

First Experiments with Photography

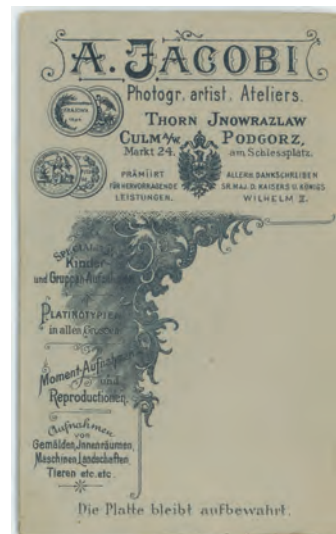
Maria
Śliwińska
Poland

At the time of development of photography as a new medium, Poland was under partition, so anything that happened at the time on its historical territory was associated either with the German, Russian, or Austrian empire. In addition, after a few uprisings (1830, 1863-1864), and unsuccessful struggles for independence, some Poles were imprisoned, sent to Siberian labour camps, or forced to leave the country. This is the main, but not the only reason we can also find some Polish photographers experimenting abroad.

This article gives a short overview of the first experiments that took place on Polish territory, or those undertaken by Poles regardless of where they lived. The list cannot be complete, of course, as many of the experiments were not recorded and thus have not survived to this day as evidence. It also cannot be presented in full because of the limited space of this article, so just some of the most interesting from those documented examples are selected.



A couple
Photographer:
Alexander Jacobi
Toruń
19th Century
© The International
Center
for Information
Management Systems
and Services,
Collection of
Emilia Betlejewska



When speaking about the first photographers we should bear in mind that we can rarely call them professional photographers. They were rather experimenters, amateurs, or those who used cameras in their work, and only occasionally developed their hobbies into a pro-



Quite often the first photographs we owe to enthusiasts, scientists, geographers, chemists, apothecaries, painting artists, and lithographers, as well as actors, priests, noblemen, and others, as at that time photography did not yet exist as a profession.

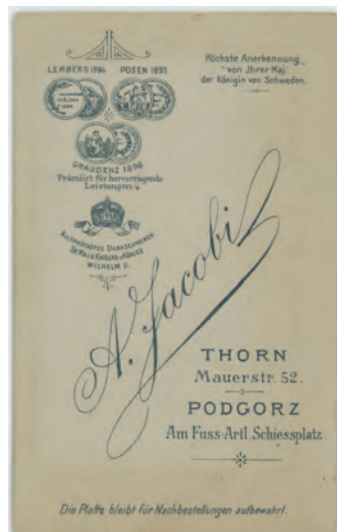
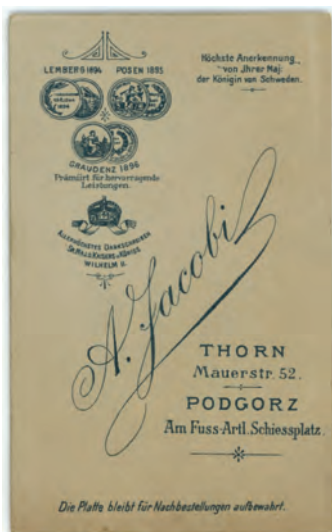
fession. Quite often the first photographs we owe to enthusiasts, scientists, geographers, chemists, apothecaries, painting artists, and lithographers, as well as actors, priests, noblemen, and others, as at that time photography did not yet exist as a profession.

As the first registered and publicly presented photographic technique was daguerreotype, invented by Louis Daguerre, who cooperated with Niépce, an author of the first documented photograph from 1826, those who followed usually started their experiments with this technique.

