

Despite the death of Father Rogalski and the absence of a successor, the Polish Hill River settlement retained its Polish character for 60 years (around 1854–1914). This was the only instance of such a long-lasting Polish enclave in the sea of Anglo-Saxon population on this continent. The church, school, and Polish ethnic marriages served as pillars of support. Even in the 1950s, many descendants of early Polish pioneers lived near Sevenhill, carefully preserving naturalization papers and mementos of their ancestors. However, the church became neglected over time, and the school was closed.

*Restoration of St. Stanisław Kostka's Church
at Polish Hill River*



St. Stanisław Kostka's church - 1960s.

In 1950, the Polish church in Polish Hill River was deconsecrated and closed due to the depopulation of the settlement. The buildings were repurposed by a neighboring farmer as a hay barn. In 1954, Father Józef Janus visited Sevenhill and later wrote that he viewed the remaining structures with a heavy heart. The houses stood empty, only traces of walls remained, and the church and school had fallen into ruin, with the library in disarray.

Marian Jan Szczepanowski (1916–1981), a historian who arrived in Australia in 1951, became interested in the history of the Polish settlement. As a Polish community activist, he initiated the founding of the Society of Knowledge about Poland in South Australia in 1962. He gathered documents and mementos from early Polish settlers in Polish Hill River at his home, urging the preservation of their memory.

In 1971, after long negotiations with Australian local and church authorities, the Polish community became the owners of the small, ruined church and two acres of land surrounding it. Archbishop James Gleeson of Adelaide handed it over to the Polish community. That same year, under the initiative of Father Dr. Tadeusz Miksa, the Committee for the Reconstruction of the Church in Polish Hill River was established, chaired by Mieczysław Wolański. Within two years, the church was rebuilt thanks to the generosity of Poles in South Australia, and it became a "Polish sanctuary" — a place of frequent pilgrimages.



Father Dr. Tadeusz Miksa, at the request of Mr. Tadeusz Krupka, wrote with great engagement his personal feelings and memories from 1971–1974 regarding the reconstruction of the church-museum in Polish Hill River. He noted that the facts he presented could be viewed and interpreted differently. According to him, the greatest credit for the endeavor went to the Polish Historical Society of South Australia, founded and led by Marian Szczepanowski, who also inspired Miksa to undertake the work.

Father Miksa's first impressions of Polish Hill River in early 1971 were as follows: *"Among the weeds: old, primitive, torn walls of the former church, abandoned for years in almost deserted fields! That was the first view — ugly. And the first impression — somewhat sad. But neither the sight discouraged us, nor the impression disheartened us. On the contrary, we circled those walls from all sides with inquisitiveness. Very damaged, but symbolically and historically*

venerable. Still on strong foundations. Suitable for repair, rebuilding, and full restoration. We touched those walls with reverence. And they seemed to call out to us: Do not abandon us! Without words, we promised: our brave and enlivening Polish community will revive you! We will restore you! From that visit in the fields of our resolution, our faith in the Polish community was unshaken — by no opposing or doubtful opinions."

Father Miksa requested a private meeting with Archbishop Gleeson, during which he presented the case of the Polish church. The archbishop responded positively, allowing for its restoration, as it was legally owned by the diocese but could be rebuilt using Polish community funds and in compliance with regulations. The building retained its original, external church appearance, but internally, it could house objects such as a painting, a cross, or even an altar for occasional services. However, the legal status of the building had to change to secular — becoming a religious, cultural, and historical monument. The diocese would no longer bear legal responsibility for it in the future. According to Father Miksa, the archbishop thus became the second benefactor of the chapel.

After discussions among the Polish group, an official Reconstruction Committee was formed, consisting of about 20 people, with Mieczysław Wolański as chairman, who played a crucial role. Among the Polish organizations ready to take ownership on behalf of the Polish community, the Federation of Polish Organizations in South Australia prevailed. Tasks were divided among organizations and individuals, funds were raised, materials purchased, contractors selected for various tasks, trees planted and cared for, picnics organized, and memorabilia collected. Thus, the Reconstruction Committee became the third benefactor of the Polish chapel.

