

שם טוב

SHEM TOV

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA (TORONTO)

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The Jews Of Toronto

The following article is an excerpt from the Toronto Mail and Empire of 25 September 1897 and is part of a larger series entitled "Foreigners who live in Toronto." The anonymous writer has been identified as the late W. L. Mackenzie King (Prime Minister of Canada from 1921 to 1930 and from 1935 to 1948). In 1897 he was a recent graduate of the University of Toronto and practicing journalism in the summer intervals of his graduate studies at Chicago and Harvard Universities. The article was republished by the Canadian Jewish Congress Central Region in 1958.

The Jewish Population

Next to the Germans the Jews constitute the largest foreign population in Toronto. As is generally known, the Jews of this generation come from almost every quarter of the earth save Jerusalem, and there are accordingly Jews of many nationalities represented in Toronto. Of these the Russian and Polish are the most numerous; then there are many from Galicia, a number of German Jews, and a small minority of English. The total Jewish population is in the neighbourhood of 2,500, of which the Polish and Russian Jews constitute about three-fifths. There are from four to five hundred German Jews and from two to three hundred English. Forty years ago there was in Toronto a mere handful all told. Recent accessions have come mainly from Russia, Poland, and Galicia, in consequence of the persecutions to which the Jews were subjected in those countries. In many cases they were denied the right to possess property, the right to education, and even of residence itself outside of restricted areas. Whilst many have come direct from the

continent of Europe, others have come here from the United States. The English Jews are the oldest residents, and, together with the German Jews, have been the most intelligent and prosperous of their race. It was chiefly the desire for commercial advancement that led to their coming here. Of the English and German Jews it may be said that at least 25 or 20 have gained more than ordinary prominence in commercial life and some of the best business concerns have been managed by them for a good time past. The majority, however, whilst they are engaged in mercantile pursuits, have not attained yet positions of much importance. A large number are occupied in the clothing trade, the manufacture and sale of jewellery and watches, diamond cutting, the hardware business, and the manufacture and sale of boots and shoes. Almost all the second-hand clothing stores and junk shops in Toronto are owned by Jews, but the total

(Continued on page 2)

In This Issue

The Jews of Toronto	1
From Our Meetings - Part I	5
Rothschild Family Tree	6
Assessment Records: A Little Used Genealogical Source	8
Little Bits	11
From Our Meetings - Part II	12

(Continued from page 1)

number of these does not exceed 58. Owing, however, to a peculiarity in the city by-law which requires all such establishments to be licensed, the words "goods, wares, and merchandise," as applied to second-hand stores, do not include goods purchased at public auctions, bones, bottles, waste paper, pianos, sewing machines, or rags, and these articles, with the possible exception of pianos and sewing machines, and the addition of old iron, are precisely which a large number of Polish and Russian Jews are busied in collecting and selling from one year's end to the other. The number of Jewish peddlers who go about the city and out among the farmers in the country is fairly large, and the quantities of old rubbish they collect and utilize is something amazing. Almost the entire rag and scrap iron trade is carried on by Jews, and of the eight pawn shops in Toronto they are the owners of four. Very few are engaged in the manufacturing industries, but a good many are contractors for the manufacture of ready-made clothing, and some have tailoring establishments of their own.

Relative Positions

The Jews are scattered over all parts of the city, but

there is a decided tendency towards grouping amongst the poorer members. York Street is distinctively the "Petticoat lane" of Toronto, and the south side of Queen for some blocks is not very different from it. It is in the lower part of St. John's Ward that the largest number of Polish and Russian Jews have congregated. Many of them live in rear cottages, and after school hours the streets are filled with their children. No matter how poor, they manage as a rule to save a little; in most cases the amount is small, but it is generally a definite percentage of what they earn. The majority hoard their earnings, but many deposit in the banks of the city. They have been unable as yet to accumulate much property, though among the wealthy English and German Jews the holdings are considerable. A large number of Jews come here without their families; when they have saved enough they send for them, and in this way their numbers have had a steady increase for some time past. The greatest disadvantage to the Russian and Polish Jews is their almost entire unfamiliarity with the English tongue, and the greatest difficulty they find in gaining any mastery of it. In the days of their persecutions amongst other sufferings many of them were deprived of the right of obtaining an education, and the result is that even their own language is to them of little service save as

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Contributions are invited. Submit material c/o The Editor, P.O. Box 446, Station A, North York, Ontario, Canada M2N 5T1.

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada was founded in 1985 and currently has about 150 members. Membership costs \$30 per calendar year, \$20 for persons living beyond both Metro Toronto and its adjacent suburbs. Meetings are held September to June, usually on the last Wednesday of each month at 8:00 p.m. (doors open at 7:30) at Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue, 470 Glencairn Avenue, Toronto (unless announced otherwise). Guests are always welcome. Details are usually printed in the *Canadian Jewish News*.

