

PROJECT TO DISCOVER
SCHENECTADY **COUNTY'S** EASTERN EUROPEAN ROOTS
NEWSLETTER

January 2020 Vol. 7 No. 1
Our Seventh Year!

Our objective continues to be to discover, document and digitally preserve genealogy, stories and pictures of Schenectady County's Eastern European immigrants.

Please share your family history, help pass on the (electronic) word. The next deadlines are April 1st and July 1st. To submit your family story, pictures, etc., e-mail Phyllis Zych Budka: abudka@nycap.rr.com. Without your stories, there can be no newsletter. To be added to the newsletter e-mail list, contact Phyllis.

The Schenectady Digital History Archive To find our newsletters on-line:
<http://www.schenectadyhistory.org/resources/eer/>

Facebook: Schenectady and Capital District Polish Heritage Facebook Group

Thanks to Brianna Jolie (Guckemus) for starting this Facebook group. It's described as a "closed group" which only means that you can request membership and an "administrator" will give you permission.

Polish Genealogical Society of America (PGSA)

Thanks to William F. Hoffman, PGSA newsletter editor, for printing our Table of Contents and contact information in "Rodziny" the PGSA newsletter. PGSA Home Page is found at <http://pgsa.org/>

Polish Origins –

<https://polishorigins.com/>

Website allows one to enter surnames and places of interest; a good website.

See the Blog from the **PolishOrigins and PGSA Galicia Tour, Sept. 22 – Oct. 3 2019** edited by Phyllis Zych Budka

<https://blog.polishorigins.com/polishorigins-and-pgsa-galicia-tour-sept-22-oct-3-2019/>

Thanks to Bernice Izzo, Carole McCarthy and Martin Byster for help in editing this newsletter!

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The Sykala Family during WWII

As told to Patricia Sykala, Daughter in Law, and Jocelyn Pleines, Patricia's Granddaughter, in 1998 and 2008

Phyllis's Note: I am grateful to friends Patricia and George Sykala for sharing the Sykala family story with us. This is the second article about a family who came to the United States after World War II as "Displaced Persons," or "DPs," a term familiar to many of us with Eastern European roots. Although they are now US citizens and indistinguishable from their native-born neighbors, the early years of our age-mates were quite different. It is important to capture these histories. Please contact me at abudka@nycap.rr.com if you, a family member or friend would like his / her story included in this newsletter.



Fig. 1 Aniela Babula Sykala – Schenectady (date unknown)

Aniela's Story

Aniela Babula Sykala was born in Mielec, Poland, July 30, 1915. When the Germans invaded Poland in 1939, they took the young Polish citizens and shipped them by train to work the farms in Germany to feed Hitler's army. Aniela Babula lived with her family on a farm in the village of Mielec, just outside of Krakow, Poland. When her brother refused to go, the Germans came in the middle of the night and took him out of bed. Aniela had a sister, two half brothers and a half sister also living there with her father and step mother. The other brothers and sisters did not have to go as they took the oldest brother and sister from each family. Aniela went willingly as she did not want to be dragged from her bed.



Fig. 2 "Polish" – Aniela's fabric logo the Nazis required Polish citizens to wear

The Sykala Family during WWII

Her girlfriend also had to go and they were together on the train to Germany and in the detention camp in Germany. They worked on farms near each other so they still saw one another. The farm family treated Aniela well and they fed her just like themselves. She could not talk to her friend when she saw her because the Germans didn't want anyone to escape or give out information.

Aniela lived on the farm of Robert Anks who was an SS soldier. She had some freedom as she would ride a bike to town with the wife of Robert Anks to pick up supplies. Aniela had to cook for the Polish men that the Germans had working the farm. The men, including her brother, would sleep in the village school at night with German guards and they were forced to work the farm during the day.

One day, Aniela got up and Robert Anks and his family were gone. The Americans came and rescued them. The Polish prisoners were sent to live in army barracks in the village of Aschaffenburg. Aniela would see Joseph at church services and in 1945 they married.

Joe's Story

That is how Aniela met Joseph Sykala. Joseph was born on February 21, 1919, in the village of Przosweski near Krakow, Poland. He grew up in the village of Lopuski. He was drafted into the Polish Army National Guard at the age of 17.

