

Patriotism



Jan Czochralski and President von Hindenburg at "Werkstoffschau" exhibition



Poster of the international industry exhibition "Werkstoffschau" (Material Exhibition) in Berlin, 1927

Jan Czochralski was born in a region under Prussian domination, but he always proudly stressed his Polish nationality. Living in Germany he helped Polish students and actively participated in the life of the Polish community. For this he was known and valued by Poles living in Germany. During the exhibition "Werkstoffschau" in Berlin in 1927 Czochralski was showing guests, including Germany's president, around. This is when a situation happened that was widely commented in the German press. Czochralski's daughter Leonia recalls:

My father was the main organiser of "Werkstoffschau", a large-scale, impressive technical and scientific exhibition. The opening ceremony was participated by Paul von Hindenburg, Germany's president, and my Father was supposed to present the exhibition to the honourable guest. Having greeted my Father, the president expressed his astonishment that with a Polish surname, my Father had such a good command of the German language and could not resist asking whether my Father was Polish, which the latter of course confirmed. Then Hindenburg answered in Polish: "So, Engineer, let us speak Polish, which I also know". He asked my Father which part of Poland he came from, and having heard about Kcynia he exclaimed with joy: "Dear sir, we are neighbours, because I have a residence near Poznań!". The president's retinue and the present guests were listening to this conversation, held in the Polish language, with utmost indignation. Count von Vitzthum was particularly irritated and ventured to make a critical remark. This was however a bad decision – the president scolded him, then took my Father by the arm and asked him to show him the exhibits.

Another story told by Czochralski's daughter is worth presenting here:

I recall an interesting moment, very characteristic of my Father. During conventions of Deutsche Gesellschaft für Metallkunde, organised usually on a large scale and participated by scientists from around the world, my Father often played the role of the host. According to the German custom my Father had to make the first toast "This first glass to my German fatherland". However, he never said these words, changing the text to "This first glass to the German fatherland", stressing in this way that it was not his fatherland. This drew attention of the opponents of Poland present at the convention. When asked by Count Schwerin why he changed the wording of the toast my Father replied shortly that he was a Pole.