



SENAT RP

## NOTES ON THE SENATE

SENATE  
OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF POLAND

CHANCELLERY OF THE SENATE  
OFFICE FOR CITIZEN RELATIONS  
ul. Wiejska 6, 00-902 Warszawa  
tel. (48-22) 694-92-84  
fax (48-22) 694-95-70  
www.senat.gov.pl

## Diaries and Shorthand Reports of Debates

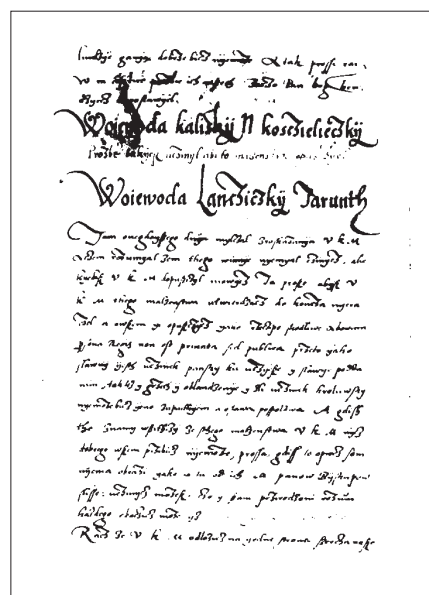
There were no official records of proceedings of parliament in Old Poland, but this does not mean to say that there are no written reports of what went on. From the 16th century, so-called “swift writers” wrote down a record of the debates. They were secretaries employed by dignitaries, most frequently their courtiers. The Deputies sometimes made a record of the debates for themselves, or at someone else’s request.

In Old Poland, the so-called Gdańsk records - reports written in German by observers from Gdańsk or emissaries to the Sejm from minor Prussian cities - were kept of Sejm debates. There were thus several diaries in existence for many Sejms, but individual examples could have different editions and copies. This enables us to cross-check them today. These diaries were very different from today’s shorthand reports. They were not a verbatim record of a debate, but a summary of everything that was said at a Sejm sitting, and also a record of how those attending behaved. Speeches whose complete text was supplied by deputies and senators were given more detailed treatment.

After World War II, Professor Władysław Konopczyński published a list of 245 pre-Partition Sejms, held over a period of 300 years. Around 900 diaries were listed for them. The earliest surviving diary is from the year 1548. Many diaries still remain in manuscript form. From the 1880s onwards, the Old Polish diaries began to be printed, thanks in great measure to the Polish Academy of Learning and the Warsaw Scientific Society.

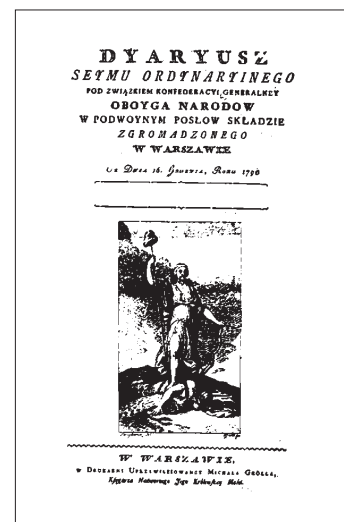
At the time of King Stanisław August Poniatowski, the diaries were written on the basis of “notebooks” by secretaries of the House of Deputies, most of whom were employed by the Royal Secretariat. No complete diary of the Great Sejm has been published. Two diaries appeared at the time, but they covered barely a fifth of the sitting. Material collected for the diarists of the Four-year Sejm exists in the archive of its Secretariat, which was thought to have been lost but which turned up in the USSR in 1960.

The diaries of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Congress Kingdom of Poland were official records. In the constitutional statute, which

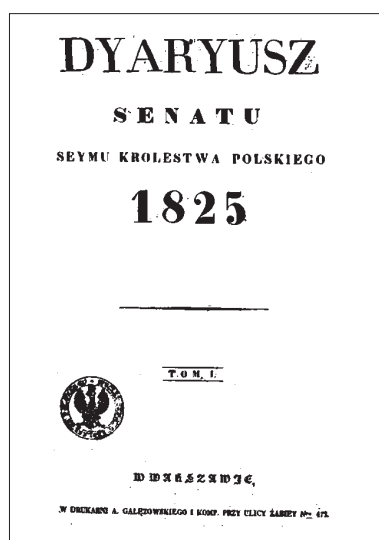


The page of the oldest Sejm diary

extended the provisions of the Constitution conferred on the Kingdom in 1815 by Tsar Alexander I, we read: “A Secretary of State appointed by the King will keep a written record of proceedings in the Senate; the Marshal will call on one of the members of the House of Deputies to fulfil the duties of Secretary of the aforesaid House.” Chancellery employees recorded speeches as faithfully as possible in longhand, and the diary was compiled by the Secretary of the House. The record of proceedings was available for examination in the Chancellery. The diaries of the Senate of the Duchy of Warsaw and the Congress Kingdom were edited by Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz. It was written in the resolutions of the Sejm of the 1831 Uprising: “A Sejm Diary will be maintained as hitherto, containing the speeches as complete as possible, and each Member will be able in the course of eight days to examine this record and demand the correction of such errors as may have been made therein.”



