

PROJECT TO DISCOVER
SCHENECTADY **COUNTY'S** EASTERN EUROPEAN ROOTS
NEWSLETTER

July 2020 Vol. 7 No. 3
Our Seventh Year!

Our objective continues to be to discover, document and digitally preserve genealogy, stories and pictures of Schenectady County's Eastern European immigrants. Please share your family history, help pass on the (electronic) word. The next deadlines are October 1st and January 1st. To submit your family story, pictures, etc., e-mail Phyllis Zych Budka: abudka@nycap.rr.com. Without your stories, there can be no newsletter. To be added to the newsletter e-mail list, contact Phyllis.

The Schenectady Digital History Archive To find our newsletters on-line:

<http://www.schenectadyhistory.org/resources/eer/>

Facebook: Schenectady and Capital District Polish Heritage Facebook Group

Polish Genealogical Society of America (PGSA)

Thanks to William F. Hoffman, PGSA newsletter editor, for printing our Table of Contents and contact information in "Rodziny" the PGSA newsletter. PGSA Home Page is found at <http://pgsa.org/>

Polish Origins – <https://polishorigins.com/>

Website allows one to enter surnames and places of interest; a good website.

Flavor of Poland

<https://www.flavorofpoland.com/>

Flavor of Poland is a culinary-travel television series which will, for the first time in the history of American Public Television, present the country of Poland to American TV viewers like they've never seen it before! Having crossed thousands of miles across Poland, visiting over 30 cities, towns and villages and exploring the country's most majestic landscapes from north to south and east to west, the Flavor of Poland team met with locals, historic, cultural and culinary experts, capturing the most beautiful aspects of Poland on film to bring back to the U.S. and share them all with American TV viewers.

Phyllis's note: Finally a focus on Polish sites and food – 13 half hour episodes by region! See website for more details.

Thanks to Bernice Izzo, Carole McCarthy and Martin Byster for help in editing this newsletter!

Table of Contents

Title	Author	Page
Keeping in Touch	Phyllis Zych Budka	2
A Brief History of My Grandparents – Vincent and Alexandra Sarnacki	Ray Sarnacki	3
Henrietta Beczak Budka	Phyllis Zych Budka	7

Keeping in Touch Phyllis Zych Budka

My Clarkson College junior Granddaughter has just returned home from an exchange term at the Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, New Zealand. When the pandemic shutdown occurred there, Granddaughter was invited to shelter with a Cousin from Poland who had married a New Zealander and their small Daughter. A 5 hour bus ride took Granddaughter to their home where they hosted her for 2 months until the shutdown was lifted. My family and Cousin's family has not lost touch in all the years since my maternal Grandmother's emigration from Russia (now Lithuania) in 1911. A few visits back and forth over the years have kept the family feeling alive even though this kind family and Granddaughter were essentially strangers. No longer! Small Daughter and my Granddaughter, FIFTH cousins, have refreshed and renewed this very special connection. Amazing!

A Brief History of My Grandparents – Vincent and Alexandra Sarnacki Ray Sarnacki

My grandparents emigrated to this country from Poland just at the turn of the 20th Century. In the late nineteenth century, lands of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were repeatedly partitioned among the regional powers of Russia, Austria-Hungary, and German-speaking Prussia. The people were no strangers to hardship, and their struggles for freedom and opportunity were repeatedly met by opposition and oppression. Compulsory military service, political oppression, and poverty pushed a flood of landless peasants and craftspeople to America.

My grandfather, Vincent J. Sarnacki, was born in 1878 in a town called Andrzejewo, in eastern Poland. I know little about his early life there. Poland at that time was considered part of Russia, so he was required to learn Russian in school. Later he was conscripted into the Russian army, where he served as a pharmacist mate, requiring him to search out various herbs and plants for the natural remedies used at the time.

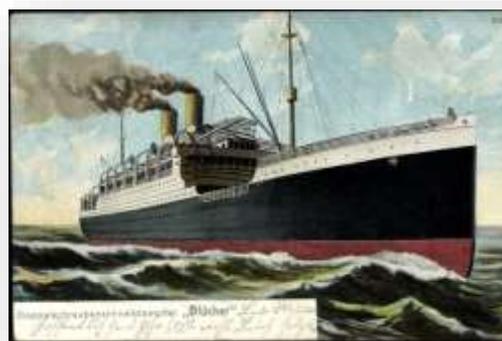
Vincent, arrived in the United States on March 15, 1904 aboard the SS Blucher, a steamship of the Hamburg-America Line. His journey began in Hamburg, with stops in Southampton and Cherbourg along the way. The ship's manifest lists his

accommodation as "zwischendeck" or steerage, a sort of bulk-rate packaging of human passengers for delivery to America. Harsh conditions with multilevel wooden bunks in windowless holds, poor food, and few sanitary facilities were part of the experience in steerage.

