

A. Buchman

The Gardening School

The Horticultural Farm in Częstochowa arose in connection with the trend of productivization¹, which was ever more apparent in Poland at the threshold of the 20th century. The first to carry this plan out were the renowned communal activists Leopold Werde, Henryk Markusfeld, Grosman and Stanisław Herc. To this end, in 1902, they purchased a piece of land of about 20 *mórg* [roughly 24 acres].

The Horticultural Farm started with just ten students and, at first, sufficed with planting flowers.

A gardening teacher was engaged from Germany. The first pupils were from Częstochowa and the vicinity, aged between twelve and fourteen. The budget was put together from voluntary donations and a subsidy from the Jewish *gmina*.

Besides physical suitability, no specific education or qualifications were required of the students. The manager was a religious Jew and the pupils were required to observe all the Jewish religious laws and traditions, such as praying, making the blessing [following a meal] and so on.

The pupils, who saw no prospects for themselves after studying in such a school for two or three years, began to demand more secular education and further instruction in the [gardening] profession. But the farm's monetary means were limited - [and] most of the pupils ran off. Only four people remained.

This continued until 1904. Then the ICA [Jewish Colonisation Association] took an interest in the farm, allocated a subsidy and engaged the renowned agronomist Burech Szejerson, who transformed the Częstochowa Horticultural Farm into one of the most blossoming institutions in Poland.

The farm in Częstochowa began to gain a reputation throughout the entire country. The number of pupils increased to thirty. There, they were given free meals, lodgings and clothes, and wore special uniforms.

The pupils, who were admitted, were required to know one of the languages - Polish or Russian - and a certain measure of arithmetic. They received further instruction at the school from a special teacher. Director Szejerson personally taught all the gardening profession subjects: botany, chemistry, physics, zoology, etc. The practical work on the farm was led by a Polish gardener. All the fittings that were needed on the farm, such as crates for the hotbeds, beehives and accessories were built and fashioned by the pupils themselves. A library, in various languages, on everything to do with gardening was also organised on the farm.

"*Ciepliankes*"² were installed [and] warm inspecting windows. Plants, from different locations, were grown - tropical and sub-tropical - such as oranges and figs, for instance.

Cucumbers, radishes, lettuce, melons and watermelons grew in the "*ciepliankes*" during the winter. Henryk Markusfeld bought a large part of a field and gifted to the farm. Various cereal crops were planted in this field.

¹ [TN: Viz. teaching the Jewish masses to become more productive through crafts and agriculture.]

² [TN: Hothouses, from the Polish "*ciepło*," or warm; they contained hotbeds for seedlings made with crates covered with glass panes through which one could inspect the plants, as follows.]

A geographically diverse and abundant selection of fruit trees was planted. *Szczepki* [cuttings, grafts] were taken from these trees, from which wild³ trees were grown. The cultivated trees were shipped in the tens of thousands all across Russian Poland.

A botanical garden was set up, with hundreds of plants from different lands.

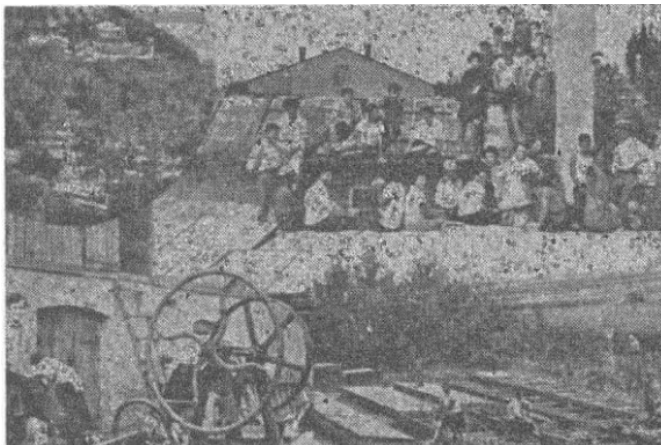
All this costed over 6,000 roubles, which were provided by the ICA and the *gmina*. In order to open up a new source of income, a florist's shop was opened in Częstochowa.

