

Elżbieta

On rare occasions, genealogists are rewarded with a sudden discovery of extensive family information. After my father died, I asked my cousin Paul Libera about my Polish family's genealogy. He gave me the Sieracki family genealogy all the way back to the village they left, Wiele, Poland. Based on this information, I was able to find my cousins in Poland – like me, descendants of my 4-times great-grandfather Szymon Sieracki. This added a whole new page of genealogy information about the cousins my ancestors left behind in Poland when they emigrated to America. One of these Polish cousins, Elżbieta, has shared with me important details of our family that are all connected to a unique family heirloom.

Elżbieta's interest in her family's genealogy began after her mother's death. She felt drawn to the old family picture, taken before World War II, that hung in her childhood home. Elżbieta's mother, Józefa Sieracka Doberstein had brought the photo from her mother's home in Jastrzębiec. From her mother, Elżbieta had learned that this photo was the only family souvenir saved from World War II. Elżbieta explains:

In February, 1940, at night, the Germans came and told them to leave the house. They had very little time to pack - they packed warm things, duvets and food into bags, and only one photo as a souvenir. They were transported to the transit camp in Potulice. I remember from the stories that they were first detained in Więcbork in a cinema hall. In April they were taken to the General Government. At the beginning, their stay near Piaseczno (just south of Warsaw) was not easy. The family they were assigned to was very dissatisfied with the situation. Over time, it turned into a friendship between the families that survived even after the war. My mother - Józefa - recalled that she worked in Wilanów for some time and watched from afar as Warsaw burned after the defeat of the 1944 uprising.

Elżbieta was now determined to identify these people posed around a table in front of the inn at Osowo. What more might she learn about her grandparents' family?



The Inn at Osowo

The older sister of the mother of Elżbieta, Franciszka Sieracka Goła, who was still living, identified everyone in the photo and said that it was taken in front of the inn in Osowo. Standing from the left are the following: Antoni Sieracki (1892 - 1919) with violin in hand, listed as missing on February 19, 1919, lieutenant of the reserves, 7th company of the 61st Infantry Regiment; Elżbieta's grandmother Paulina Pastwa Sieracka (1882 - 1972); her grandfather Józef Sieracki (1887 - 1939); Major Franciszek Sieracki (1889 - 1947). Sitting from the left are Maria Sieracka Gdaniec (1895 - 1984); Franciszka née Czapiewska Kropidłowska Sieracka Kochanek (1862-1953); her son, Bernard Kochanek (1902 - 1987); Franciszka's husband Bernard Kochanek (1861 - 1922). At the right end of the table sits Józefa Ossowska, the godmother of Józefa, daughter of Paulina and Józef Sieracki. Missing in the photo is Jan Sieracki, the son of Franciszka and Józef Sieracki, brother of Antoni, Józef, Franciszek and Maria Sieracki.

Here are additional notes to clarify the family relationships of the people in the picture. Seated in the center of the table are Elżbieta's great-grandmother Franciszka née Czapiewski Sieracka Kochanek and her husband Bernard Kochanek with their son Bernard. Franciszka's first husband, Kropidłowski, died a year after the wedding. With her second husband, Józef Sieracki, Franciszka had five children: Antoni, Elżbieta's great-grandfather Józef, Franciszek, Maria and Jan who is not in the photo. When Elżbieta's great-grandfather Józef died, her

great-grandmother Franciszka sold this inn that was the backdrop for the photo along with the land and moved in 1932 to Jastrzębiec. There she lived with her son Józef, Elżbieta's grandfather. Franciszka's daughter Maria Sieracka Gdaniec lived with her husband in the nearby village of Młynki. Her son Jan Sieracki lived in Bytów. Józef Sieracki, Elżbieta's grandfather, was murdered by the Germans in 1939. At the very beginning of World War II, the Germans arrested an estimated 4000 men from Jastrzębiec and the surrounding area and shot them at a camp in the forest. ([Obóz dla internowanych w Karolewie – Wikipedia, wolna encyklopedia](#))



Major Franciszek Sieracki

Elżbieta's research on her great uncle Major Franciszek Sieracki yielded even more details. During World War I, he served in the German army on the Russian front, was wounded twice and mustered out with the rank of second lieutenant. When the war ended, he served in the Polish army. He organized Polish military units in Pomerania, and then he participated in the Polish-Bolshevik war. In 1929, he was appointed major and served as a battalion commander. After his retirement in 1935, he was the mayor of Chojnice until 1939.

