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Jewish Wrocław: A Guide



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Not an introduction, but an invitation to a Jewish Wrocław

Wrocław is an attractive city for many reasons. One of them is its rich history formed by representatives of numerous cultures and nations. An important part of Wrocław's heritage is also the Jewish culture. Though it is not always visible, it has considerably impacted the construction and the look of the capital of Lower Silesia.

Jewish Wrocław is naturally associated with great monuments of this community, both with the White Stork Synagogue, and with the Old Jewish Cemetery at ul. Ślężna. But it's only a fraction of what's left behind from Wrocław Jews' culture. Visiting the city, we might not associate many places and buildings with the Jewish community. However, I think it is worth showing what great heritage was left by Jews and how often we use and refer to it and, quite often, consciously or not, take pride in it. I am convinced that identifying the Jewish community only in synagogues or cemeteries is rather detrimental and does not show its whole picture and complexity. That is why I wanted to talk about the objects created in Wrocław by Jews but often omitted in a general historical and social narrative.

Spreading knowledge about the Jewish part of Wrocław seems important especially for two reasons. The first, historical one aims at commemorating the community which was treated brutally by two totalitarian regimes. First, German Jews were sentenced to death or exile by the Nazis. Not much later Polish Jews had come back to those areas, the communists also forced them into exile. Minority rights could be respected only in the free Poland, though, even today, there are still acts of anti-Semitism. That is why there is also the second, contemporary reason for this guide: to emphasize Jews' contribution to the construction of Wrocław to facilitate understanding and tolerance, which, in turn, as I hope, will help to prevent anti-Semitism and the acts of hate speech in the capital of Lower Silesia.

Intentionally, I do not present the entire heritage of Wrocław Jews but only focus on the most important, in my opinion, signs of their activity in the city. I aim at outlining their history and, based on that, presenting Jewish identity of Wrocław. I also want to choose places and artefacts presented in the guide to be easily available and encourage further discoveries for both Wrocław inhabitants and the tourists. What is more, most of selected places are publicly available and do not require buying tickets. Selected educational paths are also to show different directions of development and activity of the Jewish community in Wrocław.

This guide would have not been created without great help from the City of Wrocław – thank you for your trust, support, and help in promoting Jewish heritage in our city. This project was completed as a part of the Artistic Scholarship of the Mayor of Wrocław, funded by the City of Wrocław.

Did you know?

The New Synagogue, which before its demolition was located at today's Łąkowa Street, was built for liberal Jews in 1872. It was an extremely majestic building in the Romanesque-Byzantine style. Only the Berlin synagogue was larger across Germany.



Why is the history of Jews in Wrocław exceptional?

The Jewish community has lived in Wrocław since medieval times and constituted one of the biggest groups of Jews in this part of Europe. However, the fate of Jews tended to be turbulent, depending on the ruling leader, political system, and social mood – starting from acceptance, but ending at expulsion and routs. Few people know that the oldest fully preserved Jewish tombstone in Poland comes from Wrocław. Today, it is an exhibit in the Historical Museum in the Royal Palace in Wrocław. I'm talking about David ben Sar Shalom's matzevah of 1203, probably from the medieval Jewish cemetery, which shows evidence for the conclusion that local Jewish community had already been developed in the 12th century. It should also be emphasized that the Jewish district was previously placed in a completely different part of the city than the one today. The signs of the former Jewish district can be found around the University Square and by ul. Uniwersytecka, ul. Garbary, ul. Nożownicza, ul. Więzienna, and ul. Kuźnicza.

For the following decades, with short pauses, the Jewish community could develop in Wrocław, but the first routs took place already in the first half of the 14th century. A tragedy happened almost 100 years later – forty-one Jews were burnt on Solny Square. The *de non tolerandis Judaeis* privilege (of not accepting Jews) applied in Wrocław, having been granted by Casimir IV Jagiellon. This law meant that Jews were not allowed to settle in the city. Jews could not live in Wrocław from the mid-15th century to the mid-17th century, with one exception of trade fairs, for which Jews could come several times a year for trading purposes. Social moods changed as late as in 1657, when Zacharias Lazarus, the supplier of emperor's mint, was allowed to settle in the city. A modern Jewish commune was then created in the middle of the 17th century, and the later take-over of Silesia under the rule of Prussia was very beneficial to the commune at first. From the 18th century, Jews settled around today's Ghetto Heroes Square – previously the Jewish Square – and started their institutions and centres there. It was also a location of several taverns and synagogues. Thus, with the emancipation edict of 1812, Jews gained full rights of city citizens. They could settle, purchase properties, practice their religion, and carry out professional activities. This is how the great prosperity period started, and Wrocław Jewish community developed economically, culturally, and intellectually. Great material and non-material legacy has also been preserved from this period, and you can still learn about it and admire it today in Wrocław. Thus, quite naturally, the guide presents mostly the buildings and artefacts from the golden era of Jewish life in Wrocław.

However, the events of the 20th century put a brutal end to the Jewish development in Europe. Nazis' rise to power, the Second World War, and, finally, the Holocaust, annihilated most Jewish communes, including the one in Wrocław. Increasing restrictions and depriving Jews of basic rights were the first steps leading to the dehumanization of Jews, resulting in their extermination. The first attacks on the Jewish community might have seemed harmless, but the politics of the Nazi Party (NSDAP) from the very beginnings had aimed at eliminating Jews from the Reich. In 1941, it was announced that Wrocław would be "cleaned" out of Jews. Jewish inhabitants were removed from the city in more than a dozen rounds of transport: to the concentration camps in Tormersdorf, Riebing, and Grüssau, to Kovno, Izbica, Sobibor, Bełżec, and Majdanek, as well as to Theresienstadt and Auschwitz. The last rounds of transport were organized as late as at the beginning of 1944. Thanks to an extremely meticulous bureaucracy system, Nazis were sure that Jews had disappeared from Wrocław.

This period did not last long, and with the fall of the Reich and the border change, Polish Jews came back to Wrocław. Jews who stayed there included not only the Holocaust survivors, but also repatriated people from Eastern Borderlands and former prisoners of Gross-Rosen concentration camp and its numerous subcamps located in this region. Jews from the Soviet Union and other regions of Poland would also come to Lower Silesia. Thus, such a large number of Jews setting there was a peculiar phenomenon as compared to the rest of the country trying to rise after the fires of war. Post-war years constituted an interesting but short-term attempt to reactivate Jewish presence in Lower Silesia, with communism as another act of getting rid of Jews and their heritage. The period of anti-Semitic repressions with its peak in March 1968 finished with the fall of communism, and, in democratic Poland, another attempt to rebuild the Jewish community started.



First pogroms took place in the mid-fourteenth century. A tragedy occurred almost a hundred years later – forty-one Jews were burnt in Solny Square.



Stolpersteine (ul. Świdnicka 39)

Historical Jewish district

It seems that most Wrocław inhabitants know the centre of the historical Jewish district, which can be placed nearby the White Stork Synagogue. This is an invaluable monument that reminds us of the existence of a large Jewish community both before and after the war. The district quickly expanded with the dynamic increase in the number of Jews arriving in Wrocław in the 19th century. However, it was an integral part of the city where the architecture did not stand out from other settlements. At the end of the 19th century, the wealthiest members of the community started to move to the south of Wrocław, where the network of Jewish institutions was growing and a new villa residential area was being created.

Ghetto Heroes Square

Wrocław Jews in the 18th and 19th century settled around the Jewish Square, currently named the Ghetto Heroes Square. Forum Judaeorum was the centre of the Jewish district including today's ul. Karola Szajnochy, ul. Kazimierza Wielkiego, ul. Ruska, ul. Krupnicza, ul. Pawła Włodkowica, and ul. św. Antoniego. This area housed, among others, the buildings belonging to the Jewish commune, houses of prayer, a school, hospital, beanery, numerous trade centres, and inns. It also housed territorial synagogues, which no longer exist either in Wrocław or in Poland. Territorial synagogues were small and often private houses of prayer located in tenement houses. As the trade route brought Jews from different parts of Central and Eastern Europe to Wrocław, and their rituals and ceremonies often differed, synagogues were created for specific regional communities, such as Głogów or Leszno synagogues.

The settlement in this location resulted from the fact that, initially, the Jewish community could settle outside of Wrocław borders, but after the emancipation edict of 1812, in the following decades, Jews also settled and ran businesses in the centre of Wrocław. As opposed to Jews in many towns of the former Republic of Poland, Wrocław Jews did not restrict themselves only to their district. Instead, they also lived and built their institutions in the centre, co-creating the city together with other city inhabitants. The square changed its name many times, depending on political tendencies: it was called Lassalleplatz or Carlsplatz. After the war, its look and topography significantly changed. It regained the name of the Jewish Square, but, in 1946, Wrocław Jews requested for it to be named Ghetto Heroes Square, and the square has been commemorating them ever since.

Pokoyhof Passage and the State Synagogue

In the 19th century, this area buzzed with life – a place where you could meet not only religious Jews on their way to pray in the State Synagogue, many merchants, but also city visitors who stayed for the night and ate in nearby inns. In the passage, from the side of today's ul. Włodkowica, since the 18th century, the State Synagogue had been functioning, visited by Silesian Jews. In those times, it was an exceptionally big house of prayer, housing up to 300 people, including also a rabbi's office. The State Synagogue had served as Wrocław's main house of prayer, until the White Stork Synagogue was built. The building from the 17th century, in spite of its renovation, fell into ruin and was demolished, and the synagogue was first moved to today's ul. Włodkowica, and later to today's Museum Square, where it was devastated during Kristallnacht.



