



## Visitor Experience #53

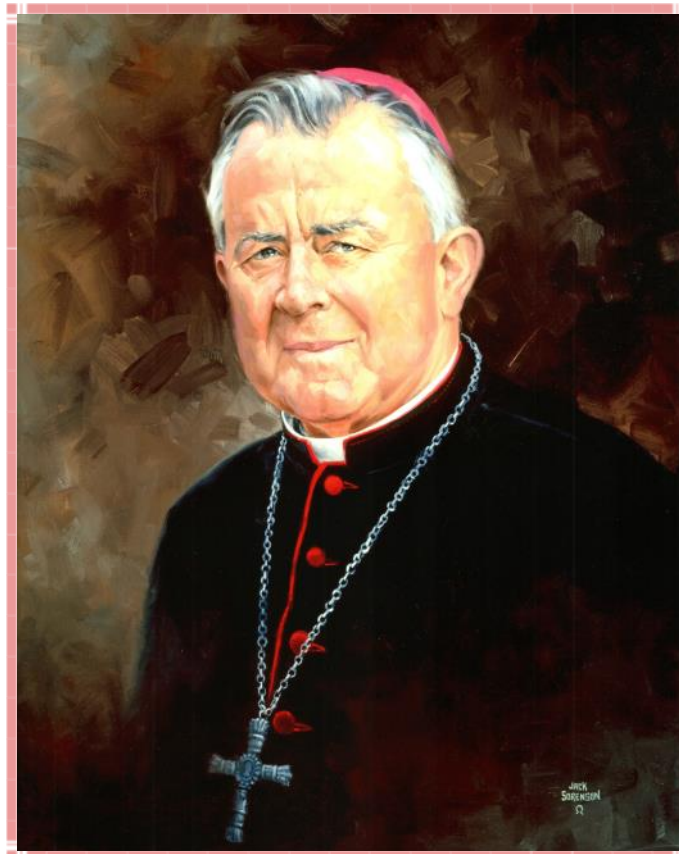
**POLISH HERITAGE CENTER CELEBRATION**

**HONORING**

**BISHOP JOHN W. YANTA**

**ON HIS**

**90<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2,  
FOR HIS LIFE OF SERVICE, STEWARDSHIP, LEADERSHIP,  
SPIRITUALITY, AND LOVE OF GOD AND NEIGHBOR**



*Portrait by:*  
Jack Sorenson

# Preface

*Since the first newsletter was published in May of 2016, there have been articles written about the communities that our immigrant ancestors founded. The communities that were featured were normally published in the order that they were established. We have even had the opportunity to highlight some of the other Polish communities in addition to those connected to the earliest immigration. All of the core communities of our immigration have been written about except one, Panna Maria. The reason was to focus on ALL thirteen of our core communities being connected and sharing a common heritage, even if we settled in other areas and arrived at different times. Almost all have “heard” of Panna Maria and may even know something of the first and oldest permanent Polish settlement here in America.*

*And now, as the Polish Heritage Center at Panna Maria is finally ready to open, it is time to tell the story of this unique and special place in Polonia. The reason for relating the narrative now is for the benefit of the many people who have come to learn only recently this story which many of us in South Texas grew up learning and maybe even taking for granted. This will be only a recap. If the entire story could be told here, then there is no reason for the Polish Heritage Center in the first place! Come, learn, enjoy, remember, and celebrate these early immigrants. Against all odds, they not only survived and thrived, they presented to us this heritage that is our inheritance.*

*John Wojtasczyk*

## ***Sto Lat!***

**In honor of Bishop John Yanta's 90th birthday** and his many significant and lifelong contributions to enriching the lives of so many people, please join us on Saturday, Oct. 2, 2021 (Bishop Yanta's actual birthday), for the first annual Bishop Yanta Birthday Celebration. The event begins at 6:30 p.m. at St. Paul's Community Center in San Antonio and will benefit the new Polish Heritage Center in Panna Maria! Please help us raise \$950,000 to meet our capital campaign goal.

St. Paul's Community Center is one of the many organizations that have benefited from the generosity of Bishop Yanta over his many decades of service. Today, St. Paul's is a thriving center that provides wonderful services for the San Antonio community.

Bishop Yanta's crowning achievement, the new Polish Heritage Center in Panna Maria, will educate and inspire visitors by preserving the history of the first Polish settlers in Texas and by promoting Polish history and culture across the nation through exhibits and programs to inspire all Americans today.

To help continue Bishop Yanta's vision to "keep vibrant and relevant the history, values, beliefs, customs and traditions of the Polish settlers and their descendants," please join us for the Birthday Celebration on Oct. 2 at 6:30 p.m. St. Paul's Community Center is located at 1201 Donaldson Ave., the corner of Donaldson and St. Cloud near Babcock, in San Antonio. There is ample parking.

