The Markusfelds: a Family Portrait of Częstochowa Entrepreneurs, Philanthropists, and Social Leaders

Juliusz Sękowski

The Markusfelds were a respectable middle class Jewish family of progressive orientation in Krakow. They lived at Kazimierz and the neighboring district of Stradom. In Częstochowa they had arrived in the mid-nineteenth century, when in 1853 a Krakow inhabitant Adolf (Abraham) Markusfeld1, during his temporary residency in Częstochowa, merchant (or speculator, as he was recorded in the registrar’s book) married Ernestyna (Estera) Kohn2, daughter of a wealthy merchant Berek Kohn3 and Ewa, nee Frenkel.

In the 1870s Częstochowa was developing rapidly as an industrial center. Adolf Markusfeld, whose line of business had previously been trade, in 1879 made his appearance as an entrepreneur and co-owner of the American Mill and Paper Factory of K. Ginsberg, L. Kohn and A. Markusfeld4. Adolf Markusfeld and his wife Ernestyna were also known as philanthropists; their generosity included founding the building of crafts workshops. In 1897 a Talmud-Torah religious school was installed there.5 Adolf himself was one of numerous Jewish honorary members of the Voluntary Fire Brigade. In 1887, however, the Russian administration excluded these members, who were not citizens of tsarist Russia and the restriction concerned Adolf Markusfeld, who was from Kraków and still a citizen of the Austro-Hungarian empire.6

Adolf Markusfeld had two sons, Henryk and Jozef. The elder, Henryk Ludwik Markusfeld, was born on December 11, 1853, in Częstochowa.7 He owned or co-owned many enterprises in town. In 1896 with Herman Ginsberg, Jan Grossman, Ludwik Kohn and his son, Maurycy, Markusfeld set up the Warta Jute Mill, which was their joint property. His 1880 initiative was Color Papers, Coating, and Cardboard Factory, while in 1895 the cooperation with his brother Jozef and the merchant Maurycy Neufeld resulted in the Glue and Gelatin Factory. In 1891 he added to the list a job printing house, providing mainly labels for his own products.

In 1901 Henryk Markusfeld with Stanislaw Grossman launched a hat manufacture, to become its sole proprietor from 1906 and turn it into a limited liability company year later (its charter was approved on February 28, 1907); the then name of the manufacture was the Public Corporation of Hat Manufacture (Tow. Akcyjne Tow. Fabryki Kapeluszy). With Ludwik and Leopold Kohn Henryk Markusfeld was also a part-owner of the Paper Factory and Mills (later the Kohn Brothers and H. Markusfeld Paper Factory and Mills).8

In 1907 H. Markusfeld joined the Power and Light Electric Lightning Bureau (the company was created in 1906). In 1908 with the engineers Wladyslaw Boguslawski and Cyprian Apanowicz he applied to the municipality for a concession to build a power station, which would provide electricity to illuminate the streets and private houses. The Light and Power Company had already (in 1907) taken over the electrical lighting of Częstochowa from the Warsaw Orion Corporation. In 1909 the power station started to produce electricity on a plot behind the Town Council building at Centralna (Slaska) street. In August 1912 Markusfeld and other owners of the Light and Power Bureau sold their shares in the company to Witold Idzikowski from Warsaw.9

Markusfeld held various posts in financial corporations in town. He was a deputy chairman and one of two directors of the Credit Society of Częstochowa, a board member of the Częstochowa Mutual Credit Society and of the Discount committee of the Częstochowa agency of the National Bank. From 1913 he was also a council and board member and the honorary chairman of the Częstochowa Crafts Savings and Loan Society.10

