

From the Bulletin of the Józef Piłsudski Institute, No 4/2009, April 2009:  
[https://docs.google.com/View?docid=dgpbw7pt\\_21qxc5796n&pageview=1](https://docs.google.com/View?docid=dgpbw7pt_21qxc5796n&pageview=1)  
Anniversary Calendar

Helena Modrzejewska (1840 - 1909)

"Collect all power of the soul and still go further - and still higher"

- Helena Modrzejewska

Talent, beauty and hard work resulted in an extraordinary career and great success of Helena Modrzejewska. For 30 years, the beautiful actress diligently gained public recognition, playing on the stages of Polish, American and British theaters. No success comes easily. This was not an exception. And so was the life of the forgotten, unusual woman.

Helena Modrzejewska died a hundred years ago on April 12, 1909 in Newport Beach, California. She was 69 years old. Her beauty, talent and hard work contributed to her extraordinary career and great success. She came to America in 1876 as an already recognized actress of Krakow and Warsaw theaters. Initially, she did not intend to act. Together with her husband, Karol Chłapowski and 15-year son Rudolf (later a well-known architect of bridges), Henryk Sienkiewicz, Lucjan Sypniewski with his family and Lucjan Paprocki, they tried to realize their dream of a happy life on a farm near Los Angeles in the Santiago Canyon (now called Modjeska Canyon). However, none of these people had any idea of farming. When the 1877 drought in California destroyed the orange groves and when in addition an economic crisis undercut the U.S. economy, Modrzejewska decided to take the challenge of playing on the American stage.

At the age of 37, she decided once more in her life to seek an acting career. She overcame the language barrier and although still with a foreign accent, she performed on American stages with great success. She took part in 26 tours in the United States and also played in London, Prague, Warsaw, Poznan, Krakow. Her repertoire included 260 roles, mostly in plays by Shakespeare, Ibsen, Schiller, Victor Hugo, Julius Slowacki. She gained fame and great popularity. She performed many times in New York and in America, her name – Modjeska, which she has adopted for the stage - was used in advertising dresses, hats, gloves, brooches, etc. Helena Modrzejewska often donated part of her revenue from the performances to local charities.

Helena Modrzejewska was buried in the family grave at the Rakowicki cemetery in Krakow - the city of her birth. A commemorative plaque dedicated to the great actress was unveiled on 5 April 2009 in the Church of St. Stanislaus Bishop and Martyr on 7th street in Manhattan. It restores the memory of an extraordinary woman, and her relationship with New York and the church.