

OGNIWO POLISH MUSEUM SOCIETY INC.

ANNUAL REPORT

1 January 2014 – 31 December, 2014

as presented at the Annual General Meeting on March 7, 2015

Thanks to all volunteers: could not have done it without all of you. We had a busy and successful year in 2014. We tackled a very difficult project in the fall & winter with the Face of the Ghetto exhibit and film presentation. We received many words of appreciation and recognition and made some very good friends within the community, especially Jewish organizations. We've also learned some lessons along the way, which will help us in the future. Community partnerships and cross-ethnic cooperation are really important to funding organizations. The more we do, and the more we show that we can work with others, the better our standing will be in Winnipeg.

Events & Exhibits

The year began with the completion of our exhibit *Dance through Time – A Reflection of Polish Folk Culture in Winnipeg*. The feedback from visitors was very positive, especially for some of the interactive elements. With this backdrop, we hosted our first lecture of the year with Dr. Dan Stone on the life and literature of Janusz Korczak.

Our 3rd annual fundraiser based on Polish liquors and food pairings - "Warm Your Spirits" – took place on the 1st of February. Whether it was a needed break from an extremely long, cold winter, or the fact that we had so much fun putting together some new recipes on an old Polish cuisine theme, the evening was a rousing success. Our guest speaker – Karen McDonald – was a great hit and will certainly be invited to join us again.

The next event on our calendar was a series of workshops for Pisanki decorating, ably coordinated by Ola Tutaj, with assistance from many other volunteers. This is one event where posters displayed in Polish storefronts really paid off.

On May 9th, we hosted a lecture with author Aga Maksymowska. Her book *Giant* received much critical acclaim and is an interesting insight into a fictional teen's life in Poland and immigration to Canada. Her candid comments about her own immigrant experience, life as a teacher and the process she followed to write her book were fascinating.

August 3rd – 9th saw us mounting and manning a temporary exhibit for the Warsaw Pavilion and Folklorama. Our folk costume theme and dress-up opportunity was a big hit with both young and old visitors, as they lined up to have their photos taken. Facebook and Twitter helped spread the word in a truly interactive way.

Our fall exhibit *Artsplasion* was a feast for the senses, as we featured 6 Manitoba artists in a celebration of Polish Canadian talent. This was an amazing event that launched our participation in Culture Days and brought in many visitors who were new to our museum.

Our final lectures for the year were well received by the public: Doctoral student Muriel Smith presented her work on the musicology of Polish Folk tradition of the Sokol Folk Ensemble in its 100th year of existence; and Magda Blackmore presented her report on Oral History of the Solidarity-era Polish immigration.

The final days of 2014 was a flurry of behind-the-scenes activity to bring the travelling exhibit *Face of the Ghetto* as well as the Polish documentary *Wielka Szpera* to Winnipeg. In partnership with the Freeman Family foundation Holocaust Education Centre, Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, the Polish Consulate and

funding from the Province of Manitoba, this project had a steep learning curve for us. We had to juggle the arrangements for the shipment of the exhibit from Dallas, TX, installation of new wall and ceiling mounting systems, insurance coverage, screening issues for the film, and many other details.

Project Grants

After a brief hiatus from grant writing in 2013, we submitted 3 applications on June 1st, 2014 for:

1. bringing a travelling exhibit to Winnipeg *Face of the Ghetto* for a Jan/Feb 2015 timeframe;
2. researching and mounting an immigration exhibit *In My Words* for a Sep 2015 – Jan 2016 timeframe; and
3. an operating grant as a Level II museum in Manitoba for 2014.

We received approval and funding for all three of these grants in the October, 2014.

An additional grant project was worked on by Dorothy Paryzek before the end of the year for January 2015 submission, for a future exhibit by Mirek Weichsel in 2016.

