

The Industrial Removal Office A Source for Researching Immigrant Experiences by Toby Carliner Sanchez

If your grandparents or great-grandparents first settled in the crowded immigrant neighborhoods of big cities like New York or Philadelphia, but moved westward within a few years, they most probably made the move on their own or to join relatives. Or, they might have received aid from the Industrial Removal Office (IRO). Herein lies a good source of information about their early lives in the U.S. This organization was created in 1901 by Cyrus Sulzberger and other prominent German-Jewish businessmen/philanthropists and ended its work in 1922, by which time it had helped 79,000 immigrants move to and get settled in over 1,000 cities and small towns in every one of the 48 states. It is possible to search the IRO files stored at the Center for Jewish History for individual names and read about their origins, their family in Europe and the U.S., their skills, and what happened to them when they left New York. There are several books and monographs on the IRO and collections of letters from the people who received help, which give the flavor of their personalities and tell much about the process of adjusting to American life (see bibliography below).

The IRO evolved from several pre-existing organizations and experienced growing pains, during

which it gradually adjusted its mission and methods of operation. In its early years it was falsely accused of sending immigrant Jews to be strikebreakers, and of encouraging mass emigration from the Russian Empire. Those who were helped to find better jobs and living conditions outside the big cities often wrote emotional letters of gratitude, but others blamed the IRO for whatever bad luck they encountered. Even those who were helped sometimes felt demeaned and patronized, because of the difference in class and background between the German-Jewish helpers and the Yiddish speakers seeking help. The IRO also had to confront the general societal suspicion and antipathy to Eastern European Jews and a growing political opposition to open immigration. Thus the story of the IRO overlaps with the evolution of the very restrictive Immigration Act of 1924, which closed the doors to immigration and kept them closed until 1965.

The Origins of the Industrial Removal Office – Well Meaning Charity plus Self Protection

The IRO grew out of the work of several prior organizations that had been working since the 1880s

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We support organizations, repositories, and archival projects through donations to insure the preservation of many of the Jewish community's treasured documents and to provide greater public access to them. These organizations have included the American Jewish Historical Society, American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, American Sephardi Federation, Center for Jewish History, Center Genealogy Institute, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, JewishGen, Jewish Records Indexing-Poland, Leo Baeck Institute, National Yiddish Book Center, Ronald S. Lauder Foundation Genealogy Project at the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

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President's Postings by Jane Rosen Berenbeim

A warm welcome home to our members who attended this year's IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy in Israel. In an upcoming issue of Dorot, we will feature stories by some of

those who attended, reflecting on their experiences and insights. And those of us who weren't able to make it across the pond still have the opportunity to hear many of the presentations online, as noted in the section in this issue on "Notes from All Over".

Dorot's editor, Toby Sanchez – usually hard at work behind the scenes – takes the spotlight in this issue with her lead article on the Industrial Removal Office (IRO). The article will be of interest to all readers as a chapter in the history of Jewish immigrants in the US, and of the relationship between early 20th century immigrants from Eastern Europe and the established German Jewish community and its philanthropic organizations. It will be of special interest to those whose ancestors were served by the IRO, the records of which can be found in the archives of the American Jewish Historical Society at the Center for Jewish History.

In the Spring issue of Dorot, we published a brief article on "The Right to be Forgotten" by Yvette Hoitink, a professional genealogist working in the Netherlands.

Ms. Hoitink's observations on the implications of the current movement to shield personal information, especially online, prompted Jan Meisels Allen, Chair of the IAJGS Public Records Access Monitoring Committee, to offer a detailed discussion, appearing in this issue, of the competing rights of privacy vs. information access, particularly as it is currently being played out in Europe.

Our always-informative interview with a genealogical expert features Itzhak Epstein, longstanding JGS member and indefatigable researcher. Dorot's conversation with Itzhak sheds light on his exploration of a wide variety of European resources, as well as the value of DNA testing.

As we begin our new season of programming on September 20th please mark your calendar for the JGS Annual Meeting and Holiday Brunch, to be held this year on December 20th. Our speaker will be journalist Laura Silver, author of the recently-published book *Knish: In Search of the Jewish Soul Food*. And don't forget to check our website, as well as the "Upcoming Events" section in the current Dorot, for information on the wide-ranging program of lectures that precedes it.

I look forward to greeting you at our fall meetings.

Jane

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We hope you will join the more than 2070 members of the JGS Facebook group. The page includes details about our upcoming meetings and follow-up reports about the presentations. We welcome comments and reactions to the meetings as well as suggestions of topics for monthly meetings.



to ameliorate unemployment, urban crowding and unsanitary conditions. Among these were the United Hebrew Charities, the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Society, B'nai B'rith, and the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society (JAIS) of the Baron De Hirsch Fund, with its support of farm colonies in various states (see "Let My People Sow: Jewish Agricultural Settlements in the United States, Parts 1 & 2," *Dorot*, vol. 32, Number 2, Winter 2010-2011 and *Dorot*, vol. 33, No. 3, Spring 2012).

In the 1890s Jewish philanthropists had created settlement houses, such as the Educational Alliance, Grand Street and University Settlements, in a sincere effort to help immigrants adjust. At the same time, they were worried that the influx of poor people who looked and spoke differently from other Americans and other Jews would threaten their social position and sense of safety. They dreaded a time when "the Jewish question" might be injected into politics. To avoid this problem, they felt that it would be wise for all concerned to find ways (but not new laws) to "limit, retard and regulate the immigration of Jews into American cities and widely distribute those who came, so as to prevent the augmentation of existing ghettos or the formation of new ones. We must work to prevent our indigent co-religionists from becoming or remaining ghetto dwellers because every family raised in that home of horrors faces the grave peril of shame for its daughters and crime for its sons."¹

Encouraging and aiding people to move to other cities where life was easier was both a well meaning and self-protective strategy of the German-Jewish establishment. They believed sincerely that Americanization would occur faster when Jews were moved away from the overcrowded big cities and settled in smaller but growing cities such as Cincinnati or St. Louis. As long as Jews could find steady work at decent wages and bring over their families, they would become less conspicuous (less easily identified as "greenhorns"). As they learned to dress and speak like other Americans, they would neither embarrass their rich benefactors nor foment anti-Semitism. As Cyrus Sulzberger said, "Beyond question there is a prejudice against us in Christian hearts. But let us not feed it. Let us not arm hatred with good reason."² The goal of the various organizations was rapid adjustment to American life via dignified self-supporting labor outside the big cities, by circulating or removing labor to places where it was needed.

The United Hebrew Charities and the other groups named above tried to encourage Jews to move out of New York and the East Coast and go to the Midwest and the South, but this work was not their main focus, and the problems associated with congestion only increased due to the enormous growth in the number of Jewish immigrants between 1890 and 1910. The IRO was the only organization that worked exclusively on relocating Jews to smaller cities and towns west of New York.

In the 1880s there were 193,000 new Jewish immigrants to all of the U.S, but the pogroms in Russia and the poverty there and in Galicia and Romania "caused 391,999 Jews to emigrate to the United States from 1891 to 1900 and another 1,387,455 between 1901 and 1914."³ In 1890 42% of the New York City population had foreign-born parents, and in 1910 the number was 79%.⁴ Leo Levi, president of B'nai Brith, in 1901 described the Lower East Side as "a worse hell than was ever invented by the imagination of the most vindictive Jew-hater of Europe."⁵

The immediate impetus for the founding of the IRO was the sudden immigration of thousands of Jews from Romania. Before 1880 only 4,000 people had come from there, but between May and July 1900 20,000 Jews left the country, 6,000 of whom arrived in the U.S. From 1901 to 1904 28,000 more arrived, overwhelming the facilities and nearly bankrupting the finances of Jewish organizations.⁶ As *The New York Times* reported on October 14, 1900 in an article entitled, "Jews Leaving Roumania,"

Some months ago there suddenly appeared at the Immigration Station at New York large numbers of Roumanian Jews. They were all or nearly all, without money and were refused landing until bonds were given that they would not become public charges.It appears from the report [prepared by an agent sent by the Commissioner of Immigration to investigate] that the laws of Roumania... make it almost impossible for the Jews to remain there and provide a living....Much that is exceedingly humiliating degrading to Jews is contained in the textbooks in use in the public schools, such, for instance as 'A Jew never eats before he cheats,' and 'A Jew is a leech and lives on the blood he sucks from the poor peasants.'⁷

An emergency organization, the Romanian Committee,

was created by the JAIS in 1900, headed by Leo Levi and administered by David Bressler, a young attorney. It separated from JAIS in 1901 and became the Industrial Removal Office, with Bressler as its first and only executive director.

How the IRO Operated

At its headquarters at 174 Second Avenue in Manhattan, the IRO interviewed prospective clients to ascertain their skills and experience, the size and location of their families and their assets, so they could make a satisfactory match between an immigrant and a new community. Immigrants had to apply directly to the IRO for assistance and no one forced them to seek help or to leave the city. Throughout its existence, the IRO had many more applicants for help than it could accommodate. There were also IRO offices in Boston and Philadelphia, but most work was done from the Lower East Side.

Many immigrants were afraid to leave the big cities, especially New York, where it was easy to live a completely Jewish life. They worried about finding Jewish friends in other places, and even whether the “interior cities” were safe or civilized. Although they might have been frustrated by the low wages in New York City, they were often afraid to leave their familiar surroundings for an unknown “wilderness.” The IRO office described the advantages of such cities as Cleveland, Detroit, Cincinnati, Columbus, Indianapolis and St. Louis, and supplemented the applicant’s limited funds with its own. The IRO’s financial aid was considered a loan, to be repaid in the future, whenever it might become possible.

In the numerous cities where it operated, the IRO set up a local committee to find jobs and housing for newcomers and to help them adjust, and paid representatives to work with the immigrants and the committee and ease the way for all parties. The IRO agent, a college-educated young man and occasionally a woman, was the first person the immigrant met on his arrival at his new home, and the agent’s job was to look after him, arrange room and board, take him to a new job, give him advice on daily living, and introduce him to the members of the local committee – in short, serve as a cultural broker. The rent was payable only for a week or two, by which time it was expected the man would be working. The agent reported regularly to the New York office on each of his charges for a year. He also had to keep the New York office informed of local conditions, the local need for skilled and unskilled

workers, local disputes or difficult persons, and the cooperation he received from the local committee.

The New York staff made regular visits to their existing agents and committees, but also to additional towns and cities, where they contacted the local B’nai B’rith, synagogues and other organizations and encouraged them to set up committees to help new immigrants find jobs and get settled. Agents also visited factories and large businesses to explain the purpose of the IRO and to see if they were willing to hire new immigrants. The leaders of the local Jewish community were usually willing to help, but wanted to take only as many newcomers as could be quickly employed. They were suspicious of *schnorrers*, who would take advantage of charity and of “difficult” families that might never succeed. They feared that if newcomers failed to get or hold on to jobs and became dependent for too long on local charity, it would hurt the Jewish community – not only placing a financial burden on them, but making Jews in general look bad. The locals were willing to help their fellow Jews and take out money from their own pockets to help people get started and to tide them over during emergencies, but not indefinitely.

