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STANISŁAW STASZIC – POLITICIAN, SCHOLAR, REFORMER 2026 – THE 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS PASSING AWAY

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If we wanted to ask the representatives of different environments who Stanisław Staszic was, we would receive different answers, being naturally dependent on the specificity of a given circle. Each of the respondents would focus on the area being mostly meaningful for him or her. To say that Stanisław Staszic was the universal man, it would be undoubtedly too little. From among all his activities, the most frequently quoted ones include: pioneer of cooperative movement, political writer and publicist, social reformer, translator, philosopher, statesman and patriot, naturalist, geographer and geologist and, finally, a Catholic priest who, however, throughout all his life had not ministered to a parish. Staszic is a more or less known founder of many still to-day existing institutions but also a man who – as being a free mason – changed consequently his environment, persistently worked in favour of general good and gave the background to thinking about (or perhaps, first of all) the community.

Medicine owes him a testament-registered financial contribution to constructing, *inter alia*, the following hospitals: the Child Jesus Clinic at Lindley street, Institute for Tuberculosis and Pulmonary Diseases, Institute of Deaf-Mute Persons, the Poorhouse for Housing and Labor (it does not exist nowadays in its primary form, but constitutes a part of Wolski Hospital), and not-existing now the Saint Spirit Clinic.

Stanisław Staszic is called a "ruder of his generation". He was born on November, 6, 1755 in Piła. He became early recognized as a reformer, scholar and politician. He actively participated in the work of the Great Sejm (Polish Parliament) (1788–1792). He wrote then "Remarks upon the Life of Jan Zamojski". The mentioned publication was edited as anonymous work (1787) and it contained a famous sentence: "The Commonwealths will be always such as their youth's upbringing". Three years later, there were published the "Warnings for Poland" where Stanisław Staszic formulated a famous idea: "I will say who is noxious to my fatherland; from the

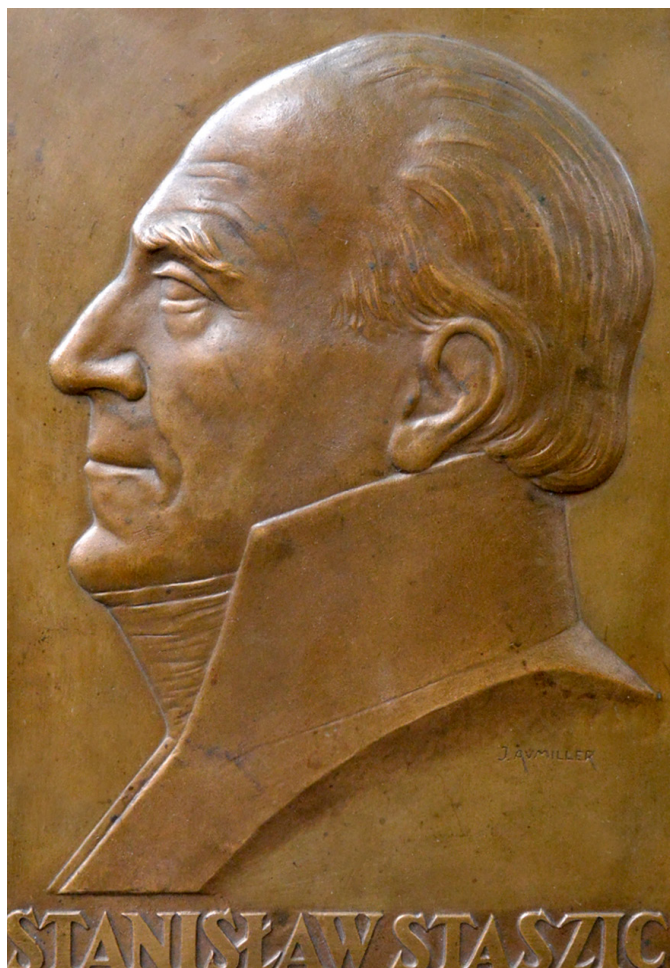


Fig. 1. A bronze plaque bearing the image of Stanisław Staszic, designed by J. Aumiller, from the collection of the Warsaw University of Technology Museum; State Mint, 1926 / photo: Warsaw University of Technology Museum (WUT Museum)



Fig. 2. The Staszic Palace building in Warsaw, headquarters of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Warsaw Scientific Society (photo: Katarzyna Trzecznyńska)

lords (nobility), the whole disaster to Poland comes". The ideas and suggestions of Staszic were partially incorporated to the resolutions of the Great Sejm and the Constitution of 3 May 1791.

