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Gdansk

Tatra Mountains

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15 days in Poland

STEVE KARCZ

Less than a month ago my wife Tracey and me fulfilled our dream of traveling to Poland. Our trip, part honeymoon, part genealogy tour, lasted 15 days in total and covered well over 1500 km of Poland. Our journey may have started in Warsaw but it ultimately spanned the entire length of Poland, from celebrating St. Dominic's Festival in Gdansk on Poland's Baltic Coast, to the sleepy hamlet of Przysieki, an ancestral village nestled in southeast Galicia, in the foothills of the Carpathians. This article is a part of a larger series I wanted to share with our readers, as there is so much to cover when looking back at our travels though Poland.

But why go to Poland? For Tracey and me, it was a way for us to reconnect with our shared Polish-American ancestry. Secondly, Poland is an inexpensive European destination with all the history and attractions you'd find in western Europe but without the large crowds and costs. And lastly, if you are looking for a romantic getaway Poland has some very beautiful destinations (my wife and I took an amazing gondola ride in Łazienki Park in Warsaw, a sprawling garden/royal palace complex that was once the private playground of the city's nobility).

With a direct flight from Chicago, we landed in Warsaw on August 9th and spent a couple days in the city. Warsaw is the capital of Poland and has a population of nearly 2 million. Most folks under the age of 30 speak English, and most businesses will accept payment by credit or bank card (just make sure you are charged in Polish Zloty so that you don't get any additional fees). It helps to know a few words in Polish, just to help you navigate little enchanges; I used "Przepraszam" (Sha-press-ham) quite often since it means "excuse me" in Polish.

While Warsaw is a very modern city, I would highly recommend travelers see the city's Old Town. Of all the major cities in Europe to suffer the ravages of WWII, Warsaw saw the greatest destruction, with roughly 85 percent of the city's Old Town lying in ruins after the war. But the city rose up from the ashes, the everyday residents of Warsaw working alongside artisans and administrators to restore what was destroyed. Priceless artworks were taken out of hiding, old photos and paintings were used as building references, and the rural communities outside Warsaw gave their aged bricks and beams so that the historic Old Town could be rebuilt. The restoration of Warsaw took decades, only ending in the mid-1980s, with many smaller projects continuing to this day.

Warsaw's Old Town hugs the Vistula River to the east with many modern businesses and hotels surrounding the neighborhood. This is good because it means that many of the historic sites are within walking distance, as are the restaurants. Many restaurants serve burgers and fries but I stuck to traditional fair developing a love for Zurek (sour rye soup). Zurek is made with fermented sour rye, kielbasa, potatoes, carrots, onions, and best served in an edible bread bowl.

As you move from the modern streets of Warsaw into the narrower causeways of the Old Town you will start to see more cobblestones, more tiled roofs, more decorative ironwork on doors and windows, and so much baroque architecture that you can't help but imagine what the neighborhood was like 400 years ago. The Old Town's Market Square is known for the rows of beautiful tall buildings that ring the square, showcasing vibrant hues of color, elegant stonework, decorative re-

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Tracing Family Roots in Polish Cemeteries

TOM SZYMKOWIAK

For many Polish Americans, the most moving moment of a heritage trip to Poland is standing at the grave of an ancestor. These moments, often filled with emotion and reflection, serve as powerful connections between past and present. Cemeteries in Poland are not only places of remembrance—they are also rich sources of genealogical information and cultural insight. They offer clues about family history that may be unavailable elsewhere and provide a deep personal window into the lives of those who came before.

Tombstones, particularly older ones, usually offer only the most basic information: the name of the deceased, along with dates of birth and death. In some cases, especially from the mid-20th century onward, you may also find photographs of the deceased, often embedded in porcelain and attached to the stone. These portraits, though small, provide a rare visual connection to ancestors and are one of the most personal elements found in Polish cemeteries. While detailed information like maiden names, occupations, or military ranks is not typically included, the gravestones still serve as valuable confirmation of identities and dates, helping researchers cross-reference church or civil records and verify family lines.