Joseph Sykala was only twenty years old and working in a bakery when the war started. At that time, he lived in Jaroslaw, Poland. When the Nazis invaded Poland, all of the Polish soldiers were sent to Germany by train to detention camps. At first, Joe escaped but as soon as he crossed the border, the Nazis caught him. They boarded the prisoners on a train. En route to a camp, the train stopped for twenty four hours and there was a rumor going around that the Nazis were just going to shoot all the prisoners. It never happened. The Germans also starved the men for three days on the way there.

When they got to the camp, the prisoners were fed potato soup that barely had any potatoes in it. The guards generously offered them seconds, and many were so hungry that they took the offer. Joe didn't though because the soup was mostly fat and it was rancid. The next morning, only half of the men woke up. They had been poisoned by the soup.

The detention camp he was at was only for the Polish soldiers. It was a two storey building, an over-crowded hall on each floor. Two hundred men had to live there. One day, two men decided to try to jump. They made it out the window, but were electrocuted as soon as they neared the ground because the wires were so close to the window. Joe told me [Jocelyn Pleines] that the conditions were so awful there that it looked like the ground was moving from the bugs. He was first there in February and the men never got blankets. Finally, the guards told the men that they didn't have enough food to keep them all there. They sent the men to work on farms.

Joe worked on a German farm for two and a half years. The man who owned the farm was away fighting for the Germans. This man's wife and two children were there. Much of the time Joe slept at the camp and was awakened at 3 am to be driven by a soldier to the farm. He often worked until 10 or 11 pm. The farmer's wife was responsible for feeding him. Although he didn't eat as much as he wanted, he ate enough to gain weight again.

The Sykala Family during WWII

Eventually Joe heard that the end [of the war] was coming. He could tell by the way the family was acting. He knew it for sure when he saw the U.S. soldiers coming toward him. The American soldiers soon realized that Joe knew more German than any other non-German in the town. He also knew a little English. They appointed him the informer for the U.S. army. That meant that he found out about what was going on in this town in Germany (criminal acts and such). He gave the U.S. army information so that they could keep law and order in that town. They gave Joe a permit to be allowed to get as much gas as he needed for a motorcycle that he was given by the army to use. The German citizens were told that they had to feed and clothe Joe. He still lived in the barracks at the time.

Shortly after his new bride joined him there. They had to live in the army barracks and ate in the mess hall. There was no romance and no privacy

The Copy of the Document issued by Biskp's Curia for Poles in Germania Frankfurt/W. Schweinheim on the April 8th, 1947. No. 23/45.-

Roman-Cath. Parochial Office
Rz. Katoicki Urząd Parafialny
Wülflecken Kr. Brückenau

DOCUMENT OF MARRIAGE
SWIADECTWO SLUBU



Nr. ~~20000~~ 551/48.

The September 23rd, 1945. in the parochial church at Würzburg.
Data w kościele parafialnym w

are married:
zawarli związek małżeński:

Full name Józef Sykala single, widower,
Imię i nazwisko kawaler, wdowiec.

son Jerzy and Maria Mazur born at Lopuszka-Wielka/POLAND/
syn urodzony w

the February 21st, 1919. religion roman.cath. is living and
dnia religii zamieszkały i

Full name Aniela Babula single, widow,
Imię i nazwisko panna, wdowa.

daughter Andrzej and Katarzyna Piekarski born at Toporów, Distr. Kolbuszowa/POLAND/
córka urodzony w

the July 30th, 1915. religion roman.cath. is living
dnia religii zamieszkała

The marriage has blessed priest Wacław
Małżeństwo pobłogosławił ksiądz

Wülflecken, December 11th, 1945
Data



Comfortable to the original.

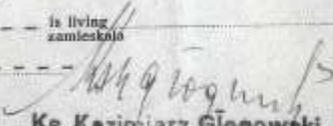

Ks. Kazimierz Glogowski
 Duquenois

Fig. 3 Copy of marriage certificate

The Sykala Family during WWII



Fig. 4 Aniela and Joseph Sykala – September 23, 1945 Wurzburg, Germany

Aniela, Joe and George

The war ended in 1945. Before that, they couldn't write home. Aniela's brother and her girlfriend went back to Poland but Aniela and Joe did not. Joe was working for the Americans because he understood English and helped with the Polish citizens who could not speak it. Aniela's brother wrote to Aniela and told her their family farm was destroyed. The family had to rebuild their home but were now under Communist rule in Poland.

