

A short history of Kashubs in the United States

Kashubs are a Western Slavic nation, who inhabited the coastline of the Baltic Sea between the Oder and Vistula rivers. Germanization or Polonization were heavy through the 20th century, depending on whether the Kingdom of Prussia or the Republic of Poland governed the specific territory. In 1919, the Kashubian-populated German province of West Prussia passed to Polish control and became the Polish Corridor.

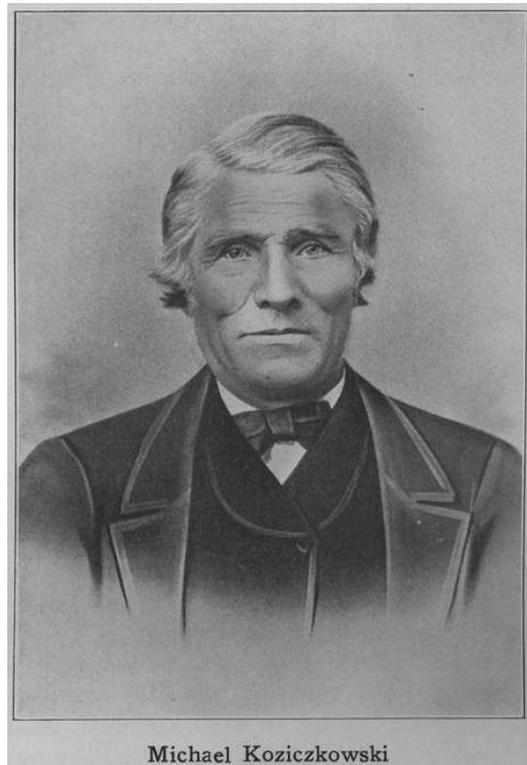
The bulk of Kashubian immigrants arrived in the United States between 1840 and 1900, the first wave from the highlands around Konitz/Chojnice, then the Baltic coastline west of Danzig/Gdansk, and finally the forest/agricultural lands around and south of Neustadt/Wejherowo.

Early Kashubs settled on the American frontier in Michigan (Parisville and Posen), Wisconsin (Portage and Trempealeau counties), and Minnesota (Winona). Fishermen settled on Jones Island along Lake Michigan in Milwaukee after the U.S. Civil War. Until the end of the 19th century, various railroad companies recruited newcomers to buy cheap farmland or populate towns in the West. This resulted in settlements in western Minnesota, South Dakota, Missouri, and central Nebraska. With the rise of industrialization in the Midwest, Kashubs and natives of Posen/Poznan took the hot and heavy foundry, factory, and steel mill jobs in cities like Chicago, Detroit, and Pittsburgh. In 1900, the number of Kashubs in the United States was estimated at around 100,000.

The Kashubs did not establish a permanent immigrant identity because larger communities of Germans and Poles outnumbered them. Many early parishes had Kashubian priests and parishioners, but by 1900, their members were predominantly Polish. Kashubs found that Polish immigrants who settled near them viewed them as unlettered, factious, pious peasants who did not speak Polish properly. To avoid the stigma of being Kashubs, some continued to identify themselves as German because they spoke some German, while others began to call themselves German Poles or simply Poles, especially when dealing with their American neighbors.

Although many were farmers and factory laborers, we find notable pioneers, thinkers, and clergy among 19th century Kashubs in the United States.

Michal von Kozickowski (1811-81), born Kositzkau/Kozickowo near Karthaus/Kartuzy, to U.S. 1857. He and his family were the first Kashubs to scout northeastern Portage County and adjacent Marathon County in Wisconsin for acceptable wooded farmland. A park in Stevens Point, Wisconsin memorializes his name.



