

THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

FAMILY AND WORK:
POLISH INTERWAR IMMIGRANT WOMEN IN ALBERTA,
1920 - 1950

by

Krystyna Lukasiewicz

A THESIS

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DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS

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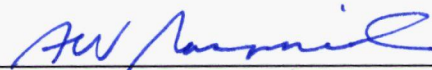
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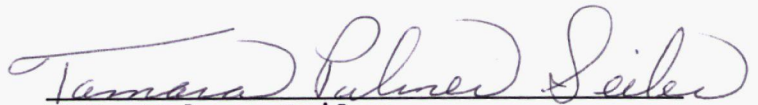
The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Family and Work: Polish Interwar Immigrant Women in Alberta, 1920-1950" submitted by Krystyna Lukasiewicz in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.



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ABSTRACT

Some three thousand Polish immigrant women settled in Alberta in the interwar period. Most of them immigrated to Canada between 1926 and 1930 under the aegis of the Railways Agreement of 1925 that limited the admission of Poles to farm labourers, female domestics and families willing to settle on the land.

The majority of women arrived in Alberta as members of families who settled on homesteads. Farming remained their principal occupation until the early 1950s. Alberta cities attracted mainly single women who often worked as domestics before marriage. Family and work remained the most important aspects of Polish immigrant women's lives. However, mainly single women were engaged in the paid labour force. The place for married women was at home. While specific tasks on the farm and work in the household were women's responsibility, paid employment, whenever possible, was avoided.

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ABBREVIATIONS

- GAI - Glenbow Archives Institute, Calgary, Alberta
- MHSO - Multicultural History Society of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario
- NAC - National Archives of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario
- PAA - Provincial Archives of Alberta, Edmonton
- PAO - Provincial Archives of Ontario, Toronto, Ontario

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the experiences of the Polish women who immigrated to Canada and settled in Alberta between the two world wars. This study focuses on their roles in families, on their work and on their social life and involvement in community affairs. Hopefully, it will contribute to a better understanding of the women's roles in the process of migration and will shed more light on their goals in life and the strategies they used to achieve them.

In the 1920s and 1930s about three thousand Polish immigrant women settled in Alberta, 78% of them in rural areas, the remainder in cities and coal mining towns.¹ They were predominantly of peasant background and most immigrated as members of families committed to settling on the land. Some women came as wives and daughters of miners and craftsmen who had been in Alberta prior to the First World War as sojourners. There were also young single women recruited by the Canadian railway companies to work as domestics on farms. After expiration of their contracts, usually within several months after their arrival, many of them left Alberta. Those who stayed in the province, and did not marry farmers, sought employment in cities before marriage.

Whether in Polish villages or on Alberta homesteads, whether in cities or in mining communities, family and work were the two most important elements in these women's lives. Marriage and family, the base of European peasant society, continued to be the most desirable options for young immigrant women in Alberta. Women's work, over and above household chores, was indispensable for immigrant family survival and crucial for its economic betterment.

Research for this thesis is based on a variety of sources. The most important include: Canadian and Polish government documents, Canadian railways' colonization papers, Polish ethnic newspapers in Canada, collections of immigrants' photographs, manuscripts and correspondence of Polish missionary priests in Alberta and the documents and publications of the Polish societies in Alberta. However, the stories and reminiscences of the immigrants, either published or in the form of interviews, were unsurpassed as sources for the study of immigrant women's experiences in Alberta.

In addition to forty published reminiscences, included in two collections, numerous family recollections from local histories and newspapers enriched the research material.² The author, besides conducting eight personal interviews and several conversations with Polish women who had immigrated in the interwar period, used collections of interviews with Polish immigrants available at the Multicultural History

Society of Ontario in Toronto and in the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton. Altogether twenty seven in-depth interviews were used. While the Provincial Archives material dealt with women who had settled in Alberta, the Toronto collection permitted a study of the experiences of women recruited as domestic servants for farms in Alberta who left the province after their work contracts expired.

The women interviewed by the author were selected in such a way as to provide examples of immigrant experiences in both rural and urban settings. Respondents in cities were selected from among women in the Polish communities of Edmonton and Calgary. Respondents representing agricultural settlers were found through local histories and telephone listings in the areas where most of the immigrants had settled. Local histories, often giving the married names of immigrants' daughters, proved to be very helpful in reaching outside the Polish community. This enabled a look at Polish immigrant women's experiences not only within but also outside the Polish ethnic community in Alberta.

The interview sessions were combined with looking at old photographs and family documents that enriched the material included in the interviews. The respondents were very open and willing to share their experiences with the interviewer. Despite the variety of questions asked about their lives, all the women tended to emphasize two themes: the hardships they had lived through during their first

years in Alberta and the importance of family and motherhood in their lives.

Polish immigration to Canada in the interwar period was part of the mass European and overseas migration of Polish peasants that had started in the last decade of the nineteenth century and reached its apex in the years preceding the First World War. Polish women were a part of this movement from the very beginning not only as members of families but also as independent immigrants. Women were particularly visible among the seasonal agricultural workers to European countries. Prior to the First World War women in some years constituted the majority of Polish seasonal migrants to Germany and the Polish immigrants to Denmark were almost exclusively female farm workers.³

In contrast to the European migration, Polish emigrants to North America were predominantly male. In the first decade of the twentieth century women constituted only about 30% of Polish immigrants to the United States.⁴ While the majority of them arrived as members of families, the movement also included single women lured by opportunities for factory work. Such work was considered light in comparison to farm labour. Some women also expected to get married.⁵ The somewhat larger percentage of women among Polish immigrants to Canada, estimated at 39.5% prior to the First World War, can be explained by the primarily familial character of agricultural settlement in western Canada.⁶

Polish women's emigration both as members of families and as independent emigrants continued in the interwar period. Women constituted 36.6% of the Polish immigrants admitted to Canada between 1921 and 1931.⁷ The majority lured by the employment opportunities available in cities and industrial centres in central Canada, underwent a transition from rural to urban life. Alberta, a province that had little to offer to the immigrants outside agriculture, continued primarily to attract families interested in farming.⁸

In this thesis women's experiences will be studied in the family context. This approach seems to be the most appropriate as regards to the women who settled in Alberta in the interwar period. Not only were the overwhelming majority of adult women married, but their participation in the paid labour force and extrafamilial activities was limited.⁹

The Polish peasant immigrant family in North America has been the subject of extensive research. Most of the studies have examined the changes that occurred in the family in the context of the urbanization and industrialization of rural immigrants. In this respect the Polish experience resembled that of immigrant families of other ethnic backgrounds. The interpretation of that experience reflects the general trends in the historiography of immigration; the pessimistic portrayal of immigrants as

"uprooted" comes to be replaced with the sanguine depiction of them as "transplanted".¹⁰

An example of the first view is the comprehensive sociological analysis, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, written in 1918-1920 by W.I. Thomas and F. Znaniecki.¹¹ The authors, in accordance with the prevailing opinions of the time, concluded that the process of emigration, involving, as it did, the industrialization of the peasant, resulted in the destruction of the traditional stable family structure characteristic of agricultural societies. In the new urban environment, the immigrant family lost its economic purpose and its social role. The resulting individualization of family members was manifested in individual demoralization, economic dependency, the breakdown of conjugal relations, vagabondage and delinquency of boys and the sexual immorality of girls.¹²

The findings of Thomas and Znaniecki were challenged by numerous researchers who provided abundant evidence that destruction of the Polish-American family was not taking place.¹³ At the same time, methodological flaws were pointed out as the cause for the incorrect conclusions of the authors of The Polish Peasant. In particular, the representativeness of their work was questioned due to a lack of statistical verification of the data by the authors.¹⁴

The importance of religious values and social status considerations among Polish Americans were emphasized as the factors that contributed to the stability of immigrant families. John Thomas argued that the predictions of widespread family disorganization had not been realized "primarily because of the efficiency of the Polish parish organization and the deep faith of the immigrant".¹⁵ Helena Znaniecka Lopata argued that status competition between families, characteristic among Polish peasants, counteracted conflicts within immigrant families and contributed to their stability.¹⁶ Lopata also drew attention to the fact that the ties between the members of Polish American families depended on the degree to which their mutual needs were satisfied by the family unit. Interest in keeping the traditional structure differed depending on the positions of individuals within the family unit.¹⁷

More recent research has turned the direction of the debate from the cultural specifics of the Polish American family to economic factors that have forced immigrant families to adapt to changing conditions irrespective of their ethnicity. For example, John Bodnar argues that a strong cohesive family unit is equally indispensable for survival in an urban environment as it was in rural preindustrial societies:

Poles operated a functional family economy which combined a traditional reliance on kinship with pragmatic responses to the demands of industrial

capitalism. This familial-based system represented neither cultural continuity nor disintegration but was simply an adjustment to working-class life. Moreover, it was similar to the family system employed by Slovaks, Ukrainians, Italians, Serbs and many other Europeans at the same time.¹⁸

He further maintains that:

Inside the immigrant family the overriding preoccupation was not with social organization, status competition, traditional culture, religion, or mobility, but with income maintenance. It was not that those other concerns were ignored; but first and foremost, the immigrant family had to meet the reality of making a living.¹⁹

Polish American scholars, preoccupied with disproving of the alleged Polish immigrant family destruction, devoted less interest to the study of the structure of immigrant families. Due to the lack of Polish studies in the field, the views of Anglo-Saxon authors prevailed. According to them a typical Polish family in the U.S.A. prior to the Second World War, both in urban and in rural areas, was authoritarian, patriarchal and resistant to change.²⁰ The transformation of the family structure was observed only in the second generation largely due to the influence of the "democratic and equalitarian" family values characteristic for American society.²¹

The view that the Polish family possessed a strong patriarchal character was also shared by Polish Canadian researchers. In a study conducted among post World War II Polish immigrants in Toronto in the 1960s, Henry Radecki concluded that the traditional patriarchal Polish family

structure underwent profound changes in Canada as early as the first generation of immigrants.²² He argued that the authority of the father was visibly diminished. Unlike in Poland, important familial decisions came to be made jointly by husbands and wives. Household duties, that had been the exclusive domain of the women, were shared by husbands and wives. Only one third of married women did not work outside the house and over 30% had regular full-time jobs.²³

The resistance to change of the Polish immigrant families observed in the U.S.A. prior to the Second World War and their rapid adaptation to the new environment in post-war Canada seems to indicate that ethnicity has not been the main determinant of the Polish immigrants' behaviour. The preservation or change of their traditional family structure has rather served the purpose of family survival or betterment under new conditions as was argued by John Bodnar. In this study an attempt will be made to determine how the Polish family structure was affected as a result of immigrant settlement in Alberta in the interwar period.

Despite the fact that a rich literature exists on the history of the Poles in Canada, Polish immigrant women's experiences have not yet been a subject of separate study. The need for such research was indicated in the late 1970s by Joanna Matejko in her article entitled "Polish Women in Canada before World War II":

The present situation, when there are among the Polish immigrant women many doctors, engineers, research workers and generally speaking women with higher education engaged in various learned professions, is historically a new phenomenon. Memories of the old situation, which endured through the years and which are still alive in the consciousness of a fair number of Canadians, often startle us or our children till today...(Negative stereotypes) prove that it is worthwhile, even today, to examine our heritage in Canada in order to be able to understand how can such stereotypes still exist. Another reason why we should devote some attention to the history of Polish women in Canada is that this subject has been hitherto totally neglected.²⁴

Matejko's call was met with a modest response. In the 1980s only one paper was published on the subject. Discussing the role of women in the Polish Alliance of Canada in Ontario, Apolonja Kojder observed that despite the fact that they were crucial to the survival of the Alliance, women remained "at the periphery of the organizational structure".²⁵

The purpose of the present study is neither to disprove nor affirm the stereotype of Polish immigrant women as domestic servants and farm workers but merely to investigate their experiences as part of Canadian history. The study is divided into three chapters reflecting three periods in the lives of the immigrants: their life in Poland, their first months in Canada and the period of their settlement in Alberta.

Chapter One examines the social, economic and cultural background of the Polish peasants who constituted the majority of the Polish immigrants to Alberta in the interwar

period. It describes women's roles, functions and work in the peasant family. It investigates the causes of emigration and demonstrates women's roles in the process of emigration.

Chapter Two describes the impact of the Canadian immigration policies on the size, occupational structure and geographic distribution of Polish immigrants in Canada, and, in particular, in Alberta. It also provides some information on the social, economic and cultural conditions existing in Alberta and the place of the pre-World War One Polish immigrants in this environment.

Chapter Three examines Polish immigrant women's lives in Alberta. It shows changes in the lives of the women on the farms and it depicts the working-class immigrant lives in the cities and coal mining towns. It also touches on the migration of the younger generation of women to cities and portrays women's roles in the building and development of the Polish communities.

This study evidences economic success, but it also mentions the problems of making both ends meet and the struggle for survival. It is a testimony of both personal happiness and frustrations. But above all it demonstrates that family remained in the centre of women's interests and activities. Immigration and settlement in Alberta did not result in women's individualization but it did not mean resistance to change either.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

¹Census of Alberta 1936. Population and Agriculture, p.1025.

²Joanna Matejko, ed., Polish Settlers in Alberta. Reminiscences and Biographies, (Toronto: Polish Alliance Press Ltd., 1979); Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed., Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada, (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute, 1975); Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed., Memoirs of Polish Immigrants in Canada. Volume II, (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute, 1977); Benedykt Heydenkorn, ed., New Memoirs of Polish Immigrants 1958-1981, (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1984).

³Andrzej Pilch, "Emigracja z ziem zaboru austriackiego (od połowy XIX w. do 1918 r.)" in Andrzej Pilch, ed., Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowożytnych i najnowszych (XVIII-XX w.), (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984) p.283; Krzysztof Groniowski, "Emigracja z ziem zaboru rosyjskiego (1864-1918)" in Ibid., pp.214, 216, 220.

⁴Andrzej Pilch, pp.269, 271.

⁵Reminiscence of an immigrant woman quoted in Halina Janowska, Emigracja zarobkowa z Polski 1918-1939, (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1981) p.260.

⁶Estimate of the author based on the the number of Poles living in Canada in 1931 who had immigrated prior to 1920. Census of Canada 1931. Volume IV, p.639.

⁷Ibid., p.639.

⁸For example in 1931 in Ontario, 81.2% of Polish interwar immigrant women lived in urban areas; in Alberta 78.2% lived in rural areas. Ibid., pp.647, 651, 653.

⁹In 1931, 92.6% of Polish women 25-44 years of age, living in Alberta, were married. Census of Canada 1931. Volume IV, p.937. In 1936, only 749 women as compared to 15.502 men born in Poland were employed in Alberta. Census of Alberta 1936. Occupations, Unemployment, Earnings and Employment, Household and Families, p.941.

¹⁰See Oscar Handlin, The Uprooted, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1951) and John Bodnar, Transplanted. A

History of Immigrants in Urban America, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

¹¹William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1927).

¹²Ibid., vol. II, chapter "Disorganization of the immigrant", pp.1647-1821.

¹³See for example John L. Thomas, S.J., The American Catholic Family, (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1956), pp.250-251; also Paul Wrobel, Our Way. Family, Parish and Neighbourhood in a Polish-American Community, (Notre Dame - London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979) pp.15-23.

¹⁴John L. Thomas, p.257.

¹⁵Ibid., p.110.

¹⁶Helena Znaniecka Lopata, Polish Americans. Status Competition in an Ethnic Community, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1976), p.19.

¹⁷Lopata, "The Polish American Family", in Charles H. Mindel, Robert W. Habenstein and Roosevelt Wright, Jr., eds., Ethnic Families in America. Patterns and Variations. Third Edition, (New York, Amsterdam, London: Elsevier, 1988), p.39.

¹⁸John Bodnar, "Beyond Ethnicity: Polish Generations in Industrial America" in Frank Renkiewicz, ed., The Polish Presence in Canada and America, (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982), p.152.

¹⁹Ibid., p.141.

²⁰Theresita Polzin, "The Polish American Family - I. The Sociological Aspects of the Families of Polish Immigrants to America before World War II, and Their Descendants", The Polish Review, v.21, no.3, 1976, pp.109.

²¹Ibid., p.112.

²²Henry Radecki with Benedykt Heydenkorn, A Member of a Distinguished Family. The Polish Group in Canada, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), p.136.

²³Ibid., p.134

²⁴Joanna Matejko, "Polish Women in Canada before World War II" in Joanna Matejko, ed., History of the Polish-Canadian Women's Federation in Edmonton 1958-1978, (Edmonton: Polish-Canadian Women's Federation Branch 3, 1978), pp.101-110.

²⁵Apolonja Kojder, "Women in the Polish Alliance of Canada" in Jean Burnet, ed., Looking into My Sister's Eyes: an Exploration in Women's History, (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986), pp.91-105.

CHAPTER ONE

FOR JOBS, FOR LAND AND FOR PEACE

The end of the war and restoration of Poland's independence in 1918, after one hundred and thirty three years of subjection to Russia, Prussia and Austria, signalled the beginning of a new era for Poles, both at home and abroad. A mass return movement included not only political exiles and refugees from Bolshevik revolution in Russia but also economic emigrants from North America. Separated from their families by the war and disenchanted with the transient, unstable life of industrial labourers in the United States and Canada they intended to build their future at home. Within a short time, however, Poles were once again leaving their native land, including many of those who had just returned.

The atmosphere of joy, hope and high expectations that entranced the nation was short-lived as political sovereignty could not change economic reality. Poland was a backward agrarian country with a very limited and undercapitalized industrial base unable to provide jobs and decent living conditions for the millions of rural dwellers who were forced to look abroad for their means of survival. War destruction and Poland's fragile geopolitical situation

were additional factors encouraging emigration. While European countries remained the main destination for seasonal migration of single men and women, the movement to the American continent was also comprised of families determined to stay there permanently. In Canada, the province of Alberta became an attractive destination for such families.

Poland, restored after the First World War, faced immense problems. Five years of war, during which large parts of the country were either used as battlefields or occupied by German and Russian armies, had resulted in enormous suffering for the people, the devastation of agriculture and the destruction of industry. Apart from France, Poland was one of the worst affected countries. While almost all of its territory had suffered from military operations, about one quarter saw long and heavy fighting. In smaller towns and rural settlements 40% to 75% of the buildings were destroyed.¹ Polish farmers lost 1,817,000 cattle and 987,000 horses.² At the end of the war 30% of the total arable land in the front areas lay fallow.³ Foreign forces removed 4,250 electric engines, almost 4,000 machine tools as well as 98,000 tons of other industrial equipment causing the reduction of industrial employment to 15% of the 1914 level.⁴

Rebuilding the country was in itself a very costly and complex problem. That it had to be undertaken under

conditions of political uncertainty, due to external factors, made it slow and painful for the population. The Treaty of Versailles merely legalized the existence of Poland as a sovereign state and established, in part, the border with Germany. Settling the territorial problems with Germany, Russia, Lithuania and Czechoslovakia by armed conflict and plebiscites took several more years, resulted in tense relations with Poland's neighbours and earned her a negative image in Western Europe.⁵ Such circumstances had a long-lasting effect on her internal stability and did little to encourage the flow of foreign capital so badly needed for reconstruction and economic development. They did not ensure a peaceful and prosperous future for her people either. War experiences, political instability and fear of another war were important factors that encouraged some people to choose Canada as the country of their refuge:

(During the war) my father was taken away from us leaving my mother with four children. When the war finally ended my wounded father returned home. He told my mother "As soon as we get enough money saved, I'm leaving Poland and going to some peaceful country like the United States of America or Canada. I want to make a life for us somewhere peaceful, where there is no danger of war".⁶

My father was convinced that the Versailles Treaty did not guarantee the safety of Polish frontiers, and that in a short time Poland would be involved in another war with its neighbours. Hence, he wanted me to leave Poland.⁷

Fear of another war as a cause of emigration was particularly apparent in familial emigration from the

disputed areas. This group included families of well off farmers.⁸ It was also a major factor that encouraged former sojourners to bring their families to Alberta.⁹ Considering their comfortable economic status in Poland, economic motives for emigration did not play a principal role in their decision to leave Poland permanently.

