

VENTURING INTO OUR PAST



JGSCV

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF THE CONEJO VALLEY AND VENTURA COUNTY

May 2015

Volume 10 Issue 8

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

On Sunday, April 12, JGSCV held its annual Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial Day) commemoration. We were honored to have Megan Lewis, Reference Librarian, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum as our guest speaker. Megan's presentation was entitled, *"Remembering the Holocaust through Family History Using the Resources of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum"*. Megan demonstrated how to use the Museum's online resources to do research from home and gave tips on how to plan a research trip to Washington. Her handout is on the JGSCV website under meetings, prior and the April 2015 date. Please see page 6 for the highlights of her presentation.

David Oseas, JGSCV webmaster, gave the 5-minute genealogical hint by walking us through the new JGSCV.org website and how he created it. We all owe David a great big thank you for all he has done to update and redesign the JGSCV.org website. If you haven't visited the new website yet—go to www.jgscv.org

Thank you to Warren Blatt for facilitating the schmoozing corner, before the start of the meeting.

Since January we have been running a series of articles by members on their own experiences or research into their ancestor's experiences to commemorate the centennial of World War I and 70th anniversary of the

Megan Lewis,
USHMM
Reference
Librarian JGSCV's
speaker at the
April meeting
commemorating
Yom Hashoah



NEXT MEETING

Sunday, May 3rd 1:30-3:30 PM

You Found the Records – Now What?

Marion Werle will identify the multiple types of records available and focus on how to analyze those records for accuracy and reliability.

WWW.JGSCV.ORG

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JGSCV is a non-profit organization dedicated to collecting, preserving and disseminating genealogical information, techniques and research tools among people interested in Jewish genealogy and family history. Anyone interested in Jewish genealogy, regardless of religion, is welcome to become a member.

end of World War II—holocaust stories are part of World War II. This month Hal Bookbinder shares two brief stories with us. See page 10. We need more participants for this project. Thus far, Werner Frank, Sarah Applebaum, Barbara Algaze and Joanne Cadis have shared their stories—how about you?

For those who attended the April 12th meeting you experienced the reduced number of books available in the traveling library. April was the first of a two month test to determine how best to fill the research needs of our members before and after monthly meetings. During the test, only the Category A books (18 distinct titles) will be available in the back of the meeting room. We need your feedback before making a final decision (email president@jgscv.org). Thus far I only heard from 4 members: 2 for bringing the 18 titles and 2 for rotating the other books along with Category A.

These are the three options:

- * Only Category A, **OR**
- * Alternate each month Category A with one other Category- for example Categories A+B or A+C or A+D at each meeting; (This is what we did before we transferred the majority of the books to the permanent library), **OR**
- * Go back to bringing the full traveling library

Previously, about 100 books were available each meeting including books from my personal collection. Each category is about equal in number. The books in categories B, C, D, most of which are not in the permanent library (located at the Agoura Hills Library) due to fragility, being out of print, or cost of replacing. When we transferred the majority of the books to the permanent library, we also kept a selection in each category. (See www.jgscv.org and click on traveling library to see what is in the collection.)

The IAJGS 2015 International Conference on Jewish Genealogy (<http://iajgs2015.org/>) has its preliminary program posted and the early bird registration price has been extended through May 6. I understand at least 7 JGSCV members are attending the conference. Please let me know if you are planning on attending. See page 9 to learn about the keynote speaker.

Those who did not renew their JGSCV membership by the April 12 meeting have been removed from the membership rolls. They will continue to receive the monthly meeting reminder. Upon renewal they will be placed back on the membership list and will again enjoy the unique benefits available to dues paid members.

It is important for each of us to recognize the importance of appropriately documenting what we find, analyzing each record to find out contradictions. For example I have 7 different birth dates for my maternal grandfather—spanning 15 years. Which one is correct? How do I know which one is reliable? These are some of the types of issues that JGSCV member, Marion Werle will discuss at our May 3 meeting, when she talks about “*You Found the Records—Now What?*” See page 4 for more information on the meeting.

Looking forward to seeing you on May 3rd!

Jan Meisels Allen



Adopted In New Jersey?

