

How I Discovered the Remarkable Liebmann Family and My Own Family History at the Same Time

by Herbert Klitzner

Introduction to the Liebmann Family in Europe and America

Most people write a family history after researching their own family. My case was very different. I did not develop an interest in my family's history until I had spent 18 months researching and writing a comprehensive history of the Liebmann family, a German-American Jewish family involved with important businesses and philanthropies for 200 years. My paper, "The Liebmann Family and the New York Society for Ethical Culture" extended previous published efforts that ended in 1918 and extended the story up to 1950.¹

My research unexpectedly led me to gain several significant strands of new knowledge about my own family's migrations to and from their home of several hundred years in Birzai, Lithuania (my father Joseph's birthplace). Coincidentally, Birzai was a center of a Lithuanian religious and cultural tolerance movement developed by the Radziwill family empire, the largest and wealthiest in Lithuania. The Radziwill family owned the progressive cities of Birzai and Kedainiai, where tolerance was mandated through regulation of

leases. This practice began at some time in the period 1450-1500. In turn the Radziwills were drawing on ancient humane religious cultural acceptance practices of the pre-Christian pagan religion. This story is told in my research paper, "The Lost Continent of Tolerance – 1200 -1658."²

So this article, which focuses on my search for the remarkable Liebmann family, also resonates with two other families – the Radziwills and the Klitzners, both of whom contributed centrally to the formation of my values.

Who were the Liebmanns? For seven generations they have been *menschen*, training new *menschen* for new social responsibilities and entrepreneurial challenges as times changed. Their accomplishments range from leadership in the New York Society for Ethical Culture and in world refugee projects to creating a brewery empire, resisting strict Prohibitionist advocates between 1910 and 1920 and countering anti- German prejudice. The antagonism to German-American brewers was so strong that many in the Liebmann family changed their

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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 Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 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.

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JGS is a not-for-profit organization open to people of all ethnic and religious backgrounds.



President's Postings by Roni Seibel Liebowitz

What a great celebration we had at our 36th Anniversary of JGS, Inc. The Double Chai event was a huge success with several of the founding and early members in attendance. You'll find a group

photo in this issue of some of those earliest members. I am happy to say that several continue to be members of JGS despite living far from New York. A video of photos taken over the 36 years of JGS was displayed on the screen throughout the event when speakers were not presenting. Some of the catering staff commented that they never saw a group function such as ours, in which the attendees were enthusiastically engaging in conversation at the tables and moving around the room, schmoozing and laughing about old memories and sharing information. Several even remained during the clean up to continue their discussions with each other.

Founding President Neil Rosenstein presented a brief overview of the history of the JGS and showed us copies of the original JGS brochure. The main program featured Tammy Hepps, who taught us about interesting ways to share family history with more than just copies of documents and records by using photos and new technology to create a living history to share with future generations.

Our September meeting was presented by Executive Council member David Kleiman, who demonstrated how

clues found in visual art can be used by genealogists to create information about their ancestors' lives. Read more about this and the Double Chai presentations in this issue.

As per the JGS Bylaws, a Nominating Committee chaired by Hadassah Lipsius (with board member Joy Kestenbaum and general member Barbara Wright) recommended the slate of individuals for the 2014 term. The nominating committee prepared a new slate with three new EC members: Lauren Shulsky Orenstein, Lanie Bergman, and Michael Pertain. The annual meeting on December 22nd at the Center for Jewish History included the elections and confirmed the new Executive Council.

We thank Avrum Geller who served on the EC for six years, Gloria Freund, an EC member for twelve years, and Rivka Schiller for the past year, for their support and years of service.

We kicked off the new year on January 19, 2013 with long-term Executive Council member Hadassah Lipsius who presented: "Jewish Records Indexing – Poland; A New Era Has Begun."

We are looking forward to greeting former and new members at exciting presentations, pre-meeting Lunch and Learn sessions, and an excursion to at least one location of interest to genealogists.

Roni

In Memory of Wendy Levin Almeleh z"l

On August 20, 2013, our good friend and JGS member Wendy Levin Almeleh passed away after a long illness. Wendy was one of the first to volunteer back in 1990 to index the Brooklyn Naturalization records and went on to work with ItalianGen on indexing records in other boroughs as well as with YIVO's HIAS records and more. Each summer Wendy volunteered to mentor the high school students enrolled in the Center for Jewish History's Samberg Program and served the public every Monday at CJH as one of the genealogical mavens available to assist researchers. Wendy was a past member of the JGS Executive Board and a very special person. She was the very skilled copy editor of a scholarly research journal up until a few weeks before her death.

Wendy was the wife of the late Lazar Almeleh and the mother of Jessica and David.



JGS Welcomes 18 New Members

Name	City	State
Lanie Bergman	Bronx	NY
Dr. Matthew A. Boxt	Los Angeles	CA
Evelyn Cohen	Deerfield Beach	FL
Dr. and Mrs. Bradley J. Dawkins	Wurtsboro	NY
Daniel Eig	Greenlawn	NY
Ms Rita Baron-Faust	Brooklyn	NY
Nitza Garza	Hendersonville	TN
Bruce and Sharyn Grossman	New York	NY
Lisa A Hoffman	McLean	VA
AJ Jacobs	New York	NY
Milton Koch	Bethesda	MD
Ruth Kurschner	Voorhees	NJ
Dr. Mickey Langsfeld	Meadowbrook	PA
Sue Levy	Louisville	KY
Kate Lewis	Los Angeles	CA
Penni Nussbaum	Whitestone	NY
Peri Swaniger	Southbury	CT
Debbie Wang	Great Neck	NY

The Remarkable Liebmann Family continued from page 1

name to Liebman during World War I.

The Liebmanns made and perfected Rheingold Beer on two continents, first in Wurttemberg, Germany and later in Bushwick, Brooklyn (1854-1963). Before coming to the U.S. the Liebmann family had been involved in farming and investing in Aufhausen, Bavaria and Ludwigburg in Wurttemberg (1800-1854). Samuel Liebmann (1799-1872), the first representative of the family in New York, left Germany in 1854 because of the restrictions on free speech in Central Europe, following the failed revolutions of 1848.

Samuel was an early leader of the New York Society for Ethical Culture and its offshoots, the Hudson Guild settlement and the Ethical Culture School. His sons, Henry (1836-1915), Joseph (1831-1913), and Charles (1837-1928), led the family beer business in the last third of the 19th century, winning top awards for their beer at the 1876 Centennial and the 1893 Columbian Expositions, and participating in New York's civic life. In the 20th Century, the Liebmann family's most prominent and enduring leader was Henry's son, Samuel's grandson, Charles J. Liebman (1877-1957), who first headed the Hudson Guild in 1901 and then

entered refugee organization work as an executive in Eastern Europe with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in 1921. He created his own refugee resettlement planning and funding organization in 1934, the Refugee Economic Corporation (REC), which continued through crisis after crisis until 1950. Charles' two main colleagues in his refugee work were Arthur M. Lampont and James Naumburg Rosenberg, who shared his Ethical Culture upbringing and ideals.

Research Beginnings

How did I get interested in the Liebmann family? It was a series of coincidences. I kept running across references to the family and decided to study its various members and accomplishments in detail.

The Annual Slocum Disaster Remembrance Ceremony

I had always been interested in the Slocum Disaster of June 15, 1904, in which a pleasure boat containing mostly women and children sank in the East River, because of faulty rescue equipment. The loss of life on that day was the largest in New York City history

until September 11, 2001. I wrote of these events in "The Long Stretch from June 15 to September 11."³ It was at one of the annual remembrance ceremonies that one of the leaders of the event commented that after the tragedy the Kleine Deutschland community, the German community, which had at that time lived on the Lower East Side and St. Mark's area, moved out to other areas. Thereafter they were very reluctant to discuss the event in their family conversations or with outsiders.

This led me to think about and search for other examples of German-American behavior that were not defensive but self assured. I found a good example of self assurance in a speech by Julius Liebmann (1867-1957) at a 1915 German-American brewers' convention. He spoke of the friendship and solidarity in the brewers' industry and said this solidarity would see them all through the current crisis of anti-German sentiment and pro-nativist forces advocating Prohibition.

The Zohrab Information Center

One day in 2011, a few months after attending the Slocum memorial ceremony for that year, I happened to visit the Zohrab Information Center at St. Vartan's Armenian Cathedral on 34th Street and Second Ave. in Manhattan and came across a book by Krikor Zohrab, an Armenian humanitarian, author and a parliamentary representative in the Turkish Empire. He was assassinated by the Turkish government during the Armenian genocide. An information sheet at the Zohrab Center explained that Zohrab's daughter, Dolores, spent 15 years in exile in Romania, moved to Paris where she met and married Henry L. Liebmann (1871-1950), a son of Samuel, one of the inheritors of the Rheingold fortune. Ultimately, his wealth financed the creation of this extraordinary center, which is open to all.

From these facts about the first two Liebmann family members I discovered, Julius and Henry L., I developed the hypothesis that this was a family of civic minded activists that bred successive generations of activists. I set out to prove it, so that the world would know about them, too. I decided to tell the whole story from their early days in Germany to the post World War II period, because familiarity with the lives of effective people gives hope to others. I also wanted to help the New York Society for Ethical Culture to know about this marvelous family, which over the years had disappeared from their collective memory.

The last Liebmann leader active in Ethical Culture

in 1900 died in 1957. This was Charles J. Liebman (1877-1957), the refugee expert. Much of my paper on the Liebmann family turned out to be devoted to the fast-moving 20th Century world of refugee assistance and resettlement, in which he was a wizard at solving refugee problems.

The Schlegel Historical Profiles of German-American Families

Through a search of Google Books, I found *Schlegel's German American Families*, which contained a biographical sketch of the Liebmann family from 1750 to 1918. This was a treasure trove of stories of social good and practical wisdom. I later supplemented this information with newspaper articles and materials from the A.M. Lamport and Jacob Levin Collections held at YIVO⁴ with that of the 1918-1950 period. This led me to the official institutional and governmental correspondence in the archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, where I found among many other items a 1917 dinner invitation by Jacob Schiff for a fundraiser for the relief of refugees from World War I. It included the invitation guest list of about 200 people, complete with seating arrangements. The Schlegel volume gave me names and short biographical profiles of many Liebmanns and detailed family relationships. Online I found a family tree created by Linda Squire,⁵ who in turn got much of her information from Jim Blum, a Liebmann extended family member by marriage and an excellent genealogist. His father-in-law is Walter H. (Terry) Liebman III, grandson of the first Walter H. Liebmann (1874-1931). Jim gave me pictures and anecdotes about most family members.

These genealogies were invaluable to me when in the next phase I began to research the archived membership lists of the NY Society for Ethical Culture. I needed to know which people named Liebmann on these lists were part of my Liebmann family and which were not. These genealogies provided me with this ability.

