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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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*** POLES AND THE TITANIC ***

by Paul S. Valasek <HALLERSARMY@AOL.COM>

Immediately from reading this title, one can ask, “And how much more can be written about the Titanic?” Let’s face it, everywhere we turn on any media format, we see Titanic This, Titanic That, Re-Rediscovery of Titanic, Titanic and Mummies and Curses, even How to Rebuild Parts of Titanic. Well, for me, an avid Titanic fan, I enjoy watching any and all NEW material about the ship. But as far as Jack and Rose in the Big Screen movie, I’ve just about had my fill.

What I find interesting is not new books contemplating this or that, or suppositions about what would have happened if this had done that, this missed that, they didn’t do this, that, and the other thing, etc. etc., but rather, what has already been written—some of it very close to the actual time of the disaster, and some of it being uncovered that came from survivors and people involved with the disaster firsthand. That kind of information is what’s worth reading, and then anyone can come up with their own assumptions and conjectures.

In many of the movies about Titanic, there is a brief moment, always in third class, involving steerage passengers interrelating on board during the voyage, usually drinking and dancing. Most times it seems to be a fine Irish lad falling for some young Polish beauty. Well, it’s always a small bit and appears to be added for flavor to the movie; but did such things occur? Were there Poles on board the Titanic? If so, who were they?

A quick review of the accepted passenger lists shows many names of eastern European travelers; some may be Polish, others surely are not. (Here we have the ever-present problem of western Europeans trying to decipher eastern European names.) Some may be Polish Jews, but one cannot tell, because a Jewish name may be with numerous parts of Europe or even the world, not necessarily Poland. And of course, in 1912, Poland was not officially on the map, as it was still partitioned among Prussia, Russia, and Austria. So the listing of a place of origin as, say, Austria, could cloud the origins of a Pole from Czarny Dunajec, or Przemyśl, or even Kraków.

In April 2012, we will commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Titanic’s sinking. Much has been written, and more is forthcoming, but this commemoration of a very special dramatic sea disaster, will be all over the media outlets. (I understand that Jack and Rose, from the 1997 movie, will be on the big screen in 3D.)

But let’s get back to the Poles on board. Looking through libraries for Polish material is difficult and, for the most part, bleak. Since we’re talking about items that could have been written around 1912, these materials would have been in Polish libraries during both the First and Second World Wars. Many, many books were lost, destroyed, and stolen through those conflicts, not to mention the 50+ years of Communist censorship. So what may have survived?

My requests for information from librarians at the National Library turned up only two titles at this time that fit my criteria of older material—and both were from the United States. I located copies of these 1912 contemporary works, and located a third on that huge library called eBay.
All three were written by Polish-American authors, aimed at a Polish-American audience first and foremost. Two of these were written in 1912, and one in 1919, all in Polish. That is contemporary enough for me and I needed to read what they had to say. I also felt those first in line to appreciate this material would be today’s Polish-American audience, seeing that it was meant for the 1912 and 1919 Polish-American population. Here is material, some in highly detailed, some exaggerated, and some appearing to be made up out of the ether—that same ether that transmits messages through the atmosphere via the Marconi device, sight unseen! Of course, anyone interested in the story of Titanic would also find additional material of interest.

I was impressed that such fairly accurate material was presented to the Pol-Am population, in more detail than I would have expected. English quotes from survivors were translated into Polish, telling and retelling that night of drama. Can one imagine if that sinking time frame of nearly three hours happened today? Cell phones, Facebooking, and Twitter tweets would be rampant and non-stop. Except for the overwhelming mundane material being transmitted, we could have seen actual footage and last words of victims for all of eternity. (Maybe it’s just better that first-hand accounts and some artifacts told the story which blossomed into a mega-industry, rather than constant repetitious playback of snips and bits of video that we see on our daily dose of world disasters on the news.)

It’s not surprising the number of possible Poles on board was limited. There are several reasons why this was so. Most Polish immigrants leaving the homeland for North America left on German ships from German ports. That was because German ports were much closer and, of course, many Poles were versed in the German language. The Titanic’s one and only voyage, in 1912, was the time of Imperial German Naval growth with such proposed ships as the Imperator, Vaterland, and Bismarck being built to surpass their English cousins’ behemoths, Olympic, Titanic, Lusitania, and Mauretania. For trans-Atlantic voyages prior to 1914, Germans, Poles, Lithuanians, Russians, Czech, Slovaks, Norwegians, Danes, Swedes, Finns, and multitudes of other central, northern, and eastern Europeans favored their Teutonic travel guides. (To demonstrate the competition for immigrants, the British White Star line had a ship named RMS Teutonic, whereas the German steamship lines had names such as Amerika, President Grant, and the Pennsylvania.)

