

# Map Corner

## One Town's Story in WWI

by Jay Osborn,  
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**SHORTLY BEFORE HIS DEATH** in 1920, the Russian Jewish writer, folklorist, and social worker S. Ansky (Shloyme Zanvel Rappaport) wrote a four-volume memoir of his experiences during WWI delivering aid to displaced and destitute Jews in broken towns of the Russian Pale of Settlement and Russian-occupied areas of Galicia. Portions of the memoir were later published with vivid titles in Russian and English, but Ansky's original Yiddish title bluntly summarized what he had seen in the suffering of Jews in the war zones: *Khurbn Galitsiye* (The Destruction of Galicia). The original title is meaningful on many levels.

The geography of WWI is nearly impossible to grasp. Ansky's writing helps to put a human face on the scope of the war in Galicia. A common story: Austrian and German soldiers arrive in a Galician town from almost a thousand miles to the west, too late to prevent Russian soldiers from deporting the town's Jewish men almost a thousand miles to the east.

The war's geographic scale was matched by its demographic numbers: Austria-Hungary's last population census counted 870,000 Jews in Galicia (in 1910), two thirds of the Jews in the Empire; half a million Jews served in the Russian imperial army, including in Galicia; during the war, roughly 400,000 Jews were deported from their home towns, especially those near the shifting battlefield lines; and various estimates put the

number of vulnerable Jewish civilians killed in western Russia and Galicia between 100,000 and 200,000.

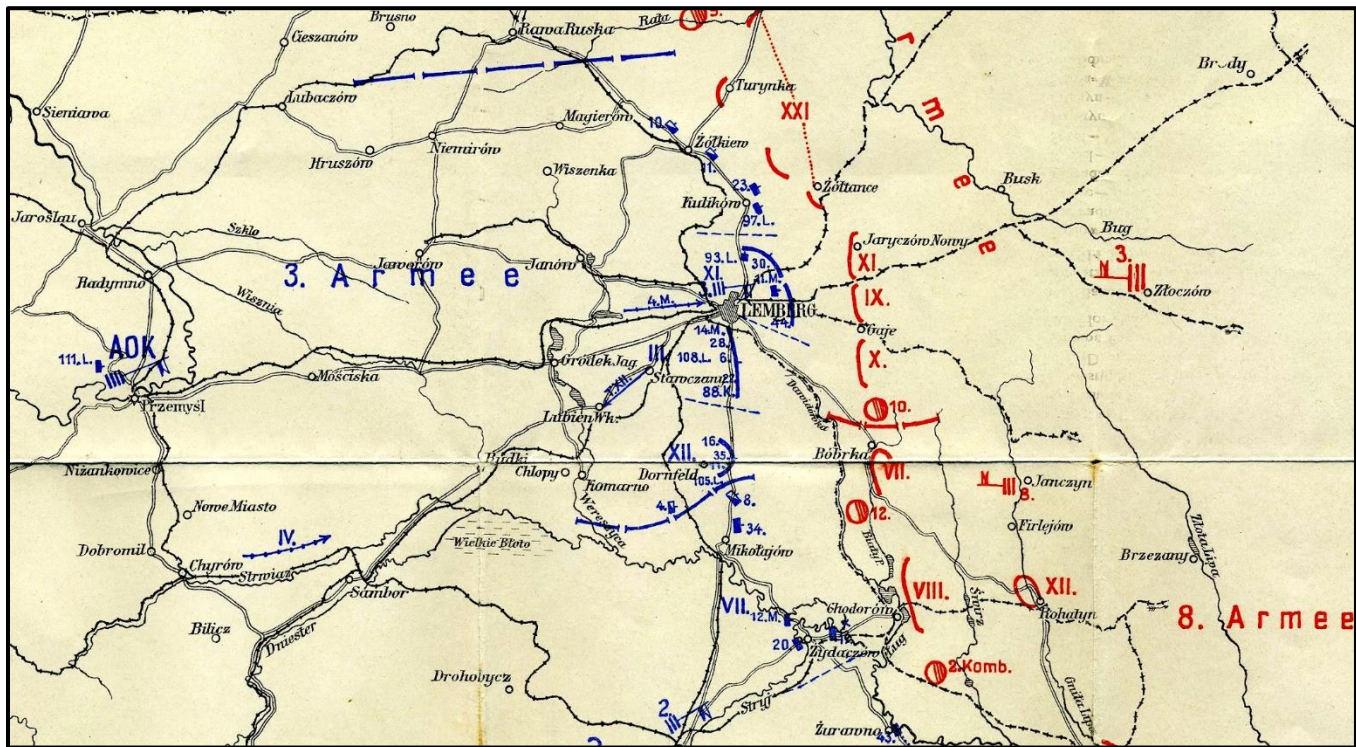
Historical maps can help to explain gaps in war-time family history data and timelines, changes in residences and businesses during and after the war, and decisions families made to send their children far away to schools or shelters. Imperial cartographers on both sides studied the Galician landscape in great detail before, during, and after the war and can help us understand the pace and extent of the upheaval. Hundred-year-old maps in the [Gesher Galicia Map Room](#) website and other sources can be useful in this respect.

