

THE FIRST RESIDENTS OF THE HOUSE · 1937-1940

Dawid Salomon Amsterdamski

Surgeon of the Czyste Hospital

ZŁOTA 7 APT. 8



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Dr Dawid Salomon Amsterdamski (1894–1943), surgeon of the Czyste Hospital. Photograph from the project's collection.

"Sleep now. We'll see each other in a moment."

— Dawid Amsterdamski to his son Stefan before an operation, the 1930s

In the Warsaw telephone directory for 1939/1940, among the subscribers of the building at 7 Złota Street, there is an entry: "*Amsterdamski D., dr, surgeon*".

		galanteria, Rybiewki 14
12 06 26	Amsterdamer R., farb. futer, Gęsła 97	
6 43 03	Amsterdamska Irena, Al. na Skarpie 69	
11 96 74	Amsterdamski I Thee, agentury	
2 17 89	Amsterdamski D., dr, chirurg, Złota 7	
5 05 23	Amsterdamski J., dr med., chor. wener., skórne, niemoc piciowa, Chmielna 34	
3 23 31	Amsterdamski Zelman, kier. szkoły, Żelazna 65	
5 12 05	Amukow Włodzimierz, m., Złota 43	

Directory of subscribers of the Warsaw telephone network, 1939/1940: "Amsterdamski D., dr, surgeon, Złota 7".

Behind that single line of small print lies the story of a distinguished Warsaw surgeon who, in September 1939, refused to flee the bombarded city, operated in the ghetto for three years — and died in hiding, on the fourth day of the January liquidation action of 1943. And also the story of his wife and sons, whom the war carried from Warsaw through Wilno all the way to Siberia, and who returned years later to search for his grave. In vain.

This account gathers what is known about him. Every fact comes from a source: from the official register of physicians and the telephone directories, from the announcements of the „Gazeta Żydowska”, from the accounts of surviving doctors and nurses, from a post-war registration card, from the family's memories. Where the sources are silent, it is silent too.

1890-12.	
Amsterdamski Chaim Josel (1890, 1923) wener. skór., ul. Chmielna 34, tel. 505-23.	
Amsterdamski Dawid Salomon (1895, 1925) chir., ul. Złota 7, tel. 217-89.	

The Medical Yearbook of the Republic of Poland, 1938.

I. The Doctor

Dawid Salomon Amsterdamski was born on 27 March 1894 in Mariampol in Lithuania, in the family of Mosze and Perla née Sołowiejczyk. He became a surgeon — and a valued one. He worked in the Czyste Jewish Hospital, an infirmary opened in 1902 and open to patients of all faiths, for years considered one of the best and most modern hospitals of Warsaw.

He married Irena née Szwarcztajn (b. 1907), who came from a wealthy family of industrialists — most of the cellulose factories in Poland belonged to the Szwarcztajns. In 1929 their son Stefan was born, a year later Jerzy. The family lived on Kredytowa Street; the Saxon Garden was next door, and nearby the Ziemiańska café with the table of the Skamander poets. Stefan's few memories of early childhood were always bound up with his father's medical practice: a bicycle crash after which his father stitched his cut

head at home; a tonsil operation and his smiling father waving to „Stefcio” just before the anaesthetic: „Sleep. We'll see each other in a moment.”

At the end of the 1930s the spouses' roads parted. Irena settled with the sons in an apartment on Na Skarpie Avenue, and the doctor — as the official register of physicians recorded in October 1938 — moved to the five-room apartment number 8 at 7 Złota Street, where he most probably also received patients.

II. September 1939. The Parting

In the first half of September 1939 Irena's brother, Edward „Edek” Szwarcsztajn — a chemical engineer and rally driver who had entered the Monte Carlo rally in his Alfa Romeo — packed his father, his sister and her two sons into the car and set off east, among bombs and throngs of refugees. Edek had returned a year earlier from studies in Austria, just after the Anschluss; he had seen what Hitler's victory smelled of, and did not intend to wait.