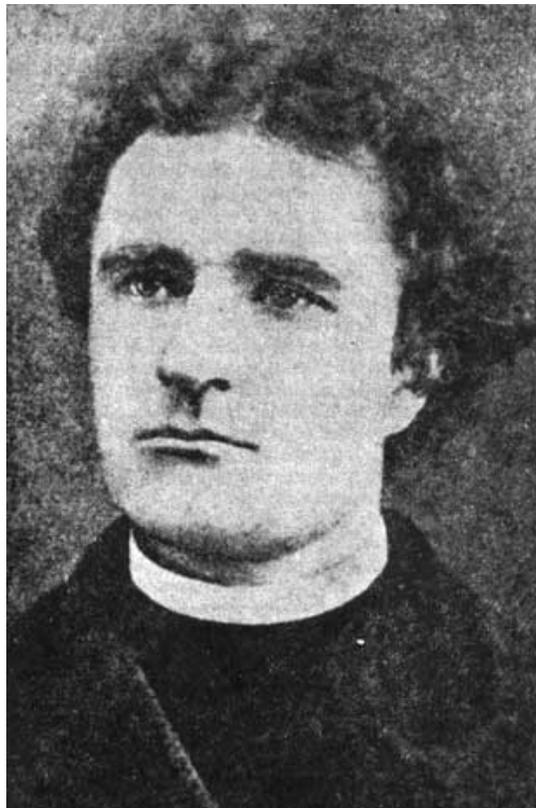
Source: http://image2.findagrave.com/photos/2007/87/18678254_117522803669.jpg

***Hieronim Derdowski** (1852-1902), poet, journalist, political activist; born Wielle/Wiele, to U.S. 1885. Opposing Germanization, he considered Kashubian a Polish dialect, sought to preserve Kashubian culture within a Polish framework, identified Kashubian political future with Polish fortunes. An intellectual voice among Kashubian immigrants in the Midwest, his emotional rhetoric invigorated newspapers published in Detroit, Chicago, and Winona.*



Source: Collections of the Museum of Kashubian-Pomeranian Music and Literature in Wejherowie

Antoni Klawiter (1836-1913), born Chojnice, to U.S. 1873. Roman Catholic, Polish National Catholic, and independent priest, founded or pastored Polish parishes in Pittsburgh 1873, Farwell, Nebraska 1878, St. Louis 1878, Buffalo 1886, Newark, New Jersey 1891, and Meriden, Connecticut 1892. Last RC pastorate was in Winona, Minnesota (1893-94). Thereafter, PNC or independent in Buffalo, Cleveland, and Denver. Usually insubordinate with bishops, dictatorial with laity sufficient to be transferred or expelled after a short tenure.



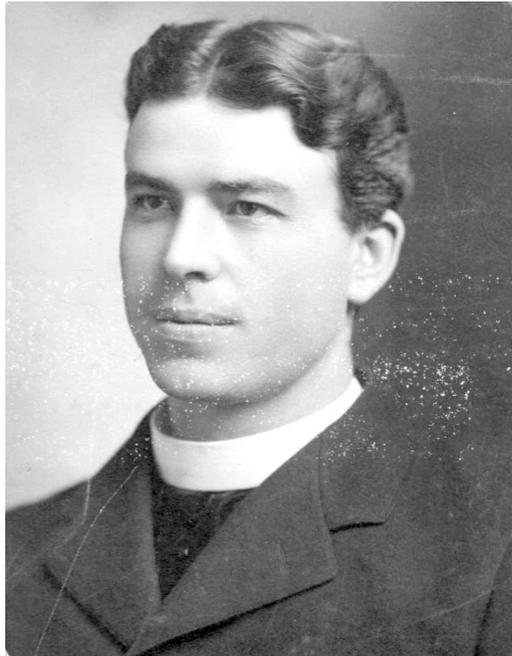
Source: http://www.polskokatolicki.pl/HISTORIA/BUFFALO/ks_klawiter_antonii1a.jpg

Jan Romuald Byzewski (1842-1905), born Karwen/Karwia, to U.S. 1875. Franciscan seminary professor expelled during Bismarck's Kulturkampf. Pastor, St. Stanislaus, Winona 1875-90, founded the newspaper Wiarus. Moved to Detroit where he founded St. Francis of Assisi 1890, then appointed pastor, Sweetest Heart of Mary 1898.



