

שם טוב
SHEM TOV

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF CANADA (TORONTO)

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LOOKING FOR A BATKIS IN A HAYSTACK: USING JEWISH GENEALOGICAL RESOURCES FROM WESTERN CANADA

by Carolynne Veffler

We get a number of general inquiries to our society e-mail, info@jgstoronto.ca.

In trying to help the inquirer, I sometimes find resources I've never accessed before. And perhaps there are some resources I use that you aren't aware of. So I thought the following inquiry might be of interest since it references: 1925-1935 Immigration Record Database, Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada, Passenger List records at the North York Central Library.

It started with the following message to our Society:

"Dear sirs!

"Whether very much we ask write to us you can to help to us and to find in Canada for our relatives: surname Batkis; names: Nahman, Gersh, Avrum which have left for Canada in 1925 - 1927. Their father called Shimon Excuse, that we disturb you.

Silviya Batkis "

(NOTE: I eventually found out these were brothers of Silviya's husband's grandfather.)

At first I thought this would be fairly easy. They arrived between 1925 and 1927. That should mean they'd be on the fabulous online database of immigration records. I had found my grandparents' records there simply by entering "Malach." I didn't need to know the date, the port or anything else. So I went to the database to try "Batkis."

But as you'll see in my reply to Silviya, this search was not successful:

"Hello Silviya,

"I received the e-mail you sent to the Jewish Genealogy Society of Toronto. I can only give you a little help.

"1. There are Immigration records for Canada from 1925 to 1935. It is very easy to search the database. I hoped I would find a Batkis, since you said they came between 1925 and 1927. But I didn't find anything. Here is the link: http://www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet/02011802_e.html

"I even tried their first names, but still got nothing with a last name like Batkis. But I leave it to you to try more searches. Perhaps I missed something. The

last name in this database should be the name on their passports. (People think their ancestors changed their names when they came to North America, but that would be after they arrived. On arrival they would be registered using the names on their official documents.)

"2. Next I tried the online telephone listing for Canada. Here is the link: <http://findaperson.canada411.ca/>. I entered 'Batkis' for 'all provinces' and got only two hits: B. Batkis and M. Batkis. Both live in the province of Manitoba.... I think your best option is to contact the two Batkises in Manitoba. There is a Jewish Genealogy Society of Manitoba as well. They might be able to help you with additional local sources. Here is a link to their web site: <http://www.jhcwc.mb.ca/geninst.htm>

"Finally, I assume you have checked Family Finder on Jewishgen (there is someone named Daniel

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UPCOMING EVENTS

Programs organized by the Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto)

*Unless otherwise noted, programs take place at the
Shaarei Shomayim Synagogue - 470 Glencairn Avenue*

Doors open at 7:30, program begins at 8 p.m.

Non-member fee: \$5.00 per meeting

Sunday, October 22, 2006

Details T.B.A.

Speakers: Gord Meslin & Neil Richler

Beginner's Workshop

This popular program will have wireless access, so bring your wireless-enabled laptop and try out some of the web sites discussed during the workshop.

Monday, November 6, 2006

In association with Holocaust Education Week

Speaker: Henry Wellisch

Topic: Theresienstadt

This presentation will focus on the history of the town of Theresienstadt and the establishment of the ghetto there. The Germans tried to use it for counter-propaganda purposes, to refute the persistent reports on the continuing Holocaust in the east. They even produced a film, which has been partially preserved and which will be shown as part of the presentation. Tens of thousands of Jews, mostly from Germany, Austria and Czecho-

slovakia, were sent to this camp, but many ended up in the extermination camps in the east. Some records have been saved and the presentation will discuss the various sources available.

Henry Wellisch, our unique and valuable resource, was president of the Toronto JGS from 1993 to 1998 and has made many presentations to our Society. He has published numerous articles and lectured on various genealogical subjects in Toronto and worldwide. He has concentrated his research on the Austro-Hungarian Empire and was able to trace his family back to the middle of the 18th century.

Wednesday, November 29, 2006

Speaker: Michael Goldstein

Topic: Finding & Connecting with Your Israeli Relatives

Whether they came to Palestine in the 19th century as chalutzim or more recently as Holocaust refugees or part of the wave of Jewish immigration from the former Soviet Union, members of your family have almost certainly reached Israel. To help

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The Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada was founded in 1985 and currently has over 200 members. Membership costs \$36 per calendar year, \$18 for students. (Please note that the out of town reduction has been deleted). 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* and on our website at: www.jgstoronto.ca.

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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Officers of the Society:

President	CAROLYNNE VEFFER	president@jgstoronto.ca
Vice President	PENNY GROSS	vp@jgstoronto.ca
Secretary	LUCY SADOWSKY	secretary@jgstoronto.ca
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	DAVID TROST	

Shem Tov Staff:

Editor	DIANE KRIGER	
Managing Editor	HENRY WELLISCH	shemtov@jgstoronto.ca
Contributing Editor	RUTH CHERNIA	
Layout and Design	DULCEY HOFFMAN	
JGS Copy Service	STAN ZEIDENBERG	

Contributors to this Issue	ELAINE CHESKES	
	MIRAY CHESKES-GRANOVSKY	
	DR. ROLF LEDERER	
	CAROLYNNE VEFFER	
	HENRY WELLISCH	

E-mail address of the society:

info@jgstoronto.ca

genealogists locate these relatives or their descendants, we will explore a range of known and lesser-known sources including Israeli government databases, cemetery records, landsmanshaften, Israel-based archives and more. We will give tips on how to best overcome the Hebrew hurdle and the distance. And finally, we'll brief you on cultural and communications issues to keep in mind once you've tracked down your Israeli relatives and/or their descendants.

