

JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE

(ŻYDOWSKI INSTYTUT HISTORYCZNY)

by Miriam Weiner

The Jewish Historical Institute, located in the building of the Main Judaic Library, is one of the very few Jewish research centers in post-Communist Europe and the only one whose activities have continued uninterrupted throughout the postwar years.

The Jewish Historical Institute (JHI) consists of five divisions: Archives, Library, Museum, Research, and Documentation of Monuments. The Jewish Historical Association of Poland is the legal owner of the Institute's holdings.

ARCHIVES

The Archives contain collections spanning the seventeenth to twentieth centuries, including one of the most important collections of Holocaust documentation in the world: materials from the ghettos of Będzin, Białystok, Częstochowa, Kraków, Lwów, Łódź and Warsaw (the Ringelblum Archive); the testimonies and memoirs of 7,000 Holocaust survivors collected immediately after the war; more than 10,000 photographs; and a major collection of underground publications. The Archives also document centuries of Jewish life in communities such as Kraków and Wrocław (formerly Breslau), as well as the postwar years in Poland.

LIBRARY

The Library, containing 60,000 volumes, includes significant collections of medieval Hebrew manuscripts and early books. The periodicals division, specializing in the Yiddish press published in Poland, has assembled one of the largest such collections in Poland, including the German-Jewish press of the nineteenth century. The Library also possesses a complete collection of postwar Polish Judaica and many anti-Semitic publications.

MUSEUM

The Museum houses 11,000 objects: traditional ritual art, oil paintings and graphics by famous Polish-Jewish painters of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and objects connected to the Holocaust. The collection of ritual objects is as important as more well-known Judaica collections in Western Europe and the United States. The collections of Jewish art and Holocaust material are unique on a world scale.

RESEARCH DIVISION

The Research Division employs 14 historians engaged in the study of Jewish history in Poland from its beginnings to the present. Over the years, such research has resulted in numerous important historical works. The Institute publishes the *Biuletyn*



Left: Jewish Historical Institute; right: "Blue skyscraper" on site of the Great Synagogue

1

Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce (Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland) in Polish. Between 1948 and 1993, the Institute also published *Bleter far geschikhte* (Pages of History: Quarterly Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland), in Yiddish.

ARCHIVAL HOLDINGS

Most of the archival collections of the Jewish Historical Institute were gathered in the 1940s–1950s. More than 1,950 running feet of records were divided chronologically into three main departments, based upon historical periods containing 84 groups. Documents consist of:

- Old records of Jewish communities (1672–1939)
- Records from the period of World War II
- Modern records produced after 1945

In the first group are documents preserved almost in their entirety from:

- The Jewish community of Wrocław (from the end of the eighteenth century until 1938)
- Jewish communities of the Province of Silesia [Śląsk] (1742–1942)
- Jewish community of Kraków (1701–1939)

One of the highlights of this group is the “Varia” collection. It contains 718 pieces from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, primarily publications by students of academic and rabbinical schools consisting of texts on the Bible, religion, religious literature (Hebrew and Yiddish), history, Jewish philosophy and law.

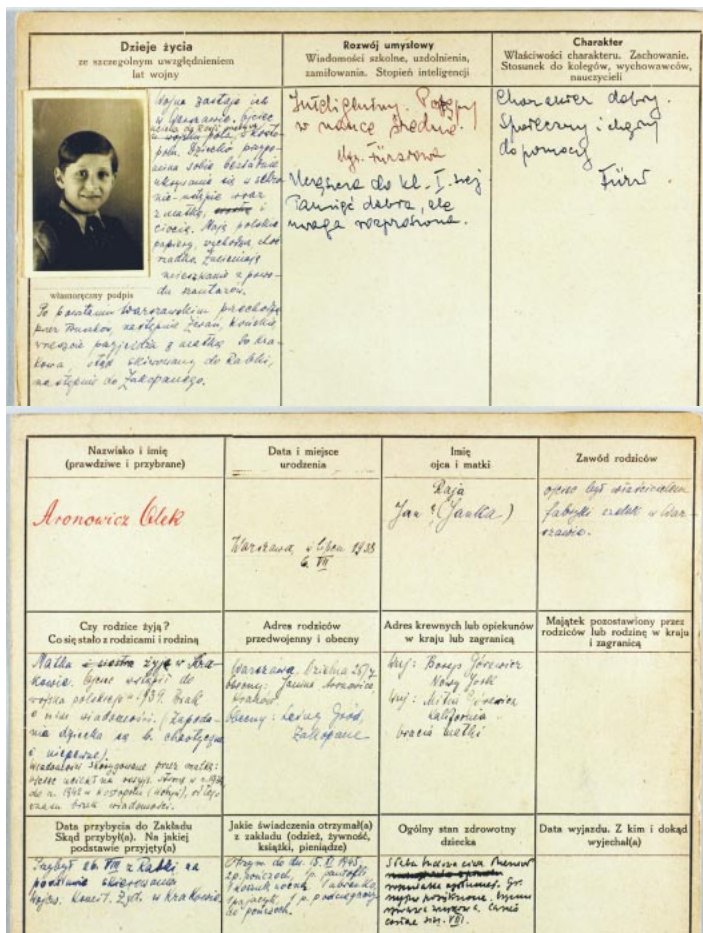
Other documents of unique value are the copies of masters theses written under the academic supervision of Professor Majer Bałaban and Dr. Ignacy Schiper before 1939. These theses were based to a great degree on source material that was later destroyed during World War II.

