

**PRESERVING  
OUR PAST  
SINCE 1988**

# SEARCHERS

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NO. 69

SUMMER

2015, ISSUE 2

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(Read the final chapter to the story...page 4)

**David and Elaine Brent of California thank Edward Kornowski at the Am-Pol Eagle 2014 Citizens of the Year awards ceremony for his successful effort to replicate and replace the old wooden Cross at Michalina Buczkowska's gravesite**

# PGSNYS - FOR YOUR INFORMATION

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**PRESERVING  
OUR PAST  
SINCE 1988**

**FOUNDED BY  
MICHAEL  
DRABIK  
(1950-2001)**

The PGSNYS meets the second Thursday of each month\* in the  
Villa Maria College cafeteria, 240 Pine Ridge Road,  
Cheektowaga, New York, at 7:00 p.m.

Annual dues are \$20 (\$25 Canada, \$30 other countries), and membership entitles you to  
three issues of the *Searchers* and participation in the PGSNYS Yahoo Group.  
As a new member you will receive an information packet to help you get started.  
The expiration date of your membership is on the mailing label of the *Searchers*.

Please remit your membership dues by check or money order to:

PGSNYS  
c/o Membership Chair  
P.O. Box 984  
Cheektowaga, NY 14225

**Please send any changes to your postal or E-mail address to PGSNYS at the above  
address or E-mail: [membership@pgsnys.org](mailto:membership@pgsnys.org)**

Postal Mailing Address:  
PGSNYS  
P.O. Box 984  
Cheektowaga, NY 14225

**If you are a member, but not receiving E-mail from the PGSNYS mailing list, please  
send an E-mail to [membership@pgsnys.org](mailto:membership@pgsnys.org)**

\*Exceptions: July - picnic and December - Christmas party for members & guests

## 2015 PGSNYS OFFICERS & COMMITTEE CHAIRS

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### PGSNYS EXECUTIVE BOARD

**President:** Denise Oliansky  
**Vice President:** David Newman  
**Secretary:** Dolores Ferguson  
**Treasurer:** Chuck Pyrak

**Webmaster:** Chuck Pyrak

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**Library** Laurel Keough  
**Media** Maureen Gleason  
**Membership** Chuck Pyrak  
**Hospitality** Rita Hider & Don &  
Barbara Golibersuch  
**Special Events** Dolores Ferguson  
& Patricia Rooney

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## THE SEARCHERS NEWSLETTER

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For submissions to the *Searchers* newsletter, deadlines are as follows:

- 1st issue (Spring) - due March 1st for April mailing
- 2nd issue (Summer) - due July 1st for August mailing
- 3rd issue (Winter) - due November 1st for December mailing

Submissions to the *Searchers* (articles as MS Word doc; photos as .jpg)

should be sent via e-mail to:

[denise.oliansky@gmail.com](mailto:denise.oliansky@gmail.com)

# PGSNYS PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

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Dear Members,

I think we have a lot to show for this year thus far. We are now officially the Polish Genealogical Society of New York State, **Inc.**, as we became incorporated as a not-for-profit charity in New York State on May 11th. Next up is to complete the application for 501(c)(3) status which, when approved, will make the Society exempt from Federal Income Tax, eligible for grants, and allow donations to our Society to be tax deductible.

We now have the digitized version of the first 40 microfilm rolls of Buffalo's *Dziennik dla Wszystkich* (*Everybody's Daily*) in our possession. The pages have been manually checked frame-by-frame and are ready for the next step, which is to make the digital images into searchable text using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software. With the addition of the digitized *Dziennik* to the PGSNYS database collection, it is a priority to now make all of our databases searchable on our Website. Chuck Pyrak and David Newman are working to make this a reality by the end of the year.

Still to come is the 7th Annual PGSNYS Genealogy Fair on September 12th at St. Gabriel's Church in Elma. Please plan to attend and support our Society -- bring displays of your research or a computer to help with surname lookups, or just come to hear Dr. David Kendall speak at 1 PM about concepts from his book, *When Descendants Become Ancestors: The Flip-Side of Genealogy*. This year the Buffalo Irish Genealogical Society will have a table, and both the German Genealogical Group of WNY and the WNY Italian Genealogical Society will provide informational materials about their groups at the event.

