



# Our Polish ANCESTORS



THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF THE POLISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF GREATER CLEVELAND

JAN / MAR 2020 VOL. 29 NO. 1

## The Clown Prince of Polkas and the Case of the Stolen Keeshka

By Trina Goss Galauner

Who Stole the Kiszka? Or Kishka? Or Keeshka? This iconic polka was written and reworded, composed, sung and danced to without ever so much as a clue as to who actually stole the keeshka and why? All we know in the end is that someone named Jusef or Yashel (in some cases, Sophie) found the keeshka and returned it to the butcher.

The stolen Polish delicacy that is the center of this polka is blood sausage. This sausage is made of pig's blood, buckwheat or barley and pork leftovers such as the liver, lungs, skin and fat. It's all mixed with spices and stuffed into pig intestine. Doesn't it sound delicious? "Kishka" is the Russian word for intestine. "Kiszka" is the Polish word for gut. "Keeshka" is a phonetically made up spelling. You may even consider it the Polish American spelling. But if you want Polish blood sausage, it's actually called "kaszanka". Either way, someone stole it for some reason.

This hilarious, nonsensical polka tune was composed by Wladyslaw Danilowski, otherwise known as Walter Dana, but the cold case story lyrics were written by Walter Solek, otherwise known as, the Clown Prince of Polkas.

Wladyslaw (Walter) Solek was born, raised, lived and died in Meriden, New Haven, Connecticut. His father was Wojciech (George) Solek, the son of Jan and Kamila, who emigrated in 1892 from the Polish area of Galicia. His surname was actually spelled "Wszolek". George ran a saloon on Willow Street, then later on Pratt Street, in Meriden. His first wife died young and George remarried Walter's mother, Julianna Markowski, on July 23, 1906. Julianna was born in the village of Krzemieniewo, near Olsztyn, in the German partition of Poland in 1887. She immigrated via the SS Blucher and arrived in New York on October 11, 1903.

Walter was born on September 22, 1910. He attended St. Stanislaus School in Meriden. St. Stanislaus parish was founded in 1891 by Polish immigrants who came to Meriden for jobs in the silver manufacturing industry. The parish is considered the oldest Polish American parish in the Archdiocese of Hartford in Connecticut.



Walter Solek  
Photo at findagrave.com

### Inside this issue:

<i>The Clown Prince of Polkas and the Case of the Stolen Keeshka</i>	1
<i>Letter from the President</i>	2
<i>Easter Memories at Dziadzia and Grandma's House</i>	4
<i>Getting Lost in Poland 2018...Part 3</i>	7
<i>Welcome New Members</i>	11

### Welcome

If you are not already a member of the PGSGC and would like to become one and receive this quarterly newsletter (cost is \$24.00 per year), please contact Michael Speare at [pgsgc@yahoo.com](mailto:pgsgc@yahoo.com) for more information.



.....continued on page 3



## Letter from the President

Greetings to PGSGC members:

2020 is the 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of the PGSGC and with it a change of guard that has a mixture of old and new faces at the helm. Anthonette Baciak, President, Michael Speare, Vice President/Membership, Lucia Dominak, Secretary, and Ben Kman, Treasurer/Program Chairman are the new officers. Meetings continue on the first Tuesday of the month through June at 7:00 pm at St. Mary's PNC Parish Hall located at 5375 Broadview Road in Parma.

Past member, Ralph Lysyk, wrote about the creation of the organization in September of 1991 with initial founders Ed Mendyka, Frank Kowalski and Joyce Hillson in *Our Polish Ancestors*, Oct./Dec.2011 hoping to attract about a dozen persons at the first meeting. They were overwhelmed when over a hundred people came to the first meeting taking place in October of 1991 at St. John Cantius. Our membership for 2019 was 79 persons averaging about 35-40 persons per meeting.



2020 Officers  
Michael Speare, Anthonette Baciak, Lucia Dominak, Ben Kman



Our yearly membership fee continues at \$24.00 to be sent to the Membership Chairman, Michael Speare. One of the benefits of membership is receiving the quarterly newsletter, *Our Polish Ancestors*, either by email or regular mail.

Thanks are extended to Lucia Dominak and her volunteers for organizing a beautiful exhibit of Polish artifacts at the *World In Your Backyard* cultural event on January 18th at the Parma-Snow Road Branch of the Cuyahoga County Library. Volunteers assisting at the table, including Lucia, were Richard Szczepinski, Art Lauterer, Ron Kraine and myself. Thank you to everyone for your outreach to the Parma community.

