

Kinga Czechowska
Pilecki Institute, Warsaw
ORCID 0000-0002-2620-6096

POLISH EVANGELICALS HELPING JEWS. TWO LETTERS
OF CELINA REŃSKA NÉE KAWECKA TO YAD VASHEM
CONCERNING AID PROVIDED IN WARSAW
BY THE SZULC AND STECHBART FAMILIES

The involvement of the Polish Protestants in helping Jews in the face of the Holocaust is still an under-researched issue, although attempts are being made to create a collective portrait of the helpers, specifically the Righteous Among the Nations. The persons who helped are characterised by such categories as the country of origin,¹ motivations,² and circumstances of help,³ gen-

¹ M. Klempner, *The Heart Has Reasons: Holocaust Rescuers and Their Stories Of Courage* (Cleveland, OH, 2006); P. Henry, *We Only Know Men: The Rescue of Jews in France During the Holocaust* (Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

² A. Grunwald-Spier, *The Other Schindlers: Why Some People Chose to Save Jews in the Holocaust* (The History Press, 2014).

³ For more on this, see, above all, the stories of diplomats M. Dick and “Raoul Wallenberg. Making of an American Hero,” in *Unlikely Heroes: The Place of Holocaust Rescuers in Research and Teaching*, ed. A. Kohen, G.J. Steinacher (University of Nebraska Press, 2019), pp. 110–138; A. Haska, “‘Proszę Pana Ministra o energiczną interwencję’. Aleksander Ładoś (1891–1963) i ratowanie Żydów przez Poselstwo RP w Bernie,” *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* (hereinafter ZŻSM) 11 (2015), pp. 299–309; H. Levine, *In Search of Sugihara: The Elusive Japanese Diplomat Who Risked His Life to Rescue 10,000 Jews from the Holocaust* (Plunkett Lake Press, 2019).

der, or religion. In this regard, Polish researchers highlight the significant role of the Catholic Church in aiding Jews, noting the involvement of priests, nuns,⁴ and ordinary believers. The denominational aspect is consistently emphasised when discussing their motivations for providing help.

Of particular note here is the example of the Ulma family⁵ or the writer Zofia Kossak-Szczucka.⁶ The latter wrote about the imperative for Polish Catholics to oppose the crimes against the Jews on behalf of the Front for the Rebirth of Poland (*Front Odrodzenia Polski*) in *Protest* – a leaflet issued on 11 August 1942 and distributed in five thousand copies during the so-called great liquidation *Aktion* in the Warsaw Ghetto.⁷ Polish and Catholic identity remained crucial to the cause: “We, Polish Catholics, therefore take the floor. [...] Whoever does not support this protest with us – is not a Catholic.” Only in one place in the brochure was a reference made to broader concepts: “The Christian conscience demands the protest [...]”⁸

Elle Linde researched motivations for helping Jews on the basis of 41,149 files of Polish Righteous Among the Nations, and one of the categories she mentioned was “religious motivations.” This applied to the 89 cases she examined without specifying which religion and denomination they represented. It can only be assumed that these were not persons of a single religion because then this category would have been named differently.⁹ It is difficult to find traces of scholarly interest in Poles of non-Catholic faiths, including Evangelicals, who helped and saved Jews.¹⁰ Few

⁴ M. Grądzka, “Kościół katolicki w Krakowie w pomocy Żydom. Zarys problematyki badawczej,” in *Kościół krakowski 1939–1945*, ed. Ł. Klimek (Cracow, 2014), pp. 125–154; E. Kurek, *Dzieci żydowskie w klasztorach. Udział żeńskich zgromadzeń zakonnych w akcji ratowania dzieci żydowskich w Polsce w latach 1939–1945* (Zakrzewo, 2012); R. Tyndorf, *Wartime Rescue of Jews by the Polish Catholic Clergy: The Testimony of Survivors and Rescuers*, vol. 1–2 (Lublin, 2023).

⁵ J. Szarek, M. Szpytma, *Rodzina Ulmów. W hołdzie miłosiernym. Przejmująca historia polskiej rodziny, która poświęciła swoje życie, ratując Żydów* (Cracow, 2014).

⁶ C. Tonini, *Czas nienawiści i czas troski. Zofia Kossak-Szczucka – antysemitka, która ratowała Żydów*, trans. T. Jekiel, W. Jekiel (Warsaw, 2007).