The cemetery as we know it today in Poland did not emerge until the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Prior to that, burials typically occurred in churchyards, with graves clustered around the parish church itself. In many older villages, one can still find remnants of these ancient burial grounds, often marked by weathered crosses or partially preserved gravestones.

As urban areas grew and public health regulations evolved, laws required cemeteries to be moved outside town limits. This shift led to the development of larger, landscaped cemeteries—places with winding paths, chapels, and carefully tended plots. Today, most Polish cemeteries are beautifully maintained spaces that reflect both reverence for the dead and the cultural traditions of the community.

fot. Adobe Stock

These changes also brought about the emergence of family plots, where generations of relatives are buried side by side. It is not uncommon to find graves dating back more than a century, revealing the lineage of a single family over many decades. Such plots can be genealogical goldmines, especially when paired with church records or municipal archives.

Visiting a Polish cemetery is not only about looking back; it is also about participating in a living tradition. Nowhere is this more evident than on November 1st—All Saints' Day *(Wszystkich Świętych*). On this day, millions of Poles travel, often long distances, to visit cemeteries and honor their departed loved ones.

In preparation, families clean and decorate graves with chrysanthemums and other seasonal flowers. At dusk, candles are lit—glass-encased votives that burn long into the night, casting a warm glow across the cemetery. The result is breathtaking: hillsides, valleys, and city cemeteries transformed into seas of flickering light. The visual impact is both solemn and beautiful, a communal act of remembrance that resonates deeply with all who witness it.

This day is one of Poland's most important religious and cultural observances. It is a national holiday, and nearly everything—businesses, schools, and offices—closes. The streets fill with people

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The passing of Polonia's "Man in Warsaw"

Robert Strybel, Polonia's long-standing Warsaw correspondent, recently passed away in Warsaw. For decades he had kept fellow PolAms informed of current events in Poland while generating interest in all facets of its cultural heritage.

Born in 1941 in what was then Detroit's predominantly Polish enclave suburb of Hamtramck, Strybel (pronounced: STRIH-bell) spent a good deal

fot. Adobe Stock

of his childhood with his Polish-born grandparents, learning the language and traditions of his ancestors. He studied journalism and foreign languages (Polish, German, French, Russian, Serbo-Croatian and Spanish) and got his Master's Degree in Polish Studies from the University of Wisconsin.

His first teaching job was that of Polish language instructor and history lecturer at St. Mary's College and Saints Cyril and Methodius Seminary at Orchard Lake near Detroit. Later, he taught Polish-related subjects at the college, high school, and adult-education levels. Thanks to New York's Kościuszko Foundation, Strybel received a scholarship to pursue doctoral studies in Polish Philology at Warsaw University. There he met his future wife, Maria "Majka" née Derkacz, who was majoring in Polish. Rob often quipped, "Instead of me getting a Ph.D., a pretty Warsaw coed got an MRS degree."

Majka was a culinary expert who wrote several cookbooks and translated more than 60 others devoted to the foodways of different nations. She was also a great cook and genial hostess personifying the traditional "polska gościnność" (Polish hospitality).

As Polonia's first accredited native Polish-American Warsaw correspondent, in the early 1970s, Strybel began providing the PolAm press with regular reports on Polish current events, which appeared in more than three dozen different publications. For over three decades, Strybel also worked as a journalist and translator at the Warsaw Bureau of the Reuters News Agency.

Poland's longest-serving American correspondent, he had reported on every major Polish development, including the violent 1970 food-price riots, the rise and fall of Solidarity (1980-81), successive papal visits, and the collapse of Communism (1989) as well as Poland's admission to NATO (1999) and the European Union (2004). Later he provided detailed coverage of Poland's unprecedented solidarity with the embattled Ukrainian nation invaded by Russia in 2022.

