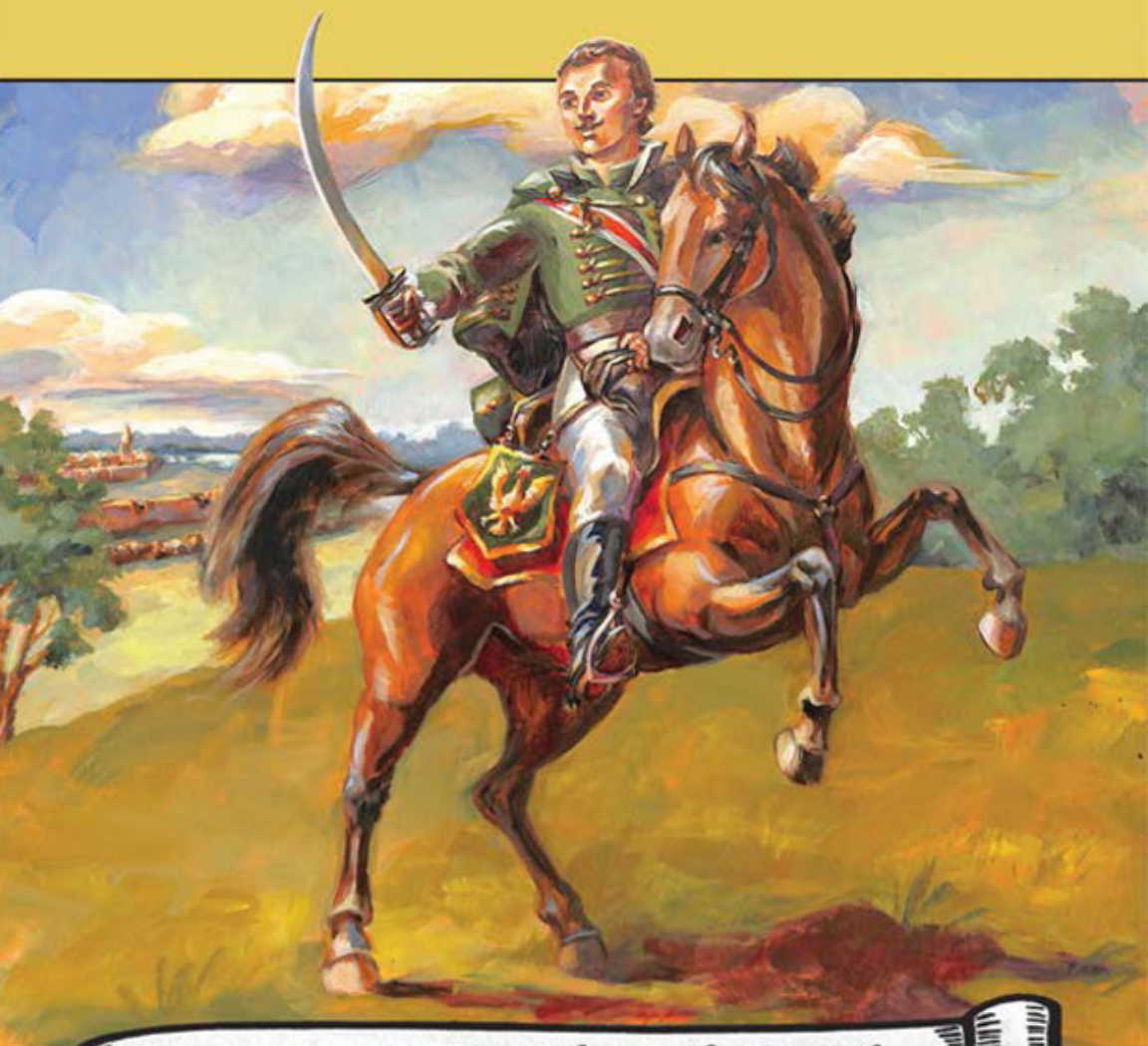


Cavalry Hero

Casimir Pułaski



Portraits in Faith and Freedom

Dorothy Adams

Cavalry Hero

Casimir Pulaski

by Dorothy Adams



Illustrated by Irena Lorentowicz

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Portraits in Faith and Freedom

SET 2: POLISH FIGURES

So Young a Queen: Jadwiga of Poland

Cavalry Hero: Casimir Pulaski

The Lion of Poland: The Story of Paderewski

Statement on Portraits in Faith and Freedom

Bethlehem Books is bringing back this series of biographies originally made available in the 1950's and 60's by publishers who wished to introduce young people to a wide range of arresting and faithful Catholic lives. Slightly edited now for the modern reader, these biographies present key people and events from the past that help us reflect anew on the meaning of freedom. They depict how powerfully men and women of faith have formed and influenced the world in which they live.

Web Resources

To access printable maps, a timeline, and other information, visit <https://www.bethlehembooks.com/cavalry-hero-casamir-pulaski-820>

About Usage of Outdated Terms

In republishing the books that form our *Portraits in Faith and Freedom* series, the editors considered whether it would be worthwhile to update the authors' usage of words like "Indian" and "Negro." The more current preference among many is "Native American" and "African American." The editors found, however, that changing the original terms often did not work well for the context of those times. The attitudes of respect and honesty that inspired these works—written in the 1950s and early 1960s—clearly conveyed the authors' positive meaning. In most cases, therefore, we have let the words stand.

