



JGSCV

VENTURING INTO OUR PAST

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

October, 2013

Volume 9 Issue 1

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Marion Werle “wowed” our attendees on September 15th with her excellent presentation on *Beyond the Family Tree – Bringing Your Family Stories to Life*. I am certain that we all have experienced the glazed over eyes when we—the family genealogist—start to talk about genealogy to our family members! Marion’s presentation was how to avoid the blank and glazed stares by giving us ideas on how to tell our family stories and how to keep us from being “overwhelmed” in our information but still fulfill the importance of telling our stories. Marion’s handout, a bibliography of books to assist us in writing better, is on our website—go to www.jgscv.org and click on meetings/prior and select the date of meeting- September 15, 2013. To read more about the program go to page 6.

Debra Kay Blatt facilitated our schmoozing corner which is available 20 minutes before each meeting to assist you with your genealogical questions.

Instead of a genealogical hint we showed the JewishGen video. Unfortunately, the volume from my laptop was not ideal. You can see and hear this excellent video by going to <http://tinyurl.com/ms8ly35> . It runs just over 7 minutes and is well worth your time. We all use JewishGen and this gives some perspective of all that they are doing.

The part of our traveling library that was transferred to the permanent library at the



Marion Werle presenting “Beyond the Family Tree” at the September 15th meeting

NEXT MEETING

SUNDAY, October, 6th 1:30-3:30 PM

Jewish Given Names

JGSCV founding member and Managing Director of JewishGen, Warren Blatt explains the history and patterns of Jewish first names in order to help in researching your family history.

JGSCV BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Agoura Hills Library is essentially completed. Only about two dozen books await cataloging remain before the project is completed. Read more about the new library collections on page 11.

Our fantastic newsletter editor, Allan Linderman, advised us that he plans to become a snowbird for 5 months a year. I have never heard of any one from southern California snow birding to Florida- but now we have. Allan will be leaving the board but not JGSCV! Starting in January we will have co-editors: Allan and Marion Werle -who is retiring from her paid job the end of December—isn't timing everything! Other JGSCV members may participate on job specific items as needed-that will be up to the two co-editors.

All eligible members should have received an email about serving on the JGSCV board from Nominations Committee chairman, Hal Bookbinder. If you are interested in serving please contact Hal at Hal@jgscv.org and complete the board nominations form available on our home page—scroll down to “Become a Board Member” at www.jgscv.org

We start our annual membership renewal for 2014 this month and already have one new member and two renewals. Our dues remain the same \$25 for a single and \$30 for a family of two. A copy of the membership form is on page 18. Anyone who renews or joins before our December 15th meeting (and attends the meeting) is eligible for great genealogy prizes. The grand prize is an Ancestry Worldwide Subscription!

Every year, starting on September 1st Ralphs requires those who are registered for their Community Contribution Program to reregister at www.Ralphs.com and list your charity of choice. Please (re)register and list JGSCV as your charity of choice. For instructions on how to obtain a Ralphs card, and how to register under the community contribution program go to our website www.jgscv.org under *Notices*.

There are six openings for the Computer Class on the FamilySearch website to be offered on October 20 with facilitator Barbara Algaze. Remember, there is a \$10 fee at the door. See page 8 for more information. This is for JGSCV members only!

Do look at our list of upcoming meetings on page 13. The programs are set through the April 2014. We added programs for January, March and April since the last newsletter.

Our October 6 meeting is our 8th anniversary!! We are delighted that Warren Blatt, founding member and board member of JGSCV and Managing Director of JewishGen will be talking on *Jewish Given Names*. Our ancestors each had many different given names and nicknames, in various languages and alphabets --this can make Jewish genealogical research difficult. This presentation will teach you about the history and patterns of Jewish first names, and how to recognize your ancestors' names in genealogical sources.

Looking forward to seeing you on October 6th!

Jan Meisels Allen



ABOUT JGSCV . . . The Jewish Genealogical Society of the Conejo Valley and Ventura County 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. Members have access to the JGSCV library located on special shelves at the Agoura Hills Public Library. Members also receive our monthly newsletter, which is circulated by email.

2014 dues are \$25.00 for a single membership and \$30.00 for a household unit. To join, please send a check in the appropriate amount to JGSCV and addressed to Helene Rosen at 28912 Fountainwood St., Agoura Hills, CA 91301. Obtain the new/renewal membership form on our website at www.jgscv.org by selecting the membership button.

ARCHIVED WEBINARS ON THE U.S. CENSUS

Archives.com conducts free webinars about U.S. censuses each Wednesday at 10 AM pacific at <http://tinyurl.com/74baz9y>. Prior webinars are archived and may be viewed as follows:

- Laying the Groundwork – All Censuses <http://tinyurl.com/lv2xp9x>
- What you're missing in the 1920-1940 Censuses: <http://tinyurl.com/kr98e55>
- What you're missing in the 1900-1910 Censuses: <http://tinyurl.com/khlsrfo>
- What you're missing in the 1850-1880 Censuses: <http://tinyurl.com/mmtujka>

While these livestream webinars are especially useful for beginners, there are usually tips and insights that everyone can use. Each webinar lasts 20-30 minutes and the weekly session can include topics other than census. Archives.com is owned by Ancestry.com.

