The following narrative of researching my grandfather Harry Shankman, and other family members is intended to illustrate the variety of materials and sources available for documenting a family history. It also illustrates how names, dates, and other information varies by document and time and must not be totally relied upon when searching for and vetting other documents.

If you are contemplating starting your own genealogy journey to learn your family history, I hope my experiences will be helpful and encouraging.

This is the story of my genealogy journey of exploration and the six years it took to discover a family mystery. Here is how the journey began:

Before the advent of computers, my older brother had compiled a family tree by interviewing many older relatives . . . but the tree was on paper and a relative who borrowed it somehow lost it. By the time it was lost, most of the older relatives had passed away, along with their memories of relative's names and stories of the old country. My brother never continued with genealogy after losing his years of research.

My mother and aunt told me that the family oral history was that their father lived with a family in New York City when he came to America as a teenager and he took their name because they treated him so kindly. He left New York shortly after arriving from Ellis Island and settled in Chicago with his mother and stepfather. All my mother and aunt knew of their father’s ‘real’ surname was the phonic CRASNITSKY, that he came from Kiev, Russia, and that his father died when he was a child.

After retiring, I decided to pursue our family genealogy and especially the mystery question. My main genealogy goal was finding the original surname of my maternal grandfather and any related family history.

What I knew about him at the time was that he was a WWI veteran who died from the effects of being gassed during a battle; I was five years old when he died. I also knew that he owned a bicycle store across the street from Chicago’s Lane Technical High School. He was in Veteran Administration hospitals in California while I lived in Chicago and I have no memory of ever meeting him.

I started my genealogical research in 1994 and eventually discovered my grandfather’s ‘real’ surname in 2000. During this time, I became the family genealogist and I became hooked on genealogy as a hobby, which I continue finding a never-ending quest as every new discovery leads to more questions.

My genealogy journey of discovery began with searching for and finding the 1920 U.S. census form that was available on microfilm and that I had requested from a Family History Center library in Eugene, Oregon. In 1994, the use of SOUNDEX for census and naturalization record searching was a necessity. SOUNDEX is a complex system designed for allowing phonetic surname searching. Harry Shankman’s SOUNDEX code was S525.

Verifying the 1920 census form entries was the start of a steep learning curve beginning my research and journey looking for my grandfather’s ‘real’ surname.

Since 2000, “The Obermayer German-Jewish History Awards have been given to non-Jewish German individuals who have made outstanding voluntary contributions toward preserving and recording the Jewish history, heritage, culture and/or remnants of local German communities. These volunteers have devoted countless hours to such projects, but until recently few have been recognized or honored for their efforts. The German Jewish Community History Council [founded and supported by Arthur and Judy Obermayer] believes it is particularly meaningful for Jews the world over to recognize and encourage such work through this award, and to bring international attention to these activities.”

http://www.obermayer.us/
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From the Editor
by Peggy Morrow, Executive Editor

The Obermeyer German-Jewish History Awards are given annually to individuals who have made outstanding voluntary contributions toward preserving and recording the Jewish history, heritage, culture and/or remnants of local German communities. Two members of JGSI, Dennis Aron and Helen Levy, nominated two of the awardees, and share their stories in this issue, and Ron Miller relates his journey finding the original surname of his maternal grandfather.

I want to share with you this amusing exchange I had through Ancestry.com. To me, this takes the concept of “distant relation” to a new level. This genealogist has thousands of names in his family tree.

"Me: You have my great-grandparents Bernatt and Elda Edelman and grandparents Leon and Sarah Edelman on your family tree - would love to know how we are related.

A: I'm only a very distant relation, I'm afraid. Charles Edelman (Leon's brother) married Esther Wittenberg, the sister-in-law of Eva Welensky; her cousin Abraham Telechansky married Lilian Waldman, my aunt's great-grandfather's half-sister.

We are looking for articles for the next issue and more “family photos that tell a story.” If you would like to volunteer, contribute an article to Morasha, or have ideas that you would like to share with us, please email morashaeditor@jgsi.org.

LEGACIES
EXTENDS ITS CONDOLENCES TO THE FAMILIES OF:
Judith R. Frazin, long-time member, former JGSI president for ten years, and former JGSI membership vice-president, on the passing of her mother, Charlotte Ray, 96, on May 7. An avid dancer, Charlotte danced at the World’s Fair in 1933 and 1934 and in the corps de ballet at the Auditorium Theatre. She also gave ballet and tap lessons at Charlotte’s School of the Dance and taught tap at various elementary schools in Chicago and ballroom dancing at Amundsen High School. Charlotte is survived by Judith, 3 grandchildren and 2 great-grandchildren.

Sara Edel Schaflier Kelman, 85, who died on May 5. Born in Canada, Sara lived in Skokie during the early years of the JGSI and was an active member helping others with their research and devoting time to writing the history of her own family. Her then husband, Rabbi Samuel Schaflier, who died in 1991, accepted a position in Boston, and while there, she served as president of the JGS of Greater Boston for three years. In 2000, she returned to Canada to marry Rabbi Joseph Kelman, who died in 2008. She is survived by five of her six children and numerous grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Sheldon Solovy, long-time JGSI member, 83, who died on June 2. Sheldon was a Korean War Vet and member of the Jewish War Veterans, the Temple Beth Israel Choir and the Skokie Photographic Society. He was also a past member of the District 73½ School Board, Skokie, IL. He is survived by his wife of forty-four years, Alice, also a long-time JGSI member, two children, four grandchildren, a brother, a sister and many other close relatives.

