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POLISH
HERITAGE
CENTER
PANNA MARIA, TEXAS

Visitor Experience #47



STOCKDALE, TEXAS – circa 1915

Marianna Kutchka Skrobarczyk, center, who left Europe in 1855 when she was “twenty Sundays old,” is pictured with her five daughters who were born in Stockdale.

Front left: Veronica “Vera” Skrobarczyk Richter; front right: Katherine “Kate” Skrobarczyk Richter; back left to right: Mary Skrobarczyk Brzozowski, Albina Skrobarczyk Sowa, Agnes Skrobarczyk Brzozowski
Photograph courtesy of: Vincent Krawczynski (1915 – 1999)

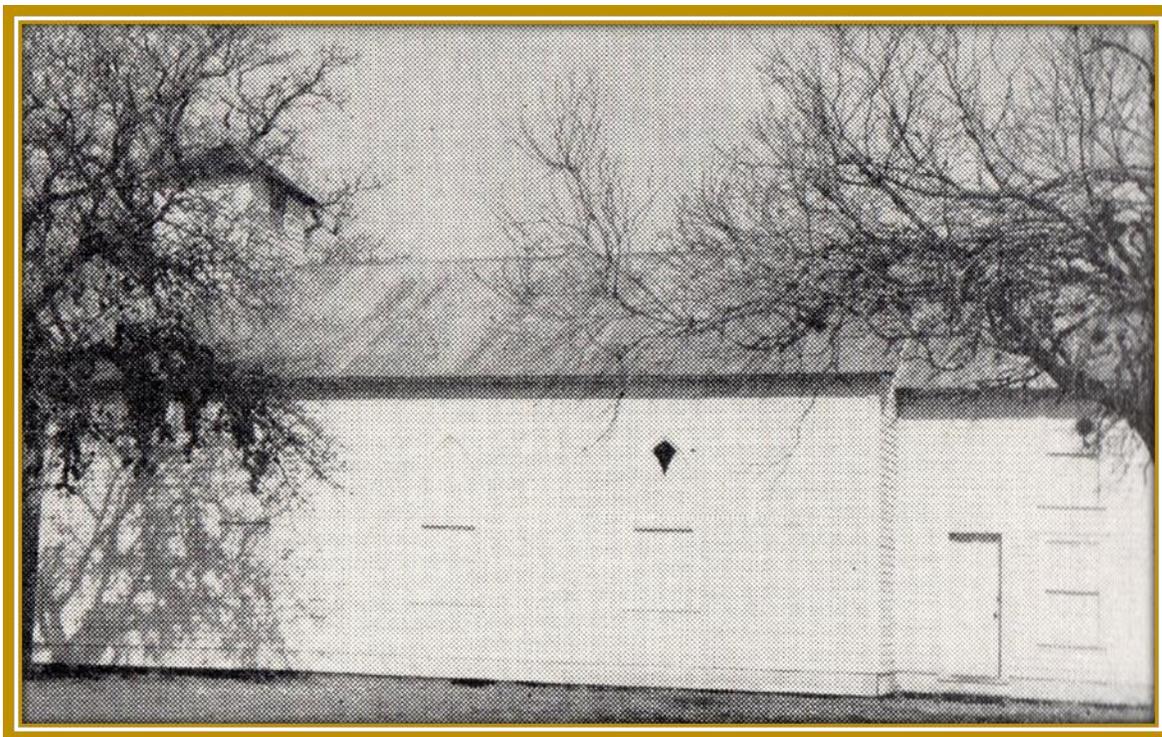
Stockdale, Texas: St. Mary's Catholic Church on Richter Farm, Richter School, and Richter Cemetery

