



POLISH HERITAGE SOCIETY OF GRAND RAPIDS

April 2021

May 3rd is Polish Constitution Day: 'Swieto Trzeciego Maja'



The ratification of the Polish Constitution by the Sejm May 3rd, 1791

By Richard Panek

Every year on May 3rd, a celebration is held in Poland and commemorated by Polish Communities around the world. On that day in 1791, the revolutionary Government Act was passed by the Polish Sejm or Parliament. At the time it was signed into law, it was only the second modern Constitution after that of the United States of America. This document is hailed by historians as the first modern European Constitution and was recognized by the European Commission with a European Heritage Label in 2015.

The Government Act of 1791 was essentially a constitutional document drawn up in response to increasing Russian influence over Polish internal affairs and difficulties in governing the Polish/Lithuanian Commonwealth. The passing of the Government Act was possible be-

cause an understanding had been reached between members of the enlightened opposition and the King.

The text of the document is traditionally credited to King Stanisław II August, Grand Marshall of Lithuania Ignacy Potocki, and the priest and philosopher Fr. Hugo Kołłątaj. They were inspired by the political and social thought of the European Enlightenment as well as the American Constitution of 1787. The authors of Poland's basic law stipulated that the government was to put the nation first rather than advance the interests of the few.

"All power in civil society is derived from the will of the people". Article V, Government Act of 1791

The Government Act was considered a revolution since it codified a constitu-

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Ruth Anne Lomas Remembered

By Matthew Gryczan

If you asked Ruth Anne Lomas what accomplishment was the greatest in her life, she'd answer that she became the sturdy trunk of a family tree carefully planted by her Polish immigrant grandparents and nurtured by her parents.

One limb of Ruth Anne's trunk was the Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids, which greatly benefitted from her involvement for 25 years in various capacities, including three four-year terms as president.

Ruth Anne, 82, died March 14 at her home in Spring Lake. In her autobiography, Ruth Anne started with the arrival from Poland of her maternal grandmother Antonia, then she wove into her life story the other threads that became central to her life: commitment to family, reverence for education, perseverance in the face of adversity, strong work ethic and pride in Polish heritage.

Those who worked and played with Ruth Anne would nod approvingly at the simile of her as a sturdy tree – people naturally gravitated around her, and she acted as a force of nature to be reckoned with.

"Who else would go to a garage sale, and end up

actually buying the garage," said her daughter Susan Swanson. "True story. My mother visited a garage sale, bought the garage itself and had it moved to a house on the West side of Grand Rapids."



It was at another garage sale held by Ruth Anne herself where she would savor fruits of her labor after she was hired by Kent City High School in 1978 as a special education teacher. A number of graduated students showed up at the sale, not to buy items, but to thank their former teacher for all she had done for them. Ruth Anne took great pride graduating from Grand Valley State University with a Bachelor of Science degree focused on Social Studies & Psychology (1974), then a Master's degree in Special Education with a learning disabilities specialty (1985).

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The Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids promotes an appreciation of the Polish and Lithuanian culture in the metro Grand Rapids. The Society publishes this newsletter monthly. We invite story ideas and content contributions. For more information, please contact Richard Panek or Marilyn Lignell by writing to [phsgrandrap-
ids@gmail.com](mailto:phsgrandrapids@gmail.com).

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Constitution *Continued from pg.1*

tional monarchy with three distinct branches of government and extended rights to all social classes. Unfortunately, such progressive reforms frightened Poland's neighbors—Russia, Prussia and Austria. Even though the Government Act authorized the mobilization of a 100,000 strong Army, political inertia led to delay in mobilization. Poland's neighbors ultimately seized the opportunity and invaded so that the Constitution would never be put into practice. Sadly, the subsequent partition of Poland in 1793 essentially ended the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

In the Government Act, the word for Republic/ Commonwealth

("Rzeczpospolita") was replaced with the words 'government', 'nation', 'homeland', 'Poland' and 'society' depending on the context. The document essentially defined the Nation as the people, not its government.

For 123 years of foreign occupation, the Third of May Constitution kept the Polish spirit alive as a symbol of freedom generating pride among people of Polish ancestry everywhere; inspiring them to fight to regain their lost independence.

Constitution Day was established in Poland in 1919 and was a public holiday until 1940. During the Second World War and in the times of the Polish People's Republic it was forbidden to celebrate the May 3 Constitution. It was only in 1990 that the public holiday was restored by law.

In some large US cities, the May 3rd holiday has been marked with parades. The best-known is held in Chicago, which can attract 300,000 or more spectators. The parade includes floats representing different Polish-American organizations, folk-costumed Polish dancers, marching bands, uniformed formations and mounted units all adding splendor to the event. This year's parade takes place on Columbus Drive in downtown Chicago on Saturday, May 1, 2021 at 11:30.

If you revere the United States Constitution, remember May 3rd by showing your Polish pride and share a little bit of this history with your family and friends!

Lomas *Continued from pg.1*

Ruth Anne was an early critic of the glass ceilings for women in the 1950s and 1960s, a conviction that spurred her on to support the launch of National Women's History Week and then establish a local essay contest in 1986 for high school students to write on the subject "A Special Woman in My Life Who Influenced Me."

