

WARSAW GHETTO



JEWS IN WARSAW BEFORE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

367,000 Jews lived in Warsaw, before the outbreak of World War II. They constituted approx. 30% of the city population. The life of Jewish Warsaw concentrated around the so-called Northern District, whose centre was Nalewki Street.

During the German air raid on Warsaw, on the night of 22/23 September (on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur - Reconciliation Day), bombs fell on the Jewish quarter.



Nalewki Street before 1939. From: A. Jeżewski, Warsaw on an old photo, Warsaw 1960

THE FIRST MONTH OF OCCUPATION - REPRESSIONS AGAINST JEWS

In October 1939, in the occupied territories of Poland, German reign of terror and exploitation began. From the very beginning, Jews were subject to special repressions. Week by week, they were deprived of basic rights, they were ordered to wear armbands with the star of David, synagogues and schools were closed, they were forbidden to walk on parts of the streets. The assault on Jews, beatings, harassments and executions became daily events.



Band with the star of David. From the collection of the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews

ESTABLISHMENT OF GHETTOS

The legal basis for the establishment of ghettos in occupied Poland was the Hans Frank's decree of September 13, 1940 on "Limiting the free choice of place of residence and abode in the General Government." However, local authorities had already introduced their own regulations, which led to the creation of separated districts in cities. The first ghetto was set up in Piotrków Trybunalski, in October 1939.



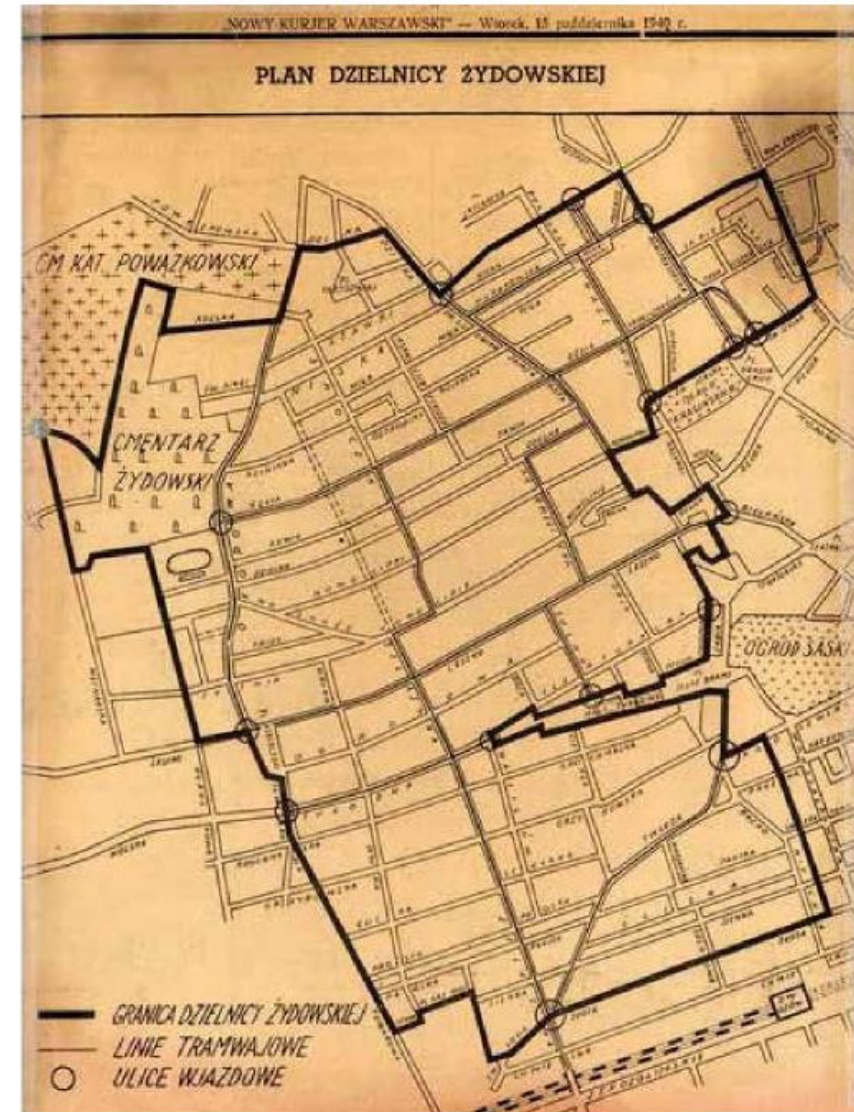
Construction of the ghetto wall, 1940.

