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December 2021/January 2022



We wish all of our PHS members and their families and friends

A VERY BLESSED CHRISTMAS AND A VERY HAPPY NEW YEAR
WESOŁYCH ŚWIĄT ORAZ SZCZĘŚLIWEGO NOWEGO ROKU!

PHS Board

Polish Christmas lore

BY ROBERT STRYBEL

Polish Christmas lore includes various local customs, beliefs and practices which differed slightly from region to region and even from family to family. But for centuries, Wigilia (Christmas eve) has been the focus of the celebration, and the opłatek or Christmas wafer its central, symbolic artifact.

According to one folk belief, if the first visitor entering a home on Wigilia was a male, that was said to bring good luck, but a female visitor foretold misfortune. In the olden days, it was customary for family members to wash in a bucket of cold water brought from the nearby stream. A silver coin added to the bucket was said to ensure robust health all year long.

The “all-year-long” theme ran through many other practices. Children were told to be es-



for Pixabay

pecially good on Wigilia, for that is how they would be all year. And if a child should have to be spanked on Christmas Eve for misbehaving, that was what was in store for him or her throughout the year. Grown-ups too were on their best behavior, refrained from arguments and settled whatever debts they owed someone in the hope of being debt-free in the year to come.

Christmas Eve supper or “wieczerza wigilijna” was no ordinary supper. It was not even a typical festive meal of the kind served at weddings, on namedays or even Easter. Everything about it was special, unique, and highly symbolic. It could begin only after the first star of the evening had appeared in the sky. Traditionally meatless, it featured the gifts of farm, field, forest, and river: pasta, grains, dairy products, fish, vegetables, fruits, nuts, honey, and poppy seeds. Courses were ordinarily brought in one by one and tables were set with the family’s best crockery.

Well into the 20th century, many poor peasants ate the food from common serving bowls with wooden spoons. For quite some time this tradition was also observed in many better-to-do homes, where there was no shortage of china and cutlery, to emphasize a sense of community. Until the meal was over, nobody was allowed to set their spoon on the table – it had to be held the whole time. Except for the housewife serving the food, no-one was allowed to leave the table until the meal was over. Everybody was expected to taste at least a small sample of everything on the table and not to leave anything uneaten on their plate. To do so was said to foretell missing out on various good things in the year ahead.

Various incantations and practices during the meal were meant – as always – to attract good fortune and keep harm away. When pasta or grain dishes were served, someone might exhort: “Mnóż się zboże!” (Multiply, o grain!). “Składaj się kapusto!” (Fold into heads, cabbage!) was uttered when sauerkraut and cabbage dishes made their appearance, and the words ‘Rodźcie się ziemniaki!’ (Grow, potatoes, grow!) were heard when boiled potatoes were brought to table.

In some areas, the head of the household would fling a spoonful of cooked yellow peas at the ceiling. The more that stuck, the better a harvest could be expected the following year. In eastern Poland the same was done with kucja or kutia, a thick pudding made of cooked grain and honey. In the mountain areas of the south a handful of straw from the sheaves standing in the corners was thrown at the ceiling to ensure a good harvest. Since only rarely did a strand or two of straw get caught on a sliver or rough spot, that practice seemed to have been a kind of self-fulfilling prophesy: a bountiful harvest was a rarity in the poor soil of the hard-scrabble mountain areas.

Various forms of fortune-telling usually centered on the marital prospects of the eligible girls of the family. For instance, maidens would draw strands of hay from under the tablecloth of the Vigil Supper table. A green strand meant marriage before the end of Zapusty (Mardi Gras), while a yellow one signified that the girl was still in for a wait before someone popped the question. But a dark, withered strand con-

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UPCOMING EVENTS

The Polish Heritage Society will not be hosting a Christmas party in December due to health safety concerns around COVID-19. We apologize for any inconvenience. We are tentatively planning an in-person Fat Tuesday event in March. Watch for more information coming soon.

