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HIPOLIT ALEKSANDROWICZ AND HIS AID ACTIVITIES FOR POLES AND JEWS DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR

In the discussion of the extermination of the Polish Jews, the attitude of the Polish population to the unfolding tragedy is an issue that is increasingly attracting research attention. Recent studies on help and rescue has also identified instances of help in regions with smaller Jewish populations, such as the pre-war Pomeranian Voivodeship.¹ In addition to the recipients of the Righteous Among the Nations medal, whose stories are usually better documented because they were investigated by a committee set up for this purpose (documentation on individual cases is kept in the archives of the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem),² aid activities were also pursued by people whose stories are less well known. The

¹ After the enlargement of the voivodeship boundaries in 1938 to include counties with a more significant Jewish population, statistics for the whole of the Pomeranian voivodeship indicate 2.3–2.4% Jews in the total number of inhabitants (T. Ceran and M. Tomkiewicz, “Polacy ratujący Żydów na terenie przedwojennego województwa pomorskiego w okresie okupacji niemieckiej,” in *Stan badań nad pomocą Żydom na ziemiach polskich pod okupacją niemiecką. Przegląd piśmiennictwa*, ed. by T. Domański and A. Gontarek [Warsaw–Kielce, 2022], p. 528).

² For more on the history and procedure involved in awarding this medal, see M. Paldiel, *The Path of the Righteous: Gentile Rescuers of Jews During the Holocaust* (Ktav, 1993), pp. 4–8.

second group certainly includes Count³ Hipolit Aleksandrowicz, born in 1884, owner of the estate of Łochocin near Lipno.⁴ From 1938, Lipno and Łochocin were within the boundaries of the Pomeranian Voivodeship, and the percentage of the Jewish population in Lipno alone was 20% (2,300–2,500 people).⁵ During the German occupation, these areas were incorporated into the Reich and became part of the newly created Reich District of Danzig-West Prussia (Reichsgau Danzig-Westpreußen), and Poles and Jews became victims of the policy of terror and persecution directed against them.⁶ During the German occupation, Aleksandrowicz gave shelter to several Jewish families. He also helped Jews in the nearby ghetto of Włocławek and the local Polish population.⁷

In an article summarising the state of research on helping and rescuing Jews in the former Pomeranian Voivodeship by Tomasz Ceran and Monika Tomkiewicz, Hipolit Aleksandrowicz is mentioned as the only known representative of the landed gentry in the region who provided such help.⁸ It is worth noting here that the German aristocrat Baron Evert Freytag von Loringhoven, who saved the lives of two Jewish women by employing them in his estate near Toruń, was awarded the Medal of Righteous Among the Nations.⁹ However, the context of the two figures' aid activities is too different to compare here.

The history of help provided by Hipolit Aleksandrowicz was previously mentioned in only one academic study, that is the one authored by regional historian Piotr Gałkowski.¹⁰ Apart from that, Gabriel Michalik devoted a report to this figure,¹¹

³ The March Constitution of 1921 formally abolished coats of arms, titles, family and estate privileges, but it could not erase the knowledge of the aristocratic origin of families and the use of titles (such as Count) in informal situations (S. Rudnicki, *Ziemianstwo polskie w XX wieku*, [Warsaw, 1996], p. 30).

⁴ P. Gałkowski, *Ziemianie i ich własność w ziemi dobrzyńskiej w latach 1918–1947* (Rypin, 1999), pp. 268–269.

⁵ Figures for 1939, see T. Kawski, *Gminy żydowskie pogranicza Wielkopolski, Mazowsza i Pomorza w latach 1918–1942* (Toruń, 2012), pp. 7, 128.

⁶ G. Berendt, “Żydzi na obszarze Okręgu Rzeszy Gdańsk – Prusy Zachodnie (do stycznia 1940 roku),” in *Pomorze pod okupacją niemiecką. Jesień 1939*, ed. by P. Madajczyk (Warsaw, 2021), pp. 264–296.

⁷ Gałkowski, *Ziemianie i ich własność*, p. 269.

⁸ Ceran and Tomkiewicz, “Polacy ratujący Żydów,” p. 547.

⁹ “Freytag Evert,” in The Righteous Among the Nations Database, Yad Vashem, https://righteous.yadvashem.org/?search=Evert%20Baron%20Freytag%20von%20Loringhoven.&searchType=righteous_only&language=en&itemId=4043007&ind=0 (accessed 29 May 2022).

