

Yearning for Freedom

by Jacob T. Muklewicz

Introduction

My family's journey from the "Old Country" to the Ohio Valley is a generational saga of courage and tenacity. For centuries my ancestors battled tyranny and oppression in the face of seemingly insurmountable opposition. Nevertheless, no matter how bleak their situations appeared, my forefathers instilled within each new generation a burning desire for freedom.

This article, the first of a two-part series, describes the historical, political, and economic hardships that my great-grandfather, Adolf Muklewicz, and his family endured during the waning decades of the nineteenth century in the Russian occupied territories of the partitioned Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth. After studying the local and regional histories written in Polish and Russian about my ancestors' homeland and speaking with living relatives in Poland, I have gained invaluable insights into my family history and cultural heritage.

The purpose of my articles is not only to share insights about my personal family history and cultural heritage, which is shared by some of the residents of Jefferson County, Ohio and the Ohio Valley, but to inspire everyone regardless of their ethnic background to learn more about their ancestral roots and cultural heritage.

According to the wise words of the nineteenth century Polish poet, Cyprian Kamil Norwid, "In order to gauge the future road, one must know from where it comes." In other words, we should first know our origin in order to properly determine our destination.

Therefore, before delving immediately into the history of my family's arrival to Steubenville, Ohio, in the early 1900s, following Norwid's counsel I will explain from where their journey historically began.

Rise and Fall of the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth

In 1386 the Polish queen Jadwiga, who was technically crowned as King of Poland, married Lithuania's Grand Duke Jogaila. The purpose of this marital union was to form a political alliance and protect Polish and Lithuanian lands from annexation by the Teutonic Order comprised primarily of German knights who had previously fought during the crusades in the Holy Land.

Initially invited by Polish noblemen to either convert or conquer pagan tribes inhabiting Prussian lands within the Polish realm, the Teutonic knights began seizing lands along the Baltic Sea belonging to Poland and Lithuania. The Teutonic knights realized that the lands encompassing the Baltic coast and Prussia were the source of great wealth due to their abundance of amber, which was valued as a precious gemstone.

As a pre-condition to marrying Jadwiga and forming an alliance with the Polish crown, Grand Duke Jogaila converted to Roman Catholicism and took the Christian name Władysław Jagiełło. The marital union between the Crown of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania formed a union of nationals creating one of the largest and most populous and diverse nations in Europe.



On July 15, 1410, Władysław Jagiełło and his brother, Duke Vytautas (Witold) commanded Polish and Lithuanian forces joined by Ruthenian and Tatar soldiers against the Teutonic Order and other knights from Western Europe in the Battle of Grunwald. The Polish and Lithuanian forces together with the Ruthenian and Tatar allies crushed the Teutonic knights under the command of Ulrich von Junginen. However, the Polish and Lithuanian forces failed to expel the Teutonic knights from their castles and fortresses throughout Prussia, which three centuries later proved to be a costly mistake.

Nevertheless, following the Battle of Grunwald, the Polish Lithuanian alliance flourished. While much of Europe was decimated by the Black Plague, religious contention and wars stemming from the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Polish Lithuanian alliance, comprised of diverse ethnicities and religious traditions, fostered tolerance.

In July 1569, the Polish Crown and Grand Duchy of Lithuania legally formalized their alliance and formed the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth, which created a constitutional monarchy granting to the noble class extensive rights and powers. Among these powers was the *liberum veto*, which allowed one nobleman to veto any act proposed by the king.

While the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth was divesting considerable privileges to some of its citizens, including the right for the *szlachta* or noble class to elect kings, other rulers in Central and Eastern Europe such as the Russian tsars, Austro-Hungarian Habsburgs, and Prussian kaisers were crushing political opposition and forming absolute monarchies. Viewing the democratic experimentation within the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth as a significant threat to their absolute powers, in the eighteenth century the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Prussian empires colluded to partition the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth.



The Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Prussian rulers used their wealth and power to buy influence with some of the noblemen within the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth, who used the *liberum veto* to block the Polish Crown and Grand Duchy of Lithuania from raising and maintaining armies to protect the commonwealth’s borders. Consequently, in 1772, 1793, and 1795, the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Prussian Empires systematically partitioned the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth until it was erased completely from the map of Europe.