The non-existent State Synagogue (ul. Włodkowica)



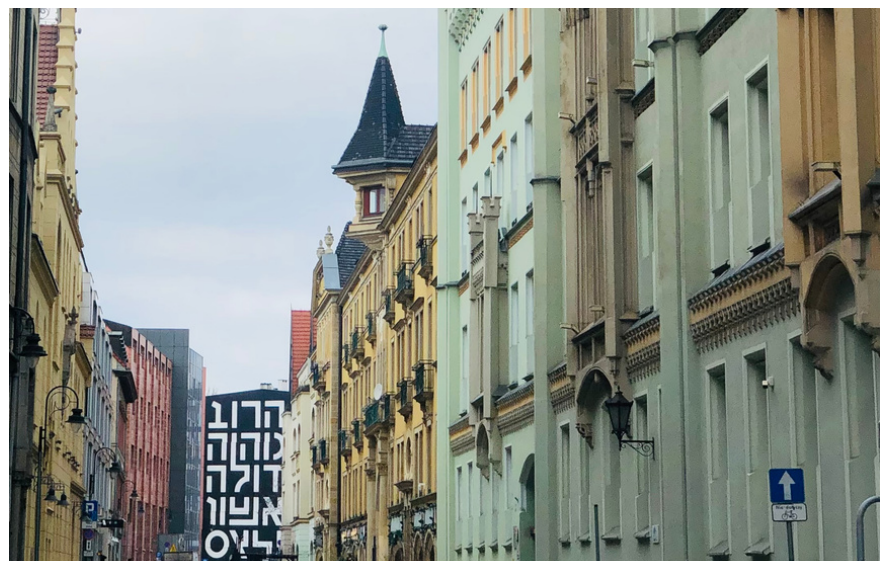
Ghetto Heroes Square

Włodkowica Street

This street has been associated with Wrocław Jews since before the war, mostly thanks to the State Synagogue and, later, the White Stork Synagogue, the buildings of the Jewish commune, the no longer existing Jewish Theological Seminary, and numerous Jewish shops and services, which functioned there before Nazis came to power. Włodkowica also housed one of the first Jewish hospitals and, later, social housing flats were available in the same tenement at today's ul. Włodkowica 25.

After the war, when thousands of Polish Jews were coming to Wrocław and Lower Silesia, this place again started to buzz with life. The centre of Jewish activity, both secular and religious one, in Wrocław was located in the buildings at ul. Włodkowica, which constituted a new yet old Jewish district. This area housed Jewish editing and publishing houses, health and cultural centres, a kosher canteen, and, obviously, a synagogue with a mikveh. Till the 1960s, there was also Talmud Tora Jewish religious school. Before 1951, Wrocław Jews could use four synagogues: the White Stork Synagogue, the shul, which is a small synagogue, and houses of prayer at ul. Oleśnicka 11 and ul. Żeromskiego 24. Many organizations located their seats at ul. Włodkowica, being an important meeting place for the Jewish community of both religious and non-religious Jews.

This area houses, of course, also the Jewish Religious Community of Wrocław, which has taken over the heritage of the pre-war community and covers not only Wrocław, but also the southwestern part of Poland. The offices are located in the same place as before the war – in a building designed by brothers Paul and Richard Ehrlich at ul. Włodkowica. One of the main functions of the commune in Wrocław is the organization of the religious life of its members by employing a rabbi, maintaining the White Stork Synagogue and the shul, as well as the New Jewish Cemetery at ul. Lotnicza.



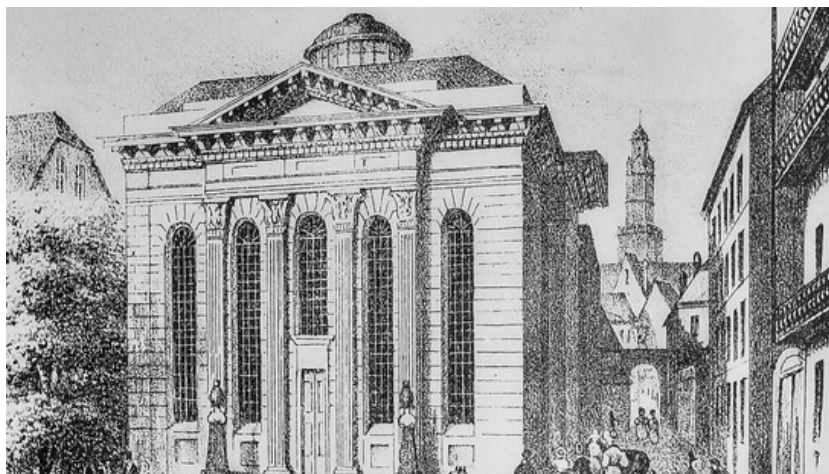
Jewish Community (Włodkowica Street)

White Stork Synagogue

The author of the architectonic design of the White Stork Synagogue was Carl Ferdinand Langhans, an outstanding German architect, who also designed the Wrocław Opera House a decade later. The synagogue was officially opened in 1829, but during its first years, it was a private house of prayer of the Association of Brothers, whose initiative it was to build the synagogue. It was only in 1847 that the White Stork Synagogue became the main synagogue of the liberal Jews in Wrocław. Its first rabbi was merited Abraham Geiger, who administered the place in the reformed spirit.

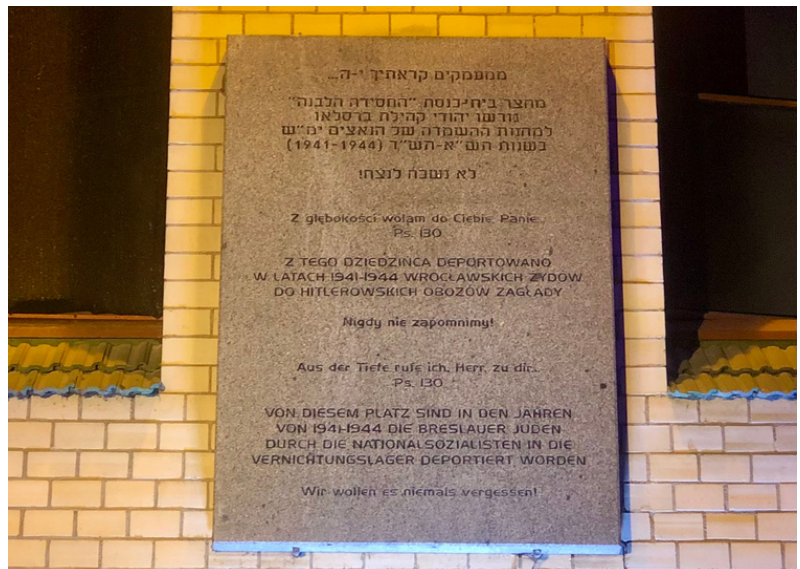
The interior mirrored the important though symbolic diversion from the conservative understanding of Jewish practices, for example, by reading Torah from the place where the aron qodesh is located, by the eastern wall of the synagogue. Another innovation was that women and men used the same entrance to the building, and the sermons were given in German. However, the innovations did not last long, as the White Stork Synagogue was taken over by conservative Jews, who restored the traditional order. Liberal Jews then had their house of prayer in the no longer existing New Synagogue at today's ul. Łąkowa. The White Stork Synagogue under the care of the conservative group gained a more classical look: during its renovation, a bimah was placed in the middle for Torah reading, and separate staircases for women and men were built. As a result, women prayed separately on the synagogue balcony.

During the pogrom of the Kristallnacht, the inside of the synagogue was vandalized and destroyed. However, tight urban development stopped Nazi fight groups from its aggressive devastation, as setting fire to the synagogue would pose a risk of nearby tenements also catching fire. The house of prayer functioned till 1941, when Nazis closed it and then used as a warehouse to store the property of deported Jews. The synagogue courtyard was used as a collection point where Wrocław Jews were required to come before being deported to transit camps or directly to extermination camps. Deportations took place between 1941 and 1944, including the whole community of Wrocław Jews.



White Stork Synagogue before the war

Paradoxically, the White Stork Synagogue survived the Nazis and the war in good condition, but it was significantly destroyed in the times of communism. After the war, it served well for almost thirty years, and stopped functioning in 1974, when the authorities overtook the building from the Jewish community. Unfortunately, a decade later, fire broke out in the synagogue, speeding up its degradation. Over the years, the synagogue was taken over by many institutions, at the same time not taken care of properly by any. It was only in 1996 that, after overcoming many formal difficulties, the Jewish Religious Commune managed to recover the ownership of the White Stork Synagogue. In 1997, a tedious and long period of renovation of this historic building, which was falling into ruin, began. Thanks to the efforts and financial resources of many institutions, the renovation of the synagogue and courtyard was completed in 2009. This is an extraordinary place on the map of Wrocław, which clearly shows the presence of Jews in the capital of Lower Silesia over the centuries.



Memorial next to the Synagogue



Jews before the deportation

Shul and mykveh

With the beginning of the 20th century, the religious infrastructure of the White Stork started to be extended: a mykveh (a ritual bath used for both women and men) was added, as well as a shul, which is a so-called small synagogue. The mykveh was built by the White Stork Synagogue in 1901, and was used for the German community of Jews during the Nazism times, and after the war, it was used till 1968. Though it had not been destroyed during the war, its condition significantly deteriorated in the years that followed. The renovation of rooms ended successfully in 2018, and today the mykveh is used both for ritual immersions, and as a place hosting exhibitions and lectures.

The shul is the only place in Wrocław in which prayers have been taking place without interruption from the time when it was built (with the exception of the period of the Second World War). The shul is located in the building adjacent to the synagogue, and serves as a place of prayer, meetings, and lectures. In 2015, the shul was renovated with great care so that its interior mirrored its pre-war elegance. Secession polychromes on the ceiling, a wooden aron qodesh or a pre-war ner tamid are extremely impressive. A contemporary supplement of stained glass windows made by an artist from Wrocław, Mira Żelechower-Aleksiu, can be noticed from the courtyard.



Shul next to the Synagogue

Św. Antoniego Street

The centre of the former Jewish district also had to house many important institutions, such as a beanery, hospital, school, or a synagogue. They were all located at ul. św. Antoniego. It is worth noting that before the war, private synagogues could also be found there, i.e. prayer houses belonging to a specific, usually wealthy, family. These synagogues served the family and their loved ones, and several of them were located at today's ul. św. Antoniego. Like territorial synagogues, they were usually located in tenement houses. Public institutions, such as schools and hospitals, also had small synagogues for their own needs and often for people living nearby.

At ul. św. Antoniego, there was also the most splendid outdoor department store in the city – Niepold Passage. Wilhelm Niepold was a prominent entrepreneur, who opened the passage for clients at the beginning of the 20th century, in 1904. It included tenement houses, with shops and business premises inside, a restaurant and the owner's house. Goods available for sale included colonial products, fabrics, underwear, and clothes.

Did you know?

You can enter the Synagogue courtyard both from Włodkowica Street and Św. Antoniego Street. To enter the Synagogue you have to buy tickets – it is run by Jewish Community of Wrocław.



Św. Antoniego Street before the war



Ghetto Heroes Square before the war

Tenement houses

Do you know the histories of tenement houses in the main square? We might be really surprised when we discover how many of them have a Jewish history. Numerous tenement houses in the city centre are examples of the assimilation of Jews and their co-creation of Wrocław with other inhabitants. Learning about fascinating stories related to Jewish entrepreneurship, we can learn a lot about the history and culture of Jews in Wrocław, but also about outstanding individuals who led to the success of the most flourishing institutions. Dozens of tenement houses on the main square belonged to Jewish owners or housed companies run by Jews. Renowned businesses were the hallmark of the city and were used by both Wrocław residents and visitors. In addition to department stores, textile companies, banks and publishing houses also operated successfully.

