

115 YEARS OF WARSAW HOUSE OF ENGINEER OF NOT

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Bronisław Hynowski talks with Jerzy Rożek, M.Sc.Eng., the President of the Warsaw House of Technical Engineer.



Bronisław Hynowski: Polish technical environment revealed the unusual inventiveness when establishing the Engineering Association in Warsaw, in 1898, and as early as one year later it addressed the initiative of constructing their own House of Engineer in Warsaw where all decisions were undertaken by the representative of the Russian invader. How did you manage in the case of building the impressive investment under the so difficult conditions?



Jerzy Rożek: The contemporary Council of the Association which used the hired rooms, discussed the subject of the building almost during each meeting; during the General Assembly of the Association held on March 8, 1901, the Council submitted the proposal concerning the necessity of commencing the active efforts aimed at purchase of the plot and building their own seat in Warsaw. The mentioned meeting not only adopted the proposal of the Council but also appointed two commissions:

- Technical commission composed of two members of the Council (Piotr Drzewiecki and Aleksander Rosset) and two

architects (Władysław Marconi and Bronisław Rogóyski); the aim of the commission was to develop the organizational and technical conditions which should be met by the future building;

- Financial commission, consisting of 30 members whose task was to „think out the ways of gaining the means for building and to consider, together with the previous commission, the proposals submitted to the Association and concerning the purchase of the place (square) for construction of the discussed building”. The initiator of the idea of building the house was, inter alia, Brunon Tyszk.

During the common meeting with the Economic Council of the Association, held on 5, June 1901, the both Commissions decided to submit – to the General Assembly of the Association – the proposal for the purchase of the plot of ca. 2100 m² (then – 6400 square ells) situated at Włodzimierska street 3/5 (nowadays Czackiego street) for 120 thousand roubles. At the moment of signing the notary act, the sum of 20 thousand roubles was required and the remaining sum became a mortgage debt for 3 years and 6% in average as interests.

To implement effectively the discussed undertaking and the appropriate surveillance of the investment run, the General Assembly of the Members of the Association (6 June 1902) elected the special committee consisting of the following persons: Piotr Drzewiecki, Kazimierz Loewe, Aleksander Rosset, Jan Sieklucki and Brunon Tyszk. The Committee was authorized to following operations: announcement of the competition for project of the building, choice of the project, choice of the constructor and entrepreneurs and all operations „indispensable for the quickest implementation of the building”. The announcement of the competition for the project of the building of the Association of Engineers in Warsaw was placed in „Technical Review” no 33, dated August 1902. The conditions of the competition were interesting. Apart from three awards equal to 500, 250 and 150 roubles. There were considered only the projects of the members of the Association of Engineers in Warsaw. The Association reserved also a right to but the non-awarded projects at the price of 100 roubles.

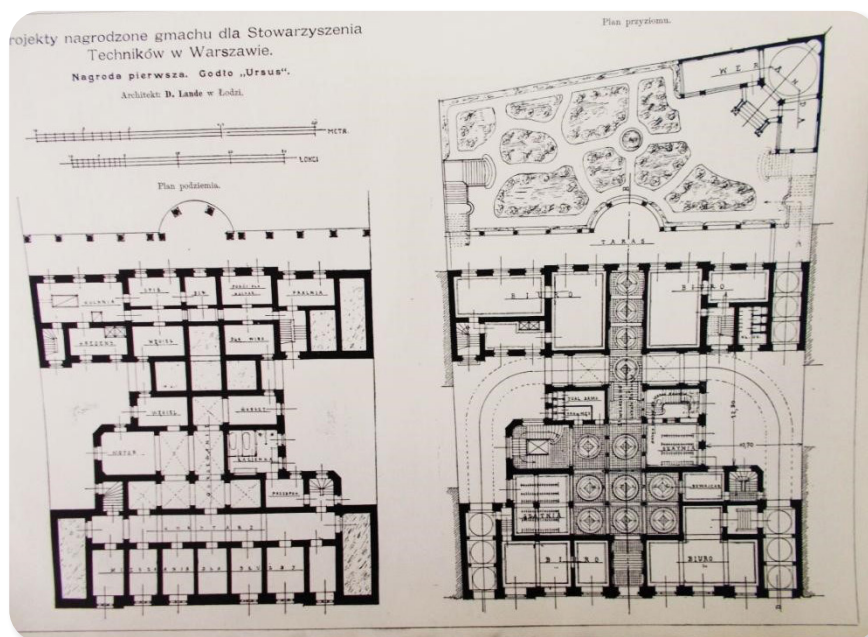
BH: *Can we say – after the elapse of more than one century from the discussed period – that the engineers of that time could accurately anticipate the meeting of the expectations of the engineering environment?*