The Generational Struggle to Regain Liberty

Although the partitioning powers had erased the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth from the map of Europe, generations of freedom loving Poles never ceased fighting to resurrect the commonwealth and to regain their liberty. As the great Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz, poignantly quipped in the prologue of his epic work *Pan Tadeusz (Sir Thaddeus)*:

Lithuania [Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth], my country! You are as good health:
 How much one should prize you, he only can tell
 Who has lost you. Your beauty and splendor I view
 And describe here today, for I long after you.



When Napoleon Bonaparte battled against the Prussian empire, many young Polish patriots formed military units and fought alongside the French. After defeating the Prussian empire, Napoleon created the Duchy of Warsaw according to the terms of the Treaty of Tilsit. Young Poles enthusiastically swelled the ranks of Napoleon's French legions, which after defeating the Prussians aimed to conquer the Russian Empire.

The Poles believed that by allying themselves with Napoleon and the French they could defeat the partitioning powers that had obliterated their country and resurrect the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth. For this reason, the second verse of the Polish national anthem today proclaims: *We shall be Polish! Bonaparte has given us the example of how we should prevail!*

However, as we know from history the Russians defeated Napoleon, and unfortunately for the freedom-fighting Poles, through the Treaty of Vienna the Russians and Prussians regained their lands that Napoleon had granted to the Duchy of Warsaw.

Notwithstanding Napoleon's defeat and the abolishment of the Duchy of Warsaw, the Poles instilled in the next generation the unquenchable yearning for freedom. As Adam Mickiewicz had eloquently penned in verse, one can truly prize country and freedom only after losing them.



The Russians replaced the Duchy of Warsaw with the semi-autonomous Congress Kingdom, granting the Poles the appearance of self-government when in fact the Russian tsar and his military governors dominated all political, economic, and social life in the kingdom. Hoping to regain the freedoms lost by their fathers and grandfathers, in November 1830, Polish officers and cadets of the Congress Kingdom's military academy launched an armed rebellion against the Russian empire.

The Poles, who were significantly overmanned and outgunned by the vast Russian Empire, valiantly battled against their foes against tremendous odds for nearly a year until they reluctantly surrendered. Nevertheless, the Russian Empire ultimately prevailed and crushed the Poles' hopes of regaining their freedom and independence.

To punish the Poles for their rebelliousness and to quell future uprisings, the Russian tsar deported many Polish officers, patriotic supporters, and their families to Siberia. The Russian Empire confiscated the lands left by the Polish deportees and granted them to Russian governors and military officers, who implemented a policy aimed at gradually eliminating the Polish language and culture and replacing it with Russian.

Nevertheless, reflecting the spirit of the modern Polish national anthem another generation of Poles learned from their fathers that "Poland has not yet perished, as long as we live!"



In January 1863 the next generation of Poles yearning for freedom again rebelled against the Russian Empire sparking the January Uprising. Young Polish men rebelled against mandatory conscriptions into the Imperial Russian Army, which brutally oppressed towns and villages populated by Poles throughout the former Crown of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

Once again outmanned and outgunned, the Poles waged ferocious guerilla warfare against the Russian Empire for a year and a half. Although the Poles won several battles and skirmishes, they lacked the manpower and resources to defeat their foe and regain their freedom.

After quelling the rebellion in June 1864 and publically executing the Polish military leaders of the January Uprising, the Russian Empire again deported Polish soldiers, patriotic sympathizers and supporters, and their families and gave their lands to Russian political and military leaders. Furthermore, the Russian tsar ordered the closing of all Polish language schools and Roman Catholic churches (viewed by the Russian tsar and military leaders not only as religious institutions but also as bastions of Polish culture and nationalism) located in former Polish territories now under Russian control.

The Russian Empire confiscated Roman Catholic churches, rectories, and convents and granted the buildings and adjacent land to the Russian Orthodox Church. The official policy of the Russian Empire now was aimed at obliterating all remnants of the Polish language and culture, including its spirituality and connection to the Roman Catholic Church.

My Family's Journey to the Ohio Valley



On May 21, 1878, my great-great grandfather, Wincenty Muklewicz, married Zuzanna Kostecka in Sokolany, a small village then located within the Grodno Governorate now situated in Sokółka County (powiat sokólski) of the Podlaskie Voivodeship (województwo podlaskie) in northeastern Poland near the Belarusian border. Having grown up without a father, like many young men following the January Uprising, my great-great grandfather was conscripted into the Russian Imperial Army, where he learned the trade of a cobbler.

