

CHRONICLES

JOURNAL OF THE JEWISH GENEALOGICAL
SOCIETY OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA

דברי הימים

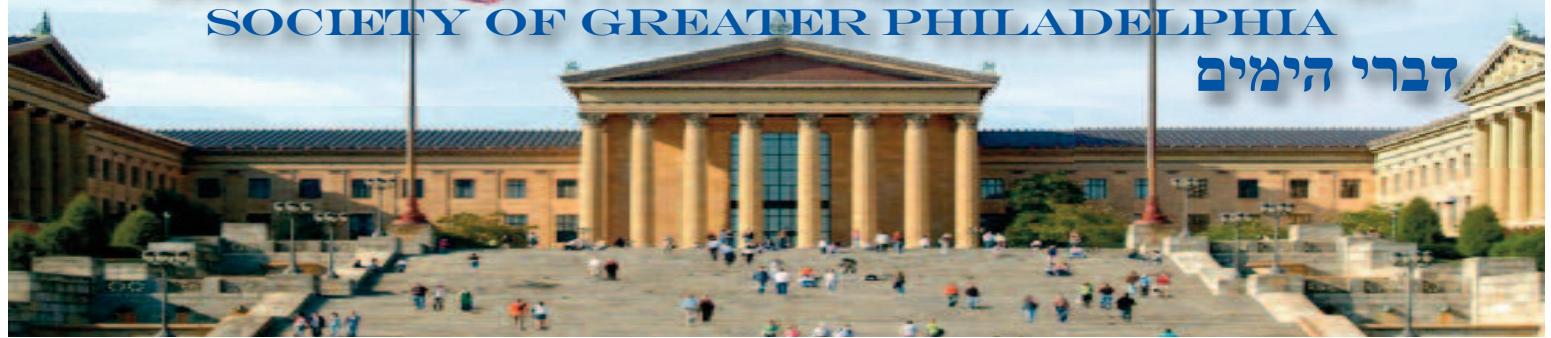


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Commentary

- 1 Reflections from Your *Chronicles* Team
- 2 JGSGP Contact Information
- 4 Welcome to New Members
- 4 President's Message
 - Death Begets (Genealogical) Life**
 - 5 A Cemetery Has Life
 - Merle Kastner*
 - 7 A New Era for an Abandoned Cemetery
 - Rachael Griffith with Jill Cooper*
 - 10 No Longer Ghosts
 - Linda Ewall-Krocke*
 - 11 Serock, Poland Cemetery Project and My Trip to Poland
 - Jeffrey Barnett*
 - 14 Rabbinic Royalty in the Family
 - Joan Pollak*
 - 16 Something Had to Be Done
 - Reprinted from the (Scranton, PA) Times-Tribune*
 - 18 Why Nobody's Buried Beneath This Tombstone in the Middle of Northern Liberties
 - Paulina Reso*
 - 20 Jewish Burial Registers from PJAC Holdings
 - Jessica Lydon*

Family Businesses

- 22 ATD-American Company Nears its Fourth Generation of Family -Run Success
 - Diane Mastrull*

- 24 A Family's Legacy Restored
 - Arlene Goldfus Lutz*

Meeting Summaries

- 27 February Meeting Summary
 - Linda Ewall-Krocke*
- 28 March Meeting Summary
 - Evan Fishman*

Brick Wall Queries

- 29 Wanted: Dead or Alive
 - Linda Ewall-Krocke*
- 30 Where is My Great Grandmother Buried?
 - Bobbi Schwartz-Biederman*

Techniques, Tools & Tips

- 31 Using the Veterans Administration to Obtain Records on Deceased Veterans
 - James Gross*
- 34 35th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy
- 34 JGSGP Speakers Bureau
- 35 Membership & Renewal Form
- 36 JGSGP Calendar & Reminders

REFLECTIONS FROM YOUR CHRONICLES TEAM

Spring 2015



Barry Levinson's 1990 film, "Avalon", captures the growth, tensions, and assimilation of an extended Jewish family living in Baltimore during the 1940s and 1950s. One element the film projects to which I readily relate is the institution of the family circle. During my childhood and well into my teen years, I attended monthly family circle meetings of my mother's maternal side which were held in a hall in Hillside, New Jersey. Eight siblings, born between 1892 and 1912, formed the nucleus of this amalgam of individuals. Together with their spouses, their children (consisting of nineteen first cousins), the spouses of those nineteen first cousins, and their grandchildren, we convened to play out our lives on a more informal, everyday basis than official family celebrations such as weddings, Bar Mitzvahs, and funerals.

The eight siblings grew up in Newark, New Jersey, and many of them still lived there or in the immediate environs. The family circle also included a contingent of cousins from Brooklyn. I never knew precisely how they were related, but they shared the same surname. One can imagine the sheer numbers; potentially eighty people, covering three generations, could have shown up at a given meeting!

At any family gathering, smaller groups develop, often along generational lines. I didn't have much to do with my first cousins once removed. When you're eight years old, even a five-year age difference seems enormous.

(Continued on pg. 3)

CHRONICLES

JOURNAL OF THE JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA

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 / postal code address.

Annual Dues (January 1 - Dec. 31)

Individual..... \$25
Family of two, per household.....\$35

Membership Applications / Renewals and Payments
to: JGSGP • 1657 The Fairway, #145
Jenkintown, PA 19046

Questions about membership status should be
directed to membership@jgsgp.org

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: editor@jgsgp.org 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 Vice President - Membership with your updated email address to ensure on-time delivery.

Copyright © 2014 All Rights Reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior written permission of The Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Philadelphia. <http://www.jgsp.org/>

EDITORIAL BOARD

Editor - Evan Fishman - editor@jgsgp.org

Graphics & Design - Ed Flax - ejflax@gmail.com

Associate Editors:

Felicia Mode Alexander - fmode@verizon.net

Elaine Ellison - ekellison@navpoint.com

Marge Farbman - margefarb@aol.com

Ann Kauffman - kauffmanj982@aol.com

Cindy Meyer - cfrogs@aol.com

OFFICERS

President: Fred Blum president@jgsgp.org

Vice President - Programs:

Mark Halpern - programs@jgsgp.org

Vice President - Membership:

Susan Neidich - membership@jgsgp.org

Vice President:

Walter Spector - educonser@comcast.net

Treasurer:

Barry Wagner - barryswagner@comcast.net

Immediate Past President:

Mark Halpern - mark@halpern.com

Trustee: Joel Spector - jlspector@aol.com

Trustee: Harry D. Boonin - harryboonin@gmail.com

COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Hospitality: Judy Becker - jbecker209@gmail.com

New Member Orientation

Lois Sernoff - jglois@verizon.net

Publicity: Jack Weinstein - jwtv@juno.com

Russian Special Interest Group

David Brill - brilldr@comcast.net

South Jersey Affiliate:

Bernard Cedar - bernardcedar@yahoo.com

Speakers Bureau:

Shelda & Stan Sandler - stanshel@msn.com

Webmaster:

Jim Meyer - webmaster@jgsgp.org

Correction: A note of thanks to "eagle eyed" Daphnah Sage of JGS of Greater Boston for finding a typo in our last issue, (Vol 31-4.) We neglected to place the page number for the photo quiz #5 answer below the question. The answer was in this box, as our regular readers would have guessed. Our quiz is on hiatus for this issue and will return in Vol. 32-2, summer 2015 issue.

(“Reflections” from pg. 1) Most of my mother’s first cousins were adults whom I respected in the same way as I respected my parents. In turn I held her aunts and uncles on a pedestal, just as I did my own grandparents. While I knew everyone by name, I related primarily to my second cousins who were closer to my own age.

Fast forward to the week I recently spent on vacation in Deerfield Beach, Florida. A number of cousins from family circle days now live in the area encompassing Miami-Dade and Broward counties. Part of my agenda during this winter respite was to reconnect with some of them. Armed with a rental car and excellent directions, I drove to North Miami Beach to visit with Marilyn and her husband, Larry whom I had seen only once since the unveiling of my grandmother’s tombstone in 1968! Marilyn is only five years older than I, but we had never interacted during family circle meetings. I did, however, fondly remember occasions when she and her younger sister visited my family at our home. During the course of four hours, my cousins and I revisited the special years when the family circle was active. Being with them was very affirming; I was finally establishing a viable connection. I’ll admit that one of the intentions for this visit was to hear Marilyn’s perspective on the various relatives. Although she and my mother were first cousins, she was young enough to be Mom’s daughter. That evening rekindled my appreciation for the closeness that emanated from that extended family. To be honest, disagreements arose, personalities clashed, and cliques developed, but almost everyone shared an inherent affinity and enduring cohesiveness.

Two days later I drove to Plantation to visit cousin Joan, who was my parents’ contemporary. Her husband, George, was another of Mom’s first cousins, but he died in the mid-1980s. Despite her widowhood and subsequent remarriage Joan maintained her connection with the family, and I last saw her in 2007 during a shiva visit for her brother-in-law, who was yet another of Mom’s first cousins. I had a long list of questions to ask Joan but was particularly interested in hearing her perceptions of the relationship between her mother-in-law and father-in-law. Her mother-in-law, Rachel, was my maternal grandmother’s sister. They had a particularly close relationship which was evident to everyone. Their respective husbands, who were brothers, however, had very different personalities, but I never knew either of them because they died when I was very young. I was fascinated by Joan’s stories about her in-laws. She was very forthcoming in her descriptions and didn’t mince words. Joan venerated her mother-in-law but couldn’t understand how she stayed married to her very domineering husband. He also had a mercurial relationship with his oldest son. According to Joan, if Harold (the son) said “green”, Samuel (his father) would say “white”. On top of that, they worked together in the family hardware business. I had heard about the friction between father and son but never knew about the uneven relationship between Rachel and Samuel. As I mentioned, I never personally knew Samuel, so I could never have witnessed any tension between my great aunt and great uncle. Perhaps my parents and other relatives also shielded me from that drama. Nevertheless, it was useful for me to hear this probably accurate portrayal even though it was less than complimentary.

I’m very glad I took the initiative to arrange these visits. I now have an adult connection with Marilyn, Larry, and Joan. Thanks to their fresh and candid perspectives, I can now visualize my extended family through a more realistic lens. These family stories and their interpretations provide the emotional flavor and gravitas, the venerable meat and potatoes, that constitute the essence of genealogy. ☺

While we consciously built our winter issue around the themes of the most recent IAJGS conference and summer travel, this issue evolved organically. After receiving several articles about cemeteries and efforts to locate the graves of specific deceased relatives, we had our theme for this issue. Joan Pollak shares the fascinating journey she took to learn about her great great grandfather, Rabbi Naftalie Reiter, culminating in a recent visit to his gravesite in Queens, New York. Volunteer efforts to restore and save cemeteries are described in three articles, including Jef Barnett’s piece on his recent visit to Serock, Poland and a joint article by Rachael Griffith and Jill Cooper in which they detail the history of and current situation at the Har Hasetim cemetery in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. Merle Kastner shares her experiences in relation to the Baron de Hirsch and Back River cemeteries in Montreal in “A Cemetery Has Life.” In “Wanted: Dead or Alive” Linda Ewall-Krocker outlines her frustrations and asks for direction in trying to locate her great grandmother’s grave; on the other hand she relates in “No Longer Ghosts” how she located other relatives. Bobbi

**WE EXTEND A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEWEST MEMBERS
& HIGHLIGHT SOME OF THE NAMES & TOWNS
THEY ARE RESEARCHING**

Lynore Eisman	Philadelphia PA	Andrea & Adam Denish	Elkins Park PA
Elansky, Balaban from Poland, Russia		Jay Freyman	Reisterstown MD
Michael Maidenberg	Oakland CA	Freyman, Davis - Kaunas Lithuania; Kirsch from Russia	
Jack Myers	Philadelphia PA	Gail Adams	Suwancee GA
Myers (Mayer) of Altenstady/t, Swabia, Bavaria; Guthman of Eich und Hamm, Hesse-Darmstadt, Germany		Alicia Granor	Broomall PA
Lori Schulman	Beverly Hills CA	Brichta, Klein, Granovsky / Granfsky, Hodes / Chodosch / Chodos/ Hodax, Englehardt, Weil	
David Steinberg	Lafayette Hill PA	from Dnipropetrovsk, Kiev/Kyyiv, Ukraine; Kosice, Uzhored, Slovakia; Miskolc, Hungary	
B. Susan Steinfeld	Hollywood FL		
Barbara Zasloff	Merion Station PA		

Schwartz-Biederman brings us full circle on her ultimately successful path to finding her great grandmother's New Jersey gravesite which began with a query to JGSGP several months ago. While Paulina Reso, a writer for the Philadelphia *City Paper*, unravels the mystery behind a tombstone in the middle of Northern Liberties, Jessica Lydon, associate archivist at the Samuel L. Paley Library at Temple University, provides information about the cemetery registers that are part of the holdings of the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center (PJAC).

We offer two articles on the subject of multi-generation family businesses, which we hope will become an ongoing feature. Three generations of the Zaslow family have been involved in ATD-American Company, which began as Jaffe's Art Linens on South Street in Philadelphia. Arlene Goldfus Lutz provides insights into her own family's undertaking business, thus ironically straddling our two, main themes in this issue.

Regular columnist, James Gross, discusses alternate methods for obtaining information about veterans. We include our usual summaries of recent meetings and promote our Speakers Bureau and the upcoming IAJGS conference in Jerusalem this July.

You may notice that we've included three reprints from other publications. While they fit into two of this issue's themes, we'd prefer to maintain our practice of publishing articles written exclusively by JGSGP members. Please don't hesitate to submit material. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln: *Chronicles* is a publication of its members, by its members, and for its members. ♦ Evan Fishman, Editor

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



The past few months have been very eventful. Besides having great speakers at our meetings, our society has been dealing with a very trying situation. Many of you may know that JGSGP has a very large library collection consisting of over 500 books on Jewish topics and family histories. The topics not only deal with research but also historical events. The library has been housed at Gratz College for many years, but this past December we were told they no longer had room for it, and we had to make arrangements to have the collection moved as quickly as possible. I reached out to our past presidents and librarian for guidance.

