

# A Guide to Czech and Slovak Genealogy

Prepared by the library staff at the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library. [www.NCSML.org/library/](http://www.NCSML.org/library/)

## Before you begin

- Gather all the family-related documents you can find. Look for official documents, obituaries, family bibles, journals/diaries/scrapbooks, photographs, newspaper clippings, and articles in Czech-American or Slovak-American publications.
- To prevent damage to original documents, make photocopies or digital scans that can be used as working copies. Store original documents in a safe place like a fireproof document box.
- Ask relatives to share any family-related information they may have.
- Make a basic family tree, starting with yourself and any siblings. Go on to your parents, documenting as much detailed information as you can about them, and then do the same for your grandparents and extended family. A variety of charts are readily available free of charge on the Internet.

## Effective Research

- Make a research file for each family member you are researching. Write a detailed summary for each family and individual you research. Be sure to note your sources of information so they can easily be found and verified by you or someone else.
- Interview your family members; ask them about their lives and what they remember of other relatives. Record all versions, since one family member may remember things differently than another. Take notes of each interview and record the interview, if possible.
- County historical or genealogical societies are great resources of family history information. Note that many of their resources are only available in hard-copy format, so you may have to conduct your research in person or hire a local researcher to do it for you.
- Try to trace your family back to the immigrant generation. Keep in mind that some may have come as individuals while others may have come as family units. Sources of information in the United States about immigrants can be found in emigration/immigration documents, naturalization records, and census records. Church records that document baptisms or marriages can sometime yield information about the place of origin of immigrants, or children of immigrants.
- The website [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com) is a great resource for finding birth and death dates, and may include additional information such as family photos or obituaries added by other researchers. Websites such as [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) and [www.myheritage.com](http://www.myheritage.com) (used by many in Europe) may have additional information about your extended family.

## Searching for Vital Records and Censuses

- Many states did not begin to keep birth and death records until the early 1900s; however, you may be able to find this information through church or cemetery records. Counties often began recording marriage and divorce records from the time the county was established. Access to this information varies from state to state.
- The United States has conducted a census every ten years since 1790; these are available to public viewing after 72 years in accordance with the privacy laws. The 1940 census is available online for free. Earlier censuses are available for purchase on microfilm but are not available online. Note that most of the 1890 census records were destroyed by fire in 1921. For more information, go to [www.census.gov/history/www/genealogy/](http://www.census.gov/history/www/genealogy/).
- States also conduct censuses, which can complement the information found in the federal censuses.

## Alternate Spellings of Names and Place Names

- It is not uncommon for immigrants to have changed the spelling of their surnames. Immigrants may also have adopted the English/American equivalent of their given names. Additionally, older documents may note place names that are not found on modern maps. Knowing the original or alternate spellings of these personal names and place names is important when searching immigration records. NCSML library staff can help determine what the original spellings or usages may have been.

## More Information

- Additional genealogy resources and NCSML library staff contact info is available at [www.ncsml.org/library/](http://www.ncsml.org/library/).