Determined to make for his wife and children the best life possible under the repressive political and economic climate, Wincenty worked hard and opened his own shoe shop in the village of Chwaszczewo where Wincenty was born and the Muklewicz family grew and milled wheat and rye and operated a dry goods store.

Wincenty and Zuzanna Muklewicz had seven children – Zofia, Emilia, Eleonora, Adolf, Ludwik, Ignacy, and Michał. Their eldest son, Adolf, born on March 9, 1884 in Chwaszczewo, is my great-grandfather. In the spring of 1902 when Adolf turned 18 years old, the Russian Imperial Army implemented its mandatory conscriptions and ordered Adolf to serve a compulsory 25-year tour of duty.

After the turn of the twentieth century, the Russian Empire was engaged in several military conquests in the Far East against the Japanese Empire. The Russian Imperial Army needed new reserves in order to replace casualties lost in costly battles. Furthermore, the Russian Empire hoped that the mandatory conscriptions of young Polish men into the Russian army would also prevent outbreaks of future uprisings.

According to verbal family histories passed on to me from my great-aunt Jadwiga (Adolf Muklewicz's youngest daughter and my grandfather Stanisław Jakub Muklewicz's sister) instead of accepting the compulsory order to join the Russian Imperial Army, my great-grandfather together with other young conscripts from nearby Polish villages, razed a Russian police garrison in an act of defiance. In order to avoid deportation and imprisonment in Siberia or execution by Russian authorities, my great-grandfather, Adolf Muklewicz, fled his homeland.

Pondering his place of refuge, Adolf decided to flee to Steubenville, Ohio, where his older sister, Zofia, lived together with her husband, Stefan Gałownia. (The spelling of this surname is in the local dialect prevalent in Chwaszczewo used by the inhabitants of neighboring villages. The official Polish spelling of this surname currently is "Hołownia.")

After Zofia Muklewicz married Stefan Gałownia in Poland, they immigrated to America, where Stefan found work in the bustling coal mines along the Ohio River. Having corresponded with his sister and brother-in-law living in Steubenville, Adolf fled to Hamburg, Germany, where in April 1902 Adolf boarded the *Pretoria* bound for New York, New York.

Below are photos of the *Pretoria* and ship manifest documenting my great-grandfather's arrival to New York. Interestingly, according to the ship manifest Adolf used his father Wincenty's name, presumably because he feared detection of his revolutionary activities by Russian authorities when leaving Poland. Also, Adolf had only two dollars when he arrived at New York, and he declared that his destination in America was 702 7th Street, Steubenville, Ohio, where his "cousin" Stefan Gałownia resided. (I obtained photos of the *Pretoria* and the manifest through the website ellisland.org.)



Photograph of the *Pretoria*, the ship that brought Adolf Muklewicz from Hamburg, Germany to New York, New York

