

That you might recount it to a future generation

למען תספרו לדור אחרון

Psalm 48:14

DOROT

דורות

תהילים מ"ח:14

The Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society

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Upcoming Programs

Sunday meetings begin at 2:00 PM and are held at B'nai Zion, 136 East 39 Street, New York, NY (between Lexington and 3rd Avenues). A *schmooze* session starts at 1:30 PM to swap genealogical problems, solutions and anecdotes. *Postscript* sessions are short "how-to" presentations on a specific topic offered after the main program.

Reminder: non-members will be charged \$3 for admission. Please bring your membership card.

Research in South Africa — June 14, 1998

JGS Executive Council member Ada Greenblatt will talk about her recent visit to South Africa and resources for genealogical research there.

Postscript: JGS Executive Council member Lucille Gudis will talk about Jews who made China their home: Kaifeng, Harbin, Tientsin and Shanghai.

The Archives in Kaunas, Lithuania — July 22, 1998

The Chief Archivist for the Kaunas branch of the Lithuanian State Archives, Vitalija Girchtye, will talk about resources in the Kaunas archives and research possibilities for Jewish genealogists seeking information from these archives. This will be a repeat of the lecture Ms. Girchtye is giving at the Summer Seminar in Los Angeles.

Note that this is a Wednesday evening, and the location will be the Family History Center at Columbus Avenue and 65th St., Second Floor. Watch for the postcard announcing the session for further details and the exact time.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Eighteenth Annual Seminar on Jewish Genealogy — July 12-17, 1998, Los Angeles, California

Last call to register for "Hollywood Chai," the 18th Annual Seminar being held in the Century Plaza Hotel in Century City. Session theme areas include use of original genealogical resources, research in areas outside of Central and Eastern Europe, Jewish communities in the southwest, computer resources, and Jewish history and culture. Research sites include the Los Angeles Family History Library (the largest branch of the Mormon library outside of Salt Lake City); major Judaica libraries; the Los Angeles Public Library; local public record offices; and the National Archives Southern California Branch in Orange County.

The conference is already heavily subscribed; the banquet (featuring entertainment by Theodore Bikel) will be limited to registrants and their spouses. Tours will be offered by both the conference, and by the Jewish Historical Society of Southern California. See the four page insert in the Fall 1997 issue of *Dorot* for full details, registrations and travel arrangements, or go on-line at www.jewishgen.org/jgsla/seminar.htm.

National Institute on Genealogical Research — July 13-18, 1998, Washington, D.C.

This annual program of classes, held in the National Archives, is geared to experienced researchers; it is not an introductory course. In-depth sessions examine federal records of genealogical value located mainly in the Washington area, including less commonly used resources such as railroad records, bankruptcy and confiscation records and lighthouse records, as well as standard sources such as passenger arrivals and census records. For applications (which must be accompanied by a short biographical sketch), contact the Institute at P.O. Box 14274, Washington, D.C. 20044-4274.

Federation of Genealogical Societies Conference — Cincinnati, Ohio, August 19-22, 1998

Titled "Immigrant Dreams: The Settlement of America," this annual conference, co-sponsored by the Ohio Genealogical Society and its Hamilton County Chapter, will feature over 140 lectures and workshops, exhibits, and extensive research resources (including the History and Genealogy Department at the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County among the nation's top libraries for genealogical collections, and the American Jewish Archives). The conference will be held at the Regal Hotel/Cincinnati Convention Center. For program and registration brochure, write to Immigrant Dreams, Federation of Genealogical Societies, PO Box 830220, Richardson, TX 75083-0220; 972-907-9727; <office@fgs.org>; Web site www.fgs.org.

DOROT

The Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society

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Past Programs

Did Uncle Jake mention you in his will? — February 15, 1998

This informative meeting consisted of a lecture by Mark Nearenberg, a genealogist and a lawyer specializing in trusts and estates. Mr. Nearenberg's profession has made him an expert on Surrogate's Court documents. In his lecture, Mr. Nearenberg shared the legal knowledge that enables him to successfully draw out the genealogical value of documents found at Surrogate's Court. He also spoke about the etiquette of the court system, and advised genealogists on how to obtain court records.

Mr. Nearenberg stressed that while the Surrogate's Court contains records of great genealogical value, that genealogical value is incidental to the original purpose of the documents, which is legal. Thus, unlike many librarians or archivists, clerks at Surrogate's Court are not trained to help genealogists. Genealogists must conform to the rules and regulations of the Surrogate's Court if they wish to obtain information there. The most important of these rules are: 1) Do not approach any department other than the Records Room.

2) Do not ask a clerk to explain any documents or provide legal advice (it is illegal for them to do so). As Mr. Nearenberg stated, Surrogate's Court clerks have

the power to facilitate or to obstruct a search for documents, so it is important to be patient and polite in dealing with them.

Each county in the State of New York has a Surrogate's Court. A deceased person's records can be found in the Surrogate's Court of the county that was his domicile, or legal residence, regardless of where he died. Mr. Nearenberg recommended going to the court itself to learn if there are records there. Obtaining old records may require at least two trips: one to learn if records are available, and another to view them once they have been retrieved from an archive. Records are indexed in card files, books or computer, depending on the court. All records in all Surrogate's Courts are indexed according to the last name of the deceased. The index will provide the name of the deceased and a file number. The file number begins with a letter (A for administration records, or P for probate records), and its last two digits represent the year of the proceeding (this is usually the year of death or the year after death). When a genealogist requests a file, he or she should give the clerk the name of the deceased, the file number and the year of death. All the records concerning that person will be in one file.

There are several types of documents that can be found at Surrogate's Court, and they vary in genealogical value. Administration papers are filed when someone dies without a will. If a person died with few or no resources, often no Administration records were filed. Probate papers are filed when someone dies with a will. Mr. Nearenberg said that while Probate records should be filed for each person who died with a will, sometimes they are not. An Accounting proceeding provides a listing of a person's assets. While the documents from the proceeding do not contain names of heirs, they do provide insight into the deceased person's lifestyle. Guardianship papers are filed when a gift is bestowed upon someone who is under 18. Normally the appointed guardians are the parents of the child, so this document is of genealogical value only if this information was previously unknown, or if the child was an orphan and another legal guardian was appointed.

Both Administration and Probate proceedings generate several documents that can be of great genealogical value. The first document generated is a Petition, which begins the Administration or Probate process. On a Petition, the personal representative of the estate (the executor of the will if there is a will, or the next of kin of the deceased if there is no will) provides information about the heirs of the deceased, usually through a lawyer. All the legal heirs of the deceased that are known to the personal representative are named on the Petition. Also listed on the Petition are potential heirs who are under legal "disability"; that is, they are minors, incarcerated or otherwise

incapable of legally representing themselves. Because the information on a Petition is second or third hand, it is not completely reliable and should be compared to information from other sources.

Several documents are generated because of an important legal principle called "jurisdiction." This principle states that no legal proceeding that concerns an individual can take place without notification.

If a legal heir is not notified of an administration or probate proceeding, the entire proceeding can later be invalidated. Because of this constitutional right to be notified, lawyers make every effort to locate and notify potential heirs. The information on the documents generated by this process is more accurate than that on the Petition. One document generated by this process is called a Citation. This is the document that notifies an heir about a proceeding, and it will contain the name and address of the heir. A Supplemental Citation will contain corrected information about the same person. An Affidavit of Service is the document that attests that all legal heirs were served with a citation. This document will contain the names, addresses, and physical descriptions of all the heirs. If a lawyer is unable to locate an heir, he or she must file an Affidavit of Due Diligence, attesting that he or she made every effort to locate the heir. This document will contain a lot of genealogical information, such as several past addresses. Finally, a Waiver and Consent document is filed by an heir who is willing to forego being served with a Citation. This is filed by the heir himself, so the information on the document is most reliable.

