



Gen Dobry!

Gen Dobry! 31 December 2000

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

Volume 1, No. 6. 31 December 2000. Copyright (c) 2000, PolishRoots(tm), Inc.
Editor: William F. "Fred" Hoffman, E-mail: WFHoffman@PolishRoots.org

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*** WELCOME! ***

to the sixth issue of GEN DOBRY!, the e-zine of PolishRoots(tm). If you missed previous issues, you can read them at the PolishRoots site. Thus issue 1 is at:

http://www.polishroots.org/gendobry/GenDobry_vol1_no1.htm

For issues 2, 3, 4, and 5, change the last part of the URL to "_no2.htm" or "_no3.htm" or "_no4.htm" or "_no5.htm," respectively.

Thanks to all who've taken the time to send me your comments, suggestions, and contributions. If you have something to contribute, or just something to say, please E-mail me at <WFHoffman@PolishRoots.org>.

Along these lines, one gentleman wrote in to say he enjoyed _Gen Dobry!_, and wondered if we could print an article discussing why our ancestors left Europe in the first place. I said I'd keep my eyes open for something along these lines. As it happened, just a few days later I read an article on this very subject, "Why Our Ancestors Left Poland." It was written by Larry Plachno, a printer and publisher with 30 years' experience who's done a lot of research on his own family and has been giving seminars for 10 years. Larry wrote it for his own family, and graciously allowed us to reprint it. So you can't say we don't pay attention to your requests!

Another item, "He Understood," is a reprint from the e-zine "Missing Links." I guess you'd say it's a kind of Christmas story, although with its setting among Polish prisoners in a Nazi concentration camp, it's less treacly than most items in that genre. Normally by mid-December I'm so sick of the hype over the looming holidays that I'd rather chew shards of glass than print anything that even mentions Christmas. But I thought this particular piece is relevant and interesting, so you may forgive me for passing it along.

Please don't forget to visit the Website that brings you Gen Dobry!, at this address:

<http://PolishRoots.org>

One feature you might find worth a quick visit is:

<http://PolishRoots.org/reference.htm#Translation>

Click on "Translation," and from there click on "Poltran.com." I've discussed this kind of software in past issues of _Gen Dobry!_. While the translations this site produces are far from perfect, they're really not half bad -- especially considering they're free!

Zycze wszystkim Szczesliwego Nowego Roku! [I wish you all a Happy New Year!].

*** WHY OUR ANCESTORS LEFT POLAND ***

by Larry Plachno <lplachno@plachno.com>

One of the most pervasive questions to come up in researching our family tree is: Why did our ancestors leave Europe? All four of my grandparents decided to leave the land of their ancestors behind, board a ship, and come to America. They were certainly not unique. One reference says that more than four million people left ethnic Polish lands between 1870 and 1914. Another report indicates that 174,365 Polish people arrived in the United States in 1913 alone.

There are at least three general and obvious reasons behind much of this European migration to America. The first reason is the traditional human need to seek a better life. The second reason was the attraction of the United States as a land of opportunity. A third reason was that in many parts of Europe, population had increased faster than agricultural technology. The result was occasional famines and not enough food to go around. For example, the potato famine was a major factor in people leaving Ireland. In Poland, there were several additional factors, most of which were a result of the country's unique geography.

Poland is bordered on the north by the Baltic Sea. Poland's south border is the Carpathian Mountains, which extend west to Germany and southeast to the Black Sea. Much of Europe to the south of Poland was not easily accessible because of the Alps and other mountains. As a result, the Baltic Sea and Carpathian Mountains acted as a funnel, with the Polish plains being the easiest and most obvious route between Europe and Asia. One the one hand, this was a blessing because some of the earliest trade routes between Europe and Asia passed through Poland. Even today it is possible to ride all the way from the Atlantic Ocean at London, England to the Pacific Ocean at Peking, China on only three trains that pass through Berlin, Warsaw and Moscow.

An interesting side note is that all of this traffic to and through Poland made it one of the most metropolitan countries in Europe. The Slavonic tribe known as the Polanie (which means "the people who dwell in the fields and open country") gave Poland its name. Over the centuries they were joined by groups of Celts, Balts, Goths, Huns, Swedes, Germans, Russians, Ukrainians, Tatars, Armenians, Latvians, and Jews. The net result was the Polish people have quite a diverse heritage.

On the negative side, Poland's geographic position as the crossroads of Europe and Asia made it a prime target for war and occupation. Virtually every European dictator or leader, including Attila the Hun, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, Catherine the Great, Hitler and Joe Stalin, occupied or

controlled Poland to some extent. In between these major problems, Poland often found itself simultaneously fighting off Germany on the west and Russia on the east. Poland's times of peace and self-government were often measured in years rather than centuries.

