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## World war from a local perspective. School chronicles from the border areas of the Province of Posen (Prowincja Poznańska) as a source of information

**Abstract:** The authors analyse the chronicles of local schools from the Province of Posen. These typically undervalued materials serve as a source of extensive information on daily and school life in times of war and reflect the mood and political sympathies of the local community.

Before 1914, the Gniezno region was located on the Prussian side of the border between two mutually-hostile superpowers, Germany and Russia. At that time it, comprised two *Kreis*<sup>1</sup> districts, Gniezno and Witkowo. At the turn of the century, the ethnic and religious structure of the local population began to change as a result of intensive activity of the Prussian Settlement Commission in Posen and West Prussia (*Preußische Ansiedlungskommission in den Provinzen Westpreußen und Posen*). In 1910, shortly before the outbreak of war, 34.14% of the Gniezno *Kreis* population and 14.6% of the Witkowo *Kreis* population declared that they belonged to the Evangelical Church, which was more or less equivalent to their membership of the German nation<sup>2</sup>.

The religious division of the inhabitants of the region was reflected in the organisation of the local schooling system. At the outbreak of the war, the area of both *Kreises* encompassed 59 Catholic schools, 67 Evangelical schools, two Jewish schools and seven 'simultaneous' schools, which could be attended by children of different religious beliefs. Each of them, pursuant to the decree of the Prussian minister, Adalbert Falk, of 15 October 1872, was obliged to manage a school chronicle which documented the most important events in the life of the school

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1 *Kreis* was the second-level unit of local administration in Prussia. The term *Kreis* is most often translated into English as "county" (trans.)

2 *Gemeindelexikon für die Regierungsbezirke Allenstein, Danzig, Marienwerder, Posen, Bromberg und Oppeln, Heft V, Regierungsbezirke Bromberg*. Berlin 1912, pp. 76–77.

and its neighbourhood<sup>3</sup>. Only 12 chronicles from the area of the Gniezno and Witkowo *Kreises* have been preserved until now. They cover, among others, the period from 1914 to 1918. The fonds of the Public Schools from the area of the City of Poznań and the Poznań Voivodship (*Szkoły powszechne z terenu miasta Poznania i województwa poznańskiego*), found under reference number 265 in the State Archive in Poznań, contains a chronicle of a Catholic post-Franciscan school in Gniezno (*Katholische Rectorsschule zu Gnesen*)<sup>4</sup>, covering the years 1854 to 1955. The name of the school is derived from a former Franciscan monastery building where the school was seated. The State Archive in Poznań, the Gniezno Branch, preserves the chronicles from Catholic schools in Pawłowo (*Katholische Schule zu Pawłowo*) dated 1899 to 1952, in Świątniki Wielkie (*Katholische Schule zu Gross Świątniki*) dated 1886 to 1934 and in Witkowo (*Katholische Schule in Witkowo*) dated 1875 to 1917. The *gmina*<sup>5</sup> office in Kiszkowo owns a chronicle of a Catholic school in Sławno (*Katholische Schule in Sławno*) dated 1887 to 1961. The repository of Secondary School no 1 in Gniezno contains a chronicle of St. John's Catholic school for Boys in Gniezno (*Katholische Knabenschule zu Gnesen*) dated 1903 to 1949. The secondary school in Mieleszyno owns a chronicle of an Evangelical school in Kowalewo (*Evangelische Schule zu Schoenbrunn*) dated 1890 to 1935, and a primary school in Modliszewko (*Katholische Schule in Modliszewko*) is the proud owner of a chronicle of a former Catholic school dated 1871 to 1951. Secondary School no 2 in Gniezno preserves a chronicle of an Evangelical school in Jankówko (*Evangelische Schule Morgenau*) dated 1888 to 1972. A private primary school in Gorzykowo owns a chronicle of an Evangelical school in Gorzykowo (*Evangelische Schule in Görzhof*) dated 1899 to 1922, while the chronicles of Catholic schools in Dziekanowice (*Katholische Schule in Dziekanowice*) dated 1896 to 1930 and Imielenko (*Katholische Schule Johannesgarten*) dated 1897 to 1926 are kept by private owners. The Gniezno Branch of the State Archive in Poznań, apart from the already mentioned originals, owns copies of all the listed chronicles.

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3 *Centralblatt für die gesammte Unterrichts Verwaltung in Preussen*, issue 10, 31 X 1872, p. 588.

4 German names of schools have been cited based on the school chronicles. The location names have been provided in the official form of the Great War period. Square brackets indicate the earlier and current location name. No square brackets were used if no changes have been made to the location name (trans.)

