

Famous Residents Of Opole

The “Famous Residents of Opole” trail was created as part of the 800th anniversary celebration. Special plaques have been installed in various places around the city, commemorating important residents of Opole.
Every plaque contains a short note on the person in Polish, English and German, as well as a QR code which links to an expanded biography in electronic form.
Many exceptional people are related to Opole, known both in Poland and abroad. Franz Waxman – winner of two Academy Awards and composer of more than 200 film scores – spent his childhood in Opole. Leo Baeck wrote his magnum opus, The Essence of Judaism, in our city, and Jerzy Grotowski, a reformer of theatre, established the 13 Rows’ Theatre in Opole. Also worth mentioning is the world-famous explorer Emin Pasha, who was born in Opole and featured in Henryk Sienkiewicz’s classic book In Desert and Wilderness, as well as Theodor Kaluza, mathematician and astronomer who exchanged correspondence with Einstein himself.

Stops along the trail
1. Leo Baeck – corner of Piastowska and N. Barlickego Streets
2. Edmund Osmańczyk - corner of Osmańczyka and Rynek Streets
3. Theodor Kaluza – 9 Strzelców Bytomskich Street
4. Emin Pasha – Helena Lehr Park

5. Jerzy Grotowski – 4 Rynek Street
6. Franz Waxman – 6 1 Maja Street

LEO BAECK

Leo Baeck was born on 23 May 1873 in Leszno (then known as Lissa) as the seventh child of Samuel Baeck, a local rabbi, and Ewa Baeck, née Placzek.

He attended a reputable gymnasium (secondary school) established by Amos Komeński, where he passed his matura examination in the spring of 1891 before moving to Wrocław for university. There, he enrolled simultaneously at the Wrocław University and the Jewish Theological Seminary. He left Wrocław in the summer of 1894 and moved to Berlin. He had received a well-rounded education by that time – he could write and translate Hebrew, Aramaic, Yiddish, Greek, Latin and English. Because of his poor eyesight, he learned his sermons and all prayers by heart. In Berlin, Baeck enrolled at the local university and rabbinical school, receiving his rabbinical certification in the 1896/1897 academic year. He also graduated from university during that time after defending his dissertation titled Spinozas erste Einwirkungen auf Deutschland (Spinoza's initial influence in Germany). Even though he completed his rabbinical studies in Berlin, he also considered himself a graduate of the Wrocław rabbinical school.

The freshly-promoted rabbi entered a contest for the then-vacant Opole rabbinate, giving his contest lecture on 24 April 1897. Leo Baeck impressed the authorities of the Opole Jewish community and became an instant favourite. He was unanimously named the winner and took over the position on 1 June 1897. The Jewish community of Opole was very wealthy and influential at the time. Undeniable proof of this is the fact that it could afford to erect a large synagogue in the centre of Opole between 1893 and 1897. The young rabbi's workload was immense form the start as he was responsible for supervising the finishing touches on the synagogue and organising its opening ceremony. Baeck blessed the building on 22 June by officially installing in it a new Torah scroll. The main event of the ceremony was the rabbi's sermon, which he gave with flair and talent in fluent German. The residents of Opole would talk about the event for many days to come.

In addition to being the local rabbi, he was employed as a Jewish religion and Hebrew teacher at the Opole city gymnasium. He proved to be excellent at his job – his students would later remark that they would impatiently await classes taught by him. Rabbi Baeck was also an active member of the school delegation, and quickly

took over leadership of the Opole Jewish history and literature association. He supervised the speaker selection processes and his own readings were also excellent. Baeck contributed to the city – he was part of the library committee of the Opole people's library in 1902. His standing among the city elite was high – along with Catholic and Evangelical clergymen, he was invited every year to sit on a committee responsible for organising a ball celebrating the birthday of Emperor Wilhelm II.