We are looking for articles for the next issue and more “family photos that tell a story.” If you would like to volunteer, contribute an article to Morasha, or have ideas that you would like to share with us, please email morashaeditor@jgsi.org.
Board Business

by Scott E. Meyer, JGSI Recording Secretary

A Mystery No Longer…

Over the course of the last few months, the discussion around the Board’s meeting table ranged from the more mundane matters of society management to the more historic.

This past April, the Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois' library and primary meeting location moved from Temple Beth Israel in Skokie to Temple Beth-El in Northbrook. Getting ready for that day necessitated creating a comprehensive inventory of our holdings (in several locations) and taking stock of the realities of our society’s current needs. Decisions were made regarding the future of duplicate materials that had been acquired over the years, as well as the purchase of new items such as cabinets and bookcases. Detailed packing and transportation plans were developed and communicated to the Board by past president Harriet Rudnit. Plus, relocating our JGSI library means photos can more easily be taken of some of the publications in preparation for expanding our catalog of holdings.

As this planning was taking place, the Board considered ways to provide even more value to JGSI members, as our new database system was about to be upgraded. The JGSI website now has a way for members to provide their profiles. In addition, the related database of information can be searched so that useful networking among members can take place. Photographs can be included so that members might more easily recognize each other at Society meetings and events. The Board is looking into linking to other society newsletters and creating a discussion list.

Board members explored changes to the dues structure for our international members.

For those who might not be able to attend local meetings and programs, options for streaming meetings and programs over the Internet so that those who might not be able to attend in person could do so remotely. Also explored was establishing carpooling opportunities for those members who might have difficulty getting to our new location.

Joint meetings and programs with other organizations, such as the Chicago Jewish Historical Society and Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership, were discussed. As summer draws nearer, the Board questioned to what extent the JGSI would be a presence at this summer’s conference of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies.

And speaking of summer, every two years the Chicago Jewish community sees another celebratory Jewish Folk Arts Festival, and this year’s event recently took place in June 2014. That meant that the Board needed to decide how the JGSI might make itself known to those in attendance. During alternate years when no such event has been scheduled, the JGSI has hosted a Midwest Genealogical Conference, and preliminary discussions began for that summer 2015 event.

It is exciting to consider that many of the ideas brought to the Board meeting table during the course of the last several months will see successful implementation in the near future!

From the Co-Presidents

by Robin Seidenberg • Debbie Kroopkin

Debbie Kroopkin and I have now been Co-Presidents for a year. Before we took office, we were confronted with the need to find a new meeting place for JGSI because Temple Beth Israel was going to be remodeling and our library space was no longer going to be available. Thanks to the hard work of Wendy Hauser and her committee of Mike Karsen and Dennis Aron, we procured our new meeting place at Temple Beth-El on Dundee Road in Northbrook, IL. Harriet Rudnit coordinated our move there. She and her committee of dedicated volunteers did an incredible job of getting us moved to our new home. We owe all of them a huge debt of gratitude.

I hope you have had a chance to visit JGSI’s beautiful, spacious new home. There is plenty of room for members and guests to sign in, visit our help desk and library, and schmooze with other members.

Now that Chicago’s long winter is over (our surprise mid-May snow notwithstanding), many families start their vacations or staycations. Keep your family history in mind when arranging your travels. Every day we read of the loss of Holocaust survivors and World War II veterans. Please try to interview them now while they are still able to talk to you about their lives. Don’t say later “If I had only asked…”

When you are visiting family members, don’t forget to ask to see old photos. They may help to jog your relatives’ memory. The time to do this is NOW. You never know what tomorrow may bring.

Try to search for other memorabilia. Jerry Lasin recently acquired his family’s yizkor book and then was able to purchase it in English translation. You may be able to locate an old high school, college, or professional school year book that will shed light on a family member’s previously unknown activities.

JGSI is proud to announce the second printing of its award-winning A Translation Guide to 19th-Century Polish-Language Civil-Registration Documents (including Birth, Marriage and Death Records) by former president, Judith R. Frazin. This may just be what you need to help with your family history work.

We are looking for people who would like to meet and greet at meetings and serve on our new membership/hospitality committee. We are always looking for individuals with computer skills. For more information or to volunteer, please phone 312.666.0100.

Happy researching!

