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The Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society

# DOROT דורות

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Volume 33, Number 2

Winter 2011-2012

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**We mourn the passing of our dear friend and colleague,  
Steven W. Siegel, z”l. May his memory be a blessing.**

## Searching for the Names of Jewish Refugees at Angel Island

By Eddie Wong

*Note: The Summer 2011 issue Dorot contained a note that the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF) was trying to locate the names of Jewish refugees who arrived in San Francisco from Russia, China and Japan in the 1930s and 1940s and were held for medical inspection and questioning at the Angel Island Immigration Station before being admitted to the U.S. To date, AIISF has the names of just 132 Jewish arrivals out of a possible 466, and they are trying to*

*compile the names of all the Jewish immigrants and and/or their descendants.*

*A few months later the 2011 issue of ZichronNote, the Journal of the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society, featured the full story of the work of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF), which is reprinted below. The following article was written by Eddie Wong, Executive Director of the AIISF, and is reprinted with permission of Mr. Wong and ZichronNote. Following the article is “One Family’s Story from the National Archives,” an example of the type of information for which the AIISF is searching.*

Among the diverse stories of Chinese, Japanese, Russian and Mexican immigrants who all spent time on Angel Island, the story of Jewish refugees has largely been untold. Under AIISF’s direction, several graduate students from San Francisco State University’s Anthropology Department and other community volunteers have spent hours reading immigration records and searching for news articles.

Because of one person, Mrs. Alice Steiner, the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation (AIISF) became aware that Jewish refugees had come to San Francisco in 1940 after long and difficult travels escaping Nazi rule in Austria and Germany. Mrs. Steiner responded to a newspaper article in which AIISF invited former immigrants who were interned at Angel Island to come

### In this issue

<b>Searching for the Names of Jewish Refugees at Angel Island</b> by Eddie Wong.....	1
<b>President’s Postings</b> by Roni Seibel Liebowitz.....	3
<b>From the Angel Island Files of the National Archives</b> by Lakhpreet Gill.....	5
<b>Upcoming &amp; Current Events</b> .....	6
<b>Program Reports</b>	
by Steve Stein and Larry Freund.....	9
<b>Two New JGS Executive Council Members</b> .....	9
<b>Notes from All Over</b> .....	13
<b>Online News</b> .....	15
<b>Hooked on Genealogy</b>	
by Irit Gafni-Pinchovski.....	17
<b>A New System for Ordering &amp; Paying for LDS Microfilms</b> by Stewart Driller.....	18
<b>Six Degrees of Separation</b> by Michael Marcus.....	18
<b>New, Recent and Noteworthy Publications</b> by Claus W. Hirsch and Toby Sanchez.....	19
<b>Questioning the Experts:</b>	
<b>Claus W. Hirsch</b> .....	23
<b>JGS Friends</b> .....	27

continued on page 4

## DOROT

### The Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society

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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 almost 1,000 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 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
- 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
- Out-of-town Member (receive local mailings) \$36
- Non-U.S. Member (air mail) US\$36

You can request a membership application by mailing a self-addressed, stamped envelope to Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc., P.O. Box 286398, New York, NY 10128-0004, or you can print out the application on the JGS website at <http://www.jgsny.org/members.htm>. 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

It's a pleasure and somewhat daunting to be writing to you for the first time as president of the Jewish Genealogical Society.

I have gotten to know many of you over the past several years, as vice president of programming, and am honored to be an active participant in this wonderful organization.

About a week ago, we held our annual members' brunch on December 25<sup>th</sup> at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y.

It was wonderful seeing so many of you there to socialize and enjoy the program. We started with some official business when President Steve Siegel introduced several past presidents seated around the tables, including Marsha Saron Dennis, Estelle Guzik, and Linda Cantor. Business followed with the election of the society's new officers for 2012. Secretary Howard Rotblatt presented the slate, which was elected by acclamation. The new officers are Roni Seibel Liebowitz – President; Jane Rosen Berenbeim – Vice President for Programming, and two new members of the Executive Council: Joy Kastenbaum and Harriet Mayer. Joy and Harriet's biographies can be found in this issue of *Dorot*. Thanks to retiring members of the Executive Council, Edie Ewenstein, publicity chair, and Karen Franklin, for all their hard work and insights as members of the council.

Next on the agenda was a vote on a proposal to add a new member to the society's Executive Council, a Vice President for Communications. This person shall be responsible for planning and executing public outreach in support of JGS Program and Membership activities, and shall collaborate with the President in overseeing the publication of *Dorot*, the content of the JGS website, and other publications that may be prepared in the future. Outreach functions include preparation of press releases, program email blasts, social network postings, and mailings for purposes of membership promotion and program publicity. This addition to the by-laws was approved by the members. If you are interested in this position, please contact me at [president@jgsny.org](mailto:president@jgsny.org). We are also looking for a member who is able to take photographs at our monthly programs, and edit and submit them to *Dorot* and the JGS group page on Facebook.

The program at the annual brunch was presented by

Rafael Guber. With his breadth of knowledge and wonderful sense of humor, he informed and entertained us with his presentation, "Genealogical Implications of Hasidic Ancestry." Read about it in this issue of *Dorot*.

We plan to increase our efforts to reach a wider audience, with special attention to involving younger people in genealogy. Executive Council member Gloria Berkenstat Freund will lead that effort. In addition, with the growing interest in one's heritage, as demonstrated by shows such as "Who Do You Think You Are," and the availability of on-line resources, we plan to stimulate interest and encourage more adults to become involved in genealogy. We have a number of ideas about how to approach this.

With much appreciation, we acknowledge David and Kate Kleiman for undertaking the huge task of updating and transferring the new JGS website. Whenever migrating websites from one host to another, there are likely to be kinks that need to be worked out. Members who have difficulty accessing the members-only resources on JGS should contact us at [info@jgsny.org](mailto:info@jgsny.org) for a temporary work-around.

Not only do we seek to involve people new to genealogy, we also strive to better serve the interests and needs of our members. We welcome your ideas. Are you interested in schmooze time before the meetings? Would informal sessions about how to attack those brick walls be helpful? Please let us know your ideas. We are ready to listen.

### Steven W. Siegel

This issue would not be complete without a few words about our immediate past president, Steve Siegel, who has over many years contributed a great deal to the world of Jewish genealogy. A founding member when JGS was created in 1977, Steve has been actively involved with JGS ever since. He was president of the organization (the first time) from 1985 to 1989, held the offices of secretary and vice president of programming, editor of *Dorot*, and has been a member of the Executive Council for many years. He was library director and archivist at the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street YM-YWHA for 31 years. Co-founder and co-editor of *Toledot: The Journal of Jewish Genealogy* (1977-1982), he compiled the Archival Resources volume of *Jewish Immigrants of*

*the Nazi Period in the USA* (1978). During New York Archives week, Steve initiated and managed the annual Family History Fair (1990-2005), which included 40 to 50 genealogical societies and vendors with upwards of 500 attendees. Past president of the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York, Steve was the 2004 recipient of the Archival Achievement award in recognition of his management of the Fair for so many years. JGS was an active participant in the Fair and presented a lecture that appealed to both the JGS membership and the wider attendance. Steve also is President of the Jewish Historical Society of New York, serves on the Jewish Book Council Board of Directors, and is a member of the Cornell University Hillel Board of Trustees and the Cornell University Council. His research and lectures focus on Jewish genealogy, Jewish archival sources and New York City

local history. He has always been willing to give his time and expertise whenever asked. Although he is stepping down as President, he will continue on the Executive Council and, as immediate past president, remain an active member of this board. We thank him for his many years of continued service to the field of Jewish genealogy.

### *Roní*

Steven W. Siegel died on January 21, 2012, as *Dorot* was preparing to go to press. A memorial tribute to him will appear in the spring issue of *Dorot*.

Donations can be made in Steve's memory and sent to Cornell University Hillel, Box 223623, Pittsburgh, PA 15251-2623.

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## **Jewish Refugees at Angel Island** continued from page 1

forward with their stories. In 2004 AIISF volunteers interviewed Mrs. Steiner, who was 17 years old when she and her mother, Hilda Edelstein, journeyed from Austria to China to Angel Island. A few years later, Nora Steiner, Alice's daughter, supplied us with additional information and photographs, which are featured in *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* by Erika Lee and Judy Yung, published in 2010 by Oxford University Press.

Preliminary research of ships' logs revealed that in 1939 and 1940, 466 immigrants were listed as being of Hebrew ancestry. We assumed that most of them were coming to the U.S. to join other family members who had left in advance of the Nazi regime. Indeed, that was the case, as we soon discovered by reading the immigration records held at the National Archives at San Francisco, in San Bruno, California.

To date, we have reviewed records and stories about 60 Jewish immigrants from Austria, Germany, Lithuania, and Poland. The oldest immigrant was Zelik Honigberg, a 61 year-old button manufacturer from Lithuania, and the youngest was Margaret Schwarz, a two year old from Germany. Several of the male immigrants had been imprisoned in concentration camps and released on the condition that they never return to Germany or Austria. Many of the immigrants had spent their life savings on the long journey across Europe and Russia to find safe passage to Shanghai, only to wait months before being able to come to San Francisco.

Our research has focused mostly on passengers of ships that came to San Francisco in 1940 and 1941. From February to November 1940, 11 ships brought Jewish refugees from Shanghai, Hong Kong and Kobe, Japan. AIISF volunteers have also looked at immigrant files from four ships that arrived in 1941, just before the close of trans-Pacific travel due to the U.S. entry into World War II. We still need to review ship records from 1938 and 1939 to develop a fuller picture of the Jewish exodus after the Nazi regime exacted more extreme measures of discrimination against Jews after consolidating power.