However, for the majority of Poles, economic necessity or a desire to improve their economic conditions were the major factors that encouraged their emigration. The war destruction and an unfavourable international climate only intensified economic problems already exaggerated by a backward agriculture and a poorly developed industrial sector. Traditionally, Poland had been an agricultural country. Agriculture had been the dominant economic sector under the foreign rule and continued to be so in the new Polish Republic. According to the 1921 census, 66% of the population depended on agriculture for their livelihood and only 12.6% on industry.¹⁰

The principal problem of Polish agriculture was that its structure was characterized by a huge number of small peasant holdings that barely ensured self-sufficiency. In 1931 64.2% of all farmholdings in Poland were smaller than 5 hectares.¹¹ This problem was most acute in the southern part of the country where farmholdings smaller than 5 hectares constituted 88.1% of all farms.¹² The constantly diminishing size of the peasant holdings was the result of

high population growth and an inheritance system that favoured the division of farms among all the children.¹³

Agricultural reform, first introduced in 1919, and undertaken on a larger scale after 1925, was based on the voluntary sale of land by the large estate owners. While it provided an opportunity for enlarging the farms of better-off peasants, it did nothing to improve the situation of the poorest.¹⁴ Furthermore, the proportion of arable land available to the peasants as a result of land reform was negligible. Between 1918 and 1938, only 8.4% more land became available while the agricultural population grew by 18.5%.¹⁵ Land reform would not, therefore, solve the problem of shortage of land among the peasants.

The lack of industrial plants in the regions of highest rural population density, and the generally low level of peasant education, limited opportunities outside villages. While domestic service for women and such occupations as doorkeeper and guard for men attracted some to cities and towns, the majority of peasants stayed in the villages. In 1931 the surplus population in the agricultural sector was estimated at 4.7 million people or about 24% of the population dependent on agriculture.¹⁶

A shortage of internal sources of capital and the unwillingness of foreign investors to risk their funds in a politically insecure country, hindered the revitalization and expansion of industry on a scale necessary to absorb the

superfluous agricultural population.¹⁷ Throughout the interwar period small handicraft shops provided a high proportion of industrial jobs. Employment in large, primarily resource and heavy industry enterprises producing for foreign markets, was very vulnerable to changes in economic and political conditions abroad.¹⁸ Unemployment in the industrial sector, ranging between 100,000 and 252,000 in the 1920s and 700,000 to 1.1 million in the late 1930s, was a permanent feature of the Polish economy.¹⁹

In general, the twenty one years of independence, 1918 - 1939, are characterized by Polish economists as a period of economic stagnation. Both agricultural and industrial production in 1939 failed to surpass the levels reached in 1913.²⁰ Taking into account that in the same period the population grew by 26%, emigration pressure was a constant component of the socio-economic life of Poland throughout the period.²¹

Emigration was seen by politicians as an unavoidable and necessary solution from the very beginning of Poland's existence as an independent country. As a result, no obstacles were placed in the path of those people who wished to emigrate. On the contrary, the government felt the obligation to facilitate emigration and attempts were even made to effect some control over the conditions of Poles abroad. A network of government employment centres was organized throughout Poland to help people looking for jobs

either at home or abroad. Free passports were provided for employment-seeking emigrants. Numerous publications were made available, describing the living and working conditions in different countries. The periodical Wychodzca (The Emigrant) helped to acquaint prospective emigrants with immigration requirements and economic conditions in different countries. The Emigration Department of the Polish government, established in 1925, supervised the recruitment of the emigrants. Agreements with France, Germany, Belgium and Argentina regulated the conditions of employment of the emigrants and established annual quotas depending on the demand for labour in the host countries.²²

However, all these efforts by Poland did not have an effect on the volume, occupational structure or even the sex of the emigrants. This was in fact determined by the host countries. For example, while most of the countries favoured agricultural workers, preference for cheap female labour was reflected in the high proportion of women among the seasonal emigrants to Denmark, Latvia and Germany. Women constituted 68-80% of the emigrants from Poland to these countries in the years 1926-1938.²³ The restrictions regarding the number of immigrants were the reason that the number of people looking for jobs outside Poland considerably exceeded the number of actual emigrants. Competition for seasonal work in agriculture sometimes presented dramatic experiences, especially for the women:

In the spring of 1935 recruitment of women for seasonal work in Latvia was taking place in Swieciany. Seven hundred women had gathered in front of the subprefecture building since dawn. At 8 o'clock the agent accompanied by a policeman arrived and said that he needed forty women...The agent took advantage of the situation and started to treat the women in an inhumane way. He fondled the young women's breasts, made loud indecent comments about those who did not attract him and took bribes. And the women, with tears in their eyes, continued to crowd in, ignoring the insults, in order to go to Latvia, because of the desperate poverty at home.²⁴

Poles were particularly affected by the quota system, introduced in 1924 in the United States that reduced the number of Poles eligible for admission to about six thousand annually.²⁵ This was a serious blow as the United States was the principal destination of Poles prior to the First World War. The number of Polish immigrants to that country exceeded 1.3 millions in the period 1899-1914.²⁶ The virtual closing of the United States to Polish immigrants had an effect on their growing interest in Canada as the second most desirable overseas destination. A number of Polish emigrants, who had originally planned to go to the United States, chose Canada instead.²⁷

Unlike seasonal migration within Europe, that was accessible even for the poorest due to low transportation costs, often paid by the employer and later deducted from the wages, overseas migration was open only to those who had access to financial resources or, whose travel was paid by relatives living abroad.²⁸ Those with financial resources

included landowning peasants, because even those with small plots of 2-3 hectares could afford at least one ship ticket using their land as collateral for a loan.²⁹ Loaned money was therefore the most popular means of financing the cost of travel to Canada, despite the fact that interest rates were sometimes as high as 25% per month.³⁰

The cost of getting to Canada, although high by Polish standards, was well worth it because Canada was considered the "Land of Opportunity". One emigrant who came to Canada in 1930 to earn money and then return home with the savings, remembered, "in that time many emigrants, after a short period in Canada, were sending thousands of dollars home".³¹ Not only were wages high, but land was cheap and abundant. The prospect of becoming an owner of 160 acres meant a better living than in Poland. "Life on 6 morgen (3.6 hectares) of land is difficult and hard, so we decided to look for a piece of bread in the wide world and emigrate to Canada".³² The high wages payed to farm labourers in Alberta in the 1920s enabled a substantial number of Polish male immigrants to bring over their families.³³

The prospect of high earnings in Canada also appealed to young, single women:

There was no work for money, only at the manor. But it paid very little, 80 grosze (about \$0.11) for the whole day from 7 in the morning until 8 in the evening. And you had to have your own lunch... People from America returned to the village with money, particularly women...The girls who went,

praised their experience. The girls were needed to work in Canada on farms. I decided to go.³⁴

Another woman, recruited by the C.P.R., remarked:

Some people who had no money, went to Germany or France...I wanted to do better, I wanted to go to Canada. Because we could not afford to pay for the trip of both girls to Canada, my mother borrowed the money for me. I was the oldest one. I was the first choice... I didn't know if it would be any better here (Canada), but they used to say "you will go there, you will work for a tailor, you will sew buttons, and you will make so much money that you will be able to pay for the ticket to Canada".³⁵

Clearly, economic opportunities attracted both Polish men and women to Canada in the interwar period. However, since travel costs were high, Canada was unaffordable for the poorest. The prospect of economic betterment rather than escape from starvation was their prime motivation as is evident in the following statement from a young woman who came to Canada in 1930: "you know, I did not have to go, we were not hungry".³⁶

Notwithstanding the economic and political pressures for emigration, the slow pace of change in the social life of Poland also led to growing disenchantment with the fatherland, particularly among returnees from North America and younger peasants. Their high expectations of Poland's democracy were difficult to reconcile with the reality of the rigid social structure of the country.

Poles are usually very proud of their democratic and liberal heritage. Before losing its independence at the end

of the eighteenth century, Poland was a multi-ethnic and multireligious state whose political system resembled that of a republic. The king was elected, however, the nobility was the only class that enjoyed political rights.³⁷ During the nineteenth century, when Poland was under foreign rule, the nobility and the intelligentsia that developed from this social class preserved the idea of the restoration of Polish statehood and cultivated national ideals, language and traditions. Polish literature flourished under their tutelage and the importance of Roman Catholicism as the religion of the Poles grew. The intelligentsia considered itself, and indeed was, a leading force in the nation. Because of its education, strong national consciousness and political activism, it differed from the uneducated peasants who were often closer to their Ukrainian neighbours than to their Polish masters. In the absence of a strong middle class the division between "masters" and "peasants" remained a characteristic feature of Polish society.³⁸

After the First World War Poland was restored as a democratic state with its people having political rights independent of social class, ethnic origin, gender or property. Noble titles were abolished. However, these reforms did not end the political influence and high social status of the ex-noble families and intelligentsia who continued to dominate the state apparatus at all levels.³⁹ Such a situation did not satisfy the younger peasants, who

felt that their problems ought to be better addressed by the state. They despised the paternalistic way in which they were treated by the authorities and were frustrated that their limited educations shut them out of positions in the public administration and the army. They were disenchanted with the state for which they had fought in the war against Russia in 1920 and which did not give them the land they had been promised.⁴⁰

The way in which peasants were treated by the authorities in Poland was also difficult to accept for returnees from North America and may have contributed to their decisions to make permanent homes in Canada or the United States:

There (in America), I with my broken English, could be understood everywhere. They immediately found an interpreter and handled everything free of charge, decently and politely whether it was a Jew or a Pole. And here if one asks for information, they require that you address them as "your excellency"... There, in America, Polish sons and daughters have access to the authorities and evening schools... This "wild" America gives one a pencil, a paper, a teacher and a schoolroom to make him a man. And here?... America was a better mother and protectress of rights than is our free fatherland now. In America I was looked after like a citizen's son, and here I am not, although I am a citizen's son.⁴¹

If the structure of Polish society acted as a factor encouraging the emigration of peasants, stratification within the village had a similar effect. The predominance of feudal values favouring land ownership as the most desirable

source of economic security and social status, placed farmers with more land at the top of the social hierarchy of the village community. Fear of the loss of that desirable position by their sons and daughters motivated the emigration of some well off farming families with numerous children. Canada attracted them as it provided an opportunity to secure large acreages for all the children if they so desired.⁴² Dissatisfaction with their low position in the village social structure also pushed out landless peasants whose bonds with their community were weak.⁴³ For many others the eventual return to Poland, after several years of work abroad, placed advancement in the village communities within their reach.⁴⁴

The fact that the overwhelming majority of peasants in Poland owned and lived off their land may have also contributed to the fact that dissatisfaction with the social system in Poland did not translate into the radicalization of the peasant movement.⁴⁵ The majority of the peasants, particularly in the 1920s, exhibited a conservative outlook. The conservative, nationalist and Roman-Catholic ideology of the *Piast* peasant movement found a strong backing in southern Poland. The National Christian Peasant Party with its emphasis on nationalism with an anti-Semitic tint, Roman-Catholicism and private enterprise, enjoyed a strong following particularly in the clergy-influenced peasant circles in western and central Poland. A more radical

peasant party, *Wyzwolenie* (Liberation), appealed to a fairly limited segment of the peasant masses.⁴⁶ The peasant strikes of the 1930s can be explained as acts of desperation resulting from the hardships of economic depression and the frustration with their failed expectations of the Polish state, rather than a change of views.⁴⁷ Successful opposition to collectivization of agriculture and the failure of the post World War II communist regimes in Poland to eradicate religion is clear evidence of deep rootedness of this conservative ideology in the mentality of the Polish peasant.⁴⁸

If conservatism predominated in the peasant's political behaviour, common sense and pragmatism were evident in his attitude towards education. While the usefulness of having a trade was appreciated, a school education that had limited use for persons working all their lives on farms, was considered a waste of time and unnecessary luxury. "We will not eat bread from reading and writing" was the common rationalization for not sending children to school. School education for girls was regarded as useless:

She will not be a lady, but a farmer's daughter and a farmer's wife. She will not go to city where she would need education.⁴⁹

A woman will not go to the army, so she does not need an education.⁵⁰

Such opinions were justified by necessity. In many rural households children's labour was simply needed to survive.

Higher education was unaffordable, especially if it required sending a child to city.⁵¹ On the other hand, providing a higher education for some of their children that ensured them an entrance into administrative positions and professions was the ambition of well off farmers.⁵²

Notwithstanding the parents' views, the attitudes of the young towards education differed. While some complained that they could not go to high school because of the lack of funds, others simply did not like the school and were happy to stay home. One woman who emigrated to Canada as a young person, remembered:

I finished two grades only. I did not like the school. And my father was only too happy, because he had help with the horses.⁵³

Illiteracy in Poland, estimated at one third of the population soon after the First World War, was substantially reduced, but not totally eradicated, following compulsory elementary education introduced in the early 1920s.⁵⁴ In 1931, 27% of all females seven years of age and older could not read or write.⁵⁵ Polish immigrants to Canada had most often completed four to seven grades of elementary school, although there were a few cases of illiteracy among older women.⁵⁶ Among those who came to Alberta, high school graduates were a distinct minority. On the other hand, both men and women had experience and knowledge of a trade or skill. Most popular among men were: carpentry, butchering,

blacksmithing and shoemaking. Women, prepared mainly for household work, knew sewing and cooking.⁵⁷

Roman-Catholicism has always played an important part in the lives of the Polish peasants. However, its influence was never simply limited to the sphere of religious beliefs and practices. Attachment to Roman-Catholicism has its origin in the many functions which religion and the local parish played in the everyday life of a villager. As a member of a parish community, the peasant was obliged to attend church regularly, to go to confession, to observe ritual and to accept the moral teachings of the church.⁵⁸ Because emphasis was primarily on ritual and concrete activities rather than on doctrine or mystical content, religion was also an integral part of the social life and work of the peasants:

The holidays are not an interruption of the agricultural cycle, but a part of it... Although they are primarily days of worship and ritual, rest and amusement are important elements - they furnish the major part of the peasant's recreation. They are rich too in magical rites and observances carried over from pre-Christian days and mingled comfortably with Roman Catholic ritual and precept.⁵⁹

Whereas the aim of church festivals, pilgrimages, singing in the church choir and playing in the church orchestra was the glorification of God and the saints, it also provided entertainment. Thus the border between the sacred and the secular was often invisible. The separation between the two was even less distinct when one realizes that the most

important events in the life of the peasant, his family and his community were celebrated in the parish.⁶⁰

While the church enabled the control of the moral behaviour of the members of the village community, it also enhanced the role of the parish priest who, for a long time, was the only educated person among his mostly illiterate parishioners. The priest served not only as the intermediary between God and people, but also provided leadership and guidance in the non-religious spheres of their lives. In the nineteenth century, when Poland did not exist as an independent state, the Roman-Catholic clergy played an important role in retaining the Polish language and in raising the national consciousness of the peasants, particularly in the western part of Poland which had been incorporated into Prussia. In the south-eastern part, the Roman-Catholic religion differentiated the Polish peasants from their Ukrainian neighbours.⁶¹

The Roman Catholic church was still strongly established in the Polish village of the 1920s and 1930s. Religious practices played a significant role in the lives of the peasants and the church was an integral part of the village community. The parish hall was often not only the centre of social and cultural life, but also the place where the political views of the parishioners were shaped.⁶² Through a network of semi-secular organizations, parish libraries, the celebration of patriotic anniversaries,

amateur theatre and clubs, the church attracted many young people and helped to increase their public participation and their knowledge of Polish history and literature. On the other hand such activities enhanced the authority of the parish priest and allowed him to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the parishioners. Although the clergy enjoyed a great measure of respect in the villages and their authority in religious matters was never questioned, their involvement in politics and their interference with the activities of secular organizations was opposed by the young, who rejected the control of their behaviour by the church.⁶³

Despite poor economic conditions, the interwar period witnessed the growing participation of the peasants, both men and women, in the organizational life of a restored Poland. Apart from the peasant political movement, it found its expression in the development of the economic circles and socio-cultural clubs of the peasantry. The Peasant Party, although divided between right and left wings, was a powerful political force that had to be reckoned with by all the governments in interwar Poland. Its significance was also reflected in the fact that in the early 1920s both the premier and the speaker of the house (*sejm*) were peasants.⁶⁴

Political activism on the part of the peasants, while especially strong in southern Poland since 1890s, did not include women until much later. The first women's sections

were established by the Peasant Party chapters in 1936. Their aim was to work towards the advancement of women's self-esteem and to enhance their role in society.⁶⁵ Women delegates were present, for the first time in the Peasant Party Congress organized in Cracow in 1938 when one was elected to the Central Council of the party.⁶⁶ Women also participated in the strikes organized by the peasants in southern Poland in 1930s.⁶⁷ However, the participation of women from other regions in the peasant movement was negligible.⁶⁸

During the 1930s women came to be represented in the territorial self-government in central Poland. For example, in 1933, 200 women, and in 1938, 275 women were elected to local councils.⁶⁹ Their participation was still, however, very small. It was estimated that for every 1000 male counsellors, there were only 2 women.⁷⁰ Women's involvement in peasant economic organizations was also limited. For example, in the late 1930s their membership in the farm women's circles (*kola gospodyń wiejskich*), that were the most numerous organizations of peasant women, was estimated at only 100,000.⁷¹ At the same time, the flourishing rural cooperative movement, that included credit societies, agricultural-food societies, food consumer societies and dairies, embraced 3 million members.⁷²

Women were more visible in peasant youth organizations. Nonetheless, in these organizations they were also in a

minority. For example, at the first meeting of peasant youth in 1919 there were only 81 women among the 258 delegates.⁷³ The first women's sections in *Wici* (Call to Arms), the politically left-oriented peasant youth groups, were not organized until the early 1930s. While men were more interested in politics, women concentrated their efforts on cultural and educational activities.⁷⁴ Toward the end of the 1930s women's sections became very popular and active in organizing short courses for farm women that covered such topics as education and culture, problems of hygiene and health, and farm economy.⁷⁵

Although their participation in all sorts of secular organizations grew, women were most numerous in church sponsored clubs and circles. Their membership in Catholic Youth Circles in two provinces alone surpassed 40,000 and was larger than that of the men.⁷⁶ The Catholic Union of Polish Women was one of the largest organizations of women in Poland.⁷⁷

