

Residential Wooden Houses Built in Small Towns of Lublin Region in 1918-1939

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Abstract: The housing situation just after the First World War was very bad. This was due, among other things, to the huge war damage of buildings as well as years of neglecting the construction movement during 123 years of partitioning. Not only public buildings were destroyed, but most of all housing development, which at that time in the Lublin region mostly had a wooden structure. The article presents a part of a comprehensive study of the wooden architecture of the interwar period of small towns in the Lublin region. Representative examples from each type of object were discussed.

Key words: Wooden houses, interwar period, Lublin region.

1. Introduction

The First World War brought huge losses in the development of Polish lands. Not only public buildings were destroyed, but mainly residential development, which at that time in the Lublin region (Fig. 1) was mostly of wooden structure. After regaining independence in 1918, the new authorities of the Republic of Poland faced the difficult task of a comprehensive reconstruction of the Polish state.

The housing situation was very bad. This was due, among other, to huge damage to the buildings as well as years of neglecting the construction movement during 123 years of annexation. At that time, construction was considered a private-economic matter, and not a social one as it happened after the war [1]. According to the census of 1921, 26% of the population lived in the city; the remaining 74% were still living in the countryside. Areas in the central provinces were inhabited by 32%, and in rural areas 68% [2]. There was an average of 5.2 persons per one flat, 4.7 persons in the city, and 5.4 in rural areas [2]. A similar situation was in the Lublin Voivodeship, where there were 4.7 persons in the city, and 5.5 persons in the rural areas [3].

Ahead the new authorities faced a huge task—the reconstruction of the country and creating a plan to improve the housing situation. In order to it a number of reforms had been carried out to stimulate the construction movement in Poland. The Ministry of Public Works, wishing to accelerate the pace of the reconstruction of the country, decided to continue the reconstruction on the principles of supplying those in need of building timber from state-owned forests¹. The state has allocated about 7.2 million m³ of timber for the reconstruction of residential resources. Thanks to this procedure, about 85% of destroyed houses were rebuilt. State aid was around 20% of the total cost of recovery borne by society [1].

The objects described in the article represent a part of the research carried out on the wooden architecture of the region. Exemplary buildings for each type of house are discussed. A comprehensive analysis covered 176 houses in sixteen cities, two urban settlements and one health resort. The presented buildings differed not only from the surface of the building but also from the form depending on the period and place of creation [5].

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¹ First former Austrian Government started the reconstruction according to those regulations. In later years it had been continued by Polish authorities [4].

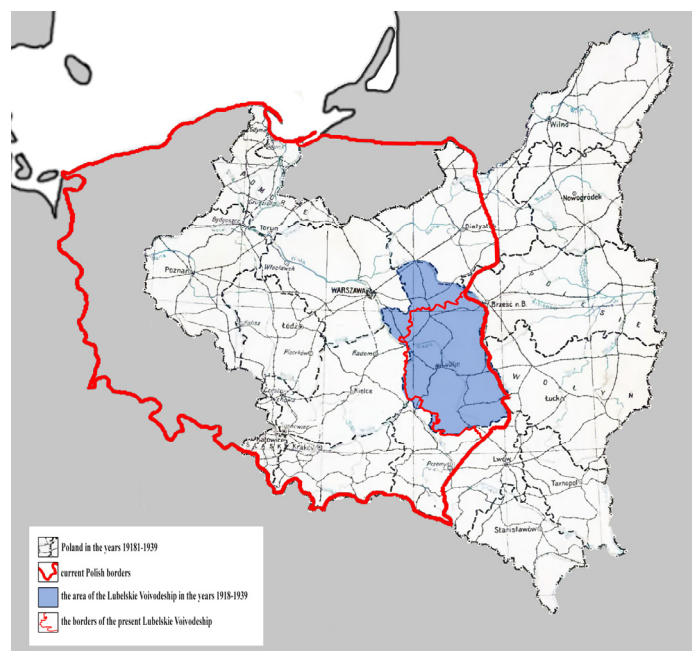


Fig. 1 Lubelskie Voivodeship in the interwar period and now. Drawing on the basis of Ref. [2]. Made by author, 2013.

2. Selected Building Regulations Regarding Wooden Housing

In the first years of independence laws and regulations of the former Kingdom of Poland and issued by other occupants were in force². The unification of the building law for the entire territory of the Republic of Poland took place on February 16, 1928 in a new law *o prawie budowlanem i zabudowaniu osiedli* (*On Construction Law and Development of Housing Estates*) [6].

It contained a set of laws regarding the method of building objects. According to the applicable building law, every newly erected building in the city or the reconstruction³ of the existing one could be made only after obtaining a building permit issued by the municipality.

Applicants for a building permit or reconstruction had to submit to the municipality a land development plan, an elevation, detailed drawings of all parts of the building and sections (longitudinal and transversal). In

addition, information about the area of each room and other necessary details was to be provided⁴. On the situational plans it had to be marked north-south direction [8].

In cities, the height of buildings with wooden structures was limited, which could not have more than two floors and exceed the height of four fathoms, i.e. 8.52 m (this height was calculated from the ground level to the eaves). This also applied to mixed-construction buildings—a stone ground floor, wooden floor. Non-fireproof residential buildings exceeding 25 meters in length were to be divided every 25 meters by a firewall⁵.

The heights of the rooms intended for permanent residence of people have been set at least 2.5 m in single-storey houses, whereas in houses with more than two floors—2.75 m, and in the case of attics, this dimension could be reduced to 2.3 m [6]. The ground floor had to be designed 40 cm above ground level [6].

