



# Gen Dobry!

**Gen Dobry! 31 October 2000**

\*\*\*\*\* GEN DOBRY! \*\*\*\*\*

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\*\*\* WELCOME! - \*\*\*

to the fourth issue of GEN DOBRY!, the e-zine of PolishRoots(tm). If you missed the first issue, you can read it at:

[http://www.polishroots.org/gendobry/GenDobry\\_vol1\\_no1.htm](http://www.polishroots.org/gendobry/GenDobry_vol1_no1.htm)

For issues 2 and 3, change the last part of the URL to "\_no2.htm" or "\_no3.htm" respectively.

Thanks to all who've taken the time to send me your comments, suggestions, and contributions. I'm very glad to receive them, because material from you diminishes the danger that this could become "The Hoffman E-zine" - which would be too boring for words! If you have something to contribute, or just something to say, please E-mail me at <WFHoffman@prodigy.net>.

And please remember to check out the Website that brings you Gen Dobry!, and much more besides:

<http://PolishRoots.org>

There's always something new and interesting there. If you can make a contribution of material or money, you'll be supporting a valuable source of information for Polish family history researchers!

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**\*\*\* SOUND LOGIC IN GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH \*\*\***

by William F. Hoffman <WFHoffman@prodigy.net>

There was an interesting exchange of notes recently on PolandBorderSurnames-L@rootsweb.com. It got me to thinking about the role of logic in genealogical research. Bear with me - I know this sounds like a real snooze, but I think it raises issues researchers can profit by pondering.

First, the notes that got me thinking. On October 7 (I believe - I forgot to save the original note) Bill Tarkulich <bill@iabsi.com> responded to notes posted on "made-up names," i. e., the prevailing notion that names of immigrants were often changed by officials at Ellis Island. He pointed out that immigrants entering the U. S. legally had to have papers which included their names; furthermore, immigration officials had little incentive to make up names, and considerable incentive to copy them accurately. (Obviously with non-legal immigrants all bets are off). Mr. Tarkulich concluded that these officials probably didn't make a habit of changing names intentionally; more often such changes resulted from honest misunderstandings, or things that happened before the immigrant arrived for processing.

Larry.Wallace@Medscape.Com took issue with this in a note posted October 8th:

- > In response to Bill Tarkulich
- > 1. Since when does our government go according to the rules.
- > 2. I personally know of a case where the name was
- > assigned using the correct first two letters. A ten letter
- > name, with several unrecognizable letters became a
- > four letter name.
- > 3. Does any one believe immigrants were told that they
- > could correct mistakes; or that WOPs (i.e. WithOut Papers)
- > would, if their welcome was in doubt?

Several more folks posted notes stating that they personally knew of names that had been changed "at Ellis Island." Mr. Tarkulich replied:

- > Every generalization, including those from the INS and the
- > suggestion that the government does not go by the rules must
- > be taken in its own context. Of course there were those who
- > didn't follow the rules. In the course of genealogical
- > research I find it imperative to consider all sources and all
- > explanation, test the hypothesis and substantiate conclusions
- > with corroborative evidence. This is a far superior method for
- > reaching conclusions than to sweepingly discount a possibility
- > based upon one piece > of data to the contrary.

Eventually the dispute died down, but not really with any satisfactory resolution.

The thing is, I've heard from experienced researchers who strike me as knowing their stuff that Mr. Tarkulich is right - the extent to which names were changed "at Ellis Island" is greatly exaggerated. And yet Mr. Wallace's comments are certainly pertinent; after all, who's naïve enough to believe bureaucrats always perform their duties flawlessly?

So who's right? This question isn't easy to answer, but let's ponder it, and the nature of research and truth.

#### - RESEARCH AND TRUTH -

One of the main benefits of genealogical research, in my experience, is that it gives "ordinary folks" a chance to do some real, honest-to-God research. This helps us learn hard lessons that benefit any thinking person. They include:

- the truth is sometimes very hard to determine;
- you may have to dig for it;
- you can't believe everything you hear or read;
- sometimes you never do get a satisfactory answer, you just weigh

the facts and make the best decision you can.