### Polish Genealogical Society of Greater Cleveland

c/o St. Mary's PNC Church

1901 Wexford Ave.

Parma, Ohio 44134

[www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohpgsgc/](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ohpgsgc/)



#### Officers:

President:	Anthonette Baciak	27380 Cook Rd. #115, Olmsted Falls, OH 44138	(440) 235-1218	arbaciak@aol.com
V. President:	Michael Speare	1525 Woodlake Blvd., Stow, Ohio 44224	(330) 634-6673	mespeare@mindspring.com
Treasurer:	Ben Kman	170 Bellus Rd., Hinckley, Ohio 44233	(216) 469-9670	ben_kman@hotmail.com
Secretary:	Lucia Dominak	6624 Rockledge Drive, Brecksville, Ohio 44141	(440) 655-6585	gkneeolog@aol.com



The Clown Prince of Polkas continued from page 1.....

Walter was only 12 years old when his father passed away in 1923. With seven children, Julianna quickly remarried a widower named Joseph Mudry the following year. Joseph had worked for the International Silver Company but became a grocer and real estate agent when he married Julianna. Tragically, in 1930, Walter's stepfather passed away suddenly. At that time, Walter was working for the Meriden Morning Record as a printer's apprentice. His older brother, Henry, was a musician in a dance orchestra. Sometime in the mid 1930s, Henry arranged Walter's musical debut with the Krakowska Orchestra as a drummer. The band played Polish music and polkas at dance halls along the east coast. By 1939, the Krakowska Orchestra was recording for the RCA Victor label. But Walter wanted to take a different direction in his musical career. His musical expression was of a more comical nature so he decided to form his own polka band.

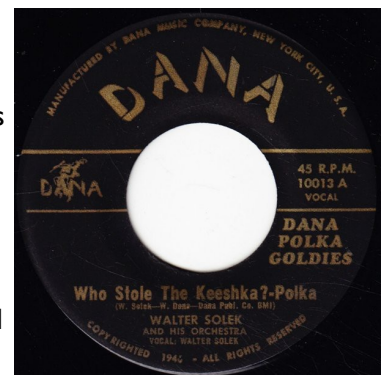
World War II temporarily interrupted Walter's musical career when he was drafted into the U.S. Navy. When the war ended, he reassembled his band and recorded his first major hit for Columbia Records, a polka called "My Girl Friend Julayda". The hit launched him to the top of the polka charts. Walter's entertainment style was endearing. He was billed as the "Polish Spike Jones" because he would dress in goofy costumes and hats, building on a more side-splitting, fun-loving aspect of polka music. His band was booked into dance halls all over the east coast. He eventually learned to play the accordion, the piano and the clarinet but was still considered "The Singing Drummer". In 1947, Walter began hosting a Sunday Polka radio show on WMMW in Meriden which he would continue for 28 years.

SERIAL NUMBER 2862	1. NAME (Print) Walter Henry Solek	ORDER NUMBER 2035
2. ADDRESS (Print) 111 Crown St. Meriden, Conn.		
3. TELEPHONE Meriden	4. AGE IN YEARS 30	5. PLACE OF BIRTH Meriden Conn.
6. COUNTRY OF CITIZENSHIP U.S.A.		7. DATE OF BIRTH 9 28 1910
7. NAME OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS Mrs. Julia Solek Mudry Mother		
8. RELATIONSHIP OF THAT PERSON Mother		
9. ADDRESS OF THAT PERSON 111 Crown St. Meriden, Conn.		
10. EMPLOYER'S NAME Meriden Morning Record		
11. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS Crown St. Sq. Meriden N.H. Conn.		
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.		
REGISTRATION CARD D. S. S. FORM 1 (Rev. 10-17-35)		

Walter Solek's Draft Registration card from 1940

In the late 1940s, in order to appeal to the younger, more American, crowd, Walter made the switch to cutting records with English lyrics instead of Polish. In 1949, the result was the hit, "Who Stole The Keeshka?" In the song, Solek mourns the loss of his keeshka and later pleads for the return of it by offering up his szynka, kielbasa and even his blue suede shoes. He would go on to write the lyrics to many more

polkas. "Who Stole the Keeshka?" was released again in 1963 by Frankie Yankovic and His Yanks making it one of the most memorable polka tunes in history.



