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Review of *The First Polish Americans: Silesian Settlements in Texas* By T. Lindsay Baker

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The First Polish Americans: Silesian Settlements in Texas. By T. Lindsay Baker. College Station, Tex.: Texas A&M University Press: 1979. Maps, illustrations, notes, bibliography, and index. xiv + 268 pp. \$14.95.

Though sporadic arrivals of Poles into the United States had started much earlier, it was only in 1854 that Polish immigration led to the establishment of the first self-contained Polish community and parish. It was perhaps a trick played by history that the first settlements of Silesian Poles sprang up in the San Antonio area of Texas rather than in an area such as Connecticut, which in many respects is geographically more like Poland. The large stream of Polish immigrants arriving in this country in the latter part of the nineteenth century and in the early twentieth moved to the American Northeast and Midwest, where the majority of Polish immigrants (largely of peasant origin) joined the ranks of industrial workers. Thus the oldest Polish settlements in Texas form a separate chapter in Polish-American immigration history. They are unique because frontier life in Texas was so different from Silesia at that time. Moreover, the rural, isolated character of their colony allowed the settlers to preserve many old cultural traits until the present day. Journalists, historians, linguists, and other scholars have been fascinated by the Texas Poles and stimulated to do research on them. T. Lindsay Baker, a young Texan-born historian of non-Polish ethnic background, stands out among these researchers as the most thorough and

perhaps most dedicated in his efforts to reconstruct and document the life of Silesian Poles in Texas.

The book first treats the Upper Silesian origins of the group, the founding of the settlement, and Polish life on the frontier. Separate chapters analyze the impact of the Civil War and Reconstruction on the colonies, the growth and development of Silesian institutions and settlements, and the Silesian way of life in Texas. The book ends with chapters on the twentieth-century experience and the significance of the Texas Silesians.

Each chapter is buttressed by numerous references to archival materials, old newspaper articles, and personal interviews. It seems that in his efforts to collect materials Baker has not left one stone unturned. Baker achieves a high degree of objectivity. For example, his description of eminent Poles such as Peter Kiolbassa is balanced by the inclusion of an outlaw such as Martin Mroz. In general, however, Baker interprets the Silesians sympathetically.

Of greatest interest to many readers may be his portrayal of Silesian way of life in Texas in which he describes some of the customs still flavored with Silesian influences, such as weddings and funerals, as well as the pioneering work on the farms of Texas. *The First Polish Americans: Silesian Settlements in Texas* is a valuable contribution to the historical study of immigration and should be highly recommended reading for ethnic heritage programs.

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