

History

Nearly six hundred years ago, in the wilderness areas along the river Gwda, also known as Chuda, a settlement was located whose industrial character related to woodworking was reflected in its name - Piła

In the first half of the 15th century, the settlement was granted town rights. This happened in the years 1437-1451 by the will of the tenant of Ujs, governor of Kalisz and participant in the Battle of Grunwald - Marcin from Slawsko. This took place during the reigns of Władysław Warneńczyk and Kazimierz Jagiellończyk. One of these two kings granted the location privilege to Piła. Most of the surnames and nicknames of Piła's townspeople, known from the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries, had a Polish accent.

The town's location under Magdeburg Law was confirmed on 4 March 1513 by King Sigismund I the Old.

The town developed slowly but systematically. At the end of the 16th century it had: 153 dwelling houses, 5 mills, 1 sawmill and 1 fulling house for fulling cloth. The centre was St. Mary's Street, also called Church Street, located along the transit road to Ujście (today's Piasts Avenue). This is where the original Old Town was located. As early as 1581, the existence, on the left bank of the Gwda River, of a suburb called "Za mostem" (Zamość) was noted. Twenty years later, two further suburbs were also mentioned: Borkowo (currently the area of 11 Listopada, do Witaszka and Plac Staszica streets) and Góra (currently Osiedle Górne).

Over time, alongside the native Polish population, Germans and Jews (from the 16th century onwards) settled in Piła. They all lived in harmony, respecting each other's distinctiveness.

In 1609, the town along with the Ujsko-Pilskim starosty was given to his wife, Queen Constance, by the will of King Sigismund III Vasa.

She founded a new church dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist (from the mid-18th century, dedicated to St John the Baptist and St John the Evangelist), which for the next centuries was a symbol of royal generosity to the small town of Piła.

The town owed a lot to the queen, especially after the tragic fire that consumed almost all the buildings in 1626. Constance provided comprehensive assistance to the desperate fire victims.

At her behest, the royal secretary Samuel Targowski of the Rogala coat of arms mapped out a new urban shape for the city. From then on, its centre was the New Square (now the western part of Zwycięstwa Square), and its periphery was the so-called Jewish Market (until recently Waryński Square, now part of Piast Avenue in the area of ul: Ossolińskich and Poczтова Streets).

At the beginning of the second half of the 18th century, Piła was home to a hussar ensemble of the mark of Duke Adam Czartoryski, whose lieutenant was the Poznań esquire Wojciech of Wierzbna Rydzyński coat of arms. Upon hearing that a confederation had been established in Bar (1768), he joined it and, at the head of his troop, set off from Piła to Kcynia, thus exciting the whole of Wielkopolska. To commemorate his stay, the Hussars left in the Piła church armour with wings, helmets and a cannon, which for more than a hundred years aroused curiosity and reverie among the inhabitants and guests of the town on the Gwda River. Soon after the first partition of Poland, the rule of the Poles in Piła came to an end. This fact fundamentally shattered the consensual coexistence of different nationalities. The forcible support of new settlers from the West by Frederick II, King of Prussia, with the simultaneous displacement of the economically weaker, especially the poorer Jews, caused anxiety among the inhabitants.

Between 1807 and 1815, Piła was part of the Duchy of Warsaw, which was a substitute for Polish statehood.

With the fall of the Napoleonic star, the Pilsen reality changed once again. The city found itself within the borders of the Grand Duchy of Poznan (then part of Prussia), although the neighbouring settlement of Koszyce to the northwest was already part of West Prussia. Piła received new street surfaces, a bridge (where the B. Chrobry bridge is now), a post office and regular postal connections to Berlin and Królewccem. In 1821, nearly 3,000 inhabitants lived in 336 houses. Harmonious development was disrupted by another great fire, which broke out on 7 July 1834, destroying as many as 200 houses. However, Piła quickly recovered from this cataclysm as well, and the coming "age of steam" brought new opportunities that were exploited. The town expanded quite rapidly, with the establishment of industrial plants - brickyards, sawmills and a starch factory. A major event was the opening of the so-called 'Eastern Railway' (Ostbahn), connecting Berlin with Königsberg.

Piła found itself on this route on 27 July 1851. Within 30 years, seven lines had been built and the town became one of the important railway junctions. To protect it, more and more military units were sent here, for which a barracks building was constructed in the area of today's Bydgoska and Podchorążych Streets. The 149th Infantry Regiment, which was stationed here until it was disbanded in 1919, and an airship unit became associated with the city.