After World War I, German shipping was devastated, with most German vessels being either sunk, destroyed, or taken as war reparations by the Allies. German shipping came to a standstill until the country rebuilt its economy and Hitler and his followers decided to “overtake” the world in all of its facets.

In my own family, most of my Polish side came to America before 1918 and thus were on German ships. On my Czech side, those who came to the U.S. before 1918 usually did so on German steamships; after the war, they started coming over on British and French ships. For that matter, my Czech grandparents came over on the RMS Olympic, sister ship to the Titanic, but their arrival was in the summer of 1921, long after that disastrous night of April 14-15, 1912.

To be continued...
*** LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ***

Subject: English Camps in Poland

My wife and I volunteered for the English Camps described in the January issue. We first volunteered for the Lithuania camps but asked to be considered for the Polish camps. We were accepted and spent three weeks, from mid-June to mid-July, in Toruń. Part of my motivation was to search out my roots. Our GREAT, GREAT guide, Łukasz Bielecki of the Poznań Project, spent three and a half days touring family sites and archives in the Gniezno and Pelpin areas. We visited the towns and churches where my great-grandfather was married and my grandfather was baptized. Near Gdańsk we visited the town and church of my grandmother. When sufficient information was not available, Łukasz had access to the local archives. We did not meet any living relatives, but to walk where they had walked was truly a wonderful feeling. Łukasz also gave us a wonderful tourist’s tour of Poznań.

Following the ancestor tour, we started the school. The subjects we taught were of our own choosing and required each of us to develop lesson plans for four subjects. We taught three hours each morning, and then each afternoon, participated in sports or activities we developed, or assisted other teachers with their activities.

We had excellent meals, and since we were husband and wife, we had our own dorm room. Coed restrooms were shared by students and faculty.

On weekends, the school provided side trips to various historical sites. At the end, the faculty visited Gdańsk and Poznań. Since we had visited Poznań earlier, we spent one and a half days in Warsaw before flying home.

The month spent in Poland changed our whole perception of the country. We would encourage all Gen Dobry! readers to volunteer for 2012 with WIESCO at <http://www.WIESCO.org>.

Ed Price

Editor—I am delighted to hear that you and your wife participated in this program and found it so rewarding. I can’t say I was surprised once I realized Łukasz Bielecki was involved; from what I hear, any project associated with Łukasz is likely to be worthwhile. I can’t thank you enough for writing to tell us about your month in Poland, and I hope many of our readers will take your advice and participate in the 2012 program.

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Subject: Poles Deported by the Soviets

Greetings from Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia!

Today [August 28], a three-page article was published on the life of my father, (Zbigniew) Alan
Helon, who was deported at gun-point by the Soviet Secret Police [NKVD] with his sister, parents, uncle, and [visiting] grandparents from their property at Krzywe, near Pawłów, Radziechów, Poland, on Saturday, 10 February 1940, to “Labour Camp” Mucznaja, near Kotlas, Arkhangelsk, where his sister and grandparents suffered and perished.

As they say, “a picture tells a thousand words.”

Attached here is a PDF copy of the article published. Feel free to circulate and upload to Web sites as you might see fit.

Regards,

[Wieslaw] George Helon
Post Office Box 88 Toowoomba, Queensland, 4350
AUSTRALIA

Editor—I have not incorporated the PDF into this issue because it is copyrighted material, and I had no time to contact the publisher and get permission to reprint it publicly. But I do have a copy of the PDF and will gladly share it privately with anyone who’d like to see it. Just write me at <wfh@langline.com> and let me know. Also, if you would like to contact George Helon to discuss this subject and compare notes, write to me and I’ll forward your note to him.

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Subject: J. W. Gorski Given FGS Distinguished Service Award

Editor—This is a copy of a letter sent by the Federation of Genealogical Societies to J. W. Gorski of the Polish Genealogical Society of Michigan.

