

# Shirley Mask Connolly

(b. 1950)

Curator, Polish Kashub Heritage Museum



POLISH SPIRIT



Shirley Mask Connolly was born on a farm near Wilno, Ontario, a direct descendant of Kashub immigrants who first settled there in 1858-59.

The Kashubs, a fiercely independent ethnic group with its own dialect and rich culture, hail from the Baltic coast of Poland. Wilno, near Renfrew, Ontario, is now the centre of the world's largest intact Kashub community.

A graduate of Carleton University in Ottawa and the University of Toronto, Shirley Mask Connolly became interested in preserving the history and traditions of this unique group. In 1992, she started tracing Kashub immigrants back to exact families, villages and parishes in Poland, and became an expert on Kashub history and genealogy. She has written many articles and several books on these subjects, maintains close ties with Kashubs around the world, and has spoken as a guest lecturer at genealogical and historical societies in Canada and the U.S. A member of the Polish Heritage Institute Kaszuby, she works closely with the University of Ottawa, the Polish Embassy in Canada and the Polish Canadian Congress.

In 2002, Shirley became the founding curator of the Wilno Heritage Society and the Polish Kashub Heritage Museum in Wilno. Having mounted displays on the Canadian Kashubs at Queen's Park in Toronto, the Bytown Museum in Ottawa and the McDougall Mill Museum in Renfrew, she is now establishing a comprehensive reference and resource library at the Museum, and edits the semiannual Wilno Heritage Society newsletter.

Shirley Mask Connolly has received the Merit Award of the Senate of the Republic of Poland for her "very high achievement, endeavor and passion for promoting Kashub culture in Canada", and particularly her "profound knowledge of the history of the Kashubs."

Photos from top left clockwise:  
• Shirley Mask Connolly • Inside the Museum Welcome Centre • At the Polish Kashub Heritage Museum • One of the exhibits of the Kashub Museum  
All photos – private archives