

PROJECT TO DISCOVER
SCHENECTADY COUNTY'S EASTERN EUROPEAN ROOTS
NEWSLETTER

February 2014 Vol. 1 No. 1

Phyllis Budka and Bernice Izzo: Welcome to our first newsletter! Our objective is to discover, document and digitally preserve genealogy, stories, and pictures of Schenectady County's Eastern European immigrants. On November 9 the Schenectady County Historical Society hosted a gathering to initiate this project. We began by sharing experiences from our genealogy research and then discussed what additional information or help is needed.



Phyllis: I have long been aware of the "invisibility" of my heritage in the SCHS archives. Yet there were more than 4,000 Polish immigrants in Schenectady during the 1920s and 30s. I discovered that at least 50 individuals came to Schenectady from the southern Polish town of Nowy Targ. I now know that my own roots in Nowy Targ can be traced back to at least the early 1800s.

Bernice: My grandmother is a daughter of a Polish immigrant who settled on Eastern Avenue hill. Her father worked at ALCO for forty years. I recently discovered where she came from in Poland. My discovery process taught me to use the computer for research, including using Ancestry.com and Family Tree Maker software.

Join us to discover, document and preserve Schenectady County's Eastern European roots!

Grandpa Tyś in Hegewisch Carole McCarthy

My mother wrote her Memoirs in the 1990s when she was in her late 70s and early 80s. They consisted of her memories growing up in the 1920s and 30s on her parents' 50 acre farm in Schenectady, NY. In her Memoirs, she told how her father, my grandfather, came to America for the first time in 1906. He was born in Poland, but at that time, due to the 200 year partition of Poland, his hometown was part of Austria, often referred to as Galicia or Galicy. A search on the Ellis Island website, back in 2005, led me to a wonderful discovery. The story about my grandfather coming to America through Ellis Island was indeed true! The passenger list on the Ellis Island site said that he left Bremen, Germany on February 10, 1906 on the ship, The Breslau. This was a big ship: 429 feet long and 54 feet wide. It was built in Vegesack, Germany, and could hold 1,720 passengers. When my grandfather set sail on February 10th, he sailed with a full contingent of passengers. He traveled in steerage with many of his countrymen from Galicy, Poland.

Józef Tyś came from a small farming village in Poland, Witkowice, which is on the east side of the Vistula River in the southeastern section of Poland. My grandfather said he lived on a small subsistence farm. They had no machinery to help them in their labors. Józef was looking for something better. He told my mother that at 16 years, he

came to America. The ship's manifest says he was 17 years old but I was later to learn that he was actually 19 years old. He told her he went to Chicago and worked in the steel mills. His dream was to make lots of money and then he would go back to Poland and buy lots of land and live like a baron. As it turned out, he did go back to Poland around 1908 but found that even though he had a lot of money, enough to buy machinery to help on the farm, there was no machinery available to buy. As my mother says, he gave the money to his family and came back to the US (19 Jefferson St. in Schenectady, NY) in 1910.

Since finding my grandfather listed on the February 24, 1906 arrival manifest of the S.S. Breslau, I have attempted to decipher the script to determine where and with whom he came to live in America. Column 16 of the manifest is entitled, "Whether going to join a relative or friend, and if so, what relative or friend, and his name and complete address". For my grandfather, who is on list 33, line 6, I could only determine that he was going to stay with a cousin/friend but could not decipher the name of the friend or his address. Guessing, it looked like the name of his friend was Jan Saint and the address was 13. A. Lot 8. 719. Chic-?????, the unknown town. Below is a copy of that section of the manifest, the circled area is what the manifest looks like for Józef Tyś in column 16:

Grandpa Tyś in Hegewisch Carole McCarthy

parish which just so happened to be having a Polish picnic that weekend. St. Florian's church was built in 1905, a year before my grandfather arrived, as the first Polish Church in Hegewisch. It was named after their first pastor Father Florian Chodniewicz. Fr. Florian and the new parish were named after Saint Florian von Lorch, one of the patron Saints of Poland.

Somehow I felt close to my grandfather when I was there, although he being 19 and single when he lived in the area, it may not have been his hangout. However the Polish people were very religious and he probably felt that he was in heaven to be able to practice his religion freely without interference from the occupiers of his beloved native Poland.

