

## Letter #16: Henryk Sienkiewicz<sup>1</sup> to Julian Horain<sup>2</sup>

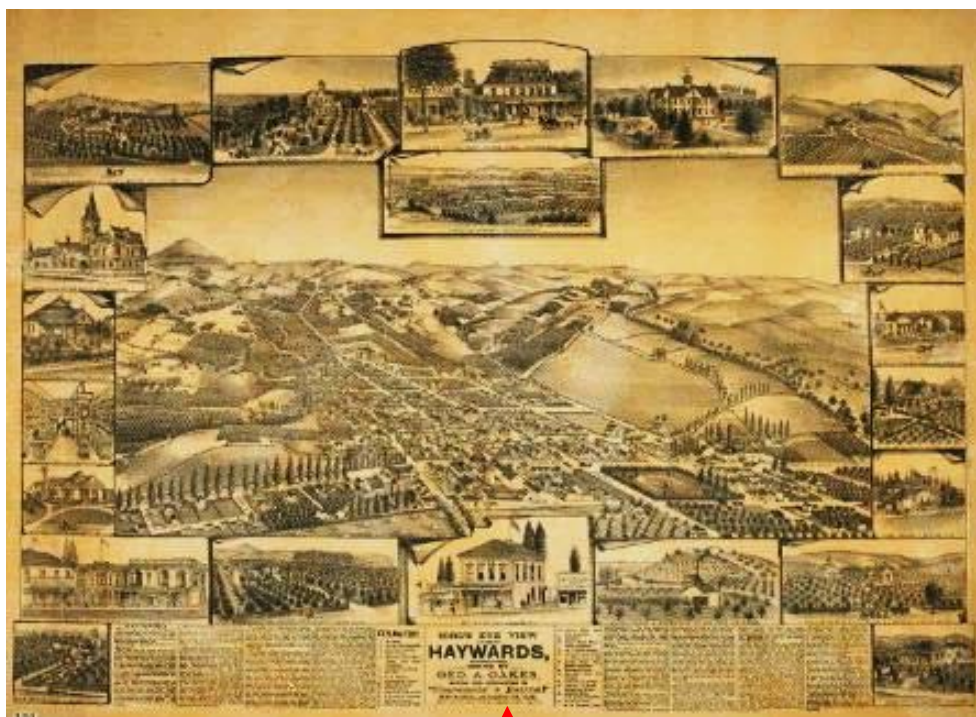
Exiles, Adventurers, Artists: Letters from Polish California, 1836-1901  
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Sebastopol: April 15, 1877

Dear and respected Sir!

We are positively moving to Haywards,<sup>3</sup> an hour from San Fran[cisco], which is to say in better circumstances regarding postal, water and rail connections.

I painted a black Sebastopol for you, because I'm lonesome here. In Haywards, closer to all of you, my frame of mind will improve. We are leaving Sebastopol tomorrow, i.e., on Monday. The Captain<sup>4</sup> did some business – his neighbor Wilburn<sup>5</sup> returned so much money to him that I don't know how he'll carry it all home [to San Francisco]. We are going directly [from here] to Haywards.



<sup>1</sup> Polish journalist and author; awarded the Nobel prize for literature in 1905; see: <http://culture.pl/en/artist/henryk-sienkiewicz>

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

<sup>3</sup> A California town known variously as "Hayward's," "Haywood," "Haywards" (since 1876), and "Hayward" (since 1911)

<sup>4</sup> Captain Rudolf Korwin Piotrowski; born in Poland; lived in the former mining town Sebastopol, Sacramento County and in San Francisco; founder of the Polish Society of California; served as Commissioner of Immigration; see: <http://www.polishclubsf.org/Piotrowski%20in%20City%20Directories.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Surname Wilburn/Wilbourn; likely an allusion to "Wellborn," a character in "A New Way to Pay Old Debts". Actor John Edward McCullough played "Wellborn" at the California theater in San Francisco in the 1870s. See: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_New\\_Way\\_to\\_Pay\\_Old\\_Debts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_New_Way_to_Pay_Old_Debts)

You'll probably see Captain Piotrowski on the 20<sup>th</sup><sup>6</sup> at Salomon's<sup>7</sup> court – but I won't be there. I'll be finishing the drama.<sup>8</sup> I wrote some nice words yesterday: the end of Act-II. I'll send it to you as soon as I'm finished, and you read it to *Pani*,<sup>9</sup> for she's constantly in my thoughts as I write. Her playing, her figure, her genius – in a word, as a dram[atic] author, I regard her as my inspiration.



E.S. Salomon

Now, what a noble mission all of you have there, and worthy of envy: the uplifting of Our Lady's spirit, the bestowal upon her of courage, joyfulness, and perseverance. I read that Leonardo da Vinci,<sup>10</sup> that incomparable genius, was all his life sickened by a lack of trust in his own powers. Our genius *Pani* Helena suffers from this same illness. Her suffering is very hard to bear. But in this her soul too closely resembles an Aeolian harp. Any rough touch, the least breath of cold wind, and the harp moans, it cries out such that tears come to one's eyes. But friendly hands may play there easily as well. Be then to her such a hand; give her trust and faith in herself, in future triumphs and in a stellar future... to put it simply, in everything. As for me, I believe in her genius like I believe in two hundred prayerful *amens*, because I believe that she will make it, that everything will turn out well and for the best. All that matters is for her to believe in herself, because it's necessary for her health, life, peace and happiness. I always blew on those little sparks of faith within her, and I saw in this not only personal happiness but service a hundred times greater than what I have – if I have it – as a scribbler. But at present I'm here, far away – and she, there, may be again tormented and gnawed by doubts; yet of all the people surrounding her, not counting the secular incompetents, fit to sweep out the temples of literature and art, you alone belong to this world of which she is the queen – so you alone can have a serious influence on her, can better and more effectively than others give warnings and hope, and

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<sup>6</sup> April 20<sup>th</sup>, 1877

<sup>7</sup> A play on words: the Biblical King Solomon is invoked with reference to Edward Selig Salomon (1836-1913), a California legislator, and an acquaintance of Captain Rudolf Korwin Piotrowski; Salomon was sympathetic to the Polish cause; see: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon>, and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward\\_S.\\_Salomon](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_S._Salomon)

<sup>8</sup> "*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.