As we read the immigration files, we begin to understand the full extent of persecution of the Jewish people by the Nazis. Professionals such as doctors and lawyers lost their right to practice; ordinary working people were rounded up on the street and taken away to prison; children were separated from their parents as they fled from invading troops. Fortunately, the Angel Island immigrants had relatives and sponsors in the U.S., but many of them still underwent scrutiny by U.S. immigration officials who wanted to verify that these immigrants were not coming into the country as contract laborers or likely to become public charges. Jewish community organizations such as the National Jewish Women's Council (sic), and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, as well as the Society of Friends (Quakers), played vital roles in providing travel funds to allow these refugees to be reunited with friends and relatives on the East Coast and in the Midwest.

Our research has taken us to the point where we have learned a little about the circumstances of these immigrants' lives in Nazi-held countries and the sacrifices they made to find their way out. We have the names of the relatives and friends who testified on their behalf. In some cases, we have been able to look deeper into public records and have discovered World War II draft registration cards, federal censuses, applications for U.S. naturalization, and death certificates. This additional information provides us a glimpse of where the refugees ended up living.

AIISF's goal is to find these immigrants and their relatives and descendants in order to explore more fully their compelling stories of courage and perseverance. This research will involve spending much more time looking at public records, contacting religious organizations and community associations, and reaching out to the broader community through the mass media. In some cases, such as that of Abraham Brumberg, who arrived as a 14 year-old on the Asama Maru in May 1941 and became a renowned scholar on Eastern Europe, we have the names of children who live in Washington, D.C. and Providence, Rhode Island. We should be able to contact them and seek an interview. Mr. Brumberg passed away on 26 January 2008. As his example indicates, time is of the essence if we wish to contact those who immigrated and have distinct memories of their journeys. Most are now at least 75 years old.

We also may be able to locate descendants by contacting the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society to see if they still have records of the families they helped. Finally, we will solicit information from the community at large by contacting key congregations such as San Francisco's Congregation B'nai Emunah, which was founded by Jewish refugees from Shanghai.

Our goal is to incorporate dozens of these stories on the AIISF site for an online exhibit about the diverse experiences of immigrants to Angel Island. We also plan to develop a new exhibit at the Immigration Station in the future to highlight a few of the personal stories of immigrants, and we would like to include several stories about Jewish immigrants, including those from the 1930's and 1940's. We look forward to working with you to tell this important story.

*Eddie Wong has been the Executive Director of the Angel Island Immigration Station Foundation since May 2008. He is a graduate of UCLA's film program, where he obtained his BA and MFA. For many years he was a documentary filmmaker and later became the Executive Director of the Center for Asian American Media, which produces and funds films for PBS and also produces the Asian American Film Festival in San Francisco, Berkeley, and San Jose. ☆*

## **From the Angel Island Files of the National Archives: Alfred Israel Marill and Klara Elizabeth Sara Marill**

File Transcribed by Lakhpreet Gill

*Note: The Angel Island Immigration Foundation hopes to locate the descendants of this family or any of their acquaintances.*

Alfred and Klara arrived from Vienna, Germany (present day Austria) to Angel Island on August 28, 1940 via the SS Rakuyo Maru. They both had in hand a Quota Immigrant Visa issued in Vienna. Alfred and Klara are Jewish, and it can be assumed they were fleeing persecution even though it is not stated in the transcripts or in the type of immigration status they are seeking. They have a network of immediate family in the U.S., who are also recent arrivals, but again, their reasons for leaving Germany are never directly stated. However, at the questioning of the immigration inspectors, the Marills claim to not have any relatives in concentration camps.

Alfred and Klara arrived in a precarious position. Their final destination was New York, where they plan to reside with Alfred's brother, Victor Marill, who sells watches. However, the couple did not have a ticket to their final destination and had only \$23 in their pocket. They told the immigration authorities that Victor would wire them \$400 once Alfred contacted him, but the officials were not convinced. A prevailing concern of theirs was that the Marill couple would become public charges. Alfred and Klara had to present their ticket before the authorities would continue with their examination of the case. They secured the ticket from the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society and were granted admission on August 31.

The interrogation files state that Alfred is 54 and is an attorney who practiced civil law for 30 years. Klara is

50 and a housewife. They were both born in Poland, but spent their entire lives in Vienna, Germany (sic). They have two daughters, Gertrude, age 20, and Alice, age 17, who attend college in Virginia. Gertrude goes to Sweetbriar College and Alice goes to Randolph Macon College. They received scholarships from the International Student Commission in New York and started their studies in 1939.

Alfred speaks and writes English and German. He does not plan to practice law in the United States. Rather, he intends to lecture on musical science. He has not studied in a conservatory, but has learned from a private instructor. He plays the piano and had lectured on music as a hobby that he did, in addition to his law career. The courts are suspicious of his proposed livelihood, but Alfred believes he is capable of this because “he has many letters from the old masters of music.” Additionally, he feels he is educated enough to be successful in anything. His wife has milliner training (garment industry), though she never worked

in Germany. She believes that between herself, her husband and her daughters, the family can support itself. The immigration inspectors were still suspicious.

Another reason the officials showed hesitancy towards Alfred and Klara was that they were relegated to Class B for health deficiencies. Alfred had a throat operation that left him with a speech impediment and Klara has varicose veins. In the end, the affidavit provided by a cousin, Max Rosenburg, who resides in New York and works in an electrical filament industry, combined with the support of Victor, Alfred’s brother, and the ticket to New York provided by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society convinced the inspectors that the Marill family should be admitted.

*Lakhpreet Gill is a graduate of Stanford University and an AIISF volunteer. He also served as a research volunteer for the Indo-American Heritage Museum in Chicago. ☆*

## Upcoming and Current Events

### Jewish Genealogical Society

March 25, 2012 – 2:00 p.m.

Monthly Program: **“We Are Here: Memories of the Lithuanian Holocaust”**

Speaker: Ellen Cassedy

The regular program will be preceded by a brief presentation given by JGS Member Avrum Geller on **“1940 Census Search Hints.”**

#### **Please be prompt!**

Ellen Cassedy set off into the Jewish heartland of Lithuania to study Yiddish and connect with her Jewish forebears. But once there, old certainties began to dissolve, and what had begun as a personal journey of return soon expanded into a larger quest.

Cassedy not only immersed herself in the nearly vanished culture of the “Jerusalem of the North,” but also conducted groundbreaking research, speaking with a brave cadre of Jews and non-Jews who were exhuming the complex truths of the mid-20th Century, reaching out across age-old barriers, and attempting to build a more tolerant future. Cassedy’s journey changed her outlook on bystanders, victims, collaborators, rescuers – and herself.

Probing the terrain of memory, massacre, and moral dilemmas, Cassedy asks: Can we honor our heritage without perpetuating the fears and hatreds of the past? Her rich and deeply-felt account offers important insights – and hope.

Ellen Cassedy has explored the world of the Holocaust in Lithuania and her Jewish roots there for 10 years. Her articles and translations have appeared in *The Forward*, *Hadassah*, Jewish Telegraphic Agency, *Lilith*, *Bridges*, *Shofar: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, and *Pakn-treger*. She is a former columnist for the Philadelphia Daily News and the author of two books for working women. Her award-winning play, “Beautiful Hills of Brooklyn,” was adapted into a film that qualified for an Academy Award nomination. She lives near Washington, D.C.

What others have said about Ellen Cassedy’s presentation: “Pioneering... will reach out to Jews, Lithuanians and all those who care about not replaying in this new century the disasters of the century that has just ended.” Michael Steinlauf, Author of *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust*

“A most captivating read. Cassedy offers an extraordinary perspective, human and moving, to concerns which often are hidden by tired cliches, sentimentality, or anger. A rare document.”

Samuel Bak, author of *Painted in Words: A Memoir*

A book signing will follow the presentation

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

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

The Ackman and Ziff Family Genealogy Institute at CJH will be open at 11:00 a.m. before the meeting for access to research materials and computers and networking with other researchers.

April 15, 2012, 2:00 p.m.

Monthly Program: A Double Header: **JGS members' tour and talk about Eldridge Street Synagogue**, followed by a talk entitled **"Found Objects and Forgotten Stories"**

Speaker: Benjamin Feldman

**NOTE LOCATION:** Museum at the Eldridge Street Synagogue, 12 Eldridge Street, Manhattan  
<http://www.eldridgestreet.org/>

JGS Members and their guests will be treated to a special guided tour of the Eldridge Street Museum followed by a discussion of the history and renovation of the Synagogue.

The program continues with a notable presentation by Benjamin Feldman, historian, archivist and raconteur, who traces history through objects and their owners to discover a world once hidden and now long gone. Join us as he follows the story of a simple leather change purse engraved with the words "Compliments of Sol Goldberg's Café," which he found in a flea market in Chelsea. This led him to a Canal Street bar, circa 1920. Sol Goldberg was a liquor dealer and saloon operator on this street, handing out change purses while striving to stay alive after the start of Prohibition in 1919 almost shut him down. Using his investigating skills, Ben searched the directories at the New York Historical Society, ancestry websites and census records to learn a great deal about the life of Russian-born Sol Goldberg and his son Herbert.

Benjamin Feldman has lived and worked in New York City for the past 41 years. When he was only 10 years old, this Tennessee native vowed to live in New York one day. A retired real estate investor, he has the time and means to follow his passion and solve mysteries about people who were complete strangers to him. His essays and book reviews about New York City, American history and Yiddish culture have appeared

on-line and in print in CUNY's *Gotham History Blotter*, *The New Partisan Review*, *Ducts*, a literary magazine, and in his blog, *The New York Wanderer*, which appears at [www.new-york-wanderer.blogspot.com](http://www.new-york-wanderer.blogspot.com). He warms our hearts when he states, "It's valuable to raise a person's story from the dead, that people shouldn't be forgotten," and "In every grave lies a wonderful story."