In the Opole synagogue, Leo Baeck was a moderate reformer. He did not abolish the separation of the sexes in the main sanctuary – during worship, women prayed in the gallery in the same room as men. Baeck introduced bilingual Hebrew-German prayer books, as well as conducting some of the services in German after learning that a large percentage of Polish Jews did not have even a passive command of Hebrew. During Baeck's tenure as rabbi, the Opole synagogue was not only a place of religious worship – he also allowed for music concerts to be organised in its halls. He was profuse in his expressions of respect and loyalty towards the Hohenzollern dynasty. Every year on the birthday of Wilhelm II an official service was held in the Synagogue, and a special service was held in February 1906 to celebrate the 25th wedding anniversary of the imperial couple.

In 1899 Baeck married Natalia Hamburger (he was probably the only rabbi ever to have got married in the Opole synagogue), with whom he had his daughter, Ruth, in August 1900.

In that same year, Protestant theologian Adolph von Harnack published a book on the essence of Christianity. Leo Baeck read his work and decided to write a response – a polemic with Harnack's claims. Work on the book progressed quickly. It was published in 1905 by the Judischer Verlag publishing house – the fact that the author was the rabbi of Opole was noted under Baeck's name, which brought great splendour to the local Jewish community. The young rabbi's publication caused a stir among theologians. One of the fundamental claims in the book is that the essence of Judaism is the "polarity" between the "mystery" and the "commandment". For Baeck, Judaism was a form of ethical monotheism. He criticised Christianity, for its "romanticism" and abstract striving for redemption, juxtaposing it with Judaism as a religion striving to better the world in concrete ways. The publication of Das Wesen des Judentums earned Baeck great popularity and respect among liberal Judaist theologians, and it quickly became obvious that his tenure as the rabbi of Opole would not last long. In 1907, newspapers reported that the young theologian agreed

to take over the rabbinate of a liberal Jewish community in Düsseldorf. Leo and Natalia Baeck left Opole on 3 October 1907, seen off by members of their community, as well as city and state authorities.

Rabbi Baeck left the Opole community at the peak of its cultural, economic and political influence. Few of those people could imagine that Leo Baeck was about to embark on a journey lasting nearly half a century, one which would lead to him becoming one of the most prominent Jews and Germans of the 20th century.

After five years in Düsseldorf, Baeck moved to Berlin in 1912. He took over a rabbinate in the German capital, as well as a teaching position at the Berlin rabbinical school from which he had graduated. When the First World War broke out, he was conscripted and spent four years on the front lines as a military rabbi. After his return in the summer of 1918, Baeck once again worked as a rabbi and teacher. He became an active member of Jewish associations and organisations, becoming the head of the German Rabbi Association in 1922, which had both orthodox and liberal rabbis in its ranks. In 1924, he became Grandmaster of Bnae Brith, the most influential Jewish lodge in Germany. He was also an expert on Jewish affairs at the ministry of religion.

In the early 30s, Baeck became the unquestioned leader of German Jewry, and it is in this capacity that he visited Opole in the autumn of 1933. In a room full of people, he presented his view of the situation of German Jews after Hitler’s rise to power. Though he received many offers, Baeck adamantly refused to emigrate. He remained in Germany despite harassment and several arrests, continuing to represent the entire Germany Jewry. He was not a proponent of drastic measures – in 1938, he rejected Mahatma Gandhi’s idea to call on all German Jews to commit suicide en masse as an act of protest.

Baeck stayed in the capital of the Third Reich, risking being arrested and deported to a death camp at any moment. On 28 January 1943, he was transported to a camp in Terezin. There, he became an honour member of the Council of Elders, but that did not protect him against harassment and humiliation. It was only by chance that he avoided being sent to a death camp – a person with a similar surname was deported instead. After the Soviets arrived at the camp, Baeck left for Great Britain and settled in London.

Despite his old age and the ordeal he experienced in the camp, Baeck became involved in the World Union for Progressive Judaism (which he became the leader of), taught courses at a Hebrew college in Cincinnati and chaired the Council of

German Jews in England. Baeck proposed the establishment of a research institute which would collect and study the legacy of Central European Jews, particularly those who spoke German. Baeck's efforts led to the establishment of an institute named after him in New York in 1955. Leo Baeck passed away in London on 2 November 1956.
Source: Borkowski M., Gmina żydowska w Opolu w latach 1812-1944. Dzieje i ludzie, Opole 2007 (doctoral dissertation).