Bethlehem Books

TO MAJA, EVA,
ANNJA AND ANDREW

Contents

Web Resources	v
Maps	1
Pronunciation Guide	3
1. At Winiary	4
2. Boyhood	13
3. The Knights	21
4. The Polish Confederates	32
5. Exile and Prison	43
6. The American Dream	48
7. Washington's Aide	53
8. Winter of Disappointment	65
9. Pulaski's Legion	72
10. Treachery at Little Egg Harbor	79
11. Victory at Charleston	87
12. The Battle of Savannah	96
13. A Hero's End	107
About the Author	112
Historical Insights by Daria Sockey	113
List of titles in Portraits in Faith and Freedom	115

Maps





Pronunciation Guide

How to Pronounce a Few Polish Places and Names

PLACES

Winiary = VIN ya ry

Cracow = CRAC ow

Czestochowa = Ches tuh HOH vah

Lwow = leVOHF

RIVER

Dnieper = NEE pr (rhymes with “keeper”)

NAME

Poniatowski = Pon ya TOF ski

1. At Winiary

AT THE TIME of Casimir Pulaski's birth Poland was at peace. He was born on March 4, 1747, the second son of Joseph Pulaski, a rich and very successful lawyer. This law practice had brought Count Pulaski an enormous fortune. Instead of money, he had preferred being paid in land, and during his lifetime he had become one of the greatest landowners in Poland.

He lived in a rambling, white-columned homestead called Winiary where he had taken his bride after their marriage, and where all his eight children were born. It was situated in Podolia, a province of southeast Poland which was near the perilous Russian border.

The news of Casimir's birth spread in that swift way news traveled by word of mouth in a time when there was neither telephone nor telegraph. At once all the friends and relatives of the Pulaski family packed into their lumbering horse-drawn coaches, or jumped into their saddles to set off for Winiary.



In those days baptisms were the occasions for great celebrations. They were considered as a wonderful opportunity for getting

together and seeing friends and acquaintances from all parts of Poland. The journey was an added excuse to visit still others as stops for the night were made on the way. The baptism of Casimir provided countless people with the pretext for a trip and a holiday.

Winiary was in a commotion of preparation for the great number of guests certain to arrive. Meats were turning on the roasting spits over the fire in the kitchen. The guest wings opening out on the gardens were being cleared and aired. Huntsmen were searching the woods for game: deer, pheasant and wild boar, while fishermen combed the streams and lakes for pike and carp. Smoke curled above the bakehouses where piles of bread were raked from the coals. The pantry maids fashioned cakes and pastries and the steward decanted wine from the oak casks in the cellar.

But the greatest excitement was in the dining room where the feast was being laid out on the table, extended to its full length, and the sideboards were already groaning with china and glass. Everything was being put in readiness for a two weeks' celebration. Some guests might stay but a day or two, some would remain a week, but others would surely come to take their place. All in all, several hundred visitors were expected.

The old housekeeper oversaw all the preparations. She was determined to keep her mistress, Countess Pulaska, the baby's mother, in bed and away from the excitement. She bustled about the bedroom, her black taffeta petticoat rustling as she laid out the robe in which, two years before, Francis, Casimir's older brother, was baptized and his father and grandfather before him. The lace-ruffled and embroidered pillow on which the child would be held was properly pressed and trimmed with new ribbons.

The two older sisters, Anna and Josepha, would not play in their room, but stayed sitting on their mother's bed begging to see their new brother.

"You spoil them, Madame. You should rest," the housekeeper scolded in vain, as the nurse in her gay linen dress, embroidered with red poppies and blue cornflowers, laid the baby in Countess Pulaska's arms.

Then the aunt who was to be Casimir's godmother appeared in the doorway. "Everyone is in the chapel," she announced, and added with a smile, "Hurry; all is ready and waiting."

While the housekeeper hastened to tie Casimir on his gorgeous ruffled pillow and arrange the huge bow, his sisters jumped and skipped about him in great excitement. It seemed as though the housekeeper would never be satisfied with the appearance of her charge; but at last she placed him in his godmother's arms. The procession swept out of the room, the nurse steadying the pillow and the old housekeeper leading the little girls firmly by their hands.

The chapel, built at the rear of the house at the end of the entrance hall, was reached through Joseph Pulaski's study. It was decorated in gold and white, the ceiling painted blue like the sky with angels peeping out between floating clouds. As it was not large enough to hold all the guests, most of the men were standing either in the hall or in the study, where they could exchange bits of news and watch the ceremony through the open doors. As Casimir was borne in on his godmother's arms, they stopped chatting with Father Mark, the kindly, black-bearded Carmelite priest who lived with the family. In silence Casimir was brought to the font, and Father Mark began intoning the prayers. When the baby wailed lustily in protest as the water trickled over his head, everyone agreed that this was a good sign. It was an old Polish saying that if the child cried loudly he was putting up strong resistance to the devil.