Priebatsch bookstore and publishing house (Rynek 58)

was one of the best-known printing and publishing companies of the pre-war Wrocław. The company belonged to the Jewish Priebatsch family. They operated in the book industry in a complex way, publishing textbooks, as well as running a bookstore, which was initially located at today's ul. Ruska. This family business was first run by Leopold, and later by his son Felix, what allowed for a dynamic development of the company. Their growing business later also operated in a tenement house at Rynek 14. The last company director was Hans, who emigrated to Palestine in the 1930s. Felix Priebatsch is buried in the Old Jewish Cemetery. Today, the tenement house is taken over by books – it houses the Lower Silesian Public Library.

Heimann Bank (Rynek 33)

used to be an outstandingly prosperous institution. It was one of the biggest private banks in the country. It was founded by Ernst Heimann, a financier and the founder of a loan facility. Later, this family business was run by Heinrich Heimann, an investor, philanthropist, and an important person in the pre-war Wrocław, who also held the position of the vice-president of Wrocław Chamber of Commerce.

The tenement house in which the bank was first located quickly became not sufficient and was reconstructed and connected to its neighbouring building from today's ul. Kurzy Targ. What is more, a treasury vault was also built in the underground of the extended building. The reconstruction was led by an outstanding architect, Albert Grau. Later, reacting to this institution's dynamic growth, the bank space was also extended by the tenement house no. 34. Heimann Bank operated till 1944. The Ernst and Heinrich Heimann Foundation does charity work and has, for example, financed the construction of an orphanage and a care institution.

Oppenheim Tenement House (pl. Solny 4)

belonged to a family of bankers and philanthropists already at the beginning of the 19th century. The Oppenheim family both lived and ran their business in their baroque tenement house. Just like many prominent entrepreneurs, they were famous for their charity work, and their foundation supported the poorest Wrocław residents. Their tenement house, which was a meeting place for the local Jewish community, also housed business premises and stores. However, in 1941, it was taken over by the Nazis, and it survived the war in a fairly good condition. Today, the building houses the OP ENHEIM gallery of contemporary art.



Heimann Bank before the war



Old Priebatsch Bookstore



Hildebrandt and Herz advertisements



Old Oppenheim Tenement House

Fränckl Foundation Tenement House (ul. Ofiar Oświęcimskich 19)

is a well-preserved building nearby the main square. Before the war, it housed the seat of the charity organization which worked extensively to support the Jewish community. The Fränckl Foundation was one of the biggest foundations in Wrocław, helping the hospital or orphanage to operate. After its sponsor, Jonas Fränckl had died, collected funds allowed to open the Jewish Theological Seminary in Wrocław. It was the first one in Europe, one of the most important universities in the world to teach rabbis. Albert Grau, a well-known Wrocław architect designed the tenement house in the neo-gothic style. Earlier, he also worked with Edwin Oppler, among others, on the construction of the New Synagogue.

Sachs Tenement House (pl. Teatralny 1-2)

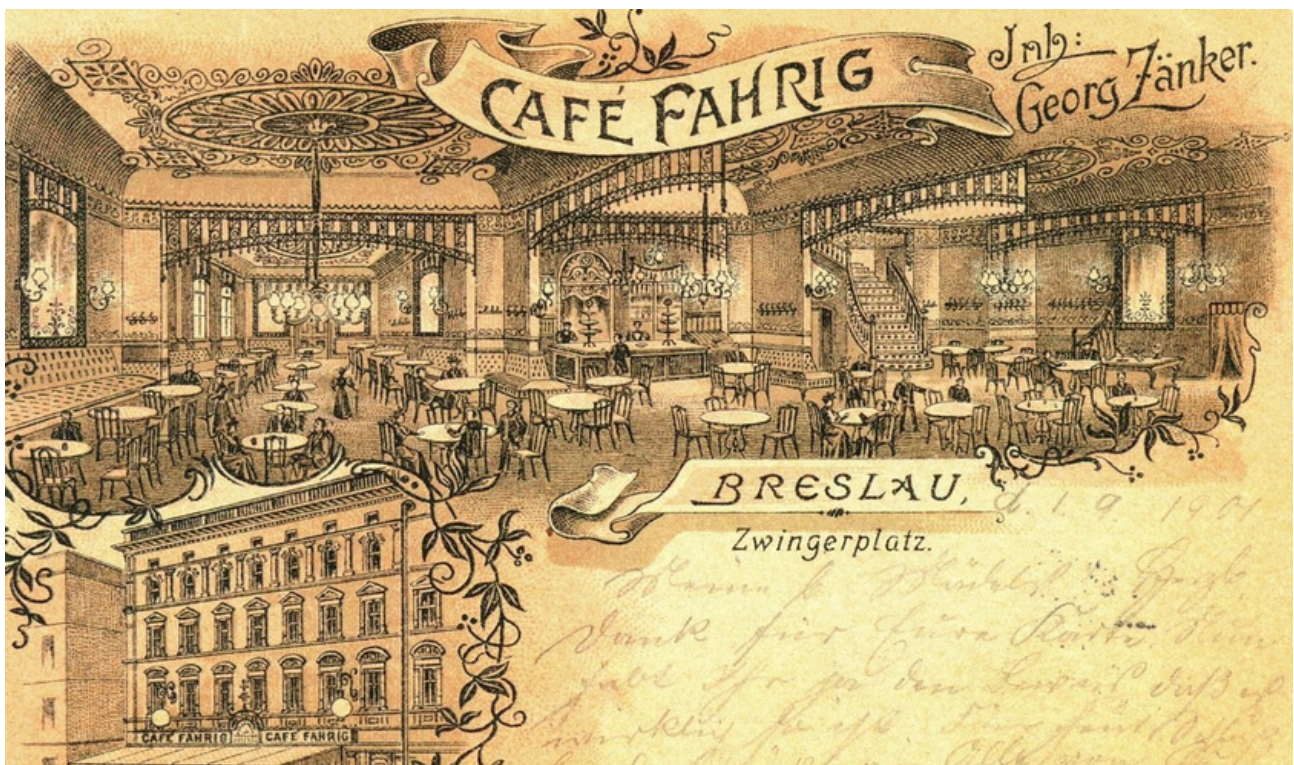
was an exceptional example of the city tenement mansion, accepted for use as of 1873. Located on the intersection of today's pl. Teatralny and ul. Świdnicka, the tenement house belonged to Moritz Sachs, a banker and tycoon well-known in Wrocław. He also owned a tenement house on the main square, where he sold clothes, among others. On the ground floor, the tenement house at pl. Teatralny housed a very popular Café Fahrig, as well as stores, an auction house, and business premises, and higher floors included high-standard apartments. Later, the building started to become a meeting place for Wrocław's intellectual and artistic elite, and the Sachs were famous for their support of art and local artists. Moritz Sachs's granddaughter Clara Sachs, was one of the most famous pre-war painters in Wrocław. Unfortunately, in the 1930s, the Nazis confiscated the family wealth and took over the tenement house. The building survived the war in good condition and today, after renovation, remains the subject of admiration.



Old Fränckl Foundation Tenement House



Old Sachs Tenement House



Café Fahrigr

Department stores

It's one of numerous examples of how fully Jews assimilated and functioned undisturbed in the city life; they did not create trade and services infrastructure exclusively in the Jewish district, but spread it to the city centre. Edifices and tenement houses built specially to orders were located at renowned addresses in the strict city centre and constituted its inherent part. Owners of department stores were often inspired by this type of entrepreneurships from western Europe. Quite often, they also introduced innovations and new sale methods focused on the client. The largest department stores also included cafes, restaurants, and service points, which made Wrocław's residents eager to spend their free time there with family and friends. Wrocław residents eagerly used the highest-quality services and products, and the family businesses run from generation to generation functioned perfectly until the Nazis came to power. Among the many department stores owned by Jewish residents of pre-war Wrocław, it is worth mentioning:

Rudolf Petersdorff department store (today's Kameleon)

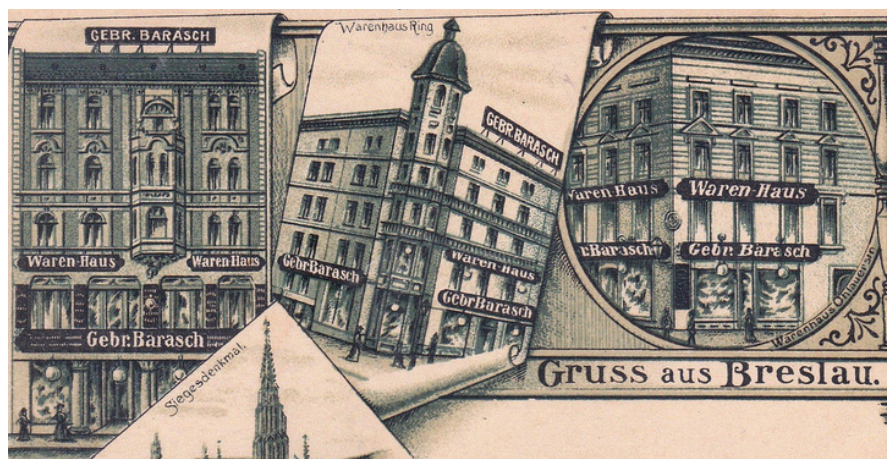
was created in 1928, designed by an outstanding German architect of a Jewish descent, Erich Mendelsohn. Like many architects of a Jewish descent, Mendelsohn ran away from Nazi Germany, thanks to which he survived the war and realized his projects among others in Israel, where he built the buildings of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the house of the first president of Israel Chaim Weizmann, and the part of the Weizmann Institute campus. The interior of the Petersdorff department store has been styled by a renowned Wrocław expressionist Heinrich Tischler. It was an outstanding trade centre, directing its services to all Wrocław residents – around Christmas, it was decorated with Christmas trees, and with Easter bunnies around Easter time. This great and modern building with numerous rhythmic glass panels was a subject of pride in the city. It still remains one of the most interesting buildings which survived the war. After the Nazis came to power, anti-Jewish picketing was organized by the department store, and later the owner was forced to sell the building.

