

The Polish Museum of America's Polish Pavilion Collection

Jan Loryś
Chicago, USA

The Polish Museum of America was established in 1935 and opened in 1937. The news of Poland's participation in the 1939 New York World's Fair was greeted with great enthusiasm in Polish Chicago. There had been no Polish pavilion at Chicago's 1933 "Century of Progress World's Fair" and this was seen

1. *The Polish Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair - a poster in the collection of the Polish Museum of America, Chicago*



as an occasion to highlight the homeland. At the Museum and Archives of the Polish Roman Catholic Union, as we were known back then, Mieczyslaw Haiman, the first Curator, wrote to the commissioners of the Polish Pavilion suggesting that the newly opened institution would be interested in some of the display cases and artifacts, saving the organizers the cost of shipping them back to Poland.

These plans were changed with the German invasion of Poland, followed by the Soviet attack. Various plans were proposed to keep the collection together to remind the world of the gallant Poles. However, the Polish pavilion was not saved and many of the artifacts were sold to pay for the costs of the pavilion and the salaries of the employees. Many items were given or sold at reasonable prices to Polish-American institutions, some of them in New York. However, the largest part was sent to Chicago, to the building at 984, N. Milwaukee Ave., Polonia's "Rappersville".

The Polish Pavilion at the 1939 New York World's Fair

The Polish pavilion in New York had three main functions: to present Poland as a country with a glorious past; to underscore the special relationship between Poland and the United States and to showcase Poland as a modern country with a growing economy. I will concentrate on the last function since this is what is of interest to this conference. The Polish Museum is planning in the near future to present a retrospective exhibition in Poland regarding the Polish pavilion in New York.

The Museum is in possession of the original blue prints of the Pavilion, which consisted of a large building and attached tower. The designers



2. *Our Lady of Ostra Brama* - detail of the *Poland Reborn* stained glass window. The Polish Museum of America in Chicago collection

were Jan Cybulski, Jan Galinowski and Felicjan Szczesny Kowarski. The building was divided into twelve rooms, each with a different theme.

The first one was the great hall, called "The Past and Future of Poland" and in that room was found what has become one of the signatures of the Polish Museum, the stained glass window "Poland Reborn" This was designed by Jurgielewicz and executed by the Żeleński studio in Krakow. On the top of the window we have Our Lady of Ostra Brama (The Gate of Dawn). The central figure we call Polonia, who is presented as a young woman holding a sword and wheat, underscoring the responsibility of a government to defend and provide for the people. The window shows some of Poland's cities – shown, but not named is Gdynia. Also shown are city crests of Poland and 12 figures depicting work and art in Poland. Since Poland was predominately an agricultural country, 4 of the figures deal with farming, here we see sewing and reaping. But we also have a factory or steel mill as well as some type of mining. At the bottom we have a depiction of the Polish Army, which defends the nation. Next, there is the crowned white eagle, symbol of the nation. The last panel depicts those who fought for Poland's borders after World War I.

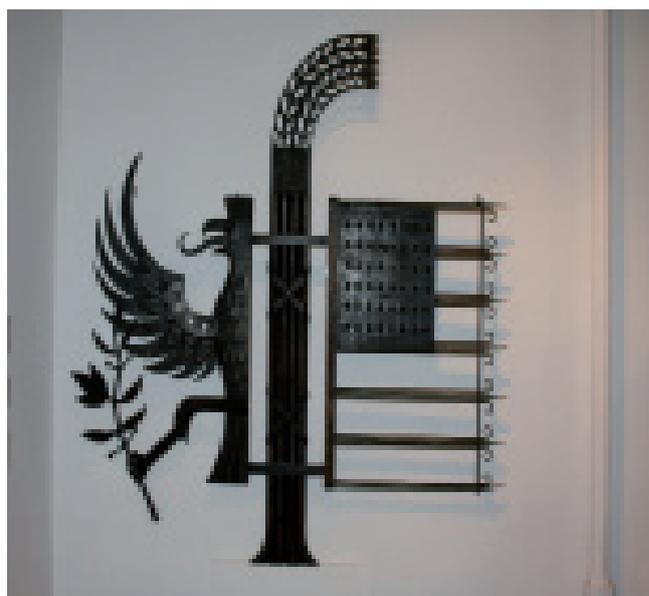
Also in the great hall were 12 display tables with legs, in the shape of a crowned eagle. Currently, we have 6, three are at a Polonian center in Philadelphia, and one is at the Polish Embassy in Washington. One is in Warsaw, at the National Museum in the applied arts section in Otwock and the last one is in Krakow at Wawel Hill.

