

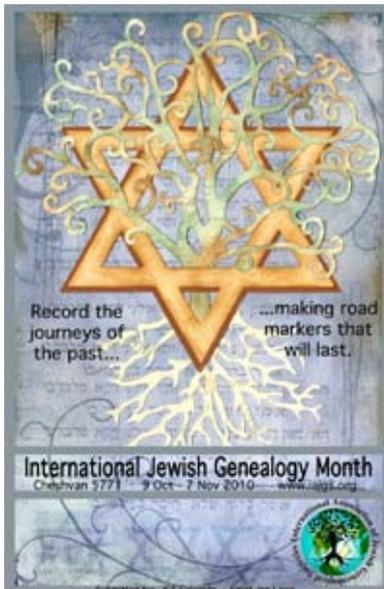
Jewish Genealogy Downunder

Quarterly
newsletter
of the
Australian
Jewish
Genealogical
Society
(Vic) Inc.

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This stunning poster, designed by Colorado-based genealogist and artist Jen Lowe, marks a month of genealogical celebrations around the world, promoted by the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS).

International Jewish Genealogy Month aims to foster Jewish genealogy organisations and activities all over the world. Each year, the IAJGS holds an annual competition for a work to be used as either a poster or flyer for announcing and celebrating the event. The winning artwork is unveiled each year at the IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy.

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OCTOBER MEETING

The AJGS (Vic) and the Makor Jewish Community Library invite you to hear

Jack Aghion

A Sephardi Family Story: Retracing Their Journey Through History

Tuesday, 12 October 2010 at 7.30 pm

Last year, Jack went on a voyage across seven countries retracing the steps of his ancestors over some 700 years, back to the family township of Ayllon, about 100 km north of Madrid, Spain.

Join us to hear Jack as he takes us back on his exciting genealogical journey.

He will give an illustrated talk about his research with photos.

Beth Weizmann Jewish Community Centre, 306 Hawthorn Road, Caulfield South, 3162

All welcome: members \$4; non-members \$6. Enquiries: admin@ajgs-vic.org.au or (03) 9523 6738.

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Editorial policy

We welcome contributions from members which will help others further their research. This might include sharing recent findings or the discovery of interesting resources. The editor has the right to accept or reject any material submitted or edit as might be appropriate. Material appearing in this newsletter may be reprinted by other newsletters as long as proper attribution is given.

Jewish Genealogy Downunder is free to all members of AJGS (Vic) Inc.

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AJGS (Vic) Inc. membership fees

Individual	\$30
Family	\$35
Concession	\$15

EDITORIAL

Jewish genealogical societies all over the world perform a number of roles, aside from helping members research their ancestral roots, responding to requests to locate descendants of deceased relatives and developing new searchable databases to aid research.

One of these important functions is in the area of community relations and education. This activity gets little acknowledgement and publicity, and is worth commenting on.

In my role as secretary of the AJGS (Vic), I am frequently invited to speak to non-Jewish local and country historical and genealogical societies on a range of topics, for example 'The settlement of Jews in early colonial Victoria', 'The origins of Jewish surnames', 'A basic introduction to Jewish family research' and 'The deportation of Jewish convicts to Australia'.

Geographic locations for these talks range from the Mornington Peninsula towns of Rosebud and Frankston, and outer suburbs such as Ringwood to, of course, the central city area of Melbourne. Attendances vary from 20 to 50 people, and the lectures take place in a variety of settings, including local municipal libraries and cultural centres. Audiences are very attentive and eagerly seek any notes I distribute at the end of the talk.

But it is what occurs after these talks which has interested me. Over a cup of coffee, people will mill around to exchange information or ask questions. Many are keen to share personal family information, proudly showing me a Magen David that had been handed down in the family or an old Jewish prayer book or Hebrew document (usually a Ketubah) they are asking me to translate.