Walter Solek was inducted into the International Polka Music Hall of Fame in Chicago in 1974. He was sometimes mocked for his animated performances and strange outfits but criticism didn't bother him. His motto was "Bringing people together through music" and he did just that. His light-hearted and energetic musical style brought his fans laughter and joy.



One of the many record album covers for Walter Solek and His Orchestra exhibiting his light-hearted, animated approach to musical performances

Interestingly, Walter Solek wrote the lyrics to the "Julianna Polka", which was his mother's name, and the "Bartender Polka", which was his father's occupation. Did Walter Solek write polka lyrics about people and events in his life? Maybe he witnessed ,

.....continued on page 6



## Easter Memories at Dziadzia and Grandma's House

By Michael Edward Speare

It was Easter, April 6, 1958. Though we visited my maternal grandparents almost every Sunday, this day was special. At 12 years old, I was dressed in a tie, starched white shirt and a new, itchy wool suit.

My day had begun at Easter Sunday mass. Easter was a time of celebration of the risen Christ which is the essence of the Christian experience. The mass was still in Latin with elaborate vestments for this day. It was marvelous!

My grandparents lived in a house at 9409 Mt. Elliott in Detroit, Michigan along with my Uncle Edward. It was the house my mother had been born in. It was like

thousands of others in Detroit and other Midwestern cities that were built to house the flood of immigrants of the early part of the 20th century. The porch was painted gray and always had plenty of dark spots from what was surely air pollution from the factories in Detroit. No one thought of air pollution then. Soot in the air meant factories were humming with decent paying jobs. That is what counted.

It was a long and trial-filled journey for my grandparents to arrive at this house they owned. My grandmother,

Mary, had come as an 11 year old, with her 4 year old sister and her mother, Jozefa, to Ellis Island in 1907. Their father, Nicholas Pugacz, had arrived a few years earlier and, after finding work in the coal mines nestled around Scranton, sent for his family. In October 1910, Nicholas died. Jozefa was now alone with two daughters, aged 15 and 8, at a time with no life insurance or little in the way of welfare. She took work managing a boarding house.



Stanley Lichota and Mary Pugasz, my grandparents  
Wedding day, 1912

Another Polish immigrant, my grandfather Stanley Lichota who was born in Kikow, immigrated, rented a room and wed my grandmother, Mary, in 1912. Stanley also worked in the mines. They had a son, Joseph (b. 1914), who perished of cholera at the age of 3 months. It was soon after that they moved to the Detroit area. Henry Ford had announced the \$5 workday and other manufacturers followed suit. Stanley found work in the auto plant but, in time, he took his skills as a carpenter into independent work. About 1921, Stanley and Mary bought the home I was about to enter.

Upon entering the home of my grandparents, one would be struck by a distinctive odor. The house and everything and everyone smelled. All the old people I knew had houses that smelled the same. In my ignorance, I just thought that was what happened to you when you got old. Later, I came to realize that the odor was garlic. Everything they cooked started with garlic. I believe my grandfather wore a clove of garlic around his neck.

The first floor of the house consisted of four rooms, plus a bathroom, and a back porch that my grandfather had enclosed. The front room is where we always spent our visits. It consisted of an arm chair, with its back to the front window, and a TV set in the corner next to it. In my memory, the television (TV) was always there but, in fact, TV's were new to most houses.



Easter 1958  
Dziadzia, Thomas (my brother), myself, Mom, Dad  
and Anne Marie (my sister)



Uncle Ed was the technology guy and the TV was his doing. Along the south side of the room was an overstuffed couch suitable for three people. Nearby it was a pole lamp with what seemed to be a 15-watt bulb as the room was pretty dim except for the glow of the TV screen. My grandparents exercised frugality in their home undoubtedly due to living through the Great Depression. Heat floated up from a three foot square grate that kept the room toasty warm. This, along with the 15-watt bulb, provided my father with many chair naps as he listened to my mother speak Polish to her mother. Dziadzia usually spoke English unless he needed a word that was not available in English or something little ears shouldn't hear.

The west wall offered a doorway into the kitchen and 3-4 kitchen chairs that always seemed stacked with magazines and newspaper which had to be re-piled somewhere else when visitors came. Sometimes, there were *Confidential* magazines, provided by Uncle Ed. My mother was always on the alert to snatch them away from my brother and I, thus assuring our continued innocence.