The history of Polish photography must give priority to **Jędrzej Radwański** (1800-1862), who took a couple of daguerreotypes of the Church of St. Joseph of the Visitationists in Warsaw, and the Palace built for King John II Casimir now in use by Warsaw University¹. Those photographs were presented in two exhibitions in Warsaw at the Warsaw Charity circle premises in the Kazanowski Palace on October 13, 1839, and were taken before the

Daguerre technique was published. Later on, the exhibition was presented in Lviv, at that time treated as a part of the Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom under the Austrian partition. Some sources claim that those photographs were taken by Countess Klementyna Małachowska *nee* Sanguszko (1796–1842), which would make her not only the first female Polish photographer, but also the first female photographer ever known. However, it appears to be a kind of misunderstanding, as this extraordinary woman, very active in charity, culture, and support of struggles for independence, was far more likely to have been an organizer of the exhibition than the author of a photograph.

In contrast, there are no doubts that **Mak-symilian Strasz** (1804-1885), Polish engineer and inventor, was an author of the first Polish photographs taken in Kielce as early as July 1839. He learnt about photography during his visit to London in 1830. There he encountered Talbot's technique, which he described later in some articles. He also experimented with





a new invention, still called *camera obscura*, and sent his own photograph to the newspaper *Gazeta Codzienna*. Unfortunately, this photograph has not survived. He was also an author of early instruction books on taking photographs².

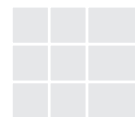
The other early experiments from 1839, less known and not clearly described, took place most probably in Toruń, where the Jewish family Jacobi lived. Most of them were painters working in the region for churches, noble manor houses, and painting portraits. The relationship between them and **Samuel Jacobi** (ca. 1829-1894), the great-grandfather of the famous photographer Lotte Jacobi, is not known. However, we know from Lotte's biography in the Jewish Encyclopedia that "*Her great-grandfather Samuel Jacobi learned his craft in 1839 from Louis Daguerre, the inventor of modern photography. Samuel Jacobi founded a studio in West Prussia that was carried on by his son Alexander; his grandson Sigismund, who moved the studio to Berlin; and in 1927 by his great-granddaughter Lotte*". Additional information, published on the University of New Hampshire site devoted to the Lotte Jacobi Papers inherited by that institution, informs us that "*Samuel Jacobi, visited Paris between 1839 and 1842, where he obtained a camera, a license, and some instruction from L.J.M. Daguerre and then returned to Thorn to set up a studio*". This studio was in Toruń, where also Lotte Jacobi, daughter of Zygmunt Jacobi and Maria (Mia) Lublińska was born. We have no firm evidence of when Samuel Jacobi established his atelier in Toruń. We only identified photographs taken by his son **Alexander Jacobi** (ca. 1829 -1894), the member of the City Council and the Board of Jewish Synagogue who inherited the studio and developed it. The majority of the photographs identified in this studio are described as taken in the 19th century with no exact dates. However, on their reverse



sides we can observe the development of the Jacobi advertisement techniques and art, starting from the modest ones containing only address information, up through the development of artistic design to those with added confirmation of honours and awards obtained in a number of exhibitions. His successful activities were expanded into other towns such as Inowrocław, Dworcowa 4 Str; Poznań, Fryderykowska 25 Str. and Chełmno Rynek 24 Str. (in 1898-1900) where he and later his son Zygmunt Jacobi established studios⁵.

In the southeast of the former Polish-Lithuanian Kingdom under the Austrian partition, **Jan Gloisner**, a Polish researcher with German roots, teacher of chemistry, physics and natural history at Jan Kazimierz University in Lviv, built his own daguerreotype camera as early as in 1839 after reading about this invention in a publication accompanied with drawings. He took his first photographs, like Niépce did, from his apartment window. In the following year, he bought a professional camera by Voigtländer, and later on started to

Poles on exile to Siberia
Photographer unknown
Omsk, 1915
© The International
Center for
Information
Management Systems
and Services,
Collection of
Małgorzata Paczkowska



*Astronomical
Observatory*
Photographer:
Maurycy Scholtz
Ca. 1840-1841
Litography
on daguerrotype
National Library
- Polona



OBSEKATORIUM W WARSZAWIE. II. S. OBSEKATORIUM A. TARSOWIE.

