How to Work with European Archives and Libraries © Alina Khuda, 2024

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What should I know before starting the research?
- An exact place of birth, marriage, death event
- An exact date of birth, marriage, death event
- Religion
- Profession

✓ Interview Family Members onsite or online

Talk or write to each member of your immediate family and investigate everything they know about your ancestors. Then talk or write to all of your oldest relatives, the ones who have all of the old family photos and stories. Make sure you ask the dates and places of birth, marriage and death for each person. Write each name out in full—first, middle, nickname and surname. Always include the maiden names of women.

Questions
- What was your father's first name—and is this the original family name?
- Describe what your father looked like?
- What national food did family cook?
- Who kept the family recipes?
- What was the village name in XX? Can you describe it? Was it small or large?
- What was his occupation or job in XX?
- Why did he want to leave? Who else left from the village? Which relatives left and who stayed behind?
- Which religion did they follow and what was the name of the parish church? Did they have one in their village or where was it?
- Did they ever consider to change their religion?
- Which port did they sail from (Hamburg, Bremen, Gdansk, Rotterdam, Odessa, etc) and which port did they arrive at (Halifax, Québec, St. John's, New York)? What was the name of the ship?
- Who has all the original primary source documents: Passport, Naturalization, Homestead Records, Birth and Baptismal Certificates, Marriage Certificates?
- Which relatives did the family write to in XX or overseas? Are there any old letters that still exist with names and addresses? Could you read them to me? They could be in XX or some other language. Can I take a photograph of those?

- Did you do any attempts for research in XX or overseas already? What was the result?

*TIP:create a separate folder on your personal computer where you will be able to collect and keep all relevant data. Moreover, you can create a research LOG where you will document your positive and negative findings with source citations.

Software that helps you to record, preserve and store family interviews:
- Twile;
- StoryCorps (if you publish your interview to the website – it becomes public, if you click to save it to your mobile device – it stays private;
- Shutterfly;
- Mixbook.

Research Process:
1) Find the right repository for your ancestral location;
2) Contact the repository;
3) Get local help or hire a translator/genealogist
4) Visit the repository
5) Fill in the forms, scan your ID, pay the fees
6) Visit a geographic catalogue or description of the files that archives have;
7) Order the right files to the reading room (usually 1000 pages or not more then 10 original books in one day)
8) Review the files in the reading room
   Note*: if you need to make a photocopy, in the most archives you must pay the fee, fill in the permission form and wait for the approval. Taking not licensed photographs might cause the suspension from the particular archives.

What can be found in the Archives?
- Church books 1600-1945 (depending on the Archives and country)
- State Registers of birth, marriage, death, divorce
- School lists
- Property deeds 1700-1945 (depending on the Archives and country)
- Voters Lists
- Tax lists
- Revision lists
- Census
- Passport/emigration files
- Personal files on doctors, civil servants, noble citizens of town;
- Directories (merchants, business owners);
- Cadastral maps;
- Pogrom files
- Military Files

- Participation in different organizations
- Police files

What can be found in the libraries?
- Newspapers;
- Journals;
- Lists of people in the town (household registers);
- Lists of local historians who researched the subject of interest;
- Published books on the subject of interest;
- Marriage announcements, property ads

Data protection laws – 75-100 years, depending on the country. To research documents younger then 75 years, researcher must provide a PoA that he/she is researching on the behalf of the relative and photocopies of documents, proving the relation. Those documents are usually called civil status documents (birth, marriage, death, divorce) and are kept in the registry offices, not in the archives or library.

Who can access the Archives?
- A person that provided an ID, filled in the official forms. In some Archives, for example, Russian Military Archives in Podolsk, only a Russian citizen can become a member of the reading room. As well, documents can be restricted by location, relation to the deceased.

Who can access the libraries?
- A person that provided an ID, filled in the official forms and paid the value of the reading ticket (usually a fee for the year).

What is the starting point of the ancestral research in Europe?
- Usually, we check what primary sources are available in the Archives. If we exhausted all the resources in the archives, we are starting the research in the local libraries. If the ancestral location is small, we might research in the local library first, as well in the archives of the village council.

Is it necessary to speak a foreign language while I am working in the archives or libraries?
- It is recommended, but not a mandatory. In many Archives they started to have forms in English for foreign researchers. In the libraries more likely the documentation will be in the language of the country, where you research. But in the most cases, people who work in the libraries or archives will be helpful with filling in the forms, especially to the person from other city or even country.

Conclusions:

- It is possible for a foreign citizen to work with archives and libraries in Europe after ID check, paying fees and filling in the forms either for "researcher of the reading room" of the Archives or getting a "member ticket" for the library.
- It is recommended to have a translator with you, but it is not mandatory. If we are working with the documents under the data protection- fluency in foreign language is required to obtain the documents, together with a PoA and a proof of relation.
- To work with a library we do not require a PoA or a proof of relation, as access is public for the newspapers and other resources.