

## Remembering Steven W. Siegel, z”l

by Marsha Saron Dennis



During the last days of his life, Steve Siegel asked me to speak at his funeral, but he was concerned that it would be a burden for me. I said, of course it would be a burden—but only because of the circumstance, not because it would be difficult to talk about my dear friend of thirty years and how much he had accomplished in this world, his legacy of friends and good works, and how much he meant to me. But I was wrong. All of it was difficult. I’m surely not unique in the constellation of people touched by Steve—so I decided that maybe I could try to distill what so many of us already know. This article is based on my remarks at Steve’s funeral on January 23, 2012.

Some of the adjectives that leap to mind when describing Steve include generous, smart, righteous, charitable, curious, modest, sensitive, and honest.

I think of charity as the gifts we give to causes we support: research facilities that need our help; students who need some scholarship aid; the kind of giving that, by writing a check, may benefit people we don’t know personally. This Steve did. But he went much further. He was generous with himself.

If someone—a friend, an acquaintance, a friend of a friend—brought a research problem to him, he wouldn’t rest until he had figured out many different ways to solve the problem. And even after the petitioner was satisfied that he or she had a solution or a methodology, Steve would follow up with even more information—

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**DOROT**  
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## WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN US!

The Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc., founded in 1977, was the first of over eighty such societies. Our almost 1,000 members live in the New York metropolitan area, other states, and other countries. We hold membership in the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies. We have an office in the Center for Jewish History and a library in the Center's Genealogy Institute.

We support organizations, repositories, and archival projects through generous annual donations to insure the preservation of many of the Jewish community's treasured documents and to provide greater public access to them. Some of them are American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardi Federation, Center for Jewish History, Center Genealogy Institute, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, JewishGen, Jewish Records Indexing-Poland, Leo Baeck Institute, National Yiddish Book Center, Ronald S. Lauder Foundation Genealogy Project at the Jewish Historical Institute of Poland, and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research.

Membership benefits:

- free admission to our monthly meetings (September through June), featuring guest lecturers from a variety of disciplines, and field trips to libraries and archives;
- discount on admission to JGS events, such as all-day seminars;
- a subscription to our quarterly journal, *Dorot*, containing reports on monthly meetings, descriptions of items held by repositories and organizations, announcements of new books, feature articles on genealogical research, and tips on new Internet sites;
- free access to JewishData.com;
- discount on JGS publications, including *Genealogical Resources in New York*, an invaluable tool for genealogical research in New York City; and
- discounts from the JGS Friends listed on the inside back page of *Dorot*

Membership dues per calendar year:

- Regular Member \$36
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- Sustaining Member \$60 (two membership cards)
- Supporting Member \$100 (two membership cards)
- Patron Member \$250 or more (two membership cards)
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JGS is a not-for-profit organization open to people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.

## Remembering Steven W. Siegel, z”l continued from page 1



Rob Selden (left) and Steve

another bit of helpful research, perhaps a pertinent photo he had found on the web. Steve’s greatest asset was Steve. And he willingly and wholeheartedly shared this asset with everyone, though modesty kept him from broadcasting it.

Steve was a walking encyclopedia on EVERYTHING! Genealogy, of course; archival resources; architecture; public transportation in any city he ever visited; New York history; even where to find a good bakery on the east side. He remembered everything he ever knew—once it was in his brain, it not only stayed there, but he could retrieve it at any time.

I used the word “righteous” about Steve; and by that I mean that he was a person of impeccable moral and ethical standards. He didn’t cut corners. He just did the right thing. He was not judgmental—or if he was, he didn’t share his opinion. He was the epitome of the saying, “If you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say anything.” In fact, much to my personal frustration, I think that one of the few things that did not pique Steve’s interest was gossip. The flip side of that particular trait is that one could count on Steve

to keep confidential anything that was told to him by a friend. We all knew that our secrets were safe with him.

He was honest and frank—one could even say blunt—but he never purposely hurt anyone’s feelings and certainly never tried to make himself look better, smarter, or more important at anyone else’s expense. If he wasn’t happy about something, he’d say what was on his mind—but that was it. He said what he meant. He meant what he said—and then he’d let it go. He didn’t harp on it. Nor was he a flatterer; therefore, a compliment from him was sincere and carried a lot of weight. And, of course, everyone remembers what a perfectionist he was. Sometimes it was difficult to deal with—but it was always worth it in the end, though he never demanded more from anyone than from himself.

Always one more fact to check; one

more typo to correct; one more edit to make the prose more readable. I firmly believe that any material produced with his editing input had fewer errors than any other publication.

Steve’s lively mind and intellectual curiosity kept him young and sharp. He was interested in the lives of all of his friends. He and his life partner, Rob Selden, were a wonderful pair who listened to and cared about everyone in their circle. They both genuinely enjoyed being part of their own families as well as our families. Neither one of them ever needed a reminder of the names and age order of their friends’ children and grandchildren. When a friend was ill or needed help, they were there. They joined us in all the happy and sad occasions of our lives. And thus, when Rob passed away in 2008, we all grieved with Steve.

Steve’s final bequests to us are the love and memories we can all cherish for the rest of our lives.

*Marsha Saron Dennis joined the JGS in 1981 and served on the Executive Council from 1982 to 2001. She was the president from 1994 to 1996. ☆*



## President's Postings by Roni Seibel Liebowitz

This issue is dedicated to the memory of our immediate past president, Steven W. Siegel, z"l, a true leader in the field of genealogy and a good friend.

We received many letters from close friends and colleagues who paid tribute to him and shared stories about how Steve helped guide them in the right direction in their research, shared his knowledge about how to find obscure information, and helped them break through the inevitable brick walls. Some of their comments are printed in this issue.

We have been involved in signing petitions concerned with two legislative issues that impact genealogical research. The first involves the potential loss of access to the Social Security Death Index (SSDI). The second would place the independent New York City agency, the Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS), within the Department of Citywide

Administrative Services (DCAS). Read more about these issues in the article by JGS Executive Council member Jeff Levin.

The Executive Council has been resourceful and creative in its ideas to stimulate more interest in genealogy and initiate new outreach programs within the community. We have also been planning some informal meetings for members about specific topics of interest to genealogists to be held at the Center for Jewish History in another room before the 2:00 p.m. presentations. If you haven't already done so, please return the survey you received. Even if you have, you can still let us know what you think about our ideas for the future.

Read about the upcoming spring JGS programs in this issue. I look forward to having you join us.

*Roni*

## Tributes to Steven W. Siegel, A Jewish Genealogy Pioneer

### From Roni Seibel Liebowitz

President, JGS, Inc. (New York)

Steve was a dear friend and mentor to countless Jewish genealogists. A founding member of the Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc. (NY) and an original member of the JGS Executive Council, he served as JGS president from 1985 to 1989 and again in 2011 and also held the offices of secretary and vice-president of programming. He was the only founding member of the JGS who served on the JGS Executive Board from its inception in 1977 to the time of his death. He also served on the Center for Jewish History's Genealogy Task Force, which helped establish the Center's Genealogy Institute.

Steve was also active in the wider genealogical and archival communities. A professional archivist and librarian, he worked for many years as library director at the 92nd Street YM-YWHA in Manhattan. He was past president of the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York and initiated New York's annual Family History Fair, an event that he chaired for sixteen years. Steve was the 2004 recipient of the Archival Achievement award in recognition of his management of the Fair for so many years.

A proficient writer and editor, Steve was co-founder and co-editor of *Toledot: The Journal of Jewish Genealogy* from 1977 to 1983 and served as managing editor and acting editor of *Dorot*. He also compiled *Archival Resources*, Volume I of *Jewish Immigrants of the Nazi Period in the USA* (Saur, 1978) and, with Zachary Baker, *A Bibliography of Eastern European Memorial (Yizkor) Books* (1992).

Steve was president of the Jewish Historical Society of New York, a director of the Jewish Book Council, and a member of Association of Professional Genealogists. He also served on the Center for Jewish History's Genealogy Task Force, which helped establish the Center's Genealogy Institute. A proud Cornell alumnus, he served on the Board of Trustees of Cornell University Hillel and on the Cornell University Council. He recently received the Frank H.T. Rhodes Exemplary Alumni Service Award for 2011.

A native of New Jersey, Steve was born in Weehawken, N.J., and grew up in Teaneck, but he lived on Manhattan's Upper East Side for many years. The



Mrs. Eleanor Siegel, Steve's mother; Jerry Siegel, Steve's brother; Steve; Connie Siegel-Dennis, Steve's sister; Frank, Steve's uncle, his mother's brother. Photo taken July 1, 2011, at his mother's 90th birthday party.

beloved son of Eleanor Simon Siegel and the late Morris Siegel, he is also survived by his brother, Jerry Siegel; sister, Connie Siegel Dennis; and nieces Jessica and Katelyn Dennis. Steve's life partner for twenty-nine years, Rob Selden, died in 2008.

A relative newcomer to the world of Jewish genealogy, I did not know the full extent of Steve's involvement with this endeavor and the extraordinary contributions he made over the years to our field. The primary reason I was unaware of so much is because he was very modest about his influence and contributions. He quietly assisted others in their research, coming up with little-known historical facts and information about obscure databases. People used to say he had a photographic memory for all this information and was very willing to share it with others when he saw it would help them in their research. He is greatly missed by all those whose lives he touched and enriched.

