

## Five Generations of the Kohn Family

In the historical material on Jewish Częstochowa, we often find details of the prolific deeds of the Kohn, Markusfeld Gincburg [and] Landau families. These names are mentioned in connection to activities in the communal or financial arenas. In the field of cultural and philanthropic good deeds, the Markusfeld family is particularly mentioned. In the municipal arena, it was the Kohns. Regarding the city's economic development, in addition to these names, the Gincburg and Landau families are also mentioned.

[All] these names were tightly interconnected, as they shared common ancestors. Their pedigree chart began from Józef Kohn, Bernard Kohn's father.

Of Bernard (Ber) Kohn we know that he was the first Jewish City Council member with full rights, as early as 1862, and that he greatly advanced the harmonious cooperation between the Jewish and Gentile Częstochowa populations.

Following the great fire of 1862<sup>142</sup>, in which a great part of the poorer Jewish townspeople was hit particularly hard, a "Communal Committee" of Jews and Poles was formed, which was headed by the local priest and the Chief Rabbi. The chairman of this committee was Bernard Kohn.

There is absolutely no doubt that the fact that Bernard Kohn had the honour of representing the Jewish population (which by then already numbered 3600 souls) as the chairman of the committee, and also as City Council member, together with Gentiles who had a high worldly education and a variety of ambitions in their communal endeavours, was a result of his particular aptitude for becoming a respected figure in Jewish public life.



*A photo of the Kohn family – among the first builders of the city*

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<sup>142</sup> [TN: See previous article.]

Bernard Kohn's financial standing was also favourable, as the owner of a mill, which was later turned into the well-known paper factory. He had both familial and mercantile ties to the respected Częstochowa families mentioned above - the Markusfeld, Gincburg and Landau families, which were so strongly connected to Częstochowa where, together they lived, and together they created and greatly developed various branches of industry, which brought the city prosperity, such as the "Warta" paper factory, the wall-paper factory, etc.

Although these families, during a certain period, had assimilationist views, none of them ever actually left the Jewish People (only one such occasion befell these close-knit families, actually in the last generation when, on the eve of Hitler's destruction, one of them converted to Christianity together with his wife.)

Ludwig<sup>143</sup> Kohn received a general, worldly education. He specialised in economics, which he studied at the institute in Breslau (later Wrocław), and he had also mastered several European languages.

Ludwig married the daughter of Mosek Fajnkind, Karolina [Ruchla] (at the time, Mosek Fajnkind was chairman of the largest *Kehilla* in Poland - that of Warsaw). Karolina Kohn, who settled with her husband in Częstochowa after their wedding, was very influential in making the Kohn family one of the most exemplary Jewish families in Częstochowa.

Ludwig Kohn's home became a model for many other Jewish families, with its modest lifestyle and simplicity. Setting their modest dwelling inside the mill (later, a paper factory) on ul. Krakowska, they made it literally a house open to all. They maintained this humble and orderly abode on the factory's premises and they also surrounded themselves with Jewish workers, whom they employed for life. The Kohn family also saw to it that the children of their employees should receive a modern, worldly education, and many of them actually achieved high levels in general, communal life. Besides their material aid, which they generously proffered to all Jewish communal institutions, Ludwig Kohn and his wife Karolina also took an active part in the essential work [done] for those institutions which were in beat with the spirit of that era.

Ludwig Kohn died in 1919<sup>144</sup> at the age of 77. His wife lived on for another sixteen years and died in 1935, at the age of 93. After her husband's death, Karolina Kohn held the family together. To the last day of her life, her exemplary home was the central point for the entire Kohn family.

Ludwig and Karolina Kohn had two daughters and three sons. The eldest daughter, Mela, was wed to the renowned medical doctor, Gustaw Hajman (died in 1951, in Łódź). The second daughter, Tekla, married Maurycy Sprecher, the son of an important family from Lwów (both perished in the Holocaust). These two sons-in-law were not involved in the Kohn family's business - Hajman practised as a physician and Sprecher became a great industrialist in Austria. But the three sons, Leopold<sup>145</sup>, Alfred and Maurycy participated quite actively and expanded their financial enterprises very successfully.

Leopold, the eldest of the brothers, was born in 1867 (he died in the ghetto in 1942). He studied philosophy and received a doctorate. He married Noemi Bakerman, the daughter of the very wealthy and famous philanthropist Piotr Bakerman from Radom.

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<sup>143</sup> [TN: Lewek Ludwik son of Wilhelm Kon, in the records.]

<sup>144</sup> [TN: Dead 16 Oct 1918, there.]

<sup>145</sup> [TN: Aluezer Leopold Kon, there.]

Leopold was the equal of his cousin<sup>146</sup> Henryk Markusfeld (the renowned philanthropist) equal in the field of Jewish communal life. Although he had no specific ambitions in general, his great financial capacities allowed him to express one certain ambition - to make his life's work, the paper factory, into one of the largest paper factories in Poland. Dr Leopold Kohn was active for years as an elected member of the administration of the General Polish Industrial Union, as well as in the other deciding factors of the Polish Paper Syndicate.

After the death of his cousin<sup>147</sup> Herman Gincburg, he was also chosen as president of "Warta", a position he retained until Hitler's destruction. In the last years of his life, he was also one of the most active members of the "B'nai B'rith"<sup>148</sup> ["Children of the Covenant"] lodge of Kraków.

Of Dr Leopold Kohn's two daughters, Janina, a widow who was married to Dr Juliusz Schleicher, a son of Dr Filip [Peisach] Schleicher, the Deputy Mayor of Lwów, one of the leading figures of Galician Jewry, lives in Israel.

Although he [L. Kohn] held extremely assimilationist views, his ideology changed at the end of his life and he dedicated himself to the work of building the Land of Israel. He was among the [Jewish] Agency's most active non-Zionist members in Poland.

The engineer Alfred Kohn, the family's third brother, also took an active part in the financial undertakings of the Kohn family, thanks to his wife Adela (*née* Frenkiel), who was brought up in Kiev, in a family of large-scale, communal activists. Even before the First World War, he became involved in the local communal work. Once Alfred and Adela Kohn had settled in Częstochowa, their home became a central point for the Zionist cause.

Adela was the founder and an active member of WIZO - the Women's Zionist Organisation [in Częstochowa].

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<sup>146</sup> [TN: H. Markusfeld was the son of Estera Kohn.]

<sup>147</sup> [TN: Herman Gincburg (also spelled Ginsberg in the records) was the son of Rozalia Kon.]

<sup>148</sup> [TN: The oldest Jewish service organisation in the world.]