

שם טוב

# SHEM TOV

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA (TORONTO)

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## A GENEALOGICAL JOURNEY

by David Bickman

**I**n the late fall of 1982 my father, Abe Bickman (Avraham ben Zalmar Hachen), of blessed memory, gave me some old family papers that he had kept for many years, including the following items: (a) his uncle Max Bikman's military passport from when Max was in the Russian Imperial Army (1904-1907); (b) a collection of letters in Yiddish written to my father's parents in the 1920s by relatives in the Ukraine; and (c) an envelope, with a return address in Brazil, containing photographs of Dad's cousins in Brazil, postmarked 1948.

The military passport was in the Russian language, and the old letters were in Yiddish, which neither Dad nor I could read; and the photographs were of cousins with whom we had had no contact in over thirty years.

Shortly after receiving these items, I phoned my cousin Gary Bikman in Lethbridge. I told him what Dad had given me, and Gary informed me that his dad, my father's brother Bill, also had some old family papers. I then received the following items from Gary: (a) a letter from my grandfather's brother's family in Chicago detailing all the brothers and sisters of my grandfather and how we were related to the cousins in Brazil; (b) an affidavit sworn by my grandfather in 1915 in Lethbridge in order to comply with the Canadian military draft for World War I; and (c) my grandfather's military passport from the time he served in the Czarist Russian Army (1905-1907).

Receiving these items, and thinking about their contents, I became interested in learning more about Dad's ancestors and their life in the Ukraine. Little did I know then that twelve years

later I would still be seeking further information about the Bikmans and Nova Ushitsa, Podolia Gubernia, Ukraine.

I began my research by having the military passport translated by Berlitz. Aron Eichler read the Yiddish letters to me. I obtained an address for one of the Brazilian cousins through the Canadian Consulate in Rio de Janeiro and attempted to contact them.

The military passports revealed that my Grandad and great-uncle Max were both born in Vonkovets (in Ukrainian it is called Vinkovtsi), a small town in Podolia (now Khmel'nitsky Oblast) Gubernia, Ukraine and that my grandfather served in the Russo-Japanese War, receiving a medal for participating in a major battle at Mukden, Manchuria. Grandad's passport also contained a permit to leave the country after September 1910.

Correspondence with my cousin in Brazil led me to discover that I had over 100 relatives in Brazil. They lived in Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo and two or three smaller cities in between. All of these cousins are descendants of one of Grandad's sisters.

In March 1985 my wife Sonia and I went to Rio de Janeiro for two weeks and we met most of these cousins. When our twins, Aaron and Keryn, became bar and bat mitzvot in the Fall of 1987, two of my Brazilian cousins and

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**Upcoming Events**  
*The Jewish Genealogical Society  
of Canada (Toronto)*  
at the Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue  
470 Glencairn Avenue

**Wednesday, December 30, 1998 at 8:00 pm**  
*"Beyond the Pale: The Latvian Jewish Community, 1850-1940"* by Professor Anders Henrikson.

Professor Henrikson received his Ph.D in Russian history from the University of Toronto in 1978. He is the author of a book on late nineteenth-century Riga and of numerous articles on Russian and Baltic history.

**Wednesday, January 27, 1999 at 8:00 pm**  
*Program to be announced*



**Wednesday, February 24, 1999 at 8:00 pm**  
*"Canadian Records - Bring Life to Your Family Stories,"* a presentation by Louise St. Denis.

Ms. St. Denis is the author of 10 genealogical books and the editor and publisher of 28 books in the Heritage Book Series. She lectures on genealogical topics across Canada and the U.S. and has researched her ancestors to the early 1600s.

**Wednesday, March 24, 1999 at 8:00 pm**  
*Program to be announced*



A workshop for beginners and advanced researchers is planned for the Spring.

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The Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada was founded in 1985 and currently has about 180 members. Membership costs \$30 per calendar year, \$20 for persons living outside the City of Toronto. 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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their wives came to celebrate our *simcha* with us. Once again, in March 1989, Sonia and I returned to Brazil. During this second visit, we went to Sao Paulo and met some more cousins whom we had not met on our first visit.

