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# שֵׁם טוֹב SHEM TOV

JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF TORONTO

*Serving the Greater Toronto Area since 1985*

VOLUME XXX No. 1

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## A TRIBUTE TO ALLEN HALBERSTADT ז"ל

**J**GS Toronto was very saddened by the sudden passing of our Cemetery Chair, Allen Halberstadt on February 14<sup>th</sup>. Allen grew up in Toronto. He was a business major at Ryerson Polytechnic Institute, then worked in retail with firms such as Bi-Way and Winners, and retired just six years ago.

Allen became interested in cemetery research because of his desire to locate where his twin sister was interred (both he and his sister were born prematurely, but she died just 3 days after their birth). \* He later learned that all of his immediate ancestors were buried in the same cemetery -- this led him to become the family archivist. (To read more about this, read Allen's story, *The Importance of Locating Tombstones*, in *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories*.)

Shortly after retiring, Allen joined the Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto. He started as a volunteer on the Cemetery Committee, and moved on to become its chair.

He took his volunteer work very seriously, single-handedly documenting all of Bathurst Lawn Cemetery (12,000 burials). His work involved photographing each tombstone, matching each record with cemetery documents and indexing the data to conform to the standard demanded by JewishGen's Jewish Online World Burial Registry (JOWBR).

Along with his committee members and other volunteers, Allen continued JGS Toronto's work by documenting every Jewish cemetery in the Greater Toronto Area and ultimately, all of Ontario. In fact, last summer, Allen even went to gentile cemeteries because he found out that Jewish burials had taken place there. To date, in excess of 100,000 records have been uploaded to JOWBR on behalf of JGS Toronto. This represents the largest submission of records provided to that project by any one organization.

This work might be considered odd or even eccentric. However, the documentation of cemetery records is very significant to those around the world searching Jewish roots. Tombstones provide very important information to historians and family researchers.

Thanks to Allen's efforts, many official cemetery records have been reconciled and are now free of major errors and omissions. (Cemetery managers frequently contacted Allen so that they could update their official databases).

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## Message From the President

Last year we conducted a survey of all of our members, and we were very pleased to achieve more than 50% response rate. We thank all those who responded.

One of the things we asked was about your experience and expertise in genealogy. And from your responses we now have a picture of the depth and extent of our members' knowledge about the various elements of genealogical research. This collective knowledge and wisdom is very important to the well-being of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto because it allows us to pool our resources, and help each other move forward with our own research. I do not recollect ever meeting anyone involved with their family tree that did not benefit from the willingness of another researcher to answer a question and to provide guidance.

This is the essence of our new initiative which is to formally establish mentoring opportunities for both new members and long-term members who may have run into a brick wall. We now have a database of your knowledge and one of our mem-

bers, Valerie Fox, has agreed to be our Mentoring Coordinator. Her role will be to find a match between a member who has a question and needs help, and the member who is possibly in the best position to answer that question. So please send your questions to [mentoring@jgstoronto.ca](mailto:mentoring@jgstoronto.ca), or ask Valerie at our next meeting, or put your question in the mentoring box that will be available at all of our meetings (see p. 12).

There will clearly be a benefit to all those who ask questions. There will also be benefits to those who fulfill a mentoring role. Not only is it a good feeling to assist others, but the answering process can help you clarify your own thoughts, sometimes resulting in a breakthrough in your own research.

Ladies and gentlemen, start your engines and let the questions begin.

Les Kelman,  
President, JGS Toronto

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The Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada (Toronto), now known as Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto, was founded in 1985 and serves the Greater Toronto Area. It is volunteer-run and is registered as a non-profit charitable organization. Membership is \$40 per calendar year, \$18 for students. Programmes are held monthly from September to June. Programme details, including topic, speaker and location, can be found in *Shem Tov* and on our website.

The goal of JGS Toronto is to provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and information through programmes, workshop and guest speakers, thereby promoting an awareness of genealogy within the Jewish community. JGS Toronto is a member of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies ([www.iajgs.org](http://www.iajgs.org)) and is affiliated with the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto.

New members are always welcome.

[www.jgstoronto.ca](http://www.jgstoronto.ca)

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

Please carefully note location and time of each programme!

Doors open 30 minutes prior to event time.

Members: free Non-members: \$5

Check [www.jgstoronto.ca](http://www.jgstoronto.ca) for updates. For further information, write to [programs@jgstoronto.ca](mailto:programs@jgstoronto.ca)

**Sunday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 10:30 a.m. to noon**

**At Beth Torah Congregation, 47 Glenbrook Avenue, Toronto**

**Film Screening: *Beautifully Broken*.** A stunning documentary film about understanding the complexity of Jewish identity and the search for Jewish roots.

**Speakers: Marc Cohen; Vladimir Kabelik, director, and Rafael Goldchain, the subject of the film**

**Wednesday, April 23<sup>rd</sup> at 7:30 p.m.**

**At North York Central Library Auditorium, 5120 Yonge Street, Toronto**

***Designing an Efficient and Effective “Tracing Forward”***

**Description:** This session will draw on actual case studies to demonstrate the importance of designing an efficient research plan to yield quick results when “tracing forward”. Learn key guiding principles that will help you succeed in finding those “lost cousins” sooner rather than later.

