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THE SKARBEKS AND THE CHOPINS: A STUDY OF MUTUAL RELATIONS

This article shows the relations between Fryderyk Chopin and his family, on one hand, and the Skarbek family, on the other. Those relations turn out to have been far more enduring than hitherto supposed.

The Skarbeks (of the Awdaniec or Abdank coat-of-arms) hailed from the Łęczyca area. In the eighteenth century they joined the ranks of senatorial families, before in the nineteenth century obtaining the title of count from the partitioning authorities. Although the Skarbek family could hardly be called magnatial, there was much to separate it from the Krzyżanowskis and the Chopins. In this article, we show the history of two generations of Skarbeks settled in Izbica, in the Kujawy region, and their relations with the Krzyżanowskis, Fryderyk's grandparents, during the second half of the eighteenth century. Those relations were maintained by the following generation after the family moved to Żelazowa Wola, and then to Warsaw, at least until the 1860s, when Count Fryderyk Skarbek died. The relations between Fryderyk's family and the Skarbeks are presented against a broad historical background: the Confederation of Bar, the Four Years' War, the war with Russia, the Kościuszko Uprising, the Duchy of Warsaw and the Napoleonic Wars, and the November Uprising and the period of the Paskevich-era reaction.

The article is based on material from memoirs, presenting colourful portraits of some of the protagonists with whom the Krzyżanowskis and Chopins had personal contact.

It also explores the rural background to the childhood of Chopin's mother, in social and material terms, and also the Chopins' later standing, when they joined the social elite of Warsaw, thanks largely to their relations with the Skarbeks. Both these aspects provide material for reflection on some features of the composer's rich personality.