



Polish White Eagle Club Canberra & Queanbeyan

Nicholas Copernicus House

50 YEARS



1973-2023

WELCOME

The White Eagle Club was founded more than 50 years ago with a soft opening in 1971 and a formal opening on 16 February 1973. It was a remarkable feat achieved by a group of dedicated, and enthusiastic members of the Polish community in Canberra. Their clear objective was to preserve Polish heritage, cement friendships and links within the Polish community and to provide a service to Club members.

The White Eagle Club's success is a testament to the work of past Presidents, members of Executive Committees and hard-working volunteers over so many years – commitments that continue to this very day.

We think the Club is as relevant today as it was 50 years ago. The Club retains its original character and continues to be a focal point for the Polish community to gather and celebrate their heritage and uphold Polish traditions. We look forward to working with the Polish Embassy in Canberra in support of these objectives. At the same time, we welcome collaboration with other community groups who use the Club as a venue for their activities.

The Club's prospects are bright. With the COVID-19 pandemic behind us, the Club looks forward to full operation in 2023. The challenge now is to encourage the next generations of Poles to step-up to Club management and grow the Club, working within the Polish and local communities. We also have to be mindful to meet the needs of senior members who have contributed so much to the Club's success.

This publication is a potted version of the White Eagle Club's history. It encompasses our Club today, early beginnings, our culture and traditions and the future. I hope you enjoy this short journey.

Andrew Bajkowski

President
White Eagle Club Inc
(Canberra—Queanbeyan)

WITAMY

Klub Orzeł Biały powstał ponad 50 lat temu dzięki niezwykłemu wysiłkowi grupy oddanych i entuzjastycznych członków polskiej społeczności w Canberze. Ich najważniejszym celem było zachowanie polskiego dziedzictwa, zacieśnienie przyjaźni i związków w środowisku Polonii oraz świadczenie usług społecznych dla członków Klubu. Nieoficjalnie Klub został otwarty już w 1971 r., a formalnie i bardzo uroczyście 16 lutego 1973 r.

Sukces Klubu Orzeł Biały jest świadectwem wieloletniej pracy byłych Prezesów, wszystkich członków kolejnych Zarządów i ciężko pracujących wolontariuszy – zobowiązań, które trwają do dziś.

Uważamy, że Klub jest dla polskiej społeczności tak samo ważny dziś jak 50 lat temu. To miejsce, gdzie Polonia Canberry może się spotykać, świętować swoje dziedzictwo i podtrzymywać polskie tradycje. W osiągnięciu naszych celów liczymy na współpracę z Ambasadą RP w Canberze. Jednocześnie chętnie współpracujemy z innymi grupami etnicznymi, które wykorzystują nasz Klub jako miejsce swoich spotkań.

Klub z nadzieją spogląda w przyszłość. W 2023 r., po pandemii COVID-19, spodziewamy się podjęcia działalności w pełnym wymiarze. Dużym wyzwaniem pozostaje zachęcenie kolejnych pokoleń Polonii do współudziału w zarządzaniu Klubem i kontynuacji pracy dla polskiej i lokalnej społeczności oraz na rzecz rozwoju Klubu. Musimy również pamiętać o potrzebach starszych członków, którzy tak bardzo przyczynili się do sukcesu Klubu.

Niniejsza publikacja jest skróconą wersją historii Klubu Orzeł Biały. Obejmuje nasz Klub dzisiaj, wczesne początki, naszą kulturę i tradycje oraz przyszłość. Mamy nadzieję, że spodoba Ci się ta krótka podróż.

Eva Buchanec

Vice President
White Eagle Club Inc
(Canberra—Queanbeyan)

Acknowledgement of Country

The White Eagle Club acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and contribution to the life of Canberra and surrounding region.

The Club Today

On 16 February 2023 the White Eagle Club (Canberra and Queanbeyan) celebrated 50 years service to the Polish and local community. For more than half a century the Club has been a place to meet, taste delicious Polish food, enjoy Polish beverages, listen to live music, experience theatre, dance and cabarets, or to just visit the library for some quiet time. Our building was designed by world-renowned architect Dr Enrico Taglietti and built by the Polish community. It was formally opened in February 1973 by L. Engledow, representing Kep Enderby, Federal Minister for Capital Territories and blessed by Cardinal Karol Wojtyła (who later became Pope John Paul II). However, the Club has a history long before that.



Cardinal Wojtyła in Canberra, 1973



Polish Club float at Legacy Fete 1959 | Photo Canberra Times

The Polish connection with the Canberra-Queanbeyan region stretches back more than 70 years. Polish displaced persons from war-torn Europe were arriving in Australia from 1948 with small numbers settling in the Canberra-Queanbeyan region. These migrants realised early the importance of maintaining culture, language and traditions, so it is not surprising that the first Polish Club in Canberra, with no building, was established on 16 March 1951.

Queanbeyan was also settling Polish migrants. It might come as a surprise that the Polish-Australian Club of Queanbeyan was first established on 5 March 1952. The two clubs shared their facilities, and many Polish dancers from Canberra practised with their Queanbeyan neighbours. Sadly, with declining membership the Queanbeyan Club was formally dissolved in March 2021. The White Eagle Club received a very generous and sizeable donation and invited Queanbeyan members to join with the Club. Queanbeyan was added to the White Eagle name.

Today the Club welcomes all members under the stewardship of the Polish community in the Canberra-Queanbeyan region.



WHITE EAGLE CLUB inc.
CANBERRA AND QUEANBEYAN

Member's lounge — old world charm

The Club bar retains its original 1970s design and authenticity. Beer on tap is no longer available, but customers can still settle down at the long green vinyl bar.

The Club has the best selection of bottled eastern and central European beers and ales, including Poland's famous Żywiec pale ale. Or try a Perła, Brok, or a nice dark strong Grand or Warka. The range of vodkas on offer also is amazing with a great selection from the 'old country' and nations of the 'vodka belt'. The Club's wine list caters to all tastes.



Poland's favourite beers | Photo WEC



White Eagle Club bar with Club mascot | Photo WEC



In the Polo kitchen | Photo WEC



White Eagle Club Lounge | Photo WEC



White Eagle Club Chopin Room | Photo WEC

A taste of Poland — Polo Restaurant

Discover traditional Polish dishes. The 'Polo' version of the restaurant was born out of the fire that destroyed the kitchen in 2014. Following the rebuild, the kitchen was leased to external operators, and the restaurant's reputation grew. For many years 'pierogi and pint' nights were a very popular feature at the Polo. From 2020, COVID-19 began to impact adversely on Polo operations. Partly in response, the restaurant licensee surrendered his lease. Since early 2022, the Polo has been thriving under strong Club management with new kitchen staff and dedicated volunteers.



