



Gen Dobry!

Gen Dobry! 30 November 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 <http://PolishRoots.org>.

Be sure to visit the PolishRoots site and take advantage of the numerous sources featured there to help you with your research. A particularly useful feature for many is the

database that lets you check availability of Galician vital records for Roman Catholics and Jews:

http://polishroots.org/galicia_towns.htm

*** SEZAMIE, OTWORZ SIE! (OPEN, SESAME!) ***

by William F. "Fred" Hoffman

Among the more interesting Websites of potential value to Polish genealogists is the SEZAM database, the entry to which can be found at this address on the Polish State Archives Website:

<http://www.archiwa.gov.pl/sezam/index.eng.html>

I gather from notes posted online that some researchers are familiar with it, but I get the impression a lot of folks still don't know about it. Or perhaps some have tried to use it, but have been frustrated by its lack of user-friendliness. I thought it might be worthwhile to say a little about it, so that you can judge for yourself whether it may help you.

The name is interesting: _sezam_ is Polish for "sesame," and no doubt this name was chosen to evoke associations with the story of "Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves" in the Arabian Nights collection -- specifically, the magic treasure cave which opened whenever someone came up and said "Open, sesame!" (in Polish "Sezamie, otwo~rz sie~!" pronounced roughly "seh-ZAHM-yeah, OT-voozh sheh"). The hope surely was that researchers who go to the bottom of the page mentioned above and click on SEZAM will feel they've entered a place where great treasure is stored.

I'm not sure users will be overwhelmed by an impression of being surrounded by riches beyond belief -- especially since the site is not as easy to use as it might be. I have a fair amount of experience navigating around Websites, plus I have the advantage of reading Polish fluently, yet I find it frustrating to search SEZAM. Sometimes I enter the information I want in the various fields, and wham! I get what I want. Too often, however, I designate search parameters that I expect to work beautifully, yet the response is "No records found."

Still, being stubborn by nature, I vary the parameters, widening or narrowing the search, and I usually end up finding what I'm looking for. There is a lot of good info to be found here, if you're patient and persistent enough to find it.

* What Sesame Opens To Reveal *

So what information does this site offer? It does NOT show you documents (do I hear a lot of you saying "Rats!" or something even more colorful?). What it offers is info on the

holdings of the State Archives -- what records they have, what specific fields of activity are included, what years they cover, which Archive they are held in, and so on.

In other words, it won't serve up your g-g-grandfather's baptismal record on a platter. But if you know when and where he was born, it will tell you whether a given Archive has records for that period, so you can decide if writing to the Archive may help you get your hands on them. This can save you a great deal of time -- especially since many of the records involved come from the time frame the LDS Family History Library was not allowed to microfilm, i. e., records less than 100 years old at the time of filming. In other words, you can't get at them in the U.S. or Canada; one way or another, you have to contact the right place in Poland. SEZAM can help you determine if the State Archive is the right place.

Suppose, just for instance, your ancestor was born sometime after 1890 but before World War I, in Kolno in the province of Lomza (under the 1975-1998 setup). The FHL doesn't have those records on film, covering only 1784-1870 -- always check the FHL Catalog first:

http://familysearch.org/Eng/Library/FHLC/frameset_fhlc.asp

Let's say you've had no luck writing the parish (remember, I'm supposing all this, by way of illustration; for all I know the pastor of Kolno's church may be a genealogist's best friend). So far you're having trouble finding the records you need. The question is, would it be a waste of time writing the Archive, or not? You could spend weeks waiting for an answer to a letter; or you could go to Lomza, drop by the Archive, and hope for the best (which is almost always a lousy idea). Or you can give SEZAM a chance to save you a little time and effort.

Once you've entered the SEZAM database itself by clicking on its icon, you click on "Archives," and from the drop-down list select the specific Archive to search -- in this case "Archiwum Panstwowe w Bialymstoku Oddzial w Lomzy" (State Archive in Bialystok, Lomza branch). Under "Category" you select "urzedy stanu cywilnego i akta metrykalne" (civil registry and metrical records). Under "Initial date" you enter "1890," and under "Final date" you specify, say, "1918." You click on "Search," and up comes a list of all records that fit your search parameters.

