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(A free translation -- cak)

LAND OF THE KASHUBS

By Ryszard Ciemiński

This land is variously named -- "Kashubian Lakeland", for this is the region of hundreds of picturesquely located lakes of glacial origin; "Kashubian Switzerland", for in a broad belt stretch valleys and ravines, those marvelous river ravines which wind their way by the towns of Raduń, Wiczyce, Łeba, Skupia; "Land of the Kashubs", for it represents the cultural, regional and historical distinctiveness in relation to neighboring regions: Kociewie, Żukow, Warmia, Mazuria from the east, Skupki land to the west and the land of Człuchowa on the south. The inhabitants of this region speak of their homeland plainly as "Kaszuby."

The picturesque lakeland is inhabited by the Slovakian ethnic group of Kashubs who have preserved through many centuries their cultural and language distinctiveness. These descendants of the ancient Pomeranians despite a long period of Germanization -- during the times when the Gdansk (Danzig) Pomerania was taken over by the Prussians (1772 - 1920) -- preserved a warm attachment to Poland. In the XIX century there developed a regional kashubian activity which gave rise to a literature in the kashubian tongue, and an appreciation of the national heritage of the Kashubs.

The decisive pro-Polish position of the Kashubs aided Poland in regaining access to the sea after World War I. During the Hitlerian occupation period thousands of Kashub patriots were lost in Hitler's concentration camps.

At one time, more than 80 years ago, many Kashubs -- not finding bread on the native soil -- emigrated; these were the pioneers of Polish settlements in America. They blazed the trail of penetration of the Polish people to the depths of the American interior. They drew to the port cities of Erie, Buffalo, Alpena and Toledo, Detroit and Chicago, and found their way down to New Orleans. John Lemke -- a Kashub from the below-Danzig town of Bretowo -- brought the beginning of the settlement, founding in the year 1859 in Detroit a Polish colony. Later, from generation to generation the Kashub lineage of Kurr, Derdowski (the foremost of his lineage, a Kashub emigrant born in Wiele, Jerome "Jerosz" Derdowski belongs today to the pantheon of Kashub literature), Lemki, Kurdzielów, Worzellów laid the foundations for the future community and political structures in America. The children, nephews and grandchildren of these emigrants

would, undoubtedly, wish to become acquainted with today's Land of the Kashubs.

The Kashubian lands spread from Klub Smoldzin and Smoldzina, from the ancient Slesonian hills of Rewekol, from lands inhabited by a small remnant of still-alive Slesonians (documented evidence of the indigenous age-old Slesonian homeland of Western Pomerania) in the west in the farming and fishing district of a half-century ago (circa 1920) and at present (the early 1970s) a 200,000 population town of Gdynia on the east; from the lantern of the sea in Rozew (portrayed by the pen of Stefan Żeromski in his book "The Breeze from the Sea") on the north, over the Tuchel Forest on the south.

Furthermost to the south is located Chejnice, the unnamed capitol of southern Kashubian land, a town with a present population of 20,000 persons, a witness of the ancientness of the land and her historical glory. The town has preserved its medieval chessboard arrangement of streets, fragments of fortress walls from the XIV century along with the city-fort entrance arch of Człuchow, and a number of medieval churches. These monuments of antiquity could relate about the battles which the inhabitants of this land engaged in with the Knights of the Cross and later with the Swedes. The town is surrounded on all sides with majestic forests, the Forests of Tuchel. This forest land abounds from the north to the only one in its class nature reservation and public cultural area which is the complex of Wdzydzki (V-did'ski) lakes along with the villages bearing the names of Karsin, Wiele, and Wdzydze Kiszewskie.

It was in the Wdzydze Kiszew where a village school-teacher, an author of his beloved region and an ethnographer, Izydor Gulowski, who in 1906 purchased from a local farmer a log-cabin in the shade, gathered to it furniture, equipment, relics, etc., and thus originated a collection which from the year 1970 earned for itself the renowned title of the Kashub Ethnographic Park.

