

The Tale of the Irish O'Dea clan in Poland By Mieczyslaw Ody, Gdansk, Poland

Editor's note: This is a presentation made by a descendant of an O'Dea seafaring family who settled in Poland. Mr. Ody, who does not speak English, read this phonetically to an enthralled audience at the gathering in Ennis.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

As a participant of this fine assembly of O'Dea Clan it is an honour to me to be here today, with all of you.

In the clan's magazine my name was presented together with my dear cousin Hanya currently living in the USA. From this article you will learn that I live in Poland in the city of Gdansk.

Good family relations have always been of great importance to me and my dearest. That is why I can still remember a lot of facts concerning my family. It has been fifteen years since I seriously started to study my family's genealogy. On this point I have to mention that because of the censorship in communist Poland it was impossible before the year 1989 to do this.

Because of the Second World War, the church's birth register books for Eastern Pomerania (now a Polish district) were taken to Regensburg in Germany, to their bishop's archives. After the agreement between Polish and German Catholic authorities, these books were returned in 2002 and since that year they have been accessible in Pelplin's Diocese. I make use of them from time to time.

Enough history for now, otherwise I will forget to introduce myself. My name is Mieczyslaw, which is of Slavonic origin meaning "the one, who gives glory to swords". My surname is ODYA. I was born in Grudziadz (lat. Grudentum) by the Wisla River. My father was a teacher at secondary and high school. When the Second World War broke out, my father was murdered by the Germans. My grandfather Joseph lost three sons in that horrible war. Apart from my father, one of my uncles died as a soldier in Warsaw in "September campaign" of 1939, after the attack of Hitler's troops. My second uncle, a priest, died a horrific death in the Dachau Concentration Camp. My mother Trudy had a very hard life as a widow, bringing me and my sister Barbara up.

I managed to qualify as an expert in building roads and bridges and as a legal adviser. My grandfather - Joseph and Hanya's grandfather - Boleslaw were brothers, - they also had ten other siblings.

The provenance of twelve generations is presented on genealogical tables, which I have brought with me. My three ladies: my wife Helena, daughter Kasia, and my granddaughter Zosia stayed in Gdansk-Oliwa.

Please forgive me my poor English, but today I have the only opportunity to give a speech to the members of O'Dea Clan, normally scattered around the world. I am not an experienced traveler. This journey to Ireland is my first in which I crossed the sea. To European capitals, such as Vilnius, Prague and Berlin I go by train or car.

Meeting so many strangers, but at the same time because of the common surname - close people, is a great experience for me. I am sure it will encourage me to further genealogical research, especially on the Irish origin of the Ody family in Poland.

Although the probability of our Irish origin hasn't been documentarily proved yet, our ancestors told us about some Irish shipwreck survivors. The story tells about two O'Dea brothers who were sailing across the Baltic Sea, in pursuit of weapons and help from the Inlands to the Irish, though we don't know when exactly it had happened, whether sixteenth or seventeenth century.

Today, when there aren't any borders, it is much easier to learn about other countries, nationalities, customs, and especially about other people's cultures. This is a precious sign of our times, we're living in.

In the end, I would like to invite you to my country - Poland and to one of its most beautiful cities - the thousand year old Gdansk. Thank you.