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Jakub Jan Spira – genealogy and works, including the years 1939–1945

Abstract

The article discusses the genealogy and work of Jakub Jan Spira (1902–1979) with special emphasis placed on the years 1930–1945.

The study is based on historical and photographic documentation of the buildings, in situ research, analysis of available academic studies and other sources (including urban space value assessment studies and building inventory cards), as well as information from genealogical portals and microhistorical sources. The research provided grounds for concluding that Jakub Spira's works constitute an architectural heritage of considerable significance and that his activity contributed to shaping high-quality urban space in Kraków. The civil engineer worked successfully in both the design and construction sectors, both independently and in collaboration with numerous architects, builders, and other specialists. The projects in which he participated are distinguished by an innovative approach, manifested in the use of modern materials, forms, and building structures. In Kraków, he created – or significantly contributed to the creation, as a construction manager or designer – of several dozen buildings, mostly residential tenements, but also other structures, including a care home, a day camp pavilion for children, and a water tower.

Documenting the history of outstanding individuals and their work under the particularly difficult conditions of World War II seems crucial for preserving their memory. The collected data, photographic documentation, information and archival materials provided by descendants can support efforts to protect Jakub Spira's architectural legacy and expand knowledge of Kraków's architecture during the discussed period.

Key words: Jakub Spira, architecture 1939–1945, Krakow, architectural heritage, Krakow tenement

Introduction

Jakub Jan Spira (1902–1979) was a prominent civil engineer of Jewish origin who worked primarily in Kraków. The subject of this article is his professional activity, with particular emphasis on the years 1939–1945. The text is enriched with the genealogy of the Spira family residing in Kraków for many generations.

The chronological scope of the article covers Jakub Spira's professional activity from 1931 until his death in 1979. It presents the architect's most important works from 1930–1939, as well as all his Kraków projects realised in the years 1939–1945 that could be located. His post-war work is presented in a concise manner. Based on the discovered doc-

uments, a family tree has also been compiled, tracing his lineage back to the early 18th century.

The territorial scope of the research includes existing and non-existent projects carried out in Kraków within the city's districts as they were in the 1930s: District III – Nowy Świat, IV – Piasek, V – Kleparz, VI – Wesoła, VIII – Kazimierz, XV – Nowa Wieś, XIX – Grzegórzki, and XXII – Podgórze.

The aim of the article is to present the works of Jakub Spira, including the period of 1939–1945. The legacy of Jewish architects and builders in Kraków is significant. Commemorating and analysing the work of a prominent member of this professional group seems particularly important in view of the significance of his oeuvre. A publication that discusses Spira's work through the lens of his origins and personal history may contribute to a deeper understanding of this valuable architectural heritage.

The following research hypothesis has been formulated in the article: the works of Spira constitute an architectural

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legacy of considerable significance, and his professional activity contributed to the creation of high-quality urban space of Kraków.

The analysis is based on a selection of 19 major designs authored or co-authored by him, as well as building projects in which he served as construction manager. A detailed analysis was conducted for four buildings from 1930–1939 and six from the time of World War II. In the interwar years, architects of Jewish origin formed a significant group of educated and experienced professionals (about 90 individuals) who played an active role in the construction and shaping of the city's space. During the war, most of them lost their lives, and some were forced to emigrate.

State of research

The fate of architects and builders in Kraków during World War II has been discussed in several publications (Agatstein-Dormontowa 1957; Motak 2024), as has the situation of the Jewish population in this period (Agatstein-Dormontowa 1957; Rączy 2014; Zajączkowska-Drożdż 2020; Kotarba 2022). The versatile professional activity of Spira has also been described in several works, including books by Barbara Zbroja on architects and builders of Jewish origin based and active in Kraków (2023, 216–218) and on the public utility architecture they designed (2005, 142, 143, 169). A concise overview of selected projects by Spira can be found in published texts (Spira 1932; Dyba, Brzoskwinia 2007, 492; Zbroja 2017) and in unpublished typescripts (Beiersdorf 1979–1981; Krasnowolski 1998; Danilczyk et al. 2004; Danilczyk, Kasprzyk 2005). Kraków tenement houses from the interwar period – including selected buildings designed by Spira – have been discussed in a number of publications (Purchla 1997; Makowska 2009; 2014; Zbroja 2013).

There is, however, no study presenting the entirety of Spira's professional output. Therefore, a detailed analysis of his work – particularly from the most difficult period of World War II – will contribute to a better understanding and preservation of this valuable heritage.

Description of the authors' own research

Research methods

The adopted traditional research methods (literature review, archival research in the Archiwum Narodowe w Krakowie [National Archives in Kraków] (ANK), *in situ* research – documentation and analysis of photographs of existing buildings) enabled presentation of the work and professional activity of Jakub Spira. The article also employs the method of microhistorical analysis (Motak 2024). This approach is based on research that preserves the individual element of the narrative while aiming at generalization of the results. Presenting Spira's work within the broader context of the genealogy of his family residing in Kraków for many years, as well as his fate during World War II, makes it possible to show how difficult the situation of Jewish architects and builders was at that time and how great were the losses that this creative community suffered.

The analysis of Spira's ancestors and family history was based on genealogical research and documents preserved in the collections of the ANK. Particularly useful for reconstructing the six-generation family tree of Spira's ancestors were Dan Hirschberg's studies on Jewish families in Kraków (Jewish Krakow... 2023) and data found on genealogical websites (Geni 2022; My Heritage 2025a, b). The information contained therein (some of it, unfortunately, incorrect) was verified by locating 41 vital data records (birth, marriage, and death certificates) concerning 51 ancestors. The genealogical website Geni includes only 26 of Spira's ancestors in its family tree (2022). Documents from the ANK *Akta stanu cywilnego Izraelickiego Okręgu Metrykalnego w Krakowie* [Civil Registry Records of the Israelite Vital Records District in Kraków] also enabled tracking down changes in the addresses of the Spira family in Kraków.

Jan Jakub Spira – genealogy

Jakub Jan Spira¹ came from a Jewish family with roots in Kraków and Wodzisław² (near Jędrzejów). He was born in Kraków on 18 September 1902 (Fig. 1) and died on 30 August 1979 in Manchester, United Kingdom (Zbroja 2023). In 1945, the spelling of his surname was changed to Spyra³. Jakub's parents were the spice/mixed goods merchant Joel Natan (Juliusz) Spira (born 5 December 1874 in Kraków, died 19 May 1938 in Kraków) and Scheindel⁴ Salomea Weinberger (born 15 January 1877 in Kraków, died around 1942 as a result of the Holocaust) (Figs. 2a, b). Jakub had an older brother, Albert (born 26 December 1899 in Kraków, died around 1947 in Wandsworth), and two younger brothers: Karol (born 24 February 1908 in Kraków, died between 1942 and 1944 as a result of the Holocaust) and Mercel (born 12 January 1912 in Kraków, died 28 July 1913 in Kraków). Joel and Scheindel's family lived in Kraków, first at 9 Miodowa Street (in 1899), and later at 45 Dietla Street (1902), 4 Kołetek Street (1908), 71 Grodzka Street (1912/1913), 8 Św. Sebastiana Street, and in the 1930s at 19 Sarego Street (until 1932: Zielona Street) (Centralna Biblioteka Judaistyczna).

Jakub's grandfather was the merchant Abraham Spira (born 10 June 1828 in Kraków, died before 1917) (Fig. 2c), and his grandmother was Rebeka Ryfka née Frost (born 1 October 1844 in Kraków, died 16 November 1917 in Kraków) (Fig. 2d). His great-grandfather, Herszel Saul Spira, was a "market speculator" and Talmudist in 1828. Jakub's great-great-grandfather was Saul⁵ Spira, the son of Israel Spira⁶.

The architect's ancestors (Fig. 3) belonged to well-known Kraków families. They pursued various professions: Saul

¹ Another version of the names: Jacov/Yaakov Yan/Yanik.

² Saul and Raycla Spira lived in Wodzisław in a house at no. 22 (in 1818).

³ The modification of the surname is visible on Jakub Spira's birth certificate – a note by the Voivodeship Office in Kraków dated 20 July 1945.

⁴ Another version of the name: Szejndel.

⁵ The article uses the Hebrew version of the names.

⁶ Another version of the name: Kahana-Shapira. The surname most likely originates from the city of Speyer (Spira).

