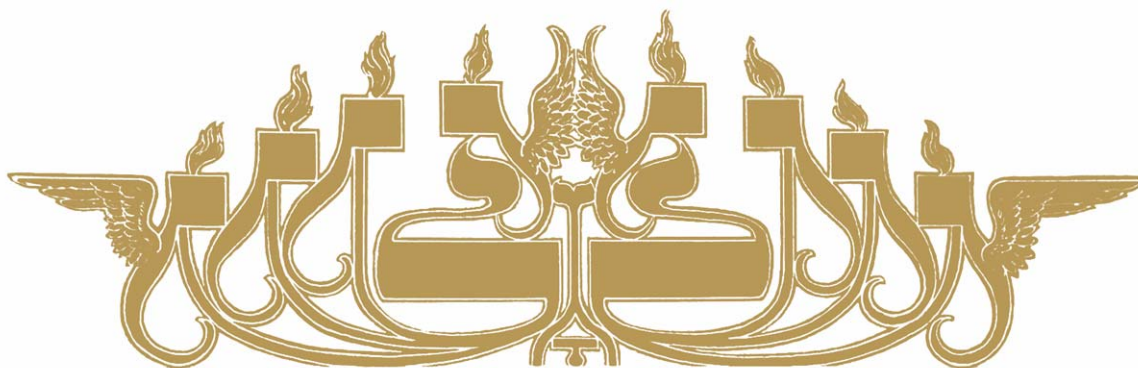


# THE JEWS OF CZĘSTOCHOWA



ŻYDZI CZĘSTOCHOWIANIE

WSPÓLISTNIENIE – HOŁOCAUST – PAMIĘĆ

THE JEWS OF CZĘSTOCHOWA

COEXISTENCE – HOŁOCAUST – MEMORY

## THE JEWS OF CZĘSTOCHOWA

Częstochowa, Poland, a city of 260,000 today and the site of the Jasna Góra Monastery (a Polish Lourdes-like destination for Roman Catholics), was also a major center of Jewish life for centuries. Some 40,000 Jews, constituting one third of the city's population, lived in Częstochowa just prior to World War II. Fewer than 100 Jews live there today.



In 2004, an exhibition mounted in Częstochowa recounted the vitality and contributions of its once vibrant Jewish community that formed an integral part of this important Polish city. The exhibition consisted of over 300 items drawn from the city archives, the collection of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and private collections. Photos were also taken from "Tshenstokhover Yidn," a yiskor [memorial] book published in 1947. In

addition, two videos about the Holocaust years were also produced for viewing at this exhibition.

Our groundbreaking exhibition, "The Jews of Częstochowa," opened in a 2,900 square foot exhibition hall on grounds adjoining the Jasna Góra Monastery in April, 2004. Before closing in July, it was seen by 11,300 visitors. It reopened in Warsaw in October, 2004 in a 2,100 square foot gallery belonging to the Jewish Historical Institute and stayed open through the end of the year.

The opening in Częstochowa was marked by the city administration with a three-day commemoration. The "Days of Remembrance" included welcoming ceremonies, concerts and poetry readings, an academic symposium, and a rededication of the Jewish cemetery. Civic and religious leaders, as well as diplomats from the United States and Israel addressed these events. Attending were local residents and hundreds of foreign visitors with roots in Częstochowa and the Polish Jewish community. Recently, the citizens of Częstochowa voted the exhibition as the "most significant event" of 2004.

The gathering in Częstochowa has inspired interest in Jewish culture among the residents of the city, especially among the youth; it has also stirred interest in the Polish - Jewish Diaspora around the world. It has also led to new educational programs in Poland. In addition, it spawned a "virtual landsmannschaft" website and listserv for Częstochowa Jews and



their descendents at <http://www.częstochowajews.org/>.

While some members of the Polish Jewish community attended the exhibition in Poland, many more are hoping to see it in this country. We are proud to announce that we are bringing this exhibition to North America in 2006 and 2007 and seeking appropriate venues. We have already accepted invitations from the Polish Consulate of New York and from Seton Hall University in New Jersey. In preparation for the tour, we are revising the explanatory texts for American audiences and planning to reduce the number of objects in the traveling exhibition.

