

# Grandma Said She Was from Poznań: An Introduction to Polish Genealogy

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All URLs were current as of January 2025.

## **General steps for tracing a Polish immigrant back to the Old Country:**

1. Gather specific evidence from U.S. records for the target immigrant's place of origin. You also need to know the immigrant's religion; priests and religious authorities frequently served as civil registrars in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, so archival collections of vital records are typically organized that way. Examples: "Akta stanu cywilnego Parafii Rzymskokatolickiej w Mławie" (Civil status records of the Roman Catholic Parish in Mława), "Akta stanu cywilnego okręgu bożniczego w Kielcach" (Civil status records of the Jewish community in Kielce).
2. Use one or more gazetteers to confirm the parish or registry office that served that village.
3. Identify the repositories (physical and online) that hold records for this parish or registry office. The initial focus should be on vital records since these are usually the most available and easily translated.

## **Top sources for place of origin in Europe for Polish immigrants:**

- Church records (especially if created in an ethnic Polish parish)
- Naturalization records (especially petitions and declarations created after September 1906) and alien registrations
- Passenger manifests
- Military records (e.g. draft registrations)
- Obituaries and cemetery records (burial society records are especially useful for Jewish ancestors; for the New York City area, see: [jgsny.org/searchable-databases/burial-society-databases](https://jgsny.org/searchable-databases/burial-society-databases))

**Tip:** Check databases from the Polish genealogical societies (PGS) in the areas where your immigrant ancestors settled; the following societies offer indexed church records and may be able to assist with providing digital images free or for a donation to the society.

PGS of New York State (PGSNYS): [Pgsnys.online/databases-2/](https://pgsnys.online/databases-2/))

PGS of America (PGSA, based in Chicago): <https://pgsa.org/research-directory/search-databases/>

PGS of Connecticut and the Northeast (PGSCTNE): <https://pgsctne.org/databases/>

James J. Czuchra also has a website (<https://polishfamily.info/subscriber-databases>) which offers indexed church records from Polish parishes throughout the U.S. (not comprehensive).

### **Gazetteers for Polish genealogy:**

An annotated list of online gazetteers, organized according to style (phonetic, tabular, paragraph) coverage area, language, publication date) is here:

[fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/gazetteers-for-polish-genealogy](https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/gazetteers-for-polish-genealogy)

**Maps for Polish genealogy:** [fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/maps-for-polish-genealogy/](https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/maps-for-polish-genealogy/)

### **Sources for Polish vital records:**

Geneteka: [geneteka.genealodzy.pl/index.php?lang=eng](https://geneteka.genealodzy.pl/index.php?lang=eng)

- Indexed Polish vital records database with more than 58 million records, some with linked images.
- Sponsored by the Polskie Towarzystwo Genealogiczne (Polish Genealogical Society), indexing is done by volunteers and new indexes are added daily.
- Comprehensive, 3-part tutorial starts here:  
[fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/2018/04/23/a-step-by-step-guide-to-using-geneteka-part-i/](https://fromshepherdsandshoemakers.com/2018/04/23/a-step-by-step-guide-to-using-geneteka-part-i/)

In addition to Geneteka, which covers all of Poland plus other geographic areas that had a Polish presence historically, there are *many* additional, regional indexed databases of Polish vital records. There are also digital archives with browsable (unindexed) images. These are summarized here:

[Sites.google.com/view/polishgenealogygroup/internet-tools/collections-and-databases](https://sites.google.com/view/polishgenealogygroup/internet-tools/collections-and-databases)

**Tip:** It's sometimes possible to find images online for vital records indexed in Geneteka even when links are not provided! Common sources include:

- Szukaj w Archiwach ([Szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/en/strona\\_glowna](https://szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/en/strona_glowna))
- FamilySearch ([familysearch.org/search/catalog](https://familysearch.org/search/catalog))
- Skanoteka ([Skanoteka.genealodzy.pl/](https://skanoteka.genealodzy.pl/))
- GenBaza ([Metryki.genbaza.pl/](https://metryki.genbaza.pl/))
- Genealogia w Archiwach ([Genealogiawarchiwach.pl/](https://genealogiawarchiwach.pl/))
- Additional sources may exist, depending on your area of interest.