FAMILYSEARCH ADDS ITALIAN JEWISH VITAL RECORDS

Birth, marriage and death records from the Archive for the Israelite Community of Mantova in Italy are now included on FamilySearch's website: <http://tinyurl.com/objelzd>. To view the records you must register on FamilySearch with a username and password. Registration is free.

GENEALOGYINTIMEMAGAZINE ADDS MORE RECORDS TO SEARCH ENGINE

The online magazine GenealogyInTime has added 532 million global records to its searchable database which now totals 2.7 billion records from more than 1,000 websites. The site will also search the entire Google Newspaper Archive which includes 2,000+ newspapers – some dating back to the 1700's. It includes Canadian and European newspapers as well as the U.S. The search engine is available at: <http://tinyurl.com/3dzxxu2>.

CALIFORNIA MARRIAGE INDEX ON ANCESTRY.COM

An index of marriages in California covering the period 1949-1959 is now searchable on ancestry.com. Available data includes name and age of the bride and groom, date and county of marriage and the state file number. You can search the database at: <http://tinyurl.com/lar379b>. Ancestry.com is a paid subscription site. If you do not have a subscription some public libraries have subscriptions which you may use at the libraries. Family History Centers also have Ancestry.com subscriptions available.



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 Elohim, on Sunday, October 6, 2013: Temple Adat Elohim 2420 E. Hillcrest Drive, Thousand Oaks, 1:30-3:30 p.m.

Come Celebrate JGSCV's 8th Anniversary!

Celebrate International Jewish Genealogy Month!

The Topic: "Jewish Given Names"

Learn why "Mordechai Yehuda" is also "Mortka Leib" is also "Max". An introduction to Jewish given names (first names), focusing on practical issues for genealogical research. Our ancestors each had many different given names and nicknames, in various languages and alphabets --this can make Jewish genealogical research difficult. This presentation will teach you about the history and patterns of Jewish first names, and how to recognize your ancestors' names in genealogical sources.

Speaker: Warren Blatt, Managing Director and Editor-in-Chief, JewishGen,



(www.jewishgen.org), an affiliate of the Museum of Jewish Heritage and founding member and board member of JGSCV. In 2004, Warren received the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) Lifetime Achievement Award. He is the author of *Resources for Jewish Genealogy in the Boston Area*, and co-author of *Getting Started in Jewish Genealogy*. Warren has over 25 years of research experience with Russian and Polish Jewish records, and is the author of the "JewishGen FAQ:

Frequently Asked Questions about Jewish Genealogy," as well as many other JewishGen InfoFiles.

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.

There is no charge to attend the meeting. Anyone may join JGSCV. Join now for 2014! Light refreshments will be served.

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UPDATES . . .

JGSCV's permanent library is now housed at the Agoura Hills Library (29901 Ladyface Circle, 91301). The Library is open every day except Sunday and Monday. For more information call 818-889-2278. A complete list of the traveling library books available at each meeting is on our website <http://www.jgscv.org> under library traveling.

THE SCHMOOZING CORNER is open 20 minutes before all meetings. Come to the front right corner of the meeting room and a knowledgeable JGSCV member will be available to help with insights specific to your genealogical questions. JGSCV board member Debra Kay-Blatt (left) is helping Joanne Cadis.



Get ready for the December 15th

JGSCV meeting. Besides anticipating Crista Cowan's always excellent insights about ancestry.com, it is our membership renewal and Chanukkah Celebration. There are many excellent genealogical door prizes for members who will be randomly chosen. And, the grand prize is a worldwide subscription to ancestry.com. Prizes are only available to dues paid members.

"Venturing Into Our Past" is not only a channel for the JGSCV to communicate with members, but also a channel for members to communicate and share with each other. We welcome your stories and offer our help

to bring your stories to the written page. Please contact Allan Linderman, editor of "Venturing Into Our Past" (newslettereditor@jgscv.org) with ideas or thoughts. Allan will help organize your thoughts to get started or write your story for you.

You can help JGSCV when you shop at Amazon.com by simply entering 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 will take you to the same page



you always start at – except JGSCV will receive a marketing fee at no cost to you.

The '5 Minute Genealogical Hint' at the October 6th meeting will be given by Judy Karta. Judy authored a recipe book that includes family history stories about the recipes. This is a technique for making your family history more interesting as suggested by Marion Werle at the September meeting.

If you enjoy and are enriched by JGSCV programs, please remember to renew your membership or join for the first time. JGSCV dues helps defray the costs required to develop such a full schedule of fertile programs and speakers to enhance your genealogical research and experience.

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Highlights From:

Beyond the Family Tree: Bringing Your Family Stories to Life

By Jan Meisels Allen

When you start talking genealogy to your family do their eyes glaze over? We all are guilty of being so passionate about our love for genealogy and telling family stories that we forget that not everyone else has the same interest let alone fervor in learning what we have found about our ancestors. Marion Werle, JGSCV board member explained how we could still tell our stories without turning “off” our family members.

When Marion started recording her family names she found her “process” resulted in too much information of little interest to other family members. Examples of too much information included discussions of toponyms (names derived from places) and Alexander Beider’s background on family names. In order to maintain her family’s interest in the history of her ancestors, she re-focused on telling short stories.

Individually we may not believe “our” stories are interesting. But for future generations Marion advised that we need to write letters diaries or stories about ourselves so our children, grandchildren, nieces and nephews have a better idea of who we are and the lives we live. Examples of what to include in writings are: where we lived, went to school, if we moved—when and where, was the family religious or not, memories of holidays shared with family.

