

Notary Records

In Poland, the profession of notary public developed toward capacities similar to notaries in the present day. Like civil vital record registration, notary records were introduced to Poland by Napoleon, in the Duchy of Warsaw, around 1807. After the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars, the system remained in place, little changed, until after WWII.

Polish notaries were public officers appointed by the district or provincial government to draft and maintain contracts and other legal agreements between private individuals. Notary records are found to touch on all aspects of life among family members, fellow members of the community, business partners, etc. The same as today, records include land transfers, business contracts, prenuptial agreements, divorce settlements, wills and testaments, powers of attorney, custody arrangements, loans, leases, etc. These are details of daily life not documented in vital records.

A notary typically held their offices for a specific town for several years and even much longer before they retired or a new notary was assigned to that office. Especially in rural areas, there were occasions for notaries to service several villages. Because of the population, large towns, and particularly cities, were served by several notaries. Thus, much the same as with parish records, over time the records will be created by different people; though, unlike parish records, in the archives notary records for a village are very likely to be found in separate collections.

In some instances, notary records can exist where vital records have been lost. They can fill blanks that missing or incomplete vital records do not provide. They could also be an additional, independent source in support of other data, especially other data of questionable accuracy. But even if you find mundane records describing the purchase of land, or the sale of furniture, or the settling of a family dispute over inheritance, these types of records provide the viewing of the private lives and personalities of your ancestors.

A final caveat: Notary records are not the easiest to locate, identify and search. Few have been digitized. Very little has been indexed. More often than not, one must visit the archive in person to peruse the collection page by page; or hire a professional researcher with experience in digging through notary records.

There are some scans of notary records. Here are a couple of examples for your viewing.

<https://www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/jednostka/-/jednostka/6074021>

<https://www.szukajwarchiwach.gov.pl/jednostka/-/jednostka/2994206>
