

THE ESTABLISHMENT AND ACTIVITY OF GYMNASTIC SOCIETY "SOKÓŁ" IN MIELEC IN THE YEARS 1893-1914

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Abstract:

The article describes the history of the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" acting in Mielec since its establishment until the outbreak of 1st World War. The aim of the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" was to popularize physical culture and to convince residents of Mielec to its health benefits. "Sokół" also tried to develop among the residents a sense of generosity, responsibility for his actions and sense of duty in relation to their homeland. During the war activities of Gymnastic Society "Sokół" in Mielec were frozen, due to the participation of members of the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" in hostilities. After the war they resumed work and continued it until 1939.

Polish Gymnastic Society "Sokół" in Mielec was established in 1893 thanks to the initiative taken by a group of Mielec citizens, who under the banner of struggle for freedom began to create an organization choosing a name which was popular in Galicia region. Its founders, among others, were: Antoni Dębicki, Roman Dębicki, Józef Droba, Antoni Fibich, F. Hirst, Józef Hodbodt, Mieczysław Korycki, Feliks Leyko, Bronisław Leszczyński, Stanisław Nowaczyński, Andrzej Pawlikowski, Tomasz Ryniewicz and others. TG "Sokół" was subjected to the "Sokół" Management Board in Lviv and from this location, they were receiving instructions on the activities and functioning of the Association. The first president of the "Sokół" was Mielec's lawyer Dr. S. Nowaczyński¹.



Figure 1. First President of "Sokół" Mielec - Dr. S. Nowaczyński, source: collections of the Regional Museum in Mielec.

¹ Mielczanin – daily magazine of academic groups in Lviv - Association of Academic Youth, Lviv, 1933, p.20.

Gymnastic Society "Sokół" concentrated mostly rich people, as well as craftsmen and young high school students. Its aim was to disseminate physical culture in the society of Mielec and to convince residents of Mielec to its health benefits. "Sokół" also tried to develop among the residents a sense of generosity, responsibility for his actions and sense of duty in relation to their homeland. The Union used the room shared by the Society for Voluntary Fire Brigade in Mielec. In this room, "Sokół" members used to meet with management, organize social gatherings, parties, as well as physical exercise in case of bad weather.

In 1895 was started a renovation of Mielec city. They started to build sidewalks, paved streets, lit main streets of the city and built a sewerage. They also continued a work related to the construction of a rail connection that began in 1892. The post office and telegraph office were also built. Members of the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" actively participated in all work related to the expansion of Mielec².

In 1903, the president of the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" A. Pawlikowski asked the City Council of Mielec for permission to purchase land for the construction of their own seat. The request was dealt with positive result and 1905, the City Council of Mielec awarded the Gymnastic Society a plot of land situated on the road leading to Złotnik.

Due to lack of funds, the construction of their seat has been postponed for an undetermined time³.

In 1906, the president of the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" was Dr. Apolinary Frank. On January 19, 1908, the position took Felix Brożonowicz. Due to his serious illness, Joseph Szponar took over the position of President on July 19th 4.



Figure 2. Members of "Sokół" Mielec with a banner in front of the Society of Imprest building in Mielec, source: collections of the Regional Museum in Mielec.

In 1908, the Directorate Society of Imprest gave to the disposal of Gymnastic Society "Sokół" a large hall in the building on Long Street, along with plot with an area of 4529 m², on which they built a pitch⁵. In the new room, "Sokoły" could already do a regular exercises⁶.

² Daily report of Committee of the 500th anniversary of Mielec, Mielec 1957, p.5.

³ The State Archive in Rzeszów. Records of the town of Mielec. No 43 of 24.X.1903.

⁴ Report on the operations department of Polish Gymnastic Society "Sokół" in Mielec for the year 1908, Mielec 1909, p.4.

⁵ M. Maciąga, Education and learning [in] History of Mielec and region, ed. Felix Kiryk, t. I, Mielec in 1984, p.557

⁶ The report on the operations department, p.6.

During this period, Gymnastic Society "Sokół" counted about 60 people. They were constantly trying to recruit new members of the Society by organizing a demonstration exercises, inviting residents to amateur theater performances or to join exercises. Classes were held in the open air, in case of bad weather inside the hall. The next of Mielec during this period participated in many ceremonies, inter alia, Sokół rally in Tarnow on 28-29 June 1908, in dedication banner of the "Sokół" in Dabrowa Tarnowska and Tarnobrzeg⁷.

In 1909, the next president of the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" was Michał Pajor. In the same year they established a football team called "Pogoń". This has contributed to an increase of Gymnastic Society members. The founders of the team were high school students in Mielec: Jan Gesing, Marian Weryński, Maksymilian Węgrzynek. Trainings and games were held in the afternoon on the square behind the gymnasium or on the Society Square on Długa Street⁸. Chairman of the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" - M. Pajor, organized trips to their befriended society seats and to Krakow. In the trips participated not only members of the TG "Sokół" but also residents of Mielec. During this period, the number of members has grown to more than 200 people. The company has gathered the considerable sum of money, which was earmarked to buy their own banner. Ceremonial consecration took place on 26 May, 1910⁹. On the banner with one hand on the white fabric was embroidered with colorful threads image of Our Lady of Czestochowa, at the bottom there were words "Faithful to Poland - Howdy." On the other side of the red cloth was embroidered with white and silver threads white eagle with a crown and the words "Gymnastic Society Sokół" in Mielec. At the top of the tree it was cast in silver a falcon snapping to fly. Banner was stored in a special bag in the apartment of management board and since 1914, after moving to their own seat - villa "Bagatelka" - in the Office of the Board.

