



Finding your family from Galicia

Birth, Marriage, Death Records & Research Tools

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Please note: this is a summary of the presentation. A list of websites is at the end.

Introduction & geography

Galicia was the name of part of the Austrian crown land that existed between 1772 and 1918. After WW1, the whole region became part of the unified Republic of Poland and, today, it's divided between southeastern Poland and western Ukraine. Over the years, the laws governing vital record registrations changed, borders & languages changed, families moved or separated, not to mention wars, fires, & ransacking of archives that all lead to challenges for genealogists. In this presentation, I'll show you where to look for birth, marriage, and death records, discuss briefly the laws regarding legal marriages & legitimacy of children, and examine some examples of those records. We'll also look at some other databases that might help you find leads about your family.



Finding your town

If you are just starting your research and you already know some family names, the next thing to know is the town your family came from. Many towns had the same or similar names, even within the same

district, so pinning down the exact town, or at least the nearest large town, will save you hours of searching. Sometimes, you may only know the Yiddish name or the name the town used to be called when your grandparents lived there. That's when a gazetteer, basically a list of towns, might help you to pinpoint where your town was. If you have no idea, and there is no one left to ask, you can try searching the **Australian Archives** for immigration & citizenship records that should give a birthplace. You have to order those documents, record contents aren't online. Also, people intending to apply for citizenship here had to post an advert saying so & that ad gives their name, nationality, place of birth & address. You can search **Trove**, which is an Australian newspaper archive to look for those ads. Also, you might find obituaries in the Jewish News which you can find on Trove as well.

JewishGen probably has the most comprehensive gazetteer for Jewish towns and we'll look at that a little later.

One more thing, when you're looking at records of any type, take note of the date it was recorded. People had to use the legal name of a location that was correct at the time of the record and names & borders changed. For instance, someone immigrating to Australia from Lemberg, Galicia in 1910 would record their country of birth as Austria. If that person married 10 years later, the record would show the place of birth as Lwow, Poland, and if they filled in a census form in 1954, they would record their place of birth as Lviv in the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic.

Jewish vital records

In 1787, Emperor Joseph II issued a law requiring surnames for Jews in the Hapsburg Empire, including Galicia. This supposedly was to transform Jews into more productive & integrated citizens but, really, it gave the state greater control over them, especially regarding taxes & military service. Before then, Jews used patronymics such as Josef ben Shmuel. This change of having surnames enables us to trace families more reliably from the 19th century forward.

The population of Galicia was made up of Poles, Jews, Ukrainians (also called Ruthenians), Germans, and Armenians. Each group had its own religious or civil records. Early recordkeeping was haphazard & there were multiple variations of forms.

In 1876/77, registration forms became standardized, and follow the same format for most towns. Early registrations were written in Gothic German, later forms were in German & Polish, and then they were in Polish. Details were generally filled out in Polish.

The registrations were kept in ledgers. Sometimes, a town started a new book every year & sometimes they used the same book until it was full. **The current privacy statutes for Poland are that birth records can be moved to the archives after 100 years, and marriage & death records after 80 years.** However, if say, a birth ledger contains records for multiple years, it can't be moved to the archives, and the contents be publicly available, until the 100 years is reached for the last entry in the book. To clarify that, if the ledger is for records from 1922 until 1927, the ledger can't be moved to the archives before 2028.

Where to start your search

There are 3 main sites for searching Jewish records – **JRI-Poland, Geshet Galicia & the Polish State Archives**. Additionally, JewishGen can give you information about towns & some other features we'll look at. Just a note here: many people use only JewishGen because of its unified search feature but I

always recommend that you go to the original sites because they have stronger search capabilities and other features.

Let's start with **JRI-Poland**.

This organisation sends researchers into Polish archives to photograph records, and then volunteers translate & compile key information to create searchable indexes in English.

There are 2 main areas of interest – the Town Explorer & the Legacy database.

You will need to create a log in but the site is free.