December 3, 6:00 PM-9:00 PM – Polish Workshop with Pierogi Dinner in Appleton, WI.
For more information visit <https://www.airbnb.com/experiences/2556518>

December 5 (1st Sunday of the month), 3:00 PM – Polish Mass in Wisconsin Dells.
Saint Cecilia Catholic Church, 603 Oak St, Wisconsin Dells, WI, Fr. Mirosław Szyal.

December 17, 6:00 PM-9:00 PM – Polish Workshop with Pierogi Dinner in Appleton, WI.
For more information visit <https://www.airbnb.com/experiences/2556518>

January 9 (1st Sunday of the month), 3:00 PM – Polish Mass in Wisconsin Dells.
Saint Cecilia Catholic Church, 603 Oak St, Wisconsin Dells, WI, Fr. Mirosław Szyal.

January 13, 6:00 PM – PHS Board Meeting
Denny’s, 2894 S Oneida, Green Bay, WI. Meetings are open to public.

January 14 – Newspaper article deadline.
Submit articles to Malgosia at malgosia Daugherty@yahoo.com

January 24, 6:30 PM – Newspaper distribution meeting
255 Terraview Dr, Green Bay, WI.



for Pixabay

Polish Workshop with Pierogi Dinner in Appleton, WI

<https://www.airbnb.com/experiences/2556518>

This workshop is addressed to adults to learn and expand their knowledge of Polish history and culture. The course is also a perfect opportunity to gain more understanding of your Polish heritage or prepare you for a visit to Poland.

As a Poland native born, I will take you on a tour of how my country looks today and share many stories about its history, events, and people that shaped it in the past 100 years.

Starting with a short language lesson, I will teach you a few Polish greetings and how to introduce yourself in my native tongue. I will then cover Polish geography, climate, and interesting facts. I will spend some time talking about Polish history, World War II, the Solidarity movement and changes that took place in Poland in 1989 and helped the country flourish and transition to democracy. Moving on, we will learn about Polish people’s traditions and I will show you a video of my brother’s wedding from Kielce, Poland.

There are 16 National Holidays in Poland, and I will talk about my favorite, All Saints Day. At the end, I will invite you to try my mom’s famous pierogi and share the recipe on how to make them.

Come join me to discover your roots, learn about Poland, and gain an appreciation for the rich traditions and culture of the Polish people!

Malgosia Daugherty

Saints among us (6)

HELEN A. SCIESZKA, PH.D.

As we end one year and begin another we have a Polish saint for each month. In December it is St. John Kanty who is a patron of both Poland and Lithuania and whose feast is December 23rd. He was born June 23, 1390 at Kanty, Silesia, Poland and died of natural causes on December 24, 1473 at Krakow. He was a very intelligent young man who did very well at the University of Krakow in his studies for the priesthood and eventually became a professor of theology at the same school.

He is described as being a humble and very generous man, especially when it came to caring for the poor but was also very serious and lived an austere life. He made four pilgrimages to Rome and one to Jerusalem, where he hoped to become a martyr at the hands of the Turks.

After some problems at the University of Krakow as the result of false accusations, he was assigned a parish at Olkusz in Bohemia. It was a position that he did not feel qualified for and for awhile neither did his parishioners. But eventually they came to love him.

Some years later he did return to the university where he taught Scripture for the remainder of his life. Upon his death there began an almost immediate veneration of this holy man and his life.

On January 1st we have the feast of St. Zygmunt Gorazdowski who was born in Sannok, Podkarpacie, Poland on November 1, 1845. This was an area that was mostly Jewish and Greek Catholic. He was a Roman Catholic. He was a frail person who struggled with respiratory issues his entire life.

Despite this, he was able to accomplish a number of things. He first studied law but after two years, he felt called to the priesthood. He completed his studies at the seminary in Lviv, Ukraine and was ordained in 1871 and served at St. Nicholas parish in the same town.