Fr. Tadeusz Miksa also discovered one of the images of Our Lady of Częstochowa in the house of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Adelaide. It bore the inscription: "By the Members of the Polish Mission as a token of affectionate esteem and gratitude – Hill River – 10th October 1876." This image was gifted to Bishop Reynolds, and the sisters returned it to the chapel at Polish Hill River in the 1970s, where, through the efforts of the Polish community, it was restored by the painter W. Dutkiewicz. The image of the temple's patron, St. Stanislaus Kostka, remains to this day in the nearby Jesuit church in Sevenhill, placed on the right side of the altar.

In 1980, the Polish Hill River center was recognized by the Australian authorities as a national heritage site

The center was cared for by Polish Christ Fathers, who oversaw many religious activities organized within the Polish settlement. During the Holy Year (1975) in Adelaide, Fr. Mirosław Gębicki and Stanisław Wrona organized jubilee missions for Poles in this remarkable place. The Federation of Polish Organizations from South Australia took responsibility for the church of St. Stanislaus and the museum, which houses archival items from the first immigrants.

On October 9, 1988, the official opening of the Polish Hill River Museum took place, consisting of three small rooms that once served as a school, sacristy, and living quarters. Each room was turned into an exhibition space. The first room featured memorabilia of the pioneers, mainly enlarged photographs. The second, arranged by M. Wolański, was rich in documents, and the third, titled "Memory from Poland" and arranged by T. Murawski, contained a series of Christmas-themed paintings and historical images. The historical understanding of the Polish settlement also expanded slightly with new publications. Lech Paszkowski also returned to the settlement's history in his research, publishing his findings in the article "Polish Hill River: A New Perspective."

Later, the Polish Educational Society and the Association of Poles in South Australia purchased an additional nine acres of land. Over the years, the "Polish farm"—Polish Hill River—grew and flourished. Electricity and water were installed, a shelter named "Gniezno" was built, as well as two barracks "Castle No. 1 and 2," which can accommodate a large group of people. Volunteers emerged to collect memorabilia and organize the museum. The small church was also repainted in 1989.

The picnics organized by the Association of Poles in South Australia grew in popularity, held at least twice a year. Before Easter, a pilgrimage is usually organized, and in October, there is a three-day picnic. Despite bad weather in 1989, 350 people gathered, and the program included Mass, a meal, and a tour of the exhibition. Tents were provided for guests, strengthening the beautiful Polish tradition.

In early 1993, a meeting of the Church-Museum Reconstruction Committee took place with the participation of representatives from the Polish Association and the Federation of Polish Organizations in South Australia. Honored guests included the Consul General of Poland, Dr. Grzegorz Pieńkowski, and Polish Consul Piotr Longchamps de Berier. The meeting addressed: a) organizing an exhibition on Polish emigration in the 19th and 20th centuries in the adjoining rooms of the former Polish school, b) constructing the House of the Polish Pioneer and opening an exhibition alongside the existing one about the first Polish settlers from the 19th century to include an exhibition on post-war emigration. One of the rooms was planned to feature an exhibit on folklore from the Dąbrówka Wielkopolska area, from where the first settlers came. An overly ambitious plan was even proposed to relocate the old cottages of Rucioch and Stelmach to the chapel's vicinity and furnish them with period furniture.

The following years saw similar efforts. On Saturday, October 12, 2002, the Federation of Polish Organizations organized a special picnic at Polish Hill River to celebrate the 150th anniversary of Polish settlement in the area, which was attended by a large group of Poles. The picnic began with a Mass celebrated by Christ Fathers and Fr. Bill Modystack, a descendant of the first settlers. After the Mass, Fr. Modystack handed over "family relics" brought from Poland decades ago to the local museum.

On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the oldest Polish emigration settlement, Polish Hill River, special celebrations were held at the Polish center in 2006. Under the leadership of **Andrzej Czechowicz** as chairman, the Organizing Committee for the 150th Anniversary of Polish Settlement in South Australia was established.

