

## A REMARKABLE ADDITION TO THE MUSEUM ARCHIVES

### DOCUMENTS AND PHOTOS FROM THE SARAH SKIBICKI COLLECTION

**S**ARAH SKIBICKI CAME TO AMERICA IN 1900 at the age of nine to live and to help with work on the farm of her uncle Roman Skibicki in Sunderland. Her older sister was supposed to have come, but she decided at the last minute to stay in Poland. Sarah came from Podkamien, a small village which at that time was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and now a part of Ukraine. She married Walter Jablonowski eight years after arriving and together with her husband Sarah moved to Northampton in 1913.

Sarah never forgot her family and her homeland. She was part of a group of women in the Northampton area who raised funds to send to Warsaw during World War I. In an article in the Hampshire Gazette, she is quoted saying that the money could be used for anything from "cod liver oil to warm blankets". During the War, her sister, who had remained home, lost four sons while they were serving in the Austrian-Hungarian Army.

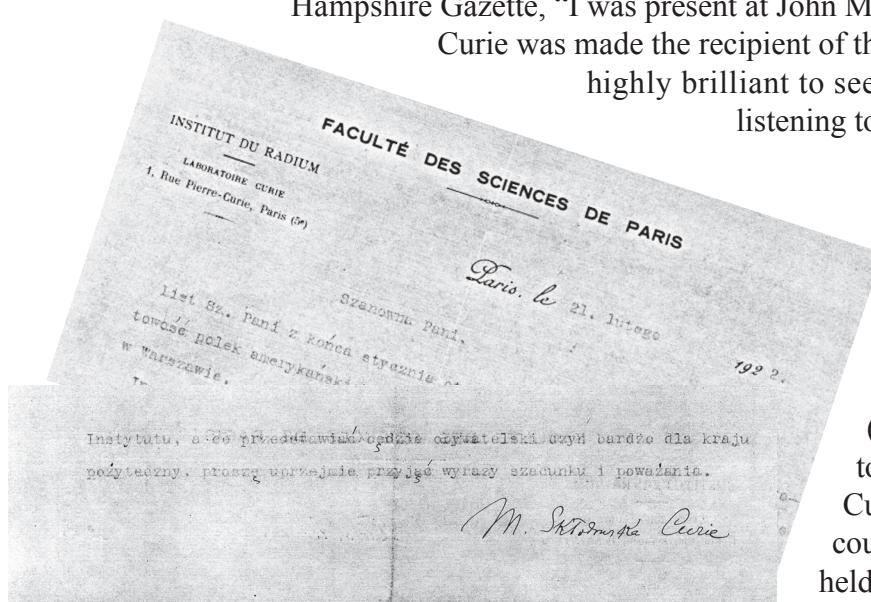


### MARIE CURIE AND NORTHAMPTON, MA THE SARAH SKIBICKI CONNECTION

In May of 1921, Marie Skłodowska Curie came to Northampton to receive an Honorary Doctor of Science Degree from Smith College. Sarah wrote the following in a letter to the editor of the

Hampshire Gazette, "I was present at John M. Greene Hall Friday afternoon when Mme. Curie was made the recipient of the Degree of Doctor of Science which was highly brilliant to see. The tears twice came to my eyes when listening to the greatest honor that could be bestowed upon a woman, a woman of my native country, Poland, Mme. Marie Skłodowska [sic] Curie."

After the ceremony a reception was held at the College Library. Sarah continues, "I entered with President Neilson who introduced me to Mrs. William Brown Moloney (who was Mme. Curie's companion for her tour of America). She introduced me to Mme. Curie and as our eyes met, for a second, I could not speak. Tears rushed to my eyes as I held her hand. She said Mrs. Jablonowska [sic],



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please calm yourself. I handed to her a bouquet of lilies of the valley, with words in Polish: Mme. Curie accept these flowers. Through them, I bring greetings from the hearts of my [sic] thousand Polish people of Northampton. We all have your name on our lips, full of greetings and gratitude, and we all wish you long life of health and power to accomplish your researches and service to humanity." Mme. Curie replied, "Many, many thanks to you Mrs. Jablonowska. Give my hearty greetings to my countrymen and women and thank them and for remembering me through you." She then notes that, "She took my address and gave me hers. Then she asked about the Polish people and their occupations here." Sarah then spoke to her two daughters who accompanied her on this trip. After shaking hands, they said, "We hope to meet you again in the future."

