

*My
Polish
Ancestry*





*Once I thought to write a history of the
immigrants in America.
Then I discovered that the
immigrants were American history.*

-Oscar Handlin

Today we call ourselves Americans and the link back to our Polish roots is almost lost. With each passing generation the link fades and we risk that it could be lost. It should not be forgotten that an entire branch of our family was born in Poland, during the Russian occupation. Part of that family tree still resides in Poland while our branch of the family tree immigrated to America.

This is a tribute to our Polish Ancestors so that, with each passing generation, we continue to remember them and our roots. Preserve these pages and the personal stories they share. Look closely at the faces of people shown here. You will never meet these people but they are your family - your great grandparents, your grandparents - a family with a rich and unique heritage that gives you a sense of identity. The faces on each page represent people who, like yourself, worked hard, fell in love, experienced pain, and laughed. Some made extraordinary decisions and willingly faced a level of risk most of us will never know. Our ancestors, who left their homeland in Poland with little more than their willingness to seek out a better life for themselves and traveled to a new country, Our adventurous and brave relatives who, not only contributed to your genes, but who have profoundly influenced who we are today and the country we call home.

Our Ancestors

Hometowns in Poland

To date, we can trace our Polish Ancestry to four families that lived in Poland. They are:

The Sielicki Family

The Hałas Family

The Kjerzył Family (name altered to Kjeru in America)

The Perzanowski Family (name altered to Pyzanowski in America)



Each family branch had 1 or more members who left their home, their parents, their siblings, and the only life they ever knew to venture across the seas to America. Each of them was single and young, between 17 - 26 years old, when they left home. Based on oral family history, none of our direct decedents ever stepped foot back on Polish soil nor did they see their parents again. Place yourself in their shoes, at this young age, and imagine leaving behind so much and never returning! Fortunately, each had a cousin, an uncle or a sibling already living in America, which they came to join. This American relative already immigrated to Schenectady, New York and was the reason that each branch of our family continued their journey beyond Ellis Island to settle in Schenectady. Below is the list of their hometowns in Poland, followed by a map of the locations. The voivodeship and powait names are present day, they were named differently back in 1900.

Family	Perzanowski	Hałas	Kjerzył	Sielicki
Village	Długoleka	Korzyce	Stelagi	Nowosiółki
Gimna (City)	Opinogora	Szydłowiec	Sterdyn	Baligród
Powait (County)	Ciechanow	Szydłowiec	Sokołow	Lesko
Voivodeship (Province)	Masovian or Mazowieckje	Masovian or Mazowieckje	Masovian or Mazowieckje	Podkarpackje or Subcarpathian