In the Town Explorer, you can enter your town and see a small map, a contact link for the town leader, record locations & links to the Polish Archives. Vital records are listed first followed by non-civil records – eg: notary records, tax lists, conscription records.

Scroll down to see any current town projects that you might want to join to get early access to unreleased records.

Now, the database. In the search tab, you'll see links for Legacy & nextGen. Choose Legacy.

There are 4 regions for Galicia - Krakow, Lwow, Stanislawow, Tarnopol

You can search by Surname, Given name or Town, or any combination.

If you put a town name, take note the search will be limited to records with the town listed in a field, but this search can be useful for searching for relatives who moved towns.

You can also search by distance from a town using coordinates eg: / Rzeszow 50 02, 22 00

Scroll to the bottom, past the vital records, to see other types of lists like conscription records & census records.

Use the Akta, or reference number, to locate an original record in the Polish Archives. Some indexes are already linked. If so, the link will be in the left-most column.

Gesher Galicia differs from JRI-Poland in a few ways.

Primarily, they look at records from the Lviv archives in Ukraine.

They also have special projects –

Landowners & cadastral maps

Record inventories of some of the major archives

Map room – collation of town maps

The database is free to use. Membership lets you view linked scans (among other bonuses).

Szukaj w Archiwach - The Polish Archives

Search for your town to find birth, marriage & death records.

Enter your town name in the search bar & all available files will come up.

In the left column headed 'filter your results', scroll down to Confession (religion) & select 'mojżeszowe' (Jewish), then scroll all the way down until you see a blue box that says filter & select. Now you will see all the existing Jewish records for your town (and small surrounding towns if they apply).

They will be divided by births, marriages & deaths.

Births - Urodzenia

Marriages - Małżeństwa

Deaths - Zgony

Not all records have been scanned & put online. If the record set you want is listed but there are no scans, try writing to the JRI-Poland town leader for more information. There may already be a project for it, or you may be able to write to the archive or hire a researcher to go into the archive to photograph it, or you may have to wait until the records are released.

If the record set you want is there, use the Akta, or reference number, from the JRI index to locate it. If you are able to, scroll through all the records of your town. You can find information in the original records that may not be in the index, such as a date of death, parents' civil marriage date, change of name, & parents of the mother.

Other items of interest may be census records & population movement registers. Towns were not required to keep these beyond a few years so many have been lost. Also, you can find detailed maps & town photographs in the archives.

The **JewishGen** site offers some other databases & resources.

As well as the Town Gazetteer, there are a few databases that have Galician names. Most of these lists are quite old & don't have many details.

Make sure to list your names in the Family Finder, where you can find researchers looking at the same names & towns & they can find you.

SIG groups – special interest groups, including one for Gesher Galicia, where you can get emails with various news items & research updates.

Kehilot – check if your town has a page or start one of your own.

Yizkor books are useful for the history of your town. Most translations start with a name index so you can see if your family names are mentioned.

Civil marriage & legitimacy

Soon after taking control of Galicia, the Austrian Empire instigated a number of harsh policies related to Jewish marriages, intending to restrict the growth of the population, because they thought Jews starting large families from an early age was contributing to the poverty of Galicia.

Not necessarily all at the same time or in this order, these policies included:

- raising the minimum marriageable age;
- prior written approval from the local government;
- a marriage tax based on family income that doubled with each male sibling wishing to marry;
- and even restricting legitimate household status to one family member per jurisdiction, whereby you had to wait until the older brother died or moved away, creating a vacancy, before the next brother could marry.

Most Jews just ignored these laws and continued to have ritual marriages. The threat of their children being considered illegitimate wasn't a great concern to them.

By 1868, most of these harsh laws had been abolished. Then in 1875, the government created 72 Jewish administrative districts and appointed a rabbi to each as a registrar designated to perform civil marriages. So basically, the government weren't letting go of this issue but the Jews were still, for the

most part, ignoring it, and that's why you may not find marriage records for your ancestors in the 19th century.

