

POLAND.

A COUNTRY OF REMARKABLE WOMEN



niepodległa

POLSKA
STULECIE ODZYSKANIA
NIEPODLEGŁOŚCI

POLAND.

A COUNTRY OF REMARKABLE WOMEN

This project is part of the commemoration of the centennial of the regaining of independence.



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Dear Esteemed Visitor,

The country of Poland has a storied and tumultuous history like no other. At one point, Poland was off the European map and almost removed from history for 123 years, but like the phoenix rising from the ashes, the Republic of Poland was re-born on November 11, 1918. After overcoming more challenges this past century, Poland has now become one of the most prosperous and dynamic countries on the European continent, if not the world, today.

This year we are celebrating the 100th anniversary of Poland's rise and regaining of its independence. Poland has many accomplishments to rejoice and take pride in, but I am especially honored to present this exposition – "Poland - A Country of Remarkable Women" - which celebrates the accomplishment of 21 astounding Polish women who have each made a tremendous impact on not just our beloved country but around the world. All these women have ultimately touched our lives. Presenting this is a humbling task because the women featured in this exposition are all true role models who have accomplished things that most of us can only dream of.

I often looked up to these women as a child and well into adulthood when faced with my own personal challenges. Marie Skłodowska-Curie showed me that a woman can discover a new chemical element and was an immense influence on my decision to pursue an engineering degree. Most of these women also overcame impossible odds. As an immigrant here in the US, I looked to them for guidance as I struggled with adjusting to American culture and language and raising three children in a foreign land.

These women all hail from a variety of disciplines whether it be politics, science, music, art, culture or sport. They all excelled in their field and some took enormous and unselfish risks to help others. For instance, Irena Senderlowa risked capture and certain death by German forces to save as many Jewish children as possible during the Holocaust and was recognized by the United States for her valor and courage. Danuta Sidzikówna gave her life in her fight against communism and for a better Poland. Wanda Rutkiewicz climbed the two highest peaks in the world. Aleksandra Piłsudska fought for and won the right for women to vote in elections, well before most other developed countries. Actress Helena Modrzejewska enthralled us with her breathtaking performances on the international stage.

These women show us all that no challenge is insurmountable and that it is possible for each of us, woman or man, to achieve all our dreams.

It is my pleasure to welcome you and to present these women to an American audience in the hopes they can inspire a new generation of women and men. We can all relate to their struggles, but we should all strive to achieve what they have accomplished. Each of the women presented in this exhibition is nothing short of remarkable!

Truly Yours,
Anna Tukiendorf-Wilhite,
President Polish Women in Business, NFP



Maria Szymanowska (1789-1831)

Maria Szymanowska was an outstanding Polish pianist and composer and one of the first successful female artists in all of Europe. She was also the mother-in-law of the eminent Polish writer and poet Adam Mickiewicz.

One of the First Female Pianists in Europe



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She learned to play the piano at the early age of eight. She taught herself the unusual expression, momentum and strong strokes that were her trademark playing style. She lived in Warsaw where her father ran a brewery that became a place for secret meetings for many notable Polish patriots and European intellectuals

such as: Lipiński, Rode, Lessel, as well as Józef Elsner, teacher of Fryderyk Chopin.

Her talent and ambitions were so strong that they overpowered her and ultimately led to the end of her marriage. However, her divorce made her career as a pianist possible. She performed all over Europe at royal and aristocratic courts. She was adored by Fryderyk Chopin, Karol Lipiński, Italian composer Luigi Cherubini, Gioachino Antonio Rossini (creator of 39 operas) and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who praised her in a poem entitled "Reconciliation" calling Maria "the charming Almighty in the realm of sounds". Szymanowska was also an outstanding composer: three of her five songs ordered by Niemcewicz became part of the "Historical Songs" published in 1816, aimed to revive the national memory of Poles. She also composed etudes, romances and preludes the piano. Her work on Le Murmure's nocturne brought her great popularity. Her 24 compositions, Mazurkas and Nocturne in B Major, published in 1825, inspired the genius Fryderyk Chopin.

She left Warsaw in 1827 and moved to St. Petersburg in Russia, where she managed a famous salon. She died during the cholera epidemic, at the peak of her

fame, on July 24, 1831. The cemetery she was buried in no longer exists and the whereabouts of her remains are unknown but her legacy lives on in her music.



Public domain



Helena Modrzejewska (1840-1909)

Helena was an amazing Polish actress who conquered America. She often said, "When I fight, I feel that I am alive". In her memoirs, she wrote that she regretted that she was not able to become the second Joan of Arc, so instead she used words as her weapons. She became an outstanding actress, despite many who believed that she had no talent.

Modrzejewska as Ophelia in Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'. Public domain

