

# Polish Genealogical Society Of Minnesota



PGSMN Newsletter Volume 27 #10lume

Spring 2019

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"Spring breathes new life into the world around us"



WELCOME TO PGS-MN'S  
**26TH ANNUAL MEETING**  
Our Immigrant Ancestors—From Poland to Minnesota Project  
Outstanding Achievement Award  
Elections  
Financial Report  
2019 Meeting / Programs



## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

This is my second tenure as PGSMN president, after an elapsed period of about 10 years. I congratulate Peggy for her outstanding work as president. From a somewhat reluctant beginning, she embraced the position, and will continue to be active with us.

Our programs are set for 2019, and we will participate with MGS in their 50th anniversary celebration March 30.

Our 2019 budget is set, and will be available in the next newsletter-there are no surprises. WE depend on our members for financial and participatory support. Our mission is to provide aid and assistance to those researching their Polish roots. Our starting points as well as our desired outcomes differ, but we can help each other on the journey. WE want to know how we can help each other, and will ask you for suggestions for talks, programs, resources, and member interactions. We will also ask you to help by volunteering, as a committee member, speaker, Library assistant, etc.

See you at the April meeting

Terry

Address/email changes or membership questions? Contact Connie Waldherr at [waldh001@umn.edu](mailto:waldh001@umn.edu)

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### Polish Genealogical Society of Minnesota

*A branch of the Minnesota Genealogical Society*

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### Committees

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## DEATH CUSTOMS AND FUNERAL HOME RECORDS

by Jonathan Shea and Diane B. Szepanski—Pathways & Passages—Fall 2003

Honoring the dead has been part of Polish culture for centuries and is most evident at this time of year (Autumn) as this is when the Catholic holy days of All Saints (Nov. 1) and All Souls (Nov. 2) are observed. The church hierarchy officially designed these celebrations in the 14th century, although memorial-type celebrations occurred long before that.

While these observations are done in all Catholic countries and theoretically exist for the same purpose, the outward manifestations of the ceremonies differ from country to country. Polish peasant culture was rich in the celebration of these holy days and some of these rituals made their way across the ocean to Polish immigrant communities in the United States.

All Saints Day is a national state holiday in Poland. It is a day off from work to enable persons to visit cemeteries where their ancestors are buried. In many cases, people who have moved away from their birthplaces will make a journey back to their ancestral parish to pray over the graves of departed members of their families. Cemeteries were cleaned of all vegetation in anticipation of numerous visitors. Large floral displays and a sea of votive candles were placed at graveside. A Mass was celebrated in the parish church or the cemetery itself.

The custom of decorating graves for this event was brought to North America, but has died out in many communities; however, it is still very much alive in New Britain, Connecticut and several other locations. Aside from the cemetery decorations and Mass, certain practices and superstitions were also evident.

For example, in rural Poland a door or window was opened on the eve of All Souls Day (called Dzień Zaduszny or Zaduszki) as it was widely held that the souls of the departed ancestors would return to their homes on this day. In earlier times, the family would gather on this night to pray for their departed family members and a small meal was eaten. The table was set with one or more extra plates for the expected visiting spirits. Special breads were baked for the occasion. Extra breads were prepared for the next day when these breads were taken to the parish church to be distributed to the dziady or beggars who, in exchange for the generosity of the family, would pray and sing hymns for the family's departed members.

### **Polish Burial customs**

Certain other customs of death and burial, aside from those described above, were also brought to the United States. Largely originating in rural areas, many were abandoned in the immigrants' new environment, and most are no longer heard of in Europe. Nonetheless, it is interesting to learn about some of the superstitions and rituals that our ancestors may have practiced centuries ago. Some may seem silly and illogical to us in the 21st century, but such is the inherent nature of most folk superstitions.

In general, the peasant viewed death with resigned fatalism, an expected part of the life cycle. The ideal death was a calm one, in one's own home, surrounded by family. Death with dignity was more important in the peasant's mind than the pomp and fanfare of an impressive religious ceremony.

Several "signs" of death were carefully watched for. The behavior of animals gave clues to impending

demise, as well as certain sounds in the house or recurrent dreams. The appearance or nonappearance of one's shadow on Christmas Eve was a sign of calamity, as well as the unexpected extinguishing of a candle during a church wedding ceremony.

Once death struck, certain rituals were observed. Windows in the house were to be opened wide to allow the soul to quickly begin its journey to the next world.

However, the journey did not begin in earnest until the final bells tolled at the deceased's funeral. Clocks were stopped in the house until after the burial, and mirrors were covered so as not to see a reflection of the dead.

The preparation of the body for burial was done with great care and without any financial constraint. It was felt that treatment of the deceased must be first-rate and all of his or her requests were to be strictly honored, so as not to cause any displeasure or irritation. Failure to observe these wishes could result in the soul haunting the house, something to be avoided at all costs.

Therefore, the deceased was dressed in the finest clothing possible, and the coffin was to be the best the family could afford. The body was laid out in the home on tables or board and surrounded by refreshments for the deceased's soul, in the event that he or she might wish to partake of them. Wakes were at least a two-day affair, at which family and the other villagers would keep watch over the deceased, singing and praying.

During this entire process and even after burial, certain activities were prohibited. No sewing was allowed for fear that the needles would injure the deceased's soul. Food was not to be left in the same room as the body, and in fact, in many cases its preparation was done outside the house. Any comb that was used to prepare the body was not to be used again, as it was feared that one's hair would fall out. Cloth scraps from the shroud and the needle used to sew it were also to be destroyed or placed in the coffin. Any wood shavings from the coffin were to be gathered and placed inside it. Stepping on the shavings was a portent of probable injury.