By Janet Dawson Ebrom

The original Catholic parishioners in the town of Stockdale, Wilson County, Texas, were mainly Irish immigrants, and their church, St. Mary's, was erected in 1877 on land donated by **W. S. Palm**. This small church of native stone was demolished by a severe storm in 1886. By that time, some Polish families had relocated into an area near the town of Stockdale. According to **T. Lindsay Baker**, "The last Polish colony founded in the Cibolo Valley was in Stockdale, a community already established by Americans years before Silesians began moving into the area in the late 19th century" (page 43). Until a church could be built, Mass was offered in John Richter's home which was about three miles northwest of Stockdale. **John Richter**, an original immigrant to Texas from Stare Karmonki, Upper Silesia, in present-day Poland, deeded two acres for the church which was built on his farm in 1891, "...about 300 feet east of his house, close to the road and north of the railroad tracks" (Daniels, page 73; Wilson County Deeds, Volume Y, page 195). **John Richter** knew that his neighbors who were mostly second-generation Polish immigrants would join him in placing their Catholic faith and religious traditions first in their lives. Some of those who helped to build a church were from these families: **Bednorz, Dlugosch, Nieschwietz, Pilarczyk, Richter, Skrobarczyk, and Sowa**. Together they constructed the heart of their vibrant farming community, the *second* St. Mary's, which was both humble and holy.

"The church was a wood frame building about 25 feet wide and 50 feet long. It was a simply constructed building with the old type

exposed metal bolt braces holding the structure together. There was a choir loft and a sacristy [in] back of the church altar. Above the sacristy there was a [second-floor] room where the priest might stay overnight. There was a small bell tower in which hung the bell to call the faithful to services” (Daniels, page 73). The bell tower is barely visible behind the branches in the upper left corner of the side-view photograph.



Photograph from: *Archdiocese of San Antonio Diamond Jubilee 1874 – 1949*, page 252

From St. Mary’s inception until 1901, priests from Floresville traveled to Stockdale since it was a mission church without a resident pastor. From 1901 through 1928, St. Mary’s on the Richter farm became a mission church of St. Ann’s in Kosciusko. Afterwards, it was a mission of St. Joseph’s in Nixon. The simple white church, called St. Mary’s Immaculate Conception Church by the rural families, had benches for seating. Since there was no electricity, candles and oil lamps were used. **Pauline Richter Esparza** was the head of the choir, and she also took care of the altar. As a member of the Altar Society,

Albina Skrobarczyk Sowa helped in cleaning the church. Usually Mass was offered only once a month by priests who traveled from their own parishes, so the Sowa family said the Rosary in Polish at home on the other Sundays. As devout Catholics, the Sows ensured that their children were well prepared to receive the sacraments. Two of the Sowa girls, **Mary** and **Apalonia**, attended Catechism classes in Nixon where **William Sowa** drove his daughters in his 1932 Chevrolet (Recollections of **Mary Sowa Petri O'Toole**; interview by **Janet Dawson Ebrom** on May 24, 2011).

1934 Holy Communion in Stockdale, Texas



Photograph courtesy of: Apalonia Mae Sowa Dawson 1923 – 2010

Rev. Edward Marco, in back of Communicants: **Ben Esparza, Bill Sowa, Mary Ellen Sowa, Eugenia Kravitz, Bernice Richter, Hedwig Richter, Albina Ramzinski, Apalonia Mae Sowa, Cecilia Richter, Fabian Richter, and Matthew Richter**

William Sowa, the father of eight children, was an altar server at St. Mary's Immaculate Conception Church. He would often take his family to the first Mass in the car, return home, saddle his white horse, and return to church to serve the second Mass. **William and Albina Sowa** extended an open invitation for visiting priests to share Sunday dinner with the Sowa family on their Stockdale farm.

In 1939, **Father Edward Marco** made the 12-mile trip from Nixon to Stockdale to celebrate the wedding Mass of the first Sowa daughter. On June 18, 1939, **Elizabeth Sowa** married **Vincent Krawczynski** from Lockhart, Texas, and even though their sacrament of matrimony took place at St. Mary's near Stockdale, it was registered in Nixon's St. Joseph Catholic Church Marriage records (page 46) when **Father Marco** returned home.