The celebrations were to include clergy, including **Bishop Ryszard Karpiński**. Various events were announced, such as a picnic for descendants of pioneers from Polish Hill River, a Holy Mass, a Polish gathering, exhibitions, and concerts. In Melbourne, a jubilee pilgrimage was also announced to mark both the 150th anniversary of Polish collective settlement in Australia and the 100th anniversary of the death of the first chaplain to the Polish community, Fr. Leon Rogalski. The event spanned four days of unique attractions and spiritual experiences, with the participation of priests such as **Wiesław Słowik** and **Ludwik Ryba**.

The pilgrimage program, which was very diverse, included the following: Departure from Melbourne on Friday, April 28, 2006 (from Richmond and Essendon). On Saturday, April 29, celebrations in Polish Hill River, a Holy Mass (presided by Bishop Ryszard Karpiński), lunch, a picnic, a museum tour, vespers, a meeting with clergy from Adelaide and Polish pilgrims, and a visit to the old cemetery in Sevenhill and the grave of Fr. Rogalski.

On Sunday, April 30, visits to the museum of Blessed Sister Mary MacKillop in Norwood, a Holy Mass, more tours, and an overnight stay in Mt. Gambier, followed by a return to Melbourne.

On the occasion of the jubilee, a colorful informational brochure titled *150 Years of Polish*

Settlement in South Australia, 1856-2006 (Adelaide 2006, 44 pages) was published, thanks to the cooperation of Fr. Andrzej Paweł Bieś SJ, Władysława Jadczyk, Krystyna Łużny, curator Susan Marsden, Krystyna Ruchniewicz-Misiak, and Rosslyn Whitcher, a descendant of the Młodystach family. Józefa Jarosz, editor of *Tygodnik Polski*, ensured that the press covered the jubilee and the history of the oldest Polish center with plenty of photos.

Special recognition was given to those who made significant contributions to the center during the jubilee celebrations. *Tygodnik Polski*, in a report titled *Wokół nas*, highlighted individuals such as Józef Glapa, who had been the caretaker of the Polish center in Polish Hill River for 35 years and a long-time president of the Polish Association in Adelaide. He regularly traveled to the Polish center every three weeks to carry out necessary work with friends.

The final act of the jubilee events was a pilgrimage of Polish youth to World Youth Day in Sydney on July 11, 2008, which involved 120 young people and 14 Polish priests, including those from Dąbrówka in Greater Poland. They were given 20 t-shirts with the inscription "Polish Hill River" and about 40 informational booklets about the Polish museum. The pilgrims were cared for by Polish Christ the King priests from Adelaide. The 10th anniversary of the Polish museum in Polish Hill River was also celebrated. In a 2009 report titled *Shared Heritage, Shared Care. The Tenth Anniversary of the Polish Hill River Church Museum*, Ernestyna Skuriat-Kozek described how she brought "armfuls" of brochures, documents, flyers, copies, press clippings, recordings, and photos provided by the Museum's curator, prepared for the occasion.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the obelisk erected in Sevenhill in honor of the fallen and participants of both world wars, featuring Polish surnames such as Borowski, Polomka, Cichoń, Janeczek, Kozłowski, Pawelski, and others. On the old parish cemetery by the church in Sevenhill, 39 beautiful Polish graves remain, bearing witness to the history of Poles in this region. Professor Jerzy J. Smolicz (1935-2006), one of the most prominent Poles in South Australia, a sociologist, and a professor at the University of Adelaide, was also buried here on November 11, 2006, beside his parents.

Although the Polish settlement of Polish Hill River has yet to receive a comprehensive scholarly monograph, numerous more or less insightful chapters in books, press articles, and contributions have been written about it, not only by esteemed historian Lech Paszkowski but also by Jesuits such as Józef Janus, Wiesław Słowik, Ludwik Grzebień, and Andrzej Paweł Bieś. The time has come to create a work worthy of this unique phenomenon—the first cohesive group of Polish emigrants in Australia in the 19th century.