

The First Polish Catholic Settlements in Texas

Compiled by: [Virginia Felchak Hill](#), *Polish Footprints* editor

A publication titled *The First Polish Colonies of America in Texas*, published in 1936, by Rev. Edward J. Dworaczyk identified the early Polish Catholic settlements in Texas. Some of the churches were established by Poles, while others were established with other ethnic groups, (-), see explanation. The settlements that were not included in his publication are identified with (*), see explanation. Additional information identified with (+), see explanation.

Settlement	Church	Diocese	Year	Address	Cemetery
Anderson	St. Stanislaus	G	1876	Box 210 Anderson, TX 77830	Yes
Bandera	St. Stanislaus	S	1855	Box 757 Bandera, TX 78003	Yes
Bellville	(-) Sts. Peter & Paul	G	--	Box 808 Bellville, TX 77418-0808	Yes
Bremond	St. Mary's	A	1876	Rt. 2 Box 58 Bremond, TX 76629	Yes
Brenham	(-) St. Mary's	A	1870	701 Church, ST Brenham, TX 77833	Yes
Bryan	(-) St. Joseph	A	1876	600 E. 26th St Bryan, TX 77801	Yes
Cestohowa	Nativity of BVM	S	1873	Rt. 1 Box 20 Falls City, TX 78113	Yes
Chappell Hill	St. Stanislaus	A	1889	Rt. 1, Box 14 Chappell Hill, TX 77426	Yes
Falls City	Holy Trinity	S	1902	Box 158 Falls City, TX 78113	Yes
Inez (Garcitas)	St. Joseph	V	1876	Box 337 Inez, TX 77968	Yes
Kosciusko	St. Ann	S	1892	Rt. 2 Box 76 Stockdale, TX 78160	Yes
Marlin	St. Joseph	A	1872	Box 371 Marlin, TX 76661	Yes
McCook	St. Paul	B	1935	Rt. 3, Box 18-E Edinburg, TX 78539	Yes
NewWaverly	St. Joseph	G	1870	Box 188 New Waverly, TX 77358	Yes
Panna Maria	Immaculate Conception	S	1854	Box 25 Panna Maria, TX 78144	Yes
Polonia	Sacred Heart	S	1897	(Closed in 1935)	Yes
Richmond	(+) Holy Family		1926	(PNC, closed)	

Rosenberg	(-) Holy Rosary	G	1910	1416 George, St. Rosenberg, TX 77471-3198	Yes
St. Francisville	St. Francis 'Polish Village'	V	1985	2001 Katy St. Bay City, TX 77414	Yes
St. Hedwig	Annunciation	S	1855	P. O. Box 100 St. Hedwig, TX 78152	Yes
San Antonio	(+) St. Michael's	S	1855		Yes
Stoneham	(+) St. Joseph's	G	1909	11323 CR 304 Stoneham, TX 77363-0388	Yes
Stockdale	(*) St. Mary's	S	1891	1201 W St. Mary Street Stockdale, TX 78160	Yes
White Deer	Sacred Heart	AM	1909	Box 427 White Deer, TX 79097	Yes
Yorktown	(+) Holy Cross	S	1855	Rt. 2 Box 152 Yorktown, TX 78164	Yes

Diocese: A = Austin, AM = Amarillo, B = Brownsville, G = Galveston & Houston,
S = San Antonio, and V = Victoria

EXPLANATIONS

(-) Included in Dworaczyk publication, however the establishment of the parish was shared with other ethnic groups.

Bellville - The first Catholic to settle in Bellville was a young man from Poland, Peter Paul Wolnitzek, who came in 1860. He attended services in Brenham and later services conducted by the missionaries who came to Bellville. The first Mass was offered at his home around 1895-1900. The church was built in 1905, on land donated by him and he also contributed practically the whole share of \$5,000 toward the cost of the brick building. The church was named St. Peter & Paul in his honor.

