

Magdziarz Surname Follow-up (Charlotte Czech)

In the Fall 2025 PGS-MN Newsletter, I submitted an article on the **MAGDZIARZ** surname. My goal was to begin researching central Minnesota Polish family surnames in the Sobieski/Swan River area. I started with my classmate, Joanne Magdziars Wimmer and her cousin Diane Magdziarz who were the only two people I knew of with that surname, which seems to be dwindling. Their grandfather, **Jozef Magdziarz**, had been born in Poland and is buried in Sobieski, MN. He married **Mary Plakut**, and they had 11 children, many of whom traveled back and forth between Chicago and Sobieski to live and work. Jozef's parents were **Michael Magdziarz and Agnieszka Kokoszka**.

I learned via Family Search and Find a Grave that **Jozef** had one brother, **Mathew/Matt Magdziarz**, who had settled in Sturgeon Lake, MN. And then I learned, in a serendipitous moment, on a PGS-MN Newsletter Zoom call that Anna Zuk, who lives in Kettle River, is related through her husband to Ed Magdziarz who lives in Denham in the Sturgeon Lake area. Sturgeon Lake is on the Minnesota map less than two hours north of the Twin Cities on the way to Duluth. It is surrounded by Willow River to the south, Denham to the southwest, Kettle River to the northwest, and Moose Lake and Barnum to the northeast.

As soon as the Fall 2025 PGS-MN Newsletter came out, we heard from member **Mark Dobosenski** from Sturgeon Lake/Duluth. His wife is **Dianne MAGDZIARZ Dobosenski, sister to Ed Magdziarz (wife Darlene)**. As it turns out, Mark has done extensive research on his wife's family and had published an article on his process and results in the Winter 2005-06 PGS-MN Newsletter, 20 years ago! It seems to be the other half to the story I wrote, like two big puzzle pieces connecting together. I will briefly summarize what Mark uncovered:

Dianne's father was **Frank Magdziarz**. Frank did not have much knowledge of his family origins. What did he remember? 1) His father was Matt Magdziarz. Matt's father had been married 3-4 times in Poland as a result of the deaths of his previous wives. Matt was from the last marriage. 2) Matt was thought to have a brother from this same marriage. 3) Frank did not know the names of his grandparents on either side of the family.

As Mark Dobosenski began his research, he learned that **Mathew/Matt/Maciej Magdziarz** had immigrated from Poland in 1901. He had come to New York through Hamburg, Germany, on the vessel Kaiser Wilhelm. His place of birth was listed as Pielzno, Austria--in the Austrian portion of partitioned Poland. Mark discerned that it was the Polish town of Pilzno, located somewhere between Tarnów and Rzeszów in Poland, about 60 miles due east of Krakow. Matt's parents were listed as **Michael Magdziarz and Agnes Koza**. Michael's father was also **Michael Magdziarz** who married **Katarzyna Marek**. Matt was united in marriage to **Mary Ann/Marianna Labak at St. Wojciech's / Adalbert's Catholic Church in Chicago**. Marianna's parents were **Andrew Labak and Tekla Bartkowicz**.

Mark eventually discovered that Matt had an older brother named **Jozef Magdziarz**. Matt's parents had had a set of twins that died before Jozef was born. Mark did not give any more information about Jozef's family. With further research, Mark learned that Matt was actually born in **Mokre** about 10 miles north of Pilzno. The family parish was in **Zasów**. In all this, keep in mind that name and place spellings can vary from document to document. It is not an exact science and almost, if not totally, impossible to discover some of the original information.

Frank was correct that his father Matt had one brother. That brother was **Jozef** who had settled in the Sobieski/Swan River area and is the grandfather of Joanne and Diane. I am excited to pass on further information to Joanne Magdziars Wimmer about her Sturgeon Lake relatives. Unfortunately, Diane Magdziarz, age 81, passed away on November 1, 2025, in Little Falls, MN. She had been born and raised in Chicago and moved to Sobieski with her parents when she was 21. That leaves Joanne and her son Michael Wimmer as the remaining Magdziarz descendants in Sobieski.

