In 1948 Poland acquired statehood with the baptism of Mieszko I. In 1295 Przemysł I adopted the White Eagle as the state symbol. Enlightened thinking with protection for religions and ethnic diversity, tolerant Poland fostered new ideas in culture, literature, science. 1569, the Union of Lublin, established the Commonwealth of The Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, characterised by an elective monarchy.

The Commonwealth’s fortunes waned and warred and internal divisions by the szlachta (nobility), influenced by foreign interests, resulted in it losing its strength.

The Partition of the Commonwealth was pursuant to the Treaty of Berlin or the Treaty of the Three Black Eagles, because the three signatories, Austria, Russia and Prussia used black eagles as state symbols.

The treaty had provisions for all three powers agreeing that it was in their best interest that their common neighbour, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, did not undertake any reforms that might re-ignite it.

The last king of Poland, Stanislaw II August Poniatowski, formulated the Constitution of the 3rd May in 1791 and is the highlight of 18th century constitutional history. The ‘libero veto’ abolished, majority rule was introduced and personal freedoms were guaranteed to all individuals.

Such reforms were not welcomed by Poland’s autocratic, expansionist and imperialist neighbours who wanted to maintain the subjugation of their peoples. To ensure that democratic principles and ideas do not find root in their respective empires, Russia, Prussia and Austria undertook the Three Partitions of Poland.

• The First Partition: August 5, 1772.
• The Second Partition: January 23, 1793.
• The Third Partition: October 24, 1795. With this partition, the independent state of Poland ceased to exist.

Thus began the colonisation, oppression, de-Polonisation, of Poland, destruction of Poland’s languages, cultures and enlightened achievements.

Russia’s primary objective was the complete Russification of Poland.

In addition, the three occupiers and oppressors used every method to hinder the economic development of the Three Portions of Poland.

As a result of the Partitions, Poles were forced to seek a change of status quo in Europe. Polish poets, scientists, politicians, noblemen, writers, the intelligentsia, the revolutionaries and freedom fighters of the 19th century, as a desire for freedom and liberty became one of the defining cornerstones of Polish Romanticism. In their drive for freedom and liberty, Poles participated in many uprisings in Prussian, Austrian and Russian occupied Poland.

Russia’s quelling of Polish uprisings and struggles for liberty and freedom was particularly brutal, and included deporting Polish revolutionaries to Siberia.

The 19th century history of the Poles is a sad but a courageous, romantic and a heroic one.

The Fourth Partition

Formed out of the chaos of the First World War approximately 400,000 soon-to-be Polish citizens died fighting for Poland’s three partitioning powers. On 11 November 1918, now celebrated as Independence Day, Marshall Pilsudski assumed control of the Polish forces, proclaimed an independent Polish state and went on to form a new national government.

The 2nd Polish Republic was short-lived. On 24 August 1939, pre-planned by Russia and Germany, the infamous and devastating Red-German Pact was signed, dividing Poland – the Fourth Partition. Following the German invasion, Poland on 17 September 1939, immediately starting the de-Polonisation of occupied lands.

The Polish nation was then subjected to a calculated Russian-German ethnic cleansing campaign that would later be defined as a new crime against humanity called “genocide”.

The cruelty which the occupants imposed on the deportees from their various places of confinement and absolved themselves from assisting them in any whatever upon their release. This utter lack of concern brought about a crisis of unimaginable proportions. After the discovery of the Katyn Forest massacre, Russia claimed to be “offended” by the Polish insistence on an independent investigation, and broke off diplomatic relations with the Polish government-in-exile and stopped any further release of deportees.

During the two great evolutions of Polish refugees (the 1st, between March 24 and the beginning of April 1942; the 2nd, between August 10 and September 1, 1942), from Krasnograd across the Caspian Sea to Pavlov, and smaller overland evacuations from Ashkhabad to Maahad (March and September 1942), on, only 115,000 people, of whom about 18,300 were children, reached freedom.

Another criminal act of historic proportions and yet another example of Russian state sponsored terrorism was the cold blooded murder of 22,000 Polish citizens in various locations in what has become known as the Katyn Forest massacre.

Compiled: Stefan Sanecki, 17 September 2012. Dedicated to those Polish citizens who did not survive Siberia, in particular the innocent children. 

The benevolent Poland

In 1947 the Polish Children’s Home was closed. The children were sent to various schools across Southern Africa to continue their education. It is estimated that half of the children remained to start a new life in South Africa, many leaving behind their parents, the illegitimate, and illegal Russian communist enslaved People’s Republic of Poland.

Poland has not yet perished

The courageous and heroic pursuit for liberty by Poles led to the peaceful downfall of communism. The Third Polish Republic was established in 1989 as a democratic state led by the implementing the principles of social justice. Poland’s on-going history, steeped with the evolution of enlightened human rights laws and the current Constitution on 17 October 1924. The phrase in the Preamble to the Constitution: “...bound in community with our compatriots dispersed throughout the world...” Mindful of the bitter experiences of the times when fundamental freedoms and human rights were violated in our Homeland. 

To acknowledge and capture the essence of the deportations to Siberia as part of Poland’s dramatic, turbulent, sad, heroic but glorious history. The Polish Children of Oudsthoorn’s unwavering belief in Poland and its enlightened values has been passed onto subsequent generations.

The Children of Oudsthoorn

All the camps and settlements established in Iran, Lebanon, Palestine, India, Africa, Mexico, and New Zealand were meant to be temporary quarters for the Polish refugees until the establishment of the Polish state. However, after the Treaty of Yalta (when the Western Allies unwittingly granted Russia the right to enslave all of Eastern and half of Central Europe), the children’s dreams became an impossible dream for most, although a few did return to join their families in Poland.

What became of the rest?

Many of those Polish refugees brought to New Zealand and the Union of South Africa remained. The Polish refugees housed in the various camps in Iran, Lebanon, Palestine, India, and East Africa moved about a crisis of unimaginable proportions. After the discovery of the Katyn Forest massacre, Russia claimed to be “offended” by the Polish insistence on an independent investigation, and broke off diplomatic relations with the Polish government-in-exile and stopped any further release of deportees.

But what happened to the rest of the hundreds of thousands of deportees who did not leave? For tens of thousands, Siberia became their final resting place – thousands in unmarked graves. Another quarter of a million people were repatriated to the “recovered territories” of Western Poland during the massive population exchanges following World War II.

As for what happened to those whose whereabouts are unknown in Siberia, God only knows. Some, no doubt, are still there.

THE POLISH CHILDREN OF OUDSTHOORN – THEIR STORY IN BRIEF

With acknowledgments to all references and sources.