Barasch Brothers' Department Store (today's Feniks)

was opened in 1904 and was the first such big department store in Silesia. This unusually functional and majestic building was a pride of the main square. Brothers Arthur and Georg Barasch were not born in Wrocław, but they quickly became members of local elite. They also owned a chain of shops across Germany, already in those times known as “the commercialism temples”. The department store was built on the property which had previously housed a so-called warehouse of new items belonging to another Jewish merchant, Moritz Sachs. Sachs' granddaughter was a well-known artist from Wrocław Clara Sachs. Barasch Brothers' Department Store, designed by Georg Schneider, underwent numerous renovations (among others, the facade reconstruction or the deconstruction of the large illuminated glass globe, which was damaged when hit by a lightning), but remained one of secession gems of the city centre. Barasch Brothers' department store had not had any competition regarding its size until Wertheim department store (today's Renoma) was opened in 1929. As a result of Aryanization in 1936, Artur and Georg Barasch had to sell the building to non-Jewish tycoons. During the period of persecution, Georg Barasch managed to escape from the Nazis to Ecuador, while Artur Barasch was sent to Auschwitz, where he was murdered in 1942.



Rudolf Petersdorff Department Store (N. Lindner)



Barasch Brothers' Department Store

Trautner Department Store (Rynek 49)

was built on Louis Cohn's order in 1901. It was designed by brothers, Richard and Paul Ehrlich. Before the construction, this property had been occupied by a tenement house which was demolished in order to build a new, modernist, and rich in ornaments building. The Trautner department store, like the one belonging to the Barasch brothers, was topped with an illuminated globe. On its upper floors there were production rooms for women's and men's clothes, while lower floors housed stores. The tenement house belonged to Willy Cohn's family of Willy Cohn, the author of *No Justice in Germany: The Breslau Diaries*. Today, the façade features a memory plaque of the chronicler of the pre-war Wrocław, murdered with his family in Kovno in 1941.



Trautner Department Store (N. Lindner)



Willy Cohn



Barasch Brothers' Department Store before the war

Louis Lewy Junior Department Store (Rynek 39–40)

was designed in 1904, combining modernist style with neo-gothic and secession. Before its construction, there had been two smaller tenement houses there. They were demolished to build a magnificent double building which work perfectly as a department store. Louis Lewy Junior's company, later run by his son Otto, produced women's coats and other clothing products. It was allegedly the best such company in the whole Silesia. There was a sewing room on the upper floors, and the highest quality products could be purchased downstairs. Lewy's family was forced to sell the tenement house to an Aryan company in 1938. The building survived the war in good condition.

Schlesinger & Grünbaum Department Store (Rzeźnicza 32/33)

was created in 1901. It sold high-quality textile products. The tenement house included production and sewing rooms, storage rooms, and stores. The department store worked till the 1930s, when the owners were forced to sell their property. This secession building designed by Leo Schlesinger was not seriously damaged during the war, as a result of which its architectonic value does not cease to amaze till today. Thanks to its extensive glazing panels, careful sculptures, and pillars, the building was one of the most important architectural realizations of this type in pre-war Germany.

Paul Schottländer Department Store

located on the corner of today's ul. Świdnicka and ul. Ofiar Oświęcimskich was opened at the end of the 19th century. Paul had inherited his family's fortune, collected by his father Julius Schottländer, one of the most outstanding and influential figures in the pre-war Wrocław. Paul himself was a philosopher and philanthropist, an honorary senator of the University of Wrocław, and a successful businessman. His department store functioned till 1927.



Old Louis Lewy Jr. Department Store (N. Lindner)



Old Schlesinger & Grünbaum Department Store



Old Paul Schottländer Department Store

Julius Schottländer Department Store

was located in the tenement house at today's ul. Świdnicka 32 since 1911. The building had been designed by Richard and Paul Ehrlich, and it housed, among others, a fashion house, an art gallery, and a cafe. Unfortunately, Julius Schottländer did not live to see the opening of the department store, as he had died before the building was completed. The building still reminds of Wrocław's former splendour and prosperity. The Schottländer family tomb can be found on the Old Jewish Cemetery.

Wertheim Department Store (today's Renoma)

was established by a company from Berlin belonging to the Wertheim family. It quickly became one of the symbols of Wrocław. Operating from 1930, this modernist trade and service centre had been created according to the design by Hermann Dernburg. The Wertheim family revolutionized the sale system at the beginning of the 20th century, as the prices in their stores were low and pre-established, goods were placed on display, and the customers could touch them and check them before purchase. However, the company success was met with growing anti-Semitic attacks and calls for boycotting the store. Despite this situation, the building still definitely encouraged people to visit – apart from the stores, there were also restaurants and service facilities.



Old Julius Schottländer Department Store (N. Lindner)

Unfortunately, its glory did not last long, because during the Nazi rule, the Wertheim department store was taken over and run by an Aryan company. In 1945, the interior of the department store burned down, while only its facade and structure survived. Despite the damage, the building is still considered one of the most interesting examples of European modernism.



Barasch Brothers' Department Store



Trautner Department Store



Wertheim Department Store before the war



Old Wertheim Department Store (N. Lindner)



Wertheim Department Store before the war



Old Barasch Brothers' Department Store

Jewish Museum and Jewish art collectors

The development of the Jewish community in Wrocław took place in many more areas than just in the growth of trade and outstanding entrepreneurships. Wealthy Wrocław residents also included many art and culture lovers. In majestic villas, they stored extraordinary collections of European paintings, which the most important art galleries would be proud of. Their far-reaching engagement in the development of cultural life was visible in their care to ensure that Wrocław residents could easily access cultural goods, for example by co-organizing exhibitions or participating in the creation and managing of a very important institution – the Jewish Museum.

In 1928, the Jewish Museum Association was created, which was a formal basis for the creation of the institution. The position of the director was held by the art collector and patron, Max Silberberg. Museum inauguration took place a year later, and the first exhibition, organized on a grand scale, presented the history of Jews in Silesia between 1050 and 1850. Exhibits were presented in the Silesian Museum of Fine Arts. The objective of the institution was to present cultural, intellectual, and material heritage of Silesian Jews who, through the collections of artefacts, starting with Judaica and synagogalia, through archives and documents, ending with artworks, started to determine their identity and history. It should be emphasized that it was also an important institution for non-Jewish city residents, enriching Wrocław's cultural offer, as the city dynamically developed and aspired to compete with other big and modern German metropolises. The museum also initiated the organization of meetings and cultural events, unified the artistic environment, and helped to initiate cooperation with other similar institutions in the country. Activities in this area also proved that the Jewish life was not only concentrated around synagogues and religious events, but also focused on secular and urban actions.

After Nazis' rise to power, Jews were banned from organizing exhibitions in the Silesian Museum of Fine Arts, so the new seat was found in the tenement house owned by the Jewish commune at today's ul. Grabiszyńska 61–65. The Nazis' objective was not only Aryanization and takeover of Jewish properties, but also the complete liquidation of Jews' cultural and intellectual heritage. Rapidly intensifying anti-Semitic movements, persecution, and confiscation of property gradually made the functioning of the institution impossible. In 1938, the Nazis finally closed the institution and confiscated collected exhibits. A small part of them can be found today in private collections and institutions around the world.

Max Silberberg (ul. Kutnowska 1-3)

Max Silberberg was one of the most prominent art patrons in Wrocław. He actively participated in city's cultural life. He enriched the collection of the Silesian Museum of Fine Arts with numerous great works of European fine arts. He also co-created the Jewish Museum and supported the collection of this institution not only with his artistic craftsmanship exhibits, but also with paintings by German Jews. His great passion for art was not only limited to the interior of his beautiful villa by Park Południowy, as he eagerly lent his artworks to be exhibited around the world.

His art collection was undoubtedly the biggest private collection in Wrocław, visited by numerous art critics and patrons. It is estimated that he had around 250 artworks, including 130 impressionist paintings. In those times, it was an extremely valuable collection, graced by works by such masters as Renoir, Monet, Pissarro, Degas, Rodin, Sisley, van Gogh, Picasso, Delacroix, Klimt, and many other outstanding artists.

After the Nazis came to power, Max Silberberg was forced to leave the villa where the NSDAP security service was later headquartered. His company was subject to Aryanization and his works were sold for next to nothing at Nazi art auctions in Berlin. Silberberg's son managed to flee to the Great Britain, but Max Silberberg himself in 1941 was sent to the Theresienstadt camp, and then to Auschwitz, where he was murdered.



Former Max Silberberg villa

Carl Sachs (ul. Januszowicka 18)

Carl Sachs was an exceptional cosmopolitan. He spoke many languages, often travelled and was a renowned member of the elite society. He was surrounded by numerous artists, thanks to which he could buy artworks directly from them. He created a well-thought-out and planned collection, and the walls of his villa were decorated with both the most important canvases and numerous engravings. Like Max Silberberg, he often shared his wealth and made works available for exhibitions at the Silesian Museum of Fine Arts, and his collection enriched the cultural life of the city.

French impressionists were at the heart of his collection, including some of the most important names such as: Monet, Renoir, Delacroix, Pissaro, and Sisley. Apart from that, his collections included the works by Whistler, Munch, Picasso, and van Gogh. An enormous collection of graphics and drawings by German artists was given by Carl Sachs to the Silesian Museum of Fine Arts. He deposited some of the most valuable paintings in Zurich, when he realized that his properties are at risk of being taken over as a part of Jewish property take-over by the Nazis.

High taxes imposed on Jewish citizens almost led him to bankruptcy. Carl Sachs saved himself from the war and Holocaust by fleeing to Switzerland, where he died in 1943. A part of collections of one of the most important art collectors in Wrocław was taken over by Nazis.



Former Carl Sachs villa

Emil Kaim (ul. Januszowicka 16)

The remains of Emil Kaim's house unfortunately include only a decorated entrance. However, we can imagine that neighbouring Carl Sachs's property, there was a majestic villa, which also was a home to numerous outstanding works of art. It was also a regular meeting place of the artistic and intellectual elite.

Emil Kaim supported not only young and aspiring artists, but he was also involved in the operation of the Jewish Museum. He was a bibliophile and collected books. It is estimated that his library included over 1500 books, not only professional literature, but also fiction. Most of his collected artworks were the paintings of German artists.

After the war started, Nazis confiscated his properties and transferred it to the Silesian Museum of Fine Arts, and to private owners. When Kaim was captured and transported to Theresienstadt, he managed to get help and flee from death to Switzerland.

Did you know?

Many inhabitants of Wrocław sponsored cultural events, supported financially local artists and the art market, and also acted for the establishment and maintenance of the Jewish Museum in Wrocław. Collectors also donated valuable works to the Silesian Museum of Fine Arts.



Fragments of Emil Kaim villa

Leo Lewin (al. Akacjowa 12)

Nearby there is also the residence of Leo Lewin, and his collections were the first widely discussed ones in the city. He started with German creators, who were very close to his heart, but later, like most art patrons, he collected also other European paintings. He also supported cultural development in Wrocław, often lent his collections for exhibitions in different institutions. He was an extremely active collector in the country, and in Wrocław, he contributed to the creation of the Jewish Museum.

