DROBNE ECHA

Installment #11

Dateline: Duluth

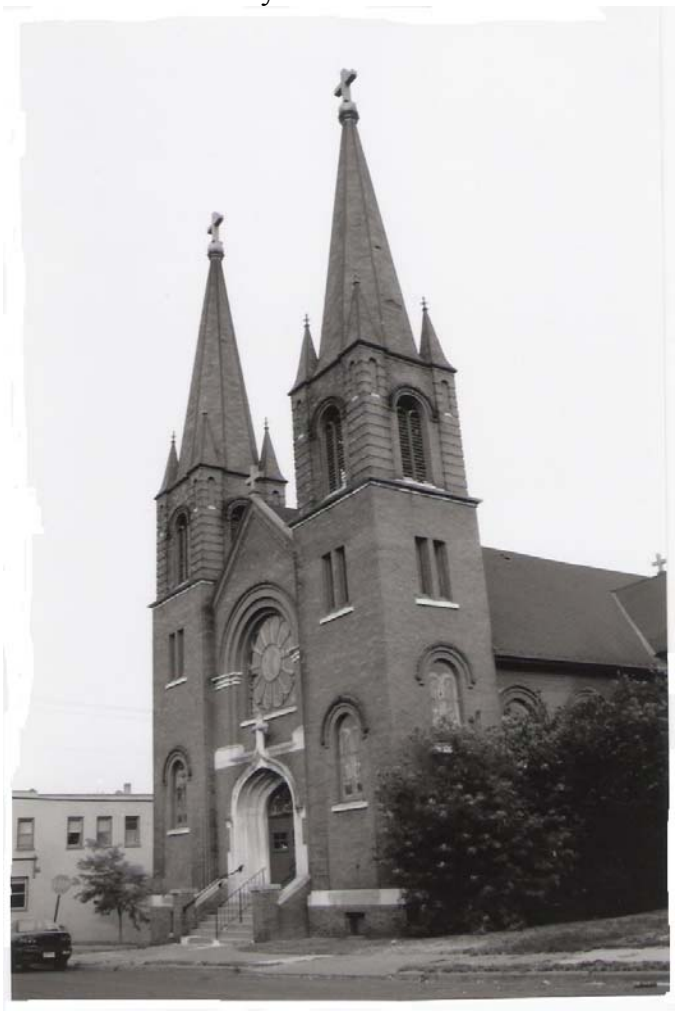
From *Straż,* 1904 and 1907, *Wiarus,* 1906-08, *Rolnik*, 1908, and *Kuryer Polski,* 1908-1909

By Greg Kishel
<gfk1@cornell.edu>

The Polish National Catholic parish of St. Josephat's in Duluth is not well-known, in the Twin Ports community or outside of it. Nonetheless, this parish has been one of the most distinctive Polish-American institutions in Minnesota, from the very date of its founding in 1907. Established out of a long-simmering controversy between some members of Duluth's Polish-American community and the local Roman Catholic diocesan hierarchy, it survived great financial challenges during the Depression and grew in size, property, and the loyalty of its members.

Now St. Josephat's is small in numbers, and a year ago it lost its beloved long-time pastor, Father Stephen Krawiec.[1] However, the parish is going forward on the fierce loyalty of its members, and is currently served on a circuit-riding basis by Father John Kutek of Sacred Heart of Jesus PNC Church in Minneapolis. We are particularly well-put to note its historical significance in this year, the centennial of its founding.

Thus, I present my translations of reportage from various Polish-language newspapers that were published contemporaneously with the events of a century ago in Duluth. They include the correspondence I found in *Straż*, then the official publication of the Polish National Catholic Church.[2] I'm also presenting items from the general Polish-American press, that I found myself or with the assistance of our PGS-MN colleagues John Radziłowski and Ray Marshall.[3]



St Josephat's Church, Duluth (Photo by the author, 2002)

[1]Father Krawiec's obituary is found in the January 1, 2006 issue of the Duluth *News-Tribune,* p. 6C. Some time later this year, a memoir of your translator's brief acquaintance with this gentle shepherd will appear in *PolAm,* the newsletter of the Polish American Cultural Institute of Minnesota.

[2]I uncovered these items with the aid of *An Index to Straż – The Guard, 1897-1915, Volume I* (Scranton, Pa.: Polish National Union of America, 1994), compiled by Father (now Bishop) Casimir J. Grotnik. The PGS-MN library includes both volumes of this index.

[3]Some years back John compiled a list of local reportage datelined in Minnesota that was published in *Wiarus,* the prominent Polish-language newspaper published at Winona. Ray collated the texts of many items from Polonian communities in northeastern Minnesota, using John's index. Using the microfilming available at the Immigration History Research Center at the University of Minnesota, I have been reviewing 1905-1910 runs of *Rolnik*, published at Stevens Point, Wisconsin, and *Kuryer Polski,* published at Milwaukee; both of these newspapers featured correspondence from Minnesota locales.

As you will see, these pieces are written from very different perspectives on a deep, sharp, and persisting divide between Polish-American "nationalists" and Polish and non-Polish Catholic traditionalists in Duluth. To preserve the newsreel-style "You are There" feel that I try to cultivate in this series, I am presenting everything in chronological order of publication. Do not get disoriented by the fluctuations in attitude, tone, and ideology! And, folks, I have not excavated and showcased this material to revive the antagonisms of a century ago. I have no personal allegiance toward either side on the matter of this dispute. As an amateur local historian, I will again say that I did not make this old news, I'm only reporting it!