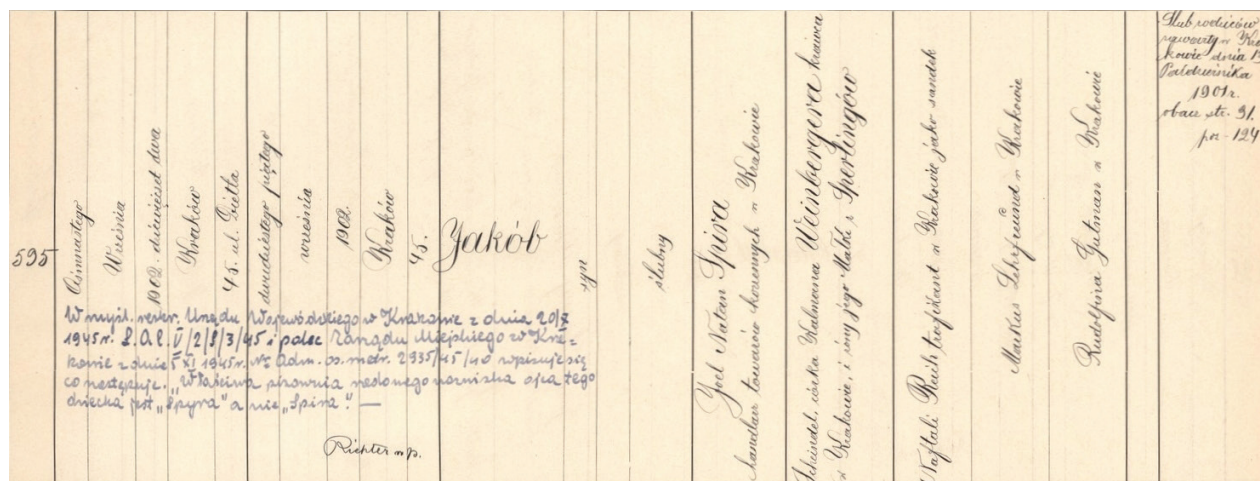


Fig. 1. Jakub Spira's birth certificate

(source: ANK, Civil Registry Records of the Israelite Vital Records District in Krakow, ref. no. 29/1472/488, record 595, p. 199)

II. 1. Akt urodzenia Jakuba Spiry

(źródło: ANK, Akta stanu cywilnego Izraelickiego Okręgu Metrykalnego w Krakowie, sygn. 29/1472/488, akt 595, s. 199)

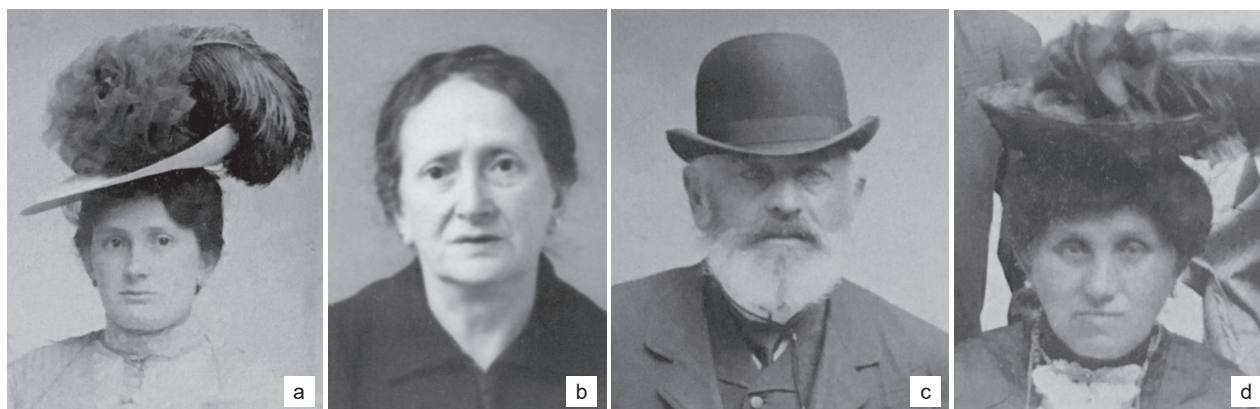


Fig. 2. Jakub Spira's family: a) Mother Scheindel as a young woman, 1906 (source: A. Bennett's archives),

b) Mother in 1940 (source: Central Jewish Library, Archives of the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute, ref. no. 218/34/215/60,

"Personal questionnaires of persons designated for resettlement from Kraków, 20.08.1940", <https://cbj.jhi.pl/documents/899353/0/>),

c) Grandfather Abraham Spira, 1906 (source: A. Bennett's archives), d) grandmother Rebeka, 1906 (source: A. Bennett's archives)

II. 2. Rodzina Jakuba Spiry: a) matka Scheindel w młodości, 1906 (źródło: zbiory A. Bennett),

b) matka, 1940 (źródło: Centralna Biblioteka Judaistyczna. Zbiory Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego im. E. Ringelbluma, sygn. 218/34/215/60, "Ankiety personalne osób skierowanych do wysiedlenia z Krakowa. 20.08.1940" <https://cbj.jhi.pl/documents/899353/0/>),

c) dziadek Abraham Spira, 1906 (źródło: zbiory A. Bennett), d) babcia Rebeka, 1906 (źródło: zbiory A. Bennett)

Spira and Israel Spira were rabbis in Wodzisław (AGAD); Kalman Weinberger and Samuel Weinberger were tailors; Mendel Lazar Sperling was a trade agent; Mosze Hirsz Josef Sperling worked as a hospital orderly; Mosze Lobzower was a shopkeeper; and Abraham Goldman was a trader.

Jakub Spira (Figs. 4a, b) completed his studies in German at the Faculty of Civil Engineering of the Technical University in Brno, Moravia, in 1924. He obtained his professional licence, issued by the Directorate of Public Works of the Voivodeship Office in Kraków, in 1932 (Zbroja 2023, 216). Until the outbreak of World War II, he lived and worked in Kraków, following in the footsteps of many generations of his ancestors. During the war, he moved to Lviv, where – on 3 October 1940 – he married Maryla Halina (Chaja) Langberg (Fig. 4c).

Jakub Spira's more important works from the years 1930–1939

Jakub Spira was a member of numerous professional organizations, including the Kraków branch of the Polish Association of Civil Engineers, the Association of Jewish Engineers in Kraków, and the Professional Association of Builders, Construction Managers, Technicians, and Building Industrialists in Kraków (Zbroja 2023, 217). In the 1930s, Spira was a highly-valued and respected designer and structural engineer in the Kraków professional community – he worked as [...] a sworn court expert in civil engineering, reinforced concrete, and steel struct.[ures]. Kraków, Zielona 19, Tel. 101-40 (ANK, AMK, ref. no. 29/33/Kr 3759). In 1932, he founded his own design stu-