We invite questions and indications of interest from other institutions that can support an exhibition of this size and scope. Interested parties should contact Alan Silberstein at 201-568-5640 or [amsilberstein@yahoo.com](mailto:amsilberstein@yahoo.com) or Lea Wolinetz at 845-354-7204 or [wolinetz@optonline.net](mailto:wolinetz@optonline.net).

Sigmund A. Rolat  
Alan M. Silberstein

*In February 2005, the people of Częstochowa showed their approval of both the idea of creating the exhibition and of the way it was presented. "The Jews of Częstochowa" was rewarded in "The Best Cultural Event of the Year" annual poll of readers of the "Gazeta Wyborcza" newspaper.*

*"The Jews of Częstochowa" exhibition won two awards. The "2004 Designer of the Year" was awarded to Professor Jarosław Kweclich, visual artist from the Jan Długosz Academy who designed and artistically arranged the Exhibition.*

*In accepting the statuette for the "Best Cultural Event of the Year" from the Editor-in-Chief of "Gazeta Wyborcza", Professor Jerzy Mizgalski, the Dean of the Jan Długosz Academy stated: "I would like this statuette to travel the world with our exhibit." And so it shall!*

## DESCRIPTION OF THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition currently consists of 348 items, organized by topic and period as described below. Most of the items are very high quality photographic reproductions of documents and large poster photographs (typically 50cm x 70 cm) laminated on matt stock and protectively coated, ready to be individually hung. They are labeled in English and Polish. There are a number of original artifacts, as well.

Each section is introduced with explanatory text. The exhibition starts by recounting the earliest evidence of the Jewish community in Częstochowa. It is followed by a portrait of the richness of their life and coexistence with their neighbors during the 1900's. Topics covered include Jewish institutions, civic life, education and culture. As visitors approach the area depicting the Holocaust era, they are confronted by a large montage photograph of a barbed wire barrier and Nazi guards. Beyond that, there are photographs, maps, artifacts and biographical videos, eyewitness testimony to convey the experience of the Jewish citizens of Częstochowa during and after World War II. A detailed description is provided below.



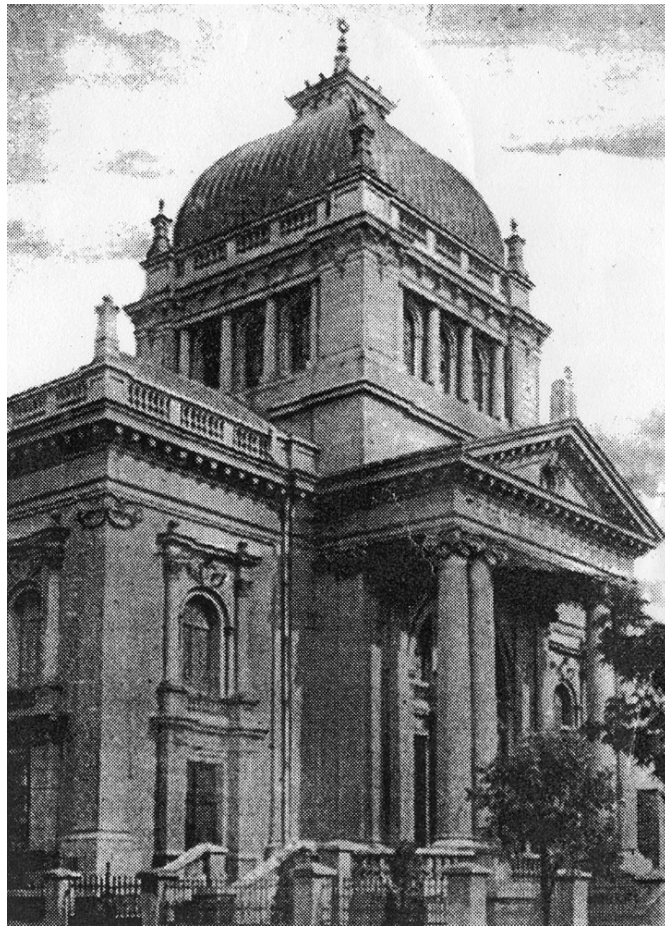
A hard-bound album entitled, “The Jews of Częstochowa, Coexistence—Holocaust—Memory,” has been published and includes many of the images from the exhibition and several essays (in both Polish and English). It is for sale in Poland for 108 Zlotys (\$33 US) and can be ordered from Jarden at <http://www.jewish-bookshop.com/towar.php?t=611>.

