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SEEKING PROSPERITY

A Brief History of Rochester's Polish American Community

Part Two

by Kathleen Urbanic





A plaque inscribed with the names of parishioners who died in World War II was dedicated at St. Stanislaus Church in 1945. (St. Stanislaus Parish)

COVER: This collage of memorabilia depicts the rich and varied experience of Rochester's Polish American community. (Photo by Bruce Litolff)

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Graduating class of 1928, St. Stanislaus School. (St. Stanislaus Parish)

New Ventures

Six months after Poland was restored as a nation in the Treaty of Versailles, the new republic sent its United States envoy to Rochester "to see at first hand the methods employed by Rochester manufacturers, whose fame has extended to all parts of the world."²⁵ During his three-day visit, Prince Kazimierz Lubomirski toured Kodak Park, Bausch & Lomb, the Hickey-Freeman clothing firm, and Taylor Instrument. At Hickey-Freeman he addressed an impromptu assembly of Polish employees, and at Bausch & Lomb a committee of Polish workmen presented him with two handsome pairs of binoculars.

Lubomirski's tour also took him to three Polish-owned businesses on the northeast side: the Polish Clothing Manufacturing Company at 850 Hudson Avenue, the Rochester Auto and Tool supply house at 17 Andrews Street, and Branch No. 5 of the Polish Mechanics Corporation of the United States, a stock organization founded to purchase American machinery for factories in Poland. As Lubomirski entered their headquarters at 538 Hudson Avenue, the officers of the Mechanics Corporation welcomed him with the traditional greeting of bread and salt, and the prince returned their hospitality by investing \$100 in the company's stock.

As Lubomirski's visit to the Polish-owned businesses illustrated, citizens of Polish descent began to move with greater confidence into the life

of the city after World War I. Participation in the war effort had brought them important benefits: increased visibility, greater local respect, a heightened sense of community pride. Bolstered by their wartime experience, the sons and daughters of Polish settlers entered the twenties with optimism, better prepared than their parents had been to explore opportunities in Rochester's civic, commercial, and cultural life.

One sign of the community's vitality was the run of Polish-owned businesses on Hudson Avenue and in its vicinity. The chain of storefronts boasting Polish names began a few blocks south of Clifford Avenue and extended in an almost unbroken row north to Norton Street. While some of these ventures would prove to be short-lived, many would remain neighborhood landmarks for decades: businesses like Kaleta's pharmacy, Bonus' and Kroll's funeral homes, Brodowczynski's and Ostrowski's meat markets, Kanty's paper box company, Figlerowicz's electric appliance company, Przysinda's hardware store, Antczak's fuel company, Mrzywka's barber shop, Sykut's candy store.

In number and variety, the shops confirmed a healthy sense of enterprise as more members of Polonia joined the ranks of the city's self-employed businessmen. Bakers, grocers, butchers, hardware merchants, dairymen, tobacconists, clothiers: following World War I, the *City Directory* listed an increasing number of Poles as independent shopkeepers.²⁶ At the same time, a growing number earned their living as tradesmen and craftsmen—shoemakers, tailors, carpenters, painters, plumbers, barbers, and automobile mechanics who maintained storefront headquarters on Hudson Avenue. The Polish neighborhood also offered consumers uncommon services, notably the natural remedies prescribed by herb specialist Jacob Trzeciak, and the bone setting and muscle massage offered by Joseph Kwapich. Kwapich produced an exclusive liniment reputed to ease all manner of aches and pains, sold to many a weary laborer and housekeeper at Kaleta's pharmacy.

Their interest in commercial enterprise led Polish Americans to invest in two ambitious projects during the twenties. The first of these, the Polish Clothing Manufacturing Company, seemed an idea with promise in a city where approximately 1,000 Poles worked in clothing factories and garment firms.²⁷ The company was incorporated in 1919 under the leadership of Adam Norwich, Adam Felerski, and Stanislaus Dukat. Five thousand dollars in preferred capital stock was made available to the community, and many families invested in the venture at \$100 a share. In 1920, the firm constructed a spacious factory at 850 Hudson Avenue (on the corner of Avenue D) at a cost of \$120,000. Scarcely a year later, however, the company ended its operations, unable to survive a recession

which forced the closing of many small local firms.

In 1924, Joseph Zlotnik, a nightwatchman for the city's public schools, began production of a Polish language newspaper named the *Rochester Rekord*.²⁸ Zlotnik opened the business for his sons—Leonard, Anthony, Henry, and Al—who turned out weekly editions for the next five years from a small office at 1119 Hudson Avenue. The brothers translated news from English dailies into Polish, set the copy by hand and linotype, and carried the galleys home for their mother to proofread. The *Rekord* enjoyed a weekly circulation of 3,000 issues, delivered by mail and sold at Hudson Avenue shops.

In 1929, fire broke out in the *Rekord's* office, fueled quickly by the benzine used to wash the leaden type. The company suffered \$8,000 in damages, principally to its linotype and printing press, and the Polish newspaper was forced out of business. Nevertheless, the experience they had gained provided Anthony and Leonard with the skills to find employment with English language publications. Anthony Zlotnik would later become a leading figure in local printing, elected president of the Rochester branch of the International Typographical Union.

The Zlotnik brothers' print shop received many requests for service from Polish organizations which, like the businesses and shops, grew in number following World War I.²⁹ Men returning from service organized two associations for veterans: Pulaski Post No. 782 of the American Legion, and Post No. 27 of the Polish Army Veterans Association of America. Signaling Polonia's entry into American political structures, neighborhood residents formed both a Republican League and a Democratic Union. Nest 52 of the Polish Falcons, elevated to new stature through its wartime activities, remained among the most popular groups and remodeled its Weyl Street clubhouse in 1922 to accommodate growing membership.

