What I did at the IAJGS Conference: A Personal Blog
By Ann Rabinowitz, Member

Saturday, August 16, 2008
I arrived in Chicago a day early to make sure I got registered and organized before the first day of the Conference. Sure enough, as predicted, it was a good move. After having to change rooms three times, my room had all the amenities that had been registered for. Fortunately, the hotel staff was terribly good about it all. I was pleasantly surprised at the gracious hospitality they extended to me and this lasted throughout the Conference.

After sorting my room out, it was registration time and I found everyone lined up and things a bit confused. However, that too was sorted out soon enough by one of the registration volunteers, Jackye Sul- lins, and I got all my materials and, most importantly, the Daily Planner.

When in line, there was the opportunity to chat with numerous other people and see old friends, make new ones and arrange to meet after we all got registered. There were even other Florida attendees in line from Broward County, who had arrived on the same plane as I had. It turned out that one of them had grown up on Miami Beach which was terrific news for me as I am trying to collect data on the Jews of Miami Beach for a new ShtetLink site on JewishGen. In addition, the JGSPBCI was well repre- sented by Marilyn Newman, Dorothy Bernstein, Phyllis Kramer, Roberta and Jerry Jainchill, and Cindy Gerstl.

Networking is certainly the name of the game at the Conference and registration is the perfect time to find out who is attending and what their roots are. Speaking of which, let me mention that sometimes you have to go all the way to an IAJGS Conference as Dorothy Bernstein did in order to learn about how to successfully research your family from another JGSPBCI member!!! Dorothy was searching for family and JGSPBCI Board Member Marilyn Newman was kind enough to provide the intros for Doro- thy and myself as we had never met. We were then able to utilize the resources of the Internet Café that had been set up at the Conference and look up various UK-based da- tabases.

Sunday, August 17, 2008
My activity of choice was to go to the Spertus Museum and do some research. The Spertus was not too far away by taxi and as I went outside the hotel to get my ride, I noticed something quite familiar on the building which faced the hotel. What was it you may ask? It was a huge wall-size photograph of an old couple next to a wood shingle house. I knew that photo by heart. 

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It depicted Joe and Jennie Weiss, who had founded the Miami Beach landmark, Joe’s Stone Crab Restaurant. Yet, here it was, in Chicago. When I investigated further, I found that Joe’s, a branch of “my” Joe’s Stone Crab, was located in the building across from the hotel. What a nice coincidence!

To continue with my trip to the Spertus, it is one of the outstanding Jewish institutions in Chicago. It is housed in a beautiful modern glass and steel skin and tucked in between other beautiful older buildings which was a great introduction to the magnificent array of architecture that Chicago is known for. The reason for my trip to the museum was its renowned Asher Library, home to 110,000 books of Jewish interest. It was there that I hoped to find information on my relative Morris Axelrad, a well-known Yiddish Theater actor and producer. As I went on my own and not with the tour that the Conference offered, I found the Archives empty and the Archivist quite willing and able to help me. She went beyond the call of duty and continued looking even when there appeared to be no further references. What she found for me were several books including one which only three other libraries are known to have, the Album of the Yiddish Theater by Zalme Zylberzweig.

The Album had wonderful black and white photographs covering the history of the Yiddish Theater from its inception in 1876 in Iasi, Romania, to its expansion to Poland, the Baltics, Russia, England, Latin America, and, of course, America. I was able to copy a number of the pertinent photos and later plasticized them for presentations. One remarkable photo I found was of Molly Picon visiting South Africa and posed with Zulu warriors (who were actually Bantus).

Following my research activities, I visited the Museum Shop and there I found much of interest as I usually do, including several books I was not able to get elsewhere and a great Jewish jazz CD recording. I try to read something new pertaining to genealogy whilst I am away at a Conference and this time I started The Girl From Foreign by Sadia Shepard which is about the search for roots in the Jewish Indian community. Also, I always bring my CD player to while away the hours in airports and enjoy finding new music for it.

From the Museum Shop, I went to the second floor kosher restaurant which is run by well-known restaurateur, Wolfgang Puck and kosher food maven and chef, Laura Frankel. It is an example of the trend towards gourmet kosher cooking. My table overlooking Grant Park gave access to massive splashes of color from the summer gardens in the park. After lunch, I walked across the street to the park and took advantage of its amenities.

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Sunday was the opening day of the Conference and I went to my first session which was my Borislav-Drohobych Research Group Meeting. The group, which was focused on two neighboring shtetls in the Ukraine, discussed the use and funding of cadastral mapping projects. Cadastral maps are those which provide the real estate information for towns, i.e., the location of family homes. Quite helpful for genealogical research, this type of project requires funding. So, the cadastral map project was introduced whereby any shtetl group could raise a certain amount of money and be included in this coming year’s project.