The Eleven Nuns of Nowogródek by Adam Styka

He founded numerous homes, shelters, and outreach programs for the hungry, poor, homeless, single mothers and their children, abandoned children, and even poor college students. In 1884 he founded a convent for the Sisters of Mercy of St. Joseph that they might help him with his work.

As I began the research for the final article in this series, I decided to review some other resources to “double check” and to make sure I had not missed any of our wonderful saints throughout the year. Sadly, I had. Two I had not heard of; one I had not really thought of as Polish (because of the boundaries at the time) and one I cannot believe I missed. So, here they are.

First on May 29th we have St. Ursula Ledochowska who was named Julia at her birth on April 17, 1865 in Loosdoor, Austria. She was one of the five children of the Polish count Anthony Ledochowski

and his wife who was Austrian. They were very pious Catholics. In fact, one of Julia’s sisters, Maria Teresa has also been declared Blessed.

The family had financial hardships when Julia was growing up. Then, in 1885 her father died of smallpox. Feeling a call to the religious life she became an Ursuline nun taking the name Ursula and then founded her own branch of the Order – the Ursulines of the Sacred Heart – establishing

their motherhouse in Pniewy, Poland. She became a missionary to Russia but was expelled during the Communist Revolution. She then took her work throughout the Scandanavian countries.

She was known as a great speaker which she did often, calling for independence for Poland in front of national leaders and royalty. She died at her Ursuline convent in Rome on May 29, 1939. On May 29, 1989 it was decided to move her body back to the motherhouse in Pniewy, Poland and it was at that time that her body was found to be incorrupt.

On July 17th we have St. Hedwig (Jadwiga), Queen of Poland! She is one of the patronesses of Poland and queens. (How could I have missed her!) She was born to King Louis I of Hungary, his youngest daughter, on February 18, 1374 in Buda, Hungary (now known as Budapest).

Because of lineage (she was King Casimir III’s great niece) she became Queen of Poland in 1382 at the age of 8. She was already engaged to William, Duke of Austria, but for political and alliance reasons, she broke that engagement, despite loving William

– to marry the Prince of Lithuania, Jagiello (who became King Ladislaus II) who was not a Christian. She was only 13 years old. She was a pious girl and a wonderfully charitable queen to her people, but especially to the poor. Eventually, she was even able to convert her husband to the Faith. St. Hedwig died during childbirth in Krakow on July 17, 1399 at the age of 25.

Also in July, on the 24th, we have the feast of another member of the Polish royal family...St. Kinga, through her politically arranged marriage to Prince Boleslaus V of Poland. Kinga (also known as Cune-gunda) was born in 1224 also in Buda, (now Budapest) Hungary and was the daughter of King Bela IV and Maria Laskarina. Her extended pious family included her sisters, St. Margaret of Hungary and Blessed Jolanta of Poland, as well as her aunt, St. Elizabeth of Hungary and Great Aunt, St. Hedwig of Silesia.

Her husband was also a pious man and they made the decision to live a celibate life with each other, using their energy and resources to care for the poor and, in a special way, for lepers. St. Kinga also founded a convent for Poor Clare nuns in Sary, Sacz, Poland. When her husband died in 1279 this is where she moved after giving all of her wealth away. It is here that she died on July 24th, 1292.

And finally on August 9th we have St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein) I had always thought of her as German-born – which she was – on October 12, 1891 in Breslaw, Dolnoslaskie, Germany. But, that area is now known as Wroclaw, Poland, and, with her being martyred at Auschwitz in 1942, I believe we should honor her as one of ours.

She was born into a Jewish family as the youngest of seven children. In her teens she lost interest in her Jewish faith and this was further exacerbated by her university studies at the Universities of Gottingen and Breisgau (both in Germany) where she earned a doctorate in philosophy in 1916.

It was the strong Faith of her Catholic friends that led her to eventually being converted to the Catholic Faith. And on January 1, 1922 she was baptized at St. Martin’s church in Bad Bergzabern, Germany.

