

Polish found freedom in Fall River

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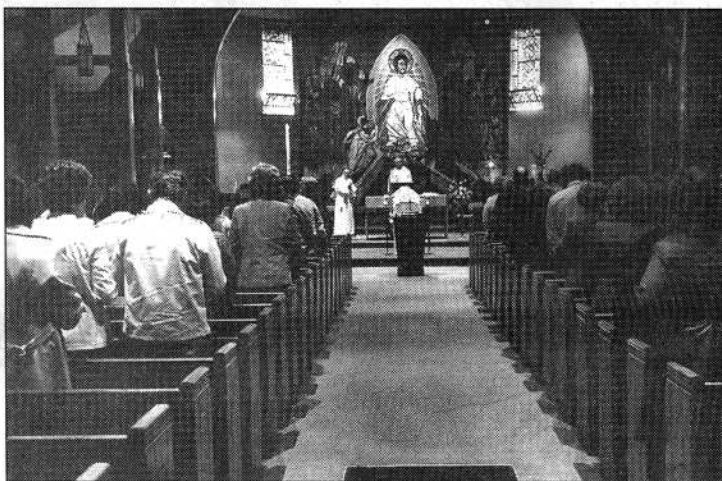
FALL RIVER — Like most of those who came in the great immigrant waves of the 19th century, the Polish people arriving in America fled hunger and political oppression at home.

In 1795, the country of Poland was eliminated from the map and divided between the Russians, the Austrians and the Prussians. None of those three nations were kind to the Poles.

The Poles resisted the destruction of their nation, but revolts were crushed by the Czar's Cossacks or the armies of Austrian emperors and Prussian kings. Those who could raise the money and the courage left.

America beckoned.

Desperately poor, the Poles who arrived in America were in much the same condition as the Irish fleeing the Potato Famine. Both groups tended to arrive with little baggage and no assets other than a willingness to work at anything.



Herald News File Photos

Above, Roman Catholics celebrate Mass in St. Stanislaus Church in 1981. Below, the church, built in 1901, is seen in this 1939 photo. The church was the center of the city's Polish immigrant community.

As a local Polish historian, the late Stanley Kania, recorded in his writings, the first Polish immigrants came to Fall River around 1882 and included families named Prezlar, Sienkowski, Zwolinski and four brothers named Urban.

One of the four Urban brothers would have a son

named Luke who would become a famous coach at Fall River's B.M.C. Durfee High School.

Another prominent son of Polish immigrant parents was Matthew J. Kuss, who served 18 years in the state Legislature and is honored by Matthew J. Kuss Middle School.

The Poles settled heavily in Fall River's South End, where their presence is still felt today.

Polish immigrants established several churches in the city, one of which is St. Stanislaus on Rockland Street. Completed in 1901, St. Stanislaus survived a major fire in the last decade and continues to host the annual Polish Festival, one of the hallmarks of Polish life in Fall River.

Holy Cross Parish, Holy Trinity and the Polish National Catholic Church are also strong presences in the Polish community.

While Polish immigrants never had the numbers of Portuguese or French Canadian immigrants, their impact on the city is undeniable. Polish organizations continue to flourish and Polish cultural events are held throughout the year.

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