

Basilica Tour is Highlight of Polish Heritage Month

By Richard Panek

In observance of October as Polish Heritage Month, the PHS will be sponsoring a tour of the Basilica of St. Adalbert, 654 Davis Ave NW, Grand Rapids, 49504 on Sunday, October 22, at 1:00 pm. This historical 1-hour tour will be led by Father Tom Simons.

St. Adalbert Basilica was the first church to be solemnly dedicated to this rank in the State of Michigan, and one of the very few in the United States at the time. St. Adalbert was raised to this honor on the occasion of the centennial of the parish in grand ceremonies on February 16, 1980.

Construction of the church was possible because of the faithful and generous Polish immigrant community. The cornerstone was laid in 1907. St. Adalbert's became a "Minor Basilica" in 1980 when Pope John Paul II conferred this honorific title, due to the significant role the

church played in the furthering of the Catholic Faith in Grand Rapids.

Early Polish immigrants founded the Saint Adalbert Aid Society in 1872. At that time the purpose of the fraternal aid societies that sprang up in the primarily ethnic areas of the city, was to assist new immigrants in settling in the area, finding housing, and employment.

With the help of the Saint Adalbert Aid Society, and on the initiative of the many Polish people of this area, two lots were purchased in 1880 at the corner of Fourth Street and Davis Avenue, NW, and in June of 1881 construction of a small wooden church was begun. Thus, St. Adalbert Parish was soon established.

In 1891 the original church was enlarged to accommodate the ever-growing Polish population. In 1892, the Society constructed a large meeting hall for the St. Adalbert's Aid Society. This hall remains in use by the Society and its members today on 5th Street near the Basilica.

In early July of 1907, work began on the present church building. The cornerstone was laid on August 18, 1907, and the building was completed in late spring of 1913 for a total cost of about \$150,000, including all furnishings. The original wooden church structure was moved on horse-drawn wagons to Belmont Michigan to



The Basilica of Saint Adalbert in Grand Rapids, MI

become the parish church of The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The old St. Adalbert Church was used until the late 1980's when a new church was constructed in Belmont.

Basilicas in the Catholic Church are church buildings that have received a special designation by the Pope. BASILICA comes from the Greek meaning "royal" or "regal" or "house fit for a king."

A basilica church is usually of Romanesque style, with the altar set before a rounded wall called the Apse. Over the

altar is a raised Baldachino, or canopy, resting on four pillars. In order to obtain the honorific title of "Minor Basilica," the parish church must have played a significant role in the furthering of the Faith of a particular area.

There are only 4 "Major Basilicas" in the world, all located in Rome. Currently, there are 91 Minor Basilicas in the United States

Following the tour, The PHS General Membership Meeting will take place in the lower level of the church. Light refreshments and snacks will be provided.



Interior view of the Basilica of Saint Adalbert

**Polish Heritage Society
of Grand Rapids**

**PO Box 1844
Grand Rapids MI
49501-1844**

<https://polishheritagesociety.com>

Email us at phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

The Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids promotes Polish/Lithuanian culture in the metro Grand Rapids. The Society meets on the 3rd Monday of every month except for December and general meetings in June and October. The society publishes this newsletter monthly. We invite story ideas and content contributions. For more information, please contact Matthew Gryczan, Richard Panek or Marilyn Lignell by writing to phsgrandrapids@gmail.com.

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PHS Membership News



By Marilyn Lignell

The Polish Heritage Society mourns the loss of life member Chara Potyraj who died August 8, 2023. Chara was preceded in death by her husband and life member Edward Potyraj.

The Potyraj's participated in many of the PHS events and volunteered, and donated yearly at the Polish Dozynki Festival. Ed and Chara were always a light and pleasure to be around at PHS events. They will be greatly missed.

A card of gratitude was received by the PHS from Nick Klak a PHS scholarship winner. He graduated

Cum Laude from Aquinas College. He has started a job at Bissel in Grand Rapids as a Senior Brand Coordinator in their Global Marketing Department. Congratulations Nick!!



Nick Klak

In October, we celebrate Polish American Heritage Month in the United States. We have so much gratitude and respect for our courageous trail blazing

ancestors who sought opportunities in a new land. Polish Americans can be rightfully proud of our ancestor's numerous contributions to America's growth, prosperity and ingenuity.

We all have some memory of our parents, grandparents and if lucky enough like me, even great-grandparents. For me, the memories are raspberry Kool aid, vanilla wafers, Pine-sol and a language spoken that I could not understand but was so enamored by the way it flowed out of their mouths with no hesitation. I wasn't fortunate enough to pick up on most of it (probably by design) but I can still hear it in my head.

Below is a story written by member Mary Ann Bergevin's daughter, Susan Stone. The piece is titled "Cabbage". I think it is a heartfelt piece that can take us all to a memory of our own heritage.

Cabbage

By Susan Stone

I used to be able to smell grandma's house walking up the back steps to her covered porch. The house always smelled the same, like cooked cabbage, even though she now only made golumpki for holidays.

