

**Life and Livelihood: Petitions  
(Kvitlekh) to Rabbi Elijah Guttmacher**  
by Professor Glenn Dynner

“Only I must say I turned my hand to a lot of different trades in my day. When I left off boarding with my in-laws, why I set up first as a money changer, and then as a grocer, a taverner, a corn factor, and a schoolmaster. Well I only tried this and that and the other thing, just one after the other, don’t you know, the way a Jewish gent will generally do—for how’s the saying? many livings, few thriving.”

Thus reads the resumé of Mendele the Bookpeddler, literary alter-ego of the famed “Grandfather of Yiddish literature” S.Y. Abramovich before he settled on the occupation of his namesake.<sup>1</sup>

Mendele was expressing a wider truth: Jews living in late nineteenth-century Eastern Europe, being barred from many professions and hampered by myriad obstacles when it came to purchasing land or relocating to certain cities, had to be versatile. Still, there are unmistakable patterns. For one thing, East European Jewry was extremely urban. Around eighty-five percent of the Jewish population lived in towns or cities, with only fifteen percent residing in villages. (In the case of Christians, it was the reverse: around eighty-five percent were rural.) Urban living meant urban occupations, like

trade and crafts. Even rural Jews often engaged in “urban” pursuits, like tavernkeeping.

The emancipation of the peasantry in the early 1860s was positive for society as a whole, but it also meant increased competition from former serfs. In addition, new factories in Warsaw and Lodz put increasing pressure on small-town “cottage” industries. By the 1880s, a combination of economic despair and pogroms encouraged large-scale Jewish migrations from small shtetls to big cities and even larger-scale migrations from Eastern Europe to America and other lands. The old way of life was being gradually displaced.

Jews often coped with their anxiety and disorientation by journeying to miracle workers. Most miracle workers headed famous Hasidic dynasties—the *rebbe*s of Lubavitch, Ger, Sanz, Chernobyl, Rhuzhin, Tolne, and so on. But in the early 1870s, a non-Hasidic rabbi and Talmudic authority named Rabbi Elijah Guttmacher (1796–1874) rose to prominence as a miracle worker too. Jews from all over Eastern Europe streamed towards his court in Grodzisk Wielkopolski bearing written petitions (*kvitlekh*) requesting health, fertility,

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**DOROT**  
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## WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US!

The Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc., founded in 1977, was the first of over eighty such societies. Our approximately 900 members live in the New York metropolitan area, other states, and other countries. We hold membership in the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies. We have an office in the Center for Jewish History and a library in the Center's Genealogy Institute.

We support organizations, repositories, and archival projects through generous annual donations to insure the preservation of many of the Jewish community's treasured documents and to provide greater public access to them. Some of them are 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.

**Membership benefits:**

- free admission to our monthly meetings (September through June), featuring guest lecturers from a variety of disciplines, and field trips to libraries and archives;
- discount on admission to JGS events, such as all-day seminars;
- a subscription to our quarterly journal, *Dorot*, containing reports on monthly meetings, descriptions of items held by repositories and organizations, announcements of new books, feature articles on genealogical research, and tips on new Internet sites;
- free access to JewishData.com;
- discount on JGS publications, including *Genealogical Resources in New York*, an invaluable tool for genealogical research in New York City; and
- discounts from the JGS Friends listed on the inside back page of *Dorot*

**Membership dues per calendar year:**

- Regular Member \$36
- Local Member 25 years of age and younger \$18
- Family Member (two members) \$45
- Sustaining Member \$60 (two membership cards)
- Supporting Member \$100 (two membership cards)
- Patron Member \$250 or more (two membership cards)
- Out-of-town Member (more than 100 miles from New York City) \$25
- Foreign Membership (air mail) US\$36

You can become a member on-line via the JGS, Inc. website at <http://www.jgsny.org/>. Click on **Membership** in the top bar and then on **Join Now**. The application form will appear on-line. Be patient. Complete it and click submit. On the next screen, select a credit card and make payment.

You can also request a membership application by mailing a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc., P.O. Box 631, New York, NY 10113-0631, or you can print out the application on the JGS website at <http://www.jgsny.org>. Click on Membership in the top bar and "Join Now" (be patient). Complete the form and mail it to the above address. Please note that within the limits prescribed by law, your membership fee less \$12 attributable to the *Dorot* subscription is deductible as a charitable contribution.

JGS is a not-for-profit organization open to people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.



## President's Postings by Roni Seibel Liebowitz

As the year quickly rushes by, it is not too early to think about the 35<sup>th</sup> IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy. In cooperation with MyHeritage, the conference will take place in Jerusalem, Israel, July 6-10, 2015. If you have never been to Jerusalem, this is the time to go!! There are wonderful resources in which to do research as well as stimulating places to visit throughout the country. And if you have been to Israel, it's time to discover new information in the repositories that will be available at the conference... and to visit with family and friends who live in this beautiful country. Having lived in Jerusalem for a year ages ago and returned several times to visit, I will be extending my trip to meet with cousins, newly-discovered family, and longtime friends who make this their home. Sessions at the conference will provide information about research in different countries with a focus on how the end of World War II impacted the Jewish people and lives worldwide. Show your support for this country and enjoy all it has to offer. Check out the conference website at <http://www.iajgs2015.org>.

As my presidency comes to an end, I look back on the past three years. We initiated the Lunch and Learn sessions, which take place several times a year, in a casual setting prior to the official program in the auditorium. During lunch we share our genealogical brick walls, respond to queries presented, and get to know each other as we exchange ideas and research experiences. If you haven't attended one of these, I encourage you to do so. They are listed on our website and in the monthly program postcards.

Also during the past three years, we celebrated our 36<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a society, which was the first Jewish genealogical society. Some of the original members no longer living in the New York area flew in for this event. It was wonderful meeting these people and hearing their recollections of the early days of JGS.

Our VP of Programming, Jane Berenbeim, presented a wide variety of superb speakers and programs during her three years in that position. We wish her well as the new president of JGS, Inc. Conscientious, creative, and easy to work with, I am confident she will continue to serve the society well.

During these three years, we have also endured many hardships. Only a few weeks after I became President,

our past President and my intended mentor, Steve Siegel, passed away after a long illness. A founding member of JGS, he was its President twice. A professional genealogist, he was involved not only with our JGS but also the Jewish Historical Society of New York, the Jewish Book Council, the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York, the Center for Jewish History's Genealogical Task Force, and as an active alumnus of Cornell University. At the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street YM-YWHA, he worked as library director and initiated many genealogical events. He has been referred to as the "Memory Keeper" and was always available to assist others with their genealogical pursuits.

We suffered another loss on the EC as recently as January 18, 2014. David Kleiman served as our primary techie with EC members Steve Stein and Hadassah Lipsius and was also President of the NY PC (Personal Computer) Users Group. David had many varied talents and pursuits. He loved folk dancing and was an accomplished musician of folk music, which he performed often with his fellow musicians. An avid chef, he often dressed in period outfits and cooked dishes based on medieval history for family and friends. He was curator and project coordinator of the Touro Synagogue; Loeb Visitor Center. Even with all this, he was never too busy to devote time to family and friends.

I am grateful for the members of the Executive Council who pulled together during those difficult times. Special thanks to a past President, Linda Cantor, who stepped up as my mentor after Steve's death. We are blessed that Kate Kleiman, David's wife, also an accomplished techie, agreed to work with us through our transition to a new web hosting service. Steve Stein and Hadassah Lipsius continue to work on this with her. In addition, we recognize and appreciate the work of our *Dorot* editor, Toby Sanchez, and our design and production maven, Jim Garrity.

We appeal to you, our members, to consider volunteering with computer skills, graphic design abilities, photography skills, program suggestions, articles for *Dorot*, and any other ways to support your JGS.

I look forward to continuing my relationship with all of you at future JGS meetings and events. ✨

*Roni*

## JGS Welcomes 14 New Members

Name	City	State
William Barcham	Highland Park	NJ
Susan Berkson	Minnetonka	MN
Larry Brickman	Santa Clara	CA
Eden Buenaventura	Middletown	NJ
Stanley Cohen	Far Rockaway	NY
Norman Danzig	Bronx	NY
Susan Eansor	Pinehurst	NC
Burton Fried	Aberdeen	NJ
Robert B Klein	New York	NY
Phyllis Rosner	Riverdale	NY
Richard Rubin	Holyoke	MA
Marjorie Sturges	St Petersburg	FL
Gaye Tannenbaum	Miami	FL
Ruth Wilnai	Palo Alto	CA

## QUESTIONING THE EXPERTS continued from page 26

**VAN NOSTRAND:** ...the Court of Common Pleas and the Supreme Court. The Court of Common Pleas started...

**ABRAMS:** ...approximately 1875 to 1895.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** And the Supreme Court from 1895 to 1934; we have the indexes to those here.

**DOROT:** And beyond that?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Those indexes are over in the courthouse. Then, after a while, they weren't kept in separate indexes, they were just kept with the general litigation indexes, which means the card indexes. Up until 1962, they used to have books and a card index, so it is pretty secure. Then after that, it just became part of the general litigation. They have to look it up in a card index that covers the period up to 1970. After that date, it is in our computer index covering 1971 to the present.

**DOROT:** Thank you both.

*Joseph P. Van Nostrand submitted the following biography: I have a B.A. from Fordham University and an M.A. from New York University, both in American history. I was hired in March 1980 as the first archivist in the Office of the New York County Clerk. Prior to that, I had been a research associate at the New-York Historical Society, an Assistant Archivist with the New York City Municipal Archives, and a Document*

*Manager at Queens College CUNY.*

*As the archivist for the New York County Clerk, I oversee a collection of approximately 8,000 cu. ft. of historical records dating from 1674. In this capacity, I have written grant proposals for both the preservation and conservation of historical court minute books and the computerization of our card indexes to give access by both plaintiff and defendant names. I also undertook an outreach program involving the exhibition of court records in the rotunda of the county courthouse for viewing by attorneys, litigants, jurors, and the general public. This helped spark interest in our holdings and the need for preservation.*

*My daily responsibilities, which I enjoy, are helping people by retrieving the records of divorces and general litigation from 1985 to 2003, assisting researchers with family history projects, and aiding scholarly research for people doing biographies, historical papers, and books.*

□□□

*Bruce Abrams worked at the Division of Old Records of the New York County Clerk as assistant to Joseph Van Nostrand for thirty years. Before coming to the County Clerk's Office, he worked for a year in the New York State Archives and was trained in the National Archives. He retired earlier this year but continues to assist as a volunteer. He has graduate degrees in history and library studies from the City University of New York. ☆*

## Life and Livelihood continued from page 1

and economic salvation, among other things. Like his Hasidic colleagues, Rabbi Guttmacher would pray on their behalf, prescribe remedies, write amulets, and dole out business advice.