When someone dies who is not a U.S. citizen, papers must be filed to notify the home country. This document is called a Notice to Consul General. Mr. Nearenberg provided an example of this document, from which he learned that his great-grandfather was not a citizen of the U.S. Finally, in response to a question, Mr. Nearenberg noted that death certificates have been required for Surrogate's Court proceedings since the late 1970's.

Mr. Nearenberg supplemented his lecture with a very helpful handout that contained an outline of the legal processes that take place at the Surrogate's Court, and a glossary of relevant legal terms.

Rachel Eskin Fisher

Beyond the Basics Seminar — March 1, 1998

This year's Beyond the Basics Seminar was characterized by generosity: experts in genealogy generously shared their knowledge, less experienced genealogists shared stories and questions, the booksellers shared books at reduced prices, and lunch brought generous amounts of food and drink. The Seminar was held in five sessions, and each session had a choice of three classes. The classes were a blend of lecture and question and answer. All were very help-

ful for people at various stages in their genealogical quest.

The classes offered at the Seminar covered topics from the nitty-gritty details of naturalization records to the hows and whys of searching for living relatives. Among the highlights were two talks by Gary Moko-toff. The first was an introduction to Jewish genealogy on the Internet, and the second was a talk on Holocaust research. For the latter, Gary graciously substituted for the originally scheduled lecturer, who was called away on business. The faculty was made up of experts from the JGS leadership and invited guests. As usual during Jewish genealogical gatherings, every point was illustrated with a story, provided by either the lecturer or a member of the class.

For the final hour of the day, the entire group came together for a lecture by Kathleen W. Hinckley, a professional genealogist from Denver, Colorado who has lectured, taught courses and published extensively over the past ten years. Her subject, "Reflex Genealogy: Knowing What to Do Next," dealt with the importance of asking the right questions at the right time; allowing new information to provoke further questions rather than being complacent with having found it, and organizing information so that it is most revealing. She urged researchers to "slow down," be thorough, "always go to the end of the microfilm roll," and "always ask why information was recorded the way it was." Ms. Hinckley demonstrated specific ways to organize information chronologically and geographically to reveal patterns in an ancestor's life. Earlier in the day Ms. Hinckley gave a session on "Reverse Genealogy: Locating the Living." Both sessions made abundant use of interesting case studies.

Thanks go out to all the organizers, lecturers and volunteers who made the day possible, particularly to Claus Hirsch who chaired the Seminar as well as handled finances and publicity. An information-packed syllabus, prepared by Ada Greenblatt from material provided by the various lecturers, was provided to all registrants. *Rachel Eskin Fisher*

Jewish History and Archives in Poland — March 15, 1998

Miriam Weiner, a well known author, lecturer and authority on Eastern European Jewish genealogical research, accompanied by Dr. Daria Nalecz, Director of the Polish State Archives, were the speakers before an overflow audience of some 200 persons. The principal topic was Miriam's recently published book *Jewish Roots in Poland* (see the Review in the Winter issue of *Dorot*), and the volume to follow, *Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova*. However, from the outset it was clear that this was to be an unusual day.

Opening with a discussion of the tragedy of books that disappear from archives and libraries - including vital record books - all too often ending up in the public market for sale, Miriam dramatically pulled out two vital record books from a town in Poland from the period 1829 to 1867. She proceeded to relate how she had been approached on at least two occasions recently by persons or firms trying to sell such materials. The denouement was that in this instance, Miriam bought a total of seven books, including these two and five more twentieth century metrical books from two towns - and was now returning them to the Polish State Archives, in the care of Dr. Nalecz. Although she was expecting the gesture, Dr. Nalecz was clearly overwhelmed; as Miriam continued to speak, Dr. Nalecz could not resist poring over the pages of these valuable documents. How well do all genealogists (and archivists, it seems) know the excitement of discovering unanticipated riches from the past!

Dr. Nalecz took over the microphone and talked about the importance of protecting such records for posterity. She noted that documents such as vital record books served as pictures of the unretrievable past, and thus were important connections with the past for survivors of past statelessness - including Holocaust survivors - that helped bring them closer to their family history. In musing over which archive the returned documents might have been taken from, Dr. Nalecz also mentioned that in the past two years, the State Archives had also taken over administration of the USC (Civil Records Offices).

Miriam then returned to the podium to address the main topic of the day. She described the origins of her interest in producing this series of books, including the realization (as she was organizing tours and archival research) that the Polish archival inventory system did not provide for the needs of genealogists. She talked about the initial obstacles, the expansion of scope as the project proceeded, and her gratitude to YIVO for their assistance. After giving an overview of the book and describing some of the nuances of overlapping data, spelling and records outside of Poland, Miriam proceeded to a discussion of the next volume in the series, on Ukraine and Moldova. There will be more towns in the illustrated historical section (some 56 in Ukraine and 8 in Moldova, compared to 28 in Poland), and an expanded 15 to 20 page pictorial section about the people of Ukraine and Moldova..

Miriam is looking for good photographs of Jewish sites in Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania. A copy of the photograph should have a caption or label that includes the date and photographic credit. To illustrate the scope of the next volume, she asked audience members to name a town in Ukraine or Moldova that they were researching, responding with what information on that town would be in the book. There was much competition from audience members vying to name their town. Of the four or five examples taken, there was significant information on every one.

A substantive question and answer session followed. Among the topics clarified were the process for obtaining records from the State Archive and the USC offices. Dr. Nalecz recommended writing to the head office of the State

Archives in both cases. The USC or regional archives are supposed to obtain permission from the central office, and when the correspondence comes through her office, she can better guarantee the response. Ultimately, it is the writer's choice. Letters can be written in English to the head office; the archive will cite the fee after evaluating the research requested.

The issue of obtaining transcripts vs. actual copies of the record, especially from USC offices, was also addressed. Miriam explained that by law, the USC will provide a certified transcript. However, in the case of records held by the State Archives, if one requests actual copies, these will be provided. Dr. Nalecz noted that the books in the Galician collection in the AGAD archives in Warsaw were currently being prepared for filming by the Family History Library (LDS). Finally, in response to a question about individual research in the archives, Dr. Nalecz replied that although persons engaging in scientific or scholarly research can often apply directly to the regional archives, persons planning to do genealogical research must apply to the head office and will be granted permission. Potential researchers should keep in mind, of course, that the regional archives do not have staff to work with people who come in lacking knowledge in the languages and methods required. Anyone intending to do personal research in the archives should either be sufficiently conversant with the material to work independently, or be accompanied by someone who can provide appropriate assistance.

At the conclusion of the meeting, JGS Executive Council member and Past President Michael Brenner, who is also a board member of the "Miriam Weiner Routes to Roots Foundation" that was established to facilitate publication of the book, presented both Miriam and Dr. Nalecz with bouquets. *Alex E. Friedlander*

Landsmanshaften: Jewish Hometown Associations — April 26, 1998

The April meeting, held jointly with the Jewish Historical Society of New York, featured a lecture by Dr. Daniel Soyer, Assistant Professor at Fordham University and author of *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939*. It was well attended by members of both groups, because the main topic held great historical and genealogical interest. The main presentation was Dr. Soyer provided an overview of the history, the defining characteristics and the function of landsmanshaften, Jewish hometown associations. Dr. Soyer spiced his lecture with quotations from members of landsmanshaften that conveyed the flavor of the times of the immigrant generation. Throughout the talk, he also pointed out possible sources of genealogical information in landsmanshaften records.