**Speaker Paul Jones** is a former Chair of the Toronto Branch of the Ontario Genealogy Society and is well known in Toronto genealogy circles for original and often humorous presentations. A committed genealogy volunteer, he is also an award-winning writer and currently contributes regularly to the “Roots” column in Canada’s History magazine. He relishes the challenge of taking on family history problems that have stumped the experts.

**Tuesday, May 27<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 p.m.**

**At Beth Tzedec Congregation, 1700 Bathurst Street, Toronto**

***Learning from our Family Heirlooms.***

**Speaker Dorion Liebgott, Curator, Reuben & Helene Dennis Museum**

Using items from the Museum collection, Dorion Liebgott will demonstrate their emotional and contextual narratives and show how we can broaden our understanding of our genealogical pasts by unlocking the stories from our own family artifacts.

Attendees may bring one special family item about which they would like information.

**Wednesday, June 18<sup>th</sup> at 8 p.m. (doors open at 7:30 p.m.)**

**At Temple Sinai, 210 Wilson Avenue, Toronto**

***Annual Brick Walls and Breakthroughs***

Featuring JGS Toronto members’ personal stories of discovery. It’s not too early to start thinking about YOUR presentation for this popular event (see p. 7)!

**Wishing all of you and  
your families  
a Happy Passover!**

## A Tribute to Allen Halberstadt - continued from page 1

It is worth noting that Allen is descended from a very famous Galician Rabbi by the name of Chaim Halberstam ז”ל who died in 1876. Halberstam was known as the “*wunder rabbi*” and is revered to this day for transforming his community (Nowy Sacz) into a great centre of Hasidism.

Our heartfelt sympathy goes out to Allen’s wife Bonny, as well as his children, grandchildren and extended family. May they take comfort in knowing that Allen, like his great grandfather, was a selfless, humble and good-hearted humanitarian who quietly made a remarkable contribution to Jewish genealogy.

He will be sadly missed by all of us at JGS Toronto.

\* Due to the traumas that occurred before and during the World Wars, Jewish parents and grandparents seldom revealed the whereabouts of loved ones who died very young, whether in Europe or in Canada.

Harvey Glasner

Immediate Past President, Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto



**Harvey Glasner (l.) and Allen Halberstadt at Israel Day at Mel Lastman Square, June 2011**

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## From the JewishGen Blog

Sad News.

We regret to announce the passing of Allen Halberstadt, ז”ל, who was Chair of the Cemetery Committee of JGS Toronto, and who often collaborated with JewishGen.

His work coordinating JOWBR records will serve as a living memorial and will help generations of researchers long into the future. Allen was recognized with IAJGS’s “Salute” in 2012 (<http://www.iajgs.org/awards/Halberstadt.html>) for the work he was doing with JewishGen’s JOWBR database.

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## Dr. Rolf Lederer: A Vital Part of JGS Toronto

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**D**r. Rolf Lederer is a founding member of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto. In this article, Dr. Lederer provides insights into his growth as a genealogist. He also describes how he gives Shem Tov a wide audience by redacting each issue for AVOTAYNU, the quarterly genealogy journal published in the United States.

### My Personal Interest in Genealogy

I was born in Hamburg, Germany. I started my research in Canada in 1976 when I recorded what I knew with the help of my father, going back to my great-grandparents. All my information filled one foolscap page! There were no guidelines at the time. Arthur Kurzweil had not yet written *From Generation to Generation* (1980). So I set about gathering as much information as I could by writing for vital records from the places where my great-grandparents had lived. Most records in those days were provided free of charge.

Over a few years I was able to construct family trees of my LEDERER, GARCIA de los REYOS, ROSENTHAL and GOTTLIEB branches, as well as the SCHIFF tree, one of my great grandmother's line. All these families had lived in Germany, with some previously in Bohemia (now Czech Republic) and the Netherlands. I amassed records back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

I contacted my parents' cousins living all over the world -- in the US, UK, Israel, Australia and South Africa -- for photographs and documents pertaining to our ancestors, and today I have photographs of seven of my eight grandparents as well as some interesting memorabilia and artefacts from them. What is remarkable is all these items were taken out of Germany prior to WWII! Of interest to me was the fate of close relatives that had perished in the Holocaust and by contacting the International Red Cross, I obtained records from their collection in Arolsen, Germany on about twenty individuals.

An unexpected treasure trove was given to me in 1978 by my father's cousin who, when he left Germany in 1937, took with him some old letters written to the family in Germany in the 1840s-1880s by Lederers who had immigrated to the US. The cousin had unsuccessfully tried to trace descendants of these early US Lederers, a task that now fell into my hands.

Over the next two decades, I tracked down many present day "cousins" and have been fortunate in being able to meet many of them in New York and California.

In the early 1980s, Jewish Genealogical Societies were being formed, starting with New York and Washington, and Toronto followed in 1985, with seven members. Rayzel Robinson became the first President and I was the Treasurer, with Selma Sacrob (a current JGS Toronto member) acting as Secretary. Then as now, the Society was intended as a forum to disseminate Jewish genealogical information and for members to share their research. After three years, Rayzel stepped down and I succeeded her as President (1988-1991). The membership grew to about forty, *Shem Tov* was inaugurated and JGS Toronto became a non-profit organization. The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) decided to hold the

1993 International Conference in Toronto.

There has been a lot of change over the past three to four decades. The internet, especially [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org), has greatly facilitated research and after the fall of the Iron Curtain, archival records from Eastern Europe have become more accessible (for a fee!). Special Interest Groups have mushroomed and are a boon to researchers of the same area. Of particular help to Toronto Jews is the Polish database established by Montrealer Stanley Diamond. Now there is also an emphasis on genetic research to help with hereditary disease and family links.

