacy where Aron Gucsevich was a pharmacist. In general all the trade and cottage crafts were controlled by Jews.

Besides the Catholic and Othodox churches there were three synagogues in Yuravichi. Old Christian graves were over the bridge along the road. Over the sawmill, there are sand mills. People often found crosses around them. The chapel was located near the graves. One day people had found a sabre when digging the grave but later they realized it had been the act of sacrilege so they put it back. At the site of the kindergarten there were even 4 chapels!

Jewish gardens in Yuravichi were very large and generous. Apple trees of different kinds grew and bore there but especially famous kind was “Raneti” – now there is no such a kind. The synagogue was located in the present-day Varoyskogo street where Buglak is leaving now. Firstly Jewish graves were in the centre of the town near the estate of Kozlovsky. People always found silver cups there. Then the graves were relocated to the mountain on Vidolichi where you can see tombstones now. At “Bazarnaya Ploshchad” there was an open market. A street lamp was lighted to light up the area. People kept guard there.

Parochial Revolutionaries (Местачковыя рэвалюцыянеры)

Russian social-democratic revolution ideas in the beginning of the 20th century reached the town Uravichi. Social oppression of parochial peasants and Jewish became so unbearable that the youth started to gather in groups, read political leaflets and going over to public fights.

According to the historical chronicle “Pamyat. Kalinkovichesky Rayon” the revolutionary-minded group in Yuravichi consisted of Yulian (brother and sister), Anisim, Leonid, Victoria and Polina Kozlovsky, Gerol Myalanich, Semen Kachanovsky, Afanasiy, Ivan, Pavel and Yakov Telesh, Domenik Lucskevich, Aron Gurevich, Mihail Gorchanko and others.

The peasants were tired of unbearable order and opposed the landowner. Mihail Gorchanko describes it in the chronicle: “If want to pick mushrooms you have to work for the landowner for 3 days. The same thing for harvesting wood, fishing… We could pasture cattle for free but the landowner made a new order so you had pay for everything like pasturing, washing and transporting cattle through the landowner’s lands. Violators were caught by guards on the horses or by foresters while there were no jobs and the jobless rate was high. Making 30-40 copecks a day was pretty good for an auxiliary worker. At the height of harvest time mower could make 25-30 copecks a day, a reaper could make 15-20, a teenager could make 5-10 copecks. But fines were exacted in rubles.

Afanasiy Telesh remembers that time: At Krivensky ditch in Vidolichi parochial revolutionaries started to hold a rally. Gerol Myalanich had distinguished speech against so-called “money-bags”. One hot day in July 30 people gathered and went to fields. Some of them were holding sticks, the other ones were holding their hands in their bosom pretending they got a gun. The landowner Bakunenko who had been keeping his eye on them was frightened. We told him: “How much will you pay mowers? –“ 75 copecks”. “What about reapers?” – “40 copecks”. Well, our claim is paying reapers 75 copeck and paying mowers a ruble. But for now we go on a strike. Bakulenka had to accept it. But authorities did not. Interrogations, raids, searches and arrests started..

Soon Yakov and Pavel Telesh were put into Rechitsa prison. The report to the secretary of the interior said that in Yuravichi disturbances of peasants led to a strike and its masterminds were peasants Pavel and Yakov Telesh.

In October Yuravichi dwellers took part in skirmish with gendarmes in Mozyr. The end was tragic: soldiers fired back on the peasants. 5 citizens were killed, 17 – injured. Arrests started again. The soldiers caught Ivan and Andrew Telesh. Yulian Kozlovskiy had time to escape. The arrested people were beaten but they could not lay the fault on them. The village constable Chernyak was notably cruel. He burst into the houses of revolutionaries, beat their fathers to get the information about the rebels. But it had its effect.

Cruel repressions took place in the country more often. Gerol Myalyanich was sent into exile where in 1917 he died soon. According to the military court’s penalty Valatkovich was hanged on July 6,1906 in Bobruisk fortress. Yulian Kozlovsky escaped to Austria where tsarist government reached him but he succeeded to escape from the prison making a sap with his friends. Then he went back to his hometown but provocateur Pikovski betrayed him. Yulian was sent to convict prison for 7 years where he died trying to escape for 3 times before that.

