



# Gen Dobry!

**Gen Dobry! 31 August 2001**

\*\*\*\*\* GEN DOBRY! \*\*\*\*\*

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\*\*\* WELCOME! \*\*\*

to the latest issue of GEN DOBRY!, the e-zine of PolishRoots(tm). If you missed previous issues, you can find them at <http://PolishRoots.org>.

Remember to visit PolishRoots, the Website that brings you \_Gen Dobry!\_. Webmaster Don Szumowski wanted to stress that there is still time left to "Adopt a Posen School!" If you are interested in volunteering your time to help index school records, please go to this address for more information:

[http://www.PolishRoots.org/posen\\_schools.htm](http://www.PolishRoots.org/posen_schools.htm)

The tax rebates are on their way, so why not contribute part of that money to your favorite charity - PolishRoots?! For those of you who've already made a generous contribution, Thank You - Bo~g zapl~ac~! For the rest of you, please go to

<http://PolishRoots.org>

and click on Support PolishRoots. To make a contribution by Credit Card click on Helping.org (a secure donation web site) OR click on Donation Form to make your contribution by Check (sorry, U.S. funds only). Remember, all contributions made to PolishRoots are tax deductible to the fullest extent allowed by U.S. law.

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\*\*\* SOME NOTES ON POLISH SURNAMES AND SUFFIXES \*\*\*

I've been receiving a lot of notes asking about Polish surnames lately, and I find I keep repeating the most basic info over and over, especially about the meaning of suffixes. It occurred to me a few notes on the subject might be worth including in \_Gen Dobry!\_. They will give you a little background you might find useful, and they will produce an overview that I can make available online -- so when people ask these questions in the future, I can just say "Go read the August 2001 \_Gen Dobry!\_." (Yeah, so I'm lazy. So what else is new?).

I realize many of you have my book \_Polish Surnames: Origins & Meanings\_, and may feel I'm just repeating what you already paid to read. But there's a lot of info in that book, perhaps too much for many folks to absorb. A short, sweet review of some basics might benefit even those enlightened folks who regard my book as the Last Word on the subject (bless all of you! -- you know who you are).

So let's look at some basic issues connected with surnames and suffixes.

\* I'm A -SKI, I Must Be Noble! \*

Again and again I hear "Someone told me names ending in -ski are noble. Is that true?" I've responded so often I'm sick of the whole subject. Still, it's a legitimate question, so let's start with it.

If you're talking about names found in records from, say, the 14th century, then yes, names ending in -ski were borne by nobles. So were names ending in -owicz, or -ik, or whatever suffix you care to mention. Back then, all surnames were noble! In other words, only nobles used surnames.

It wasn't until much later that non-nobles began using surnames regularly -- generally not until the 16th or 17th centuries. It's hard to be absolutely certain of the dates because

there are very few records before the 1600s that mentioned non-nobles at all; so we have don't have much evidence as to when the practice of bearing unchanging, hereditary names spread to the middle class and the peasants. But by and large, most scholars agree that peasants seldom used surnames before the 1600s; there are exceptions to every rule, but this one is pretty reliable.

So at one time -ski indicated nobility. But that ceased to be true, oh, a good 300-400 years ago. When the use of surnames of any sort stopped being exclusive to nobles, so did the forms of the names themselves.

What does -ski mean? In Polish it's an adjectival suffix, meaning simply "of, from, connected with, pertaining to." The form X-ski is an all-purpose way of saying "somehow associated with X." Thus Warszawa means "Warsaw," and Warszawski means "of Warsaw." The noun piekarz means "baker," and the adjective piekarski means "of the baker, the baker's."

In surnames, X-ski usually began as a short way of indicating some close connection with X. Thus Piekarski would generally mean either "kin of the baker," or "one from the place of the baker." There are subsets of the -ski names that are especially likely to refer to place of origin -- we'll look at them in a minute -- but clearly a name such as Warszawski would mean "one from Warsaw," or in a broader sense, "one connected with Warsaw in some way clear enough that calling this guy Warszawski makes sense." Similarly Bydgoski, literally "of Bydgoszcz," would mean "one from Bydgoszcz, one connected with Bydgoszcz."