Focus is important to help determine where to start the story. She cautioned that one

cannot write history in one sitting. Instead, break it up into short manageable stories. She found a book on scrapbooking family history with worksheets that helped her begin and decide which questions to ask.

Topics of family stories are a great place to begin. We all have some stories. Even if we can’t fully document the stories, it’s a place to start.

Marion started with a family story of her grandfather who lived in a pub in Ireland. Family stories said he fell in love with the owner’s daughter, Katie Flynn.



Nothing happened with that love, as he moved away and several years later Katie married someone else. Could Marion verify the story 100 percent? No, but she could relate the story and tell what she was able to find through ships’ manifests and other documents that proved her grandfather lived in Ireland, and then left for North America.

Motivation is another attribute for telling “why” in a story. Many of our eastern European ancestors left Europe (in Marion’s case Lithuania and Latvia) because they were poor. The motivation to leave “home” was to do better. Others left due to military conscription. Marion had no documentation of why her grandmother immigrated to North

America, but with resources she was able to come to a reasonable conclusion. She discovered box tax records from Lithuania and Latvia that showed her great grandfather was too poor to pay the box taxes.

Analysis is another tool she used in looking at old family photos which showed by their dress that they were poor. This bolstered the suggested motivation for them leaving Europe for North America. Photographs give one the dress, expression and context to help tell a story.

Food is another element to use in short story writing. Genealogy includes learning about how our ancestors lived, not just names and dates. Recipes from family members and the stories around the recipes make for good story telling. There are different recipes for the same types of food depending on the country of origin. Recipes are part of the history of our maternal ancestors.

Marion gave attendees an exercise—

1. To write down one or more topics that we would like to write about. Marion quoted Dawn Thurston that it's ok to have a "lousy" first draft. Marion reminded us that non-fiction can be as interesting as fiction and cited several examples including *Annie's Ghosts* by Steve Luxenberg and *In Cold Blood* by Truman Capote.

Other writing tips included just get *something* down on paper or the computer, as the final draft is not the first draft! Write and then fact check—don't interrupt the thought process.

2. What facts or sources do I have to back up the story?

This is where context is very important. Learn everything you can about the context of how your families lived, history, places where they lived and traveled, their

occupations, whether they were rich or poor etc.

3. What context can I add? Where can I research the background?

Do I have any old family letters I can use? Use a disclaimer at the beginning of the story if necessary. If you are going to write a story based on a family happening make the disclaimer at the beginning of the story that it is fiction.

4. Jot down an opening paragraph.

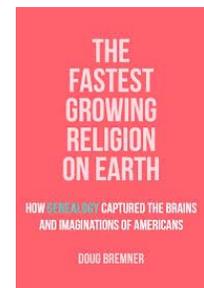
Take the time to write-create a schedule if necessary. Join a writers group and remember to break the story into smaller tasks- but concentrating on one family member or one time period.

Marion suggested sending your completed story for consideration for publication in this newsletter. You may email it to newslettereditor@jgscv.org.

Marion began her presentation with this insightful quote and it is appropriate to end the highlights with it:

"...I realized it was all about stories. Stories about people who came from another country, who had children, worked toward their dreams, had real setbacks and real disappointments, as well as real triumphs. It was stories about people who lived real lives. Genealogy was about not letting those lives go, not letting those lives be lived in vain, about honoring their existence, and not letting their spirits slip away into the mist."

Doug Bremmer: *The Fastest Growing Religion on Earth: How Genealogy Captured the Brains and Imaginations of Americans*.



Six Openings Remain For The Second Computer Workshop

JGSCV's second *Members-Only* computer workshop has room for six more participants. The "introduction to the Family Search Website" will take place on October 20th from 1-4 PM at the Conejo Valley Adult Education Center in Thousand Oaks. Family Search (<https://www.familysearch.org>) has millions of records that have been digitized and are available free online. JGSCV member, Barbara Algaze who is also a volunteer at the Los Angeles Family History Center as well as JGSLA Librarian will be the instructor. Barbara also provides the excellent overview at our annual assisted research afternoon at the LAFHC.

This workshop is in addition to our monthly programs held at Temple Adat Elohim, and is offered exclusively to 2013 dues-paid members. If you have not yet renewed or joined JGSCV for 2014 this is an excellent reason to do so now!

There are only 6 openings remaining. Please act soon if you plan to attend! There is no room for overflow.

"An Introduction to the Family Search website" will be available on a first-come first-serve basis. **To participate, you must register through JGSCV.** You may NOT register through the school. If you are interested, contact Jan Meisels Allen at president@jgscv.org. (Note, only Conejo Valley Adult Education Center computers will be used for this workshop. Please do **not** bring your own laptop.) **There is a \$10 participant fee for this workshop to help defray a portion of the cost.** JGSCV will pay the balance. Registered

participants will be required to pay the fee upon entrance by check or cash.

The class will start ***promptly at 1:00 PM on October 20th***. Late arriving registrants will be admitted but will be required to catch up on their own. Please plan to arrive early enough to be ready to begin at 1PM. **The Conejo Valley Adult Education Center is located at 1025 Old Farm Road in Thousand Oaks.**

JGSCV is required to provide The Adult Education Center with information about each registered participant. If you have a family membership to JGSCV and both members want to participate - that is considered two (2) registrations (two \$10 fees) and both must submit the information below. Therefore, in your email to Jan please provide the following information:

How to Register for "An Introduction to the Family Search Website"

Only emails to Jan Meisels Allen at president@jgscv.org with the following information will be accepted

(Do Not Contact the School Directly):

1. Name
2. Address
3. Phone number (cell or landline)
4. Birth date including birth year (this is the unique identifier used by the school)

NOTE: If you have a family membership to JGSCV and both members wish to attend, you **MUST** provide the above information *separately* for each family member.

