

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH IN THE POLISH STATE ARCHIVES

by Professor
Jerzy Skowronek

INTRODUCTION

Jews have lived in the territories of the Polish Republic for almost 1,000 years.

Rich archival materials document the existence and creativity of many generations, although a large percentage of these materials were tragically destroyed in the horrors of the Holocaust. The surviving archival materials have been carefully protected in Poland and are well preserved and saved as an integral, extremely valuable part of our national archival holdings.

The totality of Judaica in Polish archival collections probably measures several running kilometers of files. Although the largest and most significant collections are stored at the Jewish Historical Institute (*Żydowski Instytut Historyczny*) in Warsaw, documents and materials concerning Polish Jews are found in state archives all over the country. They consist of approximately 100 units and are more or less basic parts of several hundred archival fonds.

In addition, archival materials concerning Jewish communities or their individual representatives are found in at least several hundred archival fonds and manuscript collections of such well-known academic libraries as the National Library in Warsaw, the Jagiellonian University Library and Polish Academy of Sciences in Kraków, Ossoliński Library in Wrocław, Łopaciński Library in Lublin, Działyński Library in Kórnik (near Poznań), and the Archives of the Ministries of Interior, National Defense and Foreign Affairs. Records pertaining to conversions to Christianity (Catholic or Protestant) may be found in church archives. (Addresses for these libraries and archives are listed at the end of this chapter.)

The Archives of the Central Commission on the Crimes Against the Polish Nation (*Główna Komisja do Badania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu*) include material on the Holocaust and on crimes against the population of the former Second Republic of Poland committed by the Soviet Union (and the Polish secret police after 1945), collected for specific cases (trials, investigation of Nazi war criminals and those responsible for the Kielce pogrom, etc.). The Archives of the Polish Academy of Sciences are useful for their (mostly post-humous) works of individual Jewish scientists.



Professor Jerzy Skowronek and Miriam Weiner sign contract for book publication, 1993

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DOCUMENTS DATING FROM THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Documents and manuscripts in Polish archives concerning the Jews reach back to the fourteenth century. The materials refer to various areas of life and activities of the Jewish population in Poland, primarily in the areas of economics and culture and, to a lesser degree, in politics.

With minor exceptions, documents and materials held in Polish archives originated only in the territories within the present boundaries of Poland. Documents of offices (and institutions from the regions of modern-day Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine) remain in the archives of those countries (or in Russian archives). At the end of World War II, as a result of extensive wartime transfers, some Polish archival collections remained in Germany or the Soviet Union; their repatriation still poses problems that are difficult to overcome.

Most valuable for genealogical studies are priceless archives of Jewish communities going back to the Middle Ages. According to Polish archival law, such archives are taken over when a specific Jewish community ceases to exist. Unfortunately, the Holocaust and military actions taken during World War II caused great losses in these materials. Very little remained in some archives, such as that in Białystok. In other archives, such as those in Kielce, Poznań, Rzeszów, Sandomierz and Wrocław, a large proportion of the Jewish communal archives has been preserved.

GENEALOGICAL DATA IN ARCHIVES, MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Documents and material concerning the Polish-Jewish population can be found in many other archival collections. Even though no clearly marked connection with Judaica is evident in the names or character of the collections, they often include single documents (or whole groups of documents) of great value to a historian dealing with genealogical research.

Periods of violence and the partitions of Poland also affected the fate of archival collections, since less differentiation was made between documents gathered into archives, on the one hand, and those preserved in central libraries and museums, on the other hand. In fact, all three types of institutions—archives, libraries and museums—hold fonds of family documents. In some rare cases, parts of state archive holdings (such as those of a local administration or even of various ministries) were included in a library or museum collection as a result of either donation or purchase. For this reason, collections in museums and libraries should also be investigated as a part of any thorough genealogical query.

Other genealogical documents and materials may be found in the fonds of different municipal councils and other authorities or among well-preserved notary public and mortgage documents. Documents of some public institutions



■ Sign at entrance to AGAD Archives, Warsaw

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are of significant value. Files concerning population statistics and migrations; those of educational, cultural, economic, and political institutions and activities; censuses; archives of authorities dealing with religious affiliations and national minorities; and police documents all belong to that large group.

ON-GOING ACQUISITION OF JEWISH DOCUMENTS

Almost every month brings further enrichment of documentary sources. For example, the State Archives in Szczecin, Gorzów Division, recently has acquired court files comprised of (among other registry files) birth, marriage and death certificates of the Jewish population of Barlinek and other districts for the years 1847–1874. Similar files have also been acquired by many other local state archives within the past few years. A full-scale inventory of Jewish cemeteries and graves is becoming a new, valuable source of genealogical information (see Gruber, Samuel, and Phyllis Myers, *Survey of Historic Jewish Monuments in Poland*. New York: Jewish Heritage Council, World Monuments Fund, November 1995).

