

PRESERVED STORIES



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Michał Świerzbński's diary, describing his administrative work as Polish Consul in Daugavpils from 1923 to 1937

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The PAS Archives in Warsaw hold numerous diaries, journals, and memoirs, standing as testaments to the power of personal narratives in history. They offer unique insights into historical events as experienced by individuals, supplementing official documents.

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PAS Archives in Warsaw

Archives are a type of institution established to collect, preserve, and provide access to documents. A “document,” in turn, is by definition, any text, photograph, or other item that holds evidential or informational value. Archives therefore are a place of contact with truth, credibility, and historical accuracy. At the PAS Archives in Warsaw, we safeguard the intellectual legacies of more than 600 scholars, each contributing a small piece of history. Among these legacies, a prevalent type of document includes diaries, journals, and memoirs.

Within these pages, authors often recount ordinary occurrences from their daily lives. For instance,

Maria Gąsowska, a boarding-school girl, jotted down in 1881: “In the morning, I wandered aimlessly from corner to corner, then spent some time in the garden. In the afternoon, a group of people went to the shooting range, so I watched from the window.” Diaries frequently highlight easily verifiable events, offering concise reflections. Authors capture how their lives intertwined with the fate of their country or how the nation’s destiny influenced their own. Often, the urge to keep such records is tied to the extraordinary historical periods in which they lived. For instance, the Polish politician Władysław Leopold Jaworski’s diary entries shed light on his role chairing the Supreme National Committee and discuss Polish affairs in Europe during WWI. Aside from his own notes, his diary preserves numerous attachments, including extensive correspondence with such notable historical figures as Józef Piłsudski and Władysław Sikorski, as well as materials sent to the Supreme National Committee. Diaries of this sort are invaluable sources for historical research.

Michał Świerzbński, serving as Consul of the Republic of Poland in Daugavpils, Latvia, notes in the introduction to his diary covering his official work from 1923 to 1937: “Based on archival documents and the achievements of historical research, I will have to ‘debunk’ many established views about our past. (...) For understandable reasons, I will not be able to disclose everything publicly, and so such material will remain in this diary.”