The Kościerska region was known some time ago as the granary of the Kashubs. Of the 55,000 population more than half worked on the land; today, the number of farmers is much less. In the nearby town of Żubianie a modern porcelain factory was founded. The trade-mark of this factory soon will rate as high as the trade-marks of porcelain factories in Cielowa and in Chodzież. The county, however, remains largely farmland as is evidenced by 500 tractors on individually-owned farms, as well as on 12 nationalized farms and on four cooperative farms. The older generation, remembering the school situation prior to World War I, can value the fact that today there are in operation 87 grade schools, 9 middle schools, 13 pre-school centers,

16 libraries, 23 theatres and 7 cinemas; television has 5,000 viewers. Today's teachers and authors together are no less devoted patriots of the Kashub lands than once were Dr. Izydor Gulowski and his wife in their ethnographic pursuits in Wdzydze, and Thomas Rogala from Kościerzyn, who together with Anthony Abraham from Gdynia traveled in 1919 to Versailles in order to work toward the re-union of the Pomerania and Kashub lands to Poland.

The capitol and heart of the Kashubs, known as Kartuzy (although Gdansk fulfills the function of the official capitol of this land) has, in the last few years undergone an amazing metamorphosis, becoming a large tourist center in the Land of the Kashubs and gaining the title of administrator of the Gdańsk (Danzig) voivodship in the overall Polish concourse. Renowned from its uncommon beauty this region lying amidst forests, moistened by the waters of five lakes steeped in paeons of song through the efforts of the town's Organization of Kashubian Song and Dance. The town in which the Carthusians, an order of monks from the valley of Chartreuse in France, erected in the XIV - XV centuries a monastery along with the individual eramite huts. Today, the town of Kartuz enjoys a prosperity in its commercial enterprises.

Less than 10 kilometers from Kartuz is located the village of Chmielno. In this once-small village, a local man, Francis Necel, established many years ago a ceramic workshop. Laboriously he covered the clay vessels with a bright glistening yellow or blue glaze on which he painted images of flowers strange to the local lakesides, similar to tulips. Years later he added the design of fish scales and also the design of the Kashubian garland. The designs were placed on vases, plates, pitchers, jars, etc. After his death, his son Leo carried on the heritage, and after his death and burial in the Chmielno cemetery, a grandson, Francis Ryszard, carried on the family tradition. In the meantime, the village of Chmielno advanced to a tourist center. On the lakes of Białym, Kłedem, Rekowem and the largest in Kashub Land - Raduń - arose many camping sites.

In Chmielno begins the very scenic lakeside railroad through the Kashubian Pojezierze and the entire Gdańsk Pomerania, known as the Kashubian Road. Opened to traffic in 1967, the road travels from Chmielno through Chmielenko, Zawery, Rebeszewo, Złota Góra (Gold Hill, on which is mounted the monument of the Pomeranian Patriots Action, the work by sculptor Victor Telkin); further through Brednica Dolna to Wieżyca (the highest point in the lake region reaching a height of 329 meters). The Kashubian Road pins together into one entity the central area of the Land of the Kashubs. Every year in Wieżyca are held the Kashubian Folklore Days, known as the Kashub Autumnal Festival. In the program are markets, plays, parades, dance and

song presentations from various regions of Kashubian peoples including the portrayal of a Kashubian wedding, arts and crafts displays, etc.

The center of Kashubian embroidery is named Żukowo. Two native sisters, Sofia and Hedwig Ptak, achieve in seven colors -- with blue in three shades -- napkins, pillows, embroidered linens, well-known to passengers of Polish steamships -- which in the summertime take part in faraway ocean races. The embroidery was handed down by the Norbertine Nuns whose convent is the oldest architectural relic in Kashub Land.

In the Żukowo area begins the Kashub breach of the Danube River -- at a site called the Raduń Ravine -- known for its rapid current and 14 hydro-electric stations. This river flows along the landrise at Wieża-Ostrza and rushes in the direction of Babiego Doła where it flows into a deep defile whose sheer walls reach 60 meters in height. The effect is a truly mountaneous character of this river, its rapid current and great drop (7m/km).

In the nearby village of Kokoszki which lies near the Kartuszy-Gdańsk Road, there was built in 1969 a House Building Combine which produces ready-made walls and many elements required for quick mounting of residential apartment complexes. Many young people have found employment at the Combine. From the prefabricated walls and appurtenances produced in Kokoszki there has arisen a new housing community in Oliwie.

