



Polish American Historical Association Newsletter

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MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT, NEAL PEASE

I began my current two-year term as president of the Polish American Historical Association in January 2021 in an unusual fashion. Normally, in accordance with the PAHA constitution, this should have occurred at the conclusion of the annual meeting of the organization, which was planned to be held in Seattle in conjunction with the conference of the American Historical Association. In fact, my “inauguration,” such as it was, took place in unwanted solitude and seclusion, at home in chilly Wisconsin, since Covid-19 forced the cancellation of both gatherings, and made travel and face-to-face get-togethers all but impossible.

For the past two years PAHA, like all academic societies, has had to improvise to adjust to the realities and limitations imposed by the pandemic, and rely on innovation and resourcefulness to keep its scholarly work and fellowship thriving in the face of this challenge. Of course, unavoidably this has required greater resort to virtual communication. During the public health emergency, most of the constitutionally mandated meetings of the PAHA board of directors have been held via Zoom, and while one would prefer the camaraderie of gathering with colleagues around a real table than on a computer screen, it has worked well enough to keep the business of the Association running smoothly.

The need to make greater use of online capabilities has led to the initiation of a series of PAHA webinars on subjects having to do with Polish diaspora studies. Originally intended as something of a stopgap Covid-era substitute for the cancelled Seattle conference, these have been such a resounding success, expanding the PAHA audience beyond the confines of a lecture hall, that they have become a permanent feature of our activity. To date, seven of these sessions have been presented since the series began in January 2021, with surely more to come.

In the meantime, progress has continued unabated on a number of PAHA special projects led by members of the board of directors. These include “Objects That Speak,” a periodic examination of items of material culture—things—that illuminate the experience of Polish Americans; an attempt to gather letters and memoirs pertaining to the Polish Second World War diaspora; and a forthcoming compendium of Polish and Polish American cultural and historical sites in North America, titled *Footprints of Polonia: Polish Historical Sites Across North America*, edited by Ewa Barczyk, to be published in 2022 by Hippocrene Press.

More detailed description of all of these activities will be found regularly in this and forthcoming issues of the *Newsletter*, demonstrating that PAHA has continued to function vigorously during “Covid time,” not only maintaining but broadening its variety of scholarly endeavors. Thanks to the efforts of my colleagues, by the time my successor as president is installed—one trusts, in person, at the end of a “back to normal” 2023 annual meeting—PAHA will have emerged from the trials of pandemic strengthened and enriched by its response to adversity.

Neal Pease
President, Polish American Historical Association



PAHA held and broadcast two webinars in the later months of 2021, continuing a series begun the previous January. On October 23, PAHA past president dr. Anna Mazurkiewicz (University of Gdańsk) presented “America, Exiles, and Ways to Rally Global Support for the Case of Captive Nations during the Cold War,” built around her most recent book, *Voice of the Silenced Peoples in the Global Cold War: The Assembly of Captive European Nations, 1954-1972* (Boston, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021). The subject of the book and talk was the complex story of an organization of exiled political leaders of nine countries of east-central Europe that had fallen under Soviet domination after World War II. Dr. Mazurkiewicz argues that the ACEN attempted to promote the liberation of the peoples it represented from Soviet captivity, but that its activity and effectiveness was limited by fluctuating U.S. policies in conducting the Cold War. Discussants were Sławomir Łukasiewicz (John Paul II University, Lublin/Harvard University) and PAHA president Neal Pease.

A few weeks later, on December 11, the topic was “Borderlands Biography: Z. Anthony Kruszewski in Wartime Europe and Postwar America,” co-presented by dr. Beata Halicka (Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań) and dr. Z. Anthony Kruszewski (University of Texas-El Paso), based on dr. Halicka’s book of the same title (Brill, 2021). The focus of discussion was the remarkable career of the Polish-born dr. Kruszewski as World War II combatant, immigrant, distinguished academician, vice president of the Polish American Congress, and one of the founders of the Association for Borderlands Studies. Dr. Anna Mazurkiewicz served as moderator.

