

Discover Your Polish, Ukrainian, and Eastern European Ancestors

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- You need to start in the United States before researching European records
- You'll need:
 - Ancestor's name in original language
 - On documents, the ancestor's name may be switched. It may be written as Surname Forename instead of Forename Surname
 - Their exact birthplace (be warned: Eastern European languages have complex endings added on to words. So if you find a document that says they were born in Europeanabcz, you need to know to drop off the end part of –abcz –a terrible example)
 - In a lot of documents, words are smashed together. For example, what looks like the name of a place may actually be “Providence of _____”
 - It's helpful if you can learn about 200 words of that language which are commonly found on vital records. For example, the words for birthplace, age, name, etc. It'll help you with understanding what you're looking at
 - In Polish, no word starts with Y
- Most of us are descended from farmers so info about that person may be scarce
- When you get an ancestor's name here in English, you need to know how to fix it back into the native language. For example, Thomas would be Tomasz in Polish
- Sources for locating ancestral village:
 - US Church records
 - Ship lists
 - Naturalization records

- Obituaries (did not exist for poor people until 1920s)
- Passport application
- Parish census
- Civil records
- Military records
- American Vital Records
 - Every state has its own rules about creation, who can access the records and when they can be accessed by the public
 - Treat these records with suspicion. It's likely the clerk did not speak the same language as your ancestor so they may get the spelling, dates, and more wrong
 - People also often changed their names once they were in the US in order to better fit in
 - Family members may not tell each other their information (wanting to forget the past for their own reasons), so spouses, children, etc. of your ancestor may have had to answer "Unknown"
- American Church Records
 - Priests may not let you look at the records. They're really at the whim of the churches
 - In NY, the records must be 50 years old before you can look at them
 - Lithuania, Polish, Ukrainian parish churches can be a gold mine of information
 - Look for marriage information in parish records
- Other US Records
 - Visit cemeteries to check the gravestones
 - Ukrainian gravestones are often bilingual
 - Look for school registration records
 - During WWI, there was a Polish army founded in the US
 - These records are in Chicago at the Polish museum

- A copy costs \$33
- Coroner's report
 - If the person died at home under non-suspicious circumstances, the coroner had to come out and made a report
- Check parish/church records for mentions of your family
- Lots of people joined fraternal ethnic group societies as an early form of insurance for when members of that group were injured on the job and needed income to come in till they got better
- Federal Records
 - Census
 - The exact questions asked for each census differ for every census
 - Census takers only spoke English so the information may be way off
 - If your family wasn't at home at the time, a neighbor may have answered – this person may not have known what they were talking about
 - Look for State Census Records
 - Passenger lists
 - Popular ports were: New York, Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Vermont for people traveling down from Canada
 - Castleguard.org covers 1855-1891
 - Libertyellisfoundation.org (recent changes makes it more difficult to find your relatives)
 - Stephenmorse.com
 - Let's you search by truncated name and village
 - If your ancestor went to South American instead of the US, check those countries' passenger lists for information
 - <http://jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Manifests> gives you information about what abbreviations in records stands for
 - Look for the Certificate of Arrival

- St. Albans List and CollectionsCanada.com will contain information about people traveling from Canada to the US
- Departure information
 - Lots of people left from Port of Hamburg in Germany
 - It may be important to know if your ancestor traveled directly or indirectly from Hamburg
 - Direct: left from Hamburg and went straight to NYC
 - Indirect: left from Hamburg but then stopped somewhere before going to NYC
 - Google Hamburg Passenger lists
 - Port of Bremen
 - <http://schifflistend.de>
 - Huge, important port that was destroyed during WWII so many records were lost
- Canadian ports
 - Montreal, Halifax, St. John's, Brunswick
- Alien registration forms
 - Called "A files"
 - Started in June of 1941. Everyone that was not a US citizen had to annually fill out a form about themselves and where they lived
 - These records are housed in Kansas City, MO
 - You can find some of these A files online
- Naturalization paperwork
 - 1st papers is another name for the Declaration of Intent
 - 2nd papers is another name for the Petition for Naturalization
 - The government has a duplicate copy of these papers. However, figuring out what is the current name of the department that has them can be difficult.

Currently they are called the United States Department of Homeland Security and

- WWI and WWII draft registration
 - Also look for discharge paperwork
- If people don't speak English, check the local ethnic paper for them
- Learn the Soundex of your name
 - Look it up and figure out the numeric code that is used
 - It disregards A, E, I, O, U, H, W, Y
 - Use <http://resources.rootsweb.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/soundexconverter>
- Don't look for only your direct ancestors. Look for their siblings, cousins, uncles, etc.
- In the early part of the 20th century, foreign men who became US citizens would have automatic citizenship bestowed on their wife
 - Conversely, American women who married non-naturalized foreign men would lose their US citizenship. Thus they would have to reapply for it
- Geography
 - You need to know the history and geography of the area where your ancestor lived
 - Boundaries changed all the time
 - Germany, Russia, Austria-Hungary was Eastern Europe
 - Austria-Hungary → Austria in Poland region
 - Poland was powerful in 1700s but then disappeared from 1795 to 1918
 - Look up the Polish Partitions
 - Poland used to be larger than it is today
 - Ethnic Polish people were taken into Soviet Union then forced to move West
 - They ended up near the Baltic Sea from Eastern edge of Poland by the Communists

