

## The Jewish *Kehilla* in Częstochowa (Its Composition and Its Activity)

### The Configuration of the Kehilla



Jewish Częstochowa, in many respects, served well as a model of fine Jewish life, both with its institutions and with those who headed them. Jewish Częstochowa possessed a whole array of personalities, who were always prepared to do anything at all for the public benefit and to aid needy Jews. They were prosperous, yet not haughty.

The first who come to mind are the leaders of the Jewish *Kehilla*, or the *Gmina*, their *dozór* [supervisors] and *prezesi* [presidents]. These public activists continuously gave up their time and energy to organise the Jewish life of this large and illustrious Jewish city in the best possible manner.

But speaking of the *gmina* and its *prezesi*, the first one thinks of is the glorious figure of the great wealthy Jewish man and philanthropist, Henryk Markusfeld who, for decades, dedicated himself to the city and who made himself beloved by both Jews and Christians, with his simplicity and uprightness.

For many years, Henryk Markusfeld was the leader of Jewish Częstochowa. When he died, both Jews and Christians wept at his passing. At his eulogy in the synagogue, one of the city's preachers said, "He was a seldom seen Jew, this Markusfeld. Yes, gentlemen, Markus - *felt* [Yid; is missing] ( a word play on his surname)! - and the more shall we miss him, as time goes by!"

But other presidents and leaders of the Jewish *kehilla* in Częstochowa were also inspired with the same spirit. Such, for example, was Szmul Goldsztajn, one of the most distinguished people in Częstochowa. He was *prezes* of the Jewish *kehilla* for over two decades. He was the Chief Trustee of the *Chevre Kadisha* [Burial Society] and held office in many other institutions, especially in *Mizrachi*, of which he was one of the top leaders.

Szmul Goldsztajn replaced Markusfeld following his death and he played no small role in Jewish Częstochowa. Szmul Goldsztajn perished at the hands of the Nazis, may their name be obliterated.

Another such leader was the fine Jew Chaim Weksler, also a *Mizrachi* activist, who came to power after Szmul Goldsztajn resigned his position. Also, leaders of the Jewish *kehilla* included the devoted public activists Dr Zaks, Symcha Dziriat [?], H. Majtlis, Icek Mendel Epsztajn, who made a strong impression with his patriarchal appearance and, in no lesser manner, the representative of the craftsmen in the *kehilla*, Dr H. Gajsler. The latter was a physician in private life, who healed the sick, but whenever he had a free minute, he gave it to craftsmen's organisations, such as the Craftsmen's Union and the Crafts School. Gajsler always supported the cause of the working man.

## The Activities of the *Kehilla*

The activities of the Jewish *kehilla* in Częstochowa were divided into two parts - the period until the First World War, when Częstochowa, as all of Congress Poland, was still under the rule of Tsarist Russia, and the time following the liberation of Poland until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 - about twenty years.

Prior to the First World War, when Tsarist Russia still ruled Poland so strongly, the Jewish *kehilla*, or *gmina*, as it was usually called, was an insignificant institution - despite the fact that it led the entire Jewish life of such a large city as Częstochowa. This was due to the fact that, according to the Russian statutes, the activities of the *gmina* were limited to issues of Jewish religious life, such as the synagogues and study-halls, *mikves* [ritual baths], *Talmud Torahs* [free *cheders* for the poor] and the cemetery. The *gmina* also had, within its jurisdiction, the hiring of religious functionaries, such as a rabbi, a cantor, a *shames* [sexton], etc. There was a *kehilla* tax - a fee, which the richer Jews paid for these same purposes, but the tax was not a large one, because the needs were not too large. The *gmina* would comprise several of the city's Jewish burghers, usually from among the more well-to-do people. On secular issues, they did not even wish to speak within the *kehilla*. Also, men of the people - from the broad masses - had no connection to the *gmina*.

It was different, however, as soon as Poland was liberated and the country's institutions were established upon democratic foundations. Then, the Jewish *kehilla*, in all of Poland, emerged from its constraint of only handling Jewish religious issues and was set up on a much wider platform, which encompassed all matters of relevance to the city's Jews - religious and non-religious. Such was also the case in Częstochowa.

Later, elections were also held to the *Kehilla* and to the *Kehilla* Council that had then been created. In these elections, the religious elements were very active. These included *Mizrachi* [and] *Agudas Yisroel* and the General Zionists [as well]. Particularly active were the workers parties, such as the *Bund* and others who elected representatives to the *Kehilla* and the *Kehilla* Council.

The *kehilla's* activity also became quite different now - much larger and broader - and did not concern itself solely with religious issues, which consisted of five points. (They were satirically denoted with the word *Tashmish*\*: "T" for *Talmud Torahs*, "Sh" for *shuls* for praying; "M" for *mikves*; "I" for issues concerning *yetzias neshume* [last breath], such as the *Chevra Kadisha* and cemetery; and "Sh" for the *sachar* [wages] of the rabbis, cantors, and *shamoshim*). Now, the *kehilla* had a much broader and larger programme, thanks to the intellectual powers of the Jewish intelligentsia and the Jewish workers who participated.