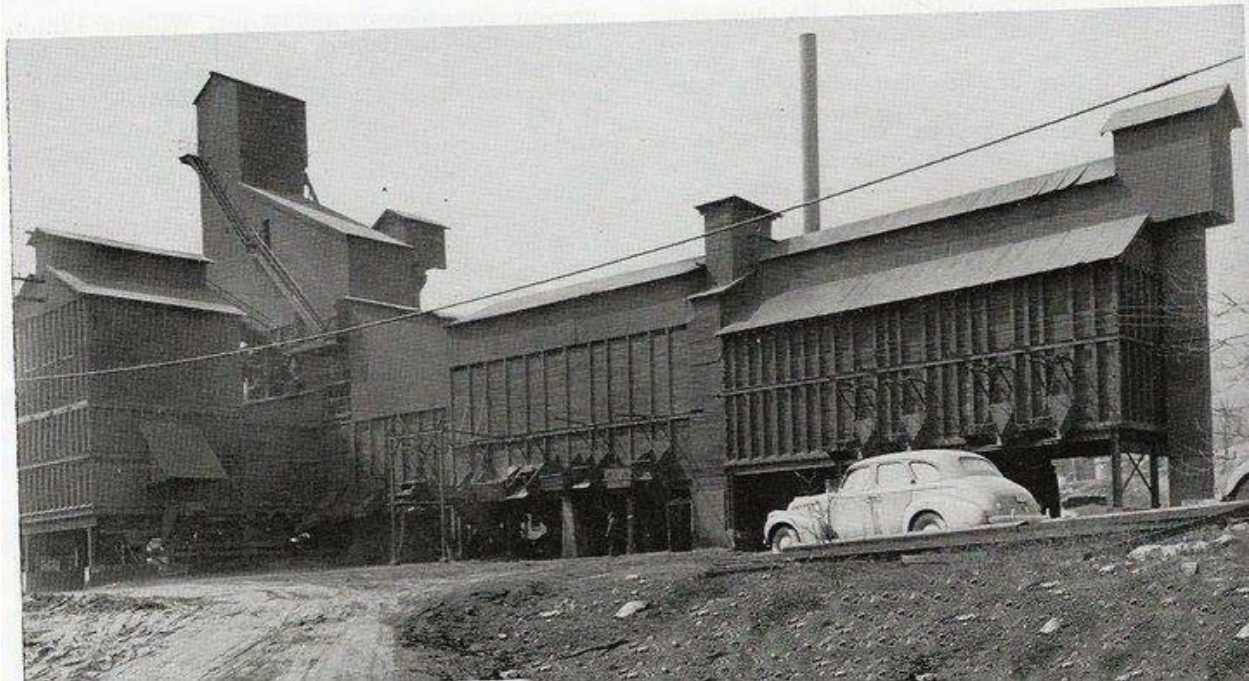
In the spring of 1902 Adolf Muklewicz arrived to Steubenville, Ohio as a young, 18-year old man. For the first time in his life, Adolf could freely and openly speak his native language, Polish, and practice his religion, Roman Catholicism, without fear of persecution or exile to Siberia. The first known photograph of Adolf Muklewicz (on left) taken after his arrival to Steubenville, Ohio reveals in Adolf's eyes a sharp concentration forged after years of living under the yoke of tyranny and oppression in his native land.



Below is a photograph of Stefan Gałownia and his wife, Zofia (Adolf Muklewicz's older sister), who in 1902 lived in Steubenville, Ohio and initially provided room and board to Adolf Muklewicz after arriving to America.



After arriving to Steubenville, Ohio, Adolf Muklewicz joined his brother-in-law, Stefan Gałownia, working in the High Shaft Coal Mine.



My great-aunt, Jadwiga (Ida) Adams nee Muklewicz often told me that when her father, Adolf, worked in the dampness and obscurity of the coal mines, he always reminisced about the green fields and fresh aroma of the pine forests surrounding his native village of Chwaszczewo. Work in the coal mines was strenuous not only to the body, frequently causing respiratory problems and eventually black lung, but also on the mind as mine collapses frequently led to the untimely deaths of many young coal miners.

Each day when Adolf began and concluded his labors in the High Shaft Coal Mine, he tightly held and caressed the crucifix affixed to his rosary beads and recited in Polish prayers from his prayer book. On the following pages are photographs of Adolf's crucifix showing wear following several years of fervent prayers of supplication and thanksgiving. Below are translations of the prayers that Adolf recited daily in the mine from his Polish prayer book.

Prayer before work

God! Our Father! Bless the labors of Thy children, that we may commence all labors from Thee, through Thee all labors end, and complete all labors for Thy glory and the benefit of our souls. Amen.

Prayer after work

God! Our Father! May my labor glorify Thee, and my rest following my labor; may my soul always glorify Thee. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.



My się jeszcze obudzili,
Byśmy Cię, Boże, chwalili.

MODLITWY PODCZAS DNIA.

Modlitwa przed pracą.

Boże! Ojcze nasz! racz błogosławić pracom Twych dzieci, abyśmy je wszystkie od Ciebie zaczęli, przez Ciebie kończyli, i wszystkie odbywali na chwałę Twoją i pożytek dusz naszych. Amen.

Modlitwa po pracy.

Boże! Ojcze nasz! niech Cię chwali praca moja, i spoczynek mój po niej; niech Cię zawsze chwali dusza moja. Przez Pana naszego Jezusa Chrystusa. Amen.

Modlitwa przed jedzeniem.