From the collection of the Holocaust Museum in Washington

WARSAW GHETTO – AREA AND BORDERS

On October 2, 1940, a ghetto was set up in Warsaw. Its area covered 307 ha of developed area of the city, mainly located in the former Northern District. The ghetto was surrounded by a brick wall and closed on November 16, 1940.

The plan of the ghetto in Warsaw, published together with the decree of Ludwig Fiszer, 1940.
From: *Nowy Kurier Warszawski*



RESETTLEMENTS

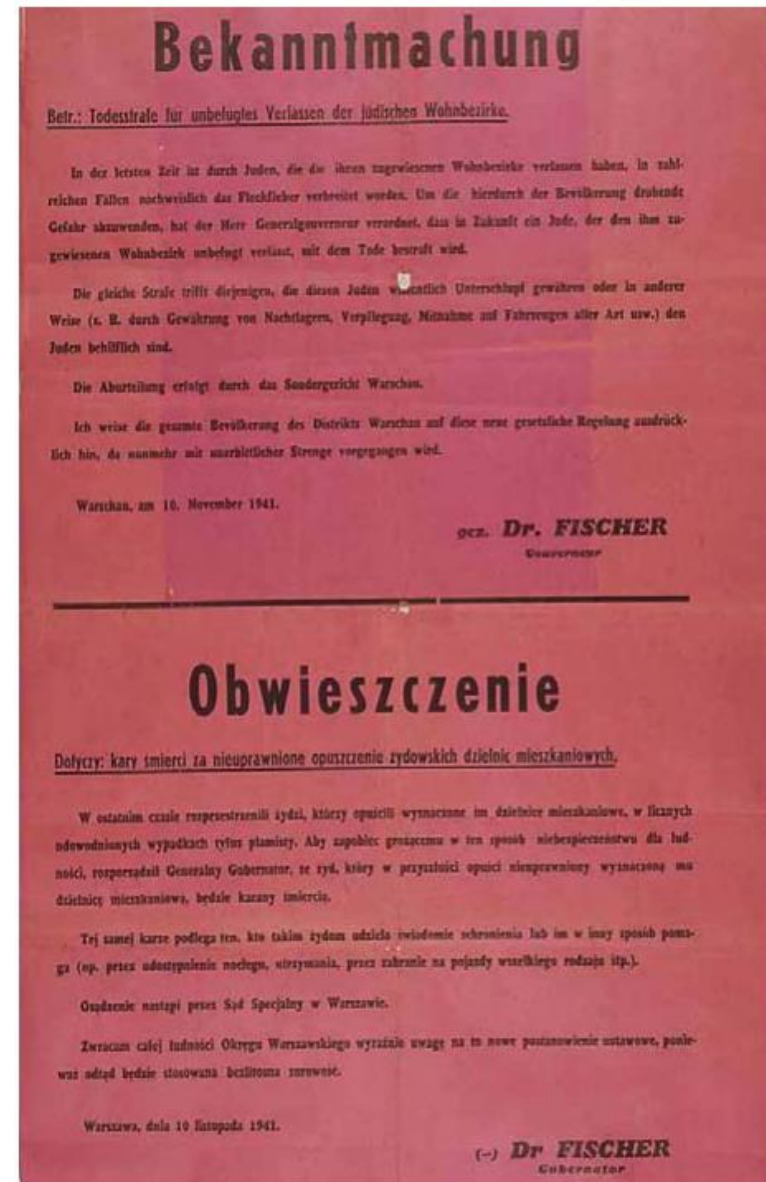
Jews from other parts of the city were resettled to the ghetto, while Poles living within its borders were forced to move out. After the ghetto gates were closed, however, Jews from other, often very distant, towns were being still deported to its area. The largest recorded number of Jewish population in the ghetto amounted to around 460,000 people.



ANNOUNCEMENT ON DEATH PENALTY

On October 15, 1941, General Governor Hans Frank issued a decree by which he imposed the death penalty on Jews in the occupied Polish territories, who “leave the designated district without authorization.” All those who “consciously provide a hiding place to Jews” were subject to the same punishment.

