

From The Czar's Army To American Citizen

A Story Of Polish Immigrants Coming To America

-By Wyatt O'Connell-

"They saw America as the land of opportunity...if you came to America you could make wealth and riches and start a new life."

My ancestors on my mom's side come from Poland. The first ancestors to move to America were my great-great grandparents who arrived around 1914/1915. Their names were Lillian Kruszewski and Konstanty Wondoloski. Lillian's place of birth is unknown, but her parents were Stanislaw Kruszcwski and Maryann Sztenderowski. She may have been born in the Łódź area. Konstanty Wondolowski was born in the town of Bialystok on March 9, 1887 (the same birthday as me!) Bialystok is in the Parish of Burzyn in eastern Poland, east of the city of Krakow. His parents were Josef and Julianna (Makowski).

"I think Pop's people were from that part of eastern Poland that at times was part of Russia and Estonia, I think Gram's people were more from western Poland," My grandmother (Christine) told me.

My grandmother thinks both Lillian and Konstanty traveled to Ellis Island by boat, but she doesn't know from where in Europe they embarked. She thinks Lillian was around 17 and Konstanty was around 20.

After they arrived in America Lillian lived in Worcester, Massachusetts with her husband and had two daughters, Helen and Sophie. Konstanty lived in Philadelphia, got married, and had one daughter named Stella. When the flu epidemic hit in 1917 Lillian lost her first husband and Konstanty lost his wife. Mutual Polish friends introduced Konstanty and Lillian. They got married and Lillian and her daughters moved in with Konstanty and Stella in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They had two children of their own, Frank, my great-grandfather, and Hedwig. Frank grew up in Philadelphia, served in World War II in the South Pacific, and married my great-grandmother Stephanie Alabrudzinski. They had two daughters, including my grandmother Christine, five grandchildren, including my mom Jessica, and many great-grandchildren, including me! They lived very long lives in the Philadelphia area and died three months apart. Frank died July 9, 2018, and Stephanie died in September 2018. Frank was 95 and Stephanie was 97.

To get this interview with my maternal grandma (Christine Wondolowski,) I set up a Zoom meeting. It was challenging to schedule because she lives in Florida, so there is a 3-hour time difference. It was very interesting to learn about my great-great-grandparents. For example, my grandmother told me that Lillian didn't trust the banks and saved money in her house, so when the banks crashed in the 1920s and most people lost their money, she had money. House prices dropped and she bought some homes in her neighborhood and rented them out. She was able to make money during the great depression to help feed her family. She eventually sold these homes for a profit.

As Christine quotes, "Well, I think like for a lot of years in the early 1900s there were a lot of economic problems in Europe and it started with the potato famine in Ireland and a lot of other economic problems and agricultural problems." That is likely the reason Lillian and Konstanty left Poland. An article I found on Ancestry.com backs up her thoughts. The article states, "Mass migration from 1870 until the outbreak of World War I in 1914, more than 2 million Poles emigrated to the United States. Most settled in the large cities of the East Coast and the Great Lakes region, including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, and Buffalo. Many immigrants were recruited by company agents scouring Europe for cheap unskilled laborers for mines, packinghouses, factories, and steel mills. Others fled poverty on their own accord. Early immigrants wrote home to family and friends and about jobs and a better political atmosphere in the U.S. By 1900, large Polish communities had formed in many cities of the American Northeast and Midwest." My ancestors, including my great-great grandparents, and my great-grandparents became part of that large Polish community in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

I asked my grandmother if she ever had a chance to ask her grandparents about what their lives were like in Poland or what their trip from Poland was like. "We visited my father's parents almost every weekend. They mostly spoke Polish. They spoke very broken English so unfortunately I never really had a real conversation with them about anything, but Babcia (Polish word for grandmother) was a really good cook and she would make all this authentic Polish food so I remember her in the kitchen making perogies, borscht, and golabki," she said.

I'm grateful for the opportunity to talk to my grandma because she gave me some very fascinating information about my family history. For example, she told me, "A very interesting thing about Konstanty is that when he was 17 or 18 he was recruited for the Czar's cavalry in Russia. My parents used to have a picture of him riding a horse in his uniform, but unfortunately, it was lost." According to Wikipedia, the "Czar" **Nicholas II** or

Nikolai II was the last Emperor of Russia, King of Poland, and Grand Duke of Finland from 1894 until his abdication in 1917.

