

# Ignacy Łukasiewicz

**Jan Józef Ignacy Łukasiewicz** (1822–1882) was a Polish pharmacist and petroleum industry pioneer who in 1856 built the first oil refinery in the world.<sup>[1]</sup> Among his other achievements were the discovery of how to distill kerosene from seep oil, the invention of the modern kerosene lamp (1853), the introduction of the first modern street lamp in Europe (1853), and the construction of the first oil well in Poland (1854).<sup>[2]</sup>

Łukasiewicz became a wealthy man and one of the most prominent philanthropists in Galicia. Because of his support for the economical development of the region, a popular saying was coined attributing all paved roads to his gulden.



Jan Józef Ignacy Łukasiewicz

## Biography



Mikolasch's pharmacy

Ignacy Łukasiewicz was born March 8, 1822 in Zaduszniki near Mielec, in the Austrian empire (after the partition of Poland). His parents were Apolonia née Świetlik and Józef Łukasiewicz, a member of local intelligentsia and a veteran of Kościuszko's Uprising. His parents rented a small manor in Zaduszniki, but soon after Ignacy's birth had to move to Rzeszów due to economical difficulties. There Ignacy started his studies at the local gymnasium, but had to abandon it in 1836. To help his parents, Ignacy Łukasiewicz moved to Łańcut where he started to work as a pharmacist's assistant. At the same time he became involved in various political organizations supporting the idea of restoration of Polish sovereignty. In 1840 he returned

to Rzeszów, where he continued to practice at the pharmacy of Edward Hübl. In 1845 he met Edward

Dembowski, who admitted Łukasiewicz to the illegal *Centralization of the Polish Democratic Society*. The aim of that organization was to prepare an all-national uprising against the partitioning powers. Because of that, on February 19, 1846 Łukasiewicz was arrested by the Austrian authorities and imprisoned in Lwów. On December 27, 1847 he was released from prison due to lack of evidence, but for the rest of his life he was regarded as *politically insecure*. He was also ordered to remain in Lwów.

There Łukasiewicz started working for the *Pod Złotą Gwiazdą* pharmacy owned by Piotr Mikolasch. On his insistence Łukasiewicz was allowed to leave Lwów and join the Kraków University. After several years of studies, financed mostly by Mikolasch, he managed to pass all his university examinations except pharmacognosy, which prevented him from graduating. Finally, on July 30, 1852 Łukasiewicz graduated from the faculty of pharmacy of the University of Vienna. He then returned to Lwów. Łukasiewicz had long been interested in the potential of seep oil as a cheap alternative to the more expensive whale oil. In 1853 Jan Zeh,<sup>[3]</sup> together with his associate Łukasiewicz, was the first in the world to distill clear kerosene from seep oil, Canada's Abraham Gesner having first refined kerosene

from coal in 1846. On July 31, 1853, Łukasiewicz made one of his kerosene lamps available to a local hospital to illuminate an emergency surgical operation.<sup>[4]</sup> The date is considered the starting point of modern oil industry.

In early 1854 Łukasiewicz moved to Gorlice, where he continued his work. He set up many companies together with entrepreneurs and landowners. That same year, he opened the world's first oil "mine" at Bóbrka, near Krosno (still operational as of 2006). At the same time Łukasiewicz continued his work on kerosene lamps. Later that year he set up the first kerosene street lamp in Gorlice's borough of Zawodzie. In the following years he opened several other oil wells, each of them as a joint-venture with various local merchants and businessmen. In 1856 in Ulaszowice near Jasło he opened an "oil distillery", that is the first industrial oil refinery in the world. As the demand for kerosene was still low, the plant initially produced mostly artificial asphalt, machine oil and lubricants. The refinery was destroyed in a fire in 1859, but was rebuilt in Polanka near Krosno the following year.

In 1863 Łukasiewicz, who moved to Jasło in 1858, was already a wealthy man. He openly supported the January Uprising and financed help for the refugees. In 1865 he bought a large manor and the village of Chorkówka. There he established yet another oil refinery. Having gained one of the largest fortunes in Galicia, Łukasiewicz promoted the development of oil industry in the area of Dukla and Gorlice. He gave his name to several oil-mining enterprises in the area, including the oil wells of Ropianka, Wilsznia, Smereczne, Ropa and Wójtowa. He also became the benefactor of the region and founded a spa resort in Bóbrka, a chapel in Chorkówka and a large church in Zręcin. As one of the best-known businessmen of his times, he was elected to the Galician Sejm. In 1877 Łukasiewicz also organized the first Oil Industry Congress and founded the National Oil Society. Ignacy Łukasiewicz died January 7, 1882, of pneumonia. He was buried at the small cemetery of Zręcin, next to the Gothic Revival church he had financed.



Galician oil wells



Oil wells in Grabownica; 1930s

## Quotes

*This liquid is the future wealth of the country, it's the wellbeing and prosperity of its inhabitants, it's a new source of income for the poor, and a new branch of industry which shall bear plentiful fruit. - 1854*

## References

- [1] Frank, Alison Fleig (2005). *Oil Empire: Visions of Prosperity in Austrian Galicia (Harvard Historical Studies)*. Harvard University Press. ISBN 0-674-01887-7.
- [2] Warsaw University timeline (<http://www.geo.uw.edu.pl/BOBRKA/DATY/daty.htm>)
- [3] Zeh Jan (Зег Ян)
- [4] The Ignacy Łukasiewicz Memorial Museum of Oil Industry (<http://www.geo.uw.edu.pl/BOBRKA/LUKASIEWICZ/lukasiewicz.htm>)

## External links

- The Petroleum Trail ([http://www.beskidniski.org.pl/szlaki/naftowy/szlak\\_naftowy.htm](http://www.beskidniski.org.pl/szlaki/naftowy/szlak_naftowy.htm))
- Pressure Lamp website (<http://homepage.ntlworld.com/munwai/index.htm>)
- Historic Lamp forum (<http://www.be-back-later.com/forums>)

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