The school assures us that this information will not be used for solicitation or other purposes unless you give them permission to contact you following the class.

For those who register, it will be helpful if you bring a USB (flash) drive with you to copy and bring home any documents you may create or want to download. Please bring with you the family names and towns you wish to research. A handout will be provided at the class to those who are registered.

Eligibility Requirements

1. Be a JGSCV 2013/2014 dues paid member-neither spouses nor friends that are not current JGSCV members may attend and those who are current

members need to be individually registered.

2. **You must be proficient in basic computer skills:** how to work a mouse-including the difference between right and left clicking, opening and closing a window, getting on the internet, migrating through webpages and **following directions.** The computers use Windows 7 operating system. **This is not a class on learning how to use a computer.** The only assistance given will be how to use the Family Search website.

The 6 remaining spaces will go quickly so please sign-up now if you plan to attend! Additional information will be provided to registered participants. If you have any questions contact Jan at president@jgscv.org

JGSCV MEMBER BENEFITS

- Annual assisted research afternoon at the Family History Library
- Members-only emails from the president announcing special events and free opportunities with Ancestry and other genealogical organizations and other items of genealogical interest
- Use of the traveling library at president's home – with an advance appointment
- For the first year of membership, JewishGen's Warren Blatt will assist with one concise question per month. He won't do your genealogy but with well thought out questions, he can help you on your genealogical journey.
- NEW! Members-Only Workshops on valuable genealogy tools

**JGSCV Welcomes New Member
JULIE SMITH**

JGSCV and RALPHS

JGSCV's partnership with Ralphs is an important part of our revenue. Your Board relies on fees received from **Ralphs Community Contribution Program** to help defray the cost of many of our programs, speakers, books and more. The Community Contribution program makes a contribution to JGSCV each time you shop at any of the Ralphs stores with no cost to you. It is the least expensive and easiest way to generate additional funds for your JGSCV. Everyone, even people you know who are not JGSCV members, can help by signing up for this program.



First, join Ralphs' Club. September 1st each year you must re-join (even if you are already a member) Besides helping JGSCV, Ralphs Club members also receive special discounts on featured purchases.

If you are already a registered participant, you remain active only until August 31, 2013 at which time you will have to re-register. You can re-register for the new term at www.Ralphs.com starting **September 1, 2013**. Even if you registered as recently as July you will be required to register again starting September 1st!

Remember: You can renew or register for the first time at the JGSCV's meetings—but you must first have a Ralph's Card. You can easily obtain a card by going to the customer service desk at a Ralphs store near you. For more information contact Karen Lewy at Karen@jgscv.org.



Once you have a Ralphs Club card, register for the Community Contribution Program as follows:

Go to www.Ralphs.com and click on register/sign-in. This will register your Ralphs card so you will be entitled to discounts on featured items throughout each store. Include your email and create a password.

After you have registered your Ralph's Rewards Card you can sign-up for the Community Contribution Program and help JGSCV by following these steps:

1. Sign-in with your email address and the password you created
2. Click on "Community" across the top of the page after it welcomes you with your name. Or, scroll down to bottom of page to click on "Community"
3. Click on Community Contribution (left hand side under "Community")
4. Click under participant where it says enroll
5. For participant questions click where it says "click here" above "enroll"
6. Click on enroll
7. Type in the first words of our organization i.e. "Jewish Gen" (if you only type in "Jewish" a number of organizations appear including ours, so by typing in the first few letters of our second name only we appear) and click on "search" and our name will pop up: "Jewish Genealogical Society of the Conejo Valley &". Or key in our 5 digit NPO number 84732 and click 'Search'. Make certain it is our Society as there are other Jewish Genealogy Societies registered!
8. In the 'Select Your Organization Section', click on the bubble next to our name

9. Click on 'Save Changes'. Our name (Jewish Genealogical Society of the Conejo Valley &.) will appear on the right side of this page. You have now completed your Online rewards card registration AND your Community Contributions registration.

10. Click on 'Logout' at the top of the page

The Ralphs Community Contribution program will pay JGSCV quarterly for monthly qualifying purchases per household:

Up to \$200 –1%;

Between \$200-\$349.99 -2%

Between \$350-\$500 3%; and

Over \$500 4%

JGSCV has been receiving from Ralphs over \$45=\$70 per quarter, or equal to 2-3 JGSCV memberships per quarter!

Remember even if you are only an occasional Ralphs shopper, your purchases help JGSCV!

Most of JGSCV's Traveling Library Now Has A Permanent Home

By Jan Meisels Allen

For many months I've been talking about transferring the majority of our traveling library to our permanent library at the Agoura Hills Public Library, a branch of the County of Los Angeles Public Library. I am delighted to inform you that the transfer is essentially completed. The Library still has just over two dozen books to catalogue into their system before putting them onto the row of shelves where the JGSCV collection is now located (Photo right).

