Grandma Said She Was From Poznań: Getting Started With Tracing Your Polish Ancestors

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General Steps:

1. Identify immigrant's **specific** place of birth in Europe using one or more documents from the U.S.
2. Determine the parish or registry office that served that village.
3. Determine what records are available for that parish (microfilm, online, on site). Note that sometimes a variety of sources need to be utilized for complete coverage (e.g. FHL microfilm from 1730-1885, parish archive on-site from 1886-1892, online from state archives from 1893-1912).

Top Sources for place of origin in Europe for Polish immigrants:

1. Census records (can be useful for determining partition)
2. Church records (especially informative for Roman Catholics)
3. Naturalization records (petitions after 1906)
4. Passenger manifests
5. Military records (e.g. draft registrations)
6. Obituaries and cemetery records (cemetery records are especially useful for Jewish ancestors)
7. Miscellaneous sources (leave no stone unturned).

Sites for Gathering Documentation from U.S. records:
https://familysearch.org/ *
http://www.usgenweb.org/ *
http://www.findagrave.com/ *
http://stevemorse.org/ * (Per the description on the home page, "This site contains tools for finding immigration records, census records, vital records, and for dealing with calendars, maps, foreign alphabets, and numerous other applications. Some of these tools fetch data from other websites but do so in more versatile ways than the search tools provided on those websites.")
http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/ * (bought by Ancestry a number of years ago, this site is still free)
http://www.cyndislist.com/ * (A categorized & cross-referenced index to genealogical resources on the Internet)
http://www.findmypast.com/
http://home.ancestry.com/
https://www.fold3.com/
https://www.myheritage.com/ * (has some free components)
http://www.genealogybank.com/

http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/passenger * (Ellis Island records for immigrations through the Port of New York, 1892-1957)

http://www.castlegarden.org/ * (Castle Garden records for immigrations through the Port of New York, 1820-1892)

http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/Pages/home.aspx *(For those of you with Canadian ancestors, you don't need to pay for an Ancestry World Explorer subscription to access Canadian census records, land records, passenger manifests, etc. – these are all available free from the Library and Archives Canada site.)

Newspaper Archives:

http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/ * (Chronicling America is the Library of Congress site.)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:List_of_online_newspaper_archives * (This list includes newspapers from around the world)

https://www.newspapers.com/

https://news.google.com/news/advanced_news_search?as_drrb=a * (Google News Archive)

http://www.elephind.com/ * (Includes international newspapers.)

http://fultonhistory.com/ * (Slightly quirky site, but well worth the effort; has papers from all over, but heavy emphasis on New York State.)

Phonetic Gazetteers for Eastern European Research:

Jewish Gen Gazetteer (www.jewishgen.org/communities/loctown.asp):

- An indispensable Soundex-type (phonetic) gazetteer for identifying villages for which the name is spelled incorrectly on a U.S. document. For more hits, try using the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex, rather than Beider-Morse Phonetic Matching.

Kresy Gazetteer (http://www.kami.net.pl/kresy/):

- This is a fantastic site for determining parish for villages in the eastern border regions (Kresy) that formerly belonged to Poland (Second Polish Republic) but are now located in western Ukraine, western Belarus, and southeastern Lithuania.
- Soundex-style allows you to search without knowing the exact spelling of the place name, if you select "similar" (Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex) or "rough" as your search method.

Mapa.szukacz.pl (http://mapa.szukacz.pl/):

- Not a true gazetteer; does not show parish for a village, but does show current administrative divisions including the gmina (useful if you want to write to the USC for a record less than 100 years old).
- Only shows villages within current borders of Poland.
- Polish diacritics don't matter (i.e. a search for "lodz" will give you "Łódź".)
- Advanced search allows you to search within a specific Voivodeship; useful when searching for places like "Nowa Wieś."

Period Gazetteers for Polish Research:

Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich (http://dir.icm.edu.pl/Slownik_geograficzny/):

- Coverage includes all localities in the former Polish provinces of Russia, most localities in the former Austrian province of Galicia (now divided between Poland and the Ukraine), Belorussian provinces of the Russian Empire (now in the Republic of Belarus), and also contains significant localities in other Slavic and eastern European nations; Russia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania. While the information is a bit less comprehensive, localities from the provinces of Poznan, West Prussia, East Prussia, Silesia, and Pomerania are also covered.
- Published between 1880-1902 in 15 volumes.
- Contains information on parishes, history, population, etc.
- Abbreviations are common; assistance can be found at PGSA website (below)
- Must use proper Polish diacritics (i.e. a search for "lodz" will yield no result, but a search for "Łódź" will give multiple hits)

PGSA Translated Słownik geograficzny entries (http://pgsa.org/polish-history/translated-descriptions-of-polish-villages-and-provinces/glossary-of-unfamiliar-terms/ and related pages, (https://pgsa.org/polish-history/translated-descriptions-of-polish-villages-and-provinces/polish-geographical-dictionary/), etc.:

- Defines abbreviations and explains historical context for Słownik entries; also offers English translations for a limited number of villages.