Unlike his Hasidic colleagues, Rabbi Guttmacher carefully filed their petitions away. In the 1930s, thousands of these petitions were discovered by collectors (*zamlers*) and brought to YIVO Institute in Vilna for preservation. Some made their way to Jerusalem; but the bulk—around 6,000—eventually fell into the hands of Alfred Rosenberg, the infamous Nazi pillager of Jewish heritage, in 1942. Rosenberg's perverse desire to create a museum of the soon-to-be-deceased Jewish people at least ensured their continued preservation. After the war, the Guttmacher petitions were restored to YIVO, now relocated to New York.

Guttmacher's petitions allow us to move beyond statistics, literature, and Chagall paintings and into the messy, tragic, dull, inspirational lives of East European Jews during the 1870s. In the course of requesting help, workaday Jews also told their stories, revealing proud hopes, chilling anxieties, and black despair. Reading through their petitions is a sensitive endeavor. We virtually become voyeurs of the dead.

Yet nothing adds context and texture to Jewish daily life like these thousands of requests scrawled on small, crumpled pieces of paper. Take the Jewish dairyman, made iconic by *Fiddler on the Roof's* Tevye. In contrast to the lone, independent figure depicted in the play and film, we find Jewish dairymen working within a whole leaseholding system based on an age-old noble-Jewish relationship. Most nobles, rather than running their enterprises themselves or entrusting them to peasants or peers, leased those enterprises out to Jews. It is a surprising case of inter-ethnic economic symbiosis that contrasts with the usual picture of anti-Semitism and violence.

This lord-Jew relationship, as it is termed by historians, is reflected throughout the petitions. Ariel Leib ben Rivka, a dairyman in the village of Turin (near Dobra), petitioned Rabbi Guttmacher for “success in the business he established with milk cows, and to move the heart of the nobleman to do his will and to want more of this business.” Less optimistic is the request by Avraham Tzvi ben Mendel of Trzebin, who leased a dairy farm from “the nobleman Paskiewicz, but he harasses Jews a lot. May God help me that I find favor in

his eyes.” However tense and tumultuous, noble-Jewish cooperation was still in full-swing during the 1870s.<sup>2</sup>

A more common form of leaseholding was tavernkeeping. Taverns served a unique and critical function in East European towns and villages: they were hotels, restaurants, country stores, banks, and entertainment and news venues, in addition to places to imbibe vodka. The nobles, who owned the taverns,<sup>1</sup> believed that only Jews had the business acumen and, most importantly, the sobriety to run them successfully. So Jews leased and ran the great majority of taverns in the region, and tavernkeepers formed as much as thirty-seven percent of the Jewish population by the beginning of the nineteenth century, not even counting the impromptu taverns that sprung up in Jewish homes on Christian holidays.

When the state outlawed Jewish tavernkeeping in rural areas in the 1840s, rural Jewish tavernkeeping was merely driven underground. Many Jews simply installed local Christians as “fronts” for their taverns, an almost natural expansion of the practice of employing local Christians to help keep their taverns running on Sabbaths and festivals.<sup>3</sup>

The open secret of Jewish tavernkeeping in the late nineteenth century is revealed in over 150 Guttmacher petitions. Tzvi ben Fionel of Badkowo village (near Nieszawa) leased his tavern from the noble village owner but “had to transfer it to a gentile because he himself was not allowed to sell without a concession.”<sup>4</sup> This time, the arrangement went awry, for “the gentile to whom he transferred the tavern caused him losses and gave out all the liquor on credit so that he was not able to collect it all.”

The typical arrangement in a tavern was for the husband and wife to work as partners—she and the Christian workers primarily dealt with customers, while he dealt with production and supplies and often ran a coach service on the side. Hannah Reizel bat Miriam and her husband Dov Ber ben Hayya of Kajowka village (near Makow) approached Rabbi Guttmacher because “they have no livelihood from their business, which is sitting in the tavern selling drinks.” To supplement their profits, the couple would bake bread and travel throughout the villages to sell it, but “there are many bandits. And when they go on the road they endanger their lives and are robbed.”

Tavernkeeping, like leaseholding in general, faced mounting competition throughout the tsarist empire in the 1870s, probably due to peasant emancipation and the declining power of the nobility. Menahem Moshe ben Feiga, a tavernkeeper in Putusk, asked Rabbi Guttmacher to “repeal the gentile from there who arose against the Jews and took their livelihood, so that the customers will not go to him and that the scent of his drinks will stink so that they can no longer bear his drinks.” Pesa bat Hannah, a widowed female tavernkeeper from an unknown location, had to fend off competition in both the economic and marriage markets:

My principal means of livelihood is my store for liquor, called a tavern. And thank God I had success in this business, but only for a period of three years, because another tavern was established here because people saw my success and were envious of me and they also established a tavern. As a result, my livelihood was diminished so much that now the profits from the store are only half of what they were before. And I have great expenses, and my household needs and other costs multiply, as is known. The second thing is that [I have] an only son, the youth Yehoshua Falk, may he live, and he has two offers for a match. And the match that he chose was based on the advice of the Rabbi of the Jewish communal court (*av bet din*) of this community, may he live, for he told him to make the match until evil people told him bad things about this match.

Unfortunately, we do not have Rabbi Guttmacher’s direct responses. But his influence in such affairs, backed by the threat of curses, should not be underestimated.

As the nobility began to decline at the end of the nineteenth century, noble-dependent pursuits, like leaseholding, were gradually displaced by another old inter-ethnic system, trade. Nobles in the pre-modern Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth had valued Jewish merchants for their ability to procure hard-to-find goods on their behalf, while others had depended on Jews to distribute goods across regions, towns, and villages. By the nineteenth century, Jews could be found in trade at all levels, from large-scale international trade down to peddling throughout the countryside. The proportion of Jewish traders rose to around 39 percent of the Jewish

population by 1897. The overall Jewish role in trade was astounding, hovering around 80 percent in Poland’s eastern regions by the early 1930s.<sup>5</sup>

Jewish women were as much involved in trade as were Jewish men. Occasionally, one finds the arrangement of the wife who toils in the marketplace so that her husband can devote his days to studying Torah. But such cases were rare and usually limited to elites. Yaakov ben Reina, of the village Omlek, reported that he “sits and learns while wife of distinguished pedigree (*yichus*) engages in trade.” Yet Yaakov asked Rabbi Guttmacher to advise him about how to obtain his own source of livelihood, one “that will allow him to study Torah.” It was, in fact, far more common for both husband and wife to engage in trade, either separately or together. Marriage was as much an economic partnership as a conjugal union. Woe to the woman who discovered that her husband was “addicted to drink.” A fair number of women asked Rabbi Guttmacher to help them obtain ritually acceptable divorces from alcoholic spouses. At least as working women they could obtain divorces without fearing total destitution.<sup>6</sup>

Yet most men, including the learned, seemed to be working extremely hard. Yehuda Leib ben Roda of Lask, for example, despaired that “his trade forces him to go from town to town to seek livelihood in trade, and because of this he is delinquent in his studies and cannot even learn a chapter of Mishah in a week, and not even on the Sabbath, because of his road weariness.” Eleazar ben Rivka Halevi had had great success as a merchant in Ostrow village, near Krośńiewice, until peasant emancipation. “And now a decree has been issued in Poland [stating] that anyone who has a patent can settle anywhere they want if they have a dwelling, and even the peasants can sell merchandise without the permission of the noble of the village. And because of this there came many merchants, even those who are not Jewish, and his business declined to the point that there is almost nothing left of his merchandise and his store is empty.”

A third major Jewish pursuit in Eastern Europe was crafts, which rose from 28 percent of the Jewish population in 1843 to almost thirty-five percent by 1897. (Again, the cause seems to have been the decline of leaseholding.) Most Jewish craftsmen were tailors, bakers, or butchers, owing to religious proscriptions against mixing wool with linen or violating *kashrut*. Daniel ben Rivka, a tailor from Częstochowa, was an ambitious tailor: “I have it in mind to begin a business in partnership in clothing and other things that have come

into my possession.” Daniel asked Rabbi Guttmacher to approve of his plan, as well as to see to it that his daughter Chava would grow up well and to “please send her a charm against the evil eye.” But tailors felt the press of post-emancipation competition too. A widower named Nata ben Kayla reported emotionally, “I was a tailor and supported myself and my household with spirit (*be-ruah*) and raised ‘orphans’ and married them off. And now, because of our sins, a gentile tailor came and encroached on me. And because of this I am without a livelihood. And every day I go down little by little to the bottom, and almost lack bread. So my request is to pray for me and give me good advice about what to do.”<sup>7</sup>

Butchers seemed to suffer more from the pious expectations of their customers. Avraham ben Frieda of Lipno “was not always a butcher, but none of the merchandise succeeded for me, therefore I took up this livelihood. But the other butchers wronged me a great deal, and pushed me out as much as they could. For I have kosher meat for sale, and they told everybody that it is not [kosher].” Another anonymous butcher had even greater problems: he was “too fond of the bottle” and had “crossed over his faith,” i.e., converted to Christianity. But “now he has abandoned that path completely and swore that he will never drink any drink of drunkenness. And it’s been several years and these drinks never touched his lips.” He wished to return to Judaism and hoped against hope that the rabbinical court of his town would reinstate him as a kosher slaughterer.<sup>8</sup>

These three main economic systems—leaseholding, trade, and crafts—were overlaid by a fourth: moneylending. Nearly every Guttmacher petitioner lent out sums of money on the side, no matter how small, to their gentile neighbors. This tendency may have been an indirect result of the barriers to purchasing land, still an important source of prestige in Polish society. Most Jews, rather than trying to obtain land (legal after 1862 but still difficult), lent out their savings on interest.

The main problem was how to collect. One petitioner from Blaszkki had made a match for his daughter Pesa bat Rikla with “one of the nice boys, Uziel ben Bluma” for the promised dowry of “400 rubles cash with books and a number of years for meals at my table for the couple. And my sole intention is to enable him in Torah.” But he was not sure how he was going to honor his obligations “because the aforementioned sum is in loans with a certain man from our town. And it is hard for me to get it from him. And in addition, I have debts with the gentiles: the miller Marcin Wegner in the amount of 200 zlotys, and with the miller Maciej Jariciek in the

amount of 52 rubles. And it’s been very hard for me to collect from them. And what to do? For they repel me repeatedly.” One had recourse to the courts, but cases could drag on for months and even years. As a result, one of Guttmacher’s most common requests was for “help collecting debts from the gentiles.”

