Debunking Myths

MYTH #1: The records have all been destroyed.
- Though there are some cases of lost records, most records have been well preserved.
- Tens of millions of records have been digitized by FamilySearch and others, and hundreds of millions more remain in archives in original paper form.
- It is not so much a question of whether the records exist, but where to find them.

MYTH #2: East European research is totally different than North American research.
- Many aspects of Russian research are the same as for other places.
- Same goals: Document the facts about events in their lives in order to confirm their identity, prove their relationships, and tell their story.
- Standard research methods apply; though Russian research also has special challenges.

Standard Research Method
- Start with what you know from family records & stories. Discern facts from assumptions.
- Pinpoint the place of origin and the historical record-keeping jurisdictions for that place.
- Learn where the records are kept today or where digital or other copies can be accessed.
- Access the records by whatever means are available.
- Read the records, using available language aids or the help of a specialist.
- Analyze the information and draw conclusions.

Special Challenges to Russian Research
- Complex historical geography and regional variations in record keeping
- Large gaps in what has been digitized and scarcity of indexes
- Surname and place name problems (variant spellings, name changes, common names)
- Difficult languages, fonts, and scripts

MYTH #3: I know my ancestor came from Russia, so I’m ready to search the Russian records.
- You must determine the town of origin first.
- You should also learn as much as you can about the family before “crossing the pond.”
- To accomplish this, you must search in North American sources first.
MYTH #4: I know how my ancestor’s name is spelled. (But the name was changed at Ellis Island.)
- Your ancestor’s name might have been spelled a dozen or more different ways.
- In most cases, the family altered the name to anglicize the spelling—not always consistently. (Names were not systematically changed by Ellis Island officials.)
- They may have adopted an English equivalent of their name, or used a nickname.
- Record takers and indexers do make mistakes!

Resolving name problems: (Applies to places as well as personal names.)
- In North American research, identify as many variant spellings names as possible.
- Think phonetically: How might a name have sounded to the record taker?
- Think visually: How might a handwritten name be misread by an indexer?
- Use advanced search techniques (wild cards, soundexes, leaving out terms, etc.).

MYTH #5: If my ancestor doesn’t come up in a name search, there must not be a record of him.
The Truth:
- The name may be there, but name variations and indexing errors are making the search difficult. You may need to try some creative search strategies.
- The name may be there, but because many of the records partially indexed or not at all, you will need to browse in order to find it.
- If the records aren’t online, they may be in an archive or church on paper. You can find out where and find a way to obtain them—by correspondence, travel, or hiring a researcher.

MYTH #6: I could never learn to read those Russian records.
- You can learn how to read and analyzing Russian records—without becoming fluent.
- You can study and apply these techniques:
  - Learn common record formats and basic vocabulary terms.
  - Study the entire document and neighboring documents for context.
  - Practice paleography techniques: study alphabets, practice tracing characters, compare with other words and letters, etc.
  - If you need help, consult a specialist. Members of genealogical societies can also be a big help, including many amateur researchers.

Other Tips for Finding Records
- Learn what you can about the history and geography.
- Know your ancestor’s religion.
- Learn how to navigate web sites and online catalogs and other finding aids.
Russian Online Records

Ancestry.com Resources Summary
- U.S. & Canadian sources for tracing origin
- Some Russian databases, mostly from JewishGen and FamilySearch partnerships. (Tip: Russia is listed under Asia in the Ancestry "Card Catalog")
- The Hamburg Passenger Lists
- Trees, message boards, and other community features

FamilySearch Online Resources Summary
- Virtually all FamilySearch Russian microfilms (ca. 60 million images) are available online in the image viewer via the catalog. (Including Ukraine, Belarus, etc.)
- Many of these images are also published as part of historical record collections.
- Very few of the online images have been indexed. Most have to be browsed.
- Unfortunately, no FamilySearch acquisitions have taken place in Russia or Ukraine for about 10 years.

Other Online Sources for Russian Research
- Russia Archive Portal (www.rusarchives.ru) – Portal site for all Russian archives. Includes contact info and links to individual archive sites, information about holdings, and some finding aids. No online record collections so far. All in Russian.
- Pokoleniia Permskovo Kraya (Generations of the Perm Region) (pokolenia.permkrai.ru/) 1.7 million+ records (images and index) from Orthodox parishes in the Perm region, provided by the government of the Perm Region. Site is in Russian only site. Click Поиск to start a search.
- All Russia Family Tree (http://www.vgd.ru/) – Russian language online tree, message boards, and other resources for Russian research. Includes and English description and explanation of how to search the site.
- Memorial – WWII Casualty Records (obd-memorial.ru/html/index.html) – Index and digital images of records for millions of Russian soldiers who died or went missing in World War II. (Also includes Belarus, Ukraine, and other former Soviet countries.) Site is in Russian.
- Podvig Naroda (Achievement of the People) – WWII Awards – (http://www.podvignaroda.ru/) Index and digital images for over 12 million people in the former Soviet Union who received a medal or other award during WWII. (Also includes Belarus, Ukraine, and other former Soviet countries.) Site is in Russian.
- Victims of Political Terror in the USSR ( lists.memo.ru) - Database of more than 2.6 million victims of political terror in the Soviet union
- Odessa : A German-Russian: Genealogical Library (www.odessa3.org) - A collaborative digital library with 1000s of indexes (without images) documenting
Germans who immigrated to Russia in the 1800s and their descendants worldwide. Compiled from a variety of original, print, & microfilm sources. (Also includes former Russian areas now in Ukraine.)

- **JewishGen** ([www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)) – Major web site for Jewish research. Includes hundreds of index databases extracted from East European records as well as many other research helps.

- **Archives of Belarus** ([http://archives.gov.by/eng](http://archives.gov.by/eng)) Portal page for the national and regional archives of Belarus. Includes good English-language resource listings for genealogists. No online record collections so far.

- **Estonian Historical Archives - Saaga** ([http://www.ra.ee/dgs/](http://www.ra.ee/dgs/)) – Includes digital images of church records, Jewish records, censuses (revision lists), and many other types of records of Estonia dating back to the Russian Empire period. Some pages available in English, otherwise Estonian. Records are mostly in Russian or German. Free registration is required.

- **Latvian State Historical Archive - Raduraksti** ([www.lvva-raduraksti.lv/en.html](http://www.lvva-raduraksti.lv/en.html)) - Over 5 million images (no indexes) in its Raduraksti (lineage) database, including church records, Jewish records, and censuses. Free registration is required. (Also includes some records from Belarus.) Site is also in English. Records are mostly in Russian, German, or Latvian.

- **Lithuania Virtual Electronic Heritage System - ePaveldas** ([www.epaveldas.lt/en/home](http://www.epaveldas.lt/en/home)) – Includes Roman Catholic church records from the 1500s-1900s as well as other manuscript collections, digital books, newspapers, etc. Part of site is in English, but to get to the collections, you need to switch to Lithuanian. Records may be in Russian, Polish, German, Belarusian or Lithuanian. (Also includes some records for Belarus.)

- **Poland State Archives - Szukaj w Archiwach** ([www.szukajwarchiwach.pl](http://www.szukajwarchiwach.pl)) – Over 2.3 million images so far from hundreds of parishes in 40 archives. A list of what has been published is at: [http://nac.gov.pl/files/D%27ASC1_02_2013v.3.pdf](http://nac.gov.pl/files/D%27ASC1_02_2013v.3.pdf). (Also includes records from former Polish areas now in Belarus, Lithuania, and Ukraine).


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#FHLWebinars
#FamilyHistoryLibrary
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