

## The Kaszuby Region-Home of the Polish Pioneers of Portage

County, Wisconsin

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*Response to, the article on the Kaszubs in the May, 1995* Rodziny was so positive that it seemed likely no one would object to seeing a bit more on the subject. This article, however, is worth studying no matter what part of Poland your ancestors came from—it shows just how much information you can amass if you're thorough and persistent.

Albert Hart Sanford, M.A., in his report, "Polish People of Portage County," which was submitted to the State Historical Society of Wisconsin as a part of its *Proceedings* in 1907, identified the following as the earliest Polish settlers: Michael von Koziczkowski in 1857, Adam Klesmit (Kleinschmidt), Joseph Platta, and John Zynda in 1858, with Christian Dzwonkowsky, Franz Wojak, Casimir Lukaszewitz, Joseph Jadzewski, — Green, and Werachowski arriving in 1859. Peter Kronopeski was identified as also coming in 1859, or the next year, from Winona, Minnesota. Sanford identified his sources as baptismal records of the Koziczkowski family members and naturalization papers on file in the office of the Clerk of Courts at Stevens Point.<sup>1</sup> An intent to naturalize - the first papers filed in the process required for U.S. citizenship - filed in Portage County on November 4, 1861, by Michael v. Koziczkowski, stated he had arrived in New York in September of 1857. A son, Michael, was born here on September 6, 1858.

Later publications such as *A Standard History of Portage County, Wisconsin*, published in 1919, and *Our County. Our Story*, published in 1959, repeat the above names (with variant spellings) and dates as above, and then add the names of other Polish families who arrived in the early 1860's.

According to a Hamburg passenger list, Michael and Francisca (v. Zielewska) v. Koziczkowski, and their family of seven children, left that seaport July 7, 1857, on the sailing ship *Howard*, bound for New York. Their place of residence was indicated as Carthaus in Preussen. His occupation was listed as that of a *Landsmann* (a farmer). New York incoming passenger lists show that the Howard arrived there on September 4, 1857.

Karthaus (Polish *Kartuzy*) was a district just west of Danzig (Polish *Gdarisk*), in what was then West Prussia. That area had been part of the Prussian empire since the first partition of Poland in 1772, and was to become part of the German Empire after its unification in 1871. Present-day maps identify the area surrounding Kartuzy as *Pojezierze Kaszubskie* or the "Kaszubian Lakelands," named after an ethnic group, the Kaszubi, who have lived in that area since ancient times.

Family History Library microfilm of the baptismal records of Suleczyno (German *Sullenschin*), a Catholic parish in Kartuzy district, revealed the births of the Koziczkowski children in the near-by village of Podjazdy (German *Podjab*). Eleven children, including two sets of twins, were born to them. Four of these children died in infancy. It appears that Koziczkowski's wife, Francisca v. Zielewska, was born and baptized in that parish. However,, no record of his birth was located in the Suleczyno records. According to marriage records from Suleczyno, the Koziczkowski's were married there on October 30, 1838.

The obituary of Francisca Koziczowska in the local Polish-language newspaper, *Rolnik*, on November 25, 1904, provided a history of the family's origins and of their immigration, along with the name of the village of her husband's birth - Polczyna.

Research of maps and gazeteers of Poland resulted in the location of the village of Polczno, just to the west and south of Podjazdy, and the identification of Ugoszcz (German *Bernsdorf*) as its parish. An affidavit of Koziczkowski's record of baptism was sent by the pastor of Ugoszcz. The record shows that he was born to Jozef and Marianna (Gostomska) v. Koziczkowski on September 13, 1811. This birth date for Koziczkowski agrees with family records. Family tradition also relates that he had an acquaintance with the Parchowo area, a neighboring parish of Ugoszcz and of Suleczyno."

Various sources relate that after their arrival in New York, the Koziczkowski family traveled to Milwaukee. Polish families had been arriving there since the mid-1850's. The arrival of railroad service in Eastern Europe had made the seaports of Hamburg and Bremen more accessible. Economic and social conditions, some as a result of the political situation, had created very difficult living conditions for Kaszuby residents. A growing landless population had developed with little hope for improvement, and as a result families had made the decision to leave the area.

