

THE OLDEST POLISH GHOST IN AMERICA

In 1867 the folk of Panna Maria, the first Polish Catholic parish in America, decided to replace the structure they had built in 1854 with a new, brick church. The best location, they thought, was the graveyard, so they carefully disinterred each body. Well, sort of carefully. When they finished the reburial, there were a few bones left over, so they put them all into a large box and buried it.

Not long afterward, the priest saw a figure outside his window one night. Tall and splendid, the man had neither hands nor head. In his shiny black boots and flowing cloak, he walked along the veranda, then entered the new church, searching for his head and hands, people supposed. And he came back again, every other night, for many years.

Actually, he proved to be quite benign, even sociable. One Saturday night he settled into the rectory rocking chair and rocked away while the priest composed the next day's homily. Another time, when the ghost appeared at his bedside, the weary cleric merely opened his eyes to see who it was, then turned over, and went back to sleep.

The folk of Panna Maria see him less often these days. And though he may have found other phantoms to keep him company, he is still the oldest Polish ghost in America.

ITC vertical files: Polish Cities and Towns, Panna Maria.
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