According to a list of Blucher passengers, Vincent's occupation in his homeland was "peasant and day laborer." Upon arrival at Ellis Island, he was detained in order to telephone for money. His contact was listed



Vincent Sarnacki served as a pharmacist mate in the Russian Army



Vincent emigrated to the US from Poland in 1904 via a German ship named the SS Blucher

A Brief History of My Grandparents – Vincent and Alexandra Sarnacki Ray Sarnacki

as a priest living in Cranville, NJ, the Right Reverend W. Jarko Karol. Since there is no town called Cranville in New Jersey, Jarko Karol most likely lived in Cranford, located west of Elizabeth and in proximity of Ellis Island. Vincent was discharged from detention four days later to begin his life in his new country, leaving his parents behind in Poland.

At some point he travelled to Granville in Upstate New York near the Vermont border. A relative had apparently told him about jobs available there in the slate quarry. After working for only a day he decided to move on and eventually found work at the General Electric Company in Schenectady, NY. He learned to operate a punch press, working in Building 17.

My grandmother was Alexandra Nietubicz, though she wanted to be known as Alice after she came to the U.S. Like Vincent, she was born in Andrzejewo, Poland. While born on April 13, 1889, she preferred to celebrate her birthday on April Fool's day. She worked as a housekeeper and seamstress when she first came to this country. I could not find the date and means of her arrival here. Her parish certificate of identification bears a date November 11, 1911, so we can assume that she arrived sometime between then and August of 1912, when she married Vincent at St. Valentine's Roman Catholic Church in Bloomfield, New Jersey.

Vincent and Alice settled in Schenectady N.Y. and eventually had six children, Joseph, Casmir, Henry, Irene, Raymond and Clara. They lived first on Bridge Street in the Mont Pleasant section of the City and later moved to Davis Terrace. In July of 1925, they purchased a house on Cutler Street from Harry and Anna Epstein.

With a mix of Eastern and Southern European families, mostly Poles, Ukrainians, Russians, Hungarians and



Above: Alexandra (AKA Alice) Nietubicz Sarnacki undated photo; below: Alice's parish



Alexandra and Vincent Sarnacki married in August of 1912 at St. Valentine's Church in Bloomfield, NJ

A Brief History of My Grandparents – Vincent and Alexandra Sarnacki Ray Sarnacki

Italians, the neighborhood was like a mini-United Nations. Most homes in the neighborhood had two flats (up and down), a few had as many as three.

In my grandparents' house, each flat consisted of a kitchen, dining room, parlor, one bathroom and three bedrooms. My grandparents, like their neighbors, rented the upstairs flat to help with their finances. A coal furnace, along with a wood burning stove in the kitchen, provided heating for the first floor flat. The upstairs was heated by a kerosene stove.

Having eight people in a three-bedroom house with only one bathroom must have been interesting. Alice slept in the bedroom off the kitchen with her daughters and the four boys slept in the room off the dining room. Vincent had his own room in between the other two.

Neither of my grandparents owned a car or learned how to drive. There was little need as every place they went was within walking distance. Vincent walked about a half-mile daily to work at GE. Except during prohibition, walks home from the GE Works on Fridays usually involved a stop for a friendly beer at one of the numerous taverns that seemingly occupied any corner where there wasn't a family owned store. Several corner grocery stores provided most of their daily needs, including a butcher, Mr. Zak, whose store was right across the street. A four-block walk (approximately .5 miles according to Google Maps) would get them to the A&P or Grand Union supermarkets on Crane Street.

When Alice sent Vincent to the stores on Crane Street, he would always make two



Alexandra and Vincent in front of their home at 935 Cutler Street

trips, one to the A&P and then another to the Grand Union, as he didn't want to be accused of stealing anything. This not only maintained his reputation but kept him in shape! Going shopping downtown (w mieście or miasto in Polish) involved a trolley that could be taken from Crane Street. Buses replaced the trolley service when it was discontinued in 1946.