### AVOTAYNU

AVOTAYNU has been around for thirty years, published by Gary Mokotoff with Sallyann Amdur Sack-Pikus as editor. The publication is sub-titled the *International Review of Jewish Genealogy*. Articles printed are on topical subjects by worldwide authors. AVOTAYNU is a quarterly journal, with one edition each year devoted to personal stories. The regular features are *From Our Contributing Editors*, *US Updates*, *Ask the experts*, *Book Reviews* and *Letters to the Editor*. Despite the internet, I think AVOTAYNU still serves a purpose in providing timely information in the field of Jewish genealogy. The corresponding editors live in about 20 different countries. (Canada is represented by me in Toronto and Lawrence Tapper in Ottawa). Each editor submits summaries of their respective publications, and get together for lunch annually at the IAJGS Conference.

It has been my pleasure and privilege to redact each edition of *Shem Tov* for AVOTAYNU for more than twenty-five years. Everything I submit is printed, with only minor editorial corrections. I think it fair to say that my writing reflects what is printed in *Shem Tov* and gives *Avotaynu* readers an idea of JGS Toronto and perhaps some insight into the Canadian genealogical scene.



**IAJGS LIVE!**, a live broadcast of the conference on the Internet, will be offered for a second year thanks to generous support of [FamilySearch](http://www.familysearch.org)

Registration is now open. For details, visit <http://conference.iajgs.org/2014/>

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## In Memoriam

The following noteworthy Jewish individuals recently passed away.

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### Irving Milchberg (1927-2014)

In the January 27<sup>th</sup> *New York Times*, Joseph Berger writes: "Irving Milchberg, who as a plucky Jewish street urchin escaped transport to concentration camps three times and sold cigarettes to Nazis in the heart of occupied Warsaw while smuggling guns and goods to resistance fighters..." died on January 26<sup>th</sup> in Toronto. Irving (Ignac)'s father was fatally shot and his mother and sisters were sent to Treblinka. Having blond hair and blue eyes, he survived by passing off as a gentile. A brave and quick-thinking young man, he moved between the Warsaw ghetto and the underground, escaping harrowing circumstances. A 1962 book by survivor Joseph Ziemian called *The Cigarette Sellers of Three Crosses Square* tells Milchberg's story.

Miraculously surviving, Milchberg ultimately arrived in a DP camp in Germany where he learned the trade of watchmaking. In 1947, when 1,000 children were permitted to immigrate to Canada, he and two other cigarette sellers came to this country. Settling in Niagara Falls, he opened a jewellery store and several years later met his wife, a survivor of a Russian labour camp who had come to that city as a tourist. Milchberg became a proud and prominent member of the Niagara Falls Jewish community.

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### Sidney Bregman (1922-2014)

Sidney Bregman was a Toronto-born architect who had been a flying ace in WWII. His internationally renowned firm, Bregman + Hamann, founded in 1953, was responsible for designing many iconic buildings in Canada, the U.S. and abroad. Some local buildings of note (to name just a few) are the Archives of Ontario (see p.7), the Royal Bank Plaza, the Toronto-Dominion Centre (consulting with Mies van der Rohe), Brookfield (formerly Bell) Place and latter phases of both Toronto General and Sunnybrook Hospital (Odette Cancer Centre).

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### Alice Herz-Sommer (1903-2014)

According to an article by Sylvia Hui & Robert Barr (*The Associated Press*) that appeared in *The Globe and Mail* on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, "Alice Herz-Sommer, believed to be the oldest known survivor of the Holocaust, died Sunday morning in London, England at 110. Ms. Herz-Sommer's devotion to the piano and to her son sustained her through two years in a Nazi prison camp..." A Canadian-made film about Herz-Sommer, *The Lady In Number 6: Music Saved My Life*, just was awarded an Oscar for Best Short Documentary.

Ms. Herz-Sommer was born in Prague; she, her husband and son were sent to Terezin concentration camp in 1943. At Terezin, she gave piano concerts and her 6-year-old son sang in *Brundibar*, the 40-minute opera for children, written by Hans Krasa, who also was interned at Terezin. She lost both her mother and husband in the Holocaust.

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### From Nu? What's New?

#### Volume 15, Number 6a February 11, 2014

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### Martha Lev-Zion (1940-2014)

Jewish genealogy has lost one of its smiling faces. Martha Lev-Zion died on February 11 at her home in Israel. Martha had a profound effect on genealogy both in words and acts. She was founder and president of the Negev branch of the Israel Genealogical Society and served on the founding committee of the Israel Genealogical Research Association. She was a former member of the IAJGS board of directors and past president of the Latvia SIG of JewishGen. She was co-founder and served on the steering committee of the Courland Research Group. Dr. Lev-Zion is one of three founders of the annual one-day seminar for researching genealogy in Israel and until recently actively served on that committee. She wrote extensively about the Jews of Franconia and Thüringen (Germany) and Courland (Latvia) including an article in the Fall 2013 issue of AVOTAYNU about where to look for archival records of Baltic-area countries. She authored the book *Taking Tamar* which described her experiences adopting and bringing up, as a single mother, a child with Down syndrome. It demonstrated three of her personal attributes: love, warmth and persistence. Born and raised in Los Angeles, she made aliya in 1977. Professionally, Martha was a historian of modern European intellectual history. She held a doctorate in history and was associated with Ben Gurion University in the Negev portion of Israel for many years. Most importantly, she was a lovely person to know.