How did this project come about?

It was conceived by Professor Jerzy Mizgalsky, Dean of Education at the Jan Długosz Academy in Częstochowa and Dr. Elizabeth Mundlak, a retired Jewish Venezuelan university professor who was born in Częstochowa during the Holocaust and rescued by Christians. Prof. Mizgalsky, an expert on the cultural history of the Jewish community of Częstochowa, discovered a treasure trove of documents and photographs in the city archives. Prof. Mundlak, the granddaughter of spiritual leader Rabbi Nachum Asch, produced a documentary about her own rescue, which took her to Częstochowa where she met Prof. Mizgalsky. Together they dreamed of an exhibition based on the archival materials and sought funding.

The project was underwritten by Sigmund Rolat and Alan Silberstein, American-Jewish businessmen with roots in Częstochowa. With the help of his uncle and aunt, Leon and Rose Silberstein (Alan's parents, now deceased), Rolat survived the war in the Częstochowa Ghetto. Rolat and Silberstein expanded the scope of the project and engaged the services of the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw to ensure historical accuracy. They also enlisted and received help and advice from Yad Vashem in Israel and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. The design and execution of the exhibition in Częstochowa was directed by Prof. Jarosław Kweclich, artist and colleague of Prof. Mizgalsi at the Jan Długosz Academy.

Once the scope of the project was established, the mayor of Częstochowa, President Tadeusz Wrona provided his wholehearted support. His administration organized the "Days of Remembrance," undertook a partial restoration of the Jewish Cemetery, and took other steps to build bridges to the Jewish community.



*Anna Maciejowska, an art historian and director of a fine arts high school for 13-20 year olds, was so moved by what she saw in the exhibit that she developed a program, "Inspiration of Jewish Culture", in which her students create artwork connected with Jewish life. "My pupils started thinking about Jewish culture in Częstochowa, then in Poland, then in Europe," she said.*

**Anna Maciejowska met with an official from the Ministry of Education to discuss the inclusion of elements of her program in national scholastic curricula.**

*And here are the words of a Polish student: "Teenagers came to visit and started to have a vision on how to understand Jewish history. People had stereotypes and few knew the true history, but now everything changed. In Częstochowa, we not only think about Jasna Góra, but think also about the Jews who helped build this city."*

## ***DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF "THE JEWS OF CZĘSTOCHOWA"***

### **PANORAMA OF THE CITY IN THE 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> CENTURIES**

Seventeen large photographs (most 50 cm x 70 cm or 70 cm x 100 cm) portray street life in the Jewish neighborhoods and major Jewish institutions. One large photograph, printed on vinyl (255 cm x 450 cm), shows the vista of Aleja Najświętszej Marii Panny, the "Champs Elysées" of Częstochowa, as it looked at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A wide boulevard, Aleja N.M.P. extended from the Jewish area, past the old City Hall and ended at the entrance to the Jasna Góra monastery.



### **THE JEWISH COMMUNITY**

#### **RABBI NACHUM ASCH**

Rabbi Nachum Asch was widely regarded as the spiritual leader of the Częstochowa Jewish community for some sixty years until 1935. He was the rabbi at the "Old Synagogue," one of the larger congregations. He successfully took on the national legislature over a proposed law outlawing Kosher ritual slaughter by explaining the origins, health and animal welfare benefits. Rabbi Asch is introduced by eight large photographs of the Rabbi and his family, by an obituary column about his wife, his pen case, and a copy of his famous treatise on ritual slaughter.