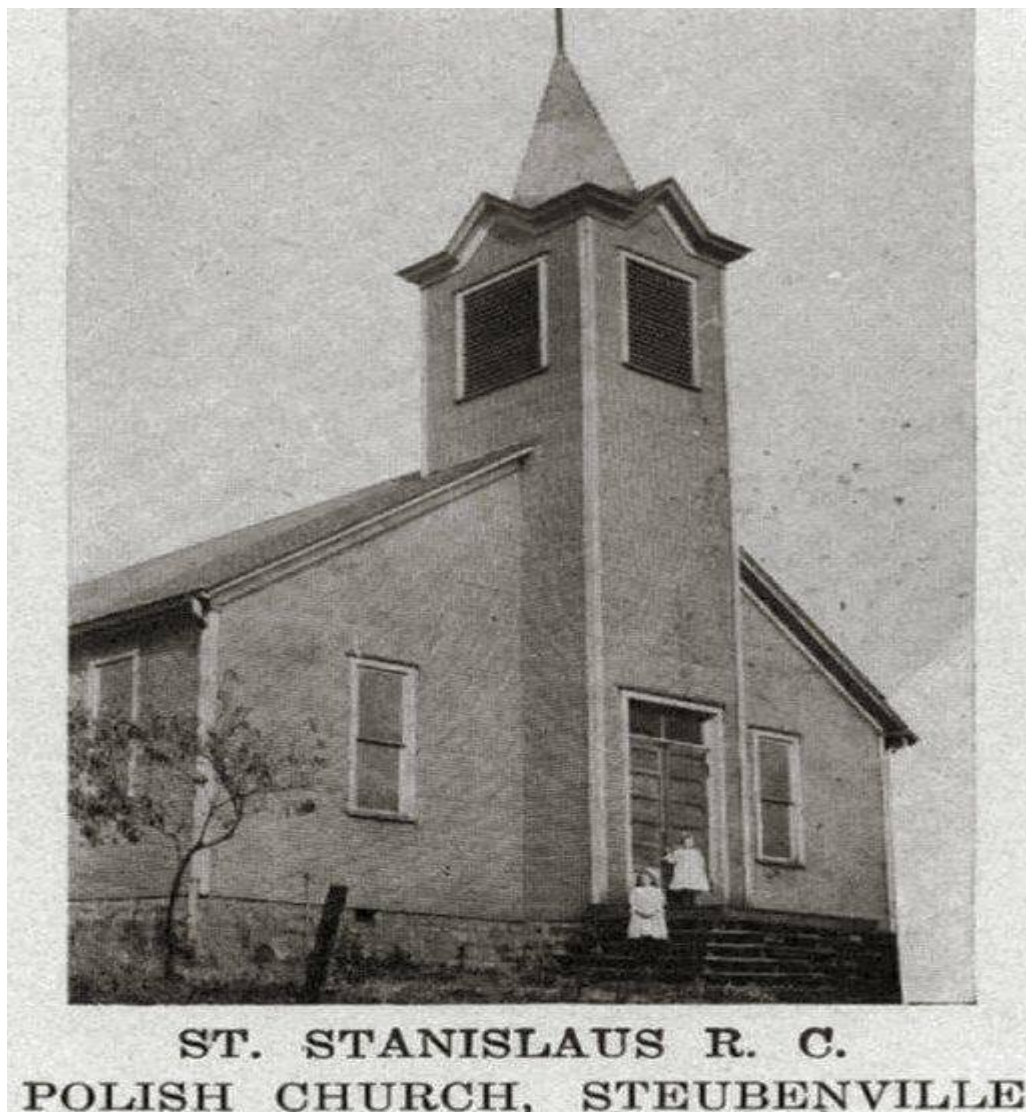
Przeżegnaj i pobłogosław Panie nas i te dary, które z Twojej

szczodro-
abyśmy
przez
stusa.

Dz
łaska
stwa
dzie
rac
A

Because Adolf's sister, Zofia, and her husband, Stefan, had their own young children in the home, Adolf did not want to cause additional financial burden. Therefore, shortly after arriving to Steubenville, Ohio, Adolf Muklewicz rented a bed in various work houses where the coal mine provided lodging to single laborers. According to my great-aunt, Jadwiga (named for the Polish queen mentioned above who married Jogaila, the Lithuanian grand duke and forged the blood union between Poland and Lithuania), my great-grandfather was allowed to sleep in his rented bed for only a few hours at a time.

