



Gen Dobry!

Gen Dobry! 28 April 2001

***** GEN DOBRY! *****

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*** WELCOME! ***

to the latest issue of GEN DOBRY!, the e-zine of PolishRoots(tm). If you missed previous issues, you can find them at the PolishRoots Website.

Thanks to all who've taken the time to send me comments, suggestions, and contributions. If you have something to contribute, or just something to say, please E-mail me at <WFHoffman@prodigy.net>.

Remember to visit PolishRoots.org, the Website that brings you _Gen Dobry!_. Here's a site you might take a look at, listing lodges of the Polish National Alliance:

http://PolishRoots.org/pna_lodges.asp

Dr. Paul S. Valasek worked hard to put it together, and encourages you to visit and search for information, or provide additional information if you have it. Zapraszamy!

*** THE ELLIS ISLAND WEBSITE AND INCORRECT NAMES ***

The big news recently, of course, has been the opening of the Ellis Island Website at:

<http://www.ellislandrecords.org>

As anyone might have foretold who experienced the inauguration of the LDS's Family History Library Website, at first it was terribly difficult even accessing this site. This often happens, even in Cyberspace, when millions of people try to crowd into the same place at once!

But as I read notes posted online, I see that more and more folks are managing to get on the site and do some research. The heavy demand still keeps some from connecting to the site, and those who do often find themselves kicked off long before they're ready. But clearly things are improving, and the FHL experience suggests the improvement will continue. Remember, genealogists, of all people, have to appreciate the value of patience!

I've seen a great many notes already from people who have been disappointed because they could not find names listed that they expected to find. There can be many reasons for this, of course. No doubt a big one is misreading of names -- personal names and place names -- by workers who processed the data at various points. This is shaping up as a major problem, from what I see.

Comments posted on Genpol@man.torun.pl by professional researcher Mary Popovich <busia@mindspring.com> point out a typical kind of error:

- > One of the things that struck me was the fact that a number
- > of the transcribers had difficulty distinguishing between
- > the capital "L" and "S". For instance, they wrote "Losice"
- > instead of "Sosice" (Croatia) and "Luwalki" instead of "Suwalki"

- > (Poland). I also noted a couple places where they interpreted
- > capital "J" as "F". Again, these were in place names.
- >
- > The implication for all researchers is that if you're looking on the
- > Ellis Island online database for an ancestor whose surname begins
- > with an "S" and you don't find him/her (using all the possible
- > misspellings you can think of), then you might want to try
- > entering the name using "L" instead of "S".

If you've had much practice trying to read documents of this sort, you can cut the volunteers a little slack. It's a shame God Almighty had other commitments and couldn't do this job, because He is surely the only one who could decipher some of those scrawls without error. Coping with human error is a frustrating but integral part of research, now and forever, amen.

* Patterns in Misread Handwriting *

I've discussed mangled names before in _Gen Dobry!_ (Ellis Island, too, for that matter), but the notes I've seen online make me think it might be worthwhile to talk a little about why Eastern European names are mangled so often. There are patterns observable in the errors. Awareness of them won't help you in every case, but it may occasionally help you snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

(I know in connection with the Ellis Island site, some folks are already sick of this subject! I hope you'll pardon me if I add my two cents, aimed mainly at helping you deal with mangled names. They say "It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness" -- although I, myself, am prone to curse the candle).

Misread handwriting is, of course, a frustrating problem, one hard to solve. Unless and until some of the more obvious errors are corrected, the only practical approach, as Mary suggested, is to try to visualize likely errors and take them into account. This requires experience, unfortunately. Until you've studied a certain number of old records and seen capital S's that looked like L's, the possibility of S being misread as L is not one likely to occur to you. Along the same lines, if you've dealt with Polish records for a while, you'll realize almost immediately that "Luwalki" is suspicious, but "Suwalki" will come to mind. If you don't have that kind of experience, you need to keep your eyes and ears open -- and talk to others who do have experience and will help you learn from their mistakes!

Similarly, capital F, capital J, and capital T are letters than can easily be confused with each other, and even with capital S and L. If only those

officials who filled out documents had been hired for their penmanship!...
(Come to think of it, what were they hired for?)

For those dealing with Polish ancestors, an obvious source of peril is the Polish l with a slash or crossbar, which I render online as l~. If you've seen Polish handwritten records, you know how easily that letter can be mistaken for a t. Even in Poland we see cases where someone made that error, and Marszal~ek became Marszatek. If Poles could make that mistake, we can hardly fault Americans for doing the same.

