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SUPERVISION OF THE MINING STAROSTY IN CRACOW OVER THE
WIELICZKA SALT MINE BETWEEN 1872 AND 1918

Abstract

Between 1860 and 1873, Galicia, which formed a part of the Habsburg Empire, received a number of social and political rights which remained in force until 1918 and became known in history as the period of “Galician Autonomy.” In 1871, the Minister of Galicia was appointed. The central state authorities were represented by an intendant (with the headquarters in Lvov), appointed by the emperor and subordinate to the government in Vienna; on the other hand, starosts from individual poviats and police directors were subject to the intendant. The chief local authority was the National Sejm, whereas the National School Council supervised education. Local government bodies were poviat and commune councils, elected locally. In 1869, Polish language was introduced as the official language of administration and courts in Galicia.

The period of Galician Autonomy, so important for the entire Polish society that inhabited this crown-land (Kingdom of Galicia and Lodomeria), was equally significant for the functioning of the Wieliczka Saltworks. Spatial development of the mine took place during the rule of the Austrian administration; changes were introduced in salt deposit exploitation, production and transport of extracted salt. These activities required provision of proper security measures for the personnel working in the mine and for the tourists visiting the designated section of underground pits. Issues related to social benefits for the mine personnel also played a significant role. All these aspects required supervision on the part of relevant instances of mining authorities, i.e. the Mining Starosty in Cracow (since 1871) and the District Mining Office subordinate to it. Throughout all the years of its functioning, the Mining Starosty performed all tasks contained in the act that established in it a very meticulous – and sometimes even pedantic – manner. Relevant activities referred primarily to permanent control of the mine with respect to compliance with safety standards, both underground and on the surface (verification of technical status of the haulage machines, fire-extinguishing equipment, etc.). The Mining Starosty supervised the activities of the Wieliczka “Brotherly Fund” (“Kasa Bracka”), a mining self-help cooperative and other organisations operating by the saltworks. Supervision over the mine, and in particular over explosives used during mining work, acquired special dimension before the outbreak of WWI, when the Mining Starosty was made liable for strict implementation of guidelines of political and military authorities. The mining institutions established in 1871 continued to operate after Poland regained its independence in 1918 and survived, sometimes in slightly changed forms, until the 1920’s.