In 1934 she joined the Carmelite religious order and taught at various schools in Germany and became an incredible spiritual writer. However, the Nazis still saw her as Jewish and forced her to resign her teaching positions. As things became worse, she and her sister Rose (who had also converted to Catholicism) were smuggled out of Germany in 1938 to the Netherlands. As we know, eventually the Nazis invaded that country. Both women were captured and sent to Auschwitz where they were martyred.

As I explained in the first article of this series there is a process that the Catholic Church goes through to determine with a degree of certainty that an individual is truly in Heaven. If you remember there are various stages within the process where after extension

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Thank You New members, RENEWING MEMBERS, and Donors!

A grateful thank you to **Dolores & Stanley Bruskiewicz** of Milwaukee for the kind donation they include with their membership renewal.

The Polish Heritage Society of Northeastern Wisconsin is pleased to welcome new members: **Jeremy Pasczak** of Algoma, **Lawrence Kaczmarek** of Appleton, and **Sandra Oge** of Cookeville, Tennessee. Congratulations and witamy!

Renewing are society members: **Clara Baker** of Stevens Point, the **Al & Elizabeth Lilla Family** of Sparks, Nevada, **Cheryl Skenandore** of Green Bay, **Michelle Simonson** of Lena, **Kathleen Patrick** of Fort Collins, Colorado, the **Jill Kurowski Family** of Green Bay, **Anne Wal** of Milwaukee, the **Paul Jankowski Family** of Murrels Inlet, South Carolina, the **Richard & Carol Ann Kichefski Family** of Appleton, the **Dolores & Stanley Bruskiewicz Family** of Milwaukee, **Michael Van Ess** of Sturgeon Bay, **Gerald Smurawa** of Pulaski, the **Elzbieta & Christopher Perry Family** of Neenah, **Victoria Frederiksen** of Stephenson, Michigan, and **Kathy Fredrickson** of Neenah. Miło, że jesteście z nami!

This holiday season, consider a gift membership for a friend or family member!

Thank you all for your support and interest in our Polish heritage. If you have any membership status or financial inquiries, please feel free to contact me. Also, your board officers’ contact information is listed in this newspaper and on the phsofnew.org website.

Paul Zwicker, Treasurer
zwickerp@aol.com; phsofnew@gmail.com

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This freshman traveled 5,000 miles to join the Badgers volleyball team. She now leads the team in kills

DENNIS PUNZEL
FROM WISCONSIN STATE JOURNAL

Julia Orzol already knew she wanted to become a part of the University of Wisconsin volleyball program. She just was feeling a little anxiety about leaving her home in Olsztyn, Poland, and traveling nearly 5,000 miles to Madison. She was telling UW coach Kelly Sheffield about this hesitation during a phone call, and he said he fully understood. But he went on to tell her a story about a bird's nest outside his home where he'd watched the mother feed the baby bird until it was strong enough to leave the nest and fly off on its own. "I said, 'Maybe, just maybe, you were meant to go and fly and this is your time to fly,'" Sheffield recalled. "She told me that really registered with her at the time." What Sheffield had no way of knowing was Orzol's surname is close to the Polish word for eagle — orzeł. One of her nicknames, particularly among the Polish national team coaches, was Eagle. "He didn't know about that," Orzol said. "I thought this comparison is really accurate to my situation because my surname is connected with birds. We started laughing."

Accidentally or not, the story had served its purpose. "She thought that was a sign that this is where she's supposed to be and it kind of gave her a little nudge to go ahead and do this," Sheffield said.

Fast forward to last weekend, when Orzol was spreading her wings for the No. 2 Badgers. The 6-foot Orzol averaged 3.29 kills per set, hitting .315, while providing six blocks, 10 digs and a service ace in her first two college matches against TCU and Baylor. It was just the kind of experience Orzol had imagined since the possibility of coming to the U.S. arose sometime after her Polish team played a couple of exhibition matches against the Badgers during their European tour in 2019. "It was pure joy and fun," Orzol said about her debut. "I think I play my best volleyball when I don't overthink, just let the game flow and be in the moment. Playing in this environment with this Badger community, it's the best place I've ever played in. It's a place that every athlete dreams of. I'm just smiling when I think of those two days, and I can't wait for the next ones."

