
Stories of a Dollhouse

Exploring our Family
Memory and Traditions

A Little Paper Army 1920



A Little Paper Army



Leon Ksiazek was born in 1910, a year celebrating the 500th jubilee of the Grunwald Battle. The victory of Poland against the German Teutonic Knights in 1410 shaped the future Polish Empire that would become the largest in Europe during the 17th century. Ten years later, Leon was old enough to understand the significance of the Grunwald commemoration. Our dollhouse scenery pictures Leon with his little paper army of medieval knights.

1910, a Jubilee Battle

Ten years earlier in 1910, the celebration of the Battle of Grunwald (*Bitwa pod Grunwaldem*) had been occasion to demonstrate patriotism in Poland. At this

time, the country was divided and occupied by Austria, Germany and Russia. Obviously, the three partitions of 1772, 1793 and 1795 had failed to wind down the flag of national pride.

In the German occupied territories of Poland, the Battle of Grunwald was commemorated with much precaution. At this time, German authorities were waging a war against the Polish culture and newspapers were muzzled.

On the contrary, the Russian occupants jumped on the opportunity to highlight the collective victory of "Slavic nations" against German barbaric, emphasizing the contribution of Russian regiments.

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Cleverly, the Austrian exploited this event with a fraternal interest. They allowed the great pianist Ignacy Paderewski to commission a Grunwald monument in Krakow.

Therefore, the popular celebration was limited to the Russian and Austrian parts of Poland. This 500st Jubilee was the occasion to produce a series of books, albums, postcards, medals and commemorative objects to emphasize the significance of the Victory of Grunwald, a landmark event in Polish History.

In 1910, the 500th Grunwald Commemoration had a special significance for most Ksiazyk Families. Many of them were living in Wielkopolska, a region occupied by the Germans. In the regions of Kalisz, Jarocin, Gostyn, Koscian and Srem, the memory of German confiscations and harassment was vivid. Błażej Książyk (1824-1882), the grandfather of Leon, had left Wielkopolska in the middle of the 1870s to establish in Mazovia. His family did not experience the consequences of the *Kulturkampf* that tightened even more the German grip.



Battle of Grunwald - Jan Matejko - 1878 - National Muzeum in Warsaw

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1920, the Nation under Threat

Sadly, in July 1920, the 510th commemoration of the Grunwald Battle was overshadowed by the dangerous situation of the country.

Poland had recovered independence in November 1918 but the country was struggling to secure borders. The Germans were still occupying many regions. Inspired by the successful insurrection in Wielkopolska one year before, the Poles in Silesia had launched a first uprising against German troops in August 1919. They were now preparing another insurrection. In addition, Poland was engaged in a war against the Soviet and Bolsheviks hordes had invaded the country. Newspapers were reporting alarming news from the front.

At this time, Leon was living in the centre of Warsaw. The city was still suffering from the consequences of WWI. The population had to make do with rationing cards for food and basic goods. Restrictions were on almost everything, including paper, pencils and ink.

Still, the business of newspapers and books was thriving. This publishing activity included patriotic booklets for children with the intention to strengthen the cohesion of the young Republic. The authors insisted on the most glorious events of the Polish History, echoing the patriotic messages delivered in schools and catechism classes.



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For Leon, Grunwald was a story of fierce enemies, bloody battles, glorious king and victorious knights. Published in 1900, *Krzyżacy* (The Teutonic Knights) had previously captured the imagination of readers but the heroes of this book conveyed "strong feelings" deemed not appropriate for a 10-year kid.

A very popular book had contributed to develop his imagination: *Grunwald album Jubileuszowe – Szkic Historyczny*. Written by Jasław z Bratowa, this book had been published in 1910 for the 500th jubilee. The 344-page best-seller had an impressive collection of prints, engraving, colour pictures, and maps.



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Kids imagination

Toys were a pre-war luxury in 1920. In every family, they were preciously shared between siblings. On this point, Leon was quite unlucky. He had no older brother and he was required to share everything with his two brothers Władysław (aged 9) and Ciesław (aged 7). During the post-WWI period, he was happy when he could get something – even broken - from one of his many older cousins.

In this deprived environment, kids had much imagination. Newspapers and magazines were an endless source of inspiration. With good scissors, much patience and skilled hands, they could turn pictures into cardboard toys. The home production of

dolls, soldiers, trucks, cars, or aeroplanes was a quiet hobby encouraged by parents.

The modest 510th jubilee of the Grunwald Battle raised the interest for chasing pictures of the battlefield. Widely reproduced and circulated, the scenic painting of Jan Matejko was a great background. Magazines and brochures were browsed to find drawings and prints. Within a few weeks, a medieval army was raised, ready to kick enemies out of Poland.