While JGSCV's library is located at the Agoura Hills Public Library, JGSCV retains ownership of all its materials. Either party may cancel the agreement with 30-days notice—but we are anticipating a mutually enjoyable, long-term relationship with the Agoura Hills Public Library. The Agoura Hills Public Library also houses the Holocaust collection and Hebrew language book collection for the County of Los Angeles Public Library. Including our Jewish genealogy collection here creates a perfect location for researchers focusing on Jewish genealogy, the holocaust and reading Hebrew!



Our permanent library collection currently has 243 books including those being processed and they are so marked on the updated list of permanent books that will be posted to the JGSCV website under library/permanent. For inventory purposes the number counts individual books. For example a three set book collection such as *City of Promises: A History of the Jews of New York* counts as three books. Books authored by JGSCV members such as *David Franks*, *Colonial Merchant* by Mark Abbott Stern and *Legacy: The Saga of a German-Jewish Family Across Time and Circumstance* by founding JGSCV member Werner Frank are also located in the permanent collection. Of course we also have many newsletters and journals from around the world that are added monthly and have been located in the permanent library for a number of years.

The JGSCV website under Library will now have three lists:

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- Permanent Library Collection of Books [these are the books located at the Agoura Hills Library]
- Permanent Library-Newsletters, Journals and Pamphlets [these are also located at the Agoura Hills Library]
- JGSCV Traveling Library Post Transfer

JGSCV's permanent book collection is also included in the County of Los Angeles Public Library's catalogue so they will be available to all library visitors. However, as a non-circulating research collection, these books may not leave the library. Those who are interested in them will have to visit the Agoura Hills Public Library and use them there. We have found some items in our collection that are self-published and may not be listed in the World Catalogue or in the Library system's own catalogue. We are discussing having a separate listing with a call number available at the library for all books including those unable to be catalogued. We may place a unique number or symbol on such books for identification. When this is decided we will let you know. Our materials all have a blue circle on a white background on the book spine and binders (newsletters and journals). The books also have a barcode with the call number for identification in the library system.

Our traveling library currently has about 80-90 items including pamphlets and maps that may eventually also be transferred to the permanent library. The majority of the category "A" books, "primary resource books" such as the *Where Once We Walked* (2002 edition) as well as Beider, Faiguenboim and Menk books on Jewish surnames will remain in the traveling library for you to use at our monthly meetings. We also did not transfer books that are out of print or very old. We have books that were published in the late 1880's and early 1900's that would be most difficult if not impossible to replace.

We have one book missing-**probably** from the May meeting as it is a category B book and that was the last time the B books were at the meetings. The annual library inventory was completed in the early Spring and it was not missing at that time. The book is: *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and their History* By: Benzion C. Kagonoff. Publisher: Schocken Books NY 1977. If someone inadvertently took it home from one of the meetings please return it at the next meeting- no questions asked.

From the photograph you can see we have room to grow. If you have genealogically relevant books — generic genealogy or Jewish - to donate, please first check our list of both the permanent and traveling libraries so we don't duplicate. We are not able to accept duplicates. Unfortunately, books that are Judaica or merely written by Jewish authors but are not relevant to genealogy will not be accepted due to space limitations. If you wish a receipt for your donation, JGSCV will be happy to provide it to you.

Both libraries are non-lending, non-circulating libraries. By housing the majority of our books, newsletters and journals at the Agoura Hills Library there are more opportunities to access them. The library is open Tuesday and Wednesday 10AM-8PM, Thursday 11AM-5PM and Friday and Saturday 10AM – 5 PM. There are computers, printers and microfilm readers available.

JGSCV thanks Community Library Manager Nina Hull and Amy Turlock. Teen/Adult services librarian and Robert Murphy Library assistant for all their hard work in getting our collection available to the public.

The Agoura Hills Library is located at:
 29901 Ladyface Court
 Agoura Hills, CA 91301
 (818) 889-2278

Its website with directions is: <http://www.colapublib.org/libs/agourahills/index.php> are there.



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VENTURING INTO OUR PAST

JGSCV Meeting Dates Through June, 2014* at

Temple Adat Elohim
2420 E. Hillcrest Drive
Thousand Oaks, CA 91362

Sunday, October 6th 1:30-3:30 PM "Jewish Given Names"
Warren Blatt, Managing Director of JewishGen and JGSCV board member will explain the history and patterns of Jewish first names.

Monday, November 4th 7:00-9:00 PM "One Step Webpages +" and a new Case Study using the One Step Webpages

Steve Morse will explain how one-step webpages (and others) can be used to develop entire family histories.

Sunday, December 15th 1:30-3:30 PM "Smarter Searching on Ancestry.com" And JGSCV's Chanukkah Celebration

Crista Cowan of ancestry.com will return with more insights and tricks to more easily navigate the site.

Sunday, January 5, 2014 1:30-3:30 PM "For the Sake of the Children: The Letters Between Otto Frank and Nathan Straus, Jr." Joan Adler, Executive Director, Straus Historical Society reveals Otto Frank's letters to his friend in his desperate attempts flee Holland more than a year before his family was forced to hide.

Sunday, February 9th 1:00-5:00 PM "Assisted Research Day"

At LA Family History Center. Only current members. May join at the door.

Sunday, March 2nd 1:30-3:30 PM Program "German Jewish Genealogy Pre World War I"

Roger Lustig, research coordinator for GerSIG and researcher and genealogist specializing in the history of German Jewry

Monday, April 7th 7:00-9:00 PM "The Sephardic Community in Los Angeles"

Arthur Benveniste discusses growing up in the LA Sephardic community.

Sunday, May 4th 1:30-3:30 PM "Yom Hashoah" (Holocaust Memorial)

Sunday, June 1st 1:30-3:30 PM Program TBD

*All programs subject to change. Check website www.jgscv.org

Jewish Community Life in Brody

By Edward Gelles (Reprinted from *The Galitzianer*, Volume 19, Number 3, September, 2012)

A fragment of the Brody Beth Din records from the early 19th century has survived. I obtained a copy of this manuscript through the courtesy of the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York¹. It has proved to be an invaluable source of genealogical and sociological material for a town within the Austro-Hungarian Empire which had a large Jewish community and was also for a considerable time an important center of Jewish learning. For ten years, from 1808 to 1817, the records detail all manner of transactions that make up the warp and weft of a town's social fabric, such as the purchase and sale of houses, land, and other property, wills and bequests, marriage contracts, and much more. The names of people and the details of these transactions, when combined with the civil records of births, marriages, and deaths and the real estate registers, throw light on family connections and the life of the community².

The procedures followed in my study of the Gelles family are of general applicability, and so are some of the conclusions. For example, Moses Gelles of Brody was a scholar of the study group called the Brody Klaus around the middle of the 18th century³. He was variously referred to as Gelles and Levush. I suggested that the epithet "Levush" recalled a descent from the 16th century Rabbi Mordecai Yaffe of Prague and the title of his magnum opus, the *Levushim*. This Hebrew epithet is noted for four generations and is quite distinct from vernacular trade soubriquets, such as "Woskoboinik" (wax chandler or candle maker), used by some members of the Gelles family. There is evidence of other Levushes who were known to be descendants of Mordecai Yaffe. A perusal of the Beth Din records reveals that, at least in this place and period, it was general practice to refer to men of distinguished ancestry by adding the ancestor's epithet or the title of his major work of scholarship⁴. This custom of recalling famous forebears clearly provides useful pointers in

rabbinical genealogy.

This custom also indicates the importance attached to lineage (*yichus*) and to standing in the Brody community, in which learning tended to take precedence over wealth in determining social position. Families such as Babad, Chayes, Margoloth, and Shapiro combined ancient lineage, intellectual distinction, and wealth. The balance between lineage and learning on one hand and more material attributes on the other was delicately struck in arranged marriages. The leading rabbis featured prominently in the social hierarchy.

The Gelles family owned some land, several houses, and a chandlery (Vaskievonia). They appear to have had a monopoly on the supply of candles to the community². From the mid-1700's to the early 1800's, a part of which is covered by the Beth Din records, the family was quite prosperous. Membership in the Klaus certainly carried considerable prestige. This is the period for which there are records of marriage alliances with the families of Brody Rabbis Heschel Hakohen, Meir Fraenkel, Yehuda Leib Zundel, Berach Margoshes, and others. The Gelles connections with Rabbi Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz are documented and discussed elsewhere.

A marriage contract (*ketubah*) from the year 1817 between the Gelles and Margoshes families contains several points of interest, viz. the relative status of the participating families; the apparent youth of the bridegroom; the use of the Russian ruble, among other currencies, in a town which was an entrepot between the Austrian and Russian empires; and assurance by the bridegroom's brother to carry out the *chalitza* ceremony⁵, if required.

The community was strong in its religious faith, the winds of enlightenment blowing from post-Revolutionary France not yet having made much impact in this distant outpost of the Austrian

Empire. The synagogue was central to the life of the community, and many smaller houses of prayer catered to special groups. Synagogue seats were bequeathed, sold, and rented. A good example is provided by Finkel, a daughter of R. Dov Ber Fraenkel and the wife of Reb Wolf Bolechower, who purchased 35 seats, later selling some or using the funds from their rental for charitable purposes⁶.

Many houses and plots of land stayed in the same family for several generations, and numerous entries for property transactions refer to owners passing property to their heirs and to later subdivisions. An analysis of names, property numbers, and dates of transactions has confirmed a number of family links.

Moses Gelles died before the period covered by the Beth Din document. His property was divided between his children and in-laws and then went to their children and grandchildren. Their houses and parcels of land were therefore often adjoining one another or the land on part of which stood the family waxworks.

In the short span of ten years the Beth Din record encompasses information on four generations of related families. Several entries show that Moses Gelles of the Klaus was one and the same person as Menachem Levush and that his sons Michel Levush or Gelles, Joseph Gelles Vaskievonie, and Mordecai Gelles had numerous issue known by various names. R. Moshe Gershon, a son of Joseph Gelles, sometimes referred to as R. Moshe, can be distinguished from the R. Moshe Gelles whose name is given on the Brody tombstone of his son, Rabbi David Isaac Gellis. This R. Moshe was probably a son of the above-mentioned R. Mordecai Gelles, who was a mechutan (in-law) of Rabbi Pinchas of Koretz. More light is thrown on other in-laws. Thus, Rabbi Yehuda Zundel, grandfather of another Moshe Levush or Gelles, appears to be identical with the Rabbi Yehuda Leib Zundel Ramraz who belonged to the circle of the wise men of Brody and died in 1804. Reb Berach Margoshes' granddaughter married a Gelles, and Berach's wife may have been the daughter of R.

