



CHRONICLES

JOURNAL OF THE JEWISH GENEALOGICAL
SOCIETY OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA

דברי הימים



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REFLECTIONS FROM YOUR CHRONICLES TEAM

Sunday, June 12th brought the first genealogy fair for JGSGP, organized by Shelda & Stan Sandler, at Temple Sholom of Broomall. We can say without reservation that Shelda & Stan's efforts produced an extraordinary community event, with a turnout that exceeded everyone's expectations. JGSGP extends our congratulations and sincere thanks to Stan & Shelda for their vision in conceiving the genealogy fair, their dedication and months of hard work that put this event together and made it a fantastic success. JGSGP had the opportunity to expose close to 200 people to a variety of learning stations, each of which was staffed by one or more society volunteers and, in some cases, by representatives of specific local repositories. Attendees were able to focus on a different topic of interest to genealogists at each stop. Thanks also to Cindy and Jim Meyer, who were instrumental in securing the venue, and all the JGSGP members who contributed their time and efforts to insure the success of this groundbreaking event.

The opening of Chapter 3 of the Book of Ecclesiastes (Kohelet) reminds us, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." Summertime is here, and many of us adjust our lifestyles to accommodate the increased hours of sunlight along with higher temperatures and humidity. Summer also means genealogy conferences. This year's gathering will take place at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Washington, D.C. from Sunday, August 14 to Friday, August 19. The organizers for the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Washington have planned some amazing programs and functions, and we encourage JGSGP members to attend, if only for a day or two. Washington is only a few hours' journey from Philadelphia. More information can be found at this link: <http://dc2011.org/>.

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JGSGP MEMBERSHIP

Membership dues and contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent of the law. Please make checks payable to JGSGP and mail to the address below. Please include your email address and zip+4 code.

Annual Dues (January 1 - Dec. 31)

Individual.....	\$25
Family of two, per household.....	\$35
Sponsor.....	\$50
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Membership Applications / Renewals and Payments
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EDITORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Submission of articles on genealogy for publication in *CHRONICLES* is enthusiastically encouraged. The editorial board reserves the right to decide whether to publish an article and to edit all submissions. Please keep a copy of your material. Anything you want returned should be accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope.

While email and other electronic files are highly preferred, the editors will be happy to work with you and your material in any form. If you have an idea, please contact Evan Fishman of the Editorial Board by email: ebf2001@comcast.net or by phone at 856-667-2077.

SUBSCRIPTIONS - ADDRESS CHANGE

CHRONICLES (ISSN 0893-2921) is the quarterly publication of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Philadelphia. It is free to JGSGP members and to JGS's in the newsletter courtesy-exchange program. Printed and mailed back issues are available at \$4.00 each in the US and \$7.00 outside the US. *Chronicles* is published quarterly and distributed electronically in PDF format. Please supply the editor with your updated email address to ensure on-time delivery.

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WE EXTEND A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS

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Karen Zeitz	Philadelphia, PA

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This is our second edition of the new look of *Chronicles*. We have had very positive feedback from our last edition. Congratulations to Evan Fishman, Ed Flax and our great team of editors. Keep up the good work!

This past June 12th, our Society hosted a Genealogy Fair at Temple Shalom in Broomall, PA. It was a huge success due to the hard work of Stan & Shelda Sandler and the many volunteers that spent their Sunday to man tables on various topics and offer help and guidance to the attendees.

We are in the process of revising our website and we will have it hosted by our society. Many thanks to Jim Meyer for taking on the task of making this happen.

Many members of our Society will be in attendance at the upcoming IAJGS Conference. We will report on the Conference at future meetings and in the next issue of *Chronicles*.

Enjoy your summer and we will see you at our next meeting in September.

Fred Blum - President

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

I love getting *Chronicles* online. Read it cover to cover and then passed it on to my brother-in-law who is the real genealogy buff in the family. I'm the scrapbooking person... I put the faces with the names and dates!

I'd like to start some classes to help people get their boxes of old photos out of the closets, attics, basements and into their family life via photo albums. There were a number of people interested at the Fair. I'd love to do an article or a series of articles on preserving your photos and putting faces to the names. Could I write for *Chronicles* about doing this?

(Yes, absolutely - Look for Marge's article in our Fall 2011 issue.)

It is really my passion to help people get the current as well as past family stories into a format that can be passed on to succeeding generations. Technology changes so quickly but the old-fashioned, basic photo album with a bit of care will last for many generations. Even digital albums will, once printed, last for many generations.

Thanks,

Marge Farbman - margefarb@aol.com

Letters to the Editor should be addressed to editor@jgsgp.org and should include your name and email address. All letters are subject to editing for length, content, etc. Unpublished letters can be neither acknowledged nor returned.

(Continued from page 1)

We have received many enthusiastic and encouraging comments regarding our last issue. They demonstrate that you find our journal a worthwhile and important resource to further your interest in genealogy. In order to keep *Chronicles* fresh, vibrant, and user friendly we'd like to mention some new features we hope you'll enjoy:

- "Breaking Down Brick Walls" will be the avenue for sharing research difficulties with other members. Over the years we've conducted numerous "brick wall" sessions during our general meetings. We hope to offer the wise counsel of a panel of JGSGP experts to help direct you to overcome your hopefully temporary quagmires.

- We hope you'll use "Letters to the Editor" to comment on developments in the Jewish and general genealogical communities. We would appreciate your reactions to articles in *Chronicles*, with corrections, amplifications and suggestions on how to make it more interesting and more meaningful.

- Finally, we want *Chronicles* to be an interactive publication. When our JGSGP was honored with the "Outstanding Publication" award by IAJGS (International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies) several years ago, part of the inscription on the plaque read as follows: "... With over two-thirds of its content original and authored by members, it (*Chronicles*) is truly a publication by members for members. Its editorial philosophy stresses variety, combining Jewish history, culture, family stories and research techniques."

Your *Chronicles* team would like to continue this tradition. We believe everyone has a story and would like you to share one of your experiences from your genealogical journey.

Suggested topics include:

- How you connected with long lost or previously unknown relatives;
- The path you followed to uncover or confirm family lore;
- How a research technique and/or website was helpful;
- A trip to one of your ancestral shtetls;
- Reminiscences about a neighborhood where you grew up.

If you can tell your family members a genealogically related story, you can put your thoughts on paper. Please send your submissions to Evan Fishman at editor@jgsgp.org. If you'd like to discuss a possible subject, please call Evan at 856-667-2077.

Have a pleasant summer. See you in Washington, DC and watch for news about an informal gathering of JGSGP members during the conference. Please let Evan know if you plan to attend. That way, you'll be included in the confab. ♦

Your Chronicles Editorial Board

THE BIRTH & GROWTH OF A GENEALOGY FAIR

by Shelda & Stan Sandler

When Steve Schechter summoned about twenty members of JGSGP to a Sunday morning bagels and cream cheese schmear at a Center City delicatessen back in April 2010, little did we know that a highly successful genealogy fair would be conceived. The gathering was designed to be a strategy/planning meeting to discuss how we could maintain the momentum that we'd experienced at the August 2009 IAJGS (International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies) conference in Philadelphia that JGSGP co-sponsored.

We divided into small focus groups of four people each. Stan and I joined Cindy and Jim Meyer. Later, all the groups reconvened to share some very worthwhile ideas including improving the JGSGP website. Favoring the broad concept of outreach, our group suggested initiating a Speakers Bureau which has since become an ongoing undertaking. We also proposed a much bigger project, a city-wide genealogy fair by which JGSGP would become known to those who were interested in family history but unaware of our society's existence.

The concept of the genealogy fair was then born. Stan and I would co-chair the event while Cindy and Jim preferred to work on the committee. The four of us met over dinner for our first planning session in June. The next day Cindy and Jim happened to be at the office of their shul, Temple Sholom in Broomall, telling Sandy Cohen, the synagogue's community coordinator, about the fair. Sandy immediately offered the use of the Temple Sholom auditorium for the event.

Cindy told Stan and me afterwards what had transpired, and the four of us arranged to meet at the shul to evaluate the proposed venue. We decided on the spot not to look elsewhere. The auditorium would be big enough to accommodate a significant number of stations* and enable a large number of visitors to comfortably roam around and learn about various aspects of Jewish genealogy. We determined the Fair's date in consultation with Sandy Cohen and the other enthusiastic members of the office staff. The auditorium would first be available on Sunday, June 12, 2011, after the conclusion of that year's Religious School program.

After spending a year planning how to turn our concept into a reality, we enlisted JGSGP members and "outside" repositories to staff stations. We requested printed materials from

those repositories that were unable to send a representative. We asked our members to post flyers in various locations throughout Philadelphia and beyond and sent publicity to every JCC and Jewish federation in the tri-state area. We also sent publicity to area libraries for posting as well as nearly 40 synagogues throughout the Delaware Valley region, including the South Jersey suburbs of Cherry Hill, Marlton, and Voorhees. Press releases were sent to the *Jewish Exponent* and other local newspapers as well on-line newspapers such as the *Philadelphia Jewish Voice* and the *Jewish Voice* in South Jersey and Delaware. Feature articles appeared in the *Philadelphia Jewish Voice* and the *City Suburban News* as well as a paid advertisement in the latter.