Competent scientists and scholars have these rather unsettling realities rubbed in their faces every day. Genealogy gives the rest of us a chance to experience them for ourselves, and that can have a positive effect. This is a world where we all have to make vital decisions. We can make better ones if we take into account all the facts available and apply sound reasoning to them. The ability to discern and weigh the relative merits of arguments is a valuable tool - not the only tool we need, but a good one to have at our disposal. Genealogical research can help develop that ability.

- ELLIS ISLAND -

In regard to the Ellis Island controversy, I think Mr. Tarkulich is right, in general. Perhaps subsequent experience will change my mind, but his argument makes sense in light of what I've seen so far.

For most of the 19th century, and on up to the end of World War I, Poles were ruled by the empires of Germany, Russia, and Austria. Those governments didn't want people getting away with not paying taxes, dodging the draft, etc. They tended to be pretty darned unreasonable about any citizen or official who played fast and loose with their rules. Research tells us our ancestors had to register with their local district offices, carry personal IDs and employment papers, and even register for business trips with the local authorities at home and in the place they traveled to. The typical legal immigrant from eastern Europe had to have those papers to travel legally to Bremen or Hamburg or whatever port he wished to emigrate from. The police authorities in port cities typically required would-be emigrants to register on arrival. The shipping lines, whose activities were monitored by the various governments involved, generally insisted on seeing those papers (and money!) before issuing tickets. Data from those papers was transferred onto the ships' passenger lists, and that's what U.S. immigration officials had before them when processing new arrivals.

In other words, there was a paper trail, which began at home with papers filled out by clerks using birth and marriage records issued by priests or officials who often knew the applicants personally and witnessed by family, friends and neighbors who swore to their accuracy. Data was copied from those papers onto subsequent ones. So it's reasonable to assume that IN MOST CASES legal emigrants started with papers that had their names more or less correct - allowing always for human error, linguistic confusion, etc. - and that that information followed them the rest of the way. My experience suggests most changes in names and other data took place either before the immigrant left home or after he came to the New

World.

So was Mr. Wallace full of it? Hardly. There are always exceptions. Some officials didn't really care. Some tried to fill out the information correctly, but made mistakes. Language problems affected the extent to which clerks and immigrants understood each other. Name spellings were subject to many factors that could cause inadvertent mistakes. Even if we assume most immigration officials tried to do things by the book, there's plenty of room for error along the way. So Mr. Wallace and the others who said they knew personally of name changes may be absolutely right. But I'm inclined to think, by and large, the travel papers were filled out as accurately as possible under the circumstances.

Yet changes unquestionably took place. Did they all happen at Ellis Island? I think the whole "Ellis Island" image is a kind of crystallized experience, a short way of summing up all the changes that could take place along the way. In normal conversation you can't go around citing every possible eventuality that might pop up in various circumstances. So we tend to use some place or event as shorthand reference to all the possibilities involved. "Ellis Island" is such a shorthand (as proved by the fact that lots of immigrants didn't even come through Ellis Island). Such shorthand is useful, but must not be relied on too much, or you get sloppy.

If your research provides evidence of a change, trust it. Just don't assume "Oh, the name got changed at Ellis Island." Use good logic to help you focus on the facts and draw sound conclusions.

- LOGIC -

I was lucky because in high school I had a geometry teacher who drilled us relentlessly in the logic necessary to prove theorems. He made us learn about various logical fallacies, and I was astonished when I realized these applied to everyday life, not just geometry! Some errors in logic people make include: drawing conclusions from insufficient evidence; relying on anecdotal evidence; succumbing to the "post hoc, ergo propter hoc" fallacy; and failing to document their facts adequately. Any one of these can lead you to serious error, and I'll discuss them in a moment.

In school I hated the science classes I had to take, and it wasn't till after grad school that I began to appreciate the "scientific method," the underlying approach scientists follow in their work. It's really just a practical way of using sound logic in a constant effort **NOT TO SCREW UP!** We humans are prone to make mistakes. In any research that deals with facts, the "scientific method" is a common-sense approach to avoiding error - except the sense involved is not really all that common.

