

WILKES COLLEGE ARCHIVES

Eugene Sheddon Farley Library

WILKES COLLEGE

POLISH ROOM

WILKES-BARRE, PA.



25th ANNIVERSARY

1950 - 1975

POLISH ROOM

This Room is dedicated to
the memory of
settlers from Poland
who since 1856
have made their homes in
Wyoming Valley

By their efforts they contributed to
the development of its major industries
mining and farming

By their sense of fair play they encouraged
the principle of collective bargaining

Through their homes, schools, and churches
they have proclaimed their faith
and
love of country

This plaque is erected by their
descendants so that
their sons and daughters, together with the
sons and daughters of those from other lands
may take courage from their lives and deeds,
and forever be reminded
in these halls of Wilkes College that
opportunity, wisdom, and justice
are for all Americans

HISTORY OF THE WILKES COLLEGE POLISH ROOM

In 1947, when Bucknell Junior College became Wilkes College, Dr. Farley, its first president, opened the doors of the college to the Slavonic people living in the Wyoming Valley, inviting them to establish rooms similar to the Nationality Rooms at the University of Pittsburgh. The American Poles in the valley were the only ethnic group to take full advantage of the offer. In September of that same year courses in the Polish language, literature, history, and culture were initiated at the college by Dr. and Mrs. Arthur Coleman of Connecticut, noted educators, lecturers, and authors. The late Dr. Coleman and his wife, Dr. Marion Coleman devoted their lives to perpetuating Poland's literature, history, and language.

In February, 1950, a group of women, under the guidance and direction of Mrs. Joseph J. Kocyan, formed the Wilkes College Polish Room Committee with the goal of establishing the Polish Room at the college. They engaged the services of Stefan Mrozewski, one of the world's leading wood-block engravers, to design the

room, which would serve as a reading and reference room in the proposed new library.

A native of Poland, and presently a resident of California, Mr. Mrozewski designed the room and furniture in the style of Zakopane, Poland, a city in the Tatra Mountains. This particular style was chosen because it was more artistic than the standard mediocrity of the middle class homes of the industrial areas, a distinction pointed out by art critics Wilkiewicz and Dyboski. In particular, they noted the beauty of the ornamental wood-carving employed by the mountain peasantry of Zakopane and the beauty of the Polish kilims [tapestries].



In 1961 Mr. Stefan Mrozewski, international noted artist, is shown discussing future plans with Mrs. V. Znaniecki, vice-president, Mrs. J. J. Kocyan, president of the Polish Room, and Dr. J. J. Kocyan. L to R - Stefan Mrozewski, Mrs. Vincent Znaniecki, Mrs. J. J. Kocyan and Dr. J. J. Kocyan.

Stefan Hellersperk of Dallas, Pa. made all the furniture except the first eight chairs, which were custom-made by Mathieu's of Philadelphia. He also made and painted the ceiling beams. For the furniture he used three-inch thick heavy birch, imported from the state of Washington. His first work was a seven-foot bench, weighing 450 pounds, handmade, handcarved, cathedral-like in feeling. The large oval table with its highly polished finish has carvings one half inch deep and required nine weeks to complete. The bookcase was the next monumental task, followed by the fireside table and two fireside chairs. Some of the expense was defrayed by the generosity of donors, identified by bronze plaques on the furniture.

With the completion of the Farley Library in 1968, the Polish Room became a reality. Situated on the second level, it creates the atmosphere of a peasant's living room and brings to the library an authentic air of old Poland. A multi-colored rug focuses attention on the deep

grey slate floor, which is complemented by candelabra of wrought iron. Imported Polish kilims or tapestries grace two walls. One is a North Baltic scene; the other, an all-over floral pattern. The first kilim purchased by the committee was earth brown with letters RP bordering the sides, indicating Republic of Poland.

Above the fireplace mantel hangs a carved wooden eagle, a replica of a 12th century eagle, symbol of Poland. A Hellersperk creation, it was presented to the room as a gift from his mother. On the mantel are two sets of wooden dolls in native attire. Mr. Hellersperk's gift to the room was a high, carved pedestal on which rests Benda's Mask of Jesus, donated by Mrs. Kocyan.

