Nine years ago I had the honor of appearing before your group at its national conference in New York. At that time I talked about "Bridging the Gap"—between one culture and another, between one generation and another, stressing our need for adaptability, courage, and diligence, as well as tolerance. Today, it is my privilege to meet with you again to renew friendships and to review the progress of Polish American culture as well as to consider the future of that culture.

On the occasion of the laying of the cornerstone in the Polish Room at the Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh, I pointed out that we, as Americans of Polish descent, are the inheritors of the culture and accomplishments of a people whose history is colorful. We are proud of those accomplishments and of that culture. The same blood is in our veins as was in the veins of those who in the past dreamed and worked generation after generation for the establishment and advancement of the Polish nation.

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. Manifestly in such a situation we do not desire that our own traditions as individuals of Polish derivation should be surrendered for the traditions of another culture. Neither do we expect that our own traditions will predominate and supplant all others. What we reasonably expect is 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.

With the growth of America, there sprang up communities which were predominantly Polish, or English, or Scottish, or German, or Italian, or Irish, or Scandinavian, etc. In all these communities there was the necessity of a certain amount of effort to hold on to the traditions which had been brought from the old world and a certain amount of effort to make adaptations to the other cultures that had been transplanted here. The result of this effort was 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 unlimited like the air we breathe—making this our nation strong—strong physically, mentally, and morally.

It is important that I emphasize that this American culture of which I speak is by no means something alien to Polish traditions, nor is it hostile to any other national tradition. It is not bound to supplant any other national tradition. On the contrary, this American culture is still in process of evolution and it is something to which we are contributing. In doing so, we are not abandoning our Polish culture and tradition and accepting another culture and tradition, nor are we forcing a tradition upon others. Just as we live and breathe, so we take in...
and give out expressions of life—in language, in music, in song; in all the fine arts that refine the taste and sharpen the mind in a blending of the fine arts with the humanities and the broad aspects of science.

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 about which he is expected to learn something. 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 and potent influences—the home, the family, the church, the school, and, beyond these, those miscellaneous influences of his daily life such as newspapers, movies, sports, etc., and the professional and business influences with which the individual finally becomes affiliated. The individual is the product of all these influences plus his innate capacities. His life will reflect the cultural influences to which he has been subjected and to the extent that he has a sensitive and forceful personality he is not merely a participant in life but a contributor to it. By his own life, he will enrich life in general. He will thus guide and direct the lives of others.

An important influence in stimulating the individual is the club or group of individuals with common interests and ambitions. Such are the individual Polish Arts Clubs which, in larger fashion, have come together into a National Conference of Polish Arts Clubs. To the original nucleus of Polish Arts Clubs have been added new clubs in an ever-widening number of American communities. They are definite units in their communities, guiding their membership in the development of our Polish-American culture.

Unfortunately, in recent years, I have been unable to participate actively in the Polish Arts Movement in the United States. However, I have noted with pride some of the highlights in the progress of this movement. Each of these highlights of successful progress illustrates what can be done when individuals all act together toward a common end—when they cooperate.

Since experience is the best teacher and thoughtful consideration of our past will make possible more effective action in the future, let us stop to consider some of the achievements of the Polish Arts Clubs in recent years. We are all proud of the successful compilation, publication, and sale of the "Anthology of Polish American Poetry", a project which did much to promote the acquaintance of Polish Americans interested in cultural work in the United States. Since it was the close cooperation of the Polish language press—in publishing sales promotional material about this book—and the individuals and groups throughout the country that made the successful publication of this book possible, the "Anthology of Polish American Poetry" is an outstanding example of cooperative achievement.

Cooperation has made possible, too, our National Conferences of leaders in cultural activities. While the war caused the abandonment of these conferences our objectives and ideals received impetus in the organization of cultural groups in new communities, and the efforts of tireless workers furthered our cooperation and promotion on a national scale.
Another achievement of our cooperation is the development of the "National Polish Arts Bulletin" from a small release issued by a single group to a bulletin of national scope issued on a subscription basis, which serves as a true clearing house of news and reports on cultural activities.

Formation of the proposed National Council of Polish American Cultural Societies, which was conceived at the 1947 Conference, will mark another milestone in the record of cooperation of those interested in the cause of cultural advancement in Polish American communities. Effective cooperation can be achieved best under the direction of an able governing body—and it seems to me the proposed National Council would offer just such leadership in directing cultural activities throughout our country.

These achievements as well as many others which have not been mentioned constitute a record of which our cultural groups can be justly proud. They show what can be done when we all act together.

