

Transcript of the Shoah Interview with M. Wiener

German Translation by Uta Allers - Volunteer – Visitor Services – February 2013

INTERVIEW DE M. WIENER KRAKOW – BY CAR By car – Traveling in the city

Wiener I:

- Q We're driving straight ahead...
- W Keep going straight, straight... to the Josepher Street...
- L Josepher Street...
- W On the Josepher Street, we'll come to the Schauka...
- L What was the Josepher Street?
- W ... one of the members of the Federation... (*uses the wrong word*)
- L ... (*corrects him*) of the Federation...
- W ... had the name of Josepher...
- L Yes.
- W ... because he was very well-known, the street was named after him.
- L But it was...
- W Now the area is on the Kasivier (?)... there was change (*a different neighborhood?*), and that's where the city of Kasivier started, which was a different city, not administered by Krakow... and there, from the 14th century on...
- L That's the beginning of Kasivier...
- W That's the beginning of Kasivier... there was the city hall of Kasivier. And now, we'll turn to the left...
- L ... now to the left...
- W ... into the old street of Josepher Ulitzer.
- L Yes, Josepher... that was an old Jewish street...
- W Yes, that was a Jewish street, of course. Before the war, ... lived...
- L Yes... that's very nice...
- W ... only orthodox Jews lived in the Jewish quarter...
- L ... here...
- W ... yes, the orthodox... for the advocates... eh,... they lived throughout the entire city.
- L Ah, yes.
- W ... here, only the orthodox, yes the orthodox Jews.
- L ... very religious...
- W ... very religious, all the synagogues...

W ... all the synagogues are there... in the city, they are there too, but they are reformed ones.

L Yes.

W Those were the synagogues of the orthodox Jews...

L The whole street?

W The whole street, only Jews lived there...

Q Meaning till '39?

W Till '39, of course... that was a center of trade, of Jewish trade, of industry, and there are also buildings... that's a monastery building...

L Yes.

W ... to the right are monastery buildings...

L A Catholic church?

W A Catholic monastery. It's all in ruins because, during the war, no Jews lived there and nothing was done. Now there's a lot of activity... the restoration of Krakow...

L Yes.

W ... a few hundred of these houses are being restored. Some have already been restored... There, what you see straight ahead, that's the old synagogue...

L Here...

W Yes... that's the old synagogue... the old synagogue is...

L It's all a Jewish quarter...

W Yes, it's all a Jewish quarter... There is a so-called high synagogue, a synagogue, a "high school" (?), there to the left...

L Yes.

W There, to the left... high synagogue...

L And now... what's is it now?

W Now it's... it's being reconstructed. There will be a museum there.

L Ah yes, I see.

W That's the old synagogue built in the 13th century... that's the oldest synagogue.

L Yes...

W There are only two types of synagogues in Europe... in Worms and in Regensburg. Built in this style, built in the Gothic style.

L But it was a very lively...

W Yes, it was very lively.

L ... quarter.

W and of course, that was destroyed by Hitler too... the Nazis bombed it, and then after the war, the city... the city reconstructed it...

L Yes.

W That's reconstruction, of course... it was all reconstructed, right after the war... there's a so-called Baru Square there...

L Baru Square...

W And that's the end of the Jewish quarter already. That's where the border is; Jews lived there too, of course. It wasn't... wasn't a fenced-off border.

L Yes, it was open...

W Of course, it was no fenced...

L But the Jews mostly...

W Mostly, thus... the orthodox Jews...

L Where do I drive now?

W Now we head left...

L Left.

W Left... We want to get to the _____ Street... so, now to the left... left again, and we drive straight left...

L It's hard to imagine...

W We were always... left, left, now... we were always in the Jewish quarter. That was Jewish too. Jews lived there too.

L Yes.

W Yes, yes, of course... businesses, Jewish businesses.

L What kind of businesses?

W Well... textiles... spices... delicatessen... everything, everything, everything...

L But were you born in this quarter?