² [7], compare: [8, preface].

³ Reconstruction had been understood as erecting of new walls, slabs or general renovation.

⁴ In the first years, the surface was given in feet, later it was changed to square meters.

⁵ [8, part C. I, Articles No. 200-201], compare: [6, Article No. 202].

2.1 Development of a Building Plot

Lack of plots for the construction of new homes had helped to find ways to solve this problem. The ordinance issued in 1920 as an instruction for the State Housing Fund Commission (Polish: Komisja Państwowego Funduszu Mieszkaniowego) set out what health and communication conditions should be covered by the areas designated for new housing investments. In 1925, a law was issued regarding the land's reclamation [9], and the land received in this way was to be earmarked for the construction of new housing estates. In the newly designed housing estates, low-rise one- and two-story buildings were to prevail, and in exceptional situations, three-storey buildings. According to the law of 1923, the building area could be about 50% of the total area of the plot for one-story and two-story buildings, and for three-storey buildings 35%. In the amendment of the law from 1928, this area increased to 75%, if adequate sunlight and ventilation were provided. This provision did not apply to corner plots, which could be built completely with access to light and safety reasons. Newly designed houses, built within the existing borderline, were to be adapted to the general regulations in force in the given area, but they could not have more than three floors⁶.

A building located on a building plot covered by a valid building plan should have a fence or a front wall within the limits of regulatory lines. If the area was not covered by the housing development plan and did not have a designated regulatory line, the front buildings could be placed directly at the plot border or at least 3.5 m from the road with the outbuildings, the rest was to be fully used as green areas [10, 11].

The requirements of the building law most often concerned new plots, as in many cities there were already existing buildings on very small plots, which most often hampered the implementation of new buildings. However, it was allowed to completely

build the plot in special cases⁷. Hence, at the beginning of the 1920s, residential buildings were erected, often on small plots, whose surface sometimes equaled the building area. This situation concerned mainly the development located close to the market squares, where the plots were small or already partially built-up.

3. Housing Situation in the Cities of the Lublin Region in the Interwar Period

In 1919, the Lublin Voivodeship was established under the Provisional Act of the Republic of Poland⁸. It covered nineteen districts: Bialski, Biłgorajski, Chełmski, Garwoliński (until 1939), Hrubieszowski, Janowski, Konstantynowski (until 1932), Krasnostawski, Lubartowski, Lubelski, Lublin City⁹, Łukowski, Puławski, Radzyński, Siedlecki, Sokołowski (until 1939), Tomaszowski, Węgrowski (until 1939), Włodawski and Zamojski¹⁰.

The housing situation in the Lublin Voivodeship, as in the rest of the country, was not the best. The ongoing struggles for the final establishment of the borders lasting until the early 1920s brought huge damage to the buildings, which further aggravated the housing problem.

Despite the introduction of the obligation to create regulatory plans, most of the cities in the Lublin region did not have them; only plans for the selected large cities were created. In other cases, they were created piecemeal depending on the needs. The wooden housing built at the time was erected

⁷ These were special plots at squares and streets, in particular corner plots. The condition for obtaining a permit to build the entire area was to provide sufficient access to sunlight and air as well as fire safety requirements [8, Article No. 177].

⁸ The new division into Voivodeships was in force from 1919 on the basis of the provisional act [12].

⁹ The city of Lublin was a separate administrative unit of the city powiat [13], on July 26, 1922, it was abolished [7] and re-created on April 12, 1928 [15].

¹⁰ On April 1, 1932, the Konstantynów District was abolished, it was incorporated into the Bialski and Siedlce poviats [16], and on April 1, 1939, the poviats of Garwolin, Sokołowski, and Węgrów as well as Irena Commune were excluded (this commune was incorporated into the Garwolin powiat [17]). They became part of the Warsaw Province [18].

⁶ [8, part F. II, Article No. 11 and Part II, *Przepisy policyjno-budowlane*, Articles No. 176-179]; compare: [6, Articles No. 176, 177].

primarily in newly designed housing estates away from the city center, most often in the suburbs or on vacant plots within existing housing estates.

The actions of the government, consisting in supplying wood as a building material for the reconstruction of destroyed houses, reduced the prevailing housing crisis at that time. At the beginning of the 1930s, there was a huge economic crisis. The construction movement was almost completely slowed down, no new investments were made, only small repairs and completion of the already started construction were limited. Wooden objects had become the answer to the prevailing recession. They were cheap and quick to make. The confirmation of this phenomenon may be the Central Statistical Office (CSO Pol. GUS) statistical data on construction work in the Lublin region from 1931. According to them, half of the new building was made of wood [19]. Not in all cities in the Lubelskie Voivodeship the ratio of wooden houses to brick houses was the same. It resulted, among others, from geographical conditions and available building material.

4. Examples of Wooden Buildings in the Lublin Region

Wood construction in the interwar period became popular not only because of the help of the government, but above all because of the speed of construction. It was aimed at reducing the construction crisis. It was most often located outside the city center, on the outskirts or in the place of vacant lots. Lots on which were placed the objects depending on the location and the city have different shapes. On the lot there were, apart from the residential building, farm buildings and an outside privy (for objects that do not have bathrooms, which were the vast majority). Built houses had different functional and spatial layouts. Due to the multitude of forms and schemes, the article presents the characteristic functional and spatial plans found in the

Lublin region in the interwar period. It discusses forms from the simplest single-family single-room to two-family and multi-family.

