

Excerpt from Poles of Chicago, 1837 – 1937, a history of one century of Polish contribution to the city of Chicago, Illinois, Copyright, 1937, Polis Pageant, Inc. Printed in U.S.A. by American Catalogue Printing Co, Chicago, Illinois

PART IV CHICAGO POLES SHARE IN CITY ART HISTORY By Jane J. Palczynska

POLISH art in Chicago burst forth in full glory with the building of the first churches. The masterly decoration of their interiors ranked equally among the best in the land. The Poles had come to stay and many, many more would follow. From the very start there was a definite manifestation of the great cultural heritage they had brought with them. It was at this time that Thaddeus Zukotynski came to Chicago and gave of his genius to glorify the traditions of the Poles; their deep faith and strong devotion to the Church, their intense love of their mother country and their sincerity in the desire to establish themselves permanently in their adopted land.

Thaddeus Zukotynski

Zukotynski came here in 1888 and worked in Chicago for a number of years. His frescos in the apse of the Saint Stanislaus' Church, the altar pieces in Saint John Cantius' and Saint Hyacinth's, the sacred pictures in Saint Hedwig's and the stations in the church of the Holy Cross, have left us a testimonial of his art which will excite admiration and devotion as long as his work can be preserved. During this time Zukotynski acquired for himself an enviable reputation and was considered one of the foremost artists in the domain of ecclesiastical painting in America. Both German and English papers were full of his praises. This truly great artist had not only gained recognition for his paintings in Polish churches, and only in Chicago, but he has to his great credit an altar piece in Saint Hedwig's in South Bend, Ind.; an Adoration in the Chapel of the School Sisters of Notre Dame, and a number of magnificently painted windows of stained glass in Saint Michael's, in Milwaukee, Wis.; sacred pictures in Saint Joseph's, in Logansport, Ind., some paintings in Mishawaka, Ind., and in Saint Mary's of the Woods, Indiana.

St. Stanislaus

In the following masterly description of what is considered Zukotynski's masterpiece we find evidence not only of the profoundness and skill of the master, but also proof that Chicago valued and appreciated the contribution of her new citizens. It is like a beautiful sermon for those who read it today. Eliza Ellen Starr, a renowned artist, and directress of a School of Art, famous for her lecture on Roman Art, in an article on "Christian Art as Manifested in Chicago Churches" in the "New World," wrote as follows: "A cheerless winter day, the wind whistling, dust, not snow, as we made our painful way through all the intricacies of the West Side, for our driver seemed ignorant even of the points of the compass, whereas the true way from our door to Noble and Ingraham streets is a direct and easy one. We were worn out with stopping before every 'Polish Church' but the one we were in search of: for this, we knew, contained treasures worthy of a pilgrimage harder even than

