

Mark December 10 on Your Calendars for PHS Wigilia



Laura Szczepanek, owner of That Polish Girl Catering, will be preparing authentic Polish dishes for the PHS Wigilia

By Matthew Gryczan

Draw a big red circle around Dec. 10 on your calendars for the major cultural event of the year put on by the Polish Heritage Society – its annual Wigilia celebration that features a seven-course traditional dinner, sharing of the opłatek, a program that explains Polish traditions at Christmastime and a sung Polish koledy.

This year the Wigilia event will be held at the West

Leonard Banquet Facility, 1140 Muskegon Ave NW, which formerly was the Knights of Columbus, Council 3104, hall. The PHS selected the new venue upon learning that The Guest House was sold and decommissioned. (see accompanying story, this page)

Marilyn Lignell, former president of PHS who has organized the event for more than 15 years, emphasized that the PHS Wigilia is much more than a dinner – it’s a

more than 50-year tradition that celebrates Polonia in Grand Rapids. Wigilia was a common occurrence in Grand Rapids for the families of Polish immigrants, and the PHS Wigilia keeps the tradition alive.

“Our Wigilia is probably the highest profile and most beautiful event held during the year that celebrates Polish culture,” she said. “It’s much more than a meal. It’s an event that

pleases all of the senses – the tastes and smells of great dishes, the sound of Polish caroling, sight of table decorations and ornaments, -- and the feel of friendship.”

Even with rising costs on everything from food to place settings this year, the PHS has kept the price per person to an affordable \$40 – which is a bargain for a seven-course meal, venue,

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Arsulowicz Chapel, The Guest House Sold to Developers

By Matthew Gryczan

Two prominent landmarks on the West Side with strong Polish ties -- the Arsulowicz Brothers Chapel on Stocking Avenue and The Guest House – will be taking on new lives under new ownerships.

Arsulowicz Brothers Mortuaries Inc. sold its West chapel at 585 Stocking Ave NW to commercial construction company CopperRock Construction Inc., according to county records and funeral home President Stephen Arsulowicz.

In a separate transaction, Arsulowicz Brothers Mortu-

aries sold The Guest House to 638 Stocking LLC, a corporation registered by Frederick Mackraz that also owns the adjacent Blue Dog Tavern.

Arsulowicz said services that used to be held at the Stocking Avenue chapel would be consolidated into the mortuary’s chapel at 3525 Remembrance Road NW in Walker.

Selling the chapel “was a very difficult decision to make, but the building was falling into disrepair,” he said. Arsulowicz added that even though it has sold the two properties, the family

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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 meets on the 2nd Monday of every month except for December and general meetings in June and October. The society publishes this newsletter monthly. We invite story ideas and content contributions. For more information, please contact Matthew Gryczan, Richard Panek or Marilyn Lignell by writing to phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

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Sold: Chapel and The Guest House

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continues to maintain its deep ties to the West Side. Dean Rosendall, owner of CopperRock Construction with headquarters at 601 Fifth St. NW, said his company is "is studying multiple site concepts for a nice cohesive utilization of the property," but any future use will try to incorporate the historic nature of the building.

Established in 2013, CopperRock is working on a number of high profile projects that include the single-family home and apartment complex being built on the former Lincoln Lawns golf course on Lake Michigan Drive in Walker and an apartment complex being built on the former Fruitport Golf Club in Muskegon.

Regarding The Guest House,



Simplex movie projector still stands at The Guest House

<p>Największa Polska Kaplica Pogrzebowa w Grand Rapids -- Zmieszana 200 ludzi Mamy Nowy System Przewietrzania Budyńku "Air Conditioning" SZCZERA USŁUGA Także Udzielamy Notariuszowskiej Usługi "Notary Public" Pomocny Wam w jakichkolwiek sprawach.</p>		<p>Organowa Muzyka Grana na Pogrzebach w Kaplicy Najnowszy Ręcznie Rzeźbiony Karawan Przeżyły do Usługi Domowej są nowo, pięknie i prawdziwie w duchu Kościelnym. Ceny są jak możliwie najniższe</p>	
<p>Poiciel Odnowiana Po Każdym Pacjencie Usługujący w Uniformach Ogrzewany Ambulans</p>		<p>Pierwsza Czysto-Polska Nowoczesna Ambulansowa Usługa w Grand Rapids \$2 Gdziekolwiek bądź w mieście Szybka i Uprzejma Usługa we Dnie lub w Nocy Specjalne Ceny za Dłuższe Wyjazdy</p>	
<p>Jan A. Arszulowicz, Jr. Władysław Arszulowicz</p> <p>ZYCZYMI CALEJ POLONI W GRAND RAPIDS I OKOLICY SZCZĘŚLIWEGO NOWEGO ROKU.</p> <p>Arszulowicz Dom Pogrzebowy Jan i Władysław Arszulowicz, Licencjowani Pogrzebowi i Balsamiści 585 Stocking Ave., N. W. Telefon 9-7933 We Dnie lub w Nocy</p>			

1942 advertisement for the funeral home: how good is your Polish?

