Elektrische Strassenbahn-Getto

Categories: **Objects**

In August 1941, at the request the Eldest of the Jews after discussing related technical matters with engineer Weinberg, a project was submitted to the Gettoverwaltung proposing the expansion of the streetcar-line in the ghetto and the procurement of the required rolling stock. It was thought, not unreasonably, that streetcars would finally regulate transport, thus far chaotic due to the slim number of horses. At the beginning of September 1941, the submitted draft was approved. Appointed as heads of the newly created institution were engineer Władysław Dawidowicz and Leopold Szreter.

In October 1941, construction began of a streetcar-line from Marysińska via Jagiellońska St. to the Radegast railway station. At the same time, a number of sidings were built, including the ones at 63 and 45 Łagiewnicka St. Also started was the construction of the track to Jakuba via Franciszkańska St. A little later, the construction of the siding at 1/3 and 32 Łagiewnicka St. began. In this way, the most important departments of the ghetto were linked with the railway station, thereby increasing transport capacity and reducing transit time. Leading the road works were engineer Leopold Fauster[1], originally from Vienna, who unfortunately died in the ghetto in very deplorable conditions; and engineer Otto Guttig[2], a native of Czechoslovakia. The line was built under very harsh conditions, with temperatures reaching well below 10 degrees centigrade and very poor provisions in the ghetto.

Construction of the line lasted until March 1942, and the siding was finished in the summer of that year.

At the beginning of October 1941, the first streetcar was launched, running along Brzezińska St. from Bałucki Marketsquare and along a section of Łagiewnicka St., and in April 1942, streetcars were launched to Radegast station. The initial rolling stock consisted of two motorized vehicles and three open-sided cars. The crew

consisted of four drivers, four conductors, and road personnel, quite a few for the time. Engineer Dawidowicz was in charge of theoretical training, while practical classes were taught by Mr. Hill, on special assignment from the city. On two occasions, the crew were taken to the municipal streetcar depot to further develop their newly acquired skills. After the construction of the track was completed, the rolling stock was expanded with twelve new open-sided cars and two motors. However, due to the enormous amount of work, increasingly more open-sided cars were needed; over time their number was increased to thirty-five, and the number of motors to five.

Expanding the rolling stock resulted in additional streetcar crew being hired, reaching a total of eighteen drivers and twenty conductors. At the same time, to improve communication, three controllers and one Head of Traffic were established. The crew worked three eight-hour shifts under particularly difficult conditions on open platforms in winter weather. They received two portions of soup a day and B1 coupons.

In May 1942, the ESG was merged with the Transport Department, and head of the Transport Department Marian Kleinman was placed in charge of streetcars. Engineer Dawidowicz was appointed head of the newly created Schwachstrom Division, and engineer Szreter was appointed technical head of streetcars. In view of the poor condition of newly arrived rolling stock, as well as the line and the overhead wiring being assembled from old, damaged parts, special groups was established to monitor the streetcar system. This group supervised maintenance of the overhead wiring of the streetcar-line, and in winter also cleaned the rails, while mechanic workshops carried out almost any repair of the rolling stock. The main purpose of the streetcars was freight traffic, athough within certain boundaries passenger streetcars were also running. The first passenger car was launched in the second half of 1942. From 6:00 until 7:30 in the morning, special motors independent of freight streetcars brought workers to departments in Marysin and to the railway station, then from 6:30 to 7:30 in the evening brought them back to the city. Tram tickets were issued initially at the Transport Department, however, after several months, Special Unit [vide Sonderabteilung] took over distribution using registered lists submitted by the departments.

In August 1943, the streetcar police were established as an auxiliary institution consisting of eighteen privates, one sergeant, and crew chief Maurycy Siemiatycki. Their task was maintaining order in passenger traffic, which was very intensive for such a slim rolling stock.

On February 29, 1944, due to technical shortcomings, streetcars were once again separated from the Streetcars Department[3] into an independent institution. Beniamin Grzmilas was made head of the autonomous institution.

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Footnotes

1 Leopold Fauster (1881 – May 19, 1943) was deported to the Łódź ghetto along with his wife Natalia on the first transport from Vienna. He lived at 22 Pieprzowa St.

2 Otto Guttig (b. 1913) arrived in the ghetto on the second transport from Prague. He lived first at 15 Franciszkańska St., then at 22 Mianowskiego St. He was liberated from the camp at Mauthausen. Further fate unknown.

3 Most likely a reference to Transport Department.

Resources

Encyclopedia, p. 63-65.

Tags

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