It is tempting to view East European Jewish life in the late nineteenth century as a rapid slide into poverty and despair and then a stampede to America. Indeed, many of the salient themes of the period—industrialization, urbanization, increased religious laxity—are hinted at in Rabbi Guttmacher’s petitions. Yet many more Jews than we might suppose clung to the old ways. The traditional world declined very slowly and unevenly, with traditional economic pursuits like tavernkeeping, petty trade, and religious-oriented crafts enduring down to the Holocaust. Historians are riveted by the idea of sudden, sweeping change. But real-life documents, like the Guttmacher petitions, should give us pause. Jewish modernity is better described as a drawn out tug-of-war between the old and the new.

<sup>1</sup> S.Y. Abramovitsch, “Fishke the Lame,” in Dan Miron and Ken Frieden, eds., *Tales of Mendele the Book Peddler* (NY: Schocken, 1996), 11.

<sup>2</sup> All petitions cited here are located in the Guttmacher Collection of the archives of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York (RG 27), organized by town name.

<sup>3</sup> See Glenn Dynner, *Yankel’s Tavern: Jews, Liquor, and Life in the Kingdom of Poland* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Such a concession would have been very difficult, if not impossible, to obtain for a village in the Tsarist Empire during this period.

<sup>5</sup> See Dynner, *Yankel’s Tavern*, 136-7; and Jerzy Tomaszewski, “The Role of Jews in Polish Commerce, 1918–1939,” in Yisrael Gutman, Ezra Mendelsohn, Jehuda Reinharz, and Chone Shmeruk, eds., *The Jews of Poland Between the Two World Wars* (Hanover, NH: University, 1989), 141-57.

<sup>6</sup> See Dynner, “‘A Jewish Drunk Is Hard to Find’: Jewish Drinking Practices and the Sobriety Stereotype in Eastern Europe,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 104, No. 1 (Winter 2014) 9-23.

<sup>7</sup> YIVO, RG 27, 878. No location.

<sup>8</sup> YIVO, RG 27, 877. No location.

*Glenn Dynner is Professor of Judaic Studies and Chair of Humanities at Sarah Lawrence College and the 2013-14 Senior NEH Scholar at the Center for Jewish History. He is author of Men of Silk: The Hasidic*

Conquest of Polish Jewish Society (*Oxford University Press, 2006*), winner of the Koret Publications Prize and finalist for the National Jewish Book Awards, and

Yankel's Tavern: Jews, Liquor, and Life in the Kingdom of Poland (*Oxford University Press, 2013*). ☆

## Upcoming JGS Programs

JANUARY MEETING: January 25, 2015, 2 p.m.

### *The Ethical Genealogist*

**Speaker: Judy G. Russell**

Judy G. Russell, well-known as The Legal Genealogist, will speak to us about the ethical considerations underlying genealogy, from privacy issues—how to handle family secrets, what to say about living people—to the courtesies we should extend to other researchers.

A genealogist with a law degree and an undergraduate degree in journalism, Judy has worked as a newspaper reporter, trade association writer, legal investigator, defense attorney, federal prosecutor, law editor and, for more than twenty years, as adjunct member of the faculty at Rutgers Law School.

She holds credentials as a Certified Genealogist and Certified Genealogical Lecturer from the Board for Certification of Genealogists, where she serves as a member of the Board of Trustees. She has published and lectured widely on genealogical subjects and serves on the faculty of several genealogy research institutes as well as at Boston University's Center for Professional Education.

Location: Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street (between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> avenues), Manhattan

Admission: JGS members are free; guests pay \$5 at the door.

The Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute will open at 11:00 a.m. for networking with other researchers and for accessing resources.

FEBRUARY MEETING: February 22, 2015, 2 p.m.

### *Ancient Texts Lead to Genealogical Discoveries: Genealogical Resources at the Jewish Theological Seminary*

**Speaker: Dr. Janette Silverman**

The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York is off the radar screen for many genealogists. Yet its library is a treasure, home to almost half a million volumes, including manuscripts, rare books, and archives. The archives are a rich repository of records of Jewish communities, institutions, and prominent individuals in the U.S. and Europe.

In Dr. Janette Silverman's presentation, we will take a digital trip and explore some of the unique resources of the JTS archives. Among these are transcriptions of notes, memos, and correspondence between the State Department and offices in Vienna, St. Petersburg, Warsaw, and Bucharest from 1863-1906 that concern the legal position and persecution of Jews and correspondence and notes about the Jewish community in France from the 1700s until after World War II. We will also explore a variety of *ketubot* and *mohel* books and discuss the ways that all of these materials can advance our research.

Janette, who holds a doctoral degree in Jewish studies, is Outreach Director for the William Davidson Graduate School of Jewish Education of The Jewish Theological Seminary. She is also a professional genealogist and owner of the genealogy consulting firm RelativaTree. Active as a volunteer in genealogical activities, she is the JewishGen Ukraine SIG Coordinator, a moderator of the JewishGen Discussion Group, a volunteer for the New York Family History Center, and former President of the Phoenix Jewish Genealogy Society.

Location: Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street (between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> avenues), Manhattan

Admission: JGS members are free; guests pay \$5 at the door.

The Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute will open at 11:00 a.m. for networking with other researchers and for accessing resources. ☆





# Location, Location, Location in New York City (Or is it the City of New York?)

by Joel D. Weintraub

**Introduction:** In order to find genealogical records, we often need to have an accurate location for the underlying event. Figuring out which archives or collection contains a record often depends on knowing that information. New York City is an example where lack of knowledge of the city's history can lead to searches in the wrong archives. This essay discusses the history of New York City and the City of New York. I will show that these two city names haven't always been equivalent as well as show other geographical situations that influence family history research in the city.

**Present-day New York:** Let's start by looking at the present geography of New York. New York City and the City of New York are now synonymous terms and consist of the boroughs of Manhattan (New York County), Brooklyn (Kings County), Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island (Richmond County). The boroughs of Manhattan (less the Marble Hill section, discussed later) and Staten Island are on their own islands while Brooklyn and Queens are part of a larger island known as Long Island. By common usage, the term "Long Island" refers to the parts of the island that are outside the city boundaries—namely, Nassau County and Suffolk County. But this is a misnomer, since Nassau and Suffolk by themselves do not constitute an island. The Bronx is not an island but is connected to the North American mainland and abuts Westchester County.

As we will see, New York City originally referred to Manhattan Island only. And to this day, common usage of the term "The City" refers to just Manhattan, although that too is a misnomer. Many maps with the title of "New York City" turn out to be primarily maps of Manhattan.

**The Dutch and the British:** Now for a historical perspective. The Dutch in 1625 founded New Amsterdam on Manhattan Island. England took over the area in 1664 and renamed it New York, after the Duke of York. From those beginnings, New York City has flourished. The City Seal reflects this history. Initially, it showed a 1664 date, but the City Council in 1977 changed the year to 1625. The official seal is used today to represent the entire city, perhaps leading people to assume the City of New York was formed in 1625; it wasn't.

**The Origin of Counties:** The counties of Richmond, New York (Manhattan), Kings (Brooklyn), and Queens were created in 1683. Queens County then included what is today Nassau. The land area of what is the Bronx today was part of Westchester County.

The area of New York County (and, synonymously, New York City) remained static until 1874. In that year, New York County expanded as the land west of the Bronx River (Kingsbridge, West Farms, and Morrisania) was annexed from Westchester County. This is the western part of what is today the Bronx. If you were looking up records of someone in the New York state census of 1875 and they lived in the western part of the Bronx, you would find them on New York County census forms. If you were searching for people in the New York City "Police Census" of 1890, you would have to know that the area covered was only Manhattan and the western Bronx.

**The Referendum:** Discussions about consolidating New York City with its surrounding areas started in earnest in the late 1860s. Many were opposed to the idea. A non-binding referendum in November 1894 of the possible areas for a new city (unofficially called "Greater New York") was put before the affected voters. In Westchester County, the referendum was defeated in the town of Westchester (by one vote) and the cities of Mount Vernon and Yonkers. Flushing in Queens County voted no, while the rest of what is today Queens County voted yes. New York County (then Manhattan and western Bronx) voted yes as did Richmond County and the towns of Pelham and Eastchester and the village of Wakefield in Westchester County.

The City of Brooklyn, which by that time had annexed most of the smaller cities within Kings County, had to make an interesting decision in this referendum. It was the 4<sup>th</sup> largest city in the United States in 1890, behind New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia. Would they give up their identity? But Brooklyn was heavily in debt, and bankruptcy was looming. Brooklyn also had limited access to water of any quality. New York City, on the other hand, had plenty of good water. By only 277 votes out of 129,211 ballots, Brooklyn supported the consolidation.

Given the general agreement to go forward with the merger, New York County in 1895 annexed the eastern

part of the Bronx from Westchester County, which included the village of Wakefield and the towns of Westchester, Eastchester, and part of Pelham. Thus, New York County and, therefore, New York City then encompassed Manhattan and all of what is today the Bronx.

**The City of New York:** In 1897, New York State Governor Black signed the charter of the City of New York (its official name), which would consist of the counties of Richmond, Kings (Brooklyn), New York (including the Bronx), and the western part of Queens County (what is today all of Queens County). The eastern Queens towns of Hempstead, North Hempstead, and Oyster Bay were excluded. The new City of New York started on January 1, 1898. At the same time, the boroughs of the Bronx, Manhattan, Richmond, Brooklyn, and Queens were established. Boroughs are a unique part of the city. Each elects its own president, although their political powers are limited. The political power is in the hands of the Mayor of New York City and the City Council.

So the term “City of New York” came into being in 1898 and consisted of the five boroughs. At that point, the term “New York City,” which previously referred to New York County, should have ceased to exist. But “New York City” continued to be used with some ambiguous meanings through the years. Today, the two terms are synonymous.

**Fine Tuning the City:** Initially, the Borough of the Bronx and the Borough of Manhattan were both in New York County, and the Borough of Queens occupied only the western part of Queens County. The excluded areas of eastern Queens County seceded from Queens County and formed Nassau County in 1899. So, the earlier records of Nassau County will be found in Queens County. In addition, the City Council in 1975 officially changed the name of the Borough of Richmond to the Borough of Staten Island, in line with popular usage.

To complete the change of political entities to what we find today, Bronx County was formed in 1914. At that time, we had five boroughs coextensive with the five counties that make up the present City of New York. So, if you were to search for residents of the Bronx in various archives, you would look in Westchester County up to 1875, in either Westchester County or New York County (depending on which side of the Bronx they were in) from 1875 to 1895, in New York County from 1895 to 1914, and in Bronx County from 1914 on.