Rev. Kruszka indicates that the availability of affordable land and the knowledge that a Polish priest, Rev. John Polak, was pastor of St. Stephan's Catholic Church in Stevens Point, drew Koziczkowski to Portage County. Sanford agrees that land opportunity probably drew him to the area, but, he notes that St. Stephan's parish records indicate Rev. Polak began his pastorate there in 1860. A tenure from July, 1860, to March, 1862, is reported for him in a history of Wisconsin Catholic parishes.

After some deliberation, Koziczkowski and his family settled in the town of Sharon. This is considered, by some researchers, to be the oldest Polish rural settlement in Wisconsin, and quite likely the second only in the U.S. to a settlement of Silesian Poles in Panna Maria, Texas, in December of 1854.

Reportedly, letters written back to Poland were encouraging, and the next year three more families from Kaszuby were to come to Portage County and to the town of Sharon.

The passenger list of the *Atlantic*, which arrived in New York from Bremen on August 9, 1858, shows that the families of Adam and Marianna (Dera) Klesmit, Joseph and Marianna (Konopacka) Platta, and John and Clara (Szyszka) Zynda traveled between decks on that ship as former residents of Poland on their way to New York. The three men were listed as farmers.

According to the filing dates of their intents, Zynda and Platta were in Portage County in August of 1859. An August, 1858 arrival in New York was indicated. Klesmit did not file his papers until April of 1860, but indicated an August, 1858 arrival in New York.

Stezyca (German *Stendsitz*) parish records provided the Klesmits' marriage record as well as the baptismal records of their children. Their home village was Msciszewice (German *Msiszewitz*), located just to the east of Koziczkowski's parish village of Suleczyno.

Research of the parish records of Koscierzyna (German *Berent*), just to the south of Stezyca, revealed the baptisms of the Zynda and Platta children as well as the marriage records of their parents. Both families lived in the village of Skorzewo.

The intent of Joseph Daczyk, filed 1859, states that he came into New York in June of 1859. However, it appears that Daczyk and his wife, Anna nee Kropidlowska, and their family left Hamburg bound for Quebec on May 14, 1859, on the *Elbe*. The spelling of the family name, as *Dotzink*, leaves some doubt, even though the names and ages of the children generally agree with church records in the Koscierzyna parish and with the 1860 Federal Census data in the town of Sharon for Portage County. Their last residence named on the passenger list, Gr. Klinsch (Polish *Klincz Wilk.*), agrees with data from the Koscierzyna baptismal records and Portage County marriage records, which show the family name as *Daczyk*.

Arriving in the late summer of 1859 were the families of Anton and Antonina (Zblewska) Woyak, Franz and Catharina (Kenowska) Woyak, Christian and Josephina (Konopacka) Dzwonkowski, Stanislaus and Margaritha (Piechowska) Konopacki, Jacob and Marianna (Rzepinska) Werachowski, Mathias Rzepinski and his daughter, Theresia, Joseph and Dorothea (Jadzewska) Grzenia, Joseph and Justina (Lukaszewicz) Jazdzewski, and the newly married Casimir and Veronica (Jacubowska) Lukaszewicz, all of whom sailed on the *Amelia*. This ship had left Hamburg on June 15, 1859, bound for Quebec.

Intents to naturalize, of those *Amelia* passengers who filed them, indicated their port of entry into the U.S. as Milwaukee, where they arrived in August or September of 1859.<sup>29</sup> According to information in the obituaries of Mrs. Christian (Josephina Konopacka) Dzwonkowska and her daughter, Mrs. Albert (Frances Dzwonkowska) Kubisiak, their family traveled by rail and by water from Quebec to Wisconsin, and then came up river by boat to Gill's Landing, where they then traveled by land to the town of Sharon.