My interest in my father's roots also caused me to purchase a few books on Jewish genealogy and to subscribe to a few genealogical publications from the U.S. From these sources I learned how to obtain other items of interest to persons engaged in family history research. For example, I received from the National Archives in Ottawa copies of Dad's and his parents' citizenship applications and confirmations of their dates and methods of arrival in Canada.

My grandfather, Zelman (Sam) Bikman, entered Canada on August 15, 1911 at Coutts, Alberta, having come to the border by train from Billings, Montana, where he had been living for slightly less than a year. He had left the Russian Ukraine in October 1910 and travelled by train to Bremen, Germany; at Bremen, he boarded a passenger steamship that took him to Philadelphia. From Philadelphia, he travelled by train to Baltimore where he remained briefly with his three brothers before heading west for Billings with two of them.

Grandma and Dad came later, arriving by

steamship at Quebec City, Quebec on September 28, 1913. The ship's passenger manifest listed my father as four years old. One can only imagine what the trip must have been like for my grandmother. Dad's only memory of the trip was when a man hired to smuggle them across the border from Russian Podolia into Austrian Galicia carried him as he waded across a river to escape from Russia. This experience gave Dad a life-long fear of deep water.

The copies of Dad's and his parents' Canadian citizenship applications revealed much useful information. I learned that Dad was born in Nova Ushitsa, Podolia Gubernia, Ukraine, a regional county town about 30 km. from Grandad's birthplace of Vonkovets. Grandma's maiden name was Rosenbloom and she was also born in Nova Ushitsa.

A curious thing about all three applications was that they were made in 1939. Dad told me about how he and his parents came to apply for Canadian citizenship. In early 1939 he was sitting on the veranda of their house in Lethbridge with Grandad, listening to the news on the radio when it was announced that Russia and Germany were about to sign a non-aggression treaty. Grandad casually remarked to Dad that

*(continued on page 7)*



### *Tour of Our Library*

Two identical tours of the Canadiana Room of the Toronto Public Library, North York Central Branch, are scheduled for January 18 and February 1, 1999.

The Canadiana Room contains, among other genealogical collections, the collection of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto).

The tours are limited to 15 people each, and will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis. We will be filling the January 18 tour first, and any extra people will be asked to come on the February 1 tour. The tours will begin at 7:00 pm sharp and last for an hour, with time for questions at the end. The librarian conducting the tour, John Jakobson, has requested that we assemble in the Canadiana Room, which is on the 6th floor of the Toronto Public Library, North York Central Branch, at 6:45 pm both days.

To reserve your spot and to obtain directions to the library branch, please e-mail the JGS librarian, Deborah Pekilis, at: [debbie.pekilis@attcanada.net](mailto:debbie.pekilis@attcanada.net)

#### SEARCH AD

**GELWACH/GELBWACHS, Dwora/ Deborah, daughter of Mendel Gelbwachs of Glogow, Galicia, Poland.**

**Born approx. 1900-1910, resided in Toronto about 1930 to 1940s; may have married (possibly SOLOMON) and moved to the U.S.**

**Anyone having information is asked to contact:**

**Monique Charlebois  
Legal Counsel, Office of the  
Public Guardian and Trustee  
595 Bay Street, 8th Floor  
Toronto, Ontario M5G 2M6  
CANADA  
Fax: (416) 314-2781**

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## *My Search for an SS St. Louis Passenger* by Henry Wellisch

The following is part of a longer posting which appeared on the Internet discussion group "H-HOLOCAUST@H-NET.MSU.EDU" followed by an exchange of messages:

Since 1996, against all odds, a small core of researchers have sought to find out what happened to all 936 passengers aboard the *SS St. Louis*, the ill-fated refugee ship that Cuba and the United States denied safe haven in 1939.

Many of the passengers - some were permitted entry to Belgium, France, Great Britain or the Netherlands - were returned to Germany and perished in the Holocaust.

The stories of 40 passengers remain unknown. Researchers hope to determine their fate before the 60th anniversary of the ship's voyage next May. "By nature it's easier to find the victims," said Scott Miller, coordinator of the *St. Louis* Project. "Survivors are harder to find because one of the reasons they survived is that they were hiding."

The *St. Louis*, manned by non-Jewish Germans, left Hamburg, Germany, on May 13, 1939, and arrived in the port of Havana two weeks later. All but 22 of the 936 passengers held visas provided by the Cuban consulate in Germany, but their entry was denied.