Dr. Soyer first corrected the common misperception that the Jewish immigrants to New York were a homogenous population. In fact, the immigrant population was diverse, with people from shtetlach, small towns and big cities, and people of different political and religious leanings. Because of this diversity, many immigrants tried to live near and congregate informally with others from their hometowns. Places of informal congregation included street corners, restaurants and private homes. In times of

extreme crises and extreme joy, however, many immigrants found that informal means of support were not sufficient. Thus, they formed landsmanshaften, or Jewish hometown associations. There were over 3,000 of these associations in New York before the Depression, and one small town might have boasted a number of associations in its name, each with its own defining interest - traditional religion, leftist politics, or a particular trade.

As formal organizations, the landsmanshaften had constitutions, and these included such information as the name of the organization, its purpose, its official language (Yiddish or English), the rules for its meetings, a list of its officers, its membership procedures, and the benefits of membership. The names of landsmanshaften resembled the names of the immigrant organizations of other groups, such as the Germans. The names and the banners of the landsmanshaften usually reflected a group's hometown and its religious or political values. The constitutions of these groups show that they tried to be very democratic. This differentiated them sharply from the hierarchical structure of Jewish society in Europe. In his landsmanshaft even a poor garment worker could have *yichus* and be elected president. Dr. Soyer suggested that the democratic structure of the landsmanshaften taught Jewish immigrants how to become Americans and how to assume the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship in a democracy.

In addition, the landsmanshaften served pressing social and material needs. This included providing necessary assistance in moments of crises. Members received sick benefits, health care and burial services. They also received company in times of joy, and held frequent and lively celebrations and social events. Many landsmanshaften instituted elaborate rituals that conferred honors on their members, who often led rather humble lives outside of the organization. Finally, the landsmanshaften aided their hometowns during the devastation of World War I.

Genealogical information is contained in several types of landsmanshaft documents. Minutes of meetings sometimes recorded the election of new members, and often this election included information about the person, such as his age and marital status. Sometimes records were kept in the form of *pinkasim*, or burial lists, and these also contain some genealogical information. If such documents survive they are most likely to be found at YIVO. Also, YIVO's photograph collection includes photographs of some landsmanshaften events. It is very important to note that typically, about 1/3 of the members of a given landsmanshaft were not from the town after which the association was named. Your relative, then, may have been a member of the landsmanschaft of his wife's town, or of his neighbor's town, or of his fellow garment worker's town. Similarly, seeing someone's name on a list of landsmanshaft members does not automatically mean that he was from that town.

There are four sources of primary information about landsmanshaften. YIVO has a guide to its landsmanshaften archives, which lists YIVO's holdings of documents from about three hundred landsmanshaften. The Jewish Communal Register is a directory of Jewish organizations that was published by the New York Kehillah, and this is available at any Jewish library or archive in New York. In 1938 the WPA Yiddish Writers published a guide to the landsmanshaften, which is available at YIVO. Finally,

JGSNY's cemetery report (a work in progress) includes an index of burial societies, many of which were associated with landsmanshaften.

Dr. Soyer's lecture was very informative, and well-illustrated by his slide presentation. JGSNY thanks him for sharing his work and for answering the many questions that followed his presentation.

Rachel Eskin Fisher

Notes From All Over

Endingen-Lengnau Cemetery Relocated

Dorot apologizes to readers who may have been misled by a compounded geographical error in the Book Review of *Der Juden Friedhof Endingen-Lengnau* in the previous issue. The publisher of this book is located in Baden, Switzerland, not Germany. The cemetery itself is also in Switzerland, not Germany. These two communities, located near Zurich, were allegedly the only places where Jews were permitted to live in Switzerland during the 18th century.

Area Code Error for Polish Genealogical Society

In the previous issue of *Dorot*, a note on an article about Grodno Gubernia listed the phone number for the Polish Genealogical Society of Connecticut/ the Northeast as 203. New Britain is in one of the regions that has lost its old area code; the correct area code is 860.

Masurian Public Archives

A privately funded institute has been established in Gizycko, Poland (Lötzen, Ostpreussen) for the purpose of cultural, ethnic and historical research and education about the Masurian region of Poland. Two sociologists, a German professor and a Polish scholar, organized a group of supporters and obtained a grant from the Volkswagen Foundation. In the past two years, the group has staged exhibitions, published a 1912 monograph and an historical magazine, held a symposium and contest, and started collecting documents and source materials. This summer, for the second edition of their magazine *Masovia*, they would like to have an article on the lives of Jews who lived in Gi_ycko between 1900 and 1945. At least two families that emigrated to the United States, named Rubinstein and Jacobies (Jacoby) are known. Any interested parties should contact Jan Sekta, Head Archivist, at ul. Olsztyńska 4/51, 11-500 Gi_ycko, Poland; e-mail <jsekta@polbox.com> or <jsekta@kki.net.pl >.

Keidan Website and Cemetery Database

One of the newer and substantive newsgroups at the JewishGen site is that of the Keidan SIG, which had over 50 members as of the end of 1997. In addition to an illustrated history of Keidan, there are excerpts from memorial books and other historical reminiscences. This has been augmented by a valuable contribution by JGS Executive Council member Ada Greenblatt, who has

transcribed the inscriptions on hundreds of stones in the old cemetery and posted these, along with photographs of selected tombstones and information about Keidaner Landsmanschaft plots in both Washington Cemetery and Montefiore Cemetery. The direct web address is www.philly.infi.net/~awcassel/Keidan/keidan.html. To subscribe to the newsgroup, send your name to Keidan@mail.jewishgen.org.

New York Resources News Briefs

- The New York region branch of the National Archives on Varick Street will stay where it is, at least for the next five years, according to Congressman Schumer's office.

- The Municipal Archives on Chambers Street has installed a new carousel rack on the open floor, and placed many of the index microfilms in the rack. This helps reduce competition at the drawers in the file cabinets.

- The New York Public Library microforms division, temporarily relocated in room 229, has upgraded their equipment. There are more readers with powered advance and rewind mechanisms, and a much higher percentage of readers are being kept in working order.

AJGS News Briefs

The Family Tree of the Jewish People has already reached its initial goal of one million names (see previous issue of *Dorot*). All AJGS member societies will receive one free CD-ROM containing the Tree, and it will be available for purchase at the seminar in July for \$35. For those not attending the seminar, it will be available afterwards for \$45 by mail order to the AJGS, P.O. Box 26, Cabin John, MD 20818.

The AJGS has been working on computerizing the Swiss bank account names received from Senator D'Amato's office. When completed, the list will be posted on the web, and compared with the Family Tree of the Jewish People. Agreement has also been obtained from the Hall of Names at Yad Vashem and from Beth Hatefuscoth to compare the list against their computerized databases.

Changes to the AJGS bylaws likely to be voted on at the July meeting include modifying the name to the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS), and redefining Jewish genealogical organizations eligible for full AJGS membership so as to allow SIGs to become full members.

Historical Society of PA Reopens

The Fall issue of *Dorot* reported the temporary closure of this facility. The Society has reopened their library on schedule; call 215-732-6200 for current hours. One useful resource at their library is a collection of record books and microfilms of cemetery records. The Summer, 1997 issue of *Chronicles* (JGS of Philadelphia) described the use of this material in researching interments at the Cemetery of Congregation Rodeph Shalom. Requests to the JGSP for back issues should be addressed to Leonard Markowitz, President JGSP, 1279 June Road, Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006-8405; 215-947-7374; email Priluki@voice.net.com. The JGSP web address is www.jewishgen.org/jgsp; the Historical Society's web address is www.liberty.net.org/~pa.hist.