It is interesting that in spite of these conflicts, the Polish people not only retained their national identity but also became a major influence on neighboring countries. For example, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania gave up official use of an old form of the Belarusian language and adopted Polish. I find it significant that Poland was the first of the Communist countries to return to democracy, thus paving the way for a domino-like collapse of Communism throughout the Soviet bloc.

All of the above negative factors, and more, were present in Poland during the 19th century.

Certainly, the worst of these problems was that Poland did not exist as an independent nation at any time during the 19th century. The first two Polish kings of the 18th century were notoriously incompetent. The last Polish king, Stanislaw August Poniatowski (who ruled from 1764 to 1795) was essentially a puppet of the Russian regime and particularly Catherine the Great, Empress of Russia.

An anti-Russian rebellion broke out in Poland, which led to the partitioning of Poland among Prussia, Russia, and Austria in 1773, and a further partitioning in 1791. An armed Polish rebellion under the leadership of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a hero of the American War of Independence, failed, and the third partition of Poland in 1795 divided the remaining Polish territory.

While later actions by Napoleon were to provide a brief respite, it can be said that Poland was divided into three parts in 1795. Russia occupied a large eastern section of Poland as well as several surrounding countries, including the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and modern Belarus. Prussia (essentially Northern Germany) occupied western Poland and what was then the north central section east to Grodno. The area south of Warsaw, which included Malopolska (Little Poland) and Borzecin, the home of our family's ancestors, was occupied by Austria.

William Hoffman, the author of the book on Polish names and current editor of the newsletter of the Polish Genealogical Society of America, described this situation as "... living under foreign emperors who regarded their new subjects as little more than tax-paying cannon fodder." This was an era of rebellion and petty wars. Among other offenses and affronts, the Polish people in these occupied territories were heavily taxed to pay for these wars, and their young men were conscripted into military service to

fight these wars for the occupying countries. Prussia continued an ongoing war with France for most of this century. Russia battled Turkey, France and the British Empire in the Crimean War. The Russians then got into a war with the Japanese in which many Polish men were forced to fight.

Imperial Russia annexed 73% of then-existing Polish lands. Following a Polish insurrection in 1863, the Polish language was prohibited and a Russification program began. Catholic churches were persecuted, peasants who caused trouble were deported to Siberia, and many villages were burned. It is noteworthy that Russian Czar Alexander II was assassinated in 1881 by a bomb thrown by a Polish engineering student. Much of this land was eventually ceded to Russia in 1945 following World War II.

Prussia occupied 15% of Polish land, including most everything from Wielkopolska (Great Poland) to Gdansk, Pomerania, and including the northern coast on the Baltic. The Polish people were treated very badly here and most sources indicate that the Polish people in Prussian-occupied territory fared worse than those in the Russian- and Austrian-occupied areas.

Traditional Polish courts were annulled, land was taken from the Polish people and given to German settlers, use of the Polish language was prohibited, and children were beaten in the streets if they protested. German people were brought in to govern the towns. Most of them were not prepared for any administrative work but used their positions to enrich themselves at the expense of the local Polish residents. Separate schools were maintained for the Catholic and Lutheran children, with the Catholics being primarily Polish and the Lutherans being primarily German, which frequent led to open conflict between the students.

However the local people attempted to maintain their *_polskosc_*, which translates as "Polishness." By the 1860s there were bands of rebels roaming the area who got into armed actions with German soldiers and administrators. Local Polish people supported the rebels and there were actual underground transport systems to get weapons and gunpowder to the rebel forces. Although the armed conflicts diminished in later years, the Polish people in this area did create several Polish societies to protect and encourage their *_polskosc_*. It is interesting that similar motives eventually led to the Solidarity movement that brought Poland out of Communism a century later.

The territory occupied by Austria amounted to only 12% of Poland and hence was the smallest of the three occupied areas. Two different sources indicate that the Polish people in the area occupied by Austria, which includes most of our ancestors, were probably treated the best of the three occupied areas. The policy of the Austrian government was to

eliminate everything Polish including place names. As a result, the area was named Galicia from the old Roman name for nearby Ruthenia/Ukraine. Hence, the Polish people living there frequently used two names to identify their region: the traditional Malopolska in Polish, and Galicia while under Austrian rule.

Rosemary Chorzempa says that Galicia had the highest birth and death rates in Europe, and reportedly also had the highest income tax rate. In addition to heavy taxes, the Austrian regime imposed censorship, a police state to terrorize the residents, and a complex bureaucracy with its numerous minor laws designed to antagonize the Poles.