Asked about his mission in life, Strybel had often said it was "to get fellow-Polish Americans hooked on their heritage." He did so by generating interest and pride in Poland's history, culture and traditions as well as promoting family research and visiting the Old Country. In the late 1980s, Rob and Majka teamed up to write "Polish Heritage Cookery", said to be the largest Polish cookbook ever published in the English language.

Its follow-up, "Polish Holiday Cookery," featured Polish delicacies for festive occasions. Strybel's major non-culinary work was "Polish/Polonian Heritage & Lifestyles," issued as an e-book by Amazon. It is said to contain most everything any PolAm needs to know about Polish culture, history, language, traditions, folklore, and more.

Like his father, the Strybels' only son Lesław (born 1972) was raised bilingually and biculturally. He got his Master's degree in American Studies (cultural anthropology) from Warsaw University under a cooperative arrangement with Indiana University and has worked as an English teacher and musician for many years.

Lesław has been the heart and soul of the pop/rock trios Partia (Party) and later Komety – The Comets (komety.com) which he set up in the early 21st century. Regarded by many as one of the country's top alternative bands, apart from touring the width and breadth of Poland, Komety has also performed in Mexico, the UK, Germany, Sweden, Hungary, and the Czech Republic.

Strybel was predeceased by his parents, Edward Strybel (1965) and Angeline Strybel née Kupczyńska (2004), as well as by his beloved wife of 52 years, Majka (2022).

Share Your Voice in Polish Heritage Newsletter

Are you passionate about Polish history, culture, traditions, or current events?

Do you have stories, research, or reflections that you'd love to share with a wider audience?

We're looking for volunteer contributors to join our growing Polish Heritage Society community! Whether you're an experienced writer, historian, student, or simply someone with a deep love for Polish heritage—we welcome your voice.

We're especially interested in articles on:

Polish history (both national and diasporic)

Folk traditions, customs, and holidays

Personal or family stories of Polish heritage

Polish language, literature, and art

Interviews with community members

Cultural commentary or opinion pieces

What we offer:

Exposure to a passionate, engaged readership

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A platform to celebrate and preserve Polish culture

Interested? Please email us at malgosiadaugherty@yahoo.com with a brief introduction and any ideas or writing samples you'd like to share.

Let's keep our heritage alive—together!

Dziękujemy!

Malgosia Daugherty

Thank You New Members, RENEWING MEMBERS, and Donors!

If you are interested in the position of club treasurer, please get in touch with me or our President, Malgosia Daugherty. You can find Gosia's and my contact details in this newsletter and at www.phsofnew.org. This role is a fantastic opportunity to contribute to the club's financial management and overall success. It involves managing the club's finances effectively and transparently, preparing budgets, compiling financial reports, maintaining accurate membership records, receiving membership enrollment forms, generating enrollment and membership reports, maintaining registration and reporting to State and Federal agencies, updating the website, and responding to or forwarding email communication from members. Your address will be the club's primary contact. I am pleased to add that I will support you as you gain experience with this role.

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We are grateful to donors, new members, and renewing members. Your support is instrumental in how we preserve our heritage.

Warmest greetings to our newest members: the **Tim Pelzek** family of Marinette, **Walt Kowalski** of De Pere, as a gift from Tyler Van Handel, and the **Steve & Polly Peplinski** family of Suamico. We are pleased to have you as part of our Polish Heritage Society of Northeastern Wisconsin family!

We want to acknowledge renewing society members: the **Paul Drzewiecki** family of New London, **Jayne Jackowski** of Green Bay, **David Jahns** of Appleton, **Mark Wesolowski** of Luxemburg, the **Jeff & Jody Meyer** family of Greenfield, as a gift from Jessica Meyer, **Bernadine Williams** of Milwaukee, as a gift from Jessica Meyer, the **Joanna & Mike Spice** family of Suamico, the **James Kruzitski** family of Minneapolis, the **Malena & Piotr Dzwonkowski** family of Oneida, the **Joan Hamman** family of Green Lake, and a private member from Appleton. Cieszymy się, że jesteście z nami!