5 *Gmina* is the principal unit of administrative division of Poland as “community” or “municipality.”

Although school chronicles have rarely been regarded by researchers as valuable historical sources, the information they communicate deserves greater attention, especially from researchers studying the everyday life of local communities. The chronicles contain not only descriptions of events related to school life, but also to the history of the people from the immediate neighbourhood. The authors of the records do not refrain from personal judgements and opinions. The substantive importance of individual chronicles as historical sources varies, and depends on the intellectual level of the chronicle author. The range of subjects covered by schoolmasters who wrote the chronicles is wide but there are some traits that often re-occur. Usually the first pages provide retrospective information concerning the circumstances of the school's construction. The chronicles of Evangelical schools include also information about the settlement of German settlers. After the school district had been formed and the school building had been arranged, the records in the following years were prepared on a regular basis. The outlook and layout of the texts changes only in wartime. In some cases this can mean that the texts were written after some time<sup>6</sup>.

The outbreak of war awoke a sense of uncertainty and fear in the local population of the Gniezno region. People who were adults at that time usually had no earlier personal experiences of war. Their "little homeland", in many cases "Heimat", was located by the border of the country which was at war with Germany. The course of this war was difficult to foresee. The residents feared the possible entry of the Russians into the Poznan Province. The chronicle pages reflect nervousness in the community and the authors' uncertainty regarding their possible fate. The authors of the Gniezno school chronicles meticulously described the last days of peace and the first days of the war. Gniezno was located close to the Russian border. It had convenient communication connections with the border and was also the seat of a large garrison. For these reasons, it became an important centre of mobilisation. Information about groups of mobilised reservists, registration points, uniforms and arms occupies a prominent place on the chronicle pages. As the existing two large barrack facilities could not accommodate the arriving soldiers, it was necessary to rent private flats for them<sup>7</sup>. A lot of space is devoted to the descriptions of the community's

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6 Kronika szkoły w Dziekanowicach (in private collections, subsequently referred to as KSwD), pp. 24–26; Secondary School in Gniezno no. 2 (Gimnazjum nr 2 w Gnieźnie, subsequently referred to as GG2), Agency Records Centre (subsequently referred to as ARC), Kronika szkoły w Jankówku (subsequently referred to as KSwJ), pp. 81–82.

7 Secondary School in Gniezno no. 1 (Gimnazjum nr 1 w Gnieźnie, subsequently referred to as GG1), ARC, Kronika szkoły Podstawowej nr 1 w Gnieźnie (subsequently referred to as SP1), sheets 36–38v.

behaviour during the announcement of mobilisation, the means of supporting soldiers leaving for the front and the organisation of field hospitals. During the first days of the war, due to the growing numbers of wounded, 11 field hospitals were organised in Gniezno, also in schools, restaurants, cafes and in the premises of various associations<sup>8</sup>. During this period, the schoolmasters stress the problems with organisation of normal school activities, which resulted from the fact that the authorities used school buildings for military purposes. The authors indicate which rooms were used as rooms for the ill, for places where the wounds were dressed, for guardhouses or for doctors' rooms. During the first months of the war, due to the insufficient number of classrooms, lessons were held in the Franciscan church and in the room rented from the Jewish school. The situation began to improve in 1916<sup>9</sup>.

The atmosphere of uncertainty and the loss of trust in state authorities was reflected in the outflow from the market of gold which, in those uncertain times, was used for retention of profits. Local teachers expressed their due indignation at this and even organised exchanges of coins to banknotes among pupils in a local Reichsbank branch<sup>10</sup>.

There is a clear difference in tone between the chronicles of Evangelical schools and the chronicles penned by headmasters of Catholic schools. The author of a chronicle of the Evangelical school in Gorzykowo, Hugo Jerschkewitz, mentioned uncertainty in the first days of the war but was much more involved in describing the enthusiasm that the announcement of mobilisation evoked in the local settlers<sup>11</sup>. He observed that a profitable trade with the Poles was realized after the German army crossed the Russian border. He also described the purchase of large quantities of crops, poultry, cattle, horses and sugar for attractive prices. The atmosphere changed for the worse only at the end of August 1914, when it was learned that the Russians had entered East Prussia. The arrival of refugees from the areas occupied by the tsarist army led to widespread panic and initiated preparation for evacuation. The mood improved again on 29 August, when the first telegraph messages informed about Paul von Hindenburg's victory in the battle of the Masurian Lakes. Fear of the Russians revived at the end of October

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8 Ibid., sheet. 39v.

