

## ***DROBNE ECHA***

From *Wiarus*, 1893, 1905, and 1908  
Dateline: Virginia, Minnesota and Bessemer-  
Ironwood, Michigan

By Greg Kishel

To my own personal delight, I found with the help of Ray Marshall and John Radziłowski that *Wiarus* published three major items of correspondence datelined in my home town. These pieces appeared contemporaneously with the foundation and first growth of St. John the Baptist, the parish in which I grew up. They're remarkable for their vigor, sauciness, and vividness. Over the course of a year, I translated all three--and had a lot of fun doing it. Here they are, with an earlier *Wiarus* report datelined in the Upper Peninsula. That one may explain why that first group of Poles left Ironwood for the Mesabi Range.

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From *Wiarus*, August 24, 1905:  
VIRGINIA, Minn.

Around 60 Polish families reside in Virginia, dispersed among a diverse group of nationalities. To date they have not had their own national parish church; only now has the Lord come to their aid, such that they have built themselves a place of worship. They have their own Polish priest in the person of the esteemed Father Michał SINGER [SENGIR], of whom all of them have become fond and who delivers beautiful sermons to them. The chief founder of the new church is Mr. J. F. MUSIAŁ, a good Catholic and a true member of the old guard; one should take an example from him. Given time, the new parish will be improved, because each Pole readily gravitates to such a church in order to hear the Word of God interpreted in his own ancestral tongue. -- No wonder that the gossips went to their neighbors and talked it around among themselves over a glass of beer, because they had to have something to do while their men were working arduously in the mills.

Mr. J. F. MUSIAŁ is the proprietor of a large tailor shop... \*\*\*\*\* In Virginia our countryman Mr. Marcin MUSIAŁ has a saloon, the Poles should give their support to their own... \*\*\*\*\*

A WELL-WISHER.

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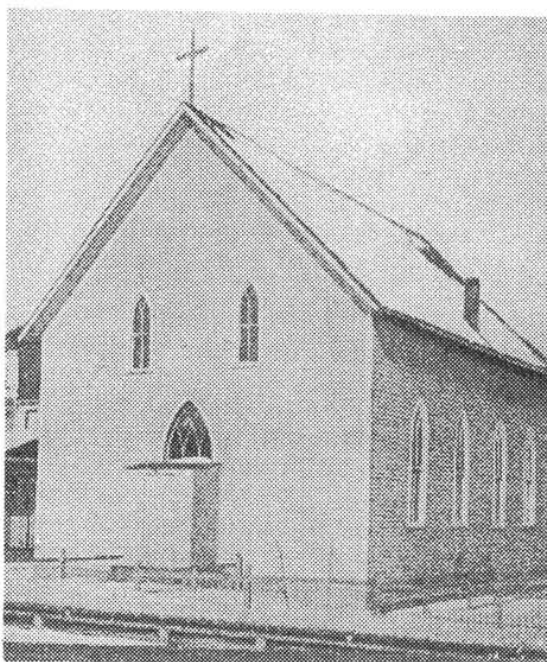
From *Wiarus*, September 14, 1905:  
FROM VIRGINIA, Minn.

Wherever Polish people gather, they immediately set to work to support the belief in Christ. In cities and towns alike we find churches and chapels where the word of God is declaimed in the tongue of our motherland. Our people love each other in their belief in Jesus and they also willingly teach their offspring to do so, because they build schools--one might call them mother schools--in which the little children learn religion, morality, and the language of their forefathers. Thus the education of young people is improved and by this design they are better people.