W I was born in this quarter on the _____ Street, and lived here my whole life, until the war, on the Augustina Alley. That's the... the old school. Now left, that's where we'll go.

L Yes.

W Till the war, of course. Then I fled. And then we come to...

L Your parents too are...

W My parents were in Krakow. My father in _____, my mother in Krakow. They were killed by the Nazis.

L Killed... where?

W My mother in the camp, in the Krakow camp...

L In the ghetto?

W In the ghetto, yes... and my father in Belzec.

L In the Belzec extermination camp.

W In the extermination... in Belzec.
That's the old synagogue... and we could park there and maybe walk around a bit. Some of the houses have been reconstructed already, restored, and... the house there ahead of us...

L Yes.

W That's a famous family, a Jewish Kassenellenbogen.

L Kassenellenbogen?

W Kassenellenbogen. Now the city conservation (*dept.?*) is there.

L Which house?

W The one in front of us.

L Ah, this one... the one in front of us.

W And what you are seeing, there, that's the old school, built in the 15th century, that's Remuschie (?)

L Ah, the...

W ... that was a very rich person, Moises Isales and he built it... one could say that the style is like that of the Middle Ages. New buildings were not created... so... that's how the house looked... I apologize that I make mistakes with my German, but I speak it sparingly... this language... I have no...

L Yes, yes...

W ... know very little... excuse me...

L Yes. Here, there were only Jews...

W Only... Jews... of course, not only Jews, but mostly Jews, mostly Jews... and there was a mikvah... now the mikvah is... and the little area behind it is the oldest Jewish cemetery in Krakow.

L Here?

W Here. About... then it was, how do you say... cholera... that was a disease; a lot of people died...

L Cholera.

W Cholera it's called... I think it's called that too...
L Yes?
W Then this cemetery was built there... those are the walls of the cemetery
L Yes...
W ... and that is now a ... a memorial...
L Yes, yes.
W They've already done work there. That's all restored, because before the war... it was already in ruins... and bit by bit...

In Krakow, 2A

W ... because many Jews lived here. That's where the Jewish high school was, there on the corner.
L Yes.
W ... there on the corner.
L (*in French*) Ah, it comes back...
W To repeat... that was the Jewish high school.
L What did you say? I didn't understand that.
W The Jewish high school. There...
L Yes?
W There, on the corner. The yellow house.
L Yes?
W Yes.
L But before that, what did you say? I didn't understand.
W What? Well, that's where the Jews lived. Only Jews.
L No, you said exactly how many Jews lived here.
W Lived here? 40,000.
L No, no, 60,000.
W Excuse me?
L 60,000.
W 60,000.
L No, but could you repeat exactly what you said before: how many Jews lived here?
W I think, 45,000.
L No, I don't understand...
W Excuse me?
L Keep going straight?

W Straight, straight ahead...
L And now?
W Now straight ahead, and then to the left...

Krakow 2

L What's the name of this street?
W This street is Krakovska Street. In German, Krakow Street.
L Yes...
W That's the street of the Rabbi M_____ That was a famous writer, a renowned person.
L Yes?
W Yes, that why his name was given to this street. Rabbi _____.
L But you personally knew this street?
W Yes, it was (*part of*) my youth. Ha ha! It went through my entire youth. I only left Krakow in 1963 for _____ and I lived there. For I was an attorney before the war, and now I'm still an attorney.
L And how do you feel about it now?
W Excuse me?
L What do you feel now? The street is entirely empty now. There are no Jews here anymore.
W There are still Jews. To put it precisely, I can't. But I can tell you... on the _____ Street, around the High Holy Days: Rosh Hashanah and then Yom Kippur...
L Yes...
W ... there are a lot... Jews from all over Krakow come here... there are still synagogues... and on those days, it looks just like before the war... just like before the war.
L But how many Jews are there in Krakow now?
W Well, it's hard to say, but in my estimation... a few... 1,500, maybe 2,000.
L Yes?
W Yes.
L That many?
W Yes, well that's not very many. The Krakow population is 1.2 million... but for example, when there are anniversaries... for the ones who made the Ghetto Uprising, lots of people come, lots... of course, a lot of Jews...
L Yes?
W So they live in the entire Krakow. Krakow is a

W ... a big city... We write to our relatives, for we live farther out... farther out...
That's the old synagogue on the brochure. There's a deep longing. The longing is
very deep... _____ But important is that we maintain the Yiddish culture.