The goals of the Society are to provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and information through meetings, outings, workshops and guest lecturers, and thereby to promote an awareness of genealogy within the Jewish community of Canada. The Society is affiliated with the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto and is registered as a non-profit charitable organization.

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(Continued from page 2)

a medium of immediate conversation. Education is such a novelty to the Russian and Polish Jews that they are anxious for their children to gain the advantages of it. Accordingly the latter are sent regularly to the Public Schools, and are kept at their books at a considerable sacrifice to their parents. On the other hand, the language of their fathers is little used among them and promises soon to be forgotten. Quite different it is in the case of the German Jew, who has received a good training at home. He is careful to have his children taught the German language as well as the English, and he himself can turn it to great advantage. Education could have no more practical example of its unparalleled service to mankind than is to be found in a comparison of the Russian and Polish Jews with the English and German Jews of this city. It is not in any inferiority of the intellect of the one class compared with that of the other, nor in the habits of thrift and economy which are characteristic of both, that the difference in their present position lies; it is almost entirely the lack of any proper educational training in the case of the latter that their relative positions are defined. It is surely not an unfair inference to draw that, taking advantage as they are of the schools of this city, the younger generation of Jews will prove to be better than their fathers before them.

In this connection the words of Mr. Alfred D. Benjamin at the recent opening of the Jewish synagogue cannot be taken too seriously by those interested in the welfare of the city at large. "It were, therefore," he said, after speaking of the efforts to Anglicize the Jews and make them proud of the privileges they enjoy in this Dominion, "it were, therefore, a thousand pities if, in consequence of the introduction of doctrinal teaching into the public schools, as has been suggested should be done, the Jewish children should be driven thence, and we, as a body, forced, in self-defence, to demand Jewish schools. We emphatically contend that the erection of such an insurmountable barrier between creed and creed would be little less than a public calamity."

Their Religious Zeal

What has been accomplished in the cause of their religion is already too well known to need comment here.

The new synagogue on Bond Street so impressively dedicated a short time ago is an edifice which testifies more forcibly than words to the religious zeal of the Jewish people and to the place which they hold in the community today. While it is unquestionably one of the finest structures in Toronto, it is also one of the few of the many churches in the city which are without a cent of debt. Services are held there during the morning and afternoon of every day in the week, in addition to the regular services on Saturday. A feature of importance to be noted is that the services are conducted in English. Instruction is given in Hebrew and Jewish History to the children on Saturday and Sunday. The old synagogue was on Richmond street, and there is another at the corner of Elm street and University avenue, though the congregation who worship there have not an ordained Rabbi. The Jewish Sunday coming on the busiest days of the week has pressed hardly upon some of the poorer Jews. In their efforts to work five days and live seven, they have felt the squeeze between the pressure of vigorous religious convictions and the necessary satisfaction of economic needs, but the fidelity with which most of them comply with the demands of their faith is, to say the least, heroic.

Social Characteristics

Their families are usually large, and the houses of the poor are invariably small, but it is seldom, if ever, that two families are found living in the same house, or that sickness prevails among them. Here, again, religion has operated to affect their material condition. The "unclean thing" is rejected by the Jew, and even to the poorest among them the custom of keeping separate sets of dishes in the "milky" cupboard and the "fleshy" cupboard, is rigorously maintained. Moreover, the Jews are a very abstemious people. It is a great rarity to see a Jew the worse of liquor. They do not frequent saloons, but when they drink have the beer brought to their houses, where it is shared by men, women and children alike. There are practically no criminals among them, and it is only when they quarrel among themselves that they give trouble to the police. Very few of them are in a destitute condition, and it is seldom that they apply for relief outside their own members. They have in Toronto two benevolent societies,

(Continued on page 4)

(Continued from page 3)

the one the Toronto Hebrew Benevolent Society, which receives an annual grant of \$150 from the city; and the Montefiore Ladies' Hebrew Benevolent Society. These two societies do practically all the relief work among the Jews, and their efforts are called for mostly in the case of new families who have been in the city but a short time. Many Jews are members of the local benevolent societies, the Masons, Oddfellows, Foresters, Knights of Pythias, and the Maccabees. A short time ago an effort was made to establish a Jewish theatre on the corner of York and Richmond Streets, and a troupe of Jewish artists came here from the United States to run for a season. The older Jews, however, did not take much interest in the venture, and the younger did not appreciate Jewish wit or understand the jokes and allusions intended for an older generation. After a few performances the doors were closed.

Most of the older Jewish residents have become naturalized, but it cannot be said that they take a very active interest in politics, although they avail themselves of the franchise. Hardly any Jews are in the employ of the city; there is, however, one of their number a letter carrier in the Post-Office Department. Very few of the men are members of trade unions, chiefly because there are few unions in the trades which they follow. On the other hand, some of the most zealous advocates of unionism are Jews, and in the garment trades one of their number in particular has been unceasing in his efforts to benefit the conditions of his fellow-workers.

