



Roots and Branches

By MIRIAM WEINER

Glasnost and Genealogy

To family historians and genealogists, *glasnost* represents the potential for a glimpse into "forbidden records." To date, it is not generally possible for an American researcher to request copies of vital records for their Russian ancestors or to research Russian census records. For those of us with Russian roots, this closed door represents a bitter frustration and we watch with cautious enthusiasm to see if the new "openness" will open the door to researchers.

Today, most Jews in the United States can count at least one grandparent who originally came from Russia or an area that was once part of the Russian empire. In the thirty years between 1881 and 1910, 1,562,800 Jews entered the United States. Of that total number, 71.6% of the immigrants came from Russia. The descendants of those immigrants constitute almost 75% of the Jewish population in the United States.

Until the spirit of *glasnost* extends to the accessibility of archives and their holdings, you can utilize the following sources.

Photographs of Russian Towns

The National Archives maintains files of aerial photos as well as photos taken at ground level for various cities and towns in the

Soviet Union. An alphabetical index by town makes it easy to locate the photos.

Boris Feldblyum of Potomac, Maryland, has amassed a large collection of photos taken in the Soviet Union between 1963 and 1979, along with an extensive collection of historic photos (early 1900's). A descriptive listing of his photographs of "Places and Subjects of Jewish Interest in the Soviet Union" describes each photograph as to date and subject.

Russian Telephone Directories

I have been successful in obtaining photo copies of pages from Russian telephone directories for the following cities: Baku, Bukhara, Donetsk, Dushanbe, Irkutsk, Kharkov, Kiev, Kishinev, Leningrad, Moscow, Odessa, Riga, Simferopol, Tallin, Tashkent, Tbilisi, Uzhgorod, Vilnius, Yerevan.

The year of the phone book varies, with many being over ten years old.

The listings from these Soviet telephone books have ultimately enabled me to contact fifteen families in the Soviet Union via telephone which resulted in the addition of over 100 members to my family tree.

Census Records

A comprehensive article entitled "Censuses in Russia and the Soviet Union" appears in *The Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History*, Vol. 6, edited by Joseph L. Wiczynski. The article outlines the various censuses conducted from the early 18th century to 1959. Although this article does not disclose sources or methods of obtaining such census returns, it does indicate the names (by province and town) of 137 places where a census was conducted prior to 1917 and the type of data included.

Libraries and Archives

A collection of descriptive "guides" to the various regional Soviet Archives (and a few guides to the Archives of other Eastern European countries) exists on microfilm. These publications as a rule are printed in small quantities (in Russian), and are not well circulated, even within the country of origin. Furthermore, they are even less known abroad and thus have been very difficult for western libraries to acquire.

For those researching the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe while in Washington, D.C., the 17-page article, *Library and Archival Resources on Russia, The Soviet Union, and Eastern Europe in the Washington, D.C. area* by D. H. Kraus of the Library of Congress is useful.

Publications

1. A 37-page research report, *Sources for Researching Ukrainian Family History* (John-Paul Himka and Frances A. Swyripa) deals primarily with Canadian and Ukrainian sources.

2. A Moscow publication, *Motorists Guide to the Soviet Union* (Leonid Zadovny) describes main auto routes through the USSR in-

cluding maps, photos, historical data and includes charts closely resembling the AAA "trip ties" available in the United States.

3. A monumental series has resulted in the following publications:

A. *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Moscow and Leningrad* (Patricia Kennedy Grimsted)

B. *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Belorussia* (Patricia Kennedy Grimsted)

C. Volume 3, *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Ukraine and Moldavia* has a projected publication date of Spring, 1988.

4. *The Black Book*, (ed. Ilya Ehrenburg and Vasily Grossman) describes the Soviet Union during German occupation 1941 - 1945.

5. While browsing at one of my favorite haunts — used bookstores — I located an out-of-print book entitled *The Slaughter of the Jews in the Ukraine in 1919* (Elias Heifetz, J.U.D.) consisting of eye-witness testimonies of survivors of pogroms in the Ukraine. Consult your local library and if not available, request via inter-library loan.

Maps - Reference

The Map Room of the New York Public Library has the most extensive collection of gazetteers and maps, including pre-19th century maps, in New York City. Included are 360,000 maps and 14,000 atlases and books. The collection of 1:250,000 AMS (Army Map Service) maps for Eastern Europe (N501 Series) includes a generally complete maps set for the Soviet Union on scales greater than 250,000.

In addition to a mind-boggling collection of maps for every part of the world (for different time periods), the Library of Congress in

Washington, D.C. has a fine collection of atlases and town plans for cities and towns, including many in Russia and Poland. Some of the maps are so detailed as to show individual houses. Note the collection of early Soviet town plans at a scale of 1:250,000.

There are photo duplication facilities at both of the above libraries and copies of most maps can be purchased.

Maps - Purchase

1. The Department Mapping Agency stocks a supply of maps for Eastern Europe (Scale 1:2,000,000 and 1:500,000).

2. Genealogy Unlimited, Inc. of Buffalo Grove, Illinois, offers a comprehensive selection of historical and topographical European maps and gazetteers which include areas in the 1871-1918 German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and Eastern Europe. they also offer modern sectional maps and general road maps for many European countries.

Oral Testimonies and Nuremberg Evidence

1. In 1976, *Vad Yashem* and the Yivo Institute for Jewish Research jointly published *The Holocaust: The Nuremberg Evidence, Part One: Documents* (Jacob Robinson and Henry Sachs) which includes a digest, index and chronological tables. Copies of these documents are on file at the National Archives and Records Service in Washington, D.C.

2. The Central Archives of the Holocaust and Jewish Resistance is the repository of individual testimonies given by Holocaust survivors describing not only their own experiences, but also detailed information about their towns and concentration camps. Testimonies are filed by location, town, or concentration camp. The holdings are listed in the *Guides to the Unpublished Material of the Holocaust Period* (Yehuda Bauer).

A 27-page reference guide including addresses and ordering instructions for Russian research can be ordered from: Miriam Weiner, 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094. (Cost: \$5.00 + \$1.00 postage/handling).