

First Families of Toledo Polonia

By Rosemary A. Chorzempa

Before the American Civil War, there were few Polish immigrants in northwest Ohio. In 1866, Poles from a small area of Poznania west of Znin began to arrive in Toledo, Ohio. Three hundred families have been documented as immigrants to the Toledo area as of 1877, and no doubt there are more that did not leave a paper trail.

A database which will be available on the PGSA website includes some or all of the following information about each family unit: names and aliases, parents' names of adult immigrants, birth/baptismal, marriage, and death/burial information, origins in Poland (parish and/or village names), ships' names and arrival dates, some information about children, residence (parish names, street names and neighborhoods in Toledo or other cities), occupations, known migrations from Toledo to other cities in the U.S., and known remarriages.

A Brief History of Poland for Genealogists

There were many reasons for Polish emigration. Studying Polish and European history and geography can shed a lot of light on why your ancestors settled where and when they did.

By 1800, Poland no longer existed as a separate state, its vast area being divided up during three separate partitions by Russia, Prussia (Germany) and Austria. Poland did not exist as a separate nation for over 120 years, until after World War I. While checking various documents, you may find your ancestors giving these three countries, or Russian-Poland, Prussian-Poland, German-Poland, Austrian-Poland or Galicia, as their origins. At times they may have also stated "Poland" as their birthplace.

Poland was the breadbasket of Europe until about 1600 A.D. Polish wheat was of the highest quality in Europe. Poland exported many goods and crops to the rest of the continent. The economy was very good, and even the peasant quality of life was better than it was in the next couple centuries. Then the climate cooled, called "the Little Ice Age" in Europe, lasting more than 200 years, until the mid-1800s. Droughts became more common. Most people's diets suffered from the wars and political and economic changes, even through the 1800s. By the 1850s, 80% of the population lived from agriculture. In the Prussian zone, where most of the earliest Polish immigrants came from, 55% of the residents relied on agriculture. The population increased rapidly through the 1800s, even with mass emigration.

The potato was introduced into the Polish diet in the early 1800s. It became the staple food of the growing number of town dwellers by the 1840s. Poland and the rest of Europe was hit by the potato pest in the 1846-1855 time period, causing disease, starvation, an increase in the mortality rate and decrease in population.

Asiatic cholera epidemics swept Poland and Europe in 1831, 1847-48, 1854, 1866, 1873, 1884 and 1892. Uprisings and revolutions by the Poles against the occupying Prussians, Russians and Austrians occurred in 1830-31, 1844-48 and 1863.

Beginning in 1864, the Russification programs against the Poles intensified as a result of the January (1863) Uprising. Evidence of this can still be seen today when searching Catholic church records from the Russian-occupied areas. Instead of Latin, church records were required to be written in the Russian language.

Beginning in 1867, Prime Minister Otto von Bismarck began his *Kulturkampf*. By 1871, his anti-Catholic, anti-Polish plan was being implemented. More intense pressure was applied to Germanize the Poles. Land was taken away from Polish farmers and sold to German immigrant farmers brought into the Polish lands by Bismarck. Many Catholic churches, monasteries and convents were closed, and some were converted to Evangelical (Lutheran) churches. Check LDS microfilms of records from your Polish parish for a parish history, or try online, as many parishes and towns in Poland now publish detailed online histories. *The Słownik Geograficzny* also contains parish histories in the town entries.

The Austrian-occupied area, called *Malopolska* or Little Poland, was named Galicia by the Austrian government. (*Wielkopolska*, or Great Poland, was in the Prussian-occupied area.) Little Poland was the most underdeveloped area of the country with most of the population engaged in agriculture. This area produced the greatest number of emigrants.

Many Poles were conscripted into the occupying forces' armies, and forced to fight in far-away wars. Conscription notations can be seen in many Catholic Church baptismal record books next to the male children's birth records. These notations were written in German script in the margins, probably by the draft board, and added many years after the births occurred when the young men were of draft age.

