

# Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria

Visitor Experience, #8 in Series

## Our Ancestors: GETTING STARTED!



### SEVERE DROUGHT 1856-1857: Immigration reduced to a trickle

Our ancestors found a completely undeveloped area to make their home. There was no shelter. They were forced to *camp* under trees for the first few weeks, while they built temporary shelters, often just dugouts, holes in the fields covered with brush and stalks. They soon planted gardens for food and learned how to prepare new unfamiliar foods.

They started building their houses using building techniques they know, those handed down for centuries in Poland. The houses had steep roofs, which in Europe would allow snow to slide off and rear roofs that came very near to the ground. Houses typically contained a meat smoking room within the house and ventilation openings on the upper-floors, all characteristics of houses in rural Upper Silesia.

Modifications were made for the warmer Texas climate. For example entrances often faced south to take advantage of prevailing southerly breezes with windows to the rear for cross ventilation. They also added porches or covered gallery.

Not all of the early Silesian settlers remained in Panna Maria; some never got that far, forced by sickness or other reasons to stay in Victoria, Inez (at the time called Garcitas) and Saint Francisville. A handful settled in the coastal area of what is today Bay City. Others, mostly craftsmen and artisans, elected to go to San Antonio while others continued on to a location south of San Antonio, to Atascosa County, settling in a community known as Las Gallinas. Another group split off and went to eastern Bexar County on Martinez Creek (later to be named St. Hedwig) while another group went north to Bandera where the danger from marauding Indians was very real. As these first settlers were getting started, more Silesians were preparing to leave their homeland for Texas. Letters home from the original colonists, and those from Fr. Moczygemba still in circulation, urged more families to come. Settlers already in Texas wrote to their friends and family to bring with the certain items such as seed for crops, wagon, plow blades, harrows, and thread.

The farmers began sowing their first crops, a new crop for the Silesians, corn, or "Turkish wheat" as they called it. They found the soil good for growing cucumbers, pumpkins, melons, potatoes, cabbage, and lettuce. They acquired livestock. A typical farm boasted a few cattle, oxen, pigs, and milk cows.

The new settlers were barely getting started, securing land (some of that land having been purchased earlier by Fr. Moczygemba, often at exorbitant prices), building shelter and planting and harvesting their first crops, planning and building their church, *when the great drought of 1856-57 descended.*

## YEAR 2016 – Poland’s 1050<sup>th</sup> Double Anniversary

1966, 50 years ago, we celebrated the Millennium of Polish Christianity. President Lyndon Johnson had his daughter represent him in Panna Maria for an outdoor Mass. In 966, Prince Mieszko I married Dobrawa, a Czech Catholic, thanks to missionaries Sts. Cyril & Methodius. He was baptized that day and was not only the beginning of the Church, but also the nation of Poland.



The U.S. celebration of the 1050 anniversary took place June 22<sup>nd</sup> at Sts. Cyril and Methodius Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan. Archbishop Tom Wenski, Archbishop of Miami, said in his homily:

*“Like the great oak tree of Panna Maria in whose shade Father Moczygemba first celebrated Mass for his people on Texas soil, Polish roots run deep. These roots of faith and culture anchored them and their families to a fierce pride in their ‘Polishness.’ It is a holy pride that the angry winds of poverty and prejudice could not conquer. Poles may have been obligated to flee their native land because of hunger or oppression – but in so fleeing, they never fled from their ‘Polishness.’ If we had to leave behind Poland, we would not leave behind our Polishness.”*

Father Leopold Moczygamba obtained permission from Pope Leo XIII to build this Polish Seminary in the U.S.A. Father Tadeusz Tabak, SDS, President of P.A.P.A. of Texas (Polish America Priests Association) represented us.

### Please Consider Prayerfully...

Become a **Heritage Circle** member at (\$100,000). If this is too much for you, may I suggest you team up with your siblings to accomplish this as others have done! Heritage Circle members will have their name(s) in the front lobby. You may extend your pledge for completion later to suit your wishes.

### Naming Opportunities (77)

18 have been taken, 59 are available: For example:

<i>Auditorium/Theater (60 seats for introduction to exhibits and special presentations).....</i>	<i>\$1,000,000</i>
<i>Blessed Mother; Our Lady of Czestochowa.....</i>	<i>\$750,000</i>
<i>Midnight Mass, Christmas Eve, 1854.....</i>	<i>\$500,000</i>
<i>Getting Started/The Early Years.....</i>	<i>\$250,000</i>
<i>Display Case for Rotating Exhibits (e.g., Historic Prayer Books, Wedding and First Communion Certificates, etc).....</i>	<i>\$100,000</i>
<i>Section of the Berlin Wall.....</i>	<i>\$50,000</i>

Contact me either through my assistant, John Wojtasczyk, at 210-387-7472 or email at [wojtasczyk@sbcglobal.net](mailto:wojtasczyk@sbcglobal.net); phone the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria 210-263-7270; you may write me at P.O. Box 28125, San Antonio, TX, 78228, or contact any of the Board of Directors: Al Notzon, Joe Yanta, Randy Pawelek, Betty (and George) Kowalik, Sam (and Susie) Kotara, Fr. Wieslaw Iwaniec, Msgr. Frank Kurzaj, Pat Hoffmann, Loretta Niestroy, Cheryl Pruski, Dr. Martha Respondek, Joyce Rives, Lambert and Rosalie Titzman, and Susan Moczygamba.

## GENEROUS GIFT TO PHC LIBRARY

In May of this year, the developing Polish Heritage Center Library received a generous gift of Polish language books from the Stanley Garczynski collection and the Austin Polish Society collection. Twenty-two boxes containing over 582 books were donated, adding to a previous gift of 120 books last year from Joanna Sokolowska and the Society. The books cover all aspects of Polish life and culture, with a concentration on art and architecture, literature, and history. Also included were many translations into Polish of world literary classics. As a bonus, APS included other gifts: 3 lovely costumes from the region of Opole, a colorful framed map of Poland with traditional costumes illustrating the different regions, and a lovely woolen tapestry of the Polish coat of arms.

A donation of this magnitude is impossible to evaluate, but an estimate of current market value of these books plus the earlier book donation would be approaching \$17,000. Many thanks to Karolina Camara, Board Member, and Angelika Firlej, Board President of the Austin Polish Society.

## Construction Update!



Week 11, pouring concrete before sun up!



### Week 13, beginning of pilings to roof

The 3<sup>rd</sup> month's construction bill was \$217,854.96. It was paid from our checking account which is getting low. We have avoided using our interim financing from the bank in order to avoid paying interest. Next month's bill is probably going to be twice or three times greater. Please pray for our Polish Heritage Center which will be here for many generations and for many years, like our beautiful churches. It will become a source of great spiritual growth and strength for our families and make us proud of where we came from, as well as how we got here, and how our ancestors suffered and sacrificed for us!

Thanking Almighty God for each of you and asking His Blessings upon you and your family, living and deceased, I am,

Bishop John W. Yanta