



**POLISH MUSEUM AND ARCHIVES IN AUSTRALIA ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
12TH OCTOBER 2003**

President's report

It's that time of year again and the Committee of Management has had a busy year full of various activities. The highlight of the past year has been the visit of Professor Daria Nalecz –Director of the National Polish Archives and her assistant Dr Andrzej Biernat to Australia. The purpose of their visit was to assess the content and the state of the archival collections of Polonia and to provide any assistance in preserving and maintaining these collections. Professor Nalecz and Dr Biernat visited Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra and Melbourne. They were in Melbourne from the 13th-15th of March 2003. During their short visit they inspected the collection at 'Millenium House' in Footscray, met with the Polish seniors in Rowville, met with Lech Paszkowski and visited the new state of the art - State Archives in North Melbourne and met with the management there. Their assessment of our collection was that it was impressive – that there were many important materials, documents, which reflected Polish community life. They recognised the need to professionally sort, catalogue and store this material so that it can be easily accessible. To this end they have made a commitment to send an archivist from Poland to catalogue and make detail notes about what is in the collection. It is hoped this will be published and also placed on the internet to increase access to our collection. In order to realise this offer we need to find appropriate accommodation and provide a reasonable allowance for this person for about three months. Recently the Committee of Management made an appeal to the membership to assist in this but thus far we have had no response. It would be a great pity to miss such an opportunity. Therefore, we call on the membership to assist us in this.

During their visit, Professor Nalecz and Dr Biernat made a number of interesting observations that are relevant to our organisation as well as to others with similar goals. These observations include:

- The fragmentation of the various collections across Australia, that they are in the hands of individuals, organisations and there is no centralised depository for these materials.
- There is the Polish collection in Canberra - at the National Library but some fears were expressed about what would happen if the Australian authorities no longer wish to house Polish materials. To alleviate these concerns the Polish authorities have signed an agreement, that in the unlikely event, the National Library can no longer house such a collection, it will be transferred to Poland.
- Proposal was made to arrange a similar agreement with the State Library of Victoria to house our collection. The only concern is that often Australian

institutions are only interested in materials that reflect community life in Australia and are less concerned with documents from Europe that reflect pre-migration experiences.

Professor Nalecz challenged the community to foster greater co-operation between various Polish organisation under the guidance of Rada Naczelna to have a more systematic and organised approach in collection and preserving relevant materials. Time is of the essence as many elderly people are passing away and with them important historical documents are being thrown away as their benefactors often do not appreciate their relevance.

Finally Professor Nalecz congratulated the efforts of our committee of management – in particular Zdzislaw Derwinski for his initiative and energy in maintaining the activities of this organisation.

Recent activities:

Currently we are endeavouring to collect as much of these materials as we can and take this opportunity to ask our members for their assistance and support. We have recently received materials from 'Samodzielna Brygada Strzelcow Karpackich' courtesy of Mr Frelek. We also received a number of items from the late Mr Kuzniarz through the "Stowarzyszenie Technikow".

Oral history project – our oral history project has begun in earnest and this is largely thanks to our new volunteer Mrs Emilia Zientalska. Mrs Zientalska responded to an advertisement placed in 'Tygodnik Polski' and has made a significant contribution to getting this project up and running. Her enthusiasm and dedication are to be congratulated. This project has been funded by the Local History grant and for this purpose we purchased a digital camera. We are interviewing and filming the recollections of various members of the Polish community who have made a significant contribution to community life. We are asking questions about their experiences during the Second World War, their decision to migrate to Australia, early impressions of life here, establishing their homes, families and community. The aim is to create a montage of people's experiences and stories that will be shown in Polish community centres and will also be archived as a pictorial depiction of Polish life in Australia.

We have applied for a number of grants, largely from the Blum foundation – to expand this project to reach rural and regional areas in Victoria and for administrative support.

Encyclopaedia – this work is ongoing and we are continually searching for entries and calling for people to make contributions about their life in Australia.

Finally I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of the Committee of Management for their good work and support and in particular to thank our new volunteer Mrs Zientalska for her efforts and our membership for your support. I wish for a fruitful next term whereby we realise our goals and make further progress in all our endeavours.

Helenska Evert