Michael Goldstein, born in Montreal, is a Jerusalem-based genealogist who researches, coaches and conducts workshops in Israel and North America. He specializes in helping North Americans locate and connect with their Israeli family, and has enjoyed particular success in tracing Israelis whose testimonies are found in Yad Vashem records.

Wednesday, December 13, 2006

Speaker: Bill Gladstone

Topic: Roots and Remembrance

Plus: JGS Elections

Wednesday, January 31, 2007

Speaker: Eli Bahar

Topic: The Jews of Turkey

Eli Bahar, an executive with IBM, moved to Toronto with his family in 1994. Born to a Sephardic family in Turkey, Eli grew up in a modern but conservative Jewish environment, went to Turkish, French and American schools and made aliyah to Israel, where he studied engineering at the Technion and met his wife Geni.

Geni and Eli made a presentation to our group, earlier this year, on their journey to Poland, where they were looking for Geni's family roots in Ostrowiec. We are now bringing Eli back to tell us about the history and culture of the Jews of Turkey.

Wednesday, February 28, 2007

Ontario Jewish Archives, 3600 Bathurst Street

Speaker: Ellen Scheinberg

Topic: Toronto Jewish Synagogues

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/TorontoSynagogues/>

Wednesday, March 28, 2007

T.B.A.

***For further information visit our website
at www.jgstoronto.ca or
watch the "What's New" column in the
Canadian Jewish News.***

Descendants of the Sax Family of Toronto Reunite to Celebrate

by Miray Cheskes-Granovsky

Descendants of Louis and Edith Sax gathered recently at the Richmond Hill Country Club to celebrate the family's arrival in Canada 100 years ago. About 115 relatives attended the reunion and learned about their ancestors. Attendees were very moved by the warmth and sense of connection felt amongst family members who had never met before. Prior to this event, a 1959 Purim party was the last reunion of the entire Sax family. Older family members were overwhelmed with emotion at the recent gathering and excited to see new relationships form among younger Sax relatives.

In 1906, Solomon Sax, 19, arrived alone in Canada from Korostyshev, Russia. Three of Solomon's brothers and one sister followed him shortly thereafter. In 1910 his parents, Louis and Edith, came to Canada with the rest of the family – seven more children aged 7 to 19. Louis and Edith were thrilled to be reunited with all 12 of their children. There were seven sons and five daughters – Abraham, Solomon, Joseph, Morris, William, Irving, Harry, Ida, Lena, Gertrude, Riva and Sarah. They lived in the heart of Kensington and attended the Kiever Synagogue.

Throughout the years the Sax family flourished and prospered. Today the Sax family numbers about 200 relatives, representing five generations of descendants from Louis and Edith Sax. Four of the Sax brothers were master carpenters who built the Aron Hakodesh and front entrance doors of Beth Sholom Synagogue. The Aron and front doors were preserved throughout the synagogue's recent major renovation. The Sax -Vaughan Road Pharmacy was a well-known, successful pharmacy in Toronto. Several of the Sax children and grandchildren were in the linen supply business that was bought out by The Canadian Linen Supply Company. A number of the grandchildren served in the armed forces during World War II. Many family members served on boards of various synagogues and community organizations, and one descendant became the Grand Master of the Royal Arch Masons of Canada (Ontario).

By all accounts, the 12 Sax siblings were a very closely-knit family. They made efforts to visit one another every weekend and they started a cousins' club for their children. They worked together and brought family members into their businesses when they needed employment. The siblings all shared a love of music and sang Yiddish songs together at family celebrations. Today, many Sax family members play instruments, sing in choral groups and even play music professionally.

The last of the 12 original Sax siblings passed away in 1983. Since then, many of the Sax cousins have remained close and see each other regularly. Most of the descendants of Louis and Edith Sax still live in the Greater Toronto area. As with any large family, there were relatives who drifted apart over time and lost contact with the Sax clan. Several family members have undertaken an extensive genealogical study of the Sax family. The family's original name was Strokowsky. The Sax family is interested in locating other family members and finding information about their ancestors. If you have any information, please contact the Sax Family Web Site at www.thesaxfamily.org.

I am the great-granddaughter of Louis and Edith Sax and I am very proud of their legacy – a strong, caring, close family that has survived throughout the generations.

Looking for a Batkis in a Haystack Cont'd from page 1

Martin Stolar who is researching the name Batkis). Sorry I can't be more help. Good luck with your search."

After sending this e-mail I decided to google "Batkis" and "Canada." Among the hits was one to the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada; their site is <http://www.jhcwc.org/search.htm>. This is a remarkable resource. It said they had eight hits for "Batkis" and one for "Batkiss." So I e-mailed them (copying in Silviya), asking about the information they had on "Batkis."

But then I received the following message from Silviya:

"Dear sirs!

"Has received from you 2 messages. Many thanks for the help. I have a problem. I do not know English language. Therefore likely I write with mistakes as I write [in Hebrew] and by means of the computer program I translate into English language. I live in Israel. If any help in Israel or in Moldova will be necessary to you, I with pleasure shall help you. (if it will be in my forces)

"Many thanks. All good. Silviya"

So, I couldn't really leave poor Silviya to follow up on all these clues. And by this time, I was getting interested. So I corresponded with Irma Penn at the JHCWC. Here is the first response I got from Irma. Note particularly the amazing resources her search accessed (I have added the bolding):

"Hello Carolynne,

"We have the following information on Batkis:

Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada
Database Search - August 18, 2005

Search of: 'batkis'

Search of 51640 Newspaper Articles:

Subject: DEATH
Article ID: 51612
Participants: Ben Batkis - formerly on Henderson Hwy.
Newspaper: JEWISH POST Dec 30, 1899
Category: GENEALOGY
Comments: DECEASED AS OF APRIL 15/2005

Subject: ELECTIONS, "Y" KAPPA CLUB
Article ID: 47372
Participants: DIAMOND,PAULINE,PRES; KUSSIN, ESTHER,SEC;
Newspaper: JEWISH POST Feb 5, 1940 PAGE 6
Category: YMHA
Comments: IDA BATKIS,TREAS.

