



A Report About My Overseas Trip, May - July 2009

By Ernestyna Skurjat-Kozek, FKPP President

While accompanying my husband on his overseas sabbatical, I took the opportunity to approach as many organisations related to General T. Kosciuszko as possible, both in Poland and the U.S. Together with my husband, we promoted our festivals and encouraged closer cooperation in building an image of Kosciuszko as a universally relevant figure. We canvassed our need for support, especially from the American Polonia (Polish Community), in convincing Australian authorities and society that Kosciuszko (a national hero in America) indeed belongs to the elite of humanity. The *Achieving Together* books and CDs with *Kosciuszko & Strzelecki Songs* were given away on a massive scale. A number of Mount Kosciuszko Festival t-shirts were given away as well.

POLAND: Cracow, Zakopane, Warsaw, Wrocław

While in Poland, we paid a visit to 'Wspolnota Polska' to invite its chairman, the Hon. Maciej Płażynski to join us for the 170th anniversary of the discovery and naming of Mt Kosciuszko. The celebrations are to be held on the 12-14th March 2010. The Hon. Płażynski expressed his willingness to join us on that occasion. The official invitation is to be sent by the Polish Community Council of Australia (Rada Naczelna), and the visit will be coordinated by the Polish Embassy.

We also paid a visit to *Swiat Polonii (Polonia World)* quarterly editorial staff.

Also while in Poland, I settled payments of the 2009 graphic competition awards to Polish participants. The equivalent of Australian dollars in prize money was disbursed in Polish currency. Receipts have been secured.

While in Warsaw, I met Ms Slawa Biencycka, a popular Polish Radio broadcaster, who some years ago, during a Pol-Art Festival, had been our guest at SBS Radio. Whenever possible, she produces programs related to Australia. Recently, she interviewed Mr W. Krzesinski of the Polish Embassy and Mr Pawel Gospodarczyk, organiser of the proposed 'Kosciuszko Run 2010'.

Due to a lack of time, I was unable to pay a visit to the Australian Embassy.

While in Cracow, I granted an interview to Mr Jan Stepien of Cracow Polish Radio. A link to this interview is available on Puls Polonii.

A meeting with singer/composer Jan Wojdak of the 'Wawele Ensemble' took place in Cracow. We thanked Jan for having composed a beautiful song, 'Ballada o Gorze Kosciuszki', specifically for our 2009 Festival. An exchange of gifts took place. We presented Jan and Elzbieta Zechenter Splawinska with diplomas and other gifts.

Likewise, some gifts were presented to composer/conductor Mr Boleslaw Szulia of Warsaw, who (again) composed a festival song, entitled 'Trzy serca, trzy tęsknoty'.

Our meetings in Poland were somewhat complicated by an article ('Gora Kosciuszki ocalona') published in *Onet.pl*, written by Marek Tomalik ([link](#)). This put us in an awkward situation and required lengthy explanations. A response to Tomalik's inaccurate conclusions in relation to this important issue should be sent for publication as soon as possible.

Two meetings with the Chairman of the Kosciuszko Mound in Cracow, Dr Mieczyslaw Rokosz, took place. The first one, also featuring the Editor of the *Tatra Wierchy* magazine, Mr Zbigniew Wojcik, took place at a Sukiennice café. A second one took place at the Mound itself; i.e. after having met the Mound Committee senior staff, we were invited to lunch. Amongst other gifts, we received a copy of Dr Rokosz's famous book, entitled *Na szczytach pamięci: szkice z dziedziny tradycji*, with full rights to reprint any chapters we wish.

While attending a congress in Zakopane, my husband Prof. A. Kozek decided to pay a surprise visit to Tatra National Park, hoping to advance sister park (twinning) plans (with Kosciuszko National Park and Tatra National Park). Alas, the chairman, Dr Skawinski, was attending a funeral that day and so was unavailable.

In Wrocław, we took a tour of the famous 'Panorama Raclawicka' and were kindly received by its director, Mr Romuald Nowak, who told us his story of a missed trip to Australia. He was to meet the famous painter of 'Wilpena Panorama', Jeff Morgan, who died unexpectedly, unfortunately, prior to the planned trip. Mr Nowak presented us with several books and albums, including A3-sized Panorama Raclawicka reproductions.

While on 'Panorama' premises, we also had the chance to view the 'Kosciuszkiana' collection owned by Mr Krzysztof Lachowicz, and also took the opportunity to interview him.