⁷ I. Gutman, “Polscy Sprawiedliwi wśród Narodów Świata,” in *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący Żydów podczas Holocaustu. Polska*, vol. 1, ed. I. Gutman, S. Bender, S. Krakowski (Cracow, 2009), p. XXXI.

⁸ *Polacy – Żydzi. Wybór źródeł*, ed. A.K. Kunert (Warsaw, 2001), pp. 212–216 (doc. II/10).

⁹ I. Gutman, “Polscy Sprawiedliwi wśród Narodów Świata,” p. XXXIX.

¹⁰ Seven Protestant Churches operated in the Second Republic, hence the use of the term “Evangelicals” in the text is a deliberate simplification. For more information, see E. Alabrudzińska, *Protestantyzm w Polsce w latach 1918–1939* (Toruń, 2004), pp. 70–89.

studies deal with the help provided by Mariavites¹¹ or the Greek-Catholic clergyman Archbishop Andrey Sheptytsky.¹² Against this background, the work by the long-time director of the Department of the Righteous Among the Nations at Yad Vashem, Mordecai Paldiel, stands out slightly, and it does not deal only with occupied Polish lands (the author's aim was to be cross-sectional) or only with cases of aid, but presents the attitudes of various Christian Churches towards the Holocaust. When listing examples of helping Poles, among non-Catholics, the author mentions only (after Emanuel Ringelblum) a former Evangelical priest, Mr. Z., who hid four Jewish children.¹³

More numerous references to other Polish Evangelicals who provided aid to Jews during the World War II can be found mainly in studies on Warsaw-based Evangelicals. The biographical dictionary *Ewangelicy warszawscy w walce o niepodległość Polski 1939–1945* (Evangelicals of Warsaw in the fight for Poland's independence 1939–1945) mentions, for example, nineteen such people.¹⁴ Memory has remained of, among others, Fr. Ludwik Zaunar, a pastor at an Evangelical-Reformed parish in Warsaw, who issued forged certificates to Jews.¹⁵ In 1978, the title of Righteous Among the Nations was awarded to Józef and Anna Bank, who rescued the Jewish family Dratwer from the Holocaust.¹⁶ Józef was of Protestant faith; his wife was Orthodox.¹⁷ These mentions and basic descriptions merely indicate the presence of a research topic. However, only through the examination of archival documents, particularly ego-documents, such as the ones described below, can the research problem be defined and questions formulated by future researchers.

¹¹ U. Grabowska, "Mariawici i Żydzi – rzecz o pomocy," *ZŻSM* 4 (2008), pp. 442–465.

¹² S. Redlich, "Moralność i rzeczywistość: metropolita Andriej Szeptycki i Żydzi w czasach Holocaustu i II wojny światowej," *ZŻSM* 4 (2008), pp. 241–260.

¹³ M. Paldiel, *Churches and the Holocaust: Unholy Teaching, Good Samaritans, and Reconciliation* (KTAV Publishing House, 2006), pp. 204–205.

¹⁴ A. Sękowska, "Zbór Ewangelicko-Reformowany w Warszawie w latach drugiej wojny światowej," in *Ewangelicy warszawscy. Wspomnienia i relacje*, pp. 30–31.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁶ "Banek Józef & Anna (Bystrzycka)," in "The Righteous Database," Yad Vashem, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/righteous/4034455>, accessed 16 May 2024.

¹⁷ *Zwiastun Ewangeliczny*, 6, 7 February 1937, p. 58, <https://sbc.org.pl/Content/618739/PDF/ii352478-1937-06-0001.pdf>, accessed 16 May 2024. In "The Righteous Database" on the YV website both are erroneously entered as Catholics. "Banek Józef & Anna (Bystrzycka)," in "The Righteous Database," Yad Vashem, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/righteous/4034455>, accessed 16 May 2024.

The scholarly edition of the two documents from the Archives of Yad Vashem, Department of the Righteous Among the Nations, presented below, is intended to contribute and encourage further research. For the history of the help given to the Jewish Kawecki family in Warsaw, the Evangelical thread has a double significance. Firstly, religion shaped the Szulc family's aid motivations; secondly, Emil Szulc's position as the intendant of the Evangelical cemetery significantly influenced the location and conditions of the aid.