A few weeks ago, an elderly woman approached me and began to extol the virtues of a Flinders Lane manufacturer whose name I quickly recognised. He had given her a job in the garment industry after she had left school, and she spoke of him as being a supportive and generous employer. She was delighted that I recalled his name and that I knew something of his background in Jewish communal affairs.

At another meeting, an audience member had brought along an old book written in German, *Die Jüdischen Gefallen, 1932 (Jewish Roll of Honour)*, and asked me to translate the title. The book had been passed down from her Jewish grandfather, who had served in the German army in the First World War.

Then, there are often questions on topics that go beyond genealogy, such as Jewish religious customs and practices. For example: "I know that boys have a Barmitzvah at 13, but is there an equivalent for girls?" or "Why do Jews not name newborn babies after a living parent or grandparent?"

By accepting invitations to speak to these groups, we open doors to audiences who might have had little or no exposure to members of the Jewish community, and that can only be a positive step.

We wish all our Jewish readers a healthy and peaceful New Year.

Lionel Sharpe
Editor

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

It has been about a month since I returned from Los Angeles, where I attended the IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy. Having previously attended only two Australian national conferences, in Canberra in 2008 and Melbourne in March this year, I was eagerly looking forward to this one.

I was not disappointed! As I reflect on my time there, I've tried to put into perspective what the highlights were for me.

First, being in the company of more than a thousand others interested in Jewish genealogy was an awesome experience. The ability to meet and discuss things with people who had genealogical knowledge from beginner to expert level meant that I was not only learning from my peers, but also often able to assist others.

Remember that in our chosen area of Jewish genealogy, everyone fits into one of three categories: they've either been where we currently are; they're at where we currently are; or they're going to be where we currently are. And therefore everybody has experience in one way or another.

My overriding memory is of small groups of people sitting in coffee shops, lobbies, lecture halls, hallways and so on, discussing 'roadblocks' and 'successes'. Many of these groups consisted of people who were meeting each other for the first time. Lots of contacts were made and lots of relatives found. Another abiding memory is one of delight in sitting in a lecture theatre and noting that the person sitting next to me was the 'genealogical giant' Steve Morse!

When I reflect on the conference, most presentations had these 'giants' of our genealogical world as speakers, such as Arthur Kurzweil, Stanley Diamond, Gary Mokotoff, Schelly Dardashti and Steve Morse, with many others as attendees. It rammed home to me that none of us knows everything and that even the most learned personalities in our genealogical world feel the need to avail themselves of the expertise of others.

I went to many presentations, primarily on my own research area of Poland, and I came away learning quite a lot. It affirmed for me that some of the things I had been doing were correct, which is a comforting thought.

Another great joy to me, and most of the other Melbournians who attended, was the resource room. Having helped organise the Melbourne conference, I was completely taken aback by what was provided in LA. Not to belittle our own efforts, but what they provided was simply amazing.

Not least was the fact that they'd come to an arrangement to bring in the microfilm and microfiche holdings of the LA Family History Centre, and I spent hours in there viewing microfilms containing the births, deaths and marriages of many of my ancestors. That on its own was sufficient to make my participation worthwhile.

Next year's conference will take place in August in Washington DC, and I'm trying to organise my time so that I can attend.

Who wants to join me there?

Allan Jankie
AJGS (Vic) President

RESOURCES

How would you like to receive your copy of *Jewish Genealogy Downunder* in the future?

To make your experience of reading our newsletter, *Jewish Genealogy Downunder*, as enjoyable as possible, we are offering you the option of choosing your preferred version:

- (a) an electronic copy, delivered as a PDF via email, where you can view all the photographs in full colour; or
- (b) a mailed-out hard copy in grey tones, as received in the past.

If you prefer option (a), email admin@ajgs-vic.org.au and write 'PDF version only' in the subject line.

FAMILY TREES

Did you know that the AJGS (Vic) has a large collection of family trees?



These trees are stored in the Resources Room at the Makor Library, and some also include short biographies.

We are continually updating our collection, so if you have a family tree that you would like us to include, email Liz James at lizronjames@hotmail.com.