By the mid-1800s, many of the Polish people became fed up with the occupation and began to leave all three sections of Poland. While the occupation was bad enough, other problems came up that did nothing to improve the situation.

Galicia suffered heavy flooding in 1836. I have yet to locate any specific record pertaining to grandpa's and grandma's town of Borzecin. However, Borzecin is located on the Uswica River, a major tributary of Poland's greatest river, the Wisla [Vistula]. Hence, it would be a fair assumption that Borzecin and Jagniowka suffered substantially from this and other floods. Even today, most the rivers and major streams in the area have dikes along their banks to eliminate or at least reduce the impact of flooding.

Galicia was not alone in suffering from severe health problems during this period. Medicine was still in its infancy and knowledge of germs and antiseptics was still in the future. Children were delivered at home by midwives and many failed to survive. Those that did often failed to reach adulthood because of lung diseases or malnutrition. There were also numerous outbreaks of cholera. The first Asiatic cholera epidemic was recorded in 1831. There were outbreaks of both cholera and typhus a few years later, in 1847 and 1848. The year 1854 is remembered for The Great Cholera Epidemic. Throughout the remainder of the century, there were additional outbreaks of cholera in Poland and Galicia, particularly in 1866, 1873, 1884 and 1892.

Add to this the fact that Poland, and particularly Galicia, suffered from poor crop yields and resulting starvation. The decade from 1846 to 1855 witnessed poor crop yields in Galicia. Rosemary Chorzempa says that the resulting starvation and epidemic diseases claimed the lives of 200,000 people in Galicia. There was also a substantial famine in Galicia in 1907. It is significant that this same year witnessed the largest number of immigrants coming to the United States.

If you take all of this into consideration, it becomes obvious that there were several reasons for people to leave Poland. Most of those who did leave came to the United States because they knew that there were opportunities here and relatives or fellow countrymen were already in America.

*** HE UNDERSTOOD ***

by Horst A. Reschke, Salt Lake City, Utah
<h.reschke@worldnet.att.net>

Stanislaw Wojcik had been so engrossed in his chat with his buddy from Poland that he had not noticed the manager standing there. The two young workers had felt secure, talking in Polish, speaking their mind about their miserable lot as teenage deportees, captured by the swiftly advancing German armies in Poland, at the outset of World War II. When Stan looked up and realized by the look on the manager's face that he had understood what the boys were talking about, he felt as though the blood froze in his veins and in his mind's eye he pictured himself back behind barbed wire, in the concentration camp, where he had languished and suffered for many months.

The year was 1940. Young Stan had felt a wave of relief on the day when he had been selected to leave the camp to work in a pharmaceutical factory. He had seen too many people wither away and die. What starvation did not accomplish, the harsh treatment of the camp staff did. Beatings and shootings were the order of the day. Compared with the concentration camp, the work at the Lecinwerk, which manufactured medical products, was heaven. Not that the work was easy. The laborers had to work hard, yet with time Stan and his buddies became accustomed to the routine. The manager, a man in his early forties, was strict, but fair.

The war in which young Stan had found himself embroiled at age 16, eager to serve and save his country, to fight the German invaders, seemed far away now. When he was captured by a German soldier so shortly after joining the fighting forces of Poland, Stan was interrogated and classified a volunteer. His captors segregated him and some of his friends and confined them to a concentration camp. For one so young and idealistic, Stan felt that life had dealt him a hard blow.

The work detail came almost as a relief. Stan found himself in the company of other Polish laborers. The common bond of the language was a balm to the ache of loneliness, homesickness, and sadness he felt deep down.

On this particular day Stan and his buddy Tadek talked about the war, their captors and about the state of world affairs, reported second-hand by Yves, their friend, a prisoner-of-war from Belgium. Yves owned a radio and he defied the Nazi order against listening to BBC London. The news was not good. The Germans were winning everywhere.

When Stan glanced up and saw the manager standing at the doorway something akin to an electric current ran through his body. How long had the man been standing there? How long had he watched and listened? Stan did not know the answer, but from the look on the boss's face he was convinced that he understood Polish and he came to the chilling realization that the German had not just picked up a few words but had been a witness to the entire hostile conversation of the two slave laborers.

Max, the manager, had liked the shy young Pole. Although his position did not permit him to show favoritism or even undue familiarity, he had kept an eye on Stan. He had noticed the slender young man's gentle nature and his willingness to learn and to adapt to the involuntary environment.