All of these passengers initially settled in the town of Sharon, with some of them later moving to Stevens Point - the first of their ethnic group to live in this city. Most of the marriage records of these couples and the baptismal records of their children were located in Lesno parish in Chojnice (German *Konitz*) district of Bydgoszcz (German *Bromberg*) province. Some of their records were located in Koscierzyna parish of the Platta, Zynda, and Daczyk families.

All came with family members parents and/or siblings. Three generations are represented in some instances. The ages of the adults ranged from the early 20's to the late 60's. Several of the children were infants, with the youngest born on May 12 and May 23 of 1859. These were not adventurers or speculators. A decision had been made to leave and to make a new home in America.

Recent research indicates that the Joseph Grzenia family, later known as Green, probably did not come to Portage County until the early or mid-1860's - perhaps, after a short stay in Renfrew County of Ontario province in Canada. According to a recently released publication, land records there indicate a purchase by a J. Gazen in 1860. Portage County intents filed by Joseph Green, Anton Green, and John Green indicate arrivals in the U.S. in 1865, 1865, and 1862, respectively.

Peter and Charlotte (Taczek) Konopacki and their family were also named as probable Polish settlers prior to 1860. According to reports, they first went to Winona, MN, and then to Portage County. The 1860 Federal Census of the town of Sharon, dated July 24th, includes this family. Their records have been located in Koscierzyna parish, but not on a passenger list. Neither has an intent been located in Portage County. However, a Peter Konopecy filed an intent in Winona County, MN, on March 4, 1859.

Three other families included in the 1860 census have what appear to be Polish surnames, but attempts to identify them from intents and other county records have not clarified their identity.

Eleven of the fourteen adult males from the group of Polish pioneers identified as having arrived in Portage County before 1860, filed an intent. Seven signed their names, while the others verified the information with an 'X'. All but three were listed as farmers on the passenger lists and most continued in that occupation in

the town of Sharon. A business center developed in the area which was known as Poland Corners at that time. The crossroads is now known as Ellis. Most of these pioneers were influential members of the community, serving in leadership roles in the township and in establishing a Polish Catholic Church.

Reportedly there were about 30 Polish families in the Poland Corner's area by 1863. The bishop of the Milwaukee diocese granted them permission to organize their own parish, which was named St. Joseph's. This Polish Catholic parish is regarded by some as one of the earliest in Wisconsin and the state's first rural Polish parish. Polish Catholics walked or came by wagon from throughout the county to attend Mass at St. Joseph's until the early 1870's when other parishes were organized.

This steady influx of immigrants from the Kaszuby area to Portage County continued until the late 1880's. This story, told many times by Anton Hintz, provides an insight into the nature of this "chain migration. When the Koziczkowski family had made the decision to go to America, the pastor of their church made an announcement to the congregation telling of their plans. When the time came for their departure, the community gathered to say goodbye and to wish them well. Among them was Anton, then a small boy. Little did these participants realize the impact this day would have on their area as well as on the area to which this family would choose to live. Years later, in the early 1880's, Anton and his young family decided to leave for America. A few days after their arrival in Portage County, much to Anton's amazement, he met Michael v. Koziczkowski on the Market Square in Stevens Point. About 23 years had passed, and in the meantime, an estimated 150 families or more had left Kaszuby for central Wisconsin.

County marriage records indicate a representation from throughout this region, although the majority came from the centrally located parishes of Stezyca, Suleczyno, Sierakowice, Gowidlino, and Parchowo, along with the more southern parishes of Brusy, Lipusz, Lesno, Koscierzyna, Wiele, and Czersk.

The post-Civil War period brought the arrival of many Poles from other areas of Poland. Most were from the Prussian partition, particularly from the Bydgoszcz (German *Bromberg*) and the Poznan (German *Posen*) areas. Some of them had lived briefly in other areas of Wisconsin or elsewhere in the U.S., often in the larger cities. The late 1880's brought representatives from the other partitions of Poland. The immigration continues until today, drawn, perhaps, to Portage County by the successful, large Polish community, which began with the arrival of the Koziczkowski family in 1857, and the 13 families who joined them in 1858 and 1859.

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