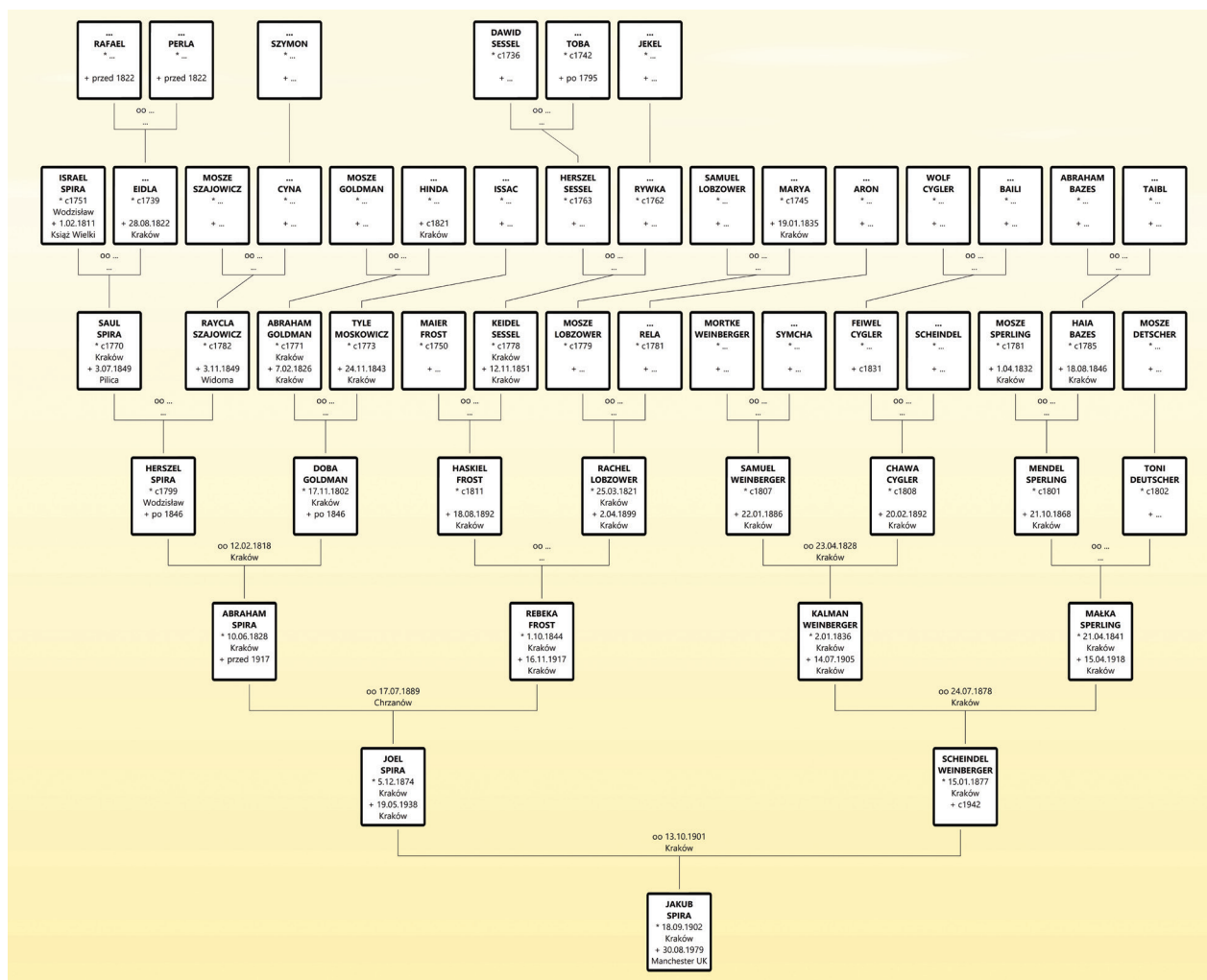


Fig. 3. Genealogical tree of Jakub Spira's ancestors, elaborated by B. Makowska
(source: ANK, Civil Registry Records of the Israelite Vital Records District in Krakow, ref. no. 29/1472/488; Jewish Krakow... 2023)

Il. 3. Drzewo genealogiczne Jakuba Spiry, oprac. B. Makowska
(źródło: ANK, Akta stanu cywilnego Izraelickiego Okręgu Metrykalnego w Krakowie, sygn. 29/1472/488; Jewish Krakow... 2023)

dio. An example of his work are the static calculations for the reinforced concrete frame of the Artists' House [Dom Plastyków] (designed by Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, 1934–1939) at 3 Łobzowska Street, which he did in 1934 (ANK, Municipal Construction Archives [ABM], 3 Łobzowska Street, fasc. 534). Spira was a licenced construction manager and probably sometimes signed off designs by his architect colleagues⁷, which is why authorship is not always easy to verify. He probably obtained a *licence to prepare plans (designs) for construction works* under certain conditions (Rozporządzenie Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej 1928, 394). During this period, he collaborated with notable architects and builders, such as: Edward Kreisler,

Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz, Józef Wetzstein, Alfred Düntuch, Rudolf Hand, Ignacy Bierer, Stanisław Zydrón, and Samuel Nebenzahl.

Thanks to his versatile professional competencies, Jakub Spira was able to partially circumvent the restrictions in practising his profession that affected Jewish architects and builders in Kraków (Motak 2021, 52–58). His works from 1930–1939 include:

- rebuilding of Fabryka Kabli [Cable Factory] at 114 Wielicka Street, District XXII (designed by Spira, 1930) (Zbroja 2023, 218),
- buildings of Fabryka Chemiczno-Farmaceutyczna Dr A. Wander S.A. [Dr. A. Wander Chemical-Pharmaceutical Factory] at 80 Mogilska Street, District XIX (designed by Spira, 1930–1931) (ANK, ABM, 80 Mogilska Street, fasc. 621 and 622) (Fig. 5a),
- the tenement of Przedsiębiorstwo dla Budowli Żelbetowych E. Uderski i Ska [Reinforced Concrete Construction Company E. Uderski & Co.] at 25 Lubelska Street, District XV (designed by Spira, 1930–1935) (ANK, ABM, 25 Lubelska Street, fasc. 515),

⁷ The Kraków building authority (the Building Department in the City Hall, and from 1934 the Building Department of the Municipal Board, often tacitly accepted such informal arrangements, but always required that the project meet the relevant criteria (Motak 2021, 52–58). This is confirmed by numerous accounts and conjectures of many researchers. However, such situations were rarely fully reflected in the official documentation; and most often, they were not reflected at all.

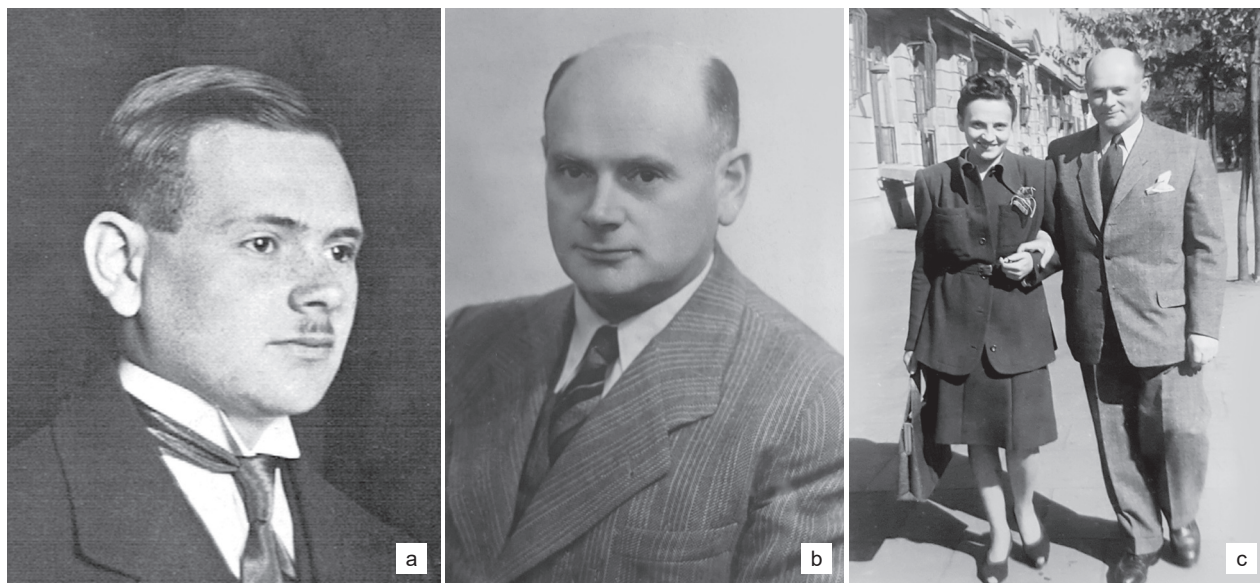


Fig. 4. Jakub Jan Spira: a) circa 1920, b) circa 1939, c) with his wife, the photo taken in Dunajewskiego Street in Krakow probably in the summer of 1945 (according to the caption on the photograph, taken in Lviv circa 1942) (source: A. Bennett's archives)

Il. 4. Jakub Jan Spira: a) około 1920, b) około 1939, c) z żoną, zdjęcie wykonane na ul. Dunajewskiego w Krakowie, prawdopodobnie latem 1945 (według podpisu na fotografii wykonane we Lwowie około 1942) (źródło: zbiory A. Bennett)

- the tenement at 43 Łobzowska Street / 1 Szlak Street, District IV (designed by Düntuch, Spira, 1934) (ANK, ABM, 43 Łobzowska Street, fasc. 539),

- the tenement at 2a Józefińska Street, District XXII (designed by Spira, Bierer, 1936) (ANK, ABM, 2a Józefińska Street, fasc. 338),

- the tenement at 20b Lea Street, District XV (designed by Spira, Kreisler?, 1935–1936) (ANK, ABM, 2a Józefińska Street, fasc. 197a),

- the tenement at 72 Krowoderska Street, District IV (designed by Spira, 1936) (ANK, ABM, 72 Krowoderska Street, fasc. 458),

- the tenement at 1 Bujwida/8 Łazarza Street, District VI (designed by Spira, Zydrón, 1936) (ANK, ABM, 1 Bujwida Street, fasc. 89), and

- expansion of Fabryka Chemiczno-Farmaceutyczna Dr A. Wander S.A. [Dr. A. Wander Chemical-Pharmaceutical Factory] at 80 Mogilska Street, District XIX (designed by Spira, 1930–1931) (ANK, ABM, 80 Mogilska Street, fasc. 621 and 622).