According to the website NJ.com, see: <http://tinyurl.com/ksj2y26> beginning in 2017, an adult adopted child can request to see a *non-certified* copy of their original birth record. Currently, all NJ birth certificates have been changed to show the parents who adopted the child, NOT the birth parents. They will not be able to use the original birth record as proof of identification or for any other legal purposes.

The only people allowed to request an original birth certificate in the case of an adoption are: an adult adopted child; a direct descendent, sibling or spouse of the adopted child; an adoptive parent or other legal guardian of a minor adopted.

The New Jersey Department of Health is currently working to create online and print forms so applications can be submitted online and by mail.

Portuguese Citizenship for Jews

According to an article in the *Forward*, there have been 300 applications in the communities of Porto and Lisbon, Portugal since the March 2, 2015 enactment of giving citizenship to Portuguese Sephardic Jews around the world. Lisbon has already certified 200 applicants of proven Sephardic ancestry. Most requests are from Israel. In Porto, requests are mostly from Turkish Jews. Since Portugal is a member of the European Union, this may have some benefits.

The Portuguese Government may grant Portuguese nationality by naturalization to the descendants of Sephardic Portuguese Jews through the attestation of their links to Sephardic communities of Portuguese origin including surnames, family speaking language and direct or indirect descent.

<http://tinyurl.com/kmonsst>

Family History Daily.com

offers a search engine that combines many of the major websites we use into one search. According to their site, Family History Daily features a unique collection of personal stories, research help, news, tools and resources for genealogists. The design is sleek and easy on the eyes. See more at: <http://familyhistorydaily.com>

[GenealogyInTime.com](http://www.genealogyintime.com)

offers a free online newsletter with tips, images, and information. Their website states: At GenealogyInTime Magazine, we have a passion for genealogy and a determination to make it better. See more at: <http://www.genealogyintime.com/newsletter-subscribe.html> - sthash.CsbHjmxl.dpuf

Genealogy Gives Insight to Whale Research

New Zealand researchers said they have developed the world's most comprehensive family tree of one of the largest and most unusual animals ever to live. The evolutionary history of baleen whales went back almost 40 million years and indicated periods of intensive evolution and extinction, University of Otago researchers announced last month. See more at <http://tinyurl.com/m4haz25>

ABOUT JGSCV

JGSCV meets once a month, usually on a Sunday. Meetings are oriented to the needs of the novice as well as the more experienced genealogist. Members share materials, research methods and ideas as well as research success or failures. **MISSION STATEMENT:** The Jewish Genealogical Society of the Conejo Valley and Ventura County (JGSCV) is a non-profit organization run by enthusiastic volunteers dedicated to the sharing of genealogical information, techniques and research tools with those interested in Jewish genealogy and family history. Members who include beginners and experienced genealogists share with each other. **JGSCV MEMBERSHIP:** 2015 dues are \$25 for a single membership and \$30 for a household. To join, please printout the membership form on our website www.jgscv.org by selecting the membership button. Send it with a check in the appropriate amount payable to "JGSCV" and mail to Helene Rosen at 28912 Fountainwood St., Agoura Hills, CA 91301.

VENTURING INTO OUR PAST

Jewish Genealogical Society of the Conejo Valley and Ventura County* (JGSCV) (*and surrounding areas)



The JGSCV will hold a general meeting, co-sponsored with Temple Adat m, on Sunday, May 3, 2015 at Temple Adat Elohim 2420 Hillcrest Drive, Thousand Oaks, 1:30-3:30 p.m.



The Topic:

You Found the Records- Now What?

Jewish genealogy is focused on finding records, but not necessarily what to do with them once you find them. What do you do when records show your grandfather with six different birthdates? When you have contradictory records, what should you believe?

This interactive presentation will focus on how to analyze the records you find and how to make the case to prove identities, ages, residence and other facts about your ancestors. The speaker will discuss how to analyze record types (original, derivative and authored), record information (primary, secondary and indeterminate) and evidence (direct, indirect and negative), and how to weight the reliability of the documents you find based on these criteria. Together we will analyze examples of actual records and show how to ask the right questions to help us create sound genealogical research.

Speaker: Marion Werle began her family history research over 20 years ago, researching family from Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus, who settled in both the US and Canada. She is on the board of JGSCV, is a past president of the Latvia SIG and has also been on the board of JGSCV and JGSLA, and is a past president of the Latvia SIG. After making the same beginner's mistakes that we all do, she is now focused on applying accepted genealogical research standards to her research. She has master's degrees in both European History and Library Science from UCLA.

