

Address at  
Polish Day Celebration  
Erie, Pennsylvania  
July 24, 1938

This is your day. You have gathered here to give evidence of your loyalty to the United States, to your state of Pennsylvania, and to your city of Erie.

Erie has a picturesque and historical background. It was at Fort Presque Isle in 1796 that "Mad" Anthony Wayne died after his expedition against the Maumee. Later in 1813 when it became necessary for the Americans to maintain a navy on Lake Erie to drive off the British fleet, Commodore Perry built the necessary ships in the harbor of Erie with materials from your forests. After the Lawrence was put out of commission by the British fleet, the Niagara became Commodore Perry's flagship during the Battle of Lake Erie in 1813. It did rest, and I presume it still does, at anchor in the Erie Harbor, so that the public might be reminded of the early struggles of this nation.

Your city has steadily grown until it now ranks among the leaders in the manufacture and production of boilers, engines, gas meters, electric locomotives, power equipment and appliances. In addition the port of Erie is important in the shipping of coal and iron ores, grapes and grain, and is also an outstanding fishing center.

The United States is diverse in area as well as in its elements of citizenry. In the East, West, North and the South various sections and various states contribute something to the economic and political whole of our country. Just as you contribute your love of your home, your unlimited industry and your sturdy characters; so others make their contribution to make this a big and a strong nation.

Let me here sketch some of our background in America:

In 1659 a Dutch colony which settled in the East of this country, hired a Polish professor to educate their youth. In 1776 Thaddeus Kosciuszko joined the American forces, and in 1777 Casimir Pulaski did likewise.

As you know, in May of 1910, a memorable ceremony took place in the capital of the United States - Washington, D. C. - during which statues to General Pulaski and General Kosciuszko were unveiled. They stand there now--on guard--as it were--guarding that for which they came here and fought here. Monuments to their memory have been erected throughout the country.

The poet--Julian Niemcewicz--arrived here about the same time as Casimir Pulaski and Thaddeus Kosciuszko, and later became a close personal friend of George Washington and of Thomas Jefferson.

An early group of arrivals in this country came in the eighteenth century and settled at various points.

In the year 1831, Congress, by legislative action set aside a section of land in the State of Virginia, for the settlement of Polish

immigrants.

The first immigration of size came here about 1848, and the first to settle as a group in a certain locality came in 1857, and settled in the State of Texas. Others followed in 1863 and subsequent years.

Many of the Polish immigrants played an important role in the history of the United States. Time does not permit me to list them. I might, however, mention General W. Krzyzanowski whose achievements during the Civil War are now well known.

On October 11, 1937, impressive ceremonies took place in connection with his reinterment at Arlington Cemetery, Washington, D. C. On May 14th of this year his monument was unveiled at Arlington with a most inspiring dedication.

I might also mention Lieutenant Felix Wardzynski, who in the war for independence of the State of Texas, fighting with Austin and Houston, defeated the Mexican General Santa Anna, causing him to flee. There are many, many others, in past and current history.

They are in the army, in the navy and in the Marine Corps. They are in business, in the arts and sciences, in the professions and in agriculture and industry. They are in the service of the Government - Federal, State, County and City.

The total number of men and women of Polish extraction in the United States at the present time is estimated to be about 5,241,863.

These are scattered and live in various sections of the country, principally Chicago, Detroit, Buffalo, Cleveland, Erie, Toledo, Milwaukee, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Boston, New York, Baltimore, St. Louis, Seattle, and San Francisco.

This country affords various opportunities for the use of talents and abilities grounded in one's life through inheritance and education - mental and moral. It affords natural resources rich and plentiful for industry, agriculture and commerce, and offers the basis for a sound business activity to supply the everyday needs of the individual. It affords a new and unexampled culture.

Apropos American culture - on June 26, just past, I attended the ceremony incident to the laying of the Cornerstone of the Polish Room in the Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh. This Polish Room represents accomplishments and a culture of which we are inheritors. We are proud of those accomplishments and of that culture.

We who are of Polish extraction carry with us consciously or unconsciously the heritage of an old world tradition of unusual interest and importance but we are living in a new world in which our tradition is only one among many. However, we do not desire that our own traditions as individuals of Polish extraction should be surrendered for the traditions of another culture. Neither do we expect that our own traditions will predominate and supplant all others. We do expect, and I think reasonably so, that in a new world made up of many elements transplanted

like our own from a different soil, our tradition should contribute in a substantial way to the evolution of a new and American tradition.

