

## **The history of the Polish Americans**

There are 9.5 million Polish Americans, according to the 2010 census data, which makes them the eighth largest American ethnic group and the most numerous and the richest part of the Polish diaspora. It has been idealized and demonized, over- and undervalued, ignored and overburdened with duties by historians, and even more often by politicians and journalists. At the same time, common knowledge in Poland about American *Polonia* is rather superficial although one can hardly find a Polish family that has no relatives across the Ocean. Press usually focuses on sensational news and stories about dramatic experiences of individual immigrants. On the other hand, it supports the stereotypic image of a “rich uncle” from America, who gives donations for various (not always particularly sophisticated) Polish endeavors. School textbooks mention the Polish Americans only very superficially and usually present them as Americanized Poles. The Polish Americans are marginalized and their image is distorted even in some scholarly publications.

The only real academic synthesis of the Polish American history in the Polish language is the one by Andrzej Brożek, published in 1977, but Brożek closed his story in 1939, as he could not present World War II and its aftermath in an objective manner due to the political circumstances of the People’s Republic of Poland. Thus, the last eighty years of the Polish American history have been neglected in the Polish historiography. At the same time, research on the earlier times has made significant progress since 1977. It is not only a matter of some detailed factual findings or of re-interpreting certain phenomena due to the abolishment of the limitation of the censorship office. The interests of historiography expanded into new areas, such as social history, history of everyday life, microhistory or comparative studies. So far underappreciated, they help construct a new image of *Polonia*, different from what can be seen from the perspective of the organizational life and political activities.

Our goal is to present the multifaceted image of the Polish American past against a broad historical, social and political background of both nations. We are not going to avoid traditional issues of the Polish American organizations, assimilation, political activities, leaders or disputes over the Polish American achievements and failures. However, we also want to include the issues of living and working conditions, the Polish American everyday life and festivities, typical and specific features of *Polonia*. Such a perspective should give appropriate proportions to the image of the Polish community in the United States.

The selection of primary sources should not merely illustrate or confirm the findings of the synthesis that it will accompany. So far neither in Poland nor in the United States has this sort of publication appeared that would document the life and achievements of *Polonia*. We would like to let the Poles in America and Polish Americans speak with their own voice to a broad audience, including pupils and student whom we see as the potential readers of our publication. We would like to provide them with material for their own reflections and conclusions with the hope that in the long run it would enliven scholarly research on the Polish ethnic group.

Both publications will appear in Polish and in English.