



Visitor Experience #39

*Even in the tough
times, we say
Thank You!*

Even in the tough times, we say Thank You!

As mentioned in the last newsletter, all of us involved with the ongoing project of the Polish Heritage Center, beginning with our founder and visionary, Bishop John Yanta, the Board of Directors, the Campaign Steering Committee, the Honorary members, the consultants, all of the professionals, and especially all of our great volunteers appreciate your generosity. We thank each and every one of you for your support towards the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria.

Be assured that the vision and goal of the Polish Heritage Center has not stopped. Just as in farming and ranching, what we are experiencing is a “bad” weather season that we will endure and emerge thankful as our ancestors were after they arrived in the *New World*. As we withstand and weather this rough season, remember we call this time “bad,” “unfortunate,” and “difficult” because it is not the “normal” life that we live and know.

What is “normal” is hard to say, and it varies from one “time, place, and situation” to another “time, place, and situation.” When our ancestors arrived, they were in a new land, did not speak the language, were not aware of the local customs, were not able to understand its nuances, were seen as outsiders, practiced a Faith that was not locally approved, and were savaged by diseases they may never have encountered before. They did not give up nor “throw in the towel.”

Our ancestors witnessed to us the power of faith and always placing our trust and hope in God. That is the glue that always held our people together. Without faith, how long could these early settlers survive?

Today, our thoughts and prayers are with those who are hurting and suffering from the COVID-19. For those who have died, Bishop Yanta remembers them in his daily prayers and when he celebrates Holy Mass daily. For those living in the Energy Belt, we have been dealing with another issue, the major slump in the Oil market. The oil and energy industry is a substantial portion of the economy and

represents a major source of income for many people and all levels of the government. For many in our Heritage Area, oil income represents an important source of financial security.

And even with all the uncertainties of life, we realize the gifts that God has blessed us with because at present, we may be unable to enjoy them fully. Just as with our ancestors, in the many hardships they overcame, not only do we raise our arms in supplications, we also raise them in thanksgiving!

The present time is difficult, but not impossible. Let our ancestors whisper encouragement into our ears and fill our souls with strength. This is why we thank so many of you who have supported the project, and many of you from the beginning.

During this time of introspection, we desire once again to reassure each of you of your importance and remind you of how much you mean to us. Our collective effort in remembering and celebrating our ancestors' faith is the greatest testament we can offer for those who suffered and gave so much, that we, their offspring and descendants can carry on as they would hope.

Your safety and well being are most important. We will continue to keep you informed by this newsletter, Facebook, Twitter, texts, emails, and regular letters of the progress and celebrate with you the excitement of our project. The time will come when we all can once again look inside, marvel at the progress, smile at where we will be memorializing and remembering our ancestors' heritage, *OUR* heritage!

We are asking for short stories and memories of a special religious, a priest, brother, sister, or nun, that touched you in your life. It can be an encounter, words that were exchanged, or act that stayed with you. It does not need to be long, no more that perhaps a paragraph. Just something that you would like to share that brings a happy smile during this time! Please email wojtasczyk@sbcglobal.net or mail to PO Box 28125, San Antonio, Texas, 78228. Thank you!

Judge Robert Thonhoff, Bishop John Yanta, Vicky Thonhoff

During a visit on March 10, 2020 at the Thonhoff home



During a visit to the home of retired county judge of Karnes County, Robert Thonhoff and his wife Vicky, I was presented with a digital reprint of Judge Thonhoff's thesis work, *A History of Karnes County, Texas*. With the gracious addition of this work, we now have the complete collection of works by Judge Thonhoff who is the foremost historian on Karnes County.

Although Judge Thonhoff himself is not Catholic, he has been a great friend and supporter of both the history of Panna Maria and the Polish Heritage Center over the years. From the beginning, he has been distinguished as an *Honorary*

Director of the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria Foundation. Judge Thonhoff's interests extend beyond Karnes County.

In addition to the *A History of Karnes County, Texas*, he included a work entitled *Maria Andrea Castañón Villanueva (Señora Candelaria): Heroine Of San Antonio*. In this work, he is a collaborating author, and this work recounts the story of one of the very few survivors of the Battle of the Alamo as recounted by a great-grand-daughter, Maria O. "Vee" Gomez.