Many of those who have known Steve have written tributes. You can read a few of them below. For those who knew him, these letters will bring back memories, and for those who did not know him, we hope you will get a sense of the man as friend, colleague, and outstanding scholar and genealogist.

### **From Dan Rottenberg**

Author, editor, journalist

The year was 1975. I was a free-lance writer who had

just secured a contract from Random House to write what became, two years later, *Finding Our Fathers*, the first modern guidebook to Jewish genealogy.

In retrospect, securing a book contract from what was then America's second largest publisher was the easy part; actually plunging into the uncharted waters of Jewish genealogy was another. I was neither a scholar nor a rabbi nor a professional genealogist—just a journalist who enjoyed tracing his Jewish ancestors in his spare time. But, of course, there were no Jewish genealogy books, publications, organizations, or websites (not to mention no Google!). For advice, all I had to consult was a handful of obscure scholars and archivists scattered around the globe who had somehow taken a fancy to the subject of Jewish genealogy.

One of those I approached for advice was the late Rabbi Malcolm Stern, who in those days constituted a virtual one-man Jewish genealogical clearinghouse. Rabbi Stern provided me with all sorts of useful guidance. More important, he encouraged me to persist at my book project and finish it. But perhaps the best advice he gave me was this: "The guy you want to talk to is Steve Siegel."

Over the next two years, Steve became my *de facto* "genealogy rabbi." He carefully led me through the intricacies of public and Jewish archival institutions. Although I lived in Philadelphia, he made himself available whenever I came to New York with questions or by mail when we couldn't meet in person (no e-mail



JGS Executive Council, November 1987. (Seated L to R) Donna Balopole, Steven W. Siegel, Karen Franklin, and Eileen Polakoff; (Standing L to R) Gary Mokotoff, Raymond M. Goldberg, Alex E. Friedlander, Miriam Weiner, Ira S. Goldberg, Marsha Saron Dennis, Arye Barkai, Malcolm H. Stern, Estelle M. Guzik, Michael Brenner, David M. Kleiman and Joseph Fibel. (Photo courtesy of Miriam Weiner Archives )

in those days). Ultimately, he reviewed my manuscript, astutely pointing out potential problems and errors and thus sparing me public embarrassment.

Although Steve might well have perceived me as a potential rival, his passion for Jewish genealogy transcended whatever commercial or ego needs he might have had. Like Malcolm Stern before him, he recognized that the key to our search for our ancestors lay in the creation of a Jewish genealogy community. That meant getting the word out, which, in turn, meant encouraging each other's lonely work—and everyone else's too.

Shortly after *Finding Our Fathers* appeared in 1977, Steve and Arthur Kurzweil launched *Toledot*, the first American Jewish genealogy publication. Later that year, Steve and Arthur and I were among the founders of the Jewish Genealogical Society. In time, I overdosed on the subject of Jewish genealogy and turned my attention to other journalistic projects. But Steve stayed with the Jewish genealogy movement for the rest of his life—as an officer of the JGS, as a planner of the increasingly large and complex Jewish genealogy conventions, and as a willing resource for any Jewish genealogist of any age.

He was an expert in his field, yes; but he was also dedicated to fostering and maintaining a sense of community in his field. That's a rare combination indeed.

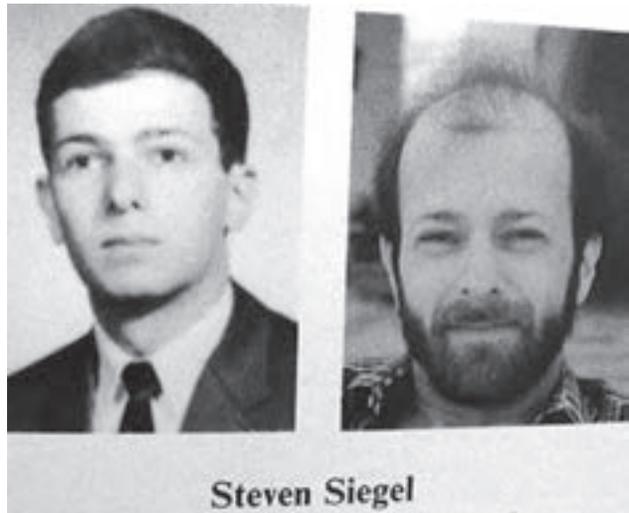
Someday soon I plan to update my family tree for the first time in decades. When I do, I will benefit from a wealth of new and esoteric resources that weren't available to me the last time around. Steve, perhaps more than anyone else, deserves credit for creating the infrastructure in which this highly sophisticated Jewish genealogy culture could flourish. In effect, he's still shining lights and opening doors for me today, just as he did in 1975.

### **From Mark Halpern**

Past President, JGS of Greater Philadelphia  
Founder, BIALYGen, the Bialystok Jewish Genealogy Group

Steve was a real *Mensch* and a mentor to many of us in the Jewish genealogy world. I did not know Steve that well, but I do know that he went out of his way to help others. Back in the early days of Jewish genealogy, Steve was of considerable help to the founders of the Philadelphia Jewish Genealogical Society, and he was the guest speaker at the first official meeting of this Society in 1979.

I have worked in my ancestral shtetlach of Bialystok, Poland, and Paterson, New Jersey, and although Steve had no connection to either town, he was very helpful as an active advisor to us. A few months before his untimely passing, Steve wrote to me about the closing of the Bialystoker Center on East Broadway, offering his help in rescuing any historical documentation at the Center. We will greatly miss his voice.



Steve's college and 25th reunion photos

### **From Linda Cantor**

Past President, JGS, Inc. (New York) 2007–2010

I still remember the very first JGS meeting that I attended back in the late 1970s, along with my first encounter with Steve Siegel. I didn't know a soul, but as soon as I sat down a man came over to welcome me and question me about my genealogical interests. It was Steve making sure to greet a new member and make me feel welcome. That was the start of a long friendship.

Steve was always helpful to me in JGS matters as well as my own research interests. He was one of my "brick wall" people. He was my "advisor" during my term as president of JGS, and I knew that I could depend on Steve thinking through a problem, applying his tremendous grasp of JGS history, and coming up with good suggestions for me. He had an uncanny ability to see the flaws and make suggestions to fix them.

Steve and I would chat about what was new in research or our other common interests: opera and travel. He had plans to travel once he retired, and it is sad to think that he was not able to do so. I'll miss our conversations, his advice, and his quiet humor. Rest in peace, Steve.

### **From Estelle Guzik**

Past President, JGS, Inc. (New York) 1996–2001  
Creator of Resources for Jewish Genealogy in New York, published in 1989 and 2003

Aside from having served as president and founder of the JGS, Steve Siegel was our "Memory Keeper." He could recall not only the historical details of the JGS but the details of collections held by various organizations and repositories in the New York metropolitan area and elsewhere. Steve was always available to assist not only heads of repositories but ordinary folk who wandered into his library or his life and sought his help.

He was a tough task master—always seeking perfection in himself and in others. One book on archival resources bears his name as author. But, in fact, he made major contributions to many others. We in the genealogical world have lost a major voice.

### **From Rachel Chatalbash**

President, Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York, Inc.

Steve's years of service as President and Board member of the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York and his achievements in the archives field, including his thirty years of work at the 92nd Street Y, were distinguished. Steve was an archivist who led by example. For decades, Steve dedicated his work to bringing archivists and archives users together by developing events such as the Family History Fair and communicating the needs and interests of researchers to archivists. By including the voices and perspectives of others, Steve expanded and improved the archives profession.

On a personal level, Steve was both a friend and a mentor to me as current President of the Archivists Round Table. He offered professional guidance, attended meetings, read documents, and provided feedback on new initiatives and plans. His emphasis on reaching across communities and collaborating with other professions has become the model for my own work.

I know that his influence will remain present in so much of what we do and will continue to guide future Archivists Round Table activities. His legacy will remain through our outreach programs, our advocacy work, and our connection to the genealogy communities. I will greatly miss Steve, and I know he will likewise be

missed by the members of the Archivists Round Table.

### **From Miriam Weiner**

Founder, Routes to Roots, Inc.

I first met Steve in the mid-1980s and I was quite overwhelmed with his knowledge of Jewish history, genealogical resources, and related subjects. Back then, I was a novice and definitely a “beginner.” Through the years, I have “consulted” with Steve when I knew I could depend upon his special expertise in an area. Most recently, we served together as members of the Advisory Board to the Genealogy Institute at the Center for Jewish History. He had a smile for everyone and has served as a “mentor” and teacher to so many. I personally have learned so much from him and will miss him deeply.

### **From Charles B. Bernstein**

Attorney-at-Law

Founding Member, JGS, Inc. (New York)

My “claim to fame” is that I am the only non-resident of the East Coast who is a founding member of the JGSNY. I was invited to attend the founding meeting at Neil Rosenstein’s house in October 1977.

It shocked and pained me deeply to learn via a telephone call from Alex Friedlander of Steve Siegel’s passing. Steve was a great leader of the Jewish Genealogy movement and made tremendous and selfless contributions to it. Steve’s monumental efforts on behalf of the Society and Jewish genealogy will always be remembered.