The search returns 28 "Fonds" (archival record collections) of registry records at that branch. You scan down till you see mention of "Kolno" -- in fact it says "Akta stanu cywilnego Parafii Rzymskokatolickiej w Kolnie" (registry records of the Roman Catholic parish in Kolno). For more info click on the blue "Card" at the far right. This brings up a page giving archival details on the available records for Kolno. What interests you is the information that the Lomza branch Archive has such records for 1890-1899; that same page gives you the address of that Archive.

Thus within minutes you can determine whether the records you need are there (probably -- no database is 100% error-free, so the results of this search still need to be verified

when you contact the Archive). If they're not, you go to plan B. If they are, you know exactly where to write and what to ask for. You might even print out the page with your results, so you can enclose it with your letter and thus show the Archive staff exactly what you're looking for, in a form that should make it extremely easy for them to locate it.

* Read The Instructions! *

My wife and I have an ongoing feud -- she never under any circumstances reads the instructions to anything, whereas I always do. (Probably because I long ago accepted that I'm a hopeless dork and can't figure anything out for myself; I need all the help I can get). In your first tries with SEZAM -- unless you're my wife -- I strongly recommend reading the instructions on this page:

<http://www.archiwa.gov.pl/sezam/index.eng.html>

Some of it is pretty hard going, but when they start talking specifics they give good pointers, in English, on how the database is organized and how to search it. Even when you've read them, the database can be a little balky; but a good grasp of those instructions will save you time and frustration and make your search more productive

Consider, for instance, what they say about spelling. The database was set up by Poles for Poles, so it expects correct spellings, with the various Polish characters (the dotted z, slash l, a and e with tails, accented c, n, s, and z). The compilers knew, however, that many English-speakers would be using the site, and they had mercy on us: they set it up so that you can ignore the Polish diacriticals. You can tell it to search "Lodz," or you can spell it correctly with slash-L, accent-o, normal d, and accent-z; either spelling works.

But if you do input the Polish characters, you must get them all! If you use those characters, the search engine expects you to spell the names right. So a search for "Lomza" is fine, or a search for L~omz*a is fine (slash L, dotted z) -- but L~omza or Lomz*a will fail. Be consistent! Ignore the Polish letters, or else use them correctly.

This brings up another spelling point. A lot of the questions I receive from researchers feature misspelled Polish place names. If you're going to search this or any other Polish database for a given place, you really need to spell the name right. Searching for "Biatystok" when you need "Bial~ystok" will get you nowhere fast. So please do everything you can to verify spellings. One site that might come in handy in locating places and confirming the correct spellings of their modern names is the ShtetlSeeker:

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

There are other sites that will help you, of course, but this is the one I tend to use most. It is particularly useful because a search using the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex may let you find the right place in spite of spelling errors.

* Beyond Birth, Marriage & Death Records *

I'm not going to go into more detail on using SEZAM -- your best bet is to plunge in and start experimenting with it yourself. Be a little patient; you may have to fiddle around with it a little. But for the serious researcher, it can be a big help.

There's one more point I want to make about SEZAM. On the introductory page mentioned above they give you a chance to download a word processor file called "class.rtf". You might want to do so and take a look. It details the classifications of various administrative entities that generated records held in the Archives. Familiarity with these classifications can help you choose the right categories to search.

But the point I want to stress is that "urzedy stanu cywilnego i akta metryaklne" is only one of 22 different basic categories the database searches. In other words, the birth, marriage, and death records that obsess most researchers are only one of many kinds of records to be found in the State Archives. Here are the other 21 basic categories:

- administracja ogolna - general administration
- administracja specjalna - special administration
- archiwa prywatne i spuscizny - private archives and posthumous works
- archiwa rodzinno-majatkowe - archives of families and estates
- cechy, zwiazki rzemieslnicze - craft guilds and unions
- instytucje finansowe - financial institutions
- instytucje gospodarcze - economic institutions
- instytucje kultury - cultural institutions
- instytucje nauki i oswiaty - scientific and educational institutions
- instytucje ochrony zdrowia i opieki społecznej - health and social care institutions
- instytucje wymiaru sprawiedliwosci - administration of justice
- instytucje wyzaniowe - religious institutions
- organy ustawodawcze panstwa - legislative organs of the State
- partie polityczne i podlegle organizacje, ruchy społeczne - political parties and dependent organizations, social movements
- samorzad gospodarczy - economic self-government
- samorzad zawodowy - trade self-government
- spoldzielczosc - cooperatives
- stowarzyszenia i zwiazki - associations and unions
- wojsko - Army
- zbiory i kolekcje - collections
- zwiazki zawodowe - trade unions

