



ARTYKUŁ

## The Lost House

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My grandmother from my mother's side married well. My grandfather was a hard-working, successful trader. He owned several flats and offices and sold luxurious furniture and "colonial products", wine and deli, in several of his showrooms. During the Warsaw Uprising, my grandparents lost all their properties and assets. Only several items miraculously remained from that rather substantial wealth, considering the times, saved by my grandmother.

According to stories passed down in my family, my great grandparents, Helena née Kugler and Feliks Gadziński, my grandmother Irena's parents were not very rich. In Felik's death certificate from 1938, however, he was described as a trader. They had a strip of land, 7.5 thousand m<sup>2</sup>, on the corner of

Czerniakowska and Chełmska Street, at what used to be the southern outskirts of Warsaw. In the 19th century, what is now Czerniakowska Street used to be the Moon Alley, which connected the Sielce manor with the Mokotów village.

My grandparents' piece of land was registered by mortgage as a colonial village no. 1, in Sielce, in the Mokotów municipality. It was later given the address Czerniakowska 71 Street. There was a house directly next to the street, built from a red, plastered brick:

“Covered with zinc on the ground floor, the first floor, the attic flats and the basements.”

The agricultural buildings consisted of a wooden stable and a barn with stone foundations, covered with double shingle; a coach house, a shed, an outhouse and a dumpster all covered with shingle. The entire residence was encircled with a wooden fence. My great grandparents had earlier lived in Warsaw, on Mokotowska 63 Street. They bought the property in the Sielce village from the previous owner in February, 1918, for 78 thousand Polish markas. A Tsarist “Mortgage Estimate” from 1875 was preserved, estimating the value of the property at 11,798 rubles, which shows that my great grandparents were rather wealthy after all.



**Great-grandparents Helena (1882-1968) and Feliks (1876-1938) Gadziński, photo from around 1910. Photo from author's collections**

## Wojtówka Inn

Initially, when the Sielce settlement still had the village status, my great grandparents lived off of running an inn, mentioned in literature as “a folk inn”. There, they offered travellers simple food, vodka and beer, and lodging. The settlement was joined to Warsaw in 1916, and the corner of Czerniakowska and Chełmska got the unofficial name Wojtówka. It was also the shady part of Czerniaków. There, among the “feisty boys”, the future “capital’s bard” Stanisław Grzesiuk was brought up.

As a twenty-year-old, he was a regular guest of my great grandparents’ “gastronomy”. Grzesiuk, with character fitting the neighbourhood, later described the inn in one of his books as “the twentieth category out of twenty.” The press described the inn in a more friendly, and probably more truthful tone:

“Have you heard of <<Wojtówka>>, the pub more popular among the more renowned drunkards than many bars in the city centre? The small pub, far away on Czerniakowska Street, visited by everyone from physical workers to ministers, chauffeurs and aristocrats? By far, <Wojtówka’s> biggest attraction is its owner: a modern Zagłoba [character from popular romantic novel on the post-Medieval times in Poland; translator’s annotation], ribald, witty and with a belly the size of a beer barrel behind his counter.”

My great grandfather, handsome and young on his wedding picture, in time indeed transformed beyond recognition... My great grandfathers had six children, one of whom died early. My grandmother Irena, born in 1906, was the first one to leave the family home when she got married at the age of twenty.

In 1938, in exchange for a life-long pension of 400 zloty, my great grandparents divided their property equally among their four children: Stefan, Zofia, Henryka and Cecylia. My grandmother was omitted since she was married, but her siblings paid her the amount of 25 thousand zloty. The value of the entire property was estimated in the donation act at 100 thousand zloty. The house and the entire residence was completely destroyed during the Warsaw Uprising. My great grandfather Feliks was no longer alive, he passed away in 1938. His wife Helena, and her daughters Zofia and Henryka, were all forcefully taken from Warsaw by the Germans. After going through the *Dulag 121* camp in Pruszków, they ended up in Cracow, where they settled permanently.



**Ziółkowski family pictures. Photo from author's collections**

## My grandparents' pre-war prosperity

Since 1926 my grandmother Irena ran the legal office of the Restaurateurs Association in Warsaw. In 1928 she married a Varsovian trader, Jan Ziółkowski, whom she had met at work. He was a widower after Aniela née Gałczyńska, raising two children: daughter Zofia, born in 1923, and older son Janusz, born in 1914.