**JEWISH MUSIC WEEK IN TORONTO**  
**Sunday, May 18<sup>th</sup> to Saturday, May 25<sup>th</sup>**

For events and information, visit  
<http://www.jewishmusicweek.com/>

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## BRANCHING OUT

by Elaine Cheskes

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### New Acquisitions to the JGS Toronto Library Collection at the Gladys Allison Canadiana Room, North York Central Library, 5120 Yonge Street, 6<sup>th</sup> floor, Toronto

1. JGS 647.95713541 LAD

*Celebrating 100 years: United Bakers Dairy Restaurant: A Toronto Tradition Since 1912.* Compiled by Caryn Ladovsky et al. Toronto: Printed by the Harvest Group, 2012.

2. JGS 331.88187 TAY

*A Common Thread: A History of Toronto's Garment Industry.* Text writer and researcher, Rachel Taylor; catalogue editor and exhibition curator, Dorion Liebgott. Toronto: Beth Tzedec Reuben & Helene Dennis Museum, 2003.

3. JGS 968.00492401734 KOLL

*Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities.* vol. 2-  
vol. 3. Researched by the South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth; text written by Adrienne Kollenberg et al. Johannesburg: South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth, 2004-2007.

4. JGS 929.1072 LEV

*My Family Tree: A Workshop for Grandparents and Grandchildren.* Myrna Neuringer Levy, Betty Sherwood and Shelley Stillman. Presented by the Canadian Friends of Hebrew University of Jerusalem and the Toronto Chapter of the Jewish Genealogical Society. Toronto: s.n., 2008.

5. JGS 30 IAJGS 2013

*Syllabus. 33<sup>rd</sup> IAJGS: International Conference On Jewish Genealogy. Boston, August 4-9 2013.* Boston: International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, 2013.

6. JGS 929.107204 ZAP

*Tracing Your Eastern European Ancestors.* Edited by Edward Zapletal. Toronto: Moorshead Magazines, 2013. *Family Chronicle* and *Internet Genealogy* (Moorshead Magazines) have published a special edition in their continuing *Tracing Your Ancestors* series, entitled, *Tracing Your Eastern European Ancestors*. If you are trying to track down your elusive ancestors in Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Ukraine or Russia, expert authors provide up-to-date information on resources that will assist in your research. The current issue is 84 pages, in magazine format.

In addition, it includes the following articles:

- Ten Ways to Jumpstart Your Eastern European Research
- Top Sites for Polish Research
- Eastern European Maps



- Getting Started on Your Czech Research
- Online Sources for Slovak Genealogy
- JRI-Poland Indexing Project
- Hungarian Research
- Russian Research
- Ukrainian Research

Each of these articles discusses the topic in general and specific terms.

Moreover, it provides lists of online or repository records. The emphasis of this magazine is online websites and databases. For genealogists and family historians who are researching their Eastern European ancestors, this special issue will be most useful.

Copies may be ordered:

local number (416) 491-3699

toll free number 1- 888-326-2476

or visiting [www.familychronicle.com](http://www.familychronicle.com)

~\*~

## Celebrate Jewish Heritage Month Ontario May 2014



### *Tracing Our Jewish Roots: Selections from the Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto Library Collection*

Curated by Elaine Cheskes  
in association with  
The North York Central Library

The enhanced version of *Tracing Our Jewish Roots: Selections from the Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto Library Collection* will be presented during the month of May, 2014 at the North York Central Library, Gladys Allison Canadiana Room, 6<sup>th</sup> floor. This exhibit represents major genealogical reference books in the library collection of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto. The selected material provides the resources for researching family histories. In addition, through the use of book covers, a historical panorama of the Jewish people is developed.

## The Archives of Ontario

by Judy Kasman

The Archives of Ontario has been in existence since 1903. It is a provincial government agency which, since June 2010, has been located at 134 Ian Macdonald Boulevard on the Keele Campus of York University. The present building was designed by Toronto architects Bregman + Hamann. (see p. 5). The Archives are open to the public. In addition to the records held there, there are special exhibits. From the website, [www.achives.gov.on.ca](http://www.achives.gov.on.ca), we learn that the current exhibits are displayed in the "...Helen McClung Exhibit Area...named for the first woman in Ontario who, upon her appointment as acting Archivist of Ontario, achieved deputy minister status. She served from 1939 to 1950. McClung enjoyed connecting students to historical documents, and in 1947, she initiated an innovative travelling exhibit that toured schools in the province."

On the website, choose *Explore Our Exhibits* and you will find a vast array of *Online Exhibits*, as well as see the *Travelling Exhibits* (these twelve exhibits may be lent to organizations), and also see which exhibits are *Onsite* at the Archives.

Further benefit can be derived from the Archives online (see *Start Your Research From Home* where there are even instructions for ordering copies of records). Choose *Tracing your Family History*, then *Getting Started*, then *The Records* (where there are *Births*, *Marriages* and *Deaths*, all limited by dates). There are also *Estate* and *Land Records*. Under *Religious Records*, you can select *Jewish* where there is the *Ottawa Jewish Historical Society* and the *Ontario Jewish Archives*.