9 Ibid., sheets. 34–40; State Archive in Poznań (Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu subsequently referred to as APP), Szkoły Powszechnie z terenu miasta Poznania i województwa poznańskiego (subsequently referred to as SPzPiWP), 265, pp. 179–181.

10 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, p. 185.

11 Private Primary School in Gorzykowo (Niepubliczna Szkoła Podstawowa w Gorzykowie, subsequently referred to as NSPG), ARC, Kronika szkoły w Gorzykowie (subsequently referred to as KSwG), p. 38.

and at the beginning of November. Troops were located on the area of the Witkowo *powiat* to prevent the Russian army from entering the border area. This improved the sense of safety in the local Germans but did not fully eliminate their sense of insecurity. The mood swings finally stopped after General von Mackensen defeated the Russians in the battles of Kutno and Włocławek<sup>12</sup>. The pages of the chronicle from Jankówko clearly illustrate the syndrome of Germany as a besieged fortress. According to the headmaster, the whole world had turned against the Hohenzollern country and intended to destroy it. He also describes in detail the mood swings which lasted practically till the end of 1914<sup>13</sup>.

The headmaster of the Evangelical school in Kowalewo included relatively balanced opinions in his chronicle. He writes little about events from the great European theatre of war. He discusses the formation of the Kingdom of Poland by the emperors of Germany and Austria-Hungary and mentions the seizure of Bucharest by the German army. At the turn of 1916/1917, the tone of his chronicle was far from that struck by the official optimism. Instead of anticipated victories, he writes about the peace proposals of the central powers and states that people were generally waiting for peace<sup>14</sup>. The message of the chronicles of Catholic schools is different. The author of the chronicle of a school in Dziekanowice describes the war as “horrible”<sup>15</sup>. Descriptions in the chronicle of the school in Imielnik reflect the insecurity experienced by the community during the final days of peace. In the subsequent years of the war, the headmaster highlighted the fact that the war continued with “unflagging power” and that the number of men mobilised into the army was still growing<sup>16</sup>.

A teacher from Modliszewko, when mentioning the announcement of mobilisation and the outbreak of the war, adds that local peasants “hurried to fulfill their military duty”<sup>17</sup>. In the following years he does not mention the ongoing war and returns to the subject of grand politics only towards the end of the war. At that

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12 *Ibid.*, pp. 45–48.

13 GG2, ARC, KSwJ, pp. 73–80.

14 Secondary School in Mieleszyn (Gimnazjum w Mieleszynie subsequently referred to as GM), ARC, Kronika szkoły w Kowalewie (subsequently referred to as KSwK), pp. 61, 66–67.

15 KSwD, p. 24.

16 Kronika szkoły w Imielenku (in private collections, subsequently referred to as KSwI), pp. 76, 87.

17 Primary School in Modliszewko (Szkoła Podstawowa w Modliszewku subsequently referred to as SPM), ARC, Kronika szkoły w Modliszewku (subsequently referred to as KSwM), p. 89.

time, he writes about the outbreak of the revolution in Germany, the overthrowing of the government, the escape of Wilhelm II to the Netherlands, the establishment of Ebert's government and the formation of councils of soldiers and workers<sup>18</sup>.

Wacław Malicki, the author of the chronicle of the school in Sławno, notes that the local society was surprised by the outbreak of the war during harvest. He describes the mobilisation of the first reservists from the village and requisition of horses by the military authorities<sup>19</sup>. The author of the chronicle of the school in Świątniki Wielkie, Jan Michalczyk, indicates the date of mobilisation, August the second, and the number of 30 men from the *gmina* who were conscripted to the army<sup>20</sup>. Just like other authors, he describes the problems caused by ongoing mobilisation.

Chroniclers from Catholic schools note first of all the tragedy of the war and all the calamities it brought about. They go on to comment about the fulfillment of "military duty" by the enlisted men, mention German victories, especially on the western front, but their enthusiasm is incomparably lower than in the chronicles of Evangelical schools. The sense of seriousness is prevailing.

A large part of all chronicles was devoted to listing the names of people mobilised to the army, killed in the battle or wounded on the front<sup>21</sup>. Their authors focused the attention on arising economic problems caused by the shortage of labour after mobilisation. Sometimes prisoners of war were used in order to remedy the situation. The author of the chronicle of the school in Gorzykowo reported that towards the end of the war, in 1918, 14 Frenchmen and four Englishmen worked in his school district. In the chronicler's opinion "Englishmen were without any exception smaller and more delicate than the French"<sup>22</sup>.

