
The Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society

DOROT דורות

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KGB Files Shed Light on a Dark Subject

By Claus W. Hirsch

Many historical tragedies are hidden from the world by the governments that committed or tolerated them or are forgotten for decades for lack of press or scholarly attention. It often takes a generation or more to reveal the true story and its significance. A recently published book, entitled *The Final Chapter: Agro-Joint Workers – Victims of the Great Terror in the USSR, 1937-1940*, by Mikhail Mitsel is the story of two noteworthy events: the formation and functioning of a life-changing organization that transformed the lives of Soviet Jews in the 1920s and 1930s, and the reign of terror by Joseph Stalin that descended upon them and much of Soviet society in 1937 and 1938. It is an inspiring tale of successful “human engineering,” farsightedness and noble deeds, destroyed by uncontrolled cruelty. The book also reveals, thanks to the recent opening of the Soviet archives, the fate of German doctors, employees of the Agro-Joint, and Russian Jewish farmers who “disappeared” into the gulag or executed.

Soviet Russia was long viewed as a vast landscape with ample land to grow crops to feed its own population and to supply products for export. But the country suffered periodic droughts and times of starvation that reached severe famine levels in 1921 and 1922. Another episode followed a decade later—“The Great Famine” of 1932-

33—but this time the Soviet Union did not seek outside help for its starving people.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (aka “the Joint”) had responded energetically to the food crises of the 1920s and 1930s with monetary and food aid, and one of its professional staff, a noted agronomist named Joseph Rosen, had closely studied the farm situation in Russia during those years. Soon the Joint formed a separate operation known as the Agro-Joint to operate there on the ground. Its mission was to aid Jewish farmers in the Crimea and Ukraine by providing modern farm machinery, improved sanitation, seeds, and instruction in various types of trades. Additional aims included agricultural electrification, water supply and irrigation, the creation of mutual aid societies and the placement of refugee physicians (many of whom were Jews no longer able to practice in Germany).

In the early years of the 1920s, agricultural aid efforts were done in tandem with the American Relief Administration (then headed by Herbert Hoover). The ARA and Congress provided \$60 million to feed 11 million people in Russia and to provide medical supplies to a much larger number. But while this important relief program was in progress, Hoover expressed indignation

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DOROT
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WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US!

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

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

Membership benefits:

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

Membership dues per calendar year:

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

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

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

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



President's Postings by Roni Seibel Liebowitz

Although my primary role in genealogy now is as President of the JGS, Inc., I am also on the Jewish Records Indexing - Poland (JRI-Poland) board and Archive Coordinator for the

Lodz Polish State Archive. Based upon the number of e-mails I have received this winter regarding research for towns within the Lodz area, I concluded that most of us spend more time doing research this season than any other. This makes sense since we are forced to stay indoors for longer periods of time. With so much more available on-line, this is not such a hardship, as long as we still have Internet connections, which has been an issue for many this winter. Thanks to genealogist Rhoda Miller's sound advice, I keep my family documents in several, very large loose-leaf notebooks, a different color for each branch. Initially I even printed the records on colored paper to match the notebooks as she suggested, but that didn't continue for very long. I am usually thought of as being an organized person, and I am *visually* organized, but when it comes to genealogy, and organizing material on the computer, it all falls apart. Perhaps at one of our brown bag lunch-and-learn sessions, we can share how we manage all the papers we accumulate. I for one would appreciate that!

The JGS Executive Council has received more requests for speaking engagements. Avrum Geller presented a two-part program on the basics of Jewish genealogical research on Thursday, March 7 and on Thursday, April 4 at the Stephen Wise Free Synagogue. He spoke about "Searching New York Roots" on March 10 for the JGS of Greater Washington at B'nai Israel Congregation in Rockville, MD.

We also received a request from the Yeshiva University Yiddish Club for a "crash course" in Jewish Genealogy. We are always excited when young people want to learn about this addictive pursuit. The perfect person to do the presentation was Executive Council member Gloria Berkenstat Freund, who impressed those students with

her easy fluency in Yiddish!

In October, EC member David Kleiman once again presented at a NY Genealogical and Biographical Society event at the New York Public Library. His presentation focused upon using Facebook, Google+, Blogger, Skype, YouTube and other social media in one's research.

Our November JGS program at the home of the first Jewish congregation in North America, Congregation Shearith Israel, a.k.a. the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue, was made even more special because of EC member Joy Kestenbaum's past involvement doing in-depth research of the minutes and synagogue records. Her work provided Stephen Tilly, architect of the synagogue renovation and restoration, much needed information. Joy shared some of her research experience with the program attendees.

If you know of any society, educational facility or synagogue interested in having JGS make a presentation, please have them contact us at info@jgsny.org

In my last column, I introduced the newest Executive Council member, Rivka Schiller. We had no photo available then, but you can see her on page 13 at the December annual banquet. Information about all the EC members is on our website under the "About Us" tab.

Reminder: a half day workshop in memory of past president and founding member of JGS, Steven Siegel z"l, will be held May 19, 2013, at the Center for Jewish History. This event is being co-sponsored by the Archivists Round Table, the Jewish Historical Society of New York (JHSNY), and the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society (NYG&B).

SAVE THE DATE for our *double chai* Celebration on October 27, 2013, when we toast the 36th anniversary of the founding of JGS, Inc. in 1977.

Roni



JGS WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS FOR 2013

Rosanne S Achtenberg
Rebecca R Alson
Susan C Anders
Lyn Ben-Dat
Barbara L Bloom
Robin Brown
Howard Bushinsky
Michael Davis
David E Deutch
Martin Eisenman
Roberta Engorn
Ira Erbs
Linda Fredin
Ronald A Garguilo
Larry Gelb & Julie Gelb
Jane Gelfand
Manny Genn
Reuven Genn
Elizabeth Glaser D'Alton
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Rebecca Krupp
Irina Kunina
Susana Leistner Bloch
Eric Lesser
Caryn Levinson
Richard Lieberman
Paula Litzky
Nathan Margolis
Mori Mickelson
Jennifer Miller
Michael A Miller
Michael Minor
Howard Orenstein
Harry Perkal
Vivian Pittman
Rita Pomade
Fern A Pops
Barbara Prins
Debra Rade
Rebecca Schaeffer
Rivka Schiller
Shari Shapiro
Rob Shlachter
Lesley C Sigall & Alan J Ferster
Mark Sternberg
Diana Weller
Jeffrey R. Werner
Chaskel Wertman
Robert Yuran



SAVE THE DATE:

**New York City Family History Research:
An Afternoon of Learning
in Memory of Steven Siegel**

Sunday, May 19, 2013 Noon - 5 pm
at the Center for Jewish History



KGB Files Shed Light on a Dark Subject continued from page 1



Samuil Lubarsky with a group of colonists from Skadovsk, Kherson district, Ukraine, 1920s



Settlers from *Chemerinsk* colony bring grain to the nearest state grain elevator, in Krivoy Rog, Ukraine, 1929



Agro-Joint tractor and farm equipment base in Dzhankoy, Crimea, 1929. Photographer: B. Buler

that grain was actually being exported by the Soviets (in order to buy machinery) while much of its population was starving.

Independent surveys established that, despite the Soviet Union's huge size and fertile lands, its agriculture was in shambles—with a much lower yield per acre than any country in Europe, as well as poverty in many rural villages and a declining amount of land per peasant. Enter the Agro-Joint (A-J) in 1924. With the benefit of free land contributed by the government and imported tractors and other equipment, the Agro-Joint eventually built over 7,000 houses, imported over 300 deep-well water pumps and over 700 tractors. The result of all this investment was the creation of over 200 collectives serving over 13,000 Jewish families. In many instances, former Jewish peddlers and small tradesmen became farmers and “contributing members of society” under the standards of the Russian Communist system.

The Agro-Joint effort was well supported by the American Jewish community and praised by important leaders. John D. Rockefeller, Jr. sent a check for \$500,000, saying “I am glad to follow the leadership of my friends, Mr. Julius Rosenwald and Mr. Felix M. Warburg, who have contributed so liberally to this cause.” And Herbert Hoover, who had earlier expressed some misgivings about Russian agricultural policies, said in 1928 that “For the past five years I have followed the Jewish farm settlement work in Russia with keen interest. It is one of the outstanding pieces of human engineering in the world today. The settlement of over 100,000 Jews on a million acres of land is a tribute to the practical idealism of the Jewish people.”

Things progressed over the years, with the Soviet government actually increasing its share of the Agro-Joint's expenses. But elsewhere dark clouds were gathering as Stalin raced to modernize the Russian economy in anticipation of an eventual war with Germany. Simultaneously, he grew increasingly suspicious of any potential challengers to his power, with mock trials and many executions—including some of his top generals and most loyal early supporters. Anyone

somehow connected with a foreign organization was under suspicion. It was during this period—culminating in 1937 and 1938—that many of the Agro-Joint’s professional staff were tried and convicted of treason. This aid organization ceased functioning in 1938.

Russian staff members and German refugee doctors alike fell victim to Stalin’s terror: there were 31 cases among Agro-Joint staff, of whom 17 were executed and six died in gulags. On A-J farms there were 147 cases, of whom 36 were executed; among German refugee doctors there were 19 executions among 41 cases. Many were rehabilitated decades later and their surviving relatives received a token financial payment—usually equivalent to three months of the victim’s pay. The report on one victim, picked at random from the book’s listing of names, tells the chilling story of the times: “Kurt Silbermann—Born in Berlin, Germany. Member of the Communist Party of Germany. Arrived in the USSR in 1934. Student of the Moscow Medical Institute. Arrested February 10, 1938. Sentenced to death on March 23, 1938 by the NKVD on charges of espionage and counterrevolutionary activities. Shot on April 7, 1938. Rehabilitated October, 1989.”

The records of these trials and the fates of the victims

became available to researchers (sometimes only with written permission of relatives) beginning 20 years ago, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. That in itself is an amazing change in the Russian government’s willingness to expose much of its own dark past. This allowed a committed researcher like Mikhail Mitsel, now working as a senior archivist with the Joint, to make several trips to former KGB archives in Kiev, Simferopol and Moscow to see files on these tragic victims.

This well researched book greatly expands knowledge about an important chapter in Russian history. Although about 80% of the pages are in Russian, there is ample information contained in the 79 pages appearing in English. There are lists and brief descriptions of many of the people who suffered during the Great Terror, specifically the dozens of Soviet Jews who worked for the JDC or its Agro-Joint division and of the German-Jewish refugee doctors who came to serve the cause of peace in the USSR. There is also a list of doctors about whom no information could be found. Every name in the book is listed in the English index.

