

Issue #2 can be viewed at:

http://www.polishroots.org/gendobry/GenDobry_vol1_no2.htm

(Can you guess what the address for issue #3 will be?)

We received a very favorable response to issue #2, and we thank all of you who took the time to write. Several folks are talking about writing articles or other pieces to contribute to Gen Dobry! I consider this a trend very much to be encouraged. The more people we have speaking up and contributing what they have to say, the better this publication will be.

If you have something to contribute, or just something to say, please E-mail me at <WFH@langline.com>.

And by the way, don't forget to take a look at the Website that brings you Gen Dobry!, and much more besides:

<http://PolishRoots.org>

If you're serious about your research, and have an extra dollar or two, you'll find a number of projects that deserve your support!

*** MANGLED POLISH NAMES: A LOST CAUSE? ***

by William F. Hoffman <WFHoffman@prodigy.net>

Ever since I first started collecting material for my book on Polish surnames, I've been answering notes on-line about the origins and meanings of names. If you'd like to see a representative sampling of my responses, visit this site:

http://www.polishroots.com/surnames/surnames_index.htm

The people who write me are often hoping the great and glorious expert will take one look at their name and say "Aha, this name proves your ancestor came from the village of Wielka Dupa. He had green eyes, red hair, and a clubfoot. He lived in a 2-room hut with a thatched roof just down the road from the parish church, and had 6 kids and 4 cats (or was it 4 kids and 6 cats)." That's what folks hope to find in me - a sort of Sherlock Holmeski who will tell them all they need to know (and save them from having to do any actual research).

I almost always disappoint them. I don't take a 7% solution of cocaine, or

smoke a pipe; and as omniscient experts go, I'm a bit of a dolt... But if, IF the form of the name is correct, or at least recognizable, I can generally give them some basic info. It won't change their lives, but it provides a little more for them to work with.

- You Mean My Ancestor's Name Wasn't Qxlrptsch? -

Far too often these days, I get notes with names that are obviously not right. For example, one researcher recently asked me about Rinchisen. I told her I had nothing on it and was fairly certain the name had been Anglicized or otherwise mangled. The combinations Rin- and -chi- were highly suspect from a Polish phonetic point of view. Anyone who knows a little Polish can tell this, just as you can tell from looking that a man named Ibn Faud al-Fariq probably doesn't trace his ancestry to Helsinki.

A few days later she wrote to tell me she'd found the correct spelling, Hrynczyszyn. I was immediately able to tell her about that name (Ukrainian, "son of the woman of Greg"). You see why I don't waste time with spellings that look wrong? I could have spent hours trying to figure out Rinchisen, and the time would have been wasted, because there was no way to connect it with Hrynczyszyn (except after the fact - once you know the names go together, Rinchisen makes sense as an Anglicized phonetic spelling). That's why I tell researchers to get the right form of the name first, then ask me. Trying to do it the other way around simply wastes their time and mine.

In all fairness, however, I realize getting the right form of the name can be horribly difficult. Eastern European names were often mangled badly during the course of immigration. Finding a document that gives the original spelling, not an Anglicized distortion, can be a real challenge. It doesn't help that there are literally hundreds of thousands of Polish surnames, many differing from others by a single letter - so if you're just one letter off, you may be up a creek. Still, you have to have the original spelling if you want to make any real progress, however hard that spelling may be to come by.

Let me cite another example I know very well. My wife's cousin is Tom Hollowak, a historian deeply interested in the history of Baltimore's Polish community; he runs Historyk Press:

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

Years ago Tom began studying his family history, and asked me for some help with the linguistic end of things. Tom was luckier than some in that his grandfather, and later his aunt, had kept up a correspondence with relatives in the old country. He sent me copies of the letters and asked

me to translate them. It was not too hard to establish that his ancestors were ethnic Poles living in the area of Alytus, Lithuania, and that his family's surname had been Anglicized. It was originally (drum roll) Cholochwosc. Or Holochwosc. Or Galachvoscius. Or Golokhvoshch. Or any of a dozen variations that appeared on the envelopes and in the letters, some in the Roman alphabet, some in the Cyrillic.