Within a month after our first contact with Gratz, the librarian there had removed our books from the shelves and

placed the collection in sixty-two boxes. My goal was to have the complete collection moved to the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Center, now located at Temple University. After many hours of negotiations, PJAC decided that they did not have enough room for our library and would take only a small portion. All issues of this publication dating back to 1982 and our Articles of Incorporation will be available there. Needless to say I was quite disappointed that they would not take everything.

With such short notice I reached out mine if they wanted our library. I am Society of Pennsylvania, located at Philadelphia, agreed to house our collection March 20th. Certain titles do not donated to Polin: The Museum of the Past president Mark Halpern has a re-are very excited to obtain these books. books will be catalogued and listed as



JGSGP Library in Storage

I would like to thank all those who helped me through this trying time: Mark Halpern, Harry Boonin, Al First, Joel Spector, Walt Spector, Barry Wagner, and Gary Brownstein.

One last item: This issue of *Chronicles* covers many areas of cemetery research. JGSGP has obtained burial records from three area cemeteries: Mt. Carmel in Philadelphia and Beth Kehillah and Rodef Sholom in Egg Harbor Township, New Jersey. We are in need of volunteers to work with various cemetery offices to obtain their records and begin digitizing them. Uploading these records and sharing them will prove useful to countless researchers. If you are interested in helping, please contact me: president@jgsgp.org. ♦♦♦

Fred Blum, President

A CEMETERY HAS LIFE

by Merle Kastner



As a member of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal since 1993 and a member of the board of directors of the Baron de Hirsch cemeteries¹ for the past four years, I have been in close contact with cemeteries for a long time. I have made innumerable trips to all of Montreal's Jewish and even non-Jewish cemeteries in order to answer requests for photos from out-of-towners who post a request on JewishGen or e-mail me directly, I have always felt that this is an important mission to fulfill for them and their families, who have invariably been appreciative.

In 2006, the database of the Back River Memorial Gardens Cemetery (est. 1867), Montreal's historic and oldest cemetery, went online on the JewishGen² website –specifically at JOWBR (Jewish Online World Burial Registry)³. Descendants of many of those buried there went on to become community leaders, recognized intellectuals, artists, professionals, and contributors to society in all areas, making the cemetery an important memorial to our community's history. The names and dates of burial were online, but there were no photographs of the *matzevot* (tombstones).

From early June to mid-September 2007, my partner, Amiram Gelbart, and I spent most Sunday afternoons photographing these stones corresponding to the more than 6,750 burials recorded to date. Armed with two digital cameras, we accomplished this huge undertaking systematically. . This was a learning experience for both of us. With apologies for the irreverence, we also had a few chuckles while standing in the broiling summer sunshine, slathered with sun-screen, photographing headstones, footstones, broken stones, and the like.

to several local institutions to determine pleased to report that the Historical 1300 Locust St. in Center City lection. It was moved to HSP on Friday into their mission, and these will be History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. lationship with this museum, and they Per our agreement with HSP our the JGSGP collection.

Of course, this activity aroused the curiosity and sometimes the amusement of the occasional visitors to the cemetery. At one point, a burial was taking place and cars filled the cemetery. Curious glances were cast our way. Finally, someone asked what we were doing, and we explained our project to him. We wonder what his reactions were.

Another time, a man from Halifax was taking his elderly mother to see his father's (her husband's) grave. I offered to email him photographs, and he expressed enormous gratitude, reiterated when the photos reached him the next day.

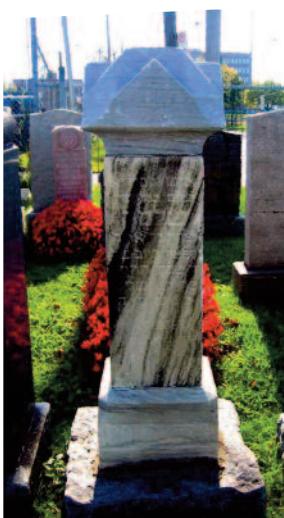
Stanley Diamond, founder and president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Montreal, had been researching the poignant story of David Wald, an American soldier who was killed in battle during World War II and buried at Back River, and asked for a photograph of this particular grave. On our next photo shoot, we made sure to take photos of his *matzevah* and those of his parents, as well.^{4,5}

The lighter side of this exercise was necessary to offset the somber feelings aroused by looking at gravestone after gravestone all afternoon, all summer long – seeing the rows of tiny graves of babies and children, young people. We saw the resting places of several members of families who had died within a short period, some of whom were obviously casualties of the 1918-1919 flu epidemic. During all of this, we developed an intimate relationship with the cemetery and a deeper understanding of Montreal's early Jewish community, a true and rich learning experience.

The La Macaza Jewish farming colony was one of the earliest Jewish Colonization Association settlements, situated 160 kilometers north of Montreal in the Laurentians. The small number of burials in the La Macaza⁶ Jewish cemetery had been exhumed and brought to rest in the Back River Cemetery. Two of the interesting names found among these burials are Isbitsky and Wroblewski.

And yes, there were some humorous stories, such as that of Sam Rosenstein who was born, married, and died on the same date. One wonders if he planned the date of his demise.

We also learned about styles of headstones and how they evolved from tall, very ornate headstones to the relatively smaller, modern ones. The designs varied greatly as did the types of stone used. We also noticed many styles of inscriptions. Many stones had lost their luster over the years. Some had been reduced to fragments; others had lost components and had been worn away by the elements. This was the case of my great great grandfather, Solomon Isaac Goldberg's stone, who was buried in 1916. The next two photographs are a perfect example of this situation: the earlier (black & white) photograph of his stone was taken in 1925; the later (full color) one in 2007.



One was able to see how earlier, fancy stones had weathered the years – as many as 100 or more years in some cases. Damage to many of the older ones was evident, but in recent years, care was taken to restore as many as possible or, to at least pile the broken pieces with respect, in order to allow viewing of the important inscriptions.

At about the same time as I was beginning my venture into genealogy, a movement to restore the cemetery began, funded by government grants and generous donations from concerned individuals⁷.

The work took several years to complete. Fallen headstones had to be righted and broken stones placed reverently. The lines of monuments were straightened, new foundations were poured, and new sod was laid



where there had been no grass for a long time or where it had been immersed in flooded, swampy areas. The results created a spectacular contrast from the former state to the present, particularly to someone such as I, who had walked the cemetery rows many times both before and after this restoration work.

The Back River Memorial Gardens Cemetery, filled with a rich history, is alive with stories to tell – a monument to the history of Jewish Montreal. ♦♦

References:

- 1 *The Baron de Hirsch Affiliated Cemeteries manages the Back River Memorial Gardens Cemetery*
- 2 <http://www.jewishgen.org/>
- 3 <http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/cemetery/>
- 4 *Montreal Forum, Vol. 3, No. 2, December, 2007, page 5*
- 5 *Canadian Jewish News, Wednesday, September 12, 2007, 29 Elul, 5767, pages 46, 47*
- 6 *Canadian Jewish Congress Charities Committee National Archives – Collection Guide*
- 7 <http://www.backrивermemorial.org/article1.htm>

*Merle Kastner is vice president of programming for the JGS of Montreal. While she resides there, she has definite roots in Philadelphia. Her paternal grandmother, Esther Miller Kastner, was born in Philadelphia in 1894 and moved to Canada with her family in 1909. Merle has spearheaded indexing of Jewish cemeteries in her home area and attends IAJGS conferences regularly. She is researching: **Kastner, Ostfeld** (Bukovina); **Nathanson, Mendelssohn** (Piatra Neamt & Negulesti, Romania). Contact Merle at merlek@bell.net.*

A NEW ERA FOR AN ABANDONED CEMETERY

Rachael Griffith with Jill Cooper



Rachael Griffith



Jill Cooper

I'll never forget the first time I walked through the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery, also known as Har Hasetim. The experience is somewhat analogous to the first time you watch a movie that immediately becomes your favorite; you love it every time you watch it, but it's never quite as magical as the first time you saw it.

It was a hot, September day and walking into the forest provided immediate shade and relief. The ethereal white sprays of boneset flowers clouded the forest understory, and I didn't immediately recognize that I was in a cemetery. As soon as I spotted the first grave, I saw that they were everywhere- crowded clusters of cradle graves arose from the wooded hillside on which the cemetery was sited. Every time I visit, birds sing in the forest that peacefully intermingles with the headstones, and although surrounded by death, the place feels utterly vibrant and alive.

The first time I met the cemetery was also the first time I met Scott Quitel. Scott had been contracted by The Friends of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery to write a master plan for the site and had been working with them on this project since 2013. I was drawn to his palpable passion for nature, and three months later I found myself moving from Boston to Philadelphia to join him in his latest endeavor- -the creation of a non-profit land advocacy and awareness group called LandHealth Institute.

My first week of work at LandHealth Institute was almost entirely dedicated to the cemetery. We were preparing to present our initial ideas for the site to our client, the Friends group, as well as members of Beth David Reform Congregation, a nearby synagogue, and several community partners. Our ideas for transforming the abandoned historic

cemetery into a truly unique public open space were well received. We suggested that in order to utilize the space to its maximum potential and garner the greatest amount of public support, the strategies employed must be diverse and interdisciplinary. So many inherent opportunities exist to recount the fascinating stories of the Jewish immigrant experience, highlight the resiliency and beauty of nature, and display the intrinsic artfulness that occurs as a result of weaving nature in with the sculpture of the stones. We believe that elements of all these things can peacefully coexist with and leverage the value of this sacred resting place.

Writing a master plan for this fascinating place
The story of Har Hasetim cemetery, which in Hebrew means "Mount of Olives", gives a glimpse of what life was like for Russian Jewish immigrants. The Har Hasetim Corporation purchased the original twenty-acre parcel in 1895. The cemetery was a philanthropic effort to provide poor Jewish immigrants with a proper burial according to Jewish law. During this time there were multiple Jewish burial associations active in the Philadelphia region, and many of them owned deeded plots at the cemetery for the purpose of collecting funds to provide its members with a ritually correct burial upon their passing. Membership dues of between ten and fifty cents were paid monthly to the burial association.



Scott Quitel

has felt like a journey through time and culture. The cemetery, which in Hebrew means "Mount of Olives", gives a glimpse of what life was like for Russian Jewish immigrants at the turn of the 20th century. The Har Hasetim Corporation purchased the original twenty-acre parcel in 1895. The cemetery was a burial association active in the Philadelphia region. Migrants with a proper burial according to Jewish law. During this time there were multiple Jewish burial associations active in the Philadelphia region, and many of them owned deeded plots at the cemetery for the purpose of collecting funds to provide its members with a ritually correct burial upon their passing. Membership dues of between ten and fifty cents were paid monthly to the burial association.

In keeping with Talmudic law, none of the people who were buried in Har Hasetim lived near the cemetery at the time of its purchase; the majority of those interred lived in Philadelphia, and a significant number of them were children. This points to the symptoms of poverty: high infant mortality rates and two working parents who had no choice but to leave their children unattended all day. Many children were killed in trolley accidents, and others in accidents within the home. Epidemics also took a significant toll on this population.

Upon purchasing the parcel, the cemetery corporation paid a small percentage of the total price of the land and took out a mortgage for the rest. Hundreds of Orthodox Jews were buried at Har Hasetim around the turn of the century. However, burials started to slow in the early 1900s, in part due to the site's steep, rocky terrain, but also because the burial societies themselves were diminishing. The Jewish immigrant community was becoming more established in society, and many associated the burial societies with a past of poverty. People now wanted to be buried in family plots in newer cemeteries that could offer perpetual care.

The failing burial societies could no longer make their payments to the cemetery corporation. In 1912 the Har Hasetim Corporation failed to make interest payments, and the mortgage was foreclosed upon. A sheriff's sale of the land ensued, and after a few changes in ownership, a contractor based in Narberth named Horace P. Moore purchased sixteen of the original acres of the property. Almost immediately he began disinterring bodies for relocation and established a stone quarrying operation in their place. Since he did not possess the proper permits to disinter the remains, Moore was brought before a judge and fined, although he did not have to replace the bodies that he had already shipped off. It is unknown what became of the remains or just how many bodies were disinterred, although some estimates suggest more than half of those interred were removed.

Soon after in 1913, three acres of the land were sold to the Independent Chevra Kadischo (ICK) burial association, who felt a moral responsibility to maintain the burial ground. Burials ceased after 1933, although one more body was interred there in 1945--a fallen soldier in World War II. In the 1950s, thirteen acres of the property that had never been used for burials were sold to a development company that built several luxury homes. At this point, an approximately three-acre parcel of the cemetery was still held by the Har Hasetim Corporation and an additional three acres by the ICK. This is the approximate size of the cemetery's property today.

In 1973, long after burials had ceased, the ICK was handling all the maintenance and business affairs for both parcels that made up the cemetery. They requested Har Hasetim Corporation turn over its deed since it played little to no part in the cemetery's upkeep. There was no push back from Har Hasetim Corporation, and the deed was transferred to

ICK the same year. It must have seemed strange when, in 1989 the Har Hasetim Corporation sold its half of the cemetery (to which it no longer held title) to a private development company that was interested in building luxury homes on the land. The agreement of sale was contingent upon the disinterment and relocation of several acres of graves. Neighbors soon realized what was going on and reported the disinterment to the Lower Merion Planning Association. The developers had not filed for an erosion and sediment control permit, nor had they submitted any development plans, so Lower Merion Planning Association issued a stop work order. The developers were able to obtain the proper permits, but neighbors and interested parties, including nearby Beth David Reform Congregation, filed a petition with the Montgomery County Orphans Court in an attempt to stop the development plans from moving forward.

Throughout the 1990s, the cemetery's ownership situation was tenuous. The non-profit group that owned it discussed striking a deal which would designate about half the land area as conservation land leaving the remaining three acres for development. After years of legal battles, Judge Ott at the Montgomery County Orphans Court issued a decision which granted ownership of the entire property to Beth David Reform Congregation in 1999.

By organizing occasional volunteer clean-up days over the next dozen years Beth David did what it could to hold back the ravenous forest from completely overtaking the cemetery. But it wasn't until 2011 when a group of interested and highly motivated members of Beth David Reform Congregation formed The Friends of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery, established bylaws and named a board, four officers and seven trustees. Among the trustees are Todd Borow, whose ancestors are interred at Har Hasetim, as well as Jill Cooper, Executive Director of Beth David. In June of 2012 the Friends group was granted a 501(c)(13) [non-profit cemetery company] status by the IRS.

