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*** WELCOME! ***

to the latest issue of *Gen Dobry!*, the e-zine of PolishRoots®. If you missed previous issues, you can find them here:

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

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Two of my main interests in life are computers and languages, so I’m always intrigued by any subject that combines them. One such subject is the question of how much computers can help us get past language barriers. This matter is obviously relevant to Gen Dobry! readers, because virtually all of you have computers, and most of you don’t speak Polish, Latin, German, or Russian, the languages in which most documents of genealogical interest were written. Given how much computers can help us in other pursuits, it is natural to expect and hope that they would provide valuable assistance in understanding those documents.

First off, I think it’s safe to say there is no computer program that eliminates the language barrier, and there probably won’t be one in the near future. I do not say there never will be one. I can accept the possibility that fast enough microprocessors, paired with massive amounts of memory and really efficient and well-organized vocabulary search and selection algorithms, could get the job done. This may require a few more technical breakthroughs; I’m not sure any system that exists now can manage it. But over the years, I’ve watched as smart people developed hardware and software that could beat the world chess champions at their game and Jeopardy champions at theirs. This has taught me never to underestimate the ingenuity of “computer nerds” (and I use that term with affectionate respect). It seems to me successful translating software is plausible, perhaps even inevitable.

So if nothing we have now does the job well, how well does what we have do? When it comes to translation, the grade has to be “incomplete.” Results are too inconsistent; computers sometimes translate text passages really well, and other times, they produce gibberish. Sometimes the gibberish is downright funny. As an example, Donna Pointkouski (a researcher and blogger, <http://pastprologue.wordpress.com/>) sent me a hilarious example of computer translation from Google Translate operating in the Chrome browser. It’s from the website <http://www.wilczyn.pl/>, in the section marked “Historia.” When Donna had Google translate the page, she was amused to read the following remark about the local church:

“Church of the Eleven Thousand Virgins is well equipped, since the pastor holds two vicars.”

After seeing this, I had to take a look at the original, which says, “Kościół pod wezwaniem Jedenastu Tysięcy Dziewic jest nieźle wyposażony, skoro pleban trzyma dwóch wikariuszów.” And you know, that translation is not that far off! But this is a case where a miss is as good as a mile. What it really means is “The church, dedicated to the Eleven Thousand Virgins, is well staffed, as the pastor has two assistant pastors.” (If you aren’t familiar with the Eleven Thousand Virgins, as I was not, see the Wikipedia entry on St. Ursula, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Ursula>).

You see how difficult translation can be! Google actually rendered the terms adequately, going word by word. But when it put the whole thing together, what came out was hilarious. It takes a human to review that and realize it just doesn’t work. A human would recognize that
wyposażony, which normally means “equipped, fitted out, stocked,” needs to be rendered in this context with a word that sounds right when applied to people. The church is not well equipped; it’s well staffed. And while trzyma can mean “hold,” it can also mean simply “has.” The pastor of the church is not snuggling up with two assistant priests; he has two assistant priests to help him carry out his parish duties.

As another example, consider the first few lines of Mickiewicz’s Pan Tadeusz, first in the original Polish, then in Google Translate’s English:

Litwo! Ojczyzno moja! ty jesteś jak zdrowie.
Ile cię trzeba cenić, ten tylko się dowie,
Kto cię stracił. Dziś piękność twą w całej ozdobie
Widzę i opisuję, bo tęsknię po tobie.

Litwo! My Fatherland! You’re as healthy.
How much you need to appreciate, it only learns
Who you lost. Today, thy beauty in the whole ornament
I see and describe, for I long after you.

Close, but no cigar. Again, the words are there; but they’re not put together well. I would translate it, more or less literally (with concessions to English word order but no attempt to convey the poetic effect), as follows:

Lithuania! My fatherland! You are like health—
Only he who has lost you knows how to appreciate you.
Today, I see and describe your beauty in all its splendor,
For I miss you.

Note that if you know what the Polish means, you can make sense of Google’s rendering. But if you know what the Polish means, you don’t need a translator anyway.

