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## Częstochowa's Streets

### The *Aleje*



The street which divided the city centre into a northern part and a southern part was the *Aleja*. It began at the exit from the New Market [*Nowy Rynek*] and ended near the lane which leads to the Pauline monastery. In liberated Poland, following the First World War, the City Council named the *Aleja* after Holy Mary.

In appearance, the *Aleja* looked like the modern boulevards in large cities, [with] one lane for pedestrians and one for vehicles on each side and, in between these two viaducts [i.e., thoroughfares], a promenade stretched their entire length. On both sides, tall chestnut trees were planted, canopies of which met. The shade which these branching trees cast were a means of protection against the summer sun, both for those having a stroll and for those sitting on the benches. Over the course of time, the old trees were replaced with younger ones, which grew and blossomed and added beauty to the appearance of the *Aleja*.

The entire *Aleja* was divided into three separate *Aleje*. The First was from the beginning to the railway bridge. Passing this bridge, the Second *Aleja* began - intersected by the streets ul. Kościuszki and *aleja Wolności*\* - and stretched to the square in front of the Town Hall. The egress from this square converged with the Third *Aleja*, which ended at the promenade leading to the monastery.

The city's finest buildings were situated along either side of the *Aleja*. They housed both living quarters and also shops.

The houses on the First *Aleja* and their tenants were almost all Jewish (of 14 houses, 11 belonged to Jews and 3 to Christians). The Second *Aleja* was a mix of Jewish and Christian residential houses, as well as shops. It was like a transition bridge to the Third *Aleja*, which was populated mainly by Christians. Somehow or other, there were individual Jewish tenants to be found in Christian buildings and amongst the Christian residents. The few little Jewish shops with snacks and water (*Ajzykiewicz*), were anomalies in the Polish environment which prevailed on the Third *Aleja*.

The *Aleja* was the viaduct [i.e., main artery] through which carts, wagons and carriages entered the city, with inhabitants (mainly Jews) from the provinces - from Kłobuck and Krzepice, from Praszka and from Wieluń and from many other nearby localities, which lay on these [sic the] highways into Częstochowa. Year in and year out, the *Aleja* teemed with pilgrims making the pilgrimage to the monastery and to the city's other sacred sites. All kinds of military parades, demonstrations or manifestations [viz. protests] passed along the *Aleja*. One [also] needed to pass along the *Aleja* to attend to everyday affairs.

### The First *Aleja*

The Jewish look of this street manifested itself in various ways. Along both sides of the pavement, the Jewish shops stretched like a chain. The small bit non-Jewishness, to which the Jews had become accustomed, were the little ironmonger's at house number 12 and the wine shop and chemist at house

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\* [TN: These two are the same street, whose name changes at the intersection with the Second *Aleja*.]

number 14. These shops had already been established for many years and [served] as symbols, that the Jewish First *Aleja*, too, was part of Catholic Christian Częstochowa.

As a business centre, the First *Aleja* was distinguished for the variety of shops that were to be found there. The street had had this character ever since it had [first] been established.

Before 1914, one could see on one pavement of the *Aleja*, the Kruk & Moszkowski tobacco and cigarette shop and, opposite, W. Szpigelman's glass and porcelain shop. L. Broniatowski's toy shop was next to the Wolfowicz family's colonial goods [viz. groceries/spices] shop. A.J. Szenfeld's wine shop was opposite the Wajnberg-Lewkowicz ironmongery. The sugar-products shops of A.M. Lubling and W. Sziffer were in contrast to the textile shops of Szumacher and Fajner. Berl Feldman's clothes shop was not far from M. Neufeld's chemist shop. The rest of the shops also contributed to the diversity of the merchandise which the *Aleja* had to offer.

The War years, 1914-1918, uprooted the foundations of many well-established merchants and, in their place, gave rise to newly-arrived men of wealth. Speculators and smugglers, who had profited from war-time deals, pushed deep-rooted businessmen out of business. Old, established businesses disappeared and new stores were set up in their place.

A similar economic situation persisted during the course of the first years of Poland's independence, due to the period of inflation. Rises and falls on the socio-economic ladder continued being an everyday occurrence. Later, too, during the next two decades, owners of businesses changed and of their branches also.

Nevertheless, the *Aleja* retained its character as a Jewish business centre, offering the broadest range of goods a buyer required. Even the government's policy to make trade Polish, which set Christian tradesmen up in Jewish streets, did not alter the *Aleja's* Jewish appearance.