In November we hold Board elections. This year we need people to run for two trustee slots, vice president, and treasurer. Being on the Board is not difficult or arduous work. Most of us on the Board already serve the Society in many other ways, but this is a great opportunity to have an impact on the success and direction of the Society. If you are interested, ask current members of the Board about what is expected and the responsibilities of their position. The purpose of establishing term limits was to give other members the opportunity to serve and bring new ideas to the table, so please consider running on this year's ballot.

~~Sincerely, Denise Oliansky

## POTPOURRI

### WITAMY! NEW PGSNYS MEMBERS

Sharon Siejak Voigt  
Blasdell, NY

Ronald Karter  
Angola, NY

Kimberly Kensy  
Irvine, CA

Peggy Earsing  
North Tonawanda, NY

Christina Wisz Hodges  
Bushnell, FL

### ANNOUNCEMENTS

The dates for upcoming 2015 PGSNYS monthly membership meetings at 7 PM in the Villa Maria College cafeteria are Thursday, September 10, October 8, and November 12. There is no regular meeting held in December as we enjoy our Society Christmas Party off-site on Thursday, December 10.

Mark your calendars for **September 12, 2015** – PGSNYS 7th Annual Genealogy Fair at St. Gabriel's Church, Elma, 11AM—3 PM. Displays, computer look-ups, refreshments, and a presentation by Dr. David Kendall at 1 PM.

## Michalina Buczkowska: The Final Chapter

by Denise M. Oliansky

The Summer 2014 issue of the *Searchers* carried the story of Edward Kornowski's efforts to replicate and replace the old wooden Cross grave marker of Michalina Buczkowska in St. Adalbert's old cemetery on Dale Road in Cheektowaga, NY. The Winter 2014 issue continued the story with pictures and first hand accounts of Michalina's short life and death as provided by her nephew and niece, Dave and Susan Brent. This is the final chapter in the story.



**Edward Kornowski (left) accepts his Am-Pol Eagle 2014 Citizens of the Year award for Good Neighbor with Dave and Elaine Brent (far right)**

Edward Kornowski was awarded the Am-Pol Eagle 2014 Citizens of the Year award for Good Neighbor for his commitment and resolve to replicate the wooden Cross for Michalina's grave. This honor was marked at the awards ceremony held on April 25th at St. Adalbert's Church.

What made the event truly memorable was the presence of a very special couple who traveled all the way from California to be with Edward as he received his award — Dave Brent, Michalina's nephew, and his lovely wife, Elaine. Their presence greatly

touched not only Edward, but those of us in attendance who had supported Edward's efforts, attended the dedication and blessing of the new Cross, and/or learned about Michalina's short life and tragic death through the words of David and Susan Brent.

In David's brief speech, he could not say enough about how appreciative he and the rest of his family were for what Edward did for Michalina. Speaking with him and Elaine afterward, he was obviously elated to be in St. Adalbert's Church, where Michalina and her family had been members. He was especially moved to be able to stand by the

baptismal font where she would have been baptized. Having David and Elaine present at the award ceremony was, without a doubt, a poignant and satisfying finale to Michalina's story and to Edward's efforts on her behalf.

Ever the Good Neighbor, Edward spent the day before the award ceremony with David and Elaine. He took them to all the old houses where David's dad had lived, to the church, to St. Adalbert's cemetery to see Michalina's new wooden Cross, and to the Polish Villa for some good Polish food. Edward had also done some research for David and found four birth certificates, three baptism records, and located David's family towns on a map of Poland for him. David and Elaine were thrilled.



