

Walter Zachariaszewicz Lectures By Stephen Skorczynski, President of Associated Polish Home



From left to right: Theresa Romanowski; Walter Zachariaszewicz; Hilary Czaplicki, Dolores Czaplicki, and Stephen Skorczynski

There is always something interesting going on the Associated Polish Home. On Sunday, March 11th, 2007, I had the pleasure of attending a truly informative and inspirational lecture hosted by The Polski Uniwersytet Ludowy. The speaker, Mr. Walter Zachariaszewicz, a renowned figure in the international Polish community of the mid-20th century, and author of the book "Etos Niepodleglosciowy Polonii Amerykanskiej" (The Independence Ethos of American Polonia) spoke about his life during and immediately after World War II, and presented a historical, yet personal, perspective of Poland's postwar period and about his work with many Polish organizations here in the United States.

In World War II, during the September campaign of 1939, Mr. Zachariaszewicz served in Poland's second tank battalion. He was arrested by the Soviets while trying to leave Poland by way of Romania to try and link up with the Polish Army forming in France. From 1939 to 1942 he was a prisoner in several Soviet work camps. After his release, Mr. Zachariaszewicz worked with various Polish groups whose goal, as sanctioned by the Polish government in exile, was to reestablish contact with the Polish "diaspora" all over the world. He eventually emigrated to the United States in 1948 where he became Director of the Polish American Immigration and Relief Committee responsible for the relocation of countless displaced persons to the United States. These were Poles who had either served in the Allied forces or who had been liberated from German concentration and work camps. At the same time he became involved in Polish American groups, including The Polish National Alliance and Polish American Congress, seeing it as a duty for Polish immigrants to get involved in the life of these existing organizations.

As a special assistant to the Postmaster General and later the Director of the International area of the Postal Service, he was instrumental in getting a stamp issued celebrating Poland's millennium in 1966. The stamp featured the Polish crowned eagle with a cross above it. It was no small feat to have this stamp issued since the Communist government in Poland at that time strongly objected to its release. Yet the Postal Service stood its ground and over 300 million stamps were issued.

Mr. Zachariaszewicz spoke about the important role that Polonia played in Poland's dark days after World War II. He painted a vivid picture of Polish organizations, both large and small, organizing in a common goal to assure that the Polish voice was heard in Washington. The dedicated work of various cultural, fraternal and educational institutions, veteran's groups and even religious organizations made it possible for Polonia to play such an important role in sustaining the idea of Polish independence during Communism and the days of martial law. His book started out as a request of the President of one Polish organization to document the Polish American organizations active during the World War II era and took two years to complete. It serves today to summarize the efforts of the American Polonia during the latter half of the 20th century to keep the idea of a free Poland alive.

The latter part of Mr. Zachariaszewicz's talk was filled with poignant and insightful anecdotes about the difficult times Poles faced in the work camps of Germany, and how they somehow managed to maintain their cultural identity. He spoke knowledgeably about the Tehran and Yalta conferences and about the westward shift of Poland's borders, the Polish section of Radio Free Europe and about the promises made to the Polish American Congress by Presidents Eisenhower, Ford and Carter to lift the Iron Curtain.

There were so many other fascinating historical recollections that were shared that afternoon that cannot be adequately captured here. When Mr. Zachariaszewicz had finished, a question was posed to him about the direction the Polish American Congress should take from this point forward. His response was essentially that they should "keep doing what they are doing" and try to recruit new people into the organization. On a personal note, after the seminar when I approached him with a question and introduced myself, Mr. Zachariaszewicz shared some fond recollections of some of the early leaders of the Associated Polish Home. Being well aware of the organization's work for Polish causes since its beginnings at the turn of the 20th century, he told me that many of the organizations he mentioned in his book received their inspiration from The Associated Polish Home. As President of the Polish Home, I thanked him for his kind words about our organization and as a son of Polish displaced persons, I thank him for his life's work.



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PAC Youth Committee Update

Get the YOUNG PEOPLE involved!

The Polish American Congress would like to encourage you to consider enrolling your children in one of the Philadelphia area youth groups listed below. They welcome participants from all area public and parochial schools. Contact:

St. Adalbert Polish Language School (Saturdays) Classes are held in St. Adalbert's School Hall, Thompson Street and Allegheny Avenue in Philadelphia. Students from 1st to 7th grade. For info call Bozena Walska at (215) 634-2084.

Adam Mickiewicz Polish Language School (Saturdays) Classes are held in the Associated Polish Home, 9150 Academy Road in Northeast Philadelphia. Students from 1st to 8th grade. For info call Irene Ruczynska at (215) 639-5148.

St. John Cantius Polish Language School (Fridays) Classes are held in St. John Cantius Hall, Almond and Orthodox Streets in Philadelphia from 5 to 8 P.M. For info call Janina Dybas at (215) 671-1161.

Our Lady of Czestochowa Polish Language School (Saturdays) Classes are held at the National Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Doylestown, PA. For info call Jadwiga Kozdra at (215) 766-1696.

Polish Scouts of America "Harcerstwo" (Sundays) The scouts welcome boys and girls between 6 and 20 years. For info call Kasia Przybycien at (215) 634-0827.

For more information about youth activities in the Philadelphia area, call the Polish American Congress Youth Committee, Monday through Friday between 9 A.M. and 5 P.M. Call (215) 922-1700.

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