



Коńskie (jidysz: Kinsk - קינסק / קיניצק)



# JEW S IN KOŃSKIE



**An information leaflet for the participants of a walking tour tracing back the history of the Jews in Końskie**

Developed by Rita Miernik, the author of the socio-historical project "Smutne Synagogi" (in English: "Sad Synagogues") within European Days of Jewish Culture organised by the Taube Center for Jewish Life and Learning. Translated by Anna Kania, Public Library in Końskie.

# JEWES IN KOŃSKIE

# 01

## · WHERE DID THEY COME FROM · Jews in Końskie

The Jewish community in Końskie began to form from the end of the XVI century. **Końskie, before 1748, was a private gentry village under the name of Końskie Wielkie**, which was passed from the Odrowąż family to the Szczawiński one and later to the magnate house of the Małachowskis.

Jan Małachowski was the Great Chancellor of the Crown who held office under the rule of Augustus III of Poland. It was a crucial function in the political apparatus of the state since the Chancellor not only dealt with foreign affairs of the kingdom but also took care of the rule of law in the country.

It was Końskie that Jan Małachowski retreated to from his duties. Thanks to his thriftiness and engagement he changed the image of Końskie from a gentry backyard to a fully-fledged town founded on the Magdeburg rights.

Małachowski turned Końskie into the centre of management of the neighbouring properties, which helped a lot to develop the region and strengthen its industrial potential. Polish noblemen often encouraged Jews to settle in their estate, counting on the improvement of its economic situation.

## · NUMBER OF JEWS · throughout XVI - XX centuries

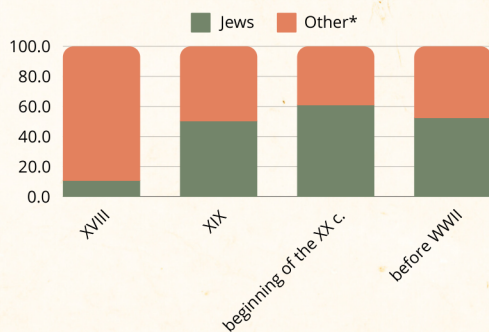
Małachowski allowed Jews to be located in his domain and decided on the related fees.

In the germ of the Końskie town there were about 1500 people living, including around 160 Jews (i.e. 11% of the town total population).

**The number of the Jewish inhabitants grew substantially and in 1921 already amounted to 5037 residents, which constituted 60,8% of the town people.**

After Kościeliska and Stary Młyn were joined to the Końskie domain, the number of Jews increased. It equalled 5314, making up 52,3% of the total.

In 1938 the Jewish population in the Końskie commune totalled 5600, which proved that just before WWII every second resident of Końskie was Jewish.



## · JEWS ACCOUNTED FOR 60% OF THE KOŃSKIE POPULATION at the beginning of the XX century



\*\* Other, because not only Catholics lived in Końskie but also e.g. members of the Orthodox Church who went to their Orthodox house of worship (of the Icon of the Mother of God, named in Polish "Znak" (meaning "sign" in English), to which there were 456 people belonging in 1913. The number was changing over time.

# • WHAT DID THE JEWS IN KOŃSKIE DO? •

Many people, trying to describe the fortunes of Jews, refer entirely to the XX century. However, Jews did not only live next to us in 1939. They established schools, bathhouses, cemeteries, workplaces, associations. In Koneskie they even had their own newspaper - Konsker Cajtung, written in Yiddish.

Trade was one of the main activities of the Końskie Jews. It took place at the market square, situated in a different place from the present one. The owners of the Końskie domain - the Małachowski family, in order to develop commerce in the town, in the year 1817 built Annotarg i.e. something in the shape of a cloth hall where tradesmen leased booths being the seat of their businesses.

Annotarg was located at Plac Kościuszki (the Kościuszko Square). In 1942 it was pulled down by the Germans.

## • JEWISH • FOUNDRIES i.e. the origin of KZO

The Końskie Jews contributed substantially to the creation of the Końskie industry, as indicated in a vast monograph of the Końskie iron foundry (**abbreviated in Polish as KZO**) which is "the heir to the tradition of all the three foundries merged into the present enterprise":

- "Słowianin" cast iron and enamelled castings factory established by Abraham Ajzenberg and Mojżesz Hochberg
- "Neptun" foundry owned by J. Mintz
- Factory for iron castings, agricultural machinery and fans, founded by Szaja Kronenblum

The fate of the plants during WWII varied: they were a place of the resistance movement formation as well as administered by the German trust. After the war in 1948 they were nationalised through the decision of the Minister of Industry and Trade.