L What did you say?

W That in Krakow we are maintaining the Yiddish culture.

L Yes. Of course.

W National culture in Poland develops based on content. That's the most important.

L Do you think so?

W Yes. Well, at this time, that's very important. It shouldn't vanish... After all,
many foreigners are arriving, Jews from all parts of the world. In June, July, in the
hot months. They are led, they are being shown. Everything. Among them are
people who haven't been here in forty, fifty years. They're always led. That's their
youth, after all. Left now.

L Left?

W Yes. Today is Seder. Everyone is gone for the weekend; that's why it's so empty.
Not even... now left, please.

L Left?

W Yes, left again. On the left, you'll see the synagogue.

L Yes, there are...

W You'll see. The southern part of the synagogue... When I came to Krakow, it was
already bombed out.

L Completely?

W Bombed... in ruins.

L Ah, ah.

W All of it... those are still the old walls of the Jewish quarter... Now left. We're on
the Sharuka Ulitzer, big street again.

L Which one?

W Excuse me? Now left.

.....

W That's another reconstructed building.

L Who lived in this building?

W Excuse me?

L Who? Which family... lived there?

W Eh... that's where... a family lived there. If you like, I can look it up.
L But only in this one?
W ... Katzenellenbogen.
L Katzenellenbogen.
W The house has two exit, from there and there; a big house, yes.
L Yes...
L Cut

WIENER. KRAKOW 3 TO 5. ENTRANCE TO THE CEMETERY
KRAKOW 6. INTERVIEW IN THE CEMETERY.

W So, then...
L Yes...
W This is one of the oldest cemeteries in Krakow. It was established in the 15th century by a famous Jew named Moises Isales. Moises Isales founded the synagogue and then the cemetery was built next to the synagogue. The cemetery was completely ruined before the war. The old stones sank down into the earth. Only after the war did the Mosaish (?) Federation and the city provide money to restore this. And... the stones were taken in (*uses the wrong word*)... dug out and now it is a memorial of the first order in the world. Every year, many Jews come from all over the world, of course... from the West, and everyone comes, of course... looks around... many famous Jews are buried there, who have... one could even... but many, many famous Jews... and for us it is indeed a memorial to bygone time.
W and L (simultaneously, inaudible)
W There is also a new cemetery in Krakow; it's about 150 years old. I know about that one, that one is still active. But this one is closed. It's only a memorial.
H May I add something now?
L What is your name?
H Hertzl. Hertzl Israel. Israel Hertzl.
L That's a nice name.
H Yes? I don't know. And I lived here in Krakow. Before the war, I lived here in Krakow.
L Yes?
H Yes. And during the war, I left Krakow for

H Stanislaw... that's where I come from.
L Yes.
H And that's where the Russian were. I was in my '30s. And in '41, there was war, Germany against Russia; I was with the Russian army.
L Yes.
H Yes. The Red Army; as a Russian soldier, I fought from Stalingrad to Berlin.
L Stalingrad to Berlin.
H Yes, but I wasn't on foot, I drove only, because I was a chauffeur.
L Chauffeur?
H Yes.
L But you...
H Medals I got...
L May I see?
H Excuse me?
L May I see?
H This is how they are...
L Yes?
H Yes...
L The Cavalier Cross... from Poland... that's Polish... from Poland, yes...
H These?
L That is a Russian one... eh, what is it called, this medal... Pierre, eh... Pierre...
W Liberation...
H For liberation... for victory...
L Yes...
H ... against Germany. Not against Stalin... not...
The victory of war, from the old war...
I But this is a hero... he was a hero...
H Here is another medal from the Russian army, but here again in Poland...
I I was a soldier too... I was in the Soviet army for 30 years; I got an anniversary medal...
L Anniversary...
I Yes, 30 years... I was in the Soviet army.
L And you fought too?
I Yes, I fought but not on the front...
L Yes, but you were on the front...