The same year, Polish People's Home, Inc., a membership corporation formed in 1918 and affiliated with the Polish Socialist Alliance, opened a meeting hall at 818 Hudson Avenue.³⁰ The new facility was available for use by Polish organizations which purchased bonds in support of its operation. Among the groups that met regularly at the hall was Local 206 of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, representing Poles employed in the city's garment firms. One of only four Polish branches of the ACWA in the country, Local 206 drew its members from among Rochester Poles who worked in clothing manufacture, many of whom had taken part in the struggle to bring unionization to the city's tailoring industry.

Religious societies at each of the churches, cultural groups like the

Echo Singing Society, and sports in the American tradition rounded out activities in the Polish section. Increasingly, organizations were formed specifically for young people, reflecting substantial growth in the number of children in the households on the northeast side. Enrollment at St. Stanislaus School had climbed steadily since the turn of the century, topping 500 in the mid-twenties when the Sisters laid claim to the church sacristy, where they opened a classroom temporarily.³¹ Later, three portable buildings were set up on parish grounds, each containing two additional classrooms. When even this space proved inadequate, the parish launched a drive to raise funds for a new school building that opened in 1931, the year that 750 students pushed St. Stanislaus' enrollment to third highest in the diocese.

As the new school's classrooms filled, the population of the Polish neighborhood spilled south beyond Clifford Avenue. Weeger Street, Baron Street, Remington Street, and Reed Park were now dotted with the homes of Polish families, many of whom had arrived in Rochester after the war. Feeling too far removed from St. Stanislaus Parish, a group of these families approached pastor Stanislaus Szupa and asked for his help in forming a second Roman Catholic parish for Poles.³² With his support and that of Bishop Thomas F. Hickey, the Polish families organized the Parish of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus in 1927. Operating under the stewardship of the Franciscan Fathers, Order of Minor Conventuals, the congregation of approximately 1,000 members spent a year raising funds to construct a church on Mark Street. The building, housing a chapel, school, and auditorium, opened in 1928 following ceremonies at which parishioners proudly displayed American flags and the banners of religious societies.

At the close of the twenties, St. Theresa's Parish stood as a sign of Polonia's growth and its families' confidence in the future, the fourth parish formed to serve an expanding community which now included 10,000 people.³³ Polish Americans represented the fourth largest ethnic group in the city, distinguished by their claim on the homes, organizations, and businesses spread east and west of Hudson Avenue. Until the last months of 1929, few in the Polish section had reason to doubt that the coming decade would extend their prosperity.

Hard Work and Self-Reliance

The wage earners of Polish Town were hard hit by the Great Depression. Factory workers and laborers felt the effects of the ailing economy first, many dismissed from their jobs on the city's assembly lines and in its industrial shops. As economic hardship intensified, trade dwindled in neighborhood shops. Grocers, bakers, butchers, and dairy-men offered their wares to customers on credit, a practice initiated before the Depression as a convenience, but now extended to many households of necessity.

For the better part of the thirties, frugality and economy replaced the spirit of enterprise and investment that had been promoted during the previous decade.³⁴ Maintaining the family in food, clothing, and housing was now challenge enough. During the Depression, the Poles' traditionally large families became a liability from one point of view and an asset from another: the more members in a household, the higher the living expenses, but the greater the possibilities for work. If a husband had been laid off, his wife might serve as a chambermaid at a downtown hotel or sew piecework for a garment firm. A teenage daughter could leave school before graduation and take work as a housekeeper in a home in a wealthier neighborhood. Children as young as age five could harvest fruit in the summer on farms north of the Polish section, earning for their work in the fields a handful of change a day.

Many in the Polish neighborhood found they could help offset troubles by drawing on the support of extended families, fraternal societies, and parishes.³⁵ Although those hardest hit by loss of income might stand in line at city hall for a handout of canned goods, relatively few from the Polish section registered for the welfare available at relief agencies. As a rule, the immigrant families felt it was better to impose on relatives, receive unemployment stipends from a Polish organization, or ask help of a parish priest than to apply for the city's assistance. Because work relief projects were viewed differently, Polish laborers were among those who signed up at the Public Employment Center in the hope of being matched with temporary jobs.

The aid provided by societies and parishes was a form of community assistance, dependent upon families' continued support for these institutions. During the thirties, the residents of Polish Town maintained their parishes and schools, but not without difficulty.³⁶ At St. Theresa's Parish, 250 families shouldered a debt of \$165,000, the accumulated cost of purchasing land and building a church, rectory, and school. The parishioners of St. Stanislaus faced a massive debt of \$400,000 incurred

with the construction of their new school, which left them with overdue payments on the church mortgage, outstanding promissory notes, and a stack of additional bills when the Depression began.

Against the backdrop of economic hardship, the 1930s became a time of simple pleasures and amusements that cost little: dances at neighborhood clubs, parish picnics, field days hosted by the Falcons and the PNA, concerts by the Echo chorus, amateur theater presented by the Polish Dramatic Club. Girls walked downtown to windowshop, and met their friends for ice cream at the Green Mill Parlor or Andy's store on Hudson Avenue. Boys competed on athletic teams sponsored by the parishes and organizations, and treated their dates to films at the Sulkowski family's Sun Theater.

One neighborhood team organized during the Depression grew from a diversion for young people into a local sensation, its accomplishments earning the squad a feature story in *Life* magazine.³⁷ The Filarets girls' basketball team, originally part of the youth sodality at St. Stanislaus Parish, were energetic competitors who became the ranking female team in the city in 1932-33, the season when they won 25 of their 26 games. Coached by American League umpire Roy Van Graflan beginning in 1933-34, the Filarets played men's rules and advanced to competition against teams from out of state, packing Falcon Hall for home games often played on a double bill with the Rochester Seagrams. In 1944, the girls broke the national record for consecutive victories held by a men's team, a distinction that propelled them to coverage in *Life* and gave them an eleven-year total of 523 wins, 12 losses.