Other works by Spira from the period 1930–1939 include:

- Water tower at 28 Rzeźnicza Street, District XIX (designed by Spira, 1931)

The old water tower was located on the site of the former municipal slaughterhouse (designed by Maciej Moraczewski, 1878), which was dismantled during the redevelopment of the complex around 1911, as the facility had by then been connected to the municipal water supply. However, water consumption at the slaughterhouse was so high that, in 1931, a new water tower was constructed using reinforced concrete, which was designed by Spira (Fig. 5b). It was built by Przedsiębiorstwo dla Budowli Żelbetowych E. Uderski i Ska [Reinforced Concrete Construction Company E. Uderski & Co.] (Spira 1932; Zbroja 2013, 170). It featured a modern,

partially openwork form mounted on an octagonal plinth. The tower was demolished in 2003 in connection with the construction of the Galeria Kazimierz shopping mall.

- Tenement house at 10 Asnyka Street, District IV (designed by Spira, Kreisler?, 1936–1937)

The four-story tenement with a wide (24.2 m) frontage was designed in 1936. The design was probably authored by Edward Kreisler (Zbroja 2023, 218), with Spira serving as construction manager. At the time, the owners of the tenement were Izrael, Jozue, Józef, Szulem, and Herman Abrahamer, as well as Helena Horowitz. The building, constructed on an approximately rectangular plan, forms a continuous street frontage and is made of brick and reinforced concrete, with a plastered finish. It is a two-bay building with a central corridor passage (Dreścik 1978; Beiersdorf 1979–1981; Danilczyk, Kasprzyk 2005, 9–10). A hall running through the whole building was designed along the central axis, and a staircase at the rear axis. The Building Department ordered placing a decorative emblem above the entrance gate (ANK, ABM, 10 Asnyka Street, fasc. 9). The bas-relief *He and She with a Fawn* was created by the sculptor Joanna Grabowska (original surname: Roma Szereszewska), the daughter-in-law of the investor Izrael Abrahamer (Grabowska 2021).

The front façade is seven bays wide on the ground floor and eight bays on the upper floors (Fig. 6). It features prominent bay windows spanning the six central bays, suspended above a partially fluted ground floor. The horizontal articulation is emphasized by the wide windows of the bay and their protruding surrounds, while the vertical articulation is highlighted by the porte-fenêtres in the outermost bays. The decorative emblem above the wide entrance portal with a geometrically stylized grille depicts two women with a fawn. Each floor contains two flats. The ground floor includes two two-room flats and a caretaker's flat. A spacious hall runs along the



Fig. 5. Spira's works from the years 1930–1939: a) the building of the Dr. A. Wander Chemical-Pharmaceutical Factory at 80 Mogilska Street, 1964 (photo by Jerzy Suberlak, source: <https://fotopolska.eu/1424286.foto.html?o=b197525&p=1>), b) the water tower in Rzeźnicza Street, 28 Jan. 1932 (source: NAC sygn. 3/1/0/8/6583)

- II. 5. Dzieła Spiry z okresu 1930–1939: a) budynek Fabryki Chemiczno-Farmaceutycznej Dr A. Wander S.A. przy ul. Mogilskiej 80, 1964 (fot. Jerzy Suberlak, źródło: <https://fotopolska.eu/1424286.foto.html?o=b197525&p=1>), b) wieża ciśnieni przy ul. Rzeźniczej, 28.01.1932 (źródło: NAC, sygn. 3/1/0/8/6583)



Fig. 6. Tenement at 10 Asnyka Street: a) the ground floor plan (source: ANK, ABM, 10 Asnyka Street, fasc. 9), b) façade (source: ANK, ABM, 10 Asnyka Street, fasc. 9), c) front façade (photo by B. Makowska)

- II. 6. Kamienica przy ul. Asnyka 10: a) rzut parteru (źródło: ANK, ABM, ul. Asnyka 10, fasc. 9), b) elewacja (źródło: ANK, ABM, ul. Asnyka 10, fasc. 9), c) elewacja frontowa (fot. B. Makowska)

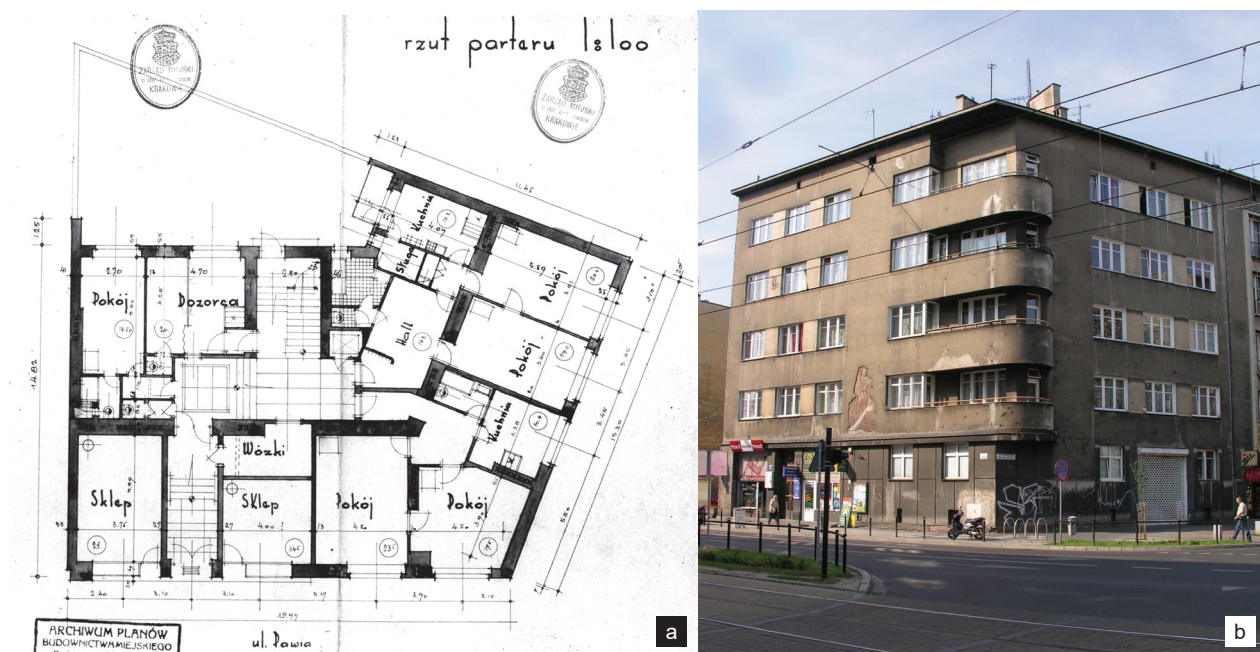


Fig. 7. Tenement at 12 Pawia Street / 11 Worcella Street:

a) the ground floor plan (source: ANK, ABM, 12 Pawia Street, fasc. 668), b) front façade (photo by B. Makowska)

II. 7. Kamienica przy ul. Pawiej 12 / Worcella 11:

a) rzut parteru (źródło: ANK, ABM ul. Pawia 12, fasc. 668), b) elewacja frontowa (fot. B. Makowska)

central axis of the building, with the staircase located in the adjacent right-hand axis. The garden-facing façade features a slight risalit with characteristic round bathroom windows and an oval portal (Makowska 2014, 174).

- Tenement at 12 Pawia Street / 11 Worcella Street, District V (designed by Spira, 1937–1938)

The five-storey corner tenement house was designed and built in 1937–1938 (Makowska 2014, 184). Spira served as the construction manager. The owners of the building were Marian Rozmaryn, Antoni Jasiński, and Ignacy Halpern. It was built of brick and reinforced concrete, and it is plastered. The Building Department ordered placing a decorative emblem above the entrance gate (ANK, ABM, 12 Pawia Street, fasc. 668). Executed in the sgraffito technique, it depicts a highlander with a peacock sitting on a branch (a reference to the street's name); it is located at the level of the first floor. The front façade in Pawia Street is five bays wide, while the one in Worcella Street has four bays (Fig. 7). A dynamic corner was designed, composed of four-storey loggias with balconies featuring solid, rounded, plastered balustrades. An interesting detail is the horizontal flagpole. The entrance portal, with shopfronts planned next to it, is adorned with doors incorporating semicircular motifs harmonized with the shape of the balconies. The spandrel panels are rendered in lighter-coloured plaster, accentuating the horizontal articulation of the façade. The tenement is a two-bay building with a corridor between the bays (Danilczyk, Kasprzyk 2005, 323, 324). In the second axis from the southern wing, the front bay contains a vestibule with a short flight of stairs, while the rear bay includes a hall leading to the staircase located in the adjacent axis, as well as a lift. The irregular, corner-shaped plot affected the plan layout, resulting in po-

lygonal rooms at the intersection of oblique directions and a staircase shifted off the entrance axis.

- Tenement at 9 Worcella Street, District V (designed by Spira, 1937–1938)

The five-storey tenement house was designed and erected in 1937–1938 in the former Pawia Boczna Street. The construction manager was Jakub Spira⁸. In 1938, additional plans were submitted for internal alterations (Makowska 2014, 190). The owner of the building was Waleria Rydlewska. The Building Department required that a decorative emblem be placed above the entrance gate (ANK, ABM, 6 Worcella Street, fasc. 991); it depicts a woman with a child and a tray of fruit. The front façade is five bays wide on the ground floor and four bays on the upper storeys (Fig. 8). The outer bays are accentuated by shallow loggias framed within a common surround. A horizontal accent on the façade is formed by the continuous framing of the entrance and the adjacent windows. The tenement is two-bay with an inter-bay corridor, built of brick and reinforced concrete, and plastered. Along the central axis in the front bay, a vestibule with a short flight of stairs was designed, while in the rear bay there is a two-flight staircase (Dayczak-Domanasiewicz 1976; Danilczyk, Kasprzyk 2005, 571, 572).

Works by Jakub Spira from the years 1939–1945

After the deportations of the Jewish population from Kraków in 1940 and the establishment of the ghetto in the

⁸ The fact is confirmed by a stamp: *construction management – Eng. Jakub Jan Spira*.



Fig. 8. Tenement at 9 Worcella Street;

a) façade (source: ANK, ABM, 9 Worcella Street, fasc. 991), b) front façade (photo by B. Makowska)

Il. 8. Kamienica przy ul. Worcella 9: a) elewacja (źródło: ANK, ABM, ul. Worcella 9, fasc. 991), b) elewacja frontowa (fot. B. Makowska)

Podgórze district in 1941, architects of Jewish origin had increasingly limited opportunities to work. Spira probably stayed in Lviv from the autumn of 1939, where he worked for some time at the construction company Johann Pontess Baukonstruktionen (Reiss 1993, 84). In September 1942, Dr. Tadeusz Niesielski arranged identification documents for him under the name Jan Sysak, which enabled his survival (Zbroja 2023, 217, 218). Later, the architect went into hiding in Warsaw, and after the war – probably in 1945 – he returned to Kraków.

The works attributed to him from this period include:

- Tenement at 13 Lenartowicz Street, District IV (designed by Spira, Kreisler, 1938 – 1940)

The tenement was designed by Edward Kreisler (Zbroja 2017; 2023, 218) for the Dr A. Wander Chemical and Pharmaceutical Factory and built between 1938 and 1940. Spira served as the construction manager⁹. According to the site log, he worked on this project until 29 August 1939, after which, from 30 October of the same year, it was supervised by Diana Reiter (representing Kazimierz Kulczyński's company). The tenement is two-bay, with segments of an inter-

bay corridor (Danilczyk, Kasprzyk 2005, 255). The asymmetrical, two-part volume features distinct horizontal window bands that continue around the corner (Fig. 9). The division of the façade into a four-storey and a six-storey section creates a gradual transition between the three-storey building flanking it on the right and the six-storey building on the left. The front façade of the southern section projects forward in a shallow risalit in relation to the two-axis northern section. The entrance portal, with a rounded right corner made of glass blocks, features doors decorated with a geometric grille and is placed in the northernmost axis. It leads to a carriage passageway and a spacious vestibule with a lift and a staircase located in the rear bay along the adjacent axis. The building is an example of functionalism, uncommon in Kraków's modernist residential architecture (Purchla 1997, 175). On the right side, the plot ends with an oblique wall, along which the sanitary facilities and servants' quarters were placed. In this building, Spira and Kreisler used new materials – the recess of the entrance portal was made of glass blocks, providing daylight to the cart storage area and the entrance hall – as well as an innovative skeletal structure, which allowed for more flexible interior layouts. The terrace serves as a decorative element enhancing the plasticity of the façade. The Building Department required a decorative emblem to be placed above the entrance gate (ANK, ABM,

⁹ The fact is confirmed by a stamp: *construction management – Eng. Jakub Jan Spira*.

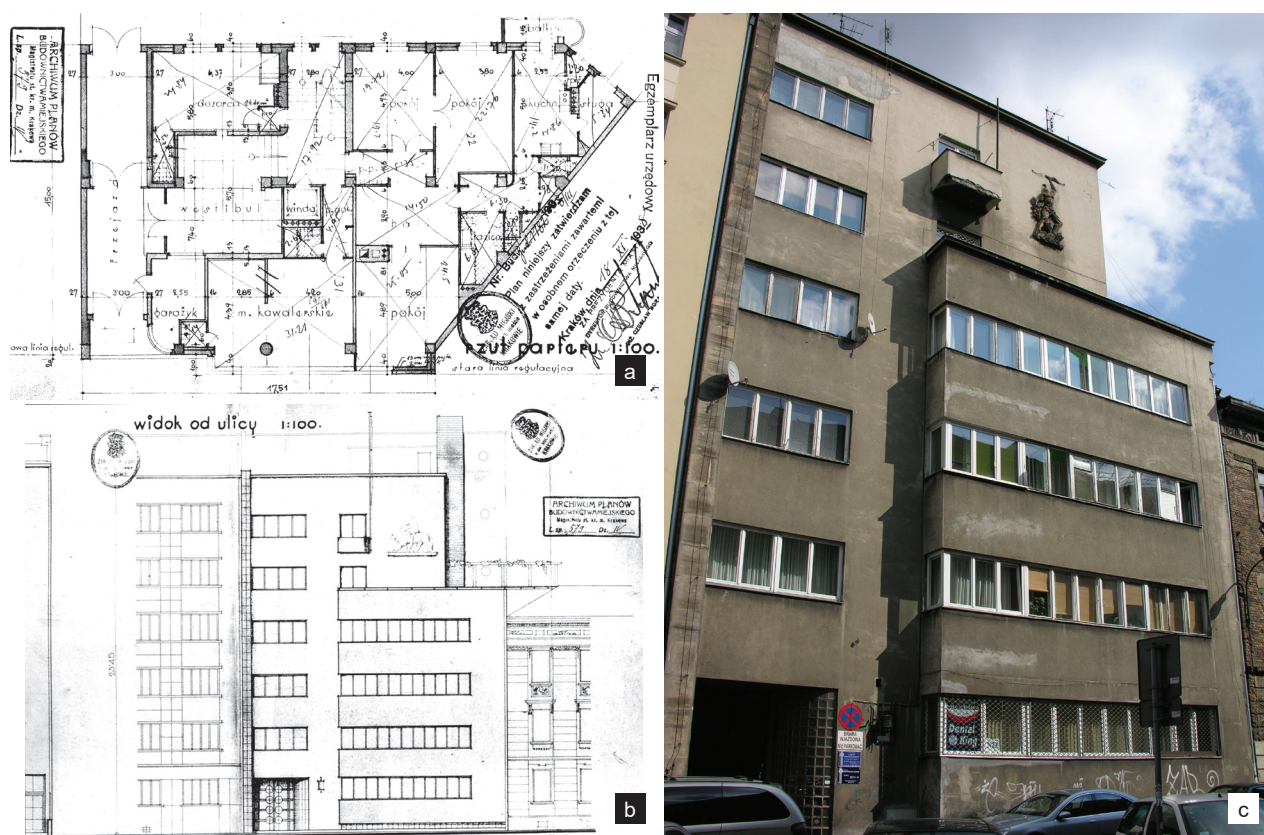


Fig. 9. Tenement at 13 Lenartowicza Street: a) the ground floor plan (source: ANK, ABM, 13 Lenartowicza Street, fasc. 491), b) façade (source: ANK, ABM, 13 Lenartowicza Street, fasc. 491), c) front façade (photo by B. Makowska)

II. 9. Kamienica przy ul. Lenartowicza 13: a) rzut parteru (źródło: ANK, ABM, ul. Lenartowicza 13, fasc. 491), b) elewacja (źródło: ANK, ABM, ul. Lenartowicza 13, fasc. 491), c) elewacja frontowa (fot. B. Makowska)

13 Lenartowicza Street, fasc. 491); it depicts an archer¹⁰, in some sources interpreted as a representation of Saint George (Danilczyk, Kasprzyk 2005, 255). The emblem is now located on the top floor.