Robin Seidenberg

Membership

by Mike Karsen, Co-Vice-President Membership (acting) as of May 28, 2014

Welcome NEW MEMBERS: Peter Brixie • Robert Brown • Nancy Eaglin • Jenna Emmons • Ronna Goldberg • Ralph A. Juss • Ellen Kahn • Willa K. Lieberman • Karen Marcus • Diane Lee Rothbart • Craig Tisdale • Peter Tyor • Sharrie Viars • Arlene Wolff

CONTRIBUTING MEMBERS: Pierre Stutin (International)  SUSTAINING MEMBERS: Linda Edelcup
by Dennis Aron

In November, 2012, I attended a memorial service for the Jewish Community of Meudt, Germany, one of my ancestral towns. To make the most of the trip, I also visited Wiesbaden to research my Baer family and visit the Hessen State Archive. In Wiesbaden, I met for the first time my distant cousin Clotilde Baer Wimmer from the Munich area.

We had good support from the Active Museum Spiegelgasse and a fruitful visit to the archive. Clotilde praised the help she had previously gotten from Dorothee Lottmann-Kaeseler at the museum and bemoaned the fact that, in spite of Dorothee being an Obermayer Award winner, she had been forced out of her position due to politics at the museum.

"Obermayer Award"??! I had never heard of it. Clotilde explained.

I left from Wiesbaden to visit Hans-Peter Klein, my friend and genealogy collaborator who has been of immense help to my family and others from North Hesse. I mentioned the Obermayer Award and asked if he had any objection to my preparing a nomination. He did not.

Hans-Peter has supported my family research in a variety of ways. A sampler:

- His experience in helping various families from the towns of Nordhessen provides ready answers for a variety of questions. When I asked him for clarity in the spelling of Kander, my great-grandmother’s surname, he recognized that he had researched the Kanders for a cousin I had never heard of and sent a ten generation family tree he had prepared for her.

- He voluntarily transcribed the last dozen illegible (to me) letters my mother received in the US in 1938-39 from her mother before she perished.

- He accompanied and assisted me for 10 days on my visits to 15 of my ancestral towns in Nordhessen, Westerwald and Rheinland-Pfalz, including visits to 5 archives and 12 cemeteries where we gathered huge amounts of information.

Hans-Peter Klein has devoted more than 25 years toward preserving the legacy of numerous small Jewish communities in Nordhessen, Germany. He assists descendants of Nordhessen Jewish families, performing archival research, building and growing family trees, providing family records and transcribing correspondence. He accompanies visitors on frequent tours of ancestors’ towns and cemeteries. As a teacher, he has accompanied German school students (26 seminars) and teachers (11 seminars) on week-long visits to Auschwitz (yes...week-long) to teach them the history and impact of the Holocaust. For all these accomplishments and many, many more, Hans-Peter was awarded the prestigious Obermayer Award for 2014.

I had no idea how much work was involved in the nomination process, nor the magnitude of this award process. I have known Hans-Peter since 2008 when we were introduced by my cousin Mark Gordon. Mark and I agreed that we would work together to nominate Hans-Peter. Our nomination included a summary of his activities, our rationale for the nomination, a list of additional personal references, Mark’s and my personal statements, a list of Hans-Peter’s publications and, finally, copies of some of the publications. After all he has done, this large effort was a pleasure.

I received an email from Dr. Arthur Obermayer on October 25 announcing that Hans-Peter had won the Obermayer German Jewish History Award. (HOORAY!!) Dr. Obermayer invited my wife and me to attend the award ceremony on Monday evening, January 27, 2014 at the plenary chamber of the Berlin Parliament. It indicated an elegant affair accompanied by a day of enjoyable activities including a press conference and luncheon. All would be preceded by a banquet on the evening of January 26. While business casual was indicated as appropriate for the banquet, suits were suggested for the ceremony. This was going to be a big deal!

My first reaction was excitement that he won this honor and a visit to Berlin. Then the question arose about the timing of this event. After all, Berlin is not a typical winter destination. Then I learned that the event is held each year on January 27: International Holocaust Remembrance Day and the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The timing makes perfect sense.

As in most years, 5 individuals received the award. Each of them has full professional lives while somehow fitting in a broad range of intense activities relating to preserving memories of the Jewish communities and restoring and maintaining their artifacts. Information about each one and his (all men this year) accomplishments can be found at http://www.obermayer.us/award/2014/2014.htm.

This year’s awardees were Johannes Grötecke, a high school teacher of Bad Wildungen, Hesse; Frowald Gil Hüttenmeister, a Jewish Studies university lecturer of Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg; Hans-Peter Klein, a high school teacher from Melsungen, Hesse; Silvester Lechner, a college professor from Elchingen, Bavaria; and Steffen Pross a journalist from Ludwigsburg, Baden-Württemberg.
My trip to Freudental, Germany in June, 2013 was much more interesting than I expected. I spent four days in the town where my Levi ancestors had lived from 1777. My gggrandfather had an inn, named Lann, and raised cattle. I stayed at the renovated inn, which was quite charming and had accommodations for 37 guests, plus a lovely German-style restaurant.

The occasion for my trip was to commemorate the third book about Freudental’s Jewish past written by Steffen Pross, a journalist and genealogist, whom I had been in contact with as I researched my Levi ancestors. His book is dedicated to the last three Jews still living in, and who were born, in Freudental: Beate Stein, now Bilha Har’el in Israel, Awnni Stein, today Anna Garfied in Southfield, Michigan and Willi Blum, today in Buenos Aires. There were 20 other guests from Argentina, Israel, France, Guatemala, and the United States.

