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THE MANOR ON THE SILK ROAD

documentary film
concept

Beyond Consulting 

This document presents an idea for a documentary that can be developed into a feature film or television series. The story of siblings Stanisława and Henryk Witaczek is a fascinating topic that combines the threads of two similar stories - about Stanisław Wokulski ("The Doll", directed by Wojciech Has in 1968, and Ryszard Ber in 1977) and about Oskar Schindler ("Schindler's List", directed by Steven Spielberg in 1993).

The positivist thread in the lives of the Witaczek siblings is the story of return from Georgia to their reborn homeland and great success in creating the Polish silk industry. The heroic thread is a brave and extensive underground and philanthropic activity during the World War II. The story of their lives is also a love story and thought-provoking history of the difficult post-war years.

SYNOPSIS

In Żółwin, there is a 19th-century manor house with a rich history related to pre-war Milanówek. It once belonged to the creators of the Polish silk industry - siblings Stanisława and Henryk Witaczek. The history of this place (since around 1924-1948) is a pretext to recall these noble figures. The Witaczeks were pioneers of Polish entrepreneurship in the reborn Second Polish Republic (1918-1939), but also defenders of hundreds of people during the wartime terror. Many residents of Milanówek keep a grateful memory of them until these days.

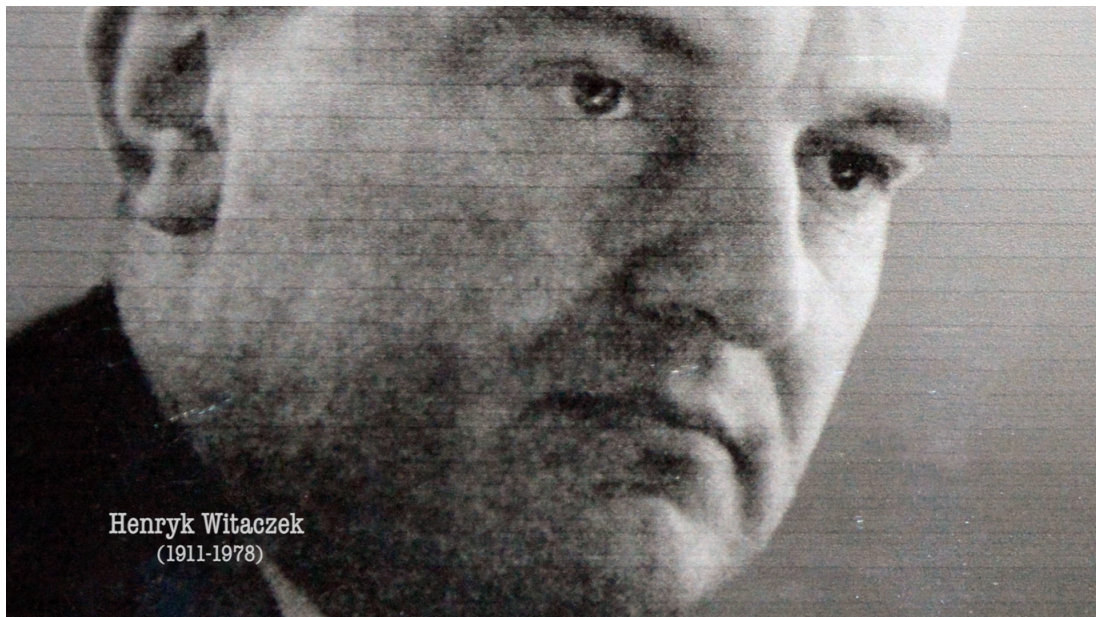
The manor, when it belonged to the Witaczek siblings, hosted and provided shelter to many outstanding figures from the circles of culture and science, as well as refugees from Kresy and the Warsaw Uprising. In the period of the People's Republic of Poland (1945-1989), it became the property of the state, but today it is a private residence offering intimate hotel rooms and conference spaces.

The action of the film begins with a series of several-second shots presenting the manor, maps, historical buildings of the Central Experimental Silk Station, villas in Milanówek, photographs of Henryk and Stanisława Witaczek, and other people associated with the history of the manor.

