

BULLETIN OF THE **POLONUS** PHILATELIC SOCIETY



Meets Every 2nd & 4th Friday at Polish Veterans Home, 6005 W. Irving Pk., Chgo.

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FIRST POLONUS HANDBOOK: THE POLISH OCCUPATION OF RUSSIA IN 1918



Many Poles served in the Russian Czarist army scattered over all of Russia. When the Russian High Command ordered the formation of the 1st Polish Corps, these Polish Soldiers within the Russian army assembled at Pulawy.

The outbreak of the First World War found the powerful nations of Europe fighting for their political survival. The centuries old dynasties of the English Kings, the Hapsburg Emperors, and the Russian Czars were about to collapse in ruin. The English were spared, but the national boundaries of central and eastern Europe were again altered. National groups which had dreamed of independent states saw this opportunity to reestablish their national identities.

Poles who had been scattered throughout the German, Russian, and Austrian empires saw the

possibility now to create a Polish state once again after over a hundred years of bondage. General Jozef Pilsudski formed within the Austrian army the first of the Polish Legions. These Legions entered Polish territory as early as August 8, 1914. To counter the Pilsudski Legions, the Russian high command proposed the formation of Polish Legions within the Russian army. The nucleus of the 1st Polish Corps was formed at Pulawy, but the operations of the Corps were severely limited by the Russians. Reorganizations of the Corps occurred in 1915 and 1916 since the Russians were un-

sure of how to handle the "Polish question".

With the outbreak of the Russian Revolution, the consolidation of the Polish units was possible since the central government in Petersburg could not risk losing the support of its Polish officers. By July 17, 1917, the task of the organization of Polish units was completed. This 25,000 man army was called the I Polish Corps and a Polish officer of the regular Russian army, General Józef Dowbór-Muśnicki, was appointed commander. During August 1917 the Corps was assigned to occupy towns in White Russia with its headquarters in Minsk-Litewski. Later this was moved to Bobrujsk. Also at this time a field post was assigned to the Corps, FPO #180. But with the collapse of the Russian government the Corps' function created a problem. A foreign territory was occupied and administered by an army belonging to no sovereign autonomously. This created a curious and perhaps unique legal nation!

On March 27, 1918, General Dowbór-Muśnicki ordered a fieldpost be established to replace the old Russian FPO #1880. This new administration was called the Fieldpost of the I Polish Corps and it began service on April 1, 1918.

The Corps was surrounded by the German tenth army which eventually called for its demobilization. This began on May 28 and was completed on July 8, 1918. The Corps was transported without its arms back to Poland by the Germans.

During the period from April 1 to June 29, 1918, an active and efficient fieldpost was in operation. Two distinct issues of stamps and one of stationery were overprinted. This post served the mi-

litary units and the civilian population as well. The story of the I Polish Corps and its stamps is the subject of the first in a series of Handbooks to be published by the Polonus Philatelic Society. The first article is by the renowned Polish philatelist Tadeusz Gryzewski and the second on the forgeries of the I Corps stamps is by Dr. Stanley Kronenberg. The Handbook is edited by James Mazepa. The format is 8½x11 and printed on high gloss paper with many illustrations. The price is \$5.50 post paid and is available from John Bor, 1810 North Richmond, Chicago, IL. 60647.

The publication of future Handbooks depends on how the membership supports this undertaking. Order promptly, please!

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In Memoriam

DR. PAUL KELLER
Rosebank Cape, So. Africa

BELORUSSIAN-POLISH RELATIONS 1918-23

By WILLIAM LESH

The first possible encounter between organized Polish and Belorussian (sometimes called White Russian) nationals was after the Belorussian Provisional Government was established on February 21, 1918 (old style). Immediately the new government set up methods to maintain order in Miensk (Minsk). The city had been totally cut off from its neighbors and was subject to raids by the Polish General Dowbór-Muśnicki. On February 23 the need for protection was met, a former Imperial Army captain organized a police force and Colonel Radkevich formed the First Belorussian Regiment of Volunteers to halt any further harassment by Muśnicki. To be realistic the Volunteers may never have seen service at all—since the Germans entered Miensk on February 25.