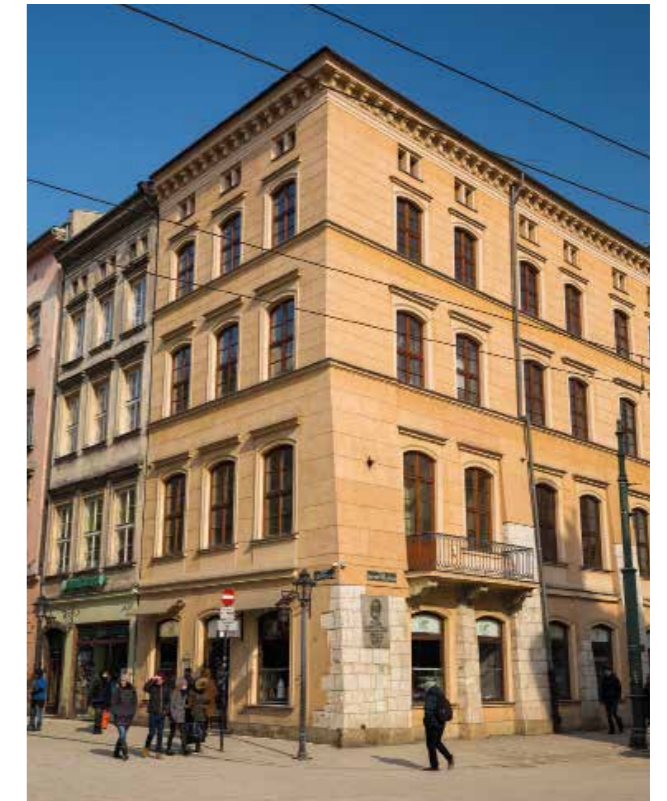
Actress of the Century

Modrzejewska was unique in that she performed with her whole body, extremely suggestively, almost magnetically. She transformed herself and made sure the viewer's attention was focused only on her. She honed her talent on the stages of provisional theaters, often to small audiences. For patriotic reasons, however she decided not to perform in German. Therefore, she learned English and in 1876, with the encouragement of Henryk Sienkiewicz, she left to leave her impression on the United States. She debuted in America in the grand spectacle "Adrian Lecouvreur" on the stages of the California Theater on August 20, 1877. "The theater howled, roared, clapped and stamped", Henryk Sienkiewicz enthusiastically exclaimed about her. A year later, her popularity grew and cosmetics packaging, match boxes, and cigar packages were adorned with her face. She became very famous and very rich. She worked hard and finished twenty-six theater tours in thirty years. All the while, family was important, and she made sure her son Rudolf received a quality education. As a result, he became one of the most outstanding American engineers and designer of many famous bridges. Helena bought Pleasant Ranch in Santa Ana, provided for her family in Krakow, funded a lace school in Zakopane and was a charity activist. In her spare time, she enjoyed crocheting laces and teaching Americans Polish customs.

In the spring of 1880, she conquered London performing many shows there. In 1893, at the International Congress of Women in Chicago, she spoke about the difficult life of Polish women in the country torn between the Partitioners. "It was a Polish woman who taught her sons how to insult enemies and she kept traditions of honor, patriotism, courage and perseverance. As long as one Polish woman is still alive, Poland will not die, and the more they persecute us, the better for us", she told an audience

in Chicago. This divisive comment resulted in her being banned from entering Warsaw by the Russian Tsar. In one of her letters, she lamented: "They have taken away our freedom, but they cannot take away our talents... We achieve fame abroad without asking them for permission".

She said goodbye to her audience in 1907, after 46 successful and inspiring years on stage. She died on April 8, 1909, in California and now she rests at the Rakowicki cemetery in Kraków.



Modrzejewska's tenement house in Kraków, in which she was born. Photo by P. Uchorzak

Olga Boznańska (1865-1940)

Olga Boznańska had a unique personality and consistently strived to create her own artistic style. Initially, she studied painting with artists in Kraków and Munich. Because she was a woman, she was not permitted to enter the Academy of Fine Arts.

Boznańska, *Self-portrait with a dog*, 1930, National Digital Archives

The Most Outstanding Polish Female Painter

In 1898, she moved to Paris where she developed her extraordinary talent. She became one of the most inspiring and unique color painters of her time and painted mainly portraits. Her works captivated the viewer with her use of strong and poignant colors. She excelled in creating the effects of insinuations and allusions, which only added to the character and enigma of her portrayed subjects. She was called the painter of human souls. She worked on every painting for a long time. Olga applied oil paint sparingly and flatly, creating slightly misted images of people, objects, flowers. All of Europe was enchanted by the colors, grays and delicacy of Boznańska's paintings. She painted a portrait of Paweł Nauen and was awarded the gold medal in Vienna in 1896 which brought her much fame. Boznańska completely lost herself in her work however, sometimes forgetting about food and smoking dozens of cigarettes. Olga never married. In one of her letters, she wrote "... in a moment, when I cannot paint anymore, I should stop living".

She exhibited her works in Munich, Berlin, London and Paris. She succeeded in a way that was impossible for her contemporaries. In 1906, she was the only woman accepted as a member of the Parisian Société Nationale des Beaux Arts. She also received an offer to become the chair of painting on the women's faculty at the Kraków School of Fine Art which she rejected. She often came to Kraków, where she had her own studio in a tenement house at Piłsudskiego 21 Street, which is currently owned by the Museum of the Academy of Fine Arts in Kraków. She died in poverty in 1940. Her work is now experiencing a renaissance. In 2008, Boznańska's portrait of "Pensive Girl" was sold in one of the Warsaw auction houses for a record amount of 1,150,000.00 PLN. Currently, Olga Boznańska is one of the most expensive artists sold in Poland. She is the most outstand-

ing Polish painter and one of the best in Europe. Her works are still on exhibit in many museums in Poland and her legacy lives on.



Boznańska, *Self-portrait*, 1906, Photography Studio, National Museum of Kraków



Maria Skłodowska-Curie (1867-1934)

Marie Skłodowska-Curie is a truly remarkable woman who through her passion, hard work and dedication reached all her goals. She is difficult to measure up to and has set the bar high for what any person – man or woman – can achieve. She changed science forever and is a pioneer of many firsts.

The Most Outstanding Polish Woman. Two-Time Nobel Prize Winner. Female Role Model

She was the first woman in the world to be awarded the Nobel Prize in two fields of science – one in Physics (in 1903) and another in Chemistry (in 1911). She was the first female professor of the Paris Sorbonne (1906) and the first female member of the Paris Medical Academy (1922). She is also the first and only woman whose mortal remains rest in the Paris Pantheon. Although the world believes she was French, Maria Skłodowska-Curie was a brilliant Polish woman whose fate related to France. Skłodowska was a great patriot and discovered a new element she called “Polonium” in honor of her beloved country Poland. Skłodowska was hard-working and persistent, stubborn, as well as humble. In a letter to her sister, she wrote: “Never to subordinate yourself to people and circumstances”. This motto allowed her to survive very tough times. Marie moved from Warsaw to Paris to attend university and became a scientist. She achieved everything that a woman could dream about. Her life shows that one’s dreams are reachable, and the struggle is worth it.