Sara Bloomfield, the acting director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, which is coordinating the *St. Louis* Project, said: "The years up to the war are not just part of European history, but also an important part in American history. America had a potential for action between 1933 and 1939, a window of opportunity. The American's depth of anxiety over 900 people is striking." [The response of the Canadian government to the appeal of the passengers was equally negative. - Ed.]

The Survivors Registry of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum is seeking documentation on passengers from the *SS St. Louis*. Anyone with information about a passenger, particularly any of the passengers on

the list that follows, should contact:

Scott Miller  
United States Holocaust  
Memorial Museum  
100 Raoul Wallenberg Place, SW  
Washington, DC 20024-2150  
Tel: (202) 488-0495  
Fax: (202) 314-7888  
E-mail: smiller@ushmm.org



The *St. Louis* departing Hamburg, May 13, 1939. Photo: Stern.

### Name / Year / Last Residence

Atlas, Charlotte 1898 Vienna  
Bajor, Ladislav (Laaglo Bajor) 1913 Budapest,  
Adzekeli Betalano 2c  
Ball, Magdakene Paula Lippert 1900 Berlin,  
Bosselmannweg 12  
Blum, Richard 1886 Berlin  
Edelstein, Ida 1879 Berlin  
Ep(p)stein, Bettina Betina Kitzinger 1905  
Pirmasens, Luisenstr. 20  
Fanto, Julius 1892 Vienna  
Goldbaum, Anna 1875 Berlin  
Goldschmidt, Fritz 1907 Berlin,

Manteufelstr. 14  
 Gross, Frida 1893 Liegnitz  
 Gross, Johanna 1892 Liegnitz  
 Grunthal, Adolf 1896 Gleiwitz  
 Grunthal, Bertha 1901 Gleiwitz  
 Grunthal, Horst Martin 1930 Gleiwitz  
 Grunthal, Lutz 1928 Gleiwitz  
 Hammerschlag, Max 1902 Kassel  
 Heller, Frantisek 1903 Prague, Bratislava 39  
 Hermanns, Julius 1878 Munich  
 Jacobowitz, Walther 1908 Breslau  
 Kaminker, Berthold 1897 Vienna,  
 Fobachstr. 25  
 Krohn, Regina 1908 Breslau  
 Leyser, Erich 1881 Berlin, Sachsenstr. 65  
 Lichtenstein, Fritz 1887 Berlin  
 Lichtenstein, Lucie 1892 Berlin  
 Maschkowsky, Toni 1888 Berlin  
 Meierhoff, Charolette (Charolette  
 Meyerhoff) 1915 Berlin  
 Meyer, Joseph (Josef Meier) 1872 Berlin,  
 Braunerweg 72  
 Moser, Edmund 1871 Prague,  
 Toschwina 141  
 Moser, Rosalie (Rosalie Moses) 1877 Prague,  
 Toschwina 141  
 Munz, Meta 1921 Frankfurt  
 Rebenfeld, Kurt 1899 Krefeld,  
 Ostwallstr. 113  
 Reichensteil, Betty 1889 Berlin  
 Reichensteil, Josef 1891 Berlin  
 Siegel, Arthur 1891 Ludwigshafen,  
 Bismarckstr. 54  
 Spira, Helene (Henne Spira) 1876 Vienna  
 Sternlicht, Lotte 1905 Dresden  
 Wachselmann, Margarete (Margarete  
 Hermann) 1894 Gleiwitz, Wilhelmstr. 57  
 Wachtel, Amanda (Amanda Brandt) 1887  
 Adorf  
 Weiss, Gerda 1902 Berlin  
 Zwiegenthal(I), Fritz 1909 Regensburg

*Soon after reading this posting in early November 1998, I contacted Scott Miller at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum:*

Dear Mr. Miller:

I saw the posting regarding passengers of the *St. Louis* on the JewishGen discussion

group. I come from Vienna and I remember that one of our neighbors was a passenger on this ship. His name was SCHUMANOVSKY. I think there were several people in this family, but he was the only one on the ship. Do you have any idea what happened to him? Thank you very much for your initiative in this matter.

