

Lwów

The land that was lost but never forgotten

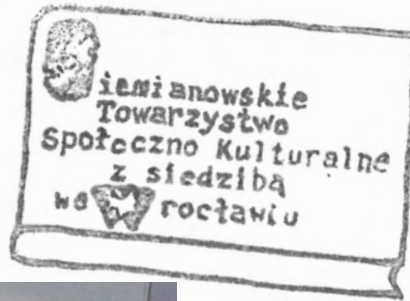
Text & Pictures: Lila Bednarska

In 1945, after the end of the Second World War, my maternal grandmother Maria together with her mother, aunt, grandmother, and grandfather moved to a new flat overlooking a bomb crater in Wrocław. They could still see and experience the legacy of war and the destruction and pain that war brings. They saw the remnants of life that just a few months prior, Germans led in Breslau. Breslau was soon to become Wrocław and the old empty German houses were soon to be full of Poles. A new legacy was to be built. And so it was, with every brick that was used to rebuild the city, with every street renamed, and with every storefront repainted. Yet, if you look close enough, the old legacy is still there reminding us that life is fragile.

The repatriations of Poles from Kresy Wschodnie (Eastern Borderlands) lasted for years.¹ My other grandfathers arrived in Poland only in 1956. My father's sister was born in the Ukrainian SSR in the formerly Polish city of Lwów (Lviv). Being originally from Siemianówka (Semenivka, currently in the Lviv Oblast), they moved to Lwów as a young couple. In Lwów, my grandfather worked as a motorman of Lwów trams. After their relocation to Wrocław, he continued to work as a motorman but now of Wrocław trams. The same job continued to connect my grandfather to his past life. My grandparents left their families and legacy in Lwów and surrounding villages. My grandmother could no longer visit her father's grave. Her father was shot and immediately



Pictures on the left: Poles from Siemianówka meeting there after they've already moved to Poland. The man in a blue suit next to the woman in red is my grandfather - Edward Bednarski.



*Roduje ty serce
gdz lewom wole do kosciolne
Ciebie my tygo nie
i polecamy strazy armiove
Mamy cię
- omie.*



owka no to swowa 22 lipca 1931

killed on the 5th of July 1944 by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, while he was walking from Młyniska (Lviv Oblast) to Żydaczów (Zhydachiv, Lviv Oblast). The relocation to Dolny śląsk (Lower Silesia) and leaving their home in Lwów was a traumatic experience. Yet, they left the traumas of death, destruction, and fear of surviving the war and the threat from the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. The traumas were not talked about. But whose legacy became visible in the tangible things – family photos and letters from Lwów, souvenirs brought from much later visits to their old home.

My family's relocation was part of a significantly larger resettlement of millions of Poles after the Second



“Millions of Poles went to sleep in Poland, but woke up in a different country.”

World War to Ziemie Odzyskane (Recovered Territories).² The resettlement and re-drawing of borders were decided in conferences in Potsdam and Yalta. By the decision of the Allied powers, millions of Poles went to sleep in Poland, but woke up in a different country. Their motherland just

disappeared and they became strangers in their own land. The newly gained territories that Germans primarily occupied until 1945, were to be populated with Poles coming mainly from Kresy. To a lesser extent from other Polish regions and repatriates from, for example, Kazakhstan. Whilst the Germans were forced to leave their houses and move further West,

the Polish repatriates were moving into their houses to restart their lives in the newly gained Western territories. This was the largest exchange of population in European history. Whole villages were relocated: an entire Polish village from Ukraine was resettled in a formerly German village. It was like nothing had changed. Yet, everything has changed. Sometimes Germans and Poles lived together until the Germans eventually had to leave. Amongst the horrors of the war, rare friendships have been built. There are

stories of Poles being impressed with German agricultural technology or Poles coming from the fertile soils of Ukraine not knowing how to harvest the mountainous fields of Sudetes. Having lost their legacy and history in Kresy, the repatriates needed to rebuild everything and their future in their new homes far away from their homelands.