the one we were making. At last our lively little companion, with her sharp eyes that read every sign on every shop, declared we were in the neighborhood of Saint Stanislaus Church, for "everything is named for him." She was right and soon our horses stood before a massive, grave edifice, with closed doors in front. There is a side door opening into a basement, but as we had nothing to do with basements, the pastoral residence must be found, and her light foot soon brought us the intelligence that we had only to drive the length of the church to find it. A courteous welcome met us at the very door and taking pity upon us, as it seemed, for our weariness after wandering two hours across all the railroad tracks and viaducts, we were kindly led through the house to the sacristy, through the sacristy into the sanctuary, there to make our thanksgiving for the happy termination of our woes: then led carefully into one of the pews near the center of the church, when the kind voice of the young priest said: "Here you can see the picture," as if he knew it was the picture we had come to see. With this word of encouragement we lifted our weary eyes to see — what? Heaven? Yes, heaven: such a heaven as we have never seen in the old world or new; such a heaven as we had never expected to see until our eyes should open, after a long purgatory, in that heaven where dwells "in light inaccessible and full of glory," the Eternal Father, the Eternal Son and the Eternal Holy Ghost! We write this sentence deliberately, meaning every word we have written and intending to have it taken in its full and literal sense. We will now give, to the best of our ability, a description of this picture, only premising, that we of today see this picture fresh from the hand of the master, its color undimmed by time or our murky atmosphere; since it must be conceded that much of the pleasure in looking at the European masterpieces is lost four, five and six centuries after the execution, owing to those changes in color no mortal care or skill can prevent. Our masterpiece on the apse of Saint Stanislaus is in all its freshness, and never, we repeat, have we ever seen such celestial tints, such a glory of heavenly radiance, as came before us like a vision in that gloomy wintry day, in the dim church. There was no touching of electric buttons, no lighting whatsoever from without: for of this picture, as of the heaven of the Apocalypse, 'the Lamb was the light thereof.' "Behold, then, Christ seated in His majesty, in His benignity in the upper center of this composition, while still above, so as to round the arch, are seen the Eternal Father and the Eternal Holy Ghost, all set in the intense light, of the Beatific Vision. On either hand of this Trinity of glory are groups of flying angels, carrying the emblems of our Lord's Passion: on the right the holy cross, on the left the lance, the crown of thorns and the nails, while three angels represent, symbolically, the merits which Poland has won in the sight of heaven by her fidelity to Christianity in the midst of dismemberment and suffering. "Thus far the upper and most radiant part of the picture; but immediately in the foreground, with the radiance of the vision upon them, is the Blessed Virgin Mother Mary, in the plenitude of grace, of beauty, of joy; for our masterpiece is entitled "The Triumph of Christ," and she who shared to the full His humiliation, is now sharing to the full His triumph, and her adoration, is the adoration of joy. At her side is her virgin spouse, Saint Joseph, and that seraphic penitent, Saint Mary Magdalene, also Saint Joachim and Saint Anne; opposite Saint John the Baptist, Saint Zachary, and Saint Elizabeth. To his right, also, as we face the picture, loom up the grand forms of the prophets, of ancient worthies, and to be plainly distinguished

among them are Adam and Eve, Noah, Melchisedeck, Abraham with Isaac and Jacob; Moses with the tables of the law, and Aaron as high priest; Joseph of Egypt, Samuel with the vial of holy oil from which he anointed David in the house of his father Jesse at Bethlehem; David as king and psalmist with his harp, repeating with transport his prophetic canticles; Ruth with her sheaves of wheat gleaned in the field of Boaz; while still in groups pressing forward to adore and praise the Christ for whom they prayed and longed are Samson, Joshua, Gideon, Judith with the head of Holofernes, Mordecai and Esther, and the valiant Maccabees; all to be distinguished by something which indicates their story. "Turning to the left as we look at the picture the heroes of the New Law come before us like a conquering host. First the apostles, among whom the eye easily rests upon Saint Peter and Saint Paul and Saint John; then the great Doctors of the Church, seated on a bench of clouds, give one of the most original features of the composition. Of these, nearest to the spectator is Saint Gregory the Great, in his tiara, with the triple pontifical staff held aloft like a banner with the right hand, in the left a book referring to the voluminous writings of this Pope; the rich cope enveloping the majestic figure, while the thin, worn, but inspired countenance, looks out on the world of which he was the spiritual sovereign, as Leo XIII, looks over the world today. Never has a Pope been more magnificently presented than Gregory the Great in this picture. Next to him the great scholar, Saint Jerome, in his Cardinal's hat, an immense tome held by one hand on his knee, the serious face bearing the mark of his austerities in the desert and at Bethlehem. Then Saint Ambrose in his mitre, one hand grasping his crozier, the other extended as if discoursing deeply of our Lord, while next to him is Saint Augustine, also wearing the mitre, but with an inspired uplift of the face heavenward, and both hands extended toward our Lord, as if in an ecstasy of eloquence. Taken by itself, this bench of holy doctors is a wonder in art. Still further in the background is Saint Helen with the Holy Cross, Saint Stephen and Saint Lawrence, Saint Clement, Pope, Saint Cecelia and Saint Agnes, all martyrs, all with their symbols; Saint Paul and Saint Anthony, hermits. Then the army of the different religious orders bearing their banners, like a triumphant host, represented by their founders, like Saint Benedict, Saint Bruno, Saint Dominic, Saint Francis of Assisi; the apostles of different nations, Saint Boniface, Saint Cyril, and Saint Methodius; popular saints like Saint Bernard, Saint Anthony of Padua, Saint Wenceslaus, Saints Vladimir, Adalbert and Stanislaus, Saint Hedwig and Saint Elizabeth of Thuringia, princesses; Saint Hyacinth, Saint Thomas of Equin, Saint Theresa, Saint Catherine of Sienna, Saint Clara and near the foreground the great martyr, Saint John Nepomucene with his finger on his lips; Saint Vincent of Paul, Saint John Cantius, Saint Casimir, Saint Francis of Sales, Saint Josaphat, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, with his spiritual son and beloved saint of Poland, Saint Stanislaus Kostka, under whose invocation stand the walls in which this glorious work of art has been executed. "The bare enumeration of these personages from all ages, all countries, shows a master's hand which alone could arrange these groups in all their beautiful details, then marshal them like squadrons under a great admiral so as to give, in their perfect unity of conception, one sunburst of gladness a triumph indeed, before which all others will pale to the end of time. "But our artist had not completed his idea; and working as he was under the wise patronage of the 'Congregation of the Resurrection,' he was left perfectly free to

