

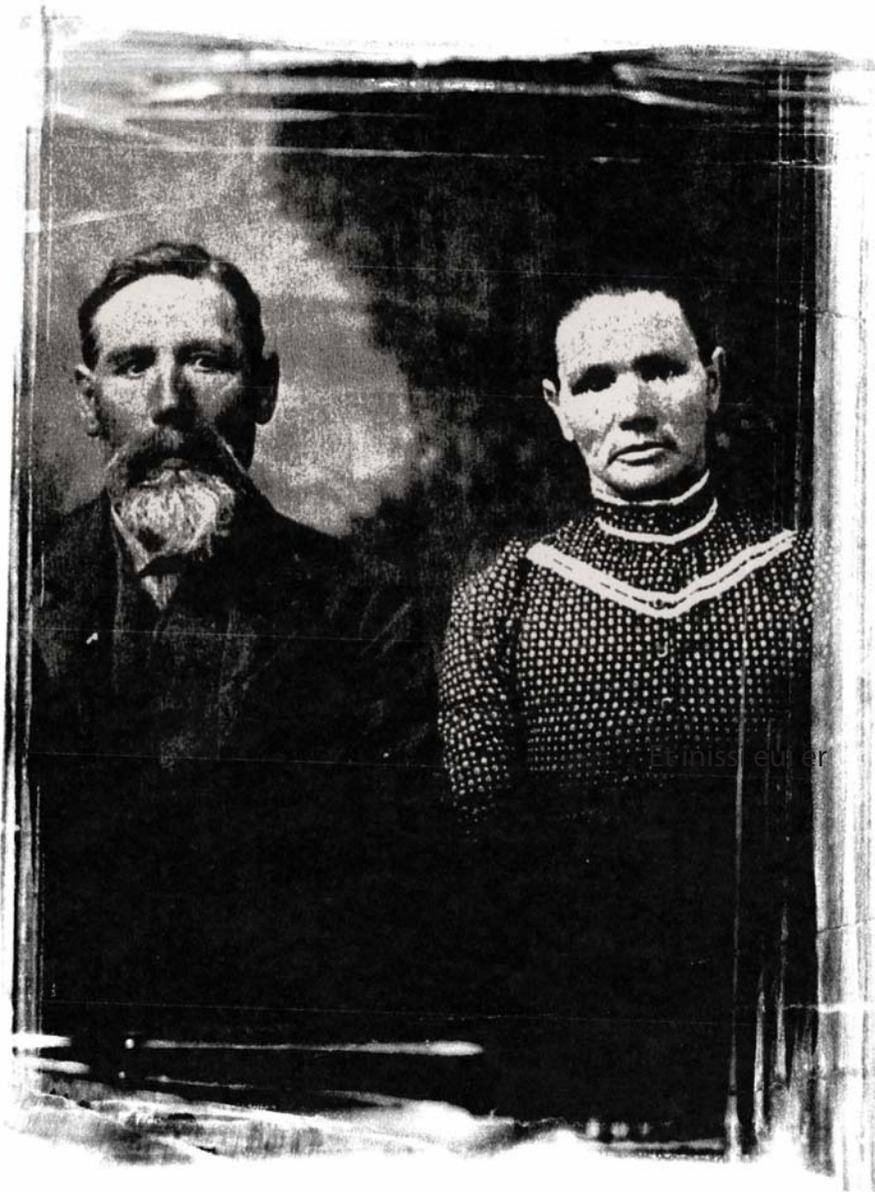
December, 2009

Nelke Family History

New findings about our ancestry . . .



John & Katherine Nelke Family



Nelke History Revisited

A trip to Poland reveals new facts

We have generally thought that our last name was changed based on a family legend. In an interview with Agnes (Adams) Nelke in 1992, the family rumor was that Nick Nelke's great grandfather, John Nelke's boss in Germany or Poland said he was going to be beat up by some guys. According to the story, John apparently fought them, they either beat him up or he beat them up and and/or he escaped across the border (which border is unknown), changed his name to "Nelke" from a sign he saw on the way out or in, probably in Germany. Therefore, base on that, our belief was that we were from German heritage.

It seems, if the legend is true, it is only in part. As it turns out, we are able now to verify that the Nelke family belonged to a very specific ethnic group of people: the Koschneiders. They were a German tribe who had lived in the territory of the former Kingdom of Poland for over 400 years, when this part of Poland was captured by the Prussian kingdom, in 1772 and partitioned into Austria, Russia and Prussia. Although they found themselves under a "friendly" administration, they stayed a closed group. Of course, some of them moved to new places over the centuries. Because of the unfortunate politics (of WW2 (especially if you were German living in Poland), this tribe became enemies of the Polish people and

those who survived were displaced to Germany during and after the war. (See more about the Koschneider family on the next page...)