U. S. Brewers' Association (USBA) Yearbook

The U. S. Brewers' Association was the association of German-American brewers from 1862 to 1944 until they merged with an older American association. The yearbooks were produced in association with the USBA annual convention. They included convention speeches and professional papers on subjects such as health, technology, and licensing policies. These yearbooks are available online via Google Books. I concentrated on World War I in the years just before Prohibition.

Henry (1836-1915), Samuel's son, was active in the earlier years of the brewers' association. A heartfelt obituary for him appears in the 1915 Convention Proceedings. His nephew Julius (1867-1957), who in 1905 took over as head of the Liebmann family's brewing business, became the USBA's youngest president ever at age 40 in 1907. At this same convention, Henry, as an elder statesman of the USBA, officiated at the presidential installation ceremony in which Mr. Pabst (Milwaukee) took over from Mr. Schmidt (Philadelphia). They were both dear friends of his.

Searching the Archives at Ethical Culture, YIVO, and JDC

I obtained access to the archives of the American Ethical Union through a chance meeting with my old friend, Andra Miller, at a Christmas Party at the New York Academy of Sciences (NYAS), where I have been a member for 43 years. She is president of the New York Society for Ethical Culture and upon hearing about my Liebmann project, she offered to open the doors to the AEU archives for me. These hold all the past records of the New York Society of Ethical Culture. Several weeks later I was deep into their contents. This was the first time I had used an archive of any kind. But their young archivist, Adam Foldes, patiently went over with me the rules, procedures, and suggested strategies -- for example, use pencils and gloves, plan your work, and work with the contents of only one folder at a time. My strategy is to gather information and get a feel for the historical period with whatever material is at hand.

In my case, this meant reading half a dozen of the Sunday morning addresses (the equivalent of sermons) of Felix Adler, the brilliant founder of Ethical Culture, who served this congregation for 60 years. Mainly I read addresses in the 1903-1905 period, the time frame around the Slocum Disaster. There was no mention of it in the addresses, but the topics and their treatments that I read were fascinating -- ranging from frank comments on a controversial municipal election to an insightful celebration of the life of Ralph Waldo Emerson in his Centennial year.

Since its earliest days Ethical Culture has always identified itself as a religion, with a binding set of ethical principles. The Supreme Court has recognized Ethical Culture as a religion for the purposes of conscientious objectors status.

In using the Ethical Culture archives, I concentrated

on three forms of data: board of trustee minutes, membership lists, and addresses by Adler. I was able to show conclusively that essentially the entire extended family of Liebmanns belonged to the Ethical Culture movement a hundred years ago, not just one or two individuals. I listed their names, relationships with each other, addresses, and dates of joining the society, citing lists of membership compiled in several sample years. I also used the board of trustee minutes to prove that Henry Liebmann left the society a major bequest when he died in 1915.

The YIVO Archives:

The second archive I used was the YIVO archive located at the Center for Jewish History in Manhattan. Very helpful archivists there helped me find two collections of records that focused on the refugee project of the Dominican Republic Resettlement Association (DORSA) and on the contributions of Charles J. Liebman.

This occurred very late in the research when I thought I was done, because I did not know about the importance of refugee work in the life of Charles J. Liebman. I knew only about his work with the Hudson Guild and similar U.S. social service agencies. It added at least four months and many more online appendices to my project, but it added much to my appreciation of this remarkable history. The results will be useful for many other historical researchers. Here is where I learned about my family's history in the Ukraine

I learned of the YIVO archives and the Center for Jewish History through a chance conversation with a woman who was sitting next to me in the Grey Dog café, two blocks from CJH. She recommended the institution, and urged me to check out its resources. That very afternoon I acted on her suggestion, and visited a bright and probing exhibit on the Freeland League, a prominent 20th century Jewish territorial resettlement organization. And there, in the center of the exhibit, I saw a 1944 letter referring to "Mr. Liebmann's committee" as a good connection for the recipient to pursue. It was written by Otto Schiff in reply to Mr. Steinberg, the League's leader. The letter indicated the highly respected standing of Charles J. Liebman in the refugee organization world. Yet none of the archivists in any of the archives I visited was familiar with the name *Liebman*. So I felt that my research could help to enlighten the entire New York research community.

What were the contents of the YIVO archive

collections I examined? The first collection, the A.M. Lamport Collection, RG687, held all the notes and correspondence sent and received on the DORSA (Dominican Republic Settlement Association, Inc., 1939-1977) project by Arthur Lamport. Some of the letters bordered on the dramatic.

Then one day a small notebook fell out from between the files in the archive box. It turned out to be a trip diary that Lamport used when he visited the Dominican Republic. I doubt that anyone has ever used this Lamport diary book in research, as it is not listed in the inventory of contents on the box. I not only used it, but created an online image of it on my website for other researchers to consult. I also read aloud from a third of its entries on a related music CD program recording I prepared dramatizing the three great personalities in the DORSA project that both collaborated and contended with each other in planning DORSA: Charles J. Liebman, Arthur Lamport, and James Rosenberg.

The second collection at YIVO, The Jacob Levin Collection (RG 1341), was a set of folders containing news clippings on DORSA and other resettlement projects with which Jacob Levin had been involved. He was a Zionist, a founder of the Yiddish secular school movement, administrator of the Workmen's Circle Schools, and founder of Camp Kinderland and Camp Naivelt.

I used box 51, concerning DORSA, which gave me context. There were speeches, analyses, news articles in English and Yiddish. I arranged for my friend, Albert Rosenblatt, to translate a *Forverts* article into English. In 1939 Charles J. Liebman paid for the consultants that studied the feasibility of the DORSA colony, but not all later histories mention this. However, his self published book, *Quest for Settlement 1948*, which I bought from Amazon, confirms this. The book took me deeply into the political challenges and philanthropic responses to the crises of the 1940s and into Liebman's strategic thinking. The YIVO Collections reflect the personal rather than institutional points of view of Arthur M. Lamport and Jacob Levin. The broader story of the rescue work is in the Archives of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The JDC Archives:

The last major archive, the JDC, gave me the institutional scope of the Liebman's work, including the JDC agricultural settlements in the Ukraine in 1925-1938, and their predecessors originating in the 19th century

Yekaterinoslav region of the Ukraine. In the early years of the Soviet Union the country suffered from droughts and periods of starvation. The Joint Distribution Committee sent money and food shipments to the starving people and in 1924, thanks to the efforts of Joseph Rosen, an onsite staff member, the Joint formed a separate operation known as the Agro-Joint to aid Jewish farmers in the Crimea and Ukraine by providing modern farm machinery, improved sanitation, seeds and instructions in various types of trades. Also included were agricultural electrification, irrigation and improved water supplies. This work was done in cooperation with the American Relief Administration, then headed by Herbert Hoover. Not only did the American Jewish community contribute funds, but so did John D. Rockefeller, Julius Rosenwald, and Felix Warberg. Hoover said it was "one of the outstanding pieces of human engineering in the world today. The settlement of over 100,000 Jews on a million acres of land is a tribute to the practical idealism of the Jewish people."⁶

Through these records, which I could access online from either my home or the JDC offices, I collected documents written to and from Liebman in Eastern Europe, dealing with Agro-Joint and JDC Committee on Medical Affairs.

These documents also helped me understand what Liebman did during the last years of his career, from 1946-1950. He continued with his Refugee Economic Corporation, working closely with the JDC in helping to resettle Jewish refugees in Australia and other places. And he worked on a program of business loans in France, Czechoslovakia. He continued with DORSA, taking over work that Lamport had begun 10 years earlier. Lamport, who died at age 56 in 1940, would have been happy to know this.

The Klitzner Family

Why did the Liebmann Family's values matter so much to me? Because values and social service were a strong element of the career and life of my father Joseph Klitzner. His family's values stretched back at least five generations to his birthplace in the historic liberal town of Birzai, Lithuania. The town is situated near the Latvian border. His maternal grandfather, Schmuel Pinchas Kretzmer, born in the 1850s, was a feminist with respect to the education of women.

Regarding my family surname, Klitzner: I learned from Alexander Beider's various books on Jewish names (which I consulted at the Center for Jewish History with the aid of their skilled and helpful staff) that the

name Klitzner was found primarily in a few districts or provinces on each side of the Latvian border in the Birzai area. I had thought that Klitzner (the German spelling or Klitsner, the Slavic spelling) was a name from Germany and that my family had originated there. But I later realized that it was just as likely that their name was given to them by one of the many German-supplied administrators in the Latvian government, and that the family later crossed the border to Birzai, Lithuania to do forestry work (that was my great-grandfather's occupation) and I was named Moshe Tzvi Klitzner after him. By the way, *Klitzner* means a cutlet purveyor.

Generations of Jewish Colonies and Settlements in the Ukraine

In 1958, during a visit to Israel with a Jewish community choir from Chicago, I made my first contact with relatives outside the United States. One branch, consisting of Refoal Kretzmer and his family in Rechovot, were chicken farmers and had been in Israel since before WW II. Refoal was a tank commander in the IDF Reserves. I learned nothing of their earlier background or how they got to Israel.

Many years later (around 2008) I became curious about this while developing my history of tolerance in ancient Lithuania. I learned from a thorough genealogical study of my family, circulated by my cousin-in-law Basil Sandler in Israel, that Refoal was born in 1915 and grew up in a Jewish autonomous region for cooperative farming in the Ukraine, in Yekaterinoslav province (referring to the Russian czarina, Catherine the Great). He left for Israel with his mother in 1938.

I learned more about cooperative Jewish farming in the Ukraine by researching and writing my Liebmann paper.

- Beginning a little before 1850, Jewish agricultural colonies were created in Greater Russia. By the 20th Century, 17 autonomous colonies remained, ringing the town of Grafskoy [Grafskaya] in the Ekaterinoslav [Yekaterinoslav] region of the Ukraine.
- In 1924-1938, large collective farms, jointly developed by a subsidiary of JDC working with the Soviet government, were developing in the southern Ukraine/Crimea region.

At the JDC archives I found *Collective Memories*

of a Lost Paradise ⁷ by Robert Belensky. This book described in detail the large-scale agricultural projects of JDC/Agro-Joint leader James N. Rosenberg in the Ukraine involving over 50,000 Jews. Robert's father, Max Belensky, wanted to be a farmer and during the 1920s he helped obtain tractors to Jewish collective farms and taught people how to use them.

I soon came to understand the relationship of this project to my research on the refugee work of Charles J. Liebman and how it influenced the approach that Rosenberg took in 1939 in forming the DORSA. The latter was a key world refugee project centered on the Dominican Republic that came about as a result of the German-Austrian *anschluss*. Rosenberg in 1940 referred to the success of the Agro-Joint project in the Soviet Union in several 1940 speeches in support of DORSA in New York City.⁸ You can read these documents on my website, www.klitzner.org, (Appendix links D1, D2, and D3). Below is a quote from one of these speeches, given on February 15, 1940.

