

# **POLISH AMERICAN CONGRESS, NORTHERN CALIFORNIA DIVISION**

Report – Annual Meeting, March 15, 2014

2013

**MARCH 25 & 27** – PAC-NC sponsored and organized two presentations (in Martinez and San Francisco) by Prof. W. Binienda who shared a summary of his findings concerning the probable causes of the Smolensk crash as well as a lecture by Maria Szonert-Binienda, legal representative of the group of victims' families, titled "Smolensk Catastrophe, its Significance, Status of Investigation, Situation of Families". Well attended.

## **MARCH - JULY**

An intensive effort had been done to launch a new campaign of asking our California senators, Diana Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, for their support for legislation which would designate Poland as a program country under the Visa Waiver Program. Poland has experienced a high refusal rate for visas, which would indicate that Poland does not qualify for the visa waiver program. However, the nonimmigrant visa refusal rate is an un-objective and arbitrary standard as it is based on decisions made by consular officers than the actual behavior of nonimmigrants.

**APRIL 7** – PAC-NC sponsored anniversaries of the Katyn Massacre and Smolensk Crash - Holy Mass was held at the Church of Nativity in San Francisco and a remembrance ceremony followed.

**APRIL 20** – The International Spring Festival of Cultures, Berkley, took place. This year the Country of Focus was Poland. PAC-NC, being a cosponsor, had a booth and passed out Polish community and PAC leaflets, and answered questions about the historical and present day of Poland. It attracted quite a number of people wanting to learn more about Poland.

**APRIL 21** – PAC-NC was a co-sponsor of the children declamatory competition, Walnut Creek Polish School, held in Martinez.

**MAY 3** – Attended a Polish Flag raising ceremony at the Mayor's Balcony of San Francisco City Hall while celebrating Polish American Friendship and Heritage Day.

**MAY 5** - PAC-NC co-hosted a celebration of the 221<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the Polish Constitution of May 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Music Concourse in the Golden Gate Park, which was additionally dignified by an awards ceremony with awards distributed by the Consul General of the Republic of Poland from Los Angeles to Polonian activists from the Bay Area. A friendly get together at the nearby café was sponsored by the PAC. High visibility for Polonia!

**JUNE 2** - The PAC-NC President visited the Polonian Cultural and Pastoral Center in Sacramento. The aims and achievements of the PAC were presented; a long Q & A session followed resulting in the recruitment of a couple new members and promises to consider joining PAC by PCPC as an organization member. This was concluded after their General Meeting in January, 2014.

**SEPTEMBER 14** - The PAC-NC representatives attended the Polish Festival in Roseville and established direct contacts with the Polish Club of Greater Sacramento.

**SEPTEMBER 15** - Our Division had a booth at the Polish Festival in Martinez. Bad weather and poor attendance resulted in poor profits, but some informational work had been done.

**OCTOBER 10-15** - PAC-NC sponsored the stay and travel costs of Dr. Ewa Kurek, a Polish historian specializing in the Polish history during the WW II period. She gave five lectures (Martinez, Sacramento, San Francisco - twice, San Jose). Her main topics were the Polish-Jewish relations in the period 1939-1945.

**NOVEMBER 9** - As the prime benefactor of the Polish Society of California 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration, the PAC-NC was actively involved (in particular Mrs. Zofia Zakrzewska) in its preparations over the period of many months (a lot of hard work). An impressive number of guests - over 300, a magnificent and prestigious venue - the historic Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco, an elaborate historical presentation, a pleasing entertainment program, and last but not least, an elegant grand ball - it was an experience to remember. High visibility for Polonia!

We had the honor and pleasure to host a number of quests from the PAC of Southern California. There were among them Mr. and Mrs. Frank Kosowicz, founders and managers of the Relief Committee for Poles in the Former USSR, for over 25 years; a couple deserving a special recognition and the highest appreciation for their devotion and noble unselfishness.

Also present was Mr. Mieczyslaw Dutkowski, currently V-President of the PAC in Southern California, a vital force in almost every Polish organization for the last 30 years.