When Adolf was not working in the High Shaft Coal Mine but could not stay in his rented bed, he volunteered his time working on the construction of the St. Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church, which was organized by Polish immigrant laborers as their own parish where they could freely pray and worship in their native tongue. Below is a rare, old photograph of St. Stanislaus shortly after its initial construction. The church underwent several renovations and expansion, including the construction of an adjacent grammar school for the parish's children including my grandfather, Stanisław Jakub (Stanley Jacob) Muklewicz and his siblings.



When my great-grandfather, Adolf Muklewicz, was not working in the High Shaft Coal Mine or on the construction of St. Stanislaus's first church building, he was corresponding with a Polish immigrant woman from the southern Austro-Hungarian partition of Poland, Agata Rzeszutko. Agata fled her native village of Łukowa on the outskirts of Tarnów due to harsh economic conditions.

After reaching adulthood and not finding a suitor in Poland, Agata believed that she was nothing more than another mouth to feed for parents, Jakub Rzeszutko and Tekla Nytko, and decided to immigrate to and work in America, where she would send money back to her parents. After arriving at Ellis Island in New York, Agata's first letter from home was from her younger sister, Maria, who informed her that their mother died of heartbreak shortly after Agata left Poland.

Agata eventually found work in Connecticut at a hotel restaurant, where she spent the majority of her time peeling and cooking potatoes. While working in Connecticut, Agata wrote a personal ad in a Polish language newspaper published and distributed throughout Polish immigrant communities in the Eastern U.S.

Adolf had left behind in the Old Country his intended, whom his younger brother, Ignacy, married after Adolf fled to the U.S. Adolf read Agata's ad, wherein she described herself as a hardworking, devout Roman Catholic woman who wanted to marry a diligent and pious Polish man with whom she could raise a family.

After exchanging letters, Father Kazimierz Smogór (some of whose sermons delivered in Polish to the early parishioners of St. Stanislaus are published online and provide great insights into the people's challenges and concerns during that time period) married Adolf Muklewicz to Agata Rzeszutko in Steubenville, Ohio on September 26, 1905. Below is a photograph of Adolf's and Agata's wedding.



Adolf and Agata had eight children – Maria Magdalena (Mary Magdalene), Wincenty (Vincent referred to as “Bill”), Ignacy Józef (Ignatius Joseph referred to as “Joe”), Stefan, Stanisława (Stella), Jadwiga (Ida), Stanisław Jakub (Stanley Jacob), and Władysław (Walter). Below is a photo of Adolf and Agata together with their children, except for Stefan who died a few days after being born in a coal mining camp in Black Oak near Bellaire, Ohio. The picture was taken in Steubenville circa 1920.



Laboring in the coal mines on average 16 hours a day for 6 days a week eventually took a heavy toll on Adolf's health. In the mid-1920s shortly after the picture above was taken, Adolf had developed black lung, which prevented him from working in the coal mines. Consequently, his children, many of whom were still attending St. Stanislaus grammar school, prematurely ended their academic studies and began working in order to support the family.