The joyful experience continued after the match with her introduction to the "time honored tradition" of singing "Varsity." "I got to know 'Varsity' in our locker room," she said. "The girls took care of that. I think it was one of my favorite moments of the game. We can connect with the fans who came to cheer for us. This experience is completely new for me, but it's one of my favorites." Orzol demonstrated her range of talents that caught the eye of the UW staff two years ago. "She had a great first weekend," Sheffield said. "She is a really easy person for people to play with. She's a great kid, she can help in so many ways and she doesn't back down, doesn't flinch. She wants to compete, wants to be great. I think what everybody saw this past weekend is how many different ways she can impact a match." Orzol said she has become quite comfortable in her surroundings more than three weeks into her UW experience. "Day by day I'm getting to know new things and getting familiar with them," she said. "I notice that I'm getting more and more organized. It's great because I can be more calm."

She didn't call her parents, Anna and Piotr, the first few days here, but they now talk every day early in the afternoon before practice, a time that best fits the seven-hour time difference. "They're asking a lot of questions," she said. "Sometimes I feel like I'm being interviewed. It's great because they're curious about what's happening here, how does it look."

Her parents were able to watch the first two matches, though it took some effort because the Big Ten Network is not available in Europe. "But



Julia Orzol

for. Kyla Wolf/State Journal

they found a way, so they were able to be mentally with me," Orzol said. "After each game, I got a message from my family, a group chat, so I feel their presence. They are with me all the time."

Orzol credits her teammates with helping with the transition. She said Giorgia Civita has been particularly helpful because she went through a similar experience five years ago when she left her home in Italy to play at Wichita State. "She knows how it actually feels to find yourself in a new environment," Orzol said. "She's been a big help." And when she needs a cultural translation, she often turns to her roommate, fellow freshman Anna Smrek, from Welland, Ontario, Canada. Smrek, who shares the same birthday with Orzol — Oct. 11 — has a sense of the differing European and American viewpoints because her mother is from Croatia. "She helps when we're talking about things and she'll say I know in Europe it looks different but here it looks this way," Orzol said. While she studied English while growing up in Poland and fluently speaks the language, she has discovered some holes in her education. "When it comes to slang and things like that, I have to learn that because this language is way different than what we learn in school in Poland," she said. "You learn more formal stuff, correct grammar and everything. Here it's not useful. It's fun because I feel like I'm learning every day so much new vocabulary."

"I like the process of learning. Day by day I'm becoming more comfortable joining in with the discussions. At first I was more of an observer, soaking up the language."

In turn, her teammates are working to adapt to her, using the Polish pronunciation of her first name — YU lee ah. They also are trying out some nicknames other than Eagle, like JuJu, Oz or YU la, a common nickname back home.

"I like any of them, but I appreciate that they make an effort to remember to call me (Yu lee ah) because they care," she said. "Like, this is your Polish name everybody called you for 18 years, so we want to call you the way people called you in Poland."

Her teammates also made a special first impression when she arrived in Madison on Aug. 9. While she felt some initial sadness when she boarded the plane in Warsaw, headed to Frankfurt, Germany, she was feeling better by the time she made her next connection from Chicago to Madison.

Her first glimpse of Madison and the lakes from the air gave her the sense she was coming home.

"In my hometown, Olsztyn, there are a lot of lakes," she said. "So my first thought was, am I actually coming to my home because it looks like my home? I think the lakes are one small thing that makes this place feel like home."

