

A Guide to Your Family History

About the Polish American Association

The Polish American Association is a non-profit organization and the nation's only human services agency dedicated to providing resources for changing lives within the Polish community.

Founded in 1922 as the Polish Welfare Association, today we offer a variety of services to Polish Americans and other immigrants in need, no matter their race, religion or national origin.

Each month, more than 3,000 individuals are served through our education, employment, immigration and social services programs.

Polish American Association *Resources for Changing Lives*

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Do you know your family's history? Has anyone in your family started a family tree? If genealogy seems complicated, it doesn't need to be if you begin by gathering all the facts you know or can easily find out.

The most important documents you need in order to find out more about your family are: birth, marriage and death certificates; religious records; cemetery records; census forms; citizenship papers; passenger ship lists; military records and other records like school records, deeds and wills.

Before searching for these documents, you'll need to know when someone lived and where, and when the events of their lives occurred. You'll find that one document will lead you to another. Also, when sending for documents, be as specific as possible and always enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope. A list of places to seek these documents can be found in the Resource list that follows.

Your family can be a source of information. Interview the older members of your family and video or audio tape the interviews - your children and grandchildren will enjoy hearing stories of the "old days" or "the old country."

When interviewing relatives:

- Record the dates when events occurred.
- If your family has any old photos, ask who they are and how they are related. Collect family albums.
- Ask if anyone has any old family items that were brought from Poland to America.

Some basic questions to ask are:

- When did members of your family first come to America?
- What city did they come from?
- How did they get here? From what port did they depart and when?
- How did they end up in Chicago?
- Did they change their name, or have their name changed at the port of entry?
- Did they become American citizens? (It was not uncommon in the 1800s and early 1900s for immigrants to remain non-citizens.)
- Where did they first live in Chicago?
- Did they belong to a church? If so, which one?
- Where are your deceased relatives buried?

Recommended Books

[Essentials in Polish](#)

[Genealogical Research](#) by Daniel Schlyter, Chicago, IL. Polish Genealogical Society of America, c/o Marcia Bergman, 926 Oxford Lane, Wilmette, IL. 60091. This brief booklet is an excellent introduction to Polish research. It is particularly helpful in showing how to use the resources of the Family History Library of The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints.

[Roman Catholic Parishes in the Polish People's Republic in 1984](#) by Lidia Mullerowa, Chicago, IL Polish Genealogical Society, c/o Marcia Bergman, 926 Oxford Lane, Wilmette, IL 60091. This useful book helps the researcher locate parishes in modern Poland, an essential part of finding family records.

[Polish Surnames: Origins and Meanings](#), 2nd edition, William F. Hoffman, Polish Genealogical Society of America, c/o Marcia Bergman, 926 Oxford Lane, Wilmette, IL 60091. The first half of this book explains the origins and meanings of Polish surnames. Also indexed are some 30,000 common surnames including the roots of their origin and how many Polish citizens bore each name as of 1990.

About The Polish Genealogical Society

The Polish Genealogical Society of America (PGSA)

Resources

On the Internet, a good place to start your genealogical search is the Polish American Association's web site at www.polish.org. This will lead to other useful sites for information, searches and products.

Libraries

For genealogical research tools, directories, indexes and publications, visit your local library or those with extensive collections:

Harold Washington Library Center, 400 South Street, Chicago, Social Sciences Division, 6th floor

Newberry Library, 60 West Walton, Chicago

Polish Museum of America, 984 North Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago

To Find Documents

Illinois vital records -- Division of Vital Records, Illinois Department Public Health, 605 West Jefferson Street, Springfield, IL 62702-5079.

Sacramental certificates, school records and other genealogical information for the Archdiocese of Chicago -- The Archdiocese of Chicago, Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Archives and Records Center, 711 W. Monroe, Chicago IL 60661 (312) 831-0711.

Ship arrivals, census records, military, naturalization and other federal records -- Main branch - U.S. National Archives, Eighth Street and Pennsylvania, NW, Washington, DC 20408

Midwest branch - 7358 South Pulaski Road, Chicago, IL 60629, (773) 581-7816

Records from Poland -- The Church of Jesus of the Latter Day Saints, Family History Centers, for microfilmed church and town records. Call (847) 885-4130 or (630) 505-0233 for the nearest location.

Readings for Beginners

[Polish Roots](#) by Rosemary Chorzempa, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 1001 N. Calvert St., Baltimore, MD 21202-3897. (1-800-296-6687).

was founded in Illinois in 1978 and is the oldest and largest of all Polish genealogical societies. The PGSA maintains a data base for Polish genealogical family research and has a home page on the Internet at www.pgsa.org. Their office is located at 984 North Milwaukee Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622.

Highly recommended by the Polish Genealogical Society, this book provides researchers with the hows and wheretos to begin and succeed in tracing your family's Polish roots.

[The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy](#) by Val Greenwood, Baltimore, MD, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc. 1991 N. Calvert Street, Baltimore, M.D. 21202. The text of choice for courses in American genealogy.