



"Poland has not perished yet..." - The Polish national anthem is performed by the symphony orchestra of the Helsinki Conservatory of Music. Jerzy Błaszkiwicz-Tuderman is conducting and Michał Zieliński is playing the piano.



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THE HELSINKI POLISH ASSOCIATION



April 1917

The Helsinki Polish Association - Zjednoczenie Polskie w Helsinkach – started its activities in the autonomous Grand Duchy of Finland eight months before the Finnish nation got its independence and the Republic of Finland was formed.

The Association was founded April 3, 1917. The founders were some thousand Polish officers and soldiers of the Tsar's Army and only a few civilian members. Before the Embassy of the Republic of Poland was opened in Helsinki in 1919, the Polish Association was the only official institution or organisation that represented the rights of the Poles living in Finland, and the membership book worked as a passport. The Helsinki Polish Association was registered in 1928 and the statute that was adapted back then is still valid today. The aim of the Association is to "create contacts and maintain them between Polish people living in Finland exercising national and cultural activities" (§ 2 of the Statute).

Since the establishment of "Światpol" (Światowy Związek Polaków z Zagranicy) – Organisational Council of Poles from Abroad - the Helsinki Polish Association tied close knots with the Council and maintained contacts to it. However, the Second World War interrupted the activities of the Association. After the war the association got back on its feet. In 1976 contacts to the Helsinki Embassy of the Republic of Poland were renewed. Thanks to this the doors were opened to new achievements in Polish culture eg. films and publications. Contacts were also renewed to the Warsawian "Wspólnota Polska" (organisation dealing with Polish abroad), as well as to the Helsinki Finnish-Polish Association. The Polish Association takes care of Polish graves in Finland.

Culture and interaction have always been central for the activities of the Polish Association. This includes preservation of Polish customs and traditions, celebration of national anniversaries and organising art exhibitions. Since the beginning of the 1990's the Association has organised musical performances by talented young Polish artists to commemorate the 3rd of May and 11th of November in the beautiful Temppeliaukio Church, which is excavated and built into rock. These concerts have become a tradition and have gained acknowledgement and popularity from the demanding Helsinki music audience, and have also established a permanent place in the cultural calendar. The celebrations were especially festive in 1998, when a weeklong Polish music festival was organised to celebrate the 80th anniversary of the Republic of Poland.

Especially important for the Association is meeting up with Polish key figures. Former guests of the Association include eg. theatre and film director Adam Hanuszkiewicz, sculptor Władysław Hasior, piano artist Halina Czerny-Stefańska, prime minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski and composer George de Godzinsky. On the unforgettable election day of the Polish Sejm on 6, June 1989, the Association greeted Pope John Paul II in Finland. In October 1993 members had the chance to greet president Lech Wałęsa during his visit to Finland.

Another important part of the activities of the Association is the involvement of the member's children. In the beginning of the 1980's a Polish club for preschool aged children was established. This club was coordinated by great dedication of the Ursuline Sisters. Usually 15-30 children participated in the classes, and during Mother's Day and Christmas the children performed. During the years the number of children participating decreased, and the activities ended in 2002. Thanks to Finnish legislation that guarantees foreign children to have first language education in their mother tongue, several Polish children can now read their mother tongue in their schools in Helsinki, Vantaa and Espoo.

During spring 2003 a preschool club was established by the Polish Association for young children to learn Polish language and culture. During the years the club has expanded its activities and the name of the club is nowadays Polish Children (Dzieci Polskie w Helsinkach). The club organises interesting events where the children as well as Polish families participate. Since April 2009 the meeting places of the club have been the Espoo library in the Entresse Shopping Centre at Siltakatu 11. More information about the events of the club can be found on the homepage of the Association under "Dzieci w Helesinkach" (Children in Helsinki).

The Polish children organise our traditional Christmas parties, where the anticipated Santa Claus pays a visit with presents. As many as 80 children greet Santa Claus. The children also participate in the excursions and traditional picnics.

In 1980's the Polish community started organising sporty picnics to Pirttimäki, which soon became popular. For example children's sport competitions as well as football games against the Polish Embassy team have been organised, finishing with sauna bathing. Different sport circles have also started among the Association members. The most active one is the tennis section, which annually

competes over the Polonia or Finnish-Polish championship. For several years a football team called Polonia-LOT Helsinki was active and won the gold medal in the Finnish Amateur Championships.

Representatives of the Association have participated several times in world summer and winter championships for Poles abroad organised by "Wspólnota Polska". Medals have also been received in the Polonia world championships in tennis, organised in Sopot.

The Association's own quarterly "KONTAKT" was established in 1980. During 1999-2007 it was called "Nasz Biuletyn", but the name was changed back to "KONTAKT" in 2008. Special editions were published on the occasion of the 75th and 80th anniversaries of the organisation.

Since 1999 the Association has maintained a homepage (www.polonia-finlandia.fi), where all the activities are presented. Information about other Polish organisations abroad can be found through the website as well as about the Polonia events "WSPÓLNOTA POLSKA" organises in Poland.

In 2004 the Association published a book in Polish and Finnish about Poles and Polonia in Finland: "POLACY i POLONIA w FINLANDII – PUOLALAISET JA POLONIA SUOMESSA". It is the only publication in Polish history that presents widely the history of THE HELSINKI POLISH ASSOCIATION. It is possible to buy the book by ordering it by e-mail from zpolskie@polonia-finlandia.fi.

Since autumn 2002 Turku has had its own Polish Association, which unites the Poles living in that area.

It is impossible to list all the names here, to whom we are grateful for establishing the Association, preserving it and continuing its activities. It is, however, worth to mention the families who were especially active: Wnuk, Kosiorek and Bigos – whose family members have through generations been the supporting forces in cultural events and been active in the board of the Association.

In 2007 the Helsinki Polish Association celebrated its 90th anniversary. Our Association is one of the oldest European associations for Poles abroad, and probably the oldest foreigner's association in Finland.

We are in touch with "Wspólnota Polska" in Warsaw and the Polish state authorities, which are the contact points for all the world organisations for Poles abroad. Since 1998 the Association is a member of the Union of Polish Communities in Europe (EUWP) www.euwp.org and the Council of World Polonia (RPS) www.polonia.org.

We meet on the third Sunday of each month at 17:00 in the parish hall of St. Henry's Cathedral on Puistokatu 1, Helsinki. We warmly welcome you to our meetings and our homepage.