Reflecting the philosophy of self-help which characterized the Polish families, an organization that represented Polonia's array of societies came into prominence during the Depression.³⁸ The Polonia Civic Centre, chaired from 1933 to 1937 by city court interpreter Edmund Lorentz, served as an oversight board that consolidated the energies of more than 30 religious, fraternal, and partisan groups. Popularly known as "Centrala," the Civic Centre focused its work on matters that touched the interests of Polish Americans and concerned their neighborhood. Some projects emphasized community welfare, like the annual Charity Ball organized to benefit needy families. Others showcased heritage and citizenship, such as Polonia's participation in Rochester's 1934 centennial celebration and publication of a *History of the Polish People in Rochester* in 1935.

Centrala's promotion of community ideals found its best expression in the observance of Pulaski Day, a holiday celebrated with a flourish each October beginning in 1929. The most impressive of these ceremonies was

the 1933 Pulaski Day observance, planned to coincide with the opening of the new public library branch at Hudson Avenue and Norton Street.³⁹ Two weeks after construction of the building began in March 1931, members of Centrala had gathered in special session to endorse a proposal that the library be named in honor of General Kazimierz Pulaski, Polish hero of the American Revolutionary War. After their petition was refused by the Library Board of Trustees, Centrala reached a compromise with the board: a plaque commemorating Pulaski would be placed prominently in the building at the Polish community's expense.

After months of preparation, Centrala presented its gift, a handsome plaque created by local sculptor Alphonse Kolb, to the Hudson Library during the 1933 Pulaski Day celebration. Mayor Percival Oviatt opened the observance with a proclamation recognizing Pulaski as "the friend of freedom everywhere" and urged Rochesterians to fly the American flag on October 11th. In the Polish section, residents took the mayor's message to heart and decorated buildings with banners along the route of a parade that wound through neighborhood streets and ended at the building which a local reporter acknowledged was "commonly known...as the Pulaski Library." The *Democrat and Chronicle* reported that "the library proved entirely inadequate to shelter all who desired to witness the ceremony, and thousands waited long outside and filed through the library long after the ceremony had been completed just to get a glimpse of the plaque." All in all, the day was "impressive," the newspaper observed. "Glorious!" Library Director John Lowe enthused in his report to the Library Board.

Although community celebrations did much to bolster spirits, prosperity remained out of Rochester's reach as the 1930s drew to a close. Life had improved since the decade's bleak early years, but ten years after the stock market crash the city could not claim economic recovery. Despite the fact that Rochester ranked high in a national study of standards of living in urban centers, thousands of residents continued to receive welfare payments in 1938 and 1939.⁴⁰ Public relief seemed an unending cycle as, month after month, the number of names added to the welfare list remained essentially the same as the number of persons who found work. Perhaps most disturbing for a city that had long prided itself on the strength of its industry, the hardships of the decade had disrupted stability: only 57.6 percent of those who were Rochester residents in 1930 were named in the *City Directory* in 1935, a statistic that reflected the greatest local transiency since the 1860s.

The Polish section resisted transiency and remained among the city's most stable neighborhoods during the Depression. If families moved,

most often they shifted residence within Polish Town. One survey demonstrates that 81 percent of the families on nine neighborhood streets remained in the Polish section between 1926 and 1933.⁴¹ Individual streets suggested higher rates of stability: 90 percent of the residents of Pulaski Street and 100 percent of the residents of Peckham Street moved only within Polish Town, if at all, between 1926 and 1933.

To the credit of its residents, Polish Town retained its character through the thirties: neat rows of homes, a thoroughfare of shops, four parishes, an assortment of organizations allied centrally. Hard work, thrift, and self-reliance proved their utility during lean years, and an emphasis on heritage helped foster unity. During a decade when small accomplishments held significance, Polonia could cite the cohesion of its families, the proportion of residents who retained their homes, the upkeep of its parishes, and the civic spirit of its organizations as evidence of the quality of life in Polish Town.

From Our Brothers' Blood

On September 3, 1939, two days after the armies of the Third Reich crossed Poland's western border, Victor Dastyk of Avenue D sat vigilantly at his radio, listening through the night for news from Europe. Intermittently, the air waves brought word of the Wehrmacht's push toward Warsaw and speculation as to whether Britain and France would honor their alliance with the Poles. The next morning, the 65-year-old carpenter wept openly as he spoke with a reporter, devastated by news of fighting in his homeland but relieved to learn that the Allied powers had declared war against Germany in Poland's defense.

In the first days of the Second World War, thousands of local Polish Americans waited as Dastyk did for word from Europe.⁴² News of the war overshadowed other concerns as families spoke worriedly of relatives in areas near the battle front, and veterans of the previous war speculated about the formation of a Polish American legion. Although its activities were limited by the United States' Neutrality Acts, a Polish War Victims Relief Committee was quickly formed at a rally held at Falcon Hall on September 6th, designated to purchase food, clothing, and medical supplies for Polish civilians. Those in attendance left \$1,000 in donations with the committee that night, and representatives of 50 Polish institutions agreed to meet every Monday to continue their humanitarian efforts as long as the war would last.