Merchandise which the *Aleja* offered was, mostly, for the "better" client - i.e., for the customer seeking merchandise of a better quality and of particular fineness. Were a resident of the city or a provincial Jew to require fine goods for a garment, he could find them at the shops of H. Zysser or J. Przeworski, which were on the upper part of the *Aleja*. The shops of J. Pik, M. Lastman and Kornbrod did not stand behind them in the offer of worthy textile goods.

This was also the case with men's haberdashery, footwear and similar items. It was not necessary to leave the boundaries of the *Aleja* to shop for them. On both sides of the pavement, there were shops of this type. Z. Proport's display window beckoned with a variety of shoes, shirts, ties and suchlike articles. In earlier times, Józef Blechszajn - the *Mizrachist* - ran a similar shop. To this same category of old, well-established haberdashery traders also belonged Horowicz at *Aleja* 12 and Józef Dauman, at *Aleja* 4. In the later years, J. Jurkiewicz's shop appeared at *Aleja* 9.

Clothing stores in Częstochowa, which were mostly in Jewish hands, had their sales market not only in the city, but also in the surrounding province - villages, towns and cities. The population of the part of Górny Śląsk [Upper Silesia] which is nearest to Częstochowa, would also do their shopping there. Shops with garments for men and women were scattered throughout the different streets where Jews lived. This branch of trade was represented on the *Aleja* by Najman at *Aleja* 13, Kempner at *Aleja* 7, Filipowicz at *Aleja* 5 and others.

These clothing stores had special employees, whom people called *rufers* [Yid; criers (who call out)]. Their task was to win the customer over. One saw them in the summer and in the winter on the

pavements, looking for buyers. The criers received a certain fee for their work. Jews made all kinds of efforts to earn a living.

The multi-branched industry of Częstochowa and the neighbouring localities created livelihoods for many Jewish families. There were Jews whose main business was to supply all types of materials to whichever factory required them. There were also small shops which supplied the factories with various goods, which constituted a considerable portion of their business activities.

One such shop was the ironmonger's *Częstochowski Skład Metali* (Częstochowa Metals Warehouse) at *Aleja 5*, which belonged to Berliner and Szwarbaum. In this shop, one could buy the most expensive technical materials, all metals and almost anything included in the classification of iron products. H. Wasserman had a similar shop at *Aleja 4*, albeit on a smaller scale. At the beginning of the street, at *Aleja 1*, Sz. Herc had his ironmongery.

In addition to the variety of these fields, there were shops [selling] hats and apparel for women, men's hats (Krauskopf and Haber), pharmacies (Neufeld and Rozenwajg), Hofman's paints shop, A. Abramowicz's sausages shop, Szenfeld's wine shop, the small shops of Hipszer and Lurie, the shops with upholsterer supplies belonging to Birencwajg and Braun, Mass' bicycle shop and many others.

The pulse by which one measured the state of the city's Jewish economic organism was mainly the *Aleja*. Life there would sometimes beat stronger and sometimes weaker. This depended primarily on the general financial situation. But what was always to be found there was the will to work, inventiveness and initiative, [and] energy and diligence. The Jewish businessmen's character was evident in this street.

The daily hubbub of trade began before the police-sanctioned opening time. One [was willing to] risk a fine, if it was a question of [receiving] remuneration from a previous client [for unpaid goods]. It was necessary to be in the shop earlier [and] to prepare oneself for the day's work ahead. People went in before the appointed hour. It was not rare to see Jews with the *tallis* and *tefillin* [prayer-shawl and phylacteries] under their arm, on their way back from the *shules* and *shtieblech*, hurrying to go inside their shops. Sometimes, one would disregard breakfast-time and hasten to work. Thus it went, from morning to late in the evening.

When the police's hour for closing the shops drew near, the front doors would be closed. If a tardy customer appeared, he would be shown in through the back door. Each shopkeeper endeavoured, in his own way, to look out for the police. The criers from the clothes shops, the shopkeepers' family members or just acquaintances would let [them] know in time when a constable was approaching. One would then quickly switch off the lights [and] sit quietly- *until the indignation be overpast* [Isaiah 26:20] - until the policeman would pass by. But, if the constable did catch one doing deals after the police's hours, one also somehow found a way out.

