The memory of those frosty nights is also preserved in official documents. As the St. John Cantius Church Centennial Book records, specific individuals were responsible for these extraordinary musical experiences – representatives of successive Polish families who co-created this community. Ladislaia Popowski played the organ, accompanied by Walter Rataczak on the violin .

"I remember this elderly gentleman who played this melody on his violin every year, accompanying the church organ," Kay Freund continues. "Years later, I taught this Polish carol to my own daughters and to the children's choir in the parish I now belong to. This music never died within us."

American Wilno is an example of how the memory of one's roots doesn't depend on the size of a metropolitan area or political boundaries. Although this small Minnesota settlement has disappeared from most commercial maps as a city in its own right, for the people with Polish surnames living there, it remains the most important place on earth—a symbol of pride, perseverance, and a remarkable heritage that began with the courage of a few families and rebels seeking freedom under the skies of the New World. It was there, thousands of miles from their former homelands, that former refugees proved that freedom and national identity can endure any test of time, if only they remain rooted in the hearts of successive generations.

Wrobleski Surname *(Charlotte Czech)*

As I continue to explore surnames of Polish families who settled in central Minnesota, the Wrobleski history and genealogy has escaped me until this past year. Why am I interested in this name? My maternal great-grandmother was **Elizabeth Wrobleski Witucki,** but I had no information about where in Poland her family emigrated from, or when. And where they settled when they arrived. To my surprise and delight, a year ago I was handed the genealogy that a family member had completed in the year 2000! This summer I began sifting through it and have now put a lot of pieces together, but there is always more to explore. I welcome any information others can add.

Elizabeth's father, **John Wrobleski Sr.**, was born in Poland in 1835, most likely in **Posen/Poznań**. He died 19 March 1931 in Buh Township, Pierz, MN. He is buried in the St. Joseph Cemetery in Pierz. He married **Mary/Marianna Schitz/Scheutze** who was born in 1841 in Poland and died 18 March 1906 in Polonia Township, Roseau County, MN. She was the daughter of **Michael Schitz/Schutze** and **Apolonia Swiatek Brzezinska.** A census shows John Wrobleski Sr. living in Roseau in 1910.



Elizabeth Wrobleski Witucki

John Wrobleski Sr. and Mary Schlitz/Schutze who emigrated from Poznan, Poland, and settled in Appleton, MN area around 1878.



John and Mary Wrobleski had nine children together:

1. Anna Wrobleski was born 25 March 1864 in Poland/Prussia. She seems to have moved to Swift County in 1878. She died 6 September 1949 in Swift County Hospital, Benson, MN. She married **John Sadergaski** 6 November 1883 in Holloway, Edison Township, Swift County, MN. He had immigrated to Swift County at the age of 11 in 1874. Anna and John had four children together, all of whom seem to have been born and eventually died in Swift County. John was born 7 January 1863 in Unknown and died 21 March 1892 in Edison Township, Swift County, MN.

Anna married **Jacob Filla** 10 July 1894 in St. Joseph Catholic Church in Holloway, Edison Township, Swift County, MN. Jacob was born in Poland/Prussia 8 May 1861 and died 10 July 1929 in Danvers, Swift County, MN. They had two children together, both born in Swift County but died in Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN, later in life.

2. Mary Wrobleski was born 10 May 1866 in Hastings, MN. and died 16 April 1957 in Roseau County, MN. This indicates that between 1864 and 1866 John and Mary Schitz Wrobleski immigrated to the U.S. One account has John Sr. arriving in New York in 1866. It seems they first settled in Hastings. Daughter Mary married **Andrew Mooney** in 1888 in Holloway, Edison Township, Swift County. He was born 1863 in Poland/Prussia and died 26 May 1933 in Roseau County They had five children together. Three of them were born in Roseau County; one was born in Appleton, Swift County; and the youngest's birthplace is not indicated.

3. John Wrobleski Jr. was born 28 June 1874 in Hastings, MN and died 8 November 1939 in Hillsdale Township, ND State Sanatorium, ND. He met **Stella Kotto** 27 November 1905 in Leo, Roseau County, MN. She was born 8 March 1877 and died 28 August 1967. They had 11 children together.

4. August Wrobleski was born 1 March 1875 in Edison Township, Swift County, MN, d. 10 May 1902 in Edison Township, Swift County, MN.