- Tenement at 3 Smoleńsk Street, District III (designed by Nebenzahl, Spira, 1938–1940)

The tenement was designed by Eng. Samuel Nebenzahl, with the significant involvement of Jakub Spira, who, among other things, prepared an alternative design and designs for a free-standing garage, as well as supervised the entire construction process. The documentation bears the stamps of the licenced civil engineers Nebenzahl and Spira. The client was Dr. Kazimierz Karelus, an ophthalmologist and the owner of the property. The 1935 design, prepared for the previous owner, had expired; the new design by Nebenzahl and Spira (dated 13 September 1938) featured modifications to the internal layout and façades. It was submitted on 25 April and approved on 13 May 1939 (ANK, ABM, 3 Smoleńsk Street, fasc. 834), at a time when construction was likely already underway. The outbreak of the war did not stop the building works (or only interrupted them briefly). However, from September 1939, correspondence from the Building Department to the owner was no

longer addressed to Eng. Spira, as before, but directly to Karelus. Most probably, Spira was no longer involved in the construction (or he was – for a short period – but only informally). It is impossible to determine whether this resulted primarily from restrictions imposed by the occupation or from Spira's departure to Lviv. Both before and after the outbreak of the war, the authorities confirmed the completion of successive stages of construction in accordance with the architectural and engineering designs, with only minor reservations. The occupancy permit for the tenement house was granted on 3 October 1940.

The building was designed in a modern style, typical of Kraków designs from the late 1930s. In addition to the standard residential programme, it is worth noting that it included a part designated for the medical practice on the first floor and a “gas shelter” in the basement. The revised design also introduced a number of changes: the free-standing garage in the courtyard was enlarged from three to four spaces, and a new, alternative form of the emblem above the entrance was included in the form of a sketch (Fig. 10). The three-storey building with a lift still exists today in its original form. The façade has six axes, with the four central ones visually unified by horizontal cornices placed beneath the windows. The window and portal frames, as well as the ground-floor plinth, were made of sandstone. Above the entrance portal is a geometric floral decoration and an emblem – added later – depicting the Eye of Providence. The shape

¹⁰ In the design documentation, it depicted a child riding a lion.

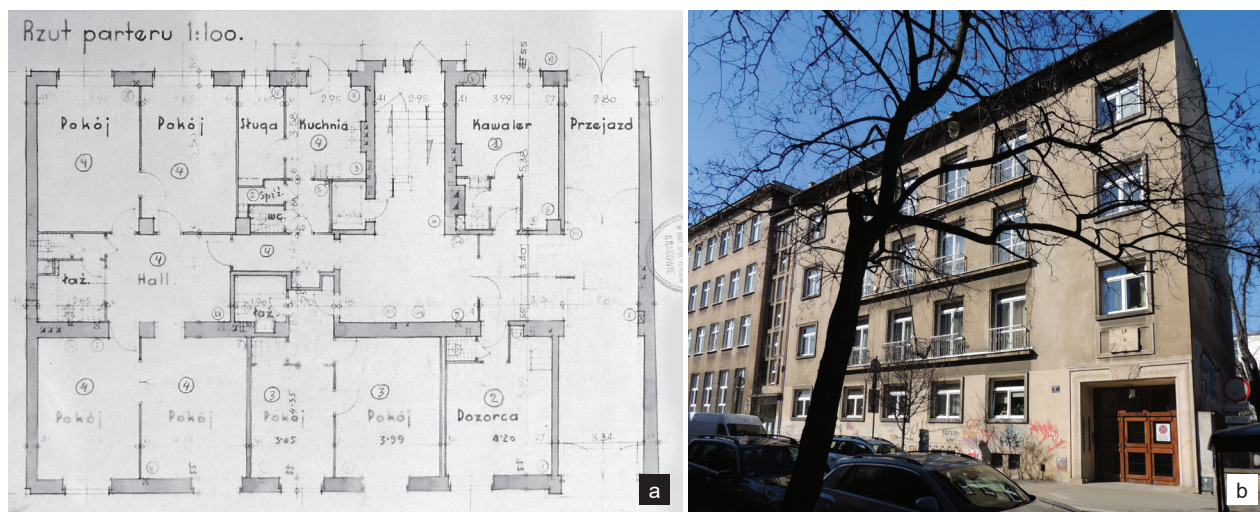


Fig. 10. Tenement at 3 Smoleńsk Street: a) the ground floor plan (source: ANK, ABM, 3 Smoleńsk Street, ssc. 834), b) the tenement façade (photo by B. Makowska)

Il. 10. Kamienica przy ul. Smoleńsk 3: a) rzut parteru (źródło: ANK, ABM, ul. Smoleńsk 3, fasc. 834), b) elewacja kamienicy (fot. B. Makowska)

of it does not fit the dimensions of the space originally intended for the emblem. The balcony railings are decorated with nautical knot motifs, and a flagpole, set at an angle of about 20°, was placed on the façade's central axis.

- The Old People's Home of the "Asyfas Skeinim" Society at 6 Chmielowskiego Street, District VIII (designed by Kreisler, Spira, 1937–1940)

The building of the "Asyfas Skeinim" Society for the Protection of Jewish Old People was erected between 1937 and 1940 thanks to a bequest from Adolf Arber. It was designed by the architect Edward Kreisler (Zbroja 2005, 142, 146; 2013, 276). Spira served as the technical advisor to the board of the "Asyfas Skeinim" Society (Krakowski Zakład Starców Żydowskich 1937, 15). He was also the construction manager for the project and executed the static calculations for the structure (ANK, ABM, 1 Augustiańska Street, ref. no 29/1410/1617; ANK, ABM, Augustiańska Boczna Street, ref. no 29/1410/1642). The building was erected as a corner structure in the then Augustiańska Boczna Street (now 6 Chmielowskiego Street). Documents preserved in the ANK archives refer to it as the Zakład Starców Żydowskich (ANK, ABM, TAU, BUP, 6 Chmielowskiego Street, fasc. 24, 2213–2216). They refer to several finishing works, including carpentry, metalwork, glazing, and painting. They were recorded on tracing sheets of the original project plans and are only briefly described, but they help in a closer understanding of the building. Additionally, a number of other documents have survived, such as: the plans from 1938, supplementary plans from 1939, and several official documents including the approval of the sewage system plan (ANK, ABM, 1 Augustiańska Street, ref. no 29/1410/1617) and a hot water heating system design (ANK, ABM, Augustiańska Boczna Street, ref. no 29/1410/1642).

The building has an L-shaped plan. Residents' rooms were located on the four above-ground floors of the southern wing and the two upper floors of the eastern wing. The eastern wing also contained administrative offices (on the

ground floor) and common rooms (on the first floor), while the basement housed the kitchen facilities, technical rooms, and a mortuary, ominously referred to as the "corpse room /trupiarnia/." The entrance complex, located at the corner, was designed to be both impressive and clear: a spacious hall was highlighted by wide internal stairs and round columns defining the space. All rooms and corridors were well lit with natural daylight. The building's style was fully modernist.

Based on undated documentation, it can be assumed that the building was almost complete at the time of the war outbreak. It has survived to this day, although it never served the function it was originally intended for. The free-standing building is three storeys high, with the eastern wing one storey taller. It features typical functionalist elements, such as extensive glazing and linear façades created by cornices linking the windows (Fig. 11). The entrance is located at the corner and emphasized by a projecting bay.

- Design for the reconstruction of the day-care building for Jewish children run by the Society for the Care of Jewish Orphans at 35 Krzemionki Street (designed by Spira, 1939)

The day-care building was designed for the Society for the Care of Jewish Orphans. Spira served as the construction manager¹¹. It was likely built in 1935, although it may be assumed that the building itself (perhaps in a different form) had already existed earlier, from the 1920s. A 1926 record contains information that day camps at Krzemionki, attended by 460 children, ended on 20 August. *On rainy days, activities were organized in the classrooms of the J. I. Kraszewski Primary School* (Brzoza 2023, 454) – which would suggest that the day-care building probably did not yet exist at that time. In the summer of 1939, designs for its expansion were prepared – in fact, it was a minor adjustment of the internal layout. However, thanks to this design,

¹¹ The fact is confirmed by the stamp: Eng. Jan Jakub Spira.