Subject: MARRIAGE- AUG. 21
Article ID: 13508
Participants: BATKIS, RAZY & BROOKLER, IRVING
Newspaper: JEWISH POST Oct 6, 1955 PAGE 4
PHOTO
Category: GENEALOGY

Comments: PARENTS- BATKIS, CHARLES (MR & MRS); BROOKLER, M (DR & MRS)

Subject: DEATH- AGE, 76, APRIL 9
Article ID: 20546
Participants: GRANOVSKY, KATIE
Newspaper: JEWISH POST Apr 24, 1980 PAGE 18
Category: GENEALOGY
Comments: SURVIVED BY- 2 DAUGHTERS COHEN RAE, BATKIS, MIRIAM, 3 SONS LES OF MIAMI, HARVEY, VANCOUVER AND HARRY

Subject: BIRTH-APRIL 7
Article ID: 21569
Participants: KAPLAN, YAEL MEREDITH
Newspaper: JEWISH POST Apr 15, 1992 PAGE 11
Category: GENEALOGY
Comments: PARENTS: KAPLAN, FAITH & HART. SIBLING: ADAM. GRANDPARENTS: LINDER, SHEILA & ELVIN, KAPLAN, IDA. GREAT-GRANDPARENTS: GOODMAN, DOLLY & JACK; BATKIS, EDITH. NAMED IN MEMORY OF GREAT-GRANDPARENTS: LEONOFF, IDA; BATKIS, MORRIS

Subject: DEATH-APRIL 1
Article ID: 21589
Participants: BATKIS, MORRIS
Newspaper: JEWISH POST May 13, 1992 PAGE 18
Category: GENEALOGY
Comments: SURVIVORS: WIFE-EDITH; DAUGHTERS-KAPLAN, IDA & GRUSKO, JOSIE

Subject: DEATH-JAN. 8, 1994
Article ID: 22034
Participants: KOWALL, ROSE
Newspaper: JEWISH POST Jan 26, 1994 PAGE 18
Category: GENEALOGY
Comments: PREDECEASED BY: HUSBAND-KOWALL, DAVID. SURVIVORS: CHILDREN-KOWALL, HAROLD & HONEY; ADLER, DOREEN & SID; SISTER-BATKIS, EDITH; GRANDCHILDREN-FREEDMAN, CAROL & MARK; GITALIS, SHARYN & SIMON; GOODMAN, WENDY & JORDAN; KOWALL, SHARI & TESSLER, ALAN; SLUSKY, CINDY & JEFFREY; ADLER, ANDREA; GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN

Search of 15369 Cemetery Burials:

Cem ID 789: Esther (FREEDMAN) BATKIS
Burial Loc: B'nay Abraham Cemetery E-19-4
Died/buried: 1969 Nov 22

Cem ID 790: Harry BATKIS
 Burial Loc: Hebrew Sick Benefit Cemetery B1-9-7
 Died/buried: 1944 Feb 7

Cem ID 791: Morris BATKIS
 Burial Loc: Rosh Pina Memorial Park A-15-483
 Died/buried: 1992 Apr 1

Cem ID 792: Rebecca BATKIS
 Burial Loc: Hebrew Sick Benefit Cemetery A3-6-7
 Died/buried: 1957 Jun 14

Cem ID 793: Rose BATKIS
 Burial Loc: Hebrew Sick Benefit Cemetery A3-10-7
 Died/buried: 1959 Aug 5

Cem ID 794: Toby BATKIS
 Burial Loc: Rosh Pina Memorial Park E-6-106
 Died/buried: 1994 May 22

Search of 1616 Books:

0 Books found

Search of 8880 Manuscripts:

Box / File: JHC 121 File 28
 Manuscript #: 4045
 Title: JIAS
 Comments: **Batkis, Gersh**

Search of 902 Tapes:

0 Tapes found

Search of 5999 Photos:

0 Photos found

Search of 607 Artifacts:

0 Manuscripts found”

Wow. All those articles, records, tapes, photos and artifacts that they’d indexed. It was astounding. And there was even one item for Gersh Batkis under Manuscripts. But I didn’t know what was in the file. So I e-mailed Irma asking her how I could find out what was in the Jewish Immigrant Aid Society (JIAS) File. She was kind enough to get the file and told me there were eight letters about farming in Saskatchewan in 1925. We agreed that I would make a donation to JHCWC for her copying the letters and mailing them to me (as I said, my interest was piqued and they certainly deserved a donation).

I don’t have the letters anymore – I sent them to Silviya – but they related to Gersh Batkis having come with his wife and four children to Saskatchewan (farming in Edenbridge - see NOTE) in 1924 (that’s why they weren’t in the 1925-35 data-

base). I then imposed on the always helpful David Price, who went to the North York Central Reference Library and looked through the 1924 passenger lists and found the entries for Gersh Batkis and his family. Not an easy task when all you have is a year and a name. Thanks David! While the copies weren’t clearly legible I did have a name for his wife, Rifka, and his eldest child, Moishe.

