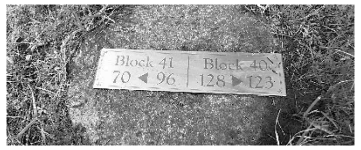
This walk takes you to the areas of the Linwood Cemetery which are linked to the history of early Polish settlement in Canterbury – the resting places of the original settlers who arrived in New Zealand in the 1860s and '70s, and the members of their families. The record of their resting places has been compiled from the CCC Cemeteries Database and The Monumental Transcripts of Linwood Cemetery held by the Christchurch City Libraries. Many graves are no longer marked by tombstones, only a careful count of the section and plot numbers will lead you to them. Look out for the section and plot number markers under your feet!

Catholic sections (section/plot no.):
    Schimanski – 41/91-92, 43/116, 43/141-142, 44/18
    Rogal – 41/106
    Kiesanowski – 41/175-177
    Suhomski – 42/37
    Watemburg – 42/55, 43/125-126
    Shaskey – 42/89
    Rogatski – 42/57, 42/96, 43/217-218
    Rhoda – 43/64, 44/123, 44/126, 44/192
    Dunick – 43/96, 43/113, 43/123
    Boloski – 43/139, 45/246-247
    Borcoskie – 43/225, 44/42
    Percasky – 43/250-251
    Gearshawski – 43/254
    Grofski – 44/68
    Yagodzinski – 44/125
    Blumsky – 45/212



Hebrew section (section/plot no):
    Nashelski – 16/87
    Marks – 16/91

Only some of their stories are told here. Please visit the sources referenced in this leaflet to learn more about the early Polish settlers, their contemporaries and their descendants.

Poland's fight for independence

At the end of the 18th century, the Polish state, having been partitioned by neighbouring empires, was erased from the political map of Europe. Poland, as one French playwright would later put it, was 'virtually nowhere'.

RUSSIE
St PETERSBOURG
TYRANNIE
OPPRESSION
ESCLAVAGE
DESPOTISME
FORCE BRUTALE
CRUAUTE
AGGRANDISSEMENT
GOLFE DE
MER BALTIQUE
Memel
RIGA
PRUSSE
POLOGNE
RESPECT A LA TOMBE
AUTRICHE
VIENNE
MOLDAVIE
TRANSYLVANIE
SUEDE
MER D'AZOF

Carte des états désunis d'Europe - Kungliga Biblioteket (National Library of Sweden)

Between 1772 and 1795 the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth's neighbours, Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungary, dismantled their shared enemy and divided its land.

Poland never gave up its fight for independence, and it was reborn as an independent country in 1918, after 123 years of foreign rule.

Poland's loss of independence led to a large wave of emigration in the 19th century in search of freedom and a better life.

A small number of Polish Jews started arriving in Christchurch in the 1850s and 60s, followed by a larger group of Polish migrants from the Prussian zone arriving from 1872 onwards. They were the beginning of the Polish community in Christchurch.

What made families in the 1870s move from central Europe to the other side of the world? Why did they choose to make new lives in a British colony they had little information about, and where they did not speak the official language? In whom did they trust to help them make their decisions?

[adapted from articles "THE CONUNDRUM OF NATIONALITY " and "FAITH IN A SAFE ANCHORAGE" by Barbara Scrivens- full text available on www.polishhistorynewzealand.org]

The Prussians imposed their culture subtly but persistently. From 1795 they germanised the names of Polish towns, rivers and mountains on new maps. After the 1863 Polish Uprising, the Prussians were so antagonised that they started germanising surnames. They re-wrote Polish surnames on marriage registrations. The conscription of Polish men into Prussian army units started. Speaking, reading and even having Polish documentation of any sort had long been illegal. Defiant Polish families who decided not to send their children to the German schools became illiterate. German soldiers roamed the villages searching Polish houses for hidden contraband. Some Poles lowered their lintels to force those soldiers to bow their heads to the crucifixes inside their front doors.

Stories extolling the virtues of a new colony in New Zealand caught the attention of Catholic Poles ripe for a better life elsewhere. The first large groups of Polish settlers to New Zealand arrived between 1872 and 1876 as part of the new colony's assisted immigration scheme.

