Polish Kindergarten Pahiatua, 1944-5

Kindergarten group at Polish refugee camp, Pahiatua

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A consequence of World War 2

The most newsworthy reminder of the plight of Europe’s children in war was the arrival in 1944 of over 700 Polish war orphans who had managed to survive a mass relocation from Soviet labour camps to the Persian Gulf. The story of these children as they grew up and remained connected to one another has been told in various ways. Their situation did not attract research interest at the time but there was considerable media coverage of the arrival of the children, the welcome by Prime Minister Peter Fraser who had offered New Zealand as a temporary home, and their subsequent life and education at the Pahiatua camp. The changed political situation in Poland prevented their return. There was considerable effort by the government and Catholic communities to ensure that these children benefited from the best New Zealand could offer by way of education and health services. Little is known about the kindergarten set up at the camp for the younger aged children except that establishing regular schooling for the children was made a priority. Initially all schooling was in Polish because it was anticipated that the children would return to Poland.

Polish children arrive in Wellington, October 1944
Kindergarten children testing the seesaw built by New Zealand soldiers, 1945

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Further information

- The Encyclopedia of NZ

- Films: