



## Research paper

# Jan Janowicz – A pioneer of surgery in Olsztyn

**Roman Łesiów<sup>1</sup>** , **Jan Zygmunt Trusewicz<sup>2</sup>**, **Miroslaw Łesiów<sup>1</sup>**, **Maciej Trusewicz<sup>3</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Department of Urology, Faculty of Medicine, Collegium Medicum, University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Poland

<sup>2</sup> Warmia and Mazury Medical History Center of the Regional Medical Chamber in Olsztyn, Poland

<sup>3</sup> Clinical Department of Trauma and Orthopedic Surgery, Municipal Polyclinical Hospital in Olsztyn, Poland

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history

Received: January 11, 2022

Accepted: March 29, 2022

Available online: April 11, 2022

### Keywords

Olsztyn

Surgery

Warmia and Mazury

History of medicine

### Doi

<https://doi.org/10.29089/paom/147821>

### User license

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution – NonCommercial – NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.



## ABSTRACT

**Introduction:** Jan Janowicz was born in 1893 in Gieluła. After arriving in Olsztyn in 1945, he began the process of establishing a surgical department in Olsztyn. In a short time, he set up hospital wards and outpatient clinics, which provided surgical care to the inhabitants of Olsztyn and Olsztyn voivodeship. Due to the lack of specialist staff, he was simultaneously the head of department at three hospitals in Olsztyn. On his initiative and under his supervision, independent departments of orthopedics, pediatric surgery, urology, and thoracic surgery were established. Jan Janowicz, as a pioneer in Olsztyn's surgery and the founder of new departments, became the most important and most distinguished surgeon in the post-war history of medicine of Warmia and Mazury.

**Aim:** The aim of the study is to present the biography of Jan Janowicz, the pioneer and most distinguished surgeon of Olsztyn and the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship.

**Material and methods:** The study is based on the available literature as well as the authors' own research.

**Results and discussion:** We present a biography of Jan Janowicz, a pioneer of Olsztyn's medicine.

**Conclusions:** Doctor Janowicz, who came to Olsztyn in 1945, was a pioneer and the first person to organize surgical care in what is now the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. His activities led to the establishment of independent departments of pediatric surgery, orthopedics, urology, and thoracic surgery.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Jan Janowicz was born in 1893 in Gieluta. After arriving in Olsztyn in 1945, he began the process of establishing a surgical department in Olsztyn. In a short time, he set up hospital wards and outpatient clinics, which provided surgical care to the inhabitants of Olsztyn and Olsztyn voivodeship. Due to the lack of specialist staff, he was simultaneously the head of department at three hospitals in Olsztyn. On his initiative and under his supervision, independent departments of orthopedics, pediatric surgery, urology, and thoracic surgery were established. Jan Janowicz, as a pioneer in Olsztyn's surgery and the founder of new departments, became the most important and most distinguished surgeon in the post-war history of medicine of Warmia and Mazury.

## 2. AIM

The aim of this paper is to present the biography of Jan Janowicz, the pioneer and most distinguished surgeon of Olsztyn and the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship.

## 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The paper is based on the available literature, the authors' own research, and the use of source material available on the internet. The primary sources are publications available in the University Library of University of Warmia and Masury, the State Archive in Olsztyn, the Library of the Municipal Polyclinical Hospital in Olsztyn, the Regional Public Library, and the Library of the Warmia Metropolitan Seminary Hosianum, Archive of the Library of the Museum of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, Archive of the Department of Surgery of the Children's Hospital in Olsztyn, and the Museum of the History of Medicine of the Medical University of Gdansk.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Family background

Jan Janowicz was born on May 27, 1893 in Gieluta (Siauliai County)<sup>1</sup> near Kaunas. His father, Marcjan Janowicz, was a forest engineer, a graduate of the Forestry Institute in Petersburg. After returning to his homeland, he managed the family property in Norejsze and Targowsk.

Jan Janowicz's mother, Krystyna, née Butkiewicz, inherited the estate in Gieluta after the death of her brother, who had no children. She settled on her property with her husband in 1884. Her life revolved mainly around child-rearing and housekeeping.