She made a pact with her elder sister, Bronisława, to help each other with their respective educations. This was one of the most important pacts in the history of science. Bronia left first to pursue her medical studies in Paris, and Maria sent her money. When Bronisława became a doctor, she brought Maria to Paris and supported her while she studied in college. Their plan was a success. In 1893, Maria obtained a bachelor’s degree in physical sciences at Sorbonne and was the third woman in the world to do so. On July 26, 1895, Maria married physicist Piotr Curie. She wore a modest dress to her wedding, which also served as her lab coat for many years thereafter. In this dress, she discovered Polonium and Radium, two elements which ultimately ended up on Men-

deleev’s Periodic Table of Elements. She came to the US for short visits in 1920 and again in 1929, for a gram of radium to study at the Radium Institute in Paris and in Warsaw. The latter trip was greatly supported by the Polish government which was recently reborn in 1918. The eminent Marie died on July 4, 1934. Shortly before her death, her daughter, Irena Curie-Joliot, and her husband, Frédéric Joliot, had been awarded the Nobel Prize for discovering artificial radioactivity. Marie was very proud of her daughter’s success and accomplishments. Maria Skłodowska-Curie left behind an amazing legacy. You can visit the museums devoted to her in Paris and in Warsaw on Freta Street, her place of birth. The institutes and hospitals founded by her (or through her initiatives) operate to this day. She is also the patron of many streets, schools, and universities. She is truly remarkable and an inspiration to us all.



Marie Skłodowska-Curie and her husband Pierre in the laboratory in Paris, National Digital Archives

She Brought the Harpsichord Back to the World

She is remembered as "The Great Harpsichord Lady". Today, she is more renowned in Germany and the USA than in Poland.

She made her music debut at the age of 14, performing "English Suite in E minor" by Johann Sebastian Bach. She was extremely talented and studied music in Warsaw and Berlin. In 1900, she married Henryk Lew, a Polish writer and ethnographer, and they lived in Paris.

Bach was her favorite composer. She adored him and wanted to recreate the sound of his music on the instrument on which the master himself played. She believed that the piano did not fully reflect his music. In 1903, the Pleyel company built a harpsichord ordered by Wanda according to her precise instructions. She performed many concerts around

the world playing harpsichord and gained world renown and fame. In the years 1925-1940 she was director of music school - L'École de Musique Ancienne in Saint-Leu-la-Forêt, which was near Paris. She not only taught the harpsichord, but also collected old instruments. She was also the author of books devoted to early music and the difficulties of playing it. She educated many outstanding musicians who continued her work. In 1941, she left for the USA and moved to a home in Lakeville, Connecticut. There, she recorded all the preludes and fugues from Das Wohltemperierte Klavier of Bach. She passed away in 1959. Her legacy lives on and the harpsichord returned to life and became more widely used.

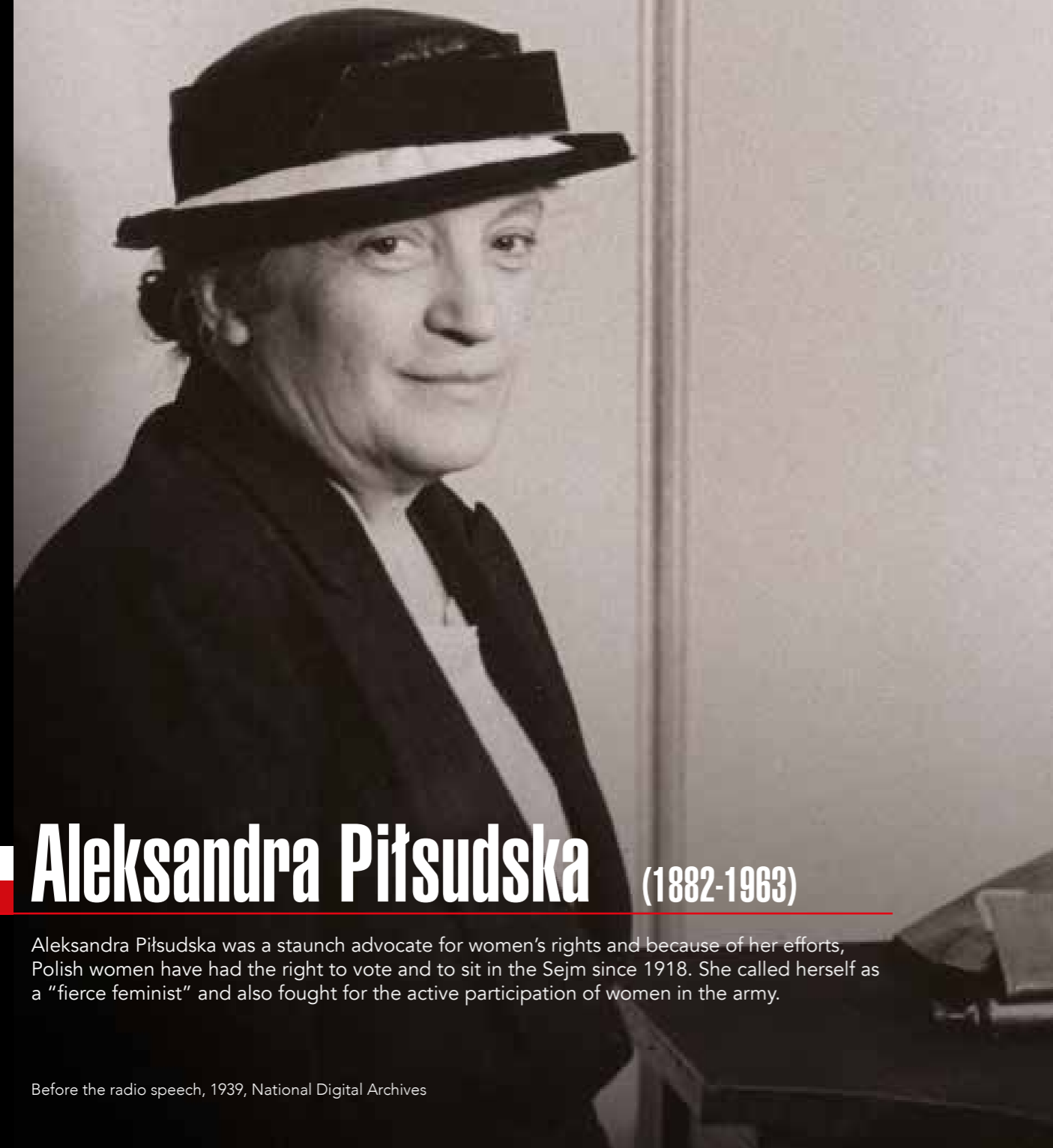
The International Astronomical Union named a crater on Venus "Landowska", in her honor.