Our 190+ membership is one of the largest Polish heritage organizations in the Upper Midwest. If you know someone who you think would appreciate a complimentary newsletter, such as extended family and friends, please share their name and address with me via email or in a note with your renewal.

Thank you all for your support and interest in our shared heritage! If you have any questions regarding membership status, please do not hesitate to contact me. You will find contact information for board officers in this newspaper and on the phsofnew.org website.

Dziękuję!

Paul Zwicker, Treasurer

phsofnew@gmail.com

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submit articles, photos, and advertising to:
Monika Pawlak
PO BOX 286
Stevens Point, WI 54481-6452
Email: mdpawlak@yahoo.com

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❑ For privacy reasons I chose not to have my name published in the newsletter

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What articles do you like to read the most: ❑ Polish News ❑ Events in WI ❑ Recipes ❑ Traditions/History ❑ Famous Poles ❑ Language info ❑ News from the Board ❑ Polish stories ❑ Other _____

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Please indicate the types of activities in which you might enjoy volunteering:

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❑ Art Street (Aug)
❑ Input to Newsletter
❑ Polish Mass (Oct)
❑ Christmas Party
❑ Other talents to share: _____

* for PHS use only to send event reminders

What do you think when you hear the word "Poland"?

PATRICIA STACHOWICZ

In a survey of nearly 1,800 Polish Americans, the Piast Institute sought to create a basic profile of the Polish American community, including their demographics, income levels, and political views. Despite the fact that there are nearly 9 million Americans who identify as Polish today, little is known about our community by the general American public. We were interested in finding out how Americans, particularly young Americans, perceive us.

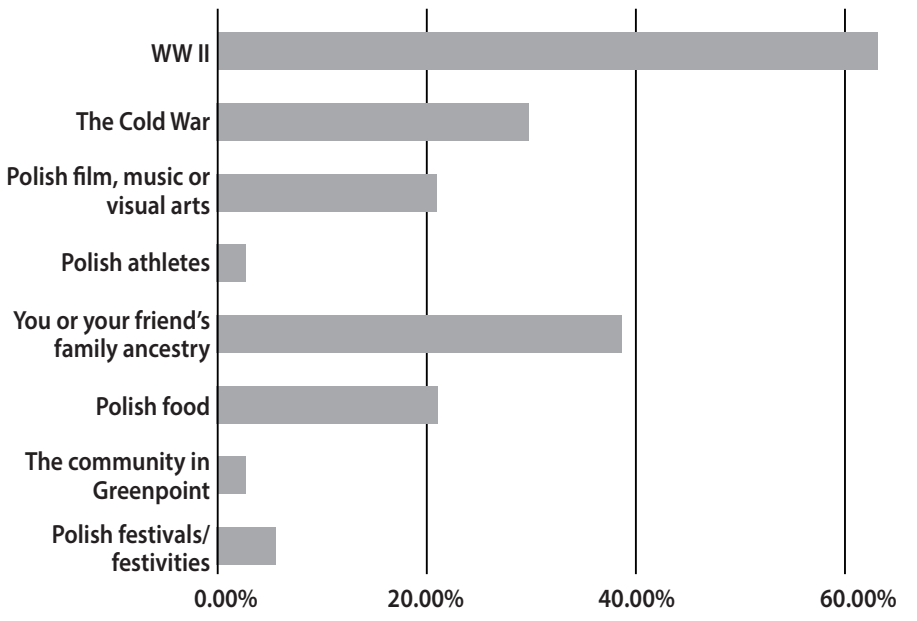
Many cultural heritage organizations across the United States have resorted to accepting older adults as their primary audience due to historically low attendance from young adults. Polish organizations are no different. That is why MPMS conducted a survey of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in Arts Administration programs across the country. Although survey participation was limited, it provided some insight into what young Americans know about Polish people.

