

AUTHOR

# Northbrook resident unlocks key to Polish, Jewish history

By **PAT KROCHMAL**  
pkrochmal@pioneerlocal.com

Northbrook resident Judith R. Frazin, an award-winning genealogist with a special knack for language, has released the newest version of a book that already is a vital tool both for Polish and Jewish history scholars and ordinary people hoping to trace their family history.

Frazin's third edition of *A Translation Guide to 19th-Century Polish-Language Civil-Registration Documents* is now available. The author, lecturer and researcher, may be better known to some as a Spanish teacher who, since 1964, has worked at various schools in the North Shore. These include Skyles Junior High School, now called now called the Martin Luther King Lab School, in the Evanston-Skokie School District 65; Locust Junior

High School, now called Wilmette Junior High; Washburne Middle School in Winnetka; and Edgewood Middle School in Highland Park.

And for the last 39 years, she has dedicated herself to the study of genealogy by serving for 10 years as president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois, one of the oldest Jewish genealogical societies in the world. She is also the program chairman of the 1964 National Seminar on Jewish Genealogy held in Evanston; and for three years as member-at-large on the board of the International Association of Jewish Genealogists.

Alan Spencer, a founding member of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois, called Frazin's guide "monumental," adding, "There is no other publication of its kind in the world. Genealogists who are tracing their

Polish roots cannot translate these documents unless they understand 'Old Polish.' The only way I know to do this is with this book."

Spencer added that the third edition refines some of the findings with input from people all over the world.

For her contribution to the field of genealogy, the Polish Genealogical Society of America bestowed upon her its Wigilia Medal, which is awarded to individuals who have made noteworthy contributions to Polish-American genealogy. Amazingly, Frazin does not read, write or speak Polish.

But she has made it far easier for those who want to do this kind of research because she has created a tool to unlock the meaning of 19th century Polish-language civil records.

Frazin focuses on documents that followed the Napoleonic Code, the sys-

tem of civil laws formalized in 1804. The narrative style was used only within "Russian" Poland, although Krakow, a city located in "Austrian" Poland is an exception to the rule. In the rest of "Austrian" Poland, a column-like format in German or Latin was usually used, and in areas of Poland under German control, various formats were used, though mostly in German.

Her guide is not a dictionary, since the scope of the actual documents is more limited. However, most of the Polish words in the guide were found in actual documents, which Frazin believes is an advantage since a researcher does not have to go through page after page to find what is desired.

"Unlike a dictionary, there is no need to know exactly how the Polish words are



Judith Frazin

# Genealogy

Continued from PAGE 12

spelled to find the translation. After you have deciphered the beginning letters of the word, it is possible to locate its translation, because the choices have been narrowed to only those words and phrases relevant to the topic," Frazin said.

And the words in the guide are alphabetized and sub-divided into 15 topics, such as age, birth, census, death, family, illness, etc.

Frazin's book also includes other important sections — suggestions on how to locate an old Polish town on a modern map; how to find 19th century documents and indices from Polish towns; sample records in script and block letters; step-by-step directions on how to extract data from the documents; a list of given names in 19th century documents; tips on finding records at Polish state archives; and information on how the Polish language works; as well as other related topics.

"I've always been interested in history, but got started after my paternal grandmother died," Frazin said. "We were gathered together after her burial and a cousin started telling a story about my grandmother. I found the story so absolutely amazing that I invited her over to get more information. From talking to her, I was led to this person and that person, and to another person.

"The story I was told was that my grandparents lived in the same town, Staszow, near Krakow, met and fell

in love. But her father was not in favor of the marriage, though nobody seemed to know why. So my grandparents ran away, intending to elope. My grandmother's father found out, grabbed a horse and wagon, went after them and brought them back. My grandmother was 'grounded,' but made some excuse to leave the house and went straight to my grandfather's home, where they were married. He then emigrated to the United States in 1903 and sent for her a few months later. I had known my grandmother all

my life and I absolutely could not see her in this situation," she added.

"I've been working on the family history of all the branches of my family for more three decades — unless my regular life got in the way. Then I would do it when I could," Frazin said. Now that Frazin is retired and the third edition of her translation guide is finished, she will have the opportunity to finish this work.

Frazin will appear at 2 p.m. Sunday at Temple Beth Israel, 3801 W. Dempster St., Skokie, when she gives

a presentation called "Flushing Treasure in 19th Century Polish Documents." Between 12:30 and 2 p.m., she also will help those with research questions. There is no charge and non-members are welcome.

She also will give a beginner's workshop, open to the public, at 1:30 p.m. Oct. 25, at the Northbrook Public Library, 1201 Cedar Lane.

The book will be available at both events, as well as by sending \$41, to Judith Frazin, P.O. Box 637, Northbrook, 60062-0637.

Comment: [pioneerlocal.com](mailto:pioneerlocal.com)