



President's Report December 2009

Another year has drawn to a close and the Committee of Management has been working consistently on a number of projects during the last year. These include:

- ❖ Organising and cataloguing the existing collection;
- ❖ Seeking funding for new projects; and
- ❖ Preparation and publication of the Polish Museum and Archives Year Book Vol III.

Organising and cataloguing the collection:

The Committee of Management have organised a number of working bees at Millennium House sorting through the collection. This involves sorting through items, removing staples and placing them into acid free folders and then into boxes. A brief description is made of what is in each box. The boxes have been numbered and form part of a number of collections. Some progress has been made in this activity but there is still much to do.

Seeking funding

The organization was successful in obtaining funds from the National Library of Australia in the form of the Community Heritage Grant to carry out a Significance Assessment. The aim of this exercise was to have someone independently assess the Museum's collection and prepare a report and recommendations. The assessment needs to clearly identify the history, themes, importance, meaning and value of the collection and based on this organisations can apply for future funding to carry out required preservation work. We engaged the services of Peter Minard who completed the Significance Assessment Report.

The main findings were:

A collection wide Statement of Significance was compiled concluding that elements of the collection are of national historical significance because of their ability to interpret post World War Two migration to Australia, the emergence of the Solidarity movement in the early 1980s, engagement of Polish-Australians in cold war politics, and the relationship of Polish-Australians to the post-communist Polish state.

A summary of his main recommendations are listed here:

Recommendation 1. Conservation needs

The PMAA needs to employ a professional conservator to conduct a Preservation Needs Assessment as soon as possible as significant records face risk of being damaged or destroyed if the current conservation and storage policies persist.

Documents are fading and becoming rust damaged because of inappropriate storage conditions.

Recommendation 2. Collecting Policy

Ensuring the future of the PMAA collection is a complex, multifaceted problem. The PMAA needs to develop a formalised collecting policy. The collection policy should be developed by a working group which includes a heritage professional, representatives of local history groups, and key individuals from the PMAA. The working group will need to formalise:

- Broad themes for the PMAA collection;
- Precisely which records the PMAA shall collect;
- How the collection should be appropriately stored;
- Collection access policy: is the collection open to the public or only key researchers?
- Prepare a disaster recovery plan.

This report recommends that the PMAA should concentrate on four collecting themes: the formation of the Polish-Australian community, the Solidarity movement in Australia, Polish-Australians and the Cold War, and the relationship of Polish-Australians with the post-communist Polish state.

Recommendation 3. Deaccession policy

No collection policy is complete without a deaccession policy. That is, a policy that covers what items can be removed from the collection, and under what circumstances items can be removed from the collection. The collection-policy working group should also develop a deaccession policy document. This document should recommend items to be removed from the PMAA collection.

Recommendation 4. Provenance and cataloguing

In the eyes of historians, curators and heritage professionals; items that are not properly provenanced and/or are not properly catalogued have vastly reduced significance. To maximise the significance of their collection the PMAA should create a formal provenance register for the collection. The register should detail, who donated the item, under what conditions the item was donated and contain a brief description of the item. The PMAA should allocate some board member time to filling out the provenance register for current items, and decide who is responsible for maintaining the provenance register.

Recommendation 5. Digitisation

Increasingly, modern museum collections and archives are digitised. Digitisation serves three purposes: creating an electronic backup of fragile material, creating a useful resource for PMAA and community use, and allowing collecting organisations to share their collections online, with geographically disparate researchers.

This report recommends that the PMAA employ a conservator to selectively digitise its archives collection; particular attention should be paid to crumbling documents.

Recommendation 6. Funding Sources

This report recommends that the PMAA seek funding for the following activities, in order of priority: a Preservation Needs Assessment, developing collecting and deaccession policies, training, cataloguing, digitisation and display funding. The three principal public sector bodies to pursue funding from are: The National Library of Australia, Heritage Victoria and the Public Records Office Victoria.

Preparation and publication of the Polish Museum and Archives Year Book Vol III.

We also received a small grants from the Blum foundation and the Victorian Multicultural Commission for organisational support. The Museum received an additional \$500 from the Blum Foundation for producing the Polish Museum and Archives in Australia Year Book Vol III

Transferring oral history recordings to DVD

A total of 18 interviews that were recorded by Mrs Zientalski and myself have now been saved onto DVD format.

Plans for 2010

- Increase the Museum's profile and membership
- Create better links with other like-minded organisations
- Hold a planning day to map out future directions
- Plan and deliver some short courses/lectures on specific topics following on the success of the workshop held in late 2007.
- Continue with preservation work, cataloguing and conducting an inventory
- Seek additional funding

Finally I would like to thanks the committee of management for all their good work and on behalf of the Committee of Management I would like to thank our membership for their interest and support.

Helena Evert
President