



Przyjaciel Ludu Kaszubskiego

PRZĘJOCÉL LĚDU KASZĚBSCZĚGÒ

(FRIEND OF THE KASHUBIAN PEOPLE)

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My Christmas in Kaszubia, 2008

by Blanche Krbechek

Background

This is the story of my first visit during the Christmas season to Kaszubia. I visited a farm near the small village of Lešno (close to Brusy and Chojnice and about an hour and a half drive south west from Gdańsk.) It is about my personal experiences and impressions during my trip, mostly about Kaszubian traditions which are very much like those in all of Poland, but also about the individual celebration of one Lešno family.

The weather in Kaszubia was a little warmer than that familiar to me in Minnesota. The temperatures were close to 32° F (0° C). One night it even reached the great low of -4° C (about 30° F)! Many days were foggy. There was a trace of snow which melted (evaporated) slowly due to the humid atmosphere, much different than the not so slowly evaporating snow during the dry days of a Minnesota winter.

All of Poland is north of the United States. The days were very short with daylight only from after 7 am to about 4 pm.

Everywhere Christmas is treated as a religious holiday. That is the important emphasis.

My Visit

I left Minneapolis on the 16th of December, flew on LOT to Chicago, then to Warsaw, and on the 17th the last leg to Gdańsk. There I was met by my friend and we drove to Bydgoszcz to celebrate the 17th birthday of his God-daughter. No, she was not even familiar with our idea of "Golden Birthday". In Gdańsk and on the way to Bydgoszcz there were only very modest (not like our elaborate) outside decorations: several evergreen trees with string of small lights, a few lights creating two dimensional figures such as bells and stars on walls, and here and there, a Santa seen from his back side climbing a building. Outside, I did not see any of either the plastic or blow-up secular and religious figures seen in such great abundance in Minnesota yards.

Inside the home of my friend's brother, the father of his God-daughter, there was a basket with candles which were set in evergreen branches. Three of the four Advent candles had wicks that had already been lighted. A few Christmas cards could be seen also—no tree yet, no decorations on every speck of empty space. When we arrived, we had "coffee," the usual collection of marvelous sweets and something in a cup or glass. Next was a trip to evening Mass (for the God-daughter's intention). Then we returned to the apartment for a delicious meal.

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The English translation of *The Life and Adventures of Remus* by Aleksander Majkowski continues on page six!

STATEMENT OF MISSION

The Kashubian Association of North America exists to preserve and promote Kashubian cultural heritage in North America and to provide and encourage exchange with Kashubs in Poland and world wide. In fulfilling this mission we hope to raise awareness of Kashubian ethnicity in North America, to stimulate an interest in and provide an educational exchange of everything relating to Kashubia and the Kashubs.

PUBLICATION INFORMATION

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President's and Editor's Letter

The Christmas Season is not over in Poland until Saint Blaise's Day, the 3rd of February so we chose to tell about a Christmas celebration in Kaszubia while it is still fresh in our minds.

We are always looking for articles about anything Kaszubian as well as suggestions for topics. Please...

Blanche Krbechek

Blanche Krbechek

President

Renata Stachowicz

Renata Stachowicz

Editor

Kaszubia.com has a wealth of information. We were pleased to learn from Jurek (jurek@linuxcsb.org) that there now is an English version.

See <http://en.kaszubia.com>

Two new translations are now available:

Kaszubes at Vienna (Kaszëbë pod Widnem)

by Hieronim Derdowski

Translated into English from the original Kaszubian
by Blanche Krbechek and Stanley Frymark

\$10.00 US which includes s/h to US and Canada.

Life and Adventures of Remus (complete)

by Aleksander Majkowski

Translated into English by Blanche Krbechek and
Katrzyzna Gawlik-Luiken

\$21.00 US which includes s/h to US and Canada.

Send orders to: Blanche Krbechek;

2041 Orkla Drive; Minneapolis, Minnesota 55427.

Kaszubian Christmas continued from page 1

That evening we drove to Leśno. Again all the decorations on the way were very modest. Inside the home in Leśno, essentially the only decoration was an Advent wreath, the four candles set in a basket filled with evergreen branches.

Friday we drove the about hour and a half drive to Gdańsk for errands. On *Długi Targ* (the main market street) the very tall evergreen tree growing beside the statute of Neptune was illuminated with about 35 thousand tiny lights. The lights had been turned on by Gdańsk President Paweł Adamowicz on December 5th the eve of Saint Nicholas Day, a tradition began in 1989. Next to the tree was a carved manger. The largest wooden figures were over four feet tall. Beyond that, the only decorations in the shops were little more than strings of small lights and a few evergreen branches.

Sunday involved another trip to Gdańsk. At the invitation of Professor Józef Borzyszkowski of the Kashubian Institute of Gdańsk we attended an annual traditional Mass at the Church of Saint John the Apostle, still badly in need of restoration, celebrated by the recently retired Archbishop Tadeusz Gocłowski of the Archdiocese of Gdańsk. The singing was provided by "*Krajniacy*," a choir from the Krajniacy region which is just directly south of Kaszubia. The day had been of the usual foggy gloom, but just as the Archbishop mentioned the birth of the Newborn Babe, sunshine burst through the windows and filled the church. Afterwards we were invited to join the Archbishop, Professor Borzyszkowski, members of "*Krajniacy*" choir and a few special guests for an "*Oplatek*" (Christmas Eve wafer) dinner at "Mestwin" restaurant. These folks are all very proud of their Kashubian heritage and were very happy to have Majkowski's "Remus" which I and a friend co-translated available in English. An aside—I highly recommend the Mestwin restaurant which is next to the Kashubian Institute on Straganiarska Street and serves excellent Kashubian dishes.

The newspapers I saw had few ads, but many Blessed Christmas Wishes and a great amount of religious content. One issue contained a small packet of hay. Tradition is to put hay on the Wigilia table in remembrance of the humble birth of the Savior. Several stores were open this one Sunday, but there was not a lot of buying, not a great rush of last minute shoppers.

Back in Leśno on Monday (22nd) food preparation was already beginning for the Wigilia dinner and the other Christmas meals. The God-daughter, her older sister and older brother, their mother, the grandmother and another daughter-in-law were all busy.

My friend had spent past Christmases in Minnesota where a tradition at my home is to make gingerbread houses. He asked that I bring molasses from the U.S. and we make houses with his nephews and nieces, the younger grandchildren. (The grandmother above is the mother of my friend.) While food preparation continued Tuesday I added making gingerbread dough and cutting out the houses to the chaos. Half jokingly, the grandmother asked for a gingerbread castle. Yes, I did accommodate her—one castle and several houses.

Wednesday—Wigilia had arrived. Wigilia is the day and evening of waiting (or being vigilant) for the birth of the Christ Child. It is one of the most important days for Catholics in Poland. Christmas is celebrated first with the meatless Wigilia meal on Christmas Eve, then Mass either at midnight (Mass of the Shepherds, or *Pasterka*) or on Christmas Day and Mass again on the day after Christmas, usually called Second Christmas. Second Christmas is also a legal holiday in Poland.

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