

AMBRIZIENĖ, Jadvyga
Lithuania Documentation Project
Lithuanian
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Box 1, Tape 1

In this interview, Jadvyga Ambrizienė, a local of Žiežmariai discusses the Jewish community and the changes it underwent during the German occupation of Lithuania during World War II. She discusses the shooting of the Jewish women of Žiežmariai and the process by which they were rounded up in the synagogue and undressed before the shooting. She also describes in great detail how many locals, including herself, followed the Jewish women to the shooting site to witness the shooting and vividly recalls her impressions of the shooting. She discusses in great detail her family's good relationship with their Jewish neighbors before the war. She talks about the establishment of the Žiežmariai ghetto and the interactions of locals with the foreign Jews who had been brought to the ghetto. She also discusses the fate of Jewish homes and belongings after the shooting, focusing on the fact that the clothes were freely distributed, the furniture and other valuables auctioned off, and that the houses were inhabited by villagers or torn down.

[01:] 19:20:02 – [01:] 23:15:09

She introduces herself as a local of Žiežmariai, born in 1930; talks about the large Jewish population in the city, constituting the majority; explains that the Jews were good tradesmen, and craftsmen and that now the houses where they lived no longer exist; describes where the houses used to stand; describes the fate of the Jews during the war—that Germans came, rounded them up and shot them; discusses witnessing the round-up of her Jewish neighbors and knowing that they would be shot because the son of another neighbor was digging a large trench and told them; specifies that the Jewish men had already been taken away and that only the women were shot in Žiežmariai; describes how the Jews were driven out of their homes, told by local “baltaraiščiai” (“white-strippers”) to gather their most valuable belongings and go; explains that they were then driven to the synagogue courtyard where they were undressed; specifies that she did not see them take their clothes off but remembers the piles of clothes that people later divided among themselves; explains that the Jewish women stayed in the synagogue for a couple of hours, after which they were forced out again and marched to be shot; describes seeing the women marching and hearing that children, the elderly, and the handicapped were driven, but does not remember seeing any vehicles; describes witnessing from the fields how the Jews walked to the shooting site along the road; describes women and children walking through the fields to witness the shooting and that many men who had been working in the fields climbed trees to gain a better view when they saw that a trench was being dug.

[01:] 23:15:10 – [01:] 28:03:04

She explains that she did not see the shooting but heard it because the onlookers were kept at a distance; describes hearing shots of machine guns and cries; explains that the shooting lasted one

or two hours but that people remained in the hills until nightfall because they were afraid to go home; recalls the threats mothers told their children to keep them from crying; explains that not only children but also adults cried because they felt sorry for their neighbors [*her eyes tear up, silence*]; discusses what became of the Jews' clothes—that the shooters took what they wanted and the rest of the people could go and take what was left; explains that her mother went and brought back pants and underwear with money sewn into patches; explains that the Jews had dressed up nicely believing they were going to travel and not knowing that they would be shot; explains that her family had not informed their Jewish neighbors of their impending fate because they had been threatened to not tell; explains that no one stood out if they had taken clothing of the Jews; discusses the fate of the empty Jewish houses—that new people moved in; talks about a villager who moved into her Jewish neighbor's house during the German occupation and even forced her family to move out, but was then kicked out when the Russians reoccupied Lithuania in 1944; [*silence until interview resumes*].

[01:] 28:03:05 – [01:] 31:06:01

She discusses the ghetto, which was established by fencing off the movie theater and the synagogue; explains that foreign Jews were brought there to live and work on building the highway; guesses that the foreign Jews lived and worked there for about a year; describes encounters with the foreign Jews when their children would go begging; remembers a young Jewish girl who would come to her house trying to trade kitchen utensils for food; specifies that the girl did not speak Lithuanian but probably Polish; explains that at that time, everyone spoke Polish in the area; describes the type of trying work the Jews were forced to do and mentions the poor quality of their food, causing many to starve to death; explains that she does not know what happened to the Jews later, that they were driven away and not shot there.

[01:] 31:06:02 – [01:] 35:29:07

She describes how the local Jews were marched in columns to the shooting site; discusses the security of local guards around the columns; does not remember how they were dressed; explains that she did not recognize anybody; speculates that maybe they were not all locals; remembers how the town monitors forced the youth of the city to dig the mass grave; explains that people did not mention specific last names of who those committed the shooting; explains that there was talk that the Germans organized, while the Lithuanians, namely soldiers and drunks, did the shooting with their own hands; mentions **Jelinskas** [**Elinskas, Eilinskas**], the neighbor who helped to dig the trench; discusses how he talked about the war but that no one paid any attention to him while he was still alive; mentions that he helped several Jewish families escape from the ghetto, who then later traveled from Israel to thank him; mentions that he was a guard who was not tried like the rest of the guards; discusses other Jewish families that lived on her street, mentioning the last name **Feišteris** [**Feichteris, Feishteris**] and lists their first names: **Tsylè** [**Cylè**], **Heimas**, and **Jankelis**; talks about how she mostly felt sorry for **Tsylè** because they were the same age; describes **Tsylè's** appearance and how she had a photograph of her which she then burned for fear of being caught with it [*eyes tear up*].

[01:] 35:29:08 – [01:] 38:09:06

She talks about the fate of the furniture and the other valuables left in the empty Jewish homes, all of which were transported in trucks to the square in front of the synagogue to be auctioned off after the shooting and after all the clothes had been taken; describes witnessing the furniture and valuables brought to the square and seeing guards posted in front of the empty Jewish houses to make sure no one robbed them; explains that farmers from surrounding villages were hired to transport the belongings from the houses to the square; remembers watching how people emptied out her neighbor's house, focusing on the fact that they did not leave a single belonging because her neighbor had been a successful businessman; recalls how a Jewish girl used to carry baked buns to the houses and that one could pay her with other food products instead of with money; mentions that Jews were relaxed about money, trusting that they would be repaid later.

[01:] 38:09:07 – [01:] 44:38:05

She discusses how life in the town changed once there were no more Jews left; discusses how all of the houses were occupied by people moving into the city from the villages during the second Soviet occupation (1944–1991); mentions that many houses were toppled; comments on the good times when Jews still carried baked goods to the houses; describes how the Jewish baker would give out buns to children trusting that the mothers would reimburse him later; *[silence until interview resumes]*; discusses rumors that the Germans filmed while the Lithuanians shot the Jews, or if not filmed then photographed; explains that the men who had dug the trench were the only ones allowed near the shooting site during the shootings; specifies that she did not see the auction herself but that adults spoke about it; specifies that she did not witness the moment when her neighbors left the house and was unable to say goodbye to them personally—that she only saw them on the street from her window; mentions that some of the Jews who survived came back to sell their houses after the war; mentions that now in Žiežmarės there is not a single Jew; explains this because there would be nothing for them to do here since they were not farmers; remembers a Russian Jew who ran a state-run store named **Orsas** after the war, who proclaimed himself a Jew; discusses how he would lower the prices on his products.

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