



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

SENATOR DONALD F. HUMASON, JR.

Second Hampden and Hampshire District

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May 28, 2019

Michael Hurley
Senate Clerk
Office of the Clerk of the Senate
State House, Room 335
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Steven T. James
House Clerk
Office of the Clerk of the House
State House, Room 145
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Senate Clerk Hurley and House Clerk James,

On January 11, 2017, Governor Baker signed into law Chapter 6 of the Resolves of 2016, An Resolve establishing a special commission for the Preservation of Polish Heritage in the Pioneer Valley. The purpose of the commission was to promote: (i) promote public support and funding of Polish cultural preservation activities in western Massachusetts; (ii) complement activities that acknowledge the contributions people of Polish heritage have made and continue to make to the Pioneer Valley and the commonwealth; and (iii) evaluate the public and private resources available to preserve and research Polish language, history, culture, genealogy, music and the immigrant experience.

The Commission was charged with filing a report of its findings and any recommendations with the Clerks of the Senate and the House of Representatives and the chairs of the senate and house committees on ways and means by June 1, 2019.

Attached for your review is our report. Please feel to contact me should you have any questions regarding the recommendations contained in the report.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Don Humason, Jr." in a cursive style.

Don Humason, Jr.
State Senator
2nd Hampden & Hampshire

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*Report of the
Special Commission to
Preserve Polish Heritage
in the Pioneer Valley*

June 2019

Legal Authority: MGL, Chapter 6 of the Acts of 2016
Secretariat: Joint responsibilities by Governor's Office &
both Legislative Branches; Amendment House No. 4922

January 11, 2017



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HR4522

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HR 4562

Chapter 6
of the Acts of 2016

THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

In the One Hundred and Eighty-Ninth General Court

RESOLVE: ESTABLISHING A SPECIAL COMMISSION TO PRESERVE POLISH HERITAGE IN THE PIONEER VALLEY

Resolved: That there shall be a special commission to investigate and report on the preservation of Polish culture and history in the Pioneer Valley. The special commission shall: (1) promote public support and funding of Polish cultural preservation activities in western Massachusetts; (ii) complement activities that acknowledge the contributions people of Polish heritage have made and continue to make to the Pioneer Valley and the commonwealth; and (iii) evaluate the public and private resources available to preserve and research Polish language, history, culture, genealogy, music and the immigrant experience.

The special commission shall be comprised of; 3 members of the house of representatives, of which at least 2 shall be of Polish heritage; 2 members of the senate; and 5 members to be appointed by the governor, 3 of whom shall be officers in Polish heritage or Polish genealogical organizations located in Hampshire, Hamden or Franklin County, 1 of whom shall be selected from a list of 3 persons nominated by the Polish Center of Discovery and Learning, Inc. in the town of Chicopee and 1 of whom shall be selected from a list of 3 persons nominated by the director of the Slavic, Eurasian and East European Studies Program at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

The special commission shall file its report with the clerks of the senate and the house of representatives and the chairs of the senate and house committees on ways and means, not later than July 1, 2017.

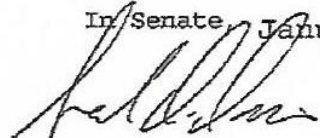
House of Representatives, December 29, 2016.

Passed,

 , Speaker.

In Senate, January 3, 2017.

Passed,

 , President.

July 11, 2017.

Approved,


Governor.

HOUSE No. 4922

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, October 4, 2018.

The committee on Ways and Means, to whom was referred the Resolve reviving and further continuing the special commission established to investigate and report on the preservation of Polish culture and history in the Pioneer Valley (House, No. 4543), reports recommending that the same ought to pass with an amendment substituting therefor the accompanying resolve (House, No. 4922).

For the committee,

JEFFREY SÁNCHEZ.

HOUSE No. 4922

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the One Hundred and Ninetieth General Court

(2017-2018)

Resolve reviving and further continuing the special commission established to investigate and report on the preservation of Polish culture and history in the Pioneer Valley.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 Resolved. That the special commission established in chapter 6 of the resolves of 2016 is hereby revived and continued to June 1, 2019. The special commission shall file its report with the clerks of the senate and house of representatives not later than June 1, 2019.



Polish Center of Discovery and Learning

33 South Street • Chicopee, MA 01013
e-mail: polishcenter@elms.edu • www.polishcenter.net
Phone: 413.592.0001

Our task to study/research how best to preserve Polish heritage and culture within the Pioneer Valley, as recommended in detail herein, could not have been accomplished without the hard work, leadership, and collaboration of the Special Commission members. To that end we submit our final report in anticipation of legislative follow-up by our commission member legislators.

As chairperson of the 'Special Commission to Preserve Polish Heritage in The Pioneer Valley', my task was made a pleasure in large measure and gratitude to the commission members who persevered for over two years to give life to our detailed recommendations herein presented.

As Chair I extend my personal gratitude to fellow members of the commission, i.e. State Senators Donald F. Humason, Jr. and Eric P. Lesser, and State Representatives Peter V. Kocot, John Scibak, Todd M. Smola, and Barbara (Gaskalka) MacEwan, Joanne M. Gruszkos, Peter Nowak, Robert A. Rothstein, PhD, Frederick Zimnoch, as well as presenters, i.e. Helen (Szubzda) Curtin, Fr. Adam Czarnecki, Irene Gadecki, Robert Gibowicz, Eugene Kirejczyk, Joseph Kos, Stephanie Kraft, Ronald J. Lech, Wieslaw Olszak, Stas Radosz, Teresa (Struziak) Sherman, John Skibiski, Jr., Carolyn Topor, Joseph Topor, Frank Wolanin, Jeannie Zapala. Their commitment and untiring efforts gave breadth to this report and strength of its recommendations, which speaks volumes for the need to preserve our Polish heritage.

