

Polonia in Austin

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Polish emigration in Texas dates to the mid-nineteenth century, when the inhabitants of the village from the Opole region came here, led by priest Leopold Moczygemba, and founded the Panna Maria settlement. Austin was then a small town and did not attract the attention of Polish emigrants. The oldest Polish traces in Austin are associated with Helena Modrzejewska, the great Shakespearean actress, who always emphasized her Polish roots. She took part in XXVI weekly "tours" of America, and Austin was on her route. Helena Modrzejewska visited Austin in 1884, 1893 and 1898, and performed at Millett Opera House, at 110 East 9 Street (this building still exists) and at Hancock Opera House at 120 West 6th Street, then Pecan Street (the building no longer exists). She stayed at the Driskill Hotel.



Texas is associated with another great Polish actress, a silent movie star that Hollywood made famous, Pola Negri. Pola Negri spent her last years of life in San Antonio, where she died in 1987.

The presence of Polish immigrants in Austin in the present days is profound. Austin Polish Society (APS) has been operating in Austin since 2005. It is a non-profit organization whose purpose is to cultivate knowledge of Polish culture, traditions, history, language, and art. A Polish language school was established by APS. There is also a Polish History Club, that organizes monthly lectures related to Polish history and traditions.

APS also organizes concerts of Polish musicians, evenings with Polish poetry and discussions for authors of Polish origin. The flagship event promoting Polish culture in Texas is the Polish Film Festival, which takes place every autumn and has already become a permanent part of the cultural landscape of Austin. In addition, every month, a Polish film is shown at a Public Library.

For all Polish Catholics, there are Polish language masses held twice a month at the University Catholic Center at the University of Texas at Austin. There are many other events through which APS cultivates Polish traditions. Those worth mentioning are Polish Christmas Eve, Easter Egg painting, Bigos Cook-off, pierogi parties, cooking classes, bonfires, and picnics. They give Polish community the opportunity to meet, reminisce and be together and all feature Polish traditional cuisine.