Henryk Markusfeld actively participated in numerous actions on behalf of the impoverished Jews in town. He was the chairman of the Linas Hatzedek Society for the Poor and Sick Jews.11 From the emergence of the Jewish Welfare Society in 1899 Markusfeld sat in its board and eventually became its chairman.12 He was an initiator of the hospital project of this Society. His indefatigable energy, commitment and prudence, upon being elected to chair the Building Committee, resulted in the opening in November 1913 of the new hospital (which was to be known as the Israelite Hospital).13 It is worth adding that Markusfeld was also a member of the Christian Charity Society.14
From 1890 on, Henryk Markusfeld acted as the president of the Jewish community in Częstochowa. When the milieu of progressive Jews suggested building a new synagogue in the 1890s, it was Henryk Markusfeld again, who headed the construction committee. The synagogue, erected in 1893 at Aleksandrowska 10, (later Wilsona street), was initially recorded in land register as a property of Henryk Markusfeld, but the latter soon handed his property officially over to “the synagogue committee”. In 1893, aware how much cantors enhanced services at the synagogue, Markusfeld brought Abraham Ber Birnbaum, the distinguished Warsaw cantor and teacher of synagogal music art in the Polish Kingdom, to Częstochowa. Birnbaum was nominated to the post of the cantor of the local Great Synagogue. As the chairman of the Jewish community Markusfeld obtained a permit to extend Jewish cemetery early in the 20th c. In 1907 he funded the new enclosure wall and started to build a new burial house.

Education of Jewish children and youth was one of major concerns of Henryk Markusfeld. Being the leader of the Jewish High Schools Society, in 1917, with his brother Jozef, Abram Sojka, Mojzesz Mokrauer, and Leon Kopinski founded the first Jewish co-ed high school at Szkolna 3 (Dabrowskiego). Earlier, in 1901, he contributed to the initiative of setting up the Gardening Farm school for Jews, who wanted to get training in agriculture before emigrating to Palestine. Yet another of Markusfeld’s functions was the head of the Crafts School Council, whereas the school itself was lodged in a house built by the Markusfeld family. Moreover, the school’s means of support was an annual 500 rubles subsidy from the Markusfeld brothers: Henryk and Jozef.

Markusfeld’s financial contributions sustained also the secular school for synagogal cantors, set up by the cantor Abraham Ber Birnbaum in 1906.

An indication of the high repute, in which Markusfeld was held by the public, was the invitation he received, along with several dozen most prominent Częstochowa leaders, in August 1906 to attend a meeting on establishing a Polish high school in town. As far as culture, education, and sports promotion among Jews was concerned, Markusfeld had a major part in initiating, organizing, and supporting, e.g., the Lira Musical and Literary Society, which he also chaired for some time, lending library and reading room by the Crafts Club, Jewish Gymnastics and Sports Society. He played a role in launching and promoting Jewish scouting, Ha-Shomer.

His involvement in the political scene was almost incidental. In 1906 he ran for the election to the Russian Duma as a candidate of a progressive group. In 1907 as a member of the Polish Progressive Party stood for election to the Second Duma, but he did not win a mandate and withdrew from major politics. By comparison Markusfeld’s presence in the self-government was somewhat more marked. From early August 1914 he belonged to the Civic Committee, which stood for Polish administration at the beginning of the First World War (the other members were: Dr. Edward Kohn, Adam Kanczewski, Antoni Janowski, Korneliusz Pietrzykowski, and Jozef Wielawski). Several days later, the entire Committee was included into the Town Council. When the Germans dissolved this Council in July 1915 and replaced it with another, consisting of appointed councilors, Henryk Markusfeld was also nominated. He sat at the Council till April 1917. Markusfeld was also a member of various organizations; some of them, like the Voluntary Fire Brigade (with Markusfeld as a board member), would have hardly endured without his contribution.

A good perception and appreciation of the activities of Henryk Markusfeld, nicknamed “the heart of the Jewish society”, is to be found in the memoirs of Stanislaw Nowak, a physician: „He was a model Jewish philanthropist, it was to his contributions that the Jews of Częstochowa owed most of their social institutions, which he founded himself or generously supported. [...]. From time to time Markusfeld granted minor donations to Christian institutions as well, [...]. he was a good person [...], liked to be praised for his generosity; neither could he resist flattery; many institutions knew how to take advantage of his frailty and vanity and obtain his financial support in return for honorary offices and titles. He was a wealthy man, but he lived a very moderate life and despite some funny characteristics was very popular with people."

