

Jewish settlers in Lower Silesia after the Second World War – biographies

Outstanding figures of the Lower Silesian Jewish community

After the Second World War, Lower Silesia became the largest concentration of Polish Jews who survived the Holocaust in Poland. About 100,000 Jews settled in this region; at first in a dozen or so, and then in over 40 towns. Therefore, the inhabitants themselves began to refer to it as “Yishuv”, which, with time, was called “the Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia” in historiography. This group of people initially enjoyed great independence in terms of culture, politics and partly economic, which enabled the Jews living here to create a substitute for pre-war Jewish life. The end of the Lower Silesian Yishuv was connected, on the one hand, with the liquidation of Jewish autonomy in Poland in 1949–1950, but also with successive waves of Polish Jews’ emigration. However, there were still Jewish inhabitants in Lower Silesia and there were organizations (branches of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland and congregations of the Mosaic Faith). It is worth emphasizing, however, that in this most difficult period, after March ,68, Jewish life in Dzierżoniów, Legnica, Wałbrzych, Żary and Wrocław survived mostly thanks to the leaders of this community, about whom we talk at this exhibition. The reactivation of Jewish life in Poland took place after the political transformation in 1989, when new Jewish organizations began to emerge, with the influx of representatives of a new generation of Polish Jews.

The exhibition covers not only the area of the present Lower Silesian Voivodeship, but also Żary – a city that until 1950 was within the boundaries of the Wrocław Voivodeship, and later had strong institutional ties with Wrocław Jewish organizations.

The exhibition presents three generations of Polish Jews. The first generation is represented by Holocaust survivors, born in pre-war Poland, for whom Yiddishkeit was always of paramount importance. Their world was completely annihilated during the Second World War. After 1945, they were the ones who built the “new life” in Lower Silesia, they were the pioneers of Jewish life in all its aspects. The second generation of Polish Jews we present at the exhibition are people born in the 1940s and 1950s - children of Holocaust survivors, who grew up in the so-called real socialism, where there was no place for education about Jewish culture and religion. They drew their knowledge of Jewishness mainly from the experiences of their parents. This generation became active in organizations in the mid-1980s and they were the ones who determined the shape of Jewish life for the next decades. These were people who did not leave after March ,68, continued their education or studies in Poland, worked and started families, found fulfilment in their professions. Second-generation Jews chose a different path than their parents - they often joined the ranks of the “Solidarity” movement and became associated with the opposition movement, suffering the consequences of arrest or internment during the period of martial law. It is also a generation that carries the trauma of the events of March ,68, when their family members and friends were leaving, and TSKŻ synagogues and clubs were emptied overnight.

The revival of Jewish life took place after 1989, when, as a result of the democratization of the state, new opportunities appeared for Jews in Poland. At that time, representatives of the third generation of Polish Jews began to work in Jewish structures – people born in the 1970s and 1980s, who were often just discovering their Jewry.

Today, Jewish life in Wrocław is focused around the Jewish Religious Community at Włodkowica street, where the White Stork synagogue, a shul (small synagogue), a kosher kitchen, a mikveh and a library are also located, as well as the seat of the TSKŻ at Świdnicka street. Jewish organizations are still active in other cities of Lower Silesia – Dzierżoniów, Legnica, Wałbrzych and Żary. However, the shape of Jewish life in the region is primarily determined by the leaders of this community, who by their involvement in social activities maintain the Jewish identity and continue the rich Jewish traditions of Lower Silesia. This exhibition is dedicated to them.

Jerzy Kichler, Tamara Włodarczyk

Jakub Rotbaum

(1901–1994)

A theater director, actor, theater visionary, visual artist, screenwriter, translator and essayist, from 1949 associated with Wrocław.

He was born in Żelechów, to the family of Dawid Szyja and Fajga, née Eiger. In Warsaw, he graduated from the M. Kryński Hebrew-Russian gymnasium, then the School of Fine Arts and the first film school in Poland. Then he completed his education in Berlin and Moscow. He made his debut in Warsaw in 1926 at the Elizeum Theater and had his first art exhibition a year earlier at the Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw. In the interwar period, he worked as a drawing teacher in Warsaw schools. W dwudziestoleciu międzywojennym pracował jako nauczyciel rysunku w szkołach warszawskich.

In 1930, he became the artistic director of the “Vilnius Troupe”. In 1938 he went to Paris to direct performances in Yiddish, and two years later to New York. In 1940–1948 he directed in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, London, Paris and Israel.

He returned to Poland in 1949 at the invitation of Ida Kamińska and settled in Wrocław, where he became the artistic director of the Lower Silesian Jewish Theater. In 1952–1962 he was also the artistic director of the State Dramatic Theaters in Wrocław. After March ,68 he was forced to retire, although he continued to work as a director. His major productions included: “Sen o Goldfadenie” [Dream about Goldfaden], “Herszele z Ostropola” [Hershele of Ostropol], “Człowiek z karabinem” [Man with a rifle], “Bieg do Fragala” [The Run to Fragala] and “Opera za trzy grosze” [The Threepenny Opera]. He has been awarded and appreciated many times for his directorial achievements. He was also valued as a painter – his paintings were presented at exhibitions all over the world.

Jakub Rotbaum was also closely associated with TSKŻ – he was a frequent guest at meetings in the Lower Silesian branches of this organization.

From 1949, he lived in Wrocław at Włodkowica 5, near the White Stork Synagogue. He died in 1994 and was buried at the Jewish cemetery at Lotnicza Street. After his death, the Lauder-Etz Chaim Jewish School was established in his apartment.

Jakub Rotbaum was the older brother of Lia Rotbaum – director and choreographer, and the husband of Sylwia Swen – choreographer and dancer.

Jakub Zonszajn

(1914–1962)

A poet, playwright, prose writer and essayist, writing mainly in Yiddish.