But I digress. Now that I knew the town where my grandfather lived when he first came to America, it was time to decipher the name of the 'friend' he stayed with. This is where my new Polish friend from Szczecinek, Poland was an enormous help. I have known Kamila now for over six years, emailing many times and writing and Skyping occasionally. It dawned on me one day that she would be more familiar with Polish surnames and perhaps she could decipher this name. I sent her a copy of the above manifest on November 2, 2009 at 2:07PM and within an hour she responded with the answer: "I'm not able to read this address but the last name was a piece of cake for me ;) This mysterious cousin/friend was Jan Słowik

(Slowik). "słowik" is a trush nightingale;)" What a windfall! I couldn't believe it! I then looked up census information on Jan Slowik in 1900 and 1910 in Illinois and every place else in the US. Again I ran into a brick wall. The only Slowik I found was a Joseph Slowik in Hegewisch who immigrated in 1907. Too late to have been the Slowik that housed my grandfather. I was not discouraged, like my grandfather, these early Polish immigrants would return to Poland and come back a later time. They would also move around to find the best jobs.

My second big breakthrough came from Kamila in an email of Jan 21, 2010. She said she perused the Ellis Island site for anyone coming from the Witkowice area. Here is her email in part:

Karolino,

I have something more - I think it's very interesting (all from Witkowice):

"Bulgaria"
Hamburg-NY
11 Apr 1903

Jan Słowik - 35, mar; from Witkowice to Schenectady, NY (of course, 19 Jefferson;)), to a friends, Wawrzyniec Rybak

"Neckar"
Bremen-NY
1 Feb 1909

no.23 - Ludwik Bartochowski - 43, mar;
h/o Maryanna Bartochowska; to b-i-l,

Grandpa Tyś in Hegewisch Carole McCarthy

Józef Słowik, 13259 Ergaman(?) Street,
Hegewisch, IL
no.24 - Jan Słowik - 34, mar; h/o Józefa;
to brother, Józef Słowik,
13259 Ergaman(?) Street, Hegewisch,
IL; USA - 1904-1908 (Hegewisch)

"Chemnitz"
Bremen-NY
10 Dec 1905

no.6 - Wojciech Słowik - 30, mar; to
brother, Jan Słowik, 13241 Erandelet
(Corandelet) Street, Hegewisch, IL
no.7 - Adam Rybak - 29, mar; to b-i-l,
Jan Słowik (above)
no.8 - Józef Bednarz - 33, mar; to b-i-l,
Jan Słowik (above)

What do you think?;)
Hugs, Kamila

There is so much pertinent information in this email. First of all it confirms that Jan Slowik was in Hegewisch in 1906 when Józef Tyś was there. In the line labeled no.24 above, Jan Slowik is coming back to America from Poland in 1909 but he indicates in the ships manifest that he was previously in the USA and specifically in Hegewisch, Illinois between 1904 and 1908. Therefore my grandfather could have stayed with Jan Slowik in 1906 and 1907. In 1909, when Jan came back to the US, he stays with his brother Józef Słowik at 13259 Ergaman Street. The name of the street may not be correct since it is difficult to read however in the no. 6 entry from 1905, just two months before my grandfather arrived in Hegewisch, another brother of Jan, Wojciech Slowik, comes to visit and

here the street name is clearer and it is 13241 Carondelet Street. Amazingly enough this is only one block south and one block west of the St Florian Church which is at 13145 Houston Ave! I can't wait to revisit the area. I had a feeling when I was at the Florian Parish that I connected with my grandfather.

The information above also gives a clue to the relationship of Jan Slowik to my grandfather. My grandfather's mother's maiden name was Bartochowski. In No. 23 above a Ludwik Bartochowski is coming to stay with his brother in law(b-i-l) Józef Słowik. Ludwik was most likely a brother of grandpa Tys' mother, Barbara Bartochowska, and his wife, Maryanna, must have been a Słowik. Maryanna would be grandpa Tys' aunt and her brothers: Jan, Józef and Wojciech would not be related directly and therefore called 'friend' on the manifest.

During my trip to Poland in 2013, I visited the village of Witkowice, where my grandfather was born. Below are pictures of the village plus pictures of my grandfather.

Grandpa Tyś in Hegewisch Carole McCarthy



Mary Gliniecki and Joseph Tys married August 16, 1916, St. Mary's Church, Schenectady



1945 - Joseph F. Tys enjoying his new tractor to help him on his 50 acres farm at 3761 Consaul Rd. in Niskayuna, NY



Ken and Carole McCarthy on the banks of the Vistula River, Witkowice, Poland



Entering Witkowice, Poland



Gate believed to be entrance to the Tys homestead, Witkowice, Poland

My Polish Grandfather Eleanor Monlea

My Polish grandfather, Michal Chmielowiec, aka Michael Chmielewicz, was born September 29, 1878, in Majdan Krolewski, Poland. It is a small village nine miles from Kolbuszowa, Poland. Michal's father, Simon Chmielowiec, and his mother, Eva Rebish Chmielowiec, had a small family farm in Majdan Krolewski. Michal had two brothers and a sister, Maria, who took care of their aging father. Eva had died early in the marriage and Simon raised the children alone.