Dr Amsterdamski did not go. He would not leave his hospital in a Warsaw under bombardment. He decided he would join the family later. They never saw each other again.

After many ordeals the family reached Wilno, where the Red Army had already stationed itself. The doctor stayed in Warsaw — in September 1939 the Germans took him, as a head of ward, as a hostage.

An account by the nurse Sabina Gurfinkiel-Glocer from the first days of the bombardments has survived: when explosions sounded over the city, the staff still thought it was the announced exercises — until the telephone rang. Dr Amsterdamski answered it: director Sztabholc reported that the Germans were bombing Wola and Koło, and that all the wounded would be directed to the Czyste hospital. A fever seized the ward; doctors and nurses operated without respite — shrapnel wounds, amputations; there were so many wounded that it was hard to decide whom to operate on first. One day a shell fragment pierced the wall of the isolation ward and fell hissing right at Dr Amsterdamski's feet. The whole ward congratulated him on coming out of it unscathed. After the city's capitulation the doctor worked additionally in the TOZ surgical outpatient clinic at 34 Pańska Street.

III. Behind the Wall

In 1939 nearly 370,000 Jews lived in Warsaw — almost every third inhabitant of the city. The occupier tightened the noose step by step: from October 1939 the blocking of bank accounts, from December the duty to wear the armband with the Star of David, then the ban on using the railways, trams, restaurants, libraries and parks, restrictions on the professional work of physicians and lawyers.

In October 1940 the Germans created the ghetto.

Sperrgebiet — the Jewish District in Warsaw, 1940



For thousands of people this meant the sudden necessity of abandoning their homes — the forced migrations covered 138,000 Jews and 113,000 Poles. Dr Amsterdamski then moved from 7 Złota Street to 61 Sienna Street.



Notice in the "Gazeta Żydowska", 16 October 1940: Dr D. Amsterdamski, surgeon, has moved to 61 Sienna Street.

On 16 November 1940 the gates of the ghetto were closed. Behind a three-metre wall topped with barbed wire were some 400,000 people; by March 1941 — 460,000. The density reached 120,000 people per square kilometre; ten people lived to a room. In October 1941 the doctor moved once again, to 5 Solna Street — an announcement in the „Gazeta Żydowska” informed patients that the surgeon received from 4 to 7.



Notice in the "Gazeta Żydowska", 12 October 1941: Dr D. Amsterdamski, surgeon, now at 5 Solna Street, apt. 5, receives 4–7 o'clock.

His hospital, too, ended up behind the wall. The surgical wards of the Czyste Hospital — 300 beds in all — were moved to the building at 1 Leszno Street. Dr Amsterdamski was head of the Second Surgical Ward there. Under the occupier's decree the staff could take only the barest necessities, though the new premises had no equipment at all. So the nurses smuggled the precious surgical instruments hidden in the makeshift pillows of the sick — telling the Germans the patients were "running high fevers", which as a rule effectively deterred the inspectors. Thanks to them the newly created wards had any equipment at all.

At the moment the ghetto was closed there were more than 900 physicians inside it; they were allowed to treat only Jewish patients. In the spring of 1942 the terror reached the doctor personally: between 15 and 30 March he was arrested in the street and held in Pawiak, from which he was released. He went back to work.

IV. The Great Deportation

On 22 July 1942 the so-called Great Deportation began in the Warsaw ghetto — the deportations to the extermination centre at Treblinka. In barely two months, by 21 September 1942, nearly 300,000 Warsaw Jews were murdered there. People were driven to the Umschlagplatz on Stawki Street and crammed into goods wagons a hundred, a hundred and twenty at a time; the floors were strewn with quicklime. In the area of the reduced ghetto only some 60,000 people remained.

