

The As Yet Unrevealed Secrets of the Skala House Number Project

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Readers may remember the exciting days when the human genome project was being deciphered through an extensive DNA sequencing effort. The scientific community and the general public were positive that the revelation of the genetic code of humans would teach us about disease susceptibility and patients' reactions to drug treatments. It turned out that deciphering the DNA sequence, which is composed of four different deoxynucleotides, was insufficient to reveal nature's secrets about humans and other living creatures.

It was with this same excitement that I started working on what was called the Skala House Number Project. My purpose was to construct a database of house numbers cited in vital records ordered through JRI-Poland and YIVO documents. I received these records from the members of the Skala Research Group (SRG) as well as from people whose roots were in Skala. In addition, some YIVO documents provided other valuable information, such as building and parcel numbers, which could all be linked to a given house.

My assumption was that by compiling the house number database, we would be able to learn new links between families which had been living in Skala for years. It turned out that the data were insufficient to reveal the complete history of Skala. As with the human genome project, however, the Skala House Number Project revealed interesting and novel genealogy links. This technique can be applied to other towns in the same way that the human genome project findings are applicable to other organisms.

An excerpt of the database is shown below. Each entry has information on a birth, a marriage, a death, or a property owner.

I was positive that once I knew who had lived in each house I would be able to learn much more about the Jewish families that had resided in Skala, some of which were being researched by my SRG colleagues. This is indeed the case: We can make connections between individuals based on the fact that they lived in the same house. But this is not al-

ways possible, and usually the database did not add new information but raised more questions:

- Why did members of some families live in many different houses?
- Could people with different family names living in the same house be related by marriage?
- Do sequential numbers belong to houses that were next to each other or are these numbers random?

To address some of these questions there was an urgent need for another piece of information, namely, cadastral maps of the 19th and 20th centuries that noted the house numbers on a map of residences and streets. This would enable unequivocal mapping of three pieces of information: the house number, the building number, and the parcel number.

A few cadastral maps of Skala have recently been obtained. In this article I use the Skala House Number Project to expand upon two ways to extract genealogical information from civil records:

- cases in which we can link the cadastral map to a piece of genealogical information

Type	Year	House # in Skala	Child First Name	Child Birth	Child Death	Father First Name	Father Last Name (original)	Father Birth	Father Death	Mother First Name	Mother Last Name (original)	Mother Birth	Mother Death
D	1842	27								Lea	WIESENTHAL	1794	1842
D	1851	27				???	WIESENTHAL	1851	1851				
M	1858	27				Srul	SCHWARZ	1836		Golde	WIESENTHAL	1837	
M	1858	27				Motio	WEIDENFELD	1840		Beila	WIESENTHAL	1843	
M	1858	27				Simon	WIESENTHAL	1841		Chane	SILBEROTH	1841	
YIVO	1867	27								Manie	WIESENTHAL		
YIVO	1867	27				Moses	VITINGLER?						
B	1877	27	Maryam	1877	1880	Motio	WEIDENFELD			Beila	WIESENTHAL		
M	1881	27				Moses	WIESENTHAL			Ester	WIESENTHAL	1821	1881
B	1872	41	Assriel	1872	1933	Schymon	WIESENTHAL			Chanzie	SILBERRAD		
YIVO	1867	43				David Szloma	HERSZER						
B	1881	43	Dawid	1884	1957	Schymon	WIESENTHAL			Chanzie	SILBERROTH		
B	1893	43	Henie	1893		Majer	GOLDHIRSCH			Lea	WIESENTHAL		
B	1886	143	Scheinzie Ruchel	1886		Meschulim	SCHRENZEL	1857	1895	Hudel	WIESENTHAL		
M	1888	143	Uscher	1865		Alter	WIESENTHAL			Babzie	WIESENTHAL		
B	1888	143	Schmiel	1888		Elio	WIESENTHAL			Ettel	WEISMAN		
B	1897	143	Moses	1897	1918	Hersch Elio	WIESENTHAL			Ettel	WEISMAN		
B	1891	143	Jankiel	1891		Hersch Elio	WIESENTHAL			Ettel	WEISMAN		
M	1896	143				Samson	GOTTESFELD	1848		Ester	WIESENTHAL	1869	
YIVO	1867	143				Froim	WIESENTHAL						
B	1897	143	Moses	1897		Hersch Elio	WIESENTHAL			Ettel	WEISMAN		
D		Death											
M		Marriage											
B		Birth											
YIVO		YIVO 1867 voters											