If Germans were involved in drawing up the original passenger lists -- and they often were -- a whole new range of errors opened up when Americans tried to read the lists. You've probably seen cases where the Germans used a form of s that looks almost like an f. There's the infamous German eszet, a letter that looks kind of like our uppercase B but should be treated like a double-s. The German script h looks like someone started to make an h, but halfway through the down stroke changed his mind and went with a j. Less well known but thoroughly baffling is a German tendency to form the letter p in a way that looks a lot like our y.

In theory, Germans knew these letters in their native script could be misread, and attempted to use forms less likely to confound Americans. In practice, even the most scrupulous Prussian might absentmindedly slip into using the forms he'd known since childhood, and thus hand an immigration official a list every bit as legible as an EKG.

These potential pitfalls deal with the mechanics of handwriting. With a little experience, you can come to recognize situations where they might come into play. A little tougher to deal with are mistakes that occurred when Polish spelling rules collided with those of Germans or Americans.

* Polish Spelling Rules *

There are certain letter combinations that are simply not normal in Polish. The phonetic tendencies and preferences of the Polish language make these combinations unlikely in native Polish names spelled correctly. Of course we can say off the top that you shouldn't see the letters q, x, or v in Polish names; they're just not used. If you see a V, for instance, it's either a mistake, a sloppy W, or an example of phonetic substitution -- Polish W sounds like English V, so somewhere along the line it got switched (but probably not by Poles or Germans, to whom that switch would be counterintuitive).

Three other tendencies worth mentioning are the equivalence of H and CH in Polish; the interchangeability of I, J, and Y in Polish; and Poles' aversion to double letters.

In Polish H and CH are pronounced the same -- a little more guttural than English H, but not as harsh as German CH in "Bach." A century ago, before literacy became widespread in Poland, the awareness of the "proper" way to spell names wasn't as strong as it is now, so names were often spelled the way they sounded. For this reason, Chojnacki could just as easily be spelled Hojnacki, because they are both pronounced the same. In modern Poland, what with greater literacy and a tendency to normalize names to standard forms, Chojnacki is far more common than Hojnacki (as of 1990, 24,744 Chojnackis, compared to 374 Hojnackis). Records from over a century ago, however, could easily have either spelling.

The letters I, J, and Y are clearly defined in modern Polish. The vowel I represents a sound much like "ee" in "feet," and is also used after consonants to indicate that they're softened or palatalized, like the combination "ni" in English "onion." Y is a vowel, representing a short i somewhat like that in "ship." J, on the other hand, is a consonant, the sound of "y" in English "yacht." In modern spelling they're not confused. But in older records they were often used almost interchangeably. The name "Maria" may show up as "Marja," "Marya," or "Maryja."

It's very rare to see I or Y used as a consonant -- unlike Americans, Poles would almost never spell JANOWSKI as YANOWSKI or IANOWSKI-- but they might use Y instead of I as a vowel. In other words, even though Polish spelling rules today say it's never -sky, always -ski, you do see -sky in some older records. To take another example, the surname FABIANOWICZ may appear as FABIYANOWICZ, FABIJANOWICZ, FABIYANOWICZ, or FABJANOWICZ. By older Polish spelling standards those spellings were all legit.

As for double letters such as SS or TT, they are common in German and English, but pretty rare in Polish. As a rule Poles only write a letter twice if you actually pronounce it twice. So a spelling like LISS or SASS is evidence of a foreign influence on spelling, usually German. The "proper" Polish spellings would be LIS and SAS. If you find them spelled the other way in Polish records, it's probably because there was a strong German influence in the area, and it affected the way names were recorded. In German LAS and LASS are pronounced differently -- the German pronunciation of LAS sounds like our word "laws." Germans pronounce LASS much as Poles pronounce LAS (like the way we pronounce "loss"). So under German influence the right way to spell the Polish name LAS, phonetically speaking, would be LASS.

Here's a list of a few other combinations of letters seldom seen in Polish; there may be many more, but these came to mind right away:

di - usually either dy- or dzi-
ge - should be gie- (except in names of non-Polish origin)
ke - should be kie- (except in names of non-Polish origin)
ri - should be rzy-
ti - should be ci- or ty-

The combinations czi-, rzi-, and szi- are also incorrect:

czi - usually ci- or czy-
rzi - usually rzy-
szi - usually either si- or szy-

Does this mean one never sees the combination Di-, for instance, in Polish? No, it does occur, especially in names originally borrowed from other languages. But Poles just don't like to say "dee." They tend to turn it into dy- (like the English word "dip" without the p) or into dzi- (much like "jeep" without the p). Every language has some sounds that come naturally to its speakers and some that don't. In Polish they jam together the guttural CH, the "zh" sound spelled RZ, the nasal A~ sounding like "on," the "sh" sound spelled SZ, and the "ch" sound spelled CZ, in the word and name CHRZA~SZCZ. Even on acid, an English-speaker would never combine those sounds. Poles do it in their sleep. But the combination RZI makes them scratch their heads and ask "Co to jest?"