Her sense of being in the right place only grew when she was greeted by Sheffield, who led her to the baggage claim area, where the entire team had gathered to welcome her with a group hug that was captured on video. "I was shocked, to be honest," Orzol said. "I didn't know what was happening in that moment. Maybe it was because I was tired from the journey and when you're tired your mind isn't as clear. When I landed it was like, what to do next? Then I saw Kelly and I had a thing in the back of my mind that he knows something I don't know."

"So then I saw all the girls on the team there and I was shocked. It was heartwarming. It was the best thing that they could do to make me feel welcome and make me forget about this transition, this changing of the culture. It was one of the most heartwarming moments that I've ever experienced."

Reprinted with permission from *Wisconsin State Journal*. The original article published on September 2, 2021 can be found at <https://madison.com/wsj/sports>.

PHS EVENTS



Joanna Spice at the Polish booth during Ethnic Fest in Two Rivers, WI



Mike Wichowski, Mark Reimer and Gloria Kaminecki during dedication of "For Our Freedom and Yours" monument in Stevens Point, WI



Polish Independence Dinner in Franklin, WI: Heather Kaminski, Malgosia Daugherty, Susan Zwicker, Rob Kaminski, Frank Czarnecki, Paul Zwicker, Gloria Kaminecki

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Polish Christmas lore

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demned the girl who had pulled it out to a life of spinsterhood. Sometimes the girl who chose the longest strand was said to be the first to go to the altar.

Another practice was to go into the front yard and listen for the barking of a dog. Whenever the first bark was heard, that is the direction from which a suitor would come courting. Girls would also count the pickets in the fence saying “kawaler, wdowiec, kawaler, wdowiec...” (bachelor, widower, bachelor, widower...), the last picket determining whom they would marry.

It was said that at the stroke of midnight the water in wells would turn to wine, but there was one, main catch: only those who had never sinned could taste it. That certainly excluded the rough-and-tumble farm hands, village drunks and other unsavory types who would have loved to sample the miraculous tippie. According to another folk belief farm animals could speak in human voices at midnight, but anyone who heard them would not live to tell the tale.

One peasant was said to have buried himself in a manger full of hay to see if his cattle could really speak. But the cows were not fooled and one of them spoke up: “Leż gospodarzu w żłobie, a wkrótce będzie po tobie” (Lie in the manger, farmer dear, now your end

is drawing near.). But our Polish ancestors were not really as superstitious as it may seem at first glance. These beliefs and practices were treated only half-seriously. Mainly they added a bit of diversion to the otherwise drab rural, winter existence of that bygone era.

After the Christmas Eve supper was over, it was common to gather up the table scraps together with any bits of leftover opłatek, the grain scattered on the table and the hay from beneath the tablecloth and take it to feed the livestock. The straw strewn about the cottage floor was tied into roping and used to wrap the fruit trees to ensure a good crop. A farmer that kept bees would also tap the hives and inform their drowsy denizens: ‘Cieszcie się i wy robaczki, Pan Jezus się narodził!’ (‘Rejoice little insects, for Christ is born!’)

After the above rituals had been re-enacted families would return home and sing carols until it was time to leave for Pasterka. In poor families the singing went unaccompanied and the kolędy were sung from memory. In better-to-do homes a kantyczka (hymnal) containing a wide array of carols and other hymns was brought out, and the singing was often accompanied by someone playing a musical instrument. But gift-giving was not practiced on Christmas Eve in the Polish countryside until well into the 20th century.

Robert Strybel

Saints among us

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sive investigation a person is first declared to be a “Servant of God.” Currently there are over 100 Poles who are on that list. The next level is called “Venerable.” There are 26 on this list. And then those declared to be “Blessed” with one miracle proven to be attributed to their intercession. At this point they are also given a feast day. So, I thought it would be fun to list the Blesseds according to their feast day in this last article in the series on Polish saints.