The opening session for the Conference featured a reception for Susan King, the outgoing head of JewishGen, who has been responsible for many of our successes over the years in genealogy. It was quite sad to see her go, but I am sure she has many interesting and productive years ahead of her. Following the reception, we heard the remarkable story told by E. Randol Schoenberg, a young attorney, who found a means of obtaining the return of Nazi-looted art. Truly a heart-warming tale of how persistence and ingenuity pays off.

Monday, August 18, 2008
I noticed that Schelley Dardashti, Jewish genealogy blog writer, had set up shop with her laptop nearby to the elevators on the main Conference floor. What a smart idea to catch people and keep in touch with the goings on at the Conference for her blog.

As my first session was canceled, I proceeded onto watching a movie which was part of the wonderful Jewish Film Festival that ran throughout the Conference. The film entitled The World Was Ours was produced by Mira Jedwabnik Van Doren. It featured original film clips of Vilna in the pre-War and War days. The clips showed Vilna citizens as quite up-to-date and dressed in modern attire and participating in activities much the same as their fellow co-religionists around the world.

Usually, films of this sort focus on the religious segment of Litvak Jewry, but this one showed a side that I had not seen before, the modern side. It was beautifully done and interspersed with commentary by survivors and descendants of Vilna families. One such commentator, a Yiddish actor, was a surprising look-alike to one of my cousins and when I saw his name, I realized why. He had the same last name!!! I was then able to trace him on Steve Lasky’s on-line Museum of Family History site, then the Yiddish Radio Project site, and finally in his obit in 2007 at the age of 92. Had I not seen the movie, I would never have known about him. It is just these sorts of things that make a Conference worthwhile.

Taking advantage of my time between sessions, I met up with Lisa Thaler who I had shared information with over the years. She had just published a new book entitled “Look Up The Life And Art Of Sacha Kolin”. I had purchased the book at the Spertus and Lisa came over to sign it for me. Lisa utilized her genealogical skills to gather information on the life of this quite interesting and talented artist.

The big event on Monday was the Litvak SIG meeting where the annual election was held and future projects discussed. The huge crowd was squashed into a tiny room, but that did not stop the meeting from progressing and the annual board election from taking place. The election provided an effortless transition as Howard Margol stepped down from the Presidency after a very productive two years and was replaced by David Hoffman.  

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At the end of the meeting, I had volunteered to help distribute the Litvak SIG T-shirts with two others and, in that way, met many of the old and new members of the SIG. This volunteering is a way that Conference participants can assist in making the sessions run smoothly. I have often volunteered in various capacities over the years at registration, the resource room, computer labs, etc., and learned so much from those experiences.

Tuesday, August 19, 2008

I visited the session on Jamaican Jews which featured Jamaican Jewish historian Ainsley Henriques, who founded the JGS of Jamaica. He had brought a number of his original resources on the Jewish community there including the rare book on tombstone inscriptions. This book I had wanted to view for many years and here it was in my very own hands. After the session, we repaired to the comfortable luncheon area just outside the meeting spaces. As we sat around chatting and noshing, Mr. Henriques and his wife joined us. Barbara Musikar, the President of the JGS of Greater Miami, happened to mention to Mr. Henriques about her college thesis which subject provided him with a new resource on Jamaica he had not heard about. Networking, it was doing its job once again.

Later in the afternoon, I went to my Yiddish Theater & Vaudeville Research Group Meeting. Although quite a small group at this Conference, we had quite an interesting session. I showed my Yiddish Theater photographs I had copied from the Spertus and, as a result, Steve Lasky, who was chairing our session, went back to the Spertus and copied the entire book. Now, many of these photos will find their way onto his web site and be made available for the first time to researchers all over the world. In addition, I made contact with someone there from the New York Public Library’s Performing Arts Division, who agreed to try and find more info for me on my relative, Morris Axelrad. Aha!!! Networking, it is terrific.

Some of our members and friends at the IAJGS Conference: Howard Margol, Cindy Gerstl, Rae Barent, Dorothy Bernstein, Jerry Jainchill, Roberta Jainchill, and Marilyn Newman. An extra thank you to member Roberta Jainchill for the photograph.  

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In the evening, I went to dinner with several others. Whilst speaking with one of the diners at our table, I learned that I could provide him with a family tree of a branch of his Yoffey family from Manchester, England. What a coincidence that I should have it! This happens all the time when two or more genealogists get together; especially at Conferences . . . it is *beshert*!!

