

שם טוב

# SHEM TOV

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA (TORONTO)

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## Jewish Genealogists Take a Bite Out of the Big Apple

*A report by Garry Stein*

Over 1,300 Jewish genealogists gathered in New York City August 8-13 to attend the 19th Annual Conference on Jewish Genealogy hosted by the Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc. It was the largest gathering of Jewish genealogists ever. Representatives of 38 states in the US and 16 countries participated, including Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, England, France, Israel, Scotland, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and the United States. Canada, England and Israel sent the most delegates from outside the USA. Representatives of over 60 Jewish genealogical societies worldwide were present, including a large contingent from Canada. The attendance by 28 Canadians, including 15 from the JGS of Canada (Toronto), indicates the growth and vitality of Jewish genealogy in our country.

It was impressive to see so many people in one place with this common interest of ours. The corridors of the fourth and seventh floors of the elegant Marriott Marquis Hotel were filled with stories of discoveries, of family mysteries, of new sites on the Internet. Discussions could be overheard in languages such as Hebrew, Yiddish, French, Spanish, Swedish, Russian and English with accents from around the globe. It was a chance to meet people whose names we had only seen in postings to JewishGen or on the cover of books. Late in the day various members of our exhausted Toronto contingent could often be seen in the lobby bar or at a nearby restaurant discussing sessions we attended and what we had learned, heard and seen. Then there was the conference itself.

During the six-day seminar, over 130 programs covering a broad variety of topics were presented. Attendees heard from Marion Smith, Historian, US Immigration and Naturalization Service; Harry Macy, Jr., Editor of the *New York Genealogical & Biographical Record*; Oleg Perzashkevich, Researcher from the Minsk (Belarus) Genealogy Group; Professor Michael Stanislawski; Nathan J. Miller, Professor of Jewish History at Columbia University; Dr. Erwin A.

Schmidl, Head of Research, Austrian Ministry of Defense; Dr. Robert Desnick, Chairman of the Department of Human Genetics at Mount Sinai School of Medicine; Vadim Altskan, Deputy Director, Registry of Survivors, US Holocaust Memorial Museum; and many more. Also at the conference, Toronto's own Henry Wellisch delivered the outstanding talk he gave in Toronto in June on *Jewish Vienna: History and Genealogy*. Prominently featured throughout the conference was Montreal's Stan Diamond, who gave talks on genetics and genealogy and the Beta Thalassemia Research Project; Jewish Record Indexing - Poland; and who was honoured at the closing banquet.

More than 25 groups with specific locality or country interests met during the conference to share information. These included researchers interested in Slutsk, Belarus, Odessa, Suwalk-Lomza, Latvia, Lithuania, Slonim, Kutno, Nesvich, Siauliai District, Keidan, Lida District, Kupiskis, Rokiskis, Volhynia, Polonnoye, Kolbuszowa, Rzeszow, Kielce-Radom, Grodno, Argentina, Bohemia-Moravia, Hungary, Latin America, South Africa, Warsaw and Germany. Even descendants of Yiddish theatre performers met as a group!

Choosing a session to attend was a major decision because of the large selection and complexity of the

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## Upcoming Events

organized by the Jewish Genealogical Society  
of Canada (Toronto)  
at the Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue  
470 Glencairn Avenue



**Wednesday, September 29, 1999 at 8:00 pm**  
Brotherhood Hall  
Members report on the International Conference  
on Jewish Genealogy held in New York August  
8-13, 1999

**Wednesday, October 27, 1999 at 8:00 pm**  
Brotherhood Hall  
*"Jamaican Jewish Genealogy in the Big Picture  
of the Jewish World"*  
Speaker: Anthony "Tony" MacFarlane, M.D.

Dr. MacFarlane immigrated to Canada 40  
years ago and actively searched out his Jewish  
background, eventually converting. He is  
presently completing his second term as president  
of Canada's oldest reform temple, Temple Anshei  
Shalom in Hamilton. He is also an authorized  
mohel.



**Wednesday, November 10, 1999 at 8:00 pm**  
Sisterhood Hall  
*"Bridge to the Future - Bridge to the Past"*  
*Stories of Hidden Children During the Holocaust*  
The speakers, Anna Cheszes and Marta  
Shemtov, are long-time members of our society  
and were "hidden children" in Poland during  
World War II.

The date of this event has been set to  
coincide with our society's participation in the  
annual Holocaust Education Week.

**Wednesday, December 15, 1999 at 8:00 pm**  
Brotherhood Hall  
*"Finding That Jewish Cemetery! Tips and Tools  
for Adventurous Genealogists"*

The speaker, Valerie Fox, is one of our  
veteran members and a former vice-president of our  
society. She has been surveying Jewish cemeteries  
in Canada and overseas.

### Volume XV, No. 3

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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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Decorative art courtesy of the Joseph Shapiro Fund, Vilnius



schedule. Fitting in side trips involved sacrifice. Lunch generally went out the window. Dinners were often late with many sessions ending at 10:00 pm. Sleep was in short supply. Thankfully, the conference provided an air-conditioned escape from the record heatwave enveloping New York at the time.

