

EASTERN EUROPEAN RESEARCH ONLINE

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Let's get right to the point: In researching family history in Eastern Europe, the most important site is [FamilySearch](#).

Why? FamilySearch has an extensive filming program, with fifty cameras deployed in Ukraine during the war – including some in occupied territories. As a result, the website has an expanding collection of records, a collection beyond compare. But beyond that, FamilySearch has country-by-country guides that will help you find even more sources for your research.

Beyond that, check the Community pages for each country. There you will find experts who know the available records, and how to make the best use of them. Need documents translated? All you have to do is ask.

FamilySearch is committed to placing online, for free, the world's largest collection of genealogical source material. You should, however, also look at pay sites, such as [Ancestry](#) and [MyHeritage](#), which have extensive collections of original documents as well as DNA features.

Beyond those basics, the most useful sites for you will depend on where your family is from. It is highly unlikely that a single website will provide all that you need – more likely you will search through a wide variety of sites, large and small, some in languages other than English, to gather the information that you are looking for.

The usual genealogical sources – church registers, census returns, civil registration and so on – might be hard to find, if not impossible to get. Maybe the records have been lost or intentionally destroyed. Or maybe they never existed at all. But here is a crucial point: While it is nice to know the precise details that are used to flesh out a genealogical chart, you should also try to gain a greater understanding of their lives.

That means learning about the history of ancestral regions, and how the events over the past couple of centuries caused borders to change, often more than once. Your ancestors were part of that history, and border changes might have had a dramatic impact on their lives.

The records that will help in a genealogical project will depend on the time frame involved, which country the region is in today, which country it was in a century or more ago, and the family's religion. Social standing might also have an impact.

In looking beyond the basic genealogy sites, the greatest results might come from academic sources and digitized books. Be sure to check the [Internet Archive](#), the [Hathi Trust Digital Library](#), [Google Books](#) and [JSTOR](#), using a variety of search terms to increase the likelihood that you will find what you need. (Remember to use the Google site search; for example “Kyiv site:archive.org” to increase your results.)

Location, location, location

Don't know where your family is from? Checking for every reference to a family's arrival in North America, and for the first records generated on this side of the Atlantic.

Look for clues about the place of origin in documents such as marriage records, church records, naturalization papers, obituaries, and census returns. Look for siblings and cousins, because collateral lines might provide information that would not otherwise be available. Find out about friends who came from the same area.

The basic rules for finding places are the same no matter what area you are dealing with. Virtually every city, town and village in Europe can be found on a map or in a gazetteer. It is just a matter of sorting out where the place is, and then finding the document that proves its existence.

The most common problem? Researchers do not have the correct place name. Gather as much information as possible, using every source at your disposal. Double-check. Do not rely on printed transcripts, no matter which site you are using; always check the handwritten name. And if you are looking for immigrants, check for other people from the same village.

Many place names have changed over the years, so determine the time frame of your source document. Some places have disappeared, either swallowed up by larger communities nearby, or simply gone.

Records indicate a province, an area or a village name, and it's hard to determine which is which. Five different names might all refer to one place – and every different one can be a clue to help you find the correct location. The more names you find, the easier the search will be.

One of the best sites for finding locations in Eastern Europe is Polish, Pilot.pl, which leads to Mapa.Szukacs.pl. It is based on modern mapping, but much more detail is included. One of the best features is the way you can calculate distances: Once you have identified your location of interest, move your cursor to a nearby village, then check the bottom right for the distance in kilometres. (One mile is about 1.6 kilometres.) That information can help you envision how far your ancestors might have walked for school, church, markets or romance.

You can use Pilot.pl to find locations in every country, although you might need to enter a country code if you are searching outside Poland. The codes are on the adjacent chart.

Other map websites include Google, ViaMichelin and OpenStreetMap. Use the site of your choice to find your areas of interest. Some sites allow you to create your own maps; for example, you could create a map that would show only the villages where your ancestors lived.

Country (kraj) codes for mapa.szukacz.pl		
(English)	(Polish)	
Armenia	Armenia	AM
Azerbaijan	Azerbejdżan	AZ
Belarus	Białorus	BY
Bosnia & Herzegovina	Bośnia i Hercegowina	BA
Bulgaria	Bułgaria	BG
Croatia	Chorwacja	HR
Czechia	Czechy	CZ
Georgia	Gruzja	CR
Germany	Niemcy	DE
Hungary	Węgry	HU
Kazakhstan	Kazachstan	KZ
Kosovo	Kosowo	XK
Kyrgyzstan	Kirgistan	KG
Latvia	Łotwa	LV
Lithuania	Litwa	LT
Moldova	Mołdowia	MD
Montenegro	Czarnogóra	ME
Poland	Polska	PL
Romania	Rumunia	RO
Russia	Rosja	RU
Slovakia	Słowacja	SK
Slovenia	Słowenia	SI
Tajikistan	Tadżykistan	TJ
Ukraine	Ukraina	UK

There are also comprehensive printed maps and atlases for all countries in Europe, often through government mapping departments or cartography printers.