Those early settlers were mostly born in Prussian-occupied Poland. Although Polish in spirit and speech, when they arrived in New Zealand, they were often defined as German or Prussian.

Their tenacity and determination helped them overcome the hardships of living in new settlements with little or no infrastructure, a new language, and seasons and countryside completely different from what they knew in old Europe.

Positive descriptions of the new colony came from German agents employed by the New Zealand government to find much-needed settlers and labourers. Emigration from the Prussian empire had already increased under Bismarck, and New Zealand was not the only colony vying for immigrants. America, Canada and Australia offered attractive incentives through agents of varying degrees of honesty.

The New Zealand Settlements Act of 1863 gave Governor Sir George Bowen the funding to create "special settlements" and the ability to offer settlers the opportunity to buy any land previously 'acquired' by the new colony.

On 5 July 1871, under the Regulations for the Introduction of Assisted Immigrants into the Province of Canterbury, New Zealand's Agent-General in London, Dr Isaac Featherston, received instructions to invite "any person residing in Europe who had the necessary trades to receive assisted passage."

As well as the potential immigrants having to "be of sound mind, good health, and good character" other requirements included: "No single man above the age of 40 years, no person above the age of 50 years unless a member of a large family, and no person above 60 under any circumstances." The candidates had to come from rural districts and the men needed to show previous employment as agricultural labourers. Young married couples were encouraged.

Difficulties in fulfilling the colonial expansion plans of Julius Vogel, then Secretary of State, led to the colony casting a net outside Britain, where in 1871 England and Scotland had an unexpected "general revival of trade."

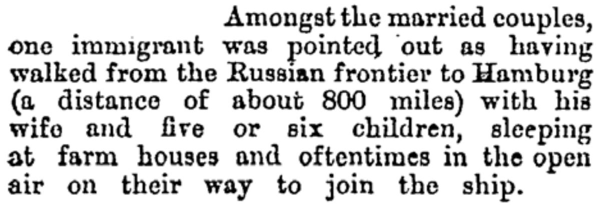
Free passage was provided to single women "accustomed to domestic service, who can bring satisfactory proof of good character, and who are between the ages of 15 and 35."

Prices charged to "assisted immigrants" fluctuated. Agents—who received a commission for each landed immigrant—bargained for trade. Married couples with two children paid £5 per adult. Those with more than two children had to pay a full adult fare for each child older than 12 and half fare for children younger than 12. Infants younger than a year were not charged but single men—because of their independence from family ties and potential to renege—paid £8, and also paid more than married couples if they signed promissory notes.

Immigrants made their own journeys to the ports of departure. For the Poles this was usually Hamburg. They were expected to arrive with "suitable and sufficient clothing for the voyage" and pay for their "outfit for bedding and mess utensils" aboard ship.

Poorer migrants like the Gierszewski, Borkowski, Watembach, Grochowski and Szymanski families went the cheaper, overland way. It was impossible to go all the way by train as the tracks only went as far as Poznań (Posen). In some places there were opportunities to catch a canal boat but they talked about walking and walking.

The Star, the evening edition of the Lyttelton Times, published a story on 2 September 1872 after the Friedeburg, carrying the first large group of Poles landed:



Amongst the married couples, one immigrant was pointed out as having walked from the Russian frontier to Hamburg (a distance of about 800 miles) with his wife and five or six children, sleeping at farm houses and oftentimes in the open air on their way to join the ship.

The Friedeburg carried 53 families, 33 single men and 61 single women totalling 297 people on board, 200 older than 12 years, 82 children and, in the end, 15 infants. Scandinavians made up the largest ethnic group on the Friedeburg, and nearly 100 Poles the second.

After 102 days at sea there is no doubt the Friedeburg passengers appreciated their first few nights on land. Trains took them to Addington immigration barracks where more than 90 applications for domestic servants waited.

The Poles may have left their Prussian oppressors but their names still carried their German baggage. Ships and immigration manifests in New Zealand under the heading "place of birth" often listed "Germany" or "Prussia" for the Poles. This wrong impression was theoretically correct—it would be a further 46 years after the Friedeburg landed in Lyttleton before the Second Polish Republic emerged out of the First World War in 1918.