¹⁰ Gałkowski, *Ziemianie i ich własność*, pp. 268–269.

¹¹ G. Michalik, “Lwy pana hrabiego,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 27 November 2005, <https://classic.wyborcza.pl/archiwumGW/4525119/Lwy-pana-hrabiego> (accessed 17 March 2022).

and journalist Tomasz Lenczewski mentioned him in his article about the situation of the landed gentry in the territories incorporated into the Reich.¹² The lack of more extensive studies on Aleksandrowicz results mainly from the almost total absence of historical sources. His case (his fate during the occupation, including the help he provided) is not an isolated one. Piotr Galkowski writes: “The question of the fate of the landed gentry from the Dobrzyń region in the years 1939–1945 is not present in the historical literature so far. The main reason for this was the lack of sources documenting this issue. To analyse this problem, it was necessary to contact the landowners or their descendants, who were widely scattered.”¹³ The lack of source material that would allow more extensive research is, therefore, a problem that concerns the landed gentry in general in the area of interest to us, and probably in other regions of the occupied country as well, in terms of helping Jews during World War Two. Compared to other social groups, the attitude of the landed gentry towards the Holocaust and the extent and forms of the help they provided are relatively little known.

In the case of Hipolit Aleksandrowicz, Gałkowski’s remarks about the lack of sources are, unfortunately, entirely accurate. Since it was impossible to reach either the documents deposited in the archives or the direct witnesses of the events, it was necessary to reach out to other sources and elicit them by collecting oral history accounts. Indeed, crucial to investigating the protagonist’s fate was reaching out to his son, Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, who agreed to be interviewed¹⁴ and provided access to the few documents from the family archives. This was the only way to get hold of a letter from Hipolit’s wife, Stanisława, to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski dated 14 April 1945.¹⁵ The original has not been found anywhere else. Stanisława Aleksandrowicz wrote this letter

¹² T. Lenczewski, “Polscy ziemianie, jawna opcja niemiecka,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 16–17 April 2016, *Plus-Minus* 16 (1207), <https://www.rp.pl/plus-minus/art11087691-polscy-ziemianie-jawna-opcja-niemiecka> (accessed 29 May 2022).

¹³ Gałkowski, *Ziemianie i ich własność*, p. 268.

¹⁴ Conversation with Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz of 14 March 2022; a recording in the author’s collections. K. Bock-Matuszyk, for example, has written about the special significance of oral history, including self-collected accounts, for regional history, “Historia mówiona a badania regionalne,” in *Bliska historia. O badaniach historii lokalnej i regionalnej*, ed. by P. Wiszewski (Warsaw, 2018), pp. 227–235.

¹⁵ Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fols 1–2.

as she was trying to get her husband released from custody, not knowing that he had been murdered earlier. Only years later, it was established that this was a robbery type of crime. His burial place was never found, and the family (wife and three children: Hipolit, Mikołaj and Elżbieta), who had already been forced to leave Łochocin, began their wandering around the country.¹⁶ In attempting to research the history of Hipolit Aleksandrowicz and the help he provided during the war, the historian is therefore faced with a lack of sources and the death of the person who provided the help and could testify to it most thoroughly. Equally important would be the testimony of those who were helped, but it has not been possible to establish their full personal details or to reconstruct their subsequent fate (more on this later). Therefore, the letter written by Stanisława Aleksandrowicz in 1945 (even though we have no other source from that period to corroborate the information it contains), the 2005 report by Grzegorz Michalik (who managed to talk to the last living witnesses of the events), and the account of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, born in 1942, who is now the oldest keeper of the family memory, gain in importance.

Nevertheless, it is possible to formulate several research questions based on the available source materials. Under what circumstances did Hipolit Aleksandrowicz, a representative of the landed gentry of the Dobrzyń area, carry out his help activities? What forms did it take, and how did it change over time? What do we know about the people whom Aleksandrowicz helped? What were the motivations behind his actions? What research proposals can be formulated, treating the fate of Hipolit Aleksandrowicz as a contribution to subsequent research?