What Stan could not have known was that Max spoke Polish with some fluency. He had learned it as a young boy, growing up in his native village of Gross Sibsau, in West Prussia. The province was then under German rule, but almost the entire village population was Polish. Only Max's father Theodor, the wheelwright and his family, and the postmaster's family, were Germans. The two ethnic groups got along well. To the Germans the Poles were simply neighbors, if not friends. But the villagers' shared joys and sorrows knew no ethnic boundaries.

Yes, Max had understood the conversation. Now Stan saw him approach and he shuddered. "Stan," the unsmiling manager said, "come to my office, please." Told to sit on a chair in the office, the young man did not dare look up. His gut feeling told him he would soon be back behind barbed wire, and that just before Christmas, he thought with regret. Meeting Max's eyes at last, Stan could not believe he was seeing a smile on the German's face. "Stanislaw," he said in Polish, "would you like to come to my apartment tomorrow evening? It is Christmas Eve and I would like you to meet my wife and children."

Stan fought back tears as he took his boss's outstretched hand and shook it. Christmas Eve instead of return to hell, what a wonderful turn of events! The God in whom he had sometimes despaired was in His heaven after all, and all seemed right.

That Christmas Eve would be forever burned into Stanislaw Wojcik's memory. Max and his wife and children showered him with affection and love. Though his escape from Germany, his existence as a Polish partisan, his recapture

and return to yet another concentration camp were still in the future, the memory of this magic night was never far from his consciousness.

Today, Stanislaw Wojcik is Stanley Blake, a proud citizen of the United States of America. Several years ago he and his wife Jane made sort of a pilgrimage to Salt Lake City, to stand at the grave of his erstwhile manager, to pay his respects and to shed a tear or two.

Max, the manager, was my father.

[Written by Horst A. Reschke, Salt Lake City, Utah
<h.reschke@worldnet.att.net>. Previously published by Julia M. Case and Myra Vanderpool Gormley, CG, Missing Links, Vol. 5, No. 51, 20 December 2000. RootsWeb: <http://www.rootsweb.com/>]

*** FEEDBACK FROM READERS ***

From: Alfred E Rosinski <pagiz@juno.com>
Re: Name Changes at "Ellis Island"

I believe a lot of those doing the research are only considering Ellis Island. Do they realize that Ellis Island didn't open until 1892?

I found that I had many name changes done by census enumerators, city/state and US levels. They have really chewed the name up better than a meat grinder. So the INS shouldn't be blamed for everything, especially when you realize that some of those immigrants were illiterate. People have to take everything into consideration and look for all variations of a name and not just sit back and blame someone. But for some, that's the easy way out.

From: Don Drimmel <rosthiof@win.bright.net>
Re: Treating newbys with patience

I always treat the newbys Like anyone else. The ones that scare me are the ones who are the experts like Filby. I have _Germans to America 1875-1888_. I didn't find any of my relatives but I did find about sixteen Ole Olsons and all from Germany. There must be 50 Olsons that come from Germany. The one that got to me was an Ostenson from Germany fits my wife's line and she is Norwegian. There is no doubt that it is her ggf. Is this a slight error on the part of the author or is it a rip-off like I suspect?

[Editor's reply: it seems to me a source like the one Don's referring to -- Ira A. Glazier and P. William Filby's ongoing series _Germans to America: Lists of Passengers Arriving at United States Ports_ -- can't help but have a lot of errors in it. A compilation can't be more accurate than its sources, and there are plenty of errors and inaccuracies in the source material Glazier and Filby drew from. But I thought I'd print this in case any of you have ideas on the subject you'd like to discuss with Don.]

From: Tom Hollowak <thollow@charm.net>
Re: Searching the Web

Good point about what you can expect to find on the web and how to do it. I might add that from an archivist's point of view -- since so many of us are "lone arrangers" (understaffed, overwhelmed with documents, etc.) -- scanning materials for the web is an expensive operation (in terms of money and labor) that will keep documents genealogists want off the Web unless they put them there as part of their family research.

With regard to name changes at Ellis Island - far more likely is the immigrant could not spell his or her name and the official wrote it phonetically. In Baltimore a Pole served as immigration officer at the turn of the century - I am sure New York had people on Ellis Island who could speak Polish as well. Just remember if someone walks up to you and says "My name is Smith," but was not literate, could you be sure it is spelled SMITH or SMYTH or SMYTHE?

*** RESEARCHING RELATIVES IN LITHUANIA ***

[Editor's Note: On LITHUANIA-L@rootsweb.com Stanley Klemanowicz <klemanowicz@dmjm.com> had this to say on researching relatives in Lithuania:]

This is the third report and second update regarding my discovery of relatives in Lithuania.

