

XI. HEALTH CENTER – CURRENTLY BAJKA MANOR

The Health Centre in Błażowa was established in 1946 on the ground floor of a former Jewish building. The first director was Dr Emanuel Rożko. He was succeeded by Dr Jan Wlazło and later by Konrad Maciejczuk. In 1950, a maternity ward was opened in the attic, with midwives including Zofia Brożonowicz, Stefania Lubas, Janina Szura, and Maria Początek, who joined in 1961 and served the longest until the ward's closure.

Maria Początek was a well-known and respected midwife in Błażowa, renowned for delivering numerous babies from Błażowa and the surrounding areas.

In 1993, she reflected on her experiences in "Kurier Błażowski":

I first worked at the maternity ward in Hyżne, where the only professional assistance available was the local feldsher. I served seven villages, and the terrain was vast and mountainous, with no electricity. I could only reach women in labour by horse-drawn cart. Babies usually arrived at night, so I delivered them under the light of a kerosene lamp.

My "competition" consisted of the village midwives, known as "babkas," who delivered babies in conditions far from sterile. Women in labour often lay on straw or dirty mats, which led to numerous postpartum complications and, unfortunately, the deaths of both mothers and children. Calling an ambulance from Rzeszów was virtually impossible, contributing to the high mortality rates.

To address these issues, I focused on gaining the community's trust by promoting hygiene and education. I carried a suitcase filled with essential tools: oilcloth, sheets, medicines, and dressings. As a result of my efforts, women gradually became convinced that giving birth in my presence was safe, and they began to rely less on the "babkas" in such situations.

Busy country women had very little time for themselves. Those who weren't feeling well would seek my advice. At the same time, women in good physical condition usually called me only when they were about to give birth. I remember performing a complicated procedure that should have been done exclusively in a hospital. This involved manually extracting the placenta, and I saved a woman's life during that time. I had to make quick decisions because I had no other options.

Often, I had to light the stove myself, fetch water from the well, wash myself, and clean the woman in labour—all without any assistance. This may be difficult for young midwives, who are accustomed to modern medical equipment and interventions, to understand. I was entirely on my own, relying solely on my two hands. During that period, I delivered 120 babies in just eight months in Hyżne.

In 1958, I began working as the manager of the Maternity Ward in Błażowa. Upon seeing my new workplace, I remarked that I had stepped from hell into heaven. The maternity ward was well-equipped, and I had two midwives and three attendants to help, which made my job

easier. Emergency medical services, including a gynaecologist, were available, and I could call upon local doctors if needed. The position came with significant responsibility.

Qualified midwives were sent to assist, but many had little professional experience. This was where they developed their skills. The work was stressful, as I constantly feared for the lives of both the mother and the baby, particularly in critical situations. I often worried about whether the ambulance would arrive in time—or if it would arrive at all. I worked three shifts, and it was rewarding to know that many women wanted me to assist with the birth of their children. I viewed every woman as someone in need of help, and I believe my patients could feel it. I worked in the Maternity Ward in Błażowa for 30 years and at the District Clinic in Błażowa for four years. During my career, I attended approximately 3,000 births. My staff and I served not only the Błażowa commune but also the surrounding areas. Hospitals in Rzeszów referred patients to us because they trusted our care.

I received several awards, including the "Meritorious for the Rzeszów Voivodeship" (1971), the medal for the "30th Anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland" (1974), and the medal for the "40th Anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland" (1984).

The Maternity Ward in Błażowa was regarded as one of the best in the Rzeszów Voivodeship. It was part of the Błażowa Health Centre but ceased operations in the 1980s, when specialised hospitals were created.



MARIA POCZĄTEK