He was born in Łuków in the Lublin region, where he also received a religious education. From 1930, he lived in Warsaw, where in 1932 he made his debut by publishing poems in the literary press. He was the author of poems, short stories, articles about literature, reportages and translations.

In 1939, he escaped to Vilnius. During the Second World War he lived in the Soviet Union, and after its end, in 1946, as part of the so-called repatriation of Polish citizens, he returned to Poland and settled in Lower Silesia. At first, he settled in Legnica, where he worked as a teacher in a school at the local Jewish committee. He was also a board member of the Legnica branch of the Jewish Society for Culture and Art.

In 1947, he moved to Wrocław, where he was also involved in the activities of the Jewish Society for Culture and Art, and from 1950 – the Wrocław branch of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ). At that time, he also published in the Wrocław Yiddish magazine “Niderszlezje”. His poems for children in Yiddish – “Blimetech” [Flowers] were published in 1947 in Wrocław, and 10 years later, in 1957, also in Wrocław, the Polish Writers’ Union published a book of his poems in Polish, “Rozdroża” [“Crossroads”] (translated by K. Koszutski). Zonszajn’s poems were translated into Polish by, among others Arnold Słucki, Jerzy Ficowski, and also the Wrocław poet Urszula Koziół.

Jakub Zonszajn is the author of such plays as “Herszele z Ostropola” and “Profesor Szwarcsztajn”. The premiere of the first of them took place in 1953 at the Lower Silesian Jewish Theater in Wrocław (directed by Jakub Rotbaum and choreographed by Sylwia Swen), and then was repeatedly staged by the State Jewish Theater in Warsaw.

In the early 1950s, he moved to Warsaw, where he died in 1962. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery at Okopowa street in Warsaw. After the poet’s death, in 1963, the publishing house “Czytelnik” published a volume of his poems in Polish, translated by Jerzy Ficowski and with an introductory word by Arnold Słucki.

Henryk Traler

(1919–1999)

A longtime member of Wrocław Jewish organizations, Cantor in the Wrocław White Stork Synagogue.

He was born in 1919 in Łódź as Chaim Trala. He graduated from the Orthodox Yeshiva in Łódź, however, the outbreak of the Second World War prevented him in further studies and obtaining Smicha (rabbinical license).

In September 1939, he joined the Polish army as a volunteer and was seriously wounded during fights. After getting into the German captivity, he stayed 9 months under the changed name in a military hospital. For fear of denouncing, he escaped to Lviv with his brother Hersz and then he was arrested by the NKVD and sent to Gulag.

He returned to Poland in 1946 as part of the repatriation of Polish citizens from the Soviet Union and settled in Wałbrzych. He started to work in the Citizens' Militia in Wałbrzych, then he was moved to Wrocław, where he was released from service in 1955. From the mid-1950s, he worked as a ticket controller in the Motor Transport Company (PKS). In 1963, he stayed in Israel for 9 months, but he decided to return to Poland.

Henryk Traler was an active member of the Wrocław branch of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, where in the 1960s he acted, among others, in the theater group and literary circle.

For years, until his death in 1999, he was also a cantor in the Wrocław White Stork Synagogue. He died in 1999 in Wrocław and rests at the Jewish Cemetery in Wrocław.

Jakub Egit

(1908–1996)

An activist of the Jewish community in Lower Silesia, the chairman of the Provincial Jewish Committee in Lower Silesia (WKŻ), creator of the idea of the so-called Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia, journalist and publicist.

He was born in Borysław in the religious family of Mojżesz and Szajndla Egit, as one of six children. At first, he was associated with the Zionist party Poalei Zion-Left Party, then with the leftist All-Jewish Labor Party, which was banned. In 1937, he was arrested and charged with anti-state activities. After the war, he was a committed communist, a member of the Jewish Fraction of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR), and then of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR).

He survived the Second World War in the Soviet Union, in Kazakhstan, and then was drafted into the Red Army. After the end of the war, he and his wife returned to Poland, to Warsaw. In the second half of May 1945, he came to Lower Silesia as an envoy of the Central Committee of Polish Jews and settled first in Dzierżoniów, and then in Wrocław. In the years 1945–1949 he was the chairman of WKŻ, he was also the editor of the Polish-language “Nowe Życie” – the press body of this organization. Due to the scope of his authority, he was called the “Jewish voivode” of Lower Silesia at that time.

In 1947, his book *Tzu a naje lebn. Cwej jor jidiszer jiszuw in Niderszlezje* [Towards new life. Two years of a Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia] was published in Yiddish by the Niderszlezje publishing house in Wrocław. It summed up the cultural, social and economic achievements of Polish Jews in this region.

In 1948, Jakub Egit initiated the establishment of the so-called the Jewish pavilion, at the Regained Territories Exhibition in Wrocław. The pavilion, however – for political reasons – was closed two weeks before the opening of the exhibition. At the end of 1949, Egit was removed from the position of the chairman of WKŻ. Then he moved to Warsaw, where he worked as an editor in the publishing house “Jidysz Buch”. In February 1953, he was arrested on suspicion of trying to establish a Jewish autonomous district in Lower Silesia and of wanting to separate it from Poland. In 1957, he emigrated to Canada, where he was still active in Jewish circles. In 1991, his memoirs were published in English in Toronto, entitled *Grand Illusion*. The title symbolically referred to the defeat of the idea of existence of the so-called Jewish settlement in Lower Silesia. Jakub Egit died in 1996 in Florida.

Ignacy Einhorn

(born in 1946)

An activist of the Jewish community in Lower Silesia, medical doctor associated with the health service in the Kłodzko Region for 50 years, social activist.

He was born in 1946 in Łądek Zdrój, to the family of Sabina née Rozenberg and Józef Einhorn. His mother came from Warsaw, she survived the Warsaw ghetto, and then the concentration camps – KL Majdanek and KL Auschwitz. His father came from Podolia, stayed in the ghetto in Tłuste and labor camps, and then served in the Polish People’s Army for three years.