In the background is a rare glimpse of the small church with its arched windows. Left to right: **Joe Krawczynski** standing beside his brother, the groom, **Vincent Krawczynski**, and **Elizabeth Sowa**, the bride, with her younger sister, **Mary Ellen Sowa**, who recalled over seventy years later that she wore a “peach-colored formal” as the maid of honor.

Photograph courtesy of: Alice Kathryn Krawczynski Hansen, Boerne, Texas

The Sowa grandchildren who spent summers in Stockdale had vivid recollections decades later about the little white church down the road from the family farmstead. William Sowa's first grandchild **Nancy** said she remembered the men and boys sitting on one side of the church and the ladies and girls on the other side of the center aisle. As a child, she wanted to be near her Grandpa, but she had to go to the other side and be seated with the women. She was disappointed because her younger brother **Harold** got to sit with Grandpa, and she didn't (Recollections of **Nancy Sowa Koenig**; interview by **Janet Dawson Ebrom** on July 30, 2011).

Harold Sowa, who enjoyed summers from 1942 until 1952 on his grandparents' Stockdale farm, was an altar server at the church when he was a boy. He and his younger cousin, **Gerald Krawczynski**, remembered that the windows were always open in the church, and they distinctly recalled the noise from the train during Mass (Recollections of **Harold Sowa** and **Gerald Krawczynski**; interview by **Janet Dawson Ebrom** on January 19, 2019).

By 1951, the parishioners of St. Mary's who lived in the town of Stockdale wanted a church more conveniently located and not three miles out in the country. The decision was made to build a new church, and the quaint church on Richter property was sadly dismantled. All that was left were special memories from its 60 years of worship by the nearby farming families. At least an effort was made to salvage the boards: "The lumber of St. Mary's Church was carefully taken down, cleaned and stacked. Today, that same lumber forms the sub floor of the present Church" (Daniels, page 97). In addition to the lumber being used in the third church, a statue of Our Blessed Mother, a statue of Our Lord, the church bell, and the organ were moved to the new church referred to as St. Mary's Church Number 3 (Daniels, page 97).

The location of the rural church on the Richter farm is now marked with only a cross.