The Jewish Genealogical Society of the Conejo Valley and Ventura County is dedicated to sharing genealogical information, techniques and research tools with anyone interested in Jewish genealogy and family history. Meeting is open to the public and there is no charge to attend. Annual dues are \$25 for an individual and \$30 for a family.

May, 2015

JGSCV UPDATES

As mentioned in the president's letter, we are in the midst of a two-month experiment where only the Category A books (18 distinct titles) will be brought to the meetings. We need *your* feedback (email president@jgscv.org) before making a final decision. The choices are below. Let us know your preference.

- * Only Category A, **OR**
- * Alternate each month Category A with one other Category- for example Categories A+B or A+C or A+D at each meeting; (This is what we did before we transferred the majority of the books to the permanent library), **OR**
- * Go back to bringing the full traveling library

JGSCV continues to participate with both Amazon.com as an affiliate and with Ralphs Community Program. Simply enter the Amazon site from JGSCV's home page. Start at <http://www.jgscv.org> and scroll to the bottom to click on the Amazon graphic (like the one here). This takes you to the same page you always start at – except JGSCV will receive a marketing fee at no cost to you. See “notices” on the JGSCV.org website for instructions for Ralphs Community Contribution Program, too.



Remember, the SCHMOOZING CORNER is open 20 minutes before the monthly meeting is scheduled to begin. Just come to the front right corner of the meeting room and look for the “SCHMOOZING CORNER” sign where you will find a knowledgeable JGSCV member to field your individual questions and provide one-to-one help until the meeting begins. At left is Warren Blatt manning the “SCHMOOZING CORNER” last month. JGSCV founding member, Werner Frank will facilitate the SCHMOOZING CORNER at the May 3rd meeting.

Start planning to participate in JGSCV's annual Genealogy in the Round program on August 2! Let Jan know if you wish to participate with a genealogical success/failure/artifact story (president@JGSCV.org). Depending on the number of participants, every may take 5-10 minutes to tell their genealogical story. This is your meeting and it is always VERY successful.

REMINDER: JGSCV's June 7th meeting will begin 30 minutes earlier than usual. Due to a special Adat Elohim program, *DNA from a User's Perspective* presented by JGSCV member Mike Markowitz will begin at 1:00 PM. **The upcoming JGSCV meeting on May 3rd, *You Found the Records – Now What*, presented by JGSCV member Marion Werle will begin at the regular time of 1:30 PM.**

May, 2015

Highlights from Remembering the Holocaust through Family History with the US Holocaust Memorial Museum

By Jan Meisels Allen



Megan Lewis, Reference Librarian, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum was JGSCV's special speaker for our annual Yom Hashoah (Holocaust Memorial

Day) commemoration. April 16 is Yom Hashoah, Holocaust Memorial Day- commemorated in Israel and the United States on the 27th day of Nisan, the day of the Warsaw Uprising. The United Nations declared International Holocaust Memorial Day as January 27. January 27, 2015 is the 70th anniversary of Auschwitz-Birkenau, being liberated by Soviet troops.

About the Museum

In 1979, under President Carter, The President's Commission on the Holocaust submitted its recommendations for Holocaust remembrance and education in the United States. In the early 1980's, under President Reagan's administration, the US Congress enacted legislation establishing the creation of a Museum. Part of the Congressional mandate is that the materials of the Museum are open to the public, unlike other research facilities. It is not a circulating library - access to the archives and library are discussed below. The groundbreaking on the National Mall in Washington D.C. was on October 16, 1985. Soil from concentration camps and the Warsaw Jewish cemetery were mixed into the building foundation. Construction began in 1990 and the Museum opened in 1993 with President Clinton performing the dedication. The U.S. Congress pays for half the museum's funding with the May, 2015

other half coming from private donations and investment income.

The Museum has over 150 million pages of archival documents. It is the US depository of most of the International Tracing Service (ITS) materials. The Museum receives updates from the ITS approximately every 9 months. The Museum's collections have about 110,000 photographs, more than 4,700 films including ephemeral home movies from families and over 65,000 oral histories. There are over 15,000 archival collections, about 15,000 artifacts—and they are still collecting documents, artifacts, photographs, oral histories, and unpublished memoirs.