Mitsel’s book was published by the Center for the Study of Eastern European Jews, Kiev, Ukraine, 2012. Copies

Document¹

Verdict on the Case of Yefim Ashkenazi – Agro-Joint workers in Crimea. October 29, 1938

Extract from a Protocol of the Court Troika of the NKVD
of the Crimean ASSR from October 29, 1938

HEARD [THE CASE AGAINST]

§ 70. **Ashkenazi Yefim Savelyevich**, born in 1894 in Dzhankoy; former prominent merchant; owned store selling textiles and groceries; Jew; citizen of the USSR; was convicted in 1923 for counterrevolutionary activities; before current arrest – bookkeeper of the Agro-Joint office in Simferopol.

In that as member of the counterrevolutionary Jewish bourgeois-nationalistic spy organization created by German intelligence. Collected spy information for German intelligence. Conducted counterrevolutionary nationalist propaganda among Jewish population.

Did not admit guilt, but was proved guilty by testimonies of the accused Mogarychev and Milostov-Gamburg.

Arrested on December 9, 1937; is retained in custody in Simferopol prison.

DECIDED

Ashkenazi Yefim Savelyevich – to be shot.

His personal property – to be confiscated.

Case – to be transferred to archive.

(Footnotes)

¹ State Archives of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, Record Group R-4808, Subdivision 1, File 06846, Pages 177-178.

of the book are in a number of major libraries, including the New York Public Library (Jewish Division), the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, Harvard University, and the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. Mr. Mitsel received important aid from Volodymyr Lyubchenko (editor), Natalia Vysotskaya (researcher), and Svetlana Nevdashchenko (book designer). The Joint Distribution Committee co-funded the project.

Note: The section on “New, Recent and Noteworthy Publications” in this issue contains a description

of Collective Memories of a Lost Paradise: Jewish Agricultural Settlements in Ukraine during the 1920 and 1930s, written by the son of an Agro-Joint employee.

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

Upcoming and Current Events

Jewish Genealogical Society

April 28, 2013 2 p.m.

Monthly Program: **“From DNA to Genetic Genealogy: Everything You Always Wanted to Know but Were Afraid to Ask”**

Speaker: Dr. Stephen P. Morse

Location: Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street, Manhattan (between 5th and 6th Avenues) Admission: JGS Members are free, guests pay \$5 at the door

The JGS welcomes Dr. Stephen P. Morse, the creator of the celebrated “One-Step” websites, who will educate us on the basics of genetic genealogy. Complementing Dr. Harry Ostrer’s February lecture on the genetic history of the Jewish people, Steve’s presentation will focus on the science we need to know in order to understand the purpose and the results of genetic testing to find our own ancestors and relatives.

This talk introduces some of the basic concepts of genetics - genes, chromosomes and DNA, and explains how DNA is inherited. That knowledge of inheritance can be used for finding relatives you didn’t know you had, learning about distant ancestors and the route they traveled, and determining if you are a Jewish high priest (Kohan). Examples presented include Genghis Khan’s legacy, the Thomas Jefferson affair and the Anastasia mystery.

Steve Morse, referred to by *Family Tree Magazine* as a “genealogical folk hero,” is renowned in the field of family history for his web-based genealogy search tools. His “one-step” search page – which began with his tool for searching the Ellis Island database, and now incorporates tools for searching a myriad of immigration, census and vital records, as well as calendar conversions and translation aids – is used by genealogists all over the world. Tributes to his

achievements include, among others, the Outstanding Contribution Award (2003) and Lifetime Achievement Award (2006) of the IAJGS, and the National Genealogical Society Award of Merit (2007).

Before applying his technological expertise to genealogy, Steve was a computer scientist and the inventor of the Intel 8086 microprocessor, the ancestor of the pentium chip that powers today’s personal computers.

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

Join us at 12:30 for a “Lunch & Learn” session in the Kovno Room on the second floor of the CJH for informal chat about genealogy issues. Bring your own lunch.

May 19, 2013, Noon to 5:30 P.M.

Special Program: **“New York City Family History Research: An Afternoon of Learning in Memory of Steven Siegel”**

Location: Center of Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street, Manhattan

Speakers include: Historians Rebecca Kobrin and Kirsten Fermaglich; Architectural historian, Anthony Robins; Genealogists Robert Friedman, Avrum Geller, and Joan Koster-Morales.

Join us for an afternoon of learning with leading genealogists and historians speaking about the pursuit of their research interests in the archives and libraries of New York City. Although the focus is primarily on Jewish genealogy and history, the presentations will be of interest to New York City researchers of all backgrounds. The program honors the memory of

the late Steve Siegel, founder and past president of the Jewish Genealogical Society.

New York City Environs

Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island (www.jgsli.org)

Sunday, April 28, 2013, 2 to 4 p.m. (pre-meeting discussion at 1:30 p.m.)

“Family History Mystery Day, the First Hands-On Family Finder Discovery Fair with Events for All Ages.”

Location: Mid-Island Y-JCC, 45 Manetto Hill Road, Plainview (www.miyjcc.org)

Sunday, May 19, 2013, 2 to 4 p.m. (pre-meeting discussion 1:30 p.m.)

“From DNA to Genetic Genealogy: Everything You Wanted to Know But Were Afraid to Ask” plus “The Ketubah: The Jewish Marriage Contract and What It Really Says”

Speaker: Dr. Stephen P. Morse

Location: Patchogue-Medford Library, 54-60 East Main Street, Patchogue, NY, (www.prmlib.org/genealogy)

Sunday, June 23, 2013, 2 to 4 p.m. (pre meeting discussion at 1:30 p.m.)

“Lithuania, Galicia, Ukraine: Research Sites and Sources”

Speakers: Dr. Rhoda S. Miller, C.G., Renee Stern Steinig and Chuck Weinstein (three past JGSLI presidents)

Location: Mid-Island Y –JCC, 45 Manetto Hill Road, Plainview, NY (www.miyjcc.org)

International Center of Photography

Now Through May 5, 2013, Tuesdays through Sundays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Fridays until 8 p.m.

“Roman Vishniac Rediscovered” and “We Went Back: Photographs from Europe 1933-1956 by Chim”

Location: 1133 Sixth Avenue at 43rd Street, NYC

Other Locations

National Museum of American Jewish History, Philadelphia, PA

Through June 2, 2013

Exhibit: “Beyond The Swastika & Jim Crow: Jewish Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges”

Ohio Genealogical Society Annual Conference

April 25 to 27, 2013 Cincinnati, Ohio

“Expanding Your Ancestry Through Technology,”

Information at www.ogs.org/conference2013/index.

National Genealogical Society Annual Conference

May 8 to 11, 2013, Las Vegas, Nevada

Information at www.ngsgenealogy.org/cs/conference_info

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SAVE THE DATE!

Sunday afternoon, October 27, 2013

JGS' 36th Anniversary Celebration

It's Double Chai!



Another Report from the 2012 IAJGS Conference

Can Ancient Memories Be Inherited?

by Susan J. Gordon

The Paris Conference featured many sessions on Sephardic history, and among the more unusual ones were “The Archeology of Memory: Reclaiming Hidden Sephardic Jewish Roots” and “The Captives Return: B’nai Anusim.” The speakers were Doreen Carvajal, journalist and author of *The Forgetting River: A Modern Tale of Survival, Identity and the Inquisition*, and Jonina Duker, an educator and genealogist. Both speakers are involved with organizations which reach out to “lost Jews,” descendants of those who were forcibly converted or have just discovered Jewish roots. Carvajal and Duker had great stories to share, and offered insightful observations about the timeless need we all have to answer the questions, Who Am I? and Where Do I (Really) Come From?

If there was one big lesson for attendees to learn, it was this: Listen to the old people in your family. Often, they’re the story keepers, the ones who remember best. Read their letters and journals, if possible. Talk to them and ask questions. What events were traumatic or wonderful in their lives? What do they recall about their parents and grandparents? What’s so special about that ordinary-looking bowl or pitcher? Why is it handled reverently?

A family may adhere to traditional Jewish, specifically Sephardic rituals, even if they don’t know why. They might say, “My parents and grandparents did the same thing,” or “It’s just something we do; it’s always been this way.” Jonina Duker said that maintaining old traditions in these families is an important way in which “Jewish souls” are finding their ways back to Judaism, as if “the blood calls.” These people may be descendants of conversos or *B’nai Anusim*, children of the forced ones, without realizing it. Most families of *conversos* habitually observe at least one or two old customs, such as covering mirrors after a death, or burying the dead so their graves point toward Jerusalem.

Names can be clues to family history, too, because the *conversos*’ new names often revealed their true identities in secret. Doreen Carvajal’s name means lost place or rejected in Spanish. Her grandmother’s name, Chacon, means salamander, an amphibian and a mythical creature believed to withstand fire. In other cases, names such as Annuziata or Santa Croce were chosen, to blatantly affirm a *converso* family’s Catholic fervor.

California-born and raised Catholic, Carvajal began to

wonder about her family’s true history and asked herself whether they had Jewish roots? In 2008, in an effort to reclaim her past, she moved to a small Andalusian hill town in southern Spain, where her ancestors had lived long ago. They had left the town about 500 years during the time of the Inquisition, and sailed to Costa Rica in the New World. Eventually, some descendants resettled in the United States. Did they simply leave Spain? Or had they fled?

Along with her husband and daughter, Carvajal settled in what had once been the Jewish quarter. She wandered through the narrow streets, studied art, poetry, and enigmatic images on church walls, feeling as if she were propelled by forces of what she calls “ancestral memories.” She sensed the ghostly whispers of Jewish life whitewashed as completely as the yearly coats of lime applied like paint to the stucco houses, and she listened to the music of *seatas*, whose haunting melodies sounded eerily like ancient strains of the Kol Nidre prayer.

During Easter Week, she photographed local inhabitants participating in elaborate religious processions. Pointing to pictures of the participants’ long white robes and red peaked hoods that covered their faces and heads, she remarked that they reminded her of the stiff cone hats worn by Inquisitors, and many attendees nodded in agreement.

Jonina Duker is one of the founders of Kulanu.org, which reaches out internationally to lost and dispersed Jewish communities in Africa and Latin America, and helps *B’nai Anusim* research their histories. Doreen Carvajal is involved with Shavei.org, an organization in Israel that helps “lost Jews” come to terms with their heritage and identity.

