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Michael Kozickowski
The pioneer Polish settler of Portage County

Portage County Poles

Polish People of Portage County

By Albert Hart Santord, M. A.

The present year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the first Polish family in Portage County. Within the half-century their numbers have increased until the immigrants with their descendants are now more than ten thousand strong, constituting approximately one-third of the county's total population. Two-thirds of the Poles in Portage County are farmers, varying in material condition from extreme poverty to affluence. On the whole they constitute a prosperous and substantial element of the population. The same may be said of the remaining one-third of their number, who dwell in Stevens Point.

The present study includes: first, an investigation into the early history and later development of this foreign group; and, second, a description of conditions among them, and such comments upon Polish characteristics as relate to the social and economic problems involved in their progress towards complete Americanization.

The first Poles who came to Portage County were Michael von Koziczkowski¹ and his family, consisting of his wife and

¹ The name was thus written at first, but later the *von* was dropped. Concerning the ending *ski*, which occurs so frequently, Prof. Leo Weiner of Harvard University writes as follows: "*ski* is an adjective ending (*ska* is feminine) denoting derivative from, origin, etc., and is a common family ending in all Slavic languages." In many cases

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nine children; they were followed a year later by the three families of Adam Klesmit (or Kleinschmidt), John Zynda and Joseph Platta. No dissent from the opinion that these were the earliest immigrants has been encountered, and no records have been found to contradict it. As to the dates of their arrivals, tradition, even among those who then came as children with their parents, is at variance. The facts are, however, sufficiently settled by papers on file in the office of the clerk of the circuit court at Stevens Point, where the declaration of intention to become a citizen, made by Koziczowski, states that he arrived in 1857. The papers of the others named give the date of their coming as 1858; and corroborating this evidence are the baptismal records of the Zynda family with the same year thereupon, furnished by the parish priest upon their departure for America, and still in their possession. The following year saw the arrival in Portage County of Christian Dzwonkowsky, Franz Wojak, Casimir Lukaszewitz, Joseph Jazdzewski, — Green, and — Werochowski. Peter Kronopeski came either this year or the year before from Winona, Minnesota.

The pioneer of this early group of immigrants, Koziczowski, had been the owner of a small farm in the region of Dantzig, West Prussia. He realized that the economic future of his nine children was dark; and having read of America, sold his farm and started for the New World without knowing his destination. Arrived in Chicago, he heard of cheap lands to be had on the upper Wisconsin River. In Milwaukee³ he learned more, for there was at that time a movement

this suffix is added to the name of a town, as, Modilinski, Grudziadzki, and Suwalski. In a list of heads of families belonging to the Polish church in Stevens Point (1901), about forty per cent had one of these two endings.

³Much uncertainty exists as to the beginnings of Polish settlement in Milwaukee. It is the opinion of John W. S. Tomkiewicz, author of "The Poles in Wisconsin" in Wis. Hist. Soc. *Proceedings*, 1901, that there were no Poles in Wisconsin before 1857. F. H. Miller, in *Parkman Club Papers*, x, 1896, asserts that "there had been a very gradual

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among the Germans to take up lands in Marathon County. Proceeding in this direction, Koziezkowski arrived at Stevens Point in September, 1857, with but fifty dollars in money. He left his family in Stevens Point while he went to Wausau to look at land, which proved unsatisfactory because too heavily wooded.³ Returning, he spent the winter (1857-58) in Stevens Point and in the following summer worked for farmers a few miles east of the city. In the mean time he had written to friends at home, and the three families of Klesmit, Platta, and Zynda had found their way to Portage County and were employed in the same neighborhood. These first Polish settlers, and others who soon followed, endured great hardships. Since there was little demand for labor on the farms, the men were paid but fifty cents a day for cradling, and twenty-five cents a day for digging potatoes, or they were paid in kind, at the rate of one bushel of potatoes per day. The wife of one of these first-comers worked for a loaf of bread a day; and a sixteen-year-old girl hired out for fifteen dollars and board for a year. In such cases the compensation for labor seems to have been the same as that to which they had been accustomed in the Old World. Under these circumstances only the bare necessities of life could be secured. Often their bread contained more of middlings than of flour;⁴ and was more often made of rye than of wheat. Potatoes were much used and, in accordance with a European custom, gen-

immigration since 1855," the first Poles coming to Milwaukee about that year. No names or records are cited. The latter further states, "It was ten years [1865] before there was a church, and at that time there were only about thirty families." Rev. Wenceslaus Kruska, *Historja Polska w Ameryce* (Milwaukee, 1905-07), vii. p. 125, states that there were Poles in Milwaukee as early as 1844, but that the first permanent settlers came there in 1860.

³ Describing conditions in Marathon County at this time, Kate Everett Levi says: "It took ten years to break 40 acres of land, no harvest could be raised for the first three or four years, and until 1861 wages were only fifty cents a day." — *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xiv, p. 359.

⁴ One man worked a week in order to earn a sack of middlings for bread.

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erally entered into the composition of their bread. A soup of milk and potatoes was often the sole constituent of a meal.

The first lands secured by these settlers and other Poles who followed were pre-empted. Later, purchases were made of State lands at \$1.00 and \$1.25 an acre, and of lands from the Fox and Wisconsin River Improvement Company at prices ranging from \$50 to \$100 for forty acres.⁵ After the enactment of the homestead law (1863), advantage was taken of its provisions. The location of the first Polish farmers, some ten miles northeast of Stevens Point, seems to have been determined by the fact that a German settler, Joseph Oesterle, chiefly engaged in hunting and trapping, induced Koziczowski to secure land in his neighborhood. His location became the centre of what was probably the earliest Polish agricultural community in Wisconsin, and one of the earliest in the United States. This community is known as Polonia, and its growth was influenced by conditions of soil, topography, and forests which will be discussed later.

The majority of the early Polish immigrants to Portage County became farmers. Others settled in Stevens Point; among them, Jazdzewski (1859), Kuklinski (1860), Paul Lukaszewitz (1861), Polebietski (1862), and Leopold Kittowski (1864). The last mentioned started from Kreis Konitz with his father and two brothers, Joseph and Thomas, in company with the families of John Boyer and Michael Mozuch. This group landed at Quebec where they remained for about two years, except Leopold Kittowski, who came direct to Stevens Point. They then moved to Detroit, where it is said there were then two or three Polish families.⁶ Their next stopping place was Berlin, Wis., where twenty or thirty

⁵ *Wis. Hist. Colls.*, xl, pp. 409-415; *Proceedings*, 1899, p. 186.