The parish consisted of several ethnic groups: Poles settled in the Raccoon Bend Community, the Czechs in the Nelsonville Community, the Germans settled mostly near the town of Bellville, and then came the Irish Catholics. In 1935, Father Nesvadba told the Bishop in a report that the church building was modernized and that they had forty-five families, twenty-five of whom are good Polish Catholics.

Brenham - St. Mary's was first formed in 1870, when the only Catholics in Brenham were English speaking. Immigrants started coming from Poland in the mid 1870s' and by the turn of the century they outnumbered the group of English speaking people who originally formed the parish. Due to the arrival of many Polish immigrants, a second and larger church was built by Father Pridal in 1896.

In 1935, under the guidance of Father Charles Weisnerowski, the third and current church was built for \$70,000 plus an additional \$25,000 for the interior furnishing and equipment. The altars, communion rail, the pulpit, and the baptismal font were of imported marble. A large pipe organ

was installed with art glass windows donated by members of the parish in memory of departed loved ones.

Bryan - The parish of St. Joseph's was established in 1876 by several ethnic groups: a French family named Bonneville, Bohemian families of Luska, Vymola, and Horak; a German family named Koelsch, and a Polish families of Krzeczinski, Chmielewski, and Staszewski.

Rosenberg - The parish of Holy Rosary was established in 1910 by Bohemians. Dworaczyk publication listed Holy Cross in error as the name of the church. In 1931, the parish was given an acre of land by Mr. and Mrs. John Polka (a Pole) and the church purchased two others acres which were landscaped and improved, the site of the beautiful Catholic cemetery.

The Poles started migrating from Chappell Hill in the 1920s' and settled in the southeastern part of the agricultural districts of Rosenberg. They were mostly share croppers. The only Pole at that time to own a large tract of land was John Wleczyk, who owned 600 acres of land and many of the Poles worked for him. The Poles were never the predominant ethnic group in Rosenberg.

(~) **Polish parishes that were not included in Dworaczyk publication.**

St. Francisville, 'Polish Village' - St. Francis Church located three miles from Wadsworth was built in 1895, on land donated by Mrs Frank Seerden, the former Mary Jadwiga Petrucha, a native of Oppehr, Prussia. The parishioners were primarily Silesian Poles. This church was destroyed by a hurricane in 1896 and rebuilt in less than a year.

Today services are held once a year for All Souls Day either the first or second Sunday of November. The people of Matagorda County keep up the church in memoriam. "They consider it a sacred place and keep it up as a kind of token to their forefathers," said Father Martin, Pastor of Holy Cross of Bay City. In 1965, St. Francis Church was recorded as a Texas Historic Landmark.

(*) **Stockdale** - The town of Stockdale was founded in 1863 and named after Fletcher S. Stockdale, the lieutenant governor of Texas. Amid the early political growing pains of Texas, there was an influx of many Irish families directly from Ireland into the community. One of these, W. S. Palm, deeded ten acres to the Catholic church in 1877 and a native stone church was built there that same year. Part of the land was used as a Catholic cemetery. In 1886, a severe storm demolished the church.

In 1891, a second church was built on the Richter Farm about three miles northwest of Stockdale and a small cemetery was established. By this time the congregation consisted mostly of Polish families. Today this second site encompasses only the small Catholic cemetery. The church was torn down in 1951 and some of the salvaged materials were used in the construction of the present church which was built on the site where the first church was located.

(+) **Additional information**

Richmond - The Polish National Church, *The Holy Family* was organized by Polish families in 1926 and disbanded in 1938. An interview was conducted with Stash Gorka, a Houston resident on April 9, 1993. His family moved from Chappell Hill to the Rosenberg area in 1919. The Poles wanted to preserve their Polish traditions and the mother tongue. The priest at Rosenberg, who was not Polish and was very hard on them. Some of the families who joined were: Gorka~ Bialas, Kaminski's, Malinowski's, Kotyras and others.

