

Panna Maria Heritage Center

Visitor Experience, #4 in Series

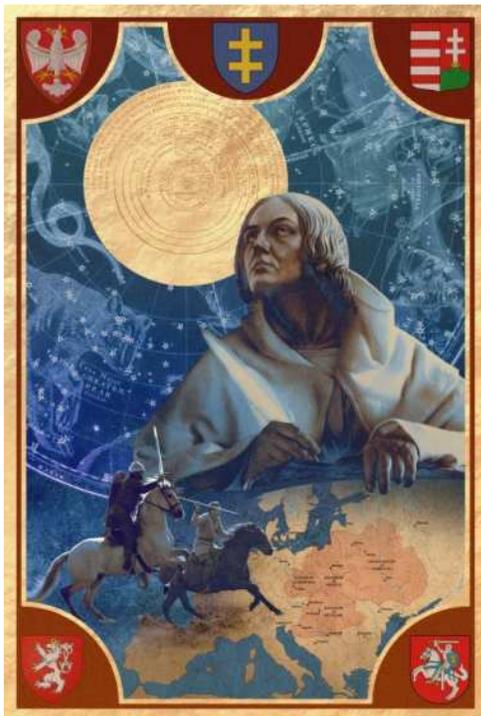
*Early Poland, Silesia, the first Bishop of Texas,
a Polish priest and his letter*

Early History of Poland 966-1854

The early history of Poland is highlighted by the birth of Christianity in 966, its dynasties and royal families, scientific discovery, war, and revolution.

Piast Dynasty 996-1370

Visitors will be introduced to this period of Polish history by a large painting depicting the marriage of Prince Mieszko I and his Czech Catholic bride, Princess Dobrava. The baptism of the prince in the year 966 marked both the beginning of the Catholic Church in Poland and Poland as a nation.

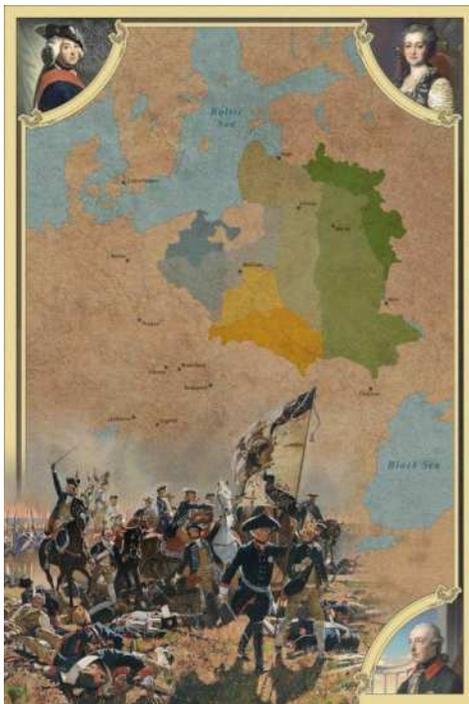
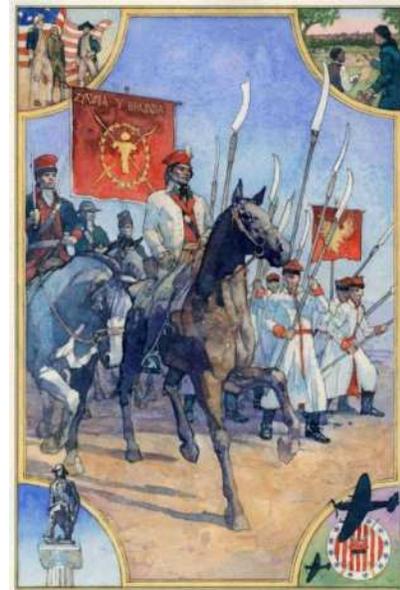


Jagiellonian Dynasty 1382 -1572

For the next 190 years the Jagiellonian Dynasty ruled Poland. The dynasty was actually a merger of the Kingdom of Poland, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, the Kingdom of Hungary, and the Kingdom of Bohemia. Despite war and unrest, the late Jagiellonian period is considered Poland's Golden Age. Universities were established and culture flourished. The Jagiellonian period is represented in the Heritage Center by a large painting featuring the great Polish astronomer Nicholas Copernicus, who, in 1543, proved that the earth revolves around the sun.

Royal Republics 1572–1795

From 1572-1795 the Royal Republics ruled Poland. The Heritage Center will feature a painting of Polish King Jan Sobieski, who, in 1683 led the Polish army at the Battle of Vienna and defeated the Ottomans. His victory saved Christian Europe from the invading Muslim Ottomans. Another large painting features Tadeusz Kosciuszko, a Polish military genius who came to America, became a general in the Continental Army, and helped win the American Revolution. The nearby Texas town of Kosciuszko was named for him.



Partitioning of Poland, Poland Ceases to Exist for 123 Years

Much of Poland's history was influenced by its geographical location – surrounded by powerful, aggressive, greedy neighbors: Prussia, Russia, and Austria. Poland, weakened by internal political bickering, fell prey to its more powerful neighbors. The Center features a large painting illustrating Prussia, Russia, and Austria and the parts of Poland partitioned and annexed three times (1772, 1793, 1795) until there was no longer a Poland on the map of Europe. For the next 123 years, until the end of World War I (1918), Poland did not exist as a nation.

Silesia – Its Importance

Our ancestors, those who emigrated to Panna Maria beginning in 1854 and then to other places in succeeding years, were Silesian Polish. Silesia is a border area with a complicated history. Today, what would be historical Silesia is a region of southwest Poland, part of the Czech

Republic and part of eastern Germany. Our ancestors came from little towns and villages in Upper Silesia that today are in southwest Poland.

