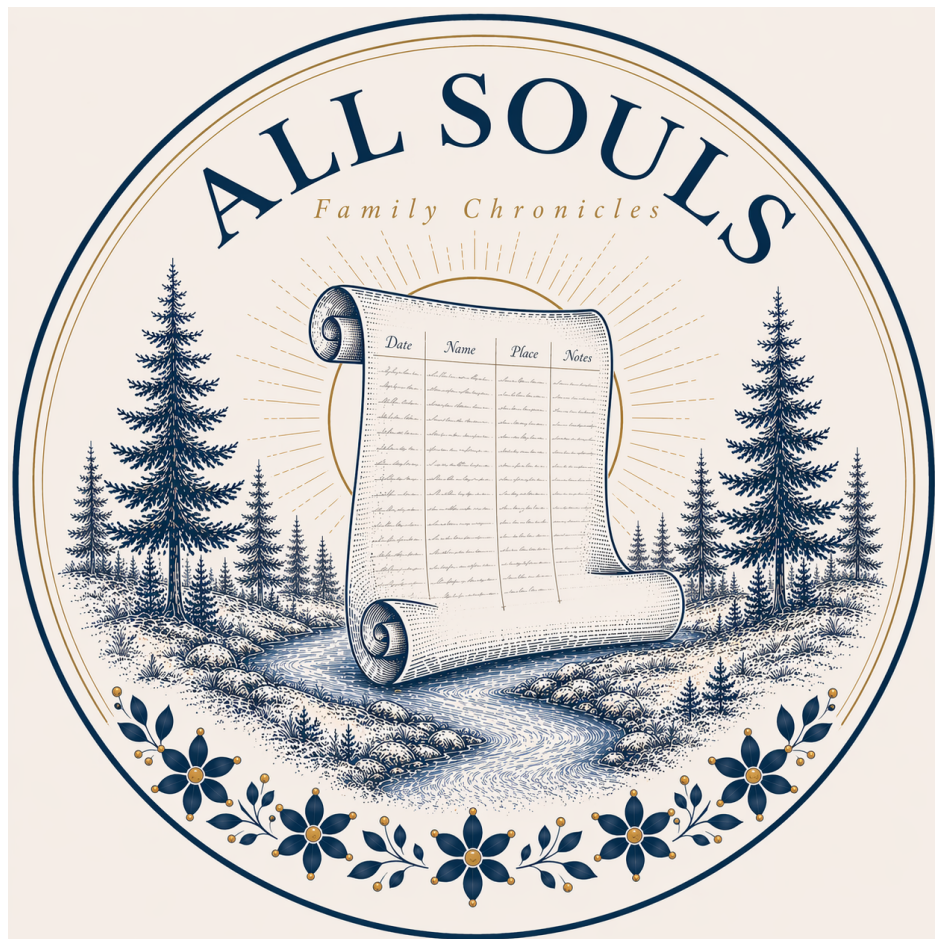


Research Report
Cecilia Oswaldowska (1864–1953)
Sister Mary Agnieszka, CSSF



Identifying Caecilia Oszwałdowska, Later Known as Sister Mary Agnieszka

Prepared as a Sample Case Study for All Souls Family Chronicles

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Research Objective

The purpose of this research was to identify "Ceylia Qswaldowski," a Polish-born sister enumerated in 1930 at Mother of Good Counsel Convent in Chicago, Illinois. At the outset, it was unclear whether this was her birth name or a religious name, and the unusual spelling offered little to work with. The research that followed aimed to determine who she really was — her origins, her family, and the records that could tell her story.

Background Information

The starting point for this research was a single census entry: "Ceylia Qswaldowski," listed on line 46 of the 1930 United States census at Mother of Good Counsel Convent in Chicago, Illinois. She was recorded as 65 years old, born in Poland, with Polish as her native language and English literacy noted. The record placed her immigration to the United States in 1872 and indicated she had become a naturalized citizen. Her occupation was listed as "sewer" — the census term for a seamstress.

That entry raised more questions than it answered. The name was oddly spelled, no birth name was given, and the religious title offered no clear path to earlier records. Establishing who she was would mean working across multiple languages, record types, and naming conventions.

