

Who was the mother of Julia (Cole) Nelson (born 1860), daughter of George S. Cole of Northfield, Cook County, Illinois?

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Despite lack of direct evidence, a strong case can be made, through the analysis and correlation of indirect evidence, that Julia's mother was not who she appears to be from a superficial reading of the census records and from online family trees.

Julia (Cole) Nelson (1860-1902) is presented in the 1870 census for Northfield, Cook County, Illinois as the oldest of the five children of George Cole (1834-1909) and his wife Julia (Leonhardt) Cole. In addition to young Julia (age 9), the 1870 census lists Frank (age 7), Erich (age 4), George (age 2), and Elizabeth (age one month).¹ No online trees seem to question that these were all the children of Julia (Leonhardt) Cole, and, at first glance, it makes perfect sense. Young Julia bears the same name as her apparent mother and is lumped in with the rest of the children in being said to have a mother of "foreign birth," which is what we would expect if Julia (Leonhardt) Cole, who was born in "Prussia," had given birth to her.

So far, no source has been found documenting any marriage of George Cole or parentage of his daughter Julia. The great Chicago fire of 8-10 October 1871 destroyed all county records, including land and probate, which might have been informative.² The state of Illinois did not yet keep records of births and marriages in the 1860s.³ And so far, no obituaries have been found for Julia or her siblings. A transcription of Julia's 1902 death record does not include the names of her parents.⁴ Similarly, a transcription of her 1881 marriage record also fails to include this information.⁵ Despite the lack of direct evidence, a case can be made, from the correlation of indirect evidence found in census records alone, that Julia, and probably her brother Frank, were not originally the children of Julia (Leonhardt) Cole, but rather those of George's first wife, Rosella (Hewitt) Cole.

George and Rosella Cole - Newlyweds in 1860

According to the 1860 census, George Cole (age 25) and Rosella Cole (age 20) lived together and had married within the past year (presumably to each other). George's mother, Elizabeth, and her younger children, lived several doors down from them.⁶ There were no other Coles in the area. Although he was not part of his mother's household in 1860, he was the head of the house of which his mother was a part in both 1855 and 1865.⁷ This strongly suggests that we have the right George Cole. (The 1860 census does give his birthplace as

1. 1870 U.S. census, Cook County, Illinois, population schedule, Northfield, page 469B, dwelling 280, family 277, household of George Cole; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.ancestry.com : accessed 15 March 2020); citing National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) microfilm publication M593, roll 213. This record also lists Joseph Cole, age 16. He was George's brother but is not relevant to this discussion.
2. "Cook County, Illinois Genealogy," *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Cook_County,_Illinois_Genealogy#Record_Loss : accessed 8 August 2022).
3. "Illinois Vital Records," *FamilySearch* (https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/Illinois_Vital_Records : accessed 8 August 2022).
4. "Illinois, Cook County Deaths, 1871-1998," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:N7VZ-PNL> : 16 March 2020), Julia Nilson, 30 Jan 1902; citing, Cook, Illinois, United States, source reference cn 13681, record number 4, Cook County Courthouse, Chicago; FHL microfilm 1,239,676.
5. "Illinois, Cook County Marriages, 1871-1968," database, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:N7XG-8JP> : 16 March 2020), Theodore Nelson and Julia Cole, 17 Sep 1881.
6. 1860 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Northfield, p. 256, dwell. 1798, fam. 1749, household of George Cole, digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.ancestry.com : accessed 16 March 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 169.
7. For Elizabeth's household, see: 1860 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Northfield, page 256, dwelling 1805, family 1756, household of Elizabeth Cole; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.ancestry.com : accessed 16 March 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication M653, roll 169. For George Cole in 1855, see: 1855 Illinois state census, State Archives, Springfield, Ill., Archive collection number 103.008, roll number 2189, line 3, household of Geo Cole; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.ancestry.com : accessed 16 March 2020), "Illinois, State Census Collection, 1825-65" > Cook

England, instead of New York, but this would be a simple mistake to make since both of his parents *were* born in England.)⁸ We also know, from the 1870 census, that Julia, age 9, was born in 1860/61. In agreement with this, the 1900 census for the household of Theodore Nelson (Julia's husband) states that she was born in December 1860.⁹ The mother of Julia was already pregnant with her when the 1860 census was taken. This indicates that Rosella Hewitt was her mother, and not Julia Leonhardt. But how did she come to have the same name as her stepmother?