After consultation with Steve Schecter we decided to offer as an incentive, free JGSGP membership for the balance of 2011 to all unaffiliated attendees. This special offer would only be available during the hours of the Fair and netted a total of 31 new members.



Welcome and JGSGP Information Station where visitors were warmly greeted and directed by Carole Strickland

In a nutshell, the Fair was a huge success! While not every-

one signed in at the Welcome Station, we estimated that between 150-200 people attended. We would have liked everyone to complete an evaluation form upon leaving but this only happens in a perfect world. We learned from the 25 completed forms that all the hours we had spent planning the Fair had been more than worth the effort.



מדור לדור (M'Dor L'dor) - From Generation to Generation
Shelda Sandler helping her grandson, Aiden, fill out a "Family Tree for Kids" as Brad, (Aiden's dad) and grandfather Stan look on.
This is the epitome of genealogy.

Seventeen respondents rated the Fair as "excellent"; six rated it as "good", while two didn't answer that question. Eighty-two percent indicated they would attend a subsequent JGSGP Genealogy Fair next year, while another 16% said they might attend. The "first ever" JGSGP Genealogy Fair was an unqualified success!

Our special thanks to Steve Schecter, Evan Fishman, Fred Blum, Mark Halpern, and the JGSGP Board of Directors. Additional thanks to Cindy and

Jim Meyer who were our contacts with Temple Sholom in Broomall. We would be remiss if we did not extend a huge "thank you" to Gene Hurwitz who diligently captured the essence of the Genealogy Fair through his many photographs throughout the afternoon. Some of his photographs are attached to this article.

Our thanks, also, to all of YOU who distributed flyers, staffed stations, volunteered your time, and came to the Fair to help make this an event which will long be remembered. Thank You, Everyone! ❖

**Stations at the Genealogy Fair: Welcome & JGSGP Information; Getting Started; JRI-Poland; Russian Research; German Research; Immigrant Bank Records; Computerized Family Tree Programs; Books & Maps; Southern New Jersey Agricultural Colonies; Members' Display Area; Family History Center; Mt. Carmel Cemetery Restoration Project; U.S. National Archives; Genealogical Society of Pennsylvania; Scrapbooking Your Family Tree; and Printed Materials / Work Area.*

Chronicles gratefully acknowledges these photos of the Genealogy Fair by Gene Hurwitz

MORE SCENES FROM THE GENEALOGY FAIR



Lisa Seeherman and Gayle Miller searching the Philadelphia immigrant bank records with the assistance of Fred Blum.



Ed Flax (left) and Harry Boonin study details of one of Harry's books on the Philadelphia Jewish community



Mark Halpern providing guidance and research suggestions at the JRI-Poland station.



David Brill with visitors to the Russian Special Interest Group station



Steve Schechter's station, with tips for "Getting Started," with software and computerization of Jewish genealogy files.



Bernard Cedar (standing right) studying brochures offered by the National Archives & Records Administration (NARA) in Philadelphia. The handouts describe NARA's holdings and opportunities for genealogical research at their Center City location.

TEN REASONS TO ATTEND A JEWISH GENEALOGY CONFERENCE

by *Mark Halpern*

I attended my first summer conference on Jewish Genealogy in 1998 in Los Angeles. The 2011 conference in Washington, DC will be my thirteenth, including the best one in 2009 in Philadelphia (I admit to bias). Here are my top ten reasons for anyone researching their Jewish roots to attend one or more of these conferences.

1. Knowledge: There are hundreds of lectures from the best of the best genealogists that are geared toward Jewish roots and all levels of competency. Learn what's new. Find out about existing and new methodologies and research resources. The conference syllabus is a great reference document providing lecture notes along with bibliographies and relevant websites. Most lectures are recorded. You can attend one and not miss a concurrent lecture of interest to you.

2. Networking: Over a thousand genealogists will attend – many with more experience than you: Some from your ancestral town or nearby, some with one of your ancestral surnames. These people are great resources to extend your knowledge, help you with that brick wall, or direct you to a new resource. Meeting people with similar geographical interest means you can share research time and cost with them.

3. Meet New People: You'll meet internet buddies in person and develop more meaningful relationships. Genealogists are a friendly lot. Meet an experienced researcher who could become your mentor. Meet professional researchers who might prove useful in furthering your research (especially overseas research).

4. Research Opportunities: Most venues provide special access to nearby archives, libraries, museums, cemeteries, etc. Arrive early or stay after to do research. Learn in advance the opportunities and plan out your approach. The conference website will always identify these places.

5. Products and Services: The Vendor Room or Exhibit Hall will have many organizations and companies selling and/or explaining their products and services. You can test competing family tree software. You can discover the online databases that contain valuable research materials. Those that charge fees for

access will provide discounts to attendees. Look at genealogy or yizkor books before purchasing. One vendor in DC will help you identify that old photo (probably for a fee).

6. Special Resources: The Resource Room always has maps, books, surname indexes, searchable databases, archival materials, free access to subscription databases such as Ancestry, Footnote, ProQuest; and free translation services. Also, Conferences have many “How to” computer classes where you can test drive genealogy software and online databases.

7. Your Special Interests: Special Interest Group (SIG) meetings and luncheons cover the research happenings in areas where your ancestors lived. Birds-of-a-Feather meetings are about a specific place or subject and allow you to meet others with the same interests.

8. Organize and Plan Research: This is always a daunting task. The resources – lectures, products, people, etc. – at the conference can help you with this. At many conferences, there are lectures on these specific subjects. Your fellow genealogists are, however, your best resources, and there are many with whom to consult.

9. Charge or Recharge Your Research: Attending a Conference and selecting activities from the considerable choices may seem like an intimidating undertaking. However, attending a conference is a great way to begin or to reinvigorate your research. So many ways to learn. So many resources and experts at your disposal. You may leave with conference overload, but your experiences will help you organize and expand your research.

10. Attend My Lecture: Thursday, August 18 at 2:15 pm – “Research in Galicia: Working with Vital Records.” Not a Galitizianer! Consider converting ☺ Hope to see you in DC.

Cannot go this year - plan ahead:

2012 – July 15-18 – Paris 2013 – August 4-9 – Boston

2014 – no exact date yet – Jerusalem. ❖

*Mark Halpern is the Immediate Past President of JGSGP.
Contact Mark at jgsgp@comcast.net*

The three stories which follow illustrate the value of attending an IAJGS conference and JGSGP meetings. We hope you will consider an upcoming conference in your travel or vacation planning, as well as regular meeting attendance.

LEAH'S STORY

by Leah Jordan Bisel

The little boy in the sailor suit peered out from the bent pages of the family photo album. His smile was enchanting, and I wanted to know who he was. When I was about seven, my father explained, to my astonishment, that he was my brother. The only brother I knew was a toddler, four years my junior. My comprehension did not include divorce, ex-wives, separation and half-siblings. All I knew was that I wanted to see that little boy whose name I now knew as Billy.



Billy was not a little boy anymore but a young adult at this time. My father never saw him after the age of three. Billy's mother had remarried and taken him far away, vowing to change his name and disassociate him from his paternal heritage. I was delighted to learn that he was a minor league baseball player. Although young, I immediately began to follow the sport and remain a faithful fan to this day. My father took me to my first ball game at Detroit's then Briggs Stadium in 1953 and I pretended it was Billy pitching on the mound. My younger brother and I attended numerous games there taking buses downtown during summer vacations from school. I even went so far as to become a fan club president in my early teenage years, this sport being so important to me.

My father died in 1960, never having seen Billy again. Five years passed and at the age of twenty I resolved to find him. I made a few inquiries and checked telephone directories for California where I knew he had settled. He did not carry our family name but carried that of his stepfather. Whether or not he was legally adopted remains to be seen. The letter I sent to a Los Angeles address was answered but the man who bore the name of my half-brother was too old to be the Billy I searched for. Not being a seasoned genealogist at the time, I had no other ideas. College, work and marriage

intervened. More years passed.

By a quirk of fate the genealogy bug bit me in 1979. One discovery led to another. The family tree was growing by leaps and bounds. My attendance at the JGS seminar in Chicago in 1984 inspired me. The more I learned the more I knew I would find the clue which would lead me to Billy. I read all the journals I could find. It wasn't a journal that would lead me to him but a casual conversation I had with a fellow attendee at the 1985 seminar in New York. She told me that the Department of Motor Vehicles in California would supply his address if I knew his birth date. In a matter of days, not only did I have his address, but also a list of his minor road violations! My timing was good because the rules have changed, and the DMV does not give out this information anymore.

It took nerves of steel to sit down and write the perfect letter to Billy. Making it sound positive was of the essence. The past held many skeletons for him, I was sure, and I didn't want to resurrect them. I selected family photos to send including the one of him in the sailor suit. Once he saw that, there would be no doubt as to the validity of my claim to being his sister. The letter was sent with a return signature required. The postcard with his signature arrived. I don't remember how long it took but the waiting was painful. When no letter arrived, I was beginning to feel that my lifelong dream was shattered.

