

Research Trip: Poland and Berlin, August 2003  
By: Emily C. Rose

You would think that “the great expert on German-Jewish genealogical research” would follow her own advice. She wrote the guidelines in her book and she spoke about them at many genealogical conferences. Well, I can safely say that I followed none of my own advice, but it turned out fine. One of the reasons I am writing this story in detail is to show that even a poorly planned research trip can be successful.

I do have a few excuses which I will list just to make me feel better. Early in 2003, I knew that in July I would be in Chicago for a wedding and in Washington DC to speak at the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Jewish Genealogical Conference. We planned to just spend the rest of the summer traveling in Canada. I planned to input much of my data on the Karpen furniture business in my computer before those trips.

Then in May I was invited to speak in Germany to give two different programs. I barely had time to prepare for the talks and for other research projects I wanted to do in the German archives. We thought of just relaxing in Switzerland or Austria after my talks, but just in case we reserved a rental car with the necessary papers to travel in Poland and Czech Republic.

The U.S., the Karpen data (from 1872 onwards) not was inputted at that time; I just had a chance to update my timeline, address lists, etc. so I knew what I would be looking for in the Chicago Historical Society and the Library of Congress research facilities.

In 2000 after my German book tour, my husband Stan and I had driven to Wongrowitz (Wagrowiec) where we saw once again (we had been there in 1999 too) the house and carpentry factory of my great great grandparents, Moritz and Johanna Karpen. In the city archive, I received a photocopy of the house purchase (1862) and sale record (1873). I had also spent a few days doing research in the Posen archives and received the photocopies a few months later. In the rush to prepare for the trip to Europe, I realized I had never had those documents from year 2000 translated. So in May my non-Jewish German translators translated the documents, and I input the data. From that list, I made a short list of documents I would like to see again. I made photocopies of those

documents to bring with me so I would have the exact citation and know what the document looked like.

I also read Udi Cain's *From Prussia with Love to Berlin and Eretz Yisrael*. Jerusalem: self-published, 2002 and noted some information about other places that would be interesting to find for Wongrowitz. I wrote Udi an e-mail, and he very kindly sent me a list of archives and contacts.

It sounds like I was organized, but what I failed to do was check with the archives to find the vacation schedules; check for other archives to do research; make a list of contacts to ask questions; and to check all the secondary sources for book citations or archive citations. This is where the wonderful and resourceful contacts via JewishGen.org and the IAJGS were lifesavers. I thank you all.

To get to Germany in time for my talks I had to leave the IAJGS conference on Thursday afternoon. That meant that we had to do our wash on Wednesday night. I only mention this because I did not have a chance to meet Edward Luft in person, but he was generous enough to talk to me on the phone for more than an hour. I was on the sidewalk outside a restaurant taking notes on a hotel notepad while we were doing our wash at the other Marriott hotel across the street! Edward gave me very useful information and contacts and then followed it up with an e-mail. But since I had two talks, media interviews, and German research ahead of me, I just put it all in my computer and forgot about it.

I usually traveled to Europe in June or September so while I was aware of everyone being on vacation, it never really impacted my research schedule. When I finished my talks at the beginning of August, I all of sudden realized that I needed to make some plans for the next part of our trip. I knew I wanted to go to the Posen archive, and not much else.

That was when I checked the Prussia BOF (Birds of a Feather) group list for the email addresses. As often happens in Europe, I had Internet access and e-mail problems. So I had to fax all the e-mails to Stan's secretary in Florida. I made blocks and indicated who should get what block. Inevitably, some people got very strange e-mails from me. That was also why I made another common mistake: I did not fully explain what type of research I was doing and what I had already done in previous years. Despite this, I did

receive very quick responses with useful information regarding the archives and some Karpen information (that I had neglected to bring with me).

I then called Steffi Jersch-Wenzel in Berlin (the historian and archive expert/author who had helped me in 2000). She said, "I think the archives are closed in Poland in August." Well, that was a conversation-stopper! That had not occurred to me. With the information in the emails, I had the telephone numbers of the archives. Since I do not speak Polish, I always started my call with, "Do you speak English?" I was passed on to someone who would help me. It turned out that the archive in Posen (Poznan) was open, but the National Archives in Bromberg (ul. Dworcowa 65, Bydgoszcz; 052-3229676), and Breslau (Wroclaw; 071-3288901; fax 071 3288045) were closed for all of August. Well, that was pure luck, but I was very relieved. Our trip to Poland would proceed.

