

From the Diary of Stanislaw Adler on the Closing of the Jewish Quarter in Warsaw

For many scores of thousands of Jews, transfer to the ghetto meant complete material ruin. There were relatively few who could exchange their apartments with Aryans who had been living in the area that was to be the Jewish Quarter. These exchanges, due to a greater demand for homes in the Quarter, were conducted with a much greater burden on the Jewish contracting parties. Usually, the Jew had to pay the Aryan a year in advance for the difference in rent when it was higher in the apartment he was receiving. He had to leave the Aryan his coal supply, part of his furniture, and so forth.

A strange sort of wandering had begun. Two hundred thousand people were exchanging living quarters. The Aryans carried out their moving operations with furniture trucks and lorries; the Jews pushed handcarts. It was a rare case when the modest chattels of a Jew were moved by lorry.

The area of the Jewish Quarter was not accurately defined until the last moment. Originally, for instance, it had looked as if the boundary in the south and south-east would run along Chmielna and Marszalkowska Streets, and in the south-west along Wronia Street, but later it was decided that the dividing line should run along Zlota and Zielna. At the last minute, due to the impossibility of building an eleven kilometer long wall down the center of the street in a few month's time, the invaders adopted provisional measures. They erected fences, usually across streets, which closed them in such a way that, as a rule, the Quarter's boundaries ran along the external walls of apartment houses. The population did not realize that these arrangements were only temporary, and tens of thousands of them were faced with continuous wandering as a result of the endless population resettlement as the ghetto's boundaries changed.

The outline of the boundary ran in fantastic zig-zags. Wherever a German industrial enterprise or any important German institution happened to be located on the periphery of the Jewish Quarter, it was sufficient reason for a whole complex of ghetto housing to be cut off and included in the Aryan

sector. In such a way, an enclave was formed of Grzybowska, Waliców, and Ceglana Streets for the companies of Habermusch, Schiele, and Ulrich; this was connected to the Aryan Quarter by a narrow neck only. Along both sides of Biala Streets, fences were erected to provide a passage to the courthouse, which had been excluded from the Jewish Quarter. Only a portion of that building remained, until the “resettlement action” that began on July 22, 1942, as a special place of meeting where Jews and Aryans could mingle more or less freely.

The basic necessities, both economic and religious, of the Jewish population were not considered in the least; this population was not a subject for regulation but an object for destruction, all the more pleasing to the invader’s eyes when it was accompanied by pain and suffering. The wooded areas, therefore, were purposely and maliciously excluded from the Quarter and the Morowska bazaars and adjoining streets, an area inhabited exclusively by Jews before the war, were cut out of the middle of the ghetto. The intention was clear: to prevent Jewish access to the largest market place.

An additional result of this arbitrary boundary was the division of the Jewish Quarter into two parts. The smaller part, known as the “small ghetto”, was the seat of the more important pre-war Jewish institutions, including the Community Council, and had a population of nearly one hundred thousand. It was connected to the other part of the Quarter, or the “large ghetto”, where more than three hundred thousand people lived, by a single communication artery composed of Ciepla, Grzybowska, and Żelazna Streets. Where Żelazna intersected with Chłodna Street, the Jewish Quarter joined Aryan territory for a length of forty meters. Later on I shall describe the scenes that took place at this communication point and the dangers to which Jewish pedestrians were exposed. The extent of the traffic and masses of people who used this artery cannot be described and these crowded conditions contributed greatly to the spread of the typhus epidemic which decimated the Quarter.

Many times individual Jews received proposals to have more territory included in the Quarter in exchange for “adequate” payment. For example, Lawyer Zygmunt Hofmoki-Ostrowski Senior appeared before the Jewish Council with such a proposal and asked the Council not to interfere in his negotiations.

Naturally, no obstacles were put in his way, but this attempt and all such negotiations ended in the loss of the money advanced by the Jewish clients. In spite of the fact that the danger of being imprisoned within the walls of the ghetto hung over the Jewish population for many months, none of us were mentally prepared for the shattering blow when this cruel Nazi idea became a reality. Right up to the last minute, the optimists, and no other community counted such a high percentage of them within its ranks, in spite of appearances to the contrary, assured the others that such a threat could not be carried out. They maintained that walls similar to those springing up in Warsaw with terrible speed had been erected in Vienna at an earlier time for “strategic reasons”.* In Warsaw, their alleged intent was to defend the invaders against a labour revolt. All this nonsensical talk aimed at assuaging immediate fears became a serious defeatist factor later. Therefore, when the contents of the order which created the Jewish Quarter were announced by loudspeaker in the streets a few days before the Quarter became a reality on November 15, 1940, the Jewish populations was inclined to take it as a bad dream.

Source: Stanislaw Adler, *In the Warsaw Ghetto 1940-1943. An Account of a Witness*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1982, pp. 33-35.

* The erection of a wall in Vienna was a rumour which spread in the ghetto. As a matter of fact it was never erected.