### **From Gideon Aronoff**

President and CEO, The Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS)

It is with great sadness that HIAS learned of the untimely death of Steven W. Siegel, past President of the JGSNY, a scholar, a historian, and a visionary, for whom the Jewish heritage and Jewish values were not abstract ideas, but rather guidelines upon which he built his life. Steve Siegel was a good friend and a longtime supporter of HIAS. He understood HIAS’ goals and valued HIAS’ archives as an inexhaustible source of historical data of Jewish immigrants and the collective memory of millions of Jews who came here during the last 130 years. His efforts to enlarge HIAS’ archival treasure and enhance access to the archival material will not be forgotten.

On behalf of HIAS and those who were lucky to call Steve Siegel a friend, please accept my deepest condolences.

### **From Joseph Fibel**

Longtime Member JGS, Inc. (New York) and former member of JGS Executive Council

I have a story about Steve’s uncanny ability to provide information about obscure historical details.

One of my mother’s important activities while I was growing up was membership in a women’s organization called the United Order of True Sisters. Their work was social and philanthropic. Eventually my mother became president of her lodge. As the years passed, this group’s meetings were less and less well attended, and eventually they disappeared. In recent years, nobody has even heard of them. At a meeting about five years ago, Steve mentioned that the records of the UOTS were located at some place or other. I stood up and asked him to repeat what he had just said, and he answered, “You know, the UOTS, the United Order of True Sisters.” I laughed, because I hadn’t heard that term in thirty-five years and assumed that nobody else had ever heard of them—and here Steve knew where their records were stored!

### **From Eileen Polakoff**

Professional genealogist and longtime member JGS, Inc. (New York)

I wanted to deliver this remembrance in person, but Steve left us before I could deliver it. I wanted to say some of the things Steve had meant to me over the nearly thirty years we have been friends.

Steve opened his knowledge and friendship to me from my first phone call in the early fall of 1984. That call was the first of hundreds. No, thousands. Within a short period of time, mostly due to his encouragement, I was a member of the Executive Board of the JGS and planning a conference in Salt Lake City. More events came every month or two, and with them board meetings, committee meetings, or just gatherings to talk.

Then there would be the late night phone calls. Steve, I loved them. When Jack, now my ex-husband, wanted to know why we always had to talk after midnight, my response was to say that Steve and I bounced ideas off of each other better late at night than earlier. Our brainstorming helped things like the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary

brunch and the 1992 international conference come off without a hitch and were actually a SMASH in all ways.

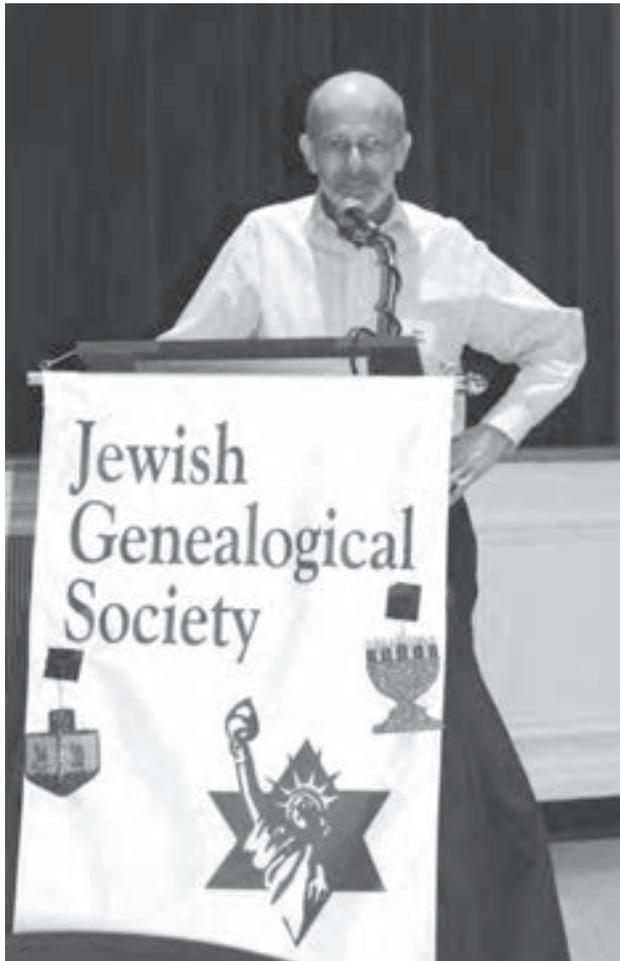
Steve's support and encouragement as I became a professional genealogist meant so much to me. Whenever we'd talk, we would find so much to talk about that the call or meeting would take hours.

Thank you so much for your enduring friendship. I will cherish it for all of my days. Give my regards to Rob when you meet him in heaven (if it exists).

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***Thank you for your caring and warm thoughts.  
Please convey this message to your members.***

***Mrs. Eleanor Siegel on behalf of the Siegel family***



Outgoing President Steven W. Siegel addresses the crowd at the JGS Brunch last December



Steven relaxing at home in 2007



Past President Linda Cantor presents gift to outgoing President Steven W. Siegel at JGS Brunch last December

## Upcoming and Current Events

### Jewish Genealogical Society

May 20, 2012, 2:00 p.m.

Monthly Program: **Jewish Chocolate Radar (Choco-Dar) through the Generations**

Speaker: Rabbi Deborah R. Prinz

The next time you eat a piece of chocolate, consider that you are partaking in an aspect of Jewish history. There are some surprising Jewish connections with chocolate, including Jews in the early chocolate trade and early Jewish chocolate makers, all of which are described in Rabbi Prinz's forthcoming book, *Jews on the Chocolate Trail* (Jewish Lights).

Using information gathered from travel in many countries, including Belgium, Egypt, England, France, Israel, Italy, Mexico, Spain, Switzerland, and the United States, Rabbi Prinz's narrative spans cultures, countries, centuries, and religions, exploring how several different faith traditions share consumption, rituals, and business interests in chocolate. The author has lectured on this topic around the country at historical societies, Jewish community centers, rabbinical associations, synagogue groups, and food conferences. She was awarded a Starkoff Fellowship and a Director's Fellowship from the American Jewish Archives and a Gilder Lehrman Fellowship from the Rockefeller Library in order to pursue this research.

Rabbi Prinz currently serves the Central Conference of American Rabbis as Director of Program and Member Services and Director of the Joint Commission on Rabbinic Mentoring. She has held a number of leadership positions in the national and regional Reform movement and served as a congregational rabbi for nearly thirty years.

Location: Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan (between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> avenues)

Admission: JGS Members are admitted free of charge; guests pay \$5 at the door.

The Ackman and Ziff Family Genealogy Institute at CJH will open at 11:00 a.m. for access to research materials and computers and for networking with other researchers.

**Also on May 20<sup>th</sup>: Please note that Geshher Galicia will hold its regional meeting from 11:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on the same day in the same place.**

Topic: **"Exploring the Archives: Unique Resources in Galician Research"**

Speaker: Pamela Weisberger, President and Research Coordinator, Geshher Galicia

June 10, 2012, 2:00 p.m.

Monthly Program: **"What, Where, and How to Search for Displaced Persons"**

Speaker: Valery Bazarov

**The regular program will be preceded by an informal meeting for the sharing of research stories and questions. (Kovno Room, 12:30-1:30).**

The presentation by Valery Bazarov, Director of the HIAS Family History and Location Services, will describe the content and significance of the case records held by the International Tracing Service (ITS), the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), and the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) and will consider the ways in which the Holocaust-era records of those agencies complement each other.

ITS files usually ended when survivors boarded the ships taking them across the Atlantic Ocean. The next step in their journey was documented by the records of the HIAS Collection, maintained in the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Chronologically, these documents are the sequel to the ITS files held in Bad Arolsen, although ITS records may also contain correspondence from a later period when an individual was searching for lost family members. The USCIS case files of survivors typically contain documents originally prepared in the Displaced Persons camps, detailing the individual's war-time experience. There is great genealogical value in the interrelationship of all these records.

The presentation will be illustrated by specific cases taken from the files of the three agencies.

Valery Bazarov began working for the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society in 1988 and during the next decade assisted with the arrival of more than 200,000 Jewish refugees who came to the United States under HIAS auspices. As Director in charge of the HIAS Family History and Location Services, he helps immigrants of different generations find the family members with whom they lost contact over the years. He is committed to finding and commemorating the

Jews who rescued fellow Jews during the Holocaust. Valery also researches HIAS history and presents his findings in lectures and publications. He is a frequent lecturer at international and national conferences and seminars on Jewish genealogy.

Location: Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan (between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> avenues)

Admission: JGS Members are admitted free of charge; guests pay \$5 at the door.

The Ackman and Ziff Family Genealogy Institute at CJH will be open at 11:00 a.m. for access to research materials and computers and networking.

## **New York City & Environs**

### **YIVO Institute for Jewish Research**

May 22, 2012, 7:00 p.m.

“**The Dybbuk**,” Film Screening and Discussion

Location: 15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan

Admission: \$10 for members, \$15 for others

June 5, 2012, 3:00 p.m.

“**Destructive Creators: Jewish Immigrant Bankers, the Business of Mass Migration and the Failures that Reshaped American Finance, 1914**”

Location: 15 West 16<sup>th</sup> Street, Manhattan (between 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> avenues)

Admission: free

## **Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island**

June 24, 2012, 2:00 p.m.