Infrastructure

The major purchase we made for our building in 2014, was a permanent wall hanging system that utilizes cables suspended from a wall track with a variety of hooks. Sourced in Canada, this system was installed by volunteer Dennis Tabbornor in November and follows the entire perimeter of the exhibit hall. The simplicity and strength of the cable system will allow us a great deal of flexibility in hanging our exhibits in the future and provide a very professional look to the entire area. Acquiring the system has also allowed us to finally recycle the office dividers we used in the past, and the old black accordion-style panels (that were both heavy and difficult to use) will be disposed of next spring.

We also had some preliminary discussions with retired architect Maria Grajewska about future renovations that would be desirable to enhance access to the museum, especially a wheelchair access ramp at the rear of the building (as originally proposed) and paving of our parking area. Some of the issues that need to be addressed are: a new survey to clearly define the lot, shared building walls, fire safety ratings, etc. and a new set of drawings to correctly render the existing interior of the building, since construction plans cannot be found. These items will be addressed in 2015.

Professional Development

Our first graduates of the Certificate Program in Museum Practice received their diplomas from the Association of Manitoba Museums in November. The program has a mandatory requirement of seven courses*. We congratulate Alycia Walichnowski & Elizabeth Tabbornor for not only completing this program, but also drafting all of the Museum Policies that we now use. Their dedication to our museum is to be commended.

* Organizing and Managing Museums, Museums and the Community, Collections Management, Collections Care and Preventive Conservation, Exhibit Design, Museums and Education and The Museum Facility.

Collections Management

Accessioning donated artefacts is a never-ending job. No matter how much time you dedicate to it, there seems to be a continuing stream of new artefacts coming in, old artefacts that need to be reviewed, and sometimes a surprise or two when rummaging in the storage area in finding items that have never been accessioned at all. It is thanks to our Collections Manager (Alycia) that this work is being done, but she desperately needs an assistant or two, especially someone who is comfortable learning a software system and who has the dedication to keep working at it, when there are more exciting things to do around the museum. We have re-purposed many of the old display/storage cases that were used for exhibits, by turning them into storage solutions for artefacts. (Note the lack of big furniture pieces in the rear work area.)

Another exciting area of Collections Management is the work that is being started by Marta Dabros to review and catalogue artefacts that are archival in nature. A storage solution will be built for these items by volunteer Herman Meyer. Marta has already provided a great solution for a new library system and will help review materials and artefacts that are relevant to our upcoming immigration exhibit.

Financial

We had another successful financial year, with details provided in the Financial Statements attached. Although some costs have risen, we've also seen some increases in new revenue streams, like our boutique sales. This is an area that Dorothy Paryzek has been developing, thanks to her photography and gift ideas.

Our decision to not charge admission to exhibits and special events continues to be a good one. We are seeing a gradual rise in visitors, especially people who have never been to our venue before, and this has created a rise in small and large donations that are spontaneously offered.

Community Involvement

The Museum continues to support a variety of groups and activities and we have enjoyed mutually beneficial partnerships this year with:

- Warsaw Pavilion organizing committee – Folklorama 2014
- Freeman Family Foundation Holocaust Education Centre, Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada
- Consulate of Poland in Toronto and Honourary Consul for Poland in Winnipeg
- University of Manitoba, German and Slavic Studies
- Canadian Polish Congress, MB Branch

Partnerships are still being sought for our immigration exhibit for the Fall 2015 and we will continue to look for partners within our community for other projects.

On July 20th, we participated in the 2nd March of Memory, held in Winnipeg to honour the memory of the Jews of Warsaw and deportations from the Jewish ghetto, organized by Stefan Carter.

We have also been asked to participate in a multi-ethnic project focusing on Selkirk Avenue and its role in our immigrant communities. Although this project is still in an exploratory stage to see if there is sufficient interest and commitment, the Museum could be critical in presenting a coordinated exhibit of the various Polish interests – church, school, business, and residential – that have occurred on the street.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Tabbornor

Board of Directors – 2014-2015

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