Increasing in Number

The Jews, on the whole, are exceedingly pleased with the liberties which they enjoy in this country. This is evidenced by the manner in which they frequently send home for their wives and families after living here a time. During the last five and six years a large number have sold what little property they may have possessed in other lands, and brought their families here. In this way their numbers have received a continuous increase, and there is every reason to expect that the increase will continue. There are in Toronto at the present time a large number of Jews who are waiting till they accumulate enough to send for their families, and it is a fact that over a dozen families are at present on their way here. An increase from the United

States is also to be looked for in the future, as in the past. It being certain that the numbers will thus increase, both from the European continent and the United States, the city cannot be too active in watching this growth, and by careful measures turn it to the advantage of the community at large. The only immediate policy which seems practicable to adopt is to check as far as possible the tendency to group, or the formation of a foreign section, in any part of the city. Only by spreading these foreign elements are they likely to become adapted to the new surroundings and properly assimilated with the general community. ☆

Index To Genealogy Publications

Persi, the PERiodical Source Index

PERSI, the PERiodical Source Index, indexes articles in over 2,000 genealogical publications by locality and family name. There are two indexes, one for publications from 1847 to 1985, and one from 1986 to date. Each entry provides the topic, the name of the article, and the name, volume, number, month and year of the journal.

Published by the Allen County (Indiana) Public Library Foundation, PERSI is available on microfiche through the Family History Library and in hard copy in many genealogy reference collections.

Now Persi can also be accessed by computer modem for the cost of a phone call. Dial (219) 424-1330 Monday to Thursday, 9 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday, 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.; and Sunday, 1 to 6 p.m.

Most of the periodicals cited in PERSI are available from the FHL on microfilm or via a photoduplication order. The Allen County Public Library, P.O. Box 2270, Ft. Wayne, IN 46801, will also copy articles for \$.20 US per page plus a \$3 US handling fee.

Lineage, JGS of Long Island via Roots-Key, Spring 1996.

From Our Meetings - Part I Holocaust Research in Berdichev, Ukraine

by Karen Fejer

"Near this site in September 1941 Hitlerite invaders brutally tortured and shot to death 18,640 peaceful Soviet citizens. May the Memory of these Victims of Fascism Live Forever." Inscription on a monument in Berdichev, Ukraine.

Uncovering the secrets of the Holocaust in the Soviet Union has become a mission of truth for researchers John and Carol Garrard. In a lecture to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada in April, the Garrards told a horrifying story about the Nazi instigated round-up and subsequent murder of Jews in Russian held territory during World War II. The evidence on this has been largely hidden away for fifty years, suppressed by the Soviet regime. Only now is it possible to gain access to archival material on this period.

It was while they were researching a book on Soviet writers that the Tucson, Arizona based co-authors (he is a professor of Russian literature at the University of Arizona) first became aware of German wartime atrocities in the former Soviet Union.

What happened to the Jews of the town of Berdichev is described in their recently published book, "The Bones of Berdichev, The Life and Fate of Vasily Grossman."

Grossman, a Russian Jewish wartime correspondent, covered the Eastern front with the Red Army. He was the first to chronicle the savagery of the Nazi extermination campaign against the Jews in the USSR and interviewed eye witnesses to the murder of the Jews of Berdichev. Ironically, Grossman discovered that his mother was among the victims of the massacre there, something that would haunt him for the rest of his life.

Berdichev, a town located west of Kiev in the Ukraine, had a population of 60,000, half of whom were Jewish. It was an important centre of Jewish culture and religion and this is why the Germans chose it as a test site for their plans to annihilate the Jewish population.

Cautioning the audience that they would leave out details of the most horrific atrocities, the Garrards described how in September 1941, the Nazis and their

henchmen, the Ukrainian Polizei, savagely murdered, raped and in some cases buried alive the Jewish inhabitants of the town of Berdichev, an estimated 30,000 people. The exact figures are unknown. The inscription on the monument at one of the massacre sites does not mention that the so-called "peaceful Soviet citizens" were in fact Jewish.