⁶ Henry M. Utley, *Michigan as a Province, Territory, and State* (New York, 1906), is authority for the statement that the first Poles came to Michigan in 1855, when some five or six families arrived in Detroit. In 1857 the first farming community was established at Parisville, Huron County.

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families of their nationality were settled.⁷ Leopold Kittowski was a tailor by trade, earning in Germany from one to three dollars a week and his board. In America his wages averaged two dollars a day.

Father Kruszk a is authority for the statement that the first Poles came to Portage County upon the invitation of Rev. John Polak, a Roman Catholic priest, who was himself a Poland.⁸ This statement cannot, however, be verified. On the contrary, the records of St. Stephen's parish in Stevens Point make it certain that Father Polak's pastorate in that city began in 1860 and ended in 1862. It was the only Roman Catholic church in Stevens Point at that time. One family, that of Matthew Recinski, is known to have been induced to make Portage County their destination by Father Polak, whom they met in Milwaukee; and the fact that a priest who could speak Polish was stationed there may, indeed, have induced others to come.⁹ The great majority of the early Polish immigrants, however, were influenced by the

⁷ Before the arrival of the railroad in Stevens Point (1871), one of the most frequented routes from the East ran through Berlin. Polish families on their way to Portage County often stopped there, some to earn enough to go farther, others to remain permanently. Inquiries made by Miss Wanda Luzenski, a pupil in the Berlin High School, make it certain that Poles settled in and about Berlin as early as 1861; tradition makes the date as early as 1851, in the cases of two families, Szubynski and Osowski by name.

⁸ *Historya Polska w Ameryce*, vii, pp. 21-23, where the date of the first Polish settlement in this region is given as 1855. "What called them to this region? * * * Was it chance, or was it that their fates drove them here? The Providence of God led them with the help of a priest—the natural leader of the people, by God's will. This priest was John Polak * * * He was placed by Providence as a sign post for the first Polish pioneers of Wisconsin * * * The news that a Polish priest was in this region became a magnet for the Polish people, thirsty for ministrations."

⁹ On the other hand it is asserted by persons who were acquainted with Father Polak that he did not like the location at Polonia, but that he had in mind plans for a Polish colony near the Waupaca lakes. His death interfered with the development of these plans.

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accounts of friends and relatives from whom they learned of cheap lands and better conditions than the Old World afforded. In many instances the immigrants were assisted by those who preceded them. All of these early-comers seem to have been subjects of Prussia. They came from the provinces of West and East Prussia and Posen. In West Prussia, Dantzic, Karthaus, Berent, and Konitz were centres from whose neighborhood they emigrated.

The great majority of the Poles arriving in Portage County before 1870 had been farmers and laborers in the mother country. In numerous instances the men were foremen on estates; they had had comfortable incomes and their labor had not been as arduous as the tilling of their lands in this country proved. But they were ambitious and looked forward to better things. Others in the Old World had owned small farms, and at the same time were fathers of large families. It was inevitable that the greater number of their sons must become common laborers. Farm hands were paid from twenty-five dollars to thirty dollars a year and board. Common labor brought from two to ten silver groschen (five to twenty-five cents) per day.¹⁰ The lot of the Polish tenant on a large estate in Prussia was hard. He had a small tract upon which he could raise his own produce; he must give some days' service each year to the landlord; and he was paid, partly in kind, for other labor. Under these conditions it was impossible to save enough to purchase land or to enable the children to rise to a better station.¹¹ Among the early immigrants were num-

¹⁰ Note as a typical instance, Frank Kujawa, who in Prussia was a farm laborer receiving twelve dollars a year in addition to his board and clothes. Coming to America in 1863, in the Wisconsin pinery his wages were thirty-five dollars a month and board.

¹¹ Michael Landowski, a tenant, was furnished a house, hay for one cow, and peat for his fire. He was paid the equivalent of fifty cents a day for labor beyond what he was bound to give. He had accumulated property to the amount of two cows and a few pigs when he realized that it was a hopeless life, and came to America alone. In a few years he sent for his family. He and his oldest boy worked

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erous artisans, but practically no tradesmen or professional men.

The only other reason for emigration assigned by the group of Polish emigrants now under consideration, besides their desire for economic betterment, was the desire to escape army service. Some of them had seen service in the Austro-Prussian War and others anticipated a draft for the Franco-Prussian War.

The majority of those who came to Portage County before 1870 seem to have come here directly from the old country; many came in sailing vessels by way of Quebec, the voyage consuming three months or more. Some tarried in Canada while the War of Secession was in progress. These, and others who are said to have returned to Canada after first coming to Portage County, feared the draft for military service.

While the wages of farm hands were very low in Portage County during the decade 1860-70, better wages were paid in the woods, on the river, and in the saw mills. Here, from fifteen dollars to twenty dollars, or even more, a month could be earned. These opportunities were embraced by large numbers of the Poles, many of whom earned enough within a few years to buy one or more forties of land. Often such labor was the winter employment of the Polish farmer, and in other cases the hard work of clearing the land was left to the wife and children, while the husband earned wages in some kind of lumbering operation.

Both in its beginnings and in its later development in this

on railroad construction summers, cleared the farm, and cut logs in the winters. The wife and other children raised the crops.

Michael Jelinski was a coachman on an estate in Prussia. He was furnished a house and feed for one cow. His pay included sixteen bushels of rye, two bushels each, of peas and barley three cubic meters of wood, and twenty-six (later thirty) thalers each year. He worked sixteen years and saved nothing. He would have been unable to meet the expense of partially supporting his sons while in the army; if they were to learn trades he would have had to apprentice them for three years and make a money payment.

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country or in Europe, the Polish immigration was without organization or direction. Families came singly or in groups. Some started without any more especial destination than "America." The greater number, however, came to friends and relatives in Portage County.