Polish Music Days in Paris, National Digital Archives

Wanda Landowska (1879-1959)

Wanda Landowska brought back an old endearing instrument for a new generation of musicians to enjoy. Wanda learned to play the piano at the age of four. Her love for Bach's music made her bring the harpsichord - a stringed instrument from the 15th century and equipped with a keyboard back to the world.



Aleksandra Piłsudska (1882-1963)

Aleksandra Piłsudska was a staunch advocate for women's rights and because of her efforts, Polish women have had the right to vote and to sit in the Sejm since 1918. She called herself as a "fierce feminist" and also fought for the active participation of women in the army.

Before the radio speech, 1939, National Digital Archives

She Gave Polish Women the Right to Vote

Aleksandra was an independence activist and the second wife of Józef Piłsudski. In 1904, she joined the Polish Socialist Party and was one of the 478 women members of this fighting organization. She took part in many combat operations, attacked trains, and coordinated the transport and storage of weapons. She was also very brave and courageous. After the start of the First World War, she was assigned to the intelligence and courier branch of the First Brigade of the Polish Legions and was the commander of its legionary couriers. Her life course led her to meet Marshal Piłsudski in 1906. For many years, they had an informal relationship because Piłsudski's first wife did not want to divorce him, but they were finally married in 1921, after his first wife passed away. Their love endured life's challenges and she stayed with Piłsudski until his death. As the wife of the Head of State and the Marshal of Poland, she remained a woman of action and was active in social and charity efforts and organizations. She worked for orphans, military families, homeless people, youth, and war veterans. In 1926, she became a member of the Board for the Order of Virtuti Militari.

Inspired by his Aleksandra's dedication and efforts, Marshal Piłsudski agreed to sign a decree granting electoral rights to Polish women on November 28, 1918. She persuaded her husband by stating that he would win favor among women, along with their votes. For the first time, Polish women voted on January 20, 1919 and was a momentous event in Polish history. Poland led the way in women's suffrage before many countries, including the USA, France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Japan and Switzerland even considered it.

In September 1939, after the German invasion of Poland, Piłsudska and her daughters fled to London. She passed away on March 31, 1963 and was buried

at the North Sheen Cemetery in London. In 1992, her ashes were brought to Poland and she rests in the Warsaw Powązki Cemetery. She left behind memoirs that were published in London in 1985.



With Marshal Piłsudski during the 5th Convention of Legionists in Kielce, 1926, National Digital Archives

Maria Kujawska (1893-1948)

A Polish woman by choice, Maria Kujawska was the first Silesian certified female doctor. She was a heroine during the Silesian Uprisings. She was awarded the Knight's Cross of the Order of "Polonia Restituta" for her hard work and dedication to medicine and helping others.

The Silesian „Dr. Quinn”

She was born on July 5, 1893 in Racibórz into humble beginnings. Her father Wilhelm Rajda was a shoemaker. She was able to attend school and studied medicine at the universities in Wrocław, Munich, Kraków, Poznań and Warsaw. On August 15, 1920, she was the first Silesian woman to obtain her doctorate.

During her medical studies, she became friends with a group of Polish students and discovered her Polish roots. She fell in love with the brilliant Kazimierz Kujawski, and they married in 1922. She became a member of the Association of Upper Silesian Students and the secret Polish youth organization called „Zet”. During the plebiscite campaign to create borders in Silesia, she advocated in Racibórz for Poland and was on duty at the Polish Advisory Board for the Plebiscite. During the Third Silesian Uprising, she was the only female doctor. She worked hard and drove a sanitary train, treated injured rebels and transported them to hospitals in Sosnowiec and Toszek. After the Uprising, until 1922, she was a physician in the Main Hospital of the Uprising Army in Mysłowice. She treated the sick and organized courses for nurses and paramedics. After the division of Silesia between Poland and Germany, she and her husband moved to Katowice, Poland, where she managed a tuberculosis clinic and was active in the Silesian Medical Chamber. In 1931, she became the vice-president of the Polish Women's Society. She was also a founder of the Silesian Institute in Katowice. She was also involved in political activities. She supported Marshal Józef Piłsudski, and as a member of the Christian National Labor Union she became a deputy to the Silesian Sejm for its second and third terms. She was a member of the Silesian Provincial Council and an advocate of unifying legal regulations and leveling differences between Silesia and Poland.

After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, Maria and her daughters fled to Romania, and then to Yugoslavia, where she managed a home for Polish mothers. Unfortunately, the Gestapo caught up with her and arrested her in January 1944. The doctor and her two daughters Barbara and Janina were sent to a German concentration camp for women in Ravensbrück near Berlin. Despite being incarcerated herself, she helped the sick prisoners, who called her the „Angel of Ravensbrück”. In 1945, she returned to Poland and settled in Pszczyna, where she worked in a health center. Maria died of a heart attack on May 23, 1948 and was buried in the cemetery in Pszczyna next to her beloved husband and daughters, who were also successful doctors. In 1974, the Professional Medical College in Opole was named in Maria's honor.



Maria Kujawska (third from the right) with her husband during the Third Silesian Uprising, 1921, National Digital Archives

Pola Negri (1896-1987)

Pola Negri is the only Polish actress who became an international movie star. She conquered Europe as well as Hollywood and was known as the queen of silent cinema. She achieved her success with stubbornness, courage, outrage, determination and her immense acting talent.