Women's limited membership in secular organizations as compared to church sponsored ones, was at least partly due to the influence of the clergy which used its authority to prohibit women's involvement in professional organizations and discouraged them from participation in the activities of the secular youth clubs.⁷⁸ However, the principal cause of a peasant's woman limited participation in the public sphere, were her functions in the rural family and economy.

not leave her much time for leisure, particularly not the married women:

The wedding, particularly for the woman, was a crag separating two distinct lives. Beyond gaped the dark precipice of lifelong drudgery, of a succession of pregnancies, of toil to the very door of death. For, as common saying had it, God sends death when He reckons that all strength has been sapped from the body.⁷⁹

A peasant woman, besides her motherly responsibilities and household duties, had defined tasks to perform on the farm. Because of the mixed character of the small peasant farms, a result of the necessity to achieve economic self-sufficiency, and due to the low degree of mechanization, farming was very labour intensive. Women performed such field work as throwing out dung, planting, weeding and hoeing potatoes and other vegetables. They raked and stacked hay. During the harvest they brought in the sheaves. In the fall, together with men, they dug the vegetables and prepared wood for the winter. Women milked cows, cleaned cattle and fed the pigs and fowl. They processed the flax, plucked feathers and did the spinning. In the summer, women on larger farms had to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning to catch up with the work. In the winter, spinning and plucking feathers, often done in groups, lasted till eleven at night.⁸⁰

Female work in rural households was not limited to adult women only. Starting at the age of five, daughters helped mothers with household chores. If the mother worked

outside the house, a six year old girl's duties included: looking after smaller children, carrying water, feeding cattle and taking care of the fire. She also washed dishes and cleaned the house. Sometimes she helped in the field.⁸¹ There was no time for play even in the families of better off farmers:

As regards playing and entertainment, I did not have time for that as a child. And in the winter there was nothing to play with and no place for playing.⁸²

I do not remember playing as a child. I recall only that I liked to help my mother.⁸³

At the age of ten the girls worked as cattle herders.⁸⁴ Because of usually very narrow plots of land, cattle herding was a responsible and time consuming task, taking sometimes the whole day from dawn to dusk:

I had to herd the cattle from my youngest years. My childhood years, instead of being the most beautiful time, were the time of torment. I had to herd five cattle, young and old, in a field 20 meters wide. On the one side there was clover, on the other bird's foot, potatoes, millet or cabbage. And the beasts, as if they plotted, one was in the clover, the other in the potatoes. And you, with your feet hurt by the stubble, had no choice. You had to run fast in order not to be scolded. O God, how many tears such a child would swallow.⁸⁵

Fifteen year old girls helped their mothers and gradually replaced them in the field work and household duties.⁸⁶

While the work on the farm was shared by men and women, the household work was the woman's exclusive domain and had to be combined with her tasks on the farm and frequent

pregnancies, child bearing and rearing. Besides cooking, a woman's household duties included washing and cleaning. In the summer the washing was done once a month or every three weeks, often on the river shore. It consisted of preparing the soap, soaking, beating with paddles, rinsing and bleaching the linen. Cooking was rather simple as the monotonous diet of the peasants consisted mostly of potatoes, cabbage and starches with the addition of milk and some fat. Major house cleaning was done in the spring and besides scrubbing the floors and washing the windows, the house had to be painted.⁸⁷

Her work, however, gave a married woman economic rewards. While she shared the ownership of the farm and the house with her husband, the income derived from the sale of fowl, dairy products and linen was exclusively at her disposal. She also often managed most of the money received from the farm. Besides money for tobacco, the husband usually kept for himself only the money received as tips or from some services he rendered.⁸⁸ In the case of her death, the land she had brought into the marriage became the property of her children and could not be disposed of by her husband before they grew up, and even then he needed their consent.⁸⁹

As there was no place on the farm for those who could not work, the life of the old people was miserable, especially if they did not own the land. Therefore, the

parents generally delayed the division of the farm between their children. Often the farms were divided only after both parents had died. This custom put even the adult children in the disadvantageous position of economic dependence.⁹⁰ Young couples often had to live in the same house with the parents:

In our village if a girl got married, they had no house, no nothing. When you married you had to go to his house or he came to your house. There were no separate houses like here in Canada where newly married people can go.⁹¹

The economic indispensability of the woman's work in a farm operation, ensured the farmer's wife a high position in the peasant family. Her function as mother strengthened her position even more as the family economic viability often depended on children's labour. On the other hand, daughters in rural families, despite their work, were in the position of economic dependence on their parents. Thus marriage and the establishment of a family were the main goals for young females. Even if it did not mean immediate economic independence, it at least ensured a status of respectability granted only to married persons in the village.⁹²

However, a woman's chances for a desirable marriage, or even getting married at all, depended on the dowry she was able to bring with her. Besides the fact that marrying "beneath" one's status was generally unacceptable, the lower ratio of men to women in Poland, placed women without dowries in a disadvantageous position.⁹³ Personal pride

kept others from getting married without a dowry and being dependent on the husband. A nineteen year old girl, living on a farm with her married brother, described her predicament:

As long as I live with my brother, he does not have to pay me my share of the farm. Although he sometimes suggests that I should marry, I know that it is impossible because he does not have the money to pay me out. And as I cannot go to husband's house without a dowry my marriage is delayed.⁹⁴

Besides the dowry, the ability to work hard and bear children were considered assets for the female candidate. The affections of the young were rarely taken into consideration when the economic viability of the new family unit and the preservation of social status in the village community were a priority.⁹⁵

The purpose of marriage was to secure the continuous successful operation of the family farm because it provided a living for all the family members in exchange for their work. Children, as the cheapest source of labour, were therefore most desirable. Individual interests and desires were subject to the common purpose and needs of the successful economic unit. It did not mean, however, that by marrying the woman became a passive executor of her husband's will. In the interwar period, the traditional patriarchal family with the authoritarian father was very rare.⁹⁶ The position of husband and wife in the family often depended not so much on gender as on the property

brought to the marriage and the personality and abilities of the individual. If the couple settled on the woman's land or if she was a better manager, her position in the family was strengthened. Often male dominance was formal rather than real.⁹⁷ A woman's opinions were greatly valued and men were often reluctant to make important decisions without the participation of their wives. Sometimes the family owed their growing prosperity to the woman's rather than the man's entrepreneurial abilities.⁹⁸

Emigration was one of the factors that enhanced the position of a married woman in the family. During the absence of her husband, she usually took over the role of the manager. Married women, therefore, were less inclined than their husbands to leave their villages and settle abroad. Although their unwillingness or refusal to emigrate was sometimes ignored, in many cases their opposition kept the family in Poland.⁹⁹ Most often, however, especially in young families the decision to emigrate was a joint decision. It was sometimes dictated by the desire of the couple to marry against the wishes of their parents, but more often to achieve the economic independence, that would enable them to live separately from their parents. Not uncommon were cases where the woman was the instigator of the move across the ocean.¹⁰⁰ Taking into account the young age of Polish immigrants to Canada, most of the married women who emigrated as members of families must have

actively participated in the decision.¹⁰¹ A comic, yet telling, exchange highlights the ambiguous nature of such decisions:

(Soon after arrival in Canada)

Wife: Why did you bring us to this God-forsaken country?

Husband: If you had said no, we wouldn't have come.

(A few years later)

Husband: Aren't you glad that I have brought you to this God-forsaken country?

Wife: If I said no, you wouldn't have brought me.¹⁰²

Unmarried men and women generally took sole responsibility for their decision to emigrate, although sometimes the initiative came from the parents, who hoped for fewer problems with the division of the farm between the remaining children.¹⁰³ As well, during the interwar period, working abroad was acceptable even for the daughters of better off farmers, who were socially stigmatized if they worked as hired labour in Poland.¹⁰⁴ Emigration, like marriage provided escape from parental control and in many cases it improved the possibility of getting married, especially for poor girls who had no dowries. Sometimes, curiosity, the desire to see something new, to avoid hard work on a farm, or to join friends motivated the young women:

I liked my job at the manor very much, but I wanted to see something new, something else,

perhaps better than in Poland. Besides I hated the work on the farm. I did not want to become a farmer's wife. When I found out that John intended to go to Canada, I decided to marry him.¹⁰⁵

I was restless, as many people had already gone to Canada in 1926.¹⁰⁶

Economic conditions in Poland, intensified by war destruction and post-war political instability, forced hundreds of thousands of people to look abroad for their means of survival. The agrarian character of the Polish economy, as well as the demand for labour in the industrial countries of Europe and America, favouring agricultural workers, resulted in the emigration of Poles from predominantly peasant backgrounds during the interwar period. Women were a part of this movement both as independent emigrants seeking work abroad and as members of families.

Canada, perceived as a country in which wages were high, where cheap land was readily available and whose geographical location ensured a peaceful life, became a desirable overseas destination for Poles, especially after their immigration to the United States was drastically reduced. While, at the time of their departure, many immigrants intended to return to Poland with their savings, an opportunity to engage in farming was the principal attraction for Polish peasant families and young couples who chose to settle in Alberta. Not all of them were motivated

by prospects of economic betterment. For some, Alberta was a safe refuge from political instability in Europe. Instability that, they believed, threatened another war.

An examination of the conditions of the Polish peasant woman indicates that in the interwar period her activities and goals in life were defined by her functions in the rural family and economy. Her status in the family depended on her role as a female (wife, mother, daughter), her financial standing before marriage and her personal abilities. High social status due to married women, and mothers in particular, made marriage and the establishment of a family the main goal for young females. Emigration made the fulfillment of this goal easier. The second aspect of a peasant woman's life was her work. Both in the household and in the field, such work was indispensable for the survival of rural families. But hard and time consuming work left little time for leisure and extrafamilial interests and activities. Although it gave economic rewards, it did not always appeal to young women who expected to find something better on the other side of the ocean.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹Zbigniew Landau and Jerzy Tomaszewski, The Polish Economy in the Twentieth Century, (London & Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985), p.24; on war destruction see also Ferdynand Zweig, Poland Between Two Wars, (London: Secker & Warburg 1944), p.31;

²Landau, p.24.

³Ibid., p.24.

⁴Ibid., p.24.

⁵Norman Davies, God's Playground. A History of Poland in two volumes, Volume II 1795 to the Present, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.393-394 and 401-402; Anna M. Cienciala and Titus Komarnicki, From Versailles to Locarno. Keys to Polish Foreign Policy, 1919-25, (Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1984), pp.1-11.

⁶A. Puzianowski, reminiscence, in Joanna Matejko, (ed.), Polish Settlers in Alberta. Reminiscences and Biographies, (Toronto: Polish Alliance Press Ltd., 1979), p.151.

⁷C. Chrzanowski, reminiscence, Ibid., p.44.

⁸P. Piskunowicz, reminiscence, Ibid., p. 401; also interviews with author: Helen Blomme, 17 August 1991, Irene Hancharyk and Phyllis Strocher, 5 October 1990, GAI, Calgary.

⁹Reminiscences of G. and M. Bieleś and K. Nizioł, in Matejko, pp. 37, 132.

¹⁰Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland 1969, (Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1970), p.28.

¹¹Pologne 1919-1939, Vol. II Vie économique, (Neuchâtel: Editions de la Baconnière, 1946), p.134. Farms smaller than 5 ha. were considered too small to ensure self-sufficiency. Mieczysław Mieszczankowski, Rolnictwo II Rzeczypospolitej, (Warszawa: Książka i Wiedza, 1983), p.106.

¹²Pologne, Vol.II., p.134.

¹³The population of Poland increased from 27.4 million people in 1921 to 34.6 millions in 1938.

Mieszczankowski, p.45; The birth-rate, although declining from 16.2 per thousand in 1921-1925 to 13.0 per thousand in 1931-1935, was one of the highest in Europe. Pologne, Vol.II., pp.102-103; on inheritance system see Sula Benet, Song, Dance, and Customs of Peasant Poland, (London: Dennis Dobson, 1951), pp.228-229; Stefan Kieniewicz, The Emancipation of the Polish Peasantry, (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1969), p.204; Zofia Jablonowska, "Rodzina w XIX i na początku XX wieku", in Jadwiga Komorowska, (ed.), Przemiany rodziny polskiej, (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy CRZZ, 1975), p.54; Krystyna Duda Dziewierz, Wies malopolska a emigracja amerykanska. Studium wsi Babica powiatu rzeszowskiego, (Warszawa - Poznan: Polski Instytut Socjologiczny, 1938), pp.15-16; Lucjan Kocik, "A Note on the Custom of 'Paying Off' on Family Farms in Poland", in Norman Long, (ed.), Family and Work in Rural Societies, (London-New York: Tavistock Publications, 1984), pp.135-141.

¹⁴For discussion of land reform, see Mieszczankowski, pp.74-86; Landau, p.127; Zweig, pp.129-135; Witold Staniewicz, "The Agrarian Problem in Poland between the Two World Wars", Slavonic and East European Review, v.42 1963-1964, pp.23-33.

¹⁵The total arable land in Poland was 38 million ha. Only 3.2 mln ha., or 8.4% of the arable land was sold within the framework of land reform. Mieszczankowski, pp.71, 73. The agricultural population grew from 17.8 millions in 1921 to 21.1 million in 1938, (18.5%). Ibid., p.45.

¹⁶Ibid., p.57; for occupations of peasants in cities, see ibid., p.60; population depending on agriculture was 19.6 millions in 1931. Ibid., p.45.

¹⁷Landau, pp.64-67; see also J. Taylor, The Economic Development of Poland 1919-1950, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1952), pp.34-60.

¹⁸In 1929, before the Depression, handicraft shops employed between 886,000 and 1 million people. At the same time large enterprises employed 865,000. Landau, p.67. For a discussion of Polish industry, see Landau, pp.33-38, 61-67, 87-95, 117-126 and Taylor, pp.79-100.

¹⁹Landau, pp.79, 80, 136.

²⁰Mieszczankowski, p.25; Landau, pp.120, 127, 129; see also Wielka Encyklopedia Powszechna, vol.9, (Warszawa: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1966), pp.67, 73.

²¹Halina Janowska, Emigracja zarobkowa z Polski 1918-1939, (Warszawa: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1981), p.69.

²²Ibid., pp.102-117; Edward Kolodziej, Wychodztwo zarobkowe z Polski 1918-1939. Studia nad polityka emigracyjna II Rzeczypospolitej, (Warszawa: Ksiazka i Wiedza 1982), pp.42-55, 110-121, 181; Pologne, Vol.I, p.489.

²³Janowska, p.268.

²⁴Biographie 267/26 in Jozef Chalasinski, Młode pokolenie chlopow. Procesy i zagadnienia ksztaltowania sie warstwy chlopskiej w Polsce, tom II, Swiat zycia, pracy i dazen kol mlodziezy wiejskiej, (Warszawa: Panstwowy Instytut Kultury Wsi, 1938), p.73.

²⁵Andrzej Brozek, "Polityka imigracyjna w panstwach docelowych emigracji polskiej (1850-1939)" in Andrzej Pilch, (ed.), Emigracja z ziem polskich w czasach nowozytnych i najnowszych (XVIII-XX w.), (Warszawa: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1984), p.133.

²⁶J. Zubrzycki, "Emigration from Poland in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries", Population Studies, v.6, 1952-1953, p.265.

²⁷Ewa Wojcicki, interview with author, 19 September 1990, GAI, Calgary; Dziuzynski, reminiscence in Matejko, p.83;

²⁸Georges Mauco, Les etrangers en France. Leur role dans l'activite economique, (Paris: Librairie Armand Colin, 1932), pp.215, 369.

²⁹Antonina Ciastek, interview with author, September 19, 1990, GAI, Calgary; For prices of land in Poland, see Janowska, p.177; Mieszczankowski, p.75; For prices in Poland and costs of ship tickets to Canada, see Anna Reczynska, Emigracja z Polski do Kanady w okresie miedzywojennym. (Warszawa: Ossolineum 1986), p.189.

³⁰Antoni and Maria Wozniak, "Pamietniki z podrozy i zycia w Kanadzie", Biuletyn KPK, Edmonton, May 3, 1970, p.4, in Walter Chuchla Papers, MG 31 H58, NAC, Ottawa; see also Reczynska, p.189.

³¹J.G., Hamilton, unpublished reminiscence, Zwiaskowiec collection, MG28v25, NAC, Ottawa.

³²Wozniak, p.4.

³³Wages offered in agriculture in Saskatchewan in 1923 were \$40-55 per month, The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1923, p.266; For immigrants who brought families to Canada, see reminiscences in Matejko, pp.40, 94, 151, 208; Alberta local histories; Lisiecki, Krzyzanowski, Zapior, interviews, MHSO, Toronto; Wojciechowicz interview, PAA, Edmonton.

³⁴Julia Golomb interview, MHSO, Toronto; see also Stanislaw Janiec interview, the same collection.

³⁵Antonina Ciastek, interview with author.

³⁶Ibid.

³⁷Aleksander Gieysztor et al., History of Poland, 2nd Edition, (Warszawa: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1979), p.122-125; Jan Szczepanski, Polish Society, (New York: Random House, 1970), p.12.

³⁸Davies, Chapter One, pp.3-80, Chapter Six, pp.178-206; Gieysztor, pp.479-4781; Szczepanski, p.12; Alexander Matejko, Social Change and Stratification in Eastern Europe. An Interpretive Analysis of Poland and Her Neighbours, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), p.59.

³⁹Davies, pp.182-183; Joseph Rothschild, East Central Europe between the Two World Wars, (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1974), pp.28-29; A. Matejko, p.61; Szczepanski, pp.20-26.

⁴⁰See biographies of young Polish peasants, published in Chalasinski, pp.10, 41, 43, 84, 145, 171, 180, 205, 408, 426, 436, 437.

⁴¹Duda-Dziewierz, p.152; see also reminiscences in J. Matejko, pp.37, 132; Gerwatowski story in Across the Smoky, (DeBolt: DeBolt and District Pioneer Museum Society, 1978), p.99.

⁴²See for example Stephanie Starr, interview with author, October 20, 1990, GAI, Calgary.

⁴³Duda-Dziewierz, p. 29.

⁴⁴See for example: reminiscence in Matejko, p.356; Joanna Portko, Jan Pasternak, Julia Wur, Julia Golomb, Wincenty Zapior interviews, MHSO, Toronto.

⁴⁵In 1931 landless peasants with families constituted only 15% of the agricultural population. Mieszczankowski, p.137.

⁴⁶Rothschild, pp.31-32; Jozef Buszko, Historia Polski 1864-1948, (Warszawa: Panstwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1988), pp.242, 270-272, 277, 298-299, 309, 314-318, 324-325; David Lane, George Kolankiewicz, Social Groups in Polish Society, (London: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 35-37; Vaclav L. Benes, Norman G.J. Pounds, Poland, (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1970), pp.191-200.

⁴⁷Lane, p. 36.