Sponsor and ticket information:

## EVENT TABLE SPONSORS:

**DIAMOND:** \$100,000 Table of 8. Sponsor will be recognized at Celebration; Picture of sponsor with Bishop Yanta; 3-year membership in the Polish Heritage Center; 8 PHC Tour Tickets. (One table already taken)

**GOLD:** \$50,000 Table of 8. Sponsor will be recognized at Celebration; Picture of sponsor with Bishop Yanta; 2-year membership in the Polish Heritage Center; 8 PHC Tour Tickets. (Three tables already taken)

**SILVER:** \$25,000 Table of 8. Sponsor will be recognized at Celebration; Picture of sponsor with Bishop Yanta; one-year membership in the Polish Heritage Center, 8 PHC Tour Tickets. (One table already taken)

**BRONZE:** \$10,000 Table of 8. Sponsor will be recognized at Celebration; 8 PHC Tour Tickets. (Three tables already taken)

**Individual ticket:** \$200.00 Due to limited space, individual reservations will be based on table availability.

For more information, please contact:

Betty Kowalik at 830-583-6236 or email at [kowalikbetty@gmail.com](mailto:kowalikbetty@gmail.com)



# *Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary Parish, established December 24, 1854, Panna Maria, Texas*



*75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration at  
Immaculate Conception Church,  
Panna Maria, 1929*

*Photograph courtesy of:  
Panna Maria Historical Society*

## *In the Beginning*

1836 saw the birth of a new nation in the Americas, the Republic of Texas. In 1839, the Catholic Church put into motion the first steps of rebuilding the church. The church in Texas, at that time, had been horribly weakened following the missionary period under Spain and Mexico. This first step was to establish an Apostolic Prefecture. The persons who were tapped to take charge were two Vincentian priests, **Rev. John Timon, C.M.** as Prefect Apostolic and **Rev. Jean-Marie Odin, C.M.** as Vice-Apostolic who had been born in France.<sup>i</sup> In 1842, Father Odin was named Vicar Apostolic of Texas and ordained titular bishop.<sup>ii</sup> Three years later, this large and young Republic was granted admission to statehood in the United States of America. In 1847, the entirety of Texas was elevated to the status of diocese as the Diocese of Galveston, and **Bishop Odin** was named as its first



The photograph of **Jean Marie Odin** is from the Catholic Archives of Texas found on the Texas Catholic Conference Website

bishop.<sup>iii</sup> During his tenure, **Bishop Odin** worked tirelessly on growing and better establishing the church throughout the vastness of this young and wild Republic and later as a state. In 1852, Bishop Odin travelled throughout Europe and attempted to procure finances and vocations for his sprawling diocese. It was during the course of his travel that he happened to visit a Conventual Franciscan cloister in southern Bavaria. There he solicited for German-speaking volunteers to come to his expansive diocese to minister to the growing Catholic German population. In response, four young Franciscans answered the call to leave all that they knew and to travel to a new world, far, far away.<sup>iv</sup>

## *The Visionary*

One of these young Franciscans was a monk named **Father Leopold Moczygamba, OFM Conv.** The young **Fr. Leopold**, with others, left the monastery and followed **Bishop Odin** back to Texas. Initially, **Fr. Leopold** was assigned to the parish of Saints Peter and Paul in New Braunfels, Texas, and eventually became its pastor.<sup>v</sup> **Fr. Leopold** also saw to the spiritual needs of the people of Fredericksburg, along with Alsatians of Castroville and D'Hanis who spoke a Germanic dialect. Here for the first time, in the openness of the Texas countryside, **Fr. Leopold** witnessed the prosperity of the German farmers.

### **Reverend Leopold Moczygamba**

The UT Institute of Texan Cultures at San Antonio,  
No. 068-1231





Wishing that his family might be able to have a share in this better life, in 1853, **Fr. Leopold** set out to procure 27 acres of land and 3 half-acre lots from a local businessman for his parents and four brothers. The initial location was about 2 miles south of New Braunfels, Texas, in a town that was called *Craców*.<sup>vi</sup>



The image of *Getting Started* that appears in Newsletter #8 issue of July 2019

But when the glowing letters that **Fr. Leopold** had written were received at home,

these letters circulated like wildfire! No longer was it just **Fr. Leopold's** four brothers; a large group of relatives of one sort or another, friends, and acquaintances committed to a new, yet uncertain future. **Fr. Leopold** would team up with a San Antonio Irish businessman, **John Twohig**.



The oak tree under which the first Mass was celebrated on Christmas Eve of 1854  
*Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk*

**Fr. Leopold** and **John Twohig** rode the countryside scouting for suitable lands. Riding through the lands of South Texas for a few days, they deemed the site at the junction of the San Antonio River and Cibolo Creek as the most suitable location for a new settlement.<sup>vii</sup> The word was mailed home. Plans were made. Families sold



Interior view of Immaculate Conception Church,  
Panna Maria, Texas, prior to the 1937  
renovation and enlargement

*Photograph courtesy of: Loretta Dziuk Niestroy†*

all they had. A new beginning was put in motion.

In October, 1854, the immigrants arrived by train to the Prussian sea-port of Bremen / Bremerhaven.<sup>viii</sup> From here, they left the Old World behind. After about a nine-week trip at sea, they arrived at Galveston on Sunday, December 3, 1854,<sup>ix</sup> only to take a second vessel to Indianola. With ox carts for their possessions, the elderly, and small children, they then had to walk two weeks from Indianola to

San Antonio. Our ancestors were not at the end of their journey.