Throughout the conference there were tours to places such as Ellis Island, the Jewish Museum, the Tenement Museum and many other locations of interest to Jewish genealogists. Special arrangements were available for partaking of the Big Apple's wide range of cultural facilities, culinary delights, and every other conceivable activity. Many created their own tours, including visits to libraries, cemeteries and New York archives. Gert Rogers, Harold Nissenthall and the writer took a morning to go to Ellis Island on their own. The memories of ancestors seeking refuge from the hardships of the Old World and facing uncertainty in a new one came to life. Imagine leaving your home and loved ones and taking your few possessions to face life in the "New World." Henry Wellisch saw how they lived in the tenements of the Lower East Side on his fascinating tour of the Tenement Museum. Carolynne Veffer even found time to take in a play - it was New York, after all!

Resource and computer rooms set up at the Marriott Marquis Hotel were busy from the moment they opened. These included copies of original materials and databases brought by participants or donated for use during the conference by New York City archives, libraries or government agencies. Many of these research tools were seen for the first time at this conference. In addition to the Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc. (New York), the Jewish Genealogical Societies of North Jersey and Philadelphia brought parts of their libraries to the conference for easy access to reference materials by attendees.

Arrangements were made with various museums, archives and libraries in New York for special hours, services or fees for conference attendees. Many of our members could be spotted wandering through the National Archives, the New York Public Library and other facilities, where they made progress with their research. Valerie Fox had great success at the New York Public Library's genealogy archives and in the Resource Room, where Lynn Rae and others could be spotted throughout the conference. The writer returned with copies of the ship's manifest from June 13, 1870, recording the passage from Bremen to New York of his great-great-grandmother (and possibly her mother or grandmother). New York is like a pirate's cave full of treasures for the Jewish genealogist. But



don't take too much time - there's another session not to be missed at the conference. Many of the participants also used the occasion to re-establish ties with family or friends in the New York area.

Well attended throughout the conference was the Vendor's Room, where *Avotaynu* and other distributors of genealogical materials maintained booths. Simcha Sales sold out all its copies of *If I Forget Thee... The Destruction of the Shtetl Butrimantz*, co-edited by our member Lily Poritz Miller. Many of the attendees had problems packing to go home (and meeting airline weight requirements) because of the purchases. A rare book dealer sold the writer a Yizkor book from one of his family towns - Brest. Another rare book purchase was *Wooden Synagogues of Poland* by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka. Many participants bought software, research tools, signed copies of books by Miriam Weiner and other authors.

Toronto's Jytte Birnbaum had a booth during part of the conference selling her beautiful family trees and a clever T-shirt inscribed with the purchaser's family tree.

Special meetings, such as the one on the Cemetery Project attended by Harold Nissenthall, took place throughout the week. Members of the Board of Directors of organizations such as JewishGen, Jewish Record Indexing - Poland (JRI - Poland) and the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) used the gathering as an opportunity to meet. Presidents of all the Canadian organizations were in attendance at

a number of these meetings, including Toronto's president, Gert Rogers. The IAJGS elected a new slate of officers, who are committed to strategic initiatives to further broaden the participation and support of Jewish genealogy around the world. Toronto's own Peter Jassem was elected to the board of JRI - Poland, clear recognition of his skills, ability and contributions.

On the closing evening of the conference most participants attended the memorable banquet - Gateway to America. The guest speaker was Stephen J. Dubner, writer and editor at the *New York Times Magazine* and the author of *Turbulent Souls: A Catholic Son's Return to His Jewish Family*. Also at the banquet the 1999 IAJGS awards were presented. The awards were selected by a committee consisting of Anne Feder Lee of Honolulu, Chair; Carol Baird of San Diego; and Henry Wellisch. Following are the awards and accompanying citations:

#### **IAJGS Lifetime Achievement Award** Presented to Arthur Kurzweil

In deep appreciation of your trail-blazing work which teaches us that learning about Jewish family history is possible, despite ages of community de-

struction, Diaspora and the Holocaust. We will always be grateful that you showed us the way, and for your past and continued inspiration to all Jewish genealogists and new Jewish genealogical societies that continue to be created worldwide because of your vision.

**Outstanding Contribution to Jewish Genealogy Via the Internet Award**

Presented to Jewish Records Indexing - Poland (Stanley Diamond accepting on behalf of all who have worked on this project)

In recognition of an extraordinary database, available via the Internet, which recently reached a half million entries and continues to grow. This database not only helps countless researchers but also demonstrates what can be accomplished through the cooperative energy of many volunteers and is an inspiration and model for databases covering other geographical areas.

**Outstanding Contribution to Jewish Genealogy Via Print Award**

Presented to Miriam Weiner for her book *Jewish Roots in Poland*

In recognition of your book *Jewish Roots in Poland*. Your success in presenting the first officially sanctioned lists of Jewish documents in Polish archives makes it an extraordinarily valuable resource tool. The accompanying pictures and illustrations bring the vanished world of Jewish Poland to life once again.

**Outstanding Programming That Advances the Objectives of Jewish Genealogy Award**

Presented to The Jewish Genealogical Society of Michigan (Stephen Rosman, President, accepting)

In recognition of programming which demonstrates a high level of creativity, organizational talent and cooperative spirit. We commend your ability to offer your members such a diverse range of stimulating activities which cannot help but energize novice and experienced family researchers alike.