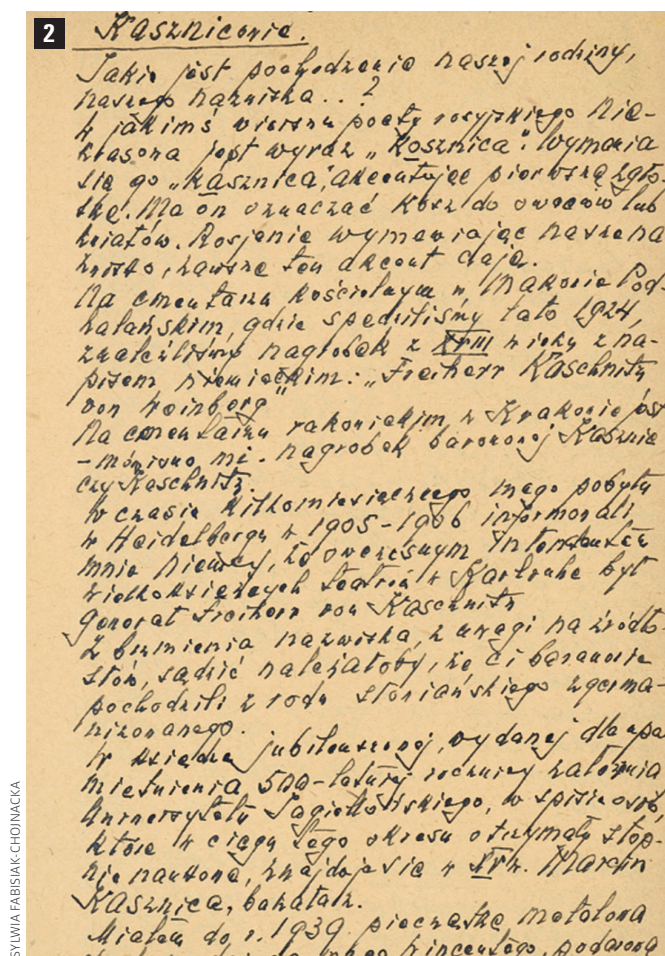
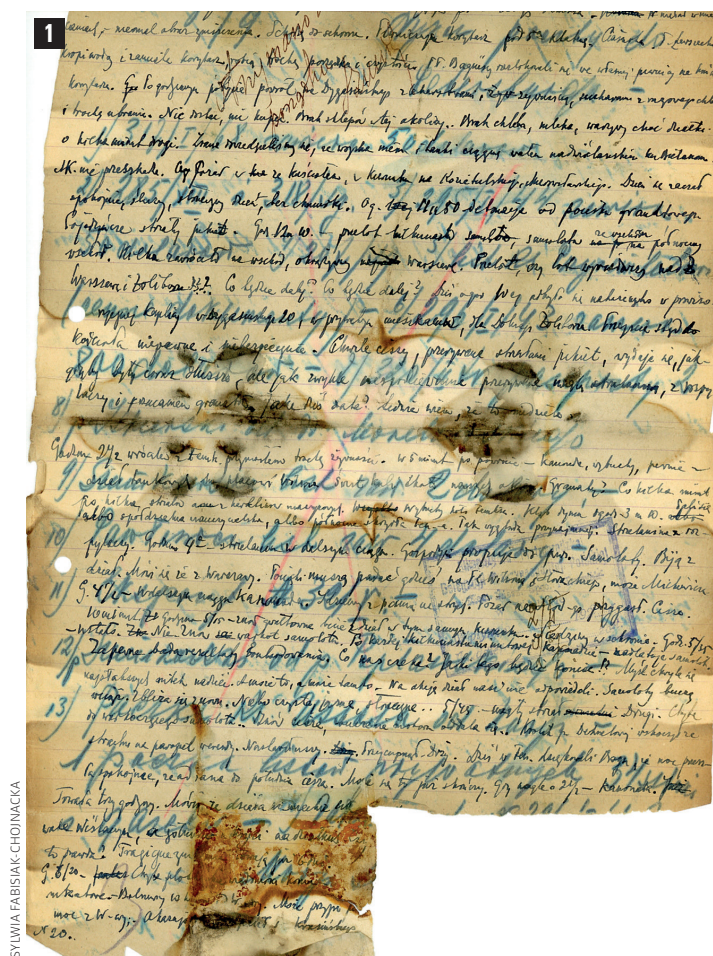
Another interwar politician, Artur Śliwiński, planned to write a memoir, but it was his wife Leokadia who took on the task. As she explained in the preface: “We lived through our long life at the turn of two eras. We witnessed profound upheavals and transformations, terror-instilling cataclysms difficult for the mind to grasp. In the swiftly moving course of events, Artur Śliwiński always played a vibrant, often prominent role. Many times, I asked him to immortalize his experiences, to leave behind his testimony (...) he never had time for that...”

Diaries kept by teachers and educational activists described the efforts to build a Polish education system after the years of foreign partition. The teacher Maria Smulikowska – the wife of Julian Smulikowski, an educational activist, a member of parliament,

The diary of the politician
Władysław Leopold Jaworski



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and vice president of the Polish Teachers' Union – left two brief memoirs: “For 30 years, I was witness to my husband Julian Smulikowski’s life and creative work, full of exertion and joyful enthusiasm, and I want to dedicate my memories to him. Enthralled by the greatness of my husband’s ideas and radiant fervor, I collaborated with him and participated in many of his undertakings despite my professional and family duties.”

Detailed Accounts

Some diaries describe family stories or exceptional events. These accounts are immensely diverse, but much space is devoted to WWII and the Warsaw Uprising. Such writings are highly valuable because they are often the only sources depicting the effects of wartime operations and the sentiments prevailing among the civilian population.

Piotr Bańkowski, the longtime editor of the archival journal *Archeion*, described his experiences at the Sokolnicki Fort in Żoliborz during the Warsaw Uprising. A whole collection of archives and books had been deposited there for safekeeping during WWII, which he strove hard to protect both from bombing raids

and from people also hiding out in the fort. Tadeusz Makowiecki, the curator of the University Library in Warsaw, recounted his efforts to rescue and safeguard the library collections he oversaw throughout the war, including after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising. To save the library, part of it was hidden and bricked up, securing it from destruction or being taken away as war loot.