As I was preparing dinner one evening, Billy's phone call took me completely by surprise. I almost wound myself up in the telephone cord as I paced around the kitchen listening to the resonant sound of his voice. My older brother! We spoke for an hour, dodging back in forth in time, trying to catch up on lost years. Not only did I learn that he had three children, but one of his daughters was married to Robin Yount who had recently been inducted into the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown. The baseball story comes full circle. That night my husband and I opened a bottle of wine we had carried back from Europe years before and saved for a special occasion.

The next month I turned forty. I am a fairly private person and warned my husband well in advance that I did not want a surprise party. Our dinner reservations were at a hotel, and when I walked in I was extremely relieved to see the table set for two. After our meal my husband handed me a gift box. The box was small and could very well have contained jewelry, but instead there was a letter inside explaining that we were on our way to the airport to pick up Billy. Can you imagine receiving a brother for a birthday gift? I was beside myself with joy. My dream was coming true and I didn't even have the time to get nervous about meeting him. I don't know how my won-

derful husband arranged all of this.

At the airport there was time to spare and many questions entered my mind. How will he know me? How will I know him? What will he look like? Would he resemble my father? Those tension-filled moments evaporated as the people started to disembark. I can't explain it, but Billy and I knew each other and just fell into each other's arms. My brother was "home" at last.

From the airport we took Billy to meet my mother—his stepmother. I learned that she was the one who had purchased the little sailor suit he was wearing in the photo in our picture album. We shared stories over coffee and cake and tried to condense his lost 52 years into a few hours. One of the saddest things I learned that night was that Billy had tried contacting my father when he was a teenager during the 1940s. Due to hard times during the war, my parents didn't have a telephone. Had he been able to call, perhaps history would have been rewritten.

The surprises didn't end that night. The next day my younger brother flew in from Pittsburgh to complete the family picture. I was no longer the older sister but the middle child. It was a strange but wonderful feeling. We celebrated with another birthday dinner at a fine restaurant. Often times the conversation would return to baseball, and we decided that Billy had to see the old Briggs Stadium, now renamed Tiger Stadium, which was so much a part of our youth and our thoughts about him.

On his last day in Detroit we took Billy to the house where we grew up. We explained how we had played baseball in the street with the curbs being the bases and how the driveway was the spot for catching pop-ups. Our childhood was very happy there but we felt guilty because he was not a part of it. From this northwest neighborhood we traveled to the cemetery where our father is buried. This was a sad moment for all of us but one that was absolutely necessary for Billy. I hope that he was able to reconcile his mixed emotions about Dad. We ended our whirlwind weekend at the doors of Tiger Stadium. It was mid-October, but there was no World Series being played there in 1985. We found an employee working on the premises and told him our saga. He kindly opened the barricaded doors and let us in. We looked at the field, still green and lush, and could almost smell the hot dogs and hear the cries of the faithful fans. We were the faithful fans. True to our sport, true to our family. This was the best birthday I ever had. ❖

*Leah Jordan Bisel is a member of JGSGP
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A BAR MITZVAH PRESENT FOR THE MAGEN FAMILY

(Magin, Magein, Magadenko, Magidenke, Mokedenke)
by Selma Neubauer with Laurel Katz

What do you give two special Bar Mitzvah boys each of whom has at least two of everything? Ten years ago, I decided to give Jonathan Magen his family history. I was encouraged by the fact that when Jonathan was younger, he seemed truly interested in my genealogy research. The gift ultimately became a really big three-ring binder and included all of his family names, except for his last name, MAGEN. At the time, he seemed thrilled to receive this unusual gift. I hoped that in time, I could research the Magen family. That opportunity presented itself five years later when Jonathan's younger brother, Ari Magen, became a Bar Mitzvah. Ari's three-ring binder included updated information about the families with the added bonus of information about the Magen family. When I gave Ari his binder, I did not realize how much more there was to do or how that information would come to me.

Just prior to the opening of the August 2009 IAJGS/JGSGP conference held in Philadelphia, the *Jewish Exponent* did a front page feature article about attendee Laurel Katz's genealogy research. Laurel told the interviewer that in 2007 she joined JGSGP and attended her first meeting. She wore a badge indicating that she was researching MAGEN. Someone, she said, told her to talk to me because I was researching Magen. We talked, she gave me a few names, and I told her that I would bring all of my Magen research to the next meeting.

Another conference attendee, Stuart Perlmutter, who attended the conference for one day, saw the article and realized that he and Laurel were probably researching the same Magen family. Stuart and his uncle, Stanley Baer, had done extensive research on a BRODSKY family. Stanley Baer's mother was Lillian MAGEIN Baer. The spelling was close enough. Now four people could share their information.

We now knew that Lillian Magein Baer was the daughter of Samuel Magen and Rose Goldenberg Brodsky Magen. Laurel informed us that her great grandmother was Pearl Magen Shenheit, the oldest child of Samuel Magen and Sarah Olshansky Magen. I was able to share information about Benjamin Magen's families. Benjamin Magen, Pearl's brother, had married twice in the United States.

There were seven children from his first marriage and two from his second. Benjamin's second wife had seven children from a previous marriage. Already, it was very complicated! The ship manifest revealed that Samuel Magen arrived in Philadelphia in 1904 with his son, Benjamin, and his daughter, Clara. This group went to Samuel's daughter, Bessie's home.

Two years later, in 1906, Rose Goldenberg Brodsky Magen, her two Brodsky sons, her three children with Samuel Magen, and another child of Samuel Magen and Sarah Olshansky Magen, arrived at the port of Philadelphia. To add to the confusion, the Brodsky sons were listed as Magen on the ship's manifest. This group went to Samuel Magen's home .

Samuel Magen's naturalization documents indicated that Samuel had a wife, Sarah Olshansky, and seven children in Russia: Benjamin (married Butofsky and later married Wolf), Clara (m. Zeidman), Bessie (m. Margolin), Pearl (m. Shenheit), Gussie, Esther, Sarah. Later Samuel and Rose Goldenberg Brodsky had Jacob (m. Reiter), Lillian (m. Baer) and Morris (m. Wolfson). Rose had two sons, Harry Brodsky (m. Burd) and Louis Brodsky (m. Baer).

Benjamin Magen's documents indicated that he and Mollie Butofsky had seven children: Esther (m. Bell), Evelyn (m. Dorfman), Sarah (m. Sharavsky), Goldie, Lydia, Jacob, Bernard. Benjamin's second wife, Bella Marks Wolf , had six children with her first husband: Pearl, Rose, Gertrude, Irene (m. LaVan), Sara (m. Gillick), Maurice Henry (m. Neff). Benjamin and Bella had two children: Freda (m. Abaluck), Samuel (m. Cohen). It is this Samuel Magen who was Jonathan and Ari's grandfather. All of the above people and their descendants are Jonathan and Ari's relatives.

Ari and Jonathan Magen's Bar Mitzvah presents are not complete. There was, is, and always will be more to do. But for now, through coincidence and serendipity, four genealogists are researching the Magen family and helping one another fill in the blanks. This is probably the largest and most complicated family I have ever researched. Come to think of it, there is nothing wrong with giving a gift certificate from a book store as a Bar Mitzvah gift! ❖

Selma Neubauer has been a genealogist and family historian since she attended the first Philadelphia conference in 1989. When she retired from the legal profession she already had a hobby and an obsession. Contact Selma at: selmanew@verizon.net

ALTERNATE WORLD WAR II RESEARCH STRATEGIES

by Lois Sernoff

In the course of conducting my family research, I have sometimes wondered which is the more interesting and compelling aspect of the project; uncovering and revealing the lost records or the process we go through to find them. Unlocking the hidden past is always a thrill, but sometimes I enjoy the process so much that I actually feel "let down" when the "case" is closed and the answers revealed.

One such research project concerned a fact, previously unknown to most of the descendants of my family - which I refer to as the "Mezhiritzky" family, although the name was changed in this country by the three male siblings to Meritz, Marritz, and Marrits. The five female siblings (whose families emigrated) headed the branches, Weinstein, Yompolsky/Young, Brodsky, Dinerstein/Diamond, and Postilnikoff/Post. It is these families comprising the Mezhiritzky history which are the focus of my research,

While interviewing a newly found member of the "mespochah", it was casually mentioned to me that a cousin in the Diamond branch had died in World War II, while



Martin Eisenman, ca. 1941

being held prisoner by the Japanese.

His name was Martin Eisenman, and his grandmother, Lillian Mezhiritzky Diamond Rappaport, was the youngest sibling of my great-grandfather, Mayer-Chaim Mezhiritzky, whom I believe to be the eldest of nine siblings. The common ancestors of Martin Eisenman, and myself, were the parents of Mayer-Chaim and Lillian (Liba), Abraham and Dina Mezhiritsky of Korsun, Russia [now known as Korsun-Shevchenkivskij, Ukraine.]