The Friends set out with a game plan; its two primary goals were fundraising and gaining community partners. Several people at local community organizations have already done great work offering their technical advice and advocacy for the cemetery, including Patty Thompson and the Lower Merion Conservancy, Deborah Cassidy and nearby West Laurel Hill Cemetery, and Dr. Craig Bailey, Associate Professor of History at Villanova University.

The Friends have done significant genealogical research in the past several years, and with the help of Villanova University and West Laurel Hill Cemetery, they have compiled records of approximately 1,000 names of interred persons. They've listed the names they've collected in a searchable database on their website, www.gladwynejewishcemetery.org.

Researching burial records has been challenging on many fronts: the cemetery has gone by many different names over the years; many of the interred are young children who may not show up in census records; and several of the burial associations that used the cemetery and kept records are now defunct. It's difficult to say who is still buried there because disinterment has occurred several times in the cemetery's history. Many headstones are eroded and unreadable, and of those that are readable, most are in Hebrew and Yiddish and require translation.

In 2013, Beth David's executive director received an interesting call out of the blue from a man whose son wished to do his mitzvah project at the cemetery. The man was Scott Quitel, who has already appeared as a character in this story. His son, also a nature enthusiast, was equally delighted by this magical place and orchestrated a kids' design charrette in the cemetery to gain input and ideas from kids to solicit their ideas for the cemetery. Once Beth David and The Friends realized Scott had a professional background in ecological restoration and design, they eagerly contracted his services to create a master plan for the cemetery.

The master plan makes many recommendations to steer the cemetery toward becoming a sacred and unique open space amenity for the greater community, but these are only recommendations. As was always the case, the future of the cemetery - its continued survival and success - is in the hands of those who care about it. Themes of survival emerge from many parts of the cemetery's story. The cemetery's existence has been tenuous since its establishment, but there have always been people who cared enough to save it from obliteration. One of the most fundamental recommendations in the master plan is basically to ensure that there will always be people who care about it. Making it more than just a

cemetery by emphasizing its historic, natural, and aesthetic value as well as its sacredness as a religious burial ground secures a more diverse interest base.

As Scott and I wrote the plan, I found myself selfishly wishing that no one else would find out about it and that I could keep it my exclusive secret. It's the type of space that after a single visit you could easily fall in love with it, just as I did, just as the members of The Friends did, and just as the coalition of protestors who saved it from development in the 1990s did. I'm confident that this trend will continue, and that as long as people are not barred access and know about its existence, Har Hasetim will always have friends. ♦♦

For a moving video showing scenes from Har Hasetim, and further information about the organization which is making efforts to maintain the cemetery, click on the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-jcdWQldF0>

Rachael Griffith is a landscape architect at the LandHealth Institute, a Philadelphia-based nonprofit whose mission is to restore the connection between people and nature. Rachael lives in Germantown with her fiance and four cats. She enjoys DIY projects, historic architecture, and long walks in old cemeteries. Contact Rachael at: rachael@land-healthinstitute.org

Jill Cooper has been the Executive Director at Beth David Reform Congregation in Gladwyne, PA since 2007 but has worked as a Jewish communal professional for more than twenty-five years. She has proudly been a board member of The Friends of the Gladwyne Jewish Memorial Cemetery since its inception. Jill currently lives in Gladwyne with her son Marc and dog Ziva. Contact Jill at: jcooper@bdavid.org

NO LONGER GHOSTS

by Linda Ewall-Krocker



I'm requesting a translation from someone with great vision. I'll share a great story to provide background. I looked for a very long time for the gravestones of my grandfather and aunt. He was killed by a truck in 1929 (great year to die). She died a year and a half later, at sixteen years old, so a family of four quickly became a family of two. I never had a chance to know them, so they felt like ghosts to me, a real hole in my life.

My father's prayer book listed their *yahrzeits* [anniversaries of death], but not the cemetery where they were buried. I called about a dozen cemeteries and a few funeral homes, but came up blank until a girlfriend suggested several I had never heard of. I called and a week or so later received phone calls from two funeral homes, both pointing me to their old cemetery. I found the stones I was looking for, apparently vandalized along with many others in complete disrepair, two graves apart. His stone was broken, but we were able to right it. Hers was broken off at the base, lying several feet away from where it should be. The base had long since vanished into the mud,



and the remaining part of the stone was sinking almost below the level of the surrounding grass. I was afraid it would vanish forever, so we dug it up and raised the level of the dirt. I was thrilled to find the Hebrew on the back! Her name was Freda Sadie Fisher, died 22 October 1930, daughter of Yale Chaim. I was successfully able to finally obtain her birth and death certificates now that I knew her date of death. If anyone can read this tombstone after unknown decades in the mud, I'd really appreciate it! ♦♦

Author Linda Ewall-Krocker has been interested in genealogy since the early 1980s, fortunately starting shortly before her dad passed away, so that she did get some information from him. His little funeral prayer books have also been a helpful resource for when family members were buried, though not where, since he knew that and didn't jot it down; the information died with him.

*Names and towns Linda is researching: **Fishelov (Fisher)** in Kachinovichi (suburb of Pinsk, Minsk Gubernia, Belarus); **Weiss** in Kamyanets Podilskyy, Khmelnytsky, Ukraine; **Goldman** in Somes, Russia (or Rava-Rus'ka in Lviv Oblast of western Ukraine); and **Greenberg** in Odessa, Ukraine. You can reach Linda at: cappuccinoholic@gmail.com*

SEROCK, POLAND CEMETERY PROJECT AND MY TRIP TO POLAND

by Jeffrey Barnett



Almost eight years ago, I wrote an article for *Chronicles* (Vol 25, No. 3/4 May 2007) detailing the condition of the Jewish cemetery in Serock, Poland and the project that several of us were undertaking. It started in the summer of the year 2000, when my son, Seth, visited our ancestral *shtetl* (town) during a post-college graduation trip to Europe. While the town of Serock, about 25 miles north of Warsaw, survived the ravages of World War II, no sign of the once thriving Jewish life remained. By chance, he met a local man who showed him the remnants of the Jewish cemetery. Located in a park, just outside the main area of the town, he found a mound with the fragmented remains of *matzevot* (tombstones.)



Eventually, my interest in genealogy began, and I found the wonderful people of JRI-Poland. When I contacted Stanley Diamond, Executive Director of JRI-Poland, about what my son had discovered, he put me in contact with Howard Orenstein, JRI-Poland's town leader for Serock. This started me on an eight-year path that culminated last August. Initially, Howard and I arranged to have JRI-Poland send a photographer to take detailed pictures of each fragment. Upon receipt of the photos, Howard added them to a town website he established. We found volunteers to provide translations of each stone and added that to the website. In 2007, Lee Seeman, a commissioner from the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad (<http://www.heritageabroad.gov/Members/LeeRSeeman.aspx>) agreed to take on the task of organizing a memorial project on the site after being contacted by my cousin, then U.S. Congressman Gary Ackerman.

Over the next seven years, Lee spearheaded a fund raising project using newspaper articles and personal appeals to her philanthropic friends, while Gary and I contacted our extended family members for donations. While this phase was ongoing, Lee worked with Monika Krawczyk of The Foundation for the Preservation

of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ) (<http://fodz.pl/?d=1&l=en>) whose stated mission is “to protect and commemorate the surviving monuments of Jewish cultural heritage in Poland.” Monika and her staff worked with the current owners of the property, PKO Bank Polski, and Chief Rabbi of Poland Michael Schudrich. Since the actual boundaries of the cemetery were not available, getting governmental approval to re-deed the land back to the Jewish authorities in Warsaw has not been possible. However, Monika was able to get the bank to acknowledge the claim and is continuing to work on a permanent transfer of ownership. Meanwhile, plans were drawn up for a memorial and dedication.

With the costs of the monument increasing as the years progressed, new life sprung when a young lady joined the venture. As part of her Bat Mitzvah project, Hannah Champness, the granddaughter of a Holocaust survivor from Serock, raised funds to help us get close to our goal. Using that impetus to “dip into the well” we were able to get additional funds from previous donors, as well as from Lee herself. Finally, in the spring of 2014 the project was on! Lee worked with Monika who arranged for the plans and construction of the actual memorial. A date for the dedication was set: August 27, 2014.

I took this opportunity to take my first trip to Poland. After a stopover in Holland and Belgium to “find my grandfather” (see my article in the last issue of *Chronicles*, Vol. 31-4, pp. 15-18) my wife and I, accompanied by my sister and her husband, traveled to Warsaw. Before visiting Serock, we spent several days touring Warsaw & Krakow. We visited the death camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau and Treblinka. We also toured many of

the towns where my family lived between the late 1700s and WWII, including Ostrów Mazowiecka, Krasnosielc, Różan, Brok, and Pułtusk. While there is no Jewish presence in any of these small towns, our guide arranged to have a local resident walk with us and show us what remained or where certain buildings used to be. In Brok, where my great-grandfather was born, we walked through a forested area sprinkled with matzevot of the cemetery.

In Rozan, (58 miles north of Warsaw) where my father was born, we saw the monument in the cemetery erected by an organization of former

Różan Cemetery Monument

residents now living in Israel.

We also visited the local civil records office, (Urząd Stanu Cywilnego, abbreviated “USC”) in Rozan, where they maintain vital records less than 100 years old, in hopes they would have a record of my father’s birth. Unfortunately, they said it was not registered, but we were able to take a picture of my paternal great grandmother’s death record in 1919. Up to this point, I had no idea when or where she died. I only knew she was alive in Pultusk in 1918 living with her daughter-in-law. Another piece of the puzzle was found!

Our visit to Krasnosielc (56 miles north of Warsaw) was most warming. This is the town where my grandmother’s family lived. I am still a trustee of a *landsmanshaft* (society of former residents of a town) of Krasnosielc families and their descendants in New York. A local historian showed us the synagogue (the only one remaining in any of the villages we visited) This building is currently a supply warehouse. I had seen photos of the building before, but being there, the shul where my grandparents were married in 1911, was an extremely moving experience for all of us!



Former Krasnosielc Synagogue

We were then taken to a small area that was the former Jewish cemetery. This is where my paternal great grandfather was buried in 1898. There appeared to be nothing left as we walked the accessible part of the plot. I did unturn a large rock that appeared to have Hebrew engraving on it. We said *Kaddish* (hymn of praises to God, often referring to the Mourner's *Kaddish*, to show that despite the loss Jews still praise God) for my ancestor and the countless others whose graves have been lost. Upon our return to the States, I started discussions with Monika Krawczyk (FODZ) about protecting and erecting a small monument in this cemetery as a reminder. In the near future, our burial society will spearhead the cost.

On August 27th, we proceeded from our hotel in Warsaw to Serock. When we arrived, a local librarian gave us a short walkthrough of the town, showing us the local Polish public school which all children, including Jews, attended and received a secular education. The school existed in the same location when my father and his siblings lived in Serock. We assume they must have been educated there. The town square or market area, *rynek*, was alive that day with local vendors selling everything from fresh fruits and vegetables, jars of pickles, and

clothing to handcrafted wooden utensils. Not quite what it would have been looked like before the war, but it still gave us a good feeling participating in a Market Day as my ancestors once did!

Jeffrey Barnett at the Serock Cemetery Monument



Nazi German forces ordered that all traces of the cemetery be obliterated. The gravestones on the wall were piled up on a nearby site. This memorial pays tribute to a once vibrant Jewish community and honors those citizens of Serock who were murdered in the Holocaust solely because they were Jewish."

The dedication ceremony was organized, once again by Monika Krawczyk. Speakers included Rabbi Michael Schudrich, Serock Mayor Sylwester Sokolniki and other dignitaries from the province, a representative from PKO Bank, Hannah Champness, (see her very moving speech on youtube at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m5O1NJi9Z-w>),

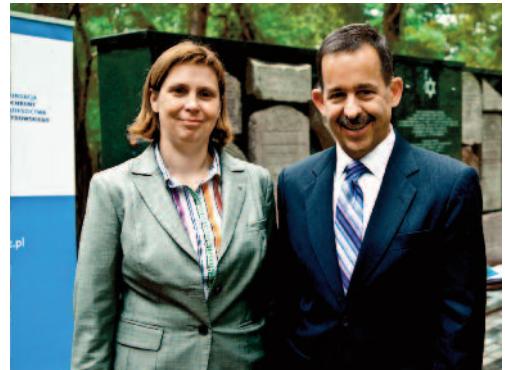
Attending the dedication ceremony from the USA:
Helen Alpert, Hannah Champness, Seymour Weiss (my brother-in-law), Ambassador Mull, Gloria Weiss (my sister), myself, Arlene Barnett (my wife) and Lee Seeman.

We then proceeded to the dedication ceremony on the grounds of the Jewish cemetery. This was the first time I saw the monument that we worked on for over seven years! To say we were impressed would be an understatement. It was a beautifully designed marble wall with pieces of the *matzevot* artistically mounted and centered by an inscription in Polish and English: "This area comprises the Jewish cemetery of Serock. Jews were buried here from the 18th century until 1939 when



Gloria Weiss who brought a message from Congressman Ackerman, and special guest speaker, U.S. Ambassador to Poland Stephen Mull. It was an extremely moving and teary-eyed ceremony. It was eight years in the making but well worth the time and effort. Our trip to Poland, culminating on this day, was a once in a lifetime event! ♦

Originally from Brooklyn, New York, Jeffrey Barnett started his genealogy hobby in 2002. His family roots are all from Poland; he is researching family names: Bandrymer, Bulman, Kraska, Solarz, Zilberberg, Grossman and Grunzspan. Contact Jeffrey at: jeffreyjbarnett@aol.com



Monika Krawczyk and U.S.
Ambassador Stephen Mull

RABBINICAL ROYALTY IN THE FAMILY: THE STORY OF MY RENOWNED GREAT GREAT GRANDFATHER, NAFTALI REITER

by Joan Pollak



When I was growing up, my mother told me about her great grandfather on her mother's side, the famous Naftali Reiter, the "head rabbi" of New York City. I was not familiar with too many rabbis other than the one from my own suburban Reform synagogue, so Rabbi Reiter sounded very exotic to me. Twenty years ago I became immersed in Jewish genealogy, and after successfully researching my dad's ancestors from Germany and Czechoslovakia, who immigrated to the U.S. in the 19th century and immersed themselves in secular business life while remaining religiously observant, I set about to learn more about the life of this exalted religious ancestor.