How can this be? Well, in that region there's a mixture of linguistic influences, including Lithuanian, Polish, Belarusian, and Russian. Polish name expert Dr. Aleksandra Cieslikowa suggests the original name was probably something like Belarusian Holokhvost, from *_holy_*, "bare," and *_khvost_* "tail" - this kind of name might indicate the family was once noble but had long since become financially "em-bare-assed." But in Polish the letters H and CH represent the same sound, a guttural harsher than our "h" but not quite so harsh as the German "ch" in "Bach"; so H and CH are often used interchangeably, even if that's not technically correct. Russian and Lithuanian tend to turn the H sound into a hard G, especially at the beginning of a word; so a Russified version of a name with H or CH might start with G. Also, Lithuanian and Belarusian tend to favor the vowel A where Polish and Russian prefer O. Lithuanian adds suffixes such as -as, -ius, -is, and -ys to names. Factor all this in and you can explain every one of those different forms as variants of one basic name.

Fascinating - if you're a linguist. If you're a genealogist, it's a pain in the butt!

- From Chaos, Order: the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex -

If it's crucial to clear your way past all the clutter caused by phonetic and orthographical variations, how do you do that? The surest way is to do what I've done - study Polish, Russian, German, and Latin, maybe a bit of Czech and Ukrainian and Lithuanian on the side. But if you're a little busy next week and can't fit it in, there are shortcuts that can work sometimes.

One of the most sensible approaches is offered by Soundex systems. There are several of these, all based on using codes to bypass the less stable components of name spellings and focus on the more stable ones. Thus certain consonants, if they change at all, are likely to change into consonants with similar phonetic characteristics. D is more likely to change to T than to, say, Q; B may match up with a P or an F, but probably not with Z. The Soundex systems use these principles to represent names with numeric codes, and any name that has the same code as yours is a possible variation of it.

Not all Soundex systems are created equal. For eastern European names the

one I find superior is the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex, developed by Gary Mokotoff and Randy Daitch. They designed it to take into account phonetic tendencies of the languages of eastern Europe. They were forced to develop something along these lines because they were researching Jewish lines that could easily have names written in Russian, Polish, German, Yiddish, Lithuanian, Belarusian, etc. So they had to have a way to cope with spelling variations. The D-M Soundex isn't perfect - for instance, it doesn't really deal too well with the complexities of the Polish nasal vowels - but it's a whole lot better than floundering helplessly in a sea of consonants and vowels that seem to change form with every wave.

If you'd like to read the ideas behind this system, and how to apply it yourself, visit this Website:

<http://www.avotaynu.com/soundex.html>

The D-M Soundex system has not caught on everywhere, but some very fine sites offer it as a search option, so you can get the coding done automatically as part of the search. As you might expect, it is particularly popular in Jewish sources. One is Avotaynu's Consolidated Jewish Surname Index [CJSI], a database of some 230,000 surnames, mostly Jewish, found in 28 different databases. The surnames are presented in Soundex order; for each surname, it identifies in which of the 28 databases the name can be found, with a link to additional information about each database. CJSI is located at:

<http://www.avotaynu.com/csi/csi-home.html>

While you're there, be sure to read the description of the new Advanced Search Option that helps you specify certain values and eliminate false positives from your searches.

Another excellent source that lets you use the D-M Soundex is the FamilyFinder:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff/>

The FamilyFinder is among the databases that Avotaynu's CJSI searches, but the version at the JewishGen site is more up-to-date than the one CJSI uses.

If it's place names you're having trouble with, use the ShtetlSeeker:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/shtetlseeker/loctown.htm>

All these sites let you search using D-M Soundex coding. If you're

stumped, they can open to your eyes to other spellings that might be relevant, ones you never would have thought to try.

Now you may be saying, "Uh, this is all very well and good, but my ancestors weren't Jews." Well, obviously these online sources are aimed primarily at helping Jews - but anyone's welcome to use them. (If you do use them, though, be a _mensch_ and make an occasional donation to defray expenses!).