M O J Ż E S Z  
 H O C H B E R G  
 A B R A H A M  
 A J Z E N B E R G  
 S Z A J A  
 K R O N E N B L U M  
 J O S E K M I N T Z



Photo no. 1

Scan the QR code and find the historical Annotarg



Photo no. 2

"Słowianin" cast iron and enamelled castings factory established by Abraham Ajzenberg and Mojżesz Hochberg. Today's headquarters of KZO on ul. 1 Maja (ul./ulica=street)



Photo no. 3

Mintz's "Neptun" foundry; J. Mintz had the plants on ul. Fabryczna (ul./ulica=street) and in Krasna along with Nieborów (today's Stąporków)



Photo no. 4

Factory for iron castings, agricultural machinery and fans, founded by Szaja Kronenblum was situated on ul. Sportowa (ul./ulica=street)

## · PARTICIPATION OF THE KOŃSKIE JEWS · in the economic development

Besides the iron foundries, which became the cornerstone of today's KZO, in the town there were also the following plants functioning: a soap factory owned by Lejbuś Młynek; brass foundry of Kałma Rozencwajg, Judka Tin and Wolf Borensztajn; Z. Grundman and W. Szlachter's (Szlamer) sweet vodka factory; Berek Rabinowicz's oil mill.

The Jewish community played an important role in the economic development of the town, **owning 26 out of 34 registered plants in 1927.**



### · BOOKBINDERS · and Jewish printing houses

Local traders dealt in iron, coaches and carts produced in Końskie. Clothing industry-related jobs were popular with the Jewish population in Końskie. Therefore, there were a lot of cap and hatmakers, glovers as well as tanners. There was also a large group of Jewish masons and carpenters.

The so called "town elite" wasn't large in the Jewish community and definitely differed from the one in big cities, in terms of wealth. At the end of the XIX century iron foundries, ceramic and stonemason's works functioned very well. Końskie was, at that time, a typical mercantile town.

### · OTHER SOURCES · of subsistence

The Końskie Jews run many businesses. In the town there were Jewish printing houses and bookbinderies. Worth mentioning is the fact that on ul. Łazienna there is a stationer's at exactly the same address where Szlama Ehrenfried managed his own printing house from 1892 up to the outbreak of WWII. It was Ehrenfried who was responsible for printing of promotion materials for the Końskie foundries, including the one owned by J. Mintz.

Another Jewish printing works, called "Renoma" (in English: "prestige"), belonging to Moszek Berger, in cooperation with the editor Abraham Gancwajch published a local newspaper in Yddish entitled "**Konsker Cajtung**".



Photo no. 5



Photo no. 6

Scan the QR code and find the still existing manhole cover manufactured in Szaja Kronenblum's factory.



# STREETS OF KOŃSKIE

# O2

## • FIND YOUR STREET •

In the late 20s of the XX century, the streets in Końskie had different names. It is a crucial fact since a few of them were named in relation to the Jewish culture and history, which only shows how much the Jewish community influenced the town social reality. [*ulica*, abbreviated in Polish as "ul." = street]

- ul. 3 Maja
- Plac Kościuszki [Kościuszko Square]
- Rynek [Market Square]
- ul. Zamkowa
- ul. Berka Joselewicza (in the sources there also appears the name ul. Żydowska; today: Strażacka)
- ul. Przechodnia (it doesn't exist any more)
- ul. Nowy Świat (today: Wjazdowa)
- ul. Jatkowa (today: Spółdzielcza)
- ul. Kilińskiego (today: Łazienna)
- ul. Rogowska (Jana Szymańskiego, Bronisława Czyża, today: Iwo Odrowąża)
- ul. Tarnowskich (today: Partyzantów)
- ul. Cmentarna
- ul. Browarna
- ul. Małachowskich (before: Łąki, today: 1 Maja)
- ul. Lipowa
- ul. Staromłyńska
- ul. Kolejowa
- ul. Kopiec (today: Hubala)
- ul. Pocztowa
- ul. Krakowska
- ul. Gimnazjalna
- ul. Polna
- ul. Maleniecka (today: Spacerowa)
- ul. Miedziarska (today: Kielecka)
- ul. Bugaj (today: Targowa)

Jewish motifs in the street names can be found in different sources and media.

