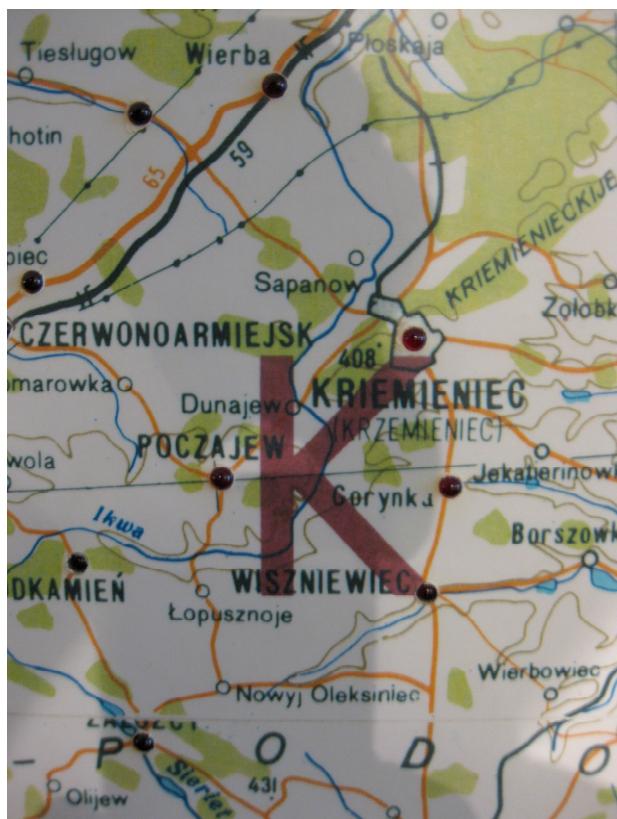


July 12, 2009

Dear Plotka and Press Family Members,

We have just returned from an extraordinary trip to Poland, thanks to the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture, and had an exciting opportunity to spend an hour with Yale Reisner, the chief genealogist at the Emanuel Ringelblum Jewish Historical Institute in Warsaw. With our family history book in hand, I was able to learn some very interesting things about the area in which our family lived, the name Plotka and more! I am eager to share this information with all of you and hope it will be a meaningful addition to our family story.

***Kolodno still exists!***



Thanks to maps found by Stuart Smolkin, narrative information assembled by Dan Nemzer and the transcript of my interview with Morris Plotka in 1976, we know that the village of Kolodno was near Kremenits and Vishnevits. Here is a section from a pre-World War II map on display at the Institute that shows Kremieniec and Wiszniewiec (the Polish spellings). Kolodno was too small at that time to appear on this particular map. The region in which Kolodno is located is called Wolhynia in English (Wotyn or Wolyn in Polish).

Yale Reisner explained that many people wrongly assume that the towns where their families came from no longer exist but in reality,

very few places were destroyed. Kolodno still exists today as a town in Ukraine, east of Poland, and has existed since the late 15<sup>th</sup> century. It was part of an estate belonging to a Polish nobleman—an important part of our story, as you will see below.

## ***There were two villages called Kolodno.***

Historical records show two villages with the name Kolodno that were in close proximity to each other. The directory listing uses the Polish letter "l" with a slash (very small, in the upper portion of the letter). The correct pronunciation of this letter is the English sound "w," so the Polish pronunciation would be Ko-wud-no.



A 1929 Polish business directory lists Kolodno-Lisowicyzna and Kolodno-Siedlisko. One had 1,307 residents in 1929 and the other had 1,012 residents. Other sources indicate that one of these villages was 9 kilometers from the nearest train station while the other was 10 kilometers. (A copy of the business directory page is included at the end of this letter. The sign above shows the spelling of Kolodno in Ukraine today.)

## ***How do we know which Kolodno was the one where our Plotka family lived?***

We can answer this question thanks to the description provided by Morris Plotka of the work he did in the years when his father and brother were already in America and he needed to help support the family in Poland. Morris described in great detail that he found work building a palace that was under construction for a "gragh," which is a variation of "graf," the German word for "count." Since they were just a few miles from the Austrian border at that time, it is not unusual that a German term would be in use. Morris described having to walk about four miles from his home to where the palace was being built.

From the 1929 directory, we can confirm that the palace location was Kolodno-Lisowicyzna and that the name of the family who owned it was Grocholski. Therefore, if Morris had to walk some distance to get there, his Kolodno must have been the other place, Kolodno-Siedlisko.