Rosella Hewitt and Her Mother in 1850

A search for Rosella (age 9/10) in the neighborhood of the Coles in 1850 (one decade earlier) turned up a "Rosilla" (age 9) in the household of "Chas Hewit".¹⁰ They lived only six houses down from the John and Aneliza Russel family (with whom 16 year old George Cole was living in 1850) and fifteen houses down from George's parents, Daniel and Elizabeth Cole.¹¹ The assumed mother of Rosilla was named "Julian" (difficult to read, but definitely a variant of Julia). In 1860, "Chas Hewitt" is listed with his five children, but no wife (no "Julian").¹² It is likely that Rosella's mother died some time in the 1850s. As the daughter of Rosella, it makes sense that young Julia would be named after her recently deceased maternal grandmother.

Julia's Mother's Birthplace

Unlike George Cole's eight youngest children, which consistently throughout their lives, have their mother's birthplace listed as Germany, the later censuses for young Julia (1880 and 1900) give her mother's birthplace as Illinois.¹³ This agrees with Rosella's place of birth as given in the 1860 census.

> Northfield > Image 2. For George Cole in 1865, see: 1865 Illinois state census, State Archives, Springfield, Ill., Archive collection number 103.010, roll number 2173, line 28, household of Geo Cole; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 16 March 2020), "Illinois, State Census Collection, 1825-65" > Cook > Northfield > Image 4.

8. For George's claimed birthplace (England), see 1860 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., p.256, dwell. 1798, fam. 1749, George Cole. For George's actual birthplace (New York), see: 1900 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Northfield, enumeration district (ED) 1176, p. 7, dwell. 92, fam. 96, household of George S. Cole; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 16 Mar 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication T623.

9. 1900 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Chicago Ward 13, ED 387, p. 2, dwell. 21, fam. 25, household of Theodore Nelson; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 15 March 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication T623.

10. 1850 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Northfield, p. 75b, dwell. 222, fam. 224, household of Chas Hewit; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 16 Mar 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication M432, roll 103. He is not indexed as "Chas Hewit". He was only found by locating the household of George's father Daniel Cole (indexed as "Danal Cales"), and then searching the surrounding families. "Chas Hewit" was found on the next page.

11. For John Russel, see: 1850 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Northfield, p. 75A-B, dwell. 216, fam. 218, household of John Russel; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 16 March 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication M432, roll 103. For Daniel Cole, see: 1850 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill. pop. sch., Northfield, p. 74A, dwell. 207, fam. 209, household of Daniel Cole; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 16 March 2020), indexed as "Danal Cales"; citing NARA microfilm publication M432, roll 103.

12. 1860 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Northfield, p. 242, dwell. 1703, fam. 1654, household of Chas Hewitt; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 16 March 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication 653, roll 169.

13. For several examples, see: 1900 U.S. Census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Northfield, ED 1176, p. 7, dwell. 92, fam. 96, household of George S. Cole; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 16 Mar 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication T623. Also, 1900 U.S. Census, Lake County, Ill., pop. sch., Deerfield, ED 0132, p. 28, dwell. 513, fam. 573, household of Edward Cole; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 16 March 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication T623. "Edward Cole" is the same individual as "Erich Cole" from the 1870 census. Also, 1910 U.S. Census, Cook County, Illinois, pop. sch., Northfield, ED 1543, p. 6A, dwell. 108, fam. 109, household of Charles Cole; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 16 March 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication T624, roll 238. These are sufficient to illustrate the point. There are many others, which are all indexed properly and can easily be found on *Ancestry.com*. For Julia (Cole) Nelson's 1880 census record, see: 1880 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Wilmette, ED 228, p. 509D, dwell. 69, fam. 69, household of Alexander McDaniels; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 15 March 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication T9, roll 202.