follow out this idea. Not one straw was laid in his path; no consideration as to time or expense was allowed to trammel him. Others might have obliged him to copy one masterpiece or another, but our Congregation of the Resurrection knew that they had a master also, whose fresh compositions would make their church a place of pilgrimage, like the apses of the old world basilicas. Therefore, the high ceiling finished, he proceeded to paint his dado, precisely after the manner of that old mosaic worker, Jacopo Turruta, in the apse of Saint Mary Major, Rome. In the center is the Blessed Virgin laying her Divine Son into the arms of the youthful Stanislaus; the Virgin Mother of a ravishing loveliness as to countenance, of an unspeakable benignity in her mien, as she holds toward the holy youth in her extended arms her Divine Child; and that Child extends both His own hands toward the kneeling Stanislaus; not only kneeling, but with hands thrown upward to the Holy Child in a transport of joy, of devotion. The glory of heaven rays from the Mother and her Son; angels fill every space; but one angel supports, with his right hand, the ecstatic youth, in the other brings him a lily as the emblem of his innocence. The picture is one concentrated rapture, such as Correggio loved to paint, and never did Murillo paint a more ecstatic vision than this one of Saint Stanislaus; its execution as careful, its glowing colors passing off into as mystical shadows as either of these two masters ever achieved. "This group being the center piece, we see single figures standing in pairs, as upon a mullion window under one arch, those saints which Poland has honored for so many centuries, whom she does not forget amid the turmoil of our commercial civilization. To the extreme left as we face the sanctuary stands Saint Josaphat, Archbishop of Plotsk and martyr, with his archiepiscopal staff, wearing his pallium, and in the flower of his age, since he was only forty-four when he gave his blood for Poland; a story full of pathos and heroism. He is companioned by Saint Hyacinth, the Dominican, in his white habit and steel blue mantle; the so-called apostle of Poland, and the wonder worker, in his hand the book of the great teacher and preacher; both standing on a tessellated pavement. Next, Saint Stanislaus, the martyr Bishop of Cracow, Poland; a magnificent figure in his mitre, bearing his episcopal staff and palm in his right hand, the left arm pressing to his heart the blessed sword of his martyrdom, while his face is turned in rapture toward heaven. His companion is Saint Adalbert of Prague, also a Bishop and also martyr; in his right hand the palm, in the other the oar of a vessel with which he was first knocked down, then pierced with a lance. To the right of the central group, the two great apostles of Scythia, Slavonia and Bulgaria, brothers, whose record is to be found on the walls of the subterranean church of Saint Clement, Rome — Saint Cyril and Saint Methodius, the latter an artist who painted his pictures in a way to convert whole nations. Lastly, to the extreme right hand, Saint John Cantius, secular priest and professor of theology in the University of Cracow, on his head his doctor's cap or berretta, in his right hand his pen, his left resting on the volume open on his reading desk, the eyes turned toward the Blessed Virgin and her Son in the central picture. He is companioned by the beautiful young prince, Saint Casmir, his crown on his head, with his kingly mantle on his shoulders, a lily for his scepter, the right foot, the right hand slightly extended, with eyes lifted to heaven — stepping forth on the tessellated pavement of his palace like a spirit rather than a mortal. ..." The recognition and encouragement of such a master was one of the greatest and most

priceless contributions of the Poles in Chicago. His influence is alive today and there is evidence of its continuation. Prof. Zukotynski, a Polish count, with a studio in Munich, was one of Europe's foremost painters of religious subjects. A pupil of Pilatti, an enthusiastic admirer of Matejko, he gathered the knowledge of centuries, brought it here and passed it on to others.

