

Jewish Communal Life Before the War

As the eighth [largest] Jewish centre in Poland, Częstochowa played a significant role in [Jewish] communal life. All the political parties had branches there and the charitable institutions also conducted a broad activity. The [composition of the] Committee of Management of the Jewish *Kehilla* reflected the balance of power of the political parties.

Among the respected personalities, who led the *Kehilla* Committee of Management were Henryk Markusfeld (the renowned philanthropist), Jakub Rozenberg, Szmul Goldsztajn, Joachim [Chaim] Weksler, Dr Gajsler, Dr Braum [sic Braun¹], Raphael Federman, Icek-Mendel Epsztajn and others. The Jewish *Kehilla* Committee of Management had an entire array of institutions, which served the Jewish populace. The Mizrachi and Zionist parties had the domineering role in the *Kehilla* Committee of Management. One of the most important institutions was the new Jewish Hospital in Zawodzie. The land, the buildings and the installed equipment were donated by **Henryk Markusfeld**. The hospital had various departments: internal medicine, surgery, gynaecology, laryngology, ophthalmology, dermatology, paediatrics and more. The hospital was equipped with the most modern installations and apparatuses. It also had home economic departments: kitchens (general and dietary), its own laundry, an entire array of storerooms and similar installations.

For long years, **Josef Imich** occupied the position of director. The chief physician was the renowned laryngologist, **Dr Ludwik Batawja**. Its representative, Dr **Wajsberg**, was tragically killed on 20th March 1943 in the *akcja* against the intelligentsia. She was shot, together with everyone, in the cemetery in Częstochowa.

This same philanthropist, Henryk Markusfeld, established the *moishav zkeinim* [aged care home], where elderly folk, who were all alone, received a home, food, clothing, medical attention and social entertainment. An orphanage was also established. The children were brought up in a [Jewish] national spirit and received general education and professional training according to their capabilities. Instruction was under the expert leadership of Mrs Sztarke and Mr Josef Imich.

The orphanage and aged care home were set up in a building on ul. Podgórna, in Ostatni Grosz. They were under the control of the “Dobroczynność” (Charity) society. The building was named in honour of **Mina Werde**, due to the following reason:

A wealthy assimilated family by the name of Werde lived in Komacher’s building, at ul. Garncarska 26, on the corner of ul. Prosta (Mirowska). Their daughter was called Mina. On Yom Kippur Eve, when Jews went to the prayer-houses and synagogues for Kol Nidrei, Mina sat and played the piano. The sounds of her playing reached the nearby synagogue. This caused embitterment amongst the Jews, who were praying, and they cursed her. Shortly afterwards, Mina died unexpectedly. Her parents were extremely stricken, and wishing to redeem her deed, they helped to establish the orphanage and aged care home building, where the two institutions were named after her, Mina Werde.

¹ [TN: This correction, among others, appears in a list of misprints which the author presented on p.336 of the book “Czenstochow” (1958), in “A Letter to the Editors from Dr Benjamin Orenstein”.]

There was also a whole series of aid institutions within the healthcare system, such as:

- **TOZ** (Society for the Safeguarding of the Health²) - the chief activist was Jakow Rozyner, who concurrently led the institution's cultural activity;
- **Linas Ha'Tzedek**³ (a society to support needy, sick people);
- **Linas Choilim**⁴ (society to serve needy sick people) and
- **Dobroczyność**.

There was also a branch of the **Auxilium Academicum Judaicum**⁵; the president of which was the advocate, Jan Glikson. Secretary was the current lawyer, Estera Epszajn.

Among the various clubs, there was a chess players' club on Aleja Wolności and, afterwards, I Aleja 14. The club was frequented by the Jewish intelligentsia and, amongst its members, there was an entire array of chess masters, such as Professor Słonimski, Professor Bałabanow, the engineer Korngold, the editor Semiatycki, Majlich Moszkowicz and others.