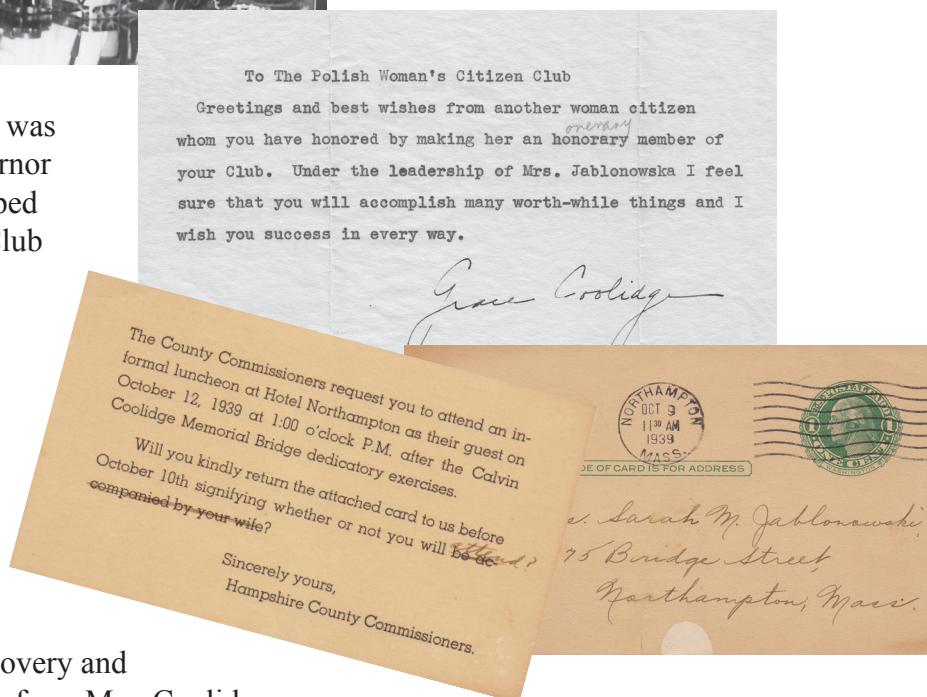
Sarah then went on to organize a fund drive to build a Radium Institute in Warsaw. Recently John Skibiski, who is a relative of hers and dedicated supporter of the Polish Center of Discovery and Learning, presented the museum with an especially significant addition to its Archive—a signed letter from Madame Skłodowska Curie to Sarah. In the letter, Madame Curie thanks Sarah for her efforts and directs her to send the money collected to Ignacy Paderewski, the current head of government and renowned concert pianist. We hope to have this letter on public display in the near future.



for his election. That local politician was Calvin Coolidge, who became Governor and later President. In 1936, she helped create the Polish Women's Citizen Club and became its President. Its stated goal was to encourage all eligible Polish women to become interested in government and citizenship as well as to encourage them to vote. Within a year, the membership was said to have reached a total of 150 members. One of its honorary members was Mrs. Grace Coolidge, the wife of our former President. The Polish Center of Discovery and Learning also has received two notes from Mrs. Coolidge, one thanking the Club for extending membership and the other saying she could not attend a luncheon.

Sarah became the owner of the Admiral Inn at 75 Bridge St. in Northampton on December 19, 1931. This inn was the home of the famous Admiral Frances Augustus Cook, Northampton's only Admiral. Cook was born in 1843 and graduated from the Naval Academy in 1863. He commanded the Cruiser Brooklyn in the

**ENGAGED CITIZEN AND ENTREPRENEUR**  
Sarah became active in Republican Party politics and when a local politician ran for Lieutenant Governor of the state, she worked



Naval Blockade of Santiago, Cuba during the Spanish American War. The Admiral Inn had a tea room, a dining room and lodging. It was the scene of many meetings, both political and social. Mrs. Grace Coolidge and sometimes her husband Calvin often ate there. Sarah sold the inn in 1955.

The Polish Center also received a large collection of newspaper clippings highlighting the many civic activities of the Polish Women's Citizens Club. They included talks by local politicians, professors as well young local entertainers. Two of Chicopee's internationally known professional performers, Sylvia Zaremba, a young concert pianist, and Gladys Kuchta, who sang in Opera Houses throughout the US and Europe, performed for them.

At the dedication of the Calvin Coolidge Memorial Bridge, which connects Northampton with Hadley across the Connecticut River, Sarah replaced Mrs. Coolidge and was the only woman there. She is featured in a newspaper photo alongside Governor Leverett Saltonstall and other local dignitaries. In another newspaper photo, she is seated with a number of people honoring Senator Chester Skibinski's appointment to the State Labor Relations Board. Among the individuals in the photo were Miss Helen Wiaderek, a ballet dancer from New York, and Professor Stephen Mizwa, founder and president of the Kosciuszko Foundation.

In still another photo we see a group of Polish Americans, who were active in the Republican Party in the Commonwealth, presenting a white alabaster elephant made in Poland to Governor Saltonstall in his office at the State House in Boston. Sarah is pictured there with her second husband Henry Kurdzylowski, her son Walter, as well as Senator Chester Skibinski of Chicopee.

