

# The picnic at Polish Hill River

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Polish Hill River is located 130 kilometers from Adelaide, the capital of South Australia. The place was named to honor Polish settlers who arrived in this land over 150 years ago. It was here, on Saturday, October 1st, that a sizable group gathered to celebrate the 140th anniversary of the construction and dedication of the first Polish church, dedicated to St. Stanislaus Kostka, as well as the 175th anniversary of the founding of the state of South Australia.



The celebrations began with a Mass concelebrated by Archbishops Szczepan Wesoły and Leonard Faulkner, along with priests working in Australia. Archbishop Wesoły also delivered the homily.

I first met the bishop in Traiskirchen, Austria, nearly 30 years ago, and now, after so many years, there was a chance to exchange a few words.

After the Mass, Gosia Skalban introduced and welcomed the Polish and Australian officials present at the ceremony. Then speeches were given by Jennifer Rankine, the state Minister for Social and Family Affairs; Stephen Wade, a representative of the state opposition; Witold Krzesiński, representing the Polish Embassy; and Leszek Wikarjusz, representing the Supreme Council of Polish Organizations in Australia. Additionally, among the participants were parliamentarian Michael Atkinson; Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland Dariusz Ross and his wife,

John Roy-Wojciechowski, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland in New Zealand, and his wife; Allan Aughey, Mayor of Clare (the area where the celebrations were held) and his wife. Also present were the rector of the Polish Catholic mission, Fr. Słowik, as well as Roger Lean, Director of the Department of Multiculturalism in South Australia, and many others too numerous to mention. However, it is essential to highlight two ladies who were the driving force behind this event: Krystyna Łuzna and Irena Sosnowska.



The festivities were enriched by a dance group in beautifully colorful costumes from the Tatry ensemble, as well as the vocal group Polanki. A significant group of compatriots from other states also attended the celebration.

In addition to touring the museum, visitors could explore various stalls offering culinary and artistic products, Polish books, and a selection of wines from local wineries. A homemade meal was also available.

And so, until early afternoon, we lived in the atmosphere of those days. Later, we returned to our homes, to the realities of modern life, but with a greater awareness that we belong to a well-established community with Polish roots.

## **Let's recall**

On August 17, 1856, the sailing ship *August* arrived at the shores of South Australia with a group of around 150 Polish immigrants. After a short period of relocation, this group settled here, by the river near the town of Clare, not far from the German settlers.

The first spiritual leader and versatile social activist was Fr. Leon Rogalski, a Jesuit, who built the first Polish church, which today serves as a museum. At its peak, Polish Hill River had over 300 settlers. A Polish school was built here, as well as the previously mentioned Catholic church.

Today, no one from the original Polish settlers or their descendants lives here. Their former presence is marked by a few buildings and a nearby cemetery. In the former church, there is a museum of the first Polish settlers. You can view exhibits from that era—traditional clothing, everyday items, as well as documents and photographs. There are also mementos from later periods, all the way to the times of Solidarity.

Waves of Polish emigration washed onto Australian soil abundantly—three times. The first was in 1856, the next after World War II, and the last was the so-called Solidarity emigration in the 1980s. In total, it is estimated that the number of Polish emigrants and their children during this time reached 150,000.