

The Survival of Poland - I

Lead: Through centuries of conquest and partition Poland has been a pawn in the hands of the great powers of Europe. At times it survived but almost as little more than an idea.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The nation of Poland lies in the heartland of Europe surrounded on all sides by great powers. There are no significant natural boundaries that mark its territory. Not unlike the Midwestern United States, Poland stretches over flat lands and lies in the

middle of the great east European plain. The absence of clearly defined borders meant that Poland was open to invasion on all fronts: by Germans to the west, Russia from the east, Austria and the Ottoman Empire to the south and Sweden to the north.

Despite these disadvantages Poland has known periods of ascendancy. In 1386 the Kingdom was expanded by the marriage of Polish Queen Jadwiga (Yahd vee gah) and Grand Duke Wladislaw Jagiello (Vwah dee swahv Yah geh low) of Lithuania. For three centuries the Polish Lithuanian Commonwealth was the dominant power in the region expanding to include East and West Prussia. However, after 1572 the Polish crown

became an elective one and powerful nobles vying for power with each other and the King brought instability and weakened Poland as the power of its neighbors was growing. In the 1600s and 1700s, wars and political weakness led to a series of partitions.

The primary author of Poland's dismemberment was Russian Empress Catherine the Great who came to power in 1762 determined to expand Russia's borders into Europe. Poland lay in her path and was ripe for the picking. In 1772 and then again in 1793 Russia, Prussia and Austria took great bites out of Polish territory. Two years later, in a final carving of Poland, the nation simply disappeared. Next time: Poland lives.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts

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