Wejherowo is the most musical town in all of Kashub Land. The town takes its name from the family of Wejherow -- of the minor level Kashubian nobility, of which Henryk Sienkiewicz, one of the foremost Polish novelists, in his book "On The Field Of Glory" had so eloquently stated: "however, most stately presenting itself was the Kashub regiment, in blue trousers with yellow cartridge belts, comprised of tall, stalworth men, grown and so paired that one appeared to be the other's brother. Heavy muskets moved in their palms like reeds." Music in this 15,000 population town has a place earned by tradition. Not by coincidence is the Kashubian - Pomeranian Museum of Literature and Music located in Wejherowo, the only one of its kind in the country gathering old tunes, presenting popular secular songs, collecting old song books, old musical instruments -- among them wonderful bassoons, bass tubas and other wind instruments. Here, several years ago began the festivals of sea-songs despite the fact that the sea is a good distance away. Here, active for over 50 years is a male choir known as "Harmonia". Here, actually functions the music center. Here live John and Sofia Trepczykow; he, a poet and author of many Kashubian songs, and his wife, a noted singer of his songs.

Music, however, is only one of the features of this city. Commerce does exist in some measure; there is a shoe factory which had been modernized in recent years, a factory which produces furniture for sea-going vessels, mills for manufacture of clothing, and a cement-making factory which produces a high quality of portland cement. Many inhabitants of Wejherowo found employment in the ports of Gdynia and Gdańsk.

Direction to the sea (the Baltic Sea) is through the northernmost counties of the Kashubian Land, mainly in the county of Puck. Other towns near the sea are Jastrzębiej Góra, Kuźnica and Juracie which are noted for their beautiful fine-sand shores warmed by the sun. Puck, which was constructed as a military post, fort and arsenal by King Władysław IV about 1620, was the only Polish port on the Baltic upon the restitution of Poland as a country in 1920, and until the construction of the port of Gdynia, the window to the world of the Second Republic. One of the national projects calls for building a large seaport at Puck and encompassing the Hel Peninsula. However, because of the high cost the project has been postponed; but "what is deferred will not run away" as says an old adage. Gdynia is over-crowded today, and who knows in which direction the plans of the builders will go.

Presently, in a 142 kilometer shore-line, this county has three fishing ports Władysławowo, Jastarnie and Hel. In the three towns of Puck, Władysławowo and Hel lives 41% of the county's population. It is the most urban county in Kashub Land, and at the same time the most industrialized. The mainstay of the economy is the fishing industry. The value of the fishing industry products in 1970 exceeded 700 million zlotys, mostly through the labors of the fishing-boats "Szkuner" from Władysławowo, "Kegi" out of Hel, and "Gryf" from the cooperative.

National and cooperative fishing undertakings have in the not so distant past brought about a decline in the traditional Kashub united fishing expeditions, which had existed from time immemorial. There were the joint expeditions of the Konkols from Jastarni, of the Budziszów's from Kuźnica, of the Bizewski's, Wittbrotów's and Felknerów's from Karwi. They not only performed an economic function but they also constituted in their separatedness the ethnicity of the Kashubs in the period of the Prussian rule for almost a century from 1872 to 1950. They still exist but in a much smaller manner and are located mostly in the area of the Hel peninsula.

The Land of the Kashubs from year to year is becoming more popular because of its broad sandy plazas. People come from practically all parts of Poland for rest and cures to health resorts like Jastrzębia Góra, Cetniewo,

Karwia at the open sea, also Kuźnica, Jastarnia and Jurata at the tip of the Hel peninsula.

In Chłapowo lives the so-called "Kashubian Sienkiewicz" a fisherman and writer in one person, August Necel, born in 1903. His father Jehn, at the end of the XIX century for ten years traveled about America. The son, however, wrote in many of his novels of the past and the present of the Land of the Kashubs, and of the emigration of the Kashubs to the New World. And so, in the person of a fisherman from Kutnowo, below the town of Rozewski -- the Lantern of the Sea --, found many generations of Kashubs its documented word -- the sea fishermen and emigrants to America.