My mom provided me with the names of the Reiter cousins she remembered, and with the help of internet search engines I began to contact first, second, and third cousins to learn more about Rabbi Reiter and to put together a more complete family tree. I also visited archives and searched for immigration and death records. The cousins that I spoke with were very aware of their renowned rabbinic ancestor, and some families were devoted to saving articles and artifacts related to him. One of my mom's cousins had saved several obituaries and articles that were published after his death, which she was happy to pass along, and also provided a photo of him that appeared in a book about great rabbis from the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City. Other cousins provided additional photos of Naftali, his wife Leah, and their children, and pointed the way to additional published articles referencing the rabbi's history, which were also located in the JTS libraries. I was fortunate that one of my newfound cousins, Jay, willingly translated the articles for me. Another cousin passed on a good amount of oral history and personal points of view about the Reiter family history and relationships.

I learned that Naftali Reiter was born to Moses and Chaja Perl Reiter in 1846 in Malcov, Hungary, a settlement outside the city of Bardejov which is now located in modern day Slovakia. The eldest of seven children, he demonstrated his talent for Torah study at an early age and was mentored by renowned rabbis in Bardejov and elsewhere in Europe. His specialty was Torah law as it applied to marriage and divorce, and he was ordained at the age of eighteen in Bardejov.



Rabbi Naftali Reiter

He married Leah Rottenberg, herself the daughter of a rabbi and storyteller in 1856, and they had three girls and four boys, including my great grandfather Jacob Reiter. Rabbi Reiter immigrated to New York City in 1886 and became the rabbi of the Congregation of Sefardim (Kehillat HaSephardim) of the Sons of Austria and Hungary. In 1888 Rabbi Jacob Joseph, a widely respected leader, came to serve as the *rav hakolel* or chief rabbi of New York and appointed my great great grandfather to his judicial court or *beit din*. As his reputation as a great teacher and scholar spread, Reiter was later appointed rabbi of the First Galician Shul, also known as the Dukler Shul and Beit Hamidrash Mogen Abraham, located on Attorney Street in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where he spent the remainder of his life.

I learned from various articles and publications that Rabbi Reiter had a significant impact in a number of areas. While serving on the *beit din* he wisely counseled several difficult cases involving divorce. He advocated for religious Jews in New York City, organizing a boycott of Lower East Side bakeries that stayed open during the Sabbath, and also investigated corruption in the production of kosher oil that was exported to Europe. He founded the First Austrian Talmud Torah (housed at the First Galician Shul), which later became the Downtown Talmud Torah. His home was always open for the relief of impoverished people and Torah scholars that sought his help, and he continued to work on behalf of the community during his last years even though he suffered from bouts of pneumonia.

My cousins shared obituaries noting Rabbi Reiter's death in 1911, including one from the New York Times (http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?_r=1&res=9405E7DB1439E33A2575BC1A9659C946096D6CF).

I learned that he was a revered leader in his community. Thousands of people mourned and joined in a funeral procession from his home. A beautiful, commemorative poem was inscribed in his tombstone at Union Field Cemetery in Ridgewood, Queens, New York (*partial translation below*).

Over the years, additional Reiter descendants have contacted me: some via Ancestry.com, JewishGen.org, and Geni.org; others after finding old family trees lying around their homes that I had sent years before. Many provided additional leads to articles, and one cousin, a rabbi in Kansas City, Missouri, sent me descriptions of two books published in 1764 that he had inherited, one of which included Naftali Reiter's signature.

One cousin's lead proved to be particularly helpful in opening up new horizons. A website, <http://kevarim.com>, devoted to an exchange of information about great rabbis, had a section about Rabbi Reiter with many questions and comments from devotees (<http://kevarim.com/rabbi-naftali-reiter/>). I introduced myself on the blog and learned about admir-



Gravestone of Rabbi Naftali Reiter
Union Field Cemetery, Ridgewood,
Queens, NY

Translation of the top seven lines of the inscription:

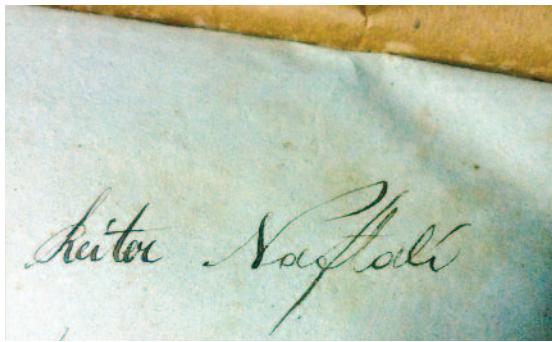
Here lies the great and well-known rabbi
Pious; righteous and wise teacher and rabbi
Naftali, son of the teacher & rabbi Moshe Reiter, may
his memory be for a blessing
The leader of the holy community of Dukler Mugan
Avraham
Who died on the 16th day of Adar...

(The first letters of the Hebrew verses below form an acrostic that spells Rabbi Reiter's Hebrew name: NaFTaLI BeN MoSHE)

Partial translation of the poem:

The light was covered on the day his body was separated from his soul
Rivers of tears will flow with him by his community
Our glory was taken from us
... Our beauty
The House of Israel will Weep
It's cherished one gone
The sun sets
Our Pain is Great, without Limit
The joy of our hearts ceases, our Leader Gone
... Who will Comfort us?
May His Soul be Bound in Eternal Life

ers who made frequent pilgrimages to his gravesite. Rabbi Joel Hirsch, an historian, who writes for the *Oitzres* magazine of the Satmar Kiryas Joel Hasidic community, contacted me through this website with a request to collaborate. This past year he published an article providing additional content on Rabbi Reiter's life.



Naftali Reiter signature from an 18th century book in the library of Joan Pollak's cousin

It was time for a long overdue visit to my great great grandfather's gravesite - overdue because I had never seen his gravesite although I'd traveled to many New York and European cemeteries hunting down the burial sites of other ancestors. I was also intimidated about visiting because I could not read Hebrew. Fortunately, during a weekend in June 2013 that I was due to be in New York City, my cousin, Jay, was available to meet up, and, with his substantial Jewish background, was able to translate from Hebrew to English. Another cousin I had never met joined us at Union Field, and three branches of the rabbi's descendants bonded over lunch afterwards.

Armed with the map provided by the cemetery front office, we found the peaceful, shady spot containing the final resting places of Naftali and Leah Reiter. My great great grandfather's grave was covered with small stones, piled by the many who had come to pay their respects. I was also moved when I saw the gravestones of my great grandfather Jacob Reiter, and his wife Celia, in the honored spot next to Naftali and Leah. Another Reiter plot, consisting of several of Naftali and Leah's children and their families, was in a nearby area. I felt at peace, having a sense of completion in understanding the life of this great man and joining a community of extended family and followers who had already gotten to know him.

Joan wishes to thank Rabbi Joel Hirsch of Kiryas Joel, New York for sharing his informative article about Rabbi Reiter. ♦♦

Joan Pollak is a clinical social worker with a psychotherapy practice in Wynnewood, Pa. Her interest in genealogy began in 1995 with research into the impact of the Holocaust on her father's extended family in Czechoslovakia which resulted in developing connections with several related survivors. She has gone on to research all branches of her parents' families, tracing Jewish ancestors in Germany, Czech Republic, Austria-Hungary, and Russia, and making friends with cousins and helpers throughout the world. Contact Joan at: jjpollak@gmail.com

SOMETHING HAD TO BE DONE

The (Scranton, PA) Times-Tribune

SOUTH ABINGTON TWP.

Scott Hunsinger couldn't take it anymore. Standing at the face of his father's tombstone, Mr. Hunsinger watched as an elderly woman climbed the hill at Shady Lane Cemetery, navigating around scattered pizza boxes and decaying garbage, and pushing aside 4-foot-high grass on her way to visit a lost loved one. "At that point, I knew something had to be done," Mr. Hunsinger, of Scott Twp., said. "I just couldn't bear to watch these people suffer anymore — it's just not right."

Since that day in June, the 31-year-old has spearheaded a family effort to revitalize the cemetery in South Abington Twp. covered in decades of neglect. Along with his two brothers, Paul and Bob; his three children, Hailey, Matthew and Frankie; his wife, Stephanie; and his nephew, P.J.; Mr. Hunsinger has slowly transformed the cemetery — once plagued by fallen trees, collapsed headstones and uncut grass — back into pristine condition.

He spends roughly 30 hours a week at the cemetery and bought a tractor and chain saw to help keep the overgrowth under control. But Mr. Hunsinger worries that it will all be for naught if he doesn't maintain the current upkeep. "It's an ongoing process, so we have to keep working hard," said Mr. Hunsinger, who heads to the cemetery each day after working at Scranton Window Cleaning.

"The people who come deserve better. That's what will continue to push us."

Either way, township manager David O'Neill said he is grateful for the Mr. Hunsinger's effort. "We have received many complaints from people visiting their loved ones, who are appalled at what they see," Mr. O'Neill said. "We've called the owner, and sent letters to him, but it's all been to no avail. "We just want people to be able to visit the cemetery in peace."

Township supervisor Giles Stanton applauded Mr. Hunsinger's efforts. "Hopefully, we can even get some more residents out there to support him," he said. The cemetery has changed hands a number of times over the years. In 1987, John Rogan, who, at the time, owned three cemeteries — Abington Hills, Shady Lane and Washburn Street — was arrested after an 18-month investigation by the state attorney general's office found he diverted money from the merchandise and perpetual care funds at Abington Hills and Washburn Street to his personal use.

Three years later, Mr. Rogan pleaded guilty to failure to make required disposition of funds, theft by deception and engaging in deceptive business practices.



View of South Abington Cemetery



View of South Abington Cemetery

owners and township officials to clean up and maintain the property. Efforts to reach Mr. Keller were unsuccessful.

After throwing his weedwhacker into the trailer attached to the back of his Chevy Tahoe, Mr. Hunsinger paused for a moment, looking around at the dozens of headstones no longer choked with weeds.

Then he found it. Gazing up at the hill, Mr. Hunsinger's eyes locked in on a single headstone — the one the elderly woman was visiting at the beginning of the summer. "That's it," said, pointing. "That's the inspiration for this project." ♦

After Mr. Rogan was sentenced to one to four years in prison by Lackawanna County Court Judge S. John Cottone in 1992, Charles Rader, president of Lackawanna Management Inc., purchased the three cemeteries with hopes of repairing their deteriorated conditions. Mr. Rader never turned those hopes into reality, though. He had blamed the cemetery's condition on the failure of some plot owners to pay their monthly perpetual care bills, as well as the lack of space to add new plots, claiming there wasn't enough income to support the cemetery.

The most recent owner, David Keller, bought the property at a 2010 tax sale but has been unresponsive to requests by plot



View of South Abington Cemetery

Reprinted, courtesy the The (Scranton, PA) Times-Tribune. Original publication date: September 15, 2012 Page: I Section: A Edition: FINAL

WHY NOBODY'S BURIED BENEATH THIS TOMBSTONE IN THE MIDDLE OF NORTHERN LIBERTIES

By Paulina Reso

At the corner of Orianna and Poplar streets, next to a bustling dog park and across from a shuttered deli, there's a manicured little park ringed by an iron fence that's never locked. A few feet from an elephant-shaped kid's slide and the adjacent community garden is an incongruous sight: a baby's tombstone.

After nearly 90 years of being battered by the elements, the grave's edges are rounded like a bar of soap that's been handled by many people. Its engravings, though faint, are still visible: "Our baby Edith Gelman, born December 14, 1925, died February 17, 1927." Hebrew is etched into the reverse side and a sculpture of a lamb, a symbol of innocence, sits on top. Pebbles line the grave's crest as if, in the Jewish tradition, visitors have come to pay their respects.

Although the grave is unassuming, it raises an intriguing question: Could someone be buried in the middle of this tiny lot in Northern Liberties? It's legal in Pennsylvania to inter a body on private property, but local ordinances can restrict this practice. In Philadelphia, for instance, it's now illegal to hold a home burial. But in the 1920s, when a young immigrant family might not have had the money to buy a cemetery plot for their child, other measures may have been taken. It wasn't uncommon for infants to be buried in the backyard, says David Morrison, a Lancaster-based elder law attorney. "When their mother dies they're dug up from the farm or wherever they were temporarily and then they're reinterred at the cemetery with their mother." Had the Gelman family buried Edith, thinking the location would be temporary, and left her behind when faced with unforeseen circumstances?

After submitting a request for a copy of Edith's death certificate (these records become publicly available 50 years after the death date), I scrolled through newspapers on microfilm at the library, but turned up no death notice or obituary. The census would not have recorded Edith, since she had been born after the 1920 one was conducted and died before the 1930 survey. Sorting through ancestry.com's results for families with the last name 'Gelman' in Philadelphia, I found a married woman who, in 1930, said she had given birth to six children, even though only five, all of them close to Edith's age, lived in her household. Suspecting that Edith could have been the missing one, I reconstructed this family's history until the telltale death certificate reached me. I had it all wrong.

Edith had been born in Philadelphia to Charles and Ida Gelman, who were both Russian immigrants. They had been living at 3126 Westmont St. in Strawberry Mansion when Edith died of pyelitis, or a kidney infection. If antibiotics had existed at the time, they could have cured Edith, but it wasn't until September 1928 — a little more than a year after Edith's death — that Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin. In the coroner's brisk cursive, the certificate says the body was conveyed to Joseph Levine, a prominent Jewish funeral home still in business, and then buried at Mt. Lebanon Cemetery in Collingdale, Pa.

The morning after a rainstorm, I drove to the cemetery to see if Edith was, in fact, buried there. Mt. Lebanon is like a labyrinth: Its graves are so close together there's barely any room to walk and navigational markers are difficult to de-



Baby Edith Gelman Grave Stone

cipher. I stopped at the groundskeeper's office to ask where Edith's grave was located, and he pulled out a thick book, flipping through aged records until he found her. He led the way with his truck, and I followed. We parked and walked to the grave, our feet sinking into the spongy ground, soaked from the previous night's downpour.