The author of both letters published below is Celina Reńska née Kawecka, born in Bydgoszcz, daughter of Helena and Jan Kawecki. She was 17 at the outbreak of World War II, and at the age of 60, in 1982, she decided to contact the Righteous Among the Nations Department at Yad Vashem and initiate the procedure for honouring two families: The Szulcs and the Stechbarts. Her parents were no longer alive at the time, but she indicated that her brother Adam was one of the witnesses with whom contact was still possible. The first letter from Celina Reńska was sent on 8 August 1982; the second one is undated, but we know that it was written as a reply to a letter from an employee of Yad Vashem of 9 August 1982. As Celina Reńska's testimony concerns the help of two unrelated families, it became the basis for two procedures, successfully concluded on 7 July 1983. It was then that the decision was made to award the Righteous Among the Nations medal to Emil and Amalia Szulc, their children Eugeniusz (son) and Alicja (daughter),¹⁸ and also Maria Stechbart and her son Tadeusz. They were honoured for their help to the Jewish Kawecki family: Helena and Jan and their children Celina and Adam.¹⁹ It is worth noting that in The Righteous Among the Nations Database available from the Yad Vashem website, next to the persons mentioned above, "Catholic" was erroneously entered under the "Religion" heading, and the brief description of the history of aid omitted the aspect of religious motivation.²⁰

Meanwhile, it is clear from Celina Reńska's testimony that the Szulcs were "religious evangelicals adhering to high moral standards." Moreover, although they were

¹⁸ "Szulc Emil & Amalia; Son: Eugeniusz; Daughter: Kutte Alicja (Szulc)," in "The Righteous Database," Yad Vashem, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/righteous/4039809>, accessed 16 May 2024.

¹⁹ "Stechbart Maria; Son: Tadeusz," in "The Righteous Database," Yad Vashem, <https://collections.yadvashem.org/en/righteous/4039804>, accessed 16 May 2024.

²⁰ The descriptions in the two entries mentioned above are identical.

of German origin, they considered themselves Poles, did not accept the *Volksliste*, and were active in the Polish underground.²¹ In the Second Polish Republic, approximately three hundred thousand Germans and two hundred thousand Poles belonged to the Evangelical-Augsburg (Lutheran) Church. Already at the beginning of the German occupation, some Polish Protestant clergy were removed from their parishes or arrested. The initial intention to resettle all *Volksdeutsche* from the General Government to the territories incorporated to Reich meant that the problem of rebuilding Evangelical churches as communities potentially bringing together Polish Evangelicals was not important to the German authorities. On the other hand, according to the key assumptions of the German occupation policy in this area, nationality-based division in the Evangelical Churches was pursued. The first step towards this was determining the number of people of a given nationality in individual parishes.²² In the biographical entries on various Evangelical clergymen, there is information about their being summoned to Szucha Avenue [Warsaw Gestapo headquarters – t.n.] to sign the *Volksliste*. Pastor Otto Friedrich Krenz was arrested for refusing to declare his German nationality and put in the Central Prison on Daniłowiczowska Street.²³

According to Celina, her father and Emil Szulc were friends “from their youth.”²⁴ Szulc was born in Turek in 1893, so perhaps the beginning of the two men’s acquaintance should be linked to their stay on the borderland of the Kujawy and Wielkopolska regions. Eugeniusz, the eldest of the three Szulc children, was also born in Turek in 1919. The family settled in Warsaw around 1923, at which time Emil became the intendant of the Evangelical-Augsburg cemetery in Warsaw and took over the duties related to the administration of the necropolis, which involved moving to a house at 54 Młynarska Street adjacent to the cemetery. Szulc, as a Polish Evangelical, was engaged in Polish underground activity from the first days of the war; at the cemetery, he gathered and hid weapons.²⁵ His sons, Eugeniusz and Janusz, also followed in his footsteps. All three fought in the “Kiliński” Home

²¹ Document no. 1.

²² J. Sziling, *Kościół chrześcijański w polityce niemieckich władz okupacyjnych w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie (1939–1945)* (Toruń, 1988), pp. 94–106, 158.

²³ <https://www.1944.pl/powstancze-biogramy/otton-krenz,24446.html>, accessed 28 June 2024.

²⁴ Document no. 1.

²⁵ D. Dąbrowska, “Szulc Emil ‘Tur’” in *Ewangelicy warszawscy. Słownik*, p. 548.