Later that evening, Ancestry.com made their announcement regarding their new agreement and partnership with JewishGen. I won’t deal with that as it has been written about by many others. Needless to say, the announcement stole the show at the Conference.

**Wednesday, August 20, 2008**

I was joined at breakfast by Nancy Arbeiter, a professional genealogist, who has participated for many years in the conferences by providing beginner workshops. This year she had been part of the Breakfast with Experts which had taken place on Monday. These breakfast sessions are certainly one means for beginners to get on track with their research and a valuable addition to their learning process.

After breakfast, I started the day off with attendance at a session entitled “The Port Jews of Libau” by Nick Evans. Nick is a vibrant, fascinating and entertaining speaker and knows his topic well. A professor from the University of Hull in England, his talk provided a rare opportunity to hear about his latest activities. This is one of the many benefits of attending a conference such as this as it provides entree to speakers which you might not be able to hear otherwise.

As I had a branch of my family who were owners of a shipping company in Libau and who were also travel agents, I was looking forward to discussing this with Nick. I was also able to tell him of a new resource for locating information about Jewish travel agents which he was not familiar with. It was another example of how networking at conferences can be quite productive and fruitful.

One of the interesting tidbits that Nick mentioned during his talk was that one out of ten passengers leaving Libau was a horse handler. In this way, they were able to pay for their passage, as they helped to tend to the regular cargoes of horses that shared the ship with the emigrants. Usually, the horses were kept on the deck above the passengers and the ordure from them trickled down onto the passengers, making the passage from Libau to England quite an unhealthy and disgusting ordeal.

The Litvak SIG luncheon followed. Ruth Laizerowitz from Berlin spoke about the Memel (Klaipeda) Archive Records. Luncheons such as this one are well-worth attending, as they too usually have speakers who can provide much enlightenment on your research. In this case, this was one of the rare appearances by Professor Laizerowitz in the United States.

The IAJGS Annual Meeting took place in the afternoon. IAJGS is the governing body of all of the Jewish genealogy societies and the sponsor of the conferences. I did not attend, but I later heard about it because the election of the board occurred, which was of interest to me. A new member, Daniel Horowitz, originally from Venezuela and now living in Israel, was elected to the board. A young and energetic voice with credentials in computers and education, he is sure to add critically needed experience to the organization.

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That evening, I attended what I consider one of the best sessions of the conference. It was the Annual Lucille Gudis Memorial Lecture sponsored by the JGSNY. The speaker Zvi Gitelman spoke on the “Litvak-Galitzianer Wars: The Cultural Geography of East European Jewry”. Professor Gitelman was especially entertaining and engaged the audience in his topic which was interspersed with Yiddishisms and other colloquialisms.

Following this session, JewishGen gave their talk about their recent announcement of partnership with Ancestry.com.

Thursday, August 21, 2008

The last day of the Conference, was very much packed with things for me to do. It began with my Southern African SIG Meeting which was chaired by Dr. Saul Issroff. Unfortunately, this session occurred at the same time as another session which I had wanted to attend. This often happens at Conferences and it is sometimes difficult to decide what sessions to go to.

As I am one of the two American coordinators for the SIG, it allowed me to get together with other researchers in this area. Roy Ogus, the other American coordinator, gave his usual splendid presentation on what the SIG is and does. I gave an update on my research and mentioned the latest avenue I have decided to embark upon. This was research into Jewish Americans who fought in the Second Boer War such as Harry Spanier, on the Boer side, and Solomon Cantor, on the British side.

Whilst I was in Chicago, I was quite fortunate to be able to meet the grandson of Solomon Cantor at the Conference as he lived in Chicago. Due to that, I was able to learn more about him and the interview the grandson had done before he passed away.

The Southern African SIG session was followed by the Canadian television film “World Travels: Lithuania – Digging Up Your Roots” by Robin Esrock which I introduced. The film was a quirky look by a young travel writer on his return to the ancestral shtetl of his grandparents, Kupiskis, Lithuania. It provided a new youthful perspective of what one can see on such a trip. Since Kupiskis is my ancestral shtetl as well, this was a moving film for me.

Following this, I was able to fit in a luncheon with some relatives and friends, who lived in Chicago. Due to the great location of the hotel, finding a superlative luncheon spot was not hard to do. This kind of connection with family and friends is just the thing that Conferences can allow you to do. I happened to mention to my relative that I had been approached earlier that day by someone who said they were related to me and who was from South Africa. My relative was truly surprised as she said he was one of her friends and she did not know there was a familial connection at all before this. Amazing what happens with Jewish geography.