The growth of the farming community now known as Polonia was faster than that of the Polish colony in Stevens Point. The former was located in the vicinity of a group of Roman Catholic families, of German, Irish, and French descent, for whom a parish was created in 1858, and later a church was built.

This was located at a cross roads now known as Poland Corners, where Ellis post-office stood until superseded by the rural delivery system. Father Polak visited and served this parish during his pastorate in Stevens Point (1860-62). In 1863, when the number of Polish families in that vicinity had increased to twenty or thirty a separate Polish church was built. The first Polish priest was Rev. Bonawentura Buczynski. During the pastorate of Rev. J. Dahrowski (1870-82)¹² an incident occurred that tested the vitality of this parish. The worthy priest was a man of convictions upon the subject of intemperance. Across the road from his church at Poland Corners stood several saloons, whose proprietors refused to close their doors on Sunday during the hours for service. The unseemly carousing that prevailed at such times led the priest to have the church building removed to a height of land about one mile farther east. A faction of the congregation, led by the saloon-keepers, opposed this removal and temporarily seceded from the church. They erected a new building at Poland Corners and employed in succession two priests, whom they discovered later had been excommunicated. The outcome was the defeat of this faction and the condemnation by the bishop

¹² He later went to Detroit where he founded the Polish Roman Catholic Seminary. While at Polonia he set up the type for a church calendar (see facsimile of title page, *post*, p. 282) which was printed at the Stevens Point *Journal* press. But one issue of this calendar was made and only one copy is now known to exist.



Polish Church at Polonia, Portage County

**This is the largest church in Wisconsin, north of Milwaukee. Courtesy
of the Stevens Point Gazette**

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of their church, which is still standing unused. At present very few Polish families are adherents of the Roman Catholic church at the Corners, the greater number of that congregation being Germans.

The settlement of Polonia is still the largest Polish community in Portage County outside of Stevens Point. The parish now numbers three hundred and twenty families who worship in a new brick church costing \$70,000 and capable of seating two thousand persons. That this church is situated in the midst of a prosperous farming community is evidenced by the appearance of the congregation that gathers there on Sundays. Practically all who come any distance ride in top buggies and drive fine teams. Near the church are a parochial school accommodating two hundred children, and an orphanage where live forty-six boys.

Soon after 1870 the beginnings of two other communities were made; one of these was about six miles south of Polonia where the earliest settlers, the Kubisiak, Werochoski, Sherfinski, Dzwonkowski, and Makowski families came from the older Polish settlement in 1871. When, in 1884, there were thirty-five or forty families in this region, a parish was created, now known as Fancher. The Fancher parish contains at this time two hundred families, having increased by one hundred and thirty-five in the last eight years, under the efficient work of the present pastor, Father Kubiszewski. A church representing, with its furniture, an investment of \$42,000 and a parsonage costing \$7,000 have been erected. The people here are very prosperous, generally owning their farms free from debt; while many have money at interest, and live in substantial brick houses.

The other community is north of Stevens Point in the town of Hull. The earliest settlers here, Petrick, Sera, Rutta, Brill and Serafinski, do not seem to have had any connection with Polonia.¹⁸

¹⁸ Petrick's son asserts that his father came to Buffalo in 1867, which was as far west as his money would take him; that there were

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At this place, the parish of Casimir was set off in 1871, a Polish priest being stationed there in 1875. This has now one hundred and sixty families. The land in this region being practically all occupied, no new families have been added within the last three years.

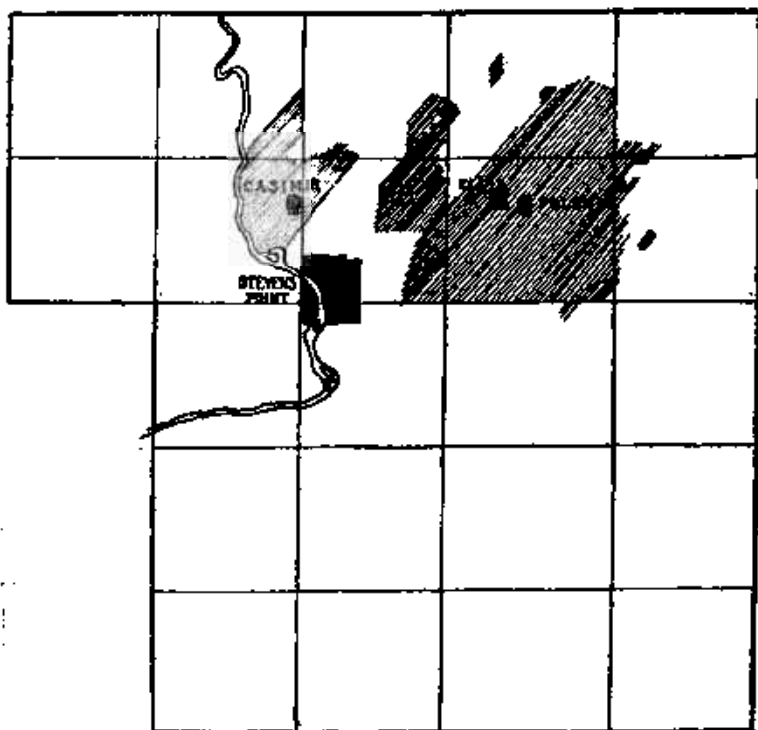


FIGURE 1

Portage County, showing location of Polish population in 1876

By 1876, the Polish community in Stevens Point had increased to fifty families living for the most part in the fourth ward of the city, and a church was then erected costing \$800.

then no Poles in Buffalo; and that he later found work in Salamanca and Dunkirk, N. Y. While he was in the latter town, Theodore Rutta (now chairman of the town of Hull, Portage County) heard from him and came there. According to this account, such was the beginning of Polish settlement in these cities. Correspondence conducted by the writer has failed to reveal further facts in its history.

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Soon afterwards a \$3,000 church was completed, and in 1887 a parochial school established. The parish roll of the Polish church contains the names of five hundred families, among whom some four hundred and fifty families are active supporters of the church and send three hundred and fifty pupils to the parish school. During the last ten years, while the Rev. Pescinski has been pastor, the number of his congregation has increased by one hundred families, due to the movement to the city from farms, and not to new arrivals from the old country.