This scientific method is described well in books by Carl Sagan, Isaac Asimov, and many others. I won't waste time discussing it in detail here. But the basic ideas are sound and worth emulating. 1) clarify the hypothesis you want to test; 2) devise the best way you can think of to test it, going to great lengths to minimize error; and 3) publish your results, so that others can confirm or refute your findings. In every instance the guiding principle is to determine the facts as best you can, and take every precaution you can think of to avoid mistakes - then let others check your work to see if they spot errors you missed.

The scientific method isn't the answer to every problem. The heart has a logic of its own. Sometimes you just know in your gut what you have to do, even if it doesn't really make sense. As "Star Trek" never tired of preaching at us via Mr. Spock, a life ruled solely by logic, with no room for emotion or inspiration, can miss out on a lot of what makes life worth living.

But when it comes to determining FACTS, the scientific method is a useful tool. Like any tool, it can be misused. A hammer is great for driving nails, not so great for cutting wood. Logic and the scientific method are useless when applied to the wrong task. But used properly, they are handy, even indispensable.

#### - DRAWING CONCLUSIONS FROM INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE -

In drawing valid conclusions, a sense of proportion is vital. If you're dealing with actions repeated hundreds of thousands of times, or even millions of times, a few exceptions don't invalidate general conclusions. In the specific matter under discussion, we know millions of people passed through immigration offices in the U. S. and Canada. Given human nature, surely some officials took, shall we say, a lackadaisical approach to their duties. If 10 million names were processed, and 99% were handled accurately, that still leaves 10,000 bogus names. So one may find thousands of exceptions to the generalization "The officials didn't usually change names." That doesn't mean the generalization is garbage. It means you must recognize that it's generally true, but remain ready to recognize exceptions when you encounter them.

If you roll the dice three times and come up with sixes every time, that's rather remarkable. It doesn't mean you're going to get a six every time. Try rolling the dice a hundred times, and you'll see that the odds catch up with you sooner or later. (Casino owners count on it!) Before you draw conclusions, make every effort to take into account as much evidence as possible, so that you don't let a few exceptions skew your results.

## - CITING ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE -

This is another mistake that bedevils us. Anecdotal evidence is evidence supplied by those who are repeating what someone else said. We've all heard someone say, "Oh, I know a guy who swore that..." Such statements can be absolutely accurate, but we still have to treat them with great care precisely because they are so hard to investigate. Over the years I've heard that Paul McCartney is dead, John F. Kennedy is still alive in a guarded room on the top floor of Parkland Hospital, Congress is getting ready to put a tax on E-mails, and so on. It all turned out to be a lot of rubbish. But not to the people who'd convinced themselves otherwise!

If dear old granny says your family's name was changed at Ellis Island, don't brand her a two-faced liar. She may be right. But it's also possible she's recalling things as she remembers them, and her memory has misled her. Anyone with much research experience soon comes to realize that even the most vivid memories can be wrong on key details.

The solution? Whenever possible, as far as possible, try to find corroboration for anecdotal evidence. Keep an open mind, but not so open your brains fall out!

## - POST HOC ERGO PROPTER HOC -

This Latin phrase just means "After this, therefore because of this." The principle involved is that just because event B came after event A, that doesn't necessarily mean event B was caused by event A.

Thus, if your ancestor left his home village the year a cholera epidemic broke out there, it's natural to conclude that's why he left. That certainly could be right. On the other hand, maybe cholera had nothing to do it. Maybe there was no work and he realized his only options were to emigrate or starve. Maybe he was due to enter the military and didn't want to spend years of his life in an army serving hated oppressors. Maybe he had a fight with his family and decided "To hell with this, I'd rather risk going to America than go on living around these clods." You need to look for every possible reason before you pick one and cling grimly to it.

## - PROPER DOCUMENTATION -

Put your research together in the most accessible form possible, and cite your sources! Share it if possible! That way, if you did make a mistake, someone else might be able to point it out. Sometimes the most perplexing puzzles clear up because another researcher points out an error, and contradictory facts then fall into place. That should make you happy, not angry. So document your facts and share them if possible. The very act of

doing so may help you do better work.