The first real encounter came at Horodnia (Grodno) in 1919. A

former member of the Belorussian National Republic (the BNR proclaimed its independence on March 25, 1918), J. Varonka, arrived in Horodnia sometime in January, 1919 and went about setting up his own government, at least among the Belorussians who made up 65% of the population (Czarist census of 1897). I believe Varonka's presence helped put the Belorussian language on the Horodnia provisional of March 1919, although he had nothing to do with initiating the issue or the formal cancellor in use. Prior to the Polish attack on Horodnia, Varonka sent a two man peace mission to Warsaw. It failed. When the Polish Army moved to occupy Horodnia they were met by the Lithuanian Army and Varonka's Belorussian infantry regiment and cavalry brigade defending the city.



Postcard with marking of the Quartermaster Front Command in Lithuania-Belorussia. The cancellation below reads: "Front Fieldpost No. 87" dated November, 1919.

They were met by nationalistic Belorussians but there were also Belorussians in the Polish camp as well. There is mention of two Lithuanian-Belorussian infantry divisions that took part in the occupation of their homelands (c.f. Rach Vol. IV). I have a cover bearing a cachet of one of these divisions from May, 1920. Regrettably it is a good example of how a rubber stamp can wear down to illegibility. These two Lit-Bel Divisions later formed part of General Lucian Zeligowski's "freebooters" that occupied the Vilna (Wilno) area of Belorussia.

Another connection between the Poles and Belorussians was the Second BNR of Anton Luckevič. Luckevič had returned from his exile in Warsaw to head a Belorussian government under Polish suzerainty. Pilsudski maintained military order in Belorussia but Luckevič would not let the Belorussian people be subject to Polish benevolence as they had been with the Russians. Luckevič turned to the only Belorussian military organization available, that of Stanislaw Bulak-Balachovič. Balachovič was a remnant of Yudenich's North-West Army and was at that time helping to maintain the Latvian frontier against the Soviets. Luckevič sent a special mission to Latvia to negotiate the transfer of Balachovič's men to Belorussia; these negotiations failed but a set of stamps was produced. These stamps are the common Scott mentioned "White Russia" issue, the printing was one million with half being perforated and the rest left imperforate. To the Polish collector these stamps represent Polish good will (allowing the BNR to return to self-government) and a people trying to help themselves. This

was also the period the Poles established thirteen post offices (excluding Vilnia) in Belorussia. Mail was effectively being conveyed for the first time since the demise of the 10th Army Post in December, 1918.

Returning to Balachovič, he arrived in Poland in the summer (?) of 1920 and remained in nominal Polish service until October, 1920, when, stationed near Lubartow he struck out for Brest and eventually attacked Mozyr. Balachovič, driven from Mozyr by the Soviets, swung north to join another Belorussian government, the Sluck Rada.

The last piece of Belorussian participation with the Poles emanated from Lithuania. Another remnant of the BNR, Vatslau Lastouski, was in Kaunas and had formed a government-in-exile. Few even knew of Lastouski's existence until Central Lithuanian authorities deported 20 Belorussian activists to Kaunas. From 1921-23 Lastouski rejected all Polish claims to any part of Belorussia. Lastouski did not stop at diplomatic harassment but also organized terrorist attacks on Polish outposts and the Central Lithuanian neutral zone. I don't know of any postal material reflecting any of Lastouski's activities but some material from the Polish defenders in the way of field post may exist.

The majority of this material was gleaned from:

Belorussia: The Making of a Nation by Nicholas P. Vakar (Harvard, 1956).

Portions of the last paragraph came from the **Lithuanian Philatelic Society of New York Journal** No. 66 page 6975, No. 72 page 7116 part of an article "Last Act of Józef Pilsudski Drama" by Antanas Ragauskas, and **Politics in Independent Poland 1921-1939** by Antony Polonsky.

MINUTES OF POLONUS PHILATELIC SOCIETY MEETING
April 22, 1977 — at the Polish Veterans Home, 6005 W. Irving Pk.