The Poles who settled west of Stevens Point, across the Wisconsin River, between 1870 and 1880, were constituted in 1883 as the parish of Mill Creek, which now has one hundred families. Many Poles worked in the mills in this region, and as the timber disappeared the owners induced them to buy out-over lands. North of the Mill Creek settlement, Junction City became the centre of another parish created in 1881, that now includes 110 families, 95 of whom are Poles. It is in this region that the largest number of Russian Poles are found, but they are a small proportion of the entire community.

From the above account it may be judged that immigration of the Poles to Portage County in the decade 1870 to 1880, and immediately thereafter, was more rapid than in the preceding decade. It is a matter of common knowledge that Bismarck's Polish policy of 1871-73 caused an exodus of Poles from Prussia. Soldiers returning home from the Franco-Prussian war found taxes heavier than ever; they were indignant and flocked in great numbers to America. While the founding of the parishes in Portage County would seem to be the reflection of this movement, yet the writer has met few Poles who speak of religious or political oppression as causes for migration. This may be accounted for by the fact that the larger number of them belong to the peasant class and were generally uneducated. They would feel the harsh Prussian policy less keenly than the urban Poles; and, again, the latter would be much more apt to settle in cities. It may be, however, that some of those with whom the writer has conversed concealed their religious or political reasons for migrating;

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either because it was difficult to express their ideas upon these subjects in English, or because they hesitated doing so, not knowing what might be the consequences.

The migration in this period proceeded without organized effort of any kind. The writer has found traces of a plan for establishing a Polish state in the West, but the idea was vague and probably had little influence. No effort was necessary to induce the Poles to segregate; but economical forces determined that there should be many widely-scattered points of segregation.

Search in the reports of the State Board of Immigration reveals no evidence that any effort was put forth under their auspices to induce Polish immigration. The Wisconsin Central Railway, whose line transverses Portage County, has never distributed printed matter relating to Polish settlers. Mr. K. K. Kennan of Milwaukee, who was agent for this road in Europe between 1880 and 1885, made no effort to induce Polish immigrants to come to America.¹⁴

¹⁴Mr. Kennan writes: "At no time have I, so far as I am aware, induced any Polish emigrants to come to this country. The reason was, that I do not understand the Polish language. In June of 1880, I went to Europe on behalf of the Wisconsin Central Railroad for the purpose of inducing desirable German and Scandinavian emigrants to emigrate to Northern Wisconsin. I spent about three months travelling in Europe, interviewing American consuls and steamship agents, and finding what had been attempted heretofore so as to proceed intelligently. I then opened an office in Copenhagen, so as to combine my efforts to procure the Scandinavians and the Germans to the best advantage. At the same time I had an office in Basle, Switzerland. I soon found that that was the more favorable point from which to operate. The German laws, as you are perhaps aware, do not permit any efforts to be made to induce immigration. The office in Basle was maintained for five years, and I advertised at one time in two thousand newspapers. I received and answered about twenty thousand letters, mostly in German, and sent out many hundred thousand circulars, the greater part being printed in German. As a result of this agitation, there were, as nearly as we can estimate, about 5000 people who came from Europe and settled along the line of the Wisconsin Central Railroad. I had a letter from Governor

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The National Polish Alliance has devoted its efforts chiefly to fostering the Polish national spirit and to maintaining loyalty to the church. It seems to have made no effort to encourage immigration or to care for the immigrants.

By the year 1894, farms had been taken up some distance northwest of Polonia. As there were sixty families in that region, a new parish was created in the town of Alban, where there are now one hundred and seventy-five families and a parochial school with sixty children in attendance. Comparatively few of these families are the descendants of the old Polish settlers; the great majority came from the old country and from large cities. Here as elsewhere, the larger number are German Poles.

South of the Wisconsin River, after it turns sharply westward near the village of Plover, is a level stretch of sandy soil. Here Poles began to settle about 1880. Some came from the old settlement at Polonia, where all but the most hilly and stony farms had been taken up. In the region near Plover there were originally forests of jack pine, which, before the advent of the Wisconsin Central Railway (1871), had been used in the making of charcoal. When the timber had been taken the owners allowed the land to become delinquent, and the county board voted to sell it at ten dollars a forty. This was an opportunity which was at once seized by the young Polish farmers. In some instances American farmers had tried to make a living on these poor lands and had failed; some farms had actually been abandoned, but the Poles made this thin soil yield a surplus. The parish of Plover, created in 1896, has now ninety-six families, of whom all are Poles except three

Smith, stating that I was authorized to represent the State and to give information as to its resources and advantages, which letter assisted me greatly. The result of my observation was that the most persuasive argument to induce immigration, is a letter from a person who is here and is pleased with the 'Verhältnisse' in this State." Mr. Kennan's statement is of interest to students of German immigration, and serves to emphasize, by contrast, the lack of similar inducements for Polish immigration.

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German ones. A parochial school is now being built, but the settlement is not growing, only four or five families having been added in as many years.

In 1897 a new parish, Torun, was created directly north of Stevens Point. It now has ninety-six families, with a parochial school attended by sixty-nine children.

It is noticeable that among the Poles who came to Portage County between 1870 and 1895, the proportion of those who came direct from the old country grew smaller; the majority had spent from one to ten years in the large cities, earning money with which to buy farms. In the early seventies railroad construction was a frequent means of employment; lumbering operations and the steel mills of Milwaukee and Chicago were also utilized, while unskilled day labor was resorted to by many. The number of families now moving into the parishes mentioned is small. The recent disturbances in Russia have had practically no effect upon the Portage County communities.

Within the past fifteen years an interesting Polish community has grown up in the southern part of the county (town of Belmont), extending across the line into Waushara. The location of this settlement was determined by a few Polish families that came here about 1890 from Berlin. Mr. J. J. Heffron, a real estate dealer in Stevens Point, acting through the Polish agent in Chicago, has sold land in this region to some one hundred and twenty-five Polish families.¹⁵ In many cases Mr. Heffron has personally attended to the erection of their houses, and by giving liberal terms of purchase has assisted the newly established farmers to make a beginning. The agent in Chicago sometimes advertises for customers; but many are induced to come by their friends and relatives. The greatest number of these settlers have bought wild land, but a few have purchased farms that were already worked. The largest

¹⁵ This agent is now settling Poles on lands near Knowlton, Marathon County, and a similar enterprise is being carried on by a Polish real-estate dealer in Adams County.