Army battalion during the 1944 Warsaw Rising. Janusz Szulc, the youngest of the siblings (born in 1929), does not appear in Celina Reńska's testimony. Probably as a child, he was not aware of hiding Jews. After the war, the family moved to Łódź.²⁶ Nevertheless, their ties with Warsaw did not cease, as demonstrated by Eugeniusz Szulc's books on Warsaw Evangelicals, including the most famous one, *Cmentarz ewangelicko-augsburski w Warszawie* (The Evangelical Augsburg cemetery in Warsaw).²⁷

In this publication – in his father's biographical entry – Eugeniusz Szulc mentions Emil's persecution by the Gestapo, who repeatedly summoned him to their headquarters on the Szucha Avenue, "where they would give him the *Volkliste* to sign."²⁸ Although Emil Szulc feared the consequences of constant refusals, he did not give in and, despite the fear, did not decline to help others. We learn from the biographical entry that the Szulcs gave help to, among others, an escapee from a prisoner of war camp and that they managed to rescue a Jewish family of four who had escaped from the Warsaw Ghetto. However, the biographical entry in a study by one of the rescuers does not bring any further information about the history of this help. It neither provides the name of the Jewish Kawecki family nor of the other family helping them – the Stechbarts.²⁹ Furthermore, none of the members of the Stechbart family is listed in this or other available dictionary publications on Warsaw Evangelicals. All that is known is that Tadeusz Stechbart is buried in the same Evangelical–Augsburg cemetery in Warsaw as members of the Szulc family.³⁰

Celina Reńska's testimony focuses on the aid effort and contains little information on the earlier fate of her family. We only know that the Kaweckis escaped from Bydgoszcz in 1939, but we know neither the date nor the circumstances of this escape.³¹ The Jews of Bydgoszcz became victims of German persecution already in

²⁶ H. Halweg, "Ewangelicy w batalionie AK 'Kiliński,'" in *Ewangelicy warszawscy w walce o niepodległość Polski w latach drugiej wojny światowej. Wspomnienia i relacje*, ed. A. Janowska et al. (Warsaw, 1997) (hereinafter *Ewangelicy warszawscy. Wspomnienia i relacje*), p. 204; D. Dąbrowska, "Szulc Emil 'Tur,'" pp. 548–549; D. Dąbrowska, "Szulc Eugeniusz 'Dobry,'" in *Ewangelicy warszawscy. Słownik*, pp. 550–551; D. Dąbrowska, "Szulc Janusz 'Pik,'" in *Ewangelicy warszawscy. Słownik*, p. 551.

²⁷ E. Szulc, *Cmentarz ewangelicko-augsburski w Warszawie. Zmarli i ich rodziny* (Warsaw, 1989).

²⁸ "Szulc Emil," in *ibid.*, p. 552.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Born in 1922, died in 1999, <https://wawamlynarska.grobonet.com/grobonet/start.php?id=detale&idg=3218&inni=0&cinki=5>, accessed 16 May 2024.

³¹ Document no. 1.

the first week of the war. On 5 September, the Germans started arresting local Jews and, a few days later, began executing them. Some, anticipating the danger, had already fled the city (and the part of Poland where a German attack was expected first) before the war broke out. By autumn, these escapes had become a common occurrence. In his situational report of 11 November 1939, the commander of Einsatzkommando 16, Jakob Lölgén, noted that the vast majority of Jews had fled and were not expected to return.³² According to the December 1940 data, the largest number of refugees from Bydgoszcz was taken in by Warsaw; many Jews returned to their hometowns in the former Congress Kingdom of Poland.³³ According to Reńska, her family went to Warsaw and visited the Szulcs there. Crucial to this contact was the figure of Emil.³⁴ His situation during the occupation was not simple: the repeated summoning by the Gestapo and pressure to sign the *Volksliste* have already been mentioned, and it should be added that he was also persecuted by Poles on account of his German origin, even though he had taken part in underground activities.³⁵

Regardless of their personal difficulties, Emil and his family were favourably inclined toward the Kaweckis from the beginning and were ready to help them. In the autumn of 1940, the Kaweckis, together with the rest of the Jewish population of Warsaw, were taken to the ghetto, but they maintained telephone contact with the Szulcs.³⁶ Despite the successive restrictions and impediments to communication between the Aryan and non-Aryan sides, the telephone – according to Justyna Gregorowicz – remained a legal means of communication between Warsaw’s “sealed quarter” and the outside world until the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. It was of great importance, among other things, for organising smuggling.³⁷ Also, Jewish refugees from Bydgoszcz used to arrange the pickup of parcels at the Evangelical

³² Z. Biegański, *Mniejszość żydowska w Bydgoszczy 1920–1939* (Bydgoszcz, 1999), pp. 138–144. For more information on Lölgén’s post-war trial, see T. Ceran, *Zbrodnia pomorska 1939. Początek ludobójstwa niemieckiego w okupowanej Polsce* (Bydgoszcz–Warsaw, 2024), pp. 344–345.