The meeting was called to order by the President, Mr. Szebel, at 8:30 p.m. with 16 members and one guest in attendance. A slight error in the minutes was corrected to read "Mr. Szebel appointed a nominating committee" rather than "Mrs. Szebel appointed..." Our apologies to Mrs. Szebel for implicating her in such a nefarious act. Mr. Szebel did indicate that Mrs. Szebel does an outstanding job of nominating him for various tasks at home, M/S/C Messrs. Poniecki, Kupiec: to accept the minutes with the correction. The treasurer reported a working balance of \$1,721.42 after all the credits and debits were entered. M/S/C Messrs. Strzelecki, Bor: to accept the treasurer's report. The secretary reported on the proposed applications for membership as listed in the Bulletin. M/S/C Messrs. Bor, Styczynski: to accept into membership. Mr. Mazepa then read the list of new applicants for membership: Henry Benski, Arlington, Va.; Zbigniew Piatek, Baltimore, Md.; Matthew Mickiewicz, San Pedro, Cal.; Zbigniew Chojczak, Seaside, Cal.; Fred Scinto, Kitchener, Ont., Canada; Joseph Maciora, Pittsfield, Mass.; Roger Szymanski, Milwaukee, Wis.; George Serchak, Syosset, New York; Larry Kierstenly, Belmont, Cal.

Old Business: Audit Committee: Mr. Strzelecki. A thorough and lengthy report was offered to the members which included several suggestions made for the consideration of the Board of Directors. The final conclusion was that the treasurer has done an outstanding job despite many difficulties. The books are in order and balanced, although new procedures are indicated. M/S/C Messrs. Kupiec, Wolosewick: to accept the report of the audit committee. Mr. Bartczak inquired if the GPS has paid for the frames they borrowed. Mr. Rybarski indicated they had paid.

New Business: A letter was received from representatives of the Milwaukee area thanking us for the nice job at POLPEX. M/S/C Messrs. Wolosewick, Styczynski: to adjourn.

Philatelic Presentation: Mr. Szebel then introduced himself as the speaker for the evening. His most excellent talk was on the Polish Fieldposts from 1914 to about the present. Fred gave a very nice presentation of the history of the times since this is so necessary to understand the various Fieldposts in Russia, Austria, France, England, etc. Not only did he tell us about the various posts, but he showed examples of many rare fieldpost cachets on cards and letters. He traced the development of the Polish Legion in the Austrian Army showing all the different transformations that occurred. Then the post of the Polish I Corps in Russia, followed by the formation of the post of the army of Independent Poland. He traced various postmarks and cachets of these units to the World War. He then passed around some rare material for the Scout post in Warsaw followed by military mail of the post-war era. Fred promised to go into even more detail on various aspects of the fieldpost in future meetings. The evening was concluded with much Easter food and drink.

Respectfully submitted,
James Mazepa, ACSW, Secretary

POLISH PRISONERS OF WAR STAMPS

By MICHAEL LUBINSKI

(Continued from March "Polonus Bulletin")

The printing of the stamps and postal stationery presented enormous difficulty due to the constant lack of paper for stamps and of dyes for the ink. Very often this shortage was even desperate. Because of this, a large variety of papers and colors and shades are to be found in some issues. Some stamps were printed on the borders of German newspapers and others were even printed on cigarette paper.

The designs in all four camps covered a very wide field. Kings, national heroes also known abroad, such as Pulaski, Kosciuszko, national events such as the Proclamation of the Constitution, Patriots such as Paderewski, Coats-of-Arms of the principal cities of Poland, Y.M.C.A., Red Cross, Sports, Allegories, well-known landmarks, Numerals, were all used in the designs.

Many of the designs show remarkable artistic talent on the part of the designers and the high skill of some of those who carved out the designs on wood.

All the stamps were printed from dies or blocks of wood, except the regular issue of Woldenberg Camp of the 5 gr. Numerals, which was printed in blocks of four. The printing of stamps varied a great deal, from well below 100 in the case of some commemorative sheets, to well over 100,000 of the regular 5 gr. stamp.

Theoretically, the designs approved by the Postal Commission had also to be approved by the German camp supervisor, before the actual printing could start, but the proper sequence

was not always adhered to. In the Gross-Born camp the souvenir sheet showing General Sikorski, who was killed in a plane accident flying from the Near East to Great Britain to lead the Polish divisions stationed there, was first printed and then submitted to the Germans for approval. Approval was refused and the Germans destroyed the die. However, over 700 copies had already been sold, but only one used copy is known to exist. Another General Sikorski stamp was issued in the Woldenberg camp with permission of the German authorities. The Gross-Born camp issue is known to have been forged, as well as the Woldenberg issue.