His house featured the works of the most outstanding artists, such as: van Gogh, Munch, Picasso, Daumier, Monet, and Renoir. Leo Lewin also owned Rembrandt's and Delacroix' drawings. However, he collected not only the works of art, but also books; his library was also famous and admired by the representatives of local cultural groups.

However, during the economic crisis, he decided to sell some of his possessions, and Max Silberberg was often happy to buy some of his paintings. In the 1930s, Lewin managed to protect a part of his collection from Aryanization. Before the war broke out, he had run away with his family to the Great Britain, taking also some of his artworks.



Former Leo Lewin villa

Leo Smoschewer (ul. Kasztanowa 5)

Leo Smoschewer lived for a short time in a majestic villa. His company producing locomotives was extremely prosperous. The art collector also lived in a nearby villa at ul. Lipowa, but it did not survive the war. This entrepreneur promoted art, supported young aspiring artists, and also contributed to the creation of the Jewish Museum. He also gave away a lot of works of art to the Silesian Museum of Fine Arts.

He was mainly interested in the German painters, but he also collected judaica, which he used to lend to the Jewish Museum. Visitors to his villa could admire paintings by Corinth, Liebermann, or Slevogt. His art collections also included sculptures. Leo Smoschewer died in 1938, and his wife inherited his collection of paintings. However, Nazis took away her property; a year later she committed suicide and their children fled abroad.

Feldbahnen für Industrie, Land- und Forstwirtschaft	Koleje polowe dla przemysłu, rolnictwa i przemysłu leśnego
Spezialität: Rüben- u. Kartoffeltransportbahnen Langholztransportwagen Kippwagen * Waggonen	Spezialność: Kolejki przenośne dla buraków i ziemniaków Wozy przewozowe dla dłużyc Wózki wywracalne * Wagony
Lokomotiven jeder Art und Spur	Lokomotywy wszelkiego rodzaju i rozmiaru
Smoschewer & Co., Breslau XIII	

Smoschewer's Advertisement



Former Leo Smoschewer villa

Paul Ehrlich (ul. Jastrzębia 18-20)

Visiting the Borek neighbourhood, it's also worth stepping by a beautifully preserved villa of one superb Jewish architect. In the close vicinity, you can find a house of Paul Ehrlich, one of the most famous architects of pre-war Wrocław. He usually worked together with his brother Richard. Wrocław is still graced with numerous private and public buildings created based on the architectonic ideas of the Ehrlich brothers. They realized orders for the Jewish commune (including, among others, the complex of building by the White Stork Synagogue at ul. Włodkowica and the Jewish hospital at ul. Sudecka), but also designed projects for private persons (among others in the Borek district, such as a villa at ul. Kasztanowa 23 and villa at ul. Jaworowa 9-11). Both brothers were deported and murdered in Theresienstadt.

Park Południowy

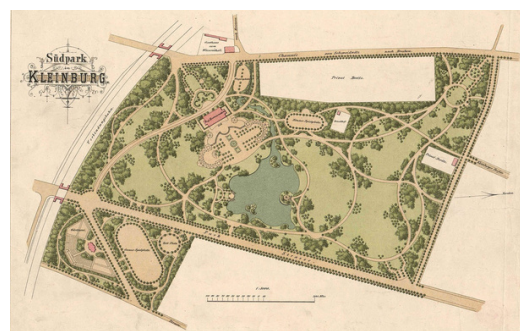
The southern part of Wrocław was often chosen by Jewish bourgeoisie as a place of residence. This area around Park Południowy housed the villas of the wealthiest entrepreneurs, but also numerous Jewish institutions. In the close vicinity, there was also a hospital, cemetery, schools, nursing homes, and foundations.



Former Paul Ehrlich villa (N. Lindner)

Julius Schottländer, one of the wealthiest Wrocław residents of those times, was also a representative of the Jewish community. He started this housing complex, offering a great piece of land to the city, a part of which was supposed to be developed, and the rest was designed as Park Południowy. Together with professor Ferdinand Julius Cohn, a superb botanist and an honorary Wrocław citizen, they are the main designers of the park which has always been – now and in the past – an oasis where you can peacefully take a break from the city hustle. This place has been on the list of Wrocław's landmarks for twenty-five years.

The project of the park was typical for the way of planning urban green areas in those times and it mirrored Silesian geographical characteristics, including a low-lying swampy part with a pond, a forest part, and a mountainous area with an artificially created hill in the southern part of the park. This place was famous for its extensive selection of types of trees, beautiful alleys, and impressive landscape architecture. The carefully planned panorama could easily be admired in a majestic Haase's restaurant, located by the pond since 1945, a central point of the park. In the northern part, there was Schottländer's Pavillon commemorating the sponsor of many objects located in the southern part of Wrocław. A monument in honour of Ferdinand Julius Cohn was also erected in the park, but in 1938, in the wake of anti-Semitic outrage, it was destroyed by the Nazis.



Plan of Park Południowy



Pre-war postcard

Old Jewish Cemetery

The Old Cemetery is undoubtedly one of the landmarks of Jewish Wrocław. Entered into the historic sites (monument) register, this cemetery is an exceptional evidence of the complexity of pre-war life among the community of Wrocław Jews. It was created in 1856, when the cemetery grounds were still beyond the city borders. The last burials took place there in 1942, when the Jewish community had almost been completely eliminated.

Approximately 12,000 tombstones are characterized by great diversity, which may indicate not only the size of the Jewish commune, but also its diversity and growing wealth. The gravestones include both traditional and modern ones, both modest and extremely elaborate. They often emphasize profession, education, social position or national affiliation. The oldest ones are typical stone matzevahs with Hebrew inscriptions, but the later ones are often built in accordance with secular architectonic trends of ancient, medieval (Neo-Gothic and Neo-Romanesque), Renaissance, Neo-Baroque, Neoclassical, Secession, or Moorish revival style typical for Sephardic Jews. Social and moral transformation of the diaspora are well visible on the cemetery – they can be expressed, for example, by bilingual tomb inscriptions, an elaborate and non-traditional tomb forms, at times completely refraining from Jewish symbolism and aiming at universalism. This Jewish cemetery also includes majestic mausoleums, family tombs, and magnificent sarcophagi. Today, the cemetery walls feature in-built medieval matzevahs – one of the oldest Jewish tombs in Wrocław found in the city.



Old Jewish Cemetery

Can the cemetery be treated as a community's collective portrait? Investigating the biographies of people buried there, it is often possible to come across outstanding people not only from the Jewish community. Wrocław Jewish society included scientists and rabbis, professors and lecturers of both the University of Wrocław and Jewish Theological Seminary, numerous bankers and merchants, important members of cultural and artistic circles, political activists and philanthropists, social activists and founders of important charity organizations. The list of distinguished people buried on this cemetery is an unquestionable proof of how important, highly developed and influential city was Wrocław in the 19th century and at the beginning of the 20th century. Unfortunately, this time of prosperity did not last long. The evening of the cemetery's functioning came with the Second World War; first Wehrmacht created a warehouse in the administration building, and then, in 1945, the cemetery witnessed the fight of Festung Breslau and served as Nazis' fortress. In the period of the Polish People's Republic (PRL), the cemetery was supposed to be destroyed, but the plan did not work out and in 1975, it was entered into the register of city's historic sites. It was only in the 1980s that the renovation works started, and today the cemetery functions as the Museum of Cemetery Art belonging to the City Museum of Wrocław.



Old Jewish Cemetery



Matzevah from Middle Ages



Old Jewish Cemetery

From among many outstanding personas buried on the cemetery, some of them include:

Isidor and Neander Alexander – founders of Bank Alexanderhaus

Leopold Auerbach – a biology and histology professor, a neurologist

Benno Badt – a teacher and the author of Bible for children

Oscar Berger – a neurology professor, a neuropathologist

Marcus Brann – a historian, a lecturer at the Jewish Theological Seminary, he also investigated Jewish history in Silesia

Moritz Isaak Caro – a philanthropist, founder of many charity organizations, among others, of an orphanage

Ferdinand Julius Cohn – a botany professor, one of the bacteriology creators, co-designer of the project for Park Południowy

Daniel Fränkel – a rabbi, lecturer at the Jewish Theological Seminary

Wilhelm Salomon Freund – a lawyer, politician, the head of the Silesian Bar Association

Isidor Friedenthal – a royal commercial counsellor, president of Wrocław Chamber of Commerce

Markus Bär Friedenthal – a banker, merchant, writer, and humanist

Joseph Gotthelf – a merchant and philanthropist

Georg Gottstein – a surgeon, head of the Jewish hospital for many years

Jacob Gottstein – an otorhinolaryngology professor, physician



Tombstone of Alexander Family



Tombstone of Heinrich Heimann



Tombstone of Kauffmann Family



Tombstone of Ferdinand Cohn

Heinrich Graetz – a history professor, the author of the first and extensive analysis of the Jewish history

Jacob Guttman – a philosopher, rabbi, the head of the Association of Rabbis in Germany

Heinrich Heimann – a bank founder, trade advisor, vice-president of Wrocław Chamber of Commerce, philanthropist

David Honigsmann – a writer, lawyer, co-founder of the German and Israeli Association of Communes

Saul Horovitz – a rabbi, lecturer at the Jewish Theological Seminary

Meyer Kauffmann – an entrepreneur, founder of clothes factories

Max Kayser – a political activist, editor

Friederike Kempner – a writer, poet, social activist

Ferdinand Lassalle – a socialist activist, founder of the first workers' party with, among others, Otton von Bismarck

Abraham Moritz Levy – a history professor, researcher of antiquity, author of many studies

Pinchas Neustadt – a rabbi, founder of a private synagogue and school

Paula Ollendorf – a social activist, founder of, among others, a house for illegitimate children

Felix Priebatsch – a historian, publisher, author of many studies

Fedor Pringsheim – a banker, co-founder of supervisory boards, city councilor

Jacob Rosanes – a math professor and rector of the University of Wrocław

Ferdinand Rosenthal – a rabbi, lecturer at the Jewish Theological Seminary

Clara Sachs – a painter

Eduard Sachs – a head of Healthcare Centre and Funeral Association, philanthropist

David Samosz – a writer, poet, translator

Julius Schottländer – a merchant, creator of, among others, Park Południowy, philanthropist

Auguste and Siegfried Stein – Edith Stein's parents

Gedalje Tiktin – a rabbi, the first country royal rabbi for Silesia



Tombstone of Ferdinand Lassalle



Tombstone of Clara Sachs



Old Jewish Cemetery

New Jewish Cemetery

New Cemetery at ul. Lotnicza is an exceptional place for many reasons. It was created at the beginning of the 20th century as the cemetery of the German Jewish commune, and today it is used by Polish Jews. On the cemetery, we can see over 100-year-old tombs, as well as Polish tombs from recent decades. However, the history was not easy for this place – in PRL, matzevahs were often devastated, and many of them were completely destroyed. Though the cemetery infrastructure buildings have also been damaged, this place is still evidence of continuous Jewish presence in Wrocław. First burials took place there as early as in 1902, when the place belonged to the village of Cosel, still outside the city borders. Currently, the cemetery is one of the biggest Jewish graveyards in Poland entered into the register of historic sites. It had been designed by a renowned Wrocław architect, Paul Ehrlich.



