



A Holocaust Geographic “How to” for Genealogists

by

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Genealogists searching for Holocaust information are accustomed to searching databases for family names of interest. They consult data provided by the many genealogical Special Interest Groups such as JRI Poland, and of course, they may also search libraries for locality specific sources such as Yizkor books or general histories of a community. They can utilize useful online sources such as Footnote.com, Ancestry.com, etc. However, with the exception of JewishGen’s Holocaust Database, which can be searched by town, none focus solely on Holocaust data.

What I find, however, is that few researchers are aware of three major geographic online Holocaust focused sources, which, in themselves, do not yield family names, but rather lead the researcher to extremely valuable sources of information.

I refer to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s (USHMM) Name List Catalog, Yad Vashem’s Shoah-Related Lists Database and the International Tracing Service’s (ITS) Inventory Search or *Inventar*. Each is described below.

USHMM Name List Catalog

This is the Holocaust Museum’s ongoing attempt to identify and describe all sources of information containing Holocaust related name lists, whether in book, memoir, archival file, internet resource or any other format, even if the resource is not held at the museum. To reach this Catalog, go to USHMM.org, then USHMM research, then Survivors Registry, then Research Tools, or go to <http://resources.ushmm.org/Holocaust-Names/List-Catalog/search>. This will bring you to Holocaust Name Lists Catalog Search. You can search by country, or even by name of author of relevant books, though I would not recommend either since such searches would be too broad. If you enter the name of a town and click the box just below the search field you will get information regardless of how the locality was filed, e.g. Kovno, *Kaunas*, *Kovne* or *Kauen*. To take another example, if you type in Warsaw you will get 322 entries, *Warschau* 30 entries, and *Warszawa* 585 entries, but if you check the box you will be able to identify all the sources of information, regardless of spelling.

What you will NOT find are names themselves. What you will find is a notation by each entry such as NL = Name List, which indicates that the names in that source are included in the museum’s Name Search catalog, CC = (Claims Conference) which means that the source was identified by Claims Conference restitution claims researchers or YV which means that the list is held at Yad Vashem. The extent of the information on each source varies considerably, but, while all identify sources of information on names, none includes the name lists themselves. The Survivors Registry at the USHMM welcomes additions/corrections/comments to the information contained in this source.

While not directly relevant, it may be useful to clarify Name Search at the USHMM. This is similar but also very different from the Hall of Names at Yad Vashem. It includes both vic-

tims and survivors and Jews and non-Jews. While there are currently 5,967,092 name entries taken from 378 different sources in this database, this figure is misleading, since an individual's name may appear in several documents and there is no attempt to link the listings. Therefore, there is no way of knowing how many persons are identified in this database. Finally, and unfortunately, unlike the Hall of Names, the USHMM public version of Name Search, which you can access at <http://www.ushmm.org/namesearch>, contains only a tenth of the number of names contained in the version used at the museum to answer inquiries. This is true since, in many cases, the providers/institutions from which the bulk of the information came insist that it not be made available on the web.

Yad Vashem

To reach Yad Vashem's Shoah-Related Lists Database simply go to YadVashem.org and near the bottom of the page you will see Shoah-Related Lists Database. Alternatively, you can go direct there by going to <http://www.yadvashem.org/lwp/workplace/listoflists>. Somewhat different from the USHMM list, the material is organized by the current name of the locality, but you will get there even if you type in the old name e.g. Breslau will take you to Wroclaw. Whether you type in *Nürnberg*, Nuremberg or *Nuernberg* you will end up with the same information. As is the case with the USHMM finding aid, one can search by name of camp, e.g. Flossenbürg. There is provision to comment on/add to existing listings.

As is the case with USHMM, Yad Vashem includes references both to its own holdings and those of other institutions. Yad Vashem offers a unique advantage in that in many cases when one clicks a document reference the actual text appears. As is the case for the USHMM, the fact that a document/source has been identified does not mean that any or all of the names in the relevant documents have been added to the Hall of Names/Name Search. There is also a significant difference in that the Hall of Names is intended to identify Jews who perished in the Holocaust, while Name Search lists all those who perished or survived, regardless of religion. The Yad Vashem approach has the disadvantage that if a list/individual listing does not indicate religion, the names are not included.

International Tracing Service (ITS) *Inventar*

ITS holdings of documents are undoubtedly larger than those of the USHMM or Yad Vashem and the number of unique persons identified in the documents held there are far more numerous. The ITS estimates that it has roughly 50 million name citations, identifying about 17 million persons, Jews and non-Jews, survivors and victims. For reasons which would take too long to describe here, one can generalize that the collection is rich in Western European and postwar documents, but weak in Eastern European holdings.

The *Inventar* (inventory or finding aid) is much less useful than those of either the USHMM or Yad Vashem. The purpose of the ITS throughout its history was never to collect the history of the Holocaust but rather to identify the fate of all those who had perished or survived. As a result, the ITS until recently did not have a historian or archivist, but rather simply collected documents in order to extract the names which appeared in them. Accordingly, the description of the documents was primitive. In addition to its home location in Bad Arolsen, Germany, copies of this massive collection are being shared with the USHMM, Yad Vashem, the Institute of National Memory in Warsaw, the National Archives of Belgium and the *Centre de Documentation et de Recherche sur la Resistance* in Luxembourg. The transfer process is gradual and may not be completed until 2011.

The *Inventar* is available on the web either through the ITS website or through the USHMM at <http://resources.ushmm.org/itsinventory/home.php>. Originally in German, thanks to the efforts of the USHMM, it is now also available in English. A fundamental difference exists when entering location searches in the *Inventar*. When one types in the name of a locality (not possible on a country level) all *Inventar* descriptions where that place name has been entered appear. There is no linkage between different spellings of a town's name so that, for example, there are 237 "hits" for Warsaw and 429 for *Warschau*, and 75 "hits" for Cologne and 104 for *Köln* and no way to meld these different sources. Moreover, if a place name appears anywhere in the description i.e. if a book about Warsaw was published in or was acquired from Berlin, it is indexed under both place names. The information in each citation is limited, usually consisting of a very brief description, the number of pages in the document and number of names which are included. There is, of course, also a reference citation but no visible link to the document itself. The names which were extracted from these sources have been collected in various databases such as the Central Names Index but, at this time, neither the documents nor the names are available on the web. (Speaking from personal experience I must stress that these databases are extremely complex, or even convoluted, and locating an individual name often requires expert help.) If one finds any citation which might be of interest, one would have either personally to visit one of the institutions where the material is held or write to these institutions and request copies, while not knowing whether they are of real interest.

Unfortunately, there has been considerable confusion as to the "rules" governing access to ITS material. Under the international agreement which "opened" ITS and made copies available to a single institution in each member country, there are neither restrictions on third party access to ITS documents at these institutions nor limitations on how a researcher may utilize copies of such material he/she has acquired.

Finally, the above is not an attempt to rank the three sources. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages and a patient researcher should examine all three. It is my hope that the above information will prove useful for all researchers.

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