Information on the atrocities in Berdichev was documented in 1944 in the government's Extraordinary Commission on Nazi Atrocities and kept in restricted archives. It was only released after the collapse of the USSR. Carol and John Garrard, who are not Jewish, have taken it upon themselves to continue working to uncover the truth about the fate of Soviet Jewry. They feel it is a disgrace that Soviet authorities have kept it concealed these many long years. ☆

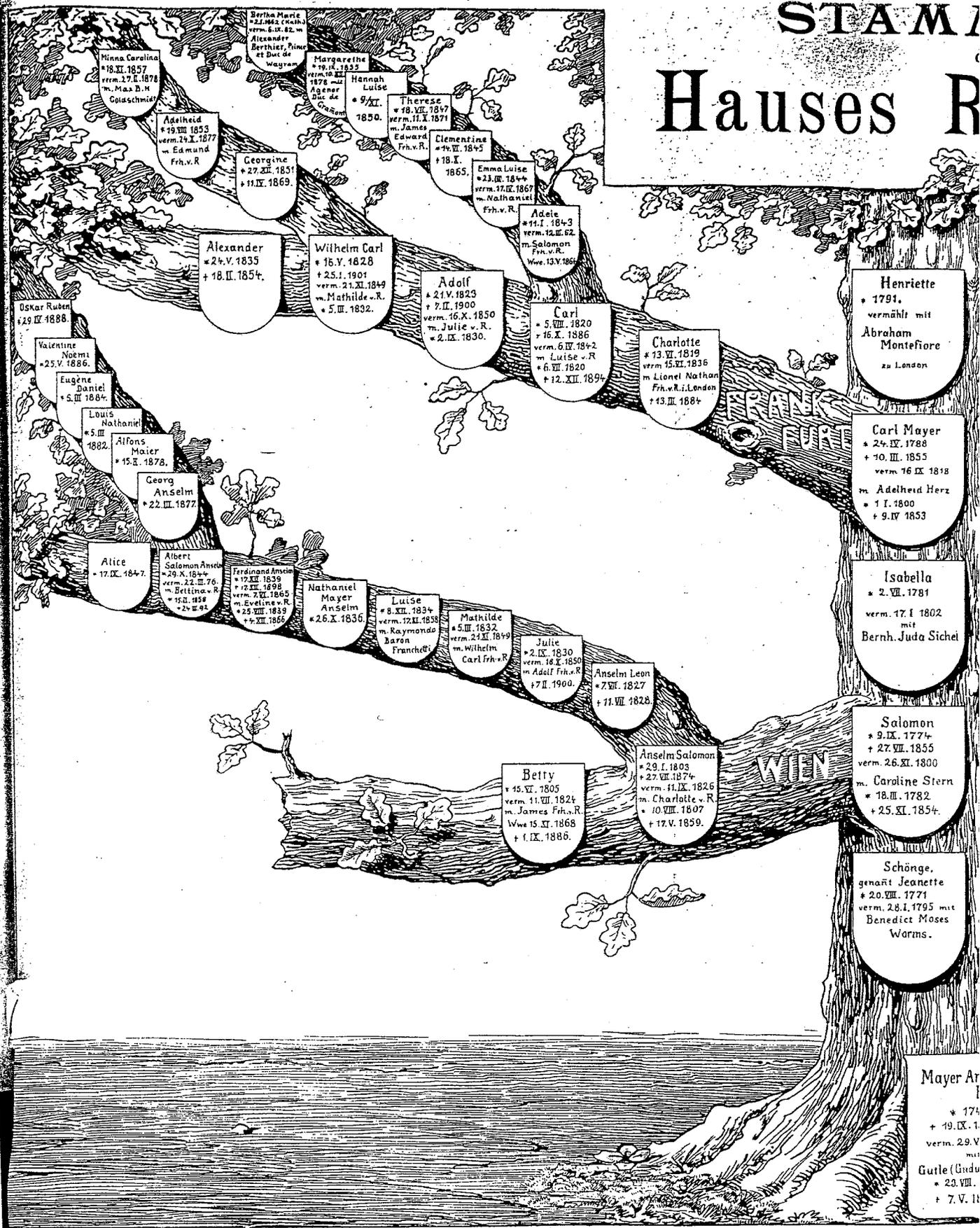
ADVERTISING RATES

SHEM TOV is now accepting display advertising for publication. Advertisers are requested to supply camera-ready art and payment by August 1996 for the Fall issue. Please indicate how many insertions you would like. As the chart indicates our basic rate is discounted for advertisements placed in four consecutive issues (one year) instead of a single issue only. By placing an ad in SHEM TOV, you are reaching a growing number of readers in Toronto, across Canada and internationally, and helping to support a unique and vital journal.

	One Issue	Four Issues (1 year)
Full Page	\$60	\$200
Half Page	\$30	\$100
Quarter Page	\$18	\$ 60
Eighth Page	\$10	\$ 32