The website has so much useful information for the Ontario researcher, more than space permits me to detail, so I encourage you to spend some time viewing all this site has to offer. If you have the opportunity to visit the Archives of Ontario in person, please consider writing an article for *Shem Tov* to describe your experience or thoughts!

Archives of Ontario: telephone number 416-327-1600  
[www.archives.gov.on.ca](http://www.archives.gov.on.ca)

### HOW TO BUY TRACING OUR ROOTS, TELLING OUR STORIES



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## Genealogy: Detective Work

by Judy Kasman

We genealogists function as detectives, always looking for clues in trying to solve cases, so to speak. At the American website, [www.voiceamerica.com](http://www.voiceamerica.com), there is a series of one-hour podcasts called *PI's Declassified*, hosted by San Francisco Private Investigator Francie Koehler. In the September 19, 2013 episode, *The Holocaust: Searching for Survivors*, Koehler interviews a professional private investigator, Fred Blum, who has become a genealogical sleuth. Blum describes how he became interested in genealogy, his volunteer efforts in assisting with the International Tracing Service (Red Cross) and in the *Remember Me? Project* for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. He also describes some family search puzzles he was able to solve, both personally and professionally. He touches on many things that we can identify with: how to research, how to document information, the importance of interviewing family members, the value of joining a local genealogy society. Despite his professional background, the term "brick walls" is heard frequently in the broadcast!

Listening to this programme is an hour well-spent! Go to:  
<http://www.voiceamerica.com/episode/72717/the-holocaust-searching-for-survivors>

## Fifteen Minutes of Fame

Here's your chance to share your fascinating story of discovery with a rapt audience! Coming, on Wednesday evening, June 18<sup>th</sup> at Temple Sinai, is JGS Toronto's Annual Brick Walls and Breakthroughs!

If you have made a family roots trip, solved a research conundrum, or have other exciting roots news to share, please consider making a short (about 15 minutes) presentation at this much-loved event.

We are seeking four or five people to speak. Those interested are asked to contact Lucy Sadowski at:  
[lsadowski@gmail.com](mailto:lsadowski@gmail.com)

## Donations & Sponsorships

In order to continue to provide top-notch relevant programming to its membership, JGS Toronto would appreciate your donations and also sponsorships of events.

For further information please contact  
Les Kelman at [president@jgstoronto.ca](mailto:president@jgstoronto.ca).

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## How Stories Bridge Cultures and Families: The Treelines.com Story

by Tammy Hepps of New York City,  
Founder of Treelines.com

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**B**efore I started work on [Treelines.com](http://Treelines.com), my award-winning family storytelling website, I knew little of genealogy outside of the Jewish world. The only conference I had attended was IAJGS, the only society meetings were of JGSs, and the only friends with whom I collaborated knew no differently. We obsessed about how to overcome the past and present political turmoil in Eastern Europe to find elusive records, and we relied upon a shared, multilingual vocabulary – *landsmanshaftn*, *yizker-bikher*, shuls, assimilation, *Shoah*, *matzevot* – to discuss our work. This was all I knew of genealogy. And then, when I attended my first general-audience genealogy conference and was met with scarcely veiled amusement when I bragged about how I pushed one of my lines back to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, I realized just how narrow was my experience compared to the majority of North American genealogists searching Western Europe’s centuries of well-preserved records.

I have just returned from one of the places where I am reminded of these differences: RootsTech, now the largest genealogy conference in North America, which is hosted by FamilySearch, the genealogy non-profit operated by the Mormon church. A number of RootsTech’s attendees view the world of genealogy through as exclusively a Mormon lens as I once viewed it through a Jewish one, as unselfconscious of their vocabulary – temple work, proxy ordinances, sealing eternal families – as we are of ours. Once a fellow software developer boasted to me how easy his website made it to submit one’s ancestors for temple ordinances, even after I identified myself as Jewish. This year, an attendee of one of my talks (<http://tinyurl.com/TAHRrootsTech>) capped his praise for my Jewish genealogy stories by asking if I were Mormon, and in presentations by other conference speakers and conversations with Treelines fans alike I’ve often heard Mormon theology casually invoked to explain their motivations for doing genealogy.

These kinds of conversations could get uncomfortable quickly, but they never do, because our similarities are so striking: a sense of belonging to a unique community, a special reverence for our ancestors in the context of our community’s history, and a desire to pass along that heightened identity to the next generation. As soon as we awkwardly sidestep where our worldviews diverge, we quickly start exchanging our best family history stories, which have universal appeal. Research stories of brick walls or serendipities, intriguing ancestors like war heroes or black sheep, family sagas of prosperity and tragedy – these themes recur in the histories of all genealogists, and here the cultural differences only increase the fascination.

And family history stories serve as common ground, not only amongst disparate communities, but also between members of one family as well. My personal focus on the storytelling aspects of family history grew out of my own experience, trying, and initially failing, to convince my own family to care about the discoveries I was making about our ancestors. The names, dates, and relationships in the family tree I was building failed to move them, as did even some of my more surprising

finds. For one thing, I was communicating using my newly-acquired genealogical vocabulary – censuses, ship manifests, family groups, oral history – yet another set of words reflecting specialized knowledge. But more significantly, I wasn’t showing my relatives why any of this mattered. Their muted reactions to my discoveries amounted to, “What is this work to you?”, words which got the wicked son of the *Haggadah* rebuked, but came from a place of innocent confusion on the part of my family. Why does dredging up this forgotten family history matter?, they were asking me. Jewish tradition may compel remembrance, but at the level of these seemingly trivial family tidbits?