A last prewar map of Galicia was published by A. Hartleben's Verlag of Vienna in 1914 (see the Gesher Galicia Map Room), as part of an ill-fated tourist guidebook to the region. Military map-makers began recording the swarming armies on their own tours there a few months later, as Russian forces swept through Galicia at the start of the conflict, taking possession of nearly all of the province in a matter of weeks. The speed of Galicia's capture in 1914 meant that many towns were spared destruction in this initial phase of the war.

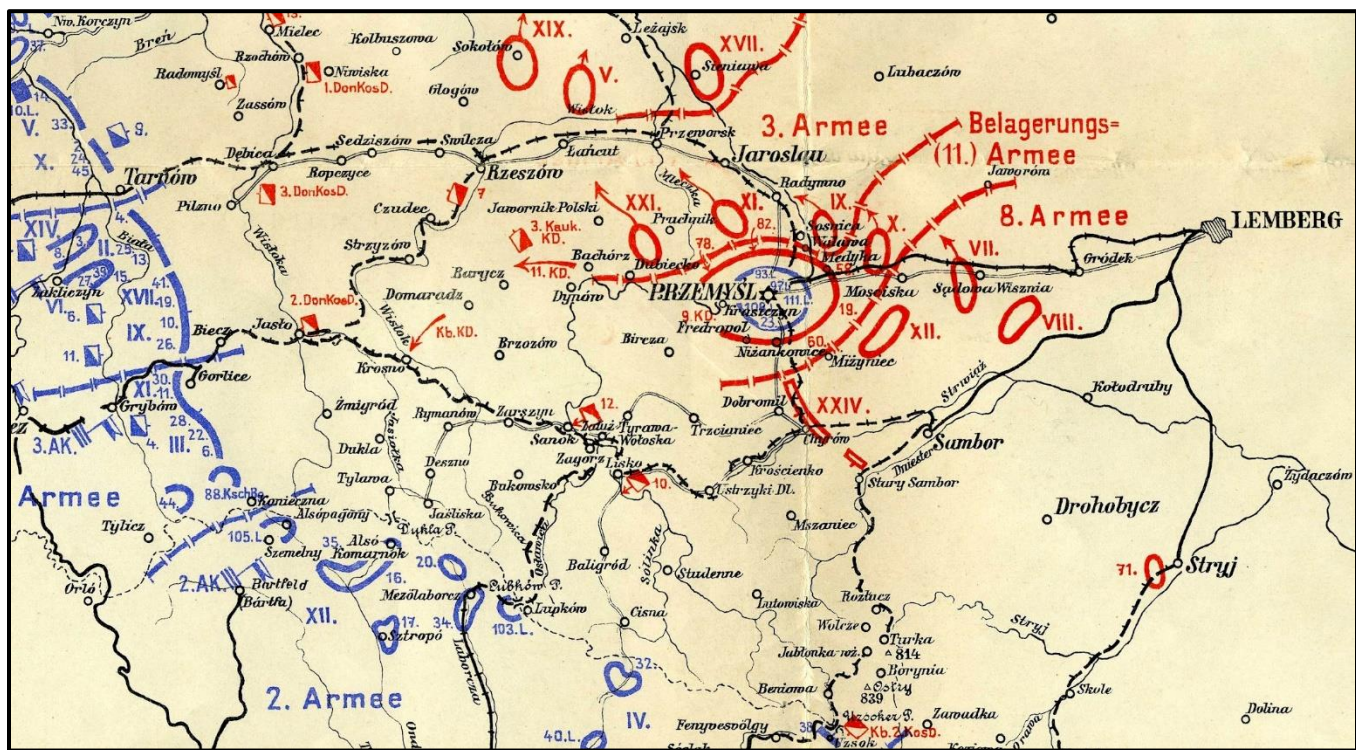
### One Town as Example

The Austrian army ministry attempted to explain their defeat in the Battle of Galicia as part of a [seven-volume history of the war](#) covering 5,000 pages with over 350 detailed maps of troop positions and movements. The two map excerpts on the next page, spanning only the month of September 1914, illustrate the rapid Russian seizure of Galicia at the start of the war.