With reference to the most stable, systematically gathered documents of registry, notary public and mortgage offices, one should remember that books and other materials from these offices are usually transferred to the State Archives 100 years after the documents are created (see Chapters 1 and 4). In some regions of the country, however, mortgage files from the period up to World War II have already been transferred to archives, because the proprietary issues are considered to have been closed.

STARTING PLACES FOR GENEALOGICAL INQUIRIES

In the beginning of the research process, as with historical studies in other areas, all genealogical queries to the Polish State Archives should consider the following:

- A detailed definition of the subject (or the objective) of the research.
- The acquisition of precise information on archival resources concerning the given subject.

When beginning genealogical studies concerning specific persons or families, information must be made available on where (i.e., in which place) and when (i.e., in which years or period of time) a given person or family lived or, preferably, when (exact date specifying a day or a year) and where (name of a place) they were born, married or died. If the information requested by a person or an institution conducting the genealogical research is not specific enough, the actual performance of the research may be assigned to staff archivists in the State Archives in order to get the appropriate information. Currently, this research is done on a commercial basis for a fee of \$15 per hour.

The Polish State Archives does have centralized information on the holdings of its archives throughout Poland regarding the list of fonds in every archive and expects to have the information computerized by the end of 1997. The Center of Archival Information (Centralny Ośrodek Informacji Archiwalnej) at the Chief Administrative Offices of the State Archives (Naczelna Dyrekcja Archiwów Państwowych, ul. Długa 6, 00-950 Warszawa), supervised by Dr. Andrzej Biernat, was established long ago. Its

activities are limited, however, to gathering and verifying information on the collections of documents of different archives. The data was collected in the form of a list of fonds of archive files (i.e., documents and materials created by a given office or institution, and collections of documents). In the best cases, we have detailed inventories of files referring to individual fonds.

Of course, the foregoing lists and inventories did not include the great collections of documents and manuscripts held in central libraries and museums. Only now are libraries beginning the difficult job of organizing computerized databases. In a few years, we anticipate the creation of very detailed and precise series of catalogs of the manuscripts for (among others) the Ossolineum Library in Wrocław, the libraries of the Polish Academy of Sciences, the Jagiellonian and Czartoryski Libraries in Kraków, the libraries of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Kórnik near Poznań, the Raczyński Library in Poznań, the National Library in Warsaw, and the libraries of Warsaw University and the Central School of Commerce in Warsaw. Most of these libraries have published catalogs of their manuscript collections, but they are usually summarized into single-sheet catalogs preserved in a given library and available only on site. A printed guide to state and church museums was created by Danuta Kamolowa and

1. Projekt nadbudowy piątra na budynku położonym w posesji przy ul. Krajowej Rady Narodowej No 1062 w Piotrkowie Tryb. Własność: spadkobierców Odnoposów.

2. R i e f e r o w s k i /?/, 29 lutego 1912 r.

3. Projekt na nadstrojku 3-go etażu na ścianach 2-ech et. domu na niewiżimosti suprugow Odnoposow rasz położiennoy po ul. Pasaż-Rudowskiego w g. P. etrokwie No 1062.

4. Sygn. G. r. P. etrokw 29 Wiewralja 1912 g. Architektor g. o. P. etrokowa /-/ Rieferowski.

5. Oznaczono: S i t u a c j o n n y j p l a n: P a s a ż R u d o w s k o g o, M i c h a j ł o w s k a j a, A l i e k s a n d r o w s k a j a a l i e j a.

-/G i e n i e r a l n y j p l a n: P a s a ż R u d o w s k o g o.

