

# Our Polish Pioneer Settlers

Patricia Dawson

When the first Poles came to South Australia in the early 1840's, many of them went to the Barossa region because there were Germans living there with whom they used to coexist in the Duchy of Poznan/Prussia. Others settled in the Adelaide Hills around the Hahndorf area. All of those who had left the Duchy of Poznan in order to find better conditions abroad were of this tough Polish type. Amongst those were Mathias and Constance Pryzibilla nee Niemcowna also the Schmucker family. Later many of their descendants settled in Farrel Flat and Mintaro.

**During the following years and especially in the 1850's more Polish families began to arrive. They settled in the Hill River Sevenhill and Penwortham areas also a few went to live and farm at Bumburnie just north of Clare.**

They brought with them various trades such as Butchers, Carpenters, Boot-makers, Wheelwrights and Blacksmiths. But most importantly many were Farmers and Labourers who's knowledge and experience in that field, was in high demand in the new State of South Australia.

On 22 January 1857, Joseph Niemetz was the first Polish name to appear on the register of land holders in the Polish Hill River area, quickly followed by Stanislaus Malycha.

Others rapidly followed and within a few years, most of the original Hill River survey was held by Poles. No surprise that it eventually became known as "Polish Hill River". Other Polish families to settle in the region were Nykiel, Bulla, Polomka, Malycha, Weyman and Wyman, Seipelt, Kostera, Kluska, Rucioch, Drula, Pawelski, & Modystach.

It was not long before there were more than 30 cottages scattered throughout Polish Hill River all having large families living within.

These people would trek over the hills too attend Mass at St Aloysius church in Sevenhill. Although a few of the priests there could speak some German, it was not in their own language of Polish which they greatly missed.



They then decided to build their very own church and school rooms.

In 1869 John Nykiel Snr donated land for this purpose allocating Lucas Malycha and Paul Polomka also Jacob Nykiel as the Trustees. A Committee was formed of local Polish men including the names of Ahle, Bulla, Borowicki, Kostera & Kluska. Malycha, Modystach & Marlow, Nykiel & Niemetz, Pawelski, Rucioch & Wyman & Weiman families. There were more, like Martin Buchkowski, Lenartowicz, Kovak but the ones mentioned are still well known names to us here at the present time.

The church of St Stanislaus Kostka was completed in 1870 and by this time Rev Father Leon Rogalski a Jesuit priest from Poland had arrived. He immediately commenced saying Services in the new Church and administering to his beloved flock of Poles.

In 1871 the school rooms were completed – this same year Fr Rogalski placed an article in the Catholic Press advising that the ***“Poles in Sevenhill and Hill River have their own school in the Polish and English Languages”***.

*Father Leon Rogalski*



**1872:** The Irish Harp and Farmers Herald - included an articles stating *“that through the persistent and tireless exertions of the Rev. Leo Rogalski, S. J., a very neat little school chapel has been built and opened at Hill River for the use of the Polish inhabitants of that district”*.

Also in 1872 the first mention of Polish schooling at Hill River was noted in Sands and McDougall’s “ Directory of South Australia”.

*“Father Rogalski now has Missions for Poles, about 200 souls (i.e. 40 families) residing in Sevenhill and Hill River, who have their own Polish-English school’*

Fr Rogalski with the help of local families taught the children until June the 21<sup>st</sup> 1874 when the Sisters of St Joseph arrived. They were received by John Nykiel and Frank Wayman. However, the sisters only stayed for 10 years as they found it was far to remote for them.

**Then in 1882** The Polish settlers employed an Irish teacher from Undayla by the name of “James Crowe”.

James was very popular amongst the families and not only taught the children schoolwork but also included music and singing which was very important to the Poles. He also learnt to speak some of the Polish language.

Sadly, due to many of the families seeking larger farm holdings. having moved to the northern districts around Petersburg (Peterborough) the remaining families found it very difficult to pay for private teachers and in 1886 the school was taken over by the State Government when it then became known as the **Sevenhill East School** and remained open until the decline of students forced its closure in 1924.

More than 24 Teachers taught in the school during those years. The average attendance was between 25 - 40 pupils this eventually dwindling to 8 at it’s closure in 1924.

Following the closure of the school, Services were held at St Stanislaus Church monthly until 1950 for the local families.

This we know by the entries in both Bert Kluska and John Rucioch diaries.

The Church was deconsecrated that year.

Over the ensuing years the building was used by a local farmer for Hay and storage and unfortunately during this time most all the records were lost or destroyed.

**The devastating Bushfire of 1965 caused severe damage to the building and sadly it fell into a state of ruins.**

\*\*\*\*\*

The post WW2 poles heard about the history of the area and of the church of St Stanislaus. This Community gathered together and decided to restore the Church and Schoolroom.

**1971.** A Committee was formed. Money was then raised for the restoration of the Church & School rooms. Then the worked commenced. The first building to be restored was the Church followed by the school rooms which now represent the Museum.