#### **JEWISH INSTITUTIONS**

The Jewish community provided support to the poor, sick and elderly. Ten posters show photos of residents of the old age home and documents related to Jewish institutions such as charities and a synagogue.

#### **CEMETERY**

Eleven photographs show gravestones in the Częstochowa Jewish Cemetery as they look today. The Jewish cemetery has been in continuous use from 1800. During the Holocaust, the cemetery served as a killing field: prisoners were shot there and buried in mass graves. By and large, the cemetery was not destroyed by the Nazis. However, it did suffer from neglect after the war. The last gravestone is dated 1965. In 2004, the city began to restore the cemetery in conjunction with the Days of Remembrance.

## **CITIZENS OF CZĘSTOCHOWA**

Sixteen photographs portray family life, as do two press announcements of engagements. For display in a display case, eight identification cards, passports, and other documents from the 1930's bring their owners back to life.

## **COEXISTENCE**

### **CIVIC LIFE**



Eight posters of photos and documents portray the full participation of Jews in civic and public life. The highlight of this section is an extra large photo (vinyl, 140 x 230 cm) showing Rabbi Asch holding a Torah and welcoming Polish President Moscicki on his visit to Częstochowa.

### **ECONOMY**

In the nineteenth century, Częstochowa became an industrial center including steel fabrication, and manufacture of textiles, toys, and devotional articles. Jews were at the center of this thriving economic boom. Their economic activity is portrayed in seven posters including company letterheads, craft guild emblems, patents and drawings of factories. For display in a case, seventeen objects including ads and obituaries of businessmen provide further insight into the role of Jews in the business economy. The highlight of this display is a doll's head from 1939, symbolizing the toy business.

### **EDUCATION**

The Jewish community ran an extensive and diverse education system, providing religious education at cheders (more than thirty) and yeshivas; and secular education at nine primary comprehensive and public schools, two secondary schools, a grammar school, and several trade schools. Twenty-two posters of classroom photos, report cards, and ads portray the vitality of the Jewish education system.

### **ZIONIST MOVEMENT**

Six posters (five photos and one document) portray Jewish participation in Zionist organizations, including youth training for agricultural life in preparation for emigration to Palestine.

## CULTURE

Twenty posters of photos, programs and ads portray the decorative arts, concerts and movies. Of special interest are pictures showing Prof. Perec Willenberg, famous artist and educator, decorating the ceiling of the Old Synagogue in the 1920's.

## SPORTS

Six photos show Jewish enthusiasm for athletic activities.



## THE HOLOCAUST

This section is separated from the rest of the exhibition by a “gate” consisting of two identical very large montage photographs of the barbed wire barriers which surrounded the HASAG slave labor camp and Nazis on guard duty.

### THE PERIOD BEFORE THE GHETTO WAS ESTABLISHED (1939-1943)



Upon entering this section of the exhibition, there is a large photo (vinyl, 450 cm x 300 cm) showing the “New” Synagogue as it looked after the Nazis and their supporters burned it to a shell on December 25, 1939. It can be compared with photos of its stately former appearance, and in its incarnation today, as the city’s “Philharmonic Hall.”

Twenty other posters portray the privations of life during this early period of the Holocaust. Several photos and documents deal with the Judenrat (Jewish governing council) established to carry out German requirements for supplying slave laborers and maintenance of reduced living standards. Included are six charts which comprise a “statistical annual report” of the work of the Judenrat in 1940.

## THE GHETTO

The first Ghetto (the “Large Ghetto”) was established by the Nazis in April 1941. A large map shows the boundaries of the Large Ghetto. Nine posters of photos, official announcements and a satirical leaflet portray ghetto life.

In this section, a TV and DVD player are used to play (in a continuous loop) a 35-minute video of testimony produced by Yale University’s Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies specifically for this exhibition. Clips are shown from

the testimony of seven surviving Jews from Czestochowa who describe growing up in the area, how they perceived the onset of the Holocaust, how they survived during the occupation, and how they carried on with their lives after the war.

