

EARLY POLISH PIONEERS OF THE ILLAWARRA PRESENTATIONS



Michael Organ, Barbara Mazur and Zofia Laba guest presenters at the MHP AGM

The Migration Heritage Project held its Annual General Meeting on 6 November 2008. At each AGM the MHP invites guest speakers to give presentations focussing on the contribution of migrants to the Illawarra. This year the focus was on the early Polish Pioneers of Wollongong. The first presentation was given by Michael Organ who had researched the Polish scientist and explorer Count Paul Edmund De Strzelecki and of his visit to the Illawarra in 1839-40. Michael's brief presentation explained that documents by Strzelecki (some being the earliest mapping of the Illawarra region) suggest that Strzelecki visited this region. Much more information is available from Michael's website. www.michaelorgan.org.au/list.htm

Our second presentation was given by Zofia Laba and Barbara Mazur. Zofia and Barbara are local historians and members of the MHP who have been researching early Polish pioneers of the Illawarra. The MHP felt that their research, and their enthusiasm for their research, would provide an interesting and informative presentation. Zofia and Barbara have provided for this newsletter the following brief history on the subjects of their research: Ignacy Zlotkowski, who became a prominent citizen of Wollongong; and John Radecki who contributed to the architectural history of Wollongong:

"The history of the first Polish pioneers of Wollongong starts in June 1854, when Ignacy Zlotkowski from Poland bought his first property in Harbour Street. He arrived in Wollongong already naturalised, wealthy and well educated (spoke a few languages) as a professor of modern languages. Zlotkowski married Jane Haigh of Market Square and together with their 5 children lived in Smith Street in Bayalla Cottage.

(Continued over)

MHP MEETINGS

The MHP Committee meets the first Thursday of the month (February-December) at 5.30 pm, Meeting Room 1, Level 10 Wollongong City Council Administration Building, Burelli Street, Wollongong. Members and other interested people or groups are always welcome. The meetings scheduled for 2009 are as follows:

5 February, 5 March, 2 April,
7 May, 4 June, 2 July, 6 August,
3 September, 1 October,
5 November (AGM), 3 December

(Venue for meetings provided through the Wollongong City Council Multicultural Services)

MHP COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Chairman
Franca Facci
Treasurer
Mendo Trajcevski
Secretary
Fidelia Pontarolo
Committee:
Gregor Cullen
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Don't forget to visit our website

www.mhpillawarra.com



Zofia Laba giving her presentation on early Polish Pioneers of Wollongong at the MHP AGM

Zlotkowski was a very prominent citizen of Wollongong. He admired the beauty of Wollongong, worried about the town's future and participated in many areas of its life. In 1864 a nomination meeting for Alderman of Wollongong Municipal Council took place at the Court House. Zlotkowski received the most nomination votes. In the 1860s he was a chairman of Wollongong National School, was an Honorary Treasurer of the Agricultural Society, member of Wollongong Improvement Society, a member of Patrick Hill Osborne election committee, chairman of the town's various meetings as well as an interpreter and arbitrator for non-English speaking servants. According to the Census from 1857 in Wollongong there were 65 of them.

Jane Zlotkowski had a private school in Smith Street. One of the Wollongong's old pioneers wrote in February 1924 ".....Madame was a very talented lady and many Wollongong's boys can thank Madame Zlotkowski for a sound and liberal education".

Zlotkowski moved to Sydney with his family in 1873 and died in Sydney in 1886.

The older citizens of Wollongong still remember the Zlotkowski name, because of the area which he once owned. They refer to this area as Zlotkowski's Heights, Zlotkowski's Hill or Zlotkowski's town (in the beginning of the 1900s there were many miners cottages there). This was a big farming land, well watered, cleared and with a beautiful view of the ocean between Mt. Keira Road, Robsons Road and Keira Mine Road. After Zlotkowski's death this land was sold during a big auction on 2 November 1887. It was a big event for Wollongong as free rides were offered for anyone who wanted to have a look at the blocks of land, a music band was playing, and free drinks were offered.

Before the auction took place the land was divided and new streets were created and named after the aldermen of Wollongong Municipal Council such as: Parsons, Cochrane, Armstrong and Poulter. None of the new streets were named after Ignacy Zlotkowski. Once he was a very respectable citizen of Wollongong, later became a forgotten first Polish Pioneer of this town.

In January 1882 a new Polish family arrived in Wollongong, the family of Victoria and Paul Radeski. Paul and Victoria lived and died in Wollongong. In 1904 Paul became the first Polish person to be buried in this town. Victoria followed him in 1932.

Victoria and Paul Radeski had 7 children and because of a spelling mistake on the Forfarshire passenger list (the ship they arrived on) some children, when they became adults, used the spelling Radecki.

