

Executions

Categories: Events

Pretty well from the very start of the German occupation of Łódź, before the ghetto was established, the city's Jewish residents were cruelly targeted. There were mass arrests of the Polish intelligentsia, as well. Many of those arrested were executed in the forests outside Łódź. In late 1939 and early 1940, this so-called Inteligencja action reached its peak. Among the intelligentsia, at least several dozen Jewish people – social and political activists, doctors – were executed in forests in Lućmierz, Brus and Łagiewniki. Jewish prisoners were also murdered while in police custody on Sterlinga Street.

At least eight executions were carried out in the Łódź Ghetto during its existence. Three of them were public. The death penalty was ordered for people who, according to the occupation law, had committed serious crimes such as resisting, attempting to escape or sabotage.

The first execution carried out in the ghetto was that of Ulrich Schultz, a 45-year-old lawyer from Prague (vide). During deportation, he allegedly insulted the German policemen who were escorting the transport. As soon as he arrived in the ghetto, he was led to the Central Prison (vide), where he was shot by German policemen on 19 January 1942. On the same day, Announcement No. 356 (vide), signed by Rumkowski, was published in the ghetto announcing the execution. The publication of information about the event was probably intended to discourage ghetto inhabitants from resisting.

On 21 February 1942, a 54-year-old man named Maks Hertz, from Gaugelt, Germany, was the first to be publicly executed in the ghetto. Hertz was deported to the ghetto in the autumn of 1941 with a group of Jews from Cologne (vide). He managed to get out of the ghetto and remained for several weeks in Litzmannstadt, where he was caught trying to buy a train ticket. He was executed in Bazaar Square (vide) on a gallows specially prepared for that particular execution (vide). About 8,000 ghetto Jews, including his wife and daughter, were forced to watch the execution. German officials and the head of the Central Prison, Salomon Hercberg, were

also present (vide). The execution, understandably, hit the ghetto inhabitants hard. This, of course, was the intention. The authorities wanted to break any will to resist and discourage all attempts to escape from the ghetto.

On 22 July 1942, a second public execution was carried out at Bazaar Square. The victims were 16-year-old Josek Grynbaum and Szymon Makowski, 51, who had tried to escape from a transport to a labour camp near Poznań (vide Forced Labour Camps for Jews in Wartheland).

On 7 September, during the mass deportations at that time (vide Szpera), another execution was carried out. Eighteen people who tried to avoid deportation were hanged in Bazaar Square. The execution was not a public event. During the mass deportations of the Allgemeine Gehsperre, or the Shpera as it is commonly called, people were forbidden to leave their ghetto residences. The Chronicle of the Łódź Ghetto reported: two victims came from Łódź, one from Zelów (vide), one from Pabianice (vide), nine from Pajęczno (vide), one from Wieluń (vide) and four from Lutomiersk (vide). The oldest victim was 72 years old; the youngest was 18.

On 3 December 1942, an execution was carried out at the Central Prison. Three young women were killed: Matla Rosensztajn, 21, Sura Jamniak, 28, and Gitla Hadasa Aronowicz, 17. They had escaped from a labour camp near Poznań and were captured while trying to get to the ghetto.

On 25 May 1943, 22-year-old Israel Chaim Brysz was executed. Brysz was accused of murdering a 12-year-old child, Etká Sznał, on 26 April (see Murders). For this execution, a gallows was assembled in the Central Prison courtyard. Until then, people sentenced to execution had been shot there. Before being executed, Brysz was allowed to write a farewell letter to his mother and to Etká's family. Brysz was then led to the execution site, where, surrounded by a small group of officials and prison officers, he was hanged. On 18 June 1943, three people were executed in a similar way at the Central Prison: Abram Tandowski, 30, Hersz Feygelis, 22, and Mordechai Standarowicz, 28. They were accused of escaping and hiding in the so-called Aryan area. Tandowski escaped from the Zduńska Wola Ghetto (vide) and hid in surrounding villages, while Feygelis and Standarowicz tried to escape from a forced labour camp. On orders from the German authorities, Order Service commanders (vide) participated in the execution. News of the killings spread throughout the ghetto, even though it was not a public event. It was described, among others, by Jakub Poznański

(vide), who noted the condemned men “reportedly shouted in a terrible manner to the crowds gathered outside the Central Prison to take revenge for their innocent blood”¹. Oskar Rosenfeld (vide) wrote a more extensive entry in his diary, detailing the behaviour of the condemned men and the reaction of those around them: "12 June, Sabbath. You are obliged to keep the Sabbath holy. Three tliyes in the Central Prison. Execution before noon at 10 o'clock at the hands of the Jewish police. Two condemned escaped from the labour camp into the countryside to Polish peasants, begging for bread. They were captured. A third tries to get out of the ghetto. Terrible scenes. The convicts were shouting. It didn't help anything. Gestapo order. A hearse to Marysin (vide) was already standing in front of the prison. All the heads of the police district and the commandant Rozenblat and Gertler had to be present... A terrible Sabbath after Shavuot... In the vegetable gardens [vide] work is in full swing, laughter can be heard. And then the evening at the House of Culture (vide). OD revue with jokes and rudeness”².