In the Immigration To New Zealand (Further Memoranda For The Agent-General) Appendix to the Journals of the House of Representatives, 1 January 1873, Immigration Officer JE March notes:

"Since the date of my last report, the whole of the immigrants by this ship have been engaged. The fourteen families who then remained in barracks have found suitable situations, chiefly at bush work on Banks Peninsula, for which many of the men seem more suited than for farm work.

I am pleased to report that the whole of the immigrants by this ship, with but few exceptions, are giving satisfaction to their employers."

Many of the new arrivals settled in the Marshland area of Christchurch, becoming instrumental in its transformation from a swamp to fertile agricultural land.

Jewish Life in Poland

The inscription on Solomon Nashelski's grave reveals he was born in 1822, son of the late Rabbi Boas Nashelski of Lubranitz (Lubraniec), Poland.

Hyman Marks' bust in the lobby of the Christchurch Hospital gives his place of birth as Warsaw, Poland. His biographer, John Wilson MA PhD, describes him as "a Pole by birth and a Hebrew by persuasion."

The Register of Persons Naturalised in New Zealand before 1949 held at Archives NZ lists the nationality of both as "Polish".

From the beginning of Kingdom of Poland (1025) to the early years of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569) Poland was the most tolerant country in Europe, in the middle ages drawing large numbers of Jewish settlers who sought refuge from persecution in Western Europe, which escalated during the crusades. The General Charter of Jewish Liberties known as the Statute of Kalisz was issued by the Duke of Greater Poland Boleslaus the Pious in 1264. The statute granted Jews unprecedented legal rights in Europe, including exclusive jurisdiction over Jewish matters to Jewish courts, and established a separate tribunal for other criminal matters involving Christians and Jews.

In their biography of the Myers family of Auckland, also Polish Jews, P Goldsmith and M Bassett write: "Poland's original Jews are thought to have arrived from Russia as well as from Western Europe in the 10th and 11th c. […] Their financial talents were welcomed in Poland. While some had been money-lenders in western Europe and in Russia, in Poland many found they were able to lease land from the nobility, and to engage more easily in commerce. One estimate is that by the end of the 17th century three-quarters of world Jewry lived in what is today called Poland and that the area possessed flourishing Jewish culture."

When Poland was nowhere...

Centenary of Poland's Regained Independence

1918 - 2018

Commemorative Linwood Cemetery Walk

Beca
HERITAGE Week
CHRISTCHURCH
12 – 22 OCTOBER 2018

Strength from Struggle –

Remembering our courageous communities

Polish Association in Christchurch
www.polonia.org.nz
christchurch@polonia.org.nz

Things changed when Poland lost its independence in 1795. Since Jews were treated badly by the Russians, many decided to become involved in the Polish insurrections: the Kosciuszko Insurrection (1794), November Insurrection (1830-1831), the January Insurrection (1863) and the Revolutionary Movement of 1905. Jews also joined Polish legions in the battle for independence achieved in 1918.

During this period, the Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) spread throughout Poland. Supporters of the Haskalah movement wanted to reform Jewish life and end special institutions and customs. A belief existed that if the Jews assimilated with the Poles, then they would prosper and would not be persecuted. The Haskalah was popular among wealthy Jews, while the shopkeepers and artisans chose to keep speaking Yiddish and continue practicing Orthodox Judaism. Despite efforts to assimilate, Jews continued to be subject to anti-Semitism under the Czars in Poland.

Solomon Nashelski (section 16, plot 87)

[adapted from https://lostchristchurch.wordpress.com/2011/09/08/melbourne-house-ashby-berghs/ and Macdonald Dictionary Record held at the Canterbury Museum]

Solomon Nashelski was born in 1822, in Lubranitz. Until the 18th century, Lubranitz was a part of the Kingdom of Poland. Following partitions, it became part of Russian occupied Poland. In the 19th century Lubranitz, approx. 60% of the population was Jewish.