They first moved into their own tenement house at the corner of Puławska and Dolna Street, and then to a prestigious location in Warsaw — a luxurious tenement house on Marszałkowska 48 Street on the corner of Koszykowa 34. They rented their large apartment no. 5, on the third floor, from the Jewish owner of the building, Adam Pawełek, a lawyer who lived on the second floor. Between 1929 and 1936 they had their own children — Zbigniew Anatol and my mom, Małgorzata Irena. My grandfather had multiple businesses, selling luxurious furniture and wine&deli products. Because of the latter activity he considered himself a wine-taster, so he didn't drink vodka to retain "tasting precision."

The previous owner, Karol Albrecht, a well-known industrialist and owner of the Ziemiańska Restaurant, ordered the apartment to be luxuriously designed. The final finishes took three years and were meant for his wife, actress Kazimiera Skalska, who would later become the wife of Jerzy Szapiro, a journalist and member of the Polish Socialist Party. The walls were covered with expensive materials, damasks and plushes, and all the paintings had the same frame style. My mom, who was eight years old when the Warsaw Uprising began, remembered her childhood home this way:

“It’s a great shame that not even a single picture remained. Even the staircase was palace-like, all marble with beautifully decorated handrails and stunning windows. The apartment had eight rooms, a living room with five windows, 120m<sup>2</sup>, a piano, a Louis XVI furniture set, a sofa, broad corridors, a bathroom with a window, white, shiny tiles, a built-in bathtub, bidets in the toilet and bathroom separately. I could ride a bike in the kitchen. There was also the so-called service room and stairs used for supplies and coal. The five-window living room took the entire front space of the apartment and faced the Marszałkowska Street. It was from these windows that I looked upon the wounded and killed on August 1, 1944.”

My grandfather’s store “Jan Ziółkowski - Wine, Vodka and Deli” was situated on the ground floor of the tenement house, on the corner. The first floor, facing Marszałkowska Street, was the warehouse of his luxurious “showcase furniture” and Stefan Radelicki’s apartment. He ran the business and lived there with his wife Zofia née Arens, the godmother of my mother, and their three daughters: Danuta, Barbara and Hanna. My grandparents also had a high-class beauty salon in the building, but I don’t know the exact location. The office on the fourth floor was occupied by Stefan Rachoń, a well-known violin player and conductor. The tenement house functioned “in good company”. Just beyond the corner, entering Koszykowa Street, there was an elegant hair salon, owned by a hairdresser who lived in the tenement house’s dome, and further down was another store: “Kucharski — Refined Shoes”. On the other side of Koszykowa Street, on Marszałkowska 46 Street, there was an elegant candy shop of the leading brand “Fuchs — Sugars”. On the other side of Marszałkowska Street, one corner had the Jan Gajewski Confectionery and the other had the Pakulski Brothers Deli. On the right side of Śniadecki Street, which ended on the crossing of Marszałkowska and Koszykowa Streets, jeweller Spaliński had his store.



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**Corner of Marszałkowska 48 Street and Koszykowa 34 Street with a visible part of the hairdressing salon on the ground floor. It is the beginning of the Uprising, the house has not yet**

been demolished, visible effects of a heavy shell hitting its front and destroying part of my grandparents' apartment on the third floor. Photo: Sylwester Braun, *Reportaże z Powstania Warszawskiego*, Warsaw, 1983, p. 307.

My grandfather also had a furniture salon at the Theatre Square; some say at the spot where today stands the National Theatre. Just before the war or already during the German occupation, his son Janusz Ziółkowski, my mom's stepbrother, ran the store. Most likely on Bielańska Street, there was also a store with expensive liquor, owned by my grandfather. On the corner of Nowy Świat and Pieracki Streets, today's Foksal Street, my grandpa ran a furniture store on the third floor of a tenement house, ran by Stanisław Radelicki. His carpentry and polishing workshop operated on Wilcza Street at a six-room apartment. He also had a wine&deli shop on Miedziana Street, which was ran by my mom's godfather, Józef Arens — Zofia Radelicka's brother.

On Puławska Street, on the corner with Dolna Street, my grandpa owned a four-story rental house.

## **Warsaw apocalypse**

The tenement house on Marszałkowska Street got damaged already during the defence of Warsaw in September, 1939. During the Warsaw Uprising, a heavy artillery shell from a Bert mortar from what I heard in the family, hit the foundations and a large part of the building crumbled. Luckily, my grandmother, mother, mother's stepsister Zofia and the cleaning lady were in one of the basements. My grandma and mom were taken to the *Dulag*121 camp in Ursus, on October 5, 1944, and after they came back from Charsznica near Cracow, in January or February, 1945, they saw that only a tile furnace hanged from the wall of the dining room on the third floor. That was the only thing that remained from an eight-room apartment. Nothing but rubble stood in the place of a magnificent, beautiful tenement house.