- **ulica Bóźnicza** (or Bożnicza) leading to the synagogue which was located close to today's supermarket with a famous beetle in its name (on ul. Warszawska) took its name from the Polish expression for a synagogue i.e. bożnica.
- the most important and obvious influence of the Jewish cultural-historical heritage was **ul. Berka Joselewicza** (at some point renamed as ul. Żydowska, today: Strażacka). Joselewicz was a renowned Jewish combatant fighting in the Kościuszko Uprising, a commander of a Jewish cavalry regiment, a colonel of the Polish Army and an officer of the Polish Legions in Italy.



# · CRANK-LIFTED ROOFS AND SUKKAHS · i.e. Sukkot - Feast of Tabernacles - in Końskie

Perhaps older inhabitants of Końskie have a chance to hear about characteristic houses in the town where one could adjust the roof positioning. In the post-Jewish houses which survived WWII until the present times one can encounter various methods of adjusting one's roof e.g. a crank-lifted one. What kind of idea was that?

Sukkot, known as the Feast of Tabernacles, (in other more colloquial words: the holiday of tents / huts), is one of the most important holidays in Judaism. Sukkot is observed by Jews to commemorate their wandering in the desert when Israelites lived in tents or huts.

The holiday takes place at the turn of September and October.

## · HOW TO COPE · with the Polish autumn?

Eastern Europe is not a very convenient latitude when it comes to the weather in the early autumn months. Therefore, the Ashkenazi Jews (the ones living in Central and Eastern Europe) developed different ways to deal with the weather challenges.

One of them was a cute box as if hanging at the facades of tenement houses, the so called "sukkah". It had an adjustable roof which allowed constant observation of the sky. It can be seen on ul. Piłsudskiego.

In Końskie, in the backyards of tenement houses one can see long wooden balconies today which were covered by extended building roofs. The yards of the houses on ul. Kościuszki, ul. Strażacka and ul. Piłsudskiego are worth a good look inside.

Interestingly enough, some Jews equipped their homes with a mechanism which made the sky visible - by means of a crank or some other ways of roof adjustment. This sort of building can be found on ul. Starowarszawska, in the neighbourhood of the Jewish School of Talmud-Torah.

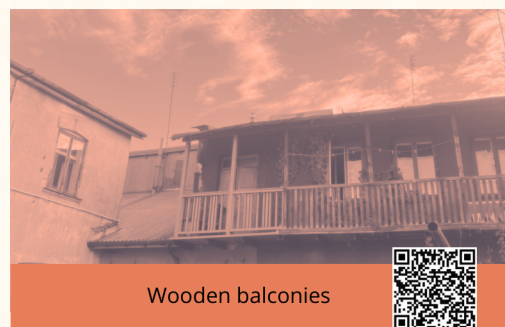


Jews living in our climate had to replace palm tree branches with local plants. Therefore they decorated their huts with boughs of fir trees, willows or apples.



a sukkah

Photo no. 8



Wooden balconies

Photo no. 9



An adjustable roof

Photo no. 10

S U K K O T  
ת ו כ ו ס

# SYNAGOGUE

# 03

The strong impact made by the Jews on the Końskie community was once described in the *Kielecka Gazeta* Newspaper:

*„[Jews accounted for] the greater half of the population, so that on a Saturday day in the streets of the town, when the Old Believers are at prayer, there is a solemn silence throughout the town, so that your own footsteps are heard echoing, in the empty streets.”*

For nearly 50 years after the foundation of the town in 1748 the population of Jews (around 10%) was small enough not to have a synagogue and used a private house of prayer whose location is not known today.

As the Jewish community grew, the stronger Jewish commune was being built and they decided to erect a genuine synagogue. Its construction finished in 1780.

The building was a real jewel - it was made of larch wood and wood has it that no steel element was used to put it up. Everything was meant to rest on wooden wedges and nails. The Końskie synagogue was a unique monument of wooden architecture in Poland.

As it can be seen in the photograph below, a brick-built extension was added to the structure. The interior of the building was made entirely of wood and in the middle of the main hall there was a beautiful wooden bimah - a platform in a synagogue where the Torah is read. Every morning, *Schulklopper* (the word from Yiddish, meaning a “synagogue knocker”), in other words a synagogue servant, called Jews to prayer by knocking on the widnows and shouting.

The synagogue was burnt down by the German soldiers on 11 September in 1939.



Photo no. 11

Photo no. 12

Scan the QR code and find the synagogue in Końskie.



# THE JEWISH SCHOOL

# 04



Photo no. 13

## • SCHOOL OF TALMUD-TORAH •

The Talmud Torah school built in Końskie, probably at the end of the XVIII century or at the beginning of the XIX c. On the same street there was also a lemonade and sparkling water plant functioning. In the cellar there was a private house of prayer.

