

R E C E N Z J E I O M Ó W I E N I A

STUDIA POLONIJNE
T. 36. Lublin 2015

American Originals: Northwest Ohio's Polish Community at Home, Work, Worship, and Play, ed. Timothy Borden, Toledo: University of Toledo Press 2014, ss. 258. ISBN: 978-0-615-99400-0.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18290/sp.2015.7>

The late XIX/early XX century *emigracja za chlebem* to the United States settled primarily in the Northeast and industrial Midwest, job-rich areas in an industrializing America. The Great Lakes region attracted many Polish immigrants, primarily to Chicago and Detroit, but smaller cities – Milwaukee, Gary, Cleveland – also garnered their fair share of newcomers. Timothy Borden studies the Polish community of Toledo, Ohio.

The book consists of fourteen chapters: nine narrative and five interviews. The authors were volunteers, contributing the Polish volume to the University of Toledo's series about ethnic groups in northwest Ohio. Volumes on Hungarian, Irish, and Arab Americans have already appeared.

Like other Polish American centers that date from the very earliest phase of the *emigracja za chlebem*, i.e., the 1860s-80s, Toledo Polonia began with emigrants from Prussian-partitioned Poland, who settled near earlier German centers. Toledo Polonia eventually coalesced around two main neighborhoods: "Kuhschwantz" (originally a German area) and "Lagrinka" (a corruption of Lagrange Street). Poles found work in mostly in factories, especially companies supplying parts to America's "Motor City" – Detroit – about 85 km north of Toledo.

Several interviews – Julia Cabanski Mitchell and Mel Robie (Robaskiewicz) – talk about working in the automotive industry. Mitchell discusses working for an automobile electronics manufacturer in the 1930s and Robie about how he made his way through various blue collar jobs into a union position in the United Auto Workers. Both address the significance of trade unionism in their lives and lament its decline within the American economy. David Borden's chapter, "The Salvation of the Poles," discusses labor activism in Toledo in the immediate post-World War I period, focusing on the Willys-Overland strike of 1919, in which Poles participated and, when police intervened, nine Poles – including a six year old girl – were shot.

Borden uses the Willys-Overland strike to introduce another important figure of Toledo Polonia: Antoni Paryski. Born Antoni Panek, he immigrated to the United States where he was an itinerant journalist until he settled in Toledo and launched a "publishing empire," *Ameryka-Echo*. The newspaper, which had subscribers in both the United States and Poland, began in 1889. At its zenith, *Ameryka-Echo* had a daily edition with a circulation of 13,000; the paper was published until 1971. [Paryski's journalism enterprise is

treated at length in Anna Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann's new book, *The Polish Hearst: Ameryka-Echo and the Public Role of the Immigrant Press* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 2015)].

Borden mentions Paryski because the publisher who vigorously defended worker's rights as a younger journalist then used his paper to attack the strikers as "socialist agitators." (He also prevented unionization of his own newspaper). To what degree Paryski sought to curry favor during the post-World War I "Red Scare" is treated more at length in Jaroszyńska-Kirchmann's book (pp. 80-83). Paryski deserves mention because his national newspaper extended its influence far beyond Toledo: his correspondent, Stefan Nesterowicz, did a pioneering series of articles on Poles in the Old Southwest – Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas – published in *Ameryka-Echo* ca 1908. Reprinting that series as a book [*Travel Notes: Visiting Polish Settlements in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas* (Houston: Polish Genealogical Society of Texas 2007)] almost a century later witnesses to its historical value.

Other chapters focus on growing up in Toledo Polonian homes during the 1920s-40s, including the question of how Polish domestic and American local cultures intersected. William Samiec discusses the tradition of *oczepiny* at local Toledo Polish American weddings, a custom that he follows at least through the 1990s. Sarah Miller talks about the role of Catholic schools and nuns in "Americanizing Polish Catholic immigrant children," a process accelerated by the deliberate de-emphasis on Polish instruction at school. This is an area of disagreement with the reviewer: Prof. Miller seems sympathetic to the early twentieth century "Americanization" campaign of the U.S. hierarchy, which involved the collaboration of sisters in carrying it out. The reviewer wonders whether either bishops or teachers today would dare engage in such a de-culturalization project except, perhaps, one involving European ethnics, their schools, and what is left of their parishes.

One chapter deals with the journey of an *emigracja polityczna* woman from Siberia to Toledo. Another deals with the long tradition of local polka music and polka bands in Toledo. Finally, there is one chapter by and one about Marcy Kaptur, the Polish-American Democrat who has represented Toledo in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1983, one of the most senior members of the House.

The book is supplemented by numerous black and white photographs.

Borden admits that the topics treated in the book are, in some sense, *ad hoc* but he deems that not so much a problem as a challenge: "I encourage readers who are disappointed that there is no mention of Stanley's Market, Mayor Ollie Czelusta, or the Circle 8 Club to dig deep, do the research, and get to writing the next volume of our region's Polish Americans" (p. 2). Like many other urban American Polonias, Toledo's inner city Polish American community has shrunken and aged. But this book fills a need of beginning to document the Polish history of this large down on the doorstep of Detroit. It is a worthy start but, as Borden admits, there is still more to do. Hopefully, others will take up the gauntlet.

John M. Grondelski
Shanghai, China
e-mail: grondelski@op.pl