The sports movement arose in 1915, during the German occupation, under the name "Jewish Gymnastics-Sporting Association" (*Żydowskie Towarzystwo Gier Sportowych*⁶). In 1920, the following sports clubs were established: Laudo [sic Lauda] and Sport. They united in 1921 under the name "Warta". Its leader was the engineer Rajcom⁷. Two years later (in 1923), new clubs were organised: Ascola, Jordania, Ha'Gibor⁸, Splendid, Ogniwo, Gwiazda⁹, Morgensztern and Ha'Koach¹⁰.

In 1929, Jordania joined the Jewish Gymnastics-Sporting Association. In 1932, Dr Aleksander Rozenfeld, the vice-chairman of the *Brit Ivrit Olamit* [World Hebrew Union], spent time in Częstochowa. With his assistance and the initiative of Chaim Birenholz, Izrael Tiber and Josef Orbach, a unification conference of the sporting clubs Ha'Koach, Ascola, Warta and ŻTG-S was held. After three months of negotiations, these clubs united under the name "Jewish Gymnastics-Sporting Association Makabi". The President was Jakow Rozenberg (the president of the *Kehilla*); representatives - engineer Czesław Rajcom, Dr Leon Goldman and advocate Hasenfeld; Honorary President - Headmistress Belle Sigman (an American¹¹). The last president was the lawyer, Dr [Lajb] Asz (a son of Rabbi Nachum Asz).

The Makabi united sports club had its own gymnastics hall and sports ground. The club had respected boxers, such as Josef Szajn, Jidl Binder (Makabi champion, who is now in the Land of Israel), Dilewski (current coach of the Ichud [Union] sports club in Landsberg), Szmulek Orbach (current player of Ichud in Landsberg), Berek Pieprz (current lightweight boxing

² [TN: The society's full name was *Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej* (Society for the Safeguarding of the Health of the Jewish Population).]

³ [TN: Heb., "Lodgings of Righteousness".]

⁴ [TN: Heb., "Lodgings of the Sick".]

⁵ [TN: Aka "Stowarzyszenia Pomocy Studentom Żydowskim" (Association for Aid to Jewish Students).]

⁶ [TN: Pol., lit. "Jewish Sporting Games Association"; in all other sources, the association's name appears as "Żydowskie Towarzystwo Gimnastyczno-Sportowe" (ŻTG-S), which is in keeping with its name in Yiddish, as it appears here, too: "Yiddisher Turn un Sport Verejn", or "Jewish Gymnastics-Sporting Association".]

⁷ [TN: This surname is erroneously spelt "Rajcam" in this book.]

⁸ [TN: Heb., "The Strongman" or "The Hero".]

⁹ [TN: Pol., "The Cell" and "The Star"; although there actually was a sports club called "Ogniwo", in this context it could be a misprint for another club named "Ognisko" (The Fire).]

¹⁰ [TN: Yid., "Morning Star" and Heb., "The Force".]

¹¹ [TN: Apparently the wife of Abram (Abe) Sigman, who, in 1915, left Częstochowa for America, then returned to Częstochowa and finally emigrated to America for good in 1938, as stated in the "Who's Who" section of the book "Czenstochover Yidn".]

champion in the American Zone) and an entire array of others. The Makabi club also held the championship in volleyball¹² and basketball. Its [most] acclaimed runners and jumpers were Szmaragd, Goldszajder, Adolek¹³, Chwat and others.

The sports clubs Splendid and Ogniwo [sic Ognisko?] merged under the name “Błyskawica” [Lightning¹⁴] and were led by Szaja Gliksman and Salek Goldberg. The club ascended to [the Football Association’s] “A” grade shortly before the outbreak of the War.