While I was in Chicago, I found the book in German that I had been looking for about the Jewish community in Chicago in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. [*Von der Gemeinde zur "Community": Jüdische Einwanderer in Chicago 1840-1900 [From "Gemeinde" to Community: Jewish Immigrants in Chicago 1840-1900]* (Osnabrück: Universitätsverlag Rasch/Göttingen: V&R Unipress 2002)]. I saw that the author, Tobias Brinkmann, lived in Leipzig. I called him so we went to Leipzig and met him at the hotel. Although we were discussing the early German-Jewish in Chicago, Tobias brought two books about the Jews in Posen (listed below). We photocopied the archive citations and bibliography, and these served as very important research aides in the Prussian archives.

On Sunday, we drove over the border at Frankfurt Oder. I knew that I wanted to go Wongrowitz to take photos and get a feel for the distances, the town, and the scenery for my book. For that reason, I had not contacted the museum curator who had found the Karpen house/factory after our initial visit there in 1992. I just wanted to wander around on my own. I figured we would go there on our way out of Poland like we had done on earlier trips. When we arrived in Posen and found the Ibis Hotel by lunchtime, we decided to drive the 45 minutes to Wongrowitz and spend the late afternoon there.

Then I realized that I had not even brought my map of Wongrowitz with the address of the Karpen house/factory. I did not have that in any data file in my computer. Just reaching for any help, I checked my family database file on my great great grandfather, and thank goodness, I had written the address in the notes.

On the way to Wongrowitz, we drove through Rogasen (Rogosno) a town that Udi Cain wrote about in detail in his book. At the museum, I bought a little booklet and some postcards, but found no information about the Jewish community.

In Wongrowitz, we had no trouble locating the Karpen house/factory. Since 2000, half the house was painted another color so probably it had a new owner. I compared it with the 1938 photo that was the initial information that started my search in 1992. It looked exactly the same. In the 1938 photo and still today, the factory stands behind the house. I took photos and calculated distances to the train station and the town center. I spoke into my tape recorder to note details and my feelings. We drove around the town taking photos of the centuries-old cloister, the town hall, and buildings from the early 1900s.

In 2000 the museum curator and newspaper editor had shown us a series of articles about the former Jewish community. One article featured my ancestors and the material I had sent them. Another article had photos of several headstone fragments. Knowing that the cemetery had been destroyed in the Holocaust, I asked (with the help of a translator they provided for my visit) where they found those headstones. With great flourish, we walked to the large lake located in the center of the town. The Jewish cemetery had been located on a hill overlooking the lake. They told us that the headstones had been thrown in the lake or used to shore up the banks. On that day they could not find any of the headstones in the lake. I politely suggested that if they ever do find them again, they should preserve them in the museum. Of course I never expected that to happen so that made what happened in 2003 to be even more surprising.

We drove to the grassy area overlooking the lake. I walked up the hill to take some photos while Stan stayed in the car. Then he called to me that I should look at some stones on the side of the hill. I could not believe it. Someone had set up a few of the headstones from the former Jewish cemetery on the side of the hill, and the smaller fragments were placed in artistic units in the ground. On substantial granite memorial placed at "entrance" to the memorial cemetery, the inscription in Hebrew, Polish, and German read: "To the Polish Jews who had settled in this city for hundreds of years." The separate footstone read: "At this place is found the Jewish Cemetery existing until the World War whose remains of the tombstones were taken out of the Lake Struga

Golaniecka by the participation in the Summer of Year 2001 of an International Young Peoples Group from Germany, Hungary, and Poland. November 2001.”

I was very emotional. This was the cemetery of my ancestors.

I knew of the IAJGS cemetery project from my dealings with Joyce Field regarding the Württemberg cemeteries, so I knew I should document this memorial cemetery. Until darkness fell, I photographed (6 films of 24 that luckily I had with me); made an audiotape description; and wrote a list of all the headstones. I do not read Hebrew, so on many I could only appreciate the carvings. A common symbol was the tree with the broken branch or the flower with the broken stem. I have sent the photographs to the JewishGen Cemetery project.

