

In 2004, we celebrate the 160th anniversary of the arrival of a group of Polish emigrants to South Australia.

Let us remember this anniversary

Lidia Mikołajewska

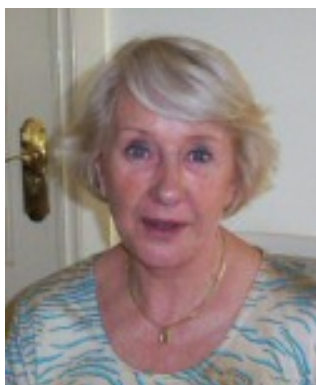
The first Poles arrived on Australian soil in 1839. However, the most important date is considered to be 1844, when a group of 31 Poles from Dąbrówka Wielkopolska reached South Australia and settled in the Barossa Valley. Another group of 131 emigrants from Zbąszyń and Dąbrówka arrived in Australia in 1856. Our compatriots, emigrants from 148 years ago, settled in places such as Hill River, Sevenhill, and Penwortham, as well as many other towns in this part of Australia.



— You could say that the region of Zbąszyń and Dąbrówka Wielkopolska supplied Australia with its first Polish emigrants — says Mr. Florian Roman Wittholz. — They are close to me because, as a little boy after World War I, I lived in Zbąszyń with my family. I attended primary school there and was a scout from a young age. Later, after graduating from the State Teacher's Seminary in Wolsztyn in 1934, I got a job as a teacher in Zbąszyń. I still have fond memories of those times. The landscape of Zbąszyń is etched in my memory: the lake and the Obra River. Wonderful nature!

Florian Roman Wittholz

I know the people of Zbąszyń well. The ones today are just like their ancestors who came to Australia over a century and a half ago. Here and there, I encounter the same surnames! They were and still are people with a healthy, rural common sense and organizational skills. Thanks to these qualities, over a hundred years ago they established a school and a church in Polish Hill River with a Polish priest, Father Leon Rogalski. Today, as is well known, there is also a museum of Polish heritage here. We are proud that our compatriots played an important historical role back then. Let's remember that when they arrived, South Australia was still in its early stages of development.



— Polish Hill River is our symbol — says Mrs. Barbara Kačka. — It helps us remember the settlers who lived in incredibly difficult conditions at the time. And despite everything, they survived, leaving behind mementos and descendants who have made their mark in Australia's social and political life. For me personally, it's proof that everything can be organized, arranged, and accomplished... that we can definitely make it, just like they did 160 years ago...

Barbara Kačka



— Polish Hill River should become our “Mecca,” the cradle of Polishness in Australia. It’s an important geographical place on the map of this country for all Poles living here — says the Consul General of the Republic of Poland in Sydney, Mr. Tadeusz Żyliński.

Tadeusz Żyliński

There’s no need to say much more. If it weren’t for the community efforts of many of our compatriots, carefully documented in the Polish press in Adelaide (thankfully!), we might have forgotten about our Polish cradle, which Father Tadeusz Miksa referred to during Mass in 1974: “We are on a piece of Poland, on our own piece of land, surrounding a church built by the hands, sacrifices, and sweat of Polish emigrants. This church was their pride and joy, and it’s worth more than grand temples because it was created through the hard work of tired hands, born from the fervent desire to possess something. What matters is its historical and meaningful value, not its material one.”



This truth is well understood by people like Stanisława and Zygmunt Pawlak, who, twenty years ago, contributed to the restoration efforts and who today dedicate their time to ensuring that the church-museum in Polish Hill River is open to all visitors. Mr. Zygmunt is a wonderful storyteller of our Polish-Australian history. It’s worth traveling to our “Mecca” to listen to him. It’s only 125 kilometers from Adelaide.

Stanisława and Zygmunt Pawlak