Did you know?

As in the slightly older cemetery on Ślężna Street, here we can also find a wealth of tombstone architecture, both modest and ornate monuments, as well as the graves of many famous Wrocław Jews.



New Jewish Cemetery

The list of notable people buried there is quite long and shows that the city was an important place on the map of Jewish life both before and after the war. Victims of both wars are also buried on this cemetery. Both civilians and soldiers who fought for their German motherland during the First World War have been buried in honorary spots. What draws attention is a centrally located monument to the memory of Jewish soldiers, topped with a magnificent dome. Also, the Holocaust survivors have been buried on this cemetery – both in nameless graves and in commemorative plaques built-in cemetery walls to the memory of Nazis' victims. From 1996, the cemetery has formally belonged to the Jewish Community of Wrocław and serves not only for Wrocław Jews, but is also a burial site for those from residing in other Lower Silesian towns.



New Jewish Cemetery



New Jewish Cemetery



New Jewish Cemetery

Just as on the slightly older cemetery at ul. Ślężna, also here the cemetery architecture is exceptionally diverse, with both simple and elaborate tombs. A unique feature in this Lower Silesian cemetery is the only ohel in this region. It is a brick tomb with doors, erected usually over the tombs of tzadiks or merited rabbis. Wrocław's ohel is placed over a woman's grave of Mina Cira Majzel, a wife of the chief rabbi in Łódź, who has been remembered by the society as a reverent person famous for her beneficence. Another interesting object preserved till today is a great ruined pre-funeral house. Among the cemetery infrastructure which has not survived over the time, it is worth mentioning the administration building, where Nazis organized a storage for commune documents. Perhaps that saved them from destruction during the war, so that they could be deposited to the Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw.

From among many outstanding personas buried on the cemetery, some of them include:

Carl Bibersfeld – a poet, essayist, editor

Jacob Caro – a historian, researcher of Polish history, professor at the University of Wrocław



New Jewish Cemetery



Ohel of Mina Cira Majzel



New Jewish Cemetery

Leopold Cohn – a philologist, lecturer at the University of Wrocław and the Jewish Theological Seminary

Elza Erlich – a lawyer, social activist

Jacob Freudenthal – a philosopher, professor at the University of Wrocław, lecturer at the Jewish Theological Seminary

Rachela Miriam Fuchs – a granddaughter of a well-known Ciechanów and Stryków tzadik Zeew Wolf Landau

Aron Heppner – a rabbi, teacher, historian, and archivist

Theodor Loewe – a philosopher, director of Wrocław's theatres, organizer of cultural life

Mina Cira Majzel – the wife of the chief rabbi of Łódź

Jakub Rotbaum – a painter and theatre director

Ernst Steiniz – a mathematician

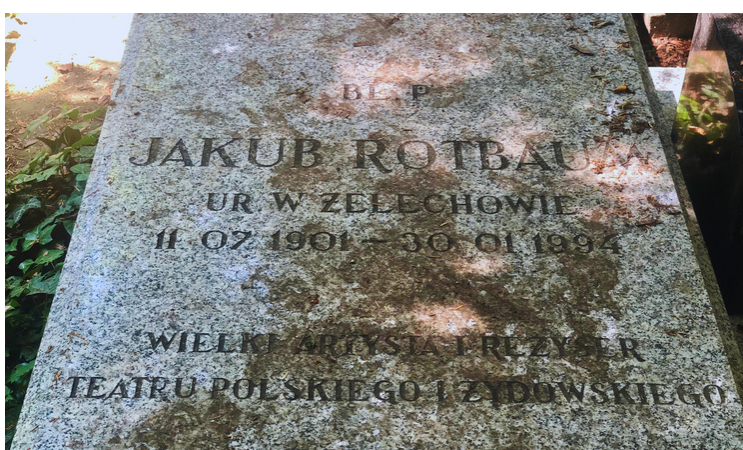
Heinrich Tischler – a painter

Maksymilian Wojnaralski – ballroom dance teacher, the founder of the first post-war school of ballroom dance

Moses Samuel Zuckerman – rabbi and Talmudist



Tombstone of Heinrich Tischler



Tombstone of Jakub Rotbaum

לזכר עולם

בשנות תש"ג-תש"ד (1943-1944)
עשרים ואחד יידישן תושבין ברסלאו
נטמנו כאן בחלקה 26 ובחלקות סמוכות
ע"י מנהיג שארית הקהילה מר ארווין לודנובסקי
אשר גורש ע"י הצורה וגורלו לא נודע
אירגון יוצאי ברסלאו בישראל תש"כ

Hermann	Ball	28.03.1944	Paula	Löbner	04.02.1944
Barbara	Cohn	23.09.1943	Sigmund	Londner	14.10.1943
Bruno	Cohn	07.11.1944	Dr. Arthur	Masur	31.03.1944
Arnold	Ehrmann	21.11.1944	Herbert	Prinz	04.10.1943
Emil Isidor	Eisner	29.11.1943	Irma	Rosenthal	15.06.1943
Franz	Friedländer	14.08.1943	Sally	Sabor	30.08.1943
Dr. Joseph	Garnmann	01.12.1944	Frank-Georg	Sander	24.02.1944
Emil	Gattel	20.09.1943	Eugenie	Schembeck	24.02.1944
Otto	Guttman	22.08.1944	Adolf	Wenglowitz	04.02.1944
Jettel	Hilbig	23.07.1943	Leo	Witkowski	14.10.1943
Josef	Kempinski	08.03.1944	Unknown person*		03.07.1944

* אלמונית נקברה בזהות חיה טייכמן אשר כך ניצלה מרדיפה והתיישבה עם משפחתה בארץ

* Nieznana osoba została pochowana jako Chaja Teichmann, która dzięki temu ocalała i osiadła wraz z rodziną w Izraelu

* Eine Unbekannte wurde statt Chaja Teichmann beerdigt, wodurch diese der Verhaftung entging und mit ihrer Familie in Israel fortlebte

Na wieczną pamięć

W latach 1943-44 dwudziestu jeden
żydowskich mieszkańców Wrocławia zostało
pochowanych na działce 26 i jej sąsiedztwie.
Zajmujący się pochówkiem Erwin Ludnowsky
został deportowany i jego los jest nieznany

Stowarzyszenie Byłych Wrocławian w Izraelu 2012

In ewigem Andenken

In den Jahren 1943-44 wurden hier auf und
neben Feld 26, einundzwanzig jüdische
Breslauer unter der Leitung
von Herrn Erwin Ludnowsky, Vorsteher
der restlichen Gemeinde, bestattet.
Er selbst wurde deportiert und ist verschollen

Verband ehemaliger Breslauer in Israel 2012

Jewish life after the war

What was life like after the biggest tragedy in the history of the Jewish nation? After the end of the Second World War, Holocaust Survivors started to rebuild their life – both individual one and the social one. An important place of this reconstruction included Lower Silesia, where the Survivors formed so-called Jewish settlements. Though a dynamic period of Jewish settlement did not last long, it was a very important moment in the history of Polish Jews. It is estimated that 100.000 Jews settled here, but the number was gradually decreasing over time. Jewish settlement included so many people and its cultural and intellectual capital was so great that Lower Silesia was the most important centre of post-war Jewish life in Europe.

This region seemed perfect for several important reasons: first of all, lands acquired after the war were subject to ethnic exchanges, so they could accommodate new settlements, with the use of basic infrastructure left by Germans. Another reason was the fact that many Jews did not want to return to their family lands, which they clearly associated with the Holocaust. During the war, Lower Silesia was a place where the Gross-Rosen concentration camp and its numerous subcamps were located – after the liberation Jews settled in the closest municipalities in the area. Settlement was also centrally controlled, as the authorities, on the one side, directed Jews who survived the war in the Soviet Union to Lower Silesia, and, on the other hand, supported extensive settlements directed by Jakub Egit, the head of the Voivodship Committee of Jews.



White Stork Synagogue during communist era (archives of Jewish Community)

Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland

Development of Jewish community resulting from actions of communist authorities was hindered in 1950. From this moment, Jews could be associated only in two organizations: in the Religious Association of Judaism (Związek Religijny Wyznania Mojżeszowego) or in the secular Social and Cultural Jewish Association (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów). Since that time, the aim of the organization was to cultivate Jewish culture, organize situational events, conducting lectures and language courses, commemorating important anniversaries and the fate of Jews after the Second World War.

In spite of many difficulties and unfavourable attitude of authorities, the life of Jews in Lower Silesia still went on possibly intensely as compared to other parts of the country. The organization was divided into separate sections, including, among others, youth or artistic ones, and at the end of the 1960s, the Association, with its seat at ul. Świdnicka, was a buoyantly operating centre, with numerous meetings, lectures, events taking place. Thanks to this organization, Jewish life did not stop completely in dark times of communism. Till today, the Association unites many members who both organize events for the Jewish community, and participate in commemorating important events in the Jewish history. The organization has its seat at ul. Mennicza (entrance from ul. Świdnicka).



Mural of Marek Edelman (N. Lindner)

"Niderszlezje" newspaper and publishing house

Important institutions under the auspices of the Voivodship Committee of Jews included also the publishing house and a Yiddish newspaper called "Niderszlezje", issued till 1950 in Wrocław. The Niderszlezje publishing house specializing in Yiddish publications of the Polish national coverage, in 1947 published Jakub Egit's famous work entitled "Ku nowemu życiu" (en. Toward a new life) describing the revival of Jewish life in Lower Silesia. Institution seats were located at the same street: editor's office was at ul. Włodkowica 7, and the publishing house office – at ul. Włodkowica 18.

Did you know?

In the seventies, Jewish life in the city disappeared. The nationalization of the White Stork Synagogue in 1974 was a great blow to the Jewish religious community. Few prayed in the shul that remained available, and its condition was not so dramatic. The secular community also faced problems.



Jakub Egit's famous book

Obywatele Żydzi!