Revolutionary Committee Takes Power (Рэўкам бярэ ўладу)

The details of February events in Petrograd reached Yuravichi only 3 week after it. But the news about overthrow of tsar government was received with no-confidence. For a month and a half after the overthrow Fedor Melej was still governing according to the law of Russian Empire.

In April the description of organizing provisional executive committee was delivered. On the 14 of April,1917 during the volost minting the committee was elected. It consisted of priest Gahovich(elected as a president of the committee), an estate owner Karolin Eyplav, parochial medial assistant Bartashevich, teacher Poznyak and Ziserman as a representative of Jewish part of population, a peasant from Slabodka Zmitro Klyampach and ex-president of volost Fedor Melej.

By order of provisional government in May people's cattle was supposed to be requisitioned. But it was not as easy to carry out. People started to argue who exactly would give cattle to a new power. Poor peasants suggested giving cattle of the rich. Those suggested giving an equal amount of cattle. The mutual decision was not reached at the first volost meeting. On the second day Stepan and Mihail Akulinko came to Yuravichi from Tulgavichi. Stepan was a socialist revolutionary who just came back from exile. At the gathering in Rechitsa on May 21-23 he insisted on acceptation of the next terms: landowners give 75% of cattle for requisition, peasants – 25%.

During the volost gathering new provisional volost committee was elected. Mihail Akulenka was elected as a president instead of Gahocich. Instead of the medical assistant – a peasant from Yjinecs Sergei Leshchenko.

The major part of peasants was not agreed with the committee's decision. They insisted on requisition of only landowners' cattle. But the executive committee had an objection.

After that Stepan Akulenko who understood the peasants' sentiments and needs started to figure prominently in political life of volost. During another volast gathering he suggested registering all the landowners' estates and property and sending this information to Rechitsa executive committee. Akulenko went to Rechitsa to carry it out where he became a president of Rechitsa Uyezd council. But the plan had not been performed so the major part of peasants was dissatisfied with it. At their request a new president of committee became Zmitro Klyampach. But the executive committee blocks all the peasants' suggestions. This is why in the end of summer 1917 Yuravichi dweller Martin Kozlovsky creates a volast Soviet of working-class and army delegates which is functioning along with the executive committee in Rechitsa.

So the period of dual power in Yuravichi started. The first volost Soviet was not elected but consisted of decisive and revolutionary-minded persons: Martin Kozlovsky as a president, Sergei Leshcheno, Kostuchenko, Zmitrok Ivanocich, Potashko as a secretary.

The struggle for power between the executive committee and volost Soviet committee was flaring up. The major part of dwellers supported the voslost committee. The working-class was unionized by teacher Yulian Popel. Peasant Soviets were created in Slobodka, Ogorodniki, Yuravichi villages. The question of requisitioning of landowners' lands and property was put. The local volost committee hampers the executive committee so the last one insisted on disbanding of volost committee. But it was not carried out because the Red October came.

People in Yuravichi learnt about proletarian revolution in the 10th of November 1917(in the old style). At first Yuravichi dwellers learnt from their relatives in Petrograd and Moscow that the power of Kernsky had been defeated. The parochial committees kept functioning along without making any orders. Although there were no fights on the days of October everyone lived all of a jump. Till November 22 they believed that the new power is still provisional power. Then came the delegates of Rechitsa Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies and the rally gathered decided to disband the parochial executive committees. The Soviet delegates explained the idea of Soviet power – transferring landowners' lands to peasants. All the rally's participants said aye unanimously. Young soldiers form Kernsky army came to Soviet army to protect its power. The estates started to be confiscated. The property was confiscated as well but soils had been sowed so it was decided to split them in spring. But it wasn't carried out.

German Battle 1918 (Барацьба з германцамі і гайдамакамі)

Polish Intervention (Польская інтэрвенцыя)

Start of Peaceful Life (Пачатак мірнага жыцця)

Young People at the Forefront (Моладзь у авангардзе)

New Life (новае жыццё)

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