Grandfather's brother Ludwik Janowicz, also known as 'Konrad,' was a leading representative of the Polish fighters against the Tsar, a member of the organisations People's Will and the Proletariat. Sentenced to 16 years in prison

for subversive activities, he was imprisoned in the Warsaw Citadel and also in Shlisselburg, a fortress located on Lake Ladoga.<sup>2</sup>

During this time, Marcjan Janowicz developed a business. He accepted an offer from the Russian millionaire Malcew to oversee the forests near Bryansk. After the bankruptcy of Malcew, Marcjan Janowicz founded a joint-stock company that took over the assets and became rich mainly thanks to government orders for railroad ties. Having made a considerable fortune, Marcjan Janowicz returned home and developed his own business in Gieluta. As Tadeusz Matulewicz writes in his book *Vilnius Ancestry*: 'He imported high-milking cows from Denmark, dug and stocked ponds, modernized a sawmill, and purchased a car. He installed a telephone in the manor house, arranged an extensive library, and got himself a gramophone that played records of Alexander Vertinsky's songs. Krystyna and Marcjan had five children, four sons: Stefan, Jan, Kazimierz and Ludwik and daughter Maria.'<sup>3</sup>

### 4.2. Childhood and early years

Initially, Jan Janowicz was educated at home; he also took private violin lessons. Later he attended secondary school in Smolensk and then the Classical Gymnasium in Siauliai, where he passed his Matura exam in 1913. He began his medical studies at the Medical Faculty of the University of Dorpat (now called Tartu). After the liquidation of Vilnius University and Warsaw University by the tsarist authorities in 1831, this university became the main place of study for Poles from the Russian Partition. Jan Janowicz had worked already as a student since 1916 in the Department of Surgery of Professor Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtsev (1865–1952), lecturer in surgery at the University of Tartu.<sup>4</sup>

### 4.3. Formative years

In 1917, before graduation, Jan Janowicz was drafted into the Russian army and sent to the Romanian front as a battalion doctor of the 195th Azov Infantry Regiment. However, as early as December 1917, he joined Polish General Jozef Dowbor-Musnicki's 1st Corps, where he served as a doctor in the 7th Regiment of the 2nd Division in Bobruisk until it was disarmed by the Germans in April 1918.<sup>3</sup>

After Poland regained its independence, Jan Janowicz served as a military doctor in the Kaunas Battalion, the 1st Lithuanian-Belarusian Division, the Radio-Telegraphic Battalion in Warsaw, the 106th Infantry Regiment, the 211th Uhlan Regiment, as well as in the Garrison Hospital in Vilnius, where he became a junior head of the surgical department. During hostilities near Lviv in 1920, he was wounded in the left calf. Initially, he was treated in the Red Cross Hospital in Lviv<sup>1</sup> and then in the Mokotow Hospital in Warsaw. He was twice awarded the Cross of Valour for his wartime service, a Polish military decoration established by the State Defence Council on 11 August 1920.<sup>2</sup>

In 1920 Jan Janowicz had his diploma recognized, and on 11 July 1925, he received his doctor's degree in all medical sciences at the University of Warsaw.

In 1922, on 28 February, Jan Janowicz was demobilized at his own request and went into the reserves with the rank of captain. As a reservist, he took his first job in Vilnius at the Railway Hospital in Wilcza Lapa, where he served as a junior and then, from 1930, senior head of the surgical department. He served in this capacity from 1 March 1922 until the outbreak of World War II.<sup>3</sup>

He honed his skills and medical knowledge in Poland, among others, under the supervision of Professor Zygmunt Radlinski (1874–1941), an outstanding surgeon who created his own surgical school and taught many famous students. Like other prominent surgeons of that period, he also had foreign internships in Vienna (1922), Berlin (1930), London, Heidelberg, and twice (1930 and 1935) in Paris, where he worked in the clinic of Professor Jean Baptiste Marion.<sup>3</sup>

Jan Janowicz founded and directed the urological outpatient clinic, and from September 1942, he was the head of the Urology Department of the ‘Sawicz’ Hospital, becoming pioneer of urology in Vilnius. Together with doctors Alina Erdmanowa and Jerzy Dobrzanski, he founded a private clinic – Obstetrics and Gynecology Department and Surgical-Urological Clinic. The clinic had a capacity of seven gynecological-obstetrical beds and three surgical-urological beds and was located at Aleja Róż 2. Jan Janowicz also received patients at his apartment at Zakretowa 9.<sup>1</sup>

In the inter-war period Jan Janowicz, as a great lover of culture, hosted many artists in his house. Among those who performed there were the pianist Stanisław Szpinalski and the actor Ludwik Sempolinski. He also funded a scholarship that benefited the outstanding sculptor Boris Michalowski.

He was also involved in public affairs, including signing a protest in 1932 in defense of the left-wing activists sentenced in the Brest trial. For this, he was punished through a reduction of his salary and withdrawal of the Cross of Valor.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4.4. World War II years

After the outbreak of World War II, after being mobilized, he again served as head of the surgical ward in the Garrison Hospital in Vilnius located in the Sapieha palace in ul. Sapiezynska. However, after the Soviet Army invasion, he returned to work at the Railway Hospital.