The house on Puławska Street was bombed already in 1939. Only ruins remained from the furniture salon and the store on Theatre Square and Bielańska Street. Similar The rest of the family properties met a similar fate. The little that wasn't destroyed by the Germans during the Warsaw Uprising and burned in its aftermath was then stolen and looted.





example of how hundreds if not thousands of Warsaw families lost their livelihoods. Allow me to list some of the losses:

“Eight rooms completely burned down, a table set in the English Baroque style, a complete study in the Empire style, four sets of living room furniture in the Louis XV and XVI style (for four living rooms), couches and sofas, gilded Louis XV servo tables, a Louis Philippe inlaid walnut serviette, nine Persian and other top-class carpets, a luxurious at that time "automatic" Telefunken radio with an adapter and a collection of 125 Polish and 60 English hit records, 75 classical music records, the so-called cross piano "Leipzig", Philips radio, telephone with number 81923 and an additional telephone, expensive trinkets, porcelain, typewriter, paintings according to a separate list, 26 crystal vases, 9 men's suits, 12 women's dresses, 2 boys' suits, 14 children's dresses, 2 men's fur coats, 3 women's fur coats, a library of approximately 180 volumes of classic Polish literature bound in embossed and gilded leather (including Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Reymont, Kossak-Szczucka), 35 similarly bound volumes of French literature, 3 women's bicycles, 2 men's bicycles, English children's bicycle, 2 cameras, kitchen equipment, two electric stoves, silver set for 12 people, plate set for 12 people, Empire set for 18 people, son's postage stamp collection, daughter's library” etc.

Apart from that my grandmother mentioned rich food supplies: jars of jam and mushrooms, sugar, groats, melted butter, tonnes of coal and wood. In the basement there were: specimen Hungarian wines from 1860, 70 bottles, foreign liqueurs with 90 bottles, cognacs, gin and whiskey in total, approx. 100 bottles. She also wrote down 8 Angora rabbits. The wine&deli store wares were mentioned separately: “walnut cabinets and counters, modern, neon lighting and advertising above the store, neon, cognacs, wines, vodkas, foreign and domestic goods, canned goods, coffee, tea, olive oil, foreign fruits (raisins, plums, almonds, etc.)” and equipment for a beauty salon with a waiting room.

Priced according to the rates from September 1, 1939, per the instructions of the form, my grandmother evaluated her movable property at 395,510 zloty [roughly 76,000 US dollars according to the rates at the time; trans. annotation.] It was only a rough estimate of the losses on Marszałkowska 48 Street and it did not include any property on Puławska Street nor the loss of furniture and wine&deli products in all the other stores, most likely rented by my grandfather. To understand this value: the pre-war salary of my second grandfather, who served as lieutenant colonel, was 600 zloty and was nearing the salaries of some of the upper level state servicemen. My grandmother's estimate equals to roughly 55 years of such salary. Compared to a lower class official that would mean... 200 years of work before reaching that number. You could buy 2.5 thousand bicycles made by the Weapons Factory in Radom before the war for that amount.





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**Corner of the Marszałkowska 48 Street and Koszykowa 34 Street in 1945. The final result of German barbarism. Photo: fotopolska.eu**

### **Only a few little things remained...**

After the uprising ended, my grandmother managed to miraculously salvage some items from Marszałkowska 48 Street. Let through by the Germans, she quickly grabbed several things lying beneath a metal tub: a five-volume, beautifully decorated encyclopaedia by Trzaska, Evert and Michalski, with spines damaged by bomb pieces already in 1939; damaged Chinese vase; large, bound in gilded calfskin, second volume of *Kanclerz Szydłowiecki. From the history of culture and art in the Zygmunt times of Jerzy Kieszkowski*; the third volume of *Popioły* by Stefan Żeromski with a leather, embossed spine; a porcelain white bear from the famous Schaubach company. All of that survived until the Soviet "liberation." Apart from the encyclopaedia, which was sold for my grandparents to receive an apartment from the state, I still own the rest of the precious items. Only a couple of pictures remained from the pre-war time. The atelier one, showing my great-grandparents, three amateur ones and several ID photographs. There are also four pictures from the time of the occupation.

Since winter, 1945, my grandmother wandered homeless with my mother. First, they were taken in by an aunt who sheltered twelve Warsaw "burnt downers" in her little apartment on Hoża Street. Then, Franciszek Arens took them in, along many others, to his tenement house on Rakowiecka 5 Street and gave them a small room, 12.5 m<sup>2</sup>. When he returned from Germany, my mother's brother joined them. In 1954, they finally received a cooperative apartment — a room and a kitchen in the Old Town, 33 m<sup>2</sup>. That's the post-war balance when it comes to my grandparents' properties.

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