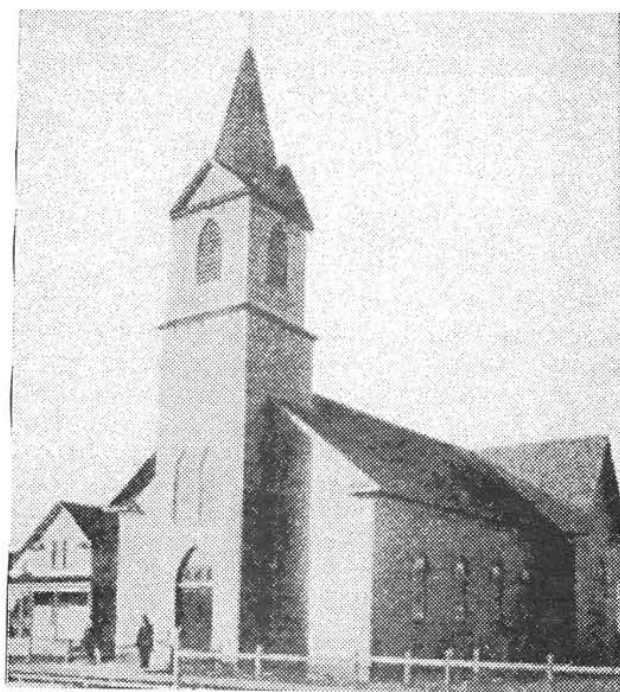
Thus it happens that even among farming people, to the extent that they can afford it, they build churches and places for the nurture of their children, in order to carry this on. Truth to tell, the heart of a fellow smiles when he visits such a progressive parish, and it does him good to be there. Still, everyone is not able to travel to such concentrated settlements to inquire after news of the wellbeing of his countrymen, because the trip may cost a lot of money. Not everyone is able to live in large cities, or in large parishes; that may be an impossibility for some.

Because the Poles are scattered over nearly the whole of the United States, accordingly, only from the newspapers do many such individuals learn about the circumstances of their countrymen who live here and elsewhere. Also, not all Poles have their own Polish church, because a great many of them are mixed in with the Irish in one church, or--what is worse--with the Germans, and for the most part the latter are present in large numbers. As long as a house of God like that remains in debt, the Pole is a welcome and careful parishioner; but as soon as the said Irishman or the German sees that the debt is repaid, out from the manor-house with the Pole. Willy-nilly the Pole must depart and he says, only too late: "Oy! If I would have known thus I never would have given so much money for that church." Thus it is said: Only after the damage is the Pole wise. Nonetheless, in such a situation the Pole does not drop off to sleep and he does not lose hope.

The Lord always chooses something to progress for the sake of the common good. Though at the beginning a small handful of Poles sets to work to build a church, they persevere to the end and they achieve it by themselves. Although they have to carry a great burden, it does not fall on the roof; they continue to eagerly make their offerings in the praise of God, and for their own benefit.



Original building of St. John's ,  
prior to addition of steeple and transept.  
Source: 1908 Industrial Edition of  
*Virginia Enterprise*.



Original building of St. John's,  
after addition of steeple and transept.  
Source: Virginia High School yearbook,  
1909.

One after another encourages, "Brothers, let us not give the Irishmen and Germans reason to laugh at us." Sometimes flattery is used by such a penny-snatcher to trick a few dollars from the Poles for its own church, but this does not succeed often at present.

It was desired to use this plan here, in this town; however, it was unsuccessfully tried because the Poles smelled the message with their noses and gave the Irishman a rebuff.

Presently there are two parishes here, one Polish-Slovakian and the second Irish. Up to a few months ago, and for the preceding twelve years, there was but one church, rather than two. A new church building of brick was desired for the Irish; the Irish thought that when the Poles were with them it would be easy to pay off such debt. When building a church, it is necessary to build a new rectory also, and that house was raised first; but that was not the end of it, more money was needed.

The Irish priest, a very exemplary and energetic pastor, resolved on a tithe of twenty-five dollars per each Polish family. The Poles regarded this tax unfavorably and some of them anticipated the time when it would be put into effect. Well, it began that one to

another asked what their views were; said Kuba to Bartek, "What do you think of this tax?" Kuba being Kuba, lacking knowledge, and Bartek being no better, did not know enough about it to state an opinion. But once the Irish priest definitely began to insist on the money, a swarming began immediately among the Poles. And then Bartek, not being a yokel, said, "I am not giving, because once I did they would repay us."(?)

A Polish meeting was called; with few exceptions, every Pole appeared. Citizen Jan MICHAN made a motion that the Poles no longer belong to the Irish church because there the fish are uncertain. He said, "If we have to give up to twenty-five dollars there anyway, we could set up our own cashbox and could deposit \$25.00 for the foundation of a Polish parish, and we would have a Polish parish." All supported that motion, and of one mind they united in the project. Soon enough money was collected, and lots for a church and rectory were purchased on the same block on which the Irish church stood.