A combination of all the above events caused the mass emigration of Poles. Polish emigrants not only came to the United States, but also to Canada, South America, France, England and Australia. There were about 110,000 emigrants (total) who had left Poland by 1870. By 1914, there were about 4.2 million.

Polish Immigration to Toledo

The earliest identified Polish immigrants to Toledo were Peter Szynka (aka Schinkey, Shinke) born about 1826 and his first wife Catherine Wisniewska b about 1830. Peter Schenk 28 a watchmaker and his wife Catherina 24 sailed on the SS Robert Peel from London arriving in New York on 22 November 1854. Their only known child was Mary who was baptized in St. Joseph Church in Maumee, Ohio in November 1858; she married and had children. They were farmers and lived in Waynesfield Twp. in 1870. By 1900, they lived in Maumee village on Sophia Street.

According to "Polacy w Toledo," written in 1908 by Stefan Nesterowicz, Peter Szynka was from the village and parish of Tuchola near Naklo nad Notec (actually quite a few miles north of Naklo). Peter was the brother of Anna Szynka who married Jan Kortas. The Kortas family was also from Tuchola, and the families were related. The Kalas family may also have been from Tuchola, and was also related to the Kortases. The Kortas and Kalas families immigrated in 1866 and 1868.

Catherine Szynka/Schinkey died in 1894 and was buried in St. Joseph Cemetery, Maumee. Peter married another Catherine later that same year at St. Hedwig Church. His second wife was the widow of John Kledzik, her father was Maciej Chlopek. The second Mrs. Schinkey died in 1927, in Kuhschwantz. Peter died 9 February 1918 in Monclova Twp, Ohio and is also buried in St. Joseph Cemetery.

While there were a few individuals and their families who immigrated from Poland and lived in Toledo before 1870, they were mostly Jewish or German-Lutherans. A few Polish Catholics did arrive in Toledo in the late 1860s, but the mass immigration of Poles to Toledo finally commenced about the year 1870. According to author Stefan Nesterowicz, there were about 100 Polish families in Toledo in 1874. In 1880, there were 150 Polish families in the seventh ward (Lagrinka) and 80 families in the eighth ward (Kuhschwanz).

A small number of Polish immigrants served in Ohio regiments during the American Civil War. Some of these from northwest Ohio are noted in this First Families database.