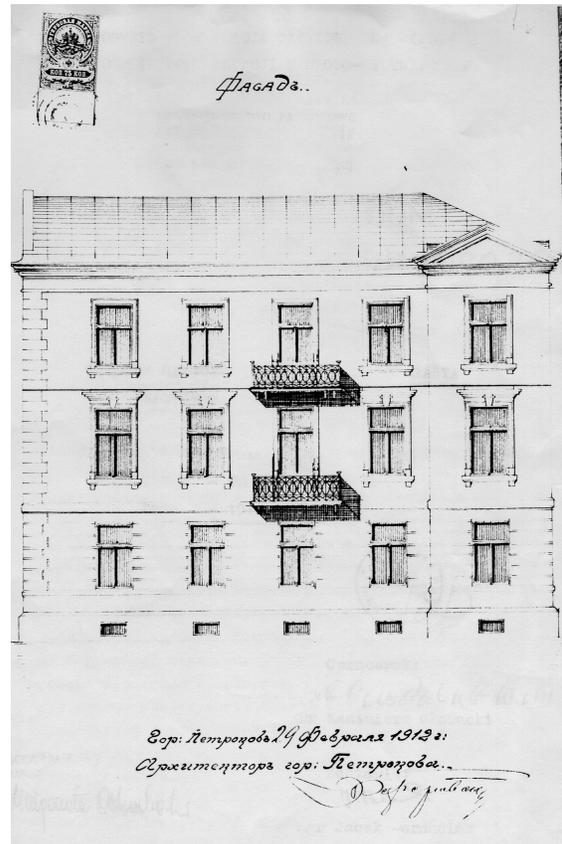
-/P l a n 3- g o e t a ż a, P l a n 1- g o i 2 g o e t a ż i e j. P o p i e r e c z n y j r a z r i e z - N a d s t r o j k a 3- g o e t a ż a i z p u s t o s t o j k a g o k i r p i c z a, P a s a ż

6.

7. Dopisy: Zatw. Kom. Budowl. No 12 Pieczęć podrzędna.

P E T R O K O W S K O J E G U B E R N S K O J E P R A W - L E N I J E

N a s t o j a s z c z y j p r o j e k t u t w i e r ż d a j e t n a o s n o w a n i j ż u r n a l n o g o p o s t a n o w l e n i j a s w o j e g o w o s t o j a w z a g o s j a 15 A p r i e l j a 1912 g. s t o m d a b y k r o w l i i l i e s t n i c y u s t r o j e n y b y l i z n i e s g o r j a j e w a g o m a t i e r j a z a. G U B E R N A T O R /-/... W i c e G u b e r n a t o r



House plans for Abram and Ester Odnopos, Piotrków Trybunalski, 1912

Krystyna Maszyńska. (See *Zbiory rękopisów w bibliotekach i muzeach w Polsce* [Collections of Manuscripts in Libraries and Museums in Poland]. Warsaw: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1988.)

Each archive has unpublished inventories on site that can be consulted by researchers. Many of the State Archives have published guides to their holdings, including the State Archives in Gdańsk, Kalisz, Kielce, Poznań, Radom, Wrocław and Łódź; the Central Archives of Historical Records; and the Archives of Contemporary Records in Warsaw. Guides to the holdings of other state archives are in progress. Some archives develop and publish inventories of their most valuable fonds, while some others have produced detailed subject directories. Note, for example, *Krochmal, Anna, Akta wyznaniowe w zasobie archiwum Państwowego w przemyślu* (Religious Records in the Holdings of the State Archives in Przemyśl) (Przemyśl: Archiwum Państwowe w Przemyślu, 1993). The Judaica holdings are noted on pages 180–190.

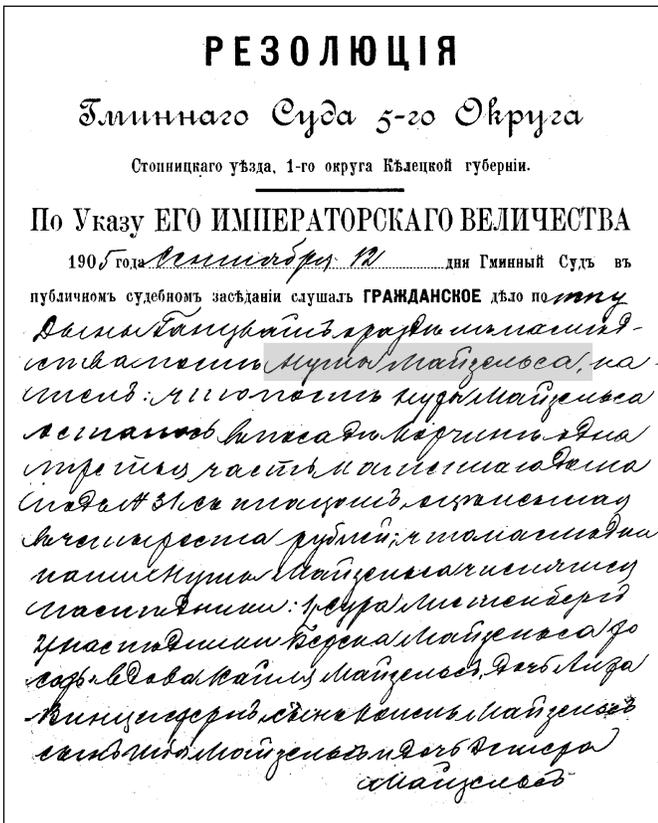
Material in the State Archives at Rzeszów has been the subject of research conducted on the history of the Polish Jewish population. The Center on Archival Information in Warsaw has also gathered information about Judaica holdings in our archives. Both are valuable in the initial determination of the range of sources for specific archival queries. Individual, specific studies on the history of the Polish-Jewish population as reflected in archival materials have been conducted by a number of archivists in different regions of our country. Among