“As many of you are aware, there exists an organization, the American Jewish Joint Agricultural Corporation, known as Agro-Joint. Agro-Joint, a child of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, was formed in 1924, and conducted the vast settlement work in Russia, resulting in fourteen years, in the settlement of over 50,000 people on three million acres, mostly in the Crimea. Its President and Chairman throughout have been Dr. Joseph A. Rosen, and myself. That settlement work was completed in 1938. Agro-Joint still had in its treasury a nest-egg of funds which were allocated by agreement with the Joint Distribution Committee for constructive settlement work wherever needed.”

Rosenberg answered the critics who said that agricultural settlements would be too demanding of European settlers by pointing to the success of the Agro-Joint settlements. And his optimism proved prescient.

Another valuable resource about the 17 agricultural settlements in Yekaterinoslav is Mikhail Mitsel's *The Final Chapter: The Agro-Joint in the Years of the Great Terror*.⁹

Conclusion

The German Consul General in New York, Busso von Alvensleben, told me: “It is so important that you retraced the path of this remarkable family in New York’s history... and its effect on the world. My understanding of both families and their intersecting worlds deepened considerably.” It wasn’t until I read this that I fully realized what my research might contribute to researchers and to the larger community. It is, I hope, a contribution to an ongoing dialog in which a flashlight is shined here and then shined there, into forgotten places, thereby enabling new bridges to be built to connect people and places that were never before connected.

I encourage others to explore this path of learning about the world -- and ourselves -- as they explore family genealogy and connect it to its historical context. Not everyone will have the opportunity to understand two different families, one of them vicariously and one of them your own, but if you do, more of the world – and people’s remembrances of events in world history -- will become part of your expanded family circle.

Herbert Klitzner spent many years in the computer field in New York, working on projects ranging from modeling the World Trade Center foundation wall construction to the integration of all 20 CUNY campuses into one central computer system. Also he designed planned IT systems for Deutsche Bank, Swiss Reinsurance and others. His experience in analyzing trends and convergences in new markets led him to become interested in exploring “forgotten histories,” such as the Slocum disaster of 1904 and to consider how to preserve memories of community tragedies for many decades afterwards. His studies of the history of medieval Lithuania and the Liebmann family in New York are part of that interest.

Footnotes:

1 See www.klitzner.org under the menu item, The Past.

2 www.klitzner.org/history-culture/lost-continent-of-tolerance

3 “The Long Stretch from June 15 to September 11” can be found at www.klitzner.org under the menu item, The Past, The Slocum Disaster.

4 www.klitzner.org/history-culture/liebmann-family-integrity/453-2/quest-for-settlement-section-1-table-of-contents-forward-by-cjl-factors-of-settlement-by-fohs/

5 The Liebmann Family Tree is part of the “Blum-Liebmann Family Tree, <http://trees.ancestry.com/tree/13832781/family> and can also be found in www.klitzner.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/The-Liebmann-Family-and-the-New-York-Society-for-Ethical-Culture.pdf

6 “KGB Files Shed Light on a Dark Subject,” by Claus W. Hirsch, *Dorot*, Vol. 34, No.2, Winter 2012-2013, pp.1, 5-7.

7 Belenky, *Collective Memories of a Lost Paradise: Jewish Agricultural Settlements in Ukraine During the 1920s and 1930s*. Hanover, N.H.: Maddoggeral Publications, 80 Lyme Road, Apt. 105, Hanover, NH 03755, 2012. [Note: This book was described in *Dorot*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Winter 2012-2013, p.25.]

8 www.klitzner.org at menu item, The Past, “The Liebmann Family and the Society of Ethical Culture,” Appendix Links D1, D2, D3 (part 6 of the paper). The documents are entitled “Concerning Jewish Refugee Settlement in the Dominican Republic, Feb., June and November, 1940.”

9 Mikhail Mitsel, *The Final Chapter: Agro-Joint Workers – Victims of the Great Terror in the USSR, 1937-1950*. Kiev, Ukraine: Center for the Study of Eastern European Jews, 2012 (in Russian with a 65 page English synopsis). [This book was described in *Dorot*, Vol. 34, No. 2, Winter 2012-2013, pp 1, 5-7.] ☆

JGS on Facebook



Facebook©

JGS, Inc. has created a group page on Facebook (<http://www.facebook.com>), an online social networking facility. After you join Facebook, you can reach JGS’s page in any of these three ways:

- (1) Go to the JGS website (<http://www.jgsny.org>) to link to the page.
- (2) Go directly to the page at: <http://www.facebook.com/#!/group.php?gid=62112838856>.
- (3) Log in to Facebook and search for “Jewish Genealogical Society–New York.”

We hope you will join the more than 1080 members of the JGS Facebook group. The page includes details about our upcoming meetings and follow-up reports about the presentations. We welcome comments and reactions to the meetings as well as suggestions of topics for monthly meetings.

Upcoming and Current Events

Jewish Genealogical Society of New York

Sunday, February 23, 2014, 2 p.m. (Informal Lunch & Learn in the Kovno Room, 12:30 to 1:30 p.m.)

From Genealogy to History: Exploring the Jewish 20th Century through One Family's Story

Speaker: David Laskin

Location: Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street, New York City

Admission: Members are free, guests pay \$5 at the door

In his new book, *The Family: Three Journeys into the Heart of the 20th Century*, David Laskin tells the story of his mother's family— eastern European Jews who split into three branches at the turn of the last century. Laskin will describe his genealogical research, which involved archives and resources on three continents— Eastern Europe, the United States, and Israel—and how he used insights from family letters and memoirs and historical documents to enrich the family stories and understand the family history in the broader historical context of the Jewish 20th century.

Among other resources, he will discuss using archives in Israel; hiring researchers and guides in Belarus and Lithuania; using JewishGen, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services; and employing Facebook and Twitter to help find a “lost” branch of the family.

David Laskin is an award-winning author who writes about the intersection between ordinary people and the seismic upheavals of our time. Born in Brooklyn and raised in Great Neck, New York, he grew up hearing stories that his immigrant Jewish grandparents told about the “old country” (Russia) that they left at the turn of the last century. He wishes he had recorded and video-taped every one of their memories. Mr. Laskin holds a degree in history and literature from Harvard and an MA in English from New College, Oxford.

Sunday, March 23, 2014, 2 p.m.

My Father's Wars: Migration, Memory and the Violence of a Century

Speaker: Alisse Waterston

Location: Center for Jewish History, 15 West 16th Street, New York City

Admission: Members are free, guests pay \$5 at the door

“My father was born into war,” begins this remarkable saga in Alisse Waterston's intimate ethnography, a story that is also twentieth century social history. This is an anthropologist's vivid account of her father's journey across continents, countries, cultures, languages, generations—and wars. It is a daughter's portrait of her father and a scholar's reflection on the forces of history in the 20th century, the experience of exile and immigration – from Poland to Cuba to New York -- the legacies of culture, and the enduring power of memory.

Alisse Waterston is a cultural anthropologist who studies the human consequences of structural and systemic violence and inequality. She is Professor, Department of Anthropology at John Jay College of Criminal Justice, City University of New York. Alisse is author of two ethnographies on urban poverty in the US, and is President-elect of the American Anthropological Association.

Future Meetings

April 27, May 18, June 22, 2014

New York City and Environs

New-York Historical Society

The Society's Fall-Winter season of lectures includes several dealing with New York City life before World War II:

Saturday, February 15, 2014, 9 a.m.– 11 a.m.

“Before the Fall – From the Roaring Twenties to the Crash of '29”

Admission: \$28 for members, \$40 for non-members

Sunday, March 9, 2014, 5 p.m.

“Harlem”

Speaker: Barry Lewis

Admission: \$20 for members, \$34 for non-members

Location for all lectures: 170 Central Park West at 77th Street

Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island

Sunday, February 23, 2014, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.

Tracking David Stone: The Jewish Bank Robber of Frost, Texas

Speaker: Karen S. Franklin

Admission: Free

Location: Mid Island Y-JCC
45 Manetto Hill Road, Plainview, www.miyjcc.org

Sunday, March 23, 2014, 2 p.m. to 4 p.m.
“From Tangier to Argentina and Bank: An International Journey”

Speaker: Sarina Roffe
Admission: Free
Location: to be announced

Westchester County Genealogical Society

Saturday, April 12, 2014, 10 a.m.
“Tips and Tricks for Using Family Tree Maker”

Admission: Free
Location: Aldergate Memorial United Methodist Church
600 Broadway, Dobbs Ferry, NY

Saturday, June 14, 2014, 10 a.m.
“Fire Up Your Research –The Digital Genealogist Is Here!”

Admission: Free
Location: Aldergate Memorial United Methodist Church
600 Broadway, Dobbs Ferry, NY

Out of State Locations

National Genealogical Society

May 7-10, “2014 Family History Conference”
Location: Richmond, Virginia (Richmond Convention Center and Marriott Hotel)
For information: contact www.ngsgenealogy.org

Federation of Genealogical Societies
“Improved Genealogy Through Better Methodology”
August 14 through August 16, 2014, sponsored by the Washington State Genealogical Society

Location: Skagit Valley Hotel & Casino, Bow, Washington, between Seattle & Vancouver
For information: contact wsgs2014conference.com or wsgs2014conference@yahoo.com ☆

Online News continued from page 24

Worldwide Burial Registry, one can now search for Romanian relatives on the updated JewishGen Romania Database, which contains:

1. 1942 Census of Jewish Males (20,000 names)
2. U.S.Consular Post, Bucharest, Romania (1,000 records of emergency passport applications, 1860-1941)
3. Jewish names in selected State Department Files, 1910-1929
4. Yizkor book necrologies (26,000 names from Romania and Moldova)
5. Bessarabia Vital Records (155,000 Jewish births, marriages, divorces and deaths)
6. Bessarabia Revision Lists (68,000 names from 19th century tax censuses)
7. Bessarabia Business Directories, 1895 and 1924
8. Bucovina Vital Records (6,200 births)
9. Maramures Jewish Vital Record, 1851-1895
10. Podu Iloaiei (Moldavia) 1898 Census

Among the 203 separate databases in the JewishGen Holocaust Database are the following dealing with Romanians:

1. Cluj Children Survivors
2. Claims Conference – Romania (167,00 Romanian Jews whose names appear in records held in the Central Zionist Archives and Yad Vashem