The merchants' element was a diversified one. There were Jewish shopkeepers with the Jewish stamp on their faces, as well as many without a beard and sidelocks. There were *Chassidim* and *Misnagedim*, religious and non-religious. But they were united by their common financial destiny - struggle and hard work for survival. They had known one another for many years and were close among themselves. They spoke to each other using the [informal] *du* [you\*] form, and one could hear both the Jewish idioms [viz. sobriquets] such as *Reb Jermia*, *Reb Chaim* [and] *Reb Josef* [and] the genuine Polish idioms - *Panie* [Mr] P., *Panie H.*, or *Panie Z.*

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\* [TN: In Yiddish, as in German, when speaking formally and respectfully, instead of the singular pronoun "du" (you), one uses the plural "ihr."]

Every tradesman had his [own] regular customers. People came and went, they packed and carried, with porters also transporting goods in carts. And purchases were made on the word: [goods] were given "open for thirty days," or borrowed on a "voucher." Transactions were also sealed on short-term vouchers, which was like [receiving] "real money" or one [simply] paid with money. Competition took place in accordance with all the rules of financial ethics. [They] did not quarrel or fight for clients. Business disputes and competition did occur, but within the parameters of [civil] conduct between one person and another. Brawls over clients did take place between the "criers" or the middlemen. But this, too, was a rare event. Owners conducted themselves according to the accepted methods of trade. The axiom, *live and let live*, was in place.

Merchants' ethics were a direct result of their Jewish morals. The traders on the First *Aleja* had not learnt their knowledge of business from schools and certainly not from business academies. They did not make use of any textbooks and the laws of economics were alien to them. The trick of doing business had been passed on to them from generation to generation. There were those who stuck to the same source of livelihood, without change (Szpigelman, Szumacher, Birencwajg and others). The business would be passed down as an inheritance from father to son, and so on. These were oaks which had been rooted in Polish soil for many years.

The middlemen and *changers* added to the tumult and hubbub in the street. One could see them sometimes strolling, and sometimes hurrying, along the pavements and walkways. The former sought out the customer and the latter lent out money for a commission. Because of their activities, they needed to hide from the police and from the tax authorities' officials. One saw them - these Jews - in the doorways and house fronts. Amongst the *changers* there were those who conducted business on a larger (J. Lipszyc) scale and those who worked on a smaller one.

Of the five Jewish cooperative banks in Częstochowa (1. Manufacturers and Merchants Bank; 2. Częstochowa Cooperative Bank; 3. Craftsmen's Bank; 4. Cooperative Bank, or "Bank Kupiecki"; 5. Business Bank), the 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> were located on the First *Aleja*. They catered mainly to the small and medium traders, the stallholders and shopkeepers, [and] the manual workmen and craftsmen.

The Częstochowa Cooperative Bank, at first at *Aleja 7* and later at *Aleja 9*, was directed by Józef Zand. Its board of directors comprised long-term *Kehilla* President Szmul Goldsztajn, G. Najman, H. Majtlis and others.

The director of the Craftsman's Bank, at *Aleja 12*, was J. Bochenek and the board of directors included members of the Craftsmen's Union, with Dr H. Gajsler as Chairman.

The Merchant Bank [Bank Kupiecki], at *Aleja 5*, was mainly the product of the religious political party *Agudas Yisroel*. Its leadership comprised Mojsze Borzykowski, Abram Naftuli Horowicz and others. The employees were Jews with beards and sidelocks, who wore *yarmulkes* [skullcaps] on their heads during work.

These banks, and especially the first two, had gained the trust of the entire population. In that scramble for existence which a Jewish businessman was forced to effect, due both to the great scarcity of his own monetary capital and the Polish government's anti-Jewish economic policies, these banks played an important role in maintaining the existence of the merchants, shopkeepers and craftsmen. The Jewish businessman found the necessary credit in these banks, which he could not receive in the Polish ones. During a financial crisis or due to some other difficulty such as, for instance, the Polish pickets in front of the Jewish shops, which did not allow a Christian customer to enter a Jewish shop, the Jew could find a point of support in the Jewish bank. They would not let a Jew fail and helped him with all means possible when revenue had decreased.

Amongst each other, Jews fulfilled the precept of *gmilus chessed*\*. If one ever had a *złoty* which he could spare to lend out for a day or two, he did so graciously. The borrower could, meanwhile, pay back a debt and continue retaining his credit.

If ever it occurred that a merchant from the *Aleja* became impoverished or if something uncommon had occurred to him, other tradesmen would not let a comrade fall. Several respected burghers would go out into the street to collect an appropriate sum and set the fallen one back onto his feet. Seldom did someone refuse. People gave each according to his means and also generously. It sometimes happened that the collectors skipped someone on purpose because, in their view, the individual was unable to give [and] the latter would demand why he was being humiliated so, that they were taking the good deed of *gmilus chessed* away from him.