Dear Mr. Gorski,

The Polish Genealogical Society of Michigan has recognized you by a submission to the Federation of Genealogical Societies awards committee. The Awards Committee of the Federation of Genealogical Societies is pleased to award its Distinguished Service Award to you. The Distinguished Service Award is in recognition of outstanding service to FGS or a member society.

Your dedication to the Polish Genealogical Society of Michigan in many capacities, your donations to the State of MI Library, and the indexing of the Hamtramck Citizen are gifts that will offer future generations links to their family history. Your activities are exceptional and your giving very generous; for these reasons and more you are very deserving of the Federation of Genealogical Societies Distinguished Service Award.

The Federation of Genealogical Societies will honor its award winners at the opening session of the annual conference on Thursday, 8 September 2011 in Springfield, IL. If you are going to be in attendance at the opening session of the conference, please let me know.
Janice A. Fritsch  
Federation of Genealogical Societies Awards Committee Chair

*Editor—*Congratulations to Mr. Gorski on this well-deserved award! He has worked long and hard to promote genealogical research in Michigan, especially by service in many capacities to the Polish Genealogical Society of Michigan (he is currently PGSM’s Vice-President). The following Web site tells of another of his contributions to genealogy. *Sto lat, Bill Gorski!*  


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*** WEEK OF FREE ACCESS TO ANCESTRY IMMIGRATION RECORDS ***

A number of individuals have posted online notes that Ancestry.com is allowing a week of free access to its U.S. and international immigration and naturalization records. The week began on August 29 and runs through September 5. *Nu? What’s New?* put out a special edition to make sure its readers would not miss this opportunity. Its article ends by explaining that the immigration and naturalization records can be found at <http://www.ancestry.com/immigration>. If you go to that address, it helps you get started.

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*** NEW DIRECTOR OF THE POLISH STATE ARCHIVES ***

*Editor—*Many thanks to Ceil Jensen for posting this info to various mailing lists. The text (with a little editing from me to make it smoother in English) is from the Polish State Archives Web site, at this URL:  


On August 10, 2011, at the request of the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Prime Minister Donald Tusk appointed Władysław Stępniak, PhD to the position of General Director of State Archives.

Władysław Stępniak, PhD is an associate professor at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń and a member of the International Advisory Committee of the Memory of the World Programme and of the Polish-Russian Group for Difficult Issues.

Between 1973 and 1976, Władysław Stępniak was a PhD student at the Institute of History of the Polish Academy of Sciences, following which he started his career at the Head Office of the State Archives. For a period of seven years, he was a junior lecturer and later a reader at the Department of Archive Studies. Between 1983 and 1997, he worked at the Central Archives of Historical Records, first as the Deputy Director, and later as the Director of this institution.
Since 1997, Professor Stępniak has been working again at the Head Office of State Archives—until 2007 as the Chief Deputy Director of the State Archives, and currently as the Director’s Advisor.

During his academic career, Professor Stępniak has participated in research projects carried out by universities outside of Poland – first in Belgrade, as part of the scholarship granted to him by the Department of Political Science of the University of Belgrade. Later he was a visiting professor at London University (1985) and Stanford University (1994-1995). Professor Stępniak is actively involved in cooperation with academic institutions: he lectures at the Department of East European Studies of Warsaw University, Świętokrzyska Academy in Kielce, and Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń.

He is the author of approximately 220 academic publications, including four monographs. His main area of research involves the legal aspects of international protection of cultural goods, the history of Polish archival records dispersed throughout the world and their revindication, as well as issues relating to the availability of archival records. His main areas of academic interest include also the position of small and medium countries particularly the Balkans, in the history of international relations in the 20th century.

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*** PROJECT FOR POLISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETIES ***

by Debbie Greenlee

Editor—Debbie Greenlee posted this note on several mailing lists devoted to Polish genealogy, and it provoked a lot of discussion. I want to pass it along, in hopes of provoking more discussion and maybe even, just maybe, some action!

I just read about a project involving the Czech State archive in which the Jewish “Special Interest Groups” (SIG’s) are considering donating approximately $25,000.00 to the Czech State Archive in order to assist the archive in completing projects of interest to Jewish genealogists such as a Prague conscription database.

This got me to thinking. Why couldn’t Polish Genealogical Societies (as a group) take up collections in order to help and encourage some of the Polish Civil archives in making a database for records which Polish _diocesan_ archives have not allowed LDS to film? This presumes that the civil archives have copies of church records to which researchers are not allowed access at the diocesan level.