**David and Elaine Brent stand by the baptismal font where Michalina would have been baptized in St. Adalbert's Church**

## The Polish Independent Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Buffalo, NY

by Gregory L. Witul

The story of St. Adalbert's Basilica and the founding of the Holy Mother of the Rosary Cathedral is a well-documented and celebrated cornerstone of Western New York's Polish history. This small group of Poles, led by Father Antoni Klawitter, fought the Roman Catholic Diocese to preserve their language and the way they worshiped in the new world. In time, they would join other like-minded parishes and hold their own synods, form their own dioceses, and elect their own Bishops. But not all who broke away from Rome did so for higher ideals or with the desire to join others. In Buffalo's Far East Side, one priest broke away in order to maintain his status, fulfill his ego, and attempt to maintain his less than reputable personal fortune. This is the history of Rev. Theophilus Semelka and the Polish Independent Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

Born in Poland, trained in Rome, and ordained in Mexico, Father Theophilus Semelka became rector of St. John Kanty on Swinburne Street in 1903. This former assistant at St. Adalbert's found himself priest of a poor church in a rough and tumble neighborhood. He did what he could for not only his congregation, but the diocese as a whole and himself. In 1908, Father Semelka worked with other Roman Catholic priests to try to persuade members of the Polish National Church back to the "Mother Church," with varying degrees of success.

One area in which Father Theophilus found great success was in building his personal wealth. In 1908, Father Theophilus circulated a letter among priests, soliciting investments for a new oil lamp invented by Mr. Joseph Misko. According to the letter, "Rev. Dr. Theophilus Semelka, Rector of St. John Kanty R. C. Church, is now fairly on his way to become a millionaire. He is anxious that his brother Catholic priests should share in his prosperity...I offer to make the lowest subscription \$5, and give you time to inquire by writing to Father Semelka or to any of my multi-millionaire friends whom I have given as references. I offer you a 30-day option to buy 3 times the amount of shares you may buy now, at the same price, namely at 33.3 cents on the dollar, even if the shares should become worth much more by that time." On the back of the letter, Father Semelka made sure to include his address for the mailing. Shortly thereafter the checks started to roll in, but even with all that money, Mr. Misko never got around to patenting his idea.

*"This former assistant at St. Adalbert's found himself priest of a poor church in a rough and tumble neighborhood."*

With his new found wealth, Father Semelka started getting involved with stocks and developing real estate around his church. He soon held deeds for lots on Ashley, Swinburne, and Walden Avenue. But just like hundreds of confidence men before him, Rev. Theophilus had too many balls in the air, and soon they started to drop. In June of 1910, the priest was sued for failure to pay \$420 on a promissory note related to mining stocks. After a one-day trial, with the jury out for less than five minutes, Semelka was found in breach of contract and forced to pay. Soon more suits were filed, and Theophilus knew, with his integrity now in question, his days as a Catholic priest were numbered. Not willing to go quietly, Semelka gathered a number of his loyal parishioners and started his own Polish Independent Church.

With the help of Peter Parucki a \$5,000 mortgage was secured, and two lots were purchased, 45 Miller Avenue for the church and 43 Miller for the rectory. For the church, a wooden frame structure 30 feet wide and 60 feet deep was built with a seating capacity of 300 and, for the priest, a two-story home was built. In 1911, after dedicating the church to Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Rev. Theophilus began holding services for his gaggle of congregants. Unlike the Polish National churches, Father Semelka had no interest in joining a larger movement; he was running the show and that was the way he and his parishioners liked it. It is unknown who these parishioners were or whether there were any baptisms, weddings, or funerals held at the little church, but what is known is that Semelka's cult of personality and an anti-establishment policy didn't draw in the crowds like he had hoped.

The end for Our Lady of Perpetual Help came on May 22, 1913. With no money to pay their bills, the mortgage holder, Julius Butzek, put the property up for auction. The winning bidder was a representative of Bishop Colton, who would turn the building into a daycare. Theophilus Semelka would go on to hold some odd jobs until the defrocked priest and conman died in a boarding house in 1926.

From a genealogical and historical perspective, the Polish Independent Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help is a mere footnote. There are no known parish records, it is unknown where anyone was buried if there were any funerals, or if the congregants went back to St. John Kanty or joined another church. Sadly, since the church only lasted two years and dissolved over a century ago, these answers may never be known.