Ill-tempered about all of this, the Irish priest began to make inquiry, wishing to prevent the Poles from completing the work; however, he was already too late. In order to pour out his vengeance on the Poles,

the same well-meaning pastor said "As long as I am here, the Poles will not build their own church." But, despite such laudable wishes, in the end he had to give the old church building to the Poles and to move it at his own expense to their lot.

In the interior of the church, all had been wrecked; there were no pews, nor an altar nor even one thing left where the altar had been.

At the end of March this year, the bishop sent a priest to the newly-founded parish. There was no rectory; hence he had to stay with one of the parishioners and boarded with others.

But shortly it was thus. A house was purchased for \$1,225.00 for a rectory; they obtained it at little cost even though it was a splendid house. However, it was necessary to have it moved, which they did on sticks somewhat larger than those that serve for the cleaning of teeth. The moving of the building cost \$300.00; the repair of the church cost \$375.00; \$131.00 was collected for a monstrance; pews were purchased for \$300; citizen KICHAN [MICHAN?] made a gift of a mantel of a value of \$50.00; Mr. Wojciech CZAJKA made a gift of a thurible of a value of \$15.00. Thus there were now the church, the rectory, and the Polish priest, and thus were frustrated the previous words: "As long as I will be here I will not permit a second priest."

At present the parish numbers 75 families: 50 Polish and the remainder Slovaks and other nationalities. With the help of God and the good intentions of the people this parish will proceed to greater improvements, but still it will not be necessary to regret sacrifice and generosity. There is more than enough opportunity for the improvement of everything, if in solidarity and unity the people quietly join hands, and one day undoubtedly this parish will rise with great power.

Now our local brothers and sisters in Christ will have to contribute more to the work around the church than before, because no one can use the excuse of not understanding the priest for not contributing to the church.

And now a few words about Virginia. And thus a trip to that place! It is situated on the train line called the Duluth, Missabe & Northern, which leaves Duluth at 7:40 a.m., and has a second train at 3:50 p.m. This train races two miles over the lowlands, after which it must climb the Duluth uplands. This little iron dog goes chug, chug, puff and puff, puff to itself, as it climbs up the bald mountain hilltop of Duluth.

One must then travel 73 miles to our city. Toward the end of the journey they cry out, "Next station, Virginia," "Virginia," and yet again "Virginia"; one would think that this fellow is never going to stop crying out, "Virginia." This name, Virginia, comes from the Latin *Virgo*, and this means "virgin." For a few years, this town gave forth a fragrance of virginity (?), and even the nose and eyes had to be covered; however, through the good effort of Mayor FAY this town clothed itself in a different form.

Virginia is built on a level area three miles square, surrounded by hills like a crown woven from roses.

Great wealth in iron ore is found in the embankments of these hills. Virginia numbers more than five thousand inhabitants of various calibres and nationalities, Catholic and non-Catholic together as if they were a mixture of peas and cabbage.

Thus the city is growing considerably; over the whole year there is enough work in the mines, in the city, and in the sawmill, day and night the work continues.

According to the most recent rumors a second sawmill has to be built this year or the next; it will employ about 500 people. Whatever the work is, the Poles have priority in getting hired because they are not as eager to strike as the Finlanders and the Italians are.

If today there were five times as many Poles here, every one would get work. Polish craftsmen of almost every occupation would be able to find employment for themselves.

For example, a good carpenter receives up to four dollars a day and more; masons also earn good money. If our esteemed countrymen in the big cities are without work and are squeezed together like bees in a hive, these excess swarms should fly forth to the north and be responsible for themselves now that the Poles are building such a straw hive for themselves there; they will find an occupation here and they will be content. They forecast that next year there will be still more work here, because new mines will be opening.

The more that finished goods of iron are in demand, the more ore is extracted from the mines.

You countrymen on those meager farms out in the woods, desert your hoes, axes, and plows! You are enriching only the shopkeepers, and you will lack freedom all the way unto death.

You work from dawn all the way to dark, as long as you are able to see in front of yourself, but what sort of advantage do you have from such work? It's uncertain. Look here, countryman! You went as a young person to the farm in the woods; you have worked on it ten years and more; you have cut the wood and then had to turn it over to the shopkeeper for food, not only for your family but also for the livestock, because there are no oats for the horses and the hay ran short.

