

Institute of National Remembrance

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The celebration of the 80th anniversary of the arrival of Poles in the city of León, Mexico



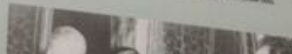






Visita del General Władysław Sikorski a México diciembre de 1942

“La visita del General Władysław Sikorski a México fue precedida por un intercambio de correspondencia diplomática entre el embajador mexicano en Londres, Alfonso Ruizcortés Díaz, y su gobierno, en el que describió al Primer Ministro del gobierno polaco como uno de los líderes más importantes de la escena política mundial después de Roosevelt, Churchill y Stalin. El resultado de esta recomendación fue una invitación a hacer una visita oficial a México y una propuesta preliminar para albergar a 20 mil refugiados polacos. [...] El presidente Roosevelt ofreció ayuda a Władysław Sikorski para financiar la operación con un préstamo especial. El préstamo total sin intereses ascendió a tres millones de dólares, que se devolvieron una vez terminada la guerra. Durante una reunión con el presidente Manuel Ávila Camacho, el General Władysław Sikorski, reconoció sus méritos para Polonia, y en agradecimiento por el consentimiento para recibir refugiados polacos, le otorgó la más alta condecoración estatal, la Orden del Águila Blanca. En una conferencia de prensa conjunta, el presidente de México, utilizando el término eufemístico “refugiados polacos de Asia”, anunció la firma de un acuerdo entre Polonia y México sobre la temporal – hasta el final de las hostilidades – permanencia en México de un grupo de hasta 5 mil polacos”, Pío Piñeros.





EL SABOR AMARGO DE LA VICTORIA

THE BITTER TASTE OF VICTORY

La



This panel features a large photograph of a street scene with a large crowd. It includes a small inset photograph of soldiers in a trench and a text block starting with 'La'.

DESDE NORMANDÍA HASTA WILHELMSHAVEN

FROM NORMANDY TO WILHELMSHAVEN

El



This panel features a large photograph of soldiers in a trench. It includes two smaller inset photographs of soldiers in a trench and a text block starting with 'El'.













On 4 November 2023, celebrations were held in Santa Rosa, Mexico, with the participation of IPN representatives, in connection with the 80th anniversary of the arrival of Poles evacuated from the Soviet Union to the city. The city of León hosted the opening of the IPN exhibition "Trails of Hope. The Odyssey of Freedom."

In 1943, 1,432 Poles, mostly women and children, found refuge in Santa Rosa, 10 kilometers from the town of León de los Aldamas in central Mexico. As a result of the 1942 agreement between Gen. Władysław Sikorski and Manuel Avila Camacho, the Mexican President, the Mexican government offered to accept a group of Polish citizens who had been in refugee camps in Persia and India after being evacuated from the Soviet Union.

80 years ago the first transport of Polish refugees arrived in Leon,

where they were warmly welcomed. The second transport arrived in Los Angeles on 24 October 1943, also aboard the "Hermitage" ship. The Poles arrived in Santa Rosa on 2 November.

On the anniversary of the arrival of Poles in Mexico, ceremonies were held in Santa Rosa with the participation of the Polish Ambassador to Mexico and Costa Rica Maciej Ziętara, the Director General Ciudad del Nino, the Mayor of León, and members of the Polish-Mexican community. The celebration was attended by representatives of the Institute of National Remembrance including its President Karol Nawrocki Ph.D. A commemorative plaque was also unveiled in the city, and Gen. Władysław Sikorski's room, funded by the Polish Embassy in Mexico and Costa Rica, was opened. The IPN President symbolically paid tribute to the Poles by taking part in the run.

IPN President Karol Nawrocki stressed that Mexico was the only country, other than the countries of the British Commonwealth bound by a military alliance, that offered humanitarian aid to hundreds of Poles leaving the Soviet Union with General Władysław Anders' Army in the spring of 1942, and thanked the Mexican people for the kindness shown years ago to Poles in need of help and shelter.

On 4 November 2023 the IPN "Trails of Hope. The Odyssey of Freedom" flagship project was inaugurated at the Museum of León in Mexico. The exhibition is part of an educational project that tells the story of the heroism of Polish soldiers who fought on all fronts of World War II. It also depicts the dramatic fate of the civilian population, especially

children.

Moreover, a plaque dedicated to Polish refugees who were rescued from Soviet captivity thanks to Gen. Władysław Anders' Army and in accordance with an agreement between Gen. Władysław Sikorski and Mexican President Manuel Avila Camacho, was unveiled. Poles found refuge in the Santa Rosa settlement in Mexico between 1943 and 1947. The commemorative plaque was designed and financed by the Institute of National Remembrance.

The event was attended by the Polish Ambassador to Mexico and Costa Rica Maciej Ziętara, the Director of the Museum and representatives of the Institute of National Remembrance, including the Director of the Office of International Cooperation Agnieszka Jędrzak. Sławomir Bardski from the Office of International Cooperation showed the guests around the exhibition.

The opening of the exhibition and unveiling of the plaque in Mexico is focused not only on the commemoration of the role Poles played in history, but also to emphasize the ties linking Poland and Mexico, where many Poles fleeing repression and seeking freedom found refuge.

Santa Rosa - a shelter for Poles in Mexico

As a result of the arrangements made in 1942 between Gen. Władysław Sikorski and Manuel Avila Camacho, President of Mexico, the Mexican government offered to accept a group of Polish citizens who stayed at refugee camps in Persia and India following their evacuation from the Soviet Union.

In 1943, 1,432 Polish refugees reached Mexico. Soon Hacienda Santa Rosa became a Polish refuge in Mexico where cultural life flourished, mainly thanks to the combination of the involvement of local intelligentsia and funding from the United States. Among other things, the "Polak w Meksyku" newspaper (English: "A Pole in Mexico") was published, and amateur theatre groups were active. The most important care facility in Santa Rosa was the General Władysław Sikorski Educational Centre. It housed 265 children who were left on their own without parental care.

The vast majority of Poles perceived their stay in Mexico as a temporary solution, hoping to return to their country quickly - as soon as the war was over. However, the new balance of power in Europe after WW2 changed those plans.

[Read more about Poles in Santa Rosa on our website devoted to the IPN flagship project, "Trails of Hope, the Odyssey of Freedom".](#)



Holy Mass aboard USS Hermitage attended by Polish children, Indian Ocean, 1943 (Photo: Józef Piłsudski Institute of America)



Train station in Leon, Guanajuato, Mexico, 1940s (Photo from the collection of Gloria Carreño)



Polish girls in traditional folk costumes, Santa Rosa, Mexico, 1943
(Photo: PAN, the Julian Płowy collection)



The most important care facility in Santa Rosa was the General Władysław Sikorski Educational Institution, which from the beginning was headed by Zygmunt Ejchorszt. In mid-1944, Chicago-based Felician Sisters came to help establish the settlement's educational system. Pictured here: Polish children at school, Santa Rosa, 1943-1947 (Photo: Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum in London)



Tailoring class, Santa Rosa, 1945 (Photo: PAN, the Julian Płowy collection)



The youngest students at the Santa Rosa hacienda, 1944 (Photo: PAN, the Julian Płowy collection)



In Santa Rosa, vocational education was also provided. Fr. Leonard Kaszyński became the head of the newly founded State Vocational School. There was a department for dental laboratory technology, one for decorative arts, and one for tailoring. Pictured here: boys during a silversmithing workshop, Santa Rosa, 1944 (Photo: Polish Institute and General Sikorski Museum in London).

The project has already visited dozens of cultural institutions in several countries on four continents, and Mexico is the next stop on its way - but that journey is far from over.

[See the project website](#)

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