



Visitor Experience #54

Grand Opening October 23/24



Come and celebrate our legacy!

The Dream!

There is an old phrase that the longest part of any journey begins with a single step. For the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria, that first step began in 2008 when Bishop John Yanta first conceived of how to remember our immigrant ancestors. Prompted by Providence, Bishop continued this discernment. He began to ask certain professionals how to go about bringing this discernment to fruition. By chance, he called on an acquaintance, a designer named Steve Harding, who had impressed him with work done in Sarita, Texas, for the Kenedy Memorial Foundation.

Bishop Yanta provided Steve Harding the *Blue Book*, which was a compilation of Bishop's Polishness. The book was an aid to Steve in his task of bringing Bishop's vision to life. Once absorbed, Steve designed the concept that ultimately was given to Morkovsky AIA to draw the plans that would become a reality.

In April of 2016, with the clearing and ground breaking for the construction, the project began. The task of constructing the building itself went to MJ Boyle Construction. Day by day, the construction progressed. The ground was prepared, forms laid out, the floor was poured, walls went up, and the trusses for the roof went up one by one. The structure of the Heritage Center would eventually be "dried in" with the roofing laid in place. The exterior of the walls had the water barrier installed, the cast stones put in place, and the doors and windows installed. From the outside, the Center looked "finished." But nothing could be further from the truth. In many ways, the hardest work lay just ahead.

In 2018, Keller-Martin was contracted to finish the "inside" of the Center. Technology is funny. It has the strange problem of advancing. If you plan something today, it could be outdated tomorrow. Between the time when the initial plans were drawn, a number of the systems that were part of the Heritage Center had advanced. Updates and revisions then needed to be inserted into the plans.

As the Heritage Center began to near its completion, the next challenge was one that we all are still struggling with – COVID. As this completion was approaching, a large number of scenarios were studied and explored. Many different plans and dates were considered, all depending on what safety procedures were needed and could be reasonably developed for the occasion. With all of these concerns in mind, the plans for the opening could finally be made.

Through this entire process, not enough thanks can be said for the many of you who have supported and contributed to the ongoing work of making this possible! From the beginnings, to now, and into tomorrow, this is your Center. This Center will remain here as a testament to our immigrant ancestors who suffered and sacrificed. They offered their blood, sweat, and tears, so their children and their children's children could know a better life.

To our ancestors and to you, we say

Thanks Be to God and Thank You!

John S. Wojtasczyk

*Come celebrate the Grand Opening of the
Polish Heritage Center,
October 23 & 24, 11:00 am till 3:00 pm!*

Because of the changing nature of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the great concern for Public Health and Safety, guidelines and protocols for crowds and gatherings will be posted on our Facebook page and website. Measures will be taken and provided for the safe visit of all during this joyful celebration. As the time approaches, please see our various media posts for the most current protocols and guidelines. Your safety is very important to us now and in the future.

Staff of the Polish Heritage Center

The Long Travelled Journey of the Polish



Ground breaking, April 2016
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

On October 11, 2015, Bishop Yanta blessed the water well that had been provided and donated by the Thomas Moy and Sons Water Well Drilling Inc. At this point, no date had been set for the ground breaking. The water well provided by Thomas Moy and Sons was a very significant contribution in its own right.

Finally, in April of 2016, Bishop Yanta and the Board of

Directors of the Polish Heritage Center decided that it was time to commit and move forward. With the ground breaking, there was no looking back, only a dedication to completion!

When simply viewed from the *outside*, it is easy to miss all of intricacies and details of what is behind and inside the walls of the building of what would eventually become our Polish Heritage Center. To appreciate all that the Polish Heritage Center represents, on the following pages are glimpses through the construction project and the readying that was involved in opening this world-class Center. Sometimes it is hard to recall that two homes used to stand in the shadow of our Center. The photograph above reminds us that there was a



Construction progress, November 2016
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

Heritage Center, And Now It Is Ready!



Construction progress, August 2017
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

beginning. The photograph on the preceding page, lower right, shows us the framework of the Center and the massive requirement that was part of building a structure, like our immigrant ancestors' faith, which would stand the onslaught of time.

The photograph to the left begins to reveal the now familiar structure in its rough detail. The arches over the medallions, the entrance into the lobby, and its stately pose of the Center are the

foundations that will become an everlasting tribute to the legacy of our immigrant ancestors.