Start out with debt and you are in debt; you will not pay it off, it will carry over from one winter to the second, and thus later it gets to where the shopkeeper says, "I cannot give provisions to you like before, unless you give me a mortgage on your livestock or on your farm." The time comes for repayment of this debt, which is thus stuck to you when you don't have the money and thus you are compelled to leave farming, like a young girl from a dance. Your situation at the finish is worse than at the beginning. Your children are living without education, because you needed every hand for the clearing of so many stumps; your toil-worn little children scarcely can shuffle their legs one after the other; sometimes in spite of all their work they must go to sleep cold and with empty stomachs.

The truth is, nowhere do roast pigeons fall into the mouth by themselves; however, it is entirely different in places of plentiful wages.

A fellow will make from \$2.75 to \$3.00 per day for himself, and will be able to dress handsomely, will eat well, and will drink champagne. The little children have full access to school inasmuch as they need not miss it on account of work, because there is no need for them to work.

Although a friend is angry with his comrade now and again, he does not long look askance at him. "Hey!" says one to the other, "what will we have to worry about. May the good old days dawn on us once again; let's drink to the souls of our mothers, and thus they will put an end to our worries, so they won't come back to bother us."

The Polish people in Virginia have a cheerful life for themselves; among them there is no poverty; though with a little candle you could look for it among them, you will not find it. On the other hand, when poverty shows itself to anyone, not long will it prevail, because there is enough gunpowder and dynamite to blow up its armor, or to dispatch it in its entirety to the Russians.

Countrymen, come to us; this place will be enough for you; there is work for the taking and money for the making; there will be a great throng of us, and the Italians and the Finlanders will flee before us.

ONE FROM THE PARISH.

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From *Wiarus*, January 7, 1909:  
VIRGINIA, Minn.

I respectfully ask for the kind placement of these several words in *Wiarus*.

The day of November 30 will long be remembered by we Poles in Virginia, Minn., because on that day our countryman, the Very Reverend Bishop Paweł RHODE, arrived here, through the efforts of our parish priest, The Reverend Father SENGIER. At the same time there arrived the priests Fathers BĄCZYK, ICIEK and LASKOWSKI. Our parish priest, Father HAGAN [sic; should be "HOGAN"], Father BILBAN, and also the societies went to the train station to meet these distinguished guests. Under the leadership of the undersigned, in the capacity of a captain, the members of the societies were drawn up in rows, like soldiers off to battle. From the train station we set forth via Chestnut Street and at length we came to a stop. We escorted the reverend Bishop to the rectory. After just five minutes the Bishop came out of the rectory, surrounded by the priests. Going before the main doors of the church, the Bishop said a prayer and consecrated the renovated church, after which the priests said a litany before the large altar. After that was finished, Father BĄCZYK celebrated a High Mass, during which Bishop RHODE gave a beautiful sermon. After the completion of the services, the Bishop gave the people his personal blessing. Although the weather was not favorable (because the snow was falling and it was wet), the church was overflowing with the faithful.

The Polish settlement in Virginia, Minn., has been in existence since 1892. Nearly on the very edge of our country, because it is only 86 miles from the Canadian border, there were only a few of us roving Poles here in the beginning. In association with the Irish and the French, we constructed a church. For a priest, we received Father KRANIEC, who could speak only a little Polish. Still, we did not decline in spirit. In 1895, I established the Society of St. John the Baptist, and in the following year, on March 9, we rose under the standard of the Polish National Alliance in the capacity of Group 297. For twelve years we lived here, harmoniously and happily like

brothers of one mother. Once per year, there came to us various Polish priests: Father SROKA, Father M. SENGIER (currently our parish priest), Father BABIŃSKI, and Father LASKOWSKI. These chaplains reinforced us with spiritual comfort. Finally, Father BABIŃSKI came to my tailor shop and said: "Dear friend! Seek a little home for your Poles, because the Irish soon will be expelling you."

In 1902, together with the Irish, we Poles started to build a new church at a cost of more than \$13,000.00, and the old church was transferred to the lots that were being reserved for the parish school. The next year the church already was near completion, but then the bishop from Duluth took Father BILBAN away from us and transferred him to Eveleth, and gave us Father HOGAN, an Irishman, in his place. This one at once removed me from the post of collector of tithes, and put an Irishman in my place. From his position, he lent the best of everything to the Irishmen. And what is worst, he began to hear confessions through a translator, because he was not able to speak Polish. To the ailing Maryanna DYLEWSKA he gave penance through a translator, even though it was possible for her to have received it through Father BILBAN in Eveleth (because that place is close by). The people fiercely resented that.