**Outstanding Publication by a Member of the IAJGS Award**

Presented to the Israel Genealogical Society (Jean-Pierre Stroweis, President, accepting)

In recognition of *Sharsheret Hadorot*, Family Roots Research Periodical, for excellent coverage of topics ranging from scholarly articles based on original research to news items about genealogy activities and resources in Israel, and for generously sharing that information with genealogists around the world by presenting those articles in both Hebrew and English.

**Outstanding Project That Advances the Objectives of Jewish Genealogy Award**

Presented to the Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc. of New York for initiating the Jewish Genealogical Family Finder (Estelle Guzik, President, accepting)

Since its inception, the Family Finder has been an invaluable resource for countless genealogists. By making it possible to link up with others via surname or ancestral town connections, scattered family members have found each other and much knowledge has been shared. Through this award, we wish to show our deep appreciation to those who conceptualized and implemented the original Jewish Family Finder project.

At the time of this presentation, the following comments were added and the individuals were asked to stand: "This is the 20th anniversary of the Family Finder. It was conceived in early 1979 under the leadership of Dr. Neil Rosenstein, the JGS's first president, and it was compiled by David Fiedler, a JGS founding member. The first edition, manually produced, was issued in July 1979. In 1982 Gary Mokotoff, then a new member of the JGS, volunteered to computerize the information. He and his wife Ruth continued to nurture the Jewish Genealogical Family Finder as it grew into what it is today. In 1996 ownership of the JGFF was transferred from the JGS, Inc. (New York) to JewishGen headed by Susan King, where it has become a cornerstone of the JewishGen website."

The conference was covered by major newspapers throughout New York and the US. Bill Gladstone was in attendance as a press representative from Canada. Most Jewish newspapers in the US and Canada will report on the event, indicating the growing interest in the subject of Jewish genealogy.

Each year a conference is held in a different city around the world. In recent years conferences were sponsored by the JGSs located in Boston, Los Angeles, Paris, Toronto and Washington. The next conference in the year 2000 will be sponsored by the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies and will be held in Salt Lake City. In 2001, the conference will be held in London and will be hosted by the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain. A future conference is also being planned for Israel.

Throughout the New York conference the participation and efforts of the Canadian contingents were clearly in evidence. Everyone in attendance was impressed with the sheer scope of the conference, the excellent organization by the host society, the research facilities, and the opportunities to form friendships. It was an exceptional chance to gain an appreciation of the ever-broadening support for the efforts of Jewish genealogists around the world. Exhausted but inspired, the Canadians have returned to their homes ready to share what they learned and motivated to continue to build bridges to our common heritage. ☆

*The foregoing report, based on a press release by the JGS of New York, was compiled by Garry Stein, an active genealogist and member of the executive of our society. He was one of the organizers of the successful Jewish genealogical Workshop 1999 held in May.*

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## Combining Genealogical and Family Trait Genetic Research

by Stanley M. Diamond

*"Mr. Diamond's work serves as a paradigm for the link between genealogy research and the study of the evolution and spread of genetic diseases."*

*Dr. Ariella Oppenheim, Professor of Experimental Hematology  
Hebrew University-Hadassah Medical School*

### **"Genes and genealogy are different sides of a shared coin in personal history"**

"Where is here? Who am I?" Geneticist Charles R. Sriver has posed these questions in talks around the world. What he calls "molecular heraldry" - what is found in the structure of the human DNA molecule - can be used alongside genealogical sciences to answer those vital questions about personal identity. Being aware that our ancestors determine who we are challenges us to create a detailed picture both of them and of what they passed on to their progeny.

While archive doors may open wide for research with life-saving potential, previously unknown family may not want to be documented, and close family may be hesitant to cooperate. Combining genetic and genealogical research involves different methods and special responsibilities. Defining this philosophy, formulating the message, and honing sensitivities are unusual challenges for casual genealogists.

### **The place of genetic/medical research**

For some family historians, learning about generations of singers, artisans, athletes, professionals or scholars is enough. Others want to document every idiosyncrasy, each quirk, everything that has been passed down through the generations. But today there is a growing recognition of the need to also fill in the "medical" field in your genealogical computer program.

Recording one's personal and family medical history is becoming the norm rather than the exception and being able to provide ready access to this information to an extended family can be of great and often unanticipated benefit. This is particularly so in the case of recessive genes which may or may not affect carriers but can result in devastating consequences for future generations. Under such circumstances, genealogists have the obligation to reach out and caution family members.

Fortunately, joint efforts of the medical and religious communities and the ease of modern-day communications have made it possible to all but eliminate Tay-Sachs and some other "Jewish" genetic diseases. On the other hand, where Jewish families carry traits rarely seen in their populations, there is no network of the usual vigilant counselors and doctors carrying

red flags or alerting them to the potential dangers. In my case, finding family members who were either unaware they carried the Beta-Thalassemia trait or had only learned the news late in life - usually when undergoing exhaustive tests for pre-surgery or other medical problems - has been the norm rather than the exception. Recognizing the potential existence of hundreds of unsuspecting carriers in distant branches and that this trait is virtually unknown in Ashkenazim is what drives my genealogical/genetic research project.