Hoping to further develop our dialogue with Ngarigo/Aboriginal elders, four folkloric scarfs, 'goralskie chusty', were purchased in Warsaw. A presentation ceremony is being planned by Ursula Lang.

USA: Chicago

While my husband was affiliated to the University of Chicago, I was free to contact Polish organisations in the city where about a million Polish migrants and their descendants live.

Thanks to Mr Felix Molski's recommendation, we were kindly received by the Board of Directors of the Polish Museum of America: Mrs Maria Ciesla, Mr Jan Loryś, and several staff members, including Monika Nowak and Halinka Misterka, among others. Unique books about T. Kosciuszko, as well as numerous booklets, were presented to us. We were told that a book launch recently took place in the PMA: namely, that Pulitzer prize winning journalist Alex Storozynski of New York launched his new book *The Peasant Prince: Thaddeus Kosciuszko and the Age of Revolution*. (I bought the book immediately and finished reading it even before our trip back home!)

We also familiarised ourselves with the museum's rich collection of 'Kosciuszkiana', which we will endeavour to promote in Australia. The museum's directors also plan to visit Australia and Mount Kosciuszko in the future. Finally, the curator of exhibitions at the Polish Museum of America, Monika Nowak, proposed exhibiting the collections of the FKPP and the Australia's Polonia (the Polish community of Australia).

To discuss plans about possible cooperation with the American Polonia, we asked for a meeting in the Polish Consulate in Chicago. At the Consulate, we were received by two Consuls: Dr Paweł Pietrasinski and Mr Mariusz Gbiorczyk. The following topics were discussed: a suggestion that the FKPP should prepare a report on the topic of Mt Kosciuszko's name controversy and send it to MSZ, Departament Polonii; Storozynski – the Kosciuszko book launch at the Consulate; Storozynski – an invitation to Australia via some university; Chicago youth involvement in the FKPP graphic competition 2010 (for financial reasons, the competition would have to be announced and finalised in Chicago); contacts to the Teachers' Association and Saturday School teachers were provided; help to contact Frank Spula (PNA, KPA president) was promised. Nota bene, during our visit to Chicago, Mr Spula was in Poland. Instead, we were advised to contact Mr Kazimierz Chlebek, President of the Illinois branch; he was away too.

Radio WPNA 1490 AM conducted two lengthy interviews with me. The first was by Mark Sewinski and Alicja Szymankiewicz, and the second was by Andrzej Gedlek and Józef Bafia of the *Na góralską nutę* program. We have copies of both.

Actress-broadcaster Alicja invited us to yet another interview. It was for the internet television TVP Chicago, owned by Bogdan Dola (www.tvpchicago.tv). During our second meeting with Mr Dola, we were joined by Dr Lidia Filuś of Northeastern Illinois University and Krystyna Jacniacka from The Matejko Saturday School. We considered inviting a patriotic singer, Henryk Zygmunt, to K'Ozzie Fest.

Thanks to Consul Gbiorczyk, I was invited to Polskie Radio 1030 AM Chicago (Polish Radio 1030 AM Chicago). I was welcomed by the General Manager, Kamila Dworska, and interviewed at length by Małgorzata Ptaszyńska. As it was a live program, I was not able to obtain a copy.

In the *Chicago Sun Times* article 'Maybe we should celebrate Kosciuszko Day' we found the name of a Professor of Mathematics, Dr Lidia Filuś, who is a President of the Chicago Chapter of the Kosciuszko Foundation. We got in touch with her and invited her to dinner in a Japanese restaurant. We discussed possible ways of cooperation. She said that the new Kosciuszko Foundation boss, Mr Storozynski, plans to open a Polish Chapter.

To celebrate Thaddeus Kosciuszko's nameday, Dr Filus plans a big ball on October 28. She has considered organising a lottery, where some unique items could be won, with profits going towards financing the trip of an artist to K'Ozzie Fest. (The idea of auctioning stone and opal items was developed by Michał Korytkowski.)

Journalist Ewa Eszpilewicz was to interview me for Polsat TV, but time was too short. We've promised to be in touch.

Conclusion: The trip to Poland and the U.S. was fruitful. Now we should quickly build on those numerous personal contacts.

Ernestyna Skurjat-Kozek
President, The Puls Polonii Cultural Foundation

July 16, 2009