Uncle Ed was in his early 30s and was my godfather. His bedroom was one of the rooms off of the living room. He was a charming and humorously sarcastic participant in our visits,

My grandma always sat at the end of the couch. Early pictures show her as beautiful woman. However, at this time, she was suffering from Parkinson's disease and her right hand shook continuously from the tremors. Over time, she became more and more bent over, lost mobility and became a fixture at the end of the couch. Little did we realize that within three months she would die of a stroke.

My hero, then and now, was Dziadzia. At this time, in 1958, he would have just celebrated his 66<sup>th</sup> birthday. Stanley was a short man with a strong, stocky body. His strength was legendary among his acquaintances, and there were frequent tales told of that strength. Perhaps, the garlic had some value after all.

This may have been the holiday when, for the first time, I was called to the back porch and offered a shot of brandy. I was too young to realize that the way to drink the brandy was as a quick swallow trying your hardest to avoid all contact with your throat. Mistakenly, I gingerly sipped the brandy and ended up coughing as it took my breath away. That was when I got the big slap on my back and a loud, "good, you drink like a man." He said it with that kind of chesty laugh and twinkle in his eye that revealed a zest for living. It was like being inducted into that secret society of men. I wasn't sure I would ever breathe or taste again, but I was secretly pleased with myself for living up to his expectations.

Personally, I liked it when Dziadzia had a drink or two because he would talk about the old country or his days in the coal mines. As a child, I liked those stories about earlier times and realized now what a wonderful incite they gave me into my grandfather as a man. Like most immigrants, he had a story worthy of a Hollywood movie.

On holidays, Dziadzia had the special Polish foods simmering on his coal stove. Their garlic filled aroma filled the air like a modern day scented candle. Fortunately, no one makes garlic scented candles, although, I might buy one just for the memories if they did. Dziadzia would make his own smoked and fresh kielbasa. They would be the gold standard from which I would judge every other kielbasa eaten in my life. The kielbasa was served with a sheet of a paper towel wrapped around it and eaten like an ice cream cone. I am convinced that the brand of paper roll used was specially selected to complement the kielbasa flavor.



Easter 1958  
Grandma with Mom and Anne Marie



Two other specialties were prepared for the holidays, gołąbki (stuffed cabbage) and czernina (duck blood soup). I relished the gołąbki. The long days of simmering made the cabbage incredibly tender and infused with the flavor of the other ingredients. To this day, I have never tasted czernina. Its description, duck blood soup, did not attract me, even at the age of twelve. My mom's sister and her family had come earlier in the day and it was all gone by the time we arrived. To this day, I thank them for that. I did see it in a jar at an ethnic store one time. Its gray color just confirmed to me that axiom about the early bird getting the worm isn't always valid. Thankfully, there was plenty of kielbasa to go around.

The day was filled with other visits to aunts, uncles and cousins around the city. Eventually it was time to leave for my distant rural home. It had been a full day and, I suspect, sleep came easily that night.

So, what is the meaning of this beyond the memories of that now much older boy? The Easter of 1958 and other family visits were oft repeated in the years before and after with little variation until the death of most of the participants. In later life, I learned people sought out counseling to help them seek their identity. I never needed to. This holiday and other visits with family gave me a sense of being important and loved. The repetition might seem boring but it was not. It all reinforced that same concept. How important is that in the growth of a child? How lucky was I?

---

## Our PGSGC Library

Pat Bakaitis, our librarian, has devoted many hours to sorting, researching and organizing all the printed books, pamphlets, photos and research materials that line several cabinets in the classroom off the hallway in the rear of the St. Mary's PNC parish hall, our meeting place. The library is open only on meeting days from 7:00-9:00 p.m. Members can sign out materials for a month at a time on an honor basis.

We do not permit permanent loans. Donations to the library are always welcome, as well as, any members willing to help our librarian with organizing projects. See Pat Bakaitis at one of our meetings if you can help. A big thank you to Pat and all that have volunteered their time in organizing our library.



---

*The Clown Prince of Polkas continued from page 3.....*

the stealing of a keeshka at his stepfather's grocery? Or maybe Walter Solek stole the keeshka himself! If so, it was never revealed and Walter Solek took this secret to his grave. He died in April of 2005 at the age of 94.

