

Magdziarz Surname (Charlotte Czech)

As I read through the Summer 2025 edition of the PGS-MN Newsletter, Missing Branches section, the **Magdziarz** (pronounced MAHG-dzyo-sh) surname caught my attention. Why did this interest me? I am interested in researching and writing stories about central Minnesota Polish immigrant families. I had a classmate, **Joann Magdziars Wimmer**, from the Sobieski/Swan River area of Morrison County. We both attended St. Stanislaus Catholic Church in Sobieski and were in the same First Communion class. Nowadays, we see each other at class reunions each August in Little Falls. I decided to begin my investigation by giving Joann a phone call. She did not have answers to many of my questions, but what she told me was enough to go on. By putting the right words and names in a Google search I found quite a bit. Joann is married and has one adult son, Mike Wimmer. I am aware of only one other living relative of hers...

Joann has a first cousin with whom I am also acquainted: **Diane Magdziarz**. Diane and I had worked together in the late 60s at a shoe store in Little Falls when I was home from college in the summers. I believe that Diane is the only person in the Sobieski area or nearby vicinity with the last name of Magdziarz. As it turns out, Diane has a first cousin who is well-known in Sobieski: Gene Retka. Her mother was **Helen Retka** who is Gene's aunt. These kinds of family connections are not unusual in Sobieski/Swan River where many of the gravestones in the church cemetery show the same surnames as those in the cemeteries of Silesia in Poland. Magdziarz is a name that appears to be dwindling. The name is Polish, as most who settled in Sobieski/Swan River are. But where in Poland did they come from, and who else in Sobieski might they be related to?

My search told me there are approximately 3,635 (in year 2014) people in the world who bear the Magdziarz surname. Most of these are in various parts of Poland...3,281 of them. The US has the next largest number with just 178. (And there are a handful in several other countries around the world) But where are they? There are even some famous people with the Magdziarz last name that were listed. I also learned that the name is derived from Madzia, a diminutive of Magdalena, and is found in the Silesian area of Poland.

Following is the genealogy, mostly from Find A Grave and Family Search, leading to Joanne and Diane:

Jozef Magdziarz: b. 19 Mar 1858 in Poland; d. 29 May 1919 (age 61), in Little Falls, MN; Buried: St. Stanislaus Sobieski; Spouse: **Mary Plakut Magdziarz**, 1866-1950. Married in St. Paul. Aha! I made my first connection with a familiar Sobieski name: Plakut.

Children:

- **George:** b. 1886 in St. Paul; d. 1955 in Kane County, Illinois; Owned GFM Tool, Die, and Manufacturing in Chicago, IL
- **Frank:** b. 1888; d. 1948 in Chicago; Grew up in Swan River, moved to Chicago to work for George, and then moved back to Swan River
- **Paul:** b. 1890 in St. Paul; d. 1942 in Chicago; Lived in Swan River
- **Tekla/Tillie Lyshik:** b. 1891 in St. Paul; d. 1966 in Little Falls
- John: b. 1893 in Swan River; d. 1945 in Swan River; Surname spelled "Magdziars"
- **Pauline Dukowitz:** b. 1895 in Sobieski; d. 1992, St. Cloud, MN; buried at St. Isidore Cemetery in Staples, MN
- **Peter:** b. 1897 in Little Falls; d. 1962 in Superior, WI; surname spelled "Magdzas"
- **Andrew:** b. 1899 in Swan River; d. 1981 in Little Falls; Buried at St. Stanislaus in Sobieski; Married Helen Retka; Parents of Diane.
- **Michael:** b. 1901 in Sobieski; d. 1951 in Sobieski; Buried at St. Stanislaus in Sobieski; Married Victoria Skwira in Sobieski; Parents of Joann. Surname spelled "Magdziars"

- **Simon:** b. 1903 in Swan River; d. 1910 at age 7 in Swan River; Buried at St. Stanislaus in Sobieski
- **Anton/Tony Andrew Madges:** b. 1905 in Sobieski; d. 1975 in Little Falls; Buried St. James Cemetery in Randall, MN; Married Agnes Dutkowitz in 1928; He changed the spelling of his surname to "Madges." and settled in Randall, MN.

Joanne's mother, **Victoria Skwira;** b. 1911; d. 1992; Gave birth to three children: Kenneth in 1947, Joann in 1948, and John in 1951. Baby John died in 1951. One month later Victoria's husband Michael died. She continued to farm with her brother Joe Skwira as a partner. In the summer of 1964 on a very hot day in July, Joe and Kenneth (who was 17) were working outdoors. Joe left for 20 minutes, and when he returned, he found Kenneth's clothes by a fenced-in water conservation pit for cattle on the farm. After dragging an hour, they recovered his body. Joann recalled that she had made her brother Kenneth's birthday cake that July 9, just 10 days before his death...and that a couple nights before the drowning, she had seen the drowning happen in a dream just the way it had played out in real life.

Diane's mother **Helen Retka:** b. 1919; d. 1984. Buried at St. Stanislaus in Sobieski. Diane had one brother, James, who lived in Chicago and worked at the post office there. He was born in 1942 in Chicago, and died at age 38 in 1981 in Chicago, from an allergic reaction to the dye in his veins for an angiogram. His father would die three months later. Since James did not marry or have children, that left Diane as the only one in her immediate family with the Magdziarz surname. She does not have children. All Joann's and Diane's brothers had died without producing children with the Magdziarz name.

I discovered one more branch to the Magdziarz family with a synchronistic ending!

Mathew Michael Magdziarz: b. 4 August 1877 in Mokre, Poland (a village located in south-eastern Poland in the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, 142 miles east from Krakow in Silesia); d. 5 July 1949 in Sturgeon Lake; Buried at St. Isidore's Cemetery in Sturgeon Lake; Brother to Jozef; Came from Poland in 1901; Married **Mary Ann Labak** in Chicago; Later moved to Sturgeon Lake, MN, around 1913. They had 11 children with eight living to adulthood; Parents were Michal Magdziarz and Agnieszka Kokoszka.

As I was on a Zoom meeting with three others on the PGS-MN Newsletter staff, Anna Zuk who lives in Kettle River mentioned there is a Magdziarz family living in Sturgeon Lake near her family. Then her husband happened to hear the conversation and interjected that his father, Thomas Zuk from Denham, MN, is first cousins with an Ed Magdziarz (wife Darlene) who lives in Sturgeon Lake. Coincidence? Or not? I have to say it left me a little speechless how serendipitously that connection happened.

Some connections and conclusions:

-I initially read online that the Magdziarz family name has a presence in Sobieski and in Sturgeon Lake in Minnesota. I certainly have found that to be true. I do believe there are still quite a few more people with the Magdziarz surname in Sturgeon Lake, MN, and in Chicago, IL, than in Sobieski, MN. With a deeper search there is surely more to be found for anyone interested.

-Another interesting aspect was the Chicago connection. Was it George Magdziarz's Tool and Die Manufacturing that resulted in so many family members going back and forth between Chicago and Sobieski/Swan River, or something else?

-And we have Mokre, Poland, as a location one Magdziarz emigrated from.

-A common thread I noticed was the use of the name "Michael": Joann's son, her father, her great-grandfather, and the middle name of her grandfather's brother Mathew.

If anyone has a story of a particular family/surname to share, you may submit it to pgsminnesota@gmail.com . Even if you just provide the facts and information, I or someone on the PGS-MN Newsletter staff would be willing to help write the story with you.