

New Hampshire's Polish Americans

Immigrants arriving in the United States tend to share at least two experiences: they look forward, trying to become American, and they look back, trying to maintain some traditions from their homeland. This document is part of a series discussing these tendencies in groups that have migrated to New Hampshire. The series is meant to support the New Hampshire Historical Society school program *Passport to New Hampshire History: Immigration and the Granite State*.

Becoming American

Creating Community

Community institutions, such as fraternal societies, parish churches, and community centers, were crucial for newcomers to gain a foothold in their new homeland by providing important services and companionship to immigrants.



Casimir Pulaski

American fraternal societies have existed since the eighteenth century but when millions of new immigrants from southern and eastern Europe began arriving in the United States, anti-immigrant attitudes prevented Polish Americans from joining older societies such as the Freemasons. Consequently, immigrants created an alternative network of social organizations, often with strong connections to the parish church. Two of the largest and best known Polish organizations in New Hampshire were the Pulaski Brotherhood (*Bratni Pomocy Ryceazy Pamiontka Obhodu Pulaskiego*) and the Kosciuszko Brotherhood (*Bratni Pomocy Tadeusza Kosciuszki I Klubu*).

Both of these social clubs took their names from Polish nationals who helped America wage the American Revolution. **Casimir Pulaski** and **Thaddeus Kosciuszko** belong to a select group of heroes, including France's Marquis de Lafayette and Britain's Thomas Paine, who acted on behalf of human liberty in their homelands and in America. For newly arriving Polish immigrants, both Pulaski and Kosciuszko were a source of pride as both figures were countrymen who played important roles in the founding of the United States.



Thaddeus Kosciuszko



A Polish fraternal society in Manchester. The caption reads "Benevolent Fraternal Order in Reverent Memory of Pulaski, October 6, 1929."

Pulaski lent his assistance to the Revolutionary cause at an important time when foreign support for the independence was scarce. He distinguished himself at the battle of Brandywine Creek, where George Washington's forces suffered a defeat; Pulaski led a counterattack that covered the retreat of the Americans and helped prevent a military disaster. Considered to be the "father of the American cavalry," Pulaski helped modernize the Patriot forces and made the Americans more effective and efficient fighters. At the age of 32, however, Pulaski paid the ultimate price, sustaining a mortal wound while fighting at the battle of Savannah in 1779.

In New Hampshire, Manchester mayor Robert Baines declared Oct. 7, 2001 National Casimir Pulaski Day. Attending the ceremonies held in the park dedicated to his memory were members of the Holy Trinity Cathedral Polish National Catholic Church, students from St. Casimir's school, and members of the city's Polish-American community devoted to a man whose devotion to freedom resulted in heroism in Poland and in the U.S.

Thaddeus Kosciuszko was one of the first European volunteers to aid the American revolutionary cause in 1776. A brilliant Polish military engineer, Kosciuszko designed and constructed fortifications to help defeat the British, notably at Saratoga and West Point in New York. Kosciuszko returned to Poland and led his own countrymen in a failed attempt to free them from foreign oppression. Seriously wounded in battle and imprisoned in Czarist Russia, upon his release, he returned to the United States.



Front and back views of a 1904 badge issued to members of West Manchester's Kosciuszko Club