The Umschlagplatz, July 1942



The terror of the Great Deportation touched the doctor personally as well: he found himself among the several dozen hostages — Judenrat councillors, lawyers, engineers, rabbis and eighteen physicians — held in Pawiak. Beaten, starved and forced into gruelling labour, they lived in constant expectation of being shot; they were released only on 24 August 1942. During the selection of patients, other ward heads had to lead the rounds — as it was recorded, *"because Amsterdamski was absent, taken by the Germans as a hostage"*. Nurse Sabina Gurfinkiel-Glocer remembered what a joy it was to see Dr Amsterdamski back — in those tragic days of darkness, when so many were being taken from the ghetto to the death camps.

Dr Amsterdamski's hospital was liquidated for the first time between 5 and 11 September 1942. On 12 September, 950 patients and 50 staff were deported to Treblinka. Those doctors who managed to survive took up work in the residual hospital at 6 Gęsia Street, right beside the Umschlagplatz. Dr Amsterdamski was one of its ward heads. On the doors of the staff apartments in the annexe hung little cards: "Dr Wohl, Dr Penson, doctor, doctor, doctor...". As Alina Margolis-Edelman wrote — *"it protected no one from anything"*.

V. January 1943

The first rumours of the planned deportations reached the hospital on Gęsia at midnight of 17 to 18 January 1943. The policeman Bronisław Girszlak called the nurse Gurfinkel-Glocer out into the corridor — he did not want to speak in front of the patients. The news was bad: the liquidation of the rest of the ghetto was planned; he advised warning people to hide wherever they could. In the office gathered Dr Amsterdamski, the administrative directors Kroszczor and Sztabholz and several clerks, and the messenger Gurwicz rode his bicycle to check the news with the gendarmes at the gate. At four in the morning the nurses handed out thermometers to the patients — to distract them and give the walking ones a chance to hide. Those who could not get up had no chance.

On the morning of 18 January 1943 the Germans began the second deportation action. The staff of the Gęsia hospital and the workers' families went down to the shelters; some of the doctors went first to hide and secure the patients, all the nurses stayed with them. SS-Sturmführer Konrad burst into the hospital. He hunted the sick — searching the corners, dragging out the hidden, shooting at those lying in their beds.

Dr Amsterdamski hid. According to the post-war testimony of Dr Stanisław Waller, one of the physicians of the Czyste Hospital, *"during the final liquidation of the hospital in January 1943 two doctors hiding in the attic died: Dr Amsterdamski, surgeon..."*.

The hospital memoirs confirm it: *"during the last night of the deportation Dr Amsterdamski, chief of surgery of Czyste, died unexpectedly"* — noted Henryk Kroszczor, the hospital's administrative director; Dr Waller's account of the hiding place in the attic is preserved in the Yad Vashem archive (ref. O.3/2358).

In the family a somewhat different picture of those days survived, heard after the war from surviving acquaintances: the doctor was said to have hidden with a colleague in a chimney and sat in it, in complete silence, for two days; when they came out, they walked through dead streets without a living soul, and when he reached his quarters — *"his heart broke"*. Both versions say in essence the same thing: Dr Amsterdamski did not let himself be deported to Treblinka. He died within the walls of his hospital.