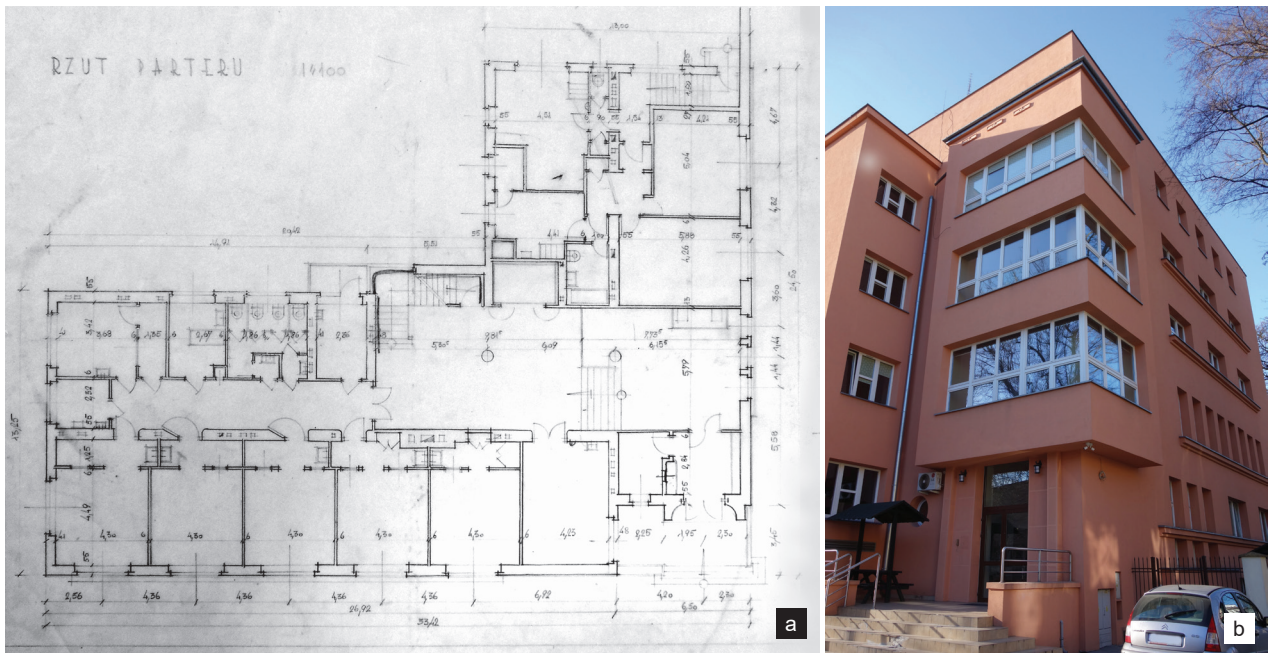


Fig. 11. Building at 6 Chmielowskiego Street: a) the ground floor plan (source: ANK, ABM, TAU, BUP, 6 Chmielowskiego Street, Fasc. 24P2214), b) the tenement corner (photo by M. Motak)

Il. 11. Budynek przy ul. Chmielowskiego 6: a) rzut parteru (źródło: ANK, ABM, TAU, BUP, ul. Chmielowskiego 6, fasc. 24P2214), b) narożnik kamienicy (fot. M. Motak)

preserved in the ANK archives (ANK, ABM, Krzemionki Street, fasc. 475a), we know the functional-spatial layout and architectural appearance of the building that had already been built at that time (Fig. 12).

It was a large, elongated pavilion (33.75×7.85 m) with a timber superstructure, concrete strip foundation, and brick foundation walls, with basement under a part of the building. It had a hipped roof, with the higher central part to accommodate a spacious, bright veranda. The building was equipped with a kitchen with pantry, two washrooms, a classroom, and

administrative rooms. According to annotations from the authorities, it was intended as a temporary building, to be demolished after ten years. When and why this actually occurred is unknown. It is possible that it did not survive the war; although it was shown on the “Detailed Plan of Kraków with Adjacent Communes, 1947”, it is uncertain whether it still in fact existed at that time (the plan – although very precise – contained some inaccurate or outdated information, see Motak 2020, 361). The building was beautifully situated on a long, elevated plot of nearly half a hectare, which also

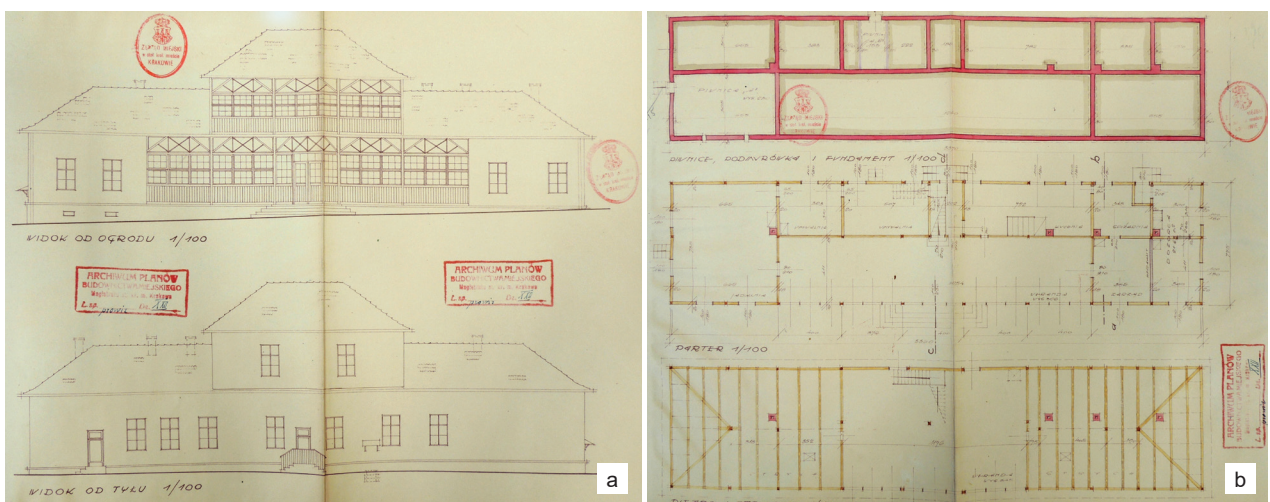


Fig. 12. Designs for the reconstruction of the day-care building for Jewish children run by the Society for the Care of Jewish Orphans at 35 Krzemionki Street: a) façade, b) the ground floor plan (source: ANK, ABM, 35 Krzemionki Street, fasc. 475a)

Il. 12. Projekt przebudowy budynku półkolonii dla dzieci żydowskich Towarzystwa Opieki nad Sierotami Żydowskimi przy ul. Krzemionki 35: a) elewacja, b) rzut parteru (źródło: ANK, ABM, ul. Krzemionki 35, fasc. 475a)

contained free-standing sanitary facilities and roofed shelters. Today, there are no traces of the former day-care complex, yet the boundaries of the undeveloped plot are still largely discernible.

- Tenement at 3 Czarnowiejska Street
/ 19 Michałowskiego Street (designed by Spira, 1939)

The documentation of the unbuilt house contains only two sketches of the structure from an earlier, unexecuted design of unknown authorship (ANK, ABM, 3 Czarnowiejska Street, fasc. 121). More information is available in the documentation of the neighbouring, also unbuilt house at 5 Czarnowiejska Street. The corner house at No. 3 was planned to include eight apartments and a caretaker's room with a bathroom. On the design sheet, there is a stamp: *Construction management: Eng. Jakub Jan Spira, government-licenced civil engineer* (ANK, ABM, 5 Czarnowiejska Street, fasc. 121) dated 22 August 1939.

- Design for a tenement at 5 Czarnowiejska Street (designed by Spira, 1939)

The unbuilt three-storey residential building was designed for Antoni Jasiński, Marian Rozmaryn, and Ignacy and Ida Halpern. It was planned to include eight apartments and a caretaker's room with a bathroom. On the design sheet, there is a stamp: *Construction management: Eng. Jakub Jan Spira, government-licenced civil engineer* (ANK, ABM, 5 Czarnowiejska Street, fasc. 121) dated 22 August 1939.

Spira's activities after 1945

In 1947, the Spiras moved to England¹², where they settled permanently with their daughters Anne and Shirley. The Krakow-born builder initially collaborated with Messrs. Husband and Company, and in October 1950 he became a partner in the firm Taylor, Whalley and Spira¹³, which still operates today (bearing his name). At that time, the company's offices were located in Manchester and London. Among the projects completed with Spira's involvement were: the post office tower in London (with a revolving restaurant at the top), the Chemistry Building in Manchester, Access Bridge Watershed Reservoir in Howarth (designed in 1956), St Mary's Church in Liverpool (designed by Weightman and Bullen, 1957–1959), and Ciba Geigy in Schaffhausen, Switzerland. In addition to designing, Spira also participated in international conferences related to civil engineering¹⁴.

Conclusions

Jakub Spira came from one of the most well-known and distinguished Jewish families of Krakow. During the interwar period, he belonged to the group of prominent Krakow architectural creators. In a relatively short time, he established a solid reputation and a stable position in a demand-

ing professional environment. He was highly successful in both the design and construction sectors, working independently as well as in collaboration with numerous architects, builders, and other specialists. It is likely that the author of several tenement houses whose construction was supervised by Spira was in fact Edward Kreisler was (including those at 13 Lenartowicza Street, 72 Krowoderska Street, 10 Asnyka Street, 12 Pawia Street, 9 Worcella Street, and 20b Lea Street – Zbroja 2023, 218). These buildings stood out in comparison with other contemporary buildings because of the designer's innovative approach, reflected in the use of modern materials, forms, and construction techniques. Spira played a significant role in creating dozens of buildings, mostly residential tenements, but also a care home and a water tower.

