

THOMAS L. HOLLOWAK, *From Cracow to Polish Town: The History of a Polish Enclave in the Weir Creek Ministerial District, New Kent County, Virginia*, Baltimore: Historyk Press 2020, pp. VII + 355. Pb. ISBN: 97801-887124-54-3.

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The American South in general, and Virginia in particular, are generally not associated with Polonia. That's somewhat unfair, as Poles appeared to have been in, and organized the first strike for equal labor rights at Jamestown, Virginia, *ca* 1620, and the first mass emigration of Poles to America settled in Panna Maria, Texas, in 1854. Stefan Nesterowicz, writing for the Polonia press in the early 1900s and republished in 2007 as *Travel Notes*, mentioned Polish settlements in Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas. Even West Virginia attracted Slavonic immigrants, especially to mines and steel mills in the western part of the state: see William Gorby's *Wheeling's Polonia*. Still, for much of American Polonia, Wheeling and Baltimore were its southern border.

Nevertheless, the paradox of Polish emigration to the United States (in contrast to Canada, where Sir Clifford Sifton was recruiting farmers to fill the prairies) was that the rural Polish peasant became the urban Polonian industrial worker of the American Northeast and Midwest. Efforts to direct Polish immigrants to America to farms – whether to keep them from urban “corruption” or to promote ethnic “colonies,” such as those John Radziłowski has researched in Minnesota or those in Nebraska or the aforementioned Arkansas – were never hugely successful.

In the early 20th century, a similar farm/colonization effort was attempted in the Tidewater region of central/east Virginia. Today that region is associated with Virginia colonial history (Williamsburg, Yorktown), education (the College of William and Mary), the military (especially the U.S. Navy at Norfolk), and vacations (Virginia Beach). Interstate Highway 64 now provides good transportation.

A century or so ago, the area was less accessible and more rural. Adam Sturtz, a Polish farmer-turned-entrepreneur, began advertising in the Polonian press to attract immigrants to buy farm land in the Tidewater region. Other Poles had come to work at factories in Yorktown, and a New York-based priest was also promoting local farm settlements among immigrants.

A handful of Polish immigrants appears to have been scattered across eastern Virginia. According to Hollowak, in the early 20th century Polish Franciscans from Baltimore had begun using St. Mary of the Immaculate Conception in Fredericksburg (a town about 80 km southwest of Washington) as a base to minister to pockets of Polish immigrants in Stafford, Mecklenburg, York, King and Queen, King William, Caroline, and New Kent counties as well as the Virginia capital, Richmond. Except for

Hollowak's monograph on New Kent County, none of those other Polonian enclaves has been studied.

The numbers involved are not huge. Hollowak focuses on a place once called Cra-cow, then Polish Town, Virginia, in New Kent County, because of a family connection: part of the Hollowak family settled there. At its height, that enclave numbered maybe 20 families.

Like all good Polonia communities, where there were Poles there was the Church. By 1920, St. John Kanty Church had been erected and the Diocese of Richmond (which took over pastoral care of the Polonians from the Franciscans sometime during World War I) welcomed Father Ceslaus Jakubowski, an alumnus of the Polish Seminary in Orchard Lake, Michigan (now about to close), to minister there. Jakubowski worked among the Tidewater Polonia from *ca* 1918 until his death in 1961. The Church had a much briefer history: it was burned down by a lightning strike in 1935 and, because of the congregation's size, never rebuilt. The communicants were transferred to another local parish under Jakubowski's care.

(An interesting note in the history of the Church was that its initial construction was in part funded by the Catholic Church Extension Society, an American domestic missionary effort that supported the construction of Catholic churches and placement of priests in unchurched America, i.e., counties primarily in the South and parts of the West with no Catholic church or priest. Whether any other ethnic parishes were funded by the Extension Society might be worth investigating).

Hollowak's monograph – which at times sounds a little “gossipy” – nevertheless provides valuable documentation, based on personal correspondence, press reports, land, court, and legal records, and census data, on this small Polonian enclave in rural Virginia. The land records document the challenges of farming there, in a hot and humid climate different from the Poland from which emigrants came. The land sales records show the economic churn that marked the community. Some farmers also kept one foot in other areas – like mining in West Virginia or factory work in Maryland or New Jersey, especially in the off-season – to ensure their economic viability, factors which would lead to the community's post-World War II decline. Correspondence and legal records also gave an insight into life in small Polonian enclave, where everybody knew everybody's business. The press also afforded a view of how this somewhat exotic immigrant group was seen in Virginia, a state not particularly an immigrant destination. The large local black population in the area, at a time when segregation was still legal in Virginia, also gets mention. The generous service of Polonia's sons and daughters in the U.S. military during World War II also was noted.

New Kent County Polonia enjoyed its glory days from the late years of World War I to begin its slow decline after World War II. Returning soldiers found the financial instability and arduousness of farm work less appealing than steadier jobs elsewhere. Over the decades, the local Polonia declined to one family today. What remains of St. John Kanty are its stone stairs in its cemetery.

Still, Hollowak reminds us that, apart from the mega-Polonia of Chicago that everybody studies and the smaller Polonian cities and states (like Toledo or Delaware or South Bend) that sometimes get attention, there were small Polonian enclaves in the United States that, in best cases, are lucky even to be remembered, much less studied. That's what makes this book particularly valuable.

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RICHARD C. LUKAS, *The Torpedo Season: Growing Up During World War II*, Las Vegas, NV, 2021, pp. 216. Pb. ISBN: 979-87210 20223.

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We might be prone to forget that anybody with military experience of World War II must be at least in his mid-90s, and that the few remaining connections with what Americans call the "Greatest Generation" are those who were children during the Second World War. Those children included the American historian, Richard Conrad (named for the author) Lukas, son of Polish parents.

Lukas's academic career focused on World War II, Poland, and the Western Allies. His 1986 book, *The Forgotten Holocaust* (Polish translation: *Zapomniany Holocaust: Polacy pod okupacją niemiecką*), ignited a firestorm in the United States: Jewish-American writers attacked him for applying the word "Holocaust" to describe the Gentile – largely Catholic – extermination of Polish civilians as part of the systematic wartime German racial plan. Unapologetic and convinced that the story of Polish Christian martyrdom under German occupation must not remain unnamed or untold, Lukas followed up with oral histories of Polish Christian witnesses and survivors as well as a book on Polish Christian and Jewish children (Polish translation: *Dziecięcy Płacz*) at Nazi hands.

Torpedo Season is the octogenarian's memoirs of a childhood in a Polish-American home in wartime Massachusetts. It also perhaps explains something about Lukas's subsequent academic career. He discusses World War II from the vantage point of a four-to-eight year old, then follows up with postwar experiences until he and his family moved to Florida at around age thirteen.

In his book *Polonia w Detroit*, Piotr Taras insists that Polonia must be something *sui generis*: it can neither be just a copy of Poland nor something completely other, but a creative fusion of ancestral heritage with the immigrant experience. The value of *Torpedo Season* is seeing World War II through the eyes of a Polish-American boy in a