The first described house is a single-family one-room building located in Ostrów Lubelski, where in the first years after the war, the construction movement was primarily associated with the reconstruction of homes destroyed by fire. The house was located at Lubartowska Street (Fig. 2). It was one-storey without a basement, situated facing the road with a ridge. It was situated on a plot of irregular shape directly at the southern border and 1.7 meters from the eastern border. It has rectangular plan with dimensions 7×5.5 m (usable area 25.6 m^2). In the north-east corner of the house a chimney shaft has been designed. The outer walls—north and east—were firewalls. Building was topped by lean-to roof covered with shingle.

An example of a single-family house with two rooms may be a building located outside the center of Biała Podlaska. It was a detached one-storey building located on Gliniana Street. The building was designed in 1922 by architect K. Srokowski from Biała Podlaska (Fig. 3). House without a cellar, situated gable wall to the street, was located in the depths of an irregularly shaped plot. In the area apart from the house, an outside privy was provided.

The house was designed on a rectangular plan with dimensions of 8×4 m. It was covered with a gable roof. The entrance was from the yard side and was preceded by a wooden porch. There was one room and a kitchen in the building. In the central part between the rooms there was a chimney shaft.

Whole gable wall elevation was planked in a horizontal arrangement, whereas formwork of gable has radial pattern, corners of the building were emphasized by decorative plank (Pol. *kożuchowanie*) with bossage pattern. The façade refers to traditional architecture.

An example of single-family, three-room building with a bathroom can be a house located in the suburb

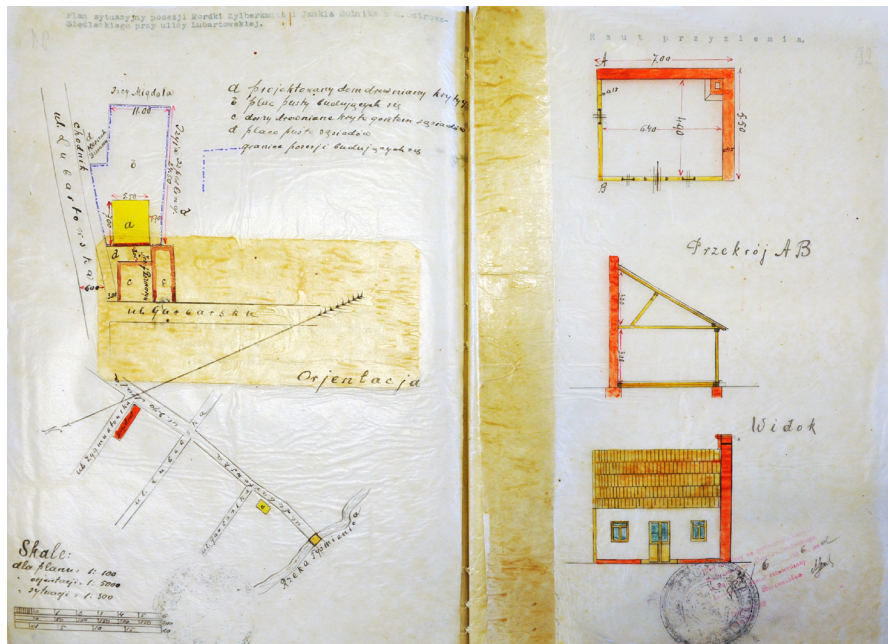


Fig. 2 Plan for the construction of the wooden house of Mordka Zylberkant and Janek Solnik at ul. Lubartowska (1926). (Plan na budowę domu drewnianego Mordki Zylberkanta i Jankla Solnika przy ul. Lubartowskiej). Source: APL, AMO, reference number 399.

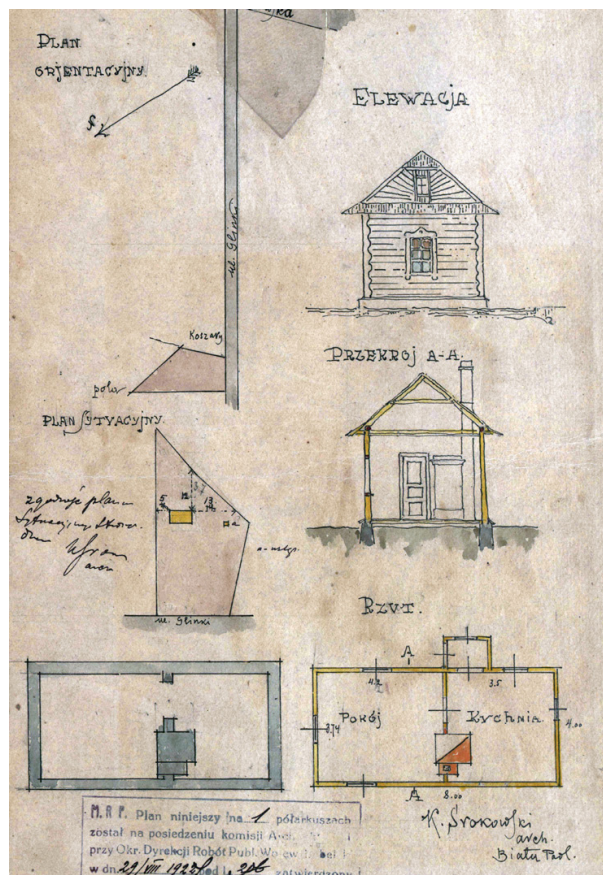


Fig. 3 Project of a residential house J. Zanczuk in Biała Podlaska. (Projekt domu mieszkalnego J. Zanczuka w Białej Podlaskiej). (1922, designed by K. Srokowski). Source: APL, UWL, reference number 413.