Shmuel Gelles. The family of Reb Ahron Benish seems to be connected through the wives of Ahron's sons, Reb Simcha and Reb David Hertz. The two couples sold their separate interests in two houses to the brothers-in-law Meir Fraenkel and Moses Gershon Gelles⁷.

The prosperity of the Gelles family declined as candles gave way to gaslight and as Brody suffered from the siting of new railways, the decline of its importance as a trading center, and the loss of its status as a Free City. Many Jews left their ancient hometown. Some, such as the Brodskys, flourished in Odessa and elsewhere in Russia. In the closing decades of the 19th century the influx of refugees from Russian pogroms led to overcrowding and poverty in Brody, but by that time many of the old families had been dispersed throughout Galicia, Austria, and beyond.

Data from the Brody Beth Din records, the civil records in the L'viv archives, and tombstone inscriptions have been augmented recently (2012) by the new Geshet Galicia Brody Cemetery Database.

Monetary Currencies

In this period the use of a variety of coins was widespread and by no means confined to Brody. For a century from 1779 Brody was a Free City with a flourishing trade between eastern and central Europe. Money in the above-mentioned documents included the Rhenish, a term for the contemporary German gulden or Netherlandish guilder. The latter was the standard Dutch coin, but many other coins were used in The Netherlands (for references to the ryder, worth 14 guilders, see <http://www.giacomocasanova.de/catour16.htm>).

This Web page contains interesting information on late 18th-century coinage and prices across Europe, drawn from various sources, including Casanova's Memoirs, Thomas Nugent's Grand Tour, and other writings). The pound sterling was worth about 11 ½ Dutch guilders and about 5 ½ Russian rubles, which were of similar value to the *rixdollar* (a variety of different Netherlandish coins each averaging about 448 grains in weight of .885

fine silver). The new Russian silver ruble, introduced under Tsar Alexander I in 1810, was clearly popular in Brody.

The money settlements in the quoted marriage contracts are in the range of a few hundred to a

Notes

1. Records of the Beth Din of Brody 1808–1817, MS 4037, held at Jewish Theological Seminary, New York. All entry numbers cited in this article refer to entries in these Beth Din records.

2. Edward Gelles, “Finding Rabbi Moses Gelles”, *Avotaynu*, Vol. 18, No. 1, Spring 2002.

3. Nathan M. Gelber, “Brody: The Jerusalem of Austria”, in *An Eternal Light: Brody in Memoriam*, Jerusalem: Organisation of Former Brody Residents in Israel, 1994. Footnote on the Brody Klaus.

4. Instances are entries 1116 for R. Zalman Margoshes Shach (descendant of the “Shach”, an acronym for Rabbi Shabbatai Katz) and 1172 for Chaim Zvi Hersh, son of R. Moshe Efrayim Chacham Zvi (descendant of Chacham Zvi Ashkenazi). More relevant to the interpretation of the Levush name, as referring to descent from Rabbi Mordecai Yaffe and to the title of his book, are instances of other epithets derived from famous rabbinical works, namely entries 1132, 1138, and 1278 for Reb Mendel Tevuos Shor, Reb Alexander Chaim Tevuos Shor, and Reb Yosef Yisrael Tevuos Shor (members of the Shor family descended from the author of *Tevuos Shor*) and 1350 for Leah, daughter of R. Avrohom Yitzchak Halevy Turei Zahav (after his ancestor David Halevy Segal, the author of the book *Turei Zahav*). The case for the derivation of the epithet Levush is certainly strengthened by these examples from the Beth Din records. The civil birth, marriage, and death records of Brody confirm that Gelles and Levush were alternative or additional names in the family for several generations. A previous record of this epithet is connected to known progeny of the Levush. The tombstone of a R. Nehemia Levush of Svierz and later of Vilna has an inscription stating that his father Rabbi Zvi Levush was a descendant of Rabbi Mordecai Yaffe².

5. Entry 1420. Ketubah of Abraham (a bachelor), son of Rabbi Moshe Gelles, son of Reb Joseph Vaskievonie (owner of the waxworks and one of the sons of Moses Gelles Levush of Brody), who married

few thousand Russian rubles or the equivalent in other currencies. Among the few indications of wages paid in that period (entry 1275, for March 1815) is the fee of one ruble per week paid to the part-time prayer leader of the New Synagogue.

Taube, daughter of Rabbi Josef Kalischer, son of R. Berach Margoshes, on Friday, 6 Tamuz 5577 (20 June 1817). Reb Moshe Gelles promised to pay the sum of 450 Russian rubles, support the couple for the first three years of their marriage, and pay for their clothing, as well as tuition fees (the provision for the payment of tuition fees may indicate the extreme youth of the bridegroom). Reb Josef Kalischer gave the sum of 100 Russian rubles. The bridegroom’s brother Reb Yankel Gelles gave an assurance to carry out the *chalitza* ceremony if necessary (the ceremony involves release of a childless bride by the brother of the bridegroom in the event of the bridegroom’s death). Other marriage contracts of the period refer to varying sums of money and years of support. Thus, in entry 277, for the 1808 marriage of Yitzchak, a son of Reb Benjamin Zeev Bolechover, Yitzchak was endowed with 1980 reinish and a promise of five years of support by the father of the bridegroom and separately by the mother of the bride. Entries 1391, 1395, 1397, and 1412 refer to 2,700 silver rubles and six years support, 675 rubles and three years support from the bride’s father, 1,425 new rubles with each side supporting the couple for four years, and 1,125 Russian rubles with support of two years from the bride’s father and five years from the bridegroom’s father. While the most common currency of the period was the Russian ruble, Austrian ducats (*Kaiserliche dukaten*) are mentioned in entry 1258 dated 1814, Prussian currency (*Preussisch*) in 447 dated 1808, and Dutch coinage (*rendelech Hollander*) in 424 and 429 in 1808.

