

Jewish Birth Records in the Collections of the National Archives in Częstochowa

In Europe, on 11th November 1563, the Council of Trent introduced the obligation of recording marriages and baptisms in Roman Catholic parishes. This was in response to the need to maintain a register of the faithful following the Reformation. In 1614, Pope Paul V ordered that registers be also kept of funerals according to the Roman Ritual. The Pope obliged parishes to maintain five series of registers – baptisms, confirmations, marriages, funerals and lists of parishioners. Also at the 1614 provincial synod, in order to better protect them, Archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Carlo Borromeo, ordered that these registers be copied annually and that the copies be sent to the diocesan archives.

In Poland, the first marriage registers (in Kraków's St. Mary's parish) date back to 1548-1585 and were implemented into the statutes by Tomasz Strzępiński, Bishop of Kraków. However, the oldest register was started in 1559 in Bochnia. The fundamental decision on maintaining registers in Poland was taken in 1607 at the Piotrków synod. Cardinal Bernard Maciejowski introduced the responsibility of maintaining registers of baptisms, marriages, confirmations occurring at Easter and a register of parishioners. A format for the maintaining of these registers was drawn up. A funerals register was only introduced at the 1631 Piotrków Ritual¹.

Religious certificates began having a greater legal-administrative significance, and a process began which converted them into official state office records.

By a decree of the National Assembly, on 20th September 1792, secular registry offices were established. In this manner, religious certificates were separated from registry office records. The Napoleonic Civil Code of 1804 authorised civil marriages, allowed for divorce and handed over matrimonial causes to the civil judiciary².

Following the creation of the Duchy of Warsaw, French legislation was introduced into Poland. On the strength of Article 69 of the Constitution dated 22nd July 1807, the Napoleonic Code was introduced into the Duchy of Warsaw, together with civil records offices and marriage registers. However, a decree dated 27th January 1808 (effective from 1st May 1808), by Frederick Augustus I, King of Saxony and Duke of Warsaw, introduced registry office records. On 18th March 1808, amendments to nine articles of the decree were implemented. In principle, lay clerks were to maintain the registers. However, due to a lack of an appropriately educated laity, the task was passed on to the clergy³.

The King of Saxony's next decree, dated 23rd February 1809, ordered the clergy to draft a civil marriage certificate prior to the religious rite. In order to avoid conflicts which may arise between the duties of the clergy and those of officials, the rights to conduct civil marriages and divorces were entrusted to city presidents and mayors.

¹ *Informator. Księgi metrykalne i stanu cywilnego w archiwach państwowych w Polsce (A Guide: Birth and Marriage Records in Polish State Archives)*, compiled by A. Laszuk, Warsaw 1998, p. II-X.

² J. Kurpas, *Początki ksiąg metrykalnych (The Beginnings of Registry Books)*, „Archiwa, Biblioteki i Muzea Kościelne” (“Church Archives, Libraries and Museums”), t. 2, z. 1-2, Lublin 1958, pp. 9-25.

³ *Ustawa Konstytucyjna Księstwa Warszawskiego (The Constitution of the Duchy of Warsaw)* dated 7th July 1807, [w:] *Dziennik Praw Księstwa Warszawskiego (Law Journal of the Duchy of Warsaw)*, No. 1, Art. 69, Warsaw 1808, pp. XLIV-XLV

In Częstochowa, the first certificates of Jews can be found in the registries of St. Zygmunt's parish. What is interesting is that that entries relating to births, marriages and deaths during the years 1808-1825, for both Jews and Roman Catholics, were written in the Polish language. Statistics were kept in two columns - one for counting the births of Roman Catholic children, the other for Jewish children.

The first birth certificate for a Jewish child is dated 18th January 1809. In that same year, in the Częstochowa parish of St. Zygmunt's, fourteen other birth certificates for Jewish children were drafted⁴.