1841

exhibit his photographs in the window of Edward Winiarz's bookstore located in the main square - Rynek 2^o. As early as 1843, a first professional atelier was established in Lviv by **Hipolit Chołoniewski** (1802 or 1807-1856), with initiatives expanded by others, including **Józef Eder** (ca. 1831 - 1903), **Teodor Szajnok** (1833-1894), **Edward Trzemeski** (1843-1905).

Quite a few photographers started their business as nomadic photographers like **Dominik Zoner** (1815-1883), who learnt about daguerreotypes in Vienna and started his photographic adventure in 1840. For a few years (1844-1847), he worked in Kraków at the atelier established at Steinkeller palace. Later he became an owner of the oldest photographic atelier in Łódź, established in 1861.

A few more photographers who started their business very early include **Antoni Wysocki** (1796-1877), painter and photographer who began before 1842 in Warsaw, as well as the other painter **Julian Zawodziński** (1806-

1890), who learnt photography in Munich, Dresden and Berlin and became active after 1843 in Płock⁷.

We can observe the rapid development of photography in Warsaw, where the first photographer was identified as **Maurycy (Moritz) Scholtz**⁸. He took a number of photographs in Warsaw as daguerreotypes and printed them for sale with added lithographic modification. Twelve photographs taken in 1840 and printed for sale included the following: Town hall, Kings' Summer Residence "Łazienki", Krasiński Square, the other part of the King's residence "Królikarnia", as well as the Bank, Wilanów, the Theater, Natolin, Astronomical Observatory, Saski Square, and some other parts of the Warsaw skyline. These works are available on the National Library Polona.pl portal. He advertised his works in a number of newspapers. In May 1842, Scholtz also opened a portrait studio, first in the public garden and operating only a couple of hours daily. Later it was located in the building at Długa Street.

Marcin Zaleski (1796-1877), a painter and professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, was also interested in taking photographs. He began by taking photographs of Warsaw views in the first half of 1840 or even in 1839. Unfortunately, any evidence of this is now missing. He painted mainly architecture with elaborated details, so his works and those of King Stanisław August Poniatowski's court painter Canaletto (**Bernardo Bellotto** 1721 – 1780 used *camera obscura* in this work) served as an aid for architects when rebuilding the Warsaw ruins after the WWII. Therefore, there is some concept that he could use for his paintings photographs as a base⁹.

Helena Modrzejewska (1840-1909) actress
 Photographer: Jan Mieczkowski
 Warszawa [ca 1870], National Library – Polona



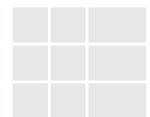
Beyer Karol (1818-1877)
 Photographer: Karol Beyer
 Warszawa, 1861, National Library – Polona



One of the most important Warsaw photographers was **Józef Giwartowski** (1802-1859)¹⁰, who opened the first daguerreotype studio in 1841 on one of the main streets, Nowy Świat 49, in the Bentkowski house. He travelled abroad frequently, and after visiting Paris and London, in 1852 he opened the most advanced atelier at the Count Andrzej Zamoy-ski Palace in Nowy Świat 67/69 Str. The quality of the photography was ensured by students of the Academy of Fine Arts, with the subsequently famous painter Juliusz Kossak among them. In 1857, his atelier was taken over by the other well-known Warsaw photographer **Maurycy Pusch** (1828 - 1902)¹¹, who was known as the theatre photographer.

1845 was **Karol Beyer** (1818 - 1877), known as the “father of Polish photography”. He treated photography as a profession with a cultural and social mission. He collected a pantheon of contemporary Poles, popularized Polish history, and distributed information about cultural and political events. He also documented architecture not only in Warsaw but also in other towns such as Kraków, Częstochowa, Gdańsk, Malbork, and Łódź. Among his many achievements there is a photograph of a solar eclipse taken on July 28, 1851¹².