“**Intermediate and Advanced Online Research Techniques**”

Speaker: Phyllis Kramer

Location: to be announced

### **Metro New York Genealogy & Computers Special Interest Group**

<http://homepages.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~metrony/>

June 5, 2012, 6:00–8:00 p.m.

“**Annual Ask the Experts Panel**”

Location: to be announced

### **Museum of Jewish Heritage/A Living Memorial to the Holocaust**

March 22–October 14, 2012

Exhibition: “**Filming the Camps: John Ford, Samuel Fuller, George Stevens: From Hollywood to Nuremberg**”

Location: 36 Battery Place, Manhattan

Admission: free for Museum members, \$10 for seniors, and \$12 for all others

### **The National Archives**

June 12, 2012, 12:30

“**New York Sources: Repositories and Imagination – Where to Go for Your Records**”

Location: 201 Varick Street, 12<sup>th</sup> floor, Manhattan

Admission: free but pre-registration required at [nyork.k.archives@nara.gov](mailto:nyork.k.archives@nara.gov) or 866-840-1752 ☆

**REMINDER:**  
**Please return the e-mailed JGS member surveys you received  
in April.**  
**We welcome your input.**

## JGS Program Reports

January 15, 2012

### “Researching and Restitution in the Austrian State Archives”

by Joy Kestenbaum

Our January meeting featured a presentation by Dr. Hubert Steiner, an archivist and historian at the Austrian National Archives (<http://www.oesta.gv.at>) in Vienna, whose field of specialization is twentieth-century Austria. He discussed the files of Jewish property created during the Nazi era, the post-war period, and the mandate and work of the Austrian Historical Commission.

Appointed to the State Archives in 1987, Dr. Steiner soon assumed responsibility for the identification of Jewish properties confiscated by the Nazi regime in Austria. Recognizing the importance of the property registration records with which he was working, he developed an electronic database to the collection so that the records could be searched by the name of the registrant. This index has made it easier to access individual files and to undertake genealogical research. Dr. Steiner prefaced his talk by explaining that his role as a historian and archivist has been to identify historical sources; he is not involved with politics or legal matters involving compensation. Legal questions should be directed to the National Fund (of the Republic of Austria) for victims of National Socialism (<http://www.en.nationalfonds.org>).



Jane Berenbeim introducing Dr. Hubert Steiner

Dr. Steiner outlined the historical background and impact of the Property Registration Office, the authority that was established to oversee the registration of Jewish assets. Following the invasion of Austria in 1938 by Hitler’s troops and the annexation of Austria to Nazi Germany, the laws of the Nazi government were implemented and enforced on the Jewish population of Austria. On the basis of the decree of April 26, 1938, persons considered Jewish under the racist Nuremberg Laws were required to evaluate and report their properties and income if their net value exceeded RM 5,000 (Reichsmarks). Non-Jewish marital partners were also required to declare their assets. Declarations had to be made for real estate, savings, insurance, company capital, jewelry, carpets, silver, and art objects and



Questions from the audience



Hubert Steiner responds to audience questions

The Austrian Historical Commission (<http://www.historikerkommission.gv.at>) was established in 1998 to investigate and report on the expropriations in Austria during the Nazi era and on the government's restitution efforts, including economic and social benefits after 1945. The Commission presented its final report in 2003. Its examination of Austrian involvement in the confiscation of Jewish property during the period of Nazi rule as well as the country's past record of returning assets has been the largest project of "scientific research" in this field in Austria.

Since property declarations were organized by province, the Austrian State Archives only has property registration records for Vienna. Individuals searching for information about family members who lived in other parts of Austria should contact the relevant provincial archive, such as the Provincial Archive of Lower Austria (<http://www.noel.gv.at/Bildung/Landesarchiv.html>), which holds registration records. For regions of the former Austrian-Hungarian Empire outside of Austria, one should inquire at foreign archives, such as the Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine in Lviv.

included such information as private address, date of birth, occupation, name and maiden name, and name and religion of spouse. Dr. Steiner pointed out that registration of any remaining assets was required prior to deportation to ghettos and concentration and death camps. This final bureaucratic act can be the last trace of an individual.

Dr. Steiner's life work has been to document the years 1938 to 1945 and to assist individuals from all over the world with their requests. He spoke from his "three hearts": as a representative of the Republic of Austria, as a historian who knows that the documentation of history only can be done in an objective way, and as a man who has seen that injustice was committed. He

After World War II, Austria was divided into four zones and occupied by the Allied forces. Property restitution began but was limited, with real estate more easily identifiable than moveable property. As a result of the Austrian State Treaty of May 1955, the country regained its independence and initiated a legal and administrative framework by which to compensate victims of political persecution. Records from the post-war period provide important biographical information about individual claimants and are very useful for family history research. Access to these files is restricted due to privacy laws, and researchers must show evidence of familial relationship. Historians who use the material are not allowed to publish any names.



Informal discussion after the presentation with audience members

welcomed visitors to Vienna and encouraged those with questions about their relatives to contact him. The inquirer should list the first and last name and date of birth and, if possible, the last street address in Vienna of the individuals one is researching. Also include one's postal address so that copies of any documents that are found can be mailed, as they will not be e-mailed. These copies will be provided free of charge for those researching their relatives. The turnaround time is generally from two to three weeks.

Dr. Steiner can be contacted at the following e-mail address: [Hubert.Steiner@oesta.gv.at](mailto:Hubert.Steiner@oesta.gv.at). An audio recording of his talk will be available on the Society's website.

*Joy Kestenbaum is a member of the JGS Executive Council and an art and architectural historian and librarian. She has researched the members of her extended family who lived in Western Galicia and the Grodno/Bialystok region, Canada, England, Argentina, Palestine/Israel, and the United States. She created the KehilaLinks web pages on Narewka, Poland, for JewishGen and often assists others with their genealogical research.*

February 19, 2012

**“What They Saved—Pieces of a Jewish Past”**  
by Steve Stein

Attendees at the February meeting were treated to the story of a personal journey as told by author and professor Nancy Miller, a Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the CUNY Graduate Center. She related how, knowing virtually nothing of her family history prior to her father's death, she succeeded in constructing a family history based



Audience with VP Programming, Jane Berenbeim, providing microphone for question

mainly on objects she found among her father's effects. Dr. Miller acknowledged that she was a relative beginner in the world of genealogy. But her tale of discovery provides many points of encouragement and inspiration to anyone beginning this journey with little or nothing to go on. It is chronicled in her latest book, *What They Saved—Pieces of a Jewish Past*, from which she read excerpts.



Nancy K. Miller

A family photo, a tallis bag, a lock of hair, a deed to land in Palestine, a postcard from Argentina, a cemetery map—these are among the items Dr. Miller found. She had some knowledge of her mother's side, the Millers, but little of her father's Kipnis family other than having come from “Russia” because of pogroms. She never met her paternal grandfather and had vague memories of her grandmother. Her paternal uncle moved to Arizona before she was born, and she had never met her cousin Julian. She had even taken her mother's surname as her own.

So when she was contacted by a real estate agent concerning a plot of land that had been purchased in Palestine in the 1920s, she began to explore the artifacts that had been found in her father's home. She then remembered a land certificate she had found along with cancelled checks, and then the search was on. In order to be able to sell the land, all of the living descendants of the owners had to be found. This led Dr. Miller to Arizona to locate her cousin and subsequently his daughter Sarah in Tennessee. Sarah possessed a photograph which Dr. Miller also owned, except that Sarah was able



Nancy K. Miller pointing out her family

to identify the people in the photo and thus helped to fill in the missing pieces of the family tree and its history—including an uncle’s mob connections. Other clues led back to Kishinev, the ship’s manifest, and the connection to the infamous pogroms that took place there in the early 1900s.

Drawing inspiration from Chaim Nachman Bialik’s poem regarding the Kishinev pogrom, she proceeded to discover more about the family. A helpful archivist at NARA gave Dr. Miller important information over the phone about her grandfather’s naturalization—his “first papers—which indicated his origins in Bratslav in present-day Ukraine north of Kishinev (currently Chisinau, Moldova). And a stack of letters in Yiddish, which she had translated, revealed a positive side of her grandfather she never would have imagined or known regarding a donation he had made to a local Talmud Torah. And, it turns out, he had begun a Kipnis genealogy of his own.

Although there are aspects of her Kipnis family history she acknowledges she will never know, Dr. Miller continues to be intrigued by those clues that she has not yet followed. But there is only so much of her story that can be squeezed into a one-hour talk. To follow her story in greater detail, she encouraged everyone to read the book!

*Steve Stein is a member of the JGS Executive Council. He is a software systems professional in the telecommunications industry and has been researching his own and his wife’s Eastern European genealogies for more than thirty years. ☆*



Nancy K. Miller speaking with Bob Kosovsky

## Notes from All Over

### Increase in the Cost of LDS Microfilm Loans

In the Winter 2011–2012 issue of *Dorot*, Stewart Driller reported on the changes in the procedures for ordering LDS films. Now he reports that there has been a price increase. A short term loan of ninety days is now \$7.50 and an extended loan is \$18.75. The JGS will continue to reimburse the difference between the Short Term and Extended Loans (\$11.25) for films of Jewish interest for use at the Center for Jewish History in Manhattan.