## **MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR THESE SPRING 2012 EVENTS**

May 20, 2012, 11:00 AM – 12:30 PM

**Gesher Galicia Regional Meeting** (immediately preceding the JGS monthly meeting at 2:00 PM)

Topic: **Exploring the Archives: Unique Resources in Galician Research**

Speaker: Pamela Weisberger, president and research coordinator, Gesher Galicia

Location: Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street, NYC (between 5th and 6th Avenues)

May 20, 2012, 2:00 p.m.

Monthly Program: **"Jewish Chocolate Radar (Choco-Dar) Through the Generations"**

Speaker: Rabbi Deborah Prinz

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

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

The Ackman and Ziff Family Genealogy Institute at CJH will be open at 11:00 a.m. before the meeting for access to research materials and computers and networking with other researchers.

June 10, 2012, 2:00 p.m.

Monthly Program: **What, Where and How to Search for Displaced Persons**

Speakers: Valery Bazarov and Marian Smith

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

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

The Ackman and Ziff Family Genealogy Institute at CJH will be open at 11:00 a.m. before the meeting for access to research materials and computers and networking with other researchers.

## **New York City & Environs**

Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan,

For information and reservations, call 212-294-8301

March 5, 2012, 3:00 p.m.  
Lecture: “**The Wise Men of Chelm: Eastern European Jewry’s Favorite Folk Tradition and Its Origin**”  
Admission: Free, RSVP required

March 15, 2012, 7:00 p.m.  
**The 16<sup>th</sup> Annual New York Sephardic Film Festival, Opening Night**  
Admission: Call 212-294-8301 for ticket information

### **Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island**

March 25, 2012, 2:00 p.m.  
“**Social Media for Genealogists & Family Historians**”  
Speaker: Terryn Barill Tower

Location: Patchogue-Medford Library  
54-60 East Main Street  
Patchogue, NY 11772  
[www.pmlib.org/genealogy](http://www.pmlib.org/genealogy)

April 22, 2012, 2:00 p.m.  
**A Holocaust Presentation**  
Speaker: Gary Mokotoff

Location: Mid Island JCC  
45 Manetto Hill Road, Plainview, NY  
[www.mijcc.org](http://www.mijcc.org)

May 20, 2012, 2:00 p.m.  
**Searching the 1940 Census**  
Speaker: Steve Morse

Location: Sachem Public Library  
150 Holbrook Road, Holbrook, NY  
[www.sachemlibrary.org](http://www.sachemlibrary.org)

June 24, 2012: 2:00 p.m.  
**Intermediate and Advanced Online Research Techniques**  
Speaker: Phyllis Kramer  
Location: To be announced

### **Metro New York Genealogy & Computers Special Interest Group**

<http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~metrony/>  
(all meetings are on the first Tuesday of the month)

March 6, 2012, 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
**Home Research Archives (Image & Media Management), Part 2**  
Location: To be announced

April 3, 2012, 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
**Home Research Archives (Sharing), Part 3**  
Location: To be announced

May 1, 2012, 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.  
Subject: **To be announced**  
Location: To be announced

June 5, 2012, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.  
**Annual Ask the Experts Panel**  
Location: To be announced ☆

## **A SPECIAL EVENT IN PREPARATION FOR THE RELEASE OF THE 1940 CENSUS**

### **SPONSORED BY**

**The New York Genealogical & Biographical Society, the New York Public Library and the National Archives at New York City**

March 24, 2012, 10:00 a.m. – 4:00 p.m.

#### **The Road to the 1940 Census**

Speakers: David Ferriero, Archivist of the United States  
Connie Potter, Senior Genealogy Specialist, National Archives & Records Administration  
Meldon J. Wolfgang III, Genealogy Scholar and Lecturer  
Suzanne Wasserman, Director of the Gotham Center for NYC History/CUNY Graduate Center

Location: New York Public Library, South Court Classroom, Steven A. Schwartzman Building  
Fifth Avenue at 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, NYC

Admission: Free, but reservations are required and will be accepted online. For reservations, see:  
<http://www.nypl.org/events/programs/2012/03/24/road-1940-census-search-your-family-history>



## JGS Program Reports

November 20, 2011

### “Odessa: Genius and Death in a City of Dreams” by Steve Stein

Our November meeting took attendees back in time to the beginnings and through the history of the city of Odessa, Ukraine, courtesy of Professor Charles King, Professor of International Affairs and Government at Georgetown University.

Odessa, located on the Black Sea in what was the frontier of the Russian Empire or “New Russia,” was founded in the late 1700s, by the decree of Empress Catherine the Great. The actual founder was José de Ribas, a military officer of Spanish and Irish descent from Naples, who had come to Russia looking for military opportunities. He persuaded Catherine to create a new city, as a “window on Europe,” which would be for her what Saint Petersburg had been to Peter the Great a century earlier.

Professor King described the affairs of state, the international intrigue, and the sexual politics involved in the early days of the city.

A significant aspect of the Odessa story concerned Alexander Pushkin, the renowned Russian poet and national icon, who conducted an affair with the wife of Count Vorontsov, governor of New Russia. Evidence of his infatuation can be found in his magnum opus, *Yevgeny Onegin* (later turned into Tchaikovsky’s opera,



Professor Charles King at the podium



Professor King signs books and answers queries

*Eugene Onegin*). Another chapter in the story concerned John Paul Jones, who came to the region after his role in the American Revolution.

Jews came to Odessa from other parts of Russia in significant numbers starting in the 1830s, when the city’s reputation as a bastion of liberalism and economic opportunity began to grow. A group of significant size came to Odessa from Brody in Galicia (now Ukraine), and they founded the Brodsky Synagogue, which stands today.

The percentage of Jews grew to one-third, and Odessa became known as a Jewish center. This growth culminated in the ascendance of Vladimir/Zeev Jabotinsky around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jabotinsky’s Zionist consciousness was raised by the 1903 pogrom

in Kishinev, leading to his writing the novel, *The Five*, which chronicled the diverse paths followed by five Jewish siblings from Odessa. The city's image was further celebrated by Sergei Eisenstein's fictionalized film *The Battleship Potemkin*, which later was used to burnish the image of the 1905 Potemkin mutiny at Odessa, as the precursor of the 1917 Russian Revolution, a characterization generally not considered historically accurate. Also contributing to our image of Odessa was the author Isaak Babel, who through his collection of short stories, *Red Cavalry*, gave us a nostalgic view of the Moldavanca neighborhood as the "underworld of Odessa."

During World War II, Odessa, considered one of four "hero cities" of World War II, was under Romanian occupation for more than 900 days. Many Jews had escaped to the East before the occupation in late 1941, but beginning at that time, the remaining Jews were killed by the tens of thousands, put into ghettos that were ultimately liquidated, and starved to death. By 1944, fewer than 50,000 Jews remained of nearly 200,000 on the eve of the war. Though Jews came back after the war, significant emigrations took place. Professor King pointed out that Brighton Beach in Brooklyn, which has become known as "Little Odessa," was the destination for many, though the nickname is only partially indicative of the origin of the inhabitants.

Professor King showed a photograph of the Brodsky Synagogue, which has become the repository of the Odessa State Archives, which houses many of the records of interest to genealogical researchers of Odessa. The building is in dire need of renovation.

Professor King answered several questions at the conclusion of his talk, and also signed copies of his recent book *Odessa: Genius and Death in a City of Dreams*.

*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 years.*

December 25, 2011

### **"Genealogical Implications of Hasidic Ancestry"**

Rafael Guber began his talk at the December 25<sup>th</sup> members' brunch and general meeting, asking the audience, "How many of you have Hasidic ancestry?" Taking note of the many upraised arms, he commented, "The rest of you are wrong." In his lecture on the



Rafael Guber

"Genealogical Implications of Hasidic Ancestry," Guber explained that 80%-85% of American Jews do have Hasidic ancestors. Connecting to those Hasidic ancestors, he added, can lead to some interesting adventures.

Guber was an instructor and founder of the Genealogy Project at the Jewish Enrichment Center in Manhattan, and was co-creator, with Janice and Billy Crystal, of "Finding Our Families, Finding Ourselves" at the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. In his JGSNY presentation, he recalled the standard advice to writers and genealogical researchers, "start with what you know," but in the case of Hasidic ancestors, he continued, people often do not realize how much they really do know based on the evidence already at hand. He urged researchers to be creative and understand that while the outward appearance of Hasidim may be different, researchers should open their minds to making family connections.

Hasidism, Guber explained, was founded by the Baal Shem Tov (Rabbi Yisroel ben Eliezer), and was a popularizing and radicalizing movement that swept across Europe from the 1750s to 1900 and beyond. The places where there were the most Jews were the places where there were the most Hasidim. In Galicia

by 1880, he said, 95% of the Jews were Hasidim, in Belarus 50%, in Lithuania, one out of five. He advised family historians to get over their assumptions and open their eyes to the fact that some people who looked like Hasidim weren't and some people who didn't look like Hasidim were.

In terms of research, Guber advised that Hasidic groups had individual migratory patterns – moving from place to place – and at times used alternative names for various towns. He suggested that databases of songs may provide genealogical clues, along with publication places of *siddurim*, *mahzorim* and other books, styles

of wrapping *tefillin* or even trimming moustaches. Various hat and clothing styles can lead people to research certain areas. Guber also recommended that researchers consult the Wikipedia article “List of Hasidic dynasties.”