The IRO tried to place newcomers in jobs with local Jewish businesses, but this was not automatically successful and they made arrangements with any businesses that they could find. They refused to allow Jews to be used as strikebreakers, which some employers wanted. For example, at one time the local agent in Akron sent word to New York not to send people to the raincoat factory in that town, while the workers were on strike.

Newcomers could not be guaranteed a job at a particular wage. They had to be willing to accept the work offered, as long as it allowed for a modest living. If they changed jobs or left town, they had no further claim on the IRO for assistance. Of course, some people were difficult, unemployable or tricky (some men became “professional husbands,” who took advantage of lonely women) and the IRO made it clear to the committees that they were not obligated to help people who would not help themselves. The archive contains many letters about difficult people and unsuccessful cases, as well as many letters of gratitude and stories of success. At all times the success of the IRO depended on preserving a good relationship with the local committees.

Here are just a few excerpts from the fascinating stories one can read in Robert A. Rockaway’s *Words of the Uprooted*. Such letters were usually written in Yiddish.

Letter from Agent Elias Margolis in Indiana to David Bressler, Executive Director of the IRO in New York, writing in 1908 from South Bend, Indiana:

It is impossible to do anything with the factories here. The men we have sent in the past years have themselves been laid off, especially those working in the Studebaker factory. Mr. Greenbaum, your erstwhile agent, claims that it was because of the Union Square bomb throwing incident, but Mr G. is particularly biased against the Russian Jews and uses intemperate language when speaking of them. He doesn't try to understand them. He classifies every Orthodox Jew as an anarchist, and he doesn't seem to know that a real Orthodox Jew cannot be an anarchist.⁸

Letter from Louis Friedman to David Bressler, writing in 1907 from Detroit, Michigan:

Dear Sirs of the Removal Office, I thank you many times for all the good you do with people and have done with me, by sending me and my three children to Detroit. I thank you for your noble deed which gave us the opportunity to tear ourselves away from oppressive New York. In Detroit, where you sent us, we can breathe more freely and make a respectable living. I can inform you that as soon as we arrived and showed your letter to Miss Pick, she straightaway provided us with accommodations, food, drink, and lodging for eight whole days and secured work for everyone in his trade. In New York, I, a man with no trade, walked around for three months and could not find work...I earn nine dollars a week. And it is a steady position ...Blessed is Detroit, where if one only wants to work, there is no shortage of work. And there the working class does not live in foul, airless rooms as in New York, because the rent is cheaper here. Detroit is to be marveled at for her freedom and for her clean air.⁹

Joseph Davidowitz wrote to Mr. Bressler in 1906 that he was not at all pleased with his experience in Memphis:

Best & Dear Caretakers (merciful sons of merciful men), You send people to make a living in Memphis and you also tell them that your ideas are to make Jews live in all parts of the land and have them make a decent living. It is true, Jews can make livings if your agents would only try and devote themselves earnestly to their work and not care for themselves only. They mock and laugh at the people sent to them. They give them jobs from which no living can be made.¹⁰

The following tables, reproduced from *Dispersing the Ghetto: The Relocation of Jewish Immigrants Across America*, list the many places where the IRO sent people and the range of industries.

The severe depression of 1907-1908 interrupted the success of the IRO. Many of its clients lost their jobs

Industry	Wage earners	Percent
Manufacturing		
Woodworking	3,300	9.5
Metal	3,408	9.8
Building	2,783	8.0
Printing and lithography	358	1.0
Needle trades	7,828	22.5
Leather	2,470	7.1
Tobacco	240	.7
Miscellaneous	782	2.2
Total	21,169	60.8
Nonmanufacturing		
Miscellaneous	775	2.2
No trade and peddlers	10,105	29.0
Farming	468	1.3
Small dealers in food	1,146	3.3
Office personnel, professionals, etc.	1,140	3.3
Total	13,634	39.1
Grand total	34,803	

and had trouble finding new ones, as employers laid people off and stopped hiring. When it was possible to hire again, they turned to their former employees, not new ones. Then the outbreak of World War I stopped immigration entirely.

Challenges to the IRO

Among the members of the Jewish establishment and their organizations, there was general agreement about

The distribution of individuals from New York by state, including Canada and Latin America, 1901–1917

Alabama	934	Nevada	20
Arizona	59	New Hampshire	37
Arkansas	261	New Jersey	1,041
California	4,850	New Mexico	56
Colorado	2,791	New York	3,773
Connecticut	388	North Carolina	113
Delaware	23	North Dakota	597
District of Columbia	51	Ohio	10,017
Florida	387	Oklahoma	311
Georgia	1,262	Oregon	858
Idaho	17	Pennsylvania	3,466
Illinois	7,534	Rhode Island	55
Indiana	2,900	South Carolina	247
Iowa	1,532	South Dakota	89
Kansas	465	Tennessee	1,239
Kentucky	895	Texas	1,560
Louisiana	680	Utah	139
Maine	89	Vermont	95
Maryland	272	Virginia	455
Massachusetts	577	Washington	907
Michigan	5,735	West Virginia	201
Minnesota	2,497	Wisconsin	3,709
Mississippi	353	Wyoming	46
Missouri	6,627	Canada	1,464
Montana	117	Latin America	13
Nebraska	2,156		
		Total	73,960

Note: The Boston and Philadelphia branches of the IRO resettled a total of 2,576 and 2,459 individuals, respectively. Most of the work of these IRO offices was accomplished by 1913. Grand total 78,995.

businessmen or ordinary workers and were living in communities with other Jews where they had “their own press, their own theatres, their own clubs, their own atmosphere, all of which harms no one and helps to make them happier and more satisfied beings.”¹⁴ He asked, “Has the Irishman ever lamented that there were too many Irish people in the city? Or has he made as much use of it as he could? Why shouldn’t the Jew?”¹⁵ He said also that no one has the moral or legal right to force Americanization or assimilation upon the new arrivals and any attempt to do so was a contradiction of the most important political lesson of America, that “in this free country, one may look like a Jew, think like one, act like one, pray and speak like one, and yet be a respected and free citizen of the republic.”¹⁶

Abraham Cahan, editor of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, said that Yiddish did not inhibit the process of adjustment; rather it helped in the Americanization process, because his paper published translations of American stories and original articles on American history and institutions. Also, the popular *Bintel Brief* column, featured questions from readers facing

the goals of the IRO. For example, *The 1906 American Jewish Yearbook* stated emphatically, “The work of the distribution of immigrants is still the greatest problem that besets American Jewry,”¹¹ but the widely read national newspaper, *The Jewish Gazette*, disagreed:

All talk of “civilizing and Americanizing” is but exaggerated phrases used to insult us under a mask of friendship...The Russian Jews saw that the supercilious attitude of the Reform Jews as nothing more than an indefensible contempt of the rich for the poor, and it is easy to see why the poor man ceased to regard the Reform Jew as his brother.¹²

In another article the *Gazette* pointed out that the term “ghetto” was never applied to districts populated exclusively by gentiles, nor by millionaires. The writer asked, “What is wrong with people choosing to live among like minded people, where they could find support, sympathy, stores and religious institutions catering to their needs?”¹³

The physicist and economist I.M. Rubinow wrote several critiques in which he pointed out that the majority of Jewish immigrants had already achieved economic independence on their own, either as

problems of cultural adjustment in the new country.

Over time the *Forward* and other Jewish newspapers softened their criticism, reported on IRO exhibitions and carried notices for job openings in other places and how they could be secured through the IRO. They also contacted the IRO for information about jobs in the greatest demand in the U.S. so as to aid people trying to leave Russia. The *Forward* published both critical and laudatory letters from people who had sought help from the IRO.

The more serious challenge to the IRO and to the general Jewish community, which favored unrestricted immigration from the poverty and suffering in Russia, Romania, Italy and other places, came from those who were opposed to immigration of people from eastern and southern Europe. They saw the conditions in New York and other cities as a prelude to all sorts of future problems: immigrants who lived from generation to generation in a separate world, speaking only their own language and not learning English, becoming a source of crime, delinquency, prostitution, vagrancy and poverty for generations, all of which would lead to radical ideas and feed the growth of corrupt political machines. This was a common belief among upper class gentiles and the secret fear of the well-established

German Jews.

The anti-immigrant language asserted openly that Italians, Jews, Greeks, Poles and their ilk were of lower intelligence and lesser morality, and mixed in with these ideas were classic anti-Semitic comments. Henry James, upon visiting Ellis Island 1907, wrote in *The American Scene*, “The spirit of any sensitive citizen after a visit here is that he comes back not the same person that he went, shaken to the depths of his being with a new chill in his heart. He is a person who has seen an apparition, seen a ghost in his safe old house. Let not the unwary visit Ellis Island.”¹⁷ After a visit to the Lower East Side, he feared for the future of the English language owing to the “Hebrew conquest of New York. These people might create a new linguistic tradition, and while it might be destined to become the most beautiful on the globe and the very music of humanity, but we shall not know it for English in any sense of which there is an existing literary measure.” And “there is no swarming like that of Israel, when once Israel has got a start....The scene here is one of Jewry that had burst all bounds.”¹⁸

H.G. Wells was even more direct in his pessimism. In *The Future in America: A Search After Realities*, published in 1906, he said,

I doubt very much if America is going to assimilate all that she is taking in now, much more do I doubt the still greater inflow of the coming years. I believe she is going to find infinite difficulties in that task. By ‘assimilate’ I mean making intelligently cooperative citizens of these people. If things go on as they are going, the mass of them will remain largely illiterate industrialized peasants. They are decent minded peasant people, orderly industrious people, rather dirty in their habits with a low standard of life. These people are not only half civilized and ignorant, but they have infected the white population with a kindred ignorance.¹⁹

These two eminent writers were joined in their pessimism by the presidents of the American Sociological Society and the American Economics Society, and members of the British and American Eugenics Societies. In the first two decades of the 20th century, there was much favorable discussion of eugenics, “the study or belief in the possibility of improving the qualities of the human species by such measures as discouraging reproduction by persons having genetic defects or presumed to

have inherited undesirable traits and encouraging the reproduction by persons presumed to have inheritable desirable traits.”²⁰ Among the supporters of this belief were Winston Churchill, Havelock Ellis, Margaret Sanger, G. B. Shaw, John Maynard Keynes, Sidney Webb, H. G. Wells and W. E. B. DuBois.

The eugenicists believed that there was a hierarchy of higher and lower races (the Jews and Italians and other newcomers from Eastern and Southern Europe obviously belonging to the lower races) and that these people, with their lower innate intelligence and a disproportionate percentage of insanity, were a threat to the preservation of “our Anglo-Saxon heritage.” They advocated measures, such as restricted immigration (and later sterilization of retarded people), to keep that heritage from being diluted by these unhealthy, unsavory barbarian races.