I had resolved to cover the cost of a trip to Duluth, so that I could go to the bishop and could petition that Father BILBAN be sent back to us. I presented this matter to the bishop, but the bishop answered in the negative: "I gave you Father HOGAN, so listen to him, and if you do not know the English language, then you will learn it." I returned home with nothing, and I related the whole matter to my countrymen. But then we seized the occasion by the forelock.

With two others, in the capacity of a committee, we went to Eveleth, to Father BILBAN, so that he could write a letter to the bishop in Duluth for us. Father BILBAN satisfied our request and immediately furnished us with a rough draft of a letter. My little girl copied the letter over to a neat form and we sent it. In a short time, we received a response from the bishop. The bishop gave me permission for the organization of a new parish, but he laid down the condition that he was not giving us a permanent pastor, only one priest who would be coming once a month.

So I went from one Pole to another and I showed the letter from the bishop, that gave me permission for the organization of a new parish. Some of our countrymen leaped all the way up from great joy; others said that hair would sooner grow on the palms of their hands, than MICHAN would bring this about

by himself. I assembled a parish meeting on the 23rd day of October and I showed all present the letter from Bishop McGOLRICK. A parish committee was immediately elected at the meeting, of the following makeup: J.F. MICHAN, president; Antoni SZYMONIAK, secretary; Franciszek TRAMPUSH, treasurer; CZAJKA and MUSZEWSKI, guardians. Immediately we imposed a tax as well: \$25 per family, and for single people \$10. On that note, this conference was concluded.

On the second day, Father BILBAN came to me from Eveleth and asked, "What's new, MICHAN?" "Everything is well," I replied. "I received permission from the bishop and also elected a parish committee." On that, Father BILBAN said: "Very fine, MICHAN, but listen to me now: those lots, which were purchased for a parish school several years ago, and on which the old church now stands, belong to me, and I have legal title to them. I will now sell those lots to you for the price I paid for them, with an additional charge of five percent, which makes \$557 in all." We were in agreement and that was that! I promised the priest that I would deliver the money in a few days. That night I was not able to sleep, thinking only to myself, how those Irishmen would be caught on the fishing rod.

On the second day I went to TRAMPUSZ and told him, that I was going to Eveleth, to buy the lots from the priest. He went with me immediately, he harnessed the horse to the wagon, and we left; and in half an hour we were there already. We paid the money, Father BILBAN gave us the legal title in proper order--and the lots were ours. "Now," we thought to ourselves, "my clever Irishman, the Pole has you in a snare!"

After we returned to the city, I went resolutely and cheerfully to Father HOGAN. I said to him that we had organized a Polish parish, and we were demanding that the old church be returned to us, the one that was known to have been built in part with our money. To that Father HOGAN said: "I am not giving the church to you, because we need it for a school, and you Poles must hearken to me for two years more; after two years, I will give you permission for that." "Well," I said, "I already have permission." "From whom?" "From Bishop McGOLRICK. And the lots are mine, and that which stands on them, that also belongs to me." "And how are they yours?" "Because I bought them." "From whom?" "From Father BILBAN. And I ask that the old church be returned to us, because it justly belongs to us Poles."

After long negotiations it ended up that Father

At right:

**Father Michael SENGIR  
and PNA honor guard.**

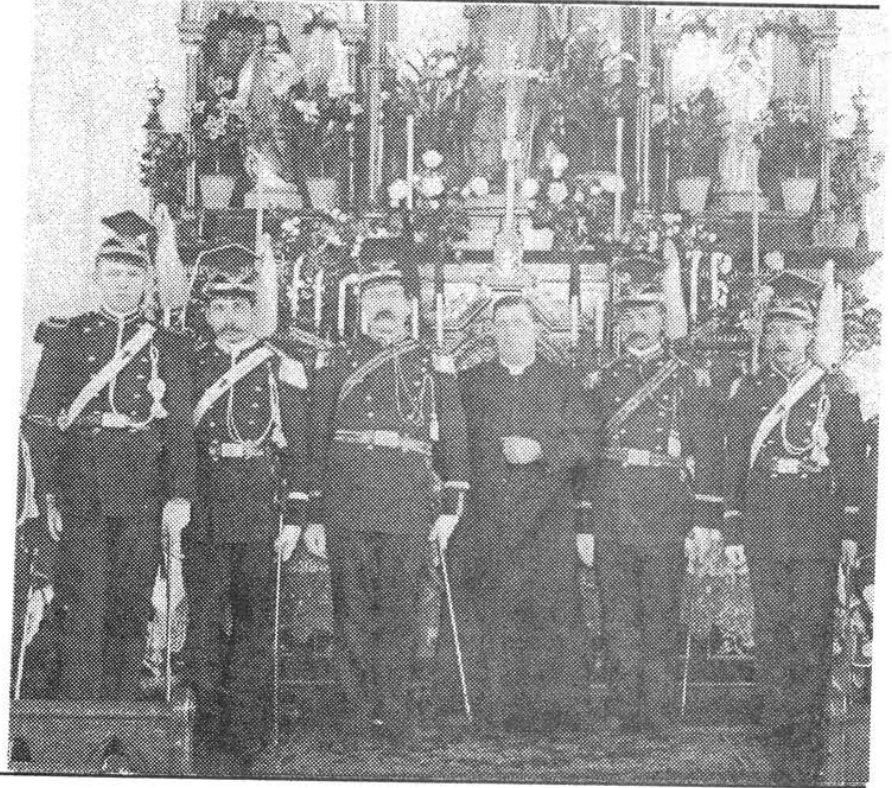
From left:

Joe GUSSMAN,  
Adam BOHO,  
Jan MICHAN,  
Father Sengir,  
Peter GUSSMAN  
unknown.

Date unknown.

Source:

Virginia Area  
Historical Society  
photo collection.



HOGAN returned the old church to us, but he ordered it to be taken away, so that it was not standing close to the new church, even if that were beyond the very edge of the town. He declared this to us at a parish meeting that he had called himself, in the presence of all the Irish parishioners. "I am not consenting to that," I answered, "The lots are mine and the church must remain on them." "When we need those lots for the parish school!" shouted Father HOGAN. "Then give us, in exchange for them, the four lots that are on the right side of the church," responded TRAMPUSZ.

And thus it then stood. On the second day, immediately in the morning, the Irishmen got to work and brought the church to those lots. In such a way, all of this work was finished by January 9, 1905, and the new parish was incorporated on January 21 of that year, under the patronage of St. John the Baptist.

So we had come one step forward. At once I gave a contract for the repair of the church, at a cost of \$247. On February 12 I went to Eveleth, in order to take a plan from the steeple on the church there, for the purpose of constructing the same sort of steeple on our church. I called on Father BILBAN there and he told me that he had received a letter from the bishop, with the information that the bishop already had a priest for us. "Instead of building a steeple, MICHAN, it is better to make efforts for a rectory," said Father BILBAN to me.

Good counsel, but how was it to be accomplished? And yet right away I learned about a sturdy little house, suitable for a priest's dwelling place. On the next day Father BILBAN came to us with Father SENGIER--this had to be our future priest. So I showed him that little house, and I asked if it would be good for a rectory. "Yes," he replied, "buy it right away." So we bought it, and in another couple of days Father SENGIER came to us. In a word, I can say, in the space of two weeks everything was already in complete order, and the debt for the parish was only \$1,600.

Father SENGIER assumed the administration of our parish on April 1, 1905; he immediately set to work, and has been working to the present day. Within two years the aforementioned debt was already repaid in its entirety; and, in the current year, through the efforts of our new parish priest, we took another step forward, since we completed the construction of a 36-foot church and a steeple 12 feet by 12, and 85 feet in height. In such a way, we showed the Irishmen what we Poles are capable of doing!

And in all of this the principal merit of our priest, is that after the construction the church presents itself so magnificently and the steeple is so beautiful. At six o'clock in the morning he has been celebrating Mass, and at seven he was already working on the construction with hammer and a carpenter's square in hand,

was watching over all, and was ordering people to keep working so they would not laze. And thus now the Irishmen, as they pass nearby, open their eyes wide like onions, and they say, "This too that Polish priest has accomplished with his Poles!"

Thus, it also is not strange that the Polish parishioners are deeply grateful to their priest for his pains and labors. Two local women, Mrs. DOMINKA with her neighbor, even took a collection and gathered \$53 for a sheepskin coat for the priest, because the winter here is harsh, but with a good sheepskin coat he will not be cold. In the church, our priest publicly thanked these two women and the whole parish alike, and said that he did not require a thing more for his work.