3. Who Perished on the *Struma*?
4. Arad Census, 1942
5. Bucharest Students Used as Slave Laborers, 1943
6. The Sinking of the *Mujkure*
7. Cernauti, Romania Lists
8. Tirgu Mares Deportation List, 1944 and Ghetto List, 1945
9. Transnistria Jews Receiving and Sending Support
10. The Jews of Oradea (business owners, 1944)
11. Deportations from Dorohoi to Transnistria
12. Bucharest Jewish Males, 1942
13. Jews from Iasi Who Survived the Transports
14. New Romanian Lists, 73,000 collected from various lists
15. Evidence Registers of Jews in Cahal Camp, 1941
16. Jews Killed in 1941 in Dubossary, Transnistria 1941

Another source of information about Romanian survivors is the World Memory Project (www.worldmemoryproject.org and accessible from the U.S Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Holocaust Survivor and Victim Resource Center) compiled by the World Jewish Congress. It was based on a 16-page questionnaire which inquired about experiences during the war, including loss of property and personal goods, forced labor, deportation to Transnistria, relatives who did not survive, pogroms, occupation by Hungary and transport to Auschwitz. ☆

Scenes from the JGS, Inc. Double Chai Anniversary Celebration, October 27, 2013



Mazel Tov Wishes for Our 36th Anniversary from Friends Near and Far



International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS)

182 Bayshore Drive, Melbourne Beach, FL 32951

Tel 321-727-3832 Fax 321-727-3832

www.iajgs.org

Dear Roni,

On behalf of the IAJGS and its Board of Directors, we congratulate you on JGS NY's 36th anniversary. As our first and one of our largest societies, you have blazed the trail for other societies and maintained a fountain of knowledgeable and dedicated members who have produced databases, the *Dorot* quarterly newsletter, and the *Genealogical Resources in New York* guide; created the first *Family Finder*; and supported several of our international conferences.

As you celebrated this past Sunday, we hope you were able to recall all of your varied accomplishments and contributions to the Jewish genealogical community in general and as a key enabler to those researching their ancestors. We join you and support you in looking forward to building on your rich history and past successes by bringing know-how to new generations of Jewish genealogist researchers.

Mazel Tov and a hearty Kol HaKavod to you, your board of directors and committee leaders, and to your members!

With warmest regards,

Marlis Humphrey
IAJGS President

From Marlis Humphrey, President of the IAJGS

Many thanks to all who sent us congratulatory messages. Here are a few of those received.

From Charles Bernstein who came from Chicago to attend our Anniversary Luncheon:

"It was a lovely affair, very tasteful, and it meant a lot for me to be there. After all these years, I'm still in there "g[enealog]-ing"

From Merle Kastner representing the JGS of Montreal:

"Mazel Tov to Roni Liebowitz, the Board of Directors, Committee Leaders and Members on your 36th

anniversary!

May you continue to do your excellent work, to the benefit of so many, for many, many years to come.
Yasher Koach"

From Jeremy Frankel:

"I, too, would very much like to add the voice of the San Francisco Bay Area JGS to the felicitations due

to JGS New York on attaining their 36th Double Chai birthday.

It's certainly a reminder that genealogy is now very much "mainstream" and often in the front pages of newspapers what with DNA and other genealogical discoveries."

From Ina Getzoff:

"Even though I am now in Delray Beach, Fla and

belong to JGSPBCI, the JGSNY will always be first in my heart. Again, many more good years for JGSNY."

Read about President Roni Seibel Liebowitz's opening remarks, Founding President, Neil Rosenstein's brief history of JGS, Inc., and the featured presentation by Tammy Hepps, "**Beyond the Tree: Tools and Tips for Sharing Your Family History**," reported by Steve Stein in the "JGS Program Reports" section on page 19.

REPORTS FROM THE 2013 IAJGS CONFERENCE IN BOSTON



2013 The New York JGS Group at the Boston Conference

Seated Front, left to right: Current President Roni Seibel Liebowitz and Founding President Neil Rosenstein

First Row Standing, left to right: Martin Feller, Naomi Bard Feller, Nina Lenz Sitron, Joseph Fibel, Harriet Fibel, Susan Kaplan Stone, Hadassah Lipsius, Joy Kestenbaum, Lillian Faffer, Eden Joachim

Back Row Standing, left to right: Renee Stern Steinig, Debbie Wang, Gary Mokotoff, Howard Rotblatt, Paul H. Silverstone, Jerry Liebowitz, Sol Krongelb, Steve Stein

Jewish Experience in the Russian Army 1827-1917

by Steve Stein

I attended the session "Jewish Experience in the Russian Army 1827-1917," presented by Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, for one simple reason – my personal "brick wall." I know next to nothing about my paternal grandfather (and namesake), except that he served in the Russian Army. Other than that, I barely know about his immediate family, and less about his life before he

came to the US. And Dr. Petrovsky-Shtern's talk did not disappoint. If I can't yet learn about Zaide Shmiel's family history, at least I can learn about his life in Russia for those many years.

Professor Petrovsky-Shtern gave a thorough history of how Jews came to serve in the Imperial Russian Army in the first place. Czar Nicholas I, who came to power in 1825, was a notorious anti-Semite, who used military conscription as a strategy to modernize and "reform" the Jews of Russia. A militarist, he idolized Napoleon

and Peter the Great because of their military campaigns and their knowledge. To him, military service was a strategic tool for many goals.

In 1827, he began his program designed to convert the Jews. He assigned responsibility for selecting the young men to be conscripted to the local Jewish communities. Since, however, the tax burden on the Jewish community was not to be diminished, the Jewish community chose individuals (a relatively low number, initially 1,800 out of a total Jewish population of 2 million) who were least likely to have an effect on meeting that burden – therefore, the indigent and the young were often chosen. In fact, 900 of the first 1,800 inductees were children. Jews were liable for the draft at the age of 12, much younger than the populace at large, and all members were required to serve 25 years!

Surprisingly, there were some accommodations for religious life: Jewish soldiers were often allowed to observe *Yom Tov* (holidays), have Torah scrolls, and have matzoh on Passover. Some Sabbath exemptions were granted as well. Were these accommodations real? Probably some, according to the speaker. Also surprisingly, most Jewish soldiers remained Jewish, especially if they served in the largely Jewish-populated areas of the Pale of Settlement. Generally, health and nutrition were better for Jews serving in the military than for their civilian brethren in the *shtetl*. There was a low rate of insubordination and of draft-dodging.

For those who served outside the Pale, synagogues were often established in places such as Irkutsk on Lake Baikal. After military service, some Jews remained in these far-flung communities. The synagogue in Irkutsk, founded in the mid-1800s, was recently restored and is again operational as a synagogue.

Did Jews serve in combat? Statistics indicate that they overwhelmingly did so. From the Russian-Turkish War in 1828, through wars with Poland and Hungary, the Crimean War in 1855, and up through the 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese War, Jews served. They became patriots and spoke Russian. Probably hundreds of thousands of Jews were drafted in the 1900s.

Was my grandfather's experience typical? I am not sure, but I know that he came out of the Army fairly sickly, from which he never truly recovered. And his service was most likely interrupted by World War I as he was probably too weak to go into battle. But Professor Petrovsky-Shtern's talk gave me a lot of information and a lot to think about.

(Steve Stein prepares the Program Reports for every issue of Dorot. His biography can be found at the end of this issue's Program Reports on page 20.)

My Family Reunion at the Boston Conference

by Michael Pertain

The IAJGS Conference in Boston was a great experience for me, although not for the usual reasons. I say this because I didn't attend many sessions, and only two from beginning to end: the opening night event with speaker Aaron Lansky, and the Rokiskis/Kupiskis SIG Birds of a Feather (BOF) annual meeting, at which I facilitated the Kupiskis portion.

In his talk, Aaron Lansky, the founder and director of the Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts, discussed the history of the organization, revealing the fascinating story of how he first became involved in saving Yiddish books (and therefore Yiddish literature). His presentation was captivating and humorous, as he revealed adventures like being called in the middle of the night to travel hundreds of miles to a dumpster filled with books that needed to be saved before the sanitation trucks got to them in the morning.

One of the highlights for me of every IAJGS conference is the Birds of a Feather Rokiskis/Kupiskis SIG meeting, because I get to see my dear friends Ann Rabinowitz, the head of the Kupiskis SIG, and Linda Cantor, Past President of the JGS, who together run the sessions. However, they weren't able to attend and I led it with the directions Ann sent me. During the sharing part, Phil and Aldonna Shapiro and Debbie Schwartz described a visit to the *shtetls* where they found in a basement a complete set of a daily newsletter dating back to the 1870s with greatly detailed descriptions of daily life, including street maps.

Those were the only *scheduled* parts of the conference I attended. What followed these events is what really made the experience a complete success for me: photographing naturalization papers of my grandfather and great grandfather who immigrated to Worcester, Massachusetts in the late 1800s, and organizing a family reunion. Both of these events required a lot of planning before the conference and could not have happened without much assistance from others.

Well before the conference, I used Ancestry.com to get the dates, volume and document numbers of the naturalizations. Then I contacted Elizabeth Bouvier, chief archivist at the Massachusetts State Archives, to

find out where to locate the documents. She had them and saw to it that they were waiting for me when I arrived. She told me that because of their age and fragility I could not scan or photograph them with a flash. Since I had no clue of what kind of camera to buy or how to use it, I leaned on my friend, David Kleiman, who is an expert in all matters technological *and* genealogical, to tell me what to buy and teach me how to use it. I came home with wonderfully clear photos.

For the family reunion, I first contacted as many Kling and Niman cousins as I knew lived in the Boston area to let them know that I would be in Boston and available. I had no idea how many would see me or where we should meet. I readily confess that I have almost no administrative skills and no desire to be in charge of a complex event. Fortunately, my cousin, Judah Levine, arranged the place and time and coordinated with cousins, some of whom he had never met. We had dinner at a restaurant around the corner from the Park Plaza Hotel and everything came off without a hitch. One of the exciting things for me was that several of the cousins had never met each other and in some cases never even *heard* of each other. So I prepared a family tree chart for each of them, showing exactly how each attendee was related to each other and gave each a genealogical goodie, the printed and bound family history I have been writing.



I am sure that had I stuck to just attending regular sessions all week, I would have had a fine experience too. But I don't regret for a moment that I utilized the conference as a kind of staging prop for what I *really* wanted to accomplish. It was truly for me a great success.

(Michael Pertain has been active in the JGS since 1999, serving for several years on the Executive Council and serving as Vice President and Secretary. He has

taught classes on researching family history. He is an ordained rabbi and was for many years a guidance counselor in the New York City schools. Most recently he was an adjunct professor in the Brooklyn College SEEK program, where he taught English and counseled students.)

The 2013 IAJGS Awards

The IAJGS Achievement Awards were announced at the Gala of the 33rd IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy in Boston, Massachusetts by Renee Steinig, Chairman of the 2013 Awards Committee. The Committee also included Henry Blumberg, Logan Kleinwaks, Kahlile Mehr, and Mark Nicholls.

The Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Neville Lamdan for his pioneering work to establish the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy and Paul Jacobi Center in Jerusalem. His vision and dedication as its director from 2006 to 2012 shaped the IJG into a driving force working to gain recognition of Jewish genealogy as an academic discipline. An innovator and bridge builder, Neville Lamdan has given Jewish genealogists new insights and tools and has underscored to the academic community the crucial role genealogical research has to play in the study of Jewish history and identity.

The Outstanding Contribution to Jewish Genealogy via the Internet, Print or Electronic Product was awarded to JewishGen KehilaLinks, which has encouraged and assisted the creation of over 600 web pages commemorating the places where Jews have lived. Introduced in 1996 as ShtetLinks, the project was renamed in 2011 to reflect its inclusion of Jewish communities throughout the world. KehilaLinks continues to grow thanks to the tireless efforts of coordinators Susana Leistner Bloch and Barbara Ellman, a team of volunteer webpage designers, and its many site owners.

The Outstanding Program or Project Award was presented to Geshher Galicia, for its Cadastral Map & Landowner Records Project and the Geshher Galicia Map Room, which has provided groundbreaking content for genealogical researchers. These extraordinary maps, which show such details as market squares, houses, synagogues, cemeteries, roads and rivers, enable family historians to visualize where and how their ancestors lived; and the landowner records capture details of everyday lives not found in traditional sources. In many cases these maps



IAJGS Award Winners, left to right: Michael Goldstein, Barbara Ellman, Susana Leistner Bloch, Leslie Kelman, Brooke Schreier Ganz, Pamela Weisberger, Jay Osborn, Neville Lamden, Renee Stern Steinig

and records provide the only available documentary evidence of a family's life in a town.

Outstanding Publication by an IAJGS Member Association was awarded to the **Jewish Genealogical Society of Toronto**, for its book, *Tracing Our Roots, Telling Our Stories*, which was published in celebration of its 25th anniversary. It shares family stories, first-person narratives, and accounts of research and discovery written by 44 of the Society's members. This 248-page anthology spans two centuries and diverse locations to explore such themes as immigration, the Holocaust, and life in Eastern Europe and in new homelands. Its moving chapters illustrate the importance of recording personal histories to enrich the details found on genealogical documents.

The Rabbi Malcolm Stern Grant honors Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern, widely considered to be the dean of American Jewish genealogy, and his efforts to increase the availability of resources for Jewish genealogical research. Two organizations received a grant:

The Oded Yarkoni Historical Archives of Petah Tikva for the purpose of recording the oral history of the settlement, doing so by interviewing the

descendants of the founders of Petah Tikva, its first industrialists, teachers and adults who learned in its first schools.

Gesher Galicia was awarded the **John Stedman Memorial Grant**, under the Rabbi Malcom Stern Grant, for the Gesher Galicia website and All Galicia Database. The awarded funds will go toward making Gesher Galicia a multilingual site enabling more international users to easily research their Galician roots.

The Lucille Gudis Memorial Lectures at the 33rd IAJGS 2013 Conference

The Jewish Genealogical Society sponsored a joint lecture by Daniel Soyer and Dr. Annie Polland entitled "City of Promises: A History of the Jews of New York – Emerging Metropolis." Mr. Soyer also presented "My Future Is in America: Yiddish Immigrant Autobiographies" and Dr. Polland presented "Working for the Sabbath: Eastern European Immigrants in New York and Their Religion." ☆

JGS Program Reports

by Steve Stein



David Kleiman explaining what can be discerned from several 19th century portraits

September 15, 2013

“Art & Identity: American Jewish History and Identity through Portraiture”

The first meeting of the fall covered a topic that was new to most if not all attendees. It was presented by Executive Council member, David Kleiman, who is a technologist, genealogist and historian, and was held at Congregation Shearith Israel. Co-sponsors of the event were the New York Genealogical and Biographical Society (NYG&B) and the George Washington Institute for Religious Freedom. NYG&B was represented by President McKelden Smith, and the George Washington Institute by John L. Loeb.

Attendees learned how art and photographs can be interpreted and analyzed to reveal important information about those people and places depicted. It can provide background and more to our genealogical research. David presented a series of images, many of which can be found at www.loebjewishportraits.org, to explain a number of concepts. First of all, some paintings, though not considered “portraits” because they do not attempt to depict individuals based on their actual appearance, such as *Oliver Goldsmith Discovering his Mistake*, reveal how art can relate or refer to an actual story. He then proceeded to show images of the following, and explained various facts about each.

- Portrait of Judah Benjamin, Vice President of the Confederacy
- Touro Synagogue, ca. 1865, from a glass negative, the earliest known image of the building, taken by Joshua Appleby Williams. It was dated using information about other objects in the photo, such as trees and fences
- Images of synagogue and other ceremonial scenes which reveal much about the religious observances, modes of dress, and social mores of the times they portrayed
- Many portraits of individuals from Malcolm Stern’s book, *Americans of Jewish Descent* and paintings of members of prominent American Jewish families by Gilbert Stuart and others
- Several portraits of well-known clergy, business and military figures

David pointed out a number of important characteristics to note about some of these images. For one, it was important to know if a portrait had been commissioned for public viewing or only for family use. Especially for the former, the subject often asked to have included in the portrait images of objects which represented something important about that individual that they wanted publicly known. That might include certain books, religious objects, objects relating to the individual’s professional or military career, etc. Also quite important are whether a man was wearing a head covering, and whether a woman was wearing a more or less revealing ensemble. One merchant had ships painted in the background to indicate his occupation. The portrait of Reverend Ezra Stiles’ showed him wearing a clerical collar, with a background of books by Plato and Locke, plus a drawing of Sir Isaac Newton, in order to indicate the breadth of his knowledge.

In addition to Gilbert Stuart, who grew up in Newport, Rhode Island, David discussed works of Solomon Carvalho, a Jewish portraitist who did portraits of

Brigham Young and Charles Wilson Peale; and Thomas Sully, who painted several portraits of Rebecca Gratz of Philadelphia, a preeminent Jewish philanthropist.

For attendees who missed the recent JGS program at Shearith Israel last November, Zachary Edinger, Ritual Director of the synagogue, conducted a tour after the meeting.

(This report was written before David Kleiman passed away on January 18, 2014.)

October 27, 2013

“JGS 36th Anniversary Celebration - A Celebration of our past and a glimpse into the future / Beyond the Tree: Tools and Tips for Sharing Your Family History”

More than 100 members and friends of the Jewish Genealogical Society turned out for our October meeting, which was also our 36th – Double Chai – Anniversary Luncheon, held at the Sutton Place Synagogue. In addition to the good food, they were treated to a slide show showing the nearly four decades of our Society’s progress and the fine leadership we have experienced since the founding meeting in October 1977.

President Roni Liebowitz welcomed the attendees and introduced the program. First, Roni asked any “original members” to stand. The response revealed that a surprising number of attendees were present at the first meetings back in the late 1970s (myself included). She



Early JGS, Inc. Members

Seated left to right: Arthur Kurzweil, Neil Rosenstein, Charles Bernstein, Back row: Estelle Guzik; Donna Balopole, Gary Mokotoff, Jane Zweifler, Lillian Faffer



Founding President Neil Rosenstein recollects the early days of JGS with the crowd

emphasized that JGS of New York was the first Jewish genealogical society in the US, inspiring the formation of other societies around the country and the world. We initiated the Summer Seminar series which later became the annual IAJGS conferences, and started a number of projects such as the Family Finder and the very comprehensive *Genealogical Resources in New York* guide.

Roni’s introduction was then followed by a recollection by Founding President Neil Rosenstein of how the society came to be, and some of the key figures involved in the founding, such as the late Steve Siegel, Rabbi Malcolm Stern, Dan Rottenberg, and Arthur Kurzweil. Neil discussed how his personal interest in genealogy began in his teens, discovering such resources as YIVO, Leo Baeck Institute, and the like. But it was through the founding of JGS that he and his colleagues were able to expand the horizons of Jewish genealogy and start the society on the road to where it is today. Neil was able to display such artifacts as the original brochure for JGS, the original stationery and the original logo.

Following the anniversary presentation, the featured program was presented by Tammy Hepps, the founder of Treelines.com, a family story-sharing website and winner of the RootsTech 2013 Developer Challenge.

Tammy has a degree in Computer Science from Harvard and many years of experience in digital media. She is also been an avid genealogist for over 20 years. Her interest in genealogy began in 1991 when she received a letter from a relative in Texas, who sent her an 80-page book containing the Hepps family tree. After a time, she began to research her mother's family as well, but found it difficult to engage her maternal relatives in what appeared to them as dry facts.

What ultimately worked for Tammy was the realization that great family history must both inform and entertain. It must be both beautiful to look at or listen to containing pictures, audio and video, all woven into a story. Also, it must be fun to read and contain a balance of memories, heirlooms, research and evidence.

In order to accomplish this goal, Tammy began to write a series of narratives, stories reconstructed or strung together using what was known and surmising the possibilities of why. Writing stories that were at one time relevant, personal, and worthy of being transmitted, she incorporated the records, maps and trees along with the historical context, and the emotional hooks developed from personal involvement. The stories need not have all the details, just the highlights in order to engage family members in their own personal stories.

As an example, Tammy related how her great-grandmother came to America. When presented in a chronological form, the story is not that interesting. But reconstructing the narrative of why one sister was left behind in Liverpool and how she finally managed to come to America created a story arc that engaged even her previously uninterested sister! And the story of how Tammy's grandfather ended up in prison for violating the Oleomargarine Act of 1886 comes to life when surrounded with the details of how the family kept moving in order to avoid the consequences of this highly inconsequential criminal activity.



Tammy Hepps, featured speaker at the Double Chai Anniversary Celebration

Finally, Tammy mentioned a number of tools that can be employed in creating and presenting these stories. These include:

- Treelines.com, (Tammy's own site)
- MyHistro.com
- Creatavist.com
- Stupeflix.com
- Narrable.com
- StoryPress.com

Tammy encouraged everyone to start telling their stories in this way.

(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-five years.) ☆



In the Repositories

New-York Historical Society Library (170 Central Park West at 77th Street, NYC, 212-873-7400)

The New-York Historical Society has digitized seven of its major collections of special interest to Jewish genealogists, but access is limited to on-site visits. The collections include American National Biography, American Periodicals Series Online, Ancestry.com (census records from 1790 to 1930), 1,000 historical maps, World War I Draft Registration Cards, Ship Passenger Lists for the ports of New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, and San Francisco; “Gateway to North America: The People, Places and Organizations of 19th Century New York”; Electronic Access to Harper’s Weekly from 1837-1923; “History Cooperative” (index and full text articles for 22 historical journals); all 20 volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary; and Proquest Historical Newspapers files of the New York Times 1851-2007).

