

**THE LIBRARY  
OF THE TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY  
OF GDANSK IN BREMEN**

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Gdansk Naturalist Society or rather more exactly the Experimental Physics Society, as it was founded under this second name, was the first one in Poland and the second in the world society that described itself as the physical one. The scientific collection gathered through the years (among others the second largest in the world amber collection) was the kernel of the stock of nature museum founded in 1880 in the Green Gate. Unfortunately, most of it got destroyed or dispersed during the last war (some of the amber collection was transferred to the Museum of Earth in Warsaw). The Society also had a rich library of about 30 thousand volumes. In 1923 it was given over to the library of the Technical University of Gdansk.

How did it happen? It all started with the exhibition of objects collected during James Cook's first voyage, organised by two English participants of the historical cruise. The exhibits came from the collection of the Royal Science Society in London. The exhibition was organised to commemorate the 180<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Gdansk Naturalist Society in November 1922. It is worth mentioning here that the official date of creating the Society is considered to be 22 November 1742. The date of 2 January 1743 mentioned by some authors was the date of the first scientific session and of resolving the statute prepared earlier. The representatives of the city authorities invited to the opening of the exhibition were wisely shown the very small seat of the library at the Naturalists' House in Mariacka Street. In that way was born the thought to come back to the original plan of one of the earlier directors of the Society – Alfred Momber – and to transfer the book collection to the Library of The Technical University. Among the enthusiasts of that idea was the newly appointed director of the library Albert Predeek. After discussions with the library committee and the board of the Society, and after a heated discussion during a general meeting on 6 December

1922, a suitable agreement to be signed by the authorities of the Free City of Gdansk was prepared.

Here is the text:

*The following agreement is between the Naturalist Society in Gdansk, represented by its Board, on one side, and the Free City of Gdansk, represented by the Senate, on the other side:*

- §1. *The Naturalist Society leases to the Free City of Gdansk its entire library, together with the belonging bookshelves and bookcases, starting from 1 March 1923. The rent agreement considers also all future purchases of the Naturalist Society in the field of books and magazines.*
- §2. *The lease fee is respective to the initial basic salary of the person employed, together with the inflation rate (without the aid benefit for a wife or children) of group IV, according to the tariff concerning group 4, and is to be paid at the end of a working period of half a year, at the place named each time by the Society.*
- §3. *The following agreement is in force to be observed by the leaseholder:*
  1. *The books are to be put in the rooms of the Library of the Technical University, yet separately, and supervised by the principal of the university library, in agreement with the librarian and the Library Committee of the Society.*
  2. *The leaseholder is obliged, within the resources mentioned in §4, pass. 2, to:*
    - a) *take care that the library is properly displayed and catalogued,*
    - b) *make sure that each book belonging to the library bears the property sign,*
    - c) *prepare an additional copy of the new catalogue for the Society.*
  3. *The leaseholder secures to all the members of the Naturalist Society free access to both the leased library and the university library.*
  4. *The leaseholder agrees, having ensured the agreement of the other parties, to:*
    - a) *make sure that the members of the society could use, within the premises of the leaseholder, all the necessary books and magazines of the leased library without additional fees.*
    - b) *ensure that the exchange of the dissertations of the Naturalist Society is done by the university library, and the coming dissertations are entered in the Society's collection.*
- §4. *200 dollars will be transferred to the Technical University's safe by the leaseholder to cover the costs of transport to and from and of professional display of the books in the University premises. All the costs should be covered by this sum. The leaseholder is obliged to secure the collection during transport and displaying at the University, together with the responsibility for any possible damage. The costs of cataloguing, current administration and enlarging the collection, together with the salaries of the necessary assistant employees will be covered by the Naturalist Society from its annual budget.*
- §5. *The agreement is signed indeterminably; both parties may terminate it at any time, observing a one - year termination period. If there are any changes in the legal or administration terms of the Free City of Gdansk or in the relationship between the Free City and the Technical University, the Naturalist Society has the right to terminate the contract immediately.*

On behalf of the Senate the agreement was signed by the chairman Heinrich Sahn and the senator for science, culture, and education Hermann Strunk, and on the part of the Society – by the director Hermann Stremme and the deputy director Wolfgang La Baume.

The agreement came into life in 1923. As director Predeek wrote later, the annexation of the “fantastic” library of the Naturalist Society was definitely the most important event in the history of the Library of the Technical University of Gdansk: *Already the first examination made us aware of how extraordinarily enriched was our library because of the older collection, and especially because of the wonderful series of dissertations of German and foreign academies and societies. The exchange of dissertations concerns over 400 societies and every year brings a rich enlargement of exchange literature, which is now also at the disposal of the Technical University. Only in the field of magazines the University gained 700 positions!*

We only have fragmentary information about the war history of the library. On 31<sup>st</sup> January 1945 some of the books sailed away together with the documents from the rector’s office, the most valuable equipment and about 300 people on the ship “Deutschland”. There were 500 cases loaded altogether. Most of them were found in Schmalkalden in Thuringia, where they found refuge in the castle. From what remained in Gdansk most was destroyed in the fire of the Main Building. Only 126 titles from the library of the Naturalist Society were preserved. From the part transported to Germany 853 titles were given in 1947 to the National Library – at present the University one – in Bremen. They were given as deposit by the professor of the Technical University of Gdansk Ernst Witt (working at the architecture department since 1933; died in 1971). As the deadline of keeping it was stated “till the times change”. They must, apparently, have changed, since on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1993 during the visit of Gdansk delegation the Chairman of Bremen Parliament gave the writer of these words – at that time the Chairman of the City Council – two volumes of that collection, describing the act as “the beginning of the return procedure to the lawful owners”. The volumes are: *The History of Animals* by Conrad Gessner (vol. 4), published in 1620 in Frankfurt, and *The Register of Plant Names* by Christian Mentzel, published in 1682 in Berlin. Both books are richly illustrated. *The Register* includes the plant names in several languages, among others Polish and Lithuanian. The volumes carry the stamps of the Technical University and the Naturalist Society. In 2000 the remaining 851 books came back to their original place in the Technical University of Gdansk.

*Translation: Anna Kucharska-Raczunas*