Thus, for instance, the new secular elements in the *Kehilla* and the *Kehilla* Council introduced into the programme - aid to the new educational institutions for the Jewish masses, such as instructional courses, trade schools, evening courses and others. No less did the new forces fight for the Jewish library to be supported, which catered to the Jewish masses by providing them with the very latest books to read. a Jewish leaflet, which came out often, periodically or irregularly; Jewish singing associations and theatre groups; and also other undertakings in the realms of art and literature. In Częstochowa, a fierce battle was waged over the Crafts School, *Lira* and other such institutions.

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\* [TN: Heb. lit. "use (of the bed);" halachic euphemism for sexual intercourse, meaning that people considered themselves violated by being forced to pay the *kehilla* tax.]

Needless to say, the religious and philanthropic institutions were placed first on the list by the religious and reactionary elements, who were usually the majority in Częstochowa. Notwithstanding this, the radical elements did not let themselves be bullied. They were constantly forced to fight against the reactionary forces, for whom the Jewish word meant nothing and who would have deemed it appropriate, had the Jewish primary schools, education courses and libraries been actually persecuted and oppressed, being a “source of heresy”, as one of the religious *Kehilla* councilmen [once] said.

This battle was not an equal one in the number of forces (because later, the *Aguda* also arose and sent its representatives to the *Kehilla* and the *Kehilla* Council, where they habitually united with the Zionists and *Mizrachi* against the radical elements.) Nonetheless, the representatives of the *Bund*, who headed all the radical forces and who were particularly active in the fight for the Jewish institutions, carried their objectives out a great number of times. They achieved this through various means, which we will describe later.

However, before we continue, we shall present a list, here, of the activities of the *Kehilla* and the *Kehilla* Council, in the twenty years from the establishment of the new Poland until the Second World War.

But first, let us see what the sections of the *kehilla* were.

There was a programme according to which the non-radical elements, besides the issues pertaining to religious functionaries, religious institutions, in [sic. and] the religious institutes of learning, were also required to allot funds to the Crafts School, to the trade schools, to the education courses, to the evening courses, to the library, to the Jewish theatre group, to *Lira* and to many others. The philanthropic institutions were taken in account as well, of course.

### **The Religious Functionaries (Halachic authorities, Judges, Cantors, *Schoichtim* [Ritual Slaughters], and *Shamoshim*)**

We now turn to the area of spiritual Jewish leaders, in the religious sense. Częstochowa possessed a large number of renowned scholars, true giants in the field of Talmudic knowledge.

Besides the great prodigy Rabbi Reb Nachum Asz, who adorned the city, Częstochowa also had a whole line of Halachic authorities and judges, as well as regular [Torah] scholars, of great repute. We will mention only a few of these here, such as, for example, the very proficient and sharp-minded Reb Jossele Kira (or, as he was called, “Jossele Prokosz<sup>\*</sup>”), who was one of the Halachic authorities upon whom the rabbi could always depend or the Halachic authority and judge Reb Nachum Grinfeld or the other Jossele, Reb Jossele Klajnplac, or, indeed, Reb Josef Rubin (the *Rebbe* Reb Awigdor's son-in-law).

Add to them the *maggidim* [preachers] - the great [Torah] scholars - Rabbi Nachum Asz's brother-in-law, Reb Mojsze Halter, who was both a great scholar and a wonderful speaker, to whose sermons hundreds of people came. He would always speak at the *Shabbes* gatherings of *Machzikei Hadas* or at *Mizrachi*. Plus the other preacher, Reb Josef Szymon Koblenz, who was called “the *Częstochower Maggid*”. Reb Josef Szymon was a Jew of stately appearance. He spoke a fine, modern Yiddish, full of worldly knowledge and sprinkled with the teachings of the Sages. He was a member of *Mizrachi* and would devote his entire time to the organisation. Nevertheless, he was not a fanatic and understood the psychology and the interests of Jewish workers.

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<sup>\*</sup> [TN: See “*Sefer Częstochowa*,” Vol. I, col.531, where it says that his surname was Prokosz, and his nickname “Kira,” or “Austrian,” in Yiddish.]

During his older years, Reb Josef Szymon lost his sight and his son-in-law would lead him into the synagogue or the study-hall, where he continued preaching, full of fire and flame. He especially did not stop speaking, until his last days, at the synagogue he had founded at *ul. Katedralna 10*. The *schoichtim* of Częstochowa were also great scholars and fine Jews, for no one could become a *shoichet* in Częstochowa unless he was proficient in [Torah] study. Above all, he had to know everything pertaining to the ritual slaughter, from A to Z. That is how Rabbi Reb Nachum Asz conducted affairs and he was very particular that the *schoichtim* should be true men of Torah. In this respect, it was impossible to extract any kind of favour from the rabbi. A *shoichet* who was not literally "soaked in learning" (as was the expression), Rabbi Reb Nachum did not allow to be appointed by the *kehilla* as a city *shoichet*. Of the city *schoichtim*, the following seven were noteworthy: Reb Aba'le Kaufman, Reb Chaim Faktor, Reb Nechemie Gotlib, Reb Chaskel Bergman, Reb Zajnwel Borzykowski, Reb Mojsze Działowski [sic. Działowski] and Reb Jossele Sznycer. There were still others, but they were not appointed by the city. Most of the city *schoichtim* also held the right to lead the morning service prayers during the High Holidays.