NEW MEMBERS

The AJGS (Vic) extends a warm welcome to the following new members:

Naomi Block
Carol Campbell
Anita Frayman
David Mushin
John and Annette Schlafrig
Paul and Georgina Schwarz
Stuart Shaw

VALE

We note the sad passing of our long-term members in recent months:

Mark Benjamin
Ella Scheffer
Howard Beaconsfield

Undeniable documents

Frank Dobia had an instinct for the moment. He always managed to escape certain death during the Holocaust. The Australian is the sole survivor of a Jewish family from Pomerania.

Yesterday [14 April 2010], he viewed original documents on his imprisonment in the concentration camp Buchenwald and on his family's fate. "I had heard a lot about Bad Arolsen," said Dobia. "Now I wanted to see the archive with my own eyes."

The Buchenwald survivor has made it his mission to share his experiences with others. Knowledge of the destruction of European Jewry by the Nazis is a personal matter to him: "I could talk for hours," said Dobia. "I want survivors to know what happened to their families." He would also like Germans to grapple with "the deeds of their forefathers".

Persecution of Jews in Dobia's hometown of Dobrzyn (Dobrin) began shortly after the Wehrmacht invasion on 11 September 1939. Four days later, the first 270 Jews were deported and shot, among them Dobia's older brother Kalman. His grandparents suffered the same fate in November.

The rest of his family was deported to the Plock Ghetto in 1939 and subsequently the Chielmnik Ghetto in 1941. Dobia managed to find shelter with a farmer nearby and worked in the farmyard. "That was dangerous as we were not allowed to leave the ghetto. But there was no fence," reported Dobia. He tried to reach his family when the ghetto was liquidated, but police had surrounded the area and no one was allowed in or out. Dobia's parents and both his siblings were transported to the Treblinka death camp. Fifteen-year-old Frank, who was still known as Icek, was on his own. His family had ceased to exist.

Time and again Dobia managed to elude death. When the Stopnica Ghetto was liquidated, he hid in a shack and fled to the Polish part of town, where he posed as a farmhand. "I could speak Polish like the farmers and fluent German, which helped me," said Dobia. He volunteered for work which was vital to the war effort and kept a low profile during raids. Dobia was forced to dig anti-tank barriers before he was sent to the Buchenwald concentration camp on 24 December 1944.

"I contracted typhus there and was not aware of much else," he confessed. He was transferred to Block 66, which housed many Jewish children and youth from eastern Europe. The Communist resistance within the camp tried to save the youths, not least by organising additional rations for them. Shortly before the approach of the American Army, Dobia was to go on a death march, yet he was once again able to hide.

Dobia the survivor was even able to elude the US Army immediately after the liberation. The concentration camp prisoners were not to leave the camp due to the risk of



Frank Dobia says he will "never stop looking for documents because they contain the undeniable truth".

an epidemic. Dobia pretended that he and a friend had to dispose of some waste and slipped past the soldiers.

"I struggled through the weeks ahead. Most of the Germans were a little afraid of me," reports Dobia. After several stops along the way he found a temporary home in a Displaced Persons camp near Munich.

On 31 December 1948, Dobia landed in Australia, his new home. A distant cousin who had emigrated before the outbreak of the Second World War had read about Dobia in a Jewish newspaper and obtained immigration papers for him. "He had served in the Australian Army so there were no problems," said Dobia.

The young immigrant met his wife in Melbourne and they have been married for 57 years. They have three children. "In the meantime, I have 11 grandchildren!" Despite his lack of school-leaving qualifications, Dobia succeeded in creating an immigrant's dream career, from a simple worker in a meat factory to vegetable shop owner to a businessman. "My company tendered for the supply of various goods to the countries that had loans from the World Bank."

Dobia has never forgotten his beginnings; the Australian is still retracing his history throughout Europe. The 84-year-old came to Germany in order to attend the ceremony marking the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald. "I will never stop looking for documents because they contain the undeniable truth."