~



**The building which served as the Polish Independent Church of Our Lady of Perpetual Help as it appeared in the 1990s**

# Member Moments

## Obits, Death Notices, *Et cetera*

by Dolores Konopa

Most of us are aware of our relatives' habit of clipping death notices or obituaries from local newspapers, many of which have yellowed with time. Others have a collection of funeral cards. Many of these cards are passed down to family members, some of whom realize their value, while others sadly discard them.

Obituaries are often confused with Death Notices and *vice versa*. Obituaries are editorials of a deceased person's life and often include personal details, such as the person's education, career, hobbies, etc. These are sometimes written by family members and presented to the newspaper editorial staff for consideration of publication. Other times, in the case of well-known local persons, such as lawyers, judges, doctors, or politicians, the obituaries are written by the paper's editorial staff. Either way, as editorials, there is usually no charge to the family.

Death notices are simply, as stated, a paid legal notification of a person's passing. These may contain a few details, such as the date of death, the date and place of burial, and possibly names of close survivors. These are usually written by the family, then handled by the funeral director (at a cost) as part of their service.

Doing my own family research, I have discovered that, many times, there is neither a death notice nor an obituary. Many families choose not to use them, nor is there a requirement. So then we must look for other information regarding our ancestor's passing.

Funeral cards are offered for purchase to the deceased family. These may include the name of the deceased, date of birth, date of death, and burial place. However, sometimes they have only a poem or inspira-

### STANLEY E. GRABOWSKI

Stanley E. Grabowski, 75, of 8016 South Town Bldg. Rd., Ovid, NY died Friday Evening June 23, 1995 at Tompkins Community Hospital in Ithaca, NY.

The family will receive friends on Thursday, June 29, 1995 from 10-11am at Holy Cross Church in Ovid, NY.

A memorial Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 11am Thursday at the church.

Burial will be in the family plot in Holy Cross Cemetery, Ovid, NY.

Memorials may be directed to the South Seneca Ambulance Corps., Ovid, NY or the American Cancer Society.

Stanley was born May 12, 1920 in the Town of Romulus. A son of the late Frank and Rose Konopa Grabowski. He retired in 1983 after 25 years of state service. At the time of his retirement he was a Stationary Engineer at the Newark Developmental Center, he had also been employed at the Willard Psy-

chiatric Center. He had been engaged in farming his entire life.

Stanley was a communicant of St. Frances Solanus Catholic Church in Interlaken and the Interlaken Sportsmen's Club. He was also a member of the Horsemen's Protective Benevolent Association. He was pre-deceased by a brother Stephen and a sister, Jenny Carroll. He was a life resident of the Ovid area.

He is survived by his wife, Priscilla Hatch Grabowski of Ovid, daughters, Niki Prysock and Barbara Grabowski of San Antonio, TX, and Stella House of Palmetto, GA. 2 grandsons, A brother and sister-in-law, Leon and Ruth Grabowski of Interlaken, NY. 4 sisters, Stella Maleski and Helen Bloniarz, both of Ovid, Bertha Lenard of New York Mills, NY and Mary Skiba of Detroit, MI. Several neices and nephews.

Funeral arrangements are under the direction of the John D. Covert Funeral Home, Inc. of Ovid, NY. ■

### Example of an Obituary



tional verse.


There are two other resources which many of us overlook. The 'Card of Thanks' and the 'Remembrance,' which are published in the newspaper at the expense of whomever places it. The Card of Thanks may list hospital/hospice staff or others who took care of the deceased before their passing or those persons who were particularly helpful to the family. These may show up in the newspaper even if there is no death notice or obituary. A Remembrance is usually submitted to newspapers by family or friends to commemorate a deceased person's birthday, wedding anniversary, or date of death.

Here in Buffalo, The Buffalo News has a database on [www.legacy.com](http://www.legacy.com) which contains death notices from September 1997 through the present. You can also use Legacy to search other countries/states/cities by selecting the country/state, then all obituaries for the state or the newspapers for the city if available. I have also found obituaries for people in Buffalo on the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library site, using my library card to log in.