So, what the government did to try to force compliance was introduce procedures that unmarried fathers would have to follow if they wished to appear on the birth records of their children. Failure to follow the procedures would result in the child being listed as illegitimate, the father not being named at all and the child had to be called by the mother's surname. A law went into effect in 1877.

Once that law was published, children were recorded as illegitimate even when fathers attested to their paternity. However, surnames were handled in a variety of ways - sometimes the child was listed with the father's surname, even when the child was marked as "illegitimate." Sometimes, no surname was used at all. And then, by 1900, there might be no identifying information about the father, showing only the name of the mother & her parents.

So, it's important to keep this in mind when you do searches. Search under the father's surname and the mother's name for birth records. And keep in mind also, that possibly the parents were using their mothers' surnames if their parents had had no civil marriage, which was very likely.

The issue came to a head in the early part of the 20th century, when emigration to the US increased dramatically and travel documents had to be obtained. Suddenly, you had to prove that you were married and that your children were legitimate. This was now a compelling reason to go through with a civil marriage. Also, illegitimate children weren't entitled to an inheritance, upwardly mobile Jews were acquiring property, getting business licenses, going to university, & all these things required you to have a legal name and so the number of civil marriages grew. And what also happened was that couples who had been religiously married for years registered to have a civil marriage to give their children their father's surname, so you might see parents & even grandparents in marriage registrations.

When that happened, official rabbis would commonly go back to the birth entries for the children to note that a civil marriage had taken place. Such notes generally changed the surname of the child to the father's as well.

On a birth record where the parents have had a civil marriage, the notes section usually gives the date & place of the wedding, and sometimes even the reference number for the record entry. If the wedding took place in a different town, that's probably the home town of the bride's family so search for relatives there.

Some children used their mother's name while others used their father's name despite the legal prohibition. The terms *recte* (correct) or *false* (incorrect) were interposed between names in an effort to clarify the legal name of the child.

Names

Many Jews had a Hebrew name, a Yiddish name and a secular name, as well as nicknames used by family & friends. Variants and transliterations are common — the same person may be “Leib,” “Löbl,” or “Leopold.” Double names were often given to a child but both names aren't necessarily found on every document. Note that spelling varies widely — use wildcards when searching or search phonetically.

Other sources for names

Beyond BMD records, look at censuses (e.g., 1790, 1812, 1857), tax lists, conscription rolls, residency permits & population movement registers. Some of these types of datasets have been indexed by JRI-

Poland & Geshher Galicia & some are in the Polish Archives. Not every town has existing records of these types, unfortunately.

Immigration documents & citizenship applications might give you new information eg:/ sponsor.

Holocaust records

Yad Vashem, USHMM

Arolsen Archives – DP camps & other lists

Kazerne Dossin – Belgium

Memorial de la Shoah - France

Common challenges

Some records were lost due to war, fire, or neglect. Some may be sitting in other archives. Reading old records can be hard due to different formats & different handwriting. Use Jewish Facebook groups to help with translations. Galicia's geography is complex: town names changed, small towns were absorbed into larger towns, and the same village may appear under multiple jurisdictions over time.

Main resources

www.jri-poland.org

www.geshhergalicia.org

www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/en/strona_glowna

www.jewishgen.org

Other resources

www.krakowjewishheritage.org/ (includes students who went to Jagiellonian Uni)

collections.yadvashem.org/en/names

www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/person_advance_search.php

www.familysearch.org

www.genealogyindexer.org

www.naa.gov.au/

trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/?type=newspapers

Facebook Groups

Jewish Genealogy Portal

Tracing the Tribe

Jewish group for your town or area

Translations of records after 1877.