Recommended books on the subjects discussed by Carvajal and Duker, in addition to *The Forgetting River*, are *Secrecy and Deceit: the Religion of Crypto Jews* by David Gitlitz; *The Mezuzah in the Madonna’s Foot: Marranos and Other Secret Jew- A Woman’s Spiritual Heritage* by Trudi Alexy.

See the section on **New, Recent & Noteworthy Publications** in this issue for further information on Doreen Carvajal’s book.

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www.susanjgordon.com

Susan J. Gordon is a writer, who has just completed a memoir, Because of Eva: How I Found My Deadbeat Dad, the Woman Who Buried my Grandfather, and Why My Mother Rode to California in the Sidecar of a Harley. She and her agent are looking for a publisher.

The February 1 edition of The Forward features her story, "An Italian Converso Comes Back: Unearthing Buried Jewish Roots in Small Town Sicily." She can be reached at susan@susanjgordon.com. Her website is www.susanjgordon.com ☆

Update on the Social Security Death Index by Jeffrey Levin

In the last session of Congress, bills were introduced that would limit or eliminate public access to the Master Death File (MDF), known commercially as the Social Security Death Index (SSDI). The MDF/SSDI is both a popular and valuable genealogical research source. Jan Meisels Allen (vicepresident@iajgs.org), the Vice President of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) and Chairperson of the IAJGS Public Records Access Monitoring Committee, has written in the Records Alert announcement list at records-access-alerts.iajgs.org, regarding continued public access to the MDF/SSDI. Allen in an e-mail stated that, "unfortunately, the elected (congressional) officials believe cutting off access to the Social Security Death Index (SSDI) is the answer to identity theft." Allen continued that "it is not (and that identity theft) will continue whether or not the public has access to the SSDI."

A bill addressing access to the Death Master File, H.R.466, called the "Social Security Death Master File Privacy Act of 2013," was introduced in Congress on February 4, 2013, by Congressman Capuano (D-MA). The printed version is now available from the Government Printing Office at <http://www.gpo.gov>. At the time of its introduction there were no co-sponsors. The bill was referred to the House Ways and Means Committee, and at this time no hearings are scheduled. Allen reports that two other bills have been introduced and she expects even more bills to be introduced that affect access to the MDF/SSDI and public access to the Social Security numbers of deceased individuals.

H.R. 466 prohibits the Commissioner of Social Security from publishing the Death Master File or any public database that includes the Social Security numbers of any deceased individual. The bill permits the Commissioner to share information with the appropriate federal or state agency that pays federally

funded benefits regarding the deceased. The bill also states that the Commissioner would not be compelled to release the information under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act, which mandates public access to information.

Last year major genealogical organizations, such as the IAJGS, FGS, NGS and RPAC (Records Preservation and Access Committee) proposed a compromise each time their representatives submitted testimony to Congressional committees. They made the argument that while a majority of researchers perhaps could wait for two to three years for access to the MDF/SSDI data, others cannot wait. Among those who cannot afford delays are genealogists who were certified by BCG, ICAP-GEN; or forensic genealogists contracted by the Department of Defense to identify human remains from past conflicts; or employees of the Centers for Disease Control who are working on family medical issues, and those with contracts with law firms researching heirs and next of kin. Those researchers working compassionately with coroners to identify next of kin of deceased also benefit from access to the MDF/SSDI. Any genealogist, including this writer, doing research regarding their family tree has benefited from access to the SSDI.

The IAJGS website at Legislative Alert has the statements of testimony from 2012. Allen will remove the old bills that automatically died at the end of the last session and will create links for the new bills introduced for the current session of Congress. She continues to encourage interested genealogical researchers, whether beginners or professionals, to contact their members of Congress and the Senate to express their opinion in support of continued access to the MDF/SSDI.

Jeffrey Levin is an attorney and a member of the JGS Executive Committee. He lives in Scarsdale and is the Scarsdale Town Justice. ☆

JGS Program Reports

November 18, 2012

“A Visit to Shearith Israel Synagogue” by Steve Stein

In the heart of the Upper West Side of Manhattan lies a wealth of Jewish history and genealogical resources. Our November outing brought a large group of attendees to the home of the first Jewish congregation in North America, Congregation Shearith Israel, a.k.a. the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue. The group heard a presentation by Zachary Edinger, the Shamash/Ritual Director, on the history of the congregation, with supplementary presentations by Stephen Tilly, architect of the recent renovation, and JGS Executive Council member Joy Kestenbaum.

The tour began in the room known as the “Small Synagogue,” which is used for weekday services. Mr. Edinger explained that many Jews fled from Spain to Portugal and other places at the onset of the Spanish Inquisition. Unfortunately, those who fled to Portugal were caught in a similar persecution only a few years later. Many became *conversos*, or secret Jews, and their families remained so for over a century. When opportunities

for religious freedom opened up in the 1600s in Dutch controlled countries outside of Portugal and Spain, many Jews emigrated to them. Amsterdam was a popular destination, as were the Dutch controlled parts of Brazil. A group of Portuguese Jews lived for a time in Recife, Brazil, but when the Portuguese took back control in 1654, a small group of those Jews came to New Amsterdam, and with the backing of the Dutch West India Company gained civil rights and established their new community.

The British shortly thereafter changed New Amsterdam into New York, and through the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the small Jewish community established institutions and probably conducted services in various

places. Then in 1730, the first congregational home on Mill Street was built. This was followed by a larger building on the same site, another on Crosby Street, yet another on 19th Street, and in 1897 at the current site. Today’s “Small Synagogue” is appointed with many artifacts that have been with the congregation from its various locations – the benches, the tablets of the Ten Commandments above the ark, and a very unique *havdalah* set – combination candlestick, spice box and cup. In the ark, there are several Torah scrolls, among which are two that were damaged during the American Revolution but remain as a reminder of the congregation’s long and patriotic history.

The second part of the tour took us to the main part of the synagogue, where Sabbath and holiday services are held. Mr. Edinger said that today Shearith Israel is an

Orthodox congregation of roughly 450 member families, some descended from the original families. He mentioned some of the traditions that distinguish it from the Ashkenazic tradition of the majority of JGS members. For example, synagogue functionaries generally dress in formal wear, and there is a professional male choir. And a few different terms, some



Zachary Edinger, Ritual Director and Shamash of Shearith Israel, speaking to JGS members in the Little Synagogue.

originating from Portuguese or Ladino, remain in use. The synagogue welcomes guests for all services and conducts tours by appointment.

The main sanctuary is an enormous, elegant space with a women’s balcony and choir loft. It is decorated in traditional deep red, and the ark contains nearly two dozen Torah scrolls, also dressed in red. The room has its share of ritual treasures as well. Attendees passed around two of the silver Torah ornaments for viewing.

As an institution, Shearith Israel has been the spiritual home of many prominent citizens, among them Henry Pereira Mendes, who served as rabbi in the latter portion of the 19th century; Emma Lazarus, poet who wrote “The New Colossus,” inscribed on a plaque at

the Statue of Liberty; New York Stock Exchange founder Seixas Nathan, his son Benjamin, to name just a few. Paradoxically, both the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America (OU) and the Jewish Theological Seminary, which trains Conservative rabbis, had their origins at and through Congregation Shearith Israel and Rabbi Mendes. It also gave birth to “breakaway” congregation B’nai Jeshurun in 1825 when a significant Ashkenazic community developed in New York.

Architect Stephen Tilly described the effort made to renovate and update the synagogue after the building’s centennial in 1997. Much work was done to uncover and/or restore color schemes and other aspects of the synagogue’s décor, which includes many Tiffany stained glass window panes, historic finishes, decorative ceilings and marble-like features. Mr. Tilly made extensive use of information uncovered by JGS Executive Council member Joy Kestenbaum, who had dug deeply into the minutes and other records of the synagogue. Joy offered a few remarks on her research of Arnold Brunner, the building’s original architect, who was probably the first prominent American-born Jewish architect. This project culminated in the congregation’s 350th anniversary in 2004.



Zachary Edinger showing the Torah scrolls in the Ark of the main sanctuary.

Finally, Mr. Edinger described the synagogue’s records as a genealogical resource. The records of life events that have taken place in the synagogue are recorded, and many have been indexed. The congregation also maintains cemetery sections for members as well as extensive *nahalah* records. *Nahalah* is a Sephardic term corresponding to the Ashkenazic term *yahrtzeit*, or anniversary of death. These events are recognized extensively in the congregation’s rituals. To demonstrate, he showed copies of the record for Emma Lazarus, whose *nahalah* was the day before the meeting (the civil date anniversary was the day after the meeting).

A lively and informative Q&A session followed the formal presentations, on topics as wide-ranging as Sephardic ritual and the sturdiness and resilience of the stained glass windows in the recent storm. Some attendees had records of or knew about family events that had taken place at the synagogue.

For more information on the synagogue and its history and archives, attendees can contact Mr. Edinger through the synagogue’s website at www.shearithisrael.org or through the website of the 1654 Society at www.1654society.org.

December 25, 2012
“Food as a Door to Your Jewish Genealogy”
by Steve Stein

Food was definitely the subject on everyone’s mind at the December meeting, which followed our annual



Stephen Tilly, architect of the synagogue’s restoration, and Joy Kestenbaum, who performed historic research as a consultant.

Membership Brunch at the 92nd Street Y. Our speaker, Gil Marks, is a noted authority on Jewish food traditions, as well as a rabbi, social worker and author. Attendees enjoyed Gil's depth and breadth of knowledge, and were quite surprised about the history of some of the foods that are so much a part of our culture and heritage. Among Gil's many books are one James Beard Award winner (*Olive Trees and Honey: A Treasury of Vegetarian Recipes from Jewish Communities Around the World*) and two James Beard finalists (*Encyclopedia of Jewish Food* and *The World of Jewish Cooking*), and his most recent book, *Encyclopedia of Jewish Food*, is one of *Saveur Magazine's 100 New Classics*.

Gil traced the origin of many of the foods common in both Ashkenazic and Sephardic culture, and showed how many dishes are fundamentally part of multiple cultures. *Kishke*, for example, is centuries old, and has many forms, with different names as well. The word *kishke* comes from the Persian word *kashk*, and means the stuffing, not the casing. The name "derma" is less unsettling than "intestines."