5. Cecelia Wrobleski was born 16 March 1876 in Hastings, MN, and died 23 October 1953 in Pike Creek Township, Morrison County, MN. She is buried at St. Adalbert's Catholic Cemetery in Little Falls, Morrison County, MN. She married **Frank Olesch** 2 October 1901 in St. Joseph Catholic Church, Holloway, Edison Township, Swift County, MN. Frank was born 8 September 1870 in Grosslehem, Germany and died 27 August 1933 in Little Falls, Morrison County, MN. He is buried at St. Adalbert's Cemetery, Little Falls, Morrison County, MN. Frank arrived through the Port of New York 22 April 1895 and became a US citizen on 3 February 1911 in Swift County, MN. Cecelia and Frank had six children together. It is indicated that three of the children were born in Appleton, Swift County, MN. The oldest was born in Little Falls, Morrison County, MN. Two died in Little Falls, and one died and is buried at the Fergus Falls State Hospital, Fergus Falls, MN.



6. Joseph Robert Wrobleski Sr. was born in 1878 in Hastings, MN ,and died 1 February 1957 in Swift County Hospital, Benson, MN. He married **Anna Mary Kotowska** 28 January 1903 in Marshall County, MN. She was born 11 May 1883 in Roseau County, MN, and died 17 November 1976 in Swift County Hospital in Benson. They had 10 children together. The birth places of three children are indicated: one in Roseau County and two in Swift County. Three children married people that appear to be from Morrison County.

7. Elizabeth Isabel Wrobleski was born 21 November 1878 in Swift County, MN, and died 12 March 1966 at her home in Little Falls, Morrison County, MN. She married **Joseph Witucki** 28 January 1896 in Holloway, Edison Township, Swift County, MN. A marriage certificate shows her name as "Eliz Frobel." Joseph was born October 1868 in Poland and died 13 October 1943 in Little Falls, Morrison County, MN. He became a US citizen on 11 October 1898 in Swift County, MN. According to the 1900 census, Elizabeth and Joseph lived in West Bank Township, which is near Holloway in Edison Township, and Appleton in Appleton Township, all in Swift County, but West Bank Township has no town of its own. They moved to Morrison County, MN between 1907 and 1910. Elizabeth and Joseph are buried at St. Stanislaus Catholic Cemetery, Sobieski, Morrison County, MN.

Joseph's father was **Walter/Walenty "Valentine" Witucki** born 2 February 1836 in Poznań, Poland, and died 24 February 1929, and is buried at St. Adalbert's Catholic Cemetery, Silver Lake, McCleod County, MN. Walenty married **Josephine Bianek** 28 October 1862 in Prussia.

Walenty's father was **Stanislaus Walter Witucki** born about 1815 in Prussia. In 1843 he married **Marianna Frances Poshek** who was born September 1812 in Prussia.

Elizabeth and Joseph had 10 children together. Two of the children died as infants. **Child number six was my grandmother, Pauline Veronica Witucki.** Most searches agree she was born in Appleton, Swift County, MN. Searches are mixed as to whether she was born in 1906 or 1907, but our family has her birth year as 1907. Pauline was their last child born in the Appleton area. The rest were born in Sobieski/Swan River, Morrison County, MN.

Their children:

1. Frank Martin Witucki, b. 15 February 1897, d. 18 May 1972.
2. Antonia/Nettie Witucki, b. 12 January 1899, d. 16 April 1981 in Little Falls, MN.
3. Joseph Witucki, b. 29 August 1901, Swift County, MN, d. 24 September 1901, Swift County, MN. Buried in St. Joseph Cemetery, Holloway, Edison Township, Swift County, MN.
4. Martha Mary Witucki, b. 12 November 1902 in Appleton, MN, d. 1987 in Sauk Rapids, MN.
5. Stanley Joseph Witucki, b. 24 March 1905 in Appleton, MN, d. 11 October 1984, Little Falls, MN.
6. Pauline Veronica Witucki, b. 22 June 1907, Appleton, MN, d. 2 January 1984 in Little Falls, MN.