EDMUND OSMAŃCZYK

Edmund Jan Osmańczyk was a known writer and publicist, active member of the Union of Poles in Germany (ZPwN) before the outbreak of World War II, soldier of the Home Army, participant of the Warsaw Uprising and underground resistance fighter during the Nazi occupation, multiple-time Member of Parliament after the war and senator in the Third Republic of Poland, member of Lech Wałęsa's Solidarity Citizens' Committee, politician and political scientist.
His great talent and incredible work ethic are best exemplified by Osmańczyk's expansive, unique and creative body of literary work: nearly 50 books including two volumes of poetry, encyclopaedic popular scientific publications, parliamentary speeches, numerous analytical articles (e.g. Germany 1945-1950, Modern America, Prussian Documents, Polish Affairs) concerning the period he lived in. He gave numerous speeches at scientific conferences and symposiums both Polish and international. In 1974, together with Professor Józef Kokot, the then-head of the Silesian Institute – Opole Science and Research Institute, he proposed the organisation of the annual scientific conference Colloquium Opole, an important platform for Polish-German dialogue.

He was the author of the unique Encyclopaedia of international affairs and the United Nations, the first encyclopaedia of its kind and a fruit of ten years of labour. The volume is a compendium of knowledge on international relations and organisations of the 19th and 20th century, in addition to being a dictionary of international terminology in four official languages of the UN and Polish. Osmańczyk's Encyclopaedia was published in 1974, during the culmination of the 40th anniversary celebration of the establishment of the UN, and was named "one of the most valuable publications on the organisation ever released". Then-Secretary General Javier Perez de Cuellar wrote that it was "a ready-made source of information and tool for research" on the history of the UN. The Encyclopaedia is still

a helpful tool for exploring the intricacies of international affairs and relations, and is useful for those interested in international topics, particularly researchers and students, journalists, politicians, lawyers, managers and other company employees and officials dealing with international trade and cooperation.
The Encyclopaedia of international affairs and the United Nations served as the basis for granting Osmańczyk the degree of Doctor of Humanities by the Faculty of Philology and History of the University of Opole as a result of a qualifying process conducted in 1975. In the same year, Osmańczyk was given an honorary degree by the Silesian University in Katowice, followed by Wrocław University in 1988.

He was a brilliant expert on Prussian and German history and politics, raising scientific arguments against the German political doctrine at the time. Every stage of his journalistic and political journey was reflected in his books, which contained deep political insights. Osmańczyk's entire adult life, every step of his career as a journalist and politician, constituted a reflection upon, and actions to defend, human dignity and the fundamental, universal human and civil rights and freedoms, a protest against violating these laws and the abuse of instruments of coercion. He was consistent in his efforts before the Second World War, when he defended the Polish minority against Germanisation and denationalisation as a young journalist and editor of a Polish news outlet and member of ZPwN. Even in the face of mounting Nazi aggression, persecution of Polish nationals and other national minorities in Germany and the rapidly approaching war, in accordance with the resolution of the General Council of the Union of Poles in Germany, he studied and documented the activity of the brutally-suppressed Polish minority as the head of the Union's Press Central, working to create the "Lexicon of Poles in Germany".
He defended human and national rights as a soldier of the Home Army and a resistance fighter in occupied Warsaw. He participated in the Warsaw Uprising, during which he wrote and broadcast daily commentaries for the Polish Uprising Radio. During the uprising, he lost his little firstborn son. During that time he also wrote the 1944 Uprising Journal (Dziennik z Powstania 1944 r.), which was published five years after Osmańczyk's death under the title This story must be told (Trzeba to opowiedzieć).