Frank Cole and his Uncle Gorden

Further evidence that Julia was the daughter of George's first wife, Rosella, is the probability that George's next child (according to the 1870 census), Frank Cole, was also born to Rosella. In the 1870 census, he is listed as age 7, giving him a birth year of 1862/63. In 1880, we find a "Franck Cole" listed as age 16, giving him a birth year of 1863/64. He is listed in the household of "Gorden Hewitt" in Niles, Cook County, Illinois.¹⁴ "Gorden Hewitt" (age 35) in 1880, matches Rosella's brother, "Gorten Hewitt" (age 15) in 1860 and "Gorten Hewit" (age 5) in the 1850 census.¹⁵ Furthermore, the 1880 census lists Frank's mother's birthplace as Illinois, and not Germany or Prussia. Frank Cole lived with Gorden Hewett in Niles township which was about eight miles from where his father, George, lived. The fact that Frank did not live with George in 1880, but instead lived in close proximity with a man who was clearly the brother of George's first wife, when combined with the birthplace information, seems to suggest that Gorden Hewett was probably his uncle and that Rosella was probably his mother.

Conclusion

No known record directly links Julia (Cole) Nelson to her mother, Rosella (Hewitt) Cole. The 1870 census leaves us with the impression that she was the daughter of George Cole's wife, Julia Leonhardt, and all online trees take this for granted. Nevertheless, by examining the neighborhood context of the Cole family, and correlating several pieces of indirect evidence, all from census records, we were able to gain a more accurate picture of the Cole family.

George Cole was first married to a local neighborhood girl named Rosella Hewitt. Rosella gave birth to Julia in December 1860, to Frank in 1863, and perhaps to another male child in between the two.¹⁶ Then she probably died at about twenty three years of age. Within a year or two, he remarried. His second wife was a German immigrant woman named Julia Leonhardt. She was the mother of the rest of his children.¹⁷ The fact that young Julia shared a name with her stepmother was purely a coincidence. She was more than likely named after her maternal grandmother.

Relationships in the census records cannot always be assumed. The 1870 census record, by itself, would have led us astray. However, because of the scarcity of other relevant sources (thanks in part to the 1871 Chicago fire, which destroyed most county records before that date), it was evidence from other census records, properly correlated, which proved crucial to finding an answer to the research question.

14. 1880 U.S. Census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Niles, ED 219, p. 345D, dwell. 305, fam. 409, household of Gorden Hewett; digital image, *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 15 March 2020); citing NARA microfilm publication T9, roll 209.

15. For "Gorten Hewitt" in 1860, see: 1860 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Northfield, p. 242, dwell. 1703, fam. 1654, household of Chas Hewitt. For "Gorten Hewit" in 1850, see: 1850 U.S. census, Cook County, Ill., pop. sch., Northfield, p. 75B, dwell. 222, fam. 224, household of Chas Hewit.

16. 1865 Illinois state census, State Archives, Springfield, Ill., archive collection 103.010, roll 2173, line 28, household of Geo Cole. This census lists two males under age 10. Frank was one. Perhaps the other was a son who eventually died young, explaining his absence from the 1870 census.

17. Edward Richard Cole ("Erich" Cole from the 1870 census) was the next son after Frank. His mother was Julia Leonhardt. See: "Illinois, Deaths and Stillbirths Index, 1916-1947," *Ancestry.com* (www.Ancestry.com : accessed 16 March 2020); death entry of Edward Richard Cole, 12 September 1945. Also, see the census records mentioned in footnote 10 which list the mother's birth place as Germany.