

Subject: Early Polish Life in Newark

Source: Interview with Mr. Rucki, 60 Pulaski street, Newark, N.J.

Many Poles worked in Balbach's Refinery and Smelting Works and in the Public Service Gas Company. Foundaries, hat factories, tailoring concerns, shoe companies, and tanneries employed them. The respondent himself worked for Freed's tailor shop and for the Johnson and Murphy Shoe Company. The Poles worked in the first Union hat shop, The Whitehouse Hat Factory on Union and Market streets. A Pole by the name of Boczar had a tailor shop on Bergen and ~~111~~15th Avenue.

One of the early unions was the Tanner's Association at 28 South Orange avenue. The hall was bought from Umbach about 1900. Many of its officers and members were Poles.

The Poles were principally Roman Catholic. If they had a dollar to give they gave it to the church. They didn't have the processions and showy displays that the Italian people had on Saints' days. Weddings were the most celebrated events in the church, and the respondent says there were plenty of them, sometimes ten or twelve on Sunday. It used to be the custom of the bride to go from door to door to invite neighbors to her wedding. To the prospective guest, ~~he~~ she would first bow daintily and then invite him or her to be at the affair. It was common for owners of saloons with dance-halls to give the use of the hall free to couples about to be married. This was a means of attracting business.

John the Baptist used to be the day when the Poles used to go to a lake to go swimming. This day inaugurated the beginning of the season that it was supposed to be safe to go in swimming.

In the old days many funerals would be kept off to Sunday on which day they would have a band at the cemetery. If the deceased

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~~WEREWERE~~was a member of a society, all the members of his organization had to be there. If they were absent, they were fined. This applied to those who might be living in the Ironbound district and had to be present at St. Stanislaus church on Belmont avenue. It was not customary for the Poles to encircle the house of the deceased before the burial. They went straight from the church to the cemetery. The burial ground for the old Polish residents was the Holy Sepulchre cemetery.

The Poles for recreation held dances and conducted dramatics. Those affairs demonstrated their great love of music. The dramatics were conducted by the Lutnia and Graza Woslce dramatic clubs. They had many of their shows at Krueger's auditorium. Caledonia Park and Seifitz Park were the popular places for Polish affairs. Seifitz Park on the corner of Morris and Springfield Avenues was probably the most commonly used because it was least expensive to rent.

The first Poles came from Prussia and many were political refugees. Many had served by compulsion in the German army and were eager to live in a land which had more freedom. They would come here alone, get a job, and then send for members of their family.

In the late 90's and the early 1900's there were more Polish men than Polish women in Newark. Men were in demand by the women who worked as servants in the wealthy homes. The Polish girls would seek their men in the saloon dance-halls. They would meet a likeable young man whom they would call a "greenie". They would go as far as to propose marriage to the man whom they thought ~~was~~ was the "one." Very often if the marriage was arranged, the girl would entrust her savings to her future husband. It was not unusual that the "one" would vanish with the money a few days before the marriage ceremony. The respondent told

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about one young man who had a servant~~x~~girl's savings in his pocket and was just about to have the marriage ceremony performed when he asked to be excused for a few minutes to get cigarettes. "He never showed up again and the girl is probably still waiting," said the respondent.

In the early days both the husband and the wife worked. Sometimes it was only the wife. Some of the young Polish men had an inclination to loaf and to let the wife assume all the responsibilities of making a living and paying expenses. It was not uncommon for a woman to use all her savings for the purchase of furniture for the establishment of a home. Many Polish young men and young women remained in poverty by keeping up their family duties of supporting members of their families living in Poland.

There was no padrone system among the Poles in Newark. However, the jobs they had were hard ones and required long hours. The weekly pay ranged from four dollars and fifty cents a week to seven dollars a week.

Poles in the early days lived in crowded boarding houses which were the tenements of those days. Bad as tenements are today, these were worse. The houses had no gas, no electric, and no running water. All lightening was with kerosene lamps. All the toilets were outside of the buildings, and there was no modern system of sewerage disposal. Streets were unpaved. ~~xxxxxx~~

Ten or twelve families usually had the use of only one water pump sunk into a well. When running water was installed in some streets, a faucet took the place of the pump. In the winter straw and cloth

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were put on and around the faucet to keep it from freezing. This protection was ineffective in extreme cold weather. Rain-water tanks stood in ~~a~~ rows alongside the rear of the dilapidated boarding house buildings. The rainwater was used by the lay of the house for washing clothes. The supply was not always adequate. The only bathing facilities were pitchers of cold water and a long galvanized wash tubs for the weekly bath.

The respondent whose family was poor said that in addition to his father and mother, four boarders were kept. They only had three rooms for these seven people. The respondent says he remembers one boarding house which consisted of only three rooms and which housed twenty-three people. One-half of the boarders worked nights and the other half days. The men of the night shift occupied the beds in the day-time which the men in the ~~night~~ day shift slept on. Many houses originally designed to house only one family, housed five families. In order to make use of as much room as possible, the wooden frame of beds were hinged to the walls. Such beds had mattresses of straw and a few cheap blankets. ~~The beds were put down only when a boarder arrived home to go to sleep.~~ The beds were put down only when a boarder arrived home to go to sleep.

The burden of taking care of the boarders fell on the woman of the house who washed their clothes and cooked their meals. Each boarder had a grocery book of order slips. Each day he would put in an order for the food he wanted for dinner. Each day such women could be seen tramping to the nearest storekeeper with a pile of these books and returning with ~~the~~ food. The food was divided into the portions ordered by the boarders. Strings or paper tags with names were attached to portions which were later cooked. The strings or the tags identified

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the portion of each boarder. On pay-day each boarder paid the accumulated amount of the slips to the storekeeper.

Because of the absence of sanitary conditions in Polish sections, they had a high mortality rate. This was especially true among the children. In the early 1900's, the respondent, who is an undertaker, declared that he use to bury on an average of fifteen Polish children a week. Today he seldom buries more than one Polish child a week. In this period in the development of Newark industry immigrants were coming over in here in droves and no effort was made improve ^{their} ~~an~~ ugly surroundings and new homes, which should have been provided for them were never built.

Poverty was so widespread ~~among the~~ among the early poles that they had to send their children to work at the early ages of fourteen and fifteen in order ~~to~~ to help support the family. If the Poles had been better off, they would have preffered to have their children better educated. Despite their hard struggles many Poles managed to save enough money through their Building and Loan association to ~~establish~~ buy homes in suburban areas. Many of them live as well and in as much style ~~as~~ as native Americans.