

by E. Wade Hone

Just as there are proper ways to hold a fork, sip wine, or cut with a knife, there is an appropriate approach to ecclesiastical resources of the Austro-Monarchy. While Hungarian barbaric, starved-like assault might accidentally yield results, a well structured and disciplined consumption will avoid the indigestion of a misleading and erroneous pedigree.

In the previous two issues we explored determining the correct place name, identifying the location of religious jurisdiction for different denominational commitments in the community, and how to identify existing records and where they might be housed. This issue takes on a slightly different aura as the do's and don'ts of researching actual church records is examined. Several considerations are presented, and their importance is illustrated by an authentic case study. Extend that pinky, gently swirl your glass, and take notes!



What church records will look like and what their ingredients are is as varied as the individual clerks and scribes could possibly cook up. Even a single ecclesiastical location lacked consistence from decade to decade. Though each has intricate quirks to manage during research, all contain fundamentally similar information. Church records of most denominations will usually provide at least the following:

- Names of child and parents
- Birth and/or christening dates
- Names of bride and groom
- Engagement/banns and/or marriage dates
- Name of the deceased
- Death and/or burial dates

 Depending on the era and the

recorder, one may also find: occupations, ages at the time of marriage, parents' names for the bride and groom, previous spouse's name(s), ages at the time of death, marital status (e.g. widower, spinster, etc.), cause(s) of death, residence in contrast to the place of occurrence, witnesses/godparents, the officiator, and more.

Spelling? What Spelling?

One of the most basic lessons of historical or genealogical research is to drop all preconceived notions of spelling and focus instead on pronunciation. Spelling, for the most part, is a trait of the twentiethcentury. Even among those who could read and write there were few established rules for the written word in contrast with today's society. An individual could have given his, or her, name to three different people in the same room at the same time, and each recipient might have written it down in a very distinct and contrasting manner, based on what they heard and their own previous experiences.

One may have written Zimmerman, while another recorded the name as Cimerman; one may have spelled the name as Catharine, another as Kathrina; Burkhart might be found as Burkhardt, Burkett, Burgart, and literally more than another dozen spellings, all indicating the same name. I remember a journal once gave the immigrant grandmother's surname as "Nadge" and the unsuspecting family had repeatedly overlooked the ancestral entries of Nagy in the actual church registers, both being pronounced Nahdge. These examples seem basic enough when researching English language census indexes or other similar resources, but they quickly take on advanced characteristics when working with foreign research.

Because of linguistic variances from country to country, and even within the same set of records for a single location over time, it is critical to at least learn the pronunciation basics for the languages and locations being worked with. If the ancestor was Shuler, it must be recognized that S in Hungarian provides a Sh sound, and the name might then be found as Suler. Perhaps elsewhere it will be found as Sjuler, the latter's jbeing pronounced as a y. Learn that Čula (Czech), Csula (Hungarian), and Chula (Anglicized) are all the same. Another recollection was an immigrant's origins being listed as "Catch Kemmate" meaning Kecskemét in Hungary. Both are identically pronounced.

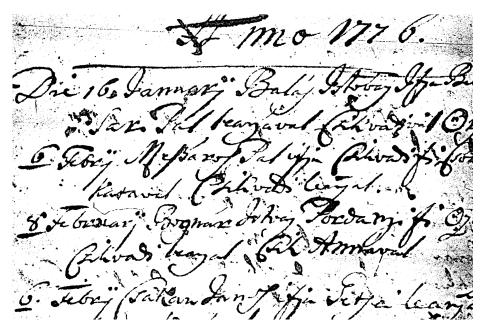
Name Equivalents

Another important factor when dealing with registers of foreign cultures is the challenge of name equivalents. It may easily be understood that *Johannes* could repre-

sent the ancestral John, or that Wilhelm denotes William. However, it is often more difficult to recognize that István (pronounced Isht-vahn) is completely interchangeable with Stephen or Stephanus. Imre and Emericus refer to the same. Lajos indicates Louis, and Örsze means Elisabeth or Ersebét, being short

Vocabulary

It is essential to learn at least a basic vocabulary in order to be aware of such issues as illegitimacy, stillborn status, father recently deceased, relatives as witnesses, etc. The Family History Library has word lists for various languages on their Web site at www.familysearch.org. These lists are specifically geared toward



Earlier registers lose their column formats, and the handwriting can be less neat in appearance. Be careful of grammar in these circumstances.

for *Örszebét*. Failure to prepare for such instances can result in constant disappointment when researching church records. The answers may have been exactly where the research took place, they were just overlooked.