Religious life was concentrated within the religious institutions. Among the [most] honoured houses of prayer were the following:

- the **Old Synagogue** on ul. Nadrzeczna;
- the **New Synagogue** on [the corner of ul. Wilsona and] ul. Garibaldiiego, [which was known as] the “German Synagogue” led by Rabbi [Dr] Hirsberg;
- the **shul on ul. Katedralna**, headed by the Maggid¹⁵;
- the **Ohel Nachum**¹⁶ study-hall next to the Old Synagogue;
- **Pruszycki’s shul** at I Aleja 1;
- the **Ohel Jakow shul** at I Aleja 4;
- the **rope-makers’ synagogue** at ul. Nadrzeczna 54;
- **Machzikei Ha’Das**¹⁷ at ul. Nadrzeczna 50,

and an entire array of *chevres* and *minyunim*¹⁸.

There were many kinds of *Chassidim* - followers of *Rebbes* - who had their own *shtieblech* (houses of prayer), such as the Gerers, Belzers, Radomskers, Pilcers, Rozprzers, and Aleksanderers ([who] had their *shtiebel* at ul. Krakowska 7). There were also *Chassidim* of Uman¹⁹, whom people called “the dead *Chassidim*” - they had their *shtiebel* in Chaim Weksler’s building at I Aleja 6.

When a *mikve* (ritual bathhouse), with modern facilities, was built on ul. Garibaldiiego, the old *mikve*, which was on ul. Nadrzeczna between the Old Synagogue and the Study-Hall, was closed down. The manager of the [new] *mikve* on Garibaldiiego was Icek-Mendel Epszajn, the owner of the wine shop at Nowy Rynek 2.

There were two respected *yeshivas* [Torah academies]:

- **“Kesor Toire”** [Crown of Torah], of the Radomsker Rebbe (its patron was Reb Lajbel Kantor, a scholarly Jew).
- The second was the *yeshiva* of the **Rabbi of Wieruszów**²⁰.

¹² [TN: The word used in the original is “resz-bal”, which apparently does not exist. We have taken “volleyball” from a passage in *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. I, col.507, which states that the ŻTG-S (Makabi) had men’s and women’s volleyball and basketball divisions.]

¹³ [TN: Diminutive form of the given name Adolf; the surname is not mentioned.]

¹⁴ [TN: In *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. I, col.518, there is a completely different version, as follows: “This club began its activity back in the 1920’s, under the name ‘Ognisko’ [Pol.; Fire]. Owing to annoyances on part of the Polish authorities, the club was forced to change its name often; earlier to ‘Splendid’, later to ‘Błyskawica’, and lastly to ‘Admira’.”]

¹⁵ [TN: Heb., “Preacher”; ref. to Rabbi Josef-Szymon Koblenz.]

¹⁶ [TN: Heb., “Tent of Nahum”.]

¹⁷ [TN: Heb., “Upholders of Religion”.]

¹⁸ [TN: Heb., “societies” and “prayer quorums”, respectively.]

¹⁹ [TN: Followers of Rebbe Nachman of Bracław (Bratslav, Ukraine), who died at the age of thirty-eight in Uman, Ukraine, where he is buried. Following his death, no new Rebbe of Bracław was ever elected, as his followers obviously thought him irreplaceable - thus their nickname in *Częstochowa*: “dead *Chassidim*”.]

²⁰ [TN: Ref. to Rebbe Chanoch Henech God Justman of Pilica, who officiated as Rabbi of Wieruszów before succeeding his father as Rebbe of Pilica upon the latter’s death in 1920.]

The *cheders* [religious primary schools] were:

- **Yesodei Ha'Toire** [Foundations of the Torah] of Agudas Yisroel,
- **Machzikei Ha'Das**, Grylak, Pinches Orkusz [sic Arkusz], Edelist,
- **The People's Talmud Torah** of the *Kehilla*, run by the headmaster Reb Jehoszua Zeligman, a hearty Jew and a great scholar

and also an entire array of private religious *cheders*²¹ where, besides the religious studies, [some] secular subjects were also studied.