The next day we arrived at the Posen State Archive (Archiwum Panstwowe w Poznaniu; ul. 23 Lutego 41/43; 52-46-01 do 03, fax 51-73-10 at 8:00AM. The same archive administrator was there who had been so helpful in 2000. I asked for the inventory books I had used before and quickly filled out the order forms by copying the citations from the photocopies I had brought with me. In an hour, a few files arrived. I thought I was really cruising along.

Then the archivist informed me that all the files with a certain “signature” had been moved to another archive located about an hour away. While I was initially aggravated, I soon realized that this was a gift because the archivist then told me that most of the Wongrowitz documents were packed away due to the archive storage renovation. Luckily, the most important document, a tax, house, profession table that I wanted to really study was now at the other archive. Until 2:30, I worked in the archive going over the documents that were available.

Note: An excellent finding-aid for Jewish documents in the Polish archives is now available:

Jersch-Wenzel, Stefi, ed. Quellen zur Geschichte der Juden in polnischen Archiven. Band. 1. Munich: Saur, 2003. ISBN: 3598116497.

It is available via Inter-Library Loan at your public library. When you photocopy the pages you need, be sure to check the previous page/s to also copy the page with the name

of larger topic and then the side of the page with the name of the broader topic. You will need all this information to order the documents at the archives.

In every archive and library I would ask for old maps of Wongrowitz to see where the Jewish houses and synagogue were located before 1870. I would also ask about a Wongrowitz newspaper from that time period. The Karpens advertised extensively and creatively in America; I wanted to find an advertisement in Wongrowitz.

Although I would have liked to speak with some historians, this was not possible. Edward Luft had given me the name of an historian at the Adam Mickiewicza University (Uniwersytet im A. Mickiewicza; ul F. Ratajczaka 38/40; 60-967 Poznan; 829 38 00, fax: 829 38 24; [library@amu.edu.pl](mailto:library@amu.edu.pl); <http://lib.amu.edu.pl> . Although he was very busy with his project on the historiography of the Posen Jews, we did have a nice conversation. He said that perhaps I could get access to the university library (closed for August) as a researcher; in the end this was not necessary. Also, Udi Cain had shared the name of his researcher, but unfortunately he was in Strasbourg doing his post-doctoral degree. It was too bad as he was born in Wongrowitz of Catholic parents.

On Tuesday we drove to the State Archive in Gniezno, east of Poznan. When I called the archive (from the street as my German cell phone, purported to work in Poland, did not), the archivist spoke a little English and said that the archive was near the train station. Maybe it was, but we never found the station. Instead we stopped people on the street who were nice enough to draw complex maps. We arrived at the address, but it was an employment office. I asked in the office and an employee pointed outside the window.

I must admit that this was one archive that I would have been nervous as a woman to go to by myself. It was down an alley and then down another alley. There a building stood alone by other buildings that looked like garages. On the side of the building was a sign "Archiwum." This was a state archive?! Up the stairs was a single room where one archivist helped researchers. He quickly found the document I wanted to really study. In 2000, I had photocopied the information about Karpen, but this time I marked the pages with all the Jewish names. In 2000 I had copied several lists of the Jewish community members so I recognized the names. Again, zipping along. At the Posen archive, one

has to mark and then leave the documents for photocopying. At Gnieszno, the archivist said I could do the photocopies. When he was showing me how it worked, he fed a sheet of the European large paper through the machine a second time and – you guessed it- a major paper jam.

I was dismayed at the thought of wasting a day to come back to photocopy, but the archivist said he had called the repairman. I kept on studying the document and a half an hour later, there he was. He must not have had much business as, after he competently fixed and tested the machine, he sat and chatted with the archivist for another hour. That did not bother me at all as it gave me assurance that if I had another problem with the machine, help would be at hand.

Again I asked for old maps and a Wongrowitz newspaper. In two seconds, the archivist produced a volume of the *Wongrowitzer Kreisblatt* from the 1880s. While I was photocopying, Stan perused the issues and found a few advertisements from Jewish establishments.