Statistics:

	1826	1836	1846	1856	1866	1876	1886	1896	1906	1911
Births	67	107	135	137	131	213	313	452	689	
Marriages	13	19	27	24	29	29	80	107	158	295
Deaths	57	37	115	56	(1867) 64	71	88	217	(1905) 367	419

Source: Registry Office Records, Częstochowa Synagogue Region, Ref. 8/58/0

On 13th July 1825, in the Duchy of Warsaw, the first book of Civil Code was introduced for the Congress Kingdom of Poland (Dziennik Praw KR t. 10), and civil registry office records were merged with church registers (art. 71-142). The parish priest was to simultaneously perform the function of civil registrar. Marriage laws were proclaimed on 24th June 1836⁵.

However, on the orders of the Prince Governor, from 3rd November 1825, register records for non-Christians (Jews and Muslims) would be maintained by mayors or their officials. By a decision of the Administrative Council dated 7th September 1830, rabbis were permitted to enter the appropriate information into the civil records, but only after religious rites. Supervision of these records was left to civil clerks, but the entries had to be made in the Polish language.

Both priests and rabbis were obliged to maintain registers divided into births, marriages and deaths.

Each series of books was to be kept in duplicate, closed off every year and placed into the appropriate courtroom securities archive. One, so-call unique, copy was to remain at its place of origin, and records could continue being added to it until it was filled. The pages of both the unique and duplicate copies had to be numbered⁶.

It was ordered that a birth certificate had to be drawn up within eight days of the child coming into the world. Unfortunately, this requirement was not always followed by Jews.

For non-Christian faiths, the marriage certificate was drawn up following the marriage ceremony. The rabbi or imam, together with the married couple and witnesses, went to the registry office in order to complete the marriage certificate. Divorces and separations were overseen by Royal Public Prosecutors⁷.

Up to 1st January 1868, civil registers were kept in the Polish language. Later, by regulation of the Organising Committee of the Congress Kingdom of Poland, they were maintained in Russian.

⁴ Archiwum Państwowe w Częstochowie (State Archives in Częstochowa), Księga metrykalna parafii św. Zygmunta w Częstochowie (St. Zygmunt parish register), 1808-1809.

⁵ M. Pawiński, *Akta stanu cywilnego w Królestwie Polskim, w pierwszej połowie XIX wieku (Civil Registers in the Congress Kingdom of Poland in the first Half of the 19th Century)*, „Archeion”. t. 104, 2002, pp. 203-204.

⁶ Postanowienie Namiestnika Królestwa Polskiego (Gubernatorial Decisions of the Congress Kingdom of Poland) dated 3rd July 1826, [w:] *Dziennik Praw Królestwa Polskiego (Congress Kingdom of Poland Law Journal)* 1826, No.42, pp. 15-28; R. Sikorski, Notatka informacyjna do zespołu akt: Akta stanu cywilnego Parafii Rzymskokatolickiej w Białej Górze z lat [1808] 1826-1901, mps - Archiwum Państwowe w Częstochowie, s. 3.

⁷ R. Sikorski, Information notes to the laws: Roman Catholic parish records from Biała Góra for the years [1808] 1826-1901, mps - State Archives in Częstochowa, p. 1.

The Jewish Community Council of Częstochowa was established in the 18th century. At that time, barely a few families lived here. They worked as weavers. However, according to the first census of the Jewish population, the Jewish Community Council counted 623 people, of whom 51 families lived in the city of Częstochowa. A cemetery was established, in 1799, near Kucelin (near the Częstochowa mill). It remained open until 1907. The construction of a synagogue commenced, in 1765, on ul. Nadrzeczna. In 1872, it was extended and restored. However, in 1899, at the corner of ul. Spadek and ul. Aleksandryjska (today, the home of the Częstochowa Philharmonic), a synagogue was built which became one of the most representative and richest synagogues in Poland. The first school for Jewish children in Częstochowa started in 1806. However, Jewish education – elementary, trade and secondary – only began forming at the end of the 19th century. By that time, Jews already comprised 31.8%, namely 20,026, of the approximately 80,000 residents of the city⁸.

Statistics of the Jewish population:

Year	No.of Persons
1765	75
1808	495
1869	3,360
1900	24,111
1923	20,960
1925	21,567
1929	23,927
1930	25,532
1935	27,162
1939	28,486

Źródło: K. Bąkowski, *Social-Professional Data of the Częstochowa populations for the years 1919-1939*, "Częstochowa Politechnik Research Papers. Social-Economic Science, No. 7 Częstochowa 1971, p. 78

Genealogical research in Polish archives should be commenced by going to the website of the Main Directory of State Archives (www.archiwa.gov.pl) to find links to databases. Among the standard databases is PRADZIAD (Great-Grandfather), where parish and civil registers are listed. It contains all registers stored in all State Archives (as at the beginning of 2013). The database does not contain any lists of names of personal information about individuals.