From childhood, Ignacy Einhorn was associated with the Kłodzko branch of TSKŻ, as a regular at the club at TSKŻ, as well as a participant in Jewish colonies. In his adult life he was actively involved in the activities of this organization. In 1993–2010, he was a member of the Presidium of the Main Board of TSKŻ, and in 2003–2006, the chairman of the board of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław; currently he sits on the Main Board of TSKŻ and is a member of the Audit Committee of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland.

His passion is the history of Polish Jews – he has published his articles in “Kalendarz Żydowski”, “Słowo Żydowskie” and “Midrasz”. He is the author of the scientific monograph “Society for the Protection of Health of the Jewish Population in Poland in 1921–1950” and several dozen articles, and the co-author of several publications. He is also involved in the protection of Jewish heritage in the Kłodzko Region and supports numerous Jewish cultural and scientific initiatives.

Ignacy Einhorn is also the vice-dean for cooperation with external stakeholders and a lecturer at the Medical College in Kłodzko, vice-president of the Kłodzko Land Lovers Society, member of the Council of the Jan Paderewski Foundation for Rebuilding of Democracy, and a member of the Rotary Club Polanica-Zdrój.

Dawid Ringel

(1920–2013)

Chairman of the board of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław and Wrocław chazzan (cantor).

He was born in Przemyślany in the Tarnopol Region, to a religious Jewish family. In the interwar period, he attended a yeshiva, and at the same time received the license to practice as a leather worker. After the outbreak of the war, he was sent to the ghetto in Przemyśl, and in 1942 he was relocated to the Janowska concentration camp in Lviv. On the day of the camp's liquidation, November 19, 1943, he managed to escape. Until the end of July 1944, he was in hiding with a Ukrainian woman. He lost his entire family in the Holocaust.

In 1945 he came to Wrocław. Soon he got married (his religious wedding was performed by rabbi Szulim Trejstman) and a daughter was born to him. From 1950, he worked in the Jewish shoe and fashion accessories cooperative named after Moshe Olgin. After its closing down, he opened his own leathercraft workshop at Jedności Narodowej street.

From 1992, he was active in the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław, in 1994–1999 as the chairman of its board, and then, until 2003 - a member of the Community board.

Dawid Ringel cultivated the Eastern Galician traditions of synagogue singing and Jewish ritual from before World War II. He said prayers in nusach Sefard, but he pronounced individual Hebrew words according to the Ashkenazi tradition, which is continued in Wrocław to this day. In the synagogue in Wrocław, prayers are sung to melodies introduced by the chazzan Dawid Ringel.

He was always the host during the kiddush ceremony in the Jewish community of Wrocław. Although an orthodox prayer rite was maintained in Wrocław, when it was possible, he included texts read in Polish or the singing of the White Stork Synagogue choir in the liturgy. His openness to changes may be proved by the fact that he did not think that a mechitza should be an indispensable element of a house of prayer. He took great care to preserve the traditions of pre-war Jewish communities in Poland, thanks to which he became a great authority, teacher and model for the generation of Jews born after World War II.

As a traditional Jew, he had never entered Christian churches before, but that changed after the establishment of the District of Mutual Respect in Wrocław. Dawid Ringel became its spokesman, actively involved in its activities. He participated in many events in the churches of the District and in the Wrocław cathedral, as well as - as a representative of Wrocław Jews - in a meeting with Pope John Paul II in May 1997. Every Shabbat he visited the most sick and needy members of the Wrocław Jewish community.

Elza Erlich

(1917–2004)

An advocate, defender in the trials of the “Solidarity” leaders, activist of the Jewish community in Wrocław.

She was born in 1917 in Vienna, to the Jewish family of Aufrichtig. After the outbreak of the war, she fled to the Soviet Union with her future husband, the attorney Jan (Aron) Erlich. Elza Aufrichtig and Jan Erlich got married in Zbaraż in 1940. After the outbreak of the Soviet-German war, they were deported to sovkhoses (state farms) in Ukraine and Kazakhstan. There, Elza Erlich gave birth to a daughter, Liliana, who, however, died in 1942 due to harsh conditions. Then the Erlichs made their way to Uzbekistan, where Elza Erlich met her brother, Izydor, who was a soldier in the Red Army.

In June 1946, Elza and Jan Erlich returned to Poland as part of the repatriation of Polish citizens from the Soviet Union and settled in Legnica. There, in 1947, their first son, Andrzej, was born, and in 1952 – Marek. In Legnica, Jan Erlich was a legal advisor in the District Jewish Committee. After moving to Wrocław, Elza Erlich at first worked as editorial secretary at the Wrocław Scientific Society, and in 1955 she began studies at the Faculty of Law of the University of Wrocław. In 1964, she passed the final Bar Exam and was entered on the list of attorneys. A year later, her husband Jan died prematurely due to complications from diabetes.

From the mid-1950s, the Erlichs tried to leave for Israel, where they had a family, but Jan Erlich’s illness prevented it. With time, both their sons, Andrzej (André) and Marek, emigrated from Poland to France.

After finishing her professional career, Elza Erlich took up social activity, participating in the Pensioners’ Club at the District Bar Council in Wrocław and in the Wrocław branch of the Siberian Deportees Association. She worked as an attorney until 1987.

In 1997–2001 she was a board member of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław, where she was an authority in legal matters and was always willing to help.

Elza Erlich died in 2004 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery, next to her beloved husband, Jan.

Lucyna Rojzen-Siedlecka

(born in 1958)

A long-time member of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław and the Wrocław branch of TSKŻ, co-initiator of the establishment of the Lauder-Etz Chaim Jewish school in Wrocław, the Szalom Alejchem Primary School and the Tikkun Olam Private Primary School, where she was the headmistress.