Hebrew National Orphan Home Web Site

The Hebrew National Orphan Home (HNOH) Alumni Association has announced that their web site has been updated. As of January, the site included information on 27 cities (actually 25, since three boroughs of New York are each counted as a "city," with detailed information on most and links to other resource pages. The 27 cities are Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Bronx, Brooklyn, Charleston (SC), Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Erie (PA), Fort Wayne (IN), Indianapolis, Kansas City (MO), Los Angeles, Milwaukee, Newark, New Haven, New Orleans, New York, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Rochester (NY), St. Louis (MO), San Francisco and Yonkers. The web address is www.scruz.net/~elias/hnoh. The Association's email address is HNOHalumni@aol.com.

Morton Allen Directory On-Line

A new web site called Cimorelli Immigration Manifests On-Line contains the complete Morton Allen Directory of ship arrivals from 1890 to 1930 (see "In Print," this issue of *Dorot*). Searches are possible by name of ship or date of arrival. The database also includes information from the National Archives M1066 microfilm series and other sources (but *not* information on individual persons on the ship lists). The Cimorelli site can be accessed from the JGS web site (members.aol.com/jgsny/main.htm) or directly at www.cimorelli.com/vbclient/shipmenu.htm.

New Jewish Genealogical Software

Beth Hatefuscoth in Israel has announced the availability of a new program called *Ilanot* that will build family trees and store information including photos, video clips and more. The software, which is designed for Windows 3.1 or Windows 95, includes specific features for Jewish genealogy: special fields, such as Bar/Bat Mitzvah dates; a Hebrew-to-English date converter; a drop-down listing of all Torah readings; and the ability to submit the genealogical records for listing in the Jewish Genealogy Center of Beth Hatefuscoth. *Ilanot* is being distributed in the United States by The Judaica Press, Inc., 123 Ditmas Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11218; 800-972-6201 or 718-972-6200; email JudaicaPr@aol.com.

Trade papers as a source

by Paul H. Silverstone

A source for research which many people may overlook came to my attention a few months ago. I am referring to newspapers and magazines (trade journals) published for people in particular industries. One can learn more about the subject's occupation, character, way of life, and family; and who knows what else will show up.

My grandfather was in the fur trade in Winnipeg. An article in a local industry paper was titled "Dean of Winnipeg Raw Fur Trade" with a description of my grandfather, Moses Finkelstein, and a drawing of him, smoking a cigar. Apparently he was known in the trade as Uncle Moe.

My father was in the movie business in England, in the less glamorous distribution side rather than production. I recently browsed through a London trade magazine, *The Daily Film Renter*, and found five paragraphs about him in the "Tatler" gossip column between December 1938 and August 1939.

This tidbit appeared on December 14, 1938: "Some of the guys that you think are the toughest are often as human and sentimental as you can possibly imagine. I've always looked upon Arthur Silverstone - Murray's brother - as a real he-man and I dare say many of you will agree with that view, but believe me that guy ain't tough at all! Why I was talking to him the other evening, just previous to going to a fight, and he remarked that his wife had gone away for a few days much needed holiday in the Swiss Alps - what time he was having taking care of the two bonny little bairns; and obviously revelling in the job."

My father was also a great card player. From May 9, 1939: "I could tell you many stories of poker parties - I would if I could, draw a picture of Maxie Thorpe looking at Arthur Silverstone after the latter had beaten five Queens with a royal flush - and Maxie's words - but there - no printer would ever dream of setting them up!"

In the July 27th, 1939 issue "Tatler" revealed my father sailed on the Normandie for New York and would be away about six weeks. But on August 29th, the editor noted that he had received a card from my father: "everything so far is okay and he hopes to see me very soon. Well I should say that largely depends upon the situation.....He's not the only one who will find transport not so easy should hostilities break out..." World War II started just a few days later and my father did not return to England for several years. I knew he had returned on the Normandie but didn't know which sailing.

Similar items can be found in unexpected places. A cousin was a theatrical manager who lived in New York and Chicago. The research library at Lincoln Center had clippings about him from the theatrical sections of out of town newspapers such as the San Diego Union. I learned much about his life and career this way. *Variety*, a well-known trade paper, has a weekly obituary page and has published a book compiling these obituaries. I found a number of useful listings going back to 1911 in this book,

one of which led to the uncovering of a family I had been unable to find in other sources.

So, if you had a relative active and/or prominent in a trade or profession, have a look in the trade journals and you may find some gems mixed in with the otherwise prosaic business talk.

Paul Silverstone is on the JGS Executive Council.

The Columbus Debate

This article appeared in the September, 1997 issue of the Ser-Charlap Family Newsletter. It was sent in by Ben and Ruth Kristol of Jacksonville, Florida and was based on an essay by Gene Stam that originally appeared in somewhat different form in the Heritage Florida Jewish News. It is reprinted here by permission of the Ser-Charlap Family Association.

The second Monday in October is the day America sets aside for honoring Christopher Columbus. It is also about this same time each year that Gene Stam drags out his "Columbus" file and writes a piece about him, telling everyone his reasons for believing that he was probably a Jew, or at least was brought up as one.

Actually, his name wasn't even Columbus; it was Colon, a very popular name for Spanish Jews in those days. He was born on the island of Majorca, off the coast of Spain, in a Jewish neighborhood called Genoa - not in Genoa, Italy as is often stated. Majorca is the largest of the Balearic Islands, and to this day is said to have a population that descends predominantly from Marrano Jews.

Stam became involved in trying to learn more about Columbus when, years ago, he received a call from Horace "Ben" Franklin. Ben informed Stan that the Franklins are direct descendants of Columbus. Like any good reporter, Stam followed up this startling news with a visit to this elderly gentleman. Franklin proceeded to show him what he thought was proof of his lineage, including a family tree that went back to Columbus.

Among his papers were other links to Columbus, including a tract written by a Catholic priest from Venezuela who had researched in the Vatican for reasons why this great "discoverer" of America had never been canonized, made a saint, by the Church. According to the tract, there was a Christopher Columbus from Genoa, Italy, but this Columbus was not the same person who was given three ships by Queen Isabella and King Ferdinand to set sail for the "Indies." Christopher Columbus was the name adopted by our Jewish friend from Majorca, claimed the priest, whose parents had been Jewish but converted to Christianity as a result of the Inquisition, the church's war against heresy. But he was also being sought for crimes against King Philip of France, so he further disguised himself by becoming Cristobal Colon. Oh yes, the intrigue and intricacies would make for an excellent mini-series or soap opera. But there is more.

Unlike some of the tales we heard as youngsters, the money for the voyage was not obtained by Isabella hocking her jewels. Rather, several conversos and prominent Jews raised the money. These included Luis de Santangel, Gabriel Sanchez, and Don Isaac Abravanel. The modern Abravanel family, related to the Ibn Yahyas, figures in another piece of the Columbus puzzle. Not too many years ago, a letter written by Isaac Abravanel to an Italian aristocrat was discovered hidden between the leather bindings of an old book bought from a peddler in Milan. The document explains that Columbus is not what he appears to be, but implies that he is in truth a Jew.

There are other hints of his ties to Judaism. Columbus was ready to sail on August 2, but he postponed his debarkation by a day. Why? It is known that August 2 that year fell on the Ninth of Av, the fast day commemorating the destruction of the Temple. Furthermore, the extra day allowed time for additional Jews wishing to escape the Inquisition to join him. In fact, Columbus begins the account of his voyage with reference to the expulsion of the Jews from Spain. It is believed that many of his crew were Jews escaping the persecutions, and it is certain that Luis de Torres, one of his officers, was baptized just before setting sail.

What did it mean in his son Ferdinand's biography of his father when he wrote of Columbus "who though his descent was from the royal blood of Jerusalem yet was content to have his parentage from an obscure source"? Was he telling us that his father was surely Jewish and of Davidic origins, hence of the Ibn Yahya clan?

