

*The Chroberz fee tail in the years 1864–1939*

**SUMMARY**

The Chroberz fee tail was one of the oldest nonallodial estates of its kind in pre-partition Poland. Family fee tails, also known as majorats or fideicommissa, were inalienable and indivisible estates, typically inherited according to the principle of primogeniture, meaning by the eldest son. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, this type of estate was owned by noble families forming the country's economic, social, and political elite, such as the Zamoyski and Radziwiłł families.

The Chroberz Fee Tail (known in the Old Polish period as the Myszkowski Fee Tail) was established in 1601 by the nephews of the Bishop of Kraków, Piotr Myszkowski – Zygmunt and Piotr Myszkowski. Its foundation was confirmed two years later, in 1603. It remained in the hands of this family for the next 124 years. During this period, the estate was in the hands of two lines of the Myszkowski family: 'bishop's' line, from which the founders descended, and, following the childless death of Władysław Myszkowski in 1658, the 'voivode's' line, initiated by the fifth fee tail holder, Franciszek Myszkowski. This situation repeated in the first half of the following century. In 1727, upon the childless death of the fee tail holder Józef Myszkowski, the estate passed into the hands of the Wielopolski family, who were related to the Myszkowskis. This event led to the emergence of a new, second name for this fideicommissum – the Pińczów Fee Tail. The term originated from the town of Pińczów, which was the centre of the estate at that time, while the first name – Myszkowski Fee Tail – referenced the founders' family name.

The first owner from the Wielopolski family was Franciszek, and his descendants holding the fee tail were referred to as the older Wielopolski line. The last representative of this line was Józef Jan Wielopolski, who struggled with enormous debts that, by the early 19th century, exceeded the value of the majorat's real estate. In an effort to rid himself of the financially troubled estate, he executed the 'Act of Reconstruction' in 1813. Under this act, the next fee tail holder of the majorat, now reduced to just three keys (from twelve), was a

representative of the younger Wielopolski line – Józef Stanisław Wielopolski. The remaining nine keys were acquired by other buyers, with Jan Olrych Szaniecki purchasing the majority, including Pińczów.

The loss of this former centre of the fideicommissum (to which it owed its name during the times of the older Wielopolski line) led to the introduction of a third name used publicly in the 19th and 20th centuries – the Chroberz fee tail, as referred to in the title of this dissertation. This name derived from the town of Chroberz, which became the estate's center under the management of the younger Wielopolski line from 1813 onward.

Its first representative, Józef Stanisław Wielopolski, passed away prematurely in 1816, just three years after taking over the estate, at the age of 39. As her eldest son Aleksander was a minor (he was thirteen at the time), the fideicommissum was administered by his widow, Eleonora Wielopolska, née Dembińska. During this time, she initiated efforts to modernise the estate's economy, including an attempt to introduce rents for the peasants. Her son, Aleksander, who took over the management of the estate after her death in 1824, also implemented measures aimed at improving the majorat's operations. He attempted, though unsuccessfully, to restore the fee tail by seeking through legal means to reclaim properties that had passed to his uncle, Józef Jan, and were subsequently sold to third parties, primarily to Jan Olrych, as mentioned earlier. Concurrently, he sought to repurchase some of these assets, including Pińczów. Besides managing the family estate, Aleksander Wielopolski was an active participant in the political life of the Kingdom of Poland, serving as head of the Civil Government from 1862 to 1863. He led to the 'conscription' to the Russian army, which resulted in the premature outbreak of the January Uprising. During the uprising, due to being compromised in the eyes of both Polish public opinion and the Tsarist authorities, he chose to go into voluntary political exile. The management of the estate was then assumed by his eldest son, Zygmunt Andrzej Wielopolski.

