

# Poland's Independence Day, 2023

Each year, on 11<sup>th</sup> November, Poles in Poland and around the world, celebrate Poland's Independence, as they have been for the last 105 years

In 1954, Poles living in Geelong celebrated Independence Day for the first time as immigrants in their new country. Today, 69 years later, we continue to celebrate this important Polish National Day, here at our White Eagle House.

To understand why this day is so important to Poles, we need to look at the turbulent and often sad history of Polish Nation over the last millennium.

I am sure that everyone, who has any knowledge of geography, will recognise Poland on today's world maps.

However, the map of Poland not always had the shape we see today. From the time Poland became a Christian Nation in 966, during the reign of **Mieszko I**, the shape of the map of Poland changed like a cloud changes its shape on a windy day.

The most significant changes, and the biggest expansion, of Poland took place during the **First Jagiellonian Dynasty** from 1386-1466, when "**Poland stretched from sea to sea**" – from the **Baltic Sea** in the north to the **Black Sea** in the South.



Prince Mieszko I



Queen Jadwiga &  
King Władysław Jagiełło

Unfortunately, the end of the Jagiellonian Dynasties was followed by a slow decline of Polish influence and power in that region of Europe. According to historians, two reasons contributed to this decline:

- At the end of the reign of the Jagiellonian Dynasties in 1572, Poland became involved in a number of wars. This financially weakened the Kingdom of Poland.
- At the same time, the military power of its neighbours, Czarist Russia in the east, Prussia in the west, the Swedes in the north and the Austro-Hungarian Empire in south of Poland, substantially increased. Naturally, Poland's neighbours took advantage of their strength and Poland's weaknesses.



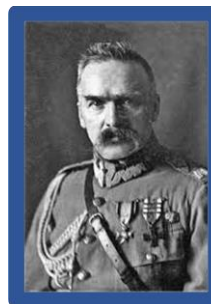
Map of Poland under the Jagiellonian Dynasty

Over time, this led to the three partitions of Poland: The first took place in 1772, the second partition occurred in 1793 and the third and final partition ended in 1795. After 1795, the map of Poland disappeared from world maps and remained so for 123 years. However, during all these years, Poles continued to live in the hope that Poland will rise up again as an independent, sovereign country.

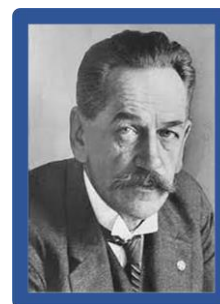
Before the outbreak of World War I, in 1914, hostilities between the three Empires, which were occupying the territories of what were once Poland, were already on the verge of war.

These disagreements between the occupying Empires gave Polish leaders, such as **Józef Piłsudski**, the opportunity to organise Polish armies to fight for Poland's freedom and independence.

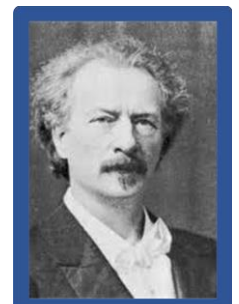
In June 1914, **Józef Piłsudski** established the so-called "**Polish Legions**", ready to take advantage of the hostilities between the three Empires.



General Józef  
Piłsudski



Jędrzej  
Moraczewski



Ignacy  
Paderewski

At the end of the First World War, on the insistence of **Ignacy Paderewski**, the U.S. President **Woodrow Wilson** added to his 13-Point Plan for Peace in Europe, the 14th Point, which was the "**Establishment of an Independent Poland**". So, on November 11, 1918, Poland regained its independence after 123 years!

As we know, **Ignacy Paderewski** was a famous composer and pianist and often performed at concerts in the USA. President Wilson loved Paderewski's music and always attended his performances when Paderewski visited America. The two remained life-long friends.

Ignacy Paderewski's heart is buried in the **Church of the Shrine of Our Lady of Czestochowa** in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, USA.



**Poland between 1918-1939**

On November 17, 1918, **Józef Piłsudski** appointed **Jędrzej Moraczewski** the Interim Head of the First Government of the Second Polish Republic. Piłsudski appointed Ignacy Paderewski as Poland's Premier in 1919. **Józef Piłsudski** served as Poland's Chief of State from 1919-1922, as well as the Minister of Defence in the new Government. And, after 123 years, the map of Poland, took its place on the world stage, along with other democratic countries, but, once again, it took on a different shape.

Poles enjoyed their freedom in an Independent Poland from 1918 to 1939, when, at 3.00am on 1<sup>st</sup> September of 1939, Hitler's Luftwaffe, bombed the City of Wieluń and went on to bomb Warsaw, razing it to the ground.

When Hitler was defeated by the Allied forces, Poland's borders changed one more. At the Yalta Convention of 1945, the borders of many European countries were redrawn. In these changes, Poland lost its eastern territories to the USSR and regained its western territories from Germany.

Sadly, we live in uncertain times today! But we continue to live in the hope that today's wars in Ukraine and in The Middle East, will not impact on Poland!



**Poland today**

Today's conflicts on the world's stage and the current instability of the Polish Government after the recent elections, remind me of the very moving words of a song by **Jan Pietrzak** from the 1980s, often sung during the "**Solidarity**" Unions uprising against the Polish Communist Government at that time. These words are:



**Henry Szkuta**

President

Polish Community Association in Geelong Inc.

12<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Link to Video Presentation: **Poland's Independence:** <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/883694754/privacy>