According to his obituary in The Press, when Nashelski turned 14, Emperor Nicholas of Russia decreed that all youths over fourteen years of age must serve in the Russian Imperial Army. Nashelski escaped before being sent away to serve but was subsequently captured by the Prussians and imprisoned in the fortifications at Posen for fifteen months. On his release he chose to go to England, and from there sailed for Australia, in the hope of making his fortune.

When the Otago gold rush began, he sailed to Dunedin with his nephew Hiram where they set up a general merchant store in Rattray Street, moving to Christchurch in 1864 after purchasing the business of J. Caro & Co. Ironmongers. They renamed the small wooden one storey building Melbourne House and operated as S. & H. Nashelski, a hardware merchants, importer and indenter.

They supplied iron, cement, coach builders' equipment and tools for carpenters, blacksmiths and coopers. The proximity to the commercial centre, as well as being in such a prominent position next to the town hall, attracted plenty of business. Nashelski's turned out to be one of the most successful retail businesses in the city. The "Freeholders of New Zealand in 1882" lists him as a significant landowner.

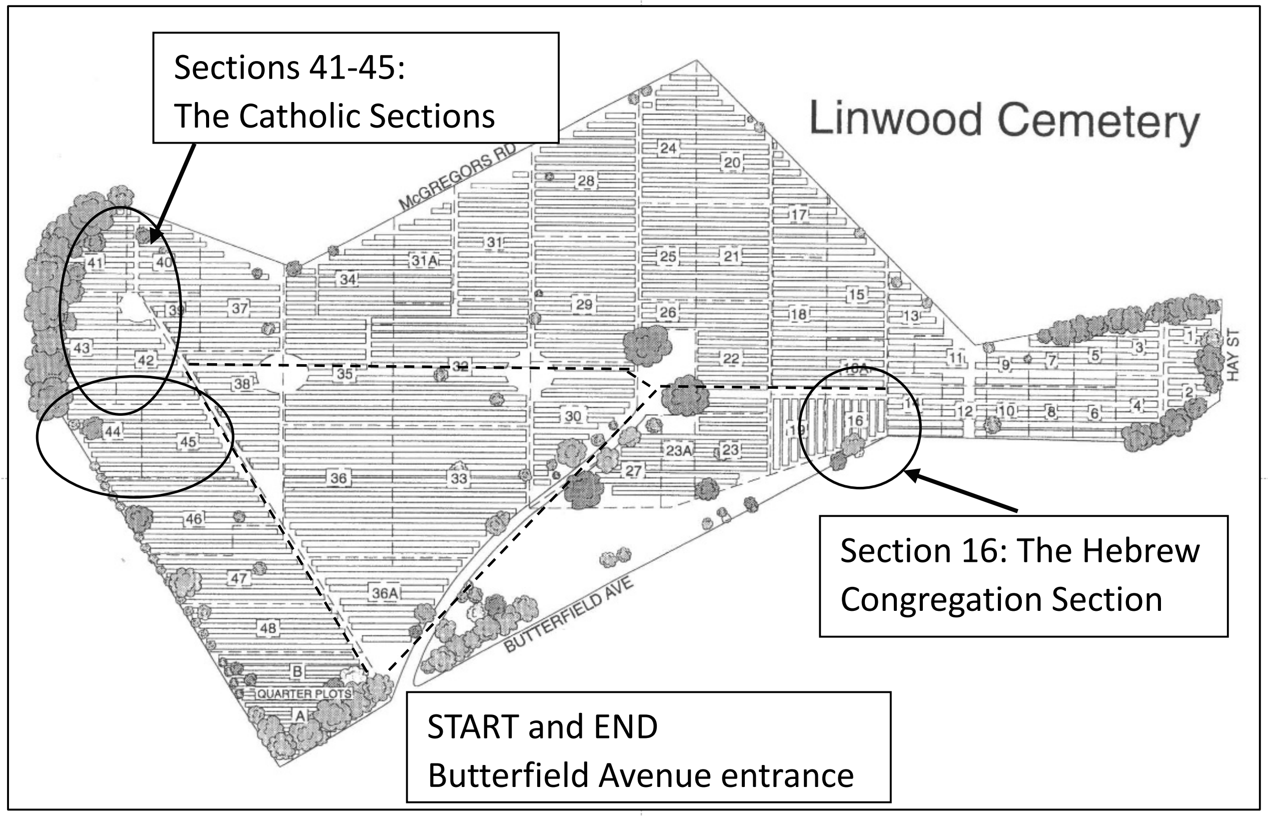
In 1880 his business was sold to two former employees of Nashelski's, Edward E. Ashby and Norwegian, Ludwig Bergh. Known as Ashby Bergh's, it became a limited liability company in 1899. The business was still running in 1950.