Vincent and Alice's marriage had to survive major historical events including WW I, the Spanish Flu epidemic, and the Great Depression. Later WW II saw two of their sons, Joe and Ray called to service in the Army and Navy, respectively. Casmir and Henry were ineligible for service for health reasons.

Life during the Depression was difficult but the Sarnacki family managed to get by. In addition to rent from the upstairs flat, the older children, Joe, Charlie and Hank brought in some extra money by working as



Front row: Clara, Alexandra, Vincent and Irene;
Back row: Raymond, Casmir (AKA Charlie) Henry and Joseph

A Brief History of My Grandparents – Vincent and Alexandra Sarnacki

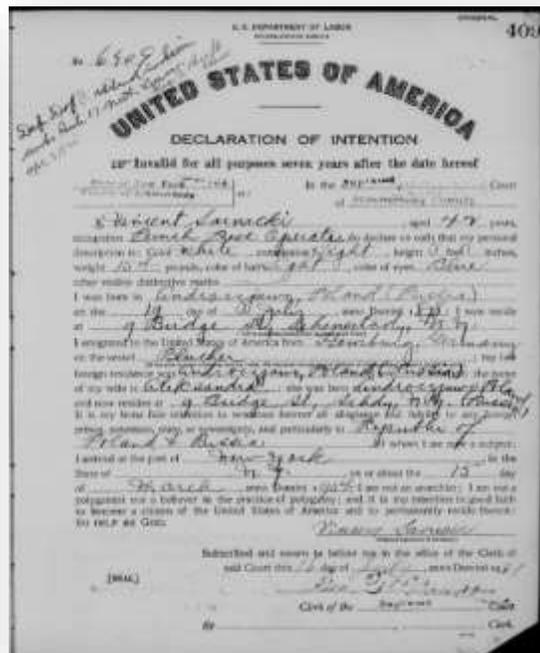
Ray Sarnacki

messengers at the main GE plant. Vincent was paid on a piece work basis and at times when he was furloughed during the Depression, GE provided food baskets for the family. Alice did seamstress work, using a treadle sewing machine she had in her bedroom. Vincent learned how to repair shoes for his family. A vegetable garden in the backyard, two grapevines and two peach trees supplemented their groceries, as did a few chickens and ducks they raised.

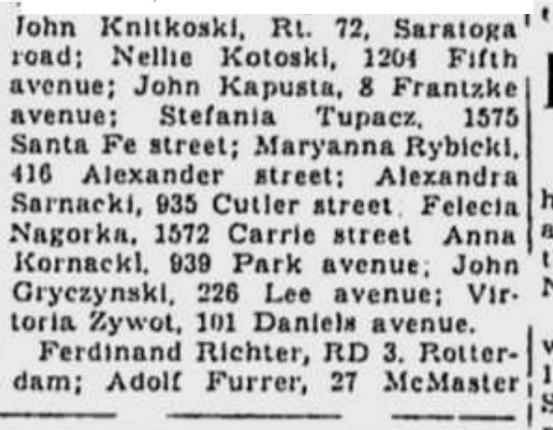
The primary language in the Sarnacki home was Polish, though Vincent also spoke some Russian, which was compulsory learning in Poland when he lived there, as well as some German. Both he and Alice spoke some English, but learning it was not a priority as most people they interacted with spoke Polish at the time. Vincent could read and write, but mostly in Polish. Alice could read but was never taught to write. It wasn't until Vincent's death in 1974 that she learned how to write a check and sign her name.

Vincent became a citizen of the United States sometime after he filed his declaration of intention 1921. An article from the Schenectady Gazette mentioned that my grandmother, Alexandra, became a citizen on July 20, 1945.

Vincent worked for GE for 35 years retiring after the War ended in 1945. He was a member of GE's Quarter Century Club and attended several reunion picnics they held for retirees. He believed in moderation, taking one shot of whiskey or brandy each morning (conveniently kept on a shelf in the walk-in pantry near the manual coffee grinder) and smoked no more than one cigarette a day (rolled his own or unfiltered Lucky Strikes) and an occasional cigar he could make last for multiple days. Alice was a devout Catholic and regularly active



Vincent declared his intention to become a citizen on March 15, 1921.



Alexandra became a citizen of the U.S. on July 20, 1945 along with 122 others from various countries. Excerpt from Schenectady Gazette article dated July 23, 1945.

in their parish Church, St. Adalbert's. They continued to live at their home on Cutler Street. Vincent died in February of 1974, just a few months shy of his 96th birthday. Alice lived another eight years and passed away in June of 1982 at the age of 94.

