Finding Your Ancestors in Poland Using Online Resources

Polish Immigration to United States

- First Poles arrived in Jamestown in 1608, 12 years before Pilgrims. In 1619 Poles also led the first labor protest in the New World.

- Polish Protestants arrived in 2nd half of 17th century, after Protestantism was banished by law in Poland.

- Waves of Polish immigrants after final Partition of Poland (1795), November Uprising (1830-31) and January Uprising (1863-65).

- Largest wave of Polish immigrants came between 1870 and 1914.

- Two recent waves of Polish immigrants came after WWII and between 1970-2004

Administrative Districts in Partitions

- German Partition
  - East Prussia/Ostpreussen/Prusy Wschodnie
  - West Prussia/Westpreussen/Prusy Zachodnie
  - Pomerania/Pommern/Pomorze
  - Brandenburg
  - Posen/Grand Duchy of Posen/Wielkie Księstwo Poznańskie
  - Silesia/Schlesien/Śląsk

- Austrian Partition
  - Kingdom of Galicia/Galizien/Galicja
  - Bukovina/Bukovyna/Bukowina
  - Austrian Silesia/Osterreichisch Schlesien/Czeski Śląsk (in Polish it means Czech Silesia)

Administrative Districts in Partitions

- Russian Partition
  - Gubernia warszawska (Warszawa)
  - Gubernia kaliska (Kalisz)
  - Gubernia kielecka (Kielce)
  - Gubernia łomżyńska (Łomża)
  - Gubernia lubelska (Lublin)
  - Gubernia piotrkowska (Piotrków Trybunalski)
  - Gubernia płocka (Płock)
  - Gubernia radomska (Radom)
  - Gubernia siedlecka (Siedlce)
  - Gubernia suwalska (Suwałki)

Setting up for research

- Set your computer's keyboard to be able to input Polish letters.
  - Keyboard for Polish language -> Polish (Programmers)

- Polish alphabet is based on Latin alphabet, same as English language.
  - Polish language has diacritical marks -> ą, ę, ż, ź, ć, ń, ó, ś, ł
  - Diacritical marks created by pressing "Alt" and corresponding letter – "Alt" + "A" = "Ą"
  - Exception is "ź" created by pressing "Alt" + "X"

- Inputting diacritical marks might be critical in some search engines

- Common misspellings in records:
  - "ó" as "u"
  - "ę" as "em" or "en"
  - "ą" as "om"
  - "A" as "Ję" or "Je" (in older records especially) [Andrzej=Jędrzej]
  - "D" as "Zd" (in older records especially) [Dziarski=Zdziarski]

Setting up for research

- If doing research on German/Czech/Ukrainian/Belarusian/Russian families set corresponding language on your computer as well.
    - You can have multiple keyboard languages set and change in-between them as you do the research.

- If doing research in Russian Partition or you have/might have ancestors of Greek-catholic religion know how the last name is written in Cyrillic alphabet.
    - Church Records in Greek-catholic church might have been written down in Cyrillic.
    - Civil records in Russian Partition after 1867 were written down in Russian (using Cyrillic).

Setting up for research

- Traditionally, marriage took place in bride's parish, regardless of her religion. If bride was of Greek-catholic religion and broom was of Roman-catholic religion wedding traditionally would take place in bride's Greek-catholic parish.

- If both, bride and groom, were of the same religion marriage would take place in parish bride's village belonged to.

- Traditionally, boys would be baptized in father's parish and in his religion, while girls would be baptized in mother's parish and in her religion.

- If both parents were of same religion baptism would take place in a parish their village belonged to.

- Civil registration of birth and death took place in civil district person was born or died in. Might not be same civil district family lived in, for example event took place during travel.

Research – Know your ancestor

- While trying to find your ancestor's village you need to write down all the information you have regarding that ancestor from all records gathered! Write down:

1. All last name variations that you have found.
    - Keep in mind Polish grammar – feminine ending of last name is "a", not "i" ("-ska" not "-ski")
    - Not all last names have masculine and feminine form

    Example:

    | masculine: Nowak | masculine: Nowakowski |
    | feminine: Nowak | feminine: Nowakowska |

2. All first name variations.
    - No standard list exists for all name equivalents from Polish to English (e.g. Mieczysław, Bolesław, Satnisława don't have English equivalent)
    - All feminine first names in Polish language end with an "a" (e.g. Helena, Julia)
    - Know equivalent in Latin/German/Russian (Albert [English] = Adalbert [Latin] = Wojciech [Polish])

Research – Know your ancestor

3. Partition they came from (Russian, Prussian or Austrian).

4. All village name variations.

- Depending on records there might be village and administrative district written down.
- Might have to use current name (Polish name) of village and administrative district for searching. Use diacritical marks.

5. Know which religion they practiced.
- Roman-catholic (in Latin abbreviated as "r.l.")
- Greek-catholic (in Latin abbreviated as "r.g.l.") NOT THE SAME AS GREEK-ORTHODOX
- Judaism (in Polish records as "żyd" or "starozakonny")
- Lutheran/Protestant
- Mennonite

Research – Know your ancestor

6. All dates (or estimate years) of births, marriages and/or deaths.

7. Know the family and repeat steps 1-6 for them.
   - Many people came to family or family came to them at some point.
   - Obituary from Polish newspaper is good source of information for discovering family members.
   - Cemetery records might give good information as to who else is buried in family plot (not all people in family plot have headstones, obtain information at the cemetery's office)

8. Search through available databases for any resemblance
   to your ancestor or their family.
   (Links to Polish websites in separate Excel file)

Dictionary for searching

- Imię – First name
- Nazwisko – Last Name
- Parafia – Parish
- Miejscowość/Miasto – Village/Town
- M/Małżeństwa/Śluby – Marriages
- U/Urodzenia – Births
- Z/Zgony/Zejścia – Deaths
- Chrzest/chrzty – Baptism/Baptisms
- Szukaj – Search
- Dokładne wyszukiwanie – Exact search/ Exact match
- Uwagi – Remarks
- Imiona rodziców – Names of the Parents
- Ojciec – Father
- Matka – Mother
- Imię Ojca – Father's name
- Imie Matki – Mother's name
- Rok/Lata – Year/Years
- Akt (numer aktu) – Record (record's number)
- Martwo urodzone/Martwy płód – Stillborn

Family trees

- Family Search has some records indexed/being indexed from Poland.

- Family Search has church records from Ukraine scanned in post part. Unfortunately, access is available only to members of LDS Church.

- Family Search has some German records indexed.

- Ancestry has very limited database for Poland.

- Most Poles use MyHeritage.com to create family trees.

What if…? Battleships!

- …many villages by the same name?
  - Write down parish for each village and check available records online or on microfilms. If no match found, move to the next parish.

- …know area, but not exact parish?
  - Do radius search. Best is to print out map of the area, research all parishes that existed in specific time period you are searching in and mark them on the map. Check records available for matches. If none found, expand the area.