Pola Negri as Catherine, the Empress of Russia, 1924, National Digital Archives

Hollywood Legend

Apolonia Chałupiec was born into a poor, patriotic family in the Polish countryside. In 1912, she made her debut on the stage of the Small Theater in Warsaw in „Maiden Vows”. She adopted the artistic pseudonym „Pola Negri” in honor of the Italian poet Ada Negri. She was only 17 when she became the favorite actress of Warsaw. In 1914, she made the first movie „The Slave of the Senses” and she was hailed as the first Polish silent screen star. Thus, her worldwide career began. She came to Germany and then to the USA at the age of 25, which she conquered with the movie „Passion”. She recorded 20 films and earned a million dollars a year. After her performance in the movie „Imperial Hotel”, she became an international star, but when the sound theater was invented, Pola Negri moved back to Germany, then to France, Portugal and returned to the USA. She acted for the last time in 1965 and died on July 1, 1987 in San Antonio, Texas. Her life is shrouded in legends and gossip, which she often fueled herself in order not to let the audience forget about her. She always remained a girl with character and had her own unique style. Since 2007, the Lipno Cultural Society of Pola Negri has organized the „Pola and Others” festival. During the event, Negri’s movies are screened and prizes are awarded to Polish artists making a career abroad.



Pola Negri,
National Digital Archives



Stanisława Leszczyńska (1896-1974)

Stanisława Leszczyńska was prisoner No. 41335 in the German KL Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp and a midwife who took over 3,000 deliveries. The prisoners called her "mother", "Mary in a striped uniform" and "angel of goodness". She was delicate and strong at the same time.

Midwife from KL Auschwitz-Birkenau

She was originally from Łódź, where she married Bronisław Leszczyński and gave birth to two children. Then the family moved to Warsaw, where Stanisława graduated from the Midwives School in 1922. They later returned to Łódź, and Stanisława began working as a midwife and gave birth to two more children. During World War II, the family helped Jews in the Łódź ghetto, for which they were arrested by the Gestapo. Stanisława and her daughter Sylwia were sent to the German extermination camp in KL Auschwitz-Birkenau where she became a camp midwife. She objected when Dr. Mengele ordered her to kill the newborns. Thanks to her heroism, not one child was born dead in Auschwitz. Also, no woman died during delivery.

She described the camp in the shocking "Midwife Report from Oświęcim" published in 1957. *Until May 1943, the children born in the camp were cruelly murdered: they were drowned in a barrel (...). After each birth (...), there was a loud gurgle in the ears of the midwives and a long-lasting splash of water. Soon after that, her mother could see her child's body thrown in front of the block and lacerated by rats ...* Leszczyńska prayed for and immediately baptized the newborns. After the liberation of the camp, she returned to Łódź, where she worked as a midwife until her death on March 11, 1974. In 1992, the church began recognizing her bravery and unconditional care for others and commenced her beatification process.



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The First Female Professor at the Lviv Polytechnic University

She was even a student of her idol at the Skłodowska-Curie laboratory in Paris. Despite the resistance and attitudes of that era, she persevered and in 1934 became the first and only female professor of the Lviv Polytechnic University. She was nicknamed by her peers as "The Only Child".

Professor Dorabialska was born in Sosnowiec into a family of a postal officer and daughter of a January Insurgent. She grew up in Wołomin, near Warsaw. She fell in love with chemistry by listening to Kazimierz Sławiński's lectures. She studied at the Association of Scientific Courses, where she was taught inorganic chemistry by Maria Skłodowska-Curie's cousin, Professor Józef Boguski. She also registered for courses at the Society of the Radium Institute of Maria Skłodowska-Curie in Warsaw. From 1918 through 1934 she worked at the Warsaw Polytechnical University (from 1929 as an associate professor). In 1925-26 and 1929-30, she conducted research at the Curie laboratory in Paris under the supervision of her idol Skłodowska-Curie. After returning to Poland, she continued her research on nuclear energy. In 1934, she was the only woman in Poland that earned the title of Associate Professor of Technology and - despite the opposition of many professors - she was admitted to the Chamber of Physical Chemistry at the Polytechnical University in Lviv. Marshal Józef Piłsudski supported her and graciously said that "she has character, let her show herself".

Dorabialska avoided the tragic fate of many Lviv professors murdered by the Germans. In May 1940 - as part of the resettlement agreement between Germany and the USSR - she left Lviv for Warsaw. During the occupation, she lectured in secret classrooms in Warsaw. After the war, she was one of the organizers and a long-time professor at the Łódź Polytechnic University. She became the dean of the Faculty of

Chemistry. She mainly dealt with the issues of radiant heat of radioisotopes, microcalorimetry, allotropic transformations, corrosion of metals and the history of chemistry. She left a legacy of 128 scientific publications. In 1972, she published a collection of her memoirs called "One More Life", and sponsored a plaque dedicated to the memory of chemists murdered in the Borderlands in 1939-1945.



Collections of the Maria Skłodowska-Curie Museum in Warsaw. Reproduction by Paweł Uchorczak

Alicja Dorabialska (1897-1975)

Alicja's role-model was Maria Skłodowska-Curie and her passion was to be just as successful as her. She succeeded and through her arduous work ultimately reached her dreams as well.

Tamara Łempicka (1898-1980)

Tamara is the creator of the famous painting "Self-portrait in a Green Bugatti" - an icon of a liberated woman. Her paintings reach bids of millions of dollars at art auctions and are collected by the likes of Madonna, Jack Nicholson and others. However, nothing could have predicted Łempicka's wildly successful career.

Master of Self-Creation. Queen of Art Déco

She was born on May 16, 1898, the daughter of a Russian banker and a Polish mother. Her life changed when she took a trip to Italy with her grandmother Klementyna in 1911. There, she discovered art and a talent in painting. At the age of eighteen, she married Tadeusz Łempicki, whose mother Maria Zofia Norwid was a niece of the famous Polish poet Kamil Cyprian Norwid. In 1917, the Bolsheviks took her husband Tadeusz in the night and she tried to free him by paying with her own body. He was released and a year later they, along with their daughter Kizette, settled in Paris. She started to paint because of poverty. In 1922, as "Tamara de Lempicki", she sold her first paintings at the Colette Weil Gallery. Her skilled portrait of André Gide brought Łempicka fame among art experts.

