A Visit to Gmina Sierakowice, Home of my Paternal Ancestors

by RichardWarmowski

For many years my paternal ancestors lived in what is now Gmina Sierakowice in the Powiat of Kartuzy, right in the heart of Kashubia. The parish church was Sw. Marcin (Saint Martin). As I searched the LDS films for this parish I came across a word, *Pustki*, which all of a sudden became important to me. The way it was used it had to have a meaning of value. I had to find out what that meaning was. The main reason for this was as I searched the films, every time I came across the place Łyśniewo Pustki, I found a person that belonged on my family tree. I knew that Łyśniewo was a village in the Sw. Marcin parish. What did the Pustki have to do with the place name? Pustki became a finding aid in my search. Every time I came across this place designation I found a Warmowski or a Puzdrowski which was an ancestor of mine.

On looking in my Polish-English Dictionary I do not find Pustki, but I do find Pustka with the meaning: solitude; empty (place); emptiness; void. I also find Pustkowie (N.) meaning: deserted place; desert; solitude; barren desolation. The more I read, the more interested I became. Many of the words that began 'pust' had to do with emptiness.

At this point I decided to ask linguist and author Fred Hoffman for his explanation of Pustki. He was kind enough to answer my inquiry. To quote some of his answer, "The form pustki is plural of the noun pustka. In the Słownik Geograficzny we often see mention of 'pustki' in entries where they give details on land area owned by a specific village or estate. They talk about so many morgs of farmland, so many morgs of meadows, forests and so on. Often they include mention of X morgs of 'pustki'. These were lands that were empty and unoccupied—some might call them 'waste lands'." This did not sound encouraging but then he added, "Given the imprecision of human speech, it is also possible some places were 'pustki' at one time, but later on people settled on them, finding a way to manage somehow."

Starting in the year 1816 continuously until the late 1870s there were members of the Warmowski family living in what was called Łyśniewo Pustki (with various spellings). What was going on to cause people to live in what was an empty place? At the time in question this area was part of West Prussia. For one thing the Prussians had decided to emancipate the serfs between 1811 and 1823. This meant that instead of having a place where they were told to live and a field they were expected to work, they now had to look for a job. This is apparently what the families of Franciszak Warmowski and his wife, Marianna Mielewczyk and Michał Puzdrowski and his wife Ewa Strarosta did. The Warmowski family already had several children. Three girls and two boys had been born in Skrzejzewo, another village in the parish. One of the boys was Peter, born in 1812, who became my great grandfather. The Michał Puzdrowski family was just starting when they appear in Łyśniewo Pustki. After his name on the record for the first birth in February 1816 he has the word 'coloni'. Michał was born in Puzdrowo which is in the same parish as Łyśniewo so I am not too sure what this could mean except that others are listed as 'coloni' in this place also. They looked for an opportunity to make a living in an area that had not been in use before. It apparently was a successful venture since members of the family were still living there after sixty years.

This was not a unique case either since I noticed at least five other villages with 'pustki' areas that had people living on the land. One thing I have to mention also is that the population of the parish was growing. Around 1818 the population was 32 souls and increased to 207 souls by 1848 and to 281 souls by 1867. It is obvious that there was a pressure to produce more from the existing area.

Other people moved into the area also. In 1819 another family consisting of Simon Miszk and his wife Ewa Breslin had a daughter born in Łyśniewo Pustki. In 1849 my great grand parents, Peter Warmowski and Franciszka Puzdrowska were married and had their first child in Lysniewer Pustken. Franciszka was the daughter of Michał Puzdrowski family, born in Łyśniewo Pustki in March, 1819.