We begin with a couple of items from *Straż* from 1904. This was two to three years before the events that culminated in the founding of St. Josephat's. Building on my past presentation of material on the founding of Duluth's Polish Cemetery,[4] they show some of the "prehistory" of the PNCC presence in Duluth. The fact of their publication in a church organ issued far from Minnesota shows that disaffected Polish Roman Catholics in Duluth were early watching the PNCC...and, undoubtedly, the PNCC was watching right back. From there we have a local backdrop item or two from *Wiarus*, from just before the split; the PNCC's 1907 coverage of the inauguration of its frontier parish in Minnesota; a short syndicated bulletin from *Rolnik*; traditionalist Roman Catholic Poles' reactions to the founding of St. Josephat's, which appeared in *Wiarus* and *Rolnik*; from *Kuryer Polski*, a debate between Duluth locals over the proper guardianship of Polish ethnicity; and later reportage on the Polish-American priest in Duluth who had been at the center of all of these events. *Zaczynajmy*--Let's begin!



STRAŻ

No. 33 Scranton, Pa., Sobota Dnia 17-go Sierpnia, 1907 Roku Rok XII

Ciągle Naprzód.

Uwagi o Kościele Narodowym.

W tych dniach połączyła się z Polsko-Narodowym Kościołem nowa parafia w Duluth, w stanie Minnesota. Proboszczem tej pierwszej Narodowej placówki na Zachodzie jest ks. Dr. K. Sierzputowski.

Historya powstania nowej parafii Narodowej, liczącej o po kłopocie z księdzem i ludem polskim. A tu ani rusz.

Ajrysz kazał i ksiądz byłby może i posłuchał, bo ksiądz chowany w dyscyplinie, ale ludzie stanęli murem i rzekli jedno energiczne słowo:

—Nie puścimy!!

Nie puścimy i basta! Nam się ksiądz udał; gospodarzy z narodem aż miło, kazania prawi, aż człeka mrowie przechodzi od wzruszenia i radości, o dalej światło, idea Wolnego, Narodowego Kościoła ku brzegom Spokojnego Oceanu. Hasłem polskiego narodu w Duluth stała się ta nasza piękna dewiza, pod którą idą polacy w Poznańskiem, Królestwie i Galicyi: Nie damy się! Tak, ani pludrom niemieckim, ani krwawym oprawcom moskiewskim, ani obłudnym ajryszom w Ameryce nie poddamy się, duszy nie zaprzedamy, języka

Z TYGODNIA.

Zapoczątkowany strajk telegrafistów z kompanii Western Union, którzy porzucili pracę wskutek nadużyć urzędników komanii rozszerzył się po całych Stanach Zjednoczonych. W każdem większem mieście robotnicy telegraficzni wyszli na strajk, solidaryzując się ze swymi towarzyszami. Dnia 12 bm. w New York zaprzestało pracy 3 tysiące telegrafistów z kompanii Western Union i 2 tysiące z Postal Te-

braćmi Tymanowskimi. Najpierw Rubińscy poczęli się bić na pięści z Tymanowskimi. Do tej walki przyłączyła się żona Rubińskiego i po krótkiej chwili wojowniczość ogarnęła wszystkich tych polaków, którym alkohol odebrał zmysły. Bójka była zażarta. Ze wszystkich stron latały próżne butelki, kamienie, a nawet podobywano noży i raczono się niemi wzajemnie.

Policya ze stacyi Lawndale otrzymała telefoniczne zawiadomienie o walce z nadmienieniem, że dwie osoby zostały zabite. Gdy wóz poli-

Front Page of *Straż,* August 17, 1907 with article on St. Josephat's

[4] *Drobne Echa,* Installment #5, *PGS-MN Newsletter*, v. 13, no. 2 (Summer, 2005), p.14

From Straż, *issue of July 23, 1904:*

On July 8 was celebrated the consecration of Ss. Peter and Paul church, which is presumably a Polish parish.

I will not write at length, about the usual ceremonies performed for the consecration; instead the thought has glided out from my pen unconsciously, about the unlimited greed of the one who celebrated the consecration, that is, of the bishop.

A year had gone by as a committee presented him with this matter, offering him one hundred dollars ($100.00) for the consecration; the bishop showed our committee the door, informing them that they had to sign the church over to his name and only later ask about a consecration.

The consecration took place. The church was consecrated. And the only thing left to us sheep was to pay off the debt, in round figures $13000.00, distinctly thirteen thousand dollars (though all of the property is worth 8,000.00), so that the Irishman had a clear title. In the face of that, if it may be said, where the motherland is in slavery, do we love Poland? The latter is a lie; we are only deceiving ourselves.

A parishioner.

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From Straż, *issue of October 8, 1904:*

Duluth, Minn. I liked your publication, which I have just read. Thus, whenever a Pole has a Polish heart, he must admit that these Irish and Krauts have done wrong to us. I desire only your newspaper, with which I am satisfied.

Jan FORYSIAK.

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From *Straż*, issue of October 24, 1904:
What's happening in Duluth.

Despite the fact that the Polish community here is numerous enough, consisting of around 2,000 people, and has been established for something like 25 years already; despite the fact that it has built two churches; however, on the matter of education, no matter how much else has been done, there is not so much as one step forward.

Here you do not have so much as a singing circle, nor anyone willing to do amateur theatrical scenes, not to mention the "*Młodzieży*" or the Falcons' Nests, there is no one to remember that. The only societies here are like to be vegetating; they are two groups of the Polish National Alliance, resting on medieval rules dictated by former parish priests.

Through the work of the societies just mentioned, the pockets of the Fathers are financially supported; labors on the national field and concordant learning with the spirit of the time are forbidden outright, by our "messengers of God."

Let a few individuals be upright and willing to toil on the soil of our Polish germinal work, and then a curse from the pulpit is dropped on them like a thunderbolt from a sunny sky, as if the people with the Roman clergy had been standing higher in the sky from such outcasts. For their deeds are as follows: The so-called (*fairs*) bazaars arranged several times per year have brought such disgrace and demoralization to us, and yet our Father LASKOWSKI explained to us that they are to be in commemoration of some feast-day, of a female or male saint.