H Yes, I was from Stalingrad to Berlin... didn't drive just once... maybe seven or six times... I went back and forth.

L Yes, as a chauffeur.

H As chauffeur, yes.

I He was chauffeur and interpreter.

H As an interpreter too... because I speak a bit of German...

L Yes, I can hear that...

H And my commandant, my major... was with Germans POWs... he called me, and said I should be his interpreter... always...

L But you're very proud of...

H Yes, of course, of course. I also have a thank you letter...

I He has a thank you letter...

H A thank you letter, five days before the liberation of the Polish territory...

I Here...

H ... with Kaltewitz...

I ... together...

H _____

L But how do you feel... Polish, or Russian, or Jewish?

H I'm a Jew.

L Yes.

H And a Polish citizen... but at 31 years of age, I came there... to _____, that's where the Russian government was, had influence on...

L And your family stayed in Poland?

H No, my wife, the first one... was evacuated... I don't know what happened to her...

L Evacuated means killed?

H Yes... and my parents... my father died before the war, and my mother and four brothers were killed by the Germans...

L Where?

H In Steinivor (?)

I After the war, we found out about everything...

L Ah yes. And your family?

I Everyone too... my parents, my brothers... I (*left?*) home _____
... a German name... but they are Jews.
My father had a big beard like this...

L A big beard?

I Yes, yes...

L He was a very religious man?

I Yes, yes... he was a religious, very religious...

L And are you religious?

I I? I'm rather religious in the modern sense.

L You are modern...

I I learned Yiddish... and then because I was in this day and age, I learned Hebrew... I took four years of Hebrew in school... I'm fluent in the Hebrew language...

L But what do you feel, since there are no longer any Jews in Poland?

L Not many.

I We're patriotic here in Poland. We live here.

L Yes.

I We survived...

L But you are the last Jews.

I Yes... yes, it's sad _____ but...

L Sad, but...

H Dr. _____ is a member of the administration of the political, social, cultural community of Jews in Poland.

L Administration of the Jewish Federation.

H Yes, no, the Federation is something else. The Federation has only to do with religious matters. We promote the Pol... the Jewish culture, of course dedicated Jewish...

L But how can you promote Jewish culture? What do you do?

H We'll show you tonight at our place... we have various presenters, like Jewish classics... and newspapers...

I Yes. I even send them to Russia. We take newspapers from here, so they have newspapers... and we have acquaintances, friends there too; then we buy newspapers here and send them to Russia.

L Yes.

I Yes? Jewish newspapers. You can get everything.

L Yes, but that's a bit sad, isn't it?

I They know what's going on in the world. The paper is very interesting, the Jewish newspaper in Warsaw...

L Yes. What do you want to say?

H The Jewish newspaper in Warsaw and the Yiddish Historical Institute are financed, after all...

H ... by the Polish government.
L Yes.
H That costs a lot of money and the Polish government pays for it.
I That's a good thing.
L Yes, very good.
I A big deal. The government, the Polish one, the opportunity of Judaism...
I The minimum at least...
L Yes.
H There is a synagogue too; even...
L How many Jews are there in Krakow?
I 1,500, I think, 1,500...
L Why do you think that? You don't have exact figures?
I I'll tell you... We know only about the members who belong to us, who come to us. Usually, there are 150 members, men, of course; there are women too, children too... So I can guarantee there are 300 with those, corresponding, for instance...
L Yes, but why do you say 1,500?
I There are many Jews who don't belong to our circle, because they work _____ in other areas, for instance, there are also a lot of Jews.
L What does it mean to be a Jew in Poland today?
I To be normal! Just like any citizen. Of course, normal. The same rights, the same responsibilities, of course; they don't feel themselves to be... Hm, old people sitting around, what shall we do?
L And are there young people in the....?
I Very few, very few... very few...
L Mostly old people?
I Old people.
H We have a son who is married and who is an engineer.
L Where does he live?
H and I Here in Krakow. He is an engineer; he has a wife and two children, and...
L But the young ones are gone, aren't they?
F There was a time, but now... everything is in order. They have a family and everything. So everything is normal.
F One can go on visits. I drive, for example... every other year, I drive to Vienna.

