

A. Gotlib

The Crafts School

The Częstochowa Crafts School was founded in 1898. Its first founder, Henryk Markusfeld, created it as a monument by which to commemorate his deceased parents, Adolf and Ernestina Markusfeld.



Graduates of the cabinetmakers' division in 1912, with H. Markusfeld, Eng. Assorodobraj and S. Jarzębiński at the top

We can only appreciate the importance of the Crafts School, if we remind ourselves that the Jewish craftsman or workman, in those times, still stood on a very low cultural and social level. A craft went hand in hand with ignorance. An apprentice would be given over for several years and, for a long time, was forced to do more household chores than learning the trade. A tailor and a cobbler were given the titles “sznajderying” and “szysterying”¹.

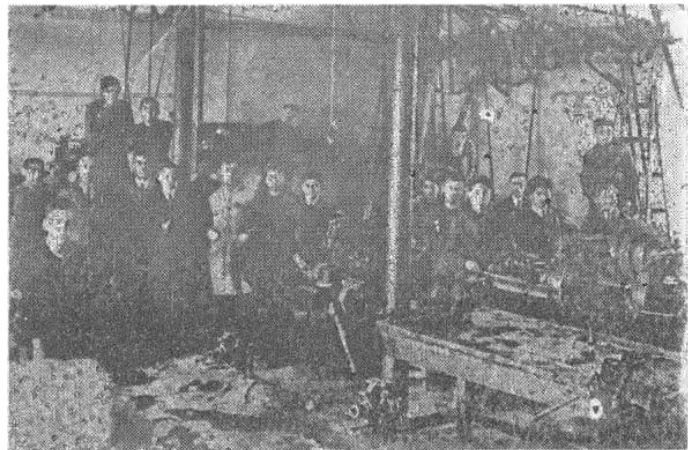
Right from the beginning, the Crafts School set itself the task of uniting crafts with general education.

At first, the Crafts School was a division of the *Talmud Torah* and was, in fact, officially called the “Jewish Crafts School at the Talmud Torah”. It occupied a three-storey building on ul. Garncarska.

It had three sections:

- 1) a mechanical locksmith department, which was [a trade] hitherto not found at all amongst Jews at all;
- 2) a cabinetmaking workshop;
- 3) a wheelwright's workshop.

The directors of these departments were Szrajber – a master of the locksmith workshop, Okrent – a master of the carpentry workshop; Jarzębiński (a Christian) - [master of the] wheelwright's workshop. The grey-haired Zalcman was the teacher of draughtsmanship. We must also mention the gatekeeper, little Mordche'le.



The school's mechanical workshop

At first, there were few candidates eager to attend this school. Unless I am mistaken, at the beginning, only those pupils, whose parents could pay 150 roubles for three years of tuition in advance, were admitted. Later, pupils from the poorer strata of the Jewish populace were also admitted and, not only were they made exempt from paying [tuition], but each one received a

¹ [TN: Yid., “tailor-youth” and “cobbler-youth,” respectively; the term “youth” is derogatory, as one would say “some tailor bloke.”]

stipend of ten roubles every three months from the ICA. This was later reduced to the sum of 7.50 roubles. The pupils worked during the day in the workshops and studied at night in the evening-courses.

Among the students during the first three years were the brothers Abram and Mojsze Weksler, Szlojme Działoszyński, Szlojme Win, [and] Chaim Win – all of whom distinguished themselves with their professional skills.

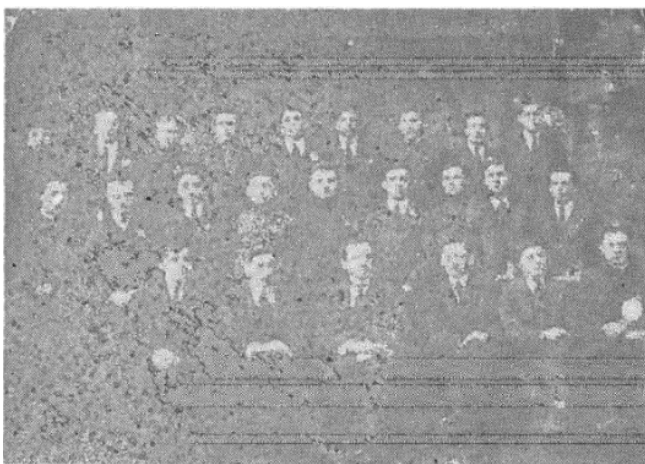
The stream of pupils increased from year to year. Many study-hall lads attended the Crafts School. In 1904-1905, when the craftsman and workman organised himself and became a revolutionary and a social force – children of wealthier parents began to come to the Crafts School, as well as pupils from middle-school (*gymnazjum* students).

Over the course of this period, the headmasters changed. Jawec replaced Headmaster Szrajber. But he was unpopular with the pupils and left the school. His position was then occupied by Gewircman. At his initiative, the Crafts School began issuing guild certificates. In 1912-1913, the position of headmaster of the school was filled by Eng. Assorodobraj. Under his leadership, the Crafts School was elevated to the level of a modern technical school. Studies, with yearly exams, were implemented, and grants were given to the more capable students to enable them to study in higher technical schools.

The institution gained a reputation as a first-class school, and pupils began to stream [to it], not only from Częstochowa, but from the surrounding towns also. With the ICA's aid, new mechanical equipment was installed and the petrol motors were replaced by electric ones.

In 1913, the Crafts School's expenditure reached 11,000 roubles. The income was 1,500 roubles from the Jewish *gmina*; 500 from the Markusfeld brothers; ICA – 4,900 and 4,000 from tuition fees paid by the students and work that had been commissioned.

Besides the abovementioned persons, Oks (Russian, arithmetic and natural sciences), Awner (Polish and German), Perec Willenberg (drawing by hand) [and] Wajsberg (Hebrew and Jewish history) were employed at the school.



A group of pupils with Dr Józef Markusfeld and personnel of the "farm"

In 1913, the School Committee comprised of Henryk and Józef Markusfeld, Eng. Ratner, Stanisław Herc, Henig, Frenkel, Dr Batawja, and Headmaster Assorodobraj.

With the outbreak of the First World War, when Częstochowa was occupied by the Germans, the subsidy from the ICA - the school budget's main support - was terminated. The workers [pupils?] could not pay the tuition fees and continue their studies. Once again, Henryk Markusfeld then came to the school's aid, giving the school many machines, which had been damaged in the fire at *Malarnia* a very short time before the War, to overhaul and

restore. With this, the Crafts School was able to pay the instructors it maintained, until the leadership could put a budget together and renew activity.

After the War, when emigration to the Land of Israel began and certain professional training was required of those making *Aliyah*, evening courses for the trades of locksmithing and carpentry, which were necessary in the Land of Israel, were opened at the Crafts School. Over the course of a few months, dozens of youths and adults received elementary, professional training, which enabled many immigrants to settle down in the Land of Israel with a proper job.

In the later years, when the Polish government passed the well-known industrial law of 15th December 1929 (people at the time called it “the guilds decree”), which set limitations for craftsmen and targeted the Jewish workman, the Crafts School, with the collaboration of the Craftsmen’s Club, opened three-year continuing education courses, at which apprentices received, over the course of three years, the theory of the profession and the elementary knowledge which was required for the exams, as stipulated by that law.



*A group of pupils with the personnel of the Crafts School
in the school-year of 1930*

In such a manner, the Crafts School not only turned out cadres of hundreds of Jewish intellectual workmen, but also created instructors and, in general, helped to raise our craftsmanship to a higher level.