The repatriates came to the Recovered Territories with nothing and had to rebuild their lives and the new lands with nothing. The overwhelming feeling was that the Recovered Territories were temporarily Polish. As easily as they were given to Poland and the Poles, as easily they could be lost. Indeed, only in 1990 with the German-Polish Border Treaty and the Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany, Germany accepted the sovereignty of the post-1945 Polish borders and the border issues ceased to be contentious. The uncertainty and temporality resulted in a reluctance to rebuild the recovered territories in the first years after the war. The repatriates felt like they were to lose their new homes at any second, therefore they thought it was not worth restoring such volatile lands. Subsequently, many areas fell into disrepair. My grandmother still recalls how as children they were picking up bricks in Wrocław to be sent to Warsaw for the reconstruction. The whole nation united to rebuild the capital. The German bricks would be used for the restoration of the Capital and Wrocław needed to wait for its



Посольство
Польской Народной Республики
в СССР

Москва, 4 декабря 1956 г.

Уполномоченный Правительства
по делам репатриации

№ 274 / Б) 1254)56

Удостоверение

Согласно имеющимся данным Уполномоченного Правительства Польской Народной Республики по делам репатриации поляков из СССР: гражданин (ка)

Фамилия БЕДНАРСКАЯ Имя Людмила Отчество Франковна
Год рождения 1934 Место рождения Львовская область, село Семенивка
Национальность поляка
проживает в СССР Львовская область, гор.Щирец, Гипсовый завод

состоял до 1939 года в польском гражданстве и проживал в Польше.

Семья вышеуказанного состоит из следующих лиц:

| Степень родства | Фамилия | Имя | Отчество | Год рождения |
|-----------------|------------|---------------|------------|--------------|
| муж | БЕДНАРСКИЙ | Эдвард | Петрович | 1929 |
| дочь | БЕДНАРСКАЯ | Гражина-Лидия | Эдвардовна | 1956 |

Примечание.

В 1945-46 г.г. подлежади репатриации последним транспортом, который не вкчал. В СССР родственников не имеет.

