

PRO LIBERTATE, RATIONE, ET TOLERANTIA

Sixty years old, plagued with chronic illness, and suffering from impaired vision and hearing, a man was confined to his home in Cracow, Poland, when the mob burst through the door. They had come for this damnable heretic. Dragged into the market place in his night clothes, he was forced to watch as enraged university students made a great bonfire of his treasured books and manuscripts. The crowd could not decide whether their victim should be burned alive or drowned, and in the confusion one of the university professors spirited him out of harm's reach.

The heretic's name was Faustus Socinus (Sozzini). His heresy was Unitarianism. Though born in Italy in 1529, he had lived for the past twenty years in Poland and had become the spiritual leader of the Polish Unitarians, called "The Polish Brethren," with the martyrdom of Catherine Weigel (see Our Liberal Heritage No. 1) marking their early history. A quiet scholarly man, Socinus hated religious controversy, but defended his beliefs when forced to it. He even had been the subject of an earlier violent street attack. Where could he find the peace and safety to rebuild his library and continue his studies?

Luslawice was the place, and here Socinus would spend the rest of his days. Lying in the charming valley of the Dunajec River, 45 miles southeast of Cracow, the community contained 300 Unitarian families. Their young minister, Peter Statorius, served a flourishing church and shared Socinus's scholarly interests. Luslawice boasted an important academy and a printing press. The local nobility, the Blonski and Taszycki families, were both Unitarian. Abram Blonski even built a Unitarian chapel by his manor house.

Socinus mourned the loss of his books and papers, but here he was among friends and could start anew. His health, however, never recovered, and six years later, in 1604, he died, here at Luslawice. He was buried in the Unitarian cemetery on a hill overlooking the flowing Dunajec. A monument of native sandstone was erected, suitably inscribed.

By 1660, Unitarianism in Poland had been wiped out by orthodox oppression. In time, the abandoned cemetery at Luslawice disappeared, leaving visible only a sandstone cube, thirty inches square, from which most of the inscription had worn away. It was the base of Socinus's monument. In 1933, Earl Morse Wilbur, historian of Unitarianism and dean of the Starr King School for the Ministry (which trained both Danny Reed and Paul Boothby, our former and current ministers), acted to set matters right. With enthusiastic Polish support, he organized the erection of an impressive monument at Socinus's grave to enshrine the worn old sandstone cube. On the polished side of the new monument a Latin inscription dedicated the new monument to the memory of Faustus Socinus "IN RECOGNITION OF HIS EFFORTS FOR FREEDOM, REASON, AND TOLERANCE IN RELIGION."

Ref.: Earle Morse Wilbur, "The Grave and Monument of Faustus Socinus at Luslawice," *Proceedings of the Unitarian Historical Society*, vol. 4, Pt. 2 (1936), pp. 25-41