

The office of starosta (Lt. Capitaneus) as a royal official first appeared in Poland at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Administrative division into counties (Pl. starostwo) emerged in the second half of the fourteenth century due to reorganization of circuit courts and liquidation of the castellany division. Over time, starosta turned into "starosta general", whose state power, in addition to the issue of privileges, extended to the entire county or province. There was also the "burgwall starosta" (Pl. starosta grodowy), who managed the royal castle and adjacent lands as well as exercised executive and judiciary powers in the settlement and the county on the king's behalf. A lessor or other tenant of the royal estates was referred to as a "non-burgwall" starosta (Pl. starosta niegrodowy). Such gentleman was not a state official and could only exercise judicial power over his own subjects.

In Royal Prussia (provinces of Pomerania, Chełmno and Malbork), starosta's responsibilities were assigned to "voivodes" (provincial governors). The administrative division in the Duchy of Prussia was even different. In state ordinance of December 1525, duke Albrecht von Hohenzollern established three administrative districts: Samland, Natangen and Oberland (Upper Prussia), divided into 39 starosties – ordinary and inheritable.

Oberland comprised 12 ordinary starosties: Paszów, Morąg, Miłakowo, Przezmark, Miłomłyn, Ostróda, Olsztynek, Kwidzyn, Prabuty, Nidzica, Działdowo, Szczytno and three inheritable ones: Susz, Iława and Dębrowno. According to lexical sources (Leksykon Polactwa w Niemczech), Oberland used to be divided into "Polnisch Oberland" with counties of Nibork (Nidzica), Ostróda and Szczytno, and "Deutsch Oberland", encompassing all lands in the north of Ostróda.

Ever since Ostróda ceased to be a komturship, management of the castle was delegated to a representative of the duke, that is the starosta (Ger. Amtshauptmann, Hauptmann). The last komtur – Quirin Schlick, also became the first starosta, presiding over the years 1525-1531. Starosta supervised the lands, external affairs of the church and education.

He was in charge of first instance judiciary and administration. He was also responsible for defending his territories and, most importantly, the castle. Starosta had significant powers, particularly in relation to the serfs, whom he could order into a "Spanish coat" or stocks as punishment for non-payment of tribute.

In the years 1547-1575, the function of starosta was served by Wolf von Kreytzen, who, famous for his wealth, used to lend large sums of money even to the Duke of Prussia himself. It is worth mentioning that in the years 1633-1643 Ostróda County was pledged to the dukes of Legnica and Brzeg, whose representative Johann Christian, from the Silesian line of the Piast dynasty, lived in Ostróda from October 4, 1636 until the day of his death – December 25, 1639.

At the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, 22% of landed property in Ostróda County belonged to the duchy. Aside from the city of Ostróda, these lands also included twelve villages, among which were five manors. The latter cultivated oats (approx. 50% of crops), rye and barley, for the brewing industry. The County derived significant cash income from fishing (20 to 40%), sale of alcoholic beverages (brewing industry), sale of timber and milling. In 1723, state administration was abolished and replaced by Kriegs- und Domänenkammer. Since then, Ostróda along with Paszów, Miłomłyn, Miłakowo and Młynary, became part of the Morąg district.

Another change in governance took place in connection with a judiciary reform of 1752, when

Prussia was divided into seven administrative districts (each consisting of several former counties) headed by landrats. As a result of the new administrative division, Ostróda and Olsztynek were incorporated into the Morąg County.

Since 1777, the function of the landrat of Morąg County was served by Andreas Leonhard Koehne-Jaski (1743-1813), the owner of property in Durąg (from 1780) and Wigwałd (from 1785), who established the Morąg Association for Nature and Economy (1792) and launched the first potato spirits distillery in Prussia (1802).



In 1800, the Ostróda County encompassed 18 villages, including one royal village (Morliny) and three noble estates (Grabiny, Worniny and Warlity). Four years later, Miomżyn County was disbanded and incorporated into Ostróda. In 1809, the administration created in 1752 was abolished. In the year 1815, the area (including Ostróda) subject to the Regency in Königsberg was divided into 20 counties (Landratsamt). Finally, division into new counties was completed in 1818.

Ostróda County came to include four cities, i.e. Ostróda, Miomżyn, Dębrowno and Olsztynek. The area of this administrative unit underwent slight changes, and so for example in 1831 it covered 1,531.93 km², while in 1939 – 1,536.26 km². During the same period, its population more than doubled – from 32,436 in 1831 to 78,053 (not including the army) in 1939. In 1900 Ostróda County encompassed 149 municipalities, and in 1939 – 167. The most populated municipalities were Kajkowo and Ostrowin – respectively 1330 and 1268 inhabitants in 1939. Within the County, there were 133 lakes with a total water surface of 7,100 hectares. Arable land accounted for 62% of the County's territory, and the forests for 25%. Before World War II, there were 45 large (over 500 ha) farm estates. The primary crops were rye and potatoes. There were also many dairies and distilleries. A large part of the population was engaged in logging, as evidenced by numerous sawmills. Timber trade thrived. Other activities of the local population included fishing and beekeeping.