The U.S. government created an Immigration Commission in 1907 that produced 40 volumes of “scientific studies” and a final report of recommendations to back up its assertions about the long-term dangers of unlimited immigration. The ideas of eugenics were eventually incorporated into the Immigration laws of 1917, 1921 and 1924. In 1917 Congress passed the first literacy test for immigrants, which was vetoed by President Woodrow Wilson and eliminated in the succeeding laws. The 1921 law set quotas to reduce the influx of people displaced by World War I (mostly from Eastern Europe), limiting annual immigration from certain countries to 3% of the number of people from a given nationality resident in the U.S. in 1910 (after the greatest period of immigration). But the 1924 law was more restrictive, limiting the number to 2% of the residents here in 1890, when the foreign-born population, especially from Italy, Greece, Russia and Poland and other Slavic lands, was far smaller than it was in 1910. This law kept Jews out of the U.S. during the 1930s and 40s and even after the end of the World War II.

There were other opponents of unrestricted immigration, among them unions, which feared displacement by low-wage workers, willing to take jobs for any amount, no matter how low, and businessmen who were afraid that foreigners would strengthen unions and preach radical ideas.

The IRO and the Jewish establishment campaigned against the restriction but quietly and discretely, so as not to arouse anti-Jewish sentiments.

How to Research IRO Records

The American Jewish Historical Society has all the records of the IRO at the Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street in New York: reports on the individuals served, letters from immigrants about their experiences; the traveling agents' surveys of towns for possible "removal" and their regular reports to the New York office on their work with local committees and the new arrivals and reports on individual companies in various cities. The IRO agents traveled regularly to over 300 towns, north and south, east and west and in all 48 states.

To search for a specific person, go to cjh.org/p/61 and click on Family History Collections, type in the name of a city as the key word, a year, and then select the IRO database. If there are records for that city and that year, then a list of names will come up, arranged by date, not alphabetically. If the person you are searching for is listed, you will see the box number, page number and entry number. This information must be given to a CJH staff person who will then fetch the appropriate microfilm, where one can read the name and occupation of the person, city and address from which he was "removed," his new destination, his place of birth, length of time in the U.S., present wages, and the name of the wife and the number of children. Also listed is information as to who paid for the tickets to the new town and the amount paid.

A review of the IRO finding aid is very informative and gives the full chronology of its work from 1900 before its formal creation and ending in 1922, when "immigration reaches nearly a standstill and IRO activity ceases."

Although the IRO assisted only a very small percentage of the vast number of new immigrants, it made a big difference in the lives of the 79,000 individuals and their families and offers an interesting perspective on early 20th century Jewish immigration from Eastern Europe and the philanthropic institutions of the established German Jewish community.

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Endnotes

¹ Remarks by Leo Levi, quoted in Glazier, p. 49

² Glazier, p.9

³ Rockaway, p. 8

⁴ Glazier, p. 2

⁵ Levi quoted in Rockaway, p. 11

⁶ Glazier, p. 48

⁷ "Jews Leaving Roumania", *The New York Times*, October 14, 1900, p. 26

⁸ Rockaway, p. 51

⁹ Rockaway, p. 123

¹⁰ Rockaway, p. 154

¹¹ Glazier, p. 81, quoted from the American Jewish Yearbook, 1906, p. 267

¹² quoted in Glazier, p. 114

¹³ *Jewish Gazette*, May 1894, p. 1

¹⁴ Glazier, p. 117

¹⁵ Glazier, p. 119

¹⁶ Glazier, p. 118

¹⁷ James, p. 139

¹⁸ James, p. 139

¹⁹ Wells, pp. 141-142

²⁰ www.dicionary.com

Toby Sanchez has been the editor of DOROT since 2010. She is also a grant writer and the archivist, historian and co-president of the East Midwood Jewish Center. She began the study of the Romanian side of her family in 1999 in order to commemorate her mother's 90th birthday, which led to a continuing interest in genealogy. ☆

Upcoming and Current Events

Jewish Genealogical Society of New York

September 20, 2015 2:00 p.m.

“Stanton Street Shul Tour”

Speaker/Tour Guide: Elissa Sampson, PhD

Come tour the Stanton Street Shul, the last of the Lower East Side’s Eastern European tenement synagogues. Learn about the neighborhood that was once the world’s largest Jewish city and its historic and current Jewish immigrants and residents, in a building that reflects the layers of time. The Shul was put together from two existing structures to create a new Breznaner (Brzezhan, Ukraine) synagogue in 1913. After World War II, other Galitzianer towns – Rimanov (Rymanow, Poland) and Blujhzev (Błazowa, Poland) – joined the Breznaner congregation. The Stanton Street Shul building has an Eastern European religious folk art component: rare mazoles – paintings that represent the Jewish zodiac on the walls of its upstairs sanctuary.

While the building is badly in need of restoration, it has a new rabbi and a lively young growing congregation that is representative of the neighborhood’s more recent and diverse arrivals. Hence, the Shul is a place where new meets old in a constant conversation on how historic buildings serve as Jewish resources for the future. Check out the Shul’s website at: <http://www.stantonstshul.com/>

We will also discuss two nearby Lower East Side buildings that were originally designed as synagogues: the original German Jewish Anshe Chesed and Rodef Shalom. Today these buildings are the Orensanz Center and the Chasam Sofer synagogue, respectively.

The speaker/tour guide will be Dr. Elissa Sampson, an urban geographer, whose interests cover how the past is actively used to create new geographies of migration, memory and heritage. Her research interests include Lower East Side migration; American Jewish culture; Triangle Fire commemoration, historical preservation; and the practice of genealogy. She has lived most of her life in New York’s Lower East Side and has spent over 20 years as a part-time tour guide showing the historic neighborhood and its living communities to both visitors and residents.

Location: The Stanton Street Shul Tour, 180 Stanton Street, NY, NY 10002

Admission: Free to JGS members; \$5 for guests

October 11, 2015 2:00 p.m.

“From the Steppes to the Pampas: The Migration of Eastern European Jews to South America”

Speaker: Victor Armony, PhD

Victor Armony, a sociology professor at the University of Quebec in Montreal, will speak about Jewish immigration to South America and, in particular, to Argentina, his country of birth and home of the sixth largest Jewish community in the world. His late father, Paul Armony, was the founding president of that country’s Jewish Genealogical Association, and Victor has been researching his family roots since he was a teenager. He will talk about the fascinating history of the arrival and settlement of tens of thousands of Eastern European Jews in Buenos Aires at the end of the 19th and the first decades of the 20th century, and also about the remarkable case of the Jewish “cowboys” in the rural colonies of the Pampas. Victor will describe the different patterns of Jewish migration in the surrounding Spanish-language countries (e.g. Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay), and also the efforts by his father and the genealogical association to uncover and preserve records from Jewish cemeteries all over that region during the 1990s and early 2000s, including some which were all but abandoned and forgotten. Victor will refer to the available resources and databases of genealogical interest in South America, and he will share some memories and experiences regarding his own quest to connect his Jewish-Polish ancestry, his personal Hispanic cultural background, and his children’s French Canadian identity.

Location: Village Temple, 33 E 12th St, New York, NY 10003 (between Broadway and University Place); closest subway station is Union Square

Admission: free for JGS members; \$5 for guests

Mark your Calendar for more Fall Events

November 15, 2015, 2 p.m.

“Three Minutes in Poland”

Speaker: Glenn Kurtz

Location: Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street, New York, NY

December 20, 2015, 11 a.m.

Annual Meeting and Brunch followed by Lecture

“Knish: In Search of the Jewish Soul Food”

Speaker: Laura Silver

Location: Village Temple, 33 E 12th St, New York, NY 10003 (between Broadway and University Place); closest subway station is Union Square

New York State Family History Conference in Syracuse, New York

September 17-19, 2015

Register at <http://newyorkfamilyhistory.org>

This three-day conference is sponsored by the New York Genealogical & Biographical Society, Family Search, FindMyPast.Com, the Capital District, the Central New York Genealogical Society, the New England Genealogical Society, the New York State Library &

Archives and the William G. Pomeroy Foundation. It will be located at the Syracuse-Liverpool Holiday Inn, 441 Electronic Parkway in Liverpool, New York.

A Town Known as Auschwitz: An Exhibit at the Museum of Jewish Heritage/A Living Memorial to the Holocaust

Location: 36 Battery Plaza, New York 10280, Open Daily, except Saturday and Jewish Holidays. ☆

The Right to be Forgotten and Why It's Important to Genealogists

by Jan Meisels Allen

Do you have an interest in accessing European records from any of the 28 member states of the European Union (EU)? Do you know that access to newspaper articles, legal documents and other citations is being removed—delinked—from search engines such as Google which has over 85% of the EU search engine market? Do you know that the concept of the “right to be forgotten” and the “right to be erased” is spreading to Asia, Latin America, and Russia, and recently in the United States, *Consumer Watchdog* has requested that the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) impose the “right to be forgotten”? Do you know that France and other countries want to make the delinking by search engines universal—that is the search engines outside of the EU would also have to remove the requested links, not just those in the EU countries?

In the Spring 2015 issue of *Dorot*, an article by Yvette Hoitink talked about a new guideline in the EU ensuring citizens have the right to be forgotten. The guideline mentioned was published by the Article 29 Working Party of the EU and it is non-binding.¹ The Working Party is an independent European Advisory Board on data protection and privacy.

I wrote to JGS NY President Jane Rosen Berenbeim expressing concerns that the article did not go far enough. Jane kindly invited me to write an article about the “right to be forgotten”.

The issue of the right to be forgotten is more than a guideline.

European Union

The European Union, founded in 1993, is an economic

and political union of 28 member states that are located in Europe. For a list of the current 28 EU-member countries see: http://europa.eu/about-eu/countries/index_en.htm.

Data Protection Regulation

The concept of the “right to be forgotten” is both a legal and legislative issue in the European Union. Since 2012, the EU has been grappling with updating their Data Protection Directive to a Data Protection Regulation superseding the Directive. A directive, unlike a regulation, gives the member country more ability to interpret the law to their liking. It is true that since the original Directive was developed over two decades ago, many things have changed including the Internet and it needed to be updated. The proposed regulation’s intent is to give the individual control over his or her personal data and to simplify the regulatory environment for business by having one set of rules governing the entire EU rather than each member state having its own rules.

The proposed Data Privacy Regulation, which still has to be approved by all three branches of the EU Legislative body, includes the concept of the “right to be forgotten” which has been amended to be the “right to be erased.”

In March 2014, a number of amendments were adopted by the EU Parliament amending the original 2012 proposed regulation, including the provision for the “right of erasure” (amendments 23 and 27—the latter replaced the “right to be forgotten” provision).² The “right to erasure” provision states: “the right to erasure should not apply when the retention of personal data

is necessary for the performance of a contract with the data subject, or when there is a legal obligation to retain this data.”

EU Parliament elections were held in May 2014 before the other EU legislative components could vote. All three branches (EU Parliament, EU Council and EU Commission) must vote on the identical proposal in order for legislation to be enacted. In June 2015, the Council of the European Union agreed on a general approach and now must negotiate with the other parts of the EU legislative body--the European Parliament and the EU Commission. A final enacted Data Protection Regulation is not expected before the end of 2015. There are several issues, not just the “rights to be forgotten/erasure.” EU member countries are not unified in their positions. The delay in voting is due to the differences that are still being negotiated.