Henry Wellisch  
 Toronto

*A few days later I received the following reply:*

Dear Mr. Wellisch:

We do have in our passenger files information on Emil Schumanovsky, born in Vienna in 1901. After the *St Louis* went back to Europe, Mr. Schumanovsky was sent to Holland, where he was placed in the Westerbork internment camp. On July 17, 1942, he was deported from Westerbork to Auschwitz where, according to the Auschwitz Death Book, he perished on August 13, 1942.

We also have a death certificate for him from the Auschwitz camp doctor, stating he died of congenital heart failure. If you send me your address or fax number, I can send you Mr. Schumanovsky's entry from the Auschwitz Death Book, as well as his death certificate. Please let me know if I can be of any further assistance.

Scott Miller

### Advertising Rates

*SHEM TOV* is now accepting display advertising for publication. Advertisers are requested to supply camera-ready art and payment by February 1999 for the Spring 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 (one 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 cents per word thereafter; your name and address are free. Please write advertisement clearly, with family surnames you are researching in *uppercase* letters. Make your cheque payable to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) and mail to: JGS of Canada (Toronto), P.O. Box 446, Station A, North York, Ontario, Canada M2N 5T1.

## Ellis Island to Get Family History Research Center



(Press release October 28, 1998)

**T**he Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is playing a key role in the establishment of a family history research center on New York's Ellis Island, where in two years the public will have automated access to a computerized database containing 17 million U.S. immigration records.

At a news conference today on the island, Statue of Liberty-Ellis Island Foundation Chairman Emeritus Lee Iacocca announced plans for the American Family Immigration History Center, expected to open in the year 2000.

During the past five years, the church, in cooperation with the foundation and the National Park Service, has spent more than two million volunteer hours digitizing Ellis Island records. To date, 65 percent of the records have been extracted from microfilmed copies of the original ledgers - passenger records and ships' manifests - which were mostly handwritten, faded and damaged. The original docu-

ments were destroyed years ago.

The remaining 35 percent of the records will be extracted and digitized by the opening of the center, which will be situated in the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. The center will house state-of-the-art interactive computer technology that will bring family documentation and genealogical exploration to visitors.

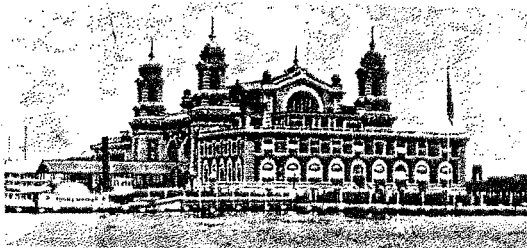
The Ellis Island records represent some 60 percent of all U.S. immigration records. It is estimated that more than 100 million Americans today can trace their roots to immigrants who passed through Ellis Island between 1892 and 1924.

The Family History Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a world leader in genealogical research, with more than 3,200 family history centers worldwide, and the world's largest collection of family history records housed in Salt Lake City. ✧



### *We Welcome These New Members to Our Society*

*Edward Cohen  
Gail Copeland  
Rose-Ann Davies  
Henry Graupner  
Larry Hershfield  
Donald Hurd  
Marcel Huszak  
Merle Langboard Levine  
Carol Moskot  
Helen Reiss  
Ed Rosenfarb*



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if Britain and Germany went to war, which seemed virtually certain, Canada and Russia could soon thereafter be at war with each other. If that happened, Granddad said, he, Grandma and Dad could be deported or face some other unpleasant fate. Dad asked Granddad why and how this could happen. Granddad answered, "Because we are not Canadian citizens. We are Russian citizens." You can imagine Dad's reaction; he didn't even know that he wasn't a Canadian. He was then thirty years old and had lived in Canada twenty-six years, with no recollection of any life outside Lethbridge. Without ever seriously thinking about it, he simply took it for granted that he was Canadian. The very thought of being deported to Russia alarmed him. He immediately contacted his dear old friends and lawyers, Saul and Max Moscovich, to expedite the gaining of citizenship for himself and his parents. Dad and Granddad were issued Canadian citizenship on July 4, 1939; Grandma's, perhaps because it was not as urgent, was issued on August 19, 1941.

After obtaining from the National Archives in Washington and Ottawa copies of the actual arrival records for Dad and his parents, I then sought the records of their departure from Europe.