### **Courtyards on the *Aleja***

An addition to the *Aleja* as a commercial centre were the countless shops in the courtyards. These courtyards contained buildings with hundreds of dwellings, with shops, warehouses [and] storerooms. Wholesale shops and retail to individuals were to be found in these courtyards. People also set up shops in private dwellings and just about anywhere where one could conduct business.

The courtyard at *Aleja 2* was more than just a yard. It was actually a *zajazd* [Pol; roadhouse]. All kinds of carts, wagons and just harnesses could be found there. One could find vehicles there from almost the entire surrounding province - from Mstów and Koniecpol, from Janów and Przyrów, from Kamyk and Wieluń, from Kłobuck and Krzepice, from Kozięglowy and from Żarki, and from other localities. The proximity of the *Nowy Rynek* (New Market) and the street *ul. Ogrodowa* on one side, and the *Aleja* on the other, favoured this yard as a place of commerce and, at the same time, as a *zajazd*. In the narrowness which was common in the surrounding streets, especially on fair-days, this yard served as a place for parking and repose, for people and *lehavdil*\*\* for horses. On a fair-day, this courtyard resembled a marketplace in a small *shtetl*.

There were all kinds of wholesale warehouses there. Abramcze Dancyger and Dawid Engel *hy''d* had the flour shop. In that same courtyard were to be found Zusman's glass shop and a wholesale sugar shop. In the back part of the yard were also warehouses with goods.

In that courtyard, retail shop which were well-known included the furniture shop of Chaim Haskel (*Pekl*) ["Little Bundle" (nickname?)]. One could see all sorts of cupboards, every type of chair and bed, and suchlike pieces of furniture, displayed for sale in the courtyard. Almost the entire family worked in the shop worked. Each member did his share of the work. [When] an established shop was in need of hands to help, they first used all their own. Such was already the way in the Jewish middle-class in Poland. In most families, the children at first worked jointly in the business and, over the course of time, would take it over. In very small outfits, the children went their own ways.

In the courtyard were also to be found the shop of Lajbisz Frydrych, a grocery shop, a haberdashery and others.

Smaller in scale, but yet lively, was the courtyard at *Aleja 4*. M. Biber had a paper shop there. There were also several smaller shops there. In this courtyard, Szymon Diamant had his restaurant. If someone ever wished to eat a lunch as good as at home, he could have it there. In the gateway, on the first floor, Jonisz once had a haberdashery. Over time, other shops were set up there.

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\* [TN: Giving charitable loans without interest]

\*\* [TN: Heb, lit. "to separate"; Jewish expression roughly meaning "different though they may otherwise be," used when mentioning two unequal or contrasting subjects in the same sentence.]

Similar to the yards at *Aleja* 2 and 4, there were those at *Aleja* 1 and 3. In the courtyard of *Aleja* 1 was an entire row of shops with a variety of merchandise. The most well-known was the haberdashery of Abram Fromer *hy''d*. In time, halls were built in which nested an array of shops, starting from oil to petroleum and grease, to scales and up to haberdashery, food, leather, footwear accessories, etc. The yard also held granaries and warehouses with goods which belonged to the owners of the shops located in that building. If ever a driver or a coachman wished to show tricks and his skill in handling a horse or in manoeuvring a wagon, he could do so in the narrowness of the courtyard at *Aleja* 1. Cymerman had his soft-goods shop there, next to his house.

At *Aleja* 3 was the enamelled household items shop, renowned in the city, of the associates Becalel Potaszewicz and Aron Kongrecki. This was one of the oldest businesses in town and it was run in a modern manner - with accountants, warehousemen and workers. For long years, this shop had the exclusive concession to sell the products of the nearby state-owned factory in Blachownia. This was both prior to the First World War and, also, later during the period of Poland's independence. This shop was the place [where] merchants and shopkeepers, not only from the city, but also from the surrounding towns and villages, bought [goods].

Over the course of time, this business passed on to Becalel Potaszewicz's daughter and son-in-law Mandl.

Of the two partners, Aron Kongrecki emigrated to the Land of Israel in the 1920's, after [Władysław] Grabski implemented his fiscal policy, and there he spent the rest of his years. Reb Becalel Potaszewicz, *hy''d*, shared the fate of all *Częstochowers* under the Nazi Germans in the years 1939-1945.