Another good example of making new connections is that of one attendee from England. She contacted another researcher to see if he could give her some clues on how to find her long-lost relatives in Chicago. He quickly did his genealogical magic and, later that day, she was able to meet for dinner with her previously unknown relatives, who were delighted to meet her for the first time.

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After this, I had my Kupiskis-Rokiskis SIG Meetings. As I am the coordinator of the Kupiskis SIG and the one who obtains the research for the Rokiskis SIG, which is coordinated by Linda Cantor, this session was especially close to my heart. These are two shtetls which are nearby to each other and where many families are intertwined by marriages. This was an enjoyable session where I was able to see my landsman once again and meet new ones who were attending for the first time.

The end of the day brought the Conference Banquet which provided a chance to network once again and was followed by a gracious and delicious meal, announcement of the winners of several annual awards, and entertainment. One of the prestigious awards was the Lifetime Achievement Award, which was won by Howard Margol. Howard has worked hard for many years in Jewish genealogy, particularly with providing access to Litvak records as well as travel opportunities to Lithuania. It was a well deserved-honor as he stepped down as president of the Litvak SIG.

Friday, August 22, 2008
Due to inclement weather, I was stuck at the airport for some time. Despite this inconvenience, I happened to find a new CD for my collection, which added a final yiddishe tam to my Chicago experience.

Later, as I finally flew home, the pilot suggested we look out the right side of the aircraft which was gliding and bumping along at 39,000 feet. There, we saw the hurricane below us, in all its glory. What a thrill!!! It was truly a remarkable end to an interesting, enlightening and very special week.

Would I do it again? You bet and you’ll see me in Philadelphia in 2009!!!

(Ann Rabinowitz, a native of Manchester, England, now living in South Florida has been active in genealogy since childhood and is a regular contributor She serves on the Board of the SA-SIG as a USA Coordinator and has produced many databases for the SIG. She is the Coordinator of the Kupiskis SIG. She was formerly the newsletter editor and a board member of the JGS of Greater Miami and is presently a member of the JGS of Palm Beach County, Inc. and the JGS (NY). Ms. Rabinowitz is a prolific writer on topics related to British, Lithuanian, and South African research as well as Jewish cultural topics such as heirlooms and food. Her latest projects are involved with American Jews who served in the Second Boer War and development of a Shtetlink site for Miami Beach Jewry.)

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*Scattered Seeds* is the publication of the JGSPBC, Inc., a not-for-profit educational organization. The newsletter is issued four times per year. It is a free publication distributed to all paid-up members and Jewish Genealogical Societies throughout the world in a courtesy exchange program. Back issues may be available at $3.50 (US) per issue.

**REQUEST FOR ARTICLES**

Contributions of articles of interest are encouraged for possible inclusion in *Scattered Seeds*. Material should be e-mailed to the editor who reserves the right to accept, reject or publish in revised form. Please use MS Word. The editor can be contacted by phone at 561.883.8566 or via e-mail at: sandy2121@bellsouth.net. If e-mail is not available, articles should be sent to:

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**Our Objectives**

- To establish a scholarly organization with the goal of preservation of Jewish family histories
- To assist and promote the research of Jewish family history.
- To encourage interested persons to pursue and preserve genealogical data.
- To provide opportunities for the sharing of Jewish genealogical information.
- To elevate the status and role of Jewish Genealogy in the Jewish community and in the academic community.
- To publish material in the field of genealogy.
- To engage in only those activities permitted by organizations exempt from Federal Income as described in section 501(C)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code

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**WE REGRET THE LOSS OF MEMBERS**

- **GLORIA LEEDS**
- **ARTHUR WIILETS**
THE GRAND REOPENING  (With thanks to Board Member Enid Shemper)

Did you think you would ever see this in your lifetime?

The synagogue was set ablaze on Kristallnacht, or the Night of Broken Glass, in 1938.

Germany’s biggest synagogue on Rykestrasse in Berlin, has reopened after a lavish restoration.

The inauguration on a Friday saw rabbis bringing the Torah to the synagogue, in a ceremony witnessed by political leaders and Holocaust survivors from around the world.

The synagogue, with a 1,200-person capacity, has been described as one of the jewels of Germany’s Jewish community.

*Enid Shemper, long a member of the JGSPBCI, is also a member of our Board of Directors and is head of the Cemetery Project Committee.*

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Please notify Sunshine Chair Phyllis Frank of any member’s simcha, illness, or death in the family so an appropriate card can be sent. E-mail her at: JerryPhyllisf@comcast.net. (Please put SUNSHINE in the Subject line.)

