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Review of the book Poles and Russians in the 1870 Census of New York City

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Poles and Russians in the 1870 Census of New York City. Marlene Silverman, Washington, DC: Landsmen Press, 1993. viii, 168 pp. \$26.00.

Review by John A. Drobnicki, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

All genealogists know the difficulties in using unindexed manuscript census records. If a soundex exists, it is helpful, but by no means as easy to use as an index. Thus, when a researcher creates an index, even if it is for a limited area, their efforts should be applauded.

Marlene Silverman has compiled an index to persons of Polish or Russian nativity in the 1870 federal census for New York City. At that time, New York City consisted of little more than the island of Manhattan and a small part of what would become the Bronx — it did not include Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island, or the rest of the Bronx until 1898. As the author explains in the introduction, there were two enumerations for that census for NYC — the first was challenged — and she has indexed the second fully, and the first partially.

The information provided from the second enumeration includes the head of household and spouse; their ages and country of birth; names of minors and others living with them; street address; and then a number indicating their ward number, election district, and page number in the manuscript census. A sample entry is:

Hoffman, Aaron 40 P Fanny 30 P Clin. 146 13-08-016
Rae, Phil, Sam, Moe

Thus, they lived at 146 Clinton Street, were both born in Poland, and had four minors living with them. Because the first enumeration did not include the street address, Silverman was not going to index it until she accidentally discovered that families from the first enumeration which she knew to be either Polish or Russian were missing from her finished list. The reason: if an incorrect country of origin was given to, or written down by, one of the census takers, that household was not included by the indexer (Ms. Silverman herself). For the second enumeration, there are 1,413 households listed; for the first, which Silverman went back and indexed for the area below New York City's Houston Street, there are 1,921.

Even if the person being researched is not in this book, it can still be a useful reference tool for genealogists. There is a cross-reference guide, where if one knows an address, the appendix gives the ward number and election district. This greatly narrows down the number of microfilm reels one will have to use in searching through the manuscript census records. 🍷