Along these lines, Leonard F. Jakubczak sent me a note advising that a new issue of the Family History Documentation Guidelines has come out. This handbook, which costs US\$10 (\$12 outside the U.S.A. and Canada), has helped researchers approach their work more methodically and format their results more accurately, whatever software package they use. If you're interested, you can get more info and order online at this Web address:

<http://www.svpafug.org>

#### - PREPONDERANCE OF EVIDENCE -

I wanted to mention one last expression, "preponderance of evidence." It sounds like typical lawyer weasel-words, but it represents something very real and completely practical. If you have much luck with your research, it's almost certain you'll come across discrepancies in your data. You may find the same person - unquestionably the same guy - appearing under different names in the records. You may find the dates in this record conflict drastically with the dates in that record. You are lucky indeed if you've encountered no such discrepancies!

What do you do in such cases? Don't gloss over the contradictions; but don't let them rock your world, either. Note them down, draw the best conclusions you can, and keep trying to gather more evidence. You may have to incorporate notes saying so-and-so was "born 1872 (or 1874 according to \_)." If so, that's not the worst thing that can happen! The worst thing is to waste lots of time and effort on a wild goose chase because you were too quick to "correct" your facts in a desire to keep everything cut and dried.

#### - CONCLUSION -

Discussions of logic and sound methodology aren't particularly sexy, and I'm sorry if I've bored you to tears. It's just that I've seen too many instances where researchers ran into terrible snags, and wasted enormous amounts of effort, because they drew the wrong conclusions from what they found. Sometimes faulty logic is to blame, and that is correctable.

The whole "Ellis Island" controversy attracted my attention because I'm constantly being asked about names and their forms. It's only one example of how important it can be to follow certain logical guidelines. You can see why it might make a big difference whether or not your ancestor's name was changed upon entering the country, and why. Perhaps yours was; perhaps not. The key is not to be lazy or sloppy and just assume it was. Find the facts, and draw valid conclusions from them. That applies to this question



and many others we encounter.

As I say, sound logic isn't everything in life. But sound logic can help you get your facts straight and draw correct conclusions from them. They, in turn, may lead you to the truth. Truth can be hard to find, but it's worth the effort!

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\*\*\* FEEDBACK FROM READERS \*\*\*

Subject: Translation Software  
From: Erozyl@aol.com

Referencing the GenDobry newsletter , Volume 1, No. 2. 30 August 2000, "Polish Translation Software - Wishful Thinking?" We decided to pursue translation software that was mentioned, but not recommended (obviously), in the above newsletter. We contacted:

<http://www.languagetranslator.com/software/intran/>

and forwarded our questions to them to elicit a comfort level before forking over the \$160. Price was not the issue here but the level of support and warranty.

Q1: Users interface, English or Polish?

A1: Choose either

Q2: Manual, English or Polish?

A2: Original manual is in Polish; English translation is provided.

Q3: Can it translate a scanned Polish document?

A3: Providing document scanned has no errors.

(Interpretation: OCR's are incapable of scanning foreign languages without errors. This is normal. Chance of a good translation is at best iffy.)

Q4: Tech support: Florida (seller) or Poland?

A4: Poland by e-mail; response time is iffy if tech support has no English speaking personnel available at the moment.

Q5: Money back guarantee if product fails to deliver?

A5: If unopened, YES; if opened, NO.

Q6: How can we tell if product works unless we open it. Then we find that it lacks the translation capability?

A6: Still waiting for a response.

Needless to say, I passed on this. These folks seem to be middlemen. Will not gamble with \$160 if product is not warranted. Any US firm will at least warranty their product.

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Subject: SS Pernambuco, and Grabskis in Brazil

Fabio Xavier <fxavier@apo.cainet.com.br> wrote:

> This is a great site!! Can any other listers please help  
> me? Does anyone know if the SS Pernambuco, of the Hamburg  
> America Line, departed Hamburg, for Brazil on or about March,  
> 1891. I am trying to find a passenger list for a ship called  
> the "PERNAMBUCO". She was the second of three sisters built  
> by Reiherstiegwerft, Hamburg: PETROPOLIS (1882 yd338),  
> PERNAMBUCO (1883 yd 342) and LISSABON (1883 yd 345) for  
> Hamburg-Sud's Germany/Brazil/Argentina service...  
> My g-grandfather, Adam GRABSKI, b1868, in Poland, married  
> Felischesi, b 1874, in Poland. They married 05 Feb 1890  
> in Poland. This family immigrated to Brazil about 1891.  
> Family tradition (which is often in error) indicates they  
> came through the port of VITORIA - ES, BRAZIL. In my research  
> I have found several GRABSKI with similar names, but none that  
> match my family. Any information will be helpful.