At the outset of his talk, Guber said there is no Hasidic database yet, and at the conclusion of his presentation he spoke of the need for volunteers to help create a database linking historic Hasidic locations to currently existing groups. He suggested that researchers with stories to tell or questions to ask write to him. His e-mail address is [rgg20@columbia.edu](mailto:rgg20@columbia.edu). ☆

## JGS Has Two New Executive Council Members



Harriet Mayer and Joy Kestenbaum

**Joy Kestenbaum**, an art and architectural historian and librarian, served as chair of the New York Metropolitan Chapter of the Art Libraries Society of North America. She has been on the teaching and library faculty of Queens College (CUNY), Pratt Institute, New York Institute of Technology, and Purchase College (SUNY), and was also Director of the Gimbel Art and Design Library at The New School. A consulting historian for numerous award-winning preservation projects, she has also lectured widely on Jewish architects and synagogue architecture. Her research on Henry Fernbach led to her

rediscovery, in the 1980s, of his original nineteenth-century architectural drawings for New York's Central Synagogue, which proved to be an invaluable contribution to the building's restoration after a severe fire in 1998. She credits her interest in family history to meeting many of her older immigrant relatives at a very young age and to her grandmother, who requested that she visit her great-grandmother's grave in London while studying abroad. She has researched members of her extended family who lived in the United States, Canada, England, Argentina and Palestine/Israel, in addition to her roots in Western Galicia and the Grodno/Bialystok region. In 2010, she traveled throughout eastern Poland, conducting archival research and visiting ancestral towns. She created the KehilaLinks web pages on Narewka, Poland, for JewishGen, and assists others with their genealogical research.

**Harriet Mayer** is a retired school librarian who has been researching her family in Belarus and Ukraine and her husband's family in Germany for 10 years. She has done extensive research in German archives and maintains contacts with research facilities there. Harriet currently serves as a volunteer for the Italian Genealogical Group database project, and has in the past volunteered on projects for Ancestry and JewishGen. She is a member of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society, the Association of Professional Genealogists, and the Computers in Genealogy Special Interest Group. ☆

# JGSNY Annual Brunch and Executive Council Meeting

All photos courtesy of Jerry Liebowitz



JGS Treasurer Stewart Driller, Executive Council member Paul Silverstone and Julius Meister



Outgoing President Steven W. Siegel



Incoming President Roni Seibel Liebowitz speaking about outgoing President Steven W. Siegel

more brunch photos continued on page 22

# Notes from All Over

## A Note about the 2011 IAJGS Conference

The 1,261 participants came from 16 countries, 39 U.S. states and the U.S. military. This year's event will be in Paris, July 15-18, 2012.

## Jewish Heritage Trip to Lithuania, June 19-29, 2012.

Peggy Mosinger Freedman and Howard Margol, two active genealogists, who have led previous trips to Lithuania, Latvia, and Eastern Poland, are organizing a new trip to Lithuania. It will provide visits to various archives, synagogues, ghettos, Holocaust sites, meetings with Jewish leaders, sight-seeing and time to visit your special place of interest. The tour group will be limited to 25 persons, and the price includes meals, (except for one dinner and two lunches), fine hotels, interpreters and modern buses. For details and the full trip itinerary, go to [www.litvaktrip.peggyspage.org](http://www.litvaktrip.peggyspage.org) or [HOMARGOL@aol.com](mailto:HOMARGOL@aol.com) (Howard's site). References from past trips are available.

## Three Genealogy Organizations Will Combine Forces to Publish Index to 1940 Census

Three leading genealogy organizations, [Archives.com](http://Archives.com), [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org), and [findmypast.com](http://findmypast.com) are joining forces to launch the 1940 U.S. Census Community Project, which will publish a searchable name index to the 1940 U.S. Census after it is released in April 2, 2012 by the National Archives and Record Administration (NARA). Since NARA does not plan to prepare a searchable index, the goal of the 1940 U.S. Census Community Project is to create as soon as possible a high quality index online linked to the complete set of census images. The index will allow the public to easily search any person found in the census and view digital images of the original census pages. The index will be available to the general public online for free at [Archives.com](http://Archives.com), [FamilySearch.org](http://FamilySearch.org), and [findmypast.com](http://findmypast.com).

In the opinion of David Rencher, the Chief Genealogical Officer for FamilySearch, "The 1940 Census is attractive to both new and experienced researchers because most people in the U.S. can remember a relative that was living in 1940. It will do more to connect living

memory with historical records and families than any other collection previously made available."

Preparation of the index will be done by volunteers, who will be recruited and coordinated by the collective resources, know-how and marketing reach of the three organizations, each of which will make substantial financial contributions to the project. [Archives.com](http://Archives.com) is a leading family history website that makes discovering family history simple and affordable. The company has assembled more than 1.5 billion U.S. and international historical records in a single location, including vital, census, newspaper, immigration, military and more. It allows users to explore its site for free for seven days. For more information about the 1940 census, go to [www.archives.com/1940census](http://www.archives.com/1940census).

[FamilySearchInternational](http://FamilySearchInternational), sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, is the largest genealogy organization in the world. FamilySearch and its predecessor organizations have been gathering, preserving and sharing genealogical records worldwide for over 100 years. Patrons may access FamilySearch services and resources free online at [Familysearch.org](http://Familysearch.org) or through 4,600 family history centers in 132 countries.

[Findmypast.com](http://Findmypast.com) is a division of brightsolid, which is based in Dundee, Scotland, and has offices in London, Edinburgh, Ireland and Australia. Its three sites, [ScotlandsPeople](http://ScotlandsPeople), [GenesReunited](http://GenesReunited), and [britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk](http://britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk) together serve over 18 million registered customers worldwide and can deliver access to over a billion records dating as far back as 1200. For people with UK and Irish ancestry, it has military records, census, migration, occupation directories, newspapers, as well as birth, marriage and death records.

## More 1940 Census News

Steve Morse's One-Step website (<http://stevemorse.org>) has a new 1940 Census tool, called United1940 Census ED Finder (<http://stevemorse.org/census/united.html>). It will enable census searchers to quickly find the ED or Enumeration District for the person being sought.

## What New Things Are in the 1940 Census?

Each decennial census added its own special questions,

beside the basic name, address and ages of each person in the household, but the new questions in the 1940 census included:

- a. A category called “American Citizen Born Abroad”
- b. The highest grade of school completed
- c. Where the person was living on April 1, 1935, so as to record internal migration
- d. Employment status of all persons 14 years old and older during the week of March 24-30, wages and salary earned, whether a person received income of \$50 or more from sources other than his or her regular employer.
- e. Whether anyone in the household was at work or assigned to any of the public emergency work projects.

## Improved Access to the International Tracing Services Holocaust Records

Thanks to a recent agreement signed by the representatives of the 11-state International Commission that oversees the archives of the International Tracing Service, Holocaust records will become more accessible to survivors and their families, as well as researchers. Implementation of the new agreement must wait until each of the 11 member states formally approves the procedures. The agreement allows for eventual online access to scanned copies of the records at the ITS in Bad Arolsen and at national repositories, one of which is the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Information about the Museum’s archival materials, including the ITS records and how to request information from them can be found at [www.ushmm.org/research/collections/resourcecenter](http://www.ushmm.org/research/collections/resourcecenter).

Note: One of the reasons ITS searching is difficult, according to a Holocaust Memorial Museum staffer who spoke at the recent IAJGS conference, is that there are, for example, 848 ways to spell Abramowitz using various alphabets and 156 ways to spell Schwartz!

## Seeking Babies Born in Hofgeismar, Germany DP Camp from 1946-1949

Were you one of the 929 babies born in the Hofgeismar, Germany DP Camp in the years between 1946 and 1949 or do you know anyone who was born there? A reunion will be held on May 12-15, 2012 in Hofgeismar. For further information, contact [museum@museum-hofgeismar.de](mailto:museum@museum-hofgeismar.de) or go to the museum website, [www.museum-hofgeismar.de](http://www.museum-hofgeismar.de). The contact person is Julia Drinnenburg at [judri@gms.de](mailto:judri@gms.de).

## Seeking Records of 2,200 Babies Born to the DPs in Cyprus, 1946-1949

The Jerusalem Archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) is trying to locate the birth records of the 2,200 Jewish babies born to the displaced persons interned on Cyprus during the years 1946-1949. To date, they have located a typed list of 500 births, compiled by the British military authorities in Cyprus, and they have a handwritten list of 300 babies, found in the University of Southampton (UK), which appears to have been written by a rabbi in the camp. Perhaps there are other such lists. If you know of their location, please contact Yitzhak Teutsch, Director Jerusalem Archives, AJDC, [YizhakT@jdc.org.il](mailto:YizhakT@jdc.org.il).

## The Queens Memory Project Wants to Interview Queens Residents

The Queens Public Library and the Queens College Library are collecting oral history interviews of local residents (past and current) and uniting them with digitized historical records from both institutions. The result will be among the first digital archives in the nation to combine contemporary and historical materials that together present an ever-changing portrait of collective memory. All records will be directly accessible to the public. The website for the Queens Memory Project is [www.queensmemory.org](http://www.queensmemory.org).

The premises of the project are: “Archives have the power to shape a culture’s collective memory, and that power brings a responsibility to capture the diverse voices that when put together tell the story of what it means to a community.”

## New York’s Greek Jewish Community Has An Active Synagogue, Museum and Website

Kehila Kedosha Janina, a Greek Jewish synagogue located at 280 Broome Street, New York 10002, holds services every Saturday and on all major Jewish holidays. The community’s museum is open every Sunday from 11-4 and by appointment during the week. Their newsletter reaches over 5000 households worldwide, and their community of “friends” grows with each issue. The website is [kehila\\_kedosha\\_janina@netzero.net](mailto:kehila_kedosha_janina@netzero.net). If you plan to attend a Saturday service, they ask that you contact the Shamas, Sol Kofinas, in advance ([papusoup@mindspring.com](mailto:papusoup@mindspring.com)) so that they will be sure to have enough traditional Greek Jewish kosher food for the kiddush. ☆

## Lists of New York City Voters 1918 & 1919 Available Online

Google Books has digitized lists of registered Bronx voters in 1918, Brooklyn voters in 1919 and Queens voters in 1919. These lists are searchable by name or address and include the voter's political party affiliation.

