

The Legend of The Three Brothers

Over one thousand years ago, there lived a king who ruled over the lands that lay near the mouth of the Vistula River. When the king died, his wealth was left to his three sons, Lech, Czech and Rus.* Their father's kingdom was not large enough to be divided between the three brothers, so they decided to set out in search of other lands.

Lech was the oldest and became the new chief. His brothers were jealous and the three often quarreled over which of them would make the best leader. After months of weary travel, the three brothers came upon a hill in a land of green meadows. At the top of the hills stood a giant Oak tree, and above the tree flew a great white eagle.

"That eagle is a good sign from the Gods!" Lech told his brothers. "I'm going to climb this tree and have a look around." As Lech climbed up the tree he saw the eagle's nest high in the branches. The eagle flew near him and would not let him come close to the nest. But he had climbed high enough to see for miles in every direction.

To the north Lech saw a large body of water. To the east he saw an endless plain of flat and fertile land and to the south were hills where sheep and cattle could graze. To the west was a thick, dark forest.

Lech came down and told his brothers what he had seen. Czech wanted to go south and Rus argued that east would be better. Finally, the three brothers decided to separate. The people who agreed with Czech went with Czech. The people who agreed with Rus went with Rus. But most of the people remained with Lech and asked him which way he planned to go.

"We will stay right here!" Lech told them. Thus, Lech became the first Duke of Poland and he assumed leadership of the Western Slavs. So, the people began to build a town there on the hill, and Lech chose the white eagle with its wings spread wide as their emblem. They called their town Gniezno, which means "A Nest" in the Slavic language. The town became the capital of their nation. As time went on, their country became known as Poland.

*pronounced Leh, Cheh and Roos