

Notes to accompany the Kozak pedigree
Parker Gambino 22 October 2021

Research on the family history of the Russian side of the family presents challenges above and beyond those encountered with the Sicilian or Irish lineages. For starters, we're dealing with a language that uses a different alphabet, and it was mucked around with by Lenin following the revolution. The Grodno (Kozak) and Minsk (Rudina) gubernias were areas that were fought over time and time again, and portions of their societies were partially disassembled or completely obliterated by the various wars and pogroms, interfering (to say the least) with the continuity of documentary records and family traditions.

Many details of the family histories were not passed down from generation to generation. The first American generation (that of my mother) did not have an opportunity to personally know their grandparents, and limited information about "the old country" has been made available to me. Even if I had wanted to learn about family history during the lifetimes of Jacob and Elena, the language barrier would have limited what could be communicated without translation by my mom. For many immigrants the main focus was on the present and future in this country; dwelling on the past was an unpleasant millstone around the neck, to be avoided.

To assemble the pedigree, typical documents of genealogical value were examined, such as census forms, immigrant ship manifests, naturalization papers, draft cards, passports, USA city directories, vital statistics records collected and maintained by government or church sources, etc. Published family trees posted at FamilySearch.com and Ancestry.com were also consulted, but always approached with skepticism, given the unfortunate amount of fiction posted on these sites.

Additionally, the following resources were used:

- Reminiscences of Myra Russack; these were collected on several different occasions: notes from an early interview by me, a second interview that was recorded on tape, and notes from a "deathbed" account dictated to her daughter.
- Nadja Grischuk's "A Gift of Memories From Grandma", an elementary school assignment of one of her grandchildren, consisting of written answers to a series of questions.
- A 1985 letter from Alyce Antonchik to Sonia Grischuk Connoles.
- Photo and ephemera scrapbooks provided by various family members.

Information was also gleaned from otherwise unrecorded conversations with various family members; some of these were second-hand accounts of what had been orally related by the earlier generation.

The mangling of names is a common theme for immigrants, especially those with poor command of English. Quite a number of Russian names do not have English equivalents, so the recording officials had to wing it in these cases. Beyond that, there were numerous intentional official name changes, mostly to ease assimilation into the new society.

The nagging problem of how to deal with discrepant information from conflicting sources is not always easy to resolve. I own many subjective decisions based on my assessment of accuracy of the various sources. I am always eager to make corrections when objective evidence (documents) is presented. One wishes that official documents were always accurate, but that's not the case. The census and ship manifest forms record information that is self-reported; sometimes to be taken with a grain of salt, sometimes with the entire shaker.

More than other pedigrees I've constructed, this one remains a work in progress and is bound to change as new information becomes available, as it surely will from several avenues of ongoing (though not necessarily speedy) research. For now, three second marriages have been omitted, those of Joseph Gambino, Valentine Russack, and John Connole. It's hardly a finished product; it is a starting point to support additional research and improvement.