I looked back at the original information that Irma had sent and noticed the references to Rebecca Batkis (could this be Rifka?) and Morris Batkis (could this be Moishe?). So I sent the following e-mail to Irma:

“Hi Irma,

“I received the copies you sent of the letters about Gersh Batkis from the JIAS file. It was very interesting, although it didn’t say what ultimately happened. But it did tell me they came in 1924 and we were then able to find passenger list records for him and his family at the North York Reference Library. Among the passenger lists it said he had a wife Rifka who was 44 in 1924 and a son Moishe who was 17 in 1924 (and 3 other children whose names were hard to decipher from the microfiche).

“So...this made me wonder if the Morris Batkis who has an obituary record and burial record in April 1, 1992 might be Moishe. Neither says how old he was at his death. He’d have to have died at around 85 years old.

“Is there a way for you to get age information from either of those records? If this is the same person, then perhaps I’d be able to contact his survivors (who would be relatives of the person in Israel I’m helping in this search). His wife Edith may no longer be alive, but I’m hoping if it is him, it would be possible to contact one of his daughters (Ida Kaplan or Josie Grusko).

“There’s also a cemetery record for a Rebecca Batkis who might be his wife Rifka, but I don’t know if there’s a way to get more information to find out if she was the wife of Gersh, mother of Moishe - is there?

“Any help you can provide would be greatly appreciated.”

In a couple of hours I got this very interesting response:

“Yes, Morris’s wife was Edith (in the obit). So it’s the same person. He was born June 15, 1905, d. Apr 1, 1992. Ida Kaplan, I know her. Ida’s phone number is 204-837-9950. I phoned and left a message. If she calls back I’ll tell her that you are looking for her and give her your number. Rebecca died June 13, 1957 age 71, buried HSBA A3-6-7. Her father’s first name was Arih Leb.”

So while the dates didn’t totally match, I was pretty sure Moishe was Morris. And it turned out Irma knew his daughter Ida, whom we hoped was Gersh Batkis’s granddaughter. What a small world!

Meanwhile, Silviya e-mailed me that a friend who speaks English had called M. Batkis. It turned out Miriam Batkis was Gersh Batkis’s great-granddaughter. They got in touch with another cousin in Calgary who was descended from Gersh’s oldest daughter Bertha. And so on, and so on.

In the end, Silviya and her husband were reunited with the descendants of Gersh Batkis – his grandfather’s brother. Un-

fortunately none of his children were still alive, but there were many grandchildren and great-grandchildren. They were very pleased to find each other. Included in one of the e-mails I received was this paragraph:

"...I am very interested in family history, I think being a mother makes you think about all of these things, and I cannot think of a better gift for my daughter. So I really want to thank you for all of your time and efforts with corresponding with Silviya and getting her connected to us. I am sure as we start to correspond we will be sharing a lot of information. I just had to write to you to let you know how your efforts have turned out...."

I hope some of these resources might be of use to you. After corresponding with Irma I was hoping I'd find I had roots in Western Canada so I could make use of their wonderful collection of resources, but no luck so far.

NOTE ON EDENBRIDGE

Edenbridge, Hirsch, Sonnenfeld and Lipton-Cupar in Saskatchewan, and Rumsey, Trochu and Montefiore in Alberta, were among the Jewish farm colonies founded in the last part of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century. (The name "Edenbridge" is a Canadianized version of "The Jewish Bridge," inspired by the fact that "Eden," which features prominently in early Canadian place names, sounds like "Yidden.")

That Jewish immigrants from Lithuania and other parts of Eastern Europe became intrepid homesteaders is a testimony to the perseverance and courage of many - including the efforts of the Russo-Jewish Committee in London to aid Jews fleeing pogroms, the interventions of Sir Alexander Galt, then Canadian High Commissioner in London, and the ingenuity of the immigrants themselves.

Various sources describe these farming colonies, and the many tribulations and successes of these immigrants. Two web sites of interest are: <http://www.mhs.mb.ca/docs/transactions/3/jewsandwest.shtml>, an article by Abraham J. Arnold for the Manitoba Historical Society entitled "The Contribution of the Jews to the Opening and Development of the West"; and <http://www.niedermayer.ca/~ral/history/index.html> on "Life in Saskatchewan from a Jewish View." Our JGS library in the North York Centre has a book of memoirs by an Edenbridge pioneer, Michael Usiskin, called *Uncle Mike's Edenbridge: Memoirs of a Jewish Farm Pioneer*. Robarts Library at the University of Toronto also has this book, as well as the Yiddish original, *Oksn un motorn: zikhroynes fun a idishn farmer-pioner (di geshikh-te fun Idenbridzsh)*. Robarts also has the more general history by Simon Belkin, *Through Narrow Gates: A Review of Jewish Immigration, Colonization and Immigrant Aid Work in Canada (1840-1940)*.

Spotlight on Members and Friends

Are you interested in volunteering on a genealogy project? Would you like to get some ideas for a project of your own? In this column we will profile some members and friends of our Society, who, in addition to researching their own family trees, are undertaking projects of interest to the general community.

Finding a replacement for the amazing David Price might have been a daunting task. To the great good fortune of the JGS, however, a keen and experienced librarian happened to walk through the door, looking to offer her assistance to David, and in December 2005 **Elaine Cheskes** became the new **JGS Toronto librarian**.

A graduate of the University of Toronto (receiving a B.A. and then many years later a diploma in Library and Information Technology), Elaine worked at the Bora Laskin Law Library and subsequently was on staff for twenty-one years at the U of T Victoria College, Pratt Library, as a cataloguer in Technical Services. "Retirement" has allowed her to pursue her many interests, including opera, current affairs, Talmudic studies, book reviews, theatre, needlepoint and travel with her husband Albert, not to mention spending time enjoying her seven grandchildren.