The family lived in Young Street and Paul worked in the one of the local coal mines. After his death in 1904 Victoria moved to Keira Street with her oldest daughter Valentina. She was the only Radeski child who stayed and died in Wollongong. She married Walter Carmody and became one of the Wollongong dressmakers.

In 1883 Radeski's oldest son John moved to Sydney to continue his education in stained glass window art. Prior to this he tried various jobs with his father including working in the coal mines. They travelled to Kiama as they heard that there was the opportunity to get a stone breaking job. They were too late, the job had been taken. Tired and hungry Paul and John were walking back through Dunmore and they stopped at William and Elizabeth James's house. William James, a very respectable citizen of Shellharbour Council and once a mayor of this town, helped them by letting them stay overnight and giving them food and some money which John used to continue his studies in stained glass window art.

In 1885 John Radecki (he used the spelling with "c") finished his study and had been employed by Frederick Ashwin who was the owner of J. Ashwin & Co the largest stained glass window company in Sydney. After Frederick Ashwin's death in 1909 John Radecki became the company's chief designer and co-owner, and from 1920 until 1954 the owner of the company.

In 1938 John had the opportunity to show his gratitude to William and Elizabeth James for the help he and his father received from them. A new St. Andrews Presbyterian Church was built and John Radecki was commissioned to do a few windows (some of the windows were used from the old church). He designed, made, and dedicated to William and Elizabeth James the 'Good Samaritan' window and he donated it to the church. Under it he wrote:

"I was a stranger and you took me in" "In the grateful remembrance of William James of Shellharbour and his wife Elizabeth who in 1882 befriended artist and his father"

The help received from James and his wife meant so much to the artist.

By doing the windows he contributed to the architectural history of Wollongong. Also, his company in 1930 made the stained glass windows in the St. Mary Star of the Sea Chapel. The beauty of the windows contributes to chapel's special atmosphere.

John Radecki Created many beautiful stained glass windows in Sydney, NSW. His stained glass windows today can be seen not only in many churches but also in public buildings like: Commonwealth Bank in Martin Place Sydney - the Grand Hall, Mitchell Library in Sydney - Caxton Window in the Reading Room.

John Radecki worked as an artist into his late 80s. He visited Wollongong many times as he kept in touch with family who lived here.

Today, the Polish community can be proud of these first pioneers. Not only did they live here as ordinary citizens but they took an active role in the town's life and they contributed to the history of Wollongong." *Brief history provided by Zofia Laba and Barbara Mazur, based on research by Zofia Laba and Barbara Mazur.*

The AGM Presentation was well-attended, including descendants of Ignacy Zlotkowski and John Radecki, as well as Mr Grzegorz Jopkiewicz from the Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Sydney



Franca Facci, Chairperson of the MHP addresses the guests at the AGM Presentation

ANNUAL REPORT 2008

MIGRATION HERITAGE PROJECT

Our Purpose

To define, record, protect and promote migration heritage in the Illawarra.

It is with great pleasure that I present to the membership and the community the annual report for 2008.

The year in review

The MHP has celebrated another year of solid work that has built upon the foundations of initiatives of past years. We continue as a very small committee to progress quite significant pieces of work by collaborating with partner organisations and government agencies to ensure the heritage of the Illawarra is more comprehensively acknowledged and recorded. To this end the MHP has focussed on the following areas.

1. Strategic Plan

After five years, it was time to review and refresh our strategic planning document. The committee agreed that it is important for funding bodies and the community to understand what our aims and objectives are in a way that is easy to read and understand. We have adopted the framework utilised by many large companies and that is to summarise our role, activities and intentions on one page. The revamped plan will be available on our website in the coming months.

2. The Places Project – NSW Heritage Office, MHC, WCC

At our AGM in 2007, Meredith Walker gave an illustrated presentation on the progress of one of the elements of the Places Project. This is a project that was funded by the NSW Heritage Office to complete a heritage study of places of significance to migrants living in Wollongong. The MHP was granted \$7,500 for the project while another \$7,500 was granted to the NSW Migration Heritage Centre and the \$15,000 was matched by Wollongong City Council bringing the project total to \$30,000. This project was carried out throughout 2007 and completed and handed over to the MHP in 2008. Louise Thom and Meredith Walker were the principle investigators with Glynnis Cummins providing research support. When the project commenced it became very clear that the original brief for the project was too extensive and in negotiation with the funding bodies the project was narrowed to focus on the first place of accommodation and women's work places. However some information was also collected on the other themes identified in the original brief including places of worship and social clubs and societies formed by migrants. Some of the outcomes of this project include: An illustrated essay on Migrant Accommodation; An illustrated essay on Work Places for Women; A database of Places; A database of Photographs; BHP research folders; State heritage inventory forms for significant places.

The greatest outcome however of this project is that it has provided a wide range of exciting areas and ideas to explore further. The summary report contains a series of suggestions for progressing the work by a wide range of organisations and groups.