Now in all fairness, I must admit that Google Translate often does a decent job of rendering Polish in English. There have been times I visited a Polish website and allowed Google to translate it into English, just to see if it can clarify unfamiliar terms. The result is often quite good, good enough to hope this process will eventually be reliable. Still, as Donna’s example and the Mickiewicz selection shows, you can’t rely on the accuracy of what you get. It may be close, but close may not be good enough. And sometimes it is not even close.

When it comes to translating English to Polish, the results are much worse. I’ve experimented before with simple sentences, and have been amazed at how Google Translate missed even the most common expressions. And I’ve lost track of how many people have posted notes to mailing lists, saying they’d used Google or some other translation program to render their letters in Polish or Lithuanian or German, sent the results to the family in the old country—and had their relatives write back saying “Please write in English, we can’t understand what you sent us.” And that’s the diplomatic version. Less tactful relatives often tell you they were rolling on the floor in laughter as they read these letters.
Of course, even human translators sometimes cause unintentional merriment with linguistic mistakes. A translator assisting President Carter during his 1977 visit to Poland, working under adverse conditions, made several blunders. The most famous came when President Carter talked of his longing for friendship with the Polish people, and the translator rendered “longing” not as tęsknota but as żąda, which means “lust, sexual craving.” Poles alternated between amazement and amusement as they realized the President surely did not mean he wanted to have sex with every single one of them; but that’s kind of what it sounded like! ... So humans are not immune to errors of this sort. But they’re a lot more likely to pick up on them than computers are (if only because humans don’t want people like me making jokes about them 34 years later).

I would summarize by saying Google Translate and similar services are worth a try when you’re going from Polish (or German or Russian) to English. The results may be quite good; and even when they’re not good, you can often get the gist of what’s said. If you need really accurate translations, however, you need humans to handle the job—and it’s a good idea to make sure the human is up to it!

As for going from English to Polish, don’t waste your time with machines; consult a human who demonstrates a good grasp of BOTH languages. You may be able to find people on mailing lists who are fluent and don’t mind translating brief items for free. If not, pry open your wallet and lay out a few bucks to have a pro do the job. This is one case where pinching pennies definitely does not pay!

But translating is not the only area where people look to computers for help. Many want a bit of assistance with pronouncing foreign words. After all, if you can pronounce words well, a phrase book may be all you need to get around in Poland. But many are the tourists who have tried to say what they read from a phrase book, only to realize they were in way over their heads. Somehow, in real life, it never seems to work quite the way the book says. But a person who can pronounce words in a language has a big advantage in trying to cope with that language.

In the last issue of Gen Dobry!, we mentioned a website that offers help in this regard, <http://www.forvo.com>. Bronwyn Klimach wrote and said she finds another site much easier to use, and asked if its pronunciations were reasonably good. She wrote, “I go through phases of just listening to town and village pronunciations on <http://www.ivona.com> and having had a couple of Polish strangers comment that my pronunciation was very good (kindness personified or what?) I was hopeful that this was a reliable site. I like having the four different voices to compare.”

Actually, last month, when I included that comment about the Forvo site, I knew there had been a similar site we’d mentioned before, and I had liked it; but I couldn’t remember its name. Bronwyn knew I was probably talking about the site now called Ivona: “You may have lost track of this site over time as it used to be say.expressivo.com.”

Now that I’ve had a chance to compare the two, I agree with Bronwyn. I also find the Ivona site easier to use, and the pronunciations are quite good, aside from an occasional stutter or clipping. It’s kind of odd that I say this, because those are synthesized voices, whereas the ones on Forvo...
are actual sound clips of Poles pronouncing the words. Obviously, I’m not going to say those Poles don’t know how to speak their own language. But the Ivona site gives you full sentences, with pretty good diction and intonation, and thus lets you approximate the rhythms of actual speech a little better.

I don’t think you can go wrong with either one; try them both and use the one you like better. I think you’ll find the Ivona site more useful; but the Forvo site is definitely worth consulting, especially for single words or short phrases.

In any case, it’s nice to be able to recommend websites that offer real help with pronouncing Polish, as well as other languages. If nothing else, have Ivona pronounce names of your Polish ancestors. This will give you a decent notion what they sounded like, and that may help you cope with the multitude of spellings that drive us crazy.

