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The Hebrew *Gymnazijum* [High School]

As is known, a large number of Częstochowa Jews wished to give their sons and daughters, at least, a secondary education and, due to the lack of a Jewish secondary school in the city, they were forced to send them to Polish schools, although nothing connected them to their nation and its history in the past.

It is self-evident that the spirit of assimilation progressively intensified within the circles of Jewish youth and the danger of alienation from all things held sacred by Jews was at its full force.

Zionist activists in our city awakened and decided, despite the many obstacles in their way, to establish a Hebrew *gymnazijum* in our city, which would be worthy of its name and which would be based, first and foremost, on the study of the Hebrew language and its culture, in the national spirit.

This mission was not so easy to accomplish, due to the lack of funds and, mainly, due to the great difficulty, in those days, of finding teachers with both a high general education and also a Hebrew one, who were capable of educating Jewish youth in accordance with the will and objective of the *gymnazijum's* founders.

These initiators were also concerned that, in the end, a sufficient number of parents would not be found, who would be willing to transfer their sons from existing secondary schools to a school at the start of its creation and whose success was by no means guaranteed.

However, thanks to the public figures who were loyal to the idea of establishing the *gymnasium* and thanks to the stamina of its founders - Natan Gerichter, Mojsze Zandsztajn, Aba Hersz Librowicz, Mojsze Mokraujer and M. Najfeld – the *gymnazijum* was opened in 1917. At first, [it was located] in a rented apartment on ulica Jasna with, in the beginning, only three grades. It was affiliated with the Jewish Secondary Schools Network in Poland, founded by Dr M. Brojda.

The *gymnazijum's* first headmaster was Dr.Szymon Berisz, who was an experienced pedagogue and who also, adroitly, chose for himself a staff of appropriate teachers. He was also able to earn the trust and admiration of the students, who especially excelled in the studies of the Hebrew language, its literature and culture, the Hebrew Bible, the history of the Jewish People and the religious laws.

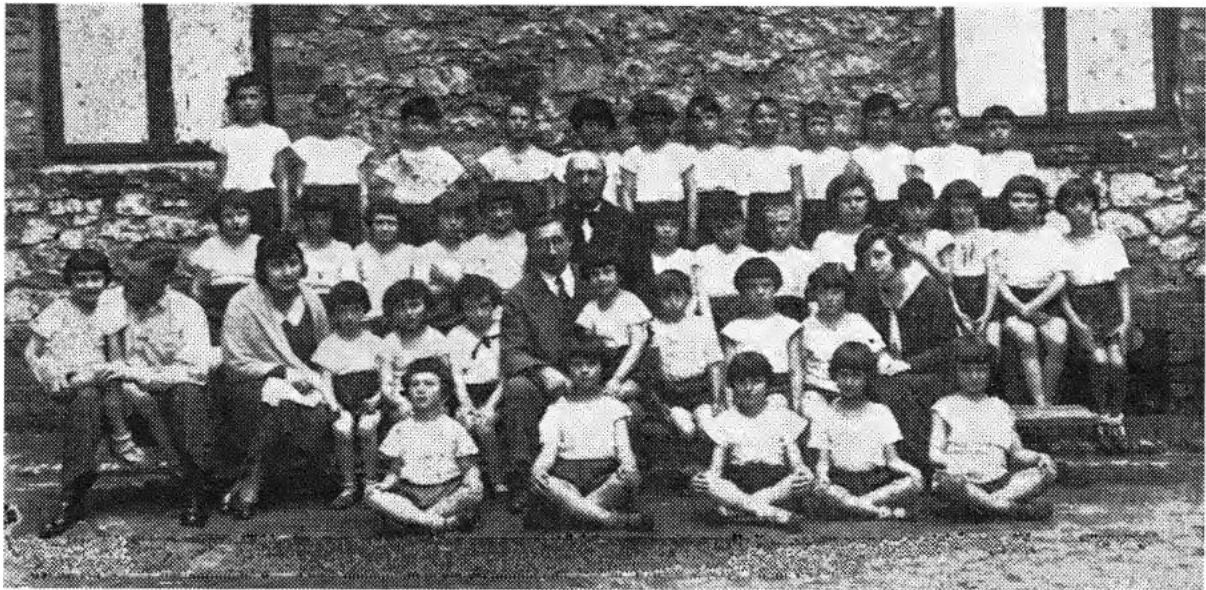
A year later, the *gymnasium* moved to a spacious building at ulica Szkolna 10. The group of activists, who dedicated themselves to the *gymnasium's* affairs, also grew. Among those active for its cause, we should mention (alphabetically [in Heb.]): N.D. Berliner, Sz. Goldsztajn, Dr Grin, Ch. Weksler, D.Sz. Zandberg, J. Lewit, G. Frager and L. Kopiński.

Meanwhile, the *gymnazijum's* headmaster, Dr Berisz, became ill and, in his place, came Professor Majer Bałaban, the famous historian who, in addition to being a great man of science, was also endowed with an exemplary, organisational talent. With all his heart and soul, Prof. Bałaban dedicated himself to raising the *gymnasium's* value and succeeded in acquiring, for it, some of the best teachers in the country, such as Brawer, the professor and painter Perec Willenberg, Wajnberg, Janowski, Mokraujer, Mrs Stobacka and Rubinsztajn.

Some time later, Prof Bałaban was invited to become the Director of the Rabbinical Seminary in Warsaw and he left Częstochowa.

In his place, Dr Dawid Einhorn was invited to become headmaster. He was followed by Dr Filip Axer but, due to ideological differences with the teaching staff and the management, he left the Hebrew *gymnasium* and established his own private *gymnasium* in Częstochowa.

He, in turn, was replaced by M. Prost, followed by Dr Lilien. During his time, the teachers included Brandlewicz, Dr Baruch-Benedykt, Ginsburg, Dr Grinberg, Hajtner, Prof Ch.Z. Hirszberg (now at Bar-Ilan university), Wajsberg, Prof Lauer, Dr Mering, Prof Sak, Mrs Fogel, Krakowiak and Dr Gerszon Szefer.



**The "Marya Konopnicka" Jewish public school of the Jewish gymnasium in 1929.
In the photo: the gymnasium's headmaster Dr Prost, Wajsberg, the teacher Krakowiak
and two other teachers.**

The *gymnasium's* last headmaster was Dr Anisfeld.

Apart from the *gymnasium's* public figures who organised its establishment and whom we have mentioned above, up to the outbreak of the Second World War, other activists included Messrs. Galster, Pruszycki, Z. Szyller and Feliks Szapiro.

It should also be mentioned that when it was decided, at the time, to construct a special building for this school, Messrs. Najfeld, J. Krak, Józef Szlezinger and Henryk Szpaltyn excelled in their commitment and stamina in the execution of the task. The live spirit among them was Feliks Szapiro.

The building was constructed during the last years, near the outbreak of the Second World War. Częstochowa Jewry took pride in this building which, over the course of time, became a cultural centre and meeting-place for the best of the city's student youth.

The building was constructed using the modern technical standards and was modelled on the greatest educational institutions in the world. The spacious building inspired respect in all those visiting in it, while the Polish population was envious of this achievement of the Częstochowa Jewry.



*A class at the Hebrew gymnasium in 1939.
In the centre: the last headmaster, Dr Anisfeld and one of the teachers.*