Unlike many Rochesterians who viewed the war with detachment before the attack on Pearl Harbor, residents of Polish descent reacted to

the conflict in Europe immediately and maintained a steady flow of assistance to Poland throughout the war. Between 1939 and 1941, the Relief Committee regularly forwarded donations for Polish war refugees to the American Red Cross, and its women's auxiliary packed blankets, sweaters, and bandages for shipment to Polish soldiers. Hoping to build public sympathy for Poland's loss of independence, the group also sponsored a series of speakers who brought news of conditions in Europe. One of these, Paul Super, who had been general director of the YMCA in Poland at the war's outbreak, described the country under Nazi occupation in speeches at the University of Rochester and St. Stanislaus Hall: "The American press is publishing much less than the truth about atrocities in Poland. The terrible things happening in Poland are simply unheard of...People have been murdered by the tens of thousands, and that is only the beginning of the story."⁴³

The summer following the invasion of Poland, delegates from Falcon nests across the U.S. and Canada assembled in Rochester for the organization's national convention.⁴⁴ In an emotional address, Falcon president Teofil Starzynski declared that Polish Americans "are ready to rise again and bear arms to protect the freedom, not only of the United States but of the whole world." The Falcons lent their full support to Franklin Roosevelt's defense program, Starzynski said, and waited to answer the call "to any duty that this great country of ours will require in these grave and humanity-shocking days." Punctuating his message, young Falcon members who had arrived to take part in athletic competition performed a drill to the strains of Polish marches on Franklin High School's field. As representatives of the Polish, Czech, and Dutch governments-in-exile watched, the athletes rose from their knees and lifted their arms: "From the smoke and ashes and our brothers' blood, Poland arise...Poland is not yet lost."

By the time of the Falcons' convention, the mood in the U.S. was shifting away from isolationism as Americans viewed events in Europe and the Far East with increasing concern. Rochesterians, like others across the country, felt the significance of the war more acutely, although few anticipated that men and women from the city would be stationed at battle fronts by the end of the next year. When the attack on Pearl Harbor cast the die definitively for America's entry into the war, enlistments ran high at local recruiting stations.⁴⁵ Before the end of the war, a total of 40,000 men and 2,000 women would leave the local area in the country's service.

Represented in those numbers were nearly 1,000 men from the Polish community, a roster of names distinguishable from the lists for other

parts of the city: Adamski, Andruszkiewicz, Antczak... Daszkiewicz, Dziengielewski, Dzierzanowski... Nawrocki, Nowak... Szymula, Szczepanski... Wajda, Woloszyn... Zielinski, Zientara, Zolnierowski.⁴⁶ The families of St. Stanislaus Parish sent 700 of their sons to the U.S. armed forces—nearly 20 percent of the parish's members and more than three-fifths of its men over age 18. One hundred twenty of St. Casimir's 1,000 parishioners entered the service, along with 130 from St. Theresa's Parish and a representative number from the Polish Baptist Church. Women were included among those who volunteered to serve, representing Polonia in the WACS, WAVES, and military nursing corps.

In addition to these enlistments, the Polish Relief Committee promoted service in Poland's armed forces as an alternative for the community's young men, launching a recruitment program before the U.S. entered the war in collaboration with local Falcons and World War I Polish Army veterans.⁴⁷ One of the first volunteers was Leopold Lorentz, a determined 23-year-old who had tried to enlist in the American forces but had been turned down because of poor eyesight. Rejected initially for the same reason from the Polish Army, he departed Rochester nevertheless for the induction center in Windsor, Ontario, and once there convinced Polish officers to assign him work in the information office. "I am in the HQ of the Polish Army in Windsor," Lee wrote with satisfaction to his family the day after his arrival, "translating some stuff from Polish to English... They sure do need English writers... I like it immensely."

Within three weeks, Lorentz had gained admittance to active duty, becoming one of fewer than 1,000 Americans of Polish descent to enlist for service with the Polish forces in World War II. An aspiring journalist, he wrote extensively of his experiences in articles published throughout the war in Polish American newspapers. Families in Polish neighborhoods across the U.S. read of his training at Windsor, his assignment to recruit other young men from the northeastern states, and his departure for Europe in a poignant article titled "A Polish Soldier's Farewell":

"I've been waiting here quite some few months for this day, and now that it is here. . . I must admit that I am a little bit afraid. . . for I am only a young man like all your brothers, who has ambitions, desires, and wants to live. And I think now for the first time, really, tenderly of my dad and mom, the kid sister, brother, all. And I think I am not the only one of the boys sailing who wonder if we shall ever see things so dear to us again."

Lorentz's words touched the experience of local Polish families, who participated in a steady series of fund-raisers, assemblies, and patriotic ceremonies while the majority of their sons were at war. Financial con-

tributions alternated between United States defense and assistance to Poland.⁴⁸ At St. Stanislaus Church, parishioners supported a second Sunday collection which went toward the purchase of war bonds three weeks a month and to the Polish Relief Committee on the fourth. The Echo Singing Society, unable to host its annual concert in 1941 because so many men from its chorus were overseas, purchased \$35,000 in government bonds between 1939 and 1945, donated an additional \$1,000 to Polish relief, and at Christmas remembered its members in service with gifts of \$10 each. The most successful relief collection, sponsored by Centrala in 1945, gathered 100 tons of clothing and 40,000 bars of soap for Polish citizens in a single-day, citywide drive.

Homefront activity in the Polish section turned to lobbying on behalf of Poland's independence when the war came to a close.⁴⁹ Hoping to exert political influence and gain public sympathy for Poland, neighborhood organizations endorsed statements of protest and signed petitions after Poland's post-war fate was set at the Yalta Conference. Centrala garnered support for a memorandum to President Truman in April 1945, urging that decisions made at Yalta regarding Poland be overturned. Two months later, delegates to the district PNA conference passed a resolution demanding "justice for Poland and protection against aggressors." The Rochester chapter of the Committee of Americans of Polish Descent voiced its opinion in communications to Congressman Kenneth Keating, urging him to work for government action to restore Poland's independence.

