

The Crafts School^{*}



A group of students of the crafts School in 1908. Sitting (from right to left): Izaak Sztajer, Grinbaum brothers, Mojsze Epszajn, Mojsze Buchner and Józef Epszajn. Standing (as above): Szmul Sztajer, Sz. Blum and M. Openhajm.

The Crafts School in our city was opened back in 1898 at the initiative and with generous financial support of Henryk Markusfeld, to immortalise the memory of his parents, Adolf and Ernestina Markusfeld.

In those times, the sentiment still prevailed, among

Jews, that manual labour was inappropriate for “respectable people” - for the children of well-born families, for whom it was more fitting to aspire to [Talmudic] learning and commerce, to become

great religious figures or businessmen.

In those times, the concept of a “tailor-boy” or a “cobbler-boy” was that these occupations “must” be learned only by the children of those whose “fathers and forefathers” came from the lowest strata of the Jewish masses.

In order to attract pupils to the Crafts School, it was established next to the *Talmud Torah*, in the hope that, among the poor children and orphans, it would also be possible to recruit the necessary number of pupils for the three departments that had been opened - a mechanical locksmithing, furniture carpentry and a coopering (barrel production).

The first directors and teachers were appointed - Szrajber (locksmith), Okrent (carpentry) and Jarzbiński (cooper) - (the last one was a Pole, because it was, at the time, completely impossible to find any professional, Jewish cooper in the whole of Poland.).

As teacher of draughtsmanship, Mr Zalcman was invited, who by then was already an elderly Jew, but was still a great expert in draughtsmanship.

At first, the school had very few pupils, due to the reasons already mentioned above and also due to the fact that each pupil needed to pay for three years of studies - about 150 roubles, a sum which, at the time, was quite large for less than prosperous parents.

The school operated with large deficits, which were covered by the J.C.A. [Jewish Colonization Association], the *Kehilla*, [and] the Markusfeld family, adding to the tuition fees paid by the parents.

However, after the first three years, when its first graduates - Szulim Blum, Szlojme Działoszyński, Chaim and Szlojme Win, the brothers Abram and Mojsze Weksler and Majer Fajnrajch – immediately received good work and, as qualified craftsmen, earned very well, a throng appeared at the Crafts School and the inflow of students grew from year to year.

^{*} Regarding the Crafts School, we've received two interesting articles, in which the facts, of course, are authentic. In order to avoid repetitions, we hereby bring forth only the summary of both articles – together.

Not only study-hall students, but also those at *gymnazjums*, among them even the children of wealthy parents, began to seek their purpose in professional training as craftsmen and technicians.

In that period, the school's name was also changed. Instead of "Crafts School by the *Talmud Torah*", it received the official name of "Jewish Crafts and Industry School".

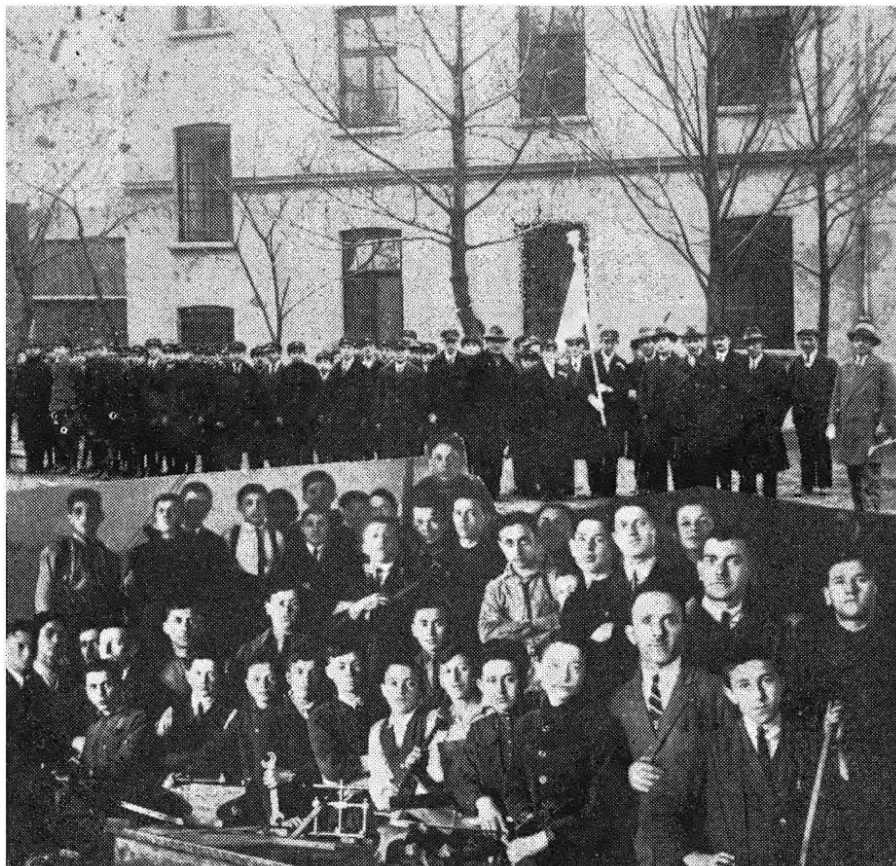
The students worked in the workshops during the day and studied at the evening-courses.