Granted, just from the names you can tell some of these records are going to be boring beyond belief. But the point is, the Archives have a lot more to offer than most of us are using; and these categories give us an idea just how much! Those sources are admittedly harder to use than vital records. But then the only reason vital records are accessible now is because people created a demand for them, and a means of supply followed. If we start

thinking about what's waiting for us, undiscovered, in these archives -- censuses, guild membership records, voting lists, draft board records -- we'll find a way to get at them!

Just as an example, the next issue of Pathways & Passages, the Journal of the Polish Genealogical Society of Connecticut and the Northeast (now at the printer) includes an article by University of Warsaw Professor Michal Kopczynski on genealogical use of draft records created by draft boards in the Russian partition. Kopczynski points out that these records can be a great source, but few people know about them and use them; his article tries to remedy that. It includes an editorial note on how to search SEZAM for such records. Getting SEZAM's archival info on them is the first step in accessing and using them. And that's only one of many kinds of records held at Archives that might fill in the gaps left by birth, marriage, and death records!

* Conclusion *

To sum up, SEZAM is a source that dedicated researchers should know about. It isn't your one-stop shopping source for records -- it doesn't have everything you want, and it can be a little balky to use. But anything that tells you what records are available, and where, is worth a look. You have to approach your search with a strategy. SEZAM is a tool that may help you put your strategy into effect and find what you're looking for.

*** LETTERS TO THE EDITOR ***

Subject: Many thanks

I just received my last issue of Gen Dobry! and wanted to take a moment to let you know how much I:

- enjoy reading it
- am thankful for the wealth of information it provides
- appreciate the hard work it takes to create it
- am grateful for the "corners" you've help me cut.

With sincere and deepest thanks,
E.R. Waskawic (prior to Ellis Island, Waszkiewicz)
<erwaskawic@directions.com>

[Editor's note -- I normally don't devote space to notes praising my work, because then I'd have to give equal time to those who write to say I stink on ice. But I had to make an exception in this case, simply because notes like this encourage me to think maybe I am doing someone some good!]

Subject: New group for Polish deportees to Siberia

(Could you please bring this site to your list's attention? Thanks.)

This message is to tell you about the Kresy-Siberia group and its mission. The "Kresy-Siberia list" brings into contact people from countries around the world with a special interest in the tragedy of the 1.7 million Polish citizens of various faiths and ethnicities (Polish, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, etc.) deported from eastern Poland (Kresy) in 1940-42 to special labour camps in Siberia, Kazakhstan and Soviet Asia. Some 120,000 of these escaped through Persia in 1942 as soldiers of Anders Army and their families, and eventually made their way to the West. The circumstances of their odyssey and the tragic history of the Polish citizens under Soviet occupation during the war was hushed up by the Allies during the war to protect the reputation of the Soviet Union, an important ally in the war against the Nazis. Sixty years later the survivors have aged and many have died. With this list we hope to bring together surviving deportees and their descendants to remember, learn, discover and spread the word of their ordeal to the world and to future generations. If this list can play even a small role in that effort, it will have been an important achievement.

TO SUBSCRIBE, send an e-mail saying who you are and your interest in the group to <Kresy-Siberia-owner@yahoogroups.com>. To learn more about this group please visit

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Kresy-Siberia>

and register as a "Yahoo member." To learn more about the deportations, please visit

<http://www.AForgottenOdyssey.com>

Regards, Pozdrawiam,

Stefan Wisniowski, Sydney Moderator, Kresy-Siberia
<swisniowski@px.com.au>

*** GRANITE MOUNTAIN RECORDS VAULT ***

[Daniel Schlyter, who has long assisted researchers as an expert and speaker on Eastern European genealogy at the LDS Family History Library in Salt Lake City, was kind enough to send some rather interesting information on the facility where all the Library's microfilmed records are actually kept. I thought it was fascinating, and perhaps you will enjoy it as well. Here it is, with thanks to Dan.]