After finally meeting **Fr. Leopold Moczygemba** in San Antonio, our ancestors were instructed that they would have to walk back three days to their new home that would be called Panna Maria on Sunday, December 24, 1854, Christmas Eve. As a result, a little over one hundred sixty six plus years ago, a group of our ancestors gathered under an oak tree to give thanks to God for surviving a long, hard, arduous trip. They sailed for about nine weeks at sea. Solely inspired by the letter from the son of their community and the desire for a better life, these people sold what little they had so that they might be able to grasp the opportunity for the better life that always eluded them. Also remember that they would never have been able to realize this if they had never left the only home they had ever known.

Not all of the new arrivals would make the trek to Panna Maria. Some stayed in San Antonio, while some in early 1855 branched out to Bandera and others to Martinez, now called St. Hedwig. Others diverged much farther and wider in search of their dream.



# *Faith*

They lived by faith. They survived by faith. They flourished by faith. In the untamed wilderness of South Texas, faith is an important commodity. Our ancestors were strangers in a strange and foreign land. There were not many that they could naturally speak with outside their own community. Their basic food stuffs



View of Immaculate Conception Church, date unknown  
*Photograph courtesy of: Elise Snoga Fluitt*

were different, and they had to learn about unfamiliar crops for their nutrition. They had no shelters or buildings to call their home. And they had no church in which to worship God. It was just themselves and nature.

Slowly, our ancestors began the process of taming nature. They desired to build a church, Immaculate Conception, to worship in and to construct homes to live in. Plans for the first church in Panna Maria began in 1855 and were completed in 1856.<sup>x</sup> They cleared the land and started breaking the sod so that they could plant the first crops. They learned the native plants and which were good for food and those that were not. Most importantly, they were free to own and use guns. They learned the wildlife and began to hunt in order to provide for their wellbeing. They also began to respect the nature that was demanded in South Texas –the insects, bugs, creepy crawlies! All those pests that annoy us to this day were those that our ancestors learned to recognize and to navigate among this new array.

Back in their homeland, one of the natural events that aided in breaking their will was a very severe flood in 1854<sup>xi</sup> and the diseases that accompanied it. After being here for two years, our ancestors experienced one of the severest droughts Texas would have ever recorded. Yet, they endured.



Over time, our ancestors, with faith in God and each other, began to emerge and stake their claim in this new world. They were known as a hardworking, industrious people. Honest and good to their word.

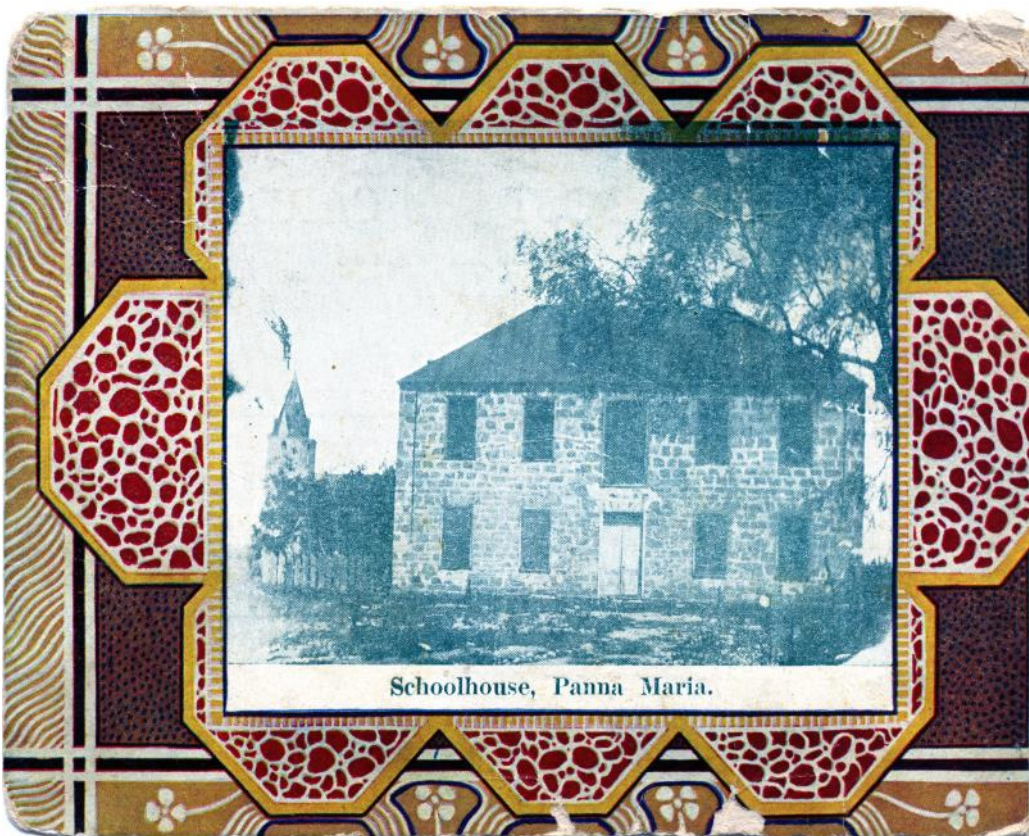
Many tell stories of being able to borrow money on a hand shake and worth of their word. The parish of Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Panna Maria, Texas, is noted for other firsts! This historic parish was the first Catholic church in all of Karnes County. Largely unappreciated is the fact that aside from ministering to the Polish immigrants, the parish was the spiritual home to a very large number of Hispanics. A review of the sacramental books of the parish reveals numerous entries of Hispanic surnames. These faithful people sought out the spiritual benefit of the church in their lives.