The photograph below is the silhouette that will be as recognizable as the neighboring Alamo of San Antonio, Texas. Our Polish Heritage Center will be known by sight alone. This building will house and make available, over the years, a vast inventory about those who left the Old Country. The goal will be to provide professionally prepared genealogies including church and civil primary records. Another ambitious endeavor will be to index all the scanned family photographs provided by descendants. Through the years, patrons may be able to

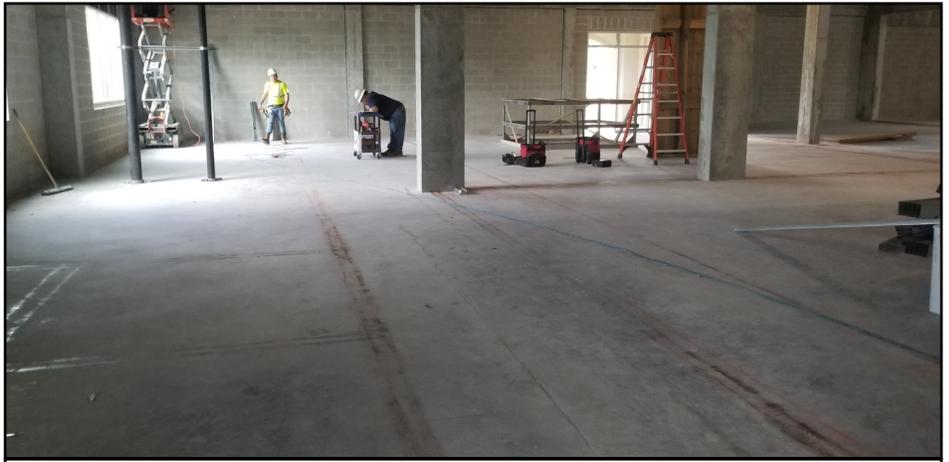
add to this valuable collection of images and records.



Construction progress, March 2018

Photograph Courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

The growing collection of our families' history will be centered here in the Genealogical and Research Library. The photograph to the right shows this space early on as an open and empty shell. The photograph below begins to show the scope of the room. This



Interior work in the area of the Library, September 7, 2018
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

area will be the location of three computer stations where patrons will be able to research. In the future, guidelines will be established for the submission of



Interior work in the area of the Library, September 29, 2018
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

additional family lineages to the developing genealogical database. The photograph below is the room in its final stage, minus the three

computer stations. Here you will be able to research a wide collection of books relating to not only our immigration history but also the vast range of Polish history, both in English and in Polish. This is going to be a much sought after destination for many!



Interior work in the area of the Library, July 2019
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

It takes a visionary to see what is not yet there. In this photograph to right is the main exhibit area with nothing else up but the walls. As work continued, electrical conduit was run, sheetrock was installed, and the oak floors laid. In the photo-



Construction within the Main Exhibit Area, April 2019
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

graph below, the oak flooring shows its rich grain through the stain. This flooring is designed to complement the many natural woods that were used in the early



Construction within the Main Exhibit Area, June 2020.
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

days. The metal posts, seen to the left, serve as a brace for the exhibit walls

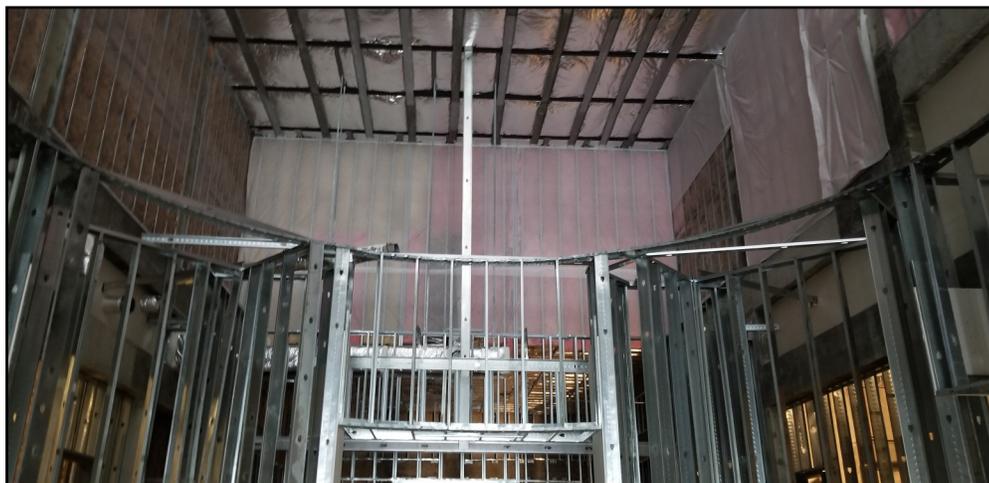
so that the many beautiful stations tell the story of

Poland and the region of Upper Silesia. As an example, in the photograph below, is a special type of type of display. There are two different perspectives, depending on your position. Standing to the right of center gives one view, while standing to the left yields another. In this, you have two experiences from a single display. This is called an accordion display.