Błonie in Krasnystaw (Fig. 4). Single-storey building without cellar located ridge to the street was designed on a rectangular plot of 56.5×25 m. The housing estate in which the building had been situated in accordance with the new law had a regulatory plan on which the building line was marked at a distance of 6 m from the northern border. Also on the plot were located brick utility sheds at the southern border at a distance of 27.5 m from the house.

The main residential part of the building is based on a rectangular plan with dimensions of 4.2×12 m, to which on both sides of the main part were designed two extensions containing communication and utility room. The main entrance located from the street was emphasized by glazed porch. The building had a bathroom, which was located next to the kitchen. The front facade referred to modernism.

The four-room house had a more extensive functional and spatial layout. As an example can be a house located at Horodelska Street in Dubienka (Fig. 5). The plot was rectangular in size 31×110 m. House was located ridge to the street, directly at the border with Horodelska Street. The four-room house was based on a rectangular plan of 6.3×10.7 m. The main entrance from the Horodelska Street was preceded by a gable roof supported by columns. It led to the entrance hall, which crossed the entire length of the house, leading to the yard. Between the rooms of each structural span were located stoves connected by an arcaded chimney. The building was covered with Dutch gable roof. The elevation referred to the style of a manor house.

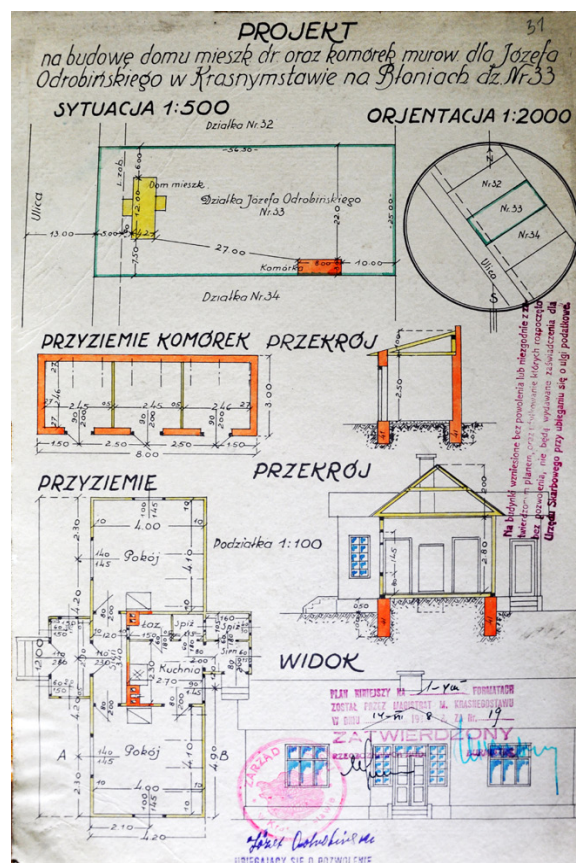


Fig. 4 Project for the construction of a wooden house and brick utility sheds for Józef Odrobinski in Krasnystaw on Błonia, plot number 33 (1938). (Projekt na budowę domu mieszkalnego drewnianego oraz komórek murowanych dla Józefa Odrobinskiego w Krasnystawie na Błoniach, działka numer 33).

Source: APZ, AMK, reference number 12.

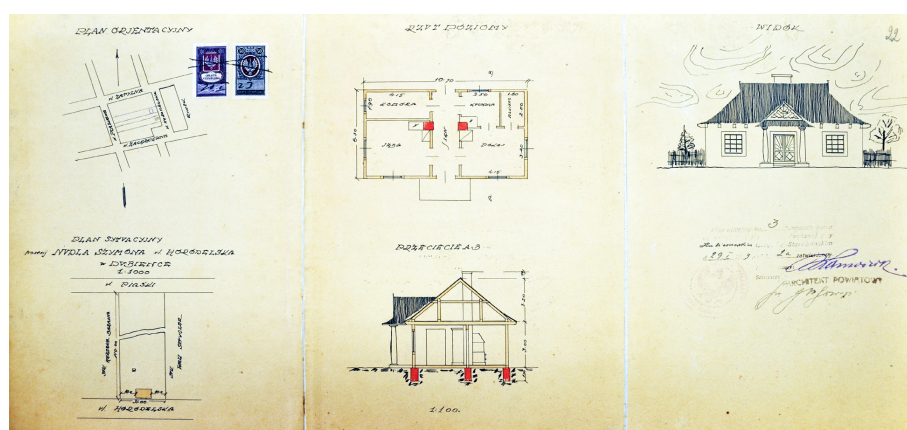


Fig. 5 Project for the construction of the wooden house of Nudla Szymon at Horodelska Street in Dubienka (1923). (Projekt budowy domu drewnianego Nudla Szymona przy ulicy Horodelskiej w Dubience).

Source: APL, SPH, reference number 838.

In the interwar period, apart from single-family houses, two-family houses with different number of rooms were built as well. An example of a two-family house with the simplest layout can be a semi-detached house in the suburbs of Hrubieszów (Fig. 6). It was located in the south-east corner of a square plot with a side of 17.5 m, by the border with a road, at a distance of 8.3 m from the neighboring house.

The plan was based on a rectangle measuring 18.7×4.6 m. A separate entrance from each side of Wójtostwo Street led to each of the single room flat. A stove was designed in the central part of the house. The façade of the building was symmetrical and completely shuttered up to the height of the window cornice in the vertical arrangement, while in the remaining part the formwork was horizontal. In addition, the corners of the building were emphasized by decorative plank.