Maybe members of the various Polish Genealogical Societies should “petition” their societies to work on something like this.

Maybe a Polish diocesan archive would even be interested in a large donation if their archivist allowed SOMEONE to digitally copy their baptism, marriage and death records. Przemyśl Archdiocesan Archive comes to mind as one which would not allow LDS to film and also does
not allow researchers access to the records.

Just a thought.

Debbie

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*** UPCOMING EVENTS ***

Friday, September 30, and Saturday, October 1, 2011

POLISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF AMERICA CONFERENCE
PUZZLED BY THE PAST? PUT THE PIECES TOGETHER!

Among the features offered at this year’s conference will be a day-long series of lectures on all aspects of Polish-American Genealogical Research Methodology, presented by Jonathan D. Shea and Matthew Bielawa. [Editor—You’re not going to find two better-informed and more articulate speakers on this subject!]

There will also be an optional Polish Chicago Bus Tour on Friday, September 30.

The Bus Tour will leave the Hilton Garden Inn at 8:15 a.m. on Friday, September 30th. While traveling on the bus, the docent will give a brief history of the establishment of Polonia in Chicago. Our sights and stops will be as follows:

9:00 a.m. we will tour St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, the first Polish parish in Chicago, which, at one time, served some 40,000 parishioners.

Drive by sites of pertinent buildings that still remain and other important locations, such as St. John Cantius Church.

Tour Pulaski Park Fieldhouse with its historical murals.

An authentic Polish lunch in the Social Hall of the Polish Museum of America, catered by Kasia’s deli.

Tour the Polish Museum of America and the newly renovated Paderewski Room.

Tour of Holy Trinity Church hosted by Fr. Andrew Maslejka.

Drive, via Milwaukee Avenue, thru the Polish corridor of expanding Polish neighborhoods detailing the establishment of St. Hyacinth’s Basilica and its Polish neighborhood of Avondale. Travel thru Jefferson Park where the Copernicus Center continues to host the Taste of Polonia Festival, every Labor Day weekend.

Drive past St. Adalbert Cemetery, originally known as the Polish Cemetery on death certificates.
Pass All Saints Polish National Catholic Church and Cemetery

Return to the hotel between 5-6 p.m.

Hilton Garden Inn
2930 S. River Road
Des Plaines, IL 60018

For more information, visit the PGSA Web site <http://www.pgsa.org>.

[From the July 2011 edition of the PGSA Notebook.]

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October 1 – 3, 2011

POLISH MISSION PRESENTS THE FILMMAKERS OF PATH TO GLORY

Save the first weekend in October to meet the filmmakers of “Path to Glory.” The Polish Mission is hosting the Midwestern premiere of the documentary that celebrates the unique, and centuries old, tradition of Arabian horse-breeding in Poland. For more details, see <http://www.horseflyfilms.com/preview/pathtoglory.html>. (This information was provided by Ceil Jensen.)

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October 11, 2011

PRESENTATION BY JOHN GUZŁOWSKI ON HIS PARENTS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES IN WORLD WAR II

St. Francis College, Brooklyn NY
4:35 p.m.

[From a note posted by John Guzłowski to the Facebook group Polish American Writers & Editors]

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October 14 – 15, 2011

POLISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF CONNECTICUT AND THE NORTHEAST CONFERENCE
Central Connecticut State University
New Britain, CT

Presentations at this event will be given by an impressive array of speakers, including Stephen S. Barthel, Matthew Bielawa, Daniel Bućko, Romuald K. Byczkiewicz, Donna Pointkouski, Patrick Raycraft, Thomas Sadauskas, Jonathan Shea, and our own Paul S. Valasek!

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October 15, 2011

33RD ANNUAL POLISH RESEARCH SEMINAR
Annual Seminar with Noted Speakers
9 a.m. - 4 p.m.
Registration begins at 8:30 a.m.
Cost $65 individual or $100 per couple

Location: American Polish Cultural Center -Hall #2
2975 E. Maple Rd. (15 Mile Rd)
Troy, Michigan 48083
(use Dequindre entrance)

Featured Speaker - Baerbel K. Johnson, AG
Speaking on Prussian Poland
Baerbel K. Johnson, AG is a professional genealogist and works as an International Reference Consultant at the Family History Library. She holds degrees in Family and Local History Studies and Sociology from BYU, and has more than twenty years of extensive experience in European family history research with emphasis on Germany. She has published a number of journal articles, contributed material for several books, and lectured at various conferences. Her personal interest is in “putting flesh on the genealogical skeleton” by placing each individual within a proper social and historical context. She was a featured speaker at our 2008 UPGS Seminar.