Polish Roots Translated SGKP entries (http://www.polishroots.org/GeographyMaps/S%C5%82ownikGeograficzny/tabid/61/Default.aspx):

- Similar to the above site, but different coverage.

Skorowidz Królestwa Polskiego (https://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/publication/11404/edition/10794/content?ref=desc for Volume 1 and https://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/show-content/publication/edition/10795?id=10795 for Volume 2):

- Seems to work best with Microsoft Edge or Firefox as your browser. Incompatible with some (or all?) versions of Google Chrome.
- Will need to install a Deja Vu reader onto your computer to read these files. Follow instructions at website for downloading (the site will prompt you) or you can download it here. Running the most current version of Java is also important. Easy-to-read, tabular format shows name of village, gubernia/governate, powiat/county, gmina/township, parafia/parish, as well as sąd pokoju/courthouse, and poczta/post office.
- Published in 1877.
- Includes only the Kingdom of Poland (Congress Poland, or "Russian Poland") – not Galicia or Prussian Poland.

Kartenmeister (http://www.kartenmeister.com/preview/databaseuwe.asp):

- Includes Eastprussia, Westprussia, Brandenburg, Posen, Pomerania, and Silesia.
- Flexible search parameters; can search by German or Polish name of village, or use other methods.
- Catholic or Evangelical parish for the village is usually included in search results.

Gesher Galicia Town Locator (http://www.geshergalicia.org/galician-town-locator/):

- If you've got the correct spelling of a town, this is a great resource because it includes places of worship for people from all towns and villages in Galicia as of 1900.

Genealogische Orts-Verzeichnis (GOV), The Historic Gazetteer (http://gov.genealogy.net/search/index):

- This German-language database includes locations around the world. It searches for the character string typed in the search box (truncate by leaving off as many letters as desired). The results list includes the type of location, the higher level jurisdictions, and the current postal code, and includes links to additional articles about this place for further reading.

Meyers gazetteer (http://www.meyersgaz.org/index.aspx):

- This is an online, searchable version of the popular *Meyers Orts- und Verkehrs-lexikon des deutschen Reichs* The goal of the Meyer's compilers was to list every place name in the German Empire (1871-1918). It gives the location, i.e. the state and other jurisdictions, where the civil registry office was and parishes if that town had them. It also gives lots of other information about each place. The only drawback to Meyer's is that if a town did not have a parish, it does not tell where the parish was, making reference to other works necessary.

Brian Lenius's Genealogical Gazetteer of Galicia
(http://www.lenius.ca/gazetteerorder/gazetteerorderform.htm):

- Not an online resource, but this gazetteer is available in print from the author, and is considered to be a superlative resource for those with ancestors from Galicia.

Bigo's Skorowidz of Galicia, 1918 (*Skorowidz wszystkich miejscowości z przysiółkami w Królestwie Galicyi, Wielkim Księstwem Krakowskim i Księstwie Bukowińskim, wydanie V* – Bigo Jan, 1918) (http://www.mtg-malopolska.org.pl/images/skany/skorowidz1918djvu/skorowidz1918.djvu):

- Like the Skorowidz of 1877, you need a Deja Vu reader to view these files.
- Tabular format includes columns for village name, the county and district council, district court and tax office, parish office, population, post office, klm distance (from the post office), telegraph office, klm distance (from the telegraph office), and the owner of the "Major estate" in a village, as opposed to the owners of the "minor estates" (commoners).
- Roman Catholic parishes are distinguished from Greek Catholic by the use of "ł" (abbreviation for "łaciński,") or "gr" (abbreviation for "grecki") next to the name of the parish that served that locality. The word "loco" means that there was a parish within that location.

Index of Place Names in the Republic of Poland *(Skorowidz miejscowości Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej)* (http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra/docmetadata?id=12786&from=publication):

- Like the Skorowidz of 1877, you need a Deja Vu reader to view these files.

- Published circa 1933, it covers locations that were within the borders of the Second Polish Republic (1918-1939).
- Tabular format again, includes villages in the eastern border regions (Kresy) that formerly belonged to Poland but are now located in western Ukraine, western Belarus, and southeastern Lithuania.

Additional Support for Getting Past Those "Brick Walls": Facebook groups! ☺

List of over 11,000 genealogy-related groups and pages on Facebook:

https://socialmediagenealogy.com/genealogy-on-facebook-list/