

FAMILY ESTATE ARCHIVES

Iwona Dakiniewicz, Łódź, Poland
Abridged from an article in Rodziny, the journal of the PGSA

Family estate archives, in Polish *archiwa rodzinno-majątkowe*, are a treasury of knowledge on regional history—one probably underappreciated by genealogists. Their documentation covers the most varied aspects of public and private life.

In the State Archives, there are a total of 826 family collections from the period of the 14th through the mid-20th centuries. The size of individual collections depends on the length of a given family's rule and the size of the lands it possessed. The collection of the Radziwiłłs is among the largest; a collection of documents measuring almost half a kilometer in total length.

As regards the contents of family estate archives, they are similar and systematized according to similar models. The usual categories of documentation cover financial administration, estate law, bookkeeping, cadastres, taxes, detailed estate inventories, inspection reports, mass mobilizations, wartime destruction, fires, hospitals, military affairs, educational activity, community and social activity, correspondence, and cartography.

The question is, what connection is there between records of magnate families and the common serfs, peasants with little land, who made up the nucleus of the great emigration to America? Collections of this type, however, conceal within their holdings interesting information on ordinary peasants as well the sort of information we do not find in registers of birth, marriage or death. For instance, they may tell us about the social status and property of our ancestors, their feudal labor duties, and their tax burdens. One can trace their fortunes with persistent and detailed research because there are chances of uncovering more details from our ancestors' daily lives, to come to know their relation with their surroundings, their trouble and joys.

In every case, the life of a peasant was determined for long centuries by the will of the landowners. The peasant's most onerous obligation to his lord was performing his *pańszczyzna* or labor service (the term comes from the word *pański*, "of the lord"). Every peasant, depending on the size and location of the land he worked, had to perform physical labor and deliver a tribute or part of the annual yields of the land. The few privileges granted peasants—such as the right to pasture their herds in meadows or to cut wood from the forests—were subject to constant verification and control.

All these aspects of the peasants' lives were immortalized on the pages of the many family archives. The owners of farmsteads and landed estates kept very detailed inventories of their property of all kinds, and recorded the obligations of their serfs with equal accuracy. The term "estate" was relative: it could refer to a single manorial farmstead or to more than a dozen villages in a given area.

Finding information on a specific peasant family needs to begin with determining the names of their lords and then checking whether the latter's archival collections exist and if they are accessible. The key to picking out units with potential are titles that contain the name of the locality

with accompanying descriptions such as *dominium* (domain), *kataster* (cadastre), *rewizja* (inspection reports), *lustracja* (audits), *powinności* (duties), or *podatki* (taxes).

To better illustrate the problem, I will use examples from the family archive of the Tarnowskis of Dzików, called the “Archiwum Dzikowskie.” The Tarnowski family ruled the regions of Tarnobrzeg and Sandomierz for more than 600 years, and specifically held (or leased) the following towns: Dzików (as the family’s chief residence, with a stately castle), Chmielów, Dęby, Góra Ropczycka, Grębów, Hermanów, Jadachy, Kaimów, Krawce, Krzadka, Machów, Mędrzechów, Miechocin, Ocieka, Podłęże, Porąb, Przewłoka, Przyszów, Rozalin, Sędziszów, Sielec, Sobów, Stale, Stany, Trześnia, Wielowieś, Wymysłów, Zakrzów, Żupawa, and Zwierzyniec.

All the books that contained personal data on serfs began with detailed descriptions of the buildings in a given locality, such as taverns, breweries, mills, wind- mills, foundries, cellars, and so forth. Next came descriptions of meadows, fields, forests, and waste lands. The lists of serfs are usually at the end, and depending on the period and nature of the documents, were in a tabular or columnar format. They contained concrete information on a given family, and especially the head of the family. For example, here are three entries from a list of 52 townsmen settled in Dzików in 1772, written in columns:

1. Michał Wojtasiewicz, *wójt* on a lot of his own, two sons, one daughter, no cows or oxen, *szarwark* [compulsory labor by the populace for public purposes] in spring and autumn marked “1”, winter and spring fields marked “1”.
3. Franciszek Skalski with his wife’s sister and mother, one son, one daughter, one cow, no oxen, and as above.
14. Mateusz Kurosadowicz – cottage with a garden, two sons, four daughters, two cows, no oxen, and as above.