Our Ancestors Home Villages

Poland's Voivodeships



My Ancestors Who Left Poland
and Came to America through Ellis Island



Antoni Perzanowski

Immigrated 1907



Franciska Sielicki

Immigrated 1912



Antonia Halas

Immigrated 1913

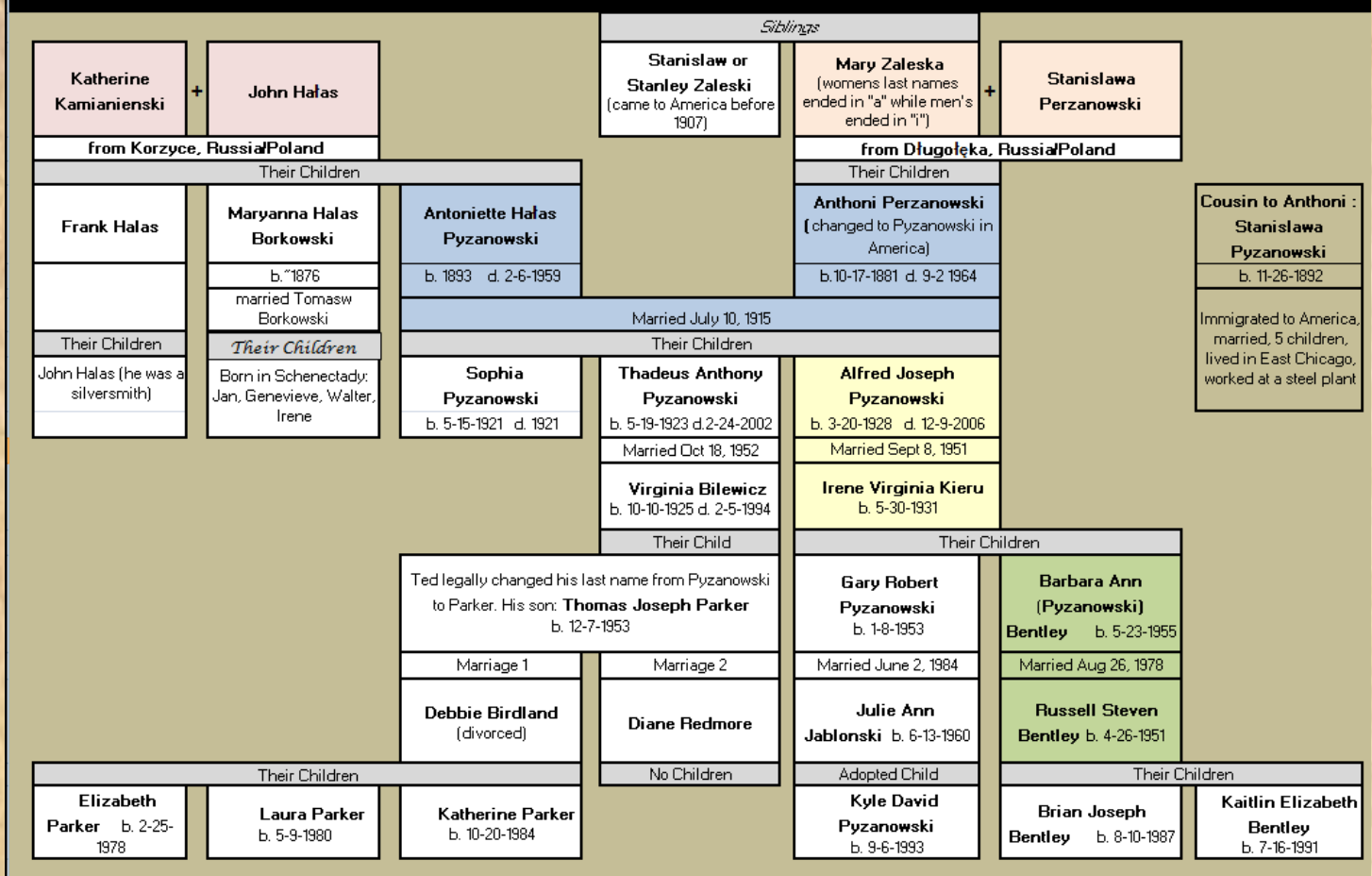


Stanislaw Kjeryl

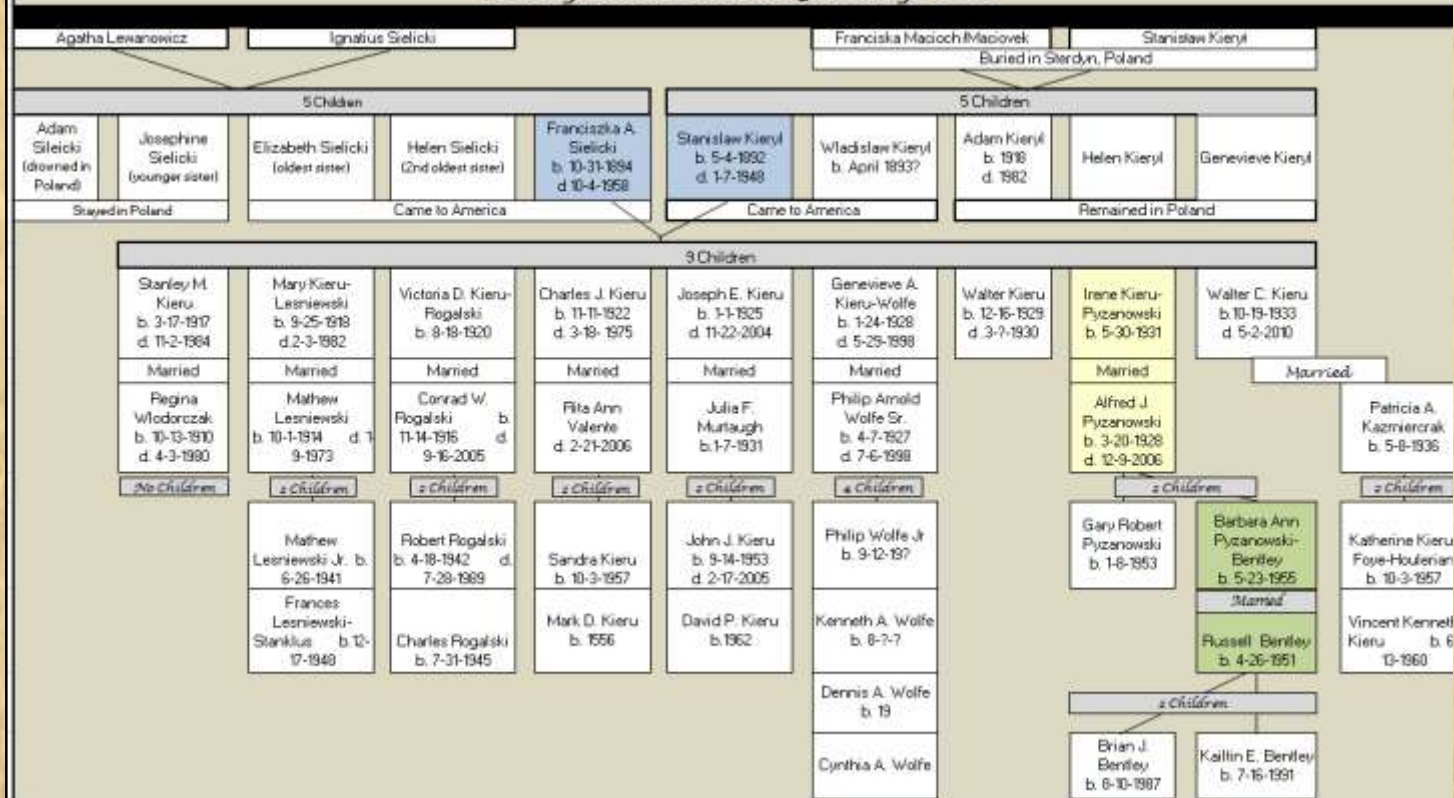
Immigrated 1913

How You Link Into these Family Trees

Pyzanowski & Halas Family Tree



Kieryl and Sielicki Family Tree



The next obvious question is "What would provoke these young people to leave home?" and the answer lies in understanding Europe's history. Our Polish Ancestors all left Europe between the years of 1907 and 1913. This was just prior to the outbreak of World War I, which lasted from 1914 - 1918. It is estimated that about 4 million people emigrated to the U.S. from Polish lands in the period 1885-1918. Our ancestors were in the later wave of this emigration.

When our Ancestors left home, Poland actually did not exist as its own a separate country. The citizens were still Polish in their heritage, traditions, language and in their hearts, but their country ceased to exist from 1850 – 1921. For decades, they were subject to the rule of other governments. The map below shows that Poland (gray area) had been divided amongst three countries - Austria, Prussia, and Russia - as marked by the green lines.

The Perzanowski, Halas and Kjeryl branches of our family resided in the portion of Poland ruled by Russia, while the Sielicki branch was under the rule of Austria. This explains why many of our ancestor's birth, immigration, or marriage records list their home country as Poland/Russia or just Russia.



1850 - 1921

From 1905-1907, just before our ancestors left, a major part of the Russian Revolution occurred in "Poland." Unrest existed between the peasant workers and the Russian government. Our ancestors were poor farmer workers. They sought improved living conditions, political freedom for Poland, and the restoration of their home country. While much of the unrest occurred in 1905, there continued to be demonstrations and occasional armed clashes through 1907.

We do not know the exact reason our ancestors fled Poland/Russia, but the harsh living conditions paired, the political unrest was most likely the reason paired with the lure of reports of a better life in America. .

Family oral history passes down the story about how the Russian Military would march through the town, grab young men off the street and force them to enlist in their military. The family story says that Antoni Perzanowski was forced to join the Russian army and sent to Siberia, where he was assigned to guard duty in the frigid Siberian winters. When he was allowed to return home for leave, in 1907, the family pooled their money and bought him passage to America, to escape this hardship. He never returned to his homeland.