## *Education*

Another first for this community was that the parish school of St. Joseph was the first Polish school in the United States.<sup>xii</sup> Our immigrant ancestors knew

the importance of a solid education and sought through their sweat and resources that they would ensure that their children would receive this benefit.

Although the Silesian dialect which was spoken at home was not the standard Polish used, the prayers and many of the songs that were recited at church were. Even today, many of the prayers and songs that were familiar to our



St. Joseph School, the first and oldest Polish school in America, in 1910

*Photograph courtesy of:* Panna Maria Historical Society





Staff and students of the  
 St. Joseph's School,  
 Panna Maria, Texas – Circa 1917  
 The UT Institute of Texan Cultures  
 at San Antonio,  
 No. 068-1219  
*Photograph courtesy of:*  
 John F. Dzuik Family

immigrant ancestors are still in use in many of the celebrations in church.

## Women Religious

Following on the heel of providing for the education of the children of the Polish communities, **Rev. Zwiardowski** sought to ensure and protect the culture and identity of the Polish students with the creation of a religious order of mostly Polish women. This religious order became the Order of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary in 1875 and would become the first order of religious Polish women established in America. Due to the azure colored habits that distinguished the Sisters, they became popularly called the Blue Sisters.<sup>xiii</sup>

This 1875 photograph taken in Panna Maria, Texas, has an inscription on the back of the original that says, “**Mary Hedwig**.” The Dzuik family who loaned the photo to the Institute of Texan Cultures noted it may be of **Pauline Urbanczyk** which seems very likely given her religious name as **Sister Maria Jadwiga** or **Mary Hedwig** as written on the back. If so, this may be the only surviving photo of the habit designed by **Father Zwiardowski** and made of blue material worn by the “Blue Sisters” of Panna Maria.

Photograph courtesy of: John F. Dzuik Family -  
 UTSA’s Institute of Texan Cultures, 068-1248

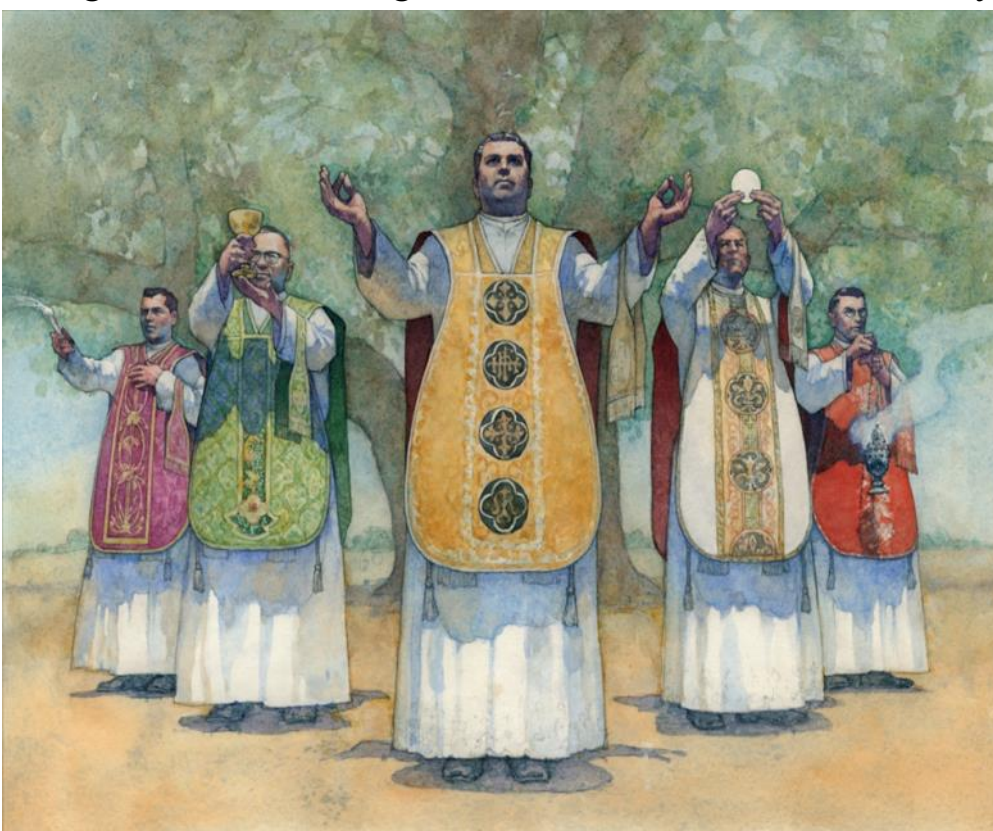
Source: [www.silesiantexans.com](http://www.silesiantexans.com)



The Blue Sisters would eventually teach in a number of the Polish communities from Panna Maria to St. Hedwig, Yorktown, Bandera, and St. Michael's in San Antonio. Short lived, this congregation of Polish sisters was eventually dissolved in 1881, whereas its members were assumed into other existing religious communities.<sup>xiv</sup> The work and dedication of these first Sisters were never forgotten. The spirituality of our immigrant ancestors would foster and give rise to a vast number of women who would choose to devote themselves to religious life both locally and in the surrounding Polish communities.