⁴⁸Ibid., pp.29-87; in 1963 85.7% of the agricultural land in Poland was owned by private farmers, 11% by cooperatives and 12.7% by state farms. Rocznik Statystyczny 1964, (Warszawa: Główny Urząd Statystyczny, 1964), p. 213; on the role of the Roman Catholic Church see for example Marc E. Heine, The Poles. How They Live and Work, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975), pp.32-34; Harriet Hall Bloch, Household Economy and Entrepreneurial Activity in a Polish Peasant Village, Columbia University, Ph.D., 1973, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University Microfilms, 1974), pp.2, 9-10.

⁴⁹M. Trawinska-Kwasniewska, "Sytuacja społeczna kobiety wiejskiej w ziemi krakowskiej w latach 1880-1914", Prace etnograficzne, t.10, 1957, p.149.

⁵⁰Chalasinski, p.340.

⁵¹Ewa Wojcicki, interview with author; Julian Topolnicki, "Na miejskim bruku" in Benedykt Heydenkorn, Pamiętniki imigrantów polskich w Kanadzie, (Toronto: Canadian Polish Research Institute, 1975), pp.256-257; reminiscences in Matejko, pp.85, 161; Chalasinski, p.47.

⁵²Duda-Dziewierz, p.47.

⁵³Antonina Ciastek, interview with author.

⁵⁴Concise Statistical Yearbook of Poland 1969, p.27.

⁵⁵Rocznik statystyczny 1964, p.31.

⁵⁶Reczynska, pp.87-90.

⁵⁷See reminiscences in J. Matejko; also interviews by author.

⁵⁸William I. Thomas, Florian Znaniecki, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1927), pp. 205-287; Joseph John Parot, Polish Catholics in Chicago, 1850-1920, (Dekalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 1981), pp. 92-93; Anthony J. Kuzniewski, Faith and Fatherland. The Polish Church War in Wisconsin, 1896-1918, (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1980), pp.3, 13; Daniel S. Buczek, "Kultura religijna Polonii. Analiza zagadnien" in Hieronim Kubiak, (ed.), Polonia amerykanska. Przeszlosc i wspolczesnosc, (Wroclaw: Ossolineum, 1988), pp.293-324; Barbara Les, "Zycie religijne Polonii amerykanskiej" in Kubiak, pp.325-344.

⁵⁹Benet, p.36.

⁶⁰Parot, p.93.

⁶¹Szczepanski, pp.165-166.

⁶²Biographies in Chalasinski, pp.108-109, 182, 185, 218.

⁶³Ibid., pp.162, 164-165, 183-184, 197, 201-202, 208.

⁶⁴Buszko, p.242.

⁶⁵Dionizja Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, Z dziejow kobiety wiejskiej. Szkice historyczne 1861-1945, (Warszawa: Ludowa Spoldzielnia Wydawnicza, 1961), p.214.

⁶⁶Ibid., pp.219-220.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp.228.

⁶⁸Ibid., p.216.

⁶⁹Ibid., p.216.

⁷⁰Ibid., pp.190-192.

⁷¹Ibid., p.193, (3% of all farm women in Poland)

⁷²Davies, pp.192-193.

⁷³Wawrzykowska, p.234.

⁷⁴Ibid., p. 236.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp.250-252.

⁷⁶Chalasinski, p.211.

⁷⁷Dionizja Wawrzykowska-Wierciochowa, Od przadki do astronautki. Z dziejow kobiety polskiej jej pracy i osiagniec, (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Zwiaskowe CRZZ, 1963), p.357.

⁷⁸Chalasinski, pp.183, 203.

⁷⁹Melchior Wankowicz, Three Generations, (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Research Institute of Canada, 1973), p.73.

⁸⁰Trawinska, p..191-192; see also Thomas, pp.106-128; Chalasinski, p.216..

⁸¹Trawinska, p.143.

⁸²Chalasinski, p.413.

⁸³Ibid., p.387.

⁸⁴Trawinska, p.143.

⁸⁵Chalasinski, p.355.

⁸⁶Trawinska, p.151-152.

⁸⁷Ibid., pp.191, 193-197.

⁸⁸Ibid., p.198.

⁸⁹Stephanie Starr, interview with author; see also Duda-Dziewierz, p.102.

⁹⁰Division of the land between the children usually took place after the death of the parents. Duda-Dziewierz, p.48; on problems connected with land division, see a Nobel Prize winning novel by Wladyslaw Reymont, The Peasants, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1925).

⁹¹Antonina Ciastek, interview with author.

⁹²Trawinska, pp.157, 171.

⁹³In 1931 the population of Poland included 15,427,500 men and 16,488,300 women. Pologne, vol. II., p.106; on women and marriage, anonymous interview with author, September 23, 1991; also Chalasinski, p.253; Jablonowska, p.62; Trawinska, pp.172-174; Benet, p.144; Helena Znaniecki-Lopata, Polish Americans. Status Competition in an Ethnic Community,

(Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc. 1976), p.3; Thomas, pp.106-127.

⁹⁴Chalasinski, p.221.

⁹⁵Trawinska, pp. 170-174; Jablonowska, p.62.

⁹⁶Jablonowska, p. 54.

⁹⁷Trawinska, p.190.

⁹⁸Ibid., p.190; Benet, p.175; Jablonowska, p.54; Topolnicki memoir in Heydenkorn, p.257.

⁹⁹Duda-Dziewierz p.37; reminiscences in J. Matejko, pp.36-37, 44; also Benedykt Heydenkorn, (ed.), Zawiedzeni, rozczarowani, zadowoleni. Pamietniki imigrantow 1958-1981, (Toronto: The Canadian Polish Research Institute 1984), p.111.

¹⁰⁰Interviews: Portko, Janiec, MHSO, Toronto; Ewa Wojcicki, interview with author; Urban interview, PAA, Edmonton.

¹⁰¹In the years 1928/29 and 1929/30 67% of men and 74% of women who immigrated from Poland, 20 years of age and older, were younger than 30. Reczynska, p.89.

¹⁰²Helen Blomme, interview with author.

¹⁰³Anonymous, interview with author, September 25, 1990; A young woman was sent by the parents to accompany her brother to Alberta.

¹⁰⁴Stephanie Starr interview with author; also Duda-Dziewierz p.47.

¹⁰⁵Ewa Wojcicki, interview with author.

¹⁰⁶Reminiscence in J. Matejko, p.83.

CHAPTER TWO

THE "NON-PREFERRED"

The majority of Polish women who settled in Alberta in the interwar period, immigrated to Canada between 1926 and 1930 under the aegis of the Railways Agreement of 1925. That agreement permitted the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian National Railways to select and settle in western Canada European farm labourers, female domestics and farm families with capital. Women came primarily as members of families interested in settling on the land and independently as domestics. Immigrants who settled in Alberta constituted only a fraction of Poles admitted to Canada in the interwar period, despite the efforts of the immigration authorities to keep immigrants from "non-preferred" countries in the West.

Prior to the First World War the majority of Polish overseas emigrants were male sojourners interested in the quick accumulation of cash.¹ The United States, with its open-door immigration policy and great demand for unskilled labour for its rapidly developing industries, was their primary destination. As early as 1910 over 1.7 million Polish speaking persons lived in the United States, most in the largest cities and industrial centres located in the

North Atlantic and Great Lakes regions.² The number of Poles residing in Chicago alone was estimated at 350,000.³

An extensive network of Polish communities, often grouping people from the same region in Poland, facilitated the finding of jobs and accommodation. It also ensured a familiar social and cultural atmosphere, that resembled that of the Polish village, and made the immigrants feel at home. The attractiveness of such a Polish community was described in a letter to his family by a new arrival to Detroit:

I feel very well here, almost all the people here are Polish. I saw many people from my village. All live close to me. So this is now a second Babica. Even though my earnings are not high now, I feel at home here. I like this place very much and would like to bring you here. The Polish language is heard everywhere, on the streetcar, in court and in the streets and the work is steady.⁴

In contrast to the United States, before 1914, Canada drew only a small fraction of Polish overseas immigrants and a substantial number of them were agricultural settlers. This was the result of both the smaller scale of Canadian industrial development and the selective immigration policy that aimed, from 1896 on, at attracting farmers to settle the vast, barely populated area between the Rocky Mountains and the Great Lakes. By 1921, 53,000 persons of Polish ethnic origin lived in Canada, 60% of them in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.⁵ Winnipeg, with less than 6,000 Polish residents in 1921, had the largest urban concentration of Poles in Canada.⁶

The capital of Manitoba served as a distribution centre for the immigrants destined for western Canada and quickly became a cradle of Polish institutional life. The community had in large part originated with and been dominated by the Roman-Catholic clergy. The Holy Ghost parish, founded in 1898 by the Polish Oblates, responding to the growing community's need, soon expanded its activities outside the religious sphere. The Holy Ghost Fraternal Aid Society was founded in 1902. In 1908 the Oblates began publishing the first Polish language newspaper in Canada, Gazeta Katolicka. Gazeta Katolicka and Czas, an independent Polish language weekly, that began publishing in 1914, were the primary sources of contact between Poles scattered in the rural areas of the prairie provinces in the interwar period.⁷

With the exception of Winnipeg, Polish urban immigrants were deprived of the support of an ethnic communal life and institutions so greatly valued by the sojourners. The need to live and work among non-Polish speaking people was considered a serious drawback by Polish pre-World War One immigrants.⁸ It was not until the second decade of the twentieth century, that Polish urban concentrations appeared in the larger cities of Ontario and Quebec.⁹ Employment opportunities and the existence of Polish communities in Montreal, Toronto and Hamilton became a magnet for Polish post-World War One immigrants to Canada. Many of these

immigrants were sojourners and primarily interested in returning to Poland with their savings.

Concerted settlement of present-day Alberta started after 1885 when the completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway made the province accessible to greater numbers of settlers. Polish peasant families, encouraged by Canadian campaigns advertising free 160 acre homesteads in western Canada, were among the thousands of immigrants who flooded into the newly opened land. While most of them took up government homesteads south, east and north of Edmonton among the Ukrainian settlers, some, particularly those who had previously resided in the USA, bought smaller holdings in the southern part of the province. Several adventurous individuals tried their luck as far north as the Peace River country. A small percentage of Polish immigrants also relied on jobs in railway construction, the repair shops, coal mines and the fast growing Alberta cities.¹⁰

From the beginning the characteristic feature of Polish immigration to Alberta was the predominance of peasant families who intended to stay in the province and regarded farming as a source of their livelihood and a future for their children. Much of the effort of the pioneers was therefore directed at establishing churches and schools in order to create vibrant, stable rural communities on the Alberta frontier. However, because of their generally

low level of education, the necessary leadership was often provided by the Polish speaking missionaries.

When they settled in Alberta, the Poles automatically found themselves under the religious jurisdiction of the diocese of St. Albert which provided religious services for the Roman Catholics in the province. Realizing the importance of the mother tongue in maintaining the Roman Catholic religion of the immigrants, Bishop E. Legal imported Polish missionary priests, early in the 1900s, to look after the Polish and other Slavic Roman-Catholics.¹¹ Because of their religious zeal, dedication and energy, the priests greatly contributed to the building of the chapels and churches that were the only Polish language institutions in the province prior to 1914.¹²

The Polish Roman Catholic settlers asked for Polish clergymen to carry out necessary baptisms, marriages and burials and they were also eager to have masses said from time to time in their homes. However, opinions were divided when the building of a church involved spending scarce money or required labour at times that coincided with the peak of farm work. Persuasion, threats, the priest's own example and the Bishop's encouragement, were sometimes indispensable to the eventual success of the venture.¹³ Nevertheless, the Polish Roman Catholic parishes established prior to the First World War, became a permanent element of the social life of the Poles in Alberta and contributed to the

retention of language and the raising of their national consciousness. With time, the Polish churches also became a source of pride and achievement for the settlers.¹⁴

Although clerical leadership and authority was generally accepted in religious matters, the priests were unsuccessful in gaining the settlers' support for the establishment of parochial schools in Alberta. An attempt by Father F. Olszewski to build one such school at Krakow in 1902 ended in failure after a few years due to the lack of interest on the part of the Polish farmers.¹⁵ On the other hand, the Polish pioneers appreciated the necessity of ensuring English language education for their children. Kulawy School District No.1526, Poznan School District No.1555 and Polska School District No.1948, formed in 1906, 1907 and 1909 in mixed Polish-Norwegian and Polish-Ukrainian communities are but few examples of the public schools organized and run at the initiative of Polish immigrants.¹⁶

However, neither the Polish church nor the English language public school prevented the Polish rural settlers from assimilating into the Ukrainian culture. Coming most often from multiethnic villages in the Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia, the Polish peasants were used to living with people who spoke different languages and practised a variety of religions. Many of them spoke Ukrainian and German as well as Polish.¹⁷ While their Roman-Catholicism and Polish language distinguished them from their neighbours

who prayed in Ukrainian in their Greek Catholic or Orthodox churches, the concept of ethnicity was foreign to most of them. Under the pioneering conditions that prevailed in the rural areas of Alberta prior to the First World War, exposed to the constant influence of the Ukrainian majority and deprived of extensive contacts with the outside world, they often adopted Ukrainian language and customs rather than those of the English-speaking majority. Also, while Polish remained the language of religious practices of the Polish settlers, Ukrainian grew in popularity in everyday use.¹⁸

The predominance of male sojourners and the small number of families in the ethnically mixed immigrant neighbourhoods in Alberta cities and coal mining towns accounted for the lesser success in the organization of Polish parishes. With one exception, Holy Rosary Parish established in Edmonton in 1913, Poles either participated in the building of or joined churches that served mixed ethnic populations.¹⁹ If the building of a Polish church was discussed, the parishioners demanded that the church become their property, to be managed by them. This led to conflicts with the clergy and was one of the issues that prevented the building of a Polish church in Calgary in 1911.²⁰

As in rural areas, the Polish urban immigrants did not attach much importance to the religious education of their

children, but emphasized the necessity of learning the English language. A Polish missionary priest, Father Anthony Sylla, complained, after visiting a group of Poles living in Calgary in 1911 that "some parents did not care what school their children attended, as long as they got the schooling".²¹ He also observed that almost all adult Poles attended an English language night school organized in the winter under the auspices of the Public School Board.²²

It was not until the First World War that political difficulties and job discrimination forced the Polish workers to organize themselves. The Polish Society of Brotherly Aid, established in Coleman in 1916, although chartered as a benevolent society, issued identity cards to its members certifying their Polish nationality in order to rescue single men from being sent to internment camps as enemy aliens.²³ A petition addressed to the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta in 1915 by 49 men in Calgary, clearly indicated that the Poles hoped to improve their economic situation by clarifying their national status:

We understand very well that in war time the English employers prefer to engage the services of people of other nationalities than German and Austrians. And it is for that reason that Poles suffer most. The English-speaking employers do not make distinction between a Pole, a German or an Austrian. The mere fact that the majority of Poles living in Canada came from Austria and Germany, gives the Canadian employers the impression that they are of German or Austrian nationality.... We therefore, take the liberty of humbly and confidently asking you, Sir, to exert your influence so that the Government and

municipal authorities may make proper distinction between Poles, Germans and Austrians.²⁴

The establishment of a Polish association was also contemplated in Edmonton in 1917.²⁵ When the war ended, the interest in the formation of secular organizations waned. Except for the Polish Society of Brotherly Aid in Coleman, which had a local character and served the miners, there was no other secular Polish organization in Alberta until the mid-1920s.²⁶

The selectiveness of the Canadian immigration policy, pursued prior to the First World War, was intensified in the 1920s. The Polish immigrants, while never particularly welcome, except to settle on land in western Canada, became even less desirable after the war.²⁷ With the population of the prairie provinces reaching almost 2 millions by the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, the government was no longer interested in a large immigration that might jeopardize the British character of the country.²⁸

The fear of post-war industrial unemployment in conjunction with the influx to Canada of racially and occupationally undesirable immigrants as a result of American immigration restrictions as well as a demand for cheap immigrant farm labour, induced the Canadian government to strictly regulate the admission of foreigners after the war.²⁹ From 1923 on, the prospective immigrants were divided

into several categories according to their country of origin and race. Special assistance programs were used to cajole British emigrants. The inhabitants of Northern and Western European countries and the USA were openly welcomed with certain financial conditions discouraging the immigration of industrial labourers. Regulations regarding the "non-preferred countries", including Poland, limited admission to agriculturalists, farm labourers, female domestic servants and the dependants of Canadian residents.³⁰

In September 1925, the government transferred all the matters connected with the immigration from the non-preferred countries to the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian National Railways. These companies were vitally interested in the economic benefits created by the profitable immigrant passenger traffic and the opportunity to sell huge areas of land owned by them in the prairie provinces.³¹ In accordance with the Railways Agreement, which would remain in force until 1931, the C.P.R. and the C.N.R. were authorized to "procure, select and settle" in Canada farm families, agricultural workers and domestic servants.³² Prospective immigrants, apart from having their agricultural experience checked, were obliged to sign a statement before leaving Poland that "they were proceeding as agriculturalists and would take up agricultural work in Canada."³³ A single woman seeking employment as a domestic, in addition to providing a

morality certificate, was required to sign a statement testifying that she:

agrees to accept the position provided for her by the C.P.R., that she is not proceeding to Canada with a view of getting married, that she has no intention of joining friends and relatives in Canada, and that she will not attempt to gain illegal entry in the USA.³⁴

An acute shortage of domestics in farm households in western Canada was the reason that the authorities made special efforts to direct women from non-preferred countries to the prairie provinces. Official publications provide ample evidence of the extent to which the Canadian authorities would go to ensure that the women reached their destination. W.J.Egan, Deputy Minister of the Department of Immigration and Colonization reported in 1929:

The conductresses' duties during the past year have been made increasingly hard by the difficulty they had experienced in looking after the domestics from Southern Europe moving under the Railroad Agreement and destined to Winnipeg for placement. The greatest vigilance has been necessary, day and night, by railroad officials and conductresses to guard these girls to their destination. Foreign girls have at times jumped from the windows of the train, not wishing to proceed to their destination.³⁵

One conductress described the following scene:

A party of twenty-four girls, destined to Winnipeg, kept the whole station in a state of upheaval for the entire day and until the departure of the special train. Had considerable difficulties with supposed relatives attempting to communicate with these women and trying to take them out of the station. After the girls were placed on the train several men with automobiles attempted to take these young women away, tossing clothing through the windows. The city police

were employed to keep people from entering the windows to take girls, also railroad constables on the station platforms.³⁶

Polish immigrant women's reminiscences include numerous descriptions of successful or failed attempts to leave the trains in central Canada.³⁷ Travelling in locked railway cars "like cattle" was one of the first unpleasant experiences remembered by some women who expected to find well paid jobs in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.³⁸

Although the unwillingness of Polish immigrants to proceed to their destinations in western Canada may have been the consequence of their interest in industrial jobs, it was often also the result of the railway companies attempting to evade fulfilling their promise of guaranteed employment. Interested in maximizing their profits from immigrant traffic, railway agents paid a commission to local Canadian colonization boards and individual farmers to issue the required employment documents. While this procedure allowed for the fulfillment of the immigration regulations and at the same time ensured a steady income for the C.P.R. steamship company, many immigrants were left without money and work on arrival in Canada.³⁹

In the interwar period, some 55,000 Poles immigrated to Canada, all but 4,000 in the decade of the 1920s.⁴⁰ While men predominated, women constituted 36.6% of Polish immigrants.⁴¹ This relatively high percentage of women was the result of a high demand for domestic servants in Canada.