My memories of the song "Who Stole the Keeshka?" are of running wild around my grandparents' basement while clutching a small neck pillow like a football which my sister and I imagined was the "keeshka" we had stolen as we listened to the Frankie Yankovic version playing on the 1950s Magnavox record playing console. In the end, I have to ask, who would miss this type of sausage if it were stolen? I suppose, only the Clown Prince of Polkas. I have to admit, it sure is a fun song.



---

**Just a reminder, if you haven't already paid your membership dues for 2020, you are overdue. This could be your last newsletter. If you aren't sure if your membership is current, please contact Ben Kman at (216) 469-9670 or [ben\\_kman@hotmail.com](mailto:ben_kman@hotmail.com).**



## Getting Lost in Poland 2018....Part 3

By Ben Kman

**The following is the story (offered in quarterly installments) of member Ben Kman's 16 day journey to his ancestral villages in Poland in the spring of 2018.**

### Day 4 Monday April 30

I had set my alarm for 5:30 again to make sure I was up, packed and ready to check out early. I wanted to get to the train station as early as possible to catch the commuter train to Sopot. However, I was up again at 4:30 because the sun was already shining. That's when I decided there was no need to use the alarm for the rest of the trip. I used my mornings to make notes about the previous day's adventures and do some planning for the current day since I had internet access through WIFI in hotels.

Around 7:00 am I went down to check out, asked if I could leave my car parked in the lot for the day, put my roller bag into the holding room and had a cup of coffee. I heard that the coffee was really good at this hotel and, once I got myself situated, I ordered one. When I got my coffee, I learned it cost 14 zł (US\$4). That's worse than Starbucks. And it really wasn't all that good. As I was drinking my coffee, the whiny English dude came down and started throwing a fit on his friend's behalf because the shower head wouldn't stay in place. Once again, the day manager got involved. You would have thought this guy owned the hotel chain and that the world was coming to an end. He eventually got his fill of berating all the employees in sight and left. That's when I decided to leave and grabbed an apple from the basket on the way out. It was the first time I had seen apples available in a hotel in Poland.

The receptionist gave me directions to the train station and I had no issues getting there. I found an automat/ticket machine to buy a ticket but it was acting up so I went to a different machine which was even worse. I went back to the first machine and fought my way through buying a ticket then found the stairs to the platform for the train. While I was waiting, I asked a person if all the trains went to Sopot and he said they did. When the next one arrived, I boarded and found a seat. Usually there is a route map on trains showing the order of stations that the train stops at. I didn't see one but then realized that they announced the stops and displayed the name of the next stop on a digital screen. When we arrived in Sopot, I got off the train and used *Maps.me* to route me to the cemetery. Twenty-five minutes later, I was at the entrance of the cemetery in which my grandmother's sister was buried. This was the cemetery I wanted to visit 4 years ago with my parents but our plans fell through when the person who was going to take us wasn't able to meet us.

I already had a general idea of where the grave was in the cemetery and that the grave marker was a simple cross with a shield. This was posted on *BillionGraves.com* along with a marker on a map of the cemetery showing where the grave was. I didn't expect to be at the cemetery very long. I trudged up the hill to the back right corner of the cemetery and began looking at every grave with a cross on it, trying to locate my grandmother's sister. I combed through the back quarter of the cemetery two or three times with no luck. Eventually, I decided to go to the cemetery office to ask the exact location. A person was milling around so I asked if the office was open today and they said "yes, but later". I went back to wandering hoping to find the grave. This cemetery was built on the side of a hill so every trip front to back involved climbing numerous stairs. After another pass through, I went back to the office and waited. The manager opened up and I had to wait for a person who was arranging for a burial. When the manager finished that up, he asked me for whom I was looking. I gave him Janina's first and married name. He, and a cemetery worker, came out and told me that there was no one in the cemetery with that name and, perhaps, she was buried across the street in the communal cemetery. I explained to him that I knew for a fact that she was buried here and he only responded that the data in their database wasn't complete. I convinced the



worker to go to *BillionGraves.com* on his cell phone to look up the grave. He was kind enough to do it. We worked through putting Janina's information into the English search engine and her grave reference popped up. When the worker scrolled down to the picture of the grave, he knew instantaneously where it was and we practically ran (back up the stairs) to the "far" back corner of the cemetery. There, lying on the ground, rotted and dilapidated was Janina's grave marker. That's why I couldn't find it.