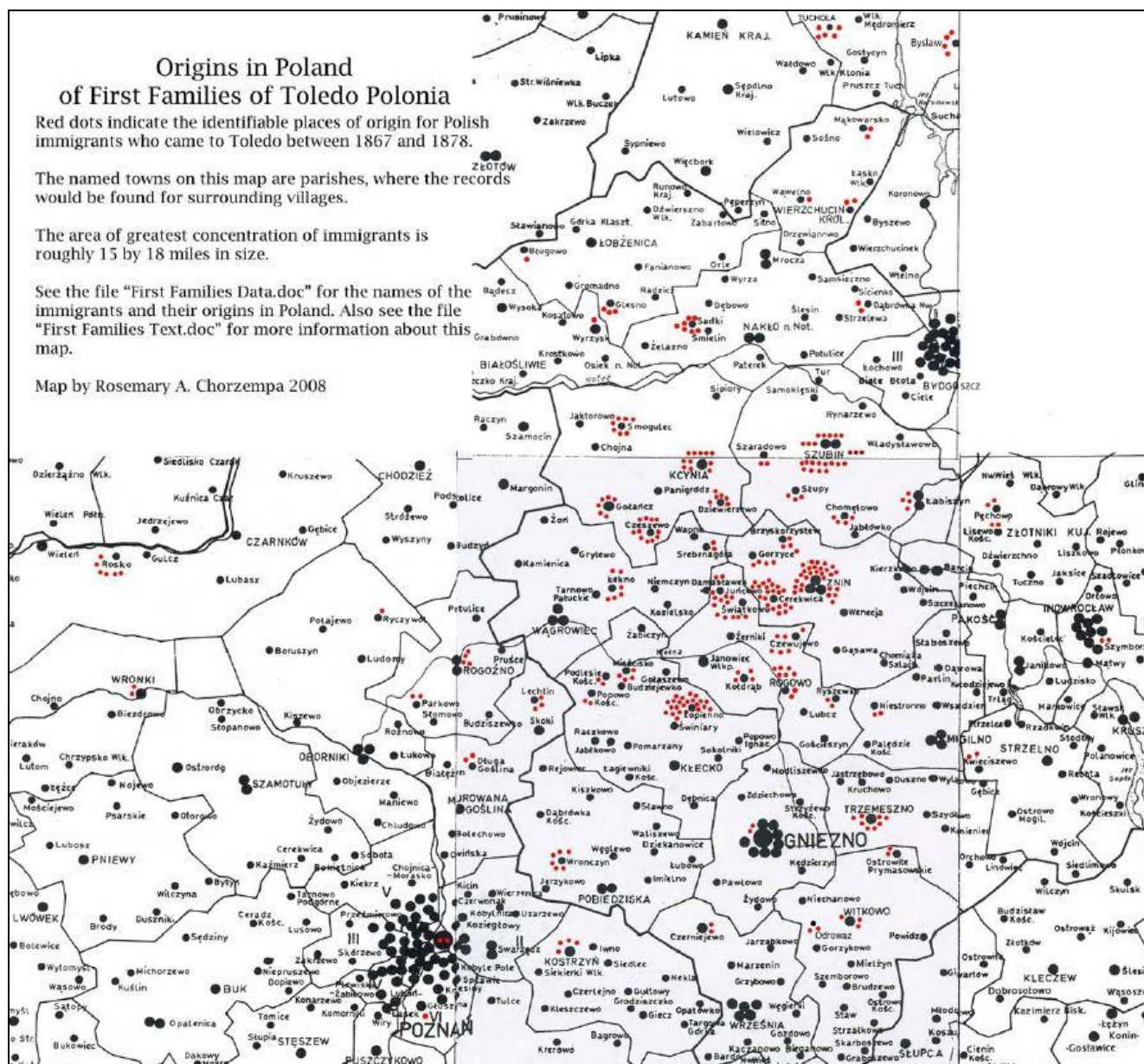
Some of these families who first settled in Toledo early on, moved to Manistee, Michigan and the Radom, Illinois area in the mid-1870s due to the poor economy in Toledo. A "clan" of related families originating in Lopiенno parish, Poland moved to Radom (in the Belleville diocese of Illinois) and its surrounding farm communities. Those identified so far: Anielak, Borowiak, Ciesliewicz, Czarnecki, Czerniejewski, Grzegorzewski, Kalas, Koczorowski, Kujawa, Lawecki, Martek, Musielak, Przybylski, Stoinski, Stelmaszewski, Szubarga (and Janowski), Wesolowski. Poles who lived in Toledo also had relatives in Fremont, Ohio (St. Joseph), Marblehead, Ohio, and South Bend, Indiana. There were small enclaves of Poles in St. Boniface parish in Oak Harbor, Ohio (Ottawa County), Immaculate Conception parish in Port Clinton, Ohio (Ottawa County) and St. Mary parish in Sandusky, Ohio (Erie County).

As more and more Poles arrived in America, they wrote home to their families and friends back in the Old Country. Many adult siblings, and even families of three generations at a time, came to Toledo in the 1870s and 1880s.

Some entries in the *Słownik Geograficzny* mention that the population of the entire village left for America. (*Słownik Geograficzny* = Geographical Dictionary of Poland, a very useful reference available on a CD-ROM from the PGSA, describing every village in the Polish territories, written in 1880-1900, the time of our ancestors' emigration). *Folwark Ameryka* was the name of a large manor and farm near Szubin, an area from which many of the first Toledo Polonia came.