She was born in Wrocław to a mixed family as a daughter of a Jew, Moka Rojzen and a Pole, Jadwiga née Sieniuc. Her father survived the war in Kazakhstan and then settled in Chernivtsi, Ukraine. The Rojzen family came to Poland in 1957 and settled in Wrocław at Żelazna street. Moka Rojzen was the originator of the establishment of the Jewish Textile Cooperative “Robotnik” [Worker], in which he was the vice-president.

Lucyna Rojzen-Siedlecka for three years was a student of the Szolem Aleichem Jewish Primary School at Peretz street, which was closed down after March ,68. She graduated from the Faculty of Chemistry at the Wrocław University of Technology and has devoted her entire professional life to education, working as a chemistry teacher and headmistress of Jewish educational institutions.

In 1998, she was a co-founder and the first headmistress of the Lauder – Etz Chaim Jewish School, which was initially located at Włodkowica 5, and then at Żelazna 57.

As an activist of Jewish organizations, she performed important functions in their bodies - in the board of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław (as its vice-president), in the Main Board of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland, twice in the board of the Wrocław branch of TSKŻ. Currently, she is a member of the Audit Committee of the Wrocław Jewish community.

Michał Mostowicz-Gerszt

(1941–2020)

An activist of the Jewish community, a long-time member of the TSKŻ and the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław.

He was born in 1941 in Siberia, in a labor rehabilitation camp, where his mother was deported from Białystok. He was the son of Rachela née Mostowicz and Wolf Gerszt. His parents separated in 1941 and lost contact with each other for many years.

In 1946, due to the repatriation of Polish citizens from the Soviet Union, he came to Lower Silesia with his mother and aunt and settled in Ziębice. Soon his mother, after an unsuccessful search for her husband, remarried Tobiasz Helman, an activist of the Provincial Jewish Committee, and moved to Wrocław.

Michał Mostowicz-Gerszt attended the Jewish Primary School at today's Żelazna street for two years. He was associated with TSKŻ from childhood, he also traveled to Jewish camps and student training and recreation camps - initially as a participant, later as a camp counsellor. He was also in the Presidium of the Main Board of TSKŻ and served as the chairman of the Wrocław branch of this organization.

In the mid-1950s, Michał Mostowicz-Gerszt's father was found in the USA. He was imprisoned in a labor camp in the east of the USSR, and left Poland after the end of the war. Convinced that his wife had not survived the war, he started a new family. The only meeting between father and son took place years later, in 1972, in East Berlin.

Michał Mostowicz-Gerszt graduated from the Wrocław University of Technology and was involved in the construction industry all his professional life; he also worked as a construction supervision inspector in the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław.

In the 1970s, his mother, along with his sister and stepfather, emigrated to Israel, and in the following decade, the second sister and her family left for Denmark.

At the end of the 1960s, he moved to a house at Włodkowica 9, next to the White Stork Synagogue. He spent over 45 years in this place, all the time living a Jewish life. For many years he dined in the communal kosher canteen, attended shul services and synagogue during holidays. He could often be found walking along Włodkowica street, where he always met someone he knew.

Mira Żelechower-Aleksiun

(born in 1941)

An outstanding painter from Wrocław, representative of the Wrocław artistic environment, activist of Jewish organizations in Wrocław.

She was born as Mona Jankiewicz in Millerowo in the Rostov Oblast, where her parents fled during World War II. Two months after her birth, her father was murdered by the Nazis. After the end of the war, as a repatriate, she returned from the Soviet Union to Poland with her mother and settled in Lower Silesia in Mieroszów. Her mother remarried, her second husband was Henryk Żelechower, who adopted the girl and gave her his surname. Her name was also changed during this period. In 1947, the Żelechower family moved to Wrocław.

In Wrocław, Mira Żelechower studied at the State College of Fine Arts, where in 1966 she received a diploma in architectural painting. She made her debut in 1967 with an exhibition at the Kalambur Theater Gallery in Wrocław. In the 1960s and 1970s, she actively participated in all major reviews of Polish painting.

During the martial law, she participated in the independent culture movement, incl. as a co-organizer of the Wrocław Youth Biennale “Droga i Prawda” [Road and Truth]. She is also active in non-artistic activities, mainly for the reconciliation of Christians and Jews, acting in the Foundation of the District of Mutual Respect of Four Denominations in Wrocław.

Mira Żelechower-Aleksiun has also been the stage designer of the Kalambur Student Theater in Wrocław; for many years she collaborated with Gardzienice Theater near Lublin and with the Pieśń Kozła Theater in Wrocław, as well as with the Anna Zubrzycka Foundation “Voices”. Her works are in the collections of the National Museum in Wrocław, Warsaw, Ludwigshafen and the Vatican, as well as in private collections.

For many years, she has also been active in the structures of Jewish organizations - she was a member of the board of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław (2001–2003), and she is a board member of the Foundation of the District of Mutual Respect of Four Denominations (since 2017).

In 2016, a book about Mira Żelechower-Aleksiun was published titled “Mona. A Tale of a Painter’s Life”, written by Monika Braun. The outstanding painter is the wife of prof. Jan Jaromir Aleksion, with whom he has a daughter, the historian Natalia Aleksion. The outstanding painter is the wife of Professor Jan Jaromir Aleksion, with whom he has a daughter, the historian Natalia Aleksion.

Karolina Szykier-Koszucka

(born in 1976)

A political scientist, culture animator, educator, activist of the Jewish community in Poland, associated with Wrocław and Warsaw.

She was born in Dzierżoniów. In 2001, she graduated from political science at the University of Wrocław. She was the originator and founder of the Jewish Culture Festival in Wrocław, of which she was the director in 1998–2008. She was also the manager of the Brave Festival in Wrocław in 2006–2012. At the same time, she worked as the executive director of the Memory and Future Foundation in Warsaw, commemorating the Righteous Among the Nations.

