

## Do Poles still love America?

By **Robert Strybel**,

Our Warsaw Correspondent

WARSAW—For generations of Poles, the story of Kościuszko and Pułaski fighting for America's freedom has exemplified the Polish principle of "za wolność Waszą i naszą" (For your freedom and ours). For the past 150 years of Polish immigration to America, the United States has been a beacon of hope and promise to the vast majority of Poles. To this day Poland is widely regarded as one of the world's most Catholic and pro-American countries. But this has largely been a one-sided romance which may finally be running out of steam.

In the olden days, the Polish immigrant's lot in America was hardly ever a bed of roses. He was overworked and underpaid, sometimes ridiculed and discriminated against, but America was nevertheless loved, admired and supported by Polonians. Per capita, Polish Americans contributed more troops to US forces in both world wars than the US average. And more houses in Polish neighborhoods flew American flags on national holidays than in many other neighborhoods.

Poles were betrayed by Roosevelt, who had effectively sold their country into Soviet enslavement, but their love for America persisted nonetheless. After all, America provided refuge for thousands of Polish DPs, and didn't the US-funded Voice of America and Radio Free Europe give Poles behind the iron curtain a glimmer of hope? And the once "almighty dollar", sent by relatives in Chicago, Parma, Hamtramck, Polish Hill or Greenpoint, often was the difference between dire poverty and somehow scraping by. No wonder then that when Robert Kennedy visited Warsaw at the turn of the 1960s, people actually picked up the car in which he was riding and paraded it around the Old Town Square.

Many Americans are surprised to learn that US presidents Reagan and both Bushes are among the most admired by Poles. Together with Pope John Paul II, those heads of state are seen as helping bring about the collapse of the Soviet bloc and/or facilitating Poland's admission to NATO. By contrast Poles have shown more reserve in assessing the current White House administration.

A recent survey, conducted among nearly 20,000 respondents in 20 different countries by the World Public Opinion organization, showed that the foreign policy of Barack Obama won a 47 percent approval rating in Poland. That stands in stark contrast to Britain's 93 Germany's 89 or France's 88 percent support. In a sense, Poles were ahead of Americans whose support for Obama has now fallen to 50 percent and will probably continue to drop.

Lower support of around 40 percent was registered among Muslim countries and only 24 percent of Russians backed Obama's policies. In another survey, a US favorability study conducted by the US Department of State, 67 percent of Poles voiced their approval in 2009, down from 86 percent in 2000 when George W. Bush was in office.

"Obamamania" was far more restrained in Poland than in Western Europe, whose media are largely controlled by leftist-liberal elites. Obama's pro-abortion and pro-homosexual overtures do not set that well in this still staunchly Catholic land. On a more personal note, Obama has so far been in the vicinity on more than one occasion in the Czech Republic and Germany, but has so far not kept his promise to visit Poland in 2009.

The Obama Administration is widely seen as stalling and hedging over previously announced plans to install American missile-defense bases in Poland and the Czech Republic. It is feared the

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n a number of Shakespearean roles as well as in plays by Ibsen, Hugo, Dumas, Legouve, and Schiller. Towards the end of her life, Modjeska retired to Arden, a charming home designed for her by Stanford White in a quiet canyon in the foothills of the Santa Ana Mountains. There she wrote her memoirs and entertained some of her friends, including Ignacy Jan Paderewski and his wife in 1904. During her final years Modjeska lived in a modest cottage on Bay Island in Newport, California, where she died in 1909.

Making a documentary about such a fascinating heroine admittedly is a rather difficult subject. The sheer variety and scope of Modjeska's life's adventures is certainly enough for a full-length feature or even for an extended mini-series. The problem of not having any moving images of the actress was to some extent solved by discreet stand-ins and by voice-over narration to historical photographs and documents. Poetic license of numerous slow dissolves, seaside sunset scenes and historic train riding through the picturesque Western wilderness was at least partially justified as it could have reflected Modjeska's romantic nature. On the other hand, Ms. Myszynski's film convincingly argues that Modjeska's successful career in America opened doors to many European-born actresses in the early days of Hollywood, significantly adding to the viewer's appreciation of the Polish actress' pioneering stage and social role.