They came from Poznania (*Posen* in German), specifically from the area bounded by Kamień Krajeński (just north of Bydgoszcz) on the north to Poznan on the south, and on the west Rosko (northwest of Poznan) to Inowrocław on the east. Most of these pioneers came from the Szubin-Znin-Lopienno-Kcynia region, an area roughly 15 miles by 18 miles.

The majority of them came from the parish towns of Znin, Szubin, Kcynia, Lopienno, Cerekwica, Dziewierzewo, Golancz, Czeszewo Wagrowiec, Sadki, Smogulec, Gorzyce, Labiszyn, Rogozno, Brzyskorzystew, Juncewo, Swiatkowo, Czewujewo, Rogowo, Trzemeszno, Poznan, Miescisko, Lekno, Rosko, Srebnagora, Slupy, Ryszewko, Lechlin, Ostrowite Prymasowskie, Popowo Koscielne, Podlesie Koscielne, Szaradowo, Witkowo, Czerniejewo, Kostrzyn, Gluchowo, Kwieciszewo, Inowrocław, Bysla, Makowarsko, Blugowo, Glesno, and Gniezno. (See map...Ancestral towns & villages marked in red.)



Many villages in Poland were inhabited by as few as a dozen people to a hundred or two, and were too small to support their own parish and church. Churches were built in larger villages and in towns, and one parish may have served a dozen small villages surrounding it. Thus, the names of the villages and towns above are the location of the parish churches, and not necessarily the name of the immigrant's village. When the immigrant was giving the pastor in America his information for his marriage record, for example, he was asked where he was baptized. These parish towns' names were taken from our local Catholic church records and parish records from Poland.

The oldest Polish settlement in America at Panna Maria, Texas was begun in 1854. The Polish origins of these Texas immigrants is nearly identical to that of Toledo. Texas Poles came from the parishes of Margonin, Jaktorowo, Smogulec, Kcynia, Panigrodz, Czeszewo, Srebnagora, Dziewierzewo, Slupy, Szaradowo, Szubin, Skoki and Lechlin.

The Early Polish Settlements in Toledo

Before the 1875 founding of St. Hedwig, the first Polish Roman Catholic Church in Toledo, the Polish Catholics were served by the two German Catholic Churches in Toledo, St. Mary and Saints Peter and Paul. These Poles were familiar with the German language, as that was the official language of their homeland. These two German churches also happened to be near the areas of the Polish settlements in Toledo, one to the north of downtown (Lagrinka) and one to the west of downtown (Kuhschwanz).

Vistula (the Latin word for the Polish river Wisla) was a town platted out in 1833 and located in the Old North End, which merged with the rival town of Port Lawrence (immediately to the west of Vistula, the site of the current downtown Toledo) founded in 1817. Toledo arose from this merger in 1837.

The first Poles in Toledo settled in the older southern portion of what is now known as "Lagrinka," the Polish settlement in north Toledo, beginning in 1867. This area was first known as "the Polish Settlement" in the 1870s and 1880s. These first homes were located well to the south of the site of the first (and current) St. Hedwig Church, in the area of Lagrange to Cherry streets, and Bancroft to Frederick streets. The largest cluster of Poles lived in and around the 900 block of Frederick Street. After St. Hedwig Church was built in 1875, the Poles settled in the area surrounding the first church, which was built on the north side of the 100 block of Dexter Street, near Warsaw Street (then called Locust Street). After the original church building was torn down, the property became Dexter Park, a city park, and its location is marked with a historical marker.

By 1880, there were two distinct "Lagrinkas." One, to the south of Frederick Street, and the newer one to the north of Hausman Street. The newer Polish Settlement surrounded St. Hedwig Church; most Poles lived in the 100 blocks of Mettler Street (then called Franklin), Everett and Dexter Streets, and Bronson Avenue. Two large tracts of land, privately owned, divided the two Lagrinkas, but were soon sold and eventually Poles and other residents moved into that area.