Another example of two-family house, but with a more extensive residential function is a one-storey building with a habitable attic located on a corner plot at the intersection of Browarna and Mickiewicza Streets in Lubartów (Fig. 7). The house was designed directly on the road and the eastern border. In addition to the house on the plot in the north-east corner there was a brick outhouse with an outside privy.

The ground floor plan of the main part, in which two apartments were located, was designed on

a rectangle measuring 11.5×7.8 m. The first flat on the west side was a three-room and the other one located opposite had two rooms. Additionally (from the north) a stairwell was located in the building. It leads to the attic, in which there were two rooms for vacationers. The outer western wall, due to its location near the border, was designed as fire wall.

The three-axis front elevation is boarded in vertical arrangement to the window base. In the remaining part, the formwork was in a horizontal arrangement. The main entrance to the building was accented with a garret with a decorative gable. Currently, the main entrance has been built-up. The woodwork has also been changed, which has been replaced with a modern one (Fig. 8).

A one-storey house with an attic located at Mostowa Street in Krasnystaw contained three-room apartments (Fig. 9). The building was located in the south-western corner of the corner plot on the building line at a distance of 5 m from the regulatory line and 4 m from the western border. The ground floor plan was based on a rectangular plan with dimensions of 14×10 m, with a symmetrical arrangement of rooms. The main entrance was from the street. On both sides of the corridor, two three-room apartments with separate bathrooms were located. The second entrance was from the yard side and was also preceded by a porch, in this case wooden. It led to all

dwellings. The straight-ahead entrance led to the staircase leading to the habitable attic, where the third apartment was located, also three-room, but without a bathroom. The front façade was designed as plastered. The main entrance was accented with an attic room with a balcony supported by columns.

An interesting example of a house, which was created just after the First World War, is an object

located at one of the main streets of Lubartów along the Lubelska road (Fig. 10). One-storey building with a basement and attic was designed in the southern part of a rectangular plot.

The ground floor plan was based on a rectangle measuring 14.32×11.4 m with a symmetrical arrangement of rooms. Two entrances to the building were located in both corners of the building. The third

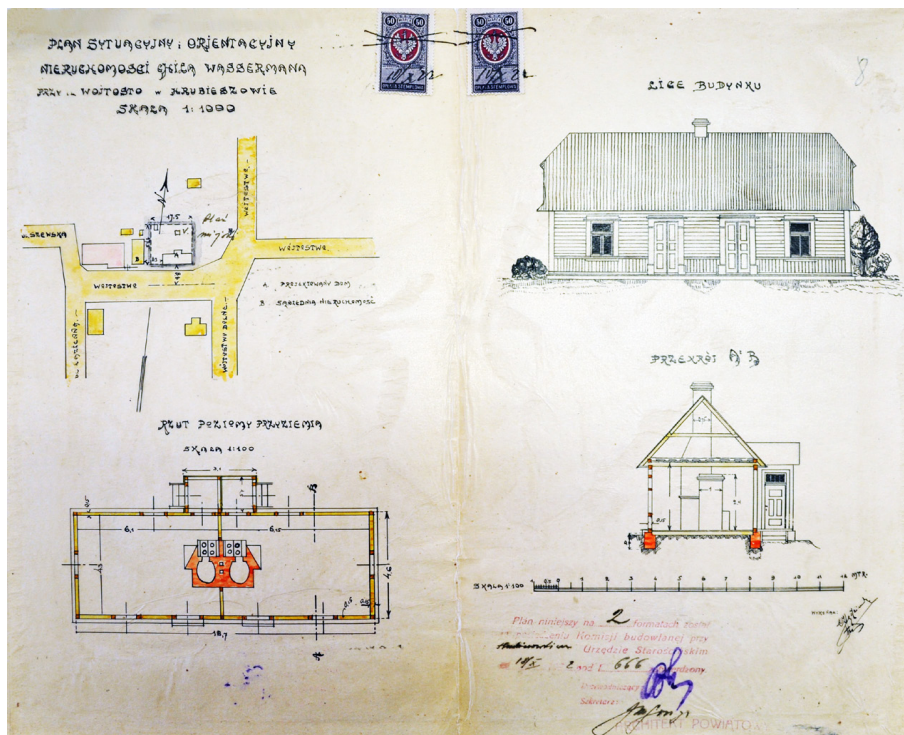


Fig. 6 Plan of Chil Wasserman residential house at ul. Wójtostwo in Hrubieszów (1922). (Plan domu mieszkalnego Chila Wassermana przy ul. Wójtostwo w Hrubieszowie).

Source: APL, SPH, reference number 841.

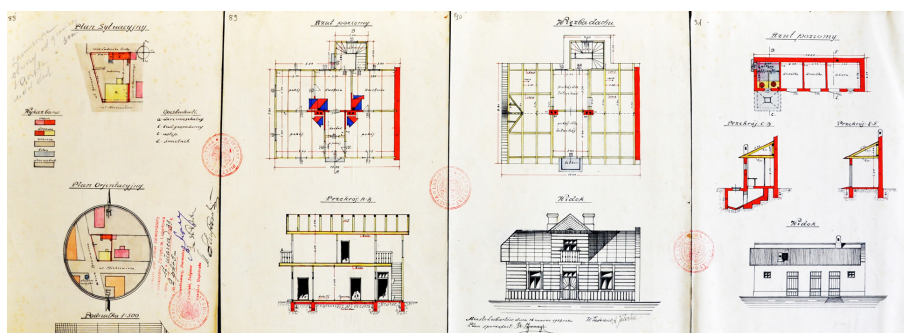


Fig. 7 Plan for the construction of a residential and brick house with a passage in Lubartów at the intersection of Browarna and Mickiewicza Streets, owned by Antoni Jalocha. (Plan na budowę domu mieszkalnego i murowanego budynku gospodarskiego z ustępem w Lubartowie przy zbiegu ulic Browarnej i Mickiewicza, własność stanowiącej). (1933, designer: St. Juńczyk).

