



Polish Heritage

Center at

Panna Maria

Visitor Experience, #17 in Series

St. Ann Church, Kosciusko, Texas

BRIEF HISTORY OF ST. ANN'S PARISH –

KOSCIUSKO, TEXAS

In 1854, the first group of families left the region of Silesia which was under Prussian rule. After nine weeks of sailing, they landed in Galveston, Texas, on December 3rd. Soon they established Panna Maria, the first Polish settlement in the United States. More immigrants and the descendants of the original ones expanded to surrounding areas, and more parishes were established. In 1898, the first Catholic church was erected in the Kosciusko community. It was named after St. Ann. The founders of the parish, numbering about sixty-five families, were mostly younger people who previously formed part of the Cestohowa parish. The church was built by local carpenters at a cost of \$2,000. Labor and

some materials were provided by the people. In 1933, the church was enlarged by 20 feet. In 1934, St. Ann's had 701 parishioners and 105 Students at the school. Also in 1934, electricity came to Kosciusko. The church received electric lighting, and the reed (pump) organ that was used in the choir was replaced with a Wicks pipe organ. In 1935, the present rectory was built, and it is to be replaced with a new one sometime in the near future.

The present church was built in 1951, at a cost of about \$150,000, under the direction of then **Msgr. Peter L. Foegelle**. Many visitors to this community are amazed at how such a tiny parish could have constructed such a beautiful and expensive church. Even a preceding pastor on his first arrival referred to it as, "the cathedral among the cactus."

There are two reasons how such a structure could be built. The first is that St. Ann's is a rural parish in every sense of the word. Most of the parishioners live on farms or ranches, some several miles from the church itself. The second and most important reason is the deep faith of the inhabitants of the Kosciusko community. Most are direct descendants of the original settlers at Panna Maria who in 1855, only one year after their arrival from Silesia, built a beautiful masonry church while themselves living in little shacks or holes dug in the ground with grass roofs.

While the sacrifices of the Kosciusko inhabitants in 1951 cannot be compared to those of the first Panna Maria settlers, it should be remembered, however, that this ornate structure was paid for primarily with income earned from agriculture. This translates to fathers, mothers, and their children working in the fields, picking cotton and pulling corn with their hands. Instead of using their scarce sparse revenue entirely on themselves, a lot of personal pleasures were "given up," so as to make their church possible. It is for this reason that many of today's parishioners view this church as a treasure they have inherited from their parents.

Today this community has assimilated itself into mainstream America yet has maintained its generous and peace loving existence.

*From the History of St. Ann's Parish – Kosciusko, Texas, St. Ann's Parish
file archives*



KOSCIUSKO the Early Years

As families and the community of Cestohowa grew, once more many immigrants set out in search of more land. In 1880, about 65 families headed north again along the Cibolo River. Surnames of some were: **Pruski, Lyssy, Korzekwa, Wiatrek, Keller, Dworaczyk, Jaskinia, Nestroy, Drzymala, and Moy**. They bought and settled the land in an area called Little Egypt. Here they joined the **Volrath, Kilgore, Butler, and Hutchin** families who had first settled this land in 1850. The immigrants found the land along the Cibolo River was rich and fertile which meant it was excellent for growing their crops. It is not known why, but, at this time, the name of the community was changed to Kosciusko. The community of Kosciusko was the first, and is the only,

Silesian-Polish colony in Wilson County; it was founded March 12, 1880. Kosciusko was a mission of Cestohowa. Since there was not a church in Kosciusko, until 1898, the people of the community still attended church in Cestohowa.

The People

The Polish people seemed to live apart from the other Texans. They spoke their own language, sent their children to their own Catholic schools, and even their dress was different from that of the Texans. Many of the women dressed in the costumes of the old country. They wore at that time what was considered very short skirts, showing their limbs two or three inches above the ankles. Some had on wooden shoes, and almost without exception they had broad-brimmed, low-crowned hats, nothing like the hats then worn in Texas.