*The diary of the Four-year Sejm*

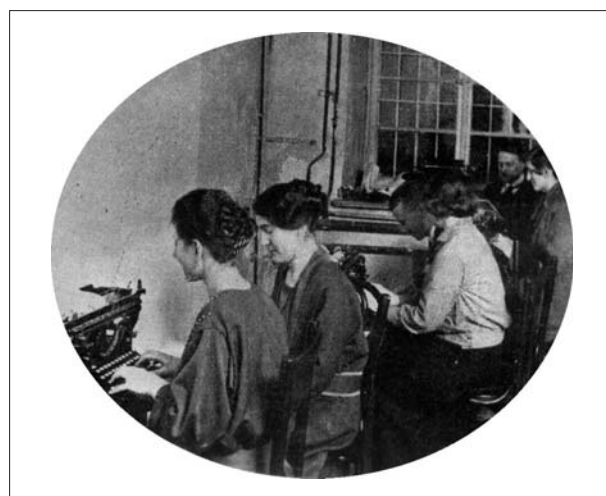


*The diary of the Senate*

In the twenty years between the two World Wars, the Shorthand Office of the Sejm and Senate of the Republic of Poland and the Editorial Office of Shorthand Reports and the Diary were available to the Sejm and Senate. The shorthand office was organized in May 1918 for the Provisional Council of State and was transferred to the Legislative Sejm after the Council was dissolved. It had 13 shorthand writers in 1928. There were three report editors in the Editorial Office, whose managing editor for fourteen years was the well-known writer Karol Irzykowski. Their task was to edit the official “Shorthand Report”. They also prepared the Diary, taking turns to sit in the debating chamber. The Diary was a summary of the deliberations, for immediate press and wire agency distribution. Journalists received a bulletin every half-hour, containing a summary of speeches, the text of motions and resolutions, the results of votes and a description of what was taking place in the chamber.

At present, the Sejm and Senate have separate departments preparing reports of their proceedings. In the Senate, the Minutes’ Unit is part of the Senate Proceedings Office, and in the Sejm the Shorthand Report Department belongs to the Sejm Sitzings Secretariat.

Senate proceedings are documented in three ways: they are written down in shorthand, recorded on tape, and filmed by Polish Television for their own uses. Ten minutes after a sitting begins, typists start typing the record of proceedings from a tape-recording. If there are any problems, they are resolved by the shorthand-writer. At the same time, editors are at work on the text of the speeches and the debate, which are now on the computer.



*The typing of the “Shorthand Report”, 1923  
 (“Illustrated Weekly”)*

They change the spoken word of the debating chamber into the written word, by introducing punctuation, and removing repetitions and linguistic errors. The resulting text is then cross-checked twice more.

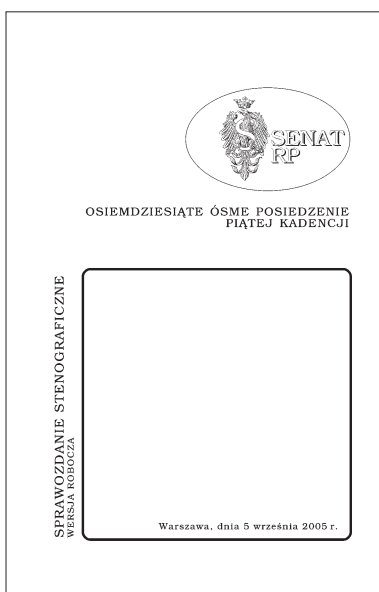
The work of the typists and editors goes on long after the Senate sitting is over. Material ready for printing is taken to the printer's twice during the night. In the morning, senators arriving at the House find a "Shorthand Report" waiting for them in their pigeonholes. This is a working, unofficial record of the previous day's debate. During the sitting and immediately after it ends, senators can check the text and submit their corrections. The proposed changes may only refer to basic doubts as to the accuracy of the record, but cannot introduce e.g. a new wording, new proposals or justifications.

A "Shorthand Report on the Sitting of the Senate of the Republic of Poland" is published about three weeks after the sitting. This is the official record.



*The typing of the "Shorthand Report", 2000*

(fot. J. Zawadzki)



*"Shorthand Report  
on the 88<sup>th</sup> Sitting of the Senate  
of the Republic of Poland. Draft copy"*



*"Shorthand Report  
on the 81<sup>st</sup> Sitting of the Senate  
of the Republic of Poland"*



*"The Diary of the Senate  
of the Republic of Poland"*

The Senate Chancellery also publishes a "Senate Diary" which comes out every fortnight. It details the work of the Senate and events there, gives brief reports on the business of the Senate's last sitting and on Senate Presidium resolutions, on the work of Senate commissions, on Senate representation at state ceremonies and visits by official guests.

*Dorota Mycielska, September 1997  
with later amendments, February 2008*