Later research revealed that Martin Eisenman, of Wilmington, Delaware, when captured by the Japanese forces, was a young enlisted man, serving a second tour of duty in the Army Air Force. He was at work as an airplane mechanic with the 17th Pursuit Squadron, stationed at Nichols Field, an airbase near Manila, when it was attacked by Japanese bombers, on Dec. 8, 1941, the day after the infamous attack on Pearl Harbor. These brave American and Philippine soldiers, airmen, marines, etc. held out until April 1942, waiting for promised help, which never came, before finally being ordered to surrender, soon after General Douglas MacArthur was forced to abandon his last Philippine outpost, on the island fortress of Corregidor.

Ten thousand (mostly American and Philippine) military personnel surrendered, overwhelming their captors by their sheer numbers. Thus was the beginning of the infamous Bataan death march, perhaps the cruelest, most heinous abuse of military convention in modern times.

Martin Eisenman survived the Bataan death march in which so many perished. He survived years of harsh labor, starvation and torture, only to die on a Japanese freighter, the *Shinyo Maru*, which was hit by the torpedo fire of an American Navy submarine, in September 1944. These facts took me years to uncover.

However, in 1993 I was in a quandary. I knew nothing of his incarceration or the circumstances of his death. The chances of getting his records from the logical source, the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis, seemed pretty slim. I was aware that the greater portion of WWII military personnel records had been destroyed in a fire at that facility on July 12, 1973. The fire destroyed about 80% of the records for Army personnel separated from the service between 1912 and 1960. Inquiries to alternate sources, such as the U.S. Army Institute for Military History at Carlisle Barracks, PA, went unanswered. At that point, not even knowing the branch of service in which he served, his serial number, or birth date, it seemed futile to even make

a request of NPRC. Since I couldn't supply the most basic of needed facts had the records existed, I abandoned that strategy. There were other "leads" that I wanted to explore but did not know how to go about it.

At a JGSGP meeting in December, 1993 that featured a "genealogy-in-the-round" question and answer format, I asked for help and advice on this elusive problem. This was about a year after I learned of Martin's tragic death. Tired of the dead ends I had been confronted with in regard to the WW II records, and, as a last ditch effort, I took the opportunity to place my dilemma before the entire JGSGP.

Fortunately, among those in attendance offering suggestions, was a new member of JGSGP, Walter Stock, an expert staff librarian of the Free Library of Philadelphia, a former military man with extensive knowledge of military sources, and an experienced genealogist. I told him about basic research I had done concerning the events of the war in the Philippines.

I had read a reference to an organization called "American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor," (one of many organizations formed by veterans from all different branches and areas of World War II service). Many of its members had been interviewed for the book, *DEATH MARCH - The Survivors of Bataan*, by Donald Knox, which related the experiences of American POW's who were survivors. While this organization seemed to be a potentially valuable resource, I could not find an address for it and none was cited in Mr. Knox's book. No problem. Walt Stock sent me the address a few days after our meeting.

He also directed me to another reference book, *American Jews in World War II, The Story of 550,000 Fighters for Freedom*, in two volumes, the second of which, lists, state by state, those Jewish veterans who died and/or were decorated during the war. These two volumes were compiled by the Bureau of War Records of the National Jewish Welfare Board. Published in 1947, the book was distributed free to returning Jewish veterans. The listing for Martin Eisenman of Wilmington, Delaware, documented his death, named the branch in which he served and his rank.

I wrote to the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor (ADBC) and was able to provide the basic information on Martin Eisenman. A gentleman by the name of Elmer Long (now deceased) responded almost immediately, providing a more detailed picture of Martin Eisenman's squadron, assignment and circumstances of his death. Additionally, the A.D.B.C. letterhead on which Mr. Long

replied, listed its officers. One name on the letterhead was Ralph Levenberg, whose name I recognized as someone interviewed in Mr. Knox's book. At the time of the capture, Mr. Levenberg had been a sergeant in the 17th Pursuit Squadron to which Martin had also been assigned. I wrote to him as he was the only board member with an obviously Jewish name. He replied that he had served in the same squadron as my cousin but did not remember him. He related that there were many Jewish servicemen stationed on Bataan prior to the outbreak of the war. He remembered going to Manila to observe the High Holidays with a large group of Jewish officers and enlisted men, before the Japanese attacked on December 8, 1941.

Unbeknownst to me, Mr. Levenberg (now a retired USAF Major) sent my letter on to the editor of the organization's newsletter, *The Quan* who in turn published it. Immediately, I began to receive phone calls and letters from former prisoners, some of whom only wished to apologize for failing to remember the name of a comrade.

At about the same time, I was able to make contact with three living siblings of Martin Eisenman, all of whom resided in Florida. Although they tried to give me helpful information, much of it was conflicting data. Later, a brother and one sister were able to provide his Army serial number, but only after I had accessed it through my own research. Now I had something to go on. Later one of the sisters found correspondence from the War Department which revealed very little new information, but would have been of great value in the beginning of my search. She did, however, send me photographs and copies of letters, one of

which Martin had sent to a family friend. This letter also provided much information on his route to his deployment and his duties before the Japanese attack.

Of the 83 survivors of the *Shinyo Maru*, about 24 were still alive in 1995 when I made the inquiry. I think I heard from most of them. Eventually I received a letter from a fellow prisoner whose imprisonment followed the same path as

my cousin. He was the only living survivor who started out in the 17th Pursuit Squadron, as did my cousin, and ended up in the same POW camp. In all likelihood his transfers from prison to prison, forced labor sites, and then to the contingent that went onto the *Shinyo Maru*, would suggest that my cousin's sad odyssey mirrored that of this brave survivor. Although he did not remember Martin, his exhaustive account of his own movements from the time of surrender in 1942 until the time they were torpedoed convinced me that I had unraveled the unknown years of Martin's imprisonment.

In addition to survivors I was also contacted by researchers, like myself, who were family members trying to document

the circumstances of a non-survivor's service. These contacts proved to be very valuable as they led me to first-hand accounts that were published in news magazines soon after war ended. One of the articles was even illustrated by the survivor who gave both a pictorial and written account of his ordeal during internment in the labor camps and finally aboard the *Shinyo Maru*.

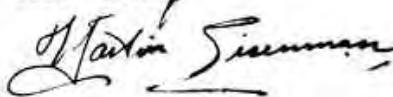
I also learned my cousin's final fate. In late 1944 these di-

Iba, Zambales, P.I.
July 10, 1941

Dear Mrs. McCabe:

Received your letter last week and was more than glad to hear from you, and I was also very pleased to know that everyone is in good health. Thanks for the pictures you sent me of my brother and sisters. Herby is sure turning out to be a big boy. A few words about myself and the Philippines, the trip took forty five days; that is leaving from New York City, stopping one day at Charleston, S.C., Panama twenty four hours, San Francisco one week, Honolulu one day and Guam also. I also saw Wake Island from the ship. The weather was fine all of the way over. In Honolulu I visited Waikiki Beach, to be it was just another beach, and far from the best. I have been in the Philippine Islands eight months and haven't seen as much as I'd like to. However, I have visited many interesting places of interest in and within the vicinity of Manila. As you already know I am with the 17th Pursuit Squadron and my work being an airplane mechanic, which I enjoy being very much. I arrived in Iba several days ago and it is very enchanting to see. Iba is located 160 miles north of Manila in the province of Zambales along the China Sea. This is proving to be very interesting to me, as this is the first time I have ever been so far away from civilization. We are going to be here approximately three months so I shall have a grand time seeing all the sights. There has been a rumor that we may go to China but nothing is certain as yet. I have nothing more to write in particular so wishing you the best of luck and health I remain as ever

Your Friend,





Two North American A-27's of the 17th Pursuit Squadron at Nichols Field, Phillipines, 1941

lapidated freighters were attempting, as the American forces were about to retake the Philippines, to remove the prisoners back to Japan for forced labor before the Allied forces could liberate them. On Sept. 7, 1944, at 4:51 pm. the freighter *Shinyo Maru*, on which Martin Eisenman was being carried, along with 749 other Americans and Brits, was torpedoed by the American submarine *Paddle*, a few miles off the coast of Mindanao. The crew of the US submarine had no idea that the freighter's hold was full of American & British prisoners crammed like sardines in 120 degree heat. Martin Eisenman, from accounts I received, did not die in the initial explosion but was shot in the water by his Japanese captors.

Of the 750 prisoners in the hold of the *Shinyo Maru*, 83 survived making it to shore and were rescued. They were carried on the backs of Filipino partisans, to high mountain village hideouts. The Fil-

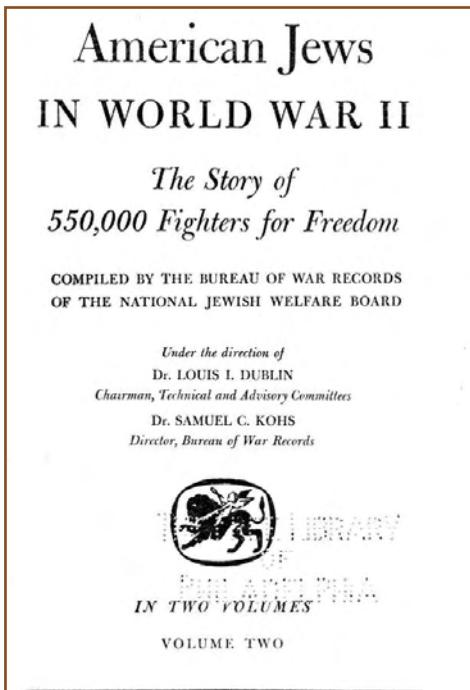
ipino guerilla fighters were in wireless communication with American forces, and were able to alert the US Navy. Twenty-one days later, the 83 survivors were once again carried by the Filipino partisans down from their mountain sanctuary to a "fleet" of tiny Filipino boats called "bancas" where they were then taken out to a waiting American submarine off the beach. Ultimately, they were taken to Australia for immediate care and then back to military hospitals in the U.S. nearer to their homes and families.