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number come from Chicago, having lived there from one to ten years; since their immigration from the Old World, any time from five to twenty years ago. A few have come from the coal fields of Pennsylvania. A parish was created here in 1896 and a new church to cost \$10,000 is now being erected.

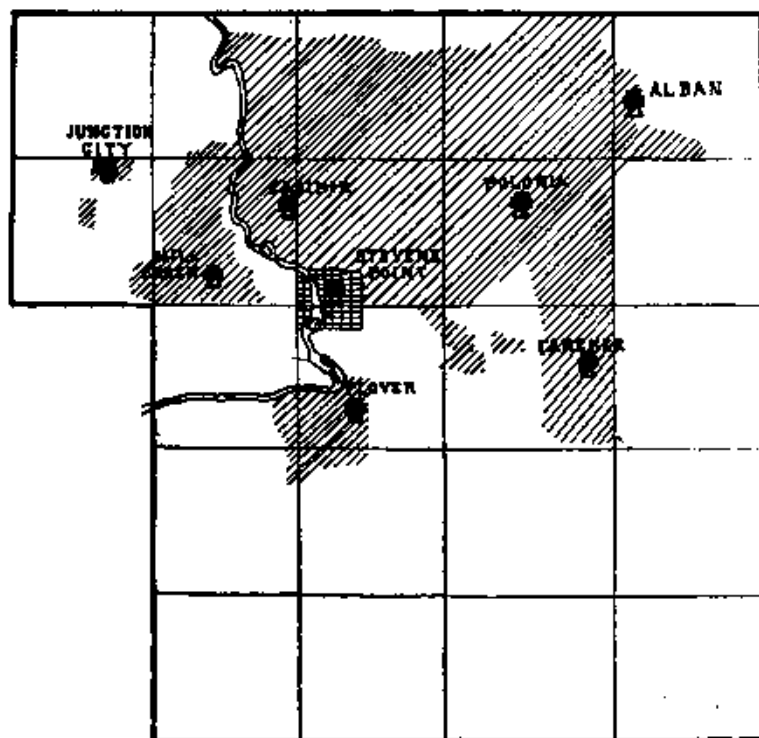


FIGURE 2

Portage County, showing location of Polish population in 1885

Census statistics of the Poles in Portage County are not very satisfactory. In the census of 1850 the Poles are not mentioned among the foreign elements in Wisconsin. The following statistics of foreign-born Poles are available:

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Year	Portage County	Wisconsin	United States
1830 ¹	417	7,298
1870.....	1,290	14,436
1880.....	5,263	49,557
1890.....	2,070	17,860	147,440
1900.....	2,750	31,789	383,595

The Wisconsin state census of 1875 does not distinguish nationalities; that of 1885 contains an estimate of 300 Poles in Portage County—a number evidently too small. In 1895 the nativity of 1095 is given as Polish, and in that of 1905 the number is 2061.

Any statistics concerning the countries in which Poles were born must be more or less inaccurate, since the obliteration of Poland from the map of Europe leads to confusion in the minds of census-takers. Only the census of 1900 and that of 1905 undertake to distinguish among Poles born in Germany, Russia, and Austria. The results for Portage County are as follows:

Year	Germany	Russia	Austria	Unknown	Total
1900.....	2,602	96	39	11	2,750
1905.....	2,469	169	323	2,961

There is doubtless inaccuracy in the figures of the State census, the numbers for Russia and Austria being too large. The towns of Alban, Belmont, and Dewey are credited with no Poles born in Germany—a gross error.

No statistics have been compiled showing the number of per-

¹In this year, every state and territory in the Union, except Dakota Territory, is credited with some Poles. The following states and cities had the largest numbers: New York, 2296 (New York city, 1586); Texas, 783; California, 730; Wisconsin, 417; Missouri, 329 (St. Louis, 184); Illinois, 341 (Chicago, 109); Ohio, 326 (Cincinnati, 199).

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sons of Polish descent is a low estimate for this county.¹⁷ The number of Polish families residing in the county, reported by the priests of the ten parishes, is 1800. Multiplying this figure by six, the probable average size of Polish families, we get as a result 10,800. As the total population of Portage County was 30,861 in 1905, the Poles constitute fully one-third of that number.

The accompanying charts (see figures 1, 2, and 3) show the regions of Portage County that have been occupied by Polish farmers at the dates indicated.¹⁸ In the shaded portions this nationality predominates to a marked degree; while a mixture of other nationalities is found on the edges of the regions shaded. The shading does not indicate that all of the land is actually under cultivation; much is held by non-resident owners, some of these being lumber companies and others speculators. There are also marsh and swamp areas.

The intermixture of the Poles with farmers of other nationalities is so slight, that the former are virtually grouped into four distinct settlements. The largest occupies the northeastern part of the county and includes the parishes of Casimir, Torun, Polonia, Alban, and Fancher. The next in size is west of the Wisconsin River and includes the Junction City and Mill Creek parishes. Both of these groups border upon the Knowlton settlement in the southern part of Marathon County.

¹⁷ Kruszka's estimate of 15,000 to 20,000 is much too large.

¹⁸ The accompanying charts were constructed from county maps of 1876 and 1903, and the plat-book of 1895, all of which show the names of real-estate owners in the towns. The peculiar forms of the Polish names constituted the sole basis of judgment as to nationality in most cases. This method may be sometimes at fault when German and Polish names are apt to be confused. The absence of other Slavonic peoples renders another possible source of confusion practically unimportant. The original maps and plat-book do not show the ownership of the land with complete accuracy, since they are made from the tax rolls in the hands of town officers, which do not give changes in ownership as they should. However, considering these sources of error, the maps serve well enough the purpose.

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The Plover parish is an isolated group, as is also that of Heffron on the southern border of the county.