Various items were placed in the coffin, such as the deceased's favorite objects; money, should it be needed on the journey; or the deceased's cap, so he would not return to get it. Children's coffins often contained toys or flowers.

On the day of the funeral, family and friends would gather to sing to the deceased the final farewell in his own home. Here the family and friends embrace, kiss and shake hands with the deceased for the final time. The casket is removed from the house, feet first so the deceased will not try to return and enter the house. The head of the coffin is touched on the outer step of the home three times. The coffin is then loaded on a wagon to be taken to church. All windows in the house are opened, as well as the lids of trunks and chests, so the deceased can have a final last look at his home. As the wagon departs, all that has been opened is closed again, and the bench or table on which the coffin rested is overturned to prevent the soul from returning to the house.

The priest led the trip to the church on foot. At the cemetery the priest conducted the final rites and all participants sprinkled earth on the coffin. Upon leaving the cemetery, it was considered bad luck to look back at the grave—if this were done, another death would surely occur among those present.

Funeral homes are private businesses and as such have no obligation to provide you with any information. Fortunately, many will gladly do so if your purpose is to learn information for a family history. You should always ask if there is a processing fee for sending you the information, and enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope.

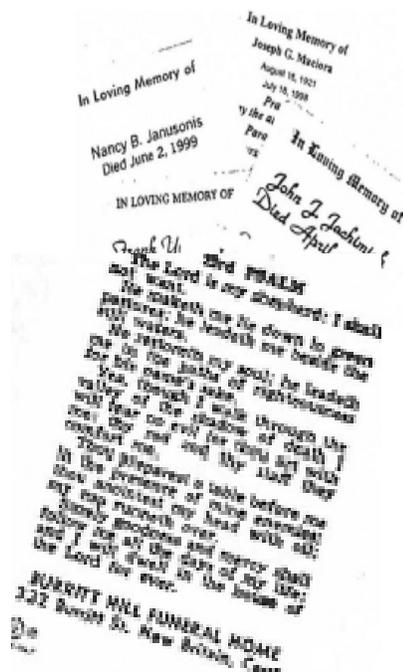
If you are unsure if there was a Polish funeral home in your place of interest, you can consult the American Blue Book of Funeral Directors. For closed homes, check the city directory that will have such listings and then try to learn what happened to the records of the establishment. Some closed funeral homes destroyed their records, while others, cognizant of their historical value, donated them to historical societies.



## PRAWA I REGULY

Rzymsko - Katolickiego,  
Cmentarza Polskiego  
NAJŚW. SERCA JEZUSOWEGO.  
przy Burritt ul. i Osgood Ave.,  
w New Britain, Conn.

Drukiem:  
Przewodnika Katolickiego  
w New Britain, Conn.



To Left— many Polish cemeteries issued deeds to the plots in booklet form, in which the names of all persons buried in the plot are listed along with their date of death. At right: memo-rial prayer cards often give the date of death.



### Traditional Polish Easter Basket

**Maslo (Butter)** - This dairy product is often shaped into a lamb (Baranek Wielkanocny) or a cross. This reminds us of the good will of Christ that we should have towards all things. **Babka (Easter Bread)** - A round or long loaf topped with a cross or a fish, symbolic of Jesus, who is the Bread of Life. **Chrzan (Horseradish)** - Symbolic of the Passion of Christ still in our minds. **Jajka (Eggs) and Pisanki (decorated with symbols of Easter, of life, of prosperity)** - Indicates new life and Christ's Resurrection from

the tomb. **Kielbasa (Sausage)** - A sausage product, symbolic of God's favor and generosity. **Szynka (Ham)** - Symbolic of great joy and abundance. Some prefer lamb or veal. The lamb also reminds Christians that the Risen Christ is the "Lamb of God." **Slonina (Smoked Bacon)** - A symbol of the overabundance of God's mercy and generosity. **Sol (Salt)** - A necessary element in our physical life. Symbolic of prosperity and justice and to remind us that people are the flavor of the earth. **Ser (Cheese)** - Symbolic of the moderation Christians should have at all times. **Candle** - Represents Christ as the Light of the World. **Colorful Ribbons and Sprigs of Greenery** - are attached to the basket as signs of joy and new life in the season of spring and in celebration of the Resurrection. **Linen Cover** - drawn over the top of the basket which is ready for the priest's visit to the home or the trip to church where it is joined with the baskets of others to await the blessing. The food is then set aside and enjoyed on Easter Sunday.

# RECORD OF FUNERAL

Total No. 504 Yearly No. 10 Date Feb. 17, 1934

Name of Deceased Leon Bryzgiel White Poland  
(What Race) (Where Born)

Head—  
Wife—Widow  
Co—Daughter of

Charge to John Bryzgiel  
 Address Broad St. New Britain

Order Given by alone  
 How Secured

Date of Funeral Feb.  
 R. residence P. O. New York City  
 Place of Death Downer's Hospital N.Y.

Funeral Services at Sacred Heart  
 Time of Funeral Service 7 A.M.  
 Clergyman

His Address  
 Certifying Physician  
 His Residence New York City

Cause of Death Myocard. Infarct.  
(Primary)

Cause of Death  
(Secondary)

Date of Death Feb. 7, 1934

Occupation of the Deceased  
 Employed

Single or Married Religion P. C.