We would be remiss in not acknowledging the late State Representative Peter Kocot, one of the leading sponsors of this commission. His energy, commitment, and passion for his Polish heritage, is evident throughout this report's recommendations. His contribution will not be forgotten, and his spirit and pride will long be remembered.

Our work in preserving the history and culture of the Polish peoples does not end with this report. The recommendations herein offer an opportunity for all cultures and ethnic communities within Massachusetts to improve their respective communications, thereby expanding the story of their people...we look forward to that journey.

Sincerely,

Carl Eger, Jr.
Board Chairperson



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

THE GENERAL COURT

May 21, 2019

As legislators and members of the Special Commission to Preserve Polish Heritage in the Pioneer Valley, it has been our pleasure to work alongside the other members of this Commission who truly deserve a vote of thanks for their hard work, dedication, and commitment to this effort.

We especially wish to honor and remember our dear friend and colleague Representative Peter V. Kocot who passed away before the Commission had completed its work. He was the driving force in passing the law that created this group. He was a Polish gentle giant and a true fan of good Polish food and Polish culture in Western Massachusetts. Peter is sadly missed but fondly remembered.

The work of this Commission endeavored to preserve Polish language, history, culture, genealogy, music, and the immigrant experience. We are honored to be a part of such an important effort with the mission of promoting Polish culture and tradition.

We express our gratitude and appreciation to the Polish people that have helped to establish roots, build our communities, and shape our history.

It is our collective hope that this report is not the end but a beginning of more conversation and action. We also believe it can be a blueprint for other groups across Massachusetts to follow in their efforts to preserve and promote their cultures and traditions. Our state's tapestry is vibrant because it is interwoven with the colorful strands of many immigrant groups.

*State Senator Donald F. Humason, Jr.
2nd Hampden and Hampshire District*

*State Representative Peter V. Kocot
1st Hampshire District (Deceased)*

*State Senator Eric P. Lesser
1st Hampden and Hampshire District*

*State Representative John W Scibak
2nd Hampshire District (Retired)*

*State Representative Todd M. Smola
1st Hampden District*

Members of the Commission

Carl Eger, Jr.
Chairman of the Special Commission
Chairman, Polish Center of Discovery &
Learning
Chicopee, Massachusetts

Joanne M. Gruszkos
Secretary of the Special Commission
Vice Chair, Polish Center of Discovery &
Learning
Springfield, Massachusetts

Senator Donald F. Humason, Jr.
2nd Hampden & Hampshire District
Westfield, Massachusetts

Senator Eric P. Lesser
1st Hampden & Hampshire District
East Longmeadow, Massachusetts

Representative Peter V. Kocot (1956-2018)
1st Hampshire District
Northampton, Massachusetts

Representative John Scibak
2nd Hampshire District
South Hadley, Massachusetts

Representative Todd M. Smola
1st Hampden District
Palmer, Massachusetts

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Educator & Heritage Consultant
Greenfield, Massachusetts

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COMMISSION SUMMARY

The original vision of the Special Commission to Preserve Polish Heritage in the Pioneer Valley (Commission) was to “promote public support and funding of Polish cultural preservation activities in Western Massachusetts” and “compliment activities that acknowledge the contributions people of Polish heritage have made and continue to make to the Pioneer Valley and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”

Through the course of multiple interviews with leaders of Polish organizations and research into programs, funding and resources currently available, the Commission validated the vision to preserve and research:

- History – Poland and Polish American (includes genealogy, immigrant experience)
- Culture (includes Polish language, festivals, etc.)
- The Arts (includes art, music, literature, etc.)
- People (notable – accomplishments)

During review, discussion evolved about the differences between “culture” and “heritage”; and determination was made that these terms have become very common and are used to describe the legacy of past generations. It involved discussing “what’s important to save and teach,” how to keep the community engaged, and how to entice the young Polish American community as well as other ethnic groups to appreciate and respect the efforts of our ancestors. Preserving the legacy became the underlying theme of the Commission and focus was then placed on how to capture the “past,” preserve the “heritage” and make it relevant in today’s world of technology

Plans evolved that would allow the Polish language to be elevated to the level of other ethnic languages, develop a method to connect and share events happening regionally, state and nationally within the Polish community, and provide a means to draw tourists and locals to visit sites and attend cultural events and learn from those who came before us. Current technology will allow the creation of multiple resources that can be utilized by the public to learn and share the diverse history, culture, arts and accomplishments of Polish people in the Pioneer Valley.

Most importantly, the research and ideas presented in this report are easily transferable to other ethnic and cultural groups. It is the Commission’s desire that the recommendations be developed in a pilot program environment so that all ideas presented in this report be transferable to other ethnic groups of the Commonwealth. Thus, all residents of the Commonwealth will benefit and be able to utilize the programs/tools developed in the pilot program in the future.