My grandfather's brother, Antek, his wife and small children were all killed (hung and burned in the barn, entire homestead) by traveling bandits. This was a bad time for Poland, during WW2. My family received a letter in 1939, telling my grandfather of these horrors. I have the letter that was sent to them. It is so sad to read.

My grandfather served as a soldier under Emperor Franz Josef. This part of Poland was under Austrian-Hungarian rule. All young men had to serve. My grandfather worked as a butler for a Polish Count and that is when he learned to speak German, Romanian as well as gentleman Polish. He and the Count traveled to America three times, as well as to other foreign countries. This is where the different languages came in handy.

In 1910, my grandfather left Poland from Antwerp, Holland, for America. He arrived in New York City and then on to Schenectady. He went to Schenectady because there were people (Partyka, Hauka) from his same village of Majdan

Krolewski living on Paulding Street, off Eastern Avenue. My grandfather had a Romanian sweetheart (my grandmother) from Galati, Romania. They met while they were both working in Bucharest, Romania. Her name was Veronica Macsim and she sailed to America in 1911 with passage that he sent her. They married and had eight children.



Michal and Veronica Chmielowiec

One of those eight children was my mother, Sophie T. Melewicz Anthony. Three of the babies died from respiratory failure and that is when my grandfather bought cemetery lots at St. Mary's Cemetery. Michael and Veronica were members of St. Mary's Parish on Eastern Avenue as well as being members of the Church's Society. I think the name was Polish Catholic Union of America. Michael Melewicz worked at ALCO until he was an old man. The family lived on Romeyne St. (spelling?), now Barrett Street. They also lived on Liberty Street. Our whole family went to St. Mary's Church. My twin sister and I went to St. Mary's School from 3rd grade to 8th grade. We graduated from St. Mary's in 1955.

My Polish Grandfather Eleanor Monlea

Father Ren was pastor and Father Zakens was Assistant Pastor.

It was a different time and now the Church does not exist. So sad. Thank goodness for the memories.

John Urbanski



Urbanski family - 1915

It was the fall of 1915. Some members of the growing Urbanski family posed for a photo in the yard of the family residence at 229 Front St. Schenectady. Pictured are the Mother of the family, Stanisława Urbanski (standing on the left), along with three of her daughters: Gertrude (later Williams) standing on the left, Helen (standing in the rear), and Katherine (Malewicz) who is seated with her three young children: Edward (on her lap) and Virginia and Helen to her left. In front of

Stanisława is her youngest child, Edmund, who is my Father. Gertrude later married and had one son while Katherine had a total of seven children, and Edmund had two children.

The father of the family, John (Jan) Urbanski, emigrated to the US around 1882 from Wylatowo, Poland (Posen region of Prussia at that time) along with at least one brother, Andrej. He was approximately 20 year old at that time. John worked at the

John Urbanski

Westinghouse Farm Machinery Co. at the end of Erie Blvd. near the entrance to the present GE. Around 1885, he arranged to bring, from Wylatowo, his Mother Julianna Urbanski (Dobrzynski), along with Stanisława Wozniak and her three siblings (Joseph, Vincent, and Rosa). John and Stanisława were married in St. Joseph's church in Schenectady on 9/7/1886.

The Urbanskis and Wozniaks emigrated to the US apparently to escape German control. As children, they had to learn German as well as Polish. Stanisława was about 18 when she left Prussia. She did not have living parents at the time she emigrated but worked on a farm owned by Germans. Life was tough for her since she was also supporting her three younger siblings. Work on the farm was demanding since she later communicated to her family that the owner of the farm expected her to work as an adult if she expected to receive the wages of an adult.