You enter the name of the locality of the Jewish community or the civil records office into PRADZIAD. You can also enter the name of the Jewish Community Council whose territory, prior to World War II, included a particular town or district. Provinces can be selected from a pull-down menu – within 1975-1998 borders or within 1918-1939 borders, when searching for a place which lies outside present-day Poland. The next steps involve selecting the religion and type of register – births, marriages or deaths.

Seven Jewish registers were found within the State Archives in Częstochowa⁹. Their reference number is 8/58/0, and are called the registry records of the Częstochowa Synagogue Region. They contain 359 individual archives, holding 7.83 metres pf records.

⁸ Z. Jakubowski, *Częstochowscy Żydzi. Charakterystyka problematyki i perspektywy badań (Częstochowa Jews – Characteristics of Issues and Research Perspectives*, [w:] *Żydzi w dziejach Częstochowy (Jews in the History of Częstochowa)*, re. Z. Jakubowski, Częstochowa 1991, p. 8.

⁹ State Archives in Częstochowa address: 42-200 Częstochowa, ul. Rejtana 13, tel. +48 34 3621-89-31, fax: 34 363-82-31, e-mail: sekretariat@apczestochowa.pl, Website: www.apczestochowa.pl.

Location	F a i t h	Type of Records	Dates
Częstochowa	Jewish	Marriages	1896
Częstochowa	Jewish	Births	1868-1869, 1881, 1884, 1888, 1892-1895, 1898-1912
Częstochowa	Jewish	Deaths	1954
Częstochowa	Jewish	alegata	1826-1829, 1844-1856, 1859-1860, 1863-1868, 1871-1877, 1879, 1882 -1885, 1889-1901, 1904-1905
Częstochowa	Jewish	Marriages	1826-1912
Częstochowa	Jewish	Births	1826-1912
Częstochowa	Jewish	Deaths	1826-1912

Source: http://baza.archiwa.gov.pl/sezam/pradziad.php?l=pl&mode=showopis&id=2319&miejscowosc=częstochowa&wyznanie_id=19

Search instructions can be found in the *Informator (Guide). Księgi metrykalne i stanu cywilnego w archiwach państwowych w Polsce* Dr Annę Laszuk of the Central of Archival Information. Search results will reveal that the State Archives in Częstochowa contain a complete set of Jewish birth, marriage and death registers from 1826 to 1895¹⁰.

According to Polish archival regulations, registers and registry office records must be stored for one hundred years. They can then be successively handed over to indexers at the State Archives in their appropriate local area.

Apart from births, marriages and deaths, within the so-named *alegata* are attachments which often constitute the basis for researching other documents relevant to a specific matter. The term originally had a broad meaning. Presently, it is related to archival documents connected to marriages. *Alegata* are also passed on to State Archives after one hundred years from their production and are also accessible as part of the registry office records.

Amongst the *alegata* are birth (baptism) and wedding certificates and, in the case of widow(er)s, a copy of the death certificate of the deceased spouse. In past times when, for some reason, it was not possible to provide a copy of a birth certificate to the parish or synagogue circuit, a certificate of knowledge was drafted in which witnesses, knowing the people who were about to get married, attested to their year of birth (or age), their place of birth and to their marital status.

As part of the Synagogue Circuit records in Częstochowa, one can also find a collection of records of decisions by courts and by the Ministry of Internal Affairs relating to changes of first names and surnames¹¹.

Photocopies of personal registry records are bound into seven volumes. From 1826 to 1867, entries were made in the Polish language and from 1868, in Russian.

Births

Part 1 1826-1898

Part 2 1898-1907

1909 –

Deaths

Part 1 1826-1907

1909 -

Marriages

1826-1907

¹⁰ A. Laszuk *Informator. Księgi metrykalne i stanu cywilnego w archiwach państwowych w Polsce*, Warsaw 2003, p. 61.