The result of this effort is an increasingly rich mixture of traditions and cultures which in the end became and are American; giving rise to a wholesome culture - wholesome because it is free and unrestricted - making this our nation strong - strong physically, mentally and morally.

The process of fusing these cultures is not one that can be deliberately directed and controlled. It is one that grows naturally. In the process of its growth the individual who is of Polish extraction will not be thinking in terms of all of these other cultures which he is expected to learn something about. He will be thinking merely in general terms of adapting himself to the environment in which he lives. That environment is made up of numerous influences. The first of these is the home and family.

Next is the church and school. Here he develops contacts with a larger and more varied world than that which he knew within the family and the home.

Beyond that are those miscellaneous multiplied influences which carry the individual farther and farther into the vast and complex world where influences of every sort begin to exert their pressure upon him. Prominent among these influences is the profession, trade, business or particular work that the individual finally accepts as his occupation. To the serious aims of his occupation he brings not only his natural powers but the discipline to which he has been subject in the successively widening circles of his experience as a growing youth.

While the process in its general outlines is simple and relatively fixed, in its details it varies enormously according to the powers and interests of the individual and the particular circle of influences in which life and experience happen to place him.

One cannot learn everything, nor can one become perfect. The individual, therefore, absorbs something from all that he touches and in the end he represents that new man and ultimately that new American culture to which I feel we are all contributing proudly and gladly.

This is the substance of what I said in Pittsburgh on this point.

May I now add that American history is replete with inspiring examples - the kind that makes us determined to "make our lives sublime." Though at times in the past perhaps we have felt that we were not moving forward - yet - just when our most strenuous efforts seemed to be ending in flat failure and our years of struggle seemed to have been spent in vain we were no doubt in no mood to notice the more certain, if less conspicuous results of all our efforts - of the united efforts - of each one of us - yours, and yours and yours.

Actually each day finds us farther ahead - whether we see it or not.

Today you write history - for future generations to read. May that

history be the source of inspiration.

At the heart of the problem of previous generations was the attempt to obtain the means of livelihood; that is at the heart of our present day problem. It has led people to this continent from all parts of the world. It has made us representative of the whole world and has added to our responsibilities as a nation. We are in the unique position of a nation that has over one half of the monetary gold of the world. This, too, is a responsibility. While we have made unrivaled progress, we are still far from realizing the full potentialities of our abundant resources. Our gaze, therefore, should be forward, and not backward. We must learn to understand our society and its functions - our government and its functions. We should yield ourselves neither to blind confidence nor to blind distrust. Individual opportunities under these conditions seem to me fully as great as those which fascinated the imagination and inspired the efforts of previous generations.

It is true, of course, that at present the soul of the world is troubled with dark and discouraging portents; yet it seems to me that history tells us it has seldom been otherwise. We are apt to live with the illusion that ease and tranquillity are the normal conditions of human life. On the contrary problems and difficulties are the normal things. They never end.

It is natural and proper that each generation, just as each individual, have its own trials and heartbreaks. "This," it has been said, "is one of the sad conditions of life, that experience is not transmissible. No man will learn from the suffering of another. He must suffer himself." Today--in a world wrenched and upset--we reach out naturally for stability and peace. But stability and peace--both political and economic--can derive only from an effective recognition of human interrelationships as visualized in a democracy. If there is to be a happy issue from the confusion and conflict which now trouble the world, the peoples and the leaders in all lands must generously seek to clear their minds of prejudice and suspicion, and to subordinate the lust for power to the will for better understanding and for deeper sincerity in cooperation.

For a long time mankind has survived reversals and threats to civilization. By recourse to intelligence, study, education and force of character, the most formidable barriers have been surmounted in the past as they will be in the future. Even admitting that our own problems are more baffling than those which some preceding generations have had to face, I can not believe for a moment that they are insuperable, and I can not doubt furthermore that basically their solution depends as it always has upon individual initiative and understanding.

Public welfare--which is the welfare of all--is dependent upon a right understanding among the members of society acting for the common good. Thus we help others and "It is one of the most beautiful compensations of this life that no man can sincerely try to help another without helping himself."

This, therefore, is your day. Make the most of it. Today, however, is typical of every other day yet to come, for as the poet wrote:

"Tomorrow - oh, 'twill never be,  
If we should live a thousand years!  
Our time is all today, today,  
The same, though changed; and  
while it flies  
With still small voice the moments say:  
'Today, today, be wise be wise."