History in a nutshell

Ages, before the Polish state was even formed. The history of the town dates back to the 12th century, when the village of Wietrzna Góra (Windy Hill) was situated here. Together with the neighbouring villages, it was granted to the nuns of the Norbertine Order from Zwierzyniec (district of Cracow) by Casimir II the Just, High Duke of Poland, at end of the 12th century (sources give the year of this event their benefactor, Casimir II the Just (Polish: Kazimierz II Sprawiedliwy).

From the 13th century, the land trade route connecting Ruthenia with Silesia and Pomerania ran through Kazimierz, which contributed to the development and determined the character of the town. The stone over peaceful trade in the town.

In the 14th century, King Casimir III the Great (Polish: Kazimierz III Wielki) transformed the medieval settlement into a city by granting it a municipal charter. Earlier, in 1325, a local parish was established castle.

Also in the 14th century, the town became a focal point for the Jewish people, who on the turn of the 20th century constituted half of the local population.

Kazimierz Dolny was growing rapidly owing to the ferrying services and customs duties from the flourishing trade. The town owed its wealth and position mainly to the floating goods down the river, grain in particular.

The 16th century saw two great fires of the town. The town raised from ruins and was reconstructed by the mid-17th century to present a new, spectacular layout. Owing to the flourishing transport of grain to Gdańsk, the local merchants amassed great wealth, and the most impressive objects and structures of one of the major commercial centres trading cereals in Poland. During the economic heyday of the town, there were about sixty beautifully ornamented grain silos in Kazimierz Dolny.

In 1657 the Swedish troops marched into the town, and Kazimierz entered the period of terrible ordeals.

The 18th century brought attempts to rebuild the town from the rubble and there was a spark of hope for economic revival in grain trade. However, as a result of all the hardships and war experiences, the town was never to regain its former greatness.

As a result of the Partitions of Poland and the separation of Gdańsk from Poland, the town of Kazimierz Dolny lost its status of a prosperous trading centre.

The town was involved in both the November and January Uprisings against the occupation authorities, which was followed by severe repercussions, including the dissolution of the monastery and persecution of the local population. After the fall of the January Uprising, in 1869 Kazimierz Dolny was deprived of its municipal rights, which were not to be restored until 1927. To make matters worse, the great fire of 1866 destroyed the entire north-west frontage of the market square, together with the City Hall building.

Despite the difficulties, owing to the picturesque situation of the town and its natural values, Kazimierz Dolny became a fashionable summer resort, especially popular among the people from Warsaw, Lublin
in the town, mainly around art professor Tadeusz Pruszkowski and his apprentices. Pruszkowski also founded an art group called the Fellowship of St. Luke the Evangelist (Polish: Bractwo Świętego Łukasza).

Kazimierz Dolny revived during the twenty years after World War I, owing to the increased tourist traffic and establishment of the art colony. However, World War II, and specifically March 1942, ended the age of Kazimierz Dolny as the town of the Jewish community. A considerable part of the town, already damaged during World War I, was completely ruined during World War II.

The new modern layout of Kazimierz Dolny is the result of work of Karol Siciński who supervised the reconstruction of the town after the war.

Today, Kazimierz Dolny with its reconstructed architectural monuments is considered a true gem of architecture, a mecca for artists and an attractive tourist destination.

**The art colony**

Artists would come to Kazimierz Dolny starting from the end of the 18th century. Many prolific painters would create their paintings here, including Zygmunt Vogel, J. Richter, J.F. Piwarski, M.E. Andriolli, Wojciech Gerson, Józef Pankiewicz (who painted the very first series of Impressionist pictures in Poland.

Dolny started in the 20th century, when the Warsaw School of Fine Arts was established, and the eyes of its professors turned to the small town upon the Vistula River. The year 1909 was a landmark in the artistic history of the town, as Władysław Ślewiński, an experienced artist working in Pont-Aven and a artists were becoming an increasingly common sight in Kazimierz Dolny, and the foundations for the art colony were laid.