The addition of this work will certainly enhance the prestige of the archival collection in our Polish Heritage Center for those interested in the history of the Battle of the Alamo. As time has continued its relentless journey, what is known about this battle is that it is believed barely over a dozen individuals survived! Most of these survivors were women and children.

In the shadow of the blood spilled 50 some miles away, 18 years later our ancestors travel to this historic city to meet Fr. Leopold Moczygemba and be welcomed by him to the New World. Who knows how long would it be before our ancestors would learn of this history? And what did they think? They knew that they were Polish, but it had been 400 years since they were part of Poland.

With this most wonderful addition to our collection by Judge Thonhoff, this part of our area's history will not fade into the recesses of time. This history of the Alamo, in the larger scheme, is also part of our history. Fr. Leopold's brother, John, married Maria Carmen de Cadena, whose family belonged to one of the original Canary Islander families, the original settlers of San Antonio.

The crossroads of time are as surprising and as they can be mysterious. It can be the crossing of paths such as John Moczygemba and Maria Carmen de Cadena or then Fr. John W. Yanta and Judge Robert Thonhoff; in these we are greeted with new encounters and new friendships. It is the fruit of these past happenings that brings us to this day. And the gifts of Judge Thonhoff will be the fruit that will help nourish the future of our Polish Heritage Center!

Reverend Edmund Stanislaus Dragon

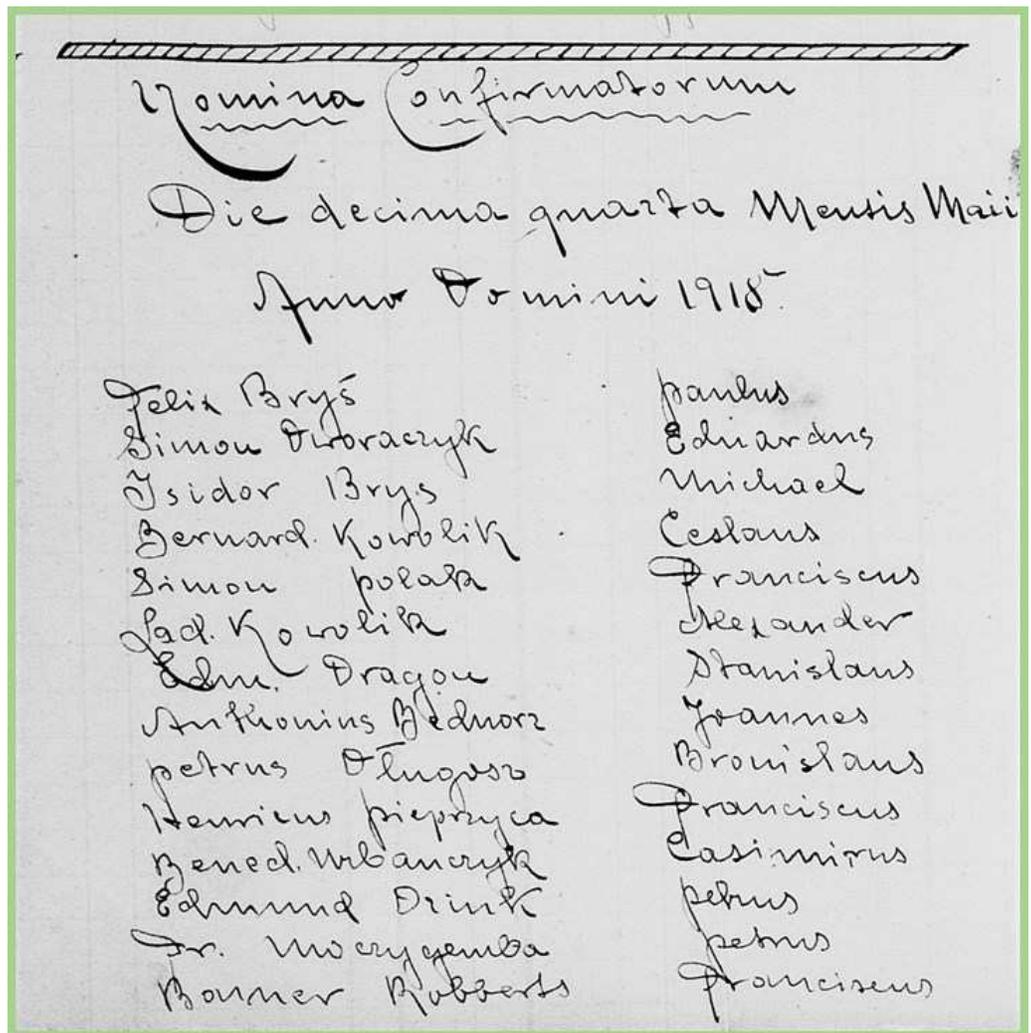
“...priesthood is the most sublime of God’s wonders...”