¹¹ State Archives in Częstochowa, Collection of birth certificates from 1868. Synagogue Circuit, USC 5130.

The majority of registry books have been microfilmed. They can only be viewed by microfilm readers which are available at the State Archives in Częstochowa. Altogether, there are 112 microfilms, amongst them being:

- 19 microfilms of books combining births, marriages and deaths
- 93 microfilms of separate books of births, marriages and deaths.

The ability to research genealogy would not be complete without information available of the *Jewish Records Indexing – Poland* website.

Jewish Records Indexing – Poland (JRI) began in 1995. It is the largest portal for the searching of records, relating to Jewish surnames, on the basis of indexes maintained in Poland. The database is the first step in locating genealogical and family data in thousands of Jewish birth registers and for hundreds of Polish cities and villages. *Jewish Records Indexing - Poland* was started thanks to the internet and to the efforts of three genealogists – Stanley Diamond (Montreal, Canada), Steven A. Zedeck (Nashua, New Hampshire USA) and Michael Tobias (Glasgow, Scotland) – from three different countries. *Jewish Records Indexing* is one of many Jewish genealogy projects having as their aim improved genealogical research of the Jewish diaspora. Thanks to the devotion of its founders, volunteers and partners around the world, more than four million records now exist on the *JRI* database, covering more than five hundred cities. In Częstochowa, the co-ordinators are Daniel Kazez, David Rose and Michael Chen. Thus far, they have alphabetically indexed 2,813 surnames.

A huge number of Jewish records have survived in Poland, despite the passage of time, wars and the vagaries of history. The aim of *Jewish Records Indexing - Poland (JRI-Poland)* is to create indices for the online searching of Jewish surnames deriving from the current borders of Poland, and from the former borders, territories which, today, are now part of Lithuania, Ukraine and Belarus. *JRI-Poland's* indices derive from two fundamental source:

- 1) the indexing of microfilms produced by Family History Centres, namely by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (LDS), the Mormons, containing around 2,000 microfilms covering over 500 cities and villages.
- 2) the work of the *JRI-Poland* itself in Polish State Archives.

Even though the microfilms of the Utah State Genealogy Society contain around two million records, a few million Polish State Archive records are yet to be microfilmed. Generally speaking, those still to be microfilmed emanate from the last 25-35 years of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century. Only records over 100 years old are available on the internet, but some records from 1910 are already in the database.

Projekt JRI-Poland is currently adding more and more genealogical resources. Among them are *Księgi mieszkańców (Residential registers)*, registers of populations, the military, cemetery graves and gravestones, deaths in ghettos, birth, death and marriage notices in Polish newspapers, as well as legal and judicial notices in official magazines, such as *Monitor Polski*.

The majority of the work of microfilming is done by volunteers from Shtetl co-operatives. However, some of the more difficult entries, written in the Cyrillic alphabet (Russians registers after 1867) are covered by professionals whose work is financed by individuals or by other Jewish genealogy societies. *JRI-Poland* has been recognised by the international medical and scientific community due to the potential benefits to be derived from the database for Ashkenazi families. The database allows for the tracing of a family's medical history, especially those with an increased risk of hereditary diseases. *JRI-Poland* aims at creating a resource for statistical analysis which can point to the high frequency the appearance of medical and genetic diseases in people of Polish-Jewish origin. *JRI-Poland* has been honoured by the National Bone Marrow Donor Foundation.

Data within the database can also be useful to the scientific community, assisting in diffusing known genetic and life-threatening illnesses¹².

Another important resource for genealogical research is *Serwis Polskiego Towarzystwa Genealogicznego GENEALODZY.PL*. Surnames and even scans of registry books can be found there. The database contains a broad range of digitised material from state archives, accidents, obituary notices, the Polish Army (1918-1920), World War I deaths, through to digitised libraries¹³.

It appears that, in the current world, full access to online genealogy searches has been greatly simplified. In today's round-the-clock and virtual global village, it is actually possible to freely conduct preliminary research utilising Polish genealogical archives within those portals mentioned above..

¹² <http://jri-poland.org/>

¹³ <http://genealodzy.pl/>