## Kazimierz Dolny

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Even in terms of its landscape, Kazimierz belonged to the world of Polish Jews. It resembled a page from a women's prayer book with shining silver corners, or an old etching that anonymous Jewish masters from a bygone era engraved with great piety on the Polish soil, seeking to present vividly what Poyln means [...].

Yehiel Yeshaia Trunk, My Life within Jewish Life in Poland, Toronto 2007 (edited)

**The royal port** ¶ Picturesquely located at a crossing of the Vistula River, Kazimierz Dolny became a royal city already in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The strategic position at the intersection of land and water trade routes stimulated its development. Grain brought here was transported down the Vistula to Gdańsk

and then further on to European ports. Local residents engaged in boat building and traded in grain, timber, wine, and salt. Granaries located near the river and richly ornamented Renaissance houses bear witness to the economic prosperity of the city in that period.

**ESTERKA'S LOVE** ¶ Even though some legends have it that Jewish merchants were present in this area already in the 11th century, most likely the first Jews settled in Kazimierz Dolny in the second half of the 15th century. According to a popular legend, however, they were already living there in the 14th century. The legend has it that King Casimir (Kazimierz) the Great – the last king of the Piast dynasty, who ruled from 1333 to 1370, fell in love with Esterka, the daughter of a Jewish merchant said to live here, and his love was reciprocated. The legend is mentioned by Jan Długosz in his famous 15th-century chronicle, and even though historians have not found evidence of her authenticity, Esterka became a symbol of Polish-Jewish coexistence. Visitors to Kazimierz before World War II, for example, could admire historical liturgical objects kept by the synagogue's custodians. These included a parochet and a Torah crown. According to local oral tradition, the parochet was embroidered by Esterka herself, and the crown was given to the synagogue by King Casimir. In reality, the parochet was most likely made in China in the 17th century.

**The market square** ¶ Painter Wojciech Gerson (d. 1901) recalled: *The market square is typical because it has traditional, wooden and stone arcades and a well in the centre, with a wheel of*  considerable size and a long chain; the place is always swarming with schmoozing Jews, who are joined on Saturdays by Jewish women that like to dress up for the Sabbath and promenade around

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A Town houses near the market square in Kazimierz, 2015, photo by Monika Tarajko, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate — NN Theatre" Centre (www.teatrnn.pl)

B Kazimierz Dolny.
Urban developments,
with the southern
frontage of the market
square on the left and
the shaded western
frontage on the right,
1794, drawing by
Zygmunt Vogel, collection of the Print Room
of the Warsaw University
Library





the place. ¶ The spatial layout of the city results from the fact that the town was chartered according to the Magdeburg law. The elements of the town centre – market square, churches, and a network of streets – were all located in a relatively small area. The castle, the tower, and the Franciscan monastery were erected on the hills surrounding the centre. When Jews arrived here in the second half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there was not much space left to establish a Jewish quarter. Jews settled east of the market

square – around the so-called Lesser Market. Nearby, there were a synagogue, a prayer house, a rabbi's house, and other communal buildings. Jews also lived in Lubelska Street – at the end of it, past the town's gate, there was a Jewish cemetery. With time, however, Jews settled throughout the town.

**The synagogue** ¶ The first shul in Kazimierz was wooden. A stone synagogue established in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century was destroyed and



Synagogue in Kazimierz Dolny, 1916, photo by Juliusz Kłos, collection of the Institute of Art of the Polish Academy of Sciences

rebuilt following the wars and other upheavals of the second half of the 17th century and once again destroyed towards the end of the first quarter of the 18th century. Much of the present-day building dates back to the second half of the 18th century, except for the interior walls, which were replaced with new ones towards the end of the 19th century. The synagogue was further renovated in the interwar period, when narthexes with women's galleries above them were added to the square prayer room on the southeast and southwest sides. The prayer room for men was covered with a dome-shaped vault built into the lower part of a timber roof truss and covered with polychrome paintings. In the 19th century, next to the shul, stood small stores belonging to the kahal and rented to the Jews in exchange for payments made to the kahal's accounts. The synagogue was destroyed towards the end of World War II and rebuilt to a design by Karol Siciński in 1953 that restructured it inside for use as a cinema. The walls of the prayer room for men were built of

limestone and – as before the war – they were not plastered on the outside. The reconstruction included the Polish type of tiered hip roof covered with shingles and a wooden vault, but without the polychromes. In 2003, the synagogue came under the ownership of the Warsaw Jewish Community, which converted it into an exhibition space, souvenir shop, and guest house called Beitenu ("our house"). A memorial plaque commemorating the Jewish community of Kazimierz is set in the wall of the building.

