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Historical Review of the Polish Postal Service *

by **W. DeRachmanow**

translated by **Stephen G. Rich**

(This section comprises part of the introduction to the Rachmanow and Polanski book on Poland published in Vienna in 1935. The material is not found in the Polanski book of 1922 except for a few isolated fragments. In making this translation nothing has been omitted and the utmost care has been taken to translate into terms that will be understood by the American reader, even at the expense of using American rather than Polish postal terms.)

The beginnings of Polish Postal Service reach back into the early Middle Ages. At first we are dealing however, with the transmission of correspondence through officers pre-

viously existing and commandeered for this service, which served the Royal Court and the state administrations. Therefore in this connection we may not speak of a post in the modern sense of the word. Such primitive arrangements, which constitute the real start of postal services are met with, first in the reign of King Boleslav Chrobry (992 to 1025). This king is reported, as it is worded, to "have turned over postal services or rather the forwarding of messages by corvees, to the cities." 1)

Later it was the royal house of the Piastos that extended these arrangements under the designation of

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Polish Post Cart and Post House of the 1815 Period (Plate A of the Polanski 1922 book and the Rachmanow-Polanski 1935 book)

"Angaria" and also added a definite rate for carriage across the level portions of the country.

Without special authorization nobody was allowed to hire out horses and wagons. If anyone was authorized to do so, he had to make a specified charge for the horses and for the wagon. Relations with other countries, and above all the carriage of letters to other countries particularly concerned merchants who very often traded abroad. For the more important official communications special couriers were frequently employed.

A postal service in our sense was first set up under King Sigismund August (1548 to 1572). At the start, however, it was only for the private communications of the sovereign. Beginning in the year 1558, the King assigned to Prosper Provana, who was then of standing and influence at his court, an Italian by birth, the privilege of setting up and conducting a Postal Service which was to maintain exchange of letters between Venice and Cracow. Along the entire route stations for change of horses were set up.

Four years later, in 1562, Christopher Taxis, a member of that famous family of Taxis which were the true founders of Postal Service in Europe, took over this postal route. By special decree Christopher Taxis was obliged to transmit Royal letters without cost or charge to Venice, Rome, Naples, and other states. (2)

Mr. Taxis also had the right to accept private letters and the charge for their carriage by his postal service. The rate was 6 groszy for letters up to 1 loth in weight. (3) A letter from Cracow to Venice required about ten days in transit. Mr. Taxis received 1500 thalers per year for setting up and managing the postal service. When he nevertheless was not able to maintain service as agreed, the post office was transferred, first to

one Peter Maffon and later to the Montelupi Family.

After the death of Sigismund August there was a halt in the development of the post. In the year 1583 King Stefan Batory set up postal service and assigned a monopoly to Sebastian Montelupi in the following words:

"We Stefan, by the grace of God, etc.

"Since We recognize the usefulness of the Postal Service which Our most renowned precursor Sigismund August has introduced, we assign to the Florentine Nobleman Sebastian Montelupi and to his nephew Valerius, whose fitness for this work has already been shown, this service. We assign to them all postal routes, which they shall maintain at their own expense under the condition that on the route from Cracow to Venice they shall maintain so many relays for change of horses that the carriers shall be able to journey from Cracow to Venice and from Venice back to Cracow in 15 days for the round trip. We also decree that the service shall be so set up that it shall run twice in each month, that is, 24 times per year, from Cracow to Venice and from Venice to Cracow. The postal officials who shall be employed on Our service are required to wear Our badges of rank and Our arms on their clothing.

"If We journey from Cracow to another city, the aforementioned Sebastian Montelupi and his nephew are obligated to cause letters and everything which arrives in the mail to be delivered at Warsaw at their own expense and by the quickest route.

"We assign the directorship of Postal Service to this Sebastian Montelupi and his nephew Valerius for five years beginning February 15, 1583, with a salary of 1000 Polish Gulden which shall be paid to them quarterly out of Our treasury in Cracow.

"With this, Our Royal warrant, we direct all Our faithful servants to recognize the aforementioned Valerius as the privileged heads of the Postal Service and to cooperate with him in all matters affecting the service. To the Highly Laudable Jan Dulski, Castellan at Chelm, Royal Treasurer, and to the Highly Laudable Hiacynth Młodziejewski, Our Court Treasurer, we issue instructions to pay the previously named sum of 1000 Polish gulden to the Director of the Postal

(1) The corvee was forced unpaid labor furnished by serfs.—Translator.

(2) The reader will recall that at this period Venice was a powerful Republic; Rome was the Capital of the States of the Church and Naples the Capital of an important Kingdom.—Translator.

(3) According to information at hand the groszy was approximately 6c at this period and the loth, even as now, approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce.—Translator.

Service regularly and to take a receipt for it. We promise to punish those for failure to follow Our regulations.

"This contract has no influence on the agreement between the Queen, our most renowned spouse and the aforementioned Sebastian Montelupi for the handling of the Postal Service, since the latter promises to accept all duties which he heretofore has pledged himself to perform.

"As fee for private letters which are entrusted to the Postal Service, we establish four Polish groszy without regard to the distance of the place from which the letter has been sent.

"We exempt from the payment of this tax the holy orders of the Franciscans, Bernhardines, Dominican, Augustines, and Carmelites. We desire that their letters shall be accepted by the Postal Service without charge.

"Given in Niepolomice January 2, 1538; 7th year of Our Reign."

From the preceding document we learn that the rate of postage had been lowered from 6 to 4 groszy.

