

Records

Sto Lat: A Review

Diane L. Richard examines a new book for Polish genealogy research

BEING A 20TH CENTURY emigrant mutt and having several branches of my family tree that emigrated as Ruthenians or Galicians, I have dabbled in Polish research. I was greatly challenged when I first attempted this in the late 1980s. I used the Church of Latter-day Saints printed country research guides, letter writing suggestions and other resources available at the time to contact the local parish. With the passage of time and exchange of \$, I received some documents purporting to be my great grandparents and their parents. Many years later, after some on-the-ground research in Poland by a distant cousin, I learned that my information was for the wrong family (frustrating to learn since the population of the town was about 450 when my ancestors lived there).

After all of that, it was hard to re-motivate myself to revisit Polish research or to be particularly encouraging to others attempting the same research. With the publication of *Sto Lat: A Modern Guide to Polish Genealogy* by Cecile Wendt Jensen, there is now a "modern" book to help those attempting to learn more about their Polish ancestors; hopefully making future research journeys easier and more successful than mine.

"Sto Lat (Polish for one hundred years) is the title of a celebration song often sung on birthdays. This book offers a plan for gathering at least 100 years of family records ..." which encompasses the period of mass emigration in the early 1900s. Reflective of "modern" times, Ms. Jensen shares both traditional and digital research methods.

Great features of this book are that it contains helpful images, it is written in an easy-to-read style, it is not verbose and it emphasizes that you have to do your homework in US records before you can hope to find the Polish records. This makes this book particularly useful for the novice researcher for

whom these are the first family lines being researched, while also assisting an advanced researcher who may have not previously researched emigrant ancestors and/or Polish ones in particular.

The book covers many topics including — Palonia: Communi-



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ties and Societies, general US genealogy research tactics (vital records, census, directories, social security records, military records, immigration and naturalization records), Gazetteers and Maps, Record Keeping and Handwriting in Poland, Case Studies and Historical Documents, and Research — Digital and Traditional and a list of web addresses for each section.

Based on my experience, and reinforced by this book, know the geography and political boundaries of the time period you are interested in! When my Galician ancestors emigrated, they were said to be from Austria and identified as Galician or Ruthenian or

Austrian (in one five-year time period). This was because, at the time, Dežno and Wola Pietrusza, were part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; they are both now part of Poland, near the border with Ukraine. In Massachusetts, they belonged to Russian Orthodox organizations, yet had traditionally Polish surnames. So, were they Polish, Russian or Austrian?! You really cannot think in those terms — you need to think about where did they live, what was their ethnicity and religion, what sovereign government prevailed at the time, etc. This means that in my research into historic records about them, I found records in German and Polish and Latin and Russian. Given this, the chapter on "Geography, Gazetteers, and Maps" is critical to understanding the historical context of your Polish ancestors and successfully utilizing Polish (and other) records repositories.

You will also find the next chapter, "Record Keeping and Handwriting in Poland", important. It can be hard enough to read handwritten English-language documents. Now imagine examining such documents in Polish, Latin, German and Russian! And, the key is to be familiar with certain often-used words (months, days, birth, marriage, father, mother, etc.) and the format/presentation of the records kept, so that you can more easily navigate and interpret the found records. This chapter assists you with both of these.

Even if you are not researching Polish ancestors, and are looking for an easy-to-use basic genealogy research book, consider this one. The included examples of forms, document types and much more, would help any beginning researcher get a great start on tracking ones ancestors.

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