Steffen was quite helpful in connecting me to several relatives, including several Levi cousins living in Paris and San Francisco. He took me to the local archives where he showed me the records of my grandparent’s confiscated files. I was very impressed with Steffen’s accomplishments.

When I learned about The Obermayer German Jewish History Award, which acknowledges the voluntary contributions to preserve the memory of local Jewish communities, I nominated Steffen, and he was one of five winners of the 2014 award.

The village of Freudental is quite charming, with cobblestone streets and remnants of its history. The town has a small coffee shop, two beauty parlors, and the locals are seen going to yoga classes.

We spent several days sharing our histories and touring the village, followed by a guided tour of the synagogue. There are imprints of mezuzot on several houses. The daily life of the rural Jewish population was on the fringes of the Christian community, but interwoven with the local community because of economic and neighborhood ties.

The gathering was held at the site of the original Freudental synagogue, which was built in 1770. During the 19th century, it was the religious center for Jews in the lowlands of southern Germany. In 1888, the building was added to the state inventory list and in 1926 to the list of historical monuments.

The synagogue was desecrated in the pogrom of November 1938 and later used as stables, workshops, and a sports hall. Ownership of the synagogue was returned to the Jewish community in 1949, and in 1980, active members of the community founded an organization to save the synagogue. Restoration was supported by the district council of Ludwigsburg and well-known figures. During the restoration work, valuable books, letters, personal documents, and important evidence of the daily cultural life of the German rural Jewish population were discovered in the loft of the synagogue.

After the destruction of the first Jewish cemetery in 1810 in Seeberg, the Jewish cemetery of Freudental was built. The 436 gravestones have survived nearly two centuries and are the oldest visible relics of Jewish culture in Freudental. They offer insight to a world that no longer exists.

For more information about the Obermayer Award and Steffen Pross, visit www.obermayer.us/award/index.htm and www.obermayer.us/award/awardees/pross-eng.htm.

Photos: Steffen Pross’ book cover, illustrations, sample of page with tombstone/information, and one of many newspaper article picturing Helen Levy (second from left).
OBERMEYER AWARD

from page 4

Each attended the proceeding with an entourage including their family and award nominators, making for a core group of attendees of between forty and fifty. Therefore, I was surprised that the 150 seat Plenary Hall was filled almost to capacity. In addition to the core group were another ten or so from the Obermayer organization and Award Jury members. The remainder of the audience included interested dignitaries including members of Parliament, representatives from the EU, the press, and various representatives of the local academic community. Simultaneous translation was available for all presentations, and the ceremony was simulcast on the Internet. The word prestigious for this award is fully appropriate.

Hosting the proceedings were Mr. Ralf Wieland, President of the Berlin House of Representatives and Dr. Arthur Obermayer, sponsor of the Obermayer German Jewish History Awards. The event began with a moving speech by Mr. Wieland, recalling the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I, the 69th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the horrors of the Nazi period and contrasting that past with the impressive efforts of the Obermayer awardees in recovering and preserving the history of the Jewish Communities.

Dr. Obermayer then addressed the history of the award program and announced the winner of the first annual Distinguished Service Award to be given to those who, for whatever reason, do not qualify for the Obermayer German Jewish History Award, but whose efforts would otherwise lead to receiving one. The first such award was given to Frau Dr. h. c. Charlotte Knobloch, the President of the Jewish Community of Munich and Oberbayern K.d.ö.R. who then gave a brief talk.

Then each of the five awardees made a brief presentation summarizing their activities which led to their nomination and selection, followed by the presentation of their award.

The various segments of the Award Ceremony were separated with musical interludes. Following the ceremony, the entire audience was ushered up to a very well-provisioned reception with servers continuously offering hors d’oeuvres and wine. It was all very elegant. There was no stinting on the respect that was shown for the awardees and their good works. It was an honor to nominate Hans-Peter for the Obermayer Award and great fun to celebrate with him and his family.

GREATER CHICAGO Jewish Festival

JGSI participated at the Greater Chicago Jewish Festival on June 8. Thank you to all who volunteered, especially Wendy Hauser and Barry Finkel for organizing and schlepping. Thanks to Devra Eisen, Ken Falkson, Judi and Marty Fischer, Geraldine Giglio, Debbie Kroopkin and Steven Marx. We had great interest in our organization.
At Last A Declaration of Genealogists’ Rights

by Gary Mokotoff

With all the talk about privacy rights by other interest and political groups, the genealogical community has finally come up with a declaration of its own rights. The Records Preservation and Access Committee (RPAC) announced the “Genealogists’ Declaration of Rights” before a crowd of more than 2,500 genealogists attending the opening session of the National Genealogy Society’s 2014 Family History Conference in Richmond, Virginia, on May 7.

The Declaration of Rights is a statement advocating open access to federal, state, and local public records. The Declaration affirms America’s long history of open public records, which has been threatened the last few years over concerns about identity theft and privacy. The Records Preservation and Access Committee has worked with state and federal legislators as well as local public officials for more than 20 years in support of legislation and regulations that achieve a balance between access and privacy. The Declaration of Rights has been approved by the board of directors of the three sponsoring organizations: National Genealogical Society (NGS), Federation of Genealogical Societies (FGS), and the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS).

