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DROBNE ECHA

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Dateline: Gilman/Alberta

From *Kuryer Polski*, 1909

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Our locale this time is Gilman, post office address Alberta, in Benton County. Gilman was probably the very first area in central Minnesota north of the latitude of the Twin Cities, to start receiving Polish immigrants, and their numbers grew to comprise a relatively large immigrant agricultural community. While looking through Milwaukee's *Kuryer Polski*, 1909, I found the following article in the December 8 issue for that year. It's about a notable event in the community's history, and one of great pride for the local Poles. Since we have a member or two who actually were pupils in the building that is its subject, or whose parents were, I am presenting my translation of this item.

THE POLISH SCHOOL IN GILMAN.

THE CONSTRUCTION WILL BE COMPLETED AT THE
BEGINNING OF 1910.

A short history of the Polish parish in Gilman, Minn. – The school building has a front of 12 windows and is two stories tall.

Gilman, Minn., December 8 – The Poles in Gilman will have one of the most beautiful Polish parish schools in America, the construction of which will cost quite a few pennies; but likewise the edifice will be exceedingly grand. The foundation is already laid under the school and the walls are already in the course of construction. *Drobne Echa* continued page 19

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Drobne Echa

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Upcoming Fall Programs....

Sept. 8 – “Polish Pronunciation for Beginners or How Someone Might Have Misspelled Your Name” – Iwona Srienc

Sept. 29 – Meeting at Little Falls

Nov. 3 – Crystal LDS Library - Hosted by Deb Vevea

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This school stands in the Polish parish of St. Kazimierz. The history of the parish goes back all the way to 1859, that is to say 50 years ago. Barely a few of the first settlers remain.

A short history of the Polish school.

In 1864 Father Józef BUH appeared here on missionary work, he currently being the vicar-general of the Diocese of Duluth. He was the first to assemble the local Catholics; and for the want of a church he celebrated the sacraments in a private home, one that had been built of wood beams and assembled in a hurry.

Later Frs. TYSZKIEWICZ and GRUENHOLZ came here. In the group of the first Polish settlers we find the surnames: ROZMIAREK, PAPPANFUSS, RUDNICKI, LICA, OKONEK, MALICKI, WIŚNIEWSKI, ZYGMAN and a couple of others. At the prompting of Fr. GRUENHOLZ the building of a small chapel was started; and since no permanent pastor at all was appointed here, this chapel then served the need for many years still, and even was enlarged substantially. As priests there also were here: Frs. CHOWANIEC, GOCH and CICHOCKI. Also, there was constructed something like a rectory; in the surviving official records Fr. WÓJCIK recalls that this rectory was six feet from its floor to its ceiling, and that its cellar was of the height of three feet. But it is said that three priests resided in turn in this rectory: Frs. SIEDLECKI, SROKA and WÓJCIK. Fr. WÓJCIK from Buffalo wanted already at that time to build a new more extensive church; but not until after the arrival of Fr. MIKLASZEWSKI was the construction of a new, attractive, and spacious church begun. However, the parishioners had not been rejoicing long over the new building, when a fire started in it from unknown causes and the church was destroyed totally, together with the neighboring rectory.

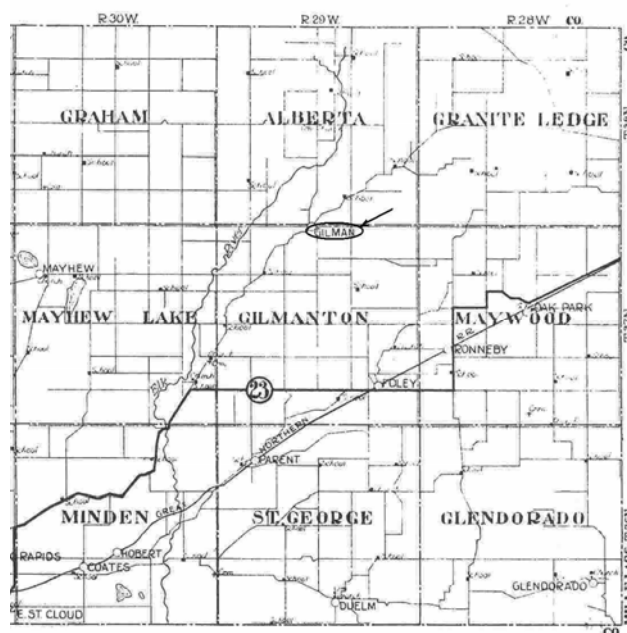
A new large church is built.