Date of Birth  
 Age 58 Years Months Days

Name of Father  
 His Birthplace

Name of Mother  
(Maiden Name)  
 Her Birthplace New York City

Body to be Shipped to Metropolitan Burial Home

Size and Style of Casket 12 x 24 x 24, coffin grey, Maple

Manufactured by Middlesex  
 Interment at Sacred Heart Cemetery



Diagram of Lot or Vault

Lot No.  
 Grave No.  
 Section No.

Casket complete service  
 Metallic Lining  
(State Kind)  
 Outside Box  
(State Kind)  
 Grave Vault  
(State Kind)  
 Suit or Dress, \$... Hose, \$... Slippers, \$...  
 Embalming Body (with Fluid)  
 Dressing Body, \$... Hair Dressing, \$...  
 Folding Chairs  
 Candelabrum, \$... Candles, \$...  
 Door Badge, \$... Gloves, \$...  
 Hearse  
 Auto Limousine to Cemetery @ \$...  
 Autos to R. R. Station @ \$...  
 Aeroplane Service  
 Getting Remains from  
 Taking Body to Inquest  
 Delivering Box to  
 Delivering Remains to  
 Death Notices in Newspapers  
(Name of Newspaper)

Flowers  
 Rental of Plants, \$... Tent Rental, \$...  
 Outlay for Lot  
 Opening Grave Vault, \$...  
 Lining Grave, \$... Matting, \$...  
 Lowering Device, \$... Rental of Vault  
 Outlay for Shipping Charges  
 Removal Charges, \$... Incineration, \$...  
 Getting Burial Permit  
 Certified Copies of Death Certificate  
 Personal Charges, \$... Singers, \$...  
 Church Charges, \$... Ministers, \$...  
 Pall Bearer Service  
 Telegr., Telephone, Cable or Radio Charge  
 Railroad Tickets  
 Cash Advanced

Total Footing of Bill Footed \$  
 By Amount Paid in Advance Feb. 17/34 \$  
 Balance \$

Entered into Ledger, page \_\_\_\_\_ or below

1934 funeral record for Leon Bryzgiel, great-uncle of co-author Jonathan D. Shea. Of course, the amount of information provided will vary from case to case. But it's easy to see how useful a record like this could be!

**GENEALOGICAL TRAVEL  
TO POLAND**

**SATURDAY, APRIL 6, 2019  
10 AM**

Rosanne Betley, Paula Colwell and Connie Waldherr will tell about their genealogical travels to Poland and pass on their advice to future genealogical travelers. Bring your questions!

Minnesota Genealogical Society  
1385 Mendota Heights Road  
Mendota Heights, MN 55120

Coffee and treats provided  
Cost is \$2 for members and \$5 for non-members

POLISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF MINNESOTA | [www.PGSMN.org](http://www.PGSMN.org)

**MAY 4  
10 AM**

*Library  
Resources*

Join PGSMN to learn about local and nationwide library resources for your genealogical research.

Guest speaker:  
Jean Bielke-Rodenbiker  
Librarian, Hennepin County Library

May 4, 2019 - 10 AM  
Minnesota Genealogical Society  
1385 Mendota Heights Road  
Mendota Heights, MN 55120

Coffee and Treats provided.  
Cost: \$2 for members, \$5 for non-members

POLISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF MINNESOTA | [www.PGSMN.org](http://www.PGSMN.org)

## Polish Genealogy Websites to explore

From shepherds and Shoemakers—<https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/2016/12/07/50-useful-websites-for-polish-genealogy/> - over 50 different sites and links for Polish Genealogy

Searchable database for Ellis Island if your ancestors came through this New York port between 1892 and 1924. Register with a username and password to view manifest images. <https://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/>

Free Polish genealogy websites can save you loads of legwork in locating ancestral hometowns and figuring out where to look for records:

- <http://sites.rootsweb.com/~polwgv/polandgen.html>—Geographic focus: Poland—help pages for research how-tos—Featured Projects—find records and a list of surnames other site users are researching
- <http://www.halgai.com/> - Geographic focus: Eastern Galicia (now in Poland and Ukraine)
- <https://www.jewishgen.org/> - Geographic focus: Poland, especially Jewish communities, including maps and use the JewishGen Gazetteer (formerly the ShtetlSeeker) for finding Polish towns
- <http://polishroots.com/> - register your Polish surnames and connect with others sharing those names; links to old gazetteers and directories covering Polish regions

# The Polish Peasant

by Charles Phillips

Editor William F. "Fred" Hoffman of "Polish Roots" shared this article in his *Gen Dobry* online newsletter on 30 November 2016. The article originally appeared in the *American Catholic Quarterly Review* in 1923, and, while lengthy, it is a wonderful read. As Fred stated, "... the view it gives of the Polish peasant, while somewhat romanticized, is consistent in many ways with other accounts, such as that of the Polish peasant Jan Slomka." The text is in its original form, with no changes in spelling, grammar, or punctuation. In a couple of instances, however, Fred provided the Polish version of place names which he felt may be hard to recognize in their Americanized forms. As we celebrate this Easter month with our families, this article brings to life those Polish peasant ancestors from whom we came. The pictures have been added and were not part of the original article or reprint by Fred Hoffman. Enjoy!