There was also an entire array of scholars, who had great fame due to their knowledge of the Talmud. Among others [there were] the dean of the *yeshiva* [Reb] Lajzer Jakubowicz, [Reb] Rubin Rechtman, [Reb] Machel Szwarcbbaum, [Reb] Abram-Naftuli Horowicz, [Reb] Wolwicz Borensztajn and [Reb] Motl Przyrowicz. Their disciples, later, studied in the world-famous institute for Jewish knowledge, Rabbi Szapira's "Yeshivas Chachmei Lublin" [Sages of Lublin Yeshiva]; [these disciples were:] Reb Wolwel Borensztajn²², Reb Henech Brill, Reb Nute Rajcher, Reb Mojsze Wolbromer²³ and Abram Lewenholtz²⁴.

Of the communal charitable institutions, the following are worth mentioning:

Hachnuses Orchim [Hospitality for Wayfarers], whose purpose was to feed poor wayfarers and provide them with overnight accommodation. The building was on ul. Garncarska. This institution was founded by Henryk Markusfeld, who was the Honorary President. The manager was the Zionist activist Nussen [or Natan] Gerichter and, at the end, Henech Lapidus. As presidents of the institution, Icek-Mendel Epsztajn and Szmul Niemirowski accomplished much for it. Upon celebrating the laying of the institution's cornerstone, all the members of the management committee signed their names on a piece of parchment, which was put inside a bottle. This bottle was built into the building's foundations.

For the institution's twenty-fifth anniversary, a festive banquet was held. The members of management committee came in their holiday attire. The reports and speeches gave expression to the communal and charitable work of *Hachnuses Orchim*. Awards and gifts were handed out. The institution's meritorious President, Icek-Mendel Epsztajn, received a golden decoration.

When the Nazi forces marched into Częstochowa, they took the picture²⁵ that was hanging in the institution and sent it off to the Jew-hater Julius Streicher, who printed the picture in *Der*

²¹ [TN: This last passage is reproduced almost verbatim on p.15 of the book "Czenstochov" (1958), but with critically different punctuation and additions, as follows:

"Aguda had an entire series of lower [i.e., ages 13-16] yeshivas in Częstochowa under the name 'Yesodei Ha'Toire', in which the Machzikei Hadas leaders, Messrs Grylak, Pinches Arkusz and Edelist were active.

There was also a 'People's Talmud Torah' that was created by the kehilla, and was headed by Reb Szyja Zeligman, a Torah scholar, and a Jew with fine attributes. Besides these, there were a great many private cheders."

²² [TN: Unless this is a misprint, the ref. is obviously to a different individual from the Reb Wolwicz Borensztajn mentioned above.]

²³ [TN: According to *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. I, col.591, this was Reb Mojsze Bram from Wolbrom.]

²⁴ [TN: Although this surname did exist (it is spelt Lewenholtz in the records), we have found no evidence of it in Częstochowa; it is perhaps a ref. to the surname Lewenhof, which was widespread in Częstochowa.]

²⁵ [TN: Presumably with the portraits of former/current presidents and members of management.]

Stürmer with the following caption: “The greatest Jewish murderers and criminals in Częstochowa”. During the War, the aged care home was moved to the **Hachnuses Orchim**.

Hachnuses Kale was a society to provide poor brides, mainly orphans, with dowries and wedding celebrations. All this was carried out in a way that no one knew about it²⁶. Such weddings were held with all the pomp and traditions.

Malbish Arimim was a society to clothe the poor, [both] adults and children.

Bais Lechem was a society to support the poor with provisions. The management committee consisted of the President Szmul Niemirowski, Berl Bocian, Icek-Mendel Epsztajn and others. One of the institution’s founders and its first president was Icek-Mendel Epsztajn. Their main activity was to provide the poor with their holiday needs and, above all, with *matzes* and wine for the central Jewish holiday of Pesach.