A Hearty Welcome to New Members
Ahron, Loretta
Bader, Ruth
Blake, Phyllis & Friedman, Irving
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Handel, Dr. Max & Fanny
Harris, Ellen
Kaye, James H.
Kloppus, Sara Silverman
Potashnick, Haasa & Obby
Reines, Stacy
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Tobias, Alma
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And Our Returning Members
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Jalowayski, Al & Irene

AND FAMILY LIFE MEMBERS!!!:
Corbett, Shirley and Michael
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Our “Experts-On-Call” Help Line is available to assist and mentor beginners and “not yet experts” with the expertise of our most knowledgeable and experienced genealogists on a one-on-one basis. Those member-experts who volunteered for the EOC Help Line are:

Mitch Heide 561-926-4311
Hal Maggied 954-725-6442
Dennis Rice 561-738-7477

It is suggested that you check your Membership Directory to determine the mentor nearest to you in case you need to meet.
GenealogyBank.com is an online genealogical resource from NewsBank, Inc. It features modern obituaries and historical newspapers, books, pamphlets, military records, and government documents, from 1690 to today. At present it contains more than 3,600 newspapers and other documents from all 50 states. They are offering a special 30 day introductory offer for $9.95. However, you must cancel before the 31st day or your credit card will be billed for the membership package you choose.

BEIDER AND MORSE CREATE A NEW INDEXING SYSTEM

Alexander Beider and Stephen P. Morse have collaborated to create a new indexing system based on phonetics. Gary Mokotoff predicts it will eventually replace the Daitch-Mokotoff (D-M) Soundex System for large Internet databases. Try the new Beider-Morse Phonetic Matching System at http://stevemorse.org/phonetics/beider.php. The site allows you to search four major surname books published by Avotaynu:

- A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland
- A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from Galicia
- A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire: Revised Edition
- A Dictionary of German Jewish Surnames

When searching for a surname, the site produces results in both the Beider-Morse Phonetic Matching System and the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex System.

NEWS FROM BELARUS

The Jewish Community of Belarus announced the opening of two new Holocaust memorials in November. The first monument opened in village Smolyarka of Bereza region of Brest province in October. This memorial will commemorate the death of more than 3,000 Jews from Bereza-Kartuzyanka ghetto.

A second memorial is scheduled to be opened in village Bogushevichy of Berezinski region of Minsk province on November 24, 2008 at 12 p.m. This memorial will commemorate the execution of 380 Jews-residents of village Bogushevichy. Please feel to contact me with any questions regarding these events.

Best regards,

Yuri Dorn, Coordinator of Jewish Heritage Research Group in Belarus
220002 Minsk, 13B Daumana St.
JEWS IN ALASKA

(Ed. Note: This article seemed especially topical in view of the recent Presidential Election. We thank Edward Schuman, Editor of The Shekel, Volume XLI, No. 5, September-October 2008, published by the American Israel Numismatic Association. This article may not be reproduced.)

In the early 1700s Russia's population exploded. Its population of animals whose skins could be sewn into coats and, of course, those famous Russian hats declined. The Russians needed a new source of fur. Explorers who had gone off to map the wilderness at the far eastern edges of the Empire, had reported abundant populations of fur bearing animals there. Before long, adventurous capitalists who understood the laws of supply and demand went to work.

The Danish sea captain Vitus Bering, whose namesake Sea separates Russia and Alaska, led the first Russian expedition that established what would eventually become a permanent Russian presence in this far corner of North America. Jewish fur trappers were among his crew.

A little over a hundred years later the fur trade was enormous, increasingly international and increasingly Jewish. Merchant companies, especially those on the territorial fringe of the Empire, were among the few commercial enterprises open to Jewish participation. One of the largest Alaskan fur ventures, the Russian American Company, was managed throughout the 1850s by a Nikolai Rosenberg. Only in 1855 did Jews permanently settle there. Robert Goldstein and his family set up a trading post in Juneau, and specialized in sable, beaver, and mink. Juneau’s first mayor was Jewish, and the Goldstein Building, which still stands, was the state’s interim capital for a time.

In the nineteenth century Alaska’s population began to explode. President Lincoln’s Secretary of State William Seward purchased Alaska from the Czars in 1867. The price he paid -- $7.2 million, or less than 2 cents per acre -- was ridiculed in the continental U.S. as a colossal waste of money. But the merchants of San Francisco, then the largest city in the American West, knew otherwise. Among them were many Jews who had built a thriving trade with Russia, and who lobbied intensively for Seward to make the purchase. Their faith in the move was soon vindicated, as the succeeding decades saw discoveries of Alaska’s vast mineral wealth.

