



In memoriam of Andrzej Wala

On March 13th, 2018 left us suddenly Andrew (Andrzej) Wala at the age of 76 (born on November 21st, 1942 in Bielsko Biala, the town located in the southern Poland), an extremely well-deserved promoter of American Indian and Latin American studies among Polish immigrants in the United States. He was the founder and long-time chairman of the unique ethnic association known as “Polish American Ethnological Society” (PAES), headquartered in Atlantic City, NJ. Founded in 1976, the Society has played a significant role in the promotion of interests and research on indigenous peoples of the both Americas.

Andrew Wala, as a Polish immigrant, by education historian, and a person interested in Americanistic issues, has gathered people with similar interests around him. With great passion and commitment he supported American Indian studies, especially research projects related to the history and culture of indigenous peoples; he successfully built cooperation ties between Polish, Polish-American and American researchers, he also made friendly contacts with chiefs, leaders and intellectuals representing the First Americans. As the president of PAES, he helped and supported the projects developed by young researchers from Poland: ethnologists, anthropologists, historians and archaeologists.

At the same time, he was building a network of cooperation between professional researchers and amateurs interested in the history and culture of America's indigenous people. He was also an ardent defender of Indian rights, and in his numerous lectures, essays and publications he often expressed that position in a radical form, accentuating the tragic fate of the Native Americans. The association he founded and successfully managed for many years, has been in fact an exceptional organization in the Polish immigrant community in the U.S., because its profile was not directed towards immigration issues, but centered at culture, history and contemporary condition of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. For achieving these

goals Andrew Wala co-organized numerous seminars, conferences and debates in the U.S. and Poland. The papers delivered during these meetings were published in three proceeding volumes, of which the editor-in chief was also Andrew Wala.

His serious interests in American Indian studies were shaped during his student years at the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, back in the 1970s. At that time he was one of the young enthusiasts of American Indian studies and joined one of the first association in Poland dealing with Americanistic issues, which functioned as the autonomous section in the framework of the Polish Ethnological Society. Even before his departure to the U.S., he participated in pioneering Americanistic Seminars organized in the city of Poznań by the recognized professor of ethnology - Maria Frankowska, an outstanding specialist in studies on indigenous Mexico and Peru, and one of the first academician in Poland building Latin American studies.

In those years, I had the opportunity to get to know Andrew Wala as a promising young historian, very much interested in matters of indigenous America. At that time, I could not suppose that in his new country of residence he would create a unique association that would pursue his early academic interests. Undoubtedly, this unusual initiative was an expression of his genuine passion, successfully implemented, in spite of the usual difficulties, he encountered as a newcomer to the United States, struggling every day for a better condition of life. These early passions and experiences developed before migration, transplanted Andrew Wala to the new country, only a few years after his departure from Poland in 1972.

However, throughout his entire life he maintained lively contacts with Polish academicians from the universities of Cracow, Warsaw, Poznań, and Toruń. He also established useful relationships with a group of Polish enthusiasts and people interested in American Indian culture, gathered around the "Tawacin" magazine. The common area of this interest was the history, culture and condition of the native groups in the United States.

It is worth to mention here, that Wala's intellectual energy and vital forces had manifested also in other fields. He was a poet and author of a few published collections of his poetry, a talented essayist, observer and commentator on the lives of Polish immigrant community, and above all a real humanist, rationalist, erudite, and a great friend and companion for all those who knew him well and shared with him the similar interest.

The death of Andrew (Andrzej) Wala, a man of great knowledge, considerable merit, genuine affection and kindness, the Polish and Polish-American social circles interested in indigenous issues suffered an irreparable loss. Admittedly, he is no any longer among us, but the memory of him and his spectacular achievements were permanently recorded in the history of Americanistic studies in the United States and Poland.

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