In the Kosciusko community, the most popular past time was hunting and fishing. Things were very different from the "old" country. Everyone could possess and carry a gun. Many would display their skills as hunters. There was a variety of wild game in the area. Many Poles were busy establishing their homesteads and farms which still remain in many families today.

In addition to rearing a family and taking care of the home, the women in the community worked alongside the men in the fields. The women also enjoyed a variety of favorite hobbies and past times, such as quilting, gardening, and canning which were also necessities. Additionally, they sewed clothing for their families.

Although the Polish people still lived as and followed the many traditions their ancestors did, they were always open to new ideas and inventions. Barbed wire strung by **Peter F. Lyssy** on his farms was some of the earliest fencing in Wilson County in the late 1800s.

The First Schools

In 1892, a Polish Catholic school was built. Two acres of land for the school was purchased from **V. J. Keller** and sold to **Bishop Neraz** for the cost of one dollar. It was a one room school; the younger children occupied one side of the room while the older children had classes on the other. There was one heater in the center of the room, and there were no screens on the windows or doors. Before 1940, the children's lessons were taught in Polish and later in English. The Holy Mass was also said daily in this one room school. Latin was also taught so that the Holy Mass could be understood. The school named St. Ann's, was operated by the **Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word**. The Sisters lived in a room attached to the school and continued their work in the parish for the next seventy-six years.

Just a few years after the founding of the first school, another school was built about two and a half miles away at the Borysownia, or Liberty Hill, community. By the early twentieth century, the nuns were alternating with a secular teacher at the two schools. When the Sisters taught at Borysownia or so-called Liberty Hill, **Mr. L. T. Urbanczyk** was the school master at Kosciusko.



Present St.
Ann's
Church-
image
from
***Celebrating
90 Years
As A
Parish
Family***



THE RED AND WHITE PRUSKI STORE

The Town

The Red and White Store, which was the first general store in Kosciusko, was built in 1896. It was owned and operated by **Nieschwietz** and **Lyssy** families. The store sold everything from hardware, dry goods, school supplies, cosmetics, and groceries to farm implements and fuels.

Later owners of the store had the surnames: **Stanush**, **Urbanczyk**, **Pruski**, **Denmark**, **Pilarczyk** (who remodeled, added on, and also changed its name to Farmers General Store), **Pawlik**, **Kyrish**, and **Dworaczyk**. A section of the Farmers General Store was actually a saloon or bar. In 1954, **Stanley Dworaczyk** and his brother, **Hagen Dworaczyk**, bought the business and property. It was still operated as a general store, and a meat market was later added on. In 1967, the old Farmers General Store building was torn down, and a new smaller building was constructed after which it was owned and operated by **Stanley Dworaczyk**.

In the late 1890s, surrounding the Farmers General Store was a meat market owned and operated by **John Skloss**, a blacksmith shop owned and operated by **John Scheffler**, and a garage owned by **John Kopecki**.

Not too far down the road was another blacksmith shop which was owned and operated by **Skrobarczyks** and later purchased by **T. W. Wollney**. Its location was on the curve which would now be directly across the street from the front of the community hall. This blacksmith shop remained open until sometime during the 1960s. Next to it was a small saloon which was opened after Prohibition where they sold 3-2 beer. It was owned by **Tom Kasprzyk** and **Ben Sells**. In the 1890s, water wells were dug by hand by **Frank Jaskinia**.