Lots of options. Nowadays, patrons can enjoy dining in the Member's Lounge, Chopin Room, or Library – each with its individual feel and style. Dishes are traditional. Treat yourself to pierogi (meat, cabbage & mushroom, cheese & potato dumplings), delicious gołąbki (cabbage rolls), goulash with Polish gnocchi or a hearty serve of bigos (hunter's stew, Poland's national dish). Pączki (jam-filled Polish doughnuts) or sweet cheese pierogi with fruit and cream satisfy those with a sweet tooth. Patrons might hear the occasional shout of "Na Zdrowie" (Cheers) or 'Sto Lat' (may you live to 100 years) – it's a part of Polish culture.





Live at the Polo

Live at the Polo is the best live music venue in the Turner-O'Connor area. Dirty Deeds has operated 'Live at the Polo' at the Polish White Eagle Club for more than a decade. Bands and music lovers regard it as a vibrant service to Canberra's live music community. With Dirty Deeds' involvement at the Polo over so many years, most of Canberra's emerging contemporary music acts have played at the venue. "Live at the Polo" has a simple motto, 'keep music live'.



Photo | Dirty Deeds
m.facebook.com



Photo | Bing CC BY



Wednesday's

Jumptown Swing

Photos | Jumptown m.facebook.com

Tango

El Bolicho is a tango dancing evening at the White Eagle Club, most Mondays. A Tango Social Club of Canberra project.



Photo | Tango Social Club
m.facebook.com

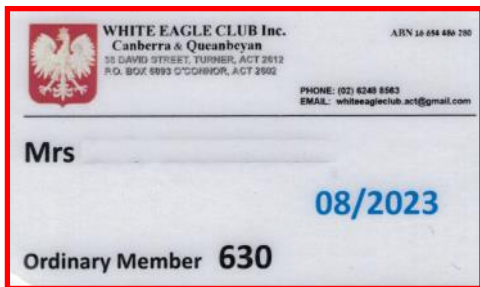
come and celebrate

10 years polo
live at the polo

live at the Polo logo

29 May
1:30pm - late

Kiley
 Emory
 Kim Yung
 Evan Buckley
 Signs and Symbols
 Ben Taylor and the Lyrebirds
 Lucy Ridge and the Dirty Willows
 Nick Delaney & The Empty Lake Singers
 Rafi Morris and The Decidals
 Magic Bob Universe
 Staghorn Christies
 Julia Johnson
 Moonong
 Betty Aho
 Steve Oul
 Clinic



Poles in Canberra

Poles punch above their weight.

While the Polish community in the ACT is relatively small, it remains active supporting the Polish and broader community. According to the 2021 ABS Census, just over 1,000 Poles living in the ACT were born overseas with a third now aged over 65 years. Add those in the community that claim Polish ancestry and the number of 'Poles' rises to 5,305 persons. There were just 558 Poles in Canberra in the 1954 Census.

No to poker machines

Poker machines were removed in 2007.

Poker machines were first introduced into the ACT in the 1970s. A small number of poker machines were licensed by the White Eagle Club and provided much needed revenue in the early years.

However, over time licensing fees, machine upgrades, maintenance costs and staff required to manage the pokies made them less economic. There was also the social impact to consider.

The Club's membership took the bold step of removing poker machines in a vote in 2007 - a decision reported in the Canberra press and covered by ABC Television.

Indeed, the White Eagle Club became the first licensed premises to remove 'pokies' from the Territory. The decision not only made the Club more 'family friendly' but also improved the popularity of the Club among a younger generation of patrons. The White Eagle Club demonstrated that it is possible for clubs to envision a future and concept of operations that does not rely on gaming.



Club membership

A resurgence in Club membership. Over the past decade membership growth, in large part, reflects new 'Associate' members joining from the non-Polish community. In early 2023, the Club had nearly 150 Ordinary (voting) members and over 400 Associate members. The latter are drawn to the Club to absorb its atmosphere, enjoy a

Polish meal, buy a Żywiec (beer) or use the Club's facilities. Associate members make a highly valued contribution to Club life.

Polish White Eagle Club

For a taste of Central Europe in the Heart of Canberra, visit us soon!

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Polish Embassy

Close links, joint activities.

In 2022 Poland and Australia celebrated 50 years of diplomatic relations. While the Polish communities' relationship with the Embassy was strained when Poland was still under communist rule, it is quite different now. The White Eagle Club has regular contact with the Polish Embassy and participates in joint activities. The Club is very grateful for grants from the Embassy to fund cultural and other activities in the Canberra-Queanbeyan region.



Butcher Day at Club | Photo: WEC

Butcher days

Krakus a fixture at the Club. Customers claim that Krakus Lawson Bros manufactures some of the best tasting small goods in the country, using traditional Polish recipes and methods passed down through generations. The Club has hosted this Sydney company for many years with a very popular fortnightly Saturday Market Day, selling Polish butcher/delicatessen meats, cheeses, cakes, confectionery, breads and packaged imported Polish goods and preserves.

The market day is a major drawcard to the Club. Over the years it has attracted many members and non-members wanting a taste of Central Europe in Canberra. The 'butcher day' as it is colloquially known was first established in 1986.



Embassy staff member farewell, 2022 | Photo WEC



A venue for community groups

The White Eagle Club is proud to be a venue for a vibrant and growing network of community and recreational groups in the Canberra-Queanbeyan region. Tango nights on a Monday, Jumptown swing dance classes on a Wednesday. Ethnic groups using the Club's facilities include Czechs, Hungarians, Latin Americans, Lithuanians, Latvians, Slovaks, and Samoans. The Latvian community have held weekly children's language classes at the Club. Let's not forget the Polo Record Fairs, the Canberra Beer Brewers who meet once a month or the Pinball championships recently held at the Club. The Club welcomes its openness to the broader community and recognises that such 'outside' activities are important to its future survival.

Stand with Ukraine

Our bonds run deep. The war in Ukraine has stretched into 2023 and continues to take a huge toll on the civilian population with the humanitarian situation increasingly dire.