The essential point here is that a Pole would not normally write the name Cxyz*yk as "Czizyk." But a non-Pole might! Non-Poles seemed to feel they were doing well just to get the "Cz" right -- anything after that, anything goes.

Thus if you've consulted an "expert" -- say, some balding, bespectacled Kraut who thinks he knows a lot about Polish names and has written a book on the subject -- he may have told you you're wrong if you spell the name Czizyk; it's Cxyz*yk (using z* for the dotted z). "Thank God for geniuses like him," you think, and you jump onto the Ellis Island site and go searching for Cxyz*yk. It's not there. On a whim, you look for Czizyk, and there it is! A few experiences like this might shake your faith in "experts" (Which, to be honest, is not all bad. As an alleged "expert" myself, I have no illusions about expert infallibility!)

If everybody on the planet knew the rules and followed them religiously, the experts would be right most of the time. But while that situation may prevail on any number of inhabited planets in the galaxy, it does not prevail on this one. If the form you've come up with from your research is not spelled correctly by Polish standards, try to look for the "wrong" ones as well as the "right" ones. Yes, Czy- is right and Czi- is wrong -- but if you don't find Czy-, sneak a peek at Czi-!

* Polish *

I recently saw a list of some changes Polish-American researchers had documented in their original surnames after arrival in America. Usually these changes fit into one of four categories:

- 1) keeping the old name with minor changes due to phonetic spelling
- 2) taking a new name that's a translation of the old one
- 3) taking a new name with a familiar sound
- 4) taking a new name, period

In category 1, the name's pronunciation did not change drastically, but the Polish spellings was modified to fit English phonetics -- turned into "Polglish," you might say. Here are a few examples, giving first the Polish spelling, an English phonetic approximation of the Polish pronunciation, and the actual spelling of the name as it ended up in America. As always, I use the tilde to represent Polish diacritical marks, but z* for the dotted z:

Dzie~giel [JENG-yell]-> Jingle
Dziedzic [JED-jeets] -> Jeddick
Je~druszek [yen-DROOSH-eck] -> Endrusick
Ro~g [rook] -> Rook
Sa~dej [SON-day] -> Sunday

I think it's especially cute how Sa~dej turned into an English word that sounds very similar, Sunday! Note that in each case, however much the spelling might have changed, the pronunciation is reasonably consistent. A great many name changes fit into this category. If you learn a bit about Polish pronunciation, then get in the habit of saying names out loud, you have a real shot at recognizing these.

In category 2, translations, the Polish meaning of the name was preserved by using an English name that meant much the same thing. Here are some examples:

Andrzejewski -> Andrews
Janczyk -> Johnson
Mielnik -> Miller
Piotrowicz -> Peters or Peterson
Tkacz -> Weaver

In each case the English version means practically the same thing as the Polish. This allowed immigrants to "fit in" among Americans better without sacrificing all continuity of meaning with their ancestral names. Here,

too, some knowledge of Polish may help you make a connection, although it's harder than with the changes in category 1.

Category 3 consists of American names chosen by Polish immigrants because they sounded just a little similar. It would be hard to get used to being called by a totally different name, after all. If the new name has a sound or two in common with the old, it might be easier to get used to. Thus a Krawczynski might go by Krauss in America (not realizing Krauss is actually a German name). A Wojciechowicz might go by Voight (also German). A Kanapicki could end up as Kane. A Boleslawski might even end up as Williams through the rather tenuous phonetic similarity between the Polish nickname Boles, for Boleslaw, and the English nickname Bill for William. Far-fetched? Yes -- but it happened.

These changes are hard to deal with because the similarity between the two names can be so slight. Usually there's no way to make a connection based on the name alone. You need some other info.

Category 4 is the toughest, because in these cases the immigrant said "To hell with the Old World, this is a new one. I'm going by a whole new name!" Choosing a new name might help psychologically because it cut all ties with the old life, and thus aided the immigrant in his resolve never to look back. If the authorities were looking for him back home, he might think a totally different name would make him harder to find. Or he might just hear an American name he liked the sound of.