Fr. MILASZEWSKI immediately set to the construction of a new temple, which is still the standing parish church now, and which was

dedicated twelve years ago by prelate Fr. J. TROBEC, [currently the bishop of the Diocese of St.]¹ Cloud.

At the time of the dedication of the temple the pastor here was the late Fr. J. BELZOWSKI from Swan River, Minn., who died not long ago. The late Fr. BELZOWSKI was the pastor here through 1898, when Fr. KITOWSKI arrived at the parish. His successor Fr. SUSZCZYŃSKI, on the other hand, was here a very short time.

In June 1906 Fr. J. A. DUDEK, who had been in Browsersville² earlier, took over this parish.



Map Source: *Plat Book of Minnesota; Rockford, Illinois; W.W. Hixson & Co.; 1916; shows a portion of Benton County which includes Gilman*

¹*Transl. note:* The original published text clearly is missing a line or two. I have interpolated the likely content in brackets.

²*Transl. note:* Thus, in original.

The lay sisters will be teaching in the new school.

The education in the newly-erected school, which will be ready at the beginning of 1910, will be managed by the lay sisters of the Academy of St. Joseph from Stevens Point, Wis. At the present moment the parish numbers 400 families and the old school has not been large enough. Also the number of Polish teachers will be increased, since one teacher for 100 or 120 children is not in a position to teach those children anything. If a Polish education is given in the new school effectively and according to current philological requirements, that is that qualified persons are to be engaged in the teaching, the Poles in Gilman will be able to take pride in their work. The school will be under the patronage of St. Wojciech. The structure stands in the center of a spacious plaza; it will have two stories, a front with twelve windows, and a grand front entrance in the style of a gateway. Besides that there are entrances from the sides and the rear of the building. The classrooms in the building are large and light.

* * * * *

When I first came across this report, I was pleased to see its relative length and detail.³ It had most of the things that I like to feature in this series—names of the earliest settlers, some detail on the earliest and ongoing history of the local Polish community and its parish church, some idea of the cohesiveness of that community—so I decided it was worth translating in full and presenting.

Father Kruszka identified Gilman/Alberta as “[s]upposedly, the oldest Polish parish in the

diocese of St. Cloud.”⁴ The enumeration of Polish pioneers in our *Kuryer Polski* report largely coincides with the surnames given for the earliest settlers in the centennial history of the local Roman Catholic parish.⁵

The parish history booklet gives more detail on the first log church building (1872), which was dedicated to St. Wenceslaus, and which was replaced by a frame structure dedicated to St. Casimir (with the log church remodeled into a school). This new building burned in 1891 and the parish had to bear the uninsured loss. After two years of worship back in the original log building, another wood-frame church was rebuilt in 1893, large enough to serve a 400-family congregation that spanned several townships. Finally, a large, brick church building, dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul, was built and consecrated in 1930-1931. When post-Vatican II innovations required the relocation of the altar, the parishioners saw to it that the ornate, traditional look and feel of the altar array was preserved as much as possible.⁶

⁴Wacław Kruszka, *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), p. 126.

⁵*Saints Peter & Paul Church, Gilman, Minnesota, 1872-1972* (Gilman, Minn. [?]: n.p., n.d. [1972]), pp. [4-5] and [15-16] (hereafter “*Ss. Peter & Paul History*”). A photocopy of this booklet is in the PGS-MN’s Church and Local History Collection, maintained at the Minnesota Genealogical Society’s library in Golden Valley.