My point here is that you can take any surname or place name and try searching for it in these databases, using the D-M Soundex, and see what kind of results you get. The specific families or places you find may not be relevant to your research, but the FORMS OF THE NAMES can be. If a Jewish family's name can appear as Schmidt or Szmidt or Szmyd or Szmyt, so can a Christian's! It's the name variations you need at this point. If you've had no luck looking for Schmidt, knowing this name could also be spelled Szmyt just might smash through that brick wall that's stopping you.

Granted, you'll get a lot of false positives with a D-M Soundex search - in other words, matches that don't turn out to be relevant. Use of the advanced search feature, where applicable, will help cut down on those, but not eliminate them. Still, if you've reached a dead end because the form of the name you have is wrong, alternatives are what you need. Go with the closest matches first, and if they don't work, gradually work your way down to the less promising matches.

- I've Got a Little List -

A Soundex search can help in many cases, but obviously not all. In that event, your best bet may be to hang out around the many Websites with lists and lists of names. If you've spent a little time doing D-M Soundex searches, you may even find these lists easier to use, because you've picked up a feel for which name variations deserve closer attention and which don't; you may instinctively recognize that Roshevsky and Rozewski are possible matches, but Nowacki and Nowinski are probably not.

My first and most basic training with Polish names came when Tom Hollowak and I pored over issues of the Chicago Polish-language newspaper _Dziennik Chicagoski_ for obits so we could index them. The Polish Genealogical Society of America published this index as a multi-volume set. Later Jim Czuchra vastly extended the index, Don Szumowski and his volunteers put it online at the PGSA site as a searchable database, and Czuchra has since added to it. It can be searched, along with a number of other databases, at this address:

<http://pgsa.org/database.htm>

What I never realized at the time was that exposure to all those names was teaching me, imperceptibly, the phonetics of Polish. This basic familiarity, born of many hours of finding and keying in names, was the experience that made it possible for me to attempt a book on Polish surnames. So dealing with Polish names, a lot, can have unexpected benefits.

What's more, I have since heard from folks who use the index not so much to find relatives (although of course they're delighted if that happens) as to check spellings of the names they have! They know the forms of the names in the indexes are generally correct. So they compare what they see in their documents with the index forms, to get a better idea what the standard spelling of the name is. Suppose you think a record says NOVACHI - then you see in the index that that name doesn't appear, but NOWACKI does. You may have just saved yourself a wild goose chase!

Another surname-oriented site worth checking is on Rafal Prinke's Website:

<http://main.amu.edu.pl/~rafalp/GEN/wykaz-eng.html>

A lot of names are listed there, names other researchers are looking for. If you spot a match, you just might connect with someone to compare notes with.

The following page is designed to help you out with the German and Polish names of some communities now in Poland but formerly in the German Empire:

<http://www.atsnotes.com/other/gerpol.html>

The PolandGenWeb site has links that offer you all kinds of help, with names and other aspects of research. The main page is at this address:

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~polwgg/polandgen1.html>

Among the links that may prove handy, the following will help you if you're having trouble making out a first name. It gives you a list of reasonably common first names to compare that unknown scribble with:

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~polwgg/namelist.html>

First names are valuable for many reasons. There aren't nearly as many of them as there are surnames, so they're easier to figure out. Once you have figured them out, they help you accustom yourself to the record-keeper's handwriting. The form of a first name also tells you in many cases about the bearer's ethnic identity - all things being equal, a German is more

likely to go by Stefan than Szczepan, a Pole would prefer to go by Grzegorz rather than Gregor, and so on.

Here's another good page focusing on personal names that may come in handy:

http://maxpages.com/poland/Name_Meanings

This site lets you search for names and variant forms with all kinds of options and wild cards:

<http://surhelp.rootsweb.com/srchall.html>

I suspect it may take a little practice to get good at using all those options to advantage. But any powerful tool takes a little time to master.