1905 – 1961

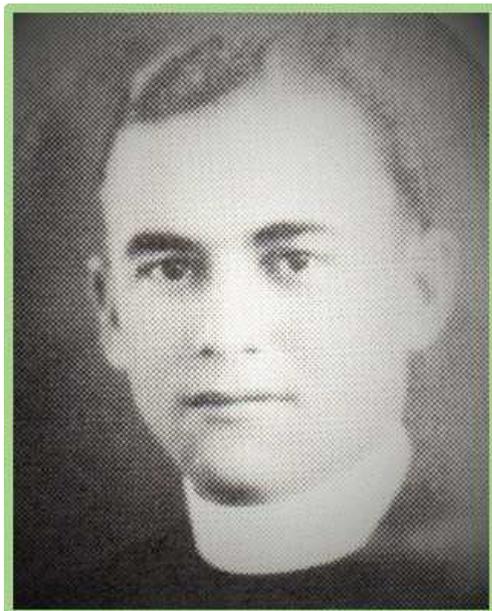
By Janet Dawson Ebrom

In 1885, **Joseph Dragon** arrived in Texas as an adventurous, single man from the region of Upper Silesia, in present-day Poland. Two years after settling in Panna Maria, **Joseph Dragon** married **Caroline Jaskola** in the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church in Panna Maria. This Catholic church was the nucleus of the Dragon family as each baby was welcomed — five girls and three boys. Their youngest son, **Edmund Dragon**, was born on November 15, 1905, in Panna Maria and was called **Eddie** as a child. He attended the local parochial elementary school where his religious vocation was fostered.

When he was 12 years old, **Edmund** received the sacrament of Confirmation in Panna Maria by **Bishop J. W. Shaw**. There were 44 boys and 52 girls gathered in church for this special event. Each had carefully selected a saint’s name, and Edmund’s was **Stanislaus** as shown on the seventh line of the May 14, 1918, list:

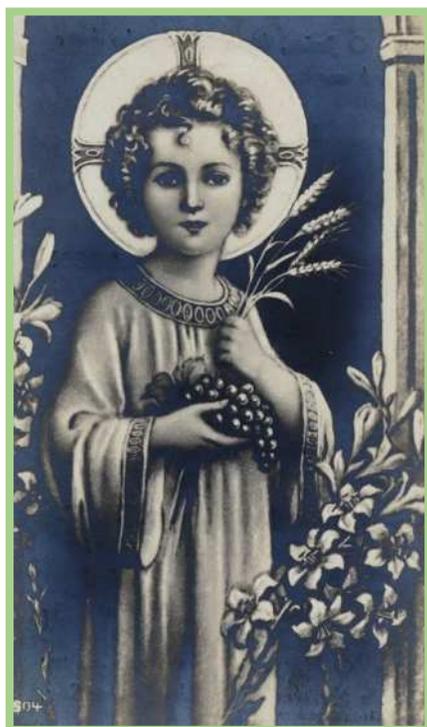


In September of 1919, **Edmund** entered St. John's Preparatory Seminary in San Antonio, Texas, for his classical and philosophical courses. In 1926, he moved to Indiana to attend St. Meinrad Seminary where he studied theology for two years. Upon returning to San Antonio in 1928, he completed his studies at St. John's Major Seminary for his final two years of preparation for the priesthood (Dworaczyk, page 72).



Photograph from *Priest Forever: History of St. John's Seminary*, page 74

Reverend Edmund Stanislaus Dragon was ordained on March 25, 1930, the feast of the Annunciation, by the **Most Reverend Arthur J. Drossaerts**, at the San Fernando Cathedral. Cards with splendid images from his Ordination and First Solemn Mass were cherished by those in attendance and handed down in families as keepsakes; one shown below was in Polish: *Jam jest chleb żywy, który z nieba zstąpił – I am the bread of life who came down from heaven.*



O Jesus, bless those who have led me to Thy Holy Altar.