After establishing of the Duchy of Warsaw, Staszic became the member of the Education Chamber and later on, of the State Council. Owing to him, the elementary, secondary and high education was organized. In Polish Kingdom, Staszic was the member of the Commission of Religion Confessions and Public Enlightenment and of the Governmental Commission for Internal Affairs and Police.

Stanisław Staszic initiated the uprising and was involved in the activities of many important institutions, having the educational character. What unusual, all those entities are functioning until now and all implement their goals.

In 1809, the Educational Chamber of the Duchy of Warsaw established the Academic-Medical Department, being commonly called Medical Academy. The President of the mentioned Department was the priest, Stanisław Staszic. The solemn inauguration of Medical Academy had place on June, 7, 1810. Stanisław Staszic, Hiacynt Dziarkowski, Franciszek Brandt and Józef Czekierski were the speakers during the ceremony. In the Academy, the following sciences were taught: medicine, surgery and pharmacy. The studies lasted for 4 years and were terminated by a public examination. On December, 30, 1813, eighteen graduates obtained the diplomas. In 1816, The Main School was established; it was later transformed into University of Warsaw. In the same year (1816), the Agronomy Institute in Marymont was created; it was the first high agricultural school and the precursor of Warsaw University of Life Sciences (former SGGW).

In 1816, as a result of efforts of Stanisław Staszic, the Mining Academy was created in Kielce. In 1817, the Institute of the Deaf-Mute and Blind Persons was created. It was found and still it is found at the Three Crosses Square in Warsaw. In 1826, Stanisław Staszic participated in opening of the Preparatory School to Technical Studies, the precursor of the later Warsaw University of Technology.

Staszic implemented also a very interesting idea, consisting in organization of cooperative under the name of Hrubieszów Agricultural Society. It included 9 villages belonging to Staszic, with the number of 4000 inhabitants. He released all of them from serfdom; they paid commonly the taxes for maintenance of church, shop and hospital. The cooperative survived until 1951.

The unusual personality of Stanisław Staszic was also revealed in financial sphere. He knew how to enlarge his property in different ways. He placed his money advantageously; he also participated in the exchange-market. At the age of 45 years, he was already a millionaire. He confirmed by his life what he proclaimed publicly: he lived modestly, did not care of the honors and implemented consequently the proclaimed ideas. The best example was his testament in which he destined his total property for public aims.

Stanisław Staszic was a moralist and pragmatist – idealist who acted in a very precise way. After his comeback from France (where he studied professional geological literature) to Warsaw in 1805, he became involved in the activities of the Society of Friends of Learning. The mentioned society was established in 1800 as a result of demand on and seeking for the ways of saving the national identity. It was founded by a group of persons connected with the democratic party of the Great Sejm, including Jan Albertrandi who

had been the President of the Society for the period of 8 years until his death. Poland was then partitioned among three invaders and Warsaw was found under the Prussian rules.

There is not surprising then that the aims set by the Society concerned a development of Polish language, the necessity of publishing translations and treatises, and enlightenment *via* the lectures and printing. There was undertaken the decision on care of the development of Polish language and popularization of science. The integration of the scientific, cultural and educational environments was also a significant problem.

Stanisław Staszic who meantime has returned to the country, became also engaged in the mentioned above work of the Society and bought three tenement houses in Warsaw at Kanonia street, 8. The mentioned address became soon the headquarters of the Society.

It should be stressed that during the meetings of the Society, only Polish language was spoken; the care was taken of the purity and correctness of translations into Polish, and writing in Polish was supported.

The support of natural sciences, technology and medicine was one of the forms of the activities of the Society. The efforts were aimed at development of elementary papers such as e.g. "Geography, that is, mathematical and physical description of the Earth" by Jan Śniadecki. There were also conducted astronomic, meteorological and geological observations.

A special role in the Society was played by Abraham Stern, the Jude from Hrubieszów, the inventor and self-learner who was famous due to discovery of "calculating machine for 4 mathematical operations" and topographic trolley, serving for measurements of poviats (the administration unit of the country), districts and of the whole country. Stanisław Staszic took a special care of him and supported his inventions.

