A Tour of Our Ancestral Villages *(Charlie Sieracki)*

On May 12, 2025, my two sons Jeff and Matt, and Jeff's son Dalton flew with me to Poland, the homeland of our ancestors, to discover the land and the way of life that they left behind when they emigrated to Winona in the 1870s. We drove through the little villages of Borsk, Wiele, Karsin, and Osowo. Like most Kashubian settlements, they are street villages where homesteads are mostly grouped around a main road.



The oldest records that have survived indicate that my fourth great-grandfather Szymon Sieracki, born about 1755, married Rozalia Klaman in 1783 in Wiele and died in Kliczkowy. Until our great-grandfather Józef Sieracki emigrated to Winona in 1873, our ancestors lived in this small group of villages clustered around Wiele where their church was located. This little space encompasses their entire world. The villages they were born in, the church they worshipped in, where they met their wives, raised their families, worked, died and were buried.

The villages lie about 44 miles southwest of Gdańsk, a major port on the Baltic Sea. They are located right between the lake district of Kashubia and the region covered with forests called Zabory. Wiele lies next to a small lake, Jezior Wielewskie, and Borsk lies just south of Lake Wdzydze, one of the largest and most distinctive lakes in the Kashubian Lake district. The farmland surrounding the villages had been cleared out from the pine forests. Such clearings, "pustkowie," are a characteristic feature of settlements in Kashubia. Life in the pustkowie was for the most part self-sufficient. The food you ate, the wood to build your houses and make your tools, the flax and wool to spin fabric for your clothes - all were sourced in the local lakes, forests and fields.

Wiele lies at the center of this little world. It is where people came to get married, baptize their children, attend Mass on Sunday along with all of the activities of the liturgical year. It was also the hub for the roads connecting the Zabory region of woodlands with the cities of Chojnice and Gdańsk.

We celebrated the end of this memorable day by having dinner with more cousins in Bydgoszcz. Standing outside the restaurant are Waldek and Remigiusz Wandzinski, Matt Sieracki, Robert Kościanek, Dalton Sieracki, Joanna Kościanek, Kasia Wandzinska, Charlie Sieracki, Ewa Lonska, Jeff Sieracki, and Marietta Wandzinska. Taking the picture was Karol Kościanek.

Bringing together three generations of Sieracki relatives from the States and from Poland after such a long separation in time and space is a moment to be treasured. I hear the melody of the Polish national anthem as the words come to mind:

"Poland has not perished yet,

While we are still alive."