The head post office was located in Cracow in the house of Montelupis on The Circle. Here the separate post routes which we have noted as being mentioned, joined.

The successor of King Stefan Batory, Sigismund III, had the intention, as may be seen from the Constitution of 1620, of abolishing the use of privately paid couriers and establishing a postal service which would make it possible for everyone to send letters and other communications once a week without great expense. The execution of this project was, nevertheless, not carried through until under his successor Ladislaus IV. In the year 1647 he did away with Feudal (corvee) couriers and imposed a tax for the maintenance of postal service, the so-called, "Quarter Money."

The later rulers confirmed and extended the postal arrangements. The ordinance of 1647 and 1650, at the time of John Kasimir, set up postal service in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Postal service was to be so arranged "that it will be conducted according to the best system." An edict of the year 1659 calls upon the cities and villages to pay over to the postmasters the "quarter money of the couriers for past and immediately future periods" imposed in the year 1647.

A further ordinance of the year

1667 approves the establishment of a local post by the Provincial Council of Przemyśl between Przemyśl, Warsaw, Lublin, Lwow and Cracow. The same ordinance further establishes that other sections of the Kingdom are to be allowed to establish "postal service on various routes with the same right and privileges." In 1673, 1677 and 1678 there appeared further postal ordinances for Lithuania.

The ordinance of 1677 confirmed the earlier postal laws within the Kingdom of Poland from the years 1647 and 1659. Further regulations as to postal arrangements and postal routes in Lithuania are included in the edict of 1717.

Finally, a local post office was set up in the year 1626 in the County of Nowogrodek.

The most important steps towards establishing regulated postal communications were made in the reign of King Stanislaus Augustus. Postal stations were set up along the more important post roads; and in Warsaw, the capital, the court post office was established. In addition there appeared regulations for mail carriers as well as a fixed rate of postage for letters. Besides this we find also various proposals for establishment of prepaid rates and so forth. At the time of the Diet in the year 1764, Stanislaus Augustus mentioned in the "Articuli pactorum conventorum" the importance of a well organized postal service as a government establishment of general utility, which had to be developed without too great cost to the people. The reforms of postal service under Stanislaus Augustus brought mail service to a notable height of development, as mentioned in the accounts of the travels of foreigners who then visited Poland.

When the Grand Duchy of Warsaw was erected in 1807, the newly established General Postal Administration headed by Ignace Zajanczek received control of postal service. In 1809 there began regular postal service between Warsaw and Poznan by means of six coaches built after the French style. On the other routes, for example, between Breslau and Warsaw, between Danzig and Warsaw, 12 coaches were used. When Zajanczek died in 1810, Sartorius von Schwanenfeld was made head of the Postal Administration. His successor was Lipowski in 1815. When the Kingdom of Poland

was established, Councillor Suminski was installed as General Postal Director in charge of the service.

In the first years of existence of the Kingdom of Poland there were in the entire realm 178 postal offices (25 post offices and 153 postal stations) which employed over 939 horses for transport. In addition to these, horses were occasionally secured for business agents, couriers and extra mails. The postal offices were located in special buildings which were also constructed according to a particular style.

These were houses set level with the ground with a front of four to six windows and a high steep roof. Within the territory of the former Kingdom of Poland there can be seen even today on the earlier main roads here and there such old characteristic postal buildings.

With the lapse of time the independence of the Postal Administration of the Kingdom of Poland was continually more limited for political reasons. Thus the "General Post Administration" was changed to a mere "Postal Administration" in 1843. Later, in the year 1851, it was made the "Headquarters of the 13th Postal District" and at the same time subordinated to the Russian Post Office Department. Some years later this headquarters was reorganized and received the name "Headquarters of the Postal District of the Kingdom of Poland. Finally, on September 1, 1858, the postal organization came under the direction of the Regent and Council of the Kingdom of Poland, thus becoming independent again, and was named "Postal Administration of the Kingdom of Poland." In 1861 a postal ordinance appeared, which unified the various branches of postal activity and contained the various sorts of regulations for handling of letters, postal rates, etc.

The post office played a special part in the January Revolution. The central and local organizations used in the mails for transmitting the decrees and the correspondence of the National Committee with the rebels in Poland and Lithuania. Likewise, postal officials did many important services for the national cause. To this effect we learn from Russian records of inquiry on the rebellion of 1863.

On the basis of the ordinance of

December 19, 1866, the "Postal Administration of the Kingdom of Poland" was subordinated to Russian post office officialdom and was formed into the so-called "Western Postal District." This was dissolved in 1871 in its place four postal superintendents for the area of the Kingdom of Poland took office. These administrative changes abolished the last remnants of any autonomy which Poland now possessed in postal matters. They brought Poland like all other Russian postal services under the command of the Post Office Department in St. Petersburg.

POLONUS PHILATELIC SOCIETY

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The Society meets every second and fourth Friday of the month at 8:00 P. M. at the Polish Falcon Hall, 1061 North Ashland Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

SEEN AND HEARD

By Victor Bukinik

Here, around the Big Town we see more uniforms than Polish stamps and that is only as it should be. And while on the subject of uniforms we have just seen a stampless cover indicating that it was mailed from the Polish officers training school in France in 1940. Must be a scarce item.

Nothing unusual has occurred in the past two or three months. A lot of #213 and 214 were dispersed and quickly gobbled up by the local trade. An unusual lot of early Russian stamps used in Poland were sold by Harmer, Rooke at the end of June. Such items bring prices completely out of proportion to any catalogue value and frequently sell for more than they are really worth.