The equivalency principle also applies to geographic names. A reference in a marriage record to the groom having been born in *Bécs*, and a separate reference at the time of death indicating he was born in *Wein*, both correctly denote the present-day city of *Vienna*, Austria. As well, *Pozsony* and *Bratislava* are synonymous, though from two different cultures. The list goes on.

genealogical records rather than everyday conversation, and are the best place to start. Other lists are also plentiful throughout the Internet.

Dictionaries are a must. When selecting dictionaries, often times the older nineteenth century publications can be the most helpful for terms that may no longer be in practice by modern society. Used bookstores are an excellent source for dictionaries, atlases and gazetteers for genealogy purposes.

Grammar

Be careful when encountering journal-entry formats in the registers. While later registers are often in columns that separate the information being displayed, earlier records can often be written as one would write in a journal or diary. In these cases, it can sometimes be difficult to distinguish whether the entry states "Johannes, the son of Wenceslas," or Johannes' son, Wenceslas." Obviously, this is more than just a minor detail.

Clerical Errors

To err is . . . well, sometimes quite predictable. Get to know the parish registers and habits of the clerk/priest. This comes from the careful study of more than just your own ancestry. While every entry does not have to be evaluated, any seasoned professional will tell you that a broader understanding of the registers in general significantly enhances success, and enables a discernment of errors that could suddenly solve a longstanding genealogical challenge. A perfect example of a clerical error is reminisced in the following:

The ancestor was Anna Gyarmati, born in 1785. Though the other names are not immediately recalled, the scenario was such that there was but one Gyarmati household during the era of her birth—e.g. the family of Lorentz Gyarmati and his wife Rebeka Hoffman. Their children were discovered in the registers as born in 1779, 1781, 1783, 1787 and 1789, with a child conspicuously absent at about 1785.

Since this was the only Gyarmati family having children at the appropriate time, a second investigation of the registers was warranted. No death could be found to indicate a stillborn or pre-christening death for the child. Close scrutiny of the registers revealed an interesting pattern.

Lorentz Gyarmati was the only Lorentz in the entire parish for over a sixty-year span, except for an elderly man named Lorentz Balos. In reviewing the registers, a lone christening entry for Anna, daughter of Lorentz Balos and his wife Rebeka Hoffman, was recorded on 3 January 1785. What made this account imperative was the name of the witnesses/godparents: Lorentz Balos and Lisbet Somogy. Lorentz Balos was found to have married Lisbet some forty years earlier, and neither was yet deceased. Their own children were matured and having their own progeny by this time.

The only Lorentz to have ever married any Rebeka in the parish was Lorenz Gyarmati and Rebeka Hoffman, the couple noted having children in the 1780s. As well, the mother from the 1785 entry for Lorenz Balos also shared the same surname of Hoffman as the wife of Lorentz Gyarmati. When carefully comparing the various entries of the parish register, it became evident that the clerk had erroneously duplicated the surname of the witness or godparent as the name of the father of the child.

10 Jul 1779Rebekadau of Lorentz Gyarmati and Rebeka Hoffman16 Oct 1781Joannesdau of Lorentz Gyarmati and Rebeka Hoffman7 Mar 1783Lorentzdau of Lorentz Gyarmati and Rebeka Hoffman3 Jan 1785Annadau of Lorentz Balos and Rebeka Hoffman28 Aug 1787Mihalydau of Lorentz Gyarmati and Rebeka Hoffman19 May 1789Saradau of Lorentz Gyarmati and Rebeka Hoffman

Of course, a thorough investigation of the church records, and a concerted effort to disprove the theory, was required in order to support the eventual conclusion. Errors can never simply be assumed. The patterns of the registers must be meticulously noted and any altering from those patterns illustrated in order to support the conjecture being developed.

Multiple Candidates

Reviewing a family-assembled lineage recently, it was noted that the ancestor, a female, who was born in 1842, was the lone child in the family unit. Her marriage record in 1859 indicated her age of seventeen and, by all appearances, the connections of ancestry were rather straightforward. However, when gathering the rest of the children for that family, it was noted that another child was given the same name almost six years later, in 1848. Research in the death registers discovered that the proposed ancestor had died in 1847. This quickly changed the dynamics of the entire pedigree, since the second child of that name was much too young to have been the woman marrying in 1859. The family actually linked to a neighboring community.

Weed out candidates by using death records, residences, ages from a variety of sources, ecclesiastical affiliation, witnesses, civil documents, and more. Remember that records recorded later in time will be more bureaucratically informative than those written earlier.