Timeline for our Polish Ancestors

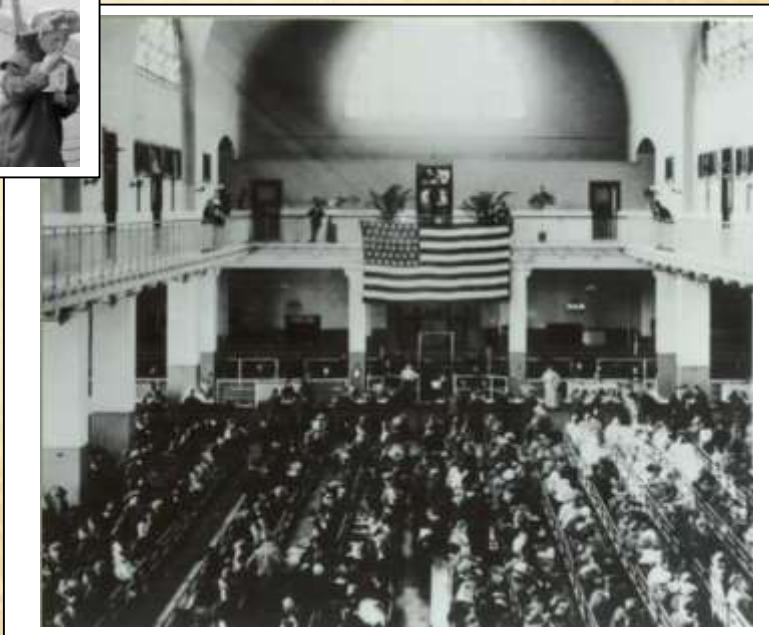
Pyzanowski Family		Halas Family		Kieru Family	Sielicki Family
Country	Year	Date	Location	Event	
Poland / Russia	1881	October 17	Długoleka, Poland	Antoni Pyzanowski born	
	1892	May 4	Stelagi, Poland	Stanislaw Joseph Kierul/Kieru born	
	1893	?	Korzyce, Poland	Antonina Halas born	
	1895	October 31	Nowosiółki, Poland	Franciska Sielicki born	
Poland to America	1907	August 3	Poland -> USA	Antoni Pyzanowski immigrates to America, joining his uncle Stanislaw Zaleski	
	1912	July 1	Poland -> USA	Franciska Sielicki immigrates to America	
	1913	July 21	Poland -> USA	Antonina Halas immigrates to America, joining her sister Maryanna Borkowski	
	1913	September 15	Poland -> USA	Stanislaw Kierul immigrates to America, joining his brother Wladislaw Kierul	
1914		July 28	World War 1 Begins		
America	1915	July 10	Schenectady, New York	Antonina Halas and Antoni Pyzanowski Mary	
	1916	June 18	Schenectady, New York	Stanislaw Kierul and Franciska Sielicki Mary	
1918		November 11	World War 1 Ends		
America	1923	May 19	Schenectady, New York	Thadeus Pyzanowski (Parker) Born	
	1928	March 20	Schenectady, New York	Alfred Pyzanowski Born	
1939		September	World War II Begins - with Germany invading Poland		
America	1942	July 24	Schenectady, New York	Antoni Pyzanowski becomes a US Citizen (age 60)	
1945		May	World War II Ends		
America	1948	January 7	Schenectady, New York	Stanislaw Kierul/Kieru dies from Stomach Cancer (age 56)	
	1958	October 4	Schenectady, New York	Franciski Sielicki-Kieru dies from Heart Congestion (age 64)	
	1959	February 6	Utica, New York	Antonina Halas-Pyzanowski dies from Cervical Cancer (age 66)	
	1964	September 2	Schenectady, New York	Antoni Pyzanowski dies from Colon Cancer (age 82)	

Their First Sight of America

Images of Ellis Island 1907 – 1913



These photos are not of our family, but rather provide a glimpse of what Ellis Island was at the time they arrived.



Why Did These Ancestors Finish their Journey in Schenectady, New York?