In Joyful Memory
of the
FIRST SOLEMN MASS
of
REV. EDMUND S. DRAGON
Celebrated in
St. Mary's Church
Panna Maria, Texas
Thursday, March 27, 1930

—

Ordained by the
Most Reverend
Arthur J. Drossaerts, D. D.
Tuesday, March 25, 1930
San Fernando Cathedral
San Antonio, Texas

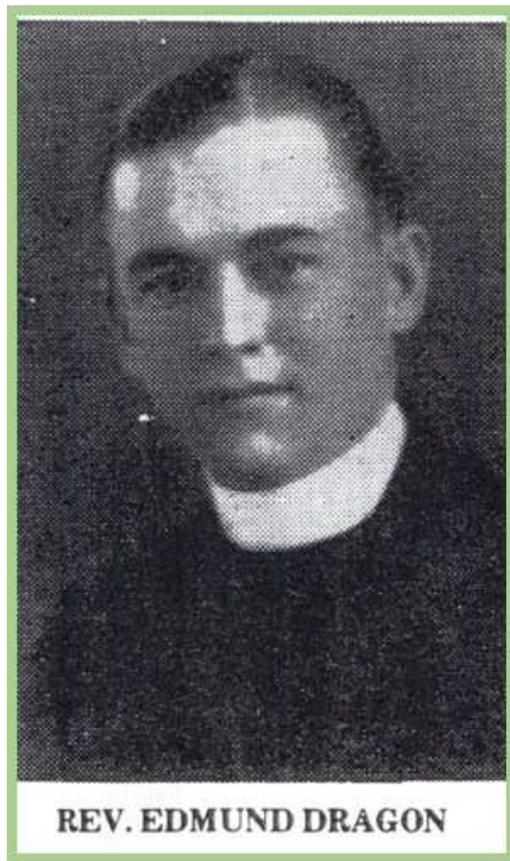
*O Mary, my Mother, bless me
in the service of Thy Divine Son.*

Made in Germany



Cards courtesy of: Casper and Rosalee Moczygemba, Falls City, Texas, and Rosie Reiman Yosko 1904-1981

Three months after his Ordination, **Father Dragon** was selected as assistant pastor to **Reverend F.O. Beck** of Yoakum, Texas. On October 29, 1932, **Father Dragon** was appointed Pastor of St. Anthony Catholic Church in Runge. By the time of the 1940 Census, he was serving in Hobson at St. Boniface Catholic Church. When the census enumerator visited Hobson, he recorded **Rev. Edmund Dragon**, age 34, who had worked 50 weeks in 1939 with an annual salary of \$820 (1940 Census of Karnes County, Texas, sheet no. 1A).



His next parish was at Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Falls City when in 1943, **Father Leo Moczygamba** was reassigned, and **Father Dragon** assumed the pastorate duties. He earnestly continued the building fund for the new church, and under his leadership approximately twenty-five thousand dollars was collected toward the planned church. Until early 1948 when **Father Theo Janysek** took over, **Father Dragon** remained in Falls City.

He served in Cistern from 1948 to 1949 at Sts. Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church before his assignment as Pastor of Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic Church in St. Hedwig in 1949.



When he was 46 years old, **Father Dragon** traveled to Paris, France, on May 20, 1952 (*Pan American World Airways Passenger Manifest*, page 212, line 2). He returned by way of England where he was listed as a priest on the manifest of the *Queen Mary* in the Port of Southampton. He departed on July 3, 1952, bound for New York according to the Outbound Passenger List. **Father Dragon** arrived in the Port of New York five days later. His destination was shown as Church of the Annunciation, St. Hedwig, Texas (*Queen Mary In-Bound Passenger List*, page 170, line 9).

Ordination Card of Reverend Dragon courtesy of: Theresa Kyrisch Ankrom, San Antonio, Texas

After his six-week European trip, he resumed his pastoral duties in St. Hedwig until the summer of 1953. Then he was transferred to St. Stanislaus Catholic Church in Bandera as an assistant pastor.