As I listened to my grandmother talk I realized how hard it was for my ancestors to make it to America. My grandmother said, "When they still lived in Poland they did have jobs in the city, but then they would still work their farms. My mom (Stephanie Wondoloski) said it was very depressing because all they did was work." Thinking about that made me very grateful they took the risk to come to America.

RZECZPOSPOLITA POLSKA
Diecezja łomżyńska
Woj. Białostockie

5 7 5 5 7 5
OPŁATA SKARBOWA

Nr aktu 31
Rok 1887

Parafia rzym.-kat. BURZYN

SWIADECTWO METRYCZNE

Imię i nazwisko	Urodził się Umarł Zewarli związek małżeński	Ochrzczony	Imiona i nazwiska rodziców
<i>Konstanty</i>	w <i>Makowskich</i>		
<i>Wędatowski</i>	Dnia <i>9</i> Miesiąca <i>Marca</i> Roku <i>1887</i>	<i>10-III-1887</i>	<i>Józef Wędatowski</i> i <i>Juliana z Makowskich</i>

Wyrażnie tysiąc *osiemset osiemdziesiątego siódmego* roku

UWAGI:

Burzyn, dnia *4 sierpnia* 1950 r.

Proboszcz *K. J. Jurek*

5 7 5 5 7 5
OPŁATA SKARBOWA

Konstanty's Birth Certificate (I was also born on March 9)

Konstanty's naturalization form (and below are marriage certificates)

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO BE GIVEN TO
THE PERSON NATURALIZED

No. 3434924

Petition No. 109147

Personal description of holder as of date of naturalization: Age 44 years, sex male, color white, complexion fair, color of eyes blue, color of hair brown, height 5 feet 6 inches, weight 155 pounds, visible distinctive marks none, race Polish, former nationality Poland, marital status Married.

I certify that the description above given is true, and that the photograph affixed hereto is a likeness of me.

ORIGINAL

Konstanty Wondolowski
(Complete and true signature of holder)

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
EASTERN DIST. OF PENNSYLVANIA } SS:

Be it known that KONSTANTY WONDOLOWSKI
then residing at 3029 E. Chatham Street, Philadelphia, Pa.
having petitioned to be admitted a citizen of the United States of America, and
a term of the District Court of The United States
Philadelphia, on March 31st 1946
the court having found that the petitioner intends to reside permanently in
United States had in all respects complied with the Naturalization Laws of the United
States in such case applicable and was entitled to be so admitted the court thereon
ordered that the petitioner be admitted as a citizen of the United States of America.
In testimony whereof the seal of the court is hereunto affixed this 31st
day of March in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred
thirty-two and of our Independence the one hundred
and fifty-six

Seal

GEORGE BRODWAY

Certificate of Marriage

Church of
St. John Cantius,
Bridesburg, Phila., Pa.

This is to Certify

That Stephen Alabrodzinski,
and Mary nee Kedziora / Kendzierski /
were lawfully Married
on the 21-st day of November, 19 09
According to the Rite of the Roman Catholic Church
and in conformity with the laws of the State of
Penna., Rev. M. Kopytkiewicz,
officiating, in the presence of Vencislaus Smialowski,
and Anthony Trzaskiewicz, Witnesses, as appears
from the Marriage Register of this Church.
Dated Feb. 15, 1943.
Rev. John B. Ligenza, ^{Assnt.} Pastor.

Certificate of Marriage

Church of
All Saints
Bridesburg, Phila., Pa.

This is to Certify

That Frank J. Wondolowski
and Stefania Alabrodzinski
were lawfully Married
on the 21st day of September 1946
According to the Rite of the Roman Catholic Church
and in conformity with the laws of the State of
Penna., Rev. Henry A. Kuss
officiating in the presence of John Kaufold
and Margaret Boreczka Witnesses, as appears
from the Marriage Register of this Church.
Dated Sept. 21, 1946
Rev. Henry A. Kuss, Pastor

NO. 1115 G/PAS

Pop-Pop (my great grandpa/ Konstanty's son,) Farrah (my sister), Gram (Stephanie Wondolowski, NÉE Alabrudzinski)



Pop-Pop, Babcia, and Gram