On the edge of the cemetery, close to West Oak Lane Road, the graves were sparser. All of them belonged to babies, many of whom had died in the 1920s, and almost every tombstone was inscribed with a lamb. Some sunk into the earth, while others were askew, but Edith's grave stood straight and glistened.

Compared to the others, it looked brand new. When I called the groundskeeper later, he said her grave had been replaced in 1976, which accounted for the fresh appearance. Nearly 50 years after her death, Edith had not been forgotten.

Edith's parents immigrated separately to America in the early 1900s and married a few years after Charles arrived. The Gelmanns, who had six children together, did not stay in one rented apartment for long, moving to a new address at least every 10 years. Over the decades, Charles worked as a shoe fitter, grocer and later as an "egg man," putting in 60 hours a week at the store he owned in Pennsport, according to census records.



Edith Gelman 1976 Grave Stone

If Edith was buried in Mt. Lebanon Cemetery by a conscientious family and had never been disinterred, how did a second gravestone for her end up in that garden in Northern Liberties? Sally McCabe, who moved into that neighborhood in the 1980s, had the answer.

Edith's old tombstone had most likely been returned to the engraver when it was replaced and left there with the intention of being reused once it had been sanded down. When the engraver went out of business, people in the neighborhood found it among the grave heap.

"In the '70s and '80s, there were these gravestones all over and people used them as doorsteps and in construction," she says. "The place where they were stored, in the back, was on Leithgow right at Bishop Neumann. And there were hundreds of gravestones of the most amazing size and shape and variety that you could believe. Everyone had one in their backyard and the smaller ones are the ones that made it the farthest and the bigger ones didn't make it as far because people just rolled them or put them on handcarts and they weigh hundreds and hundreds of pounds."

"They were beautiful. Some of them were huge and in the shape of trees," says McCabe. "We ended up with Bernard Yudelwitz in our yard. I finally figured out that his Hebrew name was wrong and so rather than redo the whole stone, they would grind the face off and start over. You might see three similar stones near each other that had the same names on them but different dates. It was like the engravers were drinking a lot."

When McCabe and her husband sold their house 10 years ago, they had two gravestones in their backyard. They gave away one with just an M on it and left behind Bernard's tombstone because it was too heavy to bring to East Oak Lane, where they now live.

"When people moved them they were a lot younger and had a lot less sense. It was like, 'Let's roll some gravestones,'" says McCabe. And by rolling, McCabe means this: "You need a couple of metal bars. You just tip and slip, tip and

slip, just like that. Everybody wanted a gravestone in their backyard.” Edith’s tombstone was being rolled to a garden on Second Street, but McCabe says the movers quit before they reached their destination, leaving the grave in the lot where it remains today.

Before 1976, an apartment building with a bakery on the first level had been there, until it was abandoned. “It got knocked down during the Rizzo administration,” says McCabe. “The whole strip of buildings there, kids kept ponies in them on Leithgow and Poplar. There were always ponies and chariot races. And one day they just came in and tore down all the buildings.”

After the demolition, the neighborhood cared for the no-man’s lot until eventually, in 2000, the Redevelopment Authority sold it to the Friends of Orianna Hill Park, a community group which remade part of it into a dog park.

“Every once in a while someone from another neighborhood would walk through and go to the deli that was across the street and they would go, ‘Why is there a gravestone there?’ and we’d say, ‘Oh, that’s where we bury the children,’ and then they would shake their heads and go away,” McCabe recalls mischievously.

Edith’s monument may be all that remains of an era of backyard tombstones. McCabe doubts Bernard is still on her old property, which has been dramatically renovated. Janet Finegar, the board secretary of Northern Liberties Neighbors Association who helped create both Liberty Lands and Orianna Hill Park, echoed a similar sentiment. “I’ve always been sorry that I don’t have one of the tombstones — I’ll bet that all the ones that are around are either in people’s gardens or have moved away with their owners. Bummer,” she says. Finegar, who continues to work with Orianna Hill Park as the board’s secretary, is glad Edith’s tombstone hasn’t been touched.

“I love the tombstone. I like big rocks in general, hence many of the ones at Liberty Lands,” Finegar says. “I think it’s funny and kind of pretty, and it’s hilarious that people think it’s a real grave.” ♦

The author, Paulina Reso, is the associate editor of Philadelphia “City Paper.” This article, originally published there on 05/29/2014 is reprinted courtesy the author and the paper. (Thanks to JGSGP member, Carol Robins, for bringing this article to our attention.)

JEWISH BURIAL REGISTERS FROM PJAC HOLDINGS

Information provided courtesy Jessica Lydon



The Temple University Libraries Special Collections Research Center contains a variety of materials of interest to Jewish genealogists, and in particular the collection of the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Collection, acquired in 2009. The collection documents the activities of the Greater Philadelphia Jewish community through the personal papers of civic and spiritual leaders and the records of cultural, educational, religious, and social service organizations established and operated by and for the Jewish community. Among the records, are burial registers from four Jewish cemeteries that record details about the interred and grave location for burials.

Jewish Burial Registers

Chevra Bikur Cholim Cemetery (Philadelphia, Pa.)

Burial register, 1864-1985, Accession 1763

Register lists name of decedent, grave lot number, and date of burial. Entries are listed by grave lot number.

Register lists name of decedent and grave lot number. Entries are listed by first letter of surname.

Independent Chevra Kadisho Har Yehuda Cemetery (Upper Darby, Pa.)

Men's and women's burial registers, 1903-1948, Accession 1262

Registers list name and age of decedent, home address (or lodge), date of burial (English), date of burial (Hebrew), and grave plot location. The women's burial register is in Yiddish only. Entries are listed by first letter of surname and generally chronological by date of burial.

Congregation Rodeph Shalom (Philadelphia, Pa.)

Burial registers, 1855-1972, Accession 1955

Registers list name of decedent, age, disease [cause of death], date of death, date of burial, remarks, and grave lot number. Entries are listed chronologically by date of burial.

No.	NAME OF DECEASED.	DISEASE.	AGE.	WHEN DIED.		WHEN BURIED.	REMARKS.
				MONTH.	DAY.	MONTH.	DAY.
1	Adolph Goldsmith		two Year	December	27 1855		
2	Moss Weis		11 Months	January	1 1856		
3	Moss Rau ✓ Consumptia		56 Year	Feby	15 "		
4	Hannah Feldman		2 "	March	9 "		
5	Rosa Frank		1 "	April	8 "		
6	Rosalie Frank		5 "	"	11 "		
7	L. Simon ✓		75 "	"	" "		
8	S. Simon Shaus		4 "	"	14 "		
9	Isaac Greenbaum		212 "	May	21 "		
10	Yonith		14 Months	June	1 "		
11	Mary Levy		39 Years	"	18 "		
12	Estella Seltzer		14 Months	July	13 "		
13	Babette Adler		66 Year	"	14 "		
14	Janny Belzinger		22 Months	"	20 "		
15	Susette Gold		65 Year	"	30 "		
16	Wenia		24 years	Augt	17 "		
17	Jacob Haas		47 "	"	29 "		

Register of Interments for the German Hebrew Congregation Rodef Sholem, 1855-1898

Research Requests

The SCRC reading room is located on the ground floor of Temple University's Paley Library and is open from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., Monday through Friday. Due to the unique, rare, valuable and often fragile nature of the items in our collection, the use of these materials often requires advance notice for retrieval. Submit inquiries to our general email scrc@temple.edu or the reference desk by calling (215) 204-8257. ♦♦

Image courtesy of Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

JGSGP thanks Jessica Lydon, associate archivist at Samuel Paley Library at Temple University, for the information on their burial registers. You can contact Jessica at: tud56101@temple.edu

ATD-AMERICAN CO. NEARS ITS FOURTH GENERATION OF FAMILY-RUN SUCCESS

By Diane Mastrull, *Inquirer* Columnist

The Zaslow brothers are at that rowdy age. They bicker. They tease. They talk over one another. They are Exhibits A, B and C that boys, indeed, will be boys - even when they're in their 80s. But each day doesn't end until Jerome, Spencer, and Arnold Zaslow make peace if anything is amiss - a routine insisted on by their parents. It has been the underpinning of a business relationship among the brothers that endures after more than 60 years of working together.

Besides their bloodline, their furniture and textile distributor had a much more diverse sales straitjackets, Jamaican beef "The idea was to sell anything to buy," said Arnold Zaslow, at

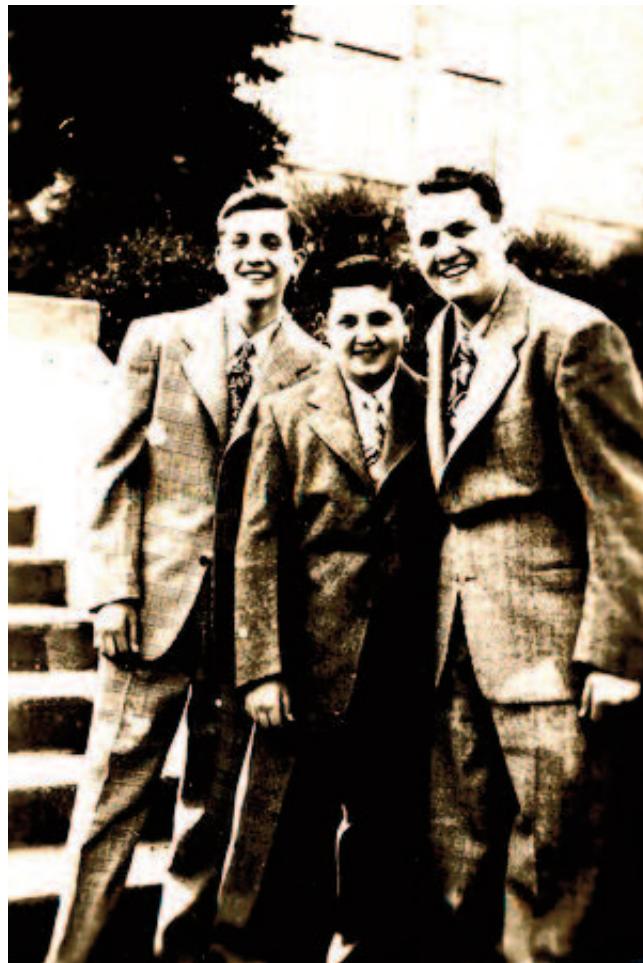
The Zaslows' small-business rare run for a family company, in Executive Leaders Radio in syndicated programming. "I've garding their success, and I special," Cohen wrote in an e-

Far from its humble begin-nearly 200 employees (count-workers make sheets and pil-of more than 100,000 in 78 pany, ATD-American would but it said sales had dipped down that still has some of its customers squeamish about

Not that the Zaslow brothers seen it before," Arnold Zaslow spective unique to people his of panic: "All you have to do is damn thing keeps happening."

He attributed the company's success, in part, to another piece of parental advice. "Our parents always said you'll go farther if you stick together," Arnold said. Included in the Zaslow family seal is this line: "Union gives us strength." The company started in 1931 as Jaffe's Art Linens in a storefront on South Street in Philadelphia, downstairs from the apartment where Irving and Ida Jaffe Zaslow raised their boys. ATD-American now has 10 of the 40 Zaslow immediate-family members on its payroll. In a bit of torch-passing, third-generation Zaslows were elected to top management positions for the first time in 2005.

Jerome Zaslow's daughter Janet Wischnia, now 53, succeeded him as president of ATD-American. One of Spencer Zaslow's sons, Robert, 44, is co-president of the manufacturing operation in Georgia, Thomaston Mills; he shares the title with Wischnia's husband, Eric, 57. On a recent morning at ATD-American's headquarters, Janet Wischnia and her cousin Robert were not nearly as laid back as their fathers. "Growth is the challenge in this economy - trying to



Spencer, Arnold & Jerome Zaslow, ca. 1940's

bond is ATD-American Co., a in Wyncote that in earlier days portfolio that included broccoli, patties, pencils, and condoms. that you had a good connection 82 the youngest brother.

experience is a remarkable and said Herbert J. Cohen, a partner Willow Grove, which offers interviewed 2,000+ CEOs re-promise you the Zaslow story is mail.

nings, ATD-American now has ing a mill in Georgia, where 70 lowcases) and a customer base countries. As a private com-not release its annual revenue, since the 2008 economic melt-institutional and government spending.

are freaked out about it. "I've said. "It will change." It's a per-age, he said, explaining his lack live long enough ... the same

make sure we keep moving forward," Wischnia said. "I take the legacy really seriously."

In the old days, price ruled. Today, with the Internet enabling people to buy more easily from a wide array of suppliers, building relationships with customers is key, said Wischnia, an anthropology major at the University of Pennsylvania during "four years of rebellion" before getting an M.B.A. from Drexel University.

Robert Zaslow, a graduate of Penn's Wharton School like his father and uncles, suggested there were more things at play at ATD-American than a business-oriented gene pool.

"Given that the majority of family businesses fail by the 2nd generation and we are at the cusp of our 4th generation, we know that we have a very special business and culture," he wrote in an e-mail. Six of the Zaslow brothers' nine children are actively involved in ATD-American. The other three - Arnold's two daughters and a son - are shareholders. The hope is that at least some of the 18 who comprise the group the Zaslow brothers call Gen 4 - grandchildren ranging in age from 3 to 25 - will eventually join the company - not that their grandfathers are planning to retire.

Consider the following passage from "*The Times of My Life*", written by Jerome Zaslow. It is a series of essays on business, family and personal achievements the oldest brother wrote over the years and published as a book in 2011. "In no way do I expect to completely divorce myself from my life's work," Jerome wrote in the final chapter, "but I do expect to take more time to develop new ideas and opportunities for both the family and the company."

Thus the 87-year-old's current title of chief strategist and chairman of the board. Spencer, 84, and Arnold each serve as an executive vice president with specific areas of focus: operations for Spencer, financial/legal for Arnold. That's an advisable arrangement, said Donna Marie DeCarolis, associate vice provost for entrepreneurship education at Drexel University.