Now I speak on behalf of the whole parish, and offer heartfelt greetings and thanks to our priest. Through the drops of sweat that he has shed for us, let us all wish our Reverend Father benefactor an old-fashioned Polish "Bóg zapłać!"

J. F. MICHAN

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...and, from *Wiarus*, December 14, 1893:

IN THE IRON MINES in the vicinity of Bessemer and Ironwood, Michigan, as well as Hurley in north-eastern [sic] Wisconsin, there is no longer the work now that there was earlier. This is because there have been found on the other side of Lake Superior, around the Mesaba region in Minnesota, deposits of iron ore that are so very close to the surface of the earth that it does not cost very much to extract it. In some places one needs only a steam shovel to dig out the ore, whereas the excavation of ore by the method of mining, deeply in the earth, costs five times as much. The Poles who set up business in Ironwood and Hurley will be having to sell out for cheap and move out, because where there will be no work, the workers also will be leaving the area. The mills and other sources of earning a living are no longer there, and it is not possible to make a living off the soil, because it is only stone.

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When I first started translating this material, I had no idea how interesting and how historically valuable it would be, for several different reasons.

First, I'll point out a few bits of Polglish that I found in the text. I could not find the word *sztornik* in *Wielki słownik* or any of my other Polish-language

dictionaries, and it drove me crazy for awhile. Finally, from the context, it came to me: this was a hybrid word born in America, the root word being the English "store," rendered in Polish phonetics and then suffixed with -nik to signify "storekeeper" or "shopkeeper"! A more obvious one was *Finlandr*, a word that could have emerged only from the close encounter between Polish and Finnish immigrant populations in the North Country of the Upper Midwest.<sup>1</sup> One I'd seen before in other Polish-American reportage was *mityng*, dropped very accurately into Polish phonetics.

On the plane of historical study, these pieces are actually very good evidence--set down as they were in close proximity to the Poles' defection from the parish of Our Lady of Lourdes. They round out the story from the English-language materials on the foundation of St. John's that I've found so far. The local newspaper reportage seems to have been limited to *The Virginian*; its competitor the *Virginia Enterprise* completely ignored the Poles' institution-building effort, even when a dignitary like Bishop Rhode came to town.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Though I could be accused of ethnic insensitivity, I've translated it directly to the English source word--a term some modern-day Finnish-Americans consider pejorative. (My mother, Virginia-born and of Finnish ancestry on her mother's side, has always used the word quite readily--and so will I.)

<sup>2</sup>The first efforts for a Polish-Slovak parish were noted in *The Virginian* in the issue of December 9, 1904, at p. 5. Then followed "The Polish-Slavonian Parish," *The Virginian*, January 20, 1905, p. 6. Though this story reported that the first pastor would be Father Buh, the Slovenian-born apostle to the Ojibwa who was still serving parishes in Ely and Tower, that changed within several weeks. In that same story, *Virginian* editor David Cuppernull was politic enough to report that "Father Hogan is doing all in his power to make things comfortable and business matters easy for those who have the forming of the parish in hand." *The Virginian* made only sporadic mention of St. John's for several years thereafter--the joint OLL-St. John's confirmation class noted in the issues of September 21 and 28, 1906, and scattered bits on weddings and funerals. Then in 1908 Cuppernull reported the beginnings of Father Sengir's renovation effort: *The Virginian*, June 17, 1908, p. 3 (building ready for plaster work); August 7, 1908, p. 4 ("...Rev. Sengir...uses the square and compass and lays out all the framing and carpentering. He has been a very busy man this season...") After covering Bishop Rhode's visit in the issue of December 1, 1908, he featured a lengthy

I have tried to deduce the author of the unattributed *Wiarus* piece of September 15, 1905.<sup>3</sup> The answer is probably lost in the passing of a century. However, the clues point to Father Sengir himself. There's no mention of him by name, nor praise of his ability, which would be consistent with the humility of a priestly author. The use of metaphor, sometimes flowery, and the exhortative tone sound very much like a homilist.<sup>4</sup> Father Sengir undoubtedly would have been the most formally-educated member of Virginia's Polonia at the time, and the most likely to have a self-consciously literary writing style. Finally, the author had the goal of rapidly growing the local Polish community and the St. John's flock, which of course would have been a natural for Father Sengir. This is all purely textual evidence, of course, but it has some weight.