Scholarship holder of Melton Education Center Hebrew University, JDC Buncher Program, Yakar Program, Nachum Goldman Program, Paideia.

Karolina Szykier-Koszucka was an active member of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław, she also sat on its board. In 1998–2003, she was also the director of culture in the Jewish Community of Wrocław. Currently, she is a member of the ZGWŻ Council and vice-president of the Religious Council of ZGWŻ.

After moving to Warsaw, she became the program director of the Ec Chaim Synagogue, Center for the Community of the Progressive Jewish Religious Community in Warsaw, and since 2013 she has been the director for Jewish education and communication at the Lauder-Morasha School Complex in Warsaw.

Jerzy Kichler

(born in 1947)

An activists of the Jewish community in Poland, one of the initiators and co-authors of the revival of Jewish life in Poland after the political transformation.

He was born in Krakow to the Jewish family of Olga and Nesanel Kichler. His father's sister was the pedagogue Lena Kuchler-Silberman, who founded Jewish orphanages in Zakopane and Rabka in the post-war period.

In 1971, Jerzy Kichler graduated from the University of Mining and Metallurgy (AGH) in Krakow. Over the following years he worked as an automation technician in Krakow and in Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski. In the early 1980s, he became involved in the social resistance against the communist regime. In 1981, due to participation in protests after the introduction of martial law in Poland, he was fired from work.

Since the early 1980s, he was acting for the revival of Jewish cultural and religious life in Poland, and then he became involved in interreligious dialogue, especially dialogue between Polish Jews and Catholics. In 1984 he worked as an instructor in the Krakow branch of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland.

In 1997–2003 Jerzy Kichler was the chairman of the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland (ZGWŻ w RP), and in 1999–2003 – the chairman of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław. He served as a member of the board of the Wrocław Jewish Community in 1992–2006, and he is currently sitting on it. He was also a member of the Religious Council of the ZGWŻ w RP.

In 1992, he established the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation Education Centre in Wrocław, whose aim was to educate Jewish youth. He was the originator and one of the founders of the Lauder – Etz Chaim Primary School in Wrocław. In 1992, he was elected to the Board of the Wrocław branch of TSKŻ. From 1992, Jerzy Kichler headed with efforts to rebuild the ruined White Stork Synagogue, and then he also took care of its reconstruction. He was also the initiator of the creation of the District of Mutual Respect in Wrocław. Jerzy Kichler was one of those who had an impact on the creation of legal regulations regarding Jewish communes in Poland after 1989. He also took part in the work on the 1997 Act on the attitude of the state to the Jewish religious communities in the Republic of Poland, which still regulates the legal and property status of these institutions. He also participated in the rebuilding of the organizational structures of Jewish communities, in launching the process of restoring the property of pre-war Jewish communities, as well as in obtaining the possibility of collecting pensions and compensation for the victims of the Holocaust.

Since 2008, Jerzy Kichler has been working at the Jewish Information Center at the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław as a guide to the White Stork Synagogue and a lecturer in Jewish culture. He is also a journalist – co-author of the “Guide to Jewish Wrocław” and the catalog “The White Stork Synagogue. The history of recovery and reconstruction” and the author of several texts on the history of Wrocław Jews.

Romuald Krieger

(born in 1948)

An activist of the Jewish community in Wrocław, businessman, musician.

He was born in Strzelin. He graduated from the Wrocław University of Technology. Since 1977, he has been running a company called “Diament”, which deals with cutting and selling precious stones.

In 1997–2003 he was a member of the board of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław, he was also the director of the Office for Property Restitution of Jewish Religious Communities in the Republic of Poland. In 1999–2000 he was the deputy executive director of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland. At that time, he created a model of operation based on which in the following years the Foundation recovered and used the property of pre-war Jewish communities and Jewish religious legal persons in Poland.

Music is his passion – as a performer and composer, he has released several albums. Together with his band, he performed several times in the Wrocław branch of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland.

His wife, Mirosława Peszko-Krieger, who is the coordinator of the Rosz Chodesz Women’s Club, operating at the Jewish Religious Community, and her daughters Delfina and Józefina, are also associated with the Jewish community in Wrocław.

Aleksander Rotsztejn

(born in 1963)

an activist of the Jewish community in Wrocław.

He was born in Wrocław, to the family of Chaim and Chana. His mother was a Jew who was born in Palestine and returned to Poland with her family after World War II.

Aleksander Rotsztejn became actively involved in the activities of Wrocław Jewish organizations in the mid-1990s. In 2003–2006 he was a board member of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław. Currently, he is a vice-chairman of the board of the Jewish Community. He is also associated with the Wrocław branch of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland, where he is the chairman of the board.

Mojżesz Hersz Jakubowicz

(1919–2003)

A longtime activist of the Dzierżoniów branch of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland.

He was born in Nowy Sącz to an orthodox Jewish family. After the outbreak of World War II, he found himself in the territory of the Soviet Union, and then was sent to Siberia, where he was forced to work for several years in a gold mine. His family, who stayed in the Nowy Sącz ghetto, was transported to the death camp in Bełżec.

In 1946, as part of the repatriation of Polish citizens from the Soviet Union, he returned to Poland and settled in Dzierżoniów. He worked there as an administrative manager of the State Cotton Industry Plant No. 1 (later renamed to “Silesiana”), and then at the “Delana” Knitting Plant.

For many years he was the chairman of the local branch of TSKŻ in Dzierżoniów, and in the last years of his life – the secretary of this branch; he was also a member of the Presidium and the Main Board of TSKŻ.