Among the downsides of long-term involvement of principals in family owned businesses is "a tendency to avoid change, to shun new ways of doing things," DeCarolis said. "So from the get-go, openness, transparency and clear identification of roles and responsibilities is important when moving from generation to generation." The Zaslow brothers' imprint on the business dates from when they were not yet teenagers and were working in their father's shop, where pillowcases sold for 8 cents and bleached sheets for 28 cents in 1932.

In 1947, with Jerome and Spencer Zaslow both through Wharton, they opened a second Jaffe's store at Broad Street and Olney Avenue. But dealing with picky female shoppers led Jerome to conclude that "it's not for me."



The Zaslow Brothers; Arnold Spencer & Jerry, 2013

Back to his father he went for advice. They would close the two stores and shift to serving government and institutional customers.

In 1979, the brothers would relocate the company to Montgomery County, following a path similar to the one their parents took when they moved the family home from South Street to Melrose Park in 1947.

Today, a chandelier from that house hangs in a foyer just steps from their sons' offices. ♦

This article, reprinted courtesy Philly.com and author Diane Mastrull. It was originally published, September 18, 2012. Contact Diane at 215-854-2466 or dmastrull@phillynews.com, or @mastrud on Twitter.

A FAMILY'S LEGACY RESTORED

by Arlene Goldfus Lutz



I'm writing this article in order to correct an omission in the *Philadelphia Area Jewish Genealogical Resource Directory* that was compiled for the 2009 IAJGS-Philadelphia conference. When I browsed through the section on inactive cemeteries, I found that my great grandfather, Samuel Goldfus, one of the first Jewish undertakers in Philadelphia, wasn't listed. I pointed out the omission to one of the conference organizers who informed me that the directory researchers had no knowledge of my ancestor.

Samuel Goldfus, (ne Schmuel Yosef Goldfus) was born in 1852 in Papile (Papilon in Yiddish), Lithuania and immigrated to the U.S. in 1889, leaving behind his wife, Esther, and three children. They in turn arrived at Castle Garden on December 31, 1891 and joined Samuel at his then residence of 623 S. 3rd Street in Philadelphia. He first appeared in the Philadelphia City Directory in 1893 and his occupation was identified as "shoes", but in 1897 he was listed as an "undertaker" at the South 3rd Street address. He conducted his undertaking business from his home until 1907 when the family and the business relocated to 331 Pine Street. He remained an undertaker until his death in 1909.

I have located considerable evidence of Samuel's service to the Philadelphia Jewish community as an undertaker. The records of the George C. Toppitzer Funeral Home in Philadelphia were recently placed on Ancestry. Those records show that, between August 28, 1903 and March 3, 1905, S. Goldfus leased a black hearse or a carriage from Toppitzer twenty-eight times. The vehicles were used to transport a funeral party to a cemetery. The charge for leasing a carriage ranged from \$4.00 to \$6.00, with most rentals costing \$5.00. The rental charge for a black hearse was higher, costing \$6.50 to \$7.00. The vast majority of the burials for which Samuel rented a vehicle were at Har Nebo Cemetery, and a few were held in other Jewish cemeteries, such as Mt. Carmel. I'm still puzzled, however, by the funeral Samuel conducted on February 21, 1904. According to Toppitzer's records, the funeral party was picked up at 4th and Reed Streets and the burial took place in Holy Redeemer, a Catholic cemetery.

Apparently, Samuel tired of renting funeral vehicles from Toppitzer because on April 11, 1908, he placed the following classified ad in the Philadelphia *Inquirer*:

**WANTED—UNDERTAKER'S WAGON. IN
good condition. Address S. Goldfus. 331 Pine
street.**

Plainly, his undertaking business was growing sufficiently for him to consider investing in his own equipment. The following death notice from the list of obituaries in the *Inquirer*'s September 13, 1908 edition attests to my great grandfather's active business.

**RUSS.—September 12, 1908. MINA RUSS,
aged 50 years. Relatives and friends are in-
vited to attend the funeral. Monday, at 1 P
M. at 516 Lombard st. Interment at Har
Nebo Cemetery. S. Goldfus, undertaker. 331
Pine st.**

While I don't have copies of other death certificates listing S. Goldfus as the undertaker, several people have told me that his name is listed on one of their ancestors' death certificates.

Samuel's undertaking business was becoming more recognized in Philadelphia. Har Jehuda Cemetery, located at 8400 Lansdowne Avenue in Upper Darby, has a list of burial organizations associated with the cemetery. Among them was Goldfus B'nai Moishe, which later merged with the Maccabee Lodge. This meant that the Goldfus undertaking business had purchased a block of burial plots in the cemetery to be used by members of the organization and further signified that Samuel could afford to invest in those plots. Plainly, S. Goldfus Undertaker was an active enterprise in the Philadelphia Jewish community. My great grandfather was also involved in the community outside of his business. Public records show that in 1905 he served as a witness to the incorporation of Congregation Mishkan Israel, which its charter identified as an "ashkenazic orthodox Jewish church."

Something I'm curious about and have never been able to determine is what kind of training or background Samuel had that he could call himself an undertaker. After all, between 1889 and 1896 he had identified himself as a merchant, a shoemaker and a driver. How and why he became an undertaker remains a mystery to me.

Samuel Goldfus died on February 23, 1909 and was buried at Har Nebo Cemetery. His death certificate states that the under-

taker was M. Goldman at 326 Lombard St. The name of the undertaker intrigued me because my great grandmother (Samuel's widow) Esther's maiden name was also Goldman. I therefore thought there might be a relationship between M. Goldman, the undertaker, and my Goldfus family. JGSP's resource directory lists a Goldman as one of the inactive Jewish undertakers but does not provide a first name. My next research task was to identify M. Goldman, the undertaker.

I learned that his full name was Manus Goldman. Although the 1910 census indicates that he immigrated to the U.S. in 1885, he first appeared in historic records in the 1891 Philadelphia City Directory, where he is listed as a "commission merchant" living at 338 South Street. The next listing for Manus Goldman appears in the 1900 City Directory as an undertaker working at 809 S. 5th Street. Subsequent listings report different addresses for his business, and in 1906 and 1907 he is identified as an undertaker at 326 Lombard Street, the address from which he conducted the Samuel Goldfus funeral in 1909.

Although I have not been able to find a documented link connecting Manus Goldman and Esther Goldfus, I still believe there was one. Both Samuel Goldfus and Manus Goldman appeared in Philadelphia around the same time, and both were employed in some kind of commercial work in the early 1890s. They both became undertakers in the latter half of that decade. Of all the Jewish undertakers operating in Philadelphia by 1909, the Goldfus family selected Manus Goldman to handle Samuel's funeral. Perhaps Manus Goldman was the cousin who welcomed the Goldfus family to Philadelphia originally.

Upon Samuel's death in 1909, his widow, Esther, continued the business and identified herself as an undertaker in the 1910 U.S. census as well as in the 1910 and 1911 Philadelphia City Directories. She was also an active businesswoman. Just a few months after her husband's death, Esther is recorded in the *Inquirer*'s September 16, 1909 edition as the defendant in a contract case. Two years later she was the plaintiff in a case in which she sued a John Goodman *in replevin* (a legal procedure to have personal property returned to the plaintiff.) Moreover, she conducted the family business while raising her seven children who, in 1910, ranged in age from eight through twenty-five. Her household also included a son-in-law and a grandson.

I found Esther's ability to continue the undertaking business interesting, given that she told the 1910 census taker that she could neither read nor write. While I had known that my great-grandfather, Samuel Goldfus, was one of the first Jewish undertakers in Philadelphia, I was amazed to discover that more than one hundred years ago, my great-grandmother, Esther Goldman Goldfus, may have been the first female Jewish undertaker in the city.

In the 1910 census the entire Goldfus family was reported as residing at 331 Pine Street. Oldest child, Freda, her husband, Charles Kahn, and their son, Robert, also lived at that address, which was identified earlier in this article as the location of the undertaking business. Significantly, the census lists Charles' occupation as "manager" for an undertaker, while Esther is identified as the undertaker. The 1911 City Directory gives the identical information for Charles and Esther. According to the following year's directory, however, Esther was still residing at 331 Pine Street, but no occupation was given. Charles was living at the same address and working as an undertaker. Until 1918 the city directories continued to list Charles as an undertaker at that same address, while Esther, on the other hand, was no longer listed at all, notwithstanding that she had signed a death certificate as the undertaker in 1916. Apparently, Charles Kahn had taken over the business from Esther.

The Kahn and Goldfus families then went their separate ways, and in 1918. Charles Kahn and family moved to 503 Spruce Street, where he continued his work as an undertaker, while Esther Goldfus and her three youngest children relocated to 327 Pine Street. In 1923 the Kahns and the undertaking business moved into the Goldfus residence where the business remained until Freda sold it upon his death. By 1930, Esther and her three youngest children were living at 1110 N. 42nd Street. It seems that although the two families separated in 1918, they reconnected later on, and the business continued throughout.

My next question was whether Charles had actually purchased the business from Esther or at least supported her financially in consideration for his taking over the business and property. To answer this question I reviewed parallel Goldfus family history. On October 6, 1918, Esther's second son, Louis, was killed in the bloody Battle of Argonne, five weeks before the November 11th armistice that ended World War I. I obtained Louis' military records, and discovered an affidavit dated January 28, 1925, that was part of Esther's Application for Adjusted Compensation for Service in the Army, filed on behalf of her deceased son.

You'll note the records in the images below exhibit severe fire damage: On July 12, 1973, a disastrous fire at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) destroyed approximately 16-18 million Official Military Personnel Files (OMPF). No duplicate copies of these records were ever maintained, nor were microfilm copies produced. Neither were any indexes created prior to the fire. In addition, millions of documents had been lent to the Department of Veterans Affairs before the fire occurred. Therefore, a complete listing of the records that were lost is not available. Fortunately, the records for Louis Goldfus remained intact, but damaged. (The author writes, "I had to pay an extra \$50 to have his records fumigated before the center could make copies for me.")

In the application, (*image below*) Esther attested:

"He sent me \$20. mo. out of his pay, the Government allowed me \$5. mo. Prior to service he gave me all his earnings \$20. wk.

APPLICATION FOR ADJUSTED COMPENSATION FOR SERVICE IN

Army, (Army) (Navy) (Coast Guard) (Marine Corps)

This application must be sent to the War Department, Navy Department, or Marine Corps, as indicated in instructions, depending on whether your last service was in the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, or Marine Corps. Use the envelope provided for this purpose, with the proper address printed on it.

READ INSTRUCTIONS OVER CAREFULLY

To the Secretary of War or Secretary of the Navy.

The following statements are made by me in support of my claim for Adjusted Compensation under the provisions of the World War Adjusted Compensation Act:

1. Name of veteran: **GOLDFUS LOUIS S.** Service of **I do not know** Serial No. **123 701**

(Last) (First) (Middle) (Month) (Year) (Street) (House number and street)

Present address of veteran or dependent: **XXXXX North 42nd, St.**

(City) **Philadelphia, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.**

(City) (Month) (Day) (Year) (City) (State)

Date of birth of veteran **June 15th, 1897** at **Philadelphia, Pa.**

(Month) (Day) (Year) (City) (State)

Original entry into World War service in the Army, Navy, Coast Guard, or Marine Corps: **Private, March 5th, 1917**

Was as a **Private,** (Rank or grade) **On** (Month) **April** (Year) **1917**

at **Philadelphia, Pa.** Enlisted in **N.G.** 1916

Date of separation from service: **DEATH October 6th, 1918** at **Killed in action during battle of Argonne, France**

Did (did not) have overseas service: **May 3, 1918 to Oct. 6, 1918**

Now in organizations, at stations or on vessels in the order named as follows:

A. 109 Inf. From to
from to
from May 1918 to death
from to
from to
from to
from to
from to
from to
from to

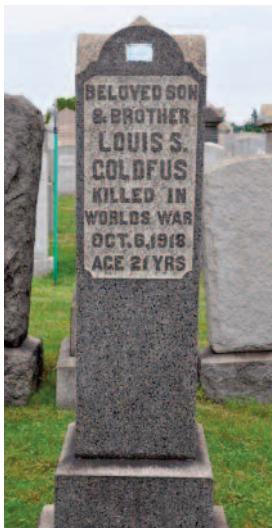
Character given on discharge certificate: **Killed in action.**

ADJUSTED COMPENSATION ACT

Application for Adjusted Compensation by Esther Goldfus for the death of her son, Louis, in World War I

pensation for her services as an undertaker for Kahn's Funeral Home through that date. Nor have I found any evidence that the Kahns offered her any payment for the value of her family's business.

Charles Kahn's undertaking business apparently thrived, and his wife, the former Freda Goldfus, took an active role in its operation. In the early 1950s,



Final Resting Place of Louis Goldfus

I was a widow before he entered service, he was my main support.”

The Army calculated Louis' service and determined that Esther was entitled to \$528.25.

If Louis had been her main support prior to his enlistment on March 27, 1917, then she most likely received little if any com-

13. Commissioned service:	GRADES	FROM—	To—
<hr/>			
14. I was a commissioned or warrant officer performing home service not with troops and receiving commutation of quarters or of subsistence from _____			
to _____ stations:	and during this period I was on duty at the following STATION	FROM—	To—
<hr/>			
15. I was granted a farm or industrial furlough from _____ so _____			
 Hixson (was not) a conscientious objector who performed no military or naval duties whatever, and HE (did not) refuse to wear the prescribed uniform of the branch of service in which I was serving.			
 Hixson (was not) discharged for alienage.			
18. Remarks: He sent me \$20. mo. out of his pay, the Government allowed me \$5. mo. Prior to service he gave me all his earnings \$20. wh. I was a widow before he entered service, he was my main support.			
<hr/>			
19. I certify that I am the <u>mother</u> _____ named in this application; <small>(See instructions for this item)</small>			
that the statements made herein are made by me of my own free act and deed for the purpose of applying for Adjusted Compensation under the provisions of the World War Adjusted Compensation Act; and that the same are true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.			
 Signature <u>Esther X Goldfarb</u> Date January 28th, 1947 Applicant <small>(L.S.)</small>			
 <i>Item 20 will not be filled in when dependent makes application</i>			
20. We, the undersigned, certify that we know the person signing the application to be friendly with the veteran whose service is set forth in the above application; that we have known him (her) for _____ years and _____ years, respectively; <small>(To be filled in by first witness)</small> <small>(To be filled in by second witness)</small>			
and that he (she) understands the statements made by him (her) and the penalty provided by law for making false statements.			
 Signature of witnesses: (1) _____ <small>(First name)</small> <small>(Middle name)</small> <small>(Last name)</small>			
<i>Handwritten signature</i> <i>Esther C. Goldfarb</i> <small>(Address)</small>			
(2) _____ <small>(First name)</small> <small>(Middle name)</small> <small>(Last name)</small>			
<i>Margaret B. Tomble</i> <small>(Address)</small>			
1610 Locust St. Chicago IL 60610			

After Charles' death in 1953 Freda announced in the Philadelphia *Jewish Exponent* that she was continuing the undertaking business under her personal supervision. Several months later she notified the public that she would be operating Charles Kahn Funeral Service with the Berschlers, and the combined business would be known as Berschler & Kahn, at 730 Pine Street. The Kahn part of the name was soon dropped, thus ending a business in Philadelphia that could trace its roots back sixty years to Samuel Goldfus.

