

The Importance of Thorough American Research in Jewish Genealogy

Finding your Family's Town and Original Surname

Risa Daitzman Heywood • Research by Risa • researchbyrisa@gmail.com • <https://researchbyrisa.com>

FAN (Family, Friends, Associates, Neighbors) Network¹

Limiting your research to only your direct ancestral line can lead to brick walls that cannot be broken down. Expand your research to include collateral family lines and people your family interacted with every day. They may be family or *landsmen*. Ask the following questions.

- Who on the census was living near or with my family?
- Who were the witnesses on marriage and naturalization records?
- Land records? Who were the neighbors?
- Old address book? May contain extended family.

Begin your genealogy research with what you know and work backward

- Begin with 1950 census if your family had immigrated by then
 - This census also gives residence in 1935
- Find all census records for your target family going back to the time of their immigration
 - Do not forget state census records, such as New Jersey and New York
 - Only 1940 census indicates informant
 - Boarders and lodgers may also be family

Determining the original surname

Not all immigrants changed their surname, especially if it was short and easy to spell. But many immigrants did change their names and the new name might have had no relation to the original name.

Keep in mind:

- **It is a myth that names were changed at Ellis Island!!!**
- **How a name is spelled does not matter**
- Different branches of the family may have taken different surnames in the U.S.

Determining your ancestral town

Our ancestors moved around more than we might think. Just as we do today, people would often relocate from a rural area to a city to study or for better work opportunities.

Keep in mind:

- Not everyone was from the cities of Minsk or Warsaw - Do not confuse the province name with the district or town
 - Immigrants could have used their province name on one document, their district on another and their town name on a third. Similar to saying that you were from Illinois, Cook County or Chicago.
- JewishGen Town Finder tool - <https://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/Search.asp>

¹ Genealogist and author, Elizabeth Shown Mills, originally coined the “FAN Club.”

The Importance of Thorough American Research in Jewish Genealogy

Finding your Family's Town and Original Surname

Risa Daitzman Heywood • Research by Risa • researchbyrisa@gmail.com • <https://researchbyrisa.com>

- Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego [Geographical Dictionary of the Kingdom of Poland] http://dir.icm.edu.pl/pl/Slownik_geograficzny/
- Towns may have had multiple names, such as a Polish name and a Yiddish name
- Triangulate info from the FAN network to determine the correct region or town

Records for best success in finding the original name and town of origin

- Naturalization records
 - Declaration of Intention
 - Petition for Naturalization
 - Certificate of Arrival
- Vital Records – Birth, Marriage and Death
 - The names of immigrants' parents were often Americanized even if they never immigrated
- Passenger List records
 - <https://stevemorse.org> for New York passenger lists
 - Uses Beider-Morse Phonetic Matching (BMPM), an algorithm developed by Alexander Beider and Stephen P. Morse
 - Pay particular attention to:
 - Relatives in the country of origin:
 - Relatives that were joined in the U.S.:
 - Special Inquiry Interviews
 - Records of the Special Board of Inquiry, Philadelphia, 1893-1909 are available on Ancestry “Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Immigration Records, Special Boards of Inquiry, 1893-1909”
 - Prepaid Steamship Ticket Records
 - Records survive for several immigrant banks in Philadelphia that sold steamship tickets to immigrants and their families. A person in the US might purchase a ticket for a family member in Europe who wanted to immigrate. These records can help connect family members and give clues as to name changes.
 - Indices
 - JewishGen – <https://www.jewishgen.org/databases/USA/>
 - Ancestry collection – “Philadelphia Bank Immigrant Passage Records, 1890-1949”
 - Records
 - FamilySearch collections
 - Lipschutz/People's Bank – “Prepaid steamship ticket record, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), 1906-1948”
 - Rosenbaum – “Ticket purchase books, 1890-1934”
 - “Blitzstein – Ticket purchase books and index, 1899-1930”
 - Temple University Libraries website <https://digital.library.temple.edu/digital/collection/p16002coll16>

The Importance of Thorough American Research in Jewish Genealogy

Finding your Family's Town and Original Surname

Risa Daitzman Heywood • Research by Risa • researchbyrisa@gmail.com • <https://researchbyrisa.com>