St. Joseph School continued despite the dissolution of the Blue Sisters. Other communities stepped in to provide for the education of the Panna Maria youth. Most noticeably, the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and the Felician Sisters continued the educational legacy for over a century! In 1934, the private church-directed school came under public control. Between 1958 and 1960,<sup>xv</sup> a “new” school building dubbed the “Panna Maria School” was built to replace the old school.

Interestingly, even when the school came under public control, the Sisters charged with educating the children remained. Not only did the Sisters’ presence



continue, but even when the Panna Maria School was closed and the children were bussed to the Karnes City School campus, those Sisters close to retirement were allowed to continue teaching in the Karnes City public school until they secured retirement. The Sisters, being renowned for their educational excellence, were cherished within the Karnes City school system.

The image of the mural of the **Five Moczygemba Priests** is located in the Heritage Center and found in Newsletter #5. From left to right: Fr. Leopold Moczygemba (the nephew of Fr. Leopold Moczygemba, the founder), Msgr. Henry Moczygemba, Fr. Leopold Moczygemba, the founder, Msgr. Thomas Moczygemba, and Fr. Leon Moczygemba



# Panna Maria Religious Vocations

The following Priests and Sisters were born in Panna Maria:

- **Rev. Edmund S. Dragon** [1905 – 1961]
- **Rev. Msgr. Peter L. Foegelle** [1901 – 1986]
- **Rev. Leon Vitalis Stanislaus Moczygamba** [1894 – 1959]
- **Rt. Rev. Msgr. Thomas Moczygamba** [1863 – 1950]
- **Barbara Krawiecz:** Sister Cecilia [1859 – 1895]
- **Joanna Moczygamba:** Sister Ephrem [1860 – 1946]
- **Pauline Urbanczyk:** Sister Mary Veronica [1858 – 1942]
- **Elizabeth Winkler:** Sister Mary Dominic [1858 – 1916]

Source: [www.silesiantexans.com](http://www.silesiantexans.com)

Contemporary priest born in Panna Maria who is currently pastor of  
Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Helotes, Texas:

Rev.  
Scott  
Janysek



**Fr. Scott Janysek**, the most recent vocation from Panna Maria  
*Image from:*  
[www.hccommunityjournal.com/](http://www.hccommunityjournal.com/)

# *Symbols of Faith*

When the early immigrants arrived, they brought many items of both temporal and spiritual necessity. As was the case many times because of their distance from any major business, the immigrants would slowly acquire many of the implements that would add to their lives. There are two very special pieces of Panna Maria's history told here.

Among the second immigration of 1855 were **Johann** and **Tekla Rzeppa** who brought a treasured symbol of faith to Panna Maria—a Corpus (the image of the body of Christ). After **Johann Rzeppa** and fellow parishioner, **Francis Cebulla**, constructed a wooden cross, the Christ figure from Upper Silesia was placed upon it. The new crucifix was blessed by Fr. Leopold Moczygamba on Friday of Easter week in 1856 in front of the yet-to-be-completed church.<sup>xviii</sup>



Crucifix in Panna Maria  
*Photograph courtesy of: **John Wojtasczyk***

arrived that had been ordered also by **Johann** and **Tekla Rzeppa**. Though “small” and the bell tower of the church was strong, it is said that when the bell was rung, it shook the walls so that the bell was removed and placed on its own platform outside the church.<sup>xix</sup> This mighty bell again hangs in its rightful place in the present bell tower, calling out to the nearby community when services are beginning.



The bell that was a gift from  
**Johann** and **Tekla Rzeppa**  
*Photograph courtesy of:*  
**Randy Pawelek**

# *A New Beginning*

After a tumultuous and challenging beginning, the roots that our immigrant ancestors planted took hold, sprouted, and grew just like the mighty oak tree next to the church in Panna Maria. Being planted and nurtured in the soil of blood, sweat, and tears; our ancestors will now smile seeing what the fruit of the work of their hands became. In an unscientific calculation since the 1854 arrival, there could be around 200,000 descendants today that can claim this legacy! We have indeed prospered and have spread out, not only in Texas, but also a large number in the United States.



Panna Maria Diamond Jubilee Parade in 1929  
*Photograph courtesy of:*  
Panna Maria Historical Society

We have become successful farmers, ranchers, business leaders, civic leaders, political leaders, religious leaders, and more! We have become so ubiquitous that we are on the verge of melting completely into society. This the way it ought to be, but we should not forget the values and morals that were the



best of who we are. We should hold to what made us who we are and promote them because society benefits from our contribution. These are the thoughts on the mission statement of the Heritage Center:

***“The Mission of the Polish Heritage Center is to “keep vibrant and relevant the history, values, beliefs, customs and traditions of the Polish settlers and their descendants...and to inspire, engage, and educate our visitors.”***