The German authors expressed in the chronicles their concern about the stance of the Poles in the face of military conflict. They feared the Slavic solidarity be-

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18 Ibid., p. 98.

19 Municipality in Kiszkowo (Urząd Gminy w Kiszkwowie subsequently referred to as UGwK), ARC, Kronika szkoły w Sławnie (subsequently referred to as KSwS), pp. 163–164.

20 State Archive in Poznań Gniezno Branch (Archiwum Państwowe w Poznaniu Oddział w Gnieźnie subsequently referred to as APPOG), Szkoła w Świątnikach Wielkich (subsequently referred to as SwŚW), 1, p. 201; KSwI, p. 71, APPOG, Szkoła w Witkowie (subsequently referred to as SwW), 1, p. 51.

21 GG2, ARC, KSwJ, pp. 74, 76–77; KSwD, pp. 24–25; KSwI, pp. 70–71, 76–77; NSPG, ARC, KSwG, pp. 41, 60–66; SPM, ARC, KSwM, pp. 89–92; UGwK, ARC, KSwS, pp. 165–166, 169–171.

22 NSPG, ARC, KSwG, pp. 55–57.

tween the Russians and the Poles; information about mass meetings of the Poles in Mielżyno and Witkowo was received with concern; people gossiped about a suspected discovery of rifles in the houses of the two largest landowners in the Witkowo *powiat*<sup>23</sup>. Quite often the chroniclers complained about the reluctance of Polish society to participate in the collections of money for war purposes. They noted that Polish children refused to be involved in these activities<sup>24</sup>. They accused the Poles of having no love for the Emperor and their homeland, which they found not only in children but also among the elder generation<sup>25</sup>. The Polish landowners did not allow pupils to collect ears on their fields after harvest. They preferred to leave the fields for their poultry rather than to join in the action organised by a Prussian school<sup>26</sup>.

Records from the first months of the war describe broadly the spontaneous collections of food transferred to soldiers leaving for the front. Supplies of bread, butter, sausage, bacon, fruit and other food products waited at railway stations for the passing military transports<sup>27</sup>. Prolonged war led to steadily greater deficits of these goods. As soon as in 1915, it became necessary to register and rationally distribute agricultural produce. Local teachers were used for preparation of the registers<sup>28</sup>. Gradually, substitute goods began to appear, most notably the so-called wartime bread baked with flour mixed with potatoes or pumpkin. We also know by word of mouth that fruit pits were collected and added to crops intended for bread. The main reason for collecting the pits was to use them for production of oil<sup>29</sup>. Distribution of wheat flour was particularly restrictive: bun production basically ceased. Owing to the reduced production of pastry, the bakeries stopped working at night. Due to these limitations, on 15 March 1915, the authorities were forced to introduce food coupons in Gniezno for the purchase of flour, bread or biscuits<sup>30</sup>. Distribution of the food coupons was also very often delegated to teachers<sup>31</sup>.

The deficit of coal was a bothersome problem that had an impact not only on common citizens but also on many sectors of economy. This scarcity was partially

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23 Ibid., pp. 38, 40.

24 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, pp. 185, 189; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheet 44v; KSwI, p. 85.

25 APPOG, SwŚW, *ibid.*, p. 205.

26 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, p. 194.

27 GG2, ARC, KSwJ, p. 75; NSPG, ARC, KSwG, pp. 41, 48–49; KSwI, p. 74;

28 APPOG, SwŚW, 1, p. 206.

29 KSwI, pp. 74, 80–81.

30 GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 41–41v.

31 UGwK, ARC, KSwS, p. 170.

the result of the conscription of a large number of miners for military service, and partially from the scarcity of means of transport, which were at that time used by the army. In the Gniezno and Witkowo districts, where wood and peat were scarce, people started to use dry dung as fuel<sup>32</sup>. From 1916, winter holidays winter holidays were prolonged due to the shortage of coal. On many occasions, the number of heated classrooms was reduced and the lessons held in them were extended until the late afternoon hours<sup>33</sup>. This was possible in Gniezno after some rooms were connected to the electric power supply. In cities, coal was supplied only to hospitals and community buildings<sup>34</sup>. In 1917, the Witkowo local authorities confiscated all the fuel from a local coal storage for the benefit of a local mill. Classes were completely suspended at that time<sup>35</sup>. However, the winter of 1917/1918 was relatively mild and in consequence the shortage of coal became less bothersome.

From the beginning of the war, the growing deficit of crude oil became a problem and was already noticeable in autumn 1914. Better-organised villagers started to use spirit lamps to light rooms, others went to bed early<sup>36</sup>. The ban on the use of English introduced in 1915 was less annoying.