This time the occasion arose at the occasion of the proclamation of the fifty-year jubilee of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. In order to sanctify that feast, there was once again a bazaar on a large scale; and what went with that, but exploitation, corruption, brawls, shame brought to all things Polish, and to one person a money-belt of gold.

One of the many.

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From Wiarus*, issue of September 16, 1906:*

I beg the kind placement in *Wiarus* of the following acknowledgments.

On August 5 the splendid solemn consecration of our new place of worship was celebrated. We hereby pay thanks to the Reverend Clergymen, who deigned to honor us with their attendance; thanks also to the Societies that took part in that solemnity.

Above all, thanks are owed not only to our Countrymen from the West End, but also to our Countrymen from Superior, Wis., who gathered in such numbers on that day and who contributed in no small amount to the luster of the ceremonies.

From the foreign Societies, the Italian Society is deserving of thanks; it gave proof that we are the children of one Mother Roman Catholic Church. Therefore, an old-fashioned *Bóg zapłać* to all.

The Pastor, Father
K. SIERZPUTOWSKI.

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From Straż*, issue of August 17, 1907:*

Continually onward.
Observations about the National Church.

In recent days a new parish in Duluth, in the State of Minnesota, has united with the Polish National Church. The parish priest of this first National outpost in the West is Father-Doctor K. SIERZPUTOWSKI.

The history of the formation of the new National parish, numbering around 300 families, is very simple.

The Polish church of the Virgin Mary in Duluth,[5] the parish priest of which was Father-Doctor SIERZPUTOWSKI, belonged to Bishop McGOLRICK, known in America to be an enemy of the immigration of Poles, Italians, Lithuanians, and the like. Bishop McGOLRICK decreed that there had to be only one Roman Catholic cemetery in Duluth, under the management of the Irish. Of course, these Irish mercilessly stole from the Poles and non-Poles alike and commanded them to pay exorbitant prices for wretched cemetery plots.

The Poles soon tired of such a state of affairs, but especially when Father-Doctor SIERZPUTOWSKI became the pastor of the church–a priest still young, well-educated in Warsaw, [St.] Petersburg, Kraków and Lwów, and by all that a Pole in soul and heart. He thus exhorted his parish, that if it were to persist in the matter, it would be able to have its own cemetery, under Polish administration, and as long as it went from Annaias to Kafais, and they knocked and knocked, eventually there would be a good piece of land for a cemetery. But then a persecution of the people and the priest began there, from the side of the Irish bishop.

Since he was not able to do much ill to the steadfast, Bishop McGOLRICK turned with all ferocity on Father SIERZPUTOWSKI. He began to stab him with the pins of petty difficulties, to treat him like dirt, to humiliate him, to incite his brothers; and in the end he ordered the parish and the people connected with it to forsake him, for his work and sacrifice.

But the Irishman mistook the Polish nature. He thought, that he would go thus at Father-Doctor SIERZPUTOWSKI in this way, like Archbishop MESMER went at Father KRUSZKA, following the trouble with the Polish priest and people. But it was without luck!

The Irishman ordered and the priest would have had to obey, because a priest is educated in discipline; but the people stood up like a wall and they uttered a single word energetically:

“We will not forsake him!!”

“We will not forsake him and that is that! The priest has worked well for us; it’s a pleasure to watch a steward with his people; he declaims his sermons, until one is brought to goosebumps from feeling and joy; he speaks about Poland like such a patriot from Poznań or Kraków; and he defends the working people everywhere....Thus we will not forsake him!”

“But, how on earth to contend with such Irish and German power all alone–” responded the pastor, delighted but not being given to understand this for himself, “–how would we manage?”

[5] *Transl. note:* St. Mary, Star of the Sea.

"We will manage, because we will not go forward alone into the fight with the enemies of the Polish nation. We have heard, that there in Scranton, in the state of Pennsylvania, a people have arisen in a church with their own priest and for ten years already they have had success in their struggle, and with Father HODUR fourteen Polish priests stand already, preparing for all for the work of God and country, and with the Scrantonians 30,000 have already united anew from Priceburg, Duryea, Wilkes-Barre, Plymouth, Nanticoke, Shamokin, Baltimore, Passaic, Bayonne, Lowell, Adams, Chicopee, Fall River, Webster and Bridgeport. Then we will become united with them, let us give them our hands and let us go forth to the holy struggle."

Of course, after such a conversation, Father-Doctor SIERZPUTOWSKI wrote to Bishop HODUR, after which he and the parish subscribed to a resolution of affiliation with the National Church, they received the rules and the principles, and one more fortress of the Polish soul had arisen in America. Now they are undertaking to the construction of a House of God; and meanwhile they have bought a church building from the Swedes, remodeled it, decorated it, and consecrated it, and the people have a roof over their heads.

Falling among the people, a tremendous, feverish movement reigns. Old people, the young people, children, all thus are speaking only about this, that the First Polish National Church in the West would be established in Duluth, worthy of the Polish people, and that with Scranton in the East the light might go forth like this from here, the cause of a Free, Polish National Church going toward the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Our beautiful motto has been established through the watchword of the Polish nation in Duluth, under which the Poles go forth in Poznań, in the Kingdom of Poland, and in Galicia. We will not surrender! Thus we will not yield, to either the German plunderers, or the bloody Muscovite butchers, or the hypocritical Irishmen in America; we will not sell our souls, we will not abandon our language, we will not give our church into slavery!