If you have a surname but don't know where the family lived, this lets you talk to others with the same problem:

<http://cgi.rootsweb.com/~genbbs/genbbs.cgi/Poland/Unknown/>

See also "Using Photos To Unite Family Members" later in this issue of Gen Dobry!

I'm sure there are other resources I haven't thought of, but then you wouldn't want me to do all the work for you, would you?

- Conclusion -

As a practical matter of necessity, you must have the original spelling of a name to trace a person back to Poland. You also need the correct date and place of birth, but to find those you usually need to know the name first. The biggest challenge is getting from the form of the name you find in English-language documents to the form you'll find in German-, Polish-, or Russian-language papers. Sometimes it's easy; sometimes it's terribly difficult. If you have a name that simply will not cooperate with you in your research, try using the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex on it. That just might give you the clue you need. If not, investigate the many resources that help you with surnames.

But DON'T give up!

*** FEEDBACK FROM READERS ***

Subject: Re: Gen Dobry! - translation software:
From: Allan C. <allan.chamberlain@sympatico.ca>

I bought Word Translator from Translation Experts Limited in 1997, hoping that I could effectively communicate with relatives in Poland. On my initial tests of letter writing I found that the program could not even translate letters back to the original English version. This I found very upsetting and began e-mailing the company directly. After a few e-mails were exchanged it was agreed that I would be sent an updated version so that those mistakes would not happen again. That was the end of that, nothing came for the next 3 years. Then I got an advertisement about upgrading, this did not sit well with me and I wrote them back about the situation.

Guess what, they came through, with an apology - and sent the Translator 2000 for free. I did have to pay customs and duty taxes although I feel I should not have had to pay that either.

The end product is much better than the original. Until now I had to have someone else rewrite the letters for me. It has now been suggested that at least this program is doing a better job of translating. It is not perfect due to grammatical errors but at least the contents can be somewhat understood.

Subject: Great Job!
From: Roxane Sepin Gehman <rgehman.ihb@prodigy.net>

I am thrilled to receive your e-zine, Gen Dobry! I just started researching my Polish roots this year on Jan. 1, 2000. The info you have provided on the web and now in your e-zine has been a tremendous aid in my research.

I just published my premier issue of the Sepin Sept Scoop, a newsletter for Sepins everywhere. I know the hard work I had to put into it for a bi-monthly basis. So, I understand the effort and sacrifice on your part for providing us with your Gen Dobry monthly!

Our surname was originally SEPIOL or SEPIAL. My gr-grandfather was born in Harklowa, Jaslo dist, Galicia province or Poland in 1871. I found a great article about the town of Jaslo at the Polish Gen. Society of TX website:

<http://www.pgst.org/>

So far, I have been unsuccessful in my search to learn about Harklowa. I

found a website maintained by Paul K. Bingham about the other Harklowa in the Tatras area, Project TARG. He has been very helpful in my quest for Polish and Slavic background. His e-mail is <bingham@iols.net>. He also puts out an e-zine for the TARG project.

If you or anyone on our mailing list knows about my Harklowa in Jaslo district, I would love to hear from them. I specifically would like the name of the Roman Catholic parish that served this area during the mid-to-late 1800s.

[Editor: The PGST site has some good Galician info. Another site with good geographical info is the selection of translations from the Słownik Geograficzny gazetteer at this address:]

http://www.polishroots.com/slownik_index.htm

Subject: Comments on Gen Dobry!
From: Renee L Lubash <reneel@compuserve.com>

I think this e-zine is just wonderful. In the last issue you talked about electronic dictionaries, how about a good printed English-Polish/Polish-English dictionary? I've looked over a couple different ones at the book stores and I don't know enough Polish to recognize the differences in them. I would just like one that I can refer to when I download or print a page that is in Polish and need to translate it.

An interesting article I think would be the advertisements that were printed in newspapers in the east and some I think actually in Poland by land agents and the railroads to entice the immigrants to settle in different areas. I have only come across a small blurb in "The History of the Catholic Church in Nebraska" about this. I think having a copy of such an advertisement would be a great addition to any family history. And I don't have any idea which newspaper to start researching to find one of these advertisements. I am looking forward to the next issue. Thanks for doing it.