Casimir's earliest recollection was of his father, holding him in a saddle, and leading the horse down the sandy driveway to the village gate. He never forgot the warmth of the strong, affectionate embrace that steadied him, or the smell of the sweet-scented lime trees, the home of countless families of birds chirping and singing high in the branches over his head. On their return his mother, who was standing in the shadow of the pillared portico, had waved and called "Bravo."

When Casimir was five his brother Anthony was born. By that time two more sisters had come into the world, but their births had occurred quietly, almost unnoticed. The day Anthony was born, however, his father promised Casimir the pony that had hitherto belonged to his older brother Francis. Francis, his father said, was now big enough to have the young Arabian mare.

As soon as the commotion over Anthony's baptism had subsided and the guests had all gone home, Count Pulaski called to

Casimir to go with him to the stable. "I want you to learn how to handle a horse properly," he explained, as the two walked hand in hand.

"But I know how to ride," Casimir boasted.

His father smiled. He had watched his son bouncing along the driveway, the pony sauntering or jogging as he pleased.

In the stables they found old Michael the coachman who was ordering the grooms about with a lordly air. Tactfully Joseph Pulkaski waited to speak until Michael noticed them.

"I'm putting Casimir in your hands," he then said. "He is to stay in the paddock until you feel satisfied he has full control of his mount. While I am far away in Warsaw you are in charge, and you decide when to let him go out with Francis."



So for the next few months Casimir rode round and round the paddock beside a groom under the exacting eye of Michael. The coachman never praised the boy however carefully he went through his paces. At a certain place he had to canter, at another gallop, then bring his pony to a trot in a split second. Old Michael accepted no excuses. "Either you know how to ride a horse or you don't," he would say sternly. "You don't leave the paddock for the fields until you do!"

There was no use in asking his mother to come to watch him ride in order to persuade Michael to let him go out sooner with Francis. Everything around the stables and the horses was under the old coachman's rule. Nor would he have hesitated to tell Countess Pulaska, "The boy doesn't go out until *I* say he is ready to."

Although Casimir had early proved he was fearless, he now tried to learn how to be patient, for he was naturally impetuous and quick of temper. Michael would not be hurried, and he taught Casimir to ride with great precision.

"You need your right hand free for your gun when you go hunting," Michael explained. "You must hold the bridle only with your left. In an emergency, when both hands are needed, you will have to guide the horse with your knees." Casimir was then shown how to jump over logs, and finally over a path the width of a stream which wound through the meadows.

At the end of the summer he made his first trip to the woods with the groom and Francis. Old Michael drove down the lane to watch them clear the brook. The wind whistled in Casimir's ears as he flew across rolling farm land, stretching as far as he could see, the grain sparkling and dancing in the sun. Rabbits kicked up their white tails and scuttled into hiding. The larks circled overhead, and from far off he heard the peasants singing in rhythm with their work. He never forgot the joy of that first wild, free ride.

That evening when he boasted to his mother that he could jump as well as Francis, she remarked, "Don't forget, dear, pride comes before a fall. Watch carefully that tomorrow you do as well as to-day." Marianne Pulaska adored her children but she never spoiled them.

However, Casimir's older sisters, who could ride as well as he, hugged him. They loved their dauntless little five-year-old brother

with his curling yellow hair, intelligent eyes and sturdy figure. Anna was especially devoted. She was happy he could now take her place riding with Francis. At eleven she felt quite grown up and preferred to accompany her mother on the morning round of visits in the village. She was already talking about becoming a nun.

The younger sister, Josepha, however, was always undecided whether to join her mother or her brothers. She loved to play tag on horseback, too, and when neighboring children drove over to Winiary with their parents for tea, it was she who led the way to the stables and organized the game.

Francis was already a fine horseman. He could ride as fast and wheel as abruptly as much older boys. But he often stole back to the house to listen quietly to the conversation about the tea table. Everyone predicted he would be a lawyer and a statesman like his father when he grew up.

When he was six Casimir was sent to the nearby parish school which Francis, Anna and Josepha also attended. He had already learned to read and write at home, and now he began to study Latin. The lessons were not too difficult, and in the afternoon he and his friends played at stalking Cossacks in the forest. Behind each tree lurked an enemy. The boys used wooden lances which they made themselves, and as they dashed about the forest they would hack down the sapling trees which represented their foe.

As they grew older they learned to shoot so straight that they could hit a bull's-eye at full gallop. They loved to set up apples on the fence posts and to split them apart. When the wind was blowing, they tied a light board to a branch to make a moving target and would shoot at it as they cantered past. These games were to prove very useful when they grew older and play turned into the sad reality of war.

During Casimir's childhood, however, no one thought of war or invasions. Podolia was so peaceful that no one locked his doors at night. The roads were guarded by little shrines to Our Lady at Częstochowa to whom everyone, peasant and noble alike, made a pilgrimage at one time or another in their lives.

It was the children's privilege to serve these pilgrims and all the beggars who stopped at Winiary. They had been taught the old Polish saying, "The guest in the home is Christ in the home."