The Poles in north Toledo walked over a mile south down Cherry Street to St. Mary Church, which at that time was located on the west side of Cherry Street at Michigan, on the southern edge of the Wabash & Erie Canal bed (aka "the big ditch." In Lucas Co. records, many people resided and/or died at the big ditch.) St. Mary was founded as a German Catholic Church in 1854. St. Mary Cemetery was located at the northwest corner of Lagrange Street and Manhattan Blvd. As was the custom and the law, the cemetery was outside the city limits (until 1868 when the city annexed the area). St. Francis de Sales Church, organized in 1841 and located just three blocks to the south of St. Mary Church, also had its cemetery in the same location. Eventually the two side-by-side cemeteries merged into Mount Carmel Cemetery. One can still find gravestones that date from the 1840s.

No evidence of Polish baptisms, marriages or funerals are found in the early St. Francis de Sales records (at that time an Irish parish), nor those of St. Joseph Parish (then a French parish, organized in 1854), located about three blocks to the east of St. Francis and St. Mary parishes, at Locust and Erie Streets.

Places of employment for the earliest Polish settlers included the Milburn Wagon Works (Monroe & Detroit), Osborn, Chase and Swayne wood moulding company (Chestnut & Champlain), B. Meilink &

Co. furniture (Summit & Cherry), Hubbard, Newhouse & Cable flooring (Lagrange & Water), Christian Guenther dyer and scourer (47 Adams Street), J. Brereton carpentry, William Peter carpentry, Finlay & Zahn, Buckeye Brewery (Bush & Champlain), Toledo Gas Light and Coke Co. (69 Madison), Lake Shore and Michigan Southern Railroad.

By 1923, Poles were the largest ethnic group in the city of Toledo, generating the need for more parishes to serve them. Currently, there are about 60,000 residents of the Greater Toledo area who claim Polish ancestry and heritage.

Kuhschwanz Settlement

In 1871, Poles began to settle in the area now known as the Nebraska Avenue area or “Kuhschwanz,” “Cow’s Tail” in German. It probably was named by the German immigrants living in this area of town known as Lenk’s Hill, a German settlement. It really was the “Cow’s Tail,” or as some might say “out in the sticks,” as this Polish settlement was literally on the edge of the Toledo city limits. At that time, the spot where St. Anthony Church stands now was outside the Toledo city limits, in Adams Township. Some of these people farmed in the area.

The earliest Polish residents of Kuhschwanz lived in the area roughly bounded by Belmont, Detroit, Campbell and Hawley. This area was just to the west of the German Lenk’s Hill settlement, on the western edge of the city of Toledo and beyond. The Kuhschwanz Poles had to walk about a mile to the east, crossing Swan Creek and the Canal bed, to attend church services at SS. Peter & Paul Church. Many of the residents of this area were buried in St. Patrick’s Cemetery, according to Lucas County death records, though there is no record of such a cemetery ever being in existence, according to the Toledo Diocese. St. Patrick Church was (and still is in the same location) in Lenk’s Hill. It was founded in 1862 as an Irish parish.

SS. Peter & Paul Church was founded in 1866 as a German parish and located on St. Clair Street near Harrison, near the canal locks and south of Swan Creek. There are not many records of Poles in this parish until early 1873, when there were 15 baptisms of Polish infants that year. The Saints Peter & Paul Cemetery was at the intersection of Western and Wayne Streets, and served from 1867 to 1923. In the 1920s the bodies were reinterred at Calvary Cemetery. The old Foodtown store at Western and Airport sits on this former cemetery property.

The First Polish Roman Catholic Church in Toledo – St. Hedwig (October 16, 1875)

After a sufficient number of Polish families immigrated to Toledo, they sought to form a Polish Roman Catholic parish. The residents of both Polish settlements received permission from the Bishop of the Cleveland Diocese. (The diocese of Toledo was not formed until 1910.)