Hipolit Aleksandrowicz as a Representative of Landed Gentry

The main character of this article was born in 1884 in Kalisz to Hipolit (VI) Aleksandrowicz and his wife Olga Narbutt. The Aleksandrowicz (or Alexandrovitz) family originated in Lithuania, and in the 19th century, its representatives settled in the Kingdom of Poland. Hipolit (VI) Aleksandrowicz was the first of the family to become associated with the Dobrzyń region. Three of his children

¹⁶ Conversation with Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz of 14 March 2022; a recording in the author's collections; Michalik, "Lwy pana hrabiego."

remained there, too: Hipolit (VII), Jerzy, and Tatiana. The Chełmica Duża estate was divided between them. The eldest of the sons, Hipolit, completed his studies in St Petersburg and Heidelberg and assumed possession of the Łochocin estate in 1922. The following years showed that he was an efficient estate administrator and social activist, belonging, among other things, to the District Society of Agricultural Organisations and Circles in Lipno.¹⁷

The assets he multiplied in the inter-war period were to prove more than necessary after the outbreak of war. Piotr Gałkowski rightly observes that the financial trump card and the possibility of giving bribes to the Germans were fundamental to the effectiveness of the Count's later actions.¹⁸ However, Hipolit was first rescued from the tragic fate of other region landowners by a fortunate coincidence. At the time of their arrests in October 1939, he was several hundred kilometres from his residence. Later, the German authorities agreed that he should continue managing his estate under their strict control. This rare decision was probably influenced by the Orthodox religion and the German education of the landowner.¹⁹

The Łochocin estate, which belonged to Aleksandrowicz, was located in the Dobrzyń region, where the Pomeranian crime of 1939 was committed. Its victims were representatives of all social groups; it did not target, for example, only the intelligentsia, in contrast to German "actions" in other parts of occupied Poland.²⁰ Landowners were also among those who died. As a result of the October arrests, several dozen people were arrested in the Lipno district alone, 33 of whom (about 70%) are known by name.²¹ The owner of Łochocin had been invited along with other landowners to an "agricultural talk" on 24 October 1939, during which this arrest was made. He was saved by the fact that he was in Warsaw at the time.²² Those

¹⁷ P. Gałkowski, *Genealogia ziemiaństwa ziemi dobrzyńskiej XIX–XX wieku* (Rypin, 1997), pp. 18–19.

¹⁸ Michalik, "Lwy pana hrabiego."

¹⁹ Gałkowski, *Genealogia ziemiaństwa*, p. 19.

²⁰ T. Ceran, "Ofiary zbrodni pomorskiej 1939 – portret zbiorowy," in *Rozstrzelana niepodległość. Ofiary zbrodni pomorskiej 1939*, ed. by *id.* (Toruń, 2020), p. 23.

²¹ P. Gałkowski, "Zbrodnie niemieckie na ziemiaństwie z powiatów Lipno i Rypin," in *Zbrodnie niemieckie na ziemi dobrzyńskiej (byłe powiaty Lipno i Rypin) w latach 1939–1945*, ed. by A. Szwalbowski and P. Gałkowski (Rypin, 2019), pp. 524–525. The author compiled (and published, see *ibid.*, p. 524) a list of "landowners of the Lipno district arrested on 24 October 1939," which includes 33 names. As he himself cautioned, this is an incomplete list.

²² Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department [Office] in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1.

who arrived at the indicated place were arrested by the Germans and deported first to Królewiec (then Königsberg) and then presumably to Działdów (then Soldau), where they were shot. Probably another part of the arrested landowners, as well as teachers from this district, were deported to camps in the Reich.²³ Representatives of various social groups living in the area were threatened because the Germans conducted the extermination of the population of Pomerania (broadly defined as the area of the pre-war Pomeranian Voivodeship) and used other forms of terror.²⁴

In a letter dated 14 April 1945, Stanisława Aleksandrowicz wrote that the requests for help in the ongoing displacement action in the area were supposed to persuade her husband to stay in the estate. On behalf of the local community, Hipolit Aleksandrowicz was approached by Jadwiga Walter – the mother superior of the Congregation of the Sisters of Common Labour of the Immaculate Mary in Włocławek, Father Stefan Wilk – the parish priest of Chełmica Duża, and Piotr Krupa – the head of the school in Fabianki. According to this account, written down in a letter, they were the first to suggest that Aleksandrowicz “use the advantage of being of the Orthodox religion and try to stay as long as possible in the estate as an outpost to be able to give shelter to the displaced people, even if only temporarily.”²⁵