It seems that Mathew/Matt Magdziarz first came to Winona, MN, and soon after moved to the new settlement of Sturgeon Lake in the mid-1880s. Since that time, Magdziarz families have maintained their presence in the Sturgeon Lake community. Within Mark Dobosenski's article are translations from the Polish-language newspaper out of Winona, MN, called *Wiarus* (which means Veteran Defender), submitted by Greg Kishel. A Polish founder in Willow River named **Maciej Dunajski** had written the articles between 1886, when the newspaper began publishing, and 1891. The articles give us an idea of what the Polish settlers of Sturgeon Lake experienced in those early days. Dunajski indicated that potatoes seemed to be their most prolific cash crop. Sawmills were built and employed people. Their goal was to erect a church, and they did; it is St. Isidore's, patron saint of farmers.

The first priest to show up in Sturgeon Lake was **Father Hillar**, just 25 years old, from the realm of Bismark. It seems that he had said something about the "iron prince" from the pulpit. As a result, he served a jail sentence and paid a rather large fine. He left Europe and arrived in New York where a copy of *Wiarus* was placed in his hand--and that is how he found the name and address of Maciej Dunajski in Willow River just a few miles from Sturgeon Lake and showed up at his door!

Frank Magdziarz had an older sister named **Viola**. It was Viola's granddaughter **Jodi Carra**, and Jodi's daughter, **Megan Cole**, who traveled to Poland this past summer to visit the ancestral homes of their Magdziarz, Labak, Opiela, and Bartkowicz ancestors. It was Megan who took the historic photos of Mokre where the Magdziarz family came from...and Dąbie where the Labak family came from...and the family church in Zasów, which is between the two villages.

Another interesting connection: I had mentioned in the Fall PGS-MN Newsletter that Diane Magdziarz's cousin on her mother's side is **Gene Retka** who lives in Sobieski. Gene Retka had a polka band for quite a few years and still plays on various occasions. As it turns out, Mark Dobosenski and his brother had a polka band in the Sturgeon Lake area for several years during his college years in the mid-70s. Mark said he knows both **Gene and his son Michael** as they have sung Polish **Kolędy** (Christmas Carols) together with others at St. Isidore's in Sturgeon Lake. I love connections!

You can read the first part of the Magdziarz Surname article in the Fall 2025 PGS-MN Newsletter. You can read the article by Mark Dobosenski in the PGS-MN 2005-06 Winter issue volume 13--Issue 4. Go to Members Only section and then choose Newsletter Archive menu option. It will bring you to a page listing all the years.

How amazing that the information about the Sturgeon Lake Magdziarz family has been there for 20 years, just waiting to connect with the Sobieski half of the puzzle! The 2005-06 article informs the Sobieski Magdziarz family that they are not alone; there are a lot more extended family members just a few hours away--while my 2025 article informs the Sturgeon Lake Magdziarz family that Mathew's brother actually existed, with a large family that led their lives between Chicago and Sobieski/Swan River.

On a final note, all of it makes me wonder: Did brothers Mathew and Jozef ever see each other again after leaving Poland and coming to the U.S.? Did the two families get together in days gone by, or were they just too busy surviving in their new country?

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. ~ Charlotte

Editor's Note: To find the Winter 2005-6 Newsletter article Charlotte mentioned in this article, go to the "Members Only" section on the PGS-MN website and select "From Poland to Minnesota". Next, select "Minnesota" and then scroll down and select "Northeastern Minnesota". This brings up a listing of counties, from which you will select "Pine County". Scroll down towards the bottom of the page and you will see a listing of old newsletter articles about this area. Just click on the issue and it will take you to that old newsletter. Following the same steps, you can search any region of Minnesota to find old articles that were written about that area of the state. You may be surprised what you find!