Reverend Edmund Stanislaus Dragon died in Bandera, Texas, on January 19, 1961, at the age of 55. According to a notice in the *Bandera Bulletin*, a Rosary was recited at St. Stanislaus Catholic Church on January 22 with **Reverend Victor Schmidtzinsky**, pastor, officiating. Funeral services were held on Monday morning, January 23, in Panna Maria, the place of his birth, where **Reverend Dragon** was laid to rest.

Funeral Card courtesy of: Rosie Reiman Yosko 1904-1981

Sources:

Bandera Bulletin [Bandera, Texas], 27 January 1961.
Diamond Jubilee Celebration 1902 – 1977- Holy Trinity Catholic Church, Falls City, Texas.
September 4, 1977.

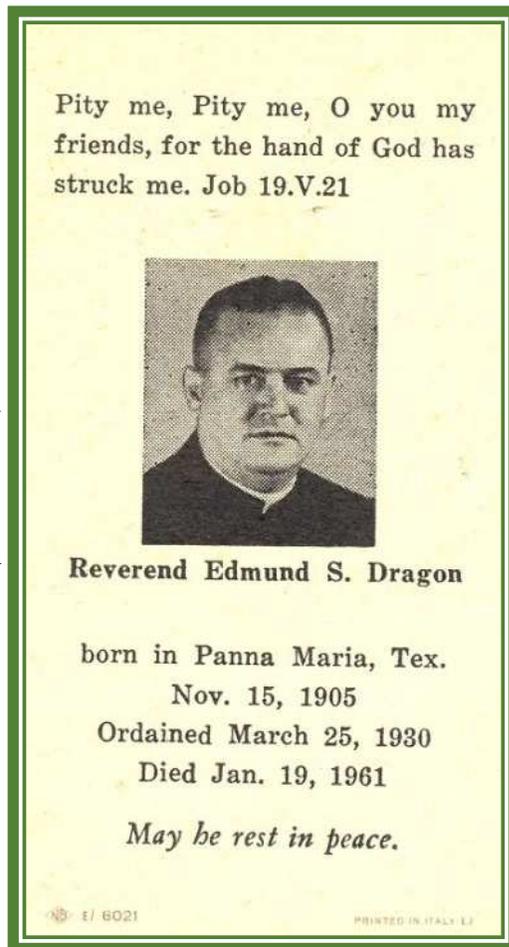
Dworaczyk, Rev. Edward J. *The First Polish Colonies of America in Texas.*

San Antonio, Texas: The Naylor Company, 1936.

Gilbert, Rev. M.J., compiler and editor. *Archdiocese of San Antonio, 1874-1949: An illustrated record of the foundation and growth of parishes, missions, and religious institutions in that part of Texas under the spiritual jurisdiction of the See of San Antonio.* San Antonio, Texas: Schneider Printing Company, 1949.

Priest Forever: History of St. John's Seminary, San Antonio, Texas, 1915-1965.

American Printers Incorporated, San Antonio, Texas, 1966.



The legacy of **Reverend Edmund Dragon** has already been honored by having him memorialized in the Polish Heritage Center by **Annie Dragon**, Karnes City, and her son, **Edwin Dragon**, Panna Maria, Texas. Their generosity is greatly appreciated and will ensure that future generations will learn about the dedication and honorable life of **Father Dragon**.



Houston, May 4, 2020

Consulate General
of the Republic of Poland
in Houston

The Most Reverend John W. Yanta
Bishop Emeritus of Amarillo,
Chairman of the Board of Directors
Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria, Texas

Your Excellency Bishop Yanta,

Since I began my service as the Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Houston, in October 2018, I have been extremely impressed with your idea of building the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria to preserve the history of Polish settlers in Texas. Visiting the site, seeing the completed shell of the building and rapidly progressing work on the interior, I was deeply touched and proud of your achievement.

Panna Maria was the first Polish settlement in the United States of America, as early as 1854. Now, one of the most important Polish heritage sites across the entire nation is almost ready, exactly where the story began 166 year ago. Not only will the Polish Heritage Center showcase the history of Polish settlers in Texas, but it will also promote Polish culture, traditions, customs, and family values. The Center at Panna Maria will serve as a research institute for scholars and students, a Polish museum for Texans and visitors from more remote destinations, and a vibrant venue, where Polish Americans will hold their most prestigious and inspiring events.