One key aspect of interest to genealogists is that the



Harriet Mayer, Susan Viuker Lieberman, Karen Gens, Nathan Rosen, Rebecca Schaeffer, Rivka Schiller (the most recent member of the Executive Council), and Beata Schulman



Roni Seibel Liebowitz, Jerry Liebowitz, Miriam Rubin (one of Gil's editors), Rita Rosenkranz (Gil's agent), Gil Marks, Jane Rosen Berenbeim, and Ron Berenbeim



Gil Marks responding to a question from the audience

various names often have geographic origins; the fact that your family uses, for example, a Turkish name for a dish someone else has a German name for may indicate that your family has roots in the former Ottoman Empire. And recipes that vary by geography, such as gefilte fish, will also serve as an indication of origin. Gefilte fish, *kugels* and other foods from areas where sugar cane was available will tend to be sweeter than from, say, Lithuania. Galitzianers, though, tended to sweeten everything; Hungarians saved it for cakes. It should be possible to use the clues provided by your family's food traditions to add some "flavor" to your genealogy.

Almost like moving from table to table at a smorgasbord, Gil described the history and evolution of diverse foods that are common to us all but may surprise you. The earliest forms of pasta, for example, may not have arisen until about the 1100s, as fried strips of dough. This type of food was influenced by trade with the Orient, and evolved as it moved from country to country within Europe. *Cholent*, the stew common in virtually all European communities because it can be kept hot for the Sabbath day without violating the laws prohibiting cooking, had its origins in France (and from a French word) around 1200 but also moved quickly

around the continent.

Dumplings, fritters, pancakes, noodles, *kugels*, stuffed cabbage, and herring are all examples of foods with varied recipes, names and histories, which were influenced by and adapted to the availability of ingredients and the ability to store and preserve food, available means of fermentation and many other factors. Perhaps two of the most surprising facts Gil presented: potatoes in Jewish cuisine, including potato *kugel* and the *latke*, are most likely less than two hundred years old; and a slice of lox probably never met a *shmeear* of cream cheese on a bagel until it came to America!

Find out more about the history of Jewish food from Gil at his website, www.gilmarks.com.

January 20, 2013

“Searching for Living Relatives on the Internet”

by Steve Stein

We genealogists spend much time and effort researching the past and our ancestors who lived in it, but we don't focus as much on the present, and our living relatives. Our January speaker, Ron Arons, well-known genealogist, author, and lecturer, gave us a new perspective on research and a long list of tools to pursue the search for living relatives.



Ron Arons at the podium

Why living relatives? Ron pointed out that living people can help you get additional information on dead people, and additionally, the living people may be related to you yourselves. Ron has successfully pursued several people in this way (although he insisted he is NOT a stalker!), and his examples and anecdotes demonstrated the kinds of information available.

Attendees received a handout, replicated below, of categories of websites, with specific examples, that can be used to do this kind of research. Using these tools in concert, Ron said, gives you the best results, and then went on to give several illustrations.

There are general search tools, such as Google, and directory tools, such as PeopleFinders, Switchboard, and the like. These tools are free, and the directory tools have additional information other than addresses and phone numbers, and they are different one from another. Some will show ages, names of relatives, other places the person has lived, maps, etc. You will get the best results when you use all of them and then compare and contrast the results, evaluating the reliability of each piece of information.

At the next level, there are several occupations that have professional societies, professional directories, and other organizations online. Doctors and lawyers



Ron Arons describing the results of a search on Pipl.com using his own name

are the most obvious of these, but the same types of websites may exist for stockbrokers and librarians, or other professions with licensing such as nursing, surveyors, and geologists.

Aggregation sites provide a different way of looking for personal information, creating profiles of all kinds of individuals. Alumni sites (classmates.com and



Ron Arons conversing with JGS members after his presentation

specific college directories) provide a different kind of background information. Government and newspaper websites also provide extensive information.

And social networking sites provide a means of contacting all kinds of people, while at the same time showing photographs and other personal information.

Most of the sites mentioned below are free or partially free, with some sites and services on other sites available for a fee. Ron felt very strongly that in most cases, the information available through the paid services can be found in other ways, and is generally not worth the additional expense. There may be cases where it is warranted, but he felt they were few and far between.

The rest of the talk consisted of several entertaining examples of the kind of detective work that these sites support. Starting with a few pieces of information such as a name, state, and profession, and using Google as the universal starting point, he hopped around from professional websites into directories, alumni lists, and aggregation sites looking for a single individual. In one case, an attorney was located through a bar association, identifying her alma mater, degrees, law firm, and such; in another case, a woman's maiden name from years gone by led to her mother's obituary, which identified the woman's married name, allowing Ron to "catch up" decades after he knew the woman.

The talk was followed by an active and enthusiastic Q&A session.

Ron may be contacted through his website, www.RonArons.com/.

Ron Arons' List of People Finding Websites

1. Google.com

2. People Finders and Directories

www.PeopleFinders.com

www.Intelius.com

www.USsearch.com

www.Zabasearch.com

www.WhitePages.com

www.Veromi.com

www.411.com

www.Switchboard.com

3. Professions

Lawyers

www.Martindale.com

lawyers.FindLaw.com

www.Lawyers.com

www.Avvo.com

State Bar Associations

lawyers.justia.com

Doctors

www.HealthGrades.com

www.DocSpot.com

www.Wellness.com

www.WebMD.com

www.Vitals.com

State Medical Boards

www.yelp.com

Dentists

www.Doctoroogle.com

www.1800Dentist.com

www.Ada.org

www.zocdoc.com

Stockbrokers

www.Finra.org

Therapists

therapists.PsychologyToday.com

www.TherapistLocator.net

www.FindCounseling.net

www.alltherapist.com

Other

State Licensing Boards

www.searchsystems.net

www.npidb.com

4. Social Networking

www.Facebook.com

www.Linkedin.com

www.YouTube.com

www.MySpace.com

5. Aggregation Websites

www.Pipl.com

www.ZoomInfo.com

www.Spokeo.com

www.nndb.com

6. International

www.Infobel.com

www.NumberWay.com

www.192.com (UK phones/voter registrations)

7. Court, Other Government Records

Local Court Records

Inmate Locators

www.bop.gov (Bureau of Prisons [Federal])

acris.nyc.gov (NYC real estate)

8. Newspapers

news.google.com

Local newspapers

9. Political Contributions

fundrace.huffingtonpost.com

www.followthemoney.org

10. Negative Research (To Prove Someone is Dead [Not Alive])

Social Security Death Index

Obituaries

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

Upcoming Events

 continued from page 8

Twentieth Annual Research Trip to Lithuania

June 25 – July 5, 2013

Howard Margol and Peggy Mosinger Freedman will for the twentieth time lead a group of researchers to Lithuania from June 25 to July 5, 2013. The trip is limited to 25 people interested in Lithuania, Latvia, parts of Poland or Belarus. There will be visits to archives, synagogues, ghettos, Holocaust sites, meetings with Jewish leaders, sightseeing, guides/interpreters and two days to visit and spend time in the town of your interest. The trip planners are on a first name basis with the archivists and directors of the main places of Jewish interest. For more information on the trip, the itinerary and the costs, go to www.litvaktrip.peggyspage.org or contact the trip leaders at litvaktrip@gmail.com

33rd Conference of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies

August 4 to 9, 2013 - Boston, Massachusetts

The early registration discount will end on April 30, 2013. For more information and/or to register, go to www.iajgs2013.org. ☆



**33rd IAJGS
International
Conference
on Jewish
Genealogy**

Registration is now open for the conference to be held in Boston, from Sunday, August 4 through Friday, August 9, 2013. The early registration discount will end on April 30. For more information or to register, visit www.iajgs2013.org.

Digibaeck, A Digitization Whose Time Has Come

By Ann Rabinowitz

The Leo Baeck Institute in New York, that wonderful repository of all sorts of gems for genealogical research, has now digitized about 90% of its holdings for ready access online. You can learn about this remarkable and forward-thinking DigiBaeck effort on the following site: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iBG1fxTz-m8>.

It is certainly a pleasure for researchers all over the world to be able to gain online access for the first time to five centuries of German-Jewish documents, whether in German or other languages including English. Also, it may surprise you to learn that there are items which refer to other than German research or Germany itself such as in France, Latin America, the Netherlands, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. The timeframe also stretches from very olden times such as the Middle Ages to the World Wars I and II eras.

The DigiBaeck includes the following categories which can be accessed:

- Archival Materials
- Memoirs and Manuscripts
- Arts and Objects
- Books and Periodicals
- Photographs
- Audio Recordings

To start your search, you should go to the following link: <http://www.lbi.org/digibaeck/>.

An example of what can be found there is a group of files donated by genealogist, Rudolf Jakob Simonis (September 13, 1893 – December 17, 1965) which deal with approximately four hundred Jewish families and their trees, as well as places in Germany, Sweden and Denmark, plus newspaper articles, correspondence and photos. The index for the collection can be viewed by family name or place.

A particularly interesting group of files referred to families from Koenigsberg (now Kaliningrad) which records have been heretofore particularly hard to locate. To see the list of families, go to www.lbi.org/digibaeck, click “Koenigsberg Memoirs and Manuscripts.”

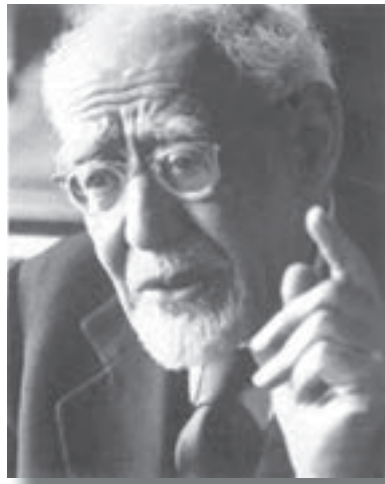
There is even mention of the Jews from the small town of Cottbus, Brandenburg, Germany, where I have been trying to trace my Choritz family, who later went to Lithuania. Although my family was not mentioned, it does give me an idea of who some of the other Jewish families were and that they existed such as the family of Margot Hirschmann.

The Simonis Collection also has family trees from various Swedish families and here is an example from those who settled in Stockholm: Bauer, Bonnier, Eliasson, Friedlaender, Geber, Heckscher, Hirsch, Huettner, jacobssen, Josephson, Kaiser, Kalisch, Labatt, Lamann, Leidesdorff, Levertin, Levin, Marcus, Nachman, Nachmanson, Philip, Phiipson, Piehl, Salmonson, Samson, Schaenthal, and Strangenberg.

