



**OGNIWO**  
POLISH MUSEUM

# 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

January 1, 2020 to December 31, 2020

[www.PolishMuseum.com](http://www.PolishMuseum.com)

1417 Main Street, Winnipeg, MB, R2W 3V3

## A Year Like No Other

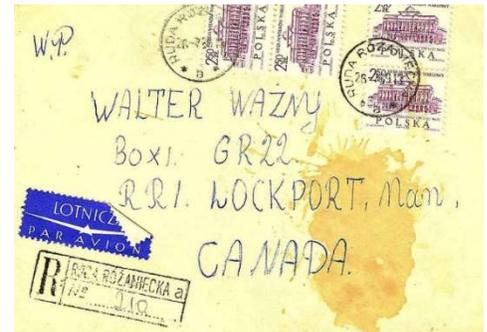


The Covid 19 pandemic that hit Canada in early 2020 changed the way we worked, gathered, communicated and traveled. It changed everyday health and safety protocols at home, in businesses and in cultural places. OgniwO Polish Museum’s activities and events were suddenly cancelled or postponed, as we grappled with what would prove to be a very long road to recovery. The pivot to online, virtual platforms created a very steep learning curve for all of us. Thankfully, we were successful in holding Zoom conference meetings, establishing Covid 19 protocols for the health and safety of our volunteers and the general

public in our museum building, and launching two virtual exhibits. We could not have done any of these things without the hard work of our Volunteers and the continued support of the community around us.

## Events & Exhibits

Our Annual General Meeting took place on March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2020, just before Manitoba announced the first pandemic lockdown. The Pisanki workshops scheduled for early April had to be cancelled. Fortunately, Marta Dabros was able to complete “*Letters from Home: A Virtual Exhibit*” that was launched at the end of April. Drawing from letters in our archives, this exhibit was well received and garnered comments and praise from an international audience.



We did not pursue our spring plans for Lectures or an exhibit of art by local Polish artists, fearing that visitors to the museum would hesitate to attend. We also found out that Folklorama was cancelled, and replaced with a virtual *Folklorama at Home*, that allowed us to participate on Facebook and Instagram, posting photos of folk-inspired themes.

The exhibit that had been planned for September was to showcase the rich history of embroidery in Polish folklore and family life. We spent some time coming up with a way to turn it into a virtual exhibit that would be in tune with Culture Days (September), stretched from 3 days to a whole month event. Our title was created to acknowledge the enormous shift in our lives caused by the pandemic, and to re-think and re-create this beautiful craft.

**Re-Thread: Embroidery Re-imagined** was the result of our collaboration with 3 young women who brought their impressions and creativity to this exhibit. We thank Natalia Weichsel, Julianna Zwierciadlowska-Rhymer and Bénédicte LeMaître for their efforts, as well as Mirek Weichsel for the photography. We were also able to partner with 3 international embroidery artists – Justyna Wołodkiewicz, Rufina Bazlova and Takashi Iwasaki in promoting contemporary embroidery art. A physical exhibit (as originally planned) was also created at the museum and open to the public for a short period of time before pandemic restrictions initially limited the number of visitors, and then forced a complete closure.



Our annual Fundraiser was also cancelled when we realized that creating a successful virtual event would be too demanding for us. We communicated with our supporters to advise them of this, and suggested, that if they wished to support us in a different way, an online donation to our Endowment Fund with the Winnipeg Foundation was easy to do. We were amazed at how generous many were, and over \$4,000 flowed into the fund by the end of December. These monies will continue to generate income for the Museum for many years to come.



During the first months of the year, our volunteers (Marta Dabros, Magda Blackmore, Alycia Walichnowski and Anna Blackmore ) were busy completing the final requirements of a major Library & Archives Canada (LAC) grant to complete accessioning and digitization of archives for the Polish Canadian Congress, Manitoba Division. The reconciliation was completed and an important section of Polonia history was added to our archives. We also acquired a new Manitoba Database for our artefact collection – *Collective Access* – that was the culmination of three years’ work with five other museums in Winnipeg. Thanks to Christine Tabbernor and Alycia Walichnowski, we will have a technically supported common platform (managed by the Association of Manitoba Museums) to use for many years to come. A dedicated laptop was also purchased to replace our old Database computer.

With limited public access to the museum over the late spring and summer, volunteers Christine Tabbernor & Ela Tukaj spent their time cleaning and re-organizing our basement work area. Workshop supplies, tools and equipment, mannequins, exhibit display cubes and stands were all tidied up. More archive shelving units were erected, artefact shelving units re-arranged more efficiently, and the concrete floor cleaned and repainted. As we moved into the fall/winter lock-down, volunteers began to move items of clothing into a flat storage system with the construction of large garment boxes. This will be an ongoing project through 2021.

## In the Community

Our involvement in community events was severely limited in 2020. Pisanki workshops and the Folklorama Cultural Display were cancelled, various workshops for children were cancelled – all because of pandemic uncertainties. We maintained a virtual presence and supported Museums Week, Culture Days, and the Association of MB Museums virtual project to commemorate Manitoba’s 150th anniversary. We stayed in touch with some of our regular partners: the Polish Canadian Congress, St. John Cantius Fraternal Aid Society, the Polish Women’s Federation Branch #7, Sokol Polish Gymnastic Association. Volunteers Magda Blackmore, Christine Tabbernor and Dan Stone participated in the online Manitoba Heritage Summit. Magda

and Marta Dabros also provided advice and assistance to the Polish Canadian Research Institute on archival issues.

## **Giving & Receiving: Grants, Endowment Fund, Scholarship**

Although we completed the LAC archival grant requirements at the end of March, we did not embark on any other new project or grant applications. However, we were successful in our application to the federal Covid Heritage Emergency Fund and received \$5000 in June. We also applied for the Manitoba Bridge Grant that was announced in November and received \$5000 in December to support our operating costs.

Our Endowment Fund with the Winnipeg Foundation received a large donation in January that brought our fund to the \$50,000 threshold amount for the initial government matching of \$25,000. Continuing donations throughout the remainder of the year brought our fund to a grand total of \$92,736. We continue to be awed by the generosity of our community.

## **Building Improvements**



The final element of our 2019 infrastructure project was installed early in 2020, primarily because of city permit and inspection delays. However, the new exterior sign generated many positive comments by our members and supporters. A catastrophic breakdown in our air conditioning system caused us to evaluate the cost of repairs vs replacement. Although completely unexpected, we determined that it was wiser to replace the system and a new A/C unit was installed in early July.

Pandemic protocols, in accordance with provincial guidelines, were developed and posted for all Museum volunteers to see and comply with. Hand sanitizer stations were created at front and rear exits, social distancing

floor signs were made and stringent cleaning/sanitizing has been taking place every time a volunteer enters the building.

On-going improvements to our basement work area involved reorganizing and cleaning/painting to create a safe environment for volunteers.

## **Financial Update**

Although the Museum suffered a small loss at the end of the year, our overall financial health is still very sound. Because of the pandemic, we did not have revenues from workshops, annual fundraiser or other events and had to replace the A/C unit, that drained one of our GIC investments. However, our Endowment fund has increased substantially, guaranteeing a higher return on investment every year into the future.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Blackmore M".

Magda Blackmore  
President