Scope and Methodology

This research drew on records created in both the United States and the former Prussian territories of Poland, spanning the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sources included United States census records, immigration and naturalization records, parish baptismal registers, and institutional histories of the Felician Sisters.

The central challenge throughout was that almost no record in this case presents itself cleanly. The subject appears under a different name spelling in nearly every document she left behind, her forename shifts between its Polish, Latin, German, and English forms depending on who recorded it and when, and the boundary between her civil and religious identities further complicated the picture. Identifying her required weighing each piece of evidence in context — considering who created the record, under what circumstances, and how much time had passed since the event being recorded. Both direct and indirect evidence were used, and discrepancies were assessed rather than dismissed.

Findings

1. 1930 United States Census: Initial Identification

The 1930 census entry for "Ceylia Qswaldowski" at Mother of Good Counsel Convent in Chicago — a record that offered age, birthplace, immigration year, and occupation, but no birth name and no obvious path to earlier documentation. The unusual surname spelling compounded the difficulty. Establishing her identity meant looking both backward and forward in time, across multiple record types, for a woman whose name changed depending on who was recording it and why.

2. Earlier Census Records: Establishing Continuity

Because the Mother of Good Counsel Convent was not completed until 1927, and the province itself was established in 1910 with its initial headquarters in Milwaukee, the search for earlier records moved to Wisconsin. Two census entries emerged, both in Milwaukee.

In 1920, a woman recorded as "Cecilia Oswaldowski," age 55, appeared at St. Joseph's Orphanage in Milwaukee — a home for homeless Polish children founded and operated by the Felician Sisters — with an age consistent with a birth year of approximately 1864–1865 and a birthplace recorded as "Posen Poland." A decade earlier, in 1910, the same name appears again at St. Joseph's Orphanage, her birthplace now recorded within the German Empire, reflecting the political designation of Prussian Poland at the time. The enumeration district is identical in both years.

Taken on their own, these records cannot establish identity with certainty. The surname spelling differs from the 1930 entry, and census records alone carry known limitations. But the age progression is consistent, the geographic and institutional context aligns, and the evidence points steadily in one direction.

3. Naturalization Records: Linking Civil and Religious Identity

The naturalization records resolved what the census records could only suggest. A Declaration of Intent filed in Milwaukee on 21 April 1921 names "Cecilia Oswaldowski," recording a birth date of 22 November 1864 and a birthplace of Dombrowka, Poland — details consistent with everything identified so far.

The Petition for Naturalization filed on 26 April 1923 is the key document in this case. It names the petitioner as "Cecilia or Mary Agnes Oswaldowska," explicitly linking her civil name to her religious name in a single legal record. There is no ambiguity here: the woman known in census records as Cecilia Oswaldowski and the sister known in religious life as Mary Agnieszka are the same person. The Oath of Allegiance taken on 10 September 1923 completed the naturalization process.

With this established, the earlier census entries fall into place, and the remaining records serve to fill out the picture of who she was rather than to prove who she was.

4. From West Prussia to America: Immigration and Baptismal Records

The 1930 census records her immigration year as 1872, and a corresponding entry was identified in the Hamburg departure records for that year. Among those leaving from the Graudenz region of West Prussia was "Cäcilie Oczwaldowski," an eight-year-old girl traveling with her parents, Johann and Antonina Oczwaldowski, and siblings. The age is consistent with a birth year of 1864, and the place of origin corresponds with Dombrowka, as recorded in her naturalization documents. The surname spelling varies, as it does throughout this case — but that alone is not cause for doubt. What remained to be confirmed were the names of her parents.

That confirmation came from a baptismal record in the parish of Grutta, in the Graudenz district of West Prussia, recording the birth of Caecilia Oswaldowska on 21 November 1864 and her baptism six days later. She is identified as the daughter of Joannes (Johann) Oswaldowski and Antonina Majewska — the same names recorded in the Hamburg list. This closed the loop, firmly connecting Cecilia Oswaldowska to her family of origin and to a specific parish in West Prussia.

Her naturalization records give her birth date as 22 November 1864 — one day later than the parish register. The difference is easily accounted for: November 22nd is the feast day of Saint Cecilia, and it would not be unusual for a woman of her background and vocation to remember her saint's day more reliably than her actual birthday.