Fascinated by the United Nations since its first London session in 1946, he devoted himself to, as he himself described, "collecting information for an encyclopaedic chronicle of this unique, historic event – the first universal protection of the lives of

all nations and rights of all men”. As a correspondent, he covered sessions of the General Assembly, the Security Council and other UN bodies. He relayed information on actions taken to foster international cooperation for the purpose of solving economic, social and cultural issues and promoting and popularising respect for the fundamental human rights and freedoms. His encyclopaedias offered easier access to information, facilitating mutual understanding between people, states and their leaders.
He demanded 20 years of stabilisation in 1987, harshly criticising the regular quakes resulting from what was in his opinion “inept” management of the economy. Osmańczyk’s belief was that stabilisation-related decisions had to be made by a sovereign Polish society consisting of “government forces and a civic opposition”. He demanded that the opposition be proportionally quite numerous in the Sejm, national councils and the judiciary, particularly of the constitutional and administrative kind, in order to eliminate impunity, wilfulness and disregard for criticism.

Considering the systemic changes which occurred in Poland, some opinions expressed by Osmańczyk during the communist period may seem controversial and draw criticism. However, looking at the big picture, it is beyond all doubt that Osmańczyk did contribute to promoting fundamental human rights and freedoms, both in post-war Poland and across the globe, to facilitating friendly relations and cooperation between nations, including positive relations, close partnerships and friendly cooperation between Poland and her neighbours. His public activism, including in the Sejm, contributed to government transformations and the restoration of the universal political and cultural standards of democracy in Poland.

Stefan Ziarko
Source: Almanach Miejski – Opolanin’99

THEODOR KALUZA
Theodor Kaluza (Kałuża) was a physicist, mathematician and astronomer born on 9 November 1885 in Opole (Oppeln) to Dr Max Kaluza, a professor of English at an Opole gymnasium, and his wife Amalia Kaluza, née Zaruba. He lived in a house on Strzelców Bytomskich Street on Pasieka Island, but boon after his birth, the Kaluza family moved to Königsberg, a famous German university city at the time. That is where Theodor went to school and university.

Theodor Kaluza is the only scientist from Opole to be listed among the 60 greatest scholars of all time (along with Aristotle, Nicolaus Copernicus, Marie Curie and Einstein). He acquired a doctorate in mathematics at the young age of 22, marking the beginning of his scientific career. In 1909, in order to meet the requirements of the German education system, he did a year-long internship at Göttingen University to complete his studies. There, he was taught by world-class scholars such as Hilbert, Minkowski, Klein, Runge and Schwarzschild. After his return to Königsberg, he acquired the habilitation post-doctoral degree for his dissertation on the general theory of relativity and was employed by the “Albertina” – one of the most important universities in the First Republic of Poland. In Königsberg, he married Anna Helena Bayer, with whom he had two children.

Scientists around the world have recently celebrated the 100th anniversary of the publication of the special theory of relativity by Albert Einstein. It was beyond doubt one of the most important scientific events of the previous century, one which revolutionised our lives to a greater degree than many may think. Theodor Kaluza is actually a link connecting the theory with our region, in a sense. How so? He dared to contest what had been considered obvious at the time – that the world was three-dimensional, by positing the existence of a “fifth dimension of space”. Much time had to pass before the scientist from Opole was vindicated and his theory broadly accepted and acknowledged as one of the most inspiring ideas of the 20th century. Kaluza did not receive a Nobel Prize, but his work enabled others to become laureates. In a short, several-pages-long article published in 1919, the relatively unknown mathematician from Königsberg proposed a solution to one of the greatest problems of the century. In a couple of lines, Kaluza unified Einstein’s theory of gravity with Maxwell’s theory of light, embedding field equations not in four (as it had been done previously), but five dimensions. After reading this on 21 April 1919, Einstein responded by saying that he had never thought of achieving unification by introducing a fifth dimension, but even though, at first glance, his idea was very attractive, he was not completely convinced. Two years later, Einstein wrote Kaluza once again: “If you so wish, I would ultimately be willing to present your work to the Academy”. After a two-year delay, Kaluza’s work finally entered the scientific discourse. Oskar Klein, a Swedish mathematician, combined Kaluza’s theory with quantum mechanics in 1926. His suggestion was that the fifth, invisible dimension of space-time was not flat, but curled into a circle/ball/cylinder.