And what of Columbus' signature? Many claim that the mysterious scrawl was Hebraic in origin. But most convincing are the records of his correspondence. Letters to church and government officials are circumspect, but letters to his son reveal strong evidence of the Judaic heritage. Only in those very personal family letters does Columbus insert the Hebrew letters *bet-hay* at the top. To this day, religious Jews do the same. It is Hebrew shorthand for "with the help of G-d." We leave it to the reader to surmise why he would insert a Hebrew religious phrase in correspondence with his family, but to the anti-Semitic authorities omit it. Then there is the matter of his will, in which according to the Law of the Shekel (*Exodus* XXX, 11-16) he allocated "To a Jew who lived at the entrance of the Ghetto in Lisbon, or to another one who may be named by a priest, the equivalent of one-half mark in silver." The biblical half shekel is for "making atonement for your lives."

Many books have been written on this subject, even one by Simon Wiesenthal, who believes as Stam does, that Columbus was Jewish. So the mystery continues, but the evidence is mounting that we Jews can count Columbus as one of our own. It makes little difference in our daily lives. It is unlikely that the Knights of Columbus will change their charter or welcome Jews as members. Nor will Columbus, Ohio ever become the capital of Israel. And Columbus Day will never make it as a Jewish holiday.

Book Reviews

Eliyahu's Branches: The Descendants of the Vilna Gaon and His Family. By Chaim Freedman. 704 pp., 1997. Published by Avotaynu, Inc. \$69.50 plus \$4.50 shipping (NJ residents add 6% sales tax). Order from the publisher at P.O. Box 900, Teaneck, NJ 07666; 201-387-7200 (for credit card orders only, call 800-AVOTAYNU).

Rabbi Elijah: The Gaon of Vilna and his Cousinhood. By Dr. Neil Rosenstein. 430+ pp., 1997. Published by The Computer Center for Jewish Genealogy. \$49.95 plus \$6.00 shipping (NJ residents add 6% sales tax). Order from the publisher at 654 Westfield Avenue, Elizabeth, NJ 07208; Fax 908-353-6080; ccjgen@aol.com.

The Vilna Gaon (1720-1797) was a singular personality in the history of Lithuanian and Russian Jewry. The stories of his life, and his influence on both the religion and the daily conduct of Jewish life both during his time and in the ensuing 200 years, have become almost legendary in character. As a youngster, he showed extraordinary precocity and sagacity not only in Talmud and Torah interpretations but also in his intense study of secular fields of knowledge such as philosophy, history, astronomy, mathematics and anatomy. His travels through several countries in his twenties spread his fame; by his thirties he was being sought after for opinions, and called on to judge disputes, by eminent rabbis and scholars decades his senior. Even then, he was described by the eminent Rabbi Jonathan Eybeschuetz as "among the learned men of that city (Vilna) ...one singularly distinguished as a saint, a holy and pure person, a light unto Israel, who embraces the knowledge of all sciences, and wisdom and understanding."

Although he refused throughout his life any appointment to a rabbinical post, or even to be a member of the Bet Din or Kahal in Vilna, he became for all practical purposes the spiritual head of Lithuanian and Russian Jewry. His rulings, moral teachings and emendations on the liturgy, and even his portrait, permeated Jewish homes throughout the pale, even though none of the 70 works attributed to him were published until after his death. He was considered a master of a rational, scientific approach to Talmudic interpretation and Torah study, emphasizing a return to the obvious literal meaning of the text (*peshat*) and the avoidance of excessive dialectical discussion (*pil-pul*). His focus on researching original sources revived the study of the Jerusalem Talmud and pre-Talmudic sources, which had fallen into neglect. He had a number of famous disciples who became messengers of his teachings, including Chaim of Volozhin who founded the famous Yeshiva at Volozhin to perpetuate the Gaon's teaching methods. Modern Israel and Zionism owe their successful development, in part, to the religious and social infrastructure developed by a group of 70 of his disciples and their students who settled in Safed and Jerusalem in the early 19th century.

The Gaon of Vilna also attained lasting repute as the leader of the Mitnagdim in their opposition to the rise of the Chassidic movement. As Freedman explains, the Gaon "saw it as a threat to the stability of the authority of halakha (Jewish law)" and to the emphasis on study of the Torah and Talmud. The Gaon and his followers also objected to the primacy and dynastic structure of the Chassidic Rebbe. Yet his manifesto and excommunication against the Chassidic movement in one sense helped avert a major schism in Judaism, as the Chassidic Jews in response retreated from over-reliance on the Kabbalah and according to Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, "kept it within the sphere of ancient Judaism." Today, Freedman notes, "the Gaon is regarded by scholars of both Misnagdic and Chassidic tradition as the highest rabbinic authority of the past several centuries, probably since the time of the Rambam (Maimonides)."

Israel Cohen, in his authoritative history of Vilna (*Vilna*, originally published in 1943) summarizes the Vilna Gaon's stature in Jewish history: "Among the host of talmudical scholars in whom Vilna so richly abounded in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries...whose erudition and authority had earned them the title of Gaon, or 'Eminence,' he was the Gaon *par excellence*." In range of knowledge, profundity of learning, intellectual grasp and originality of research, he towered not only above all his contemporaries but also above all rabbinic scholars of five centuries before him; and he has not been surpassed or approached since. He was a remarkable phenomenon, intellectually and spiritually....Even if Vilna had never produced any other Jewish scholar or writer, the fame of the Gaon alone would have conferred upon it eternal luster. His name is uttered to this day, by all who have a glimmer of his greatness, with a feeling of the deepest reverence."

Even the Lithuanians, in belated recognition of the importance of the Gaon to the history of Vilna, seem to have decided to claim him as a major figure in Lithuanian history. In commemoration of the 200th anniversary of his death, the Lithuanian government sponsored a series of events in modern Vilnius, including a symposium at which new findings from the Lithuanian archives pertaining to the Gaon and his family were revealed. A new monument to the Gaon was dedicated near the now vanished site of his home and study. Tourist literature refers to him as well.

The Gaon and much of his immediate family, however, were decidedly uninterested in - if not averse to - perpetuating the genealogy of his family for descendants. Early published sources contain hints and partial attributions, but leave many vexing gaps. There is no scroll or written pedigree handed down through his descendants similar, for example, to that found in the Charlap family. Most families that claim descent from the Gaon do so through oral tradition. And given the degree of yichus attached to such claims of descent, it is not surprising that over the generations, many families who were related through descent from siblings, cousins or marriage into the Gaon's family evolved a tradition of being directly descended from the Gaon himself. Relatively few works were published tracing the genealogy of the Gaon, his family and descendants, and these were all in Hebrew. The most

complete was *Sefer HaYachas* by Eliezer Rivlin, published in 1935; but even Rivlin's work left many lines untraced.

The 200th anniversary of the death of the Gaon of Vilna became the catalyst for not one, but two major works in English that have substantially remedied the lack of information on the genealogy of the Gaon and his descendants. The combined credentials of the two authors are worthy of the Gaon's own scholarship. Dr. Neil Rosenstein is well known within the genealogical community as an expert on rabbinic genealogical research, and the Founding President of the Jewish Genealogical Society in New York. Among his publications is the landmark *The Unbroken Chain*, a two volume history of the Katzenellenbogen family. Chaim Freedman, a professional genealogist in Israel who has been researching the Gaon's family for over 30 years, has accumulated important archives in Israel from the late Rabbi Shmuel Gorr and the Rivlins.

Probably the most impressive thing about their two books is how completely different they are in virtually every respect - style, format, methodology, and content. Freedman uses the text descendant format ("genealogy report") found in most major computer programs today (Freedman used *Brother's Keeper* software), with a minimum of diagrammatic charts. Within the text is embedded information on dates, places and biographic detail. The book thus closely resembles Rosenstein's *Unbroken Chain* in this respect. Rosenstein, however, departs completely from that format. The bulk of his book is not text, but diagrammatic "box" charts (he used *Family Tree Maker*), with no biographic or place detail. Both books are voluminous - Freedman's is 704 pages, Rosenstein's 453 pages) and both are attractively packaged. However, Rosenstein's has a very different appearance because of its larger dimensions (9" x 12" vs. Freedman's 7" x 10½"), glossier pages and more open typographic look - the latter due to the use of box charts instead of text on so many pages, and the use of much larger fonts on those pages where there is text.