Another group of records is for the Vierfelder Family Collection (1694-1960) from the town of Buchau, Wuerttemberg, Germany, which includes a Vierfelder family chronicle of 266 pages. On the search page of Digibaeck, click on “Vierfelder Family Chronicle” or “Vierfelder Family Collection” to see the photographs of the family and the town and other materials.

One of the very helpful collections is that of Bruno Weill, which will interest researchers of both German and French branches of this famous family name. It includes the following privately printed family history by Ernest B. Weill, 1957: “Weil – DeVeil, A Geneology 1360-1956 (Weil, Weill, Weyl, De Veil, De Veille, De Weille), Important Figures Among the Descendants of Juda Weil: Generations of Rabbis, Teachers, Priests, Ministers, Writers and a Composer.”. This resource can be found in English at the following link: http://www.archive.org/stream/brunoweil_01_reel01#page/n2/mode/lup. There are many maps, drawings and other tools for locating information about where the family lived and worked.

As you can see, this free DigiBaeck resource is well-worth viewing online or in person during a trip to New York. I hope researchers will take full advantage of it. An added thought is that one should remember



Leo Baeck

that German research is not a limited study, as many of our families who ended up in the Baltics, first came there from Germany and that many of the early settlers in America in the 1800's were German Jews. The DigiBaeck is a good means of learning about and

savoring these connections.

Ann Rabinowitz is the Editor of the JewishGen Blog, Coordinator of the KupiskisSIG and a former Board Member of the LitvakSIG. In addition, she researches and writes about her British, Galitzianer, Litvak and



Polish State Archives and Jewish Records Indexing - Poland sign historic agreement providing expanded access to Jewish records in Poland

On February 15, 2013, the Polish State Archives (PSA) and Jewish Records Indexing -Poland (JRI-Poland) entered into a new multi-year agreement to expand access to Jewish records. Please see <http://www.jri-poland.org/> for the full story and video of this historic signing.

A Family Anecdote

My great grandfather, Kalman, was a notorious procrastinator who was always running late. If my grandmother needed him to pick her up from the train station at 10 A.M., she would tell him to get there at 7 A.M. and would be pleased if he arrived by noon. There's an old story about Kalman that we still retell to this day

Kalman was a very talented jewelry maker who emigrated here from Wyszogrod, Poland, in 1910. He had a very successful business at Canal and Chrystie Streets, in the heart of the old diamond district (before it moved uptown). My great grandfather was even the personal jeweler to the Vanderbilt family.

One summer day, Mrs. Vanderbilt called my great grandfather to tell him she wanted a special broach made for Thanksgiving. "Sounds wonderful. I'll get started on it right away." A month or two passed and Mrs. Vanderbilt called him to check in on the progress. "Oh yes. It's going wonderfully. You'll have it soon." Finally, two days before Thanksgiving, a very concerned Mrs. Vanderbilt appeared in Kalman's shop to inquire about her broach. "Don't worry! I'm almost finished," he said. "I just bought the gold!"

Submitted by Terissa Schor. If you have a good anecdote to share with DOROT readers, please send it to tobysanchez34@gmail.com. Thank you.

SPECIAL NOTE!

Genealogical Resources in New York, edited by Estelle Guzik, is now on sale for a greatly reduced rate of only \$12 +\$3.50 shipping in US.

For more information check our website www.jgsny.org

Online News

British Newspapers and Censuses on line

If you have relatives who lived anywhere in the United Kingdom, www.findmypast.co.uk/search/newspapers is a source for notices of births, marriages and deaths plus obituaries in local newspapers from 1761 through 2006. By looking at local news reports, local court records and much else, one may come across significant bits of information. The site also has census records from 1841 through 1911. Searching the site is free, but to view the actual record, requires a fee and there is another fee for obtaining a copy.

Finding Aid for Census data of Toronto Residents of 2011.

Avotaynu's book review editor, William Gladstone, created a finding aid to the 1911 Canadian Census, focusing on the area of Toronto heavily populated Jews. It is called the "Street Guide to the Jews of Toronto in the Canadian Census of 1911," at www.billgladstone.ca/?p=8245. Gladstone has another site about life in Toronto, available at www.billgladstone.ca. Both sites give background information about Jewish life in Toronto in the early 20th century.

Czernowitz Site Offers Birth Records, Stories, Family Histories, Photographs and Much More.

At <http://czernowitz.ehpes.com> there are 40,000 birth records from 1877 to 1829, containing the name of the child, parents' names, year of birth, volume number, page and record number. Copies of the original documents can be ordered on microfilm from the Family History Center through the Center for Jewish

History's Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute, 15 West 16th Street, NY 1001 or 212-254-9318.

There is also a database of occupations plus family stories, photographs, a Bukovina cookbook and more.

Search Tips for Shoah Foundation Database

The Shoah Foundation has improved its search capabilities. One may search by name of the victims, by the name of survivors, by the name of the person who provided testimony and by the name of the town where the victims and survivors lived. The easiest way to access the Shoah Foundation is to type in Shoah Foundation. This will bring you to its site at the University of Southern California. The Foundation has 52,000 testimonies, just 1,100 are available in English from this site. The others may be viewed at special sites around the world. See the instructions on line.

All Kaunas Gubernia Records Now on LitvakSIG.

The LitvakSIG Vital Records Translation Project focuses on translating the 19th and early 20th century Lithuanian Jewish Communities' vital records (birth, marriage, death and divorce records), which were microfilmed by the Mormon Church (the LDS). To date the Litvak special interest group has translated all known vital records for the Kaunas Gubernia, except for post 1911 birth records which are closed due to the 100 year privacy law. The records cover the districts of Kaunas, Panevezys, Raseiniai, Sauliai, Telsiai, Ukmerge and Zarasai. To find relatives who lived in the Kaunas Gubernia go to www.litvaksig.org. ☆

JGS on Facebook



Facebook©

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

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

We hope you will join the more than 654 members of the JGS Facebook group. The page includes details about our upcoming meetings and follow-up reports about the presentations. We welcome comments and reactions to the meetings as well as suggestions of topics for monthly meetings.

Skuodas - Researching a Jewish Town

By Ann Rabinowitz

For those researchers who are looking for information on a shtetl in Lithuania, the first stop is JewishGen's KehilaLinks. However, there are many towns that are not represented on the KehilaLinks site and finding data on them is a sometimes difficult and arduous task. An example of a shtetl that does not have its own site is Skuodas, Lithuania. I know this because I was doing some research and wanted to know more about the Barron family, who came from Skuodas. This seemed a good time to determine how to go about gaining information when no site exists.

It all started when I had come upon information about a Dr. Moses Barron, the son of Jacob Barron, who came to America as a child from Poland/Russia in 1889. He became a doctor and later a University of Minnesota Pathology Professor. He wrote an article in 1920 discussing his research, which helped Sir Frederick Grant Banting of Canada come up with the idea for insulin.

When I read about Dr. Barron and his remarkable accomplishments, I thought that I would try and find out where he was from exactly, as everything I was reading about him either said Russia or Russia/Poland. It is so inaccurate and imprecise to list a person as coming only from "Russia" or "Russia/Poland" – particularly as it is a primary goal of genealogical researchers to know exactly what an individual's origins are and where they are from. So, how to go about going deeper into Dr. Barron's ancestry to find this information?

First of all, I had to determine Dr. Barron's date of birth, which I got by "Googling" his name. Several biographical references confirmed that his birth date was November 8, 1883. Now I was able to look for Barron in other databases and evaluate the information where the first name was the same.

Secondly, I did an all-out blitz on Ancestry.com. Since I knew that Dr. Barron arrived in America in 1889, I started with the 1900 U.S. Census data and went on to

1910, 1920, 1930 and 1940. All of these stated that Dr. Barron had come from Russia or Russia/Poland and nothing more specific.

Not accepting that I was stumped, I proceeded to look at military records, where I found that Dr. Barron had served in World War I (December 14, 1917 – May 3, 1918). Again, I found that his records only stated Russia. What a disappointment! Many times, the military records are the only place where one will find the name of the town where a person originated.



Skuodas Marketplace

Since Dr. Barron lived in Minnesota, I decided to try the Historical Society of Minnesota to see whether any data on him resided in their records. State and local historical societies and libraries are often very good sources. And so it was

that in the Minnesota society I found the answer I was looking for and more.

The Society had a file called "Jews in Minnesota: An Inventory of Its Oral Histories at the Minnesota Historical Society." It turned out that Dr. Barron happened to be one of the individuals who were interviewed. The detailed description of the interview again said Russia, but I decided to go ahead and click on the transcript option. Here, I found that in the actual interview, Dr. Barron had said he was born in the town of Skud, Lithuania. Mystery, at last, solved!!!

Many times, individuals will use a colloquial, Yiddish or old form of an ancestral shtetl. In this regard, I wanted to be sure of the correct present-day spelling, so I then turned to JewishGen, my ever-ready standby, to look up the town on the ShtetlSeeker (now the JewishGen Gazetteer – <http://www.jewishgen.org/Communities>). There the shtetl was listed as Skuodas, Lithuania. I had my definitive answer, but I wasn't finished yet.

Since I was already on JewishGen, I decided to find any pertinent *Yizkor* Book resources. I hit pay dirt as the *Yizkor* Book site yielded three different *Yizkor* books: Shkude-Pinkas Hakehillot Lita (http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/pinkas_lita/lit

00690.html); Kihilat Skhud, Kovets Zikaron (<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Skuodas/Skuodas.html>); and Ha-Edut al ha-retsah Yehude Shekod shebi-Lita (<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Skuodas1/Skuodas1.html>). The Yizkor books proved to be a tremendous source of historical information about families that had remained in Skuodas until World War II. However, there was nothing about the Barron family that had left in 1889.

Wanting to now find whether there were specific records available for either the Barron family or the town of Skuodas, I entered the LitvakSIG site and went directly to the All Lithuania Database (ALD). There, I input the name Baron and found one record for the Barron family listed under Yankel ben Berel Baron, born 1853. This appeared to be Dr. Moses Barron's father. With so little information, I could not really connect with any other Barron families including mine, who had lived in Kupiskis and Vabalninkas. As time goes by, it is possible that more records will be added to the ALD and they may include the Barron family. I will keep looking.

My next move on the LitvakSIG site was to look up the District in which Skuodas was located. I found that it was Telsiai. I now had a clue to further research on the Barron family. Who knew what I would find? As I have recommended in other postings, it is a good idea to join a LitvakSIG District Research Group (known as a DRG) and see what will turn up.

