

Poles in New Hampshire

Century of Immigration to America (1820-1924)

- Most Poles from one of the three European empires: the German, the Austro-Hungarian, and the Russian
- Brought a relatively strong sense of national consciousness, because, before partitioned, Poland had a long history as an independent nation
- 1870 - Polish population in America probably less than 30,000
- About 90% of Poles to America after 1850 to the cities where work more readily available
- 1900 – hundreds of thousands Polish Americans
- Total ethnic Polish immigrants: 2 to 2.5 million of whom perhaps 1/3 returned to Poland
- Many ethnic organizations formed; and most Poles joined at least one
- Two largest organizations: the Polish National Alliance (founded 1880 to further Poland's independence) and the Polish Roman Catholic Union (founded 1873 to discourage Americanization in any form)

Polish Immigrants

- First Poles to Nashua in the 1890s; mostly impoverished peasants from the Russian Empire; mostly young men who came alone or in groups to work in textile mills and paper factories
- Older Polish immigrants helped newer ones, renting rooms and serving as translators
- Most could read and write but no specialized learning or job training so had to start at the bottom of the job ladder in mills or other industries
- Big adjustment for folks used to working outside all day
- Getting promoted difficult, because most Poles to United States when many native Americans and earlier immigrants worried that their jobs and neighborhoods would be taken over by new immigrants
- All family members pitched in: teenage sons joined fathers at work and daughters to the factory or domestic servants; married women grew food, raised livestock, ran laundry or dressmaking businesses, took in boarders

- By 1936, Poles approximately 3% of Nashua's population; many owned homes; some ran successful businesses

Polish Catholic Church

- An important role in protecting Polish culture, preserving Polish identity
- Polish spoken during religious ceremonies; traditional ways of celebration kept alive
- Polish clergy and laity joined against the American Church hierarchy, which was mostly Irish and wanted to Americanize all Catholic churches
- By 1908, 500 Poles in Nashua; bishop's permission for Polish parish of St. Stanislaus
- Parish both social and religious center; priest the leader; church helped transition to America
- In 5 years, Jan Sobieski III Organization raised enough money for church, school, and land for cemetery
- Other mutual aid groups for Poles in Nashua: a cooperative business venture, a chapter of the Polish National Alliance (1911), the Polish -American Citizens Club (1921), St. Joseph's Society of the Polish Roman Catholic Union
- These groups often cultural and political groups as well as insurance companies

Education

- Education a luxury and most Polish not in school beyond the age of 10
- Poles in America supported parochial schools; most Polish Americans' children attended them
- Polish language taught
- Polish children in public school teased about clothes, accents, and names by *teachers* as well as other children
- By the 1920s, Polish graduates of Nashua High School into trades and professions as teachers, nurses, engineers, machinists, and many other occupations

FYI

- Poland not a separate nation between 1795 and 1919
- A new Poland created after World War I
- Polish communities outside of Poland collectively known as Polonia
- Today 8 million people in the United States claim Polish ancestry; one of the nation's largest ethnic groups
- Polish immigrants and descendants nearly 5% of New Hampshire's population

Early History of Poles in America

- A few Poles to colonial America, to the first colony of Jamestown and to Pennsylvania
- About a hundred Poles to fight with colonies during American Revolution; two best known were Count Casimir Pulaski (1748-79), killed during the Battle of Savannah, and Tadeusz Kosciuszko (1746-1817), a military engineer

History of Poles in New Hampshire Communities

- Poles present in Manchester in latter decades of 19th century; established a number of fraternal, political and religious organizations in addition to two Roman Catholic parishes
- By 1910, 30 Poles in Claremont; most from the Russian Empire; in 1912, Tadeusz Kosciuszko Society formed; funds collected to establish Roman Catholic parish; St. Joseph's Church first used in 1921; also own St. Mary's Cemetery
- Poles in small towns such as Newmarket, Dover and Franklin and in many communities along the Connecticut River in western New Hampshire

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