However, she later devolved into a Parisian symbol of a decadent era: cocaine, orgies, lesbian clubs and search for anonymous sex. She cheated on her husband with men and women. In 1928, she divorced and threw herself into the vortex of her work. These events all led her to create her greatest works, including "Adam and Eve" or "The Beautiful Rafaela" which is considered by critics as the perfect reproduction of a woman's bodily desire. At the end of the 1920s, she was the highest paid portrait artist in the world. In 1934, she remarried a multi-millionaire and collector of artworks, Baron Raoul Kuffner de Dioszegh, who accepted her extravagant lifestyle. In 1939, they emigrated to Hollywood where her parties were more known than her paintings. She then moved to New York, where she created her series of abstract paintings. She stopped painting for a while but started again in 1969 in the Art Déco style. Art Déco had its breakthrough in 1972 at an exhibition at the Luxembourg Gallery. She again climbed the ladder of fame and gained popularity once again.

Tamara died on March 18, 1980, and her ashes were scattered over the top of Popocatepetl - El Popo in Mexico.



De Lempicka, *Her Sadness*, 1923, oil on canvas, National Digital Archives



Maria Wittek (1899-1997)

Maria Wittek was a fighter and often called the "Piłsudski for women". She was the organizer of the Military Preparation of Women and the Military Women's Service during the occupation. She was the first Polish woman who was appointed to the rank of Brigadier General of the Polish Army.

Presentation of the banner to Chorzów branch of Women's Military Training, 1938, National Digital Archives

First Polish Female General

She came from the Mazovia Region, but she grew up in Kiev (Ukraine), where she was a scout. From 1917, she was a member of the Polish Military Organization. She finished military school while studying mathematics at the Mathematics Department of the Kiev University. She was the first woman in this department. From 1919, she served in the Polish Army. A year later, she heroically defended Lviv and for her valor was awarded the Silver Cross of the Order of Virtuti Militari. In the Second Republic of Poland, she trained women in the fields of aircraft and gas defense as well as communications and sanitary services. After the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, she was the commander of the Women's Battalions of the Auxiliary Military Service, and later headed the Military Women's Service at the General

Headquarters of the Armed Resistance-Home Army. She had a hundred thousand girls from various organizations under her command. In 1944, she fought in the Warsaw Uprising and became a colonel. After the war, she was the head of the Women's Department of the General Headquarters of the Universal Organization "Service for Poland" initiative. In 1949, after false accusations were made against her, she was sent to prison. After release, she ran a "Ruch" kiosk in the building of the Polish Radio at Myśliwiecka Street in Warsaw. After the fall of communism in 1991, she was appointed a Brigadier General being the first woman in the history of the Polish Army to be awarded this esteemed position. In 2007, a monument in her name was erected at the Polish Army Museum in Warsaw.



A camp of the Women's Military Training in Istebna, 1931, National Digital Archives



Halina Konopacka (1900-1989)

Halina Konopacka was an all-around athlete, poet, painter, and war heroine. She achieved spectacular success in sport. She won the gold medal at the first Olympic Games that women were allowed to participate in. She was always ambitious and dedicated to achieving her goals and dreams.

International Athletics Competition in Warsaw, 1930, National Digital Archives

The First Lady of Pre-War Sport

She was born in Rawa Mazowiecka, but she grew up in Warsaw. Sport was always very important to her and it was her passion. She practiced in many disciplines, but she loved athletics the most. The first time she competed in 1924, she won two championship titles: in shot put and discus throw. In 1926, she set the record in Poland for longest discus throw. She achieved her first international success in Gothenburg in 1926 at the Second World Women's Games where she won a gold medal in discus throw with a distance of 37.71 m. At the Olympics Games in Amsterdam in 1928, she also won a gold medal in discus throw. The press was crazy about her and appropriately labeled her "Miss Olympic". Her success inspired the creation of Women's Sports Clubs all over Poland. Within seven years, she won Polish championships in various disciplines 27 times and broke even more records. She represented Poland a total of 23 times always with grace and admiration.

Her marriage to a diplomat, then Minister of the Treasury, Ignacy Matuszewski, did not change her. She continued her work for women's sports. After the Second World War, they moved to the USA where the couple co-founded the Piłsudski Institute in New York and the National Committee of Americans of Polish Descent, which became the largest Polish community organization in America. The Olympic champion also founded a fashion salon and oversaw outfit design. Later painting became her passion - she set up a gallery and was very successful. Fifty years after her success in Amsterdam, the year 1978 was declared the Year of Women's Sport. She passed away on January 28, 1989 in Daytona Beach, Florida, and her ashes were transported to Poland. She rests in a family tomb at the cemetery in the Warsaw neighborhood Bródno.



Konopacka in 1936, National Digital Archives

The Pilot Murdered in Katyń

She grew up in independent Poland, near Poznań. She first wanted to become an opera singer, but her voice was too weak to become a soloist in the opera, so she began performing in a cabaret, much to the chagrin of her father. She had a passion for fighting but practiced sport aviation because women were not accepted into the army in the Second Polish Republic. She joined the Poznań Aeroclub and mastered gliding, piloting motorboats and parachuting. She later married Mieczysław Lewandowski, a pilot instructor who shared her passion for flying. They were together for only 50 days until they were separated by World War II. Janka was assigned to the air regiment and valiantly fought for her country. On September 22, 1939, she was captured by the Soviets. She was a prisoner of war but never complained and always prayed on a rosary made of bread. She

deeply wanted to survive but unfortunately circumstances caught up to her. On her 32nd birthday, on April 22, 1940, she was transported to a forest in Katyń. The Russians murdered her with a shot in the back of the head and buried her in a mass grave together with nearly 4500 Polish soldiers. It was not until 2005 that her skull was discovered during exhumation and was buried in her family grave, next to her father General Dowbór-Muśnicki in Lusowo. The Cardinal of Wrocław, Henryk Gulbinowicz, who celebrated the mass, said: "Janina Lewandowska, lieutenant of the Polish Army pilot, the only woman prisoner of war murdered in Katyń, you have returned to your homeland". The sculpture depicting Janina Lewandowska is one of the more poignant elements of the National Katyń Monument in Baltimore.