So following my own advice, I contacted the Telsiai District Coordinator, Jill Anderson, who was quite helpful. She told me that the following records were available to DRG members:

- 1816 Revision list
- 1846 Candle tax payers
- 1849 Box tax payers
- 1851 Additional revision list
- 1854 Real estate owners' list
- 1859 Additional revision list
- 1867 Electors' list, local municipal

- 1881 Box tax payers
- 1883 Electors' list, Rabbi
- 1885, 1884, 1883 Voters' lists
- 1891-1915 Postal bank records
- 1892 Box tax payers
- 1901 Voters' list, 1899 Voters' list
- 1903 Electors' list, Rabbi
- 1904 Box tax payers
- 1912 Electors' list, local municipal
- Internal Passports

The records were voluminous, but it seemed that there was very little that fit in the particular timeframe in which I was interested, from Dr. Barron's birth in 1883

until his emigration in 1889. And so I was unable to find any records with the Barron name attached to them. Perhaps the family was actually registered in another town and/or district and that could be followed up on.

Following this, I decided to go to Yad Vashem and

I turned up a helpful resource in terms of the Yad Vashem Photo Archive, which included Skuodas: <http://collections.yadvashem.org/photosarchive/en-us/search.html?q=skuodas>. There were several photographs of the town and people:

A Street in the Town of Skuodas

A final step was to "Google" the Internet to find additional resources. One of those that I found was the following link: <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/128072457/Display-case-Skuodas-Museum>. This was a 41-page manuscript that was chock-full of information on many Jewish families and about their life in the shtetl, but there was nothing related to Dr. Barron or his family.

It appeared that while I did not find much of substance regarding the Barron family, I did increase my knowledge about their ancestral shtetl of Skuodas. Not only that, I recognized many of the names of those who lived in Skuodas, including what appeared to be a new branch of the large and sprawling Shereshevski family, who were known to have originated in Taurage, another shtetl.



A Street in the Town of Skuodas

Quite a number of the family names I saw in the Skuodas records were of those who later settled in South Africa such as Kangisser, Malkinson and Urdang. There were many more such names that could be profitably researched in the South African records.

The important thing is that the information I found was quite enough to perhaps entice, at least, one of the 100 JewishGen Family Finder (JGFF) registered researchers

of Skuodas to start a KehilaLink site for Skuodas. Maybe my research will inspire someone to do just that - so that Skuodas will be a mystery no longer!

Ann Rabinowitz is the Editor of the JewishGen Blog, Coordinator of the KupiskisSIG and a former Board Member of the LitvakSIG. In addition, she researches and writes about her British, Galitzianer, Litvak and South African roots, as well as the Holocaust. ☆

Notes from All Over

Grants to Genealogical Projects are Available from The Seton Shields Awards Program

The SetonShields awards is a one woman operation, created by Megan Smolenyak Smolenyak, (her true name) a professional genealogist and author of *Trace Your Roots with DNA: Using Genetic Tests to Explore Your Family Tree* (Rodale, 2004). The purpose of the awards is to help organizations, large and small, to undertake special projects, publish newsletters or create documentaries, anything to advance interest in genealogy.

Over 150 grants have been awarded since 2000, one a month. Recent recipients include JewishGen, as well as small town genealogical and historical societies. The sized of the grants has not been stated, but one can assume that they are less than \$500, because they are all funded by Ms Smolenyak.

The website which contains the simple online application form, a list of past grantees, and other information is available at www.honoringourancestors.com/grants.html.

Safe Storage of Your Genealogical Records

The Eastman Online Newsletter of November 8, 2012 recommends storing your precious genealogical information on “the cloud.” Theoretically, the cloud is safer than paper because paper can be destroyed by fire or floods, mildew, mold or insects. CDs can become obsolete, and hard drives crash without warning. These things don’t happen on the cloud, but Eastman still recommends keeping copies in different places and in different forms (Note: In *Dorot’s Spring, 2013* issue, computer expert David Kleiman will explain how to store material on the cloud, the costs, and the value for the individual genealogist).

Definitions and Common Abbreviations for Official Russian Administrative Divisions

TERM	DEFINITION	ABBREVIATION
Gorod	City	G
Khutor	Farm	Khut
Kolonia	Agricultural Colony	Kol
Mestechko	Town	M
Poselok	Small Village	Pos
Derevnya	Village	Der
Selo	Village with a church	S
Sloboda	Village on a Highway, often at a crossroads	SL
Stants	Village, southern Russia, Cossack	

Source: NU? WHAT’S NU? Vol. 13, No. 28, 7/1/12

Uniforms of the Austro-Hungarian Army During World War I

Among your possessions you may have pictures of relatives who served in World War I, wearing their uniforms and showing their medals and badges. Help to decipher these and gain some understanding of what your relatives experienced is available from www.austro-hungarian-army.co.uk/.

Website lists numerous books by and about "The 1000 Children"

The story of how more than 1,000 European Jewish children were brought to the U.S. between 1934 and 1945 and raised by foster families all over the country can be read at www.onethousandchildren.org. This site lists biographies of key players, such as Cecilia Razovsky and the American Jewish Women's Rescue Operations, plus memoirs written by former OTC children, describing their lives in Europe and in the U.S. and their search for their parents during and after the war. The books are also available from Amazon or

directly from the publishers. A few examples are:

Don't Wave Goodbye, edited by Iris Poner and Phil Jason, Praeger/Greenwood, www.greenwood.com.

Hearing a Different Drummer by Ben Hirsch, Mercer University Press www.mupress.org/webpages/books/hirsch.html. Mr. Hirsch became an architect and designed the Holocaust Memorial in Atlanta, Georgia.

Picking up the Pieces from Portugal to Palestine: Quaker Refugee Relief in World War II, University Press of America, www.univpress.com.

Renewal of Life – Healing from the Holocaust by Henri Parens, an OTC child who became a child psychiatrist and peace activist. Schreiber Publishers, www.schreibernet.com.

Over the Highest Mountain by Alice Resch Synnestvedt, who saved at least 12 of the 1000 Children in France. Intentional Productions, <http://intentionalproductions.com>.

Thanks to: *Scattered Seeds*, Vol. 20.No. 2, First Quarter 2013 and *Avotaynu*, Fall 2011. ☆

The Jewish Genealogical Society website opens the door to

- Jewishdata.com (accessible by members of JGS)
- NY Naturalizations: Database of the Index to Brooklyn Naturalizations (1907–1924); Other New York Area Naturalizations: links to searchable online New York State naturalization indexes by county
- Cemeteries: Map of New York Area Jewish Cemeteries; Directory of Jewish Cemeteries in the Metropolitan New York Area; Burial Societies in the New York Metro Area; New York Area Cemetery Directions
- NY Area Resources: a comprehensive list of repositories in the metropolitan New York area
- Dorot: downloadable issues: spring 2000-winter 2005–2006; list of highlights of back issues: 1979-2008
- Events: Announcements of upcoming JGS monthly programs and events
- New York Landsmanshaftn and Other Jewish Organizations: links to indexes, databases, and directories, such as *American Jewish Year Book*; Landsmanshaftn and other town and country-related organization organizations incorporated in New York County, 1848-1920; WPA Survey of New York City Synagogue Records, 1939
- Memorial Database of Jewish Soldiers, Partisans and Workers killed in action during the Nazi era
- Inventory of LDS Microfilms and Microfiche on Indefinite Loan at the Center for Jewish History
- Other: links to other sites that may be of interest to the JGS community



Metro Area Repository Round-up

Portal to American Jewish History Is Now Open at www.ajhs.org

The American Jewish Historical Society, in combination with its partners at the Center for Jewish History (YIVO, American Sefardi Federation and the Leo Baeck Society) plus libraries and historical societies in several states, has a functioning site which allows researchers to locate collection records and images held by all the members of this special archival coalition. More member collections will be added in the future.

For now one can view the yearbooks, scholarships and history of the Grand Street Boys Association 1907-1968, or the history of every aspect of the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue (Shearith Israel), or the records of children's hospitals in Denver, which took care of many New York children with asthma and tuberculosis, or plus pictures from the Philadelphia Jewish Archives. One may search by type of resource (newspaper clipping, finding aid, posters, portraits, etc. or by the name of the partner repository. The site is at ajhs.org and then click on Jews in American, Portal to American Jewish History.

JDC's Cyprus Collection Online Lists Holocaust Survivors

Parts of the Cyprus Collection of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, covering the period 1945-1949 have recently become available online. There are letters and reports by JDC and some photographs of life in the detention camps. From 1946 until 1949, the

British confined 53,000 Holocaust survivors on Cyprus.

To access the available parts of the collection, go to <http://archives.jdc.org/about-us/articles/jdc-cyprus-collection-now.html>.

YIVO's "People of a Thousand Towns" Has Pictures of Pre-War Europe

A small proportion of YIVO's Territorial Photographic Collection is on line arranged by the following subjects: departure, Yiddish and Hebrew literature (portraits of famous writers such as Sholem Asch, Isaac Leib Peretz, I.J. Singer, Chaim Nachman Bialik and others), women in communal life, formal photographic studies, and Jewish holidays. The pictures show the Jewish world from 1900 to 1937. Although the collection contains only about 100 pictures, one can discern much from the changes in clothing, especially after World War I.

"Guide to the YIVO Archives" Is Now Online

The useful compendium of what is in the YIVO archives is now online at www.yivoarchives.org. Every listing includes a clear description of the contents. However, to view the contents, one must visit the Center for Jewish History Library at 15 West 16th Street, Monday through Thursday. To view materials on a Sunday, one must submit a list by Thursday. The hours of YIVO are available online at www.yivoinstitute.org and then look for "Visitor Information". ☆

New Publications

continued from page 26

Besides discussing great historic moments like the revolution of 1848 and World War I, Elon also dissected the controversies raging within individual families. These also make for fascinating reading, such as that of the family of the businessman Arthur Sholem, each of those three sons espoused a very different lifestyle. Reinhard was a right-wing German nationalist; Werner a Communist; and Gerhard (aka Gershom) was a Jewish anti-war activist anxious to strengthen his ties to Judaism, who later became a leading kabbalist.

The Pity of It All has the hallmarks of a historical study (including ample end-notes), combined with a

great storyteller's endless supply of anecdotes. It also features many historic photos and etchings drawn from the Jerusalem branch of the Leo Baeck Institute. Elon's book is also a lament – a clear expression of regret that, after all the Jewish struggles to gain acceptance into the fabric of German life, everything was shattered with the nightmare that began in 1933 with Hitler's ascent to power. This is an informative and entertaining book.