   The 1910 census from Morrison County lists her name as Pelagia Veronica Witucki.
7. John Peter Witucki, b. 24 January 1910, Sobieski, MN, d. 18 December 1995.
8. Elizabeth Eleanor Witucki, b.15 April 1913, Little Falls, MN, d. 19 July 1999.
9. George Albert Witucki, b. 24 April 1916, Little Falls, MN, d. 19 July 2005, Little Falls, MN.
10. Alex Witucki (Infant) b. Unknown

8. Antonia Wrobleski was born 15 December 1881 in Edison Township, Swift County, MN, and died 17 February 1953 in St. Cloud Hospital, St. Cloud, MN. She married **Frank Zinda Sr.** 15 February 1898 in Edison Township, Swift County, MN, son of Joseph Zinda and Justina Steep. Frank was born 20 May 1876 in Hastings, MN, and died 5 September 1938 in Sauk Rapids, MN. Antonia and Frank had 10 children together. Most were born in Swift County with the exception of child number four, Praksade M. Zinda b. 30 May 1904 in Greenbush, Roseau County, MN, d. 8 September 1977 in St. Cloud, MN.

9. Josephine Wrobleski was born 11 April 1885 in Edison Township, Swift County, MN. She died 27 June 1950 at Lady of Good Counsel Home in St. Paul, MN. She married **Paul Skarry** 30 September 1905 in St. Aloysius Church in Leo, Roseau County, MN, son of Joseph Skarry and Anna Brotuski. Paul Skarry was born 20 February 1881 in LaSalle County, IL, and died 28 January 1945 at Our Lady of Good Counsel Home in St. Paul, MN. Josephine and Paul had six children together. According to the birth places of their children, they moved a lot: the first was born in Appleton; the second and third were born in Dane, Saskatchewan, Canada; then back to Appleton for the fourth birth; and to Swan River/Sobieski, Morrison County, MN, for the fifth; and the last one was born in Sauk Rapids, MN.

I will focus on the parts of this genealogy and history that touch me personally:

I was the first born of my Grandma **Pauline Witucki's** 27 grandchildren. Our family farm in Pike Creek Township, between Little Falls and Sobieski, was just a mile from her farm, and we went back and forth to each other's houses almost daily. She married **Alex Witt** 10 July 1923**.** whose parents were **Jacob Witt and Gertrude Tandeck**i. Pauline and Alex were later divorced. Alex was born 23 November 1893 in Pike Creek

Township, Morrison County, MN and died 22 February 1946 in Swan River, Morrison County, MN, two years before I was born. Pauline's second husband was **Albert Cichon** who was my step-grandpa. Grandma Pauline mentioned a few times that she and her family had come from Appleton, which is close to the South Dakota border in west central Minnesota, but I never asked her any other questions before she died in 1984. I had been too busy focusing on my education and then raising my triplets who were five when she died.

<u>This is my first exploration of the Wrobleski family, and I am excited to have made some meaningful connections:</u>

I would sometimes go with my mother, Eleanor Witt Czech and my grandparents, Pauline and Albert, to St. Cloud to visit **Praksade** (pronounced PRAHK-sah-dee) and her husband Barney Witt who was a brother to my deceased grandpa Alex Witt. The two couples had the best time together. They joked, told stories, and laughed until they had tears in their eyes. This was different from the way I normally saw them. I have now learned that Praksie's mother was **Antonia Wrobleski** who married **Frank Zinda**. Grandma Pauline would talk about the Skarrys. I had no idea that Mrs. Skarry was her aunt **Josephine Wrobleski** who married **Paul Skarry.** And she would talk about **Mrs. Elizabeth LaSota** and even had a photo of her. Through genealogy I found this was Grandma Pauline's first cousin from her aunt **Anna Wrobleski's** second marriage to **Jacob Filla.** Also, I would hear my parents, **Eleanor Witt and John A. Czech Jr,** mention the Olesch family who lived in Pike Creek Township. I now know that Mrs. Olesch was my Grandma Pauline's aunt **Cecelia Wrobleski** married to **Frank Olesch.** Most of my Grandma Pauline's cousins she talked about were children of the sisters of my Great-Grandma Elizabeth Wrobleski Witucki.

My Great-Grandma Elizabeth died the spring of 1966 just as I was graduating from Little Falls High School. I was not close to her, but the times Grandma Pauline would host a Sunday afternoon gathering with her sisters and her mother Elizabeth are vivid in my memory. Elizabeth was already in somewhat poor health and wore very thick glasses as a result of glaucoma for which there were limited treatment options at that time. My mother Eleanor was very fond of her Grandma Elizabeth and shared that she baked bread every day, was a wonderful cook, and served nine meals each day on the farm: breakfast at 6 a.m., lunch at 9 a.m., dinner at noon, lunch at 3 p.m., supper at 6 p.m., and lunch at 9 p.m. It was a busy life of raising a large family and continuously preparing food. Their home/farm was located on what is now Dove Road in Sobieski, Morrison County, MN.