Nashelski died on 5 May 1890, leaving behind a widow and five children. From his obituary: "There were few citizens better known in Christchurch and none better respected. Mr Nashelski's kindly disposition, unassuming manners and genial urbanity have won for him universal respect, whilst his generous hospitality and numerous sterling qualities have endeared him to a host of friends."

Hyman Marks (section 16, plot 91)

[adapted from https://lostchristchurch.wordpress.com/2011/08/10/marks-ward-christchurch-public-hospital-1897/ and Macdonald Dictionary Record held at the Canterbury Museum]

Born in Warsaw, Poland in 1834, Hyman Marks joined hundreds of thousands of other Jews in the great exodus after the Russians and Polish cleared farms, villages and cities of the Jewish population, sailing for the colonies and settling in Christchurch in 1861, where he soon became a naturalised British subject.



In his early days in the city, Marks entered into a partnership with Bernard Simpson to run a tobacconist's store in High Street. There were two carved figures at opposite ends of their shop front which were popularly supposed to represent the two partners, no one knew which was which. When they split up, Simpson reportedly covered the figure of Marks with a black cloth. Later on, Marks established a shoe and boot business and was also listed as a 'financial agent' or money lender and land buyer in the local business directory.

HYMAN MARKS

Hyman Marks married Bessie Barnett c.1861 – it was the first Jewish marriage to be solemnized in Christchurch. This union produced no children. Hyman passed away from an illness on 22 May 22, 1895 at the age of sixty at his home at 53 Hereford Street. His tall marble tombstone is engraved with the epitaph *"He bequeathed his wealth to the poor and afflicted"*: 5,000 pounds was to be used to create a large wing at the Christchurch Public Hospital (named the Marks Ward when built). With his friend and National Bank manager, Alexander Ferguson, he had organised to have a portion of his estate put into a trust to provide for poor people who had been patients at the Hospital and for the relief of deserving poor in Christchurch through the winter months. The Trust continues to support charitable causes until this day. The Christchurch Jewish community was another beneficiary of his will.

Marks' graveside funeral was held in the Jewish Section of the Linwood Cemetery at noon on May 24th, 1895. Amongst those present were His Worship the Mayor, Councillors, the Superintendent of the Hospital Board, the President and officers of the Jewish Congregation, attesting to the high esteem he was held in by the Christchurch community.

Mathew (Matthias) and Julia Schimanski (section 41, plot 91-92)

[adapted from "History of Marshland: Szymanski Brothers" by Thelma May Szymanska" and http://polishhistorynewzealand.org/the-schimanski-family-of-marshland/]

Born around 1850, Mathew was the youngest of the Schimanskis and the first to arrive in New Zealand, as a passenger on the Friedeburg in 1872 (as Matheusz Szymanski). When he arrived, his pockets were said to be full of onion seeds. He initially worked for a land owner in Darfield, some 30 miles out of Christchurch. He would walk (or perhaps cycle) to Marshland to see his girlfriend Julia Burkett (also a Friedeburg passenger, who arrived as Burchard, a family of six). Julia pre-deceased Mathew by 37 years. When she died, he married Mrs Rogal, also widowed (the Rogal family is buried in section 41, plot 106). Marriages within the small Polish community were very common, making it even harder today to trace back the family connections with many people in different generations sharing just a handful of surnames.

Mathew's obituary records that he was "very popular amongst racing". He owned Bessie Bee a notable mare which won many races. He was a very devout Catholic man, and set a good example to the community in his gifts to charity and the Church.