Future Webinars:

March 12, 2022

“A Conversation with Kent Washington”

This program was built around Mr. Washington’s new memoir *Kentomania: A Black Basketball Virtuoso in Communist Poland* (Amazon, 2021), which tells the story of his career as the first American to play professional basketball behind the Iron Curtain, leaving its mark on Polish cinema as well as sport.

Moderated by:

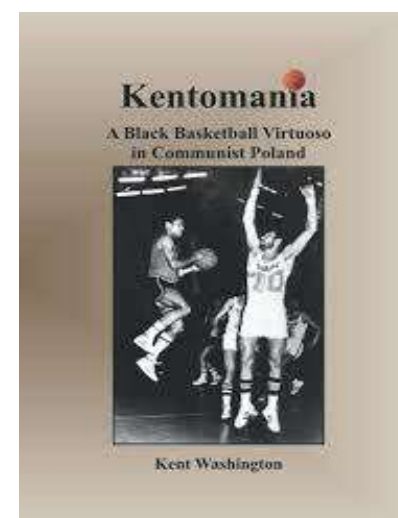
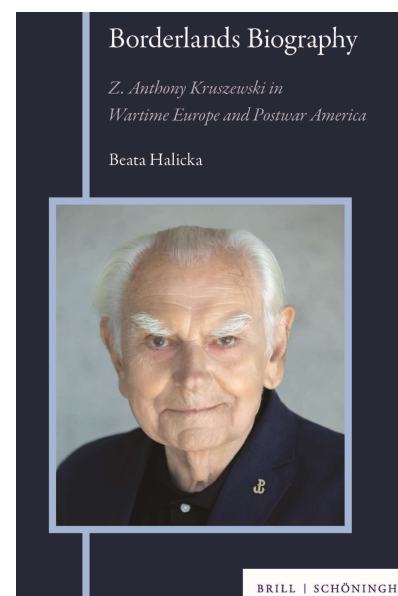
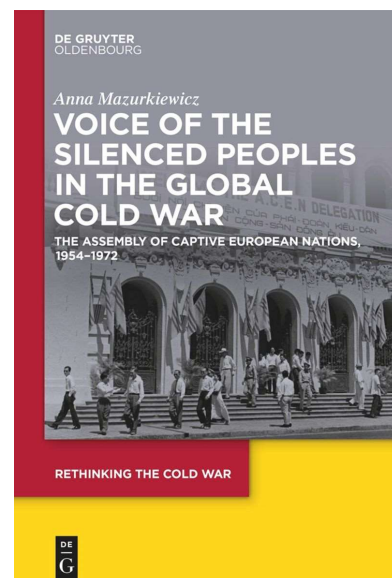
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MORE INFORMATION REGARDING WEBINARS CAN BE FOUND HERE:

<https://polishamericanstudies.org/text/204/paha-webinars-2021.html>



IN SEARCH OF TONESK... BILL TONESK

By: ANNA MAZURKIEWICZ



Figure 1: William J. Tonesk, private collection of Xenia Tonesk (daughter)

It was November 2007 in Washington D.C. Warming my frozen self with a fruit tea I was chatting with Zofia Korbońska about her late husband – Stefan. We were sitting in her cozy apartment at Decatur Street, next to the famous Embassy row. On the table laid scattered papers and photos she pulled out to tell me the story of one of the most prominent leaders of the Assembly of Captive European Nations, ACEN. This organization brought together exiled leaders from nine East Central European countries after World War II. Korbońska's stories from New York, Rome, Strasbourg, Washington gradually became interwoven more and more so with those from Warsaw, Poznań, and Zakopane. At one point, she diverged from the story of her life with Stefan to tell me about Bill Tonesk. These are her words I recorded at the time: "Bill Tonesk was a very close friend of ours [...] We met William Tonesk in Warsaw [where] he was a real sensation, not only as a great specialist on European affairs of our region, but also as a man. He looked great. Tall, handsome, in a Navy uniform. Well, all the ladies just fainted at the sight of him. And finally, he got married to a Polish woman, whom he met there [in Poland] and also got married there."¹