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

New, Recent, and Noteworthy Publications

About Recovering a Sephardic Past

Doreen Carvajal, *The Forgetting River: A Modern Tale of Survival, Identity and the Inquisition*.

New York: Penguin Group, USA, 2012. 320 pages. \$26.95 hardcover, \$12.98 paperback

From the publisher: “The unexpected and moving story of an American journalist who works to uncover her family’s long buried Jewish ancestry in Spain. Carvajal travels to the south of Spain, to the centuries old Andalusian town of Arcos de la Frontera to investigate her lineage and recover her family’s original religious heritage. She comes to realize that fear remains a legacy of the Inquisition along with the cryptic messages left by its victims. As she tries to find proof that her family had been forced to convert to Christianity six hundred years ago. Carvajal comes to understand that the past flows like a river through time – and that while the truth may be submerged, it is never truly lost.”

About Jewish Life in Eastern Europe

Jonathan Dekel-Chen, David Gaunt, Natan M. Meier and Israel Bartal, editors, *Anti-Jewish Violence: Rethinking the Pogroms in East European History*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010.

240 pages. \$34.95

From the publisher: “Although overshadowed in historical memory by the Holocaust, the anti-Jewish pogroms of the late 19th and early 20th centuries were at the time unrivaled episodes of ethnic violence. Incorporating newly available primary sources, this collection of groundbreaking essays by researchers from Europe, the United States and Israel investigates the phenomenon of anti-Jewish violence, the local and transnational responses to pogroms, and the instances where violence was averted. Focusing on the period from World War I through Russia’s early revolutionary years, the studies include Poland, Ukraine, Belorussia, Lithuania, Crimea and Siberia.”

Robert Belenky, *Collective Memories of a Lost Paradise: Jewish Agricultural Settlements in Ukraine during the 1920s and 1930s*. Hanover, N.H.: Maddoggeral Publications, 80 Lyme Road, Apt. 105, Hanover, NH 03755. 2012. 135 pages. \$14.95

From the Kirkus Reviews: “An oral history comprised of interviews with members of Ukrainian collective farms organized after the Bolshevik Revolution.

Belenky explores a little known corner of history, traveling to Ukraine to record the memories of elderly men and women, who were the children of the *kolkhoz* movement – a push toward collective farms fueled by revolutionary fervor and encouraged for a time by the Soviet state. The interviewees tell stories of peaceful lives on farms and friendships that cut across ethnic and religious boundaries, which were shattered in 1941 when the Nazis swept into Ukraine. These Ukrainian Jews are among the relative few who lived through the war. The author has a personal stake in the story as his father worked with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a philanthropic organization that sent experts to Ukraine in the 1920s to educate people on farming techniques. Belenky has delivered a truly engaging work and a remarkable history of the *kolkhoz* people of wartime Ukraine.” (See the Claus Hirsch’s page 1 article on the history and demise of Agro-Joint.)

About Post World II Reconstruction

Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe’s Families After World War II*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011. 320 pages. \$35.00

From the publisher: “During the Second World War, an unprecedented number of families were torn apart. As the Nazi empire crumbled, millions roamed the continent in search of their loved ones. *The Lost Children* tells the story of these families, and of the struggle to determine their fate. We see how the reconstruction of families quickly became synonymous with the survival of European civilization itself.”

A reviewer wrote: “Zahra deftly draws important lessons about conceptions of childhood and nationality from the way international organizations, individual countries, and families themselves sought to rebuild shattered lives. An essential contribution to our understanding of a refashioned postwar world.”

About Jewish Life in Germany

Robert Liberles, *Jews Welcome Coffee: Tradition & Innovation in Early Modern Germany*. Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press (Tauber Institute for the Study of European Jewry), 2012, 190 pages, paperback. \$35

From the publisher: "Tracing the introduction of coffee into Europe, Robert Liberles challenges long-held assumptions about early modern Jewish history and shows how the Jews harnessed an innovation that enriched their personal, religious, social and economic lives. Focusing on Jewish society in Germany in the 17th and 18th centuries, and using coffee as a key to understanding social change, Liberles analyzes Germany rabbinic rulings on coffee, Jewish consumption patterns, the commercial importance of coffee for various social strata, differences based on gender, and the efforts of German authorities to restrict Jewish trade in coffee, as well as the integration of Jews into society." A reviewer wrote, "This book shows how a single edible can be treated as a lens for historical research, proving that ideas alone do not change history, sometimes food does."

Elon, Amos. *The Pity of It All: a Portrait of the German-Jewish Epoch, 1743-1933*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 2003. 446 pages. \$15.00.

Reviewed by Claus W. Hirsch

Note: Although the following book was not published recently, it offers genealogists a useful introduction to the German past, which will enable them to understand the lives of their ancestors. To quote Valery Bazarov (*Dorot, Summer 2012, page 24*, "Genealogy without history is an empty, empty place.")

Jewish life in Germany began in the early fourth century, according to authoritative sources. Specifically, the Jewish presence is dated to 321 C.E., when a Jewish settlement was established in Cologne on the Rhine River. However, author Amos Elon begins his story of German-Jewish history some fourteen centuries later. Using a novelist's device he begins his story of Jewish emancipation with the entrance into Berlin by a poor boy, Moses Mendelssohn, in 1743. He entered through the Rosenthaler Tor – "The only gate in the city wall through which Jews (and cattle) were allowed to pass." Elon tells us that Mendelssohn had walked some one hundred miles for five or six days from his home in Dessau-Anhalt and that he was frail, sickly and small for his age. And he had a stutter. Yet from such humble and weak beginnings he rose to fame and won acceptance among the educated elite and established figures of his country

By dint of native intelligence and prodigious study habits – and with the friendship of some well placed intellectuals – Mendelssohn achieved considerable

fame. And his own advancement helped ease the way for other Jewish men and women to reach success in German society and the country's economy over a period covering nearly 200 years, following his inauspicious start.

We really should use the past tense in talking about Amos Elon, because he died in 2009 at age 82. An obituary, which appeared in the British *Guardian*, noted that he was born in Vienna in 1926 and that he was only seven years old when his family emigrated to Palestine in 1933. But his father maintained a large personal library of German language books, and German was spoken at home. It was evident that Elon (born Sternbach) was comfortable with German, as evidenced by the many German sources cited in his footnotes. And it is this background which gave Elon an edge and his book a rich texture, as the story he told benefited from the often obscure details included in his narrative.

Elon dwelled at length on Moses Mendelssohn's Jewish education, his friendship with leading lights of German academia, and also spoke of the fact that his heirs turned away from their roots. As is well known, Moses' grandson, the noted composer, Felix Mendelssohn, was eventually baptized. But as Elon proved, many Jews who converted never met with the success and acceptance they thought would be theirs upon changing religions.

The book is filled with interesting tales about the Jewish luminaries, who inhabited Germany and Austria – names like Gerson Bleichroder, banker to the "Iron Chancellor" Bismarck; Berthold Auerbach author of sentimental tales of German peasants; the Liberal Party member Eduard Lasker; Walter Rathenau, the industrialist and later Foreign Minister of the Weimar Republic; Ludwig Bamberger, the economist and member of the German Parliament; and the scientist Ludwig Borne, who, like Heinrich Heine, was baptized but remained a Jew.

There are also fascinating stories about the women who began "salons," which brought some leading gentile intellectuals of the nineteenth century into contact with Jewish burghers, who sought social acceptance and stimulating discussions. Perhaps none of these is as revealing as Elon's discussion of the *saloniere* named Rahel Varnhagen. Elon describes her lovers (both aristocratic and common) and even what she served at her gatherings (pretzels and weak tea).

continued on page 24

QUESTIONING THE EXPERTS

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

Interview with Joy Kestenbaum, Member of the JGS Executive Council

DOROT: Let's start with you and genealogy. How did you meet?

KESTENBAUM: I can't say that I started a particular number of years ago, because it's been a lifelong interest and has developed in phases. I've become more involved over time and more focused and professional in recent years. I was the youngest in my extended family and just met so many older relatives. When my maternal grandparents celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, I was four years old and there was a big gathering. After my grandfather died, my grandmother moved in and lived with us for 15 years and family came from Canada, England, Argentina and throughout the United States to visit. My grandmother used to tell me about her childhood and early life in Bialystok, where she was born and later became a member of the Bund, and in London, where she married my grandfather. At a young age I knew that her mother was married three times and which cousins were on which line. I inherited many family documents and photographs and, for the most part, have been able to sort out who everyone is and how they were related.

DOROT: During your research, did you have any surprising discoveries – surprising in the way you discovered them?

KESTENBAUM: Well, yes, several. For one, I had learned that a survivor who had been on "Schindler's list" came from Narewka, Poland, a small town where my maternal grandfather was born, and I contacted him a few years ago. During our conversations, he remembered my great-uncles because he used to spend time watching them in their blacksmith shop and, also, realized that his *cheder* teacher, whom he also mentioned in his Shoah Foundation testimony, was

my grandfather's brother-in-law. I had hoped that there might be some connection, but this was a surprise for us both. From talking with him I was able to verify some family stories. [Sadly, this man, Leon Leyson, the youngest survivor on "Schindler's List," died after this interview was held.]



Joy Kestenbaum

Earlier, in the late 1990s, an older cousin who was professionally involved with computers told me that he had found on a web site called JewishGen someone researching our grandfather's surname in Narewka. I knew that it had to be a descendant of one of our grandfather's sisters. So that's what got me started with JewishGen Family Finder. I contacted this person, who was a second cousin once removed and had moved from London to Israel. Through e-mail we jointly put together a family tree. Later, I connected with someone whose great-uncle had married my grandfather's niece, who told me she had some information on my great-grandfather. This other person mailed me a tree that included

information that I had added to the other tree. When I told her that, she said that she received it from the same cousin in Israel with whom she had been in contact.

DOROT: What do you think about that?

KESTENBAUM: At first I was disappointed, for I thought that I'd learn something new. I was also a bit concerned, since the tree on which I had worked had a great deal of detail, including information on living relatives, and I wasn't sure how much information was shared.

DOROT: I guess it's an issue for many people who do genealogy – if you develop a considerable research base, share it with someone and they don't see a problem in sharing it with the world.