Genealogists must be aware that genetic science is not yet able to re-engineer disease-causing genes. That's why genetic counseling and pre-natal testing have played such an important part in raising awareness and helping people understand their chances of being affected with genetic diseases along with how to deal with this knowledge. Directing family members to medical professionals who are trained to communicate the appropriate information is the responsibility of every genealogist charting his or her family's medical history.

### **Researching your family's medical/genetic history**

Genealogists asking medical-related questions - whether of long-known or recently discovered relatives - soon realize they may be treading on delicate ground. Whether the information sought is general - i.e., just to fill in the "cause-of-death" field in a genealogical software program - or very specific, one often hears, "Why do you want to know?" While the question "why" may be the first one heard, the researcher's response must also address "who," "when," "where" and "how," all the while being both cognizant of the sensitive issues and prepared to allay the concerns of the reluctant relative.

### **Why are you doing this? Why do you want to know?**

Whether it is simply asking for names, dates and place - the staples of genealogical research - or medical-related questions, people will ask, "Why are you doing this?" There are many excellent articles and hundreds of posts on JewishGen detailing reasons why individuals become fascinated with family history research. Answering the question "why?" when it involves medical matters has different connotations.

*(Genetic Research continued)*

It has been said, "Ask the family gossip a medical question and the answer may be never-ending or dead silence." Therefore, be prepared to give a direct, carefully crafted answer - one that invites cooperation as opposed to a "never bother me again."

Researchers should:

- Define the objectives of your medical research project (your own "mission statement").
- Be able to clearly explain what you are doing, why you are asking questions.
- Understand and be able to communicate the basic facts of the medical condition or genetic trait that is the basis for your reaching out. Prepare a document that can be used to follow up verbal communications.
- Outline the benefits of your research to all members of your family and their future generations. Use terms they understand - "life-saving" or "preventing the inheritance of a genetic disease in future generations."
- Detail what you expect to do with the information you gather and how it would be communicated to family members or shared with the medical community which might find the data of scientific value.

**Who to talk to**

Every member of each branch of a target family should be tapped for relevant information. "The left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing" may aptly describe what one nuclear family knows and another does not about the circumstances of Zayda's death. When it involves a genetic trait, not every family member will be comfortable sharing all the details or even mentioning it. Therefore, researching your family's medical history and making a genetic tree requires talking to everyone, and frequently more than once.

Researchers must:

- Focus on those branches and individuals who may be able to provide the key leads for expanding the search.
- Never assume anything! People often don't know or cannot remember their exact medical condition. Check and double-check. Ask for permission to talk to family doctors or anyone who has been involved with the health of the family. This is particularly relevant when tracking genetic traits that can be a potential disaster for future

generations as not everyone will recognize the implications of the trait they carry.

- Enlist others in the family, particularly doctors and other medical professionals who understand and support the aims of the research. Ask them to join your team.

**When to start; when to push**

We are told time and again, "Interview the living! The documents will be here forever." The two words genealogists dislike are "if only." If only I had listened to Bubba when she talked about her youth...if only I had written down all those endless stories my father used to tell about his grandparents...if only mother hadn't thrown out Zayda's old address book or diary or \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank!). It is no different for the family historian who seeks to record his family's medical history. Remember when Mom or Dad came home from visiting Uncle Sam at the hospital and went on and on about his strange condition. I wasn't listening, were you? Talk to the older generations *now!*

Even if a death certificate states "arterial sclerosis," you should be asking questions: "Was this a heart attack? When did Zayda first get sick? Was it his first heart attack? Did he die suddenly or was he in the hospital?" Ask about and record the circumstances.

**How to find the answers**

Face-to-face meetings are always the best. They instill confidence. The expression on your face, the sound of your voice show you really care. But genealogists know that researching family history entails more than a drive around town. Our ancestors settled all over the world and our modern families have spread with the winds. It is true that the advent of email and low-cost long-distance rates have significantly simplified the search process and facilitated communications. But unless we are skilled, the printed word can seem unfeeling when asking sensitive medical questions. Because your genuine concern and interest may not come through, the phone call is indeed "the next best thing to being there."

The first goal must be to gain the confidence of the person you are calling, often someone who may never have heard of you or your branch. Even the words to be left on an answering machine should be carefully considered in advance. Establishing credibility with someone you are calling or writing for the first time is a must.

When phone calls are impractical (for reasons of cost, language barriers, etc.), the reaching-out letter

*(continued on page 8)*



## BOOK REVIEW

by Diane Goldman, JGSGW

*If I Forget Thee...: The Destruction of the Shtetl Butrimantz*, Testimony by Riva Lozansky and other witnesses. Trans. Eva Tverskoy. Eds. Olga Zabludoff and Lily Poritz Miller. Washington, D.C. Remembrance Books, 1998 (151 pp.)

Readers are privileged to see events through the eyes of their guides, 4 of 5 surviving town Jews: Dvora Reznik, Victoria Golombewski, Riva Lozansky-Bogomolny, and Tevie Sheinker (Tsila Lozansky-Sheinker, since deceased). The fifth survivor is Dvora's sister Shifra. An essay by JGSGW member Olga Zabludoff presents complex layers of town life, including political groups, musicians and school officials.

Our visit to this town of 200 Jewish families and three synagogues lasts from the June 1941 German invasion through the post-war fate of survivors and their persecutors. The text includes a list of victims compiled during the war by two of those who perished - Hona Boyarsky and his son Avram. Each death's location and circumstance are noted, to the extent known. Their list is followed by 31 pages of photos, showing numerous citizens of Butrimantz, the town's pre-war society and its post-war visage.

