



[Title: *Neighbouring Landsmannschaften*  
On signpost: *Działoszyn, Nowo Radomsko, Pruszków<sup>1</sup>, Wieluń, Zawiercie, Kamyk*; signature: *Nota Koslovsky.*]

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## There Once Was a *Shtetl* Działoszyn<sup>2</sup>

The *shtetl* Działoszyn, near Częstochowa, lies in a valley, surrounded by woods and tall, green hills. A clear river flows by the town, and it is divided into two. One part is called “the Courtyards River”. That is where the women would bathe in the summer. In the second part - by the bridge - the men bathed. This river converges with the Warta, which flows by Częstochowa. The town’s centre consists of a large, four-sided marketplace, with many little side-streets all around. There is a well at each corner of the marketplace and it is from these four wells that the *shtetl* drew water.

At the centre of the market stands the firefighters’ building and, during a fire, the bell rings from its tall wooden tower. Each time, the ringing of the bell caused a panic in the *shtetl*. When there was a fire, they would seize horses from the arriving peasants or the local burghers and harness them to the firefighting equipment.

The fire brigade’s building also had a hall, where theatrical performances and dance evenings were held. Before a show or a dance evening, the firefighting equipment was taken outside the hall. There were Polish theatrical performances and also Yiddish ones, usually performed by travelling actors’ troupes. The fire brigade’s building was called “the Wog”. No one knew what this name meant.

A large *kościół* [church], surrounded by a park of flowers, was the jewel of the Christian populace. The greatest pride of the Jews in Działoszyn was the *shul* [synagogue]. They boasted that it was one of the most beautiful synagogues in Poland. There is a tradition that this synagogue had been built in the 18<sup>th</sup> century by the same Jewish master architect who erected the magnificent *shul* in Przedbórz, and

<sup>1</sup> [TN: Pruszków is at a distance of about 200 km from Częstochowa, and would hardly be considered as a “neighbouring city”. Perhaps the intention is Praszka, which is much nearer to Częstochowa.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: Quite a few individuals are mentioned in this article whose surnames we have not been able to find in any available sources. In these cases, it is very probable that the name given was actually a nickname – perhaps in Polish or Russian – or simply a misprint.]

probably also the one in Pińczów<sup>3</sup>. The *Shul's* cantor, whom people called “*der Litvak*” [the Lithuanian], prayed with a choir of singers. When a visitor came to the *shtetl*, he was taken to be shown the *Shul*. When the Holy Ark was opened, the birds with which it was decorated would emit musical sounds. The walls were decorated with oil paintings [viz. frescoes]. People said that there were only two other such synagogues in Poland, which were built by a German master.

## Jewish Livelihoods

A large proportion of the Jews had little shops with different goods. The number of craftsmen was no smaller: tailors, cobblers, carpenters, tinsmiths, cap-makers and others. There were also some who engaged in smuggling over goods from Germany. Among them were also women. When a woman was sometimes sentenced to several months in prison, a sister or a relative would often spend the night with her, in order to make her feel more at home.

Działoszyn also had a watermill and a *tartak* [sawmill], which belonged to a Christian family with three members: the old bachelor Pytlewski<sup>4</sup> and his two sisters. In the beginning, he traded with Jews. When the antisemitism intensified, he made butter from his own milk and sold it in the larger towns. Following the First World War, with the aid of his mill, he introduced electric light to the town and became the “Lord of Light and Darkness”. He gave light at sundown, and turned it off late at night. When there was a festive occasion in the *shtetl*, he was paid for the whole night, and the entire *shtetl* was forced to sleep with the electric lights [on].

In Działoszyn, there were also a few weavers’ workshops, where woollen fabrics were manufactured. The most important of them belonged to Mojsze-Zalman Rusak, Herszl Weber<sup>5</sup> and Juda-Lajbisz Gnieslaw. Each weaver’s workshop consisted of two or three looms and employed several workers.

Two sack factories with manual machines, which employed Jewish girls, belonged to the Rusak family, Szlojme Stempel’s<sup>6</sup> and Zelikowicz. Some ten girls worked in each of Alke Bornsztajn and Herszl Kutlak’s [?] two straw-hat factories. Dozens of Jewish and Polish workers were employed in the two Jewish tanneries. The finished goods were sent on carts to Warsaw, Łódź and other cities.

Once a fortnight, a fair was held in Działoszyn. Peasants from the villages and Jews from the surrounding *shtetls* converged, bringing with them their products and goods.