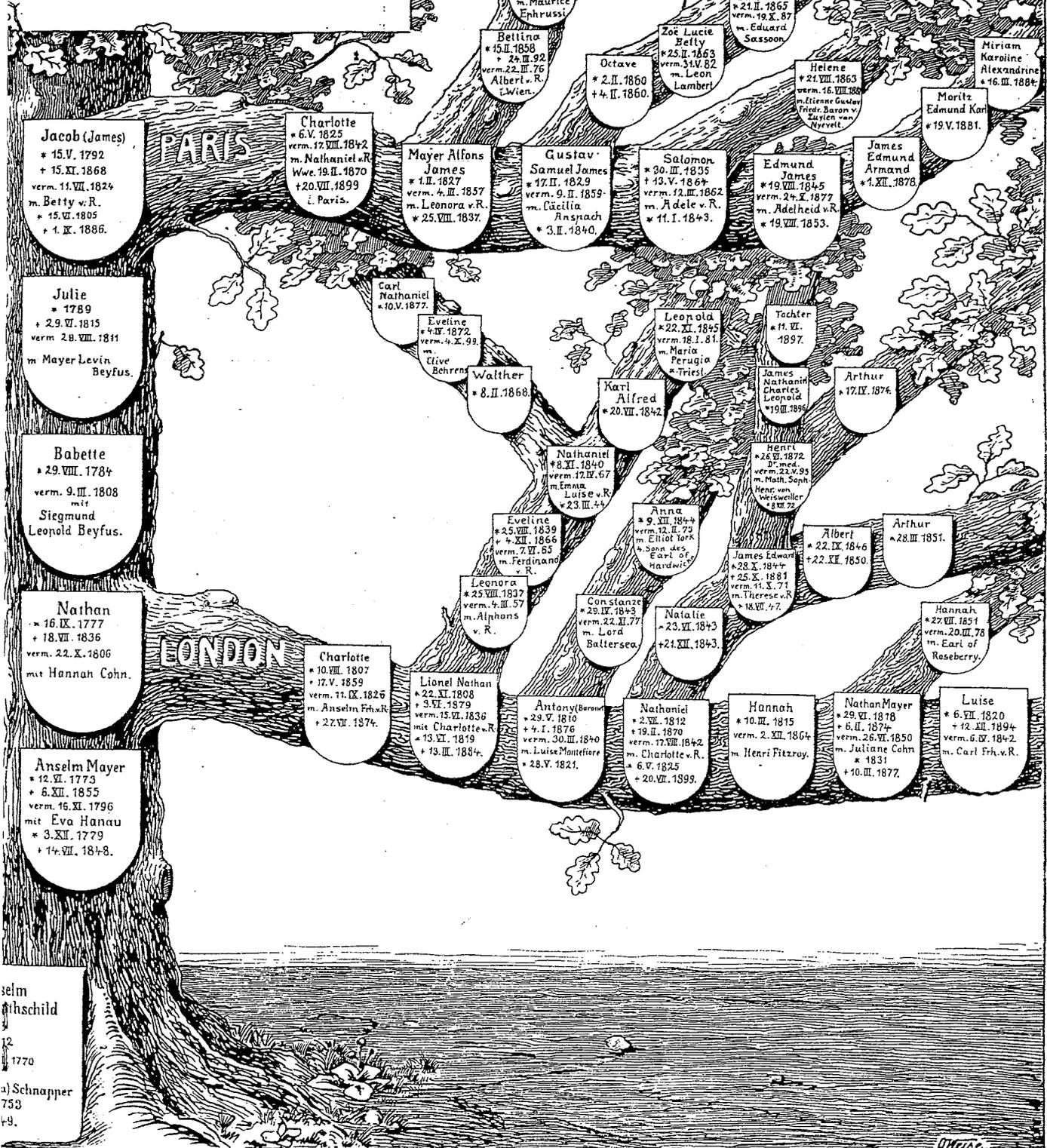
Search ads are also available. Rates are \$5 for the first 25 words and 25¢ per word thereafter, your name and address are free. Please write advertisement clearly with family surnames you are researching in UPPER CASE letters. Make your cheque payable to Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) and mail to : JGS of Canada (Toronto), P.O. Box 446, Station A, Willowdale, Ontario M2N 5T1.

STAMM Hauses R



FROM: BERUHMTE ISRAELITISCHE MANNER UND FRAUEN
(FAMOUS ISRAELITE MEN AND WOMEN IN THE HISTORY OF
LEIPZIG)

BAUM othschild.



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N IN DER KULTURGESCHICHTE DER MENSCHHEIT
(RY OF CIVILIZATION OF HUMANITY) BY ADOLPH KOHUT.
ZIG, 1901

Assessment Records: A Little Used Genealogical Source

By Glen Eker

Assessment records are a little used potentially valuable source of genealogical information. They can provide important facts about a property owner and a property. An assessment is a levy placed upon a property to defray the cost of a specific improvement or service, such as garbage collection or sewer installation. It may also mean the value put upon the property for the purpose of computing the real-estate tax. An assessment can be seen to represent user fees that will help pay for public services. Assessment records establish land or property values and how much the owners have to pay.