Of the seven city *schoichtim* mentioned, Reb Aba'le attained longevity. He died an old man of over 90, leaving a large family of children and grandchildren. Reb Aba'le was especially much loved by the city's butchers and, in every lawsuit they had with cattle dealers, he was their arbitrator. He was also the oldest *shochet* in Częstochowa and the vicinity.

As for the other religious functionaries of Częstochowa, this Jewish *kehilla* was blessed with an abundance of renowned Jewish cantors, who had a reputation also outside Częstochowa.

Of course, we hardly need mention the greatest musical artist and [Torah] scholar, Reb Abram Ber Birnbaum. He was, after all, an extraordinary phenomenon and the city of Częstochowa felt truly fortunate to have this same, great, song-master in its New Synagogue for over twenty years. But, there was under him in Częstochowa an attire array of great masters of song, starting with the great composer Matesyahu [Mateusz] Bensman, until the last cantor from after the Second World War.

Thus, for example, Częstochowa was privileged to have, as a cantor, the famous master of liturgy Ziskind Rozental, who was municipal cantor for thirty three years. This was a Jew with a noble countenance and, what is more, he was also a scholar. Cantor Rozental was not only a singer, but also played two instruments - the violin and the piano. He also composed a whole series of Jewish compositions. He had a entire choir of singers and, every year, he would prepare new compositions for the prayers on the High Holidays, in the old Jewish spirit. Music-loving Jews in the city would therefore run to the municipal synagogue during the sacred days, in order to hear Cantor Ziskind's new works.

Cantor Ziskind Rozental passed away at the age of 73.

After him, the young Józef Badasz, who already then had a name as a great master of song, was appointed cantor in the city synagogue. At once, he became beloved in the city and, in him, they were consoled after Cantor Rozental. But he was in Częstochowa for no more than ten years, because the Jewish *kehilla* of London soon snatched him up. Later, he [travelled] away to Johannesburg (South Africa), where he was engaged as City Cantor at the local synagogue.

After Cantor Badasz, a master of liturgy came as cantor in the city synagogue from within Częstochowa itself - Mr J. Cholewa, who had hitherto prayed in a different synagogue. As City Cantor, he organised a choir of good singers for himself, every one of whom was noted for his voice. He was the city's last cantor. The Nazis sent him to Oświęcim [Auschwitz], where he perished.

At the *German Synagogue* [the New Synagogue], during its entire existence, there were no more than two cantors - the musical artist Abram Ber Birnbaum, of whom we have written earlier and following him, the renowned song master Cantor Fizel, who held his position until the Nazis burned down the *German Synagogue* and sent him to Treblinka in 1942.

Among the religious functionaries, the *shamoshim* of the municipal synagogue, the *German Synagogue* and the Częstochowa study-hall must also be reckoned. It is a fact that all the *shamoshim* of Częstochowa were men of letters and were, in addition, respectable burghers.

In Częstochowa, there were four elderly *shamoshim* who literally grew up along with the growth of the city. Thus, for instance, no one remembered when Uri *Shames* (Aron Pelc) had still been young, for he was almost the oldest one of all. Moreover, Uri *Shames* knew everybody. [He] knew every individual lineage and had been present at almost everyone's circumcision. He served as *shames* of the municipal synagogue for many years and passed away at the age of 90.

Also elderly was the second *shames*, Kalman Szczekacz (or as he was called in the city "Kalman Shames"), the *shames* of the study-hall. He, too, was an elderly Jew, but very energetic and, when one entered the study-hall, it was well-lit and warm there. The third *shames*, that of *Machzikey Hadas*, was also an elderly man - Reb Icek Majer Baum, but he was called "Biczner". These were the Jews who were *shamoshim*, personalities who gave themselves over to their work with true selflessness.

There were also other *shamoshim* in the smaller synagogues, but they did not particularly distinguish themselves to such an extent. It is nevertheless a fact that even the *shamoshim* of the craftsmen's synagogues were sufficiently scholarly. It was a known fact that, of all of those who were in the service of the Jewish *kehilla* in Częstochowa, there was not a single one who was not a man of Torah, versed in the small letters. With this, Częstochowa distinguished itself over all the surrounding cities. And with this, the leadership of the Jewish *kehilla* in Częstochowa stood at a very high level.

### **Houses of Prayer (Synagogues, [Progressive] Synagogues, Study-halls, and Chassidic *Shtieblech*)**

Among the houses of worship in Częstochowa, the places of honour were taken by the municipal synagogues and the *German Synagogue*. The city synagogue, however, was not the oldest Jewish synagogue in Częstochowa, as it had been preceded by a small synagogue, which had been built in the first year of the 19th century. In 1801, the newly established Jewish *kehilla* of Częstochowa built a small synagogue for the small number of Jews living there and, fifteen years later, in 1815, the *kehilla* also built a small study-hall. In the winter, prayers were held in the small study-hall, as it was too cold in the synagogue to pray.

In 5594 (1834), several prominent Częstochowa Jews realised that the number of Jews in the city had greatly increased and that a new house of prayer must be had. They deliberated whether they should build a synagogue or a study-hall and finally decided that, as in a synagogue it was too cold in the wintertime to pray\*, a large study-hall should therefore be built.

On the first day of Adar of that same year, at the initiative of the then Head of the Congregation, Reb Leibel Kohn, a General Meeting was called at the house of the *dozór* then, Reb Gerszon Landau, at which it was decided to build a new study-hall, with a women's section.