We were fortunate to have a student of the University of Wollongong School of Art and Design, Sophie Karsulke on placement from Germany, utilise some of the material collected in the Places project to develop a tourist brochure and poster describing and mapping places of significance to migrants in the Illawarra. Sophie will be continuing her work on this project and provide the MHP with a prototype for consideration. In addition, the Wollongong City Council Cultural Services Museum Development Officer, Eva Castle is working with the MHP and the University of Wollongong School of Art and Design to conduct a workshop in early 2009 on the potential to expand this initial work.

3. Migration to Wollongong Publication

Meredith Walker has provided the MHP with the completed manuscript for this publication. This has been an enormous task and the MHP thanks Meredith for her generosity and expertise in producing this draft, we only hope we will be able to do the content justice by producing a quality publication for use and reference by people interested in migration history in the Illawarra and across Australia. The committee has sought guidance from Siobhan McHugh, an award winning writer and broadcaster with respect to editing the manuscript.

The intent of this publication is not only to document the impact that migrants and refugees have made in the Illawarra, but also to act as a thematic guide for people wanting to explore and research the heritage of migrants in the Illawarra and Australia. The main themes identified in the book include: Life in the homeland; The decision to emigrate & the choice of Australia; Journey to Australia & to Wollongong – first experiences; Migrant accommodation & next home; Work; Worship, maintaining worship and religious traditions; Forming organisations – communities of language culture & homeland; Home & family life; Getting to know Wollongong – leaving, staying, becoming Australian, links with kin; Recognising the contributions of migrants – multicultural Wollongong, festivals and traditions.

This project has been funded by the NSW MHC. (The NSW Migration Heritage Centre at the Powerhouse Museum is a New South Wales Government initiative supported by the Community Relations Commission. www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au).

4. The MHC Belongings Project

This is a project of the NSW Migration Heritage Centre and the MHP was invited to contribute to the project as a partner organisation. Belongings is a website exhibition which records and shares post-World War Two (WW2) migration memories through community memorabilia – or belongings. As we are all only too vividly aware many of the memories of post WW2 immigrants have been lost because we are unaware of the significance of the memorabilia that people have. Belongings helps to save some of this history by recording the story of the keepsakes. The project also advocates for belongings to be kept within the family and advises how to care for them. The project is still looking for people from the Illawarra who arrived between 1945 and 1974 to participate. There is an expression of interest form on the website that can be completed and sent to the MHP for consideration by the Belongings team. The website can be accessed at www.belongings.com.au

5. The MHP quarterly newsletter and website

The MHP newsletter and the website are our main communication tools with the broader community. We receive a lot of positive feedback about both our newsletter and website and we would encourage people to keep their memberships up to date so that we can continue producing it and you can continue reading it. Thanks in particular to Cultural Services at The Wollongong City Council who generously print the newsletter as part of a negotiated agreement.

With thanks

There are a number of organisations that assist the MHP through their generosity and in-kind support. In particular we would like to thank Wollongong City Council for use of meeting rooms on a monthly basis, the function room for our AGM and costs associated with printing and mailouts throughout the year. Council officers Darinka Radinovic Multicultural Services and Eva Castles Museum Development Officer also provide great support in their respective roles. We extend our gratitude once again to Meredith Walker, Louise Thom and Glynnis Cummins for the Places project and to Meredith for the Migration to Wollongong publication. In addition Sophie Karsulke for her work utilising material from the Places project for a tourist publication. Thanks also to John Petersen and Andrea Fernandez at the Migration Heritage Centre for NSW, for their enduring and enthusiastic support of the MHP. The generosity of the IMB Community Foundation, Heritage NSW, The Migration Heritage Centre for NSW and WCC for the funding they have provided for a number of the projects mentioned earlier. Macedonian Welfare continues to help with our bookkeeping and for this we are always grateful.

I have left the MHP committee till last because I want to make sure that everyone understands how so few can achieve so much. Each person on the committee makes a valuable and complimentary contribution to the endeavours of the organisation so that we come together to carry out projects that we believe promote the heritage of the community in its fullest sense. As I pointed out last year, it is always difficult to highlight some members of the committee over others but I do want to thank Fidelia Pontarolo our secretary who does an amazing job week in and week out, year after year to keep the organisation ticking over. To Peter Bestman who helped to revise our strategic plan, to Gregor Cullen whose talent makes what we produce look invitingly beautiful and to Rina Montgomery, Olga Romano, Giulia Bonacina and Ludwik Inhat who remind us why we need to keep pressing on.

Franca Facci, Chairperson, 6 November 2008



To all our readers thank you for your continued interest throughout 2008. We hope you continue to read our newsletter to keep you informed of what we are up to and what we hope to achieve. If you are interested in helping with any of our projects please contact the MHP. May we take this opportunity to wish everyone a safe and happy holiday season and a Merry Christmas to all those who are celebrating Christmas and Happy New Year to one and all.