Mojżesz Jakubowicz was a propagator of knowledge about the culture and history of Polish Jews; he also preserved the legacy of Jews living in Dzierżoniów in the post-war period. He was the initiator of the Days of Jewish Culture, organized for the first time in Dzierżoniów in 2001, and the caretaker of the synagogue in Dzierżoniów and the Jewish cemetery in that town. He was involved in social activities, was a lover of Jewish history and culture. He was also a great popularizer of the history of the local Jewish community, which he willingly told about and made available his private collections for exhibition purposes.

In 2000, in recognition of his outstanding achievements in social activity for the benefit of the Jewish community, he was awarded the Officer’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta. He died in Dzierżoniów and rests next to his wife in the municipal cemetery in Dzierżoniów at Wrocławska street.

Marek Huf

(born in 1952)

An activist of the Jewish community from Dzierżoniów, chairman of the Dzierżoniów branch of the Social and Cultural Society of Jews in Poland.

He was born in Dzierżoniów as the son of Haskel and Danuta. His father, Haskel Huf, was born in Lublin in 1918 to a large Jewish family. Most of his father's relatives died in the concentration camp at Majdanek. Only his brother Jankiel (with whom they escaped to the Soviet Union) and uncle Hersz, who emigrated to Brazil before the war, survived from the large family. During the war, father and his brother worked in the Ural ore mines in Omsk and Tomsk, and then on the construction of a dam in Uzbekistan.

After the end of the war, in 1946, Haskel Huf with his brother and his brother's wife Dita came to Dzierżoniów. In this city, until his death in 1967, he worked as the manager of the "Bawełna" [Cotton] Cultural Center operating at the "Silesiana" textile factory.

Marek Huf's mother, Danuta, was born in Warsaw in 1928. She lost her entire family in the Warsaw Uprising, during a bombing. In 1949, she came to Dzierżoniów, where she worked as a purchasing manager in a kindergarten.

In his youth, Marek Huf participated in dance classes at the "Bawełna" Cultural Center and at the TSKŻ club in Dzierżoniów. He was also a member of amateur music bands and brass bands in Dzierżoniów, and then in Bielawa.

After passing his high school diploma in 1972, he graduated from the Post-Secondary School of Veterinary Sanitary Controllers and from 1973 until his retirement in 2017, he worked at the Veterinary Inspection.

In 1979, he married Małgorzata Stopa, with whom he had three sons. After graduating from high school, Maciej emigrated to Israel, Marcei studied at the University of Wrocław and lived in a Jewish dormitory at the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław, and Maurycy graduated from the Academy of Music in Wrocław.

Marek Huf has been a member of TSKŻ since 1981; in 2004 he became an instructor in the Dzierżoniów branch of TSKŻ, and since 2019 he has been the chairman of this branch. He co-organized Jewish cultural events and celebrations of holidays and anniversaries important to Polish Jews in Dzierżoniów – together with the Wrocław Jewish Community, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and other Jewish organizations and regional authorities. In 2012–2020 he was a member of the Main Board of TSKŻ. In 2015, he became a member of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław, and since 2019 he has been working as a caretaker of the Jewish cemetery in Dzierżoniów.

Samuel Haliczer

(1914–2002)

A long-time member of Jewish organizations in Legnica, a Torah reciter, teacher, book enthusiast, bookseller and antique dealer.

He was born in 1914 in Założce, Tarnopol Province, to the family of Łazarz and Antonina née Hochfeld. He graduated from high school in Tarnopol, and then went to study in Warsaw. He studied history and German philology at the University of Warsaw, and at the same time he started studies at the Institute of Judaic Studies in Warsaw. Thanks to these studies, he became a Torah reciter – he could read it in the synagogue, lead prayer meetings and conduct funerals.

After the outbreak of World War II, he returned to his homeland and there, under the Soviet occupation, until 1941 he worked in Tarnopol as a clerk. After the German attack on the USSR, he escaped from Tarnopol and lived in the estate of his father's friends, where he hid until the Red Army entered the area. He returned to Poland only in 1957, as the so-called “late repatriate”, together with his wife Ida and two-year-old son Leon. The Haliczer family settled in Legnica at Jaworzyńska street. In 1965, his wife and son emigrated to Israel, but he remained in Poland.

Samuel Haliczer worked in Legnica in a bookbinding cooperative, in the public library in Legnica, as a distributor in “Dom Książki”, and then took up the door-to-door book sales. In the 1960s and 1970s, by selling books from house to house, he became a one-man bookstore institution. He also had many friends among Legnica writers. At that time, he was one of the most characteristic figures of Legnica.

From the very beginning, he was also involved in the life of the Jewish community in Legnica – the congregation of Mosaic denomination and TSKŻ, where until 1995 he taught Yiddish.

At the end of his life, he would come from Legnica to Wrocław to participate in Shabbat services.

Mojsze Sznejser

(1920–2018)

A longtime member of the Legnica branch of TSKŻ and the Jewish Religious Community in Legnica, the last Jewish shoemaker in Poland.

He was born in 1920 in Łuków in the Lublin region to the family of the shoemaker Dawid Josel and Szajndla, née Sosnowiec. He was the eldest of four siblings. In Łuków, he attended a Jewish elementary school, as well as a Talmud Torah and a cheder. He finished his education at the age of 12, when, after his father's death, he had to help support the family.

After the outbreak of the war, he wanted to escape to the Soviet Union, but was captured on the border in Brest and taken to Belarus, to Gomel, where he worked in a machine factory. After the outbreak of the Soviet-German war, he found his way to the city of Kurgan in the east of the USSR, where he found a job as a shoemaker. Then he was drafted into the Red Army, but as a Polish citizen he was sent to an aluminum factory in Chelyabinsk in the Urals. Accused of attempting to desert from the army, he was brought to trial and sentenced to death, later commuted to 10 years of hard labor in a labor camp in Nizhny Tagil. Later, he managed to get to a labor camp in Moscow, where he worked mending military boots, which were then sent to the front. He stayed there until 1946.