When asked what came to mind when they hear the word "Poland," 60% of respondents selected World War II, and nearly a third chose the Cold War. Fill-in-the blank responses centered around cuisine and personal associations, whether via friends or family members.

More strikingly, we found that young Americans are unfamiliar with contemporary famous Poles. Over 62% were unable to name a single famous Polish person. The remaining participants were most familiar with individuals who have long been deceased, such as Marie Curie and Frédéric Chopin.

From these results, we can gather that what little information is disseminated about Poles in the United States is restricted to the past. Younger generations cannot possibly feel obligated to keep alive a culture that is seemingly dead. As the number of new Polish immigrants to the United States wanes, so do fresh perspectives of the Polish community. It is imperative that we find new ways to form meaningful connections with Millennials and Generation Z in order for these organizations to thrive in the decades to come.

Editorial note: This publication is an excerpt of Patricia Stachowicz's master's thesis for the Arts Administration program at Baruch College, City University of New York. Cited figures are part of academic and personal field research conducted for the professional consultancy that informed this paper.



FROM MPMS PRESIDENT:

We are excited to share the findings of the innovative survey conducted in 2021 by Patricia Stachowicz. This initiative was spearheaded by a young second-generation Polish-American who worked as a consultant for our organization. Although the sample size was small, the results are highly informative and offer valuable insights into how the younger generation of the US general population perceives the Polish-American community.

This article was originally published in *Kuryer Polski* on June 20, 2025 https://kuryerpolski.us/en/Page/View/when-you-hear-poland

Family Roots (5)

The Second Trip

HELEN A. SCIESZKA

So as not to keep all of you in suspense…YES! Leaving notes on my paternal Great Aunts & Uncles graves just before All Saints and All Souls Days worked! My friend in Poland received phone calls from family members that I did not know I still had there. Two of my Paternal Grandmother's nieces and one nephew from three of her younger brothers are still living! Almost immediately plans were made to video chat with the nephew and one niece with my friend serving as translator, and with the youngest daughter of the other niece who speaks English. Family information, history and photos were all shared over the next couple of months. The highlight came at Christmas when I was able to video chat with one niece's entire family on Christmas Day. One of the youngest grandsons at the time recited a beautiful Polish prayer, the rest of the family played musical instruments and sang a traditional Christmas song, and the table was filled with wonderful Polish food just like my grandmother's used to be. Another young granddaughter began corresponding with me as she is learning English and I wanted to start learning more Polish words. (Needless to say, her English is much better than my Polish!)

With all these new connections and information it was only a matter of time before I would be making a second trip. While there, we did connect with a couple of priests at the two village parishes of my paternal grandparents again and were able to get copies of records that validated new information that I had been given. Sadly, as mentioned previously, these records only go back so far with the older ones maintained at the main diocesan offices. This new practice was even more evident when we began visiting the churches of my maternal Polish lines in a different part of Poland. They only had the most recent records and tried to erroneously tell us that it was illegal for me to look at them. A few were not very helpful at all…even with promises of a donation to the church (which I always do anyway.) Other priests were wonderful, steering us to websites for cemeteries or asking at the weekend Masses if anyone with one of my family's last names to contact my friend, etc. However, in most cases, if you are looking for Catholic records, I would now suggest that you send your requests directly to the Catholic Diocesan offices in each area. I have not done this yet, so I am not sure how helpful they are. But it is worth a try.

fot. Courtesy of Helen Scieszka

As anyone knows who has seen these records, they can provide so much information on an individual. The obvious…name, date of birth and date of Baptism. But also, the parents' names, their occupation, the name of the grandparents, the sponsors and in some cases, their house number.

