

# Memory Unearthed: The Lodz Ghetto Photographs of Henryk Ross

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PORTLAND ART MUSEUM



## The Last Journey of the Jews of Lodz

OCTOBER 9, 2018 - FEBRUARY 24, 2019

OREGON JEWISH MUSEUM AND CENTER FOR HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

# Memory Unearthed: The Lodz Ghetto Photographs of Henryk Ross



Man walking in winter in the remains of the synagogue on Wolborska Street, destroyed by the Germans in 1939, 1940, gelatin silver print

Henryk Ross (1910-1991), a Polish Jew, worked as a photojournalist before World War II. He was living in Lodz, Poland, in 1940 when Nazi occupiers forced all area Jews into the neighborhood of Baluty, the poorest area of the large industrial city. Over the four years that the Nazis controlled the Lodz Ghetto and used it as a labor camp, more than 200,000 people were confined within its boundaries, some staying for only a short time before being deported to concentration or extermination camps.

The Lodz Ghetto's Jewish Council, which was overseen by German administrators, hired Ross to make resident

identification pictures as well as propaganda photographs depicting workshop laborers producing supplies for the German Army and luxury goods for private companies. Without the Nazis' knowledge, Ross hoarded film and used it to photograph birthday parties, wedding ceremonies, and other life-affirming events that continued during the early period of the Jews' confinement in the ghetto. As deportations and malnutrition increased, he photographed fragile bodies destroyed by overwork and starvation, gallows executions, and people being forced onto train cars destined for extermination

camps. He took these pictures at great risk, keeping his camera under his coat and hiding in attics or empty storerooms to photograph without detection.

Sometime in 1944, as the Nazis halted the ghetto's factory production and deported most remaining residents to extermination camps, Ross buried 6,000 negatives in the ground at 12 Jagielonska Street, hoping that this photographic evidence would survive him and serve as proof of the Nazis' genocidal program. Ross was one of fewer than 1,000 registered residents still alive in the Lodz Ghetto when it was liberated by the Red Army on January 15, 1945. Two months later, he returned to recover the fragile negatives, half of which survived the winter. Seven decades later, these powerful images continue to bear witness to the realities of the Holocaust and remind today's viewers of the unbearably destructive potential of hatred and racism.

— Julia Dolan, Ph.D.,  
*The Minor White Curator of Photography*  
Portland Art Museum

*Memory Unearthed* at the Portland Art Museum and *The Last Journey of the Jews of Lodz* at the Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education are dedicated to the memory of Miriam Greenstein (October 29, 1929 – April 9, 2018).

Miriam survived three years in the Lodz Ghetto, the atrocities of Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen, and a slave labor camp in Germany before being liberated by British troops on April 15, 1945. Arriving alone to live with an uncle in Portland in November 1945, Miriam rebuilt her life, finished school, and established a career and family.

Toward the end of her life Miriam unearthed the memory of her childhood experience and dedicated herself to educating Oregon's youth on the consequences of hatred and racism. Her voice, the voice of an indomitable courage, resonated over decades as a beacon of hope and acceptance.

— Judith Margles, *Executive Director*,  
*Oregon Jewish Museum and Center for Holocaust Education*

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Exhibition organized by the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto.  
All photographs: Collection Art Gallery of Ontario, Gift of the  
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Industry: workers in the textile workshop sewing, 1940-1944, gelatin silver print

## Lodz Ghetto Timeline

### 1939

**September 1:** Germany invades Poland; France and England declare war on Germany two days later.

**September 8:** The German Army enters and occupies the large industrial city of Lodz, population of approximately 672,000; one-third of its residents are Jewish.

**September 13:** Adolf Hitler passes through Lodz; crowds of the city's German residents welcome him.

**Late September:** Jewish holidays are banned. Restrictions are placed on Jews making financial transactions, and they are required to forfeit property and personal goods to non-Jewish Poles and Germans. Jews are randomly beaten and forced to perform pointless acts of labor meant to demean them.

**October:** Mordechai Rumkowski, a local Jew, is appointed Elder of the Jews and head of the Nazi-controlled Jewish Council of Lodz, which will enforce German laws and orders. Jews are forbidden to trade in leather and textiles.

**November:** Hitler's propaganda minister, Joseph Goebbels, tours Lodz on November 1, and declares it "hideous." The city's four historic synagogues are destroyed, and Jews are required to obey strict nighttime curfews.

**December:** Nazis plan for a restricted Jewish quarter within Lodz. Jews are forced to wear the yellow Star of David patch on fronts and backs of their clothing.

# 1940

**February:** Nazis formally decree that Jews will be isolated in Baluty, a small and poor section of Lodz.

**April:** Nazis rename Lodz after the German General Litzmannstadt, who captured the city during World War I. Barbed wire, barricades, and sentry booths are installed to isolate the ghetto from the rest of the city. Rumkowski proposes that skilled ghetto residents produce goods for the Nazis.

**May:** Jews are restricted to the ghetto, which is now sealed off from the rest of Lodz; attempts to escape result in immediate shooting without warning. Around this time, Henryk Ross is hired as a photographer for the Jewish Administration's Statistics Department.

**June:** A census records 160,320 people living in the 1.6-square-mile ghetto — over twenty times the population density of Portland today. Rumkowski establishes production systems and opens factories; he also takes control of food distribution, giving the most food to office workers.