While in Poland, the Nelke's, Behrendt's, Beienk's, and Wamke's ancestors were mainly farmers who owned or tilled the land as laborers. They had many children on average, but many didn't make it to adulthood. Those who survived lived difficult lives on the farm and during violent times in their country's history.

John (Johann) Nelke, the son of Josephus Nelke and Anna Glaeser of Duza Cerkwica in West Prussia (Poland) was one of the first to migrate to the United States in 1868 at the age of 25. He settled in Chicago, where he married Katherine Kollas, who was from a nearby community near his ancestry - Wilkowa, Poland. (Note: When Elaine was visiting Poland this past year, she found numerous grave markers in the southern portion of Poland, in the Mazury area, near where husband Joe's relatives are buried, with the name "Kollas" or "Kolasa.")

It is unknown if John knew Katherine before Chicago. They married in 1870 at **St. Stanislaus Polish Catholic Parish** in Chicago and sometime after 1879 moved to Arkansas. There is record of him applying for a deed to land in 1894 in Franklin County and the 1900 census shows them living on their farm in Charleston, Arkansas by then. Our family's roots are pretty well documented from this point on.

Further History of the Koschneider Families

Koschneider family names include: *Nelke, Behrendt, Hoppe, Beinke, Warnke* among others which gives validity to being related to this ethnic group.

The Koschneider families were German Catholic, residents of seven villages in Southeast Konitz in Poland. The original spelling of Koschneider was derived from the Polish name, Koschnaewjer, from a leader of the group, Tucheler

Our Nelke ancestors lived in Kamien parish in Duza Cerkwica and Drabowka areas since the 1400's. Back then, this area was the home of Germanic tribes. During the 1700's – 1800's, this region was Poland, then partitioned to become Prussia, then a part of Russia and then became Poland again after the World War II (not shown). The big red dot marks are where our ancestors lived, until they either migrated to the United States or parts of Germany.

The Partitioning of Poland & the Nelke's

Are we German, Polish or a little of both?



DUCHY OF WARSAW, 1807-1813 (Napoleon)



Congress Poland or Kingdom of Poland was part of the Russian Empire, west of the dotted line, 1815-19



INDEPENDENT POLAND, 1921-1939. After World War II, the borders of Poland shifted west, taking parts of Pommern and Brandenburg and giving up parts of Grodno, Volhynia, and Vilna to Russia.

Starosteibeamten Koschnewski who held the deed since 1484 for the people of the village. Around 1319, the German settlers used the forest areas for a new settlement of villages Petzin, Dt. Zeksin, Granau, Lichnau and Schlagenwerth and later Zirwitz (Duza Cerkwitz). Their colloquial language was niederdeutsch (a dialect attributed to the northern German/Polish regions and the northern seacoast regions, including Denmark and the Netherlands).

The villages of Koschneider totaled about 9000 and kept its German character until 1945. Parishes in the Koschneider villages include Gross Zirkwitz (Cerkwitz) where most of the Nelke and Behrendt families were born, lived and died. The region in

today's Poland is northeast of Warsaw, on the other side of Torun, just above Bydgoszcz.

So, based on what we know now Our family was "originally" of German descent, but living and inter-marrying in what is now Poland for at least 400, probably well over 600 years. Our ancestor, Katherine Kollas (various spellings), who married John Nelke, Nick's Great Grandfather, was definitely of Polish descent, however. Then, you throw in Agnes' family history, which was primarily German, we are German and Polish. §

"Now we know the rest of the story.....?"

Information in part provided by our family genealogist in Poland, "A History of the Family 'Nelke' from Duza Cerkwica (Gross Zirkwitz)"; Warsaw, 2007 by Jadwiga Kwolczak, our family's genealogist. The family's history is available in photos, stories and in a pretty extensive database from Elaine (Nelke) Swyt at 503-694-6649 or eswynt@mediaphysics.com. We also thank Al Classen, Tom Pick and Matt Adams for all their meticulous research on our behalf.

Front Cover: John & Katherine (Kolasa/Kollas) Nelke, 1889 taken in Fort Smith, Arkansas. The children standing in the back are Josephene (Nelke) Reichert and Joseph Nelke (our great grandfather). The children in the front are John Nelke, Cecelia (Nelke) Shelby and Catherine (Nelke) Smith. The oldest girl, Mary (Nelke) Minden is not in the picture.



The Nicholas Nelke Family
Arkansas, 1937