

Canadian Polish Research Institute

2020 Annual Report

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The Canadian Polish Research Institute was established in 1956 by Victor Turek, PhD, with the aim of preserving the history and experiences of the Polish Canadian community, while sharing its knowledge and collection through lectures, talks, exhibits, and publications.

Overview

As many of you are aware, 2020 was a difficult year. The Covid-19 pandemic brought to a halt the work of many organizations. It affected our ability to meet with each other and to go out into the community and share our materials. Organizational centres, libraries, and archives have remained closed to the public. Nonetheless, this past year has also permitted our organization to consider new ways to facilitate outreach by moving our activities to a virtual platform. We can have hope that 2021 will bring about a more comprehensive and extensive outreach to the general public and other community organization and institutions.

Changes within the Board



We would like to warmly thank Dr. Joanna Lustanski who led the Institute from 2011 as President, for her dedication, hard work, inspiration, and many accomplishments. Under her leadership, the Institute was able to secure a new location for its holdings. Joanna worked tirelessly to fulfill the Institute's mandate—she initiated Lecture Nights hosted by the Polish Consulate in Toronto; she oversaw a range of research projects; co-organized conferences and numerous talks; identified and assisted several publications, including the latest volume on immigrant memoirs; she secured an Ontario

Trillium Foundation grant that went towards the purchase of a microfilm scanner—these are only a few of her many accomplishments. She established partnerships with the Emigration Museum in Gdynia (Poland), with the Jagiellonian University in Krakow (Poland), and the Multicultural Historical Society of Ontario. We look forward to continuing working with Joanna, who has taken the position of Secretary.

At our last meeting, the Board chose to elect a new president, Dr. Gabriela Pawlus Kasprzak. Gabriela was trained as a professional historian receiving her PhD from the University of Toronto, where she worked for a number of years as an Adjunct Faculty lecturing on Canadian, religious, and immigration history. She has published a number of peer reviewed articles, and is currently working on her manuscript on Polish Canadian identity during the interwar years. Gabriela's mandate will be to build on Joanna's initiative of digitizing and making accessible the Institute's holdings; organizing and cataloguing the backlog of the Institute's holdings; increasing donations to sustain the organization's activities; developing an online periodical for those wanting to share their work on Polish-Canadian life; and recruit more volunteers to continued the critical work of making our holding available to a broader audience.



Institute's Activities

The Institute is currently preparing a print and ebook for **publication**. The work is a translation of a handwritten chronicle of the daily life of soldiers at the Tadeusz Kościuszko Polish Army Training Camp, based at Owen Sound, Ontario, during the early years of the Second World War. The translation and historical introduction were completed by **Stan Skrzyszewski**, an expert in the field of military history. As Stan notes in his introduction, "The fact that I originally knew nothing about...the camp bothered me. I was someone with an interest in history, especially Polish-Canadian history, and yet I had never heard of it....It is not unusual, that history, such as Polish-Canadian history, which exists beyond the mainstream narrative of Canadian history...tends to be quickly forgotten, or goes unrecorded, becoming footnotes to history." The book has undergone a rigorous editing process by Joanna Lustanski and Gabriela Kasprzak, and will be published in the Spring of 2021. Stan has graciously offered to facilitate **several talks** on the subject.



Here is an **excerpt** from the book: "**August 10, 1941**
First Sunday. A local parish priest, Rev. Father Sheridan, who is very friendly towards us, provided us with a Catholic church, St. Mary's, for our Mass. The Mass will be led by Father Dean Bombas at 9:30[am]. A lot of local people also

took part in the Mass. Father Sheridan endeared himself to all our hearts after Mass by stepping out in front of the balustrade and greeting us in Polish: “Welcome Soldiers.””

The CPRI has also sought out and retained a reputable local website developer, **VZiON Designs**, to modernize the Institute’s current **website**. The goal is to streamline the content, increase accessibility (in line with WCAG 3.0 requirements), and create a platform where we will be able to post our digitized holdings. Gabriela is currently preparing the Institute’s new website content. The new website will be operational by the beginning of February 2021.

As well, Michal Kasprzak has begun to seek out a **new location** for the CPRI, where we would have the opportunity to display and exhibit our holdings, to hold talks and workshops, and to improve access to the Institute by the general public.

Collections Management

Since September 2020, Gabriela and Michal have begun the work of **organizing**, **cataloguing**, and properly **storing** the Institute’s holdings. The Institute is committed to taking its holdings and **preserving** them in **digital form**.



Financial Support

The Institute would like to thank the estate of **Alicja Drabkowska-Kaczmarek** for her substantial donation. The Institute would also like to express its gratitude to the **St. Stanislaus-St. Casimir Polish Credit Union** for its generous donation which will be used to offset the costs of the new website. Details of our fiscal year are provided in the 2020 Financial Statements. The CPRI will also be applying for a grant through the **Digital**

Heritage Community Program to support the costs of digitizing our rare and out-of-print book collection. The application will be submitted by Gabriela in January 2021.

Looking Forward to the Future

In 2021, the CPRI will update its website so that the platform will be able to accommodate the posting of digitized materials. Further work will continue on the organization and cataloguing the backlog of the Institute's holdings. These opportunities will allow us to present our first virtual exhibit highlighting articles of material culture, posted to the Institute's website in September 2021. We also expect to publish Stan Skrzyszewski's work on the Polish Army in Owen Sound in April 2021.

The annual report was prepared by Gabriela Kasprzak.