The art colony was in full bloom in 1923 when prof. Tadeusz Pruszkowski, the president of the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, came here with his apprentices for the first time. Since then, outdoor painting sessions in Kazimierz Dolny have been an indispensable phenomenon in the town. Artists would come here not only to create, but also to make friends and to join or to create art groups after graduation. The first, the most famous and the most significant art group was the Fellowship of St. Luke the Evangelist (Polish: Bractwo Świętego Łukasza) established in 1925. It had Jan Cybis, Jan Zamoyski, Antoni Michalak and Jan Wydra among its members.

Many other artists from other Polish cities representing different artistic styles and forms would follow Dolny. Therefore, it is clear that the Kazimierz Dolny art colony did not have a defined ideological
underpinnings or an art manifesto. The fundamental concept of the art colony revolved around Kazimierz Dolny itself.

Tadeusz Pruszkowski and Antoni Michalak build their houses in the town. Painters, including Jewish artists, would become more and more popular guests in the town and soon they became an inherent element of the urban landscape, which today is the symbol of the town.

after the war ended. They not only created their works, but also started to exhibit them here. Stanislaw followed in his footsteps.

In 2000, the Kazimierz Confraternity of Art (Polish: Kazimierska Konfraternia Sztuki) was established. Its members (approx. 70) carry on the artistic interwar tradition of the art colony.

Art and artists have shaped the identity of Kazimierz Dolny. Both are still present here, and new generations come here to appreciate the value of the town and to become enamoured of Kazimierz Dolny. It can be certainly stated that the art colony in Kazimierz Dolny lives on and thrives, and art was

The memory of art colonies comes flooding back in the entire Europe, which can be confirmed by the operates under the auspices of the European Union. The Vistula Museum in Kazimierz Dolny has been a member of this organization since the year 2000.

Shtetl Kuzmir

For ages, Kazimierz Dolny was a focal point for the Jewish community, which started to emerge here in the early 13th century. In the 16th century it already amounted to 1/6 of the local population, and by the end of the 19th century the Jews constituted half or more of the population.

The Jews usually resided at Mały Rynek and Lubelska Streets, but they would also build houses along side streets next to the market square. In the 17th century, when restrictions concerning urban settlements were abolished, they were allowed to settle at the market square.

During the golden age of the town, the significant local Jewish merchants engaged in trade, especially in floating goods down the river.

The Jews were mainly involved in trade and crafts, but there were also Jewish ferrymen, guides, medics and a chemist.

Before World War II, apart from residential housing, there were many Jewish religious buildings in cemeteries. The presence of Jewish residents was nothing unusual in the everyday life of the town, and there were no ethnic conflicts. The Christian Catholics and the Jews of Kazimierz Dolny lived in symbiosis with each other; however, there were some significant differences between the two cultures, which introduced the element of strangeness of habits.

sidelocks, wearing long frocks called chalats; the Shabbat candles flickering in the dim light; men swaying their bodies back and forth in prayer in their tallits; the hubbub of voices speaking Yiddish and
popular locations for outdoor scenes for film crews. Two well-known American films in the Yiddish

Also, the history of the beautiful Jewish girl, with whom King Casimir III the Great allegedly fell in love, was passed from generation to generation. It was her for whom the King most probably built the castle in Bochotnica, with a secret underground passage that would connect the Bochotnica castle with the one in Kazimierz Dolny.

The local scenery and realistic background details were also illustrated in the stories and novels by Jewish writers, e.g. in A Shtetl (Polish: Miasteczko) by Sholem Asch.

The pre-war Kuzmir was an enchanting town and a favourite outdoor location for photographers. This is where the outstanding series of photographs showing the Jewish realities of the town by Benedykt Jerzy Dorys and Alter Kacyzne were taken.

The Jewish community fell victim to Nazi repression not long after the outbreak of World War II. A ghetto was established between Nadrzeczna and Senatorska Streets, and the entire Jewish population of Kazimierz Dolny and its environs was moved there by force. In March 1942, the German army liquidated the ghetto and moved its residents out of the town. The forced death march of the Jews towards the town of Opole Lubelskie ended with the majority of them dying in the Nazi death camps. Today, all that is left of the once-flourishing Jewish community are the synagogue with an exhibition and a Jewish cemetery in Czerniawy, as well as the nostalgic memories and the unique atmosphere of shtetl Kuzmir.