The obligations of the townsmen as of 1772 included: two days of *szarwark* during harvest, 1 to 2 days of work in winter, an additional two days of work in the fields in spring and fall, eight days of weeding and raking hay; 15 days for winter harvest, 10 days for spring harvest; loading and ship- ping grain on the manor’s orders; fortifying and taking care of the dams as ordered. Every citizen had the obligation of providing one chicken per head of oxen and cattle owned. Shoemakers had to provide 15 pairs of shoes to the “Dzików Income Treasury”. Innkeepers and bakers had to pay with fruits and vegetables according to contractual prices.

In that same unit are similar lists for the villages of Dzików, Zakrzów, Wielowieś, Sobów, Sielec, Trześnia, and Grębów. In the case of villages, the lists distinguish peasants by social status as *kmieci* [peasants with full-sized farms], *zagrodnicy* [peasants with garden-sized plots], and *komornicy* [boarders, peasants with no land who lived in the houses of wealthier peasants].

Duties and tributes also differed by location. For example...

- Obligations at that time for Grębów: *pańszczyzna* per week: two days with livestock and on foot; work in the fields during winter and spring: one day; spring and fall *szarwark*: one day each.
- However, peasants from Miechocin or Machów paid tribute in the form of seed, oats, poultry, and hops. The land owners knew their estates thoroughly, and the duties and

tributes they imposed were calculated on the basis of crop size, the village's geographical location, the quantity and kind of livestock, and estimated yields.

One can seek out other interesting documents in the Dzików Archive that enrich our knowledge of our ancestors. I note a few interesting examples.

- From the files of arrivals and departures in 1857: on 10 June, Zofia Kuszewska arrived, age 24, religion Roman Catholic, citizen of the Kingdom of Poland, she resided in Kleczanów, accompanied by Jędrzej Chołota, wagoner from Kleczanów, she possesses a passport, and left Dzików on 13 June for Kleczanów.
- An 1879 list of laborers' wages on the manorial farmstead in Góra Ropczycka illustrates the relations in incomes at the time. I shortened the list to the needs of this article:

Ignacy Deissenberg – commissar – 1700 złotych

Roth Sydon – director – 1300 zł

Aleksander Czaplicki – steward – 200 zł

Maciej Gerlak – director's stable groom – 144 zł

Michał Rolek – directorate guard – 120 zł

Antoni Kłamut – smith – 108 zł

Katarzyna Wozowicz –maid – 84 zł

Michał Karemski – guard – 60 zł

Franc Sędzielowski – doctor – 50 zł

Józef Filar – estate overseer – 25 zł

Stanisław Woycik – field overseer – 25 zł

Jan Motyka – herdsman – 25 zł

Franciszek Darlak – stable groom – 25 zł

Floryan Kupa – cartwright – 25 zł

Another item is of the foundation on the behalf of war invalids for the years 1918 to 1926. It describes invalids with valuable details, such as the case of Franciszek Ordyk:

Registered to the gmina of Dzików

Opinion of the gmina: has a hut with a garden, exemplary behavior, married 35 years;

Opinion of the priest: same as that of the gmina

Policeman's opinion: very decent and hardworking, 55% disabled.

Furthermore, in the Dzików Archive are:

- Lists of loan collectors for loan associations, 1850 to 1930 (many units), as well as long lists of debtors from the 1830s
- Stipends for 1901 to 1912
- Numerous regulations and legal administrative disputes between individual citizens and the manor, 1770 to 1880
- Shelters and orphanages 1918 to 1937; and
- Aid during wartime, 1914 to 1916.

Thus, one can see that with the labor of the search and some luck, it can be possible to uncover a significant amount of personal information about the life of your ancestors.