The Museum co-sponsors teaching programs with other Holocaust museums in the United States and around the world — each institution is separate. They have made temporary loans of artifacts to other Holocaust museums.

In addition to what happened to the Jewish population during World War II, the Museum has information on Polish forced laborers, Polish political



prisoners, Jehovah's witnesses, gays and lesbians, Soviet POW's and the handicapped.

Why Remember

Personal stories bring the Holocaust to reality—the ones that tie the Holocaust directly to individuals. The Museum's encyclopedia compendium, *Encyclopedia of Camps and Ghettos, 1933–1945*, lists over 42,000 such entities. In Part A of Volume 2 it mentions JewishGen 78 times, including Yizkor Books, JewishGen publications and Kehila (shtetl) links. The compendium has thus far published Volumes 1 and 2 (each consisting of two volumes) of an expected 8 volume set. Locally, these volumes are available at The Agoura Hills Public Library, a branch of the Los Angeles County Public Library which is the designated many Holocaust library for the County Library system [88 branches]. It is the same library

- Genealogists create resources for historians.

How to Find Museum Materials

Due to copyright considerations, many photos and films have to be viewed within the Museum itself. However, there are many opportunities to research the collections from the comfort of your home from your computer.

While the Congressional mandate requires all material be open to the public, some are off-site. Megan encouraged people to plan in advance of a visit, by notifying the Museum of materials of interest so they may be readily available.

Some of the research materials most useful may be the database of names and digital resources at:

“When the Nazis rounded up our relatives, they took away their names and gave them numbers. What we genealogists are doing is taking away the numbers and giving them back their names”.

Arthur Kurzweil

where the JGSCV permanent library is located.

Megan shared a quote by Arthur Kurzweil which sums up why genealogists find the Museum important:

“When the Nazis rounded up our relatives, they took away their names and gave them numbers. What we genealogists are doing is taking away the numbers and giving them back their names”.

Genealogy and Remembrance

Megan summarized how genealogy affects remembering:

- An act of research is an act of remembrance.
- Genealogists preserve the past for future generations.
- Genealogy documents the micro-histories of the Holocaust.
- By focusing on the individual, family historians make the Holocaust more relatable.

<http://www.ushmm.org/remember/the-holocaust-survivors-and-victims-resource-center/holocaust-survivors-and-victims-database>

Visit the collections page: <http://collections.ushmm.org/search> to see the wealth of information that is available both at the Museum and from your home computer. Everyone calling the Museum directly is transferred to staff knowledgeable in their area of interest. However, emailing reference@ushmm.org is the preferred contact method.

Megan suggested searching finding aids. The Collections catalog search automatically includes finding aids when running a search. Some finding aids are not available on the web—but Museum staff will search for you if you contact them. There is a research question submission

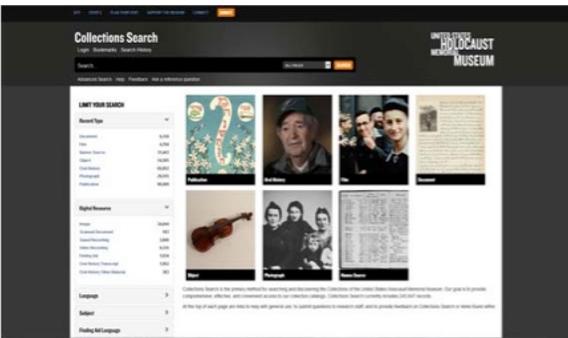
form on the website in the search area (use the url above to access the area).

You can search by last name but since there is no name thesaurus it is advisable to type in multiple spellings of names. The Collections catalog search function includes a built-in geographic thesaurus - for example a search from Wroclaw will return results for Breslau.

Library Collection

The catalog uses the Library of Congress method of cataloging. Some records have links to websites, scans of rare books and other electronic media. Books must be accessed onsite. The books are in 61 languages—English comprises only 43% of the collection. What is of most interest to genealogists are community histories, survivor memoirs (4,000), family histories and postwar newspapers (especially if you speak Yiddish) for displaced persons camps.