The landowner’s original intention was to move to Warsaw. In October, he went to find accommodation for himself and his family.²⁶ According to Krzysztof Jasiewicz’s research, this behaviour corresponded to the prevailing trends of the time: “In the years 1939–1944 Warsaw became the largest concentration of the landed gentry in its history,” as both landed gentry from the Eastern Borderlands and those from the western parts of the country, expelled from their estates by the Germans, went there.²⁷ However, in the end, after his return from Warsaw on 2 November 1939, Aleksandrowicz did not decide to settle there with his family. In

²³ P. Galkowski, “Zbrodnie niemieckie,” pp. 524–529. The author convincingly challenges the findings of Maria Wardzyńska (M. Wardzyńska, *Był rok 1939. Operacja niemieckiej policji bezpieczeństwa w Polsce „Intelligenzaktion”* [Warsaw, 2009], pp. 102–103).

²⁴ Ceran, “Ofiary zbrodni pomorskiej 1939,” p. 25.

²⁵ Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ K. Jasiewicz, *Lista strat ziemiaństwa polskiego 1939–1956* (Warsaw, 1995), p. 31.

the subsequent weeks, he became involved in helping the local Polish population and, soon, the Jewish population.²⁸

In his research on the General Government (GG), Jerzy Gapys argues that the involvement of the landed gentry in charitable activities under the challenging conditions of the German occupation was due to several factors. Traditionally, it was important for this social group to work for the benefit of its community, and its economic position also entailed certain obligations towards groups dependent on it. Of additional importance for individual landowners may have been religious motivations or those stemming from their views on social issues. All this translated into their charity – as Gapys calls it – or aid activities for the benefit of those in need, both Poles and Jews.²⁹ Notwithstanding the differences in the German occupation's progress and the landed gentry's situation in the lands incorporated into the Reich and in the General Government, his findings concerning the propensity of the landed gentry to adopt caring attitudes can also be considered relevant to our areas of interest.

Help for the Polish Population

When considering the motivations of Hipolit Aleksandrowicz, it is essential to note that also, in the case of his aid activities, the recipients were both Jews and Poles. The first months of the occupation hit the local population hard, so Aleksandrowicz began to use his position to protect them in line with the earlier appeals voiced by local notables. Initially, his efforts were focused on helping displaced people with “grain, cash, fuel, whatever he could.” It is also worth noting that he went beyond sharing reserves and surplus goods – his wife underlined that he, for example, donated his entire stock of peat to the displaced persons. He was also involved in broader help efforts, for example, when “the Committee in Włocławek worked to feed the population”³⁰ – this probably refers to the Polish Committee for Aid to Poles, established at the beginning of the war³¹ – Aleksandrowicz do-

²⁸ Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1.

²⁹ J. Gapys, “Prywatna akcja dobroczynna ziemiaństwa polskiego w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w latach 1939–1945,” *Almanach Historyczny* 19 (2017), pp. 161–164.

³⁰ Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1.

³¹ A. Baranowska, *Żydzi włocławscy i ich zagłada 1939–1945* (Toruń, 2005), p. 100.

nated grain and money to it. He did so through the Committee's chairman, Teofil Hajda, the last pre-war vice-president of the city and long-standing president of the Włocławek's Polish Red Cross. After the Red Army entered the city, he was appointed temporary president of the town, and it was probably for this reason that Stanisława Aleksandrowicz recalled this acquaintance in her letter and in her efforts to have her husband released.³²

In 1940, the Count took steps to ensure the smooth operation of the estate by protecting the people who managed it. He prepared a document subsequently signed by forty Volksdeutsche, who confirmed that the farmer of the village of Łochocin, Stanisław Celmer, and the servants working at the estate had not persecuted the German population. They also asked the occupation authorities not to deport the farmers, spare them searches and other persecution. The certificate was drawn up in two copies – one was kept with the farmer, Stanisław Celmer, and the other with the German village leader Flemke. However, it is not known precisely when this was done,³³ whether it was still before,³⁴ during or perhaps already after the new wave of deportations of the region's landed gentry in the spring of 1940. The idea was to secure his position before the next wave. In one way or another, it turned out to be possible to protect Łochocin and its owner from the fate of other estates in the region.