From Straż*, issue of November 16, 1907:*

Dulut,[6] Minn. I am informing you, that with the change in parish administration here, the practices have changed further and for the better. For sixteen years there had never been rites and a procession to the cemetery on All Saints' Day; but from the time when our beloved shepherd Fr. SIERZPUTOWSKI associated with the Polish National Church, the administration went for the better. Our beloved pastor gave us a great joy, when he announced that he was organizing a procession to the national cemetery, that we should pray in common for the souls suffering in Purgatory and that we should maintain such a beautiful Polish custom for the younger generation. Our brothers from the Roman faith found out quickly, and they did the same. And thus the National church always leads in that which is Polish, that which pleases us Poles and from which we are bound together and educated. This gladdens us beyond measure, that we have a national cemetery all our own, and that soon, may God grant it, we will finish off our national church under the patronage of St. Joseph.[7]

Jan FORYSIAK.

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From Rolnik, *issue of January 10, 1908:*

Duluth, Minn. – The Poles from the parish of St. Josephat are beginning the construction of a new Sanctuary of the Lord under the patronage of St. Josephat. The new church will stand on the northeast corner of Third Avenue and Fifth Street. The width of the church will amount to 45 feet, and the length 145 feet. The front of the church will be on Fifth Street.

Messrs. Karol NEUMAN and Tomasz MATLAK are supervising the construction of the building; while the architects are BRAY and NYSTROM.

The foundation is of compressed brick, and the upper structure will be from Menominee veneered brick. The church will be in the Italian Renaissance style, the windows will be colored, and the interior finishes will be of oak wood.

[6] *Transl. note:* So in original; obviously a typo.
[7] *Transl. note:* Again, so in original.

The basement will be used for the Sunday school as well as for meetings of the Societies.

After it is finished, the church will cost from $25,000 to $36,000.

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Window in east transept, St. Josephat's Church, Duluth (Photo by the author, 2002)

From Kuryer Polski, *issue of February 29, 1908:*

THE DENATIONALIZATION OF THE POLES IN DULUTH.

(Correspondence to *Kuryer Polski*)

Duluth, Minn., February 19. – There are around 700 families of Poles in Duluth, and since Duluth is spread out over a number of miles in extent we likewise have had three Polish parishes with three churches for awhile here.

In but a single parish, that of St. Józefat, where the pastor is Fr. SIERZPUTOWSKI, the Poles cherish their own pure language and speak among themselves in Polish; because Fr. SIERZPUTOWSKI is a good patriot and a good Pole, he thus is vigilant over that, so the Polish people do not lose their national character.

However, in the parishes on the East and West Ends, where the pastors are Fr. LASKOWSKI and Fr. ICIEK, priests of the so-called "new school," the Poles are losing their ethnicity completely.

In recent times Fr. LASKOWSKI had started to bring out Polish qualities in the Irish people, recognizing that the duty of a Polish chaplain is not only to propagate the faith but also to uphold the national life. However, Fr. ICIEK in the East End is completely of Irish nationality. This priest speaks only in English to himself at home and to the parishioners, and he is ashamed to speak in Polish. All of the Poles belonging to this parish use only the English language among themselves; many of their children do not know a single word in Polish, and the women and young girls even publicly ridicule the Polish language in the presence of Fr. ICIEK, who is enormously pleased by this.

It very much astonishes us, that the clique of patriots belonging to that parish such as: Messrs. BUL., GRABAR., DUN., RYDL., BUCH., DRYM., STAW., are not preventing this. Are they also becoming completely Irish?

It is sad and distasteful to see these Poles the victims of denationalization, and the heart aches. We hear constantly about certain monuments that are supposed to be built..., but we are completely forgetting about Polish schools. Are those monuments to be erected for our Irish generation? A bad thing it is, brothers of ours here in the States, that the assimilation proceeds by swift steps; and in a short time, through the help of the Irishized chaplains here in Duluth, not a trace of the Poles will remain!

This is tragic but true!

H. W.

From Kuryer Polski, *issue of March 9, 1908:*

AN EXPLANATION FROM DULUTH, MINN.
The pastor Fr. ICIEK is a good Pole and chaplain.
The malice of a correspondent is punished.
(Correspondence to *Kuryer Polski*)

We have received a communiqué rectifying the correspondence from Mr. H. W., which we are publishing in the interest of impartiality.

Duluth, Minn., March 5. – In number 51 of *Kuryer Polski* correspondence from Duluth appeared, signed with the letters H.W., which defamed us the undersigned, our parish, and our venerable pastor Fr. Stanisław ICIEK.

Before we set about the proof of the falsity of the many accusations published in the cited article, we point out immediately beforehand that Mr. H. W. has perpetrated an affront against the undersigned and against all upright Poles! This is so because the author notes in his correspondence that the former Roman Catholic priest SIERZPUTOWSKI is "a good patriot and a good Pole" and then, appealing to us, he mentions part of our last names, and he indulges us by further titling us "patriots"! We solemnly protest against placing us on the same level as the former Roman Catholic priest SIERZPUTOWSKI!!

After that preamble, so unpleasant for every Pole, we proceed to the "main item."

It is a lie that in the independent parish of St. Józefat, where the pastor is the independent Fr. SIERZPUTOWSKI, the Poles have cherished their pure ancestral language and have been speaking among themselves in Polish; instead the fact and the truth is, that the so-called "leading lights" of that parish do not speak Polish at home and instead are ashamed of their own Polish surnames, having changed them to English forms such as: Mr. KĘPINSKI renamed himself "KEMP"; Mr. FRANKOWSKI, FRANKLIN; Mr. BOROWIAK, BURKE; Mr. NAIMAN–NEWMAN (read as *Niuman*); and so forth. The children of these gentlemen even do not know any Polish at all, and those of Mr. NAIMAN do not even understand Polish. It is a lie, that Fr. SIERZPUTOWSKI is on guard that the Polish people do not lose their nationality! On the contrary, the truth is that he has forbidden his own parishioners to send their children to the Polish school! It is further the truth, that Fr. SIERZPUTOWSKI has not arranged for even one Polish national holiday here and is forbidding his parishioners to attend the national celebrations organized in our parish!