The name rang a bell. I remembered the U.S. Navy officer from my earlier studies on U.S. diplomats in Warsaw during Bliss Lane's term (1945-1947). Tonesk arrived at the war-ravaged Polish capital city directly from Moscow, where he was busy since late 1945 assisting with translations related to the creation of the provisional government for Poland. In Warsaw he translated

for General Eisenhower (September 1945) and for Herbert Hoover (March 1946) during their visits,² but also worked on establishing networks among Poles opposed to the Communists. He disappeared from my radar about March 1946 as he left the country to take on a different assignment. Little did I know at the time, that the Korboński-Tonesk relationship, turned into friendship, continued for the next four decades. Fascinated by Korbońska tale, I was delighted to receive a phone number to Tonesk's daughter – Xenia – who was a child born out of the romance that was ignited by the encounter in the Polonia Hotel in Warsaw. By 2009, after few futile attempts to reach the daughter, with internet searches retuning no results, and with Zofia's passing in 2010, again, I let Tonesk go.

It wasn't until much later, in 2017, as I was on my way to Stanford to dig deep into the archives of the Free Europe Committee at the Hoover Institution Archives, that I realized that Tonesk's personal papers had just been deposited there. Destiny, I thought, as I devoured the content of the archival boxes. The curator of the Polish collections at Hoover – Dr. Maciej Siekierski – offered help with reaching the donor, the daughter of my hero. Xenia agreed to come to Stanford, and I finally got some answers to a lengthy list of questions related to Tonesk's life story. This meeting was crucial for me to finally give in and devote my next research project to Bill. His life seemed to reflect all major turning points in the U.S.-Polish relations in the 20th century.

¹ Author's interview, November 1, 2007.

² Polish National Film Archive offers a rare opportunity to see Mr. Tonesk in actions. See Tonesk interpreting for Eisenhower at 2:41 here: <http://www.repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=en/node/4181>; for Tonesk with Hoover see: 00:35 here: <http://www.repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=en/node/4335>

Born to Polish immigrants in 1906, he was growing up as Poland was coming back to the maps of Europe. As one of the first Kosciuszko Foundation stipendiaries he travelled to Poland and other countries in East Central Europe in 1930s. Using Polish heritage, language skills, he served in U.S. Navy during WWII. In 1945, as Poland's future is being decided, he was in Moscow, then in Warsaw. He continued to work for the U.S. government in many capacities, including intelligence, diplomacy, and world development agencies. He lived to witness Communism's collapse across East Central Europe. He died in 1992.

His story contains all elements of a great non-fiction narrative. However, as a historian, I believe a remarkable story deserves great factual evidence. I wanted to pursue further archival research. At this point Xenia told me about a document held at the Hoover Archives vault. I had no idea there was a vault under the Hoover Tower to begin with. Second, once granted permission to see it, I realized that there was so much more to Bill. The letter was his resignation from the service in the CIA dated 1952. Given his earlier service in the OSS and then Office of Naval Intelligence I knew I will not let Mr. Tonesk go for a long time.

A year later, I was back in the U.S. attending the ASEES conference in San Francisco – the last event, as it soon turned out – before COVID stopped all academic and research related travels for two years! I did use my time well, though, because right after the conference I flew to Arizona to spend few days with Xenia and her family. Hours spent with her, family photos, personal papers, the chance to talk to family and friends of Bill, examining private artifacts that belonged to him made the story come alive. Knowing that his role in U.S. intelligence, diplomacy as well as in political life was at least noticeable (Tonesk served as a Deputy Chief of Protocol in Kennedy's White House³) I flew back to Gdańsk knowing that I must plan for a sound archival research in the national archives, presidential libraries as well as in relevant Polish American collections.