an employee of the Blue Dog Tavern said plans are being discussed to connect the tavern by hallway to the banquet facility to create a beer hall atmosphere. One unique feature that may be incorporated into the renovated facility is an old movie projector in the front of the building that is a holdover from its time as Brown's Stocking Avenue Theater that operated from 1915

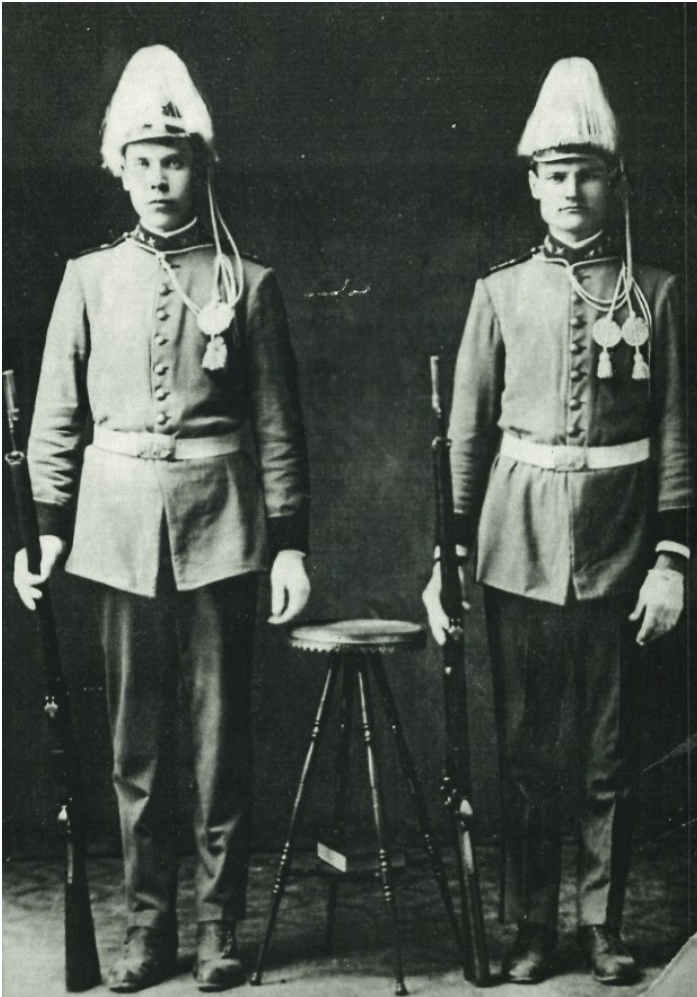
until the mid 1950s.

The Arsulowicz chapel and The Guest House have served Polish immigrants and their descendants living on the West Side for decades. John J. Arszulowicz sold musical instruments and real estate out of the 585 Stocking Ave. address before the property became a mortuary and chapel in 1938, first operated by Jan A. Arszulowicz Jr. and Władysław Arszulowicz. The latter men dropped the "z" from their last names, and Americanized their first names to John and Walter.

At the time, the men advertised as having "The largest Polish Funeral Chapel in Grand Rapids" that could hold 200 people in the comfort of air conditioning and offer extra amenities such as live organ music that accompanied funeral services.

Arsulowicz Brothers also launched the first "pure-Polish modern ambulance service in Grand Rapids" that would travel anywhere in town for \$2.

Catholic Parishes Encouraged Paramilitary Groups in GR



(From left) Peter Mondry and Lawrence Czarnowski stand at attention as members of the Guards of King Jan Sobieski, formed at Sacred Heart Parish. Courtesy of Sacred Heart

By Matthew Gryczan

Imagine battalions of uniformed and armed men 500 strong, drilling openly in Grand Rapids parks or secretly behind fences in West Side neighborhoods.

Then imagine that they aren't U.S. citizens and speak in broken English, generally keeping to themselves about their aspirations and plans.

Now imagine that they may have been your grandfa-

thers, great uncles or distant cousins.

You're not imagining things – that was Grand Rapids just before the outbreak of World War I. And after practicing military maneuvers in Grand Rapids, some of those men went on to fight for the reunification of Poland as members of the "Blue Army," under the command of Gen. Jozef Haller.

The city's three main Roman Catholic parishes that

served the local Polish community – St. Adalbert's, St. Isidore's and Sacred Heart of Jesus – were hotbeds for paramilitary groups that yearned for a reunited Poland.

Poland had ceased to be a sovereign nation in 1795, and many of the Polish immigrants who settled in Grand Rapids dreamed of one day returning to their homeland when it was reunited.

Local newspapers reported that Fr. Ladislaus Krakowski, pastor of the Sacred Heart parish, openly encouraged men in 1907 to join a paramilitary group he organized under the name of the Guards of King John Sobieski, after the famous Polish king who defeated the Turks in the battle of Vienna in 1683.

Under the headline "Poles Will Drill," the Grand Rapids Evening Press reported on April 17, 1907 that Krakowski organized a "military company" of perhaps 100 men and ordered uniforms. "Many of the members have had experience in military service in the old country,"

the article states. "The company will be drilled in the regular United States Army tactics..."