While Poland's status stirred high emotion, no event drew more heartfelt response as the war ended than the return of the community's young men and women: the sons, daughters, brothers, and sisters who had been away from home for as long as five years. The service stars that signified their absence came down from front porch windows as families on Kosciusko, Sobieski, Weaver, and Warsaw Streets celebrated homecoming. Many of the neighborhood's soldiers, sailors, and flyers returned decorated for bravery in combat in the European or Pacific theaters of war. Pride in this record of service mixed with the pain of those who came home maimed and wounded, and with the sorrow of families whose sons did not return.

Special tribute was paid to one local man who gave his life in the war by his colleagues in the Echo Singing Society.⁵⁰ In April 1946, Echo members installed a bronze plaque in the front hall of their clubhouse, dedicated in honor of Melvin Michalski who was killed in action with the 182nd Infantry Division on Cebu Island. A crowd of 400 watched in silence as veterans of the new American Legion Post named for

Michalski saluted his memory with a volley of shots that rang from Echo Hall down Sobieski Street.

The community also welcomed at least 600 Polish families uprooted by the war, helping them through the efforts of the Polish parishes and organizations to resettle in Rochester.⁵¹ Some of these refugees had been members of the Polish armed forces, men who had fought at Narvik, Tobruk, Arnheim, Falaise, and Monte Casino but were now cut off from their homes by a peace settlement that left Poland under Communist rule. Others were members of the Polish Home Army, survivors of the bitter battle to reclaim Warsaw. Some were civilians who had spent the war years in German or Soviet camps. All had seen their lives disrupted by the war and carried stories of its suffering, horror, and loss. From a different generation and of an experience in many ways removed from that of the first immigrants, these refugees represented the largest influx of newcomers to the Polish community since early in the century. Their membership in the parishes, and their support for established and new organizations, would bolster the strength of Polonia in the next decades.



Traditional Polish customs remained popular in the community after World War II. Here, Msgr. Joseph Balcerak blesses Easter baskets during “swieconka” in 1955. (St. Stanislaus Parish)

There would be other changes beginning in the fifties, results of a renewed economy and the assimilation of the community’s third and fourth generations. Some of these changes would be matters of pride and accomplishment, such as the education that would be attained and the

careers that would be built by children born after the war. No change would be more significant or more painful, however, than change in the neighborhood, its dissolution as the city's Polish Town.

Less by Location, More by Heritage

"If someone ran a contest to pick Rochester's cleanest street," a Gannett newspaper reporter observed after the war, "the nominations would have to include Warsaw Street...Almost every morning and evening, many of the residents are out with broom and dustpan. They sweep not only their steps and sidewalks, but the street in front of their homes, too."⁵² Citing the pride that homeowners took in their property, the reporter admired the carefully tended flower beds and commented that no litter could be seen the length of the block. "There's no secret in how the folks here do it," explained a man who had been a Warsaw Street homeowner for thirty years. "We sweep, we fertilize and water the lawns, we keep the yards clean." That practice had been the norm, he said, for as long as he could recall.

For the most part, the pattern of life in the Polish American section was little different in the 1950s and '60s than it had been for many years.⁵³ Although the congregation of the Polish Baptist Church disbanded shortly after the war, three sizable parishes retained their status as centers of community activity. The largest of these, St. Stanislaus, included more than 4,000 members and filled its school with 700 children.

Polish American organizations, many rivaling the parishes in longevity, held healthy memberships drawn for the most part from neighborhood families. Parish societies, lodges of the Polish National Alliance, Democratic and Republican leagues, and cultural organizations continued their collaboration under Centrala. Nest 52 of the Polish Falcons remained among the best supported clubs, increasing its membership to 370 and enrolling more than 100 children in its gymnastics program. The Echo Singing Society, which like the Falcons celebrated its golden jubilee in the fifties, counted 340 members and supported a 52-man chorus. Complementing the activities of well-established groups, several new organizations were formed, including a Polish Arts society and groups for American and Polish veterans.

Like activity at the parishes and clubs, commercial enterprise along Hudson Avenue was vigorous, dominated by Polish-owned businesses as it had been since the turn of the century. A housewife could purchase most provisions in a drive through the neighborhood, stopping at grocery stores, meat markets, bakeries, dairies, dry goods stores, hardware

stores, and pharmacies. If her family's home needed repairs, she could call on neighborhood electricians, plumbers, painters, and heating contractors. There were Polish-owned insurance companies, barber shops, automotive service stations, sweet shops where children could enjoy triple-scoop banana splits, and taverns where couples could kick up their heels at polka dances.

Despite routines that suggested continuity, Polish Town was a neighborhood in transition in the sixties, one that would lose its ethnic identity by the start of the next decade. Trends affecting the city as a whole were felt in the area as families seeking newer homes and a more prosperous lifestyle made the decision to move from the northeast side. Although St. Stanislaus School graduated large classes through most of the decade, for the first time in its history the community lost its young adults when they finished high school and left the area to pursue college education and careers. New immigrants, while drawn to the churches, were not linked by history to Polish Town and increasingly chose not to settle on neighborhood streets. Most distressing to older residents, use of the language that had long typified the neighborhood's character diminished in homes, churches, organizations, and shops.

By the seventies, the waning of Polish Town's identity was pronounced.⁵⁴ St. Stanislaus Parish's membership dropped to 3,000 persons, a loss of 25 percent since the previous decade. St. Theresa's Parish lost 100 of the 300 families who had belonged in the sixties. St. Casimir's Parish counted the smallest group: fewer than 500 members, only half of whom lived in the neighborhood. Organizations cited comparable drops in membership, and a smaller assortment of Polish-owned businesses lined Hudson Avenue, their number curtailed as longtime proprietors retired, passed away, or closed their doors in the face of competition from supermarkets and shopping malls.