#StandWithUkraine
#PolandFirstToHelp

Many in the Polish community have close family and personal ties with Ukraine. In support, the White Eagle Club has joined forces with others in the Canberra community to support Ukrainian families in need. The Club has undertaken a number of fund-raising activities, jointly with the Ukrainian community, as well as with Latvian and Lithuanian supporters to donate to Caritas' relief efforts in Ukraine. The Club plans to continue hosting events and raising funds in support of Ukraine.

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The Club has undertaken a number of



Ukraine stall at Club | Photo WEC

Early Beginnings

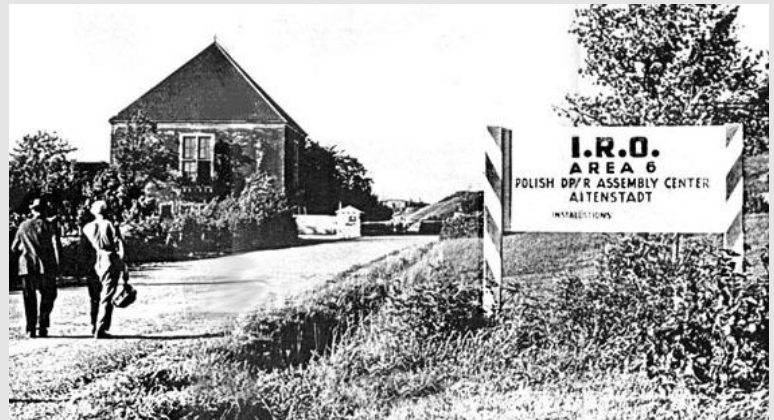
Polish migrants arrive in Australia

Polish displaced persons were settling in Canberra and Queanbeyan from 1948. Australia's post-war immigration program expanded to gradually include displaced persons of all nationalities, including Poles identified as refugees by the International Refugee Organisation (IRO).

Displaced persons camps in regional Australia were a first stop. On arrival in Australia, migrants were transported to various displaced persons camps (such as Bonegilla (Vic), Bathurst, and Greta (NSW), Northam (WA). From these camps, they were sent out as government contracted unskilled labour across Australia. Many ended up working for projects such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme, in heavy industry, factories, or as agricultural labourers (picking asparagus in Gundagai, apples around Tumut, or gardening in Canberra). Many migrant women went into domestic service or often as cleaners and cooks in hospitals.

The early settlers to Canberra recognised the importance of maintaining Polish culture, language, and traditions. The catalyst came when in 1950, the Department of Immigration organised an exhibition of artefacts from all the new migrant communities at the YMCA hall in the city. This was the first time the Polish community stepped out publicly as a group. The Polish exhibit at the YMCA and a subsequent dancing performance of the first Polish dancing group at the Albert Hall, brought the community together. There was a strong desire to build a club.

Early Beginnings | Photos: Top: www.dpcamps.org
Left: J. Zawartko
Right: www.naa.gov.au
Bottom: J. Zawartko



Altenstadt DP Camp, Germany 1946



DP's asparagus farming Gundagai 1949



Bonegilla, 1949 (NAA A12111)



YMCA Centre, Canberra c.1954

Polish Club establishes first

In February 1951, a meeting of interested Poles formed an 'Organising Committee' which worked to draft a constitution for a new Polish club in Canberra. On 16 March 1951, a small group of Canberra Poles held a General Meeting at the YMCA building. They adopted the constitution, and the 'Polish Club of Canberra' was established. However, it was a club with no building or permanent address.

Polish returned veterans follow

In 1953, Polish veterans settling in Canberra decided to establish their own organisation in the city. It was called the Polish Ex-Servicemen's Association Sub-Branch No.5 (better known simply as the SPK). The SPK also had no club house. In the following years, both organisations engaged and shared in many social and cultural activities, and many Poles were involved or members of both organisations.

Start of a small community

The Polish community in Canberra was still quite small in the early 1950s. According to the 1954 ABS Census, there were just 558 Poles living in Canberra, 375 males and just 183 females. Most lived in hostels such as Acton House, Eastlakes, and Riverside.



Extract from Polacy w Kanberze 1951-56 (in Polish)

(describes establishment of Polish Club and election of office bearers)

Rok 1951 9 1952.

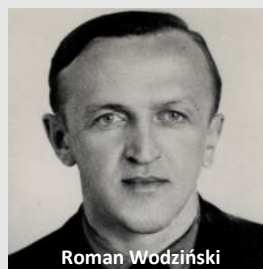
W lutym 1951 roku, kilku Polaków w osobach p.p. inż. E. Trawińskiego, K. Szurgota, W. Czajora, i R. Wodzińskiego zwołała w "Acton Guest House" małe zebranie koleżeńskie, nawstórym przedyskutowano obszernie sprawę założenia polskiej organizacji w Canberra. Obecnych na tym zebraniu było 23 osoby. Zebranie to wykonało Komitet Organizacyjny, w skład którego weszli: E. Trawiński przewodniczący, członkowie: Hanna Czajor, Dionizy Olbrychtowicz, Bolesław Smółka i Roman Wodziński, oraz Komisja Statutowa w osobach: mgr. Jan Dąbrowski, Kazimierz Szurgot i dr. Antoni Przybylski.

Komitet Organizacyjny zwołał pierwsze Walne Zebranie Polaków w Canberra na dzień 16 marca 1951 roku, w sali Y.W.C.A. - Centre. Na zebranie to przybyło 55 osób. Zebranie uchwaliło nazwę organizacji, "Klub Polski w Canberra", zatwierdziło przedłożony przez Komisję Statutową Statut, oraz wybrało pierwszy Zarząd Klubu Polskiego, w skład którego weszli: inż. E. Trawiński jako Prezes, S. Orzybowski -V-Prezes, dr. A. Przybylski sekretarz, inż. E. Przybylak - Skarbnik, J. Dąb-Dworski - imprezowy, oraz Bolesław Smółka i Kazimierz Szurgot - członkowie Zarządu.

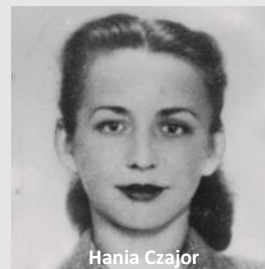
Nieporozumienia natury prywatnej w łonie członków zarządu spowodowały to, że do końca kadencji, zarząd ten przetrwał w następującym składzie: inż. E. Trawiński - Prezes, S. Sochacki V -Prezes, R. Wodziński sekretarz, inż. E. Przybylak - skarbnik, W. Czajor - imprezowy, oraz K. Szurgot i Tadeusz Kościuszko członkowie Zarządu.