Construction within the Main Exhibit Area, March 2021, *Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk*

There is an old saying that the *devil is in the details!* And your Heritage Center has its share. Here in the photograph to the right is the initial framing for what would become the amazing Rotunda! Believe me, I have a much better



Construction of the dome for the Rotunda, March 2019
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtaszyk

photograph of the construction, but it is so cluttered with details, that even I, looking back at it, become dazed and confused. But order came out of chaos. The proof is in the photograph to the lower left. Watching the dome be constructed was



no less than a work of art! Any general contractor can build and erect a straight wall. But to build a surface that is both curved and round at the same time takes one who knows his or her craft. Even the painting presented its own challenges. When all was said and done, the dome of the Rotunda is every bit a masterpiece as the rest of the Polish Heritage Center. Within the blue sky are painted gold stars. And even some of the stars seem to *twinkle* because they are actually embedded Swarovski Crystals. In the band that encircles the dome, written in English, Polish, and Spanish, is the Great Command by Jesus Christ to His disciples:

Go and make disciples of all nations.

Idźcie i nauczajcie wszystkie narody.

Vayan y hagan discipulos de todas las naciones.

Completion of the dome in the Rotunda, January 2020
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtaszyk

Even though this was a late addition, in the middle of the lobby floor is a nine-foot diameter, terrazzo, tri-seal medallion featuring the seals of the United States of America, the Republic of Poland, and the State of Texas. The photograph to the right



Creation of the Tri-Seal Medallion in the Lobby floor, November 2020
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk

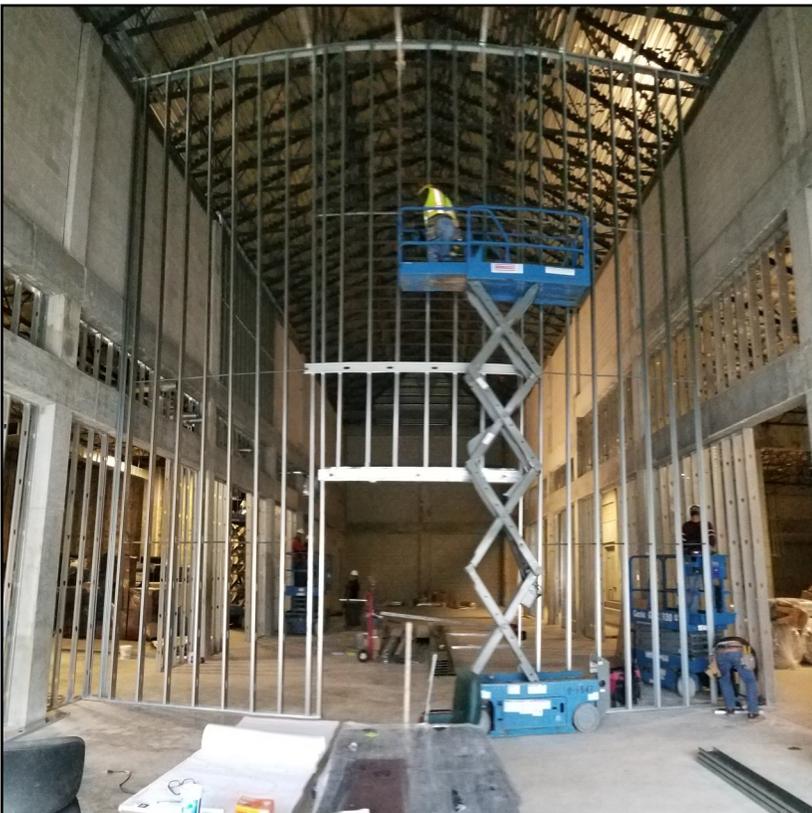
shows the slow and painstaking detail that was involved in producing this hallmark of the Polish Heritage Center. Wishing to contribute to the Polish Heritage Center, the people of the Republic of Poland funded the tri-seal medallion with a gracious and memorable grant. This tri-seal honors our ancestors who left their Upper Silesian homeland in the mid-to-late 1800s. Although they lived within the Kingdom of Prussia and later the German Empire, they were always Polish in their hearts and souls. They left all that they knew for a distant land called

Finished work on the Tri-Seal Medallion on the Lobby floor, December 2020
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk



America. And once here, they established new roots at the conjunction of the San Antonio River and Cibolo creek here in Texas. Under the largest oak that they could find, they gathered and gave thanks to God invoking His help and blessing upon their new endeavor. This oak leaf and acorn design is seen in the tri-seal. The shaft of wheat reminds us that they were people of the land. And the dove reflects the peaceful nature these people were known for within the local communities.

