

# Wacław Lasocki (1837–1921) – his life in Poland and Siberia

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**Abstract:** Wacław Lasocki was born in Wołyń in a Polish family of landed gentry in 1837. He graduated from University in Kiev with diploma in medicine in 1859. He took part in insurrection in 1863 and was condemned to death and later to deportation to Siberia by the Russians. He stayed in Siberia from 1864 to 1873 where he gained recognition as an excellent physician. After his return to Poland he contributed to creation of health institution in Nałęczów. He died in 1921.

**Key words:** history of medicine, physician, Polish medicine, Siberia

Wacław Lasocki was an outstanding physician, whose destiny was a long stay in Siberia. He was born in 1837 in Bigówka in the Wołyń region into a Polish landowning family preserving rich patriotic traditions. In 1854 he completed his secondary education in Żytomierz. He studied at St. Vladimir University in Kiev, where he was awarded a diploma in medicine in 1859.

In the years 1859–1860, he was employed in the Kievan military hospital. Later he moved to the country and worked on his home farm. In 1861 he married Maria Mianowska (1840–1898) [1]. Staying in the country, he acted as a secretary of the Wolyn Medical Society (Towarzystwo Lekarskie Wołyńskie). He was arrested for participation in the anti-Russian uprising, which broke out within the former territory of Poland in 1863. After a 4-month imprisonment he was sentenced to death. Due to the efforts of his closest family and a 5,000-ruble bribe in silver, the sentence was changed to the 10-year hard labor in a saltern in Usole in the Irkutsk district. As a consequence of the punishment, Lasocki was “deprived of all state rights, both inborn and acquired, i.e. the nobility and the medical diploma [...] as well as movables and real estates” [2].

Dressed in a convict garment, he was transported along with his wife to Siberia. After reaching Tobolsk, he took active part, with the consent of local Russian authorities, in eradication of typhoid and smallpox epidemic, among others introducing perfect order in the local hospital. For his huge contribution to fighting the epidemics of infectious diseases, the Russian governor of Tobolsk asked competent authorities

for pardon for the Polish physician. In October 1865, Maria and Wacław Lasocki went to Usole, and next October the Czar himself overruled Lasocki’s sentence, however he was ordered to settle in Siberia [3]. Deciding on staying in Usole, the Lasocki family bought a house, where they lived for over 3 years. At that time, 17 exile physicians lived in the town and patients were coming to see them even from Irkutsk. Lasocki, as a state prisoner, was deprived of the right to practice his profession, so initially he worked as a feldsher in the local hospital, taking active part in meetings of the Society of Usole Physicians. Only after being pardoned, he went into private medical practice, which, due to strong competition, failed to bring him substantial profit. In 1869, the Lasocki family was ordered to settle permanently in Galitch (Kostroma province) in Siberia [4]. In the town with 10,000 inhabitants, there practiced 5 physicians. Lasocki run a private practice with two Polish physicians: Karol Brodowski and Feliks Kieniewicz, gaining huge popularity among local society. In recognition of his diagnostic and therapeutic achievements, Lasocki regained all his rights as a physician and the title of nobility. Moreover, he became famous for efficient eradication of a cholera epidemic in Kostroma, where he introduced subcutaneous morphine injection and ether to reduce bowel in patients. Thanks to gratitude and friendliness of Kostroma inhabitants, in 1871 the Lasocki family moved to the town. Despite insults from Russian physicians, who regarded a foreign practitioner first of all as a rival, the number of patients coming to his surgery was constantly growing. Leaving Siberia for his homeland in 1873 [5], Lasocki had 6,000 rubles, which was a considerable amount of money at those times. Both the governor and the people of Kostroma tried in vain to dissuade Lasocki from leaving Siberia, offering him numerous awards and medals.

In Warsaw Lasocki initially run a private practice, and in 1875 he obtained a position of head physician of the Vistula Railway (Kolej Nadwiślańska). In 1878, he became one of the founders (along with Fortunat Nowicki and Kon-

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Received: November 19, Accepted in final form: November 28, 2007.

Conflict of interest: none declared.

Pol Arch Med Wewn. 2007; 117 (11-12): 528-529

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**Fig.** Wacław Lasocki. A picture taken from a book by Antoni Kuczyński "Syberia. Cztery lata polskiej diaspory", Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków, Ossolineum, 1993: p. 272

rad Chmielewski) of a company, which objective was to establish a health resort in Naleczów. In 1884, presiding over the Board of Shareholders (Rada Zarządzająca Towarzystwa Udziałowego), he saved the project from failure and within several years he brought prosperity to the health resort, which earned him a title of the "Naleczów resurrector". He also rendered services to Naleczów establishing a local museum, for which he handed over numerous objects of historical value and books. He also donated a part of his collection to the National Museum in Warsaw.

Wacław Lasocki was an honorary member of the Warsaw Medical Society (Towarzystwo Lekarskie Warszawskie) and the Lublin Medical Society (Towarzystwo Lekarskie Lubelskie). During the time of Poland Republic II he was honored with the Polonia Restituta Cross for participation in the January Uprising. He died on December 27, 1921 in Naleczów and was buried there [6]. Ten years after Lasocki's death his memoirs were published.

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