**1980.** The Polish Hill River Church & Museum was placed on the Register of State Heritage.

**1988.** It was officially opened to the public. We owe these Post War Polish migrants so much for their contribution to the restoration of the church and museum.

\*\*\*\*\*

**During 1860's through to the 1880's,** More Polish families continued to arrive and settle here including the Borowski, Bryksy, Buda, Bocian, Janetski, Kluska & Konopka Kozlowski & Novack, Mathys, Miloch & Nayda, Seipelt, Sobszak, Trolepsey, Vogt, Wytkin, Yurczek. These all settled in and around Penwortham and Sevenhill also Polish Hill River.

In **1890** Fr Rogalski wrote a list of the names of 62 families and 322 Polish Souls living in Sevenhill, Penwortham & Hill River. Many of their descendants are still living here today.

The graveyard in Sevenhill, where so many Polish pioneers were buried, shows the Polish roots of this community even today. Unfortunately, the Polish language has not survived.

In **1954**, one could speak Polish locally with just six people. Mary Seipelt (nee Malycha) and her son Tom. Annie and Frank Kluska (nee Pawelski) also Caroline Rucioch and her son John. Sadly with their passing the old Polish Dialect disappeared with them. These Polish families contributed immensely not only to this area but also in the northern districts of Peterborough and surrounds where the names are still very prominent.



All of our ancestors had interesting stories to be told no matter what their country of origin. I have selected a few of these stories and information to pass on beginning with the Nykiel family who originally settled in Polish Hill River where Pikes Winery is now.

Fot. Andrew Darling

John Nykiel Snr donated the land for St Stanislaus Church & schoolrooms.

John Nykiel junior was known as the 'King of the Poles' for he spoke and wrote seven languages fluently. People travelled many miles to seek legal advice from him.

He was also Proprietor of the 'Black Eagle' Hotel at Sevenhill which his son managed. He travelled extensively and on one of his trips he brought gum trees from Tasmania and transplanted them close to his home at Polish Hill River.

John Joseph (3<sup>rd</sup>) was known as John Nykiel the Younger – he assisted his father on his father's farm and also had a 'Butcher business' which he operated out of the small mud and stone hut, located at the rear of the homestead. (now Pikes Winery). This hut was the original home. By 1910, he had relocated himself and his family to Blyth where he became the Licensee of the Hotel there.

**The Nykiel family is credited with being the first of the Polish settlers to cultivate the vine, and in time most Polish landholders had a small garden with assorted fruit trees plus a small patch of vines.**

They were essentially mixed farming operations, with cereal and livestock providing most of the income. Legend is that most of these families made a little wine for their own consumption.

During the 1890's there was a large vineyard development adjacent to the Mintaro Road by Clare doctor **John Bain**, comprising 100 acres (*this property was originally owned by Stanislaus and Rosalia Malycha*). Dr Bain may have intended to construct a winery however during the 1890's, Doctor Bain lost considerable money on mining ventures. He died in 1903 and the property was purchased by the Main brothers, who constructed their Nyora winery during 1904.

Nyora was planned to produce 10,000 gallons of wine during its first vintage. Nyora winery continued to produce until 1908 then ceased to function as a winery and the Main Brothers leased the property.

All of Dr Bain's vines were removed and replaced by Currant vines.

For many years the old winery operated as an apple-packing shed. The Nyora ruins are a prominent landmark adjacent to a bend in the Sevenhill Mintaro road.

Both Currants and Wine grapes were still growing on these properties up until the late 1960's. The last of these being Rucioch's, Seipelt's, Kluska's, Wayman's & Modystack. However by this time the Stanley Dried fruits Association in Clare had closed down making the situation of producing Currants unviable. It was at this stage that owners grafted the currant vines to different varieties consisting of Riesling, Grenache, Pedro's and Shiraz. These grapes were sought after by the Clare Wineries for the excellent wine they produced.

During the following years Wolf Blass and Penfolds having realised the value of wine produced from this area then purchased land to plant their own respective Vineyards the ones you see today.

The early Polish settlers of Polish Hill River were tough and shrewd. An old descendant **Joe Baxter** (now deceased) had childhood recollections of his great-grandmother, Granny Nykiel, and recounts some of the stories that were passed down.

**Mary Anne Rucioch**, was born in Gros Dammer in Western Poland about 1840. She came to South Australia in 1856 and married Jacob Nykiel in 1861.

They occupied land in Polish Hill River near what is now known as the "Blue Cutting". Each day Mary Anne would milk the cows and make butter, and would regularly walk into Clare with the butter to sell. When meat was required she would slaughter a calf and personally attend to all aspects of preparation.

Granny Nykiel's Wine: **Granny Nykiel** also made wine, and in a quantity excess of the family needs, the surplus she sold privately. The local constable was determined to make an arrest on the matter, and tried to trick her into selling him some wine, but succeeded only on procuring a free taste and a firm reassurance that although some

wine was given away, it was "never sold!". For many of her later years, Granny Nykiel lived in what was known as Walnut cottage in Sevenhill. (now the "Good Catholic Girls" Wines).