In May of 1947, Joseph and Aniela's son, George, was born. George's name in Polish is Jerzy. He was born in a hospital in Aschaffenburg.

The Sykala Family during WWII



Fig. 5 Jerzy / George Sykala ~ 1947

Joseph still worked for the Americans and Aniela took care of George. In 1949, Joseph, Aniela and George sailed to Louisiana, USA. Joe had to work the sugar cane fields for several months to pay for their passage over on the ship General Henry Taylor in February 1949. They sailed from Bremen, Germany. They lived in a shanty with no bath, no water and no refrigeration. There were beds but not much furniture. There was an outhouse.

Aniela wrote to her sister in Poland and got her mother's sister's address in Schenectady, NY. Aniela's mom had died when she was a baby. Her Aunt's name was Agnes Moskal. Joe and Aniela managed to have her aunt send them money and they traveled by train to Schenectady where her aunt and uncle took them in. They lived there from January 1950 to June 1950. They moved to Bailey Street where she still lives. Joseph died in 2009 and Stephen her second son died in 1998. Aniela will be 100 on July 30, 2015. [Editor: Aniela passed away April 2016.]

Joseph and Aniela always had a big garden on Bailey Street. Aniela worked for the Schenectady School District. They were, and she is still, a communicant of St. Adalbert's Polish Catholic Church. Every month Aniela would send clothes, food and money to her family in Poland. Aniela did go back after the war to visit. By the time she went back, her father and one brother had died.

Aniela received a pension from Germany four times a year because she was considered a forced laborer during the war.

Ewa Gajewski (neé Bartkowska) Part III

Brianna Guckemus (neé Gajewski)

See April 2019 Vol. 6 No. 2 of the newsletter for Part II.

Thanks to this wonderful newsletter I was contacted recently by my Cousin Carol Pechar (neé Gajewski)! She provided me with some invaluable stories about the “Gajewski” family in Schenectady. Carol’s Father Stanley Gajewski Jr. was an older brother of my grandfather Benjamin Gajewski (b. 1917 d. 2007). Carol was thrilled to connect with me and was vigilant in meeting so that she could show me family photos. Most importantly she was able to bring a giant portrait of my great grandfather Stanley Gajewski, along with his wife Ewa Bartkowska and Stanley Jr (See Figure 1.). I have never seen a photo of what they looked like up until now. It warms my heart to be able to have a digital copy



Figure 1. Circa 1911 Stanley Gajewski Sr., Ewa Bartkowska, and their son Stanley Gajewski. Photo credit Carol Pechar.

of the photo and able to add more depth to the story of my Great Grandparents. To finally see a photo of my great grandparents has made the past 8 years of searching worth it. I am forever grateful to Carol and her family for contacting me. I’ve even come to know that I have other cousins around my age in the area where I live and hope that one day, I might get to know them.

Carol also shared with me a photo of a “Gajewski Family” gathering. It is my understanding that my great aunt Blanche DeLuca (neé Gajewski) was the family socialite and driving force behind planning family gatherings. Many events took place at her home 527 Hattie Street, Schenectady. This photo includes all of the brothers and sisters except for my grandfather Benjamin. Sisters Genevieve “Jean” Gajewski (b. 1909 d. 1956), Blanche Gajewski (b. 1912 d.

1984), are shown along with brothers Henry Alexander Gajewski (b. 1914 d. 1990) , and Stanley Gajewski Jr. (b. 1911 d. 1990) There are also several significant others around the table include the DeLuca family (See Figure 2).

The Gajewski family also had a camp at White’s Beach on nearby Ballston Lake. Part of me wonders if the Gajewski’s ever took the train to Forest Park, the amusement park

Ewa Gajewski (neé Bartkowska) Part III

Brianna Guckemus (neé Gajewski)

located on Ballston Lake. This was a popular recreation spot for General Electric (GE) and ALCO families between 1904 and 1927. Forest park was built by the Schenectady Railway Company, which was owned by General Electric at the time (1). By 1908 the park was said to have attracted between 75,000 and 100,000 visitors every season (2)!