Still, libraries remain Elaine's passion: "I thoroughly enjoy this role [as JGS librarian], for it enables me to utilize my library experience in accessing records and extracting pertinent information from documents. It is with eagerness and enthusiasm that I approach the tasks of cataloguing, processing, researching, and the writing of book reviews. What an interesting way to upgrade my computer skills! I am continuously updating and acquiring the most recent editions to add to our outstanding genealogical collection at the North York Public Library, Gladys Allison, Canadiana Room, 6th floor. It is with great pride, pleasure and excitement that I announce the acquisition of Bill Gladstone's *Roots and Remembrance* and Peter Cullman's *History of the Jewish Community of Schneidemühl: 1641 to the Holocaust*."

Though she describes herself as a "newcomer" to both genealogy and JGS Toronto, Elaine has had some excellent successes in her research, particularly regarding the history of her father's family, the Sax family, in early 1900s Toronto. She notes that the City of Toronto Archives, the Ontario Archives and the Ontario Jewish Archives proved to be valuable sources of information. Elaine has also shared her knowledge. She and her cousin Judi Wagman made a presentation to JGS members entitled "Unlocking the Secrets of the Past: From Korostyshev to Kensington," and at a June Breakthrough Meeting Elaine demonstrated how she located information regarding two relatives from the Passenger List Indexing Project of the Nanaimo Database.

Perhaps the most rewarding consequence of this research was a family reunion. Elaine notes: "We held our first family reunion since 1959. Immediately following the celebration my

daughter, Miray Cheskes-Granovsky, wrote an article [contained in this issue], which briefly outlined the history of her great-grandparents' immigration to Canada, and described the emotionality and excitement experienced by family members at the reunion."

Elaine firmly maintains: "The JGS Canada (Toronto) has been an inspiration and a motivating force to enable me to research the Sax Family. The many interesting lectures and *Shem Tov* newsletters have provided many new resources for genealogical research."

If you have a volunteer experience you'd like to share, please contact shemtov@jgstoronto.ca.

SHANAH TOVAH

A YEAR OF PEACE, HEALTH
AND PROSPERITY TO ALL

@JGS Toronto

Volunteers Needed for Cemetery Committee Project

Shelley Stillman, Chair of our Cemetery Committee, is very pleased to report that the Committee's project to submit data on all Toronto-area Jewish burials to the Jewish Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR) at JewishGen is proceeding full-speed.

The following data are now on-line: Dawes Road, Jones Avenue, Lambton Mills, Pardes Shalom, Pape Avenue and Roselawn Avenue.

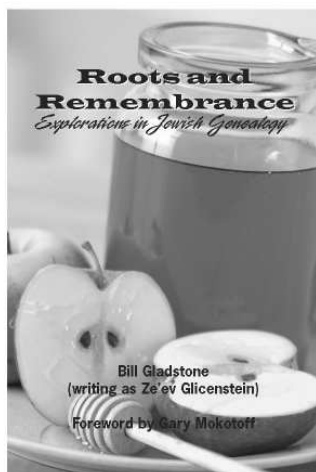
Holy Blossom records were submitted to JOWBR in August.

The Committee has received permission to transcribe data from Beth Tzedec Cemetery; and your assistance is needed. As Shelley notes: "We are excited to be embarking on a project to transcribe 4,300 burial records from Beth Tzedec Cemetery. Volunteers are needed to help with photocopying index cards, typing and proofreading."

If you are able to assist, please contact Shelley at [<info@jgs.toronto.ca>](mailto:info@jgs.toronto.ca), or [<msstillman@hotmail.com>](mailto:msstillman@hotmail.com) or 416 663-6309.

Thank you to all of the volunteers who have been working to gather data for submission to JOWBR.

The Ontario Genealogical Society Presents the First Canadian Book on Jewish Genealogy!



Roots and Remembrance: Explorations in Jewish Genealogy Bill Gladstone (writing as Ze'ev Glicenstein) Foreword by Gary Mokotoff

"Now he has combined the best of [his] columns into this magnificent book. Some of the columns are emotional responses to discovering some aspect of a person's family history, others are informative about how to access information.

Readers will not only enjoy these pieces but also learn much about the process of Jewish genealogical research."

— Gary Mokotoff, Editor, *Avotaynu*

Whether you are just starting out on the study of your ancestors or have conducted research for many years, you will find these articles rewarding reading. The author has built on the study of his own extended Rubinoff-Naftolin family to provide insight into Jewish genealogical research both in Canada and elsewhere.

Gladstone has used the resources of Library and Archives Canada, Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, YIVO Institute and others too numerous to mention. He also has reviewed many books that provide insight and context for the family historian to explore. Many of the articles are updated to include the latest information and websites. The book contains a bibliography of all works mentioned and an index.

2006 232p index bibliography 0-7779-2160-X \$27.00

Mail order to:
The Ontario Genealogical Society,
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26th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy in New York, NY - August 13-18, 2006

Report by Dr. Rolf Lederer

The recently-held IAJGS Conference in New York was a truly overwhelming and magnificent event. That Jewish Genealogy can attract over 1,500 (of the anticipated 2,000) participants to New York City in the midsummer heat is a veritable expression of the importance that the subject holds today. Although the vast majority of attendees were from the United States (particularly from the New York area), there were people from the rest of the world too, including Europe, South America, South Africa and Israel, and of course, Canada. We had a fairly sizable representation, and it is of course gratifying to me that I am no longer the sole Canadian representative, as was the case in the 1980s.