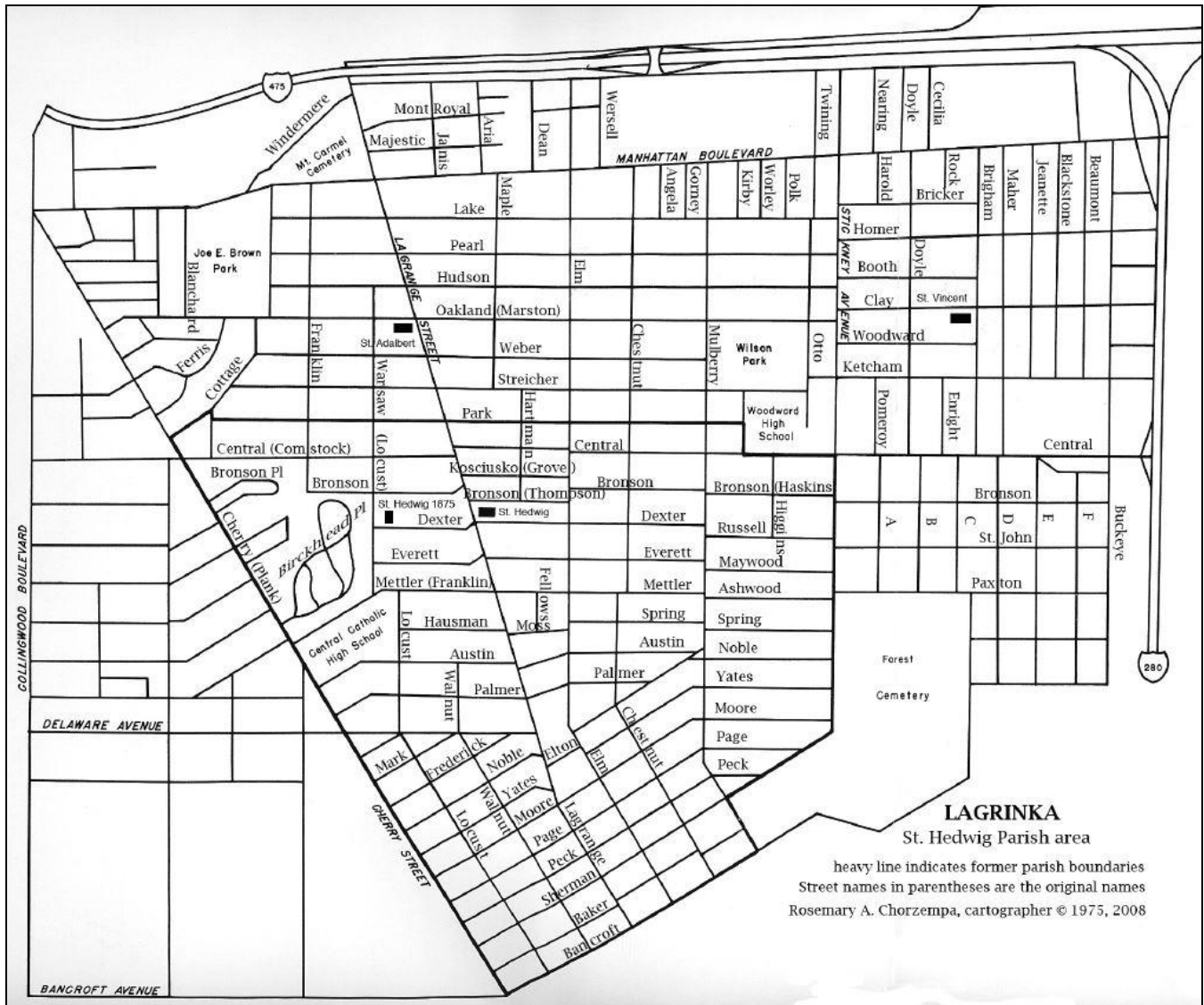
October 16, 1875 marked the official beginning of St. Hedwig Parish with the celebration of the first Mass in the basement of St. Mary Church. Construction was begun shortly after, and the red brick church was built at 100 S. Dexter Street, between Locust (now Warsaw) and Lagrange Streets. The church was blessed on May 7, 1876. Father Vincent Lewandowski was the first pastor. Once St. Hedwig was established, almost all of the Polish families went to St. Hedwig for the sacraments. Records of Polish sacraments at St. Mary and SS. Peter & Paul parishes became almost non-existent after 1875.