INTRODUCTION

The Pioneer Valley is the region around the Connecticut River Valley in Western Massachusetts. It is renowned for its rich history and cultural offerings. With history dating back to the very beginnings of this nation and each major historic milestone it has encountered since then, the landscape, sites, artifacts and cultural diversity of the Pioneer Valley help define the region. Successful cultural and historic preservation reflects and honors the past while also helping to advance a myriad of community and regional objectives – including community/cultural identity, economic development, neighborhood improvement and tourism.

History of Polish People Immigration to the Pioneer Valley¹

The story of the Polish community in Western Massachusetts is one of triumph over tragedy as thousands of men, women and children fled poverty, war and persecution to carve out a new life in a new world. During the Revolutionary War two Polish generals, Thaddeus Kosciuszko and Casimir Pulaski, helped George Washington defeat the British. The bond between America and the Polish people was established; but it would take another 100 years for the masses of immigrants to arrive.

In the 1880s, the rise of the textile mill in places like Chicopee, Indian Orchard, Ludlow, Holyoke, Turners Falls, Ware, Adams and other mill towns brought thousands of Polish workers. The rich soil of the Connecticut River Valley and wages of \$30 a month, multiple times more than they could make in Poland, brought farmers to the field.

It was this large migration that set the stage for the Polish community to grow and prosper. Churches were among the first priority for the overwhelmingly Catholic population. Eventually some of the mill workers would become shopkeepers and the farm hands would buy their own land and become successful vegetable, tobacco and asparagus farmers whose families have continued working the land through the generations.

The Poles came here in three waves that coincided with wars and upheavals in Europe. The immigrants from the first wave, from the 1880s to 1914, came for economic, political and religious reasons. At that time Poland as a country had disappeared into Prussia, Russia and Austria. The second wave took place after World War II, in which 6 million Poles were killed. They were the displaced persons, political prisoners, dissidents and others that had survived war only to come under Russian communist rule thrust on Poland. The third wave would begin in the 1980s and continued through Martial Law to the 1981 Solidarity movement. It is continuing up to the present although much more slowly as Poland's economy and status in the European Union have brought opportunity and stability. Today, there are an estimated 10 million Polish-Americans of whom over 350,000 in Massachusetts.

We celebrate their perseverance, love of country, enduring faith and significant contributions.

¹Adapted from *Polish Heritage, A History of a Proud Community in Western Massachusetts*, Wayne E. Phaneuf & Joseph Carvalho, III, The Republican Heritage Book & Travel Series, 2017

Difference Between Culture and Heritage

The cultural and historical heritages of the Polish people are products of the bountiful comingling and integration of many disparate cultures and religions, sharing talent, language, and thoughts for more than a millennium.

Culture and heritage are concepts that have become very common and are used by people to describe the legacy of the past generations. In fact, the use of the phrase cultural heritage and the endeavor by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization hereinafter referred to as UNESCO to declare World Heritage Sites in different parts of the world have confused many as they look for differences between culture and heritage. For purposes of this report, this section attempts to differentiate between the two concepts and to appreciate the two tools of human civilizations.

Culture

Culture is a complex whole that makes the behavior patterns and interactions between members of societies unique and distinct. It is defined as the body of knowledge that is passed down the generations and comprises all the traditions, habits, customs, beliefs and capabilities that are acquired by the people by being a member of the society. Culture is all things that are acquired and not ingrained or present by birth.

It is the learning of culture that helps members of the society to survive as they know how to behave and interact with others in the society. It is the cultural identity that makes people living in one part of the world unique and distinct from other people. Culture should not be mistaken as a means of communication as the traditions and customs help to achieve peace and order among the members of the society. It is the shared traditions and customs that develop a feeling of belonging and brotherhood among the members of a society.

Heritage

In all countries and cultures, there are gifts of nature in the form of hills, rivers, landscapes, flora and fauna, mountains, volcanoes, etc. that form the natural treasure of that country. This is referred to as the heritage of a country or place. However, there is another legacy that is developed and passed over generations and referred to as cultural heritage. For example, the foods, dress, jewelry, architecture, structures, monuments, art forms etc. are called the cultural heritage of a people. This also includes the artifacts from the past that constitute a cultural legacy of a culture.

What is the difference between Culture and Heritage?

- While culture is the composite body of knowledge that members of a society acquire by virtue of living in a place, heritage refers to the legacy of the people that they inherit from earlier generations.
- Culture is all that constitutes the way of life of a people, whereas heritage is what the people inherit from the past.
- Heritage includes culture and is not restricted to artifacts and monuments alone.

- Heritage is a concept that reminds us of the value of our treasure that we must protect to leave for our future generations.
- Preservation and conservation of our treasure from the past is the way to carry our heritage from the present to the future.
- Heritage is extrinsic while culture also includes intrinsic items.

Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage

UNESCO considers the importance of the intangible cultural heritage as a mainspring of cultural diversity and a guarantee of sustainable development.

The “intangible cultural heritage” means the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage.

Intangible heritage is passed down from generation to generation by the community, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity. It also contributes to greater respect for cultural diversity and is a source of inspiration for human creativity.