The next year, Krakowski organized another military company from parishioners that he called the Polish Zouaves, named after the guerilla fighters from Africa and France.

Krakowski wasn't alone in his militancy. Fr. Casimir Skory, pastor of St. Adalbert's, organized a military company in 1907 called the Polish Ulahns, after a famed Polish cavalry unit, and the St. Casimir's cadets for young Poles.

Not to be outdone, St. Isidore's pastor Fr. Marianus Matkowski organized the Knights of St. Hedwig.

Grand Rapids wasn't alone in experiencing the formation of paramilitary groups. Similar organizations formed in Gaylord, Hilliards, Bay City and Saginaw.

More than 70 local men went on to fight to reunify Poland and secure its borders after World War I.



Polish Zouaves in a military drill. Courtesy of Sacred Heart



Polish Heritage Society's Annual Wigilia Dinner and Program

Saturday, December 10, 2022

West Leonard Banquet Facility/1140 Muskegon NW

Includes: Nine Course Wigilia Dinner

Oplatek, Rye Bread with Horseradish Butter, Cream Herring, Mushroom Soup,

Homemade Pierogi

Lemon-Dill Baked Cod, Roasted Vegetables, Potatoes

Delectable Authentic Homemade Polish Desserts

Coffee served throughout/Wine served with fish course

Social Hour 5:00-6:00PM/Dinner and Program at 6:00PM

Door Prizes

Polish Koledy: Featuring Jarek Kozal and Nick Palmer

\$40.00 per person-prepaid: Checks payable to Polish Heritage Society

*******Reservation deadline December 1, 2022*******

Send to PHS-c/o Marilyn Lignell Phone: 616-443-3773

2858 W Sandrel CT NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Name _____

Phone # _____

of tickets @\$40.00 _____

Amount enclosed _____

I would like to be seated with _____

Community News — A Meeting and History Mystery!



By Marilyn Lignell

Hello members!!

We had a very interesting presentation by Matt Gryczan at Eastern Hall during the October General Membership Meeting about the more than 70 men from Grand Rapids who left their jobs and families to fight for the reunification of Poland near the end of World War I.

Matt found out the names of many local men who served as the members of the “Blue Army” by combing through records on this website <https://feefhs.org/resource/poland-army-in-france-records>. We have published on our website the names of the men he found – check it out because they may be your grandfathers, great uncles or first cousins!

Matt started the presentation by explaining that Poland didn’t exist as a country when Poles began immigrating to Grand Rapids, and they left their homeland because they were being terribly repressed by conquerors Prussia and Russia. Depending on the years they emigrated, our rela-

tives came from different sections of Poland.

PHS member Lois DeGraff added an extra spark to the presentation by bringing pictures and artifacts of her grandfather Antoni Oracz, who served in the Blue Army, which got its name from the blue uniforms that France supplied to the soldiers.

After returning in about 1920, Antoni was one of the original members that organized local Post 97 of the Polish Army Veterans Association of America, which used to own the building at 917 Bridge St. NW.

And here is a historical mystery that you readers may be able to help us answer – who commissioned the monument at Holy Cross Cemetery of the Blessed Virgin Mary that commemorates the local Poles who fought in World War I? And when it was built?

Holy Cross Cemetery doesn’t have any records on the monument, and we want to make sure it is preserved for generations to come.

After some research, we know that there was a dedication of an altar at the monument that commemorated members of the Polish Army Veterans Association of America and the Ladies Auxiliary of the organization on May 30, 1998. However, we strongly suspect the monument itself was built years before. Do any of you know more?



Little is know about the World War I monument at Holy Cross

Wigilia: New Venue

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music and program. Lignell said the upcoming event will repeat the popular giveaways of Christmas ornaments and door prize drawings. The ornaments are the result of a work bee last year that included Lignell, former PHS Director Richard Panek and his wife Mary, Stephanie Kovitz, Sally Stephenson and Lynn Bucella.

Those who wish to attend must buy tickets in advance so that the caterer can cook the appropriate amount of food and the hall can be set properly, Lignell said. Patrons should fill out the form contained in this newsletter and pay either by check or Paypal on the PHS website.

Laurie Sipka, manager of the West Leonard Banquet Facility, said the venue was pleased to host the PHS Wigilia this year and help support the event. The hall

was recently renovated and redecorated to host everything from wedding receptions and rehearsal dinners to birthday parties and funeral lunches.

The dinner starts with the sharing of Christmas wafer, or oplatek, then a vegetarian meal with fish, rounded off with koledy, a sing-along of Polish carols lead by vocalist Jarek Kozal and musician Nick Palmer. During the dinner, PHS members also will give talks on the customs of Wigilia.

Laura Szczepanek, who owns That Polish Girl Catering, will be preparing most of the dishes for the event, except for the pierogies that will be prepared by Lignell and Kozal. The meal will consist of rye bread with horseradish butter, cream herring, mushroom soup, baked cod, roasted vegetable, pierogi and desserts, along with coffee and wine served with the fish.

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

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