In some cases a change may have been imposed on him. If he had trouble finding a job, but finally got one, maybe his boss said, "I don't know how to pronounce Kramarzewski, let alone spell it. If you want to work for me your name is Casey. Ya got it?" What could "Casey" do but shrug and say "OK, boss"?

With name changes in category 4, no amount of insight or expertise helps. These changes were made almost by whim sometimes, and Sherlock Holmes himself couldn't deduce the original form. Oh, once you've made the connection, you may be able to backtrack and see some logic to it. But if all you have is the American name, and you need to get to the Polish name -- well, all I can say is, good luck!

* Conclusion *

My point is that there can be a jillion reasons why the name you're looking for doesn't match up with the ones in the Ellis Island database, or any other source, for that matter. Misread names are one factor you have to deal with. But a lot of researchers discover that their immigrant ancestors changed their names -- or had them changed by others -- while

they were in the process of getting settled in the New World. Tracing the family back, you may find the Americanized version of the name is fairly consistent up to a year or two after immigration; then suddenly wham! it's different, more like the original Polish version. And while some changes certainly could take place between your ancestors' departure from their ancestral village and their arrival at Ellis Island, the really radical changes usually took place at some point after entry into the U. S.

As for place names, many of the same problems apply. Granted, a boss might tell a Wojciechowicz "Hey, your name's Jones now, or you're fired" -- but no boss ever came up to a Wojciechowicz and said, "Hey, I'm going to fire you if you keep saying you're from Woodge [L~o~dz~]!" There was no particular intent or pressure to change place names. But most names of places in eastern Europe sound pretty foreign to English-speakers. With the best will in the world, and every intention of recording data accurately, even a conscientious official or clerk could get a name wrong. There was too much potential for error. And once an error was made, it tended to stick.

All of which is true, as well, of those who filled out immigration records, those who indexed them, and the volunteers who did the data entry for the Ellis Island site.

Personally, I'm inclined to say let's make the best of things and learn whatever we can that may help us work around the errors. I know some of you feel otherwise, and if you'd like to put your opinion into an e-mail and send it to me, you're welcome to do so.

But frankly, folks, from the e-mails I get asking about names, you, too, are capable of occasional errors in spelling. Those who live in glass houses, etc. I don't want to name names, but... well, as a high-school teacher of mine once said, "I don't like making idle threats, but I will if I have to!"

*** LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ***

Subject: Website of interest to Poles
Susan Wietnik @czjadyku@aol.com

Thank you for devoting your time in publishing _Gen Dobry!_ ...I look forward to it each month, and you have shared numerous tidbits that have aided me in my genealogical quest.

When you have a spare moment (ha ha), check out Polish Righteous at:

<http://www3.sympatico.ca/kpk-quebec/righteous/index.htm>

What a great compilation, although horrific for us Poles...but still a good resource!

Subject: Article on _gospodarz_ and other terms for farmer
From: Leonard Jakubczak <jakubczl@csr.nih.gov>

I enjoyed your article in the newest (today's) _Gen Dobry!_, and learned some socio-linguistics of "gospodarz". It's important to point out, as you did, that a word's meaning varies with the historical/social context.

Subject: Article on _gospodarz_ and other terms for farmer
From: "David Zincavage" <jdz@inr.net>

Some of this historical stuff isn't quite so cut-and-dried as your _Gen Dobry!_ article puts it. In the southwestern Suwalkija region of Lithuania, for instance, because of the region's history of colonization, there was always a very large class of free land-owning peasants, sarcastically termed _bajorai_ by the actual gentry. I believe the same situation existed in some parts of Belarus and Podlasie.

80% of the former gentry estate was declassified in the era of the Partitions, and the typical petty gentry family by default inevitably sunk to official _gospodarz_ status. If you were not among the minority confirming nobility with the occupation, you wound up a _gospodarz_, assuming you were a 30+ mo~rg land-owner. It is not terribly unusual to find the same persons receiving the _urodzony_ honorific on one record and being referred to as _gospodarz_ or _rolnik_ on others.

[Editor: I have every reason to believe you're right. If the article seemed cut-and-dried, it's because _Gen Dobry!_ lacks the space for discussing this or any subject in detail. All I can do is give people general insights, and let them fill in the blanks as those insights are confirmed or modified by their own research. Your note will help them do so. Thanks!]

Subject: e-mail address for IRO, superseded in 1951 by OHCHR-UNOG
From: Edward Potereiko <epotereiko2@hotmail.com>

[Editor: in the last issue we printed a request from Mr. Eduardo Gomez <szumyckyj@yahoo.com> for help finding the e-mail address of the International Refugee Organization or its depository of records. Mr. Potereiko answered him and forwarded me a copy. I'm printing it partly to brag about how our readers help each other, and partly to repeat info that might benefit other readers.]