The forces at work in determining the direction and extent of growth of these communities may be discovered by a com-

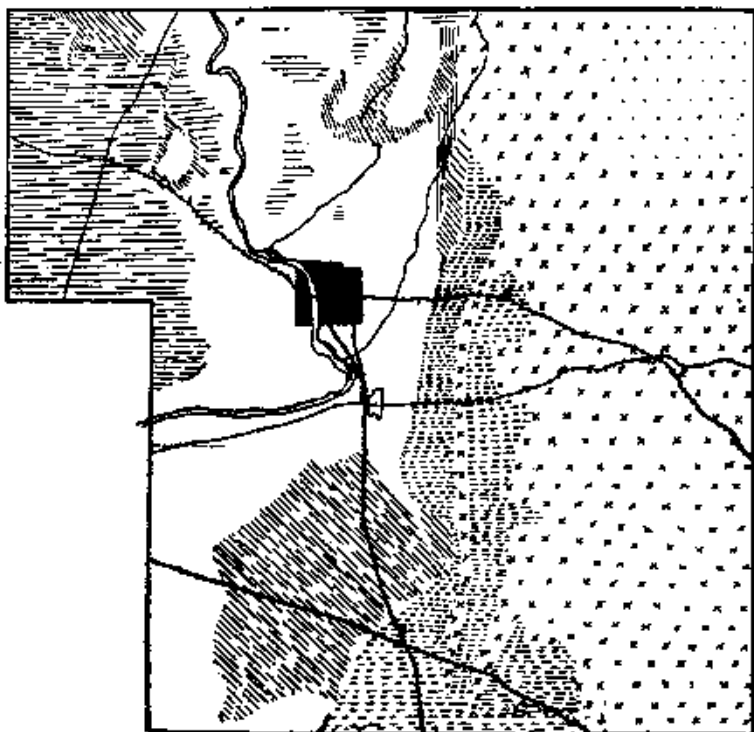


FIGURE 4

Portage County soil map. Dotted area represents clay loam; crosses, Amherst sandy loam; short, broken horizontal lines, Bancroft gravelly sandy loam; long broken horizontal lines, swamps; inclined broken lines, Marathom loam; blanks, Wisconsin River sand

parison of these maps with that showing soil areas of Portage County (see figure 4).¹⁸ From such a comparison we find that Polish settlement has spread over three distinct soil areas.

¹⁸ From map of Portage County in Samuel Weidman, "Preliminary Report on the Soils and Agricultural Conditions of North Central Wisconsin," Wisconsin Natural History and Geological Survey Bulletin, No. 11.

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First, the original colony at Polonia had its seat upon the Amherst sandy loam and it is upon this soil that the greatest number of Poles have made their farms. This is the area of the terminal moraine, a region of "low steep hills and ridges," in many places quite stony. The earliest farmers of Portage County, who were a mixture of Americans, Germans, and Irish, with a few French, sought the soil area, that of the Bancroft gravelly sandy loam, bordering this on the west. This is for the most part a level prairie, free from stones and easy of cultivation. The lands of the moraine region are less inviting and more difficult to work, and were therefore cheaper. The Poles, poor in goods, but with unlimited capacity for hard work, have taken up these less attractive lands. It is interesting to note the southern projecting peninsula of Polish settlement in the centre of the county, corresponding to the isolated moraine ridge running north and south between broader belts of the Bancroft loam. The termination of the Polish area on the east may be accounted for in two ways. Says the *Report of the Natural History and Geological Survey*, "Steep ridges and hills are less common along the east border of Portage County." Here the land is more gently rolling and more easily cultivated, and in consequence it was held at a higher price. In the second place, this region was already occupied by a Norwegian community before Polish settlement had extended so far eastward.²⁰

It is an important fact in the economical development of Portage County that the Amherst loam, which the Poles have occupied, is a better soil than the Bancroft loam. The Poles are already buying farms in the more level regions, paying for them prices which the American farmers cannot afford to refuse. Throughout its greatest extent the terminal moraine is wooded with a dense growth of scrub oak. In the extreme northern

²⁰ Norwegians began to take up government land near Scandinavia, Waupaca County, in 1850 and 1851. This land had been ceded by a treaty with the Indians in 1848. Some of the Norwegians came from Dodge County and others from the mother country. They settled westward in Portage County between 1860 and 1870.

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part of the county is found a still heavier growth of hardwoods and pine. Here the Poles bought cheap cut-over lands. Because of the distance from towns and railroads, and the poor wagon roads leading thereto, the Poles of this region are isolated and backward.

The second soil area occupied by the Poles is that of the Wisconsin River sand. This is the poorest soil in the county, containing but small amounts of clay and loam. Here land was cheap. North of Stevens Point on the east side of the Wisconsin River, the land bore some timber of size, but south of the city in the town of Plover was the region of jack pine. Mention has already been made of the ease with which the Poles acquired this land and the way in which they have made good farms therefrom.

The third soil area in which the Poles have made their farms is that of the Marathon loam. This had originally "a dense growth of hardwoods and hemlock, with scattering large white pine." The soil is "one of the most fertile soils of the state;" but the land was cheap because it was held by lumber companies who had already stripped off the timber, and also because the heavy stumpage rendered its clearing a most difficult task. Here again the Polish farmer showed his capacity for patient toil.

We may conclude, therefore, that soil, topography, and forest areas have together influenced the direction of the Polish settlement, and that this has tended to the regions of cheapest land. These lands were cheapest in two instances because of the initial difficulty of cultivation, though they are in reality superior in quality.

The Polish farmer possesses the qualities necessary to enter upon the cultivation of difficult lands. We have already noted his persistent industry and capacity for drudgery. Coupled with this, he possesses great thrift and is willing when necessary to endure an extremely low standard of living. It is a common saying that the Polish farmer lives upon the products that he cannot sell in the market—an unjust generalization, though the statement may be true in many instances, when this

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becomes necessary in order to secure a margin of profit. Among the prosperous Polish farmers, however, the standard of comfort is similar to that enjoyed by other nationalities. There is another fact which enables these farmers to thrive under adverse conditions; the hard labor is shared by all members of the family who are old enough to be of any assistance. While the farm is being cleared and paid for, the wife works by the side of the husband in the field, and children are kept from school in order that they may assist in this labor.