L Ah yes.
F I even had a cousin – unfortunately, she’s no longer alive – so I go to the cemetery, and take in Vienna and the world... I go every two years.
L Do you remember how life was before the war, here in Krakow?
F I didn’t live here before the war. I lived in Stanislaw. My husband lived here before the war.
W I had a cousin who lived in _____, whose daughter got married. His daughter got married in December.
F ... this year...
W ... on December 29th. We were at the wedding.
L But don’t you have a longing for life before the war? Or not?
W Of course, one can’t forget. That’s only human; one can’t forget.
F We suffered a lot, after all, and we lost so much, the whole family, what can I say?... There are no reproaches (*I’m not out to blame anyone?*)...
W I can say, from my point of view, we have a better life now than before the war.
L Yes.
W ... because before the war, I was unemployed, had no education, no work, etc. And now, I get a pension here. I get a pension...
L And you are a hero.
W No. But of course, but everyone gets that.
H It’s completely normal; I get it too...
L You too. Why? Why?
H Yes, of course.
L Did you fight too?
H No. I do the cultural work, for the cultural work in our community I get the...
F Everyone working gets...
H Now I got an award, an honorary award for the cultural work in the city of Krakow.
L That’s very good.

L So this is the question... But are you a member of the Communist Party?
W 51 years.
L 51 years in the Party!
W Yes. Yes.
L That's a lot!
W It was... Before the war, the Party was illegal.
L Illegal?
W Illegal. And it had to function illegally.
L Yes.
W If you risked anything, you got locked up...
L Your wife is a member too?
F No, I don't belong to the Party.
L Without membership.
F I am a person only...
L You are a person (*ein Mensch*), ah, ah, and there is a difference... between being a person and a Party member?
F A person for the people.
L A person for the people.
F Yes, that is my meaning.
L Yes. And you, Dr. Wiener, are you also a Party member?
W 50 years.
L 50 years. Before the war too?
W Yes.
L But there were a lot of Communist Jews.
W Yes. A lot.
L A lot. And now in the Federation, are there a lot of Communists?
W In the _____ two organizations: the cultural organization, ours, ...
L Yes.
W ... there are a few Communists. And in the congregation, of course not... because that's a religious organization, a...
L Yes.
W We are a (*hard to make out the adjective; could be "chosen", "prehistoric"*)...
L But you are religious?
W No, no, not at all.
L You are a real Communist.
W Yes. Someone else should say that.
L Yes. But you are right.

H I think religion gives you nothing.
L Yes... And what do you think of the "Papa" (Pope)?
H Papa?
F Why should I care about him?... I don't give a hoot about him.
L But Poland is a very religious country.
F Yes.
W Not all... many Communists in Poland.
H Not just Jews, Poles too.
F Of course... that goes without saying...
L I hope there are, there are a few Poles who are Communists.
L And where were you born? In Stanislaw?
H Stanislaw.
L Where is that?
H That's near Letberg... It belongs to Soviet Russia.
L Yes, yes.
F But before the war, it was Lesser Poland.
L Yes.
F Here Krakow, that was Greater Poland, and that was Lesser.
L Yes. Did you go back there?
H After the war, for I was demobilized, I went to Stanislaw. And I lived there from '45 to '57.
L Yes, in Stanislaw.
H In Stanislaw. That's where I worked, my wife, etc... I got married there.
L Meaning, you were in Russia?
H Yes, till '57 I lived in Russia... and in '57 I repatriated from Russia to Poland.
L Why did you return to Poland?
H Because I pray for Krakow.
F He lived in Krakow before the war.
W Longing for Krakow.
F Longing, of course... And I was already married then, so I had to come too... My home is also Stanislaw.
L And now you can...
F Yes, we go to visit every time ... yes, excuse me, every year.
H Last year we were in Russia... we have relatives there... they come to us... and we go there.
F We go to the cemetery there, where our ancestors are buried...
L Ah, ah, and are there Jewish cemeteries?
F Yes, yes, yes... we have photos I'll show you... Maybe if we meet again later today...