Henryk Ludwik Markusfeld died in Częstochowa on October 7, 1921. His marriage to Flora Heyman (born on Feb. 24, 1864 in Lodz, died Dec.12, 1927 in Warsaw), a daughter of Szymon and Rozalia (nee Rozental), was with a daughter Dora (b. Oct. 2, 1884 in Częstochowa) and two sons, Mieczyslaw and Karol.
The elder son of Henryk Markusfeld, Mieczysław Józef Henryk (born March 3, 1886 in Częstochowa) graduated from Berlin Technical University and was a board member and director of the Corporation of Częstochowa Color- and Wallpaper Factory. The younger son, Karol (born July 3, 1893, in Częstochowa) was also a board member and director of the same factory. He was also active in the promotion of sports, as a board member of the Warta Sports Club in Częstochowa. From 1928 he belonged (with his uncle Jozef) to the Polish branch of the Bnei Brith Association.

Częstochowa public opinion esteemed also Henryk Markusfeld’s brother, Józef, born on December 6, 1870, in Częstochowa. He studied at Berlin Technical University and at Geneva University, from which he graduated in 1894 as a chemical engineer, to obtain a Ph.D in chemistry some time later. Upon his return to Częstochowa, he settled at NMP Alley 27, at the corner of Teatralka.

Józef Markusfeld co-owned, and from 1928 (when he ceded his share to his son Antoni) sat at the board of the Alfred Kohn and Józef Markusfeld Paper Factory and Mills. Together with Henryk he owned also the Częstochowa Glue and Gelatin Factory. At the board of the Corporation of the Częstochowa Color and Wallpaper Factory he held the post of a director till the end of the 1920s. He was also a board member of the Warta Jute Mill Ltd. As a major partner in several factories in Częstochowa Józef Markusfeld was “a rich man”, to quote again Dr. Stanislaw Nowak. Józef Markusfeld was one of the top fifteen wealthy members of the Jewish community, as reflected in the rate of community tax he was paying in 1930: 750 zlotys. As a prominent industrialist of Częstochowa Józef sat with his brother at the board of the Częstochowa branch of the Entrepreneurs Society of the Congress Kingdom of Poland; he represented the branch at general assemblies of the Society.

Józef Markusfeld followed in his brother’s footsteps with being active in the local government; from July 1915 he sat at the Food Supplies, Coal Supplies, and Hospital committees of the Town Council. In 1917 in the curial municipal election he won a councilor’s mandate representing Curia No.2 (commercial and industrial enterprises). As a member of the Town Council he worked at the hospital and school committees.

Józef’s social efforts were manifold. He contributed much to the development of the Warta Sports Club of Częstochowa, set up in 1921. In the late 1890s he joined the board (acting as its cashier for some time) of the Jewish Charity Society and was also a member of the Hospital Project Committee. When the construction of the hospital was completed Józef Markusfeld funded the park surrounding this institution, “adding considerably to its esthetic and hygienic values.” Józef joined the board of the Israelite Hospital in 1913. In the later 1920s he committed himself also, along with a group of local entrepreneurs, to the organization of the Tuberculosis Prevention Campaign Week in Częstochowa.

Education of Częstochowa Jews, including their university studies, was another of Józef’s concerns. In this field he acted as a member of board of trustees of the Crafts School, and from 1917 as a board member of the Society for Promotion of Knowledge. In 1922 he helped to set up a Częstochowa branch of the Auxilium Academicum Judaicum Relief Society for Jewish Students and later became its member (the organization was focused on fundraising to assist poor Jewish students). As I have mentioned above, he part-founded the Jewish high school, which was open in Częstochowa in 1917.