In conclusion, I think it is safe to say that had I relied only on available government documentation available in the 1990's about WW II fatalities, I would not have been nearly as successful in unraveling the true story of Martin Eisenman and his ultimate sacrifice. Sharing my research dilemma with other JGSGP members and employing the strategies suggested provided me with a much richer and more detailed account of his WWII service. ❖

Lois Sernoff is a member of JGSGP and Chair of our New Member Orientation.

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Postscript to Alternate World War II Research Strategies
I first conducted this research before the advent of Google. Today a Google search yields lists of such organizations formed by veterans from all different branches and areas of WWII service.



•Eisenman, Martin, Sgt., Wilmington, A, PH

Martin Eisenman in American Jews in WWII, with the note "PH" indicating his receipt of a Purple Heart.

After the advent of Google a fast search immediately yielded a short list (but there are many more.)

Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge Organization
<http://www.battleofthebulge.org/>
The 70th Infantry Division Association Home Page
<http://www.trailblazersww2.org/>
P-47 Thunderbolt Pilots Association
<http://www.p47pilots.com/>
86th Blackhawk Division Association, Inc.
<http://www.86blackhawkdiv.org/index.htm>
Air Force Veterans - 13th AF of WWII
<http://www.13afvets.org/>
The 494th Bomb Group (H) Association, Inc.
http://home.att.net/~kelleys_kobras
The Cottontails - <http://www.450thbg.com/>
11th Armored Division Association
<http://www.11tharmoreddivision.com>
USS Block Island CVE-21 CVE-106
<http://www.ussblockisland.org/>
Friends of the U.S. Second Infantry Division (WW II)
<http://home.thirdage.com/military/friends2idww2/>
Official website of the 65th Infantry Division who served in WWII in Rhineland and Central Europe.
<http://www.65thdiv.com/>
The 78th Division Veterans Association
<http://www.78thdivision.org/>
U.S.S. San Francisco Association
<http://www.geocities.com/mariwether.geo/sfa.html>
44th Division - 71st Regiment Site
<http://www.angelfire.com/la2/44thdivision/index.html>
723rd Railway Operating Battalion
<http://members.tripod.com/USMRR/index.html>
314th Infantry Association WW II, Inc.
<http://home.earthlink.net/~jwitmeyer/314Reunion/>
Organization of veterans of the 314th Infantry Regiment and 79th Reconnaissance Troop, 79th Infantry Division, World War II.
100th Infantry Division -
<http://www.100thww2.org/>
336th Air Service Squadron WWII Association
<http://home.earthlink.net/~drummer102/>
Pearl Harbor Survivors Association, Chapter 11, Rio Grande Valley, Texas
<http://westernwebs.net/pearlharbor>

SYNAGOGUE MEMORIAL TABLETS - AN OVERLOOKED GENEALOGICAL RESOURCE

by Shalom Bronstein with Harry D. Boonin

There is a widespread Jewish custom of memorializing deceased relatives by placing a plaque with their names in the synagogue. The plaques are attached to larger memorial boards and on the *yahrzeit* (the anniversary of the death) of the individual, a small light is turned on next to the name. Genealogists have generally overlooked these plaques as a potential resource for serious study. Even synagogues do not recognize the historical importance of these memorials.

Some years ago when Harry Boonin of Philadelphia was doing research for his book *The Life and Times of Congregation Keshet Israel*, he analyzed that synagogue's memorial tablets. There he found listings for five members of the Blatt family, all with the same date of death, 13 Adar 1942. Pages 138 to 142 in the book are devoted to the story behind these plaques. From these listings, Harry was able to trace the fate of the memorialized family members who had perished in the Holocaust. He subsequently located information on the person who placed these listings in the synagogue. Since the names on the board included the Hebrew name of the father, he was able to determine that those listed were siblings and their mother.

I have consulted with Harry in writing this article, and he has graciously agreed to add the following comments. They reflect the vital importance of memorial tablets and what we can learn from them in pursuing our research.

“The Keshet Israel Congregation was begun in 1889 in an old building constructed as a church in 1793. It is located at 4th and Lombard Streets in Philadelphia. I do not know when the first *yahrzeit* tablets were erected. The tablet we are discussing is made of wood, and each individual plaque is wooden. The two boards were dedicated and presumably put in place by being nailed on the wall in 1944. Because of the scarcity of metal during the war, they used wood. The names were scribed by a calligrapher, and the pencil lines are still visible. The entries for the Blatt family include an Arabic numeral 13, the Hebrew month Adar written in Hebrew followed by the year 1942 (in Arabic numerals). Since the board indicated that the five Blatt family members all died on that same date, I came to several erroneous conclusions. First, I wrongly believed that all of them died on the recorded day.

They did not. Secondly, I wrongly thought they died in Philadelphia, or nearby, since most, if not all, the other named people on the board died in Philadelphia or its vicinity. This was a bad mistake. But the more I looked at the date, the more I thought something was odd. The dates had the month and day in Hebrew but the year was not according to the Hebrew calendar. I initially thought they had all been killed in a bus crash in the city; but there was no record of any such crash on that date according to the Gregorian calendar. Also, I had found members of another family at the synagogue who had died on the same date, and they had been killed when a boiler exploded in their store several blocks from the synagogue.



The more I looked at the date, the more peculiar it appeared. The mixture of Arabic numerals with a Hebrew month struck me as strange. Then it hit me. The year recorded was 1942. What if the Blatts did not die in America? What if they were murdered in the Holocaust? I knew Shalom Bronstein for some years and that he was familiar with the Arolsen records at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem. I asked him to see if there were any Blatts murdered on that date during the Holocaust. This led to significant findings – we now knew the name of the donor of the plaques, who the people were who were memorialized, where and when each of them perished during the Holocaust, and finally we located and spoke to surviving family members in Israel. The importance of the oddity, I think, is it got me to think outside the conventional research pattern. Once one starts thinking, instead of operating on automatic pilot, strange things can happen and one can achieve remarkable results.”

Researchers, familiar with the demographic changes that transformed urban neighborhoods that once teemed with Jewish life into areas devoid of Jews, may believe that if a synagogue was sold and is no longer functioning, that the memorial tablets have also disappeared. While this may be the case in many situations, it is not always so. Arthur Rosenthol, a JGSGP member, who has researched and recorded former synagogues in Philadelphia, found that the tablets were still in place some fifty years after one synagogue, Tikvas Israel at 41st and Viola, was sold to a church. The church had covered them over with a red velvet cloth out of respect and to protect them and is willing to turn

them over to the Jewish community. One should check with local Jewish genealogical societies to find out if there are successor congregations in the suburbs, or if other synagogues added the closed synagogues’ memorials to their collection. The former synagogues may have merged with other synagogues, and they in turn have taken over maintaining their memorial tablets. This is certainly true with both urban and suburban congregations of Philadelphia. On a recent tour of the former Jewish Quarter of Philadelphia, led by Harry, he discovered that the memorial plaques of B’nai Reuben synagogue, which closed in 1956, were now housed in the Vilna Shul. Local Jewish genealogical societies should be encouraged to find out if synagogues in their area have in their possession memorial tablets of now defunct synagogues. If they do, this fact should be publicized in their local community or synagogue bulletins. Unfortunately, synagogues are not fully cognizant of both the historical and genealogical importance of their memorial tablets. I believe I am safe in assuming that very few synagogues have computerized the names recorded on their memorial tablets for easy and wide-spread accessibility. This could prove a most worthwhile genealogical endeavor.

I recently spent an afternoon studying the memorial tablets at Temple Beth Hillel Beth El located in Wynnewood, a suburb of Philadelphia. This congregation absorbed the former West Philadelphia Jewish Community Center in 1960, the year it closed its doors, and then later merged with Congregation Beth El in 1970. Both of the congregations that were absorbed were, at an earlier point, large flourishing Conservative synagogues that for decades figured prominently in Philadelphia Jewish life. Beth El was founded in the early 1900s, and the West Philadelphia Jewish Community Center was established some twenty years later. Their imposing buildings now serve as churches. The memorial tablets of these synagogues are now housed in the chapel of Temple Beth Hillel Beth El.