E Trawiński (First President)



Roman Wodziński

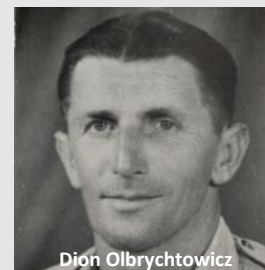


Hania Czajor

First Polish Club
Organising
Committee
February 1951



Bolesław Smółka



Dionizy Olbrychtowicz

Important milestones

The early 1950s saw a number of key initiatives undertaken by the Polish community. Particularly important was the establishment of a Polish School for children, a dance group called 'Kujawiak', and a men's choir called 'Echo'.

There was a very successful theatre group called 'Teatr Kanbery'. Keen footballers established a soccer club (Polski Klub Sportowy) under the Polish Club's umbrella and fielded a team called 'Napad'. There would have been some surprise when Napad won the Soccer Association's Canberra Cup and Coronation Shield in 1953.

The Polish Catholic migrants also welcomed the arrival of Polish priests. First Fr Wolak, and then from the mid-1950s by Fr Warzecha, who played a very active role in supporting the Polish community and activities at the White Eagle House for nearly 15 years.

(Photos | J. Zawartko)



Men's Choir 'Echo', 1953



Napad Soccer Team, 1953



Performance 'Św. Maximilian Kolbe', 1959



Polish Club Committee, 1955-56



Choir 'Krajan' at Cathedral with Fr Warzecha c.1958



Dance Group Kujawiak meeting Governor-General, c.1955



Dance Director W. Kasprzak with 'Kujawiak', c.1955



Polish children's pageant, Albert Hall c.1953



Polish angels, Albert Hall c.1953

Photos | J. Zawartko

First Club House

The community takes a step forward in 1955 pressing for the building of a community centre/club. The community wanted to call the new club 'Polish House (Dom Polski), and established a 'Dom Polski' Building Construction Sub-Committee to raise funds. Money came from two sources: the Polish community in Canberra; and from a loan of £5,000 (Sterling) from the London Headquarters of the Polish Ex-Servicemen's Association. These funds converted to £A6,250. The Polish community raised a further £A7,500 (the initial funds raised would be equivalent to around \$300,000 today).

With these funds and assisted by a grant of land from the Federal Government, the road was clear to building a new club. The SPK took control, and in 1958 started construction of a new building at 15 Moore Street, Turner. Tight funds and reliance on a volunteer workforce saw slow progress with the club not opening until 3 December 1960.

The building was known as the White Eagle House (Dom Orzeł Biały). A separate organisation called the White Eagle Club was established in 'the House' to operate a licensed bar serving alcohol. This separate entity (basically replacing the original Polish Club) had its own President, Executive Committee, and membership (principally non-veterans).

All photos J. Zawartko

POLISH EX-SERVICEMAN'S ASSOCIATION
 SUB-BRANCH No. 5 FOR CANBERRA
 AND DISTRICT INCORPORATED

THE CORNER STONE OF THE HOUSE
 WAS BLESSED ON 12TH APRIL 1958 BY
 HIS EXCELLENCY
 THE MOST REVEREND ARCHBISHOP
DR. JÓZEF GAWLINA, V. M., K. W., K. Z., M. B. E.,

THE HOUSE WAS OFFICIALLY OPENED
 ON THE 3RD DECEMBER 1960 BY
GEN. JULIUSZ E. KLEEBERG, K. P. R., K. W., K. Z.,
 FEDERAL PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL
 OF POLISH ASSOCIATIONS IN AUSTRALIA
 AND FOUNDATION MEMBER OF S. P. K.
 IN AUSTRALIA



White Eagle House (later SPK) c. 1964 | Photo J. Zawartko

Polish House Building Construction Sub-Committee

The Committee membership included: Michał Konecki [Chair], Kazimierz Knap [Secretary] and Marian Petelczyc [Treasurer]. The architect was Tadeusz Andrzejczak. Construction began in 1958 using volunteer labour.



Children's performance with teacher J. Kraciuk c.1964



Christmas pageant 1967



Children's performance c.1964



Pageant c.1965



Polish School at White Eagle House c.1965



Polish exhibition c.1969

Split & Club Reborn

Polish Ex-Servicemen's House (*Klubu Kombatanta*).

Split and transition to new Club (1968-1973). By the mid-1960s differences began to appear in the joint management of the White Eagle House. The White Eagle Club bar was generating good revenue, while the SPK complained at a lack of income.

No easy solutions found to problems. Discussions between the partners to share income and expand the White Eagle House were inconclusive. Differences began to emerge over the building's ownership and membership rights.

Tensions continued to exacerbate such that at a meeting on 22 May 1968, the two organisations decided to end formally their partnership.

By 1970, the SPK No 5 Branch had notified its National Headquarters that it had taken full possession of White Eagle House and renamed it Polish Ex-Servicemen's House (*Klubu Kombatanta*). It took another four years for all formalities to be completed.



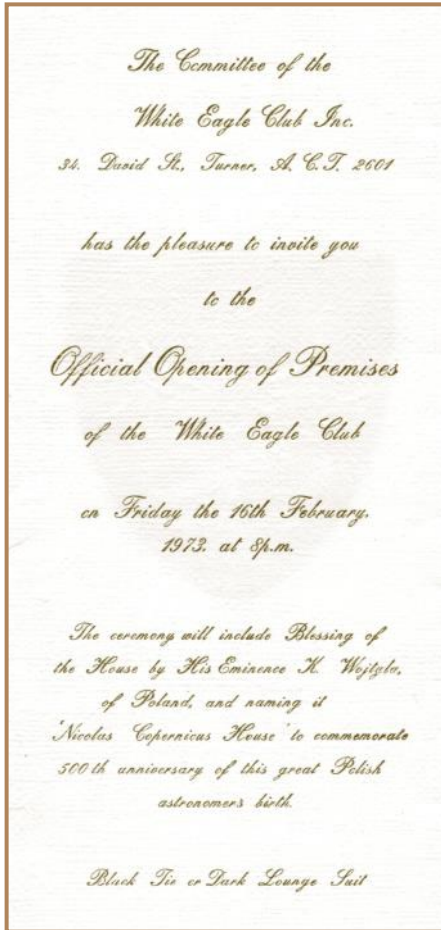
Photo J. Zawartko



Following the split, the White Eagle Club quickly avowed to build a new club in a separate location and secured a concessional land grant from the Federal Government at 38 David Street, Turner.