It could never happen without your vision and dedication, the long-lasting commitment and hard work of the Heritage Center team and financial support of numerous individuals and Polish organizations.

I wish you all expanding success of the Polish Heritage Center in Texas. Our office and the Polish – American community will support your great efforts in whatever capacity we can. Today, on May 2nd, we also celebrate the Polish Diaspora and Poles Abroad Day as well as the Polish National Flag Day. Let me wish you all the best, on those occasions, too!

Sincerely Yours in Christ,

Robert Rusiecki
Consul General

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By George Kowalik

***It's Not About
Panna Maria***

or Bandera, or St. Hedwig, or Yorktown, or Cestohowa, or Kosciusko, or Falls City, or
White Deer or McCook.

It is About

The ancestors that came in 1854, 1855 and 1856.

It is to Honor them and not the town.

You can memorialize and honor them by contributing to the completion of the Polish Heritage Center. It will be the preeminent Polish Heritage Education Center in the U. S. A. It will cover Polish history from 966 to the present time. It will be so technically advanced that there will be no other like it. That is why we are asking for your help us generate the funds needed for its completion. The last stages of construction are the most expensive with the exhibits and electronics nearly ready to install. We have raised over \$10.8 M of our \$14 M goal which includes \$1 M for operating costs and we will need ongoing donations for future operations.

Consider if our ancestors would not have left Poland to come to this land not knowing what was in store for them. Traveling on trains, boats, the long trip in the holds of ships (relatives dying at sea), and arriving to a prairie with no shelters (living in dug outs) in the cold of December, a coming drought, no food and failed crops. If they had not come, we, who are so blessed now, would possibly not have been born, or survived wars, the Holocaust or communism after WWII. We should honor our ancestors who were so determined to get here to have a better life and who worked so hard in difficult and near impossible conditions to survive.

If you would like to honor your ancestors with your genealogy and a donation, according to your means, please visit our website <https://polishheritagecentertx.org/> or call me, George Kowalik at 830-583-6235. If I don't answer, it is because I won't hear the phone on my tractor, so please leave me a message and I will return your call. Thank you.

This is a sample of the information that we are looking for in our veterans display.

Polish Heritage Center Veterans Memorialization Initiative						
Name	Branch of Service	Community and/or Parish and/or Community Origin	War or Conflict KIA or MIA	Terminal Rank	Commendations Received	Other related information
Peter J Dziuik	U.S. Army	Panna Maria, TX, Immaculate Conception parish	Killed in Action in France, July 14, 1944	Sergeant	Purple Heart	Interment in Panna Maria cemetery
Adrian Ibrom	U.S. Army	Yorktown, TX, Holy Cross parish	Killed in Action, in Tyo How Province, Vietnam, December 9, 1966	SPC 4	Bronze Star medal, Purple Heart, National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Combat Infantry Badge	
Frank Jablonski	U.S. Army	Goliad County, Weser, TX	Killed in Action in France, October 15, 1918	Private, 42nd Division, 168th Infantry Regiment	Purple Heart and WWI Victory Medal	Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery, Romagne, France
John Optiela	Union Army	Karnes County, Texas	Died June 24, 1864 in Confederate prison camp, Andersonville, GA.	Private, 16th regiment calvary volunteers, IL.	Originally joined Confederate Army, Yorktown, TX, April 11, 1862, Company I, 6th Texas Infantry, joined Union Army, February 9, 1863	
Adrian B. Swierc	U.S. Army	Falls City, TX, Holy Trinity parish	Killed in Action, Luzon, Philippines, June 1, 1945	Private, 38th Infantry Division		
John V. Wiatrek	U.S. Army	Cestochowa, TX, Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary parish	Killed in Action near Casino, Italy, February 25, 1944	Private First Class, Company I, 142nd Infantry Regiment		Interment in Cestochowa cemetery
Valentine J. Yanta	U.S. Army	Karnes County, Texas	Killed in Action, Korea, September 26, 1952			

Veterans Recognition Gets Underway



Korea & Vietnam Memorializations

A heartfelt thank you to those readers who responded to the introduction of our veterans recognition initiative in the past newsletter. Several sample submissions are on the preceding page. That is not the final format that will appear in the interactive display in the Center, but we wanted all of our readers to see a sampling of the entries that have been made to date. We hope this encourages others to make submissions.