## ENFORCEMENT OF GHETTO PRIVATIONS

Five posters portray the increasing privations enforced by Jewish Police appointed by the Judenrat. Eight original artifacts including food stamps, work permits, and an armband make a haunting display to be placed in a case.



## LIQUIDATION OF THE GHETTO: SEPTEMBER 22 - OCTOBER 8, 1942

On Yom Kippur, September 1942, the Nazis began to “liquidate,” the Nazi euphemism for destroy, the Ghetto, deporting some 40,000 Jews to Treblinka for extermination, their tem for murder. Those not deported were crowded into a smaller area known as the “Small Ghetto.” Three posters portray the deportations. Most haunting among these is a business-like memo showing the schedule of transports to Treblinka and the number of Jews to be transported on each. There are three posters related to Treblinka, where over 800,000 Jews



were murdered in eighteen months. Also in this section are bronze sculptures (each approximately 60 cm x 60 cm x 70 cm) portraying Jews in their last minutes before extermination, sculpted by Samuel Willenberg. Willenberg, who lives in Israel, was the son of the Perec Willenberg, whose art graced the Old Synagogue. He is also known as a survivor of the Treblinka revolt (in August 1943) and a veteran of the Warsaw Uprising, when the Warsaw non-Jews revolted against the Germans, a year later.

## HASAG

HASAG was a private German firm that set up production facilities on the outskirts of Czestochowa to produce war materiel using slave labor. After the liquidation of the Small Ghetto in January 1943, any survivors left were taken to work at HASAG. A large map (vinyl) shows the location of these slave labor camps. (Today, the buildings of HASAG Percery survive as a revitalized industrial zone.) A portrait of resistance fighters and a poem written by an inmate represent this period.

## AFTER THE WAR

Some 5,000 Jews survived in Częstochowa or returned from hiding or having survived in concentration camps. Seven posters portray their efforts to rebuild their lives. Most notable is a copy of an appeal issued by Częstochowa Bishop Theodor Kubina condemning the pogroms in the city of Kielce where on July 4, 1946, Christian residents harassed and killed Jews returning to their homes.

## VIDEOS

A TV monitor should be used to play two videos: One, produced specifically for this exhibition, is *As If It Were Yesterday*, a 60-minute documentary which recounts the wartime experiences of teenager Sigmund Rolat, one of the organizers of this exhibition. It was directed by the award winning Polish documentary film maker Michal Trepka. The second, *I was Lucky*, is the story of the survival of Elizabeth Mundlak, who was born in the Ghetto during the war and smuggled to the Christian side to be raised by a Christian family. This documentary, 35-minutes long, was directed by Piotr Bartecki.

## ADDITIONAL MATERIAL UNDER DEVELOPMENT

For American audiences, Seton Hall is developing a section giving background on the non-Jewish history of Częstochowa and explaining the importance of this city to Catholics. Other venues may be able to add artifacts from the local community.

## CONTACT INFORMATION

Parties interested in hosting this exhibition during 2006 - 2007 should contact Alan Silberstein at 201-568-5640 or [amsilberstein@yahoo.com](mailto:amsilberstein@yahoo.com), or Lea Wolinetz at 845-354-7204 or [wolinetz@optonline.net](mailto:wolinetz@optonline.net).

### Illustrations in this brochure:

- Page 1 Logo of the exhibition, adapted from the design by Perec Willenberg for the Old Synagogue.
- Page 2 Exhibition in Częstochowa in April 2004. Sigmund Rolat and Cardinal Edward M. Egan. Jacob Shacharon and Eric Silberstein.
- Page 4 Exhibition in Częstochowa in April 2004.
- Page 5 New Synagogue before World War II.
- Page 7 Aleja N.M.P. in the early 1900's.
- Page 8 Rabbi Nachum Ash welcomes President Moscicki of Poland to Częstochowa.
- Page 9 Maccabi Sports Team in 1930's.  
Mural of barbed wire surrounding HASAG slave labor camp.
- Page 10 Armband worn by the Jewish Police.  
German soldiers marching Jewish Ghetto inmates to railroad station.