I

One of the most interesting figures in the world today is the European peasant - that man of the soil, who, by the fortunes of the world war, has in half a dozen countries suddenly found himself rising to the stature of a living factor in the making of history. And of all the peasants of Europe, Russian, Roumanian, Czech, Hungarian, Serbian, or what not, perhaps the most interesting is the peasant of Poland, because of the vital part he plays in the fortunes of the one country destined above all its neighbors, by reason of its peculiar geographical situation, to preserve the future peace of Europe. Vastly in a majority in the Polish population, and holding a dominating position in the Polish congress, the peasant of Poland is a man well worth our getting acquainted with.

But he is interesting from more than merely the political viewpoint. Simply as a human being, he is, in fact, one of the most picturesque figures in the world today. "Good stock," the salt of the earth, with qualities like iron, he lives a rugged and wholesome life in his little wioska or village, a life which, despite the changes of time, still bears many marks of an ancient communal system, holding his councils, electing his soltys and starostas, and realizing in his own small circle a rudimentary democracy such as his ancestors knew further back than history goes. He is a traditionalist to the marrow, the most conservative creature on earth, clinging to age-old customs and habits with the greatest tenacity; not very progressive, it is true; hard and rather inflexible, if not intractable, in the modern movement of affairs, but sure, solid and dependable. As for his conservatism, it shows at every angle of his daily life. In no corner of the world, for example, have the inroads of fashion in dress made less headway than on the Polish countryside among the Polish peasants. The spinning-wheel and the loom still hold their place of honor in the cottage. Homespun is still the garb of solid respectability. Men's coats and women's skirts are cut as were those of their great-grand-fathers and great-grandmothers for generations back. When they come into the cities they still wear unabashed the brightest and best of this picturesque garb, though, alas, I must confess that in the case of the women I have seen its fine primitive beauty spoiled more than once by staggering experiments with French high heels!

The peasant's cottage is small, either of frame, logs or brick, white-washed often, and usually with a thatched roof which is the owner's special pride. He may have a telephone or an electric light wire strung to his gable, but the thatch seems to stay. If, however, the roof be shingled,

its long sloping surfaces are not left to fate unadorned, but are often painted with a design of conventional squares and angles, red or blue, which give an effect of neat gaiety to what might otherwise be a drab spot on the landscape. High up alongside the door, or on the roof, or at the end of the cottage, under the gable, one will almost invariably see a cross either painted or made with the bricks set out in the desired cruciform lines. Thus the Polish peasant puts a blessing on his little home, even while he is building it, embedding that blessing into the actual structure, as it were; and at the same time he proclaims to all who pass that his is the house of a Christian. These are the definite intents of this typical Polish decoration.



Such is the cottage of the plains, in the dooryard of which will be often seen in the early autumn months neat piles of peat fresh cut from the neighboring marshes and seasoning for winter use. In the mountain districts of the Tatry quite a distinct building pattern, entirely of wood, is found, now known among architects as the Zakopane style. The steep roofs of the Tatry cottage tell the story of heavy snows, while its wide eaves and galleries and colonnades are made for the torrential rains and the blazing sunlight of mountain regions. Whole villages are found in the Tatry hills built in this picturesque and airy fashion.

The garden around the Polish peasant's cottage, plainsman or mountaineer, is bright with flowers. Flower-boxes often fill the windows. All the old friends we know at home bloom there in profusion, lilacs, the sweet-smelling pink, the tall, lusty hollyhock, pansies, asters, roses galore, and invariably the sunflower, the seeds of which are in some districts a staple delicacy.



When you enter the cottage of a Polish peasant you will encounter good manners that may astonish you. Your host, in the first place, will be sure to greet you with a hearty "May Jesus Christ be praised!" It is the greeting of the Polish countryman for a thousand years; to which you must answer, "For ever and for ever." This custom may surprise you at first; but if by chance you should surprise him- if you are an old acquaintance, let us say, arriving unexpectedly -you will hear another exclamation, this time straight out of the Book: "And the Word became!" It is not irreverence but sincerity and honest piety that speaks thus. As for the manners, everyone I know who has come in contact with the Polish peasant in his home has been impressed by the unconscious grace of his modest etiquette. I was continually opening my eyes at revelations of gentle breeding in the most unexpected places. The manners of the children, neither bashful nor forward, were a constant source of delight to us.

The interior of the cottage, not well lighted, would be dark were it not for the white-washed walls. There is always one great central feature, the oven. This is built into the house, or rather the house is built around it; a huge permanent affair, which not only bakes the family bread and cooks the family meals, but serves also as the single heating apparatus of the home, beds even being made, in the coldest season, on its broad stone flanks. After the oven the next thing that catches the visitor's eye is the "Holy Corner" - I know no other term to use-in which hangs a crucifix or a picture of the Blessed Virgin, the Madonna of Chenstohova [i.e., Czystochowa]. This is the family shrine, before which the rosary or other family prayers are recited. Often a miniature sanctuary lamp burns on the shelf under either side; many festoons of colored tissue paper cut into the most delicate lacelike patterns; and



the crucifix or image; there are blessed wax candles on fresh flowers, if it be the season, breathing the tribute of the fields to the peasant's holy of holies. Here also, or perhaps upon one of the rafters, if not over the door where you have entered, you will see the little duster of grain and flowers which has been blessed in the village church on Lady Day, and which is treasured the year around along with a spray of evergreen or palm given out at Mass on Palm Sunday.

If there is a baby in the house -and there always is a baby in the peasant's house - you may see a cradle that you won't forget. A supple elm pole bends down from the rafters, with a strap or a heavy cord on the end of it. The cradle is a basket tied to is the cord. With what a gentle motion, rise and fall, it hushes the little one! It is as if a soft wind in the trees were rocking him.