The second group of documents forms the main body of the Archives: Sixty percent of all the records are documents connected with the Holocaust. First, there is the Underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto, founded and managed by Dr. Emmanuel Ringelblum. These records were discovered after the war under the rubble at 68 Nowolipki Street. They still are of primary importance when researching the history of the Warsaw ghetto and the Holocaust.

Also of great importance are the Testimonies of Surviving Jews in the form of eyewitness accounts given mainly between 1945 and 1948 to the Historical Commission of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland.

Similar to the above are *Memoirs of Jews*, seven of which are memoirs of children, written by Jews in ghettos, labor camps or in hiding (see Umińska, *Apolonia*, and Natalia Aleksyūn-Mądrzak, *Inwentarz zbioru ‘Pamiętniki Żydów’ 1939–1945*, *Archiwum Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego* [Inventory of the Collection “Memoirs of Jews” 1939–1945, Archives of the Jewish Historical Institute]. *Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny*, 1994).

This group also contains documents of the Jewish Councils (*Judenrate*) from the towns of Będzin, Częstochowa, Falenica,



1945 registration of Olek Aronowicz, born 1938 in Warsaw

Jaśło, Jędrzejów, Kamieńsk, Kraków, Lublin, Lwów, Radom, Staszów and Włoszczowa. Among them are almost entirely preserved records produced by the Directorate of Representatives of the Jewish Population of Będzin in 1941–1942. Similar records were preserved at the Council of Elders in Częstochowa. From the Kraków *Judenrat* are personal records with photographs attached to applications for an identity card (*Ausweis*) from 1940. There are also documents of the Jewish Council of Lwów from 1941.

The original documents from POW camps are unique personal records with photographs of Jewish inmates (Jewish soldiers serving in the Polish Army) selected by the Germans from the POW camps after the September 1939 campaign. These Jews were imprisoned in Lublin at 7 Lipowa Street and then exterminated.

The Underground file contains fragmentary materials of the resistance press of the Jewish National Committee (ŻKN), the Jewish Coordination Commission of the ŻKN and the Bund, and of the Jewish Fighters Organization (ŻOB). Some of the documents (created by Mordechai Anielewicz) are appeals for weapons and help in organizing the Warsaw ghetto uprising.

The Archives also have records of the Jewish Social Mutual Aid from 1940 to 1941 and records of the American Jewish

Joint Distribution Committee from 1939 to 1941. The Archives of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland consist of documents for its 18 departments and independent bodies: Social Courts; the Organization for the Development of Creativity (1946–1950); the Society for Health Protection, known as TOZ (Towarzystwo Ochrony Zdrowia) (1945–1949); and Zionist Organizations (1945–1950). This group also contains a wide array of works from the Institute’s employees and contributors.