The main threads of the film story are the most important facts as well as anecdotes and curiosities from the lives of the Witaczek siblings. They are presented in short stories by several people: a historian from Milanówek (the origins of the manor, the most important facts, historical curiosities etc.); representatives of the Milanówek Silk Association (the portrait of Witaczek siblings, the history of their life, Milanówek silks etc.) and the present owners of the manor (renovation of the manor, its present days etc.). The statements are illustrated with film shots and photographs made available from the Museum of Milanówek Silk and private individuals.

Illustrative film shots use, among others, slow motion effects, time lapse and animated 3D photos. People's statements are filmed on a green screen screen, allowing you to replace in post-production the green background with a background film and photo illustrations. Behind the story, dynamically diverse music edited to the beat.

The film is a promotional material lasting several minutes, aimed at perpetuating the memory of Stanisława and Henryk Witaczek and drawing attention to the rich history of Milanówek and its surroundings. It is addressed to the people interested in the history of the Polish silk industry and the garden-cities surrounding Warsaw.



LECTOR'S NARRATION

We have all heard of the Silk Road, which led caravans filled with exotic goods between China and Europe. However, only a few people know that the silk route also exists in Milanówek – the beautiful garden-city located near Warsaw. The Milanówek's Silk Road guides residents and tourists to places related to life and activities of the creators of Polish silk industry – siblings Stanisława and Henryk Witaczek. The most important points on this trail are historic villas, the Central Experimental Silk Station, mulberry trees and the old manor house in Żółwin.

The manor in Żółwin was built in the mid-nineteenth century by Aleksandra and Michał Radziwił for their daughter Michalina, married to Leon Rzyyszczewski. In the period up to World War II the house changed its owners frequently. It belonged to Eustachy Marylski, then to the Zieliński family, and later to the family Szellers and Michał Natanson. In 1940, it was bought by Henryk Witaczek, who in 1924 created the Central Experimental Silk Station and the famous silk factory in Milanówek. He lived here together with his older sister Stanisława, who has dedicated her life for supporting her brother in his great life endeavor.

Witaczeks founded in the estate in Żółwin a large mulberry plantation, they conducted silkworm breeding training there and organized apprenticeships for students of the Silk High School in Milanówek. In a short time, the manor was connected with the Central Experimental Silk Station, where besides the basic research on the technology of silk production, many interesting ideas appeared for using the natural silk proteins. The station developed standards and technical conditions not only for the production of silk threads, but also for the production of gunpowder bags, parachute and balloon fabrics, and cosmetics.

The silk center in Milanówek very quickly developed impressive activity. In 1938, it purchased cocoons from about 2,400 farms. The high-quality silk products from the Milanówek factory successfully replaced imported products.

The most popular and the most valued were dress, shirt and underwear fabrics, as well as fleshy satins and thin checkered fabrics that shimmered with many colors of taffeta. The popularity and recognition enjoyed also the male jacquard ties, scarves and small, colorful boutonniere handkerchiefs – supposedly bringing happiness.

Many well-known and recognized guests visited and stayed at the Żółwin manor. Among them were: Maria Dąbrowska, Anna Kowalska, Stefan Krzywoszewski, Ewa Szelburg-Zarembina and an extremely popular pre-war traveler, scientist, writer and international

spy - Ferdynand Antoni Ossendowski. After an extremely colorful, adventurous life, he lived to see his last days here.

During the World War II, the manor in Żółwin became a safe haven for exiles from Poznań and Kresy Wschodnie, and after the fall of the Warsaw Uprising, also for many deprived of their homes Varsovians. The Witaczek family saved hundreds of people from death and deportation to Germany. They were hiding them in the manor house, factory and school, as well as in the rented private apartments. They were also intervening financially with corrupt Germans. Many people passed through the estate in Żółwin - permanent employees, maids, cooks, as well as local peasants who were well versed in all matters. However, no one denounced anyone.

