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## **Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa (1864–1910): woman of fortitude, energy, and enthusiasm**

**ABSTRACT:** This article presents the life and activity of Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa, education organiser and socially engaged journalist, who made it possible for hundreds of women to enjoy higher education, ensured access to scientific publications, and brought to attention an awareness of the need for social work. Co-creator of specific forms of education for adolescent girls and women. Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa was active in an epoch of the underprivileged social and economic status of women in a country whose entire population was deprived of political rights. By means of her actions and publications she contributed to inspiring not only women aware of their rights but also citizens of a non-existent state. Even though Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa was, first and foremost, a person of action she remained, at the same time, a pragmatic visionary.

**KEYWORDS:** Adult education, women's education, 'flying university', women's journalism.

The aim of this article is to portray a single person, whose importance for Polish adult education deserves more attention than it has hitherto received. Despite Szczawińska-Dawidowa's attainments not many studies described and analysed her prominence in the history of adult education. Only two scholarly articles are devoted entirely to her educational and social achievements. Today, the article by Stanisław Jedlewski (1956) is difficult reading because it is "tainted" by Marxist-Leninist drivel. Nevertheless, it contains a number of useful facts, sober observations, and thoughtful assessments. The second article (Muszczyńska, 2017) is more of a summary of known information, and thus does not contribute much to our knowledge about Szczawińska-Dawidowa. Therefore, the main source of information about her life and achievements

are accounts by her contemporaries, as well as her texts and correspondence. Published reminiscences and other publications are of special importance and use in view of the fact that many manuscripts and archive materials were destroyed during World War II (Nietyksza, 1995, p. 64).

In order to acquaint the reader with Szczawińska-Dawidowa the article begins with a short biographical sketch. Next, it presents her greatest adult educational achievement – the so-called flying university. Her ability to combine ideas with day-to-day practicalities is shown through her focus on adult education ‘infrastructure’ in the form of libraries and reading rooms. Szczawińska-Dawidowa was not only an organiser and facilitator of education for girls and women, but also committed to other social issues of her time. In order to involve others she became an ardent journalist. This activity is the subject of the next section of the article. Concluding remarks cite some features of Szczawińska-Dawidowa’s character and enumerate her achievements.

### **A biographical sketch**

Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa was born in Warsaw on 1 October 1864. Her father, Wojciech Albert, a member of an impoverished landowner family, was employed as a civil servant at the Police Board of the City of Warsaw. In January 1864 he married Bronisława Natalia Gumpricht, daughter of a Protestant owner of a Warsaw hat-making factory. Jadwiga was the older sister of Gustaw Stefan, Wanda Maria, and Helena Zofia (Muszczyńska, 2017, p. 84). Gustaw Szczawiński was an engineer, a social activist, and co-publisher of “Przegląd Społeczny” (Social Review). Zofia married Henryk Melcer, composer and, subsequently, director of the Warsaw Philharmonic. Wanda Szczawińska, similarly as Jadwiga, graduated from the Second Gimnazjum for Girls in Warsaw, and thanks to the support of Piotr Chmielowski, Józef Nussbaum, and Bolesław Hirszfeld left for Geneva and then Paris, where she studied microbiology and zoology; unable to pursue the career of a scientist she became a medical doctor. Returned to Poland after Jadwiga’s death in 1910. Took an active part in work performed by the Society of Scientific Courses (conducted courses on hygiene).

The siblings lost their father early on, and Jadwiga, as the oldest daughter, kept house together with her mother and took care of the younger children. Already while attending secondary school she worked additionally as a home teacher. At the same time, she participated in illegal educational activity, started publishing texts on social self-help and education for women, and even gave lectures (Micińska, 2008, p. 137).

In 1880 Jadwiga Szczawińska graduated with distinction from the Second Gimnazjum for Girls in Warsaw and then passed a state examination for teachers, which offered an opportunity to find employment in a secondary school for girls. For a certain time she worked at the same secondary school (on Wilcza Street) from which she had graduated (Nagórska, 1932, p. 204). Here, Jadwiga taught Polish for two hours a week. *Thanks to the teacher's talent and courage her lessons, during which it was officially forbidden to lecture or speak in Polish, turned into a fount of beauty and kindness* (Bergson-Bornsteinowa, 1910, p. 115).