All authorities agree that the Polish farmer has opened to cultivation areas that would not have been touched by other nationalities; and that he thrives and advances from poverty to prosperity upon lands where American farmers would starve.²¹ It is not surprising that he can buy out his neighbors of other nationalities. This process has been under way for some time. The Norwegian settlement in the northeastern town of Portage County (Alban) at one time extended into the township of Sharon immediately west thereof; but the Poles have bought out these Norwegian farmers and are still pushing eastward. The high birth-rate among the Poles and the desire of the majority of the Polish young men to own land, renders certain the continuance of this process.²² Moreover, the Poles display good business foresight in purchasing farms, very frequently giving a mortgage which they almost uniformly redeem.

We have here an interesting instance of a stock possessing lower standards and greater industrial efficiency displacing other stocks who are unwilling to pay the price necessary to obtain equal results. There is undoubtedly a tendency on the part of the Poles to adopt higher standards, but this fact does

²¹ Professor R. A. Moore of the State University writes concerning Polish farmers in Kewaunee County: "They have converted a wilderness of land, that I thought at one time would never amount to anything, into some of the finest farms in the county."

²² One Polish farmer stated to the writer his estimate that these families have on the average four boys each, and that two of the four remain farmers. It is frequently predicted that, agriculturally, Portage County is destined to become Polish.

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not as yet seem to render them less able to supersede their neighbors.

Another strong influence besides the purely economic one works in the same direction. This is social in nature. The concentration of Polish farmers in parts of Portage County is evidence of a clannish spirit, which is more marked in this than in other nationalities. The Polish ward of Stevens Point gives evidence of the same spirit. This is also seen in the fact that intermarriage between Poles and other nationalities is quite uncommon.²² The separateness of the Polish people is likewise marked in their failure to mingle socially with people of other nationalities. They show little desire for this kind of intercourse. The feeling of their non-Polish neighbors also acts as a barrier to the free and natural mingling of these classes upon an equal social basis. This fact stands in strong contrast to the freedom with which the German, Irish, Norwegian, and English intermingle and intermarry. When asked why this difference exists, the non-Polish farmer answers, "The Poles are different from the rest of us," or, "They are an inferior class of people," or, again, "We have nothing against the Poles, but we do not like them." While there seems to be little reluctance to conduct business with the Poles, there exists little social sympathy on either side. As a result of these conditions, non-Polish farmers are more willing to sell out to the Poles when they become numerous in their neighborhood. Farmers, likewise, who have no Polish neighbors within several miles, look forward to the time when they expect to sell out, and retire to the cities, or go West.

Because of this clannish spirit, also, the process of Americanization among the Poles is slow. The national feeling is strong and it is fostered by their church. The Poles are noted

²² There were issued by the county clerk, from November 1, 1906, to November 1, 1907, two hundred marriage licenses; of these, ninety-five were issued to parties both of whom were Polish. In eight cases the man only and in six cases the woman only was Polish. In seven instances the woman was under eighteen years of age, and in two cases the man was under twenty-one years old.

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for their faithful adherence to the Roman Catholic church, and the history of their spread in Portage County indicates the remarkable activity of the church in caring for their needs. The church does not encourage the social intermingling of

KALENDARZ

Polaki katolicki

DLA LUDU POLSKIEGO

W AMERYCE

Na rok Panski

1875

CENA KWARTALNIA 25 CENT

Polonia

Polonia Co Wydawca w Nowym Jorku Zjednoczonych Stanowisk Ameryki

Miastem i okoliznami K. J. Dabrowskiego.

Reduced facsimile of title-page of a church calendar, the type for which was set by Father Dabrowski at Polonia, in 1875;
see ante, p. 266

Poles with non-Poles, and it discourages their intermarriage. Adherence to the use of the Polish language is another evidence of racial conservatism, and this also is encouraged by the church. The parochial schools constitute a force working in the same direction. In the country parishes but a small portion of the time in school hours is given to studies involving the use of the English language; but in the parochial school

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in Stevens Point, English is employed to a great extent.²⁴ In the city the Polish language is going out of use much faster than in the country. It is a common statement that the language is being corrupted, and that no one, not even the priests, can speak pure Polish. A recent arrival from Warsaw, who is a university graduate, makes this statement emphatically. In some of the remote country parishes, however, children are growing up without the ability to speak the English language. It is a common occurrence to have adults born in this country, who are testifying in court, ask for an interpreter. On the other hand, there are numbers of Polish children in Stevens Point who cannot speak Polish; sometimes the latter are ashamed to be known as Poles among their playmates in the public schools, and so purposely avoid learning the language of their forefathers.²⁵

An American tendency which is frowned upon by some of the Polish priests is that of altering surnames to make them more easy of pronunciation.²⁶ Generally, the owner of an Americanized name continues to be known by his original surname among his fellow countrymen.

In 1892, Mr. S. Hutter established in Stevens Point, a weekly newspaper the *Bohnik*. This has had an important educative influence and has tended to preserve the distinct national traits of the Poles. This paper has now a total circulation

²⁴ In the parochial school at Polonia, Polish is used in teaching the following subjects: geography, history of Poland, reading, catechism, arithmetic, composition, writing, and drawing. English is used in reading, writing, and geography classes. In the city the course of study is the same as that in the public schools.

²⁵ As German children dislike being called "Dutchman," so Polish children are tormented by the use of the word "Polack" or "Polander." The latter word has come to have a peculiar accent, "Po'-land'-er," which carries with it insinuation of disrespect, implying social inferiority. The word is, however, in good usage; but one avoids employing it in polite conversation with intelligent Poles.

²⁶ Instances of this are, Ciesiolka = Sanky and Sobiesczyk = Summers. Often the ending *ski* is dropped, or the original name is otherwise abbreviated.

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of 5,000; in Portage County alone its circulation is 1,800, while it has many subscribers in other parts of Wisconsin, in Minnesota, the Dakotas, and Michigan. The *Gazette*, an English Democratic paper, has three hundred Polish names on its subscription list.