With the book on the ACEN completed, I put together a grant proposal to the National Center for Science in Poland



(NCN) which was successful (OPUS 17). By then, I had the plan, and I had the money to go after Tonesk's traces in the official records. I was stopped in the starting blocks as with 2020 there was no way to travel to the U.S. The archives in Poland were closed for research as well. So, I spent my weeks reading what I could find in the press of the era, re-reading materials collected in California and Arizona, sharing parts of his story via online webinars, all along trying to figure out to frame his story to achieve contextualization to the American-Polish relations through the lenses of a Polish American.

A man who usually stood in the second, or third row in the order of importance at most meetings, and yet, was always "in the room where it happened" (to cite from "Hamilton"). His life story represents a turbulent century as well as changes in U.S.-Polish relations with Tonesk's own ancestral roots neatly positioning the Polish American experience at the center of the narrative.

There is so much to be told about the Polish Americans in the U.S. diplomatic and intelligence services. Bill's story was a real eye-opener for me, and I hope that the book will prove to be an illuminating read for many who wondered if Polish Americans were recruited for some jobs precisely because of their ancestry. Did it matter for the ways in

Figure 2: Mazurkiewicz at the grave of William J. Tonesk resting next to his beloved wife. Phoenix, AZ, November 2019.

³ See Tonesk in the Oval Office during J.F. Kennedy's meeting with Alexander Bustamante of Jamaica, June 27, 1962. JFK Presidential Library, JFKWHP-1962-06-27-B: https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/JFKWHP/1962/Month%2006/Day%2027/JFKWHP-1962-06-27-B?image_identifier=JFKWHP-AR7322-B

which they performed their duties for their homeland – the USA? I hope that with the summer 2022 shall come the opening of archives in the U.S. Transatlantic travel has just opened (November 2021). So, I do hope I can finally get into the archives.

In the meantime, I thought of drafting this story for PAHA members as I believe there may be some among us who might have met Bill. I would not be surprised if some of you knew him, maybe via his work for the Polish American Congress (under Aloysius A. Mazewski, 1968-1988). Given how many times he popped up in most unexpected circumstances, I would not be surprised if you did. If so, please write to me to share your story. I want to write the book as a multi-layered, nuanced, lively and real as it gets. Who knows, maybe, as the audience of the PAHA Annual Conference in Chicago in January 2019 suggested, one day we may get him even on the screen, again!



Figure 3: Tonesk always on my mind. November 14, 2019: Mazurkiewicz giving a lecture during a tribute to Arthur Bliss Lane, awarded posthumously the Commander's Cross with Star of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Poland at the Polonia Palace Hotel. In the lobby, archival footage was shown with Bill Tonesk walking next to the ambassador on his way to present his credentials to Bierut. Seeing Tonesk in the Polonia Hotel took me by surprise and seemed almost surreal at the time. For the footage see the first three seconds of the film at the Filmoteka Narodowa: <http://www.repozytorium.fn.org.pl/?q=pl/node/4539>



PAHA MISSION STATEMENT

PAHA's goals are

- to promote the study of Polish American history and culture as part of the greater Polish diaspora
- to encourage and disseminate scholarly research and publication on the Polish American experience in the fields of history, the social sciences, the humanities and the arts, and advance scholarly collaboration across disciplines
- and to support collection and preservation of historical sources regarding the Polish past in America.

OBJECTS THAT SPEAK ABOUT DAL, LIFE, AND LIFEBOUY

By: ANNA MÜLLER AND MAŁGORZATA KOT

Małgorzata Kot, known to her friends and colleagues as Małgosia, has been working for the Polish Museum of America in Chicago for the last 26 years. Working with the past and present of the Polish American community, she communes daily with the various objects that surround her, inspire her, and speak to her about their experiences and the people whose complicated lives they accompanied. Some of them are part of larger collections, some found their home in the museum almost by accident, lost in incidental boxes, somehow strangely disconnected from where they originally belonged while creating a new set of meanings. "Various objects appear by surprise, and they bring a story with them. (Przedmioty pojawiają się z zaskoczenia i przynoszą ze sobą historie)," says Małgosia.

