

## ***Landed property in Włocławek district 1864/1866–1945***

### **Summary**

In the doctoral dissertation titled *Landed property in Włocławek district 1864/1866–1945*, the author undertook the task of presenting the group of large landowners from economic, social, cultural, and political perspectives.

The dissertation presents a collective portrait of the landed gentry of Włocławek County. Before outlining this portrait, the author attempted to define the term „landed gentry”. The study presents their social, national, and religious structures. One of the key elements that distinguished landowners from other social groups was education; therefore, the author discusses issues related to the education of the gentry—from home schooling, through secondary education, to higher education. The study also characterises manors/palaces, parks/gardens, and granges as significant components of landed estates, which were a distinctive feature of Polish countryside until the land reform of 1945.

Significant attention was given to the characteristics of estates, which formed the economic basis for their owners. The author discussed the total area of landed property divided by type of land use, issues related to servitudes and the problem of land subdivision, with a focus on the second half of the 19th century and the land reform acts of 1920 and 1925 and their impact on subdivision in Włocławek County. The study also addressed questions relating to the length of time that estates remained in the ownership of specific gentry families in the region, and which granges were leased by landowners. Managing estates was associated with income and expenditure, so the financial condition of the estates was an important topic. Many factors influenced this, including debt, generated revenues and various expenditures, such as those allocated for workshop modernisation, salaries and taxes. Large landownership came to an end with the land reform decree of 1944. This dissertation discusses the process of land subdivision in Włocławek County and identifies the social groups to which land formerly owned by the gentry was redistributed.

The activities pursued by landowners were primarily economic and were determined by ownership of land estates. This dissertation describes agricultural production in granges, as well as animal husbandry and seed production. Technological advancements, particularly the acceleration in the second half of the 19th century, led to an increased use of artificial fertilisers on estates. The emergence of new agricultural machinery, as well as improved versions of existing machinery, also enhanced crop yields. However, landowners' economic activities were not limited to managing their own estates. On a larger scale, in the Kingdom of Poland and later the Second Polish Republic, particularly in Włocławek County, landowners were also involved

in industry. They were among the founders of industrial plants, such as sugar factories, starch factories, dairies and slaughterhouses. These enterprises not only served as outlets for gentry capital, but also as consumers of agricultural products, livestock and animal products from landed estates and peasant farms. Peasant owners often found employment in these facilities, both year-round and seasonally. The gentry's economic initiatives were recognised through their participation in numerous agricultural fairs and exhibitions, where they received many awards and distinctions.

The possession of financial resources enabled the gentry to participate in social, economic, cultural, educational and political life, as well as in efforts to regain Polish independence. Members of the landowning class were active in agricultural, social and political organisations at the level of both the Kingdom of Poland and the Second Polish Republic, as well as locally in the county of Włocławek. These organisations included the Central Agricultural Society, the Landowners' Union, the Association of United Landowner Women (whose long-standing chair was Maria Kretkowska from Baruchowo) and the Union of Brewing Barley Producers. They organised and led the Kuyavian branch of the Polish Sightseeing Society in Włocławek, and participated in the establishment of volunteer fire brigades. They were also active in the Polish Educational Society, which established schools in the county. On their estates, they established childcare centres. In Włocławek County, schools for peasant children were established — in Kruszynek and Marysin for girls and in Stary Brześć for boys. These were initiated or co-initiated by landowners. Landowners also sat on municipal and county councils and served as local judges. They also made a significant contribution to the struggle for independence, beginning with the January Uprising and continuing through World War I and the Polish–Bolshevik War to their participation in the defensive war of 1939, resistance activities and the Warsaw Uprising.

A key part of the dissertation involved an analysis of the relationships between the manor and the village, the manor and the rectory, and the manor and the Jewish community. Manor–village relations were often difficult. The main source of conflict between landowners and peasants was feudal legacies, particularly servitudes. These conflicts were largely economic in nature: estate workers demanded higher wages in money and in kind (so-called 'ordynaria') by taking part in strikes. However, these relationships were not solely characterised by conflict; areas of cooperation also existed, including agricultural circles, fire brigades, and collective national and state-level efforts in times of crisis. Relations between the manor and the rectory were also not unequivocally positive. Cooperation in various initiatives and organisations represented an ideal of harmonious collaboration, often reflecting social ties between

landowners and the clergy. However, disagreements also arose, for example over financial contributions to parish initiatives or the religious observance of landowners. A notable example of such tension in Włocławek County was the dispute between the Kruszyn parish priest and the Dębice (formerly Dembice) and Kruszynek owners concerning their educational initiatives. Similar patterns characterised the relationship between the gentry and the Jewish population. Due to differences in lifestyle, social relations were generally limited to assimilated Jewish families, particularly converts. Such families played an active role in the county's economic and social life. In the early 20th century, growing public discontent with Jewish dominance in trade led to increasing calls for a boycott. Initially, the landowners of Włocławek County were not heavily involved in this movement. However, after 1918, they became more involved — local members of the Landowners' Union were the first to adopt a resolution on the 'nationalisation' of trade, aimed at reducing Jewish influence in this sector.

The dissertation does not discuss relations between the gentry and Russians, as the author could find no documents or memoirs indicating contact between Polish landowners and owners of entailed estates in Włocławek County. Contacts between landowners and the Russian administration, however, were an everyday occurrence and a political necessity, just as they were for other social groups. For this reason, this aspect was not analysed in detail in the study.