JR: In my opinion, even very accurately. I would like to cite several from the remaining conditions of the discussed competition: „The building shall correspond to the needs of the Association and as the institution concentrating a social life of the members and, simultaneously, having the scientific and research targets. The building may have four floors. The ground floor shall include the rooms with the separate entrances, destined currently for lease as offices and in the future, for various institutions connected with the Association such as: offices, stid6y rooms, editorial offices etc. The specific rooms of the Association shall be found on the first, second and, eventually, on the third floor. Kitchens,

auxiliary rooms, living rooms for the service and clerks may be situated in attics (mansard) or on the basement level. There are necessary the following rooms: 1) the main entrance, cloakroom with a waiting room, large and appropriate for the mentioned above rooms, with elevator for 6 persons in the staircase; the office [two rooms, ca. 40 m² in total]; 3) the room of the Economic Council [ca. 30 m²]; 4) the main room for technical meetings, general assemblies and social meetings for 350 persons, with the scene, screen for projections and 2 small rooms near the scene [ca. 275 m²]; 5) 2 small working rooms for the commissions and departments (ca. 60 m²); 6) library [ca. 50 m²]; 7) reading room [40 m²]; 8) a room for technical collections [25 m²]; 9) major dining room for 280 – 300 persons, sideboard room with the lifts, buffet [ca. 240 m² in total]; 10) two smaller dining rooms for 50 persons [ca 80 m² in total]; 11) 3 cabinets near the dining room [ca 80 m² in total]; 12) snooker room [3 snooker devices, ca. 65 m²]; 13) room for playing cards [may be in 2 parts, ca. 120 m² in total]”.

Apart from the above, it was planned that all rooms would be accompanied by sanitary utility rooms, kitchen, pantries, cellars for storage of the products and the special basement rooms for wine, washing room, bathroom with a shore room, the room for technical equipment (lighting, heating, ventilation) and flats: a) 2 rooms with a kitchen for authorizing officer (intendant), b) 3 rooms for restaurateur, c) 1 room for lunch lady, d) 1 room with the kitchen for senior waiter, e) 2 rooms for scullery maids and farm labourers, f) 1 room for doorman, g) 1 room for watchman. Besides it, in the depth of the possession, the garden was planned; eventually with verandas and terraces on the first floor, communicating with the rooms of social meetings. The rooms and their entrances shall be so projected as to create a separate apartment for sparing it to the members of the Association for the private social meetings. The designers had also to consider the possibility of developing the building in the future.

Projection of cellars and ground floor derived from the project with “Ursus” emblem



BH: *It should be admitted that the requirements were not easy to be met...*

JR: In spite of this fact, 13 projects were submitted in total. The Commission for the evaluation of the projects, as being called the „competition court” gave the first prize to the project of the architect D. Lande from Łódź, with the „Ursus” emblem, the second prize - to the project of the same author (D. Lande) with the emblem „Engineer for Engineers” and the third one – to the project of architect Jan Fijałkowski from Warsaw, with the „Gniezno” emblem. The awarded projects were exhibited for one week (1 – 7 December 1902) in the flat at Królewska Street, 5. Despite the granted awards, after a precise consideration of the projects, the following text could be read in the „Report on the activity of the Association in 1902”: “The Commission came to the conclusion that any of the submitted projects was not suitable for the implementation due to the cost, exceeding the anticipated sum and due to the configuration on the plan. We decided, therefore, to think over a new project, using the material resulting from the submitted projects. To this end, a limited competition was arranged again. W. Marconi, Br. Rogóyski and J. Fijałkowski were invited to the mentioned competition”.