These can be found at <http://books.google.com> under the heading "list enrolled voters Brooklyn or Queens or Bronx." The following shortcuts may be used: <http://tinyurl.com/Brooklyn-voters-1919>, or <http://tinyurl.com/Bronx-voters-1918>, or <http://tinyurl.com/Queens-voters-1919>.

Renee Steinig, who supplied this information, said she could not find the Manhattan voter lists online, but lists for many years are available from the New York Public Library (on microfilm, where they must be searched by Assembly District and Election District) and in the Municipal Archives.

For more information on New York City voter registration records, see Mike Meshenberg's JewishGen InfoFile (dated 1998) at [www.jewishgen.org/infocfiles/nycvote.txt](http://www.jewishgen.org/infocfiles/nycvote.txt).

## Finding Death Notices

The New York Public Library has published *The Great Obituary Hunt: A Genealogy Research Guide*, which is available online at [www.nypl.org/blog/2011/11/09/great-obituary-hunt-genealogy-research-guide](http://www.nypl.org/blog/2011/11/09/great-obituary-hunt-genealogy-research-guide). This item deals with obituaries as news articles, but does not describe paid death notices, which are far more common. These can be located via the ProQuest Historical Databases at [www.nypl.org/collections/articles-databases/proquest-historical-databases](http://www.nypl.org/collections/articles-databases/proquest-historical-databases).

## New Jersey Death Records on Microfilm Now Available Through 1955

The New Jersey State Archives in Trenton recently opened to the public the microfilm records of deaths from 1948 through 1955. The death records from 1904 through 1948 are arranged in chronological order by microfilm number and access is self-service. For the

years before 1904 and after 1948, it is a two-step process. One first has to look up the name in a separate microfilm index that is arranged alphabetically within each year to get the death certificate number. Then one looks up the actual record on separate microfilms, where the death records are arranged in chronological order by certificate number.

Further information about the New Jersey State Archives can be found at [www.state.nj.us/state/darm/links/archives.html](http://www.state.nj.us/state/darm/links/archives.html).

## Two Sites for Cincinnati Research

The Cincinnati Birth & Death Index, 1865-1912 is available on Google. Just type in the words Cincinnati Birth & Death Index, 1865-1912.

The Jewish Cemeteries of Greater Cincinnati have an online inventory of 30,000 graves, with photographs of about half of the gravestones. Go to [www.jcemcin.org](http://www.jcemcin.org) and then click on "Genealogy."

## Maps & Photographs of Philadelphia

[PhillyHistory.org](http://PhillyHistory.org), which is the online database of the Philadelphia Department of Records, is a good source for historic photographs and maps of Philadelphia. It has 84,000 photographs and 5,000 maps and can be searched by neighborhood, address, keyword or topic. The site recently won an Award of Merit from the American Association for State and Local History Leadership in History.

## Learning How to Use JewishGen

JewishGen now offers 10 different screen casts (five minutes each) to help people navigate JewishGen. So far they include:

"Prepare for Your Search," "Navigate JewishGen," "Find Your Ancestral Town (for USA Researchers)," "Communicate with Other Researchers," "Use the JewishGen Databases," "Special Interest Groups and Hosted Organizations," "Jewish Records Indexing-Poland," "Jewish Genealogy Websites, Parts I and II.

To find these helpful sites, go to [www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen/FirstTimer.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen/FirstTimer.html).

## **JewishGen Shtetl Seeker is now JewishGen Gazeteer**

The new name is designed to describe more accurately the contents of this database, which now contains the names of one million localities in 54 countries throughout Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. New additions include places in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland; Spain and Portugal, Luxemburg, Kyrgyzstan, and Yemen. It includes place names in non-Latin alphabets (such as Arabic and Cyrillic), and provides the Beider-Morse Phonetic Matching search tool. To access the JewishGen Gazeteer go to [www.jewishgen.org/Communities/LocTown.asp](http://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/LocTown.asp). Questions or problems can be handled by e-mailing [info@JewishGen.org](mailto:info@JewishGen.org).

## **The New JDC Website May Have a Piece of Your Family History**

If you or a member of your family escaped from Eastern Europe during World War II, passed through Spain, Portugal or Italy, found temporary refuge in China,

Japan, Cuba or Austria, lived in a displaced persons' camp after the war or were resettled in Australia, then you may find your family in the new website of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee at [www.JDC.org/SharedLegacy](http://www.JDC.org/SharedLegacy). There you will find the Names Index and be able to view the primary source, such as the ship passenger list or registration card or other item. The site lets you explore over 50 photo galleries, which bring to light JDC's rescue and financial support operations in many countries.

## **Persons Detained in Spanish Concentration Camps During World War II**

From the records in the Leo Baeck Institute comes *Holocaust Records from France. Spain and Africa*, listing by nationality the names of persons who were interred in Spanish concentration camps. Also listed are the names of some individual child refugees in France, plus background information on conditions in the GUR and other French camps. See [www.archive.org/details/franceconcentrationcamp/](http://www.archive.org/details/franceconcentrationcamp/) ☆

## **Resolutions for Genealogists in 2012**

1. I will regularly back up my genealogical data.
2. I will interview the eldest members of my family as soon as possible
3. I will attend local genealogical events.
4. I will always cite my genealogical sources.
5. I will share my family trees with relatives.
6. I will organize my genealogy files on my computer.
7. I will scan all my old photographs.
8. I will label my photos, identifying names, places and dates, as best I can.
9. I will keep a research log.
10. I will join forces with other people researching the same surname or in the same area.
11. I will attend all the meetings of the Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc. (New York) or my local society.





## From our Correspondents

### Hooked on Genealogy by Irit Gafni-Pinchovski, MLS

Zack Oryan, an Israeli journalist, visited the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute at the Center for Jewish History on August 2010 and became hooked on genealogy right away. He spent the next week going back and forth between the Genealogy Institute located on 15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan and the Mormon or Latter Day Saints Family History Center near Lincoln Center, using their microfilms and other resources to explore his Polish-Ukrainian roots.

I was surprised to meet Zack again at the Genealogy Institute more than a year later and amazed to hear the story of how he helped Rachel Vered (65), a resident of Israel, to find her uncle, Wolf Hall (87), a resident of Seattle, a man who had supposedly perished in the Holocaust.

How did this happen? A chance encounter in the lobby of a hotel in Tiberius, Israel, with a woman named Shoshi led Zack to reunite two siblings who survived the Holocaust but lost contact with each other 71 years ago. Shoshi asked Zack about his occupation, he told her about his new interest in genealogy. She immediately told him about her friend, Rachel Vered, who was desperately trying to find her mother's family. She asked Zack if he would be willing to help, and he agreed.

When Zack met Rachel, he learned that her mother, Esther Hausspiegel Bielski, now 90 years old, never spoke about the Holocaust to anyone. There were no family photos, documents, or certificates. All Rachel knew was that her mother's maiden name was Hausspiegel.

Zack searched the Yad Vashem testimony pages for that name in the Lodz area and found only 28 hits for this name. Many of those pages were signed in the 1950s, which meant that signers are most likely dead, and it would be hard to track down their children, who might or might not be able to supply information. However, Zack found other important clues - the names of Esther's and Wolf's parents,

Chaim Hausspiegel and Sprinca Fingehard, appear on the Page of Testimony, and someone named Wolf Hall signed the testimony page of the Hausspiegel family

during his visit to Yad Vashem in 1980. At that time he listed all his siblings as deceased. Zack decided to contact him.

It turned out that Wolf Hall, an 87 year-old Holocaust survivor, was actually Wolf Hausspiegel, but had changed his name to Hall after the war. He is Rachel Vered's uncle, her mother's brother. Rachel had checked the Yad Vashem testimony pages long before she met Zack, but did not connect the name Hall with Hausspiegel nor realize that Wolf Hall was her uncle.

Zack, who worked on Rachel's family tree for many days and nights, did make this connection, and he was the one who reunited, via Skype, the two siblings, Esther Hausspiegel Bielski and Wolf Hausspiegel Hall after 71 years. Unfortunately, the two siblings are not able to meet, since the brother lives in Seattle, and the sister in Israel, and neither is able to travel any longer. However, Esther's daughter, Rachel Vered, flew to Seattle to meet her uncle and his children, accompanied by Zack. Among his other discoveries about this family is the fact that after the war, the two siblings lived in DP camps located just 15 miles apart.

Zack is now making a documentary movie about the reunion of these two long separated families, to be called "A Bitter-Sweet Story in Three Parts," but this is only a temporary name. The movie tells about the genealogical journey of the Hausspiegel family, from the beginning of the search to the concluding meeting in Seattle. It also deals with the Jewish genealogical world in general and describes how to search for lost relatives.

To learn more about the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute, visit <http://cjh.org/p/34>.

*Irit Gafni-Pinchovski, MLS is the Reference Services Coordinator at the Center for Jewish History and oversees the electronic resources of the Lillian Goldman Reading Room. She also specializes in Jewish genealogy at the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute. Irit has been working at CJH since 2006 and received her MLS degree in Library and Information Studies from Queens College in 2007.*

# A New System for Ordering and Paying For LDS Microfilms

## by Stewart Driller

### Background

On October 19, 2011 the LDS instituted a new system for ordering microfilms at all Family History Centers. All films must now be ordered from the LDS FamilySearch website ([www.familysearch.org/films](http://www.familysearch.org/films)) and paid for with a credit card (MasterCard or Visa only) or PayPal. It will no longer be possible to order them at the Center for Jewish History and pay with your own check or cash. Microfilms may now be ordered as a Short Term Loan of 90 days for \$5.50 or as Extended (formerly "Indefinite") Loan for \$13.75. A Short Term Loan may be renewed for an additional 60 days for another \$5.50. However converting a Short Term Loan to an Extended Loan will still cost \$13.75, even if you have already paid \$5.50 or renewed and paid a total of \$11.00.