At the same time, the incidence of crime in the neighborhood increased, disrupting the security of a section where it had been common not to lock front doors.⁵⁵ Although the police department reported similar increases in crime in other parts of the city, residents of the Polish section were convinced that the extent of crime resulted directly from loss of their neighborhood's identity. "At one time, the streets were safe here," former City Councilman Leonard Tomczak commented in a 1974 newspaper article headlined "Fear Walks the Streets of Polish Town." "People knew each other...But there doesn't seem to be any more of that camaraderie we had years ago."

Between 1972 and 1975, three neighborhood institutions announced plans to close or leave the area.⁵⁶ St. Theresa's Parish graduated its last

class of students in June 1972 and shut the school that it had operated for 44 years. Two years later, St. Casimir's Church put part of its property up for sale when it ended operation of the Polish National Home, a community center in which the parish had invested \$100,000 two decades before. The sale of the center was a preliminary step in the parish's decision to relocate to Irondequoit, a move announced in September 1975 when parishioners voted to sell their Ernst Street church and invest in suburban property a mile to the north.

At the time when St. Casimir's Church departed, the neighborhood known through all of its history as Polish Town was no longer distinguishable as an ethnic community. Reporters visited to record the changes, and spoke with residents who recalled earlier days. "The street names are the same," one reporter commented.⁵⁷ "Pulaski and Sobieski and Kosciuszko and Warsaw...And on those little streets there is still pride...They still brag about Warsaw Street being the cleanest in Rochester, about how they washed the sidewalks and cleaned the gutters so when the street sweepers rolled by there was nothing to pick up."

The changes that signified the waning of Polish Town also became an impetus for Polonia's transition to a community identifiable less by location, more by heritage. During the past two decades, the Polish community in the Rochester area has retained a cohesiveness based in large part on affiliation and shared tradition. The churches—noticeably St. Stanislaus—remain spiritual centers, drawing families from residences throughout the area to services, social events, and activities that range from religious instruction for children to gatherings for "golden age" citizens. Long-standing and new organizations carry on their work and collaborate in community projects under the auspices of Centrala. Connection with Poland remains important, expressed in the activities of groups like the Krakow-Rochester Sister Cities Committee, and in the contact that many local families have maintained over the years with relatives in Europe.

Immigrants from Poland continue to arrive, often gravitating to the Polish churches as their first point of reference in a new land. Many young Polish families with children have settled in the Rochester area in the last two decades, bringing new energies, ideas, and interests to parish and community life. Among organizations they have helped to form are a Polish language school for children, a troop of *Harcerstwo* (Polish scouts), a credit union, a folk dance group, and an ensemble of young musicians who perform at the Polish language Mass at St. Stanislaus Church—a service that attracts approximately 300 people weekly.

Most telling are activities that draw the community together on behalf

of shared interests. In the 1980s, for instance, many rallied to offer assistance to Polish citizens when martial law was declared, longtime residents and newcomers joining in a series of fund-raisers that channeled \$100,000 to the National Council of Bishops in Poland for purchase of food, clothing, and medical supplies.⁵⁸ Most impressive in the response it elicited was a benefit dinner sponsored by the Polish Women's Alliance. On a blustery winter weekend, the event drew 1,700 people from all parts of the county for platefuls of homemade Polish food and a chance to donate to Polish relief.



American and Polish army veterans march from St. Stanislaus Church during the 1981 Pulaski Day observance. (Photo by John B. Stenclik)

It was in the spirit of affiliation that 1,200 people gathered in November 1989 to celebrate the opening of St. Stanislaus Parish's centennial year, on the site where Bernard McQuaid blessed a modest church at the city's edge.⁵⁹ Traveling from throughout the Rochester area, those in attendance represented a variety of relationships with the first immigrants' church. Some had been parishioners through a lifetime, some had attended the parish school, others had joined the congregation recently after arriving from Poland. A few, children of the earliest immigrants, had been baptized in the wooden church. Others, younger by several decades, marched with the Polish scouts or studied the images of great-grandparents in photos placed on display.

Those who crowded the pews and stood in the aisles of St. Stanislaus Church that day represented both the history and the future possibilities

Radoslaw Jurczuk portrayed Father Szadzinski, first pastor, and Margaret Cremaldi portrayed Sister Wojcieska, one of the first teachers at St. Stanislaus School, during St. Stanislaus Parish's centennial celebration in 1989. (Photo by Babette G. Augustin, courtesy of the Rochester Catholic Courier)



of Polonia. The Polish community formed in the 1880s by a few families from Poznan has compiled an impressive record of experience during its first century in Rochester. That experience, significant in the number of lives and the extent of accomplishment it represents, has added a noteworthy chapter to the story of the city where Wojciech Kaczmarek and his fellow emigres, seeking prosperity, decided to stay.

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End Notes

Abbreviations:

- ASSP: Archives of St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish, Rochester
 DC: *Democrat and Chronicle* (Rochester, 1870-present)
 HPPR: Norman Lyon, *History of the Polish People in Rochester* (Buffalo, Dziennik dla Wszystkich, 1935)
 PE: *Post Express* (Rochester, 1882-1923)
 RH: *Rochester Herald* (Rochester, 1879-1926)
 TU: *Times-Union* (Rochester, 1918-present)
 UA: *Union and Advertiser* (Rochester, 1856-1918)

