

Poland

One of the best-known Poles who came to Australia in the early nineteenth century was Paul Edmond Strzelecki, who explored the Snowy Mountains and named several Australian geographical features including Mount Kosciuszko and the Strzelecki ranges in Gippsland.

It was not until the Victorian gold rushes of the 1850s that Poles began to settle in significant numbers. Many were political refugees, following the unsuccessful revolt against Austria in 1848. Most of these new arrivals were well educated and found work as engineers, teachers, artists and businessmen. By 1863 a Polish Relief Fund and a Polish Society was established in Melbourne.

The Polish community in Victoria remained small until several thousand Polish Jews came to Australia during the rise of Nazism. Following World War II, the majority of Polish immigrants arrived as Displaced Persons. There was also a significant intake of Polish soldiers who had fought alongside British soldiers in the War. The Poland-born community in Victoria increased five-fold between 1947 and 1954, to 21,428 people. Many worked on public projects such as railways, roads and housing developments for the first two years to fulfil the terms of their migration.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, many immigrants from Poland arrived through the Family Reunion Program. The community increased slowly in size, then stabilized until the 1980s, when political and economic unrest in Poland saw the population rise to 24,638 in 1986.

In 2001, 19,949 immigrants from Poland lived in Victoria, 69% of whom spoke Polish at home. Whilst the majority were Catholic, there was also a significant Jewish minority. In Melbourne today, Poland-born people mainly live in Caulfield, Bentleigh, Carnegie, and Gardenvale. Over 40% of Poland-born workers are employed as professionals; many others work in clerical, sales and production roles. The community is supported by organizations such as the Polish Community Council of Victoria.