People tried to compensate for the deficit of some goods on the market with replacement materials and recyclables, which were typically collected by children and teenagers. In 1915, the pupils from the school in Gorzykowo collected scrap metal and old rubber, and a year later, those from Gniezno collected cherry and plum pits and nettles. Through 1916 and 1917, the range of collected materials was significantly extended to tinfoil, medical herbs, pops, spikes of rye, barley and oats left by harvesters, potatoes left after digging, leaves of strawberry and blackberry and coloured scrap metals. Some collections of raw materials were organised and monitored by schools. Money from the sales of raw materials was most often paid by headmasters to the Red Cross account<sup>37</sup>.

A deficit of available manpower caused by mobilisation was particularly problematic for agriculture. In order to address this situation, the Prussian school authorities agreed in 1915 to exempt children over 14 years old from compulsory education, regardless of the planned date of their graduation, to allow them to

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32 KSwI, p. 73.

33 APPOG, Szkoła Podstawowa w Pawłowie (subsequently referred to as SPwP), 1, pp. 36, 38; GM, ARC, KSwK, p. 67; SPM, ARC, KSwM, p. 93.

34 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, p. 157–158.

35 APPOG, SwW, *ibid.*, p. 71.

36 KSwI, p. 72–73.

37 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, p. 194; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 47–47v., 53v.; NSPG, ARC, KSwG, pp. 41, 49–50.

work in the fields. From 1917, the Royal Prussian District of Bydgoszcz (*Königliche Preussische Regierung zu Bromberg*) authorities ordered volunteer pupils over 12 to be sent to work for a fixed period, mainly on farms. Children were most frequently employed in weeding, sorting potatoes, farming sugar beet, collecting stones and potatoes in fields, turning hay and grazing. The underage workers were supposed to receive remuneration of 30 Pfenning a day for their work. The farm owners were additionally obliged to insure them and to refund possible costs of their travel<sup>38</sup>. If a large number of pupils was sent to the same place, they were to be supervised by a teacher. Most often, this youth labour was used from April to mid-November. Children from Gniezno worked mainly on the estates in Łukaszewko, Arkuszewo, Braciszewo, Jankówko, Dziekanka and Winiary. The authors of the school chronicles provided also exact lists of the working children and the number of man-days they worked<sup>39</sup>. In order to enable employment of pupils on farms, the dates of summer and autumn holidays were adjusted to the time of the harvest of crops and root vegetables<sup>40</sup>. At all costs, efforts were made to prevent the growth of the area of waste land.

The school authorities were forced to seek means to cope with the worsening food supply situation, especially in cities. The Gniezno Catholic school district decided that a local municipal canteen would provide free lunches for the children of widows and families of soldiers. More than half of the cost was covered with municipal money, the rest with voluntarily donations and contributions by the school community<sup>41</sup>. Increases in food prices forced the state authorities to provide help for widows and orphans of killed soldiers. Additional “war support” was also offered to teachers and clerks: the amount of support depending on salary and number of dependent children<sup>42</sup>.

The growing expense of industrial goods, especially of soap and oil, was particularly noticeable in the country. People started to ration food even though food shortages were not so problematic outside cities. From 1915, rye and wheat could be exported from the Gniezno *powiat* only with the permission of the central German Reich authorities<sup>43</sup>. In order to save resources of meat, so-called meat-free days were introduced across Germany. On these days, no meat was sold in shops and restaurants served only vegetarian dishes. Villagers usually ignored

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38 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, p. 202; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheet 52v.

39 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, pp. 200–202; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 52–53v.

40 GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 47v., 48v.

41 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, pp. 196–197; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 49–49v.

42 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, p. 206; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 40–41.

43 KSwI, p. 80.

this ban. The headmaster of the school in Imielnik noted that in his village more animals had been slaughtered after the introduction of this ban than earlier. This procedure was widely employed by butchers who claimed that they were only slaughtering animals for their own use. Next, they speculated and raised prices. The chronicle author complained that for poorer people and minor clerks two meat-free days a week turned into whole meat-free weeks<sup>44</sup>. In 1915, the prices rose by 100–200%<sup>45</sup>. In subsequent months of the same year maximum prices of crude oil, rye and wheat flour were regulated. A ban on slaughtering sows was issued. Raw sheep yarn and cotton fabrics were confiscated. Prices of butter and milk were regulated and their consumption was rationed. On 8 December, copper, brass and nickel objects were requisitioned and these were followed by chrome and tungsten. Local communities were warned not to waste or damage their agricultural produce<sup>46</sup>.