Among art creations throughout the room is a 16th century map of Poland executed by Abraham Ortelius, royal geographer to King Phillip II of Spain. On either side of the fireplace are two lithographs by T. Lewicki, Sieve-makers on the left and Harvesting on the right. There is also a small old print of Kosciuszko's resting place. Left of the bookcase is an original oil painting "Farmer and Horses" by Joseph Brodowski, presented by Miss Mary Koons. On the right is a large portrait of Anthony Mroz, the last of the Tatra bagpipers. Above the colorful wycinanki, a gift from artist Irene Lorentowicz, is a handmade Polish linen embroidery of the Blessed Mother, the Patron Saint of Poland. The lithograph print of Paderewski and Chopin, "Poland's Immortals", by Mat Gacek was presented by Anna Maria Gacek of Massachusetts, a teacher and author of books on Polish folk art. Unique is the mural depicting life in Poland by Stefan Mrozewski, which is painted on the reverse side of glass.

The silver Polish samovar on the table is a priceless antique made in Warsaw at the turn of the 18th century. Of Greek design it is a gift of the Reymont Club. The room features other memorabilia such as Goral jackets, carved boxes and plates, and pisanki. The pin eggs were designed by Anna Kalonick and her mother; 28 of the more intricately designed pisanki were made by Sophie Yurkowski, a master of this old Polish Folk Art. She also donated her blue ribbon and prize-winning entry to the room. A set of goblets from the Royal Palace was presented by Miss Mary Glowacki.

Standing near the door is a huge, commemorative bronze plaque honoring early Polish immigrants who have contributed so much to Wyoming Valley. Funds making the Polish Room possible were raised by the Wilkes College Polish Room Committee.



1973 Pisanki Demonstration by Sophie Yurkowski, a member of the Polish Room, at the Fine Arts Fiesta, Public Square, Wilkes-Barre.

In the bookcase in the Polish Room is a fine collection of original editions in both Polish and English. One of the oldest, dated 1830, is a gift from Rev. Szufladowicz. An 1845 edition of Thaddeus of Warsaw by Miss Porter is from Miss Ellen Strojny. Mrs. Adam Stepan donated an 1887 copy of Poems by Michael Balucki. Rev. N. Sosnowski contributed Poems of Mickiewicz. Other donors were Rev. A. Lewandowski, Rev. V. Biczysko, and Rev. J. Gryczka. Twenty-five Polish Coin Books were received from Rev. Suchos. The room houses many personal collections including those of Dr. and Mrs. J. Kocyan and Leon Wazeter's library.

One of the first purchases made by the committee was a portfolio of Mrozewski's woodcut prints of Mickiewicz's poems. Another was the treasured 13 volume Bibliografia Polska, Ed. K. Estreicher, acquired in 1969. The most recent purchase is the beautifully illustrated "Flemish Tapestries at Wawel Castle in Cracow" acquired in 1974.

The room has a large and ever-increasing collection of new books, primarily in English. One method of acquisition has been the practice of purchasing books in memorium. Averaging 20 books per year, they are placed on the open shelves of the college library as well as in the Polish Room. By 1975 there were 2,000 books in the W. C. Library and 650 in the Polish Room Collection.

In memory of several deceased clergy, more than twenty books on music of the Polish Renaissance and Baroque period were placed in the Music Section of the Farley Library. Music scores by Szymanowski, Bacewicz, Dobrzynski, and others were added. At present vocal and orchestral music is being presented to the Music Department Library at the Fine Arts Building, to be utilized in musical presentations planned by the music department for the upcoming Bicentennial year. Recently, a memorial donation of 12 volumes of music from organist Kaz Sosnowski's library was made available to faculty and students.

Learning about the devastation of '72 caused by Agnes, a publisher from Poland generously contributed 40 books to supplement the library. In addition the committee gratefully acknowledged the receipt of books from authors Mrs. Coleman, Mrs. Korwin-Rhodes, and Arthur Waldo.

Two interesting projects which the Polish Room sponsored were the cutting of a record of songs of the Polish miners and publication of a Polish cookbook. The songs were written by Anthony Piotrowski, father of Mary Makowski, and sung by four students from Wilkes College, one of whom was E. Pashinski [Eddy Day] teacher and bandleader. The cookbook, now out of print, contains the prize recipes of many generations of Polish families.