Fall and revival ¶ The period of prosperity of the Jewish community was cut short by the turmoil wrought by the series of wars in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century caused by the Ukrainian Cossacks, the Swedes, Rákóczi's forces, and Polish troops; fires and bubonic plague also took their heavy toll. In 1661, there were only seven Jewish houses in the city. The Jewish community could only start to rebuild after Kazimierz was granted a new charter, issued by King Jan III Sobieski in 1676.

Kazimierz Dolny, cleaning before Pesach, 1918-1939, collection of ge National Photo Archives



We decided that the Jews [...] shall be granted freedom and allowed to [...] relish the freedom enjoyed by other burghers and residents of the city. They shall have the privilege to trade in whatever products they find fit, such as salt, herrings, both wholesale and retail, to bake both rye and white wheat bread, to brew beer and mead, to build their own breweries or rent them from burghers; Jews shall be allowed to enjoy all privileges granted [to the dwellers] in the city and those granted to [dwellers in] other nearby crown cities. Moreover, we hereby allow them to buy plots of land and buildings as well as to renovate old ones and to establish buildings on plots of land that remain empty. ¶ The charter granted to Kazimierz on November 18, 1676 by King Jan III Sobieski

Tensions still existed, however. During the 1699 Corpus Christi festivities, clashes broke out on the marketplace when the Catholic Corpus Christi procession intersected with a group of Jews who were welcoming Rabbi Judah, a prominent sectarian and a leader of the crypto-Sabbatean movement in Poland, who had arrived in the city on that day. The city brought a lawsuit before the Crown Tribunal in Lublin against the elders of the Jewish community of Kazimierz for creating a disturbance to the Christian procession and injuring some of its participants. In the wake of the destruction caused by the Great Northern War, another official document, issued in 1717, granted the Jews of Kazimierz considerable liberty in trade. The income they received implied that they had to pay a tax as high as 600 guilders in 1732–1733. In 1778, taxes were paid by 303 Jews living in the city and by 141 living in 27 surrounding villages, the town of Wawolnica, and at one inn. In 1827, Kazimierz Dolny had 2,096 residents – including 1,197 Jews (57 percent of the population). Around 1882, the 3,297 residents of Kazimierz (including 1,784 Jews - 51 percent) lived in 250 houses, 89 of which were built of brick. This was exceptional among the predominantly wooden towns of the Lublin region.

Singing Hasidim of Kazimierz ¶ In the 1820s, the Hasidic tsaddik Ezekiel Ben Tzvi-Hirsch Taub (1772–1856), a disciple of the Seer of Lublin and a highly gifted composer and musician, settled in Kazimierz Dolny. Ezekiel Taub's followers – known as the Kuzmir Hasidim – became famous for emphasising the messianic role of music and singing in Judaic liturgy, in accordance

with the tsaddik's saying: *I cannot feel the joy of the Sabbath if I do not hear a new melody.* The tradition of singing songs composed by the Hasidim of Kazimierz has survived to-date. In 1925, one of Taub's descendants – Shmuel Eliyahu Taub of Dęblin (1905–1984) – moved to Palestine with a group of his followers and set up an agricultural settlement.