This enabled Aleksandrowicz to continue his activity for the benefit of the local community. In the first months of the occupation, he ensured the safety of as many people as possible, for example, by employing them in fictitious positions on the estate. The number of people he helped can be counted in dozens. These were often whole families who often did not know each other. He gave them a place to live, food, and work certificates. Among the recipients of aid were teachers, clerks and other landowners, such as the family of Bolesław Grochulski,³⁵ the owner of the

³² Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1; M. Gruszczyńska, "Organizacja władz miejskich Włocławka w latach 1914–1939," in *Włocławek. Dzieje miasta*, ed. by J. Staszewski, vol. 2 (Włocławek, 2001), p. 134; R. Kozłowski, "Życie społeczne i polityczne w latach 1945–1959," in *Włocławek*, p. 463.

³³ Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1.

³⁴ Gałkowski, "Zbrodnie niemieckie," p. 529.

³⁵ Conversation with Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz of 14 March 2022; a recording in the author's collections; G. Michalik, "Lwy pana hrabiego."

estate of Oleszno, one of the many landowners of the County of Lipno who were arrested at a meeting on 24 October 1939,³⁶ and also the family of Karnkowski, Wilski and Klimkiewicz. He also helped the landowners by successfully arranging the release of Tadeusz Świecki and Kazimierz Różycki, imprisoned in Lipno, and facilitating their departure for Warsaw.³⁷ The Count also sent parcels to prisoners of concentration and POW camps.

Thus, if Aleksandrowicz had been arrested and there had been a change in the administrators of his estates, the circle of sufferers would have been numerous. In 1940, at the latest, Aleksandrowicz extended his help activities to another category of people in need – the Jewish population.³⁸

Helping the Jewish Population

Jews were one of the social groups that, in addition to the intelligentsia and the mentally ill, suffered most severely as a result of the Pomeranian crime of 1939.³⁹ Fleeing the threat of death or deportation, in those early months, many decided to head eastwards, to the General Government or further into the Soviet-occupied territories. The persecution of the Jewish population began as early as September, which was remembered precisely because of the Jewish holidays celebrated at that time. In nearby Lipno, they started on the eve of Yom Kippur on 22 September, when the Germans issued summons for forced labour and committed harassment against the local rabbi. Despite earlier declarations, prayers on the Day of Judgment were forbidden, and those praying were chased away and beaten. In the weeks that followed, the Germans committed subsequent acts of violence and robbery. In November, they burned down the local synagogue and murdered a wailing Jewish woman.⁴⁰ In December, the last remaining Jews in Lipno were deported to Włocławek or, even further, to towns in the GG.⁴¹ In Włocławek itself, the most

³⁶ Jasiewicz, *Lista strat*, p. 329.

³⁷ Gałkowski, *Ziemianie i ich własność*, p. 269.

³⁸ Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1.

³⁹ Ceran, "Ofiary zbrodni pomorskiej 1939," p. 28.

⁴⁰ *Archiwum Ringelbluma. Konspiracyjne Archiwum Getta Warszawy*, vol. 8: *Tereny wcielone do Rzeszy: Okręg Rzeszy Gdańsk – Prusy Zachodnie, rejencja ciechanowska, Górny Śląsk*, ed. by M. Siek, (Warsaw, 2012), doc. 13, pp. 45–50; *ibid.*, doc. 14, pp. 50–51.

⁴¹ Kawski, *Gminy żydowskie*, pp. 135–136.

populous Jewish community in the former Pomeranian Voivodeship (within its extended 1938 borders), arrests had been ongoing since September, and similarly, as in Lipno, tragic circumstances accompanied the Yom Kippur holiday, violence and murders were frequent, and hundreds of people were displaced in December.⁴² In the summer of 1940, the remaining Jews (around 4,000 people) inhabited a few streets in the city, and in October–November of that year, they were confined to a ghetto located in the poorest district.⁴³

The available studies on the extermination of the Jews of Włocławek do not mention attempts to help them by hiding them in Polish homes during the first years of the occupation.⁴⁴ It is known, however, that until the closure of the ghetto in November 1941, it was possible to cross its borders and maintain contact with Poles.⁴⁵ As in the case of other ghettos in the Wartheland (Warthegau), this fostered trade and service relations, which in the circumstances of the occupation acquired an aid dimension,⁴⁶ for example, when Poles in need of Jewish craftsmen entered the ghetto and paid for their work with food. When the ghetto was closed, and these contacts were made impossible, the situation of the Jewish population deteriorated drastically. Representatives of Jewish youths then made dramatic attempts to leave the ghetto illegally and get food from Polish acquaintances. Not all of them succeeded in returning – we know the names of at least several young Jews who were shot while trying to return to the ghetto.⁴⁷ One study also mentions the shooting of a Pole, Stanisław Kujawa, trying to throw food over the fence.⁴⁸ The case of Hipolit Aleksandrowicz allows us to add new threads to this story.

