

The Polish History Museum in Warsaw Receives Unique Film Documentation Related to the History of the Siberian Gulags and Exile and Polish-Jewish Relations.

November 17, 2011 – The families of Polish filmmakers Jagna Wright and Aneta Naszyńska Donate Documentation to the Polish History Museum

On November 23rd during a moving ceremony at the Polish Embassy in London, several hundred hours of original film material, including unique interviews with Polish survivors of the mass deportations of Poles to Siberia in 1940, were officially bestowed upon the Polish History Museum's Director, Robert Kostro. The film documentation was the work of Polish filmmakers from London - Jagna Wright, a native of Gdynia, and Aneta Naszyńska, a native of Opatówek. Both women died prematurely within three years of one another. According to the will of the surviving families, the materials will become part of the museum's film and video collection; they will be incorporated into the Museum's permanent exhibition and made available for further research by young historians. The Kresy-Siberia Foundation and virtual museum, a group created by Stefan Wisniowski from Australia, has volunteered to work on the digitalization of the material.

The Gulag tapes recorded in mid 1990s by the two filmmakers captured the testimonies of a rapidly shrinking pool of former gulag inmates. Wright, a linguist turned filmmaker, and Naszyńska, a film editor, joined forces to bring to British audiences the little-known story of over a million Polish citizens condemned to exile by Stalin. Following WWII, survivors dispersed across the world, over 100,000 of them settling in Great Britain. Wright and Naszyńska decided that their dramatic story should be better known worldwide. Unable to gain the backing of any British or Polish broadcasters, they filmed and edited the documentary in their spare time and using their own resources. Their moving documentary was eventually bought by the History Channel and has been broadcast to TV audiences in Great Britain, the US and Canada.

Thanking the families for their generosity and making note of the sacrifices made by the two filmmakers, Polish History Museum Director Robert Kostro said that the two women's work was in the best tradition of the Polish intelligencja „*where you do something not for the profit it can bring but because it serves your country, contributes to its culture and is the right thing to do.*”

The second film project, *The Other Truth*, was the two authors' voice in the discussion about Polish-Jewish relations. In it they sought to document the deep, centuries-long cultural bond between Polish Christians and Polish Jews, a bond that was weakened by anti-Semitism and virtually destroyed during and after the Shoah.

During the editing of *The Other Truth*, Wright was already succumbing to cancer but the film was shown at large private screenings followed by lively discussions before she died. Naszyńska continued work on the distribution of both films which were repeatedly shown on TV in the UK, US and in classrooms and in public showings in many countries. Her plans were tragically cut short when Naszyńska died in Chile within weeks of being diagnosed with brain cancer.

According to the wishes of the surviving family members of the filmmakers, the film materials will become a separate collection in the Film and Video Archives of the Polish History Museum, a modern cultural institution under development in Warsaw.

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