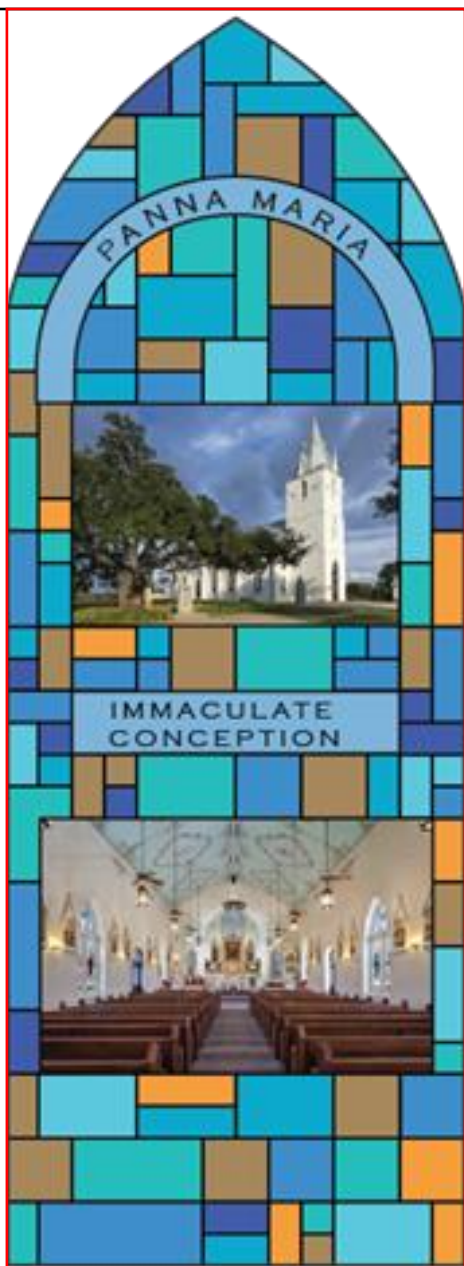
On the second Sunday of October, thousands return for what is basically a “mini reunion” during the annual Turkey Dinner and Home Coming!

*Photograph courtesy of: John Wojtasczyk*

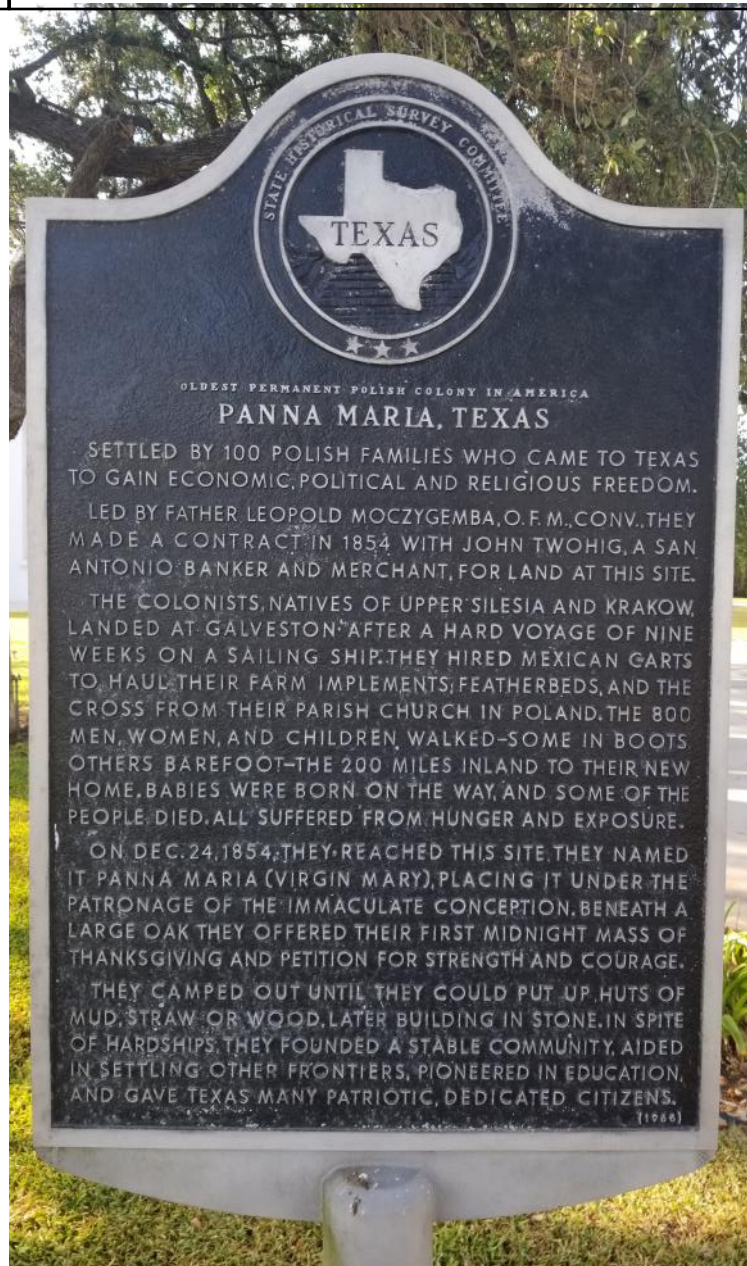


# Come, learn, celebrate, and enjoy your Polish Heritage Center!

The simulated stained glass window that commemorates the parish of the Immaculate Conception Church of Panna Maria within the Polish Heritage Center



The Texas state historical marker at Immaculate Conception Church in Panna Maria designating that this community is the first and oldest permanent Polish settlement in America