Using records on microfilm at the Mormon Family History Centre in Calgary, I discovered in the Emigration Lists for Hamburg, Germany that Dad and Grandma left Hamburg by passenger steamship on September 17, 1913 for Grimsby, England. I subsequently verified this information by obtaining a certified extract of the actual emigration list from the Hamburg Emigration Office. I then obtained, through a genealogist in England whom I hired, the record of their arrival in Grimsby, England on September 18, 1913 and their subsequent departure from Liverpool aboard the *SS Canada* for Quebec City on September 20, 1913.

My search for my Granddad's arrival record in the USA was conducted through the National Archives, Washington, DC. I had heard conversations within the family that my grandfather came to the USA in December 1910 via

steamship landing in Baltimore, Maryland, and that accompanying him at the time was his sister-in-law (Max's wife), Tuba (Tillie). After ten years of searching, I finally located a copy of the record of their arrival at Philadelphia on November 17, 1910. Long before, I had obtained manifests for the arrival at Baltimore for all three of his brothers. Menasha, his oldest brother, who wound up living in Chicago, arrived on June 4, 1907 via the *SS Gera* from Bremen, Germany. Max (Mordko) and Louie (Leib) arrived on June 5, 1909 via the *SS Koeln*, also from Bremen.

Max and Louie came to Lethbridge from Billings in late 1910, a short time after my grandfather. Records in Ottawa confirm their crossing at Sweetgrass/Coutts enroute to Lethbridge. I have a photograph of the Lethbridge Jewish Congregation, taken at a Purim Ball in 1912 or 1913, and in the photograph are my grandfather, his brothers Max and Louie and his sister-in-law Tillie.

Once I had most of the particulars of the arrivals of my father and his parents in Canada, I then began to research the history of my father's birth town, Nova Ushitsa, and its Jewish community. From YIVO Institute of Jewish Research in New York, I obtained several extracts from Jewish, Russian and Polish encyclopedias, which when translated told me quite a bit about the town.

Until 1793, Nova Ushitsa was in Poland and was known as Litnowce. In those days it had a population of about 3,000; more than half of them Jews. By 1897, it had a population of 6,371, of whom 2,213 were Jews. At that time, Vonkovets had a population of 3,150, of whom 1,768 were Jews. Nova Ushitsa had one synagogue and three prayer houses, one school with two classes, a post office and a telegraph. Its name changed from Litnowce to Nova Ushitsa in 1826, shortly after and as a result of the Imperial Russian government having transferred the county government services there.

Several of the YIVO sources related a story about an "incident" that occurred in Nova Ushitsa in the 1830s, entitled the "Ushitsa Afair." Eighty Jews from the county were tried,

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convicted and received various punishments for murdering two Jewish spies who were reporting to the Russian police on efforts by members of the community to avoid conscription. In the 1830s the draft was being imposed on Jewish males at age ten for terms of up to 25 years. One of the Jewish spies was murdered in the synagogue. The rabbi was allegedly involved in the conspiracy to draw the spy into the synagogue for the purpose of killing him.

The story about this "incident" is significant to me because one of the conspirators, all of whose names appear in one of the sources, was Shmuel Bikman, presumably an ancestor of mine. He received a minor punishment by comparison to many of the others. He was simply forbidden to travel out of the county for a period of five years. Some of the conspirators were put to death, others were flogged and others were exiled to Siberia.

Nova Ushitsa was the scene of fighting in both world wars and also in the revolutionary war that ended in Communist rule coming to the area in the 1920s. The region was occupied by Austrian and German forces in World War I. When the Germans retreated, a brief attempt was made to create an independent Ukraine. Civil war raged throughout the region until the early 1920s when the Bolsheviks put down the Ukrainian independence movement and the Ukraine became a Soviet republic. There were many pogroms in this period, some perpetrated by Ukrainian nationalist sympathizers and some by Bolshevik supporters. The Jewish citizens of the Ukraine were for the most part politically disinterested but they suffered nevertheless and all out of proportion to the general suffering of the whole population.

It was in this period of upheaval that my grandfather's nephew left for Brazil and three years later sent for his wife and four children.