In 1895, the magnificent Imperial Post Office was completed and a network of telephone connections followed.

At that time, Poles still constituted a significant group among the city's inhabitants. Many of them were Germanized, but also many others, together with Dr. Antoni Drygas, in 1874 co-founded the Polish Industrial Society. From 1894, the Catholic Workers' Association was also active. It cultivated among its members Polish song, Polish word and the readership of Polish books. Under the wings of Catholicism, these people tried to defend their identity, which the then imperial administration tried to deprive them of. On August 3, 1917, Fr. Zygmunt Dykiert founded the Halka Singing Society.

In November 1918, the Polish People's Council was also established here, headed by the tireless Fr. Zygmunt Dykiert and Józef Budnowski, Aleksander Bannach and Teofil Drozdowski.

The approaching end of World War I raised hope for the revival of the homeland and the return of the city to the Motherland. Unfortunately, despite the strenuous efforts of the Piła patriots, the German efforts turned out to be more effective. Piła remained within the borders of the Reich. The border, established in March 1920, ran just a few kilometres from the town's outskirts. In this situation, many Poles left Piła for their independent homeland. On the other hand, German officials and settlers began to arrive in large numbers to the city. Due to the new geopolitical system, Piła was appointed the seat of the provincial authorities called "Border March of Poznań - West Prussia". Following this decision, the construction of new official buildings began. In the years 1925-1928, on the site of the former Horse Market Square, a massive government building was erected (today it houses the Police School), which was to be a symbol of German work, faithfulness and strength in the so-called Borderland.

In the vicinity, the edifice of the Reichsdankhaus (Reichsdankhaus) was erected. It housed a theatre room with a thousand seats in the audience (after the reconstruction during the war, it

served as the Pilski Cultural Centre, now it is the Regional Cultural Centre - Factory of Emotions). To the north-east, there was a wing that housed the national museum and the library.

On the opposite side of the square, a building was built for the needs of the Evangelical Consistory, the financial office and the customs office (today it houses the Piła City Hall and the headquarters of Exalo Drilling S.A.). Between the road to Jastrowie and the Gwda River, in the years 1927-1929, a building of the local government was erected (now the seat of, among others, the County Office).

The "construction fever" spread to the entire city. The number of inhabitants increased, as well as the rank of the city. Therefore, efforts were made to ensure that new facilities, like the government ones, were at the highest level. Among the construction projects of that time, the Catholic Church of St. Anthony (1929-1930), designed by Hans Herkommer from Stuttgart.

There were many small factories in the city, based mainly on local raw materials (brickyards, sawmills, carpentry shops, foundries, railway workshops, etc.). Numerous shops, restaurants, 6 cafes and 9 hotels were built. The largest plant was the railway workshop, which employed about 2,000 people.

The local Poles, despite many difficulties, concentrated in the Piła branch of the 5th District of the Union of Poles in Germany and the "Halka" choir, performed mainly in the church of st. st. Janów (later called St. John the Baptist and St. John the Evangelist. From 1933, after A. Hitler came to power, showing his national identity was associated with a high risk. Only the bravest met in a small club in the old stable at ul. Stara Dworcowa (today ul. 14 Lutego 45). Today, its facade is decorated with a commemorative plaque, unveiled in 1960.

In the years 1922-1930 in Piła, the Vice-Consulate of the Republic of Poland was active, and from 1930 to 1939, the Consulate of the Republic of Poland, covering the vast area of the so-called Borderlands (Złotów land), where many Polish seasonal workers lived and also stayed periodically. With the outbreak of World War II, Consul Dr. Kazimierz Drobniak was interned and expelled from Germany. The most active Poles in Piła were also arrested and placed in concentration camps. They were among them, among others murdered: Franciszek Brzeziński, Wiktor Herc, Feliks Kowalkowski and Stefan Wojciechowski.

Until 1945, apart from the Allied air raids in May and December 1944, Piła was spared the direct atrocities of the war. It was only during the winter offensive of the Red Army in January and February 1945 that it shared the tragic fate of thousands of cities. As a result of long fighting and their subsequent consequences, the city was seriously damaged. The tragic fate affected thousands of its current inhabitants, who, as citizens of the defeated power, found themselves far from their hometown. On its ruins, new people, also tragically affected by the cruelty of war, laboriously began to build a new life.