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*** LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ***

Subject: Poles Who Lived in Western Russia

Pozdrowienie, Fred,

When one reads messages on the various Polish genealogy forums, it is clear that most participants are either unaware of, or have forgotten, that Poles lived in parts of pre-World War Russia besides the Kingdom of Poland (Congress Poland). It was good to find a reminder of this in one of the “More Useful Web Addresses” posted in 30 September 2011 issue of Gen Dobry!. I am referring to the historical map given in:

<http://www.staypoland.com/history-map.htm>

You wrote, “Also on that list, John Peters suggested this site, featuring a map showing the boundaries at different times between Russia, Lithuania, Poland and Belarus. I found it rather difficult to make out, but John said ‘It is worth studying the boundaries at various times to get a sense of which nation controlled which territory.’ He added that ‘probably the most important consideration is that this far eastern part of Lithuania was populated by a mix of ethnic groups, dominated by ethnic Poles.’”

Besides the example of Lithuania noted, another significant example is Białystok.

I am referring to the Poles living in the so-called Western Provinces of Russia (Gubernie Zachodnie), shown in the map in:

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7f/Gubernie_zachodnie_krolestwo_polskie_1902.jpg>

The map shows the political boundaries of the provinces and many towns, with the Polish name used. It is taken from:

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The Polish-language version of the above article is very interesting, with more detailed descriptions of the political organization of Congress Poland:

<http://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podzi%C5%82_administracyjny_Kr%C3%B3lestwa_Polskiego>

Henry Szot

*Editor*—Thank you, Henry, for sending me this. You make an excellent point, and the resources you cited should help anyone trying to make sense of where Poles have lived over the centuries. Researchers are in for problems until they forsake the notion that “All Poles lived in Poland, all Germans lived in Germany, all Russians lived in Russia,” and so on. It’s just a little more complicated than that!

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Subject: Lingotek

*Editor*—I wrote a brief piece for the last issue on Lingotek’s project to help FamilySearch members translate documents. A few days later, the same subject came up on the Lithuanian Genealogy mailing list, and I repeated much the same thing there. I thought this note, addressed to me but posted to the public list, was worth repeating here.

Fred, it sounds as if computer translation is just part of what they [Lingotek] would offer. It sounds as if they say they have people around the world who volunteer translations, like some of do indexing of records. Now, for our purposes, how many of them speak Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian and also read Cyrillic writing at the same time is another thing.

For documents in just one or two languages, this could be a great help. I would also hope that FamilySearch has some idea of what they would be getting into.

Megan Peterson

*Editor*—Very interesting. If they have volunteers doing translations, that would certainly raise the chances of good results—provided the volunteers know their stuff. I hate to rain on anybody’s parade, but sometimes free translations are worth exactly what you pay for them. I’ve seen too many examples ... Still, if that’s true, there’s potential benefit. And I absolutely agree, I hope FamilySearch isn’t in for any nasty surprises.

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*** ANOTHER KINDLE BOOK OF INTEREST ***

In the last issue, I mentioned how useful I had found Amazon’s Kindle book reader. Several times, I have found out about a book that sounded interesting, checked to see if it was available
on Kindle, and seconds later, I was reading the book. I mentioned two works relating to Poland that I obtained this way.

Another example arose this month, when John Guzowski posted a note to the Polish American Writers & Editors group on Facebook. He said some years back, he’d heard from a Pole who had experienced and survived some of the horrors inflicted on Poland during World War II. The gentleman had written a book and wanted some assistance getting it in shape to publish. John made some suggestions, and heard nothing more till recently. It turns out the book was published on Kindle, for a cost of 99 cents.

It’s called *Angus: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier through World War II (Volume 1)*. If you go to Amazon and search the Kindle Store for that title, you’ll find it easily.

I just wanted to comment, this is one more way of getting material published that no conventional publisher would touch. People who write works on history—or family history—can now make those works available to others without investing large amounts of money to print books on paper. It used to be, when people told me they’d spent lots of times compiling a family history or other book, and wanted to publish it, that I could not paint a very optimistic picture about their prospects of seeing their work in print. Desktop publishing and digital bookstores certainly have their disadvantages, but they have opened doors to people in that situation.