In the 1930s in the USSR, after Stalin came to power, there was wide-ranging suppression of Jewish religion, culture and education. Synagogues, *cheders*, *mikvot* and other institutions were ordered closed; in Nova Ushitsa this was achieved by 1937. While Yiddish was still permitted, Hebrew was forbidden. The authorities associated Yiddish with the working classes

who were sympathetic to socialist ideals, whereas Hebrew was considered the language of the religious and more educated Jews. By the time World War II began, with the division of Poland between Germany and the USSR, Jewish life in Nova Ushitsa had already ended, though the Jews were still alive.

Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941. In order to find out what happened in Nova Ushitsa in World War II, I obtained copies of captured German war records from the National Archives, Washington, DC. These records indicated that Nova Ushitsa was first occupied by German and Hungarian forces on July 12, 1941. It remained under occupation until German forces withdrew in the face of a Soviet assault on March 27, 1944. The arrival of German and Hungarian forces was relatively quiet, but there was heavy fighting in and around Nova Ushitsa before the Germans withdrew. During World War II, the Germans treated Nova Ushitsa as a garrison town.

I discovered what happened to the Jews of Nova Ushitsa and the surrounding region from two sources. Through the cousins in Brazil, I was able to find a number of cousins still living in various parts of the Ukraine and Russia. One of them was in Nova Ushitsa when the Jews there were forced into a ghetto in the town and later murdered. In a letter, he told me how they were led from the ghetto a short distance out of town, stripped naked, shot and buried into a pit. He was ten years old at the time and he was pushed into the pit by his uncle before he was shot. He stayed in the pit until the Germans and their local collaborators left, then climbed out and ran away. He spent the rest of the German occupation hiding in the barn of a Ukrainian peasant who lived in the area.

My other source was also a young boy during the war. I found him by writing a letter to a Russian-language newspaper in New York asking for anyone from Nova Ushitsa to write to me. From his correspondence, I learned that he is now in his late sixties, was a career officer in the Soviet army, and was a school teacher after leaving the army. He was in the Nova Ushitsa ghetto with his parents and brother. He wrote that there were two "actions" in which



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the Jews of the ghetto, of whom there were about 3,000, were murdered.

The ghetto was established in the fall of 1941. Jews from Nova Ushitsa and the surrounding area were forced to move into it. In August 1942 about 2,500 of them were taken into the woods outside of town and shot and buried; later, in October 1942, the rest were taken to a field in town and suffered the same fate. This fellow survived because he was not taken in the first "action" and he managed to escape to Romania with his father before the second "action." His mother and brother were murdered in the second "action."

In Nova Ushitsa today there are memorials at the two sites; I have photographs of both of them. There are perhaps twenty Jews remaining in the town, all of them pensioners. In a few years' time there will be none left. What will happen to the memorials after the last of them has passed on is anyone's guess. I wouldn't expect the local population to maintain them.

The Library of Congress in Washington, DC sent me three excellent maps of Nova Ushitsa, one of which was sufficiently large that my contact through the New York Russian-language paper was able to identify the locations of the synagogue, *cheder*, *mikva*, ghetto and the killing sites.

A friend of mine, a newcomer from Kamenets Podolsk, Ukraine, which is only about 70 km. southwest of Nova Ushitsa, went home to visit his father in the summer of 1992. He was kind enough to drive up to Nova Ushitsa and take some pictures of the town for me, including the ruins of the Jewish cemetery. Since then, a genealogist I hired spent two days there in January 1993, during which she took a number of photographs, made a video at the memorial in the woods outside of town and conducted interviews and research in the various archives there. She found a record for my great-grandfather, Meyer Wolf Bikman (Meyer Ze'ev ben Menasha Hacohen), who was born in Vonkovets in 1849. She also found an old postcard of Nova Ushitsa made before World War II. It looks just like Anatevka from the movie and stage play, "Fiddler on the Roof."

I have recently also obtained extensive

records of my ancestors from Ukrainian archives located in Kamenets Podolsk through the use of the Russian American Genealogical Archive Service (RAGAS).

While I have mentioned the major sources for my research, other channels helped me accumulate many interesting facts as well. From the Lethbridge School District and the Department of Education, Edmonton, I was able to receive copies of school records for both of my parents. From the Alberta Provincial Archives I obtained a copy of my grandfather's brother Louie's homestead application. From Vital Statistics, I obtained birth registrations for my father's brother and sisters, death registrations for my grandparents and one of my father's sisters, and my parents' marriage registration.