Scarcities of food products on the market were noticeable also in 1917. It was assumed that the reason for this situation was a poor harvest of potatoes in the previous year. Due to the shortage of artificial fertilisers and workforce, the area intended for sugar beet cultivation was reduced. The state authorities started to intervene in the breeding of animals and ordered the slaughter of thin animals that would not bring any profit in the future. The situation worsened during the draught of 1917, which resulted, among other things, in reduced production of butter. Farmers, who had so far produced butter themselves, were ordered by authorities to deliver butter to dairies. This decree, according to the village school chroniclers, was generally ignored<sup>47</sup>.

At the same time, a plague of caterpillars affected orchards and gardens. To prevent damage to agricultural produce, pupils collected nests of the pests from fruit trees and cabbage plants and burnt them. May of the following year saw a plague of May beetles. Children from Sławno were instructed to collect the insects, and in the case of feed shortage, dead May beetles were used to feed pigs<sup>48</sup>.

Despite the worsening economic situation, people still tried to help soldiers on the front. They started to send warm clothes and woolen articles prepared by women and young girls to the front instead of the food products that had prevailed during the first months of the war. Often the pages of school chronicles contain information about collections of wool, blankets and felt or money for buying them.

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44 *Ibid.*, p. 82.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 84.

47 NSPG, ARC, KSwG, p. 56.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 58; UGwK, ARC, KSwS, pp. 172–173.

Some of these actions were spontaneously initiated by communities, others were initiated by different authorities. Generally, local communities took part in such collections in large numbers; the German chroniclers also praise the involvement of the Poles, but almost solely regarding the actions organised by the Red Cross<sup>49</sup>.

Another subject that was prominent in the pages of the school chronicles was a description of the problems related to organisation of education. These problems resulted from the conscription of some teachers to the army and from a plague of illnesses among the teaching staff<sup>50</sup>. Despite difficult wartime conditions and a significant shortage of qualified staff, teachers whose health prevented them from working were sent to nursing homes. Teachers who reached a certain age were sent on retirement. In many cases, the scarcities of teaching staff resulted in a reduction of the number of lessons. Although the situation was under control to some degree in Gniezno, where there were relatively many teachers, the situation was much worse in villages, where there was usually one teacher working in a small school. The authors of the chronicles often describe situations when teachers from neighbouring schools conducted classes for their absent colleagues. It happened on many occasions that classes were held only on two or three days a week in certain schools because one teacher had to work in a few locations<sup>51</sup>. Unusual situations called for unusual measures on the part of the school authorities: From the outbreak of the war, attempts were made to address the shortage of teachers caused by mobilisation, such as transferring pupils to other schools located closest to their place of residence. In 1914, the school in Witkowo was forced to accept children from Malachowo Wierzbiczy. A similar situation occurred in 1917 when children from Makowica were admitted to the Witkowo facility<sup>52</sup>. In 1915, following the conscription of a teacher called Funk from Imielnik, children from that school were taught in a school in Lednogóra for three weeks by the wife of a local priest, Georg Mattke, who was not a professional teacher<sup>53</sup>. Two years later the Royal Prussian District of Bydgoszcz (*Königliche Preussische Regierung zu Bromberg*) allowed a crafts teacher from the post-Franciscan school in Gniezno, Lieutenant

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49 GG2, ARC, KSwJ, p. 76; KSwI, pp. 75, 85.

50 APPOG, SPwP, *ibid.*, pp. 36–37; APPOG, SwŚW, *ibid.*, pp. 203–209; APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, pp. 181–182, 192; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 39, 42–47v., 52, 54–54v.; GG2, ARC, KSwJ, p. 81; SPM, ARC, KSwM, p. 94; UGwK, ARC, KSwS, pp. 166–170.

51 APPOG, SwW, *ibid.*, pp. 69–70; APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, pp. 178–180, 199, 210; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 42, 43, 44v., 46, 48–49, 52; GG2, ARC, KSwJ, p. 81; KSwD p. 25; NSPG, ARC, KSwG, pp. 46, 53–54; KSwI, p. 78.

52 APPOG, SwW, *ibid.*, p. 60, 70.

53 KSwI, p. 78.

Ella Matha Schach, de domo Hausbeck, to work as a teacher even though she was married<sup>54</sup>. This decision might have been made easier for the district clerks by the fact that Lieutenant Schach was a daughter of Wilhelm Hausbeck, the dean of the Gniezno school for boys, which neighboured with the school for girls. In order to enable the teachers to get to work on time the beginning of lessons was moved to 7 am in many village schools<sup>55</sup>.