Forest Park offered a small steam launch, rowboats, canoes, and a swimming beach. It also had an Inn, a dance pavilion, dining hall, ice cream parlor, a carousel, a toboggan slide, a shooting gallery, a restaurant, ice house and a

baseball diamond(1). Several special events took place at Forest Park including clambakes, picnics, fireworks and “a special trolley run, The Moonlight Special,” which brought people from Schenectady for dancing (3).



Figure 2. The Gajewski's at a Family Gathering.
Photo credit Carol Pechar.



Figure 3. Entrance to Forest Park Ballston Lake

In 1932, White's Beach was established on the northwest bank of Ballston Lake. White sand was hauled in for the beach, they continued to host clamebake sheds, had baseball diamonds, and pony rides. This became a popular spot for Schools to bring their students for picnics (4). Unfortunately, there was poor planning for residences that surrounded Ballston Lake. Sewage drainage from the houses ended up into the lake making it unsuitable for swimming. Like many of the bodies of water in New York State, this continues to be a problem as the levels of phosphorus and fecal coliform are increasing in the lake.

My grandfather Benjamin “Benny” Gajewski was the youngest of his siblings. His mother Ewa Bartkowska passed away due to stomach cancer when he was only three years old in 1920. I cannot imagine having gone through my childhood without my mother.

Ewa Gajewski (neé Bartkowska) Part III
Brianna Guckemus (neé Gajewski)



"On the Beach" at Ballston Lake 1906



Forest Park, Boat Landing, Ballston Lake, N.Y, On Line of Schenectady Rr



Ewa Gajewski (neé Bartkowska) Part III
Brianna Guckemus (neé Gajewski)

End Notes

1. Starr, Timothy (March 4, 2012). "History Lesson: Trolley line was vital to Ballston Spa area commuters". Saratogian.
2. "Forest Park on the line of the Schenectady Railway Company". The Street Railway Journal. XXXI (9): 314. February 29, 1908.
3. Briaddy, Katherine Q. (2004). Around Ballston Lake. Arcadia Publishing. ISBN 9781133960867.
4. Ballston Spa Clerk. Retrieved from <https://www.saratogacountyny.gov/saratoga-county-clerk/the-way-we-were/2762-2/>

PANI KATARZYNA KORNACKA
Part 17- The Fifties
Martin Byster
Descendants of Pani Katarzyna Kornacka
at the
Close of the Nineteen Fifties
(Corrections to the October 2019 Vol. 6 No. 4 Release)

<u>Gertrude and Robert Barry</u>		
SURNAME	FIRST NAME	DOB
Barry	Gertrude	1929
	Robert	1929
	Pamela	1950
	Mark	1951
	Kathleen	1952
	Barbara	1954
	Christopher	1957
	Bridget	1962
	Paula	1963

<u>Pauline and Benjamin Byster</u>		
SURNAME	FIRST NAME	DOB
Byster	Pauline	1912
	Benjamin	1912
	Martin	1941
	Katherine	1949

<u>Joseph and Grace Kornacki</u>		
SURNAME	FIRST NAME	DOB
Kornacki	Joseph	1916
	Grace	unkn
	Paul	1942
	Donald	1950

<u>Genevieve and Donald Reed</u>		
SURNAME	FIRST NAME	DOB
Reed	Genevieve	1922
	Donald	1925
	Donald E.	1952
	Martha A.	1953
	Stephanie B.	1957
	Elizabeth V.	1968
	Richard T.	1960
	David F.	1962

<u>Josephine and Bernard Symanski</u>		
SURNAME	FIRST NAME	DOB
Symanski	Josephine	1919
	Bernard	unkn
	Gregory	1949
	Judith (Jude)	1952

<u>Victoria and Joseph Zakriski</u>		
SURNAME	FIRST NAME	DOB
Zakriski	Victoria	1921
	Joseph	1915
	Cynthia	1944
	Timothy	1951
	Susan	1953
	Christine	1957

TO BE CONTINUED