**KONOPA—Frank B.**  
 Aug. 29, 1961, of 56 Lombard St., beloved husband of Cecelia (nee Kuzara); dear father of Dennis; dear brother of Stanley (Martha) Konopa, Sophie (Walter) Jarmusz, Andrew (Florence) Konopa and the late Bertha Stawicka, Frances and Benny; dear son of the late Joseph and Catherine Konopa. Funeral from the Chapel of Okoniewski Brothers Funeral Home, 926 Sycamore St, Saturday morning at 9:30 o'clock and from Transfiguration Church at 10 o'clock. Interment in St. Stanislaus Cemetery. Friends invited. Deceased was a member of J. H. Williams & Co., USW Local 1183 and a veteran of World War II. 3011

Example of a Death Notice



In Loving Memory  
**FRANCES MALECKI**  
 (nee Cebula)  
 of Niagara Falls Blvd.  
 Died November 21st, 1951  
 Funeral from  
 Casper C. Urban Funeral Home  
 188-190 Clark Street  
 Services at Corpus Christi Church  
 Nov. 24th, 1951  
 Burial in St. Adalbert Cemetery  
 Sec. A - Line 13 - Grave 48

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**P R A Y E R**  
 O gentlest heart of Jesus, ever present in the Blessed Sacrament, ever consumed with burning love for the poor captive souls in Purgatory, have mercy on the soul of thy departed servant. Be not severe in Thy judgements, but let some drops of Thy Precious Blood fall upon the devouring flames, and do Thou, O Merciful Saviour, send thy angels to conduct Thy departed servant to a place of refreshment, light, and peace Amen.

---

**CASPER C. URBAN**  
 Funeral Director & Embalmer  
 188-190 Clark St. Buffalo, N. Y.  
 Tel. HU. 7647 - HU. 7544

Example of a  
 Funeral Card

## The Dark Side of the Family Tree

By Patricia Filipiak Rooney

“What do you mean I can't use your picture? I took that picture myself. You didn't object then.”

“Since you are putting the family tree on the internet and making it public, then, no, you can't use my picture or my data. I have a right to privacy.”

“But all information is private for living people. No one will see it.”

“Oh, and you think people can't figure out who I am from the dead people in the tree?”

“Anyone who doesn't know our family won't. Besides, who'd care anyway?”

Have you ever had to deal with this kind of conversation? Ever wonder why some people are so reluctant to share their life's data? Ever wonder what secrets they are trying to keep secret?

I have. My entire childhood was a series of brushoffs from older relatives concerning their lives lived in Poland. Only because of bumping into cousins attending the same school did I slowly learn that there were large families of my relatives living in Eden and Buffalo, New York. I mean I had hundreds of cousins!

*My entire childhood was a series of brush-offs from older relatives concerning their lives lived in Poland.*

Often I wondered who was left back in Poland, but no one would talk to me about that either. And, I wasn't the only one who wondered. Many years later I learned a younger cousin went with a friend to Poland at the age of eighteen to find the family homestead near Poznan. Ha! She knew conversational Polish only! Our grandparents gave her sketchy details of where she had to travel and her mother wished her “powodzenia” good luck. She was unsuccessful.

We laugh about it now. I needed the internet and years of research to find the family left behind, and even then it was because of powodzenia that the family and I bumped into each other.

But I digress. I had that gnawing question, too. Since I felt my view might be a little rosy and narrow, and because of past experiences, I turned to the internet for a wider perspective. What a wonderful source! So, I googled “why people don't share family history.”

My first hit was The Clue Wagon's article: “Why People Don't Post Public Family Trees?” Within seconds it gave me a “Duh” moment. It also

reminded me how optimistic and naive I am. It said, “Some people have family circumstances that prevent them from having a public tree.”

You think? I read on.

“Ever think that maybe rape occurred? What about abuse? There were lots of alcoholics in the 1900's and beyond. Let's talk about wars and marriages falling apart. Ever consider child abuse?”

