

NOTES ON THE SENATE



SENATE
OF THE REPUBLIC
OF POLAND

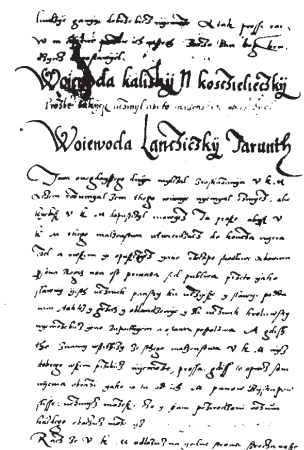
Diaries and reports from debates

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THERE WERE NO OFFICIAL RECORDS OF PROCEEDINGS IN PARLIAMENTS OF OLD POLAND throughout almost the entire period in which they were in operation. It does not mean, however, that no written records of debates were made. Quite early, they became a sought-after source of information about the political life of the country. From the 16th century, the so-called “swift writers” wrote down a record of debates. They were secretaries employed by dignitaries, most frequently their courtiers. Debates were sometimes recorded by deputies themselves – either for their own purposes or at someone’s request. In Old Poland, the so-called Gdańsk records – reports written in German by observers from Gdańsk or emissaries to the Sejm from minor Prussian cities – were kept of Sejm debates. There were thus several diaries in existence for many Sejms, but individual examples could have different editions and copies. This makes it possible to cross-check them today. These diaries were very different from today’s shorthand reports. They were not a word-for-word record of a debate. Instead, they summarized everything that was said at a Sejm sitting and described the behaviour of its participants. More detailed accounts can be found in complete texts of speeches supplied by deputies and senators.

After World War II, Professor Władysław Konopczyński published a list of 245 pre-Partition Sejms, held over a period of 300 years. Around 900 diaries were listed for them. **THE EARLIEST SURVIVING DIARY DATES BACK TO 1548.** Many diaries still remain in manuscript form. From the 1880s onwards, the Old Polish diaries began to come into print, mostly due to the efforts of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Warsaw Scientific Society.

At the time of King Stanisław August Poniatowski, the diaries were written on the basis of “notebooks” by secretaries of the Chamber of Deputies, most of whom were employed by the Royal Secretariat. No complete diary of the Great Sejm was published though. Two diaries appeared at the time, but they covered barely a fifth of the sitting. The material collected for the diary of the Four-year Sejm are contained in the archive of its Secretariat, which was thought to have been lost but was found to be in the USSR in 1960. So it is possible to reconstruct the diary now.



A page from the oldest Sejm diary

Diaries and reports from debates

**DYARYUSZ
SEJMU ORDYNARYJNEGO**
POD ZWIĘKSIKIM MONTEBRATECZY, GENERALNYM
OBOWGA NARODOW
W PODWOJNYM POSŁOW SKŁADZIE
ZGROMADZONEGO
W WARSZAWIE

Ci. Dnia 16. Januaria, Roku 1798



W WARSZAWIE,
w Drukarni Urzędniczej Michała Górska,
Tytuł Księży: Jan Kłobucki Ksi.

Diary of the Four-year Sejm

DYARYUSZ

SENATU

SEJMU KRÓLESTWA POLSKIEGO

1825

T. O. M. I.



W WARSZAWIE,

THE DIARIES OF THE DUCHY OF WARSAW AND THE CONGRESS KINGDOM OF POLAND WERE OFFICIAL RECORDS. In the Organic Statute, which extended the provisions of the Constitution conferred on the Kingdom in 1815 by Tsar Alexander I, we read: “A Secretary of State appointed by the King will keep a written record of proceedings in the Senate; the Marshal will call on one of the members of the House of Deputies to fulfil the duties of Secretary of the aforesaid House.” Chancellery employees recorded speeches as faithfully as possible in longhand, and the diary was compiled by the Secretary of the House. The record of proceedings was available for examination at the Chancellery. The diaries of the Senate of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Congress Kingdom were edited by Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz. As stated in the resolutions of the Sejm of the 1831 Uprising, “A Sejm Diary will be maintained as hitherto, containing the speeches as complete as possible, and each Member will be able in the course of eight days to examine this record and demand the correction of such errors as may have been made therein.”

IN THE TWENTY YEARS BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS, THE SHORTHAND OFFICE OF THE SEJM AND SENATE OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND AND THE EDITORIAL OFFICE OF SHORTHAND REPORTS AND THE DIARY PROVIDED SERVICES FOR THE SEJM AND SENATE. The shorthand office was organized in May 1918 for the Provisional Council of State and was transferred to the Legislative Sejm after the Council was dissolved. In 1928, it employed 13 shorthand writers. There were three report editors in the Editorial Office, including a well-known writer Karol Irzykowski, who was its managing editor for 14 years. The editors were tasked with editing the official “Shorthand Report”. Taking turns to sit in the debating chamber, they also prepared the Diary, which contained a summary of the debates. As soon as it was written, it was made available to the press and wire agencies. Journalists received it every half-hour, in the form of a bulletin with a summary of speeches, texts of motions and resolutions, voting results and a description of what was happening in the chamber.



The typing of the “Shorthand Report”, 1923
Tygodnik Ilustrowany

Diaries and reports from debates



The typing of the “Shorthand Report”, 2020
(photo by K. Czerwińska)

AT PRESENT, THE SEJM AND SENATE HAVE SEPARATE DEPARTMENTS WHICH PREPARE REPORTS FROM THEIR PROCEEDINGS. In the Senate, it is the task of the Minutes’ Unit of the Senate Proceedings Office. In the Sejm it is the task of the Shorthand Report Department belonging to the Sejm Sitings Secretariat. Senate proceedings are recorded as digital audio and video files. Audio files are divided into 5-minute sections on an on-going basis and transcribed into a written text. If there are doubts as to a given fragment of the recording, the stenographer contacts the speaker concerned to clarify them. The spoken word of the debating chamber is transformed into the written word not only by stenographers, but also by editors, who introduce punctuation and remove repetitions and linguistic errors.

FRAGMENTS OF THE STENOGRAPHIC RECORD ARE EDITED ON A CURRENT BASIS (more or less 4 hours after a speech is made). Next, they are **PIECED TOGETHER AND POSTED ON THE SENATE’S WEBSITE AS A PRELIMINARY VERSION OF THE “STENOGRAPHIC RECORD”** (upper photo on the right). During the sitting and immediately thereafter, senators may check the text and submit their comments. However, any such comments can only be made to ensure the accuracy of the records and not to introduce e.g. a new wording, new proposals or justifications. A **“SHORTHAND REPORT ON THE SITTING OF THE SENATE OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND” IS PUBLISHED WITHIN THREE WEEKS OF THE SITTING. THIS IS THE OFFICIAL RECORD**, which is also posted on the Senate’s website (middle photo).

On its website, the Senate publishes a “Diary”, which provides information on issues discussed by the Senate during its sittings, the work of its committees, participation of senators in State ceremonies and visits by official guests. There are also transmissions of current and former sessions of the Senate and its committees available at website www.senat.gov.pl/transmisje. The Senate also publishes the “Chronicle of the Senate of the Republic of Poland”, which provides an overview of legislative work, activities of committees and international activity of the Senate (bottom photo).