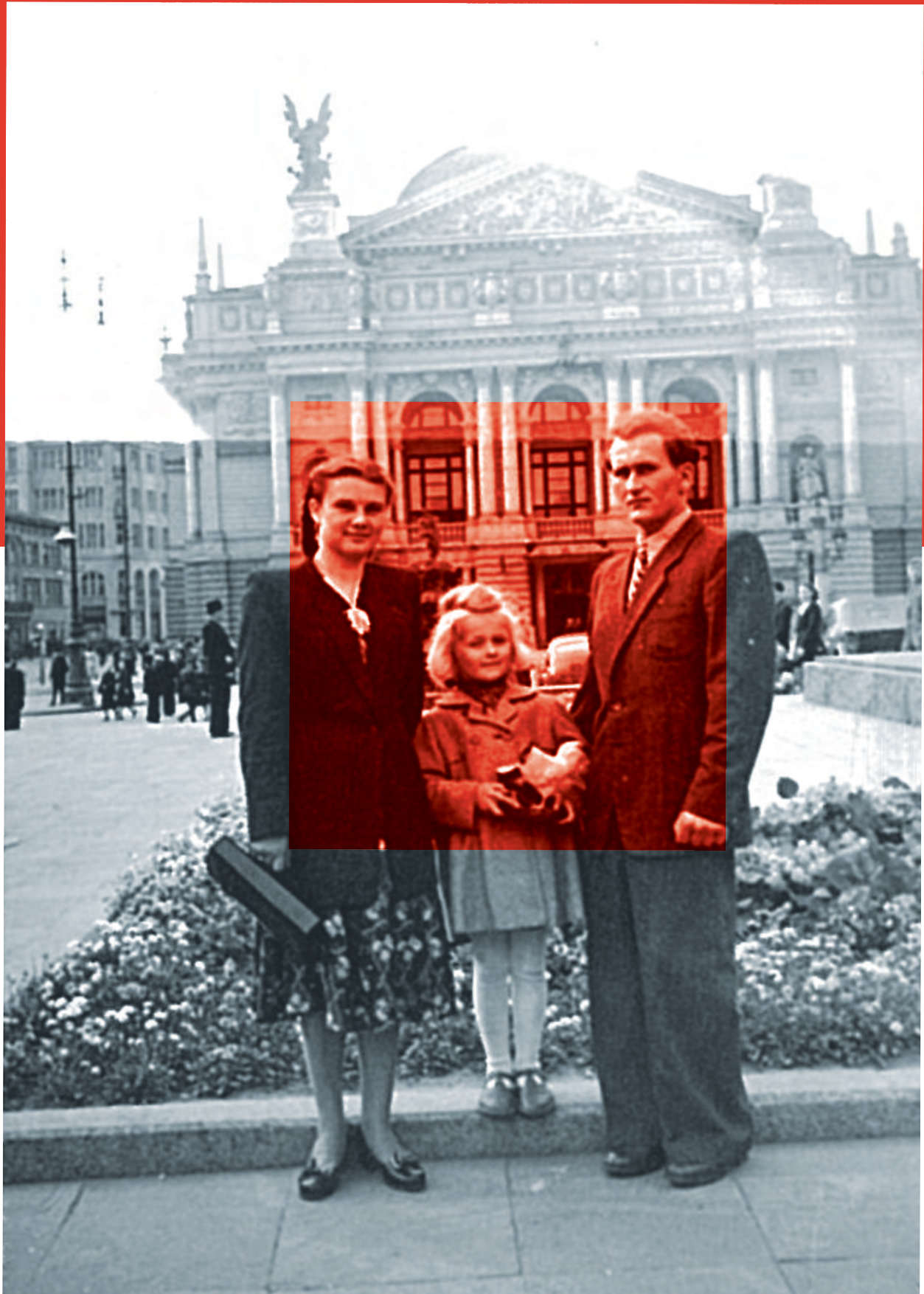
Просим вышеуказанному гр. БЕДНАРСКОЙ Л.Ф. и его семье ускорить возвращение в Польшу.



Уполномоченный Правительства
по делам репатриации

Stefan Kolonowski
—/. Колиновски Стефан

1855-5000



13 Polish family members in Lviv in 1955

turn. Its Polish legacy was yet to be built. The legacy of former Polish territories is present in tangible items and institutions in cities like Wrocław. Yet, in the hustle and bustle of everyday life, we fail to notice it. In many ways, Wrocław became the new Lwów. The majority of professors from Lwów University relocated to Wrocław. Additionally, many members of the Lwów Mathematical School moved, including Hugo Steinhaus. The Ossoliński National Institute was relocated from Lwów as well. It continues its mission of supporting Polish language, upkeeping the archives, and publishing. And, finally, the Aleksander Fredro Monument was moved from Lwów in 1956. From the ruins and shreds of old Polish legacy, Wrocław has surged to become Polish.

As elements of German rule and Lwów are present in modern Wrocław, so do the legacies of Poland and the Poles remain in Lwów and Western Ukraine. I experienced this with multiple trips to Lwów, Tarnopol Oblast, and surrounding villages. While walking the streets of Lviv, I saw the remains of the Polish legacy at every corner. I thought about how just a few decades ago my grandfather was driving the Lwów trams. Driving through the old town's streets every day. The most famous examples are the monument of Adam Mickiewicz and Cmentarz Orłąt Lwowskich (Cemetery of the Defenders of Lwów). Although the national identity of Adam Mickiewicz is disputed, for Poles, he is undoubtedly Polish. The monument is a haunting reminder of how volatile legacy is. My grandparents passed this monument many times without even thinking that one day, they would no longer be able to do it. Until they couldn't. As I sat on its stairs, felt the need to deeply reflect on my grandparents' past in the city. The same feeling recurred again when I found a picture of unknown distant family members in front of the monument in the family archives after my paternal grandmother passed away. Similarly, the feeling of reflection and overwhelming sadness is inescapable when one enters the grounds of Cmentarz Orłąt Lwowskich. This is the place where hundreds of young Lwów men defending Lwów against the Bolsheviks are buried. The youngest boy was 13. His and many others' sacrifice and legacy are now physically far, but also far away in memory. For them I hold nothing but reverence.