The farm gained such renown in the planting world for its practical knowledge that the City gave parks over to it to organise - the park in Ostatni Grosz [and], later, also the municipal park for the exhibition in 1911.

In 1906, an orchard with hundreds of trees, as well as rose gardens, was set down [and] even a nursery for the summer plantings.

The farm's "*różarnia*"⁴ made a strong impression amongst the Christian gardeners in Poland. It was a glasshouse for roses, with thousands of rosebushes of different varieties and with different blooming times. These roses were sent to florist's shops in Poland and were also shipped abroad.

In January, during the great frosts, the Częstochowa Jewish Horticultural Farm's first roses appeared. This harvest continued until May, when the roses began in the open gardens.



General view of the farm

There was also a special drying room for bulbs - daffodils, tulips, lilies and various other flowers.

The Częstochowa Jewish Horticultural Farm participated in the World Exhibition in Częstochowa in 1911 and won one gold and ten silver medals.

The non-Jewish gardeners were greatly displeased with the fact that the practical work on the farm was being managed by a Christian. Director Szejerson, therefore, sent a few of the pupils to become

educated in the special cultures of planting, in order so that they should be able to manage the practical work themselves.

However, everything began to go downhill when, in 1913, Director Szejerson left the farm. Other Jewish agronomists came, but no one could compare with Director Szejerson in energy, idealism, knowledge and expertise.

With the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, many of the pupils travelled away. Those who remained continued working, with a small subsidy from the *gmina*.

³ [TN: This term may be used here literally, meaning new trees to be planted in the wild, but we must note that "wild" was also used in Yiddish slang very much like "wicked" (i.e. first-class) is used in English.]

⁴ [TN: Although we have not been able to ascertain whether this was a word used in Poland at the time or was the name of this complex, it is evident from the context that it was a large glasshouse for roses with open-air gardens as well.]

The ICA renewed its subsidy with the arrival of Director Dubrzyński. But the farm then already took on a different character - a more [Zionist] pioneering one. What occupied the primary position was the type of agriculture that was necessary for the Land of Israel. This pioneering work was conducted until the end of the First World War, at which point Director Dubrzyński left the farm and was replaced by the agronomist Feldsztajn. Ninety percent of the pupils, who studied under his directorship, emigrated to the Land of Israel.

The school for girls was also opened under his directorship and girls, many of them with higher education, came from all over Poland to learn the gardening profession, in order to be able to emigrate to the Land of Israel. They adapted well to the physical work in the garden with the trees, flowers [and] hotbeds, and also in the byre with the cows.

[All] this elevated the school's prestige for any Jew, [and] above all the nationalist element. It made a rare impression when young, healthy girls in the farm uniform stood in the Częstochowa streets with spades, piling up the manure and flinging it onto carts which took it away to the farm.



***A group of pupils with Director Dubrzyński
and the staff of the farm***

The Częstochowa Town Hall also began to take an interest in the farm. The farm was already even about to be "granted" certain rights by the Polish Ministry of Education but, precisely then, agronomist Feldsztajn travelled off to America and the whole situation at the farm changed.

The farm was taken over by *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*. Almost all the trees were chopped down; the greenhouses, the "*różarnia*," the hotbeds, [and] all the decorative plants – all this was destroyed and the ground was repurposed for agriculture. Vegetables from the farm were sold on the Częstochowa

marketplace. Many male and female pioneers worked outside the farm, awaiting the opportunity to emigrate to the Land of Israel.

Once the farm had gone over to *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*, the Jewish *kehilla* refused to subsidise it. On 2nd December 1927, the *Częstochower Zeitung* came out with an alarm-article, calling upon the *gmina* to provide for the farm under the directorship of *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair*.

Over the course of its existence, until to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the Częstochowa farm produced hundreds of male and female students, who were qualified as gardeners or agricultural workers.

Many of the first pupils dispersed throughout the globe: America, Australia, Argentina, [etc.] But 80% of the graduates are in the Land of Israel, both in *kibbutzim* and in their own farms or in commercial horticulture.

Whoever has come in contact here, in the Land of Israel, with the male and female pupils of the Częstochowa Horticultural Farm has marvelled at their work and ability.