³³ T. Kowski, “Eksterminacja ludności żydowskiej z Bydgoszczy w latach II wojny światowej,” in *Servitium Klio. In honorem Professoris Alberti Kotowski*, ed. M.G. Zieliński, Z. Biegański (Bydgoszcz, 2021), pp. 180–183.

³⁴ Document no.1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*; “Szulc Emil,” in E. Szulc, *Cmentarz ewangelicko-augsburski w Warszawie*, p. 552.

³⁶ Document no.1.

³⁷ J. Gregorowicz, “Komunikacja telefoniczna w życiu społeczności getta warszawskiego,” *ZŻSM* 10 (2014), pp. 409–410, 413–414.

cemetery by phone.³⁸ The location was not accidental. As this Warsaw necropolis on Młynarska Street was adjacent to the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street, which belonged to the ghetto (until December 1941), and the Catholic Powązki cemetery,³⁹ it was a popular point for the illegal transfer of food from the “Aryan” side of the city. For the Kawecki and Szulc families, this location was all the more evident because Emil Szulc, as the intendant of the Evangelical Augsburg cemetery, occupied a flat with his family in a house adjacent to the cemetery.⁴⁰ What is more, there was an Evangelical enclave in the ghetto area. The building belonging to the Evangelical-Reformed Church at Leszno Street, the Protestant hospital, and other parish buildings were separated from the surrounding ghetto by a wall – the Warsaw press reported on the boundary on November 16–17, 1940. The enclave existed until the ghetto area was reduced in 1942.⁴¹

According to Celina Reńska, it was at the instigation of Emil Szulc that her family decided to escape from the ghetto. She does not specify when exactly this happened, but based on the subsequent chronology of the events, we can presume that it was in the first half of 1942. The Kaweckis found their first shelter in the Szulc’s house near the cemetery, but their stay there lasted only a few weeks. Emil found other (“suitable,” as Celina described it) accommodation for them with the Stechbart family, with whom they stayed for two years until the outbreak of the 1944 Warsaw Rising.⁴² Perhaps it was the proximity to the ghetto that made the flat at 54 Młynarska Street too dangerous a location and thus “unsuitable” for hiding a Jewish family. As Halina Helweg, who, as a girl, visited the buildings there, recalled years later, children were forbidden “to stay in the part of the yard adjoining the flat of the cemetery intendant, Emil Szulc,” and even adults “did not pass through there unnecessarily. A mysterious peace and silence reigned there.” It was only after the war that she found out the reasons for this and learned that

³⁸ Document no.1.

³⁹ P. Wieczorek, “Cmentarz żydowski na Okopowej – trzy perspektywy (cz. 1),” Muzeum Getta Warszawskiego (Warsaw Ghetto Museum), 13 April 2021, <https://1943.pl/arttykul/cmentarz-zydowski-na-okopowej-trzy-perspektywy-cz-1/>, accessed 16 May 2024.

⁴⁰ D. Dąbrowska, “Szulc Emil ‘Tur,’” p. 548.

⁴¹ A. Sękowska, “Zbór Ewangelicko-Reformowany w Warszawie,” p. 27; *Getto warszawskie. Przewodnik po nieistniejącym mieście*, ed. B. Engelking, J. Leociak (Warsaw, 2013), p. 94.