## II

The land, the countryside of Poland, is so intimately woven into the life and language of the people that even the names of months of the year are taken directly from the fields. Thus April, "Kwiecien," is "the flowering time"; Lipca, "July, is "the month of the blooming linden" ; August, "Sierpien," is "the sickle"; September, "Wrzesien," "the heather"; November, ' 'Listopad," "the falling leaves"; while "Pazdziemik," October, is "the month of the flax," the word signifying the hull of fibre of the flax straw. If you happen into a peasant village at this season you will see a curious and a very ancient process going on, as the flax is threshed and drawn and worked into *its* eventual linen fabric. "Bees" are held, peasant women going from house to house to help their neighbors, making much merriment and enjoying plenty of gossip and singing and dancing on the way.



The flax is hauled in from the field, either in the low narrow wicker-work carts, which Americans in Poland have christened "puppy baskets," or else by hand, usually by the women, to whom the entire ritual of the flax seems to more or less belong, and who take special pride in the ease and grace with which they can walk up the road with huge bundles poised on their heads, or with broad wooden yokes across their shoulders, a bundle or pail swinging from each end of the stick. The straw is first soaked, either in the village stream or *in* a big primitive vat hewn from the trunk of a tree; pounded and worked by a great pestle into the proper degree of softness and pliability; then drawn and redrawn with a large wooden comb until it becomes fibrous and stringy.

One often sees long strands of this fibre draped on the fences, where it is hung out to dry before it goes to the spinning wheel and the loom, to be woven into great bolts, which later must be carefully washed and spread on the grass to bleach. Seventy-five percent of the garb worn by the Polish peasants is homespun.

Flax and the homespun linen of the countryside play an intimate part in the life of the Polish peasant. His days are woven into its fabric, from birth to death, from his swaddling clothes to his funeral sheet; from the time that he runs knee deep through its blue flowery fields till he is wrapped in his shroud, not to speak of the good old-fashioned uses to which his wife puts it, making oil from its seed and poultices for his back. It enters into the Polish folk-lore, too, one of the peasants' favorite legends being the story of the coming to Poland of the first flax, the "treasure from Heaven." According to this legend the flax was planted in the beginning by the Madonna of Chenstohova to befriend a motherless peasant girl who was in distress over her parents' illness and the ruin of their crops. "Worry no more, my daughter," said the Queen. "I shall send you a treasure from Heaven. Tomorrow, when the sun rises you shall find new flowers in your garden, smiling up at you with eyes blue as the sky. Pluck them and they shall serve you well."

So it befell, as the legend goes; and the bewildered girl obeyed, though she did not know what to do with the flax after it was plucked. But the Madonna came in the night, attended by troops of angels, who set up a workshop in the poor cottage, and taught the child how to work the flax and spin and weave it. "And when morning came Hela held in her hands the first piece of linen in all Poland. And she made a shirt of it for her father, and at once he was cured. And from that day there has been linen in Polska, and that is why the flax is a holy flower. How could it be else? Was not the Lord Christ Himself wrapped in it both at His birth and at His burial?"

Reymont, the most famous of living Polish novelists, whose analysis of Polish character is so keen that the German authorities, during their occupation of the country, ordered his writings read by all the Prussian military officials, writes at his best when he deals with the Polish peasant. There is one page in his novel, 'The Comedienne,' which sums up in a few sentences the whole life of the peasant. "Imagine for a moment the fields," he writes, "green in springtime, golden in summer, russet-grey and mournful in winter. Now behold the peasant as he is, from his birth until his death -the average normal peasant!" And he goes on:

"The peasant boy is like a wild, unbridled colt, like the irresistible urge of the spring. In the prime of his manhood he is like the summer, a physical potentate, hard as the earth, baked by the July sun, grey as his fallows and pastures, slow as the ripening of the grain. Autumn corresponds entirely to the old age of the peasant—that desperate, ugly old age, with its bleared eyes and earthly complexion, like the ground beneath the plough. It lacks strength, and goes about in tattered garments like the earth that has been reft of the bulk of its fruit, with only a few dried and yellow stalks sticking out here and there in the potato fields; the peasant is already slowly returning to the earth whence he sprung, the earth which itself becomes dumb and silent after the harvest and lies there in the pale autumn sunlight, quiet, passive and drowsy ... Afterward comes winter; the peasant in his white coffin, in his new boots and clean shirt, lies down to rest in that earth which has, like him, arrayed itself in a white shroud of mist and has fallen to sleep- that earth whose life he was a part of, which he unconsciously loved, and



together with which he dies, as cold and hard as those ice-covered furrows that nourished him."

### III

I never shall forget the first time I visited the Polish village of Lowicz [Lowicz]. It was Sunday, and when we arrived Mass was being celebrated in the old Abbey Church. The place was packed, with the congregation overflowing at all the doors. A young peasant mother, in brown and orange stripes, knelt by the main entrance with her little three-year-old girl, the child dressed in an exact duplicate of her own gay garb, even to a wee kerchief folded on her baby breast. But oh, how sleepy and noddy she was in her warm Sunday gown!...One or two young fellows, in top boots and long, black much-befrogged and braided coats, loitered by the iron gate. They carried their flat beribboned hats in their hands, and knelt when the Consecration bell rang.