25. "Princes Will Arrive Monday: Polish Ambassador and Party Coming Here," *RH*, Jan. 17, 1920, p. 15; "Mayor Will Officially Welcome Prince Lubomirski, Ambassador of Poland, to Rochester To-day," *RH*, Jan. 19, 1920, p. 10; "Polish Prince Visits Kodak Park Plant," *TU*, Jan. 20, 1920, p. 8; "Temporary Aid Only Request Poland Makes," *RH*, Jan. 20, 1920, p. 9; "Poland's Ambassador Addresses Factory Hands in Native Tongue," *DC*, Jan. 21, 1920, p. 21; "Polish Prince Attends Mass This Morning," *TU*, Jan. 21, 1920, p. 9; "Polish Ambassador and Party Spend Busy Day Sight-Seeing and Being Entertained," *RH*, Jan. 21, 1920, p. 9; "Old Custom is Observed in Greeting When Ambassador Visits Polish Organization," *DC*, Jan. 22, 1920, p. 28.
26. See editions of *The Rochester Directory* for the 1920s (Rochester: Sampson and Murdoch Co., Inc.).
27. *HPPR*, pp. 138-39; Catherine Harding Hendrickson, "Continuity and Change in Two Rochester Neighborhoods: 1890-1958" (doctoral dissertation, State University of New York at Buffalo, 1975), pp. 133, 137; stock certificate of the Polish Clothing Manufacturing Company, Inc., given to the author by William Auchter of Rochester, NY.
28. Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Leonard Zlotnik, Dec. 8, 1985 (Rochester, NY); *HPPR*, p. 139.
29. For a fuller description of Polish community organizations at this time, see *Shoulder to Shoulder*, pp. 96-100.

30. *HPPR*, pp. 145-47; Stanley P. Bartles, "Rochester Polish People's Home," handwritten document, Aug. 14, 1989; *The Amalgamated in Rochester: 1915-1939*, pub. Feb. 1939 by the Rochester Joint Board of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, pp. 28-29; Frank Renkiewicz, "Polish American Workers: 1880-1980," in *Pastor of the Poles: Polish American Essays Presented to Right Reverend Monsignor John P. Wodarski*, ed. Stanislaus A. Blejwas and Mieczyslaw B. Biskupski (New Britain, CT: Polish Studies Program Monographs, 1982), pp. 116-36.
31. "History of St. Stanislaus Church of Rochester," pp. 11 and 18-19; Robert F. McNamara, *The Diocese of Rochester: 1868-1968* (Rochester: The Diocese of Rochester, 1968), p. 375.
32. "History of Church," souvenir album of the silver jubilee of St. Theresa's Church, Rochester, NY, Oct. 26, 1952, p. 8 (Archives of St. Theresa's Parish); "New Catholic Parish," *Catholic Journal*, Rochester, NY, Sept. 30, 1927, p. 5; "New Church Dedicated by Archbishop," *DC*, Dec. 10, 1928, p. 18.
33. Ward S. Miller, "The Sinews of a City: Part I, The Poles," *DC*, July 24, 1933, p. 3.
34. Interviews with Agnes and Catherine Pawlik, Aug. 1982; Mr. and Mrs. Roman Kwiatkowski, Feb. 15, 1986; members of St. Stanislaus Parish's Golden Age Club, Aug. 27, 1986; Mr. and Mrs. Stanley Jaskot, Sept. 13, 1986. (All interviews conducted in Rochester, NY.)
35. Almost without exception, the Polish Americans interviewed about the Great Depression for chapter 7 of *Shoulder to Shoulder* mentioned their families' determination not to accept public assistance. Hendrickson cites statistics that show a disproportionately low percentage of families from the Polish section on public relief from 1933 through 1938 (p. 164).
36. "History of Our Church," golden jubilee program booklet, St. Theresa's Parish, 1977 (Archives of St. Theresa's Parish); "History of St. Stanislaus Church of Rochester," pp. 13-15.
37. "The Powerful Filarets: Rochester Girls Make New Basketball Record," *Life*, April 3, 1944, pp. 43-46; Jim Myers, "Filarrets Were 'All-Winning'," *DC*, Dec. 20, 1980, p. 7A.
38. For a fuller description of the role of Centrala, see *Shoulder to Shoulder*, pp. 128-33.
39. Written account of Pulaski Day observances, from the records of the Polonia Civic Centre, Inc., Oct. 9, 1937; "Joint Resolution and Petition to the Common Council of City of Rochester, NY," from the Polish

- American Citizens' Central Committee, March 30, 1931; *Minutes of Meetings of the Pulaski Tablet Committee, 1931-32*, records of the Rochester Public Library; John A. Lowe, "Annual Report of the Director for 1933," *Minutes of Meetings of the Board of Trustees, Rochester Public Library*; "Polish Heroes Given Tribute in Ceremonies," TU, Oct. 12, 1933, p. 8; "Bronze Pulaski Plaque Unveiled in Hudson Branch Library," DC, Oct. 12, 1933, p. 16.
40. Blake McKelvey, *Rochester, An Emerging Metropolis: 1925-1961* (Rochester: Christopher Press, Inc., 1961), pp. 114-15; McKelvey *Rochester on the Genesee: The Growth of a City* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973), p. 194; "Communications from the City Manager," Oct. 14, 1939, *Proceedings of the Council of the City of Rochester: 1939*, p. 278.
 41. Hendrickson, pp. 122, 165.
 42. "10,000 Poles in Rochester Asked to Help Homeland," DC, Sept. 3, 1939, p. 1C; "Foreignborn Stand Loyal to America," DC, Sept. 4, 1939, p. 15; "Polish Group Alters Plans on War Relief," DC, Sept. 7, 1939, p. 16; "War Relief Committee Formed by City's Poles," TU, Sept. 7, 1939, p. 3A.
 43. "1,000 Poles Said to Face Death Daily," TU, Oct. 7, 1940, p. 1A; "Polish 'Y' Head Slates Talks in 3-Day Visit," DC, Oct. 7, 1940, p. 14; "Rebirth of Poland Forecast by Refugee Aid Chief Here," DC, Oct. 8, 1940, p. 13.
 44. "Falcons See War Aid Unit" and "Falcons Ready to Serve, Says '18 Army Organizer," DC, July 5, 1940, p. 17; "Falcons Pledge Support for Defense Program," TU, July 5, 1940, p. 3A; "Polish Falcons Compete in Mass Athletic Drills," DC, July 7, 1940, p. 1C; "3,000 Falcons Parade, Drill, Chant Anthem," DC, July 8, 1940, p. 11.
 45. Blake McKelvey, "Rochester's First Year in the War for Survival," *Rochester History*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Jan. 1943), pp. 27-28; McKelvey, *Rochester, An Emerging Metropolis*, pp. 131-32.
 46. Roster of servicemen and women, compiled by the Rochester Catholic Diocese, 1945 (Archives of the Rochester Diocese); roster of parishioners in service, St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish, ca. 1943 (ASSP); "Church Burns Old Mortgage, Opens Campaign" (Nov. 1944 newspaper article in the scrapbook of John T. Skalny, Rochester, NY).
 47. "Polish Army Enlistments Pushed Here," TU, Sept. 16, 1941, p. 3A; "Rochester Poles Plan Unit to Aid Enlistment Drive," DC, Sept. 23, 1941, p. 16; scrapbooks of Leopold Lorentz (property of Olga Pulawski Lorentz, Bristol, NY).