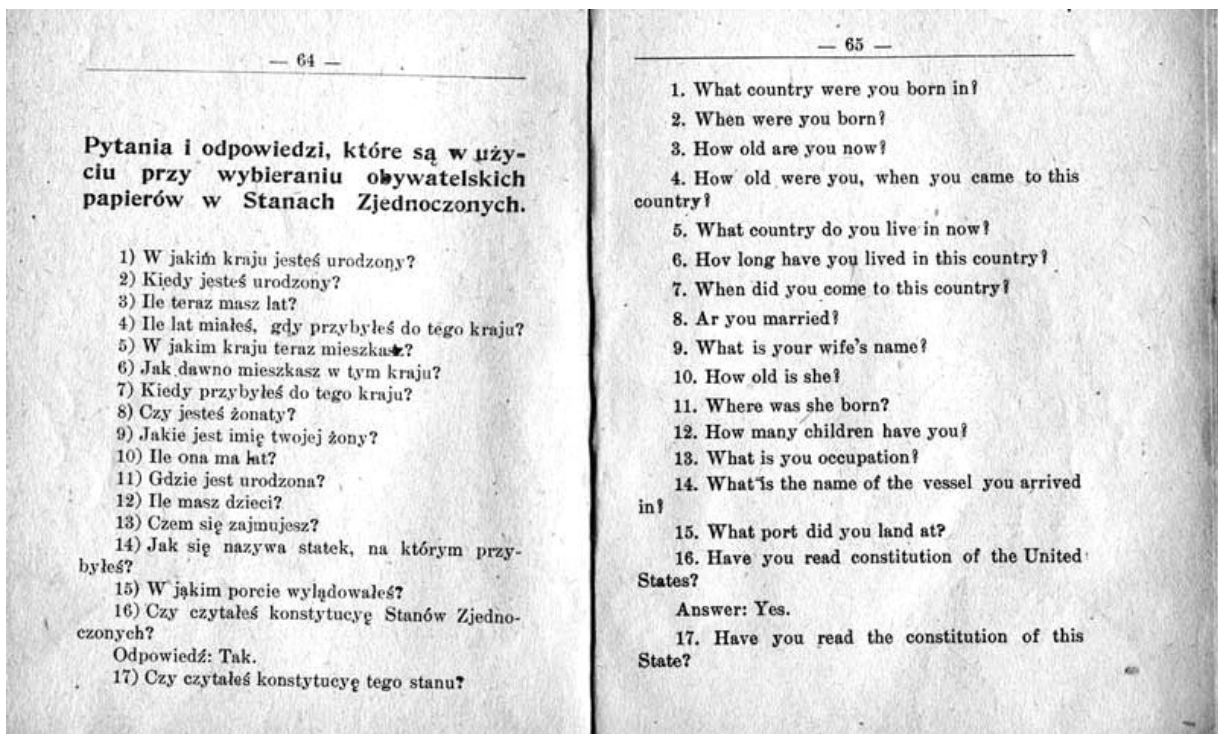
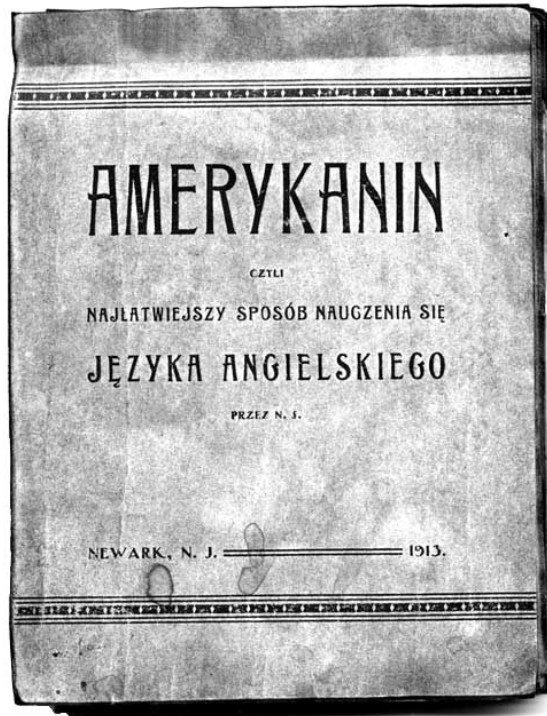
Learning the Language

Immigrants from Poland acknowledged the importance of being able to communicate with their new American neighbors. While Poles continued to cherish their native language within their homes, neighborhoods, and churches, they realized that learning English was essential to being successful in the United States.

Furthermore, in cities like Manchester, Nashua, and Claremont, with multiple languages being spoken by several different immigrant groups, knowledge of English could provide a common language for Polish immigrants to speak with their Greek, Russian, and French Canadian counterparts.

To assist immigrants coming to the U.S. from all over the world, books were published to teach them English, as well as practical information about life in America.

For immigrants intending to become U.S. citizens, several of these booklets included a section on civics to introduce future citizens to the American system of government.



Keeping Traditions

Folk Dances

Source: *Polish Folk Dances*, Love & Co. Ltd., 1946. Illustrations by Irena Lukaszewicz; music arranged by Tomasz Glinski. Lyrics appear elsewhere in this document.

Polish immigrants, like their counterparts from other countries coming to New Hampshire, used traditional forms of music and dance to feel connected to their traditional culture while simultaneously becoming integrated into mainstream American society.

Of the so-called five national dances (including also polonaise, *mazur*, *kujawiak*, *krakowiak*), the *Oberek* is the most vivacious and acrobatic.

The *oberek* originated in the villages of Mazowsze in central Poland; its name is derived from the verb *obracac sie*, “to spin.” The dance’s main movement is rotational: the dancers spin and twirl around the room. It is considered to be a national dance because it is common all over Poland and because all social groups, rich and poor, dance it. Different regions, however, still retain their local style, variations and their specific music.

The Polish folk dance *Zbójnicki* is an energetic men’s dance from southern Poland’s mountainous region. The name comes from the word, *zbójnik*—a bandit or robber.



Stylized Polish highland dress worn in the Zbójnicki



Traditional costumes worn in the *Oberek*

These bands of thieves thrived in southern Poland in the 1600s and 1700s and included highlanders who were trying to escape from the oppression of the lords or avoid military service, as well as peasants who wanted to evade the burden of serfdom. The bands pillaged manor houses, farms, mills and cottages, taverns and coaches of traveling merchants. The robbers evoked terror but also admiration and envy for their courage, freedom and wealth. Similar to the tales of Wild West outlaws or even Robin Hood, folk legends and stories about the *zbójnik* have been romanticized.

The *zbójnik* no longer lurk in Poland’s southern mountains, but Polish and Polish-American culture carry their memory into the present day.

Other Artistic Traditions: A Heartfelt Sentiment



Original watercolor on paper, ca. 1910–1930. Rochester-Farmington, N.H., area. Artist unknown.