It is of interest to know that at Gross-Born the "Lagermark" currency issued by the Germans for the use in the camp was replaced by a "Piast" currency issued by the Camp Bank with 100 percent coverage in... American cigarettes, two cigarettes to one Piast! The Woldenberg Camp also replaced the "Lagermark" currency with new currency, also with coverage in cigarettes.

The majority of the plates used in the Neubrandenburg, Gross-Born and Woldenberg camps were defaced in the presence of the Postal Commission by means of a saw in the middle of the design. Only a few last issues before the sudden liquidation of the camps could not be destroyed or defaced. There is no evidence of any kind regarding the dies used at Murnau camp. This, the smallest of the four camps, was administered by one man; he was the post office!

Later on, appearances of some Murnau stamps seemed doubtful and these were carefully checked and examined by experts. They seemed to be from original dies, but on a different paper to that used originally, and also with a different ink, which is a sure indication that someone is still in possession of the dies and is using them.

In the spring of 1944, the inmates of Neubrandenburg (IIE) were transferred to Gross-Born (IID). Because both camps had a postal service, the two Administrations were merged. The remaining stamps of the Neubrandenburg camp, bearing the designation IIE, were overprinted "OBOZ IID".

The Woldenberg Camp issued an Official Correspondence stamp. Both the Woldenberg and Gross-Born camps issued postage due stamps for use in the camp.

Following the continuous retreat of the Germans in the East and the resulting advance of the Russians, the Gross-Born and Woldenberg camps were evacuated in a more or less organized manner. The evacuation started on January 25, 1945. The camp inmates were forced to march about 300 miles. The Postal Service carried all of its own equipment but did not try to be really active while on the march, but did manage to issue a few stamps showing the episodes on the march. The evacuation march of Camp Woldenberg ended up in Murnau camp, where the officers met the liberating armies. Only 300 reached their destination. The liberation was commemorated with an overprint in Polish on a stamp reading "POLSKI OSRODEK WOJSKOWY MURNAU" (Polish Army Center Murnau).

The evacuation march of Camp Gross-Born ended up in Sandbostel, after nearly 400 miles. During the evacuation marches, everyone had to carry all his belongings himself. Therefore, during the long march in snow, rain and cold, most of the marchers disposed of all or part of their baggage, so it was obvious that a very large quantity of philatelic material must have been lost on the road.

The history of the POW camp post offices and their achievements is a most brilliant incident in the story of the Polish Army, 1939-1945.

GRUSZKA TAKES TOP AWARD

John Z. Gruszka of Woodstock, Ont. Canada won the top award in the foreign class of the Oxford Philatelic Society's annual show held April 9th with his five-panel collection of POW camps, concentration camps, and commemorative stamps of the Polish army.

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Our new By-Laws require that names of candidates for membership in our Society be posted in the "Bulletin". Should anyone have reason why any of the above should not be Polonus members, please notify the Secretary.

WANTED: Polish Fieldpost of 1914/21, 1939, 1944/46, & Postal History of Warsaw 1700-1864.

WILL DISPOSE: Polish Fieldpost, Postal History WW II, Concentration, POW Camps, etc. 'Groszy' Ovpts. on covers, Polish Maritime Mail and other.

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The Polonus Philatelic Society is non-political. Views expressed by authors of articles appearing herein do not necessarily express the views of the Polonus Philatelic Society.

— Annual Dues are \$5.00 —

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Friday, May 13th, 1977 —

Chester Schafer to speak on the Lublin Issues and will illustrate his talk with color slides. Nominations of officers for the coming term. Refreshments to be served.

Friday, May 27th, 1977 —

Meeting at COMPEX 77 at the Palmer House. New officers to be elected at this meeting.

TID BITS

President Alfred Szebel was invited to attend the exhibition and convention of the active "Polonica" specialty group of the Association of Polish Philatelists in Chodzież b. Poznan June 4-12.

Memorabilia like Polpex souvenir sheets, program catalogs, medals, etc. will be presented to the Postal Museum in Wrocław by our president during his coming June visit in Poland.

* * *

A speedy recovery to Dr. Miet Kamiński of Scarborough, Ont. Canada who was hospitalized last month.