Soon Jadwiga Szczawińska was relegated due to her inobservance of Russification regulations. She began teaching in private schools for girls (including the one ran by Sikorska and Kosmowska – among the best-known in Warsaw) and in private homes; she found work by means of an announcement in the daily press:

*Secondary-school teacher prepares girls for exams. 24 Złota Street, flat no. 9. Jadwiga Szczawińska ("Kurier Warszawski" 1 May 1886, p. 7; quoted from: Muszczyńska, 2017, p. 85).*

Despite her youth Jadwiga was capable of detecting among her pupils

*the more keen and talented ones or those less fortunate. She secretly provided all of them with Polish books... Finally, she organised meetings held at her home, where we absorbed great democratic and national ideals... She gave me my first books... Mill's: The Subjection of Women, followed by a book that exerted a decisive impact upon my intellect: History of Civilization in England by Buckle* (Bergson-Bornsteinowa, 1910, p. 115).

Jadwiga Szczawińska made her life choice early on. Going abroad to seek higher education was virtually impossible due to her family's financial condition. She stayed in Poland, and dedicated herself to years-long educational, journalistic, and social activity (Nagórska, 1932, p. 204). One of her acquaintances recalled: *She granted pride of place to practical activity, into which she wished to draw as many energetic and determined persons as possible* (Kulczycki, 1910, p. 110). Another contemporary remembered Jadwiga similarly:

*In 1883–1888 a considerable number of young people inaugurating their personal and social career as journalists met at the Szczawiński flat in Złota Street... There we argued and waged battles or planned assorted undertakings... Miss Jadwiga in particular was full of energy and a desire to act and strive. She yearned*

*for social work and organised meetings concerning education for the people. Wrote brochures. Drew others into public efforts* (Straszewicz, 1910, p. 115).

In 1889 Jadwiga married the psychologist, pedagogue, and journalist Jan Władysław Dawid (1859–1914). Upon inauguration from a secondary school in Lublin J. W. Dawid became a student of law and the natural sciences in Warsaw; subsequently, he left for Germany where he studied psychology and pedagogy in Halle and Leipzig under Wilhelm Wundt and Hermann Ebbinghaus. Marriage to Jadwiga Szczawińska led him from exclusively theoretical-pedagogic work onto the tempestuous scene of a struggle waged for the sake of convictions (Krzywicki, Szuman, 1938, p. 459). They ran a very open house. With time, their subsequent homes became editorial offices and administrative quarters of the journals they published. Young Zofia Nałkowska remembered her visits to the Dawids – the professor was “a man of few words” while Mrs. Dawid was *talkative and full of life. She seemed to us to be young and pretty – especially when she laughed and wrinkled her nose slightly. And she laughed eagerly* (Nałkowska, 1934).

On 16 January 1894 Szczawińska-Dawidowa was arrested and imprisoned at the Warsaw Citadel. Her husband was sentenced *in absentia* for holding clandestine lectures and managed to flee to Galicia. Upon her release Jadwiga successfully obtained in St. Petersburg consent for his return (Nagórska, 1932, p. 209).

Despite repressions and detentions Jadwiga and Jan Władysław Dawid did not withdraw from public life. In 1900 they both became editors of the reactivated “Głos”, turning it into the most leftist of all periodicals published at the time in Warsaw; Nałkowska, 1934). Their flat in Smocza Street became a place of editorial meetings, administration, and posting the periodical. This is how Nałkowska recalls her visits at the Dawids at that time:

*I do not know whether these gatherings could be called a literary salon or editorial meetings. The guests included many collaborators of “Głos”. There were also various people from the world of the bourgeoisie, who at that time became somewhat and temporarily inclined towards supporting a revolution* (Nałkowska 1934).

*[Jawiga] drew friends of the periodical and found sympathisers and followers in various social spheres. I did not have the impression that she was having fun ... She dressed modestly, was devoid of feminine coquetry, and not a bit vain. She never spoke about herself ... But she lit up talking about matters that were of general importance, she laughed and enjoyed herself, or gave way to indignation.*

*She persuaded people, drew them into sphere of issues she was impassioned about, into her domain of social work* (Nałkowska, 1934).