In order to build the collection of microfilms with Jewish content from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, (the LDS), which are on Extended Loan at the Center for Jewish History Genealogy Institute, the Jewish Genealogical Society has been paying for the second (final) renewal of the microfilms.

To continue the JGS policy of assisting with rental fees and to encourage patrons to borrow the films as Extended Loans initially, the JGS will reimburse \$8.25 for each film borrowed as an Extended Loan, making the cost to the user just \$5.50, the same as the cost of a Short Term Loan. This policy applies only to films which will be viewed at the Center for Jewish History.

### How to Order Microfilms from LDS

You should order the microfilms from your own computer since the public computers at the Center for Jewish History may not be secure for credit card transactions. To use the new system, you will first have to create an account at FamilySearch. The easiest way

is to go to [www.familysearch.org/films](http://www.familysearch.org/films) and click on "Create an Account" near the upper left. Once you have created the account, return to [www.familysearch.org/films](http://www.familysearch.org/films) and click "Sign In" at the upper right. You may then order the film. The website has extensive help information. Change the default Family History Center (next to the small house icon) to "Center for Jewish History."

We encourage you to select "Extended Microfilm Loan" as the type. Note that if a film is already in the CJH collection the system will not let you order it.

### Reimbursement Procedure

To request a reimbursement (only for films with Jewish content), contact Stew Driller at [treasurer@jgsny.org](mailto:treasurer@jgsny.org) and give your name, address, and the film numbers. We will also check our records to find patrons due a refund. If you have any questions, you can speak to the librarian at the reference desk at the Genealogy Institute or contact Stew at the above address.

We would like to reimburse each patron once a year; however if you order three or more films at a time (or within a short period), you may request reimbursement at that time. Also, if you are reasonably certain you will only be ordering films once during the year, you may be reimbursed for that order. We will be flexible, but would like to avoid writing numerous small checks and so we hope you will be understanding.

It will take some time for all of us to adjust to this new system and are open to your suggestions. We will make the necessary changes as we gain experience with it.

*Stewart Driller is the Treasurer of the Jewish Genealogical Society and a regular volunteer at the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute at the Center for Jewish History.*

## SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION

### by Michael Marcus

His name was Sidney Allison, and he was my uncle, my mother's brother. Sidney was a rebel, a type unheard of in the World War One era. At 15 he lied about his age and secretly enlisted in the army. After a long search, his father found out where he was and had him discharged. Sidney later married, had a daughter, was divorced, and

lived for years in a single room in the Albert Hotel in Greenwich Village (Keep the Albert Hotel in mind). He was a telephone operator at the famous Copacabana Night Club and a baker at Danilow Bakery in lower Manhattan, but also a gambler who was always in debt. I never met his daughter, my first cousin, and

was determined to find her through my genealogical research.

I finally found her on the Social Security Death Index. Did she have children, I wondered? The search continued. With a few clues I sent, “Are you my cousin?” letters to many people with surnames that suggested they might be possible cousins. One night my phone rang, and it was Uncle Sidney Allison’s grandson. We talked for hours, and he told me that both his mother, my first cousin, and his grandmother, my aunt, refused to tell him and his sister anything about his grandfather, my uncle. Remember that I said my uncle had lived in the Albert Hotel. Well, his grandson had lived in the Albert Arms, which was attached to the Albert Hotel. Although his grandfather was already deceased by that time, the grandson had unknowingly walked in his footsteps. It was a case of six degrees of separation.

On another genealogical journey, I was researching the brothers and sisters of my great grandfather on the Marcus side of my family. Unfortunately, the gravestone of this ancestor contained no clues as to who his father was. I knew from oral history that we had

family in Germany after World War Two. By contacting Marcuses in the tri-state area, I found relatives of a Marcus who lived in Queens, New York. During our conversation he suggested I speak with his cousin living in Florida, because she was more knowledgeable about the family. He gave her my number, and she called me. After speaking for over an hour, we both agreed that we needed more information in order to establish a relationship. I finally asked her for her last name, and she said it was Magenheim. “That’s interesting,” I said. “The daughter of my next door neighbor was married to a Magenheim, now deceased. She lives in Texas.” My caller told me that her relatives also live in Texas. It turned out that the father of my neighbor’s son-in-law (the deceased Mr. Magenheim), and this woman’s husband are brothers. It was another six degrees of separation.

*Michael Marcus is a retired New York City physical education teacher and a former Adjunct Professor at Long Island University. He currently teaches stained glass classes to UFT retirees. He has been a family genealogist for the past 15 years. ☆*

## New, Recent, and Noteworthy Publications

Toni L. Kamins, *The Complete Jewish Guide to France*  
New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2001. 238 pp. \$17.95

*Note: Claus Hirsch brought our attention to this book, which is of special relevance to JGS members who plan to attend the 2012 IAJGS Conference in Paris (July 15-18) and to any other travelers to France with a strong commitment to visiting Jewish sites. His review follows.*

The author of this useful guide, Toni Kamins, is a travel writer who authored a similar guide to Britain and Ireland and herself has lived in France. The advantage of having actually resided in her topic country shows in the comments made throughout this book.

The book is divided into sixteen chapters, each covering a specific region of France. There are also various maps, selected photos and a bibliography, supplemented by short essays on the Dreyfus Affair, Klaus Barbie, the Rothschild family and the infamous 1240 “Trial of the Talmud.” Some of the chapters, such as those covering the Alps, Brittany, Burgundy, Franche-Comté and Poitou-Charentes, are quite brief because the Jewish presence was small in comparison with places like Paris and Alsace-Lorraine.

Her specific comments about Brittany are of historic interest—but also justify the rather brief treatment of this region: “Brittany has been home to Jews since the fifth century C.E.—albeit very few. Even today the Jewish population remains small. Though there aren’t many records, there is documentation of a massacre of Jews by crusaders in 1236. The survivors were thrown out by the local duke, Jean le Roux, in 1240.” The guide goes on to point out the stained glass windows in the cathedral of Le Mans which depict the synagogue of that town. It also contains the address and telephone number for a synagogue in the town of Nantes.

While the book has brief descriptions of virtually every geographic corner of France, it also notes the changing character of the Jewish population over the past century. Places like Dijon, Montpellier and Nimes, she notes, today have a Jewish presence that is largely North African in origin. In the same vein, Kamins remarks that “the Jewish community of Strasbourg has retained its Ashkenazic character, unlike most communities in France.”

Of particular interest to genealogists, the guide contains the addresses and phone numbers for many Jewish

cemeteries throughout France, as well as data on the earliest known gravestones. On a more contemporary note, Kamins provides information on synagogues, museums, and even the location of kosher restaurants.

As expected, the chapter on Paris is the longest and most informative. Here Kamins provides much useful information on sites in the various arrondissements, historic tales of the harrowing experiences of the community since the thirteenth century and key events of World War II and the postwar period. She indicates that the Jewish population in Paris just prior to the Revolution numbered a mere 500; by the mid-to-late nineteenth century the figure had grown to 30,000 and to about 150,000 on the eve of World War II. By 2001, that figure had more than doubled to 375,000 or 8% of the then-total Paris population. Since then, over 10,000 Paris Jews have made aliyah to Israel—spurred by strife with the Muslim community. I haven't seen any authoritative estimates of the current Jewish population.

A newer edition of this paperback contains 272 pages and lists for \$19.99. However, lower-priced offerings are posted on the Web by several discount book sellers.

## About Jewish Life in New York City

Jonathan Boyarin, *Mornings at the Stanton Street Shul*. New York: Fordham University Press, 2011. 208 pages, 20 ill. \$24.95

From the publisher: "In these pages Jonathan Boyarin invites us to share the intimate life of the Stanton Street Shul, one of the last remaining Jewish congregations on New York's historic Lower East Side. Coming with Boyarin inside this narrow building, wedged into a lot designed for an old-law tenement, we see the congregation's life as a combination of quiet heroism, ironic humor, disputes for the sake of Heaven, and above all the ongoing search for ways to connect with Jewish ancestors while remaining true to oneself in the present. It offers readers with no prior knowledge of Judaism and synagogue life a portrait that is at once intimate and intelligible."

Katherine Greider, *The Archaeology of Home: An Epic Set on a Thousand Square Feet of the Lower East Side*. Jackson, TN: Public Affairs Press, 2011. 352 pages, \$26.99.

From the publisher: "When Katherine Greider was told to leave her house (at 239 East 7<sup>th</sup> Street) or risk

it falling down on top of her and her family, it spurred an investigation that began with contractors' diagnoses and lawsuits, then veered into archaeology and urban history. The land on which Number 239 was built has a history as long as America's own. Her sleuthing of public records shows how the building had evolved over the 150 years of its existence. Well written and thoroughly researched." A reviewer wrote: "An astonishingly complex yet easy-to-digest tale. Greider succeeds brilliantly."

Ellen Levitt, *The Lost Synagogues of the Bronx and Queens*. Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, 2011. 168 pages, 86 photographs, \$26.00.

*Note: Ellen spoke to JGS about the lost synagogues of Brooklyn last winter.*

From the publisher: "The author of *The Lost Synagogues of Brooklyn* has now published and researched the synagogues of the Bronx and Queens, whose buildings still exist but whose congregations are no more. This book is a photographic essay and a history of these ex-shuls, what happened to them, and how they appear today. Many became churches - one a mosque - but their facades often still have Jewish symbols."

Marni Davis, *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition*. New York: NYU Press, 2012. 272 pages, \$32.00.

