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## **Pastor Ludwik Behrens - a pillar of Novodworski evangelists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century**

Evangelical parish in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki was founded at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. According to information, there were already 47 people of German descent living in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki in 1775. The influx of German colonists to these areas forced, in 1782, the establishment of an evangelical commune. A year later, the first pastor was employed - Gottfried Leske, running the parish between 1783 and 1796. Later, the parish priests were Johann Christophorus Friedrich Nataniel Bando (1799-1813), Samuel Tock (1818-1830), Traugott Schulze (1830-1831) and Peter Paul (Karl) Berkau - unapproved but ruling the parish in 1831-1832. Between 1813 and 1818, there was no pastor at all.

Unfortunately, nothing is known about the first or next heads of the Evangelical commune in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. It is difficult to say whether they died in the parish or were moved somewhere. The oldest metrical book that have survived dates back to 1826.

In 1794, there were 142 evangelicals in Nowy Dwór. Less than 20 years later, evangelicals from neighboring towns, including Kępa Nowodworska, Kępa Kikolska, Piaski and others. Regardless of the working commune, the evangelicals did not have their church. The services were celebrated in one of the city hall audience rooms. It was not until 1828 that a reconstruction of the former town hall was made for an Evangelical church.

In 1832, Wilhelm Helbing became the parish priest in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. Wilhelm was coming from Kalisz, born around 1803, his father Kalikst was a merchant. Wilhelm's younger brother, Ludwik was born four years later and was born already in Kalisz. It is hard to imagine where Wilhelm was born, whether the family moved to Greater Poland before 1803 or later. Mother - Florentine Kuntzel is basically unknown. Pastor Wilhelm Helbing presided over the Evangelical community until 1859. Thankfully to his efforts the Evangelical church was opened in 1835, and more evangelicals arrived to Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. In 1857, 1/4 of the city population was residents of German descendants.

Pastor Wilhelm Helbing gave his entire adult life to the parish in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, he was the pastor of the congregation for 27 years of his priestly ministry. The parish after his death in 1859 was taken over by Ludwik Behrens.

Ludwik Behrens was born on March 14, 1833 in Kutno in the family of Ludwik Behrens, a carpentry master, as the oldest son of Ludwik and Ewa b. Wolff. The founded birth certificate of the later pastor is surprising. It informs both that

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the born child given name is Filip, not Ludwik. However, since all the data agree with the later written CV by the pastor, there cannot be a mistake. Perhaps the name of Ludwik was taken over from his father as his firstborn son.

In the years 1845 - 1849, the future pastor attended the district school in Łęczycza, while from 1849 he became a student of the Gymnasium of the Kalisz Voivodship. As reported on the Web site of the school in Piotrków Trybunalski, a continuator of the nineteenth-century school:

“There were 5 professors and 5 teachers and a catechist priest in the school. In six classes, 154 students took lessons. The conditions of the school were good, it had a good laboratory for teaching physics and chemistry and a library of 1,400 volumes. In the following year classes VII and VIII were opened (philological and technical). (...) In the 1940s, Russian language was introduced to school (for lack of teachers only toughed in older classes), learning history and statistics, and geography of Russia.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1852, Ludwik Behrens passed his final exams and returned to the family for a year. This unexpected return and interruption in education was probably caused by the need to repay the funds. Both the Piotrków School and the desire to continue education required money. At that time Ludwik's mother was dead (she died in Łęczycza in 1847), but at home or in the schools there were still two younger brothers - Mikołaj (born in 1835) and Edward (born in 1838).

In 1853, after a year's stay at home, Ludwik joined the University of Dorpat. In the Russian partition it was the only university educating in the specialty of Evangelical theology. As Maria Kaczc emphasizes: “In order to be able to work as an evangelical priest in the Kingdom of Poland, it would be necessary to either graduate from Dorpat or obtain the tsar's permission to study outside of Russia”<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, Jan Trynkowski, in the review of a book about Poles at the University of Dorpat, adds: “the term” dorpatczyk “was a formal ticket that evoked almost immediate positive reactions. This university not only did not denature its listeners, but vice versa, it favored strengthening the feelings of patriotism, and sometimes wake them up”<sup>3</sup>.