Right to be Forgotten or Erased

The right to be forgotten/erased is a controversial concept that allows individuals to have information that was posted about them on the Internet removed from search operators, such as Google, even when those references are truthful. EU regulators believe the Internet prevents citizens from escaping their past whether they did something adverse or foolish or just do not want their actions or information made available. This concept is antithetical to the United States’ core belief in freedom of expression. The right to privacy is a highly developed area of law in Europe. This is the debate that genealogists are continually confronting when accessing records—the right of privacy vs. the right to know— access to what we as genealogists believe is in the public domain and should be available.

The European Union concept appears to have no cutoff date, so that the right to be forgotten could outlast the individual’s life. This could permit an individual to alter history, or produce incorrect or false history. There should be “a statute of limitations” defining a date when the right lapses, and the censored information is freely available. Even a false statement is historically important as it may explain actions taken that otherwise would seem odd or inconsistent.

Aggrieved individuals could use the decision to hide or suppress information of public importance, including links about elected officials. In Europe, the right to privacy trumps freedom of speech; the reverse is true in the United States. However, in California, a law went

into effect in January 2015 providing minors with the right to erase what they placed on the Internet. Other states could follow and legislation could be expanded from adolescents to all persons. In June 2015, the Santa Monica, California-based Consumer Watchdog requested the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to impose the “right to be forgotten” concept from the European Union on Google in the United States.

We have seen movement in Latin America, Asia and elsewhere where the “right to be forgotten/erased” has been adopted.

European Union Court of Justice Ruling against Google

In 1998, a Spanish newspaper published two small notices stating that certain property owned by Mario Costeja González, a lawyer, was going to be auctioned to pay off his debts. Costeja later cleared up his financial difficulties, but whenever someone Googled Mr. Costeja’s name, the newspaper records continued to surface. In 2010, Costeja went to Spanish authorities to demand that the newspaper remove the items from its website and that Google remove the links from searches for his name. The Spanish Data Protection Agency denied the claim against the newspaper, but granted the claim against Google. In May 2014, the European Court of Justice (EUCJ) affirmed the Spanish agency’s decisions. The newspaper could leave the Costeja items up on its website, but Google was prohibited from linking to them on any searches relating to Costeja’s name. In a broadly worded directive, the EUCJ went on to say that all individuals in the countries within its jurisdiction had the right to prohibit Google from linking to items that were “inadequate, irrelevant or no longer relevant, or excessive in relation to the purposes for which they were processed and in the light of the time that has elapsed.” While the actual documents are still on the Internet, most people use a search engine such as Google (which has over 85% of the search engine market in the EU), in order to find the links to the original documents.³

Google has complied with the EUCJ ruling and has received hundreds of thousands of requests for delinking (removing the link to the story, record etc.). Google opened a digital hotline to let Europeans complain when links to embarrassing personal information turn up in a search of their names. The complaints are vetted and removed unless a company-appointed panel says the public’s right to access the information outweighs a complainant’s right to privacy. Google accepted 41

percent of the requests.⁴ While the case was against Google, all search engines (e.g., Bing, Yahoo, etc.) are required to comply

The European Case for the Right to be Forgotten to be Global

In February 2015, a French Court found that the “right to be forgotten” should be global, that is, links should be removed on all of the search engines’ sites, including those outside of the European Union, such as Google.com in the US or Google.ca in Canada or Google.com.au in Australia. Google maintains that the ruling should only apply across its European domains, such as Google.fr in France and Google.de in Germany.

The French Data Protection Agency, CNIL, decreed that the earlier French Court decision on delisting to be global needs to be followed and gave Google 15 days to comply or sanctions would be imposed. Google has refused to comply and is appealing the CNIL ruling. Google warned applying the “right to be forgotten” globally would trigger a “race to the bottom” and the “Internet would only be as free as the world’s least free place”. Google believes that “no one country should have the authority to control what content someone in a second country can access”.⁵

IAJGS Action

In August 2013 the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) submitted letters to each of the 28 EU Ministers addressing our concerns about the right to be forgotten/erased and asking the proposed regulation be amended to reflect those concerns:

- Access to vital records—historical as well as current— is essential in making certain that one is researching the correct person. Information included in birth, marriage, and death records is critical to reconstructing families and tracing genetically-inherited attributes in current family members.
- “The right to be remembered.” Many family historians are still trying to find out about their lost relatives from the Holocaust. Not only do we need to help people trace those who were lost or murdered during the Holocaust but also those persons trying to reunite members/descendants of their original family by first finding out their original roots.

The IAJGS Public Records Access Monitoring

Committee monitors the actions of the EU on the right to be forgotten/erased and posts items relevant to this on the IAJGS Records Access Alert. To continue to be informed about this critical issue and to access any of the Records Access Alerts, go to: <http://lists.iajgs.org/mailman/private/records-access-alerts/>. You must be a registered subscriber to access the archives. To register go to: <http://lists.iajgs.org/mailman/listinfo/records-access-alerts> and follow the instructions to enter your email address, full name and which JGS/JHS/SIG/JewishGen is your affiliation. You will receive an email response that you have to reply to or the subscription will not be finalized.

The “right to be forgotten/right to be erased” is erasing history—both of individuals and countries. Being aware of these concepts and making efforts to prevent the expansion and adoption of these concepts are of crucial importance. Genealogists are very concerned about the potential loss of access to links that might help them with researching their family history and the history of their ancestral towns.

An earlier version of an article discussing the EU’s “Right to be Forgotten” appeared in Avotaynu Online.⁶ *Jan Meisels Allen is the Chairperson, IAJGS Public Records Access Monitoring Committee; IAJGS representative as sponsoring member to the Records Preservation and Access Committee; President of the JGS of the Conejo Valley and Ventura County (California) and a member of JGS NY, Inc. She can be reached at janmallen@att.net.* ☆

Endnotes

¹http://ec.europa.eu/justice/data-protection/article-29/documentation/opinion-recommendation/files/2014/wp225_en.pdf

²<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P7-TA-2014-0212&language=EN>

³<http://curia.europa.eu/juris/document/document.jsf?text=&docid=150642&pageIndex=0&doclang=EN&mode=req&dir=&occ=first&part=1&cid=24797>

⁴<http://www.google.com/transparencyreport/removals/europeprivacy/?hl=en-US>

⁵<http://googlepolicyeurope.blogspot.de/2015/07/implementing-european-not-global-right.html>

⁶<http://www.avotaynuonline.com/2015/03/european-unions-proposed-right-forgotten-described/>

JGS Program Reports

by Harriet Mayer and Steve Stein

April 15, 2015

“Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind”

Sarah Wildman, award-winning journalist and author, opened her presentation with a description of her beloved grandfather from the introduction to her book, *Paper Love: Searching for the Girl My Grandfather Left Behind*.

“We called my grandfather *saba*, the modern, muscular Hebrew appellation, rather than the Old World Yiddish, *zeyde* – or German, *Opa* – let alone the (far too) American *grandpa*. Born Chaim, he went by Karl, [and later Carl]. My grandfather, in my memory and in the hagiography of my family, was a bon vivant, a multilingual, well-traveled émigré doctor, who lived with the joie de vivre of a man who had never been oppressed by hardship. Or maybe that’s not right: with the joie de vivre of a man who had known *only* hardship, and then emerged from it, phoenixlike, into a problemless promised land. He was dashing, a character out of (Jewish) film noir, with a perfect suit, a jaunty hat, a top note of expensive European aftershave....He

carried himself in the way of men who know they are appealing, who understand women – and men – and how to win over either sex. And swoon they did. His inherent attraction was some combination of pheromones, charisma, charm, actual beauty, mystery.”

“As much as my grandfather loved America, for what it stood for, for its freedoms, for what it had done for him, he never seemed ‘of’ this country; certainly he stood apart from, or perhaps outside, the town in northwest Massachusetts where he settled and opened a medical practice. His English, though grammatically perfect, had the light, lyrical accent of European sophisticates; he

would, biannually, free himself from our idioms entirely for six weeks at a time and find his way back to Europe.”

The story of Karl and his family’s leaving Vienna, six months after the Anschluss, was part of family lore. The whole immediate family – Karl, his mother, his sister and brother-in-law and nephew, left together and came to the United States; a relative had provided the necessary affidavits. Because he had finished his medical studies before Jews were expelled from the schools, he would be able to pursue his career here.

The early years here were very difficult – it was hard to find a place to practice and money was always a problem, even with help from a physician’s group formed to help refugee doctors. There was no money available to help family left behind in Europe. Later he had a very successful practice in Massachusetts.

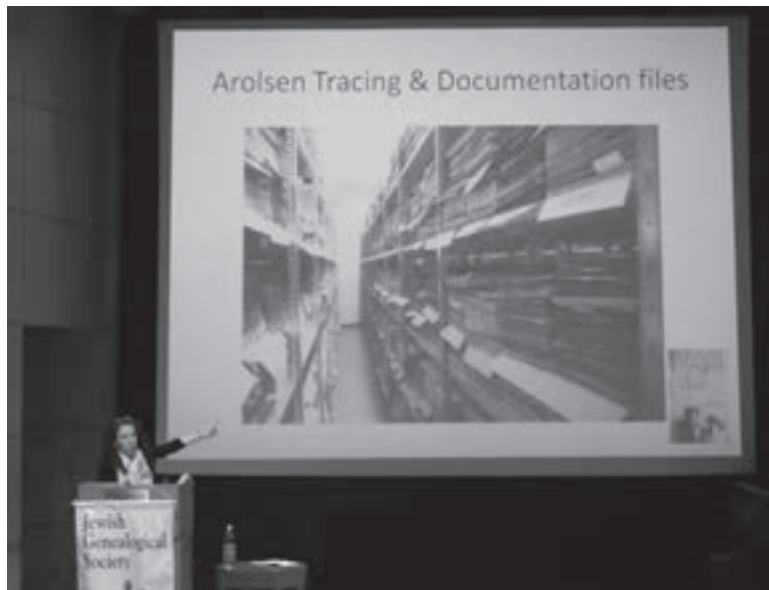
At some point after her grandfather’s death in 1990, Sarah discovered a photo album she had not seen before, with pictures of a girl called “Valy.” Her grandmother called her “your grandfather’s true love,” and refused to

discuss any further details. Sarah was intrigued, but not sure how to go further with this story. Some years later, after her career was more established, her grandmother’s death and the selling of her grandparents’ house, Sarah discovered a cache of letters “hidden” in a file marked “Patient Correspondence”, but they were not from patients. They were from friends of the family and from “Valy.” These letters set her on the quest to find “the girl her grandfather left behind.”

In 2007, when the Bad Arolsen archives were about to be opened to researchers, Sarah was selected to be the journalist who accompanied the first group. Her



Sarah Waldman speaking about her grandfather and her research on his friend Valy.



