

Panna Maria Heritage Center

Visitor Experience, #5 in Series

Immigration to Texas/Texas Silesian Settlements 1854-2015



THE FIVE MOCZYGEMBA PRIESTS

This painting will be 8 ft. wide and 6 ft. tall. You probably recognize the one in the center is the famous Father Leopold, founder of Panna Maria and the Patriarch of American Polonia; the word "Polonia" describes the 12 million Polish people who presently live in our nation. Can you recognize the other four? The other four Moczygemba Priests will be identified in a coming newsletter.

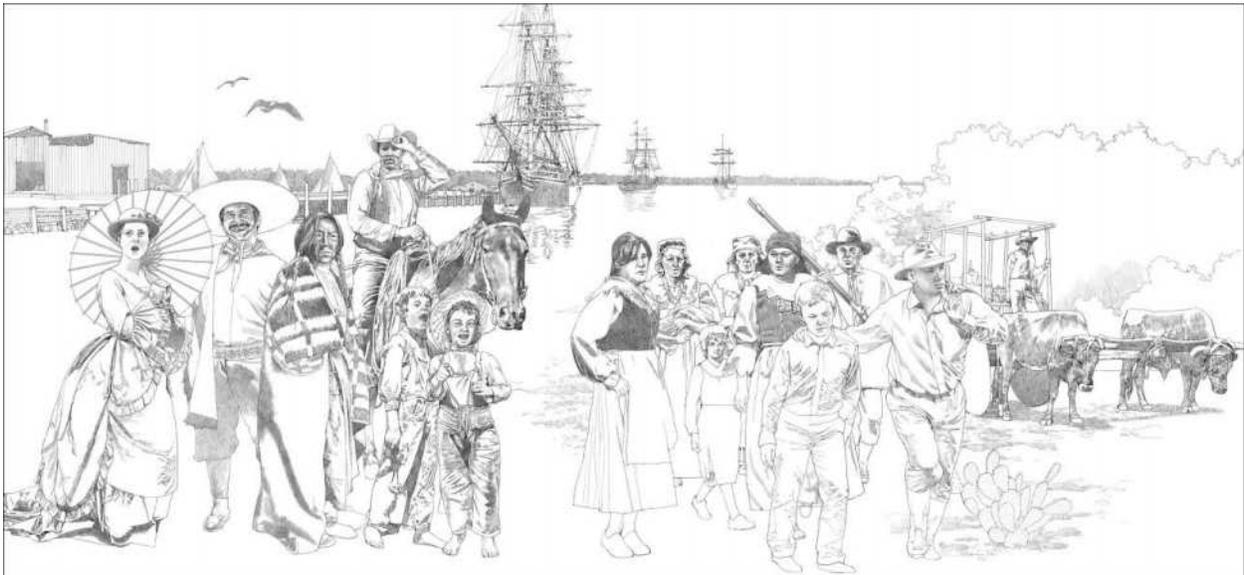
Arrival in Texas 1854, Settlers Trek to San Antonio/Panna Maria

The first Silesian settlers arrived in Galveston on December 3, 1854. They wore Silesian clothing, heavy blue woolen coats, small crowned, wide brimmed hats and wooden shoes.

The men wore heavy wool pants and wool coats. The women wore Silesian peasant dresses, scandalously short by American standards; the ankle was visible. They brought their bedding, kitchen utensils, farm equipment and religious articles from home.

When they arrived in Galveston they found people from a variety of different cultures, i.e., cowboys, Native Americans, Mexicans, Europeans, Black slaves, and Americans. The Silesians neither spoke nor understood any English.

Fr. Moczygemba was not there to meet them. They managed to acquire boat transportation to the port of Indianola, Texas, further down the coast. From there they hired Mexican ox carts to take them and their belongings overland to San Antonio.



Our Ancestors arrival in Texas; this temporary pencil drawing will be in color in our center.

The caravan of bewildered, beleaguered, extremely tired immigrants, our ancestors, arrived in San Antonio, Tuesday, December 21st. Father Moczygemba was not there to meet them. He had been transferred to Castroville in his new appointment as head of the Conventual Franciscans in Texas. As soon as he found out that they had arrived, he went to meet his brothers, relatives, and kinsmen. What a reunion!

Father welcomed them, and announced to them that they needed to travel three more days back towards the Gulf coast. He assured them he had secured land for them at a place where a river (San Antonio) and a running creek (Cibolo) meet. The land had been surveyed thoroughly previously by Father Leopold and a prominent real estate agent, John Twohig, who was Catholic. I assume that some of the members of the group, namely the craftsmen, remained in San Antonio after seeing the stores, homes, and Catholic Church of San Fernando. Perhaps others decided to also stay in San Antonio for various reasons. Further historical research is needed.

On Friday, December 24th, they finally arrived at the designated location. At this new place, they would finally have the opportunity to celebrate and worship freely, live according to their customs and values, and be able to make a better life for themselves and us their descendants. There was nothing there except a livery – a small building where horses could be feed and cared for – on the La Bahia Road, a trail to historic Goliad.

Divine Providence chose that place to reward their strong faith by offering Christmas Midnight Mass (Pasterka) in thanksgiving under the oak tree that still stands there today. The oak tree which can live for hundreds of years is a great symbol of their strength of will to endure, and even welcome the trials, crosses, “ups and downs” of life peacefully, even joyfully. Their devotion and love of Mary, Mother of God’s son, Jesus, led Father Moczygemba to the place he named Panna Maria, Virgin Mary in Polish. Thus you have the oldest Polish parish in the USA and the oldest permanent Polish settlement in the USA – December 24, 1854, Panna Maria, Texas.



Christmas Midnight Mass under the Great Oak tree; this temporary pencil drawing will be in color in our center, 11feet wide and 6 feet tall.

WESOŁYCH ŚWIĄT BOŻEGO NARODZENIA

A merry and Holy Christmas to you all from the Panna Maria Heritage Center, its Board of Directors, Fund Raising Committee, Construction Committee, Consultants, Honorary Directors, Major Donors, Heritage Circle Members, all of our generous donors, those family treasures that have been scanned into our abundant archives, our many saintly supporters – Prayer: the Greatest Power on Earth!