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 261–263.

⁴³ E. Zegenhagen and S. Fishman, “Włocławek,” in *The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, vol. 2: *Ghettos in German-Occupied Eastern Europe*, part A, ed. by M. Dean (Bloomington, 2012), p. 119.

⁴⁴ Baranowska, *Żydzi włocławscy*; B. Berent, “Zagłada Żydów,” in *Włocławek*, pp. 430–439; T. Jaszowski, “Okupacyjna martyrologia Żydów włocławskich,” in *Z badań nad eksterminacją Żydów na Pomorzu i Kujawach*, ed. by T. Jaszowski (Bydgoszcz, 1983), pp. 22–30.

⁴⁵ Kawski, *Gminy żydowskie*, p. 265.

⁴⁶ K. Czechowska, “Getto otwarte – getto zamknięte? Kontakty z Polakami jako kategoria przy klasyfikacji wybranych gett w Kraju Warty,” in *Żydowscy sąsiedzi*, ed. by K. Morta (Ostrów Wielkopolski, 2018), pp. 159–174.

⁴⁷ Berent, “Zagłada Żydów,” pp. 440–441.

⁴⁸ Baranowska, *Żydzi włocławscy*, p. 100.

Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz recalls that his father remained friendly with Jews from the neighbouring villages and towns, above all from Włocławek, during the interwar period. He maintained both professional and private contacts with them. Moreover, through his brother's wife, he was related to an assimilated Jewish family. During the first months of the occupation, Jerzy Aleksandrowicz tried to conceal his wife's identity by dyeing her dark hair a light colour, but soon decided they would be safer if they changed their surroundings, and the couple left for Warsaw. After their departure, Hipolit placed at least some of the many people he had helped in the Okrągła estate belonging to his brother.⁴⁹ In the case of assisting the Polish population, the most crucial factor may have been the desire to fulfil one's duty of care. With regard to other landowners, the motivation may have been the concern for the survival of one's social group;⁵⁰ involvement in helping Jews probably stemmed from personal bonds. In the light of research into the motivations prompting such activities (admittedly concerning the Righteous among the Nations), "long-term acquaintance, social or other ties with Jews" were the most common.⁵¹ Marcin Chorążki writes that "mutual contacts between landed gentry and Jews developed on two levels: professional and social," which may or may not have intermingled. However, there was certainly no shortage of Jews who belonged to the social spheres of the landed gentry,⁵² and the case of the contacts maintained by Hipolit Aleksandrowicz confirms this. At the same time, however, it is not sure that he had previously had close relations with all the Jews he helped during the war. His good contacts with some representatives of the affected group may have influenced him to be more open to fulfilling the requests for help from others in need.

⁴⁹ Conversation with Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz of 14 March 2022; a recording in the author's collections.

⁵⁰ J. Gapys, "Ziemianie wobec zagłady Żydów w dystrykcie radomskim," in *Życie codzienne społeczności żydowskiej na ziemiach polskich do 1942 roku*, ed. by E. Majcher-Ociesa and B. Wojciechowska (Kielce, 2013), p. 311.

⁵¹ *Księga Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata. Ratujący Żydów podczas Holokaustu. Polska*, ed. by I. Gutman, S. Bender, and S. Krakowski (Cracow, 2009), p. XXXIX.

⁵² M. Chorążki, *Ziemianie wobec wojny. Postawy właścicieli ziemskich województwa krakowskiego w latach 1939–1945* (Cracow, 2010), p. 177. Tomasz Kawski's research reveals the existence (until the outbreak of the Second World War) of a small group of landowners of the Mosaic faith (T. Kawski, "Właściciele ziemscy wyznania mojżeszowego na Kujawach i ziemi dobrzyńskiej," in *Pomorskie rody ziemiańskie w czasach nowożytnych*, ed. by W. Jastrzębski, [Toruń, 2004], pp. 161–178).