48. "Ksiegą Dochodów i Rozchodów, Parafji Św. Stanisława Kostki, Rochester, NY," 1939-1949, pp. 472-73; Henry Chlebowski-Laboski and Roman Kwiatkowski, "History of the Rochester Echo Singing Association, Inc.," Oct. 31, 1959, summary of activities for 1939-1945; "Citywide Drive for Poles Nets 100 Tons of Clothing," *DC*, Feb. 26, 1945, p. 17; "Clothing Drive Nets 100 Tons for Poland," *TU*, Feb. 26, 1945, p. 1A.
49. "Lawmaker Asks Overthrow of Yalta Polish Decision," *DC*, April 19, 1945, p. 16; "O'Konski Asks Free Election, 1939 Boundaries for Poland," *TU*, April 19, 1945, p. 2A; "District Poles Convene Here," *DC*, June 11, 1945, p. 14; "Polish Parley Asks Justice," *TU*, June 11, 1945, p. 2A; "Poles Urge U.S. Uphold Policy for Freedom," *DC*, Jan. 7, 1946, p. 15; "U.S. Policy Shift Urged," *TU*, Jan. 7, 1946, p. 2A; "Polish Group Hits Wallace, Byrnes Ideas," *DC*, Oct. 7, 1946, p. 17; "Poles Back Truman Plan," *DC*, March 31, 1947, p. 15; "Speakers Ask Aid to Poland," *DC*, Oct. 13, 1947, p. 17; "Aid Polish Liberty, Resolution Urges," *DC*, Oct. 16, 1950, p. 14.
50. "Polish Club Honors Memory of Member Killed in War," *DC*, April 1, 1946, p. 17; "Plaque Honors Song Group War Hero," *TU*, April 1, 1946, p. 12.
51. For stories of some of the Polish soldiers and families who resettled in Rochester after the war, see *Shoulder to Shoulder*, pp. 167-75.
52. "Clean Sweep," article printed in the Gannett Rochester press, undated copy in the author's possession.
53. For a more detailed description of the community at this time, see *Shoulder to Shoulder*, pp. 187-94.
54. "Annual Report, 1973-74," St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish (ASSP); Nancy Kreisler, "Century-Old 'Polish Town' Disappearing," *TU*, Aug. 8, 1974, pp. 1B and 2B; "St. Theresa's Marks 50th Anniversary," *Catholic Courier Journal*, Rochester, NY, Sept. 21, 1977, and Del Ray, "'Polish Town' Losing Identity," *TU* (articles in the scrapbook of Rev. Alexander J. Stec, ASSP).
55. Dan Lovely, "Fear Walks the Streets of Polish Town," *DC*, Dec. 2, 1974, pp. 1B and 6B.
56. "St. Theresa," *Northeast Rochester Tribune*, June 1972, p. 7; "Hudson Avenue to Lose Bit of Its Polish Flavor," *TU*, Dec. 14, 1974, p. 3A; Stuart Elliott, "Polish Church Follows Members to the Suburbs," *TU*, Sept. 29, 1975, pp. 1A and 10A; Stuart Elliott, "St. Casimir's Church Sold to Northside Church of Christ," *TU*, June 17, 1976, p. 6B.

57. Dan Lovely, "Fear Walks the Streets of Polish Town."
58. "Polish Fund Hits \$96,000," *Catholic Courier Journal*, March 31, 1982 (article in the scrapbook of Rev. Alexander J. Stec); Bob Minzesheimer, "Benefit, Ever So Briefly, Reunites a Neighborhood," *DC*, Feb. 1, 1982, p. 1C; Sue Smith, "Polish Weekend Feast a Huge Success," *TU*, Feb. 1, 1982, p. 6B.
59. "St. Stanislaus Kostka Church, Opening Centennial Service (1890-1990)," Nov. 12, 1989 (ASSP); "A Hundred Year Heritage: The Opening Ceremonies of St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish's Centennial Year," Nov. 12, 1989 (videotape produced by Pearl Video, Rochester, NY, ASSP).



After World War I, the Polish American community entered a period of enterprise and new ventures, characterized by greater assimilation into the routines of local life. This photo shows a parade on Hudson Avenue near Roycroft Drive, led by Polish Army volunteers and Grey Samaritan nurses. The Polish Baptist Church is visible on the left—the third structure from the corner of Roycroft Drive, then called Weddale Way. (St. Stanislaus Parish)