**The Marble Hill Anomaly:** Marble Hill, with a Bronx

ZIP code of 10463, is the exception that proves the rule about historical knowledge leading to correct genealogical resources. This original northeast tip of Manhattan Island was once separated from the mainland of the Bronx, to its north, by Spuyten Duyvil Creek. The Harlem Ship Canal was completed in 1895, and it created a waterway on the south side of Marble Hill. This left Marble Hill surrounded by water: the canal on the south and the original northern loop of the creek along the remaining edges. The creek was eventually filled in so that Marble Hill became part of the mainland of the Bronx and was no longer on Manhattan Island.

Marble Hill, however, remained in Manhattan Borough and New York County. I checked the 1915 New York state and the 1920, 1930, and 1940 federal censuses, and streets in Marble Hill appear on the New York County census sheets. In 1939, Bronx Borough President Lyons tried to annex Marble Hill. Lyons even went there as a publicity stunt and raised the flag of the Borough of The Bronx over it, declaring that community as a part of Bronx Borough. Mayor La Guardia then recommended that Marble Hill be placed in the Bronx, but angry residents opposed the plan, and that ended the takeover attempt. In 1983, a court ruled that Marble Hill was in Manhattan Borough and in Bronx County! That paradox was quickly addressed by the New York state legislature, which put the area firmly back within New York County and the Borough of Manhattan.

**The Street Name Problem:** One byproduct of the consolidation of the areas into the City of New York was the loss of autonomy of the small communities in Queens and Staten Island. Eventually, those original communities grew together, and that created a problem with street names and house numbering, since a street could change its name every few blocks. Queens then underwent a massive street name change and address renumbering process in the 1910s and 1920s, which makes it difficult to locate old addresses on modern maps. Staten Island also changed many street names.

To resolve problems with old street names for the census locational tools on the Steve Morse “One Step” site ([stevemorse.org](http://stevemorse.org)), I found resources, such as street guides, that showed old and new names and numbers and old maps to find street name changes. I put the results in table format so that researchers can convert an old street name or an old house number to their modern equivalents (and vice-versa). That resource, called “Changed Street Names,” is at <http://www.stevemorse.org/census/changes>. The utility contains information about street name changes for

many cities of the United States, based on our own tables (some with the help of volunteers) or links to such information on other websites. The website also shows the conversion of old house numbers to the modern house numbers for streets in Queens. The website also has street name conversion tables for Staten Island.

**Summary:** Here's a timeline for New York City and The City of New York.

1625: Dutch founded New Amsterdam, consisting of only Manhattan Island

1664: English take over city and rename it New York City

1683: Counties of Richmond, New York (Manhattan), Kings (Brooklyn), and Queens created

1874: New York County annexes western Bronx from Westchester County

1895: New York County annexes eastern Bronx from Westchester County

1898: City of New York formed to include the counties of New York

(including the Bronx), Kings, Richmond, and western part of Queens

1898: Boroughs of Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens (western part), Bronx, and Richmond established

1899: Eastern part of Queens County secedes from Queens County and becomes Nassau County

1914: Bronx County forms from the borough of the Bronx

1975: Borough of Richmond renamed Staten Island

1977: City Council changes date on City Seal from 1664 to 1625

**Conclusion and Credits:** Although the history of New York City/City of New York is obviously unique to that area, it illustrates that an understanding of the history of street names and address number changes, the changing boundaries of communities, and which political units they were in are often crucial for deciding which archives or collections have the information you seek. "Location, Location, Location" isn't only the realtor's motto; it is the motto of successful genealogists as well.

I thank Steve Morse and Gloria Weintraub for providing critical comments on this paper.

*Joel Weintraub was born and raised in Manhattan. He is an emeritus Biology Professor at California State University, Fullerton. He was a volunteer for nine years at the National Archives and Records Administration in southern California and has created search tools for the U.S. and New York City censuses that are freely available on the Steve Morse "One-Step" website. He has given presentations on census, immigration and naturalization, the genealogical standards, and Jewish genealogy, to genealogy, natural history and university groups and has published articles on census research and the 72 year rule. His hobbies include birding, collecting census memorabilia and making interesting PowerPoint presentations. ☆*

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## **New Publications** continued from page 20

property be registered, His Majesty King Mohamed V declared that the Jews were Moroccan nationals and under his protection. He also famously said that "there are no Jews in Morocco, only Moroccans." He saved the lives of 300,000 Jews while about 200,000 French Jews were killed in Nazi concentration camps. In recognition of Mohamed V's constant heroic acts to save the life of the Jews, a group of Moroccan Jewish elders annually lay a wreath at the foot of his tomb.

In conclusion, *Jews under Moroccan Skies* provides an excellent source to anyone wishing to familiarize

himself/herself with or deepening his/her knowledge about Moroccan history in general and Judeo-Berber heritage in particular. The way the book is written and organized as a comprehensive guide is a pioneering attempt in the field of Judeo-Moroccan studies. It has certainly filled the void and significantly contributed to our knowledge, thanks to its historical accounts and convincing arguments.

*Ousama Saki is a teacher and researcher at Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, Morocco. ☆*



## Online News

### Roman Vishniac's Photographic Archive of Pre-war Jewish Life Now Available

Roman Vishniac was hired by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in 1935 to travel to Eastern Europe to take photographs documenting Jewish poverty and relief efforts. The photos were to be used in JDC's fundraising campaigns. Over 8,000 of the negatives, many of which have never been seen or published before, have been made available in a database jointly created by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the International Center of Photography in New York. One goal of this new effort is to enable the public to identify the people and places in the photos. The site is [vishniac.icp.org](http://vishniac.icp.org), and it may be browsed or searched by keyword, location, or date.

### FamilyTreeNow Is a New Genealogy Database

This new site, [www.familytreenow.com](http://www.familytreenow.com), does not have as many birth, death, marriage, divorce, or military records as Ancestry or MyHeritage, but it is completely free and claims to have billions of historical records, including the census returns from 1790–1940. Experienced researchers say that it pays to search multiple sites because there is always the chance of finding something not found elsewhere, perhaps overcoming a brick wall. The *DOROT* editor typed in two names and quickly came up with a relative's draft record and another one's 1920 census record.

### GenealogyInTime Lists Many Sources of Czech Jewish Records

At the search engine [www.genealogyintime.com](http://www.genealogyintime.com), one can quickly find a long list of sources of Czech Jewish records. Some are from [jewishgen.org](http://jewishgen.org), others from the

Center for Jewish History. There are many pages of listings, and one can quickly locate numerous sources.

### Billion Graves Shows Pictures of Headstones and the Birth and Death Data They Contain

The address for this free resource is <http://blog.billiongraves.com>.

### World War I Prisoner of War Records Now Available from the Archives of the International Red Cross

The address for this material is <http://grandeguerra.icrc.org> or search for Prisoners of the First World War in the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Archives. There are index cards for five million prisoners and detainees. There are also postcards of the camps in France, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Germany, United Kingdom, the British Empire, and Italy and reports of life in the prisoner of war and internment camps.

### YIVO Digital Archive on Jewish Life in Poland

This site, located at <http://polishjews.yivoarchives.org>, was mentioned briefly in our spring 2014 issue, but it is worthwhile to point out some of its gems. Among them are "Polish Jewry: A Chronology" by Marek Web, which tells the story of Polish Jewish history from medieval times until 1939, with text, maps, and photographs. The audio files include folk songs, cantorial singing, and Hasidic *niggunim*. Another interesting part of the archive is the collection of autobiographies written by Polish youth for the writing contests of 1932, 1934, and 1939. The "Territorial Photo Collection" records numerous scenes of family life, pictures of famous and ordinary people, and changes in clothing styles. ☆

## JGS on Facebook



Facebook©

JGS, Inc. has created a group page on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>), an online social networking facility. After you join Facebook, you can reach JGS's page in any of these three ways:

- (1) Go to the JGS website (<http://www.jgsny.org>) to link to the page.
- (2) Go directly to the page at: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/group.php?gid=62112838856>.
- (3) Log in to Facebook and search for "Jewish Genealogical Society–New York."

We hope you will join the more than 1720 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.

# JGS Program Reports

by Steve Stein

September 21, 2014

“Finding Granddad’s War”

If you have a parent, grandparent, or other relative who served in the U.S. military during World War II or another 20<sup>th</sup>-century conflict, you would have found Jeffrey Badger’s presentation, as well as his book, both fascinating and motivating. Jeffrey, an engineer and consultant by profession, related an engaging narrative of his search for the history of his grandfather’s service during World War II and how others can do the same for their family members.

As most family history stories begin, Jeffrey’s began with a pile of photos and some meager details from his mother regarding his maternal grandfather’s service. Though Jeffrey was born in 1970, shortly after his grandfather Leo Kavanaugh died, he had heard stories but knew little about the details of where he had served, what his job was, who his buddies were, or whether any of them might still be alive.

Some clues Jeffrey had: a photo, apparently of his grandfather with a buddy nicknamed “Ski”; a notebook with a list of names with dollar amounts next to their names (presumably gambling debts); and a map. Then, in 1998, he discovered the name of the unit on his grandfather’s gravestone—the 978<sup>th</sup> Engineering Maintenance Company. An Internet search for this unit revealed its history, including where it had been during the war—pretty much all over the world but largely in Holland and Germany; thus, he was able to trace



Jeffrey Badger explains how he located some of the men who served in World War II with his grandfather.



Jeffrey Badger speaking at the September JGS meeting about his research for his book, *Finding Granddad's War*

its journey through the latter days of the war across Europe, then to the war in the Pacific, and, ultimately, to postwar Japan. He also found out that the unit repaired artillery and other things and discovered a roster of about 350 men who served in the unit at one time or another during the war.

Jeffrey then compared the roster against the names in the notebook and was able to find some definite matches and some “possible” as well. And in his quest to find out who “Ski” was, he presumed that one of the many Polish surnames on the list might be Ski. He was also able to identify living individuals on [Switchboard.com](http://Switchboard.com), one of the Internet directory sites, whose names were rare enough to presume a match. He began writing letters, not expecting a response, so when the letters and the photos he enclosed engendered such a strong response, Jeffrey’s search was in full swing.

Over the next months and years, Jeffrey conducted phone interviews, wrote letters, and actually visited and developed relationships with several of the soldiers or with members of their families. He began to collect anecdotes, photographs, and other memorabilia. Many of the veterans had never spoken even with their families about their war experiences because what they saw and experienced was so traumatizing that memories were suppressed for decades until Jeffrey came to encourage them to share those events. Events ranged from defusing bombs and building (and rebuilding) bridges to some no-so-pleasant memories of looting and confrontations.