Information about the life and work of the Krakow-born architect during World War II is limited, which is understandable given the circumstances of the period. Nevertheless, the conducted research and available data indicate that, during the war, Jakub Spira continued his excellent professional practice started in the interwar period, inasmuch as it was possible in the situation of dramatically restricted opportunities and extremely difficult conditions. For a short time, he continued previously started projects; later, he was forced to hide his identity, yet even then he sought to remain active in his trained profession.

Jakub Spira made a substantial contribution to shaping the urban space of Krakow through his projects, both those he was able to complete before the outbreak of the war and those finished in the subsequent months and years. Most of these buildings have survived until the present day and constitute an important part of the currently highly valued legacy of Krakow's architectural and urban thought.

After the war, Spira continued to work in his trained and beloved profession. However, a significant portion of his later creative output was produced outside Poland – like many other survivors, the architect left his homeland after the tragedy that befell his family and community.

List of characteristic features of Spira's tenement houses

The tenement houses designed or co-designed by Spira feature elements of functionalism and characteristics typically associated with the International Style (Table 1). They are characterized by a modular form – typical of modernism, rounded corners, ribbon windows, and simplified detailing, including emblems. During this period, decorative emblems were most often created by sculptors who were graduates of the Academy of Fine Arts or the State School of Decorative Arts and Artistic Industry.

Influence of World War II on Spira's works

Because of the war, tenement houses owned by people of Jewish origin had to change ownership. After the war, many members of this community made efforts to reclaim the buildings that had previously belonged to them and their families – for example, Spira recovered his shares in the tenement houses at 43 Łobzowska Street and 9 Straszewskiego

¹² In England, they lived in Sheffield, and then in Manchester; source of information: Anne Bennett

¹³ Based on information provided by Anne Bennett.

¹⁴ Among others, in the 7th Congress of the International Association for Bridge and Structural Engineering in Rio de Janeiro in 1964.

Table 1. List of characteristic features of Spira's tenement houses (elaborated by B. Makowska)
Tabela 1. Zestawienie charakterystycznych cech kamienic Spiry (oprac. B. Makowska)

Characteristic features	Tenements from the years 1930–1945 built with the participation of Jakub Spira (in the role of the construction manager or designer)
Façade composition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – compositional and aesthetic relationship between the exterior and interior of the buildings – frequent asymmetry in the division of architectural elements (13 Lenartowicza Street, 12 Pawia Street) – dynamic horizontal intersections of surfaces: ribbon windows (13 Lenartowicza Street), oval balconies (12 Pawia Street), rounded entrance corners (13 Lenartowicza Street)
Façade surface	– smooth and flat surface of the walls enriched with horizontal or vertical rhythmic patterns
Interiors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – clear relationship between the floor plans and the building façades – mostly high interior standards, with spacious staircases and halls
Windows and doors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – rectangular windows, often emphasizing their horizontal arrangement – “band” windows, sometimes wrapping around corners – window/balcony recesses grouped vertically – individually designed details of entrance portals
Details and decorations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – details treated as structural elements, rather than applied independently of the surface layout – decorative emblems on tenement houses added at the request of the Building Department and placed above entrances (9 Worcella Street, 72 Krowoderska Street), on the top floor along the axis of a risalit (13 Lenartowicza Street), or above the ground floor near the entrance portal (12 Pawia Street)
Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – high-quality decorative plasters (terrabona), variety of materials used in the design of entrance portals and window surrounds (cherry-coloured clinker brick, stone, glazed tiles, metal grilles on entrance doors) – mostly monochromatic compositions; interiors made use of, among other things, glass blocks/luxfers, terrazzo floors, and wall cladding (13 Lenartowicza Street)

Street (ANK, Okręgowy Urząd Likwidacyjny w Krakowie/ District Liquidation Office in Kraków/, file no. 29/1052/32). The occupation authorities interfered with the designs of buildings constructed during the war, and the war itself led to damage or destruction of buildings and to changes in their function. It is worth noting several characteristic examples of such – usually adverse, though varying – effects:

- bullet marks are still visible on the façade of the tenement house at 12 Pawia Street (located near the railway station),
- the Jewish Old People's Home at 6 Chmielowskiego Street was never used for its intended purpose,
- the building and the entire summer day-care centre complex at Krzemionki ceased to exist,
- a bomb attack took place in the tenement house at 25 Lubelska Street, commemorated by a plaque on its front façade bearing the inscription: *On 28 January 1943, a combat unit of the Polish Socialist Party carried out a bomb attack on the Arbaitssamnt /Labour Office/ located in this building, destroying all its records and saving thousands of Poles from being deported for forced labour in Germany,*
- the use of antennas was prohibited – on 10 October 1939, the occupation authorities banned listening to foreign radio stations, and the confiscation of radio sets was ordered on 15 December 1939 (Czocher 2007, 20; Motak 2020, 137),
- flagpoles were not used in the way originally intended by the designers.

The construction of tenement houses designed by Spira, as well as by other architects and builders, was hindered during the occupation, among other reasons due to a shortage of materials (Broński 1987, 181).

Summary

Jakub Jan Spira was a talented designer with a substantial and diverse body of work from the years 1930–1939, and an equally significant one from 1939–1945 – his designs continued to be carried out even in his absence. His professional activity took various forms: from designing residential buildings (as author or co-author), through structural design, to supervising or managing construction. He successfully continued his creative work in exile in England. Spira was one of the few members of Kraków's Jewish community who survived the war – thanks to the help of non-Jewish people (providing documents under a false name, escape from Lviv) and, certainly, to the more substantial financial means he had accumulated through his professional work. His brother Karol (Jewish Krakow... 2023), also an engineer, and his mother, Scheindel Salomea, did not survive the war (his mother was shot on a train¹⁵).

Documenting the history of outstanding individuals and their work under the extremely difficult conditions of World War II seems particularly important for preserving their memory. The collected data, photographic documentation, archival information, and photographs shared by descendants can help support efforts to protect Spira's architectural legacy and expand knowledge of Kraków's architecture from the period under consideration.

In the authors' opinion, based on the research conducted so far, there is no doubt that Jakub Spira and his works deserve further study and a comprehensive book monograph.

Translated by
Alicja Półtorak-Filipowska

¹⁵ Based on information provided by Anne Bennett.

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Streszczenie

Jakub Jan Spira – genealogia i dzieła z uwzględnieniem okresu 1939–1945

W artykule omówiono genealogię i twórczość Jakuba Jana Spiry (1902–1979) ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem okresu 1930–1945.

Praca oparta została na dokumentacji historycznej i fotograficznej budynków, badaniach in situ, analizie dostępnych opracowań naukowych i innych źródeł (studia waloryzacji przestrzeni, karty ewidencyjne obiektów), a także na informacjach zamieszczonych na portalach genealogicznych oraz mikrohistorii. W wyniku badań wyciągnięto wnioski, że dzieła Jakuba Spiry są dziedzictwem architektonicznym o znaczącej randze, a jego działalność przyczyniła się do kształtowania wysokiej jakości przestrzeni miejskiej Krakowa. Inżynier budownictwa działał z dużym powodzeniem w branżach: projektowej i wykonawczej, zarówno samodzielnie, jak i z licznymi architektami, budowniczymi oraz innymi specjalistami. Projekty powstałe przy jego udziale wyróżniają się nowatorskim podejściem, które przejawiało się stosowaniem nowoczesnych materiałów, form i konstrukcji budowlanych. Stworzył w Krakowie (bądź istotnie przyczynił się do stworzenia jako kierownik budowy czy projektant) kilkadziesiąt budynków – w większości kamienic mieszkalnych, ale także innych, m.in. domu opieki, pawilonu półkolonijnego dla dzieci, wieży ciśnień.

Zapis historii wybitnych ludzi i ich działalności w szczególnie trudnych warunkach II wojny światowej wydaje się bardzo ważny dla zachowania pamięci o nich. Zebrane dane, dokumentacja fotograficzna, informacje i archiwalne zdjęcia przekazane przez potomków mogą wesprzeć działania na rzecz ochrony dziedzictwa architektonicznego Jakuba Spiry i wzbogacić wiedzę o architekturze Krakowa omawianego okresu.

Słowa kluczowe: Jakub Spira, architektura 1939–1945, Kraków, dziedzictwo architektoniczne, krakowskie kamienice