The archives contain personal collections which were donated by



individuals and families. Some of the contents in the personal collection include: Photographs, letters, birth, death, or marriage documents, school diplomas, passports, diaries, immigration information-naturalization certificates, ship passage and unpublished memoirs. These are rich for family research. Currently there are 189 personal available through the Collections catalog.

The Institutional Archives collection is those

documents the Museum were able to copy from other worldwide institutions. Some of the collection includes Jewish community records, prewar materials, property and restitution records, SS, police, and war crimes trials. These materials are not available on the Internet. Some of the documents in the Museum may no longer be

available elsewhere if the original archives has closed its access, such as in Belarus. One example Megan gave was about the Hungarian police records which were then taken by Russia after the war and Hungary only got them back last year—these are not yet indexed but are

<http://collections.ushmm.org>



available to researchers.

The Collections catalog is ‘crawled’ (indexed) by Google. If you place the name of the search into the Google search bar it will provide “hits” back to the Museum catalog. The Library received 18,000 requests for assistance last year with only three reference librarians, so be patient when submitting a request for assistance.

Megan noted that genealogists underuse oral histories. About 7,000 oral histories consisting of 20,000 hours of testimony are available throughout the Collections catalog. On the USHMM’s website those with thumbnail photos indicate the testimony is streamable. More testimonies will be digitized this year. The USC Shoah Foundation has 51,000 testimonies available on their website <http://vhaonline.usc.edu/login.aspx>. These testimonies are heavily indexed including all the names that are mentioned. Not all sources provide permission to digitize oral histories.

Preparing a Research Visit

While many items are available online the best way to access all that the Museum has to offer is to make a personal visit to Washington, DC. The Museum provides tools to help plan your visit. Start with <http://www.ushmm.org/research/research-in-collections/research-visit> when preparing your trip and narrow the topics. For example, you may consider biographies or holocaust encyclopedia (mentioned above) and use the catalog to identify resources.

Megan included examples of a search she has been doing for a number of years for a friend's grandmother from Leipzig. Her file of information on Klara Koppold included immigration questionnaires (which lists where she wanted to go, her occupational skills, what languages she spoke, etc.), a book about the Koppold family, Klara's listing in the 1939 German minority census, her name on a deportation list to the Riga ghetto and records from the Stuffhof concentration camp. Megan is still searching for Klara's actual death record—however, some people won't have records. For example those who died on death marches were buried along the way with no records. The ITS has fewer records the further east the person was located. Many deaths were not recorded.

Megan suggested looking at Google Books as a source to access information. Google won their lawsuit several years ago against the publishers who were concerned about the loss of revenue if the book was online for free. In many cases the book is fully digitized—others only the paragraphs where the search word or name you entered will be available.

See: <https://books.google.com/>

How to Help

Along with Ancestry.com, the USHMM supports the World Memory Project (<http://www.ushmm.org/online/world-memory->

[project/](#)). You can help index the records even if you are not a member of Ancestry.com. Thus far 3,300 volunteers have indexed almost three million records. The indexed records are free to search on Ancestry's website but you need to contact the Museum for a copy of the actual document.

You can also help by filling out Pages of Testimony for Yad Vashem. Go to: http://www.yadvashem.org/yv/en/downloads/pages_of_testimony.asp#!prettyPhoto

Answers to Some Questions

How to contact Megan: mlewis@ushmm.org

Reference desk: reference@ushmm.org

Glossary

RG—Record Group: Way of classifying collections by theme, place of origin, etc. For example, at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, RG-14 indicates a collection that we received from Germany

Finding aid: An inventory of the content of an archival collection. Some finding aids include the names of individuals included in the collection.

The USHMM relies on donations as half their budget is from private individuals. Go to:

<http://www.ushmm.org/support/ways-to-support>

35th Annual IAJGS Conference in Jerusalem

Rabbi Israel Meir Lau, former Chief Rabbi of Israel and Chairman of the Yad Vashem Council, will deliver the keynote address at the 35th Annual IAJGS Conference July 6-10 in Jerusalem. Rabbi Lau will speak on the topic, "Connecting to Jewish Heritage through Jewish Genealogy." Rabbi Lau brings to the Conference a message that reinforces how vital our research is so that we learn of those members of our family who were displaced and murdered and how important our research is in bringing together families which were torn apart. Learn more and register at <http://iajgs2015.org/>



A Look Back At My Family

By Hal Bookbinder

Originally appeared in Avotaynu. Reprinted with permission.