## ***Can we see the palace?***

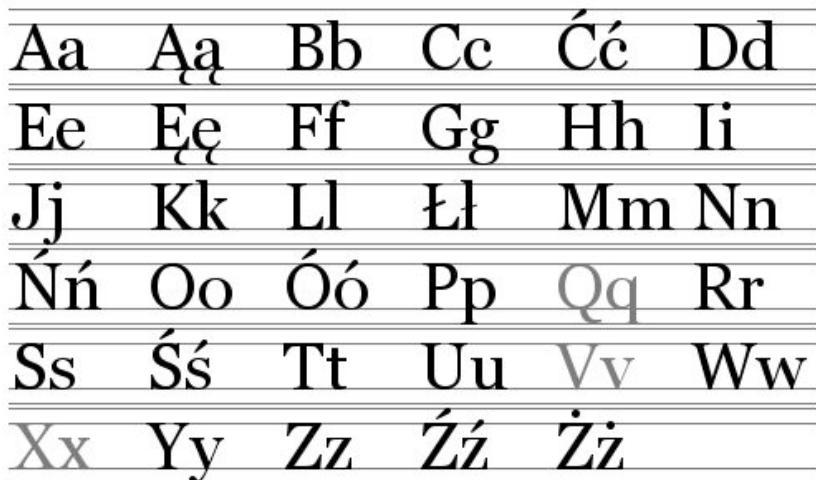


The Grocholski family descendants have a website with some history and photos that enable us to actually see the palace Morris Plotka helped build.

The website address is <http://www.grocholski.pl/> and there is some English and Polish content available. The address for the Kolodno images is <http://www.grocholski.pl/majatki/kolodno.html>.

The palace survived both wars but was demolished along with the adjoining park by the communists for being too bourgeois. In 1943, the Polish Catholics living in Kolodno were attacked by Ukrainians and 500 people died. By then, there would have been no Jews in the area.

### **What about the name Plotka?**



There are two surnames in Poland that are spelled the same, except that one has the Polish letter "l" with a slash through it as shown in the alphabet here, which changes the meaning. The Polish pronunciation is "Pwotka."

The version spelled with the l/slash means a kind of small fish that is also called "roach," which is a common fish in northern Europe. An online source for explanation of names shows the following: *Jewish (from Belarus): 1. from Belorussian plotka 'roach', one of the many ornamental names based on fish names. 2. habitational name for someone from Plotki in Belarus.*

The other version of Plotka is the "l" without the slash, and the translation is "rumor." In Poland today, based on census data, the version with the slash is much more common and 2,518 Plotkas were reported versus only 23 without the slash.

Unfortunately, we do not have documents that I am aware of that would enable us to determine if our name was originally spelled with the slash and there is no one living today who could answer the question. There do not appear to be any surviving records of the Jewish community in Kolodno.



A wonderful discovery for me, however, was that Café Plotka (without the slash) was just down the block from our hotel in Warsaw. We stayed at the Bristol Hotel, next door to the presidential palace, on Krakowskie Przedmiescie. With or without the slash, I was thrilled to visit the café, which sells ice cream, coffee and other treats.

### ***Children's Voices from Kremenets***

A rhyme for a children's game,  
from Kremenets.

A rud in a ran. Ikh shtey mikh tsu zan. Ba Rives verter mitn tukhes aran.	A wheel and a pan. I stay in my place. When Riva speaks, you put your backside in.
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A surprising moment occurred during a fascinating presentation that was part of the 19th annual Krakow Jewish Cultural Festival.

Ethnomusicologist Michael Alpert presented a program of recordings and history on the work of An-sky (Shloyme-Zanvi Rappoport), who was a native of Belarus and researched Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Aramaic and Jewish songs from the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century in eastern Europe. In the midst of the presentation, Michael Alpert showed a children's rhyming song from Kremenets and played a 1913 recording of children there singing the song. 1913 was Morris Plotka's last year in Kolodno, so we know that our family was still there at the time of this recording. I purchased the recording on a CD called "The Upward Flight" by Michael Alpert and Stuart Brotman.

## **Go to Poland!**

John and I were so fortunate to have this extraordinary opportunity and would recommend a visit to today's Poland to any of you who want to reconnect with our family heritage and the precious Jewish legacy that existed for 1,000 years before the tragedy of the Holocaust.

Jewish heritage tours of Poland are readily available (see <http://www.polandjewishheritagetours.com/>) and I would be happy to share information.



With much love to you all,  
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