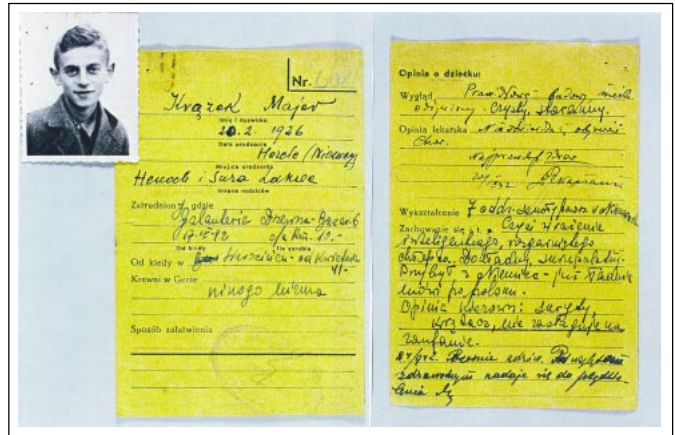
The Archives own a rich and important collection of more than 10,000 photographs from World War I, the 1920s–1930s, World War II (covering Poland in its pre-1939 borders) and the postwar period, along with another 7,000 photographs of monuments of Jewish culture.

The Archives have a separate Cartographic Collection covering the period of World War II, including posters, bills and ghetto maps.

The Institute continues to receive objects and documents from the local population as they are discovered throughout the countryside—sometimes buried behind a house, thrown into a trash receptacle, or retained in an attic for years, only to be found by new generations of family members.

ON-SITE RESEARCH

On-site research is available, but staff assistance with language and translations is limited due to time constraints. During on-site research, if photocopies of a few pages are desired, the copies may be made quickly. If it is a large copy order, the copying is done later and mailed to the address provided. Copy costs vary according to the number and purpose (scholarly research/institutional affiliation receive a discount).



Registration (1942) of Majer Krązek, born 1926, son of Hencoch and Sura 4

PROTOKOLL

aufgenommen am 1940.

In der Kanzlei der jüdischen Gemeinde in Krakau erscheinen: Premer Chaim aus Krakau derzeit wohnhaft in Krakau Sybil Krzywicz 15 und die Zeugen: Laudberger Julius von Beruf Schweizer wohnhaft in Krakau Sybil Krzywicz angewiesen durch den Personalanweis der Stadterhaltung in Krakau vom 14. VIII 1939 Nr. 164/2/39 und Geiger David von Beruf Photographen wohnhaft in Krakau Zuloprawa 43 angewiesen durch den jüd. Gemeindevorstand in Krakau vom 2. III 1940 Nr. 594/40

Die Zeugen erklären folgendes:
Premer Chaim geboren am 8. I 1901 in Mosilany Stand verheiratet Beruf Kaufmann aus Moskau derzeit wohnhaft in Krakau Sybil Krzywicz 15 zuständig nach Krakau ist uns persönlich bekannt.

Wir bestätigen die Personengleichheit obiger Person mit unterstehendem Lichtbilde.

Obiges erklären wir, zwecks Erteilung eines Personalausweises von Seiten der jüdischen Gemeinde in Krakau in Angelegenheit der Umsiedlung des (der) Genannten von Krakau nach _____

Die Richtigkeit obiger Angaben bestätigen wir durch unsere eigenhändigen Unterschriften:

David Geiger Als Zeuge
Laudberger Julius Als Zeuge
Chaim Premer Antragsteller

Ghetto registration, Chaim Brenner, born 1901, living in Kraków in 1939–1940 3

WRITTEN REQUESTS FOR RESEARCH

Research requests should be brief and provide as much specific data as possible. Research requests sent by mail may be written in any language and should include the following specific information:

- Town(s) to be researched
- Family names and first names with spelling variations
- Time period of interest
- Types of documents to be searched

While the archivists are skilled researchers, they can accept official assignments to research material only within the Institute.

While there is no set fee schedule for research requests to the Institute, contributions are welcome. The funds are used for restoration and preservation of material.

THE RONALD S. LAUDER FOUNDATION GENEALOGY PROJECT

The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation Genealogy Project, established in 1994, is the genealogical research arm of the Jewish Historical Institute. The Project seeks to help Jews with Polish roots (and Poles with Jewish roots) explore and document their family histories. The Project has been instrumental in reuniting Holocaust survivors, helping child survivors learn their true identities and the fates of their relatives, locating new sources of genealogical information and creating finding aids to previously uncatalogued materials.

The Project does not charge for its services. However, it does encourage voluntary contributions, to be used exclusively for the physical conservation of Polish Jewish archives and the creation of finding aids to those materials.