Taking a single Galician town as an example, on September 1, and only two weeks into the war, Jaryczów Nowy was in Russian hands (the Eleventh Corps of Aleksei Brusilov's infamous Eighth Army) and Lemberg was under threat.



Troop positions of the opposing Austrian (blue) and Russian (red) armies around Lemberg at the start of September 1914. Jaryczow Nowy, just east of Lemberg, was already taken by Russia.

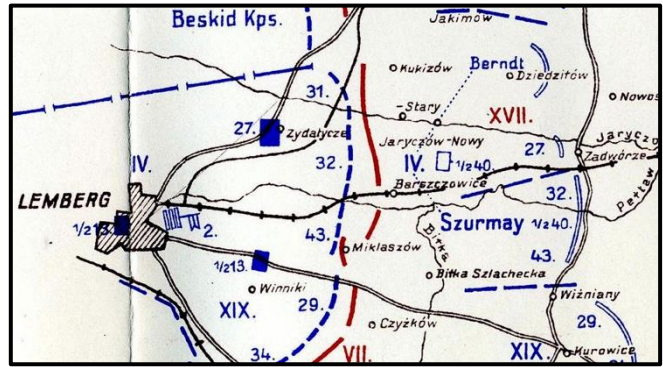


Troop positions in eastern Galicia at the end of September 1914.

Galician capital fell two days later, and by the end of the month, the front had moved 150 miles west through Tarnów, leaving the fortress city of Przemyśl completely surrounded.

For the next nine months, Galicia was Russian; the population adapted to new rulers, new rules, and a new language. Then it became worse: when Austria-Hungary, reinforced by German armies, began to retake Galicia in mid-1915, the eastward progress of the front resulted in greater damage to towns in the region. As Russian military units withdrew, they set fire to buildings and bridges to destroy anything of value to the advancing Central powers.