Since the Karpen family had emigrated in 1872, I just wanted to get a sense of the 1880 newspaper. When I open to the second issue, I found a list. I always check any list—it is now a compulsive obsession! I looked quickly and my eye saw “Solomon Karpen” in column 2 at the bottom. Solomon Karpen was my great grandfather who was 12 when he emigrated. Stan could not believe that I picked up the paper (that he had been looking at for an hour) and in 2 seconds I found a Karpen. Later, after studying the page, it was a draft call to serve in the military.

I really wanted to find earlier editions of the newspaper, but I did not have any success in Posen or later in Berlin. The art museum director said she might be able to find a few editions in the museum.

On Wednesday, I went back to the Posen Archive. I went through the documents and made my list for photocopying. The archivist told me that the old maps were also inaccessible in storage. The system was the same as in 2000. They would make the photocopies and send me a bill. I would then send the money to their account and they would send the copies.

Per my request (and as I do in every archive), they made a photocopy of my photocopy list. In these and other archives, you write your name and date in each group of files. It is interesting to see who has looked at the documents.

The libraries in Posen are now part of an online database for Polish libraries (<http://galileo.pfsl.poznan.pl>). I went to the state library (Biblioteka P.T.P.N. ul. Mielzynskiego and Biblioteka Racynskich, ul. Marcin 65) where they investigated the *Wongrowitz Kreisblatt* holdings in Posen. Only the A. Mickiewicza University library had any issues, and those were only from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

After the archive closed, we drove to Berlin. For my earlier research about the Württemberg Jews, I had done research in the State Archives in Stuttgart and other places in south Germany, but I was not familiar with the Jewish Archives at the New Synagogue (Stiftung Neue Synagoge in Berlin- Centrum Judaicum; Oranienburger Str. 28/30, 10117 Berlin; Tel -030 88028 425/426; Fax- 030 880 28 405; [archiv@cjudaicum.de](mailto:archiv@cjudaicum.de) )

The e-mails from JewishGen people gave me that information. I found the hours on their website. On Thursday, I arrived there about 10:00AM. At the security desk, they said I needed an appointment. Oh no! I hadn't called ahead. Anyway, I rang the bell. There the administrator was very nice. I explained that I did not know an appointment was necessary; I showed her the archive web page I had printed out with the hours. In German, it said an appointment was needed, but of course I could not read that. She did say that they had asked for that sentence to be in English too. Anyway, that day one of the two microfilm machines was available. I had not seen the volume that was the inventory of that archive before, but it was easy to locate the microfilms for Wongrowitz using this finding aid:

Jersch-Wenzel, Stefi and Reinhard Rürup, eds., *Stiftung Neue Synagoge - Berlin Centrum Judaicum*. Band 6. Teil I. Munich: Saur, 2001. ISBN: 945681305.

I spent the next 5 hours looking at the microfilms of the documents of the Jewish Community in Wongrowitz. The inventory book gave a summary of the documents on each microfilm. There were notices; lists of votes for community leaders; a 1744 list of accounts; hundreds of receipts; a will. Just a few documents were in Hebrew (or in Judeo-German?). There were diagrams of the synagogue, and on and on. It was just incredible to find that quantity of documents. I printed out about 141 pages.

On Friday, I went to the Prussian State Archive, Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Archivstr. 12-14, 14195 Berlin (Tel. 49 30 8390100) located in Dahlem Dorf just outside of Berlin. When I met with an archivist who had helped me for

years in Germany, I told him I was planning to go to that archive and asked him if he had any contacts there. He gave me the name of the archive director.

When I got to the archive, I realized that this was a big-time serious archive. The state archives I had worked in seemed like village archives in comparison. On my letterhead stationery I had written a short note to the director explaining my research and sending greetings from the other archivist. I asked the person at the desk to pass the letter to the director. It was good that I did this because the archive restrictions and situation would have made it difficult to do the research in the time I had planned.