Please notice: when -ski is added to a noun, a letter or two at the end of the noun may disappear: Piekarz -> Piekarski, Warszawa -> Warszawski. Sometimes the change is even greater, as in Bydgoszcz -> Bydgoski, Zamosc~ -> Zamojski. Poles tended to add -ski to what they regarded as the base form of the noun in question, and clear away final suffixes or consonant combinations that weren't essential parts of the name.

The practical consequence of this is that a lot of -ski names referring to places are ambiguous; they may refer to a number of different places with names derived from the same base form. Thus you can't be positive Warszawski must refer to the capital of Poland. There may be another place, or two, or five, with names beginning Warszaw-; the surname, by itself, gives no clue which one it's referring to in a given instance. There's a Warszawa in former Zamosc province; there's a Warszawice in Siedlce province; there's a Warszawiaki in former Lublin province; and a Warszawskie Przedmies~cie in Elbla~g province. It is POSSIBLE the surname Warszawski could refer to any of them.

Obviously most of the time Warszawski would refer to the nation's capital. My point is that you can't take that for granted! The moment you assume that, it will surely turn out YOUR Warszawski was the one in 100 who came from Warszawa in Zamosc~ province. That's why even surnames that refer to place names MUST be interpreted in light of a specific family's history -- it's the only way to make sure you're focusing on the right place.

Of course, a lot of -ski names don't refer to places at all. Piekarski might refer to a place named Piekary or something similar; but most of the time it probably started out meaning "the baker's kin." Kowalski would usually mean "the smith's kin" (from *\_kowal\_*, "smith"). Szczepan~ski would usually mean "kin of Szczepan (Stephen)." Nosalski can mean simply "kin of the big-nose" (*\_nosal\_*). This suffix can be added to all kinds of roots, whether they refer to an ancestor's place of residence or origin, his occupation, his first name, his most obvious physical feature, and so on.

\* -SKI vs. -SKA \*

As basic as this is, I still get asked a lot: why does my great-grandmother's name end in -ska? The answer is simple: Polish adjectives have different forms for the genders. Surnames ending in -ski are regarded as adjectives, so they, too, reflect gender with different endings. Thus Janowski is the nominative form for a male; Janowska is the same form for a female. The endings differ in the other cases, too: "of Janowski" is Janowskiego if referring to a male, Janowskiej if referring to a female. But the nominative forms are the ones we encounter the most, and you can save yourself some wear and tear if you just realize that X-ska normally means "Miss X-ski" or "Mrs. X-ski."

Now nothing's ever too simple, and there is one factor that can throw a wrench into the works: names derived from nouns than end with -ska, e. g., *\_deska\_*, "board," *\_maska\_*, "mask," *\_troska\_*, "care, worry." These have to be handled on a case-by-case basis. But the rule of thumb is as stated above. When you see -ska, replace the -a with -i and you'll usually have what we regard as the standard form of the name.

\* -CKI and -ZKI \*

What about names ending in -cki/-cka and -zki/-zka? Essentially, these are just variants of -ski/-ska. Certain words end with consonants that, when combined with the basic ending -ski, produced a pronunciation change. Thus Zawadzki comes from *\_zawada\_*, "obstruction, fortress" + -ski. The final -a in *\_zawada\_* drops off, giving Zawadski. But it's hard to say -d- followed by an -s- (notice, in "gods" or "wads" or "lads" we always pronounce that final -s as a -z). Zawadzki seemed the more accurate way to spell this name.

But, just to complicate things, the combination -dz- in that instance is actually pronounced like -ts-, which Poles write with the letter -c-. So Zawacki is another way of spelling that same name. Either way, Zawadzki or Zawacki, it's pronounced roughly "zah-VAHT-skee," and just means "of the obstruction or fortress," or "from the place called Zawada or Zawady because at one time there was an obstruction or fortress there."

My advice is, treat -cki and -zki as variations of -ski. You don't really need to know why they're spelled differently. It's enough to recognize the difference, note the spelling variation, and move on.

\* -SKI vs. -SKY \*

Lord, am I sick of this one! People are always asking things like "If it's spelled -sky, isn't that a Jewish name?" or "Can I conclude my Jablonsky was Czech instead of Polish?"

