

The History of the Polish Scouting Unit “Tatry”

“Tatry” was founded in Toronto in 1950; it was composed of Polish immigrants in their late teens and early twenties who came here in the period 1948-1956 as “Displaced Persons” having been war refugees or deportees to Siberia, Kazakhstan and other parts of the Soviet Union. It was founded and remains a unit of the Polish Scouting Association which is not solely a youth organization, but includes co-educational groups of adults who had been boy scouts and girl guides, and remain in the movement. The activities of those groups change as their members age, but traditions of patriotism, Catholicism and community service remain.

“Tatry” provided contacts and friendships with people of similar age and backgrounds, vital to recent immigrants while they were integrating into the larger society, especially to those who came here alone. As the first post-war unit of Polish Scouting in Canada it was one of the generators of the growth of that movement at all levels, from cubs and brownies upward, as well as of support of all Polish-Canadian organizations and causes. Many “Tatry” members become instructors and leaders of junior scouting and girl-guide units, and taught Polish language and culture in Saturday and evening courses at public schools. Tatrans were also among the pioneers in the creation and maintenance of the Polish youth centre in the Barry’s Bay area.

Tatrans were, and continue to be, active in many organizations of the Polish-Canadian community; they played leadership roles in the Canadian Polish Congress and have participated in raising funds for various charitable activities and cultural endeavours, such as the creation of the Katyń Memorial. In the nineteen-eighties Tatry sponsored the immigration of two families from Poland, providing funds, arranging accommodation and employment. One of the lasting achievements was the leadership and administration of a Canada-wide campaign to fund a professorship of Polish history, resulting in the creation of a permanent Chair of Polish History at the University of Toronto (U of T), the first such position outside Poland. “Tatry” led all Polonia organizations in the size of the average donation by its member families to that cause. Members of “Tatry” continue to participate in the support of other areas of Polish studies at U of T.

Earning a living and participation in community life did not prevent Tatrans from completing their own education, in some cases up to the doctoral level, often while working full-time. Some reached advanced positions in Ontario academic, business and professional lives, while remaining active members of “Tatry”. Many families were formed and had children who grew up to be productive Canadians, often with college, professional and other university degrees. All our members had been productively employed throughout their working lives, participating in building Canada in many ways beyond their initial contribution of strong backs and willing hands.

Our group has reasons to be proud of its record as Canadian citizens, as well as our role in the Polish Canadian community, roles stemming from the ideals of our upbringing and participation in the Scouting movement.

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