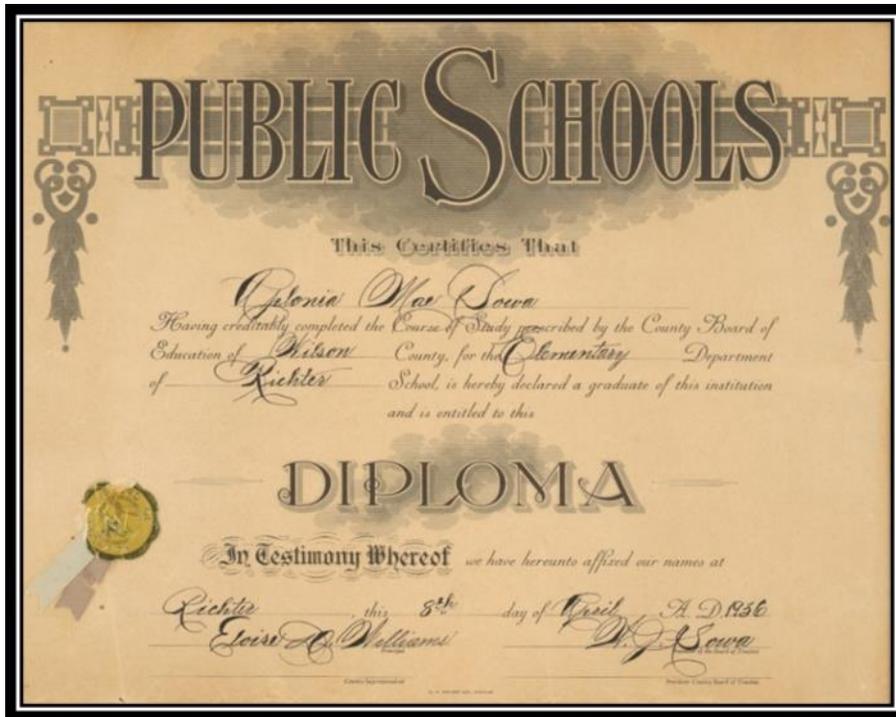
Richter School

In addition to the church on the Richter farm, a schoolhouse was built because education was valued, and the close proximity to farm families made it convenient. The schoolhouse was located off County Road 418 on property later owned by **Fabian Richter** (shown below) who was the son of **Pete Richter** and **Veronica Skrobarczyk**.



Photograph courtesy of: Apalonia Mae Sowa Dawson 1923 – 2010
Children who attended Richter School together circa 1932–1933:

Front Row: **Florence Sowa, Alex Richter, Margaret Richter**
Second Row: **Margaret “Maggie” Skrobarczyk, Bill Sowa,**
 Emmett Fayne Henry, Rudolph Richter, Heddie
 Richter
Third Row: **Mary Ellen Sowa, Cecilia Richter, Apalonia Mae**
 Sowa, Elizabeth Skrobarczyk, Marion Skrobaczyk,
 Fabian Richter
Back: **Helen Skrobarczyk**



After attending Richter Elementary School for seven years, **Apalonia Mae Sowa** received her diploma on April 8, 1936. It was signed by the principal, **Eloise D. Williams**, and the President of the School Board of Trustees, **W. J. Sowa**, who was Apalonia's father.

The one-room schoolhouse opened the world of academics in a familiar setting where students walked to school. Raised in nearby farmhouses by parents who spoke literary Polish or the Silesian dialect of their ancestors, the children became fluent in English. All that remains of Richter School are the steps which led into this country schoolhouse.



Photograph courtesy of: Eddie Skrobarcek, Orange Grove, Texas

Richter Cemetery

One of John Richter's sons, **Vincent Richter** who was married to **Martha Ploch**, deeded one acre of land for a Catholic cemetery about 200 feet from the church, and they were dedicated at the same time (Gilbert, page 253). **Vincent** was only five years old when he had sailed across the Atlantic Ocean in 1855 with his parents and six siblings; they endured the loss of their mother, **Barbara Anders**, who died on the voyage according to family memoirs. Years later, it was a meaningful gesture by **Vincent Richter** to provide for a cemetery in his community. The Wilson County deed recorded on page 197 was dated May 25, 1892, a year after the dedication. Fittingly, it was named Richter Cemetery and is still in use today.



Photograph courtesy of: Ed Ebrom, San Antonio, Texas

The oldest grave in this pastoral cemetery on County Road 417 is that of **Johanna Graboń Skrobarczyk** who was born in Sollarnia, Upper Silesia, present-day Poland, on May 9, 1819, and died on July 15, 1894. The following year, the eldest person in the cemetery, **John Richter**, who was born on December 5, 1816, died on July 20, 1895.

Surnames from Upper Silesia are engraved on tombstones in this little country cemetery: **Dlugosch / Dlugosh / Dugosh, Felux, Ploch, Richter, Skrobarczyk / Skrobarcek, Sobeczyk / Sobeczek, Sowa, and Wiatrek.** Also, **Victor Ramzinski**, the son of original immigrants from the Poznań area in present-day Poland, is buried beside his wife, **Amelia Sowa.** The **Esparzas**, who spoke Polish handed down in their maternal lines, are buried here. By far, the Richter family has the most graves in this cemetery which bears their surname. **John Richter** was the father of eighteen children— seven children by his first wife and eleven children



by his second wife, **Paulina Kiolbassa.** Joined by their Catholic heritage and devotion to family and farm life, they rest peacefully in the Stockdale countryside.