According to estimates, some 40% of adult women from Poland were admitted under this category.⁴² Despite the best efforts of the authorities to direct them to the West, only half of post-World War One Polish immigrants resided in the prairie provinces in 1931.⁴³ By 1931 Alberta had attracted 7649 Polish immigrants, of whom 3118 were women.⁴⁴ Most of them came to the province between 1926-1930.⁴⁵

A distinctive feature of Polish immigration to Alberta was that, apart from single men and women, it included families interested in farming. Their proportion of the total immigration was rather small. The majority of Polish peasant families found it difficult to meet the financial requirements set by the Canadian immigration authorities.⁴⁶ The so called "agriculturalists with capital" were divided into several categories ranging from one hundred to over one thousand dollars.⁴⁷ The majority of the immigrants from Poland came under category A, requiring capital of five hundred dollars. This was considered the minimum amount necessary to succeed on a farm in western Canada. Railway officials, however, were flexible and accepted farmers with less capital in order to ensure more passengers.⁴⁸ The fear that young couples without children "would not make permanent land settlers" made families with a large number of children more desirable.⁴⁹

In order to "deter immigrants from non-fulfillment of their declared intention to settle on the land", before

leaving Poland families were obliged to pay deposits refundable when "they took up land in western Canada".⁵⁰ These deposits not only ensured the immigrants' settlement in western Canada, but served as a security that they would buy property indicated by the company agent rather than register for a cheap homestead. While a variety of properties were offered for sale by the C.P.R. agents, information about the availability of homesteads was impossible to obtain:

After travelling about a month on trains and ships we finally got dumped off at a little town called Gainford, Alberta. This was approximately May 1929. My parents had no clue where they had come to. All they knew was we were in Canada, and by then, we had seen lots of it. My parents began wondering if they had made the right move to come to this new country, yet it was only the beginning of their life in Canada. While we were living in a hotel in Gainford, Dad was shopping for land. There was nobody there to give information on farms except land sale agents, selling for private companies. They took you out and showed you their lands and offered to sell at quite a high price with a down payment as much as you could afford. Dad asked these agents about the \$10.00 farms which were homestead quarter sections; they replied that they did not know of any.⁵¹

As a result, most of the Polish farming families settled along the lines of the C.P.R. near Gainford, Wabamun and Seba Beach west of Edmonton and around Vermillion.⁵² Similarly, the families brought by the C.N.R. bought land along the St. Paul - Cold Lake line and in Athabasca.⁵³ The prospects awaiting pioneers in the latter area and its

unattractiveness to other than Eastern European immigrants is evident in the C.N.R. report of 1928:

There is only one class of settlers available willing to face the prospect of the extremity of hard work involved in clearing and bringing under cultivation the areas of heavily timbered homestead land. Hardships and expectations of meagre return in initial years of establishment, must necessarily be encountered by settlers with limited capital. Observations of the conditions that are being faced by those settlers of Central European nationalities in the Athabasca district would not appeal to any other available nationality.⁵⁴

A more detailed description of the conditions revealed that the land available for homesteads in the area was covered with heavy poplar and swamp spruce making clearing without equipment very difficult and time consuming. There were no roads across the muskeg flat further than 15 miles from the town of Athabasca. Some regions were inaccessible for some parts of the year. Even though there was a ferry across the Athabasca river, communication with the town was cut off for several weeks of the year.⁵⁵

Single males predominated among the Polish immigrants to Alberta. According to the 1927 annual report of the Edmonton C.P.R. Office of the 631 Poles placed in jobs in the Edmonton district, 573 were men.⁵⁶ In 1928 the numbers were respectively: 933 and 833.⁵⁷ Polish immigrants destined for Edmonton were taken care of by the Ukrainian Immigration and Colonization Association, a C.P.R. front, and usually found jobs with Ukrainian and Polish farmers in the area.

Only a few were placed in farm employment by the C.P.R. In Calgary, the male immigrants from the non-preferred countries were turned over to the Hungarian Colonists' Service Association which placed them in employment in southern Alberta.⁵⁸

Many of the Polish men, who came as single immigrants, had left their families in Poland and brought them to Alberta as soon as they could afford the ship tickets.⁵⁹ Thus the majority of the Polish women and children arrived in Alberta in the interwar period as members of families and they joined their husbands and fathers who had emigrated earlier. Although some families stayed on in Edmonton or Calgary, the majority settled on homesteads or in rural areas in different parts of the province.⁶⁰

If single males constituted the majority of Polish immigrants brought to Alberta by the railways, young, generally unmarried women, recruited to work as domestics on farms were also represented, although in smaller numbers. According to the Calgary C.P.R.'s Central Women's Colonization Board, which specialized in the placement of the female labourers, 27 Polish immigrant women were placed by the Board in 1927 and 105 in 1928.⁶¹ In Edmonton the numbers were respectively 5 in 1927 and 17 in 1928.⁶² The majority of those destined to Calgary were sent to English-speaking farming families in the area. In 1929, fifty Polish girls were placed in domestic service near the town of

Nanton, an area largely populated by Anglo-Saxon settlers.⁶³

The nature of the Alberta agricultural economy in the 1920s, characterized by a low degree of mechanization, created a large demand for female and male farm workers. Because of the hard work, low status, meagre wages and seasonal, unstable character of the employment, Canadian born men and women avoided these jobs. Farm labourers and domestics were therefore best secured by immigration.⁶⁴ While better opportunities in the urban centres of central Canada attracted British domestics and those from preferred countries whose movement in Canada was not restricted, women mostly from non-preferred countries were employed on Alberta farms.⁶⁵

Judging by the farmers' applications, the supply of immigrant domestics was much smaller than the demand.⁶⁶ The situation was further aggravated as many immigrant women, discouraged by the conditions, soon left their employers and had to be replaced. Women from Poland, with their work experience in farm households and often willing to accept whatever conditions they were offered, were therefore particularly in demand and quickly earned themselves a very good reputation in Canada.⁶⁷

The Central Women's Colonization Board, consisting of women representing the Catholic Women's League, Alberta Women's Institutes and YWCA, not only received and processed

the applications for domestics, but also took care of the female immigrants destined for Alberta until they were placed in employment. The Board made some efforts to organize a social life for those who stayed in Calgary. The Polish girls usually received free accommodation and meals for 24 hours at the Catholic Women's Hostel in Calgary before arrangements were made for their employment.⁶⁸ While the aftercare theoretically provided a possibility of learning English and social teas on Thursday afternoons, few Polish girls were able to make use of this service as the majority of them were placed on farms. Even those who worked in Calgary and had their Thursdays off, preferred to take an extra cleaning job rather than attend the teas.⁶⁹

In general, the inability to communicate in an English language environment was the most serious problem facing the immigrant women. It could, and sometimes did, have dangerous consequences resulting in death.⁷⁰ Being unable to obtain advice regarding medical and personal problems from their English speaking employers forced others to address their worries to the Women's Board.⁷¹ However, the lack of knowledge of the English language did not seem to be an obstacle for some of the Polish domestics in looking after their own interests or actually improving their working conditions. While several wrote letters in Polish to the Board asking for intervention in regards to the lower than promised level of wages, others left their employers if they

thought that the working conditions did not comply with the original arrangements. Some succeeded in obtaining more satisfactory placements.⁷²

Even if they had no health problems or conflicts with their employers, the failure to communicate combined with hard work and separation from family made employment as a domestic one of the toughest experiences that these young women had ever faced:

My days at the Armstrongs' were sad ones. To this very day I do not know how I survived. My morning started at five o'clock with the milking. There were twelve cows to milk... Then I went to the chickens. I fed them,... and went back to the house to make the beds, wash the dishes and tidy up all the rooms. Sometime later I took two pails and went down to the spring for water. Next to the house there were three big wooden barrels to be filled. I remember the three barrels held thirty six pails of water. After the supper dishes were done I had to water the garden. I was only sixteen years old but I worked from sunrise to sunset. It wasn't eight hours daily like it is now, nor were there any days off. The worst thing was having no one to talk to. I couldn't understand English yet and it was like being deaf and dumb.⁷³

The women destined for Edmonton did not have the luxury of the Central Women's Colonization Board's mediation in making arrangements for their employment. For them, the very process of obtaining a job often left unpleasant memories:

In Edmonton we were kept inside a fence and guarded by the immigration officer so that we would not leave. The big strong girls were hired first. I was small, so I stayed longer. Then the boys came and started to ridicule the girls, calling them old maids that had come here to get married. I was so mad, that when a farmer offered me \$10.00 per month I accepted right away.⁷⁴

On the other hand, these women had a better chance of finding Polish employers and meeting Polish speaking people at the Polish churches. An opportunity to live and work among their own people made their first months in Canada much less traumatic and sometimes even satisfying.⁷⁵

For all the hard work the domestic had to do, she received the monthly wage of 10 to 15 dollars.⁷⁶ Wages were much lower for women than for male farm labourers as household work was considered less hard than the work in the field. However, remuneration depended not so much on the sex of the worker as on the type of tasks performed. Women who volunteered to help with harvesting or threshing, were paid the same wages as the men.⁷⁷

Although the women were promised good wages in Canada and expected steady year round work, most of them were only needed on farms for several months during the busy season. After the harvest, they had to go. While some married farmers, others were discouraged by the hard work and drifted to cities. They then tried to obtain jobs through contacts with their former friends and acquaintances now living in other provinces.⁷⁸ Those who had worked for Polish farmers, remembered with gratitude their help in finding jobs in the cities; their employers' friendly, parent-like attitude; gifts of warm clothing to protect them from the cold Alberta winter and practical advice that was meant to spare them from unpleasant encounters in the cities. " In

city don't talk to boys. They are broke and will want money from you."⁷⁹

Among the women who came to Alberta as domestics there were also some married women and fiancées of Canadian residents as it was easier to be admitted as household workers rather than dependants.⁸⁰ Some married women worked alongside their husbands doing whatever type of job was available. One woman, for instance, was hired with her husband as a team to clear a farm near Compeer, Alberta.⁸¹ Another, who had been admitted as a fiancée, worked before marriage in a farm household near Lethbridge.⁸² The primitive, filthy living conditions on southern Alberta farms and the lower than expected wages made many regret their decision to come to Canada. While the desire to return was the first thing that came to mind, personal pride even more than the lack of money for a return ticket, did not permit that wish to be realized.⁸³

The small number and wide dispersal of the Poles who had arrived in Alberta prior to the First World War and the absence of Polish organizations in the province that focused on assisting the immigrants, forced newcomers to rely on the inadequate services of the Canadian immigration agencies or on their own resourcefulness during their first months in the province. On the other hand, the opportunity to attend Polish churches and meet other Poles was greatly valued by

Polish domestics and farm labourers and helped their adjustment to a new and unfamiliar environment.

Permanent settlement on the land in Canada was not the goal of the majority of Polish overseas emigrants prior to the First World War and in the interwar period. The intention of the majority was rather to return to their villages with their savings. Their interest in industrial jobs available in central Canada was, however, incompatible with the objectives of the Canadian immigration policies that saw western Canada as the destination for immigrants from "non-preferred" countries.

Most of the Poles who had arrived in Alberta in the interwar period immigrated during that five year period when the Railways Agreement was in effect. Although single males predominated, those who were married brought their families to Alberta within several years of their arrival. Thus the majority of the Polish women came to Alberta in the interwar period as members of families who joined husbands and fathers who had emigrated earlier.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

¹Caroline Golab, Immigrant Destinations, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1977), p.48.

²Ibid., p.178.

³Ibid., p.13.

⁴Krystyna Duda-Dziewierz, Wies malopolska a emigracja amerykanska (studium wsi Babica powiatu rzeszowskiego), (Warszawa-Poznan: Polski Instytut Socjologiczny, 1938), p.57.

⁵The number of persons of Polish ethnic origing living in in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1921 was 32,227. Census of Canada 1921, vol.I, pp.354-355.

⁶Ibid., p.543.

⁷For a discussion regarding the Poles in Manitoba, see Victor Turek, Poles in Manitoba, (Toronto: Canadian Polish Congress. Polish Research Institute in Canada, 1967), pp.167-168, 197. See also: Henryk Radecki with Benedykt Heydenkorn, A Member of a Distinguished Family. The Polish Group in Canada, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1976), pp.29, 63-65, 112; William Makowski, The Polish People in Canada. A Visual History, (Montreal: Tundra Books, 1987), pp.137-148.

⁸Solikoski interview with author.

⁹Zofia Shahrodi, From Sojourners to Settlers: The Formation of Polonia in Toronto and Hamilton, 1896-1929, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 1989; Makowski, pp.85, 95, 113-115.

¹⁰On Polish immigrants in Alberta see Joanna Matejko, "The Polish Experience in Alberta", in Howard and Tamara Palmer, (eds.), Peoples of Alberta. Portraits of Cultural Diversity, (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1985), pp.274-284; Joanna Matejko, "Polish Farmers in Alberta, 1896-1939" in Frank Renkiewicz, (ed.), The Polish Presence in Canada and America, (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1982), pp.47-62; Joanna Matejko (ed.), Polish Settlers in Alberta. Reminiscences and Biographies, (Toronto: Polish Alliance Press Ltd., 1979), pp.11-19; Sylla, Antoni, O.M.I., Autobiographie. vol.I - III., unpublished manuscript, PAA, Edmonton.

¹¹M.B. Venini Byrne, From the Buffalo to the Cross. A History of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Calgary, (Calgary: Calgary Archives and Historical Publishers, 1973), p.104; E. Legal, O.M.I., History of the Catholic Church in Central Alberta, (Edmonton, 1914), p.115; Sylla; Francis Kosakiewicz, O.M.I., "Polish Oblate Ministry and Immigration in Alberta", in Raymond Huel, (ed.), Western Oblate Studies 1, (Edmonton: Western Canadian Publishers et Institut de recherche de la Faculte Saint-Jean, 1990), pp.171-180.

¹²Matejko, "Polish Farmers in Alberta", p.60.

¹³See for example Pride in Progress, pp.142-143, 146; Legal, p.116; A. Sylla, "The Polish Community in Kopernik (1903-1926)", in Matejko, Polish Settlers, pp.282, 283.

¹⁴Matejko, "Polish Experience in Alberta", note 7, p.517; see also Memories of Mundare. A History of Mundare and Districts, (Mundare: Mundare Historical Society, 1980), pp.56-57; Pride in Progress, pp.139-147; Salute the Pioneers; pp.54-56; 50th Anniversary Skaro Shrine, Star, Alberta, PAA, Edmonton.

¹⁵A. Sylla, "Krakow - Father Olszewski's Settlement (1899-1910)", in Matejko, Polish Settlers, pp.270-273.

¹⁶Salute the Pioneers, pp.124-127, 136-139; Hem-stiches and Hackamores: A History of Holden and District, (Holden: Holden Historical Society, 1984), p.137; Sylla in Matejko, Polish Settlers, pp.287-288.

¹⁷See reminiscences of the Polish immigrants in Salute the Pioneers: Round Hill & District, (Round Hill: Round Hill and District History Book Committee, 1983), p.172; Sowinski interview, PAA, Edmonton.

¹⁸Joanna and Alexander Matejko, "Polish Pioneers in the Canadian Prairies", Ethnicity (5), 1978, p.362; Matejko, "Polish Farmers in Alberta", p.58; reminiscence in Matejko, Polish Settlers in Alberta, p.275; For more examples see Pride in Progress. Chipman-St.Michael-Star and Districts, (Chipman: Alberta Rose Historical Society, 1982); While the immigrants who had come to Alberta at the turn of the twentieth century spoke Polish, their children spoke Ukrainian. Antonina Ciastek, interview with author.

¹⁹John Huculak, History of the Holy Rosary Parish in Edmonton 1913-1987, (Edmonton: Holy Rosary Parish, 1988); Sylla.

²⁰Sylla

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Krystyna Lukaszewicz, "Polish Community in the Crow's Nest Pass", Alberta History, vol.36, No.4, 1988, p.4.

²⁴A petition to the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta of 29 June, 1915 signed by Poles in Calgary, Petitions and Resolutions 1913-1921, Records of the Clerk of the Legislative Assembly, PAA, Edmonton. 88.553 Box 1/file 2.

²⁵Huculak, p.21.

²⁶The Polish Canadian Society was formed in Edmonton in 1927. Maria Carlton, Towarzystwo Polsko-Kanadyjskie (Edmonton) 1927-1987, (Edmonton: The Polish Canadian Society, 1987).

²⁷Joanna Matejko, "Kanadyjska polityka imigracyjna w stosunku do Polaków w latach 1896-1939", Studia polonijne, vol.3, 1979, pp.27-37.

²⁸Census of Canada, 1931, vol.I., pp.717-719.

²⁹Robert England, The Colonization of Western Canada. A Study of Contemporary Land Settlement (1896-1934), (London: P.S.King & Son Ltd., 1936), pp.82-83; The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs 1923, pp.266-267; Matejko, "Kanadyjska polityka imigracyjna", pp.44-45.

³⁰England, pp.82-87, 312-313; Matejko, "Kanadyjska polityka imigracyjna", pp.45-46.

³¹England, pp.84-85; Matejko, "Kanadyjska polityka imigracyjna", pp.49-50. The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1925-26, p.164.

³²England, pp.83-84; James B. Hedges, Building the Canadian West. The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), pp.362-366.

³³Matejko, "Polityka imigracyjna", pp.42-43; Special Land Settlement Report by Superintendent of Land Settlement, Winnipeg 7.7.1927, RG 30, vol.5992 w.337, NAC, Ottawa; For occupational tests, see for example Swistara and Janiec interviews, MHSO, Toronto.

³⁴C.P.R. London memorandum to Mr. Colley dated February 28, 1930, C.P.R. Papers, Box 149, file 1481, GAI, Calgary. For morality certificates see the immigration documents of L. Krzyzanowska, J. Zuraw, K. Zygmunt, Multicultural Collection, PAO, Toronto.

³⁵W.J.Egan, "Report of the Department of Immigration and Colonization 1929-30", Annual Departmental Reports 1929-30, vol.II, (Dominion of Canada, Ottawa: King's Printer, 1931), p.81.

³⁶W.J.Egan, "Report of the Department of Immigration and Colonization 1928-29", Annual Departmental Reports 1928-29, vol.II, (Dominion of Canada, Ottawa: King's Printer, 1930), p.81.

³⁷Interviews: Portko, Pasternak, MHSO, Toronto; reminiscence in Matejko, Polish Settlers, p.84; Benedykt Heydenkorn, (ed.), Pamiętniki imigrantów polskich w Kanadzie, (Toronto: Canadian-Polish Congress, Canadian-Polish Research Institute, 1975), pp.188-189.

³⁸Antonina Ciastek, interview with author.

³⁹Heydenkorn, Pamiętniki imigrantów, pp.190, 263; Forczak interview, PAA, Edmonton; reminiscence in Matejko, Polish Settlers, p.370.