Assessment records are the property of local governments and can usually be found in government offices and in some cases in public libraries or archives. For example, City of Toronto assessment records can be found in both the Assessment Office and the City of Toronto Archives at the lower level of Toronto City Hall at Bay and Queen Streets. The Assessment Office has records from 1918 to the present while the archives have pre-1918 records dating back to the 1830s. All records are on microfilm reels. City of North York as well as the records of other municipalities can be found at their respective city halls. The Canadiana Room of the North York Central Library at 5120 Yonge Street, North York and the Archives of Ontario at 77 Grenville Street, Toronto both have on microfilm reels assessment records of selected cities, towns, and villages throughout Ontario.

The type of information found in assessment records may differ from place to place. They usually however provide some basic information about the property owner and his family and the property itself. The information found in City of Toronto assessment records can differ from year to year or from decade to decade, depending what is asked. For example, records prior to the early 1940s asked for year of birth.

The typical information found in City of Toronto assessment records may include the following:

- (a) name of tenant and occupation
- (b) religion
- (c) age or year of birth

- (d) name and address of owner or lessee
- (e) tax ledger number
- (f) street or lot number
- (g) name of street
- (h) size of lot
- (i) actual land value
- (j) building value
- (k) number of residents
- (l) number of dogs
- (m) British Subject or Alien
- (n) persons not designated as British Subjects
- (o) public school or private school supporter
- (p) number of children in certain age categories
- (q) other questions relating to the monetary value of the property

Assessment records allow the genealogist to obtain some basic genealogical information about the tenant and/or property owner and his or her family as well as a description of the property and its value. They also allow the genealogist to obtain some basic facts about neighbours and their property. Thus a general description of a neighbourhood in terms of the type of people who live there and the type of residences they live in can be made.

Assessment records are particularly valuable in that they can allow the genealogist to trace an individual's or a family's residential pattern over a period of time as well as changes that have occurred in the neighbourhood or neighbourhoods in which they lived. This can often be an indication of an individual's or a family's upward or downward mobility within society and thus an indication of success or failure occupationally. Changes in the type of people or properties in a neighbourhood provide a look at a neighbourhood's development over a period of time. Thus assessment records are important for the genealogist who seeks to bring his or her research on individuals or families within the context of the urban development in which they lived.

The following is an example of information extracted from the 1942 assessment records of my grandparents Benjamin and Bella Eker:

(Continued on page 9)

(Continued from page 8)

Name of Tenant and Occupation	Religion	Year of Birth
Benjamin Eker Ins Agt.	J	96
Name and Address of Owner or Lessee	Tax Ledger No.	
Bella Eker 15 Dewson St.	509,659	
Street or Lot No.	Size of Lot	
Name of Street	34'6" 94'3" W Lot Cor	
15 Dewson St.	Narrows to 10'5"	
Land Actual Value	Building Value	
1,035	50	
	3,200	
Number of Residents	Number of Dogs	
7	1	

The seven residents in the house would be my grandparents and their four children as well as my grandfather's brother Morris Eker from Glace Bay, Nova Scotia. The records show that this was the only year he resided with the family. The dog would be Peter, a German shepherd who my grandfather brought home one day. The records show that this was the only year the dog resided with the family. ☆

Glen Eker, a veteran member of our society has published a number of articles on Canadian Jewry in SHEM TOV.

L'viv And Kiev Records Being Filmed

The Mormons have begun the filming of the L'viv and Kiev, Ukraine, records. Starting point is the 30,000 volume collection of Jewish records, covering not only Galicia, but a large part of the Jewish Pale of Settlement in Russia. It will be a year or more before the films are included in the FHL catalogue.

*Polish GS of America via Roots-Key
JGS of LA, Spring 1996.*

Getting Results By Mail

There are ways to enhance the quality of genealogical research conducted by mail. Whether corresponding with institutions, genealogists, or research sources, follow these simple rules for success.

1. Take your correspondence seriously. Write a professional looking letter that demands attention.
2. Do your homework. Find out everything you can about the institution you are writing to.
3. Don't expect the staff to do research for you. They don't have the time, training or inclination (unless you know for sure they will do it for a fee).
4. Use the complete, accurate address of the institution or person to whom you are writing.
5. Make one initial request and make it as simple as possible. Explain what you need briefly and specifically. Don't clutter your letter with family information they don't need to know.
6. When asking for information about a specific person, give the person's name, locality and the time period from which the information is sought.
7. Enclose a self-addressed stamped envelope (SASE). When writing to a foreign country enclose an international postal reply coupon. To the US enclose a 1\$ US bill.
8. Offer to pay for copies and labor whenever no fee has been quoted.
9. Include your complete name and complete, accurate address on the letter as well as the envelope.
10. Date and make copies of all correspondence.
11. Send thank you notes for all responses to correspondence.

*Church of Latter Day Saints via
the Cleveland Kol, October, 1995*

Upcoming Events

Wednesday, June 26, 1996, 7³⁰ pm
at the Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue
Annual General Meeting and Program:

BREAKTHROUGHS OF THE PAST YEAR

We wish you a pleasant summer. Please watch the "What's New" column in the *Canadian News* for date and program of our September meetings.