The photos are courtesy of Pat Hoffmann, from Hobson, a member of our Campaign Steering Committee. They picture portions of the war memorial in Kenedy. Pat offered eight entries as a result of his visit to this memorial, plus one personal entry. Our heritage area is rich in such memorials and we encourage you to follow Pat's lead.

Here are the criteria for inclusion in our Veterans Memorial:

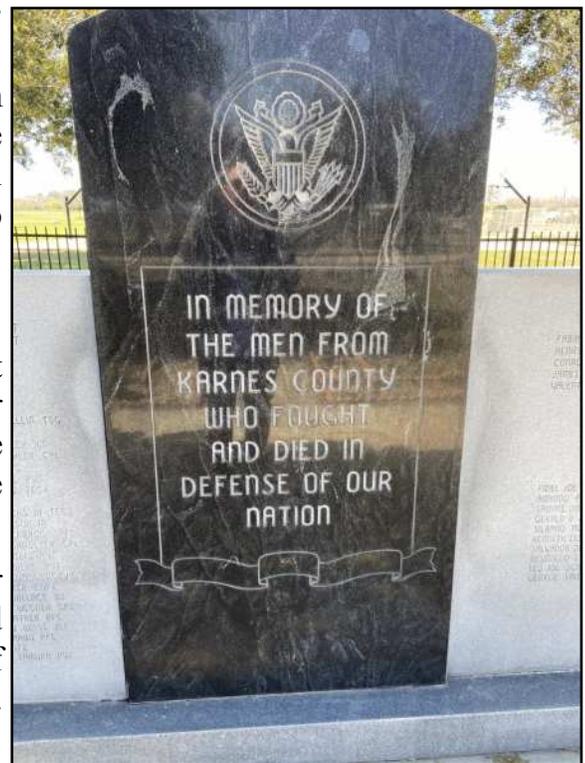
We will honor the Polish-American immigrants from our Polish heritage area, and their descendants, who died while serving in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard. We will honor those who made the ultimate sacrifice in the Texas-Indian Wars, Civil War, Comanche Campaign, Spanish-American War, Banana Wars, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Lebanon Crisis, Vietnam War, Invasion of Grenada, Gulf War, Somali Civil War, Bosnia & Kosovo Wars, War in Afghanistan, War in Iraq, Intervention in Syria, and other conflicts.

If the lineage of those who died facing hostile fire can be traced to these immigrants, in any way, they will be honored in Donor Gallery 2 in an interactive display that will permit visitors to locate family members or loved ones who died in combat.

We seek your help!

We ask everyone receiving this newsletter to contact us if they know of anyone who died in combat with their name, branch of service, rank, war or conflict in which the person died, commendations received, and the name of the parish or community from which they came.

Please email John Cebrowski, PHC Board member and Director of Development, with the information noted above. John is a US Marine Corps attack pilot veteran of Vietnam. His email address is jcebrowski39@gmail.com. Thank you!



Karnes County Memorial, Kenedy, TX

Memorializations & Donations

From February 16, 2020 to May 8, 2020

In Honor of Bishop Yanta 25th Anniversary of Episcopal ordination by Michael Davis, San Antonio, Texas	Moczygemba, Floresville, Texas
In Memory of the Michalski and Ploch Families by Susann Baker, St Hedwig, Texas	In Memory of Frederick John Moczygemba by Ronald & Debbie Moczygemba, Victoria, Texas
In Memory of Elenora Mary "Ella" Pieprzyca Manka by Velmon & Peggy Pieprzyca Buehring, Karnes City, Texas	In Memory of Alvin Thomas Pawlik by Thomas & Bridget Padalecki Pawlik, San Antonio, Texas
In Memory of Leonard & Virginia Jendrusch by Laurie Clark, San Antonio, Texas	In Memory of Alvin Thomas Pawlik by Thomas & Dorothy Jean Pawlik, San Antonio, Texas
In Memory of Alvin Thomas Pawlik by Paul & Doris Heinlein, Glen Rock, Pennsylvania	In Memory of Janina Witek by Ray & Diane Vacek Solarczyk, Boerne, Texas
In Memory of the Kolodziejcyk & Kotzur Families by Alois & Emily Kotzur Kolodziejcyk, San Antonio, Texas	In Memory of Janina Witek by Edwina M Scinta, San Antonio, Texas
In Memory of Leysa Susann Moczygemba Batot by Lucian & Josephine Lyssy Moczygemba, Falls City, Texas	In Memory of Elenora Mary "Ella" Pieprzyca Manka by Bobby & Rosalie Walker, Killen, Alabama
In Memory of Leysa Susann Moczygemba Batot by Robert "Lester" & Mary Jane	In Memory of John August & Suzie Katherine Bednorz Wojtasczyk by John & Chris Schroeder Wojtasczyk, Panna Maria, Texas

