

## The *Möbellager*

One of the better workplaces in Częstochowa, which were referred to as “covered” [viz. safe], was the *Möbellager*, which was located at ul. Wilsona 20-22 and belonged to the Jewish proprietor, Lewkowicz. The Germans had requisitioned the *Möbellager*, which consisted of large storerooms with furniture, along with all the Jewish property and goods. An entire array of workshops was also set up there, where good professional labourers worked.

There were the following workshops: carpenters, wood-polishers, metalworkers, auto mechanics, painters, watchmakers, upholsterers, tinsmiths, *zduni* (oven specialists), electricians, radio technicians, glazers and saddlers.

The *Möbellager's* task was to put all the requisitioned buildings and dwellings in order - to furnish them and carry out all the works, such as painting, electric installations and plumbing. The *Möbellager* was under the direct orders of the German *Stadthauptmann* [City Captain]. He appointed, as its chief, one of his subordinates named Lindermann, who worked in the *Stadthauptmann's* office and would only come to give directives to his deputy, who was named Lange and whom the workers nicknamed “The *Chazan*” [cantor]. The latter sat in his office all day, doing nothing. The entire work was run by Machel Birencwajg. “The *Chazan*” had the utmost trust in Machel, who was the *de facto* leader of the entire enterprise. He was so popular and well-known, that people referred to the *Möbellager* as “*Machellager*”. His deputy was Altman and the foreman of the transportation group was Naparstek. In total, sixty people worked there until the deportation.

On Yom Kippur, 21<sup>st</sup> September, one day prior to the tragic deportation of the Częstochowa Jews, Machel Birencwajg convinced Lindermann that the sixty workers, with their wives and children, should be barracked inside the *Möbellager* and that the number of workers should be increased to 120. All the workers brought their parents, children, sisters and brothers and thus their numbers reached 400, including fifty children.

The deportation was carried out in stages. Entire streets, [with their] buildings and dwellings, were emptied. The task of the *Möbellager* workers was to clear the furniture out of the homes that had been vacated. Very frequently, it happened that the workers came upon Jews who were hiding. They took them along with them in the evening and smuggled them into the *Möbellager*, thus momentarily saving them from certain death.

The deportations took six [sic three] weeks, and the *Möbellager* labourers were in great fear that the arch-murderer Degenhardt might come and, finding the children and elderly people, he would carry out a selection. Consequently, a committee of seven members was formed, which was tasked with making bunkers (hideouts). They also organised a kitchen, which cooked three times a day to feed those in hiding. This was no easy feat. When the workers left for work, they were marched in tight formation, guarded by the SD (*Sonderdienst*<sup>1</sup>). The camp was surrounded at all hours of the day by the SD men, who were stationed in the yard.

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<sup>1</sup> [TN: Ger., “Special Services”; Nazi German paramilitary formations made up initially of Volksdeutsche (ethnic Germans), who had lived in Poland before the occupation, and later also of Soviet POWs who volunteered for special training.]

It was critical that they did not find out about what was happening inside the camp - about the bunkers and the elderly people and children.

Once the "Small Ghetto" had been formed, the *Möbellager* workers were given the building at ul. Nadrzeczna 88 as quarters. Every day, the children and older people were smuggled into the "Small Ghetto." [Only] Machel Birencwajg, with his wife and mother, continued to live in the *Möbellager*. Every day, the workers were taken to work and back in tight formation, guarded by the SD.

During the period of the "Small Ghetto", the number of labourers in the *Möbellager* increased to 300. A radio apparatus was installed and, every day, Jankiel Roziner and Liber Brener listened to the news from London and from the Polish underground movement. They recounted that news in the "Small Ghetto", so that the people should orient themselves as to the political and strategic situation. There was also an organised group of partisans, who had grenades and weapons, which they manufactured in the *Möbellager*.

Through the *Möbellager*, there was contact with the outside world. Those, who had identity cards and wished to leave the "Small Ghetto", went along with [the workers] in the morning and disappeared from the workplace. Liaison people came to the *Möbellager* and entered the "Small Ghetto" along with the workers. They did the same upon leaving the "Small Ghetto".

The *Möbellager* workers were in contact with Poles - they bought products from them and brought them into the "Small Ghetto". In this manner, the scarcity of food there was alleviated. An entire business of Jews selling things to Poles was also conducted. By the same means, correspondence was maintained with the outside world.

There were also tragic moments in the *Möbellager*. Degenhardt came several times with his helpers, carried out selections and shot people or took them away to be killed. On 19<sup>th</sup> March 1943, the following incident occurred: Degenhardt and his helpers unexpectedly entered the room of the partisans and, after carrying out a search, they found grenades and weaponry. Six of the finest figures, whom the Częstochowa youth possessed, fell as victims on that occasion. These were Moniek Flamenbaum, aged twenty-one; Olek Herszberg, aged twenty-six; Jerzy Rozenblat, aged eighteen; Heniek Richter, aged nineteen; Janek Krauze, aged twenty-three, and Szlamek Szajn, aged twenty-three.

During another search, Aryan papers were found on Miss Rozenzaft, for which she was shot. She was a liaison person, of the underground movement for the "Small Ghetto", with the outside world.

Before liquidating the "Small Ghetto", Degenhardt ordered that Machel Birencwajg be arrested. Machel found out about this and managed to escape. Degenhardt's deputy, a *Volksdeutsch* named Laszynski, came to the *Möbellager* and shot Machel's wife and mother. A few days later, Machel Birencwajg fell into the hands of Degenhardt and was shot.

When the "Small Ghetto" was liquidated, so was the *Möbellager* - which had suffered, bled and fought together with all Częstochowa Jewry and the underground movement.