As a theater lover Józef Markusfeld deplored the fact that Częstochowa had no suitable theater building, and engaged in any initiative aimed at changing this situation. According to the information published in Goniec Częstochowski on July 15, 1908, J. Markusfeld and his brother Henryk headed the group of founders of the future corporation for theater construction. High costs of the undertaking (estimated at 100,000 rubles) and small number of potential shareholders resulted in the project’s failure, but in 1927 the idea was refreshed. In December of 1928 Markusfeld joined the board of the Corporation for the Building and Use of Częstochowa Theater. The edifice was erected at the intersection of Kilinski Street and Jasnogorska streets, on a plot donated by Henryk Markusfeld in 1911 to the Lutnia Singers’ Society.

Józef Markusfeld died on September 29, 1942 in Częstochowa. He was married to Emma (Estera) nee Barcinska (b. Aug.5, 1874), a daughter of the renowned Lodz industrialist Salomon Barcinski and of Ruchla nee Birnbaum. Their marriage was with three children, two daughters Irena Ludwika
Antoni Adolf (born January 25, 1901 in Częstochowa) represented, with his cousins Mieczysław and Karol, the third generation of the Markusfeld family of entrepreneurs. Having completed his studies in chemistry, just as his father, Antoni returned to Częstochowa. In 1928 he was a stockholder in the Kohn Brothers and Markusfeld Paper Factory and Mills and eventually joined its board. The same year he was elected a delegate to the Poviąt (County) Council of Health Fund in Częstochowa. In 1933 he married Eugenia Henigsberg (born August 2, 1903 in Częstochowa), who was a daughter of Chil and Augusta (nee Hejman). Antoni Markusfeld and his wife survived the war. He stayed in Częstochowa, where he got a job of a technical manager in a factory. In 1946 he changed his name to Ojrzyński. In 1959 they left for Canada, settled in Toronto, where he died. His wife Eugenia has been living in Toronto ever since.

What certainly distinguished the Markusfelds among other prominent Częstochowa industrialists, was the scope of their philanthropy and social commitment. In this sphere their involvement, initiative, organizational activity and material contributions (often combined and reinforced by the efforts of others) resulted in the emergence of numerous social, charity, educational, and health care institutions. The above examples hopefully add to the portrait of the family, whose high material standing and prestige affected not only the economy of the town, but also many of its other facets.

Footnotes

1 Adolf (Abraham Markusfeld (b. 1826) lived in 1847 with his wife Sheyndla (b.1830) at Stradom, suburb of Krakow (Archiwum Państwowe w Krakowie, Spis ludności miasta Krakowa 1847, p. 125). His brother, Henryk (Chaim) Markusfeld, was a merchant, councilor of Krakow, active in Polish patriotic and independence movement, b. Dec. 12, 1819 in Krakow. In 1848 he took part in the events in town, as one of the first five chiefs of the National Guard. In 1848–53 he sat at the City Council, representing progressive Jews of Kazimierz; as a councilor he defended the interests of Krakow Jews, demanding, e.g., abolition of a municipal tax imposed on Jews. He acted as a secretary of the Jewish merchants’ union – Filial Assembly of Mosaic Traders; he campaigned resolutely for extend Jewish right to settle and trade beyond Kazimierz. In 1863 he enrolled to the Uprising Committee as an revolutionary police officer. To quote Bolesław Łopuszański, „in every field of his activity he represented that sector of Jewish society, who were attracted to Polish culture, and definitely opposed to Germanophile inclinations of some Jews.” In 1877–90 he was the president of the Jewish community in Krakow. He died on Jan. 5, 1890.

2 Ernestyna Estera Kohn (b. 1835) was the second wife of Adolf Abraham Markusfeld. His first wife, Sheyndla born Lisek, died on Jan. 28, 1849 at the age of 19 in Krakow. Archiwum Państwowe w Częstochowie, Księga metrykalna i stanu cywilnego gminy wyznania mojżeszowego w Częstochowie 1853, małżeństwa, akt nr 1, s. 95.