There were so many thoughts and emotions running through me. I could have visited her in 1990 when she was still alive and I was in Poland for the first time. Not being able to have my mother visit Janina's grave 4 years ago still disappoints me. Seeing the grave in this run down state saddened me. Her second husband, Wladyslaw Kuncewicz, was buried next to her and he had a proper granite headstone. There were some pine boughs from Christmas on both graves and some old candles. After photographing the grave, I put a note with my name, address and email in a ziplock bag and placed it under one of the candles so it would not blow away in the hope that whoever was caring for the grave would contact me.

I made my way back down the hill to the office yet again. When I had an opportunity to talk to the director again, I mentioned to him that Janina was buried in his cemetery and the worker confirmed. After some discussion, I mentioned that I was sure my family would like to put a new headstone on the grave if at all possible. The issue is that in Poland, each grave is paid for by someone, a dysponent (administrator). That person is the only one who can make decisions about the grave. Without that person's permission, there was nothing we could do. The cemetery had that person's information on file but, by law, cannot release it due to privacy concerns. With that wrinkle, the director began calling around trying to find a way to get permission to put a new stone on the grave. After several phone calls, there was not much else he could do. However, he did give me his email address and a couple of suggestions to follow up on. So when I get back home, I'll have to do more digging.

I left the cemetery with my head muddled. I achieved my goal for the day but it only turned out to be the first step of a staircase. Now I was running late, again, and contemplated skipping my visit to the pier in Sopot. I checked *Maps.me* and it was only a 20 minute walk to the pier from the cemetery and basically in the direction of the train station. What better way to clear my head than a walk along the seaside with a visit to a historic pier, right?

Off I went and ended up in a nice park that ran along the beach. Poles like to joke that every time they go to the seaside, it rains. I had beautiful sunny weather again. After a short walk in the park, I ended up at the pier and got



in line to buy a ticket to walk out on the pier. It cost 8 zloty. (You can start doing the math to figure out the cost in dollars!) There were attendants directing tourists to various ticket windows to speed up the process of buying ticket so no one had to wait in a long line. I followed the attendant's suggestion and quickly got a ticket. I made my way back to the pier and walked through the manned booth to validate my ticket. People were taking leisurely walks on the pier, sitting and enjoying the sun and beautiful weather, or having a meal at an outdoor restaurant at the end of the pier. It was relaxing.





On my way back to the shore, there was a young couple with a child in a stroller. The mother was struggling to lift the front of the stroller to carry it up a set of stairs. I walked over, I asked if I could help, grabbed the front of the stroller and carried it up the stairs with her husband. They thanked me and I continued on. Back “on land”, I stopped to look at the architecture of the stately historic hotel, *Grand Hotel* by Sofitel. There was an elaborate *Sheraton* right next to it...prime real estate.

It was time to head back to the train station and to Gdansk for more wandering. *Maps.me* took me up the main pedestrian/tourist drag. People were walking, sitting at cafes and generally relaxing/enjoying themselves. I walked past the *Krzywy Dom* (Crooked House). It's pretty much a tourist trap/architectural attraction. I continued on after a brief look at the exterior. I needed to ask directions to the train station once because it wasn't well signed and the entrance was like a storefront in a mall.

Back in Gdansk, I started wandering around the old town area (historic center). Since I had never been to Gdansk before, I wanted to get a general feel of the city and its layout. There were a few things I wanted to see: *Zuraw* (a medieval crane for loading ships), the *Neptune statue* and *Dlugi Targ* (Long Market Street). I knew I wouldn't have time for the *Solidarity Center* or the *WWII Museum* so I spent several hours just looking around. I later learned that there was an amber altar in St. Brigit's church so I'll need to file that away for future visits. Overall, Gdansk was a pleasant surprise for me and I was able to get a good sense of the city even with my short visit. It's definitely worth a return trip and deeper visit.



It was now early afternoon and I was hoping to get to Paslek between 3:00 and 5:00 pm. With the construction and traffic that I knew were waiting for me, I needed to get back to the hotel, grab my bag and hit the road. Of course, my suitcase was buried 10 deep and under 2 layers of piled up suitcases in the storage area. I offered to dig my bag out for the girl at the front desk but she insisted that she would take care of it. When she finally brought my bag to me, I told her she wouldn't need to go to the gym that evening and work out. She just smiled and laughed.