It was commonly recognized that Stanisław Staszic was not friendly to Polish Judes. In fact, he criticized the mentioned social group but he was not unfriendly to them. Moreover, he thought that the wise government could properly utilize their large potential. Such convictions of Staszic allowed him supporting significantly Abraham Stern whose patron and promoter he became. The mentioned above "device", constructed by Stern was demonstrated during the meeting of the Society of Friends of Learning and caused a great sensation. Abraham Stern became the member of the Society in 1830.

It may be supposed that Stern's activities convinced Staszic because they were consistent with the idea of "useful for the nation", being often cited in his writings. It was one of the arguments aiming at recognizing Staszic, being a scholar, entrepreneur, politician, financial expert and, finally, philanthropist as one of the most outstanding personalities of his time and as co-creator of social elite of the country, the elite of Poland.

Since 1809 the Society had conducted Library and Archives. It took care of the documents of the 4-Year Sejm and the documents concerning the Revolution of 1794 or Polish Legions. The mentioned archival papers were obtained on the grounds of the testament of the General Jan Henryk Dąbrowski (1818).

During the mentioned above period, Poland and Europe experienced the boom and decline of Napoleon. In 1812, Stanisław Staszic formulated one of the most meaningful ideas, determining the

direction of activity of the Poles' generations: "Be useful for your nation". By this, he indicated the involvement and practical assistance which should occur in relation citizen – state.

In 1815, after establishment of the Kingdom of Poland, being dependent on Russia, tsar Alexander issued a diploma, ensuring the care and royal protection to Royal Warsaw Society of Friends of Learning. In such situation, Staszic began to think about a new headquarters of the Society. He decided to sell his houses at Kanonia street, 8 and build a new place for the Society in the center of Warsaw. On September 28, 1830, the foundation stone was laid and the bottle, containing old and new currency, various medals and diplomas of the Society and the names of all its members were bricked in the walls. The fundaments contained also the medal of 1808, commemorating the foundation of the Society and granting the royal title to the Society.

On October, 5, 1823, the first meeting had place in the seat of the Society of the Friends of Learning. It was created by Italian architect Antonio Corazzi. The palace was constructed in a classicistic style, decorating the panorama of the Krakowskie Przedmieście street.

All architectonic elements were carefully designed. The front stairs were made from the Chęciny marble. At the bottom, the figure of Kazimierz Wielki, performed from dark-yellow marble was placed: it presented a lying knight, a large mask from sandstone which was probably a chip of caryatid; and there were also stone plates with Polish-Lithuanian coats of arms.

In the vestibule, the marble panel was bricked in; it contained the proclamation of Elector Frederic Augustus I of Saxony, Duke of Warsaw, dating back to 23 of October, 1807.

In the Hall of Meetings, the portraits of tsar Alexander I and Frederick Augustus were hanged and also the marble busts of the famous Poles and the members of the Society were placed.

The next place after the room of meetings was H.J. Dąbrowski Hall where the testament-recorded archives of Polish Legions, weapons, plants and documents were found. The next room was called armory. There were 5 cannons, one of them dating back to 1794, 4 flags (including 3 legion ones), the original banner of Mahomet, gained in 1863 by King Jan Sobieski at Vienna, enameled broadsword of Tadeusz Kościuszko with the inscription reading: "fatherland - to its defender", 3 rifle bullets which hit H.J. Dąbrowski at Verona, Tczew and Berezina and, also, a map of Russia of 1812 which was owned by Napoleon and was given to Dąbrowski. The testament of General of 1818 enabled all Poles to see the mentioned collection and ordered not to separate them.