Indeed, almost 2.8 thousand Poles studied at the University of Dorpat throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nearly all of them belonged to the Academic Corporation of the “Polonia” Convention. Ludwik Behrens, and later also his son Bronisław, belonged to this corporation too. This is one of the proofs confirming Ludwik's patriotic attachment to his homeland of Poland, despite his German origins.

In 1857, Ludwik Behrens was awarded the degree of a real student, which marks the end of studies. The same year, on November 15 he was ordained a priest in the Evangelical-Augsburg Church in Warsaw, and then he left for the first work - he was appointed vicar at the monastery and parish in Suwałki, where he stayed for one year. After completing this ministry, he returned to Warsaw and became a chaplain of the Warsaw garrison. When in 1859, Pastor Wilhelm Helbing died, Ludwik Behrens

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.liceum1.piotrkow.pl/o-szkole-t72/historia-t103>[access V.2018]

<sup>2</sup> KAUCZ M. (2014), *Pastor Oskar Ernst (1872-1922)*, Warszawa, p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> TRYNKOWSKI J. (2004), Recenzja *Uniwersytet w Tartu a Polacy. Rola dorpatczyków w polskiej nauce, kulturze i polityce XIX i XX wieku na tle porównawczym*, edit. S. G. Isakow, J. Lewandowski, Studia Podlaskie, tom XIV, p. 400.

became a parish priest of the Evangelical parish in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. Shortly after arrival, he met the family of the deceased predecessor, and a year later he married his daughter. Wanda Zuzanna Leokadia Helbing was Wilhelm's and Augusta b. Piepenburg (born 1842 NDM) child, born in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki in 1842. Thanks to marriage with the daughter of the last pastor, Ludwik gained the favor of the parishioners and got into the management of the Evangelical community. According to the "Zwiastun Ewangeliczny" (Evangelical Trailer) from 1865: "The church in Nowydwór is inhabited by 403 families, and the local pastor, Priest Behrens is also the administrator of the Radzymin Church, located in the Stanisławów district, inhabited by 410 families"<sup>4</sup>.

Ludwik and Leokadia had six children, but only four grew up to adulthood. In 1874, the pastor met with misfortune because his wife died being just 32 years old. Despite the ongoing mourning, in the same year he married her younger sister - Aurelia Florentina Behrens (born in 1846). Aurelia brought up the children of her sister, but the greatest love she dedicated to her son Eduard, born in 1877. Her second son - Ludwik, born in 1878, died in the second year of his life.

Although Aurelia and Leokadia were sisters, they nurtured completely differently their children. For Ludwik and Leokadia, Poland was a homeland, even under annexation. Ludwik supported Poles, was trying to be a good priest who didn't divide people in case of nationality. He was working in charity and providing social work in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. He delivered homilies both in German and Polish. He supported the Polish Upraise in 1863, for which he was called for interrogation by the tsarist Okhrana. He raised children for good Polish patriots. Only his son from the second marriage - Eduard did not feel the bond with Poland, and even, in later years, when the father is gone, he denied this Polishness.

Aurelia also died early, leaving Ludwik a second widower. Although most of the children were already grown up, but living alone is hard. Ludwik therefore devoted himself to the oratory. He wrote wonderful speeches and homilies, preaching them on various occasions. However, when he tried to change his place of his work, (he wanted to embrace the Evangelical parish in Łódź), his speech was "described as beautiful, but too long"<sup>5</sup>.

In 1882, he celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the priestly ministry and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Evangelical parish in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. As reported by the "Evangelical Trailer" from this year: "On November 15, a double celebration took place in Nowy Dwór in the Evangelical-Augsburg church: the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the parish and the 25-year pastoral jubilee of the local priest Pastor Behrens. 15 clergymen came to this jubilee, among them N.J. The General superintendent Everth, who before the altar had a longer speech to the jubilee,. (...) The jubilate also had a homily. (...) Not only the city and the entire Nowodwór parish took part in the ceremony, but also the parishes of Przasnysz and Radzymin, administrated by Priest Behrens. And all of us (the journalists) wish for our honorable and beloved colleague a still abundant blessing of God"<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> *Zwiastun Ewangeliczny* (1865), No 13, p. 206.

<sup>5</sup> MOŹDŻYŃSKA M. (2018), *Ludwik Behrens – spóźniony awans*, Fakty Nowodworskie, No 100, p. 9.

<sup>6</sup> *Zwiastun Ewangeliczny* (1882), No 11, p. 263-264.