[Young] *Działoszyner* couples liked to promenade in the familiar garden that was called “Lipkes”, for the *lypowy* [lime] trees. The garden belonged to Tuwja Jakubowicz, the *Chassid*. After his *Shabbes* nap, however, Reb Tuwja took his walk here, and the youngsters moved over to the Częstochowa road, by the bridge.

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<sup>3</sup> [TN: According to historical sources (Prof Ilia Rodov), it is not the construction of these synagogues that the legend attributes to the same man, but the decorations painted inside them, which in the Przedbórz Synagogue were done (and signed) by a wandering painter named Jakob Judah Leib ben Isaac in 1760.]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: Stanisław Pytlewski’s mill and sawmill appear in the 1929 Polish Business Directory (p.833). In the original Yiddish, this surname is erroneously spelt “Pidlawski.”]

<sup>5</sup> [TN: Although the surname Weber certainly does exist, here it is more likely to be a nickname, viz. “Weaver,” as we have found no record of the surname in Działoszyn.]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: Apparently the son of someone who was nicknamed “Stempel,” or “Stamp.”]

The young couples' promenades were often disrupted by the *Shomrei Shabbes*<sup>7</sup> Society, who did not permit girls and lads take walks together, in order to protect the town from diseases<sup>8</sup>.

Działoszyn was also guarded from illnesses by the two barber-surgeons [*felczery*], Juda-Hersz and Icze-Majer, who also served as physicians and dentists. Their wives were also [the] midwives [who] delivered the children for the mothers.



The *melamdim*<sup>9</sup> in Działoszyn were Lajb the Lame, Mojsze P...<sup>10</sup>, Mendel Trene [?] and Motl Sh... Załme-Dydie<sup>11</sup> taught reading and writing in Yiddish, Polish, Russian and German to the children of wealthy parents.

At the age of fifteen-sixteen, the youth left the *shtetl*. They travelled mainly to Łódź or Częstochowa. Later, when they were required to go serve "Phonya"<sup>12</sup> [in the Russian Army], they emigrated to America.

Chaim Szylit was the "Учёный еврей" [Rus. Scholarly Jew]. He registered the new-born children, wrote petitions and, when it was necessary to defend a Jew, he was also a lawyer.



Nachman Blader was the *shtetl's* poor man. He had a dozen children, who helped him make a living – because the more children [he had], the more pity and alms [he received]. His *brises*<sup>13</sup> were paid for by the town. At the last *bris*, there was no name left for the child<sup>14</sup>. The Rabbi then said that he had already seen all kinds of paupers, but it was the first time he had encountered one [so] poor that he did not [even] possess a name.

Działoszyn had several charitable societies, such as *Hachnuses Orchim*, *Hachnuses Kale*, *Gmiles Chassudim* and *Biker Choilim*<sup>15</sup>.

The *Hekdesh*<sup>16</sup> was next to the cemetery. Wayfaring visitors went through the *shtetl* begging for alms. The town's Jews would take a guest home for *Shabbes*<sup>17</sup>.

When the *Hachnuses Kale* married off Bine'le the Hunchback from Działoszyn to Zelig the water-carrier from Pajęczno<sup>18</sup>, it was merry in the *shtetl*. The wedding was held at the house of the *gabay*

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<sup>7</sup> [TN: "Upholders of the Sabbath"; religious vigilante group who enforced strict Halachic observance of the Sabbath, rules of modesty, etc.]

<sup>8</sup> [TN: It is very likely that this Society viewed diseases as a celestial punishment for what they considered "debauchery." In their culture, no contact at all was permitted between the sexes outside the closest family circle.]

<sup>9</sup> [TN: Religious teachers for primary school-aged children.]

<sup>10</sup> [TN: The ellipsis would probably indicate a nickname starting with P – perhaps an unsavoury one (unless the author had a reason to hide his full surname), as must also be the case with the subsequent Motl "Sh..."]

<sup>11</sup> [TN: His full given names would have been Zalman-Jedydie.]

<sup>12</sup> [TN: Derogative term for a typical Russian from the name Aphonasy, which was very popular in Yiddish, especially in the 19th century.]

<sup>13</sup> [TN: Circumcisions of his new-born sons, upon which they were given their names, and the banquets to celebrate them.]

<sup>14</sup> [TN: In traditional Judaism, babies are named after deceased ancestors, giving priority to the closest generation or one who died within the same year, and going back further with each new child. The parents take turns in naming their children after each one's ancestors, starting from the mother. Thus, the first child would be named after his maternal grandfather, the second after his paternal one, etc. In this case, the number of children born exceeded that of the names of deceased male ancestors known to the parents.]