The other rooms were Art, Applied Art; Science; Communications; Poland at Sea; Social Welfare; Manufactured Products; Agriculture; Textiles; Folk Art; and Forestry. The Polish Pavilion Committee published a catalogue and while it is not specific in all aspects, for instance some items are marked "jewelry", others are

described in some detail. Copies of the Catalogue in both Polish and English can be obtained on E-Bay, at a reasonable price.

Among the objects that the Polish Museum obtained are large metal works created by Henryk Grunwald. I want to show you one that stressed the special relationship of Poland and the United States. The eagle is divided into three parts: the head shows the crowned eagle of Poland, with the tongue, the breast area is common to both symbols and the bottom of the eagle is the American version, the one showing the olive branch held in the eagle's left talon. For the center image, we offer the following interpretation: the trunks on the bottom mean that the Poles have rooted themselves in America. The middle section is *fasces*, the symbol of republican Rome. The *fasces* are a series of rods tied together – individually weak, but strong when bundled – strength in unity. This image was popular among Americans who saw themselves as the inheritors of Greek Democracy and Roman republicanism. Above the *fasces*, we have factory chimneys, showing the industrial might of America. The smoke turns into shafts of grain, since the United States is also an agricultural power.

The port city of Gdynia was the pride of Poland as was its sea tradition. The pride of the merchant navy were the Baltic Twins the *Pilsudski* and the *Batory*, built by the Italians in exchange for Polish coal. Here we have the *Pilsudski* passing the Gdynia breakwater. This Pilsudski Calendar shows the "Dworzec Morski" (Sea Terminal) and New York harbor. However, there were other ships flying the Polish merchant marine flag such as the *Boleslaw Chrobry* and the *Lewant*, as well



3. *Metal works by Henryk Grunwald* - a symbol of ties between Poland and the United States of America. The Polish Museum of America in Chicago collection

as the training ship *Dar Pomorza*. All these models are from the Poland At Sea room.

Other forms of transportation were also presented at the Polish pavilion including a model of a Polish-designed plane in LOT colors, the *Wicher*. We also have a model of the PM36 streamlined locomotive which was named *La Belle Polonaise* at the 1937 Paris International Fair.

Another form of Communication was the Radio and we received one console, the *Capella* model that had a phonograph element and a short wave radio. Thanks to the Pavilion, the Polish Museum of America has a collection of mid-twentieth-century art, which we are very proud of.

Future plans

The Polish Museum of America is in the process of talking with institutions here in Poland to have an exhibition dedicated to the

Polish Pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair. While we have a significant amount of artifacts, many were either sold off to pay the bills of the pavilion or given to other Polonian institutions. Some have even found their way back to Poland. An exhibition would be possible since there are examples of artifacts found in Poland that were exhibited in New York. The Army Museum in Warsaw has an example of the *Sokół* motorcycle and army field telephones. There is a bust of Paderewski by Alfons Karny in the headquarters of the Polish office responsible for liaison with the Polish community outside of Poland, that is a duplicate of the one sent to New York and now in our Paderewski room. While there might not be enough time for 1939, we could commemorate the 70th anniversary of the closing of the fair in 1940, or the transfer of the artifacts in 1941. Gdynia, the last place where the artifacts were still on Polish soil, would be natural for their return as an exhibition.

Jan Lorys

The Polish Museum of America
e-mail: janlorys@yahoo.com