A postscript. In 2009, the SPK Sub-Branch No.5 was dissolved by the SPK National Office, and the building sold for \$1.35 million. Part of the proceeds received by the Canberra Sub-Branch were donated to the Polish White Eagle Club to assist with refurbishment of the building following fire damage in 2014.

Construction 1971



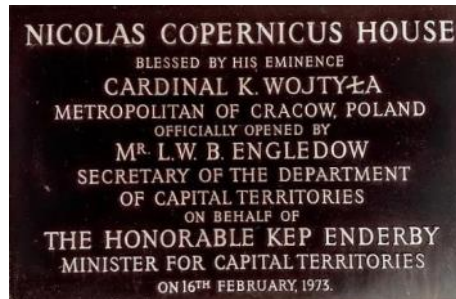
Construction Committee established. A White Eagle House Building Committee was formed in 1969 to oversee the construction of the new club. Again, the Polish community of Canberra raised the bulk of the funds. Over 40 members who had contributed significantly to the building of the Club received the title of Foundation Members.

Internationally acclaimed Milan-born architect designed the new Club. Dr Enrico Taglietti, was commissioned to devise the building concept and design. His artistic vision for the Club was to 'symbolise a big tent under which the whole Polish family in Canberra would gather'. The builder, Józef Kędzia, was paid full-time and used volunteers from the Polish community, who worked after hours and on weekends. Various modifications during construction (such as widening of the main hall) added to costs. The building was completed in less than a year during 1970-71, opening its doors for the first time to members and guests on 13 November 1971. The final cost was \$190,000.

The official opening was delayed until 16 February 1973 when His Eminence Cardinal Karol Wojtyła would visit Australia for the 40th Eucharistic Congress. Mr Engledow, representing Federal Minister for Capital Territories Kep Enderby officially opened the Club. In line with Polish tradition, and to the joy of the Polish community, the Club was then blessed by Cardinal Wojtyła (later Pope John Paul II). The Club was named Dom Polski imienia Mikołaja Kopernika (Polish House in the name of Nicholas Copernicus) but is better known simply as the Polish White Eagle Club. Today, the younger generation refer to it as the 'Polo'!

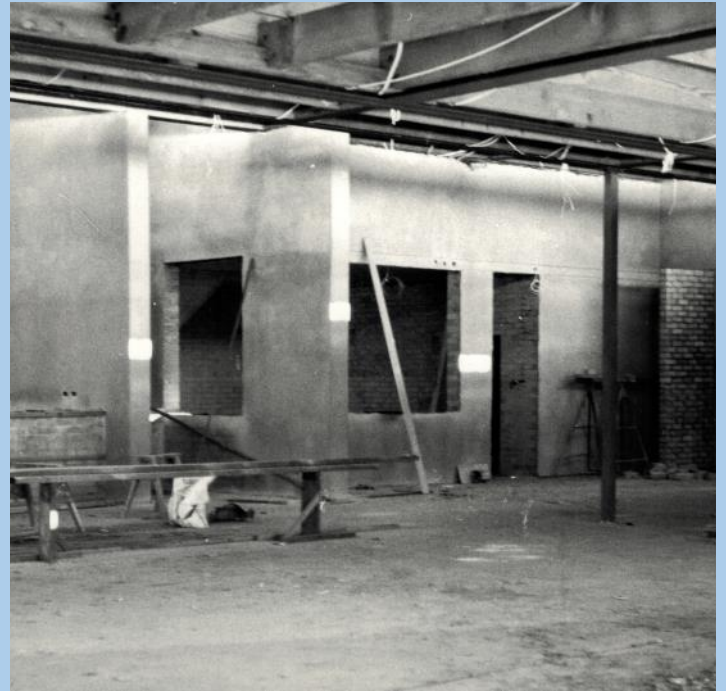


Cardinal Wojtyła at White Eagle Club opening | Photo J. Zawartko



White Eagle Club Building Committee

Members of the Committee included:
Kazimierz Knap [President],
Stefan de Waldorf, Roman Wodziński,
and builder Józef Kędzia, with others
also involved.





Photos | J. Zawartko, 1971



Good and Lean Years

Sculpture of Copernicus in foyer

A wooden sculpture was commissioned for the opening to coincide with the 500th anniversary of the birth of **Nicholas Copernicus**. In honour of Poland's famous astronomer, the Club commissioned this wooden sculpture by well-known Polish Canberra artist, Jadwiga (Jacqueline) Tupalska.



Wooden sculpture by Jadwiga Tupalska | Photo WEC

An active Club for members

In its opening year the Club had **370 members**. The Polish community was excited at having a new Club that supported different activities. A number of different Club Sections formed—Young Adults (Sekcja Młodzieżowa), a Sports Group (Sekcja Sportowa) and Fishermen's Group (Sekcja Rybacka).

Other organisations using the Club were the Polish Saturday School (Polska Szkoła im. arb. J Gawliny), Polish Women's Association (Koło Polek), the Boys and Girls scouting groups (Harcerstwo) and their support (Koło Przyjaciół Harcerstwa) and the Church Committee (Komitet Kościelny).

Various Polish choirs, dance and theatre groups also were frequent users of the Club. The Club thrived in these early years.



Polish Language School in the name of Archbishop Gawlina 1971-92 | Photo U. Baczyński

A flow and ebb of events at the Club

Annual and regular activities were held at the Club.

These included the National Day functions (Akademia on 3 May and 11 November, to celebrate National/Independence Days). Mother's and Father's Days celebrations were a must. Christmas Eve dinners, New Year's Eve Balls, dance evenings, cabarets and theatre performances filled the calendar.