Theodor Kaluza inherited his father’s exceptional language skills and well-rounded

general education. He was a polyglot who spoke 16 languages, his favourite one being Arabic. He also used Polish to communicate with some family members. He passed away on 19 January 1954 in Göttingen. In November 2005, a memorial plaque was revealed on the building in which Kaluza was born, and Opole University commemorated the great scientist by naming its Astronomical Observatory after him in 2006.

EMIN PASHA

German doctor and explorer who studied Sudan and East Africa, world-famous governor who commanded a large garrison during the Mahdist Revolt.

He was born in Opole on 29 March 1840 under a less exotic name, to a Jewish merchant Ludwig Schnitzer and Paulina Schnitzer, née Schweitzer. His parents named him Isaak.

Their house was located on Stockgasse near the Młynówka Canal, on what is today known as Minorytów Street. When little Isaak was two, the family moved to Nysa (1841), where his father died in 1845. His mother soon remarried, this time with a Protestant.

Under the influence of his foster father, Isaak was baptised in 1846 and given new names – Eduard Carl Oscar Theodor. In 1858, after graduating from the Collegium Carolinum in Nysa, Eduard Schnitzer moved out to enrol at university. He studied in Wrocław, Berlin and Königsberg. In 1864, he graduated with a degree in medicine and left Germany. He joined the Ottoman army as a medic and was stationed near what is today known as Bar.

His linguistic abilities were exceptional, allowing him to master exotic languages such as Turkish, Farsi and Arabic. During that time, he once again changed his religion, converting to Islam and adopting the name Tabib Efendi. He travelled the Balkans and Asia Minor before returning to Germany after ten years. Soon after his return, he travelled to Sudan as a doctor. His achievements and high organisational skills were acknowledged there, and Eduard was appointed chief doctor of the province, before becoming Governor of Equatoria in 1878. His promotion also earned him the title of Bey, and later Pasha. In addition to his duties as governor, he led expeditions to the Upper Nile and Buganda regions, as well as territories occupied by the Lotuko tribe and many other areas. He sent his written observations and collected specimens to European research societies and museums. He referred to himself as Mehmed Emin Effendi, and later Mehmed Emin Pasha after his promotion.

The Mahdist Revolt against the Egyptian-Ottoman rule in Sudan, which took place

between 1883 and 1885, earned Emin Pasha international fame. He was the only governor who still performed his duties amidst all the chaos, commanding a ten-thousand-strong garrison near Lake Albert.
Several expeditions were organised to break through and save him. One such expedition was led by known journalist and traveller Henry M. Stanley, who was able to reach Emin Pasha in 1888. Ultimately, it was not a relief force that forced him to retreat, but Egypt's ceding of control over Equatoria.
Both explorers embarked on a journey home in 1889. Emin Pasha later enlisted in the German military and headed a 1890 military expedition tasked with exploring the territories surrounding Lake Victoria and capturing them for Germany. His next expedition was with ethnographer and zoologist Franz Stuhlman, the goal being to make Equatoria a German colony.
That was his last journey. By the order of Sultan Kibonge, he was murdered by slavers near Lake Tanganika on 23 October 1892.
In his final years and after his tragic death, he was the focus of many publications and books. His name has been immortalised on the pages of many an encyclopaedia, and discerning readers can also find him in Henryk Sienkiewicz's In Desert and Wilderness.
No genuine Emin Pasha memorabilia are stored in the Museum of Opole Silesia. The pre-war museum was established after Pasha's death in 1900. To emphasise his Opole roots, his birth certificate drawn up by the Opole magistrate on 5 November 1900 was included in the collection. No original portrait of Emin Pasha was available, which is why a lithograph of his likeness was taken from a publication and decorated with a tasteful mount. After the war, the memorabilia were incorporated into the collection of the Museum of Opole Silesia.

Urszula Zajączkowska
Source: Almanach Miejski – Opolanin'98

JERZY GROTOWSKI
Opole was a special place for playwright Jerzy Grotowski. It was in a small room there that his opinions on theatre and acting matured and theories crystallised. The history of the 13 Rows' Theatre in Opole is five years long, spanning a period from 1959 to 1964.
A total of ten plays were created in Opole. When discussing Grotowski's body of theatrical work, two of his Wrocław plays come to mind: The Constant Prince and

Apocalypsis cum figuris, both of which were ground-breaking events in the history of Polish theatre. It was those two plays that earned Grotowski fame and respect across the globe, but his Opole plays are equally as important for the Polish theatre tradition. His closest collaborators were literary director Ludwik Flaszen and stage architect Jerzy Gurawski.