In 1938 the Genealogical Society of Utah (GSU) began filming vital records and other documents important to genealogical research. From that year to the present, the GSU has amassed a huge collection of microfilms. This priceless collection is kept safe within a large complex, literally buried in a granite mountain. The Granite Mountain Records Vault (GMRV) is now the repository of more than 2.2 million rolls of microfilm and

more than 250,000 microfiche sets. A historical summary follows.

1938 Only 12 rolls of microfilm were produced.

1950 The microfilm collection had grown so large that it needed a permanent storage facility.

1956 The design requirements were approved for a vault.

1958 Core testing began in Little Cottonwood Canyon, near the site of the quarry where early pioneers procured stone for the construction of the Salt Lake Temple. This massive formation known as Wasatch Granite though technically called quartz monzonite was found to be solid, with very few fissures or cracks.

1959 Construction received final approval, and the official name, the Granite Mountain Records Vault, was introduced.

1960 Centennial Development Company of Eureka, Utah, began construction of the massive complex. Hard-rock miners drilled and blasted the solid granite. Conventional explosives were largely ineffective, so the miners exploded ammonium nitrate soaked with diesel fuel to excavate the tunnels. The rubble and material removed from the tunnels became the foundation for a parking lot. The size of the parking lot and its location, some 200 to 300 feet above the canyon road, attest to the massive quantity of debris removed during construction. As miners progressed into the heart of the mountain, they encountered cold water seeping down through the rock. They channeled the water and constructed a reservoir to hold it. The reservoir holds approximately 40,000 gallons of water that is used for film processing and other needs.

1965 The Granite Mountain Records Vault was ready to receive the first set of microfilm. By this time the collection had grown to 429,356 rolls.

1966 The Granite Mountain Records Vault was dedicated on 22 June by President Hugh B. Brown of the First Presidency.

The Granite Mountain Records Vault is located 22 miles southeast of Salt Lake City, in Little Cottonwood Canyon. The granite cliffs tower above the vault some 725 feet (220 meters), and the facility extends approximately 650 feet (200 meters) into the mountain. The finished facility consists of four tunnels and has a total of 65,111 square feet. The tunnels have a one percent grade. Their walls consist of a 3/8-inch (.94 cm) corrugated steel skin. The skin was cut and welded into place and then shored up with timbers. Concrete grout was then pumped into the space between the steel and the rock, an average distance of 18 inches (approx. 45 cm).

The GMRV supplies duplicate microfilms and microfiche copies to a network of over 3,500 family history centers throughout the world. Requests are routed through the Church's distribution centers and support offices. If a distribution center or support office does not have a circulating copy of a requested film, it sends an order to the vault. Each day vault employees produce between 500 and 2,500 copies to fulfill these orders. Nearly 1,500,000 microfiche parts are produced each year. Great care is taken to ensure that the best quality is delivered in the most economical way.

About 60 dedicated, well-trained employees see to the many tasks associated with microfilm production. Many of the employees are considered experts and world-

renowned authorities in the field of micrographics. Archivists and preservation experts from around the world visit the GMRV to share ideas and gain insight from our storehouse of knowledge. Our micrographics technicians are some of the finest in the industry, with years of experience in photography and other technical disciplines. Much of the machinery used in the vault has been specially designed and constructed by our own team of skilled technicians.

The Genealogical Society of Utah is committed to gathering vital records and assisting people in their family history research. The Granite Mountain Records Vault plays an integral part in that mission and continues to be a guiding force in making those important records available.

Daniel Schlyter

+ ANTONI "ANTEK" JAKUBOWSKI +

The October 2001 issue of PGS-California's Bulletin included the sad news that Capt. Antoni Henryk Jakubowski (Polish/British Navy Ret.) died in January at the age of 86. "Antek," as everyone called him, was a charter member of PGS-CA, and he was a familiar figure at other Societies' events -- I remember talking to him several times at PGSA Conferences. He was active in many Polish-American organizations, as well, and we are the poorer for his passing. Czeszc jego pamieci!