Sister Stanisia

In 1920, Sister Stanisia, a Chicago artist nun of the Academy of Our Lady, Longwood, was commissioned to restore some of the precious frescoes of Zukotynski. Sister Stanisia was born in Chicago. Her talent developed early and was recognized by Prof. Zukotynski, who proceeded to give her instructions. For seven or eight years she remained under his supervision and was well grounded in the continental methods and technique of her celebrated teacher. On his death so great was the progress she made, she was called upon to finish some of his work. As a nun, Sister Stanisia continued her art studies at the Chicago Art Institute. She studied with Ralph Clarkson, Frank C. Peyrand, John Norton and Albin Polasek.

St. Stanislaus' Frescoes Restored

As his most talented pupil, Sister Stanisia was entrusted, as one best qualified, to restore the frescoes of St. Stanislaus. To quote Karol Wachtel in translation, from an article in Dziennik Chicaigoski (The Polish Daily News) of November 23, 1920: "... Sister Stanisia worked long and conscientiously in the Church of St. Stanislaus; the work entrusted to her, she executed with real piety. First of all she prepared a whole series of sketches of the paintings to be restored, and after having studied them in detail, undertook to repaint them. This was tedious and difficult work. Some parts of the paintings had to be gone over seven or eight times, and required great care and skill in order to retain faithfully, the characteristics of the original. "Sister Stanisia was most successful in the complete fullness of her undertaking. The restoration of the murals in the presbyterium and naves of Saint Stanislaus' is a great and beautiful achievement which brings her honor and associates her name and her art with the famous one of Zukotynski— a name that the Poles of Chicago will never forget. "The paintings gained remarkably in clearness. Their superbly beautiful colors came to life again, strangely harmonious, pleasing, peaceful, and yet strong and sure. That which the long years had sought to obliterate, emerged again, as if alive and resurrected from behind the curtain of dust and smoke; all the figures — so beautiful, so radiant, and so inspiring, are plainly and distinctly visible from afar, and the unity of the composition, especially the upper section above the presbyterium, stands out clearly and impressively in all its details " Sister Stanisia has been called upon to restore other Zukotynski paintings. Fresco painting, in which the design is drawn and painted on wet plaster is extremely difficult to preserve in its original state, and constant restoration is being made of some very famous ones. Among others, Sister Stanisia restored those at St. Hyacinth's and at Holy Cross Church. "Little Flower" When the Stehli Bros., a famous art firm of Zurich, desired an original conception of the Sacred Heart for reproduction in color

and circulation throughout the world, they passed over the religious painters of Europe and commissioned Sister Stanisla for the work. C. J. Bulliet in an article in the Chicago Daily News of March 14, 1936, says: "Sister Stanisla is perhaps the most widely known of woman painters throughout the Catholic world, in the United States and Europe. She became internationally established when she exhibited four paintings at the religious art show in connection with the Eucharistic Congress in Chicago in 1925 — a painting of the "Little Flower," a portrait of Bishop J. F. Noll of Fort Wayne and two Madonnas. Commissions began coming to her immediately for altar pieces, devotional works, portraits and murals. "An early portrait of Cardinal Mundelein was hung in Saint George high school, Evanston and a later one exhibited in 1935 at the Davis Galleries, was commissioned for the College of Cardinals, Washington. Murals and paintings of her are in St. Luke's, St. Paul, Minn.; Adrian College, Michigan; Mount Mary College, Milwaukee; and St. Joseph's hospital, St. Margaret's church and Holy Cross church, Chicago. These are but several of the seventeen churches in which she painted."