In another source I recently came across I found the following information. In talking about historian Kossmann's explanation of the term 'Kaschuben', the authors say the following, "But his book clearly differentiates between the 'Niederunger,' who came from the Vistula-Nogat lowlands, tended to draining the marshy lands and settled in river valleys, where they found *Hollandereien*, based on the Dutch-style local autonomy and guaranteed inheritance of technically tenant lands. The 'Kaschuben,' on the other hand, founded *Pustkowien*, and were also known as *Waldebauerern* (farmers in the woods) who cleared wooded land, where at least originally they built isolated farmsteads on crown woodlands in West Prussia, which became the *Haulandereien* of Poznania. It is unfortunate that Prussian authorities themselves soon obliterated the difference, because they are near-opposites—drainers of marshy lands vs. clearers of spots in the woods. Many of the *Pustkowier, Waldbauer,* or *Haulander* escaped from the heavy burdens of landlords to eke out a living from their small clearings in the woods... Both were groups of free men, but the latter often did not have the contractual agreements to guarantee their rights and thus were frequently forced to move, although some permanent scattered settlements existed."

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From our mailbox:

DNA Testing, a Kaszubian Genealogy Quest

received from Mary Mishefske

To all my Kashubian kinsmen,

I'm an amateur genealogist in the Milwaukee , Wisconsin area of Kashubian descent. I've collected a huge family tree of over 8000 individuals, most of Polish or Kashubian descent . I'm still on the hunt for new family and continuing my ancestral research. I'm also adding in a new age technique with DNA testing.

DNA testing is for the serious amateurs and the professional genealogists who wish to extend their family trees by confirming a link where no conventional source records exist. In some cases our tests can also be used to determine if a person is part of a larger group of people. In our case it can be used to confirm a link to the Kashubians, an ethnic tribe in the Pomeranian region of Poland . We now have 2 projects which are relevant to our family, the Kashubian Dual Geographical Project and the Polish Dual Geographical project.

For a fee, you can have your DNA tested and matched to our groups. Men can match their Y chromosome and both men and women can match their mtDNA to the Kashubian and Polish projects. If you are Kashubian or come from Kaszuby, we would like to analyze your DNA to find common links and inheritance patterns. mtDNA is mitochondrial DNA and we all inherit it only from our mothers. The Y-chromosome is passed from father to son unchanged, except for the occasional mutation. Did you every wonder why your Polish you learned as a child isn't understood in Poland or by Poles? It's probably Kashubish, a separate west Slavic language not just a dialect of Polish.

Order the kit under the group desired to get the group pricing. Test once and join both groups. Check out the Family tree DNA web-site at **http://www.familytreedna.comfor** more information or to arrange for testing. Or checkout our website at **http:// www.familytreedna.com/public/kashubian.**

Thank you for your consideration,
Mary Mishefske
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Over the years, the place had different spellings. Łyśniewo was at times Lysniewskie, Lysnierwer, Lysneiwer, Lisniewo or Lis-niewer. At times Pustki was just Pustki, but at other times it was Pustkowie, Pustken and once Pustkain.

In about 1822 the German influence became stronger, the church changed from the Latin paragraph form of record notation to the column form with German headings. Also the change in given names was becoming noticeable. Józef became Joseph and Fran-ciszek became Franz. Also two given names were becoming more popular, names such as Joseph Franz.

By 1871 when Otto von Bismark's *Kulturkampf* was being instituted the family had grown and was moving to other areas of the parish. One thing that did change in 1878 was that places that once were called Pustki now became Colonia. Instead of Łyśniewo Pustki we now find Łyśniewo Colonia. This village is now called Łyśniewo Sierakowickie. The Evangelical church was built in Sierakowice in 1886. Soon after that date, around 1890, I start to find the Warmowski surname in the United States. There was one in Minnesota, my grandfather in Chicago, Illinois and one in 1892 on his way to Detroit, Michigan.

This past summer my wife and I made a pilgrimage to the heart of Kashubia. As I walked and viewed the places in Gmina Sierako-wice that my anacestors had cleared for their farms and to raise their families, I had a deeper understand of their lives. When I wor-shiped in the church that they had helped to build my soul found peace. By the warm welcome we received from cousins I had never met before, I knew in my heart I was Kashubian.

* *The discussion of Pustkowien is from Genealogical Guide to East and West Prussia by Edward R. Priedt and Albert Goertz*

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