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Subject: Mangled names

Lou Ruffus <louisruffus@altavista.com> wrote:

> I'm a member of LGGS and on the mailing list for Gen  
> Dobry. I thought I would send an example of mangled  
> Polish names. My gfather's name was William Pulaski  
> (Americanized). 1900 census reads: Walenty Pokolskie.  
> 1910 census reads: William Pokalsky. His tombstone  
> reads: Walenty Puchalski. If you want to use this as  
> an example, go ahead.

---

Subject: Samples of Vital Records in Latin, Polish, and Russian

Norman J. Pieniazek <normanp@mindspring.com> wrote:

> If you are looking for examples of birth, marriage, and  
> death records in Latin, Polish, and Russian please visit

> my family site:

<http://www.pieniazek.com>

- > I have over 1,000 scans of such records
- > pertaining to my family history. Not all are still on the
- > Website and not all are translated. I hope to finish the
- > project in about six months. The oldest document is from
- > 1713 (a list of members of the Brotherhood of the Holy
- > Rosary) and the oldest vital record is a marriage certificate
- > from 1719, a marriage record of Krzysztof Rendaszka and
- > Zofia Pieniazek.

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\*\*\* GENPOL SHUTS DOWN...TEMPORARILY! \*\*\*

On October 30 Kaj Malachowski <GENPOLMN@plearn.edu.pl>, manager of the list Genpol, sent out a note informing subscribers that the server used by Genpol is giving up the ghost. It has had Y2K problems since the start of the year, and Genpol has sputtered badly since then. Now it's about to be shut down.

But that doesn't appear to be the end of the story. Today (October 31) Kaj announced plans to revive Genpol on a more reliable server, connected with the University of Torun. He advises members to watch for announcements on other lists if and when Genpol returns. Of course, if that happens, we will tell you about it in "Gen Dobry!"

For now the word is, Genpol is shutting down, but will move to a new server. There may be some inconvenience during that process, but it appears Genpol will live on! Keep your eyes open for more details.

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\*\*\* THE POZNAN PROJECT: UPDATE \*\*\*

Lukasz Bielecki <bielecki@rose.man.poznan.pl> sent a note that read, in part:

- > Our project is slowly being launched. I ask everybody who
- > have this possibility to start right now. I remind that the
- > original description is still available under the URL:

[http://www.polishroots.com/posen\\_indexing.htm](http://www.polishroots.com/posen_indexing.htm)

- > It gives the general idea of what should be done. It will
- > probably soon be replaced with a more detailed file.
  
- > Please promote the project in any place you think it might
- > get new volunteers. Please give my email as the contact.
  
- > We have already received several declarations of
- > volunteering for indexing particular parishes. The
- > list of those who declared is available under:

[http://www.man.poznan.pl/~bielecki/proj\\_volunt.txt](http://www.man.poznan.pl/~bielecki/proj_volunt.txt)

- > Please refer to it before you sign up for a parish.
  
- > If you had notified me your interest for a particular
- > parish and you are not on the list, PLEASE WRITE TO ME
- > AGAIN!! It might have been sent on the early stage of
- > the project or the declaration was not unambiguous for me.
- > Please also remember to write if you want to take the
- > Catholic parish, the Lutheran community or maybe both.
- > Transcribing civil records might remain the task to be
- > done by the end of the project, unless there are no
- > other records available for a town.
  