KESTENBAUM: Fortunately, in this case, there wasn't

a problem, but I am concerned about some social media sites, which are always evolving. Several years ago, after a cousin invited me to join a tree on Geni.com, I uploaded photographs, added quite a bit of information, and invited many more second cousins to join. Later, the policy changed and I started noticing that the profiles of some of my older deceased relatives that I had been managing had become public. Also, others added incorrect information. I became more cautious and by that time began to add my research data, images and source information to a genealogy database on my own computer. By then Geni had started charging a yearly fee to join Geni Pro. I couldn't add anything even if I had wanted to because of Geni's profile limits for basic members. Our tree had become quite large and I hadn't paid to upgrade. It will be interesting to see what happens now that MyHeritage has acquired Geni.

DOROT: What parts of the world has your research focused on?

KESTENBAUM: My father's side of the family was from western Galicia, southeastern Poland, and my maternal side from the Grodno gubernia, formerly Russia, in northeastern Poland near the Belarus border. Fortunately, I knew where all my grandparents were born before I started my more serious genealogical quest and have been able to find documents to support this. All my grandparents left Eastern Europe by 1900 for New York or London, and a few relatives had emigrated earlier. My maternal aunt and uncle and at least 17 of my mother's first cousins were born in London. Later, my grandparents again followed their older siblings, first, emigrating to Montreal, where my mother was born, then to Brooklyn, and, before 1920, finally settling in Englewood, New Jersey, where a landsman was living. My research has traced the family in all these countries and locations.

New York, of course, has also been a big component of my research, since my father's family was here since the late nineteenth century. I remember when I moved to Greenwich Village my father told me that his relatives used to live nearby. I discovered that in 1910 his maternal grandmother lived about three blocks from where I live today, and coincidentally, my great-uncles had a business right on my block. My paternal grandfather died before I was born, so I knew less about that side. When my parents traveled to Israel in 1971, they met my father's first cousin, who had gone to Palestine from Poland in the mid-1930s. Several years ago I tried to find her twin sons. Through Family Finder I connected with an Israeli woman who

was related through marriage and had grown up with these second cousins, who, sadly, had both died. She sent me a photograph of my great-uncle's family in Rymanow, Poland, from about 1928 and urged me to attend the first annual commemoration of the Jewish community there, which she had organized with two Polish brothers. I finally went two years later, in 2010, when I spent a month in Poland. Most of that branch of the family perished in the Holocaust, so part of my research has been to find out more about these relatives. Through the Rymanow group I met survivors who knew my family there before the war and were friends with my father's cousins.

DOROT: How much success have you had in finding records that take you further back in that area of the world?

KESTENBAUM: I have not been able to find vital records in Poland for direct ancestors, but I have found records for other relatives that mention great-grandparents and even great great-grandparents. That's why it's so important in genealogy to work sideways, because you can often learn more about your family through siblings and cousins. Since I grew up knowing more about the ancestry of my mother's family, I find it curious that I have been able to go back a generation further on both of my dad's lines. First, I learned as much as I could here, in New York, from immigration, naturalization, marriage, death and census records. Then, when I went to Poland, I obtained an 1870s marriage record from Lvov at AGAD (The Central Archives of Historical Records in Warsaw) that was indexed on JRI-Poland (<http://www.jewishgen.org/jri-pl/>).

The husband was a Kestenbaum who came from the same small town as my grandfather, so I deduced that we were related and that he might have been my great-grandfather's brother. I proceeded to do more research, found that this couple and their children had emigrated to America, and then tracked down some descendants. One agreed to do DNA testing, which indicated we were indeed third cousins, as I had suspected. Another thing that clinched it was when I finally found the gravestone of that groom – that is, my grandfather's uncle – and was able to determine that he, like my grandfather, was a Levite. So, using DNA and circumstantial evidence, I could confirm that my great great-grandparents were the parents named on that Galician marriage record.

More recently, I initiated a Kestenbaum surname project with Family Tree DNA. I should also mention

that about 30 years ago my father gave me a 1931 copy of his mother's birth certificate from Korczynna, Poland, which provided the names of her grandparents, as well as her grandfather's profession. The original record no longer survives.

DOROT: Do you have a strategy to deal with brick walls?

KESTENBAUM: For one, as I said, I research collateral relatives, such as great-aunts, great-uncles, and cousins. I also review documents that I already have to see if there is something I might have overlooked. On Ancestry.com I found a great-aunt's passport application from 1922. Looking at it again online, I discovered that, attached to the application, there was a letter from her father that I had not previously noticed. It was written in beautiful English, obviously a translation and not the original, but it was very moving and the closest I ever got to this great-grandfather. Among other things, he wrote about how he would love for one of his children to come to visit from America. It's so important to be thorough and read the complete document and, when you're looking online at ship manifests, census returns and other records, be sure to click to the following pages.

I'm always searching for clues that can lead me to other resources. After reading an article in *Dorot* published a few years ago, I wrote to the State Department for three 1930s passport applications, one for this same great-aunt and for two great-uncles. I am still waiting for them and it's been over a year and a half.

DOROT: What would you hope to find on those passport applications?

KESTENBAUM: I already know when these relatives were born, first immigrated and were naturalized, but the applications also tell you where they were going and for what purpose. I'd like to be able to determine if either of my paternal great-grandparents was still alive then. Each application was for a different purpose. I gather that my great-aunt was visiting family; one of my father's uncles went to Paris for business and the other to live in Palestine, where he died.

DOROT: You have been involved professionally with library work and research involving architectural history. Has that experience had any application to your genealogical research, perhaps in methodology?

KESTENBAUM: Yes. I've been doing historical research in libraries and archives for some time and

have used a variety of types of records also used in genealogy, such as land, probate, institutional and religious, for my work in architectural history. To develop a study on an historical figure, including artists and architects, especially those on which not much has been published, it may be necessary to undertake some basic genealogical research. In fact my good friend compiled his *Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840-1900*, published by the Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records back in 1980, using business directories.

In the 1990s, as an academic librarian, I began to assist college students and faculty with their research and teach them the use of online resources, so I also have experience searching on the Internet and in databases. I might add that I took a couple of courses on JewishGen and several online courses through the National Institute for Genealogical Studies, which is located in Toronto, and have been studying methodology and research standards for genealogy.

In general, the approach is similar, to define your research questions or thesis and then try to find the answers or evidence, to prove or disprove your theory or a family tradition. Determining your research goals can help guide you to the relevant historical sources. Now that I've already acquired many of the more commonly used sources for my extended family, I have been doing research in various archives and elsewhere on particular individuals of interest to flesh out their story.

Sometimes one has to be creative in finding sources. Through various searches I found out that an uncle's brother-in-law whom I was researching was the brother of Rose Schneiderman, the prominent labor leader. I acquired her autobiography and was able to learn more about his early life and then find some older records. I would not have known any of this because he had changed his name to Taylor.

DOROT: There's an issue for family researchers who have accumulated not only the data, but documents, sometimes the original documents as well as artifacts. So, first of all, are you doing anything to pull together your own family research, and have you given any thought to where these materials should eventually land?

KESTENBAUM: I don't have any children, so I'm going to have to take responsibility at some point and decide what I'm going to do with all my research and how I will share it. After my mother passed away, I did

have contact with a few institutions with collections because I inherited many photographs and some interesting items that I believe should be preserved for their intrinsic value. Those discussions started because I have my mother's wedding dress and *ketubah* and her U.S. Army nurse uniform from the 1940s, as well as her World War II scrapbook and complete army papers. Museums and archives want original material and many of these institutions have posted their guidelines for donations on their website. I have also been in touch with the National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University, which expressed interest in acquiring my family's home movies as part of their collection of stock footage for filmmakers. First I must finish completing a log of the films, which is required.

DOROT: Do you intend to bring all your material together in a narrative of some form?

KESTENBAUM: Eventually I hope to create some kind of compilation, either in print or as a web publication. I've thought about starting a blog, but, for now, that will have to wait. I have been developing chronologies for particular individuals and family lines and have begun writing pieces on a few relatives with interesting stories, for example, my mother's experiences during World War II, an uncle who was a rabbi and a chaplain in the war, their older cousin who became a priest, and their uncle, who was an early Zionist and later helped Russian Jews to settle in Canada. When I returned from Poland I created a ShtetlLinks site, now called KehilaLinks (<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/>), on Narewka, and therefore have also become involved with the history of other families. Another similar project involves my paternal grandfather's town of Krzywca, which, like Narewka, did not have a *yizkor* (memorial) book.

DOROT: Would you discuss your trip to Poland a bit more?

KESTENBAUM: When I came back, people seemed surprised that I went alone. I couldn't find a relative or friend who was interested, but didn't want that to keep me from going. Before I went I did a great deal of planning. I wrote letters to archives ahead of time and those that were closed had copies of the records waiting

for me to pick up. For the month I was there, I prepared an ambitious and customized itinerary that combined a roots trip with a rich cultural and educational travel experience, organized around the commemorative event in Rymanow. I went to the Korczyna USC (Civil Records Office) with someone who lived locally, and later hired an experienced guide who was highly recommended to drive, translate and accompany me in the State Archives in Skolyszyn, Sanok, Przemysl and Bialystok.

To visit the hometowns of all my grandparents, I had to cover a large geographical area in eastern Poland, so we stopped along the way to visit numerous cities and towns, local and regional museums and natural, historic and religious sites, Jewish, Christian and even Tartar-Muslim. I met many Poles involved in the study and preservation of Polish-Jewish history and culture and I'm still in contact with some dedicated individuals from the towns of my ancestors. The trip was tremendously rewarding and to some of my friends it sounded like the trip of a lifetime. However, I intend to return in the future.

DOROT: Thank you.

Joy Kestenbaum is an art and architectural historian and librarian, who served as chair of the New York Metropolitan Chapter of the Art Libraries Society of North America. She was Director of the Gimbel Art, Architecture and Design Library at the New School and has been on faculty of Purchase College, SUNY, Queens College CUNY, Pratt Institute, and the New York Institute of Technology. She has been the consulting historian for numerous award-winning preservation projects and has lectured widely on Jewish architects and synagogue architecture. Currently she serves on the JGS Executive Council. She is the creator and site owner of JewishGen's Narewka KehilaLinks web pages and has been working on a site on Krzywca, the towns where her grandfathers were born. In addition to pursuing her family history, she provides clients with genealogical, historical and archival consulting services. She has an M.S. and Certificate in Archival Management from the Palmer School of Library and Information Science, Long Island University, and an M.A. from the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University.



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