From the Alexander Galt Museum & Archives in Lethbridge, I was able to obtain extracts from Henderson's Directories as far back as 1914 containing entries for my family, a photograph of the first synagogue in Lethbridge and some general background information on the Jewish community there. The Lethbridge Herald sent me a copy of a photograph of the last class in school that my father attended. Medicine Hat Archives provided me with similar Henderson's Directory extracts for my great-uncles, Louie and Max Bikman, who lived there briefly between 1913-1916.

I maintain a fairly regular correspondence with various relatives all over the USA, Canada, Israel, Brazil, Russia and the Ukraine. From information provided to me by these relatives, I have on computer disk over 200 entries, all of whom are descendants of my great-grandfather, Meyer Ze'ev ben Menasha Hacohen Bikman.

It is now more than twelve years since I began my research into the Bikman family history. I will likely be continuing this research for many more years. A form of amateur detective work, genealogical research can be very rewarding. You can never foretell what you will find. ☆

*David Bickman is a member of the JGS of Southern Alberta. This article came as a response to our request to the president of the society for a contribution.*

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## *Documenting Victims of the Holocaust*

*Ruth Chernia reports on talk by Gary Mokotoff*

**A** capacity crowd was present to hear Gary Mokotoff talk about documenting victims of the Holocaust on Wednesday, November 4, 1998. Neither a survivor nor a child of survivors but a second-generation US citizen, Mokotoff had always had the idea that the Holocaust was something that had happened to "other Jews," that his family was safe. However, in 1979 he began to document his collateral relatives and discovered that of the 1,000 descendents of his great-great-grandfather, 250 had perished in the Holocaust. Once he made the discovery, his goal was to try to document what had happened to them. Since they did not have tombstones, his documentation would be their memorial book.

Ten to 15 years ago the accepted wisdom was that individual victims of the Holocaust could not be traced. In fact, there are hundreds of thousands of documents that can be divided into three categories:

### **1. Documents That Name Specific Individuals**

The most common document in this category is the deportation lists. These typed lists name many of the individuals who were "deported" to concentration camps. For example, convoy lists exist for the 70,000 Jews of France who were sent to Auschwitz. Beside each person's name is the date of birth. If the person survived the initial selection, the person was given a number. Some of these prisoner registration forms with name and number exist. If the person died in camp (not in the gas chambers), the death was registered. Again, some of these death lists exist. Finally, if the person survived the camp, the Joint Distribution Committee compiled survivor lists.

### **2. Events That Are Documented But Individuals Not Named**

There are lists published in Israel of the actions carried out by the Einsatzgruppen. These are by town and give the number of people killed and date of action. Individuals are not named.

### **3. Events That Do Not Register the Fate of Individuals**

There are some lists registering when a convoy arrived in a concentration camp. While these do not list the fate of individuals, one can be fairly sure that old people, children under 14 and mothers of young children were killed around that date. There are no arrival lists for extermination camps such as Treblinka or Belzec.

Mokotoff then went on to detail with specific examples from his own searching how one uses these documents. The first task is to find out what happened in the town. Were the inhabitants murdered there? Were they shipped off to a ghetto in another town? Were they sent directly eastward from that town? Was it to an extermination or a concentration camp? Once you have some idea of this, you can proceed to the next step.

### **4. If You Know the Name of Specific Individuals**

The International Tracing Service of the International Committee of the Red Cross began even before World War II but mostly afterwards to track individuals on index cards. For each mention of an individual a card was written with the name of the individual and source of information. By 1945 they had 45 million cards. You can write to the International Tracing Service but it takes about two years to get a response. Mokotoff recommends that you work with your local Red Cross office. The response time is cut to about six to nine months.

In 1955 Yad Vashem began to document the six million through the pages of testimony. These are filed in the Yad Vashem archives. The pages document the name, date of birth, place of residence; names of parents, spouse, children; circumstances of death and, even more important, the name and address of the testimony giver. There are currently two to three million pages. This is a valuable database, but don't expect to fly to Israel, go to Yad

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Vashem and look up your great-uncle. If you have a friend or relative in Israel, ask him or her to go to Yad Vashem or hire a professional researcher there. To contact a professional researcher in Israel, go through the president of the Israeli Jewish Genealogical Society, e-mail address: stroweis@trendline.co.il.

