# History

On the isthmus of two lakes, refugees from the Noteć river region established old-Slavic wooden dwelling which traces can be fund at the highest hill in the town. In the times of dukes of Gdańsk, the village belonged to Szczytnian Castellany, which seat was located 20 km to the north from today's Człuchów in no-longer existing Szczytno. In 1312 the Teutonic Knights bought Człuchów cheaply from Mikołaj from Ponieca's sons. In that time the local authorities centres were made at i.a. Tuchola, Człuchów and Lębork. Człuchów's natural surroundings influenced the decision to locate in this part of the monastic state a defensive castle that for centuries was actually unconquered.

The main and for long time the only building made of brick in Człuchów was the castle. Around the castle arose a small village settled mainly by Kashubians and Prussian settlers. Today it is believed to be the roots of the town. During each of the numerous wars the wooden buildings of Człuchów were destroyed by fire. The specific character of Człuchów as an administration and military centre influenced its fast ethnic changes that occurred in the region in 14th century. The Teutonic Knights in the middle of the 14th century started colonization of the south-west boundaries of their country by inviting settlers from German countries. In the times of the First Republic of Poland the town was the administration centre for the whole south-west part of the Royal Prussia. In comparison to other towns in Poland in that time Człuchów was small town and recorded in the end of the 16th century number of craftsmen was similar to the number recorded in Biały Bór. The majority of German-speaking people among Człuchów's citizens contributed to quick victory of the Reformation and taking over the building of the church in 1550. It was also important that the present-day Starosta Latalski was a Protestant himslef and supported his brothers in faith. The preserved documents from 1750 describes Człuchów as a town with 20 houses around Town square, 25 at the Road, 8 craftsmen's workshops and 3 stalls. Decline of towns in the 17th century caused by the wars did not omit Człuchów. Rebuilt after tragic fire (in 1598 when only 2 buildings survived) the town was being destroyed during both Poland-Sweden wars. During „The Deluge" the unconquered castle was finally seized by Swedish army. After ending struggles and signing Treaty of Oliva the town and surrounding villages

were so destroyed that there was lack of resources to rebuilt. To solve the problem Starosta Radziwiłł tried to bring Jewish merchants to Człuchów, who then established in the outskirts in the direction to Chojnice their own village with synagogue, school for boys and court, so called Bejt din.

In September 1772 by virtue of the Partitions of Poland agreements Prussian Army entered to Człuchów. In the new administrative division Człuchów was part of Chojnice Poviat. In 1786 and again in 1793 Człuchów was destroyed by big fires for the last time. In that time the plans for rebuilding of the town were prepared, past layout of buildings and present-day requirements have been taken into consideration. On citizens request the king allowed to disassemble the castle and use obtained bricks as a material to rebuild the town. From the castle survived only the tower on the hill over the town and old castle chapel that was reconstructed later (in 20-ties of 19th century). After 1818 Człuchów again was the Poviat town. In the end of 30-ties of 19th century the road Berlin-Królewiec crossing the city was modernized and in 1844 on the main road in the town was installed lightening. The build of railway track in 1877-1878 created an important junction in the town. Already in 1865 a small municipal hospital was opened. In 1871 Poviat Saving Bank was established. It is interesting, that to 1892 there was no Post Office in Człuchów. It was built by private investor only after the request of the General Postmaster of Germany.

Revival of Poland in 1918 totally changed the situation of Człuchów. In the distance of couple of kilometers from the town was established a state border that cut long-time economic and social contacts. It also contributed to some exchange of the citizens and a group of so called optants – people who could choose their nationality, found their homes in Człuchów. As many other towns in the German borderland, Człuchów encountered many demographic and economic problems. In June 1938 ceremony of building in the foundation stone for the building one of 600 Hitler-jugend houses took place in Człuchów. On the other hand, the town in the 20-ties and 30-ties became more beautiful and enriched with lots of new culture-recreation facilities, for example new stadium with facilities and Poviat museum.

Already in September 1939 Człuchów was crossed by contingent of Polish prisoners of war directed to famous prisoner-of-war camp in Czarne. Soon after there start to arrive also compulsory workers. Only in autumn 1944 citizens of Człuchów faced the war and authorities started evacuation. In the end of January 1945 Poviat borders were entered by Russian army but the town was seized only on 27th February 1945.

60% of buildings in Człuchów were destroyed. In the next three years German people were displaced and in their place arrived settlers from the surrounding regions and repatriates from the East. In 1947 Ukrainian people from Bieszczad were displaced in the action “Wisła” and were settled on the area of Poviat and directly in Człuchów.  Rebuild of destroyed town was really slow. Only in the 60-ties of 20th century in the place of ruins started to be built uninteresting form today’s view blocks of flats.