What I had to learn was that every rediscovered tidbit can change the way a family sees its history if looked at in the larger context of its times. A changed name points to a story of assimilation. A census gives a snapshot of how our ancestors’ circumstances compared to our own. The town of origin and date on a ship manifest pinpoint which historical events, global and local, they experienced. These connections aren’t always obvious, but to do our ancestors’ lives justice, we need to read between and around the evidence to understand more fully our ancestors’ world and how they may have experienced the important events of their lives. And we need to transmit what we learn as the stories they are: journeys with a beginning, middle, and end, concerning lives which encounter conflict and are changed by it, in a historical setting which only heightens the inherent drama.

Storytelling is the common language we all share. In fact, researchers believe that storytelling has ancient origins as a way that we, the most social of all species, make sense of our world, understand our interactions, and cope with our circumstances. So, when I started communicating my discoveries not as isolated facts, but as stories to my family, they got why our family history matters. With the extra work on my part, I have shown my relatives that our own history is just as engaging and even more personally transforming than the historical fiction they already enjoyed, since the stories of our ancestors are the stories of how we came to be. For the first time they were responding to me with questions reflecting genuine interest and emotional reactions from the heart.

I started work on [Treelines.com](http://Treelines.com) when I realized that most family tree programs encourage genealogists to continue down the mistaken path that I was on – to assemble information without making sense of it for our relatives. What’s the point of making all these great discoveries if we can’t pass them down? What if a family tree program were more than a glorified database, but actually helped family historians to become better sharers? I built Treelines to be a site where you and your family can collaboratively build your tree in a familiar way, but unlike typical family tree software, Treelines.com puts the emphasis on the lives our ancestors led. Its storytelling platform helps you write timeline-based stories for individuals or branches of your

*Continued on page 9*

## How Stories Bridge Cultures & Families - *cont'd from page 8*

family based on the best pictures, memories, anecdotes, and discoveries you have to share. When you share the results with the rest of your family or your larger community,, you are sharing it in a meaningful and familiar format.

And since Treelines launched last year at RootsTech 2013 (where I won the Developer Challenge and have since benefited from the support of FamilySearch), I've seen people from all over the world use Treelines' family storytelling software to write and share their family's history with their relatives, and I've observed on the site and heard from the users themselves that through Treelines, genealogists are finding a way to break through their family's seeming apathy about their history to have meaningful conversations about the past. The language one usually hears – boring, dry, remote, irrelevant – has been replaced with reactions like “inspires me,” “tugs heartstrings,” “tears in my eyes,” and best of all, “makes me want to know more.”

I hope you'll take the time to browse our best stories at [Treelines.com/community/](http://Treelines.com/community/) to get a taste for how Treelines helps families and communities share their history.

### From Nu? What's New? The E-zine of Jewish Genealogy From Avotaynu

Gary Mokotoff, Editor

*Reprinted with permission from Gary Mokotoff*

#### Volume 15, Number 8 | February 23, 2014 Conference Registrants Asked To Submit World War I Stories

The theme of the upcoming IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy is the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I. To commemorate this event, the Conference is offering registrants (both those who will attend the conference in Salt Lake City and those who register to access it LIVE! over the Internet) the chance to share their family's World War I era stories and photos. Stories may relate to military service, the disruption caused by fighting, forced relocation, emigration, or other topics related to this era.

Complete information is at <http://ww1ha.wordpress.com/tag/genealogy>.

#### Yiddish Books Online at Polish Site

For those subscribers who can read Yiddish, more than one hundred 19th-century works of Yiddish writers have been digitized and placed on <http://www.polona.pl/search/collection/22/>. Examples of authors include Sholem Aleichem, Chaim Nachman Bialik, Isaac Leib Peretz and Mendele Mocher Sforim. Included is Aleichem's *Tevye der Milkhiger* (Tevye the Milkman) at <http://www.polona.pl/item/534066/2>. This was the basis of the Broadway play and film *Fiddler on the Roof*. Some of these books already may be digitized at the [Yiddish Book Center](#) site. There may be other items of interest at the site (<http://www.polona.pl/>) for people who read Polish. For example, *The Golem* by Gustav Meyrink.

## JGS Toronto Visits the Ontario Jewish Archives

On February 20<sup>th</sup>, a group of over twenty JGS Toronto members attended at the Lipa Green Building for a tour of the Ontario Jewish Archives. Archivist Melissa Caza's presentation was informative and enlightening.

The Archives holds items such as rabbis' records, family histories (oral and written accounts), camp photos, synagogue bulletins, material from Jewish societies, commemorative booklets and documents from various organizations and individuals.

The website, [www.oja.ca](http://www.oja.ca), is currently being updated. When completed it will allow for online searches.

Many thanks to our members Linda Offman for organizing this event and Debbie Sacrob for taking photos.