Oh, the dark side list went on and on. And that's not even the worst things, like murder, that were written up in the local newspapers that are now available online. Does someone really want those things about their family available to the world?

And now we have a new source for the dark side of genealogy to broadcast to the world. Like all of life, there is a Ying and a Yang. The light versus the dark. Within the Clue Wagon article is a link to an article by Roberta Estes. She raises the DNA research concerns about another form of bullying. <http://dna-explained.com/2013/05/15/no-dna-bullying/>

I am highlighting certain ideas from her article:

**There are hardly any hobbies that hold more passion than genealogy. Once hooked by the bug, most people never retire and one of the things they worry about passing down to their family are their genealogy records – even if the family of today isn't terribly interested.**

**Genetic genealogy is the latest tool in the genealogists' arsenal, but it introduces some new challenges and, unfortunately, with the increased number of people testing, we're seeing some examples of what I consider bullying – for DNA, for identification, and for information.**

**I know of one case where someone googled the e-mail of their contact, discovered the person was a doctor, and called them at the office. That is over the line into cyber-stalking. If they wanted to answer the e-mail, they would have. If they don't want to, their decision needs to be respected.**

**I've heard of two or three situations recently. One was at Ancestry.com where someone had a DNA match and their trees matched as well. At first the contact was cordial, but then it deteriorated into one person insisting that the other person had information they weren't divulging and from there it deteriorated even further.**

**This is a hobby. It's supposed to be fun.**

**For the adoptees and the parents, there are laws in each state that govern the release of their legal paperwork to protect both parties. Either party can opt out at any time. But for inadvertently discovered family connections, this isn't true. Think of the person who doesn't know they are adopted, for example, who discovers a half-sibling and through that half sibling their biological mother. Neither person may welcome or be prepared for this discovery or contact.**

**Imagine this at the dinner table with the family gathered, “Hey guess what, I got a half-sibling match today on my DNA. I wonder if that's some kind of mistake. How could that be?”**

**So if you match someone as a half-sibling or a cousin, and they don't want to continue the conversation, be kind and respectful, and leave the door open to them if they change their mind in**

*As genealogists we need to consider what information should be put online and what should be part of a private collection only.*

the future. Pushing them can only be hurtful and nonproductive.

**Bullying, of course, is not because of DNA or unique to genetic genealogy, but the new products introduce new social situations that we have not previously had tools to discover nor the opportunity to address in quite the same way.**

As genealogists we need to consider what information should be put online and what should be part of a private collection only. We can save those collections by writing an codicil to a Will with instructions as to where the collection of family history is to be stored. Provisions for storage can also be made with Ancestry.com and other online companies. However, as the years pass, these options may disappear.

Until then, it is a precious history for those who seek it, and it might enrich a life or two. By then, too, maybe the dark side of the family history will reveal a strength learned because of the trials and struggles conquered.

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## I Seek Dead People My Mom, Not So Much by Denise M. Oliansky

My Mom, Adella (aka Adeline, aka Adele, aka Jim) Muczenski (née Koralewska) never really understood my passion for researching her family's history. When I'd ask questions about her relatives, she'd always say, "Why do you care? They're all dead!"

While this *was* an accurate statement of fact, it didn't stop me from trying to find (and share with her) every little tidbit of information I could about her known relatives and her ancestors. For me, fleshing out their lives and learning their stories and secrets feels like I'm bringing them back to life. I will admit, even though Mom may not have understood my interest, she *almost* always listened when I'd find something new, and *usually* she would try to answer my questions if she could. But there was much she did not know or could not remember.

She particularly perked up at newspaper articles I found about her relatives on fultonhistory.com. Like me, she was amazed at the detail (although often erroneous) many of the old articles would go into when reporting a local incident involving her family. When her Uncle Walter

Koralewski committed suicide in April 1929, newspapers across New York State carried the story, and in Auburn, where he had lived, the article about his death took up two columns of print! Likewise, when her Cousin Joe, who had been a reporter for the *Buffalo News* for many years, passed away, his lengthy obituary detailed practically his whole life story. Those types of things she would read with interest. Perhaps it was because she knew and had more contact with these people while growing up. But, when it came to her grandparents and generations further back, she really didn't have much to say. She couldn't even tell me the first names of her maternal grandparents. She would say, "They were just Grandma and Grandpa to us."