There was a fire in St. Hedwig Church in 1886, during which time the first book of death records disappeared. That is part of the reason for including Lucas County death records in this project, as well as to include Poles who lived in Kuhschwanz or other parts of the city. After the fire, the second and final building was built in 1891, located at 1916 Lagrange Street, only one block away from the original St. Hedwig Church.

In 2005, St. Adalbert was twinned with St. Hedwig and shared a pastor.

On 1 July 2010, St. Adalbert and St. Hedwig parishes were “suppressed,” a diocesan term that means each parish was terminated with all metrical records from both parishes sent to the diocese. All societies and employees of the parishes (Altar Society, choir, office staff, etc.) were terminated. Pastor Fr. Richard Philiposki, of the Society of Christ (an order based in Poland) was reassigned by his order to another city. New records were to be begun; new staff hired; and Fr. Joseph Poggemeyer was named the pastor of the newly-created parish called Sts. Adalbert and Hedwig Parish. Fr. Poggemeyer also remained pastor of his former parish of St. Joseph (the once-French parish founded in 1854). An announcement was made that the St. Hedwig Church building was to be open only for weddings and special occasions; and that it will no longer hold Sunday or daily Masses.

In 2012, St. Hedwig Church building was permanently closed by the diocese, its assets (stained glass windows, altars, statues, pews, etc.) sold. It now remains an empty shell.



Additional Polish Parishes in Toledo

Several other ethnic Polish Roman Catholic parishes were formed in Toledo after St. Hedwig..

St. Anthony Parish: founded in 1882, located at 1416 Nebraska Ave. Kuhschwanz neighborhood. This was the first Polish parish formed after St. Hedwig. This parish was also founded by Father Vincent

Lewandowski, the founder of St. Hedwig. He served as the pastor of both parishes for several years until June 1885. St. Anthony was closed 30 June 2005.

St. Adalbert Parish: founded in 1907 by the division of St. Hedwig's area along Park St., north of Park St. went to St. Adalbert, south of Park St. remained in St. Hedwig. Located at 3233 Lagrange in the St. Lagrinka neighborhood. Currently the parish is called St. Adalbert-St. Hedwig.

St. Stanislaus Kostka Parish (usually referred to as St. Stanislaus): founded in 1909 by the division of St. Anthony's area along Detroit Ave. East of Detroit remained in St. Anthony. West of Detroit was St. Stanislaus. Located at 415 N. Detroit Ave. Kuhschwanz neighborhood. Closed 30 June 2005.

Nativity Parish (officially Church of the Nativity): Organized as a Roman Catholic Parish in 1922, originally a Polish National Catholic Church. It ultimately merged with St. Anthony. Located at 1124 Nebraska Ave. Kuhschwanz neighborhood. Closed in 1982.

St. Vincent de Paul Parish: founded in 1924, located at 1035 Woodward Ave. Lagrinka neighborhood. Closed 30 June 2005.

St. Hyacinth Parish: founded in 1928, located at 719 Evesham Ave. (Parkside Blvd. and Victory St.) Kuhschwanz neighborhood. Twinned with St. Charles Boromeo Parish.

Though not officially Polish ethnic parishes, St. Mary Magdalene Parish in Rossford, Ohio (founded 1903) and Our Lady of Lourdes Parish on Hill Avenue in Holland, Ohio (founded 1927) had many Polish members.

