



Przyjaciel ludu Kaszubskiego

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CANADIAN KASHUBIAN HISTORY; THE BEGINNING(S):

by Shirley Mask Connolly

For the first edition of the KANA newsletter, this article focuses on establishing the first appearance(s) of the Kashubs in Canada. The most commonly identified years are 1858 or 1859 or 1864 and all of these are indeed significant points in Canadian Kashub history.

1864 is the date that many Canadian Kashubs are familiar with, as are visitors to the Wilno area of Ontario, Canada. It is forever inscribed on a metal historical plaque commemorating Canada's First Polish Settlement. The plaque reads:

CANADA'S FIRST POLISH SETTLEMENT

The first group of Polish immigrants to Canada, some 300 in number, established a settlement in this area in 1864. Adverse social conditions and political unrest in their partitioned home land had encouraged them to leave. They cleared the land and rapidly established a thriving agricultural community. During the 1880's, the village founded here was called Wilno after the birthplace of the Reverend Ludwik Dembski, one of their spiritual leaders. In 1875 the Parish of Wilno was organized and a chapel, dedicated to the Polish saint Stanislaus Kostka, was built. The Canadian Atlantic Railroad linked Wilno with Ottawa in 1894. This district, which received a new wave of Polish immigrants in the early 1900's, retains much of its cultural heritage.

1864 is the year the first group of Kashubian settlers received legal title to the lots assigned to them in 1859 and 1860. By this time, they had fulfilled the settlement conditions that were imposed by the Agency for Settlement of the Ottawa and Opeongo Road. That meant that these first Kashubs had "taken possession of their land within a month of assignment and had cultivated at least twelve acres of land in the course of four years" and that they had built a "house at least 20 by 18 feet" and resided on the lot until the settlement conditions were "duly performed".

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LOOKING FOR FAMILY TIES IN KASZUBY

by Lynne Visutskie

Lynne's husband Jim is with the Canadian Embassy in Poland. While Jim is on a posting at the Canadian Embassy in Warsaw, he and his wife are taking advantage of the opportunity to look for his roots in Kaszuby

As Jim and I are living in Poland this year, we decided to take the opportunity of finding the village in Kaszuby from which his great-grandfather, Martin Wysocki, had emigrated. Jim also wanted to check out the Kashubian dialect, to see if it was true that there were people in Poland who spoke Polish the way he did!

We were able to go on our genealogical and linguistic quest in March this year. We knew, thanks to Shirley Mask Connolly's research on Polish pioneer families in Renfrew County, Ontario, that Jim's ancestor had lived in the parish of Lešno in Kaszuby.

As the weather was "Canadian Winter", we went by train - the train service in Poland is excellent and cheap - so that was no problem. The linguistic quest was fulfilled as soon as we were met in Gdańsk by our hired driver. Jim was very pleased because he was a Kashubian and his dialect matched the Wilno, Ontario...

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Canadian Kashubian History

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Father Al Rekowski, a Canadian Kashubian descendant and avid Kashubian scholar, is the author of the "Hometies" series of articles published in *Barry's Bay This Week* newspaper. In article #19, June 1, 1983, entitled "Ontario's First Kashub Homesteaders" he stated that "Sept. 2, 1859...is the date on which the saga of Polish set in Canada begins".

This is the date when the first seven Kashub pioneers received assigned lots on the Opeongo Colonization Line. Thus Sept. 2, 1859, is an accurate signpost for the Kashubian settlement in the vicinity of the present day Wilno. Possibly 1859 should be the date that appears on the historical plaque on Shrine Hill.

This date, however, is not the date that the Kashubs first arrived in Canada because they first lived in the village of Renfrew, apparently as early as the late summer or autumn of 1858. This initial arrival date is given by a number of authors in several scholarly articles and books including (not a complete list):

KASZUBI W KANADZIE/ KASHUBS IN CANADA, by Kazimierz Ickiewicz, a 70 page brochure published in Polish and printed in Gdańsk in 1981. Father Rekowski translates that "Ickiewicz opts for the year 1858 as the year of the first arrivals". This author has not seen the brochure and unfortunately is unable to read Polish.

Apparently Izabela Jost in her book OSADNICTWO KASZUBSKIE W ONTARIO published in 1983, ISBN 83-00-00203-0, also indicates 1858 as the starting point. This book is well worth having, even for the non-Polish reader because of the excellent maps, photos, charts and copies of original documents ie. T.P. French's letters, pages from his assignment books, censuses, township patent maps etc.

THE PROUD INHERITANCE: ONTARIO'S KASZUBY published by The Polish Heritage Institute-Kaszuby, 1991, page 15, states that "the first Kaszubs arrived in Renfrew County as early as 1858".

THE POLISH PEOPLE IN CANADA, A VISUAL HISTORY by William Makowski, published in 1987 by Tundra Books (ISBN 0-88776-170-4, hardcover and 0-88776-189-5 paperback, Library of Congress Catalogue Number 86-51039) on page 55, states "in 1858, the Opeongo Road witnessed the arrival of the first group of Kashoubs ... They embarked at the German port of Bremen, and after 11 weeks at sea, having been severely overcrowded and suffering from hunger, typhus and other diseases, arrived at Quebec...The first group of Kashoubs to reach Renfrew village consisted of 16 families, 77 people in all. They were housed with established residents, mostly Irish."