From the publisher: "At the turn of the century, American Jews and prohibitionists viewed one another with growing suspicion. Jews believed that Americans had the right to sell and consume alcohol, while prohibitionists insisted that alcohol commerce and consumption posed a threat to the nation's morality and security. In 1920 when the Eighteenth Amendment to the Constitution made alcohol commerce illegal, Jews discovered that anti-Semitic sentiments had mixed with anti-alcohol ideology, threatening their reputation and their standing in American society. Davis offers a novel perspective on a previously unstudied area of American Jewish economic activity."

## About Jewish Life in Canada

Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto), *Tracing Our Roots: Telling Our Stories*. Toronto: Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto), P.O. Box 91006, 2901 Bayview Ave., Toronto, ON, Canada M2K 2Y6, [www.jgstoronto.ca](http://www.jgstoronto.ca), 2011. 248 pages, \$25 Canadian.

From the publisher: “This is an anthology of over 45 compelling and entertaining contributions, written by members of the Jewish Genealogical Society. The themes include tales of research and discovery, escape, struggle, family reunion, growing up, lives led. Some will make you laugh, some will have you reminisce and a few may even make you weep.”

A reviewer wrote: “Each story seems to make a unique contribution. Despite the wide variety of subjects and settings, one may discern a common thread in these stories. Jews today seem to have an imperative need to collect and preserve family history as a vital link to our authentic roots and our own identities as Jews. It is as though we need to collect the shards of the past and reassemble them as we might the fragments of a fine china plate that has been shattered on the floor. Jewish genealogy may thus be seen as a form of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world.”

Rebecca Margolis, *Jewish Roots, Canadian Soil: Yiddish Culture in Montreal, 1905-1945*. Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2011. 320 pages, 25 ill., \$85.

From the publisher: “Yiddish culture has continued to have a prominent place in Montreal’s social landscape. Rebecca Margolis shows that the city’s vibrant Yiddish culture is the legacy of a driven group of the city’s Jews who devoted themselves to the revitalization of the Jewish community, creating a long lasting infrastructure and institutions that have bolstered Yiddish identity. Margolis explores the lives and works of activists, writers, scholars, performers, and organizations that fueled a still thriving community.”

## About Jewish Life in Eastern Europe

David Assaf, Editor, *Journey to a Nineteenth Century Shtetl: The Memoirs of Yekhezkel Kotik*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008. 512 pages, notes on terms, names and customs, and bibliography. \$29.95.

From the publisher: “Originally published in Warsaw in 1913, this beautifully written memoir offers a panoramic description of the author’s experiences growing up in Kamieniec Litewski, a Polish shtetl connected with many important events in the history of nineteenth-century Eastern European Jewry. Although the way

of life portrayed in this memoir has disappeared, the historical, cultural, and folkloric material it contains will be of major interest to historians and general readers alike. Kotik’s story is the saga of a wealthy and influential family through four generations. Masterfully interwoven in this tale are colorful vignettes featuring Kotik’s family and neighbors, including rabbis and *zaddikim*, merchants and the poor, Hasidim and *mitnaggedim*, scholars and illiterates, believers and heretics, matchmakers and informants, and teachers and musicians.”

When the book was published in 1913, Sholem Aleichem said, “The historical importance of this family chronicle cannot be exaggerated...I could not put it down.

Iva Steinova, *Matzeva: The Jewish Tombstone and the Symbolism of Its Decoration*. Prague: National Heritage Institute, 2011. 206 pages, approx. \$35. Available in English and Czech from <http://www.antikvariati-judaica.cz/en>

From the publisher: “Jewish tombstones are cultural monuments that have, so far, been neglected, despite providing exceptionally valuable historical evidence of the life of Jewish communities in the Czech lands. The purpose of the tombstone is to mark the place of burial and to inform future generations of all that is necessary to know about the deceased, so that their name does not fall into oblivion. In addition, tombstones also often have considerable artistic value. This book explores the use of iconographic motifs on Jewish tombstones in the Czech lands. Most epitaphs affirm that the deceased person fulfilled the necessary and that their good deeds in this world will guarantee them a place in the world to come (*olam ha-ba*). Various activities may contribute to this during a person’s life and these are often emphasized in epitaphs.

All types of symbolic decoration are examined and interpreted on the basis of a thorough knowledge of Judaism. Among the main motifs on Czech tombstones are the symbols of the Torah, the emblems of the *Kohanim* and the Levites, depictions of charity, crown motifs, symbols representing names and various occupations or activities, symbols of mourning and motifs connected with expectations of the coming of the Messiah.” ☆

**Brunch and Executive Council Meeting** continued from page 12  
All photos courtesy of Jerry Liebowitz



JGS Secretary Howard Rotblatt presents the Nominating Committee's slate of officers for vote, accompanied by outgoing President Steven W. Siegel



6531 Past President Linda Cantor presents gift to outgoing President Steven W. Siegel

# QUESTIONING THE EXPERTS

**DOROT questions JGS members about their genealogical adventures and elicits their advice for those embarking on similar paths**

## Interview with Claus W. Hirsch

DOROT: Claus, when did you first become interested in family history and what got you started?

HIRSCH: I got started in the early 1980s, partly as a result of hearing my mother talk about her family on a fairly continuing basis and then got started very seriously in 1983 when my father passed away. I knew that I could then dig into questions about his roots. He was, unfortunately, very hesitant about talking about family matters, and I didn't want to embarrass him or put undue pressure on him by asking the questions that were really on my mind.

DOROT: Where are your family roots and what are the areas of the world that you have focused on?

HIRSCH: I was born in Berlin as were both of my parents and one set of grandparents. My father's mother was born in Amsterdam and there is a whole other Dutch side of the family that has been very important in my research.

DOROT: Did the part of your family from Holland go back significantly in time – or did they immigrate more recently from somewhere else?

HIRSCH: What I found, and this surprised me a little bit, is that a large part of the Dutch family – and this is going back at least 300 years – actually originated in Germany and there was a fair amount of travel back and forth between Germany and Holland. So one of my ancestors, who was a rabbi in Germany and came from a prominent family, went to Amsterdam in the late 1600s and became the chief Ashkenazi rabbi of Amsterdam around 1700 and that produced a lot of interesting history.

DOROT: How did you start with your research?

HIRSCH: My father did something for which I am very grateful. He started a little family book, "Mein Stammbaum" or "My Family Tree." It seems that almost



Claus W. Hirsch  
Laura Yanes Photography

everybody did this in Germany in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. When people were married, they were presented with a little family history book, where they were supposed to record their own dates and places of birth and the dates and places of birth of their own parents and grandparents as far back as they could go, at least two or three generations. So I had that to start with and I then thought, well, why not build on this and try to go back as many generations as possible?

DOROT: Using what sources?

HIRSCH: I wrote to the *Standesämter*, which are the German civil registration offices, and told them, I am a descendant of so-and-so, could you please furnish me with at least the dates of birth of his parents and

his grandparents and so on. As long as they were given fairly correct data, they were happy to provide that information for a small fee.

DOROT: You did this about 20 years ago. Approaching it now with what you know, would you do it any differently?

HIRSCH: Probably not. I probably would have followed the same path because the game always is to try to go back as far as possible. It would probably be a little easier today because most of these offices have conformed to advances in technology and digitized some of their records and so on. The information is basically the same but is probably a little more accessible.

DOROT: What about the Dutch side of your research?

HIRSCH: I would do it exactly the same way. I have to say I am very, very impressed with the records that they keep. I contacted the civil registration office in Amsterdam and I was always amazed and very pleased at how promptly they reported back to me and they were able to furnish lots of very detailed information such as the profession of the ancestor, and if he was in business, what sort of business he did, and if he had a bankruptcy proceeding – which was not uncommon – that was also available. And on top of that, they would tell me he was married to woman A from this year to that year, and

then she died and then he married woman B, and so on. They were happy to furnish all this information for a very fair and nominal fee.

DOROT: How far back do those records go, usefully for you?

HIRSCH: I don't know exactly how far back they go, but I easily got the information to the early 1800s or maybe late 1700s.

DOROT: Those are civil records in Holland. Are there any specifically Jewish records in that same country that were relevant in your search?

HIRSCH: I was not able to access any such records. There are Jewish cemeteries in Holland and I was able to get some of those records by using some local researchers to do the research for me. They had certain language skills that I did not possess, so it was much easier for them to get those records.

DOROT: Have you gone to Germany or Holland specifically to do research or perhaps even to go to wherever your ancestors were living?

HIRSCH: Yes, I have, I've gone to Berlin, I've gone to some smaller towns in what is now Western Poland but was at the time part of West Prussia and I have also gone to Holland.

DOROT: In terms of research, was that a good use of your time?

HIRSCH: Not as good as you might think, because there are all sorts of obstacles thrown in your way, not so much in Holland as in Germany, where they have very strict privacy laws. They make it a bit difficult to get records that are less than 100 years old.

DOROT: During your years of research, have you hit brick walls and have you been able to chip through those walls after some period of time?

HIRSCH: Of course I've run into some brick walls and I still have one or two more. If somebody could wave a magic wand and tell me a way around them, I would be thrilled and appreciative. Specifically, I have found the name of my great grandfather on my paternal side, and I know the names of all his children and their dates of birth and all that. But I don't know for sure his date of birth. I have also found the name of the person who by all odds seems to be his own father! By all sorts of triangulation it's virtually positive that that is the case, but I cannot prove that beyond a shadow of a doubt. This is a real brick wall, for which I just cannot solve

the mystery.

DOROT: Where in Germany would those records have been?

HIRSCH: They would be in the Jewish community records of the former West Prussia. A lot of this happened before there was mandatory civil registration, so some of them might appear in community census records, which are scattered but which are very useful.

DOROT: Have there been any research problems that you've put aside and then come back to them and found your way through them?

HIRSCH: Yes and no. In the case mentioned above, I still don't have the answer. But when you do hit a brick wall, I think it's a huge mistake to just stop your research, because there are always other parts of the story that you can research while you're hoping to find a solution to this brick wall. Sometimes you can get lucky and somebody else who happens to be researching the same area will come up with the answer in the meantime.