Intangible heritage includes:

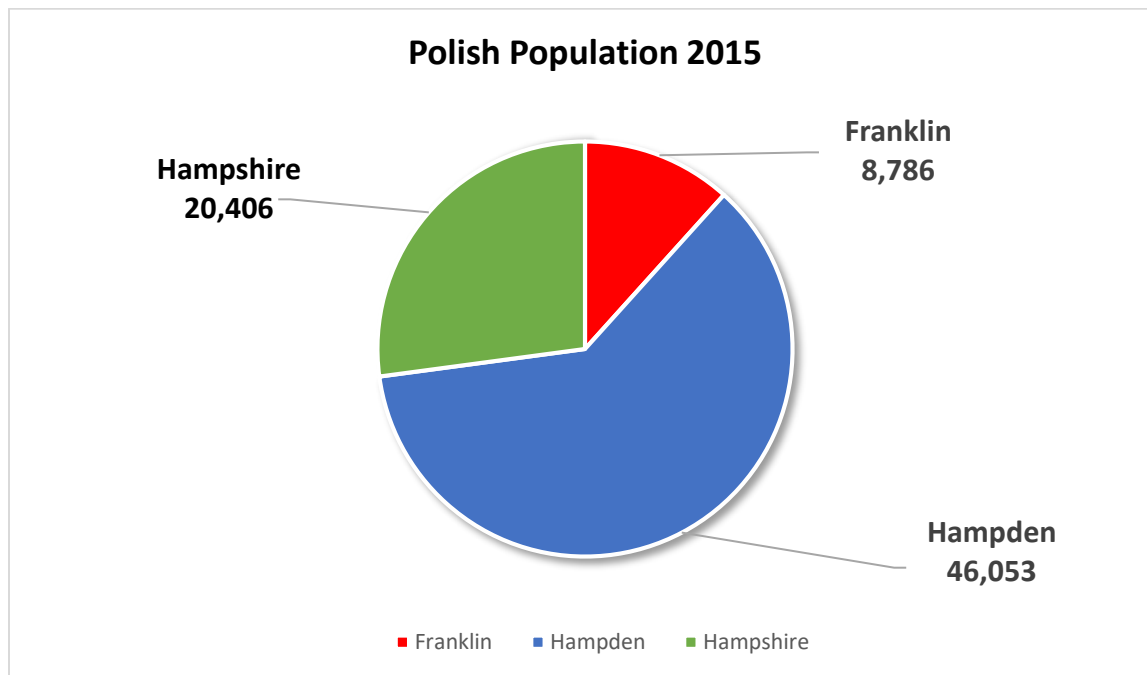
- traditions and oral traditions, including language as a carrier of intangible cultural heritage
- performing arts
- customs, rituals and holiday celebrations
- knowledge and practices regarding nature and the universe
- skills related to traditional crafts

Size of the Community

Polonia in New England

Polish Americans or Polonia began settling in New England in the 1880's and continue to do so today.

- The population of Polish-Americans living in New England* is about 775,000
- In Massachusetts about 350,000
- Most of the old immigration lives in Central or Western MA
- “Newcomers”, mainly post Solidarity Movement immigrants, occupy the Greater Boston Area and Eastern part of the Commonwealth.



*US Census 2000

Western Massachusetts continues to draw a good portion of Polish immigrants due to its strong academic, agriculture, manufacturing, engineering, design and research opportunities and strong Polish community.

Economic Impact

Polish Americans – The Overlooked Ethnic Market

While large ethnic communities are recognized around the country for their buying power, the Polish community is largely overlooked. The Polish American community in the US is one of the largest and most established ethnic groups in the country - its roots date back to the early settlements of Jamestown, Virginia in 1608 - and ranks as the third largest ethnic group of European origin after the Irish and Italians.

The Polish American community of the 21st century is characterized as highly educated, hardworking and entrepreneurial. According to the US Census, Polish Americans surpass the national averages for both higher education and home ownership with the median annual income of a family exceeding the national average by over \$12,000.

These national trends are also supported by the regional data for Polish Americans in the Pioneer Valley. As indicated in the following tables, the Polish population in Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire Counties have achieved the highest levels of educational attainment, home ownership and median household income. These findings illustrate why Polish Americans in this region would be lucrative and desirable targets for mainstream companies and national brands.

Educational Attainment

Level	Franklin	Hampden	Hampshire
High School Graduate or GED	2,245	12,405	4,802
Some College, less than 1 year	423	2,858	977
Some College, 1 year or more, No Degree	869	3,622	1,979
Associate Degree	609	4,143	1,951
Bachelor's Degree	1,005	5,856	2,514
Master's Degree	442	2,969	1,418
Professional School Degree	159	511	296
Doctorate Degree	54	178	324

Source: Piast Institute of Hamtramck, MI

Housing Tenure

County	Total Households	Owner-Occupied Housing	Renter - Occupied	% of Households Owning Home
Franklin	3,926	2,953	973	75.22%
Hampden	21,373	16,881	4,492	78.98%
Hampshire	9,249	6,964	2,285	75.29%

Source: Piast Institute of Hamtramck, MI

Household Income

Income Level	Franklin	Hampden	Hampshire
\$45,000 to \$49,999	253	1,095	432
\$50,000 to \$59,999	185	1,792	734
\$60,000 to \$74,999	546	2,358	960
\$75,000 to \$99,000	582	2,965	1,297
\$100,000 to \$124,999	365	2,009	890
\$125,000 to \$149,999	93	1,133	399
\$150,000 TO \$199,999	98	872	372
\$200,000 or More	57	534	297

Source: Piast Institute of Hamtramck, MI

VISION

Western Massachusetts residents, businesses, organizations, municipalities and educators enjoy and actively engage with the Polish community – attending cultural events, concerts and parades, celebrating significant historical dates, recognizing prominent people of Polish descent, researching their family history, and enjoying food, song and dance associated with Polish culture. The new balances with the old in compelling ways; and history is embedded in the pride, recreation, education, economy and daily activities of the Polish community in tangible ways and are ever evolving.