VI. The Survivors: Wilno, Siberia, Return

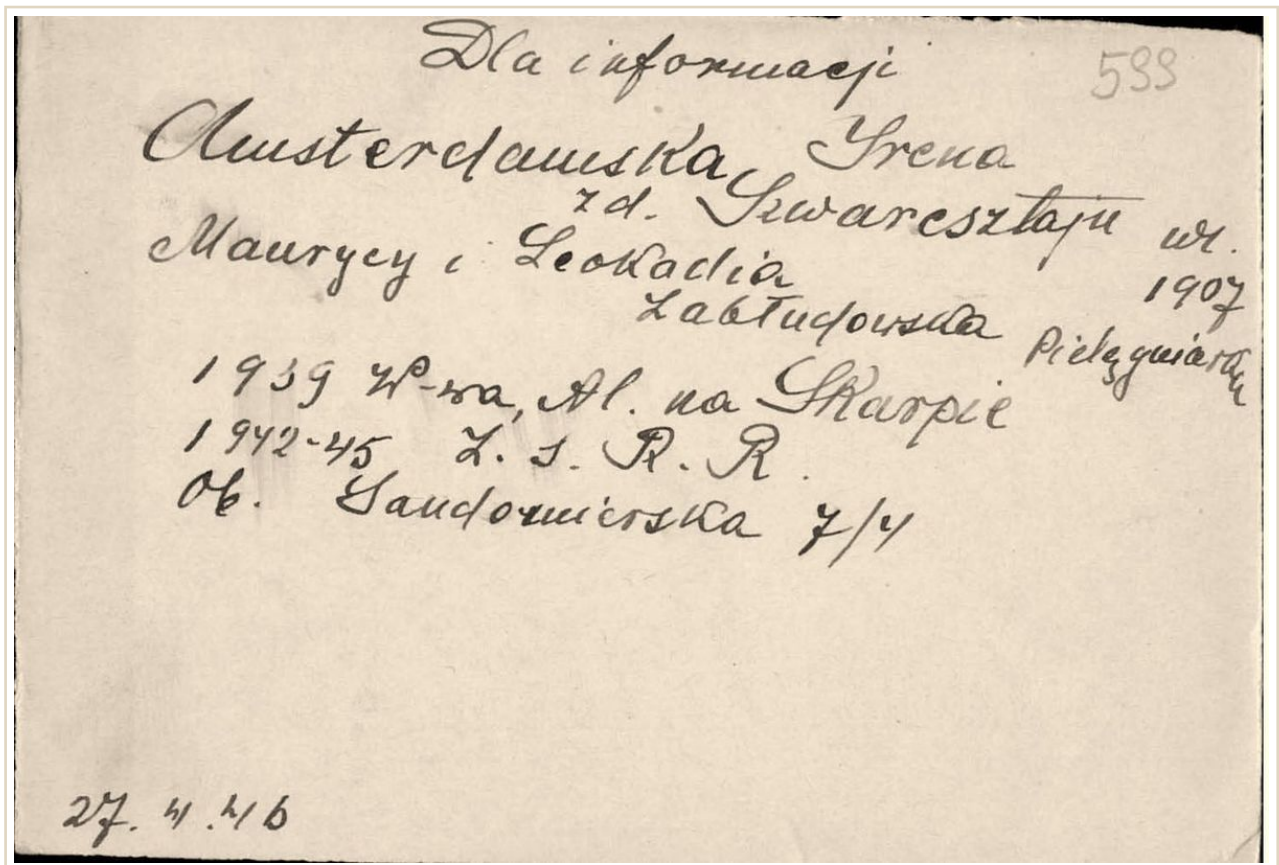
Irena and the boys spent not quite two years in Wilno. In June 1941 the Soviets decided to deport them east — in cattle cars, to Siberia. It was a sentence that turned out to be a rescue: a few days later the Germans marched into Wilno, and the Jews of Wilno shared the fate of those of Warsaw.

The journey lasted many weeks in dreadful conditions. Twelve-year-old Stefan stole food and coal to heat the wagon; during one expedition for food the train suddenly moved off and the boy caught it with the last of his strength. The family ended up in Slavgorod in Siberia, in a wretched clay-sealed farmstead. Paradoxically it was precisely there that the future scholar was formed: Slavgorod had an excellently stocked library with a great collection of the Russian classics — Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Turgenev, Pushkin.

The library was the only warm place in the little town, and to sit in it one had to read. So thirteen-year-old Stefan read for days on end.

In 1945 they returned to Poland. There was nothing to return to in Warsaw — they found a great sea of ruins; they settled in Łódź, where most of the Szwarcsztajns had lived before the war and where their factories stood. Of the whole family that had remained in the country not even a trace was left — all perished in the Holocaust, and the factories were taken over by the state. Edward Szwarcsztajn, the former owner, took a job as an engineer under the direction of his former workers.