In February 1905 tsarist authorities closed "Głos" down and arrested J. W. Dawid. After a two weeks long incarceration he was ordered to leave the country and made his way to Vienna, where he stayed until June. Meanwhile, Szczawińska-Dawidowa remained in Warsaw, from which she sent her husband the local press and even articles to be reviewed. She also provided financial assistance (Musczyńska, 2017, p. 87) and did not cease seeking ways of reaching tsarist officials so as to obtain permission for Dawid's return.

Subsequent years became a period of Szczawińska-Dawidowa's increasingly deteriorating mental health. The prohibition issued by the Russian authorities and her illness made all teaching impossible; moreover, Jadwiga's former co-workers abandoned her (Micińska, 2008, p. 137). At the beginning of 1910 the exhausted and overwrought Szczawińska-Dawidowa, suffering from a nervous breakdown, was advised by her friends to leave for the winter holidays and to stay in the village of Rokosz near the locality of Góra Kalwaria. Here on 26 February 1910 she committed suicide.

### **Adult educational activities *per se* – 'flying university'**

A growing number of clandestine self-education groups emerged in Warsaw at the onset of the 1880s. Their outstanding organisers included students of the tsarist University in Warsaw. The young supporters – with an increasing participation of girls and young women – met in private homes, often those of ladies renting rooms to students. A series of arrests in 1883 became the reason why numerous circles ceased to exist. Several years later, illegal self-education gatherings were re-established. This time the initiative belonged to young women, who had already taken part in clandestine education and had not only gained knowledge but also won organisational experiences. Eminent representatives included Jadwiga Szczawińska, Stefania Sempołowska, Maria Gomólińska, and Julia Unszlichtówna. In 1885/1886 upon the initiative of Jadwiga Szczawińska the sporadically held circles assumed the form of courses conducted in conspiracy. By combining existing study circles and establishing new ones, Szczawińska managed to create their uniform structure, unify programs, and ensure the academic level of classes (Mackiewicz-Wojciechowska, 1933, p. 8). In time they became known as the 'flying university'.

During the initial period of 'flying university' activity Szczawińska-Dawidowa maintained direct contact with numerous students, whom she ad-

vised about selecting courses or offered practical guidance concerning methods of studying and self-education.

Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa established a board composed of representatives (between 12 and twenty) of each course. Board delegates were known as cashiers – their tasks included finding suitable locations for the lectures, informing lecturers and listeners about meeting places, collecting annual dues (one rouble) and fees for the lecturers (one rouble), as well as acting as liaisons between the course participants and Szczawińska-Dawidowa. The board met once a month to discuss financial and organisational issues.

Many students could not afford to pay for their education, and on the average every fourth one was released from payment. During certain months almost half of all the students were exempted owing to their unsatisfactory financial situation. This gives us an idea of their character. Throughout the whole illegal period of ‘flying university’ activity the majority of students were young women, usually from lower- and middle-class families of the Warsaw intelligentsia.

Apart from wages intended for the lecturers, significant sums among the “flying university” expenses were intended for ...bribes for policemen “pounding the street”. Sempołowska, one of the students, recalled how she used University funds to buy a samovar as a bribe to ensure the discretion of a district policeman (Mackiewicz-Wojciechowska, 1933, p. 10).

The logistics of organising the courses gave the illegal university its name. In order to avoid surveillance by agents of the tsarist secret police courses had to take place in constantly new places – hence the adjective: ‘flying’”. All participants

*had to be notified on time (personally, since the telephone was not a universally used appliance) about the location and type of lecture or which lecture was cancelled or transferred to another day ... All took place in an atmosphere of total conspiracy and almost without any funds ... The entire organisation depended mainly on women ... Szczawińska-Dawidowa guaranteed more than ten facilities at homes known for unblemished political law-abidingness and, sometimes, high social rank (Krzywicki, 1958, p. 365)*

Originally, the ‘flying university’ was composed of two ”faculties” – natural sciences and the humanities. Didactic work was based on so-called circles (modelled partially on already existing self-education ventures). The courses did not encompass solely lectures – female students were expected to prepare papers, conduct discussions, and sit for obligatory examinations. As one close

acquaintance of Szczawińska-Dawidowa recalled: *The spoken word differed from making one's way through various books, by no means an easy task due to the absence of public libraries* (Nagórska, 1932, p. 206).