Historically the spellings of Eastern European surnames have varied so much -- even back home in Europe, let alone in North America -- that you can't lay out a hard and fast rule for this -ski/-sky business. The rule of thumb, however, is that -ski usually is associated with Poles; -sky may be associated with Czechs, Ukrainians, Russians, etc. There are jillions of exceptions, but if you want a basic rule to go by, that's it.

That's because Polish spelling rules say -k- can never be followed by -y, only by -i. Well, Poles arrived in this country writing their names in the same alphabet we use. Some of the special Polish letters caused problems, but the -ski ending was easy enough to copy and use. So as a rule Poles tended to spell their names -ski even after they came to America.

Religion was not really a factor. Jews tended to use whatever spelling was regarded as correct where they lived. As I say, in Polish -sky is incorrect, -ski is correct, so Jews living among Poles usually spelled it -ski. Jews living among Czechs spelled it -sky because that is correct in Czech. If they lived in what is now Belarus or Russia or Ukraine -- as millions did -- their names were written in the Cyrillic alphabet, and could be rendered in our alphabet as -ski, -sky, -skiy, -skyi, -skyj, -skij, and so on. Most often it ended up as -sky, so that spelling seems to predominate among Jewish immigrants. But there were and are plenty of Jews in America who spell their names -ski.

There seems to be a tendency among German- and English-speakers to spell this Slavic suffix as -sky, to the point that even Polish immigrants quit fighting it and accepted that spelling. I'm not sure what accounts for that tendency, but I have a theory: Czech influence. In Czech -sky (actually with an accent over the y) is the correct spelling. Over the centuries Germans have dealt a lot with Czechs, and that experience may have convinced them -sky is the right way to spell this suffix. And when Poles immigrated to the U. S., they often found sizable Czech communities already flourishing here; in many cities Poles went to Czech churches and social events, until they were numerous enough to establish their own. Since the Czechs had come first, and the Poles often mixed with them, it's understandable that Americans became familiar with the Czech spelling first, and regarded it as standard. That may explain why, in Europe and especially in America, the -sky often shows up in instances where it was not "correct."

\* -OWSKI/-EWSKI and -IN~SKI/-YN~SKI \*

Surnames ending in -owski or -ewski or -in~ski or -yn~ski usually were derived from place names. That isn't true all the time, but it tends to be true more often than not. So Xowski or X-ewski or X-in~ski or X-yn~ski generally started out meaning "one from X." That X may or may not have various suffixes added to it; Jankowski could indicate a family connection with Janko~w or Jankowo or Jankowice, and De~bin~ski could come

from De~biny or De~bno or De~bna, and so on.

The difference between -owski and -ewski, and between -in~ski and -yn~ski, need not concern you too much. For our purposes -owski and -ewski are slightly different versions of the same thing; the same is true of -in~ski and -yn~ski. The distinction is due to the hardness or softness of the consonant or consonant cluster at the end of the name's root -- and if you're smart you'll nod and say "OK, that's enough of that, on to something else." (The alternative is to take a graduate class in Slavic linguistics and orthographics).

The essential point is that -ow/-ew and -in/-yn are basic Slavic suffixes indicating possession. Jano~w or Janowo means literally "Jan's \_," and De~bin or De~bina or De~bino or De~bno means literally "the oak's \_." Add -ski and you have Janowski, literally "from, of, connected with Jan's \_," and De~bin~ski, literally "from, of, connected with the oak's \_." The blank stands for something so obvious it didn't need to be spelled out -- usually either "kin" or "place." So Janowski can mean "of Jan's [kin]," but most often it will mean "from Jan's [place]." And that place could have been called Jano~w or Janowo or Janowice or Jano~wka, and so on.

As I said earlier, surnames derived from place names are usually frustrating. Once you remove the -ski from X-ski, almost any place with a name beginning X must be regarded as a possible source of origin. Relatively few Polish place names are unique. So I say again, it's essential to combine analysis of the surname with details on the family's past. Otherwise you have no clue which of the jillion places with names beginning Janow- your particular Janowskis came from.

