

ANTHONY JOSEPH BAJDEK, *When Victimization of Poland Was Never in Doubt: Fostering Knowledge of and Sympathy for Poland in the Early American Republic, as Reported in the Niles' Register*. Point Pleasant, NJ: Winged Hussar Publishing, 2021. Pp. 412, HB. ISBN 9781950423439

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There are gaps in the history of American Polonia. The history of Poles in the United States mentions Jamestown and salutes the contributions to American independence of Kazimierz Pułaski and Tadeusz Kościuszko. But the lion's share of attention focuses on the mass *emigracja za chlebem* and the *emigracje polityczne*. If there is any period of U.S. history broadly neglected, it is the early American Republic, i.e., from the time Kościuszko went home until the beginnings of mass immigration.

Anthony Bajdek fills one of those *lacunae* with this study about how some Americans saw Polish events: the portrayal of Poland's struggle for freedom from roughly the end of the Napoleonic order until after the November Uprisings. They learned about it through the eyes of the *Niles' Register*.

The *Niles' Weekly Register (NWK)* was what today would be called a "weekly news-magazine." It was published in Baltimore from 1811-48 and had a national readership.

At a time when print media was the exclusive source of news about global events, *NWK* informed readers about what was going on in the world, typically both with background and commentary. News reports, for example, often were accompanied by detailed statistics to inform readers about foreign countries.

One should remember that Americans in the early Republic were extremely proud of their national achievement: they saw the United States as an example of freedom and independence, to which other lands aspired, and they rooted for those who wanted to follow that path. It is why there was initial sympathy for France in 1789. But, because Americans also tended to look through moral lenses, it is why that sympathy waned as the Jacobin abuses of the Revolution became evident.

Poland, though further away, was an object of interest: Pułaski and Kościuszko had performed good public relations for their homeland. Americans were aware of Poland's partition by authoritarian monarchies and watched as she sought to recover her freedom.

Bajdek, who was an associate dean at Northeastern University in Boston, compiled 320 articles mentioning Poland from *NWR*, transcribing the text, usually accompanied

by his own commentary set off in a rectangular box. The publication seems to have been done by a small press, which makes its layout appear dense, but having all the primary source material from an influential early American newspaper assembled in a modern book is a major benefit.

*NWR*'s treatment of Poland is almost always sympathetic. Consider this 1815 appeal for Poland:

A spirit of independence is up in Poland. May God grant her gallant people strength to expel their Russian, Prussian, and Austrian oppressors, a trio of knaves, that have parceled them out and treated them like cattle. "Down with the tyrants" – "let the republic be restored" and the "long agony" be over [...] (p. 51).

By contrast, *NWR* is antagonistic towards Poland's partitioners, with special criticism of Russia, which is regularly presented as a barbaric and immoral land. Consider this presentation of historical context (and note its moral flavor):

"Catherine the Great" murdered her husband, assassinated prince Ivan, the "legitimate heir" of the throne, and "usurped" the government. The infamous strumpet took to her bed the villains who done the first deed of horror, and lived her reign in open whoredom; and she had, as it were, a regiment of male prostitutes [...] to satisfy her lusts; but to those degraded wretches the nobility of Russia, as Edmund Burke called that class of imposters, humbly paid their court (p. 37).

*NWR* also tended to be critical of those who promised Poland liberty, but whose promises were meaningless. Americans were largely dubious of Bonaparte. While reporting the opening in 1812 of a Diet in the Napoleonic Grand Duchy of Warsaw, it does not seem to hold out great hopes. All Russian promises of autonomy in their vassal Kingdom of Poland are dismissed as meaningless. It attacks, for example, Russian policies that suppressed news circulation, noting that in 1827 500-600 newspapers were published in the United States for twelve million Americans, while claiming that in Russian Poland twenty million Poles were served by 15 (p. 111).

Over the years, *NWR* reported statistics, hard news, and key developments. Hard news, for example, included regular reports on flooding in what is now Poland. Key developments included events like the death in Switzerland of Tadeusz Kościuszko, the beloved American patriot. *NWR* published a six-page eulogy to Kościuszko delivered by then-Representative/future U.S. President William Henry Harrison in the House of Representatives.

*NWR* devoted detailed coverage (insofar as news was available and reached North America) about the November Uprising, how Poles struggled for freedom, and how Russia brutally suppressed it, detailing both Muscovite savagery in war and repression afterwards.

Poles may be familiar with the refugees produced by the November Uprising who remained in Europe, particularly France, but some did come to North America. In 1834, Congress actually awarded land for settlement to 235 such émigrés in Illinois. Illinois at the time had only been a state for 16 years and was somewhat on the American frontier. Those émigrés were supposed to form a “Polish colony,” the assumption being that freedom-loving Poles would be an asset to the republican United States. For various reasons, that project never actually succeeded. Among the factors leading to its failure were squatters on the land who would not give it up for “foreigners,” a proposal to relocate the Poles to Michigan, and the eventual dissolution of the Polish group itself, each making his own accommodations as life went on (pp. 323-29).

Obviously, the Polish presence in the United States prior to the mass immigration of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, or even before immigrants showed up at Panna Maria in Texas, was small compared to what it would be. But those limited numbers should not be taken as suggesting that Poles did contribute to the early American Republic or that Americans were not interested in what was going on in Poland itself. This period is acquiring greater scholarly attention, e.g., Ewa Modzelewska-Opara’s study, *Dorobek pisarski i misja kulturalna polskich emigrantów w Stanach Zjednoczonych Ameryki w latach 1831-1842* (Kraków, 2022). It is good to see equal attention in the United States.

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RAYMOND LESNIAK, *Cultivating Justice in the Garden State: My Life in the Colorful World of New Jersey Politics*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022. Pp.195, HB, e-book. ISBN 9781978824973.

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The impact of Polish American politicians on U.S. national politics is relatively limited, particularly in proportion to their population. Polish American politicians have had far greater impact on state and local politics but, because those influences are more localized, their impact tends to be less documented. Polish Americans have, for example, been numerically better represented in state legislatures, the legislative bodies that make laws for individual states. That is a fruitful field for research.

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