Every third person in Kazimierz is a painter.  $\P$  Yakov Glatstein, Wen Yash iz geforn (When Yash Set Out), New York 1935

**Artists' colony** ¶ The picturesque townscape and scenic landscape of river and hills attracted painters to Kazimierz Dolny already in the 18th century, but it became a particularly favourite spot for artists from the early 20th century. The breakthrough came in 1909, when Władysław Ślewiński, a friend of Paul Gauguin and a professor at the Warsaw School of Fine Arts, started bringing his students here for plein air painting sessions. Kazimierz soon took on the aura of a city of painters and became home to an artists' colony. Another professor at the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, Tadeusz Pruszkowski, should also be given credit for this. Starting in 1913, he organised annual plein air painting sessions for young artists, Christians and Jews alike. Artists admired the town's "unique landscape," "warm, familiar atmosphere," "Polish beauty," and "wistful poetry tugging at the heartstrings." ¶ Writers and ordinary holidaymakers looking for a beautiful place to relax followed the painters. As a result, the landscape of Kazimierz was rendered numerous times in both literary and visual works. Among the visiting artists

there were many Jews. The town on the Vistula left its mark in the works of artists such as Maurycy Trębacz (1861-1941), Natan Korzeń (1895-1941), Roman Rozental (1897–1942), Izrael Tykociński (1895–1942), Józef Gabowicz (1862–1939), Eliasz Kanarek (1902-1969), and brothers Ephraim and Menashe Seidenbeutel (1903-1945). Visiting painters became an integral part of the local environment, and their presence helped awaken many artistic talents among the native residents. ¶ One of these figures was Shmuel Wodnicki (1901–1971), a shoemaker born in Kazimierz, who at the same time worked as a painter. Dispirited by the difficult life in Poland, he emigrated to Palestine with his family in 1934 but continued painting the landscapes of Kazimierz until the end of his life. Haim Goldberg (1917-2004) was born into another shoemaker's family from Kazimierz. Already as a young boy, he observed artists and took his first steps as a painter. Thanks to contacts with artists established in Kazimierz Dolny, Haim enrolled in the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts in the 1930s. He developed

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as a mature artist after World War II and the motifs from his native shtetl became one of the key subjects in his works.

In the summer of 1929, Jakub Rotbaum and I appeared at a literary evening devoted to the contribution of Jews to contemporary poetry, which was held on the veranda of the guesthouse belonging to the Szenderowicz family. The evening had to be organised twice, since only half of the people who wanted to attend could enter the room. After my introduction, Jakub Rotbaum recited my Yiddish translations of poems by Julian Tuwim, Józef Wittlin, Bruno Jasieński, Anatol Stern, and Adam Ważyk and followed each poem with the reading of its Polish original. It was probably the only literary evening held in two languages – Yiddish and Polish – which, by the way, was attended by both Anatol Stern and Adam Ważyk. ¶ During all those years when Jakub Rotbaum spent his summer months in Kazimierz, he immortalised many people who lived there in his charcoal and ochre drawings. ¶ Szmuel Sznajderman, Artistic Family in Kazimierz, in: Pinkes Kusmir (The Chronicle of Kazimierz), Tel Aviv 1970

KAZIMIERZ IN FILMS ¶ The character of the town and its surroundings also attracted filmmakers looking for settings that would suit films directed in Yiddish. This is where the blockbuster Yidl Mitn Fidl (Yiddle with His Fiddle, 1936) starring Molly Picon and directed by Józef Green and Jan Nowina-Przybylski, was shot. Some other films that were shot here include: Lamed Vov (One out of 36,1925, dir. by Henryk Szaro), In die poylishe velder (In Polish Woods, 1929, dir. by Jonas Turkow) based on Joseph Opatoshu's novel, and The Dybbuk (1936, dir. by Michał Waszyński). ¶ Many years after the war, the atmosphere of the pre-war shtetl – that was also an artists' colony – was recreated in a Polish film titled Two Moons (Dwa księżyce, 1993, dir. by Andrzej Barański) based on short stories by Maria Kuncewiczowa. The history of Kazimierz Dolny was also immortalised in the documentary Snapshots from Kazimierz (Album Kazimierski, 2001, dir. by Tadeusz Pałka).