Freedman's book, *Eliyahu's Branches*, has much more of the feel of a scholarly tome. There is a 24 page section describing sources and methodology, as well as another 20 pages describing the problems and methodologies used in analyzing oral traditions. The book is extensively footnoted (there are 671 endnotes), and among the sources frequently cited are actual vital records in the Polish and Lithuanian archives. A bibliography cites some 200 published sources with both English and Hebrew titles, and a 93 page index subdivides each surname by each given name.

Rosenstein's book, on the other hand, has no footnotes (except for a handful in a few text sections), no archival reference sources, no bibliography, and a 17 page index by surname only. The sources for the charts themselves, when shown, are typically "personal family communications" or similar. A paragraph in the Preface lists a handful of sources, followed by the statement "Numerous other sources have been used, not all of which are necessarily accurate..." There are also a number of reproductions of title pages and Hebrew manuscripts

reproduced in the book, alluded to as sources. The overall impression is very different from that of *The Unbroken Chain*. Here it appears that research by individual contributors, photocopies of articles, correspondence and exhibits along with the box charts have been cobbled together with no unifying narrative or discussion of sources and methodology, and little if any original research by Rosenstein himself.

Both books are relatively sparsely illustrated, with a scattered combination of photographs of families or individuals; tombstones in cemeteries; and title pages from important treatises. Freedman reproduces one vital record, untranslated, while Rosenstein reproduces several biographies of the Gaon's ancestors extracted from *Kiryah Ne'emanah*, also untranslated. Indeed, it would have been helpful to the readers of both books if such exhibits, including the title pages, could have been translated or at least summarized in English. Rosenstein even reproduces 14 pages of R. Eliyahu Landau's handwritten genealogical and biographical manuscripts that were an important source for Rivlin's *Sefer HaYachas*. Unfortunately, few readers of the book will be able to make use of this untranslated gem.

Even the treatment of names differs. Rosenstein fairly consistently uses anglicized versions of given names, other than in the earliest generations - often losing track of the Hebrew names, even in cases where the person may have been known in his or her lifetime by his Hebrew or Yiddish name. Freedman, on the other hand, fairly consistently uses Hebrew given names, right down to current generations (when known) - often either losing track of the anglicized version of the name used in the person's lifetime, or at best consigning it to parentheses. But neither author is completely consistent in this matter.

Most importantly, the two books differ greatly in the substance of their contents. There is remarkably little overlap. One reason, noted in the Preface to Rosenstein's book, is that he chose to place more emphasis on American branches. The difference is also, in part, explained by Dr. Rosenstein's decision to spread a much wider net, encompassing siblings and cousins of the Gaon, and their descendants. A third reason is that Rosenstein chose, in certain cases, to refer to other sources for details on descendants (including his own major work, *The Unbroken Chain*), rather than include the details in his book. In the case of the Grad and Lipschitz family descendants, where Freedman has 53 pages of information, Rosenstein has a one page chart accompanied by two paragraphs of text referring the reader to a booklet on descendants of the Grad family authored by Judy Epstein.

In fact, the bulk of Rosenstein's book - 258 pages of charts and text - is on descendants of the Gaon's siblings and cousins; and 100 of those pages are all descendants of Abraham Kalir, a great grandson of Moses of Copenhagen whose father married Beila Rivlin, a second cousin to the Gaon.. Only 125 pages of charts and text in Rosenstein's book deal with actual descendants of the Gaon, and half of the 125 pages describe only the descendants of one

daughter in a section authored by Sam Chwat (who was the source of this information).

Freedman's book also has the information provided by Chwat, where it comprises 41 pages of text. There, however, it is only a small part of 343 pages of text on direct descendants of the Gaon. While some of the branches in Freedman's book are also in Rosenstein's book, the majority are either not there or are represented by a single diagram on one or a few pages. In some cases, Freedman has found lines of descendants that do not appear in Rosenstein's book through the use of the vital records from the Polish and Lithuanian archives. Freedman does have nearly 100 pages on descendants of the Gaon's siblings, including 22 pages of text on descendants of the Gaon's sister about whom there is no information in Rosenstein's book - but then Rosenstein shows a fifth brother to the Gaon not shown by Freedman, and has branches not found in Freedman's book descended from some of the other siblings.

Even where the same branch of descendants of the Gaon is included in both books, the information is often far from identical. For example, Rosenstein shows 26 descendants (plus spouses) of Eliyahu Warshawsky and Freedman shows 32 descendants - but only 12 of these descendants overlap. The details on spouses and dates differ in some cases as well. In the case of the Sunstein family, both books contain information deriving from similar sources in that family but filtered through different members of the family and reflecting research by either Charles B. Bernstein (Rosenstein) or this reviewer (Freedman). As a result, there are differences in birth dates, spouses and places of birth; a large branch missing in Freedman's book that is shown in Rosenstein's book; more information on current generations in Freedman's book; and many other differences.

The format of each book presents obstacles in trying to find people, or place them in relation to others, for differing reasons. Rosenstein's book is particularly frustrating, because not only does the index only list surnames without any given names; it refers to chart numbers, rather than page numbers. This requires the reader to either further consult the table of contents to locate the chart, or flip the pages to do the same. And on reaching some charts, which may be 7 or 9 pages long, there is not a clue as to where the particular surname might be. Freedman's book presents no such problem; the detailed index lists each individual given name under each surname and directly references the page number (although married females are only listed under their *maiden* names, an unnecessary obstacle common to many indexing algorithms found in genealogical software). But because of the almost complete lack of diagrammatic or box charts, it is very difficult to see how any given person is related to another. There is a numbering system used, but it is very difficult to trace through the numbers and visualize the relationship. Rosenstein's extensive use of charts makes this somewhat easier, but this advantage is largely canceled out by the lack of specific indexing and the presentation of the charts.

The charts in Rosenstein's book that spread across multiple pages are not only more difficult to visualize, they are presented exactly as *Family Tree Maker* spins them

out: with the boxes containing information arbitrarily split wherever the page ends. This is a feature of the *Family Tree Maker* program that should have been corrected long ago (their recent revision which provides for sub-charts without split boxes is not a very effective fix; it is very wasteful of space, and contains neither any logical method for splitting apart the charts nor any provision for the user to control how it occurs). This problem could have been solved for the book by some cutting and pasting of the initial computer printout (*Family Tree Maker* provides an overlap at the edge for that purpose, which can be seen in the charts as reproduced in the book). The split and overlapping boxes and text lend a somewhat makeshift and less professional appearance to the book, particularly when the splits occur at page turns.

At the other end of the spectrum, it is hard to understand why Freedman used almost no charts at all. There are only four one-page charts in *Eliyahu's Branches*: a three generation chart showing the Vilna Gaon, his siblings and the children of each; a three generation chart showing the children and grandchildren of the Gaon; and one chart each (also three generations) for the children and grandchildren of two of the Gaon's brothers. Furthermore, these charts contain no page references as pointers to help find where each person's line of descent commences. Nor is the table of contents any help: it lists the main chapter, all 479 pages, without a single subdivision!