The book is a tribute to Riva Lozansky-Bogomolny, who authored much of the book, and took responsibility for preparing a grave site for the mass dead of Butrimantz, for searching out Jewish mass graves at other Lithuanian sites, for hunting Nazi collaborators. This recent publication is much more than a history of the community or a tribute to human strength (and weakness). It is a successful effort by genealogists to honor their ancestral home. The book owes much to Lisa Beth Kaplan, to Carl Horvitz, and to JGSGW members Olga Zabludoff and Stephen Grafman.

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*(The foregoing review appeared in the Spring 1999 issue, Vol. 19(1), pp. 10-11, of Mishpacha, the newsletter of the JGS of Greater Washington. Reprinted with permission.)*

## Fall 1999 Genealogy Series

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto) has received an invitation from the North York Central Library to give a series of lectures as part of the fall program in order to popularize genealogy, teach family tree-making and genealogical research, and present techniques of family history publishing. The lectures are designed for the general public and are suitable for teenagers to seniors. They will take place at the library at 5120 Yonge Street, Toronto.

**Sunday, October 17, 1999 - 3:00 to 4:30 pm, Room 1**  
*"Jewish Genealogy for the 21st Century - How to Make Your Family Tree Grow"*  
Speaker: Dr. Rolf Lederer

A bird's-eye view of how to start your research will be provided. Techniques include interviews, locating records, searching the Internet and sharing information with other researchers. Visual aids will be utilized.

Dr. Lederer is a psychiatrist in Toronto. He was co-founder of our society in 1985. He has traced back several branches of his family to the beginning of the 18th century. He writes and lectures on genealogical topics in Canada, the United States and Israel.

**Sunday, November 14, 1999 - 3:00 to 4:30 pm, Room 1**  
*"How to Document Victims and Find Survivors of the Holocaust with Resources Available in the Toronto Area"*  
Speaker: Henry Wellisch

A comprehensive and practical lecture full of tips which will make participants aware of the extensive resources available locally for research pertaining to the Holocaust.

Mr. Wellisch was president of our society from 1993 to 1998. He was born and lived in Vienna until his departure in 1939. For the last fifteen years he has researched his family who lived in Vienna for many years and he was able to trace his roots back to the 18th century.

**Sunday, December 5, 1999 - 3:00 to 4:30 pm, Auditorium**  
*"How to Self-publish Your Family History"*  
Speaker: Dr. Larry Gaum

A presentation of the methods the speaker used in publishing his own family history, and how this can be achieved through the "magic" of computers. Visual aids will be utilized.

Dr. Gaum is an oral surgeon. About five years ago, after extensive research on his family in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia, and his ancestry in Belarus, he set out to write and publish a book, *"From Belarus to Cape Breton And Beyond - My Family My Roots."*

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*The lectures will run about 1 hour and 30 minutes, including a question-and-answer period. Admission is \$5. Pre-registration is not required. For general inquiries, call: (416) 395-5623.*

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(Genetic Research continued)

must be clear, concise and effective; having it co-signed by other family members and/or a doctor is recommended.

#### **A short guide to interviewing for medical/genetic family history**

- Explain who you are, where you live, and how you got his or her name.
- Convey why you have an interest in the family's history - in a few short sentences.
- Describe your exact relationship or what you think the relationship may be. Articulate it in terms that a non-genealogist understands. "Third cousins, once removed" is likely to bring silence. But, "My grandfather and your great-grandmother were sister and brother" is far easier to grasp.
- Share your family history: Tell the story of your branch and show a general interest in theirs, where they live and how they got there. Offer to send a "family tree" but avoid providing details as to whether it will be a graphic tree, a descendant's list or other report - that gets confusing to non-genealogists. Share a vignette about a common ancestor or living relative, one that will make them proud or provide a laugh.
- Avoid the turn-off: While most people are flattered to be asked non-leading questions about their history and unique accomplishments, it could be dangerous to rush into discussions about college degrees or well-kept family secrets about mental illnesses or suicides. Allow the conversation to evolve. Avoid putting on pressure...don't try to get all the information in one phone conversation.
- Define your role as the family historian: If you are the first person to call about the family, then - in their eyes - you become a special person to be befriended or feared. You will be *the* family historian by default. People want to be cast in a favorable light. Listen, take notes...ask questions...take more notes!
- Elaborate about yourself as an individual: Describe where your family history studies have taken you, whether it be to ancestral towns, the Family History Library in Salt Lake City or visits with branches you just discovered. This deep interest and sincere effort will be recognized. If articles about your research have appeared in magazines and newspapers, send copies. If you have a website, suggest they look at it and offer the URL; but refrain from put-downs if they are not computerized!

- Carefully posing the medical/genetic question: How you say it and what you say should be tailored to your own comfort level and the nature of the reaction. One example might be: "You know, because of my study of our family, I hear as many questions as I ask. It seems everyone is curious about one thing or another and I now seem to be the one with some answers. Health preoccupies all our older relatives and that has taught me a lot. For instance, were you aware that Grandma and almost all her siblings had heart disease? That made me curious and I found that their father's death certificate showed heart disease too. I guess that's a signal for us. What's the heart situation in your family?"