While searching on the internet for more information about Franciszek Sieracki, Elżbieta found an intriguing letter published by an association, Stowarzyszenie Nasze Iganie. (In 1831 during the uprising against Russia, Polish insurgent forces were victorious in a battle with the Russian army near the town of Iganie. This association commemorates this victory.) The letter reported on the existence of three albums of pictures, among which were photos taken at the dedication of the monument commemorating the battle of Iganie.



Dedication of the Monument at Iganie

Here are the details. After the death of Bernard Kochanek (the half-brother of Franciszek Sieracki), three photo albums were retrieved from his residence by his neighbor, Cezary Marchwicki. With a little detective work, Marchwicki was able to identify Franciszek Sieracki and his family as the subjects in the photo albums. When Elżbieta read the story online, she contacted the association for the address of Cezary Marchwicki, only to find out that he had died. When Elżbieta identified herself as a relative of Franciszek and expressed her interest in the photo albums, she was rewarded with the gift of all three albums. As Elżbieta says, "A valuable treasure. The history of the Sieracki family documented in photos makes a GREAT impression."

The letter of Mr. Marchwicki reads like a detective mystery with important family information and is worth including here.

The photos I sent you - as I mentioned - come from an album that I found in a pile of items taken from the apartment of my neighbor, Mr. Bernard Kochanek - and they would probably end up in the trash. I forgot to add that there were three albums and it seemed to me that they all documented the pre-war times and the career of my neighbor. However, it turned out that only two of them present photos of my neighbor, and the one from which the photos from Siedlce come was probably inherited by some close relative and documents the military career of another person. Since the album is not signed, I decided to find out who the soldier was who could have participated in the unveiling of the monument in Iganie and was the owner of the album. I spent three days matching and comparing photos from these three albums. I couldn't find Kochanek's surname in any of the officers' lists (which I gave you incorrectly). However, in the dedication on the back of one of the photos there was the name Franciszek and on the major's epaulettes he had the markings of the 22nd Infantry Regiment from Siedlce. The photos show that in the years 1928 - 1931 he lived and served in Siedlce, previously working at the headquarters of DOK VIII in Toruń (I have a photo from the railway station in Leśnia from September 12, 1928, when his unit was leaving for Siedlce). So I started looking in the list of officers for a major named Franciszek from the 22nd regiment. The only one I found was Major Franciszek Sieracki. He appears under two other photos. On the Internet I found information that "retired major from Toruń Franciszek Sieracki was elected mayor of Chojnice in 1936". I also found information somewhere that he came from Ossowo and participated in secret scouting and philomacy in West Prussia

[http://chojnice.zhp.pl /index.php...](http://chojnice.zhp.pl/index.php...) . The album contains many photos and postcards from Ossowo, Czersk, Chojnice in which he appears as a teenager. Everything started to come together and I am now 100% sure that the album belonged to Maj. Franciszek Sieracki. I just can't determine the family affinity between Bernard Kochanek and Major Sieracki (cousins?). There is a photo of the Sieracki couple in Mr. Kochanek's album, where in the dedication they call Mr. Kochanek "benjaminek"? Without a doubt, Maj. Sieracki made many contributions to the creation of the Pomeranian Military Organization and the Polish Army of the Second Polish Republic. After Poland gained independence, he began his service in the Polish Army with the rank of lieutenant - he received his officer training in the Prussian army, to which he was obligatorily conscripted. At this moment, I treat the album as a special souvenir. Contains photos documenting the major's career from 1915 to 1932.

Weblink: <https://naszeiganie.org/2018/04/09/rewelacyjne-zdjecia-z-odslonienia-pomnika-w-iganiach/>



Antoni Sieracki, (kneeling on the right)



The Inn at Ossowo