Jewish Theological Seminary Archives (3080 Broadway at 122nd Street, NYC, 212-678-8000)

There are many items in the Archives of the Jewish Theological Seminary, but they can only be viewed in the JTS Library by appointment. Here are just a few examples: Records of the *Consistoire General Israelite de France*, 1808-1876; Records of the French Community 1648-1945; Records of Jewish Foster Homes and Orphan Asylums.

For those interested in synagogue records, go to www.jtsa.edu/The_Library/Collections/Archives.xml and look for the category “Finding Aids to Records of Conservative Rabbis, Synagogues and Jewish Community Leaders.” Here you can find many boxes of records of the famous Brooklyn Jewish Center, records of Congregation *B’nai Jeshurun* (1825-1993) such as

its Wedding Book; Marriage Certificates; Records of the various rabbis; Religious School Student Registers with Parents’ Names; Minutes of the Annual Meeting, other Congregational Meetings, Boards of Trustees Meetings; and legal documents regarding a dispute over mixed seating.

Also available from the same collection are the Minutes of the Meetings of the Board of Directors of the Kane Street Synagogue, and Minutes and Membership records of *Ansche Chesed* Synagogue.

Another interesting item is the extensive, digitized post card collection covering many decades.

New York Public Library (Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street, 212- 917-275-6975)

The Library’s Dorot Jewish Division has a great deal of information on line about the Jews who spent the war years in Shanghai, including links to oral histories, newspapers, photographs and books. It is necessary to contact the Dorot Division Librarian in order to see the materials and access the interviews about Shanghai Jews in the American Jewish Committee Oral History Collection.

The NYPL now has 709 digitized collections on line including many volumes of Jewish newspapers such as the Jerusalem Post and other news sources. One can directly access the numerous photos from the Museum of the City of New York and examine the “1943 New York City Market Analysis,” which has photos, maps, statistics and short narratives about many NYC neighborhoods as revealed by the 1940 census.

NYPL’s Digital Gallery contains 800,000 images. Of especial interest to genealogists are: Photographic Views, NYC 1870s-1970s; Russia and Eastern Europe - Rare Photos 1860-1945; Ellis Island Photos 1902-1913; NYC Apartment Buildings 1880s-1910s - Floor Plans and Views.



World War I Prisoners of War in Siberia

By Linda Cantor

The JGS volunteers who work at the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in New York are indexing an extremely interesting collection of records of German and Austro-Hungarian Army Jewish prisoners of war in Siberia in 1920. This collection of over 1,000 cards, primarily Hungarians along with some Galitzianers and others, contains biographical information, and many of them have photos of the men. In addition, some of the records contain the names and address of relatives in America. It's a great resource if you have Hungarian and Galitzianer heritage, so watch for this project, which will be on-line shortly.

The end of World War I and the disorder of the Russian Revolution found about 10,000 Jews among the 160,000 prisoners of war still in Siberia in 1920. The conditions in the prisoner of war camps were abysmal. It's estimated that over 300,000 prisoners died from illnesses, such as typhoid and dysentery as well as starvation and the rigors of the Siberian winter. A Jewish prisoner from the Nikolsk-Ussuriysk camp, near Vladivostok, described how they survived the winter of 1919:

Imagine overcrowded barracks, with a double row of cots ... the buildings themselves are dilapidated; the window panes are broken, fuel is at a shortage, there are no facilities for washing, the wells are in a desolate condition and at a long distance from the barracks, the toilets are from 20 to 100 steps from the house and indescribably filthy. In the best preserved room in the barracks we never had, during the whole winter, a temperature above +5 Reamer [about 40^o Fahrenheit] in daytime; at night we were freezing like puppies. (from POW files at YIVO - RG 1572, B1, F17)

JDC, together with the American Red Cross and other groups, established the Siberian War Prisoners Repatriation Fund, in order to assist these prisoners of war. JDC organized a census of the prisoners and helped to provide care as well as a way for them to communicate with their families, and, of course, help in going home. There are two sets of records of this massive effort. The first, already on-line at JDC Archives (http://archives.jdc.org/?s=global_f), is a list entitled "Prisoners of War Released from Siberia, 1921." The second set, which we are currently indexing, contains individual

records for about 1,000 men who were prisoners in 1920.

The information the records contain (in the order you see it on the samples below) includes: name of the prisoner (Vor-und Zuname); where they did their Army service (Charge und Truppenkorper); when and where they were captured (Gefangen, wann und wo); when and where they were born (Geboren, wann and wo.); district they served for (Zustandig); home address (Heimatsadresse); nationality and religion (Nationalitat und Religion); occupation (Beruf); marital status and number of children (Stand und Zahl der Kinder); current place of residence (Derzeitiger Aufenthalt); information on transport from capture (Abgegangen am, mit Transport); and notes (Anmerkungen).

So looking at Sample 1, we learn that Alexander Balazs was born on April 2, 1894 in Hungary. His home address was in Budapest and he was Jewish; the name and number of the company he served in; when and where he was captured, and that he was a bank official. And looking at Sample 2, we learn that Herman Aschkenaz was born in 1889 near Chorostkov (near Tarnopol, now in Ukraine), he considered Vienna to be home; was single; the name of the company he served in; when and where he was captured; and that he was a furrier. And both entries have excellent photos attached.

Not all the records contain photos, not all the fields are complete. Many listed their nationality as Jewish rather than Hungarian or Polish. Keep in mind that this was a confusing issue for men from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, which had just been dissolved. So a person from Galicia, who would have thought of himself as Austrian, was suddenly Polish, a person from Moravia suddenly Czech, and so on. Nevertheless, this is a wonderful source of information if you are lucky enough to find a family member in this group.

And if you have some time to contribute to this and other JDC indexing projects, please contact the Indexing Project Coordinator at archives@jdc.org

You must be able to work in midtown Manhattan and be comfortable working on a computer.

(Linda Cantor, long-time JGS member, is past president of JGS, Inc and has been doing voluntary indexing at the JDC for several years. ☆

Auxiliary Branch
of the
Joint Distribution Committee
of the American Funds for Jewish War Sufferers
Vladivostock.



Vor-und Zuname: *Alexander Balázs*
 Charge und Truppenkörper: *Fabrik, T. R. 37*
 Gefangen (wann und wo): *Rudawa (Polen) 10 Juni 1916*
 Geboren (wann und wo): *Ungarn, 2. April 1894*
 Zuständig: *Budapest*
 Heimatsadresse: *Budapest, III, Ilka-Str. 22.*
 Nationalität und Religion: *ungar, israelit.*
 Beruf: *Bankbeamter*
 Stand und Zahl der Kinder: _____
 Derzeitiger Aufenthalt: *P. Rietschka, bei Vladivostok*
 Abgegangen am /mit Transport/:
10/8 To Heiman
 Anmerkungen: _____

Sample 1

Auxiliary Branch
of the
Joint Distribution Committee
of the American Funds for Jewish War Sufferers
Vladivostock.



Vor-und Zuname: *Hermann Aschkenaz*
 Charge und Truppenkörper: *Inf. D. R. 2.*
 Gefangen (wann und wo): *Przemysl 14/11. 1914*
 Geboren (wann und wo): *Chopietz 21/10. 1889*
 Zuständig: *Chopietz*
 Heimatsadresse: *Has Landau, Wien*
 Nationalität und Religion: *jude*
 Beruf: *Müschner*
 Stand und Zahl der Kinder: *ledig*
 Derzeitiger Aufenthalt: *P. Rietschka*
 Abgegangen am /mit Transport/: *26/8 To Heiman*
 Anmerkungen: _____

Sample 2

News and Notes from Our Readers

The Spring 2013 of *Dorot* (Vol 34, No. 3) elicited several interesting letters, some with important genealogical information.

Rivka Schiller's article, "A Bashert Genealogical Discovery," brought two complimentary letters. Susan J. Gordon wrote, "I enjoyed reading Ms. Schiller's paper because it reminded me of something I had read previously about serendipity. In his 1993 book, *Psychic Roots: Serendipity & Intuition in Genealogy* (Genealogical Publishing Company), Henry Z. Jones says, "the evidence is overwhelming that the serendipitous and intuitive do indeed influence our research....I do believe that our ancestors have no wish to be forgotten; they wish to be found."

Roberta Newman, Director of Digital Initiatives at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, asked for permission to reprint the Schiller article in the new YIVO blog, "Yedies: News from YIVO,"

(www.yivo.org/blog/).

Robert Kern's article, "Buyer Beware," elicited this comment by Claus Hirsch: "Robert Kern's short article of what can happen to genealogists is a good warning. Clearly, he was gypped by some sharp Hungarian claiming to do bona fide research. But he reminds us that there are various steps one can take to seek redress. In his case the steps did not produce satisfactory results, but he gave it a good try. It may come as a shock to learn that even the most sophisticated investors on Wall Street sometimes get taken by charlatans. Regardless, his tale may save some other unsuspecting genealogists from falling into the same trap. Therefore, *Dorot* performed a service by publishing his story."

Ann Rabinowitz's article, "Jews as Honorary or Hereditary Honorary Citizens in the Russian Empire," brought a valuable note about where to find information about Jewish families with the title of baron.

Unfortunately, the name of the author of this interesting letter is lost somewhere in the ether. Perhaps the author will come forward, so that we can give proper credit. Here is a long excerpt from the letter:

"In the article, 'Jews as Honorary Citizens in the Russian Empire' by Ann Rabinowitz, my attention was drawn to the paragraph on Baron Horace Ginsburg, who I had encountered years ago in a book on German nobility. This is the *Gothaisches Genealogisches Taschenbuch der Freiherrlichen Hauser, 1913*, also known as *Freiherrl Taschenbuch*, published by Justus Perthes, Gotha, 1,110 pages. It was a compilation of all existing titles of Baron (Freiherr) in Germany and Central Europe, published annually. The genealogical

tables are quite complete. Similar to Burke's Peerage, all the living members of the family are listed with dates and places of birth, marriage and death.

"I found the following Jewish families here: Dreifus, Goldschmidt-Rothschild, Gunzberg, Groedel, Hirsch, Konigswarter, Kurschner, Landau, Mayer-Ketschendorf, Parente, Rothschild, Schey von Koromia, Stein, Worms.