Dear Mr. Eduardo Gomez,

I read your request in _Gen Dobry!_. I located these two sites for you by doing a search at <http://Copernic.com>, a search engine (free, which you download and install in your computer). I typed in International Relief Organization and searched the Web - US. I came up with numerous hits which yielded your desired information.

Your IRO no longer exists. It was replaced by the United Nations High Commissioner on Human Rights Jan 51/52.

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/decade/decad053.htm>

The above site will give you a little historical background. The following address is of the home page of the current organization. It gives mission, mailing and e-mail address and phone number.

<http://www.unhchr.ch/>

IRO was replaced by:

OHCHR-UNOG
8-14 Avenue de la Paix
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland
Telephone Number (41-22) 917-9000
Fax Number (41-22) 917-9016

*** UPCOMING EVENTS ***

September 12-15, 2001

THE 2001 FGS/QUAD CITIES CONFERENCE

"A Conference for the Nation's Genealogists"

The RiverCenter, Davenport, Iowa

For more info:

Our email: fgs-office@fgs.org

Our website: <http://www.fgs.org>

Register Online at:

<http://www.fgs.org/2001Conf/fgs-2001.htm>

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October 5 - 7, 2001

FEDERATION OF EAST EUROPEAN FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETIES
-- INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION 2001 --

Ramada Inn South Airport
6401 South 13th Street
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Conference details, as they become available, will be posted at:

<http://feefhs.org/conf/01mil/01mil-hp.html>

or by return mail from:

FEEFHS, PO Box 510898, Salt Lake City, UT 84151-0898

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October 6, 2001

MASS-CONN-ECTION II

Plans are being finalized for a second Mass-Conn-ection II after the success of the inaugural event last year. Like the first one, this conference is being sponsored jointly by the Polish Genealogical Societies of Massachusetts and of Connecticut/the Northeast. At this point the plan is to hold this Conference in New Britain, Connecticut on October 6. More information will follow as details are confirmed, but it's not too early to mark your calendar. Conferences on Polish genealogy are not often held in New England, so if you live in the area, this is one you want to attend! You can learn more by e-mailing PGS-CT/NE at: pgsne2@aol.com.

*** HUMOR ***

When I was younger I hated going to weddings. It seemed that all of my aunts and the grandmotherly types used to come up to me, poking me in the ribs and cackling, "You're next."

They stopped that after I started doing the same thing to them at funerals.

Written by James Boyce of Geneva, Switzerland
<jim-Marta.Boyce@wanadoo.fr>. Previously published by Julia M. Case and Myra Vanderpool Gormley, CG, Missing Links, Vol. 6, No. 14, 4 April 2001.
RootsWeb: <http://www.rootsweb.com/>

*** MORE USEFUL WEB ADDRESSES ***

<http://www.ugkc.lviv.ua/>

Egon Wojciulewicz<egon@eswo.org> posted a note on PolandBorderSurnames-L@rootsweb.com about this site, which provides information on the Greek Catholic Church.

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/gene/misc/translation.html>

Debbie Greenlee <daveg@AIRMAIL.NET> posted a note on Genpol@man.torun.pl about this, saying it was the new site for translations done by volunteers, formerly at <http://www.toledolink.com/pl/translations.html>. I checked out the old site, and it still seems to be working as well. But I suspect this new address is a good one to note down.

<http://www.charm.net/~thollow/HistorykPress/source.html>

Tom Hollowak <thollow@charm.net>, owner of Historyk Press, sent us a note on this site, which announces Historyk's newest publication: a CD-ROM with names, addresses, and occupations of Polonians living in Baltimore City during the years 1870-1894, 1899-1903, and 1905-1917. It's \$10.95, but note, it is "only for Microsoft Windows 95/98 NT version 4.0."

http://tel.portal.pl/asp/szukaj_a.asp

Asia Plazewska <asiaplazewska@poczta.wp.pl> posted a note to PolandBorderSurnames-D-request@rootsweb.com, saying that this is a link to the Polish white pages. "There are only phone numbers from Warszawa and Poznan. There is only Polish version available so short explanation. It is necessary to fill in places with red dot using polish spelling with diacritical signs: nazwisko = surname; miejscowosc = city."

[Editor's note: What with recent Polish privacy laws, I'm surprised such a site is available. I think the key is it's only for _abonenci_,

subscribers, and thus presumably limited to those who choose to be listed, and thus voluntarily give up their right to privacy. In any case, it might be worth a look.]

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