Source:
http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/b/b3/Reverend_Jan_Romuald_Byzewski%2C_OFM.jpg

Josef Cieminski (1867-1959), born Borzyszkowy near Bytow, to U.S. 1881. Secretary to the archbishop of St. Paul, but soon became the troubleshooter at several Polish churches in three Minnesota dioceses. Parishioners disliked Bohemian pastors, financial decisions by high-handed clergy, and construction of oversized church edifices during times of unemployment. He faced PNC and independent secessions in Duluth and Minneapolis (1910-32). Appointed to Winona pastorate 1932-46.



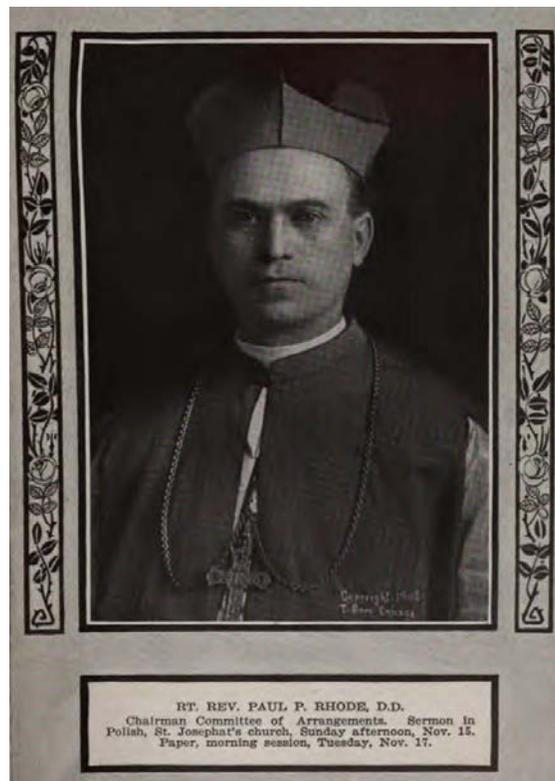
Source: <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7f/Cieminski01.jpg>

Francis X. Lange (1857-1914), born Domotow/Domatowko, to U.S. 1884. Pastor of St. Josaphat, Chicago 1888. His parishioners numbered 5,000 in 1902, when he built the first Catholic Church edifice with steel structure in the U.S.



Źródło: http://image2.findagrave.com/photos/2011/196/73472540_131087998069.jpg

Paul Peter Rhode (1871-1945), born in Wejherowo, to U.S. 1880. Founded SS. Peter and Paul, Chicago 1895, and pastored St. Michael on Chicago's southeast side 1897 where he built a large impressive neo-Gothic church 1909. Appointed auxiliary bishop of Chicago 1908 and bishop of Green Bay, Wisconsin 1915-45. First Polish member of the American Catholic hierarchy.



Source: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/72/Paul_P._Rhode.jpg

***Faustin Wirkus** (1896-1945), from Kashubian-Polish family. Born in Czyżewo near Rypin, part of Polish Kingdom at a time belonging to Russia, his paternal ancestors came from Swornegacie village (currently borough of Chojnice). Immigrated to the USA with his parents in 1899. Joined United States Marines in 1915. From 1926 until 1929, inhabitants of the Haitian island of La Gonave proclaimed him their ruler – **Faustin II**.*



Source: <http://www.antiqubook.nl/boox/besteb/31764.shtml>

The rise of interest in genealogy and the availability of the internet after the 1970s resulted in reference and academic studies in immigrant history, especially in the Upper Midwest. A Polish/Kashubian museum opened in Winona, Minnesota. The most important popular work on Kashubs is in the Kashubian Association of North America quarterly newsletter, which began publication in 1997. In the 21st century, Kashubs were officially recognized in Poland as a community using regional language, which resulted in rise of interest in the historical role of Kashubs in American society.

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Descendant of Samp and Rhode/Rohde/Roda families originally from around Wejherowo