Oh, and meeting the family? How does one put that into words? I felt so accepted and loved being treated as if I had always been a part of their lives. Then visiting with them as they shared their homes with me; having meals together, getting to know their families, seeing glimpses of my grandmother, my father and his siblings in each of them knowing they are seeing the same family resemblance in me. And finally, being at Sunday Mass in my ancestor's church, where up to my Third Great Grandparents (and probably beyond) had attended and my paternal grandparents had both been baptized, sitting next to my grandmother's niece, while two of her great-great nephews served on the altar…all blessed experiences I hope never to forget.

Helen A. Scieszka, Ph.D. a retired psychologist now spends her days researching family genealogy and is currently working on her sixth novel. Please visit her author Facebook Page https://www.facebook.com/Dr.HelenS to keep up with news on talks, book sale/signings and new releases!

15 days in Poland

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liefs, and intricate patterns of interlacing cords that climb the sides of the buildings. In the center of this splendor you will find the Market Square's most famous attraction, a fountain adorned with the symbol of the city, the Warsaw mermaid.

A couple blocks southeast of the Market Square is the Castle Square which is a large open plaza where a statue of King Sigismund III Vasa stands valiantly atop a pillar at the center of the plaza (the entire memorial stands 22 meters tall). King Sigismund was famously known for moving the capital from Krakow to Warsaw in 1595 (we were told that the king did not want to pay for repairing the palace in Krakow after an alchemical experiment went awry and instead moved the capital to Warsaw; in reality, Warsaw was more centrally located for the king to govern the vast Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth).

Across the plaza to the east stands the Royal Castle ("Zamek Królewski" in Polish), a fully restored castle and palace complex that was once the home of the Polish monarchy, and a silent witness to many of the most important events in Polish history. In 1611, Tzar Vasily IV of Russia was captured by Polish forces and brought to the castle to pay homage to King Sigismund III Vasa. In 1791, in the castle's grand Senatorial Hall, King Stanislaw II August signed the Constitution of May 3, a legal document aimed at sharing power between the Polish people and their monarchy (it was the second constitution of its kind in the world and a first for Europe). Over the centuries the castle became something of a repository for objects of fine art (tapestries, oil paintings, and sculptures). After Poland regained its independence in 1919 the castle became the seat of power for Poland's elected government, and you will find busts of great leaders like General Józef Piłsudski alongside those of Polish kings and queens. Today the Royal Castle is open to the public with audio tours that tell you the history of the castle while showcasing the splendor and beauty of its art collection.

I hope you've enjoyed this tiny glimpse into my travels in Warsaw. I admit there is much more to share with our readers and I promise I'll circle back in a later installment (just so you know our trip also ended in Warsaw). Do widzenia (for now).

Steve Karcz

Polish footprints across Wisconsin

EWA BARCZYK

My book, *Footprints of Polonia. Polish Historical Sites Across North America* (Hippocrene Press, 2022) highlights contributions of Polish Americans throughout our continent. Needless to say, I had to be selective to keep the book a manageable size, so it is more a sampling of the innumerable visible marks in our communities that our ancestors left us rather than a complete inventory. Wisconsin has one of the country's highest percentages of Polish ancestry. In our state, Polish birth and ancestry account for ten percent of the state's population so the Polish footprint can be found throughout the state from monuments in Stevens Point, Polish roadside shrines, to numerous beautiful churches scattered across our state to majestic statues and even Polish bowling alleys in Milwaukee. The book highlights statues, churches, plaques, memorials, organizational buildings, museums to mention a few sites. I thought I would begin the series for the newsletter with Milwaukee since the Polish presence in Milwaukee and its surrounding area remains very visible, which is no surprise since the city (and Wisconsin) was the destination for large numbers of Polish immigrants from the 1860s on. Nearly 90 percent of them hailed from the lands of partitioned Poland that were under imperial German rule before World War I (Poznan, Kashubia, and Silesia). By 1910 Milwaukee, long famous as America's most German (and beer loving) city, was also home to over 70,000 Poles, 20 percent of its population at the time, second only to the Germans. Not surprising, since the Poles from these regions also spoke German and could find employment in Milwaukee. Only after 1960 did increasing numbers of their descents begin the move out of the city into its surrounding suburbs and even beyond Milwaukee County.