The over-reliance on diagrammatic charts and the frequent paucity of text in Rosenstein's book leads to another problem: a significant lack of information on individuals. Even such basic information as birth or death dates (often approximated when included) or geographic placement (i.e., where they lived or were born or died), which *Family Tree Maker* does allow to be placed in the box charts, is noticeable by its absence. Biographic detail is also sparse. The major exceptions occur in sections of the book attributed to other researchers, in particular Charles B. Bernstein, Sam Chwat and Arthur Ahlquist. But even these sections frequently seem to selectively target prominent individuals for biographic detail while omitting similar information about many others. The much more inclusive treatment of such information in Freedman's book (although not completely consistent either) is one of its major strengths.

A disappointment in both books is the relative lack of biographical and historical information on the Gaon. Freedman has a six page section describing highlights of the Gaon's life, his students, and the historical context in which he lived ("His Life and Times"), as well as some additional information in a four page Foreword by Dr. Arye Morgenstern. Rosenstein simply reproduces the Jewish Encyclopedia article on two pages. Freedman notes that there is a recent book in English (*The Vilna Gaon* by Betzalel Landau, translated and adapted by Yonason Rosenblum and published by Mesorah Publications in Brooklyn in 1994). The Landau/Rosenblum book, some 250 pages, is rich in detail on the philosophies, ethics, interpretations and views of the Gaon, as well as containing much interesting biographical material. However, there are other previously published articles and books in both English and Hebrew that contain information which could

have been synthesized with the information in the Landau/Rosenblum book to provide a more substantive chapter that would have been welcome and appropriate in either Rosenstein's or Freedman's book.

The accuracy of information in any genealogical work is one of the most important measures of its quality. Unfortunately, it would be an impossible task to evaluate the accuracy of information on any comprehensive scale in these two books. However, a review of some information on early generations common to both books turns up some significant discrepancies. The problem commences virtually at the outset. Rosenstein's charts on pages 10 and 17, displaying the ancestry of the Gaon, begins with Petachiah of Prague (dec. 1599), and show a daughter of Petachiah's grandson Moses Rivkes marrying Elijah Chassid Kramer (the great grandfather of the Gaon). This information is repeated on page 11 in the text on ancestors of the Gaon. Yet the photocopy of the biography of Moses Rivkes from *Kiryah Ne'emanah* on page 12 clearly lists the ancestors of Moses in the first paragraph going back to Petachiah's father Yosef of Vienna. This same Yosef is also shown (as Yosef HaKhaver) in what Rosenstein refers to in his Foreword as the principal source for his book, Eliezer Rivlin's *Sefer HaYachas*. And in the photocopy of the biography of Elijah Chassid Kramer reproduced on page 20, it clearly states that Elijah's wife was not the daughter of Moses Rivkes, but rather the daughter of Petachiah the son of Moses Rivkes.

In his discussion of the ancestors of the Gaon on pages 12 and 13 of *Eliyahu's Branches*, Freedman's information on both the marriage and the Gaon's ultimate known ancestor is consistent with the sources quoted above and shown in Rosenstein's book, and these sources are cited as the basis for his information.

Rosenstein and Freedman also have very different information on the age and birth order of the Gaon's sons. Rosenstein shows Judah Leib born about 1740, Shlomo Zalmen born about 1745 and Abraham born about 1750. Freedman, on the other hand, shows Shlomo Zalmen as the youngest son, born about 1758, with his brothers born in 1764 and 1765. A difference of this order of magnitude can have significant implications in terms of how many children each might have had, when the children might have been born, and by extension what family lines might logically be descended from them. Nor should there be this wide a discrepancy between the two authors, given the availability of sources that bear on the subject.

This reviewer has, in the past, examined (or had translated) a number of these sources (emulating the Gaon's advice to go back to original texts!), sources which were available to both authors. Most of these sources are consistent and clear on the fact that the Gaon's first son was Shlomo Zalmen, named for the Gaon's father who died in 1758; and that Shlomo was still the Gaon's only son at age 5 or 6. Vital records from the Polish archives, and census records from the Lithuanian archives, contain information that are consistent with this - the former showing ages for Shlomo's brother Yehuda Leib and his children in Seirijai, and the latter showing the Gaon with only Shlomo and a daughter in Vilna in 1765.

There are some published sources where contradictory information is shown on Shlomo's brothers (these are discussed in Freedman's analysis); and one could argue that the 1765 census - since it does not specify ages - is not definitive. Apparently Rosenstein based his information on these or other uncited sources, although it is unclear why he would assume that the Gaon's son Shlomo Zalmen could have been born 13 years before the Gaon's father, after whom Shlomo Zalmen was named, passed away.

There are also some disappointing lapses in proof-reading contained in Rosenstein's text on these early generations. For example, on page 26, he states that Judah Leib "lived in Seirijai *where his father was the chief rabbi*" (italics added here for emphasis) and that Judah Leib, "together with his younger brother, Abraham *Ragoler*, published some of his father's works." The Gaon of Vilna was of course not chief rabbi anywhere, and lived in Vilna, not Seirijai; and Ragoler was the surname attributed to the Gaon's brother, not the Gaon's son. And on page 32, Rosenstein states that Judah Leib "was the father of Mordecai Marcus Wilner of Warsaw," when the photograph of Mordecai's tombstone on the same page, and the photocopy of a letter from Jacob Landau right next to the photograph, both show that Mordecai was the son of Issachar Ber(ush) Wilner and the *grandson* of Judah Leib.

Errors of this type are certainly not unique to the genre, and can be found in major published genealogical treatises by eminent authors, going back hundreds of years. Succeeding researchers have either been misled by them, or had to grapple with the conflicting information presented in different texts. In this case, it is to be hoped that such errors are not reflective of the level of attention paid to accuracy in the remainder of Rosenstein's book; they certainly are not reflective of the usual high standards of the author.

Conversely, a related issue is raised by Freedman's approach to the level of evidence deemed acceptable for validating some of the families who claim descent from the Gaon.

In the course of his analysis, Freedman rejected a large number of branches as having insufficient evidence to include information on descendants. These are included in a 14 page summary of "Unconfirmed Connections" which lists 93 separate surnames (of which some common ones are subdivided, so that there are actually over 100 family lines represented). Freedman briefly describes the source of each claim of descent, as well as why he concluded there was not enough information to show a definitive link. It appears that, at most, only one or two of these lines can be found in Rosenstein's book.

However, in those instances where Freedman found sufficient cause to accept a family's claim of descent, he has hypothesized five new granddaughters for the Gaon, as well as a second spouse for one of the Gaon's daughters, for which there was no previous documentation. The author himself traces his descent from one of the new granddaughters. Freedman explains in considerable detail in his opening sections how he dealt with the varying levels of evidence available to augment oral traditions, and speci-

fies both there, and in the appropriate places of his text where a line of descent is postulated, how and why he decided to include that branch as valid. However, in order to retain a logical order to the text, following the sequence of the descendants of each child of the Gaon - and because Freedman concluded that the available evidence supported the existence of the ancestors of these lines - these branches are included in the main portion of the text, rather than in a concluding section of the main chapter titled "Unknown Connections." Furthermore, these new granddaughters are shown in the initial diagrammatic charts undifferentiated from the previously known and more definitively documented grandchildren.

There is a danger contained in Freedman's approach: that present or future readers who do not thoroughly read the text - or family members all too happy to accept the presence of their name in the book as incontrovertible proof of their descent - will use the information as proof of their pedigree. To this extent, it would have been useful if the inconclusive nature of these links could have been shown with more clarity, to better distinguish the postulated connections from the fully verified ones - perhaps through devices such as a broken line on the diagrammatic charts, a subdivided table of contents that identified degrees of certainty for each line, and the use of qualifiers in the headings for these branches (i.e. "Postulated daughter of..." instead of simply "Daughter of...").

