



Polish Genealogical Society of New York State, Inc.

(PGSNYS)

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Getting Started: A BASIC RESEARCH GUIDE

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This guide is provided to members of the PGSNYS and is intended to share basic genealogy research information. You can think of it as a checklist of reminders and suggestions.

Based on your specific needs, we can make recommendations for assistance from our members and from other local research centers.

For example:

- Use the PGSNYS website (www.pgsnys.org) to search our databases by surname
- Fellow PGSNYS members and contacts are a source of advice
- Referral to other research facilities that support genealogists here in western NY, online, or in person
- Researchers in Poland. Check the Research tab for this sub-page at our website, <http://pgsnys.org/research/polish-researchers-translators/>

Your Personal visit to local offices and research facilities is important.
Much information is not online.

Let's take a moment and review a few basic realities.

A personal visit to a specific office of a church, a cemetery, a government department, a church, museums and archives is still a genuine necessity; much valuable information is not available online. Remember: you will benefit from calling ahead for an appointment or to verify open days and hours.

We assume you may, or may not, have a basic skill level. Let's take a look at your personal situation!

- Are you a true *beginner*, brand new to genealogy research?
 - Conversations with family members will yield clues. Become your extended family's historian.
 - Documents of many types may yield helpful facts: Deeds, mortgage papers, court records, federal and state census, military records, city directory listings, immigration and naturalization records are all worthy of your time and effort to find and review for family facts.
- Are you an *established genealogist* with basic skills, but new to Polish genealogy research?
 - Do you need to learn about genealogy resources for ancestors with Buffalo NY history and records?
 - Do you need to learn about genealogy resources for ancestors with Polish history and records?
- Do you have a *specific question* that needs brainstorming with someone right now? Ask!

In the rest of this document, we would like to share the following suggestions and pieces of information, gathered into these topical categories:

- Facilities in the Buffalo area
- Basics for getting started or refreshing one's skills.
- Polish Genealogy resources
- Other Societies for Polish genealogy, culture, and history
- Keeping yourself organized is a matter of personal choice
- Recent advances with DNA Testing and learning Genetic Genealogy
- Staying informed and motivated

Facilities in Buffalo, NY Area

In general, most city and county facilities are the leading research places for continuing your efforts. Gratefully, numerous guides and publications exist, and are maintained by the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library's efforts.

Grosvenor Room, Buffalo, & Erie County Public Library's Main downtown Library.

Dozens of guides and publications are maintained and published by the research staff, many are available online, links are provided throughout this document.

<http://www.buffalolib.org/content/grosvenor/guides-publications>

Civil Records Centers City of Buffalo Inactive Records Center and Erie County locations.

Use the 2-page guide "**Government Sources of Vital Records for Buffalo and Erie County**"

<http://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/pdf/genealogy/subject-guides/GovtSourcesVital.pdf>

Use the 5-page guide "**Vital Records in the Grosvenor Room**"

<http://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/pdf/genealogy/subject-guides/VitalRecordsGro.pdf>

Church and Cemetery records offices (Check with fellow member, Maureen Gleason), and use the 14-page Guide: "**Cemetery Records for Erie County in the Grosvenor Room**"

<http://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/pdf/genealogy/subject-guides/CemeteryRecords2014.pdf>

Family History Library, there are two Latter Day Saints church locations, in Williamsville and in Orchard Park. The library in Williamsville is open more hours per week than the Orchard Park location.

Buffalo History Museum has a research library; basic info and days open are at this page:

<http://www.buffalohistory.org/Learn/Research-Library.aspx>

The genealogy research information page has guidance on their resources.

<http://www.slideshare.net/BuffaloHistory/genealogy-basics-at-the-buffalo-erie-county-historical-society-12970970>

See the APPENDIX at the end of this document for detailed directory info for each facility.

Basics for getting started or refreshing one's skills

A) At the Buffalo & Erie County Public Library.

Grosvenor Room, BECPL publishes and maintains many excellent and relevant guides and Finding Aids for genealogy research. Many are available online at their website.