Irena, a nurse by profession, registered on 27 April 1946 with the Central Committee of Jews in Poland.

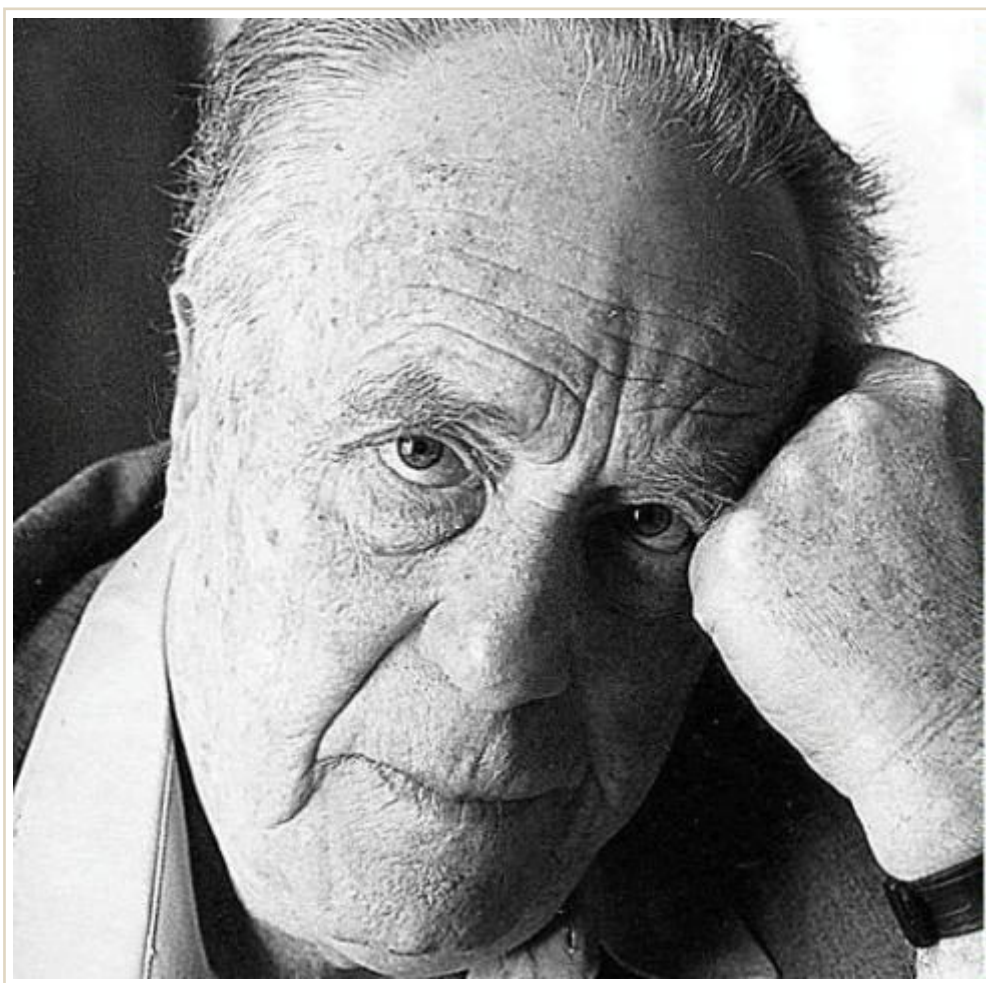


Irena Amsterdamska's registration card at the Central Committee of Jews in Poland, 27 April 1946.

VII. The Family's Later Years

Irena Amsterdamska died in 1989. The younger son, Jerzy, died prematurely in 1963, leaving his wife Jadwiga and two sons: Andrzej and Piotr (both deceased). In Germany lives Jerzy, Piotr's only son, great-grandson of Dawid Amsterdamski — like him, a physician.