None of the paper soldiers of Leon have survived the battle of time since 1920 but we treasure the *Grunwald album Jubileuszowe*, one of the most read book we have in our collection.



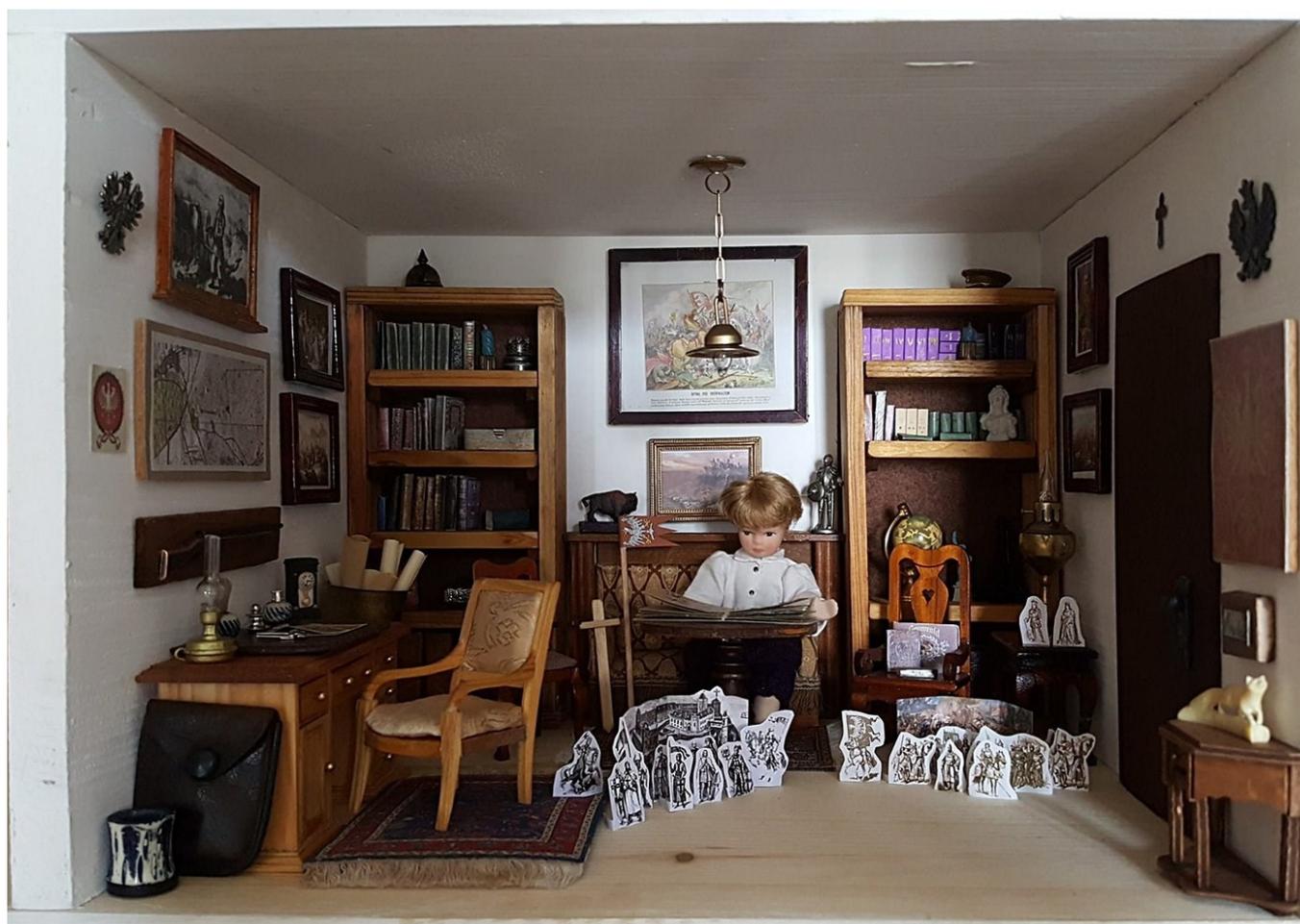
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Our “Little Paper Army” story pictures Leon in the office of his father. The decoration is inspired by the Grunwald Battle with reproduction of paintings, engravings and a few symbolic objects.

A tin soldier refers to the Polish Knights. The bison (*żubr*) symbolizes the region of Easter Poland where Teutonic Knights had established their Kingdom. A miniature *Pickelhaube* refers to the Prussian

occupation of Poland. There is also a portrait of King Władysław II Jagiełło. On the walls are antique maps with the estate our family in Mazovia (left) and in Wielkopolska (right). Other maps are in the jar.

Leon is reading some of the most popular books of the time about the Grunwald Victory. His postcards album displays several collections produced in Poland between 1900 and 1920.



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