Coat of arms of the county was established only in the thirties of the last century. In accordance with the resolution of the County Council, on December 5, 1934 it appears as follows: on the crest in the middle – green fir on a red hill; on the white field to the left – a black cross, and a blue key on the opposite side; on background of the hill – a silver lily. Fir on the hill was derived from the coat of arms of the village of Stębark (Tannenberg), established in February 1916. The key is an attribute of St. Peter and was taken from the coat of arms of Olsztynka. The lily was and is the hallmark of Dębrowno. However, the cross of the Teutonic Order is an element specific to Ostróda. The coat of arms and the seal were designed by Prof. Otto Hupp. An interesting historical fact is that in 1945-1946 the German seal with the coat of arms of the

district was used to sign official documents by Polish mayors: Stefan Uciński and Stephen Szojewski. Surviving documents from that period show a part of the inscription removed from the seal and the name of the city changed to "OSTRÓD". Unfortunately, this seal has not survived to this day.



Pieczęć Herbowa byłego Powiatu Ostródzkiego sprzed 1945 roku

After Ostróda was easily taken over by the 10th Guards Armoured Corps (Red Army) on 21 January 1945, in accordance with the Agreement of July 26, 1944 on relations between the Supreme Headquarters of the Red Army and Polish administration in the territory of the Republic of Poland, the control of the city and the county was transferred to the Soviet war command.

On May 26, 1945, starosta Stefan Cendrowski regained civilian power from the hands of Col. Ivan Stepanovich Konstantinov – the war commander. He lifted the curfew, and the people who entered the county no longer had to report to the command.

The first meeting of the National County Council in Ostróda took place on March 6, 1946. It was attended by 33 councillors. The post-January 21, 1945 boundaries of Ostróda County coincide almost exactly with its pre-war borders. Bigger changes occurred in 1958, when the Ruszkowo cluster was assigned to Działdowo County, and the Waplewo cluster – to Waplewo County.

In 1960, the county's area was 1,376 km², and was populated by 60,579 people. Two years later, the territory of Ostróda County lost the Kurki cluster, incorporated into Nidzica County.

Further adjustments in 1973 transferred the city of Olsztynek and surrounding villages to Olsztyn County. Two years later, the county system was abolished and replaced by a two-level administrative division into communes (gmina) and provinces (województwo).

In the years 1945-1950, the starosta acted as the head prefect of the general county administration, subject to the voivode. At the same time he was supervised by the national social councils – legislative local government bodies established by the Act of September 11, 1944, bearing similarity to Soviet institutions and non-elected until 1954.

In 1950, the state administration offices (starosta, voivode) and local governments were abolished, and their tasks assigned to national councils and their presidiums. On January 1, 1999, a new local government reform came into force, introducing two new levels of territorial administration: county (powiat) and province (województwo). After many years, the position of starosta and county of Ostróda were restored.

Currently, Ostróda County covers an area of 1,766 km² populated by more than 105 thousand people. It consists of 9 municipalities: one urban – Ostróda, five rural: Ostróda, Dąbrówno, Grunwald, Małydyty, Żukta and three urban-rural – Miłomłyn, Morąg and Miłakowo. The new district lost the territory of Olsztynek Commune; however, it gained a considerable part of the

former Morąg County. Popular elections to local governments on the county and provincial level took place on October 11, 1998. The first session of the Ostróda County Council was convened on November 6 that year. Bogusław Fijas was elected as the chairman of the council. Jan Antochowski was chosen as the new starosta. In the years 2001-2003, the council was chaired by Cezary Wawrzyński, since 2003 – Jerzy Grubba, since 2006 – Bogdan Purzycki, since 2010 – Wanda Łaszkowska, and since 2014 – Wojciech Paliński. During this period, the office of starosta was consecutively occupied by the following persons: since October 2001 – Aleksander Gawryluk, since November 2002 – Cezary Pec, since June 2003 – Janusz Lipski, since March 2005 – once again Aleksander Gawryluk, since November 2006 – Włodzimierz Brodiuk, and since November 2014 – Andrzej Wiczkowski.

Currently, starosta also acts as the chairman of county administration and the county office director as well as the superior of all county organizational units, public service units and fire brigades.

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