

Greater Poland Uprising 1918-1919

<https://greaterpolanduprising.eu/pwe/memory/3255,Glass-and-eye-Kazimierz-Greger-18871967.html>
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“Glass and eye”. Kazimierz Greger (1887–1967)

Piotr Grzelczak

Almost everyone knows the characteristic white signature of a photograph of "K. Greger&Co. Poznań"; it can be seen on the outside edge of unique photos which document Poznań at the time of the Greater Poland Uprising. This illustration was used in umpteen publications related to the Uprising as well as commemorative prints, it is regularly reproduced in the press and electronic media; also the authors of museum exhibits and curators of anniversary exhibitions cannot do without it. Its great historical value is confirmed by an entry in the prestigious National List of the UNESCO programme: "Memory of the World". Drawing abundantly from this unique photographic legacy, sometimes we forget to whom we really owe it. The perfunctory description which is limited only to the information that the author of the photos is Kazimierz Greger does not do it justice. Not only

is this "photographer of the Uprising", as he is sometimes presented, an outstanding documenter and a popular entrepreneur and philanthropist, but also a deep patriot who did not defer from active cooperation with the underground independence movement during World War II.

Kazimierz Greger was born on 3 February 1887 in Inowrocław, which he quickly left for Poznań. Here, he completed gymnasium and it was most probably also here that he was completely preoccupied by his love for photography. It definitely accompanied him during his study of economics in Berlin and during his trips to the largest German cities. As time passed by, it became an idea for life, and here, the contacts which he established in Dresden, one of the largest centres of the photographic industry in Europe during his apprenticeship surely helped him a lot. In 1910, after his return to the capital city of Greater Poland, Greger set up his first photographer's shop on Wiktorii Street (currently Gwarna Street), which he moved quickly to Berlińska Street (currently 27 Grudnia Street) where he, eventually, occupied the entire front of the tenement house No. 18. Paradoxically, the outbreak of the Great War was conducive to the development of the company as demand for commemorative military photography increased almost overnight. In December 1918, however, the time came for Greger to leave the safe atelier. His photo-journalistic sense led him to the streets of Poznań, where great historical events were starting to take place. This was precisely when he made a collection of several hundred unique photos in which he captured, among other things,

the assembly of the Partition Sejm of Poznań, the famous march of the Polish children (27 December 1918), the arrival of General Józef Dowbor-Muśnicki into Poznań (15 January 1919), the insurgent oath on Wolności Square (26 January 1919) and the visit of the Inter-Allied Commission (1-2 March 1919).

As the insurgent epic came to an end, Greger was engrossed in his professional work, quickly making his company the biggest photographer's shop in pre-war Poland. He published "Wiadomości Fotograficzne", subsidised "Polski Przegląd Fotograficzny", and printed "Poradnik Foto-Gregera", which enjoyed tremendous popularity and whose circulation reached as many as 130000 copies. The outbreak of World War II brought an end to the photographic empire of Kazimierz Greger, whereby the merchant, exiled from Poznań (via Durchgangslager Głowna), spent it in Warsaw where he worked in a branch of his company which he had opened in 1938. We now know that it was there that he helped exiles from the Poznań region and operated covertly. It was actually his shop where the photo-journalist of the Warsaw Uprising, a correspondent of the Government Delegation for Poland - Jan Tomaszewski, pseudonym "Jur" arrived in August 1944. Greger put his photo studio as well as his laboratory at his disposal. This was the place where almost 2000 photographs of the fighting in Warsaw were developed[!]. Another documenter of the uprising, Eugeniusz Haneman worked with a camera presented to him by Greger himself. His insurgent card was thus dramatically complemented.

After the war, Kazimierz Greger lived in Cracow and Wrocław. The so-called “People’s Poland” did not treat him too generously. He died ill and forgotten on 23 October 1967. His remains are buried in the Stare Powązki cemetery in Warsaw.

THE COLLECTION OF THE WIELKOPOLSKA MUSEUM OF INDEPENDENCE