During the NGS Conference, genealogists from almost all 50 states signed the Declaration. Over the next few months, the Declaration will travel to the 34th IAJGS Conference on Jewish Genealogy in Salt Lake City, Utah, July 27–August 1, and the Federation of Genealogical Societies Conference in San Antonio, Texas, August 27–30. Nu? What’s New? readers can read and sign the Declaration at http://tinyurl.com/GenealogyDoR.

Genealogists advocate the right of access to records held by government agencies including but not limited to vital records (births, marriages, deaths, divorces); land conveyances and mortgages; tax assessments; guardianships; probate of estates; criminal proceedings; suits of law and equity; immigration; military service and pensions; and acts of governmental entities. Genealogists further advocate that they need to be allowed access to original records when photocopies, microfilm, digital images, or other formats are insufficient to establish clear text, context, or completeness of the record. The rights of genealogists specified in the Declaration object to numerous barriers created to deny them access to records.

Thousands of professional genealogists do research everyday on behalf of clients, government agencies, and attorneys.

Reprinted with permission from “Nu? What’s New? - The E-zine of Jewish Genealogy From Avotaynu,” Gary Mokotoff, Editor, Volume 15, Number 19 | May 18, 2014

Gangsters and Organized Crime in Jewish Chicago

by Alex Garel-Frantzen

My friend focuses her genealogical efforts on having thousands of names in her family tree. I’m more interested in the immigrant experience: where did my family come from, why did they leave, and what were their lives like in America?


The Amazon.com description says “...in the early twentieth century, the harsh environment of the Maxwell Street ghetto produced a proliferation of Jewish gangsters involved in everything from labor racketeering to white slavery. Their illegal activity offended their own community’s value system and sparked rifts between Reform and Orthodox Jews. It also ignited tensions between city officials and Jewish leaders, indelibly marked the gentile population’s perception of Chicago’s Jews, and shaped the city’s West Side for years to come.”

The first thing I did with the book was check the index for family names. Not found.

After a recap of Jewish immigration to Chicago, the book is organized by type of crime, including Jewish gangs, white slavery, gambling, and bootlegging. It explores the social and economic drivers of Jewish crime. Call me naïve, but I was shocked to read that some Rabbis bootlegged sacramental wine during Prohibition and sad that nice Jewish girls were forced into prostitution.

The book shows a different view of the area where my ancestors lived and owned small stores. Even the author points out that he covers a side of Maxwell Street that Irving Cutler did not. I’ll never know how crime affected my families’ lives and hope it had minimum impact.
How I Got Hooked on Genealogy...
from cover

The 1920 census listed my grandfather Harry SHANKMAN as age 26 (estimated date of birth being 1894), emigrating in 1912, naturalized in 1917, and unable to speak English. My research ultimately revealed that Hershel KRASNITZKY had arrived by himself at Ellis Island in 1910 at age 16, was naturalized in 1920, was born May 5, 1893 … but 1894 on some documents, and he spoke good English. I also was able to discover his WWI military service history.

When I asked my mother why my grandfather could not speak English but served in the Army and was a WWI Veteran she told me he had a heavy Russian accent but spoke good English.

Harry SHANKMAN, born Herschel KRASNITZKY in Rzeshtchive (Rzhyschiv 49°57′40″N 31°02′37″E, near Kiev, Russia on May 5th, 1893, was the son of Lazar KRASNITZKY and Chani (Bessie) KAPLAN. Harry’s father, Lazar, died before Harry emigrated from Russia. Harry’s mother remarried in Russia and had four children with her second husband, Max SKOLNICK, before immigrating to America. Harry’s stepfather Max had arrived in America in 1907 and lived in Chicago; Harry arrived in 1910; and Harry’s mother and her four children, Harry’s half-siblings, arrived in 1911.

In this c1893 (cover) photo taken in Russia. Harry’s parents Lazar and Bessie are on the right. Photo interpretation indicates that Bessie’s hands folded over her stomach was indicative of pregnancy; best guess is that she was carrying my grandfather Harry. My guess is that the older woman on the left is Harry’s grandmother, and the man behind her possibly Harry’s uncle (Lazar’s brother). I have not been able to discover their names.

Herschel (Harry Shankman) arrived at Ellis Island in 1910 at age 16. Harry’s ship manifest lists his occupation as shoemaker. He was detained for being a likely public charge (LPC), but was granted entry. It is assumed that he was able to verify he would be living with his stepfather and would not be dependent on government assistance. Family oral history is that Harry lived with a family in New York City named SHANKMAN before he came to Chicago to join his mother’s family. Herschel took the name Harry SHANKMAN and settled in Chicago living with his stepfather Max SKOLNICK. My aunt Millicent recalled visiting the SHANKMAN family in New York when she was young but could not remember any names, addresses, or other details in the intervening 50 years. I certainly wish that school genealogy programs existed when I was a child.