Pastor Ludwik Behrens participated twice in the Warsaw Diocese Synod. Every time the most important matters for him in the church was evangelism and matters of care for the poor. He postulated the establishment of counseling councils in municipalities and was personally engaged in their creation. In his home, she established a catechetical school and ran it in the rectory until his death. The school moved into a new building only in 1899.

In 1880 he was a co-founder of the Fire Guard in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. In June 1881, the company officially started its operations, and Pastor Ludwik Behrens was its president. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the city occasionally succumbed to fires, however, since the establishment of the Fire Guard, the residents felt calmer. Many citizens of different nationalities and religion were made available to the guard, but accustomed to cooperate when necessary. Funds for fire purposes were collected mainly during municipal events. Carnival ball decorated in 1888 “(...) gathered over 200 participants. Income from tickets this time amounted to 150 rubles, and from the buffet - about 300”<sup>7</sup>. The money was probably used for a wooden fireman's lodge which was soon to be built.

City fire in 1888, preceded by floods, destroyed about 80% of the city, including damaging the Evangelical church in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. Despite the huge expenditure and efforts of all residents, not everything was rebuilt or restored immediately. Renewal and reconstruction of the church had been successful no earlier than in 1906, after the pastor's Behrens death.

Shortly before his death, he was appointed as a superintendent in the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession. It was the Protestant equivalent of a Catholic bishop but elevating him to the rank of a noble. That was why his son Edward will later name himself as “von Behrens”.

Pastor Ludwik Behrens died on November 1, 1896 in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki and was buried in the now defunct local Evangelical cemetery. Little is known about all of his descendants, except two sons: from the first marriage – Bronisław, born 1866 and Edward (from the second wife), born on 1877.

Bronisław also studied at the University of Dorpat and became a doctor. Before the first war he worked in hospitals in Sochaczew, Skierniewice and Łowicz. During the first war he worked in Oranburg as a medicine doctor of the 5<sup>th</sup> Siberian Division. A little bit earlier, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he married Maria b. Eichhorn, also evangelical, a daughter of famous Łowicz land architect and builder Ferdinand Eichhorn and his wife Marcela b. Smolińska. Three children are born from this relationship - Jerzy, Tadeusz and Maria. Bronisław died in 1938. Interestingly, his son Jerzy only on his deathbed changed his faith from Evangelical to Catholic, so that his wife would not have troubles burying him. The second son, Tadeusz, during World War II, was forced up to sign a volklist to save his son from death, for which later on, he had a spying trial in the communist Poland.

The negative figure turned out with the son of the second marriage of pastor Ludwik Behrens - Eduard, who unfortunately all his life tried to ruin his father's achievements. In an article about him from 1922, we can read that: “Mr. Behrens, the son of a pastor from Modlin, has three faces: Russian, Polish and German. As a Russian, he holds high dignity in Russian diplomacy in the Far East. He is showered

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<sup>7</sup> *Strażacy ziemi nowodworskiej* (2015), edit. St. BUKOWIEC, Bochnia, p. 138.

with medals. After the Bolshevik coup, he appeared as a Pole in 1918 in Warsaw and (...) seek for a job in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (...) he did not receive a job. On the other hand, after the capitulation of the Germans, he liquidated the German Masonic lodge "Das Eiserne Kreuz im Osten" with the authorization of General Bessler (...). Masonic rank entitles him to this role: he is a member of the great mother "Grosser Mutterloge unter dreien Erdkugeln" in Berlin"<sup>8</sup>.

He cut all of family relations, changed citizenship into German and acted for the German minority in Poland, aggressively attacking Poles in his work. He cooperated with the revisionist German People's Union for the Defense of Minorities, being in 1921 a diplomatic representative of Germany in Poland. He was also the editor-in-chief and head of the "Freie Deutsche Press in Łódź" publishing house. Nothing is known about his family. He died probably in 1940.

Pastor Ludwik Behrens worked 37 years in the Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki Evangelical parish. He tried to change his job several times, trying to get a job in Łódź and Warsaw. He failed to leave Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki. Apparently, he did not realize how much this parish needed him. Today, there is no Evangelical parish in Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, however, former parishioners and Pastor Behrens' family still care that the memory of this place and people is not lost.

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<sup>8</sup> *Rozwój. Dziennik polityczny, społeczny i literacki* (1922), Łódź, No 73, p. 2.