A HUNDRED YEARS OF FRIENDSHIP

In the coming months, U.S. Mission to Poland will be commemorating the centennials of Poland regaining independence (2018) and the establishment of U.S.-Polish diplomatic relations (2019). This special issue of Zoom in on America features two people whose contribution to the emergence of the independent state of Poland after WWI was especially significant: President Woodrow Wilson and Ignacy Jan Paderewski.
President Woodrow Wilson Helps Shape Europe After WWI

President Woodrow Wilson, the 28th President of the United States from 1913 to 1921, in early 1918 issued a document that helped shape postwar Europe. The Fourteen Points, as this document came to be known, listed his principles for an end to WWI (see p. 4). In 1919, following an armistice, the president traveled to Paris, promoting the formation of a League of Nations and concluding the Treaty of Versailles. The 13th point proposed erecting an independent Polish State.
When he was born in 1860 in the village of Kuryłowka in Podolia, nobody could have foreseen that this boy would become one of the most renowned pianists in the world or that he would play a vital part in bringing his native country – Poland – independence after 150 years of political non-existence, when she had been swept from the maps of Europe by Germany, Russia, and Austria.

Ever since he was three, little Ignacy was attracted to the piano. Orphaned by his mother in infancy, his and his sister’s upbringing became a sole responsibility of their father. Jan Paderewski, himself an artist (a painter and a sculptor,) understood that Ignacy had a talent for music and arranged for various teachers to instruct him. Unfortunately, none of them specialized in piano.

The carefree and happy years of his childhood were disturbed by the 1863 uprising for Poland’s independence, when his father was taken to prison. The arrest, preceded by encircling and sear of the house, left a strong impression on the boy. Little as he was, he demanded information on what was happening to his father. Instead of an answer, he was given several heavy strokes with the knout. “This first contact with the Russian authorities affected me very deeply - it will always affect me. First of all it was very painful, it cut my flesh, but I also considered it a supreme insult - in the pride of boyhood, not quite four years old! It wounded my spirit.” After a year in prison, Ignacy’s father was released thanks to the successful pleas of the Russian Administration, thus saving hundreds of thousands of people from starvation.

Nevertheless, the family had to move soon because the owners of the land had left. This next home was the little town of Sudylkow. This stage of their life was quite agitating for young Paderewski as the house to which they moved overlooked a big Jewish cemetery. He witnessed children from starvation.

A wish to learn to play the piano was very strong with Paderewski even at an early age. Yet, he seemed unlucky in getting a teacher who could teach him piano technique. In his Memoirs he often comes back to this issue. “I preferred always to improvise rather than practice. I did not know how to practice.”

As a result, even when he started his formal music education at the Warsaw Conservatory at the age of twelve, no one considered him for a career of a pianist. He did extremely well in composition, harmony and counterpoint, learned various instruments such as flute and trombone, but he still was not lucky enough to find a good piano teacher. One of them told him: “Now, I’ll give you some good advice - do not try to play the piano, because you will never be a pianist. Never.”

But his desire persisted. He spent hours playing, improvising, as well as composing. He prepared a certain repertoire and with two companions set out on a tour of the Provincial towns in the north of Poland and Russia.

Paderewski returned to the Conservatory, got a diploma, and then went on to Berlin to study composition under Friedrich Kiel. There he met the top musicians of the time including Anton Rubinstein, who predicted for him a brilliant future. In Zakopane he met Helena Modjeska, a Polish actress who found fame and recognition in America. It was she who encouraged him to pursue his dream - a career as a pianist. Paderewski went to Vienna to study with Theodor Leschetizky, the man who ultimately launched Paderewski onto the world’s concert stages.

Paderewski had always been interested in politics. Touring America - from 1891 to 1941 he had 20 concert tours of the United States, performed in more than 200 American cities, travelled more than 360,000 miles (about 600,000 km) and visited all 48 continental states - he became an unofficial ambassador of Poland in the United States who used each opportunity to raise American awareness of the “Polish question.” He went by the name of “The World’s Most Famous Pole.”

Paderewski’s relationships with U.S. presidents turned out to be vital for Poland. It all started in 1895 when a young Stanford student, Herbert Hoover, invited him to play in San Jose, California. The bad timing of the concert – during Holy Week – resulted in unsold tickets and a considerable financial loss. Even the artist’s honorarium could not be covered in full. When Paderewski learned about this, he not only waived his salary, but paid the fee for renting the hall. His kindness was repaid by President Herbert Hoover over 20 years later, when he provided humanitarian relief to war-ravaged Poland via the American Relief Administration, thus saving hundreds of thousands of people from starvation.

In 1915, during WWI, the political shape of Europe was transformed and Paderewski used all his influence and skills to put forward in the international arena the case for independent Poland. His treatise outlining the terms of the proposed establishment of the Polish State that he prepared for President Woodrow Wilson paved the road to his country’s freedom. When the Versailles Treaty was signed after WWI and Poland was put back on the map of the world, Paderewski’s biggest dream came true. He had a huge hand in it.
President Wilson’s Fourteen Points

The Fourteen Points was a statement of principles for peace that was to be used for peace negotiations in order to end World War I. The principles were outlined in President Wilson’s January 8, 1918 speech on war aims and peace terms to the United States Congress. Woodrow Wilson deemed them the only possible basis for an enduring peace.

I. Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind, but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.

II. Absolute freedom of navigation upon the seas, outside territorial waters, alike in peace and in war, except as the seas may be closed in whole or in part by international action for the enforcement of international covenants.

III. The removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance.

IV. Adequate guarantees given and taken that national armaments will be reduced to the lowest point consistent with domestic safety.