There are many objects that move her – one of which is a yellow lifebuoy from an 8.5-meter sailboat, named Dal, on which Andrzej Bohomolec sailed from Gdynia to Chicago from June 1933 to August 1934. He started in Gdynia and travelled via Copenhagen (Denmark), Ostend (Belgium), Le Havre (France), Plymouth (Great Britain), and Bermuda until finally arriving in New York, from where he continued sailing through American inner waters – through Albany, to Buffalo, Cleveland, Hamtramck, Mackinac, and finally arriving in Chicago in August 1934 for the World Fair *Century of Progress*. Based on his travels, he wrote an autobiographical book: *The Voyage of the Yacht Dal: From Gdynia to Chicago*, which was recently translated into English by Irene Tomaszewski. Małgosia takes a deep breath and begins her story about Bohomolec and Dal: he was a daredevil and visionary, who risked his life in order to realize his dreams. He wore a signet with the Bogoria coats of arms, a town in Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship, where Małgosia spent her childhood. He kept it on his finger, she keeps it in her heart. According to Małgosia, Dal - the name of the yacht - is one of the most graceful words in the Polish language - it means distance, it suggests a horizon, or the space that separates one from one's goals. And this yacht, the adventures it promised, the dreams and anxieties it uncovered, were Bohomolec's dal. He had two crewmen - Jan Witkowski and Jerzy Świechowski. Near Bermuda, the crew experienced a heavy storm that broke a mast. Bohomolec promised that if the voyage was successful, he would fund a chapel devoted to the Mother of all Seas.



Figure 1: Dal's Lifebuoy

For Małgosia Kot, the yellow lifebuoy has yet another meaning. It reminds her of Mieczysław Haiman, the godfather of the Museum and one of the most distinguished historians of American Polonia. Haiman was a sailor, and his love for sailing and sea travel is clearly visible in the memoirs and memorabilia he collected and left for the museum. The life condition of an immigrant has something in common with sailing. For Małgosia, sailing means the courage to challenge one's path, it means searching rather than finding, it means risking one's comfort and sense of safety. But the lifebuoy is an ever-present protection and a chance at being saved that accompanies the turns of daily life. For Małgosia it also symbolizes the trust that such support exists, one that is important for her as an immigrant and a passionate Museum employee.

The lifebuoy from Bohomolec's yacht has lived its own metaphorical life. The one that is in the Museum is not from Bohomolec's original Dal. The yacht has its own complicated history. After it sailed to Chicago in 1934, Bohomolec sold it in

December 1934 to a committee of Polish Americans who placed it in Jackson Park at Lake Michigan, from where in 1942 it was moved to the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry, where it stood for over 20 years - first on the water and then on land. In 1968, the Museum decided to remove Dal from its exhibition.

It was then that another adventurer, Ireneusz Gieblewicz, decided to change the fate of Dal by fundraising money to restore the ship and return it to Poland. His vision was to repeat Bohomolec's success by freshly laminating the ship and sailing it all the way back. However, this was not what Bohomolec had in mind. The ship was not to be laminated. Moreover, it belonged to America. And that's where it was supposed to remain. Regardless of the ongoing conflict, Gieblewicz began a public fundraising campaign. He managed to collect enough money to attempt the return; however, the yacht was in poor shape, and its frame was badly damaged, despite careful laminating. In the end, Dal was transported to Bramenhafen in a shipping container, and from there it sailed along the shore to Gdynia as an aging, yet still proud fragment of history. It was August 1980. Polish attention was acutely centered on another historical event and only a few noticed the return of the famous Dal.