Sarah Waldman describes the piles of paper at the International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, Germany

experiences became a series of reports on Slate.com which won Sarah the Peter Weitz Prize from the German Marshall Fund “for excellence and originality in reporting on Europe.” She described for us the overwhelming amount of unorganized material in the Bad Arolsen archive, and her efforts to explain what was there and how it could be used by researchers. While she was there, she took the opportunity to pursue information about Valy. There was a file for her there, and it indicated that someone else had been looking for her back in the 1950s, and that she had been married. The reports about Bad Arolsen became the basis of this book.

Sarah eventually followed Valy’s trail from Vienna to Trapow, Czechoslovakia, and then to Berlin. In Vienna, Sarah had a journalism grant and worked with congenial people while she steeped herself in Viennese history, through which she became much more aware of the virulent anti-Semitism of the time, particularly at the University and the medical school.

In Berlin, she met some people who had been there at the same time that Valy was working in a children’s school. Again she was confronted both by an attitude of “past history” and a sense that so much has already been forgotten. She traced the details of Valy’s

time, and also found the location of the old age home where Valy’s mother had worked.

Though she did not include this information in her talk, we learn from her book that Sarah eventually found a child of the person who had been looking for Valy, the sister of the man Valy had married. Through her, she finally found out about the end of Valy’s life and more about the man she had married in the last days before deportation.

As a third-generation descendant of survivors, she is concerned about how we will remember and who will tell the stories when all the people who actually lived through these times are gone.

Harriet Mayer is JGS Vice President, Communications. She is a retired school librarian who has been researching her family in Belarus and Ukraine, and her husband’s family in Germany, for ten years. ☆

May 17, 2015

“Holly Golightly Was a Nice Jewish Girl: Our Ancestors Reinvented”

Not all Jewish family histories followed the conventional story that many of us are accustomed to, according to Pamela Weisberger, genealogist, president of Geshen Galicia, and frequent speaker at JGS meetings. Some Jewish immigrants not only shed their old world clothing and shtetl names, but reinvented their personalities,



Pamela Weisberger introducing her book, *Holly Golightly Was a Nice Jewish Girl: Researching the Reinventions of Our Ancestors*



Pamela Weisberger answering questions after her presentation at the May 17 JGS meeting

creating new identities and obscuring old ones. These people may be passingly familiar to us as fictional characters such as Truman Capote's Holly Golightly of *Breakfast at Tiffany's* fame, but according to Pamela, they were based on or were a composite of real people.

Pamela described the research she conducted, pretty much solely out of curiosity, on such women as Carol Matthau, perhaps the most likely basis for the fictional character. Through sheer will and force of her personality and that of her mother, and her mother's marriage into high society, Carol lifted herself into rarefied social circles. She befriended Truman Capote, as well as Oona O'Neill Chaplin, daughter of Eugene O'Neill and wife of Charlie Chaplin, and Gloria Vanderbilt. At various points in her life, she was married to writer William Saroyan and actor Walter Matthau. Pamela speculated on rumors that actor Leslie Howard of "Gone with the Wind" fame (whose father was Jewish) was actually Carol's father. Other potential models for the character included an author named Bonnie Golightly, who actually sued Capote, as well as Vanderbilt and Oona Chaplin themselves.

In doing her research, Pamela investigated the whereabouts of the various characters involved in these stories at the times the true events should have happened (such as whether Leslie Howard could have been

Carol's biological father), as well as trying to contact Carol's son Aram by William Saroyan. She used many standard techniques that we all use as genealogists.

The actual prototype for Holly may remain a mystery, but it is clear that there were some colorful characters of Jewish origin who may have developed into American cultural icons. And genealogical research helped Pamela Weisberger discover them and back up the legends with facts.

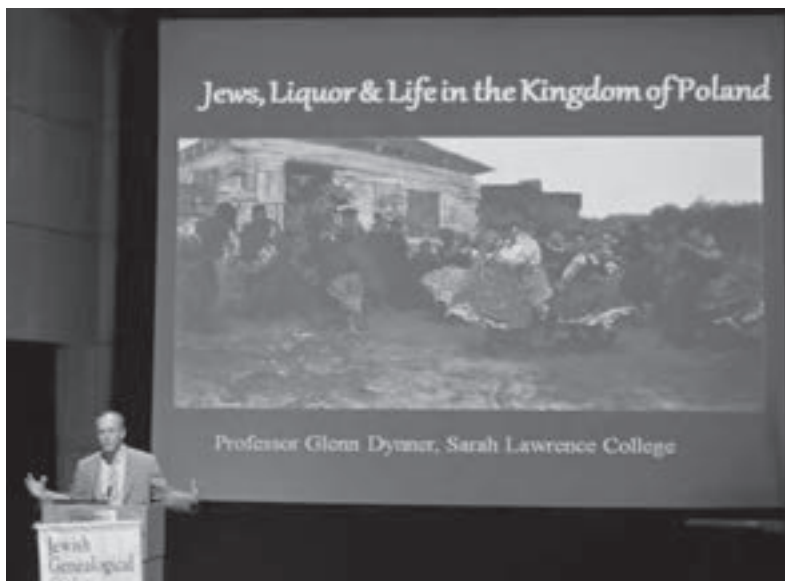
June 14, 2015

"Jews, Liquor, and Life in Eastern Europe"

Jewish life in much of Eastern Europe, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries, centered around the estates of the nobles, and life on the estates often centered around the taverns.

Glenn Dynner, Professor of Jewish Studies and Chair of Humanities at Sarah Lawrence College, spoke extensively on this topic at the June meeting, detailing the facts and myths of how those taverns, and the liquor trade in general, were often run by Jews.

Fully three quarters of the Jews in the mid-19th century lived in Poland. As early as the mid-1500s, Poland had become one of the most favorable places economically for Jews, because Jews were often viewed by the local nobility as being more honest and trustworthy than the local peasants, and because Jews were prohibited from owning land themselves, they were often put in key



Professor Glenn Dynner discussing the role of Jews as tavernkeepers in Poland.



Professor Glenn Dynner responding to questions following his presentation.

positions of responsibility on the estates, most notably the tavern keepers, as well as mill operators and other professions. It was expected, justifiably or not, that Jews would not become drunkards even if they were in constant proximity to the rye-based vodka and other alcoholic beverages prevalent at the time.

Professor Dynner showed paintings such as those by Polish artist Jozef Chelmonski, Henryk Rodakowski, and W. Grabowski that demonstrate life in the taverns. These paintings have obviously Jewish characters, and some of these appeared as late as the second half of the 19th century. He also referred to the poem “Pan Tadeusz” by Adam Mickiewicz which spoke of Jankiel the Tavernkeeper. Professor Dynner’s hypothesis,

supported by these artifacts, is that Jewish tavernkeeping and sale of liquor continued beyond the time when the practice was “outlawed.”

In fact, agreements of legal fiction began to arise whereby the Christian Pole became the front for a tavern business which was actually still operated by Jews. This practice continued for a long while during the 19th century. It was only after the emancipation of the serfs in the Russian Empire in the 1860s that the culture began to change, albeit slowly; the nobles were no longer in as tight control as they had been, and thus the Jews eventually lost their protectors. Peasants eventually began moving to the towns and cities and sought to take over these businesses, and pogroms became more commonplace.

One of the ironies pointed out by Professor Dynner is that Jewish sobriety was largely a myth, at least within Hasidic circles.

The difference was that within the Jewish community, drinking was largely confined to private venues, whereas the peasants were much more likely to drink, and consequently get drunk, in public venues.

As many attendees claim to have ancestors or other relatives who are believed to have been involved in the liquor trade in one way or another, it was easy to identify with Professor Dynner’s narrative.

Steve Stein is a member of the JGS Executive Council. He is a retired software systems professional in the telecommunications industry and has been researching his own and his wife’s Eastern European genealogies for more than thirty-five years. ☆

New Publications continued from page 21

Press, 2013), 1152 pages, 203 color illus. 49 halftones, 7 maps, \$75.

From the publisher: “This is the first encyclopedia guide to the history of relations between Jews and Muslims around the world from the birth of Islam to today. Richly illustrated and beautifully produced, the book features more than 150 authoritative and accessible articles by an international team of leading experts in history, politics, literature, anthropology,

and philosophy. Organized thematically and chronologically, this indispensable reference guide provides critical facts and balanced context for greater historical understanding and a more informed dialogue between Jews and Muslims.” A reviewer wrote: “A solid work of scholarship....a serious and timely effort to repair a relationship between kindred people who have never been fully at ease with each other, and yet, thanks to the accidents of history, are fated to live in close proximity.” ☆

Online Access to the Lectures at the 35th IAJGS

For those who couldn't attend this year's International Conference on Jewish Genealogy in Jerusalem, it is possible to access 50 of the lectures and the resource handouts (when provided by the speaker) from one's computer up until October 10, 2015. The price is \$149 for the entire package or \$55 for individual days. To register, go to the Conference website, <http://iajgs2015.org> and follow the "On Demand" tab. Registrants will receive a unique password for access.

The Online Museum of Family History Tells the Stories of Eastern European Jewish Life

Among this site's features are sections on: (1) Eastern European Jewry, which shows conditions of Jewish life from the time of the Czars to the Holocaust and beyond; (2) postcards from Europe, including photographs of families; (3) Walk in My Shoes (stories told by Holocaust survivors from Hungary, Poland and Ukraine); (4) From the Pale to the Golden Land (how our families came to America); (5) the Yiddish World (about Jewish books and plays, writers and actors); and (6) World Holocaust Memorials (photos and descriptions from Europe, the U.S., Canada, Israel and elsewhere).

<http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/exhibitions-1.htm>

UK Holocaust Foundation Seeks Survivors' Stories

The new UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation urges survivors and those affected by Nazi persecution who have never told their stories to come forward and do so before it is too late. The Foundation is working with Yad Vashem, the American Shoah Foundation and other established groups. If you are a survivor or know one and would like to tell your story for the first time, you may email a message to UKHMF@cabinetoffice.gov.uk or write to the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, PO 72270, London, SW1P 9WU.

Two Sources for Photos of Gravestones in Polish Jewish Cemeteries

JRI-Poland and the Foundation for Documentation of Jewish Cemeteries (FJDC) began collaborating in 2014 and have since photographed and transcribed gravestones in over 80 cemeteries (approximately 100,000 gravestones) in Poland and put the information online at

www.jri-poland.org/foundation-for-documentation-jewish-cemeteries.htm/ The site is searchable by surname, given name and town or a combination of these.

Virtual Shtetl (<http://www.szetel.org.pl/en/>) contains a section called "Memory in Stone –Virtual Maps of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland" that lists cemeteries in 150 towns; a click on the town reveals a report on the condition of each cemetery, plus pictures of individual stones identified by name of the deceased or by number if the name is not readable. A click on the picture brings a clear photo with readable inscription in Hebrew and (with another click) a translation into Polish, plus the date of death in the Jewish calendar and the Gregorian calendar. For example, the Belz cemetery contains the grave of Sara Miral Corka Abrahamama Jehoszuy Heszela, who died on the 10th of Elul in 5688 or August 28, 1928.

