Post Department

Categories: Institutions

The establishment of the Postal Department on March 15, 1940, as an agency of the Jewish administration, was a response to the regulations introduced in February 1940, which stipulated that only collective delivery of correspondence to the seat of the Eldest of the Jews was allowed, with the obligation to pass it on to the addressees. In order to improve the delivery of parcels, Rumkowski appealed to the inhabitants of the ghetto to provide their new addresses. In May 1940, an agreement was concluded between Rumkowski and the Reich Post on the exchange of mail, while on June 17, Announcement No. 65 (vide) was published, stating the rules that applied to ghetto residents when sending correspondence:

• It was forbidden to send mail to hostile countries.

• No scenic post cards or photographs were allowed.

• Print for the blind, chess challenges, crosswords or riddles were all forbidden.

• It was forbidden to “write in secret ink, use Esperanto and Hebrew script, shorthand and lined envelopes.”

• Postcards and letters were to be written legibly in German.

• Letters could be up to four pages long.

• Letters sent out of the ghetto could not to be dropped in mailboxes but had to be brought

to the post office, clearly labelled with the sender’s address and no stamp.

• Stamps were bought from the Reich Post Office by the ghetto post office.

• An additional fee was charged in the ghetto for the collection and dispatch of parcels.

For the main headquarters of the post office, rooms were allocated in the building of 4 Church Square. The first to organize the Department was Herbert Grawe (vide), who headed the post office at the time of its greatest development. For those living on the other side of Zgierska Street (excluded from the ghetto), a branch was opened in June 1940 at 1 Rybna Street, headed by Jakub Abram Dawidowicz (vide). The Philatelic Department was active at the branch (vide).

After the post office had been in operation for a year, additional post office rooms were opened at 4 Kościelny Square. A meeting between Rumkowski and representatives of the Jewish administrations and the post office staff was held for this reason. An account of it was included in the third issue of "Geto-Cajtung" (vide) of March 21, 1941.

“The President's best child. One year of the Jewish post office.

Last Sunday, March 15, marked one year since the President established the Jewish post office. In connection with this, the post office held a modest celebration in its own station at 4 Kościelny Squere, to which Chairman Rumkowski, his deputy Dr. Leon Szykier (vide), Mr. Jozef Rumkowski and his wife and a number of heads of various departments were invited.

The head of the post office, engineer Mr. H. Grawe, gave a brief overview of the establishment and gradual development of the post office over the past year. Numerically, the post office, for the residents of the ghetto handled: 64,049 remittances from abroad, amounting to 1 million 699 thousand 151 marks; 135,062 intrastate mail and 14,229 foreign mail; 10,238 dispatches and 1 million 74 thousand 351 letters and postcards.

The speaker sincerely thanked the hard-working staff who supported him in his work, and at the same time assured that in the future, too, the post office will faithfully and sincerely serve the Chairman and all his sisters and brothers in the ghetto.

As a sign of gratitude to the Chairman for his tireless and sacrificial work on behalf of the ghetto, Engineer Grawe presented him with an artistically made album with various photographic shots of the post office. A pleasant surprise for the Chairman and the assembled guests were reports and scenes by anonymous authors, postal clerks, depicting daily work at the post office. The content, form and humorous tone caused great joy among the attendees”[1].

The new premises were also mentioned in the Chronicle:

“The new station, which has been appointed in a truly comfortable and modern fashion – for the ghetto, that is – is causing a significant improvement in the post office’s efficiency and, what is more important, is making it possible to deal with customers without having them wait in line outside, as had previously been the case".[2]

In March 1942. Herbert Grawe was replaced as manager by Maurycy Goldblum (vide) who held the position only until July. He was succeeded by Abram Jakub Dawidowicz, the manager of the Rybna Street branch. In November of that year, the mailman's fraud was revealed, as he failed to deliver food vouchers to the addressees. At that time, Dawidowicz returned to his former position, and Abramovich from the Investigation Office (vide) was assigned to the Postal Department as commissioner. He managed the post office together with the young and energetic clerk Moses Gumener (vide). As an independent postmaster, Gumener maintained his position as head of the Department until the liquidation of the ghetto.

Letter carriers wore dark suits as uniforms with a band on the left shoulder and caps with a green brim and green cord. Some of the distributors used bicycles acquired especially for them. In addition to letter carriers, the post office employed clerks to receive and register mail, deposit and withdraw money orders, sell stamps, sort and issue parcels and dispatch mail. By the end of 1940, the Postal Department had 149 employees. By the summer of 1942, the number had risen to 183. After deportations in the spring and fall of 1942, due to declining postal turnover, staffing levels were reduced. In mid-1943, the Post Office employed 70 people, including 40 letter

carriers.

Letters, post cards, parcels, telegrams and money orders were sent to the ghetto. To cover the costs related to the delivery of correspondence, additional fees were charged and collected by postmen, ranging from 10 to 30 pfennig in the ghetto currency.

Until the outbreak of the German-Soviet war in June 1941, about 50% of the parcels were sent from the Soviet Union. After that, most correspondence came from Portugal, as mail from the United States was directed via that country. The ghetto also received deliveries from such exotic places as San Domingo, Manchuria, Bolivia, and Cuba.

With each passing year, the number of shipments decreased, a result of the correspondence bans (vide), and the extermination of the Jewish population in occupied Poland and in conquered European countries.

Despite the declining turnover, letter carriers were burdened with work, mainly official internal mail. In mid-1942, it was estimated that up to 4,000 deliveries were handled daily, with up to 550 pieces of mail per letter carrier each day. In mid-1943, up to 2,000 deliveries were handled daily, and monthly turnover reached 60,000 pieces. Internal correspondence between private individuals may be surprising given the small size of the ghetto. However, mobility difficulties resulting from long hours of work, illness, and exhaustion, especially when crossing footbridges, meant that contact with family and friends was maintained by mail. People tried to continue the tradition of sending wishes for holidays, religious celebrations, or birthdays. Many of the wishes were addressed to Chairman Rumkowski. The intentions behind these messages probably had a different meaning: from the gesture of courtesy towards a pre-war friend to the desire to please him in hopes of some profit.On the occasion of Rumkowski’s wedding to Regina Wajnberger (vide) on December 27, 1941, the ghetto post office delivered over 600 congratulatory messages. In 1943, a pre-printed telegram form was compiled to send good wishes. It was used only for internal purposes, with text in German and Yiddish. Single preserved copies of filled telegrams indicate that only the elite of the ghetto used that method of communication, as it was largely symbolic, meant to create an appearance of normality. Telegrams

sent in 1944 are labelled with a date stamp used in the ghetto. It was also the duty of letter carriers to distribute deportation summonses (vide), known in the ghetto as "wedding invitations."

In order to stay in business, fees were charged for both mail delivered and sent outside the ghetto, regardless of the German postal service's tariff, which created opportunities for fraud. The poorest were exempt from the fees, but handed special settlement vouchers to the letter carriers. There were attempts to extort money under the pretext of postage fees. A warning against a shaykh of scammers posing as letter carriers was made public in Announcement No. 194 (vide).

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Footnotes

1 „Geto-Cajtung”, nr 3, 21.03.1941, s. 2.

2 Kronika, t. 1, s. 130, 10 – 24.03.1941.

Resources

„Geto-Cajtung”, nr 3, 21.03.1941, s. 2.

Kronika, v. 1, s. 130, 10 – 24.03.1941; vol. 1., s. 407, 26-28,12,1941; vol. 2, 20.11.1942, s. 615.

References

https://pocztawgetcie.pl/en/

Tags

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