

## A Wendish Custom of Multiple Surnames

by Andrew M. Kollosche

When I was a young boy I followed my parents and pronounced my surname as "Kollo-shay". Predictably this is not the way the bank teller pronounced it when calling my name or teachers at school for that matter. Everyone considered it to be German, it was not until my uncle Ron travelled to East Germany in the 1970's researching the family history we became aware of our Sorbish origins.

Nothing more was done about understanding how the Kollosche surname came to be, until I started researching the family history for a book. One of the first things I wanted to understand was the origins of the Kollosche surname.

Limited in my search by the language, I put this question to a German researcher, Uwe Porten, his research revealed that Sorbs in Lower Lusatia could have more than one surname. These surnames in sequence would be the Sorbish surname, a German translation and lastly the name taken from his trade, farm or cottage. That's how George Nechilla-Nezasock-Kollosche was assigned the name, I was happy with his answer and did not take it any further.

One name popped up in Ron's research that haunted my searches, that of Anna Hondow (formerly Kollosche, nee Miatke). I assumed Anna was married to a Kollosche and subsequently widowed, but could never find the connection. So as part of the next round of research into the Kollosche's of Spreewald I asked Uwe to investigate Anna.

Uwe reported that Anna Miatke bore the alias Kollosche, he also discovered her grandfather, father and brother all named Martin Miatke, had used the alias Kollosche since the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, well before Kollosche was assigned to my family. But more importantly to me, Uwe could find no bloodline connection between the two Kollosche families.

Move forward three years, quite by chance while corresponding with Lyall Kukpe I became aware of his connection to Anna Hondow. Lyall was of the understanding that Kollosche was either Anna's maiden name or a former married name, he was not sure about it as in the baptism records of her children sometimes the mother's name is recorded as Anna nee Kollosche and sometimes as Anna nee Miatke.

Excitedly, I forwarded a copy of Uwe's research regarding Anna to Lyall, in his reply he recalled being told about surname changing. *When a landowner only had daughters, and when the daughter married, the husband would take his wife's surname so that he could inherit the land. Thus the land remained in the name of the original family.*

Lyall went on to explain this suggested that Anna's father, Martin Miatke alias Kollosche may have married a Kollosche and taken that name. His children would have been known by the name Kollosche, although they really were Miatke. It would explain the use of both names in the records in South Australia.

We were both intrigued by this revelation, I emailed Uwe Porten in Germany asking if he was aware of this name changing custom. Uwe confirmed this was correct and gave further insight into the reasons for the spouse name change clarifying; men who married a female farm heir or farm owner (widow) and moved to her farm adopted the wife's last name. Actually, they adopted the farm name. The farm was the solid element in society and stood above individuals. The farm was not divided, but always given to one sole heir. All of this often led to situations where the husband

ended up with a last name that is actually not his original one.

Uwe's example of this: *George Miller inherits his father's farm, the Miller Farm. He marries Anna Smith, whose maiden name traditionally changes to Miller. George dies after a few years, his widow remarries John Meyer. John Meyer moves to his wife's farm; his name changes to Miller. Now both John and Anna go by the name of Miller, although this is not his original last name. Their children, by the way, are called Miller as well.*

This used to be the tradition in northwest Germany, far from where our Kollosche ancestors in Lower Lusatia lived. Wends do not have this tradition, but a slightly different version, that of adding an alias to their surname.

Uwe went on to explain in the case of Anna Miatke alias Kollosche, *not only Anna's father, but already her grandfather was a Miatke alias Kollosche. Most likely they got this by-name because they once had lived in a house that was named Kollosche. In many areas houses had names, often the name of the person who built it. The house name was added by the people of the town to the homes inhabitants' surname as an alias to distinguish them from others in the village by the same last name.*

Recently I re-read Ron Kollosche's Booklet "*Kollosche's of Werben Sprewald*" from 1976 and there on page 2, paragraph 5 was "*Another Wendish custom was the adoption by son-in-laws of the father-in-law' family name if they lived and worked on his property*".

Both these traditions add to the confusion when tracing Wendish family names and need to be taken into account. While it appears conclusive that Lyall and I are not blood related, how can we be sure with so many records destroyed during the 30 Years Wars (1618-1648). Perhaps the only way to be certain is a DNA test!