Polish Girl Scouts (Harcerki) 1974 | Photo E. Sulikowski

Early good years (1973-97)

A strong performance for more than two decades. Members characterise the first 25 years of Club operations as the good years with peak activity, a large membership, energetic Executive Committees, and active use of the Club by the Polish community, and its older and new organisations. The Association of Polish Students and Graduates (SASP) was active from 1977 to 1994. The 1980s saw the Friends of Solidarność, join in Club activities. Newly formed dance groups, Trojak and Wielkopolska, were competing for members and greater attention. Theatre groups, choirs and scouting groups were frequent Club users for much of the period. The Club opened daily from 3.30pm to 10.30 pm and was making good profits from the bar and the poker machines. The peak year for the Club was 1995 with over 400 members.



Dożynki (Harvest Festival Performance) 1975 | Photo WEC

Lean years (1998-2005)

Tough times were followed by recovery. The lean years were characterised by dwindling membership (around 150 members annually), incomplete Executive Committees, little profit and out-dated poker machines. This situation provoked a crisis in 2001 and possible Club closure was mooted. By 2005 opening hours had been reduced to 5 hours from Friday to Sunday, with the Club's restaurant under pressure to operate profitably. Appeals were made to the community with much debate about how to support the Club. Some members suggested that 2005 be nominated as the *Year of United Poles in the ACT*, which spoke much about re-evaluating the objectives of the Polish community and the need to support the Club.



Chopin Ball 2010 | Photo A. Plazińska

Recovery (2006-12)

The good years began to return in 2006. Club patronage was increasing among Australian organisations. The recovery was due to the efforts of the various Executive Committees, which had attracted younger members with bright ideas and much energy. Functions included the Chopin Ball, 50th anniversary of Koło Polek, and participation in Canberra's Multicultural Festival. The Polish restaurant attracted patrons. The Club became a popular venue for local and touring performing musicians. Concerts hosted by the Canberra Musicians Club raised the Club's profile. Significantly, poker machines were removed in 2007, and donations from a financial appeal helped pay for much needed renovations.

40th Anniversary 2013

Gala event

The Club celebrated its 40th anniversary in 2013. The Club's architect, Dr Enrico Taglietti, attended the celebration. The Club was looking forward to a bright and prosperous future. Membership was increasing and the Polo restaurant was popular. Polish events, live music, dance groups, dance lessons, meetings and other activities were regular features at the Club.



Dr Enrico Taglietti (centre) | Photo WEC 2013



Former President Barbara Alwast | Photo Canberra Times

Visionary club prospers

By Mark Sawka

IN CANBERRA many ethnic clubs have come and gone over the years but one that is enjoying a resurgence in its 40th year is the Polish-Australian White Eagle Club.

It has been a year of celebration for a community that has contributed so much to the Canberra region since arriving from a war-ravaged Europe in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

For many who escaped the horror, Australia, Canberra and the Polish Club became home.

Life member of the club Joseph Zawarko arrived in Australia soon after World War II.

"After the difficult life that I went through, with the underground army during the war and then escape from Poland to Germany where I joined a Polish guard company with the Americans, I couldn't go back to Poland," Mr Zawarko said.

At the time Poland was under Soviet control and Polish refugees were given the choice of America, Canada or Australia. Mr Zawarko said given America's friendship with Joseph Stalin there was only one real choice - Australia.

"I came with nothing," he said. "But this is the only place which I feel as though I'm really home."

"This is a lovely place."

Many of the Polish who arrived in the region after the war would go to work on the Snowy Mountains scheme or the Cotter Dam project. In time they began to congregate and form various groups.

In 1973 the Polish community had their club blessed by then Cardinal Karol Wojtyla, later Pope John Paul II, who was visiting Australia. The opening coincided with the 500th



White Eagle club members Lodziia and Joseph Zawarko, Andrew Bajkowski, Barbara Alwast and Wanda Horky look forward to celebrating the club's 40th anniversary. Picture: Besa Kurtz

anniversary of the birth of Polish astronomer Nicolas Copernicus.

The club has since been central to maintaining many of the traditions the Polish community hold dear.

President Barbara Alwast said they were very proud that the club had been in existence for 40 years.

"We've had ups and downs as any club has but in the last few years it has been going well," she said.

A traditional Polish restaurant has been operating successfully for three years, with the Canberra Musicians Club finding a home there.

The club, designed by internation-

ally acclaimed architect Enrico Taglietti, has an intimate homely feel in dramatic contrast to many modern larger establishments.

Vice-president Andrew Bajkowski represents a new generation.

"The club went through a rather lean period, like all of the ethnic clubs in the 1990s, and some of them are shut," he said. "But part through hard work and persistence and partly because we've got this wonderful building and facility, and a very different change in outlook, we've been able to increase patronage."

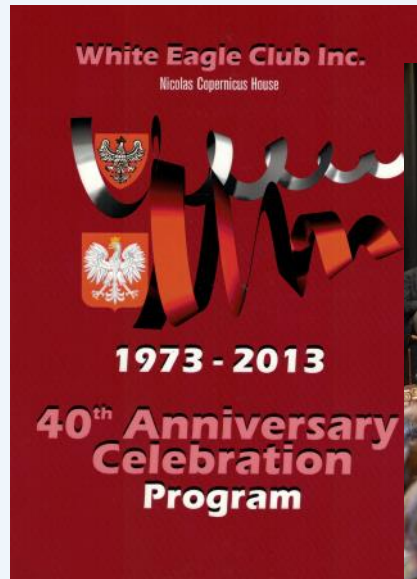
The club was the first in the ACT

to take the financial risk of divesting itself of poker machines, which led to a renewed vitality and more community groups coming in.

Rounding out their 40th anniversary celebrations, the White Eagle Club will host a Polish Christmas Festival Day on December 14 in Turner.

Polish food and beer as well as a variety of stalls and other attractions will be at the event. The festival starts at 11am and is expected to continue until late in the evening. Everyone in the community is invited.

Visionary club prospers | Photo The Chronicle, 26 November 2013



40th Anniversary Celebration | Photo Kronika 2013

Fire & Recovery 2014-22

Shattered dreams

The Club suffered a devastating fire on 21 January 2014. Police believe the fire was deliberately lit but no culprits were caught. The Club's bright future was in doubt. The Club did not reopen until 16 May 2015.

Rebuilding was not easy. The kitchen at the rear of the Club was totally destroyed. The hall, members lounge, and upstairs conference areas all suffered smoke and water damage. Insurance assessors estimated the damage at around \$500,000. Disappointingly, the Club had to wait 10 months for a smaller insurance payout which delayed reconstruction until December 2014.

Club President at the time, Barbara Alwast said Canberra's Polish-Australians and the community at large lost "the place where they love to meet, and they lost a good restaurant".