Stash Gorka's father was a committee men for the new church and held the position of secretary. Stash recalled the building of the church and he himself as a lad putting shingles on the pastor's house. He also recalled how the parishioners had collected money, only to have the priests of the National Church to leave with their funds. The church site and grounds were sold to a Texas Oil man for \$6,000.

San Antonio - St. Michael's was established as a Polish National Church in 1866, and the first resident pastor was Vincent Barzynski, a Resurrectionist. For eleven years previous to that, priests from Panna Maria ministered to the Polish Catholics of San Antonio.

The first Mass of the parish was celebrated in San Fernando Cathedral in November, 1866, and in a rented building until the church was built. A combination church and school building was completed on January 6, 1868, with a congregation of forty four families.

Under the direction of Father Thomas Moczygamba, the first native born priest to be ordained in Texas, the twin-towered Gothic church was built on South Street. It was dedicated by Bishop Arthur J. Drossaerts on October 25, 1922. In 1947 the status of St. Michael's Parish was changed from national to territorial and definite boundaries were assigned.

In 1965, the parish plant was purchased for use by Hemisfair. The Hemisphere Tower now stands on the grounds where the original St. Michael's was located. A new location was chosen and a contemporary brick building was dedicated in 1967, which is now comprised of Hispanic parishioners.

Stoneham - The history of St. Joseph's, Stoneham, Grimes County, Texas is intertwined with St. Stanislaus, Anderson and St. Mary's, Plantersville. It first became a mission of St. Stanislaus in Anderson and today it is a mission of St. Mary's of Plantersville. The sacramental records for Stoneham are recorded in both of these parishes.

Yorktown - The Parish of Yorktown dates back to 1866 when it was a mission of Meyersville with the title of Immaculate Conception. On June 29, 1868, Father John Frydrychowicz, a Resurrectionist, became the first resident pastor of the parish. He enlisted the help of the parishioners and began the construction of a wooden church of his design. The small wooden church with two towers was completed by September 1968.

From 1872 to 1874, Father Adolf Snigurski was the pastor of Yorktown. From 1874 to 1880 Immaculate Conception was a mission of Panna Maria, then it reverted to Meyersville again. Later the Poles from Meyersville came to Yorktown. In one publication on Yorktown, there is so much discussion on Meyersville, that the reader begins to feel that the writer has now changed

the subject to Meyersville. The Polish Catholic history of Meyersville and Yorktown are intertwined.

Other Settlements

<u>Settlement</u>	<u>Church</u>	<u>Diocese</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Addresss</u>	<u>Cemetery</u>
Meyersville	St Peter & Paul	S	1856	StarRte 2, Box 50 Meyersville, TX 77974	Yes

The first German Catholic settler was Peter Bluntzer who came from Alsace in the year 1846. In that year Mass was offered in his home, and he donated fifteen acres for the first church which stood where the present one now stands. The first Mass was celebrated on November 4, 1859.

During the time of Bishop John A. Forest, a quarrel divided the Parish into Polish and German communities. The Polish people built their own little church about three miles to the west. Father Gerlach resigned from Meyersville in 1898, after six years of hard labor. His resignation was tendered to his bishop with the words that "not being Polish himself he could not do justice to his congregation." Because of the appointment of pastors, these people soon drifted twelve miles away to Holy Cross Parish in Yorktown. Their little church in Meyersville was torn down in 1947 and the lumber was used for the new Yorktown Catholic school. As a Polish Parish, Meyersville no longer exists, however you can visualize how Meyersville and Yorktown were closely intertwined in those early years.