There appears to be two main reasons why our ancestors continued their journey beyond Ellis Island and traveled on to Schenectady, New York. The first reason is that each of them already had a family member living in Schenectady. These relatives immigrated at an earlier date, and by joining them, our direct ancestors immediately found a place to sleep and a link to family they left behind. As they came to America with little money, unable to speak English, and most could not read or write, it was so important to have the support of a relative to help them get started and fill the loneliness of leaving their families back in Poland.

The second reason was employment opportunity. In 1892, Thomas Edison established his headquarters for the General Electric Company in Schenectady. Additionally, ALCO, the American Locomotive Company, had a large plant in Schenectady. ALCO was the second largest builder of steam powered railroad locomotives in the United States. These two companies established Schenectady's reputation as "The City that Lights and Hauls the World." GE and ALCO formed a consortium and their growing need, for laborers, was satisfied largely by immigrants. Within a decade (1890-1900), Schenectady's population grew by 60% as immigrants from Poland and Italy flocked to work in the factories. This is probably what brought earlier relative to Schenectady, and the news of employment opportunities and a better life in America spread back to Poland, serving as a lure for our immediate ancestors to soon follow. The population of Schenectady was 13,655 in 1880; and more than doubled to 31,682 in 1900; and grew to 92,061 by 1950. Our ancestors found employment with ALCO. Stanislaw Kjeryl worked at the American Locomotive Company as a boilermaker helper and Antoni Pyzanowski first worked for ALCO as machine operator and eventually retired from the merged GE-ALCO.



Schenectady, New York in the Early 1900's



Schenectady is approximately a 150 mile trip due north of Ellis Island/New York City. The demand for laborers made Schenectady a magnet for immigrants from both Poland and Italy. The Polish community in Schenectady was formed by emigrants predominately from Russian Governed Poland. In 1910, Russian Poles made up 72% of Schenectady's population. Due to the vast and rapid influx of immigrants, Schenectady was crowded and housing was at a shortage. Houses were build to hold 2 or more families, each occupying a flat or one story of the building.

An average of 5 people lived in one flat and it was common to have one or more boarders living with a family. Census records show that the Kijeryl family once rented or boarded with a family called Snowstein.

When these immigrants came to America, most could not speak English and still held a strong attachment to their home/birth land and their ethnic traditions. Thus within Schenectady, the Poles and Italians settled in their own mini-communities that closely tied to their ethnic background, where they continued to speak Polish, celebrate Polish holidays and share religious beliefs. Two areas of Schenectady were dominated by Polish immigrants; those were the Mont Pleasant Area and the Eastern Avenue Area.

Additionally, there was blatant bias and discrimination that existed based on your ethnic background. Today we think of discrimination based on one's skin color, however, in earlier Schenectady, discrimination occurred based on ethnic background. The Poles and Italians resented each other and larger scale discrimination occurred between early (more established and wealthier) Dutch, German and French Schenectady settlers versus the poorer/non-English speaking Polish and Italians immigrants. Refusal to rent to an Italian or a Pole because of their ethnic background was not uncommon. And some new home builders were as blatant to place ads in the local paper, the Union Star, announcing that new home sites were "For Americans " and further specified that "land sold only to white Americans of English speaking, German or French decent." These attitudes lead to Polish and Italian clustering to reside in certain areas of the city.



Left: Downtown 1910

Right: Shops on Albany Street

Center: Erie Canal (since filled in to create a street, Erie Blvd.)



Faith, Tradition and Community – Our Family Church

In the Polish community, the Catholic Church was the heart of the immigrant colony. Thus, it is not surprising that in each Polish section of Schenectady, Polish speaking Catholics organized, raised funds and erect churches where they could hear mass spoken in their native Polish language and socialize with others from their homeland. St Mary's Catholic Church was built on Eastern Avenue and St Adalbert's Catholic Church was built in the Mont Pleasant area. St. Mary's Church (in Polish: Matki Boskiej Czestochowskiej) first gathered in 1891. In 1903, the congregation built a stunning gray granite church (cost \$125,000), plus a three-story school (\$16,000) and a rectory (\$6,000), all completed that same year. Even a plot of land was purchased (\$2,000) on McClellan Street for a cemetery.