[Editor: I like _McKay's Polish-English and English-Polish Dictionary_, J. Stanislawski, Random House, NY 1988, ISBN 0-812-91691-3, LCC #87-37694. It's inexpensive, \$17.10 at <http://amazon.com>, and pretty useful for a one-volume dictionary; the only problem is, it emphasizes older Polish, and isn't as much help with modern vocabulary. Does anyone out there have other suggestions? Or would anybody care to tackle the advertisement story?]

Subject: Poland map
From: Mary Kelley <Mdkelley5@aol.com>

Hi, Enjoyed and learn a lot from your Gen Dobry! Thanks for your hard work. For over a year I have tried to locate a small town in Poland using every resource I heard of and all search engines with no luck. Finally I located a great site that gave me a map of "Szebnie Poland" with many small and a few larger cities located nearby. As a result, I was able to pinpoint what part of Poland my grandparents lived. This site is a must:

<http://oddens.geog.uu.nl/index.html>

USING PHOTOS ONLINE TO UNITE FAMILY MEMBERS

[Tina Ellis, listowner of the Poland Border Surnames list, posted a letter recently on a new feature she's added to the Poland Border Surnames website:]

I received a letter from a lady on Poland trying to find her father who left Poland in 1946. I decided I should post it to the website where we are listing the surnames that our members are researching. His last name is ZIEMBA, so he is on the Z page. You can view the letter and photos at

http://maxpages.com/zpbs/Tadeusz_ZIEMBA

After doing that I remembered one of our members recently learned she has a half sister in Australia. Before her father married her mother, he was married to a lady in Australia that had a daughter by him. We have photos on that page also. You can view them and the letter at:

http://maxpages.com/gpbs/dorothy_grabosky

I thought this may be a unique way to unite some family members and am offering this service to anyone that has photos. I have seen many sites with just names and letters. Most are not even organized. Ours will be on the respective alphabetical pages in alphabetical order, of course.

Those of you who are searching for family members that you would like to find can now submit your stories and photos to me at <mackiewicz@hotmail.com> to have them posted.

POLISH ARMY RECORDS

Hasia Babicz <iznik@home.com> posted this note to Poland-Roots:

Good News! For those of you looking for relatives that were in the Polish Army, namely those born before 1930 or so, DO try this place:

Ministry of Defence
Polish Army Records Office
London
(020) 8573-3831 extension 335

or write:

DR 2c, Bourne Ave
Hayes, Middlesex UB3 1RF
England

I have just found over 10 members of my family there.

One catch: You must prove your relationship to these people. Begin with a father, mother, aunt or uncle and go from there. They are very helpful, lovely people in this office!

*** MORE USEFUL WEB ADDRESSES ***

http://www.historyserver.org/napoleon.series/research/government/c_code.html

Joe Armata <joe@gsphean.gsphean.pitt.edu> cited this site as "a link with the full English text of the Napoleonic Civil Code, the code of law that was the basis for the civil registration system of 19th century Russian Poland. Book 1, Title II (Of Acts Before the Civil Authorities) and Title V (Of Marriage) are probably the most pertinent to genealogy. Title II begins with a detailed listing of the duties of the registrar and the rules for keeping the registers."

<http://genealogy.about.com/hobbies/genealogy/library/weekly/aa042400a.htm>

This is the URL of a Website offering "A Step-by-Step Guide to Using the World's Largest Genealogy Library From Your Own Home Town."

<http://www.ussc.alltheweb.com>

In the Sept. 10 issue of _Nu? What's New?_ Gary Mokotoff praised the

search engine called FAST at this location. He especially liked its ability to find Internet sites on various countries with content in English that other search engines were less likely to locate. Clicking on the "Advanced Search" link lets you set the Language preference as "English" (or whatever language you like). To find info on specific countries, find the "Domain Filters Only Include" box and type in the Internet country code, e. g., "ca" for Canada, "de" for Germany, "lt" for Lithuania, "pl" for Poland, "ua" for Ukraine, etc.

