

THE MUSEUM PUBLIC IN THE LIGHT  
OF THE VISITORS' BOOKS OF THE MUSEUM  
AT WILANÓW IN 1805—1931

In 1805 thanks to Stanisław Kostka Potocki, the Wilanów museum was opened to the public. Owing to the fact that it combined patriotic functions (cult of Sobieski) with didactic and academic functions, it stood a much better chance to survive in post-partition Poland than the museum in Puławy, established several years earlier, which had a distinctly revolutionary character.

A reflection of the activity of the Wilanów museum are its Visitors' Books. The five volumes, covering the period from August 1805 to July 1931 (Fig. 25), with a break for the years 1838-1852, contain valuable research material. Their analysis makes it possible to establish the social structure of the museum visitors, where they came from, evolution of forms of museum tours, fluctuations in attendance, etc. First and foremost however they prove that S. K. Potocki's collection functioned as a public museum open to all lovers of art.

In the first years of its existence the majority of the museum visitors were relatives and friends of the owner, the Potockis, Czartoryskis, Radziwiłłs, Zamoyskis, but there were also some representatives of the lower orders. At first the museum was visited by individuals or small groups. Large group tours of the museum began in the 1870's, the first being noted in the Book under the date of 8 May 1872. The largest number of groups appeared at Wilanów in the early 20th century and in the inter-war period. These were mostly groups of secondary school pupils and students, members of sports and tourist associations, officers and cadets, doctors and university professors.

Attendance differed and largely depended on the course of historic events. During the first five years of its existence the number of visitors gradually grew, however later it began to drop. The lowest attendance was noted in the 1820's and immediately after the

fall of the November uprising of 1830-1831. However as soon as 1833 it started to increase to reach its apogee in 1880. This was connected with a new ideology: the Romanticism gave way to Positivist ideas of historical education through reverting to the nation's glorious past.

A separate problem is the territorial and national composition of the visitors. The museum attracted crowds of Poles, from all three partition zones, including the borderland areas of Wolhynia and Podolia, as well as Poles resident in America and in other European countries. Among foreigners, the largest numbers of visitors came from France, Germany, England, Scotland, Bohemia and Russia (until 1914), but there were also arrivals from far-away countries, such as Japan, China, India and Australia.

The renown enjoyed by the collection is best confirmed by the names of outstanding personalities who left their signatures in the Visitors' Book, artists, novelists, poets, statesmen, revolutionary leaders, scholars. Some artists chose Wilanów as their place of work, for example the painters Zygmunt Vogel, Aleksander Kokular and Wilibald Richter, and the sculptor Zygmunt Hegel. The authors who signed the Book included Jan Paweł Woronicz, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz, Zygmunt Krasiński and Jan Karłowicz. In 1927 the former residence of the Sobieskis was visited by Thomas Mann (Fig. 26).

For years the Wilanów palace was not only a museum but also an official state residence. Therefore the Books contain signatures of various public figures, ministers, ambassadors, envoys of foreign states. Besides the ordinary signatures and notes by those outstanding personalities, the Books contain numerous occasional poems, maxims and patriotic slogans. In this way the Visitors' Books reflect public feelings in the various periods of Polish history, demonstrate the visitors' respect for the past and their sensitivity to the beauty of the palace and its surroundings.

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Księga

do zapisywania się Osób przyjeżdżających  
Pałac Wilanowski

od dnia 5<sup>tego</sup> Sierpnia 1805. do dnia 26. Lipca 1838.  
to jest przez Lat 33.

Onescajpp  
Thomas  
Frederick  
Edward  
Wladyslaw  
+ Jean

Franziska  
Wilm  
Christine, 13. II. 27  
Gael.  
Warkow  
Kubni

Becker  
19  
II  
19  
19

26. 'Book of Visitors' from between 1904—1931 (among others the signature of Thomas Mann)