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\* [TN: A synagogue, as stipulated in Halacha, must be a tall building, and habitually has very high ceilings, whereas a study-hall may be built to any desired proportions.]

But, in 1855, they realised that the Jewish population had [again] greatly increased and that it was necessary to have a suitable synagogue. It was, therefore, resolved to erect a synagogue of this type and they, in fact, embarked at once upon its construction. This was the city synagogue, which existed in Częstochowa until the Nazis destroyed it.

Another magnificent *shul*, or as others called it, “The Synagogue”, was the New Synagogue or the *German Synagogue*, which was built by assimilated Jews at the beginning of the 20th century.

The New Synagogue was a marvellous building, built after the style of the *German synagogues* in Warsaw and Łódź. The synagogue cost a fortune and, when it was finished, Częstochowa had something of which it could be proud. It was a splendid edifice. As the synagogue’s Head Cantor, the renowned great musical artist, Cantor Abram Ber Birnbaum, was invited. He directed the services there for twenty years, from 1903 until 1923, followed by Head Cantor Fiszel.

The Nazis set fire to the New Synagogue and burned it down, on the night of 25<sup>th</sup> December 1939, soon after they entered Częstochowa. Together with the synagogue, the Judaica Library was also burned down. It contained many precious antiques from Jewish religious and secular literature.

In Częstochowa there were also a great many Chassidic *shtieblech*, where the followers of each *Rebbe* would pray separately. Thus, there were *Chassidim* of Ger [Góra Kalwaria], *Chassidim* of Sochaczew, *Chassidim* of Aleksander, of Ostrowiec, of Skierniewice, of Grodzisk, of Pilica, of Bełż, of Ropczyce, of Amshinov [Mszczonów] and *Chassidim* of Nowo-Radomsko. Each Chassidic group had its own *shtiebel* (some Chassidim, such as the *Gerer*, for example, had several *shtieblech*). Most of the “*shtieblech*” were on ul. Krakowska. Of a completely distinct character was the “*shtiebel*” of the Braclaw *Chassidim*, whom people called “the dead *Chassidim*”, as their *Rebbe* was still Reb Nachman *Braclawer*, even though he had passed away some 150 years earlier and was buried in Uman (Kiev *Gubernia*). Prior to his death, the *Braclawer* had instructed his followers not to choose another *Rebbe* after his demise, but to come to his tomb and lay *kvitelech* [notes] there and he would help them. Therefore, the *Braclawers* did not choose a successor in Reb Nachman's place and he remains their permanent *Rebbe* to this day. The *Braclawer shtiebel* was located in Chaim Weksler's building on the First Aleja 6.

The Chassidic *shtiebel* of the Rebbe of Żarki (Trisker), who lived in Częstochowa, also held a singular position. The *Rebbe* was a Russian from the Trisker dynasty and the followers of the Polish *Rebbes* used to say of him that he was a “Chassidic *Misnaged* [opponent of Chassidism]”. This was due to the fact that these *Chassidim* conducted themselves with great composure during prayers - nothing at all like the Polish *Chassidim*. They also said numerous prayers in adherence with the *Ashkenaz* rite\*. Generally speaking, this *Rebbe* did not conduct himself as the Polish *Rebbes* did.

In Częstochowa, there were also several *minyanim* [prayer groups] or small houses of worship of craftsmen, such as tailors, for instance, and others. There, it was customary on *Shabbes*, at prayers \*\*, to discuss all matters of the trade.

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\* [TN: The “*Ashkenaz*” [Heb. Germany] rite is the mainstream traditional liturgy of non-Chassidic Ashkenazi Jews (which precedes Chassidism), whereas the Chassidim usually follow the more Kabbalistic “*Sefard*” rite, which has many similarities to the Sephardic liturgy, thus the appellation.]

\*\* [TN: These issues would presumably have been discussed once the prayer service had concluded and not during the service itself, but the religious authorities would most certainly have frowned upon the practice nevertheless, as it is strictly forbidden to discuss business matters on *Shabbes*, according to *Halacha*.]

## The Religious Educational Institutions (*Cheders*, *Yeshivas*, Cantors School, and others)

In the religious field, the Jewish *kehilla* of Częstochowa possessed all forms of educational institutions - from the very lowest to the highest possible.

Before any other, [must come] the *cheders*. In Częstochowa, there were several teachers of the youngest children who had a name in the world. First of all, there was the *cheder* of Reb Leibale Landau. As one Częstochowa Jew writes:

*Who is it, who hasn't studied with Reb Leibale Landau? Who, from the last three generations, does not remember the long cheder on ul. Mostowa, with the broom<sup>\*\*\*</sup> and with the poor legless cripple, who sat on his low wagon at the entrance to the cheder - the one with the green cap [and] with the little toys?*

The same *Częstochower* also had something to say about the other *melamedim*:

*How could anyone forget Reb Pinches Arkusz, this melamed of the wealthy children, with whom, in addition to Torah, one also received a general education, with a report for every six months? And how could one forget Reb Icze Majer Amstower or Reb Motl, with whom the young lads would already study a page of [the tractate] Nedarim, with [the commentaries of the] Ra"n [R. Nissim ben Reuven], or even celebrate the completion of [the tractate] Chullin?"*

Thus [far] regarding the *cheders* - the lowest, middle, and highest levels.