Christmas night was our annual celebration with the Zechlinski family. We would have already been to a Christmas celebration for my dad's side of the family where I loaded up on

mashed potatoes, turkey and gravy. But now it was time for the Polish dinner which included thick sliced ham, bright red beets with horseradish, cheesy potatoes and grandma's beloved golumpki.

She must have worked hours preparing so many of the delicately stuffed cabbage rolls. I know from my own attempts that getting the cabbage to just the right pliability takes a lot of practice.

When the gently cooked leaves are ready to be stuffed with the ground beef, sauteed onion and white rice, it takes time to find just the right-sized leaf for the spoonful of stuffing. Once rolled, they lay in a

pool of rich tomato sauce ready for the oven.

Though my grandma always used Campbell's tomato soup, I try to be fancy and make a



Golumpki (Continued on page 5)

Polish Heritage Society 2023 Wigilia Dinner Coming Up December 9th.

By Matthew Gryczan

More than 100 years ago in Grand Rapids nearly every family of Polish immigrants – no matter their station in life or wealth -- celebrated the centuries old tradition of Wigilia, the Christmas Eve vigil supper that included the singing of carols and sharing of the Oplatek wafers.

As the children and grandchildren of the original immigrants became more Americanized, the sharing of the meatless meals at Christmas Eve in West Michigan declined to the point that many aren't even aware it exists.

"But Wigilia is a beautiful tradition worth observing to keep connected with your Polish roots," said Marilyn Lignell, who has helped organize the Polish Heritage Society's Wigilia dinner for more than 15 years. "Some people put a lot of effort into making Christmas Eve fabulous and warm because they believe that it bodes for how the whole rest of the year will go."

One barrier to more people observing Wigilia is its unusual menu, another is unfamiliarity with the traditions themselves, Lignell said. A simple search on the internet goes a long way to solve the latter, but the former takes some effort.

"Frankly, that's why the PHS puts on Wigilia dinner," she said. "We don't hold it on Christmas Eve because everyone wants to spend that day at home. But we do offer an authentic meal and koledy -- a sing-along of Polish carols -- so people can get a taste of the real deal.

"We even have a motto: Enjoy the tradition of Wigilia -- without the work!" This year's Wigilia dinner will be held Dec. 9 at the West Leonard Banquet Facility, 1140 Muskegon Ave NW, which formerly was the Knights of Columbus, Council 3104, hall. (See reverse side for ordering tickets.)

It's understandable that future generations of original Polish immigrants in Grand Rapids fell away from celebrating Wigilia. The event calls for a lot of preparation and some of the traditional menu items were either hard to find or unfamiliar to the palate.



Sharing Oplatek at the traditional Christmas Eve Dinner, "Wigilia."

Traditional Wigilia calls for a 12-course feast to represent the 12 apostles of Jesus and the original menu featured carp as the main dish. Although considered an undesirable species for consumption in North America, carp has long been prized as a gamefish in European and other countries.

Prior to widespread use of refrigeration, Grand Rapids families literally would go to local markets to buy their carp prior to Christmas Eve and have them live in their bathtubs for a couple of days. Grandmothers would say that this was also a way of assuring the fish was

living in clean water before it was prepared. The practice continues in some parts of Poland, but it is rapidly falling out of favor. As an aside, the scales of the Wigilia carp were carried in wallets as a good luck charm.

Even the first traditional dinner held by the then Polish Arts Society of Grand Rapids on Dec. 29, 1966 at the Guest House, strayed quite a bit from a traditional Wigilia. It served golabki and kielbasa, instead of fish. "Then we would all watch for the first star, the Gwiazdka, to appear in the sky, to signal the start of dinner."

In the PHS version of Wigilia, the meal features a seven-course traditional dinner, sharing of the oplatek, a program that explains Polish traditions at Christmastime, and a sung Polish koledy.

"It's much more than a meal," Lignell said. "It's an event that pleases all of the senses -- the tastes and smells of great dishes, the sound of Polish caroling, sight of table decorations and ornaments, -- and the feel of friendship."

Even with rising costs on everything from food to place settings this year, the PHS has kept the price per person to an

affordable \$40 -- which is a bargain for a seven-course meal, venue, music and program.

Those who wish to attend must buy tickets by Nov. 18 so that the caterer can cook the appropriate amount of food and the hall can be set properly, Lignell said. Patrons should fill out the form on the back of this page and pay either by check or Paypal on the PHS website.

Laurie Sipka, manager of the West Leonard Banquet Facility, said the venue was pleased to host the PHS Wigilia again this year and help support the event. The hall was recently renovated and redecorated to host everything from wedding receptions and rehearsal dinners to birthday parties and funeral lunches.

The event starts with a social hour from 5 to 6 p.m., followed by a sharing of Christmas wafer, or oplatek, then a meatless meal with fish, rounded off with koledy, a sing-along of Polish carols led by vocalist Jarek Kozal and musician Nick Palmer. During the Wigilia dinner, Lignell and others will give talks on the customs of Wigilia.

You are also invited to join the Wigilia Committee for a crafting session to create the 2023 Wigilia Dinner ornaments. Each year, a unique handmade ornament is given to guests as a favor.