The conditions of the new competition were based on the principles of financial calculation and were aiming at the maintenance of the building of the Association at the level of no more than 10 000 roubles per year. The decision was undertaken to entrust the author of the best project with the task of constructing the building. Due to this reason, the Commission gave up the offer of the author of the projects, distinguished by the first and the second award as it was the person not living in Warsaw. The second competition resulted in a choice of the well thought project of the building, convenient in its configuration. Its author was Engineer Jan Fijałkowski and he also became

instructed with the task of implementing the construction work. On the other hand, the authors of the most important sections of the documentation were as follows: engineer architect W. Marconi (construction), Eng. C. Rodkiewicz (central heating and ventilation), Eng. K. Karczewski (lighting).

Architect Jan Fijałkowski, Eng., utilized skilfully a quite vast square (ca.2100 m²) for construction of two main pavilions: frontal one, situated on the first and second floor, destined for the needs of the engineering activities of the Association, and the back pavilion, on the same level of the floors, destined for the social purposes. In the middle of the mentioned pavilions, there was situated a staircase with the side galleries which were the convenient connectors of the both pavilions. Owing to it (as it was demanded during the second competition), the building was erected with the consideration of two natures of the Association: the scientific-technical (engineering) and the social institution.



Overall view of the building according to the project by architect Jan Fijałkowski, Eng



Rys. 15. Widok ogólny według projektu.

Arch. J. Fijałkowski.

The construction was commenced on July, 31, 1903; the solemn laying of the foundation stone had place on September, 5, 1903 and as early as in November 25, 1905, the building was given to the Association of the Engineers for use. Simultaneously, the building work was accompanied by the preparation and the implementation of external and internal decoration of the building. In „Technical Review” no. 10 of 1904, there was announced the 12th Competition of Warsaw Artistic Society for the projects of the sculptures which were assumed to decorate the front of the building, situated at Włodzimierska street, according to the following conditions: 1) the projects for the allegoric group, decorating a top of the building's front; 2) the projects for 2 single figures for the mentioned front; 3) the sketches shall be performed in gypsum and have the following dimensions: a) for the group – the height of 80 cm and b) for the figures – the height of 80 cm.

The prizes for the best projects were: groups – 300 roubles and for 2 figures – 200 roubles. The subjects of the composition were optional, corresponding however to the building which was maintained in a style of the late French Renaissance. The authors of the rewarded project were entitled to perform a model in

gypsum to be next carved in Pińczów limestone; the dimensions should be as follows: for the groups – 2 m and for the figures – 1.15 m. the payment for the gypsum models were equal to 600 roubles (group) and 200 roubles (2 figures). The Competition jury granted unanimously the reward of 300 roubles to the piece of art, bearing the emblem „Dedalus and Icarus” by Zygmunt Otto. Finally, Mr Otto made three sculptures from the limestone for the House of the Engineer. The group representing Dedalus and Icarus was placed on the top of the building. The remaining two sculptures - Archimedes and a woman with a radium ray was placed on the front of the building at the height of the second floor.

BH: *The front of the building is impressive. Even if we do not enter the Czackiego street, we must perceive the outstanding front façade of the building of the House of Engineer...*

JR: Yes, indeed, the façade is impressive, exceptional and enchanting; primarily, it was even more interesting. The top was decorated with the sculpture performed from limestone by Zygmunt Otto; it represented old Dedalus, father of mythological engineering and architecture, creator of Labyrinth, and his visionary son, Icarus who wanted, on the wings glued with wax, to rise up to the bright, sunny lands of ideas. It is the juxtaposition

of realism and idealism in the engineering and art, practical life conditions and ideal aspirations of technique which does not know the borders for its development. The discussed masterpiece accented the axis of the building and was a significant element of the composition. Unfortunately, the sculpture was damaged during the World War II.