Portraits of the town ¶ The everyday life of Jewish Kazimierz was documented in photographs by Benedykt Jerzy Dorys (born Rotenberg, 1901–1990), a portrait photographer of the crème de la crème of Warsaw who spent his holidays here in the 1930s. His photographs of the pre-war Kazimierz are believed to be the first Polish photographic reportage. A permanent exhibition of these photos can be seen in the former synagogue. ¶ Many paintings of Kazimierz are displayed in the

Celejowska House – a branch of the Nadwiślańskie Museum. The Museum's collections also include numerous photos and documents connected with the history of the local Jewish community. An interesting exhibition of Jewish liturgical objects can be seen in the Goldsmith Museum. ¶ Among numerous literary renditions of Kazimierz, two novels stand out: *The Shtetl* (1901) by Sholem Asch and *Lato* (Summer) by Adolf Rudnicki (1938). Jacob Glatstein included an interesting description of



Kazimierz Dolny, Rozmowa (A Conversation), 1931—1932. Photo by Benedykt Jerzy Dorys, the collection of the National Library—www. polona.pl

the town from the early 1930s in his volume of reportage titled *Wen Yash iz geforn* (When Yash Set Out, 1935). And a selection of texts about Kazimierz Dolny can be found in an anthology

titled *Kazimierz vel Kuzmir. Miasteczko różnych snów* (Kazimierz vel Kuzmir. A Town of Various Dreams, 2006, ed. by Monika Adamczyk-Garbowska).

The current ferryman, Haim, is fifty years old. He is tall and slender. His face is elongated, with a long white beard and a furrowed forehead. Haim is a child of water, he grew up by the water, and who knows – perhaps water will become his grave. [...] In summer, water is Haim's only source of income. All week he is with his boat on the water, and the sail stands between clouds and their reflection on the water's surface... Sabbath. Water respects Jewish customs, it observes the Sabbath as well as other holidays; it remains calm, and waves a kiss to one another. Haim is sitting with his wife at the door; he is praying and she is reading "Tsene urene," a book of Biblical stories for women. They are telling the waves about God's miracles and each wave catches a word, says "Amen," and disappears in the distance. ¶ Sholem Asch, A Shtetl, Warsaw1904 (translation edited)

The shtetl had something particularly noteworthy: a market, an extraordinary market; people who were there looked as if they were on stage, there was always somebody on duty: carriers by day, dreamers by night. Somebody stopped – it seemed that the role required it; he turned into a side street to go about his business, which was known to everybody, since everybody knew everything about their neighbours – again, it seemed that he was acting according to an unwritten but obligatory script. From this market, which was seemingly the main source of life, one would go behind the scenes, in order to go back again

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A 70-year old Haim the Ferryman stood at the helm of his boat and transported passengers across the Vistula River for 62 years; the photo was published on November 28, 1926 in the Forverts daily. Photo by Menakhem Kipnis, collection of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



after doing one's bit and bow down before the invisible forces. ¶ There was a river flowing below, there were ruins on the hills; nearby there were also ravines, numerous tobacco plantations, arable farming land, woods, and meadows; each fragment of the landscape was different, but invariably beautiful. In the ravines, gusts of gentle, warm wind would give one a feeling as if one had entered into a magical circle and as if the best long-forgotten characters were about to appear. People doubt whether miraculous places exist, but there were so many of them here. ¶ Adolf Rudnicki, Lato (Summer), Warsaw, 1938

## **World War II and the Holocaust**

¶ In 1939, some 4,641 people lived in Kazimierz, including approx. 2,500 Jews. Relatively soon after the outbreak of World War II, as early as 1940, the Nazi Germans established a ghetto in Kazimierz, where the local Jews and the surrounding areas were ordered to move. It occupied a small area in the Jewish quarter around the Lesser Market. The Germans also created a forced labor camp in the brewery on Puławska St., which functioned from spring 1940 to fall 1942. Its inmates (more than 100 people) worked in a quarry and in the town. The pavements and stairs at the camp

as well as in the town (near the Gestapo headquarters in the monastery of the Reformati) were built by prisoners out of matzevot that had been uprooted from the Jewish cemeteries. In March 1942, the ghetto dwellers were transported to the ghetto in Opole Lubelskie and then to one of the death camps – probably to Bełżec. During the liquidation of the labour camp, the Jews who worked there were deported, and a dozen or so were shot dead in the autumn of 1943 at the new Jewish cemetery.