The Club was very grateful the community rallied in support, including the Croatian Club, Alliance Française, and the Turner Bowls Club.

Followed by rapid recovery

The Executive Committee moved rapidly to reenergise the Club. By 2016, a new licensee was granted a licence to operate the Polo Restaurant and quickly established a reputation for serving traditional Polish cuisine with a modern twist. The Club welcomed the return of 'Butcher Days', dance studios, Polish festivals and dances. Broader engagement with the community through private functions (wakes, birthdays, and christenings) as well as events hosted by Dirty Deeds (Live at the Polo) continued to boost Club patronage and bar revenue.



Fire at the Club | Photos Canberra Times

Culture & Traditions



The Council of Polish Organisations ACT is the umbrella group representing the whole Polish community. It promotes and coordinates cultural events and provides financial and other assistance to member organisations. The Council publishes the Kronika Polonii (Polish Chronicle).

Of course, the Club also organises activities throughout the year, including festivals, dances, New Year's Eve parties, as well as cabarets featuring artists from Poland, just to name a few.



Maintaining Polish heritage, language and traditions is embedded in the Club's Constitution. To that extent, the Club's facilities always have been provided free-of-charge to Polish organisations, but these organisations have changed over time.

The sports and fishermen's clubs have waned as their membership aged. The Polish Women's Group (Koło Polek) has morphed into the Seniors Club. The children's Sacrasong choir and the girls and boys scouting groups have fallen away to be replaced by playgroups, youth groups, and dancing groups. The Krasnoludki Youth Group commenced as a need arose for younger Polish families to meet and support each other and integrate their children within the community. It still serves as a feeder for other groups.

Polish organisations most active in the Club today include the Polish Seniors Club, Krasnoludki, Bursztyнки Play Group, Wielkopolska Folkloric Dance Group, Polish School (Phillip), Friends of Chopin Australia, the Art & Craft Society, the Polish Computer Group (Polonet), Polish Chronicle (Kronika Polonii) editors, and the Australian-Polish Business Council.



Kronika Polonii, 2021 | Photo A. Pazińska



Friends of Chopin | Photo WEC



Art & Craft event organisers 2017 | Photo WEC



National Day | Photo Kronika Nr. 110, 2017



Polish Language School | Photo Kronika Nr. 120, 2022

Polish Organisations



Using the Club



Polish Chronicle
Kronika Polonii



Pope John Paul II Polish Catholic Centre
Polskie Centrum Katolickie
im. św. Jana Pawła II

polish playgroup



KRASNOLUDKI

Polish Children Group "Krasnoludki" and
Polish Youth Alliance, Canberra
Grupa Dziecięca "Krasnoludki"
Związek Młodzieży Polskiej



Polish Playgroup "Bursztyнки"
(Little Ambers)
Polska Grupa Przedszkolna "Bursztyнки"



Polish Language School, Phillip ACT
Polska Szkoła w Canberze



FRIENDS OF CHOPIN AUSTRALIA INC.

Friends of Chopin Australia Incorporated
Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Chopina, Australia



Polish Seniors Club in the ACT Inc.
Polski Klub Seniora w ACT

WIELKOPOLSKA
CANBERRA POLISH FOLKLORIC DANCE GROUP



Polish Dance Group "Wielkopolska"
Grupa Taneczna "Wielkopolska"

- Polish Historical Institute in Australia
- Polish Arts & Craft Society, Canberra
- Polonet Computer Group, Canberra
- Professor J. Wilczynski Fund Management Committee
- SPK Fund Management Committee
- Australia Poland Business Council Inc



Polish Women's Group 1999 | Photo Koła Polek



Katyń Anniversary 1980 | Photo U. Baczyński



Dr Klim's Girls Choir c. early 1970s | Photo J. Zawartko



Girls dancing c. mid 1970s | Photo J. Zawartko



UN Day c.1985 | Photo J. Zawartko



J. Kraciuk's Sacrasong Girls Choir c. 1979 | Photo D. Zawartko



Kronika Polonii helpers, 2013 | Photo A. Plazińska



Multicultural Festival 2011 | Photo A. Plazińska



Polish Seniors Group on Remembrance Day 2018 | Photo M. Stawski



Koto Polek 50th Anniversary 2009 | Photo A. Plazińska



Bursztynki Play Group 2022 | Photo A. Waldon



Club Dance 2017 | Photo A. Liso



Ambassador Kołodziejki farewell 2022 | Photo Ł. Graban



Emilia Strzelecka & Marek Ravski (on right) | Photo M. Mikołajczak



Enjoying the Cabaret | Photo WEC



Wielkopolska Dance Group at Biesiada (Summer Revelry) | Photo K. Mikołajczak



Festive almond crescents | Photo Z Sulikowski



Polish Art & Craft Group Christmas stall 2022 | Photo Art & Craft Society



Club New Year's Eve function 2023 | Photo E Buchaniec



New Year's Eve 2023 | Photo E Buchaniec



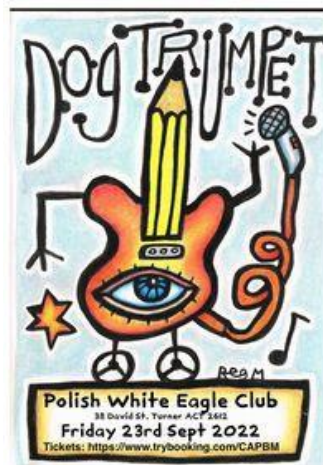
Club mascot | Photo WEC



Community Engagement

Live music scene

Chop and change. Dirty Deeds is the most recent successful organiser of live music at the Club. But live music has a much longer history. Many in the older Polish community will fondly recall dances at the Club with the Polish band 'Siroła' a frequent attraction performing polkas, waltzes and traditional folk songs.

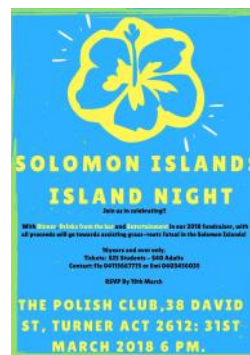


Like Dirty Deeds, the CMC supported local original musicians. Close collaboration benefited both the CMC and Club, but the 2014 fire saw the CMC move to another venue.

Other community groups use the Club on an ad-hoc basis, such as ethnic groups from the Solomon Islands, or Bangladesh community, or groups such as the Canberra Brewers and Pinball Players.