"I can give only a glimpse of the wealth of data about these families in this book. Justus Perthes was also the well known publisher of the annual *Almanach de Gotha*, which continued until 1944. A similar annual on all existing titles of count was also published." ☆

Online News

The JewishGen USA Database Incorporates Many Different Databases for Marriages, Deaths and Passenger Tickets

If you are looking for marriages and obituaries in important Jewish newspapers and rabbinic records, then try your luck at the new consolidated JewishGen USA Database. Enter the name for which you are searching and get an instant search of:

1. *The American Jewish Yearbook Obituary Index* of prominent Jews who died between 1948 and 1981
2. The Rabbi Samuel Langer Database consisting of 5,000+ entries from his personal notebooks listing births, bar/bas mitzvahs, marriages, funerals and unveilings in the Eastern U.S.
3. *The Boston Jewish Advocate's Obituary Database* (25,000 obituary notices from 1905-2011)
4. Boston area marriages performed by Rabbi Aaron Gorovitz of Boston (1910-1956) and Rabbi Ber Borochoff of Malden, Mass. (1900-1939)
5. The Chicago Obituary Database (1994-1998) and an index to 500 marriages performed by Rabbi Benhard Felsenthal of Chicago's Sinai Congregation (1861-1905)
6. *The Cleveland Jewish News Obituary Database* (30,000 names from 1964-2012)
7. The Denver, Colorado *Intermountain Jewish News Index* of 15,000 obituary notices (1918-2011)

8. The *Houston Jewish Herald-Voice* database of 64,000 names and events from 1908-2012

9. The New Haven *Connecticut Jewish Ledger's Obituary Database* (5,000 names from 1975-2002)

10. The *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent* Obituary Database of 57,000 notices from 1887-2012

Also in the JewishGen USA Database are:

1. Records of passenger tickets purchased from three Jewish banks in Philadelphia: Blitzstein Bank, the Lipschutz People's Bank and the Rosenbaum Bank. (The Summer, 2013 issue of *Dorot*, vol. 34, no. 4, contains a report on the operation of Jewish immigrant banks on pages 1-4 in the insert)
2. The JewishGen Worldwide Burial Registry (995,000 burial records for cemeteries in the US and Canada)
3. The JewishGen Memorial Plaques Database (30,000 records)
4. Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society Boston Arrivals (24,000 names from 1882-1929)
5. The JewishGen Family Finder has 50,000 entries by Jewish genealogists researching families in the US

JewishGen Has Expanded Its Romanian Database

In addition to searching for Romanian names in the JewishGen Family Finder and the JewishGen Online

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QUESTIONING THE EXPERTS

DOROT questions both JGS members and outside experts about their genealogical skills and elicits their advice for those embarking on their own genealogical path.

Interview with Eileen Flannelly, Deputy Commissioner of the New York City Department of Records and Information

DOROT: Would you tell us about the Department of Records and Information Services. What's under its umbrella?

FLANNELLY: We hold the Municipal Archives for the City of New York, the City Hall Library. The Municipal Archives holds 221,000 cubic feet of historic records dating back to the 1600s. The City Hall Library holds all government publications, reports to the mayor, the Common Council records, again, dating back to the 1600s. Then we have records management. We manage close to one million cubic feet of records for the City of New York, and we do conservation, photography. We just launched last year the largest collection of historic photographs in the world online, 870,000 images, and we're adding to that daily. We do a lot for a little place!

DOROT: What do you mean when you say that you "manage" records?

FLANNELLY: We have two warehouses. We have a million cubic feet of records. We act as a storage facility for city agencies and courts under the city's jurisdiction; we not only store them but we also teach people how to follow the city's guidelines for records and records retention, record schedules. And that's actually how a record becomes a historic document: it's first in the custody of the agencies and managed by the records management unit. Then, once it meets its retention schedule, it goes for disposal. I review disposals along with the Law Department; we sign off on them. Once they're signed off, then they're reviewed by the Municipal Archives and they're assessed for historic value. If they deem records historic, it becomes property of the Municipal Archives and the rest get destroyed.

The Municipal Archives

DOROT: Let's turn to the Municipal Archives – for

many genealogical researchers in New York City, that's number one on the list of places to go. When was the Municipal Archives organized in New York?

FLANNELLY: It was organized in 1977. It was actually my grand uncle, Paul O'Dwyer, who created this agency. He was the City Council President and he created this agency in 1977. Prior to that, there was a



Eileen Flannelly

library, there were records under the General Services Administration, but he created this agency so that the records could be housed in one place and that there could also be actual guidelines and rules for the charter that mandate how agencies would preserve and maintain their records. The first employees of this agency were my mother and my now assistant commissioner. They were both interns. My mother was studying history at Queens College and she was recommended to an intern program, and my assistant commissioner was studying at another school, and they were both interns together when this

was a loft above where J&R is now today on Park Row. J&R wasn't there at the time.

DOROT: When were the vital records – the birth, marriage and death records that so many researchers use – organized the way they are now?

FLANNELLY: The way they came in, there were procedures where they were kept by the General Services Administration. Then they became our property. What we've been doing is, we've been indexing with the assistance of the Italian Genealogical Group – they've done a lot of the indexing. Now we're about to launch a very huge project where we're going to digitize 9.5 million vital records starting in December 2013. It's something that we've been wanting to do for years. For the first time in our history, we're going to get an opportunity to do this.

DOROT: What effect will that have on how people access the records?

FLANNELLY: Of course, it's going to make the process

a million times easier. We'll always keep our microfilm because we always say, no matter what happens with technology advancements, you can always hold the microfilm up to a light or reproduce it. But this for us is going to be huge. Not only is it going to be assisting people, giving them an option to very quickly search for their records – not a simple task right now – but it also frees my staff that spends most of their days searching these records and doing the research; it's going to free them to do more projects with things like the Visitor Center, with things like digitizing. We're going to be able to really allocate our resources to other places, to other areas and advance the agency even more.

DOROT: With the digitization of the vital records, does this mean that researchers would have to go to the Municipal Archives to access the images and perhaps copy them or will the records be on line? How do you foresee that working?

FLANNELLY: As of now, we're still figuring out how that's going to play out. We're going to initially offer an index that people will be able to easily search on line and then they can order it. Depending on software, the technology, the firewalls, all of the security regulations, those are things we're going to iron out as we go along, to figure out what's the best way to give the public access to it. With anything we do, that's our goal, to give the public access, to give worldwide access. So as of now, we're still working that out. This is brand new. We're very excited about it. There definitely will be an easily searchable index, a way to find it and be sure that it's your record, over the Internet. [Ed note: these indexes will appear on www.ancestry.com in the near future. Watch for more info.]

DOROT: And see the image of the record?

FLANNELLY: Again, that depends, because of the security issues, even with the old records, what's available, how people can see it without actually replicating them. A lot of different issues are involved. We're now looking at what others have done, their security measures, what different programs are available to us. We want to be able to see them but not so that people can actually take them and reproduce them.

DOROT: What's your timeline for this vital records digitization project?

FLANNELLY: We're aiming for the end of June 2014. I'm being told they can do it.

DOROT: How is that done?

FLANNELLY: We've cleared out a large area downstairs at 31 Chambers Street in our micrographics unit and we're going to have tables, workstations set up. New York City's Industry for the Disabled, which did the Department of Health's records, they're going to be coming in and digitizing them on site. We'll bring in the records. They'll scan them, digitize them. Then we'll bring those records back out to the warehouse, bring in new records. It's going to be just like a production line.

DOROT: You mentioned the Department of Health and its records and that leads to this issue: the vital records that are available in the Municipal Archives are wonderful up to the point where they stop (birth records in 1909, marriage records in 1939, death records in 1948). When was the last time you received new records from the Department of Health?

FLANNELLY: I think the last time that the agency has gotten any records was in the late 1990s. And yes, it's an issue. But security concerns are always cited. I know that there's a big debate about security and "they are over 100 years and people are dead." But they've been able to get the backing of Homeland Security and many of the federal agencies on why it really is impractical to release them to us. But, having said that, last year we met with the commissioner and the assistant commissioner and several of the higher-ups in the Health Department. We formed a committee of genealogists who come here for research purposes to actually sit with the Health Department and loosen their regulations, to make the records more accessible to genealogists. To my knowledge, they've been meeting quite often, so there should be an easier platform for people when they go to the Health Department now. It should be easier and easier to obtain these records. They did say, "We're under all these restrictions about what we can give you, but, understanding that, we also understand that there's a need for research and genealogy and it's a huge field, and where we've had very strict rules, we're going to try to work with the individuals and make it easier." And I honestly believe it, because I had a big conference and I brought the Health Department in and I opened it up to all the genealogists and I let them ask them their questions and have their debate back and forth, so anybody who wanted to sit on that committee was invited. So to my knowledge, they've been making progress. Because if they weren't, I'd be hearing about it! I see the genealogists, they've been coming for years, they know me from when I was with the City Clerk's Office. They have told me they're definitely getting better.

DOROT: So the more current vital records wouldn't necessarily move to the Municipal Archives but, where they do sit, at the Department of Health, procedurally things might improve?

FLANNELLY: Yes. You should already be seeing an improvement. I also was told by a lot of the attorneys, people who are going over to the Department of Health, that they have seen a drastic improvement in their procedures. I know the Department of Health really stepped up to the plate. Last year, when they were called in, they agreed to have this meeting and they're working on making it a simpler procedure. And that's all we need. Ideally, here at the Municipal Archives is where we would like the records, but if that can't be the case or if there are blocks or security concerns – and I'm all for that – I do think that as long as there is a very easy way for them to access what they need, then it shouldn't be a problem.

DOROT: We've been discussing the vital records, but in terms of research, that seems to be the tip of the iceberg in terms of what's available to people who are researching their families or other matters. What else is available at the Municipal Archives of interest to genealogists?

FANNELLY: The collections are so vast. Depending on how far you're going back – a lot of people discover when they're using the vital records, they can take it a step further and say, "Okay, this person was listed as my great grandmother," and then you start to research the records. We have records dating back to the 1600s. There have been people who started to do research and started to look at old neighborhoods or old buildings. We have the 1939 tax photos here. In 1939 the city decided that it was going to assess taxes based on photographs of every property. So they actually photographed every single property within the five boroughs of New York City, anything that was in existence. So if your grandparents had a home or a business that existed in 1939, we have a picture of it. It exists here. We did an exhibit on black veterans in the military last year in partnership with the Mayor's Office of Veterans' Affairs, and we picked a picture of a soldier that we found and we blew it up, just because the girls thought he was handsome. When the commissioner from MOVA came in and he started walking through the exhibit, he nearly fainted – it was one of his relatives who was in that picture from the early 1900s. So it's buried here. There are so many different areas – if you have people in your family who worked for government. When we did the Koch exhibit recently, all the people who worked during the

Koch administration, their papers, their records were available. You can start with a marriage, go to births, and go to the deaths, and not only the genealogy, but your neighborhoods, where your parents lived, all of that is here.

Don't Start Your Search on Your Own – Ask an Expert for Help

DOROT: If someone comes to the Municipal Archives and they want to go beyond the vital records, where would they start and learn what to look for and where to find it?