Yesterday, I received a letter confirming many of the names, places, and dates I sent to them about two weeks ago. I was surprised how quickly they responded. I feel they are equally excited about this discovery. I plan to meet them next June in Vilnius.

For those new to this thread, I discovered them through a mass mailing to all persons in the on-line Lithuanian phone book who had similar surnames to that which I was searching. It can be done!!!

The next step is to retain a researcher in Vilnius. I have been working with someone on my father's father's side of the family and he has proved very helpful. He was able to fill in a few blanks for me. I plan to use this same person and am hopeful (also hoping that records exist) I can learn about my grandmother's family in the coming months.

If anyone is serious in pursuing this option please send me a private e-mail. I will provide details.

*** FILM "PAN TADEUSZ" ON VIDEO ***

[Editor's Note: Andrzej Szymanik <ASzymanik@aol.com> of the Polish Bookstore & Publishing in New York sent an E-mail to a number of folks announcing that this film is now available for purchase. Normally we don't run promotional material, but this production of "Pan Tadeusz" can legitimately be called a major cultural event. Many of our readers might be quite interested in getting a copy, and thus might like to read what he had to say:]

Dear Friends of Polish Culture:

Finally a film adaptation of Polish timeless masterpiece available on video! Directed by Andrzej Wajda, an Academy Award winner for lifetime achievement, with a superb cast of the best Polish actors. English subtitles. Price: \$39.95 plus Shipping & Handling (\$6.00). You can e-mail, fax (718 389-7050), or call 800 277-0407 to place a credit card order. If you prefer to pay by check or M.O. please send it to:

Polish Bookstore & Publishing
135 A India St.
Brooklyn, NY 11222

*** HUMOR ***

<TerryRules@aol.com> sent this in to Missing Links:

If the Three Wise Men had been Three Wise Women, they would have asked for directions, arrived on time, helped deliver the baby, cleaned up and put down fresh straw, brought appropriate gifts, and made a casserole.

[Written by <TerryRules@aol.com>. Previously published by Julia M. Case and Myra Vanderpool Gormley, CG, Missing Links, Vol. 5, No. 51, 20 December 2000. RootsWeb: <http://www.rootsweb.com/>]

*** MORE USEFUL WEB ADDRESSES ***

<http://www.vorfahrensuche.de/index.php3>

Annie <lotocki@ozemail.com.au> wrote on Polish Borders Surnames that she'd discovered this very comprehensive database with Polish/German/Prussian Lists. She found it through Copernic 2000 <<http://www.copernic.com/>> after entering a relative's name. "Go to the home page and click on Namen [on the left] and use the alphabet, as we found errors with the search engine when entering surnames. There are thousands of names and associated family details."

<http://www.necronet.com.pl/Katalog/katalog.html>

On POLAND-L Onna <onna@sakurazone.poznan.pl> suggested visiting this site, which lists the following info on deaths: names, DOD and place where they were buried.

<http://www.accurapid.com/journal/12gene.htm>

This is an article Ann Sherwin wrote on the challenges of translating German records. While aimed primarily at professional researchers who have to deal with German script, it might prove helpful and informative to anyone working with German documents.

<http://www.scrapbookpages.com/Poland/index.html>

Debbie Greenlee <daveg@MAIL.AIRMAIL.NET> mentioned this site on Genpol. She says it includes churches, houses, concentration camps, and tourist spots. She also suggests visiting this site:

<http://www.bright.net/~dunn/>

She describes it as "a work in progress; I know because I keep sending the web site owner, Carol, lots of my own pictures. The village names, their województwo and parishes are given. There are street scenes, churches, cemeteries, stores and houses. Since people add to this site you might want to check back every week or so. You never know when someone will post a picture of your ancestral village!"

<http://www.carpatho-rusyn.org/villageg.htm>

Egon Wojciulewicz <egon@eswo.org> mentioned on PolandBorderSurnames-L@rootsweb.com that there is a list of Carpatho-Rusyn villages at this site.

<http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/grodno.htm>

Cheryl <charr1961@webtv.net> mentioned on PolandBorderSurnames-L@rootsweb.com that she found this link. It's a list of over 26,000 men of Grodno Gubernia who were eligible to vote in the Russian parliamentary elections in 1912.

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/12204c.htm>

On POLAND-ROOTS-L@rootsweb.com Lill734@aol.com reported finding this site, describing it as "very long and informative about the Poles in America." It is a reprint from the 1911 issue of the Catholic Encyclopedia, including insights on why some Poles left their homeland for the New World.

To be added to or removed from this mailing list, go to this address:

http://www.PolishRoots.org/GenDobry_signup.htm

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