The question I usually pose is: "Has there been any sign of mild chronic anemia in your family?" By way of follow-up, the comment is: "Well, we seem to be rather special. We are one of only thirteen Ashkenazic families carrying a genetic trait called Beta-Thalassemia or Mediterranean anemia." Often, by the time I get that out of my mouth, the questions come rapidly: "What does that mean?" or "Is it dangerous?" or "How do you know if you are a carrier?" That's when the calming words and clear statements are needed. My reply is: "It has no effect on carriers - I know because I am one - but there is a significance to future generations..." The discussion goes on from there, and I quickly point out that I am not a medical person but merely someone with a deep interest in the medical and genetic history of our family.

#### **How research is different**

There are several features of genealogical research with a medical/genetic focus that sets it apart from typical family history projects.

- Potential for networking: There are more receptive ears...everywhere, both within and outside the genealogical community, particularly when it involves potential life-saving situations.
- Response of the genealogical community: Genealogists are probably the most generous individuals one can find in any walk of life. When genetics are involved, the response is magnified both in quantity and quality.
- Reaction of archival resources: Archivists, whether at home or abroad, can vary from being highly cooperative to passionately supportive. Invite the archivist to be part of your research team!
- Support from the non-genealogical community:

(continued on page 9)



(Genetic Research continued)

Newspapers want stories; doctors and scientists welcome the opportunity to share their expertise or learn from unique studies; universities seek projects which address the need of students to learn while at the same time making meaningful contributions to the outside world. The Jewish Genetic Disease mailing list is a forum for networking with both medical professionals and those at risk or suffering from genetic diseases. Go to: <http://www.gaucherdisease.org/list.htm>

- The credibility factor: Because it involves the health of both living family and future generations, your family history project should rightly give your research an enhanced level of credibility. This is not automatic. It takes time, effort and patience to bring all the pieces together.

### Documentation, Confidentiality, Perpetuity

Whatever the reasons for charting your family's medical and genetic history, confidentiality must be respected; permission is necessary to share information. In the U.S., where it often seems medical insurers are looking over everyone's shoulder, there is a particular need for prudence. (I maintain a separate confidential family tree of carriers of the trait.) Finally, decide to whom you will pass on your valuable research and under what conditions.

### Acknowledgements

To launch, persevere and have success with a genealogical/genetic project, one is fortunate to have the inspiration, guidance and moral support of the medical/scientific world. My stimulus came from Dr. Robert Desnick of Mount Sinai at the 1992 Jewish Genealogical Conference in New York. He introduced me to Dr. Charles Scriver of McGill University. This led to the Beta-Thalassemia research project and the paper published with Scriver and Dr. Ariella Oppenheim et al in *Human Mutation*, January 1997. They, their associates and many others have been unstinting in their support, contributions and encouragement. ☆

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*From a presentation by Stanley M. Diamond at the 19th Annual Conference on Jewish Genealogy, New York, August 11, 1999. Reprinted with permission of the author.*

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*Stanley M. Diamond, MBA Harvard, is founding president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal, and Project Co-ordinator of Jewish Records Indexing - Poland. Diamond has a particular interest in genealogical research related to genetics that ultimately*

*led to the creation of JRI - Poland. He is the genealogist for the international team doing research related to his family's novel mutation of the Beta-Thalassemia genetic trait and is co-author of a scientific paper related to the project, "Probable Identity by Descent and Discovery of Familial Relationships by Means of a Rare Beta-Thalassemia Haplotype," *Human Mutation* 9:86-87 (1997). As part of his research, Diamond is documenting the rare incidence of the Beta-Thalassemia trait in Ashkenazic Jewish families of the Diaspora. <[www.geocities.com/heartland/pointe/1439](http://www.geocities.com/heartland/pointe/1439)> Diamond was the founder and Chairman of the Intalite International Group of Companies from which he retired in 1986.*

### Recommended for Further Reading


Nelson-Anderson, Danette L., R.N., B.S.N., and Waters, Cynthia V., *Genetic Connections: A Guide to Documenting Your Individual and Family Health History*, Sonters Publishing, P.O. Box 109, Washington, MO 63090-0109, 1995. 301 pages. ISBN 0-9639154-1/2/3

Willard, Jim and Terry, with Wilson, Jane, *Ancestors: A Beginner's Guide to Family History and Genealogy*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1997. (Chapter 8: Your Medical Heritage, pages 89-102.) ISBN 0-395-85410-5



### We Welcome These New Members to Our Society

Jerry Bromstein	Gord Meslin
Reuben Bromstein	Linda R. Offman
Albert Edelstein	Kathryn Polychronopoulos
Marilyn Glass	Terri Rothman
Warren Goldstein	Sara Ruda
David Grader	Minna Sapirman
S. Grosbein	Arlene Stone
Penina Hornstein	Sadie Stren
Beverly Kassirer	Jackie Welland
Stephen Kraft	Kenneth Wyman
Avraham Lebenfish	



20th International  
Conference on Jewish Genealogy  
Salt Lake City, Utah  
July 9-13, 2000

For the latest updates on SLC Y2K:  
[www.jewishgen.org/iajgs](http://www.jewishgen.org/iajgs)

## Polish Business Directories

by Carolynne Veffer

I think I'm like a lot of Jewish genealogists born in North America. When I started my research I assumed my grandparents, who came to Canada in 1929, were from Polish shtetls that looked like something out of "Fiddler on the Roof": tiny populations, dirt roads, horses and carts. I had no vision of Poland in the 1920s. During my research I learned differently about Ilza, Wierzbnik and Zwolen - the towns from which they came. While not major metropolises, they did have populations in the thousands in the '20s. And I was astonished by the variety of occupations I found in a 1926 Polish business directory. Finding this directory was a real eye-opener.

