



# Chairman's Column

By: Aloys Notzon, PHC Chairman and President

This July we celebrate our wonderful country and its freedoms, which were an inspiration and impetus to our immigrant ancestors. As always, we are supremely grateful to our donors who continue to support Bishop Yanta's vision. Let us always honor the mission of the Polish Heritage Center, which is to retain for posterity, and keep vibrant and relevant, the history, values, beliefs, customs and traditions of the Polish settlers and their descendants at this first and oldest permanent Polish settlement in America and to inspire, engage and educate our visitors.

We have wonderful news to share with you. The National Terrazzo and Mosaic Association (NTMA) presented Venice Art Terrazzo of San Antonio with its 2023 Honor Award for the terrazzo installation of the Medallion in the lobby of the Polish Heritage Center. Here's the story behind the PHC's Medallion.

As Bishop Yanta and the Board were discussing the need for a logo in the lobby, Center designer Steve Harding offered to design the logo and provide it as his contribution to the Polish Heritage Center. His spectacular original medallion design recognized Bishop Yanta's vision of the three influences of Faith, Family and Community as well as the influences symbolized by the seals of Poland, the United States, and the State of Texas.

The PHC Foundation applied for a grant in an international competition for funds provided by the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Poland, and the logo was part of our application. The Polish Heritage Center was awarded the grant, and Venice Art Terrazzo Company was selected to produce the medallion.



The wire frame was made in New York City by a specialty company selected by Venice Art Terrazzo. The frame was made with two different kinds of wire, standard zinc (silver color) and bronze wire for wheat stems for a gold color.

Venice craftsmen then ground down a 9-foot diameter circle and continued grinding and measuring until it was perfectly level. They then placed the frame into the circle. The following laborious process included filling nonadjacent openings in the frame with colored terrazzo which they then allowed to dry, 20 different colors in all.

Craftsmen were on their knees for hours at a time and would begin with other colors after the first colors had dried. This went on for over a week, and the finished product at first looked like an out of focus picture. Venice then ground down and polished the dried terrazzo over and over again until finally, the finished medallion was revealed.

Our thanks go to Bishop Yanta, Steve Harding, Lawrence and Matthew DiFilippo of Venice Terrazzo Company, the Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Poland, our other donors and our Board and staff. This award honors their shared effort.



FAITH

FAMILY

COMMUNITY

# Remembering Tadeusz Kościuszko on the Occasion of America's 247<sup>th</sup> Birthday July 4<sup>th</sup>

By: John Cebrowski, Board Member



Tadeusz (Thaddeus) Kościuszko, hearing of America's uprising against Great Britain and its need for military engineers, and armed with a fervent belief in democracy, departed for America in June of 1776.

Two months later he walked into Ben Franklin's Philadelphia shop. Kościuszko, a 30-year-old Pole just off the boat from Europe, via Martinique, introduced himself and offered to enlist as an officer in the new American nation's army. A curious Franklin quizzed Kościuszko about his education, experience and values, and was impressed with his revolutionary spirit and genius for engineering. That August 30, armed with Franklin's recommendation, Kościuszko walked into Independence Hall and introduced himself to the Continental Congress.

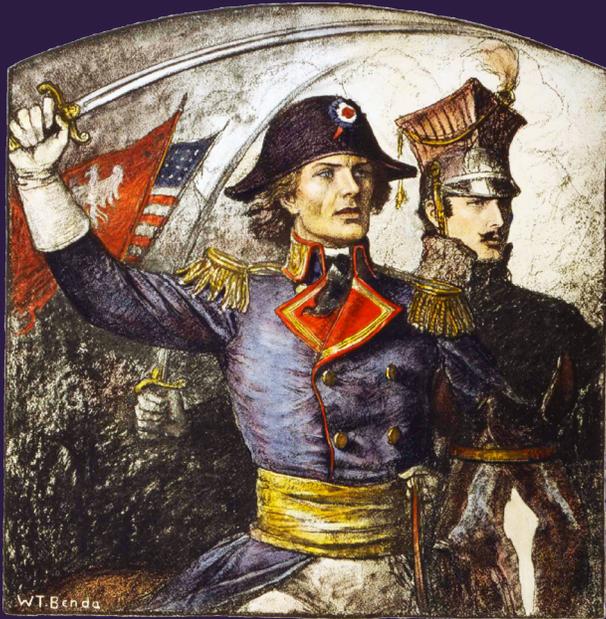
In October John Hancock appointed him an engineer and colonel in the Continental Army, and Franklin hired him to design and build forts on the Delaware River to help defend Philadelphia from the British navy. General Horatio Gates, commander of the Continental Army's northern division, sent him north to New York to evaluate Fort Ticonderoga's defenses. Kościuszko and others advised that a nearby hill needed to be fortified with cannons. Superiors ignored his advice, believing it impossible to move cannons up the steep slope. The British, under the command of General John Burgoyne, would prove them wrong, sending six cannons up that slope, firing into the fort and forcing the Americans to evacuate. A floating log bridge across the Hudson River, designed by Kościuszko, helped them retreat south.