We have no thought at all of denying that many in our parish are using the English language; but that is not the fault of Fr. ICIEK, who has been the pastor here for barely a few months! Why, before he "broke his oath and deserted the faith" the renegade SIERZPUTOWSKI was the pastor here! Why did the actions of the independent priest not depolonize our parish, rather than those of Fr. ICIEK? Why, we are asking did this "strange" priest not undertake some sort of measures against the depolonization of our parish?

And when all is said and done, Fr. ICIEK is reviving the spirit of patriotism and joy toward our great Motherland; he has founded here a "Literary-dramatic Circle," a "Society of Polish Youth," and a "Society of Polish Children." Through Fr. ICIEK's efforts the Drama Circle has already given three performances arranged for the observance of the January uprising, and besides that two evening vocal declamations.

Fr. ICIEK has devoted all of his time free from work to our Polish school, and has even forbidden the children to converse among themselves in English!

We should be witnesses ourselves when Fr. ICIEK reprimanded those who spoke to him in English! At times Fr. ICIEK does use the English language, but he does this only at those times when he may not speak in Polish, because several Irish, Swedes, and Frenchmen who have gotten married to Polish women belong to our Parish, and have been going to our church; and after all Fr. ICIEK must converse with them in English!

It seems to us, that we have irrefutably demonstrated to Mr. H. W. the lack of foundation for his correspondence, from which we wholeheartedly advise him that he should not trouble his head about our parish, we are resolutely looking to the future; and if everywhere they were to have such chaplains as our pastor Fr. ICIEK, then the Poles here in the States would rate very highly in relation to their patriotism and uprightness.

Ignacy GULCZ
Antoni GRABARKIEWICZ
Mieczysław S. DUNIN
Józef REDLOSK
Peter BUCHOTZ
Franciszek DRYMA
Andrzej SŁAWNY

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From Wiarus, *issue of June 4, 1908:*

DULUTH, MINN.
Attention Countrymen, Poland is saved!

A miracle has occurred in Duluth; Messrs. HODUR and Count SIERZPUTOWSKI saved Poland on May 24, 1908.

The fight was dreadful, under the banner cry: "For your freedom and ours!"

Clothed in everlasting glory, they lie in serenity on the laurels of victory!

Oy, gentlemen, gentlemen, there are none like you rogues, you shattered the rock of Peter! And it will go the same with you. Your falsehood and heretical theater will not last; and the Lord's truth will endure for the ages.

AN INDEPENDENT.

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From Wiarus, *issue of July 30 , 1908:*

DULUTH, Minn. What we once hoped for, has occurred. The notorious SIERZPUTOWSKI, the "independent" priest, scurried away as soon as a wrangle exploded in the local independent parish. SIERZPUTOWSKI packed up his bags in the night and slipped away, together with a companion. They say that he went to Canada, but this has not been ascertained yet. SIERZPUTOWSKI was the previous Roman Catholic priest in the parish of the Most Holy Virgin Mary in Duluth. On the complaints of the parishioners, the Most Reverend Bishop McGORLIK [McGOLRICK] ordered an investigation of him. Naturally, SIERZPUTOWSKI did not like this; accordingly he founded an "independent" parish and declared himself an independent canon. Building an independent church, he encumbered his own followers in debt for a thousand dollars and currently has escaped. This is the usual end of renegades and betrayers of the trust of the people.

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From Wiarus, *issue of September 17, 1908:*

Father SIERZPUTOWSKI has reformed
(From *Nowiny Polskie*)

Through a special posting we have received two very significant letters from the Very Reverend Father Augustyn BABIŃSKI from Superior, with a request for publication. These are letters from Father K. SIERZPUTOWSKI, who was excommunicated from the Church and who is now repenting.

Below we submit a letter from Father SIERZPUTOWSKI to the Reverend Father ICIEK in Duluth, Father LASKOWSKI in Duluth, and Father BABIŃSKI in Superior. This letter got sent with a request to read it from the pulpit on Sunday, September 13. It was read in the three churches.

Fr. SIERZPUTOWSKI's letter to the Poles reads as follows:

Cleveland, O., September 20.
Beloved Brothers in Christ!

After a year of heavy trials and work I am today persuaded that grief and bitterness have sent us onto bad paths.

Let us love the Faith of our holy Father, let us respect the sentiments of our people, but let us not yet forget that all authentic authority descends from God.

As I am presently convinced, the Polish National Church has altogether lost the justification for existence, and has followed a bad path. I now feel fortunate, that I made the way home to this connection.

Pardon me then my errors, and pray for me, and God will bless us without end.

May Poland always believe in the Church.
Your former pastor in Duluth,
Father K. SIERZPUTOWSKI, D.D.

THE LETTER OF FR. SIERZPUTOWSKI TO HIS BISHOP.

Most Esteemed Bishop!

After appropriate reflection, I have decided to submit to legitimate authority and to acknowledge my separation from the church, as having been in error and wrong.

I thus ask you for forgiveness, my Bishop and I beseech you to have mercy on me.

I have sent a letter to all of the Reverend priests who administer the Polish parishes, authorizing them in my name to ask for forgiveness. This letter is equipped with my signature.

Together with the independent Bishop J. TICZY I want to submit ourselves to the Roman Catholic bishop in the Diocese of Cleveland.

Asking for your prayers at Mass, I await a favorable decision.