Since American culture is still in evolution, the future offers endless opportunities for continuing our cooperation. Our objective is that of making a contribution to American culture. What is there in Polish culture that can contribute to American culture, and what makes us sensitive to our broad responsibilities in America as human beings who not only take but also give? We have much to give and we have material from which to draw. That material is in the contributions of

Nicholas Copernicus - one of the truly great geniuses of mankind - one of the ten or twelve greatest geniuses that humanity has produced who revolutionized our conception of the universe;

Frederyk Chopin - the centenary of whose death we shall commemorate next year - another truly great genius of Poland on a universal scale, without whose contributions the world’s repertoire of music would have been much poorer indeed;

Ignace Jan Paderewski - composer, artist, statesman - the great ambassador without portfolio of Polish culture to the entire world - especially to America;

Helena Modrzejewska, Modjeska - one of the greatest of Shakespearean actresses since the days of Shakespeare - beloved of hundreds of thousands of American theatre-lovers of the generation preceding ours;

Henryk Sienkiewicz - the Sir Walter Scott of Poland - whose "Quo Vadis", was translated into over 30 languages and who earned a permanent niche in the Hall of Fame of universal literature;

Joseph Conrad - Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski - "The marvel of a Polish country gentleman . . . becoming a great English writer", whose literary creations have become a part of Anglo-American culture;

Marie Curie-Sklodowska - another great genius of Poland - the
discoverer of radium - one of the greatest scientists of all time, a Nobel Prize winner, and the first woman of France to enter the French Academy;

Wladyslaw Reymont - author of "Peasants" - "The vagabond actor who became Nobel Laureate in Literature", who has enriched the literature of the world as his great masterpiece has been translated into several languages.

This is but a fraction. There is much more material, past and present, from which to draw and with which to inspire.

This, then, is our assignment as individuals, as clubs, and as conferences of clubs.

A typical practical approach to this assignment is to be found in the work of one of our allied cultural organizations—the Kosciuszko Foundation. Now nearing its silver anniversary, the Kosciuszko Foundation was established as a living memorial to perpetuate the ideals of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, through the promotion of intellectual and cultural relations between Poland and our United States.

Tadeusz Kosciuszko, the Polish national hero and American Revolutionary patriot, has been aptly called the "hero of two worlds". Traditional monuments in the form of statues, etc., have been erected in America and Poland to the honor of Kosciuszko, but none is so well known as the Kosciuszko Foundation which, by deeds, is making it possible for the people of Poland to know more about the country for which Kosciuszko fought, and, vice versa, for the people of America to know more about Kosciuszko's native country.

Although the road hasn't always been straight and smooth, the loyal people behind the Kosciuszko Foundation have maintained their course and by now have brought to the Foundation an inspiring record of achievements as well as a permanent home in New York City. From the very beginning, the Kosciuszko Foundation has served as a clearing house of information pertaining to cultural relations between Poland and America. Since moving to its own building, the Foundation's role in this respect has been enhanced. American friends of the Foundation are constant visitors at its quarters and visitors from Poland come to the Foundation immediately upon arrival and often make it their permanent forwarding address.

Although frequently limited by lack of funds, the Foundation has nevertheless been able to successfully promote intellectual and cultural relations between Poland and the United States in various practical ways: Since its organization, it has been instrumental in effecting the exchange between Poland and America of several hundred students, scholars, lecturers, and professors. During the war, it extended material aid to additional hundreds of Polish professors and scholars in distress and gave initial financial assistance in the organization of several university centers in Switzerland for about a thousand Polish soldier-student-internees who found asylum there after the capitulation of France, and continued their interrupted studies. It sponsored the publication of a goodly number of books—in English on Polish historical and cultural topics and in Polish on American subjects. Some of them have become standard reference works
in their respective fields. Its exchange scholars have written and published books and hundreds of magazine articles and monographic contributions. Since the war the Foundation has sent to devastated Polish university libraries thousands of scientific books and journals—the product of American genius and American scholarship—and tens of thousands of additional volumes are to follow. Likewise, in a very limited way, the Foundation has been able to supply some scientific apparatus to Polish institutions—but here, especially, the need far exceeds the financial ability of the Foundation.

If nations are to achieve a lasting peace, the peoples who make up these nations must develop a common ground between them. Development of cultural interests can provide that common ground for, in its broadest sense, true culture knows no political subdivisions nor barriers of language or race.

Realizing this, the Kosciuszko Foundation is very keenly aware of the challenge of the future. Its work for exchange students and professors, building libraries, etc., must go forward in ever-increasing degree in order that the people of America and Poland may develop cultural unity despite economic and political differences that now exist. With cultural unity between America and Poland, we have made a forward step in the direction of arriving at an eventual solution of economic and political problems in the interest of a permanent world peace.

Likewise, in the more narrow sense, we as individuals can gain personal profit in our efforts in the field of the Polish Arts Clubs—by almost unconsciously becoming more and more conversant with and acquiring a taste for the fine arts, broad science, and human interests and ideals which make life full and satisfying. This is refinement. It purifies and glorifies. It advances civilization.