The Poles of this county do not, on the whole, take as much interest in education as is taken by other nationalities. Even making allowance for their support of parochial schools, the attendance of Polish children in the public schools is deficient. Enough has already been said to indicate that there is a real child-labor problem on the farms of the Polish people of Portage County, with all that implies on the intellectual side. However, conditions are improving among the more prosperous farmers of the new generation. In the city many Polish children are set to work at an early age in factories. In higher education, likewise, there is but little interest.²⁷ The number of Polish students in the Stevens Point high school is small; the number in the State Normal School is still smaller. During the past four years, no Polish child has gone as far as the seventh or eighth grade in the graded school at Plover. Polish children are as bright as those of other nationalities in their studies. There are ordinarily from three to six Polish girls who are district school teachers in the county. In some of the country schools pupils cannot speak English, and it is with the greatest difficulty that an English-speaking teacher accomplishes anything. A teacher who can speak Polish teaches these children more English than one who cannot.

As might be expected, the Polish farmer is not in close touch with recent progressive agricultural methods. The few of this nationality who attend farmers' institutes are the younger men, but this fact is suggestive of future improvement. The

²⁷ There was established at Stevens Point, in 1904, an academy for girls who intend to become sisters in the Catholic Church. The courses here are intended to fit them to become teachers in Catholic institutions. A number of Polish girls have attended the grammar grades of the Normal School in preparation for their work in the academy. The latter institution now has fifty pupils.



Public Square in Stevens Point, on Market Day
Courtesy of the Stevens Point *Gazette*

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question arises, do the Poles have lower moral standards than other nationalities? They have everywhere a reputation for petty thievery. In the lower courts they are charged most frequently with this offense and with assault and battery. Drunkenness is usually the condition under which the latter offense is committed. In the justice courts of Stevens Point, and the municipal court of Portage County, fully one-half of the criminal cases involve Poles. In the circuit court, during the six years 1902 to 1907, inclusive, sixty-seven criminal cases were tried against the Poles, sixty-nine against non-Poles. These figures indicate a greater number of criminal charges against the Poles than their proportion of the population would warrant; but allowance must be made for the fact that the poor and the illiterate, who everywhere furnish the largest number of criminals, are especially numerous among the Poles. On the other hand, among the non-Polish defendants in the circuit court were several persons who were non-residents of the county. It is the opinion of many observers that the first generation of Poles born in this country furnish a much larger proportion of offenders than the original immigrants. The greatest enemy of the Poles is strong drink. It involves enormous economic waste. Among the younger generation, this fault is decidedly more common than among their fathers.

In politics the Poles of this county are uniformly Democrats. By some this is attributed to their church allegiance, by others to imitation, the early settlers having adopted that party. In recent presidential elections, however, many Poles have voted the Republican ticket, some of them doing so secretly. Good times accounts for this change. Efforts to hold the Poles to their Democratic allegiance include the circulation of the stories that the Republicans are opposed to their church schools and that they would prohibit the use of the Polish language in all schools. In past years, the Polish voter has been corrupted with great ease, and in many cases he has invited corruption. With stricter laws and more settled conditions, this evil has become less common. The influence of the Polish priest in politics was formerly considerable, espec-

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ially in the country districts, and traces of it are still found. In the city, however, such influence has disappeared.

The town of Sharon, in which the original Polish settlement was located, was organized in 1860. In 1867 the first Pole was elected to a town office. Since that date, Poles have had representatives on the list of town officers continuously; not, however, in proportion to their numbers. The same is true of other towns containing a contingent of this nationality. Polish officers are notable for their strict obedience to the laws defining their powers. As members of school boards they fulfill their duties on the whole as well as non-Polish officers. There is no tendency among the Poles to combine in political action against other nationalities. While they act harmoniously with non-Poles, the same cannot be said of their relations to each other. In business, politics, and social affairs quarrels among Poles are very frequent.

In their business relations the Poles show some tendency to favor their own nationality where that is possible. Distinct Polish corporations have been formed as follows:

Stevens Point Brick & Construction Company; Stevens Point Brewing Company; Stevens Point Automatic Cradle Company; Portage County Polish Fire Insurance Company; Sharon Creamery Company; and Lake Thomas Creamery Company.

In Stevens Point much business property is passing into the hands of Poles. However, not more than five of the one hundred and seventy-five members of the Business Men's Association are Poles.

With their gradual Americanization come changes in the old-world customs of the Poles. Customs associated with marriage are still retained to a considerable extent. The bride must furnish an elaborate feast, which often lasts several days and includes all the liquor than can be drunk. She is compensated by the payment of a dollar by every man who dances with her. Each silver dollar is thrown violently upon the plate in an effort to break it. The taking of snuff is common among

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the older Poles.²⁸ The saloon retains its former place as a social institution, women using it as freely as men in the country districts, and upon their visits to town. The white kerchief as the sole head-covering for women is disappearing in favor of the hat.

The Poles have two market days at Stevens Point, Thursday and Saturday. No satisfactory explanation for the use of the former day has been discovered. The farmers gather in large numbers in the market square and patiently await the sale of their produce. In the mean time saloons are the only available places of resort for the women and children.

Church holidays are more frequent among the Poles than among other nationalities; dances and similar festivities are much enjoyed. There are, also, numerous social and beneficiary societies organized in connection with the church. This great institution has among the Poles a restraining and civilizing influence of enormous value. In the process of Americanization, however, its influence is conservative. Among the city population, and with the younger Poles everywhere, its authority is becoming weaker; and the priests wisely tend to become in their parishes leaders rather than autocrats.

In their physical characteristics the Poles have no marks that are so distinctive as those of the Germans, Scandinavians, or Irish. The type is recognized among the older people more by the stolid, apathetic countenance of the European peasant than in any other way. The influence of environment works noticeable changes in this type, by brightening the countenances and making more regular the features of the younger generation.

Comparison between the economic condition of the ten thousand Poles in Portage County and that of the average city Poles must convince one that the advantage is in favor of the former.²⁹ No movement could result in greater good for

²⁸ Among the items, a few years ago, of a candidate's sworn campaign expenses, appeared several dollars spent for snuff.

²⁹ For some conditions existing in Milwaukee see Wisconsin Bureau of Labor Report, 1905-06.

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the poorer classes in the cities than one encouraging their removal to the country. Such a movement is in progress, on an individual basis; but it would seem that some organization among the Poles themselves to advertise and stimulate it, would result in great benefit.