

Threads of Heritage

On the northern slopes of the Carpathian Mountains, in the small Village of Wysowa in Galicia, on January 10, 1887, Sylvester Warycha, son of John Warycha and Rose Danch Warycha, was born.

It was the misfortune of Galicia, and through no merits of its own, that the region of Sylvester's birth was a political ping pong belonging first to Poland then to Austria then to Russia. Galicia was in its Austrian phase when Sylvester entered the world. Economically it was the least developed area of the great Habsburg Empire. To top things off, the Village of Wysowa was located in the poorest area of the poverty stricken region. The average income at the time of Sylvester's birth was lower than in any other part of Europe while the tax burden was laid at about 17% of the yearly income of the residents. In spite of the heavy taxes, the region was deeply in debt.

Lacking any exploited natural resources and seething with the revolutionary fervor common among disinherited nationalities of pre-World War I Europe, Austria ruled the Galician region by neglect. Galicia was relegated to being a source of a cheap workforce, recruits for the army and as a buffering zone against Russia. The single improvement Austria made to the region was to crisscross the land with railroad tracks. The railroad, meant to unify the vast lands of the Habsburg Empire, gave the inhabitants an escape route from poverty, military conscription and ethnic turmoil.

Eighteen year old Sylvester Warycha followed those railroad tracks to Hamburg, Germany in 1905. Given the extreme poverty of Wysowa, it can be assumed Sylvester went to Germany to find work to pay for a ticket to America. In December 1906 Sylvester paid around \$30.00 for a ticket and boarded the *S.S. Patricia* as a steerage passenger bound for the United States. The *S.S. Patricia* landed at New York harbor in January 1907.

Next stop, Ellis Island. The passage through Ellis Island was a bewildering and fear-filled experience for the many. The passengers were ushered from the ship into the prisonlike fortress where they and their baggage were subjected to a thorough scrutiny. The lucky ones were then conducted, under guard, into a large room where they were divided into language groups and assigned an interpreter. There they waited. One by one the travelers were summoned to the inquisition room on the second floor. It was here the immigrant learned if he was to be accepted or deported. Sylvester was accepted.

Leaving Ellis Island, Sylvester once more gathered his gear for travel. He made his way to St. Louis, Missouri, at that time the fourth largest city in the United States. He quickly found work as a laborer, found a boarding house in the dominantly Polish Kosciusko Neighborhood, and he found Mary Krestynich.