Announcement informing on Hans Frank's decree issued by the Governor of the Warsaw District - Dr Ludwig Fischer
From the collections of the Institute of National Remembrance



HUNGER



In the ghetto there was misery, hunger, spreading of infectious diseases and frighteningly rapid increase of mortality. Food shortages were attempted to be supplemented by smuggling food and medicine from the “Aryan side.” Collective kitchens were put in place wherever there was the possibility of organizing self-help.

According to: B. Engelking, J. Leociak, Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście, Warsaw 2001, p. 407.

**Table: Daily calorific value of card assignments
in the Warsaw Ghetto in 1940 and 1941**

	First Quarter	Second Quarter	Third Quarter	Fourth Quarter
1940	503	449	331	369
1941	237	219	198	360

FORCED LABOUR

Jews in the ghetto were forced to become slave laborers in both German enterprises in the ghetto - so-called sheds - as well as outside it. There were round-ups conducted in the streets and Jews were taken to labor camps in the provinces.

Loading of forced labourers at Grzybowska Street, 1941.
From Bundesarchiv collections



EVERYDAY LIFE

Despite the tragic living conditions in the ghetto, people tried to live as normal lives as they could. There was underground education, the press was published and cultural and religious life was organized. These were forms of a very difficult civil resistance.

RESISTANCE MOVEMENT

In 1940, at the initiative of Dr Emanuel Ringelblum the underground Archive of the Warsaw Ghetto was created. A dozen or so people operating under the name Oneg Shabbat gathered the testimonies of the fate of the Jews. The collected material was to be a documentation of the life of Jews and the crimes committed by the Nazis. It was used, among others, to prepare reports for the authorities of the Polish Underground State and the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile. After the war, some of the collected documents were found. They constitute a unique source of knowledge about the Warsaw Ghetto and have been included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.



In the autumn of 1942, young Jews established underground armed organizations: the Jewish Combat Organization and the Jewish Military Union.



Emanuel Ringelblum,
From: Władysław Bartoszewski,
Warszawski pierścień śmierci 1939–1944.
Warsaw 1970

Metal boxes and milk cans in which the archive of the Warsaw Ghetto was hidden
From: E. Ringelblum, Kronika getta warszawskiego, Warsaw 1983

THE GREAT “LIQUIDATION ACTION” OF THE WARSAW GHETTO

In the spring of 1942, the Nazis decided to liquidate ghettos in the General Government and deport Jews to the extermination centres. The project was given the codename “Aktion Reinhardt”. On July 22, 1942, the liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto and deportation of Jews to Treblinka began.

As a sign of protest and despair Adam Czerniaków, the president of the Judenrat (Jewish Council), committed suicide. On September 21, 1942, the last transport from the Umschlagplatz (reloading yard) departed. It meant the end of the Great Liquidation Action of the Warsaw Ghetto. As a result, about 300,000 Jews were murdered.

Jews waiting at the Umschlagplatz for deportation

From: *Warszawskie getto 1943–1988. W 45 rocznicę powstania*, Warsaw 1988



UPRISING

After the Liquidation Action, the enclosed area of the Warsaw ghetto was still inhabited by about 60,000 Jews. Members of the armed organizations began preparations for resistance against the next deportation.

On April 19, 1943, Germans entered the ghetto with the intention of erasing it completely. They met with armed resistance of Jewish insurgents, who in the first days of fighting managed to maintain their positions. The Germans, systematically burning house after house, eliminated individual resistance points. Due to the lack of arms and isolation of the fighters, the uprising was suppressed. On May 16, 1943, the Germans blew up the Great Synagogue in Tłomackie, and then the whole area of the ghetto was razed to the ground.

A burning building in the ghetto in April 1943
From: Jurgen Stroop's report,
The Jewish residential district does not exist! IPN



COMMEMORATION

In 1948, a huge Monument to the Ghetto Heroes commemorating the Jewish insurgents and the Great Liquidation Action was erected on the ruins of the ghetto. For Polish and foreign Jews, it has become, over time, an icon of the struggle for freedom and dignity. After the war, the Muranów residential district was built on the ruins of the ghetto.

POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, located opposite the monument, from 2013 organizes the “Warsaw Ghetto Uprising Campaign” social and educational Campaign commemorating the heroes who fought in the Warsaw ghetto. In Poland the campaign is known also as the Daffodils Campaign or in Polish, “żonkile.”

The Monument to the Ghetto Heroes in Warsaw

From the collection of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews

Volunteers of the ‘Warsaw Ghetto Uprising’ Campaign

From the collection of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews





WARSAW GHETTO



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