

The Panna Maria Heritage Center

The Panna Maria Heritage Center will be a 16,500 sq. ft. building facing the church to the east. The west parking lot of the church will separate the two buildings. The church will always be the focal point, the primary building, and the center of attention in Panna Maria.



The exterior of the building will be creamy white cast stone. The roof will be a copper colored metal shingle. Because the property is on a slope, the rear of the building will have an elevator for entrance and exit.



The rear of the building will be connected to 35 parking spaces plus several more at the front of the building. Landscaping for the building will have an irrigation system and will include some oak trees descended from the famous oak tree of December 24, 1854 fame.



The front of the building will have its name cast into the stone: “Panna Maria Heritage Center.”



Two medallions about 5 foot in diameter (here illustrated) will grace the front: the one on the left will be the Polish White Eagle, the oldest of Poland’s national symbols. At the top: “From Poland – Polska to,” and at the bottom of the medallion “United States of America”.

The medallion on the right with the wording “From Silesia – Slask to Texas,” will contain one large image and four (4) smaller symbols: dominating the central portion is Virgin Mary (Panna Maria), the Immaculate Conception (the name of the parish). Our Silesian Polish ancestors had and still have a strong devotion to Mary, Mother of Jesus who is God.



In 1855, Johann and Tekla Rzeppa brought a Christ figure with them from Silesia. This Christ figure, now mounted on a modern cross, still stands in front of the church. The cross of Jesus Christ, which is the most popular symbol in the world, was dear to our ancestors and is to us as well.

After the cross in the medallion, there is an image of the church in Panna Maria. The church in Panna Maria contains many historical, priceless items and sacred memories of generations.

The same Rzeppa couple arranged for a bell to be brought over by Silesian immigrants in 1858. That same bell still hangs in the bell tower in Panna Maria, calling people for Mass and devotions and tolling for the deceased.

The majority of our immigrant Silesian Polish ancestors were hard working farmers. They are symbolized by the mule drawn plow.

Honorary Director: Historian Robert Thonhoff

The Honorable Robert Thonhoff, has donated a Collection of his many books and writings to our Panna Maria Heritage Center. Historian Thonhoff has the distinction of having been president of the Texas Historical Association. He is the foremost historian of Karnes County, having taught at Fashing School, being the County Judge, and being the master of ceremonies at the Annual Folklife Festival sponsored by the Institute of Texan Cultures. The only other institution to whom such a gift as ours was given, is Texas A&M at San Antonio. We thank Robert and his wife Vickie for their tremendous, precious, meaningful gift.

May they Rest in Peace

Please remember in prayer Mary Ann Pollok, wife of Board of Director Norman Pollok, who passed away June 5 after a brief illness. Funeral services were held in the Panna Maria Church and Cemetery.

Also please remember in prayer Father Stanislaus Oleksy, SDS, 58, pastor of St. Ann's Church, Kosciuszko, who died suddenly June 16. Father Oleksy was buried in the St. Ann's Cemetery.

Prayer: The Greatest Power on Earth

From the beginning and proclaimed many times since then, we have dedicated the construction of the Panna Maria Heritage Center (PMHC) to our Blessed Mother after whom Panna Maria was named. I ask your daily prayer for our

center to be a place of pilgrimage for ancestry and education, asking the Blessed Virgin to intercede for us with her Divine Son Jesus under the title of Our Lady of Czestochowa, Patroness of Poland.

The last words of Jesus were: “Go and make disciples of all the nations...” (Mt. 28:19) e.g., St. James responded by bringing Christianity to Spain, St. Patrick is the one who converted the Irish, Our Lady of Guadalupe is responsible for the Catholic faith of the Mexican people. In the ninth century, two Greek brothers, Cyril and Methodius evangelized the area which is now the Slavic nations. Dobrawa, a Czech Catholic girl married Prince Mieszko I who was baptized in 966 – the beginning of both the Polish nations and the Church in Poland. I invite you in your prayers, please ask Sts. Cyril and Methodius, co-patrons of Europe, to help us in the realization of our Center.

In addition we ask the following Polish saints also to intercede for us:

- 1) St. Stanislaus (1030-1078), Bishop of Krakow and Martyr. Patron Saint of Poland.
- 2) St. Hedwig (1174-1243), mother of seven children, widow, then became Cistercian nun, founder of hospitals and Patroness of Silesia.
- 3) St. Hyacinth (1185-1257) Apostle of Poland, native of “our” Silesian area in Poland.
- 4) St. Pope John Paul II (1920-2005); many of you were in San Antonio October 13, 1987 when he visited the parishioners of Panna Maria and 1,000 Polish Texans at Assumption Seminary, San Antonio.

Also, as you pray for your deceased Polish family members and ancestors, ask them to intercede for our PMHC with our Saviour Jesus Christ (Catechism #958).



This is the first of a series that will take you through the building.

May God Bless You and Yours,

Retired Bishop John W. Yanta, President; Panna Maria Heritage Center
P.O. Box 28125; San Antonio, Texas 78228; Tel.: 210.263.7270

Please visit our web site, www.pannamariacenter.org, and follow the progress of the project, Panna Maria Heritage Center, on Facebook.