Achieving the Vision

The vision will be achieved through the collaborative efforts of educators, genealogists, communities, preservation partners, businesses and residents to pursue and implement strategic actions in three main areas as it relates to culture and heritage.

1. **Connecting People** – The goal is to inventory, highlight and protect historic resources and connect the wider Polish community through a pilot program to include
 - a. an ethnic events calendar website
 - b. ethnic heritage trail
 - c. preservation of ethnic heritage through oral/visual/written
 - d. family history documentation.

Efforts will be made to tell the rich story of the Polish community's past, sustain the impact of the Polish community on the region today, and ensure its contribution for future generations.

2. **Commonwealth of Massachusetts Pioneer Valley Heritage Region** - The adoption of a Heritage Region Designation for the Pioneer Valley, finishes the work started in 1968, brings focus to the unique character of the Pioneer Valley Region: the history, cultures, geology, natural places, and traditions both agricultural and industrial that contributed and continue to contribute to the historic, cultural and economic fabric of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the United States. While the role of Polish heritage will certainly be an important component of the proposed Heritage Region, the designation is intended to be comprehensive and reflect the full scope of historic, cultural, ethnic, educational and economic resources that are significant for the Pioneer Valley. As with the other 49 National Heritage Areas, a Heritage designation will bring with it a variety of benefits from economic revitalization to tourism and recreation.
3. **Seal of Biliteracy** - Language preservation is the effort to prevent languages from being lost. A language is at risk of being lost when it no longer is taught to younger generations, while fluent speakers of the language pass away. The Seal of Biliteracy ensures that proficiency in a language other than English is recognized; and inclusion of the Polish language in the final standards developed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will allow children of Polish descent, speaking their native language, to receive recognition of their biliteracy skills on their high school records.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Connecting People: A Comprehensive Approach

The Commission recommends the development of a pilot program the focus of which will be a network system to enable people in the Valley to build and maintain connections with their neighbors, their community and their region.

Given that this initiative focuses on the preservation of Polish Heritage in the Pioneer Valley, the Commission advocates that a pilot program be developed with the Polish Center of Discovery and Learning as the management entity and that the Polish culture serve as the initial ethnic focus. It is anticipated that the Polish Center will utilize the resources and expertise of the state higher education institutions in the Pioneer Valley in this endeavor, relying on faculty researchers in various disciplines and the availability of students and interns. When completed, this pilot program can be utilized as a prototype by other ethnic groups, civic organizations, and agencies.

The Commission also recommends that the Polish Center and higher education institutions also access the available resources of the American Folklife Center² (AFLC). The AFLC was created by Congress in 1976 to preserve and present the heritage of American folk life through programs of research, documentation, archival preservation, a reference service, live performance, exhibition, publication, and training. The Commission also recommends that the program provide a link to the American Folklife Center Archive of Folk Culture, which was established in 1928 in the Library of Congress. It is now one of the largest collections of ethnographic material from the nation and the world, encompassing millions of items of ethnographic and historical documentation recorded from the nineteenth century to the present.

The pilot program will include an ethnic events calendar website, ethnic heritage trail, and preservation of ethnic heritage through an oral/visual/written and family (both public and private) history documentation program.

- **Ethnics Event Calendar**

The pilot program will include an ethnic events calendar website which will serve as a centralized network and calendar for all Polish organizations in the region to post events. The calendar will offer an up-to-date concise, listing of all events which focus on Polish heritage, culture, arts music and history occurring within the Pioneer Valley. The calendar will offer a vehicle for all organizations within the Polish community to collaborate and support the efforts of one another to enhance widespread communication and increase participation and attendance. The prototype for the calendar will include an outline of development and implementation steps as well as a delineation of responsibilities of the various partners and the technical and financial support needed for sustainability.

² The American Folk Life Center, The Library of Congress, Research Center <https://loc.gov/folklife/>

- **The Polonia Trail**

The Polonia Trail will include the development of a series of self-guided walking and auto trails to form a system of linked Polonia sites within the Pioneer Valley which shaped the history of Polonia in the area. In addition to the physical trail, which will utilize distinctive road and interpretative signs throughout the Pioneer Valley to identify and link the various resources, there will be a website which will be hosted by the Polish Center of Discovery and Learning and will enable individuals to virtually explore the architecture, clubs, meetinghouses, churches, cemeteries, historic monuments and parks and other places that figured prominently within the Pioneer Valley Polish American Community. Guidebooks will also be developed and published that will focus on various aspects of the history and migration of the Polish people to the Pioneer Valley and beyond. Specific topics for the guidebook are expected to include farms, shops, galleries, music venues, festivals, historic sites, restaurants featuring ethnic cuisine, religious institutions and cemeteries.