Elizabeth Wrobleski and Joseph Witucki on wedding day of niece Isabelle Skarry who married Joseph Robert Blachfelner at Holy Cross Catholic Church in NE Minneapolis 20 August 1938. Perhaps they were godparents as Elizabeth's middle name was Isabel.



Four youngest daughters of John and Mary Schitz Wrobleski: L to R – Antonia (Zinda), Josephine (Skarry), Cecelia (Olesch), Elizabeth (Witucki)

I contacted **Jim Wrobleski** who is a PGS-MN member to see if he had information to offer. He willingly gave me the information he had. He is working on his own Wrobleski genealogy, which does not seem to overlap with mine. I will support him in sharing it when it is ready. But he says that Wrobleski is a common Polish name and has been shortened from **Wroblewski** or **Wróblewski.** And that there are many Wrobleski families on the Iron Range and in northern Michigan that are not related to him... or me.

I saw at least five different spellings for Schitz in my searches. Skarry is sometimes spelled Skarra. Spelling was not standardized, so that can make family research challenging.

St. Joseph Cemetery in Holloway, Swift County was the cemetery in which I found some Wrobleskis, and from there I could track who their family members were and the families they married into. A lot of them tracked to Pike Creek or Swan River Townships in Morrison County, MN, with no fewer than a dozen Polish surnames that I recognize as a result of growing up there.. St. Joseph Catholic Church itself no longer exists due to closings and consolidations in the New Ulm Diocese. The areas of settlement in Minnesota that kept showing up in the John and Marianna Schitz Wrobleski family were: 1) Appleton/Swift County, 2) Hastings/Dakota County, 3) Roseau County, and 4) Pike Creek Township, Swan River Township/Sobieski, and Little Falls in Morrison County.

I still don't know the exact location the Wrobleskis emigrated from in Poznań/Poland/Prussia or what ship they left on. By the way, **Posen** is the German/Americanized name. **Poznań** is the Polish name of the city. Prussia (Germany) was on the western side when Poland was not a country during the **Partitions from 1795-1918.** Polish people left Poland/Prussia because of the oppression they were experiencing from Prussia (Germany) in losing farmland, in not being allowed to practice their Catholic faith or speak their Polish language, and to avoid the long military conscriptions. When the fertile, flat, prairie farmlands of Swift County were made available in the early 1870s by westward railroad expansion and the Homestead Act, Polish people left behind the political oppression of partitioned Europe for a new life of economic opportunity and cheap farmlands. In fact, it is recorded in Swift County's Edison Township near Appleton that the area was originally named **New Posen** in 1878, for the area of Poland the immigrants had left. It is not clear why Joseph and Elizabeth left the area to move to Morrison County. Perhaps much of the farmland in Swift County had already been purchased and new opportunities were opening up in Central Minnesota with other family members moving as well.

Find a Grave, Family Search and Ancestry.com have been extremely helpful in my searches. I am also grateful to Gary Mills who guided me when I visited the **Swift County Historical Society** in Benson, MN.

PGS-MN News *(Terry Kita)*

PGS-MN became a Branch (subsidiary) of the Minnesota Genealogical Society of Minnesota (MGS) in 1992. Prior to that PGS-MN was a "club" organization for several years.

A couple of years ago, MGS notified each of its six Branch organizations it was discontinuing its sponsorship of Branches as of December 31, 2026. We had several choices to remedy this situation, for which a group of five people were tasked with investigating. We convened meetings with the other five Branches and discussed options. Four of the six Branches opted to become separate Minnesota non-profit corporations, including PGS-MN.

In late 2025 we incorporated as a Minnesota non-profit organization, then registered as a Section 501(c)(3) non-profit with the IRS. Recently, we purchased Liability and Property insurance to enable us to conduct and attend outside events. We incurred some costs by doing this, but our Board felt it was our best choice. There will be several annual reporting obligations, an annual income tax return and insurance costs. To-date, the costs do not appear to affect our budget significantly.

MGS leases the space at 1385 Mendota Heights Road, the Minnesota Genealogy Center. Nine other genealogy organizations (partners) pay rent to MGS for their space. The lease for this space will terminate on December 31, 2027. MGS is considering whether to renew a lease for the existing space, lease another space or purchase a building. The nine "partner" organizations, which now rent space, have expressed the wish to remain as part of the Minnesota Genealogy Center. We will continue to update our members about the plans for post 2027.