Currently, Dal is on display in the modern Vistula River Museum in Tczew, a branch of the National Nautical Museum in Gdańsk. It was lovingly restored in 2015 and shines with majestic grace the way only beautiful yachts can. Its neighbors on display are the Kumka IV Yacht from 1937 - the first Polish (and probably also first of its kind in the world) fully-welded vessel - and the Opty yacht on which Leonid Teliga circumnavigated the world solo. In a conversation with me, Radosław Paternoga and Katarzyna Schaefer from the Nautical Museum carefully narrate the process of Dal's restoration and the decision to restore it to its 1930s form. After the laminate was removed, they saw little rivets on the sides - clearly a sign of some previous material. Without any old photos, they were moving a bit in darkness, but the object itself dictated fragments of its history. Radek reached out to Bohomolec's memoirs to realize that there had indeed been copper plates covering the sides. Radek recalls that in the book, Bohomolec mentions that one of the team members had to scuba dive to secure a piece of copper plate. He called Gieblewicz to ask if he remembered removing the copper plate, but he did not. Who knows at what point in Dal's history they disappeared?



Figure 2: Dal in the Vistula River Museum in Tczew

Dal's body is beautifully displayed in Tczew. It tells a history of Polish-American dreams, cooperation, and conflict. In Tczew, there are also two sets of Dal masts, one of which is the original wooden one from 1934. It



Figure 3: Another angle of Dal in the Vistula Museum in Tczew

made it to Poland even before Dal - on a plane. There is also a new mast, the one with which Dal sailed in 1980. But the lifebuoy from Dal's second trip - the one that inspired Małgosia - is in Chicago. Why? Perhaps it was donated by Ireneusz Gieblewicz? It exists in the photographs from the PMA Archives. The yellow lifebuoy that Małgorzata passes by daily during work plays a number of roles: it's a historic artifact from the yacht's second trip; it is a metonym of support and assurance; but for Małgosia, it is also a metaphor for adventure, the journey to one's inner self via a dangerous and hard path, but ultimately of the stability that can facilitate more dreaming. "A lifebuoy is important," ends Małgosia.

"It is our security that makes life and work sustainable."

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POLISH AMERICAN STUDIES





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The "back content" will take you to <https://www.jstor.org/journal/poliamerstud> which is a complete repository of PAS archives from its inception in 1944 through Volume 75 (2018). The content on the JSTOR platform will expand as the "moving wall" advances; new issues will appear three years after publication.

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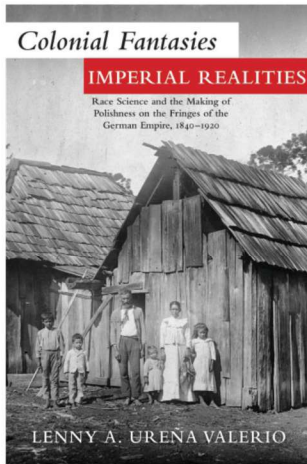
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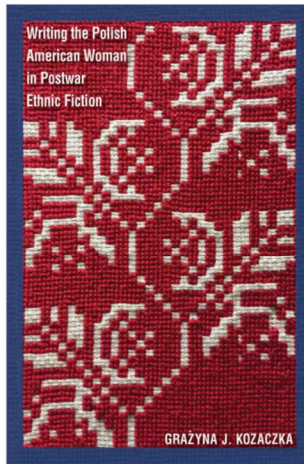
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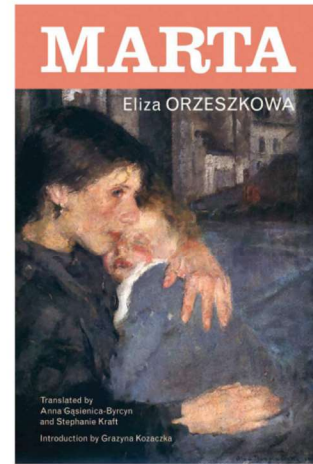
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