The school was run by Josek Cukier in Marianek Boruch's flat. In the 60s of the XX c. people still used to say that some things were located "close to Marianek".

In the years 1930-33 even 100 students were attending the school: mainly orphaned children and the ones whose parents found themselves on the verge of poverty.

## • AND INSIDE •

This is a recess left after the mezuzah i.e. a box concealing the Torah's extracts which was fastened by religious Jews to the right side of the door frame. Its goal is to remind of the divine law and protect the residents of a given place. Jews kiss mezuzahs on entering or leaving a house, which is a sign of respect and devotion to God.



Photo no. 14



# SAD FATE OF MATZEVAHS

# 05

## • WHAT ARE MATZEVAHS? •

Matzevahs are gravestones which, by tradition, are used to mark tombs on Jewish cemeteries. The word "matzevah" originates from Hebrew where it denotes an upright stone slab / tombstone. Matzevahs are an important element of the Jewish funeral tradition and culture.

Gravestones usually include inscriptions or writing in Hebrew or some other language spoken by the Jewish local community. Inscriptions, besides the name of the deceased, often contain symbols or ornaments which refer to the Jewish traditions and beliefs.

In Christianity the memory of ancestors is cherished through flowers and grave candles. Jews use gravestones to do so.

This custom comes from the belief that gravestones will stay for ever whereas flowers wither away.

Matzevahs mean a lot in the Jewish culture because they help retain the memory of the deceased and their heritage. They are also an essential element of the Jewish respect for the dead and of communicating the history of ancestors to their families.

Many Jewish communities and organisations take care of keeping the matzevahs tradition on cemeteries. They try to renovate rundown matzevahs, preserve cemeteries and disseminate information about the deceased which can be found on tombstones.

## • CEMETERY IS SACRED •

Whereas a synagogue becomes a sacred place once it houses the scrolls of the Torah (it isn't a temple in the same way as christian churches are), a cemetery is the biggest sanctity for the Jews. Destroying Jewish cemeteries by the Jews was a painful view since not only the memory of their ancestors was profaned but also the largest holiness was violated.

Gravestones were a durable piece of raw material, therefore destroyed cemeteries were a source of precious stock. They were used by the Germans for hardening roads, paving the bottoms of reservoirs, making kerbs and even for building houses. Local people all over Poland also took part in this shameful practice and made from gravestones e.g. outbuildings or lapidary grinding wheels.

The Jewish cemetery in Końskie was situated at the junction of ul. Staszica and ul. Wjazdowa. Its establishment dates back to the XVII century. The cemetery area amounted to 2 ha. There is no trace of it left nowadays. However, its matzevahs are scattered around in the neighbourhood...



Photo no. 15



Scan the QR code and find the Jewish cemetery.



Photo no. 16

The experimental property on ul. Przemysłowa. The archival photo.



## · THE GERMAN BUILDING · made from gravestones

On ul. Przemysłowa, in the proximity of the town tax revenue office there is a building located which was built by the Germans to establish there a so-called experimental property. As shown in the photographs from the State Archives, they farmed, seeded fields with cabbage and pastured horses in the place.

What is yet the most appalling, on the building walls one can still see Hebrew letters, grave adornments and even the Star of David.

Photograph no. 16 depicts an archival condition of the experimental property in the 40s of the XX century, photo no. 2 is from the photo collection by Ł. Baksik entitled "Matzevahs of everyday use".



Photo no. 17

A piece of the building facade with Hebrew inscriptions. Photograph by Ł. Baksik [in:] Matzevahs of everyday use.



Photo no. 18

The watchtower in Modliszewice



## · TOWER OUT OF GRAVESTONES · in Modliszewice

A watchtower in Modliszewice, erected in 1943. It was entirely built from matzevahs from the Końskie cemetery. It is located close to the fortified mansion on ul. Piotrowska in Modliszewice, which, after the enforced displacement of countess Tarnowska, became a seat of the German administrator Eduard Fitting - a man of particular cruelty and callousness.

At the top of the tower there was a red flag with the black swastika fluttering proudly in the air.

Polish soldiers killed the German murderer in May 1944.

The location of the tower - the artefact of the terrible war past, is extremely unfortunate - up to now the tower stands amid the blocks of flats situated on ul. Piotrowska.



Photo no. 19

Visible pieces of matzevahs

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Instagram: [smutne\\_synagogi](https://www.instagram.com/smutne_synagogi)



[smutne.synagogi@gmail.com](mailto:smutne.synagogi@gmail.com)

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