Dr. Rosenstein has also included some branches whose descent is either not fully documented in previously published sources, or is taken from published sources where specific generations are missing names. However, although he does not explain his basis or sources for including these branches, there is no attempt made to hypothesize new grandchildren and link them to families claiming descent from the Gaon. Rosenstein also shows two grandchildren not found in Freedman's book, but without descendants (one, a son of Yehuda Leib, is attributed to an intriguing full page illustration of two book seals that Rosenstein claims belonged to Yehuda Leib and his son Shlomo Zalmen; unfortunately, Rosenstein does not give further details as to the source of the seals and how he was able to link them to the Gaon's family).

Each reader will have to ultimately form their own judgement as to the validity of the inclusion or exclusion of specific branches, and there is much opportunity for reasoned debate on the matter. To this reader, the methodology used by Freedman is an important contribution to the traditional reliance on tombstone inscriptions, introductions to rabbinical treatises or other sources that state an individual is "a descendant of...". Indeed, there is no compelling reason why an oral tradition passed down to current generations, particularly when found in multiple branches of a family and reinforced by analysis of naming patterns and dates, should be any less valid than an oral tradition inscribed on stone or on paper 100 or 150 years ago. Freedman performs a valuable service by attempting to construct the likely connections based on such evidence, and he clearly shows where he is making assumptions absent firm documentation.

In short, even if every line of descent in both books were fully validated, neither book alone is a definitive authority on the genealogy of the Gaon's family. Although Freedman's book is certainly the more comprehensive source for direct descendants, and is more thoroughly annotated with respect to sources, the two books must be studied together to obtain a complete picture of the Gaon's genealogy. Whatever flaws may exist in these books, each is a major genealogical treatise that makes the genealogy of the Gaon of Vilna and his family accessible for the first time to the English speaking world.

Both authors imply or state that there will be future editions of these works; Rosenstein even has the words "First Edition" prominently displayed on the title page. As he notes in his Preface, "The tracing of family is a never-ending task. Whenever one thinks he is finished, a new branch opens up." Both books certainly raise questions requiring further research. Did the grandson shown by Rosenstein in the book seals have children? Did the Gaon's son Abraham really have only two (Rosenstein) or three (Freedman) children? Did the Gaon's daughter Peshah Batya really have only three (Rosenstein) or four (Freedman) children? Might the daughter of the Gaon who was divorced, at her father's command, from her first husband because she could not have children (Freedman) subsequently have remarried and had children?

An abundance of information is accessible and waiting to be examined in archives in Lithuania and Poland (as well as waiting and hopefully more accessible in the near future in Belarus) that could answer such questions, as well as prove or disprove some of the connections shown in each book, not to mention the 93 "unconfirmed connections" summarized in Freedman's book. Perhaps it is too much to hope that the authors might combine efforts to incorporate the best features of each book into one master opus. Either separately or jointly, future iterations of these works will be awaited with great interest by genealogists and scholars of the Gaon.

Alex E. Friedlander

Readers should know that the reviewer is briefly credited for his help in the Preface to Rosenstein's book, and extensively credited for his contributions to Freedman's book.

The reviewer's family is also included in Freedman's book, traced back by Freedman to two of the new granddaughters of the Gaon discussed in the review.

In Print

Of Jewish Interest

Boris Feldblyum. *Russian-Jewish Given Names: Their Origins and Variants*. Avotaynu, Inc., 1998. 144 pp. hardcover. \$35.00 plus \$4.00 shipping. A collection of over 6,000 Jewish given names used in Russia at the turn of the 20th century, based on a book originally published in Russia in 1911. Includes etymology, variants such as *kinnui*, nicknames or distortions. An introduction reviews the historical evolution of Jewish names since biblical times and shows which names were prevalent in specific regions and time periods. Order from the publisher at P.O. Box 900, Teaneck, NJ 07666; 800-286-8296; www.avotaynu.com.

Aleksander Kronik and Sallyann Amdur Sack, ed. *Some Archival Sources for Ukrainian-Jewish Genealogy*. Avotaynu, Inc., 1998. 96 pp. softcover. \$19.95 plus \$3.00 shipping. A published inventory of Jewish records in archival repositories in Ukraine and Poland, provided by four leading record research firms and compiled by the editors. Vital records, censuses, community and school lists from some 400 towns in 11 regional archives in Ukraine plus the holdings of the State Archives in Warsaw for former Polish towns now in Ukraine. Order from the publisher (see previous listing).

Alberto Gerchunoff, transl. By Prudencio de Pereda. *The Jewish Gauchos of the Pampas*. University of New Mexico Press, 1998. 149 pp. paperback 5½ x 8" paperback. \$18.95 plus shipping. A series of vignettes about shtetl life in Argentina written about a decade after significant Jewish immigration to Argentina commenced. First published in 1910 and only now available in English. The inaugural volume in a new Jewish Latin America series. Order from the publisher at 1720 Lomas Blvd. NE, Albuquerque, NM 87131-1591; 800-249-7737.

Yulian I. Rafes, ed. *The Way We Were Before Our Destruction*. Via Press with YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, 1997. 221 pp. \$16.00 plus \$3.00 shipping (add 5% sales tax in MD, 7% G.S.T. from Canada). A compilation of compositions and essays of his high school classmates in Vilna from the 1930's, with additional narration by Rafes. Includes over 100 photos and illustrations from the Vilnius archives. Order from VIA Press, Vestnik Information Agency, Inc., 6100 Park Heights Ave., Baltimore MD 21215; 410-358-0900; email <books@vestnik.com>; www.vestnik.com/eng/books.htm.

Tina Levitan. *First Facts in American Jewish History From 1492 to the Present*. Jason Aronson, Inc. 432 pp., 1998. \$40.00 plus \$3.95 shipping (NJ and PA residents add 6% sales tax). In chronological order, over 100 "firsts" are discussed, each in its own chapter.

Where was the first matzoh factory? Who first brought pasteurized milk to America? Learn about the first Jewish astronaut, Supreme Court Justice and others. Order from the publisher at 1205 O'Neill Highway, Dunmore, PA 18512; 800-782-0015.

Of General Interest

Genealogical Publishing Co. has announced three new titles of interest:

•Mark D. Herber. *Ancestral Trails*. 688 pp., cloth, 1998. \$34.95 plus \$3.50 shipping. A comprehensive and up to date guide to British genealogy, published in association with the Society of Genealogists (London). Includes detailed descriptions of archival records, published sources, finding aids and indexes. Introductory chapters dispense general research advice. Separate chapter topics include Jewish records, property records, newspapers and electoral registers, cemeteries, immigration, census records, and research in Scotland, Wales and Ireland.

•Christina K. Schaefer. *The Great War: A Guide to the Service Records of All the World's Fighting Men and Volunteers*. 204 pp., cloth, 1998. \$22.50 plus \$3.50 shipping. Catalogues service records and related sources from two dozen countries that participated in World War I, including Britain, Germany, France, Russia, Canada, the United States, Australia and South Africa. Location of conscription and service records in the second part of the book includes specific roll numbers for the Family History Library System of the LDS Church, while the third part of the book describes casualty and POW records. Draft records, personnel papers, unit records, embarkation lists, death records, hospital and pension records and more are covered.

•*The Morton Allen Directory of European Passenger Steamship Arrivals*. 268 pp., cloth, (1931) reissued 1998. \$20.00 plus \$3.50 shipping. A reissue of the classic guide to ship arrivals at the Port of New York (1890 to 1930) and at the Ports of Philadelphia, Boston and Baltimore (1904 to 1926). Each year's arrivals are listed, separately by each shipping company and port of origin, chronologically by ship name with the arrival date (see also the note about this information on-line in "Notes From All Over"). Order from Genealogical Publishing Company, Inc., 1001 N. Calvert St., Baltimore, MD 21202-3897; 800-296-6687. Shipping discounts for multiple orders; MD and MI residents add sales tax.

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