

Polish Club



“I think there are not too many very aggressive, high-strung Polish people. We tend to be an easy-going, hard-working bunch, a little bit practical, and not really super-geniuses. Of course, there are exceptions.”

Don Norkoski,
“President, manager
and janitor” of the
Aberdeen Polish Club

Poles

Continued from Page 3

the 1930s, bit off a little more than he could chew on one occasion.

He could hold his own against almost all of the Harbor boxers. It was, however, a different story when he was lured into a session with “Sailor” Jack Silver, a boxer who was visiting his mother on the Harbor and who also happened to be preparing for a bout with a world championship boxer in San Francisco.

“He was short, stubby, and had a big, flat nose,” Dombroski recalled. “He weighed about 236 pounds. I weighed 150 pounds.”

The training session took place in a makeshift gym at the Polish Club and if Dombroski had any aspirations of becoming a professional boxer, his experience with Silver changed all that.

“He was showing me the counterpunch technique,” Dombroski said. “After he showed me, I came in with kind of a right and I hit him, but it didn’t even budge him. Then he hit me with an upper cut, and I believe I must have gone up in the air about three feet before I came down. I saw stars.”

Dombroski said he spent the rest of the session dodging Silver’s iron fists.

Activities at the Polish Club haven’t always been quite so energetic, although perhaps not any less dangerous.

During the Prohibition era

that spanned the 1920s and the early 1930s, some Polish Club members sipped bootleg booze and played cards in a tiny room that is located at the end of a steep and narrow staircase, lodged between the building’s first and second floors.

On a recent tour of the card room — now a slightly musty storage room — Norkoski, who is the club president, pointed out the significance of the room’s only window.

The neighbors “used to bootleg next door, so the card players would stick a broom handle out the window and (the bootleggers) would slide a bottle down onto it.”

A LOT has changed over the years, including the roles of the men and women of the Polish Club.

Until the start of this year, the female members were not permitted to make club policy decisions. A woman couldn’t

be a member of the club’s board of trustees, and she couldn’t be president. But that’s all changed.

Combining the two clubs and giving both sexes equal voting rights was part of an effort to help the women’s club, which had been losing membership in recent years, and to become more progressive.