⁴⁰Immigrants Admitted to Canada by Ethnic Origin. Calendar Years 1919 to 1939. Statistics Section. Department of Citizenship and Immigration. In Aloysius Balawyder, The Maple Leaf and the White Eagle: Canadian-Polish Relations, 1918-1978, (New York: Boulder, 1980), pp.276-278. For statistics regarding the immigration of Poles to Canada in the interwar period see also Anna Reczynska, Emigracja z Polski do Kanady w okresie międzywojennym, (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1986), pp.35-53. According to Reczynska, 43,000 Poles immigrated to Canada between 1918-1939, Ibid., p.81. The discrepancy between the Canadian data and Reczynska's estimate can be the result of the fact that, especially in the early 1920s, the Jews from Poland were registered as Poles in Canada. Reczynska, "Emigration from the Polish Territories to Canada up until World War Two", Polyphony, (6), No.2 Fall/Winter 1984, p.19.

⁴¹15,092 Polish women and 26,115 men, who had immigrated between 1921 and 1931, resided in Canada in 1931; Census of Canada 1931, vol.IV., p.639.

⁴²In the twelve year period, 1926/27 and 1937/38, 28,908 women from Poland, 18 years of age and older, were

admitted to Canada; 11,371 were admitted as domestic servants. Reczynska, pp.67 and 87.

⁴³Of 41,207 Poles, who had immigrated between 1921 and 1931, 20,779 lived in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta in 1931. Census of Canada 1931, pp.639, 647, 649, 651,653.

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 651-653.

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 651-653. Of 7,649 Polish interwar immigrants residing in Alberta in 1931, 6,680 arrived between 1926 and 1930.

⁴⁶Estimates by the author based on the fragmentary data available. In 1929, of over six thousand Poles admitted to Canada, the C.N.R. recruited only 211 persons under the familial category. Summary of continental families by nationalities and placement as at August 31, 1929. RG 30 vol.5896 w.33A, NAC, Ottawa. In the period of three years, 1927-1929, the C.P.R. settled in Alberta sixty Polish families consisting of about 200 persons. Annual Report. Department of Colonization and Development of the Calgary Office 1927, 1928, 1929; Annual Report Edmonton Office for 1927, C.P.R. Papers, Box 186, file 1872, GAI, Calgary.

⁴⁷Summary of 1929 qualification under various family schemes, RG 30, vol.5896 w.33A, NAC, Ottawa.

⁴⁸RG 30, vol.5992 w.337; Canadian National Railways Report on Season's work 1929, Warsaw, August 18, 1929, RG 30.5647, NAC, Ottawa.

⁴⁹A letter from Superintendent, CNLSA, Winnipeg to Dan M.Johnson, Western Manager, Winnipeg, dated 27.1.1927. RG 30 5990 w236, NAC, Ottawa.

⁵⁰England, pp.105-106. Deposits depended on the category under which the immigrants were admitted. For category X, the deposit was \$1,000, for category A - \$500, for single men \$25.

⁵¹Tomahawk Trails, (Tomahawk: Tomahawk Trails Book Club, 1974), p.213.

⁵²Illustrations of Settlers' Progress in 1925 and 1926 and their own story of their success on farm lands in Alberta bought from British Dominion Land Settlement Corporation Limited, Peel Bibliography on Microfiche no.2956A; C.P.R. Gainford-Seba-Sundance District Photographs 1929-1930, PAA, Edmonton.

⁵³Report on families from Poland settled along the lines of the Canadian National Railways St. Paul-Cold Lake District, Alberta, 1928, RG 30 vol.5894 file 11; Family settlement Alberta 1929, RG 30 5895, file 11, 24, 27; also RG 30 vol.5998, NAC, Ottawa.

⁵⁴F.B. Kirkwood, Report on Athabasca District of Alberta, November 1st, 1928, C.N.R. Department of Colonization, Edmonton, Alberta, RG 30 5894, file 12, NAC, Ottawa.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Annual reports for Edmonton Office 1927 and 1928, C.P.R. Papers, Box 186, file 1872, GAI, Calgary.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Reminiscences of Polish immigrants in Matejko, Polish Settlers, p.40, 94, 151, 208; Lisiecki interview, MHSC, Toronto; Krzyzanowski immigration documents, Multicultural Collection, PAO, Toronto.

⁶⁰In 1931, 6035 of 7649, (i.e. 78.9%) Polish interwar immigrants in Alberta lived in rural areas. Census of Canada 1931, vol.I., p.651.

⁶¹C.P.R. Papers, Box 186, file 1872, GAI, Calgary.

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴Norma J. Milton, Essential Servants: Immigrant Domestic Servants on the Canadian Prairies 1885-1930, unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Calgary 1983, p.61.

⁶⁵Ibid., Chapter II; Varpu Lindstrom-Best, "I Won't Be a Slave - Finnish Domestic Servants in Canada, 1911-30" and Marilyn Barber, "Sunny Ontario for British Girls" in Burnet, Jean, (ed.), Looking into My Sister's Eyes: an Exploration in Women's History, (Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1986), pp.33-54 and 55-74.

⁶⁶C.P.R. Papers, Box 186, GAI, Calgary.

⁶⁷C.P.R. Papers, Box 149, file 1480, GAI, Calgary.

⁶⁸C.P.R. Annual Report of the Calgary Office 1929, C.P.R. Papers, Box 186, file 1872, GAI, Calgary.

⁶⁹Antonina Ciastek, interview with author.

⁷⁰Olga Wolenska file, C.P.R. Papers, Box 149, file 1474, GAI, Calgary.

⁷¹Correspondence of Central Women's Colonization Board, Calgary 1928, letter signed by Ahalja Jackiw, undated, C.P.R. Papers, Box 149, file 1469, GAI, Calgary.

⁷²Ibid., letter signed by Marianna Gugala, undated; reminiscence in Matejko, Polish Settlers, p.85.

⁷³Reminiscence in Matejko, Polish Settlers, p.153.

⁷⁴Antonina Ciastek, interview with author.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶Ibid.; Golomb interview, MHSO, Toronto; reminiscence in Matejko, Polish Settlers, p.85. The wages of East European domestics were lower than those of British or Scandinavians. While the first earned \$25 per month, the latter \$15 in city and \$20 in the country. Milton, p.46.

⁷⁷Antonina Ciastek, interview with author; reminiscence in Matejko, Polish Settlers, p.164.

⁷⁸Antonina Ciastek, interview with author; reminiscence in Matejko, Polish Settlers, p.85; interviews: Portko, Golomb, Zapior, MHSO, Toronto; interviews: Urban, Wojnarowski, PAA, Edmonton.

⁷⁹Antonina Ciastek, interview with author; reminiscence in Matejko, Polish Settlers, p.85.

⁸⁰Reczynska, p.69.

⁸¹Ewa Wojcicki, interview with author.

⁸²Wojnarowski interview, PAA, Edmonton.

⁸³Ibid.; Portko, Wur interviews, MHSO, Toronto; reminiscence in Matejko, Polish Settlers, p.85.

CHAPTER THREE

FROM HOMESTEADS TO CITIES

The experiences of the Polish interwar immigrant women in Alberta differed not only whether they lived in rural areas, in coal mining towns or in cities but also depending on their positions within families at the time of their arrival to Canada. While single women, recruited to Canada as domestics, were attracted to cities, families settled mainly in rural areas. Unlike their mothers whose move to Alberta was motivated by the opportunity to settle on the land, farming as a way of life did not appeal to all the daughters, who had come to Canada as children. This often resulted in their move to the cities.

The overwhelming majority of the post-World War One Polish immigrant families settled in rural areas in Alberta and agriculture was the main source of their livelihood. In 1936, 79.7% of the Polish men and 77.8% of the Polish women who had immigrated to Canada after 1921 resided in rural areas in Alberta.¹ In the same year, 70% of gainfully employed men and 40% of gainfully employed women, born in Poland, were involved in agriculture, most of them as farmers and stock raisers.² Meager financial resources determined that most of Polish families settled on

homesteads. During the Depression, even better off farmers, who had bought farms upon their arrival, were forced to abandon them and start all over again on homesteads due to their inability to make the mortgage and tax payments.³ Life on a homestead was therefore a common experience of the Polish interwar immigrant women in Alberta.

Although the bulk of the Polish immigrants were brought to Alberta by the railway companies, their distribution was only partially determined by the railway agents. Many immigrants selected their homesteads independently and some moved several times before they found a place suitable for permanent settlement. Nevertheless, as most of the unoccupied land was available north of Edmonton in the Peace River and Athabasca regions and east of Edmonton near Cold Lake and St. Paul, these areas became the major destinations of the post-1918 Polish immigrants.⁴

Another characteristic feature of Polish rural settlement in the province was its dispersal. The immigrants generally settled in small groups among settlers of other nationalities or individually in remote areas far from other people. The Webster settlement in the Peace River Country was one exception to this pattern. This community consisted almost exclusively of Polish immigrants, who had arrived there after 1927. Its development was the result of the community building spirit of the first settlers who used the Polish press in Canada to attract other colonists.⁵

Most of the Polish immigrants had acquired their agricultural experience on small self-sufficient farms that required a large measure of hard manual labour from all family members. They were therefore considered to be well prepared for the pioneering conditions in Alberta. This opinion was emphasized by the Polish government representative who visited Polish settlers near Athabasca in 1929:

The Polish peasant is an axeman. Brush has no terrors to him, for to him brush means two things - it means lumber for buildings and it means that beneath the bush, there must be good soil. So he cleans the bush, builds himself a loghouse with the lumber and then commences to farm. He is no grain farmer, and so he acquires a cow, a few pigs, chickens and then he has a living whether crops be good or reverse.⁶

This optimistic view did not reflect, however, the reality of the hardships facing the pioneers and it disregarded the tremendous efforts necessary to manually remove the trees from the heavily wooded homesteads. Due to the lack of equipment progress in land clearing was very slow. It took a family of five near Tomahawk three weeks to clear five acres and one woman recalled that her husband needed two weeks to clear one acre near Wanham.⁷ While clearing land remained one of the main tasks of immigrant families throughout the 1930s, for many, it was not until the late 1940s that their entire quarter sections could be utilized for agricultural purposes.⁸

On many homesteads most of the work, except for the removal of the largest trees, was done by the women and children while the men were away in search of income producing jobs. Women also cleared the land for their better established neighbours in exchange for farm equipment, animals, food and seeds or helped their husbands who were hired to do the job on a contract basis.⁹ Although women usually cut, piled and burned bushes and smaller trees, one woman recalled that she helped her husband in the removal of big trees. Her job was to dig out the roots and climb the tree with a rope that was later used to fell the tree.¹⁰

Primitive living conditions were yet another characteristic feature of the early years on the homestead. Before log houses were built, the settlers lived in dugouts covered by sod, granaries, dilapidated houses left by former settlers or even shacks previously used for horses.¹¹ The conditions of those immigrants who had purchased farms from railway agents was rarely better than those of the homesteaders. Although some received tents, tools, cattle and fowl from the C.P.R., others got mostly unimproved land with very primitive buildings or no buildings at all.¹²

When the building of a house was undertaken, women often helped in putting on the roof and sealing the walls.¹³ The small two-room log houses without electricity and running water, built in the first years after their

settlement on the homesteads, were to serve the growing immigrant families for many years to come.¹⁴

The economic depression, that started soon after their arrival in Alberta, slowed down the process of farm development and prevented the immigrants from expanding their homesteads beyond the subsistence level. On one hand, the Depression limited the possibility of finding cash-paying jobs to finance the purchase of necessary equipment, on the other, the cost of farm production exceeded farm revenue, making commercial farming unprofitable. One farmer summed up the situation he found himself in:

Because we had no machinery, it cost us 95 dollars to work our land, seed and harvest 150 bushels of oats and the same quantity of wheat, 10 cents for oats per bushel and 25 cents for wheat. Instead of selling the grain we made some into chop to fatten a calf for sale. After six months of feeding, the calf weighed 800 pounds and sold for \$7.50.¹⁵

No wonder that for several years the immigrants used only small portions of their quarter sections to provide food for themselves and grain to feed a few cows, a pig, some chickens and the horses.

While survival during the Depression demanded a contribution from all family members, the life on the homestead was more often the experience of the women and small children than of the men and teen-aged sons and daughters. These members of the family were usually absent for extended periods of time working for better established farmers, on the railways or in the coal mines.¹⁶ Large and

growing families forced the women to combine household duties and work on the farm with frequent child bearing and care. Many Polish families already had children when they had arrived in Alberta, and more were to be born in the 1930s. Families with eight, ten and even twelve children were not uncommon.¹⁷

While the children provided some help with household and farm chores, it was a woman's responsibility to produce and prepare the food and to make, mend and wash the clothing. The women looked after the vegetable gardens, watered and fed the farm animals, milked the cows, made cream and butter and transported the dairy products to the local store, often on foot for a distance of several miles.¹⁸ In addition some did housecleaning and laundry for their better off neighbours.¹⁹ One woman recalled that she had to take in laundry for four years to pay off the seed grain.²⁰

Surplus dairy products were very important to the immigrant families. During the Depression, they either provided cash income or, more often, they were exchanged for such necessities as coffee, tea, oil, sugar and salt.²¹ What is more important, they provided income on a regular basis throughout the year, whereas money from the sale of grain was seasonal.

Although immigrants living on homesteads did not suffer from food shortages, providing shoes and clothing for large

families was a serious problem. Many families relied on the incomes of their older daughters for these necessities. Working for the neighbours was a common experience for the teen-aged daughters of the immigrants. During the Depression they often had a better chance of obtaining jobs than their fathers and brothers. These girls usually started to work for wages as household workers on farms at the age of fourteen or fifteen. Their monthly pay ranged from five to eight dollars per month and the income from their employment was not at their disposal. "The money I earned was used to buy shoes and clothes for my younger brothers" recalled one woman.²² Several others remembered that their wages were used for their families' needs.²³

Life on homesteads located in remote areas was particularly difficult. Typical of the experience of isolated immigrant women were the hardships undergone by one who lived on a homestead eighty miles from Edmonton near Athabasca. The homestead was located in deep woods and the closest people lived nine miles away. The neighbouring homesteads, taken up by single men, remained unoccupied for much of the year as their owners were absent in search of work. Most of the first six years were spent alone on the homestead with one and then two small children as the husband worked for a farmer in Mundare. The train, the only connection with the civilized world, reached the area twice a week. Her two children were born on the homestead with

nobody being present because she was unable to reach the hospital that was thirty five miles away and the doctor could not come as there was no road.²⁴

During the homesteading period, the religious needs of the immigrants often went unfulfilled due to the absence of Polish churches in the areas where they settled. Great distances, poor transportation and the use of English or French in the Canadian Roman Catholic churches were the reason that the immigrants were rarely present at mass.²⁵ Due to the shortage of Polish speaking priests and difficulties with accessibility, pioneers in some areas were completely deprived of religious services. In other areas, immigrants preoccupied with economic problems, neglected religion.²⁶

The greatest drawback of homestead life was that it limited the opportunities for the immigrants' children. In some areas only education by correspondence was available. In others, schools were built several years after the arrival of the settlers, thus affecting the education of the older children. Erratic attendance, due to great distances, difficulties in getting to school in the winter, the necessity to carry out household and farm duties and even the lack of proper clothes and shoes, often made acquiring a formal education very difficult. The older children were rarely able to complete more than three to five years of elementary education.²⁷

A shortage of cash generally made it impossible to educate children beyond elementary school. One immigrant daughter complained:

I couldn't continue with my education even though the nuns in Grande Prairie offered to teach me free of charge because my father didn't have eight dollars to buy the books.²⁸

In many families, higher education for the children was not even considered as their work was necessary to provide cash for the household needs. Being deprived of the possibility of advancement through education was seen as the most negative aspect of being the daughter of a homesteader.²⁹

Hard work with few rewards was the reason that many young immigrant women, after a few years of working for neighbours, left the rural areas. Their own and their mothers' experiences made the prospect of marrying a homesteader most unappealing. They were attracted to the towns and cities where employment was easily found in private homes, hospitals and nursing homes. There were always too few candidates for such poorly paid and low status jobs. Even such jobs, however, were considered better than the drudgery of farm work.³⁰

The attitudes of the host rural society were another factor that affected the lives of the immigrants in the pioneering period. In some areas the spirit of hospitality, friendliness and cooperation, that prevailed on the Alberta

frontier, crossed ethnic lines and embraced the newcomers.³¹

One woman recalled with nostalgia:

We lived like a united family. I wish that young people wanted to be now like they were then. We were never afraid to walk, it was so safe. We never locked houses. We never knew what fright was.³²

However, some women recalled how they were ridiculed at school because of their looks, language and Roman Catholic religion.³³ Others remembered with bitterness that the term "bohunk" was in wide use with respect to the immigrants from Poland.³⁴

While homesteading limited the forms of entertainment available to the people, they were certainly not deprived of good times. These often took the form of social gatherings. Sometimes fun was combined with work, like the feather stripping and wool pulling get-togethers that were held by the women when the men were away. Sunday dinners organized by Polish families, were followed by card playing for the men and gossiping by the women in the kitchen. Christmas receptions with music and dance were occasions to share the joy of the first harvests with friends and neighbours. For the young, Sunday dances in the local school house and the reading of Polish books brought from the library in Edmonton filled some of their leisure time.³⁵ Weddings provided yet another occasion for distraction. One woman, married in 1936, remembered:

I had a big wedding. Three priests from Grande Prairie were present. We had a floor built to dance on. My father killed a cow and a pig and we cooked in the granaries. There was a lot of moonshine. People had a good time.³⁶

The improvement of economic conditions in the late 1930s meant the end of the pioneering period for the Polish interwar immigrants. While some sold their partly improved homesteads and moved to town, those determined to stay on the land were able to buy machinery, to acquire more land and to expand their farming operations. In 1941 subsistence farms constituted only 25.7% of all the farms operated by the Poles as compared to 40.3% in 1936.³⁷ The percentage of farms specializing in the production of grains and livestock grew from 24.4% in 1936 to 46.7% in 1941, while the share of mixed farms declined from 30% to 21%.³⁸ At the same time, the size of the farms grew. Whereas in 1936 only 33.4% of the farms run by the Poles were larger than 200 acres, in 1941 their share reached 45.4%.³⁹ Such data clearly indicates that at least for some immigrants emigration resulted in the achievement of their goal of economic betterment.