Kościuszko's greatest contribution to the American Revolution came later in the Battle of Saratoga, when the defenses he designed along the Hudson were the most significant factor in the Continental Army's victory. The British troops couldn't penetrate Kościuszko's defenses. On October 17, 1777, Burgoyne, and what was left of his army, officially surrendered to Gates. This was the first British Army in world history to surrender, marking the major turning point in the Revolutionary War. France might never have entered the war to support a shaky American cause. Gates and Benedict Arnold got most of the credit for the victory, which Gates deflected to Kościuszko. "The great tacticians of the campaign were hills and forests," Gates wrote to Dr. Benjamin Rush of Philadelphia, "which a young Polish Engineer was skilful enough to select for my encampment."

Since General George Washington considered West Point on the Hudson to be the most important strategic location in America, in 1778 he selected Kościuszko to plan its fortifications. From 1778 to 1780, during the height of the Revolutionary War, he designed and oversaw the construction of forts, gun batteries, redoubts and the placement of a 65-ton iron chain across the Hudson River to block British invasions. Fortress West Point was never captured.

# Kościuszko Squadron 303

By: John Cebrowski, Board Member



## Tadeusz Kościuszko armed with a fervent belief in democracy, departed for America in June of 1776.

Kościuszko then sought transfer to the Carolinas, where serving as chief engineer under General Nathaniel Green, his duties included siting camps, overseeing fortification construction, and directing a ring of Afro-American spies. There he twice rescued American forces from British advances by directing the crossing of two rivers.

After the war, Washington honored Kościuszko with gifts of two pistols and a sword. In 1783, in recognition of his services, the Continental Congress promoted him to brigadier general.

Today, Kosciuszko is remembered with statues in Washington, Boston, Detroit and other cities, but the most famous is at West Point.



Anthony Bajdek, Associate Dean Emeritus, Northeastern University, contributed to this article. See an expanded version on the PHC website at [www.polishheritagecenter.org](http://www.polishheritagecenter.org) and visit the Kościuszko exhibit at the PHC. Artwork courtesy of the PHC exhibit.



Royal Air Force Squadron No. 303, also known as the “Tadeusz Kościuszko” Fighter Squadron, was one of two Polish squadrons that fought during the Battle of Britain (July-October 1940) and one of 16 Polish squadrons in the RAF during World War II. Manned by experienced veterans and initially flying Hurricane Mark I fighters, 303 claimed the largest number of Luftwaffe aircraft shot down, 126 in six weeks, even though it joined the fray two months after that battle had begun.

How did they do it? The Poles were experienced combat pilots having flown against the Germans in Poland in 1939 and again in France in 1940. They placed more emphasis on loose formations, eyesight, vigilance, and initiative rather than instruments and radar, and their surprise attacks came from above, breaking up German formations, and closing to 100 yards or less before firing, allowing them more accuracy. The Brits were taught to fire at a range of not less than 150 yards and preferably 150 to 300 yards. A New York Times correspondent reported, “Poles are pure courage!”



They also had a secret weapon in Polish ground crews, both men and women, who worked tirelessly, often all night, to repair damaged aircraft. Fame brought visits of notables including King George VI and Queen Elizabeth. During the royal visit, 303 scrambled to meet a raid of more than 80 Germans over Portsmouth. Before leaving, the king asked to be apprised of the results of the action, and 303 was proud to report later that day: “Eleven enemy aircraft shot down, one probable, our losses nil.”

In a marksmanship contest in April of '42, 22 Royal Air Force squadrons competed for a trophy and bragging rights as the best shots in the RAF. Three Polish squadrons participated. The order of finish had 303 “Kościuszko” Squadron on top, followed by the other two Polish squadrons. The best fighter squadron of World War II, with 206 air victories to its credit, the Kościuszko Squadron was officially disbanded on December 11, 1946.

James Pula, Prof. Emeritus, Purdue University, contributed to this article. Visit our website to read the entire article.



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**News from the Heritage Communities**

# Renovation in Falls City

Submitted by: Roger Moczygmba

Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Falls City, which was built in 1950, is undergoing a major makeover which will take about four months to complete. The whole church interior is being repainted, a new acoustical tile ceiling and insulation is being installed, along with additional recessed LED lighting and a new AC system. Wells Construction of Pleasanton is the contractor for the project. In addition, church parishioner Ray Pilarczyk, who specializes in this type of work, is painting all of the church statues. During the renovation, Mass is being celebrated in the CCD Building. Once new church pews are delivered in December, the project will be complete, and parishioners will enjoy their beautiful, updated church. You'll be able to see the almost completed project during the annual Falls City picnic on Sunday, Sept. 3, which is Labor Day weekend.