<sup>9</sup> [*P]ani* [Madame]; in reference to Helena Modrzejewska (Modjeska); renowned stage actress; see: <http://culture.pl/en/artist/helena-modrzejewska-modjeska>

<sup>10</sup> Da Vinci (1452-1519) was an Italian Renaissance polymath.

channel peace into that beautiful, extraordinary soul. Carry out this mission then with a fervor worthy of the case; I know she's in accord with your noble way of thinking and your love for all that's beautiful. Show the lady, if you wish, my letter. Were I writing to her alone, I'd say nothing different. But you'll do this, won't you? In America there are two Polish colonies – one is broad; the second is very narrow. To the second there belongs just Our Lady, occupying the throne, and at the foot of the throne two heads amidst the radiance, with wings beneath their necks, two seraphim: you and I. If I knew how to draw, then I would sketch it



out. But never mind that. What I'm saying is that we ought to more tightly support and care for one another, give ourselves spirit, courage, and all that's necessary. Show her this letter, and she'll smile at the seraphim. Maybe she'll have a little fun. This would be the highest payment I have ever gotten.

Meanwhile, be well – perhaps I'll see you. I really miss your kind heart, on whose friendship I count on like an ace (in my hand). No joking: keep for me such a friendship as you have so far, and I'll be very happy.

Hugs to all – your lady<sup>11</sup> [and] *Pani* Helena. I kiss their hands.

Postscript: On further thought, I've written to her what I wrote to you about her. I put this in your hands because I don't want to arouse untimely little jealousies. What if a certain someone<sup>12</sup> took offense at not being numbered in the tighter, literary-artistic colony? It would be the cause of new and long-drawn-out distresses for *Pani* Helena, and I'd prefer to have any other sin on my conscience than one like that. Because – as God knows – though there is nothing secret in my letter, give it to her when the literary laity, jealous of her fame, are not around. Give it to her as I've asked – or keep it until I arrive. And now once more I press your kindly hands.

Your sincere friend and Paul's persecutor<sup>13</sup>

Henryk

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<sup>11</sup> Horain's wife, Michalina Marie Horain

<sup>12</sup> Helena Modjeska's husband, Count Karol Bozenta [Bodzenta] Chłapowski

<sup>13</sup> Horain's youngest son, Paul (Paweł)



SOURCE:

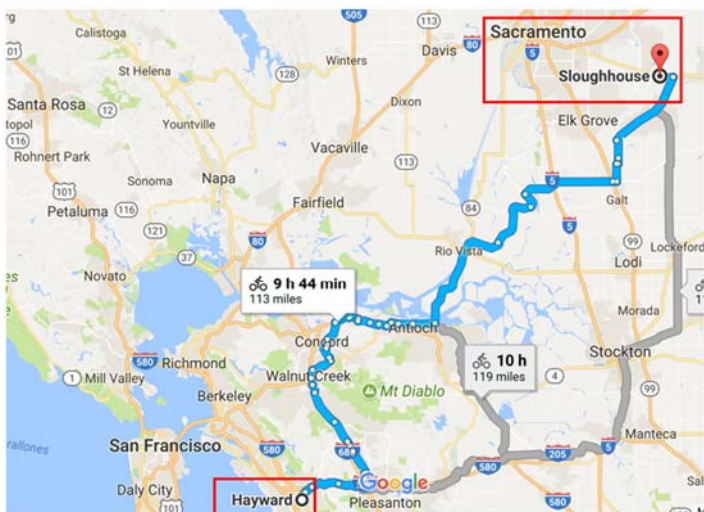
Letter from Henryk Sienkiewicz to Julian Horain.

Letter number 16, 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.

Translated from the Polish by **Bob Lamming**, with **Elżbieta Kieszczyńska** (Clifton, New Jersey) and edited by **Maureen Mroczek Morris** (San Francisco) with **Roman Włodek** (Kraków) and **Lynn Ludlow** (San Francisco). English summary translation kindly proffered by **Anna Samborska** (San Francisco).

**CALIFORNIA THEATRE.**—Not all the attraction of three excellent first-class actors in the principal roles, in "Romeo and Juliet," last night, succeeded in drawing a crowded house, yet when the "legitimate" is withdrawn, there will probably be the usual clamor raised against having the managers produce what will crowd the theatre. If the public do not go on Monday night to see Mr. Montgomery, Mr. Barrett, and Mr. McCullough, in "Julius Cæsar," then they are incapable of appreciating an intellectual feast when it is set before them. Mr. Barrett has made his mark in Cassius—it is one of his best characters; Mr. McCullough is probably without an equal as Brutus; and Mr. Montgomery has shown by what he has done what he can do with the part of Mark Antony. To night, Mr. Montgomery will appear as Sir Giles Overreach, in "A New Way to Pay Old Debts," with Mr. McCullough as **Wellborn.**



Sebastopol was located near today's Soughouse.