Some of those he met or corresponded with did indeed remember Leo Kavanaugh and added to the picture of a grandfather.

One particular poignant recollection of a Jewish member of the unit was of the blatant anti-Semitism he experienced at the hand of a fellow member of the unit. When Jeffrey interviewed the fellow member, without disclosing the specific incidents recalled by the Jewish soldier, his memories were very different, blurred by time and distance.

Jeffrey reviewed some of the resources he was able to use to provide primary or background information for what became a major research project. Some of these are

- World War II military records, through the National Archives; many primary records were destroyed in a fire in St. Louis in 1973, but other records remain that can be located via <http://vetrecs.archives.gov>,
- personal effects, such as discharge papers, photographs, dog tags containing serial numbers, and even the name of the unit the veteran served with,
- records of veteran reunions, which sometimes may be found online,
- Individual Deceased Personnel Files (IDPFs), if the soldier was killed during his/her service,
- replacement medals, obtained at <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/replace-medals.html>, and
- World War I and World War II Draft Registration records at various sites, such as [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com).

So in the end, was Jeffrey able to locate “Ski”? I bought the book, got it signed by Jeffrey, and plan to find out shortly, as I read it. Read more (and order a signed copy yourself) at <http://www.findinggranddads.com>!

October 26, 2014

#### “Passenger Manifests and the Immigrant Voyage”

If you thought you knew everything about your family members’ journeys to the U.S. from Eastern Europe because you’d found their ship’s manifests, think again. At our October meeting, JewishGen VP of Education (and JGS member) Phyllis Kramer painted a vivid, detailed picture of what the journey from shtetl to America was like, what obstacles were encountered, and how to find more manifests and more information.



Jeffrey Badger autographing a copy of his book at the September JGS meeting

The major wave of immigration to the U.S. from eastern Europe, the Russian Empire, Austria-Hungary—including Galicia, Romania-Moldavia-Bukovina-Bessarabia—and, to a lesser extent Germany, occurred between about 1880 and 1924, at which time immigration was severely curtailed by a wave of new laws. During that period, millions of immigrants, many of them Jewish, traversed the Atlantic, the largest portion landing in New York.

Swindlers, fraud, and other dangers awaited potential immigrants at every turn.

First, what ports did they depart from and how did they get there? Phyllis identified the major ports, including Hamburg, Bremen, Libau in Russia, Liverpool, Antwerp, and Rotterdam. The major steamship lines, such as Holland America, Red Star, White Star, and North German Lloyd, sent agents to many shtetls, where they engaged locals, such as teachers, rabbis, etc., to recruit passengers. Banks were founded specifically to engage in the ticket financing business, both in Europe and America, since tickets were expensive and funding often came from relatives already in America. The shipping lines often posted railroad fares and informed passengers what lodging would cost them in the port while waiting for the ship to depart. This information was often posted in Yiddish.

To get to the port, Phyllis described how passengers often endured a train ride of two to four days; by 1900, most larger towns were accessible by rail. Kosher food may not have been available in the ports and rarely on the ships; passengers often brought their own provisions or simply didn’t eat. All told, considering the train fare, the cost of lodging and food, and the cost of the ship



Phyllis Kramer addressing the JGS at the October JGS meeting

ticket, passengers generally spent somewhere between 165 and 215 rubles. Many ships could hold a thousand or more passengers, and most Jews traveled in steerage. The journey across the Atlantic generally took up to about two weeks. Many passengers made the trip in multiple segments, stopping first in Liverpool or other cities.

With whom did people travel? In families, often the father came first, sometimes with a son. Wives often followed with the younger children, or the father returned to retrieve the rest of the family. The elderly, particularly widows and widowers whose children were already in America, generally came last. Sometimes, these individuals' manifests may be harder to find because they traveled with the Anglicized surnames of their already-American children. If you suspect you have missed some of your relatives, particularly in the last category, Steve Morse's website, which front-ends the Ellis Island database, or the [Ancestry.com](http://Ancestry.com) immigration collection or [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org) can be used to find them.

Once passengers arrived in America, they generally endured both medical and other kinds of screening at Ellis Island and other screening centers and were sometimes detained for further processing. The notation "LPC" on a manifest indicates that the agent felt that the immigrant was "likely to become a public charge" unless their means of support could be verified.

Unaccompanied women were particularly vulnerable, and measures were taken, particularly by HIAS and other groups, to ensure the immigrants'

safety and "grease the skids" for them by finding relatives, jobs, lodging, etc. (HIAS records are a separate topic.) Passengers were also screened for a variety of contagious diseases. Regarding records from the Court of Special Inquiry, which documented some more thorny cases, unfortunately only the Philadelphia records survive.

Early manifests contained relatively little information, sometimes only name, age, gender, occupation, and country of origin. But as time went on, information such as last residence, destination, how much money the passenger had, who paid for their passage, the name of the closest relative or friend (both in Europe and at the destination), nationality, ethnicity, and even personal description were added. Handwritten notations on manifests may indicate that a later process, such as naturalization, required the individual to have his or her arrival verified. See [www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles](http://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles) for more information on interpreting passenger ship notations.

Phyllis acknowledged that the handwriting on some of the passenger lists may present an obstacle to interpreting them, considering the number of indexing errors that have been introduced by various transcriptions. Using handwriting samples from elsewhere on the same manifest can often aid in interpreting the information that has not been indexed, such as the additional information concerning family members and locations. For safekeeping, future reference, enlargements, distribution, and the like, use a snipping tool to screen-capture the portion of the manifest regarding your relative as it appears on the screen.



Phyllis Kramer discussing European departure ports



Phyllis Kramer discussing Jewish population density in Europe, during her talk, "Passenger Manifests and the Immigrant Voyage"

Phyllis detailed the laws that were enacted beginning in 1921 that imposed quotas by nation of origin.

Phyllis' handout supplemented the wealth of information she presented during her talk. Below are the key links and references for further investigation.

- <http://www.ancestry.com> – fee-based, includes Hamburg, Britain Inbound
- <http://www.familysearch.org>
- <http://www.stevemorse.org/ellis/boat.html> – Steve Morse
- <http://www.Germanroots.com/onlinelists.html> – "What Passenger Lists are Online?"
- <http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/USA> – JewishGen Philadelphia Banks
- <http://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Manifests/glossary.html> – Glossary of Manifest terms
- <http://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/Manifests> – guide to interpreting manifest notations
- <http://www.castlegarden.org> – Castle Garden
- <http://aad.archives.gov/aad/series-list.jsp?cat=GP44> – NARA database for Early Manifests
- <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcsrch/PassengermanifestSearchContents.html> – Boston Manifests
- <http://www.cjh.org/collections/genealogy/JIIB.php> – Galveston
- [https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Hamburg\\_Passenger\\_Lists](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Hamburg_Passenger_Lists) – Hamburg Passenger Lists
- <http://www.archive.org/stream/cu31924021182500#page/n35/mode/1up> – Steerage Conditions
- <http://www.cimorelli.com/safe/shipmenu.htm>–

Morton Allen Directory of NY Arriving Vessels

- [http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/cgi/cgi\\_shelter.exe](http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/cgi/cgi_shelter.exe) – Jews Temporary Shelter
- <http://dgmweb.net/Ancillary/OnE/ImmigrationManifest.html> – Passenger List Heading
- <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/immigration/Pages/introduction.aspx> and <http://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2000/fall/us-canada-immigration-records-1.html> – Canadian Manifests
- <http://www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/hollam3.txt> and <http://www.unofficial.net/hal/passlist.html>– Holland America
- <http://www.passengerlists.de> – Bremen
- <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/passengerListPersonSearchStart.action> – Britain Outbound
- <http://bit.ly/1cl2pvz> – Jewish migration to UK
- <http://www.gjenvick.com/PassengerLists/index.html#axzz2wQ7KFpjN> – Antwerp

#### Suggested Reading:

- Irving Howe: *The World of Our Fathers*
- Charles Wills: *Destination America*
- Michael W. Grunberger and Hasia R. Diner: *From Haven to Home*
- Mary Antin: *The Promised Land* (on Google Books)

November 23, 2014

"No One Remembers Alone: Memory, Migration, and the Making of an American Family"

November's program continued the theme of immigration, but our speaker, lecturer, and scholar, Patricia Klindienst, focused on a single family and its immigrant experience. Her narrative, focusing on the Schochetman/Spiwak families from Orgeyev, Bessarabia, and Odessa, summarized her exhibit currently on display at the Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale in New Haven, Connecticut.

Much of the story is told at the exhibit through postcards, which became a common and popular means at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century for recording the lives of Jews in that part of the world as well as elsewhere. Both families were traumatized by the failed revolutions within Russia around 1905, and, much like survivors of the Holocaust, they were reluctant to tell of their lives to their children. Instead, they spoke among themselves in Yiddish, their hidden language, and recorded their experiences through these postcards. The story is reconstructed through these photos as well as diaries and other documents.



Abram Spivak and Sophie Schochetman first met in Russia and then, after being separated by the revolution, reunited in New York on the Lower East Side, where they married. He had experienced and graduated from a school established by Baron de Hirsch for the training of farmers while in Russia, so it was fitting that the work he found when he arrived was growing flowers in Short Hills, New Jersey. Sophie was a seamstress, work that she continued upon arriving on the Lower East Side.

Eventually, Abram and Sophie moved to a farm in Elmhurst, Queens, then known as the flower capital of the United States. As they began to prosper, they endeavored to bring over, one by one, the other members of their family. Ms. Klindienst described the stories of Abram's sisters, five of whom succeeded in coming to America (though Chava entered using her sister Gittel's name and documents). She spoke of the resources, financial and otherwise, that he put into this effort over the course of many years, from just after his arrival until the real Gittel's arrival in 1923.

The backdrop to the entire story is the wide array of photographs and postcards. The technology of capturing photographs in such a durable medium helped preserve the events of the day, such as the Paris Expo of 1900, which included the Grande Roue de Paris Ferris wheel (postcards of which sister Rivke used while trapped in Paris in 1920 to plead for money from her brother). Ms. Klindienst even described how regular New Year cards were repurposed by printing Jewish New Year greetings over the unused secular cards of previous years.

The families maintained some degree of attachment to their families and towns of origin in Europe, even after being in America for so long. Abram traveled back in 1929, bringing his daughter Lillian. Lillian's diary served as kind of a "Rosetta Stone" for some of the genealogy that Ms. Klindienst was able to construct. Sister Gittel wrote six chapters of her town's Yizkor book.