### Comparison of Genealogy Software Available on Wikipedia

*Eastman's Online Genealogy Newsletter* reports that Wikipedia has an online comparison of twenty-one varieties of free and commercial genealogy software. It is available at [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison\\_of\\_genealogy\\_software](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comparison_of_genealogy_software). ☆

## ACTION REQUESTED

**To: JGS Members**

**From: Jeffrey L. Levin, JGS Executive Council**

**Re: Pending Legislation and Regulations**

There are two pending legislative and regulatory issues that, if passed into law, will adversely affect genealogical research.

**Issue #1:** The House Ways and Means Committee's Social Security Subcommittee is proposing to completely shut down use of the Social Security Death Index (SSDI) by genealogists and other industries that rely upon its publicly available information. The proposed changes are the result of legislators' misplaced concerns regarding identity theft. The IAJGS Public Records Access and Monitoring Committee does not accept that vital records, including the SSDI, are the causes of identity theft. The IAJGS committee states on its website that the causes of identity theft are hacking into major databases, theft of wallets, credit cards or mail, in-store or on-telephone transactions and computer spyware.

The IAJGS has proposed that the genealogical community make the effort to educate and petition the legislators and regulators regarding these issues. We are urged to contact our representatives in the House and the Senate, especially since it's an election year, to ask them not to permit the elimination of public access to the SSDI. **Please read** important details at: [www.iajgs.org/pramc/Latest\\_Alert.doc](http://www.iajgs.org/pramc/Latest_Alert.doc) and take action.

**Issue #2:** At the behest of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, the New York City Council has proposed legislation that would eliminate the autonomy of New York City's Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS), the agency responsible for the records and archival documents produced by past and present city governments. The proposed legislation would place the currently independent agency within the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS). If passed, the legislation would significantly downgrade the authority of DORIS within city government and potentially put at risk its ability to preserve, protect, and make accessible the intellectual legacy of New York City's civic and human history.

The petition opposing the elimination of DORIS as an independent agency can be signed at the website of the Archivists Round Table of Metropolitan New York at [http://www.nycarchivists.org/doris\\_petition](http://www.nycarchivists.org/doris_petition).

We urge you to take action on these two important genealogical issues.

Thank you.

## U.S. Military Discharge Papers Available

Your own military records as well as those of individuals to whom you are next of kin may now be ordered online from [www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records](http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records). This is DD Form 214, "Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty," a document that the U.S. Department of Defense issued upon a military service member's retirement, separation, or discharge from active military duty. The form must be printed out, signed, and faxed. Genealogy is an acceptable reason for requesting the DD-214.

Other individuals seeking military records for persons who are next of kin should download and complete Standard Form 180, available from the same site.

For records other than your own, remember that military records become archived sixty-two years from the date of separation from military service and are then open to the public. Currently, that means before 1950.

## Holocaust Restitution Project

Project HEART, the Holocaust Era Asset Restitution Taskforce, is seeking individuals and heirs with potential claims regarding loss of property in countries governed or occupied by Nazi forces or Axis powers during the World War II era. Eligible properties include immobile property, movable property, and intangible personal property, such as stocks, bonds, insurance policies, savings accounts, registered patents, and dowry policies. See [www.heartwebsite.org](http://www.heartwebsite.org) for eligibility requirements and forms.

## Jewish Genetic Disease Consortium Covers Nineteen Diseases

At [jewishgeneticdiseases.org](http://jewishgeneticdiseases.org), you will find descriptions of the nineteen Ashkenazi Jewish genetic diseases (their origin, symptoms, treatment, age of onset, and prognosis) and how to connect with relevant organizations for more information.

## Passenger Lists to South Africa

A new site hosted by the Genealogical Society of South Africa, <http://eggsa.org>, will eventually carry

"transcriptions of all the passenger lists in the South African archives that the archivists can find." So far, one may find the first 7,000 names of the Natal lists from 1850 to 1882. The site also contains lists of gravestones, archive documents, and newspaper extracts.

## Find Numerous Historical Directories on The Jewish Genealogy Indexer

This site, <http://genealogyindexer.org>, contains 153,000 searchable pages of historical directories primarily from Central and Eastern Europe plus 28,000 pages of 64 Yizkor books, 11,000 pages of lists of Polish military officers, 19,000 pages of community and personal histories, and 11,000 pages of 145 Polish secondary school annual reports and other school sources. Among the useful items are the 1939 Address and Business Directory of Jews in Shanghai, a 1930 Warsaw Address and Business Directory, a 1934 Bialystok Address Directory, and a 1937 Bucharest-Ilfov Telephone Directory.

## Children Sent from Europe to Canada

From 1860 to the early 1930s, over 100,000 children from all over Great Britain were sent to Canada during the child emigration movement. The most recent addition to the Library and Archives Canada includes the names of 20,000 children who came to Canada between 1925 and 1932. The site lists the child's name, birthplace, year of arrival and ship, sender, occupation, ship, and name and address of relatives. See [www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/home-children/index-e.html](http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/home-children/index-e.html).

## Directory of Local Newspapers Available from the Library of Congress

At Chronicling America, <http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>, you will find a list of newspapers published in the U.S. from 1690 until today plus a list of libraries where you can find them. You may also search for and view digital reproductions of newspaper pages from 1836–1922. More pages are added quarterly. ☆

# Let My People Sow (Part II) Am Olam: Experiments in Socialist Agriculture in America

By Irwin Weintraub

The period from 1880 through 1920 was the era of the major immigration of Jews from Russia to the United States. Many immigrants settled in cities and small towns, and others joined or established agricultural settlements throughout the country. (See *Dorot*, Vol. 32, Number 2, winter 2010--2011). An organization called Am Olam (The Eternal People) was established in 1881 by two idealists named Mani Baker and Moses Herder. They believed that agriculture was a noble and vital part of society, and they wanted to establish the new immigrants in egalitarian agricultural settlements based on a utopian socialist model. Agriculture was considered to be a productive occupation that would bring Jews back to the land and facilitate their adaption to American society.

In 1881 and 1882, Am Olam members came to the United States and joined or established colonies in Louisiana, South Dakota, and Oregon. These settlements failed within three to five years due to crop failures, poor soil conditions, lack of agricultural knowledge, bad weather, high interest rates, isolation from other Jews, and ideological differences among settlers. Each problem fed on the others, but particularly important were the colonists' lack of agricultural knowledge and their inability to purchase adequate equipment and supplies and support themselves in their early years. Many colonies were located in areas far from markets and had poor soils and were subject to hail and drought.

The short sad history of four Am Olam colonies in Louisiana, Oregon, and South Dakota will be briefly described.

## The Sicily Island Settlement in Louisiana

Sicily Island was established in November 1881 in Catahoula Parish, Louisiana, on the Ouachita River with an initial payment of \$3,000 from the colonists, \$1,800 from New York's Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, and \$2,800 from the Alliance Israelite Universelle. The Louisiana Commission for Agriculture and Immigration welcomed the settlers, and Jews from New York and New Orleans offered additional financial support. The colony consisted of 151 people: fifty-one men, thirty-four women, and sixty-six children. Among them were a dozen merchants, eleven farmers, three teachers, and

various other professions. The settlers established a constitution with seventeen articles that they called the *Constitution for the First Agricultural Colony of Russian Israelites in America*. The constitution empowered the members to purchase lands, erect dwellings, a farm house, a school house, and a library for the common use of the colony, and supply money, farming utensils, or other articles of husbandry, household furniture, and other amenities that would serve the colony's aims and purposes. There was a governing board to administer the colony and settle disputes, and all members were granted equal rights whether they had invested money in the colony or not.

Right from the beginning, one disaster after another plagued the colonists. In addition to poor soil, inexperience, and social isolation, Sicily Island was destroyed by malaria and Mississippi River floods. Having come from cold climates, the colonists were unprepared for the heat of Louisiana summers and the prevalence of snakes and mosquitoes. Settlers began leaving in the fall of 1882, and the colony was abandoned by the end of 1883. Some went to New York and other large cities, while others joined existing colonies in Arkansas, Dakota, and New Jersey.

## The New Odessa Settlement in Oregon

In January 1882, more than sixty Am Olam devotees left the Russian city of Odessa for New York, where they established a cooperative. After scouting around for a location, they heard that there were great opportunities for farming in Oregon. They selected a site near Glendale in Douglas County. With funding from New York supporters, twenty-six Am Olam members sailed for Oregon in July 1882. After arriving in Portland in early September, a few members of the group left on foot for the site of their colony to prepare for the others who were to join them early in 1883. The remaining members remained behind to earn money and learn English. The colonists called their community New Odessa. By the spring of 1883, forty to fifty people were living in the colony, and by 1884, the population of New Odessa had grown to sixty-five individuals. With initial enthusiasm at its peak, they erected a large two-story frame building that served as a dormitory, communal kitchen, and assembly hall.