The Tom Tom (GPS) got me out of the maze of streets of Gdansk and back on the highway....same story, different day. I flied along until I hit construction then crept through construction. Traffic seemed even worse today. As it turned out, a tractor trailer broke down and was parked in the median. A tow truck/repair vehicle was trying to get to the truck but the road was completely gridlocked both ways. Eventually, there was a break in the traffic and the tow truck was able to pull off the road and we started moving again. During this break, I decided that I would take the back roads from Paslek to Wdzydze after my visit. I couldn't comprehend sitting in this traffic for a third time in 3 days. Finally, I made it back to Elblag and the highway again and was in Paslek within 30 minutes. I was able to figure out how to program addresses into this GPS so the Tom Tom took me directly to the correct group of blocks (old communist apartment buildings). After parking, I left my stuff in the car and went to find the right building. Once I found the building, I remembered where the entrance was and climbed the three sets of stairs (no elevator) to the Socha's flat. They have two doors at the entrance to their flat. One opens out and one opens in. I'm not sure of the reason behind that design.



Hugs, kisses (three cheek kisses) and handshakes were all around. Polish men are fervent hand shakers. If you walk up to a group of men, it's expected that you shake everyone's hand even if you don't know the person, regardless of the number of people. I've noticed this even among my group of Polish friends. After being welcomed in, I was told that Marian (aka Mariusz) my cousin was showering so I sat down and started talking to my grandmother's cousin. He is a history and map buff and I had a good opportunity to have a one-on-one conversation with him so I started asking leading questions. "Where was your house located (before the war)?" I've had this discussion with him before but this time he showed me on an old map where the house was. "Did you have electricity?" They didn't have electricity until after WWII. When electricity did arrive in the village (Huta Poreba near Bircza), there was one small light bulb on the altar in the church. There was no running water nor was there a school that was accessible for the children of the village. He continued to tell me about experiences he remembered during the war. He was a child during WWII and the village he lived in was located between the San River and the current Ukrainian border. This region experienced much fighting because opposing forces were stirring up discontent between the ethnic Lemkos and the Poles. The UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army) laid waste to the region burning down villages. Before the war, this was a multi-ethnic region (Poles, Lemkos, Jews, Germans) and everyone got along. After the war, there were mass deportations of people to other regions of Poland leaving this area severely depopulated. As a result, the family home was burned to the ground and my grandmother's cousin's family moved to a house vacated by a Lemko family. If my understanding is correct, this new house was located closer to a village with a school so the children were able to attend a few years of school and get a rudimentary education. I also confirmed that his family bought my great grandfather's property when my great grandmother returned to Poland to visit her family and sell the land. This was probably one of the best conversations I've had with a relative in Poland. I had a high level of comprehension and was able to ask driving questions that kept things going.

All the while, his wife was yelling at him from the kitchen to stop telling all these old, boring stories. That's when the plate of cakes came out. For whatever reason, and I'm sure many people wouldn't complain, Poles serve cake and sweets prior to eating a meal. I'm not sure if that is just a hospitality thing for guests but I'd rather fill up on good home cooking. To make matters worse, Mariusz's mom is a wonderful cook and baker so either way you can't go wrong. Eventually, Mariusz finished cleaning up and came to the room we were sitting in. He showed me how to connect my phone to the TV wirelessly and I showed the family some old family photos from that side of the family from the U.S.



We spent the rest of the day in conversation and watched some TV. There was some Polish reality show about scrap metal collectors called *Zlomowisko*. It was rather entertaining but generally over dramatized. More family and friends stopped by. We re-arranged the table so more people could sit around it. One grandson stopped over. He is a paramedic studying to become a nurse. I didn't recognize him even though he said we met 4 years ago. That's when he said he started exercising and lost a lot of weight. That's when I realized who he was and was amazed at his transformation. It was his wife that was at the flat when I arrived and was helping the Sochas in the kitchen. While we were talking, Mariusz went to the "piwnica", a basement storage room in the block. The food started to come out in quantity and the bottle of Pepsi showed up followed by shot glasses and a liter of vodka. It was time to settle in, relax, eat and drink. Another grandson showed up. He was a border guard at the border



between Russia and Poland. Yes, Russia does border Poland. The Oblast of Kaliningrad is detached from the Russian “mainland” but is still a territory of Russia. We talked about his responsibilities and what his job was like.