Leo Baeck Institute To Expand Genealogical Services

The Leo Baeck Institute in New York City has announced the development of **Users Guide for Genealogical Researchers**, which will include all necessary information on family and community names in the LBI Archives, as well as names of professional researchers in the United States, Germany, and Austria. They will also be expanding computer access to the Institute's Special Collections to expedite research, and adding new family histories to the computer base as they become available. LBI plans to provide researchers with previously unavailable indexes from the former East German Archives. They are encouraging genealogists to submit their own research even if still in progress.

Leo Baeck Institute, 129 East 73rd Street, New York, NY 10021. Tel. (212) 744-6400

Mishpacha, JGS of Greater Washington
via Roots-Key, Spring 1996

We Welcome These New Members To Our Society

Lori Barsky	David Birnbaum	Michael Charles
Robin Conway	Shirley Conway	Mindy Finkelstein
Shana Ginzburg	Leonard P. Green	Mel Groper
Stephanie Hall	Arlene Himmel	Michael Kelemen
Albert J. Kirshen	Andrea Lobel	Lucy Sadowski

Dr. Harold Silver

Les Train

Jewish Vital Records from Belarus on Microfilm

Microfilms of Jewish records from Belarus are beginning to show up at the LDS Family History Library (FHL). *Avotaynu* printed a list of the cities/towns contained in the first batch of records in its Winter 1994 issue. JGS of Los Angeles member Gayle Riley obtained a list of the microfilm numbers shortly thereafter. These film numbers appear in the February 1995 microfiche edition of the FHL catalog. For convenience, they are listed below.

There may appear to be overlapping dates on different films, but this is misleading. The description of each film's contents has been simplified for this list. Most films include records for scattered years — the births, deaths and marriages for similar ranges of years may appear on different films. (For example, the film 1 may have births from 1860, marriages from 1870 to 1880, and deaths from 1865 to 1890. Film 2 may have births from 1865 to 1880, marriages from 1881 to 1890, and deaths from 1860. Each film would get the simplified description of BMD 1860/1890 even though the records are different). Thus some of the descriptions of consecutive films may appear to contain duplicate records, but they do not. For full details about the contents of a film, see its entry in the FHL catalogue, Locality section, under the heading: "BELARUS, [Town] - JEWISH RECORDS".

The LDS have also microfilmed nine reels of "Revizkie Skazki" (Revision Lists) in Minsk. These are census records which were created by the Minsk gubernia Financial Office for taxation purposes.

Pinsk district (now part of Brest oblast):
1850 1,792,212-213

Slutsk district (now part of Minsk oblast):
1863-1865 1,792,205-206
1874 1,792,209-210

Borisov district (now parts of Minsk and Vitebsk oblasts):
1834 1,792,208-209
1874 1,792,206-208

Minsk district (now part of Minsk oblast):
1857-1858 1,792,209-211

Jewishgen infofile originally posted by Ted Gostin, with additions by Warren Blatt.

Mass-Pocha, Fall 1995

Little Bits

Hmm...

Although my sister Olga and I have been able to go back to our great-great-grandfather on my father's side, we've run into a snag with our maternal grandparents, Beryl and Ethel Markus Shapiro.

Question:

Could Peshy Shapiro have been Shlomo Shapiro's sister, as you surmised, then married Reb Aryeh Leib Hurwitz and was mother of Marks Hurwitz and siblings? Then, as a widow, married Abram Markus and was mother of Ethel?

Lily

Answer:

Maybe Peshy married Shlomo Shapiro first and then had Beryl and Eliash. Then Shlomo died, so Peshy married Hurwitz and had a bunch of kids. Hurwitz died at 35, so Peshy married Abram Markus and they had Ethel. Then Ethel married Beryl because in all the confusion they forgot they were brother and sister.

Olga

*Submitted by our member
Lily Poritz-Miller*

Jewish Cemeteries Abroad

Reports on the condition of Jewish cemeteries, synagogues, and former synagogues in Poland and the Czech Republic are available for \$18.00 US each (postage included) from the US Commission for the preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, 1101 15th Street NW, Suite 1040, Washington, DC, 20005. Checks (or money orders) should be made payable to "US Comm. PAHA".

*Dorot, JGS of NY via Roots-Key,
Spring 1996.*

Canadian Military Records

Information about past members of the Canadian Armed Forces is available from Veterans' Affairs, Access to Information, P.O. Box 7700, Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, C1A 8M9, Canada, and Personnel Records Centre, National Archives of Canada, Tunney's Pasture, Goldenrod Street, Ottawa, ON K1A 0N3, Canada. Provide basic information.