## The New Odessa Philosophy

They drew up a constitution which described the colony's philosophy, rules, and management structure. Colonists were not to work outside the colony nor engage in commerce beyond the sale of the colony's products. The constitution also specified that men and women were to enjoy equal rights. William Frey, who was not Jewish and was opposed to all established religions, was chosen to lead New Odessa because of his experience with agrarian colonies in the Midwest. New Odessa attempted to follow an ideal Marxist approach of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." There was no organized religious life or interest. The colonists decided that bosses and managers were not needed, and they renounced private ownership of property, deciding to work without salaries and lead a frugal existence. Fixed hours of labor and specific tasks on the farm, in the forest, and in the kitchen were assigned. The colonists cleared land, planted crops, and furnished wood to the Oregon & California Railroad. They planted vegetables and wheat on more than 100 acres of land and hunted and foraged food from their surrounding environment. When they found themselves short on agricultural experience and supplies, the surrounding community lent them tools and expertise. Evenings were devoted to discussions and debates regarding the ideas of August Comte, the French philosopher who had inspired the colony and the beliefs of William Frey.

## From Harmony to Factionalism

Life in New Odessa was harmonious for two years, but then people became dissatisfied with their sparse lives. The colonists were mainly young men, who complained of the lack of female companions. Others felt they should develop their already profitable timber business and bring in more money. Some felt that there were other routes to a happy life in the United States besides agriculture and communal living. This led to ideological differences and clashes among those who accepted Frey's approach and those who desired a more structured socialist system. Frey and fifteen followers left the settlement in 1884. Shortly afterwards, a fire destroyed the community building and library, which were the heart of the settlement and much appreciated by the surrounding community. The remaining colonists moved on to other colonies or to towns in Oregon and elsewhere in the West. Some returned to New York, where they became part of other activist movements. The final demise of New Odessa came in 1887 with a bankruptcy suit, followed by foreclosure in 1888.

## Crémieux—A Good Start

In July 1882, Herman Rosenthal, a Russian from Kiev who had been president of the failed Sicily Island Colony, along with several families from Sicily Island who had managed to hold on to their idealistic beliefs, were determined to try again to settle another colony. Fifty families (200 people) settled in the southeastern part of South Dakota and formed a colony that they called Crémieux, after the famous French lawyer and Jewish leader who was a founder of the Alliance Israelite Universelle. The new colony was fourteen miles from the nearest railroad station in the town of Mount Vernon and twenty-six miles from the county seat town of Mitchell. Rosenthal was impressed by the temperate climate, good soil, and free land provided by the government. Some of the colonists were granted farms of 160 acres, acquired under the terms of the Homestead Act, while other farms covered as much a square mile (640 acres). In contrast to the collective ownership in the Louisiana and Oregon settlements, each family in the Crémieux colony owned the land but shared tools, seed, livestock, profits, and losses. They had a good social life with parties, dances, lectures, meetings, a glee club, a choral group, and concerts. The members shared humanistic values but rejected the practice of religion as superfluous.

## Then Came the Problems

Like the other would-be Russian Jewish farmers, the Crémieux residents lacked experience and good leadership. The settlers incurred debts by spending beyond their means. They bought horses, livestock, and quality lumber at exorbitant prices. When the livestock arrived, they realized that they had not provided adequate means to house and feed them. The first year, they managed to raise and harvest good yields of oats, wheat, rye, barley, and flax. But a severely cold winter in 1882 and a prairie fire destroyed the entire hay crop, which forced them to buy livestock feed from local farmers. Kerosene froze in the lamps, and water drawn from wells had to be consumed immediately to prevent it from freezing. A small well three miles away served as a temporary source of water, but the water froze while they brought it back to the colony. Despite these setbacks, the Crémieux colonists survived the winter. In the 1883–1884 season, they planted more wheat, but the Hessian fly destroyed most of the crop, and a prolonged drought killed off most of the livestock. The small amount of wheat harvested sold for low prices due to a depressed market. In autumn 1884, hailstorms destroyed the entire flax crop.

Because of these disasters, the colonists could not pay their debts and had to mortgage their farms, but the interest rate on the loans was so high that most of the settlers sold out and moved away. A few remained a year or two longer; but the scarcity of water forced them to leave and abandon Crémieux in the latter part of 1885.

### **Bethlehem Yehuda**

In 1885, a group of single men, supported by a grant from the Alliance Israel Universelle settled near Crémieux on a tract of land in Davison County, South Dakota, which they called Bethlehem Yehuda. They were determined to live a collectivist life and to demonstrate that Jews could be capable farmers. In fact, the dedication to collectivism was so strong that commercial activity was prohibited. They also vowed that women would share equal rights with men in the true spirit of collectivism. Like the other Am Olam colonies, the rigors of frontier life, lack of farming experience, crop failures, factionalism, and serious disagreements about task assignments and the division of labor led to the colony's demise in about a year and a half. As one observer noted, Bethlehem Yehuda was "characterized by differences of opinion, quarrels and confusion without any law or order."

After leaving the colonies, some settlers got involved in agricultural education, marketing cooperatives, and farm publications. Others entered politics and the labor movement. Some moved to cities and established businesses and became absorbed in American life.

### **Conclusion**

The Am Olam immigrants believed that the best way to live a normal life in their new country was to become farmers. The Am Olam experiments failed due to the hardships of living on the frontier, factional disagreements, lack of farming experience, arguments over task assignments, and division of labor. But unbeknownst to these innocent, idealistic agriculturalists, there were larger forces at work. The 1880s was a period of economic distress for both agriculture and industry, which reached a climax in the panic and depression of 1893. America was emerging as a center of industrial capitalism with emphasis on individual initiatives and private ownership. The back-to-the-land philosophy of Am Olam came at a time when the desire to remain on the land was beginning to wane, and many rural residents left agriculture. Small family farms around the country were seriously hurt by the depression. Foreclosures were common, forcing many farm families to sell or abandon their farms and move to the cities to make new lives in factories.

The state colleges of agriculture, established in 1860 under the Morrill Act, could not stem the movement out of agriculture. They tried to improve agricultural efficiency and productivity by advocating the formation of large scale units to replace the small family farms. In 1860, America was predominantly rural, and only one-fifth of the population lived in cities. But by 1900, one third of the population lived in cities.

Idealistic Jewish immigrants continued to establish new colonies during the early 1900s in New Jersey, California, and other places with varying degrees of success. They learned from others' mistakes by combining agriculture with industry and choosing locations close to urban areas so that they could market their crops and earn income from off-farm work. Perhaps if the Am Olam colonists had been willing to alter their rigid utopian ideologies and adopt a mixed agricultural and industrial approach, combined with a willingness to learn modern agricultural and management techniques, their experiences in American agriculture might have been less painful and more successful.

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*Irwin Weintraub, author of the above listed comprehensive bibliography on Jews in agriculture, was formerly the science librarian for the Brooklyn College Library. He now lives in Beersheva, Israel, and can be reached at [Irwin1812@gmail.com](mailto:Irwin1812@gmail.com). ☆*

## New, Recent, and Noteworthy Publications

### About Jewish Life in the United States

Steve Luxenberg, *Annie's Ghosts: A Journey into a Family Secret*. New York: Hyperion Books, 2009, 210 pages, \$15.99, paperback edition.

From the author: "My mother was an only child. That's what she told everyone. When I heard that my mother had been hiding the existence of a sister, I was bewildered. Part memoir, part detective story, part history, *Annie's Ghosts* revolves around three main characters (my mom, her sister, and me as narrator/detective/son), several important secondary ones (my grandparents, my father, and several relatives whom I found in the course of reporting on the book), as well as the Eloise Hospital, the vast county mental hospital where my secret aunt was confined all of her adult life. Eloise was a place little known outside Detroit, which housed so many mentally ill and homeless people during the Depression that it became one of the largest institutions of its kind in the nation, with 10,000 residents, 75 buildings, its own police and fire forces, even its own dairy. My search to find the story of my aunt took me to imperial Russia and Depression-era Detroit, through the Holocaust in Ukraine and the Philippine war zone, and back to the hospital where Annie and many others languished in anonymity."

This book was named to the *Washington Post's* list of Best Books of 2009 and was chosen as a Michigan Notable Book by the Library of Michigan. Jan Alpert, president of the National Genealogical Society, said, "*Annie's Ghosts* is a great non-fiction read for genealogists."

Abbie Lipschutz, *Child of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: Growing Up Jewish in Holland, Belgium, Palestine, Israel, America. And Texas*. Accord, NY: Jewish Currents Press, 2012, 186 pages, \$19.95.

From the publisher: "Abbie Lipschutz was a kibbutznik in Palestine in the early 1940s, a veteran of the Dutch Princess Irene Brigade in World War II, and a volunteer in Israel's War of Independence. He made a living for half a century as a diamond dealer throughout the American South. His memoir is filled with the sights, sounds, scents, songs and surprises of a progressive life well lived."

### About Jewish Life in Eastern Europe

Marlene S. Englander, *My Dear Hindalla, Remember Me: Letters from a Lost World, May 1937 – January 1940*. Cleveland: Windjammer Adventures Publishing, 2011, 172 pages, \$34.95.

From the publisher: "What was everyday life like in the late 1930s before World War II and the Holocaust? How did friendships endure? Meet Hinda Zarkey Saul and Nochum Berman. Hinda is a teenager trying to adjust to her new life in Cleveland, while Berman remains in Lithuania, hoping to come to America. Through his letters to her, their friendship unfolds—a friendship based on shared values and hope for the future. Their correspondence is a refuge from everyday trouble and challenges as the comfortable life they knew was unraveling. This book is a testament to the rich heritage of a world that is lost, but not forgotten."