Another way is to write to Yad Vashem, Hall of Names, P. O. Box 3477, Jerusalem 91034, Israel. Provide as much specific information about the individual as possible. You cannot do a generic search for all the Schwartzes, for example.

#### 5. If You Know the Name of the Town But Not the Fate of Individuals

Yizkor books (literally, memorial books) were compiled and continue to be written for many locations within the 1919-1939 Polish borders. There are currently about a thousand of these individual remembrances by individuals of their families, families without survivors and, often, a necrology - a list of who was murdered. The drawback for many is that most are in Yiddish or Hebrew. However, you can find translators. You can also learn how to recognize the important words and names in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. Mokotoff found a photo of a cousin and several mentions of Mokotoffs in the Yizkor book for his ancestral town, Garvelin.

Using the information at Yad Vashem and some of the concentration camp lists mentioned above, Mokotoff was able to document the fate of Berek Mokotoff, born in Warsaw, March 11, 1892. The Dachau entry register lists him as arriving September 3, 1940; from there he was sent to Saschenhausen where he died January 15, 1941. An additional kernel of information gained from these documents was his address in Frankfurt. The pages of testimony were submitted by Rachmiel Mokotoff who lives in Australia, and separately by Gilda Mokotoff, Berek's daughter.

While researching Rachmiel and Gilda, Mokotoff discovered a branch of his family that had made aliyah to Israel in the 1930s. The person giving testimony had given his informa-

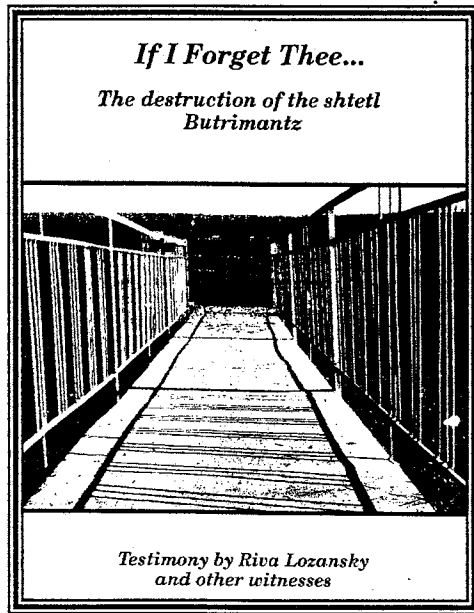
tion in 1955 and died in 1956. Previously, Mokotoff had thought the names of Berek's sisters had been lost, but through these pages they were found. In Jerusalem the Search Bureau for Missing Relatives, staffed by Batya Unterschutz, locates people who live in Israel. Since the arrival of thousands of immigrants from Russia, her work has exploded. Her address is P.O. Box 92, Jerusalem 91000, Israel.

There are other sources of information. For example, the Netherlands has produced a list of all the victims from that country - 128,000 people. There is a Gedenkbuch for the former West Germany and now people in eastern Germany are putting together similar Gedenkbuchs. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's library catalogue is online at <[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)>.

The Dachau arrival list, the German census of "non-Aryans" conducted in 1938-39, and the death list of the Lodz ghetto are all available in Toronto; the first two in the Mormon Family History Library and the library of the Jewish Genealogical Society, the last one at the Robarts Library of the University of Toronto. YIVO has an unindexed collection of identity cards, some with photos. JIAS (in Canada) and HIAS (in the US) have case files of survivors. There is no similar organization in Australia but the Jewish Genealogy Society there will help. Argentina has an organization similar to Canada's. Poland has provided the USHMM with a list of 200,000 survivors who were in Poland right after the war. Also at the USHMM and in Toronto is a copy of Stalin's extraordinary commission to document the actions carried out in Ukraine by the Einsatzgruppen. The USHMM list can be accessed through their website. Documents also exist listing the members of the Hungarian labour battalions.

Throughout his talk, Mokotoff emphasized the necessity for detective work. Don't give up too easily because you never know where you'll find the answers. ☆

*Gary Mokotoff is the publisher of Avotaynu and a leading genealogist in North America.*



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