School chronicles are, most importantly, an irreplaceable source for investigating the daily life of schools of that time. The impact of the war on the chronicles was limited to some degree. The authors of the city chronicles provided, year by year, the number of students in individual classes, the number of children attending schools, the number of organised divisions and the number of newly-admitted pupils. Their village colleagues listed the number of children from different villages in a given school district that attended school<sup>56</sup>. Almost all chronicles provide dates related to the organisation of the school year. Every year, the chronicles indicated the dates of the beginning and the end of the school year as well as the dates of summer, autumn, Christmas, Easter and Pentecost holidays<sup>57</sup>. However, the mentions of students held back for an extra year were very few. Although this was a frequent element of the schooling practice of the time, it was apparently not interesting enough for the authors to include it in the school chronicles<sup>58</sup>.

The patriotic education of youth was one of the priorities of the authorities during a global military conflict. People continued to celebrate all the earlier commemorative events related in particular to anniversaries of important events in the history of Prussia. Almost all chronicles mention annual celebrations of the Sedan festival (the anniversary of the battle with the French in 1870) and the birthday of the Emperor<sup>59</sup>. The Great War period covered the anniversaries of the birthday of Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and the rule of the Hohenzollern dynasty in Prussia, not to mention the declaration of Martin Luther: the celebration of which is

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54 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, p. 205.

55 GM, ARC, KSwK, p. 64.

56 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, pp. 186, 197, 209; APPOG, SPwP, *ibid.*, pp. 34–39; APPOG, SwŚW, *ibid.*, pp. 203, 207, 210; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 42–42v., 46v., 48v., 50v., 52, 54v.

57 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, pp. 181–182, 189–190, 198, 209; APPOG, SPwP, *ibid.*, pp. 34, 36–37; APPOG, SwŚW, 1, pp. 203–205; APPOG, SwW, *ibid.*, p. 60; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 34, 41v., 42, 45v., 47v., 48v., 49v., 54; GM, ARC, KSwK, pp. 64, 67, 69, 73; SPM, ARC, KSwM, pp. 93–95.

58 GG1, ARC, SP1, sheet 46.

59 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, p. 187; APPOG, SPwP, *ibid.*, p. 35; APPOG, SwŚW, *ibid.*, p. 201.

described in the chronicles of Evangelical schools<sup>60</sup>. Other anniversaries were also celebrated in Catholic schools<sup>61</sup>. Events associated with wartime, particularly the victories of the Prussian army, became a pre-text for the celebration of new festivals. On the occasion of the victories of Metz, Tannenberg, the seizure of Łódź, the end of the battles of the Masurian Lakes, the victory of Gorlice, the seizure of Lvov, Kaunas, Warsaw, Modlin, Brześć Litewski, the victory on the North Sea or the seizure of Riga official celebrations were organised and consisted also of a ceremonial speech by the teacher and a day of vacation<sup>62</sup>. A cancellation of school classes on 5<sup>th</sup> March 1918 [the author wrote 1919 by mistake], on the day when the peace treaty with Russia was signed, was of a slightly different nature<sup>63</sup>. On the one hand, people rejoiced at the victory, on the other hand, they waited for peace treaties to be signed on all fronts.

Despite the financial difficulties of wartime, the local school authorities tried to keep the material assets entrusted to them in good technical condition. The authors of the school chronicles mention repairs in school buildings in Dziekanowice and Świątniki Wielkie<sup>64</sup>. They did not omit a report on the completion of the construction, the consecration and the hand-over for occupancy of a new school building in Witkowo in 1915. The school impressed with its size and outlook as well as with its modern equipment, among others, a central heating installation<sup>65</sup>.

The school teachers did not overlook the formation of new associations and cooperatives on their areas. They were frequently established by teachers, both Polish and German, who acted as representatives of the local intellectual elite<sup>66</sup>.

The issue of natural disasters and weather anomalies was a frequently re-occurring motif. For obvious reasons, this was a common subject on the pages of village school chronicles. Local teachers describe draughts, long-lasting and very cold winters, or rainy and chilly springs. They mention hazes and violent storms that destroyed the harvest, which always led to increase of food prices.

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60 GG2, ARC, KSwJ, p. 82.