Source: APL, AML, reference number 661.



Fig. 8 A one-story building with a habitable attic at Mickiewicz St. (currently number 29) in Lubartów. Fot. Author, 2013.

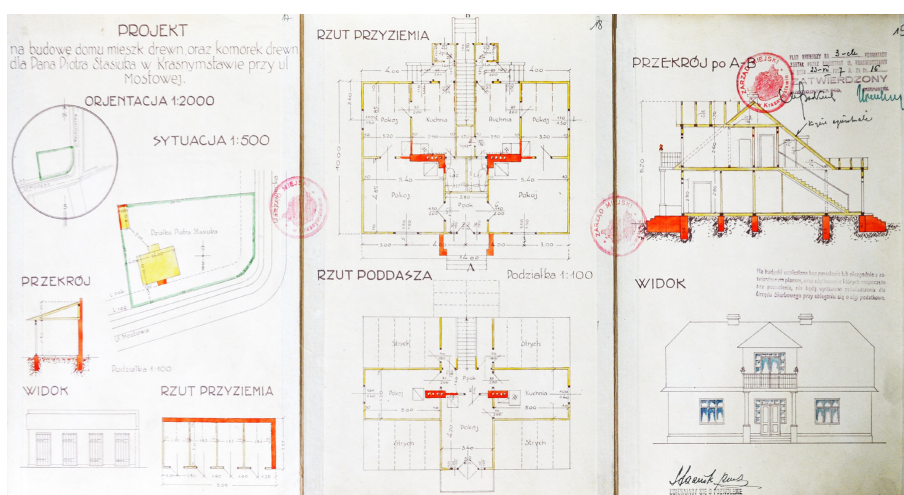


Fig. 9 Project for the construction of a wooden house and wooden cells for Mr. Piotr Stasiuk in Krasnymstaw at ul. Mostowa (1937). (Projekt na budowę domu mieszkalnego drewnianego oraz komórek drewnianych dla Pana Piotra Stasiuka w Krasnymstawie przy ul. Mostowej).

Source: APZ, AMK, reference number 198.

was located from the side of the yard in the annex building containing a staircase. In the first floor there were two four-room apartments. The third dwelling, also four-room, was in the mezzanine in the central part of the building.

Facade was designed as a six-axis. The corners are underlined by two porches with gable roofs. In the middle part there was a garret with a balcony. The windows on the facade had decorative stools and drip cap (crown). In addition, gables, both avant-corps and

garret, were finished with ornamental vertical wooden element placed on the roof ridge, on the extreme rafters (Pol. pazdury). The building has remained unchanged so far. There are no decorations proposed in the project. From the details to the present day only the original window woodwork has survived (Fig. 11).

Two-story multi-family buildings with wooden construction were rare. An example of such a building was a corner house located between Zielona and Urzędnicza Streets (now Rynek Street) (Fig. 12) in

Bełżyce. On the plot, apart from the new building, there were two existing one-story wooden houses, a brick barn, wooden stable, utility shed and an outside privy.

The ground floor plan of the house was close to a rectangle with a beveled corner. Six rooms were planned on the ground floor, divided into two and four rooms. The identical layout of the rooms was on the first floor. For fire reasons, the building from Urzędnicza Street had a fire wall separating it from

the existing wooden house. On both facades, the windows and doors on the ground floor were decorated with ornamental frames, while the floor windows were devoid of decorations. The whole facade was covered with boarding.

In the interwar period, designed buildings, despite of the main residential function, had additional rooms for example, store rooms, cabinet or a workshop. Merchant buildings, including commercial rooms and shops were located near the center, most often in the

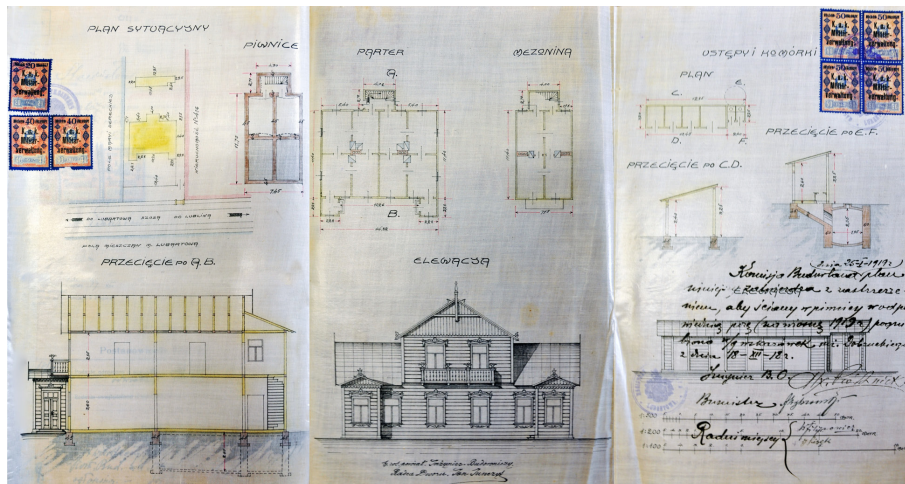


Fig. 10 A project for the construction of a house and cells and a wooden section by Stanisław Borek at the Lubelska road in Lubartów. (Projekt na budowę domu oraz komórek i ustępu drewnianych Stanisława Borka przy szosie Lubelskiej w Lubartowie).