Lecturers were recruited from among leading Warsaw-based men of science of the period. On the one hand, they followed patriotic motives and the ethos of the Polish intelligentsia, who regarded *social and education activity – even threatened by repressions carried out by the partitioning authorities – to be a natural modus operandi at a time when Polish society was deprived of its state* (Micińska, 2008, p. 136). On the other hand, lectures guaranteed a relatively satisfactory income. It follows from the reminiscences of lecturers and female students that a considerable impact upon decisions to work for the 'flying university' was exerted by Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa's enterprising spirit and force of persuasion.

Due to the renown and superiority of the lecturers the number of female students at the 'flying university' grew systematically. Initially, it totalled about 200, but already in the mid-1890s attendance reached ca. 500. In one of the following years there were 1000 'flying university' (mostly female) students, which signified about a hundred hours of lectures a week. At the same time, the Imperial University of Warsaw enrolled ca. 1 500 students (male only) (Micińska 2008, p. 135).

During the first years of the existence of the 'flying university' the majority of students were young women. In time, thanks to the high level of the lectures and courses it was attended also by students of the legal tsarist university. Naturally, graduation from the 'flying university' did not guarantee any sort of formal education. Recollections by some of the female students make it possible to conclude that participation in courses available at this particular school of higher learning was significant not solely for intellectual development, and acted as the leaven of self-education, but also possessed the features of civic education in a non-existent state (Nagórska, 1932, p. 206).

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The 'flying university' outlasted its founder – Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa. In the wake of the revolutionary events of 1905–1907 terror inflicted by the tsarist authorities declined. Many existing underground organisations became legitimate, amongst other the 'flying university', which operated now as the Society of Scientific Courses and still attracted primarily women.

## Facilitating education/learning – libraries & reading rooms

A characteristic feature of the ‘flying university’ was the absence of permanent locations for lectures and courses – the outcome of the demands of conspiracy. The lectures could be ‘flying’, but a library – indispensable for all sorts of studies – had to have a permanent address.

During the 1880s, apart from the library of the Imperial Warsaw University of Warsaw, the libraries of several societies, predominantly the Medical and Gardening Associations, or the Association for the Promotion of Industry, possessed scientific literature available exclusively to members. The University library was opened only from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and did not lend books out. The book collections of the free-of-charge libraries of the Warsaw Charity Society (WTD) were unsuitable for the needs of the ‘flying university’ female students.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Szczawińska-Dawidowa, known for her acuity and endless energy, initiated efforts to guarantee female students access to suitable literature. Already in 1885 she set up, together with several other persons, a lending library offering books and periodicals. Tsarist authorities did not permit the establishment of public-social institutions. In order to circumvent this prohibition Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa formally opened a firm whose “owner” was her mother – Bronisława Szczawińska. Throughout its entire existence the reading room tackled assorted financial problems.

Upon the basis of a private contract signed in 1890 a large group of Warsaw-based representatives of science and culture deposited their private book collections for public use. The contract guaranteed the social character of the reading room, which contained also books belonging to Student Brotherly Help (Bratnia Pomoc Studencka) at the Imperial University of Warsaw as well as collections of several local libraries intended for women readers. Importantly, the library was open from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m.

*The great need for such an institution became apparent; three rooms comprising the reading room were insufficient for all the readers, so that many persons were unable to find suitable space, particularly in the afternoon (Szczawińska, 1897/1901, p. 134).*

In 1894 the institution was reorganised thanks to the efforts of Szczawińska-Dawidowa and became known as the Reading Room of Scientific Works and Writings. Members of the board included *representatives of donors and students, although decisions concerning multiple issues were made by*

*Szczawińska-Dawidowa alone. She was also responsible for obtaining funds indispensable for functioning* (Micińska, 2008, p. 135).