That same courtyard contained the Sachsenhaus & Goldstein\* glass and porcelain shop. They, too, in due time left *Częstochowa*, and settled in the Land of Israel.

In the old days, Jermia Pik *hy''d* had his soft-goods shop there, in his private residence. Jakow Berman had his shop of buttons and similar accessories there.

A courtyard, where commercial enterprises were to be found, was at *Aleja* 10. Of the more well-known shops there was Wajntraub's shop of enamelled goods, Alter's herring shop [and] a row of storerooms with merchandise which belonged to the wholesale traders.

Further commercial undertakings in the yards of the buildings in the *Aleja* included Rajngold's shipping business at *Aleja* 9 (he left *Częstochowa* and settled in the Land of Israel), the writing materials shop at *Aleja* 11 belonging to Sztajer [and] the shops at *Aleja* 12 - F. Kozłowski's paper and cardboard, and *Częstochowski's* paints.

Also, other courtyards held smaller or greater businesses, both in open shops and in private homes.



Friday nearing dusk, the *Aleja* fell silent. Almost all the shops were locked up. The owners and their employees went home to prepare for *Shabbes*. Yesterday's toil-worn Jews became *Shabbes* and Holiday-like. *Chassidim*, burghers and common Jews walked, each to his prayer-group or to his synagogue. The hurrying ceased and, with leisurely, measured steps, some went into the Ch. Weksler & Assoc. building at *Aleja* 6, where the majority of the worshipers in the *shtiebel* there were

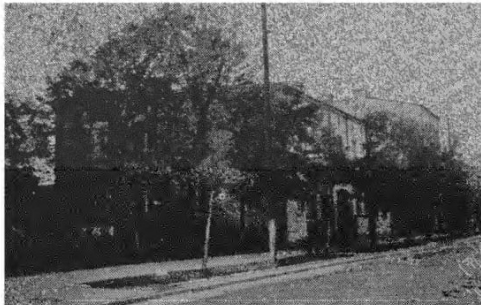
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\* [TN: I have spelled these surnames as they appear in the original 1929 *Częstochowa* business directory, as with other names of businesses in this book.]

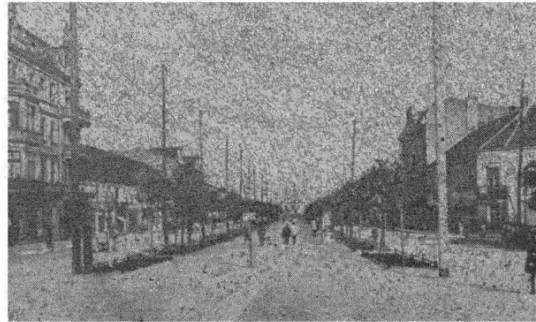
*Mizrachists*. Some entered *Aleja 8*, where the *shtiebel* of a group of *Gerer Chassidim* was located. There was also a prayer-group at M. Rozenwajg's building, *Aleja 7*. Burghers prayed at the synagogue in the building of Goldstein & Assoc., *Aleja 4* or at the synagogue on *Aleja 1*. On their way to the prayer-groups, the pious Jews would remind tardy merchants to lock up their shops. The *Aleja* seemed as if dead. The stillness persisted thus to the end of *Shabbes*. The law regarding rest on Sunday forced Jewish traders to keep their shops closed on Sunday. But Jews, also on Sunday, did not rest. It was a day of work. Tradesmen went about in the city to attend to various affairs. Provincial merchants, who on weekdays were bound to their shops, came into the city to purchase goods. The traders, instead of in the shops, were in the street. They chatted, gave each other news from the world of business or just talked about current affairs. Sunday was also a day on which merchants participated in social work. On the Monday morning, the workweek began again. Such was the way in the world of commerce of the Polish-Jewish tradesman, until ... Hitler's typhoon passed across the Polish land and tore out the Jewish oaks with their roots.

Now, on the first *Aleja*, only a handful of Jews may be seen - saved from bunkers and gas chambers. They seek out their old friends and acquaintances, but no trace of them has remained. The First *Aleja*, on which once were heard the resounding voices of Jewish men, women and children, has been laid to waste. Jewish life has been severed from the Jewish *Aleja*. Not even in a single cemetery may their graves be found, for they have become ash and dust - the Jews of the First *Aleja*.

May these words be a consolation in our great woe and agony, and an eternal monument to the martyrs of Cześćochowa.



*A house on ul. Warszawska*



*The First Aleja*