I had seen references to Polish business directories in various genealogical articles, but no directories were available in Toronto (at least I haven't found any - I searched the library catalogues for U of T, York and the Central Reference Library). But several months ago there was a note from Tomasz Wisniewski of Poland in the JewishGen discussion group mentioning having "a list of names for Zwolen." It turned out to be something that looked like a business directory - occupations and names written in Polish and French. It provided an amazing view of the assortment of occupations - from blacksmiths to candy-makers to jobs in a savings and loan association. I promptly ordered Ilza and Wierzbnik.

When I received the lists, the first thing I did was look for "my names." To my great delight, I found my grandfather in the Wierzbnik list! There he was - Gershon Malach. Despite the list being in French as well as Polish, I wasn't sure what his occupation was. From the French, it looked like something resembling shoes. But what exactly? All I knew was that in Canada he was a leather cutter. So I started to look through the reference material to figure out what exactly this "list of names" was and how to translate the occupations.

It turned out what I had were pages from the Księga Adresowa Polski (Directory of Poland) 1925 (or '26?). According to Jeffrey Cymbler, it is "the most comprehensive business directory published for post-World War I Poland." It includes even the smallest villages. In addition to names and occupations, it provides information about towns: population; distance from the nearest larger town; number of schools, hospitals, synagogues; market day, etc. What a find!

I discovered that my grandfather made the

upper part of boots. But the excitement wasn't just finding "my names"; it's getting an overview of what the town was like, the occupations of the people who were friends and neighbours; and gaining a clearer picture of the town.

Business directories exist from all three empires that "governed" portions of pre-World War I Poland (Russian, Austro-Hungarian and German). They start as early as the mid-19th century. And there are other versions and years for directories between World War I and II. I encourage everyone to use these as a source for Polish genealogical research.

OCCUPATIONS				
POLISH	FRENCH	ENGLISH	NAME	INITIAL
Herbaciarnic	Debits de the	Tea house/shop	Bliman	D.
			Tolak	S.
Hotele	Hotels	Hotels	Zajfman	Ch.
			X Zylberman	Ch.
Introligatorzy	Relieurs	Bookbinders	Bensztok	M.
Jaja	Oeufs	Eggs	Rolnicicki	P.
Kamaszniczy	Tiges p. chaussures	Upper	Frymerman	J.
		Boot Makers	Goldberg	Fizel
			Isser	Sz.
			Korenblum	I.
			Malach	Gershon
Kamieniolomy	Carrieres de pierres	Stone quarries	Kuczynski	J.
			Lichtensztejn	H.
			Plusa	J.
			Sokol	I.
			Taubman	Bcia
			Krzysz	M.
Kapelusznicy	Chapeliers	Hatters	Krzysz	M.
Kasy pożyczk oszczędz	Caisse d'emprunt et	Savings &	X Kasa oszczędz.pow	
Kawiarnie	dispargne	Loans		
Kinematografy	Café	Cafés	Goraczka St.	
	Cinemas	Movie theatres	X "Oaza" w/l.	J.
			Przygoda	
Kiszki zwierzece	Boyaudiers	Casing maker	Gielbard	J.
		(sausage)		
Kołodzieje	Charrons	Wheelwrights	Warszawski	
Kominarskie	Entrepr. de	Chimney	Grudzinski	J.
przedsięb	ramonage	swsaps		
Konfektcja	Confections	Candy Seller/	Frankiel	M.
		Candy shop	Goldszajn	J.
			Rozenberg	L.

### Sources

#### Books & Articles

Boonim, Harry D., "Russian Business Directories," *Avotaynu*, Vol. VI, Number 4 (Winter 1990)

Cymbler, Jeffrey K., "19th and 20th Century Polish Directories in Resources for Genealogical Information," *Avotaynu*, Vol. XIII, Number 1 (Spring 1997)

Eisenberg Davis, Lauren, "Nineteenth Century Occupations," *Kielce-Radom SIG Journal*, Vol. III, Number 2 (Spring 1999)

Rhodes, James, "Russian Business Directories as Aids in Genealogical Research," *Avotaynu*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Spring 1998)

Ring, Dolores Lee, "Cyrillic Occupations," *Kielce-Radom SIG Journal*, Vol. II, Number 2 (Spring 1998)

Weiner, Miriam, *Jewish Roots in Poland*

(Polish Business Directories continued)

#### Locations

Business directories are available at the following locations and may be found elsewhere as well:

- Harvard University (Widener Library)
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (some German directories)
- Library of Congress (Microform Division)
- New York Public Library (Slavic and Baltic Division)

At the New York Jewish genealogy conference this August, Stan Diamond gave an update on their business directory project. The JRI - Poland project recently acquired a photocopy of the 3,000-page 1929 Polish Business Directory. They are working out a detailed system for distribution of pages in order to get the whole business directory transcribed and available online. They will try to come up with workable methods in the coming weeks. Keep an eye on the JRI - Poland entry on JewishGen for updates. This could be a great way to both get information for yourself and to volunteer and help your fellow genealogists. ☆

*Carolynne Veffler is treasurer of the JGS of Canada (Toronto)*



### Advertising Rates

**SHEM TOV** is now accepting display advertising for publication. Advertisers are requested to supply camera-ready art and payment by November 1999 for the winter 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
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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.