Rosemary Horowitz, Editor, *Memorial Books of Eastern European Jewry: Essays on the History and Meaning of Yizker Volumes*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2011. 302 pages, 9 photos, bibliographies, notes, index. \$55.00.

From the publisher: "From the Russian civil wars through the Nazi years, the Jews of Eastern Europe were targets of violence. During the Holocaust, especially, entire communities were wiped out. In response, survivors sometimes compiled memorial books or yizker (sic) books, in an attempt to preserve historical, biographical and cultural information about their shtetls. This multipart collection provides a concise history of the memorial books and their cultural contents." A reviewer wrote, "The editor discusses different definitions of yizker books and explores the uses yizker books have beyond commemoration, from genealogy to religious history to tracing partisan activity. The essays describe the uses of yizker books in researching Jewish music, art and social history, and their potential as teaching tools."

Moishe Katz, *The Generation That Lost Its Fear: A Memoir of Jewish Self-Defense and Revolutionary Activism in Tsarist Russia*. Accord, NY: Jewish Currents Press, 2012, 296 pages, \$19.95.

From the publisher: "Moishe Katz (1885-1960) was a

leftwing journalist for Yiddish newspapers in Russia and the U.S. Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as the Tsarist regime in Russia sought to stifle revolutionary and reform movements through repression and pogroms, Katz helped to organize armed Jewish self-defense and

workers' committees in several cities. The book offers a vivid narrative of an era when young Jews took real risks to fight tyranny in Russia and bring economic justice and an end to Jewish persecution." ☆

## Metro Area Repository Round-up

### A Note about Finding Aids

A finding aid is prepared by an archivist after all the materials have been culled, sorted, arranged, and described. It summarizes the importance of a collection, lists the contents of each box, places the materials in historical context, and describes the person or institution that created the collection.

Below are listed the digitized finding aids now available online from four local repositories plus two other not-to-be-overlooked resources.

### American Jewish Historical Society

The AJHS has recently created new finding aids for the records of such organizations as the Hebrew National Orphan Home Alumni Association, AMIT, and the American Jewish Congress, and for individuals. See <http://ajhs.org/collections/newfindingaids.cfm>.

### Hebrew Union College–American Jewish Archives

The American Jewish Archives (<http://americanjewisharchives.org>) has over 600 digitized finding aids to their collections pertaining to organizations, congregations, and individuals.

### LaGuardia and Wagner Archives

This archive contains finding aids for the papers of six New York City mayors (LaGuardia, Wagner, Lindsay, Beame, Koch, and Giuliani) plus the records of the Steinway & Sons Piano Company, Queens Local History from 1800 to the present, the New York City Council, and the New York City Housing Authority. The website is [www.laguardiawagnerarchive.lagcc.cuny.edu](http://www.laguardiawagnerarchive.lagcc.cuny.edu). The location is Fiorello H. LaGuardia Community College, 31-10 Thomson Avenue, Room E-238, Long Island City, NY 11101. To discuss your

research needs, contact Douglas DiCarlo, Archivist, at [ddicarlo@lagc.cuny.edu](mailto:ddicarlo@lagc.cuny.edu), 718-482-5065.

### New-York Historical Society

The Patricia D. Klingenstein Library at the New-York Historical Society has a new online catalog, which enables the researcher to search the manuscript collections (letters, diaries, account books, etc.), books and pamphlets, journals, broadsides, maps, prints, photographs, architectural drawings, and ephemera. Go to [www.nyhistory.org](http://www.nyhistory.org). If you have questions or cannot find what you want, call the Historical Society's General Reference (212-485-9225).

### In Other Repositories

#### Brooklyn Historical Society

The Brooklyn Historical Society is the place to consult or visit for housing and building research. It has many years of Brooklyn directories, historic atlases, land conveyances, real estate brochures describing new apartment buildings from the 1920s through 1960s, architecture books, scrapbooks of newspaper clippings, and detailed descriptions of individual buildings within landmarked neighborhoods. The website is [http://brooklynhistory.org/library/house\\_bhs.html](http://brooklynhistory.org/library/house_bhs.html).

#### Routes to Roots Foundation

Jewish genealogists seeking family documents from Eastern Europe are now able to search the Routes to Roots online database (<http://rtrfoundation.org>) for listings of their ancestral towns in Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova and some selected holdings from Russia, Latvia, and Romania. For each country, there are web articles which provide historical background, descriptions of the contents of each record group, maps, archivist insights, and related web links. ☆

# QUESTIONING THE EXPERTS

**DOROT interviews a professional librarian about the vast resources for genealogical research available in the New York Public Library and how to access them.**

## **Interview with Maira Liriano, Manager, Irma & Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy, New York Public Library**

DOROT: What is the history of this division within the New York Public Library?

LIRIANO: The collections are original documents from the Astor and Lenox libraries, the two private libraries that formed the basis of the New York Public Library when it was formed in 1895. We opened in this building in 1911, and at that time there was a local history and genealogy division and a separate American history room. Those collections were always considered core, foundational collections, because they support so many other collections in the library, but there are many other departments of the research libraries that collect materials about United States history, the history of New York City or other local places in the U.S.

Among these are Rare Books, Manuscripts, Maps, Photography, Prints, and the Schomburg Center. But our emphasis on genealogy differentiates us from the other divisions. Our original genealogical records makes us special, even though many times these are not records that we created, but rather copies of original records that reside in other repositories and archives.

Our genealogy collection is international in scope. The majority of the collection is U.S. genealogy, but we do have materials that cover Canada, Latin America and Europe, especially Great Britain. We have foreign language materials in Roman alphabets. And, of course, given your publication and your interests, the other divisions and collection that are very important for Jewish genealogy are the Dorot Jewish Division and the Slavic and Baltic Collection. The Jewish Division has books and periodicals about Jews throughout the world, including Jews in New York and America, and they do have some special collections that contain original documentation of Jewish life, especially in New York. For people researching their Jewish ancestry, there are materials in that division that they would want to

consult as well as materials here. So they really need to use both divisions.

My division has the more general kinds of records. The most obvious would be things like census records and directories. The Jewish Division has the more specialized collections that were created by Jews such as newspapers that might be in English or might be in Yiddish.

DOROT: So the New York Public Library's genealogy collection dates back to its origins.



LIRIANO: I believe the Astor and Lenox libraries, when they were founded in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were collecting American history and genealogy, especially Lenox. I know we have some materials that date back to those libraries. Genealogy at that time was just getting established as a field of research in a more popular way. That's when, for instance, the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society was founded with a library around 1869 (that collection is

now a part of the New York Public Library and most of it is here in the Milstein Division). Genealogy research was starting to be written and published. And serious libraries were collecting it. But it wasn't until the 20<sup>th</sup> century that a lot more was produced. So we have actively been collecting genealogy from the very beginning and were able to build quite a substantial collection in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and we still actively collect published materials, and some unpublished, in the sense of self-published. We receive many family histories from individuals who have worked either in the division or, if not here, want their family history here because maybe it relates to ancestors who were in the New York area or because they know that this is one of the major genealogy collections in the entire country. And it's a public library, so it's accessible to everyone at no cost.

In around 1980 the U.S. History collection was combined with Local History and Genealogy. Then in 2000, we were named the Irma and Paul Milstein Division of U.S. History, Local History and Genealogy, and, at the same time, we moved to newly renovated rooms where we currently are, on the first floor in Rooms 119 and 121.

DOROT: Has the usage of material by your customers shifted in recent years, with the emergence of the Internet and digitization?

LIRIANO: Absolutely. I've been here only 10 years, but from what I understand from my colleagues who have been here longer, the research before the Internet, before materials were online, was primarily a lot of microfilm and a lot of digging around in books, and it was very time consuming. There wasn't indexing for everything, so indexing was very important. Any time some kind of an index was produced, that was obviously critical in terms of helping people find things. Without an index, people had to browse through pages and pages of things to try to find that one person they were looking for. I can only imagine that the folks who used the collection for genealogy were really the more serious kind of researchers and really committed. I think now we have a wider range of users, because it has gotten a whole lot easier and people can walk off the street and come in and actually get started almost immediately, because there is so much more online. The best stuff is by subscription, so from the beginning of the Internet, it was very important for the library to provide free access to these subscription services. So very early on, we had access to things like Ancestry.com, HeritageQuest, which is the ProQuest genealogy database, and we are looking at other genealogy resources and making them available for free in the library. That helps many people, from the beginner to the professional genealogist, to have access to all those resources.

DOROT: What are the most common questions asked when someone walks into the division?

LIRIANO: People come here who are looking for information about ancestors in New York, specifically New York City – and it's obvious that they would think to come here because we are the New York Public Library. We have people who even come from overseas, who are vacationing here in New York and they have ancestors they want to research. Our most common, general category of question is, "What New York resources do you have to help me find this person who was here during a particular period of time?" Of course, that is our strength, New York State and New York City resources. But we do also have a lot for other parts of the U.S. and I think that's one thing that is not obvious to people. Our print collection is a closed-stack environment, not a browsable collection. I think that sometimes gets lost on people who may not be as familiar with the library. When they walk into the division, they don't see it, so they don't necessarily think of it, but it's all listed in our online catalog. We have to work hard on exposing that other part of the collection, because people will come for New York materials and that's sort of an easy sell. The most common kind of assistance we provide is to help find people

in the obvious sources: census records, passenger lists, city directories and also vital records. Those are the top four record types that people are looking for or that we direct people to. Especially when you are getting started, looking at census records is the best way to go. We have many of these popular record types for all parts of the U.S., and even some internationally, available online through the numerous databases we subscribe to.