Three generations of our family found a home church and community at St. Mary's Church. Within the church these 3 generations held Baptisms, First Communions, Weddings and sadly funerals. St. Mary's was not only a place of church services but a place where our family interacted with friends and connected with the Polish community. The church provided an enormous sense of belonging to the Polish community.



Centered on the Alter was an image of St. Mary or Matki Boskiej Czestochowskiej



This gorgeous church holds wonderful, warm memories for all of us that attended services here. The huge stained glass windows, which lined each wall, allowed beautiful hues of reds, blues, greens and gold colors to flicker across the pews. The scent of burning candles, lit by parishioners, or incense burned at mass filled the air. On special holidays, like Christmas or Easter, the alter picture of Mary was lowered to reveal a statue of the Holy Family. Left of the altar, a full size manger scene was setup every Christmas. Carols were sung in Polish and accompanied by a choir with a huge organ whose pipes lined the upstairs wall of the choir loft. After services, friends gathered outside the church steps to socialize. The church was closed in June 2009. Some of the major family events that occurred within the walls of Saint Mary's Church were:

Baptisms:

1st Born Generation in America: Alfred and Ted Pyzanowski, Irene Kjeru

2nd Born Generation in America: Barbara and Gary Pyzanowski

3rd Born Generation in America: Brian and Kaitlin Bentley

Marriages:

Polish Born Immigrants: Antoni Perzanowski to Antonia Halas

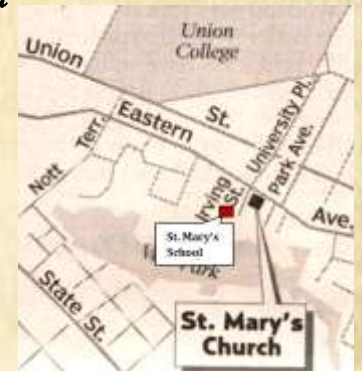
Stanislaw Kjeryl to Franciska Sielicki

1st Born Generation in America: Alfred Pyzanowski to Irene Kjeru

Thadeus Pyzanowski to Virginia Bielwicz

2nd Born Generation in America: Barbara Pyzanowski to Russell Bentley

Gary Pyzanowski to Julie Jablonski



*Alfred Pyzanowski's marriage to
Irene Kjeru at St. Mary's Church
Sept. 8, 1951*



*Barbara Pyzanowski's
marriage to Russell Bentley
August 26, 1978*



*Gary Pyzanowski's marriage
to Julie Jablonski
June 2, 1984*

Associated with St. Mary's Church was the establishment of a Polish Catholic School, by the same name. The school was located on Irving Street, kitty-corner from the church. Because most immigrants spoke Polish in their homes, their America born children also spoke Polish. These parents desired to send their children to a Polish church affiliated school where their culture could be kept alive. Alfred and Thadeus Pyzanowski attended St. Mary's Catholic School and so did Fred's children, Barbara and Gary Pyzanowski. During Fred and Ted's school years, all lessons were taught in Polish, but by the time Barbara and Gary attended lessons were taught in English while Polish was taught as the secondary language. The school was run by an order of nuns from an order called the Sisters of the Resurrection. The nuns were very strict in their discipline and a ruler slap, across the hand, was often doled out for bad behavior or bad grades. The school ran from kinder to 8th grades, and closed in 1979 due to declining enrollment. It was a 3 story, gold brick building erected in the shape of the letter T. Classrooms were on the main floor, the lunchroom in the basement and the top floor held an open theater/gym room, a library, 1 classroom, and an elongate wooden bar (since the theater/gym was also used for church carnivals and parties).



Alfred Pyzanowski's 8th grade graduation class from St. Mary's Catholic School – 1942. He is standing in the back row, second from the right. There were only 9 students in his class.

The final part of the Polish-Catholic community was the establishment of a final resting place for family members. In 1903, when the church and school were built, land was also purchased for a cemetery. Located at 738 McClellan Street, it is the burial site for approximately 1100 Polish-American church members. Most of the people buried here are the early immigrants who were born in Poland and came to America. St. Mary's Cemetery is the resting site for all four of our family members who immigrated to America.



Gravestone for Antoni Pyzanowski, his wife Antonia Halas and their infant daughter Sophia.



Gravestone for Stanislaw Kjeru and his wife Franciszka Sielicki

Our family's gravesites are located near the back section.