The historian Prof. Włodzimierz Dzwonkowski chronicled – virtually day-by-day – the times of the Warsaw Uprising, being evacuated and liberated, the rebuilding of postwar academic life. In the preface to his journal, he notes: “I write this diary/memoir fresh from the events, mindful of how rarely there are direct eyewitness accounts of great historical moments.” The Warsaw Uprising found him in the Wola district, from where he and his family made their way to the Old Town, surviving there until being expelled from the city. His historical awareness prompted him to bear witness to the truth of what he had seen.

Some diarists intended their memoirs to be read by others – while writing they addressed the readers directly, repeatedly offering reassurances that their descriptions indeed authentic. Józef Staszewski, a geographer and cartographer, described his time

Fig. 1
Piotr Bańkowski, longtime editor of the archival journal *Archeion*, described his experiences in the Sokolnicki Fort in Żoliborz during the Warsaw Uprising

Fig. 2
Stanisław Kasznica, a senator and two-time rector of the University of Poznań, kept a diary from 1890, and for some time also memoirs

in a prison in Lwów: “Gestapo prison, August 1943 (...). Condemned to a cruel, slavish death, we had no illusions. (...) Suddenly, Zuckerkandel looked at me and said: ‘Professor, you’re lucky, you will live.’ That authentically happened. It was an inconceivable prospect. And yet I came out whole and healthy.”

The family of the prominent lawyer Prof. Stanisław Kasznica left behind an interesting source. The author himself, a senator and two-time rector of the University of Poznań, kept a diary since 1890 and also, for a time, a memoir. Towards the end of his life, he wrote an autobiographical book, *Ród*, chronicling his family lineage. In it, he described the lives of his ancestors, all the way up to his contemporary times. Using a legalistic style and strictly adhering to the chronology of events, he depicted private life events, like the death of his first wife, alongside national and state affairs: “In spring 1921, Amelcia fell ill; we fought (...) fiercely for her life. She passed away on December 13, 1921. The Versailles Peace Congress authorized the Council of Ambassadors of the Main and Allied Powers to determine our southeastern state border.” His second wife, Eleonora, also left behind a diary, describing the births of their children and details of ordinary life under the care and shadow of a much older husband.

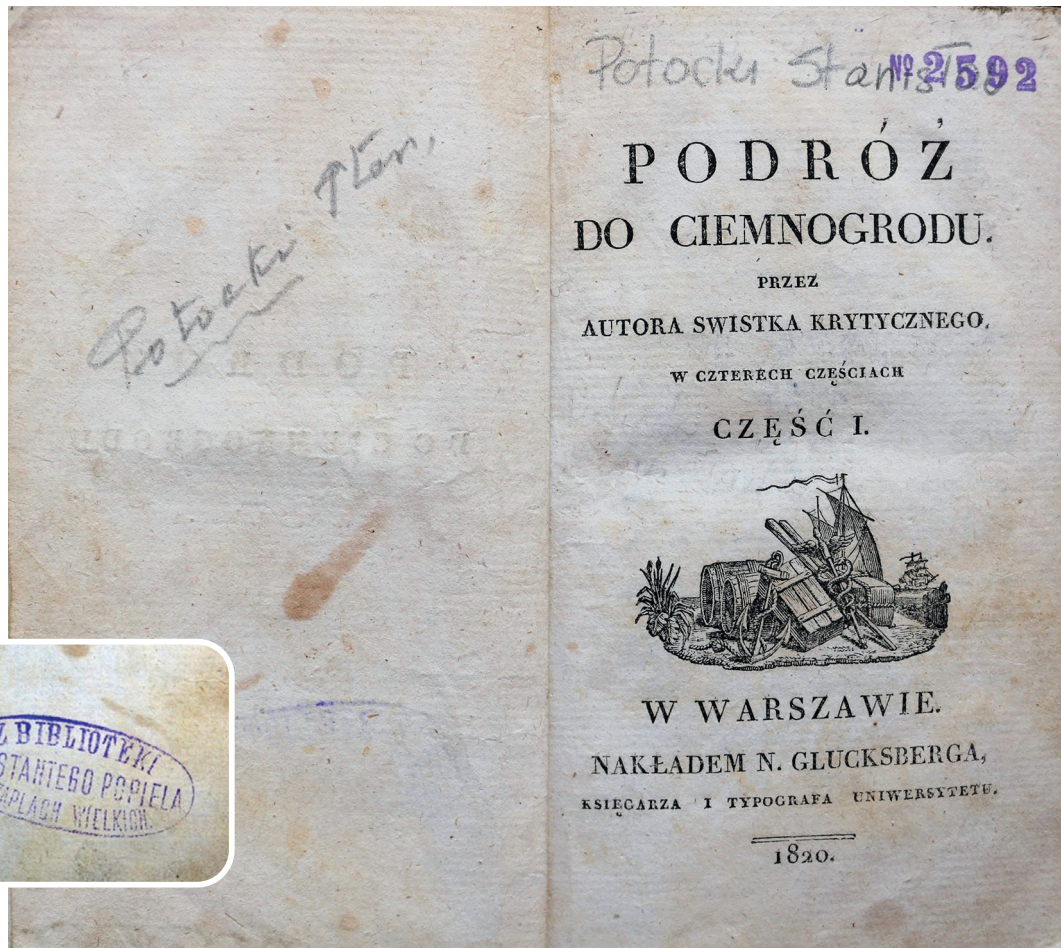
The overall picture is further complemented by the memoirs of their daughter, also Eleonora, portraying the warm atmosphere of life, multi-generational family, everyday life organized by her mother, and respect for her hard-working father. Their mutually intertwining relationships provide a splendid and authentic picture of the life of a professorial family in the interwar period.