6. Entry 394. “Finkel [the sister of Rabbi Meir Fraenkel, a son-in-law of R. Josef Gelles Vaskievonie, who was a son of R. Moses Gelles], daughter of R. Dov Ber Fraenkel and wife of Reb Wolf Bolechower, purchased 35 seats in the Synagogue.” Entry 1133. “A sale by the wealthy Finkel ... of a seat in the women’s section of the New Synagogue ... in memory of the soul of the late Feiga, daughter of

Reb Yehoshua Heshel Hakohen, the wife of Rabbi Michel, son of Reb Moshe Gelles ... so that this should be an everlasting memorial to her soul, never to be sold. The rental income from the seat is to be used to pay for a *yahrzeit* lamp [candle lit on the anniversary of the deceased's death] and the remainder to be distributed to the local poor on the day of her *yahrzeit* . She appointed a trustee ... Elul 5573 [September 1813]." The husband of the abovementioned Feiga is identified in entry 270. "Reb Michel, son of Reb Menachem Levush* (son-in-law of Reb. S. Gelles), signed and sealed to his wife Feiga, daughter of Rabbi Yehoshua Heshel, that if she passes away before him, he is obliged to return to her heirs, or to whomever she instructs, half of the value of her *shterentuchel* ** [the customary jewelled headdress], and all clothing, bedding etc, immediately after her death ... 27 Tishri 5568 [29 October 1807]."

*Menachem Levush in entry 270 is thus one and the same person as Moses Gelles in entry 1133. **An entry in 1808 gives the value of a *shterentuchel* as at least *200 rendelech Hollander* , and an entry for the wedding in 1813 of Benjamin Wolf, son of Zvi Hirsch Schonblum of Lvov, to Rikel Landau, daughter of R. Yosef ben R. Shachna, refers to a *shterentuchel* , earrings, and pearls being worth at least 900 Russian rubles.

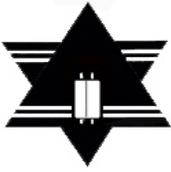
Entry 401. "Gittel Malka, the widow of Reb Todros ben Ramraz [of the Zundel family] sold a seat on the eastern wall in the women's section, next to the seat belonging to Malka Margoshes ... Iyyar 5568 [May 1808]." Entry 1308. "Sale by Chaya, widow of R. Shmuel Gelles, of half a seat in the women's section of the synagogue to Ektish, wife of the wealthy R. Yehoshua Margalioth ... 28 Menachem [Av] 5575 [3 September 1815]."

7. Parts of houses and parcels of land were conveyed frequently between the heirs of Moses Gelles and

their descendants. These transactions involved Leah and Bonna and their in-laws of the Benish family (entries 713 and 813; see also entries 1064 and 1067); Reb Moshe Gershon Gelles, a son of R. Joseph Gelles Vaskievonie, and his brother-in-law Rabbi Meir Shlomo Fraenkel (entries 713, 786, and 813); the latter's wealthy sister Finkel and her husband Reb Benyamin Wolf Bolechover (entries 574 and 922); and other sons of R. Joseph Gelles, namely Reb Yaakov Hersh Feigang and Rabbi Abraham Yonah Reich with the Reich family (entry 786). These two Gelles family members were referred to by the names of their fathers-in-law, a common custom at the time. Yonah Reich is perhaps identifiable as the father of the R. Isaac Reich who married a granddaughter of R. Joseph Landau, ABD of Zolkiew who became head of the Brody Klaus in 17578 . R. Moshe Gershon Gelles was probably Bonna's brother. Reb Mordechai Gelles, a brother of Reb Joseph Vaskievonie, is mentioned (entries 762 and 1035), and Reb Shmuel may be a kinsman of Moshe Gelles of the Klaus (entries 481, 530, and 953). Reb Shmuel's daughter married Reb Berach Margoshes. The Margoshes also had marriage links with the Shapiro family (entries 860 and 863). The identity of Rabbi Yehuda Zundel, whose daughter Sarah Bathya married Mordecai Levush, son of R. Michel Gelles, is indicated by the entry for a property sale to their son Reb Moshe Levush in March 1814 (entry 1194) and the entry relating to land belonging to the heirs of the late R. Zundel Ramraz (entry 1131) and again to the heirs of Reb Zundel son of R. M. Reb Zelig's in December 1814 (entry 1260). Rabbi Yehuda Leib Zundel carried the epithet "Ramraz", an acronym for Rabbi Moshe Reb Zelig's (as the son-in-law of Reb Zelig was called).

8. Neil Rosenstein, *The Unbroken Chain* , Lakewood, NJ: CIS Publishers, 1990, pp. 755–757.

Edward Gelles, M.A., D.Phil. (Oxford 1951), was born in Vienna in 1927 and has lived in England since 1938. He has published numerous papers on physical chemistry in scientific journals, a book and articles on antiques and art, and five books and many articles on Jewish history and genealogy. He may be contacted at edward.gelles@btinternet.com This essay will be included in a forthcoming volume of collected essays by Dr. Gelles.



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