Find a Grave for Those Without Graves

Scattered Seeds (JGS of Palm Beach), *The Kol (JGS of Cleveland)*, and Gary Mokotoff report that Findagrave.com lists Holocaust victims who have no graves.

Deciphering Jewish Names in the Cyrillic Alphabet

The Kol reports a clever way to translate names from one alphabet to another: look up a well known person on Wikipedia, click on translate article into Russian, and then see the person's name with Cyrillic letters.

The Major Communities of Poland in 1900, Grouped by Guberniya

See following pages.

Geography of the Pale of Jewish Settlement (excluding Poland)

See following pages.

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Mr. Hal Bookbinder has graciously allowed DOROT to reprint these charts which show the *guberniyas* of the various parts of the Russian Empire and Poland where Jews lived in 1897 and the approximate Jewish populations at that time. ☆

Geography of Poland

In 1815, the Kingdom of Poland was reconstituted at the Congress of Vienna, with the Russian Tsar as its King. The resultant entity was referred to as Congress Poland ("Kongresowka"). Congress Poland was divided into provinces referred to as palatinates or voivodships ("Wojewodztwa" in Polish). These voivodships included Cracow, Sandomier, Lublin, Podlachia, Kalisz, Plock, Warsaw, and Augustowo. The first four covered Polish lands that had been occupied by the Austrian Empire as Western Galicia. The latter four covered Polish lands that had been occupied by Prussia.

After two unsuccessful attempts at revolution, the army and legislature of Congress Poland were disbanded and it was consolidated into the Russian empire as "Vistulaland", the "governments on the Vistula" or the "territory on the Vistula", though it continued to be referred to as Congress Poland or the Kingdom of Poland. Its provinces were redrawn into ten guberniya, administered in the Russian fashion. Kielce was created out of Cracow. Radom was fashioned out of Sandomier. Podlachia was renamed Siedlce. Augustowo was divided into Suwalki in the north and Lomza in the south. Piotrkow was formed from portions of Cracow, Sandomier, Kalisz, and Warsaw. The other voivodships retained their names as they were converted to guberniya.

Russian Poland was bounded on the north by the Prussian provinces of West and East Prussia, on the west by those of Posen and Prussian Silesia, on the south by the Austrian crownland of Galicia, and on the east by the Russian governments of Volhynia, Vilna, Grodno, and Kovno.

In the census of 1897, Congress Poland contained 1,321,100 Jews, who constituted 14.0% of the population. Jews tended to live in cities and other urban areas, where they often constituted more than half of the population of the urban area. The chart below lists the ten Congress Poland guberniyas and some significant communities in each at the turn of the century. The communities shown are those on the map of Russia in the 1900 edition of The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia.

Guberniya #, % Jews, 1897	Major communities, 1900 (identified by their contemporary names)
Kalisz 71,700, 8.5%	Działoszyn, Kalisz, Kleczew, Koło, Konin, Leczyca, Ozorków, Sieradz, Słupca, Turek, Warta, Wielun, Wieruszów, Zdąńska Wola
Warsaw 351,900, 18.2%	Aleksandrow Kujawski, Blonie, Gabin, Góra Kalwaria, Gostynin, Grochów, Grojec, Kowal, Kutno, Łowicz, Lubien Kujawski, Minsk Mazowiecki, Mszczonów, Nasielsk, Nowy Dwór Mazowiecki, Piasek, Praga, Pułtusk, Radziejów, Radzymin, Skierniewice, Warszawa, Włocławek, Wołomin
Plock 51,500, 9.2%	Bieżan, Chorzele, Ciechanów, Lipno, Mława, Osada Lubież, Plock, Prasnysz, Rypin, Sierpc, Wyszogrod
Lomza 91,400, 15.6%	Grajewo, Kolno, Lomza, Maków Mazowiecki, Wysokie Mazowieckie, Myszyniec, Nur, Ostrołęka, Ostrow Mazowiecka, Szczuczyn, Tykocin
Suwalki 59,200, 9.7%	Augustów, Kalvarija, Kudirkos Naumiestis, Marijampole, Prienai, Scirijai, Sejny, Suwalki, Szakiiai, Vilkaviskis, Virbalis
Piotrkow 222,600, 15.8%	Bedzin, Brzeziny, Częstochowa, Koluszki, Lask, Łódź, Myszków, Pabianice, Piotrków Trybunalski, Radomsko, Rawy Mazowiecka, Tomaszów Mazowiecki, Warta, Wolborz, Żarki, Zgierz
Radom 112,300, 13.7%	Ilza, Konskie, Kozielnice, Radom, Raków, Opatów, Opoczno, Ostrowiec Świętokrzyski, Przedborz, Sandomierz, Solec, Staszów, Szydłowiec, Zwoleń
Siedlce 121,100, 15.6%	Biała Podlaska, Garwolin, Janów Podlaski, Laskarzew, Łosice, Maciejowice, Ostrow Lubelski, Parczew, Siedlce, Sokółów Podlaski, Stoczek, Węgrow, Zelechów
Kielce 83,200, 10.9%	Busko Zdrój, Chęciny, Chmielnik, Działoszyce, Jedrzejów, Kielce, Nowy Korczyn, Łuków, Miechów, Olkusz, Pilica, Pinczów, Stopnica, Włoszczowa
Lublin 156,200, 13.4%	Bilgoraj, Biskupiec Lubelskie, Bychawa, Chełm, Hrubieszów, Janów Lubelski, Kazimierz Dolny, Krasnik, Krasnostaw, Lubartów, Lublin, Paławy, Szczepieszyn, Tamogrod, Tomaszów Lubelski, Uchanie, Zamość



Geography of the Pale of Jewish Settlement (excluding Poland)

The Pale of Jewish Settlement consisted of the Vice regencies of Belorussia, Bessarabia, Lithuania, New Russia, and Ukraine (Poland was a separate legal entity). Each vice regency was composed of one or more guberniyas (provinces). Each guberniya was made up of a number of uyezds (districts). Normally, the name of a uyezd was the same as its chief town. When the town had a different name, it is shown as "Uyezd/Town." The chart below shows these breakdowns. The population figures are from the 1897 Russian census as shown in the *Atlas of Modern Jewish History* by Evyatar Friesel. The list of uyezds by guberniya is from the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*. The contemporary names (in parenthesis) are from *Where Once We Walked* by Gary Mokotoff and Sallyann Saek.

Vice regency #, % Jews, 1897	Guberniya (year formed) # Jews, 1897	Uyezd (contemporary name) * = Guberniya capital
Belorussia 724,000, 13.6%	Minsk (1793-95, 1796) 345,000, 16% (1906)	Bobruysk, Borisov, Igumen (Cherven), *Minsk, Mozyr, Novogradok, Pinsk, Rezhitsa, Slutsk
	Mogilev (1773-78, 1802) 203,900, 11.9%	Bykhov, Chausy, Cherikov, Gomel, Gorki, Klimovichi, *Mogilev, Mstislavl, Orsha, Rogachev, Sennó
	Vitebsk (1802) 175,600, 10.1 % (1906)	Drissa (Verkhnedvinsk), Dvinsk (Daugavpils), Gorodok, Lepel, Liutsan (Ludza), Nevel, Polotsk, Rezhitsa (Rezhkne), Sebezh (Sebeza), Velizh, *Vitebsk
Bessarabia 228,500, 11.8%	Bessarabia (1873) 228,500, 11.8%	Akkerman (Belgorod Dbestrovskiy), Beltsy, Bendery, Izmail, Khotin, Kishinev, Orgyev, Soroki
Lithuania 697,900, 14.7%	Grodno (1801) 280,000, 7.4%	Bialystok, Bielsk, Brest Litovsk (Brest), *Grodno, Kobrin, Pruzhany, Slonim, Sokolka, Volkovysk
	Kovno (1842) 212,700, 13.7%	*Kovno (Kaunas), Novouleksandrovsk (Zarasai), Panevezys, Rasciniai, Siauliai, Telsiai, Vilkomir (Ukmerge)
	Vilna (1795-97, 1802) 204,700, 12.7%	Disna, Lida, Oshmyany, Svencionsys, Trakai, Vileika (Naujoji Vilnia), *Vilna (Vilnius)
New Russia 501,800, 8.0%	Yekaterinoslav (1802) 101,100, 4.7%	Aleksandrovska, Bakhmut (Artemosvk), *Yekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk), Mariupol (Zhdanov), Novomoskovsk, Pavlograd, Slavianskerbsk/Lugansk (Voroshilovgrad), Verkhnedneprovsk
	Kherson (1803) 339,000, 12.4%	Aleksandriya, Ananyev, Elizavetgrad (Kirovograd), *Kherson, Odessa, Tiraspol
	Tavrida (1802) 60,800, 4.2%	Berdyansk, Dnepr/Alshki (Tayurupinsk), Feodosiya, Melitopol, Perekop, *Simferopol, Yalta, Yevpatoriya
Ukraine 1,425,500, 9.7%	Chernigov (1796) 114,500, 5.0%	Borzna, *Chernigov, Glukhov, Gorodnya, Konotop, Kozelets, Krolevets, Mglin, Nezhin, Novgorod Severskiy, Novozybkov, Oster, Sosnitsa, Starodub, Surazh
	Kiev (1708-81, 1796) 433,700, 12.2%	Berdichev, Cherkassy, Chigirin, Kanev, *Kiev (Kiyev), Lipovets, Radomyshl, Skvira, Tarashcha, Uman, Vasilkov, Zvenigorodka
	Podolia (1796) 370,600, 12.3%	Balta, Bratslav, Gaysin, *Kamenets Podolskiy, Letichev, Litin, Mogilev Podolskiy, Novaya Ushitsa, Olgopol, Proskurov (Khmelnitskiy), Vinnitsa, Yampol
	Poltava (1802) 110,900, 4%	Gadyach, Khorol, Konstantinograd (Krasnograd), Kovel'yaki, Kremenchug, Lokhvitsa, Lubny, Mirgorod, Pereyaslav (Pereyaslav Khmelnitskiy), Piryatin, *Poltava, Prileki, Romny, Zenkov, Zolotonosha
	Volhynia (1796) 395,800, 13.2%	Dubno, Iryslav, Kovel, Kremenets, Lutsk, Novograd Volynski, Ostrog, Ovruch, Rovno, Starokonstantinov, Vladimir Volynski, *Zhitomir

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New, Recent, and Noteworthy Publications

Books about Jewish Life Around the World

Azriel Shoet (author), Mark Mirsky & Moshe Rosman (editors), Faigie Trooper, (trans.) *The Jews of Pinsk, 1881 to 1941* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Studies in Jewish History, 2013), 792 p. \$67.50.