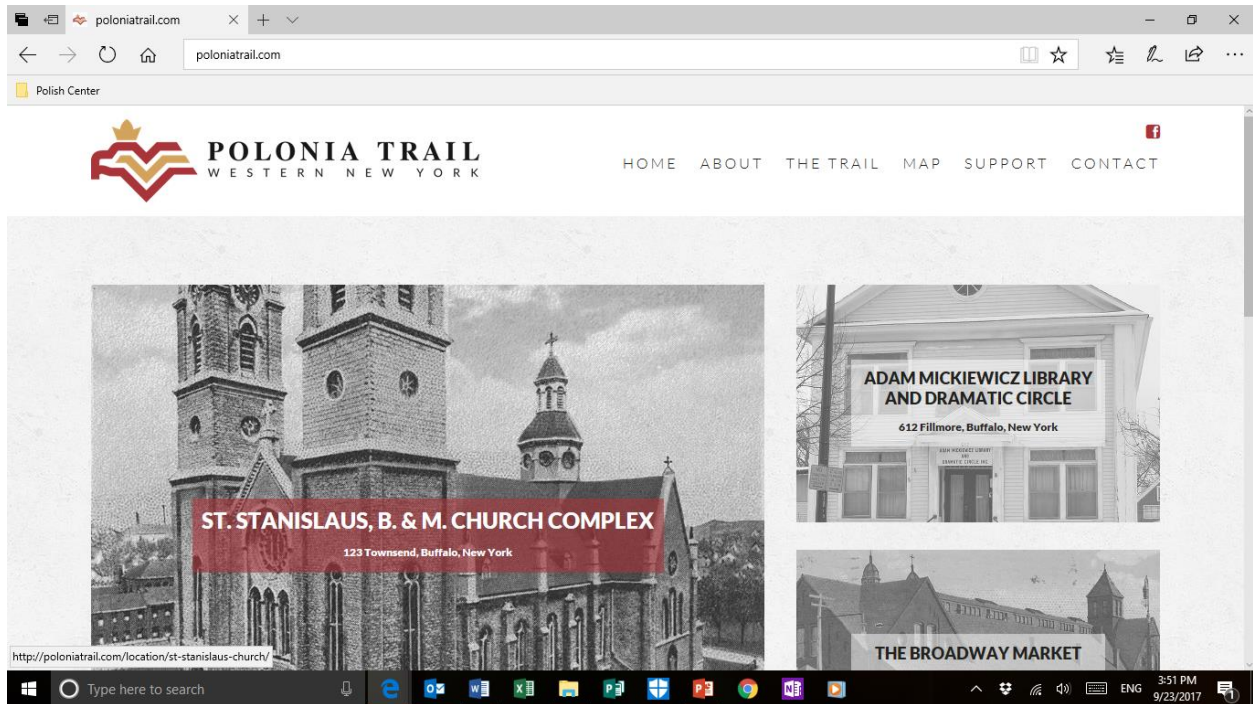
- **Oral/Visual/Written Histories**

A critical part of the preservation of the ethnic heritage will be the development of oral/visual/written histories. Interviews will be conducted with members of the Polish American community who participated in or observed past events and whose memories and perceptions will be preserved for future generations. Written family histories are the basis for a Polish Family history. They are composed of documentation that verify a person's family tree or pedigree that extends into Poland. Documentation of these histories will utilize a variety of media, including audiotapes, videotapes and written documentation of individual, family and group interviews. The pilot program will collect and preserve these documents in the Genealogical Research Library at the Polish Center for Discovery and Learning to preserve their heritage. Excellent examples of written Polish family histories are available at the Genealogical Research Library

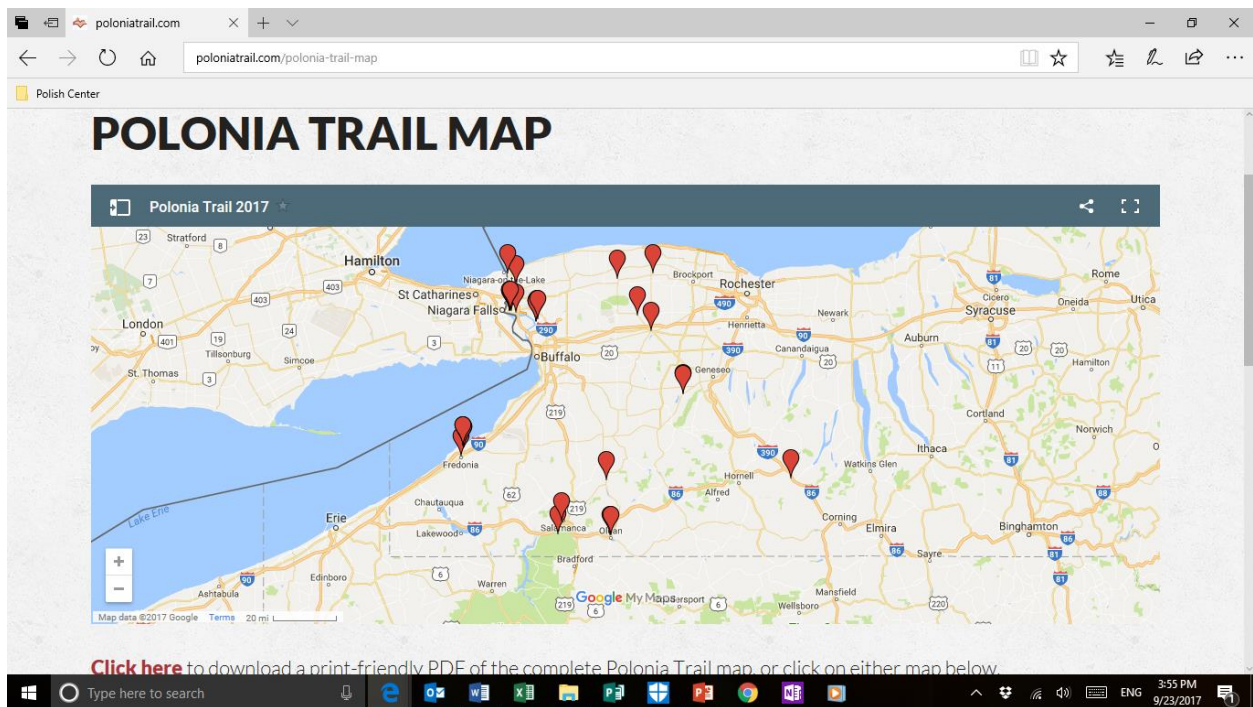
The Commission envisions this pilot program when developed and implemented by other ethnic groups, civic organizations and agencies will:

- Increase tourism and economic development
- Bring attention to opportunities in the region
- Connect to future generations learning to value and preserve their heritage
- Provide a source of revenue to niche markets in the valley

Example of Polonia Trail Website



Example of the Polonia Trail, Western NY website



Example of the Polonia Trail, Western NY guide map

2. Commonwealth of Massachusetts Pioneer Valley Heritage Region

The Commission recommends the adoption of a Heritage Region Designation for the Pioneer Valley. Designating the Pioneer Valley as a Heritage Region, encompassing the establishment of an interrelated program focusing on developing a comprehensive approach to the natural, cultural and historical heritage in ways that clearly articulate the importance of the region, will provide a promotional framework reflecting a regional perspective.

The Commission strongly recommends that the Pioneer Valley Region be designated by the State Legislature as the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Pioneer Valley Heritage Region dedicated to saving and promoting the unique character of the Pioneer Valley Region: the history, cultures, geology, natural places, and traditions both agricultural and industrial that contributed and continue to contribute to the historic, cultural, and economic fabric of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the United States.

Commission research has revealed a 1968 federal survey, the “*New England Heritage Study*”³, and subsequent report to Congress recommending that the Pioneer Valley be designated as a National Heritage Region. The report in presenting the survey’s findings stated the many natural, cultural, historic and scenic resources which contribute to the “outstanding” heritage attributes of the Pioneer Valley Region.

Based upon this report to Congress in 1968, the Commission strongly recommends bringing this unfinished business to the attention of the Congressional Representatives representing the Pioneer Valley as well as the United States Senators representing Massachusetts. The official designation of the Pioneer Valley as The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Pioneer Valley Heritage Region is long overdue. The citizens within the Pioneer Valley should no longer be denied the benefits and opportunities provided by this designation.

A Heritage designation will bring with it a variety of benefits from economic revitalization to tourism and recreation. Implementation of these benefits within a heritage designation would include the development of a coordinated interpretation strategy for the region’s stories. With its regional focus, a Heritage Region provides the framework within which communities can work together to form partnerships between the public, private, and non-profit sectors for formation and implementation of the goals and marketing strategies for the region. Within this partnership framework, residents will play an important role in the design of promotional and preservation strategies for the region.

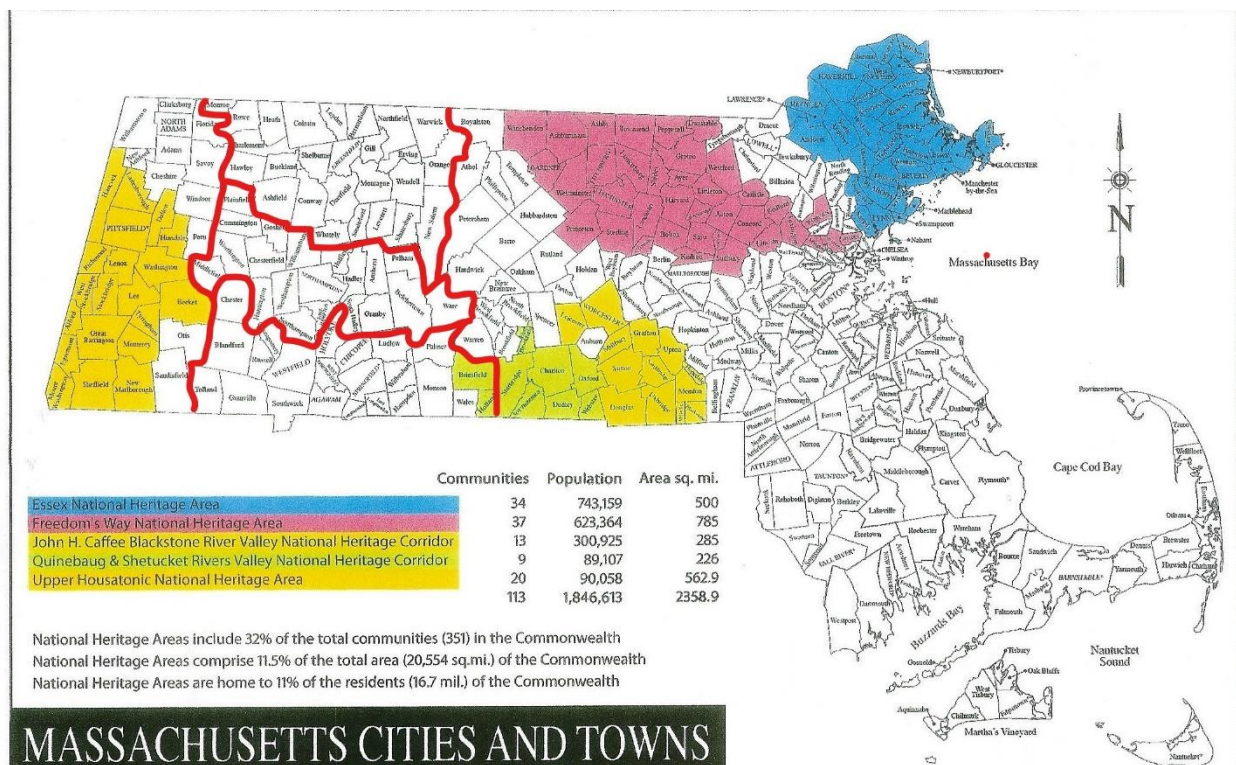
The Pioneer Valley Heritage Region has an outstanding array of historical, educational, industrial and cultural heritage, high quality scenic and recreational resources and the need for a coordinated and interrelated program of public and private action. Developing such a program through the framework of a Heritage Region will connect people to the Valley, inspiring initiatives to promote that special place: The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Pioneer Valley Region.