FLANNELLY: The best thing I advise people is: don't try to do it on your own, because there are 221,000 cubic feet of records and we're coming across new things every day. We have assistants in the reference area in the Municipal Archives, we have assistants in the City Hall Library. We also have now, with the Visitor Center, people who work on it. Any of my staff, ask them. They will tell you, for example, "You should check out this, you should check the old Yellow Pages; look for a name in there, look for an address in there." There are so many different resources that they are so familiar with that the average person wouldn't think of. So just ask, because they're the researchers, they're the professionals, and they can help you and give you ideas.

DOROT: You mentioned earlier the digitization of photographs. How can someone learn what's inside that collection that might be of use to them?

How to Search the Digitized Photographs

FLANNELLY: Right now we have 2.2 million images and growing in our photo collection. We've managed to digitize 870,000 and we're about to add another 26,000 or 27,000 to that. It is on our web site, these images are on line, you go to our web site (<http://www.nyc.gov/records>) and you look under the Municipal Archives Photo Gallery and then you can search them by collection or search word, and you can pull up these amazing pictures. And it's done in a LUNA software so you can really zoom in and view the most miniscule images.

DOROT: Where did these photographs originate?

FLANNELLY: Many of them come from the agencies themselves: the WPA Collection, we have Sanitation, we have NYPD, we have the mayors' collections. Our

photographs come from everywhere.

The Eugene De Salignac Collection

One of our most famous collections now is the Eugene de Salignac Collection. That was glass plate negatives. There were boxes found in one of the basements of a building – somebody called years back and said there were negatives downstairs in the sub sub-basement of a building, and we went over and retrieved them, since we do get a lot of our collections in that way. Things that were just left for years and years. As my photographer was going through them, he noticed two things: they were all done by the same photographer and it was actually the documenting of the building of the City of New York. This gentleman was a civil servant whose job was to take pictures for the Department of Bridges and Structures at the time, now the Buildings Department. His job was to just go and photograph all the sites, just the workers. It wasn't for any historic purpose. They just wanted to make sure that they were doing what they were supposed to. But at the end of the day, what this man created was a collage of the building of the City of New York. He died unknown. He was just a city worker. And now we made his photographs into a book called "New York Rises." It became a museum exhibit. It traveled around the United States for a year and now he's a famous photographer.

DOROT: In what period did de Salignac do his work?

FLANNELLY: From 1906 to 1934.

DOROT: And his photographs have been digitized as part of the Photo Gallery?

FLANNELLY: Oh, yes.

The Difference Between the Municipal Library and the Municipal Archives

DOROT: Many genealogists enter 31 Chambers Street, make a right turn and head for the Municipal Archives. If they were to instead go straight ahead, they'd find the City Hall Library. What could they access there?

FLANNELLY: People are amazed when they find the City Hall Library. As I said, it has every government publication, any reports, anything that was sent to the mayor or the City Council or published to the mayor or City Council, Common Council minutes going back to the 1600s. A large number of people from the Corporation Counsel go back into the very old cases.

People from the Mayor's Office, if we're going into a fiscal crisis or a transit strike, will use these materials, they'll go back in time to see what other administrations did, what worked, what didn't work. Commissioners' reports from the 1800s – they're in there. Those are the things you'll find in there. That's what's different from the Archives – reports, publications of the city, whereas the Archives is more mayors' collections, more independent items.

DOROT: Are these collections in the library accessible by genealogists who walk in the door?

FLANNELLY: Anybody. We're not a lending library. But they are accessible. We do photo copying. We do research. We assist people with their research. So, yes, all the information is there and available to anybody who wants to use it.

The Visitor Center

DOROT: Let's talk about the Visitor Center, probably one of the newest additions within your department. What led you to create it and how did you carve out this space within the historic building in 31 Chambers Street?

FLANNELLY: When I came in – and I wasn't a historian – I was just so overwhelmed by what was there. What bothered me all the time was that we were constantly lending it out. I didn't have a problem lending the material to people. What I had a problem with was, we were lending it to all these museums and institutions, but the people who came to 31 Chambers Street and were our patrons and researchers didn't have exposure to it, they weren't able to see it. Genealogists who know what we have and spent many years at the Archives, that's fine, but somebody new getting into it wouldn't know, and even I'm sure people who spent many years here wouldn't know that we actually have so many different collections and so many different items. And it's not only the 1600s stuff, it's to present-day that we hold these items. So it always bothered me that we didn't have a spot to showcase the highlights. There's no way that we could possibly put everything on display, but just little bits and pieces to give people a taste of what actually exists and how far the span is. So I was passionate about getting it done. There were two rooms that really had been just used as a dumping ground and storage space for years and years. It was killing me that we had this beautiful space. I knew that all I had to do was get everything out and we would be able to create something spectacular. It took

everybody in this agency to say, “We’ll do it, we’ll do it on our own time.” And we had it done in a year. Since opening, we’ve hosted over 7,000 people from all over the world.

DOROT: What are you doing in the Visitor Center?

FLANNELLY: We’re doing exhibits, we’re doing educational programming. The object behind it is to highlight all the different influences in New York City, in the creation of our city and bring an awareness of the fact that we’re here. We’re here for people – this is yours to access. We’ve done about 12 different exhibits and educational programs. We’ve done bungalows of Rockaway, the Croton aqueducts and waterways, we hosted 220 historians from all over world for a seminar. When we don’t have a specific exhibit, we have our highlights collection – our crime scenes, we have the slave manumissions, the original deed to Coney Island is in our trust, the flag from Ground Zero.

The Exhibit of “Historical Moments in the Jewish Experience”

DOROT: The current exhibit is called “Celebrating 359 Years: Historical Moments in the NYC Jewish Experience.” How long will it be here?

FLANNELLY: We’re going to run it until the end of December 2013, which is very long for us, we’ve actually extended it. The interest in this exhibit has been phenomenal.

DOROT: The material from the exhibit includes documents, photographs, pamphlets, letters ...

FLANNELLY: Our crime scene photo of Abe Reles, one of the most notorious mobsters. He actually turned informant for the FBI and they had him held in a hotel room in Coney Island ... and they called him “The canary who could sing but couldn’t fly” (he fell to his death from his hotel room in 1941). We have not only his case files, but also his suitcase and the bed sheets that he tied together. That’s all part of his collection. We have the largest crime scene collection in the English-speaking world.

DOROT: When you go into this vast collection of thousands of cubic feet of material, how do you find all this stuff?

FLANNELLY: It’s more of a sit-down discussion between people. For example, with this current exhibit,

I was joining up with the Manhattan Jewish Historical Initiative to make this happen. One of the first thing I said to them was, “Listen, we’re going to do everything, but what can be really helpful on your end is, you give us some historic events that you might want us to highlight, and then we’ll go into our records.” Mainly what we do is discuss and shoot ideas off each other, for example, “We know that LaGuardia was anti-Nazi, he was very vociferous, and we know that we have letters from his collection in which he is protesting the Nazis and Hitler.” And we know that we have those in our collection, so we bring out some of those. So a lot of it is institutional knowledge. Most of this stuff is not digitized. We do not have these collections digitized.

A Few Words About Eileen Flannelly

DOROT: Tell us a little about yourself. When did you come to the Department of Records?

FLANNELLY: I came here in 2002. I came from the City Clerk’s Office. I was brought in as the Assistant Commissioner and then was promoted to Deputy in 2005 and then I was promoted Commissioner in 2010 pending the merger with a larger agency, but that never happened.

DOROT: Have you ever done any family research yourself?

FLANNELLY: I haven’t done any family research because I come from a huge family. We’re all extremely close. We’re all over the world. So I have a couple of cousins who have stepped up to the plate. If you go to my office you will see that my family tree is hanging on my wall. We were kind of brought up in the history and there were never any big mysteries.

DOROT: Have you ever tried to find those people in all the records you have in the department?

FLANNELLY: Oh, yes. My grand uncle was the 100th mayor of New York City – Bill O’Dwyer – and his brother, Paul, was the president of the City Council, and my family has always served in civil service, so our records are overflowing with my family. So for me, this is personal on top of just being a job, this is really family legacy for me, for my uncle who created this agency, my mother who started in this agency. To me, it’s home and I get to see it all the time.

DOROT: Thank you.

Eileen Flannelly serves dual roles as Deputy

Commissioner for the New York City Department of Records and the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS). She has had several positions within the department since her arrival in 2002. She entered City service in 1999, working in the City Clerk's Office. Before that she worked in several management positions in large private sector organizations. In addition to her many accomplishments in the Department of Records described above, Eileen represents the City of New York as a voting member on the Archival, Grant and Legislative Committees of the New York State Local Government Records Advisory Council (LGRAC). She serves as a reviewer of grant proposals and awards

for the Local Government Records Management Improvement Fund. She sits as a board member of the NYC Commission on Public Information & Communication (COPIC), Recording Secretary for the Irish Institute of New York City, and is a participating member of the Manhattan Jewish Historic Initiative (MJHI). In addition, Eileen serves as a mentor for the NYC Disability Mentoring Program and hosts an annual program to teach young children about the various choices of employment within the private and public sectors. She is a supporter of and fundraiser for the Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, the Children's Arthritis Foundation, and the March of Dimes. ☆

JGS, Inc. mourns the loss of Executive Council member

David Marc Kleiman, z"l

March 17, 1954 – January 18, 2014

An article about David's life and accomplishments will be in the next issue of *Dorot*

The Jewish Genealogical Society website opens the door to

- Jewishdata.com (accessible by members of JGS)
- NY Naturalizations: Database of the Index to Brooklyn Naturalizations (1907–1924); Other New York Area Naturalizations: links to searchable online New York State naturalization indexes by county
- Cemeteries: Map of New York Area Jewish Cemeteries; Directory of Jewish Cemeteries in the Metropolitan New York Area; Burial Societies in the New York Metro Area; New York Area Cemetery Directions
- NY Area Resources: a comprehensive list of repositories in the metropolitan New York area
- Dorot: downloadable issues: spring 2000-winter 2005–2006; list of highlights of back issues: 1979-2008
- Events: Announcements of upcoming JGS monthly programs and events
- New York Landsmanshaftn and Other Jewish Organizations: links to indexes, databases, and directories, such as *American Jewish Year Book*; Landsmanshaftn and other town and country-related organization organizations incorporated in New York County, 1848-1920; WPA Survey of New York City Synagogue Records, 1939
- Memorial Database of Jewish Soldiers, Partisans and Workers killed in action during the Nazi era
- Inventory of LDS Microfilms and Microfiche on Indefinite Loan at the Center for Jewish History
- Other: links to other sites that may be of interest to the JGS community



<http://www.jgsny.org>

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That you might recount it to a
future generation, Psalms 48:14

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