Banner could only be used during public appearances, shows and celebrations as the closed meetings, only with an assists of one plutonium at least¹⁰.



Figure 3. Theatre performance entitled "Kosciuszko under Raclawice", 1910. Source: collections of the Regional Museum in Mielec.

⁷ *Tamże*, p.6.

⁸ J.Witek, *Encyclopedia T.1 town of Mielec*, Mielec, 2004

⁹ Interview with Kazimierz Leyko carried out on 28.03.1987

¹⁰ Many notes and memorabilia associated with "Sokół" activity were destroyed during the war and in the postwar period, among other banner, which was probably burned down in 1947. On his pole they were placed silver "nails" with dates and celebrations, and the names of donors – "Sokół" Mielec members.

On 15 July, 1910, members of "Sokół" Mielec took part in the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the victory in Grunwald. The group of about 100 people went to Krakow. During the trip they were singing specially written song for the occasion¹¹. The rally was also attended by female platoon created in May, 1910. Everyone actively participated in demonstrations gym and a large parade Polish "Sokół" teams¹².

In 1911 they began to introduce also a military trainings. As a result, the "Sokół" Field Teams were created and stocked with 50 guns, 49 of which were Werndl and Manlihera system¹³. There was also created a branch of Samaritan Polish Red Cross. It counted 106 people, mostly women¹⁴. They held trainings in first aid and help for the elderly. Military exercises were for "Sokół" additional obligation. There took place only on Sundays during the summer, in the forests near "Smoczka" or "Biesiadka" under the command of M. Pajor reserve officer or chief L. Weryński. The Board of "Sokół" Mielec arranged for its members four-week military training course, which took place in the forest near "Cyranka", and the trainer was Józef Piłsudski¹⁵.

In 1912, as a president of the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" was elected August Jaderny, photographer and chronicler, who was photographing the most important events in the history of Mielec. Thanks to him, amateur theater in Mielec began to work intensively. A. Jaderny was a director, decorator, writer and actor in one person, he also organized and directed many performances e.g.: „Krakowiacy i Górale” - W. Bogusławski, „Grube ryby” - M. Bałucki, „Warszawianka” and „Noc listopadowa” - S. Wyspiański, „Kościuszko pod Raławicami” - W. Anczyc. He instilled in the environment of Mielec’s residents the tradition of wearing Cracovian costumes during festivals and celebrations. At the same time at the initiative of Franciszek Siorca - a gym teacher in high school in Mielec, it was established a team of scouts under the name of Tadeusz Kosciuszko. They organized physical exercises, bivouac and camps. Scouts did not have special uniforms, but they wore school uniforms¹⁶.



Figure 4. Opening of "Sokolnia" in Mielec, villa "Bagatelka", 1914. Source: collections of the Regional Museum in Mielec.

The main tasks of the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" in Mielec in the years 1913-1914 was conducting military exercises in the forests near Smoczka. As they suspected a soon outbreak

¹¹ E. Kubalski, *Na sokolą nutę*, Katowice 1937, p.21.

¹² Interview with Kazimierz Leyko carried out on 28.03.1987.

¹³ S. Woźniak - Chronicle of Rifle Association, p.10

¹⁴ *Tamże*, p.10.

¹⁵ J. Terlaga, Diaries of 1st Congress of Rifle Association ",1934,p.48.

¹⁶ Interview with Kazimierz Leyko carried out on 28.03.1987.

of war, the care was taken at the same to the good physical preparation of members of the Society. Popularity of Gymnastic Association and its activities was increasing. In 1914, Gymnastic Society "Sokół" had acquired their own house - a villa "Bagatelka" on Long Street.

This was possible thanks to the increased influx of new members and to increase funding. Opening of the new "Sokolnia", which became the seat of the Board was a great celebration in the history of the city of Mielec. For this occasion, "Sokół" teams came from Tarnow, Dabrowa Tarnowska, Tarnobrzeg. The celebration march started at town square, where they created an eagle formation and went to a new seat of "Sokół", where was organized a show of physical exercises and a football match.



Figure 5. Town square in Mielec. Welcoming the group Sokol Tarnow for the opening of "Bagatelka" in 1914. Source: collections of the Regional Museum in Mielec.

On July 31, 1914, at 18:00, was announced a great mobilization. At the request of the commander Pilsudski to join the ranks of forming legions Krakow answered many Mielec's citizens – "Sokół" members. They left in two groups with correct inventory, with a total number of 108 persons. Mielec's residents came to Krakow on 3-4 August, joining to on-site team Gunners Team of Mielec. With a members of Gymnastic Society "Sokół" in Mielec they started to create a recruiting Commission. It started working in the Polish Kingdom on 8 August, 1914 and soon recruited 26 volunteers for legions¹⁷.

During the war activities of Gymnastic Society of "Sokół" was frozen. President A. Jaderny was fighting on the front and Antoni Rink, an inspector of junior high school devoted very little time for the Gymnastic Society "Sokół" because of the war¹⁸.

Gymnastic Society "Sokół" had been working in Mielec since 1893 to 1939. The organization was arousing among the residents a sense of patriotism and attachment to tradition, the history of the Polish nation and the region. Many young people joined the Society, who participated in various forms of entertainment, sports, as well as weapons exercises. "Sokół" Mielec members were willing to participate actively in all sorts of chats, meetings and initiatives such as work on the modernization of the town of Mielec, creation of a football team "Pogoń", creation of amateur theater, organizing all kinds of trips to the seat of "Sokół" and first medical aid trainings.

¹⁷ F.Sokół. The history of the independence movement in the town of Mielec and Chronicle of Rifle Association, Mielec, 1934, p.13.

¹⁸ S. Woźniak, Chronicle of Rifle Association, p.11.