A servant in Christ,
Fr. K. SIERZPUTOWSKI, D.D.

And thus yet another prodigal son has repented; he has returned to the house of the Father. Would to God that all such, all of you, who have fallen away and have sown scandal, were to go on the record and to return to the bosom of the Catholic Church.

The Seat of Peter gave us one Polish Bishop, in the person of the Most Reverend Bishop RHODE. His conciliatory work is overturning the Polish schism in America. Within two months after his consecration several independent priests returned, and here and there their whole parishes are returning to the old fold.

Bishop RHODE is going to the East, to Pennsylvania, there where the notorious independent Fr. HODUR still holds several thousand Poles in infatuation. With certainty, there also he will begin to convert our countrymen back.

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From Rolnik*, issue of September 18, 1908:*

DULUTH, MINN.

Father Sierzputowski is repenting. After deserting his own local parish, the independent priest K. SIERZPUTOWSKI has left for Cleveland, and now desires to return to the bosom of the Roman Catholic Church, of which he previously was a servant. He has sent a letter to Bishop McGERLICK [McGOLRICK] with a request for forgiveness as well as acceptance as a Catholic priest. Together with SIERZPUTOWSKI the independent Slovenian "bishop" TICHY is repenting.

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From Kuryer Polski, *issue of September 21, 1909:*

The Letter-Box.

From Duluth, Minn., we received two pieces of correspondence almost simultaneously: one against the independent priest, the second against the Roman-Catholic priests. The affair there evidently is coming to a head. Not wanting to pour oil on the fire, we consider it for the best not to publish either the first or the second correspondence. This is unpleasant, that Poles are waging such fierce religious wars in the current civilized times.

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Alas, the story outlined in these terse, scattered, fragmentary, and very partisan reports is incomplete. One gets the impression of a swirling vortex of emotions and events, boiling up out of longstanding grievances with the stands of the local diocesan hierarchy on several matters very important to the Duluth Poles.

But these sources do not enable us to precisely identify the precipitant of the sharp split within the congregation of St. Mary, Star of the Sea in late 1906 and very early 1907, not to mention the huge and historically-unprecedented decision to withdraw from allegiance to Rome and to reaffiliate with the PNCC.

By that time the matter of the local Polish cemetery was close to fifteen years old.[8] It clearly was an ongoing source of tension; its founders, supporters, and lot-owners were interring their departed ones there, but it still was not consecrated ground at which a Roman Catholic priest could perform graveside rites. Nonetheless, there does not seem to have been any pivotal action on this matter in 1906-1907 that would have fired the Poles' anger so high.[9]

A dispute between the Bishop and a group at Duluth's Polish-ethnic Ss. Peter & Paul parish, over the ownership of the real estate and the parish church building, was very much alive at that point; and it either was already in civil litigation, or was heading for a lawsuit.[10] But while this undoubtedly was an emotionally-charged goad to Duluth's Poles generally, it had to have been an indirect one at most for the people at St. Mary, Star of the Sea; it involved a different parish and a different place, in Duluth's West End. So again it does not seem reasonable to conclude that this was the immediate precipitant.

As several of our featured reports show, for some within Duluth's Polish community there was ongoing concern over the preservation of Polish traditions and ethnic identity, versus the process of Americanization and the second generation's adoption of the English language. Our 1904 *Straż* correspondent seems to have taken especial umbrage to the locals' use of American-style church fairs as fundraisers for their parish.[11] While they are tantalizingly vague, the August, 1907 *Straż* report and the near-contemporaneous material from non-PNCC sources suggest that Father SIERZPUTOWSKI came under some sort of pressure from the Bishop on the matter of acculturation, perhaps due to a resistance on his part to diocesan efforts toward Americanization. It could be that one thing led to another, with the strength of personal wills pitching animosity to a high level. If there was some act of discipline against SIERZPUTOWSKI, that may have ignited the emotions of his followers on ethnic-cultural issues and prompted a show of loyalty that ripened into a schism.

But I hasten to say that this is only my conjecture, and it is only one of many possible flows of events. From the sources readily-accessible to us, we just can not tell with certainty.[12]

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[8]See *Drobne Echa, Installment #5, op. cit.* n. 4, for translations of two letters from *Wiarus,* 1894, on the local Poles' withdrawal from the diocese's newly-established and prescribed Calvary Cemetery and their founding of a neighboring cemetery of their own, in defiance of the newly-installed Bishop McGOLRICK.

[9]The *Straż* correspondent from 1907 definitely has it wrong, in attributing to Father SIERZPUTOWSKI an involvement in the seminal events surrounding the Polish cemetery; that all happened long before his arrival on the Duluth scene.

[10]The parishioner-group's initial victory in the litigation in the state courts was reported a year later, in English- and Polish-language newspapers. See, e.g., "Poles Win Their Case," Duluth *Evening Herald,* Jan. 8, 1909, and "Parafia przegrała proces," *Rolnik,* Jan. 15, 1909, p. 5.

[11]The Poles in Duluth had adopted this sort of event early in their institutional life. See "Fair w Duluth," *Wiarus,* Sept. 20, 1888, p. 5, about a *polski fair* used to raise money for a remodeling of the first building of St. Mary, Star of the Sea.

[12]There is an accord of sorts with my frustration, in one of the few other modern published historical treatments of Duluth's Polish community. From the sources he used, the late Father John Whitney EVANS was not able to identify the specific reason for the Bishop's actions against Father SIERZPUTOWSKI either. *Faith on a Changing Frontier: A History of St. Joseph's Parish, Gnesen, Minnesota* (Gnesen, Minn. [?]: publ. by the author, 1996 [?]), p. 8.