In 1898 Szczawińska-Dawidowa withdrew from all activity and resigned from her membership in the Reading Room Board. Her decision was the outcome of a conflict with representatives of Student Brotherly Help, who accused her of insufficient concern for the book collection and accepting the fact that many books were not returned to the library. In 1906 tsarist authorities confirmed a legal act concerning the Public Library in Warsaw, whose entire collection, deposited in storage, was handed over to the Public Library of the City of Warsaw (from 1918 up to this day located in 26 Koszykowa Street, in the town centre).

Szczawińska-Dawidowa perceived readers' needs not only within the context of 'flying university' female students but also as a prominent factor for self-education and raising the cultural level of Polish society. Hence her work for the sake of creating a public library (and a reading room network). In 1897 she published an article: *O potrzebie założenia publicznej biblioteki w Warszawie* (the last of its two subsequent editions appeared in 1901), stressing the significance of a library for effective self-education. In doing so Szczawińska-Dawidowa appealed to the board of Kasa im. Mianowskiego (the Józef Mianowski Fund) – an institution granting scholarships for research and scientific trips abroad – arguing that it should entrust part of the funds for a library since the latter was used by many more scholars than just a few scholarship holders. Szczawińska-Dawidowa thus polemised with views claiming that a library is a "luxury" compared to other, more urgent social requirements. In her opinion *society should steadily meet important needs, care for the ill and build hospitals intended for them as well for the healthy, for whom it should establish libraries* (Szczawińska, [1897/1901]).

Szczawińska-Dawidowa even ran a *sui generis* employment agency. By making use of a wide network of her acquaintances she made it easier for students and graduates to find wage-earning jobs. Among several thousand graduates we come across numerous important figures from Polish social, political, and scientific life at the turn of the nineteenth century. In time, many of them pursued the professions of teachers, journalists, pharmacists, writers, and organisers of cultural life in local communities.

### **Journalism – own and others'**

Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa published texts in such opinion-forming periodicals as "Przegląd Pedagogiczny" (Pedagogical Review), "Głos" (Voice),

“Społeczeństwo” (Society), and “Przegląd Społeczny” (Social Review). Some of her articles appeared also in the form of separate offprints or successive editions. She rarely signed her works but, as a rule, used easily decipherable initials: J. Sz., Jotes, or J. S. D. It was precisely this activity as a journalist, albeit sporadic, that resulted in meeting her future husband – J.W. David, since 1890 editor-in-chief of “Przegląd Pedagogiczny”.

Szczawińska-Dawidowa wrote predominantly about social themes (e.g. women’s working conditions, suffragettes), pedagogy (access to schools for children of the poor, bad teachers) and politics (the right to vote for women). Thanks to her adroitness she managed to “smuggle” political contents. Take the example of the article: *Z prasy fachowej* (“Głos” 1902, no. 14) in which Szczawińska-Dawidowa urged to strike while alluding to “a collective lapse in work”. In order to propagate her ideas concerning the significance and needs of the co-operative movement she wrote a novel: *Wojciech Kłos. Historia pożytecznego człowieka* (Wilno 1900).

From their wedding in 1893 Jadwiga Szczawińska-Dawidowa assisted her husband by running a number of periodicals. When as a result of a conflict within the editorial board (1898) Dawid left “Przegląd Pedagogiczny”, and in 1900 took over the periodical “Głos”, Jadwiga once again joined him. In 1905 tsarist authorities closed “Głos”, and Dawid and Szczawińska-Dawidowa embarked upon editing “Przegląd Społeczny” (1906–1907). Once tsarist censors shut down also this periodical the husband and wife team began issuing “Społeczeństwo” (1907–1910). Due to Jadwiga’s ingenuity, efficiency, and exceptional organisational skills her husband was capable of editing a number of successive periodicals.

Characteristically, in the four periodicals issued by J. W. David his wife never appeared as a member of the editorial board despite her great involvement: she endeavoured to obtain indispensable funds not only for the printing and dissemination of a given periodical but also for paying continually imposed fines.