Prior to this, the school's directors had changed.

Following headmaster Szrajber, Mr Jawec became director. He was followed by headmaster Gwircman, who managed to have the Crafts School given the right to issue their guild certificates, which granted the right to work in the profession.

In 1912, Engineer Assorodobraj was engaged as director. He succeeded in raising the school to the level of a modern technical school. He implemented annual examinations for the students and also created a subsidy-fund for the capable pupils, which enabled them to continue their studies at a technical college. With the aid of the J.C.A., the most modern, mechanical equipment was purchased.

The teaching staff was also expanded. Messrs. Awner (Polish and German), Oks (Russian, mathematics and Natural Sciences), Perec Wilenberg (hand-drawing) and Wajsberg (Hebrew) were invited to join.



The Crafts School in 1928

Above: The celebration of Poland's independence in 1928; the teachers' staff with the students and the headmaster, Engineer Przysuski.

Below: The students with their teachers in a workshop.

A new social[?] administration for the school was also elected, comprising (alphabetically [in Heb.]): Dr Batawja, Henig, Stanisław Herc, Henryk and Józef Markusfeld. Eng. Assorodobraj, Frenkel and Eng. Ratner.

Following the outbreak of the First World War, the school went through a most difficult crisis. The subsidy from J.C.A., which was the main foundation of the school budget, was halted. The students were also unable to pay tuition fees and many of them completely interrupted their studies.

But, in that difficult period too, the “redeeming angel” was Henryk Markusfeld!

Shortly before the outbreak of the War, a great fire broke out in one of his factories and many of the factory’s machines were damaged. Markusfeld sent everything to the Crafts School to be revised and restored and paid well for it. Thus, the school received money to pay its instructors at least a small salary, hence retaining them with the school!

Great contributions to the Crafts School must be put down to the merit of the headmaster, Eng. Przysuskier - a man of high education, inborn intelligence and strong energy and initiative. He expanded the school’s different departments, enlarged its building and provided it with the most modern machines and appliances.

The school was in its own building on ulica Garncarska, in the exclusively Jewish district, from where its students surged.

Of the school’s former students, three were able to emigrate to the Land of Israel: Landsman – died in Jerusalem; Lewkowicz [died] in Tel-Aviv; the third – may he be set aside from them, to a good and long life – is Abram Gotlib, [who] lives in Tel-Aviv and is very active in the Częstochowa Organisation and, most importantly, in the “*Sefer Częstochowa*” book Committee.

After the War, when *Aliyah* to the Land of Israel commenced, the school was also revived. People scrambled there to learn trades were opened – evening-courses for locksmithing and carpentry, which very much served the interests of the *Aliyah*. Many of its former pupils emigrated to the Land of Israel and helped there in the building of industry and craftsmanship in our country!

And thus, our Crafts School, too, wrote a fine page in the history of Jewish craftsmanship in Poland!

But it is all in the past!

(The blood-deluge of the Second World War also swept away our Częstochowa Crafts School.

May these lines serve as eternal thanks to those who created, taught and brought benefit to our People and our Land!

May their souls be entwined in the thread of the eternal life of the eternal Jewish People in its Land!)