When I was a child in the late 1950s and before I knew my family's history, I was with my father when he was introduced to someone as "Stanley Goldfus." The new acquaintance asked him, "Are you related to Goldfus the undertaker?" This incident took place fifty years after the death of my great-grand-

father, Samuel Goldfus, and marked the first time that I heard that my father's grandfather had been an undertaker. It was also important to me because it illustrated that fifty years after Samuel Goldfus had died, my great-grandfather was still remembered in the Philadelphia Jewish community despite the fact that the Goldfus name was no longer directly associated with the undertaking business and Charles Kahn's had become more prominent in the Philadelphia Jewish funeral industry. I occasionally wistfully think that if my father, Stanley Goldfus, had accepted his Aunt Freda's offer, there might still have been an S. Goldfus Undertakers in Philadelphia, more than fifty years after the original business ceased operating. ♦

Arlene Goldfus Lutz is a retired attorney in New Jersey who served as a Deputy Attorney General for the state and as a Deputy Counsel for the Governor of New Jersey. While she was born in Philadelphia and lived there until she was eight, her entire family as well as her husband's family lived in Philadelphia. She became interested in genealogy because of her unusual maiden name, but no one could give her any information about her paternal relatives. Almost everything she now knows about her father's family – including the information in this article – she learned from her research. Arlene is researching Goldfus, Freilich, Chernobalsky, Feinberstein/Feinstein, Lutzker/Lutz, Goodman/Grubman, Press. She can be reached at aglutz11@gmail.com.

FEBRUARY MEETING SUMMARY

by Linda Ewall-Krocker

What was to be the January meeting took place on Sunday, February 1, 2015 at Main Line Reform Temple. The later meeting scheduled for February 22nd was cancelled due to inclement weather.

Our presenter, Glenn Kurtz spoke about his new book, *Three Minutes in Poland: Discovering a Lost World in a 1938 Family Film*, which traces the author's remarkable four-year journey to identify the people in his grandfather's haunting images.

Traveling in Europe in August 1938, one year before the outbreak of World War II, David Kurtz, a Jewish immigrant to the U.S., captured three minutes of ordinary life in the small, predominantly Jewish town of Nasalis, Poland on 16 mm Kodachrome color film. Through the brutal twists of history, these few minutes of home-movie footage became the sole surviving moving images of this town. Seventy-five years later, as part of the Ushak permanent collection, the film serves as a memorial to an entire community—an entire culture—that was annihilated in the Holocaust. The film can be seen at: http://www.ushmm.org/online/film/display/detail.php?file_num=5221



Photo: U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

Kurtz is a graduate of the New England Conservatory-Tufts University double degree program and holds a PhD from Stanford University in German studies and comparative literature. His writing has been published in *The New York Times*, *Lost*, *ZYZZYVA*, *Tema Celeste*, and elsewhere. He has taught at Stanford University, San Francisco State University, California College of the Arts, and New York University's School of Continuing and Professional Studies.

Glenn's sister Dana Kurtz is the former president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of the San Francisco Bay Area (JGSSFBA). ♦

For more information, go to: <http://glennkurtz.com/>

<http://www.npr.org/2014/11/16/364051174/family-film-offers-glimpse-of-three-minutes-in-poland-before-holocaust>

MARCH MEETING SUMMARY

March 8: “DNA for Genealogy”

Dr. Jay Sage, former president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston (JGSGB), retired as a physicist from MIT Lincoln Laboratory to pursue his interest in Jewish genealogy. He was one of the three co-chairs for the 2013 IAJGS-Boston conference and currently is co-editor (along with his wife, Daphnah) of *Mass-Pocha*, the journal of the JGSGB.

Dr. Sage prefaced his talk by relating a humorous story of how he could've been part of the Nobel laureate team that was recognized for discovering DNA. You can follow his talk in its entirety at <http://DNA.sagefamily.org>. Here are some highlights:

DNA testing is a complex subject so don't expect to understand it all at first; you'll need to review this talk several times, listen to other speakers, and read educational materials on testing sites.

Genetic testing can answer some (but only a limited number of) genealogical questions that documentation and family stories cannot.

Genealogical tests have progressed significantly in the number of markers they can test: now 111 markers for Y-DNA to an entire genome of 16,000 bases (mt-DNA) to 700,000 markers (autosomal).

Basic biology background: the cell + its genetic components, DNA, chromosomes, reproductive cells + progeny, mitochondrial DNA, mutations (SNPs and STRs).



Critical Fact #1 for Genetic Genealogy:

- o A male received a Y chromosome **unmixed** from his father, who received it from his father, who received it from his father, etc.
- o Thus the Y chromosome is relatively easy to trace (and it follows surnames)
- o Testing a (relatively) few locations (markers) on the DNA is sufficient to determine a match or mismatch to another person.

Critical Fact #2 for Genetic Genealogy:

- o Sperm's mt-DNA generally does not enter the egg (or is destroyed by the egg if it does).
- o **All children** received their mt-DNA **unmixed** from their mother, who received it from her mother, who received it from her mother, etc.
- o Thus the mt-DNA, like Y-DNA, is relatively straightforward to trace.

If DNA replication were perfect, we would all have the same DNA. Consequently, mutations create variety—and make genetic genealogy possible.

A strong case for when DNA can inform genealogy occurs when it can more-or-less *conclusively* prove or disprove a (biological) relationship in the male (and possibly female) line where a relationship is suspected. Case study: rumors that Thomas Jefferson fathered children by his house slave, Sally Hemmings.

Critical Fact #3 for Genetic Genealogy:

- o The DNA of paired (autosomal) chromosomes gets scrambled ("recombined") and generally contains segments from many ancestors.
- o Therefore, it is **much** more difficult to analyze.
- o Requires measuring a very large number of markers in order to identify matching segments.

While Y-DNA and mt-DNA remain essentially unchanged from parent to offspring, autosomal DNA changes drastically from parents to each offspring. Only random strings of common DNA match between related individuals. Testing multiple family members can help sort things out.

Comparison of types of DNA tests and costs. Tests can be upgraded; there are frequent sales.

Do not do DNA testing unless you are prepared for the possibility of learning something uncomfortable.

DNA testing in no way supplants traditional genealogical research.

P.S. Here's a moving testimonial to the value of registering with JewishGen Family Finder (JGFF) and listing all the surnames in your family: <http://jaysage.org/Horace.pdf> ♦♦

WANTED, DEAD OR ALIVE!

by Linda Ewall-Krocker

I'M DESPERATELY SEEKING MY GREAT GRANDMOM! PLEASE HELP ME SOLVE THIS MYSTERY!



I'm searching for the mother of A. GOLDMANN, my grandfather JACOB GOLDMAN (1883-1959), and SAMUEL GOLDMAN (1889-1978?). The sons were residents of Philadelphia by the early 1900s. Their mother came to the United States some time later than Jacob did in 1904. She settled in Rock Island, Illinois where she remarried. (Great, so I didn't know her surname when she arrived, and then she married and changed it again!). There may be other relatives as well in or around Rock Island and Omaha, Nebraska.

According to ship records Jacob (ne Jankel) came to the United States from Woliniem. Family members indicated that he came from Russia-Lithuania, Rushka-Zhitomir Gubernia or Brest-Litovsk, but Jacob's naturalization papers indicate Somes, Russia as his birthplace. He arrived in Baltimore on June 30, 1904 on the SS Brandenberg. Jacob was a milliner and had a thriving business in Philadelphia for many years. He married Celie (Celia) GREENBERG on June 10, 1907. They had seven children in twenty-two years. Jacob's gravestone indicates their father's name was AARON YUMF who died of pneumonia while in "the old country" when Jacob was a boy.

Jacob (Jankel) arrived in 1904. Ship records indicate that his brother, A. GOLDMANN of 1625 Columbia Avenue, Philadelphia, met him. Finding information on "A." is impossible because there are far too many possibilities.. I need to try to find his first name in a Philadelphia city directory, then find more information on him. I hope a field trip to the Pennsylvania Historical Society in Philadelphia will help.

Another brother, SAMUEL GOLDMAN, who, lived at 3131 Fountain Street, Philadelphia, signed Jacob's naturalization papers in 1916 and his World War I registration in 1917. It seems he was twenty-eight years old and worked as a hat manufacturer, possibly with my grandfather at 617 Arch Street. Jacob was widowed and had two children

under twelve. He may have remarried in 1919 to Dara or Dora and had a third child. Further records (1920 and 1930 censuses) do not give me any clue about their mother. The common surname makes tracking him further iffy. There is a death record in Dade, Florida in 1978, but I'm not sure if it's he.

So far I've done the following:

- I have checked my grandfather Jacob's naturalization, marriage, and death records, but his parents are never listed.
- I looked for more information on brother Sam.
- Conjecture based on DNA: there is another possible brother, Max Goldman, who married Jennie Wechsler (1882-1966) and died in Chicago in 1942.
- Clue???: an uncle's diary, apparently written in the 1920s, claims that my great grandmother's Rock Island hubby lived to be 100 and celebrated a second Bar Mitzvah. I contacted the largest synagogue in the Tri-City area (including Moline and Davenport), which has combined with others over the years, but they state that they have no records for 100 year olds being Bar Mitzvahed. Does any site have records of centenarians from long ago???
- I tried calling the largest local cemetery as well, hoping that perhaps their records were digitized, but they were not. I can't imagine they'd have too many centenarians, but there's no easy way to look that up without names.
- I downloaded a list of all Goldman women married in that tri-county area in the right timeframe, but throwing a dart at a multi-page document can't help find the right name.
- My uncle also thought they may have changed their name from SCHNEIDERMAN(?) to GOLDMAN, but I haven't seen anything to verify that.
- I emailed the Rock Island Genealogical Society hoping for a Random Act of Genealogical Kindness or a miracle. I've broken through other brick walls, but none like this!

Any sleuths out there willing to help track down my elusive great grandmother? ♦♦

Linda Ewall-Krocker has been interested in genealogy since the early 1980s, fortunately starting shortly before her dad passed away, so that she did get some information from him. His little funeral prayer books have also been a helpful resource for when family members were buried, though not where, since he knew that and didn't jot it down; the information died with him.

*Names and towns Linda is researching: **Fishelov (Fisher)** in Kachinovichi (suburb of Pinsk, Minsk Gubernia, Belarus); **Weiss** in Kamyanets Podilsky, Khmelnytsky, Ukraine; **Goldman** in Somes, Russia (or Rava-Rus'ka in Lviv Oblast of western Ukraine); and **Greenberg** in Odessa, Ukraine. You can reach Linda at: cappuccinoholic@gmail.com*

WHERE IS MY GREAT GRANDMOTHER BURIED?

By Bobbi Schwartz-Biederman



Preface: Bobbi Schwartz-Biederman originally posted her query on JGSGP's Facebook page on December 17, 2014. She'd been unsuccessful in locating her great grandmother, Sara Bella Rick's gravesite. She was under the impression that her great grandmother was buried in Philadelphia, along with her great uncle, Carl Rick. While she knew that the surname had been changed from Chitrik, Bobbi didn't know much more about that side of her family. Bobbi shares her research journey below:

Imagine my surprise when a 1940 census showed Sarah was alive and living with Ben's sister, Esther, in New York City. She was listed as Sara Bella Rick, a widow and the mother-in-law of the head of the household. I rechecked my mother's notes on Aunt Esther and found a scribbled reference in the margin that Esther's mother was buried in Philadelphia by her son Karl. My grandfather, Ben, died in 1949 before I was born. He and his Russian family always seemed vague and distant but all the time they were alive and living in Philadelphia.

I kept searching for more information on Karl and Sarah. Luckily Ben, his sister and Karl all applied for naturalization. Now some genealogy blanks could be filled. They came from Chernigov and had grey blue eyes like my daughter Dina Sara, with her middle name in honor of my elusive great grandmother Sarah. In 1924, Karl had his name, Coppel Chitrik, changed to Carl Rich. I found Sarah in one census only. I thought perhaps she had remarried and changed her name.

Coming to a dead end in my search I posted a note on Facebook to the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Philadelphia. Emily Garber suggested I look for the name Sarah Rick at the Italian Genealogical Group's website: <http://italiangen.org/>. That seemed unreasonable, but it showed she passed away at 70 years old in 1945. Later Evan Fishman forwarded a suggestion by Ann Kauffman that perhaps Carl's name was erroneously spelled Carol on a Pennsylvania death certificate in 1935. That proved correct with his mother's maiden name listed as Sarah Rosen. Informant on the death certificate was my grandfather, Ben Rick from Atlantic City. I thought I had tried every "C" or "K" name I could think of including Charles, yet I never would have thought to look for Carol. The death certificate shows he was buried on October 10, 1935 in Har Judah Cemetery. I checked their site online, however, neither his name nor Sarah's is listed. A note says many graves are not easily legible, and those that are legible were recorded on their site. I did note several Rosen family members are buried there. When Karl left Russia for Philadelphia, possibly he lived near his mother's family. Some of the surnames in the cemetery are the same ones that show up as fourth cousins in my DNA Ancestry report.

