

POLISH COMMUNITY IN THE UTICA AREA

A joint research project of JU and Utica College

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Utica College, located in Utica, a small city in the central region of New York State, has been a partner of the Jagiellonian University for many years. The most important activity within this partnership is a faculty exchange programme that hosts Polish scholars at Utica College and American scholars at the Jagiellonian University, usually for a semester. It is possible thanks to a donation made to Utica College by Joseph Furgal, a member of the local Polish community and a Utica College alumnus. Mr Furgal donated money to provide scholarships for students, to provide Utica College with audio-visual equipment like cameras and tape recorders. He contributed to the Utica College Library's collection with materials relating to Poles and Polish Americans' history and culture. Finally, he donated \$117,000 to establish an exchange programme for professors. From the time of the programme's inception until 2015, Utica College hosted eight Polish scholars, including specialists in sociology, anthropology and chemistry. The Jagiellonian University hosted American professors of Utica College's Departments of Government and Politics, Sociology and Anthropology, Biology, Public Relations and Journalism, History and English.

In the fall of 2014, Dr Paulina Niechciał, a sociologist and anthropologist from the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations of the Jagiellonian University was hosted by the Department of Sociology and Anthropology of Utica College, where she was teaching classes on sociology and Iranian culture. Surprisingly for her, the Utica area appeared to be full of people of Polish descent, starting from her neighbors and students and ending with people met in groceries or the post-office. The local Polish Americans turned out to be very open and hospitable, interested in news from Kraków. They invited her to join such activities as the annual White Eagle Fall Ball, Polish Christmas Eve or Polish Veteran's Christmas Party. As Dr Niechciał's previous work was centered on religious and ethnic minorities, the idea of a research project on the local Polish community was born.

From the beginning the idea was supported by the chair of the Department of Sociology and Anthropology Department at Utica College, Professor of sociology Jan DeAmicis as well as John Johnsen, a professor of cultural anthropology who at that time was the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences and currently is the Provost of Utica College. Both Dr DeAmicis and Dr Johnsen had the experience of teaching at the Jagiellonian University within the exchange programme. Of the faculty of



Utica College in 2016

Utica College, Dr Jessica Singer Brown, a sociologist from the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, has been involved in shaping the idea of the project. Dr Singer Brown's previous research focused on family ties and social support, which drew her interest to this project. In addition, her family is from Poland, having immigrated in the early twentieth century. Finally, when the new Dean of International Education Christopher Johnson, visited Kraków in September 2015, he also supported the research project, and finally the field research began in July 2016.



*J. Singer Brown, P. Niechciał and J. DeAmicis,
Utica College Convocation 2014*

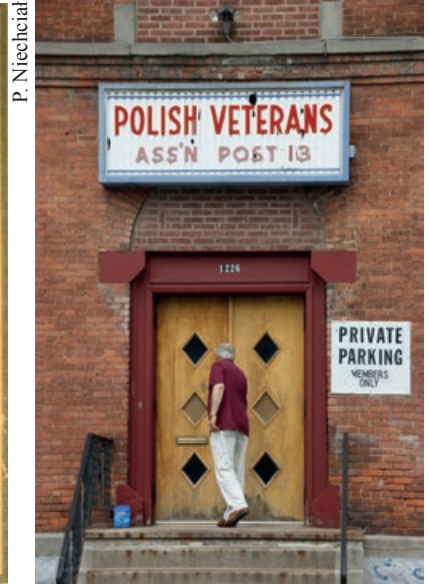
Why do so many Polish Americans live in the Utica area? Their history has been examined profoundly by two scholars of Polish descent coming from the area: James S. Pula, President of the Polish American Historical Association and editor of 'Polish American Studies: A Journal of Polish American History and Culture,' recently a professor at Purdue University North

Central in Indiana, and Eugene E. Dziedzic, an educator, author and activist who passed away three years ago. Their research shows that some of the Americans of Polish background are descendants of those Poles who came to Central New York State almost one and a half of century ago – the first families came here around 1870. They found employment in the local textile mills and manufacturing plants or opened their own small businesses, for instance shops or bakeries. The migration slowed in the 1920s due to the immigration legislation implemented at that time which restricted immigration from certain countries, but rose again due to the larger number of refugees of World War II and veterans of the Polish Armed Forces in Exile, who did not wish to go back to the communist post-war Poland. Within the next few decades Poles were coming to this area for both political and economic reasons. By 1990, the Polish Americans comprised one of the largest ethnic groups in Oneida County.

One central component of community life for the first immigrants to the US was the Church. In 1896, the first Mass was celebrated in the new Holy Trinity Church in Utica. At the beginning of the 20th century, new parishes were established, including St. Stanislaus, Bishop and Martyr in East Utica and St. Mary Our Lady of Czestochowa in the nearby New York Mills. The Holy Cross Parish of the Polish National Catholic Church was also opened – this Church was founded at the end of the 19th century by the Roman Catholic Polish immigrants in the USA who were dissatisfied by the domination of local Catholic churches by Irish and German religious hierarchs and with the discrimination of the Polish language in parish schools. In the course of time, various clubs and associations for Polish Americans were opened in the area, including the Polish House (1910), the Polonia Community Club (1938), choirs, ‘nests’ of the Polish Falcons, posts of the Polish Veterans, the General Casimir Pulaski Memorial Association, the White Eagle Association (1950), the Kopernik Memorial Association of Central New York (1972), the Mohawk Valley Supporters of Polish Solidarity and others. Moreover, the Polish language media, such as newspapers and radio programmes, were established.



Polish migrants in Utica, old picture, collected during the field work in 2016



Polish Veterans Post in Utica

Three of the aforementioned churches continue to operate in the area – Holy Trinity in Utica, Our Lady of Czestochowa and Holy Cross in New York Mills, and some of the Masses are celebrated in Polish. The language is kept alive mainly by those who came to Utica during the last few decades, but some among the oldest generation of Polish Americans remember Polish, although almost no one speaks it on an everyday basis. Young people leave this area in search of education and work, but still a couple of Polish associations and clubs operate there. Polish food may be purchased in shops, such as the Pulaski Meat Market or Hapanowicz Market, as well as tasted on Thursday and Friday evenings at the Polish Community Club.

The current project explores how different groups of Polish immigrants and their descendants express their Polish identity. It also examines the structure and dynamics of the local Polish community. Through the collection of life stories of members of the local Polish community, we hope to investigate how identity, religion, food and other cultural norms and values are interpreted, expressed and transmitted across generations.



A. Pyrda, President of the Polish Community Club in Utica



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