In her family, as with many families of that era, the adults just didn't talk much to the kids, and certainly not about their lives in Poland or their ship voyage to America or about *their* parents and relatives. So it was only very occasionally that she could provide me useful information about her extended family. I greedily drank in any reminiscences she did share about her immediate family, aunts and uncles, and her 52 first cousins (all of whom she outlived!).



In my pursuit of dead people, obviously I spend a lot of time in cemeteries. If the cemetery was located at some distance, I would sell it to Mom as a Sunday drive so she would come along with me. The only problem was, while she enjoyed the ride, she did not enjoy hanging around the cemetery while I scurried around taking pictures of gravestones. She would get bored very quickly and start making the, "Let's go!" noises, so I was never able to spend as much time as I wanted exploring for more family graves. However, often on the drive there, she would talk about the people we were "going to visit" in the cemetery, giving me insight into who they were, what they did, and what kind of people they were. Priceless memories those.

Mom often said I knew more about her family than she did. And I suppose that is true since, with resources like the Poznan Project and founder Lukasz Bielecki's help, I've been able to trace back her line to her second and even third great-grandparents in Poland. She had never even heard mention of any of them before I shared these pieces of her family history with her. She probably never in her whole life even *thought* about their existence, especially being raised in a time when one did not ask 'irrelevant' questions of parents or other adults.

I am so grateful I had my Mom and Dad for as long as I did...both lived to be in their 90s. Now that she's gone, I wish I had bugged Mom more, asked more questions -- especially more of the *right* questions, and had found those things that are proving to be mysteries when I still had someone around who might be able to help me solve them. Mom may not have understood my passion, but she tolerated it and helped when she could. I'd give anything to have five minutes here and there with her to share new information I find and to ask questions when I uncover puzzles in our family history.

My advice, gentle reader...even if they seem uninterested or blatantly think you're nuts to be spending so much time seeking dead people, if you still have your parents, grandparents, or other extended family to ask, ask now and ask often! I'm finding out, to my dismay, that some mysteries will never be solved and some questions will never be answered when there is no one left to ask.



## Polonia in Lackawanna and Beyond!

by James Ciulis

My grandmother, Julia (Stoklosa) Molenda came from Przecisowa, Poland to the United States in February 1913. Julia Stoklosa met Frank Molenda, and they wed in late August 1916. They had four children: Constantine, Lottie, Mathew, and Alberta. In November of 1932, just five years after the birth of their last child Alberta, Frank passed away. Julia was faced with raising four children as a single mother.

Julia became a well-known event organizer in Lackawanna within the local Polish community. She was the treasurer for the Rosary Society of St. Barbara's Church, a post she held for 25 years and was also a major fund raiser for the parish.

In 1940, Julia founded the Marie Curie Skodlowska Polish National Alliance Lodge No. 2959, an organization that has provided scholarships for young persons, sponsored bowling competitions, had a drum corps, and organized folk dances.

Julia's fundraising extended beyond Lackawanna. She was a member of Kolko Polek, a charitable organization that helped create a better Polonia. She was also a past President of the Buffalo Chapter 5, Orchard Lake Seminary Auxiliary of Michigan. Now known as SS. Cyril and Methodius Seminary. It is a four-year private Polish seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan. The seminary, taking its name from Saints Cyril and Methodius, was founded in 1885 in Detroit, Michigan to prepare candidates for the Roman Catholic priesthood primarily to serve Polish American immigrant communities.

Julia was past president and a 23 year member of the Piarist Fathers Guild of Derby. The first Piarists (Hungarian and Polish Fathers) arrived in the United States in 1949. The first Community was formed in the diocese of Buffalo NY in 1950, and the Community then moved to Derby in 1951. The House of Derby was closed in 1999.