My grandfather, Harry Bookbinder, a tailor at Bamberger's Department Store in Newark, New Jersey, was "drafted" while walking home from work. His protests that he was deferred due to the fact that he was married with three children did not sway the recruiters. He was taken to Fort Dix, New Jersey where, over his protests, he was inducted into the Army. My grandmother Pauline frantically searched for her missing husband, finally locating him. It took months to untangle the mess and get him discharged. His entire military career was spent



in limbo at Fort Dix. But, having served honorably in the military, his citizenship process moved quickly.

. . . (L)ets go back 100 years to the Pale in 1914 and the war that would cause enormous destruction across Europe including the areas of Eastern Europe where so many of our ancestors lived. The town of Khmelnik, in what is now Vinnyts'ka oblast, Ukraine, changed hands numerous times during and immediately after the War as Austrian, Hungarian, German,

Ukrainian, Polish, White Russian (Tsarist) and Red Russian (Bolshevik) troops repeatedly captured the town from one another. David Barenberg, a well-to-do lumber and sugar merchant, and his wife Zelda owned one of the best houses in town. When troops of various armies would occupy Khmelnik, officers would typically commandeer their home. By being hospitable, they were left generally unmolested. Their daughters, 14 year-old Sonya and 12 year-old Clara would hide under the floorboards in a secret cellar keeping very quiet when they heard that the soldiers were looking for girls. As a well-to-do Jewish merchant, David eventually became a target himself and was forced to flee. He obtained a horse and fled south to Bessarabia, in Romania, where he was born and had relatives. Bessarabia had been taken from Russia by Romania in the aftermath of the Bolshevik revolution and he felt safer once out of the Soviet Union. David then sent for his family and his brother's family. They traveled by sled to the border but then had (to) cross the frozen Dniester River on foot. The young daughter of his brother died as a result of the harsh conditions. His brother then decided to turn around and returned to Khmelnik. Contact was subsequently lost and we do not know the fate of this family. David's family lived in Bessarabia for two years until he could arrange for passage to America. The family settled in Boston where numerous Barenberg relatives resided. In her late 90s, Clara Barenberg Zonis, my second cousin twice removed, shared stories still vividly etched in her memory. She told me that the Jews fared worst when the town was occupied by Ukrainian and White Russian troops and that the mistreatment was least when the occupiers were Red Russians who were the most disciplined.

May, 2015

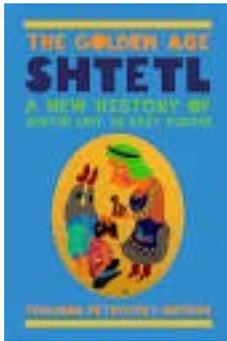
VENTURING INTO OUR PAST

Book Review: *The Golden Age Shtetl: A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe*

Author: Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern

Reviewed by Carol Flesher, JGSCV Member (A copy of the book is in JGSCV's permanent library).

Originally appeared in JGS Oregon's *Shalsholet* Reprinted with permission.



“A riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.” Winston Churchill said this about Russia, but he certainly could have been describing Jewish genealogy, specifically Ukrainian-Jewish genealogy. In my family’s area of the Pale of Settlement, there were 5 “gubernyas” (historical

regions), 4 names for each person (Hebrew name—often two names, vernacular name, patronymic), 3 languages (Russian, Hebrew, Yiddish), 2 kinds of records (civil and Jewish), and 1 big headache!

We genealogists are detectives and researchers who comb records searching for elusive relatives. For me, the more people I find, the more questions I have. I want to know not only who my ancestors were but also what they were and how they were. What were their lives like? And how can I reconcile the family stories of impoverished Anatevka-like villages with Russian/Ukrainian Revision List records listing them as “meshanin”—burghers whose lives were often comfortable and occasionally prosperous? Thankfully, Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, Professor of Jewish Studies at Northwestern University, has recently published [The Golden Age Shtetl: A New History of Jewish Life in East Europe](#), Princeton University Press, 2014, pp. 432. In this compelling book, Petrovsky-Shtern uses both illustrative anecdotes and scholarly research from Kiev, Volhynia, and Podolia Gubernyas to support his premise—“The shtetl between the 1790’s and the 1840’s was an East European market town” which, “went through a fifty-year period of prosperity and stability, a time of economic and cultural opportunity.”