*Generations, January 1996 via
Roots-Key, Spring 1996*

From Our Meetings - Part II

The Jews of Morvedre, Spain

by Ruth Chernia

Mark Myerson, associate professor at the Centre for Medieval Studies and the Department of History, University of Toronto, talked to us about Morvedre (Catalan) (now known as Sagunto, its original Latin name, given by the Romans), about 30 miles north of Valencia in what was the Kingdom of Valencia in the Kingdom of Aragon.

Prof. Myerson draws on archival records in Latin and Catalan to document the life of the Jews there from 1391 until 1492. The documents came from three sources.

1. Royal letters regarding Jewish affairs; royal bailiffs' registrars on financial matters in the archives in Barcelona and Valencia listing royal fiscal demands, legal documents, even information about the electoral system of the Jewish community.
2. Notarial records of commercial dealings, loans, marriages, wills and other financial data between Jews and Christians and even between Jews. Many of these were destroyed during the Spanish Civil War but the records of one Morvedre notary, Leonard Miralles, survived in the archives in Valencia.
3. Judicial records of the Spanish Inquisition, records of the Jews and conversos.

History

1248 - Morvedre was part of the Kingdom of Valencia; it had been re-conquered in 1243-45. The city then consisted of colonizers, administrators and settlers. It was very much a frontier town with a wild-west feel. The first documented Jew arrived in 1248 because he spoke Arabic and was invited to deal with the local population, which was then 80 percent Arab. The Jews who followed were often intermediaries in relations between Christians and Arabs.

By the early 14th century 50 Jewish families, representing about 200 individuals, lived in Morvedre. They were wine merchants (their wine was exported throughout the Mediterranean), silversmiths, tailors, weavers and wholesalers of various goods. They were also expected to act for the King as moneylenders and tax farmers.

At first relations between Jews and Christians were stable. However, by the 1330s, the King began to put pressure on the population to increase tax revenue to finance the re-conquest. Many Jews left Morvedre during this period to avoid taxation and there was internal bickering in the community.

In 1347-48 a rebellion against the monarchy also targeting the Jews who were seen as loyal to the King since they were under his protection.

In 1355-56 and 1363-65 there was war between the kingdoms of Aragon and Castile. According to fiscal records, it took 10 to 15 years for Morvedre to recover from Castillian occupation.

In 1391, just as the Jewish community was getting on its feet, anti-Jewish violence flared again against crypto-Jews and conversos. In Valencia, Jews were killed and there were forced conversions. Many of the Jews in Morvedre escaped the violence because the bailiff, Bonofonat de Santfeliu, protected them in the local castle. For the next century these survivors and their descendents were the centre of Jewish life in

Valencia. From 1416 to the 1480s there was economic expansion and stable relations between the Jews and others. By 1492 there were about 700 Jews in the town.

Relations between Jews and Conversos

In 1413-14, during the disputation of Tortosa, Judaism was put on trial and the 'truth' of Christianity was proven. Many demoralized people converted at this time but still engaged in Jewish practices. A royal letter dated 1415 granted Joan de Sanfeliu (former Jewish name: Samuel Legem) permission to live with his Jewish wife. (Note that many conversos took the last name of the person responsible for converting them. This man took the name of the bailiff who had saved the Jews. This complicates immensely genealogical study of conversos.) In 1418 a marriage between two conversos was recorded. While the conversos realized political and economic success by converting, until the Inquisition began its work in earnest, many continued to practice Judaism. In 1488 it was noted that Salamó Çatorta a leading Jew, was helping the Jews of Valencia to participate in Jewish life by attending Jewish weddings, visiting synagogues and talking of Jewish matters.

That there was some tension between the two groups can also be documented. Maria (a conversa) sued Jaim (her Jewish son) for a pension that the king granted.

Jewish Christian Relations

During this period there had to have been some ideological hostility but for the most part the two groups co-existed as they had for centuries. There were networks of economic dependence and the quarters where they lived were not sealed. The members of the two groups met and came to know each other, surely dispelling some of the stereotypes. Tax farming and money lending were not primary occupations for the Jews but were engaged in to supplement income from other sources. And Christians often worked with the Jews in tax farming to make it easier to collect the taxes. Even the church used Jews to collect its taxes on first fruits. Small amounts of money were lent to Muslim and Christian farmers and artisans keeping money circulating at the lowest level of the economy. The largest amounts of money were lent to individual Jews and to the whole community. And Christians invested in the public debt of the community.

Problem areas

The Christian government of the town of Morvedre constantly demanded higher taxes from the Jews as the community as a whole grew. Since nobles didn't pay taxes, the town was in conflict with the nobles. As well, the records list litigation between individuals. Regrettably, the nature of all these documents means that we cannot know about the normal relations between groups only about behaviour that was deemed scandalous or litigious.

In 1492, about 100,000 Jews (including the 700 living in Morvedre) were expelled from the Kingdom of Spain. They scattered around the Mediterranean basin and even as far as the New World. The records that remain of their lives have not been systematically studied for their genealogical content. ✪