Many Poles settled early on in Adams Township (just west of St. Anthony parish and west past the University of Toledo campus), Swanton, Ohio and Holland, Ohio, Bedford Township in Monroe County, Michigan, and near Oak Harbor, Ohio (belonging to St. Boniface Parish).

SOURCES AND RESOURCES

The following publications are very useful to people researching their Polish families' ancestry. Some of these have been used as sources of information for this project.

St. Hedwig Parish records

St. Mary Parish records

SS. Peter & Paul Parish records

St. Boniface, Oak Harbor Parish records

Lucas County death records

U.S. Federal Census records

Toledo City Directories

U.S. Immigration and Passenger Lists

LDS microfilms of Roman Catholic parish records in Poland

Poznan Project (<http://bindweed.man.poznan.pl/posen/project.php>) An index of marriages in the Poznan district, from about 1820 to 1889, work in progress.

Toledo-Lucas County Public Library Local History & Genealogy Department, maps (Toledo Additions Map, 1837-1963, by the Toledo-Lucas County Plan Commission

Korzenie Polskie – Polish Roots by Rosemary A. Chorzempa, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., Baltimore, Maryland, 1993 (still in print), a book on how to research your Polish ancestors

The First Hundred Years, 1875-1975, A History of St. Hedwig Parish, Toledo, Ohio by the St. Hedwig Parish Centennial Anniversary Committee (David G. Chelminski, Larry Chorzempa, chairman Rosemary A. Chorzempa, Mark D. Dembinski, Gerald A. Mazuchowski, Michael J. Niemiec and Melvin R. Ogradowski), 1975.

Polska Atlas Drogowy (Road Atlas of Poland), GeoCenter, Warszawa, Poland, 1996.

The Latin Church in the Polish Commonwealth in 1772, a Map and Index of Localities by Stanislaw Litak, Polish Genealogical Society of America, Chicago, Illinois, 1990. (Polish Roman Catholic parishes maps, use it to find out what parish your ancestor belonged to, then look at LDS records. This book shows parishes in the old Commonwealth, which extended far to the east and south of current Poland.)

Roman Catholic Parishes in the Polish People's Republic in 1984 by Lidia Mullerowa, Polish Genealogical Society of America, Chicago, Illinois, 1995. (Maps of parish locations in current Poland.)

Słownik Geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego (Geographical Dictionary of the Kingdom of Poland and other slavonic countries) digital edition on CD-rom, Rafal T. Prinke, Polish Genealogical Society of America, 2003. (The original paper volumes were written and printed c. 1880 to 1900, and show information about towns and small villages when your ancestors were living there. Very useful for information and locating villages and to which parish they belonged.)

Germans to America, Lists of Passengers Arriving at U.S. Ports by Ira A. Glazier and William P. Filby, Scholarly Resources Inc., Wilmington, Delaware, 1988- . (Indexes of passengers arriving in the U.S. onboard German ships, from German ports, coming from German areas in Europe or having German names.)

Toledo's nineteenth-century Polonia: Ziomki I Rodacy (Country Folk and Compatriots) by David Chelminski, 1989. (Written in English)

The Ethnicity of the Poles in Toledo c. 1830-1886 by David Chelminski, 1978. (Both of Dr. Chelminski's publications are available at the Toledo-Lucas County Public Library.)

Polacy w Toledo [Poles in Toledo] by Stefan Nesterowicz, Anthony Paryski Publishing Co., Toledo, Ohio, 1908. [written in Polish language, with photographs of old pioneers and businesses and homes]

Peter Ueberroth, Archivist for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Toledo, who provided information for some of the old churches and cemeteries.

St. Michael Parish records from Radom, Illinois (and other parishes in the Diocese of Belleville, Illinois), and all Diocese of Toledo parish records are available at <https://www.familysearch.org>.