The next fee tail holder initially managed the estate in coordination with his father, who was residing abroad, during the 1864 enfranchisement of peasants, after which landed estates began transitioning toward capitalist transformation. The Tsarist reform, which granted peasants ownership of their parcels, forced the landowning class to seek new forms of management to maintain stable incomes. This issue was also apparent in the Chroberz fee tail, where, in the post-enfranchisement period, two of its three constituent keys were at risk of being auctioned out. This, therefore, necessitated an urgent need for corrective and modernising measures. The year 1868 marked another significant turning point in the early period of Zygmunt Andrzej's management. At that time, he signed an agreement with his father, regulating property matters due to the latter's extended stay abroad, despite his remaining the

rightful fee tail holder. As a result of this agreement, Zygmunt Andrzej became the next owner of the centuries-old majorat during his father's lifetime.

Aleksander's son proved to be an adept manager. By pursuing a strategy of acquiring new properties, he expanded his land holdings (although not all acquired estates were incorporated into the fee tail, some remaining as freely inheritable). He introduced new crop varieties and achieved success at agricultural exhibitions, where he presented livestock kept on his estates. Among the awards he earned, the most notable was a gold medal at the 1901 exhibition in Moscow, in the field of cattle breeding. In comparison to his father's efforts, Zygmunt Andrzej also put more focus on and made greater improvements in horse breeding within the fee tail. Zygmunt Andrzej was additionally engaged in non-agricultural economic activities, collaborating with other landowners and the bourgeoisie in advocating for the establishment of the Ivangorod-Dąbrowa Railway, which was finally opened in 1885, and participating in the administrative structures of a financial institution for large landowners in the Kingdom of Poland – the Land Credit Society. These matters affected the functioning of the Chroberz fee tail, as part of the railway line ran close by, and Zygmunt frequently utilised loans from the Land Credit Society to fund the modernisation of his fee tail holdings.

In 1902, upon his death, his eldest son, Aleksander Erwin, became his successor. As the fee tail holder, he faced events well-known from history books, which affected the estate: the 1905 revolution, the global conflict of 1914–1918, and, in the era of a reborn Poland, the impact of the ongoing land reform. Similarly to his father, Aleksander Erwin was involved in non-agricultural ventures, including the construction of the Działoszyce–Kazimierza Wielka narrow-gauge railway and the development of the 'Łubna and Szreniawa' sugar factory in Kazimierza Wielka (of which he was president). This focus influenced agricultural production on the Chroberz estate, as it became the primary supplier of sugar beets for the factory. Aleksander Erwin was also interested in horse breeding and equestrian sports, serving as vice-president of the Horse Racing Society in Piotrków Trybunalski and president of the Equestrian Club in Warsaw. This passion shaped the estate's breeding direction, as it maintained racehorses and remounts (the latter raised for sale to the army). He also aimed to intensify forest management on the estate, attempting to create a unified forest complex, as the estate's woodlands had irregular borders. His interests extended to game management on his lands, which specialised in deer breeding.

Aleksander Erwin passed away in 1937. His successor, and as it turned out, the last owner of the fee tail that had lasted for over three centuries, was his eldest son, Zygmunt Konstancy. In the two years between taking over the estate and the outbreak of World War II,

he sought to improve the functioning of the majorat. He attempted to introduce sheep breeding and to use the developing Central Industrial District for the expansion of his agricultural production. He also continued efforts, started during his father's lifetime, to reduce the debt that had accumulated during the Great Depression. For this purpose, he implemented land division operations. The actions of the last fee tail holder brought measurable benefits, as evidenced by a reduction in debt from 1.4 million PLN (1936) to 0.9 million PLN (1939).

The history of the fee tail, founded in 1601, was interrupted by the outbreak of the Polish-German war in 1939. After the September defeat, the Nazis established an administration over the fee tail on behalf of the Treasury of the Third Reich, known as the *Liegenschaft*. The final end of the fee tail came with the land reform enacted under the decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation in 1944. The Chroberz fee tail shared the fate of many other landed estates. Their division also marked the liquidation of the Polish landed gentry as a social class, which, for the ruling communists, was considered a 'hostile element' to the new political order of the People's Republic of Poland.