

The Recollection of Jan Rucioch

According to oral tradition, passed down by Jan Rucioch, preparations for the construction of the Polish church in Hill River, around which the religious life of the Polish community would later center, began even before the arrival of Father Rogalski or at the time when his arrival had already been decided.

The initiator of the construction was Jan Nykiel, who donated two acres of land for the project and organized a committee in 1869, which immediately began building. The further construction of the church was overseen by Father Rogalski. Stones were quarried locally, and the rest, including nails, was handmade.

The construction was completed in 1871, and on November 30th of the same year, Bishop Lawrence Bonaventure Shiel from Adelaide consecrated the church under the patronage of St. Stanislaus Kostka, granting permission to celebrate Mass there on Sundays, church holidays, as well as on the feast days of Polish patrons.

In 1873, Archbishop of Sydney Cardinal Francis Patrick Moran visited Hill River. Knowing Polish history well, he delivered a heartfelt address to the Poles, encouraging them to remain faithful to their national traditions by giving an elevated speech about Our Lady of Częstochowa.

Similarly, the following year, Bishop Reynolds of Adelaide visited the church and confirmed 50 children. In memory of his visit, he gifted a beautiful statue of the Sacred Heart of Jesus for the main altar.

On October 10, 1876, Bishop Reynolds also consecrated a painting of St. Stanislaus Kostka for the main altar, brought from Kraków, along with two images of Our Lady of Częstochowa, one of which the bishop kept as a souvenir.

After the church celebrations, Jan Nykiel hosted the bishop with a formal reception. Through the efforts of Father Rogalski, relics of St. Stanislaus Kostka were also brought from Kraków and placed in the altar.

Father Rogalski took care to furnish the chapel with paintings, vestments, and liturgical vessels. In a letter from October 1879, he wrote that a few families had recently arrived from Prussia (from Zbąszyń and Babimost) and had brought with them a white-and-blue vestment donated by Teodor Meynberg from Hamburg. However, the Poles would have been more pleased to receive church altar vessels, especially those related to the veneration of their patron, St. Stanislaus Kostka.

In 1883, Father Rogalski wrote that while the chapel previously could easily accommodate everyone, it had since become too small due to the growing number of Poles arriving from Sevenhill, Penwortham, and especially from Hill River. On larger holidays, Poles from even further regions would also come. He noted that Catholics of other nationalities often emphasized that Poles had many more devotions, missionary teachings, and catechetical sessions, and more frequently received the sacrament of confession.

"May God only grant me health," he wrote, "so that I can fulfill my duties and handle the work, which continues to grow. What happiness it would be for us if we could receive two more priests from you, or at least one. I know it is difficult for you, as you have much work, but we also do not lose hope."

Excerpt from the book: Polish Jesuits in Australia (South Australia 1870-1906, Victoria 1950-2012),