## Sources:

- i <https://www.archgh.org/about/about-us/history/>
- ii <https://www.archgh.org/about/about-us/history/>
- iii <https://www.archgh.org/about/about-us/history/>
- iv *The First Polish Americans*, T.L. Baker, pg. 7
- v *The Polish Texans*, T.L. Baker, pg. 16
- vi *Texas Pioneers From Poland*, Rev. Jacek Przygoda, pg. 35
- vii *The First Polish Colonies of America in Texas*, Rev. Edward J. Dworaczyk, pg. 1
- viii *The Polish Texans*, T.L. Baker, pg. 18
- ix Galveston Immigration Database, <http://ghf.destinationnext.com/immigration/Search.aspx>
- x *The First Polish Colonies of America in Texas*, Rev. Edward J. Dworaczyk, pg. 8 & 12
- xi *The First Polish Americans*, T.L. Baker, pg. 12
- xii *The Polish Texans*, T.L. Baker, pg. 35-36
- xiii *The First Polish Americans*, T.L. Baker, pg. 119
- xiv *The First Polish Americans*, T.L. Baker, pg. 120
- xv *The History of Panna Maria*, Rev. Edward J. Dworaczyk, pg. 114
- xvi *The First Polish Colonies of America in Texas*, Rev. Edward J. Dworaczyk, pg. 59
- xvii Polish Heritage Center Newsletter #6, pgs. 5-6
- xviii *Silesian Profiles: Polish Immigration to Texas in the 1850s*, pg. 166
- xix *Silesian Profiles: Polish Immigration to Texas in the 1850s*, pg. 167

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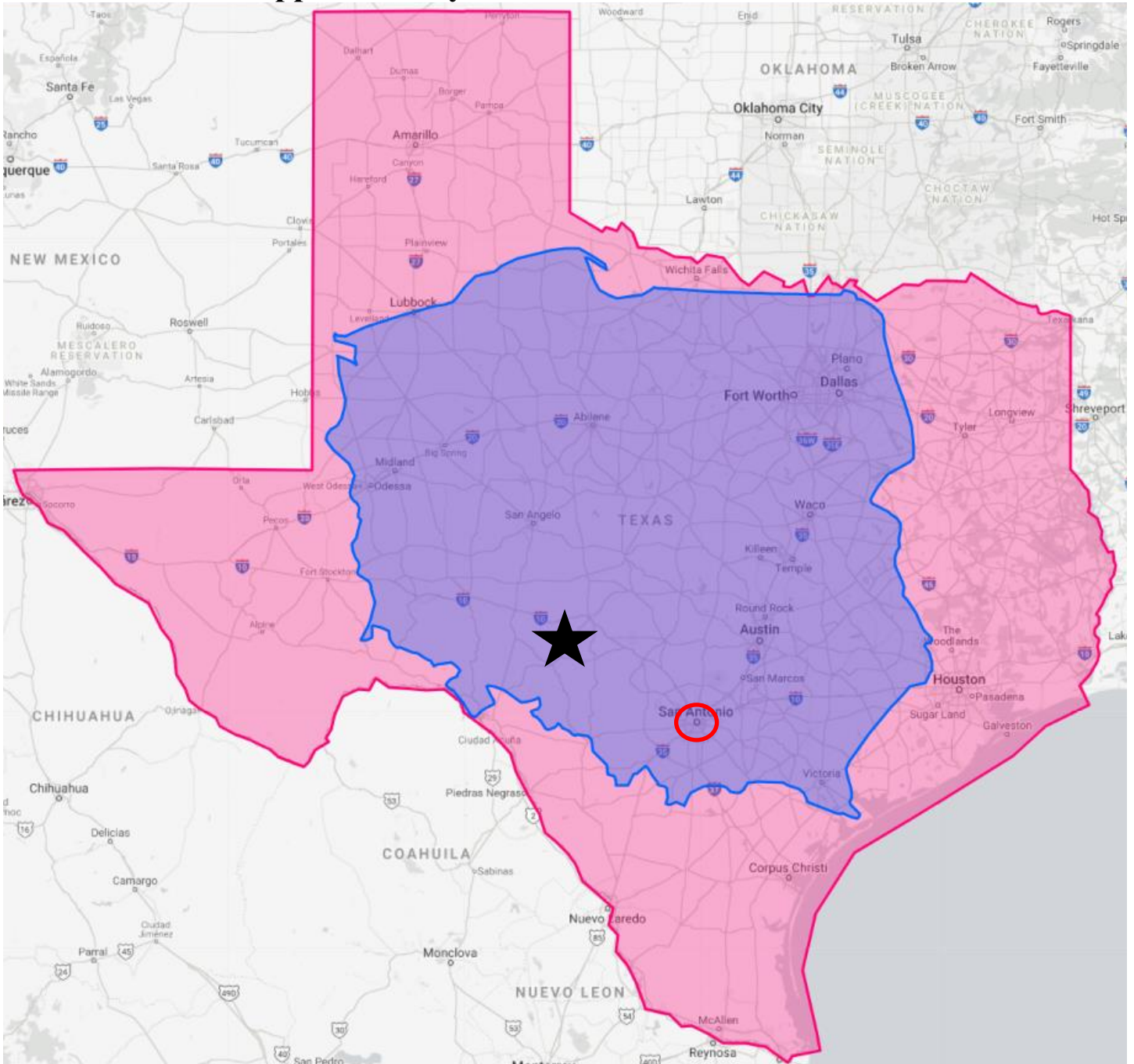
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# What's in the size?