\* -OWICZ or -EWICZ \*

This suffix simply means "son of." Here, too, the difference between -owicz and -ewicz is of no great importance to non-linguists; some names tend to show up with one or the other, and some show up with both. But the basis meaning of X-owicz or X-ewicz is "son of X."

What happened here is that the possessive ending -ow/-ew had the suffix -icz tacked onto it. That suffix -icz or -ycz is how Poles once said "son of," so that "son of Jan" was Janicz or Janycz; "son of Kuba" was Kubicz or Kubycz. But as time went on the Poles were influenced by the tendency of other Slavs to use -owicz or -ewicz instead of plain -icz.

By the way, -owicz is just the Polish way of spelling the suffix we see in many other Slavic names as -ovich or -ovic^ (using ^ to indicate the so-called hac^ek in Czech -- it looks like a little v sitting on top of the letter in question). The spelling varies from language to language, but it almost always means "son of."

\* AK-/-EK/-IK/-KA/-KO/-UK/-YK \*

Suffixes with a -k- generally began as diminutives. In other words, Jan is the Polish form of "John," and Janek or Janko is much like "Johnny." English, however, typically has

only a couple of diminutive suffixes, -y or -ie. Polish (and the other Slavic languages) have tons of them. Most have a -k- in there somewhere, or the -k- has been modified by the addition of further suffixes (e. g., -czak, -czyk). As a rule, in surnames a suffix with -k- means something like "little" or "son of."

Thus Jan is "John," Janek or Janko is "little John, Johnny," Jankowicz is "son of little John," Jankowo is "[the place] of little John" (or "of John's son"), and Jankowski is "from the place of little John or John's son." You see how different suffixes can combine to add layers of meaning to the basic name?

The original usage of these suffixes was to indicate a diminutive form. But they also came to be used in other ways, usually meaning "associated with, related to, exhibiting the quality of." Nowak comes from *\_nowy\_*, "new" + -ak, to mean "new guy in town," and Stasik means "one associated with Stas~" = "kin of Stas~."

Also, these suffixes were often added to nouns to serve as a term for a person or object perceived as related to whatever the base root meant. Thus Bartek started as a nickname from Bartł~omiej (Bartholomew), and meant "little Bart, son of Bart." But once Bartek existed as a name, it could come to be used more loosely as the noun *\_bartek\_*, which means "yokel, peasant, hick from the sticks." This happened because folks perceived Bartek as a name popular primarily among people in rural areas, so it came to be used as a common noun for such a person. We have done similar things in English; you might refer to a redneck in general as a "Billy Bob" or any other name perceived as common among rural folk.

Similarly, *\_sowa\_* means "owl," and *\_so~wka\_*, literally "little owl," can be a term for a specific kind of owl, *Athene noctuae*. But it's also used as a term for the Noctuidae family of moths. Apparently something about those moths reminded people of little owls, and the term stuck. Thus you have to be careful when you interpret surnames with these diminutive suffixes: the "little X" may be turn out to be a term for something not readily apparent. If you trace the development of the name back far enough, you can usually see what the semantic connection was. But it's often pretty obscure until you dig deep.

\* -ANKA, -INA/-YNA, -OWA/-EWA, -O~WNA/-EWNA \*

Finally, these suffixes differ from the others I've mentioned in that they're not intrinsic parts of the surnames. Jankowski is a different name from Jankowicz; Jankowiczowa is not a different surname from Jankowicz, but merely a special form of it. These suffixes all mark feminine versions of surnames that take the form of nouns, not of adjectives ending in -ski or -cki or -zki. To arrive at the standard form of the name you have to remove the suffix (and sometimes add an ending): Jankowiczowa = Mrs. Jankowicz, Kos~ciuszkowa = Mrs. Kos~ciuszko.

In standard Polish -owa or -ewa indicates a married woman, and -o~wna/-ewna an unmarried one. As I said, Jankowiczowa is Mrs. Jankowicz, but Jankowicz~wna is Miss Jankowicz; Kowalewa = Mrs. Kowal, Kowalewna = Miss Kowal. In records we often see

-o~wna/-ewna forms as maiden names.

The suffixes -ina/-yna are added to noun-derived names ending in -a, and usually indicate a married woman; the corresponding form for unmarried women was -anka or -ianka (sometimes -onka or -ionka). So Mrs. Zare~ba is "pani Zare~bina," and Miss Zare~ba is "panna Zare~bianka."