We will be making 75-100 ornaments. November 18th, 10 am -- 2 pm, at the Panek's home -- 6620 Knockadoon Dr., Rockford 49341. Brunch will be served. Please reply to Mary at marypanek@gmail.com or 616.550.4113.

Polish Heritage Society's Annual Wigilia Dinner and Program

Saturday, December 9, 2023

West Leonard Banquet Facility/1140 Muskegon NW

Oplatek

Marbled and Traditional Rye Bread with Whipped Butters

Cream Herring with Lemon and Pickled Turnips

Barley and Wild Mushroom Vegetable Soup

Potato Dumplings with Sour Cream and Fried Cabbage

Haddock Filet Baked with Cucumber Aioli and Panko Crumbs

Roasted Golden Beet Salad

Authentic Polish Desserts

Wine served with fish course

Social Hour 5:00-6:00PM/Dinner and Program at 6:00PM

Polish Koledy: Featuring Jarek Kozal and Nick Palmer

\$40.00 per person-prepaid: Checks payable to Polish Heritage Society

******Reservation deadline November 18, 2023******

Send to PHS-c/o Marilyn Lignell Phone: 616-443-3773

2858 W Sandrel CT NE

Grand Rapids, MI 49505

Name _____

Phone # _____

of tickets @\$40.00 _____

Amount enclosed _____

I would like to be seated with _____

Email: _____

(Cabbage continued from page 2)

homemade creation with canned crushed tomatoes and a dash of vinegar and sugar.

I have made many mistakes with my trials of this traditional Eastern European dish. The cabbage has been undercooked, the meat has been undercooked and even the rice has been undercooked.

I can still remember the time my effort came out as I had dreamed. The rolls were perfect and simmering in the sauce that had a beautifully thick consistency. Each roll a uniform size and the edges slightly browned.

As I cut them open, a fragrant waft of steam floated in the air greeting my nose and warming up my tastebuds. The flavorful beef pulled apart gently and soaked up the right amount of sauce.

If only I had remembered to

put the dish in the refrigerator that night, perhaps I could have had several more meals. Live and learn.

I often wonder how many times grandma had to run through the recipe to get it right.

My mother also made the classic Polish meal. Though, it was not necessarily saved for a special occasion and I would often smell the cabbage coming home from school on a regular Tuesday afternoon.

She served golumpki with soft boiled potatoes. I used to mash them with a fork and put extra tomato sauce all over them with a dash of salt. She did a great job cooking the cabbage. Even though it was wrapped around the meat, I could tell the end of the leaf from the vein. The end was so well cooked that it melted in your mouth like pasta. The leaf vein was also cooked to perfec-

tion and did not need to be cut around to be consumed.

In the fall of 2019, I was fortunate to be able to visit the old country with my mom and three of my aunts. A full 10 days of golumpki! And to my surprise, it was not always made from supermarket beef and red sauce. It had been transformed from a daily working man's meal to one served in the finest restaurants of trendy Krakow.

I had golumpki with seasoned pork instead of beef, hearty buckwheat instead of rice, with creamy mushroom sauce, and even with decadent truffle sauce. It was often served with pillowy pierogies covered with caramelized onion or fluffy mashed potatoes loaded with butter.

Every restaurant had their own recipe, and probably had their own grandma in the back cooking. Each establishment also

had the familiar smell of grandma's house.

No matter where I ate the golumpkis were served with love and pride on a plate that usually looked like it had been hand-painted. And in traditional Polish restaurants, you often had doilies as your tablecloth. It was like Christmas at grandma's all over again.

Over the years I had met others from Eastern Europe. We have a family friend who came from Serbia. They have a similar flavorful variation, except the cabbage is pickled and is essentially sauerkraut.

My Russian friends have a version that uses Savoy cabbage and mixes sour cream into the sauce. The German's also have a rendition with chopped cabbage that is engulfed in a strudel casing. My friends from these countries have similar stories of foods that elders made for special occasions.

These homeland meals were the heart of the family gathering and have endured generations, new languages and new food sources.

Golumpki was part of our family for decades and it left a legacy in the cabbage odor of grandma's house. So many gatherings, stories, laughs and celebrations happened while dishing the hearty, warm meal on our plates.

Grandma's house was purchased by the neighboring veterinarian clinic a few years ago after she passed. We wondered whether it would be used to house animals or as a parking lot. The parking lot prevailed. Somehow, I think over the asphalt you might still be able to smell the cabbage.



Preparing Cabbage leaves for stuffing



Join the Polish Heritage Society to receive our monthly newsletter and other benefits!

Annual Student Membership for full-time students through college \$5

Annual Adult Membership \$20

Annual Family or Business Membership \$35

Lifetime Membership \$150

ONLINE

You can join the Polish Heritage Society online by going to our website at <https://polishheritagesociety.com/>, filling out the Membership form and paying by using the PayPal Button.

MAIL

Fill out this form and send a personal check made out to the Polish Heritage Society to this address:

Polish Heritage Society of Grand Rapids

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