**The old Jewish cemetery** ¶ The cemetery is claimed to have been

established towards the end of the 15th century, near the road leading to Lublin (beyond the Lublin Gate, on Sitarz Hill). It was surrounded by a limestone wall, and those buried there included the tsaddikim of Kazimierz from the Taub dynasty - Ezekiel and Efraim. During World War II, the Germans forced the Iews to destroy this burial place, where - after the matzevot were taken away various buildings were established. In 1954, a nearby school was extended in such a way that it partly overlapped the former graveyard area. The southern part of the cemetery - near Lubelska St. - was levelled and a school sports field was created there. The upper part of the graveyard with burial places and a ruined wall have survived. One matzevah in its lowest part still carries a fragment of a late 17th-century inscription.

The new Jewish cemetery ¶ The new Jewish cemetery was established in the second part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century near the road to Opole, in the area called "Czerniawy." The plot of land allocated for it was located on a slope on the eastern side of the road and was purchased for the community in 1851 by Herszek Mandelsberg. The area was surrounded by a wall, and a pre-burial house was established inside. The cemetery was

rectangular and covered an area of 0.64 ha. It was the site of executions of a dozen or so people, Jews and Poles. In 1984, a "Wailing Wall" memorial was erected here. Designed by Tadeusz Augustynek, it is a long, high wall in the centre of the cemetery above the road, with a jagged vertical crack breaking it, symbolising the destruction caused by the Holocaust. Hundreds of broken matzevot that were recovered from all over the town were set into its face. In front of the wall, a group of several dozen complete matzevot stand on the grassy slope, and behind the wall, about 25 matzevot stand in a hornbeam grove.

Present day ¶ Today, Kazimierz Dolny is one of the most important tourist attractions in Eastern Poland, with many hotels, guesthouses, and restaurants. The traditions of a summer resort and artists' colony remain alive. Apart from cultural events such as the festival of Folk Bands and Singers, the Two Riversides Film and Art Festival, and the Alternative Music Festival "Kazimiernikejszyn," the town's cultural offerings include events evoking its Jewish history, e.g. the Klezmer Music and Tradition Festival (2006–2012) or the Pardes Festival, Encounters with Jewish Culture (since 2013).

I know people who have breakfast in Warsaw, lunch in London, and dinner in Paris. But they always come back to Kazimierz for the night. Because this is the city of their dreams... ¶ Anatol Stern

Bochotnica (5 km): castle ruins (14<sup>th</sup> c.); tomb of Jan Oleśnicki, Esterka's legendary burial place (1532); the Krystyna and Władysław Pożaryski Wall, a former chamber rock quarry; a mill on the Bystra River (1870); a blacksmith's shop (1890); the remains of a mill that belonged to Josek Fryd; memorials to the victims of the "Bloody Wednesday," who were murdered on 18 and 24 November 1942. ¶ Janowiec on the Vistula (6/28 km): the remains

Surrounding area

Kazimierz Dolny

Jewish graveyard in Czerniawy, 2014. Photo by Wioletta Wejman, digital collection of the "Grodzka Gate — NN Theatre" Centre (www. teatrnn.pl)