3 Berek Kohn was a stock provider for the army. In 1861–1862 he sat at the Town Council in Częstochowa, from 1865 he owned a tenement house at NMP Alley 27 (at the corner of Teatralna street), where his daughter Ernestyna was to live with her husband Adolf Markusfeld.


5 Rocznik Częstochowski. Kalendarz na rok 1903 wydany na korzyść Towarzystwa Dobroczynności dla Chrześcijan, p. 94.

6 J. Kon, Monografia Straży Ochotniczej w Częstochowie 1871–1911 [Częstochowa 1911. APCz, Księga metrykalna i stanu cywilnego gminy wyznania mojżeszowego w Częstochowie 1853, urodzenia, akt nr 145, p. 49.


8 Zakład Energetyczny Częstochowa SA. Stulecie elektroenergetyki Częstochowskiej, Częstochowa 1996, p. 96, 102, 108. The Light and Power Company was set up by Cyprian Apanowicz and Jan Skalmierski, joined later by Stanisław Jełowicki and Karol Lessig. In 1907 Jan Skalmierski left the


12 Pamyatnaya knizhka petrokovskoy gubernii na god 1900, p. 130, Pamyatnaya knizhka petrokovskoy gubernii na god 1904, p. 293–294; Wiadomości Częstochowskie 1906 (23 V), nr 79, p. 3; Handlowiec. Kalendarz 1914, p. 288–289.

13 The fund raising activity for the hospital project lasted from 1899, when the Jewish Charity Society was established. Thanks to Leopold Werde, Herman Ginsberg, and primarily - to H. Markusfeld the funds were raised to start the construction. The Building Committee included: Dr. E. Kohn (chairman), M. Gradstein, Jan Grossman, Henryk Ginsberg, Dr. Adam Wolberg, Engineer Ludwik Karpf. The building cost amounted to more than 150,000 rubles. The Hospital at Zawodzie consisted of five pavilions: ambulatory, main ward, infectious diseases ward, administration, and technical. One of the pavilions was named after Henryk Markusfeld. Handlowiec. Kalendarz 1914, p. 288–289.

14 Wiadomości Częstochowskie 1906 (23 V) nr 79 p. 3.

15 H. Markusfeld wanted to secure the synagogue ownership legally against any change of heart of his sons, who might have wanted to use the building to some other purpose against the wish of their parents and the founders. J. Mizgalski, Życie religijne częstochowskich Żydów w XX wieku przed holocaustem, [in: Z. Jakubowski (ed), Z dziejów Żydów w Częstochowie, Częstochowa 2002, p. 95.

16 M. Pawlina-Meducka, Kultura Żydów województwa kieleckiego (1918–1939), Kielce 1993, p. 156.


18 Goniec Częstochowski 1917 (5 VIII) nr 150, p. 2. The headmaster of the high school was a doctor of philosophy Szymon Brysz from Uniejow. Upon his death in February 1918 he was succeeded by Dr. Majer Bałaban.

19 Gazeta Częstochowska 1909 (19 XII), nr 136, p. 8.

20 Handlowiec. Kalendarz 1914, s. 295–296.

21 J. Kapsa, Henryk Markusfeld, p. 86.

22 Dziennik Częstochowski 1906 (14 VIII) nr 161, p. 3.

23 E. Małolepszy, Kultura fizyczna i przysposobienie wojskowe w Częstochowie i powiecie częstochowskim w latach 1918–1939, Częstochowa 1996, p. 74; M. Pawlina-Meducka, Kultura Żydów województwa kieleckiego (1918–1939), p. 94; Goniec Częstochowski 1908 (12 III) nr 71, p. 3, 1921 (27 X) nr 218, p. 2.