Po niebywałym kataklizmie dziejowym, który tak boleśnie dotknął naród żydowski na całym świecie, a specjalnie Żydów w Polsce, resztki uratowanych Żydów przystąpiły do budowy nowego życia na Ziemiach Odzyskanych. Korzystając z możliwości, które daje nam nowa rzeczywistość polska, budujemy nasze życie kulturalne, tworząc cały szereg instytucji związanych z rozwojem kultury żydowskiej. Jedną z najbardziej cenionych instytucji kulturalnych jest teatr żydowski. W ciągu dwóch lat istnienia zespołu teatralnego społeczeństwo żydowskie, oceniając ogromny wkład tegoż zespołu w nasze życie kulturalne, pokochało ten zespół, czemu daje na każdym kroku wyraz.

Warunki, wśród których dotychczas pracował kolektyw naszego teatru były b. ciężkie. Najważniejszą rzeczą dla normalnego rozwoju każdej instytucji, a cóż dopiero teatru, jest własny budynek w którym-by artysta mógł spokojnie poświęcić się codziennej pracy, któryby stanowił jego warsztat pracy. W zrozumieniu tego Wojewódzki Komitet Żydów na Dolnym Śląsku przystąpił przed około rokiem do zrealizowania myśli o budowie własnego teatru żydowskiego we Wrocławiu. Po przezwyciężeniu różnych trudności Komitet Budowy wybrał odpowiedni budynek i posiadanyymi, szczupłymi narazie funduszami przystąpił do remontu tego budynku. Niestety, dotychczasowe prace wyczerpały istniejące fundusze i stanęliśmy w połowie roboty.

Zdając sobie w pełni sprawę z tego, jak drogą jest dla każdego Żyda każda nasza placówka kulturalna, a specjalnie teatr żydowski, postanowiliśmy zwrócić się do społeczeństwa żydowskiego, by pomogło w wykończeniu rozpoczętego dzieła. Postanowiliśmy rozpocząć szeroką akcję zbiórkową. Jesteśmy przekonani, że nikt nie uchyli się od szczytnego obowiązku, jakim jest umożliwienie normalnego rozwoju naszego życia kulturalnego, stworzenie centralnego Domu Kultury żydowskiej na Dolnym Śląsku.

**Prezydium
Wojewódzkiego Komitetu Żydów
we Wrocławiu**

**Komitet Budowy
Dolnośląskiego Teatru Żydowskiego**

Famous Wrocław residents

Not often do we ask the question how Wrocław would look like today without the impact and work of superb Jewish representatives of science, culture, and business at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Assimilated Jews actively participating in the development of the city and region undoubtedly went down in history. They were outstanding luminaries promoting Wrocław and making it famous on the map of Europe, though they are not always recognized as representatives of the Jewish community. It is also important to notice the contribution of women in the city development – their activity in culture, science, and social work has been undebatable till today. The number of Jews in Wrocław continued to grow gradually, reaching its peak at the beginning of the 1930s. Of course, it was a significantly diverse group when it comes to religious, national, cultural, or social identity. However, many Wrocław Jews primarily considered themselves German, and, thanks to their work and ambitions, went up to the top of their social ladder of those times.



Ferdinand Lassalle

Most of all, Wrocław could boast of its Noble winners: Max Born and Fritz Haber, as well as first-class scientists, such as Otto Stern, Ferdinand Cohn, Georg Gottstein, Siegmund Hadda, Jacob Caro, Heinrich Graetz, Clara Immerwahr-Haber, or Oscar Berger. Some outstanding European rabbis were also associated with Wrocław, including, for example, Abraham Geiger, Zacharias Frankel, Leo Baeck, and Manuel Joël.

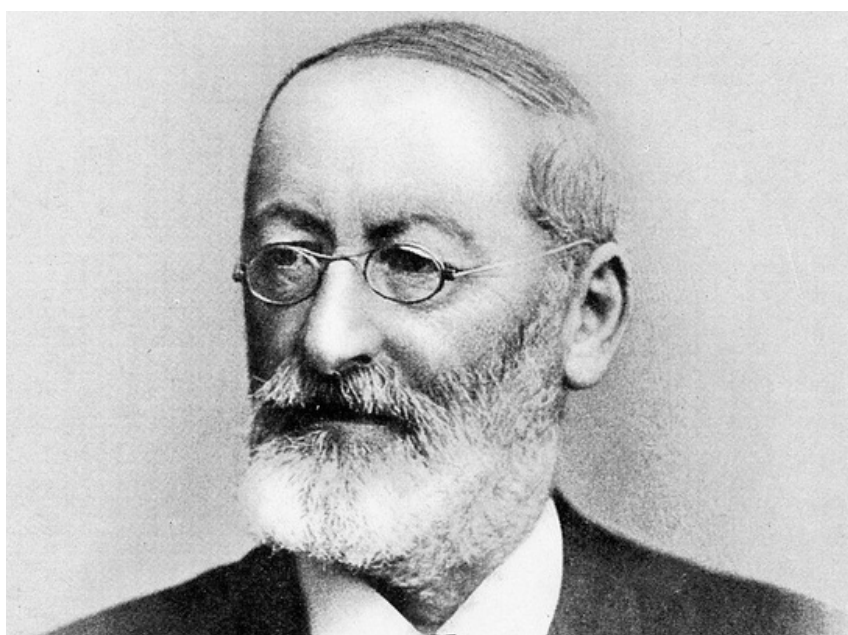
Of course, an undoubtedly exceptional and one of the most famous Wrocław individuals was Edith Stein. Culture was promoted by art patrons and artists who were also well-known in western circles: Clara Sachs, Eugen Spiro, Isidor Ascheim, and Heinrich Tischler. The pioneers of social and charity work included Beate Guttman, Paula Ollendorf, or Hedwig Engel. Ferdinand Lassalle and Max Kayser, in turn, made the city well-known on the European political level. The city council included, among others, Siegfried Haber, Sigismund Asch, Klara Eckstein, Anna Friedländer, and Salomon Freund. Wrocław was also famous for exceptionally talented entrepreneurs, the most important of whom included Julius Schottländer, Joseph Jonas Fränkl, the Kauffmann family, Leo Smoschewer, Albert Bauer, or Louis Galewsky.



Max Born

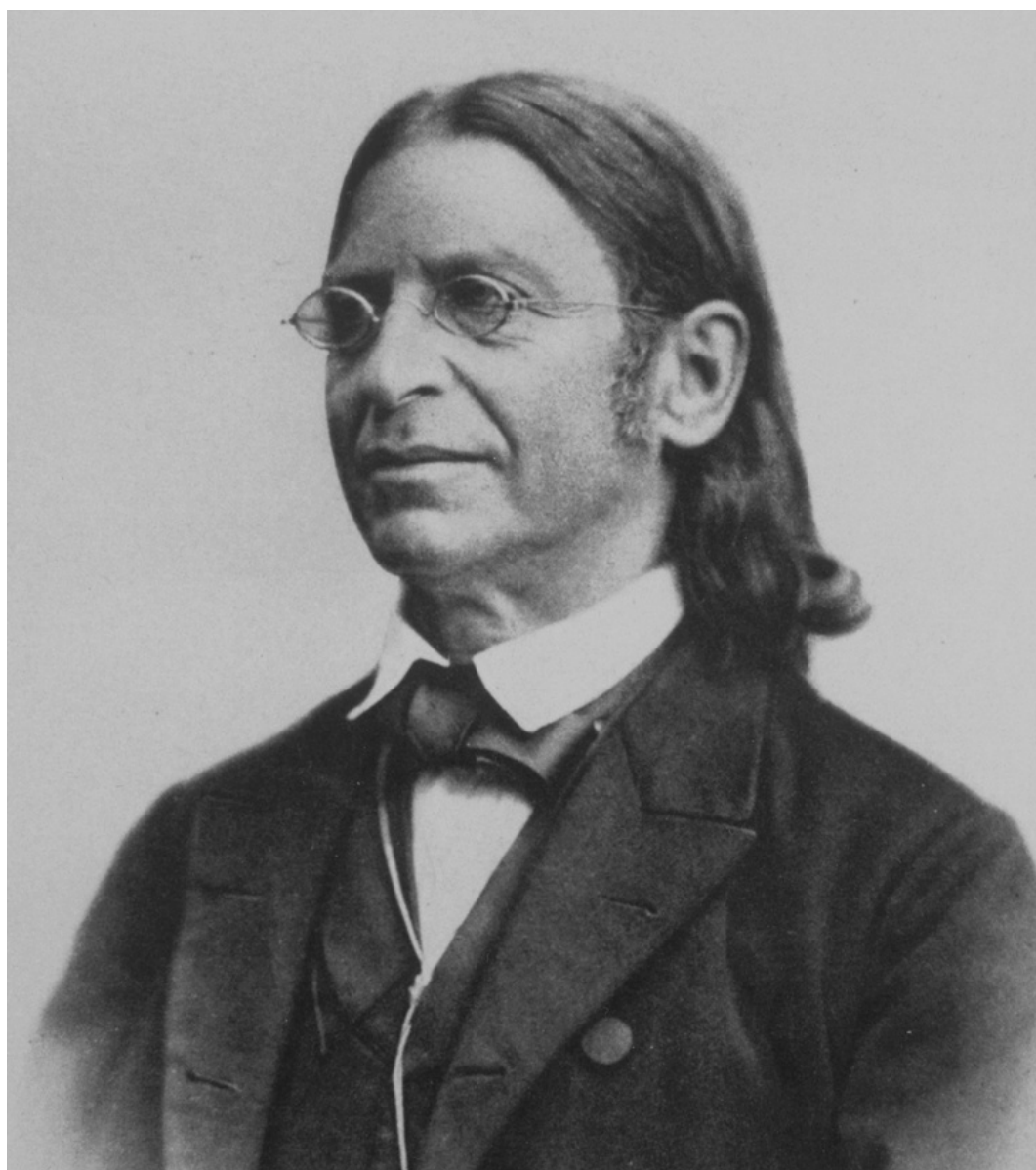


Edith Stein



Ferdinand Cohn

Considering a very short period of Jewish settlement in Wrocław after the Second World War, it seems quite natural that it was not possible for Jewish talents to flourish. Several years when the communist authorities allowed for the organization of Jewish world and building new life after the tragedy of Holocaust were certainly not enough. At the same time, it can easily be noticed that also at that time Wrocław was attracting outstanding individuals, for example from the cultural environment, such as Ida Kamińska, Lia and Jakub Rotbaum, or Sylwia Swen.



Abraham Geiger

What is now gone

On a more upsetting note, Jewish Wrocław can also be visited through the path of places which no longer exist. All heritage was destroyed by two totalitarian systems, and the history was not merciful to the Jewish community, especially in this part of Europe. Thus, going for a walk to see places where great and important Jewish monuments are missing, one can also realize not only how dramatic the 20th century was in the end, but also how important it is to take care of our heritage, of which we, as heirs, are responsible.