Almost the entire family of Mojsze Sznejser perished in the Holocaust. After the war, he returned to Poland, to Łuków. Soon – together with his wife Chaja – he moved to Lower Silesia, first to Dzierżoniów, and then to Legnica. In Legnica, from the very beginning he worked as a shoemaker – in the Jewish shoemaker cooperative “Dobrobyt” [Prosperity], and after it was closed, in his own shoemaking workshop at Kartuska street.

Mojsze Sznejser had three children, two of whom emigrated from Poland after the anti-Semitic campaign in March 1968 (the son to Israel and the daughter to Denmark). He himself never wanted to leave, because he claimed that Legnica was his home.

He ran his shoemaking workshop in the Legnica district Zakaczawie until 2005, until he was 85. He worked there for over forty-five years. Until the end of his life, he actively participated in the life of the Jewish community of Legnica. He died in Legnica at the age of 95.

Fryderyka Cohensius

(1914–2016)

An organizer of cultural life in Wałbrzych and the Wałbrzych district.

Fryderyka Lieberman-Cohensius, née Lemberger, was born in Trzebinia to an assimilated Jewish family. In the 1930s, she studied Polish and German philology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, and then began her PhD in German Studies. During World War II, she was a prisoner of the Gross-Rosen camp, where she worked in the production of parts for German submarines. She managed to survive in the camp thanks to the help of the camp doctor, a Dutch Jew, Isaac Cohensius, with whom she married after the end of the war.

She arrived in Wałbrzych as early as on May 9, 1945. In mid-June 1945, she started working as the head of the Culture Department in the Municipal Board in Wałbrzych, and then as the head of the Culture and Education Department in the Municipal National Council. Thanks to her, the City Library, the Music Conservatory, the Puppet Theater and the City Theater were established in Wałbrzych. She organized the first Polish cultural events, inviting outstanding artists, co-created the Wałbrzych literary community, and also founded “Tygodnik Polski” - the first Polish newspaper published in Wałbrzych. She was also a co-initiator of the creation of the Chopin Festival in Duszniki-Zdrój. On behalf of the Polish and Soviet authorities, she also held talks with the writer Gerhart Hauptmann, whom she knew from before the war.

Thanks to Fryderyka Cohensius, the old museum collections were secured, on the basis of which the Regional Museum in Wałbrzych was created. In 1947, she moved to Wrocław, where she started working at the Provincial Department of Culture and Art. In 1948, she was a co-organizer of the World Congress of Intellectuals in Defense of Peace.

At the beginning of 1949, she emigrated to Israel, where she professionally dealt with the methodology of teaching mathematics. After retiring, she traveled the world giving lectures. In the 1990s, she visited Wałbrzych and its cultural institutions several times.

In 1997, she was awarded the title of Honorary Citizen of the City of Wałbrzych for her achievements in the 1940s. Fryderyka Cohensius died in 2016 in Israel, at the age of 102.

Ludwik Hoffman

(1923–2010)

An activist of the Jewish community in Wałbrzych, a long-time chairman of the Wałbrzych branch of TSKŻ and the Wałbrzych branch of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław.

He was born in Drohobycz to a middle-class Jewish family, one of two children of Natan Hoffman and Sabina née Sztegman. He graduated from the Polish elementary school, and he attended the Jewish humanities gymnasium in Lviv. In Drohobycz, his drawing teacher was Bruno Schulz, who worked in schools in Drohobycz. The writer's sister, Hanna Hoffmanowa, was related to the family of Ludwik Hoffman.

In 1940, the Jews of Drohobycz were displaced - the Hoffman family then moved to Truskawiec, where a ghetto was established after the outbreak of the Soviet-German war. In August 1942, Ludwik Hoffman's family was transported to the death camp in Bełżec, and he and his sister were sent to the labor camp in Truskawiec. In 1943 he was relocated to the ghetto in Drohobycz, where he worked in an oil refinery. In 1944, he was deported to the concentration camp in Płaszów, and then transferred to the Gross-Rosen camp in Lower Silesia. He lived to see the end of the war in the Wałbrzych branch of Gross-Rosen. Of his family, only his sister Stella and one cousin survived.

After the end of the war, he stayed in Wałbrzych, where he worked for many years in trade, incl. at the Wałbrzych Internal Trade Company and the "Centrum" State Department Store. From the 1970s, he was active in the Wałbrzych branch of TSKŻ, of which he was chairman for many years. He was a member of the Arbitration by Fellow Members for many years in the Main Board of this organization. Ludwik Hoffman was also involved in educational activities - he often met with students from Wałbrzych schools and with young people from Poland, Germany and other countries, whom he told about his experiences.

He died on July 24, 2010 in Berlin, during a reunion of former prisoners of Nazi concentration camps. He rests at the Jewish cemetery in Wałbrzych.

Abram Brand

(1923–2007)

A leader of the Jewish community in Żary, a long-time chairman of the Żary branch of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (TSKŻ) and the branch of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław.

He was born in the village of Podusilna in the Przemyślany District, Tarnopol Province, to the family of Michał and Estera. He graduated from primary school in Brzeżany, and then he learned the profession of a tailor. A year after the Soviet Union's aggression against Poland, he was recruited to work in a coal mine in Donbas, from which he fled in 1941. Two years later he was transported to Siberia, and in January 1945 he was conscripted into the Red Army and sent to the front near Gdańsk. In the army, he was a projectionist in a field cinema. After demobilization in 1948, he settled in Lviv, where he worked as a tailor and cutter in cooperatives.