Stanisława Aleksandrowicz said, “Throughout 1940, we began to provide shelter for the Jewish families of Paljard, Dyszel, and Milner from Włocławek.”⁵³ The Father Stefan Wilk mentioned above, who forged baptismal certificates to conceal their Jewish identity, played his part in helping at this first stage.⁵⁴ We know neither the number nor the exact personal details of those hiding in Łochocin. Stanisława Aleksandrowicz only mentions that they were kept in hiding for the whole of 1940 and then managed to make their way eastwards (without specifying a particular destination) – but it is unclear whether this applied to all three families or just one.⁵⁵ Her son Hipolit only remembered his mother’s post-war contacts with one rescued family, who sent them parcels from Israel in the 1950s.⁵⁶

It is likely that the surname of the first of the Jewish families: “Paljard,” has been written with a mistake, as among the surrounding Jewish families, one can find the Peljarts, possibly (as a variant spelling of the surname) the Peljards, who lived in the nearby Lipno and Tłuchów. Members of this family perished, among others, in the ghettos of Warsaw and Radom.⁵⁷ The Milner family did indeed live in Włocławek – the girls Ruta and Sara Milner died in the Włocławek ghetto, while Fajga Milner was exterminated at Kulmhof. At least one member of this family survived, Israel Milner, who was a claimant in both actions he raised to have a presumed death declared.⁵⁸ Israel and Motek Dyszel, in turn, were among several Jews murdered in the town on 22 September, the tragic eve of Yom Kippur, when the Germans

⁵³ Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1.

⁵⁴ Michalik, “Lwy pana hrabiego”; *Wartime Rescue of Jews by the Polish Catholic Clergy. The Testimony of Survivors and Rescuers*, ed. by M. Paul (Toronto, 2018), p. 35, <http://kpk-toronto.org/wp-content/uploads/Wartime-Rescue-of-Jews-by-the-Polish-Catholic-Clergy-rev-2019.pdf> (accessed 29 May 2022). Father Wilk was a prisoner of several concentration camps and died in KL Dachau in 1943 (J. Adamska and J. Sziling, *Polscy księża w niemieckich obozach koncentracyjnych. Transport 527 duchownych 13 grudnia 1940 r. z Sachsenhausen do Dachau* [Warsaw, 2007], p. 115).

⁵⁵ Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1.

⁵⁶ Michalik, “Lwy pana hrabiego.”

⁵⁷ T. Kowski, “Ludność żydowska ziemi dobrzyńskiej w latach 1939–1945. Próba bilansu,” in *Zbrodnie niemieckie*, p. 399.

⁵⁸ Delegatura IPN w Bydgoszczy – Wydział Archiwalny [Institute of National Remembrance Delegation in Bydgoszcz – Archival Department; hereinafter AIPN By], 109/60, Case file of the action for the declaration of death of Fajga Milner; AIPN By, 109/386, Case file of the action for the declaration of death of Rutka Milner and Sara (Sarenka) Milner.

proceeded to brutally arrest a group of praying Jews.⁵⁹ However, we do not know their family ties with people with the same surnames hiding in Łochocin in 1940.

According to the same letter from Stanisława Aleksandrowicz, her husband also helped Jews in the Włocławek ghetto. However, it is unclear whether the first and the second acts of help concerned at least partly the same group of people. Due to the incomplete description of the situation in the only document concerning it, we cannot rule this out. There were times when those on the “Aryan” side decided to enter the ghetto because of relatives remaining in the ghetto who would not be able to be guided out of there. It is, therefore, possible that in addition to those hiding in Łochocin who managed to be saved and lived in Israel after the war, other Jews whom the Count tried to help ultimately became victims of the Holocaust.

Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz’s account shows that his mother, Stanisława, was also an active helper, delivering food parcels to Jewish acquaintances.⁶⁰ It seems likely to assume that the persons carrying out this task changed with the increasing restrictions on the functioning of the ghetto and the growing danger involved in providing help. It is also possible that Stanisława Aleksandrowicz’s being relieved by a farm worker, Jan Makowski, was due to personal reasons, i.e., her pregnancy (her son Mikołaj was born in April 1942). Hipolit started going with the parcels and the farm worker when the situation became even more dangerous. By then, the ghetto was fenced off and guarded by German guards, and attempts to help involved the risk of death. On one attempt to pass food over the fence, Aleksandrowicz and his servant are caught and are saved from being shot only by a bribe given by the Count.⁶¹ Despite this, he did not give up on further help. However, it is unknown how long he managed to provide it. The ghetto in Włocławek was liquidated in late April/early May 1942, and its inhabitants were taken to the Kulmhof extermination camp, where they were murdered.⁶²

Hipolit Aleksandrowicz’s last act of help to the Jewish population was of a family nature and concerned his sister-in-law. In 1944, she was wanted by the Gestapo,

⁵⁹ Berent, “Zagłada Żydów,” p. 433; Baranowska, *Żydzi włocławscy*, p. 26.

⁶⁰ Conversation with Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz of 14 March 2022; a recording in the author’s collections.

⁶¹ Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1; Conversation with Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz of 14 March 2022; a recording in the author’s collections; Michalik, “Lwy pana hrabiego.”

⁶² Berent, “Zagłada Żydów,” p. 444. See P. Montague, *Chelmino. Pierwszy nazistowski obóz zagłady*, transl. by T.S. Gałązka (Wołowiec, 2014), p. 296.

and the Count went to Warsaw to warn her. Once in the city, the Warsaw Uprising broke out, and he was sent to a camp in Pruszków. By this time, his health had deteriorated. Thanks to the help of his two brothers, Jerzy Aleksandrowicz's wife survived the war.⁶³

Conclusion

Hipolit Aleksandrowicz eventually became a victim of the second totalitarianism. Officers from the secret political police under Communism (the Security Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski arrested him on 6 March 1945 when he was staying at the vicarage in Nieszawa after leaving Łochocin. Contrary to his wife's initial assumption, he was not taken into custody, but the officers had previously assaulted him, robbed him of his valuables and then murdered him. The exact place of his burial is unknown.⁶⁴ Due to the savage behaviour of the secret police, the story of Aleksandrowicz's death was shrouded in mystery.⁶⁵

Both the Count's death and the circumstances surrounding it, which remained unclear for a long time, harmed our knowledge of the fate of this figure during the German occupation. Regarding the Polish population, we can assume that a significant proportion of those he helped survived and that these people remained in the region, so this aspect of Hipolit Aleksandrowicz's activities is more alive in local memory.⁶⁶ Of the Jewish families hiding in Łochocin, only one is known to have survived the Holocaust. Of those who may have been recipients or witnesses of food aid given to the ghetto inmates, the vast majority perished before the end of 1942. In the overall tragedy of the Jews who suffered on the territory of the Pomeranian Crime of 1939, including those locked up in the ghetto in Włocławek, the efforts to provide relief become increasingly challenging to identify. The story of Hipolit Aleksandrowicz, the only landowner in the County of Lipno who was not murdered and was able to stay in his estate, is an example of highly improbable but possible attempts to help the local community, not only other landowners, not only other Poles but also Jews.

⁶³ Family archives of Mikołaj Aleksandrowicz, Letter of Stanisława Aleksandrowicz to the Security Department (Office) in Aleksandrów Kujawski, 14 April 1945, fol. 1.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*; Gałkowski, "Genealogia ziemiaństwa," pp. 19–20; Michalik, "Lwy pana hrabiego," Jasiewicz, *Lista strat*, p. 31.

⁶⁵ M. Golon, *Dzieje Nieszawy*, vol. 2: 1945–1990 (Nieszawa, 2005), p. 14.

⁶⁶ Michalik, "Lwy pana hrabiego."

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SUMMARY

This article attempts to shed some light on Hipolit Aleksandrowicz and his aid activities during World War Two. By coincidence, he did not become one of the many victims of the Pomeranian Crime of 1939, and having been allowed to remain in his estate in Łochocin near Lipno, he used it to help the local population. Those in need included both the Polish population (threatened with expulsion) and Jews from the surrounding villages. Despite the scarcity of sources, the new information about Aleksandrowicz enriches our picture of the occupation in Pomerania, the extermination of the local Jews and the possibilities the Polish population had to help them.

KEYWORDS

German occupation • Holocaust • helping Jews • Polish-Jewish relations
• landed gentry • Pomerania