- In the 1970s, counties in Poland suddenly increased by a lot
 - You can have the same village name multiple times within the same county/providence
 - In 1998, Poland moved to having only 16 providences
 - Check diocesan boundaries which differ from government boundaries
 - Kingdom of Galicia
 - 1919 to 1920
- Gazetteers
 - A list of place names within a certain geopolitical jurisdiction
 - They show proper spelling, counties, parishes, etc.
 - Look for German information on census records
 - The Kartenmeister is online
 - This covers east of Oden and Neisse rivers
 - Volume 12 covers Galicia
 - Genealogical Gazetteer of Galicia by Brian J. Lenius is a good resource
 - Skorowidz Miejs_____ in 1934 for the interwar period is online
 - Spis, 1968
 - Miejscowosci Polskiej
 - Look at four books from 1930s for more information. These are regional publications
- Church directory
 - History of church and parish information
- Vital Records
 - Languages: Polish, Russian, Latin, German, Prussian
 - Lithuania and Ukrainian not used to record official information until after WWI

- Russian alphabet does not have the same alphabetical order as English. It goes ABVGZ
- G and H are interchangeable in Russian. For example, Gertrude may be written as Hertrude
- You need to know which letter equals what sound when looking at records
- Local record offices were created which were called the USC (Urząd Stanu Cywilnego) in Poland and RATS in Ukrainian
- To find the records, you need to know which parish that village belonged to in order to discover where the microfilm is kept at
- You can find records at the national level, in church records, or at the USC/RATS
 - Town halls were created in 1946 in Communist countries that wanted nothing to do with religion.
 - Up until 1830, the Catholic priest was responsible for recording information about everyone in his parish regardless of their personal religion
 - Records must be 100 years old to be viewed unless you're a direct descendent
- Nazis destroyed many church records during WWII
- So to find vital records:
 - Find the original place
 - Discover the parish
 - Look in four or more locations before giving up
- Records were recorded in either columns (like the US census) or in narrative paragraphs
 - The government mandated the exact format of forms and other documents
 - German/ Russian partition
 - Language of German/Latin (I think)
 - Had a set form
 - The government inspected records once a year

- If you changed or crossed out anything, you could be fined or go to jail
- Jewish records may be bilingual but they're always in Russian
- White Russia means Belarus
- Austria/Galicia
 - Used the column method
 - All in Latin
 - Bishop copy created 2 or 3 copies
- If you check the death records for a village, you may discover epidemics
- Look for abstracts which are only a summary of information
 - They leave out stuff like the name of the godparents
 - You want the original, not the abstract
- European non-vital records
 - Protocol
 - Voter list
 - Revision list (taxes) – males and females are on different pages
 - City directories for 1800s and beyond
 - Business directory
 - Nobility records
 - By mid-1800s, lower nobility was just as poor as farmers, but they were called sir
 - Could have a minor tax break if they proved their nobility
 - Notary records
 - In Europe, a notary was more like a lawyer

- Their records are in the state archives
- Passport records
 - Hard to find as they're buried in other locations
 - May be in state archives
- Military draft eligibility
 - Especially found in Poland and Lithuania
 - Are located in the state archives
- Military discharge records
- Census records are poor and/or non-existent
- Church census records are rich with detail
 - Yearly in Catholic and Orthodox parishes
 - Everyone was expected to go to a yearly communion where they were questioned
- Anonim
 - Anonymous letters complaining about their neighbors (highly enjoyable to read)
- Galician Church Census
- Estate inventory
 - Peasant list
 - Was used for tax purposes
 - Are located in state archives
- Researching on-site
 - Plan your objectives (family, archives, village, tours)
 - Plan ahead (archives, libraries, weather, family)

- You should write ahead to request to be seen as many archives/libraries close randomly
- If you're lucky, they'll go ahead and pull the materials out for you
- Often times, you need the permission of the head of the organization to see the records
- In late July/all of August, archives are usually closed
- Staff may resist turning on lights before 6 p.m. even if the building is very dark
- Pack lightly
- European archives are slow to respond
- You may need to bribe someone to get in to see the records
- Photography of your records tends to be free if it's for yourself
 - You can often photograph up to 75% of a register
 - In Ukrainian, you have to pay for photos at around \$2/shot
- Eastern Europeans love to drink, so be prepared to be expected to drink heavily when meeting with relatives
 - Especially vodka
- Visit cemeteries – many are abandoned which can be good since plant growth protects stones from weathering
- Bring copies of your original documents and research to share with your family
- Also bring photos of relatives on your side of the pond to give to your Eastern European family members
- Websites
 - Myheritage.com is very popular in Eastern Europe
 - Great for Poland
 - Costs money to join
 - Moikrewni.pl/mapa

- Shows surnames and locations in Poland
- [szukajWArchiwach.pl](#)
 - Polish State Archives
- [Basia.famula.pl/en/skany](#)
 - Database of archival indexing
 - Shows where records have been digitized
- [Geneteka.genealodzy.pl](#)
- [Agad.gov.pl/inwentarze/testy.html](#)
- [Ksiegi-parafialne.pl](#)
 - Parish registers
- Books
 - In their words by Hoffman and Shea
 - Vol. I Polish
 - Vol. II Russian
 - Vol. III Latin
 - Going Home: A Guide to Polish American Family History Research
 - Polish Surnames by William F. Hoffman