The following examples illustrate the change. A family of four that had settled in 1930 on a homestead in Manly district, bought two more quarter sections in the 1940s and owned a tractor along with other farm implements. They also owned fifty head of cattle and eighteen milk cows.⁴⁰ Another family that "broke with hope and hands" one half

acre for a vegetable garden in the Athabasca district in 1930 had, by the end of the 1930s, 70 acres under crop and made money by selling pigs and turkeys and cream from fifteen cows. During the war they bought a tractor. After the war they were able to pay \$3600 for the clearing of the rest of their quarter section and three more taken by the sons.⁴¹ A couple that had arrived in Alberta in 1927 and settled on a homestead near Webster in 1928, farmed on six quarters of land in the 1940s.⁴² The three sons of a family that had homesteaded on one quarter section near DeBolt in 1931, farmed twelve sections there a few decades later.⁴³

Farming, as a way of life, appealed to the majority of the Polish interwar immigrants throughout the 1940s despite a growing trend toward urbanization among the younger generation and the retirees. In 1951, 69.2% of the interwar immigrant men and 66.3% of the women still resided in rural areas and 55.3% and 53.6% respectively supported themselves by agriculture.⁴⁴ For many Polish interwar immigrants farming in Alberta meant economic security. "We never got rich but it sure was a good living" recalled one Polish immigrant farmer whose family kept thirteen cows, three hundred laying hens and pigs.⁴⁵

The expansion of the farms resulted in significant changes in women's work both on the farm and in the household. Larger farms meant that the women had more cows to milk and more chickens and pigs to feed. However, while

at the beginning of the decade they had devoted most of their time ensuring the self-sufficiency of their families, now the bulk of their production was destined for sale. The cash income received from the sale of dairy products, fowl and pigs was often the principal source of funds for further expansion of the family farm and the improvement of living conditions.⁴⁶

Cooking, always one of the principal household duties of the women, required a different approach with the development of commercial grain farming. Providing big and nourishing meals for the harvesters and threshing crews was quite different from everyday cooking for the family. Good, professional cooks were in great demand both on the farms and in the saw-mill camps, thus providing a new and very well-paid occupation for immigrant women.⁴⁷

The improvement of economic conditions for the immigrants in the late 1930s was accompanied by the development of Polish social life and religious institutions. However, this was not on the scale achieved by the immigrants who had arrived prior to the First World War. During the 1930s the immigrants managed to build only two churches, one in Webster and the other in Ardmore, compared to the twenty constructed by their predecessors.⁴⁸ Although the small number of interwar immigrants and their broad dispersal can partly explain this situation, the Roman-Catholic church authorities also did not see the need to

develop ethnic parishes as the immigrants already had access to existing churches providing services in the English and French languages.⁴⁹

The arrival of Polish resident priests in the late 1930s not only strengthened the religious discipline of the immigrants but enhanced their cultural life. As in Poland, the ethnic parish came to play the role of social and cultural centre in addition to fulfilling religious functions. In Webster, the priest organized a library that subscribed to Polish newspapers and people attended Sunday dinners organized in the rectory.⁵⁰

If the improvement of economic conditions allowed the immigrants to finance the building of the Webster church, it also enabled them to construct a hall to meet the growing demand for socializing and entertainment. "Our houses were too small, we needed a hall for dances" said one woman from Webster.⁵¹ Dance hall fights and moonshine were infamous in this Polish settlement. According to the local priest, "Webster was not always a saintly place. They had a church and they had a hall, it was rough."⁵²

* * *

Although only a small percentage of Polish immigrants worked in the coal mining industry in the 1930s, marriage to a miner was one of the few choices available to young immigrant women not interested in farming.⁵³ Due to great distances, poor transportation and frequent moves in search

of work, marriage to a miner involved the lessening of contacts with parents, siblings and relatives. One woman who left her parents to work in a boarding house in the city and was soon married, said:

There was nobody present from my family. The boarding house keeper made all the arrangements for my marriage. There was no wedding. The same day we left for Mountain Park.⁵⁴

The absence of family at her wedding was recalled with sadness by another woman who immigrated in 1935 to join her fiancé:

Joe and I got married in a little Catholic church in Wayne. The reception was in a private home in Rosedale with about thirty-five people present. Most of them were strangers to me. The reception was very sad for me as I did not have any of my own relatives present.⁵⁵

However, the lack of family support and difficulties in contacts with the neighbours because of the language barrier were not the only problems faced by these young women. The living conditions were often very primitive and if the husband was not employed full time, as was often the case in the 1930s, wages were hardly sufficient to pay the rent and groceries not to mention other necessities. Apple and orange boxes were used instead of tables and chairs and one woman remembers that when their first child was born they could not afford a crib.⁵⁶

The sickness or death of a husband could put a family in a precarious situation and required an extraordinary effort from the woman to ensure family survival. Families

did not receive any assistance from the companies employing the men and were not eligible for government help if they were in Canada for less than five years. Women born in Canada and married to immigrants lost their Canadian citizenship and were in the same situation as immigrant women.⁵⁷ Widows had to depend on spontaneous collections from other miners and neighbours and their own initiative and resourcefulness. One exception was Crowsnest Pass, where the Polish Society of Brotherly Aid provided organized support for the families of its deceased members. While a knowledge of sewing proved to be very helpful for some, others took whatever jobs were available, including that of harvester.⁵⁸

Dependence on the erratic income of the male family head in the 1930s, involved frequent moving of the miners' families in search of work. One family moved three times between 1928 and 1936, another three times between 1935 and 1940.⁵⁹ Families with children tended to settle in rural communities around the mining areas or even further away on homesteads where they could secure their own food supply by cultivating vegetable gardens and keeping a cow, chickens and pigs. These small subsistence agricultural ventures were the responsibility of the women and the children. Some women also supplemented the family income by sewing, selling milk and doing laundry for single men.⁶⁰

Women's lives were centered around their families and household duties. There was not much time left for socializing and entertainment. The wife of a miner in the Drumheller region described her married life in the following words:

I took care of our six children, the garden and my regular household chores. I look back and I realize that for seven years I never went anywhere except to my sister-in-law's at Christmas; and one summer, I went to Cambria to visit my mother.⁶¹

With the decline of the coal mining industry, starting in the early 1940s, immigrant families gradually moved to larger urban centres where they hoped to find jobs and ensure a better education for their children. However, their economic situation was often worse than that of the homesteaders who had sold their partially improved farms and had some capital when they moved to cities. The miners' properties, plagued by floods and located in the deserted areas were not worth much and difficult to sell. Coal mining experience was not an asset in an urban setting either. Often janitorial positions were the best the men could hope for and women's work outside the home became a necessity.⁶²

* * *

Although the bulk of the Polish interwar immigrants settled in rural areas in Alberta, newcomers also enhanced the Polish presence in the larger urban centres of the

province. Between 1921 and 1931 the number of Poles in Edmonton increased from 652 to 1643, and from 287 to 807 in Calgary.⁶³ The largest influx coincided with the period of the greatest immigration between 1925 and 1930 and was the result of the seasonal employment of immigrants as agricultural labourers.⁶⁴ While the limited opportunities for steady employment in cities for immigrant men did not create favorable conditions for the settlement of families, the seasonal agricultural work forced single immigrants, both men and women, as well as childless married couples, to look for survival in the cities in the winter. Here, they looked to contacts with other Poles to secure jobs and accommodation. Due to their inability to speak English, the assistance of the earlier Polish immigrants was of crucial importance.⁶⁵

A popular job for single women in Calgary in the 1930s was that of a domestic, often in Russian-Jewish households, where the similarity of Polish and Russian helped to overcome the language barrier. The wages were higher than those in agriculture, the work was less hard and the income steady. Wages for work involving various household duties including house cleaning, washing and ironing, cooking and looking after children ranged from \$15 to \$30 per month.⁶⁶ However, a career as a full-time domestic servant was not the dream of Polish immigrant women. Most were interested in establishing their own families and looked for their future

husbands among the Polish immigrants. Their chances of getting married were much better than in Poland. On the one hand, the male/female ratio among Polish immigrants in cities definitely favoured the women, on the other, their ability to earn money made them desirable marriage partners.⁶⁷ Females interested in marriage did not lack suitors, particularly during the Depression when most men remained unemployed and women had no problems finding house cleaning jobs.⁶⁸

Decisions to marry during the Depression were characterized by pragmatism. While "the men married to have a roof over their heads", the conviction that "two could manage better than one" motivated some women.⁶⁹ Wedding receptions in the city in the 1930s were modest if held at all. "There was no reception. Those were hard times.", remembered one woman married in 1931.⁷⁰ However, not all the immigrants were so badly affected by the Depression. A domestic, who married in 1934, noted that there was a reception for about one hundred people at the Polish Hall after her church wedding. All the cooking was done by herself and a friend.⁷¹

The decade of the Depression did not encourage large immigrant families in cities. An explanation given by one woman, "I didn't have time for children. I had to work", characterized the situation of many immigrant families.⁷² As it was easier to find work for women than for men in those

hard times, often the income from woman's work kept the family going. One woman remembered that during her nine years in Calgary in the 1930s, her husband was unemployed all the time, except for some odd jobs. She supported the family of four by sewing and doing house cleaning jobs which paid a dollar for a ten-hour working day.⁷³

If economic conditions did not encourage large families, fear of deportation was another reason that large families were a hindrance in the urban areas. With only 48.5% of the Polish immigrant men and 52% of the Polish immigrant women naturalized by 1936, the unemployed immigrants were particularly vulnerable.⁷⁴ In Calgary, fear of deportation became acute when two families were deported and another family, on government assistance, was informed that they would be deported if they had more children.⁷⁵

Not all the women in cities worked for wages. Those who came to Alberta with children to join husbands who had emigrated earlier, concentrated on ensuring the self-sufficiency of their families. One woman, whose family lived in Edmonton in the 1930s, remembered:

There were nine children in our family. My mother kept chickens, cows and pigs. She made her own bread. She sewed everything for us and did all the laundry. She also prepared her own sausages and meat preserves for the winter.⁷⁶

Despite the hardships of the Depression years, most immigrants were able to improve their economic conditions in the first decade after their arrival in Canada. Cheap land

prices made the purchase of lots in cities possible even for the poorest. Free time available to unemployed immigrants, who often had experience in carpentry and plastering, was used to build houses. Cooperation among the immigrants and private loans received from friends greatly contributed to the success of their ventures. By the end of the 1930s at least some of the immigrant families lived in their own, though often small and primitive, houses.⁷⁷ This period also provided opportunities for some of the immigrants with a flair for entrepreneurial endeavours. One woman recalled that her husband made a good profit by buying pigs from farmers at low prices and selling the processed meat and sausages in the city.⁷⁸

With the outbreak of war in 1939, the economic situation of the immigrants in the cities improved considerably. The unemployed men found jobs and the range of jobs available to women widened. Nevertheless, personal service remained the main occupation of Polish immigrant women throughout the 1940s.⁷⁹ However, rather than working full time, most concentrated their efforts on household duties and child rearing. At the same time, they supplemented their husbands' earnings by working part-time. They bought bigger houses, better clothes, furniture, cars and enabled their children to receive the education that had been denied to them.⁸⁰

The influx of the immigrants to the cities in the second half of the 1920s coincided with the formation of Polish societies in Edmonton and in Calgary in 1927 and 1931 respectively.⁸¹ Although the need for socializing and entertainment among people speaking the same language was an aspect of the societies' constitutions, it seemed to be the principal motive driving the young immigrant men who had founded the society in Edmonton. The main activity of the society during its first three years of existence were the Saturday dances.⁸² In Calgary, Saturday dances and amateur performances attracted large audiences. Their entertaining character and importance to the immigrants was stressed in the society's history:

These performances were not only a source of income, but drew together and integrated all the Poles, provided cultural entertainment, gave moral and spiritual support.⁸³

The possibility of meeting single men at these dances, the opportunity to sing in a choir, to perform and to view performances attracted many women. "I started to go to the dances at the Polish Hall... Every weekend we gathered at the hall as there was no money to go anywhere else", remembered one woman.⁸⁴ Another, commenting on the theatrical performances, noted: "there was no television, no cars. This was our only entertainment."⁸⁵

Creating conditions that enabled socializing and entertainment was the goal of the young immigrants. Women

played an important role in fund raising activities necessary to achieve that goal. In Calgary, women were responsible for organizing dances and selling tickets. In both Calgary and Edmonton women prepared social teas and did all the cooking and baking for the picnics and bazaars that provided the funds needed for the organizations.⁸⁶

When, under the influence of the Polish consulate, the societies started to put more emphasis on the national context of their activities, women's participation became even more visible as they constituted the majority of the members of the dance groups and the youth circles.⁸⁷ Participation in the organization of concerts celebrating Polish national anniversaries was a source of pride for some women:

Just before the Second World War broke out, I organized a concert for the 3rd of May. We invited the Polish Consul from Ottawa, the late Bishop Carrol of Calgary, and many dignitaries from the City and other institutions... I put in a lot of work but it was worth it, as everyone was congratulated and satisfied.⁸⁸

The opportunity to become a teacher at a Polish Saturday school was very much appreciated by women whose household duties and work outside the home failed to fulfill their aspirations. One woman who taught Polish dances and history in Calgary emphasized how rewarding this voluntary work for the community was:

I enjoyed this kind of activity. And although it was very exhausting physically, it gave me a great inner satisfaction.⁸⁹

The Polish society, or "the club" as it was often called, remained important to many of the immigrant women throughout their lives. During the war women played a great role in raising funds for war victims. After the war, they were the ones who welcomed and helped the displaced persons. They were the major driving force in fund raising campaigns for the building of a Polish church and a new Polish hall in Calgary. Today, they meet on a social basis for teas, to sing in a choir and to take part in excursions organized by the senior citizens' club.⁹⁰

The Roman-Catholic religion continued to play an important role in the lives of the Polish immigrants in the cities in the 1930s. The Polish church not only served their religious needs but was also part of their social life and activities for the community. While voluntary work for the church gave great personal satisfaction to some women, the church related women's organizations were of crucial economic importance for the community. The Rosary Sodality, established in Edmonton in 1933, was the principal source of funds for the building of the second Polish church in Edmonton in the early 1950s.⁹¹

* * *

The late 1930s and the 1940s also witnessed the move to the city of young, single women who had arrived as children with their parents and settled on the homesteads. Due to

their poor education they were forced to join the lowest echelons of the female working class. Like other immigrant women who had entered the urban labour force in the late 1920s their choices of work were limited. Most worked as domestic servants, some as hotel and nursing home employees, cooks and saleswomen.⁹²

However, for many of these women, the period of working for wages lasted only a few years between leaving their parents' home and establishing their own families. Also working for wages was done out of necessity rather than choice. "In Poland, my mother lived at home until she got married. But we couldn't do that. We had to work", complained a homesteader's daughter.⁹³ A working class woman from Edmonton emphasized that although hers wasn't a big wedding, it was "from home", meaning that she did not have to leave her parents' house in search of work before marriage.⁹⁴

Immigrant women most often married immigrant men, although not necessarily Polish and not always Roman-Catholic.⁹⁵ These men came from the same social strata as the women and although some had experience in different trades, others were unskilled labourers.⁹⁶ Despite working class status, which often meant low family income, the women did not work outside their homes. They devoted most of their time to the children and looking after their families. Often

this was the result of upbringing and tradition. A farmer's daughter who married a truck driver, remarked:

You grew up having heard that women were supposed to get married, have children and look after the home, while men's role is to work and look after the woman.⁹⁷

A wife of an unskilled labourer recalled. "My husband wouldn't let me work. He told me: I married you and you are going to work for no one."⁹⁸

The fact that married women did not work outside their homes did not mean, however, that they did not contribute to the family financial well-being and income. Having agricultural backgrounds some had vegetable gardens and saved on food expenses. Many were able to sew and that benefited their families and sometimes brought in a good income. Still others earned money by boarding single men or doing hairdressing for their neighbours.⁹⁹

Although work outside the household was avoided, unhappy marriages, drinking and physical abuse by the husband, forced some women to rely on themselves to support their families. Their ability and willingness to work hard and to be financially independent helped them survive these difficult periods in their lives. Their training in household duties proved to be an asset when they were forced to look for work to support their children.¹⁰⁰ For some their persistence, entrepreneurial spirit and common sense made up for their educational deficiencies and allowed them

to be successful in business. One divorced woman, with two years of school in Poland and no education in Canada, became a shopkeeper, then opened a restaurant and was the driving force behind the building and successful running of a motel with her second husband.¹⁰¹

Although most of the women came from Roman-Catholic families, their religion played a less significant role in their lives than in their parents'. Participation in church activities and practices was the result of personal inclination and conviction rather than of a social tradition. For some women, religious beliefs were the source of the psychological strength that helped them to survive the difficult times in their lives. Some actively participated in different church related activities and belonged to religious organizations. There were, however, others for whom church and religion held no meaning at all.¹⁰²

Unlike the Polish immigrant women who lived in the cities during the Depression, those who moved to cities from farms in the last years of the 1930s and in the early 1940s, tended to have larger families with four to six children.¹⁰³ Providing a good education for their children was the major goal of many of these women. They saw their own lack of education as the principal obstacle to their social advancement. A woman who supported three children, without the help of their father, noted:

Raising my children and giving them education was always my priority. I have never had time for anything else but my children and my work.¹⁰⁴

An unskilled labourer's wife remarked. "We both wanted to give them an education that we had not been able to have".¹⁰⁵ A truck driver's wife emphasized:

We never had the opportunities, people have now. That was the biggest stumbling block. I was convinced that my children should have a good education even if it would take the last dollar we had.¹⁰⁶

Many of the women achieved their goals. Their children received university degrees and became a source of pride for their immigrant mothers.¹⁰⁷ The "desire to be somebody", that had motivated the movement of the peasants from Polish villages to the Alberta frontier was not realized by their born-in-Poland daughters who chose to live in the cities. These women, however, were determined to ensure that the social status of their own children would be better than theirs.

* * *

Like their predecessors who had arrived in Alberta prior to the First World War, the majority of the Polish interwar immigrant families were attracted to Alberta by the possibility of settling on the land. Acquiring or maintaining economic security and a respectable social status like that enjoyed by farmers in Polish villages motivated their move. Although most of them eventually

achieved their dream, the human cost involved in the process was often higher than expected. The hardships of life on a homestead and the drudgery of work on the farm discouraged a growing number of immigrant women. They preferred to live in the city. Deprived of opportunities for economic and social advancement due to their limited education, they saw securing a proper education for their children as the major goal in their lives.

In contrast to the rural areas, Alberta cities attracted single men and women, rather than families, in the 1930s. Deprived of familial support they looked for contacts with other Poles and they in turn greatly contributed to the development of Polish institutions in the cities. Women along with men were involved in the activities of the Polish churches and societies in Edmonton and Calgary and they continued to be in touch with these institutions throughout their lives.

Polish immigrant women in cities, due to their lack of education, remained among the lowest paid in the ranks of the working-class females. However, during the Depression, the survival of their families often depended on the women's housecleaning wages. With the improvement of economic conditions, they became primarily occupied with household duties and raising children.

The possession of land had always been the dream of Polish peasants. The realization of that dream in Alberta

proved to be difficult and painful, but nevertheless worthwhile for many immigrant women. Farming as a way of life was less appealing for their, born-in-Poland, daughters. For them the city became an option worth exploring.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

¹Of 4407 Polish interwar immigrant men residing in Alberta in 1936, 3514 lived in rural areas. For women the numbers were 3039 and 2366 respectively. Census of Alberta 1936. Population and Agriculture. pp.1025, 1029.

²Ibid., Occupations, Unemployment, Earnings and Employment, Household and Families. pp.941-950.

³See for example: Kutera and Piskunowicz reminiscences, Polish Settlers in Alberta, pp.119, 406; Chechotko family history, Tomahawk Trails, ed. Marion Jouan. (Tomahawk: Tomahawk Trails Book Club, 1974), p.182; Blomme, Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author.