I based my requests on these finding aids and bibliographies:

Jersch-Wenzel, Stefi and Reinhard Rürup, eds. *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Band 2, Teil I. Ältere Zentralbehörden bis 1808*. Munich: Saur, 1996. ISBN: 3598224427

Jersch-Wenzel, Stefi and Reinhard Rürup, eds. *Geheimes Staatsarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz. Band 2, Teil II. Sonderverwaltungen der Übergangszeit 1806-1815*. Munich: Saur, 2000. ISBN: 3598224451

Sophia Kemlein, *Die Posener Juden 1815-1848: Eitwicklungsprozesse einer polnischen Judenheit unter preußischer Herrschaft*. Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz, 1997.

Cornelia Çsterich. "*Des rauhen Winters ungeachtet...*": *Die Auswanderung Posener Juden nach Amerika im 19. Jahrhundert*. Hamburg: Dölling und Galitz 1997.

The rule in the Prussian State Archive was only 5 requests per day. Even putting in 5 under Stan's name too, I had many more than that. Then I happened to ask where the materials listed as being located at the State Archive in Merseburg were located. It turned out that they were now in their archive but in a different building and it would take until Wednesday to get them.

I tried to explain my time constraints (our flight from Frankfurt was the following Saturday), but rules are rules. In early afternoon, a man walked into the research room, pointed at me, and indicated that we would talk outside. Guaranteed everyone noticed as it was the director of the archive. We had a short chat. I showed him my books; showed him how I thanked the various archives in my acknowledgments; and told him the names of the other archivists who had helped me. Then I explained that all I needed from him

was to ask the archive staff to allow me to get all the documents I needed as soon as possible. He obviously gave the order, and I was able to get everything I needed.

We had decided to spend the weekend as tourists, but that was not to be. On Saturday morning I called the State Library (Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, [www.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de](http://www.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de)) and found that it was open all day. It was hot that week in Berlin so every desk in the air conditioned library was occupied. Everyone was studying there and not using the library so that made getting help from the librarians easier.

With a week library card, you can order 20 books each. The online database (<http://stabikat.de>) is excellent. They have instructions in English and a special help desk. But nothing is ever that easy. The library has two branches. Haus Potsdamer Straße 33; 10785 Berlin (49 30 266-2839; Fax: 49 30 266 3010; [www.sbb.spk-berlin.de](http://www.sbb.spk-berlin.de)) has the more modern books and periodicals. The older materials and maps were located at another site, Haus Unter den Linden 8, 10117 Berlin (Tel: 49 30 266-1309; Fax: 49 30 266-1392; [www.sbb.spk-berlin.de](http://www.sbb.spk-berlin.de)). Not to lose time, we ordered materials to be delivered at each library. Some materials came that same day; some would come the next day. In the database, some were listed as “maybe available.” One would have to search on microfiche to check if it was lost or not there at all. Just checking on a few, led to the conclusion that “maybe” really meant “not,” but I could be wrong about that.

The State Libraries have a photocopy shop- so to speak- where you are assigned a machine and pay an attendant. Lines can be long, especially in the late afternoon.

I had a list of books and periodicals that were more difficult to find. The catalogue librarians and regular librarians were helpful. I had read in Heppner, Aron and J. Herzberg. *Aus Vergangenheit und Gegenwart der Juden und der jüdischen Gemeinden in den Posener Landen* 2 Vols. Breslau: Self-published, 1929 [Online: Online at: <http://www.wbc.poznan.pl/dlibra> (Digital Library of Wielkopolska)]

that Solomon Karpen had been an honorary member of the Wongrowitz Club. I could not find any source to learn about such a club. Edward Luft had suggested to look at the *Heimat Bätter*, but I had not written down the exact name of the newsletter. A librarian took a special interest and in the database found the *Posener Heimatblätter: Organ des Verbandes Posener Heimatvereine*. I had no idea if this would help, but of course I ordered the issues, most of which were on microfilm.

Another library at Humboldt University ([www.ub.hu-Berlin.de](http://www.ub.hu-Berlin.de)) located near the Unter der Linden branch of the State Library might perhaps have some obscure sources, but the materials were in storage.

Sunday really was a day off – the zoo and the Jewish Museum.