Prospectors in search of their fortunes migrated north. Dawson City, whose population today is just 1500, had 40,000

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Inhabitants in the early 1900s. It was the site of the first significant Jewish institution in Alaska. Nearly 200 Jews had settled there. Thirty-six of them gathered for Rosh Hashanah in 1898 and celebrated the first organized Jewish worship in Alaska in the back of Charles Rosener’s General Store.

Soon, the Hebrew Congregation of Dawson had to rent the commodious Yukon Order of Pioneers Hall for services. A cemetery was founded when a young Jewish prospector drowned. Isaac Simons, originally from New York, was honored with a proper Jewish burial. That cemetery, Beit Chaim, was restored and reconsecrated in 1998 as part of the ceremonies commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Klondike Gold Rush.

Jews have made a disproportionately large contribution to Alaskan history as they have to every society and culture in which they’ve lived. Those furriers who accompanied Bering were second in their influence only to the prominent Jews who came there to profit from the Gold Rush.

Lewis Gerstle, a Jewish San Francisco merchant founded the Alaska Commercial Co. and became a major provider of groceries and general merchandise for trappers, explorers and gold seekers. His steamboat line plied the Yukon River, providing one of the only reliable routes into and out of the territory. He also financed an enormous percentage of Alaskan mining. Gerstle’s village stores became centers of community activities, serving as post offices, community halls, courtrooms, marriage parlors, funeral homes and safe havens for travelers, as well as banks which could extend credit to trappers, miners, and fisherman. Gerstle got a river named after him. J.B. Gottstein, another Jewish retail merchant, named his company after himself, and to this day Gottstein’s remains one of Alaska’s largest firms.

In 1901, the Jews of Nome, who built the shipping and retailing industries of that city, formed the first Jewish charitable organization in Alaska, the Nome Hebrew Benevolent Society. Nome was also the location of The Dexter, a saloon run by the legendary O.K. Corral gunfighter Wyatt Earp. Mrs. Wyatt Earp was a young lady by the name of Josephine Sarah Marcus.

The Jewish community of Fairbanks was founded with the arrival of Lithuanian

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Jewish History in Alaska (Cont’d from P. 13)

Robert Bloom in 1904. Bloom ran a general store in town and was a leader of the Fairbanks Jewish Community for nearly half a century. He became the Yukon’s first lay rabbi. He was also a member of an advisory group that helped establish the first U.S. military base in Alaska, and he was a founder of what would become the University of Alaska.

Bloom’s wife, Jesse Spiro Bloom came to Alaska from Ireland and soon became an active member of the community. She helped the women of Fairbanks organize to win the vote in 1913. Later, she established the first kindergarten in Fairbanks and the first Girl Scout troop in Alaska. Together, the Blooms were very active in conservation efforts, supporting the movement to create wilderness preserves in Alaska. They also served as unofficial chaplains for Jewish servicemen stationed in Alaska during World War II.

The war years saw one of the stranger episodes in the Alaskan-Jewish saga. FDR’s Secretary of the Interior, Harold Ickes and New York Congressman Charles Buckley, came up with an extraordinary solution to overcome the strict immigration quotas preventing aid to the Jewish refugees attempting to flee Europe. They sought to allow a number of Jewish refugees to settle in sparsely-populated Alaska, then still a territory. Roosevelt and many Americans resisted at first, some on anti-Semitic grounds, others opposed to any measure that would increase competition for scarce jobs. Alaskans also opposed the plan for a variety of reasons including the cost of absorbing so many new citizens.

In the summer of 1939, as Europe prepared for war, a nine-page letter from Nazi Germany arrived in Washington, D.C. at the high-ceilinged offices of the U.S. State Department. The writer identified himself as the leader of the Jewish community in the town of Neustadt.

He wrote, he said, on behalf of 30 men, women and children, all of them “healthy, strong and energetical,” who wished to make an urgent application “for immigration to Alaska Territory.” The prospective immigrants were experts in animal husbandry, the letter said. Some were also “handicraftsmen and mecanicians.” They vowed to be good citizens of Alaska and obey the laws of the United States. “We know quite well the difficulties making the rough clime of Alaska,” wrote Bruno Rosenthal, “but now we have no other choice, we German Jews.”

One day after his letter arrived, Germany invaded Poland and World War II began. In March, 1940, Roosevelt answered the
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Neustadt letter, saying that the Alaska immigration plan was still being considered. In May, 1940, Congress debated the proposal and it collapsed in subcommittee, unable to attract sufficient votes for passage. The Jews of Neustadt perished in the Holocaust, but their letters petitioning Roosevelt remain in the National Archive, a testament to one of the darker moments of American Jewish history.