After the war, the property was confiscated. The factory and the Central Experimental Station were nationalized. On January 17, 1945, the Soviet army liberated Warsaw, and the very next day the plenipotentiary of the PKWN entrusted Henryk Witaczek - in his own company - the duties of the temporary director of the Central Experimental Silk Station, while prohibiting making any important decisions without consulting representatives of the people's power. On March 10, 1948, the Silk Station finally became the property of the state. On October 20th - a few months later - finally, Henryk Witaczek's job was terminated.

Until 1997, the manor was a breeding, training and experimental center belonging to the Institute of Natural Fibers in Poznań. Not renovated, it turned into a ruin over the years. Today belongs to the marriage of Sylvie and Zbigniew Prokopowicz, who breathed new life into this property. The mansion has been beautifully restored and turned into a small luxury hotel offering hospitable shelter and conference spaces. It is set in a vast park with hundred-year-old trees, close to numerous ponds and many historical places worth visiting.



Witaczekowie w willi "Józefina"



siedziba CDSJ w Milanówku

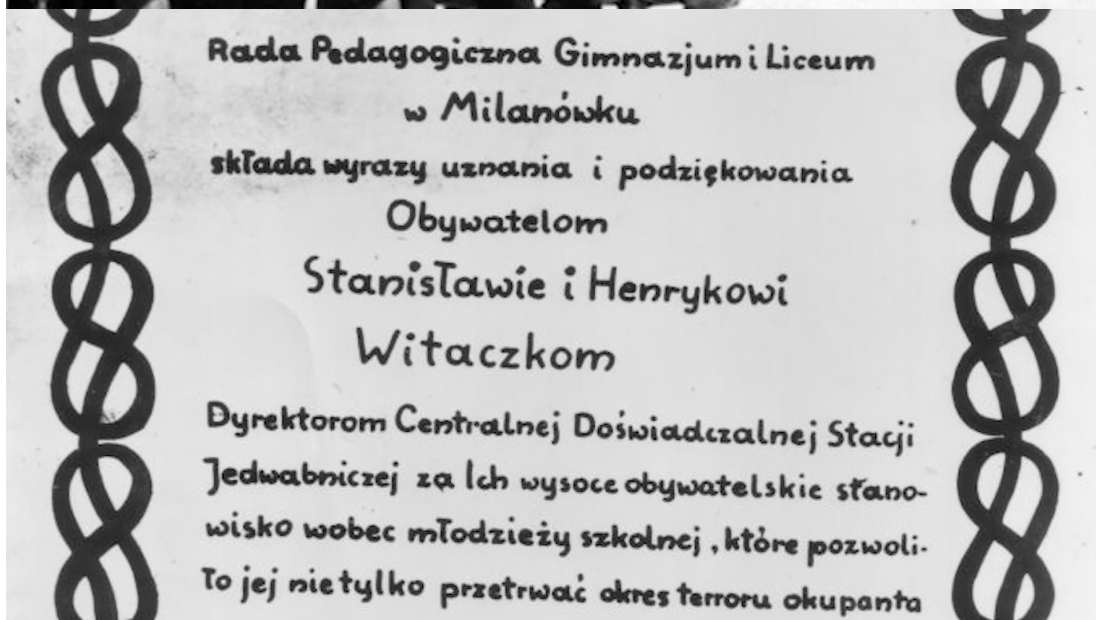


nici jedwabne





wydawanie posiłków w czasie okupacji



pochód pierwszozajowy, 1947



The Milanówek and Surroundings Route was created thanks to the cooperation of the Association of the Milanów Silk Museum with the Archives of Personnel and Payroll Documentation in Milanówek, the Milanówek City Hall, the Congregation of the Ursuline Sisters SJK in Milanówek, Grażyna Adamska, Małgorzata Dygas, Sylvie Prokopowicz and Małgorzata Trębińska, MTE Social Junior High School, Social Secondary School No. 5 STO in Milanówek and the New Private Primary School in Milanówek, with the financial support of the Bank Zachodni WBK Foundation as part of the project "I live here - I change here". The Silk Road is, next to the Virtual Museum of Silk Production in Milan, another project on the way to creating a stationary museum – the target project of the Association of the Silk Museum.