The repertoire of the Opole 13 Rows' Theatre reflects the changes in Grotowski's personality resulting from his explorations. An interesting pattern emerges here. In Cocteau's Orpheus (1959), Byron's Cain (1960) Majakowski's Misterium Buffo (1960), Kalidasa's Siakuntala (1960) and Mickewicz's Dziady (1961), the text became a source of inspiration for Grotowski, a foundation upon which he erected autonomous works of art. At that time, Grotowski also explored the relationship between the scene and the audience. On the other hand, in Słowacki's Kordian (1962), Wyspiański's Acropolis (1962), Marlowe's Doctor Faustus (1963) and Shakespeare-Wyspiański's Study of Hamlet (1964), it is the actor who is in the centre of attention.

It was in his Opole plays that Grotowski realised his vision of theatre to its fullest. Opole journalist Edward Pochroń, who was responsible for bringing the playwright to the city, claimed that for an experienced audience, those plays were "a revelation and a revolution", but for the majority, they were an "unintelligible revolution". The premiere of Dziady was long awaited by everyone in Opole – both the actors and the audience, especially those from the eastern borderland areas. Nobody in the foyer could expect that what was about to begin would be a blasphemous toying with their memories. Grotowski's Konrad utters the words of the Great Improvisation, so important to every Pole, dressed in a bedcover and with a broom on his back. In Kordian, the director placed the protagonist in a mental hospital, which is actually in line with the original text. Both of those plays were a means for Grotowski to see if the saviour myth contained within them was still of any significance to a contemporary Pole. Wyspiański's Akropolis was Grotowski's way of taking on the Holocaust. It was during the development of that play that the Polish term teatr ubogi (impoverished theatre) was coined. Akropolis was invaluable as an acting experience, but it was not until Doctor Faustus that Grotowski reached the limit of the art of acting, achieving the total act in the role played by Zbigniew Cynkutis. The play was the most mature work ever produced by the Opole 13 Rows' Laboratory theatre. It was presented as Faustus's feast, his Last Supper. The audience sat at long, rectangular plinths which served as giant tables and Faustus was played by

Zbigniew Cynkutis. Creating the play involved exploring and transcending the limits of acting. It was in that little room that the “total act” was born – a new acting method which brought Grotowski great fame.

His last Opole play was the Study of Hamlet, based on the works of Shakespeare and Wyspiański. It was Grotowski’s most unique and political play, with Hamlet being a Jew, and the royal court serving as a clear reference to the authorities at the time. Years later, the spectacle was reinterpreted as the predecessor to the student protests and crisis of March 1968. The Study was cancelled after three weeks to avoid angering the authorities.

The Theatre was only able to function in Opole thanks to Jerzy Grotowski, who was a master at presenting projects too complicated for party officials to understand as something necessary, valuable and, most importantly, promoting Polishness in the Western Territories (he paid lip service to the authorities with his propagandising Publicist Plays, which were reminiscent of commemoration ceremonies). It should be noted that Grotowski would always emerge victorious from his encounters with the communist authorities and his few journalist enemies.

In Opole, he was reborn not only as a playwright, but also as a player, strategist and politician. His resolve and determination were incredible. The troupe’s path from the half-amateur Orpheus to the magnificent Doctor Faustus is not only an example of rapid artistic development, but also of very consistent image building, resulting in great fame both in Poland and abroad, as early as during Grotowski’s Opole phase. The last play by the 13 Rows’ Laboratory theatre in Opole, Akropolis, took place on 21 December 1964. On 2 January 1965, the troupe left Opole to permanently settle in Wrocław, but it was not until 6 January that Trybuna Opolska published an official announcement of the move.