<sup>15</sup> [TN: Hospitality to wayfaring guests, aid for poor brides (dowry, bridal outfit, wedding etc.), charitable loans fund (without interest), and visiting the sick, respectively. We have rendered the original Hebrew according to the Polish Jewish pronunciation.]

<sup>16</sup> [TN: Usually called "Beis Hekdesh," lit. "Sacred House," viz. poorhouse.]

<sup>17</sup> [TN: The custom among *shtetl* Jews throughout Eastern Europe was that itinerant Jewish beggars would attend the Friday evening prayer service, and after the service each pauper was paired up with a member of the congregation, who took him home for the *Shabbes* meals and often provided him with overnight accommodation.]

<sup>18</sup> [TN: Although we are certain of our rendering, we must note that in the original it is spelt "Fanczne" (פאנצנע). As in the Hebrew handwritten type two Yuds (י) – which are pronounced "aj" in Yiddish – may be easily mistaken for the letter Aleph (א), and only a dot in the middle (which

[synagogue sacristan] Mojsze-Zalman Rusak, and all the *shtetl's* Jews were *mechitunim*<sup>19</sup>. The groom and bride were led to the Synagogue courtyard, like in all the *shtetl's* weddings.

The couple received their home furnishings from the wedding gifts that all the *shtetl's* Jews presented.

The main water carrier was Icyk “*Goilem*” [Oaf]. Once, in the wintertime, he slipped and fell<sup>20</sup>. A crowd of Jews rescued him. His first words were, “*Gevald*<sup>21</sup>, *Yidn!* – just check if I’m [still] alive!”



There were no brawls between Jews and Christians. They only insulted the Jews with the word “*Żydzi*<sup>22</sup>”. On *Yom Kippur*, the Christian intellectuals, such as the *rejent* [notary], the *sędzia* [judge], the *sołtys* [town administrator] and the *kancelaria* [office/chambers] clerk came inside the Synagogue for *Kol Nidre*<sup>23</sup>.

On one occasion, the Jewish judge’s daughter returned home from Wieluń with a fiancée - a Russian soldier. [When] the *shtetl* found out about this, they went to her father’s house and poured tar over the daughter’s head. The groom absconded and the bride was forced to shave off her hair - and she remained a Jewish daughter.

There was a Jew in the *shtetl* who owned a carousel. [Once], when [military] recruits went cavorting before going to their fate<sup>24</sup>, they took the little horses from the carousel and scattered them all across the town. A little horse stood by every house - the Jew had enough work in gathering them and in setting back up his livelihood.

Forty years ago [viz. c.1907], Działoszyn suffered a flood. Following a harsh winter, when the snow on the surrounding hills melted, waters flooded Działoszyn and the entire *shtetl* turned into a massive river, in which all sorts of equipment, livestock and even humans swam about. Boats were necessary in order to return to one end of the town from the other. The town then became greatly impoverished because, for a couple of weeks, people could not work or do business.

Nevertheless, Jewish Działoszyn continued living, working, doing business and multiplying - until the bloody deluge of Nazi German murders wiped it off [the face] of the earth, like hundreds of other *shtetls*.

No more than a memory has remained. There was once a *shtetl* Działoszyn.

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*is never marked in cursive) separates an F from a P, we deem it most likely that this article was sent to the Editorial Board in handwritten form, and that the editors mistook the author’s Pajęczno (פײַנשענע) for “Fanczne.”*

<sup>19</sup> [TN: Fellow in-laws, viz. side participating and paying for the wedding – in this case, the whole *shtetl* saw themselves as the parents of *Bine’le the Hunchback*, whom they had married off.]

<sup>20</sup> [TN: Possibly into the river, as a crowd was needed to “rescue” him, as follows.]

<sup>21</sup> [TN: Lit. “violence/force”; exclamation used in Yiddish to express utmost anxiety, shock or surprise.]

<sup>22</sup> [TN: Although this word simply means “Jews” and is neutral, it can also be used in a pejorative manner in certain contexts.]

<sup>23</sup> [TN: “All Vows”; opening prayer at the start of *Yom Kippur*, which is very beautifully sung. The Christian intellectuals presumably came to listen to this melody.]

<sup>24</sup> [TN: The word used in the original is “los” (לוס); as this is not a Yiddish word, we infer from the context that it is in Polish, in which “los” – among other things – means “fate/destiny.”]