Now, about the *yeshivas*:

As soon as he arrived in Częstochowa, the rabbi Reb Nachum Asz z"l founded a *yeshiva* where lads, who dedicated themselves to Torah study, learnt. But later, other *yeshivas* were established. The [more] famous one was the "Keser Torah" *yeshiva*, at the head of which stood two of the generation's great ones, the two acclaimed deans of the *yeshiva* - the prodigy Reb Ruwele Rechtman and Reb Mechel Szwarcbaum. At the *yeshiva*, there were [different] classes and levels. Almost half of the city's Jewish youth studied there - including even those who attended [secular] *gimnazja*. The *yeshiva* was under the [general] supervision of the *Radomsker Rebbe* and the general director was the fine Jew and great scholar, Reb Leibel Kantor. But besides these two *yeshivas*, there was also a third, which was run by the Rabbi of Wieruszów, where over a hundred students studied.

In Częstochowa, *Aguda* had an entire series of lower [i.e., ages 13-16] *yeshivas* under the name *Yesodei Ha'Torah* [Foundations of the Torah], in which the Machzikei Hadas leaders, Messrs Grylak, Pinches Arkusz and Edelist were active.

There was also a "People's Cheder" which was created by the *Kehilla* and was led by Reb Szyja Zeligman, a Torah scholar and a Jew with fine attributes. Besides these, there were very many private *cheders*.

The rabbis who studied with the pupils at the *yeshivas* were, besides those already mentioned, the following: the *yeshiva* dean, Reb Lajzer Jakubowicz, Reb Abram Naftuli Horowicz, the scholar and pious man [Reb] Wolwisz (and the Torah scholars: [sic]) Borensztajn, and Reb Motl Przyrowicz.

A separate place was occupied by the Jewish *Gymnazjum* in Częstochowa, which was the pride of the city. The *gymnazjum* was established in 1917. Children from all strata of the Jewish population

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<sup>\*\*\*</sup> [TN: See "Sefer Częstochowa," Vol. I, col.555 regarding this broom.]

studied the *gymnazjum* - children of *Misnagedim*, young people from Chassidic homes, children of Jewish-nationalists and Zionists - even those who had half-assimilated or, indeed, had [fully] assimilated parents.

## Jewish Secular Schools and Institutions

Besides the religious schools, Jewish Częstochowa had an entire array of regular, Jewish schools, which achieved much for the Jewish population.

The first that comes to mind is the Crafts School, which was founded back in 1898 by the philanthropist Henryk Markusfeld, as a [memorial] monument to his parents.

A second school, which had a good reputation in the province, was the Częstochowa School of Agronomy. This school, too, was founded by Henryk Markusfeld, together with Messrs Grosman and Stanisław Herc. To this end, in 1902, they purchased a small plot of land, consisting of some 20 acres. Jewish Częstochowa had a wealth of libraries. They were not very large, but they accomplished a great deal for the Jewish population.

In the field of philanthropy, Jewish Częstochowa had a very large number of institutions. There were two types - one type of institution was for aiding those in need, and the second was to help the sick. There was also the *Chevra Kadisha*, which engaged in interring the dead.

The top place for philanthropic activities must be held by the *Dobroczytność* Society, [its name] means “charity” in Polish. Thus the society was named by its founder and leader Henryk Markusfeld and thus its name remained until its destruction by the Nazis.

The *Dobroczytność* Society was actually not one single organisation, but five [all rolled] into one.

The Society was founded as long ago as 1901 and was tasked, right from the very beginning, with occupying itself with the following fields of relief activity:

- 1) emergency aid;
- 2) the Jewish hospital;
- 3) an care home for the elderly and also an orphanage for poor, lone children;
- 4) a children’s home [i.e., a day-care centre for the poor], and
- 5) care of poor lying-in [pregnant and post-natal] women.

The task of emergency aid consisted of granting interest-free loans to those in need - this was a *Gmilus Chassodim* [charity] fund. During the First World War, the fund’s work was weakened, but it was renewed after the War under the chairmanship of the lawyer Koniarski, and, with the aid of [the] Joint, he conducted [even] greater activity.

The Jewish hospital began being built already back in 1910 and was finally opened in November 1913. This Jewish hospital immediately showed itself to be of great necessity, for just the number of surgical and gynaecological treatments already provided in its first year, which numbered around 2,500. The hospital was maintained by the city and from moneys which arrived for that purpose from the Częstochowa *landsleit* in America.

The aged-care home and the orphanage were named after Mina Werde.



The Children's Home was created later by the working elements and it expanded greatly. The department for aiding poor in-lying women was directed by women and was named *Ezras Noshim* [Women's Aid].

Besides *Dobroczynność*, there were numerous other important philanthropic institutions in Częstochowa.

The *Linas Ha'Tzedek* [Lodgings of Righteousness] and *Linas Cholim* [Lodgings of the Sick] Societies both had but a single purpose - to aid the underprivileged sick.

The goal of the *Hachnoses Orchim* [Taking in Guests] was to provide food and accommodations to poor, Jewish strangers who had arrived here [viz. in Częstochowa] and had nowhere to stay. *Hachnoses Orchim* had a house on ul. Garncarska. The Zionist activists Natan Gerichter, Henech Lapiques, Ajzyk Mendel Epsztajn and Szmul Nemirowski devoted themselves extensively to this institution.