*The “administrator” of the periodical was well aware of the fact that she was burdened with the most thankless, difficult, and responsible tasks, and that everyone around her enjoyed recognition for their work, even if only some sort of satisfaction, while she received solely barbs and was able to seek solace exclusively in an awareness of the justness of the cause (Korczak, 1910, p. 111).*

The fact that the burden of managing the periodical was shouldered by a capable person was to the liking of her intellectual co-workers. Janusz Korczak mentioned that only once did Szczawińska-Dawidowa make an accusation:

[...] whenever “dirty” work is involved not one of you wants to come to my assistance. All of you are such idealists! Paper, printing, announcements, and subscriptions are much too lowly for you... (Korczyk, 1910, p. 111).

### **Jadwiga – a person of many qualities and some flaws**

Accounts by acquaintances, family members, and co-workers reveal a woman brimming with energy, “task-oriented”, and finding fulfilment in activity – be it running clandestine schools or periodicals, or social or journalistic efforts. *I recall Aunt Jadwiga – always in motion, going somewhere or returning from somewhere* (Melcer, 1934, p. 3). Authors of diaries also evoke her negative features – Jadwiga was overbearing, hot-tempered, and unable (or unwilling?) to accept opinions different from her own. In time this obtrusive personality contributed to rising conflicts and caused her to resign from membership in the boards of the ‘flying university’ and the Reading Room (Micińska, 2008, p. 137).

Other co-workers complaining about Szczawińska-Dawidowa’s aggravating character included not only students (‘flying university’ “cashiers” charged her with ignoring students’ postulates; Mackiewicz-Wojciechowska, 1933, p. 11). Also mature publicists, the collaborators of “Głos”, mentioned her growing despotism. Krzywicki and Stanisław Stempowski repeatedly mentioned the way in which the “wife ruled” the periodical and the categorical manner in which Szczawińska-Dawidowa implemented her plans (Krzywicki, 1958, p. 354; Stempowski, 1953, p. 234). Some looked for mitigating circumstances or searched for an explanation:

*Her activeness, energy, and intrusion into each issue were not always assessed suitably. Some perceived – totally incorrectly – a wish to lead. Meanwhile, this was only a case of a willingness to offer society as much of her toil as possible, and of a concern that this work would turn out to be as useful as possible... Whenever she decided to pursue some plan she simply had to carry it out. In such instances she sought suitable people and means, sometime risking much unkindness expressed by those indifferent towards public issues or incapable of suitably comprehending her intentions and tactic. All those conflicts and unpleasantness, however, did not discourage her* (Kulczycki, 1910, p. 110).

Clearly aggrieved, Szczawińska-Dawidowa shared her reflections in an article, which she gave the unambiguous title: *Grabarze społeczni* [Social grave-diggers]:

*Quite often someone embarked upon a certain idea and commenced work just so that others, who basically share this view, would ostentatiously withdraw or even cause damage. In the case of each joint task woe betide the individual, who incautiously shows excessive initiative and energy, does not try to alleviate and lull the ambitions of others, does not guarantee himself allies, and does not create a clique. The more zealous his work and the better its outcome, the greater the certainty that it will cause envy and intrigue aimed against him...* (SzczaWińska-Dawidowa, 1900, p. 680; quoted from Muszczyńska, 2017, p. 93).

Despite growing disappointment and exhaustion SzczaWińska-Dawidowa continued to be socially active and support her husband's scientific and journalistic undertakings; for all practical purposes, she pursued these tasks all the way until her tragic death.

By creating the 'flying university', reading rooms, and libraries, managing social periodicals, and assisting female students SzczaWińska-Dawidowa stirred into social action successive age groups of young Polish women. She urged them to take a vigorous part in assorted campaigns and undertakings, some of which gave rise to women's organisations and associations. In this manner she contributed to inspiring not only women aware of their rights but also citizens of a non-existent state.

SzczaWińska-Dawidowa was among the proponents of a necessary reform of teaching both girls, adolescents, and adult women. She urged, by basing herself on her husband's scholarly arguments, for an education system that would focus more on learning than on simple memorisation (Marcinkowska-Gawin, 1996).

Even though Jadwiga SzczaWińska-Dawidowa was, first and foremost, a person of action she remained, at the same time, a pragmatic visionary. A woman of fortitude, energy, and enthusiasm.

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