



# THE JEWS OF CZĘSTOCHOWA

## COEXISTENCE...HOLOCAUST...MEMORY

### **Narrative Description**

Częstochowa, Poland, a city with a current population of 260,000 and the site of the Jasna Góra Monastery, a holy site and pilgrimage destination for Polish 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 the once vibrant Jewish community that formed an integral part of this important Polish city. The exhibition consisted of over 300 scanned and enlarged photographs and original artifacts from the city archives, the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw, and private collections. Photos were also taken from "Tshenstokhover Yidn," a *yiskor* [memorial] book published in 1947 written by Jewish former residents of the city. In addition, two videos about life before and during the Holocaust years, with eyewitness recollections by former residents were also produced especially to complement the exhibition.

The exhibition is organized by theme with introductory texts for each section. It starts by recounting the earliest evidence of the Jewish community in Częstochowa which dates to the 17th century. This is followed by a portrait of the richness of Jewish life and coexistence with their neighbors during the 1900's. Topics covered include Jewish institutions, civic life, education, business, religious life, Zionist activities and culture. The tragic experience of the Jewish community during the Holocaust is conveyed in photographs, maps, artifacts and biographical videos with eyewitness testimony by survivors. These portray life in the Częstochowa Ghetto, survival in the HASAG labor camps and deportations of 40,000 Jews to Treblinka where most were murdered.

This groundbreaking exhibition was assembled by the faculty of the Jan Długosz Academy, the local college in Częstochowa, and underwritten by Sigmund Rolat and Alan Silberstein, Jewish-American businessmen with roots in Częstochowa. It opened in a building on grounds adjoining the Jasna Góra Monastery in April, 2004, and subsequently in Warsaw at the Jewish Historical Institute. It was seen by tens of thousands of Polish and foreign visitors at the two venues. The citizens of Częstochowa voted the exhibition as the "most significant event" of 2004. The exhibition 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, many of whom have expressed interest in seeing the exhibition come to their communities.

We are proud to announce that we are bringing this exhibition to North America in 2006 and 2007 and seeking appropriate venues. At present, the exhibition will be presented at the Polish Consulate of New York, the Russell Senate Office Building Rotunda in Washington, D.C., and Seton Hall University in New Jersey. In preparation for the tour, all materials will be prepared for easy installation, explanatory texts will be written for American audiences and artifacts and photographs will be selected so that the exhibition can be effectively installed in a variety of spaces while sustaining the integrity of this moving story. .

Sigmund A. Rolat & Alan M. Silberstein

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### Space Requirements

The entire exhibition requires 1,000 - 1,500 square feet. Approximately 100-150 photographic and text panels (typical size 20" x 28" with several larger panels measuring 177" x 119"). All panels are prepared for hanging on a variety of wall systems. Approximately 15 artifacts require secure display cases to be provided by the host institution.

**Audio Visual Requirements:** TV/DVD player for continuous loop of 35 minute video, "Remembering Częstochowa," and ideally, a TV/DVD player and viewing area for a 60 minute video, "As if it were Yesterday" and 35 minute video, "I was Lucky." All were commissioned for this exhibition.

**Crates:** 3 crates (30" x 19" x 42") plus a large tube. Total weight 175 lbs.

**Dates Available:** April 2006 through December 2007

**Insurance Value:** \$200,000. Insurance to be covered by host institution during installation and shipping to next host venue.

**Booking Period:** The minimum booking period is eight weeks.

**Rental Fee:** The rental fee for this exhibition is \$800 a month. Each venue is responsible for shipping to the next host venue.



**Additional Components:** Each host institution will be provided with a CD of graphics and explanatory text for the exhibition brochure. The brochure can be customized by host museum in order to provide address, hours and any special programs. Each institution is responsible for printing costs. Docent training materials will also be provided. Available for sale will be a catalogue of the exhibition and DVDs of the videos produced for this exhibition.



### Contact Information:

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#### Illustrations:

- Częstochowa Menorah, logo of the Exhibition; adapted from the decoration by Perec Willenberg for the Old Synagogue of Częstochowa
- Exhibition installation, Częstochowa in April 2003
- Częstochowa New Synagogue before World War II, burned by Nazis in December 1939