Photograph courtesy of: Ed Ebrom, San Antonio, Texas

Sources:

- Baker, T. Lindsay. *The Polish Texans.* San Antonio, Texas: The University of Texas Institute of Texan Cultures, 1982.
- Daniels, Jean, editor. *Stockdale, Texas—St. Mary’s Catholic Church 125th Anniversary Commemorative History Book 1877–2002.* Privately printed, 2002.
- Ebrom, Janet Dawson and Richard Allan Sowa. *The Sowa Family History: Six Generations of Polish-Texans.* Chicago, Illinois: Adams Press, 1981.
- Gilbert, Rev. M. J., compiler and editor. *Archdiocese of San Antonio Diamond Jubilee 1874 – 1949.* San Antonio, Texas: Schneider Printing Company, 1949.
- Silesian Profiles Committee. *Silesian Profiles: Polish Immigration to Texas in the 1850s.* Panna Maria, Texas: Panna Maria Historical Society, 1999.
- Silesian Profiles Committee. *Silesian Profiles II: Polish Immigration to Texas 1850s – 1870s.* Panna Maria, Texas: Father Leopold Moczygamba Foundation and Panna Maria Historical Society, 2004.

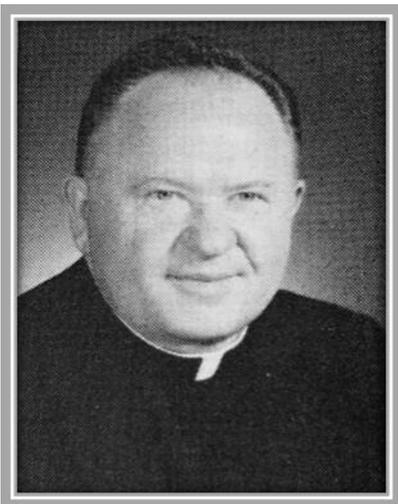
Reverend Peter T. Kolton

1910 – 1981

By Janet Dawson Ebrom

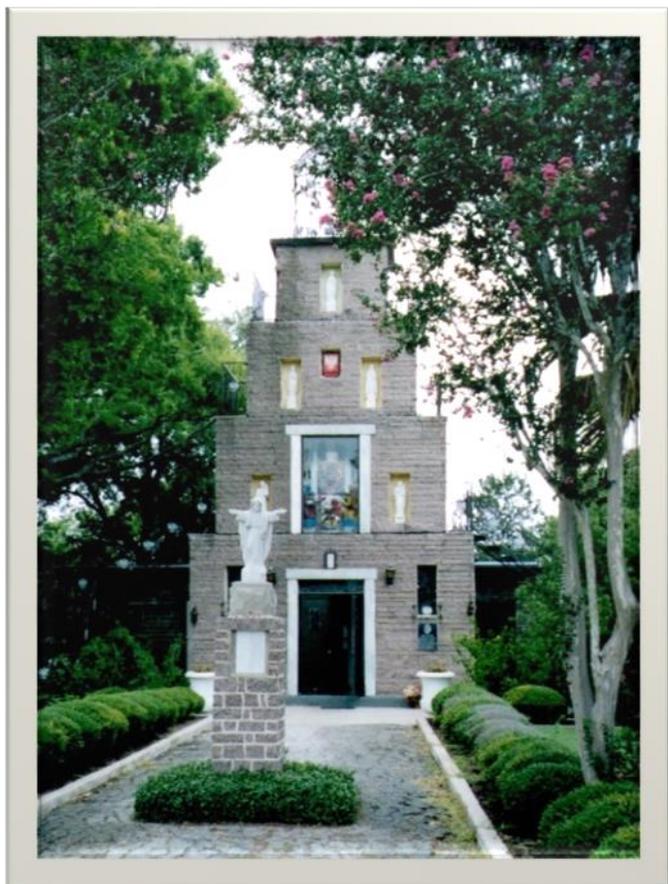
Peter was born on June 29, 1910, in Zaloscie [Reniów], Poland, to **Anna Angela Koltowski** and **Damian Koltun / Kolton**. When he was twelve years old, Peter immigrated to the United States under the name of “**Piotr Koltun**” and arrived in New York on the *Estonia* on December 21, 1922.