The Ellis Island Data Base website was one source for my grandfather’s arrival passenger manifest information. My grandfather arrived on the ship named Russia, which left Libau, Russia (port on the Baltic Sea) on July 19th and arrived in New York, Ellis Island, on August 1, 1910.

Close inspection of his actual ship manifest reveals that his given name was Herschel, NOT Gerschko as is on the EllisIsland.org version of the actual ship manifest. However, knowing the ship name, date of arrival, and manifest page it was possible to find the actual ship manifest.

Harry made his way from his home in Kiev, Russia (now Ukraine) to the Baltic port of Libau. The ship on which he traveled to America was the M/V Russia. Harry SHANKMAN was one of the 3rd class passengers.

Immigrant ship manifests are one or two pages, depending on the year, and are approximately two feet wide. In some cases, only an index card of the manifest data exists. The images can be difficult to read and interpret. Few actual paper manifests exist; most were microfilmed and destroyed.

Harry’s ship passenger manifest of his 13-day voyage shows his entry on line #24. The manifest reads: KRASNITZKY Herschel – age 16 – born Russia – Hebrew – Relative in Europe: Kiev – Destination: Chicago, Illinois. He was en route to his uncle Max Skolnic. And he was born in Reshiza, Russia.

I’ve expanded the manifest entry so you may see the difficulties in interpreting written ship manifests and other documents. The manifest entry reads Krasnitzky, Herschel (as I see it), age 16. The translator of this manifest recorded his name as Gerschko but if you look closely the correct interpretation Herschel.

Herschel (Harry) was retained on Ellis Island as a LPC (Likely Public Charge) and was subject to deportation until he convinced officials otherwise. The LPC documents were added to the manifests by Ellis Island immigration inspectors after the ship arrived and the passengers were processed. Note the spelling of his typed name; it was easier reading than the written manifest page that the ship deposited with Ellis Island. The person transcribing passenger names into electronic databases must likely used these typed entries instead of the written entry where possible. Note the names that were corrected (circled in green).

Harry SHANKMAN was approved as a US citizen on April 7, 1920 as indicated by his Naturalization Petition. He married my grandmother Rosabel GOLDEN eleven days later, on April 18, 1920, although his Naturalization Certificate has the effective date as May 14th, 1920.

Harry’s mother-in-law, his wife, Rosabel SHANKMAN’s mother, was Sophia GARFINKEL who was married to Charles GOLDENBERG in Philadelphia in 1893. Charles GOLDENBERG maintained his surname throughout his life, while his children took the name GOLDEN.

Sophia’s marriage license shows she was born in Russia. The 1920 census listed her as born in Pennsylvania. Family oral history, from my mother’s records, indicated that she was born in Philadelphia c1877. According to her marriage license, she was born in Russia c1874.

My grandfather Harry’s stepfather, Max SKOLNICK, (also spelled SKOLNIK in records) had a child named Harry; they were called Big Harry (SHANKMAN) and Little Harry. They lived in Chicago; Harry arrived in 1910; and Harry’s mother and her four children, Harry’s half-siblings, arrived in 1911.

Harry’s stepfather, Max SKOLNICK, was born in Russia on May 5th, 1893, was the son of Lazar KRASNITZKY and Rosabel GOLDEN. Lazar was born in Russia c1874. They took the name GOLDEN. Sophia’s marriage license shows she was born in Russia. The 1920 census listed her as born in Pennsylvania. Family oral history, from my mother’s records, indicated that she was born in Philadelphia c1877. According to her marriage license, she was born in Russia c1874.

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(SKOLNICK). Harry worked in the shoe industry; Max SKOLNICK was a shoemaker. The assumption is that Harry learned the shoe trade while in Russia, from his stepfather, Max, who arrived in America in 1907. Doing the math it becomes probable that Harry’s father died sometime between 1894, when he was born, and 1900 because Harry’s oldest half-sister was born in 1900.

Harry’s mother-in-law, Sophia GOLDENBERG, divorced my great-grandfather, Charles GOLDENBERG, in 1915. The divorce papers, located in the Superior Court of Cook County, revealed what would be a good soap opera melodrama. A portion of the decree that is directly genealogy related lists their marriage information with children’s names and ages.

In 1917 Harry was drafted and served overseas during World War I. The certificate, dated 1929, certified that Harry was a member of Company “L” in a veteran’s fraternal organization that held gatherings annually. My mother remembered attending picnics that were sponsored by the organization. Col. Abel, the regimental commander, attended these events and wrote a history of the 132nd Infantry’s WWI involvement.

My grandfather Harry’s WWI Draft Registration shows him born in Kiev, Russia on May 5th, 1894 and working as a shoe examiner at Sears Roebuck & Company.

When Harry Shankman first arrived in France in May 1918, the division trained with the British, then rotated trench duty. A myriad of details concerning WWI is contained in a variety of military documents and unit histories that are available in libraries, online, and at the NARA military archive in College Park, MD.

From August 8 – 13th, he participated in the Somme Offensive Operation. During this time, the 3rd battalion of the 132nd Infantry Regiment, which included Harry’s Company “L,” fought at the battle of Albert. During much of this time his company also rotated trench duty on the front lines.