On Monday, I went to the library of the Free University (Freie Universität Berlin, Garystr. 39, 14195 Berlin, Dahlem Dorf; (49-30-838-54273; Fax: 838 53738; [www.ub.fu-berlin.de](http://www.ub.fu-berlin.de)) where a few journals and books (including Heppner-Herzberg) were available. Not all their materials (pre- 1990) are in their online database (<http://opac.fu-berlin.de>). Also the JFK library at the American Studies Institute (Landstrasse 7-9, Dahlem Dorf; 30-838 52109) have microfilms of several German (*Illinois Staatszeitung*, Chicago) and German-Jewish newspapers (*Der Zeitgeist*, Milwaukee) published in America. In the *Illinois Staatszeitung* I found the obituary of my great great grandfather Moritz Karpen who died in 1886.

I then returned to the Prussian State Archive. In other archives, the documents are brought to you or to a desk in the reading room. Nothing appeared, and I kept on seeing people going into another room behind an unmarked door. Finally I realized that perhaps I should go in there too, and found an organized delivery system. I marked many documents for photocopying. There were many lists of Jews—asking for protection, tax lists.

Tuesday I went to the Unter den Linden State Library. The *Posener Heimatblätter* was on microfilm. They had only one microfilm machine that also printed so I was glad I was there very early as it took me 4 hours to read the issues from 1926 to 1932. That early in the day, however, you need exact change for the copies, but of course the change machine did not give the correct coins. Once again, Stan to the rescue as he rushed out to the bank.

The *Heimatblätter* is a wonderful source. The monthly newsletter was written by Jews who had emigrated from the Jewish communities in Posen and West Prussia to Berlin, Munich, and Hamburg and belonged to home-town Jewish social clubs. It included news of home; births, deaths, marriages; articles about the history of the various towns (with photos of cemeteries and synagogues); various articles by Heppner-Herzberg; news of the various town clubs in Berlin and other cities. I printed more than 100 pages. The newsletter was renamed *Des Verbandes Jüdischer Heimatvereine* in the

late 1930s.

In the *Heimatblätter* I found the explanation for Heppner's comment about Solomon Karpen as an honorary member of the Wongrowitz Club. As late as 1932, he donated to the Wongrowitz Help Fund. The fund was even named for him. None of his grandchildren had known this. The newsletter often mentioned his great success in America.

Still on my quest for old maps, I had requested several maps from the online catalogue. I must have done the requests incorrectly as all came back unfulfilled. At Unter den Linden (<http://karten.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de>), I went to the map room where they were very helpful. They had a few old maps of Wongrowitz, but none with the house numbers that correlated with the table I found at the Posen State archive. I made photocopies of what they had.

Wednesday, I returned to the Prussian Archive. All the materials were there and I went pile by pile. That day it really was hot and stifling in the archive. I knew I would need time to make my microfilming/photocopying list so I marked everything, leaving decision-making for a cooler morning.

On Thursday, I was again at the Prussian Archive. Anything fragile or before a certain date needs to be microfilmed. Since I found that it was time-consuming and costly to get good print-outs in the US, I also ordered paper print-outs of the documents. I got a bill for the copying in six weeks and then they sent the materials.

The Prussian Archive Library had some books that I could not find at the State Library or the Free University (where the photocopying was very inexpensive). One of those was Isidor Hirschberg, *Verzeichniss sämmtlicher naturalisirten Israeliten im Grossherzogthum Posen*. Bromberg: I. Hirschberg, 1836. Edward Luft had so carefully used Bromberg's book for his book, *Naturalized Jews of the Grand Duchy of Posen in 1834 and 1835*. Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987, Revised edition Avotaynu, 2004.

Thursday afternoon, we finished up at the State Libraries. From 1932-1938, the *Heimatblätter* were in hard copy. Solomon Karpen died in October 1936. The November 1936 issue was torn out so I don't know if his death was acknowledged. Perhaps I will find it on microfilm.

From August 3 to August 14, 2003, I immersed myself in the story of the Karpen family in Wongrowitz. This research will make the story of the Karpens more

meaningful.

Fast-forward to 2006. In 2005 I reviewed my family genealogy documents again. This time I saw a line in the Family Bible that I had missed before—the countless times I had looked at it. My great great grandfather was born in Pudewitz in 1823, not Wongrowitz! He or his father had moved to Wongrowitz. Since I had seen other Karpens listed in Pudewitz, I had photocopied mentions of Pudewitz in secondary sources, but I had not checked the archives. So summer 2006, I will be back in the archives.