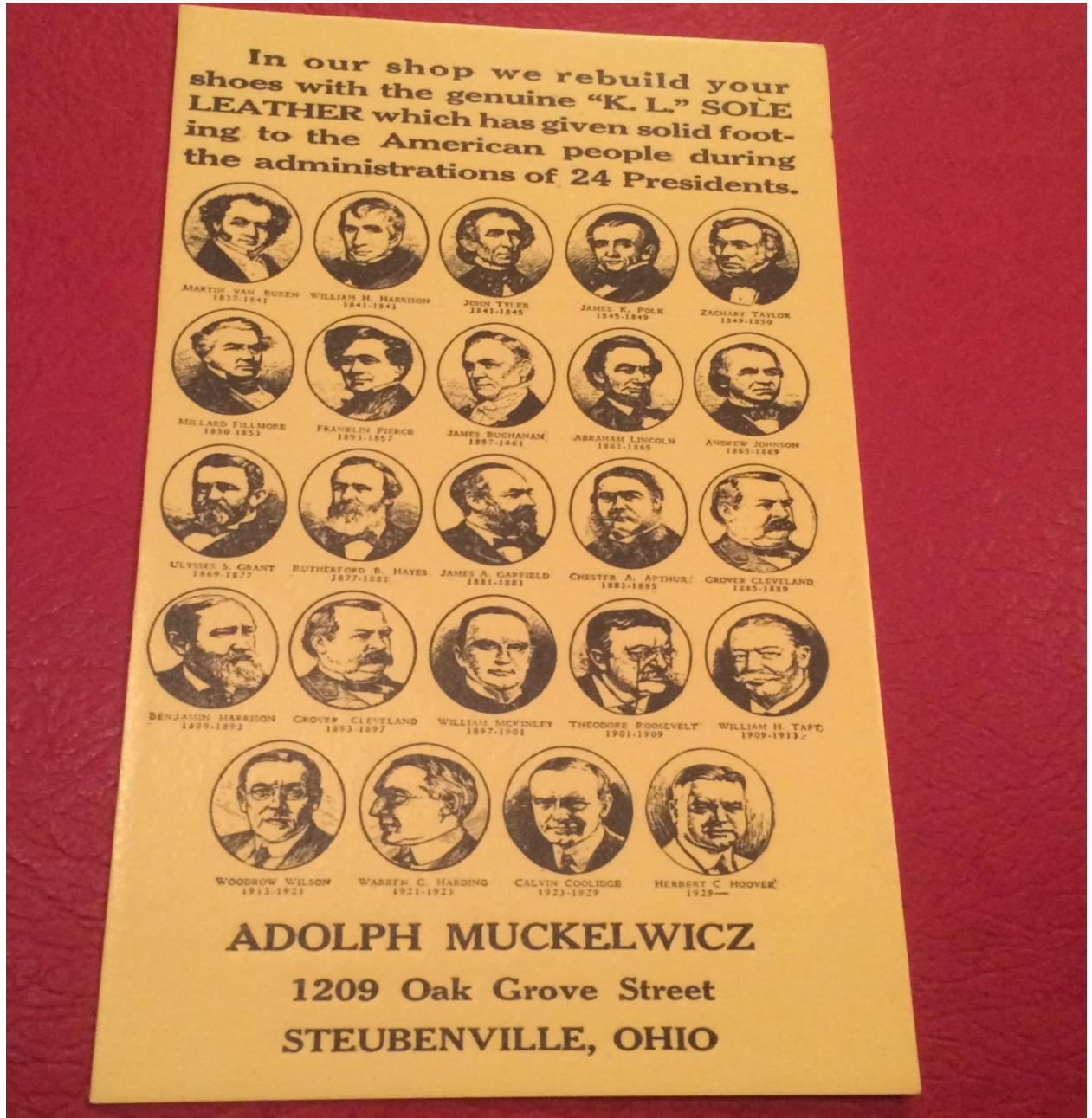
My great-aunt Maria (Mary) got a job working for Steubenville Pottery. According to my great-aunt Jadwiga (Ida), my great-grandmother, Agata, was overwhelmed with pride and gratitude when Maria brought home her first pay check. My great-uncles Wincenty (Bill) and Ignacy (Joe) found work in the local bakeries. My great-aunt Jadwiga (Ida) also worked with her brothers in the bakeries and often said that although she had to trudge up Market Street hill late on cold winter nights after a long work shift, she felt fortunate to work in the bakery because she and her family would at least always have bread to eat. Her gratitude for the job in the bakery multiplied when the Great Depression began in October 1929.

My grandfather, Stanisław (Stanley affectionately called "Staś) fought his way to the front of work lines and performed various odd jobs including cleaning the horse stables for the soldiers manning the U.S. Armory on LaBelle and laboring on work gangs for various steel mills along the Ohio River.

Although my great-grandfather, Adolf, suffered from black lung during the waning years of his life, he persisted in trying to live the American dream by applying his cobbler trade and opening a shoe shop behind his home on 1209 Oak Grove.

My great-aunt Jadwiga (Ida) often recalled that every Sunday after mass at St. Stanislaus Roman Catholic Church, her father (my great-grandfather) Adolf would sit on the steps of his shoe shop, smoke a corn cob pipe filled with Prince Albert tobacco, and reminisce with other immigrants of the Gałownia, Zapolnik, and Walenciej families from his region of Poland about the green meadows and cool forests surrounding their home villages. Adolf longed to return to his native homeland, Poland, which at the conclusion of World War I on November 11, 1918 had regained its independence after 123 years of oppression at the hand of the partitioning powers of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and Prussian Empires.