I am confident that my discoveries can be repeated in other locales were others to analyze synagogue memorial tablets carefully. The two synagogues which were absorbed used completely different styles for their plaques. For example, in many of the Beth El plaques, most of which are arranged alphabetically, the year of birth appears on the left followed by the name of the deceased in English usually followed by the Hebrew date of death in English. In comparison, plaques from the West Philadelphia Jewish Community Center had the name in English and Hebrew with the date of death in English and Hebrew. There were also variations and exceptions to these generalizations in both sets of memorial boards.



Together, the plaques of Beth Hillel Beth El number in the upper hundreds. For the genealogist, each style has its benefits and drawbacks. One set has the year of birth, a most important item of information for our research, but it does not include the name of the person's father. This eliminates the possibility of finding family relationships through the patronym. The other set has the father's name in Hebrew and English, making it easy to identify relationships. Most of the newer plaques of the present synagogue also list the Hebrew name of the mother. Including the mother's name is something that Sephardic Jews have done for centuries but has only become the practice in some Ashkenazi synagogues in more recent years.

In reviewing the Beth El plaques, the earliest date of birth I saw listed was for Meyer Weitzel, who was born in 1808 and who died in 1893. Charles M. Solomon was born in 1839 and died in 1919. There were 11 people born in the 1840s, 20 born in the 1850s, 30 born in the 1860s, 26 born in the 1870s, 23 born in the 1880s and 13 born in the 1890s. One plaque did not have the year of birth but the year of death was 1874. Also listed were members of the United States Armed Forces who died in World War I and World War II.

The plaques of the West Philadelphia Jewish Community Center were not arranged in alphabetical order but many appeared to be grouped by family. Even though brothers and sisters had different family names, siblings could be ascertained by the Hebrew name of the father. While a number of the plaques memorialized people who died in the 19th century, most were for people who died in the first half of the 20th century. Included with the special notation of a star before their name were soldiers who lost their lives in World War I and in World War II.

One double plaque had the additional information that Sgt. Morris H. Busch lost his life in France in 1944. The Hebrew on the plaques provides us with another important piece of information, informing us whether the person was a Kohen

or a Levi. This aids in verifying family connections. When I discovered that male members of a family from my paternal grandmother's home town with the same family name were Levites, I knew we were related. Conversely, when the male members of a family from my maternal grandfather's hometown that had the same family name



were not Levites, I knew that we were not related. My consultations with Harry Boonin added a further dimension to genealogical research on synagogue memorial boards, as he relayed that, "In the room at Keshet Israel where daily services are conducted are the more recent yahrzeit boards for members of the synagogue and their families. All except one are from Keshet Israel. That board contains one hundred names from Sharei Israel, 4th and Porter Street, South Philadelphia. That congregation closed some thirty years ago. I have a copy of the names and the dates of death. The yahrzeit board was erected at Sharei Israel in 1962. Dates of death are mainly from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. The board is in the back of the room, and I did not examine it closely for many years. Only when I finally did, I realized it was from a different congregation." Harry continued, "Later I was to learn, at least with respect to the old immigrant congregations that closed, that many of them donated their Torahs to synagogues in Israel. Many gave artifacts to museums and archives. But what is done with yahrzeit boards when shuls close? I suggest you might want to take a look around your own temple or synagogue and see if you have closely examined everything in the building and are familiar with everything. You might be surprised by what you find. Of course, you can poke your nose in other nearby synagogues just to see what they have. You never know."

In reviewing the plaques I came across another fact that researchers must consider. If a person's English first name is Biblical, it does not necessarily mean that the person's Hebrew name is the same as his/her Biblical English first

name. The first name in the following list is the individual's name as it appears on the plaques in Temple Beth Hillel Beth El in English; following that name is the variety of Hebrew first names I found listed among the plaques: Abraham David – Zev Wolf; Asher – Abraham; Benjamin – Baruch, Ben Zion, Berel, Dov, Israel; Daniel – David; David – Tuvia; Emanuel – Meir; Hyman – Hillel; Israel – Isar; Jacob – Asher, Joshua, Raphael; Joseph – Jacob, Jonah, Isaac, Zusman; Joshua – Joel; Michael – Mordechai; Nathan – Naftali, Nahum, Nehemiah, Nisan; Samuel – Isaiah, Israel, Nathaniel, Shabtai, Shachna, Shalom, Shmaryah, Simon, Solomon, Zalman; Solomon – Israel, Zalman. For women's names I found Naomi – Nechama; Sarah – Tcharna and Rebecca – Baila and Pessa. It should be noted that this list is far from being complete as I did not check all the hundreds of plaques. The above list covers only a portion of the memorial plaques located at only one synagogue.

One of my early 'encounters' with *yahrzeit* tablets was in the first congregation where I served as rabbi (Buffalo, New York in 1970). There, at Shabbat services, it was the custom to read the names of those people listed on our plaques whose *yahrzeits* were to be observed during the coming week. As the plaques were in the back of the sanctuary those with the lights on were clearly visible to me from the pulpit. I read the names of three people, and I noticed that the three lights were burning next to each other. I was new in the congregation and did not know the names of all of the people but one of our regular Shabbat attendees had the same last name. After services I walked over to the plaques to see the three names and asked this gentleman if they were relatives. I had never paid any attention to the fact that he spoke accented English as did many in the congregation. He replied, "Yes, they were my children from before the war."

Indeed, the *yahrzeit* tablets in our synagogues and temples tell many stories. But time is short. If we do not pay heed to the stories they tell now, much will be lost. ❖

This article first appeared in "Avotaynu", Volume XXVII, Number 1 – Spring 2011. It is reprinted here with the permission of the authors and the publisher.

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WHAT'S IN A NAME

by Wolf Karo

It is an old story: A couple of Jews stand in line at Ellis Island to complete the immigration procedure. One turns to the other; "What is going to happen here?" "Well, they are probably going to ask you where you're from, what your name is, that sort of thing." "My name -- how am I going to explain to him how to write a name like Schlivowitzki?" "Just give him some nice simple name instead, like Silver or Gold." "Hmm, -- Silver, Gold, Silver, Gold..."

It is now his turn. "Name?" "Hmm. Hob Shon Fergessen." (I have already forgotten). "OK, move along. Next..." And so the Yid "Sean Ferguson," complete with *tzitzis* (fringed garment) and *payos*, (earlocks) entered the "Goldene Medina."

When his grandchildren started to do genealogy, they searched in vain from the Outer Hebrides to Lands' End for their grandfather's origin. If they had spent more time with their *zeydeh* (grandfather) they might have learned more about the facts of life in America.

This matter of changing a family name in America is so easy that we don't give it a second thought when we are asked "What was your name in the Old Country?" or "What was it before you shortened it?" This motivated me to work on the origin of my family name.

When I tell people that my name has not been shortened and that it is a pure, ancient, Hebrew name, they raise an eyebrow in disbelief. But it is true - well, sort of. In fact, depending on your point of view, it may have been lengthened. To make a short story long: My family name goes back to the Mishnah (about the second century CE). There we find a Rabbi Hanina Karo (a/k/a Hananiah, but not to be confused with R. Haninah The Great) at the [rabbinical] Academy [of Yavneh].

At that time, it was the custom when teaching Mishnah and Gemara to only quote bits and pieces of the Holy Scripture as required. R. Hanina, however, thought that he should teach the close reading of the plain text of the *T'nakh* (Hebrew Bible). This concept was called "Mikra", i.e. "to be (intensely) read". (By the way Mikra is pronounced like the "i" in fit.) Therefore he was called R. Hanina Karo, "Rabbi Hanina The Bible Reader or Bible Teacher."

When the head of the academy heard that Hanina was teaching Mikra, he was furious and said that Hanina couldn't do

this in the academy and fired him. This was probably the first case of a lock-out, or of a teacher - administration labor dispute over curricula ever recorded.

(Incidentally, the head of the academy was Rabban Gamliel II, a reputed autocrat. Among his many great accomplishments was the establishment and enforcement of the Hebrew calendar. Oh, I should also mention that R. Haninah was his son!)

To get back to my family name: it seems simple enough. The meaning of the name is clear, but it is the vocalization that presents problems. There are only three or four letters to my name. Yet there are two problems. One has to do with transliteration from Hebrew (or Yiddish) to the Latin alphabet, the other has to do with the intricacies of Hebrew grammar and orthography itself. Of course, the two are intertwined. In my copy of Mishnah T’anit (27b) the name is spelled רבי חנינא קרא

There were no vowel points at that time. Those had not really been established until the Masoretic system (the authoritative Hebrew text of the Jewish Bible regarded almost universally as the official version of the T’nakh) was developed about 800 CE. Since then, in fact to this day, the vowel points were frequently used along with those consonants that had served as pseudo-vowels. This confusing system is still used today in modern Hebrew, for beginning students of the language, prayer books, very important documents, etc. (in effect, depending on how you count, Hebrew actually has at least a dozen vowels plus silent letters.)

Hebrew grammar usually requires that a syllable start with a consonant and that there be a vowel along with most consonants. The vocalization of the consonants in my family name (all three or four of them) is a real problem. Therefore, the ק has to have a vowel. In this case, this may be an א, vocalized "A". In some versions of my name this actually exists. However, here it seems to be optional. But how do you vocalize the final א in the name?

