Poles in Illinois
John Radzilowski and Ann Hetzel Gunkel

The untold story of Polish immigrants and their descendants

Illinois boasts one of the most visible concentrations of Poles in the United States. Chicago is home to one of the largest Polish ethnic communities outside Poland itself. Yet no one has told the full story of our state’s large and varied Polish community—until now. *Poles in Illinois* is the first comprehensive history to trace the abundance and diversity of this ethnic group throughout the state from the 1800s to the present.

Authors John Radzilowski and Ann Hetzel Gunkel look at family life among Polish immigrants, their role in the economic development of the state, the working conditions they experienced, and the development of their labor activism. Close-knit Polish American communities were often centered on parish churches but also focused on fraternal and social groups and cultural organizations. Polish Americans, including waves of political refugees during World War II and the Cold War, helped shape the history and culture of not only Chicago, the “capital” of Polish America, but also the rest of Illinois with their music, theater, literature, and food.

With forty-eight photographs and an ample number of extensive excerpts from first-person accounts and Polish newspaper articles, this captivating, highly readable book illustrates important and often overlooked stories of this ethnic group in Illinois and the changing nature of Polish ethnicity in the state over the past two hundred years. Illinoisans and Midwesterners celebrating their connections to Poland will treasure this rich and important part of the state’s history.

**John Radzilowski** is a professor of history at the University of Alaska and the author or coauthor of sixteen books, including *Poles in Minnesota* and *A Traveller’s History of Poland.*

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Introduction

1. **Na Początku: Settling in Illinois**
   This chapter covers the history of Polish settlement in the state from 1818 to the 20th century. It also overviews major concentrations, reasons for coming, and sequences of different waves of immigrants.

2. **Rodzina: Family Life**
   This chapter examines family life among Polish immigrants in Illinois. Family was a crucial element in the reason and the means for immigrating, but immigration also put families under new and unfamiliar strains.

3. **Praca: Poles in Industrial Illinois**
   This chapter delves into the Polish role in the economic development of the state, working conditions they experienced, and the development of labor activism.

4. **Wiara: Faith and Religious Life**
   Faith was a pillar of immigrant life, and churches were the central institution in Polish communities. Though the overwhelming majority of Poles were Roman Catholic, there were also small non-Catholic groups in the state.

5. **Polonia: Polish Community Life in Illinois**
   Poles in Illinois developed intensive and closely knit communities centered on parish churches but including a wide array of schools, fraternal and social groups, cultural organizations, hospitals and businesses.

6. **Czykago: Capital of Polonia**
   This chapter examines the unique role of Chicago as the “capital” of Polish America and the role played by Poles in shaping the history and culture of the city.

7. **Kultura: Polish and Polish American Culture in Illinois**
   Polish American culture was and is expressed in diverse ways in Illinois. This chapter examines several aspects of it, including music, theater, literature, and food, among other things.

8. **Po Wojnie: Poles in Illinois during the Cold War Era**
   This chapter looks at the history of Poles in Illinois during the Second World War and the Cold War era, including new waves of political refugees who made the state their home and the changing social and economic conditions of the 1960s and 1970s.

9. **Dziś i wczoraj: Poles in Illinois, Today and Yesterday**
   This chapter covers contemporary Polish American life in Illinois.

Appendixes

1. Polish Parishes in Illinois, by Date of Founding
2. Polish Schools in Illinois, 1946 and 1959
3. Polish Newspapers in Illinois

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