The Polish footprint was and still is most visible in Milwaukee's Catholic parishes –eighteen were established before 1940. Each symbolizes the Poles' desire to give of themselves and their resources to make their churches both beautiful places of faith and worship as well as proud centers of the community. Allow me to first begin with my favorite church which is such a visible and revered site in Milwaukee, namely St. Josephat Basilica.

SAINT JOSAPHAT BASILICA

Saint Josaphat Basilica, an architectural gem, a center of worship and cultural life, and a remarkable repository of the Polish religious and patriotic experience, is a popular Milwaukee landmark located on Milwaukee's near south side, very visible from Milwaukee's main north/south thoroughfare Interstate 94.

The edifice was the work of two outstanding and creative minds, Milwaukee architect Erhard Brielmaeier and the parish's pastor, the Rev. Wilhelm Grutza. By the mid-1890s Grutza realized that the existing Saint Josaphat parish church was too small to serve its mushrooming congregation, which already numbered 12,000. He hired Brielmaier to design a far larger structure, one modeled after St Peter's Basilica in Rome. His dreams were big, but the parish was very poor made up of factory workers in the tanneries and slaughterhouses. However, he was a very resourceful man and after learning that Chicago's Post Office and Customs House were to be demolished, Grutza purchased all its building materials and had them shipped on 500 flatcars to Milwaukee for Brielmaier's use in constructing the new church. To this day, you can see the doorknobs on the massive entrance doors bear the insignia of the US Post Office and Customs House.

fot. Courtesy of Mark Heffron

Milwaukee Basilica of St. Josaphat

But the mammoth project, completed and dedicated in 1901, was swamped in mountains of debt and controversy. Parishioners even mortgaged their modest homes to help finance the construction as well as helping to build the church after completing their shifts in the factories. Even the women helped by carrying out debris in their aprons. In 1910, Milwaukee's Archbishop turned the parish over to the order of Conventual Franciscans of Buffalo, New York. By 1925, its pastor, Rev. Felix Baran, had retired the debt and initiated a new drive to fund the decoration of the Church's interior, whose bare walls at the time were painted white. A respected Roman painter, Gonippo Raggi, was contracted and in 1929 completed his splendid work. Paintings around the apse include numerous Polish saints with Warsaw in the background and historical scenes such as the *Miracle of the Vistula*. Large paintings include one with Gen. Kosciuszko leading Polish peasants into battle against Russian invaders and another with Piotr Skarga, a 17th century Jesuit, preaching before the Polish royal court. In the very top of the dome, there are stained glass windows depicting Polish shrines dedicated to the Blessed Virgin. Behind the altar is a painting by Prof. J.S. Zukotynski from 1904 of the Martyrdom of St. Josephat—the church was named in memory of the martyr St. Josephat Kuntsevich. Pope Pius XI raised the church to the status of a Basilica in 1929, the third such edifice at the time in the United States to be so recognized.

In the 1990s, a new generation of parish activists organized a massive fund-raising campaign that led to the Basilica's complete restoration. The Basilica is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Seating up to 1,500, it frequently hosts symphonic concerts and choral events and continues to be a location for Polish commemorative and historical events and concerts. I urge you to visit this stunning tribute to Polish contributions.

https://www.thebasilica.org/

Tracing Family Roots...

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making their way to and from cemeteries, carrying bundles of flowers and candles. Despite its spiritual nature, All Saints' Day is not a sad occasion. It is peaceful, reverent, and, above all, filled with love and connection.

It's worth noting that Halloween, so prominent in American culture, has only recently begun to appear in Poland, mostly among younger generations in cities. Even just 20 years ago, it was virtually unknown, and in many smaller towns and villages, it still remains foreign or even frowned upon. In Poland, the focus remains firmly on honoring the dead.