The really consequential aspect was the near-immediate establishment of an institution founded in both religious and Polish-ethnic identification, which was incorporated into the supporting superstructure of the PNCC. Father SIERZPUTOWSKI's personal break with the Roman church must have taken place after his mid-September, 1906 expression of thanks in connection with the consecration of the new building at St. Mary, Star of the Sea.[13] PNCC-issued histories give February 2, 1907 as the date of the organizational meeting for St. Josephat's parish.[14] It is not clear from these publicly-available sources whether the founders' initial intention was to join the PNCC, or whether the parish was first contemplated as an "independent" one that later affiliated. Given our evidence of contact between St. Mary's parishioners and the PNCC several years earlier, the former is the more likely.[15]

In any event, by mid-1907 St. Josephat's was part of the Scranton fold, and it remains so to this day. The devotion of its founders--not to mention their numbers--is indisputably evidenced by the large and ornate sanctuary they envisioned for their worship, and the short time it took to fund and build it.[16] The impressive features of the Neogothic structure are described in thumbnail in our *Rolnik* text.[17] A visit today will attest to the strong efforts of the flock to preserve them over the years. The details most immediately striking are the windows: two large stained glass depictions of patron St. Józefat KUNCEWICZ in his roles as pastoral minister and archbishop,[18] and a marvelous Polish-themed rose window between the two steeples. The consecration of the building by PNCC founding bishop HODUR on May 24, 1908, obviously prompted the lament I found in *Wiarus*'s June 4 issue from that year.[19]

As the balance of this installment's items show, the completion of a physical foundation was only the beginning of the challenges for this Polonian institution. Its founding pastor's change of heart

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[13]The old St. Mary's building had been destroyed by fire in mid-1905. *Wiarus,* July 20, 1905, p. 4. *Wiarus* published a lengthy report on the new structure's dedication in its issue of August 2, 1906, p. 5.

[14]"St. Josephat's Parish," *A History of the Parishes of the Western Diocese, Polish National Catholic Church* (Park Ridge, Ill.: Chancery of the Western Diocese, 1998), p. 22; *Fortieth Anniversary, St. Josephat's Parish, Polish National Catholic Church, Duluth, Minnesota,* (Duluth: publ. by the parish, 1948), p. 13.

[15]Research into internal parish or PNCC records probably would answer this question, but that is beyond the depth of this series.

[16]Father KRAWIEC recorded the parish tradition from St. Josephat's that "[a]pproximately half of the members of St. Mary Star of the Sea Roman Catholic parish broke away and organized the St. Josephat's Parish..." *St. Josephat Church Bulletin,* March 13, 1994, p. 4. Before the new edifice was constructed, Father SIERZPUTOWSKI held services for his congregation at the Lutheran church at Second Avenue West and Second Street. *Fortieth Anniversary History,* at pp. 13 and 15.

[17]As to the beautiful ornamentation, see "for the Glory of God...," *Golden Anniversary 1907-1957, St. Josephat Church, Duluth, Minnesota* (Duluth: publ. by the parish, 1957), pp. 22-24.

[18]In the former role, as a friend and teacher to children; the parishioners proudly point out that the design is a very rare example of the depiction of a dog in a church window! As to St. Josephat himself, the first person of Eastern Rite Catholicism to be canonized, see Michael Walsh, ed., *Butler's Lives of the Saints* (Concise Ed., San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), pp. 373-375.

[19]As to the consecration, see also "Separated Poles Dedicate Church," Duluth *News-Tribune,* May 25, 1908, p. 8; *Fortieth Anniversary History,* p. 13.

and departure could have presented a supreme challenge for the congregation and the PNCC.[20] However, the PNCC leadership in Scranton met their needs, sending successors. Though there was a frequent change of pastors until Father KRAWIEC arrived in 1980,[21] the allegiance of the core of the congregation has not wavered, and the parish is part of the PNCC to this day.

The story of St. Josephat's is a remarkable one, both in the significance of its founding as an event of deep ethnic competition in northeastern Minnesota and in the persistence of its institutional existence. The discoveries I have just presented give no more than elusive hints as to the nature of the former. We are left with such mysteries as the real precipitant of the secession, the clerical fate of Father SIERZPUTOWSKI, and the motivations of the laity in all of the events. However, pursuing those is beyond the scope of this series. This story presents a real opportunity for a significant historical case study in ethnicity, right out of Minnesota's Arrowhead--but that is an effort for another time.

In the end, for us as genealogists and amateur historians of the Polish experience in Minnesota, my last little discovery is the one best taken to heart. As *Kuryer's* editor observed, Polonians should not "wag[e] such fierce religious wars in the current civilized times." Let us give respect to the deep, honest, and incontrovertible convictions of all of the participants on both sides of this story, and of those who followed them: though we can inquire from the distance of a century's passing, the fierce ill-will that accompanied the founding and growth of St. Josephat's parish must be relegated to the status of historical artifact. The story here is a very significant one, and one worth further investigation, but it should not be the source of any revived resentments or divisiveness among anyone who reads this.

Drobne Echa……*continued on page 31*

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To Probe Further…..