He came to Poland in 1957 with the so-called second wave of repatriation of Polish citizens. He settled in Żary, where, together with other Jewish displaced persons, he founded a tailor and kilim making cooperative under the auspices of TSKŻ, which with time was named Wytwórczo-Uługowa Spółdzielnia Pracy im. Bohaterów Getta [the Heroes of the Ghetto Manufacturing and Service Cooperative] in Żary. Abram Brand at first worked in the cooperative as a tailor-instructor, and after a few years, he became its president and held this position for the next several dozen years, until his retirement. He was also the president of the local branch of the Association of Jewish Combatants and Victims of World War II and a member of the main board of this organization.

He was associated with TSKŻ from 1957 – in the years 1965–2007, he was the president of the Żary branch of this organization, and from the second half of the 1990s until his death, he was the chairman of the Żary branch of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław. He was also a municipal councilor and lay judge at the District Court in Żary.

Mozes Grin

(1912–1996)

An activist of the Jewish community in Żary, a long-time chairman of the Jewish Religious Community in Żary.

He was born in Krakow to a traditional Jewish family. During World War II, he served in the Polish People's Army, including taking part in the battles in the Eastern Borderlands and the Lublin region. After 1945, he settled in Żary. He was one of the pioneers of Jewish economic life, becoming involved in the activities of cooperatives. He was the deputy president of the "Igła" Tailor Cooperative, and then the secretary of the Council of the Heroes of the Ghetto Manufacturing and Service Cooperative in Żary.

In Żary, he worked as a state administration official (including in the Presidium of the National Council as head of the Personnel Department), in the Żary Wool Industry Plant, in the District Hospital in Żary (as the Deputy Director of Administrative Affairs) and in a bookstore of "Dom Książki" (House of Books; the nationwide bookstore retail enterprises).

He was one of the founders and a long-time employee of Powszechna Spółdzielnia Spożywców [Common Consumer Cooperative] "Spotem". He also performed many social functions – as the president of the Polish Red Cross in Żary, probation officer and social inspector at the District Court in Żary. He was also active as a journalist and columnist (member of the editorial board of "Głos Powiatu Żarskiego").

For many years he was the chairman of the Żary congregation of the Mosaic faith, he was also a member of the Audit Committee of the Religious Union of Judaism in Poland and a board member of the local branch of TSKŻ.

Sport was his great passion – he was a co-founder (together with Maurycy Kajler) of the Jewish Sports Club in Żary, and then a sports activist of KS Spójnia-Promień and the president of the Zielona Góra Football District based in Żary.

Alicja Skowrońska

(born in 1942)

An activist of the Jewish community in the Lubuskie Region, a long-time chairman of the Żary branch of TSKŻ.

She was born in 1942 in Ufaley, Siberia, where her parents, Polish Jews from Mazovia, were departed during World War II. She was the oldest child in the family of Józef and Dora Graniasty. Nine of her father's siblings and most of her mother's family were killed in the Holocaust.

In 1946, the Graniasty family returned to Poland as part of the so-called repatriation of Polish citizens from the Soviet Union. Initially, they settled in Przemków, and then in Nowa Sól, where Józef Graniasty was one of the founders of the congregation of the Jewish faith. After 1956, they became associated with the Jewish community in Żary, where Alicja Skowrońska's father was engaged in cultural activities and performed with children in a music band.

In 1960, Alicja Skowrońska became a full member of the TSKŻ branch in Żary. In the same year, she was elected to the board of this organization. Initially, she was a board member, secretary, and then chairman. She was also a member of the Main Board of TSKŻ and a member of the Audit Committee of the Jewish Religious Community in Wrocław.

Throughout her professional life, she has been associated with trade; in addition, she has performed many important social functions in Nowa Sól – for three terms she was a municipal councilor, for 36 years she was a lay judge at the Labor Court in Nowa Sól, and for 9 years she was the chairman of the pensioners' organization.

As part of her activities for Jewish organizations – despite numerous difficulties – she supports Jewish life in the Lubuskie Region, enabling local Jews to participate in Jewish holidays and cultural events. In the Żary branch of TSKŻ, she regularly organizes religious holidays and celebrates important anniversaries for the Jewish people. As a representative of TSKŻ, she also participates in numerous scientific conferences and meetings taking place in the Lubuskie Region, dealing with the promotion of Jewish heritage.

Maurycy Kajler

(1910–1997)

an activist of the Jewish community in Żary, journalist and cultural activist.

He was born in Lviv as Mosze Keiler, to a traditional Jewish family, one of eight siblings. He received religious education in the cheder, he also graduated from the Polish gymnasium, and then started trading. In 1936 he got married, a year later his son was born. In 1941, he was forcibly drafted into the Red Army, and then deported to a Stalinist labor camp in Asia, where he spent several years. He lost his entire family in the Holocaust. His wife and son also died in Lviv.

He came to Żary in 1946 as part of the so-called repatriation of Polish citizens from the USSR. Soon he married a second time – his wife was a Polish Jew from Łódź, who also lost her husband in the Holocaust. For 28 years he was a municipal councilor, and for two years – vice-chairman of the City Council in Żary. He was also a probation officer and a lay judge, a journalist of “Głos Powiatu Żarskiego” and a correspondent of “Głos Wielkopolski”, a member of the Committee for the Investigation of Nazi War Crimes – the Institute of National Remembrance. He was an Honorary Citizen of the City of Żary, he was also awarded the Knight’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta and the Gold Cross of Merit.

From the very beginning, he was deeply involved in the activities of Jewish organizations - he was an employee of the District Jewish Committee in Żary, a co-founder of the Jewish Sports Club in Żary, the chairman of the local branch of the Association of Jewish Combatants and Victims in World War II, as well as the vice-chairman of the Jewish Religious Community in Żary.

He was also one of the organizers and co-founders of the Heroes of the Ghetto Manufacturing and Service Cooperative in Żary. He was associated with TSKŻ from the very beginning of this organization. A long-time secretary of the Żary branch of this organization, he also served as the vice-chairman of the Main Board of TSKŻ and chairman of the Main Audit Committee of TSKŻ.

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