Ms. Klindienst answered many questions after the formal talk, such as how she became interested in this particular family in the first place (they are the family of a friend).

The postcards, photographs, and much more are on display at the Slifka Center through early February. It is an easy train ride up to New Haven.

*(Steve Stein is a member of the JGS Executive Council. He is a 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.). ☆*



Patricia Klindienst, guest speaker



A member of the audience at the November 21 JGS meeting asking a question of the speaker, Patricia Klindienst



After the presentation, with the speaker



## Notes from All Over

### The Proceedings of the 2012 IAJGS Conference in Paris Are Now Available for Purchase

The texts of all of the talks given during four exciting days in Paris in July 2012 are now available—160 texts collected into four volumes, totaling 1400 pages, including bibliographies.

Volume 1, “The Western World,” contains 32 articles in 330 pages in either English or French about France, Western Europe—including Italy (but not Spain, Germany, or Austria) —the United States, and Israel.

Volume 2, “Central and Eastern Europe,” contains 37 papers in 292 pages in either English or French.

Volume 3, “Sephardim,” contains 57 papers or summaries, 507 pages in the speakers’ original languages with abstracts in either French or English, dealing with Sephardim in various countries, the Jews of Africa, and the Jews of Asia.

Volume 4, “Thematic Lectures and Methodological Workshops,” 35 papers in 295 pages, available in either French or English, deals with the Holocaust, genetics, ethics, biblical genealogies, genealogical travels, and publishing.

The volumes can be ordered separately in hard cover (in color or black and white) or downloaded as PDF files. PDFs cost 10

euros each. Paper copies come with a flash drive and cost from 39 to 52 euros.

To review the contents of each volume and order online, go to <http://www.genealog.org/en/catalog/proceedings-2012-iajgs-paris-conference>.

### Archived Genealogical Webinars Available on CD

Legacy Family Tree ([www.familytreewebinars.com/archived\\_webinars.php](http://www.familytreewebinars.com/archived_webinars.php)) has a complete list of its past 198 online classes, a total of 199 hours, and 804 pages of instructor handouts available for \$10- \$12 each.

Among the interesting titles are Researching Your Jewish Ancestors; Debunking Misleading Records; Copyright Mythconceptions; German Internet Research; Using Tax Lists to Solve Genealogical Problems; I Had my DNA Tested –Now What?; Estate Records, More than Just Wills; 7 Habits of Highly Effective Genealogists; Using Google Earth for Genealogy; Get the Scoop on Your Ancestors with Newspapers; and many more.

To see the schedule of upcoming webinars, find out how to sign up, and read the FAQs, go to <http://www.familytreewebinars.com/index.php>. Each webinar is free for seven days following the live presentation, but after that, the \$10-\$12 charge applies. ☆

## In the Repositories

### Ellis Island Website Has New Look and New Name

The new URL for the Ellis Island website is <http://library.ellisfoundation.org>. One must re-register in order to use it, as logins from the old site are not recognized. The site has been redesigned, but Gary Mokotoff, editor of *Avotaynu* and *Nu? What's New*, recommends using the powerful, user-friendly Gold Form on the Stephen P. Morse website at <http://stevemorse.org/ellis2/ellisgold.html> rather than searching the new site. But there is a caveat: to view the manifest, etc., the researcher will still have to visit the new Ellis Island site (and re-register) or use an alternate.

### Free Access to Academic Journals on JSTOR

JSTOR, a digital library of 1500 academic journals,

books, and primary sources, recently made its 5 million articles available free to individuals through its Register to Read. Many of its journals have articles on Jewish history and genealogy. An online subscriber may read the full text of up to 78 articles per year, at no charge, and you may save up to 3 articles at a time on your “reading shelf.” To access this vast repository, go to <http://about.jstor.org/rr>. Then click Register to Read for Free.

### National Archives at New York City

Four current exhibits of interest to genealogists are “The World’s Port,” “Camp Kilmer,” “The Deadly Virus: The Influenza Epidemic of 1918,” and “The Slocum Disaster.” NARA is located at 1 Bowling Green, 3<sup>rd</sup> floor, in Manhattan (between State Street and Whitehall Street, just south of Broadway). ☆

## New, Recent, and Noteworthy Publications

### Books about Sephardic and Mizrahi Life

Raphael David Elmaleh and George Ricketts, *Jews under Moroccan Skies: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life* (Santa Fe, NM: Gaon Books, 2012). 278 pages. \$19.95.

By Ousama Saki

There has recently been a keen interest in the writing of serious books on Moroccan culture and subcultures, but over the years, the overwhelming majority of such intriguing books as *Morocco That Was* (1921), *Lords of the Atlas: The Rise and Fall of the House of Glaoui 1893–1956* (1966), *We Share Walls: Language, Land, and Gender in Berber Morocco* (2007), etc. were all written by foreign travel writers, visitors, and anthropologists who made Morocco their permanent or temporary home. Albeit there are not many books written by Moroccan writers and academicians in this particular area, there are a good number of unpublished Ph.D. and M.A. dissertations submitted to Moroccan universities by promising Moroccan post-graduates. Alas, very few are written in English as at present Moroccan writing on Moroccan culture in general and ethnic and cultural minorities in particular is an academic discipline. It should be encouraged and more widely available so that the ancient and present-day unrecorded oral history of Moroccan plurality and cultural mosaic can be documented by “insiders,” whose voices and perspectives can be very revealing.

*Jews under Moroccan Skies: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Life* is a long-awaited book and the fruit of a research enterprise that was undertaken by a Moroccan Jew, Raphael David Elmaleh, and his Scottish co-author, George Ricketts. Their book is, as George Ricketts once told me, an attempt to preserve some of the unwritten long history of Moroccan Jews, frequently transmitted by word of mouth, and to fill the void in the field of the culture and history of Moroccan Jewry, relatively unknown in international academia. The book also aims to reconstruct, through writing, a forgotten Judeo-Berber culture that once characterized Moroccan plurality.

Raphael David Elmaleh, one of the authors of the book, was born in Casablanca, Morocco, but he lived in England for seventeen years. In 1995, he returned home, and he now lives in Morocco alongside 4,000

Moroccan Jews. Besides being a professional tour guide specializing in Moroccan Jewish Heritage tours, he is an active member of the Foundation for the History and Culture of Moroccan Jews. He also participated in the restoration of synagogues throughout Morocco and contributed mightily to the enrichment of the Casablanca Jewish Museum by assisting in the transfer of Jewish artifacts and furniture from abandoned synagogues located in different parts of Morocco. The Jewish museum, which opened in 1995, is housed in an ex-Jewish orphanage in a suburb of Casablanca, and it is the only Jewish museum in the Arab world.

George Ricketts, the other author, was born in Edinburgh, Scotland, but moved to Casablanca, Morocco in 1991 and has lived there ever since. He decided to settle in Morocco due to its warm and sunny weather, the country’s abundant natural beauty, and the friendly character of the Moroccan people. Being devoted to studying Moroccan history and culture has led him to travel all around Morocco to practically every small village and town in order to see things with his own eyes and mingle and talk with the locals in his fluent Moroccan Arabic. Besides teaching English to non-native speakers, he also takes a great interest in the work of Raphael Elmaleh.

There is no doubt that the two authors of *Jews under Moroccan Skies* have a sound knowledge of the subject matter of their book. In addition to the books already available on Moroccan Jewry and history, the writers rely on some pieces of rare recorded information and unrecorded oral testimonies. They managed to obtain some of the undocumented information from elderly Moroccan Jews who lived in Morocco and witnessed the unrecorded past events. On the whole, their book provides not only basic information from library research, which any armchair researcher can obtain, but also inside knowledge acquired while mingling with Moroccan Jews and Muslims in every part of the kingdom.

*Jews under Moroccan Skies* is apparently not addressed to a target audience. Anyone interested in Moroccan history in general or Moroccan Judeo-Berber history, culture, and traditions in particular can study it. The book can also serve as a guidebook for anyone coming to visit Moroccan Jewish sites, as it gives substantial historical background information about many Moroccan cities and their environs where Moroccan Jews live or lived. It is written in plain English so that non-native speakers of English will not find the content

difficult to understand. Readers will certainly find it an enjoyable and engrossing read.

The authors neatly divide the book into three detailed chapters. "A Brief History of Morocco," the introductory chapter, provides a pithy description of the historical evolution of Morocco since the Romans (429 C.E.) and up to the creation of the Casablanca Jewish Museum (1995). It also includes comprehensive coverage of all of the Moroccan ruling dynasties from the Umayyads (690–768) to the Alaouites (1666–present). The second chapter, "Jewish Morocco by Region," chronicles, as the title suggests, an account of the early Jewish history, life, settlement, and religious practices of each of the eleven regions into which the authors divide Morocco. Thus, anyone interested in the Jewish particularities of a specific region or city can go directly to its page number without having to read the book from start to finish. The last chapter, "Jewish Culture in Morocco," is dedicated to some specificities of Moroccan Jewry, such as feasts, beliefs, and cuisine, to mention but a few. The last section of the book contains a glossary and a list of some recommended readings.

Besides its rich content, *Jews under Moroccan Skies* contains some fascinating photographs, among them black-and-white photographs of Jewish fortified settlements, shrines of rabbi saints (*Tzadiks*), synagogues, Jewish leaders, rabbis, and many others. The front cover of the book displays some wonderful color pictures, such as the tomb of the famous Moroccan Jewish martyr, Lalla Solica Hachwelle, buried in the Jewish Cemetery of Fes, now a UNESCO World Heritage site. Another picture shows an alley of a former *mellah*, the name given to the Jewish quarter in most parts of Morocco. The back cover depicts pictures of the authors, a door of an abandoned, but restored, synagogue in Ifrane in the Anti-Atlas region, some Hebrew inscriptions, and a photograph of Haim Botbol, the renowned Moroccan Jewish singer.

*Jews under Moroccan Skies* has received unstinting praise from eminent intellectuals and academics in the field of Jewish cultural heritage and politics. Serge Berdugo, the Secretary-General of the Council of Moroccan Jews and also the President of the World Assembly of Moroccan Jewry, states that the book "shows the heritage of tolerance and coexistence between Jews and Muslims...and delivers a message of hope in a world of hatred and exclusion." Peter A. Geffen, the founder of the Abraham Joshua Heschel School, asserts that "no chapter in the long history of the Jewish people has more power and more relevance to our contemporary world than Moroccan Jewry. And it is the

least known, by far! This wonderful book will draw you into its mystery, captivating and capturing your imagination."