To acquaint the general public with Polish contributions, the Room committee has placed, as a paramount responsibility, the sponsorship of outstanding Polish artists and their works. In 1950 the Committee sponsored its first concert by Roy Eaton, the first Kosciuszko Foundation Chopin Scholarship winner. Many others were to follow, such as Dr. Felix Labunski, composer and teacher; Felicia Vlodek, coloratura soprano; Adam Kapuscinski, pianist; Stephen Hero, violinist; Thomas Michalek, violinist and Debbie Sobol, pianist; Andrzej Bachleda, tenor; Peter Haase, violinist; and Bachleda and Gromada's Tatra program. Memorial programs to Paderewski, Chopin, Mickiewicz, and Copernicus have also been sponsored.

Other areas of sponsorship have been lectures and art exhibits. Lectures have been given by Dr. and Mrs. Arthur Coleman, Edmund Zawacki, Dr. E. Kusliewicz, Colonel Alice Gritsavage, Walter Placek, and Marta K. Rhodes, author of "Mask of Warriors". In the world of art there has been an exhibit of Mrozewski's wood-cut prints, and paintings by Paul Gorka, Richard Rutkowski, and Helen Mosier. Irene Lorentowicz gave a lecture and demonstration of drawings,



1974 Reception at the Colonial Inn, Nanticoke for Jan Gromada's Folk Music and Dance Ensemble, featuring Andrzej Bachleda, eminent Polish tenor from Zakopane.

three of which she presented to the Nanticoke Girl Scouts and which are now on display at the Nanticoke Library.



1963 Testimonial honoring Col. Alice Gritsavage [Ret.] U. S. Army. Speaker, Mayor V. Znaniecki, Nanticoke.

The first dramatic production presented by the Committee was "Forefather's Eve" by Mickiewicz, directed by Al Groh. The Christmas of 1955 the Committee presented "The Nativity Play", Bethlehem by Lucyan Rydel, which was translated into English by Viola Piszczek. The following year brought "Fashions of History", prompted by much research on the Wyoming Valley. It highlighted the Indian, the discovery of coal, and the different ethnic groups as they became part of the valley. In 1964 "Festival of Leaves" was presented to promote the beauty of the valley, particularly the autumn scene. Those participating included the State Department of Forest and Waters, the State Game Commission, Boy Scouts, 4-H Clubs, the Art League, and nineteen ethnic groups, each of whom decorated a table and served one national food. Babka and coffee were served in the Warsaw Coffee House.



1964 - The Polish Table Display at the Festival of Leaves, Wilkes College Gymnasium. Caroline Jendrzewski and Mary Novitsky.

One of the biggest undertakings of the Committee was sponsorship of "Pan Twardowski", a ballet by Jurek Lazowski. Cooperating with other Polish organizations, the Committee helped sponsor the Mazowsze and the Poznan Choir and hosted the receptions for both. The Committee also hosted the ACCPC Convention in Wilkes-Barre in 1959, as well as a garden reception for the Smithsonian Crafts of Poland Display, sponsored by the Copernicus Society. In addition, a post-reception for Conductor Thomas Michalek and the Philharmonic Orchestra and guests is an annual event. As members of the Copernicus Society, they co-sponsored the Copernicus Banquet in 1973.



1959 Reception at McClintock Hall highlighted the American Council of Polish Cultural Clubs [ACPPC] Convention at Wilkes College.

The Committee has also been an active participant in community events such as the United Nations Pageant and May Arts Fiesta. Their contributions to the Fiesta are two living arts and crafts demonstrations papercuts [wycinanki] and egg designs [pisanki]. In cooperation with the Wyoming Valley Wrestling Association, the Committee welcomed and presented gifts to the Polish National Junior Wrestling Team.



1958 performance of Yurek Lazowski's ballet, Pan Twardowski.

The committee has also sponsored numerous trips, including one to see the Slask Song and Dance Ensemble at the Academy of Music in Philadelphia, another to the Millenium Concert at Carnegie Hall, New York, to hear Stokowski play Andrzej Panufnik's Sinfonia Sacra, and most recently to Dan Pollack's All Chopin Concert at Lincoln Center.