DOROT: In terms of New York City vital records – birth, marriage and death records – you don't have the actual vital records here.

LIRIANO: That's correct. We do not have copies of the actual records, just indexes.

DOROT: They're in either the Department of Health or the Municipal Archives. But some people in the genealogy community have expressed some frustration at not having access to more recent records that legally could be available but aren't. Is the library, as a major repository of archival information, able to become involved in those kinds of issues, if not that specific one?

LIRIANO: I'm very much aware of that issue. I can't say that I've done anything pro-actively to try to change that. It's not to say that I couldn't or wouldn't. It's just that I haven't done so up until now. Yes, that's a serious concern. I don't quite understand what the issue is. I know that the parties involved are very much aware of this. Basically they promise that it will change but nothing seems to happen.

DOROT: Is the division a passive receiver of incoming material or do you actually go out in search of documentation that could aid genealogists, whether from the Department of Health or the other side of the world?

LIRIANO: It depends on what it is. If materials are available commercially (via a publisher), yes, I will seek those out and add those to the collection. As to working with specific government agencies, not so much. Not to say that I am opposed to doing that, it's just that I haven't done it. I've been in this current position, as the head of the department, for three years. The one thing I could say is that the library does have a very good collection of indexes to the vital records and we're the only other place, besides the Department of Health, that has the index to births and deaths, at least up to 1982. At some point the library was getting these from the Department of Health, and I don't know what happened in 1983 that we stopped getting them. I know there are issues there. Luckily in the past, we collected these indexes. It would be great to get more. I really

would love to get more of the marriage ones, because we only have them until 1937. And nobody outside of the Office of the City Clerk seems to have anything after that even though marriage records are publicly available after 50 years.

DOROT: This next issue comes up among genealogical researchers who have amassed file drawers of materials. Their question: Now where does it go? The general feeling is that libraries and archives are not positioned, because of the storage involved and so forth, to take what people have. Have you considered what researchers might do with their papers, especially those they consider historically important documents, etc.?

LIRIANO: Up until a few years ago, the library would collect loose papers. If somebody had a manuscript that wasn't book length, let's say they had 10 pages or they had created a family tree, we have a family clipping file. It's like a vertical file, literally a file cabinet with folders arranged by family names. Over the years, people have donated exactly what you described: somebody just types up their family history with maybe some notes. It's very miscellaneous, it's usually pages here and there that we've collected. Our original collection is over 3,000 names. Otherwise, as I mentioned earlier, we very happily would accept donations of a family history book of some kind that we can bind. In 2008 we acquired the library of the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society. Along with over 50,000 books and microfilm collections, they also had a family clipping file, exactly like ours, but they also collected what they referred to as "genealogists' papers." These were either professionals or very serious genealogists who had done research on behalf of a client or had been doing research for their own family and maybe never produced a family history, a book, but they had all this research and they had all this documentation. We acquired that and processed those things. The advantage of that library coming here was not only that all of those materials, which had been in a membership library, is now here at the New York Public Library, available to anybody for free, but they gave us money to process the collection as well. So everything that came from that library is cataloged, searchable in our online catalog and was handled in some way. This includes some of the manuscript-type things that were put in archival boxes and labeled. We have more than 150 of these genealogists' papers. They really run the gamut of quality. Whether or not we would ever collect more of that material, I don't know, but I'm inclined to say probably not. There's that issue of space and that is a big issue in this library. And then there is the issue of how we evaluate this material.

DOROT: So you would not encourage a researcher with a banker's box full of files to come to your doorstep and say "here."

LIRIANO: No, no, I don't encourage that! The answer is probably no, unless they can show some really compelling reason that we should have it. But I do encourage people to donate their self-published books.

DOROT: What about the impact of digitization, of taking records that have previously absorbed shelves of library space and compressing them in a tiny corner of a computer or a flash drive? As a professional librarian, do you foresee it having a growing impact on how you manage your collections, how you give the public access to that material?

LIRIANO: Absolutely. A lot depends on the kind of material. In genealogy, the digitization of original records that, say, come from the National Archives has made a tremendous difference in terms of how usable that material is. It's night and day. You can walk in here and you can find your ancestor in the 1910 Census – it might take you two minutes whereas 10 years ago it might have taken you days if not weeks. So that's huge, a huge impact. We still have the microfilm and occasionally people want to refer to the original because when things get digitized, there is human intervention happening there. People have to transcribe things, create an index. You can't OCR (optical character recognition) handwritten records so every time you are searching for something online that is an original handwritten record, somebody has intervened – a person, not a computer – and has had to transcribe what is written there and they may get it wrong. So keeping all of the original things is really important, because people may need to go back and figure out if something went wrong. If you're talking about published things such as books, it's a slightly different ballgame, because with a lot of that, there is a whole issue of copyright. Copyright in this country starts in 1923. Anything prior to that is in the public domain so more easily can be digitized. Having said that, a lot has been digitized but not everything has been digitized. Whether or not it will get digitized is tricky because a lot of times it is an issue of condition. Some materials that are old may not be suitable to be digitized, because they are too fragile or they are too big. So we still have to get over those technical hurdles. You can see many digitized books from the New York Public Library in Google Books and the Internet Archive.

DOROT: Have you done any genealogical work yourself?

LIRIANO: I haven't. I am a first-generation American. My parents are from the Dominican Republic. I don't really have access to records here. FamilySearch.org, the Mormons' online library, has some records. But I have to get more information from my family to figure out if some of those people I'm finding are actually my ancestors. But I would really have to go down to the Dominican Republic to search in their archives. I'm also interested in getting a genetic DNA test done.

DOROT: You have books available to the public on your open shelves, but many, many more on your closed shelves, behind the scene. What would you recommend a genealogist do to become aware of the division's resources?

LIRIANO: There are three things that I can think of. The most important is to come here and talk to the librarians and be very specific about what you're trying to find. The more you talk to us and ask questions, the better we can serve you and expose you to all of our resources. Secondly, using our online resources, especially searching the catalog (<http://catalog.nypl.org/search>) – and so much of our material is cataloged, maybe not as specifically as people would like. Of course, most people are looking for names. Most of our catalog records don't include names except for the person who wrote the book or compiled it, or if it's a family history. It's very important to remember that with most books, you're going to be looking at a lot of different sources and looking for names in the indexes printed in the back of the books. Lastly, I recommend that you go to our website (<http://www.nypl.org/milstein>); we also have research guides, and we write blogs about specific subjects or research tips. There's a lot of information on our website that I think can be very useful. We also offer classes and specialized lectures and that's a really great way to get exposed to more things as well.

DOROT: How can someone learn about the classes and lectures?

LIRIANO: We post everything on our website, which is [www.nypl.org](http://www.nypl.org). There's a calendar to see what classes and programs are being offered any day of the week, at any location, and it goes out pretty far in advance, months out. We also publish a very attractive brochure three times a year called the *Now* brochure. It advertises major classes, programs, and exhibitions at the New York Public Library, and most of our genealogy programs and classes are in that. It's freely available at many locations at the library.

DOROT: This is a question we like to ask researchers:

Is there one set of data that you don't have in your collection that you'd like to have?

LIRIANO: Those vital record indexes that we were talking about earlier. Wouldn't that be great! But it's not so much about acquiring things that are held in other repositories, because it's not a realistic proposition. Some of the best records are things that are held by government entities. They are the keepers of those records. That's their mandate. It's more about things that we already have in the library that are not easy to use. It's more about digitization, I think, or indexing or organizing better. Newspapers are a category that I would love to see be digitized more – and it is getting there but it is going to take a while – because newspapers are such an incredibly rich resource for genealogists. The New York Public Library has one of the best newspaper collections, especially for New York City. There are so many newspapers that people don't even know about that were published during short periods of time, especially in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To have those searchable for the very first time – because they are not indexed anywhere – would be just tremendous. That's my wish – more digitization of newspapers. We own them. There are still some copyright issues with some of those. But it's a massive undertaking to digitize any newspaper. There are efforts. The Library of Congress' Chronicling America (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>) -- and we're participating in that project. We have contributed *The Sun*, *The Evening World* and *The New-York Tribune*. Those are freely available on that website. It's a long-term project. I think there's another 15 years to go. Even that project is not moving as quickly as I'd like, but we'll get there, I think, eventually.

DOROT: Thank you.

*Maira Liriano is the Manager of the Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy of the New York Public Library's world-renowned research collection. The Milstein Division collects materials documenting American history on the national, state and local level and genealogy. As one of the nation's largest publicly accessible and non-membership genealogical collections, the Milstein Division is a national resource for family historians. Ms. Liriano has been at NYPL since 2002. Prior to joining the NYPL, she worked in leading positions at the Chicago Public Library and the main library of the George Washington University in Washington, D.C. Ms. Liriano grew up in New Jersey and is one of five daughters from immigrant parents from the Dominican Republic. ☆*

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