General Thaddeus Kosciuszko

General Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a Polish hero and national leader, was born February 4, 1746 in the Polesie district of Poland. In August of 1776, Thaddeus Kosciuszko offered George Washington his services in the struggle for freedom of the United States. On October 18, Kosciuszko was appointed an engineer with the rank of colonel in the American Army. In 1777, Kosciuszko was credited for the victory against the British in the Battle of Saratoga, which was a turning point in the American Revolution. In 1778, Kosciuszko directed the construction of fortification at West Point, one of the finest military schools in the world. In 1783, Kosciuszko was promoted to the rank of Brigadier General. He was granted American citizenship, a pension, and land estates. Five years after returning to Poland, on October 1, 1789, Thaddeus Kosciuszko was appointed Major General in the Polish Army. The following year Kosciuszko led a revolution for Polish independence. During the early battles the Poles were victorious; however, eight months later in the battle of Maciejowice, a combined Russian and Prussian force crushed the Polish Army. In 1797, after a slow and lengthily physical and emotional recovery, Kosciuszko returned to America. The last years of Kosciuszko's life were spent trying to gain support for a central education system. He also had great sympathy for the plight of blacks in America. Kosciuszko had made Thomas Jefferson executor of his will, leaving some of his land and most of his money to the blacks. General Thaddeus Kosciuszko died in Switzerland on October 15, 1817, at the age of 72, from complications due to a horseback riding accident. General Thaddeus Kosciuszko's body was returned to Poland in 1818 and is entombed in the Cathedral of Krakow, next to Polish kings, which is considered a great honor indeed.



The Post Office

In 1896, Kosciusko also opened its first U.S. Post Office. Its location was inside the general store. The first postmaster was **Frank Nieschwietz**. Other postmasters were: **Ignatz Lyssy**, **Elias L. Stanush**, **Hieronim Bomba**, and **Ladislaus Urbanczyk**. The Post Office remained opened until 1920 when rural delivery became available.

The following from Centennial – St. Ann's Catholic Church, Kosciuszko, Texas 1898-1998

ST. ANN CATHOLIC CHURCH - HIGH MASS - CIRCA 1940

IMAGE COURTESY OF BRANDON DARR



PASTORS OF ST. ANN'S

Fr. Stanley Przyborowski, 1898-1901; Fr. John Matysiak, 1901-1903; Fr. Stanley Przyborowski, 1903-1904; Fr. Joseph Maszolas, 1904-June 1905; Fr. Theodor Jaron, 1905-Sept 1911; Fr. Joseph Karcz; **Fr. Mariano Garriga (later named the 6th Bishop of the Diocese of Corpus Christi)**, 1911-1912; Fr. Peter Grzesiak, Nov 1912-Aug 1915; Fr. Anthony Gorek, Aug 1915-1917; Fr. John Karnowski, 1917-1918; Fr. Peter Grzesiak, Mar 1918-1921; Fr. John Jachtyl, 1921-1929; Fr. Ben Kaminski, Jan 1930-Dec 1936; Fr. Peter Vaitonis, Jan 1937-Sept 1937; **Msgr. Peter Foegelle, Sept 1937-Feb 1971**; Fr. Sigmund Wojciechowski, Feb 1971-Dec 1986; Fr. Jasper Mauss, Temporary Care; **Msgr. Thomas Lyssy, Mar 1987-Oct 1990**; Fr. Leon Rubaj, Jan 1991-Jan 1994; Fr. Edward Wanat, SDS, Jan 1994-2000; Fr. Boleslas "Bill" Zadora, SDS, 2000-2003; Fr. Wojciech Pelczarski, SDS, 2003-June 2009; Fr. Andrzej Waszczenko, SDS, June 2009-June 2012; Fr. Jan Szpilka, SDS, July 2012-April 2013; Fr. Andrzej Waszczenko, SDS, May & June 2013; St. Stanislaw Oleksy, SDS, June 2013-June 16, 2015; Fr. Gregory Szewczyk, SDS, July 2015-Sept 2016; Fr. Damian Jaje, SDS, Sept 2016 – Current.

Vocations from St. Ann's:

These vocations all have connections with St. Ann's

Fr. Edward Dworaczyk, Fr Julius Dworaczyk, Msgr. Benedict Pruski, Msgr. Thomas Lyssy, Sr. Cyrilla Korzekwa, Sr. Loritta Korzekwa, Sr. Lucy Korzekwa, Sr. Janelle Korzekwa, Sr. Mary Barbara Kopecki, and Sr. Carol Marie Wiatrek.

GOOD NEWS!

