

Paul Libera, Family Historian

For anyone interested in the history of the Polish people in Winona, the article, “Polish Settlers in Winona, Minnesota,” written by my cousin Paul Libera is required reading. His article published in the Polish American Journal was first presented as a lecture given in 1955 at St. Stan’s that begins: “The first Polish people came to Winona in 1855, 100 years ago and four years after Capt. Orrin Smith made the first move which started the founding of the city of Winona.” These first families – Bronk and Eichmann – were followed by a large group of families in 1857 who sailed from German ports to New York and then through the nation’s waterways to St. Louis and ultimately to Winona. They first built their houses along the river between Vine St. and Laird St. My great-great grandmother’s house was located on Front St. near Laird St. and my grandfather’s house was located on Second St. near Vine St. All my neighbors in the 1950s will remember the little group of shanties down by the river’s edge, probably a vestige of the settlement of the early squatters. The sawmills claimed many of the first Polish immigrant houses and Whitaker Marine Boat Harbor claimed the land the shanties were on. Paul’s article touches on most of the salient features of the Polish way of life in Winona: home construction, employment, church and school and civic and social activities. Libera, Paul. “Polish Settlers in Winona, Minnesota.” *Polish American Studies*, vol. 15, no. 1/2, 1958, pp. 18–29. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/20147468

When I first became interested in the Sieracki family history, I asked my mother what to do. She told me to go see my cousin Paul Libera. I didn’t even know I was related to any of the Liberases in the West End of Winona. Paul was very gracious when I called on him. He introduced me to his mother, Elizabeth Sieracki Libera. Her father, Franciszek Sieracki and my grandfather’s father, Joseph Sieracki were brothers. She was my first cousin twice removed. I had never met any of my grandfather’s contemporaries. What a thrill that was. Paul explained that our family came from Wiele, Poland, southwest of Gdańsk in a region called Kashubia. Hieronim Derdowski, poet and publisher of the Polish newspaper *Wiarus*, also came from Wiele, and my grandfather worked for him as a type setter. Paul mentioned that my great-great-grandmother went to live with her daughter, Julianna Sieracki Repinski in Pine Creek and that he wanted to verify that she was buried in the church cemetery there. So the next day we were off to visit the cemetery office, and we did find the record that she is buried there. I regret now that I did not ask Paul for all the details that he knew of the family history. But he did open the door to Poland for me, through which I was able to find my cousins in Poland, descendants of Szymon Sieracki. This story is told in the Kashubia link on homepage of this website.

My cousin died in 1999 at the age of 82. His obituary tells us of some of the basic facts of his life. He served in the army during W.W.II and attained the rank of sergeant. He was a self-employed tax accountant, who served many people in the community. He was a member of many social and religious organizations. He has made a lasting impact on the Polish community in Winona. Paul gave me a copy of his Oct. 26, 1955 speech given at St. Stanislaus Church – Notre Dame Auditorium, “History Of The Polish People At Winona Minnesota.”

Paul Libera

Paul Libera, 82, of 748 W. 5th St., died Wednesday, Oct. 6, 1999, at Gundersen Lutheran Medical Center, La Crosse, Wis.



He was born Aug. 10, 1917, in Winona, the son of Harry L. and Elizabeth (Sieracki) Libera.

Libera

Paul was a self-employed tax accountant who served many people in the community.

He was a member of St. Casimir's Catholic Parish and active in many functions during his lifetime.