For five centuries Silesia was ruled by nations other than Poland. Through strong will and determination our Silesian Polish ancestors held on to their Catholic religion, their Polish language, and their Polish culture and traditions.

Msgr. Frank Kurzaj's excellent history of Silesia published in the Panna Maria Sesquicentennial booklet (2004) and T. Lindsay Baker's two books about the Silesian Texans are important sources for learning more about your Silesian heritage. Searching the Internet will also reveal insights into the Silesian immigration to Texas.

Is the Polish language still spoken by some descendants of the early immigration from Silesia to Texas a dialect of Polish or a separate language? This question is still being debated. You may have heard stories about Polish leaders from Chicago and other American cities visiting our communities and trying to communicate in modern Polish. "We couldn't understand them and they couldn't understand us!" But in the final analysis, all agree that the Panna Maria immigrants' descendants and their version of Polish today is a treasure that needs to be preserved and promoted.

A Polish Priest – One of Ours!

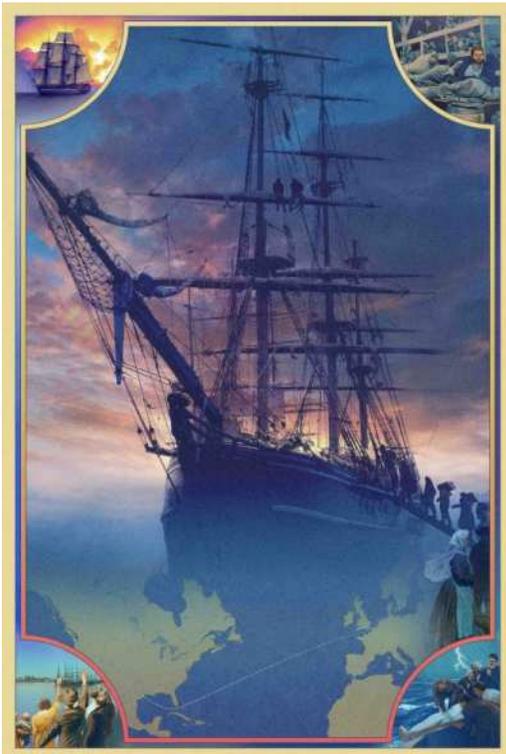
In 1851, Bishop Jean-Marie Odin of Galveston, a diocese that covered all of Texas, traveled to Europe searching for missionary priests who could pastor the German speaking Catholics already in Texas – New Braunfels, Fredericksburg, Castroville, D'Hanis, and Quihi. The Texas Bishop found a Polish Silesian priest, Fr. Leopold Moczygemba, who spoke perfect German. Fr. Moczygemba volunteered to go to Texas, arriving in 1852. He was assigned to pastor Catholics in New Braunfels. Father Leopold Moczygemba bought some farmland nearby, hoping his family would emigrate to Texas and start a new life.

Come to Texas

Father Moczygemba wrote what is now his famous letter to his brothers in Silesia. He presented Texas as a place of great opportunity where one could buy good land for a cheap price. The letter excited members of his

family – and dozens of other families – upwards of 100! The letter was a great motivator and triggered a tremendous response. At that time conditions in Silesia were difficult. Noblemen had unjust economic rights over the farmers that worked the land. During this same timeframe war was raging in the Crimea and Silesian men were being forced to join the Prussian army. A flood in the summer of 1854 brought even more misery. Texas offered new hope and Father Leopold had land near New Braunfels on which his family could farm and prosper.

Our ancestors sold their small farms, packed their belongings of clothing, seeds for planting, and farm tools, and gave their tearful goodbyes to those they were leaving behind, knowing they might never see each other again. They forged out into an unknown future armed with their faith in God and strong virtues steeled by generations of hardship and injustice. They had enough money for the journey, first by train to the seaport of Bremerhaven, Germany, and then by sailing ships bound for Galveston, Texas.



One of the first vessels they embarked on was the Weser, a 265-ton cargo ship. She sailed eastward across the Atlantic carrying cargo, and then made the westward voyage carrying passengers to Texas. Conditions aboard were difficult during nine weeks at sea in cramped, unsanitary conditions below deck. Though some of the immigrants died along the difficult journey, our Silesian Polish ancestors came with hope and faith and the will to succeed in South Texas.

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Be sure and read the latest news (included in this mailing) about where we are with building the Panna Maria Heritage Center (PMHC). We are grateful to the **Heritage Circle Members** (\$100,000 or more) whose names are listed on the two large outdoor signs on our PMHC land, which is located across the west parking lot of the church in Panna Maria. Also we have 77 **Naming Opportunities** for various exhibits, statues, paintings, rooms, areas, etc., to sponsor or remember a loved one in a memorial. Money can be given in many forms: pledges over time, estimates of giving, yearly gifts, in-kind gifts, insurance, royalty, etc. PMHC is a IRS 501, c, 3 non-profit organization. Your gift is tax deductible. Consult with your CPA.

If you wish to receive these newsletters regularly by e-mail or U.S. mail, simply send us your information to our e-mail or U.S. mail address below.

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Please pray to our Lord and the intercession of our Blessed Mother, St. Joseph, and our Polish saints, for the success of our heritage (and faith) center. Our families will be strengthened and inspired by “our unique story” that makes us all proud. Ours is a precious legacy!

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Prayer, the greatest power on earth.
May God Bless You and Yours,

Retired Bishop John W. Yanta, President; Panna Maria Heritage Center
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Please visit our web site, www.pannamariacenter.org, and follow the progress of the project, Panna Maria Heritage Center, on Facebook.

Next: **“Arrival in Texas/Texas Silesian Settlements 1854 to Present”**