## Jewish Genealogy Conferences 1981-2001

- 1981 - New York City  
Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1982 - Washington, D.C.  
Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy II
- 1983 - Los Angeles  
3rd National Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1984 - Jerusalem  
International Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1984 - Chicago  
4th National Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy  
(Yes, there were two conferences in 1984)
- 1985 - New York City  
5th National Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1986 - Salt Lake City  
6th National Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1987 - London  
2nd International Jewish Genealogy Conference
- 1988 - Washington, D.C.  
7th Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1989 - Philadelphia  
8th National Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1990 - Los Angeles  
9th Annual Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1991 - Salt Lake City  
3rd International Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1992 - New York City  
11th Annual Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1993 - Toronto  
12th Annual International Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1994 - Jerusalem  
4th International Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1995 - Washington, D.C.  
14th Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1996 - Boston  
15th Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1997 - Paris  
5th International Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1998 - Los Angeles  
18th Annual Seminar on Jewish Genealogy
- 1999 - New York City  
19th Annual Conference on Jewish Genealogy
- 2000 - Salt Lake City  
20th International Conference on Jewish Genealogy
- 2001 - London  
Name not yet finalized

## **Canadian Immigration** *Adelle Weintraub Gloger*

I receive an e-mail newsletter from RootsWeb and today there was an extensive article about Canadian immigration through Pier 21 in Halifax. Pier 21 appears to be the equivalent of Ellis Island in the USA. Pier 21 will re-open on July 1, 1999 after being refurbished and opened to the public. The website is interactive. One of the areas that might be of interest is a listing of ships that came to Pier 21 with immigrants and refugees as well as war brides, etc. I'm sure this will help many with Canadian connections.

The URL is: <http://www.pier21.ns.ca>

## **CGJ - Cercle de Genealogie Juive**

The oldest French Jewish Genealogy Society has at last opened its Internet home. Come and visit us at:

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

You will find:

- the bilingual summaries of our Revue, which contains valuable research tools, ancestor lists, in-depth genealogical analyses, etc.
- the various publications available for sale among which are the 1808 name adoption lists for Alsace, the 18th-century life records in Lorraine, the index of the 18th-century Jewish marriage contracts in Alsace, the papers of the 1997 International Seminar in Paris, etc. Also the cassette recordings of our monthly conferences on various topics.
- a billboard where you can post your personal questions (English language accepted) in order to receive answers from a selection of our 580 members.

Our members often originate from various European countries, and thus may be knowledgeable beyond our political borders. Many emigrants from Germany, Eastern Europe, etc. have stopped in France, sometimes for extended periods, and have kept traces in civil records or even in naturalization files, which are full of information.

Also, significant parts of Europe - from Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands - have been annexed by the French at the turn of the 19th century, when they introduced civil records. These regions have mostly maintained this practice up to now.

There will be more in a short time.

Welcome to our home page: [www.genealoj.org](http://www.genealoj.org) !

Ernest Kallmann

Neully, France

[ekallmann@club-internet.fr](mailto:ekallmann@club-internet.fr)

## **Anglo-Jewish Data on the Web** *Jeffrey Maynard*

I have updated my "*Anglo-Jewish Miscellanies*" website, which now includes:

Index to London Jewish Chronicle Birth, Marriage and Death Announcements to 1869

Index to London Jewish Chronicle Birth, Marriage and Death Announcements, 1880-1889

Contributors to the Initiation Society, 1886

Contributors to the Society for the Aged Poor, 1891

Contributors to the Sick Room Help Society, 1907-8

Members of the Central Synagogue, London, 1909

London Synagogue Officials, 1931

This is a simple site with no graphics as it is for research, but be patient as some of the files are big!

The URL is: <http://www.berzack.com/jeff>

## **21,866 New Records in the "All Lithuania" Database**

*David Noyek Handler*

*Co-coordinator, LitvakSIG*

To all who have been waiting - the first update to the "All Lithuania" database went "live" today. You will find additional listings for 21,866 records within many different shtetlach and uyezds for Voters, Taxes, Births, and a variety of listings for directories - street, telephone, business, medical - and names indexed from books of Lithuanian interest.

Within a few days, we will be adding thousands of cemetery listings, and additional Revision, Tax, and Voter lists, as well as more vital records. We have much, much more "in the works" and are moving as fast as we can. Not all introductions are in place, but we didn't want to hold up on this information.

Special thanks to JewishGen for hosting us; Anne Rothman, who put everything into the correct format; and to Michael Tobias, without whom none of this would ever happen.

Good luck in all your searches - and be sure to read the names of those who have made this possible at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/litvak/contribute.htm>

To get to the "All Lithuania" database:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/litvak>