In 1931, while living with his parents and six siblings in Manhattan and working in a hotel, **Peter** made his Declaration of Intention. Three years later, he signed his Petition for Citizenship in the Southern District of New York. As a naturalized American, he exhibited his patriotic duty by joining the US Army during World War II. He was in the 88th Infantry Division and personally experienced the horrific bombing of Monte Cassino and the Po Valley campaign in Italy. He was wounded twice, and after five years in the Army, he joined the Navy because as he explained, “I wanted to see the world and I did.” His wounds flared, and he spent time in military hospitals. When **Peter** recovered, he began attending Eron Prep School in New York City under the GI Bill. In a personal interview, he related, “The Jewish principal of the school became aware of my religious nature and one day said to me, ‘Why don’t you become a priest?’ He had a Catholic priest come and talk with me. I knew this was what I wanted. Since I spoke Italian, I decided to study in Rome” (Carmack, page 1-B).



Photograph from: *Archdiocese of San Antonio 1874 – 1974*, page 270

Peter’s dream of becoming a Catholic priest came true on December 16, 1958, when **Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński** ordained him at the age of 48 in Rome, Italy. Then **Father Kolton** moved to Texas and ministered at Our Lady of Sorrows Church in San Antonio. In 1966, to commemorate the millennium of Christianity in Poland, **Father Kolton** built a museum and shrine to Our Lady of Częstochowa at 138 Beethoven Street in San Antonio. The impressive shrine is 30-feet high and constructed of pink granite. Inside is a small chapel and museum.



Photograph courtesy of: Janet Dawson Ebrom

During his active pastoral duties, he took time to visit his mother in New York in 1966. While there, the priests and Sisters told him about a little boy from Poland who had come to New York with his adoptive family; however, after a year, the family wanted to send the child back to Warsaw. **Father Kolton**, who was very kindhearted, believed he could find a good home for the youngster, so he brought him back to Texas. Each time he thought he had found the ideal family, the boy would cry, “Father, please don’t give me away.” So, **Father Kolton** himself adopted **Mitchell**, enrolled him in Catholic school, and also sponsored his American citizenship (Thomas, page 2-A).

On Nov. 24, 1970, at the invitation of **Father Kolton**, two Sisters of the Daughters of Our Lady of Sorrows, **Sr. Alphonsa Bobek** and **Sr. Helen Haladyna**, arrived in Texas. These Seraphic Sisters from Poland accepted the responsibility to take care of the Black Madonna Shrine and promote devotion to the Blessed Mother. With his jovial personality, **Father Kolton**, welcomed visitors and guided

them through the museum which showcased beautiful statues of saints, chalices, rosaries, and religious art that he had enjoyed collecting through the years.

At the age of 70, **Rev. Peter T. Kolton** died on April 26, 1981, in San Antonio, Texas. **Archbishop Patrick Flores** was the main celebrant of the funeral Mass at St. Margaret Mary Catholic Church, and fellow priests of the archdiocese were concelebrants. Father Kolton's final resting place is Our Lady of Czestochowa Cemetery in Doylestown, Pennsylvania. An image of the Black Madonna for whom he had such devotion is fittingly displayed on his tombstone.

Sources:

1930 Federal Census, New York, Manhattan Borough, sheets no. 18-B and 19-A.
Carmack, George, *San Antonio Express-News* [San Antonio, Texas], December 29, 1973.

Declaration of Intention, No. 323962, November 4, 1931; Petition for Citizenship, No. 241136, December 7, 1934; Southern District of New York.

Texas State Death Certificate #24679.

Thomas, Sylvia, *San Antonio Express* [San Antonio, Texas], November 4, 1971.