<u>Settlement</u>	<u>Church</u>	<u>Diocese</u>	<u>Year</u>	<u>Addresss</u>	<u>Cemetery</u>
Plantersville	St Mary's	G	1894	Rt. 2 Box 3160 Navasota, TX 77868	Yes

In 1872, several large land owners in the community were desirous of obtaining foreign labor from Poland to till their land and spoke to James Markey, a Catholic and a native of Ireland, who had resided in the county since 1844. He told them that "those people are Catholic, and will ask if there is a Catholic Church and resident priest ? " The parties interested set about building a small church (25 X 50 feet) on a lot situated on the east side of the town site of Plantersville. Mr. Markey obtained a deed from the trustees of the town site and had it made out to the Bishop of Galveston. This church was built in 1873 and the cross was placed on this church by a Baptist preacher by the name of Parson Carson, who was a carpenter by trade. The Poles arrived in February of 1873 and were served by missionary priests until Father Felix Orzechowski became their first resident pastor in 1876 and lived in a three room house provided by the Markey's

The Poles bought a public school in Anderson, Grimes County, Texas and the deed was filed on December 23 1880. So some of the Poles then attended services in Anderson. When St. Joseph's Church at Stoneham was built in 1910, the Poles of Plantersville, then attended services there.

The same little church in Plantersville was then used by the Germans who immigrated after the Poles. Most of the Germans emigrated from Odessa, Russia. This little church was later moved

to the Womack farm and was used as a school house. In 1894, the Germans built their church on land acquired from the estate of Mrs. Della Baker, about three miles north of Plantersville. In 1917, this church was struck by lightning during a storm and burned to the ground. Father Apel rebuilt the church on a larger scale.

The history of St. Stanislaus, Anderson; St. Mary's, Plantersville; and St. Joseph's, Stoneham are intertwined. To understand the history of one, it is necessary to research the history of the others.

Other locations

Thurber - St. Thuribus was established in 1892 and later changed its name to St. Barbara's in Thurber. With the recruitment of Eastern European miners, the immigrants felt a communion with home and loved ones through the Mass. The Poles were one of many ethnic groups in Thurber. Everything was company owned in this coal mining town of Thurber.

"You can come across Polish farmers settled in the midst of other nationalities all over Texas," per Stefan Nesterowicz, author of *Travel Notes*. He traveled through Texas in 1909 and interviewed Poles in settlements of Lockhart, Galveston, Navasota, Houston, Conroe, Strawn, Gordon, Wooten Wells, Fort Worth, Austin, and Floresville.

There were several Silesian communities along the Gulf Coast which included: Bay City and Wadsworth, near St. Francisville. In areas closer to San Antonio there were communities of Las Gallinas and Coletto. These communities required traveling Polish priests.

BIBLIOGRAPHY .

1. *Resurrectionist Charism*, a history of the congregation of the Resurrection, Volume I, 1836-1886 by John Iwicki, C.R. with James Wahl, C. R., printed 1986 in Rome.
2. *The First Polish Colonies of America in Texas*, containing the general history of the Polish people in Texas, compiled by Rev. Edward J. Dworaczyk and printed in 1936.
3. *Travel Notes*, by Stefan Nesterowicz, printed in 1970, a translation of *Notaki z podrozy*, Toledo, 1909.
4. *The Polish Texans*, by T. Lindsay Baker, printed in 1982.
5. *The First Polish Americans, Silesian Settlements in Texas*, by T. Lindsay Baker, printed in 1979.
6. *Archdiocese of San Antonio, 1874-1974*, their centennial publication.
7. *125th Anniversary, Diocese of Galveston-Houston*.
8. Kinga Perzynska, Archivist, Catholic Archives of Texas.

9. Marion Zientek, Editor of, *The Texas Catholic Herald*, the diocesan newspaper for the Galveston & Houston Diocese. *St. Francis, 'Polish Village'*, article appeared on December 6, 1968, in the Texas Catholic Herald.

10. Interview conducted by Virginia Felchak Hill with Stash Gorka, a former parishioner of the *Holy Family*, Polish National Church, located in Richmond, Texas.

11. *The History of Catholicism in the Vicinity of Plantersville, Grimes County, Texas*, by Betty Markey, Catholic Archives of Texas.

12. *History of St. Mary's Parish, Brenham, Texas and Catholicism of Washington County & Early Texas*, by Bruno Gorzycki, printed May, 1986.

Copyright © 1936. Rev. Edward J. Dworaczyk. All Rights Reserved.