JGS Toronto members view archival material



Melissa Caza (left) & Linda Offman

## Yiddish LIT Goes Digital

by Bill Gladstone

**T**he National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Mass., recently launched [Taytsh.org](http://Taytsh.org), a new website to help Yiddish translators improve their skills, build an online dictionary of unusual words and phrases, and discuss lexical fine points with their peers around the globe.

For Aaron Lansky, president and founder of the Yiddish Book Center, the new website for translators is one of several exciting “tectonic shifts” that he foresees in the next few years.

As he announced at last summer’s Jewish genealogy conference in Boston, in the next few years Yiddish “will take its place as the first completely digitalized and accessible literature in human history.”

The Yiddish Book Center is reportedly in the final stages of perfecting an optical character recognition (OCR) software system for Yiddish literature that will make all of its 40,000 rescued Yiddish titles, and perhaps some 3,000 Yiddish periodicals, fully searchable by keyword.

“You can type in any search term -- the name of your family, a place name, anything you want -- and it will instantly search five million pages of Yiddish literature,” Lansky said. “Research that would have taken ten years can be done in ten seconds. This is coming very, very soon.”

Aided by generous grants from Steven Spielberg, the Center began scanning books about 1997. Teams of workers scanned books in three shifts a day for four years to complete the task. Special machines were utilized that could scan both sides of the page at once, and sometimes “we had to clean the glass after each scan because the books were crumbling,” Lansky said.

Additionally, they had to cut the spines off some books in order to feed the pages through. Lansky jokingly called the process “the General Westmoreland school of digitalization -- we had to destroy the book in order to save it.”

Although not searchable, more than 11,000 Yiddish works are now accessible free of charge via the “internet archive” website, [internetarchive.org](http://internetarchive.org). According to Lansky, the online works have been downloaded about 500,000 times: not bad for a language supposedly in its death throes.

The Yiddish Book Center has been training large numbers of students to undertake translations of the 98 % of the titles on its shelves that have not yet been translated. “The good news is that an ever-growing number of younger and non-native Yiddish speakers, both inside and outside the academy, are seeking out training and opportunities to translate Yiddish texts,” he said.

Teveye, the central character in Sholem Aleichem’s ‘Teveye’ stories, “sometimes quotes the Biblical saying, ‘Ain chadash tachus hashemesh’ -- there is nothing new under the sun,” Lansky observed. “I think the Bible’s got it wrong. The truth is there are all sorts of things that are new under the sun.”

*This article is reprinted with the kind permission of the author. It originally ran in the Canadian Jewish News. Bill*

*Gladstone is a Toronto genealogist and former president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto. His website is [www.billgladstone.ca](http://www.billgladstone.ca)*

*Editor’s note: Please see the article on the Yiddish Book Center in Shem Tov, December 2013 issue, Volume XXIX No. 4.*

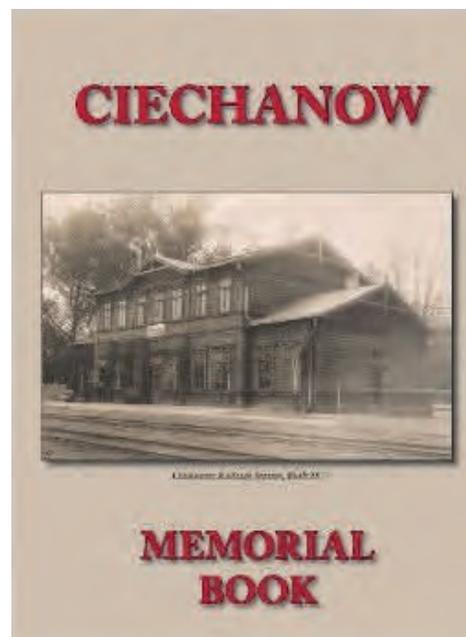
## Ciechanow Yizkor Book Translation

by Judy Kasman

**F**or so many towns and cities destroyed during the World War II, survivors and former residents put together memorial books (*yizkor bicher*), mostly written in Yiddish, Hebrew and Russian. These books are usually a compilation of articles written by different people; they are remembrances of the people who lived and buildings which existed in these places so that they should not be forgotten.

The town of Ciechanow, Poland, is located 47 miles NNW of Warsaw. Only about 200 of its 1,500 residents survived World War II. Its yizkor book was called *Yisker-bukh Fun Der Tshekhanover yidisher kehile*. Last August, the English translation of this book was released at Amazon. It is important to note the involvement in this translation of two JGS Toronto members: Stan Zeidenberg is noted as Composer (coordinator), and Miriam Dashkin Beckerman is Translator. Miriam writes: “This translation is dedicated to the blessed memory of Mordko (Marcos) Hersz Myssior and Lonya (Lea) Szrenskier.”

The JewishGen Yizkor Book Project can be found online at <http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/>. There are presently over 700 books. A number of English translations can be found at this website.





In Warsaw, JGS Toronto member Myrna Levy (r.) gives a copy of *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories* to Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Program Director of the Core Exhibition of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. (See *Shem Tov*, December 2013, Volume XXIX, No. 4)

### *From Galicia to Barbados, Guatemala, Montreal and Toronto - A Genealogist's Journey*

On January 29<sup>th</sup>, JGS Toronto members and guests had the privilege of hearing and seeing the above-noted presentation based on the family history written by Toronto psychiatrist Dr. Simon Kreindler, who happens to be a JGS Toronto member. Those who attended were witness to an enthralling story full of serendipitous events, spanning three continents.