Crossing into the new century, the long-term hire of the hall by the Merry Muse Folk Club was a great support. When Merry Muse moved to a new venue, the void was filled by the Canberra Musicians Club (CMC).



Club's Future

Next generation to step-up

The Executive Committee governing the Club recognises the need for the next generation of Polish descendants to take up the reins and management responsibilities. With an ageing post-war Polish population, it is clear that in the future most of the Club's income will be generated mainly by Australians of all backgrounds together with their organisations.

The Club is well located to take advantage of its position in the inner-city suburb of Turner, so close to Civic, within a 7 kms radius surrounding the city centre. The suburb and city are both undergoing rapid urban densification, with booming population growth. The Club's close proximity to the Australian National University also makes it popular with students.

There is a shortage of space to hold live music and other community events in Canberra. The Club is fortunate to have 'Live at the Polo' which is a great attraction for members and guests. Other community groups and associations also require suitable venues for meetings, dance classes and other recreational pursuits.

The Club is planning to capitalise on these underlying opportunities to maintain a steady source of income. The Executive Committee is working proactively to ensure the viability of the Club and to fulfill its aims of being a Club for Poles, their families, and friends.

We are optimistic that the Covid-19 pandemic is behind us. The Club's closure or limited trading over 2020-21 was a significant financial burden, eased by JobKeeper payments and support from the ACT Government. We cannot necessarily rely on such support in the future.

With an ageing building, the Club requires continual maintenance and renovation. Over 2020-22, the whole Club, inside and out, was repainted. The roof was repaired. The parquet flooring in the main hall was replaced, as were the carpets in all downstairs areas.

Priorities for coming years include further roof work, resurfacing of pavement around the Club and upgrading toilets to include a disabled toilet and entrance ramps. These are all important renovations and financing of this work will be a major focus.

Nevertheless, we believe the Club's future is full of bright promise. We are confident the White Eagle Club will truly remain a meeting place as envisioned by its architect Dr Enrico Taglietti – for Poles and all multicultural Australians but still under the stewardship of the Polish community in the Canberra and Queanbeyan region.



Executive Committee 2023



President
Andrew Bajkowski

Vice President
Eva Buchaniec

Treasurer
Edward Sulikowski

Secretary
Julia Różycka

Membership Secretary
Wanda Kiljańska-Całka



Member
Anna Kaufmann

Member
Bożena Belżowska

Member
Irena Zarębska

Member
Leszek Piechocki

Member
Miroslaw Czajkowski



Past Club Presidents

Polish Club in Canberra (Klub Polski w Canberze) 1951-1968

1951-1954	Eugeniusz Trawiński (1 st)
1954-1955	Kazimierz Szurgot
1955-1956	Roman Wodziński
1956-1957	Eugeniusz Obara (1 month)
1956-1958	Roman Wodziński
1958-1959	Zygmunt Schlegel
1959-1961	Józef Zawartko
1961-1962	Stanisław Augustyzak
1962-1963	Michał Konecki
1963-1964	Adam Milańczuk
1964-1966	Michał Konecki
1966-1968	Kazimierz Knap

White Eagle Club (from time of split) 1968-2023

1968-1970	Józef Stefaniak
1970-1973	Marian Domagała
1973-1976	Zenon Mikołajczak
1976-1980	Andrzej Mikołajczak
1980-1982	Zenon Mikołajczak
1982-1983	Marian Rudnicki
1983-1986	Zenon Mikołajczak
1986-1989	Tadeusz Zapaśnik
1989-1990	Stanisław Kwasik [5 months]
1990-1991	Tadeusz Zapaśnik
1991-1994	Benon Wachniewski
1994-1997	Eugeniusz Nodzyński
1997-2001	Andrzej Mikołajczak
2001-2005	Zygmunt J. Opczyński
2005-2007	Teresa Pęczalska
2007-2008	Tomasz Śliwiński
2008-2009	Iwona Adam
2009-2012	Barbara Alwast
2012-2013	Eta Rogoyska
2013-2015	Barbara Alwast
2015-2019	Andrew Bajkowski
2019-2022	Eva Buchanec
2022-2023	Andrew Bajkowski

Donations



Life Members



Club Facilities for Hire

Main Hall (Ground Floor)

The main hall (18m x 11m) seats up to 120 people at tables. A lectern and microphones are also available. Table cloths and glassware can be provided for an additional fee. The hall has an upgraded sound and stage lighting, a large drop-down projection screen, access to a piano and backstage change/green room creates an ideal venue for live music and theatrical performances, concerts, balls, weddings, birthdays, anniversaries and wakes.

Members Lounge (Ground Floor)

A fully licensed bar and restaurant with 1970s charm. A boutique selection of imported European beers and spirits — including over 50 types of vodkas from Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Finland and Ukraine are available.

The Club's 'Polo' restaurant can provide catering options, generally limited to a buffet or a sit-down dinner.

Chopin Room (Ground Floor)

The Chopin Room is a quaint yet charming space filled with polish memorabilia and traditional pieces as well as some of the clubs original furniture. This private extension of the dining area seats up to 35 people and includes a timber dance floor ideal for smaller dinner parties or gatherings.

Library (Ground Floor)

Be transported back in time. The Library is lined with authentic polish literature and décor has excellent acoustics creating an intimate setting perfect for quiet conversations. The room is also available for hire and is ideal for small gatherings, community meetings and informal business meetings. It seats up to 20 people and includes a lounge and direct access to the bar.

SPK Boardroom (1st Floor)

The SPK Boardroom is located on the first floor of the Club and provides a unique meeting space with high vaulted ceilings, an abundance of natural light and the buildings original finishes and furniture. The original solid timber boardroom table seats 12 in a comfortable setting with a delightful charm as well as including a drop down projection screen, projector and white board. Private toilet facilities and air-conditioning are added for comfort.



Acknowledgements

Contributors

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White Eagle Club Executive Committee
16 February 2023.

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Caveat

The Polish community's history in the Canberra-Queanbeyan region stretches back for over 70 years. Early records and documentation are often missing, incomplete or unavailable. While every effort has been taken to ensure accuracy of facts, errors may exist. The White Eagle Club Executive Committee would, therefore, appreciate that any errors identified by Members be notified to the Committee along with supporting documentary evidence.

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—•• POLISH ••—
WHITE EAGLE CLUB