I must add, however, that in regional dialects you sometimes see -anka or -onka added to adjectival surnames, and even used for any female, so that a Mrs. Kowalski might appear as "Kowalszczanka." That is not correct in mainstream Polish; but you may run into in records from some regions, especially northeastern and southeastern Poland.

\* CONCLUSION \*

Well, I could go into a LOT more detail -- I have oversimplified things grossly. But a basic outline should stick with basics, so I'll end here. I hope it helps you make a little more sense of the names you're looking for.

Of course, if you're saying "Hey, now I don't need Fred's book" -- well, maybe I've outsmarted myself!

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\*\*\* LETTERS TO THE EDITOR \*\*\*

Subject: Ellis Island

The last issue of \_Gen Dobry! had a letter to the editor that wished there was a better way to search the Ellis Island on-line database (<http://www.ellislandrecords.org/>) than by using the search mechanisms the site offers. Well, there already is one! Stephen Morse offers an alternate search at:

<http://sites.netscape.net/stephenpmorse/ellis.html>

and its mirror at:

<http://home.pacbell.net/spmorse/ellis/ellis.html>

which allows you to search using the first part of a surname, certain years, ports, or even a ship name. I imagine most people will want to use a surname that "starts with" ... and then limit their search using the other fields.

Some people have also noticed that some of the on-line manifest images are not linked to the correct manifest texts. By using the "missing manifests" button on his page, one can find information that will help locate the correct image.

Christine Elia <ChrisE365@aol.com>

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Subject: New Polish list

You are invited to join a NEW Polish genealogy mailing list. Bring all your questions, suggestions and expertise to the Polish Genius list. Polish Genius is devoted to all types of Polish genealogy and Polish heritage whether in Poland or in another country, during any era (B.C.-21st century). We consider Poland's history and culture to be part of genealogy.

You will have the choice to reply to an individual or to the whole group (in other words, "reply-to" WILL NOT be set by the list server to force everyone to reply to the list). There will also be a Polish Genealogy FAQ to help eliminate the redundant "how-tos" which clog up other lists.

Be one of the first to sign-up and enjoy! Count yourself as a founding member along with Debbie and Onna.

If you're tired of the reply-to munging on other lists and members running amok, join us in establishing a new list, Polish Genius.

To learn more about the polish\_genius group, please visit:

[http://groups.yahoo.com/group/polish\\_genius](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/polish_genius)

To start sending messages to members of this group, simply send email to:

<polish\_genius@yahoogroups.com>

Debbie Greenlee <daveg@airmail.net>  
Moderator, polish\_genius

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Subject: Two new genealogists!

Date: Thu, 30 Aug 2001 15:44:18 +0200 (MET DST)

Dear Friends,

Together with my wife, we are very happy to announce the birth of our twin daughters today, on Thu. Aug. 30, 2001 at 10 a.m. Their names will be Weronika and Hiacynta.

Dr. Lukasz Bielecki <bielecki@rose.man.poznan.pl>

[Editor's note: as the grandfather of twin 19-month-old girls, whom we are helping to raise -- one of whom, coincidentally, is named Veronica -- I'm not sure whether to say "Congratulations!" or "Yikes!" But the less curmudgeonly among our readers will want to wish the Bielecki family the very best. And I hope Dr. Lukasz and his wife enjoy learning how to live without sleep.]

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\*\*\* UPCOMING EVENTS \*\*\*

September 12-15, 2001

THE 2001 FGS/QUAD CITIES CONFERENCE

"A Conference for the Nation's Genealogists"

The RiverCenter, Davenport, Iowa

For more info:

Our email: [fgs-office@fgs.org](mailto:fgs-office@fgs.org)

Our website: <http://www.fgs.org>

Register Online at:

<http://www.fgs.org/2001Conf/fgs-2001.htm>

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October 5 - 7, 2001

FEDERATION OF EAST EUROPEAN FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETIES  
-- INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION 2001 --

Ramada Inn South Airport  
6401 South 13th Street  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Conference details, as they become available, will be posted at:

