

Embassy of the Republic of Poland



80th Anniversary of Independence

1918–1998

A flame that never died....

*T*he 11th of November is a special date for Poles. It is celebrated as the Independence Day — commemorating Poland's return to the map of sovereign European states after 123 years of foreign rule. This special date, however, marks a series of important events that gave the day a symbolic meaning: long and bloody World War I had come to an end; most of German troops deployed in Warsaw since August 5, 1915, were disarmed; Jozef PILSUDSKI, the architect and leader of the Polish Legions, one of the most esteemed politicians of the time, began talks on taking over power and re-creating the Polish state 'from scratch.'



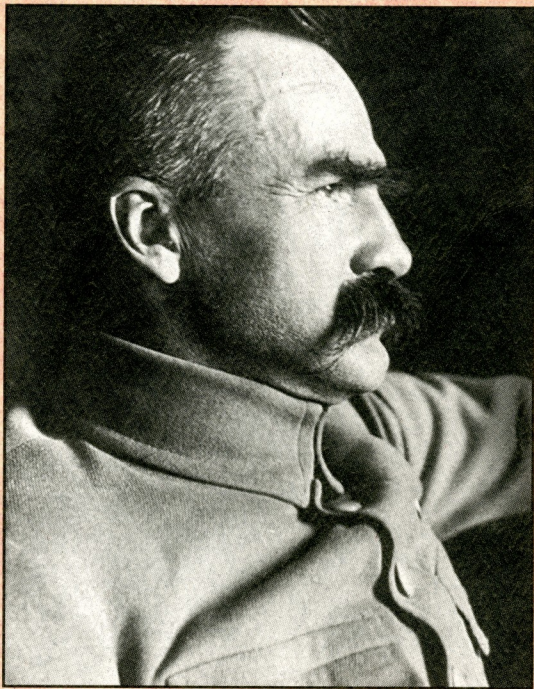
Soon after Poland regained her independence, in 1919, the first Polish envoy to the United States, Prince Kazimierz Lubomirski, purchased the property on behalf of the Polish Government. Only a few changes have been made to the building throughout the years. The main rooms look today just as they did in the 1911 photographs, with the exception of some minor changes in lighting and wall coloring.



The Glory of Polish Arms, by Jan Henryk de Rosen, 1938

*T*he Polish state was wiped out of the map of Europe after the Third Partition in 1795. The three Partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, 1795) divided the Polish Kingdom among its three powerful neighbors — Russia, Austria, and Prussia. The opportunities for regaining independence emerged only at the end of the World War I, when the three conquerors were defeated. The first to collapse was Russia, unprepared for

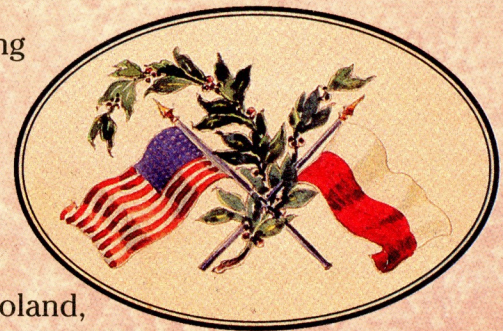
conducting a prolonged war. The abdication of Czar Nicholas II in February, 1917, and the seizure of power by the Bolsheviks in November of the same year led to the ultimate disintegration of that country's war-machine followed by signing the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918) with Germany. The second conqueror, Austria, turned out to be incapable of carrying on the war and, with defeats becoming increasingly severe, its former satellite countries started to gain independence. The third occupier, Germany, fought the longest but was also defeated.



J. Pilsudski

*W*hen independence finally came in 1918, it was not only the result of external circumstances, i.e. dissolution of the Russian, German, and Austrian empires at the end of World War I. An equally important factor was the Polish independence movement both within the divided country and abroad. The dominant political figure in this movement was Jozef Pilsudski, whose fame and prestige reached its peak in 1918. The legend surrounding Pilsudski allowed him to take over the government later in November 1918 with consent of the majority of Polish society.

A major supporting factor for the reborn Polish state were Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, a peace program



announced by the U.S. President before a joint session of Congress on Jan. 8, 1918. The entire point 13 was devoted to Poland, proposing establishment of an independent Polish state that incorporates all native Polish territory inhabited by an undisputedly Polish population, which would enjoy free and secure access to the sea, and whose political and territorial integrity would be guaranteed under an international treaty.

*T*he 11th of November was celebrated in the inter-war Poland as a national holiday. After World War II, however, the holiday was repudiated by the communist regime. In line with the communist doctrine, the government put an emphasis on the impact of the Russian Revolution of 1917 as the decisive factor in Poland's regaining its independence. The first serious historical studies on Jozef Pilsudski and his contribution to the reemergence of the Polish state were published only in the 1970's. Throughout those dark days, and especially in the 1980's — after the suppression of the Solidarity movement — people opposed to the communist system recognized their Independence Day, paying tribute to the Unknown Soldier on the 11th of November. In one of its first decisions, Poland's new parliament, elected in June of 1989, reestablished November 11 as the Independence Day.

The celebration of the 80th Anniversary of Poland's independence provides a wonderful opportunity to highlight and truly enjoy the historic act that took place just a few months ago, when the US Senate, representing the great American people, paved the way for Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. With that historical vote, our country is being embraced by the family of free and democratic nations sharing the same values and principles. With that vote the traditional bonds of amity between American and Polish peoples were transformed into the bonds of alliance. This makes our Anniversary of Independence even more special today.



Linen binding designed by Wojciech Jastrzebowski and Bonawentura Lenart. 13-5/8 x 21 in.

The Embassy of the Republic of Poland
2640 16th Street, NW Washington, DC 20009

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