Some of the memoirs preserved at our archives have been published with scholarly commentary. Publishers are not always interested in the entire memoirs, which often contain highly varied information (e.g., about books the author read, or thoughts difficult for modern-day readers to accept). In such cases, although a selection is published, the entirety remains available at the archives.

Intertwined Fates

Books once held in private libraries were often marked with owners’ signatures, bookplates, or library stamps placed on the first pages and inside the text. These markings turn a book from just one of multiple published copies into a distinctive, authentic item, part of a specific collection – offering clues about the fas-

The title page of this copy of the book *Podróż do Ciemnogrodu* [Journey to Darktown] offers evidence of the history of its owners, including the stamp of the book-collecting Popiel family

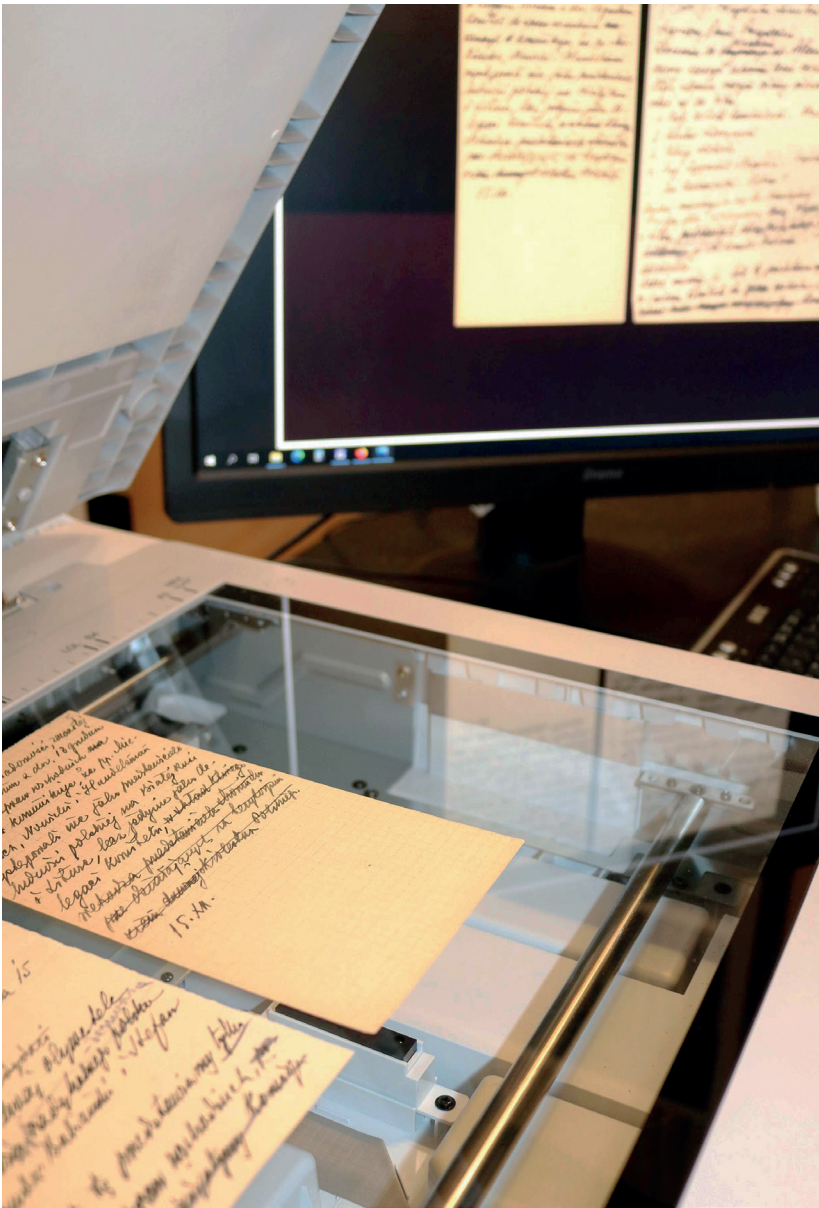


cinating lives of their successive owners. The provenance of a book can often be traced by examining ownership markings.

For instance, the PAS Archives holds an intriguing copy of *Podróż do Ciemnogrodu* [Journey to Darktown] – a novel/treatise written by Stanisław Kostka Potocki, published in 1820. The author depicts a fanatical, religiously intense state where ignorance runs rampant. This particular copy is stamped, indicating that it belonged to the private book collection of Konstanty Popiel from Czaple Wielkie near Miechów (in the Kielce region). This fact is part of a much broader story: the village of Czaple Wielkie had been owned by the Popiel family since 1749, when Maria Piegłowska brought it as a dowry to her husband Konstanty Popiel. The next heir was Konstanty Michał Ignacy Popiel of the Sulima coat of arms (1774–1847), followed by his grandson Konstanty Popiel of the Sulima coat of arms (1841–1919). Irrespective of the family’s financial condition, successive heirs of the estate continued to collect books. In preserved documents, other family members described library-building as one of their passions. For instance, Wincenty Popiel (born 1825), an independence activist and Archbishop, collected books in Czaple Wielkie and wherever else he resided. He possessed a library in Płock as a bishop and in Novgorod as an exile. His mother collected prayer books; their