BIRTH RECORD [AFTER 1877] –ZBARAZ 1898

Headings in German and Polish Page 1 of 2

1 Fortlaufende Zahl Liczba porządkowa	2 Der Geburt Urodzenia					3 Der Beschneidung oder Namens Beilegung Obrzezania lub nadania imienia					4 Des Kindes Dziecięcia			5 Eheliche, ange- blich eheliche oder uneheliche Geburt		6 Vor- und Zuname des Vaters sowie Standt Beschäftigung und Wohnort			
	Tag Dzień	Monat Miesiąc	Jahr Rok	Ort Miejsce	Haus-Nr. Nr. domu	Tag Dzień	Monat Miesiąc	Jahr Rok	Ort Miejsce	Haus-Nr. Nr. domu	Name Imię	Geschlecht Płeć męski żeński nieznany		Ursachen dieses raskone ślubu lub nieślubu		Imię i nazwisko stan zatrudnienia i miejsce zamieszkania ojca			
Record Number AKT	Date of Birth: Day/month/ year					Date of Bris or Naming Day/month/ year					Childs' Given Name			Male	Female	Born Legitimate or Illegitimate		Father's Name, Surname, Occupation, and Place of Residence	

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7 Vor- und Zuname der Mutter, Ihr Stand und Wohnort dann Vor- und Zuname Beschäftigung und Wohnort ihrer Eltern. Imię i nazwisko, stan, miejsce zamieszkania matki i jej rodziców		8 Eigenhändige Unterschrift, Beschäftigung und Wohnort Własnoręczny podpis z wymienieniem zatrudnienia i miejsce zamieszkania der Pathen oder Zeugen des Sandeks oder Schemas kumów lub świadków Sandeka lub Szemesa		9 des oder der Beschneider obrzezują- cego lub obrzezujących		10. der Hebamme oder des Ge- burtshelfers akuszerki lub akuszerki		11 Toit geborene Kinder Datał niedywo urodzone		13 Anmerkung U w a g a	
Mother's name, civil marriage status, occupation, parents names, place of residence		Signature of Official or Witnesses and place of residence		Signature of Mohel and place of residence		Signature of Midwife and place of residence		Report of Stillbirth		Remarks	

MARRIAGE RECORD [AFTER 1877] – KOZLOW 1898

Headings in German and Polish Page 1 of 2

1 Fort- laufende Postzahl Liczba porząd- kowa	2 Des Bräutigams Narzeczonego				3 Der Braut Narzeczonej							
	Vor- und Zuname Geburtsort, Beschäftigung, Wohnort u. Haus-Nr. ferner Name, Beschäftigung u. Wohnort seiner Eltern Imię i nazwisko, miejsce urodzenia, zatrudnienie i miejsce zamieszkania, Nr. domu narzeczonego i jego rodziców				Alter Wiek		Stand Stan		Vor- und Zuname und Geburtsort, ferner Name, Beschäftigung, Wohnort und Haus-Nr. ihrer Eltern Imię i nazwisko, miejsce urodzenia, imiona, zatrudnienie, miejsce zamieszkania i Nr. domu jej rodziców			
Record Number (AKT)	Name and Surname of Groom, place of birth, occupation, place of residence, and parents names				Alter Rok	Monat Miesiąc	ledy wolny	Widmer Wdowiec	Alter Rok	Monat Miesiąc	ledy wolna	Widme Widowa
					Age - years	Age - months	Single	Widower	Name and Surname of Bride, place of birth, occupation, place of residence, and parents names	Age - Years	Age - months	Single

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4 Der Trauung Zasiubin					5 Eigenhändige Unterschrift Własnoręczny podpis		6 7 Anmerkung U w a g a												
Tag Dzień					des die Trauung verrichtenden Rabbiners (Religionsweifers) funkcyjującego przy zasiubinach rabina (szkolnika)					der Zeugen und deren Beschäftigung świadków i ich zatrudnienie									
Monat Miesiąc					unter Angabe des Wohnortes z wymienieniem miejsca zamieszkania														
Date of Marriage Day/month/ year					Civil Official's Name, title, and place of residence					Witnesses Names and place of residence					Remarks				