A second institution was *Hachnoses Kallah* [Bringing the Bride (under the *Chuppah*)] which supplied poor brides with a dowry and also an outfit so that they may be wed. Often, the brides were aided in such a manner that no one would know. The head of the institution was also, at one time, the philanthropist Henryk Markusfeld, who often gave for such brides out of his own pocket.

There was another institution, named *Malbish Arumim*<sup>\*</sup>, which provided clothes to poor people. This society collected old garments, which they repaired and washed and then distributed amongst the poor Jewish men and women in town.

The *Beis Lechem* [House of Bread] was a society to help poor people with provisions. The management comprised of the President Szmul Nemirowski, Beryl Bocian, Ajzyk Mendel Epsztajn and some others. The latter was the founder of the society. He was concerned, above all, with providing poor Jews with all the necessary foodstuffs for the holidays.

A singular society was the one called *Git Shabbes Yidelech*<sup>\*\*</sup>. This was a group of Jews who would make the round of the houses every *Shabbes*, yelling "*Git Shabbes, Yidelech!* You [yourselves] have what to eat – give to eat for those who haven't! Give something for poor people!" They would usually stand in the middle of a courtyard, calling up to everyone to throw down victuals. And the Jews would already be waiting for them, especially the children, and they threw valuable things down to them. They would gather all this in baskets and distribute it. There were some devout Jewish women who would expressly bake extra *challes* [Shabbes bread] to have for throwing down to them. The collected food was mostly divided amongst Jewish arrestees and among regular Jewish poor and sick people. The president of the organisation was Emanuel Wajcenblat, a simple labourer - a brush-maker.

Another organisation, *Ezra* [Aid], was founded by Mrs Gerichter. This was a group of women who concerned themselves, particularly, with poor, sick people and who later took on the responsibility of [also] helping, poor in-lying women.

The *Chevra Kadisha* was an old institution in Częstochowa and it was an honour to belong to it. The *Chevra Kadisha* occupied itself only with bringing the dead to a Jewish burial. It existed from back in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and it had its own cemetery [viz. for its members] (because, in the

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<sup>\*</sup> [TN: Heb.; "he who clothes the naked", an attribute of God. This phrase is taken from the "Morning Blessings" liturgy.]

<sup>\*\*</sup> [TN: Yid; "Good Shabbes, little Jews" ("little Jews" is used as a term of endearment to this day). See "Sefer Częstochowa," Vol. I, col.375, in which the society's nickname is rendered as "Git-Shabbes Yingelech" (Yid.; "Good Shabbes" Boys).]

past, they were forced to bring the Jewish dead to the nearby town of Janów). The head *gabay* [trustee] of the *Chevra Kadisha* was Natan Gerichter and, after him, Szmul Goldsztajn.

The *Chevra Kadisha* had an whole array of regulations which all members had to abide by. Thus, for example, it was their tradition that on *Shabbes Bereishis* [the first Shabbes following the High Holidays], all would pray at the [Main] Synagogue together with the [Chief] Rabb, and all *gaboim* would receive an *aliya* [be called up to the Torah]. They also had other rules and customs.

In the early 1920's, the Jewish-Russian OZE Society, which occupied itself with caring for the health of Jews, opened a branch in Warsaw. In order to operate in Poland (after the Bolsheviks had disrupted their work in Russia), the society changed its name [from] "OZE" (which were its Russian initials\*) to "TOZ" (which means the same in Polish).

TOZ endeavoured to open branches throughout Poland. One such branch was also opened in Częstochowa. The leader was Dr Stefan Kohn-Kolin.

### **Jewish Kehilla Life Up To the Second World War**

The Jewish *Kehilla* of Częstochowa, with its various, local representatives from all the strata of the Jewish population, was a permanent battleground between the reactionary and radical elements, over the Jewish secular institutions. While the representatives of the Jewish workers' parties showed tolerance and willingness to cooperate with the religious elements, and to second their demands for the religious institutions, it was impossible to persuade the latter to be just as tolerant and cooperative with the radical forces in *their* demands.

This is reflected in all of the journals and newspapers of all the radical factions, over the course of the entire twenty years of free Poland.

Thus we read in *Unser Stimme* [Our Voice] (organ of the Independent Socialist Workers Party in Poland), from 11<sup>th</sup> June 1926:

*It is impossible to execute any joint work together with the reactionary forces in our gmina, for they do not know what it means to be cooperative and the word "tolerance" is utterly alien to them. At a time when the Endecja [(right-wing nationalist Polish) National Democracy Party] councilmen have allotted subsidies for Jewish secular schools, our Aguda-Zionist gmina was unwilling to allocate a single grosz for the secular Jewish schools at its last session. The Endecja councilmen have appropriated large sums for Jewish libraries, because they understand and know the value of culture and enlightenment, but our Kehilla was unwilling to allocate anything at all for the cultural interests of the Jewish masses, such as the library and other institutions.*

We read the same in the *Proletariat* (weekly organ of the Jewish Bureau of Culture in Częstochowa), from 16<sup>th</sup> July 1926:

*See how the Kehilla Council works. The Kehilla's budget for the forthcoming year is 419,420 złoty. But what is this sum to be spent on? All on religious affairs - the schoichtim, the mikvah [and] the cemetery, whereas for Jewish cultural issues, for education, no more than 43,450 złoty have been appropriated. A drop in the sea, compared to what is actually needed. But, at the same time, the Aguda people, with the help of the Zionists, had allocated*

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\* [TN: Общество здравоохранения евреев (Jewish Health Society). The Polish TOZ stands for: Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia Ludności Żydowskiej (Society for the Safeguarding of the Health of the Jewish Population).]