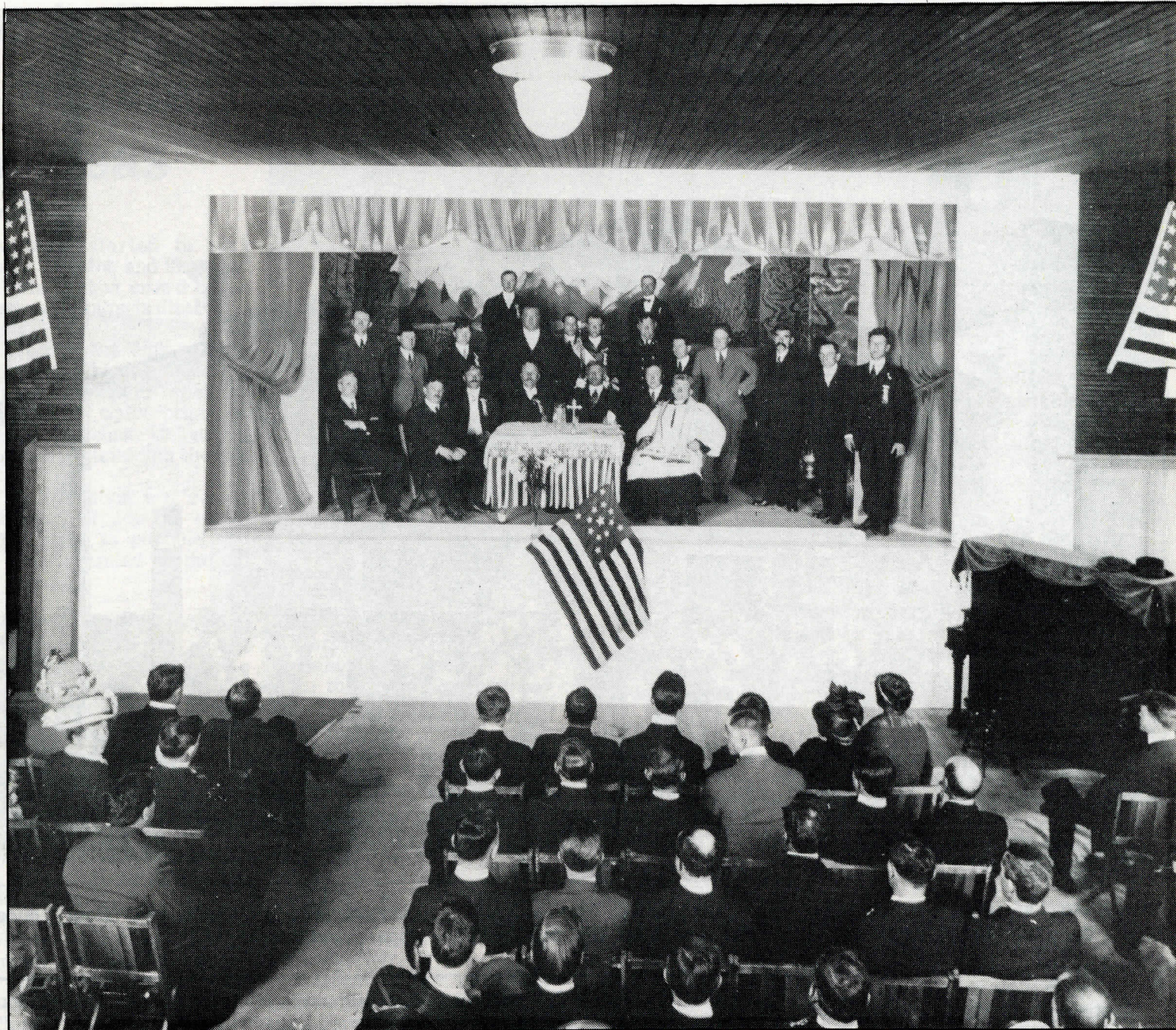
But why wait so long to allow women to vote?

“We waited until some of the people who were adamantly opposed to joining together kind of gave up, dropped out and died,” said William Kalinowski, a longtime member and the club’s financial secretary.

“It’s exciting for everybody to have one club. The women are enthusiastic and that made the men more enthusiastic, and it’s going to make it a lot better.”

But as President Norkoski takes a visitor on a tour of the

The Rev. Constantine Brzoska, in vestments, and Polish Club dignitaries pose on the stage of the hall as



proud Harbor area Poles gather for the dedication of the structure on May 6, 1916.

Polish Club, he says the organization’s longterm survival will require more drastic changes.

Like fraternal organizations nationwide, the Polish Club has not had great success in attracting young members, says Norkoski. The majority of the 120 members are retirement age.

During the last 15 years, the club’s mission has been mostly to restore the facility, but now, with that project largely complete, it’s time to expand horizons, Norkoski said.

TO lure new members of all ages, Norkoski envisions a new restaurant and a Polish community centered around the club and the neighboring Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church.

Private investors would be encouraged to provide funding for a Polish retirement center situated on land now occupied by surrounding

homes that have “for sale” signs in their front yards.

With a thriving center that could attract beach-bound tourists from across the state, Norkoski sees younger people taking a greater interest in the Polish Club.

But if it also sounds a little overly ambitious for a economically depressed community, Norkoski says he’s quite serious — even though it’s all very preliminary.

“You can’t build a club on dinners,” he says, surveying one of club’s enormous dance halls, which are rented out for weddings and other large social events,” the club president added.

“In the longterm there has to be a new vision. Without a vision, the people will perish. If you don’t have goals and a reason to exist, you’re dead, you’re gonna fade away.”

But for Poles, no strangers to hardship and challenge, hopes and dreams never fade.

POLISH CLUB COLLECTION