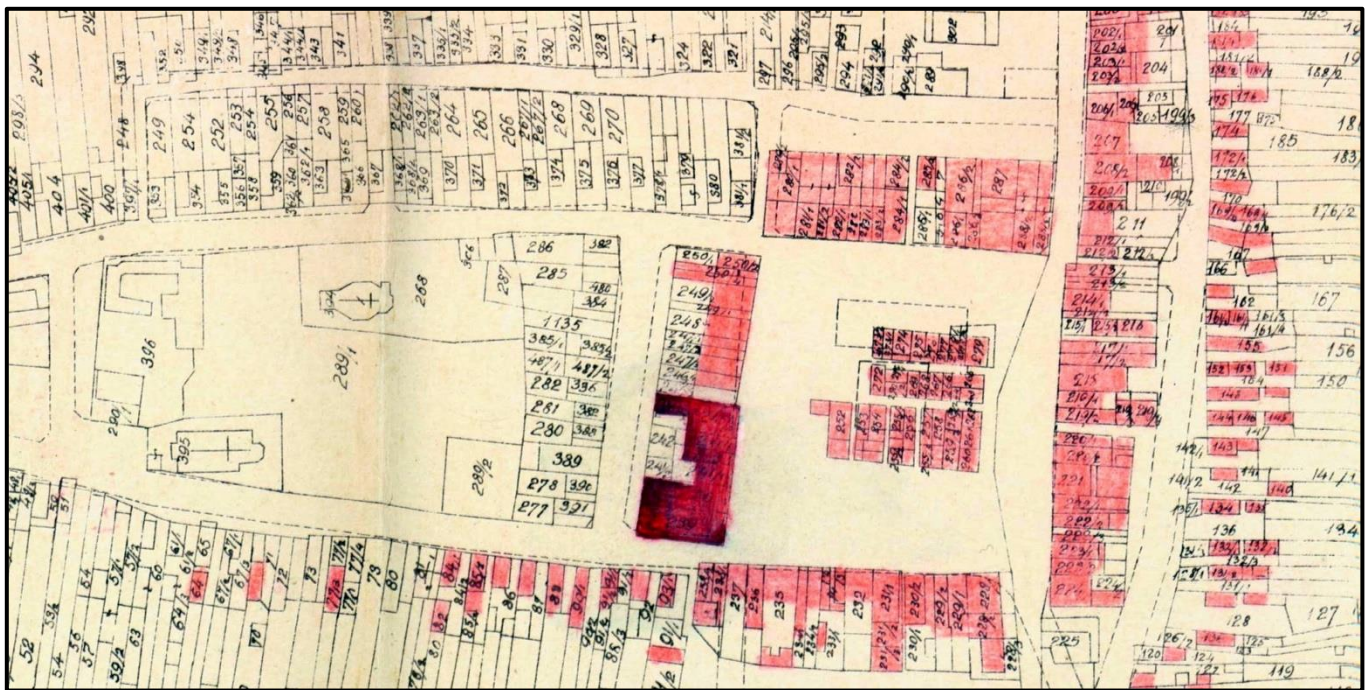
Jaryczów Nowy found itself in the midst of battle again at the start of summer 1915. On June 22, Przemyśl and Lemberg had already been recovered by Austrian and German forces, but Jaryczów Nowy was less than four miles behind the front line, in the hands of Russian Eighth Army. For the next five days, the Central powers battled



*The front returns to Jaryczów Nowy in June 1915*

stubborn Russian forces back and forth around Jaryczów Nowy; the Austrian military historians recorded heavy losses in personnel and equipment, but the devastation to civilians and their properties must also have been very great.

Russian forces never occupied Jaryczów Nowy again; the deadly Brusilov offensive that captured Brody and Stanisławów in 1916 did not quite reach the town. Its citizens were under the control of Austria-Hungary for the next three years.



*An excerpt from the 1917 war damage map of Jaryczów Nowy; destroyed buildings are shown in red*

In 1917, while the war was at a standstill some 50 miles to the east, residents had time to take stock of the damage to their town, and claims were submitted to cover the destroyed buildings; from existing cadastral records [a special map was drawn](#) to indicate where in town the damage was located. The map shows the devastation quite clearly: all but three of the buildings facing the town square were destroyed, including all of the buildings within the market square, along with most of the buildings that faced the main road north of the town center, where the majority of Jewish homes had been (the synagogue and community house were spared). In addition, a separate map was drawn showing just the most-damaged buildings, with the [building owners' names](#) included.



*Jaryczów Nowy's market square before 1904*

It is not hard to imagine the hardship the residents must have endured after the waves of battles in and around Jaryczów Nowy. A postcard from before the war shows a view of the town square looking westward, the towers of two central churches visible in the background. All other buildings visible in this photograph were destroyed in WWI. It is unknown whether any of the property owners received reparations before Austria-Hungary collapsed in 1918 and Jaryczów Nowy became part of independent Poland. The former market area of today's Noviy Yarychiv (Ukraine) lacks the density and organization of

the well-built square visible in the [1850 cadastral map](#). In the next issue, we'll look at how historical maps give clues to life in other Galician towns as the war progressed.

## FACES of GALICIA



*Solomon Herzl Turner in the Austro-Hungarian army during WWI. He was born in 1877, Rohatyn, and died in 1935, Vienna. Early during the war, Solomon's wife and their five children were forced to flee Nadwórna, Galicia, becoming refugees. The Turner family was finally reunited in Vienna. The above photograph was taken in Hungary circa 1917. Submitted by Steven Turner (grandson), Gesher Galicia.*