

SUMMARY

---

*Poudrette Business: Sanitary Conditions  
in Dorpat at the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century –  
Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century sanitary issues in rapidly expanding towns often became very severe. Although technology and medicine were also developing quickly, these different areas failed to provide sufficient support to each other at the right time.

The University of Dorpat was known as an innovative centre of medicine in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The town had been studied by chemists (for instance a research on wells in Dorpat by Carl Schmidt), physicians (medical topography since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century), demographers (biostatisticians) etc. Thorough research on sanitary conditions in Dorpat based on the 1897 population census was compiled by Bernhard Körber (1837–1915), who was Professor at the Department of State Medicine at the University from 1879 to 1890. However, the research shows that even for those times the sanitary conditions in Dorpat were substandard. The city lacked a water supply and sewage system, thus springtime floods were common in the lower riverside areas and districts. Since only the poorest citizens lived there this issue was overlooked for a long time. The University constructed its own water supply system already in 1889, but different institutions and estates were unable to reach an agreement regarding the town water supply. At the turn of the century, organized waste removal from dry closets formed only 26% of the total amount of human waste. The poorest citizens refused to join the system since they wanted to use this fertilizer for their own gardens. The newly emergent group of active Estonians, who built the modern Vanemuine theatre in 1906, as first generation town dwellers accepted quite modest sanitary conditions.

In order to solve the town's waste problem, a Poudrette factory was built on the territory of the Jama town manor in 1866. This solution was somewhat outdated yet it proved to be very lucrative. The factory produced a fertilizer mix of dry night soil which sold quite well. Gustav Post, the lessee and later owner of the factory, became a wealthy man. Together with his brother, Johannes Post, they established a distillery and yeast factory, a town sauna house and a rag factory. The Poudrette factory itself was municipalized before World War I and became a substantial source of income for the town in independent Estonia. Dorpat was the only town in Estonia where this part of its economy was profitable. This is likely to be one of the reasons why a water supply system covering the entire town was built only in the 1930s.