5. Religious Identity and Life within the Felician Sisters

Cecilia Oswaldowska entered the Felician Sisters in 1882 from Saint Stanislaus Kostka Parish in Chicago — though how her family came to settle there after their arrival in the United States in 1872 remains to be established. From Saint Stanislaus Kostka she went on to serve in multiple communities across the country, including Saint Joseph's Orphanage in Milwaukee, where census records place her in both 1910 and 1920.

Her rise within the congregation was significant. By 1910 she held the position of provincial bursar within the newly established Mother of Good Counsel Province and served on the provincial council, continuing in leadership roles into the 1920s. Her occupation in census records as a seamstress reflects the practical labor that

ran alongside those responsibilities — the kind of work that kept a religious community functioning.

By 1930 she was in Chicago, at the Mother of Good Counsel Convent, which had become the provincial headquarters. It is where the record that began this research found her.

6. Later-Life Records

The 1940 and 1950 census records find Cecilia Oswaldowska still in Chicago, still at the Mother of Good Counsel Convent. By this point her name in the records has drifted furthest from its origins — she appears in 1940 as "Celia Oswaldanski" and in 1950 simply as "Agnes Oswaldowski," the Polish Agnieszka now fully anglicized. It is a reminder of how much a name could shift across a lifetime of documentation, and how easily the same woman could seem like several different people to a researcher working backward.

She died on 6 September 1953 in Chicago. Her death record names her as "Cecilia or Sister Mary Agnes Oswaldowska" and identifies her parents as John Oswaldowski and Antonina Majewska — details consistent with everything found across nearly a century of records on two continents. She was buried on 10 September 1953 at Saint Adalbert Catholic Cemetery in Niles, Illinois, in the section reserved for the Felician Sisters.

Conclusion

She began this research as a misspelled name on a census sheet — a woman whose identity had been obscured by time, language, and the particular way religious life could render a person invisible to the records that surround her. She ends it as Cecilia Oswaldowska, born 21 November 1864 in the parish of Grutta, West Prussia, daughter of Johann Oswaldowski and Antonina Majewska, who crossed an ocean as a child and spent her adult life in service to her faith and her community.

That identification rests on a body of evidence spanning two continents and nearly a century — census records, naturalization documents, immigration lists, parish registers, and institutional histories — each imperfect on its own, each made more meaningful by the others. The naturalization petition naming her as both "Cecilia"

and "Mary Agnes" was the pivot point, but it was the accumulation of consistent detail across every other record that gave it its full weight.

Cases like this one are rarely straightforward. The names shift, the borders move, the records thin out at precisely the moments that matter most. But the people are there, waiting to be found.

Research Limitations

The 1880 United States census presented the first significant gap. The family is believed to have been in Chicago by this point, and the search focused on enumeration districts known to serve the heavily Polish neighborhoods around Saint Stanislaus Kostka Parish. Several districts were examined, including one spanning seventy pages that was reviewed line by line. When a Chicago directory later placed Cecilia's mother at an address in a different enumeration district, that district was searched as well. Neither effort produced a match. The density of urban census districts, combined with the range of spelling variations this family's surname attracted, likely accounts for the absence — but the record, if it exists, has not yet been found.

The 1900 census presented a different kind of challenge. By that point Cecilia had been a member of the Felician Sisters for nearly two decades, and women in religious communities are notoriously difficult to locate in census records of this period. Institutional enumeration practices varied, religious names were used inconsistently, and a sister might appear in a convent far outside the expected geographic area. No definitive entry was located.

Neither gap undermines the identification established in this report. They remain open questions, and honest ones.

Recommendations for Further Research

Several avenues remain open for future research:

- **Locate additional parish records in Grutta and surrounding parishes,** including marriage and burial records for her parents, Johann Oswaldowski

and Antonina Majewska, to better document the family structure and earlier generations.

- **Examine Chicago parish records**, particularly those of Saint Stanislaus Kostka Parish, to identify potential records of her entry into the Felician Sisters or connections to family members following immigration.
- **Search for records of her religious profession and service within the Felician Sisters**, which may provide further detail regarding her roles, assignments, and movements between communities.
- **Investigate the lives of her siblings**, identified in the immigration record, to determine whether other family members remained in the United States or returned to Europe.

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Published Source

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