



# POLISH AT HEART RESOURCES



## 1. TRACING FAMILY : PRE - WORLD WAR 2

### Before you start

- Work backwards in time through birth and death certificates as it's easier to start from a concrete date than starting from a name you don't know much about.
- Try to have a clear idea of what you are looking for. Perhaps start with one side of the family as it's easy to get overwhelmed with details that are irrelevant to your original aims.
- Remember surnames in particular can vary in spelling as people rarely needed to use them, so test variations. Christian names can often be used in a different order. Dates of birth could have been altered for enlisting into the military. Handwritten records can upon transcription sometimes be slightly inaccurate. For Russian or German records, use [Google Translate](#).
- Use a digital or paper notebook with a separate file or pages for each surname or person. Add screenshots of links or make a note of where you found information. Add children when they are born but when they marry, start a separate file or page for each you are interested in.
- Ask your family members and keep asking as different memories come back at different times.

### Pre war Polish records

Pre-World War 2 military records 1918-1939 for soldiers in World War 1(WW1) or called up in 1939, can be obtained from the [Polish Military Records Centre in Warsaw](#). Check their archives by clicking on the "Bazy Personalne" tab and entering name (imię) and surname (nazwisko). Email them for the correct process of obtaining records or write directly by post with as much detail as you have about the person including your postal address and relationship to them. Email: [wbh.informacja@ron.mil.pl](mailto:wbh.informacja@ron.mil.pl) Address: Wojskowe Biuro Historyczne, ul. Pontonierów 2A, 00-910 Warszawa, Poland.

Records of birth, marriage and death from the areas that were part of Eastern Poland between WW1 and WW2 are held in Warsaw in the Urząd Stanu Cywilnego, ul. Jezuicka 1/3, Warszawa Srodmiescie, 00-281 Warszawa, Poland. Although this probably requires a trip to Poland, [here is the list](#) of archives they hold.

Remember pre-WW1 Poland was partitioned between Prussia (Germany), the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Russia so records will be in these languages. For southern Poland pre-1918 there are Austrian sources such as newspapers including the [Kurjer Lwowski printed in Polish](#) - simply enter the surname you are looking for into the search function.

Many military families were given land in the Eastern borderlands during the 1930s and The Polish Osadnik organisation has [published a list](#) showing names and locations of all Military and Civil settlements. Information about Police officers (in Polish) and others can be found on the [Kresy Family WWII History Group website](#). Lists of students in various Polish university Korporacje (clubs) can be found on the [Archiwum Korporacyjne](#).

### Villages and towns

Records of villages and towns under German, Austro-Hungarian or Russian rule were published in 1880 in 15 volumes and available online as the [Słownik Geograficzny](#) (in Polish) often listing the number of inhabitants, religion, local facilities and origins. [MapyWIG](#) is a huge collection of detailed town and county maps. [Click on the correct area](#) for large scale maps.

# WWII and arrival in the UK

There are so many sources that I have written a separate guide on WW2 history. Alternatively go direct to some of the key websites such as:

- [Frank Pleszak's website](#) has a good list of useful sites.
- The [WWII Kresy Family group](#) have excellent links to maps, cemeteries and deportation lists.
- The [Institute of National Remembrance](#) has a [search facility](#) for people sent to Russian camps.
- [Polish Exiles of WW2](#) has lists of soldiers' names (not complete) who were in the Polish Corps
- [Janusz's research](#) has many lists of deported families and [Krystek's list](#) is of airmen in the UK.
- A site dedicated to [Polish Resettlement Camps in the UK 1946-1969](#) lists post war camps.
- The [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#) will currently send you any files they have for German concentration or labour camps.
- There is [a Polish site](#) for people killed or repressed by the Germans where you can search by surname
- There are several Facebook groups in English you can join including: [WW2 - 2 Korpus Polski](#), [Kresy-Siberia](#), [Polish Resettlement Corps](#).

## Certificates and old documents

One site I have found really useful for **genealogical searches** is [Genealodzy.pl](#) Here you can search for family members throughout present day Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and Ukraine. The link is to the English language version, though obviously the records themselves are in Polish. It includes parish names and links to scanned entries. None of the parishes have complete records but they are being added all the time. Some records destroyed in wartime will never be recovered but there is much to discover. 19th century handwriting is incredibly difficult to decipher so enlarge or print it. German and Russian records can be translated with patience through Google Translate. For pre -1917 Russian letters of the alphabet, you can find the modern Russian equivalent [on this site](#). The Polish government have centralised all their archives into [one search engine](#) for photographs of towns and villages and old family documents.



## Old Photographs and Directories

Whilst it might be difficult to identify family members, there is a bit of detective work that can be done to at least understand what time period a photograph was taken in. Searching the studio name on this photo, I found that Władimir Wysocki was a well - known photographer who set up a studio in Kiev in 1873 and died in 1894. Many towns only had one or two photographers. For Russian names, Google Translate works wonders though you have to be careful with old Russian letters (pre - 1917) for which you can find the modern equivalent on the link above. There are also pre-war directories for many cities and areas being digitised. It takes time but you may find addresses for where your ancestors lived.

## Ancestry or My Heritage?

You can register with both of these companies for free, though you need to pay a yearly fee to access all of their records. Ancestry have a large focus on American and British records whilst My Heritage covers more of Europe. DNA testing will confirm for example, East European, Jewish, Nordic or Balkan roots rather than more specific areas but once done, you will start to receive matches of your DNA and can contact these members through the company mailboxes. Remember that these sites only compare your DNA to that of their existing base of DNA so it's an ongoing process. You can also transfer your DNA from one company to the other so you don't need to complete the test again.