According to the project of the architect Jan Fijałkowski, the building was constructed with three-floor, seven-axis façade with two-floor pedestal. On the pedestal, there was placed two-column portico, staying in a perfect harmony with the composite capitals (caps of columns), ended with the tympanum, interrupted at its base. The space of the mentioned front piece with the interrupted beaming was filled with a bib outwardly curved cartouche. Over it, there was an inscription reading ARTIBUS TECHNICIS MCMIV and above it – a head of woman with the cover similar to an open shell. The cartouche was supported by two, freely sitting, and semi-naked figures of women in dishevelled dresses. They were both oriented to the cartouche – one woman pointed her right hand to the head of another woman above the cartouche and the second woman kept a laurel wreath in her left hand. Under the cartouche, there was a lion's head. Many such heads were found on the facade of the building.

On the corners of the balcony at the second floor, in the central avant-corps („fore-body”), there are two preserved-until-



now figures, also by chisel of Zygmunt Otto. They represent the extreme stages of the contemporary engineering: Archimedes, using his machine and lever, and a modern female figure, keeping shining radium in her hand. Application of the act of the Nobel Prize Laureate (1902) in order to express, in the allegoric form, the newest achievements of science is an evidence of a big creativity of the author and quite a big courage in this respect. The sculpture's form was skilfully adapted to neo-baroque decoration of the facade.

The axis of the building in the upper part is emphasized by the until-now existing deep-seated entrance portico with two columns made from black marble. It contains the inscription reading: FEDERATION OF THE ENGINEERING ASSOCIATIONS.

Vertical composition of the facade was additionally stressed by two extreme projections crowned with the peaks in a shape of arch and with four-shell dome with small lanterns. At the lower part, you could find the passage gates leading to small yards; they were linked with the cradles and had a rich sculpturing. They have survived until now. The central part above the main entrance had a characteristic cradling roof (Delorme roof).

BH: *Not only the facade is impressive. We may also see a lot of interesting things inside the building of the House of Engineers.*

Deep-seated entrance portico with the columns made from black marble.



Lighting of the main hall facilitates the admiration of the rich and precise decorations



JR: The attention is attracted by the entrance hall and the main staircase, the upper part of which at the third floor is decorated by plafond by the painter artist, Stanisław Bohusz-Siestrzeńcewicz. It was probably the only one plafond in Warsaw which was painted as plafond, not as image. It presented „Renaissance”, i.e. marching of humanity towards the better future. The discussed plafond was destroyed during the World War II and during the building during the Warsaw Uprising. We may see its black-white photography only in the archival copies (No. 50-51) of the „Illustrated Weekly” of 1905 and in No. 18 of „Technical Review” of 1907.

Despite the careful searches in archives, museums and libraries, it was not possible to find any coloured image of the discussed plafond. Due to this fact, the attempt to reproduce the mentioned piece of art of the painter was not undertaken.

Historical and contemporary photos of the main staircase



We should also pay attention to the representative conference room having a height of 9 m and area of 328 m², situated at the third floor. It was called earlier the main lecturing hall with the adjacent rooms, enabling also its utilization for other purposes, and namely: as a meeting room, for concerts, theatre performance etc. On the wall from the side of the street, there are three big semi-circular closed areas, covered with glass. The discussed room had very abundantly decorated walls and ceiling with two

big chandeliers which may be admired only in the archival copy of „Technical Review”. Opposite the big representative room, there was a large dining room (height 7 m, area 152 m²) which was lighted by 3 chandeliers. In the discussed room, banquets and solemn parties had place; there was also a small scene with a small elevation and, in the vicinity, a heraldic room. The entrance to the terrace and garden, situated behind the back pavilion led from the dining room via loggia which played a role of winter garden during the winter time.

The wars left the durable traces in the House of the Engineer which are even not perceived by the contemporary users of the building.