The lack of those places is manifested mostly in the elimination of former Jewish community which lived and co-created Wrocław in times before the war. After Nazis came to power, each following month and each anti-Semitic law, Jews' situation worsened, and the country politics successfully demoralized ordinary citizens, who, to a large extent, adopted discrimination and aggression towards Jews as right and necessary. In 1939, Jews were not allowed to use most of generally available public places, such as cinemas, libraries, theatres, or even benches in Wrocław's parks were marked with signs reading "not for Jews". Their kids could not use the playgrounds. Soon after that, Jews had to wear armbands with the star of David, which led to their stigmatization and treating with everyday direct aggression. In 1941, it was announced that Wrocław will be "cleared" out of Jews. It is estimated that most of Jews from Wrocław, during several years of Nazis' rule, left the city and only those who were left did not believe in the risk of being killed, or could not afford to leave or were stopped by their health condition. German meticulous administration system enabled them to find every person of Jewish origin and force them to "evacuate to the East", which actually meant deportations to transit ghettos or directly to concentration or extermination camps.

An increasingly popular way to commemorate murdered Jews in public space is the so-called memorial stone. Stolpersteine are small paving stones with a distinctive brass plaque, built into the sidewalks in front of houses where victims of Nazism lived before the war. Micro-monuments by Gunter Demnig inform about who lived in this place, as well as where and when they were murdered. In Wrocław, more and more Stolpersteine are mounted, and they can be found, among others, at ul. Świdnicka, ul. Zielińskiego, or ul. Jedności Narodowej. The first Wrocław memorial stone, located at ul. Nowowiejska, was devoted to Edith Stein who was murdered in Auschwitz.

Cemetery at ul. Gwarna

There are no remains after one of the most important historical cemeteries of Wrocław Jews. It used to be located at today's ul. Gwarna. It was a burial site of the merited for the Jewish community – mostly rabbis of Wrocław and Silesia, scientists, writers, teachers, doctors, social activists, and founders of the Jewish Theological Seminary.

The cemetery, established in 1761, operated for almost a hundred years until the opening of the Old Cemetery at today's ul. Ślężna. The cemetery at ul. Gwarna was officially opened by Rabbi Joseph Jonas Fränckel, who was buried there thirty years later. The cemetery contained over 4000 tombstones. A part of the cemetery was liquidated before the war by the Nazis, and the other part was demolished after the war by the communists, resulting in the devastating fact that only a few matzevahs survived from the historic graveyard. However, the bodies have never been moved to other cemeteries. One of the preserved matzevahs can be seen on the wall of St. Maurice's Church at ul. Traugutta. The remaining matzevahs were transported to the New Jewish Cemetery. Currently there is no sign of the former cemetery at ul. Gwarna, as this property has been used for the construction of a hotel, tennis courts, and housing development.



Non-existent Cemetery at Gwarna Street

New Synagogue

The second largest synagogue in the country – the New Synagogue at today's ul. Łąkowa – towered over the surrounding buildings and amazed with its dazzling architecture. Edwin Oppler's design was characterized by references to the Romanesque-Byzantine style. The New Synagogue, established in 1872 for liberal Jews, was one of the symbols of the multicultural city and was even featured on postcards. The wealth and majesty strongly emphasized the status of the Wrocław Jewish community, distinguishing it from other German cities. Also, Jews from nearby towns attended the New Synagogue. Prayers and concerts were often attended by even as much as 2000 people. Located close to the city centre, by the Jewish Commune building, and surrounded with a median strip, this synagogue was a true meeting place for the Jewish community.

Unfortunately, the New Synagogue is one of many victims of Nazism. The anti-Semitic dynamic directed aggression first at the richest and best-functioning Jewish institutions. And although in the 1930s the commune renovated the synagogue and rearranged its interior according to the design of the famous painter Heinrich Tischler, in 1938, during the Kristallnacht pogrom, the synagogue burst into flames, and then the Nazis planted explosives under it. So first they blew up the New Synagogue and then demolished its remains. Today, this place is a home to the monument commemorating the Kristallnacht victims – a monument to which a march is organized every year on 9th November to commemorate this tragic pogrom.



Memorial of the non-existent New Synagogue

Nearby the New Synagogue, there was also a religious school teaching Judaism. A liberal Jewish commune invited to religious courses conducted by superb lecturers: the first class was conducted by a well-known in Wrocław, long-term head of the school, dr Bendix Samuelsohn. He employed many rabbis to conduct classes for the Wrocław community. Advanced classes were conducted by rabbi and philosopher dr Jakob Guttman, who had graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary and from the University of Wrocław. For 27 years, he held the position of a rabbi in Wrocław liberal commune, and for 9 years – the position of the head of the Association of Rabbis' in Germany. His wife was also an outstanding person – Beate Guttman, social activist, founder of a philanthropic foundation and the house for single women. Classes taught by dr Samuelsohn took place in his apartment at today's ul. Kościuszki 6b. Classes taught by Jakob Guttman were conducted in educational rooms, and both those places were located nearby the New Synagogue. What is interesting, rabbi Jakob Guttman also lived in the school building (on the second floor). Both professors with their wives have been buried on the Old Jewish Cemetery at ul. Ślężna.



Non-existent New Synagogue

Jewish Theological Seminary

Today in Wrocław there is no trace of the university – unique on a European scale – educating rabbis and teachers. The Jewish Theological Seminary of the Fränkel Foundation, which was located at ul. Włodkowica, was established in 1854 and quickly became the centre of intellectual and religious life not only of Wrocław's Jews. The initiator of the seminary creation was Abraham Geiger – a visionary, founder of reform Judaism and a long-time rabbi of the liberal Jewish community in Wrocław. Later, however, he was excluded from making decisions about teaching at the Seminary because he promoted reform ideas. His plan for a radical renewal of Judaism was unfortunately not accepted by the conservative community, which constituted the majority of lecturers.

The innovative school, the first such school in Central Europe, led by Zechariah Frankl and quickly became one of the most important Jewish institutions in the world. The Seminary aims at modernizing rabbis' education so that their complex education in Jewish theology keeps up with the secular world. Its graduates included, among others: Leo Baeck, Jakob Guttman, Wilhelm Bacher, or Philipp Bloch. Each graduate was supposed to be a perfectly educated rabbi or teacher, but also to serve the Jewish community in a professional way.

Thanks to the dynamically operating and developing Seminary, Wrocław became one of the most important centres for teaching Jewish ideas. Later, European institutions took the Wrocław university as an example. Unfortunately, the Seminary shared the fate of all Jewish institutions in Wrocław: the university was devastated by Nazi militias during the Kristallnacht pogrom in November 1938 and, the same year, it was formally closed, although the last rabbinical smichahs were granted clandestinely in early 1939. Interestingly, the tenement house in which the school was located survived the war in good condition. It was only demolished by those implementing of the next regime, the communists. Today, the place of this exceptional rabbi's library is used as a parking lot.



Logo of the Jewish Seminary



Non-existent Jewish Seminary

Bank Alexanderhaus

Wrocław is also poorer by an exceptionally looking pre-war bank, located at today's Jan Paweł II square. The bank was founded by brothers, Henshel and Jacob Alexander, created in 1827 and kept operating there until the middle of the 19th century. It was an exceptional financial institution in pre-war Wrocław, and its owners were Isidor and Neander Alexander. The classicist building was destroyed during the war, and then fell into damage and ruin. Ultimately, it was demolished in the 1960s. The modern office building, which was built on the site of a Jewish bank, is called New Alexanderhaus. The Alexander family tomb is located in the Old Jewish Cemetery at ul. Ślężna. Interestingly, the tombstone features the bas-relief showing the building in which the bank used to be located.

Tack Department Store

Few people know that at the intersection of today's ul. Wita Stwosza and ul. Kuźnicza, there was an outstanding Jewish department store. However, before the phenomenal building of the Tack department store was built in 1903, there was a smaller also Jewish store in this spot. It was Emanuel Breslauer store. It is justified that the Tack department store resembles the one belonging to the Barasch brothers – it was designed by the same architect, Georg Schneider. Conrad Tack was an extremely dynamic entrepreneur and was successful in creating the first chain shoe store in Germany. His department store was bombed during the war and its remains were demolished after the war.



Non-existent Tack Department Store



Non-existent Bank Alexanderhaus

Conclusion

Places and people presented in this guide constitute only a part of Jewish heritage in Wrocław. I hope that this book will help Wrocław residents and tourist discover the history of Jews and notice that they significantly impacted the development of the capital of Lower Silesia. Even with the work of many historians, there are still places on the map of Wrocław which could be investigated more deeply and, quite often, discovered to have their connections with the Jewish culture. I will be immensely happy if this guide inspires readers to make their own discoveries and follow the path of history of Wrocław Jewish community.

I wish you fascinating discoveries and joy from learning more about Wrocław!



About the Author

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We do not have to be related by blood with the German Jews; it is enough that we are associated by the place. We do not have to think of them as *ancestors*; it is enough that they will be our *predecessors*.

Urszula Rybicka



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Urszula Rybicka is a publicist, reviewer, and educator. She has graduated from the University of Wrocław. She is a founder and editor of Żydoteka, the only Polish media about Jewish literature. Most of all, she tries to introduce readers to Jewish literature and culture. She gives lectures, organizes walks, workshops, and author's meetings devoted to Jewish-related topics. Urszula Rybicka co-operates with local, Polish state, and international institutions, as well as with diplomatic missions. She has twice been awarded with a scholarship of the Mayor of Wrocław. She is one of the Dialogue Leaders associated with the Dialogue Forum and was presented honourable mention POLIN Award 2021. The educator is also the author of the website www.zydowskiwroclaw.pl. The project "Jewish Wrocław: A Guide" was created in 2023 as part of the Artistic Scholarship of the Mayor of Wrocław.

In 2021, she founded Żydoteka Foundation to promote knowledge about Jewish culture and history. The main objective of the foundation is to build a competent and tolerant society through education and sharing knowledge. Żydoteka carries out a series of meetings of the Jewish Book Club, organizes the festival called Borek. Historia i sztuka (Borek: History and Art), and co-creates numerous cultural and artistic events. Her activities to promote and share knowledge about the Jewish culture are also visible in social media.

For further information check my websites:

- 01 www.zydowskiwroclaw.pl/en/
- 02 facebook.com/zydowskiwroclaw
- 03 facebook.com/zydoteka
- 04 instagram.com/zydoteka
- 05 twitter.com/zydoteka



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