*3,500 złoty just to Aguda's "Beis Yaakov" [Girls School]. That is why the radical elements [then] proceeded to revoke the sum of 2,500 złoty for the Radomsko Rebbe's Keser Torah yeshiva.*

The picture always remained the same in later years as well. In the *Unser Weg* [Our Way] of Częstochowa, from 24<sup>th</sup> October 1930, we read practically an identical story:

*In the Kehilla, the picture has not changed. The same attitude which prevailed toward the radical elements during the last ten years is still continuing. Aguda and Mizrachi may quarrel - the Aguda people are against Zionism and wage a bitter battle against the Zionists – but, when it comes to thumping the worker representatives and not allowing their demands to be met - then all the reactionary forces unite and become a single bloc against the radical front - a fine lot [indeed]! Also during the Kehilla Council's last session, this bloc was not to allow any increase in the sums they distribute to the secular Jewry's institutions.*

And we read the same exact [thing] in *Unser Weg* from December 1934:

*"Oświata" [education] is what our gmina trustees call our cultural life. What a mishmash we have in the gmina and what demands they have put forth! The Zionists want a "Hebrew in Hebrew" school; the Mizrachi people want a "Hebrew-Yiddish cheder"; the Orthodox [viz. Aguda], a "Yesodei Ha'Torah" [Foundations of T.] cheder; those unaffiliated [with any party], want a "Torah in Torah\*\*" cheder; the "Poalei Agudas Yisroel" - Torah in Yiddish, using the new orthography; the "Histadrut" [(The Zionist) Organisation] – "Tarbut" [Culture; secular Hebrew schools] schools. But as for secular schools - of this, they wish to know nothing and [they ask you] why do you need more? The municipal Talmud Torah, where Jewish children are taught for free and where there are only two classes for beginners and a Chumash [Pentateuch] class – they do not support this cheder either. This Talmud Torah was founded for those children who attend "powszechny" [universal or public] schools, but the Kehilla Council shows very little interest in the children of the poor. They are not bothered with poor children.*

And that is how it always went, also in the subsequent years. In 1935, the *Kehilla* issued a new *Kehilla* Tax, which was three times larger than the previous one, but to the secular institutions, they still did not wish to grant any additional [funds]. The excuse was, that the *Kehilla* had a deficit of 100,000 złoty for 1934.

Even the fact that many of the radical representatives conducted a fierce battle against the reactionary bloc was to no avail. Those, who particularly excelled in this, were representatives of the Bund, who did not hold back and called the reactionary bloc by their true names, but that helped little. The Jewish secular institutions did not receive a single *grosz* more.

This was the way *Kehilla* life in Częstochowa also looked in the later years, until the year of destruction. Yes, until that teary Friday, 1<sup>st</sup> September 1939, when Hitler's hordes destroyed the city and obliterated every trace of Jewish life in the great Jewish city of Częstochowa.

Yes, yes, there was once a fine, large Jewish *Kehilla* in the city of Częstochowa – but the devil, in the shape of one Hitler, turned everything to ruins.

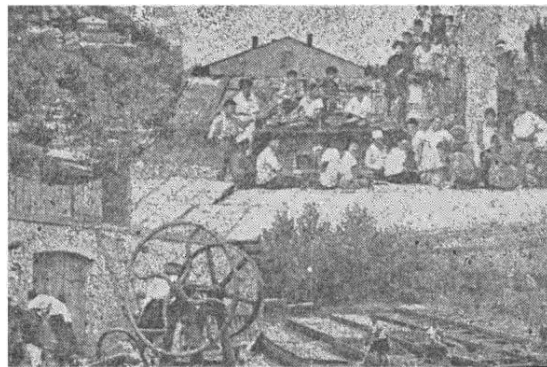
May these words be a monument to its memory.

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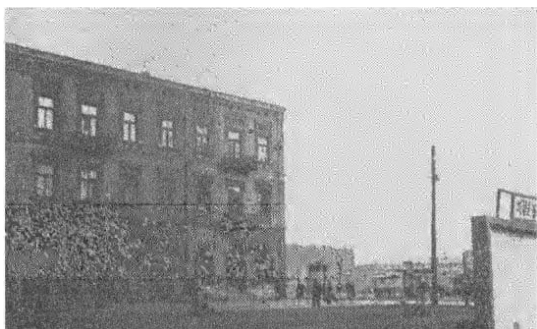
<sup>\*\*</sup> [TN: Perhaps they wished Torah study to be carried out in biblical Hebrew, and other subjects in Yiddish or Polish.]