⁴² Document no. 1.

a Soviet prisoner of war and a Jewish family had been hiding there at various times. It is possible that the only source of information on this subject for her were references in biographical notes by Eugeniusz Szulc that were older than her written memories.⁴³

The next part of the story of the rescue of the Kaweckis, that is, their hiding by the Stechbart family, is more nuanced than the altruistic help of the Szulcs who befriended them. In this case, the helpers and the help recipients did not know each other. Moreover, the help was initially paid for. Celina herself emphasized the difficult material situation of Maria Stechbart, a poor widow who lived with her son Tadeusz and her mother (unknown by name). However, it is not entirely clear what role money played in arranging this hiding place. The testimony goes on to say that the Stechbarts received money each month to support the Kaweckis, but the term “remuneration” also appears, which suggests an extra amount over and above the cost of living itself. Reńska’s testimony also highlights a particular dynamic in the relationship between those in hiding and those offering them shelter: although initially, the basis of the decision to help was to be paid, over time, deeper motivations became apparent. In moments of trial, when the Germans were looking for escapees from the ghetto, the Stechbarts did not betray their charges.⁴⁴ In the context of the ongoing discussions in historiography on the meaning and interpretations of the financial aspect of hiding Jews,⁴⁵ the above example – as a more complex one – seems particularly interesting.

During the Kaweckis family’s two-year stay with another family, Emil Szulc continued to visit them, brought them newspapers published in the underground once a month (if not more often), and gave them the money needed for their upkeep. Earlier, Jan Kaweckis had left a certain amount with him, and these funds were then used. The Szulc family’s help remained completely selfless from the beginning to the end. Edwin Kutte, Alicja’s husband, who visited the Jews in hiding together with his father-in-law Emil Szulc, also participated.

⁴³ H. Helweg, “Mieszkańcy domu przy Cmentarzu Ewangelicko-Augsburskim w Warszawie,” in *Ewangelicy warszawscy. Wspomnienia i relacje*, p. 204.

⁴⁴ Document no.1.

⁴⁵ See J. Grabowski, “Ratowanie Żydów za pieniądze – przemysł pomocy,” *ZŻSM* 4 (2008), pp. 81–109; G. Berendt, “Cena życia – ekonomiczne uwarunkowania egzystencji Żydów po ‘aryjskiej stronie,” *ZŻSM* 4 (2008), pp. 110–143.

The 1944 Warsaw Rising marked another turning point in the history of the Kawecki family, as well as that of other Jews staying in hiding in Warsaw.⁴⁶ According to Celina, her brother and father were taken into care by the Stechbart family, and it is an open question where she and her mother were staying at that time. The Szulc family, whose members were sent to a camp after the fall of the Rising, could no longer shelter them. However, it was not a concentration camp (as Reńska claims)⁴⁷ but a POW camp: Stalag XI A in Altengrabow.⁴⁸

Also, the second of Celina's letters to Yad Vashem, published below, did not dispel the doubts about her survival in post-war Warsaw. In it, she was answering questions from an employee of the Department of the Righteous Among the Nations. This unit collects documentation about specific cases of Jews being rescued by non-Jews during the Holocaust, and it is only on this basis that a committee at Yad Vashem decides whether to award (or not to award) the title of the Righteous Among the Nations. Celina mentioned friends who had met the Szulcs after the war and knew they had rescued the Kaweckis. Both families lived in Łódź, which was conducive to their meetings.⁴⁹ As for the Stechbarts, it is known that they kept up a correspondence with the rescued Jews.⁵⁰ The Yad Vashem official was also interested in how old the Szulcs' children were. Celina was able to clarify that two of them were of a similar age to her and had come of age during the war. It is unclear why Reńska mentioned "Lilian" next to Eugeniusz's name, although the Szulcs' daughter's name was Alicja.⁵¹ Age information, on the other hand, may have been important in assessing the siblings' involvement in helping a Jewish family and thus in awarding them Israel's highest civilian award for non-Jews.⁵²

⁴⁶ For more, see G.S. Paulson, *Utajone miasto. Żydzi po aryjskiej stronie Warszawy* (Cracow, 2009), pp. 247–286; B. Enkelking, D. Libionka, *Żydzi w powstańczej Warszawie* (Warsaw, 2009).

⁴⁷ Document no. 1.

⁴⁸ D. Dąbrowska, "Szulc Emil 'Tur,'" p. 549; D. Dąbrowska, "Szulc Eugeniusz 'Dobry,'" p. 550; <https://www.porta-polonica.de/pl/wojenne/stalag-xi-altengrabow>, accessed 16 May 2024.

⁴⁹ Document no. 2.

⁵⁰ Document no. 1.

⁵¹ Alice was born in 1923, so her age also corresponds to Reńska's memories, <https://wawamlynarska.grobonet.com/grobonet/start.php?id=detale&tidg=2146&inni=0&cinki=0>, accessed 16 May 2024.