Stefan Amsterdamski



Stefan Amsterdamski (1929–2005) became one of the most eminent Polish philosophers and methodologists of science. He returned from Siberia — as he himself admitted years later — an ardent communist; „later I was ashamed of it”. In March 1968, as a dean at the University of Łódź, he took the side of the protesting students, for which he was expelled from the party and the university. He refused to emigrate despite the antisemitic campaign. He signed the Letter of 59, joined the Workers’ Defence Committee, co-founded the Society for Academic Courses, was active in „Solidarity”, took part in the Round Table talks and worked in the government of Tadeusz Mazowiecki. He was a professor of the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the creator and first director of the Graduate School for Social Research at the Academy; he translated into Polish, among others, Thomas S. Kuhn and Werner Heisenberg. Asked shortly before his death about existential fears, he answered like a sceptic: *„I can say nothing sensible about it. I prefer to keep silent.”*

The doctor’s grandson, Jacek Amsterdamski, is a media manager. It was he who, on behalf of the family, gave consent to the commemoration of his grandfather before the house.

Timeline

Date	Event
27 Mar 1894	Dawid Salomon Amsterdamski is born in Mariampol in Lithuania, son of Mosze and Perla née Sołowiejczyk.
28 Dec 1907	Irena Szwarcsztajn is born, daughter of Maurycy and Leokadia née Zabłudowska, of a family of Łódź industrialists.
1929–1930	Birth of the sons: Stefan (15 Jan 1929) and Jerzy (1930). The family lives on Kredytowa Street.
Oct 1938	After the spouses part, the doctor moves to apartment no. 8 at 7 Złota Street (official register of physicians); Irena and the sons live on Na Skarpie Avenue.
Sep 1939	Irena, the sons and part of the family flee in her brother's car to Vilnius; the doctor stays with the hospital in bombarded Warsaw. They will never see each other again.
Oct 1940	The Germans create the ghetto; the doctor moves from Złota 7 to Sienna 61. The surgical wards of the Czyste hospital are moved to Leszno 1 — the doctor head of the 2nd surgical ward.
16 Nov 1940	The gates of the ghetto are closed — some 400,000 people behind the wall.
Jun 1941	The Soviets deport Irena and the sons from Vilnius to Siberia (Slavgorod); the deportation paradoxically saves their lives.
Oct 1941	The doctor moves to Solna 5 (announcement in the „Gazeta Żydowska”).
Mar 1942	Arrested in the street and held in Pawiak; released, returns to work.
22 Jul – 21 Sep 1942	The Great Deportation: some 300,000 Warsaw Jews murdered at Treblinka. The doctor among the hostages held in Pawiak — released 24 Aug.
5–11 Sep 1942	First liquidation of the hospital; the doctor one of the ward heads of the residual hospital at 6 Gęsia Street.
17/18 Jan 1943	Night warning of the planned action; a conference in the hospital office with the doctor taking part.
22 Jan 1943	Dr Amsterdamski dies of a heart attack after leaving his hiding place in the attic, during the final liquidation of the hospital. He was 48.
1945	Irena and the sons return from Siberia to Poland; they settle in Łódź. Of the family that stayed in the country no one survived.
27 Apr 1946	Irena's registration card in the Central Committee of Jews in Poland.
1963	Death of Jerzy Amsterdamski.
15 May 1989	Death of Irena Amsterdamska.
2005	Death of Prof. Stefan Amsterdamski, philosopher of science, activist of the democratic opposition.

A Note on Sources

Compiled on the basis of, among others: the residence register of Złota 7 and the Warsaw telephone directories of 1937–1940; the Warsaw Voivodeship Gazette (25 Nov 1938); the files of the getto.pl portal and the collections of the Jewish Historical Institute (including the account of Dr Stanisław Waller, ref. 301-6805); the 1946 registration card of the Central Committee of Jews in Poland; the Encyclopaedia of Solidarity; and the accounts of the family — Jacek Amsterdamski, whom we warmly thank for his help and his consent to the commemoration.

Opracowanie w ramach projektu upamiętnienia mieszkańców kamienicy przy ul. Złotej 7 i 9 w Warszawie
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