⁴The largest increase in the number of Poles between 1921 and 1936 took place in the following census divisions: 13 (St. Paul - Cold Lake), 14 (Athabasca) and 16 (Peace River). While the number of the Poles in the province grew from 7172 in 1921 to 24060 in 1936, their increase in the above census divisions was respectively: from 322 to 1839, from 611 to 3761, and from 42 to 1125. Census of Canada 1921, v.I., pp.521, 535, 537; Census of Alberta 1936. Population and Agriculture, pp.989, 991, 993.

⁵Hancharyk interview with author; Ostaszewski reminiscence, Polish Settlers in Alberta, p.317. Wagon Trails Grown Over: Sexsmith to the Smoky, eds. Jean Fraser Rycroft and Margaret Fraser Thibault. (Sexsmith: Sexsmith to the Smoky Historical Society, 1980), p.1076; Matejko, J., "Polish farmers in Alberta", p.51.

⁶"Polish Settlers Near Athabasca Doing Splendidly", Edmonton Journal, 02.10.1929, p.9.

⁷Maria Wozniak, "Pamietniki z podrozy i zycia w Kanadzie", Biuletyn (Edmonton), nr.25, 03.05.1970, p.25.

⁸Tomasz Gorski, "Na kanadyjskiej ziemi", Biuletyn (Edmonton), NAC, Ottawa, Chuchla Walter Papers, MG31,H58.

⁹Blomme, Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author.; Wozniak reminiscence; Polish families' histories, local histories of Webster, Onoway, Pibroch, Flat Lake.

¹⁰Struzynski interview, PAA, Edmonton.

¹¹Ibid., Hancharyk and Blomme interviews with author; Polish families' histories, local histories of: Ardmore, DeBolt, Pibroch, Tomahawk.

¹²Illustrations of Settlers' Progress in 1925 and 1926 and their own stories of their success on farm lands in Alberta bought from British Dominions Land Settlement Corporation Limited. (British Dominions Land Settlement Corporation Limited, undated), Peel Bibliography on Microfiche, no.2956A; C.P.R. Gainford-Seba-Sundance District Photographs 1929-1930, PAA, Edmonton; Report on families from Poland settled along the lines of the Canadian National Railways St.Paul-Cold Lake District, Alberta 1928, RG 30 vol.5894 file 11; Family settlement Alberta 1929, RG 30 vol.5895, files 11, 24, 27, NAC, Ottawa.

¹³Hancharyk interview with author; Kutera reminiscence, Polish Settlers, p.114; Jurguwicz family history, Wagon Trails, p.586; Wozniak reminiscence.

¹⁴Most of the immigrants built better houses during or after the Second World War. See for example: Flat Lake: So Soon Forgotten. A History of Glendon and Districts, (Glendon: Glendon Historical Society, 1985), pp.746, 835; Faith and Flowing Water: the History of the Catholic People in the Eastern Irrigation District and Surrounding Area, (Brooks: St.Mary's Historical Book Society, 1982), p.171; Hancharyk interview with author.

¹⁵Tomahawk Trails, p.182.

¹⁶Albert, Blomme, Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author; Urban interview, PAA, Edmonton; see also Polish families' histories, Polish Settlers and local histories of Webster and Onoway.

¹⁷Blomme, Hancharyk, Strocher, Starr interviews with author; Polish Settlers, p.178; see also Polish families histories, Tomahawk Trails and Wagon Trails.

¹⁸See for example, Coal Oil to Crude:Iron River-La Corey and Surrounding Areas. (Iron River: Iron River-La Corey History Committee, 1980), pp.314, 315; Polish Settlers, p.118; Hills of Hope, (Spruce Grove: Hills of Hope Historical Committee, 1976), p.361.

¹⁹See for example, The Story of Ardmore and Friends, ed. Charlotte Bowers, (Ardmore: C.Bowers, 1981), p.23.

²⁰Wozniak reminiscence.

²¹Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author; see also Memories of Pibroch, Sunnibend, Linaria, Shoal Creek, Alberta 1900-1984, (Sunnibend Historical Society, 1984), pp.862, 997.

²²Blomme interview with author.

²³Albert, Hancharyk, Blomme, Strocher interviews with author; see also Puzianowski reminiscence, Polish Settlers, p.152-155.

²⁴Urban interview, PAA, Edmonton. See also Wozniak reminiscence. Medical assistance during childbirth was unavailable for most of the women. Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author. Memories of Pibroch, p.391; Polish Settlers, p.178.

²⁵Albert, Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author; Stanley Puchniak, Polish Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate. Volume I. Western Canada, unpublished typed manuscript, pp.337-342, Polish Collection, Folder 7, MHSO, Toronto

²⁶Puchniak, pp.341-342; see also reminiscence in Polish Settlers, pp.114-116.

²⁷Albert, Blomme, Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author; Struzynski interview, PAA, Edmonton; letter to Pere Provincial dated 15.11.1935, Rygusiak Correspondence.

²⁸Hancharyk interview with author.

²⁹Strocher, Albert interviews with author.

³⁰Albert, Strocher, Blomme interviews with author.

³¹Wozniak reminiscence; Tomahawk Trails, p.181.

³²Strocher interview.

³³Blomme interview with author.

³⁴Albert interview with author.

³⁵Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author; Wagon Trails, p.1089; Wozniak reminiscence; Polish Settlers, p.420.

³⁶Hancharyk interview with author.

³⁷Census of Alberta 1936. Population and Agriculture, p.1240; Census of Canada 1941. v. VIII, p.1572.

³⁸Ibid.

³⁹Census of Alberta 1936., Ibid, p.1239; Census of Canada 1941., Ibid., p.1561.

⁴⁰Kowalski family history, Hills of Hope, p.361.

⁴¹Gorski reminiscence.

⁴²Wrzosek family history, Wagon Trails, p.234.

⁴³Gerwatowski family history, Across the Smoky, eds. Vinnie Moore and Fran Moore, (DeBolt: DeBolt and District Pioneer Museum Society, 1978), p.100.

⁴⁴Census of Canada 1951. v.II, p.41-17, 41-18.

⁴⁵Budzich family history, Memories of Pibroch, p.497.

⁴⁶See for example Gorski reminiscence.

⁴⁷Blomme interview with author; Times to remember, p.269; reminiscence in Polish Settlers, p.154.

⁴⁸Matejko, "Polish farmers", p.51.

⁴⁹See for example Rygusiak Correspondence.

⁵⁰Hancharyk interview with author.

⁵¹Ibid.

⁵²Wagon Trails, p.1072.

⁵³In 1936, 5.9% of gainfully employed men born in Poland worked in mining. Census of Alberta 1936. Occupations, Unemployment, Earnings and Employment, Household and Families, p.941.

⁵⁴Starr interview with author.

⁵⁵Radmanich reminiscence, Polish Settlers, p.162; a wedding photograph of Mrs. Puzianowski, Mrs. Puzianowski's collection.

⁵⁶Reminiscences in Polish Settlers, pp.158, 163.

⁵⁷Chuchla reminiscence in Polish Settlers, p.63.

⁵⁸Starr interview with author; reminiscences in Polish Settlers, pp. 63, 164.

⁵⁹Starr interview with author; Radmanich reminiscence, Polish Settlers, p.163.

⁶⁰Starr interview with author; Kutera, Puzianowski, Radmanich reminiscences in Polish Settlers, pp.114, 159, 163.

⁶¹Ibid., p.160.

⁶²Ibid., p. 63 (a photograph of flood in Coleman in 1942), pp.161, 165; Starr interview with author.

⁶³Census of Canada 1921, v.I, pp.542, 543; Census of Canada 1931, v.II., pp.471, 477.

⁶⁴Trzydziestolecie Związku Polaków w Calgary 1931-1961, (Calgary: Związek Polaków, 1961), p.10; Golden Anniversary. Polish Canadian Society. Edmonton - Alberta 1927-1977, (Edmonton: Polish Canadian Society 1977), p.16.

⁶⁵See for example Ciastek and Wojcicki interviews with author.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷In 1936, 636 Polish men and 452 Polish women resided in Edmonton. Their number in Calgary was respectively: 265 and 207. Census of Alberta 1936. Population and Agriculture, p.1029.

⁶⁸Ciastek interview with author.

⁶⁹Wojcicki interview with author; Dziuzynski reminiscence, Polish Settlers, p.86.

⁷⁰Polish Settlers, p.86.

⁷¹Ciastek interview with author.

⁷²Ibid.

⁷³Wojcicki interview with author.

⁷⁴Census of Alberta 1936. Population and Agriculture, p.1061.

⁷⁵Wojcicki interview with author; Trzydziestolecie Związku Polaków w Calgary, p.10.

⁷⁶Solikoski interview with author.

⁷⁷Ciastek and Wojcicki interviews with author; Polish Settlers, p.86; photographs of immigrant's house in Calgary in 1930s, E. Wojcicki Collection, GAI, Calgary.

⁷⁸Solikoski interview.

⁷⁹In 1951 37.5% of the Polish immigrant women, gainfully occupied, worked in the personal service sector as compared to 38.5% in 1946, 55.3% in 1941 and 47.8% in 1936. Census of Alberta 1936. Occupations, Unemployment, pp.941-950; Census of Canada 1941, v.VII, pp.425, 427; Census of the Prairie Provinces 1946. v.II, pp.648-663; Census of Canada 1951. v. IV, pp.13-18.

⁸⁰Wojcicki and Ciastek interviews with author.

⁸¹Maria Carlton, Towarzystwo polsko - kanadyjskie (Edmonton) 1927-1987. (Edmonton: The Polish Canadian Society 1987). The Polish Alliance Calgary. Minute Book, MG 28 v36. NAC, Ottawa; Polish Canadian Association, Konstytucja Polskiego Związku w Calgary, undated manuscript. MG 28 v36. NAC, Ottawa.

⁸²Carlton, p.28.

⁸³Trzydziestolecie Związku Polaków w Calgary 1931-1961, p.31.

⁸⁴Puzianowski reminiscence, Polish Settlers, p.157.

⁸⁵Wojcicki interview with author.

⁸⁶The Polish Alliance Calgary. Minute Book; Carlton, pp.27, 37, 38.

⁸⁷A photograph of the Polish dance group members in 1930 with 12 women and 2 men in Golden Anniversary. Polish Canadian Society, Edmonton, p.16; a woman presided over the youth club in Calgary. Polish Alliance of Calgary. Minute Book; the youth club in Coleman consisted only of women. Czas, 31.05.1938, a photograph, p.1, Chuchla, W., "Klub Młodzieży w Coleman czyni dobre postępy", p.3.

⁸⁸Dziuzynski reminiscence, Polish Settlers, p.102.

⁸⁹Radmanich reminiscence, Ibid., p.166.

⁹⁰Wojcicki, Ciastek, Solikoski interviews with authors; Trzydziestolecie Związku Polaków w Calgary, pp.14,26,27; photograph representing immigrant women's social tea get together, Mrs. Puzianowski's collection.

⁹¹Cecile Solikoski, "History of the Rosary Sodality from 1933 to 1988", History of the Holy Rosary Parish in Edmonton, pp.158-159.

⁹²Albert, Blomme, Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author.

⁹³Albert interview with author.

⁹⁴Solikoski interview with author.

⁹⁵Albert, Blomme, Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author.

⁹⁶Ibid.; In 1951 16.9% of the men, born in Poland and employed outside agriculture in Alberta, worked as unskilled labourers. Census of Canada 1951. v.IV, p.13-18.

⁹⁷Albert interview with author.

⁹⁸Strocher interview with author.

⁹⁹Blomme, Hancharyk, Starr, Solikoski, Strocher interviews with author.

¹⁰⁰Hancharyk interview with author.

¹⁰¹Starr interview with author.

¹⁰²Albert, Blomme, Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author. In 1951, 59.8% of the women of Polish origin were Roman Catholic as compared to 79.5% in 1931. Census of Canada 1951. v.II, p.35-22; Census of Canada 1931. v.I., p.932-935.

¹⁰³Albert, Blomme, Hancharyk, Strocher interviews with author.

¹⁰⁴Starr interview with author.

¹⁰⁵Strocher interview with author.

¹⁰⁶Albert interview with author.

¹⁰⁷Most of the children of the women interviewed by the author graduated from universities or colleges.

CONCLUSION

The Polish Republic reborn after the First World War suffered from serious economic problems as a result of war destruction, an antiquated agricultural structure and an underdeveloped industrial sector. Overpopulation each year forced hundreds of thousands of rural dwellers to look abroad for their means of survival and economic betterment. Canada, perceived as a country in which wages were high, where cheap land was readily available and far from European conflicts became a desirable destination for Poles. This was especially so after their emigration to the United States was drastically reduced by immigration restrictions.

In the interwar period Canada admitted some fifty thousand Poles. About one third of them were women. Most of the Polish immigrants entered Canada between 1926 and 1930 to meet the demand for male and female agricultural workers in the prairie provinces. Despite the efforts of the authorities to send them to the West and keep them there, many drifted to central Canada in search of steady, better paid industrial and service jobs in the large urban centres.

Polish immigrants who chose to stay in Alberta were mainly attracted by the opportunity to settle on the land. The natural resource oriented, predominantly rural economy of the province had little to offer to non-British

immigrants outside the agricultural sector. On the other hand, to Polish peasants the ownership of land was associated with economic security and a desirable social status. An abundance of cheap land in Alberta made the achievement of these goals possible. Although economic motives for emigration predominated among the Polish interwar settlers in Alberta, recollections of the horrors of life during the war and the fragile geopolitical status of Poland after the war were additional factors in the decision of some families to choose Alberta as the place of their permanent residence.

Most of the Polish women came to Canada as members of families. They either accompanied their husbands and fathers or joined them within several years. Available evidence suggests that married women, particularly in younger families, were often active participants in the emigration decision and sometimes initiators of the trip over the ocean. These findings contradict the view that the typical Polish family was strongly patriarchal and authoritarian.

For young, single women a trip to Canada offered not only the possibility of well paid jobs, but also an opportunity to see the world and to experience something new and more exciting than village life. It also enhanced their chances of getting married. Women's expectations, aroused by the optimistic tales of returnees from the United States and Canada, sometimes by their own imagination and sometimes by

Canadian railway agents who promised good wages for light work, were high and often difficult to meet. For most the reality they were faced with in Alberta brought disenchantment and regrets. The twelve to fourteen-hour work-day of immigrant domestics on farms did not differ much from what they were used to doing in Poland. Although wages were higher, so were living expenses. Besides, the jobs were mostly seasonal and did not allow for the accumulation of savings. Poor living and working conditions and the inability to be understood in an English language environment often made them feel miserable during their first months in Alberta.

For women from farm families, settlement in Alberta resulted in an initial deterioration of their living conditions. Due to their meager financial resources, most of immigrant families settled on homesteads. Life in the wilderness and the isolation of the Alberta frontier presented new and sometimes shocking experiences to women who had lived all their lives in crowded villages. Left alone with small children, while the men were in search of cash-paying jobs, they greatly missed their everyday contacts with relatives and neighbours and the rich social life of the Polish village.

Whether they settled in rural areas, in cities or in coal mining towns, in the 1930s, Polish families were preoccupied with survival. Social status considerations and

even religion were often pushed into the background, particularly on the Alberta frontier. With high levels of unemployment, primarily affecting the men, the women's role was keeping the families going. Women with small children concentrated their efforts on ensuring the self-sufficiency of their households by producing almost all the food and making all the clothing at home. While the sale of surplus dairy products and the wages of teen-aged daughters were the principal sources of income in rural areas, women employed as domestics were often the main providers for families in the cities.

With the outbreak of war in 1939 and the acceleration of economic recovery in Canada, the conditions of the Polish immigrants improved, particularly for those engaged in agriculture. From poverty-stricken homesteaders they became successful farmers. In 1941 almost fifty percent of Polish farmers owned more than one quarter section of land and specialized in the production of grains and livestock. Outside agriculture Polish immigrants' progress was less remarkable. Although immigrant families in cities managed to build their own houses, they were often small and primitive. Also, their occupational structure indicated that many still belonged to the lowest echelons of the urban working class. In 1951, personal service continued to be the principal occupation of Polish women and almost one fifth of Polish

men working outside the agricultural sector were employed as unskilled labourers.

The economic recovery also helped to bring about a change in women's lives and work. Farm women, who had initially spent most of their time ensuring the self-sufficiency of their families, became producers of specialized agricultural products destined for sale. Women in the cities gradually withdrew from the wage-labour force and devoted most of their time to family and household duties.

Family and work preoccupied Polish peasant women in their homeland and they continued to be the most important aspects of their lives in Alberta. Married women with children simply had little time for extrafamilial and non-work related activities. On the other hand, both in Poland and in Alberta, the need for socializing and entertainment motivated young single women and men to organize themselves. Polish societies, established in Calgary and Edmonton in the interwar period, initially focussed on those needs, although with time and with the change of international situation, national themes came to play a larger role in their activities. For some women Polish societies and Polish churches, apart from the social or religious context of their activities, also provided an outlet for interests and aspirations that were not fulfilled in the domestic sphere.

The decade of the 1940s was characterized by the growing urbanization of the younger generation of immigrant women who had come to Canada as children. Unlike the women who had lived in the cities during the Depression, these women avoided working outside the home after marriage. This was the result of social values that prevailed at that time both in Poland and in Canada. In Poland only the poorest peasant women worked outside the farm household. In Canada women's participation in the active labour force was still very low.¹ The stigma of being a "Polish domestic" certainly did not encourage women to take up employment if the family could do without it. The proper place for a married woman in respectable families in Canada in the 1940s was still at home. Polish immigrant women wanted to be included in that category.

Immigration and settlement in Alberta did not result in women's individualization. Both in the rural areas and in the cities Polish immigrant women acted primarily as family members rather than as independent individuals. The extent to which they preserved their traditional roles in families depended not only on the Alberta economy, but was also the determinant of social values prevailing at the time both in the country they had come from and in the country they chose to live in.

The fact that women saw themselves as members of families rather than as independent individuals did not

mean, however, that within families they were passive executors of men's will. On the contrary, they realized that because of their position as mothers and because of their economic importance as farm workers and homemakers they had much better chances to exert their influence in the home sphere than outside of it. The extent to which they succeeded depended on their personal goals and abilities rather than on their gender.

The women who settled in Alberta in the interwar period were ambitious, energetic, able and willing to work hard. They came to Canada to ensure "a better life" for their families. During their first decade here, their dreams turned out to be "sour" more often than "sweet". But eventually, their hard work, endurance and perseverance brought results that made all the efforts worthwhile. The essence of their experience seems to be best illustrated in the following reminiscence:

Over the years, Frank and I endured many hardships, but love for our family made us go on, and we never gave up. We were both determined that at the end of that long tunnel, there really was a light, and we would work out our way there to reach it. I now feel we did indeed reach it, and the satisfaction cannot possibly be described, in mere words.²

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

¹The percentage of married women in the female labour force in Canada was 10% in 1931, 12.7% in 1941 and 30% in 1951. Ceta Ramkhalawansingh, " Women during the Great War", in Janice Acton, Penny Goldsmith and Bonnie Shepard (eds.), Women at Work. Ontario, 1850-1930, (Toronto: Canadian Women's Educational Press, 1974), p.294.

²Reminiscence of Josephine Smela, Memories of Pibroch, p.391.

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