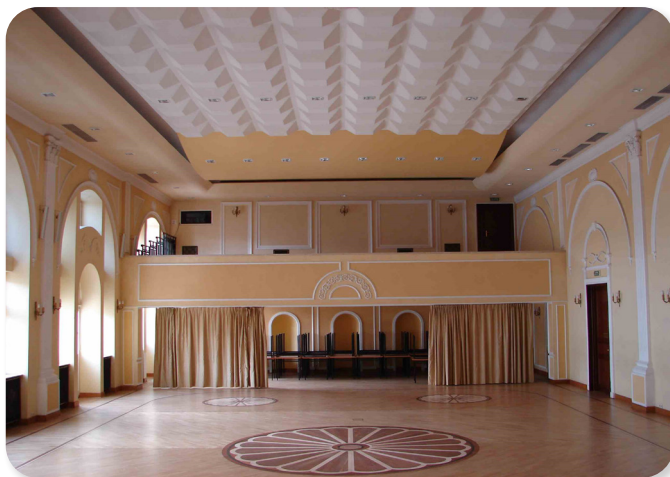
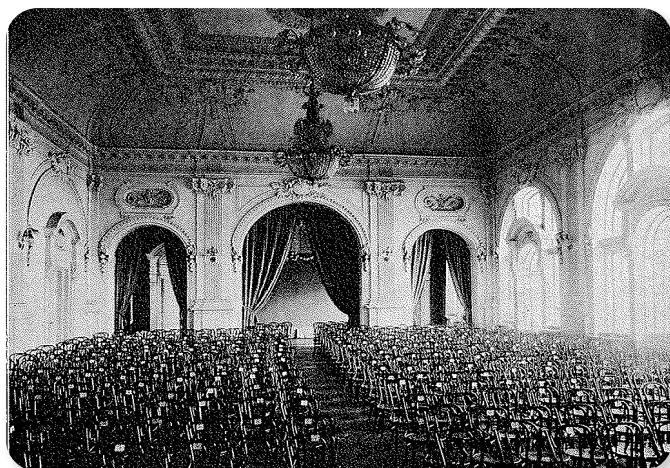
Financial state of the Association, as being weakened as a result of the World War I was many times the subject of care and considerations of the Council. In 1915, they planned to address the more wealthy members of the Association, living in the Empire, for a loan. The flow of the events did not allow developing the mentioned action of self-assistance. Since the beginning of the World War I until July of the reporting year (1915), the upper rooms of the building of the Association were occupied by the hospital of the Polish Committee of Sanitary Assistance on a free basis but under the condition of returning the costs of renovation of the rooms and these parts of the building which were changed due to the needs of the hospital. The mentioned costs were not returned as they were expected to be paid by the Union of Lands, the authorities of which left Warsaw in a hurry. The Council authorized its member, Mr. Majewski, evacuated into the depth of the State, to receive the sums due to the Association from the Union of Lands and to store the money until the return to the country. The incomes from the tenants, inhabiting the building were considerably decreased because the Council had to lower the payment few times.

The Association played – as before – its public and civil service, giving asylum or sojourn to different institutions of public service, freely or only for return of the maintenance costs of a given flat. Thus, the letter of the Commission of the Care of Public Buildings of the Citizens' Committee resulted in granting a free utilization of the room for the office of the mentioned commission. For example, the Department of the Enlightenment of the discussed above Committee asked the Association to hire freely the room for 3 weeks, for the lectures of the persons, teaching the illiterates. The Council granted a heraldic hall for this purpose. The Council decided to support the attempts of the Circle of Architects in respect of opening the lectures on rural building and hired the heraldic hall at the sum of 300 roubles for the whole year.