So if you’re not worried about making money on a book, but just want to get your story out there, look into your digital options! Publishing e-books is just one of many inexpensive ways to do so.

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*** UPCOMING EVENTS ***

November 3–12, 2011

6TH ANNUAL POLISH FILM FESTIVAL
AUSTIN POLISH SOCIETY

The Austin (Texas) Polish Society will be hosting its 6th annual Polish Film Festival beginning on November 3rd. For the complete event schedule and how to purchase tickets please see:

<http://www.austinpolishfilm.com/2011_Festival>

Please feel to pass this information on to anyone you may know who might be interested in attending. Thanks!

[Posted on the Polish Genius list by APS member Elliott Nowacky]

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November 5, 2011

PHILADELPHIA’S ANNUAL MUGĖ FESTIVAL
12:00 p.m., Lithuanian Music Hall

[Christiana Noyalas posted this information to the Lithuanian Genealogy mailing list.]

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November 9, 2011

CENTRAL CONNECTICUT STATE UNIVERSITY

“Czesław Miłosz: A Poet of Both Nations,” by Yale professor Tomas Venclova
7 p.m., Founders Hall, Davidson Bldg,
CCSU, New Britain CT.

Free, open to the public. Parking available in campus garages. For more info: Polish Studies @ 860 832-3010, or <jacquesm@ccsu.edu>.

[Barbara Proko posted this to the Polish American Writers & Editors group on Facebook].

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November 12–13, 2011

2011 POLISH OKTOBERFEST, PHOENIX, ARIZONA

Mark your calendar for the 2011 Polish Oktoberfest. The event will span over Saturday, November 12th (noon to 9 p.m.) and Sunday, November 13th (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.), 2011.

For more information please visit <http://www.PolishFestivalAZ.org>
On Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/polishfestivalaz>
Twitter: AZPolishFest.

We hope to see you, your family, and friends at this fun-filled event!

Sincerely,
Our Lady of Czestochowa Parish
2828 W. Country Gables Drive in Phoenix, Arizona
Tel: +1-602-212-1172
<http://www.polishchurchphoenix.org>

[Passed along by Debbie Greenlee on the Poland mailing list.]

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November 13, 2011
“Political and Social Changes in Poland Since the end of Communism There” — Lucyna Migala

Lucyna Migala is an impresario, arts administrator, broadcast journalist and cultural activist in the Polish-American community of the Chicago area. She is co-founder, artistic director, and general manager of the Lira Ensemble, the nation’s only professional performing arts company specializing in Polish music, song, and dance. She is also vice president and program director of WCEV Radio/1540 a.m. With Lira, she produces and narrates concerts of the Lira Symphony, Lira Chamber Ensembles, Lira Singers and Lira Dancers in the Chicago area and around the U.S.

To read more, go to the PGSA website <http://www.pgsa.org>.

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UNITED POLISH GENEALOGY SOCIETIES 2012 BIENNIAL CONFERENCE
Friday, April 20, 2012 at 9:00 a.m. – Monday, April 23, 2012 at 10:00 p.m. (ET)
Salt Lake Plaza Hotel at Temple Square
122 W South Temple
Salt Lake City, UT 84101

For more details, go to <http://upgs.eventbrite.com/>.

[From an e-mail sent by Ceil Jensen].

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*** MORE USEFUL WEB ADDRESSES ***

<http://www.cracow-life.com/poland/all-saints-day>

On the Poland-Roots list, Debbie Greenlee reminded us that November 1, All Saints’ Day, is a time in Poland for cleaning up family graves and placing lots of flowers and candles around them. “This is a sight to see, especially at night. Whole cemeteries glow. I found a video that shows the Rakowicki cemetery in Kraków.” The URL is above. She also posted URLs for YouTube videos of people visiting Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FhR3Kco3mD4> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dNqTrCBEuA>.