JANUARY

- 5th – Marcelina Darowska (Maria Marcelina of the Immaculate Conception)
- 18th – Regina Protmann
- 26th – Michał Kozal
- 29th – Bolesława Maria Lament
- 30th – Bronisław Markiewicz

FEBRUARY

- 7th – Ludwika Szczesna (Klara)
- 15th – Michał Sopoćko
- 22nd – Stefan Wincenty Frelichowski

MARCH

- 8th – Wincenty Kadłubek
- 12th – Aniela Salawa
- 15th – Jan Wojciech Balicki
- 17th – Gertrude of Trzebnica

APRIL

- 6th – Maria Karłowska (Maria of Jesus Crucified)
- 28th – Hanna Helena Chrzanowska

MAY

- 4th – Michał Giedroyc [Mykolas Giedraitis]
- 15th – Zofia Czeska-Maciejowska
- 19th – Mother Elizabeth Rosa Czaacka
- 28th – Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński
- 30th – Marta Anna Wiecka

JUNE

- 5th – Małgorzata Szewczyk (Łucja)
- 11th – Jolanta
- 25th – Dorota of Mątowy Wielkie

JULY

- 6th – Maria Teresa Ledóchowska

AUGUST

- 7th – Edmund Bojanowski

- 9th – Michał Tomaszek
- 9th – Zbigniew Adam Strzałkowski
- 23rd – Władysław Findysz
- 29th – Bronisława
- 29th – Janina Szymkowiak (Sancja)

SEPTEMBER

- 4th – Blessed Martyrs of Nowogrodek Sisters Stella Mardosewicz, Imelda Zak, Kanizja Mackiewicz, Rajmunda Kukulowicz, Daniela Jozwik, Kanuta Chrobot, Sergia Rapiej, Gwidona Cierpka, Felicita Borowik, Heliodora Matuszewska, and Boromea Narmontowicz
- 7th – Ignacy Kłopotowski
- 23rd – Maria Jabłońska (Bernardyna)

OCTOBER

- 2nd – Jan Beyzym
- 10th – Zofia Angela Truszkowska (Maria Angela)
- 19th – Jerzy Popiełuszko
- 26th – Celina Chłudzińska Borzęcka

NOVEMBER

- 14th – Maria Luiza Merkert
- 18th – Karolina Kózka
- 21st – Maria Franciszka Siedliska

DECEMBER

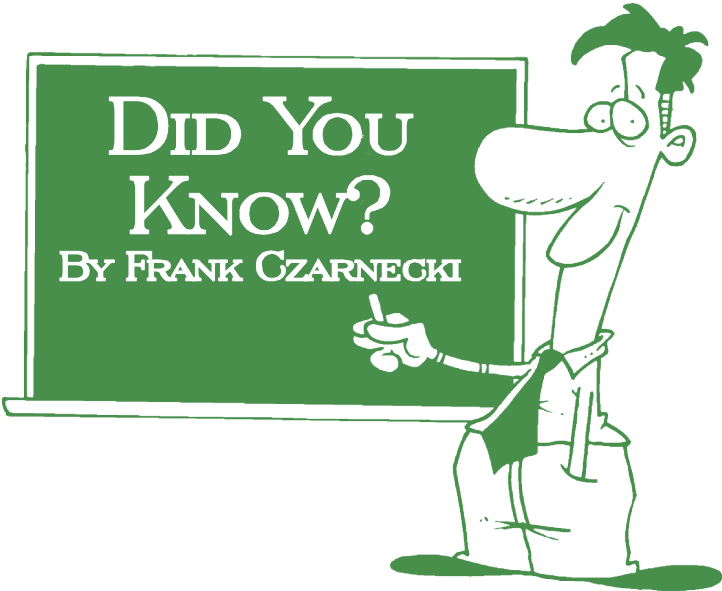
- 2nd – Melchior Chyliński (Rafał)
- 16th – Florentyn Wacław Koźmiński (Honorat of Biała)

As we finish, let us ask, Sts. John Kanty, Zygmunt Gorazdowski, Ursula Ledochowska, Hedwig (Jadwiga), Kinga (Cunegunda), Teresa Benedicta of the Cross (Edith Stein), all of the Polish Servants of God, the Venerables, the Blesseds and Saints, to please pray for us.