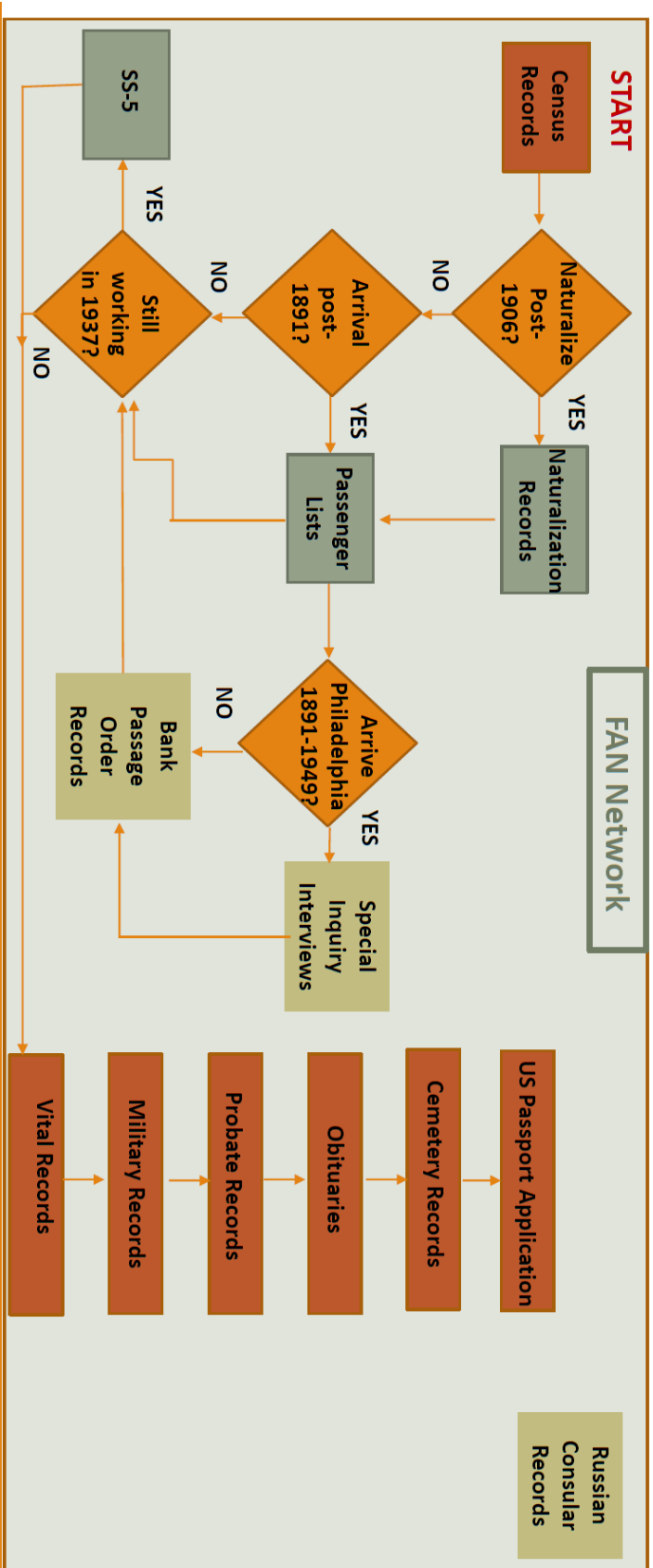
- Obituaries
 - Look for siblings you did not know about
 - Often give the married name for female relatives
- Probate records
 - Did the deceased leave anything to a family member who did not emigrate?
- SS-5
 - Original application for a social security number. Asked for birthplace and parents' names
 - Some are now on *Ancestry*
 - You can order online and it will be mailed to you
 - <https://www.ssa.gov/foia/request.html> - may change after Sept. 30
- Some military records
 - WWI Draft registration
 - WWII Draft registration
 - On *Ancestry*
 - “Pennsylvania, Veteran Compensation Application Files, WWII, 1950-1966 Pennsylvania”
 - “WWI Veterans Service and Compensation Files, 1917-1919, 1934-1948”
- Graves
 - Hebrew name
 - Father's name
 - Birthdate
 - Burial society can give clues as to area or town of origin
- Russian Consular Records
 - These are records created at Russian consulates in the United States. Prior to becoming US citizens, Russian immigrants would have to work through a Russian consulate for matters such as passports, visas, nationality certificates, inheritance information, and more.
 - Index
 - Sack, Sallyann Amdur, and Suzan Fishl Wynne. *The Russian Consular Records Index and Catalog*. (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1987).
 - Borrow this book using Interlibrary Loan through your local library.
 - Records
 - FamilySearch collection – available online from home - “Records of the Russian Consular Offices in the United States : NARA publication M1486, 1862-1928”

The Importance of Thorough American Research in Jewish Genealogy

Finding your Family's Town and Original Surname

Risa Daitzman Heywood • Research by Risa • researchbyrisa@gmail.com • <https://researchbyrisa.com>

Records for best success



These are the records in which you might find the best clues as to your ancestors' towns in Europe and/or your ancestors' original surnames. These are not the only records you should research. It is important to gather as much information about your family as you can, analyze the data, resolve conflicts and come to reasoned conclusions before even attempting to start research in Europe. Focus not only on your direct-line ancestors, but also on the FAN (Family, Friends, Associates and Neighbors) Network.