

How do I find my great-grandfather's ancestral town?

Part 5 - Records from the Holocaust Era

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Very few of us are in families that were untouched by the Holocaust. Even if most of our direct ancestors came to America before WW2, it is almost certain that many were left behind ... great-grandparents who were too old to travel, distant aunts, uncles and cousins. They may or may not have escaped or survived the Nazi onslaught. Traces of most of these people exist in various archives. These paper trails can help us identify our great-grandparents' ancestral towns. Equally important, finding these records can help us memorialize our murdered ancestors and locate long lost living cousins who are their descendants. There is something that is both horrifying and satisfying about this pursuit. The first time I identified a family member who had been lost in the Holocaust a chill ran down my spine. Yet, the feeling of triumph that I had in being able to record his name for future generations was very special.

So, how do we find these people who were lost?

It helps to consider three time periods: pre-Holocaust (1920s-1930s), WW2, and post-Holocaust. The Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People (in Jerusalem) gathers pre-Holocaust documents from archives all over Europe. Their collection is impressive and growing. I'll discuss these documents next month. This month I'll focus on WW2 and post-Holocaust documents.

Israel's Yad Vashem (<http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/resources/index.asp>) is our premier resource. Their excellent on-line databases are constantly expanding. The US Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington D.C. is a major source of documentation, both online (<http://resources.ushmm.org>) and in print. The International Tracing Service at Bad Arolsen, Germany (ITS) has tens of millions of records. Until recently, these were locked away and queries to ITS went unanswered for years. That logjam now is being broken and records are becoming available, but, it still will be a while before that treasure is publicly available. You can request data from the ITS Archives by contacting the USHMM (<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/its>). The Yad Vashem and USHMM websites focus on Holocaust victims. These websites are incredible, but they can be overwhelming. An easy place to begin is on JewishGen's Holocaust Global Registry (<http://www.jewishgen.org/Registry>). The Registry focuses on survivors and their descendants. Its purpose is to connect living people. It is a collection of 158 datasets joined by a single search form. Each dataset is itself a collection of lists,

reports, and other documents. Do a search for a surname, given name, town name, or keyword and JewishGen will produce a list of databases with the number of your "hits" listed for each database. Some of those hits will have images of the original document. These are downloadable and will enrich your family history. Some documents have information on both sides of an index card. Data on the back of the card often includes names of children, but, in many cases, the database lists only data from the front. So, be sure to look at the images, front and back, carefully.

Yad Vashem's *Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names* is extraordinary. It has names of more than 3 million Holocaust victims. Besides Pages of Testimony (PoT), you'll find records from:

- Yad Vashem Shoah Survivor's Database
- The Soviet Extraordinary State Commission to Investigate German-Fascist Crimes Committed on Soviet Territory
- Testimonies, Diaries and Memoirs
- Auschwitz Death Registers
- Holocaust Documentation Center and Memorial Collection, Budapest
- Deportation Lists, and,
- many other sources like correspondence of Nazi bureaucrats, personal documents of Jews, documents of Jewish institutions, etc.

A "Basic Search" requires only surname, given name and/or town. The search engine does phonetic searches, so input names as they sound in English. Also try the "Advanced Search" option which allows Exact, Fuzzy, Soundex, and Synonym searches. The Search Form explains these terms (<http://tinyurl.com/ndjr7e>). For each name found, a table of results gives town, district, region, country, birthdate and source of data. Click on a name and a new page gives a summary of information in the PoT.

Let me illustrate what you can expect. My paternal grandmother, Reyzl Vurer, was born in Kremenets, Ukraine in 1872. Her father, Duvid was from Yampol, a nearby town. I have traced this family line back to the 1730s. All of them and their relatives lived in Yampol and surrounding shtetlach for almost 300 years. As far as I knew, only Reyzl and her sisters made it to America. A Basic surname search produced 7 hits; an Advanced Soundex search, 15 hits; an Advanced Fuzzy search, 23 hits. Four of these were from Kremenets.

Wurer Meshulam	KRZEMIENIEC	POLAND	1910	Page of Testimony
Wurer Yehoshua	KRZEMIENIEC	POLAND	1870	Page of Testimony
Wurer Yosef	KRZEMIENIEC	POLAND	1915	Page of Testimony
Wurer Hinda	KRZEMIENIEC	POLAND	1892	Page of Testimony

From other data previously obtained, I know that Yehoshua Wurer was Yehoshua Eliezer Wurer, my great grandfather's brother. Clicking on his name in the results list produced an English summary of the PoT:

"Yehoshua Wurer was born in Jampol in 1870 to Meshulam. He was a grocer and married to Tzeitl nee Halpenson. Prior to WWII he lived in Krzemieniec, Poland. During the war he was in Krzemieniec, Poland. Yehoshua perished in 1942 in Krzemieniec, Poland. This information is based on a Page of Testimony (displayed on left) submitted on 27-Oct-1956 by his daughter. [More Details]"

The "More Details" button gave the same information in tabular form. It also names Yehoshua's daughter, Bruria Wurer. Bruria registered the Hebrew PoT in Israel. She submitted the other PoTs for her family: brothers Meshulam and Yosef and sister Hinda (from Yehoshua's first wife, Chaya). All were victims of the *Aktion* on 14 Aug 1942 ... 15,000 Kremenets-area Jews murdered and dumped into a mass grave. The figure shows Yehoshua's PoT.