Getting started with Genealogy. 2 pages of tips to begin, how-to books, the basic records available at the library.

http://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/pdf/genealogy/Getting%20Started_Genealogy.pdf

Genealogy Resources in the Grosvenor Room. Revised May 2015, 14 pages. This is a guide to all the resources available for Buffalo-centric information resources.

http://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/pdf/genealogy/subject-guides/Genealogy%20Resources_MainGuide.pdf

Facts can come from a variety of records or an official document; some may be unknown to you. Use the 2-page table, *Record Selection Table*. It is very handy for learning which document to seek, based on which fact is on your mind and in your research plan.

Sometimes, the fact may be in a free source.

<http://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/pdf/genealogy/subject-guides/Record%20Selection%20Table.pdf>

A complete list of the Grosvenor guides, by subject, is found at this main page, with links to specific documents and finding aids. The library tries to review and update their guides on an annual basis.

<http://www.buffalolib.org/content/grosvenor/guides-publications>

IMPORTANT REMINDER ABOUT LINKS:

- *As time goes by, a link to a specific report could become 'broken.' This happens when it gets a rewrite; and so, a new link is posted on the website.*
- *Solution: The BECPL recommends the use of the above subject guide page as their reliable place to find the most current correct link to any BECPL Grosvenor guide document.*

At Family Search. <https://familysearch.org/>

This is a free resource. The Church of Jesus Christ Latter Day Saints owns and operates their website, FamilySearch.com and the Family History Centers across the country. Staffed by church volunteers, the hours of operation at the Family History Centers vary by location.

A Family History Library is located at two local Latter Day Saints church locations, Williamsville, NY and Orchard Park, NY. The library in Williamsville is open more hours per week than Orchard Park. (See APPENDIX for details for each location.) There are centers around the country if you are not local to western NY.

A complete location directory is online via <https://familysearch.org/ask/help>

This website also maintains the **Family Search Wiki**. It is a valued resource of self-paced learning materials. https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page

Example:

Family History for Beginners. 3 pages of basic tips, and links to the other specific articles about the other tasks. All articles can be found in the Wiki online.

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Family_History_for_Beginners

The Family Search website Wiki is a vast collection of personal learning materials to build your skills, and it is *free* for anyone to use. There is even a unique page for Poland learning materials. Resources are available on a multitude of topics. https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Main_Page

Or, from their Home page, find the Wiki via their **Search Tab**.

1. Select **Wiki**
2. Use the left side of page to select your preferred topic.

Here is a guide to their Research Process.

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Research_Process

B) At Ancestry.com

- This is a *paid* service for personal use with many levels of membership and costs.
- Check with a Public Library to determine if it provides access for use while at a Main Library or branch. Your use is with the slightly different ‘Library Edition.’ The Buffalo & Erie County Library system provides access.
- There are some *free* Ancestry.com materials available:
 1. “Finding Your American Immigrant Ancestors at Ancestry.”
http://c.ancestry.com/cs/media/1265132417966/imm2011_immigrant.0.pdf.com
 2. It is a 7-page article in .pdf format.
- Self-paced video learning materials on basic topics:
 1. Find tab called **Extras**
 2. Select “**Ancestry Academy**”
<https://www.ancestry.com/Academy/courses/recommended>

- Videos are available for Getting Started (no videos for Poland materials yet).
- Short Course videos exist (3 min. or less) to learn about basic record such as the federal census.
- Lengthy courses on video (1 hr. more or less) are also available

Resources exist for learning to use Ancestry.com's search interface and website features:

1. Find Tab called **Help**
2. Select "**Support Center**" Note that these materials are about the Ancestry.com site and how it presents basic material.

Polish Genealogy Resources:

Here are some research centers and websites that offer specific resources for Polish Genealogy:

A) At Grosvenor Room, BECPL.

Polish Genealogy: Selected Sources in the Grosvenor Room. Revised 2015, 15 pages.
<http://www.buffalolib.org/sites/default/files/pdf/genealogy/subject-guides/PolishGenealogy.pdf>

An immensely useful guide that describes handbooks, guides, manuals, indexes to record compilations, atlases, maps, gazetteers, surname directories, passenger lists, newspapers, and church records that serve numerous purposes for researchers of Polish genealogy.

B) At Family History Centers, LDS Church (Williamsville or Orchard Park).