Please watch for my next series on Polish Nobel Prize winners which will begin in the next newsletter.

NOTE: Information for this article was gathered from various Catholic Saint sites on the web.

Helen A. Scieszka, Ph.D. is a former ad executive, psychologist, college professor, Catholic church pastoral associate, Diocesan marriage & family life director; published author of four novels and stories in “Chicken Soup for the Soul” books. She loves reading, travel, music, photography, art, sports, & family genealogy. Please visit her website drhelenscieszka.com to keep up with news on talks, book sale/signings and new releases!



(We continue with Kosciuszko’s contributions to the American Revolutionary War)

When he returned to Poland in 1784, Kosciuszko wrote that “the affairs of the republic as well as mine are in a very horrid situation.” The reforms of the Great Diet of 1788 brought hope that his country could follow America’s example and throw off foreign domination. The Diet provided for an enlarged people’s army, and Kosciuszko accepted a General’s commission. When the new Constitution of May 3, 1791 was enacted, he and his command were among the first to swear allegiance to it.

The rising spirit of independence brought repression from Catherine the Great, the Russian Empress, whose troops invaded Poland in 1792. Kosciuszko was in the thick of the resistance. The King of Poland bestowed upon him the highest of Polish military honors, the cross of Virtuti Militari. Yet, only a few months later, the same king decided to appease the Russians and ordered an end to Polish resistance. Kosciuszko and many other officers resigned, went into exile in the German city of Leipzig, and began planning rebellion.


When Russia and Prussia agreed upon a second partition of Poland in 1794, the exiles felt they could not wait any longer. They made their way to Cracow, the ancient capital of Poland. There, on March 24, 1793 – a date comparable to July 4 in the United States – a great throng in the marketplace of Cracow proclaimed Poland’s Act of Insurrection. The Act denounced the tyrannies of Catherine the Great and King Frederick William of Prussia, in much the same style that the Declaration of Independence recited the oppressive acts of King George III.

The Act of Insurrection named Kosciuszko commander of the people’s army and temporary dictator of the state until the war should be won. He took an oath “not to use the power entrusted to him for any personal oppression, but only ... for the defense of the integrity of the boundaries, the regaining of the independence of the nation, and the founding of universal freedom.”

Unlike traditional European armies, Kosciuszko’s force was not made up entirely of professional soldiers, but included thousands of Polish peasants, some armed only with

their scythes. Kosciuszko became known as the “Leader of the Scythe-bearers. He adopted as his uniform the peasants’ cap and the white coat of the people of Cracow.

For a short time, the insurrection achieved unbelievable success. Superior Russian force were defeated at Warsaw and Raclawice. Paintings of scythe-bearers successfully charging the cannons of the enemy are as common in Polish history as American pictures of the Minutemen. But without any foreign ally coming to his aid, Kosciuszko could not overcome the might of armament. In the savage battle of Maciejowice on October 10, 1794, Kos-



Thaddeus Kosciuszko

ciuszeko’s army was crushed. He was seriously wounded, captured, and taken as a prisoner to Russia. He remained in Russian custody for more than two years mostly under house arrest in St. Petersburg.

As soon as the new Czar, Paul I, succeeded Catherine in December of 1796, Kosciuszko was freed and presented with gifts, including valuable Russian furs. The American diplomat at that time recorded: The Emperor took his son to the apartment where Kosciuszko lay ill. He told the prisoner he saw in him a man of honor who had done his duty, and from whom he asked no other security but his word that he would never act against him. He was immediately released – the guard taken away. At the same time, ten thousand Poles confined in Siberia received passports and money to bring them home.

The price Kosciuszko paid for the freedom of his soldiers was exile for himself. He was never again to return to Poland. He determined to make a visit to America and he considered settling permanently in what he called “my second country.”

(to be continued)