This article was first published on the ITS website (www.its-arolsen.org) on 15 April 2010. It has been reprinted here with the kind permission of the ITS, Bad Arolsen.

Frank Dobia is a member of the AJGS (Vic).

The mishpocha track: along the road to Olomouc

A presentation by Daniela Torsh

Thursday, 4 November 2010, at 7.45 pm
National Jewish Memorial Centre
Cnr Canberra Avenue and National Circuit
Forrest, Canberra, ACT

In an exciting breakthrough in her research at the Czech National Archives in May and June this year, AJGS member Daniela Torsh found information about seven generations of her mother's POLLAK family in Bohemia, one of whom was a Rabbi in Prague. She also found a second cousin alive in Vienna who, like her, is a writer and filmmaker.

Daniela says Olomouc (German: *Olmuetz*) is a lovely, ancient Gothic town in the Czech Republic in Moravia near the Slovak and Polish borders. "It's where I went in June this year to find out more about an uncle of my father's called Berthold WINTER," she says. "He worked as an engineer for the Czech railways."

"Olomouc is interesting because of its Jewish and Czech history and also because of its renewed Jewish community, which next year will take part in the *Stolpersteine* laying of cobblestones to mark the Holocaust deportations that included my father's family. I plan to return for this important event next European summer.

"In the 10 weeks I was travelling and researching in Central Europe, I made many significant 'finds' about my family history, and Olomouc was the site of some surprising discoveries both for my own history and also for Jewish genealogy in the Czech Republic.



This photo was taken just outside the cemetery gates in Straznice, Moravia, during an earlier visit to the Czech Republic, in June 2008.

Galina Rucka (centre) is an archivist at the Hodonin Regional Archive, which collects documents about the Jews of Straznice. Galina has written her masters degree on the subject and put together an amazing database of all the Jewish census data held in the archives, which is invaluable for genealogical research. She has most generously shared this with Michael Gordy (right) and me (left).

Michael is a genealogist I 'met' on the Austria-Czech SIG, and we both attended the reopening of the Straznice synagogue in the summer of 2008. He had the idea of documenting the cemetery, which we began when we were both there with our families. Michael is a fantastic researcher, and we are still working on an update of the Straznice cemetery database, which I hope will be added to in the next year. He lives in Washington DC with his family.

Daniela Torsh was born in Czechoslovakia to Holocaust survivor parents. She grew up and was educated on Sydney's North Shore after the family emigrated to Australia in 1948.



Inspired by the birth of her daughter Hanna in Sydney in 1978, she began to research her family history. Since the Velvet Revolution of 1989, she has travelled to the Czech Republic and Austria regularly to search archives and cemeteries and to meet with local experts and the remnants of her family.

Daniela has presented at the first and second national Jewish genealogy conferences on both Czech and Austrian Jewish genealogy and spoken on the 1793 Bohemian Census of Jews at the AJGS in Sydney. She has also written beginners' guides on Czech and Austrian Jewish genealogy.

Daniela has two adult children and one new granddaughter. She is retired after working for more than 30 years in the media as a journalist, most recently at SBS television in current affairs as a senior researcher and producer.

"It was a critical turning point for my research, so I shall be discussing this in the talk, which I will illustrate with photographs and maps."

Daniela says that if anyone from Melbourne is planning to attend her talk, they should advise Sylvia Deutsch from the Canberra Jewish Historical society for security reasons. "All are welcome! The society just needs to know who is coming, and Sylvia will place them on a guest list."

Contact Sylvia on (02) 6248 6196 or 0412 032 772 (mobile) or email deutand@grapevine.com.au.



This photo was taken inside the Jewish cemetery in Straznice in 2008. I am (in the red t-shirt) with my two cousins, and it's the first time we have all met. They include my American cousin, Dr Susan Bryant (far right), and my Israeli cousin, Yehoshuah Rezek, and his wife, Miriam.