Soon after, in 1940, he was arrested by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (Naródnny komissariat vnútreńnikh del – NKVD). Accused of espionage (due to his frequent trips abroad), he was imprisoned in Lukishki, the oldest prison in Lithuania. Thanks to the intervention of his wife Larysa, he was released from prison. After his release, he practiced privately.

He was arrested again, this time by the Germans (September 1943) as one of the hundred hostages of the Polish intelligentsia after the killing of the Lithuanian collaborator Marianas Padabas. Ten selected hostages were executed in Ponary. Among them were Professor of Law Mieczyslaw Gutowski and Professor of Oncology Kazimierz Pelczar.<sup>3</sup>

Jan Janowicz and other hostages were taken to the concentration camp in Prawieniszki. After his family intervened, he was released and began working again in the

newly organized hospital of the Lithuanian railroads under German administration.

There is an incident described from this period where Jan Janowicz saw in a column of Jews being led to execution a patient who had had his prostate operated a week before. He pointed out to the guard that the man was having surgery and could not walk on his own because he had drains and stitches that had not been removed. The guard instructed Jan Janowicz to take the patient on his back and join the column. Janowicz followed the order. The doctor was saved from imminent death by the German superintendent of the hospital, who was informed by a nurse who had seen the incident.<sup>5</sup>

Jan Janowicz was posthumously awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations, a distinction for people who risked their own lives to save Jews during World War II.

Together with Jerzy Dobrzanski, he became a doctor of the Polish underground. During Operation Tempest, he was running a field hospital. When the Russians encircled Vilna in July 1944, the Janowicz family hid in a forest shelter.

From the time the Red Army entered Vilnius in June 1944 until the time of his expatriation, Jan Janowicz worked as the head of the surgical department at the railway hospital in Wilcza Lapa.<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.5. Post-war years

After being forced to resettle in February 1945, he took his first job as the head of the surgical department at the Hospital of Polish National Railways in Białystok on 6 March of that year. Two months later, however, he was transferred to Olsztyn, where he took the post of head of surgery in three hospitals: the railway hospital (1945–1954), Regional Department of Public Security Hospital – so called ‘polyclinic’ (1945–1954), and St. Mary’s Hospital, which was then a provincial hospital.<sup>2</sup>

His task was to organize the wards both in terms of medical and nursing staff as well as medical equipment.

The first surgical procedure in postwar Olsztyn was performed on 20 January 1946. It was an amputation of the left foot. The procedure was performed by Dr. Florian Piotrowski, assisted by Dr. Jan Janowicz.<sup>1</sup>

Janowicz’s name also appears in the operative book with the date 24 January. This was a procedure of removal of the eyeball after trauma.

Jan Janowicz became a consultant for surgery and head of the surgical consulting team. In addition to organizing the departments, he took charge of training a new cadre of surgeons. He was also head of the Olsztyn branch of the Polish Medical Association, of which he became an honorary member. The Society of Polish Surgeons also granted Jan Janowicz honorary membership. His name appears on the list of 49 founding members of the Polish Urological Society. The second member of this society from Olsztyn was Bohdan Tallat. The founding meeting of the Polish Urological Society was held on 27 April 1949.<sup>6</sup>

Jan Janowicz was the author of many scientific papers in the field of practical surgery. He published papers in *Polish Medical Weekly* and *Polish Surgical Review*. He was the author

of a paper in urology A Contribution to the Research on Operative Trauma of the Ureter and Bladder.<sup>7</sup> He remained primarily a notable practitioner, however, and refused to move to the Medical Academy in Białystok for an academic post.

Many prominent Olsztyn surgeons are counted among his students: Mieczysław Pimpicki, Jan Rymian, Zygmunt Krassowski, Mieczysław Szwalkiewicz, Bohdan Tallat, Henryk Dawnis, Maria Natalia Swietlikowa, Stanisław Niepsuj.

On Jan Janowicz's initiative, independent departments of pediatric surgery, urology, thoracic surgery, osteoarticular tuberculosis, and trauma and orthopedic surgery were opened in Olsztyn. Jan Janowicz was and still is for the entire medical community an unrivaled model of a great doctor, an excellent surgeon with broad interests also outside medicine. It is worth quoting here the opinions of doctors who worked with Jan Janowicz. His student Mieczysław Pimpicki called him the 'Paganini of the Scalpel.' He also said: 'Dr. Janowicz was a very emotional man. He could step in the shoes of a suffering patient. He was not a money-chaser; he was simply a doctor with a big heart.'