⁶*Ss. Peter & Paul History*, pp. [5-6]. See also the following installments of “Picture Story of Early Foley Days...” published in the *Benton County News*: “Dedication Service of Gilman’s Second Church,” April 3, 1985, p. 4; “Interior of Third Catholic Church at Gilman,” Sept. 9, 2003, p. 4; “Gilman Church on Register of Historical Buildings,” Jan. 28, 1992, p. 4.

³I have reviewed a couple of years of *Kuryer Polski* so far, 1908-1909. Though this daily newspaper featured reports in some number from various locales in Minnesota, it was on an irregular basis and few of them in these years were very long.

The parish school was operated from 1890 to 1969. For the construction of the grand new building covered in our report here, the parishioners supplied most of the labor—including wagon-hauling all of the materials from Foley. Apparently the ambitiousness of proposals for the project sparked a dispute among the parishioners, with about 25 families leaving the congregation as a result. The Benedictine Sisters provided instruction in the school from 1912 until it was closed in June, 1969. In 1972 and 1999 the building was being leased by the Foley public school district and was being used as a public school. The structure is still standing today.⁷ See photographs on next page.

⁷*Ss. Peter & Paul History*, pp. [9-10]. See also: "Picture Story of Early Days...Building the Gilman School," *Benton County News*, Sept. 21, 1999, p. 4.

Author's Note:

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS:
For several years PGS-MN member Mary Ann Quade, a native of Gilman, has been after me with cheerful persistence to cover her home community. Among other things, she's made the Saints Peter and Paul centennial book available for photocopying, and she gave me a large sheaf of items on Gilman from the Benton County News pictorial history series. All of this material helped me a lot with background for this installment; this is a start, Mary Ann! We also thank Bev Abraham, Executive Director of the Benton County Historical Society, who furnished us with e-format copies of pictures of our report's subject. Wiarus featured a lot of reportage from Gilman/Alberta, from 1886-on; and in some future installment of this series we'll feature a compilation of that material as well.

Answers to Immigration Quiz:

1. – **b)** *The Jazz Singer* is a remake of the 1927 Al Jolson movie about a Jewish cantor – first movie with sound.
2. – **c)** Kosciusko was the founder of West Point but died in Poland. Dombrowski lived in the same period and fought with Napoleon - mentioned in the Polish national anthem. Pulaski died in the battle of Savannah in 1779 – founder of American Cavalry.
3. – **b)** The first Poles (Kashubians) arrived in Winona from St. Louis by boat in 1855, although some use 1857 as the first settlement. The first Poles were reported in Gnesen in St. Louis County and Marion Lake in Otter Tail County in 1867 some years later.
4. – **False** Today's immigrants are younger and better-educated.
5. – **d)** There was not much tolerance for immigrants in the late 1800s.
6. – **b)** The 1880s Polish immigration was significant and the peak at Ellis Island was the early 1900s but in Minnesota it was the 1913-14 time frame.
7. – **d)** Around World War II the U.S. established a formal system. Before that shipping companies were given major responsibility.
8. – **a)** The National Origins Act started setting up quotas.
9. – **d)** There were no limitations for immigration from North or South America.
10. – **a)** The rankings are in the order listed: New York, Illinois and Michigan. Minnesota is about 13th.

How did you do? If you got 7 right you know your Polish immigration!



Photograph taken during the construction of the Gilman School (1909)
From left: Bricklayer, George Kujawa, John Hep (the contractor), bricklayer, August Heir (?), bricklayer, Frank Kujawa, Walter Wojchiechowski (?), Paul Scyparski (church organist), John Zlock, Pete Kuzma
Source: Benton County Historical Society



St. Wojciech's School in Gilman (1972)
Source: SS Peter and Paul History, Benton County Historical Society