Search Periods

When researching in church registers, keep in mind there is a difference between the birth date and the christening date. Pay attention to which event is being recorded. Additionally, search for marriages at least five years after the birth of the ancestor, if not more. When an age is not known, begin a search of births fifteen years prior to the marriage date for females, and eighteen years prior to the marriage date for males. Females sometimes married quite young, and most males served in the military before marrying.

Never stop with the first entry found. Extend a period of search to insure all candidates have been examined. A great-grandfather may have married at twenty-three, or may have married the ancestor as his second wife after becoming a widower at the age of forty-four, despite the fact that she was only twenty-six at the time. Always consider potential age differences.

Illegible Entries

When an entry is illegible, compare it with the handwriting elsewhere on the page. As well, if one of the names is difficult to read, don't become frustrated and don't waste a significant amount of time trying to decipher the undecipherable. Find the same family elsewhere in the registers when the handwriting may have been better. For example: if a mother's name is unreadable, seek the next child born to the known father and compare the mother's name there. Also, study all entries in the parish for a better understanding of which surnames and given names are prominent.

Putting It All into Practice

In countries where most surnames are rarely unique and the given names are few, it is easy to make a number of scenarios "fit." However, a process of due diligence, mixed with an understanding of the records and the recorders, will generally reward labors with not only a correct and accurately detailed ancestry, but also with some fascinating historical observations that add flesh to the skeletal pedigree and family group sheets. The following case study is taken from an actual project, though is presented here in an abridged format. It incorporates most research cautions discussed into a single example.

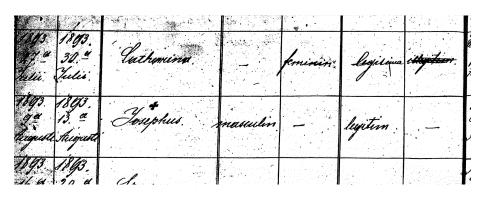
A marriage record for Matthew Vukovich and Katherine Hudik in New York City indicated that Katherine was born in Jakabfalu, Hungary, the daughter of Joseph Hudik and Annie Krivonjak. Though there is a Jakabfalu in present-day Hungary, censuses and the Ellis Island passenger lists had distinctly noted her language as Slovak. During the time of these events, present-day Slovakia was part of the Kingdom of Hungary, and a check of the gazetteers showed a Jakabfalu in Szepes County, (now Jakabany, Slovakia). It was in this latter locality that research continued.

Family information suggested the Hudiks were Catholic, though there two such churches in Jakabfalu; a Roman Catholic and a Greek Catholic. Research in the Roman Catholic registers uncovered several Hudak individuals, though none that matched even remotely with the 1893 birth date of the ancestor. The Greek Catholic records were also superficially void of the desired entry during the appropriate time period. However, there were numerous entries for the surname Chudik, ostensibly distinct in spelling, but perceptively similar in pronunciation, especially noticeable when written in Cyrillic during certain periods of the Greek Catholic administration.

had not been found originally, though continued searches showed an entry in 1895. It recorded that Joseph and Anna had been married on 20 October 1892 in Perth Amboy, in America, by Petrus Connolly, a parish priest there. Evidently, the couple had left for America, married while briefly there, then returned to settle in Jakabany. It was not until an official letter had been received that the union was recorded in the local parish registers, and the clerk had retroactively corrected the birth entry of the ancestral child to reflect the true status. This, however, was only the beginning of the peculiarities for this lineage.

Joseph was found to have been born on 30 May 1862, and was the son of Stephen Chudik and Susanna Fircsa (pronounced "Fircha"). For a period, the registers recorded a house number, and the residence at the time of his birth was "Jakubjan 343."

The marriage for Joseph's parents, Stephen Chudik and Susanna Fircsa, was the most diffi-



Birth register showing Catharina Chudik's altered legitimacy status.

Katherine's birth was soon discovered on 27 July 1893 as Catharina Chudik, daughter of Joseph Chudik and Anna Krivonyak. She was listed as illegitimate, though this had later been crossed out and corrected, for reasons that were soon to be revealed. A marriage for this couple

cult challenge of the project, mainly due to an unexpected name change. When the marriage records failed to disclose the correct couple, an in-depth study of the birth records was made for other children of Stephen and Susanna. The following was observed:

Children of Stephen Chudik and Susanna Fircsa

Joseph	*ancestor
Anna	
Joannes	
Marianna	
Catharina	
	Anna Joannes Marianna

It was also discovered that Susanna had three illegitimate children born prior to the ancestral Joseph in 1862.