- cases in which we use the house number project to create new information

Links between the Skala Cadastral Map and the Skala House Number Project

The YIVO Skala land estate document from 1880 shows that the “Skala Gmina Israelischka” (Jewish community of Skala) was located on garden parcel 205 and that building parcels 134, 140, 320, and 321 were all located on this parcel.

The 1859 cadastral map shows the Skala Juden Gemeinde on garden parcel 205. In the upper part of this parcel, we



can see building parcels 320 and 321. This shows that we can make correlations between the cadastral map and the

information extracted from the YIVO 1880 land estate document. At this time, we do not know who lived in houses 320 and 321. Note also that house 321 seems to be located outside of garden parcel 205.

On the cadastral map we see that Chaim Wainberg lived on garden parcel 146 and building parcel 360. A search of JRI-Poland extracts from Skala birth records shows that in 1879, a daughter Breine was born to Eidel and Chaim Weinberg (note that on the cadastral map the last name is spelled with an a and not an e). What we now need is a copy of Breine’s full birth record which, we hope, would confirm that she indeed was born in house number 360.

We also see that two other numbers are on garden parcel 147: building parcel 273 and house number 360. Based on the 1880 Skala Land Estate document from YIVO, this house was owned by Koppel Fischbach. In the JRI-Poland extracts are

two records related to Koppel Fischbach in Skala: Shlomo Aron born in 1873 and Mirke born in 1875 to Koppel and Henie Fiszbach. Again, we would have to order the birth records of Schlomo Aron and Mirke Fiszbach to confirm the correlation between the house number data and the cadastral map.

Information Extracted from the Skala House Number Project without the Cadastral Map

Even before we had the cadastral map, the Skala House Number Project provided some researchers with valuable data for their family trees and history. In 1858 in house number 27 there lived a couple I have studied extensively: Shimon and Chanzie Wiesenthal. They were the grandparents of my grandfather Simon Wiesenthal, who passed away on 20 September 2005. He always told his family—his daughter and son-in-law (my parents) and his three grandchildren—that during the Holocaust all family members (his and my late grandmother’s), a total of 89 people, had been murdered and that no family was left.

The marriage record of Shimon and Chanzie Wiesenthal, purchased via JRI-Poland, appeared in a list of couples who were married on various dates. The record provided the names of the groom and the bride as well as a house number. In the case of this happy couple, the associated house number was 27. A careful look at the complete list of marriage records showed that two women whose last names also were Wiesenthal lived in house number 27: Beile Wiesenthal Weidenfeld and Golde Wiesenthal Schwartz.

Correspondence from the 1960’s between Simon Wiesenthal and descendants of the Weidenfeld and Schwartz families led to the construction of an extensive family tree of the descendants of my great-great-grandparents Moses and Esther Wiesenthal. The grandchildren of

Shimon, Beile, and Golde kept in touch for many years after the Shoah. These bonds led to the recent unification of three family branches that had been cut off over the course of years. My parents, my siblings Danny and Joeri, and I grew up with the dogma that “there was no one left after the war”, so it is understandable why we were so excited to learn after my grandfather’s death that we are part of a large Wiesenthal family, some of whom are directly related to us and some of whom we assume are related but have not yet determined exactly how.

Now, 102 years after the birth of the late Simon Wiesenthal at the beginning of the 20th century, the search for family members that is taking place in the 21st century complements the search for those whose nefarious activities led to the disruption and destruction of almost all Jewish families. Skala’s survivors can be proud of the collective and individual efforts that are being made to preserve the history of the Galician town of their ancestors.

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This article is published in memory of Simon Wiesenthal, for his fifth Yahrzeit (31 December 1908–20 September 2005). Racheli Kreisberg lives in Raanana, Israel and can be reached at genealogy@ibexperts.com.