

Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń
Faculty of History
Egodocumental Research Group
Polish Historical Society – Toruń Branch
Association of Polish Archivists – Toruń Branch

Of Those Who Stand in the Shadows – Family, Friends, Organizations, and Their Significance in the Biographies of Scholars

April 23–24, 2026

Faculty of History, Nicolaus Copernicus University
Bojarskiego 1, 87-100 Toruń, Poland

The world of science has traditionally been dominated by the image of scholars, most often men, presented as monumental figures — conducting research, engaging in social activities, or pursuing other interests, yet detached from ordinary everyday life.

In such portrayals, these individuals are primarily researchers and representatives of their disciplines. They are only secondarily “flesh-and-blood” individuals, to the extent necessary to illustrate their achievements. This traditional image, however, is undeniably distorted. First, one cannot be a scholar without being a human being. After all, it is our humanity, experiences, and interests that largely determine which research areas a scholar chooses to explore. Secondly, behind almost every scholar stands a person “in the shadows” — most often a wife/husband or partner — whose quiet dedication, care for the home, children, and daily matters allows the researcher to “detach from the mundane and wander among the stars.”

At the proposed conference, we aim to examine the figures and roles of these quiet heroines and heroes. We are convinced that giving a voice to and drawing attention to those who are usually invisible will contribute to a better understanding of how the world of science functions, in all its dimensions. A second, equally interesting area of exploration is the issue of marginalization. It is often observable that men are credited with a greater role in joint research than their partners, even when their contributions are equal.

Apart from close family members, other individuals, institutions, or organizations (whether social or governmental) often stood in the shadows of scholars and may have influenced their academic

paths, research choices, or the execution of their work. For this reason, although we intend to focus primarily on individual figures, we also welcome reflections on institutional influences. We have deliberately chosen not to impose chronological restrictions on the conference. While we are aware that most presentations will likely focus on the 20th century, we hope that previously invisible figures from other eras will also emerge.

Suggested areas of reflection include:

- The figure of the wife/partner (husband/partner) supporting the scholar.
- The influence of the wife/partner (husband/partner) on the scholar's work environment.
- The image of family in scholars' egodocuments (memoirs, letters, etc.).
- Women's participation in joint research and its perception by the academic community.
- Friends and acquaintances influencing scholars' work and life.
- The influence of institutions/organizations on a scholar's career and research activities.

The suggested topics are, of course, only examples. The organizers are open to all other issues related to the central theme of the conference.

Please submit your participation form (attached below) to the following email address by December 31, 2025: egodokumenty@umk.pl. Notification of acceptance will be sent by the end of January 2026, and the conference program will be published in March 2026. The conference fee is 300 PLN, payable to the account number. 45 1160 2202 0000 0000 3174 8579 with the note "egodokumenty" and the participant's name by February 28, 2026.

The primary language of the conference is Polish; however, we also welcome papers in English.

Sincerely,

Dr. Janusz Bonczkowski

Dr. Hab. Hadrian Ciechanowski

Conference Secretary:

Lic. Weronika Zimoch

Application Form

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Name and Surname:

Academic Degree/Title:

Affiliation:

Email:

Phone (optional):

Title of Presentation:

Abstract (max. approx. 200 words):

Participation: online/stationary