On 13 September 1943, Ick Bekerman, a 34-year-old employee of the Leather and Saddlery Department (vide), was executed. Bekerman was accused of taking several pieces of leather. The alleged theft was treated as sabotage, punishable by death. A gallows was set up at Przelotna and Próżna streets (according to Poznański, it was at Robert and Marysińska streets), opposite the Straw Footwear Department (vide). Employees of the leather and shoe ministries, representatives of other establishments and Bekerman’s family – his wife and two children – were forced to watch. German police officers and Order Service officers from the Central Prison kept watch.

Many of the executions were public. Bazaar Square was used for this purpose. People forced to be at the execution and to watch often included families and relatives, as well as colleagues from work and their particular communities, such as a group of ghetto Jews from the Reich and the Protectorate (vide). Such treatment was, first and foremost, to strike fear in people so they would not resist ghetto laws. Sometimes only German police and the Jewish administration officials took part in the execution. This was especially true of executions carried out at the Central Prison. It has not been possible to establish the identity of the executioner, or executioners, who manned the gallows. It is uncertain whether each execution was carried out by the same person. This is because the descriptions indicate the executioner did not wear the yellow Star of David (vide) and that he was an employee of the Central

Prison.

The number of people executed in the Jewish cemetery on Bracka Street (vide) is unknown. Documents, including photographs, indicate that the German police executed people there who were captured while trying to cross the ghetto borders (vide Shmugel). In the years 1943 and 1944, a group of Poles associated with Armia Krajowa (the Home Army), the Grey Ranks and the Promieniści youth organisation were also executed and buried in the cemetery. The remains of 54 people were found in mass graves, although the number of victims reportedly reached 110. Among them were 12 members of Promieniści, identified by name, who were executed at the cemetery on 15 November 1943. A plaque on a boulder pays homage to these victims at the site of the mass graves.

Adam Sitarek

Footnotes

1. J. Poznański, Dziennik z łódzkiego getta, Warszawa: Bellona, 2002, s. 76.
2. O. Rosenfeld, Dziennik, [w:] Oblicza getta. Antologia tekstów z getta łódzkiego, red. K. Radziszewska, E. Wiatr, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2017, s. 21–22.

Resources

Kronika, t. 2, s. 27, 14–31.01.1942; t. 2, s. 42–43, luty 1942; t. 2, s. 397, 22.07.1942; t. 2, s. 413–414, lipiec 1942; t. 2, s. 503, wrzesień 1942; t. 2, s. 521, 4.10.1942; t. 3, s. 181–182, 26.04.1943; t. 3, s. 236–237, 25.05.1943; t. 3, s. 464–465, 13.09.1943; t. 5, s. 65, Oblicze getta we wrześniu 1943 r.; N.N., Moja ucieczka z Łodzi, [w:] Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy, t. 10: Losy Żydów łódzkich, red. M. Polit, Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny i Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2013, s. 245; J. Poznański, Dziennik z łódzkiego getta, Warszawa: Bellona, 2002, s. 76, 110; O. Rosenfeld, Dziennik, [w:] Oblicza getta. Antologia tekstów z getta łódzkiego, red. K. Radziszewska, E. Wiatr,

Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2017, s. 21-22; D. Sierakowiak, Dziennik, red. A. Sitarek, E. Wiatr, Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2016, s. 291, 345; O. Singer, Po śmierć do getta, [w:] idem, „Przemierzając szybkim krokiem getto... Reportaże i eseje z getta łódzkiego, red. J. Baranowski i in., tłum. K. Radziszewska, Łódź: Oficyna Bibliofilów, Archiwum Państwowe w Łodzi, 2002, s. 47-49;

J. Baranowski, Zbrodnie na inteligencji i grupach przywódczych ludności żydowskiej w pierwszych miesiącach okupacji, [w:] Eksterminacja inteligencji Łodzi i okręgu łódzkiego 1939-1940, red. A. Galiński, M. Budziarek, Łódź: Okręgowa Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 1992, s. 51-59; J. Podolska, Spacerownik. Cmentarz żydowski w Łodzi, Łódź: Agora, 2010, s. 44; Wykaz rozstrzelanych w lasach podłódzkich (1939-1940), [w:] Eksterminacja inteligencji Łodzi i okręgu łódzkiego..., s. 125-140.

Tags

jewish administration|German administration|extermination
resistance|occupation law|legal system in the ghetto

Updated: 29-01-2026

Added: 24-04-2025