also

J. William Gorski, PGSM Vice-President
Speaking on Researching Polish Settlements in Michigan

An avid genealogist and collector of Polish historical records, Bill donated his own entire collection of Polish genealogical materials to the library of Michigan in 2002. The J. William Gorski Historical & Genealogical Collection is the product of more than 20 years’ extensive research and offers valuable resources to genealogists who visit the library. To this day, Gorski continues to promote the library’s holdings and urges family historians to use the collection. Bill was also Editor of the PGSM journal, Polish Eaglet, for many years.

Reservations by mail by October 3, 2011. Make checks payable to P.G.S.M and send to:

PGSM
c/o Burton Collection
Detroit Public Library
5201 Woodward Ave.
Detroit, MI. 48202-4007

Out-of-town guests can reserve a room at:

Marriott Courtyard Detroit-Troy
1525 East Maple Road
Troy, Michigan 48083

Questions may be sent to Valerie Koselka: <vkoselka.pgsm@gmail.com>

See also this page on the PGSM Web site: <http://www.pgsm.org/index_049.htm>

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October 26 - 29, 2011

CGSI’S 13TH GENEALOGICAL/CULTURAL CONFERENCE - MO
Sheraton Westport Chalet Hotel, St. Louis, MO
For more info, visit the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International’s Web site:


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*** MORE USEFUL WEB ADDRESSES ***

<http://www.genealogyblog.com/?p=13140>

Ceil Jensen’s Sto Lat: A Modern Guide to Polish Genealogy got a nice, succinct write-up on this blog. If you’re not familiar with her book, take a moment to read this.

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On the PolandBorderSurnames list, Tina Ellis responded to a request for help with German handwritten documents by citing this resource. Also, in a follow-up note, Tina Wells mentioned free online courses in “German Handwriting” at <https://www.familysearch.org/learn/researchcourses>.

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A recent edition of the e-zine Nu? What’s New? mentioned that the 1940 U.S. Census will be made free for browsing and searching on Ancestry.com when it starts to become available in April 2012. Nu? gave this URL as the source of the complete press release, so you can read it and get your facts straight from the source.
The same issue of Nu? mentioned this new site with info on more than 200 concentration camps and of Jewish synagogues and cemeteries in Poland. The site is in French, but use of Google Translate will help you make sense of it. That issue of Nu? also gave an alphabetical list of all the localities included—but if you want that, you’ll need to subscribe to Nu? for yourself at <http://www.avotaynu.com/nuwhatsnew.htm>.

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This is a link to an interesting article from Eastman’s Online Genealogy Newsletter. Its title is “Windows is Dying… and so are Macintosh and Linux.” I know this isn’t directly relevant to genealogy, but I figure all of you reading this are probably doing so on computers of one kind or another. Besides, Eastman explains how it actually could have a major effect on genealogical software. I think it’s interesting reading—take a look, if you have a moment.

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This link has been given several times on the LithGen mailing list. It talks about a new English-language 408-page book Lithuania on the Map, which traces Lithuania’s presence on maps from long ago to today. The book can be ordered via e-mail at <biblioteka@lnm.lt> or by phone +370 (5) 212 02 58. The price of the book itself is 195 litas (56.50 euros); one person who posted the link on LithGen said the total he paid, including shipping, was 88 euros, which is some $126 at current rates. I’d love to get a copy, but I’m in the process of moving all my books from Connecticut to Houston, and that has a way of making you hesitate about buying more books to lug around...

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On the Polish Genius list, Debbie Greenlee answered a request for help learning Polish by trying this site to see if there is a Polish MeetUp group in your area. If so, maybe someone in the group would be willing to teach Polish. Debbie said it would be smart to try Facebook for this, too. Facebook I knew might be worth a try, but this is the first I’ve heard of MeetUp.

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A recent mailing of “Genealogical Tips” from the East European Genealogical Society <http://www.eegsociety.org> said there were 10,000+ messages on this free forum for Ukraine. It’s worth checking out for possible connections. Of course, there’s also a forum for Poland, <http://genforum.genealogy.com/poland/>, and for other countries. If you have never visited these forums, I’d suggest you do so.

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