For family historians and genealogists, cemeteries in Poland can be invaluable resources.

In fact, one of the most unexpectedly effective strategies for connecting with long-lost relatives in Poland is surprisingly low-tech: leaving handwritten notes at ancestral graves. These notes—usually sealed in plastic—ask anyone tending the grave to get in touch. In most cases, it works. Descendants, caretakers, or extended family members reach out, opening new doors in the search for family history.

The days surrounding All Saints' Day are the ideal time to try this method. Since nearly every cemetery in Poland is visited and lovingly maintained during this period, your note is far more likely to be seen. Even if the person who finds it isn't directly related, they may have helpful information or be willing to connect you with someone who is.

One crucial difference between Polish and American burial customs is the temporary nature of grave plots. In Poland, graves are typically leased for a period of 20 or 50 years. If no one pays the renewal fee or maintains the site, the plot may be reused for another burial. While this may seem strange to those accustomed to perpetual plots in the U.S., it is a long-standing and practical tradition in Europe, especially in densely populated areas.

Whether through the flickering lights of All Saints' Day, the quiet stories told by gravestone inscriptions, or the serendipitous meeting with a long-lost cousin, Polish cemeteries are places where the past and present meet. They offer more than just names and dates—they offer context, emotion, and a sense of belonging. For those seeking to reconnect with their heritage, they may be the most meaningful stop of all.

So, if you're planning a heritage trip to Poland, be sure to include a visit to a cemetery. Walk slowly. Read the names. Light a candle. Leave a note. And listen—not just with your ears, but with your heart. Your ancestors may be gone, but in places like these, they are never far away.

Tom Szymkowiak – CEO & Co-founder of genealogytour.com – a Polish company providing genealogy research and organizing heritage tours. (tom@genealogytour.com)

HIPPOCRENE BOOKS, INC.

Footprints of Polonia:
Polish Historical Sites Across North America

"*Footprints of Polonia* is an outstanding look at the way that Polish Americans have transformed America's cities, suburbs, and towns. It is an essential guide to the physical impact of one of the country's largest ethnic groups."

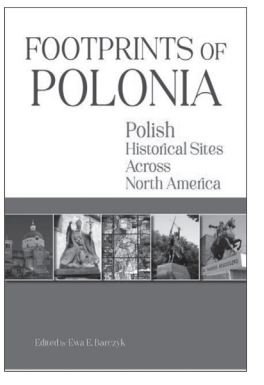
—Dominic A. Pacyga, author of *American Warsaw: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of Polish Chicago*

The innumerable contributions of Polish immigrants and their descendants on communities in North America can be seen on monuments, bridges, churches, cultural centers, and cemeteries across the continent. These "footprints" of Polonia (the Polish diaspora), commemorating towering events and figures from history that are a source of pride among Polish Americans, are cataloged for readers in this unique volume. From Revolutionary War heroes Tadeusz Kosciuszko and Casimir Pulaski to more recent figures like Pope John Paul II and political movements like Solidarity, statues and historic sites all over North America pay homage to their contributions and importance.

Volunteers from Polish organizations all over North America helped identify the most important sites in their region and provided summaries and pictures for over 200 entries. The guide is organized alphabetically by states and provinces, with entries that describe the historical significance of each site. Most entries also include a color photo. Informative prefaces and introductions from the editor and other historians help contextualize the culture of Polish immigrants and their deep, lasting connection to Poland.

Footprints of Polonia can serve as the perfect travel companion for anyone who wants to learn about the rich history and heritage of the Polish diaspora.

Ewa E. Barczyk, emerita, Associate Provost and Director of Libraries, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, serves on the board of the Polish American Historical Association (PAHA). She is currently President of the Polish American Librarians Association which provides resources and opportunities for librarians to promote Polish materials, culture, and history. She resides in Milwaukee, Wisconsin.



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