V. A free, open-minded, and absolutely impartial adjustment of all colonial claims, based upon a strict observance of the principle that in determining all such questions of sovereignty the interests of the populations concerned must have equal weight with the equitable claims of the Government whose title is to be determined.

VI. The evacuation of all Russian territory and settlement of all questions affecting Russia as will secure the best and freest co-operation of the other nations of the world in obtaining for her an unhampered and unembarrassed opportunity for the independent determination of her own political development and national policy and assure her of a sincere welcome into the society of free nations under institutions of her own choosing; and, more than a welcome, assistance also of every kind that she need and may herself desire. The treatment accorded Russia by her sister nations in the months to come will be the acid test of their good-will, of their comprehension of her needs as distinguished from their own interests, and of their intelligent and unselfish sympathy.

VII. Belgium, the whole world will agree, must be evacuated and restored, without any attempt to limit the sovereignty which she enjoys in common with all other free nations. No other single act will serve as this will serve to restore confidence among the nations in the laws which they have themselves set and determined for the government of their relations with one another. Without this healing act the whole structure and validity of international law is forever impaired.

VIII. All French territory should be freed and the invaded portions restored, and the wrong done to France by Prussia in 1871 in the matter of Alsace-Lorraine, which has unsettled the peace of the world for nearly fifty years, should be righted in order that peace may once more be made secure in the interest of all.

IX. A readjustment of the frontiers of Italy should be effected along clearly recognizable lines of nationality.

X. The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity of autonomous development.

XI. Rumania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated, occupied territories restored, Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea, and the relations of the several Balkan States to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality, and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan States should be entered into.

XII. The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and an absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development, and the Dardanelles should be permanently opened as a free passage to the ships and commerce of all nations under international guarantees.

XIII. An independent Polish state should be erected which should include the territories inhabited by indisputably Polish populations, which should be assured a free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and economic independence and territorial integrity should be guaranteed by international covenant.

XIV. A general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording mutual guarantees of political independence and territorial integrity to great and small States alike.

Source: Library of Congress

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The separate sheets were collected and hand bound into volumes arranged as follows: signatures of national, municipal, societal, and religious officials (volume 1); regional officials (volume 2); the faculty and students at the major institutions of higher learning (volume 3); faculty and students at the Academy of Mining in Krakow (volume 4); the professors and assistants of the State Dental Institute in Warsaw (volume 5); members of all the Polish organizations in Austria (volume 6); teachers and pupils of secondary schools (volumes 7-13); and teachers and pupils of elementary schools (volumes 14-109). Also included is a separate portfolio of loose sheets received after the binding process was completed. The collection is accompanied by a Guide to the Address Presented by the Polish Nation to the United States of America 1776-1926. The guide was written by Konstanty Hejmowski, vice-president of the American-Polish Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Poland.

The 111 volumes of signatures and greetings comprising The Polish Declarations of Admiration and Friendship for the United States were presented in 1926 to President Calvin Coolidge to commemorate the 150th anniversary of U.S. independence and to acknowledge American participation and aid to Poland during World War I.

The project started in February 1926 and lasted eight months. Many signatures were collected at events celebrating the anniversary of American independence on July 4, 1926. Among the signatories were the President of the Republic, national and regional officials, religious authorities, members of social organizations, and faculty and students of the major universities, as well as millions of Polish schoolchildren.

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Among the many original and unique illustrations are works by leading Polish painters and graphic artists of the time, such as Stanisław Czajkowski, Władysław Jarocki, Zygmunt Kamiński, Ferdynand Ruszczyc, Władysław Skoczylas, Ludomir Sleńdziński, Zofia Stryjeńska, Jan Wroniecki, and Leon Wyczółkowski.

At President Coolidge’s behest, this unique gift was transferred to the Library of Congress.

Some seventy years after their last public exhibition, the Library of Congress decided to put part of the collection on display to mark the opening of the new reading room of the European Division.

In December 2015, the Polish Library in Washington partnered with the Library of Congress to digitize Volumes 14 to 111.


(Above): Pages from the Polish Declarations of Admiration and Friendship for the United States. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Polish Declarations of Admiration and Friendship for the United States
Exercise 1 Reading

Are these President Wilson’s or Ignacy Paderewski’s Quotes?

The world must be made safe for democracy. Its peace must be planted upon the tested foundations of political liberty.

I cannot imagine a genuinely happy home without music in it.

The culture of any country is gauged first by its progress in art.

Friendship is the only cement that will ever hold the world together.

I owe my success in one per cent to my talent, in ten per cent to luck, and in ninety per cent to hard work. Work, work, and more work is the secret to success.

I not only use all the brains that I have, but all that I can borrow.

If you want to make enemies, try to change something.

You are a dear soul who plays polo, and I am a poor Pole who plays solo.

The history of liberty is a history of resistance.

The genius is the man who has genuine and deep human relations with others, who does not cut himself off in the search for originality, but who realizes the value of artistic tradition.

The man who is swimming against the stream knows the strength of it.

It is like writing history with lightning and my only regret is that it is all so terribly true.

Exercise 2 Speaking

Work in pairs.

Read the quotations above and choose the one that you like the most.

Compare and discuss the meaning of your chosen quotation with the other student.

Useful links:

Library of Congress: An overview of the Collection:
https://www.loc.gov/collections/polish-declarations/about-this-collection/

You can search this site to check if your ancestors signed the Declaration:
http://deklaracja.genealodzy.pl/

Catalogue of the exhibit “Emblem of Good Will” (1977):
https://www.loc.gov/rr/european/egw/polishex.html