Source: APL, AML, reference number 647.



Fig. 11 A residential building with an attic at Lubelska Street currently number 117 in Lubartów. Fot. by author, 2013.

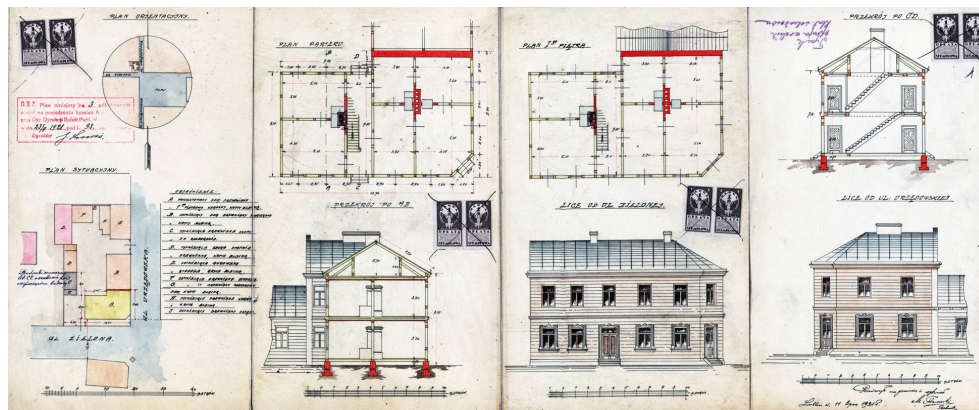


Fig. 12 Design of the residential house of W. Plewik in Belżyce (1921, designed by M Koranowski). (Projekt domu mieszkalnego W. Plewika w Belżycach).

Source: APL, UWL, sygn.1685.

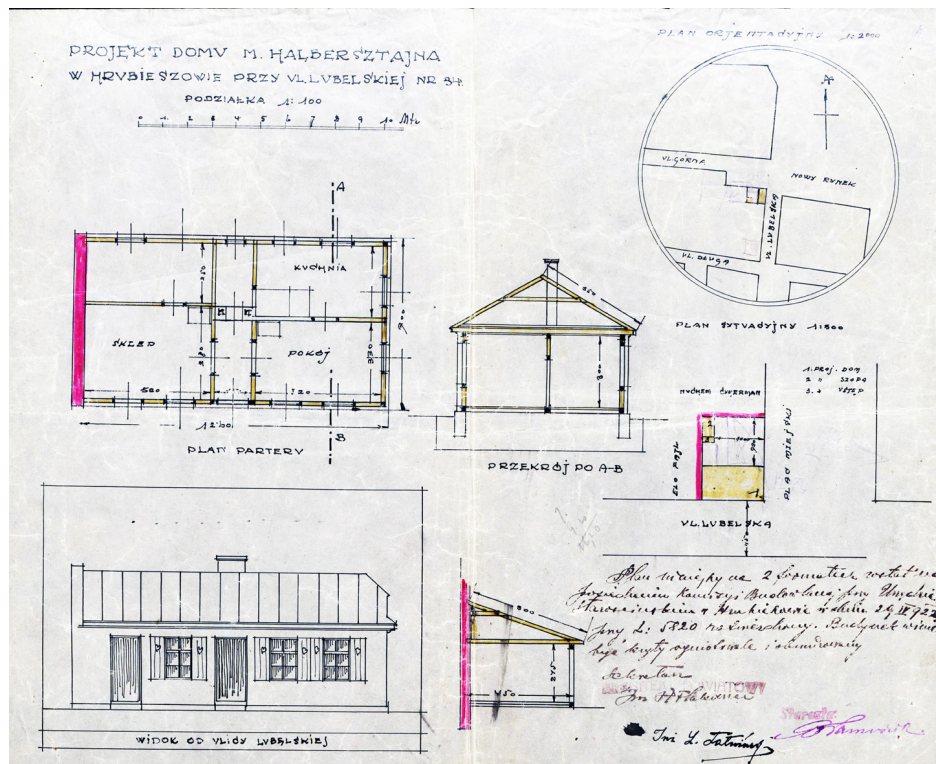


Fig. 13 Design of the house of M. Halbersztajn at Lubelska Street No. 34 in Hrubieszów (1922). (Projekt domu M. Halbersztajna przy ulicy Lubelskiej nr 34 w Hrubieszowie).

Source: APL, UWL, reference number 895.

pedestrian development. An example of such a house was a one-storey building situated on a corner plot of the Nowy Rynek on Lubelska Street in Hrubieszów (Fig. 13) in the front part of a rectangular plot measuring 12×16.2 m. Due to the location (directly at the market square), it occupied an area between three borders.

In the central part of the rectangular plan with dimensions of 12×7 m there was a passageway separating the residential part (room, kitchen) from the store and warehouse located in the eastern bay. Two entrances from the hall and from the side of Lubelska Street led to the store rooms. The external (western) wall, due to its location near the border, was planned as a firewall.