Alaska’s Jewish population waned as the war raged on, falling below 100 in 1940. The following year, Jewish military chaplains arrived to minister to Jewish soldiers stationed in the territory, becoming the first ordained rabbis to officiate there. After the war the GI Bill swelled Alaska’s population and brought new Jews to the most remote towns and biggest cities.

The first mayor of Anchorage was David Leopold, who was followed in that capacity some years later by another Jew, Zachary Loussac. Former territorial governor Ernest Gruening was elected one of Alaska’s two senators when the territory gained statehood in 1959. In 1964, Jay A Rabinowitz was named to the Alaska Supreme Court.

Since 1970, the Jewish population has grown steadily, fed mostly by Jews from California, Oregon and Washington. A 1995 survey counted a Jewish population of approximately 3,000, or about six-tenths of one percent. But Chabad statistics indicate a presence of some 6,000 Jews, or approximately 1% of the state’s population.

81% of Alaska’s Jews live in its three largest cities, Anchorage, Fairbanks and Juneau, and fully half of them live in Anchorage. The Alaskan Jewish community is surprisingly robust. A recent study showed that fully 42% of Alaskan Jews belong to synagogues, compared with 27% in the continental U.S. Most of the Jews are between the ages of 25 and 62, married, and highly educated. Some 53% of Alaskan Jews are women. The intermarriage rate is high. Finally, only 6% of Alaska’s Jewish community was born there.

Anchorage boasts a Reform synagogue and a Chabad House, and Fairbanks has a lay-run Reform synagogue. Jewish cemeteries are now established in Anchorage and Fairbanks. Anchorage is also home to chapters of Hadassah and the Anti-Defamation League, and an active outreach program to Jewish communities in Siberia. Kosher food is found in supermarkets in Anchorage and Fairbanks, and in more remote areas, is shipped frozen from Seattle. The Anchorage Lubavitch rabbi maintains a mikvah.

Even some Alaskan mountains (Ripinski, Neuberger, and Applebaum) are named after Jewish pioneers.
THE YEAR 1908

One hundred years ago.
What a difference a century makes!

The average life expectancy was 47 years.
Only 14 percent of the homes had a bathtub.
Only 8 percent of the homes had a telephone.
There were only 8,000 cars and only 144 miles of paved roads.
The maximum speed limit in most cities was 10 mph.
The tallest structure in the world was the Eiffel Tower!
The average wage in 1908 was 22 cents per hour.
The average worker made between $200 and $400 per year.
A competent accountant could expect to earn $2000 per year, a
dentist $2,500 per year, Ninety percent of all doctors had NO
COLLEGE EDUCATION!
Instead, they attended so-called medical schools, many of which
were condemned in the press AND the government as 'substandard.'
Sugar cost four cents a pound.
Eggs were fourteen cents a dozen.
Coffee was fifteen cents a pound.
Most women only washed their hair once a month, and used Borax
or egg yolks for shampoo.
The population of Las Vegas, Nevada, was only 30!!
Crossword puzzles, canned beer, and ice tea hadn't been in-
vented yet.
There was no Mother's Day or Father's Day.
Two out of every 10 adults couldn't read or write.
Only 6 percent of all Americans had graduated from high school.
Marijuana, heroin, and morphine were all available over the
counter at the local corner drugstores.
Eighteen percent of households had at least one full-time ser-
vant or domestic help.
Canada passed a law that prohibited poor people from entering
into their country for any reason.

Now... I forwarded this from someone else without typing it my-
self, and I sent it to you and others all over the U.S.A and
possibly the world, in a matter of seconds!
At nearly every meeting someone refers to information found on JewishGen. Now JewishGen needs our help. Warren Blatt, their new Managing Director has written to ask for contributions. Checks can be sent to JewishGen, 36 Battery Place, New York, NY 10280 or you can go online to www.jewishgen.org and up near the top you can click on “contribute” which will take you to their secure server so you can make your tax deductible contribution by credit card.

Our own Phyllis Kramer recently wrote in reply to a query to the JewishGen Discussion Group <jewishgen@lyris.jewishgen.org> about books of death records in the New York Public Library... there are hardbound death index books at the Milstein division of genealogy on the first floor; the books are in the stacks and you can get them directly or you can ask at the desk. The books contain names, ages and certificate #s for the years 1969-1982 by boro for all NYC boros. Phyllis suggested, “I would bet if you called the desk they would help you out with a lookup!”

While I’m on the subject of the New York Public Library and its holdings, Joy Rich of Brooklyn, NY advised that a list of the New York City vital records indexes held by the New York Public Library’s Irma and Paul Milstein Division of United States History, Local History and Genealogy is at http://www.nypl.org/research/chss/lhg/research.html#nyc. Indexes for some of those years are online. Links to them are at http://www.italiangen.org/VRECLIST.stm and http://www.germangenealogygroup.com/otherdb.stm You can search them more thoroughly from the links at http://www.stevemorse.org/#births.