לְרֹשֶׁם
ירושלים רחוב בנייתורה 12

<p>1. שם המשפחה (במדינת ליטות) בשפת ארץ המוצא (במדינת ליטות) במדינת ליטות</p> <p>2. שם פרטי בשפת ארץ המוצא (במדינת ליטות) במדינת ליטות</p> <p>3. שם הלב</p> <p>4. שם האב</p> <p>5. שם האם</p> <p>6. מקום ארץ היולדת (במדינת ליטות)</p> <p>7. מקום הולדתו הקבוע (במדינת ליטות)</p> <p>8. המקצוע</p> <p>9. המדינה לפני הכיבוש הנאצי</p> <p>10. המדינות הכבושות במלחמה (במדינת ליטות)</p> <p>11. מקום המגוריים לפני הנסיבות (במדינת ליטות)</p> <p>12. מצב משפחתי</p> <p>13. שם האשה ויום שנשאה (במדינת ליטות)</p> <p>14. שנות היילדים עד גיל 18 שנשא (שם לילי זה רשמיים יודע/יודעת בלבד)</p>		<p>אנא מלא(י) עד כמה שידוע לך!</p> <p>שם המשפחה: Wurer</p> <p>שם פרטי: יחזקאל</p> <p>שם האב: משה</p> <p>שם האם: רחל</p> <p>שנת היולדת: 1870</p> <p>מקום ארץ היולדת: קרמניץ, גמלי (מדינת ליטות)</p> <p>מקום הולדתו הקבוע: קרמניץ, גמלי (מדינת ליטות)</p> <p>המדינות הכבושות במלחמה: גמלי (מדינת ליטות)</p> <p>מקום המגוריים לפני הנסיבות: קרמניץ, גמלי (מדינת ליטות)</p> <p>מצב משפחתי: נשוי</p> <p>שם האשה ויום שנשאה: תציתל הלפנסון, 1885</p> <p>שנות היילדים עד גיל 18 שנשא: ---</p>
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תוקן בקרן השואה והגבורה — **יְרוּשָׁם**
תש"ז 1953
קובץ בעתק מס' 2

הצהרה:
אני מוכרת/קונה/מקבלת/מקבל את התוכן של פורמולר זה כנכון ונכון לכל המידות המצוינות בו.
אני מצהירה/מתחייבת/מבטיחה/מבטיח את נכונות המידות והנתונים המצוינים בו.
אני מצהירה/מתחייבת/מבטיחה/מבטיח כי אינני יודעת/יודע על מידות או נתונים נוספים המצוינים בו.
אני מצהירה/מתחייבת/מבטיחה/מבטיח כי אין לי ידע על מידות או נתונים אחרים המצוינים בו.
אני מצהירה/מתחייבת/מבטיחה/מבטיח כי אין לי ידע על מידות או נתונים אחרים המצוינים בו.

27.10.56 תאריך
חתימת בוריא וורר

1. Family name, Hebrew: Wurer
English: Wurer
2. Given name: Yehoshua
3. Name of Father: Meshulam
4. Name of Mother: not given
5. Birth year: 1870
6. Place of birth, Town & District: Yampol, Kremenitz
7. Permanent residence: Kremenitz Krzemieniec
8. Occupation/Profession: Grocer
9. Citizenship before war: Polish
10. Residence before war: City of Kremenitz
11. Place of death: Kremenitz Ghetto, 1942
12. Family status, no. of children: 4
13. Name of wife, maiden name: Tseitl Halpenson
birth year: 1885
14. Names of children under 18: ---

Declaration and signature of Bruria Wurer

These PoTs are in Hebrew. Others may be in any of 20 languages. Translations to English are done by computer. This sometimes results in names spelled in unfamiliar ways. Also, the English translation sometimes doesn't include all data that is in the original. So, if you can read the language of the PoT, look it over and verify the English translation.

After my joy at finding this PoT, I wondered if Bruria was still alive, and if so, how could I locate her. Fortunately the Israel Genealogical Society [IGS] offers a service to help us locate people who submit PoTs. Send full information to: "Rose Feldman (rosef@post.tau.ac.il). She will post your info to www.isragen.org.il where the "Projects" button on the side bar has a category called "Searching for Submitters of Pages of Testimony in Israel".

My attempt to locate Bruria Vurer was too late. This is what I learned.

"Bruria Vurer, daughter of Jehoshua, b. 1912, came to Palestine in 1935. She never married and died lonely in August 1974. She was buried in Holon Cemetery, Part 6, division 1, row 24, grave N-18."

Next month, we'll review records from Eastern European archives.