

Joanna Kulpińska

**A Study on Migrations from a Polish Village to the United States. Analysis of Arrival Records from the Ellis Island Archives.**

On January 1, 1892, the newly opened Ellis Island immigration station welcomed its first passenger - 17-year-old Irishwoman Annie Moore. The girl, who became in a way a symbol of all those crossing the ocean to fulfill their "American Dream", was traveling with two younger brothers to their parents, who settled in New York.

Among the pioneers, crossing the gates of Ellis Island, there were also people of Polish descent. The Banach family may serve as an example: Maria, a 34-year-old mother with three young children, heading to Michigan in January 1892, probably to visit her husband. They gave Germany as their country of origin and nationality. Most Polish emigrants leaving before 1918 indicated the partitioned country as their place of origin. This procedure makes it difficult to obtain accurate data and analysis of the migration of this group to the United States at the turn of the 20th century, which could be provided by information contained in passenger lists of ships arriving at Ellis Island.

The immigration station at Ellis Island, which between 1892 and 1954 received over 12 million immigrants (mainly from the eastern hemisphere), exercised control over the rapidly increasing number of newcomers who wanted to take advantage of the opportunities that America was to offer them. This control consisted not only in checking those who did not meet the requirements for entry into the United States (mainly concerning health), but also in keeping a detailed census and collecting data on all ship passengers.

These lists are nowadays an excellent source for the analysis of migrations from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They formed the basis of the research conducted for the author's doctoral dissertation, the aim of which was to compare migration trends from the Polish countryside to the United States over the course of a century (early 20th century - early 21st century). Initially, I chose the village of Babica near Rzeszów as my research area, and then I extended my research to selected villages in the districts of Strzyżów and Brzozów. The choice of this region as a research area was influenced by the possibility of conducting time-scale comparative studies of past and present overseas migrations there. We owe it to Krystyna Duda-Dziewierz's work "Village of Lesser Poland and American Emigration. A study of Babica village

in Rzeszow county" (Duda-Dziewierz 1936). This work is one of the best publications analyzing emigration from the Polish countryside. The author's goal was to analyze the impact of emigration on the transformation of the traditional Polish peasant community. Her research covered the entire village, collecting information on each household, thus providing a detailed description of the migration process against the background of a broader context of cultural and social changes occurring in this group.

This text presents a part of the research that was conducted for the author's doctoral thesis. This section refers to the analysis of ship passenger lists from the Ellis Island Archive. On the basis of the material collected on overseas emigration from the Podkarpacie region, the question of the usefulness of the data contained in those lists for the exploration of the phenomenon of the first migration streams flowing from the Polish lands to the United States has been discussed. Both the advantages of having access to such rich material and certain limitations in using it to describe the phenomenon of migration are presented.

#### METHODS AND SOURCE CRITICISM

The basis for the analysis of the emigration from the area under study at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, apart from monographic studies - mainly the study by Duda-Dziewierz, is data obtained through ship passenger lists from the Ellis Island Archive. It forms a vast database of immigrants coming to the United States from various countries of the eastern part of the globe in the years 1892-1924. Here one can find the following data: the name of the migrant, his age, marital status, declaration of occupation performed in the USA, nationality, country and place of origin, destination in the United States, data on the person he was going to and some information on his physical features. The author of this paper used lists available online, both those provided by the Archives at the American Family Immigration History Center's Passenger Record Archive website and a directory created by Stephen Morse Seraching the New York (Ellis Island Gold) Database in One Step , making it much easier to search for immigrants by the name of their place of origin.

However, before we discuss the results of the research based on data from the Ellis Island archive, we will draw attention to certain limitations and difficulties associated with the use of this source. These data should be treated with caution and critically. The inaccuracy of the data contained in these lists is mainly due to the following.

1. until World War I, data were entered into the questionnaires of the passenger lists arriving at Ellis Island handwritten. This therefore generates several difficulties in their analysis. Firstly, problems could arise in reading the information they contained because of careless entry.

Secondly, it was the reason for errors appearing in the Archives' catalog, because due to misreading of data by the staff completing the online database, the name of the same locality was sometimes spelled differently, thus making it difficult to search and reach all the immigrants from a given region.

Therefore, the author first conducted a search based on the criterion of the names of ships sailing from ports that were most popular among the surveyed immigrants, in order to find various combinations of the names of particular localities. Babica, for example, was recorded as "Babita," "Babire," "Cubica," or "Babika," among others.

Third, immigration officials often changed the names of immigrants to more "American" sounding names or simply twisted them due to haste and carelessness in typing them, which again introduces problems with verification of specific individuals.

Fourth, there are also errors in the Archive's online catalog when, for example, a list from a completely different ship is assigned to a given immigrant.

2. information provided by the immigrants themselves should also be treated with caution. They could intentionally mislead the officer by giving false information (e.g. about their employment in the destination place or about the person they are going to, for example by having the address of their friends or relatives in the USA from other immigrants) in order to be able to enter the territory of the United States. Verification of the veracity of this data is currently impossible.

Consequently, I have kept a kind of distance from this information because of its possible level of unreliability.

The issue of nationality is also important. Until World War I, immigrants from Poland often indicated that they were Austrians or Galicians in the case of the partition of Austria analyzed in this work, which makes it impossible to make any general estimates of the number or characteristics of Polish immigrants in the United States at that time.

Another problem is the changes that were made to the data collected through the questionnaire over the years. For example, until 1890 the questionnaire did not ask about the place of origin, while in the interwar period data on marital status or occupation is unavailable.

The search for information through these lists is also problematic. Due to the existence of several towns with the same name in the partitioned territories, it is often difficult to determine which of them is meant. This was also an important criterion in selecting individual villages in the county for research. Villages with names occurring in different parts of Galicia were rejected. Only in the case of Babica, of which there are two in the partitioned area, such selection could not be applied. In this case, the verification of immigrants was based on their surnames, which in a given period within Babica were not very diverse due to the dense kinship structure of the village residents.

Despite the difficulties mentioned above and the possible inaccuracy of the data and lack of verification, the information provided by the ship passenger lists, with some caution, can still be an interesting material that broadens the knowledge of transatlantic emigration in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, allowing a partial insight into the mechanisms of migration.

The analysis of ship passenger lists from Ellis Island Archive concerned 20 towns and villages in southeastern Poland. Information was found on more than 4,700 immigrants from this area.

The selection of the above localities was made mainly due to two determinants:

1) their diverse location in the study area, the purpose of which was to obtain comparative material on migration trends in its different parts;

2) the ethnic diversity of the localities at the turn of the 20th century, for a comparative analysis of migration trends: Ruthenians (living at that time in Blizianka, Bonarówka, Gwoździanka and Oparówka), Jews (mainly Strzyżów, Frysztak, Czudec and Niebylec) and Poles (all the mentioned localities).

Ship passenger lists from the Ellis Island Archive provide extremely rich material for the analysis of migration to the United States at the turn of the 20th century. The data provided a wealth of previously unknown information on overseas migration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, including identification of additional ports from which Polish migrants sailed to North America and reconstruction of the settlement pattern of migrants from the study area in the United States in the early twentieth century.