As Texans, we brag, boast, and *joke* about our size. This is a true size map comparison showing the size of Poland to the size of Texas! On this map, San Antonio (red circle) would mark the approximate southern end of Silesia and the northern end approximately would be Wroclaw which is the black star.



Map images acquired from [www.thetruesize.com](http://www.thetruesize.com)



# *Heartfelt thanks to our supporters from June 22 to July 21!*

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## Calendar of Events

As many of our communities are still examining moving forward with their celebrations,  
many of the listed events ARE PLANNED BUT NOT FINALIZED!

September 5: St. Joseph Annual Bazaar,  
New Waverly, Texas  
September 5: Annual Homecoming Bazaar,  
St. Mary, Plantersville, Texas  
September 5: Holy Trinity Church Festival,  
Falls City, Texas  
September 5: Dożynki Mass & Homecoming,  
Chappell Hill, Texas  
September 6: Labor Day  
September 12: Annual Sausage Picnic,  
Holy Cross Church, Yorktown, Texas  
September 16: PHC Virtual Event  
September 19: Slavic Festival,  
Houston, Texas  
September 24-25: Bremond Festival,  
Bremond, Texas  
October: Polish Heritage Month

***October 2: Bishop John W. Yanta's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
Celebration, St. Paul's Community Center,  
St. Paul's Parish, San Antonio, Texas***  
October 1-3: Dożynki & Polish Festival, Our  
Lady of Czestochowa, Houston, Texas  
October 9: 71<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Dinner & Celebration of  
Immaculate Conception Parish,  
McCook, Texas  
***October 10: Turkey Dinner & Homecoming,  
Panna Maria, Texas***  
October 10: Homecoming Bazaar,  
St. Stanislaus, Anderson, Texas  
October 17: Annual Parish Festival,  
Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
Cestohowa, Texas  
October 21: PHC Virtual Event  
***November 13: PACT ANNUAL MEETING,  
St. Joseph Church, New Waverly, Texas***

*This was the opening prayer at the first meeting of the Polish Heritage Center Foundation used to mark the beginnings of this project which we now thank God for its completion.*

PANNA MARIA HERITAGE CENTER FOUNDATION CHARTER  
MEETING-JULY 28, 2012  
At the Bed and Breakfast House  
OPENING PRAYER

O, Lord God the Almighty, Creator of Heaven and earth, our Loving Father - we praise you, we glorify you, and we thank you.

Thank you for your Son Jesus our Redeemer and Saviour who established Your Kingdom in our midst as your eternal plan for mankind until the end of the world.

Thank you Jesus for bestowing your Holy Spirit on your Church to go and make disciples of all the nations.

You graced the Greek brothers, Sts. Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century to evangelize, the Slavic people, thus the beginning of Christianity in Poland in the year 966 with the marriage of the Czech young lady Dobrava to Prince Miesko I of Poland.

In the southwestern area of present day Poland, northern Czechland, and south-eastern Germany a distinct, recognizable people with their heritage and culture emerged in the last few centuries called Silesia.

It was from this area that the young missionary, Father Leopold Moczygamba and the first 100 families came to Texas and this place - Panna Maria in 1854 to establish a new life for their young families - of bonding their children to the Catholic faith.

Many have been instruments of Your Divine Providence - like the first Bishop of Texas. In 1852 he went to Bavaria in his search for priests who could minister to the German speaking Catholics already here in Texas at New Braunfels, Fredericksburg, and Castroville.

Your Divine Providence chose John Twohig, a San Antonio Irish Catholic realtor, to direct the tired, faith driven Polish Silesian immigrants to this completely undeveloped place Christmas Eve 1854. They suffered and felt disillusioned. But their perseverance and strong faith life sustained them.

Our Lady of Czestochowa, Patroness of Poland, Pray for us! Our Lady of Opole, Pray for us!

St. Ann, grandmother of Jesus, and Mother of Mary, Pray for us!  
St. Hedwig, Patroness of Poland, Pray for us!  
Blessed Pope John Paul II, Pray for us!

All the original immigrants to Panna Maria and several succeeding generations have gone to their eternal reward. Eternal rest give unto them, O Lord - and let the perpetual light shine upon them! May they rest in peace! Amen.

Bless my deceased parents, both natives of Panna Maria (married here in 1920), and the John A. and Mary Pollok Yanta Memorial Trust.

This place was named after the Virgin Mary - Panna Maria in Polish. This first Polish Parish in the U.S. is named the Immaculate Conception, which doctrine of the Church was declared Dec. 8, 1854, two weeks before the founding of this place. A strong devotion to Mary, Mother of God, has always been a vital element of parishioners, residents, and descendants of Panna Maria.

Hail Mary.

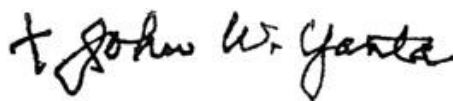
May Almighty God bless this Panna Maria Heritage Center guide us through your Holy Spirit to honor with love and dignity the memory of thousands with your design and architecture. May their great and indomitable qualities live on through this new adventure, which we formally begin today.

May this heritage center attract, inspire, and engage each and all, young and old; Catholics, other Christians, and even non-believers; Polish and Non-Polish; Americans and foreigners.

May we be always mindful of your word, O Lord, Ps 127.  
"If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor."

May Almighty God Bless the Panna Maria Heritage Center Foundation, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

May God bless you and yours,



†Bishop John W. Yanta