This was a most historic occasion for our family, as all our grandparents died in the Holocaust and I had only made contact with Yehoshuah a short time before the photo was taken.

We are standing in front of the stone of our great aunt Olga WINTER which I had only located that day in June. She died as a young girl from a brain inflammation and her grave was hidden for years by the tall grass. It was only when we went to Straznice for the ceremony at the opening of the synagogue on 5 June that Michael Gordy, a fellow genealogist who reads Hebrew, found the stone. As you can imagine, it was a very exciting moment and I wanted to remember it with this photo.

In June 2008, a group of descendants of the Jews of Straznice began photographing the 1100 tombstones there, and these photos have been uploaded to the JewishGen online cemetery and translated into English.

Bendigo Synagogue – the building was demolished in 1926.



Descendants of the Bendigo Jewish community: retracing the past

The Australian Jewish Historical Society (Vic) wants to make contact with descendants of early Jewish settlers who at some stage lived in the gold mining town of Bendigo (formerly known as Sandhurst). The society is seeking information about the names of businesses, home addresses or other interesting historical information.

The Jewish community of the town peaked at 208 persons in 1861. Its first synagogue was consecrated in 1872, and by the turn of the 20th century the well-known retail trader Sidney Myer established his first business in the town.

Contact Liz James on (03) 9822 2849 or email lizronjames@hotmail.com.



Sharing the LA experience

AJGS (Vic) members who attended the 2010 IAJGS conference in Los Angeles shared their experiences and discoveries in a colourful panel presentation at the August meeting of the society. The panel included Max Wald (above), Allan Jankie, Liz James and Debbie Jurblum.



A meeting of minds ... at the 2010 IAJGS conference in Los Angeles

From left: AGJS (Vic) members Allan Jankie, Max Wald and Debbie Jurblum (far right) attended the 2010 IAGJS conference in LA and met up with JRI-Poland founder Stanley Diamond (centre) and Eva Browne, an AJGS member from Sydney. Other genealogists visiting the conference from Australia included Nigel and Sarah Meinrath, Pebbie Wald, Debbie Weiner, Liz James and Evelyn Frybort, and New Zealand attendees included Peter and Claire Bruell.

RESEARCH TIPS

POLAND

JEWISHGEN FAMILY FINDER SEARCHABLE DATABASE (JGFF)

The JewishGen Family Finder searchable database (JGFF) is one of my best tools for research. Hosted by JewishGen, it can be found directly at www.jewishgen.org/jgff/.

It is a searchable database where researchers from all over the world can enter in the names/places of interest to them, and see if others are researching similarly.

When you enter the website, you find the welcome page, which gives you three options:

SEARCH	search the database
LIST	view your existing entries
ENTER/MODIFY	enter or modify your surnames and towns

To search the database, you do not need to 'register' with JewishGen (it is free to search).

If you want to add your names/locations to the database, you will, however, need to 'register'.

To do a search, just click on the tab and the search parameter page comes up.

Like most searchable databases on JewishGen, this one gives a number of options when searching surnames and towns. Generally, I use the 'sounds like' option as researchers tend to use varieties of spelling.

For example, I recently searched for the name ENGEL, one of my paternal branches.

My ENGEL ancestors came from a number of towns in Poland, so I decided not to specify a town but rather to ask for all researchers who had put 'Poland' as the country. I could have chosen to only view results that had been entered from a specific date but I prefer to look at all results.

The search produced a list of 42 researchers with 79 locations within Poland. Most I had seen before, as I've been using this research tool for some years.

But in this search, I noticed the last entry was dated 20 June 2010 and listed the town of Lodz, where my grandmother was born. I decided I wanted to contact this researcher, so I clicked on the 'Click HERE' tab on the right side of the page. Immediately a 'Contact JGFF submitter' page appeared and I was able to send an email directly to that researcher.

It took only the response from that researcher to find out that we were, in fact, from the same family and we are fifth cousins, once removed, and that she was a descendant of a 'branch' that I had no knowledge of. Even more importantly, I was able to give her information that enabled her to extend her family tree back three generations. We are now exchanging information so that we can both update our trees.

