

# The Polish-Canadian Press: Historical Overview

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## Early Years of the Polish-Canadian Press

The history of the Polish press in Canada begins in Winnipeg, Manitoba, a major centre of Polish immigration at the beginning of the 20th century. In the late 1800s and the early 1900s, a shortage of jobs and land forced thousands of Poles to leave their homeland in search of work and opportunities abroad. Attracted by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company's publicity campaign promoting ample opportunities in the Canadian prairies, most of the early Polish immigrants settled in Western Canada.

Isolation, loneliness and poor knowledge of the English language were often obstacles for these settlers, who soon looked for ways to communicate and share their community news with each other in the Polish language. Polish-American newspapers were available in Canada at the time and some included news about Polish-Canadian communities, but they were not enough.

In response to the growing needs of the Polish-Canadian community, five Polish-language weekly newspapers were published in Winnipeg between 1904 and 1908: *Głos Kanadyjski* (The Canadian Voice), *Prawda* (Truth), *Gazeta Polska* (The Polish Gazette), *Echo Kanadyjskie* (The Canadian Echo), and *Gazeta Katolicka* (The Catholic Weekly). Of these early newspapers only *Gazeta Katolicka*, published by the Oblate Fathers, survived and went on to serve the Polish-Canadian community for over 40 years. Until 1915, when the secular weekly *Czas* (Polish Times) was published, *Gazeta Katolicka* was the main source of news available in the Polish language and provided a much needed way of communicating and connecting with other immigrants scattered throughout the country. It was also an invaluable source of information about society, laws and customs in Canada.

After the First World War, a new wave of Polish immigrants arrived in Canada, many of whom settled in the Toronto area. The weekly *Nowe Życie* (New Life), established in Toronto in 1919, was the first Polish-Canadian newspaper published east of Manitoba. Toronto, the new centre of Polish immigration, also became the new centre of the Polish-Canadian press. Other periodicals published in Toronto before the Second World War were the communist monthly *Budzik* (Alarm Clock) published in 1931, continued by the weekly *Głos Pracy* (Voice of Labour), later by *Kronika Tygodniowa* (Weekly Chronicle), and *Związkowiec* (The Alliancer), one of the most successful Polish-Canadian newspapers in Canada. The publication first appeared in January 1933 as a very simple mimeographed monthly.

The first Polish periodical to appear in Montréal was the weekly *Słowo Polskie* (Polish Word) published in 1930.

Over the years new periodicals continued to be published (even during the Second World War), mainly in Toronto, Montréal and Winnipeg. Although most of the Polish-Canadian periodicals focused on providing news and political articles and commentaries, some were dedicated solely to arts and culture, Polish-Canadian youth issues and activities, religion, sport, business and alternative news.

Today Polish-Canadian newspapers and magazines are published in almost all major Canadian cities. Some use the Internet to reach readers across Canada and abroad.

More information on the Polish-Canadian press can be found in Victor Turek's book *Polish-Language Press in Canada* (1962) available at Library and Archives Canada (see Sources).

## **The Library and Archives Canada Collection of Polish-Canadian Press**

The Library and Archives Canada collection of the Polish-Canadian press includes most of the titles published in Canada, starting with *Gazeta Katolicka*. Because of the unique role these publications played in the lives of Polish immigrants, they offer today's readers much more than past news stories. Historians, sociologists, genealogists as well as lay readers can find a wide variety of information included in these periodicals:

- History of early Polish settlements, in particular those in Western Canada, described in letters of Polish immigrants, news articles, and community announcements and reports
- Numerous lists of names of Polish immigrants: donors for various causes; prize winners; individuals sought by Polish Consulates in Canada and abroad; passengers on European ships arriving in Halifax; members of Polish-Canadian clubs and organizations, newspaper and magazine subscribers; business owners and professionals; Poles killed or wounded during the First World War; children who received first communion or highest marks on exams; missing person ads
- Wedding, anniversary, birth, and christening announcements (some anniversary announcements include a short history of the couple, a description of the community they lived in, and description of the celebration)
- Obituaries
- Emigration experiences described in letters and articles
- Profiles of Polish-Canadian soldiers fighting in the Second World War
- Some news about Poles and Polish settlements in the United States

Also included in this collection are professional and organizational bulletins which offer not only professional articles and organization reports, but members' names, addresses and profiles, personal stories and announcements, and community information.

The contents of these periodicals vary greatly. Although some titles offer mostly news stories and articles originally published elsewhere, other titles are filled with valuable

information which may not be available anywhere else, such as letters from readers, personal stories, community reports and announcements.

### ***Gazeta Katolicka***

Among the 92 titles available in the Library and Archives Canada collection, *Gazeta Katolicka* is worthy of a special mention. Because of some of its content and contributors, *Gazeta Katolicka* is a unique newspaper in the history of the Polish-Canadian press and perhaps a unique product in the history of Polish immigration in Canada.

In the first issue of *Gazeta Katolicka*, its editors asked readers to share their stories with others. “Write like a friend to a friend and it will turn out,” they encouraged, knowing that most of their readers had little education and may be hesitant to write letters to a newspaper.

Readers from the prairies and from the rest of Canada responded by writing about their lives and communities. They wrote about their journeys to Canada, their loneliness, their joys and sorrows, victories and disappointments, and lessons learned. They wrote about their settlements providing details such as how many Polish-Canadian families there were; how their communities were growing and developing; whether they had a church or a school; who their neighbours were; and what they were planning for the future.

Articles included in *Gazeta Katolicka* show Poles in Canada becoming Polish-Canadians, learning their rights, obligations and responsibilities, and finding their own place within Canadian society. *Gazeta Katolicka* is a collective diary of Polish immigrants who left one homeland and helped to build another.

### **About the Annotated Bibliography of Polish-Canadian Periodicals**

The [Polish\_Bibliography\_WEB.doc]Polish-Canadian Periodicals at LAC, 1908-2005: Annotated Bibliography includes all Polish-Canadian periodicals available at Library and Archives Canada for the period 1908-2005. Each title was reviewed for content. The principal types of information found in each are listed.

### **Sources**

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## About the Author

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