extensive correspondence mentions book exchanges between the son and mother. As per a notarial record, the book collection remained with Archbishop Popiel until his death and was then taken over by Konstanty Popiel. The book collection was gradually supplemented by donations from family members. However, after many years, the library at the Czaple Wielkie manor was dispersed; some books ended up in the antiquarian market, and through this route, a part of the collection found its way to the Library of the PAS Archives in Warsaw. Another part is now held in the Gdańsk Library of the PAS – including is an inventory of old prints from Konstanty Popiel’s library.

Digital preservation

The digitization of archival materials has become an integral part of the work of libraries and archives. Authenticity is a key aspect that must be considered when preserving archival materials. This is accomplished via the principle of maintaining the integrity, truthfulness, and reliability of digitally preserved documents. *Integrity* involves preserving the completeness and consistency of archival materials. All elements of the original, such as text, images, seals, and other individual contents, e.g., marginalia, should be preserved in the digital version without any external interference. The format, resolution, and coloring should be replicated. When this is done with proper



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care, archival materials can properly serve their function as scientific and historical sources. *Truthfulness* refers to preserving the original meaning and content of materials. Making changes to a text or interpreting it in a way contrary to the authors’ intentions is unacceptable. *Reliability*, in turn, is related to ensuring that the digital version is an accurate representation of the original, so that users of the materials can be confident that they have access to credible sources.

Lastly, another important aspect is access control. To preserve the best possible condition of original documents, archive institutions are generally shifting away from providing access to originals in favor of access to digital copies. However, controlled access to digitally preserved materials is also necessary to safeguard their authenticity and avoid improper manipulation. ■

Part of the process of digitizing archival materials