24 S. Nowak, Z moich wspomnień, cz. II, Częstochowa (lipiec 1902 – lipiec 1914), Częstochowa 1933, p. 131, 133; Wiadomości Częstochowskie 1906 (22 IV), nr 6, p. 2; Goniec Częstochowski 1907 (6 I), nr 6, p. 3.


26 Jakób Kon, the head of the Fire Brigade expressed his appreciation for Henryk Markusfeld's efforts in his own book on the Brigade history: „Let me thank here Mr. Henryk Markusfeld, for his superb gift, as well as for supporting our Brigade for so many years; no purveyor was ever waiting for his pay, as all stock were immediately paid by our treasurer, even if we not only had never any funds, but were also indebted to our treasurer for many a thousand. It would only fair to call Mr. Henryk Markusfeld the pillar preventing our institution from total decline, to whom we owe so much”. J. Kon, Monografia Straży Ogniowej Ochotniczej, p. 26.

27 S. Nowak, Z moich wspomnień, cz. II, p. 43–44.

28 APCz, Akta m. Częstochowy 27/13, t. III, k. 1906-1907. The burial ceremony, which took place on October 9, 1921, was attended by thousands of Częstochowa inhabitants with the Mayor, Dr. Józef Marczewski, and the chairman of the Town Council, Dr. Stanisław Nowak. Eulogies were delivered by: Dr. Władysław Sachs (in the synagogue), by Dr. Ludwik Batawia (in front of the Hospital), and at the Jewish cemetery by Dr. Edward Kohn, Goniec Częstochowski 1921 (27 X) nr 218, p. 2. In 1929 a motion was submitted to the Town Council to name Garncarska street after Henryk Markusfeld. The proposal was not, however, approved by the Council. Express Częstochowski 1929, nr 19, p. 2. <29 APCz, Akta m. Częstochowy 27/13, t. III, k. 1906-1907, 27/12, t. V, s. 263-264; Mag. Cz. 3620, nr akt 134; T. Szober, Rocznik informacyjny o spółkach akcyjnych w Polsce 1930, pp. 907–
The reputation of Jozef Markusfeld was confirmed by the results of the popularity contest announced in 1924 by Nowiny Częstochowskie; he was high at the list of most respected public figures of Częstochowa. Nowiny Częstochowskie 1924 (21 IX), nr 232, p. 3.

30. Adresowa książka członków Bnei Brith w Polsce, Kraków 1937.

31. The so-called Kohn’s House, built in 1865 by the constructor Hermiszewski with the stuccoist Dominik Morganti, was a property of the merchant Berek Kohn, and then of his daughter Estera Mrs. Markusfeld (mother of Henryk and Jozef).


33. The square (1,310 square meters) was purchased by the Theater Building Project Society from the Lutnia Singing Society for 28,000 zlotys.

34. APCz, Mag. Cz. 1998, k. 2. Prior to that, before May 1917, Jozef Markusfeld acted as an executive councilor at Częstochowa Municipality. Upon being elected a regular councilor, he resigned the previous function (in a letter of May 26, 1917, to the Mayor. APCz, Mag. Cz. 4998, k. 486–487, 5010, 5011, p. 7.


36. APCz, Akta miasta Częstochowy 27/13, t. III, nr akt 2.

50. Salomon Barciński (1850–1902) was a partner owner of the S. Barcinski and Co. Wool Industry. His son, brother of Emma and brother-in-law of Jozef Markusfeld was Marceli Barciński (1881–1929), entrepreneur, business and social leader.

51. Nowy Express Częstochowski 1928, nr 126, p. 3. Partner owners of the factory were the sons of Ludwik Kohn: Leopold and Alfred, as well as his daughters: Telda Mrs. Sprecker and Amelia Mrs. Heyman. The board included Dr. Stanisław Markusfeld (1864–1942) from Warsaw, a cousin of Antoni.

52. APCz, Akta miasta Częstochowy 27/13, t. III, p. 1191.