DOROT: I believe the history of the Shanghai Jewish community during World War Two has been of interest to you.

HIRSCH: Yes, of great interest. There was a very active Jewish community in Shanghai during World War II and that consisted mostly of refugees from Germany and Austria who had nowhere else to flee, so Shanghai was the last refuge. It became a very active Jewish community of about 18,000 to 20,000 people. There were also people from Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Poland, but they were much smaller in number. There were also two other separate, older communities, consisting of Sephardic Jews who originated in Baghdad, so-called Baghdadi Jews, and Russian Jews, who emigrated there in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century after the revolution.

DOROT: Are the records for that wartime refugee community accessible and reasonably complete?

HIRSCH: There are a number of records that are quite accessible right here in New York. The YIVO Institute has a very nice collection of such records. The Leo Baeck Institute has a pretty nice collection. And then on top of that, there is the thing that I am currently involved with, which is an indexing project at "the Joint" (the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee). The Joint, which was dearly beloved by all the people who received aid from them (and my family was among



them as was virtually everybody who lived in Shanghai during World War II) is almost 100 years old, and it has done a just absolutely fantastic job of providing aid to needy Jews around the world, starting with World War I. During those almost 100 years, they managed to accumulate thousands and thousands of lists of records of people who either received aid directly from the Joint or through the generosity of their families around the world.

The Joint decided several years ago that it would be nice to index these records and digitize them and make them available to the whole world. So there are a few of us, members of the JGS, who have been working on this for the past two years and each of us goes there one day a week and so far we have already spent hundreds of hours indexing these records. It's sort of tedious work but we are very happy to do it because we recognize the tremendous value of it. And, as I go through records, I am always touched by the dire circumstances that people have found themselves in over the years, especially when I see a record of someone in Morocco or Shanghai or some other exotic part of the world who received \$5 or \$10 from a relative of Brooklyn or Rio de Janeiro or some other part of the world. Those \$5 or \$10 meant a great deal and were worth a lot more than they are today.

DOROT: The numbers for the individual Joint Shanghai files are available from the Joint database but the files themselves seem to be in China. Is there a continuing effort to make those files available?

HIRSCH: Virtually everyone in the Jewish community left Shanghai around 1947-1948 as the Communists were coming to power. They finally came to power in 1949 and by that time virtually everyone had left. The Joint had thousands and thousands of case files on individual families, with a lot more detail than just the name and age and the fact that they lived in Shanghai, and they were ready to ship those records back to world headquarters in New York. The Chinese government stopped them and seized those files. They are now in the Municipal Archives in Shanghai along with files on other communities. I honestly don't believe this was an anti-Semitic move in any way on the part of the Chinese government; it's maybe a suspicion of foreign records. I know attempts have been made to get those records back and I personally contacted someone who is very well connected in the Chinese government and sought his assistance and was promised that he would try to do something. But it is very much in limbo.

DOROT: In general, are there any sources for research

and information that you have found particularly useful?

HIRSCH: There are several. One is the newspaper files of the New York Public Library, the main branch on 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Fifth Avenue. I haven't used them recently but I used them many years ago, and I was incredibly surprised and pleased at how much information they have. What I needed was actual German language publications from Berlin going back 80 to 100 years. I was surprised that they still had the original publications and they were literally crumbling before my eyes; it was really painful turning pages. Those produced some really surprisingly useful results. Now a researcher would find all those things on microfilm and they are extremely useful. The second source, in view of my background, is the Leo Baeck Institute at the Center for Jewish History, which is a very rich source of information. A few years ago, I worked there as a volunteer, and I was always surprised at the extent of their files and how much wonderful information they have in these individual files.

Also in terms of sources, I don't think some of the currently available publications get enough credit. *Avotaynu* has been useful to me over the years. There are a lot people writing for *Avotaynu*. Much of the information has absolutely no relevance to my personal needs but it certainly is important to someone. I have paid particular attention to two people who contribute to it. One of them is Peter Lande who works for the Holocaust Museum in Washington and another one is Edward David Luft, who is also in Washington and is an excellent researcher. They are both very careful and have managed to come up with a lot of new sources over the years and have been very good about sharing that information. Another one is *Dorot* itself. I think a lot of credit goes to the editors, present and past. I think *Dorot* does a really fine job and people would benefit greatly by reading every issue carefully.

DOROT: Now for the "wish list" question: if there were a set of data that you would like to get your hands on that you haven't been able to find, what would it be?

HIRSCH: One or two things that I would wish for. One of them would be a large set of *mohel* records. Many, many of these, I know, were lost forever with the death of a particular rabbi. But there are scattered records available at the Leo Baeck Institute, at the Yeshiva University Library, other great institutions in New York, and I imagine at certain synagogues. They are very scattered and, from my experience, pretty sparse. If there were somebody who would be willing

to roll up their sleeves and solicit money to do all this, if somebody could produce a consolidated collection of *mohel* records from around the world, they would do just a phenomenal service to the genealogical community.

DOROT: What are the *mohel* records, how useful are they and where were they produced?

HIRSCH: These are records that were kept by the person in each Jewish community who was performing circumcisions. I've seen some of them and they are not models of clarity by any means, as they are written in somebody's shorthand. But at least they produced a record that so-and-so was born on this Hebrew date and they provide at least some sort of proof way before civil records were mandatory. Unfortunately, they leave out women, but at least they would be of good help to family researchers. These were universal within Jewish communities.

Also, in terms of a wish list, I mentioned before how newspaper files have been very useful to me, and I can't emphasize that strongly enough; if somebody like Google took it upon themselves to produce a gigantic database of newspapers around the world, covering hundreds of years, that would be a phenomenal resource.

DOROT: Are there useful newspaper records that you've looked at for the two countries where you've focused much of your attention, Germany and Holland.

HIRSCH: Yes, mostly Germany. I don't speak Dutch, so I would have missed out there. But for Germany, yes, for Berlin in particular, there were one or two newspapers that focused on the very substantial Jewish community in Berlin. For example, in doing research on my father's immediate family, I couldn't remember the name of one of his brothers and there was nobody left who could give me the answer to that. So I figured, well, if I do some research on the date that their mother died, there would be an ad in this paper expressing condolences by all her children. That's exactly what happened. I knew the exact date that she died, I looked in this newspaper file going back 70 years and there it was, a record of the date of her death and a listing of

her children. I could tell by the order in which they were listed that that was their birth order. So I used a simple bit of detective work, and it worked.

DOROT: Was there any particular time when you made a breakthrough in your research?

HIRSCH: Yes, in doing research at the Leo Baeck Institute, I had the liberty of looking through all their files, and I knew that certain families in Germany had common ancestries with mine. I was just looking through their files for any little clue and I came upon copies of letters that were exchanged between professional genealogists 70 or 80 ago. One of them said, Mr. So-and-So was told by Mrs. Such-and-Such of the family that the original ancestor dates back to 1550. That was a very thrilling piece of information for me that motivated me to keep going back in terms of trying to access the earliest records.

DOROT: Is your personal research continuing and do you see it reaching an end-point?

HIRSCH: As Bob Friedman pointed out in an earlier interview, it has to be open-ended because you're never really done; somebody always comes along with a new source. It's usually surprising, but it's something you hadn't thought of or you didn't realize the significance of this. So that's what I count on. In terms of my immediate work, I have slowed down a lot from my initial years of very enthusiastic and hard work, because I have found out quite a lot. But there are still new sources coming along and I am always pleasantly surprised, and when somebody writes to me and says, I think we have common ancestors, and they are going back 100 or 200 years, it's a pleasant surprise.

DOROT: Thank you.

*Claus W. Hirsch is a long-time member of the JGS and was on its Executive Council for 13 years. He is on the editorial board of Stammbaum (the journal of German-Jewish genealogy, which has published many of his articles) and has made past contributions to both Avotaynu and Dorot. He is a retired Wall Streeter who lives in New York City and travels extensively around the world. ☆*



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## **THE JEWISH MUSEUM**

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New York, NY 10128  
(212) 423-3200  
[www.TheJewishMuseum.org](http://www.TheJewishMuseum.org)

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Saturdays free.

Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Saturday,  
11:00 a.m.–5:45 p.m.;  
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Friday (EST: Nov–Mar) 11:00 a.m.–4:00 p.m.;  
(DST: Apr–Oct) 11:00 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.

Closed on Wednesdays and major legal and Jewish holidays.

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## **LOWER EAST SIDE TENEMENT MUSEUM**

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[www.tenement.org](http://www.tenement.org)

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*The Visitors Center & Tenement Shop hours of operation are different from the times of tenement tours.*

Check with the Museum for the schedule of tenement apartment tours & the walking tour of the neighborhood. Call also for special events.

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## **MUSEUM OF JEWISH HERITAGE: A LIVING MEMORIAL TO THE HOLOCAUST**

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[www.mjhnyc.org](http://www.mjhnyc.org)

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Sunday, Monday, Tuesday,  
Thursday, 10:00 a.m.–5:45 p.m.;  
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10:00 a.m.–3:00 p.m. (EST);  
Friday, 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m. (DST).  
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and Thanksgiving Day.

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15 West 16th Street  
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JGS members will receive free admission for a companion (**2 for the price of 1**). \$8 adults; \$6 seniors and students.

Sunday, Tuesday, Thursday, 11:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.;  
Monday, 5:00–8:00 p.m (Free)  
Wednesday, 11:00–8:00 p.m. (5:00–8:00 p.m. Free)  
Friday, 11:00 a.m.–2:30 p.m. (Free)

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## **Jewish Genealogical Society**

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[www.jgsny.org](http://www.jgsny.org)

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

למען תספרו לדור אחרון, תהלים מ"ח:14