Its projects cover a wide range. In the spring of 1964 the committee hosted and tutored four 4-H Club Exchange students who went to Poland for six months. They were given an intensive one-week course in the Polish language and culture. The following year another group of 4-H Club Exchange students was given a similar orientation program of one week.

The first formal Kosciuszko Ball was inaugurated in Wilkes-Barre in 1951 by the committee. Its history began, however, in 1937 and 1938, when pageantry performances preceded the ball at Irem Temple. Proceeds of the KF Balls go to the Foundation fund, whose benefits are far-reaching. The WC Polish Room Committee is listed as a Benefactor on the plaque at the KF National Home in New York. The committee also has the distinction of having two members on the KF National Council and recommends



12th Annual KF Ball - 1962 - at Hotel Sterling, Wilkes-Barre, with Mrs. Norman Karmilowicz as Chairman.

local students for KF Summer Sessions in Poland. The theme of the 1975 KF Ball is a "Salute to Polish Women". In preparation for this event, each regular meeting has been highlighted by a reading, profiling the life of an outstanding Polish woman.



This Millenium KF Ball picture shows eight past chairmen from the first ball to the 1966 Ball. L to R are Mr. & Mrs. V. Znaniecki, Mr. & Mrs. S. Hellersperk, Mr. & Mrs. C. Maslow, Dr. & Mrs. S. Dombroski, Mr. & Mrs. E. Kopicki, Atty. & Mrs. A. Wallace, Mr. & Mrs. M. Weiss, Dr. & Mrs. J. Rusin and Chairman of Ball, Mrs. J. Skuzinski.

In 1974 a choral group was organized by Mrs. John Pagoda, who is director and accompanist. The repertoire includes Treasured Polish Songs including traditional Polish music associated with holidays and celebrations.

Through special fund-raising events, such as the annual card party, bus trips to the Pocono Playhouse, and Bicentennial locket sales, the committee also contributes to Wilkes College. In 1972 the Marie Kocyan Scholarship was created,

an annual continuing scholarship in memory of its founder and first president. Cash contributions are gratefully accepted for the scholarship to support the education of a student of Polish



1962 "International Fashion Show" featured Oriental fashions in this group.

extraction. One of the first donations to this worthy cause was a sum of \$200 made by Mrs. Canavan in memory of her son James.

As a memorial to Mrs. Kocyan, Mrs. Coleman presented her whole collection of Kazimiera Ilakowicz's poetic works to the college.

A continuing project of the WCPRC is the compilation of data, including photos, family histories, early documents, programs, newspapers, books, etc., tracing the history of the Polish settlers from their entry into Wyoming Valley to the present. Important historical data has been added to the portfolio of the Wyoming Historical and Geological Society and also to the Pennsylvania State Historical Society.

Throughout the last decade students from the local colleges have utilized the Polish Room's collection of data for various research papers and theses on the graduate level. In addition, in preparation for the Bicentennial events throughout the U.S., data has been forwarded to the K.F. in New York and to the Thames Television Teddington Studios, England, for use in their series Destination America. The WCPRC has cooperated with Channel 16 in the preparation of a brief documentary entitled "Polish and Proud", recently seen in segments on local television. The Committee's President, Mrs. Vincent Znaniecki, has written the history of St. Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church, Nanticoke, in preparation for the church's 1975 Centennial. The Committee has been collaborating with the King's College Ethnic Heritage Studies Institute

of 1975 with research material, manuscripts, and lectures on the history of the early Poles. Committee contributions of photos, 85 slides, and background information for a film were utilized in the curriculum of this summer's course, the Ethnic Studies Institute. Serving on the Luzerne County Bicentennial Committee as vice chairmen are Melania Hellersperk and Jule Znaniecki. Current affiliations of the Wilkes College Polish Room Committee include: Wyoming Historical and Geological Society, Pennsylvania State Historical Society, Polish American Historical Association, Kosciuszko Foundation, American Council of Polish Cultural Clubs, Polish American Congress, and Perspectives.

The objective of the Polish Room Committee is to foster an appreciation of Polish culture through enrichment programs focusing on Polish contributions, past and present, in the arts and sciences. It is hoped that Polish Americans may be instilled with a true recognition of their illustrious past and that they may develop an expression of pride in their heritage — and that all Americans have the opportunity to be exposed to the diversified excellence of Polish culture.

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