A MEMBER OF A DISTINGUISHED FAMILY, THE POLISH GROUP IN CANADA, by Henry Radecki with Benedykt Heydenkorn, published by McClelland and Stewart in 1975 (ISBN 0-7710-7255-4 hardcover or 0-7710-7256-2 paperback) page 21, states that a "group of Poles arrived in Quebec in 1858 from the German port of Bremen after about eleven weeks at sea in an overcrowded ship, suffering from typhus and hunger. Having been told by a shipping company agent that each family would receive 100 acres of land in Canada, they sold their few acres and cottages and landed here paupers, without as much as the price of a loaf of bread amongst them. There were 16 families, 76 people in this group... These people were the Kashubs, a distinct minority but closely related to the Poles."

THE WAY IT WAS IN THE OTTAWA VALLEY, by Brenda Lee-Whiting, published by Townsend Books, 1992 (ISBN 0-9696174-0-2), page 22, states "that in fact, the first 16 Polish families had landed at Halifax in 1858".

I must admit that like Father Rekowski, this author felt sceptical about using 1858 as the official beginning of Kashubian History in Canada. There seemed to be no record of the Kashubs' Canadian existence prior to a baptism

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recorded in Renfrew in June of 1859. 1858 needed closer examination. Luckily Makowski and Radecki footnoted their entries and the primary source of the information should have been easily found. I had only to look for the Report of the Select Committee on Emigration, 1860, in THE JOURNAL OF THE LEGAL ASSOCIATION 18, Appendix 4.

At the National Library of Canada, I was told they did not have a JOURNAL OF THE LEGAL ASSOCIATION in 1860. With the assistance of a knowledgeable librarian, we wondered if this Journal was possibly that of the LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY of 1860. Bingo!! We found the document in the rare book section of the Public Records of Canada. It was entitled: REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE TO WHOM WAS REFERRED THE ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CHIEF EMIGRATION AGENT AND SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT OF THE GERMAN ASSISTANT AT QUEBEC. Printed by order of the Legislative Assembly. It was an appendix or addition to the SESSIONAL PAPERS, VOLUME 3, THIRD SESSION OF THE SIXTH PARLIAMENT OF THE PROVINCE OF CANADA, SESSION 1860. Emigration came under section 18. This select committee was appointed to deal with the general subject of the progressive decline of European Emigration in the last decade. The committee sat for 17 days and examined several witnesses including W. Sinn, the Emigration agent in charge of German Emigrants. For many years, the Kashubs would be "lumped in" with the Germans because of their Prussian origins. The following excerpt is quoted from his response to Question #161 in the minutes of the report previously cited:

Ques. 161. Have you any opinion to give with regard to the offer of Free Grants of Land?

Answer—"It is undoubtedly a great inducement to Immigrants to receive a Free Grant of Land; but I object to the present system of publishing, that every male emigrant above 18 years of age will receive such a grant on certain conditions; because poor people, trusting in this advertisement, have spent a good deal of their hard earned money in reaching these free lots and were disappointed. Whenever a free grant road is opened, the parties residing in the neighbourhood take up all the lots good for anything, several miles along the road, before any part of it is even finished; and so they continue. Even if an emigrant would select a lot beyond those already taken, how will he get in through the jungles, swamps, and fallen trees. In 1858, 76 Poles, (16 families) landed here by the Heinrich from Bremen. They had been told by a passage agent for the Bremen shipping interest, that they would receive 100 acres of land on going to Canada, free of any expense or pay. They sold their little cottages and few acres, and landed here paupers. They had not as much as the value of a loaf of bread in money amongst them. They said the agent at home had deceived them, in telling them the cost of removal from Prussian Poland to Quebec was a great deal less than they afterwards found out. These people were much more to be pitied, on account of their not speaking anything else but Polish. I shall never forget their bitter, despairing cries, when they found here on the other side of the ocean how awfully they had been misled. I procured free passages for them from the Chief Agent to Renfrew, and although late in the season I saw them all, except one family, for whom I could not get employment, provided for, with the farmers in that neighbourhood. They were considered a burthen on their arrival, but in one year they have already elicited honorable mention from the Ottawa Agency".

This quote almost identically matches Radecki's although he mentions "eleven weeks at sea" and does not include the name of the ship. Unfortunately ships' lists were not preserved at Canadian ports of entry until 1865. Records from Bremen as a port of exit likewise do not exist. They were apparently destroyed because of the problem of storage. Possibly there was some other document that would explain the reference to "11 weeks at sea"?

This author finally feels that 1858 should be cited as the beginning year of Kashubian Canadian History. Still I can't help but wonder why no other record of them i.e. birth, marriage or death, appears prior to June of 1859 when the first Kashub child is baptized in Canada. In a future KANA article, I will attempt to identify who these 16 families or 76 Kashubian people might be. American KANA members might be interested to know that some of these people may have been discouraged by their "Canadian experience" and eventually left for the United States. Others persevered and formed the backbone of the Kashubian settlement in Canada.