The thesis of the whole book is that peaceful coexistence has mostly united Jews and Muslims in the Kingdom of Morocco for almost two thousand years, an idea that some scoff at. Making use of a historical approach to buttress this major argument, the authors trace the relative peaceful coexistence back to the first arrival of the Jews in Morocco. They describe how, all throughout Moroccan history, Muslims and Jews have interwoven their lives, held tremendous respect for each other, harmoniously lived side by side, and supported one another in times of appalling hardship.

The authors also maintain that Morocco is a peaceful country and that Moroccans are generally tolerant and seldom judgmental with regard to foreigners. They boldly point out that "of all the Islamic countries, Morocco is the most tolerant and respectful when it comes to people of different religions." Even before the arrival of Arabs and Islam in Morocco in the seventh century, Jews enjoyed a healthy kinship and symbiotic relationship with Berbers, the indigenous inhabitants of North Africa, which resulted in the integration and adoption of Judaism by many Berbers, who later became known as Berber Jews.

Unfortunately, the peaceful coexistence and harmonious relationships between the Muslims and the Jews were interrupted by periods of social unrest and political conflicts. In the twelfth century, for instance, Berber Jews underwent forced conversions and endured blatant discrimination for several years due, in particular, to some fanatical Muslim rulers of the Almohad dynasty. The authors also attribute some of those conflicts that arose in the twentieth century to the French divide-and-rule policy, which resulted in the break-up of the long-term bond between Moroccan Muslims and Jews. The same divide-and-rule tactic was deployed by the French colonial occupiers in order to provoke divisions between Arabs and Berbers. The authors do not deny that another major cause of the problems between Muslims and Jews is attributed to the creation of Israel.

Still, regardless of all the tribulations that Moroccan Muslims and Jews encountered, Morocco remains one of the saviors of the Jews in the entire world. While the Germans, through the Nazi-controlled, French Vichy government, demanded that all Moroccan Jews While the Germans, through the Nazi-controlled, French Vichy government, demanded that all Moroccan Jews and their

continued on page 11

# 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 Joseph Van Nostrand, Senior Management Analyst, and Bruce Abrams, Principal Court Analyst, Retired from the Division of Old Records, New York County Clerk, New York State Supreme Court**

**DOROT:** What is the Division of Old Records and what does it contain?

**VANNOSTRAND:** The records that we have in the Old Records Division span the years 1674 to 1910 and they deal with civil actions: matrimonial actions, medical malpractice actions, accidents, overwhelmingly loans and business failure to deliver on goods and services. The New York County Clerk is the Clerk of Supreme Court, New York County and has responsibility for its records and those of its predecessor courts. We have naturalization records for when the state court did naturalizations in Manhattan from 1792 to 1924. We have census records. We have the New York state censuses for Manhattan for 1905, 1915, and 1925. We have the 1870 federal enumeration for Manhattan, and we have the 1855 New York State Census for Manhattan—that is, New York County.

**DOROT:** Your floor-to-ceiling shelves of paper records give visitors a sense of being very close to the original sources of information. How do you find individual cases?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** We do have a lot of indexes on computer, so you can do both a plaintiff and defendant search for all of our court records up to 1910. So you can do a matrimonial search, you can do an accident search, any individuals you may be interested in; you search by name. You can run it in the computer by plaintiff, in the event they instituted the action, or by defendant, in the event that somebody was suing them.

**DOROT:** Are those indexes on the Internet, or do researchers have to come here to the Old Records Division on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of 31 Chambers Street to access them?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** They are not online. They have to come here to run our indexes.

**DOROT:** Is there any chance that the indexes might someday come online?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** The indexes, yes. I would tend to doubt whether the records themselves will, but I'm almost sure we could put the indexes online. Right now, they are scanning post-2010 records and so forth. But once that's done, I can ask the computer people to put us online, which I'm sure is not very hard.

**DOROT:** Bruce Abrams, how long were you at the Division of Old Records before you retired in early 2014?

**ABRAMS:** Thirty years.

**DOROT:** Did much change over those years?

**ABRAMS:** The indexes are the biggest factor that has enabled researchers to get materials. Up until that time, the card indexes were the only indexes, and they were arranged by plaintiff, the party that began the lawsuit. Now, both sets—as Joe has explained—are available. In addition, Ancestry.com has made equity actions and naturalization indexes available online.

**DOROT:** Could you clarify what's available online on Ancestry.com and what's only available on the computers in the Division of Old Records?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** What we have online are all of the naturalization indexes. We have online the equity actions. But the other indexes are not online: the historical records index that covers the Courts of Chancery, Common Pleas, and Superior and Supreme Court.

**DOROT:** What is of value to someone researching their family history in the Division of Old Records?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** The biggest attraction is the naturalization records, which are fully indexed by name. The records for the state courts in Manhattan are the ones that are here. The ones with the greatest amount of genealogical information are the records from 1907 to 1924. This office has both the petitions



Joseph Van Nostrand

for naturalization and the declarations of intention. Beyond that, there are the state censuses. New York State took a census every ten years in the years ending in a "5." It happens that for Manhattan, the only four that survived were 1855, 1905, 1915, and 1925. Also, some people doing family research try to find records of their ancestors' businesses (many are off-site) and certificates of incorporation in this office. In the Division of Old Records, there are incorporations up until 1920. Particularly for Jewish genealogy, it's of interest because of the *landsmanshaftn* and burial societies that were part of the community.

**DOROT:** What records are connected to those groups and what information do they provide?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** There's the certificate of incorporation, so the society's existence is documented. The documents contain the names of the boards of directors and their addresses. Not much more than that. There are also some paper copies of city directories that genealogists like to use. This office has a pretty good run of those city directories for Manhattan from 1851 until 1901 and a few after that: 1916 to 1920, 1922, and 1933.

**DOROT:** The records in this office are, by definition, for New York County, that is, Manhattan. Are there similar repositories in the other four boroughs?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Yes, there are. Each of the county clerks would hold their records. Queens and Brooklyn have many naturalization records and they have census records. The Bronx also, and I'm assuming also Staten Island. Estelle Guzik's book, *Genealogical Resources in New York*, pretty accurately reflects what the other counties have. (Ed.: The 2003 revised edition of the book is available from JGSNY at <http://www.jgsny.org/book-genealogical-resources-in-new-york>.)

**DOROT:** Why is there a separation between old records and new records?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** At one time, the records here in the Division of Old Records went up to 1940. They were all in the halls and all over the place. Then, when they needed space, those records from 1911 to 1940 went off-site to create space for newer records. Right now, we have the records from 1998 through 2003, and we do have divorce records. But remember, in New York State, divorces are sealed for 100 years to everyone except the parties to the action and the original attorneys or an authorized representative. So, people can look at those divorces up to 1914.

**DOROT:** So, there are some newer records in the Division of Old Records?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** That's right.

**DOROT:** What kinds of records are those?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Those are all civil court actions, many of them matrimonial, medical malpractice cases, debt cases, and also asbestos cases because that was a time frame when they were filing a lot of asbestos actions.

**DOROT:** What is the best way for someone who is new to this to come here and figure out what might be relevant to what they're researching?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** They have to talk with one of us because they have to focus their research and we can tell them exactly what we have and what they can find here. Many times, they come here and discover that they need another institution; they're just in the wrong place. If they call us first (646-386-5395), we'll certainly tell them on the phone, but if they don't call and just come in, we have to talk with them and find out exactly what they're interested in and what we have to satisfy their interest because we may not have those records. Some people come up to me who are looking for birth, death, and marriage records. I say, "Nope. First floor, Municipal Archives, Room 102." Or they may be looking for wills, another big topic. That's in Room 402 (Records Department, New York County Surrogate's Court). Luckily, we're all in the same building at 31 Chambers Street.

**DOROT:** What are the typical searches in terms of what people are trying to discover?

**ABRAMS:** The naturalization records are the most requested. Typically, people will come to this building because of the Municipal Archives on the first floor, where they have birth, death, and marriage records, and they can also go to the fourth floor, where they have the wills and estate records from the Surrogate's Court. This building, which was once called the Hall of Records, is a good place for genealogists. *Genealogical Resources in New York* is still the best place to start trying to figure out a research strategy.

**DOROT:** Do you recall people coming to the Division of Old Records and making consequential discoveries?

**ABRAMS:** Oh, sure. People will point to a record and say, "That's my grandfather" or "That's my aunt." That happens all the time.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** People going through naturalizations will have a bunch of names, so they have to look for each one, and they'll say, "That's not it, that's not it..." But then they discover their ancestor and they can take pictures of it, and I say, "Do whatever you like, within reason; take your picture, take your notes." I always tell them, "If you have a color camera, the images come out really nice because they show the oldness of the records."

**DOROT:** How long has the Division of Old Records and its huge collection of documents been here?

**ABRAMS:** Since the building went up.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** The cornerstone says 1901. Since then, they gradually moved the County Clerk records upstairs. At one time, this was a very active area. They used to give out marriage licenses up here when the County Clerk issued marriage licenses, before it was turned over to the City Clerk. There were typists up here. We have condemnation records. They don't have much genealogical value, but the title searchers look at those—who owns what property, or what right did the city have to take this property, and so forth. We have them coming in every once in a while. Those records have been here a while. And the old court records: Court of Chancery, Common Pleas, Superior, and Supreme; I'm sure they were moved in after the building was built and this office was set up.

**DOROT:** You must have an amazing memory to be able to put your fingers on these records and locate the right ones.

**ABRAMS:** When you work with them every day, it's less imposing. And, fortunately, almost everything is indexed, so they all have their numbers and you can find them through the numbers.

**DOROT:** Do you have records off-site?

**ABRAMS:** Yes, there are records kept in a warehouse in Brooklyn that are slowly being transferred to another warehouse in New Jersey.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** The Brooklyn people lost the contract with the state. The documents are from 1911 to 1940. We have the indexes to it. If people want those records, we have to send for them.

**DOROT:** How much of a delay is there in retrieving them?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** They say three to five days. With

all this moving about, I'm not sure if it still holds.

**DOROT:** Have you done any family research yourself and used any of these records?

**ABRAMS:** Not for my own family, but I've tried to be aware of how people use it.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Neither have I. Someone was doing my genealogy for me, but most of my records—they were doing the Dutch side—were on Long Island, in Queens, but not here.

**DOROT:** In terms of the civil court records that you have in the Division of Old Records, what information can be of use to family researchers?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Many of the actions are really straightforward suits: you owe me money and so forth. Maybe a family member will be mentioned. But the equity actions—those dealing with divorces, land settlements, construing wills, and stuff like that—may have a lot of family information. Sometimes I try to direct people to the Court of Chancery old records equity indexes because if you're going to find anything, there will be a lot more in there. Many of the other cases are debt and provide little personal information.

