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Database of death notices from “Nasz Przegląd”

When Poland regained independence after World War I, Polish social life boomed. The new Polish culture was modern, open, multilingual and popular, with Jewish intelligentsia playing a vital role. While almost nonexistent throughout the 17th and 18th centuries, in 1920s the Jewish population of Warsaw became second largest in the world¹, and its impetuous development attracted businessmen, artists, spiritual leaders and journalists from all over Eastern Europe. A previously marginalized community underwent an immense transformation: once mostly observant and living well with Polish nobility, now there were both Warsaw Jews enjoying a secular life and identifying themselves with Polish or European culture, and very observant ones, who never met a non-Jew in their life – often within one family. Naturally, it was the press who became an essential tool to enable communication within this rapidly diversifying population. In

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With 368,394 Jewish inhabitants in 1938 (G. Zalewska, “Ludność żydowska w okresie międzywojennym”, Warsaw 1996, p. 53), Warsaw was second only to New York.

1932, the estimated total circulation of the city's daily Jewish press in Yiddish and Polish reached 170,000², with many issues being read by several neighbors one after another.

While the two main Yiddish daily newspapers, *Haynt* and *Moment*, were created before WWI and did not try to attract a modern, Polish-speaking audience, the most prominent Polish-language Jewish daily newspaper in Warsaw, founded by J. Appenzlak and N. Szwalbe and called “*Nasz Przegląd*” (“Our Review”)³ started in 1923 as a modern newspaper for everyone. In print 'till September 1939, this publication reached an estimated circulation of 50,000 issues daily and never tied itself to any political movement. Aware of their important cultural role, editors of “*Nasz Przegląd*” published not only daily news, but also all kinds of Polish literary forms, including various notices. Most importantly to us, they printed death notices for all Jewish citizens of Warsaw (even for converts to Christianity) and smaller Mazovian towns. Those obituaries often included not only dates of death and names of the deceased, but also such information as: age, profession, address, town of origin, family members, circumstances of death, employer, cemetery plot and membership in organizations.

Although copies of almost all 8962 issues of “*Nasz Przegląd*” are freely available in Warsaw libraries, there is no index to death notices and therefore no way to obtain the data without exact knowledge of the date of death. An index of obituaries would enable users to easily find relatives and all available information about them. Therefore, I'm planning to inventory all issues of “*Nasz Przegląd*” and prepare an index.

The inventory will consist in collecting all relevant

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M. Steinlauf, “The Polish-Jewish Daily Press”, *Polin* 2 (1987): 219–245

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M. Fuks, „Prasa żydowska w Warszawie, 1823–1939”, Warsaw 1979

information from the notices, translating them into English and putting into a database. The database will be freely available in the Internet.

As most sources concerning Warsaw Jewish community after WWI have been irreversibly lost, the data from the “Nasz Przegląd” death notices is unique. There are various historical, social and biographical works discussing diverse aspects of pre-WWII Warsaw Jewish history, but for genealogists it's almost entirely a *terra incognita*. The most active and triumphant years in the history of Warsaw Jews are practically undocumented on the level of single people.

Just themselves, “Nasz Przegląd” death notices constitute an invaluable source of genealogical information, almost untapped to this day. Combined with the current state of Jewish Warsaw cemeteries and the fact that there are no Jewish civil registry documents in Warsaw from 1914 to 1945, this source is not only a treasure for every Jewish genealogist whose relatives lived in Warsaw or vicinities, but also for historians, sociologists and anthropologists all over the world.

Despite an increased general interest in publishing scanned newspapers in the Internet, the Warsaw University Library is not planning to publish “Nasz Przegląd” this way in the coming years. Therefore, the researcher's plan to index all death notices in the next academic year provides a unique opportunity to make this