After the partitions of Poland, Russia inherited a new population of Jews, “about two-thirds of world Jewry at the time,” who lived in shtetls owned by Polish landlord-magnates. According to Petrovsky-Shtern, these formerly-Polish regions were filled with Jews—merchants, traders, and artisans whose shtetl towns were centered on the marketplace where, “... almost all, if not all the stores belonged to Jewish merchants.”

So how did the Jews get from this world to “underfed, overworked Anatevka,” where most inhabitants scratched out a meager living as best they could, the world of Cossacks and pogroms that my grandparents talked of and escaped from? This book explains that after the 1840’s, the Russian central government enacted policies designed to remove the pragmatic Polish landlords and place the shtetls under direct government control. The “militarization, political and economic rivalry, xenophobia, and nationalism” of successive regimes transformed the successful market towns into ramshackle remnants and “leveled local traditional social institutions, replacing them with the Russian administrative system.” This brings to mind the “We had to destroy the village to save it” policies of more recent times, as Russian government intrusion and interference broke the economic engine that was the Jewish market town.

Other chapters of the book go into detail about Jewish life during the first half of the 19th century. Topics include Jewish tavern owners and liquor dealers, the justice system, family life, housing, book publishing, and religion. The details come from these three specific regions, however the author did mention that Russian suppression of the Ukrainian autonomous Hetmanate, the Cossack state on the east side of the Dnieper river, was

carried out in much the same manner as the elimination of the Polish legacy on the western side of the river. The eastern bank includes Chernigov and Poltava Gubernyas, home to other branches of my family. Based on this, I can assume that much of the deterioration of shtetl life there was similar to the examples found in the book.

I enjoyed reading this. The anecdotes and case studies humanized the history, and as a genealogist, I had to smile as the author recounted how he gained access to archives and material. "To gain access to these documents, I sometimes disguised myself as a Ukrainian clerk, a Soviet speleologist, and a Polar explorer." His premise answered some of my questions about the deterioration of Jewish life, and information about population movement in the area gave me insight about why my ancestors left a town where they were property-owning "burghers" to move en masse to scattered smaller towns in the area.

Occasionally, I wished the book might have gone in a different direction. Personally, I felt there was too much time spent on book printing, tavern keeping, and other specific aspects of society. I would have preferred an expansion of the depiction of Jewish daily life, social customs and music, and interactions with the non-Jewish population. The chapter on violence among Jews and between Jews and their neighbors was interesting, suggesting that shtetl Jews were far from perpetually-bespectacled victims. However, I felt that, unlike other chapters, this was a one-sided, selective view of a complex world.

Even if your ancestors don't come from this part of the Jewish world, I think that this challenging of the traditional accounts of the shtetl is useful and interesting. I continue to seek out clues about the lives of my ancestors to flesh out and provide context for the family trees. I am grateful for any work that can assist me in my journey.

Future JGSCV Meeting Dates through August 2015 **Sunday afternoons starting at 1:30 p.m. (1:00 p.m. on 6/7)** **Programs co-sponsored by Temple Adat Elohim.**



May 3, 2015 Sunday 1:30-3:30 PM You've Found Some Records Now What? Marion Werle Evaluating the information you have, reconciling discrepancies, what is a reliable?

June 7, 2015 Sunday 1:00-3:00 PM (SPECIAL TIME) DNA from a User's Perspective. JGSCV Member Mike Markowitz will talk about DNA testing- autosomal as well as mTDNA and Y-DNA from a Users perspective and what the test results mean.

July 2015 No Meeting- -IAJGS Conference Jerusalem July 6-10, 2015

August 2, 2015 Sunday Genealogy in the Round 1:30-3:30 PM Come and share a genealogical success, failure, brick wall, or genealogical artifact! This is YOUR meeting—We all learn from one another—take this opportunity to share your genealogical story—success or failure, ask questions about your brick walls, and more!

Programs are subject to change -check JGSCV website www.jgscv.org