In the list of the first important photographers in Warsaw must be included **Jan Mieczkowski** (1830 - 1889), who began as a nomadic daguerreotypist and in 1853 took over an atelier of Mikołaj Stroński at Senatorska Str. in Warsaw. His photographs included *carte de visite*,





and starting in 1855 he used collodian techniques. In 1856, he moved the workshop to the elegant, newly-opened Hotel Europejski. He was very active and mobile, changing locations of his activities often – including an atelier in Paris, which unfortunately was not as successful as planned¹³.

Apart from Warsaw, Kraków also played an important social role and was an important centre where many intellectuals lived, including photographers. The most famous photographer from Kraków was doubtless **Walery Rzewuski** (1837-1888), who studied first technology in Kraków, and later on (1857-1858) chemistry in Vienna. On his return to Kraków in 1859 he began with photography, and was the first to take photographs of the Tatra Mountains. He established what was then one of the most modern ateliers, in which he used wet collodian techniques and dry plate. He photographed monuments in Kraków and insurgents, among others. His portraits were of technical precision and excellent composition.

Photographers were not always lucky. Some of them paid a price. As early as about 1860 in Kraków, the priest **Jan Schindler** (1802-1890), who was also a professor at the Jagiellonian University, had an unpleasant accident while experimenting with photography. While taking photographs at the market square, he was accused by fishwives of using magic, and bitten by them.

Another amateur photographer was the famous Polish composer **Mieczysław Karłowicz** (1876 - 1909), who had an interest in photographing the Tatra Mountains. He collected a good set of well-made photographs, but lost his life in age 32 in an avalanche when going around with a heavy camera.

Photographers were active in difficult situations as well. Some of them documented the life of Poles in exile in Siberia. One of them was **Lucjan Kraszewski** (1820–1892), the younger brother of the writer of popular Polish historical novels. He was a painter and a photographer mostly involved in illustration of his brother's publications. He can be called a trend-setter in artistic photography. He was deported to Siberia in 1863 as punishment for his help to insurgents during the 1863 January Uprising. There he not only documented landscapes and some interesting places, but also made portraits of people¹⁴.

However, the most active and interesting was the Prószyński family, involved in the new media such as photography and film. **Stanisław**



Insurgent Łukasz Dobrzański
Photographer: Walery Rzewuski
Kraków, 1863, Muzeum Historii Fotografii, Kraków

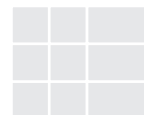


Antoni Prószyński (1826—1895) belonged to a noble family. After his marriage to Pelagia Kułakówna, a noblewoman who was, however, not wealthy, he decided to start an independent life in Mińsk Litewski (now in Belorussia). He was unable to earning a living by giving piano lessons, so he opened a workshop for the production of sealing wax, and in 1839 one of the first photographic ateliers, run with his wife's help. Active in the preparation of the 1863 January Uprising, he was sent to Tomsk in Siberia, whilst all his properties were confiscated by Russians. Among other things, he had been accused by the Russians of placing patriotic symbols in the background of the photographs made in his atelier. Transport to Siberia was mainly on foot from Mińsk to Vilnius, from there by train to Petersburg and Moscow, and once again on foot to Tobolsk. From here, as a special privilege on his wife's request, he was allowed occasional transport at his own cost to arrive to Tomsk. When he arrived to the place of his exile, his wife joined him with their children. Prószyński was allowed to have a relatively normal life there, so he continued giving piano lessons and opened a photographic studio registered in his wife's name. However, he was frequently visited by gendarmes and also imprisoned frequently¹⁵. His son **Konrad Prószyński** (1851-1908) was 13 when he went with his mother to Siberia. There he met Stanisław Witkiewicz, another talented artist (painter and writer), and both boys tried to figure out how to help their parents by earning some money. When he was 17 years old, he came back to Poland on his own. He studied in Poland while struggling with poverty and the Russian administration, trying to obtain amnesty for his father, which he obtained in 1873. In 1878, he established his publishing house and became a very well-known cultural activist, who tried especially to educate poor people. He used his father's photographs in his

