

The "Little Poland" of Little Harbor Road

During the first decades of the 20th Century glamorous advertisements appeared in foreign newspapers, and in Polish newspapers in such places in the U.S. as Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; Toledo, Ohio; Chicago, Ill.; Niagra Falls, N.Y. and New York City, which painted in glowing terms and pictures independent and prosperous settlements in the New World, placed there by slick real estate agents from the United States. These advertisements drew many people from Poland and other Slavic countries here.

At that particular time there was general discontent in these countries. Poverty, oppression, and the threat of war were constant in their lives. They had heard of this new free country and the promise of freedom from all these threatening factors they were living under. They saw a chance for a new life in the United States. Most were young people, some married with children. They arrived by ocean liner, mostly by third class, spending about 30 days on the ocean and two weeks at Ellis Island where they were processed.

They visioned farm land to settle on and so friends and relatives grouped together and secured the services of colonization agents who were quick to sell them cut-over pine land which was being offered by the lumber companies. These 40 acre plots were sold for \$400-\$800.

In 1911 the first Polish immigrants arrived in Bark River twp., Delta County, upper Michigan. Many Polish families settled here and at Perronville at that time.

Most of the families to come to the Garden Peninsula had come first to Chicago and it was there the big real estate agents of the Illinois Northwest Colonization company (later called the "Grimmer Land Company") showed the people pictures of substantial farm buildings and fertile farm land on maps of Upper Michigan and other places. The new families to come here were persuaded to give up their life savings to purchase their land and homes in this new country leaving just enough for train fare to arrive in Escanaba, Michigan.

In the fall of 1914 a group of ten or twelve families came here from Chicago in search of their Promised Land. These brave people who came here at that time deserve an account of their toil and struggles to survive in a new and strange wilderness country.

Upon arriving in Garden it was soon discovered by these foreign speaking people that their new homes were nothing but a wilderness on barren sand hills. There were no buildings of any kind nor any preparation for their coming had been made. There was no train fare to return to relatives in Chicago. So it was with heartbreak and bitter resignation that they encamped on this barren land for which they had given all their savings. Their so-called farms were located about five miles east of the village of Garden on the Little Harbor Road.

These people, all Slavic in descent, were thrifty people and with the racial fortitude of many centuries set about to make the most of their hard lot. They built log homes and made corrals for any livestock they were able to acquire. They cut the trees and cut and burned the brush and planted the rutabagas and potatoes among the stumps. Their labor was from dawn to dusk. There were many hardships and isolation from the outside world. They could speak only their native tongue and at first could not converse with the merchants and people in the village of Garden. At times they were unable to make the storekeepers understand what supplies they needed that were necessary to sustain life. One can imagine the discouragement these people suffered during their first years here.

Soon these people found their land was not only very sandy but also very stony. This meant many days of hard work with every member of the family helping to remove the stones before any crops could be produced. These huge stone piles and fences remain to this day, an abject of wonder to all who pass and proof of the industry and plodding perserverance against tremendous odds of those who so toiled. At first all the work was done by hand but with stove wood as a medium of trade the settlers were soon able to buy old horses, later

replacing them with sturdy teams for use on the long five mile haul to Garden as for general work. There were no telephones and the roads were often impassable for many years.

For a time some of the people called the new community "New Krakow" as this was the place in Poland where the Bartus family had originated from. They had lived in N.Y. state for a time before they arrived here in 1915. He had some experience in mining and so hoping to earn needed extra income he worked in the mines of northern Michigan for a time. His wife and children stayed on the homestead east of Garden. One day a terrific wind and rain storm came up and blew the roof off their house. Mrs. Bartus with great presence of mind, placed the children in their trunks while she herself hid beneath a mattress until the fury of the storm abated. Alex Tarzali helped the Bartus family put the roof back on their house. A well for water was blasted with dynamite on the north side of the house. The early families here were bothered with the huge mosquitoes in the summer time.

The settlement as constantly been in danger of forest fires. A large blaze in 1922 destroyed a dry bottom swamp and crept up to the Bartus buildings which were saved by a bucket brigade formed by neighbors and friends. Again in 1930 a fire swept away a long forest frontage and checked at the very threshold of the Mike Goldi home. Later it became the practice to plow fire lines between the forest areas and the farm lands.

The names of the families who came between the years of 1914 and 1918 and stayed included the Harbinski, Bartus, Rokosky, Leckson, Preznar, Tarzali families. Other Slavic families came later. They included the Goldi, Slowlinka, Czajowski, Juskewicz, Zaborsky, Sowa, Beana (Bajina), Lunenburg, Boultrenas and Sopko families.

It is certain that their hard work and perserverance made these people far happier than the dishonest men who had cheated them so badly.

With few exceptions the second generations of these people followed the examples of their parents, becoming hard working thrifty Americans.

Similar land swindles were repeated in different places in this northern country. A similar one of upper Michigan was that of the surrounding area of the little town of Moran, near St. Ignace, a story by itself.