Jan Janowicz's great passion was sailing. He obtained a Yachtmaster Certificate. In the inter-war period, he was an activist of the Maritime and Colonial League, a mass social organization founded in 1918 to popularize maritime issues. In the inter-war period, he participated in many cruises to Baltic ports. In 1932 he served as first officer on the ship Jurant on a voyage to the Norwegian fjords. Doctor Czesław Czarnowski was the commander. After the war, Jan Janowicz continued his passion for sailing. He was a co-founder and vice-chairman of the Olsztyn Branch of the Polish Yacht Club.<sup>1</sup> He was deeply involved in rebuilding the sailing marina on Lake Ukiel in Olsztyn. He also organized sailing courses, as well as sailing and iceboat competitions in Olsztyn. For his outstanding service, he was awarded the Cross of Valour, the Bronze Medal For Long Service in the Regional Directorate of State Railways in Vilnius in 1938, the Gold Cross of Merit in 1946, the Badge For Exemplary Work in the Health Service in 1951, the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta in 1954, the Medal of the 10th Anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland in 1955, and the Order of the Banner of Labour of the Second Class in 1961. On 7 December 1956, he received a car from the Presidium of the Provincial National Council as a 'reward.' It was a cherry-colored Wartburg, widely recognized among the people of Olsztyn.<sup>2</sup>

#### 4.6. Family life

Another thing worth mentioning is his family life. His first wife was Jadwiga Cumft, a graduate of the Faculty of Architecture at the Warsaw University of Technology. He had one daughter with her, Danuta (married name Pogorzelska), who, after graduating from the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, initially worked as a stage designer at the Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw, and later at the Stefan Jaracz Theater in Olsztyn. For her work, she was awarded the honour of Meritorious for Warmia and Mazury. After the tragic death of his first wife, Jan Janowicz married Larysa Chrzanowska, who had been a nurse during the war and was later employed as a

laboratory assistant. They had two children. Their daughter Sylwia (married name Lachnitt) graduated from the School of Drama. After graduating, she worked from 1958 to 1960 as the art director of the Olsztyn Theater and later at the Gdansk Land Theater. His son Mariusz, after graduating from the Agricultural University in Olsztyn, was employed in the Department of Biochemistry at the Faculty of Zootechnics of this university. He died tragically buried in an avalanche in the Tatra Mountains in 1960 at the age of 27.<sup>3</sup> Jan Janowicz died in Warsaw on January 6, 1964 after a long and serious illness. He was buried in the municipal cemetery in Olsztyn. Several thousand citizens of Olsztyn accompanied him on his last journey. In December 1975, a plaque dedicated to Jan Janowicz was unveiled at the Provincial Hospital, and in January 1977, the common room at the Municipal Hospital was renamed after him. This room contains a bust of the patron carved by Balbina Switycz-Widacka.<sup>22</sup>

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Doctor Janowicz, who came to Olsztyn in 1945, was a pioneer and the first person to organize surgical care in what is now the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship. His activities led to the establishment of independent departments of pediatric surgery, orthopedics, urology, and thoracic surgery.

### Conflict of interest

The authors have no potential conflicts of interest.

### Funding

None declared.

### References

- 1 Trusewicz JZ. *Vilnius traditions of Olsztyn surgery* [in Polish]. Olsztyn: Elset; 2020.
- 2 Skrobaccki A. *An Album of pioneer physicians of the Mazurian Voivodeship 1945–1946*. Olsztyn: Pojezierze. 1980.
- 3 Matulewicz T. *Vilnius Ancestry* [in Polish]. Olsztyn: Wers; 2005.
- 4 Bednarski ZM. *Poles at the Faculty of Medicine of the Dorpat-Juryevski University in 1889–1918 and Estonian National University in 1919–1940* [in Polish]. Olsztyn: Ośrodek Badań Naukowych im. Wojciecha Kętrzyńskiego; 2005.
- 5 Janowicz L. *Playing Truant on Trzykrzyska Street, or, A Warning for Poets...* [in Polish]. Staszow; 1993.
- 6 Borkowski A. *50 years of the Polish Urological Society* [in Polish]. Warszawa: Remedy; 2002.
- 7 Janowicz J. A Contribution to the Research on Operative Trauma of the Ureter and Bladder [in Polish]. *Pol Med Weekly*. 1954;9:3–15.
- 8 Chłosta J. *People worthy of memory. The Warmian-Masurian patrons of the streets of Olsztyn* [in Polish]. Olsztyn: Książnica Polska; 1997.