Git-Shabbes Yidelech²⁷ was a separate society. Every *Shabbes*, its members went about, across the courtyards, shouting, “*Git Shabbes, Yidelech*, hand down, throw down whatever you can”. The children always waited for the “*Git-Shabbes Yidelech*” in order to be able to put something into their baskets. Pious women baked *challes*²⁸ especially for the collection. The products gathered were then distributed amongst Jewish arrestees and also amongst the sick. We should note that in all these institutions everyone worked for free and, in addition, spent large sums of money. The president of this institution and its most active worker was Emanuel Wajcenblat, a brush-maker by trade. People called him “*Emanulke Bersztn-macher*” [Brush-maker].

The **Ezra** [Aid] women’s aid institution was headed by Mrs Gerichter. There was also a **Chevra Kadisha**, which consisted mostly of older, religious Jews who engaged in burying the dead.

The **Achiezer** [Fraternal Aid] society was an insurance society which, in every case of a death, paid the family of the deceased 5,000 złoty.

In Częstochowa, belonging to the *Chevra Kadisha* was considered an honour. This was the oldest of all the societies, dating from the establishment of the Jewish cemetery in around the first half of the 19th century. Before that, the dead were taken to Janów, 24 km from Częstochowa. They say that the founder of the society was Landau. The society had a constitution and precise regulations, which were strictly observed. The last leaders of the society were President Natan Gerichter and, following his death, President Szmul Goldsztajn. No one took any money for this work - it was an honour to do it. The society’s traditional customs were:

- 1) On *Shabbes Bereishis*²⁹, all the members of the society gathered at the [main] synagogue with Rabbi Nachum Asz and each one was called up to the Torah.

²⁶ [TN: Viz. the aid and who had given it.]

²⁷ [TN: “Good-Shabbes little Jews”; affectionate nickname given by the Częstochowa residents to the men who collected special *Shabbes* foods to give out to those in need, as follows.]

²⁸ [TN: Special sweetened bread eaten on *Shabbes* and the holidays.]

²⁹ [TN: The first *Shabbes* following the High Holidays, on which the first weekly Torah section is read; this section begins with the word “*Bereishis*” (In the beginning).]

- 2) Every *Simchas Torah*³⁰, the whole society gathered at the home of one of the most respected members to drink a small glass of liquor - and, afterwards, they went with the rabbi to *Hakufes*³¹. Every member was given an *Hakufe*³², in alphabetical order.

These customs were implemented from the foundation and every member joining the society signed all the regulations, customs and halachic requirements. The society's most interesting characters were [Reb] Aron-Eliasz [Rotenberg³³] - burial attendant, the elderly [Reb] Majer Biczner – gravedigger, Eli “Greber” [Digger] – who sewed *tachrichim*³⁴ and the *walkownik*³⁵. Women also belonged to this society, among them being Mrs Lelinska.

At the funeral of a wealthy individual or a respected communal activist, the burial attendants would be members selected by the society's secretariat. An honourable plot was assigned and two horses were harnessed to the wagon. In the case of a poor person, one horse was harnessed to the wagon.

³⁰ [TN: Heb., “Rejoicing of the Torah”; religious observance held on the last day of Sukkos, when the yearly cycle of Torah reading is completed and the next cycle is begun.]

³¹ [TN: Heb., “Circles”; on *Simchas Torah*, the custom is to take the Torah scrolls out of the Ark and to encircle the reader's platform with great joy, singing and dancing. All those present are called to the Torah for a short reading, by their name and father's name.]

³² [TN: Viz. every member was given one of the Torah scrolls to hold in his arms for the duration of one circling of the reader's platform.]

³³ [TN: May also be a ref. to his nephew, Reb Aron-Eliasz Alfus; see regarding both individuals in the article “The Rotenberg Family in Częstochowa”, *Sefer Częstochowa*, Vol. I.]

³⁴ [TN: Traditional plain white burial shrouds, usually made from pure linen, in which the bodies of the deceased are dressed by the Chevra Kadisha.]

³⁵ [TN: Apparently the person who dresses the corpse, most likely from the word “walkarz”, which means “a craftsman who whitens linen, rolls cloth, cleans dresses”.]