

# POLISH EMIGRATION BEFORE 1914



Presented by:

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In 1914 there were over four million Poles who were immigrants or children of immigrants who were abroad or had gone abroad. The major receiving countries were:

Germany	700,000 + (100,00 in Berlin)
Brazil	115,000 +
Canada	45,000 +
Argentina	30,000 +
Russia	400,000 +
United States	2,500,000 +

- It is this group and this emigration we will be concerned with today.

- U.S. immigration about  
2,230,000 – 2,500,000

- From German Poland

450,000 – 500,000

to 1914

300,000 – 350,000

1850 – 1890

120,000

1891 – 1914

50,000

after 1900



- From Austrian Poland

850,000 to 1914

150,000 to 1891

700,000 1891 – 1914

- From Russian Poland

900,000 to 1914

50,000 to 1891

850,000 1891 – 1914 (most after 1900)

Polish return migration was about:

- a) 33%. Some came back and forth several times. This aim was not to make a new home in America but to make enough to live comfortable in Poland. For these as well as all Polish immigrants, there was a serious emotional toll separation inflicted on both families at home and migrants in America.

b) A Polish immigrant song tells the plight of these sojourners. This is a song about an immigrant who returned home after 3 years in America.

*“And my children did not know me  
They fled from me a stranger,  
My dear children, I’m your papa  
Three long years I have not seen  
you.”*



## **Distribution of Poles in the United States**

	<b><u>1900</u></b>	<b><u>1930</u></b>
a.) New England	9.3	10.9
Massachusetts	5.6	5.6
Connecticut	2.8	4.0
b.) Mid Atlantic	4.2	46.6
New York	18.2	23.3
New Jersey	3.8	7.9
Pennsylvania	20.0	15.4

## **Distribution of Poles in the United States**

	<u>1900</u>	<u>1930</u>
c.) Great Lakes Area	39.5	34.6
Ohio	4.4	5.3
Indiana	1.6	1.5
Illinois	17.8	14.1
Michigan	7.4	9.6
Wisconsin	8.3	4.1



## **Distribution of Poles in the United States**

	<u>1900</u>	<u>1930</u>
d.) Northern Great Plains	5.5	3.2
e.) South Atlantic	1.7	2.2
f.) Eastern South Central	0.3	0.2
g.) Western South Central	1.1	0.6
h.) Pacific Coast	0.3	0.4
i.) Alaska and Hawaii	0.3	0.4

The difference (see especially Pennsylvania, New York and Michigan) reflects the large internal migration that took place among Polish immigrants. When new industries such as the Auto Industry began to flourish, many Poles left coal fields and farms to move to better paying and safer jobs.

## **Largest Polish Urban Population Centers**

### **1905**

Chicago

New York

Pittsburgh

Buffalo

Milwaukee

Detroit

Cleveland

### **1920**

Chicago

New York

Pittsburgh

Buffalo

Detroit

Milwaukee

Cleveland

### **2000**

Chicago

Detroit

Philadelphia

New York

Buffalo

Pittsburgh

Milwaukee



There are many individual stories in those statistics.

A remarkable 1891 letter from Chicago written by a young Polish immigrant woman to her parents in Russian Poland sums up eloquently all of these opportunities and hopes as well as the guilt and conflict. She has done quite well in America and is about to open her own shop. She is clearly committed to her new life and wants to bring her sister over to share it despite her parents' misgivings.



She writes:

I now work in a tailor shop and earn two and a half dollars a week, and I will earn more. I am going to be sewing at this tailor shop until Christmas, and then I will set up my own sewing business, and I will let you know more about it. Only I ask that Petra (come to) help me. I will send her a steamship ticket at Easter, if the most holy Mother of God allows it. Dear Daddy and Mama, do not forbid Petra (to come) because she is only wasting her life there. Dear Mama and Daddy, I do not want to bring her to America so that she would be lonesome for you, but rather that it would be better for her than it is there.

She rejects most adamantly the offer of a local suitor passed on to her by her parents and heaps scorn on his request for a dowry.

In America if a man has three hundred dollars, then he can get married, because in Chicago the custom is that the girl's boyfriend must even buy her a wedding dress and everything else that is needed for the house. The young lady only has to worry about getting to the wedding. Here they do not ask how much dowry she will receive, dear parents.



The letter ends on an ambivalent note: life in America is exciting and rich and yet she is lonesome for her family and old home; she has changed so much that her parents might not even recognize her yet she has forgotten none of his duties to her parents.



Chicago is Poland in perfection. You can hear Polish hymns in Church. It is very gay here, so that one can forget one's longing. But when I think about you I am a little lonely. I am, as it were, still at home. There are three of us now. Helen is no longer with us; they live separately, but not far from us. We are sending you Helen's wedding picture. Helen's wedding dress cost thirty dollars; it was canary-colored silk. When you receive this letter from me, and I receive an answer from you I will send you my photograph; but you will probably not recognize me.

Dear Mommy and dear Daddy, do not be lonesome for me, because I thank you for sending me to America. I trust in God and the Mother of God, that they condescend to hear my prayers, so that I will still take care of you until death and that you will die in my arms.