⁵² Document no. 2.

The following source text edition is based on two letters from the case file of Maria and Tadeusz Stechbart;⁵³ they were probably also included in the dossier concerning the Szulc family. Apart from this, the file holds only a letter from the long-time director of the Righteous Department at Yad Vashem, Mordecai Paldiel, who informed the applicant of the favourable decision relating to the two families she nominated for the title,⁵⁴ as well as a copy of the certificate of honour dated 17 September 1984.⁵⁵ The file, therefore, does not contain the complete correspondence – even the letter from the Yad Vashem employee referred to by Celina Reńska in her reply is missing. There is also no indication that the witnesses she mentions were contacted, that she was requested to send the correspondence she mentions between her parents and the rescuers, or the photographs in her possession. After Celina sent her first written testimony, she was requested to clarify several points, and her explanations apparently proved sufficient. Both of Reńska's letters were typed in Hebrew. I am publishing their translations in full [here translated in English], without alteration or interference with the content. It was only decided to omit the address details because of the short time that had elapsed since they were written. The letters were sent by post in Tel Aviv. As a result of the anti-Semitic policy of the communist authorities, their author was forced to emigrate from Poland.⁵⁶ The translation of the letters from Hebrew into Polish was done by Anna Klingofer-Szostakowska.

⁵³ Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem, The Righteous Among the Nations Department, M.31.2/2643, Files concerning the case of Tadeusz and Maria Stechbart (n.p.).

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Mordecai Paldiel to Celina Reńska, 28 July 1983 (n.p.).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, Certificate of honour for Maria Stechbart and her son Tadeusz (n.p.).

⁵⁶ Archives of the Institute of National Remembrance, 1218/32017.

No. 1

*8 August 1982, Tel Aviv (Israel) – Letter of Celina Reńska née Kawecka
to Yad Vashem concerning the aid provided by Emil & Amalia Szulc
and Maria & Tadeusz Stechbart.*

[...] ^a

Tel Aviv, 8 August 1982

To The Righteous Among the Nations Department,
Yad Vashem

Re: Application for awarding the title “Righteous Among the Nations”

My name is Celina Reńska, ^b née Kawecka. I was born in Bydgoszcz, Poland, on 18 September 1922.

On behalf of myself and my late parents, Helena and Jan Kawecki, I would like to ask you to immortalize the memory of the people who saved my life and that of my family during the Nazi occupation.

In 1939, after fleeing my hometown, I arrived with my family (my father, mother and brother) in Warsaw. There, we visited a friend of my father’s from his youth – Emil Szulc. From the first moment, even before the ghetto was closed, Emil Szulc and his family showed great interest in our fate and readiness to help us. At this point, it should be emphasised that Emil Szulc, although he was of German origin and was persecuted by Poles because of this, at that time refused to accept the “Volkstlist” (*Volkstliste*) and felt himself to be a true Pole, belonged to the Polish underground and clearly opposed the Nazis. Szulc and his family were religious evangelicals adhering to high moral standards and a deep inner conviction that it was a duty to help one’s neighbor. During the time we were in the ghetto, Emil Szulc maintained a constant telephone contact with my father and passed parcels

^a *The address details of the sender and recipient have been omitted.*

^b *Surnames in the original are uninflected.*

from the Evangelical cemetery to the Jewish cemetery,¹ that was adjacent to it. When the persecution in the ghetto began, Szulc arranged false papers for me and my whole family (he used his contacts with the Polish underground for this purpose). He convinced my father to leave the ghetto. We took our first steps on the “Aryan” side with his help and moved into his flat at 54 Młynarska Street² for several weeks until he found suitable accommodation for us. I would like to point out that at that time, Szulc was suffering from *angina pectoris*.³

Szulc found us paid accommodation with Mrs. Maria Stechbart, a widow without means, who lived with her mother and son Tadeusz. For the entire period of our stay (about two years) with Mrs. Stechbart, until the Polish uprising in Warsaw, Emil Szulc visited us in our hiding place at least once a month, sometimes with his father-in-law Edwin Kutte.⁴ He brought the underground press and money for upkeep from the amount my father had left with him. The entire Szulc family, including his wife Amalia, their son Eugeniusz and daughter Lilian, had an extremely friendly attitude towards us and showed readiness to help us despite the threat of death stipulated for those helping Jews – they did all this without expecting any compensation in return. The Stechbart family, who at first took care of us based on the remuneration we paid them, showed a very good attitude towards us in the end and, in a few cases, when the police conducted a hunt for hiding Jews, did not turn us in.

