

Introduction

In 2009, we made a trip to meet newly located cousins in Poland. They lived in a small rural community in west-central Poland. The name of the town ... Kożuchów, Nowa Sól County, Lubuskie Province.

Under normal circumstances, an initial visit to any new place should not make an instant impact on a visitor. The newness, the novelty, the expectations of things "different" take some time to leave an enduring dent on one's perception. Yet, our first reaction to Kożuchów was unexpected ... even before we were introduced to its uniqueness. There was something medieval about this settlement ... something dated, exceptional, and compelling. We sensed that this place had a story to tell us and that we would not be satisfied until we got to understand its history.

At first exploration, Kożuchów was unremarkable. In some manner, it was contemporary in the face it presented to the visitor ... normal public buildings, shopping, transportation, venues for dining, and the compulsory public parks and places for leisure. Beneath this façade of conformance to expectations, Kożuchów displayed, although in a subtle yet uncompromising way, its very uniqueness. The town plan, its streets and buildings, was devoid of any sense of order. Whereas most recent towns were laid out according to an orderly and logical plan, Kożuchów was archaic and seemed haphazard. The architecture was antiquated, mostly crumbling, lacking the most minimal upkeep to retain its former magnificence, and on the verge of becoming a blemish. That was the first impression. However, given time to absorb the town's landscape, it became obvious that there was more than met the eye.

Kożuchów and its environs only became part of Poland after the end of the Second World War and this region, called Silesia, was annexed from Germany. With this annexation, all ethnic Germans were expelled, resulting in the re-occupation by a Polish population. This shift in "ownership" did nothing to change or alter the character of the land and its towns ... they still maintained the history of their bygone, and often glorious, days. And this history, never forgotten and only now exploited, is what prompted us to get to know Kożuchów in all of its nuances. More than the town itself, the region beckoned us to learn as much as practical of its roots, its beginnings, its evolution through the centuries and how its present makeup is the result of its storied history ... to understand what it is today based on what it was yesterday.

On our initial foray to the lands of Kożuchów we visited three historic communities that formed the nucleus of our interest. Because of our personal and intimate contact with these enclaves, we yearned to understand precisely their detailed history. The result of our interest is reflected in the following synopsis which consumed our time since 2009.

Although it is not of academic value, our précis is worthy of review. In a nutshell, it compares what we experienced in 2009 with what we learned of its past. That comparison should give the reader a balanced view of the towns and this region. We trust that its reading will bestow a greater awareness of the many historic places in Poland.

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