I have a handwritten family tree from June 1952, done by the husband of my father's great aunt. (Figure 1). This family tree had originally been constructed by Rabbi Abraham Karo of the early 19th century with some addendum of the late 19th century. This document carries the family forward to Rabbi Joseph Chayim Caro (1800-1895), an uncle of my father's

grandfather. There the name is also spelled קרא

(It is interesting to note that this family tree mentions his sons in an addendum, but not his daughter Cecilia. This daughter left us with an interesting and important memoir of the life and activities of her father during the great political upheavals in 19th century Poland. It is very sad that so many rabbinical family trees don't mention the existence of daughters or wives. It is also sad that the copyist did not bring the family data up to his and our own time.) Here again, spelling of the consonants isn't much of a problem. The vocalization of an א after the ק is sort of optional and is pronounced "a" so it is not used here. It is the final aleph that is the problem.

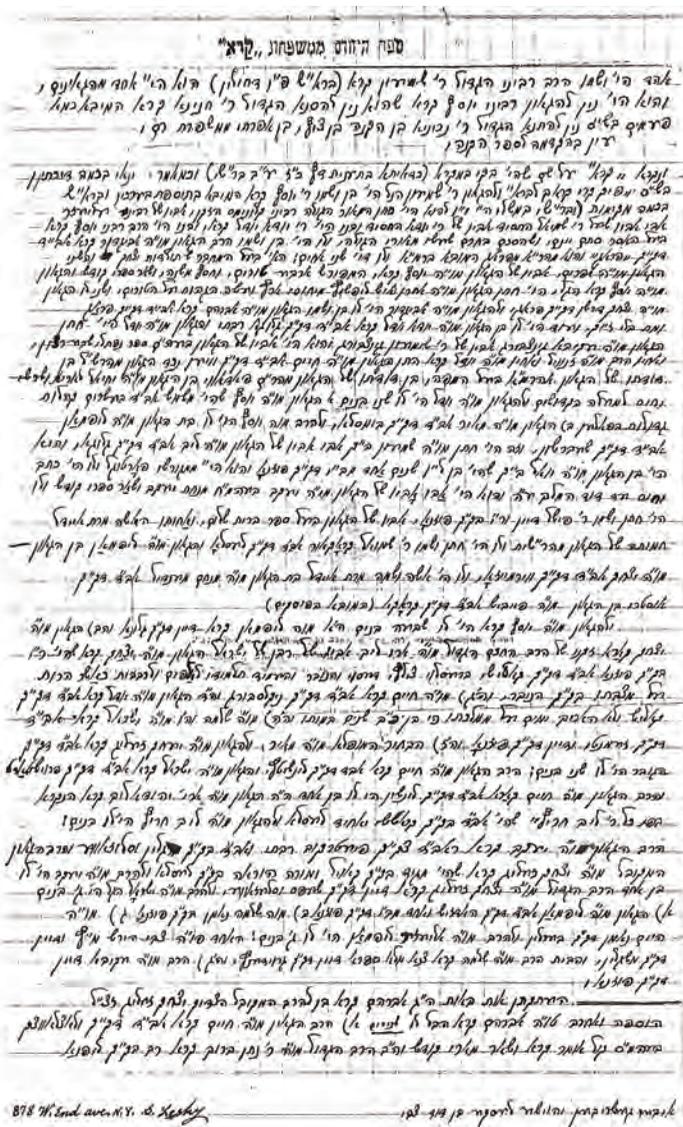


Fig. 1

Somewhere along the line a ך was substituted for this “aleph”: קארו This final ך may be pronounced either as "u" or as "o" (or "au" in German Ashkenazi, "oy" in Eastern

Europe), while an א might be vocalized as either "a" or "o". So, this final ם actually reflects a more accurate vocalization.

I have not yet been able to determine just when R. Hanina's final א was dropped and a ם put in its place. In transliterated form, there are K/Cara's and K/Caro's in many encyclopedias. Yet their Hebrew spelling is not given. For example, various encyclopedias show that there was a French Rabbi Joseph ben Shimon Kara, born between 1060 - 1070 CE, an associate of Rashi. There was a Shimon Kara of Frankfurt, Germany in the 13th century There was an Avigdor ben Isaac Kara of Prague (d. 1439). Heinrich Caro (b. Posen 1834, d. Dresden 1919), was technical director for BASF and is known for commercialization of synthetic indigo and the invention of "Caro's Acid". Nikodem Caro (b. Lodz 1872, d. Rome 1935) was the co-inventor of the cyanamide process of fixing nitrogen. Considering that I am also a chemist, I wonder whether there is a latent chemistry gene in the family! Also to be mentioned: the contemporary artist Sir Anthony Caro of the UK. THE Rabbi Joseph Karo, [the author of the gigantic "Bet Joseph" and (for young students) his abbreviated Cliff Notes known as the *Shulkhan Aruch* was born in 1488 in Toledo, Spain and died in Tzefat, Palestine in 1575. He spelled his name קארו.

In his Sephardic pronunciation, this would be very accurately: KARO. Figure 2 is a part of a letter signed by Joseph Karo, found in the Cambridge University Library. I cannot really read the hand-written Rabbinic script well. It looks to me that the signature in the lower right hand

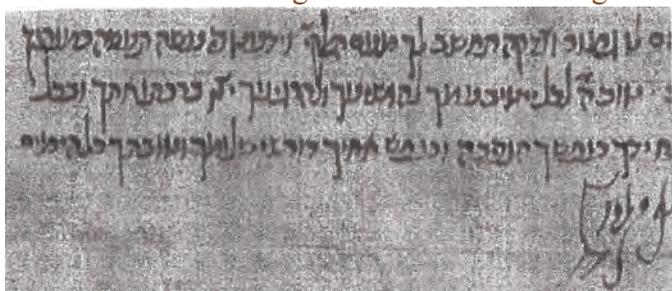


Fig. 2
Cambridge University Library, T-S 13J24.28

corner reads םרק. This at least confirms the reading of the end of the name as "o". So when Cambridge University reads the signature as "Karo"(with a K and an o), who am I to argue?!

The title page of Rabbi Karo's *Shulkhan Aruch*, edition of 1594 confirms this. (Figure 3 top of next column)



Fig. 3

put this into context, go back just a few years: The uncle of my grandfather, Alexander Karo, was Rabbi Joseph Chayim Caro of Wloclawek, Poland.(1800- April 21, 1895) pictured below.

Dr. Neil Rosenstein had sent me a copy of the title page of a collection of Rabbi Joseph Chaim Caro's sermons, (Figure 5). Note that here the name is spelled קרא. So the ultimate aleph is back! Of course, it may be that he was merely punning. The title is a citation from Isaiah 40,6: which reads: "Kol Omer K'ro" (A voice rings out, 'Proclaim...)



Fig. 4
Rabbi Joseph Chayim Caro

The entry in the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (1971) spells his name Caro. So it seems reasonable to me that the pronunciation of the final "o" is pretty well established and conformed by the 15th century usage shown above. I had

I thought that things were settled. Then I ran across some material that the noted genealogist Dr. Neil Rosenstein (author of *The Unbroken Chain*) had sent me after speaking at a JGSGP meeting. This helped me with tracing the more recent members of my family tree but I'm not sure that it didn't just add to the confusion. To



Fig. 5

thought that this had been the usage in my family. And yet, I found several Yiddish letters in which my father was addressed as Mr.

קארא. In other words we are essentially back to a variation of R. Haninah Karo's spelling.

Well, I thought I'd check my mother's K'tuvah (marriage document). There I could not find my father's last name at

all. However, in her T'nayim (the document confirming the engagement of my father and mother) he spelled his name קארא. So, we are back to a version of the original spelling of R. Haninah (with an optional א). But I must say that I like the version of R. Joseph Karo better קארו.

Now as to the transliteration of the first letter of our name - ק. There really is no question but a ק is a hard "K" or possibly a "Q" sound. While our family lived in Poland, there was no problem. In Polish, the letter "C" is pronounced "S". In fact, I understand that in Spain the letter "C" may be pronounced something like "S" or even "Th." So, while we were in Poland, ק was simply K, and we all very happily were Karo's. Things were different in the West. Judging by innumerable entries in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Caro seems to be common.

When my uncle and his wife and their oldest daughter migrated to the US in the 1920s, my aunt Frieda, who was a pre-Betty Friedan feminist, thought that it would be more elegant, more modern, more PC, and more Western to change the initial K to C. Little did she realize that years before, already in the late 1800s, the official Prussian dictionary of the German language (*Duden*, 1988.) changed virtually all nouns beginning with C to K! So there went the concept of modernizing the name. My three female cousins actually retain the Caro spelling as a middle name even after their assorted marriages. I won't even comment

on the pronunciation of our name in upstate New York where we grew up or how to pronounce "Karo Syrup". Just to show how confusing things get: Dr. S. Groneman, in his *Genealogische StudienHanover*; (1913), gives a history of a Rabbi (Isaak) Selig Karo (with a K) of Hanover, Germany, who died in 1755. In a footnote the spelling is Caro. A few pages later, Groneman reproduces the Hebrew inscription of his gravestone. There it is shown as being in the German cemetery records as "R. Selig Caro". In other words the same author uses both spellings. Of course, the first statement, since it was published after the Duden reform, may be expected to use the more modern spelling with a K.