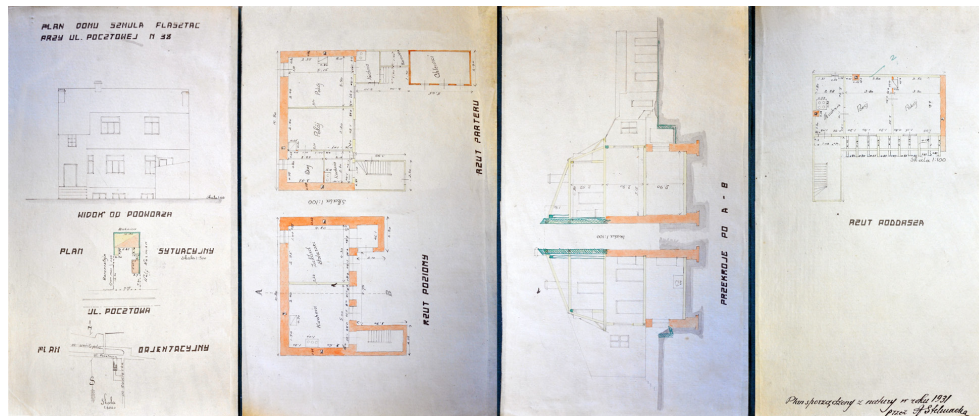


Fig. 14 Plan of the house of Sznula Flasztać at ul. Postal No. 38 in Chelme (1931). (Plan domu Sznula Flasztać przy ul. Pocztovej nr 38 w Chelmie).

Source: APL, AMCh, reference number 796.

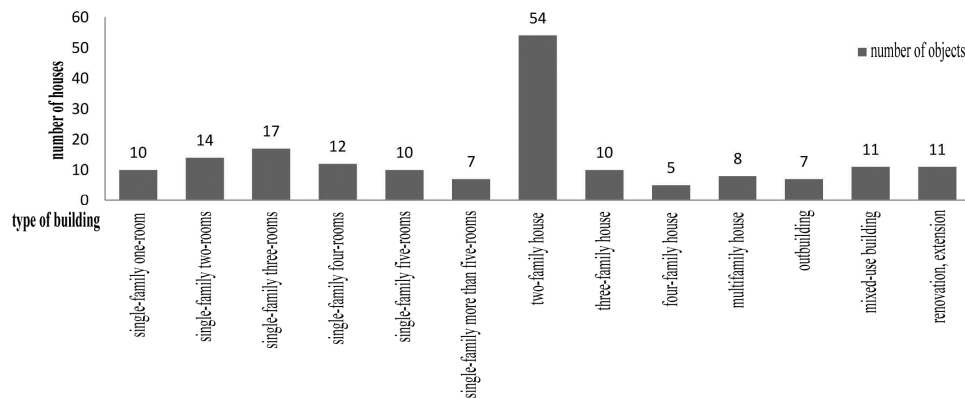


Fig. 15 Quantitative comparison of the analyzed wooden houses in terms of the functional and spatial layout.

A multi-family building with rooms containing a carpentry workshop was a two-storey cellar house located at Pocztowa Street in Chelme (Fig. 14). The plot on which the house was located was rectangular in shape. Its shorter side was 10.8 m long. The building was located in the back of the plot, occupying the space between the three borders. The object was based on a “C” shaped plan. The first entrance was located on the east side in the extension, while the second was located in the west wing, containing staircase. The functional and spatial layout of the facility was very diverse. In the basement there was a kitchen and a carpenter’s workshop. Two dwellings were located on the first floor: the first was three-room and the other two-room. In the attic there was one flat with two rooms and a kitchen.

The external walls of the building located at the border of the plot were firewalls due to the requirements of the building law. The other walls of the ground floor were made of wood.

5. Summary

In the interwar period, wooden construction was very popular in the Lublin region. This was most often due to the availability of material and regional tradition. Another factor that influenced the popularity of wood as a material is the speed of building the object. This was important in the case of housing shortages that prevailed in the interwar period.

Newly designed houses were usually built in the suburbs or in the place of vacant lots. They differed from each other not only the surface of the building,

but also functional and spatial arrangement, which depend on the needs of the investor (Fig. 15). Small, one-, two- and three-room houses respond to the most urgent housing needs. This type of development resulted also from the lack of land for the construction of new homes. Also, because of the lack of free area, the density of existing plots increased. Houses with a more complex functional program belonged to more affluent residents, public officials. They could be both one-storey and two-story ones. The largest group of objects was two-family houses. There were also multi-family houses for rent, and residential buildings erected by the state for officials and employees of state administration.

The style in which the buildings were designed depended on the region and the period in which it was created. In the Lublin region, most of the buildings referred to the form of traditional architecture, which was used throughout the interwar period. The second trend widely used was manor-house style in the classical meaning, antic-Palladian (academic classicism) [20]. The third style occurring in wooden buildings appearing in the mid-thirties was modernism with functionalist forms.

Many residential buildings with wooden structures created in the interwar period have not survived to this day. Those that have often been difficult to recognize or are in poor technical condition due to reconstruction were carried out over the years. Mostly these buildings are located in the centers of small towns that have been renovated, insulated, devoid of detail. There are many reasons for this. One of them was the destruction of World War II and the policy of the occupant associated with mass displacement. Also the lack of proper maintenance makes these objects fall into disrepair and often requires demolition due to poor technical condition. However, the condition of wooden houses is not always bad. There are also positive examples, when the owners care about their building with all due diligence. In addition, some of the residential buildings are transported to public and

private open-air museums. A good example is the Lublin Village Museum in Lublin (public institution), currently conducting a reconstruction project of a typical provincial town from the 1930s called the Central European Provincial Town (Polish: Miasteczko Prowincjonalne Europy Środkowej), where there are replicas of small wooden houses and public utility buildings. Attentiveness to detail and the character of the building allows to present, although minimally, the character of small-town buildings. Among positive examples of commercial institutions collecting the original trans-located wooden buildings from Lublin countryside and small towns is Zaborek Guesthouse.

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