First, I want to acknowledge and make a correction; **Jeanette & Ken Urbanczyk** were misspelled in the last newsletter, my apology! And now to give many thanks for those who have supported the Heritage Center Project since our last newsletter are: **Fr. Joaquin Zermeno for Immaculate Conception Church in McCook, TX; Velmon & Peggy Buehring; John & Patricia Picacio; Michael Kurtin; Archie Opiela; John A & Mary Pollok Yanta Memorial Trust; Betty Lind; Raymond, Janice J., Daryl R., & Corwin S. Moczygemba; Lucy & Edmund Titzman, Jr.; Michael Lee & Vivian M Hudson; Johnnie D & Louise Thornton; Brigidine Sisters c/o Kathleen Teresa Fogarty; Mildred Dupnik; Judy Weber; Martin Jendrusch; Donald & Catherine Varella; Mr. & Mrs. Alfred Pawelek; Charles Lane Olmsted; Rev. Msgr. Emil J. Wesselsky; Austin Polish Society; Evelyn & Rudolph Lyssy; Elizabeth Burda; Sam & Susie Kotara; Kiolbassa Provision Company; Jim & Barbara Britton.**

LOOKING FOR SPONSORSHIP FOR THE LARGE ELECTRONICALLY ILLUMINED GRAPHIC APPEARING TO BE A BEAUTIFUL STAINED GLASS WINDOW FOR THESE PARISHES!

It would be a shame if these had no sponsorship!

St. Stanislaus Church, Bandera, the second oldest Polish parish in America!

Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, St. Hedwig, the third oldest Polish parish in America!

St. Michael, San Antonio, the third oldest parish in San Antonio!

St. Joseph, Las Gallinas, in northern Atascosa County.

St. Joseph Church, Inez, Victoria County.

Sacred Heart Church, White Deer, in Carson County, in the panhandle.

Remember, an individual or family does not have to do this on their own. Talk it up among others in your parish and represent your parish as a group. Also, the pledge can be paid out over time! This is our heritage; do not let it slip by! We must keep it alive!

**GIVE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN, WHEN YOU CAN!
FOUNDING DONORS TO DATE:**

Library & Genealogy Research Room founding donor **Father Leopold Moczygemba Foundation**

Folk Architecture in Poland, Wooden Country Style Church founding donor **Andy & Joyce Rives**

According Graphic of all Silesian Polish Families that came to Texas (1854-1870) founding donor **George & Betty Kowalik**

Cattle Brands, Ranching, Farming, Family Community and Church founding donor **Sam & Susie Kotara and Mary Ann Kotara Schirmer**

Immaculate Conception, McCook founding donor **Joyce Skloss family et al**
Holy Cross, Yorktown founding donor **Dr. Martha Respondek**

Holy Trinity, Falls City founding donor **Barbara Moczygemba Hoffmann, Roger Moczygemba, William & Eleanor Moczygemba, and Clifford & Yvonne Kotara Moczygemba**

St. Ann, Kosciuszko founding donor **Mark Hoffmann**

Immaculate Conception, Panna Maria founding donor **Andy & Joyce Rives**

Nativity of BVM, Cestohowa founding donor **Lambert & Rosalie Titzman**

Sts. Peter & Paul, Meyersville founding donor **Dr. Martha Respondek**

Moczygemba Sculpture founding donor **family of Msgr. Henry Moczygemba**

Display Case for Rotating Exhibits founding donor **Lorraine Ponish**

Panna Maria Pastors founding donor **Barbara & Patrick Hoffmann**

SOME OF THE AVAILABLE NAMING OPPORTUNITIES!

Images of Sts. Cyril & Methodius

Image of St. Hedwig

Image of St. Stanislaus

Image of St. Hyacinth

Image of St. John Paul II

Marriage of Meiszko & Dobrawa

Tadeusz Kosciuszko

Letter from Fr. Moczygemba

Midnight Mass, Christmas Eve, 1854

Five Moczygemba Priests

Education in the Texas Silesian Communities

Bishop John W. Yanta, the first Bishop from the Polish Immigration of 1854



ONLY ONE PRIEST AND NO NUN MEMORIALIZED!

