

Using Pre-1826 Polish Parish Records in Jewish Research

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Introduction:

Separate vital records registers for Jews did not begin in Congress Poland until 1826. However, a wealth of information can be obtained through research in the 1808-1825 Catholic parish civil registers. These records can give insight into the adoption of surnames and research with patronymics, as well as to the lifestyle of non-town (rural) Jews, who often were innkeepers and liquor franchisees. The geographic limits of the register for each parish were often different and more extensive than the later Jewish "town" boundaries. Two specific parish areas, in south central and eastern Poland, will be discussed.

Historical Overview of Polish Border Changes:

- 1795 — 3rd and final partition of Poland; Poland ceases to exist as a nation. Northern and western areas (Poznań, Kalisz, Warsaw, Łomża, Białystok) taken by Prussia; Eastern areas (Vilna, Grodno, Brest) taken by Russia; Southern areas (Kielce, Radom, Lublin, Siedlce) becomes part of Austrian province of West Galicia.
- 1807 — Napoleon defeats Prussia; establishes "Duchy of Warsaw" from former Prussian territory.
- 1809 — Napoleon defeats Austria; West Galicia (includes most of future Kielce-Radom-Lublin-Siedlce gubernias) becomes part of Napoleon's Duchy of Warsaw.
- 1815 — Napoleon defeated at Waterloo; Congress of Vienna establishes "Kingdom of Poland" (aka "Congress Poland" or "Russian Poland") from former Duchy of Warsaw, as part of the Russian Empire; Galicia becomes part of Austro-Hungarian Empire; Western provinces are retained by Prussia.
- 1918 — End of WWI. Poland reborn at Versailles, but only comprising 3/5ths the size of pre-partition Poland.
- 1945 — End of WWII. Polish borders shift west: loses territory to U.S.S.R., gains former German areas.

History of Civil Vital Record-keeping in the Kingdom of Poland:

- 1808 — (May 1). Civil vital registration begins in Grand Duchy of Warsaw. Napoleonic format, Polish language. People of all religions registered in the Roman Catholic civil registers.
- 1810 — (Sep 1). Civil registration begins in areas newly acquired by Napoleon: Kielce (Kraków), Radom (Sandomierz), Lublin, and Siedlce (Podlesie) départements.
- 1821 — (Oct). Jews required to take surnames.
- 1826 — (Jan 1). Separate civil registers maintained by each religious community (Roman Catholic, Jewish, etc.)
- 1868 — (Apr). Records begin to be maintained in Russian language.
- 1918 — Polish language resumed for recordkeeping.

Locating the Ancestral Shtetl:

- Mokotoff, Gary and Sallyann Amdur Sack, with Alexander Sharon. *Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust*. (Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, Inc., 1991, 2002). 704 pages.
- *Słownik Geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych Krajów Słowiańskich* [Geographical Dictionary of the Kingdom of Poland and other Slavic Countries]. Edited by Filip Sulimierski, Bronisław Chlebowski and Władysław Walewski. (Warsaw: Wiek, 1880-1902). 16 volumes.
< http://dir.icm.edu.pl/pl/Słownik_geograficzny/ >.
- Lenius, Brian J. *Genealogical Gazetteer of Galicia*. 3rd edition. (Anola, Canada, 1999).
- U.S. Board on Geographic Names — *JewishGen Gazetteer*: < <http://www.jewishgen.org/Communities> >.
- 1929 Polish Business Directory - Town Index: < <http://jri-poland.org/bizdir/bd1929.htm> >.

Locating Records – Inventories of Polish-Jewish Vital Records, by Town:

- Family History Library Catalog™ — Locality catalog: < <http://www.FamilySearch.org> >.
- *Jewish Roots in Poland: Pages from the Past and Archival Inventories*. (The Miriam Weiner Routes to Roots Foundation and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1997). 446 + xx pages.
- Routes to Roots Foundation database: < <http://www.rtrfoundation.org> >.
- *Księgi metrykalne i stanu cywilnego w archiwach państwowych w Polsce*. [Metrical and civil registration documents in the State Archives in Poland]. Edited by Anna Laszuk. (Warsaw: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych [Head Office of the State Archives], 1998, 2000). 469 pages.
- Polish State Archives' database: < <http://www.szukajwarchiwach.pl> >.

Translating Records:

- Frazin, Judith R. *A Translation Guide to 19th-Century Polish-Language Civil-Registration Documents*. 3rd ed. (Northbrook, IL: The Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois, 2009). 472 pages.
- Shea, Jonathan D. and William F. Hoffman. *Following the Paper Trail: A Multilingual Translation Guide*. (Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, 1993). 256 pages.
- Shea, Jonathan D. and William F. Hoffman. *In Their Words: A Genealogist's Guide to Polish, German, Latin and Russian Documents*. (Language and Lineage Press). *Volume I: Polish*. 400 pages. (2000). *Volume II: Russian*. 496 pages. (2002). *Volume III: Latin*. 420 pages. (2013).
- “Polish Genealogical Word List”. (Salt Lake City, UT: Family History Department, November 1990). 12 pages. Also online at < https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Polish_Word_List >.