Editor's Note: The foregoing description of archival holdings (pp. 164–165) was excerpted and adapted from a brochure published by the Jewish Historical Institute and edited by Ewa Świdorska.

Eleonora Bergman is vice-director of the Jewish Historical Institute. Since the early 1980s, she has published many articles on the subject of synagogue architecture in Poland. While working in the state-owned Workshops for Conservation of Monuments, she has authored and co-authored numerous documentation works on urban history. Ms. Bergman is currently working with Jan Jagielski in the Jewish Historical Institute on a catalogue of the extant synagogues in Poland.



Eleonora Bergman, vice-director of the Jewish Historical Institute, 1996

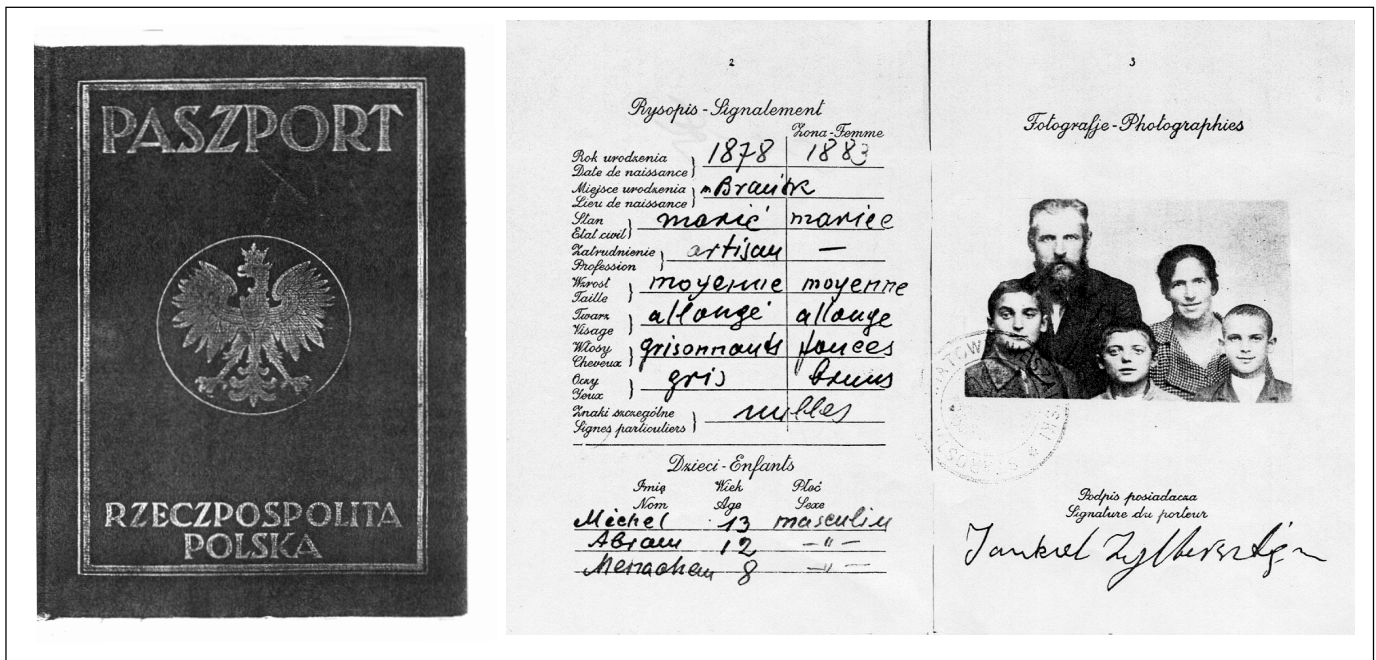
5

THE JEWISH HISTORICAL INSTITUTE IN POLAND

ul. Tłomackie 3/5
00-090 Warsaw
Tel: 22/827-9221
Fax: 22/827-8372
e-mail: zihinb@ikp.atm.com.pl

HOURS: 9:00 AM–3:00 PM
Archives & Museum: 11:00 AM–6:00 PM (Thursday only)
Library: 8:00 AM–3:00 PM (Monday–Thursday)
9:00 AM–Noon (Friday)

The Institute's building is currently undergoing extensive renovation. As a result, there will be limited access to the Library and Museum through 1997.



Passport for Jankiel Zylbersztajn and his family, c. 1935

6