**October:** A labor office is established to oversee factories that will produce goods including clothing, shoes, textiles and munitions for the Nazis. Malnutrition and illness begin to spread.

**December:** All food is rationed, and death due to starvation increases in the ghetto.

(continued)



FOTO HENRYK ROSS



רום גמון-לודז 1940-45

Deportation, people walking looking at camera, small boy in center escorted by Ghetto police, 1942-1944, gelatin silver print from a half tone negative



Children talking through fence of central prison on Czarnecki Street prior to deportation, 1940-1942, gelatin silver print

## 1941

Henryk Ross marries Stefania Schoenberg, also a Polish Jew, in the ghetto.

**September-October:** 19,954 Jews from Western Europe are transported to and resettled in the Lodz Ghetto.

**November:** Nearly 4,500 Roma from Austria are settled in a separate area of the ghetto that lacks sanitary facilities. Typhus quickly spreads there and kills some 700 children.

**December:** Coal and wood are rationed. Chelmino nad Nerem, a new extermination facility, opens forty-five miles north of Lodz. Rumkowski severely limits photography in the ghetto, allowing only pictures of “official” activities. Ross takes on greater risk to photograph the realities of life in the ghetto.

## 1942

**January:** Deportations begin. Throughout the winter and spring, 4,500 Roma and over 52,000 Jews board freight trains to Chelmino, where they are murdered in mobile gas vans.

**September:** Rumkowski works to deport the most vulnerable of ghetto residents—the elderly, the infirm, and children—people Nazis call “useless eaters.” Over 15,000 people, including more than 5,500 children, are sent to die at Chelmino.

**October:** The ghetto now holds almost 90,000 residents, and deportations slow because the Nazis need laborers to make war supplies. Outbreaks of typhoid, typhus, and tuberculosis, along with spreading malnourishment, cause eighty to 100 deaths each day within the ghetto.

## 1943

Residents continue to labor and starve, but no deportations to extermination camps occur in 1943. Adolf Eichmann, one of the architects of the Final Solution, visits the Lodz Ghetto during the summer.

## 1944

**January:** More than 75,000 Jews still live in the Lodz Ghetto.

**June:** The Nazis order the closure of the ghetto and liquidation of its inhabitants.

**August:** 70,000 ghetto residents are sent to Auschwitz to be exterminated.

**Fall:** An additional 1,000 residents are sent to a concentration camp near Berlin. About 1000 residents, including Henryk and Stefania Ross, remain in the ghetto and are charged with cleaning it up after liquidation; they are also ordered to dig their own mass grave, where they will be buried after being executed by the Nazis. Sometime this year, Ross buries his negatives and other documents at 12 Jagielonska Street.

## 1945

**January 15:** Russia’s Red Army enters the Lodz Ghetto and liberates its remaining inhabitants. 877 people are officially recorded as survivors.

**March:** Henryk Ross returns to 12 Jagielonska Street to recover the buried box of negatives and documents.

# Nazi-era Terminology

**Concentration camps:** Forced labor camps in use between 1933 and 1945. During this period, Nazis set up and ran approximately 15,000 concentration camps throughout German-occupied Europe.

**Extermination camps:** Also called death camps or killing centers. Nazis used extermination camps to quickly and systematically murder many people at the same time by exposing them to poison gas. The six extermination camps—Chelmno, Belzec, Sobibor, Treblinka, Majdanek and Auschwitz-Birkenau—were located in German-occupied Poland. More than 3.2 million people were killed in these camps between 1942 and 1944; Almost all were Jews, while ten to fifteen percent were Roma, people with disabilities, and gay men and women—groups Nazis also considered unacceptable.

**Final Solution:** The Nazi Party's policy of genocide that targeted Jews. This systematic murder of Jews began in 1941 and lasted through 1945, when Allied forces liberated German-occupied Europe.

**Genocide:** The intentional murdering of a large group of people united through a common ethnicity, nationality, or religion.

**Ghetto:** Areas within European cities and towns where Jews were forcibly confined. During World War II, the Nazis set up more than 400 ghettos. Lodz was the first ghetto to be established and had the second largest population next to the Warsaw Ghetto.



Young child smiling, 1940-1944, 35 mm cellulose nitrate negative



Ghetto police with woman behind barbed wire, 1940-1944, gelatin silver print

**The Holocaust:** Also called The Shoah, the Holocaust was a period of genocide during World War II. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, defines the Holocaust as the systematic bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. Approximately half of Jews murdered during the Holocaust were killed in the extermination camps; about ninety percent of Poland's 3.3 million Jews were murdered, and one-third of the world's Jewish population was eliminated.

**Liquidation:** The forced removal of residents and prisoners during the closure of ghettos and concentration camps. During most liquidations, Jews were deported to extermination camps by the thousands where they were quickly murdered.

**Roma:** Itinerant peoples whose migrant ancestors relocated to Europe from northern India sometime between the tenth and fifteenth centuries. It is estimated that over 940,000 Roma lived in Germany and German-occupied countries at the beginning of World War II. Nazis considered most Roma racially inferior, exterminating an estimated 250,000 between 1939 and 1945.

COVER: Excavating the box of negatives and documents Henryk Ross buried in the ghetto at 12 Jagielonska Street, Lodz, March 1945, 1945, gelatin silver print from half-tone negative

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