### Translation resources:

#### **Genealogical Translation Guides by Jonathan D. Shea and William F. Hoffman**

([Langline.com/books/](https://langline.com/books/)) The four-volume *In Their Words* series of genealogical translation guides in Polish, Russian, Latin, and German is available from the authors in both print and e-book versions. These books are worth their weight in gold for genealogists seeking to develop independence in researching historical records—especially vital records—for their Polish ancestors.

**Recommended machine translator:** DeepL, [Deepl.com/en/translator](https://deepl.com/en/translator)

### PolishOrigins Translation Forums:

- Polish ([Forum.polishorigins.com/viewtopic.php?t=1814](https://forum.polishorigins.com/viewtopic.php?t=1814))
- Russian ([Forum.polishorigins.com/viewtopic.php?p=62389](https://forum.polishorigins.com/viewtopic.php?p=62389))
- German ([Forum.polishorigins.com/viewtopic.php?p=62958](https://forum.polishorigins.com/viewtopic.php?p=62958))
- Latin ([Forum.polishorigins.com/viewtopic.php?t=1759](https://forum.polishorigins.com/viewtopic.php?t=1759))

### Facebook groups for research assistance and translation:

- PGSNYS ([Facebook.com/groups/pgsnys](https://Facebook.com/groups/pgsnys))
- Genealogical Translations ([Facebook.com/groups/GenealogicalTranslations](https://Facebook.com/groups/GenealogicalTranslations))
- Additional groups for Polish genealogy (national, regional, etc.) were indexed by Katherine R. Willson in January 2021 ([Socialmediagenealogy.com/genealogy-on-facebook-list/](https://Socialmediagenealogy.com/genealogy-on-facebook-list/)). Note that this list only includes groups where English is the primary language of communication. Many Polish-language groups exist, and many new groups have been created since this list was last updated. (Similarly, some groups may no longer exist.)

### Additional Tips:

Many Polish immigrants adopted new given names that were more familiar to Americans. These names sometimes bore some phonetic similarity to the original Polish names even though the names may not be etymologically related (e.g. Stanisław to Stanley). Polish names ending in -śław/-śława have no direct translation to English although Latin versions may be found.

Example: Czesław (masculine), Czesława (feminine); Stanisław/Staniśława, Bronisław/Broniśława, etc.

*Remember that there were no “rules” dictating adopted names.* While many men named Stanisław chose to use Stanley in the U.S., I’ve seen examples of men with this name who chose to go by Edward! Your mileage may vary!

Poles use diminutives routinely, and these sometimes played a role in the names that were eventually adopted.

Example: Bolesław (Polish given name) → Bolek (Polish diminutive) → Billy (English diminutive) → William (English given name)

List of Polish names with diminutives and English equivalents:

[En.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Polish\\_given\\_names](https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/Appendix:Polish_given_names)

If you know the original Polish spelling (with diacritics!) of your surname, you can often predict misspellings in U.S. records after listening to the pronunciation of a native Polish speaker. Google Translate offers this option. **Be sure to click the “sound” icon in the Polish “input” side on the left.** Examples:

[Translate.google.com/?sl=pl&tl=en&text=Szczepankiewicz&op=translate](https://translate.google.com/?sl=pl&tl=en&text=Szczepankiewicz&op=translate)

[Translate.google.com/?sl=pl&tl=en&text=%C5%81%C4%85cki&op=translate](https://translate.google.com/?sl=pl&tl=en&text=%C5%81%C4%85cki&op=translate)

Additional research links from PGSNYS: <https://pgsnys.online/research-links-2/>