Below is a photograph of my great-grandfather's business card, which incorrectly shows the spelling of both his first and last names. (Whenever someone mispronounces or misspells my last name, I always think of my great-grandfather's business card, which shows that he also experienced the same thing.)



Sadly, not long after opening his shoe shop, Adolf Muklewicz succumbed to black lung and died at his home in Steubenville at the young age of 49 years. My great-aunt Jadwiga often recalled her father fearing going to sleep at night because he thought it might be the last time he closed his eyes. The copy of Adolf's death certificate available on newfamilysearch.org maintained by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints shows that Adolf died at 6 a.m. on February 7, 1934.

Having died early in the morning shortly before sunrise, I hope that my great-grandfather left this world peacefully shutting his eyes in the light of the dawn of a new day. Below is a photograph of my great-grandfather, Adolf Muklewicz's, funeral card written in his native language of Polish.

"Błogosławieni miłosierni, albowiem oni miłosierdzia dostąpią."
Słowa Św. Mateusza V. 5.



Jezu bądź miłościw duszy
Adolph Muklewicz
Died February 7, 1934
Age 50 years

MODLITWA
O najśodsze Serce Jezusa, zawsze obecne w Przenajświętszym Sakramencie, zawsze przejęte gorącą miłością dla biednych dusz przebywających w Czyśćcu, miej miłosierdzie nad duszą Twego sługi

Adolph

Nie bądź surowy w Swym sądzie i pozwól aby kilka kropeł Twojej Przenjświetszej Krwi spłynęło na pożerające Go płomienie i poślij o Najmiłościwszy Zbawicielu Swych aniołów aby Go skierowali do miejsca pokoju, światła i ciszy. Amen.

When my great-grandfather, Adolf Muklewicz, died of black lung in February 1934, my grandfather, Stanley Jacob (Stanisław Jakub) Muklewicz, had already been working in various bakeries and finally the Weirton Steel Steubenville Plant following his premature conclusion of studies at the St. Stanislaus primary and middle schools.

While working to financially support his parents and siblings during the Great Depression, my grandfather never complained about not being able to attend high school and pursue his dream of becoming a newspaper writer.

Instead, my grandfather was grateful for whatever jobs that he could attain and above all for the freedom and opportunity that his parents found in America.

In July 1941, my grandfather enlisted in the U.S. Army before the outbreak of WWII on December 7, 1941. He was proud to wear the uniform of his country. After the war, he returned home to Steubenville, where he tirelessly worked in the steel mill.

Wherever I work I always have in my office this photo of my grandfather working in the mill in Steubenville. His dedication to his family and work ethic constantly motivate me to be the best husband, father, and worker that I can be. I am blessed to have a rich heritage of dedication to family and hard work from my ancestors from Steubenville.



This is the saga about my family's journey from Chwaszczewo, Poland to Steubenville, Ohio. For generations my ancestors yearned for freedom while seeking their fortunes in America, where the streets are supposedly paved with gold. Instead of finding streets paved with gold, my ancestors quickly learned that many of the streets in America were not paved. Instead, they discovered that they would have to pave their own roads leading to fortune and opportunities for subsequent generations.

I am the humble and grateful beneficiary of the courage and determination of my ancestors. Through them I have inherited a legacy of determination and hard work, as well as a beautiful cultural heritage.

My great-grandfather, Adolf Muklewicz, never realized his dream of returning to a free Poland because his life was cut short after working tirelessly in the deep, dark coal mines. My grandfather, Stanisław Muklewicz, never realized his father, Adolf's dream, because after World War II the Soviet Union murdered masses of freedom-loving Poles, including many of my relatives remaining in the Old Country. My grandfather and his siblings feared returning to their parents' native land, upon which communist dictators forced a repressive, authoritarian regime.

After the 1980s when Lech Wałęsa and members of the Solidarity trade movement, thanks in large part to the courageousness of Pope John Paul II, also a Polish native, vanquished the oppressive puppet political regime imposed by the Soviets, I have been able on several occasions walk in the footsteps of my ancestors who once lived in northeastern Poland.

In the next article, I will share my photographs and feelings about seeing the villages and surrounding fields and forests for which my ancestors in Steubenville longed and reuniting with family after nearly a century of separation.