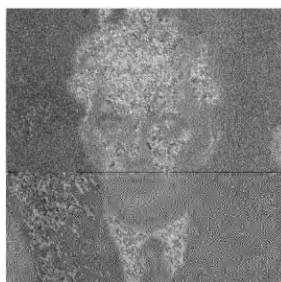
***Doctors and nurses of the Częstochowa Jewish Hospital in Zawodzie***



***General image of the farm***



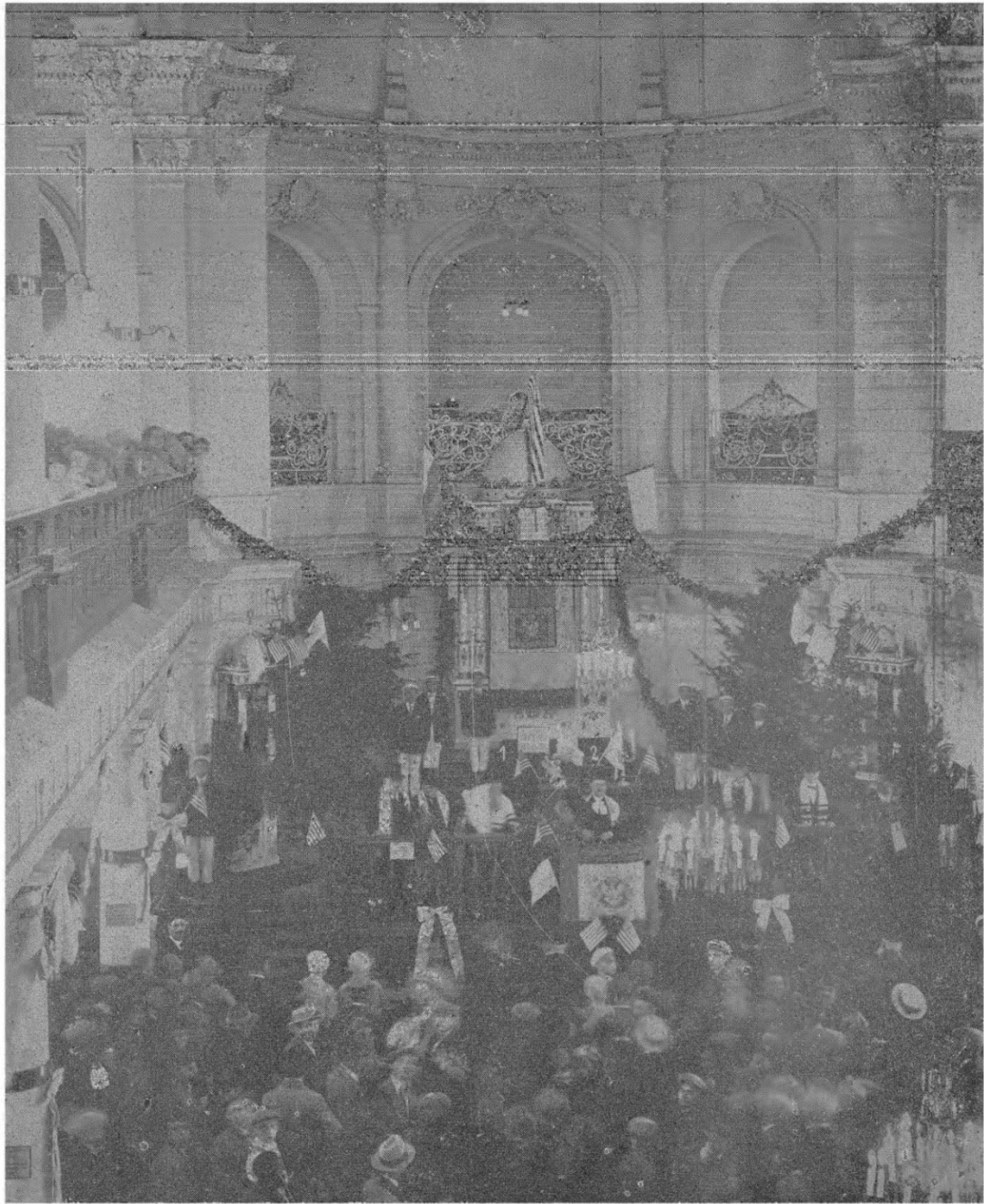
***The New Market; part of the Old Market also seen***



***Jakow Rozenberg, the last leader of the Częstochowa Kehilla***



***Henryk Markusfeld, the famous Jewish Częstochower public activist and philanthropist***



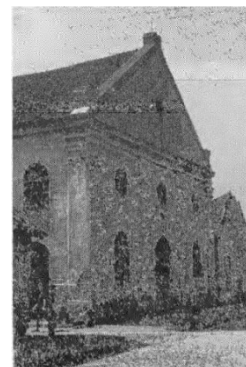
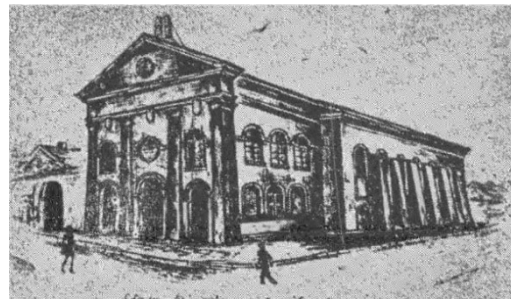
*The New Synagogue, inside, during the [celebration] of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary  
of the independence of the United States (1776-1926)*



*Representatives of the Częstochowa Jewish Kehilla. In the front rows are also the dozór Szmul Goldsztajn, Chaim Weksler, the famous Maggid Koblenz, and others*



*The New Synagogue's main entrance*



*The Old Synagogue*