An overview of Jewish vital records in Russian Poland¹

Years	1808 - 1825	1826 - 1867	1868 - 1917	1918 - 1942
Where Recorded	Catholic Civil Transcripts	Separate Jewish registers		
Language	Polish		Russian	Polish
Location of Registers	Records older than 100 years are kept in regional branches of the Polish State Archives. Many of these records have been microfilmed by the Mormons, usually up to around 1865 or later for some towns.		Records less than 100 years old are typically kept in each town's Civil Records Office (Urząd Stanu Cywilnego).	

¹ This chart applies only to records in localities within the semi-autonomous region under Russian rule known as the “Kingdom of Poland” (Congress Poland, aka “Russian Poland”). This area covered forms almost half of present-day Poland. For other localities which are now part of Poland (e.g. parts of former Galicia, Prussian Poland, Grodno Gubernia), the record format, language, and periods covered are different.

Selected Reference Works:

- Beider, Alexander. *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland*. (Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, Inc., 1996). 607 pages.
- Beider, Alexander. *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from Galicia*. (Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, Inc., 2004). 624 pages.
- Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego w Polsce* [Bulletin of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland]. (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 1951-). {Quarterly}.
- Cymbler, Jeffrey K. "Polish-Jewish Genealogical Research - A Primer", in *Avotaynu* IX:2 (Summer 1993), pp. 4-12.
- Dubnow, Simon M. *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times Until the Present Day*. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916-20). 3 volumes. Reprint by Avotaynu, 2000.
- Dynner, Glenn. *Yankel's Tavern Jews, Liquor, & Life in the Kingdom of Poland*. (Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Eisenberg Davis, Lauren B. "The Power of Extracts" and "Don't Let a Little Extraction Scare You!" in *Kielce-Radom SIG Journal*, Vol. I, No. 1, pp. 25-29 (Winter 1997), and No. 2, pp. 21-27 (Spring 1997).
- The Galitzianer*. (Geshher Galicia, 1993-). {Quarterly}. <https://www.geshhergalicia.org/the-galitzianer/>
- Hoffman, William F. *Polish Surnames: Origins and Meanings*. 2nd edition. (Chicago: Polish Genealogical Society of America, 1992, 1997). 592 pages.
- Hoffman, William F. and George W. Helon. *First Names of the Polish Commonwealth: Origins and Meanings*. (Chicago: Polish Genealogical Society of America, 1998). 426 pages.
- Hundert, Gershon David. *The Jews in a Polish Private Town - The Case of Opatów in the Eighteenth Century*. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992). 242 pages.
- Hundert, Gershon David. "18th-Century Polish Jewry: Demographic and Genealogical Problems", in *Avotaynu* XV:4 (Winter 1999), pp. 9-14.
- Kielce-Radom SIG Journal*. (1997-2004). {Quarterly}. http://jri-poland.org/kr-sig/krsig_index.htm
- Landsmen: Quarterly Publication of the Suwalk-Lomza Interest Group For Jewish Genealogists*. (Washington DC, 1990-). {Quarterly}. <http://www.jewishgen.org/SuwalkLomza/>
- Litwak, Stanislaw. *The Latin Church in the Polish Commonwealth in 1772: A Map and Index of Localities*. (Chicago: Polish Genealogical Society, 1990). 43 pages + 24 maps.
- Ortell, Gerald A. *Polish Parish Records of the Roman Catholic Church: Their Use and Understanding in Genealogical Research*. (Chicago: Polish Genealogical Society of America, 1996). 104 pages.
- Pinkas HaKehillot: Polin. Entsiklopedia shel ha-yishuvim le-min hivasdam ve-ad le-aher shoat milhemet ha-olam ha-sheniya* [Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities - Poland]. Eds.: Dabrowska, Danuta and Abraham Wein. 8 volumes. (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority, 1976-2005). (Vol. I: Łódź region, 1976; Vol. II: Eastern Galicia, 1980; Vol. III: Western Galicia and Silesia, 1984; Vol. IV: Warsaw region, 1989; Vol. V: Volhynia and Polesie, 1990; Vol. VI: Poznań, Pomerania & Danzig; Vol. VII: Kielce and Lublin districts, 1999; Vol. VIII: Vilna, Białystok & Nowogródek districts, 2005).
- Polish Sources at the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People*. Compiled and edited by Hanna Volovici, Witold Medykowski, Hadassah Assouline and Benyamin Lukin. (Avotaynu, 2004). 320 pages.
- Shea, Jonathan D. And William F. Hoffman. *Polish Localities in the Russian Partition and their Parish Affiliations. Volume I: Białystok, Drohiczyn, Łomża, Płock Dioceses*. (Language & Lineage Press, 1994). 167 pages.
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- Weiner, Miriam. *Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova: Pages from the Past and Archival Inventories*. (The Miriam Weiner Routes to Roots Foundation and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1999). 600 pages.
- Źródła Archiwalne do Dziejów Żydów w Polsce*. [Archival Sources for Jewish History in Poland]. (Warszawa: Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, 2001). 600 pages.

Web Sites:

- JewishGen — < <http://www.jewishgen.org> >
- Jewish Records Indexing - Poland — < <http://jri-poland.org> >
- Vital Records in Poland — < <http://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/polandv.html> >
- Polish-Jewish Genealogy - Questions & Answers — < <http://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Poland/Questions.htm> >