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FEBRUARY 1997—VOL. 86, NO. 2

Eugene Kusielewicz: Scholar and Teacher

BY JOHN A. DROBNICKI

Eugene Kusielewicz, a leading spokesman on Polish and Polish American affairs and former Associate Professor of History at St. John's University, passed away on December 10, 1996 after suffering a stroke at his upstate New York home. He was 66.

Eugene Francis Vincent Kusielewicz was born in Brooklyn, New York, on October 12, 1930. After receiving his B.A. from St. John's University, he went on to earn an M.A. and Ph.D. from Fordham University, where he studied under eminent historian Oskar Halecki, under whose guidance he wrote his doctoral dissertation on "The Teschen Question at the Paris Peace Conference" in 1963.

Kusielewicz began his teaching career in 1953 at P.S. 126 in New York City, and quickly moved on to St. George's Academy, where he was a social studies teacher and Chairman of the department. He joined the faculty of his alma mater, St. John's, in 1955, and taught there until his retirement.

Kusielewicz was active in many Polish American organizations, particularly the Kosciuszko Foundation, where he progressed from Assistant to the President (1963-65) to Vice President (1965-70), and then succeeded Stephen Mizwa as President (1970-79). During his tenure, he also served as editor of the Foundation's *Monthly Newsletter*, for which he wrote a regular column. Kusielewicz also served as President of the Polish American Historical Association (1964-66) and editor of its journal, *Polish American Studies* (1964-68); a member of the Advisory Boards of the Jozef Pilsudski Institute for Research Into the Modern History of Poland, the Polish Museum of America, the Wanda



EUGENE KUSIELEWICZ. Leading spokesman of Polonia.

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Kusielewicz: American Polonia has Lost a Great Champion

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Rochr Foundation, the Catholic Historical Association, and the Polish Institute of Arts and Sciences in America. Long active in Greenpoint's Smolenski Democratic Club, he was appointed a Trustee of the Brooklyn Public Library by (then) Mayor Ed Koch, and was a member of the official U.S. Delegation to the installation of Pope John Paul II in 1978. Kusielewicz was one of the founders of the *Polish American World*, and contributed a weekly column during its early days. Among his many honors were the PAHA's Haiman Medal for "outstanding contributions in the field of Polish American Studies"; the Distinguished Service Medal of the Polish Ministry of Higher Education; the Annual Award of the Polish Section of the Societe Europeenne de Cul-

ture; the Distinguished Service Award of the American Council of Polish Cultural Clubs; and the Citizen of the Year Award of the *Polish American World*. He was inducted into the Knights of Malta in 1988.

Kusielewicz was a noted authority on Wilson and the Polish cause at the Paris Peace Conference, and contributed articles in that area to many scholarly journals, including the *Polish Review* and *Polish American Studies*. He was the author of *Reflections on the Cultural Condition of the Polish American Community* (1969), editor of *A Tribute to Stephen P. Mizwa* (1972), and co-editor of *Polonia Amerykanska* (1988) and *Polonia Stanow Zjednoczonych Ameryki 1910-1918* (1989). Among his many publications are articles on such varied topics as the image of Poles in American media, King John

III, Sobieski and the Battle of Vienna, and the portrayal of Ignace Paderewski in American poetry. As PAJ readers know, Kusielewicz had a special interest in the Holocaust and fought tirelessly for the recognition of Polish losses during that tragic period.

Kusielewicz also was writer and chief historical consultant for 17 half-hour films on the Polish American Experience, produced by Polish Television in commemoration of the U.S. Bicentennial.

Under his editorship, Twayne Publishers and the Kosciuszko Foundation issued a Library of Polish Studies, which brought several classic historical titles back into print and made others available in English. An active guest lecturer, Kusielewicz organized symposia and presented papers throughout his career, before

audiences at scholarly conferences in both the U.S. and Poland, at neighborhood libraries, and at local community meetings, and was frequently sought out by the media for comments on events in Poland and Eastern Europe. During the heated Auschwitz convent controversy in 1989, he debated Rabbi Avi Weiss on the CNBC program "McLaughlin," and also spoke on that topic on PBS' program "John McLaughlin's One on One."

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While a graduate student in history, this writer was fortunate to take some classes with Professor Kusielewicz and to work under him as a graduate assistant. Aside from his erudition and marvelous sense of humor, what I will remember most about Eugene Kusielewicz is how he always had time to devote to his stu-

dents, whether by explaining the intricacies of a particular historical topic or gently prodding someone to complete their assignment. Professor K. served as advisor for many master's theses and doctoral dissertations over the years, at least one of which was later published as a monograph (*General Weygand and the Battle of the Vistula, 1920* by Zdzislaw Musialik).

While Dr. Kusielewicz will justly be remembered for his scholarly contributions to Polish and Polish American historical literature, what I am most grateful for is the way that he instilled pride in me for my Polish heritage.

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Kusielewicz is survived by his wife Krystyna, and his children, Janina and Christopher. American Polonia has lost a great champion.