**Patrick (Paddy) Rucioch:** Born at Sevenhill on 6 August 1861, Paddy was the oldest of the six children of Tomas & Mary Rucioch née Laughlin.

Tough and talented, the remarkable Paddy Rucioch packed into his short life of 32 years no fewer than seven senior premierships – five with Norwood and two with Fremantle.

Paddy was a top centreman and also useful around the goals with deft snapshots or 70-yard place-kicks. He played a vigorous game and had a short fuse which sometimes got him into trouble.

Matters came to a head at Adelaide Oval on 30 August 1884 in a match to decide whether Norwood would win its seventh successive premiership or Port Adelaide its first. It was a rough contest. Port won but finished the day two players short. At one point Paddy sent Port's Bill Buchan packing with a dislocated shoulder.

Paddy his brothers **Charley** and **Jack Rucioch** were giants of men, and were in the famed "Sevenhill tug-o-war team". It is said of Paddy and his brother Charley that they used to hurl stones from one to the other for practice in hurling. It is now history how Paddy Rucioch went to Adelaide and caused a world-wide sensation in the athletic world by out-throwing the Scottish Hurling Champion and Champion of the World.

Paddy was an extraordinary athlete, renowned Australia wide in wrestling, weightlifting, hammer throwing, tossing the caber, Indian club exercises and juggling, manipulations of sharpened axes, dumb-bell movements, tug-of-war events and other feats of strength. He operated an athletics hall in Adelaide and later a gymnasium in Perth.

Just a bit of trivia regarding **Frank Kluska** who had been successful at running at the sports held at Martindale each year in the early 1900's. He decided when being in his

early to mid 30's he would enter in the foot races again. So for training he would run at night time in his bare feet from his home (which is now Brian Jeffries) to the top of Trilling's Hill and back home again (approximately 6 kilometers).

This became a big talking point in the area as people were quite concerned about the foot prints along the side of the road in the soft soil, and kept asking him if he had seen them up his way to which he answered he had not. Anyway he went to the Sports day and beat the men who were a lot younger than he himself. He was quite proud of himself and told us about it many times.

**It is also worth noting that one of the first Doctor's in the Clare district was Polish. His name was Anton Sokolowski.**

Sokolowski arrived in South Australia on the 6<sup>th</sup> December 1848 aboard the Alfred and was the ships surgeon. The Alfred carried a group of immigrants led by a wealthy Silesian farmer, **Franz Weikert**, and included Aloysius Kranewitter who founded St Aloysius Church & College at Sevenhill.

Anton Sokolowski was registered with the South Australian Medical Board on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1850. Dr Sokolowski was a member of the first Clare District Council in 1853. On the 24 August 1853 he married Pauline Weikert (Daughter of Franz Weikert).

Sadly he died at the age of 44 years on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1862. and is buried in St Mark's Church Cemetery at Penwortham. On the day of the funeral, the great majority of inhabitants of the district turned out to pay homage to his passing and scarcely a dry eye was observed. On the tomb of Anton Sokolowski is inscribed these words:

*Long will he live in the memory of those whom he relieved, and the tears of his mourning widow, and of the suffering poor for whom he spent his life, will long yet witness his truly Christian Charity. May he rest in Peace.*

On the sides of the tomb are engraved bunches of grapes and sunflowers (an emblem of eternal life and a symbol of the life Everlasting).

Some of the Occupations/Business's in that era held by the Poles

**Thomas Wytkin & Thomas Niemietz:** in Partnership, had the Butcher Business at Sevenhill.

**Lawrence Malycha:** Sevenhill, wheelwright & carpenter.

**Charles Kozlowski**, of Sevenhills, bootmaker,

**Lou Kozlowski**, son of Charles was both a Bootmaker and had the Butcher shop in Sevenhill (Where the Red Grape Shop is now) Lou was a great sportsman playing football and Cricket for South Clare and Sevenhill.

**Polish men who served on local Councils in that era**

Thomas Niemietz, John Nykiel, Lukas Malycha, Frank Wayman, Carl Kozlowski, Michael Ruciak, Andreas Pawelsky.

**Appointed Constables:**

John Nykiel, Mr Malycha, Thomas Kluska, John Shultz, J Seipelt, Mr Bulla, Martin Buchkowski, Victor Rucioch, Jacob Modystack, Frank Lenartowiz, Thomas Niemietz.

- We hope you have found this information regarding those early Polish settlers to this region of interest.
- We are very proud to be descendants of these tough Polish people who contributed so very much, not just to this area but to the State of South Australia.



(The Museum is open on the first Sunday of each month from 11am to 4pm also by special arrangement by Pat Dawson & Brendan Kluska.)

**Patricia Dawson nee Seipelt** (Great great niece of Lucas, Laurence and Stanislaus Malycha and Direct descendant of Mathias & Constance Pryzibilla)