them have been archivists in Białystok, Lublin and Suwałki. In Pułtusk, Dr. Janusz Szczepański wrote *Dzieje społeczności żydowskiej powiatów Pułtusk i Maków Mazowiecki* (The History of the Jewish Population from the Districts of Pułtusk and Maków Mazowiecki) (Warsaw: Pułtuskie Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne and Towarzystwo Miłośników Makowa Mazowieckiego, 1993).

From all of the necessarily general information above, it is obvious that the Polish State Archives are a very rich and important source of data for Jewish genealogical research. As such, we do try to ensure the best possible working conditions for each researcher, within the limitations of our imperfect technical facilities.

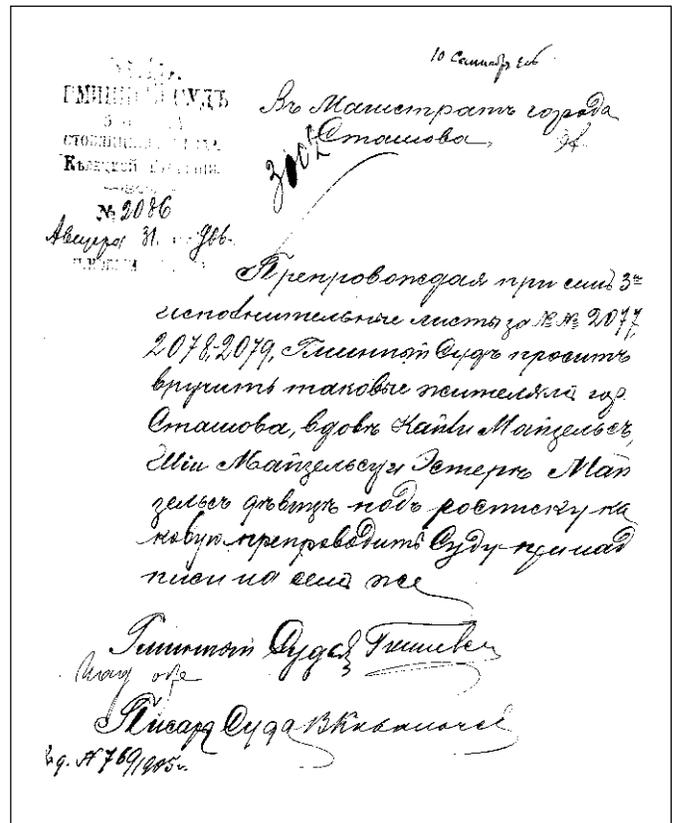
ACCESS TO POLISH STATE ARCHIVES

Access to the Polish State Archives is regulated by a law enacted on July 14, 1983, which provides that individuals seeking admission to archives for academic research may be permitted to work at the discretion of each individual archive director. For those individuals seeking admission to the archives for the purpose of researching genealogy, property ownership, citizenship changes (by the German government during World War II), permission must first be obtained from the main director in Warsaw. This permission may be requested prior to arrival in Warsaw by letter or fax or by applying in person at ul. Długa 6 in Warsaw (tel: 831-9584; fax: 831-7563).



Will of Nuta Maizels (first page), Nowy Korczyn, 1905

4A



Last page of Nuta Maizels' will, dividing 400 rubles among his children

4B

STEPS TO INITIATE A GENEALOGICAL SEARCH

To initiate a search by the Polish State Archives, one must:

- Define in the most precise possible manner the range of a search—that is, a date and place of birth, marriage or death.
- Send an advance payment equal to a one-hour fee for a qualified archivist.

The second condition results from the necessity to cover the cost of a preliminary search for specific documents concerning an individual person or family. Polish archives do not have access to specific information indicating in which fond the data on a given person can be found. Such data can be acquired only by actually going through the records manually.

In the case of completed studies with a positive result, the advance payment is applied to the total costs. For a variety of reasons, however, such work often is not successful. Sometimes gaps exist in the registry books; at other times, the date and place of birth or death provided by the person initiating the research is incorrect. In any event, as is customary with professional genealogists, time spent doing research must be paid for whether or not the search is successful.