In addition, Dr. Kreindler showed the audience how he researched his roots and offered many useful genealogical suggestions.

He created his eventful tome, filled with stories, photos and maps, for his children and grandchildren.



## A Beatles Backstory with a Jewish Twist

by Judy Kasman

There has been so much hoopla over the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of The Beatles' first appearance on the Ed Sullivan Show on February 9, 1964.

I was intrigued to learn some Jewish background information to this event in *All Those Years Ago*, an article by Jonathan Mark that appeared online on February 12th on *The Jewish Week's* website, [www.thejewishweek.com](http://www.thejewishweek.com). According to the article, Sid Bernstein, a struggling music promoter who was an Orthodox Jew from the Bronx, had called The Beatles' manager, Brian Epstein, in 1963 to book The Beatles for their first American performance at Carnegie Hall, for February 12, 1964. "A show in Washington, D.C., and the Ed Sullivan shows, were booked later, sandwiched around Sid Bernstein's show in Carnegie."

Bernstein, in New York in 1963, had read in the London newspapers about the new group and was noticing their escalating press coverage. He got Epstein's number from a friend who was an agent, and offered Epstein \$6,500 for two Beatles Carnegie shows, where tickets were \$5.50 a piece.

Mark writes: "They were like two Jews doing deals in the Diamond District; everything was trust, never a written contract, not even for that first trip to America, not even when the financial stakes were big, such as booking the Beatles into Shea stadium. 'Brian gave me his word,' recalled Bernstein, 'all I needed...'"

Over the years, until Epstein's untimely death in 1967 at the age of thirty-two, the two kept in close contact, and subsequently, upon each trip to England, Bernstein visited Epstein's family in Liverpool and his grave in the Kirkdale Jewish Cemetery (the headstone reads *Shmuel ben Tzvi v' Malka*). Bernstein died in 2012.

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## Mentoring Coordinator: A New Position for Our Society

I was elected as a Director of JGS Toronto at our recent Annual General Meeting, and I have agreed to accept the new role of Mentoring Coordinator.

If you have encountered a brick wall, need resources or a translation, need a new avenue to take or help getting started, I am here to help.

What is a Mentoring Coordinator?

I, like you, am a fellow family historian. I am not a genealogical expert. I am your peer, a good researcher who loves to uncover mysteries and I enjoy small details. Most importantly, I have the time, patience and, very relevant for this position, I have a good ear for listening.

First, let me tell you about myself. I have been actively pursuing my hobby of genealogy since the late 1990s. In the early 1980s, my first family tree was drawn on a brown paper bag, on which my late uncle z"l had written the names of my paternal male ancestors. Then my daughter, for an independent high school course, made up a questionnaire which she mailed to various members of the family. She passed on to me the questionnaire and answers, along with the respondents' family trees. I keep the original brown bag in a plastic sleeve inside one of my fourteen genealogy binders. (You can read more about my family history, *The Joys and Challenges of Genealogy*, in the September 2012 issue of *Shem Tov*, VOLUME XXVIII No. 3.)

Let's get down to the nitty-gritty about the process.

Option 1. At a JGS Toronto meeting, drop your question (s) in the box at the Welcome Desk. Be sure to include your name (printed), e-mail address and telephone number with your question.

Option 2. Email your question(s) to: [mentoring@jgstoronto.ca](mailto:mentoring@jgstoronto.ca)

Your inquiry will be handled in two possible ways:

1. If I think I am able to answer the question, I will be your mentor. If you are satisfied with your answer, great!
2. If I cannot help you, I will suggest a member or even a non-member who might have the expertise or experience to assist.

I hope you like my accompanying ditty which I wrote to show that genealogy can have a fun side. But the message is clear. We, as a Society, are here to help you.

*Valerie Fox*

Mentoring Coordinator, JGS Toronto

## Stumped by a Tree?

*by Valerie Fox*

Has your tree got you stumped?

are you in a slump?

don't know who to ask?

and thought "That's that"

and there you sat.

I am up to the task!

In my position as MENTORING COORDINATOR

I will act as your facilitator

for avenues to explore

to open new doors,

to hear your needs,

give you some leads.

A cute little ditty,

you get the jist...

I am here to assist.

[mentoring@jgstoronto.ca](mailto:mentoring@jgstoronto.ca) is my email

And then, perhaps, you'll be back on your trail!

## Professional Service Provider Directory on JGS Toronto's Website

Do you need the services of a professional translator? Are you seeking a tour guide in a country that you plan to visit? At JGS Toronto's website, there is a directory of experienced service providers whose names have been suggested by Society members who have been satisfied with the quality of services that they have received from them.

At our website, [www.jgstoronto.ca](http://www.jgstoronto.ca), choose the heading *Resources*. On that page, you can simply click on *JGS Toronto Professional Service Provider Directory*. The names listed are provided as a convenience. Please note that JGS Toronto does not endorse anyone on this list and therefore does not take any responsibility for any contractual arrangements that an individual makes with any of these people.

Please email Harvey Glasner at [hglasner@jgstoronto.ca](mailto:hglasner@jgstoronto.ca) if you would like to recommend any researcher, guide, translator or tour operator for this directory.

### NEW MEMBERS

JGS Toronto is very pleased to welcome  
as new members:

Phyllis Fien

Jacob Shapiro