An 82 page supplement (edited by Hal Bookbinder) to the 574 page Syllabus lists 120 organizations involved in Jewish Genealogy today (covering societies, SIGS, publications and organizations). This is a very handy reference to the Jewish Genealogy world of 2006, which is available online at: www.iajgs.org (select "Resources" and then "Jewish Genealogy Yearbook 2006").

The Syllabus is a comprehensive outline of all the events which occurred, and in particular provided a summary of the manifold lectures, several taking place simultaneously. The lectures I attended were all informative and well presented, utilizing the latest technology (for which there was a capable staff on hand to help with any glitches). I enjoyed once again Stephen Morse's (and I note his well-deserved Lifetime Achievement Award by IAJGS at the Conference) succinct approach to simplify access, particularly to various records. (One can only marvel how he seems always to be one step ahead of the experts in the field.)

Another very topical field is the DNA Testing Project - a mechanism for connecting closely-related persons based on their DNA similarity. Here, Bennett Greenspan demonstrated his mastery of DNA testing and its practical application. It was interesting to hear from Horia Haim Ghuizelli about the leap of modernization occurring at Beth Hatefutsoth (Museum of the Jewish Diaspora) in Tel Aviv. Stanley Diamond and Henry Wellisch featured very prominently on the Speakers' roster as Canadian representatives. One speaker that deserves more credit is UK researcher Nick Evans who is working on migrant records (persons passing through the UK to elsewhere). Perhaps the most significant advance to date in Jewish Genealogy is the January 2006 establishment of the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy and Paul Jacobi Centre in Jerusalem, directed by Dr. Neville Y. Landan, as a venue for Academic Jewish Genealogy.

The fact that this year's conference was held in NYC was not lost on the organizers, who used the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island logos in the publicity. A popular guided tour of "Jewish" Ellis Island proved to be outstanding and is highly

recommended in order to understand the experiences of immigrant arrivals from 1892.

Hal Bookbinder lists the venues of all the conferences held to date from 1981 starting in New York City (2006 being the fifth time the conference was held here - twice in Toronto) (and I think this was my 20th conference). Next year the IAJGS will meet in Salt Lake City, Utah, and it will be an opportunity to tap into the vast holdings there as well as to meet the leading figures of the Jewish Genealogy world.



Kashrus certificate at Ellis Island - issued in Liverpool for the S.S. Cedric (White Star Line)



Steamer trunks used by immigrants at Ellis Island

Photos by Dr. Rolf Lederer

Report by Carolynne Veffler

It's about a week since I returned from the 26th IAJGS Conference and I'm finally no longer exhausted! It's quite an experience, as you can find out from some of the other Toronto JGS members who attended, including: Henry Wellisch (who was also a speaker), Judy Ghert, Rolf Lederer, Gert Rogers, Sheryl Adelkind, Cheryl Tallan, Kevin Hanit, Lisa Newman, Judy Goldstein, Henry Graupner, Barry Spinner and me.

As usual, New York put on one of the biggest and best conferences I've attended (although Gert said there were people still telling her how much they enjoyed our conference in 2002).

Here are some of the NYC statistics (my approximations):

- 1,200 full registrants, plus daily registrants
- 250 lectures and presentations in categories like DNA, Holocaust, Methodology, Israel, United States, Baltic States, Repositories and Sephardic research
- 25 films
- 25 computer labs
- 50 breakfasts, lunches and meetings for Special Interest Groups.

Events started at 8:00 a.m. and lasted until 6:00 p.m. (I won't discuss the 7 a.m. meeting for Canadian attendees - oy.) There were usually eight concurrent events, so you can imagine it was often very hard to choose what to attend. Referring to the giant Syllabus (provided in both hardcopy and on CD) with its descriptions of the presenters and presentations often helped. Thank goodness there were 15-minute breaks between presentations to get from one meeting room to the next.

If you had some "free" time there was a vendor room and a very well stocked resource room, which provided computer access to a number of web sites (including Ancestry.com), maps, books, microfilm and translators.

There were also opportunities to leave the hotel. There were tours to Ellis Island, the Tenement Museum and Eldridge Street Synagogue, and Walking Tours of the Lower East Side. For those who had New York ancestors there were a number of trips organized to NY cemeteries. There were also genealogical resources you could visit e.g. The Center for Jewish History (including Leo Baeck and YIVO), the National Archives and Records Administration, and the New York Public Library, to name but a few.

And, of course, you had to find time to shmooze with people with whom you'd only communicated through e-mail. Or people you'd met at a previous conference. Or people you just discovered were your relatives (Lisa Newman found a cousin). I finally met Nolan Altman who is our contact for submitting cemetery records to JOWBR. I also met Michael Goldstein who will be our speaker at the end of November.

Luckily I found a couple of hours when I wasn't attending any sessions, so I hurried over to the recently reopened Morgan Library to check out the renovations and see the fabulous Rembrandt exhibit. After all, I was in New York and had

to do something touristy. In the evenings I met NY friends for dinner, but Gert and I did attend the Klezmer concert on Monday evening.

Attending an international conference is an invigorating and exhausting experience all at the same time. But I think every Jewish genealogist should do it at least once.

But don't believe just me. Here are some comments that Judy Ghert shared:

"The lectures were thought-provoking and stimulating. I found Marion Smith's presentation on 'Castle Garden Records', Jean-Pierre Stroweis's talk on 'Name Changes During the British Mandate' and Phil Brown's 'The Jewish Legacy in the Catskills' especially memorable. The plethora of superb films - a nonstop Jewish Film Festival - was an added bonus. A counseling session in the computer room with a representative of Ancestry.com was particularly helpful. The large supply of microfilms shipped to the conference from Salt Lake City was an important component for many (though I did not use them myself at this time). The tour of the Lower East Side, and especially the Tenement Museum, had an impact on me far greater than I could ever imagine, especially since it was a stone's throw from where my forebears lived.