<http://www.cosmopolitanreview.com>

Maureen Mroczek Morris kindly wrote to remind me that the Fall 2011 issue of *Cosmopolitan Review* is now available at this URL.
On the Polish Genius list, Debbie Greenlee posted this link, the first phase of Aleksandra Kacprzak and Mariusz Zebrowski’s work on the Prussian Army project. The goal is to give users the ability to search the “Deutsche Verlustlisten,” the list of the Prussian Army’s personnel losses during World War I.

On the Polish Genius list, Bronwyn Klimach posted this link to a BBC story on Polish authorities’ reopening an investigation into crimes committed at Auschwitz and its satellite camps during World War II.

On a variety of mailing lists, Ceil Jensen gave this link to the Museum of Emigration, described as “a pioneering project of great importance for millions of Poles in Poland and all over the world. The history of Polish emigration, the process so important for our culture and national identity, will gain here the proper recognition it deserves. Gdynia became the true centre of Polish emigration in the times of the 2nd Republic. The Maritime Station served the passenger traffic for half a century and will regain its splendor owing to the Museum. The address and location of the future museum were imprinted in the memories of thousands of Polish emigrants and their relatives.”

Ceil also sent our notes about the unveiling of “the American Flag of Faces.” This is “a large interactive video installation filled with a montage of images submitted by individuals of their families, their ancestors, or even themselves which illustrates the ever-changing American mosaic.” You can see it and learn how to submit your own photos at this URL.

A recent issue of Nu? What’s New? said that the British site FindMyPast.co.uk has gone into the TV production business. They plan to do a show along the lines of Who Do You Think You Are? but with everyday people rather than celebrities and connecting families with historical events such as Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain, and so forth. The show is scheduled to run on Thursdays on the Yesterday channel in the UK, and began on October 20. For more info, the announcement cited by Nu? is at the above URL. You’ll have to check to see if you have access to any of the services that carry Yesterday’s programming.

On the JewishGen list, Brooke Schreier Ganz posted a note about new features added to the All Galicia Database. They involve searches based on geographical location, and the ability to sort search results by various criteria. These features are optional. The database is free and is
available at the above URL. As you might expect, it is most valuable to Jewish researchers; but a quick look suggests to me that non-Jews may also find it worth a close look—if you have roots in Galicia, that is.

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<http://old.news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20111022/ap_on_re_eu/eu_poland_obit_bielecki>

On the Poland-Roots list, Sharon Galitz posted this link to the story of a Pole, Jerzy Bielecki, who saved a Jewish woman from Auschwitz and was awarded the title “Righteous among the Nations” by Yad Vashem.

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<http://www.rakowice.eu>

On the Poland-Roots list, “Mrs. Mick” posted a note explaining that the above site has an online database that allows you to search for the location of graves in the Rakowicki cemetery in Kraków. As she said, “it is in Polish but pretty easy to figure out.”

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On the Lithuanian Genealogy mailing list, Vidimantas Kucas recommended the free Lithuanian Language Lessons (with pictures and sound) available on this site and supported by the Australian Lithuanian Foundation.

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<http://1000memories.com/blog/106-family-history-month-genealogy-roundtable-survey-how-genealogy-can-thrive>

A recent issue of Eastman’s Online Genealogy Newsletter (EOGN) mentioned this article, which should be of interest to anyone who wonders about the future of genealogy. You can access it at the above URL, or at <http://goo.gl/EQnlZ>.

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<http://eogn.com/wp/?p=17973>

This story from EOGN is sad for anyone who’s ever used RAOGK, “Random Acts of Genealogical Kindness.” Due to computer problems and the health problems of the administrator, RAOGK will be offline for some time. It is, however, encouraging to see how many people are stepping up and volunteering to help.

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This is another article from EOGN, and it’s not really about genealogy, but I thought it was worth pointing out. Dick Eastman gives information about LibreOffice, a free alternative to Microsoft Office. This project is a continuation of OpenOffice, which has offered a free suite of programs for some time; but Eastman says most of the OpenOffice developers are now working with LibreOffice, so it’s probably where the action will be for the foreseeable future. The main point is, if you feel Microsoft’s Office is overpriced, overhyped, and overwrought, you do have an alternative...

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