**Henrietta Beczak Budka
Phyllis Zych Budka**



Fig. 1 Henrietta Beczak Budka (1913 – 1965) First Holy Communion ~1922

Henrietta Beczak Budka Phyllis Zych Budka

The First Holy Communion studio portrait of Henrietta Beczak (Fig. 1) in our family archives reminds me of the significance of this event in the lives of so many of us who grew up in St. Adalbert's Polish Roman Catholic parish. The original size of this image, once in a frame, is 11 inches x 19 inches. Complete with candle, rosary, prayer book, beautiful dress, veil and high top button shoes, this portrait of my mother in law reminds me that she was a person of deep faith, sweet disposition and great generosity.



Fig. 2 Henrietta's First Holy Communion class – 1922 - side of St. Adalbert's Church

The large Communion class in Fig. 2 testifies to the more than 4000 foreign born Poles in Schenectady about the time this picture was taken. The table below is from one of the very few sources of history about my own heritage available in local archives before we began this newsletter, "Electric City Immigrants: Italians and Poles of Schenectady, N.Y., 1880-1930," by Robert R. Pascucci ¹.

¹Robert R. Pascucci ¹- A Dissertation Submitted to the State University of New York at Albany in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Department of History, 1984

<http://www.schenectadyhistory.org/resources/pascucci/>

**Henrietta Beczak Budka
Phyllis Zych Budka**

Italian and Polish Population in Schenectady 1890 — 1930

	1890	1900	1910	1920	1930
Italians					
(Foreign Born)	221*	607	3,660	5,378	5,910
Percentage of Total foreign born	5.0	8.6	19.6	26.2	29.3
Poles					
(Foreign Born)	196	1,732	4,221	4,316	3,648
Percentage of Total foreign born	4.5	24.2	22.7	21.1	18.1
Total Foreign-Born Population	4,382	7,169	18,631	20,490	20,162
Percentage of City Population	22.0	22.6	25.6	23.1	21.1
Total City Population	19,902	31,682	78,826	88,723	95,692

* Schenectady County. City figures not reported.



Fig. 3 Henrietta's St. Adalberts first grade class 1921. She is in the first row, 2nd from left.

**Henrietta Beczak Budka
Phyllis Zych Budka**



Fig. 4 Henrietta's St. Adalbert 8th grade graduation class - 1927. She is in the first row, 4th from right.



Fig. 5 Henrietta's St. Adalberts 8th grade diploma 1927
Signed by Rev. Sr. Cypryana, CR and Rev. J. Ostrowski

**Henrietta Beczak Budka
Phyllis Zych Budka**

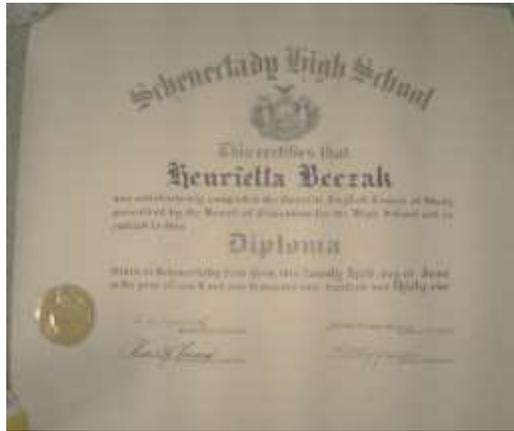


Fig. 6 Henrietta's Schenectady High School diploma, 1931.



Fig. 7 1957 St. Adalbert pilgrimage to Canadian shrines – Henrietta, Row 3 2nd from right. Phyllis Front row on right – I had just graduated from St. Adalbert's 8th grade.

Henrietta Beczak Budka Phyllis Zych Budka

Figures 3, 4 5 and 6 show other stages of Henrietta's life familiar to us St. Adalbert's graduates: Class pictures with priests and the 8th grade diploma. Henrietta's Schenectady High School diploma is the predecessor to Mont Pleasant and Nott Terrace, later Linton, and déjà vu, today's Schenectady High School.

In the summer of 1957, after I graduated from St. Adalbert's 8th grade, I went on a pilgrimage to Canadian shrines with a St. Adalbert's parish group. Figure 7, taken on the steps – probably the Basilica of St. Anne de Beaupre – can be found both in my mementos of those of Henrietta – we both were on the trip. Little did we know at that time that I would become her daughter in law.