During the World War II and occupation of Warsaw, the House of Engineer was destroyed very much. Due to the Nazi raids and bombs falling on Warsaw, the third and fourth floors were burned in September 1939. The damage caused by fire covered also the plafond on the ceiling of the main staircase, painted by artist Stanisław Bohusz-Sięstrzeńcewicz. The buildings on the both corners of Czackiego street and Świętokrzyska street were also completely destroyed. After the fall of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, a special „brand-commando”, established for the damage

of the buildings in Warsaw, set up the fire at the remaining part of the House of the Engineer. The fire burned down the abundant interior fittings and, also, rich molding ornaments by the sculptor Jan Gardecki. We may find them on old photos. The fire destroyed completely the ceilings, situated on wooden beams and caused the falling down of many partition walls. Many sculptures, including the figures of Dedalus and Icarus, being visible earlier at the top of the building, were damaged, as well. The fire weakened considerably the side walls.

Historical view of a large conference hall and its contemporary images after renovation



Big efforts of the engineering environment resulted in reconstruction of the House of Engineer after the war damages, including the representative hall on the third floor. The systematic renovation and modernization covers not only the rooms. The House of Engineer has the plans of revitalization which are implemented gradually in the particular stages as the House gives all the time the active support to the engineering associations. In 2014, some very significant constructions were performed. The first stage from the programme of the building revitalization was implemented, i.e. desiccation and damp insulation of the walls in the building's cellars. The fire-signalizing system in the building, together with its connection to the monitoring at the State Fire Brigade was performed in 2015. Also, the necessary lightning protection system was installed. The both mentioned installations have significantly contributed to the rise of the safety of the persons, staying in the building and also protected the building from the possible fire events. Warsaw House of Engineer (WDT) Ltd. conducts the repairs and furnishes the conference rooms with the audio-visual devices. The mentioned conference halls are utilized for conferences, training, cultural and social meetings, organized by Engineering Associations and FSNT NOT as well as for the concerts, New Year Parties, prom nights for the youth and events for external entities.

The Management of WDT NOT Ltd. has implemented one of very important stages of revitalization and modernization of the House of Engineer in Warsaw – the project of constructing a new lift, travelling from the basement floor up to the 3rd floor where the greatest conference rooms are situated. The mentioned lift was launched in June 2016. Many changes in the interior part of the building, implementing the successive stages of revitalization were carried out. The molding was supplemented and the main entrance to the building, hall at the basement floor and the main staircase were reconstructed. In 2018, the major renovation of the Presidium Hall on the 2nd floor and of the adjacent corridors and of the corridor at the 5th floor in the over-built part (1968) was carried out.

A lot of the work in the 115 years old Warsaw House of Engineer was undertaken and performed on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of regaining the independence by Poland. The implementation of the successive stages of revitalization i.e. front facade and courtyards and the remaining parts of the building is anticipated for the next years (it is dependent on the financial capabilities of WDT NOT). The above mentioned work at the building and care of the technical condition of Warsaw House of Engineer NOT is performed with the purpose to serve the next generations of technicians and engineers for at least the next 115 years as the House of Engineer, although being more than 100 years old, is completely modern entity; it has a charming secession architecture. Therefore, there are many scientific-research conferences, symposia, debates and trainings

Entrance to the new lift on the basement floor



organized by the Engineering Associations and the units of the Federation, various organizations have their seat in the building: the Chief Management of FSNT NOT, 17 boards of the major engineering associations, Warsaw Council of FSNT NOT with many divisions of the particular associations belonging to NOT and the editorial offices of scientific and technical periodicals. As early as in 1996 the matters of purchase of the rooms in the building at Świętokrzyska street 14 (from Czackiego street to staircase A) were officially regulated; they were integrally linked with the building at Czackiego street 3/5. The conference rooms of Warsaw House of Engineer are also often a place of social meeting of the technicians and engineers, frequently with the families in the case of different occasions and jubilees.

Thus, the tasks which constituted the basis of the assumptions of building the Warsaw House of Engineer are still implemented and developed. The maintenance of the building, being as a well-known nest of engineering environment in the centre of Warsaw, which was constructed by the Association of the Engineers in 1905 during the Russian invasion – in spite of the changes in the system and economy during a century – is our common duty i.e. of Polish technicians and engineers.

BH: *I thank you very much for the interview and reminding a very interesting history of this unusual object.*