The rest of the lobby that greets you is shown here. The photograph to the right shows the construction of the back wall that you first see when you enter. The height is meant to instill the great achievements of the ancestors that are remembered here. The photograph below presents to the newly arrived visitor what is in store. A large curved image presents an image that is a synopsis of what you will encounter here. Halfway up the wall, a band of painted names represents ancestral villages in Upper Silesia and Texas towns which were researched by the Silesian Profiles Committee. Various monitors on either side of



Construction of the Lobby and overhead curved Mural wall, January 2019. *Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk*

the lobby begin the presentation and prepare you for your experience. Lastly, we give thanks to all our donors. Just past the glass panels is a list of many of our founding donors. While on the glass panels themselves is a list of the major founding donors. *To all we say, **Dziękuję Bardzo!***

A panoramic view of the Lobby & overhead curved Mural wall, December 2020
Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk



Heartfelt thanks to our supporters from July 22 to August 21!

Ronnie & Laura Bitterly, San Antonio, Texas
George Bobinski, Vestal, New York
John & Shirley Bordovsky, San Antonio, Texas
Marvin & Janet M. Boroski, San Antonio, Texas
Barbara Kiolbassa Britton, San Antonio, Texas
John & Amanda Cebrowski, San Antonio, Texas
Jesse & Susie Estrada, San Antonio, Texas
Falls City National Bank, Falls City, Texas
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San Antonio, Texas
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John & Mary Pollok Yanta Memorial Trust,
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Theresa Kotara, Falls City, Texas
George & Betty Hooks Kowalik, Panna Maria, Texas
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Susan Moczygamba McKinsey,
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Robert Moczygamba, Hobson, Texas
Carlos & Guadalupe Malacara Ontiveros,
San Antonio, Texas
John & Patricia Picacio, San Antonio, Texas
Polish American Council of Texas,
La Vernia, Texas
Raymond James Charitable Endowment Fund,
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Donald & Catherine Varella, San Antonio, Texas
John & Christie Schroeder Wojtasczyk,
Karnes City, Texas
Addison Yanta, Port Neches, Texas
Conrad & Terri Yanta, Port Neches, Texas
Bishop John W. Yanta, San Antonio, Texas

Calendar of Events

Many of our communities are still examining moving forward with their celebrations;
many of the listed events ARE PLANNED BUT NOT FINALIZED!

September 19: Slavic Festival, Houston, Texas
September 24-25: Bremond Festival,
Bremond, Texas
October: Polish Heritage Month
**October 2: Bishop John W. Yanta's 90th
Birthday Celebration, St. Paul's
Community Center, St. Paul's Parish,
San Antonio, Texas**
October 1-3: Dożynki & Polish Festival, Our
Lady of Czestochowa, Houston, Texas
October 9: 71st Anniversary Celebration of
Immaculate Conception Parish,
McCook, Texas

**October 10: Turkey Dinner & Homecoming,
Panna Maria, Texas**
October 10: Homecoming Bazaar,
St. Stanislaus, Anderson, Texas
October 17: Annual Parish Festival,
Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary,
Cestohowa, Texas
October 21: PHC Virtual Event
**October 23-24: Grand Opening of the
Polish Heritage Center in Panna Maria,
Texas**
**November 13: PACT ANNUAL MEETING,
St. Joseph Church, New Waverly, Texas**

Niech Będzie Pochwalony Jezus Chrystus!

The time is finally here—the grand opening weekend of October 23 & 24. After five years of construction itself and the years of preparation that came before, the memorial to our immigrant ancestors is now ready to tell the story of those who came before us. This Polish Heritage Center is a touchstone that will help keep us rooted in not only who we are but will also remind us of the legacy that has been entrusted to us. The Center is designed to uplift the human spirit and to teach us the lessons of the past. A sacred goal is to instill the values that made our ancestors a standout community and highly respected for their moral integrity and work ethic. Let us never lose those qualities that exemplify the heart of the Christian life so that we become the light for all to see. And for all who have supported the Polish Heritage Center through these years, thank you! This Center is possible only because of you.



Bishop John W Yanta posing next to the statue of his cousin, **Fr. Leopold Moczygemba**.

Fr. Leopold is **Bishop's** second cousin, four generations removed.

Statue by:
Kodiak Studios,
Inc., Brooklyn, NY

God bless you and yours, Bishop John W. Yanta

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John W. Yanta".