From the publisher: “Pinsk was a small city in Eastern Europe where Jews were a majority of the population from the end of the eighteenth century. Pinsk boasted both traditional rabbinic scholars and famous Hasidic figures, and over time became an international trade emporium, a center of the Jewish Enlightenment, a cradle of Zionism and the Jewish labor movement, and a place where Orthodoxy struggled vigorously with modernity. This book focuses on Pinsk’s turbulent final sixty years. From the 1905 Russian revolution through World War One and the long prologue to the Holocaust, the sweep of world history and the fate of this dynamic center of Jewish life were intertwined.” A reviewer wrote: “This is a wonderful piece of scholarship that enlightens our understanding of Jewish communal life in Eastern Europe in modern time. It uses archival documents, unpublished letters, memoirs, rare newspapers in four languages and conversations with individuals from Pinsk.”

Jan Lanicek, *Czechs, Slovaks and the Jews, 1938-1948: Beyond Idealisation and Condemnation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 280 pages, \$95.

From the publisher: “Covering the period between the Munich Agreement and the Communist Coup in February, 1948, this volume provides the first full account of the Czechoslovak Government-In-Exile in London. The author challenges the official history which still presents Czechoslovakia as an exceptional case study of a state that treated the Jews decently. Instead, he explores the notion that Czechoslovak treatment of the Jews was shaped by resurgent Czech and Slovak nationalism caused by the war and by the occupation of the German army.” A reviewer wrote: “This important contribution will be of interest to students of nationalism, Czechoslovak politics and Jewish history alike.”

David Laskin, *The Family* (New York: Penguin Books USA, 2013), 401 pages, \$25.

From the publisher: “David Laskin has written the story of his family and in doing so he has given us a sweeping historical account of the Jewish experience in the twentieth century. Opening on the western edge of the Russian Empire at the turn of the last century, *The Family* tells the story of a Torah scribe and his wife and how their descendants took three dramatically different journeys spanning multiple continents and two world wars. Some went to the crowded tenements of New York City’s Lower East Side, some stayed in the yeshiva town of Volozhin in the midst of bitter Tsarist pogroms, and some struggled to establish an agricultural village in Palestine’s Hefer valley. One of Laskin’s ancestors, four foot eleven Ida Rosenthal, was the dynamo behind the Maidenform Bra Company. Using sources that range from gripping family letters to U.S. Census records to archival Holocaust testimony, Laskin masterfully animates one family’s journal with skill and ingenuity.” David Laskin was the featured speaker at the February 2014 meeting of the JGSNY.

Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 288 pages, 24 illustrations, \$32.50.

From the publisher: “For those who had survived the unimaginable, the experience of liberation was a slow, grueling journey back to life. In this unprecedented inquiry into the days, months and years following the arrival of Allied forces at the Nazi camps, a foremost historian of the Holocaust draws on archival sources and eyewitness testimonies to reveal the complex challenges liberated victims faced and the daunting tasks their liberators undertook to help them reclaim their shattered lives. Historian Dan Stone focuses on the survivors –their feelings of guilt, exhaustion, fear, shame and devastating grief, their immense medical problems and their later demands to be released from Displaced Persons camps and settled in countries of their own choosing. Stone also tracks the efforts of British, American, Canadian and Russian liberators as they contended with survivors’ immediate needs, then grappled with longer term issues that shaped the postwar world and ushered in the first chill of the Cold War.”

Abdelwahab Meddeb & Benjamin Stora, editors, *A History of Jewish-Muslim Relations: From the Origin to the Present Day* (Princeton: Princeton University

continued on page 17

QUESTIONING THE EXPERTS

DOROT questions both JGS members and outside experts about their genealogical skills and elicits their advice for those embarking on their own genealogical path.

Interview with Itzhak Epstein

DOROT: What motivated you to get interested in genealogy?

EPSTEIN: Actually, what motivated me to continue? It started around 1990 with my sister sending me copies of the Epstein genealogies – Efrayim Mordechai Epstein’s (my fourth cousin three times removed) *Gvurot He’ari* (<http://hebrewbooks.org/46713>) and Shim’on Arye Epstein’s (my third cousin three times removed) 1908 Epstein family tree. I knew the family myth. So then I got involved in my patrilineal line, which was a start. And everything followed from there. Of course, I was minimally knowledgeable about genealogy, but I was fascinated by Efrayim’s book and Shim’on’s tree, which covered mostly the 18th and 19th centuries.

DOROT: You mentioned “the family myth.” Why do you call it a “myth”?

EPSTEIN: Undocumented family lore. The account is that during the golden age in Spain our family name was Benveniste and as persecutions increased, we migrated westward and settled in a place called Eppstein where we changed our surname. Of course, I examined the collateral information about that reference. Who were the Benvenistes? Which Benvenistes? And so forth. I became fairly knowledgeable except for one thing: I could not find any information connecting our Spanish origin to the Eppstein family that appeared in Frankfurt am Main in 1392. I found information in German and Hebrew about this Eppstein family. But how they connect to the Benevenistes of Barcelona and Girona is still a mystery.

DOROT: But you are certain that the Epstein family that you found in Frankfurt is your Epstein family?

EPSTEIN: Not exactly, but mostly. Most of the literature refers to Epstein families here and there. But the only Epstein family that I could find in the middle of the second millennium was in Frankfurt. And the Epstein genealogical classics trace us back to the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 1600s. From there backwards it gets vague. But with further research I connected the Polish Epsteins to the Prague Epsteins.

I’ve not been sufficiently diligent in the matter of two generations or so connecting the Prague Epsteins to the Frankfurt Eppsteins, which I assume I should be able to do. But that’s not where I am investing my resources. There is a fairly good source documenting the Frankfurt Epsteins. Unfortunately, however, they fade away in the late 1400s. They probably migrated and/or changed their surnames. Because I am involved in so many genealogical projects, my patrilineal Epstein research became just one part of it. I know what I have to do, but how much resources, especially time, do I have?

DOROT: The Epstein family on your father’s side is one line that you’ve been working on...

EPSTEIN: One line, and with every generation there is a father and a mother. And I was sticking to the direct patrilineal Epstein line. These are what I would call the historic Epsteins because we are the Epsteins about whom there is a family history, and who are recognized as an established rabbinical family (http://www.jewishgen.org/rabbinic/infofiles/famous_surnames.htm).

And what I’ve discovered through genetic research – and, by the way, much of my genealogical involvement in the past decade has been with genetic genealogy and that becomes very complex – is that about one quarter of the tested Epsteins, myself included, form a cluster of matched Y-DNA (<https://www.familytreedna.com/public/Epstein/default.aspx?section=yresults>). The other Epsteins’ Y-DNA matches range throughout Ashkenazi Jewry. In addition, more “non-Epsteins” than Epsteins match me.

I can trace my Epstein ancestry through *Gvurot He’ari*, which is about as good a genealogy as you can expect out of 19th century Eastern European Jewry. It includes my two times great gggrandfather and cites the family tradition tracing us back to Frankfurt and Spain. While I am not at all sure about Spain, I am pretty sure about Frankfurt.

In addition to *Gvurot He’ari*, there’s a whole chapter in Neil Rosenstein’s *The Lurie Legacy* (<http://www.avotaynu.com/books/lurie.htm>) that focuses on the Epsteins. While I mention Rosenstein, his earlier work, *The Unbroken Chain* (<http://www.geni.com/projects/The-Unbroken-Chain-by-Dr-Neil-Rosenstein/4064>),

lists one of my Epstein great grandfathers who married a Gerstein.

DOROT: Where did he live?

EPSTEIN: Binyamin Akiva Epstein lived in a small shtetl called Motol where he was a famous pioneer in the timber trade. In later years, toward the turn of the century, he and my grandparents moved to Pinsk. So when I grew up, people said, “Oh, the family is from Pinsk and they have relatives in Motol.” My father was born in Pinsk and his associations were with Pinsk, but my family was in Pinsk for only the first four decades of the 20th century.

DOROT: Getting back to the Epsteins’ Spanish connection, you don’t seem certain about it.

EPSTEIN: I am skeptical about it. But one thing is real: the Spanish connection is a real myth. It’s not just a myth that somebody mentioned. You can find it in encyclopedias and in JewishGen’s infofiles (<http://www.jewishgen.org/rabbinic/infofiles/surnames.htm>) because, once somebody writes it, everybody quotes it and it becomes a semi-fact. I cannot take it so easily and I’ve been working pretty hard on the genetic aspect and we do not have genetic matches from Spain or anywhere outside of Ashkenazi Jewry.

The Horowitz family claims the same origin because its alleged patriarch was a brother of our alleged patriarch in Girona. Except for one little thing: the historic Horowitz Y-DNA is significantly different from the historic Epstein Y-DNA. Which leads to one of two possibilities: Either one family tradition is true and the other family tradition is false or neither myth is true ... or there may be an explanation, that it is not exactly so, and that it got confused along the way.

DOROT: Do you have a strategy in mind to work on this puzzle?

EPSTEIN: When I began, I wrote a seven-page collaborative research plan and sent it to fellow Epstein researchers. Many were impressed but nobody offered to collaborate. Now I resort to available tools and resources, but can’t adhere to a strategy, because there are so many demands in real life and elsewhere in genealogy.

My wife says, “Stop working on all those dead relatives, you’re ignoring your grandchildren!” And my son asks me, “Why haven’t you written all the information that you know about your parents and grandparents, the

people about whom you know, rather than going into those revision lists and those genetic tests that nobody would care about?”

DOROT: How do you answer him?

EPSTEIN: I say, “Yes, you are right, I should put this further up on my priority list.” But, because of my research interests, I get caught up – “Oh, gee whiz, I discovered another piece of our genetic puzzle a few weeks ago.” I haven’t even discussed the genetic research yet, which is a story by itself. It’s fascinating and takes up at least half of my genealogical research time.

DOROT: I believe some of your research is focused on a region of what is now Belarus. What part of your family is that?

EPSTEIN: Almost all of my 19th century relatives lived within a certain area of western Polesie, southwest Belarus – between Pinsk and Kobrin– and I really do wish (this is my fantasy) that I could do some time travel. And I ask myself, what year would I choose and where would I go? I think, maybe 1895, maybe 1855, and I’d take maybe six months.

DOROT: Why would you pick those years?

EPSTEIN: Because I have no problem knowing who my sisters are, I know who my parents are, I know who my grandparents are. But sometime around the late 19th century, things get blurry. 1855 would be better for breaking through genealogical brick walls. In 1895 I would also meet my young adult grandparents, which would be emotionally more satisfying.

And, as all of us say, if I had only interviewed the people whom I should have interviewed. I remember a half century ago, a great aunt of mine said, “I want to write about my experiences and all that happened.” I was in my twenties and I told her, “Who would really care and want to read it?” Now I am doing courthouse research about her life in New York, which is fascinating, all the politically related controversies involving her in the 1930s; it’s a story by itself. But that’s not the problem. I can research her relatively easily.

But if I went to 19th century Polesie, I would sit with my great great grandparents and ask them, “So, where do you come from, to whom are you related?” I would go from Motol to Yanow to Antopol and Horoddec and places in between, and I would sit with them and do

the kind of genealogical interviewing that all of us are taught.