Armando A. "Rocky" Aranda, Sr, San Antonio, Texas
Dolores Beardsley, San Antonio, Texas
Marvin R & Janet M Boroski, San Antonio, Texas
Elizabeth Burda, Yorktown, Texas
Manlio D Cavallini, San Antonio, Texas
John Cebrowski, San Antonio, Texas
Sherry J Gasparovic, Crown Point, Indiana
Steve & Sue Gasper
Robert & Diane S Grisamore, Austin, Texas
Pat & Barbara Moczygemba Hoffmann, San Antonio, Texas
John & Mary Yanta Trust, San Antonio, Texas
Kenedy Memorial Foundation, Corpus Christi, Texas
Leonard & Mary Krzywosinski, San Antonio, Texas
Michael Kurtin, Navasota, Texas
Jim & Carolyn "Sissi" Haycraft Lubbock, Adkins, Texas
Gene Lysik, San Antonio, Texas
Dwight & Pamela Mitchell, Bremond, Texas

Kenneth Moczygemba, Adkins, Texas
Benjamin Notzon, Houston, Texas
Carlos & Guadalupe Malacara Ontiveros, San Antonio, Texas
Alex Shelley Opiela, Austin, Texas
Gary Pawelek, Karnes City, Texas
Pearl Perkins, Crown Point, Indiana
John & Patricia Picacio, San Antonio, Texas
Joseph & Marcia Scionka Raley, Brownsville, Texas
Jose Santos, San Antonio, Texas
Edwina Scinta, San Antonio, Texas
Donald & Catherine Varella, San Antonio, Texas
Don Roy Yanta, Karnes City, Texas
Fred Yanta, San Antonio, Texas
Bishop John Yanta, San Antonio, Texas
Julia Yanta, Houston, Texas
Thaddeus Zawistowski, Richmond, Texas
Peter & Jean Zerda, San Antonio, Texas

Construction Photos



Images of the roughed in Rotunda dome ceiling to the left and lower right.

Construction of the concrete drive, below, around the south and to the west around the Heritage Center.



Installation of support metal posts within the Main Exhibit area.



Poland: Faithful Daughter of the Church

First in a series by Bishop John W. Yanta

Who is responsible for bringing the Christian Catholic faith to Poland, i.e. St. Patrick to Ireland or Our Lady of Guadalupe to the people of Mexico? Saints Cyril & Methodius are the apostles to the Slavic people. These two brothers were from Greece. St. Pope John Paul II, in June 2, 1985, in his encyclical *Apostles of the Slavs* wrote **The Baptism of Poland in 966, in the person of the first historical sovereign, Mieszko, who married the Bohemian Princess Dubravka, took place principally through the Bohemian Church, and by this route Christianity reached**



St. Methodius,
Archbishop of Sirmium
(present day Serbia),
died in
Velehrad, Moravia



St. Cyril,
Basillan monk, died
and buried in Rome

Poland from Rome in the Latin form. But the fact remains that the beginnings of Christianity in Poland are in a way lined with the work of the Brothers who set out from distant Salonika, Greece. Thanks to the evangelization efforts of Sts. Cyril & Methodius and the subsequent marriage of the Catholic Bohemian Dobrawa to Prince Mieszko, Poland became a Christian and Catholic nation. You will see their statues—in the center. Pope John Paul II made them co-patrons of Europe with St. Benedict. Their feast is celebrated February 14.

Trusting in the power of God, the intercession of the Blessed Mother, and our deceased family & ancestors, may the pandemic of the Coronavirus vanish.

† John W. Yanta

† Bishop John W. Yanta