"And of course the camaraderie and contacts with other participants from all over the globe made this conference a truly fruitful and memorable adventure."

So, that's it for the 26th International Conference. Chat with some of the other attendees if you have a chance and find out about their experiences.

Next year's conference will be in July in Salt Lake City; the conference in 2008 will be in Chicago. And there are rumours of Warsaw one day.

We will keep you informed of conference developments as they happen. Consider attending - but rest up first.

ADVERTISING RATES

SHEM TOV is now accepting display advertising for publication. Advertisers are requested to supply camera-ready art and payment by November 2006 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.

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Awards, Awards and Yet More Awards

Jewish Canadian Genealogy Awards

Reported by Carolynne Veffler: At the IAJGS Conference in New York, there was a meeting of representatives of JGSs from across Canada. Prior to the conference, the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal distributed a white paper proposing the establishment of Jewish Canadian Genealogy Awards. A majority of attendees agreed that this was a good idea.

The IAJGS has its well-established annual awards, some of which have gone to Canadians and Canadian JGSs. However, certain of these awards were for projects related to non-Canadian resources (e.g. to Ottawa in 2002 for the Chernivitsi Cemetery project, and to Stanley Diamond in 1999 on behalf of JRI-Poland). To encourage Canadian Jewish genealogists to initiate projects using Canadian resources the Canadian Genealogy Awards are being established.

A National Committee will be formed from JGS Societies across the country. This National Committee will have one representative from each society, regardless of size. The National Committee will determine the details of the award process, the nature of the awards, and the method for selecting a Nomination Committee.

There are still many details to work out; you will be updated on all progress.

IAJGS Achievement Awards for 2006

From IAJGS: "The International Association of Jewish Genealogy Societies is delighted to announce the recipients of the 2006 IAJGS Achievement Awards. These honorees were selected from a large field of outstanding candidates, whose number and achievements reflect the vitality of our Jewish genealogy community. Many thanks to all the member societies who participated in the nomination process and kudos to all the nominees for their remarkable accomplishments."

The IAJGS Lifetime Achievement Award went to Stephen P. Morse, "recognizing his ongoing work to enhance access to online databases. His versatile "One-Step" programs have become essential tools for thousands of Jewish genealogists. Thanks to his extraordinary skill and creativity, researchers have made critical discoveries in immigration, census, and vital records, as well as numerous other databases, and they have overcome hurdles presented by unfamiliar alphabets and languages. Extending his generosity beyond cyberspace, he has also lectured widely at conferences and to local societies, contributing to their growth and furthering learning."

(By the way, our own JGS Toronto nominee for this award, **David Price**, provided extremely strong competition. To see a description of some of David's outstanding contributions to Jewish Genealogy, see *Shem Tov* of March 2005, "Spotlight on Members and Friends.")

The Outstanding Contribution to Jewish Genealogy via the Internet, Print or Electronic Product award went to Ada Green, "recognizing her devoted and meticulous efforts to re-

cord burials in Jewish cemeteries in the New York City area and beyond. Since 1995 she has documented over 180 burial society and landsmanshaft plots and has single-handedly cataloged over 36,000 gravestone inscriptions worldwide."

The Outstanding Programming or Project that Advances the Objectives of Jewish Genealogy award went to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Philadelphia, "for creating searchable online databases of Philadelphia's Blitzstein and Lipshutz 'ethnic bank' records. These records detail steamship ticket purchases made in the United States... 55,000 records spanning 50 years of immigration to the Port of Philadelphia are now accessible to researchers worldwide on JewishGen."

The Outstanding Publication by a Member Organization of IAJGS award went to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston, "recognizing the excellence of its quarterly journal MASS-POCHA which informs JGSGB members as well as readers worldwide."

IAJGS Salutes

From IAJGS: A new IAJGS project was approved by the Board, March 2006, and announced at the August 16, 2006 Annual Meeting. Here are some of the details:

Purpose: To encourage noteworthy projects and activities relating to Jewish genealogy that increase the availability of resources, demonstrate creative techniques others can use or increase interest and participation in Jewish Genealogy.

Eligibility:

1. Recognition is open to non-profit organizations and individuals. Recognition does not disqualify such an organization or individual from being nominated for or receiving an Outstanding Achievement Award.
2. For consideration, the project or effort must have been completed since January 1st of the prior year (exception: during 2006, projects or efforts completed since January 1, 2001 can be submitted for recognition).
3. Segments or phases of a larger project may be considered. However, it is the result from that segment or phase alone which must meet the criteria.

Criteria for Recognition: One or more of the following will be used to evaluate efforts and activities:

1. Did the project or activity increase the availability of resources for Jewish Genealogy?
2. Did the project or activity demonstrate creative techniques others can use?
3. Did the project or activity increase interest and participation in Jewish Genealogy?

Process To Be Followed:

1. The IAJGS Board will appoint a committee to three (3) individuals. Only one of the three may be a current board member.
2. This committee will be appointed shortly after the Annual General Meeting and the members to serve until a new committee is appointed after the following Annual General Meet-

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- ing. Individuals may not serve two consecutive terms.
3. Nominations will be solicited throughout the year via the Leadership Digest, JewishGen digests and direct contact. Self-nominations are permitted.
 4. Nominations will be submitted using a form that will be found on the IAJGS web site: www.iajgs.org
 5. Upon receipt of a nomination, the committee will consider it and within 30 days submit its recommendation to the IAJGS

- President.
6. Upon the endorsement of the president, the organization or individual will be recognized on the IAJGS web site.
All the necessary information will eventually be placed on the IAJGS web site.