Mathew had a ginger beard and most of his children were fair and therefore referred to as "White Schimanskis". His brother Christianus (also known as Christopher), who came to New Zealand in 1882, was on the other hand quite dark, and his offspring came to be known as "Black Schimanskis". Christopher and his wife, Louisa Annie (known as Annie), as well as their grandson George John, were also laid to rest at the Linwood Cemetery – section 43, plot 141-142. Unlike his brother, Chris seems to have lived his life with a wild abandon. Both he and his wife were heavy drinkers, who according to family lore often went to town "good as gold" but would come back drunk as "an owl".

Joseph and Dorothy Boloski (section 43, plot 139)

John and Augusta Boloski (section 45, plot 246-247)

[adapted from "History of Marshland: Szymanski Brothers" by Thelma May Szymanska" and http://polishhistorynewzealand.org/wj-boloski/]

In their late years, Christopher and Annie Schimanski were mostly taken care of by their daughter, Augusta Boloski who is buried at Linwood with her husband John, son of Joseph and Dorothy Boloski.

Joseph and Dorothy were Jozef and Dorota Borkowski who arrived in 1872 on the Friedeburg – with the many variants of the spelling of Polish names, and no accurate historical records, a degree of detective work is required to piece family stories together. Joseph Bolowski was naturalised in October 1887, his occupation, farmer, and his address, Bottle Lake, Christchurch. Dorothea Bolowski appears on the first electoral roll for women in 1893, registered in Avon. Her residence was Marshlands and her occupation "domestic duties."

John Boloski married Augusta Schimanski in 1899 and followed his father's occupation. The family lived on Prestons Road.

According to birth records John and Augusta had 11 children, the oldest, Joseph, died at 18 years and the youngest, Thomas, at 15 months – both are buried with their parents. All their living children went to Marshlands School and three went on to technical college.

Joseph and Julia Dunick (section 43, plot 113)

Joseph arrived in New Zealand as a child on the Friedeburg in 1872, with his parents and two brothers (listed as the Zdonek family). Julia was "Black" Christopher Schimanski's daughter. The Dunicks and Schimankis were friends and neighbours and there were a few Dunick- Schimanski marriages in Marshland.

Julia died aged 33, possibly due to birth complications. Her infant daughter, Kathleen Margaret, only lived 6 months. She died in March 1907, and is buried with her parents. Joseph re-married.

His second wife, Mary, appears to have died in similar circumstances to her predecessor. Mary, aged 25, and her infant daughter, Mary Amelda, who lived only two months, are buried with Joseph and Julia.

John and Mary Suhomski (section 42, plot 37)

John and Mary Suhomski arrived in Wellington in 1874 on the Cartvale with their son Carl who was about three.

John and Carl, both farmers, became naturalised New Zealanders in Marshland in 1893, the same year Mary Suchomski put her name down for the first-ever electoral roll for women. The Suhomskis had at least two more children in Marshland. Mary died in 1908, aged 59.

Also on the Cartvale were Albert and Mary Rhoda (section 43, plot 64-65), with their three children.

The Suhomski family was in all likelihood invited to New Zealand by Albert Watemburg, whose wife, Katarzyna, was Mrs Mariane (Mary) Suhomska's and Albert Rhoda's older sister. All came from the same area of Czersk in Prussian-occupied north-western Poland.

The Watemburgs, too, rest at Linwood Cemetery (section 43, plot 125-126).

Matthew Shaskey (section 42, plot 89)

Little is known of Mateusz Jaroszewski (Mathias Jaroshewski, Matthew Shaskey) who arrived in 1872 on the Friedeburg with his wife and four children. The inscription on his grave, showing his place of birth as Poland, which at the time did not exist, is a testament to his patriotic feelings.

We are indebted to the thorough research of J.W. Pobóg-Jaworowski in his "History of the Polish Settlers in New Zealand" (Warsaw, 1990), and of Barbara Scrivens, who has collected a wealth of stories on http://polishhistorynewzealand.org/, from which we sourced much of the material for this leaflet. If your ancestors were the Marshland Poles, or early Polish settlers generally, and you would like to share and record your family's story, please get in touch with Barbara via that webpage.

http://www.linwoodcemetery.org.nz/ is also a wonderful resource recommended to anyone interested in the early history of Christchurch.