Original	Pronunciation	Translation
TO CZEM JESTEM I	Toh chem yestem ee	Who I am and
CZEM BYĆ PRAGNE	chem beech pragneh	who I wish to be
ZAWDZIECZAM MEJ	ziv-jyecham mey	for that I thank my
DROGIEJ MATCE	drow-gee matse	dear mother

For Further Investigation

Song Lyrics

O berek.
[Strój podlaski - Costumes from Podlasie]

XX

Con fuoco. arr. by J. Glinka

The lit-tle quail has hid in the mil-let I'll fol-low bare-foot and try to catch it
U - cie - kta mi prze - pio - recz - ka u pro - so, A ja za nią nie - bo - ra - czek bo - so.

Don't run fur-ther you pret - ty little quail For I am still a ve - ry lit-tle boy
Nie u - cie - kaj prze - pio - recz - ko da - lej, Bo ja jez - cze nie - bo - ra - czek ma - ty.

Zbójnicki - Highlander's dance.

[Strój zakopiański - Costumes from Zakopane]

VII

Tempo di marcia.

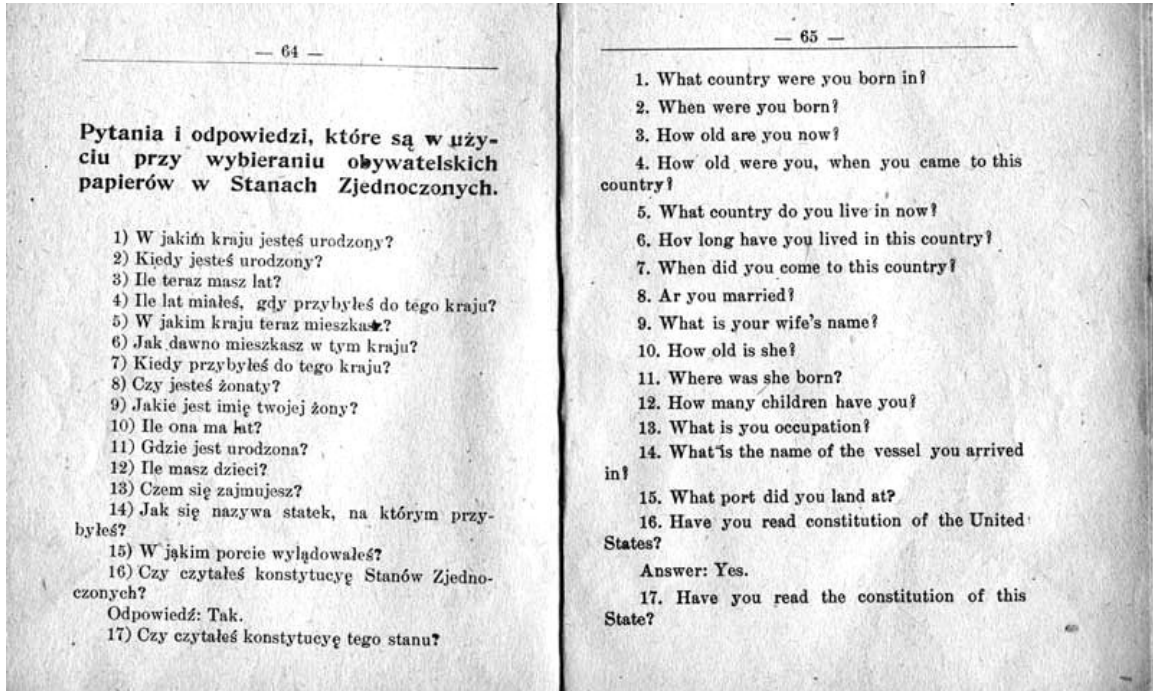
arr. by J. Gliński

1. To a stone wall-ed cellar Tho rob-bers came to dance. They bade the play-ers play
2. I would love to join the dance If my legs gave me a chance They are ve-ry cross-kod though
1. Wmu-wo-wa-ny piw-ni-cy Tari-co-wa-li zbój-ni-cy. Ka-za-li se pie-knie grać
2. Tań-co-wał-bym gdy-bym mógł, Gdy-bym nie miał kry-wych nóg. A-le kry-we no-gi mom

1. And watch their feet so gay. They bade the play-ers play And watch their feet so gay.
2. And when I dance they bow. They are ve-ry cross-kod though And when I dance they bow.
1. I na nóż-ki spo-zie-rać. Ka-za-li se pie-knie grać I na nóż-ki spo-zie-rać
2. Jak tari-cu-je to się gra, A-le kry-we no-gi mom Jak tari-cu-je to się gra.

Questions for Inquiry

Below is an excerpt from *Amerykanin*, a Polish language publication written to help immigrants learn English as well as some basic information about American Society. Examine the document and answer the questions that follow.



1. What is the connection between the pages shown here?

2. Can you translate any Polish words into English? List up to three Polish words and their English translation. (Hint: check out numbers 16 and 17.)

3. What clue does question number 14 provide about how Polish immigrants came to the U.S. in the early 1900s?

4. Which question would be most helpful for an immigrant intending to become a U.S. citizen? Why?

