

Discovering Your Eastern European Ancestors on MyHeritage

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The Challenge of Eastern European Geography

The Core Genealogical Problem

The single biggest challenge in Eastern European genealogy is finding the name of the place *at the time* an event occurred in your ancestor's life.

- Borders in this region have shifted drastically over centuries.
- A location might have been in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the Austro-Hungarian Empire (Galicia), the Russian Empire (Pale of Settlement), or the Soviet Union depending on the year.
- **Action Item:** You must take time to research the specific history of each location you identify to understand where the records might be kept today.

Defining "Eastern Europe"

Because there is no single agreed-upon definition, the list of countries varies by source.

1. The UN Statistics Division Definition (Geographical) This standard classification includes 10 countries:

- Belarus, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Russia (European portion), Slovakia, and Ukraine.

2. The UN "Eastern European Group" Definition (Political) For voting purposes, this broader list includes 23 member states. It includes the 10 countries above, plus:

- **Balkan States:** Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia.
- **Baltic States:** Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.
- **Caucasus States:** Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

Leveraging MyHeritage Technology

The Power of the Family Tree

- **Build the Tree:** There is a distinct advantage to hosting your tree on MyHeritage. You should add all known information about your family.

- **Automated Search:** MyHeritage automatically searches all entries in your tree for documents (Record Matches) and connections to other people (Smart Matches).
- **The Benefit:** You may find it unnecessary to manually search for every record; the search function may take care of finding pertinent records for you.

Using the Collection Catalog

To find specific Eastern European records, navigate to **Research > Collection Catalog**.

- **Filter by Location:** You can filter by "Europe" or specific countries like Lithuania or Hungary.
- **Specific Collections:** The catalog highlights valuable databases, such as:
 - *Lithuanian-Jewish Revision Lists from LitvakSIG (1795–1942).*
 - *Hungary Catholic Church Records (1636–1895).*
 - *Former Russian Empire, World War I Casualties.*

Processing Matches

When MyHeritage presents a match (brown for documents, green for people), you must:

1. **Review for Accuracy:** Carefully examine the dates, places, and relationships.
2. **Save to Tree:** Save correct entries to your tree. This helps the algorithm find *more* records based on the new data.
3. **Cross-Platform Data:** Matches may come from other platforms like Geni or FamilySearch trees.

DNA Strategies for Eastern Europe

Ethnicity and Genetic Groups

- MyHeritage provides an Ethnicity Estimate (e.g., Danish, English) and specific **Genetic Groups** which can help pinpoint origins.
- **Vital Tip:** For Eastern European research, it is extremely important to have an up-to-date DNA test to overcome the lack of paper records.

Filtering DNA Matches by Location

You can filter your list of DNA matches to show only those residing in specific countries. This is a powerful way to find cousins who stayed behind.

- **Example:** You can filter for "Poland" or "Germany" to find matches that are new to you and might hold the key to your European connection.
- **Analyze the Match:** Look at the "Shared DNA" percentage and the size of the largest segment (in cM) to estimate the relationship (e.g., 3rd or 4th cousin).

Advanced Tool: Shared Ancestral Places

This map tool shows ancestral events that you and a DNA match have in common.

- **Triangulation Strategy:** Ancestral places can point to common ancestors even if the location is in the US.
- **Case Study:** A match with a Polish individual (Marcin Jasiński) showed a shared ancestral place in **Illinois, USA**. This Illinois connection suggests a specific line of research to find the common ancestor.

Theory of Family Relativity™

MyHeritage generates "theories" that explain how you and a DNA match are related by analyzing combined family trees and records.

PAGE 4: Visual Tools and Continued Learning

Working with Photos

MyHeritage offers advanced tools to enhance historical photos, which can bring Eastern European ancestors to life.

- **Enhancement:** Sharpening blurry images.
- **Colorization:** Adding color to black and white photos.
- **Animation:** Using "LiveMemory" or Deep Nostalgia to animate faces.
- **Tagging:** You can tag people in photos (e.g., "Archibald Newell Hill") and view details uploaded by other users.

MyHeritage Wiki

The Wiki is a crucial resource for understanding the local context of your research.

- **Country Guides:** You can search for "Latvia" (or other countries) to find articles on history, geography, naming traditions, and ethnicity.
- **Historical Context:** The Wiki explains complex histories, such as the Livonian Order, Swedish rule, or Soviet occupation, which affect record availability.

Educational Resources

- **Knowledge Base:** Visit education.myheritage.com for articles, downloadable resources, and courses (e.g., "Intro to Genealogy").
- **YouTube Channel:** The MyHeritage channel (@myheritage) features thousands of videos, including tutorials on DNA features and documentaries.

Summary Checklist

1. **Define the Place:** Research the shifting borders (Galicia, Pale of Settlement, etc.).
2. **Build the Tree:** Upload what you know to trigger Smart Matches.
3. **Test DNA:** Use location filters to find cousins currently living in Eastern Europe.
4. **Verify:** Always review matches and confirm data before adding it to your tree.