For all areas in Eastern Europe, try the JewishGen Town Finder, which will help you deal with name changes and mistranslations.

The best maps for determining changed names in former German areas are in a series published by [Höfer Verlag](#) in Germany. For each place, these maps include the original German name as well as the name used today.

Gazetteers could have key information about administrative districts, churches, populations, proximity to railways, telegraph offices, post offices and more. In European research, the most well-known gazetteer is known as [Meyers Orts](#), short for Meyers Orts- und Verkehrslexikon des Deutschen Reiches, for German locations.

Many others are available online; a handy [summary](#) is on the website of the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University. For Poland, try the [1934 Skorowidz](#), which is found on several websites. (The link is to a Poznan library.)

Languages

Try to use the local language as much as possible, which means understanding the way each letter sounds. That can be a key to sorting out how a town name might have been spelled in an old record.

Researchers might find a variety of languages, sometimes with alphabets that bear no resemblance to ours. If you are lucky, you will only need to deal with German, Hungarian or Polish, and there are handy guides online to help you sort your way through genealogical documents.

Cyrillic lettering is easy to decipher if you set your mind to it. As shown on the chart adjacent, if you learn the sounds of twenty-three Russian letters, you will be able to find villages on most Russian maps.

Russian alphabet

А а (A)	Р р (R)
Б б (B)	С с (S)
В в (V)	Т т (T)
Г г (G)	У у (U)
Д д (D)	Ф ф (F)
Е е (E)	Х х (KH)
Ё ё (YO)	Ц ц (TS)
Ж ж (ZH)	Ч ч (CH)
З з (Z)	Ш ш (SH)
И и (I)	Щ щ (SHCH)
Й й (Y)	Ь (-)
К к (K)	ы (Y)
Л л (L)	ь (')
М м (M)	Э э (E)
Н н (N)	Ю ю (YU or IU)
О о (O)	Я я (YA or IA)
П п (P)	

Websites of note

Dozens of websites, some official and others put together by volunteers, are available for almost every country in Eastern Europe. You find them with basic web searches, but do not forget to try [Cyndi's List](#), which has been a vital genealogical tool for a quarter of a century.

Some pages from Eastern European countries have an option for English. If not, try Google Translate. Here is a sample of sites that might help:

[Arolsen Archives](#) – For information on the Nazi era

[Europeana](#) – Art, books, films and music from thousands of institutions

[FEEFHS](#): Foundation for East European Family History Studies

Belarus: [Archives of Belarus](#)

Bulgaria: [Bulgarian Archival Portal](#)

Croatia: [Hrvatski Drzavni Arhiv](#) – About Croatia’s regional archives

Czechia: [Česka archivni společnost](#) – Extensive information on Czech archives

Estonia: [Rahvusarhiiv](#) – List of links to Estonian archives

Hungary: [National Archives of Hungary](#) – includes a PDF guide to the archives

Kazakhstan: [Tsentral'nyi Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Respubliki Kazakhstan](#) – The Kazakhstan State Archive, available in Russian and Kazakh

Latvia: [Latvijas Valsts arhīvi - Laipni aicināti!](#) – Links to national and regional sources

Lithuania: [Lietuvos Archyvu Departamento svetainė](#) – With links to specific archives

Macedonia: [Државен архив на Република Македонија](#) – Macedonian State Archives

Moldova: [Moldovan Archive Guide](#) – A 205-page PDF

Poland: [Szukaj w Archiwach](#) – in English, Search the Records – is a nation-wide project that brings together documents from 32 state archives and 29 other organizations

Poland: [Archiwum Główne Akt Dawnych](#) (AGAD) – the Central Archives of Historical Records – in Warsaw has an extensive collection online

Poland: [Geneteka](#) – is a superb volunteer-based indexing project with about 42 million entries

Poland: [Polish State Archives](#) – A network of three central archives and 29 regional ones

Romania: [Arhivele Naționale ale României](#) – Links to holdings and regional information

Russia: [Find Lost Russian and Ukrainian Family](#)

Russia: [Guide to Surviving 1897 Census](#) – in Russian

Serbia: [Arhivska mreža](#) – Archival portal with links and contact information

Slovakia: [Slovak National Archives](#) – with links to regional archives

Slovenia: [Arhiv Republike Slovenije](#) – with an online database

Ukraine: [Archives of Ukraine](#) – Portal with contact information and regional links

Ukraine: [Архів:Архіви](#) – Wikisource, with plenty of scans from Ukrainian archives

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (former): [Victims of Political Terror in the USSR](#) (use Google Translate)

Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) (former): [Open List](#) (use Google Translate)

Yugoslavia (former): [Archives of Yugoslavia](#) – Based in Belgrade, Serbia