Apart from the collection of J.H. Dąbrowski, in the Palace there were the rooms of medals, collections of minerals and gallery of paintings. During the meetings of the Society, many lectures were delivered. In 1805, Stanisław Staszic submitted a treatise on the geological situation and characteristics of Polish mountains (in Polish: "O ziemiórództwie dawnej Sarmacji"). He placed therein an address, calling for attachment to homeland: "may happen that even a great nation may fall whereas the wicked one somehow cannot be destroyed.." One of the most important achievements of the Society includes publication of "Historical songs" by Julian Niemcewicz and "Dictionary of Polish Language" by Samuel Bogusław Linde (6 volumes). During the promotion of the Dictionary in English Hotel,



Fig. 3. The unveiling of a portrait of Stanisław Staszic at the Warsaw House of Technology (NOT) during the celebrations for World Engineers' Day, March 2026 (photo: SIGMA-NOT Publishing House)

Stanisław Staszic paid the attention to the necessity of erecting the monument of Mikołaj Kopernik in Warsaw. "The national fame of Kopernik requires from us to prevent usurpation by the foreigners". To implement the project, Staszic employed the outstanding Dutch sculptor, Bertel Thorvaldsen. He paid for this work mainly from his own money. The monument was exposed in 1830, already after the death of Staszic.

The fame of the Society attracted the greatest scientists and famous persons of the contemporary world. The foreign members of the Society were, *inter alia*: Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the USA; Johann Wolfgang Goethe, the outstanding German poet; Alexander von Humbolt, German naturalist and traveler, John Dalton, English physicist, chemist and meteorologist; Rene Chateaubriand, French writer, politician and diplomat.

Stanisław Staszic was also active in the matters of development of textile industry in Łódź and mining industry in Kielce. He created also a Mining Corpus – organization having a vocational character.

The unusual personality of Staszic was also manifested in his modesty. Once, the request came from France asking for biographies of the members to the Biographic Publication. Staszic refused as "the modesty does not allow the living people to publish the information about them with the aim to be contained in the paper, being published publicly".

He lived alone in three rooms in the Zamojski Palace, he employed only a coachman and one servant. He was active in the Society of Friends of Learning until the end of his life. He died on January, 20, 1826. His funeral was a great manifestation. The thousands of people passed the way from the Palace to Bielany District, to the Camaldolese church where he was buried. The students who

had carried the coffin, tore the shroud later on into pieces and took them for memory. Among the attenders, there was also a young Fryderyk Chopin.

After the death of Staszic, Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz became the president of the Society. In 1830 when the November Uprising occurred, many members of the Society took participation in the struggle for the homeland. The defeat of the uprising was the end of the activity of the Society. On April 6, 1832 the Duke Alexander Tsernyshev (Czernyszew) wrote to the count Ivan Paskiewicz: "the Emperor decided to recognize the Society of the Friends of Learning as not-existing". In consequence of the mentioned decision, the collections were confiscated and exported to Moscow and Petersburg. In the building of the Staszic Palace, the Board of Lottery was located and later, from 1857 – the Medical-Surgery Academy was placed, and then – a secondary school (gymnasium) was installed. In 1893, the Palace was reconstructed. The historical Hall of meetings was changed into the Saint Tatiana of Rome Orthodox church. The façade of the building was also changed into Russian style, with the brick-maiolica elements. During the First World War, when the Russians left Warsaw, the façade was taken off and after the war, there was a comeback to Corazzi project.

Although the material background of the existence of the Society was destroyed, and the Society became dissolved, the idea of the group of the scholars survived. It was destroyed neither by the dark of the partitions nor by the activities aimed at wiping the names of the noble persons from the memory of the nation. When the Dawn of the Freedom appeared, Warsaw Scientific Society (1907) and Polish Academy of Sciences (1951) were established. The both mentioned institutions feel as the inheritors of the Staszic ideas and they have their seat in the Staszic Palace.

The motto of Warsaw Scientific Society is a watchword developed in the years 1907–1908, coming from Thorvaldsen relief. *A Genio lumen* means exactly "From genius the light comes". The interpretation of the mentioned low relief may be wide but it is recognized in many papers that it has defined an area of values, being confessed by the persons associated in the Society. It treated the mind, human thought as a force, creating the new civilization values. What important, the motto indicated the active attitude to the existing reality. It was connected with a belief in the power of human mind and based upon the scientific and educational activity.

All science and culture efforts undertaken in the Staszic Palace have its Creator as a patron. Stanisław Staszic is not a hero of one epoch but the architect of the future. He has not left the castles or dynasties, he did not possess any army but he created the institutions and gave the shape to the ideas which have functioned until now. He formulated his program as it follows: "To save and improve the fatherland speech, to preserve the native land and all its crops. To gain them and use, it is necessary to develop skills and arts. In order to reach this all, we should be useful to our nation".

Literature

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