- > The file containing the very detailed information on all
- > parishes (RC and LU) within the area of the Poznan
- > province, about what marriage records exist for the
- > 1835-84 period (which is to be transcribed) and on what
- > LDS films they are available at:

<http://www.man.poznan.pl/~bielecki/mrecords.htm>

>and some comments on the format:

[http://www.man.poznan.pl/~bielecki/mrecords\\_expl.txt](http://www.man.poznan.pl/~bielecki/mrecords_expl.txt)

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\*\*\* PGS-CLEVELAND OHIO HAS MOVED \*\*\*

On October 7 Nancy Gorzkowski Parisi <parisi@mindspring.com> posted a note on PolandBorderSurnames-L@rootsweb.com with the following information:

The Polish Genealogical Society of Cleveland has moved from St. John Cantius in the Tremont Area to: St. Mary's PNC Church, 5375 Broadview Road, Parma, Ohio. The meetings are held on the first Tuesday of the month

from September to June. They start at 7:30 p.m. and usually end at 9:20.

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\*\*\* MORE USEFUL WEB ADDRESSES \*\*\*

<http://www.kartenmeister.com/>

James Birkholz, list manager of Posen-L@rootsweb.com, mentioned this site on his list. It is a searchable database compiled by Uwe Krickhahn with 52,621 locations and over 14,000 name changes. All locations are EAST of the Oder and Neisse rivers and are based on the borders as of spring, 1918.

<http://www.delphi.com/iarerelative/start/>

On PolandBorderSurnames-L@rootsweb.com Bill Tarkulich <bill@iabsi.com> said there is a very knowledgeable and helpful Czech and Slovak discussion group at this address.

<http://members.nbc.com/makushome/atpc/index.html>

This is a site for Polish genealogy and culture, and features a forum, photo library, news from Poland, music, resource links and index and more.

<http://golem.umcs.lublin.pl/users/ppikuta/lessons/lessidx.htm>

Thaddeus Ciechanowski mentioned this site on Poland-Roots-L@rootsweb.com, responding to a request for a Polish language online instruction site.

<http://www.ambient.com.pl/gminy/en/index.htm>

Pat Smith <pita@WESTOL.COM> mentioned this on Genpol, describing it as an online atlas of cities, towns and villages. Topics include towns & villages, general information, history and tourism. She adds that it has highlighted cities that you can click on to get a brief history of the towns.

[http://www.ipipan.waw.pl/~klopotek/church/rcc\\_in\\_p.htm](http://www.ipipan.waw.pl/~klopotek/church/rcc_in_p.htm)

Pat Smith also mentioned this site on Genpol. She says it includes 108 martyrs of WW II (priests, nuns & lay persons) murdered by the Gestapo, some with biographies. There are also pages with 16 categories which include the archdioceses of Poland, some with photos of the churches and sanctuaries, Catholic traditions, the Mass in Poland, etc.

<http://www.calle.com/world/poland/>

Pat Smith also mentioned this site on Genpol, saying it's super if you are trying to find a town/village in Poland. It includes "google links" if there are web sites for that particular town or city.

<http://neris.mii.lt/heritage/metrika/metrika.htm>

On LithuanianGenealogy@egroups.com, Richard Vitkauskas <tooketu@epix.net> posted the URL of this site, which deals with the Lituanica Metrica, a collection of documents issued by the state office of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the 15th-18th centuries.

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\*\*\* COMING EVENTS \*\*\*

NOVEMBER 12, 2000

The Polish Genealogical Society of America will hold a meeting on November 12th at the Social Hall of the Polish Museum of America, 984 N. Milwaukee Ave., Chicago IL. The speaker will be Ms. Julie Satzik, Assistant Research Archivist at the Archdiocese of Chicago Archives and Records Center, located at 711 West Monroe, Chicago. She will speak about what kind of records are available at the Archdiocese of Chicago Archives, what kind of access to expect, and the protocol for obtaining records. There will be an election of officers and directors at the meeting.

NOVEMBER 11-12, 2000

The Polish Highlander Festival will be held at the Dom Podhalan [Highlander Hall], 4808 S. Archer Ave., Chicago. We have it on excellent authority that this festival is always a lot of fun, with dancing, music, and lots of \_goral\_ stories.

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To be added to or removed from this mailing list, go to this address:

[http://www.PolishRoots.org/GenDobry\\_signup.htm](http://www.PolishRoots.org/GenDobry_signup.htm)

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