



BOOK:: Gruber, Ruth Ellen. *Jewish Heritage Travel A Guide to East-Central Europe*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1992. p. 58

Alternate names: Oleśnica [Pol], Öls [Ger], Oels. : There are 10 places named 'Oleśnica' in Poland. This one is at [51°12' N, 17°23' E](#) , 17 miles ENE of Wrocław (Breslau), in Lower Silesia. Jewish population: 335 (in 1885), 118 (in 1925). This town in the Trzebnickie Hills in SW Poland with 38,900 inhabitants in 1995 in Lower Silesian Voivodeship (and from 1975-1998 in the former Wrocław Voivodeship) and is the seat of Oleśnica powiat and also of the rural district of Gmina Oleśnica (but not part of the territory), the town being an urban gmina in its own right. The city has been part of an important trade route between Wrocław and the Greater Poland region with ties with Kraków. It was the site of an important printing press, school, and from the 13th century, a coin mint. Normal 0

Jewish settlement was as early as 1329 when Konrad reaffirmed the right to bring them to his duchy. The Jews had their own district in the city next to the synagogue, ritual slaughterhouse, and separate school within the walls of the city. The princes collected special duty from each Jewish family for which he was obliged to protect them. In 1389 to 1453 Jews lived there with the support of Duke Konrad II, but probably were forced to leave in 1453-1454, although no official ban on Jewish settlement is found. Official permission enabling the Jews return is not found, but in the early 16th century, the Olesnica kahal reestablished in a period when the city was second after Prague in printing for the empire. That press was founded by Chaim Szwarz, ben David ben David and Yonathan. In 1530, they printed [the Pentateuch](#) , the oldest printed and first Hebrew printed in Silesia, Czech and German. In 1535 or 1539 a horrible storm destroyed many homes; Jews were blamed. The second exile was not long since in 1555-1575, Jews lived there. In 1575, Jews again ordered were leave, but this time for almost two hundred years. In 1758, 24 Jews lived there. The 19th century saw significant development of the Jewish community because on March 11, 1812 they were granted full civil rights. Jewish population rose from 121 persons in 1842 to 335 persons in 1885. Difficult economic conditions at the end of the 19th century and early 20th centuries reduced the Jewish population through immigration although in the early 20th century, the kahal still had Jewish social and political organizations. When Hitler came to power, the 114 Jews living in Olesnica gradually were subjected to repression. During Kristallnacht, the Nazis vandalized the synagogue and shops

belonging to Jews. In 1939, only a few Jews remained, their fate unknown. [June 2009]

CEMETERY: Location of a cemetery in the Middle Ages is unknown, but in the eighteenth century, Olesnica Jews used nearby **Miłocicach** and **Twardogórze** for burial. In 1821, the local kahał received permission to set up their own cemetery on an area of 0.15 hectares away from buildings on current ul. Brzozowej

• The area later was enlarged to about 0.25 ha with a mortuary house and ritual well. To find the cemetery, take a bridge over the River Olesnica or find the current ul. Wojska Polskiego. The cemetery supposedly was beautiful with gravestones of precious stone and some of high artistic value. Little is known about the fate of the cemetery in WWII except that researcher Marcin Wodziński asserted that probably the Third Reich tax office sold them and the land in the first months of 1944 and survived WWII in relatively good condition although in 1941, some gravestones were overturned. Also, the tahara roof burned. Women, found in one of the houses on ul. Leśnej, were buried after the war. After 1946, devastation of the cemetery began. Wrought iron fencing surrounding the plot and gravestones were broken by the children playing then stolen and "converted" to a new one. Some loaded trucks for several people and hauled away the matzevot for building materials. In 1969, the National Municipal Council decided to officially close the cemetery. Expansion of barracks and the ground exercises did the final damage. After the elimination of those barracks, the site was unused. A few stone slabs remain as do small fragments of gravestones with inscriptions seen on this

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