

## *The Return of the Polish Treasures*

IN SEPTEMBER 1939, employees of the museum at the Royal Wawel Castle in Krakow, Poland, moved certain of the priceless treasures from the museum for a hurried flight from invading armies, a flight that eventually brought them to Canada for safekeeping. Some of the items returned to Poland shortly after the end of the war and others, which had been in a branch of the Bank of Montreal in Ottawa, were returned in January 1959, while the rest remained in the Quebec Provincial Museum in Quebec City.

Late in December 1960, a delegation of experts and technicians from the Wawel Museum came to Canada, including some of the same men who had packed the treasures and sent them on their voyage to safety 21 years earlier. The delegation, led by Professor Jerzy Szablowski, Director of the State Art Collection at the Wawel, and Professor Bohdan Marconi of the Centre of the Conservation of Relics in Warsaw, held discussions in Quebec City with officials of the Provincial Museum. Following a careful and detailed examination of the treasures, which confirmed that they had been well cared for and were in excellent condition, documents were exchanged on December 31 transferring their custody to the Wawel delegation. The packing was completed and the treasures began their journey home during the evening of January 2. They were transported by truck to Boston and thence by the Polish vessel "Krynica" to Gdynia, where they arrived on January 17.

In a press release issued on January 4, Mr. Howard Green, Secretary of State for External Affairs, noted that:

... The Government of Canada has favoured an arrangement by the parties concerned which would permit the Polish people to enjoy this important part of their national artistic heritage. Mr. Green recalled that he had had occasion to express this view to M. Rapacki, the Polish Foreign Minister, at sessions of the United Nations General Assembly in New York and to explain that, while the achievement of a solution has not rested with Ottawa, the Canadian Government was prepared to assist in any way it appropriately could to help the parties to reach agreement.

Two years ago the Canadian Government was instrumental in arranging the return of those items which had been deposited with the Bank of Montreal in Ottawa and now has assisted in the solution which has brought about the departure for Poland of the balance of the items which will take their historic place again in the Royal Palace of Wawel in Krakow, from which they were sent for safe-keeping at the outbreak of the Second World War.

The Polish Government also issued statements to the press on this event, recounting the details of the hand-over and shipment of the treasures, and concluding:

The efforts have achieved a positive result — the treasures of Polish culture are on their way home. In this way the problem has ceased to be a handicap to Polish-Canadian relations.