Despite the fact that you generally end up well inebriated after a vodka drinking session, it really is more than just getting drunk. It is an opportunity to relax and get to know one another at a deeper level. It’s a privilege to get invited or be asked to drink vodka with a family. When the last drop was rung out of the vodka bottle, people started to disperse and all the food was cleaned up. We were drinking and dining in the room that was going to be my bedroom. Pretty much every room in a Polish house is multi-purpose. Almost every chair or sofa pulls out into a bed. I settled in, got ready for bed and, in the glow of the vodka, worked to upload my photos for the day and take some notes. I also looked at alternative routes to avoid the construction when I left the next day.

---

## Welcome — New Member — Witamy

Mary Lou Melena	cgcpetalprincess@aol.com	Bartkowiak, Preneta, Prenenta
Mary Russian	33779 Sicily Ct., North Ridgeville, OH 44039	Jakobowska/i, Jablecki, Szczepanski, Misielak
Pete J. & Anne K. Wielicki	3314 Fortune Ave., Parma, OH 44134	Charvat, Wojcik, Sniezek
Kathy Thomas	kit52@att.net	Jakubowski
Joseph Bialek	4233 River Ridge Dr., Cleveland, OH 44109 jgbialek2@roadrunner.com	Blalek
Melanie Mazur	1216 Kensington Dr., Mundelein, IL 60060 chicsub@aol.com	Mazurowski, Lassa, Piechowski, Leszkowicz, Malak, Dobrowski, Karpowicz
Mary & James Zamiska	633 Shallow Creek Circle, Northfield, OH 44067 maryzamiska@gmail.com	Mirek, Bojdo
Carol & Dennis Szymanski	caszymanski@windstream.net	Sztybel, Jurkowski, Kolczynski, Magalski, Otto

---

## Schedule of Presentations for Upcoming Meetings

Apr: ***Prussian Research: Searching For Your Elusive Prussian Ancestors***  
Presented by Stephen Wendt

May: ***Cuyahoga County Archives***  
Judith Cetina, the director of the archives, will discuss the new county archives’ location, logistics and holdings of interest to the genealogist.

Jun: **TBA**

The Polish Genealogical  
Society of Greater Cleveland  
c/o St. Mary's PNC Church  
1901 Wexford Ave.  
Parma, Ohio 44134



**Polish Genealogical Society of  
Greater Cleveland**

PGSGC  
c/o St. Mary's PNC Church  
1901 Wexford Ave.  
Parma, Ohio 44134

President: Anthonette Baciak  
E-mail: [pgsgc@yahoo.com](mailto:pgsgc@yahoo.com)

Newsletter Editor: Trina Galauner  
E-mail: [galauner@yahoo.com](mailto:galauner@yahoo.com)



Visit us on the web at:  
[sites.rootsweb.com/~ohpgsgc](http://sites.rootsweb.com/~ohpgsgc)

Please submit all correspondence to:  
**PGSGC Newsletter**  
c/o the return address above

### About Us

Meetings are held the first Tuesday of the month (except July and August) at St. Mary's PNC Church parish hall, 5375 Broadview Rd., Parma, Ohio. We have summer break in July and August. St. Mary's is located on the corner of Broadview Rd. and Wexford Ave. in Parma, Ohio. Meetings begin at 7:00 PM and are usually over by 9:00 PM. There is ample parking in the parish parking lot. The entrance is on Marietta Ave. Membership dues are \$24.00 per calendar year.

At many of our meetings, we have guest speakers who address the group on subjects in which we have an interest. The subjects may include genealogical matters, Polish history, heritage and traditions. When we do not have a guest speaker, we have "**Show and Tell**" nights when fellow members discuss their genealogical problems, ask for advice from anyone with a similar problem, tell us of their discoveries, or let us know what they've learned about their ancestors.

Our group maintains a library which is a popular resource our members enjoy. It contains various books, maps, pamphlets and newsletters from other genealogical groups. Materials can be borrowed from the library for a period of one month. We employ the honor system with regard to borrowing of books and other related materials.

We also keep a surname research list. This list includes the surnames of our ancestors which our active members are researching. In the past, members have discovered that they were investigating names that other members were also researching.

We publish a quarterly twelve page newsletter entitled, *Our Polish Ancestors*. Articles for the newsletter are selected that are of interest to our membership. Many are based on materials gathered from the many fine research facilities in and around the Greater Cleveland area, such as: The Cleveland Public Library, The Western Reserve Historical Society, The Cuyahoga County Archives, The Family History Centers and the many Polish-American churches in this part of northern Ohio. Articles written by our membership are always welcome.