<http://feefhs.org/conf/01mil/01mil-hp.html>

or by return mail from:

FEEFHS, PO Box 510898, Salt Lake City, UT 84151-0898

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October 6, 2001

## MASS-CONN-ECTION II

Last year's first Mass-Conn-ection Polish Genealogical Conference was a big success, so a second one is planned for this year. Like the first, this conference is being sponsored jointly by the Polish Genealogical Societies of Massachusetts and of Connecticut/the Northeast. It will be held on Saturday, October 6, at General Jozef A. Haller PAV Post, Grove & Broad St., New Britain, CT. It will include a Beginners Workshop, and talks on Records in Poland, Polish Surnames, and Using the US National Archives. There will be a Polish lunch! The price is \$35. Register early by mail: PGSCCT, c/o MASS-CONN, 8 Lyle Rd., New Britain, CT 06053-2104. Telephone: (860) 223-5596. Conferences on Polish genealogy are not often held in New England, so if you live in the area, this is one you want to attend! You can learn more by e-mailing PGS-CT/NE at: pgsne2@aol.com.

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### \*\*\* MORE USEFUL WEB ADDRESSES \*\*\*

<http://www.avotaynu.com/ellisland.htm>

In the Summer 2001 issue of *\_Avotaynu\_*, Gary Mokotoff authored an article entitled "Strategies for Using the Ellis Island Database." He gave this URL as the address of a Website where the article will be updated from time to time. If you'd like some help making use of the Ellis Island database, I recommend seeing what Gary has to say.

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<http://www.archiwa.gov.pl/sezam/index.eng.html>

On POLAND-ROOTS-L@rootsweb.com James Tye <kurpie@home.com> told of a new database for searching the holdings of the Polish State Archives, called SEZAM (Polish = "sesame," as in "Open, Sesame!"). This page explains what the database offers. At the bottom is a button marked "Sezam" on which you click to go to the database itself at:

<http://baza.archiwa.gov.pl/sezam/index.eng.php>.

[Editor's Note -- This database hasn't worked out all the bugs yet, and its results require some expertise in the Polish archive system to interpret and use properly. But I did a quick search under "Archives Name: Archiwum Panstwowe w Bialymstoku," specifying "Category: urzady stanu cywilnego i akta metrykalne," with no specific date or fond. It returned a long list of records of various registers for different religions held by the Bialystok archives. So it is worth visiting, especially to confirm the existence and location of specific records. As time passes it will surely become a more and more powerful research tool, and -- we hope -- a little easier to use, especially for those who don't speak Polish.]

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<http://www.davidrumsey.com/>

Jerry Frank <jkfrank@home.com>, an experienced researcher, recommends this site for those interested in 19th-century atlases. It has "thousands of high-quality images ... with ability to search for specific countries, zoom in and out, print them, etc."

In case you have difficulty finding your way around, Jerry offers these instructions:

On the opening page, click on "View Collection with Browser". (Note - it appears that not all browsers will work with this site. Opera would not work. Explorer works. I do not know about Netscape.)

On the next page, in the left column, click on "Search". This opens a box that will allow you to search by country, author, etc.

Click on "Country". Enter the name of the country you want to find, and click "List". This will bring up a list of possible maps or map combinations that show that country. Click on one of them and thumbnails of that selection will appear in the right screen. Double click one of the images to bring it up in a large view on a screen by itself.

In the bottom right corner you will find a tool bar that allows you to zoom in and out, print, etc. You can experiment with those features to get what you want. If you move your cursor over these items, their function will show up in written form in the lower left of your screen.

If you right click on any image, you can download the image to your own computer. The image you download will be whatever is on your screen at the time. If you download the first image, it will print out quite small on your paper. If you zoom in first, then right click, you will download the zoomed image which is very clear and readable when you print it out. Again, you may need to experiment a little to get it just right. You can also print the image directly from the browser using the toolbar at lower right.

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<http://www.republikasilesia.com>

Ted Jeczalik <msz@republikasilesia.com> has sent updates and information from this site, which advocates the independence of the Republic of Silesia in what is now southwestern to southcentral Poland. Whether you favor that cause or not, it is a fascinating site to browse through for anyone with roots in Silesia.

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