Within, in the dim light of the large church, we could see nothing but a great irregular floor of color, a mass of kneeling people clad in such rainbow hues, such kerchiefs and cloaks and shawls and skirts as I had never seen before, not even in the Warsaw ballet. And then a hymn began; and it grew and grew till the whole church echoed with it, and the kneeling mother by the door and the loiterers by the gate joined in. The little one, her eyes still dewy with sleep, awoke, but she stayed very still. The hymn went on, sad, minor-chorded and chant-like and very long.....

The scene brought back memories of Chenstohova, that chief of all the shrines of Poland, where as many as eighty thousand pilgrims have gathered at one time to kneel and pray for their country. It is an historic spot, the scene of the famous defense of the monks of Yasna Gora [Jasna Gora] against a Swedish invasion in the seventeenth century, and also the shrine of the celebrated "Black Madonna," an ancient painting on wood, so called because of the discoloration with which age has darkened it. According to tradition, this picture was painted by St. Luke the Apostle. It is deeply venerated by all Poles. I have seen thousands of peasant pilgrims kneeling before it, their packs on their backs, their bright garb dusty with travel over many miles on foot. I have heard thousands singing at the altar of Chenstohova, their faces and their voices lifted in rapture as the curtain was slowly raised from the sacred picture, while the organ pealed, and bugles high in the galleries above the shrine blew a thrilling aria of praise.

When the hymn was finished at Lowich that Sunday morning and the congregation began to pour out of the church, the sadness of the peasants' chant was quickly forgotten in the gay picture they made. Such a massing and movement of color it is impossible to describe. I had seen touches of it before at the Diet in Warsaw, or when an occasional peasant appeared in the city streets, or a little group crossed the open fields near the roads where we happened to travel. But here there were hundreds of them, crowding through the big churchyard gates, streaming into the wide street and the square beyond, all clad in their famous rainbow wool, a great animated blur of color, rich and bright and gay, like an illuminated page from a story-book come suddenly to life.



The men's trousers, tucked into high boots, and the women's skirts, all were of the famous Lowich wool, broad striped, dyed much in canary yellow and orange, alternating with blacks and browns, violet and amaranth, rich chocolate hues, deep purples, green and rose and cream color. But yellow seemed to prevail, a yellow so radiant and luminous that I can liken it to nothing so much as to the hue of the California poppy.

The men's vests were very gay, but their coats were more sober, black, long, and much befrogged and trimmed with braid. The women's fancy aprons and their cloaks, very full and gathered at the neck, were of a piece with their skirts; and their skirts were so ample, one might think they were wearing hoops. Most of them wore high-laced boots, the laces of a color to match the dress; a few wore tan top boots, cut like a cavalryman's. Many carried their cloaks on their arms, displaying linen bodices literally crusted with rich colored embroidery. Around their necks endless chains of coral or amber beads; on their heads kerchiefs, tied close if they were matrons, worn loose if they were unmarried, with long braids reaching below their waists.

When a Polish peasant girl marries, she cuts her hair and binds her brow with a tight kerchief of wifehood. But she dresses none the less prettily whether she shows her braids or not. And she clings to this gaiety of raiment even into old age; she walks all her days in its rainbow hues. We saw scores of tots, some blue eyed and flaxen hair, some dark as gypsies, like dolls out of the Warsaw shops, clinging to their mothers or their grannies' skirts. The grannies, too, though wrinkled and grey, were dressed in the gayest of Sunday "rainbows."

The hand of nature weaves a bright thread through the whole fabric of the Polish peasant's life. Flowers especially play an intimate part in his history—at his christening, at his betrothal, at his wedding. A christening in Poland is a joyous affair, while to witness a Polish wedding is a privilege not to be forgotten. If it be summer, bride and groom are wreathed with flowers. On the eve of betrothal her bridesmaids have crowned the bride-to-be with rosemary, barberry blossoms, rue and the green leaves of the periwinkle; but on the wedding day her crown is a much gayer one, of daisies, rosebuds, whatever flowers the season affords, built high like a coronet and tied with streamers of multi-colored ribbon worked in rich patterns of flowers and leaves, these ribbons themselves telling a gay story, since they are the traditional gift of Polish peasant beaux to their ladies; a girl's collection of streamers on her wedding day representing the extent of her popularity in maidenhood. There is dancing on the lawn, a feast spread out of doors; or else, if it be fall or winter, in the house, where the tables creak under their festive load. The cup of cheer brims for days before and after, to welcome any and every guest, friend or stranger, who happens along. The bridesmaids sing; the older folks chat in the corners; the dancing keeps up for hours, till the sod thunders or the floor of the cottage trembles under the gay stamp of boots. The wedding cake, which in the eastern border region is called "korowaju," has a very special significance, and must be first cut by the "match-makers," usually the godparents of the bridal couple. After the wedding, when the bride first enters her new home, she is welcomed with the traditional gift of bread and salt, symbol of homely plenty; and this is a custom equally honored among the gentry.

Sometimes a Polish wedding lasts for days. I went to one Saturday evening in the district of Lodz. We danced till six o'clock the next morning -there was no breaking away; left for Liskow; returned Monday night - and found the wedding still going on! But, elaborate as the affair was, the piece de resistance of the feast was truly a reminder of war times. Plain rabbit. There was fun and hospitality enough, however, to more than make up for all the fatted capons in Europe.