Konrad Prószyński with his sister Zenia and brother Maksymilian
Photographer: Antoni Stanisław Prószyński
Tomsk, 1864 © Mieczysław Prószyński



publications. His son **Kazimierz Prószyński** (1875-1945) was interested in science and photography. As a teenager, he became a member of the Warsaw Photographic Society. Most of all, however, he was a great inventor who patented his first film camera, called the Pleograph, a year earlier than the Lumière brothers. He also improved the cinema projector for the Gaumont Film Company. He made many other interesting inventions, including the widely used hand-held Aeroscope camera. He was also a pioneer of TV, building a telephot in 1898. His biography is exciting and deserves a monograph and film. He studied in Poland and Belgium, later working in Poland, En-



Antoni Stanisław Prószyński with his family
 Photographer: Antoni Stanisław Prószyński
 Tomsk, 1864 © Mieczysław Prószyński



gland, the USA, and again in Poland, where he was arrested in August 1944 during the Warsaw uprising and sent to the German concentration camp of Mauthausen, where he died.

Some other Poles working abroad, although not as bright as Prószyński, were luckier. They established ateliers in many countries around the world and represented those countries as their citizens. Many photographers, such as Jan Bułhak (treated also as Lithuanian because of his activities in Vilnius) and Konrad Brandel, as well as many inventors, are omitted here even though they deserve the interest of contemporary readers.

A selected list of other interesting photographers and inventors includes: Leon Barszczewski (1849-1910), Karol Juliusz Drac (1875-1906), Maksymilian Fajans (1825-1890), Władysław Gargul (1883-1946), Aleksander Ginsberg (1871-1911), Michał Grejm (1828-1911), Jakub Jodko-Narkiewicz (1848-1905), Aleksander Karoli (1828-1901) as well as his father Jan Edward, and son Władysław, Aleksander Ken (1828-1874, Ignacy (Izaak) Krieger (1817-1889), Stanisław Krygowski (1868-1944), Piotr Lebieźński (1860-1934)...

Bibliography

1. Ignacy Płażewski, *Dzieje fotografii polskiej: 1839-1939*. Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 2003, p. 111-112.
2. Andrzej J. Wójcik, *Maksymilian Strasz - architekt, fotograf, autor map okręgów górniczych Królestwa Polskiego*. <http://www.anwoja.pl/9.html> [December 2014]
3. Marion Levenson Ross, *Lotte Jacobi 1896-1990*. In : *Jewish Women : A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*. On-line. 2006 - <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/jacobi-lotte>
4. *Guide to the Lotte Jacobi Papers, 1898-2000 Collection number: MC 58*. <http://www.library.unh.edu/special/index.php/lotte-jacobi> [December, 2014]
5. Danuta Thiel-Melerska, *Leksykon fotografów*. <http://www.fotorewers.eu/fotograf/Jacobi/342/>
6. *Dawna fotografia lwowska 1839-1939*. Ed. Aleksander Żakowicz. Lwów: Centrum Europy, 2004, p. 5-6, 12.
7. Wacław Zdżarski, *Historia fotografii warszawskiej*. Warszawa: PWN, 1974, p. 19.
8. Wanda Mossakowska, *Początki fotografii w Warszawie (1839-1863)*, t. I, Warszawa, 1994, p. 40.
9. Ibidem, p. 29-30.
10. Płażewski, op.cit., p. 53.
11. *Leksykon warszawskich fotografów 1845 - 1945*. <http://atelierwarszawskie.blogspot.com/2011/10/giwartowski-jozef.html>
12. Danuta Jackiewicz, *Karol Beyer 1818-1877*. Warszawa: Dom Spotkań z Historią, 2012.
13. Mossakowska, op.cit.
14. Joanna Arvaniti, *Syberyjskie wątki w życiu Józefa Ignacego Kraszewskiego i jego rodziny*. „Zesłaniec”, 2013 no 55.
15. Mieczysław Prószyński, *Konrad Prószyński (Kazimierz Promyke)*. http://www.konradproszyński.pl/szczepan_lewicki_rozdzial_1.asp