After the Warsaw Uprising, on the Polish side, the Stechbart family took my father and brother (Adam Kawecki) under their care, and this also involved a threat to their lives.

It should be added that the entire Szulc family was sent to a concentration camp after the Warsaw uprising due to their refusal to accept the “Volklist.”

In conclusion, from the bottom of my heart, I ask that the late Emil Szulc and his wife Amalia be awarded the title of “The Righteous Among the Nations.” In my

¹ We are referring to the Jewish cemetery on Okopowa Street, to which the Catholic and Protestant cemeteries were adjacent. During the occupation, it was a place for Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to smuggle food from the “Aryan” side.

² The address of the house is also that of the Lutheran cemetery in Warsaw.

³ A disease manifested by, among other things, chest pains.

⁴ Incorrect use of the word “father-in-law” instead of “son-in-law.” Edwin Kutte was married to Emil’s daughter, Alice.

opinion, the conduct of the members of the Stechbart family (Tadeusz and Maria Stechbart) also justifies their recognition with this esteemed title.

As witnesses to all that is written above can serve: Ewa Madfes, Magdalena Relirad, Magdalena Fagot, Adam Kawecki [...].^c

In my possession is a photograph showing Emil Szulc with my late father, along with correspondence with the Szulc and Stechbart families. [^d]

Yours faithfully,
Celina Reńska [...].^e

Source: Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem, The Righteous Among the Nations Department, M.31.2/2643, Files concerning the case of Tadeusz and Maria Stechbart, n.p., Hebrew, manuscript.

^c *The address details of all persons mentioned have been omitted.*

^d *The correspondence and photographs mentioned were not attached to the letter in the available records.*

^e *The address details have been omitted.*

No. 2

1982 [after 9 August], Tel Aviv (Israel) – Letter of Celina Reńska née Kawecka to
Yad Vashem concerning the aid provided by Emil & Amalia Szulc
and Maria & Tadeusz Stechbart

To Yad Vashem
The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority

Re: Szulc Emil and [Szulc] Amalia – Poland (3530)¹
Stechbart Maria and her son Tadeusz – Poland (3531)²

Dear Ms. Prausnitz,

In reply to your letter dated 9 August [19]82, I beg to inform you that:

1. As far as Ms. Chawa is concerned [...] ^a, the deeds of the Szulc family are known through the stories shared by my late parents and my own accounts.

2. The additional witness, Magdalena Fagot, was a friend of the family and knew the Szulc family well as the persons who rescued us during the Holocaust. We often met with the Szulcs at our home in Łódź after the war.

3. The two children of the Szulc family, Eugeniusz and Lilian, were about my age (I was born in 1922). Eugeniusz was about two years older than me, and Lilian was a year younger than me, meaning they were both over 17 during the war.

Eugeniusz Szulc [...] ^b

Lilian Kutte [...] ^c

^a Name illegible. Presumably, the reference is made to Eve Madfes mentioned in the first letter.

^b Address details have been omitted.

^c Address details have been omitted.

¹ The original number of the file relating to awarding the title to Emil and Amalia Szulc.

² The original number of the file relating to awarding the title to Maria and Tadeusz Stechbart.

Additional details will be submitted upon request.

With kind regards,
Reński Celina [...] ^d

Source: Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem, The Righteous Among the Nations Department, M.31.2/2643, Files concerning the case of Tadeusz and Maria Stechbart, n.p., Hebrew, manuscript.

Translation of the documents from Hebrew: Anna Klingofer-Szostakowska

^d *Address details have been omitted.*

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SUMMARY

In 1982, Celina Reńska née Kawecka wrote two letters to the Righteous Among the Nations Department, Yad Vashem. In the letter she outlines how her family – Jewish refugees from Bydgoszcz – were rescued by two families of Polish Protestants in Warsaw. The publication of both letters gives an insight into the aid's circumstances, the helpers' motivations, and the procedure leading to the award.

KEYWORDS

Holocaust • Warsaw ghetto • Bydgoszcz Jews • Jewish refugees •
World War II • Polish-Jewish relations • helping Jews •
The Righteous Among the Nations