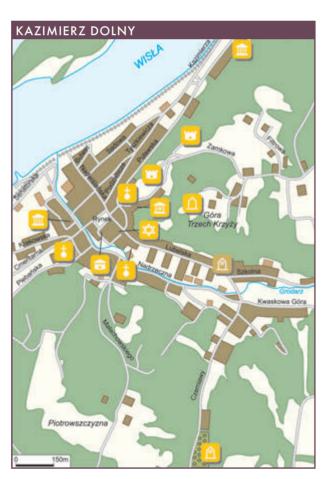


of the Firlej Castle (16th c.); Church of St. Stanislaus (1350, reconstructed in the 16th c.); presbytery (17th c.); the manor complex: a manor house from Moniaki (1760–1770), a granary from Podlodów (18th/19th c.), a barn from Wylagi (around 19th c.); a manorial granary from Kurów (circa 19th c.); a branch of the Nadwiślańskie Museum. ¶ Puławy (15 km): the Palace and Park Complex of the Czartoryski Family (1671–1677); a landscape park (17<sup>th</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> c.): the Temple of the Sibyl (1798-1801), the Gothic House (1809), the Chinese House (2nd half of the 18th c.), the Greek House (1788-1791); the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (1800–1803); Marynka's Palace (1791–1794); a granite boulder with a plaque in memory of 3,600 Jews of Puławy, placed at the site of former synagogues; the Czartoryski Museum; a military graveyard at Piaskowa St. with graves of 15 soldiers of Jewish origin. Wawolnica (17 km): The Shrine of Our Lady of Kebło: the Church of St Adalbert (1907– 1914); a Jewish cemetery, 3 Maja St. (19th c.). Nałeczów (23 km): The Church of John the Baptist (18th c.); Spa Park: the Małachowski Palace (1760–1777), the Old Bathhouse (Stare Łazienki), a mineral water drinking room; the Stefan Żeromski Museum; the wooden Chapel of St. Borromeo, Armatnia Góra St. (1917–1919); wooden and brick villas (19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> c.), including villa "Osłoda" – a former Jewish hotel that belonged to the Tanenbaum family. Markuszów (29 km): the new Jewish cemetery (early 19th c.); the Church of the Holy Spirit (1608); the Church of St. Joseph the Betrothed (1676–1690). ¶ Czarnolas (36 km): the manor house of the Jabłonowski family, currently the Jan Kochanowski Museum (19th c.). ¶ Jastków (40 km): a manor house, so-called palace (1894) with a park; a wooden church (1st half of the 20<sup>th</sup> c.); a military graveyard (1915) with graves of Jewish legionnaires. ¶ **Kraśnik** (59 km): The Great Synagogue in Kraśnik (17<sup>th</sup> c.) and a beth midrash (mid-19<sup>th</sup> c.), Bużnicza St.; the mikveh building at 3 Bagno St.; the new Jewish cemetery (mid-19th c.) in Szewska St. with a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust; Marian Shrine: the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (around 15th c.), the Monastery of Canons Regular (15th/16th c.); the Church of the Holy Spirit (16th c.) with a wooden poorhouse building; The Museum of

Firefighting. ¶ The Lesser Poland Gorge of the Vistula, "Krowia Wyspa" (Cow Isle) and "Skarpa Dobrska" (Dobre Escarpment) nature reserves.

Synagogue (18<sup>th</sup> c.), 4 Lubelska St., with "Jewish Kazimierz" exhibition inside. Opening hours: 10:00–17:00, except Mondays and Tuesdays, group reservations: tel. +48 81 881 08 94. Website: www.beitenu.pl ¶ The Nadwiślańskie Museum, branch in the Celejowska House (1635), with a rich collection of paintings of pre-war Kazimierz and its Jewish residents; the room on the ground floor features mementoes of Jews from Kazimierz, e.g. a menorah, a Torah, and a Hanukkah lamp, 11/13 Senatorska St., 24-120 Kazimierz Dolny, tel. +48 81 881 01 04. ¶ The Goldsmith Museum, 2 Zamkowa St., has an exhibit of Jewish liturgical objects; tel. +4881 881 00 80. ¶ Jewish cemetery (19<sup>th</sup> c.) and "Wailing Wall" memorial, Czerniawy St. ¶ Medieval layout of the town, which was listed as a historical monument in 1994. ¶ Ruins of the royal castle with a tower (14<sup>th</sup> c.) in the northeastern part of the city, on the hill, Zamkowa St. ¶ Stone fortified tower (13<sup>th</sup> c.), Zamkowa St. ¶ Parish Church of St. John the Baptist and St. Bartholomew the Apostle (1586–1589), Rynek St. ¶ Town houses (17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> c.), 2, 10, 15, 18 Rynek St. ¶ Reformed Franciscan Monastery and Church of the Annunciation to the Blessed Virgin and St. Peter of Alcantara (1680–1690), Klasztorna

St. ¶ Hospital Church of
St. Anne and the former
hospital (1649–1670),
Lubelska St. ¶ Granaries
(17<sup>th</sup> c.), Krakowska
St. and Puławska St. ¶
Summer houses and
villas (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c.),
Puławska Krzywe Koło,
Lubelska, Szkolna, Krakowska, Małachowskiego,
Czerniawy, and Góry
Streets.



Worth seeing