From today’s perspective, it was inevitable that the theatre would move to a different city. The decision was made for several reasons, the two most important ones being that the local authorities were unable to finance a “theatre laboratory” and that Opole became too small for Jerzy Grotowski and his troupe. The theatre was known in Poland, and began to receive invites from abroad. Wrocław, a large university city, offered comfortable working and development conditions.

Agnieszka Wójtowicz, author of Od Orfeusza do Studium o hamlecie Teatr 13 Rzędów w Opolu (1959-1964) (From Orpheus to the Study of Hamlet, the 13 Rows’ Theatre in Opole (1959-1964)), Wydawnictwo Universytety Wrocławskiego 2005; co-author (along with Teresa Kudyba) of the film Gra z pamięcią. Grotowski w Opolu (Playing

with memory. Grotowski in Opole) – recipient of a 2017 Ministry of Culture and National Heritage scholarship for theatre.

FRANZ WAXMAN

Franz Waxman was born as Franz Wachsmann on 24 December 1906 in Królewska Huta (modern-day Chorzów) as the youngest child of Rozalia and Otton.

The family moved to Opole around 1915. There, Franz's father became the owner of a large scrap metal company located at 6 Zimmerstrasse (modern-day 1 Maja Street), on the territory of what today is a bus interchange. The place was associated so closely with Otto that pre-war residents of Opole referred to it as Wachsmann Ecke – Wachsmann corner. The scrap yard owner's family lived in a nearby tenement on the corner of what are now 1 Maja and Reymonta Streets.

From a young age, Franz loved to play the piano, which was his favourite instrument. As a six-year-old in Opole, he began practising playing the grand piano, becoming proficient at twelve.

He worked as a teller at one of the local banks, but a career in finance was not his destiny. The future Academy Award winner loved music and rejected his parents' advice, who would long insist on their son becoming a banker. At seventeen, he went to study music in Dresden before transferring to a conservatory in Berlin, where he studied conducting and composition.

He lived off his piano skills, working as a pianist at various restaurants and night clubs. In 1928, he joined the famous jazz band Weintraub's Syncopators, which gave him an opportunity to go on several international tours. The 24-year-old Wachsmann was helped by Friedrich Hollaender, a friend from a jazz orchestra. As a result, Franz could conduct the orchestra responsible for the score for the film Blue Angel, starring Marlene Dietrich. The film was a hit and enabled Franz to find work with UFA, the leading German film production company at the time.

He got married in 1934, but what soured his happiness was the increasingly hostile atmosphere in Germany. Eventually, the Nazis came to power. In the spring of 1934, he was attacked by anti-Semitic militiamen in Berlin. Without much hesitation, Wachsmann left for Paris along with other Jews from the film industry.

There, he met Fritz Lang, the creator of the famous film Metropolis, who was in the process of directing Liliom. The director hired the German to write a piece for the film. His use of a choir brought him recognition in the film industry once again.

In late 1934, Wachsmann moved to the US and changed his name to Waxman. In December of that same year, he composed the score for Bride of Frankenstein.

Director James Whale asked the composer to write a score which had never been heard in a horror movie before, and that is exactly what he got.
In 1936, Waxman signed a seven-year contract with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, which enabled him to work on the music for films produced by the roaring lion. The company had him produce the score for The Young in the Heart, which earned Waxman two Academy Award nominations for best original score and music. He did not win a statuette, but he began to feel more confident in the US. He brought his wife over from Paris in 1936, and three years later, now as a US citizen, his parents and only sister from Opole. This enabled his family to escape the Holocaust, similar to Waxman's brothers, who had left for other countries as well.
Franz Wachsmann was nominated five more times between 1940 and 1946. He won his first statuette in 1950 for his film score for Billy Wilder's Sunset Boulevard. George Stevens's A Place in the Sun, starring Elizabeth Taylor, brought him another award one year later. The composer became a nominee three more times for a total of twelve Academy Award nominations.
Franz Waxman passed away at his peak on 24 February 1967. He wrote music for more than two hundred films and collaborated on many more. The Franz Waxman Collection, containing his entire body of work, is stored at Syracuse University in New York.
Source: Wikipedia and Marek Kosma-Cieśliński, „Franz Waxman. Zdobywca Oscarów z Königshütte"

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Location