

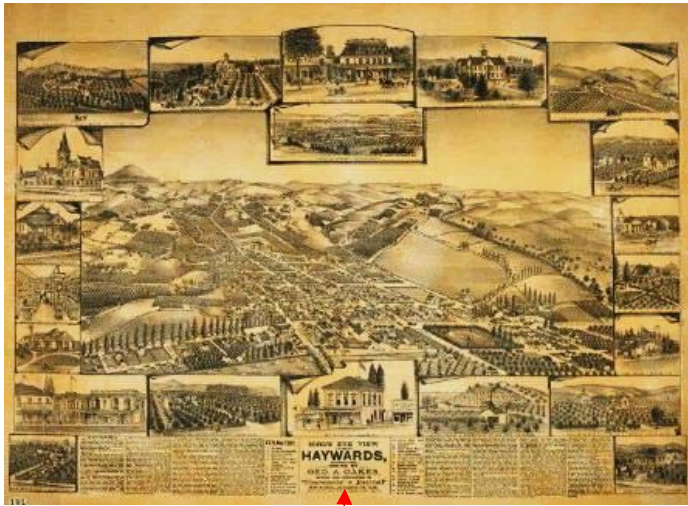
Letter #14: Henryk Sienkiewicz¹ to Julian Horain²

Sebastopol: April 8, 1877

Exiles, Adventurers, Artists: Letters from Polish California, 1836-1901

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I'm writing a second letter even though I've received no answer to the first. I've got nothing new to report, aside from a claim to news from you. It's empty here; I'm alone and homesick. Captain Piotrowski³ will probably decide not to settle here permanently. He'll wind up in Haywards.⁴ Perhaps we'll live



together for a while, but when all is said and done, God only knows what will become of me. In the meantime, I write. I've started an American play.⁵ I've already done almost one whole act; I'll finish it in about two weeks. Our Lady⁶ promised that she'd translate it into English.

Miss Castelhune⁷ is supposed to make corrections. I don't know if anything will come of this... if The Lady's health will allow it. I'd prefer to give up writing entirely, if I could know she'd be strong and healthy.

¹ Polish journalist and author; awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1905;

see: <http://culture.pl/en/artist/henryk-sienkiewicz>

² Julian Florian Horain, Polish journalist. See: <http://www.polishclubsf.org/Horain.pdf>

³ Captain Rudolf Korwin Piotrowski; born in Poland; lived in Sebastopol, Sacramento County (a former mining town) and in San Francisco; co-founder of the Polish Society of California; served as Commissioner of Immigration; see:

<http://www.polishclubsf.org/Piotrowski%20in%20City%20Directories.pdf>

⁴ A California town known variously as "Hayward's," "Haywood," "Haywards" (since 1876), and "Hayward" (since 1911); sounds [to the Polish ear] like the pronunciation of the postmark "Haywood"

⁵ *American drama (Dramat amerykański)* described by Sienkiewicz as a "critical-satirical-sentimental" play; written for Helena Modrzejewska (Modjeska); the featured character, "Helena Steven," is modelled after Modjeska. Modjeska translated the play into English. This handwritten play is lost to history.

⁶ Helena Modrzejewska (Modjeska); see: <http://culture.pl/en/artist/helena-modrzejewska-modjeska>

⁷ Miss Mary A. Castelhun, a San Francisco school principal at various schools in the City including the South Cosmopolitan Primary School on Post Street, between Stockton and Dupont Streets

Why don't you⁸ write to me? Do you want me to go totally mad? I write for days at a time – I read and study English, but the rest of my hours I spend pondering Hamlet's expression, "To be or not to be."⁹ Have you had no news from Dyniewicz?¹⁰ If something's going to come of this labor, I'd like to begin as soon as possible, because I need some kind of ordinary work – prosaic, boring – to kill within myself this tendency to ruminate. I'll amuse myself here, as I've already mentioned, for about two months. That's a long time. You could forget about me – amidst the entertainments and new sensations of the city, and new faces – and various concerns. Here, forlorn, I cannot forget about you, though I might so wish; but even if I could – I don't want to.

Write long and broadly about everything that interests me. Give those in our acquaintance my best wishes... or don't – trouble them not. Please convey to Lady Helena that I kiss her hands, with fullest adoration; inquire about her health, her moods, her disposition – her projected future triumphs, and last of all refresh me in her memory, if ever I had a place therein, and if it hasn't



covered over with a growth of grass, and maybe wormwood¹¹ too. I say wormwood because I sometimes bore myself, so I imagine how I sometimes must have been a bore to her. To you and all the others[.] But for this I am endowed in such a way, that once a sense of reverence and friendship's been conceived in me for someone else, time and distance cannot change it. Be that as it may, I don't suppose this will affect my standing in the view of anybody there.