Collections of the General Joseph Dowbór-Muśnicki Museum of the Greater Poland Insurgents in Lusowo

Janina Lewandowska (1908-1940)

Janina Lewandowska was a courageous airplane pilot who fought for Poland's freedom. She was the first woman in Europe who jumped with a parachute from 5,000 meters in 1930. She was distinguished even in death - she was the only woman murdered by the Russians in Katyń.

An Outstanding Violinist and Composer

Her father first taught her the violin and she continued her education at the Helena Kijeńska-Dobkiewiczowa Music Conservatory in Łódź. In 1923, she moved to Warsaw, where she studied composition and performance on the violin and piano. As a soloist, she reached success in 1935. During the German occupation during World War II, Bacewicz performed at underground concerts and concerts of the Cen-

tral Welfare Council. She performed concerts until 1953 and then she devoted herself to composition and teaching at the Music Academy in Warsaw. She was a juror of prestigious international competitions. Towards the end of her life, she also took up writing, leaving behind several novels and short stories. Grażyna passed away on January 17, 1969 in Warsaw.



International Chopin Festival in Majorca, 1933, National Digital Archives

Grażyna Bacewicz (1909-1969)

Grażyna was the accomplished author of seven violin concertos, two cello concertos, an altar concerto, five sonatas for violin and piano, two sonatas for solo violin and seven string quartets.

She Saved Twenty-Five Hundred Jewish Children

Irena was modest, always with a smile, and a war heroine. She grew up in Piotrków Trybunalski, and after graduating from high school she moved to study in Warsaw, which she did not finish. She was active in the Polish Youth Democratic Union and in the Polish Socialist Party. In 1932, she took a job in the Citizens' Social Welfare Committee, where she ran a care unit for mothers of illegitimate children. Immediately after Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Sendlerowa, together with a group of collaborators, including Jan Dobraczyński, Irena Schultz, Jadwiga Piotrowska and Jadwiga Denka, founded a secret organization for helping the Jews at the Department of Social Welfare of the City Board in Warsaw. She helped Jewish fellow citizens even before the Warsaw ghetto was created. In 1942, she became the head of the Children's Section of the secret Jewish organization Żegota. She had a pass to the Warsaw ghetto and, under the pretext of triage, sanitary control and disinfection, she and her friends carried food, medicines and money into the ghetto. She also organized a campaign to smuggle Jewish children away from the ghetto. The details of each child were written down on small pieces of paper, tissue paper, which was later named "Sendlerowa's List". In 1943, she was arrested by the Gestapo and kept in a tram at Szucha Alley, tortured and condemned to death but Żegota saved her by bribing German guards. In hiding, she continued working on saving Jewish children. During the Warsaw Uprising, Irena was a nurse at a triage station that was transformed into a hospital. She also created a Care Center for Mother and Children institution that helps unemployed families. In 2006, the Association of Children of the Holocaust together with the foundation "Life in a Jar" and with the participation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, created the Irena Sendlerowa

Prize "For fixing the world". After her death, on July 30, 2008, the US Congress House of Representatives passed a resolution commemorating Irena Sendlerowa, a very courageous and heroic Polish woman.



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Irena Sendlerowa (1910-2008)

Irena Sendlerowa was a true Polish heroine that had the courage to do the impossible during the Second World War and was known as the "mother of children of the Holocaust". In 1965, she was honored with the Righteous Among the Nations Medal by the Israeli Yad Vashem Institute. In 1983, she planted a tree in the Forest of the Righteous.



Wisława Szymborska (1923-2012)

An accomplished poet, essayist and translator, the world first learned about Wisława Szymborska in 1996, when she was awarded with the Nobel Prize in the field of literature for lifetime of poetry. She scribed over 300 poems during her career.

Kraków 1991, photo by E. Lempp

Polish Nobel Prize Winner

She made her debut in 1945 with the poem "I'm Looking for a Word" published in the "Dziennik Polski". In 1952, she published her first volume of poetry entitled "Therefore, We Live".

She lived most of her life in Kraków. She was very modest and valued peace. Her poems are a unique lyrics of deep reflection and intellectualism, often containing a clear philosophical subtext. Szymborska's work

is characterized by precision of the word, conciseness, frequent use of irony, paradox, and perversity to emphasize a deeper content. She was very popular in the USA, where her set of poems "View with a Grain of Sand" translated by S. Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh reached a circulation of at least 120,000 copies. In 2001, she became an honorary member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.



Szymborska's house in Kraków. Photo by P. Uchorczak

A black and white portrait of a young woman with dark hair, looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression. She is wearing a dark, patterned garment.

Danuta Siedzikówna „Inka” (1928-1946)

Danuta “Inka” Siedzikówna was a paramedic, unforgiving anti-communist, and liaison officer of the 5th Vilnius Home Brigade. She was the only woman executed by shooting in the Gdańsk prison.

The Cursed Girl

Over the years, the communists wrote and described her as “bloody Inka”, “bandit”, haunted with “dark murderer” and one who killed her friends in hospitals. Inka is a modern idol and a symbol of anti-Communist resistance.

She came from the Podlasie Region, from a patriotic family. Her father, Waclaw was arrested for patriotic activity. At the age of 19, he was sent to Siberia, but he miraculously returned in 1926. Unfortunately, not for long. In 1940, he was again taken to the East, this time by the Communist Secret Police, as part of the first large deportation of the inhabitants of the Borderlands. Inka’s Mother Eugenia died three years later, after being tortured by the Gestapo. Inka dreamed of a normal, peaceful life but it was never given to her. In 1945, she joined the 5th Vilnius Brigade of the Home Army, commanded by Zygmunt Szendzielarz, ps. Lupaszko. She was only 15 years old. The communists arrested her on July 20, 1946 and she went to the 5th pavilion in Gdańsk prison as a special prisoner.