His 3rd battalion took part in the Meuse-Argonne Operations and was involved in the attack on Bois de Fays. Harry’s battalion was exposed to intense artillery and machine gun fire and gas. The advancing lines were subject to artillery fire and gas, causing the unit to suffer many casualties. Hand-to-hand fighting occurred frequently, and machine gun nests were numerous and strongly placed. Every foot of the advance was contested. The fighting was so fierce that the troops could not be provided with proper rations.

Every officer in Harry Shankman’s Company “L” was killed or wounded. The Company First Sergeant commanded company “L” until the objective had been reached. Harry might have been gassed during this battle; he died in 1949 from the after effects of being gassed. The battalion also captured 400 Germans. After the battle of Bois de Fays, the 3rd battalion attacked the enemy in Buttneville and drove them to the north edge of town. Later, they received word of the armistice (signed at the 11th hour, of the 11th day, of the 11th month of the year). During this last day of the war, Company “L” suffered 1 killed and 6 wounded.

Military veterans have been given naturalization preference since 1862. Harry used an updated May 9, 1918 Act of Congress to apply for his citizenship without having to wait 5 years. Harry’s Naturalization Certificate yields little genealogy information, but includes the petition number and court where his Naturalization Petition was filed, and his date of Naturalization May 14, 1920. The petition number and court name allow discovery of the Naturalization Petition Application containing genealogy data.

FAMILY MYSTERY SOLVED! This is Harry SHANKMAN’S Naturalization form revealing his original surname which in this Naturalization Petition document is spelled Harshel CRASNITZSKY and on his ship manifest is spelled Krasnitzky. A close look reveals the same cursive ‘a’ in Harshel and Harry, as compared to the ‘e’ on the passenger manifest; a reminder how documents differ. Note that since his ‘real name’ is added after the entry of Harry SHANKMAN, it seems obvious that the person reviewing his application must have asked if Harry was known by any other name which led to his naturalization approval, and also to making official his name change from Harshel CRASNIKZKY to Harry SHANKMAN.

On April 7, 1920 Harry was certified as eligible to become an American citizen. On April 18, 1920 he married my grandmother Rosabel. Rosabel died in 1926 after giving birth to my Aunt Millicent.

Harry’s WWI draft registration card listed his employment as a shoe inspector at Sears Roebuck & Co. The 1920 Census listed his occupation as a store shoe clerk. The Chicago City Directory (1923) entry, lists my grandfather Harry as a shoe cutter, living at 3332 Grenshaw. Address information is often useful for census searches and validating other documents.
Harry SHANKMAN later opened “Harry’s Bicycle & Tire Shop” on North Western Avenue in Chicago across from Lane Technical High School. The 1930 Chicago City Directory listed “Harry’s Tire Shop.” Here’s Harry in front of his tire shop c1929 with my Aunt Millicent, who was named after her great-grandmother Millicent GARFINKEL.

Harry’s (1942) WWII draft registration listed him as living in Los Angeles. My assumption is that Harry was required to keep the draft board advised of his current address. His place of work is still Harry’s Tire Shop, 3435 N. Western Ave, Chicago, and his Chicago address was 3049 N. Claremont. Harry registered in 1942 for the 4th of six WWII draft registrations that were called the ‘Old Man’s Draft’ because of the men’s ages. They did not register to serve in the military but as an effort to determine an inventory of wartime manpower.

Harry’s 1948 American Legion membership card notes his WWI service dates. Harry was also a member of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Jewish War Veterans. Over the years he served as Commander of his local chapters. I obtained his application by contacting the American Legion.

My mother received a Western Union telegram informing her that my grandfather, Harry, died in 1955 at the age of 49. I attempted, unsuccessfully, to obtain his medical records from the Veterans Administration Hospital.

The California Death Index, available via Ancestry.com has his correct birth date as confirmed by the funeral home record. It’s the wrong father’s surname, but does have his social security number so a Social Security Form-S, used to register and listing place of birth and parents names, could be requested.

On Harry’s gravestone, the incorrect date of birth is listed: 1883 instead of 1894. And his photo was vandalized probably for the metal value. The grave-stone image is from JewishData.com.

Family photos documented the SHANKMAN family, although many were ruined or lost over the years. My personal experience is losing all my genealogy materials and research collected when Hurricane Katrina destroyed my house while I was away. I had no opportunity to rescue them before 28 plus feet of water covered our one story home. All I had was my laptop containing some records and photos. Family members and friends were able to provide their copies of some materials, but most were lost.

It should be obvious that I would conclude with the admonition to back-up your genealogy data. And you must keep in mind that technology changes. I have some old files that cannot be easily read due to file and software changes. Many new word processors will not open older files created by earlier versions, and some file formats cannot be opened or images viewed. You don’t need a scanner to copy photographs as most cameras, including smart phones, have adequate resolution for preserving documents and photos. Having a photo of an artifact is better than having no record if it is destroyed by fire, flood or other calamity.

