

Techniques to Discover Ancestral Origins

Ilene (Kanfer) Murray
publications@stlgs.org

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First, What Country Were They From?

Historically, borders of European countries were constantly shifting.

- Determine the time period of immigration.
- Learn the history of the changing borders in your immigrant's country.
- Search all American records before you move on.

Pay attention to the family stories that have come down to you. Often there are clues to origin, even if other facts are missing.

Look for clues in your genealogy files to help locate places. Do you have:

- Biographical or autobiographical material?
- Diaries, journals, or letters?
- Photographs?
- Untranslated documents?

Mine American Records! Start with the U.S. Federal Census

Start with every census for the years your immigrant was in the U.S., beginning with the most recent and working backward.

- And don't just do your direct ancestors!
- Work the census for all siblings, children, spouses, and even close friends.
- If there are state censuses for your ancestors, use those too.

After the Census . . .

Find the **passenger manifests**, if your immigrant's arrival was in the twentieth century. Prior to that, they are not as helpful.

After September 1906, they will reveal quite a bit of information. Find manifests for every member of your family, not just your direct line.

Same for **naturalization**, keeping in mind that sometimes the earlier ones can include birthplace. Be sure you get both the **Declaration of Intention** and the **Petition for Citizenship**, especially after 1906. Again, find documents for everyone in the family.

Remember, spelling does NOT count in genealogical records!

Look at **World War I** and **World War II draft registration cards**. All men who did not enlist, regardless of citizenship, had to register. Don't stop at indexes; be sure to look at the actual records.

Other places to look:

- Newspapers
- Social Security applications (not the index)
- Vital records (birth, marriage, death)
- Cemetery records/benevolent associations (landsmenshaftn)
- Tombstones
- U.S. Passport Applications (Ancestry)

Remember, don't just do your direct line ancestor! Search for everyone!

Some Print and Online Resources

Cohen, Chester, *Shtetl Finder*, (Bowie, Maryland: Heritage Books, Inc.) 1989.

JewishGen Communities Database and Gazetteer, *JewishGen*,
<https://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/>

JewishGen landsmenshaftn: <https://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/landshaf.html>

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http://www.pgsc.org/History_of_Poland/10_The_Partitions_1764-1795.htm

Mitukiewicz, Ed. "List of Resources to Help Locate Ancestral Towns in Eastern and Central Europe." *Avotaynu*, volume 36, no. 4, Winter 2020, 12–14.

Mokotoff, Gary and Sallyann Amdur Sack. *Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust*, 2nd edition. (Bergenfield, New Jersey: Avotaynu, Inc., 2002).

"Museum of Family History Cemetery Project: Society Gates," *The Museum of Family History Cemetery Project*, <http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/cp-sg.htm>

Szczepankiewicz, Julie Roberts. "Those Infamous Border Changes: A Crash Course in Polish History," *From Shepherds and Shoemakers*, 15 January 2017,
<https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/2017/01/15/those-infamous-border-changes-a-crash-course-in-polish-history/>

"U.S., Passport Applications, 1795–1925," *Ancestry.com*.