On November 30, 1935, Sarah received a telegram from Henry Cabot Lodge thanking her for the letter she wrote to the President of Poland on his behalf. Lodge had been an advocate for closer relations with Poland. He informed her that he had received the Chevalier Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta at the Polish Embassy in Washington, D.C.



Sarah married Henry Kurdzylowski in 1941. During World War II, Henry served in the 33rd Chemical Company. The 33rd was involved in the Invasion of Normandy, demining the beaches and clearing the way for the main body of troops to assault Utah Beach. Henry along with two thirds of his unit that survived, were given the Croix de Guerre with a Palm for "Outstanding Courage and Heroic Achievement in Liberation of France". The unit continued this dangerous work until the end of the war.

When Sarah sold the Admiral House, she and her husband owned and operated the Quonset Hut Restaurant in Hadley from 1951 to 1980. The restaurant was a popular food and polka facility and has been described as one of the largest such facility in New England.

In a letter dated July 2, 1948, Senator Leverett Saltonstall thanked Sarah for her interest in supporting statehood for Alaska. The Senator explains the issues involved as well as the process through which the legislation has gone and will go through. The Senator concludes by thanking her for her interest in the issue.

This is another example of Sarah's continued interest in the affairs of Government.

Sarah had three children—Jean, Alma and Walter—with her first husband Walter Jablonowski. All her children predeceased her. Her daughter Jean was pursuing a career in acting and had minor roles in a number of films when she abandoned her career to marry Henry Ditzell of Newark, New Jersey. Mr. Ditzell was the head of security of Ironbound Trust of Newark. Alma was a manager of a food shop in Newark. Walter stayed in Northampton and was an assistant manager in a local Sears & Roebuck store.

In an article in the July 18, 1987 Hampshire Gazette, Sarah is featured as Hadley's oldest resident and as such was the possessor of "the golden cane". The article concludes with the following words.

"Kurdzylowski [sic] said that she is pleased with the decision she



made when she was 8 years old. There have been many sad things along the way, she readily admits, such as having to face the death of her three children." She continues, "I still have my health. I feel good and I keep the memory of so many lovely things that are gone. Having those memories makes you feel in some way contented with life."

Sarah died two years later on July 17, 1989 at the age of 96. She is buried in the Holy Rosary Cemetery in Hadley, Massachusetts. During her long life she had experienced and seen great changes in both this country and in her native Poland. Sarah Skibicki Jablonowska, with her goal to encourage women and immigrants to get involved in politics, no doubt had lasting effects on her community and country.

*Ron Lech, Associate Director*

#### ILLUSTRATIONS

Front page: Photograph of Sarah about age 8. Letter from the Institut du Radium (Paris) and signature "M. Skłodowska Curie".

Page 2. State House, Boston; seated is Governor Leverett Saltonstall, Sarah and husband Henry Kurzydlowski behind elephant. Also a note with signature from Grace Coolidge. Invitation to the dedication of the Coolidge Memorial Bridge ("...be accompanied by your wife?" penciled out).

Page 3. Standing, L to R: Dr. John T. Cender of Chicopee, representative of the newspaper "Nowy Świat"; Mr. Stephen Mizwa, Founder and Executive Director of the Kosciuszko Foundation; Prof. Manfred Kridl (of Poland); State Senator Chester Skibinski; Mr. Henry Kurzydlowski; Attorney Joseph A. Jerome; Felix Urbanek (of Poland). Seated, L to R: Mrs. B. Zawadzki, wife of Prof. Zawadzki of Smith College; Sara Skibicki Jablonowska; Miss Helen Wiaderek, ballet dancer from NYC.

Page 4. Advertisement for National Mazda Lamps with image of Jean Jablonowski, Sarah's daughter.

Note: On occasion, the surnames Kurzydlowski and Jablonowski are incorrectly spelled in some original texts. This is not true for the surnames Skibicki, Skibicki, and Skibinski as noted in the above article.

## FOLK EMBROIDERY PATTERNS EXHIBIT JULY 8 THROUGH AUGUST 21, 2019

The Polish Center is exhibiting traditional folk embroidery patterns from its collection with stitch designs from Łowicz, Kraków, Rzeszów, Cieszyn, Podhale, Kujawy, Zalipie, Żywiec, Pułtusk, Hrubieszów, and Opoczno. Kaszub designs are shown, which include patterns of the monochromatic bonnet embroidery (haft czepcowy), whose origins date back to 1209, and the multi-colored designs prominently featured in the embroidery of traditional Kaszub tablecloths, wall-hanging, clothing, etc. inspired by village women in the early 1800s. There are also a number of finished embroidered pieces of clothing and textiles on display. The exhibit may be viewed July 8 through August 21, Monday through Friday 1-5 PM. Please call for further information.