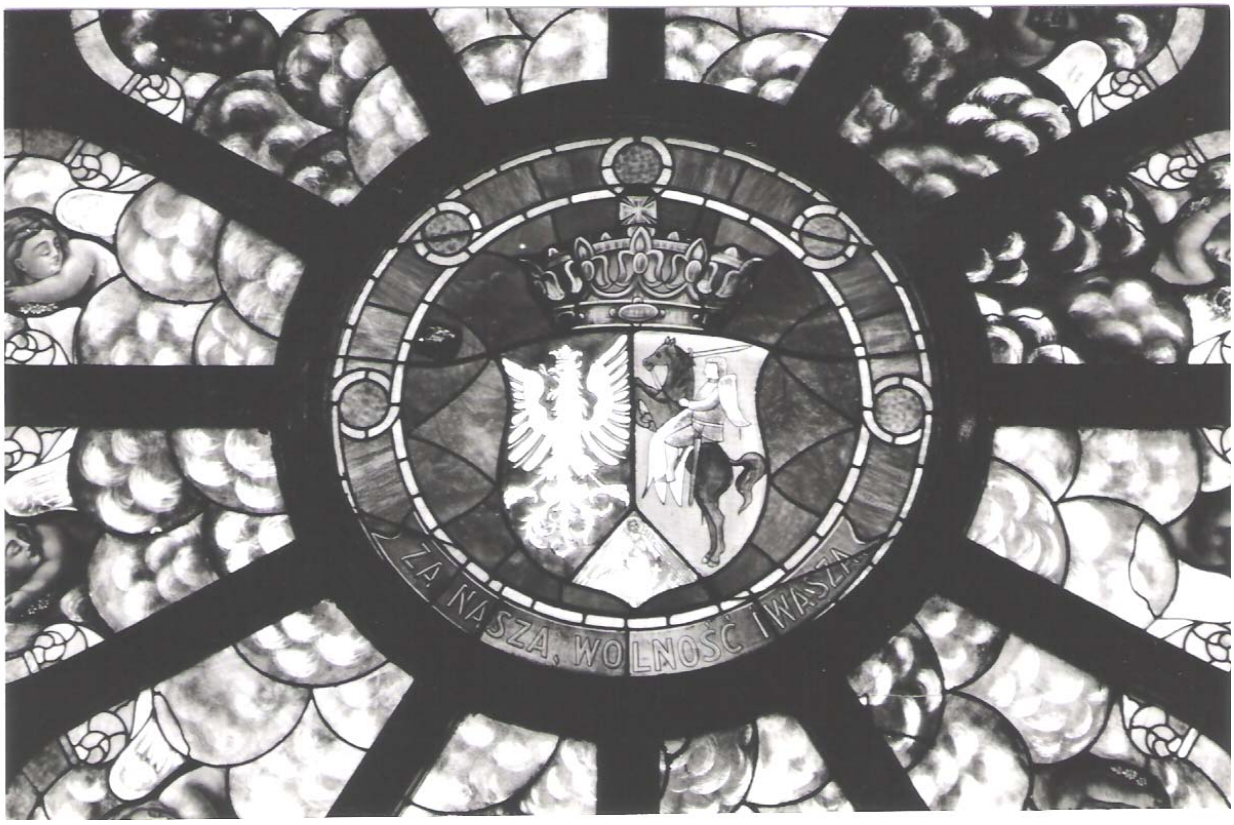
The PGS-MN Library contains a number of resources related to the Polish National Catholic Church. Some are mentioned herein: -JWK

- Indexes to *Starż* 1897-1997
- *The Polish National Catholic Church in the USA from 1897-1980*
- *The Origin and Growth of the Polish National Catholic Church*
- *The Polish National Catholic Church*
- PNCC Studies Index (1980-1991)
- *Polish National Catholic Church Independent Movements and Old Catholic Church*
- Synods of the Polish National Catholic Church 1904-1958
- *The Polish National Catholic Church*

[20]When I finished translating the *Wiarus* items from the mid-summer and fall of 1908, the revelation thunderstruck me, as it did long-time Duluth Polonia researcher Ray Marshall. Once he had given his allegiance to the PNCC, Father SIERZPUTOWSKI had come under excoriating public criticism from a former colleague in the Roman Catholic clergy. "Nieszczęśliwego Księdza Kamilla Sierzputowskiego, Doktora Filozofii: List Otwarty," *Wiarus,* Oct. 24, 1907, p. 4; "Wychodzi szydło i worka," *Wiarus,* Dec. 12, 1907, p. 5 (both authored by Father A. BĄCZYK, then of St. Isidore's parish in Sturgeon Lake, Minnesota). Father SIERZPUTOWSKI must have been in overwhelming personal turmoil during the summer of 1908.

[21]Father KRAWIEC gave me a copy of a typewritten list of the priests who have served St. Josephat's since 1907. Not counting him, it includes 26 numbered names--apparently the resident pastors--and two more--apparently visiting priests from Minneapolis.

WITH A LITTLE HELP FROM MY FRIENDS*:* I began the inquiry that turned into this installment six years ago, when I first started searching out Minnesota correspondence in *Straż* through Bishop Grotnik's index. Then I coordinated these first findings with the non-PNCC reportage I found using the work of John Radziłowski and Ray Marshall, and went from there on my own. The project stretched out beyond my anticipation, due to the breadth of the sources, my own unfamiliarity with the backdrop history, and the relative difficulty of some of the translations! Pat Maus, archivist at the Northeast Minnesota History Center at UMD, helped me with materials from that collection's files on Duluth's Polish community. I again received great help from Anna Kuroczycka, my Polish translation consultant, now close to receiving her M.A. in American Studies from the University of Warsaw. The ladies of St. Josephat's were gracious hostesses and guides for a historical and architectural tour of their church, given for the PGS-MN's outstate meeting in Duluth on September 6, 2006. And, most importantly, this installment is dedicated to the memory of Father Stephen Krawiec (1924 - 2006). I know Father Krawiec was flattered by the attention from an outside historian when I first contacted him in early 2002. But in measure far broader than my outreach, he immediately opened himself, his life, and the story of his parish to me, with great kindness, generosity, and graciousness. Though my contacts with him were unfortunately too brief, I know why his parishioners miss him so. May he rest in peace! And *dziękuję bardzo* to all the others who helped with this large project!



Detail of Rose Window, St. Josephat's Church, Duluth (Photo by author, 2002)