While working full-time and caring for family members who were suffering through medical issues, Ruth Anne also found time to volunteer for activities of the Polish Heritage Society and connect with the Grand Rapids Sister Cities International organization.

As she faced a surgery with an uncertain outcome a few years ago, Ruth Anne reflected in an autobiography on her pride of Polish heritage. "My involvement with my Polish heritage has – and will always – anchor me to the dynamic and industrious heritage of my family," she wrote.

Ruth Anne also highlighted a comment from her 1956 high school yearbook that she felt summarized her mission in life. The yearbook editors placed the quotation under her picture "If I can't do the great things, I can do the small things in a great way!"

She is survived by her brother Robert (Dolores) Rudzinski of Kentucky; three children Susan (Sheldon) Swanson of Muskegon, Dr. Kenneth (Angie) Lomas, PhD of Virginia, and Steven Lomas of Spring Lake; two granddaughters, Gwendolyn Noelle and Rosalyn Paige; and four nieces and nephews.

Kelli Jo Peltier, tour director for Make-A-Wish Michigan who also oversees the Grand Rapids Sister City International program, said a person can donate to Ruth Anne's essay contest through PayPal account grscipaypal@comcast.net by choosing an amount and typing "Ruth Ann" in the message field. Alternatively, a person can donate by sending a check made out to Grand Rapids Sister Cities to Kelli Jo Peltier, 108 Campau Circle, Grand Rapids, MI 49503.

PHS Member News

By Marilyn Lignell

Hello members! We want to thank all members that have sent in their membership renewals. If you are reading this and are having an “oops” moment, please send your renewal using the form in this newsletter or through PayPal on our website.

We are planning on sending out 2021 membership cards at the end of April. If for some reason you do not receive your card in the May newsletter, please contact us. We have had a couple Post Office issues.

We want to thank Mark and Barb Levandoski for their generous donation of \$500 to the Polish Heritage Society. Mark and Barb passionately support education and have asked that the money be donated to support the P.R.C.U.A. Malbork Dance Group with music, costumes and fun for the kids. “It is so important to get kids involved when they are young,” Mark said.

Amber Gillette, Director of the Malbork Dance Group, said, “We sincerely appreciate the donation and support of the Polish Heritage Society and will use the money to purchase some costumes for the dancers. We are looking forward to performing again soon!”

Mark also wants to encour-

age other members to consider a donation to Polish Heritage if they have reached the age to take minimum contributions from traditional IRA’s. One can avoid paying taxes on the contribution if donating to a qualified charity. The PHS now qualifies with our 501(c)3 status. We advise talking to your IRA custodian for more information.



Malbork Dance Group

Meeting Minutes — February 15

A meeting of the PHS Board was held on February 15, 2021 via Zoom and in person. President Adam Porczynski called the meeting to order at 6:00pm.

Attendance: Mary Ann Bergevin, Adam Porczynski, Dennis Ziolkowski, Anthony Zasuwa, Richard Panek, Michael Jasperse, Matt Gryczan, Theresa Bonham, John Theisen, Elena Chaidez Absent: Greg Rosloniec

Minutes from the last meeting were approved as printed. Minutes were sent via e-mail to the board. Motion was made by John and seconded by Elena to accept. Motion passed.

Treasurer Report: The financial report was given. Motion was made by John seconded by Richard to accept the report. Motion passed.

Correspondence: The checks from renewals were given to Mary Ann for deposit. Member information is going to Marilyn. Cards have to be requested by a current member but can be sent to anyone. Otherwise a slow month.

Old Business: Motion by John, seconded by Elena to change and update our society logo to the half eagle submit. John will bring samples to the next board meeting. Motion passed.

Our accounting is good. All caught up, last

year’s paperwork done, our accounting firm will take care of all IRS forms so we are current all the time.

So far, one person might be interested in taking over some of the things Matt currently does. Aprox. 20 hours a month. Matt will work and assist the person or persons interested.

For Facebook and website the person does not have to be on the board, but has to be a member.

After looking at various banks and credit unions, Adam suggested we leave our money where it’s current at and relook once, hopefully interest rates rise.

Matt requested a digital picture and bio on the people that received scholarships. Mary Ann will write articles to be put in the newsletter.

With an update at next month’s meeting, our game plan will be working with Laura to have a food pick up on May 8th featuring a polish plate for \$12. All pre orders only. Pick up times and pick up place or places and volunteers to be decided yet. Food thoughts: 3 kielbasa, 2 pierogies, kapusta, rye bread etc. To be figured out at a later meeting. A motion by John, seconded by Elena to form a committee. Motion passed. Elena, Anthony and Adam expressed interest.

Join the Polish Heritage Society to receive our monthly newsletter and other benefits!

Annual Student Membership for full-time students through college \$5

Annual Adult Membership \$20

Annual Family or Business Membership \$35

Lifetime Membership \$150

ONLINE

You can join the Polish Heritage Society online by going to our website at <https://polishheritagesociety.com/>, filling out the Membership form and paying by using the PayPal Button.

MAIL

Fill out this form and send a personal check made out to the Polish Heritage Society to this address:

Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids

P.O. Box 1844

Grand Rapids MI 49501-1844

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

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