³ New England Heritage. The Connecticut River National Recreation Area Study, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation (Dept. of Interior), Washington, DC, ERIC Number: ED032149, Record Type: Non-Journal, Publication Date: 1968-Jul.

Within this framework, the Polish Americans (Polonia) can present their role in the history of the Valley and partner with other historic, cultural and ethnic groups to show how their contributions interacted within a larger context.

Proposed Pioneer Valley Heritage Region

- Includes Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin counties
- Follows the 1968 federal “New England Heritage Study” which recognized the rich heritage of the areas around the Connecticut River and recommended they be designated as a Heritage Region.



3. Seal of Biliteracy

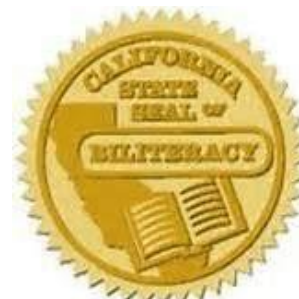
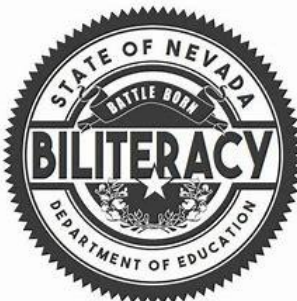
The Special Commission to Preserve Polish Heritage in the Pioneer Valley supports the recent establishment of a State Seal of Biliteracy and strongly recommends the inclusion of the Polish language in the list of languages for which students can receive the Seal of Biliteracy on their high school record.

As the criteria are developed upon which evidence of proficiency in a language other than English is based, the Commission requests that a nationally accepted assessment tool be utilized for the Polish language and acknowledges that such tools currently exist and are used by other states (e.g. Michigan). The availability of an accepted recognizable assessment tool gives educators in high schools and other educational institutions a process for awarding the Seal of Biliteracy.

The Seal of Biliteracy recognizes high school graduates who speak, read, and write proficiently in another language, in addition to English, with a seal on their high school diploma. Recognition that students have attained this achievement – biliteracy - the Commission feels will encourage language learning and teaching as well as provide evidence to institutions of higher learning and businesses that the students have high level cognitive skills in language. Research also has shown that bilingual speakers are better at maintaining focus and attention than monolinguals.

The adoption of the Seal of Biliteracy in Massachusetts will allow the Commonwealth to join with several other states across the country in recognizing the importance of competence in multiple languages. And the inclusion of Polish as one of the approved languages will support the large Polish population in Massachusetts as others have done.

(Examples of other State Seals)



IMPLEMENTATION

The Special Commission recognizes that the achievement of the vision and recommendations provided earlier goes well beyond the scope and tenure of its membership and offers the following suggested strategies:

1. The Polish Center of Discovery and Learning will be responsible for overseeing the implementation of the Committee's recommendations and will work with the region's legislative delegation to secure the necessary legislation and financial support for the initiatives identified herein.
2. The Polish Center of Discovery and Learning will establish an ongoing Committee to provide input and feedback relative to the implementation of the recommendations and to identify future directions and activities not included in this report.
3. The legislative members of the Commission will file and seek the support and cosponsorship of their colleagues from the Pioneer Valley for legislation which will create the Pioneer Valley Heritage Region.
4. The legislative members of the Commission will work with their colleagues to seek earmarks and line item funding for initiatives identified by the Committee and Polish Center.
5. The members of the Commission will request from Representatives Richard Neal (D-MA) and James P. McGovern (D-MA) support for the Congressional designation of the Pioneer Valley National Heritage Region.
6. The Special Commission recommends that the Massachusetts Cultural Council, the Economic Development Council of Western Massachusetts, the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Hampshire County Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Franklin County Chamber of Commerce incorporate and promote the Pioneer Valley Polonia Trail, website and other activities of the Pioneer Valley Heritage Region as an economic development opportunity for the Commonwealth.