61 APPOG, SPwP, *ibid.*, pp. 35, 38; APPOG, SwŚW, *ibid.*, p. 203; APPOG, SwW, *ibid.*, p. 68; KSwI, pp. 86–87.

62 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, p. 183; APPOG, SPwP, *ibid.*, pp. 34, 36, 38; APPOG, SwŚW, *ibid.*, pp. 202–203, 208; APPOG, SwW, *ibid.*, pp. 64, 69; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 40–40v., 42–43v., 48; GG2, ARC, KSwJ, pp. 81–82; NSPG, ARC, KSwG, p. 43; SPM, ARC, KSwM, p. 94; UGwK, ARC, KSwS, p. 16.

63 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, p. 208.

64 APPOG, SwŚW, *ibid.*, p. 210; KSwD, p. 26.

65 APPOG, SwW, *ibid.*, pp. 53–55.

66 NSPG, ARC, KSwG, p. 52; UGwK, ARC, KSwS, pp. 171–172.

They also reported the good times for farmers when they could work in the field without any problems and in a timely manner<sup>67</sup>. Only the author of the chronicle of a Catholic school in Świątynki Wielkie describes frequently recurring fires in the village. The reason might have been their suspicious frequency<sup>68</sup>. By contrast, apart from information concerning illnesses of the pedagogical staff, information about the spread of diseases was rarely included. An exception was the occurrence of flu epidemics, which began to spread in summer 1918 and led to the closing of schools in Gniezno towards the end of the war. The chronicle author mistakenly recorded that the city schools were closed until 11 November 1919 instead of 1918<sup>69</sup>.

The reports of the events of 1918 are the last to be drafted in German. Polish records appeared from the turn of 1918/19 and were often prepared by different authors. In a few cases, it can be seen that some pages are missing. The time, circumstances and reasons for their removal remain unknown<sup>70</sup>. Similarly, when a report written in German finishes at the very end of the page and the next page begins with a text in Polish, with a clear time gap between the described events, this is adequate reason for suspicion<sup>71</sup>. The appearance of some records concerning the time of the military conflict seems to suggest that they are retrospective and the level of detail in the narration implies that the author was using earlier prepared notes. Descriptions of events related to international politics and the course of war that are frequent in 1914 disappear from the chronicle pages in the following years. Their place is taken by descriptions of daily problems far from the front. The difference between the village and the city chronicles is visible. The former list names and surnames of men mobilised for war, soldiers killed or wounded on the front, their widows and children and often also their fathers' surnames and professions. These were the people that the chronicle author usually knew personally, in many cases they were neighbours from the same village. By contrast to these village chronicles, the city chronicles are more "anonymous". The surnames that appear on their pages are mostly teachers that the author met professionally. The records of the Deans from city schools are dominated by information concerning school life. The public events outweigh the description

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67 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, pp. 197–198; GM, ARC, KSwK, p. 68; NSPG, ARC, KSwG, pp. 52, 58; KSwI, pp. 70–71, 79; SPM, ARC, KSwM, pp. 93, 96–97; UGwK, ARC, KSwS, pp. 168–173.

68 APPOG, SwŚW, *ibid.*, pp. 207–210.

69 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, pp. 210–211.

70 APPOG, SwW, *ibid.*, pp. 73–to 74; GG2, ARC, KSwJ, pp. 84–85; KSwI, pp. 88–89.

71 APP, SPzPiWP, *ibid.*, pp. 212–213; GG1, ARC, SP1, sheets 54v.–55; KSwD, pp. 26–27.

of school problems only at the outbreak of the war. Later most records are again devoted to the daily school reality. The ongoing war is perceived by the authors from the perspective of the shortage of teaching staff and of the required number of classrooms. It involves organised collections and aid actions or increasing economic problems. The village schools headmasters more often went beyond the boundaries of a school chronicle with their texts and eagerly depicted events of their school district and its inhabitants. The records were as much a school chronicle as a chronicle of the village community.

Although the majority of teachers, just like the Prussian administrative clerks, were not in the habit of criticising the authorities' decisions, this does not mean they did not have their own views; Usually they simply did not reveal them and sometimes they even hid them. They allowed themselves to openly criticise the Prussian system only when it collapsed<sup>72</sup>.

While not losing their official nature, some sections of the school chronicles contain personal views or records of personal experience of their authors, through which they begin to resemble diaries. On such occasions they introduce an element of subjectivity that aspires to be objective, which is very interesting for a contemporary reader. The volume of details present on their pages can sometimes be overwhelming. However, to a historian they remain an irreplaceable source, allowing the reconstruction of the daily atmosphere of wartime. The source material included in the school chronicles of the Gniezno and the Witkowo districts remains until this day, completely unknown to researchers.

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72 APPOG, SwŚW, 1, p. 212; UGwK, ARC, KSwS, pp. 173–174.

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