As you can see, Julia had a strong foundation both in the Roman Catholic Church and her Polish culture. In 1965, Julia had the Black Madonna of Czestochowa on display in her yard at 24 Grape Street in Lackawanna. The icon of Our Lady of Czestochowa has been intimately associated with Poland for the past six hundred years. How the painting came to be in Julia's back yard, unfortunately, is a mystery. I have a home movie that was taken at the time. In the movie, the yard was full of priests,



Julia (Stoklosa)  
Molenda

nuns, and an array of babka's all there to view the iconic painting. A recent conversation with a woman at Corpus Christi R.C. Church, verified that the Black Madonna was on tour in the Buffalo area in 1965. I am awaiting a copy of an article that appeared in the Buffalo News July 16, 1965 about the painting. The woman at Corpus Christi was amazed that I was calling about the painting because she had just recently found the article, and as we talked we both had goosebumps! It's possible that the painting in my grandmother's back yard is the same painting that is currently hanging in Corpus Christi Church.

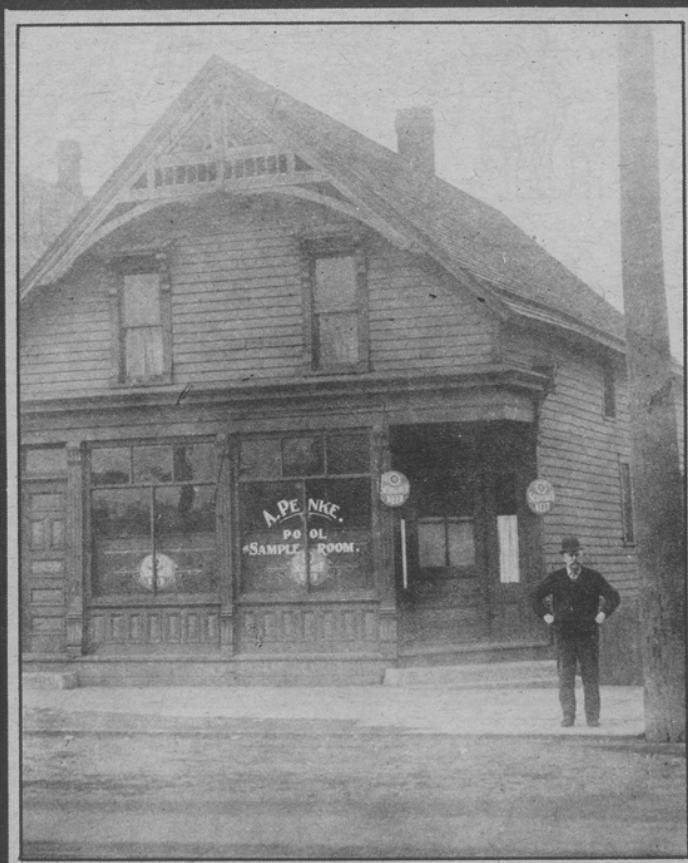
Julia remained active in many organizations up to a year before her death at age 90. She passed down her pride in her Polish Culture to her sons and daughters. Lottie (Molenda) Jackson participated in many Polish organizations and worked for her church. Lottie also sold Polish National Alliance Life Insurance until just before her death. Alberta (Molenda) Ciulis, my mother, promoted her Polish Heritage and her church. As for the boys, they both served in the military during WWII. Constantine fought in many of the major battles and ended up a prisoner of war in Germany, but that's a story for another time.



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# THE OLD PHOTO ALBUM



This 1910 photo and caption from the June 6, 1976 *Courier Express* newspaper in Buffalo, NY was shared by PGSNYS member Geraldine Penke Kalkanis, the granddaughter of August Penke, Sr.

COURIER EXPRESS - June 6, 1976

The man in the derby at left is August Penke, Sr., standing in front of his pool hall at the corner of Broadway and Goodyear in Buffalo in 1910. The proprietor's granddaughter, Geraldine Penke, tells us there's still a tavern on the site.

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