Book Review

by Dr. Rolf Lederer

History of the Jewish Community of Schneidemühl 1641 to the Holocaust.

Peter Simonstein Cullman. Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, 2006.
Pp. 390, price not stated. [ISBN - 886223-27-0]

While this book may never become a bestseller or receive a literary award, it is nevertheless a most outstanding and valuable addition to Holocaust Research. Cullman is to be highly commended for the fruits of his labour spanning 15 years, in which he traces Polish history from 950 CE through to 1772, when the Province of Posen came under Prussian rule. We learn of the dual development of the Polish Pyla (Polish for "sawmill") followed by the Prussian influence on Schneidemühl (German "sawmill"). Cullman focuses on the interrelationship (his word "symbiosis") between the Jewish and Polish (later Prussian) inhabitants of the town (and this coexistence probably reflects what happened everywhere in the Province). Cullman decries the lack of early documentation, either because of a dearth of early record-keeping or because of the destruction of records by fires (which were a hazard and prevalent), or constant instability in the region.

Cullman, however, has managed to rise above these seeming handicaps, and he has painstakingly re-created a history of Jewish Pyla (accounting for at most 30% of the total population) from the mid-sixteenth century (based on a divorce document) and of Schneidemühl after 1772. The Jews in the town were prosperous and by and large contributed greatly to the town's economic growth. Cullman discusses the history of the Jewish community during the tenure of each Rabbi that served Schneidemühl, up to and including its last, Rabbi Fritz David Plotke.

With the advent of Nazi domination in the 1930s, a few Jews (about 65 families) left Schneidemühl, and Cullman documents their emigration and subsequent settlement. Cullman also provides us with a list (alas only a few) of eight Holocaust survivors, tracing their whereabouts after the cessation of hostilities in 1945.

The greatest contribution that the author makes is undoubtedly the painstaking detail in which he researched the victims of the Holocaust from Schneidemühl. He memorializes their names by elevating them from obscurity and anonymity, in the chapter aptly titled "Z'chor" – Remember. From the me-

ticulously kept Gestapo and other records, Cullman has identified 513 of an astounding number of 544 "detainees," and he traces their various incarcerations (in short paragraphs for each) covering 68 pages. We learn in graphic detail (and Cullman pulls no punches) the horrific degradation and humiliation to which these individuals were subjected (from February 1940-1942). Cullman's connection to Schneidemühl is through his mother, Betty Simonstein, to whom the book is dedicated.

The book has a collection of excellent photographs of early Schneidemühl, of some of its former prominent inhabitants (including its erstwhile Rabbis) and some of the Simonstein family. It also has a map c.1910 of Pommerania, showing the location of Schneidemühl, in relation to Berlin, Stettin and Bromberg.

In the Appendix, Cullman presents alphabetical Burial Records of the Jewish Cemetery in Schneidemühl (1854-1932), the 1774 Schneidemühl Census, and the 1939 Census, a list of Rabbis 1641-1938 and Schneidemühl street names. There is an extensive Bibliography as well as a useful Glossary of non-English vocabulary, mostly German and Hebrew, but also encompassing a few Polish, Greek and Latin expressions.

Cullman is to be lauded for this magnum opus, produced with diligence as to detail and heartfelt devotion to the memory of the community that was exterminated and whose Jewish population was so ruthlessly annihilated. His lifetime career as a gemologist and craftsman in this field, as well as his participation in JGS Toronto, especially as the first editor of *Shem Tov* (the name which he selected for the publication) are truly reflected in this labour of love.

Urgent: Yad Vashem Needs Volunteers

Yad Vashem is seeking to expand its Shoah Victims Database. Volunteers are needed to contact local institutions and individuals. To volunteer, send your name, address, phone number and e-mail address to names.outreach@yadvashem.org.il with the subject heading "Names Volunteer." See also the web site at http://www1.yadvashem.org/names/whyCollect.htm?WT.mc_id=yvscommunityguide

Book Review

by Henry Wellisch

To the End of the Earth: A History of the Crypto-Jews of New Mexico

By Stanley M. Hordes. Columbia University Press, New York, 2005.

This well-researched book discusses in great detail the history of those people in New Mexico who maintain that they are of Jewish descent. The book contains a huge bibliography and many detailed footnotes, testifying to the meticulous research that has gone into it.

A lot of information on the earlier history of Mexico and New Mexico is contained in the records of the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition, which was extended to the Americas. Many of these records have survived, and they give a good picture of life in these parts.

From these records it also becomes clear that many Jews immigrated to the Americas from Spain following the 1492 Edict of Expulsion by the Spanish monarchy. They were followed by the Jews of Portugal after 1581, when Spain extended its rule over the whole Iberian Peninsula. In many cases Jews in the New World were forced to convert, but many continued in secret to adhere to their ancient religion. These people were called *conversos*, and sometimes they were caught and punished severely.

The book, based on Inquisition records, refers to many Jewish families by name and describes in detail what happened to them. Most of this information comes from the records of the trials that were conducted by the Inquisition in Mexico and New Mexico from the late sixteenth to the eighteenth century.

Today there are quite a number of people in New Mexico who claim Jewish ancestry. They base this belief in many cases on family stories and traditions that were transmitted orally.

All in all, a very interesting book.

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New Acquisitions to the JGS of Canada (Toronto) Collection at the North York Public Library (Gladys Allison, Canadiana Room 6th floor)

by Elaine Cheskes

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