Summer evenings the peasants often set their table out of doors, eating their simple fare in the shade of the family apple tree. Then they have music, of flute or fiddle, and they sing and chat till the frogs begin their nocturnal chant. The stork on the roof has already given the signal. The old Polish legend says that what the frogs sing when bedtime comes and the stork, their daytime enemy, disappears in his nest, is a joyous refrain, "The stork is dead! the stork! the stork!" - first the froggy chorus leader, then a duet; a quartette; finally a vociferous song in unison, "The stork is dead! Kro-ak! Kro-ak! Hurrah-h- h!" The peasant who told us this, having talked of the problems of his country and his kind, particularly of invading Bolsheviks and Germans, smiled dryly at the frogs and said, "But he isn't dead. He'll eat them again

tomorrow, if they don't look out." Frogs, as it happens, figure a good deal in Polish folklore and fairy tales, and give rise to many proverbs, such as the classic, "Frogs in the pond know nothing of the sea."

The peasant's work is hard and his hours are long. But if he and his kind are a quiet lot, not given to loquacity, they seem to be always ready to sing. In the fields they improvise songs as they go along, with tunes that are always melodious, and words that are either witty or sharp or very tender and sad. They set all their thoughts and feelings to impromptu music. It was from long days listening to peasant melodies that Chopin drew much of the material embodied in his immortal compositions.

The Polish peasants are a long-lived and prolific race, age into the nineties being common, and families always large. They are vegetarians in spite of their heavy toil; yet what strength, what ruddy skin, what clear good-humored eyes. The men are big framed fellows often of almost giant stature, and strong as oxen. When they appear, as I have seen them on occasion, in the uniform of their military service, wearing the enormously tall caps of the Ulans, for instance, they are veritable giants. Powerful, broad-backed, with the stamp of the wind and sun on them; they are a hardy, sturdy people, women as well as men; the women (as I have frequently seen them in wartime) doing the tasks not only of the men but of the beasts, drawing plough or wagon like horse or oxen. In the mountain districts I have seen men bearing a strange resemblance to our southwest Indians, almost bronze in coloring, high cheekbones and supple. Their costume, brightly trimmed with braid and buttons and beads, and their white wool close-fitting trousers cut to the shape of the leg and slit at the ankle, not unlike the buckskin breeches of the Indian, heightened the effect, which was completely topped off by the "ciupapa" or mountaineer's stick, the handle of which is practically a tomahawk.



#### IV

The peasant of Poland has a deep-seated respect for books and learning. He takes readily to schooling, and is already making the most of the new educational laws of the country, which are not by any means designed exclusively for the younger generation. Numbers of men and women of middle age may be seen already attending the evening classes opened in towns and villages, figures which would be pathetic were it not for the admirable pluck they show studying their ABC's and trying to learn to spell and write. Pupils of this kind are far from being ignorant, however, for their general knowledge of Polish history and geography is much greater than might be expected, thanks to the traditional teaching of the countryside, which usually has had its centre in the manor house. That the peasant's eagerness for learning is fruitful is evidenced in the fact he has already shown his capacity in letters and art and affairs by giving some of the best-known men of the nation to public life. Witos, the prime minister of the Republic today, is a peasant.

The whole subject of Polish art and architecture might be touched upon here, in relation to the peasant for it is an interesting fact that through all the centuries during which Polish culture developed, inevitably shaped and moulded by France and Italy, the arts and crafts of the Polish peasant remain untouched by outside influence. While the formal architecture of Poland, for example, passed through the varying stages of Roman and Renaissance and Baroque, common to all European countries, the Polish peasant learned to build his house and his church in a style uniquely his own, designing its steep roofs with their sloping curves and wide eaves - like the careful topping-off of a grain stack - to shed the heavy snows and rains of his northern climate. In woodcraft and weaving, pottery and basketwork too, he and his

women-folk made their own expressive way from aboriginal crudity to finished art, developing a mode of line and symbol unlike any other in the world, except it be, curiously enough, that of our southwestern Indians, whose bright colors and stripes, at their best, often resemble the more primitive Polish peasant handcraft.

In this regard, it is interesting to note the strange fact that, in far off Europe, the peasant of the Polish plain, without any possible foreign inspiration, invented the art of Batik supposed to have originated solely in Batavia; exactly the same process of designing and coloring with wax springing up ages ago in these two immensely different lands. In Poland it began with the coloring and picturing of eggs, at a time when Christianity, just introduced, appropriated the old Festival of Spring to the celebration of Easter; and this fact brings up another interesting detail of the history of the peasant and his art. It was due to the foresight of Italian and French missionaries that the faith finally took root in the Polish soil, at a time when its introduction was being fiercely resented because the earlier German missionaries had ruthlessly stripped the land of every sign and symbol of its heathen age, stamping the iron "verboten" of the Teuton on all the old customs and usages grown dear to the people from immemorial ages. The Italians, knowing better than that, followed the wise policy of the early Church in Rome. Instead of tearing down the old pagan structure of festival and folklore, they put a Christian blessing on it and preserved it with a new significance.

Today it is from the peasant art of Poland, thus originating in the very soil and thus preserved, that the modern art of the country is drawing its strongest inspiration. One needs to see with his own eyes the rich and curious designing of Polish peasant furniture, wood-carving, leather-embossing, pottery, rug-weaving or embroidery, to realize what a fund of originality it furnishes to the artist of the new Poland; a glimpse, for example, at the treasure—chest of a peasant bride—a treasure in itself of delicate carving and chasing and coloring, almost Oriental in the sumptuous intricacies of its deep-cut lines and figures. So also in the case of architecture: the whole story of modern building design in Poland today draws its inspiration from peasant origin. And so also, as time goes on, the whole structure of the new Poland of modern times will draw much of its strength and stability from the peasant, the Christian God-fearing Catholic man of the soil.