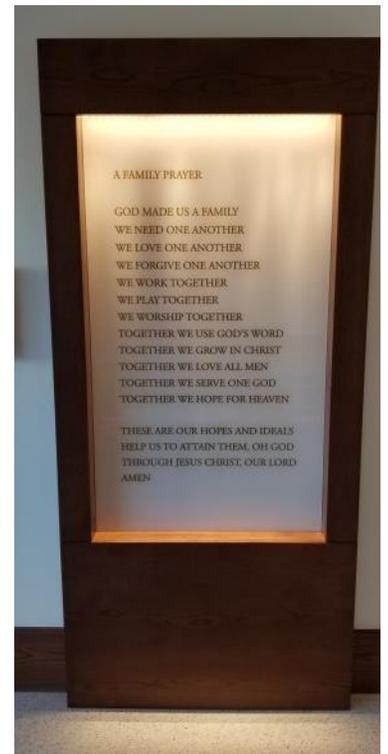
Note: On his WWII Draft Card, he wrote his full name as **Peter Theodore Kolton**; however, on his adopted son's Petition for Naturalization, he gave his full name as **Peter Thaddeus Kolton**.

Bishop John W. Yanta has honored the legacy of **Rev. Peter T. Kolton** by having him memorialized in the Polish Heritage Center. Each departed religious vocation from our immigrant families can also be recognized. If you would like to memorialize a nun, priest, monk, or religious brother for a \$10,000 donation, please contact **John Wojtasczyk** at **210-387-7472**.

Pictures from the Center



View of the statue of Fr Leopold Moczygemba in front of the simulated stained glass windows of Bandera, Panna Maria, & St Hedwig



The “Family Prayer” panel that is located in the Lobby



A few of the many photographic images of our families and communities in the Heritage Center

The mural on the upper wall of the Lobby as you walk into the Heritage Center



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Wielki Post – Lent

Wielki Post, Lent in Polish, means literally "the Great Fast." It was observed more severely in Poland than in many other European Catholic countries. In the first centuries after Poland accepted Christianity in the year 966, the Lenten fast was observed so strictly that nothing cooked or warm was eaten from the middle of Lent until Easter Sunday. Lent was, and remains, a time of special services, retreats, fasting and individual acts of penance. Liquor and raucous entertainment are avoided, and very few weddings take place. Meat and snacks are avoided on Ash Wednesday and Fridays during this period. For Poles, Lent is the most reflective spiritual season, a time of the church calendar cycle for prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and reflection on the mystical nature of redemption.

Because the fast for Lent was quite rigorous in Poland, the use of such things as lard, sugar, eggs and fruit were forbidden. This meant that prior to Lent, these items had to be either thrown away or consumed. Instead of tossing out everything, it was decided that many of the forbidden ingredients could be mixed together to create a type of jelly doughnut, now called a "**paćzki**" (pawneh-ky).

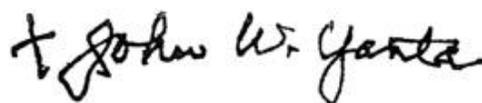
In Poland, from the beginning, there permeated among the people a desire to meditate on the Passion and death of Jesus. One tradition during Lent that maintained this sentiment was a weekly Lenten service called **Gorzkie Zale**. This devotion that was developed in the 18th Century in Poland is a set of hymns that focus on the Passion of Christ.

The **Stations of the Cross** also remain a very popular practice among the Polish people. There are numerous exquisite chapels and shrines around the country whereby a pilgrim can trace Jesus' Passion, death and Resurrection; the most notable one is at Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, near Kraków, whose origins date to 1601.

On **Środa Popielcowa** (Ash Wednesday), while priests in America draw the sign of the cross in ashes on the foreheads of parishioners, in Poland the priest sprinkles parishioners' heads with ashes.

As we begin our Lenten observance, let us recall and renew the practices of our ancestors for whom this special season prepared them to celebrate the climax of our faith, the Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ at Easter.

May God bless you and yours,



Bishop John W. Yanta

Article submitted by John Cebrowski and sourced from several online websites