

140 th Anniversary of the election of the first Polish Canadian to the Parliament of Canada - Alexander Edward Kierzkowski from Quebec

It was a beautiful sunny day on the Parliament Hill – a joyous occasion for the Polish Canadian Community and for all Canadians. October 22, 2007 is a day to remember – just to think of it that it was possible for a Polish Canadian with a name “Kierzkowski “ to be elected to the House of Commons. He was born in Poland in 1816 and was fighting with his father Jakub Filip in the November Uprising (1830-31).against Russian oppression. First he immigrated to France and then to USA and in 1842 he came to Quebec. He worked as a Major and then Lt. Colonel in the Military, was educated as an engineer and became a Justice of Peace His first wife, Ludwika Amelia was a great granddaughter of the first Polish immigrant- Dominik Barcz who settled in Montreal in XVIII c century. Her father was well known as a political activist working in the administration of justice. Alexander Edward Kierzkowski was elected to the Parliament in October of 1867.

The event was sponsored by the Canada-Poland Parliamentary Friendship Group chaired by Borys Wrzesnewskyj, M.P. and by the Ambassador of Poland, Dr. Piotr Ogrodzinski Members of Parliament, Senators, members of the Diplomatic Corps and the Polish Canadian community representatives were invited to attend. After formal speeches MPs started dropping in-between the bell rings to call them to vote in the House of Commons. I've noticed among others Peggy Nash, Alan Tonks, Judy Sgro, also Minister of Multiculturalism and the Secretary of State- Jason Kenney. The Polish Canadian community was represented by the President of the Canadian Polish Congress, Mr..Wladyslaw Lizon, President of KPK (Montreal) Mr. Andrzej Okoniewski, President of the Polish Combatants Association, Dr. Andrzej.Garlicki and President of the Polish Canadian Womens' Federation - Yvonne Bogorya-Buczowski together with the Vice-President and President of Ottawa Branch- Ewa Zadarnowski. Many eminent community members from Ottawa and Montreal were there – it is not possible to mention all the names: Prof Jerzy Wojciechowski, Mrs. Margaret Boczkowski, a Scouts troupe from Ottawa and a dance group from Montreal with other representatives of the Polish Community. Montreal group was especially visible as they were paying tribute to their compatriot, they were taking group pictures with the Ambassador of Poland and the MPs.

There was an interesting exhibit displaying the original historical documents and photographs of Alexander Edward Kierzkowski from the period of his youth and the the Parliamentary service. This exhibit has added a touch of history but at the same time it provided a personal touch. Although 140 years ago is a long time away and the world was so different, this man's history seems to be so alive and close to our hearts. He followed his father's dream to fight for independence and as a result created new opportunities for himself. His character was obviously forceful but gentle. His life story demonstrated that it was possible to be an immigrant who succeeded so well in his new country that he became a part of its nation's history. This was a great moment for all of us to learn about it. It is so important to share our history with others. It is such a good feeling to commemorate those eminent and distinguished Polish Canadians.

One can reflect, on how the immigrants who came to this country without any possessions but with their talents, abilities and determination to succeed, were able to take an important position in a Canadian society. This is a good example for others to follow. It is a pity that so few people from Toronto were able to come and see this celebration.

In the future we should demonstrate more strongly our presence and encourage more Polish Canadian youth to learn about the history of great Polish Canadians. We should also take this opportunity to invite all Canadians to learn about our heritage.

Iwona Bogorya-Buczowska

Toronto, 25.10.2007.