Memory and legacy are volatile. I have seen it vividly during my four journeys to Ukraine, mostly to Ternopil Oblast as a part of the initiative “Mogilę pradziada ocal od zapomnienia” (Save your grandfather’s tomb from oblivion). The initiative, jointly with schools in Lower Silesia, organised voluntary excursions to Ukraine to tidy up old, forgotten, Polish cemeteries in Ukraine. My school took part in cleaning old Polish cemeteries in Podwołoczyska (Pidvolochysk) and Hałuszczyńce (Halushchyntsi). Still a small number of the original Polish population resides there. Every year we would go to the Polish cemetery in Podwołoczyska to take care of the overgrown grass, weeds, and trees. It is a forgotten place, in which lives and legacy blur together. The cemetery always looked miserably forgotten as we would have to cut the thicket to discover the old graves. We would cut the grass around graves and clean each grave one by one. While being there I would always wonder what the people buried here were doing before they died. What happened to them and their descendants? Has their legacy and stories been passed on? We discovered the grave of a participant of the January Uprising, one of three




important Polish uprisings in the 19th century, Stanisław Woźniewicz. We rebuilt his tomb and marked it with a white and red ribbon. One by one, we would bring people’s memories to the world again. For a few weeks or months till the thicket wins over yet again. And this same tedious process we would repeat every year. The cemetery in Hałuszczyńce is located on a hill overlooking the village and wheat fields. It is a peaceful and isolated space with hundreds of Polish graves in relatively good condition, but nevertheless, touched by the passing of time and oblivion. Yet, once you walk through the alleys, you’re faced with the legacy of the past. You pass by forgotten graves while the dead look at you from the photographs on the tombstones. And in these moments, it becomes clear how fragile and volatile life and legacy are.

When you ask somebody in Warsaw where they are from, you are likely to hear how proud they are for being from Warsaw through generations. And how their ancestors fought, for example, in the Warsaw Uprising. Some may even claim that the newcomers are never going to be from Warsaw. In the recovered territories, the idea that your family has been settled in one city for generations is



Graveyard in Podwoloczyska before, during and after tidy up

*Wszystko przemija,
wspomnienia, pamięć też.
A bez namacalnego,
rzeczowego świadectwa
świat o nas zapomni.*

bizarre and alien. In Lower Silesia and other recovered territories, nobody is from “here”. Our original legacy comes from somewhere else. In my family’s case, it is mostly Lwów Oblast. For others, it is Wilno or the current territories of Western Belarus. Therefore, the recovered territories are a place where different legacies have met and created a new one by entwining traditions, local customs, and dialects. Now, we are all simply Polish. One day I hope to return to the land of my ancestors. To face what’s no longer there in the flesh but continues to haunt my family’s legacy to this day. I will finish this story with what I wrote when I was 15 years old: Wszystko przemija, wspomnienia, pamięć też. A bez namacalnego, rzeczowego świadectwa świat o nas zapomni – Everything passes, memories and memory too. But without tangible, material testimony, the world will forget us. 

[1] The term Kresy Wschodnie also has an ambiguous meaning. With years the meaning of the term blurred from a literal meaning towards a more mystic and ideological description of the great, truly Polish, rich lands of Poland. Only after the second world war it is meaning gravitated towards description of lost lands of Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania as a result of agreement in Potsdam and Yalta.

[2] The term Ziemie Odzyskane was created for propaganda purposes as the new lands have been barely, if ever, Polish. Nowadays, it is more appropriate to use the term Ziemie Zachodnie (the Western territories).