<http://www.mapa.unicom.pl/>

This is a Website with over 400 photos of the Carpathian mountains. Tina Ellis posted a note on the PolandBorderSurnames list describing how to navigate around it while waiting for the Webmaster to add instructions in English:

- > Click on the Indeks (Index) in the top left hand column.
- > Click on the first link Masyw Tarnicy i Halicza
- > Next page click on Dolina Wo³osatego z Prze³ Bukowskiej
- >
- > You will get a beautiful photo of snow in the mountains. There will be red
- > dots on the page. After you view the current photo, click on the dots.
- > What he has done is take you on a trip with his photos. Where the dots are
- > is where the next photo was taken. It's quite a nice concept in traveling
- > via the Internet.
- >
- > When you are done viewing those sites, click on the "Back" button in
- > your tool bar at the top left of your screen. When you get back to
- > the page with the Dolina Wo³osatego z Prze³ Bukowskiej link, go to
- > the next link. He tells you where you are.

- Ships, Passenger Lists, etc. -

There's been a lot of talk on the various Polish lists about sites with good info on ships, passenger lists, etc. Let's cite a few recommendations:

<http://www.cyndislist.com/ships.htm>

This is the address for Cyndi's List - Ships, Passenger Lists, etc. Frederick Kobylarz <fkobylarz@monmouth.com> recommended it highly on Poland-Roots. It has links to virtually every online resource you can think of (including most of the sites mentioned below). In fact, Cyndi's

List is worth checking for almost any aspect of genealogical research.

<http://www.theshipslist.com>

Martha Last (nee Lozinski) <MartyLast@cs.com> sent us this address, saying she found it very helpful with info on finding ships and records (it is among the sites with links on Cyndi's List, see above). When I tried to access it today (30 Sep 2000) I kept getting an error message saying the server was down. I don't know if this is temporary, but Martha's recommendation made it seem worthwhile mentioning the address, so that you can try visiting it if you wish.

<http://www.ubalt.edu/archives/ship/transm.htm>

Jon Walgren <jakerag@earthlink.net> recommended this site on the POSEN list.

<http://www.cimorelli.com/vbclient/safedate.htm>

Pat Smith <pita@westol.com> mentioned this site on Poland-Roots. She says the "safe" part is an acronym for "Ships Arriving from Europe."

*** COMING EVENTS ***

OCTOBER 6-8, 2000 - CHICAGO, IL

PGS-America holds its 22nd Annual Conference, "Bridging the Gap - Genealogy and Technology" on October 6-8 at Four Points Hotel in Schiller Park, IL. The price of admission is \$60 for members, \$55 for their spouses, \$70.00 for non-members, and \$75 at the door. For more info contact Bernadine Saelens, phone 630-833-1355, E-mail <BSaelens@aol.com>, or check the PGSA Website:

<http://pgsa.org/conference2.htm>

OCTOBER 21, 2000 - DETROIT, MI

PGS-Michigan will hold its annual Seminar on Saturday, October 12, 2000 at Madonna University, Kresge Hall, 36600 Schoolcraft Rd., Livonia MI. The speaker will be William F. "Fred" Hoffman, speaking on the secrets of translating Polish Vital Records like the experts. He will also offer insights on surnames. For more information visit the PGSM Website:

<http://pgsm.org/schedule.htm#Seminar>

OCTOBER 28, 2000 - AGAWAM, MA

The PGS-Massachusetts and PGS-Connecticut/the Northeast are co-sponsoring a genealogy conference, MASS-CONN-ECTION I, at the Agawam Senior Center. The fee is \$30 per person, \$50 per couple. Scheduled speakers include Matthew Bielawa, Jan Zaleski, and Jonathan D. Shea. For further info e-mail <PGSNE2@aol.com>.

To be added to or removed from this mailing list, go to this address:

http://www.PolishRoots.org/GenDobry_signup.htm

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