There is a Yiddish aphorism: "He is so stupid, he can spell the name Noah (in Hebrew) with seven mistakes." Since the name consists of only two letters, to spell the name with seven more or less legitimate errors is not easy. Over the years, I did manage to do it once, but "Hob Shon Fergessen". When you now apply this concept to my name with four consonants, each of which requires a vowel, and there are 13 vowels or so in Hebrew, not counting silent letters, musical notations, and accents, we are faced with quite a task. I feel that the best Hebrew version of the name is the spelling my cousins in Israel are using קארו. ❖

Postscript: A little while ago, I was rummaging through a used book store. There, on a back shelf, was a book entitled *Caro*, by Bernard Packer, (Publisher: E. P. Dutton & Co., New York, 1975). Naturally, I promptly bought it. It was only a quarter or so, a bargain for genealogical material. It is a pretty good adventure story of a pursuit of a Nazi war criminal by its hero, Dr. Caro, through the wilds of Latin America. The hero actually uses a variety of names. Toward the end, he is revealed as Wolf Karo! (To the best of my knowledge, my name is unique in the United States. And in Israel there is only one, as far as I know: my first cousin Ze'ev Karo, and Ze'ev is Hebrew for Wolf.) Go figure.

Wolf Karo is a long-time member of JGSGP. He can be reached through the editor of Chronicles.

A LABOR DAY TRIBUTE IN HONOR OF NATHAN WERTHEIMER

by Stanley R. Sandler

My mother, Blima Marium Thau (her Polish name) told me that her uncle, Nathan Wertheimer, paid for her ship passage to the USA. Her passenger manifest confirmed this as well as the fact that she arrived at the Port of New York in 1923 and was going to Nathan's home where he lived with his wife, my great aunt, Sadie Thau Wertheimer.

I became interested in finding out more about my great uncle after my older brother, Fred (z"l) told me that Nathan had come to my bris. Fred also mentioned that our great uncle was an important union leader in New York City and had worked for twenty years as a union organizer with Sidney Hillman, the head of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, which was part of a larger group called the Congress of Industrial Organizations (C.I.O). Nathan was also reputed to have been active in securing pension and welfare benefits for the Retail Clerks of the American Federation of Labor (A.F.L). Finally, Fred told me that there was a long obituary about Nathan in *The New York Times* which described his personal accomplishments and his family. This obituary became an important lead. Nathan Wertheimer died unexpectedly from a heart attack on July 31, 1952.

After locating *The New York Times Obituary Index* in the Newspaper Department at the Philadelphia Free Library I found Nathan Wertheimer's obituary in the August 1, 1952 edition (1). It covered some of the same facts that I just mentioned as well as additional information about his family: "survived by his widow, Sadie Wertheimer and her four children: (Mrs.) Dorothy Springer, (Mrs.) Esther Robinson, Joseph and Herbert Wertheimer, and two grandchildren (the son and daughter of Esther Robinson)." The death notice indicated that the funeral services were to be held at "The Riverside" at 76th Street and Amsterdam Avenue in Manhattan on Friday, August 1, 1952.

I subsequently obtained a copy of Nathan's death certificate from the Department of Vital Records in New York City and learned that he was buried in Mt. Lebanon Cemetery in Glendale (Queens), NY. I asked the cemetery office for the locations of his grave and those of other family members as well as photographs of the tombstones of Nathan and Sadie Wertheimer. I was thus able to obtain their Hebrew names which would have been how they were listed on the ship manifest.

I also requested the office staff to provide the names of the next of kin who were the cemetery contacts. They said that two family members were listed but would not disclose their addresses or telephone numbers. Instead they suggested I write a letter to each contact, send both letters to the cemetery office, and they would in turn forward them on my behalf to those two family members. I wrote the letters on August 19, 2003 and received my first response about ten days later from my cousin Herbert Wertheimer, a son of Nathan Wertheimer, who lived in Long Island, NY. He told me about his nephew (the recipient of my other letter) and his family who currently live in Cherry Hill, NJ. Since then I have been in frequent contact with them and have developed a relationship with these newly found relatives. Unfortunately, my cousin, Herb Wertheimer, passed away in June 2007.

In order to get more information about Uncle Nathan I later contacted the AFL-CIO library in Washington, D.C. which sent me two relevant publications (2, 3), one of which, *Who's Who in Labor* (2), contained his biography and turned out to be a virtual gold mine! He had been International Vice President of the Retail Clerks International Protective Association (affiliated with the AFL) and married my aunt, Sadie Thau, on February 12, 1897. The biography went on to list the names of their children and filled in gaps about his birthplace (Austria), his birth date (December 12, 1887), and his parents' names (Joseph Wertheimer and Dina Haberman Wertheimer). I also learned about Uncle Nathan's hobbies, the charitable organizations in which he was active, other professional career activities, and that he was a US citizen.

A further search indicated that Nathan and Sadie Wertheimer were both brought over to the USA in 1906 by my mother's uncle (Aaron Fernbach) in 1906. Armed with all this new material I was able to add the Wertheimer branch to my family genealogy as well as information about the Thau, Haberman, and Fernbach family lines. ❖

References:

1. New York Times, Friday, August 1, 1952, page 17, Column 3.
2. Dr. John R. Steelman, ed., *Who's Who in Labor; The Authorized Biographies of the Men and Women Who Lead Labor in the United States and Canada and Those Who Deal with Labor* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1946), 372-373.
3. *The Retail Clerks, International Advocate*, 50:9 (September, 1952)

Author Stanley R. Sandler is an active member of JGSGP and co-chair, with his wife Shelda, of the recent JGSGP Genealogical Fair.

Contact Stanley at stanshel@msn.com

BREAKING DOWN BRICK WALLS

A *Chronicles* feature where members submit their most difficult genealogical problems and ask the community of genealogists and readers of *Chronicles* for assistance in solving them. Please respond to the *Chronicles* editor by email: editor@jgsgp.org so your suggestions for breaking down these brick walls can be shared with all our readers.

A few years ago I discovered a possible relative (Mark M.) from the Pages of Testimony at the Yad Vashem website. We communicated several times but weren't able to find a common relative. His father (and possibly his paternal grandfather) was born in the same town where my grandfather and great grandparents lived which leads me to believe that there is a connection between us. His father would've been a contemporary of my maternal grandfather.

By the way Mark M is in his late 70s and resides in Montreal.

Can you suggest some other means I could use to try to establish a more convincing connection?

Evan Fishman
ebf2001@comcast.net

My grandmother, Pauline/Pearl Newman Wagman died in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in October 1912, leaving my grandfather, Isaac Wagman, with a house full of children. Isaac remarried Sarah Ginsburg, age 42, a widow in April 1913. On her marriage license application, she said that her husband died "1-1/2 years ago," or I suppose late in 1911. She said that she lived at 1039 S. 3rd St., Philadelphia, PA. The family story was that Isaac could not handle the children; that he sent for Sarah from the "old country". I do not believe this because of the information on the marriage license application including her signature in English. I did a thorough search of the 1910 census and could not find a man named Ginsburg/Ginsberg, with a wife Sarah who would fit the description. My only recollection of her was that she was hated by Isaac's children - she was the stepmother. My brick wall: - Who was Sarah Ginsburg? - Was Ginsburg her maiden name or married name? - Were Sarah or her late husband relatives of Isaac or Pauline/Pearl?

Selma Neubauer
selmanew@verizon.net

CORRECTIONS AND AMPLIFICATIONS

The article "T458: Old INS Correspondence & Case Files at the National Archives," published in *Chronicles* Vol. 28-1 Summer 2011 (page 10), was previously published in a more complete form in *Avotaynu*, Vol. XXIV, No. 1, Spring 2008. It was reprinted in *Chronicles* with the permission of the author, James Gross and publisher, Avotaynu, Inc.

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If you're planning to attend the conference in DC, please notify Evan Fishman, email: editor@jgsgp.org or phone 1-856-667-2077. We want to inform all JGSGP members of the time and place for an informal gathering during the conference.

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Upcoming Meetings & Other Dates of Interest

Monday, September 12, 2011 7:30 PM Congregation Keneseth Israel, Elkins Park, PA.

Speaker: Dr. Nathan Reiss, a member of the speakers bureau of the Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey

Topic: Cousin Marriages in History and Jewish Custom

There are a number of features that distinguish Jewish genealogy from that of other groups, including the high probability that many of our ancestors were closely related to each other. A century or more ago, marriages between close cousins occurred much more frequently than they do today.

Dr. Reiss will discuss how this practice has helped make Jewish genealogy unique.

Delaware County / Main Line Affiliate

Sunday, September 18, 2011 - 1:30 p.m. at Martins Run Lifecare Community, 11 Martins Run, Media, PA

Speaker: Dr. Mark Weiss Shulkin, Author and Editor

Topic: "100 Years in America" - Book Signing to follow

Sunday, October 30, 2011 - Same time, Same place - Speaker: TBA