Since prices do change from time to time, it is best to write and request a current price list, which will include charges for duplicates, photocopies, microfilms or certified copies of documents ordered by a person requesting genealogical research. The fees of the Polish State Archives are lower than those charged by the archives of some of our neighboring countries, such as Latvia, Lithuania and Russia. Charges for photocopies are deliberately high so as to minimize the number of such requests. Exposure to the strong light of photocopying has a destructive effect on archival documents and, thus, should be done as rarely as possible. Unfortunately, we do not have equipment to scan or copy microfilms, nor does our budget include money to purchase modern technical equipment. In the future, however, we will endeavor not to make photocopies of archival documents at all—a limitation that already exists in many archives in Western Europe.

FEES FOR GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

Charges for our services, calculated according to the price list, are to be paid after completion of the research—that is, when the results actually are sent to the person ordering the search. Fees are updated only every few years, despite the relatively high yearly inflation rate in Poland these days. The Chief Administrative Office of the State Archives, acting as an intermediary, guarantees that the research is reliable and has been properly evaluated. Since the fee structure changes periodically, please write and request a current fee schedule to be sent to you.

Address requests to: ARCHIWUM PAŃSTWOWE
skr. poczt. 1005, ul. Długa 6
00-950 Warszawa, Poland

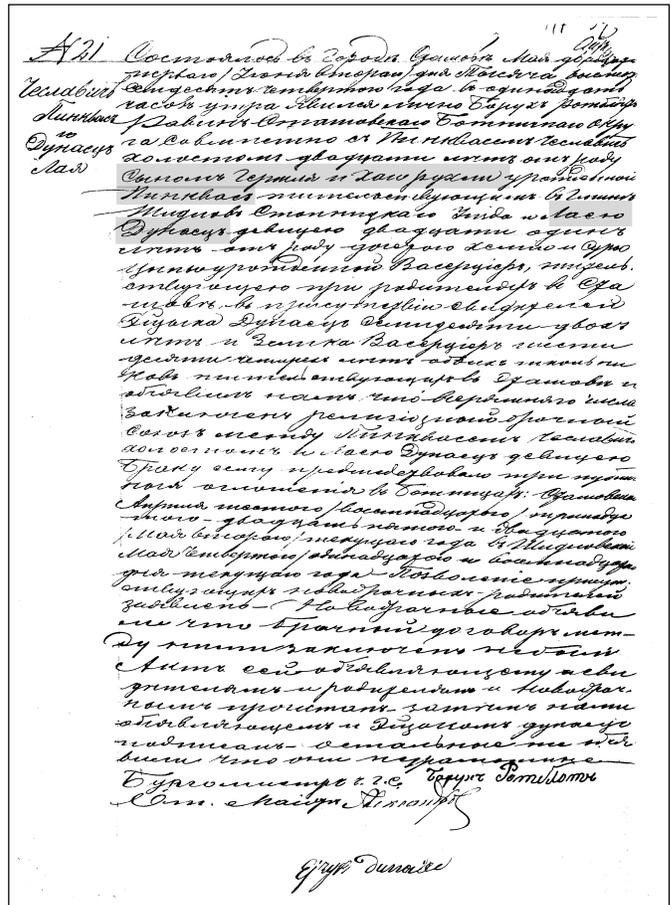
Editor's Note: An earlier version of this material appeared in Avotaynu, vol. 10, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 5–8.

Professor Jerzy Skowronek was born in Radom, Poland. He earned his Ph.D. in history at Warsaw University. In 1984, he was named an Extraordinary Professor of that university. His specialty was Polish history of the nineteenth century. In his 32 years in the History Department of Warsaw University, he held numerous organizational and administrative positions. On January 1, 1993, he was appointed the general director of the State Archives of Poland.

Professor Skowronek published 12 books and approximately 100 papers, articles and research notes. He conducted research in France, Italy, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Great Britain and the republics of the former Soviet Union. He lectured at several European universities and participated in more than 50 congresses and international seminars.

Professor Skowronek was the recipient of six awards from the president of Warsaw University, two first prizes from the Minister of Science and the award of the Scientific Secretary of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Among his many distinctions was a medal from the National Education Commission and the French Palmes Academiques for his scientific and civic activities.

Editor's Note: Professor Skowronek died in an automobile accident in France in July 1996.



Marriage, 1874, Staszów: Pinkas Czeslowicz, age 20 (son of Hersh and Chaya Ruchla) and Leah Dunajec, age 21 (daughter of Chaim and Sura Cipa Wasercyger)