F ... then I'll show you. We took pictures of our homeland. Yes.
 H There are cemeteries there, Jewish ones... and they look better than the one here.
 L Yes.
 F They are protected... by the government.
 L Ah yes... here in Poland?
 H Yes... there in Russia.
 L Ah, in Russia.
 H And there are the mass graves too... protected too... etc...
 L What kind... for example... Babi Yar?
 H Babi... I have a picture. As I'm placing flowers on the monument.
 F Yes. We were there.
 H I'll show you this evening there... in...
 F Should we go now... and then we can see everything.
 L Good... (*In French: good, cut.*)

KRAKOW – WIENER 11

Continuation of Interview with M. Wiener
 IN FRONT OF THE PILLAR

L Ok.
 W Already?
 L So we're looking here...
 W We're at the _____ Square near Krakow, the place of the Hitler concentration camp.
 L No, no, we can't do that... Cut.

KRAKOW – WIENER 12

L Yes, how do you explain this for yourself? What is this memorial?
 W We're at the site where, during the war, the Hitler concentration camp was, in which many thousands of people died... young ones from Hungary and Poland, and several other countries... who fought against Hitler.
 L Yes, but who were the people from Krakow?
 W They were Jews.
 L They were Jews.
 W Yes... There are two memorials. One, a big one for all the people who were killed there, and that is a memorial...

L What is written on it?

W “On this site, many thousands of Jews from Poland and Hungary were murdered and burned in the years 1943 and 1945. We don’t know the names of those murdered. We can say only one word: They were Jews. On this site, many people were murdered. That was the biggest... the biggest... the biggest murder of all time... you can say only one thing: that was Hitlerism. For the ones who were murdered, for whom that was the last word: we will die. The silence of the _____ Cemetery stands for the truth and the mercy of all who lived here; that’s all the Jews.

L But please, if I understand this correctly: this memorial was built by the Jews...

W Yes... that was for Jews, who were murdered from Hungary and Poland.

L Yes, but who built this memorial?

W The memorial was built by the Jews of Krakow, and the content was written by a famous journalist, Kurschak.

L Yes, but why is there such a big difference between this memorial and the other one?

W The city built that one for all the murdered people; that is a smaller memorial just for the Jews...

L Yes but...

W This memorial was built by the city...

L Yes, but why isn’t it the opposite? Why isn’t that memorial bigger than the memorial for the other people?

W I’ll tell you: not only Jews were the murdered people, but a lot from other nations...

L Yes, but the majority were Jews!

W Yes, the Judaism (*Federation?*) did that, the Krakow Judaism. Only they. That one was built by the city.

L But that’s strange, this contrast, isn’t it?

W That’s not important, as far as I’m concerned... _____ and the memory is the most important. We have the memory in our hearts.

L I understand. What’s written on that...

W There?

L Yes.

W It says: “For all who were murdered in the Warsaw concentration camp, and there is something else for people, for people with the _____ (*indecipherible*) heart... with the _____ (*indecipherible*) heart...

L Yes... and the Jews who were deported from Krakow...
W They came from there too; at first people from the ghetto were deported. From the ghetto, (*they*) were deported to other extermination camps, Auschwitz; that's where my father was, for example.
L Yes...
W ... and from there he was taken to Germany and burned.
L Your father was taken from Krakow to Breschov...
W And from Breschov to _____; there was a big fire, the _____ was opened. I made a presentation on the radio there.

END OF THE WIENER INTERVIEW.