An effort of many years of research, filming and post-production, Modjeska—Woman Triumphant fortunately came out during the anniversary year, as April 2009 marked the centenary of Modjeska's death. Shown to an enthusiastic audience at the Silent Movie Theatre in Hollywood a few weeks ago, the film will be screened at the Ann Arbor Polish Film Festival and the Polish Film Festival in Chicago in November. Other showings at various venues and festivals—in North America and Europe—are planned for the near future.

*Modjeska—Woman Triumphant*, a film by Basia Myszynski. Produced by OC Influential Productions, LLC, in association with GetBizzy Entertainment Inc. Co-produced by Thaddeus Krzyzyczko and Sandra Segestrom Daniels. Cinematography by Leonard Myszynski. Original music by Mikolai Stroinski. Featuring Danuta Stenka, Svetlana Efremova, Jane Hilary, Sareen Tchekmedyan, and others. Running time: 57 minutes. □

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project may be scrapped in the name of improved US relations with Russia which fiercely opposes it. And there has been no real progress in enabling Poles to pay visa-free visits to America, although that controversy dates back to the times of Bush and Clinton.

But the US-Polish romance has cooled somewhat not only because of what the current White House resident has or failed to do. Since Poland joined the European Union in 2004, European countries, especially the British Isles, have eclipsed America as the "promised land" for job-seekers. Not only can Poles work there legally without dodging US immigration officials, but the geographic proximity to Poland makes frequent trips home a real option. Another turn-off is the weak dollar which does not buy as much back home as it once did.

All that notwithstanding, this may well be just a temporary lull in a long-standing relationship that has withstood the test of time. Despite the setbacks and inconveniences Poles have endured at America's hands, the US still gets a grade

## Washington Loves Pierogi!

By: **Jane Morse**



Washington, D.C. – Food lovers in the nations' capital flocked to the National Polish Center's pierogi tasting event.

More than 120 reservations were made to down the 1200 pierogi produced by Bogdan and Danuta Konefal. Bogdan, who runs Creative European Catering, offered four types of pierogi, including blueberry filled dessert pierogi. Danuta, who helped manage the crush of eager tasters, is a Polish language instructor at the Foreign Service Institute, which prepares U.S. diplomats for their assignments overseas. Among the many guests was Allen Greenberg, who, along with his wife, will soon be headed to Krakow to be the new American Consul.

Entertainment was provided by Zusana Osuchowska, who was visiting Washington from Poland. Just 14 years old, she sang Polish poetry in a performance that mesmerized her audience.

It was the first public event arranged by the Center's new executive director Patricia Hill, who lived in Poland a total of six years and is eager to share what she learned of Polish food and culture with the residents of the Washington D.C. metro area.

For those who love pierogi enough to learn how to make them themselves, the Center held a cooking class on August 13 conducted by the Konefals.

Pierogi enthusiasts spent the evening learning the fine points of pierogi making, tasted their efforts and took home a box filled with their creations. Sitting around the table stuffing and crimping pierogi had some of the hallmarks of a "quilting bee" – it gave everyone a chance to relax, laugh at their student efforts and get to know each other.

In Poland, pierogi began as peasant food, but became popular among all social classes. Krakow hosts an annual pierogi festival in August during which the city's best restaurants vie for the jury's and the crowd's recognition. □

of 47 percent and ranks in the top 10 of their best-loved nations.

Incidentally, the best liked are Italians (54%), Czechs (53%), Spaniards (52%), Slovaks and the English (51% each). At the bottom end of the scale are Vietnamese and Turks (28%), Romanians (25%), Gypsies and Arabs (21%). □

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## Mark Prochowski Attorney At Law

*Immigration Law*

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*Formation, Buying and Selling of*

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30011 Ivy Glenn Drive, Suite 203

Laguna Niguel, CA 92677

**(949) 481-7581**

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