Various resources and research guidance are available, as well as assistance with ordering microfilms of birth, marriage, and death civil or church records in Poland gathered by the LDS Church Library, Salt Lake City, Utah.

A catalog of available microfilms is found at FamilySearch.org, for delivery and use at a local Family History Center.

C) At Family Search.org. Family Search Wiki.

Poland Genealogy is an online guide to Poland's ancestry, family history, and genealogy. It covers many topics about Poland.

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Poland_Genealogy

Poland Letter Writing Guide, 11 pages. This is a guide for people who do not speak Polish, but who must write to Poland for genealogical records. Includes useful sentences and the Polish translation of the sentences.

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Poland_Letter_Writing_Guide

D) At Ancestry.com

Poland family history research page. Here you'll find record collections, history, and genealogy resources to help you trace your Poland ancestors.

<http://search.ancestry.com/Places/Europe/Poland/Default.aspx>

E) At the blog by Julie Roberts Szczepankiewicz.

Our PGSNYS member, Julie, writes and maintains an excellent, informative blog.

Julie is an accomplished genealogist and writer. Her blog is called *From Shepherds and Shoemakers: Sharing Musings, insights, resources and strategies as I discover my family History*. <https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.wordpress.com/>

Blog began in May 2016. Of importance, from among her many relevant articles:

- “Writing to Archives in Poland,” June 2016.
<https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.wordpress.com/2016/06/26/writing-to-archives-in-poland/>
- “Online Translation Aids,” July 2016.
<https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.wordpress.com/2016/07/>
- “Overview of Vital Records in Poland,” Part I and Part II. September 2016.
<https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.wordpress.com/2016/09/>
- “5 places to find Polish Census Records”, October 2016.
<https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.wordpress.com/2016/10/18/5-places-online-to-find-polish-census-records/>
- “50+ Useful Websites for Polish Genealogy.” December 2016.
<https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.wordpress.com/2016/12/07/50-useful-websites-for-polish-genealogy/>
- “Grandma said she was from Poznan: Decoding Stories about Ancestors from Poland.” January 2017.
<https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.wordpress.com/2017/01/26/grandma-said-she-was-from-poznan-decoding-stories-about-ancestors-from-poland/>

F) Lost Shoebox Genealogy.

Focus is on Poland and Germany and has guides, tutorials, and some reviews of products and services. www.lostshoebox.com

Article: *Online Records for Poland*

<http://www.lostshoebox.com/poland/online-records/>

Societies that focus on Polish Genealogy, Culture or History

A) Polish Genealogical Society of America. Located in Chicago

www.pgsa.org

Website offers Chicago databases and many links to other information resources.

B) Polish Genealogical Society of Connecticut & the Northeast, Inc.

www.pgctne.org

Website offers regional databases and information, of note:

- a. **Polish American Marriage Database.** Covers years 1892-1940 for Connecticut, Delaware, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

http://pgctne.org/Marriage_Database/All%20States%20Database.aspx

C) Polish Genealogy Society of Michigan.

<http://www.pgsm.org/index.php>

Website offers Detroit area databases. PGSM paid membership allows access to more databases to aid members in their research of Polish genealogy.

Of interest:

Maintains large list of links and sites with content of interest to Polish genealogy enthusiasts. <http://www.pgsm.org/links.php?sid=1>

D) Examples of other organizations:

- Polish American History Association focuses on study of Polish American history and culture; more academic. <http://www.polishamericanstudies.org/index.html>
- Polish Arts Club of Buffalo. <http://www.polishartsclubofbuffalo.com/>
Focuses on events that include Polish culture and heritage.
- Polish American Congress. <http://www.pac1944.org/>
Serves as a national 'umbrella organization' for Polish historical and cultural organizations and issues.

Keeping yourself organized is a matter of personal choice

This is a totally personal choice and many techniques, such as folders or albums can be implemented.