I also discovered that Sarah's husband was listed as Arnold Rick. Ben's tombstone shows his Hebrew name as Behr Ben Yonah Ha Levi revealing his Hebrew name.

I'm very grateful for everyone's help in finding information regarding this part of my family that I knew so little about. The "trees" online can stand as silent as trees made into telephone poles. Finding information from many sources helps us locate our ancestors. Sometimes we can find more information from a long lost sibling than our own grandparents. ♦♦♦

Bobbi subsequently requested her great grandmother's death certificate from the New York City Department of Health which indicated that Sarah Bella Rick was buried at Beth El Cemetery in [Paramus] New Jersey.

*Bobbi Schwartz is a writer who blogs regularly at www.hurricaneharbor.blogspot.com. She specializes in the interrelatedness of weather, history and politics. She is piecing together the broken branches of her family tree applying her knowledge of demography & history. After arriving in America from England & Nezhin her family settled in the Philadelphia area as well as Malaga, NJ before moving south to Key West & Tampa. The surnames in Philadelphia she is researching are **Rosen, Chitrik/Rick, Morris and Abrahams**. She remembers fondly hearing her grandmother talk about living in Strawberry Mansion as a teenager; the samovar her mother-in-law brought from Russia and modeling high button shoes at Wanamakers. Contact her at bobbischwartz@gmail.com*

USING THE VETERANS ADMINISTRATION TO OBTAIN RECORDS ON DECEASED VETERANS

by James Gross, MLIS



The focus of this article is to explain how to use Veterans Administration (VA) files on deceased relatives as an alternate resource. In addition to medical records, VA files may contain, the DD 214 Form that provides information about the veteran from the date of entry through separation, application for military duty, and/or other military records. In essence the files provide a snapshot into the military lives of these veterans and provide as well as a timeline as to when and where they served in defense of their country.

This resource has taken on greater importance as a result of the massive 1973 fire at the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in Overland, Missouri.¹ I previously wrote an article on this topic which was published in *Avotaynu* in Winter 2003.² To give you an idea of the scope of the potential destruction consider the following facts about the NPRC:

- It handles the service records of persons in Federal civil service or American military service.
- It holds historical military personnel records of nearly 100 million veterans.
- The vast majority of these records are paper-based and not available on-line.
- It is a department within the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA).

As a result of the fire, approximately 16-18 million official military personnel records were lost³ including:

- 80% loss to records of U.S. Army personnel discharged November 1, 1912, to January 1, 1960.⁴
- 75% loss to records of U.S. Air Force personnel discharged September 25, 1947, to January 1, 1964, with names alphabetically after Hubbard, James E.⁵
- Some U.S. Army Reserve personnel who performed their initial active duty for training in the late 1950s but who received final discharge as late as 1964.⁶

A 2014 Fox News article describing the long ordeal veteran Tom Morrow experienced in trying to retrieve his records noted that, "No duplicate copies of these records were ever maintained, nor were microfilm copies produced... Neither were any indexes created prior to the fire. In addition, millions of documents had been lent to the Department of Veterans Affairs before the fire occurred. Therefore, a complete listing of the records that were lost is not available."⁷

The first step is to identify whether the VA has a copy of the NPRC military file. When dealing with a military record that has been presumed to have been destroyed, the NPRC is able to reconstruct basic service information, such as military date of entry, date of discharge, character of service, and final rank by using the following sources: VA claims files, individual state records, Multiple Name Pay Vouchers (MPV) from the Adjutant General's Office, Selective Service System (SSS) registration records, pay records from the Government Accounting Office (GAO), as well as medical records from military hospitals.⁸ In reality this reconstruction effort takes a lot of time, and the results are often mixed. Is there was a way or a method for a researcher to try and locate and possibly recover some of the date or information from the burned NPRC military records?

Let's face it: we live in the digital information age in which everyone expects instant information! Fortunately, there is a partial solution. Ancestry.com has added a database entitled, "U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850-2010." This index contains birth and death dates for more than 14 million veterans and VA beneficiaries who died between the years 1850 and 2010. Per Ancestry, "The majority of information in the index comes from the BIRLS (Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem) Death File; however, the veteran's name has been added by cross-referencing the Social Security Number in the BIRLS Death File with the Social Security Death Index. No names were provided directly in the BIRLS Death File."⁹ See image below from Ancestry.com.

The BIRLS, Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem Death File is a Veterans Benefits Administration database that lists information for deceased individuals who had received benefits from the Veterans Administration while they were alive. These include veterans who received educational benefits and veterans' survivors who applied for benefits.

So, does the Ancestry.com database totally eliminate the need to send a written Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) letter to the VA? I can tell you there's no record in Ancestry's copy of the Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File database for my late grandfather, Dr. Nathan Steinberg, a captain in the U.S. Army during World War II. So, it may be prudent to send a letter to the VA if your relative is not listed.

Name:	Samuel Steinberg
Gender:	Male
Birth Date:	12 Aug 1895
Death Date:	19 Jan 1982
SSN:	077201140
Enlistment Date 1:	29 Apr 1918
Release Date 1:	9 Aug 1919

Here's the method I use:

1. Typically I send a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) letter to a VA office, preferably one in a smaller city or town because they are often less busy and more apt to actually reply. I cite the FOIA and inquire as to whether a BIRLS file existed on my deceased veteran. I include the veteran's name, date of birth, date of death, and social security number. I usually ask that in their reply, they enclose a copy of the BIRLS file number or to print out and send me a screenshot of that information from their computer monitor screen.

What replies have I received from the VA? I have often received a reply in the form of my original letter with the words "no record" scrawled on it. On occasion, however, I have had positive results and received either my letter with the VA BIRLS file number written on it or a print out from the VA computer screen showing the VA BIRLS file number.

2. Take the BIRLS information, whether from the Ancestry.com online database, or from the written VA reply, and send a follow-up letter to your local VA office, citing the FOIA, and requesting a copy of the deceased veteran's complete file. During the VA's interaction with the veteran it often requests a copy of that veteran's military file in order to verify his or her eligibility for veteran's health benefits. The VA maintains medical records on veterans. This includes those veterans who filed a medical claim before July 1973.¹⁰

An example of one published reply from the VA: "All the paperwork from 1967 was there, including a detailed drawing a doctor had made of my Dad's head injury." In December 2004, Shawn Morrow said his father finally received a letter stating the VA would begin sending him checks for \$2,600 per month. "They gave him 100 percent disability after waiting 42 years to get anything," Morrow said.¹¹ ♦♦♦

References:

- [1] Stender, Walter W.; Evans Walker (1974, October). "The National Personnel Records Center Fire: A Study in Disaster". *The American Archivist, Society of American Archivists*, 37 (4). Retrieved Dec 9, 2014 from: <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/nprc-fire.pdf>
- [2] Gross, James. (2003, Winter). "Using the VA to Get WWII Military Records," *Avotaynu*, Vol. 22, No. 4: 5-5. Available at: <http://works.bepress.com/jamesgross/4>
- [3] DD214. (2007). "The 1973 NRPC Fire; DD214s and the 1973 NRPC Fire, a "Record" Loss," DD214.TLD. Retrieved December 9, 2014 from: http://www.dd214.us/nprc_73fire.html
- [4] United States, (2007, June). "The 1973 Fire, National Personnel Records Center," Archives.gov. College Park, Maryland: National Personnel Records Center, National Archives and Records Administration. Retrieved December 9, 2014 from: <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/fire-1973.html>
- [5] *Ibid.*
- [6] Wikipedia (n.d.). "National personnel records center fire," http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Personnel_Records_Center_fire
- [7] Corbin, Cristina. (2014, June 8). "Veterans still battling 1973 fire that wiped out millions of service records," Fox News. Retrieved December 9, 2014 from: <http://tinyurl.com/mcf86xj>
- [8] Military.com (n.d.) "Rebuilding service records," Web. Military.com, retrieved December 9, 2014 from: <http://www.military.com/benefits/records-and-forms/rebuilding-service-records.html>
- [9] Ancestry.com. (n.d.). "About U.S., Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File, 1850-2010" Retrieved 1/20/2015 from: <http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=2441>
- [10] See footnote # 8.
- [11] See footnote #7.

Author James Gross has been working on his family tree since the early 1990s. A periodic contributor to various genealogy newsletters, James volunteers regularly at the Cherry Hill, NJ Family History Center where he helps other genealogists in their research.

He also has a genealogy website: <http://tinyurl.com/gross-steinberg>.

James can be reached at: navistar96@yahoo.com

35TH IAJGS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON JEWISH GENEALOGY



The logo features a stylized menorah on the left side, with a green tree growing from its top. To the right of the menorah, the text reads "35th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy". Below this, it says "Jerusalem, 6-10 July, 2015" and "In cooperation with MyHeritage".

For complete information on the conference; registration, travel, accommodations, costs, the program, speakers and add-ons, connect directly to the conference website: <http://iajgs2015.org>

The 35th IAJGS Conference in Jerusalem will be here before we know it. This will be a conference “like no other” before.

The conference will be held at the Ramada Jerusalem Hotel, located near the entrance to the city on the main road leading to all sections of Jerusalem. The hotel is near the Israel Museum, Bible Lands Museum, Science Museum, Jewish National and University Library and its archives, the Israeli Parliament and other places of interest. The Citypass : Jerusalem Light Railway system is a 5-minute walk and offers trains to downtown and the Old City. The direct link to our conference website is <http://iajgs2015.org>.

I look forward to seeing you in Jerusalem this summer.

Warm regards,

Jackye Sullins
Steering Committee,
2015 IAJGS Conference

HAVE EXPERTISE IN GENEALOGY, WILL TRAVEL JGSGP SPEAKERS BUREAU

We are proud of our Speakers Bureau and wish to reach a broader audience in the greater Philadelphia Jewish community.

We have speakers available for synagogue groups and organizations to help their members get started in tracing their family roots. Please contact Stan and Shelda Sandler at stanshel@msn.com for more details. Our publicity flyer can be found at: http://www.jgsgp.org/Documents/Speakers_Bureau.pdf

The following Speakers Bureau guidelines have been approved by the JGSGP board of trustees.

- There is a \$100 fee for a speaker.
- The fee will be waived if five attendees join the JGSGP after the presentation: speaker receives five completed JGSGP membership applications and a \$25 check with each.
- Presentations are given to groups of at least ten adults interested in genealogy.
- Presentations can be made at synagogues and affiliated groups such as men's clubs, sisterhoods, and organizations like ORT and Hadassah, within a 20-30 mile radius of Philadelphia.

Schools, JCC's, and retirement homes will be considered on a case-by-case basis as long as they agree with the above guidelines.



Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Philadelphia 2015 Membership & Renewal Form

Enjoy *Chronicles*, Our Award Winning Quarterly Publication

Please print, complete and mail this form with your check to our NEW ADDRESS:
JGSGP, 1657 The Fairway, #145, Jenkintown, PA 19046

You may also complete our online form and pay your dues using Paypal on our web site:
<http://www.jgsgp.org/>

Membership Categories	New	Renewal	Amount
Individual - \$25			
Family - \$35 (2 Person Household)			
Additional Voluntary Contribution			
A check is enclosed for the amount of:			

Name (please print) _____

Additional Name(s) _____

Address 1 _____

Address 2 _____

City _____ State _____ Zip+4 _____

Phone (____) _____ email: _____

Family Membership second email: _____

Dues are for the calendar year, January 1-December 31, 2015.

(New members joining after September 30, 2014 receive membership benefits through December 31, 2015.)
Contributions and dues are tax deductible within the limits of the law.

What are the most important surnames and their associated ancestral towns that you are researching?
Provide up to three surnames, towns and current countries which will later be shared with other members.

Surname	Town	Country



JGSGP CALENDAR & REMINDERS

Please note that our mailing address has changed to:

1657 The Fairway, #145 Jenkintown, PA 19046

Please direct all U.S. mail correspondence to this address.

Look for information about other IAJGS member societies:

<http://www.iajgs.org/members/members.html>



Join the JGSGP Facebook group: <http://tinyurl.com/jgsgp>. Our members are continually posting fascinating news and developments which impact on genealogy and important related areas.

A thirty minute period before each meeting is devoted to browsing reference books and getting help from mentors.

We schedule meetings to accommodate our members and excellent speakers who lead complicated lives.

Please check your JGSGP emails, our website (<http://jgsgp.org>) and our Facebook page (<http://tinyurl.com/jgsgp>) for complete and up to the minute program information.

Monday, April 13, 2015, 7:30 PM

Main Line Reform Temple, 410 Montgomery Ave., Wynnewood, PA 19096

Yuri Dorn

“Researching Your Jewish Ancestry in Belarus”

Yuri Dorn is the founder and coordinator of the Jewish Heritage

Research Group in Belarus which has provided genealogy research services as well as arranged ancestral tours to Belarus since 2002.

<http://www.jhrgbelarus.org/>



Sunday, May 17, 2015, 1:30PM

Main Line Reform Temple, 410 Montgomery Ave., Wynnewood, PA 19096

Ruth Ellen Gruber

“Jewish Heritage Travel in Eastern Europe”



Ruth Ellen Gruber has travelled thousands of miles around Europe visiting Jewish heritage sites and tourist attractions and is one of the leading authorities on Jewish heritage and Jewish travel.

With her Jewish Heritage Travel Workshop, she uses her more than 20 years experience on the road to address all aspects of Jewish travel, from what to wear and what to see, to where to eat and where to stay. She also discusses the emotions that travelers may feel when visiting Holocaust sites or synagogues and cemeteries in places where Jews no longer live and gives a host of practical tips.

Sunday, June 14, 2015, 1:00 to 4:00PM

Fifth Annual JGSGP Genealogy Fair

Congregations of Shaare Shamayim

9768 Veree Road, Philadelphia, PA 19115 Ph: 215-677-1600

*FREE admission *Convenient location *Talk to the experts

*More than 15 stations with information to help you trace your ancestry.

*Ample free parking in the rear of the building and on the street.

Contact co-chairs, Felicia Mode Alexander, fmode@verizon.net

or Barry Wagner barryswagner@comcast.net for additional information or to volunteer for the fair.

Deadline for submission of articles for our summer issue is Sunday, May 17th.

Please send material to: editor@jgsgp.org