

The Book Committee

Public Libraries and Reading Rooms

Częstochowa proved that the “spiritual food” provided by the “booksellers” and their binders, Reb Emanuel Bajgele and Reb Henoeh Lapides, was not sufficient.

To the praise and glory of all parties in our city, it should be mentioned that each and every one of them provided their members with books and various pamphlets - obviously, those which would, first and foremost, “light up” their eyes in current party matters and, together with this, also literary reading material - *belles-lettres*, poetry and any material which attracts the reader’s heart.

The Russian authorities, who then ruled in Częstochowa, saw in this “signs of *Kramola*” [Old Ru.; dissidence], the propagation of which should be contained. They therefore refrained from granting licenses to open libraries and reading rooms, and all the activities in this area were conducted illegally - literally underground.

The first and most important library to rise in our city was that of the “S.S” [Zionist-Socialist] Party, which was located in one of the side storage-rooms of the iron-merchant Mr Berliner on ulica Ogrodowa. He was one of this party’s adherents and employed Szaje Lewenhof (S.S. member) in his business as its accountant.

Party member Nuta Szwarcbaum took it upon himself to look after this illegal library. He purchased books in Warsaw and brought them to Częstochowa. He catalogued them, worked to distribute them in the factories and workshops and the party’s different circles, and also dealt with their replacement.

The library housed *belles-lettres* books in Yiddish (originals and translations) and, from time to time, expanded.

After the branch of “The Jewish Literary Society” from [St.] Petersburg was opened in Częstochowa, it also received a license to open a library, conducting its work publically. Indeed, before long, the Russian government changed its mind and banned the activities of this Society and of all its branches.

As is known, this Society then, at the end of 1911, merged with “Lira”, with its library passing over to it - over two thousand volumes in Yiddish and over six hundred in Hebrew.

Faitel Szmulewicz, who also conducted an interesting statistic on the configuration of the readers and their reading rooms, served as librarian.

During the First World War, this library passed over to the local Zionist Organisation and continued its activities at ulica Dojazdowa 19.

The Jewish workers’ parties did not view this favourably and, through their [respective] headquarters, they established their own libraries and reading rooms, transferring to them the books still remaining from the days of Russian subjugation, when the libraries were conducted illegally. After the German occupation government licensed the first professional union named

“*Bildungsverein*” [Educational Association], which was headed by the S.S. party, this library was opened and expanded, and Chaja Waga, Ester Fuks and S. Landau served there as librarians there.

Concurrently, special libraries for “Poalei Zion” and “Bund” members were established, albeit on a limited scale.

When, after the War, a delegation of the American “Częstochower Relief in New York” appeared in Częstochowa and brought with it a large shipment of books and monies as well, all the parties’ libraries merged, at the delegation’s initiative, under the name “*Algemeine Arbeiter Bibliothek*” [General Worker’s Library]. Its management was in the hands of representatives of “*Vereinigt*” [United], “Bund” and “Poalei Zion”.

This library was supported, in a large measure, by the “Relief” in New York and CYSZO [The Central Organization of Yiddish Schools] in Warsaw.

At proposition of workers’ representatives on the City Council, municipal funding was also approved to buy books in Polish for the library.

The library, which was housed at first in the “Children’s Home” at ulica Strażacka 10, later moved to “Beit Peretz”, next to the public school at ulica Krótka 23

As librarian, Jakub Icek Zarnowiecki first performed that function, followed by Herszel Lipszyc.

On Friday nights and on Saturdays, discussions were held at the library with readers [discussing] what they had read and wished to read. The number of participants in these discussions was large.

In Częstochowa, there was also a library belonging to the “Trade and Industry Workers Association”, but it only held books in Polish and Russian, and books in Yiddish or Hebrew were outside its realm. They were considered “not to be seen and not to be found”!

After a “war” that continued for some years, this association was “conquered” and its library, too, was opened for Yiddish and Hebrew books.

Over the course of time, this library merged with the W. Medem library, which was founded in 1926 by the “Bureau of Culture” (*Kultur-Amt*). In 1927, the unified library moved to Aleja 20.

Andzej Monowicz served as its first librarian.

In 1938, the library, for some reason, changed its name to “Kultura” and was managed by Mrs Roza Berkensztadt (who continued to manage it illegally in the days of Nazi rule. When this was discovered, she was seized by the Nazi murderers, who tortured her until her tragic death).

We must also mention the “Tzeirei Ha’Mizrachi” organisation’s library, whose beginning was at the end of the First World War. It was located at ulica Ogrodowa 14.

This library expanded steadily year after year, until it held a few thousand books - mainly philosophy books on religion and nationalism, religious research and philosophy, beginning from the Middle Ages - works of the contemporary Jewish sages - and up to the enlightenment and Jewish academic research books by the great *Maskilim* and thinkers of the 18th and 19th centuries.

* [Translator’s note: i.e., taboo. This expression originates in the Halachic prohibition of seeing and/or possessing chometz (leavened foods) on Passover. See *Pesachim*, Ch. 9, mishna 3.]

There was also a special section for poetry and *belles-lettres*, which contained the works of the greatest of our and the nations of the world's authors and poets. The majority, of course, were in Hebrew and Yiddish and a few of them in Polish, as well as in Russian and German.

From 1925 and until he emigrated to the Land [of Israel], Chaim Fajnsztadt (who now lives in Rehovot) served as this library's librarian, and he loyally and devotedly served the readers, who were mostly study-hall students. Most of them "exercised caution" by coming to the library late in the evening, for fear of the "evil eye".

We should also mention the Craftsmen's Club library and reading room (which were partly founded by Henryk Markusfeld), the Crafts School's Adolf Brill library, the horticultural farm's botanical library [and] the I.L Peretz School's children's library.

(All this was destroyed and annihilated, together with its activists and loyal personnel, by the murderers of our People, may their names and memories be obliterated.)



* [Translator's note: Most of the aforesaid books which the library held, would have been unacceptable to the young readers' ultra-orthodox teachers and parents. Although "Mizrachi" was a religious organisation, they were (and are to this day) considered heretical and lukewarm by the ultra-orthodox community.]