Our founding president, Al Silberfeld, has not been well. Even when not feeling up to par he came to one of our “Brick Wall” sessions to help out. Without Al our JGS would not be the same organization. Many of you go back to the early meetings after Al and Mona Morris merged their groups and you understand what I am saying. So, please take a moment to send a card or give him a phone call. I’m sure he will appreciate it.

Please take note that our MINICONFERENCE is on Wednesday. It’s not too late to attend. Just call Cindy Taylor or Sylvia Nusinov and let them know you are coming. Bring your check to the door. See Page 20 for details.
BIALYSTOK INFORMATION  Bialystok vital events, as in all of the Russian Pale of Settlement, were recorded in columnar format in Russian Cyrillic script and many were later copied in Hebrew.

Based on my personal experience, a typical birth record recorded the name of the subject, the dates of birth and circumcision (in both Gregorian and Julian dates), the father's name and patronymic, the mother's name (given name and sometimes surname) and patronymic. In some records you may also find the name of the Mohel, the social status and occupation of the father, and the place of official residence, if not Bialystok.

A typical death record recorded the name and age of the deceased, the dates and place of death (usually the town), the cause of death, the father's name and occupation. In some death records you may find the deceased date of birth, the husband's name if the deceased was a married or widowed female, and the place of official residence, if not Bialystok.

A typical marriage record recorded the date and place (town) of marriage, the names of the bride and groom and their fathers' names, age of bride and groom, town of residence if other than Bialystok, and names of two witnesses. In some marriage records, you may also find the officiating Rabbi's name, the social status and occupation of the fathers, and the place of official residence, if not Bialystok.

Ben Milder of Edison, NJ suggested that the BIALYGen website (found on www.jewishgen.org) should include sample records with translations of the columnar headings. If anyone would like to volunteer to create such information, I would be happy to place it on the BIALYGen website for all to benefit.

Thank you to Mark Halpern, BIALYGen Coordinator

Help with International Tracing Service (Bad Arolsen): If you are searching for family members killed in the Holocaust, one of the simplest ways is to go to www.yadvashem.org. They not only search their ITS files but their entire Yad Vashem files. If you need assistance, contact Don Hirschhorn, Chairperson of our Yad Vashem Committee at sdh2381@bellsouth.net, and he or a committee member will contact you.
JewishGen is proud to announce an arrangement between JewishGen, Ancestry.com (The Generations Network, Inc.) and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJJDC), to provide access to the world's largest online collection of Jewish family records.

Ancestry.com announced recently that a collection of records from the Joint Distribution Committee was added to their website.

Here is the link to an article in Newsday:
or http://tinyurl.com/5lne6o (moderator)

and further information can be found below

I invite all of you to take a look at this collection by going to the JewishGen.org website and searching your surnames through the box on the top of the page for Ancestry.com. All of the JewishGen and Joint Distribution Committee records are free and will continue to be so.

Finally, we are in the midst of the re-hosting of our servers. The re-hosting will provide you with better service. This is a process which may take several weeks, and you may notice interruptions in access to JewishGen. We apologize for any inconvenience. We will continue to update you on our progress.

Warren Blatt. Managing Director, JewishGen

THE SCHEDULE FOR FUTURE IAJGS CONFERENCES IS:

2010 Los Angeles July 11–16
2011 Washington, DC. Date to be determined
2012 Paris (tentative)
2013 Not determined
2014 Jerusalem (tentative)

IAJGS stands for: International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies. Our JGS is one of the approximately 70 member organizations who comprise the IAJGS.
LAST CALL FOR OUR MINI CONFERENCE!!!!
Registrations accepted at the door, conference morning
Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2008

WHERE: Beifield Auditorium and Lecture Rooms, Sandler Center for Jewish Life Enhancement, Levis JCC Campus, Glades Road and 95th Ave. South, Boca Raton.
FEES: (includes lunch) Members: $25.00, Non Members and "Walk-ins" $30.00
TIME AND SCHEDULE:
Registration: 9:30 am
Lectures begin at 10:00 am
Final lecture session: 3:15 pm – 4 pm
Kosher Box Lunch: 12 noon-1 pm.
CHAIRPERSON: Sylvia Nusinov 561 483 1060

SAVE THE DATE!
Our Annual Luncheon will be this coming
March 1, 2009
Guest Speaker: Paul Shapiro of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

For further information: Dennis Rice 561 738 7477 or Natalie Hamburg 561 734 7946