**DOROT:** What does "equity" mean in this legal context?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Equity action deals with breaking a contract or not fulfilling a contract. The court will not order you to pay money for damages but they will order you to fulfill that contract. Then, if the contract is not fulfilled, you will have to sue in a law action to recover the damages. Divorces are equity actions—breaking a bond—as well as land settlements, boundary disputes, where the court is trying to determine the right thing. Those are all equity actions. Sometimes there's a lot of information in those.

**DOROT:** Do you recall anyone finding this data as part of their family research?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Yes, because in many cases people have family legends, let's say, of divorces or an ancestor who may have been hit by a trolley car and families suing on that basis. So that material is of interest.

**DOROT:** Divorce in New York State was difficult for the parties during the period covered by your records, wasn't it?

**ABRAMS:** Yes, the most typical legal grounds for

divorce would be adultery, and up until the early 1960s, if it was proven that one party had been involved in an extramarital affair, the other party would gain the right to remarry, but the party who had been in the wrong would not be able to remarry...

**VAN NOSTRAND:** ...without the permission of the court. You had to apply to a judge for permission to get remarried because they had been accused of adultery, they had been found guilty, the divorce went through, and they were told that they didn't have the right to marry unless the court gave its permission.

**DOROT:** Do any of the people who come here ever have a shocked look on their faces when they discover unexpected information?

**ABRAMS:** Yes, I remember somebody finding a record of an abortion having taken place in their family and being very upset.

**DOROT:** What brought you to this division? Do you have a legal or administrative background?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** History background. Previous to this, I worked at the New-York Historical Society on the papers of Aaron Burr, and I worked at the New York City Municipal Archives and at Queens College when they had a large collection of court records which are no longer there. I received a B.A. from Fordham in History and an M.A. from NYU in History.

**DOROT:** Are you ever tempted to conduct research in the Division of Old Records?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** The answer is no. When you are around it every day, it's not the same as when you come in, you have never seen it before, and you discover something.

**DOROT:** What about you, Mr. Abrams?

**ABRAMS:** A little bit from time to time. When I read a story in the paper about a historical event, I'm tempted to look it up.

**DOROT:** Do you have a legal background?

**ABRAMS:** Not really. I did work for a private agency involved in the Brooklyn Criminal Court for a number of years, and I was going through graduate school in history, so I was interested in dealing with old records.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Bruce has a doctorate in history

from the City University of New York.

**DOROT:** What period of history was that?

**ABRAMS:** The early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**DOROT:** Did you use old records?

**ABRAMS:** Yes.

**DOROT:** As a doctoral student, did you make any use of these kinds of records that were part of your life when you worked here full-time?

**ABRAMS:** Elsewhere more than here, but the records have always been of interest.

**DOROT:** You've said that the documents here are from civil court.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** We have some criminal records—a limited amount. We have the early Court of Sessions. We have the volumes, but the Municipal Archives has the microfilm, so most people don't come up here for the volumes; they use the microfilm downstairs. We loaned the records to them so they could microfilm them. We have some of the Court of Oyer and Terminer—again, a limited amount. It might not be worth coming to look for those except if it's for a very specific era.

**DOROT:** What is Oyer and Terminer?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** At one time, it was a major criminal court, and it handed down capital punishment. Then, over the years, the Court of General Sessions assumed that responsibility. The Court of Oyer and Terminer was the court in which Boss Tweed was found guilty and given a couple of years. I don't know if it's worth researching these records for genealogical purposes unless you know specifically that you have someone in the family who was involved in a crime and you want to check and see what happened.

**DOROT:** Are some of the court documents being scanned and digitized?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** More recent records. None of our records are being scanned. I'm afraid if we were to try to scan them, they would fall apart. They're very fragile, brittle, and dry, and we have a massive volume of these records. In fact, when researchers come, I always ask them to bring a camera; don't try to flatten it on a copy machine or parts of it would crumble. I say, "Just use



your camera and take a picture.” We have no problem with people bringing a camera. I thought all researchers would have some form of camera these days, but not everybody does. So sometimes they have to take notes.

**ABRAMS:** Scanners are very helpful, and a lot of people have hand-held scanners that can get through pretty long documents very quickly.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** They call it a wand, but in reality, it’s a scanning unit that stores the memory, and then when you go back to your computer, you download the information that’s in the scanner. Some of the law firms have them for their staffs. And some of those who are doing historical research and have to go through many records and make copies, they bring something like that in. I think they told me that some are less than \$100, so if you’re doing historical research, it’s an ideal investment.

**DOROT:** So someone coming to the Division of Old Records to look at really old documents should not expect to make Xerox copies.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Not Xeroxes. Copies with their cameras, sure, or a scanner. Because if you flatten a brittle document on a machine, it’s going to fall apart. We’ve seen it many times. That’s why we had to limit that. We have to feel the paper to make sure it’s good to copy or if it will fall apart or crack.

**DOROT:** Are there any documents in the division that the wider public might be interested in, in terms of their historical significance?

**ABRAMS:** There are some individuals who always attract a lot of interest: Irving Berlin, Typhoid Mary, Aaron Burr....

**VAN NOSTRAND:** His divorce and some of the cases he was involved in.

**DOROT:** Those records are here?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Yes. Alexander Hamilton was an attorney and he practiced—before the duel. We have some of his papers here.

**DOROT:** Are the people who use the facility mostly family researchers?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Yes. Historical researchers come in just once in a while. Professors tend to come in in the summer or during their long breaks.

**DOROT:** What about law firms?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** You get those all the time. There are some right now going through asbestos cases. They don’t usually go through the old records but go into the active records that we have.

**DOROT:** Will any records be coming in here?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** I tend to doubt it because they have a new policy. They have these big scanners over in the courthouse, and they’re trying to scan all the records in each case, and they’ll probably dispose of those (documents), creating room on the shelf for the newer records as they come in. And now they have a new policy for the most recent records: e-filing. So everything goes into the computer. So there won’t be much need for space on the shelf for paper records. What we’re talking about is scanning forward. I don’t think they’re going to scan any of the old records. Right now, they’re doing 2009 and 2010 and they’ll probably do 2011, and they’ll try to meet with e-filing. And then maybe they would go back. But that’s creating an awful lot of space, and as a result, they don’t have to create space over here.

**DOROT:** What records are we talking about?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** All civil actions in Supreme Court. Civil, again, divorces, accident cases, medical malpractice cases, debt cases, companies suing companies over failure to deliver on services, breach of contract, and so forth.

**DOROT:** Once these records are e-filed or scanned, how does a researcher access them?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** They used to be able to access some of them online through the SCROLL (Supreme Court Records On-Line Library) system, which was a system set up by the New York State Supreme Court in which documents were scanned. Now, with them scanning everything, researchers may have to come in person because they’re making them pay per page for each copy printed out.

**DOROT:** Is there anything lost in putting everything in computers?

**ABRAMS:** Yes, there are mistakes in the indexes in spellings. And you’re more likely to find the name if it’s misspelled by browsing through a bunch of cards than by searching a name on the computer.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Because you’re subject to somebody who is data entering making a mistake. The computer doesn’t know that, doesn’t recognize that

name if it's misspelled.

**ABRAMS:** And people have used different spellings for their names at different times of their lives. The cards are easier for finding that.

**DOROT:** Who created those card indexes?

**ABRAMS:** They were done mainly in the 1930s with funding from the federal government.

**DOROT:** There are similar offices in each of the boroughs.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Each of the county clerks.

**DOROT:** Do you all compare notes with each other?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Very rarely. The only one I hear from is Mark Nusenbaum in the Bronx. He helps the genealogists when they go up there. They do naturalization searches, the change-of-name searches, and so forth in Bronx County. Remember, Bronx County was created in 1914, so their records don't go that far back.

**ABRAMS:** A lot of their records are scanned and available on a computer up there. But, as Joe says, it helps that there are fewer of them.

**DOROT:** Do New York County records go back to the early days of New York City?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** Yes, they do. Our first record is from 1674. When the British retook New York from the Dutch, they instituted the common law tradition, and they set up the courts strictly in English, following their English procedures. We have the first page of that minute book when the court first met.

**DOROT:** Is there a problem with those very old records in terms of the language or handwriting?

**ABRAMS:** Sure. Sometimes, the records have faded ink and are difficult to read. Just because they exist doesn't mean that they're readable.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** We find that the handwriting in the minute books is better because I think the clerks recopied, maybe later in the day, what exactly went on each day in the courthouse, and they were able to write very slowly. I have a feeling they were hired because they had excellent penmanship. But sometimes they can be a little flowery in their writing, and then it makes it hard to understand which letter it is.

**DOROT:** What about the issue of preservation? You mentioned the fragility of some documents. Can anything be done to preserve them?

**VAN NOSTRAND:** We have done a lot of the minute books, the daily occurrences in the courts. We have done the Court of Common Pleas, the old Mayor's Court. These minute books are all preserved, deacidified in folders. The Supreme Court Judicature up to 1846, the Court of Chancery, and General Sessions, the earliest books, are also preserved. So they're going to survive us.

**ABRAMS:** And the 1855 Census for Manhattan.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** But there are so many of the file papers, that you can't do it. The room is full of file papers from the 1790s to 1910 that have been folded over for so many years, so you've got to be very careful taking them apart and opening them. Those are the ones that would require an astronomical amount of money to preserve, so that's why, with what money we could, we concentrated on the books. The books tell people what happened each day in court, what types of cases they heard, and what were the judgments.

**DOROT:** You mentioned earlier that there are records documenting name changes.

**VAN NOSTRAND:** We do have change-of-name records. We have them from when they were part of the Court of Common Pleas. Then, when the Court of Common Pleas was abolished, it was done in the Supreme Court and in the old City Court. We do not have the records of the old City Court. That's with Civil Court. They have their volumes, and genealogists go there. But we do have Supreme Court records from when the names were changed. We have a card index up to 1934, and our card index continues over in the courthouse. The public can search and see if a name was changed. Usually, they are indexed both ways, the old name and the new name. So, if you don't know the old name, you should know the new name, and you can then find out the old name. But many times, people didn't legally change their names, they just used a new name. In those years, people just said, "I'm going to be known as..." Then, later on, when people were looking for legal changes of name, it's not there. Family members would shorten their name on their own.

**DOROT:** So to summarize, the name-change records that you have here cover...

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future generation, Psalms 48:14

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