After marrying, they lived on a farm in Scotia and later moved to 229 Front St. where they lived to 1925. Their house in Scotia was near the train tracks and John would sometimes hop a slow freight train to and from work. He owned a team of draft horses that were retired from the fire department and he used them to plow the fields and to use them in part time job of hauling dirt with a dump wagon at construction sites in the area. On one occasion, the hoses were tied up outside a Schenectady saloon and when fire bells went off, the horses ran with the empty wagon through the streets and across the narrow wooden Washington Ave bridge across the Mohawk river to their Scotia home. The larger house on Front St. provided needed room for the growing family. The yard ran to the Mohawk river

and allowed them to have a large garden which was tilled by hand, and they also had chickens, and a few fruit trees. The back of the house had a summer kitchen with a wood fired stove so that the coal fired stove in the kitchen could be turned off and not heat the house during the summer. John used his river access to till and plant potatoes and cabbage on an island between Schenectady and Scotia. Crops were stored in a root cellar and extras were sold in the neighborhood. Edmund recalled helping his father till the garden in the spring when he was young. During a hot day, he gave Edmund a nickel and asked him to run to the local saloon to fill the beer pail. Both would drink from it to quench their thirst and the rest was spilled in the garden. He also recalled helping his older brother erect a pole in their Front St backyard in the 1920s with an antenna for a crystal radio set which they took turns listening to. The family moved to Vale Pl in 1925 to be closer to St. Mary's church and school and because Stanisława was becoming concerned that her sons were spending too much time in the saloons around Front St. that catered to ALCO employees. Front St became a wave of workers at shift change. In fact, 3 sons worked for their entire careers in ALCO. However, John worked at GE from approximately 1890 until around 1930 when he retired.

John and Stanisława had twelve children between 1890 and 1911. Nine lived to adulthood and four of those married and had families. Tuberculosis and diphtheria took two children, and a drowning in the Mohawk River took John Jr. In 1917, Joseph Urbanski (the fourth oldest child) enlisted in the Army for duty in World War 1. Until that time he and his older brother Steve worked for Proper Ice Co in

John Urbanski

harvesting and delivering ice. Joe left Schenectady telling his mother he would bring the Kaiser home on a chain. He was assigned to the 312th Infantry of the 78th Division and was killed in action on 11/1/1918 near GrandPre France. He is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.

All the males in the family worked during the depression either at ALCO, GE, or in the government sponsored WPA. They were known for their hard work and commitment to their families. Edmund served in the US Army during World War II. John died in 1941 and Stanisława died in 1961 at the age of 94. The house on Vale Place stayed in the Urbanski family until 2004 when Edmund, the youngest and last living sibling, died at the age of 93.

LITHUANIAN INDEPENDENCE DAY COMMEMORATION St. Joseph's Church 600 State St., Schenectady

The Knights of Lithuania Hudson Mohawk Council 136, will commemorate their 96th Anniversary of Lithuanian Independence, at the 10:30 a.m. Mass on Sunday, February 16th.

Immediately following the Mass, everyone is invited to the church hall for assorted ethnic foods, desserts, coffee and tea.

The former Holy Cross Church, located in the Stockade, was founded by Lithuanian immigrants to America in 1922, and Lithuanian Independence Day is observed out of respect to the founders of that Parish and for their families in Lithuania, living or deceased.

An enlarged copy of a photo believed to be that of the Founders of Holy Cross, circa 1922, will be on display, for the purpose of asking folks present if they can identify ancestors or others therein.

Resources

Polish American Historical Association – Good list of resources

<http://www.polishamericanstudies.org/>

Polish Genealogical Society of America

<http://www.pgsa.org/>

TATRA Area Research Group – Information about former Galicia region

<http://www.e-targ.org/>

Polish Roots – Magazine on line: Gen Dobry – Excellent!

<http://www.polishroots.org/GenDobry/tabid/60/Default.aspx>

Historical Maps of Poland - University of Buffalo - Poland in the Classroom

[http://info-](http://info-poland.buffalo.edu/classroom/maps/task4.html)

[poland.buffalo.edu/classroom/maps/task4.html](http://info-poland.buffalo.edu/classroom/maps/task4.html)

Memories of Nowy Targ in English - Yskor Book

http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/Nowy_targ/nowy_targ.html

Biblioteka Kresowa (Library of the Borderlands – Poland, Lithuania) – look for English Index – Documents in Polish, Russian and Latin – includes Church record books – have to download viewer on Home Page - Dejavu

<http://www.wastan.pl/biblioteka/>

Google Translate

Fultonhistory.com – NYS old newspapers
<http://fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>

Dear Reader:

Many thanks to Carole, Eleanor and John for their family stories. They illustrate the joys and frustrations of family research. Ben Kroup, Carole McCarthy and Bernice Izzo generously reviewed the draft newsletter.

Bernice Izzo is building a database of names and places mentioned in newsletter articles that can be shared with others doing genealogy research.

Please send this newsletter to anyone who might be interested.

To be added to the newsletter e-mail list, contact Phyllis.

Next newsletter deadline: April 1st.
The frequency of this newsletter's publication depends on the volume of family stories we receive.

To submit your family story,
e-mail Phyllis Zych Budka:
abudka@nycap.rr.com