(Editors note: This article has been shortened for publication in Morasha. The complete article, with more examples, can be found at http://ronaldimiller.com/wp/how-i-became-hooked-on-genealogy/).
FEBRUARY 16 • JGSI members viewed “The Green Dumpster Mystery,” a 2008 Israeli documentary which traces the family history of the Volkovich family, following the discovery of the family’s photos in a dumpster in Tel Aviv. Ultimately, a three generation family tree is created, using Google, Yad Vashem and the Israeli Defense Forces websites, together with assistance from surviving friends and distant family. A copy of the film is available in JGSI’s library collection.

MARCH 30 • Professional genealogist Dr. Rose Lerer Cohen (kin-search.com) gave a detailed presentation on Locating Israeli Relatives and Holocaust Survivors: Search Strategies and Integrating Resources. A number of organizations have vast amounts of data related to both missing persons and individuals searching for those individuals. Holocaust resources mentioned included Yad Vashem, the American Joint Distribution Committee, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and the International Tracing Service which has access to the repository of information located in Bad Arolsen in Germany. Israeli resources included the Israel Genealogy Research Association (IGRA) and the Israel Genealogical Society (IGS).

The speaker stressed the importance of searching multiple locations in order to collect as much data as possible, which can then be “triangulated” to better trace the paths taken by Holocaust victims.

Other valuable information, such as the names of survivors who either submitted data about victims, or are themselves searching for possible survivors, can be found among the documentation. While many sites have searchable databases containing digitized information, other places require that you contact them directly and also provide proof that you are related to the person for whom you are searching. Handouts from the meeting are available on JGSI’s website www.jgsi.org in the Members Only section.

JGSI HELP DESK

The JGSI Help Desk is available before every meeting, from 12:30 p.m. to 2:00 p.m., for members who need help with genealogical Internet websites or have genealogical related questions. Do you have a Help Desk success story you would like to share? Email MorashaEditor@jgsi.org.

APRIL 27 • JGSI held its first meeting at its new location at Temple Beth-El in Northbrook.


As an introduction, and to illustrate the usefulness of DNA testing, Marsha told the group the story of how the remains of one of her relatives, thought to have been lost at sea during WWII, were confirmed to be his and returned to his family, some fifty years after they were recovered from an island in the South Pacific.

During her presentation, Marsha stressed the importance of not making assumptions and reanalyzing the information you have when you are faced with a brick wall. Other useful suggestions included making sure that copies of documentation you have are complete; comparing the same names over time when using City Directories; recording GPS coordinates for graves; borrowing eBooks from your local library rather than purchasing them; using Cluster Genealogy by researching family, associates and neighbors; making use of the LDS Wiki (which includes a Brick Walls wiki); networking with others via RootsWeb (part of Ancestry.com); finding clues in already compiled genealogies (but always confirming those facts, too); investing in DNA testing and joining a DNA Project; employing spreadsheets to help breakdown complex relationships; making use of historical information often found free via Google Books; and when looking for the services of a professional genealogist, searching the websites of professional genealogical associations.

MAY 18 • JGSI held its second meeting at its new location at Temple Beth-el in Northbrook. Former society president, Mike Karsen, presented “How to Find Your Immigrant Ancestor’s Arrival Records Online.” Mike noted that while there are many tools available, it is not as easy as it seems, and one must be aware of certain pitfalls when conducting one’s research.

It is most important to separate family myths from actual facts and to gather many clues. These include the individual’s full, original name in Europe (which may have been Hebrew or Yiddish), the port of arrival, birth date, others accompanying that person, and their final destination.

Possible sources for this information include inspection cards, census records, petitions for naturalization, certificates of arrival, and WWI draft records. Mike also noted that there were many other ports and border crossing points besides Ellis Island, and clues about which port of arrival was used may be found in where the individual decided to settle, as well as in European departure records. Mike covered possible sources including Steve Morse’s One-Step websites, Ancestry.com, the LDS website, and listings posted online by researcher Joe Beine.

Mike also recommended using a matrix to help analyze results when several of them look promising, and cautioned researchers about possible transcription errors and errors in process.
Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois  
P.O. Box 515  
Northbrook, IL 60065-0515

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

JGSI 2014  
MARK YOUR CALENDAR
MONTHLY SUNDAY MEETINGS
Sunday JGSI meetings are held at Temple Beth El  
3610 Dundee Road • Northbrook
The temple will open at 12:30 p.m. to accommodate members who would like to use our library materials, need help with genealogical Internet Websites, or have genealogical related questions. Programs begin at 2:00 p.m.; the Library will reopen after the programs until 4:00 p.m.

July 20 • My Cousin the Murder Defendant, presented by Martin Fischer
August 24 • Treasures in Print: Finding and Using Historical Newspapers, presented by Robin Seidenberg
September 28 • Using FamilySearch.org and the Family History Research Center, presented by Judith R. Frazin

JGSI Special Program
WEDNESDAY • JULY 23 • 6:30 PM
Speaker: Israeli Genealogist Rose Feldman  
Looking Outside the BMD Box for Your Mother and Aunts: A Case Study Based on Eretz Israel.

Skokie Public Library  
5215 Oakton Street • Skokie