Of particular significance in the Naming Opportunities is remembering the priests and religious vocations who both served our people and the priestly and religious vocations that have come from the community. To date, the only priest that has been memorialized is **Msgr. Henry**

Moczygemba by his brother, **Lucian** and his family. And at this point, no nun has been memorialized either! We need to remember and give thanks for those who have served us in the Church. We have produced numerous vocations to serve God and His Church. Just as the saints of old are remembered; we need to not let these precious memories fade. Those not directly connected to any one vocation, may memorialize those who impacted your life and who were important to you. Help us not to forget!

MEMORIALS: CLUSTERING OF FAMILIES AND REPEAT DONORS!

The Heritage Center is not about any single individual or family; we all have roots and connections. So should the support be any different? The easiest way to support the project of the Heritage Center is for families to pull together and memorialize their ancestors! We have seen several of these and it is amazing what these families have done! So discuss it with one another and memorialize of your family's ancestors. The Polish Heritage Center also needs repeat donors! Building the Center is only a single phase! Once built, we need to keep it open for the future generations who want to come and learn about their ancestors. This project is for the ages!

You can contact me, **Bishop Yanta**, at **210-733-1979**, or write to **P.O. Box 28128, San Antonio, TX 78228**. Or you can contact **John Wojtasczyk** at **210-387-7472** or email at **wojtasczyk@sbcglobal.net**.

BISHOP YANTA UPDATE!



Bishop Yanta is still behind the wheel and driving the bus!

Bishop Yanta update: above are pictured Bishop Yanta and Vice Chairperson Al Notzon at the “Monday Meeting.” Bishop Yanta has a standing meeting every Monday with Al Notzon, Joe Yanta (Vice President of the Board), CPA Michael Schott, and others to discuss and track the ongoing progress of the Polish Heritage Center.

Thanks be to God for the progress we have made in capturing the values of our Polish ancestors who courageously sacrificed for us today and future generations. ***Prayer is the most powerful thing on Earth! In your prayer, join us for our weekly meetings!***

CONSTRUCTION WEEK 67!



WATER PROOF COATING BEFORE THE BEAUTIFUL CAST STONE IS PUT IN PLACE!

Summary: Phase II – Construction of Exterior

Bid awarded to Boyle Construction:	\$3,373,000.00
13 th Month completed Construction Cost (April '16 – May '17):	\$1,840,421.05
8 Months payment by Polish Heritage Center:	\$1,114,376.21
5 Months payment by Falls City National Bank Loan:	\$726,044.84
Interest Payments paid to Falls City National Bank for loan:	\$16,631.40
Construction cost for first 14 months (including payment #14):	\$1,905,831.32
14 th Month payment due August 7 th , 2017:	\$65,410.27
Remaining Construction cost after 14 months paid:	\$1,467,168.68

UPDATE OF POLISH HERITAGE CENTER AT PANNA MARIA

AUGUST 1, 2017

Phase II of the project which includes construction of the piers, foundation and exterior work is nearing completion. I am so appreciative of all the donors who have chosen to honor their Polish immigrant ancestors in such a wonderful way. I know that our ancestors have to be smiling down on us and our efforts to honor their courage, hard work, dedication, sacrifice and faith. I am appreciative of all the prayers that have been offered for my recovery, and I am so happy to be home again and taking up the projected challenge to raise the money for the next phase which will include the interior of the Center along with the production and installation of the exhibits and the audio visual effects in the Polish Heritage Center. In that regard, we had a review of the project by a noted fund raising consultant who congratulated us on the progress we have made and recommended that we consider having not only the Board and Campaign committee involved, as in the current Phase, but also hiring a Vice-President of Development to manage the day to day operations of the effort. Our Lord and His Blessed Mother have truly been a part of our daily prayers for the success of the Polish Heritage Center, and we need to pray that they guide us and send us a great person or couple to be Vice-President of Development for the center. If you are interested or know of someone for this position, please contact me at 210-733-1979. Also, if you would like to receive our newsletter, please write to PO Box 28125, San Antonio, TX, 78228, or contact John Wojtasczyk at 210-387-7472 or email at wojtasczyk@sbcglobal.net. Asking for God's blessings on you and your family.