**NOVEMBER 10** - PAC-NC sponsored and co-hosted Poland's Independence observance celebration which started with a solemn Holy Mass for Poland at San Francisco Nativity Church followed by a Polish lunch and commemoration event, which included an address by the PAC President suitable to the occasion, filled with historical references, and an artistic commemorative program presented by the scouts of Sacramento.

**NOVEMBER 23** - PAC-NC co-organized a performance of a well-known entertainer from Poland, Andrzej Rosiewicz, which attracted a huge attendance.

**DECEMBER 8** - The PAC President attended the celebration of welcoming the relics of Blessed John Paul II, an event grandly celebrated by six Polish priests at the Chapel of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Sacramento. On January 19, 2014, he joined the Sacramento Polonia in an unusual "Christmas caroling in the mountains".

## 2014

**JANUARY 23** - PAC sponsored a lecture by Dr. Marek Chodakiewicz who talked about the circumstances around the so called transformation in Poland (25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Round Table talks).

### **THE DEFENSE OF THE POLISH SELF IMAGE FROM DEROGATORY ATTACKS**

Nowadays, attacks are mostly in the form of deliberate (?) misrepresentations of Polish history and in particular, occasional allegations about anti-semitism and racism which are linked to the Polish ethnicity, although attacks in the form of demeaning ethnic humor are mostly gone. Defamation against Polish Americans supposedly declined substantially during the past years, but it can still be found and experienced too often.

**Our activities in this field:**

**MARCH 13, 2013** - The PAC President attended a lecture at Stanford given by Dr. Timothy Snyder, a Yale historian. Its title was: "Why Did the Holocaust Happen? A History Lesson for the Future". It was an interesting and balanced presentation.

**APRIL 24** - A group of the PAC-NC members joined the audience listening to an author E.T. Wood who presented his book about Jan Karski : "Karski: How One Man Tried to Stop the Holocaust". The title itself implies a solitary action on part of a lonely "one just man", as it is seemingly on purpose often propagated. Hence, it called for a comment and correction: Karski acted on behalf of the Polish Underground State; as much as he was heroic and daring, he was a part of the structure, a soldier of the huge underground army. That was our comment.

**OCTOBER 5** - "The King of Hearts" - a play from Poland and in Polish was presented at Cal State East Bay University in Hayward. As a contextualizing session to the very expressive performance, a panel discussion aimed at making the events during and after the war in Poland a bit more comprehensible to the viewers was organized. The key person to lead a discussion **on the historical realities (!)** that forged the events depicted in the play was Dr. Krzysztof Persak. He featured in that discussion, as a senior expert for the Institute of National Remembrance in Poland, and was highly recommended by the Consulate General in Los Angeles. It is only regrettable that in his contribution to the discussion he carefully omitted to mention three essential facts pertinent to the discussion: a) that Poland under the German occupation was the only country where any help to the Jews was punished by death of the whole family, most often neighbors including; b) that the Polish Underground State took a very firm stand towards those collaborating with Germans in persecution of Jews - death penalty; and c) that a special organization was formed, called "Zegota", to help rescue the Jews. Dr. Persak's special focus is on Polish-Jewish relations. His expertise encompasses legal aspects of historical events. Is not the German "Bekantmachung" within this area? However, one should admit that when correction to the above was made, he graciously acknowledged its validity.

It should be very clearly stated that a magnificent job had been done in the above discussed matters by our long-time member Gordon Black, also a member of the Polish American Defense Committee. He recently undertook a significant effort to review the Polish play "Our Class" performed in Los

Angeles (he lives in Mendocino) and exposed how much it is based on false premises. The Los Angeles Consulate General distributed the publicity for "Our Class" referring to the massacre (Jedwabne) as "an act of wartime genocide".

If so, does this play definitely clarify who the true perpetrators of the Holocaust were? Thanks to Gordon Black we, at least, will think otherwise, but what about the average viewers?

These two examples presented above create a feeling that Polonia is on its own when defending a good Polish name, or even more importantly, when correcting the basic historic narrative, and not in the Polish interest, but simply in the interest of truth - an adherence to the historical facts would be enough. At least for us.