What do you¹² want? I'm writing a play – that's it. It's American, with a business theme, critical-satirical-emotional. It's going to be crummy since one

⁸ The Polish pronoun "Wy," and its corresponding verb form – "you" plural – is frequently used in these letters as the polite and respectful form of address to the recipient – who is one man, singular. However, in this usage of the "you" plural form, Sienkiewicz is alluding to the circle of Polish people in San Francisco that both he and Horain belonged to.

⁹ From William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 3, Scene 1

¹⁰ Władysław Dyniewicz (1843-1928); Chicago editor of *Polish Gazette (Gazeta Polska)*; he arrived in the US in 1866, settled in Chicago a year later, and began publishing this daily in 1873. It existed until 1913.

¹¹ Wormwood repels intestinal worms, moths, earwigs, mice, flies and slugs

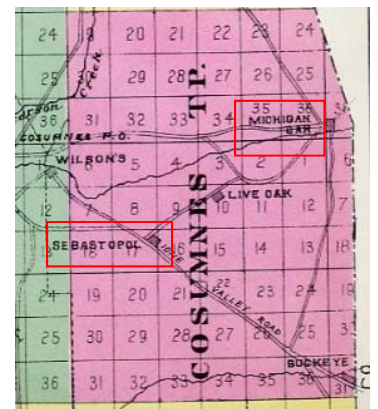
¹² "You" plural; Sienkiewicz's Polish circle in San Francisco

can't do much on foreign ground. Anyway, you'll judge for yourselves, and you'll all have a good laugh at the author – I'm ready for that. Anyhow, I attach no weight to this pursuit. What else? There's been no rain here, the grass is withering, my soul is withering, and that's all. There is no other news.

Hugs to you. Remember me. I kiss Lady Helena's hands – ask her also what's to be of *Beatrix Cenci*¹³ – and once more remind her of my friendship. Greetings and a respectful bow to your family – and please give a good smack to Paweł¹⁴ so he doesn't forget me either.

Henryk

Postscript: It's Sunday morning. Act-I is finished. I read it to Captain Piotrowski. He liked it. At any rate, I'm going to make this into a Polish story, and I'll print it in the *Gazette*.¹⁵ The story will be even better than the play. At least I have this one consolation, that I keep my promises. I promised to work, so even if my very mind escapes me, I gather it and force it back to work. One scene's not bad, and there may be several, between the heroine, Helena Steven, and the hero, Simon. As I write them, I imagine that I see Helena's brilliant acting, which gives me courage and desire. Were she ever to appear in this role, she'd cover with her queenly robe its author's misery. Yet will this come about? . . . But if not, there isn't any use in writing. Tomorrow the butcher¹⁶ from Michigan Bar¹⁷ is coming, the guy who brings my letters. He comes every other day, and every other day I experience a letdown, having hoped that he would bring some news from San Francisco. Perhaps tomorrow will be more fortunate.



¹³ *Beatrix (Beatrix) Cenci* is an opera in two acts by Alberto Ginastera, based on the historical family of Beatrice Cenci; see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Beatrice_Cenci; Modjeska did not perform in this dramatic role.

¹⁴ Horain's son Paul (Paweł)

¹⁵ *Polish Gazette [Gazeta Polska]*; the play, *American Drama*, was never printed.

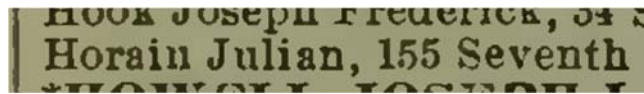
¹⁶ It may have been an actual butcher who delivered the Sebastopol mail or perhaps Sienkiewicz felt gutted (cruelly disappointed/"butchered") when he did not receive letters from San Francisco.

¹⁷ Michigan Bar was a goldmining town northeast of Sebastopol. The nearest post office to Sebastopol was located in Michigan Bar, Cosumnes Township, Sacramento County.

I'm in good health. *Pan* Franciszek¹⁸ is still flagging. He is aging, getting old and cankered; he's grown irritable, vexatious to himself and others, harsh and dissatisfied with all the world. He gets angry constantly, first at Captain Piotrowski, then at his French farmhand. Sometimes in the morning he brings me a rose from the garden, but staying my course here will be hard. Don't tell the Poles there about this. Captain Piotrowski has at last decided that living with *Pan* Franciszek is presently out of the question.

Henryk

Envelope: M. Jules de Horain, San Francisco, Cal., Seventh Street 155



SOURCE:

Letter from Henryk Sienkiewicz to Julian Horain.

Letter number 14, in: Henryk Sienkiewicz, *Listy*. Tom 1, Cześć 2. Warszawa 1977; referenced online: <http://www.henryk-sienkiewicz.eu/index.php?id=listy&r=1877&akcja=pokaz>

NOTE: The editors and translator have revised or augmented some of Maria Bokszczanin's original footnotes.

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Post Office in Michigan Bar

¹⁸ Captain Francis Michel (Franciszek Michał Wojciechowski); see: <http://www.polishclubsf.org/Franciszek%20Michal.pdf>; "*Pan*" is a Polish honorific, roughly equivalent to "Sir."