During this translation I made a broader historiographic discovery as well: these *Wiarus* reports seem to have been the sole (and unattributed) source for

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piece on the 1905 founding, attributed to "(Contributed)." "New Slavonic Catholic Church," *The Virginian*, December 4, 1908, p. 2 ("Rev. Sengir was the boss contractor, architect and carpenter. The work was telling on his hands and steel square. It was a very laborious undertaking. Most of the time the boss and two men were at work and some times only one. Still, perseverance won the battle."). Finally, with a front-page banner headline and a rare locally-taken photograph, *The Virginian* presented a view of the newly-steepled and renovated building. "Virginia's New Slavonic Catholic Church," *The Virginian*, December 15, 1908, p. 1.

<sup>3</sup>The shorter, nastily-toned, and misogynistic item of August 24, 1905 doesn't have the clues that the other piece does.

<sup>4</sup>I really liked the endearing reference to a steam locomotive as a "little iron dog," and the likening of Virginia's surrounding terrain to a red crown captured the look of the hillsides being stripped of their hematite. Perhaps most tellingly, there's the metaphor of the bees and the hive for the ethnic population and the church, one often used by Slavic-American clergymen and one used by that "Contributor" of the December 4, 1908 *Virginian* piece. Finally, there's the use of the ironic "fragrance of virginity" to emphasize-by-contrast the licentious atmosphere of a raw mining town a century ago. It certainly resonates with Shakespeare's "Get thee to a nunnery," at *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, III, i, 121. (Some backdrop on our Polish reporter's little jeremiad, to put his references into context: A successful mining captain and business developer, Mayor Marcus Fay was

Father Waclaw Kruszk's text on Virginia in his *Historia Polska w Ameryce*.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, a broader conjecture on my part: I think these items are significant evidence of the early development of the "Iron Range personality," barely a decade after the Mesabi's first settlements. Those of us who grew up there, or who married into a local family, or who have substantial contact with modern-day Rangers, should recognize a few character traits here. Note the strong sense of ethnic identity, with an undercurrent of sharp competition between ethnic groups in a diverse community; a powerful sympathy for the underdog, and support for his overcoming of the obstacles to his advancement; a canny but sometimes ruthless "political" sensibility; a bit of a chip on the shoulder; a deepening attachment to the harsh but beautiful climate and geography of the area; and a tendency to a bombastic, overstated style of self-expression. Sound familiar? It all does to this son of the Mesabi.

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elected in 1903. He immediately cracked down on the gambling and prostitution activity in Virginia that catered to single male lumberjacks and miners. See "Exit Old Enter New," *The Virginian*, January 8, 1904, p.1; "Violated the Ordinance," *The Virginian*, February 26, 1904, p. 4; "The Marble Heart Swells the Receipts of Municipal Court Several Hundred Dollars," *The Virginian*, March 18, 1904, p. 8; "Mayor and Council at War," *The Virginian*, May 20, 1904, p. 4; Marvin Skaurud, *A History of Virginia, Minnesota*, ch. III, p. 41 (unpubl. M.A. thesis, Univ. of Minn, June 1941). For his pains, Mayor Fay was the victim of arson of his horse stables and an attempted bombing of his house. See "Mayor Fay's Home Blown," *The Virginian*, November 18, 1904, p. 5; "Mayor Fay Victim of Fire Bug," *The Virginian*, January 20, 1905, p. 6. Several years later he left Virginia for Duluth. See "Captain M. L. Fay Sells Out," *The Virginian*, November 30, 1906, p. 1; and, in general, Charles E. Ellis, "Captain Marcus L. Fay, One of the Foremost Upbuilders of the Range," *Iron Ranges of Minnesota: Historical Souvenir of the Virginia Enterprise* (Virginia, Minnesota: Virginia Enterprise, 1909), n.p. [p. 20].)

<sup>5</sup>The modern English translation of Father Kruszk's material is found in *A History of the Poles in America to 1908, Part IV: Poles in the Central and Western States* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), pp. 134-135. Kruszk not only quoted directly from the September 14, 1905 report, he repeated the error of the August 24, 1905 report in misidentifying founding father Jan MICHAN with the surname of bartender MUSIAL.