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## Pierogi Must Be Polish by Trina Goss Galauner

Article originally appeared in Our Polish Ancestor / Polish Genealogical Society of Greater Cleveland (December 2018)

Pierogi have been a staple of the Polish American dinner table for generations. But where and when were pierogi invented? And is pierogi indeed a Polish creation?

The word “pierogi” is plural for pierogi and is a generic term for a filled dumpling. It is derived from the Slavic languages where it has many different spellings.

One theory of the origin of pierogi is that as the Tatars and Mongols advanced across Muscovy (now Russia) they brought with them the concept of the stuffed dumpling which they obtained from the Far East. The Chinese made a type of filled dumpling called *jiaozi*/ *These are thought to have been created during the Eastern Han dynasty around 25-220 AD.*

*Another theory is that pierogi were originally developed by the Kievan Rus’ people (Ruthenians) and introduced to Poland by Polish Friar Hyacinth Konski Odrowgi (St. Hyacinth) in the 13th century. As a Dominican missionary, he established monasteries all over Ruthenia undoubtedly picking up their culture, traditions and recipes along the way.*

*In one of St. Hyacinth’s documented miracles a hail storm in 1238, in the mountain village of Koscielce, destroyed the village’s crops. The holy man’s pleas for the people to pray to God miraculously saved the harvest with which the people made pierogi for St. Hyacinth in thanksgiving. Another story claims the harvest with which the people made pierogi for St. Hyacinth in thanksgiving. Another story claims that St. Hyacinth fed people pierogi during a famine caused by a Tatar invasion.*

*These stories of St. Hyacinth and pierogi have led to his being named the patron saint of pierogi. The expletive “Swiety Jacek z pierogami!” which literally means “St. Hyacinth and his pierogi” is an expression of surprise, astonishment or disbelief, similar to “good grief.”*



Pierogi first appeared in a cookbook in 1682 when the head chef at the court of the house of Lubormirski, Stanisław Czerniecki, published the *Compendium Ferculorum* in Polish, dedicating it to Princess Helena Tekla Lubomirska. Czerniecki's pierogi contained meat or were of the sweet, dessert variety.

When potatoes were introduced to Eastern Europe in the late 1700s, Ruthenians started filling their pierogi with potatoes, farmer's cheese (twarog) and onions. Today they are called *Ruskie pierogi* which literally means "Ruthenian pierogi" and they are probably the type of pierogi we most associate with our Polish American heritage. But, this variety is not the most popular in Poland. Poles more often fill their pierogi with ground meat, mushrooms, cabbage or berries.

Polish immigrants brought their pierogi recipes to the U.S. and the Ruskie pierogi evolved into the potato and cheddar cheese pierogi, the most popular variety in the U.S. today. According to local legend, pierogi was first served in a restaurant setting in the U.S. during the depression when the Marton House Tavern in Cleveland served pierogi to unemployed steel workers. Ted Twardzik, whose ancestors came from southeastern Poland, established Mrs. T's Pierogies in 1952, providing frozen pierogi for sale in supermarkets.

So it's hard to say where a dough filled pocket of filling was first conceived of and created. But the Polish people certainly made it a worldwide sensation and gave it a name that will forever be synonymous with Polish ethnicity.

\*\*\*\*\*

Interested in more information on pierogi — check out

Polish Food 101—Pierogi at <https://culture.pl/en/article/polish-food-101-pierogi>

The Pierogi Renaissance: How Poland's most famous dish is reinventing itself at <https://culture.pl/en/article/the-pierogi-renaissance-how-polands-most-famous-dish-is-reinventing-itself>

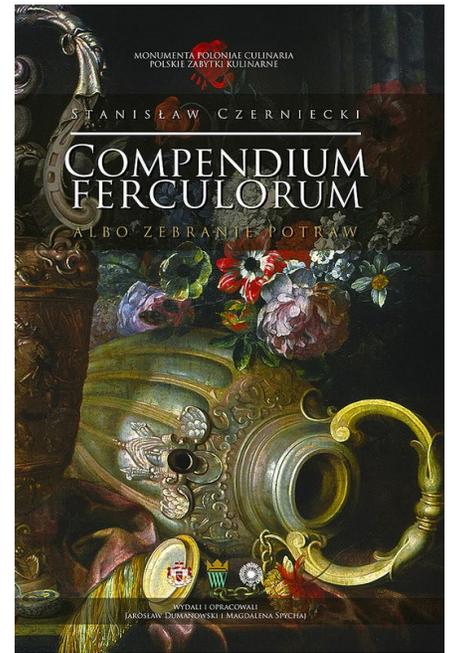
The dumpling that comforts Poland at <http://www.bbc.com/travel/gallery/20181218-the-dumpling-that-comforts-poland>

Exploring Pierogi: The Polish dumplings at <https://delishably.com/world-cuisine/Exploring-Pieroges>

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Research in Prussian Poland—Online tutorial  
<https://www.familysearch.org/ask/learningViewer/418> (in English)

This tutorial discusses the most important websites used in the "Prussian" area of Poland prior to WWI (including Pommern, East and West Prussia, Silesia, Posen and Brandenburg.)



Mentioned many times in *Compendium ferculorum*, the first Polish cookbook of 1682. The author included the first recipe for pierogi in the chapter with meat dishes. pierogi were either fried in olive or oil, or baked. Pierogi were very domesticated in the Polish cuisine of the 17th century with a multitude of recipes for pierogi that surprises foreign visitors has existed for at least three hundred years.

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