*** UPCOMING EVENTS ***

From Now - January 13, 2002

* "Gifts to the Tsars 1500-1700: Treasurers from the Kremlin" *

Paul S. Valasek <Paval56@aol.com> sent word of this exclusive U.S. showing at the Indianapolis Museum of Art, now through January 13, 2002. It's a study of power and history in a 105-piece collection of metal work and fine silver from Moscow's Armory Museum. 96 of the items have never before been seen in the States. Polish-related items include a silk saddle given to Czar Boris Godunov from King Sigismund III of Poland to conclude a peace treaty in 1600 between the two countries as well as a large silver eagle with two sets of wings resting on a golden base which served as a stand for a crown.

Further details may be seen at:

<http://www.ima-art.org>

Or you can contact IMA at 317-923-1331.

* PGS Michigan Meeting *

December 8, 2001

Zak Memorial Library
2360 Caniff Ave.
Hamtramck, MI

2:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m. - Short Business Meeting
2:15 p.m. - 2:30 p.m. - Member Research Problems Discussed
2:30 p.m. Genealogy - Just For The Fun Of It, by PGSM Board of Directors
(5 min. presentation per Board Member)

January 7-11, 2002

* Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy 2002 *

Wyndham Hotel, Salt Lake City, UT
Sponsored by the Utah Genealogical Association
For more info: 1-888-INFO-UGA
or <http://www.infouga.org>

April 5-6, 2002

* Illinois State Gen Society 2002 Conference *

"Ethnic Illinois"

To be held at the William Tell Holiday Inn, Countryside, IL

Featured Speaker: Dr. George Schweitzer

Contact: ISGS P.O. Box 10195, Springfield, IL 62791-0195

*** HUMOR ***

[Arleen Gould <gould@igcom.net> sent me this note. I couldn't decide whether to laugh because it's funny, or cry because it's so damned true!]

I was recently diagnosed with AAADD - Age Activated Attention Deficit Disorder.

This is how it goes:

-- I decide to clean out the car. I head to the garage and notice the mail on the table. OK, I'm going to do the car, but first I'll go through the mail.

-- Lay car keys down on the desk. After discarding the junk mail, I notice the trash can is full. OK, I'll just put the bills on the desk and take out the trash ...

--But first, since I'm going to be near the mailbox, I'll address a few bills... Yes, now where's the checkbook? Oops, there's only one check left. Where did I put the extra checks? Oh, there's my empty cup from last night on my desk. I'm going to look for those checks ...

-- But first, I need to put the cup back in the kitchen. I head for the kitchen, look out the window, notice the flowers need a drink of water. I put the cup on the counter and there's my extra pair of glasses on the counter. What are they doing there? I'll just put them away ...

-- But first, I need to water those plants. I head for the door. Aaaagh! someone left the remote in the wrong spot. OK, I'll put the remote away and water the plants.

-- But first, I need to find those checks.

-- END OF DAY... Car not clean, bills still unpaid, cup still on the counter, checkbook still has only one check left, lost my car keys ... and when I try to figure out why nothing got done today, I'm baffled because I know I was busy all day.

I realize this condition is serious ... I'd better get help

But first, I think I'll check my e-mail.

Does this sound familiar to you? [:]

*** MORE USEFUL WEB ADDRESSES ***

www.dmarie.com/timecap/

John Kozakiweicz <kozak02871@home.com> mentioned in a note to PolandBorderSurnames-L@rootsweb.com that he found this a useful page, allowing one to go back in time, research birthdays or anniversaries, or what happened on a specific date.

www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Tarnobrzeg/

In a note to genpol@man.torun.pl, Webmaster Gayle Schlissel Riley <key2pst@pacbell.net> announced "My page has many new things for Jews and non-Jews. Check back if the photo album does not work well." Gayle is an experienced researcher, whose own studies concentrate on Jewish research -- but she emphasizes cooperation for mutual benefit between all researchers interested in eastern Europe. If you have roots in the Tarnobrzeg area, her site is worth visiting.

<http://www.polstnews1.com>

This is the Website of editor Albin S. Wozniak's Polish Studies Newsletter, "a worldwide compendium of useful information by and for the Polish community." You might want to visit the site and consider subscribing to his newsletter. You can get more information on the site or by writing to him at <polstnews1@aol.com>.

<http://www.genealogienetz.de/reg/SCI/orte-d.html>

In a note to <polish_genius@yahogroups.com>, Debbie Greenlee <daveg@airmail.net> described this as "a Website that gives the German and Polish names for towns that were in Silesia/Schlesien. Use either the German or Polish name."

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