Children of Susanna Fircsa

29 Oct 1856 Stephen
 3 Sep 1858 Joannes
 22 Jun 1860 Joannes

All children, including those that were illegitimate, were born at Jakubjan 343, indicating that Susanna lived there before her marriage to Stephen. These earlier "illegitimate" entries also presented a shift in linguistics, as they were recorded in Cyrillic script. While the father was not recorded for either of the last two entries in 1858 and 1860, a notation on the birth record of the eldest in 1856 referred to the father as Стефан Хуанк, or Stephen

Chudik/Hudik. Thus, Stephen and Susanna had at least one, if not all three, children together before other children began to be listed as legitimate. This helped narrow down a period in which the marriage should have occurred, June 1860-May 1862.

Searching the marriage registers for a second and third time, there was still no evidence of Stephen Chudik as a groom. When the brides were researched, however, an entry was noted on 30 July 1860, for a Stephen Korchnyak and Susanna Firtsa (still pronounced "Fir-cha"), with Susanna having been resident of Jakubjan 343. This was just barely one month after the illegitimate birth of the second Joannes. (The first one had died in infancy.)

Who was Stephen Korchnyak? If Susanna married him, why did she continue to have legitimate children by Stephen Chudik? No matter how Stephen Chudik is pronounced, twisted, or slurred, it remains difficult to compare with Stephen Korchnyak. At least until further research was undertaken.

The marriage record listed the parents of both groom and bride. It recorded Stephen as the son of Michael Korchnyak (deceased) and Catharina Malina. He was thirty-three years old, making him born in 1827, and was of Jakubjan 413. A fourth time through an extensive period of the registers showed that this was the only person to have ever

at times interchanged. Stephen had elected to (was directed to or, for whatever reason, did) change his name back to Chudik by 1862, though was even referenced as Chudik in 1856, despite being born in 1827 and marrying in 1860 under the name of Korchnyak. Part-time Chudik, part-time Korchnyak. Only with three generations of potential ancestry uncovered was this reconciliation of two separate surnames able to be made.

This case study also illustrated the need to research all siblings/chil-

	Storie gezit Posngecmba,	gericari OM. 19 agenis, a Av paunomosanis M.M.	79	Acumumus una Ston		Jakinna disaka	
			Chans.	.nysheuckii	shenekin.	ro proga.	nase po
93.	1856 20: Okombois.	1856. 93. Okmolp.	Nomagina,		nenchia	3a kerna	
	1856. 22 Okmolpis				ohonckin	3a kon na	y
	1856. 28: Ohmolpis.				•	"	pesako paro poga

Registers may have a variety of languages within the same church book. This Greek Catholic register was recorded in the Cyrillic script for specific periods of time.

married the ancestral Susanna, and research continued to try and further sort out the confusion.

The birth record for Stephen Korchnyak was uncovered, and his birth date shown as 2 September 1827. He was the son of Michael Korchnyak and Catharina Malina, just as the marriage record had indicated. However, it was critical to somehow show Stephen Korchnyak as Stephen Chudik in order to validate the hypothesis being developed. This key piece of evidence was finally found when it was noted that Michael Chudik, not Michael Korchnyak, married Catharina Malina.

In retrospect, it became obvious that the Korchnyak name was used by Michael Chudik and his children from about 1810 to 1855, though was

dren, not just the direct ancestor. Patterns, and sometimes the very absence of patterns, can raise a flag and beg for further attention. Researchers need to be receptive to observations that can illustrate errors or intentional redirects. Never be afraid to develop obscure theories. After all, the very essence of genealogy is to develop a hypothesis, then prove or disprove it with the use of documents. Be overly diligent, not selective, in your efforts.

Despite being in a foreign language, church records can oft be researched without special linguistic skills, at least on an elementary level. An open and creative mind will usually separate success from failure. It's truly not what we eat, but how we eat it that matters most.





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Still ahead for the Austro-Hungary Buffet: civil sources such as censuses, tax lists, military records, land leases, etc.; things to consider if you're wanting to travel to the former Austro-Hungarian regions; and U.S. sources for determining more precise places of origin.



E. Wade Hone is currently establishing the Research and Education Eurogins Foundation, devoted to European and foreign language research, and the promotion of European history, geography, and cultural tolerance, in addition to other academic objectives. He recently concluded a thirteen-year tenure as senior partner of Heritage Consulting and Services in Salt Lake City, and has been professionally involved in history and genealogy since 1984. His educational background is in world history and linguistics. He is a national speaker and the author of Land and Property Research in the United States and has also produced numerous multimedia presentations on a variety of genealogical subjects. He lives in the Salt Lake valley and spends portions of most years in the former Austro-Hungary regions doing research, inventory and preservation work to compliment that which can be done from the Family History Library in Salt Lake City. He can be reached via email at wadeh@eurogins.org or through the Web site of www.eurogins.org.

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