- Hard copy in folders or binders
- Self-published books or photo albums
- Create image file of your paper materials
- Online sites to store your specific family tree are available, again fee or free. (Ancestry.com, familysearch.org, myheritage.com)
- Software for personal devices is available for PC or Apple hardware. Various costs associated with purchase.
 1. Family Tree Maker.
 - a. Closely associated with Ancestry.com, but now independently owned.
 - b. <http://www.mackiev.com/ftm/>
 2. RootsMagic.
 - a. Supposed to be able to synch with Ancestry.com sometime in 2017.
 - b. <https://www.rootsmagic.com/>
 3. My Heritage. www.myheritage.com
 - a. Claims to be the “most internationally diverse collection of family trees using groundbreaking search and matching technologies.” Offers My Heritage DNA.
 - b. Available in 42 languages.
 - c. Fee-based or some free features.
 4. Other software products do exist.

ARTICLES:

Family Search.org, *Organize Your Genealogy*

https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/Organize_Your_Genealogy

Family Tree Tips: 23 Secrets to Organize Your Genealogy. A free, downloadable E-book with tips on organizing your genealogy.

<http://www.familytreemagazine.com/family-tree-tips-23-secrets-to-organize-your-genealogy>

Recent advances with DNA Testing and learning Genetic Genealogy

DNA tests continue to improve. Fees vary.

- A) Ancestry DNA
- B) 23andme.com
- C) My Heritage DNA
- D) Familytree DNA

DNA Articles on making your personal choice.

Which Genealogy DNA Test is the Best? A Detailed Comparison Guide to Help You Decide by Family History Daily. January 20, 2017.

http://familyhistorydaily.com/genealogy-help-and-how-to/ancestry-dna-tests-comparison-guide/?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+familyhistorydaily+%28Family+History+Daily%29

Excellent blogs and resources linked (ctrl+click) below for more help on your genetic genealogy journey. The information they provide is invaluable and fascinating.

- [DNAeXplained](#)
- [The Genetic Genealogist](#)
- [The Legal Genealogist](#)
- [Genie1](#)
- [The International Society of Genetic Genealogy \(ISOGG\)](#)

Staying informed and motivated

Many resources for continuous genealogy news and info-sharing communities can easily be found online. Some are free, some are paid subscriptions.

Here are just a few randomly chosen websites for genealogists, just a grab-bag:

| GRAB-BAG: Random selection of popular resources: | | |
|---|---|---|
| Cyndi's List | http://www.cyndislist.com/us/ | |
| Roots Tech | https://www.rootstech.org/ | |
| Family History Daily | http://familyhistorydaily.com/ | |
| Facebook pages and communities exist | Polish Genealogy Join this Facebook group, worldwide membership | Our member, Julie Roberts Szczepankiewicz, is one of its administrators |
| Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter | https://blog.eogn.com/ | Technology news |
| Family Tree Magazine | http://www.familytreemagazine.com/ | |
| Family Tree University | https://www.familytreeuniversity.com/ | |
| Find My Past | www.FindMyPast.com | |
| Ellis Island | http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/ | Immigration records |
| Castle Garden | http://www.castlegarden.org/ | Immigration records |
| Stephen Morse | http://stevemorse.org/index.html | |
| Fulton History *** | www.fultonhistory.com | useful collection of historic newspapers |
| Lisa Alzo, genealogy trainer | www.lisaalzo.com | Polish genealogy research writer and lecturer |

***Fulton History has a tutorial: <http://whereyoucamefrom.blogspot.com/2014/01/tutorial-searching-fulton-history.html?m=1>

APPENDIX

Directory of some of Buffalo New York's research locations:

| Research Facility | Address, phone, hours | |
|---|--|---|
| Buffalo & Erie County Public Library. | 1 Lafayette Square Buffalo, New York 14203-1887 | Grosvenor Room (same hrs. as library) |
| Family History Centers. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. 2 locations | 4005 Baker Road Orchard Park , NY 14127 716-662-3117 OPEN: Tu 9 – 4; Wed, Th 6-9 | 1424 Maple Road Williamsville , NY 14221 716-688-2439 OPEN: Mon-Wed-Sat 10 – 2; Tu, Th 10 – 9 |
| Buffalo History Museum Research Library | 1 Museum Court Buffalo, NY 14216 3199 | 716-873-9644 ext. 306 |
| City of Buffalo Inactive Records Center | 85 River Rock Drive, Suite 301 Buffalo, NY 14207 | 716-874-6401 |
| Erie County Clerk, Erie County Hall | 92 Franklin St. Buffalo, NY 14202 | 716-858-8785 |