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## **READING BETWEEN THE LINES: MINING JEWISH HISTORY THROUGH EXTRACTION OF POLISH ARCHIVE DATA**

### **ABSTRACT**

What began as a study to explain the perceived proliferation of “other” towns outside the town of Opatow during the review of 19th century Jewish marriage record extracts from that town’s archive, evolved into an exploration of how these “other” towns became a “spouse pool” for marriage—seeking Jews from Opatow.

The process of town identification became a pivotal exercise in the analytical process. Evaluating locations outside the archival town meant going beyond mere town name extraction; it meant pinpointing the precise location on a map. Accurate assessment of town location is a critical underpinning of genealogical research without which inroads are stymied. This paper highlights issues and prescribes methodology logic for resolving them.

By benchmarking statistics from record extracts during the same time frame from two Polish archive towns, relevance is determined. Techniques used in business analyses are applied to genealogical research, enabling illumination of similarities and anomalies. Applying such methodology is a way of “reading between the lines” of archive extracts, and allows for isolating salient aspects of any archive data.

After validating the evidence of “other town” statistics in town archive marriage records, the marriage registrations are divided into four segments in terms of each couple’s towns of residency. Comparison in this way enables isolating disparities that are evident in the segment comprised by non—Town brides who married non—Town grooms. To further splice the data, we apply a frequency distribution model, which clearly isolates the towns skewing the data. We then discover the political mandates underlying the deviation by examining the history of these specific towns.

This paper demonstrates the theory that “other towns” of spouses listed in 19th century marriage records from a Polish town archive during a specific time frame were a function of the locations with which the town had entrenched network connections. In the case of Opatow, these connections had been forged in the 18th century by the confluence of political, economic, and religious currents dictating Jewish life.

Regrouping the data from the Opatow archive, we identify all the couples where one partner is from the town while the spouse is not. We then map out the far—flung towns, color—coding them by the historic reason for the connection. In this way we create a model that comprises towns from which Jews from Opatow would seek a spouse if they did not marry a cousin or neighbor. This technique can be applied to other town archives to garner different slices of Jewish historical reality in different periods of time.

**[Click here](#)** for the Final Report on this project.