Despite being tortured, she did not break or cooperate. At 18 years old, she was sentenced to death for cooperation with the anti-communist underground. On August 28, 1946, she was murdered in prison on Kurkowa Street in Gdańsk. Several executioners shot at her from a distance of three steps but none of them managed to hit her. Danuta Siedzikówna was fatally shot by the commander of the executing squad with a shot in the head. She died with the cry of “Long live Poland”. Shortly before her death, in a secret letter she gave to the Mikołajewski sisters, she wrote: “Tell my grandmother that I behaved well”.

Inka’s burial place was found by the Institute of National Remembrance in 2014 and her identity was confirmed in 2015. A public funeral finally took place in 2016. The remains of this very brave girl were buried at the Garrison Cemetery in Gdańsk which she has finally found peace. Several monuments, squares, streets, schools and scout teams were named after her and carry her legacy.



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Co-founder of the Solidarity Labor Union

Anna lost her parents very early and was adopted. In 1941, she moved to Warsaw, then to Gdańsk, where she worked on a farm, in a bakery and then in a margarine factory. In 1950, she took courses in welder training and was hired in the Gdańsk Shipyard, where she was a supervisor. As a member of the Communist Union of Polish Youth, she went to the youth congress in Berlin. She had one son but never married. She joined the Women's League and advocated for the rights of employees. It was then that her troubles with the Security Service - the communist repression apparatus - began.

In 1968, after an investigation, she discovered that certain relief funds for workers were embezzled and demanded an explanation. As a result, the party leaders attempted to remove her from her position at the shipyard. During a workers' protest in December 1970, Anna prepared food for the strikers. In January 1971, she was elected as a delegate for a meeting with the First Secretary of Polish Worker's United Party, Edward Gierek. In 1978, she became one of the co-founders of Free Trade Union called NSZZ "Solidarność" or "Solidarity". She acted openly and candidly, which resulted in severe harassment from the SB (Security Service), including 48-hour detentions, searches, threats of dismissal. She was finally expelled from work in August 1980, five months before she reached retirement age. This decision resulted in the workers striking on August 14, during which time the Solidarity group was established. The first demand of the protesting workers was to restore Walentynowicz to work and the authorities eventually succumbed to their demands. But it was not easy. They tried to poison her, and she was sent to prison. Despite all this, she never gave up her fight and in the 1980s she criticized the leadership Lech Wałęsa and did not identify with the politics of the post-Solidarity parties. She

lived in difficult conditions and was never properly honored in Poland for her bravery and perseverance. On December 13, 2005, in Washington D.C. she received the President's Medal of Freedom from the American Foundation of Communism Victims. Anna passed away on April 10, 2010, in the crash of the Polish Tu-154M aircraft near Smoleńsk on the way to the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the genocide in Katyń. On April 21, 2010, she was buried and rests at the Srebrzysko Cemetery in Gdańsk-Wrzeszcz.



Collections of the Gdańsk branch of the Institute of National Remembrance

Anna Walentynowicz (1929-2010)

Anna Walentynowicz was an incredibly courageous activist for the Free Trade Unions during Poland's communist era. As such, she was under constant surveillance by dozens of officers and secret collaborators of the Security Service.

Maria Kaczyńska (1942-2010)

Maria Kaczyńska was the First Lady of Poland and the wife of Polish President, Lech Kaczyński. She died tragically on April 10, 2010 in the Tu-154M government plane crash in Smoleńsk, Russia on the way to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Katyń massacre.

The First Lady

She attended the First High School of E. Romer in Rabka. In the years 1961-1966, she studied foreign trade (with a focus in maritime transport) at the University of Economics in Sopot. She knew English and French, and to a lesser extent, Spanish and Russian. After finishing her studies, she started working at the Maritime Institute in Gdańsk in the business research laboratory, where she conducted research on the development of freight markets in the Far East. In 1976, she met her future husband Lech Kaczyński. They married and later in 2005 she became the First Lady of the Republic of Poland. She undertook many charitable campaigns, always seeking to help those less fortunate. On behalf of the president, she participated as a Special Envoy of the President of Poland in many international ceremonies, representing the head of the Polish state. In April 2008, the new cultivar of a tulip with the name Tulipa L. „Maria Kaczyńska” was officially named after her.

Maria died on April 10, 2010 with her husband, Lech Kaczyński, and 94 people from the Polish political elite on the way to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the genocide of Polish officers in Katyń. On April 18, 2010, she was buried and rests with her husband in the Arch-cathedral Basilica of St. Stanisław and Saint Waclaw in Krakow, in the crypt under the Tower of Silver Bells in Wawel. Over 200,000 people took part in the somber funeral ceremonies.



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Outstanding Mountain Climber

She was the daughter of engineer Zbigniew Błaszkiwicz and Maria Pietkunów. They were Lithuanian repatriates and after the Second World War, they settled in Łańcut, and then moved to Wrocław. There, she graduated from high school and studied at the Wrocław University of Technology. She was an electronics technician. While there, she fell in love with climbing the mountains and rocks near Jelenia Góra. In 1968, she took part in an expedition to the mountains of Norway, where she was the first female to climb the eastern pillar on Trollryggen. She then conquered Mount Everest on October 16, 1978. On the same day, Karol Wojtyła was chosen as the Pope of the Catholic Church. During his meeting with Wanda Rutkiewicz, he said: "...God wanted us to go so high on the same day".

She often wrote about her journeys and thoughts in mountaineering magazines. She was a determined spokeswoman and a staunch advocate for climbing women's independence. She was also the author or co-author of several books. Unfortunately, she disappeared in May 1992 during the summit attack on Kanchendzonga, the second largest peak in the Himalayas and the third peak on the planet. Her body was never recovered. However, Wanda's legacy lives on and she is the patron of many schools and streets in Poland.



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Wanda Rutkiewicz (1943-1992)

Wanda Rutkiewicz was the third woman in the world and the first Pole to climb Mount Everest, the highest peak on Earth. She was also the first woman in the world to successfully climb the K2 peak.

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