Before you even go to the records, find the oldest members of your family and interview them. In the early 1990s, when I became involved with genealogy, I found the oldest generation's survivors and I sat with them, and I wrote it down and I promised myself to go back to those people. I never did, but at least I got some of my oldest, most knowledgeable relatives to tell me a lot about the family and its history. But I would have loved to have talked with their grandparents. So what do I do? I research archival records. I'm involved in the Kobrin Uyezd Jewish Research Group (<https://groups.yahoo.com/neo/groups/KUJRG/info>) and review data before it is ready for inclusion in the JewishGen Belarus database (<http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Belarus>), which is really not that reliable.

DOROT: Not reliable in what sense?

EPSTEIN: They are not highly reliable because of all the layers of distortion that take place. There were Jews there, and here comes the enumerator to ask them questions. What do they tell him and how truthful are they, and what's missing? Then, what do the enumerators hear? Then, what do they write? Then, a 21st century researcher copies data from the Russian handwriting. Then somebody tries to translate and transliterate it into English. It's not easy. And in some revision lists, only the males are listed, so we miss all the females. When it gets to me, I try to reconcile obvious contradictions and errors without overriding what was transmitted clearly. We are doing our best.

DOROT: Have you visited this area?

EPSTEIN: No, I have not. My sisters have. My reasons may be somewhat emotional. My question is: What will I see? Where was my grandparents' house and what was built in its place? The cemeteries are obliterated. I saw pictures of what Yanow used to look like. It is no more. Of course, there was a lot of destruction. Do we want a local historical society to preserve the marketplace where my grandmother used to sell what she gathered in the villages? I would love to be in that marketplace and talk with my grandmother! But the marketplace is gone. Grandmother was murdered when I was four years old.

DOROT: Is there any advantage to going there to look at the records?

EPSTEIN: The records are in the archives but not where my grandparents lived. I would like to go to the archives and look, so I would at least know what the researchers are writing about.

DOROT: Are the records in Minsk?

EPSTEIN: No. The archives for Belarus are mostly in Minsk, but for Grodno Gubernia, they're in Grodno. Almost all of the records in which I'm interested are in the Grodno archives.

DOROT: Are those records you'd like to see just for the Epstein family?

EPSTEIN: No. But genealogy is not always a doubling of your ancestry with every generation. In my case, I am twice an Epstein, I'm twice a Gerstein and I'm twice a Chemerinsky. Sometimes people get overly attached to their own surname as being their main genealogy. I started with my own surname and I'm still involved with it, but with every generation our ancestry mostly gets doubled and unfortunately, the female lines are not well documented and are insufficiently recognized.

Similarly with geography, genealogists often become fixated on a locality that they recognize and ignore that our ancestors mated and interacted regionally, and not necessarily along the authorities' jurisdictional definitions. Jewish geography has its own dynamics.

When you say "Grodno Gubernia," people think of the city of Grodno. No, no, that's what people often said when they came here – "I come from Grodno Gubernia" – and they were recorded on the ship manifest as being from Grodno. When people say "Kobrin" records – I'm very much involved with the Kobrin Uyezd Jewish Research Group – I want to make sure that they understand that it's not only the town of Kobrin. It is the district where Kobrin was the county seat.

DOROT: Are those other family lines focused in the same region?

EPSTEIN: Yes. The early records show that the Gerstein surname appeared in Antopol in the early 19th century. But that's when surnames were adopted. Suddenly there were several brothers with that surname. I know from looking at the 1784 Grand Duchy of Lithuania census who their father was and his patronymic and I know who their mother was because the Gersteins have a whole chapter in Neil Rosenstein's *The Unbroken Chain*. I know how they spread and I know that I am

descended from at least two of those brothers.

Chemerinskys most probably came from the village of Chemerin near Motol. The surname was common in Motol and I know that Rochel Leya Chemerinsky Weizman told journalist Jean Jaffe (*Der Tog*, April 1938) that her family and her Chemerinsky childhood neighbors were “not related to each other.” I’m working at getting genetic testing to determine whether they are related or not. If you go to the Motol KehilaLink, you’ll find an old discussion of sources for that family (<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/motol/mb10.pdf>).

The Chemerinsky family is well documented for two main reasons. Khayim Chemerinsky’s classic, *Ayarati Motele (Motol My Shtetl* – <http://tinyurl.com/q633uce>), describes the town and its personalities, especially his relatives and their milieu. It’s a fantastic resource, except that most of the names were intentionally changed by the editors. It is available in Hebrew but there is no published English translation. The other reason is that because Rochel Leya Chemerinsky Weizman’s son Chaim was Israel’s first president, the family became very famous. All that I have to remember her by are photos of me in the stroller that she gave me.

DOROT: What would you suggest to someone who is beginning research in this region of Belarus?

EPSTEIN: You should begin by doing your new world research as diligently as possible – talking with the elders, researching ship manifests properly, doing cemetery research of relevant sections, looking at landsmanshaft records. Learn how your shtetls were transplanted to the new world.

Go to JewishGen’s Family Finder (<http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff/>) and find whoever else is researching your towns and write to them: “What have you learned and how?” And you very often are not going to get an answer. But one or two of them may be helpful. For the region, you go to the JewishGen Belarus Database (<http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Belarus/>) to see what was recorded. Go to Belarus SIG’s Kobrin Region Jewish Records Project (http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen-erosity/projectdesc/DB_KobrinRecords.htm) and contribute so that we can obtain more data that may help you.

It is difficult for me to think of newbies. I want to talk with my relatives in 1855. But the newbies might barely know who their most recent non-immigrant ancestors were. When I talk with area researchers,

there’s always the discussion: I want to go into early-19th century research. And they say, I want to go into late-19th century research and there is little easily usable information from the late 19th century, after the revision lists stopped. You can also do genetic genealogy research cautiously.

DOROT: Why do you say “cautiously”?

EPSTEIN: Because genetic genealogy is not a panacea. So you spend \$100 on a genetic test and you see if you discover something. It’s a gamble. Autosomal DNA is especially problematic for Ashkenazi Jews. Because we are endogamous, genetic reports overestimate our closeness. If an allegedly close match cannot identify recent Polesien origins, I do not bother too much with her/him.

You test your patrilineal DNA and you see if you’re related to anybody, if you’re lucky. Don’t expect too much and when you get information, don’t think that you really found a close cousin. It may be a false positive. But you really may find something, and it is available. You cannot walk around those ancestral towns 150 years ago and start asking, “Hey, are you my *mishpoche*?”

If you go to a genealogy conference, you can participate in birds-of-a-feather meetings and meet involved genealogists, some of them more experienced and knowledgeable, some less so. Or something else: you open the *yizkor* (memorial) book. I have many of the *yizkor* books for my area of interest and I read the Hebrew and the Yiddish and you get a good feel for those places. In the *yizkor* book translations into English (<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/>) you lose some of the flavor, but I’m a snob.

If you want to go past your new world experiences, you have to understand the environment in which our ancestors lived. And you start reading what is available, what the culture was, the sociology of what was, the history. You have to understand the culture of the Jewish Pale of Settlement. And then you discover, perhaps, that your relatives were in the forestry business, lumber-cutting Jews who harvested lumber and sent it down the rivers in rafts, all the way to Danzig. You may not learn exactly the middle name of your great grandparents, but you will understand more about their lives. I think it’s much more important than discovering exactly which month they were born in. I’m trying to find out what their lives were about.

DOROT: What new set of records would you most want to have?

EPSTEIN: Outside of Polesie, I do want German-Jewish records for the years that connect the Epsteins in Prague to the Eppsteins in Frankfurt, and the Frankfurt Eppsteins back in time. That's clear. I have just not looked for the researchers or agreed to pay them.

DOROT: Where would you look for that kind of record?

EPSTEIN: Those experts would know where to look. What do I know about how Jews of that period in Germany migrated and mated? I know more about Jews of the 19th century Pale of Settlement, especially in Polesie, that area about which I've been talking. German Jews around 1500 or 1380? There are people who know about it and I have to collaborate with them.

DOROT: Are you clear on the movement of that family from Prague to Polesie?

EPSTEIN: I learned how to use the published records of the old Jewish cemetery in Prague (<http://www.hugogold.com/prag/DieFamilienPrags.pdf>). And there I found Meir Epstein (d. 1603), his father and his grandfather. He "must be" the father of my 12th great-grandfather – Avraham ben Meir Epstein (d. 1638), who was a rabbi in Grodno, Brest and Lublin and whose wife was a granddaughter of Shlomo Luria, the *MaHaRaSHaL*. So I connected them! I should continue to dig for evidence that is less circumstantial.

Shlomo Ettliger's *Ele Toledot* (<http://tinyurl.com/pqr8vre>) contains a pretty good database of death records from Frankfurt, so that is what we are dependent on. These Frankfurt Eppsteins go to the late 1400s and disappear. They may have changed their surnames. They may have migrated. What can I say? I'll be asking if anyone knows a good researcher who can help me bridge that gap.

DOROT: What is the satisfaction you get from doing this work?

EPSTEIN: I'm a researcher by temperament. Breaking through brick walls is a lot of fun. There are some brick walls that are really more important. All these people

who have been copying the Epstein lineages and the Spanish connection and so forth are part of conventional wisdom. The challenge is to either prove or disprove it – and, again, not condemning anybody, because that connection was popularized by the *Torah Temimah*, my father's *sandak* (godfather) Baruch haLevi Epstein, who wrote *Mekor Baruch*, his family history, when he could not do serious Torah writing during World War One. If anybody knew late 19th century rabbinic aristocracy, that was him. He did his best and I greatly admire him. But this is the conventional wisdom.

The puzzle of our genetic genealogy – we historic Epsteins and certain related Ashkenazi men have a very unusual Y chromosome line that's hardly related to anybody anywhere. There is hardly anybody, Jew or Gentile, who is anywhere near us genetically.

There is a family tradition that we were in Spain and that we got to Spain as refugees from Judea. And of course we are Levites and we go back to the Kehatite clan of the Levite tribe who came out of Egypt and we were Moses' cousins. Holy Moses is my cousin! And, as I was told by my father z"l, we walked through the desert backward carrying the Ark. My father was not a great believer but he told me that this was a family tradition. If I could connect us anywhere to Judea; how did we get to Judea? Or how did we get to Egypt? I'm really speculating because these are far-fetched possibilities. And who are the Levites? How did people become Levites and how did we become Levites? I got involved in genetic genealogy about 10 years ago and now I'm very involved. If I could find an explanation, I may put another twist on Jewish history. And if I do not, I say beware of family traditions. They are lovely stories to tell your children and grandchildren, but do your own research!

DOROT: Thank you.

Itzhak Epstein was born in pre-State Israel and has lived mostly in the United States. He holds a Master of Regional and City Planning degree from the University of Oklahoma and was employed in the public sector. His current Y-DNA haplogroup is R-L408, L409 and his current mtDNA haplogroup is K2a2a1. He has 4,791 FTDNA Family Finder matches of which the great majority are false positives. ☆



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That you might recount it to a
future generation, Psalms 48:14

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