The point I am trying to make is that I check JGFF every three to four months because of this very scenario. There are new researchers registering all the time. I even go back to researchers I ignored previously because I thought, at that time, that the towns they listed were not relevant to my ancestors. Subsequent discoveries over time have proven that assumption to be incorrect.

CRARG

Czestochowa-Radomsko Area Research Group

Some years ago, I was corresponding with a 'maybe relative' in the USA and he asked me if I was a member of CRARG. When I replied "what is CRARG?", he directed me to the website at www.crarg.org and told me to have a look.

I was looking for my ancestral family names of ENGEL and GOLDBERG from the small town of Radomsko (south of Lodz). Jews were first allowed to live in Radomsko around 1780, and in 1827 there were 329 Jews living there (21% of the total population) and just before World War Two, there were about 10,000 Jewish residents out of a total population of about 25,000. In June of 1943, the Nazis declared Radomsko to be 'Judenrein' (free of Jews).

I got in contact with the convenor of this 'micro-SIG', a music professor at Wittenberg University, Ohio, named Daniel Kazez. Dan explained to me how CRARG works. It has two distinct operations.

The first operation is to find, and type, Holocaust survivor lists and death lists. Most of these results have been passed on to JewishGen and JRI-Poland and appear within their records.

Their second operation was of major interest to me.

CRARG employs a full-time researcher in Poland who goes from town to village to city within the research area, finding and typing up records of Jewish residents. These are then transmitted back to Dan, who puts them into a database.

Any member of CRARG (membership cost is US\$100 annually) is entitled to receive a 'report' on any surname they are interested in. This report lists every record from every town that mentions the surname of interest.

For example, I asked for a report on the name ENGEL. I received back a 'file' containing 422 records from the towns of Czestochowa, Kruszyna, Klomnice, Krzepice, Mstow, Nowa Brzeznica, Pajeczno, Pilica, Piotrkow Trybunalski, Plawno, Przyrow, Radomsko, Rozprza, Zarki.

While some of the ENGEL records from these towns weren't my ancestors, all the ones from Radomsko proved to be. And many others from Czestochowa and Plawno also were mine.

Included in the records was the *Radomsko 1841-1860 Book of Residents*, which lists all those with an ENGEL connection by street/house number. The book also gives their dates of birth and town/village of birth.

Other Radomsko records were births, marriages and deaths dating back to the early 1800s and up to the 1930s. Many of these records list parents' names, including maiden names, and from these I was able to glean maternal branches going back to the early 1700s.

As a member, I am entitled to receive as many 'files' (Word document reports) as I like during my membership year. The researcher is continually sending new information, and this is uploaded to the various databases every fortnight. The more I research my family, the more surnames I find of interest and so I continue to ask for and receive reports!

The towns of primary interest covered by CRARG are: Near Czestochowa; Czestochowa; Janow; Klobuck; Klomnice; Krzepice; Lelow; Mstow; Pilica; Praszka; Przyrow; Szczekociny; Zarki; Near Radomsko; Kruszyna; Nowa Brzeznica; Plawno (including Gidle); Przedborz (including Gowarczow, Kilece, Konskie, Radoszuze, Wloszczowa); Radomsko (including Bugaj); and Rozprza.

If any of these towns are of interest to you, I strongly recommend that you contact Daniel Kazez via email at dkazez@sbcglobal.net.

RESEARCH TIPS

WHY DID MY ANCESTORS CHANGE THEIR NAME FROM HERZOG TO GERZOG?

Some time ago I was puzzled as to why, on JRI, some of my family names changed from HERZOG (or variants) to GERZOG (or variants).

A birth record for my ancestor stated his name as Hercek HERZOG, but on birth records for his children the surname had been changed to GERCEK (a spelling variant of GERZOG) in the transliterated English listings on JRI.

What had happened? Had they deliberately changed their surnames? It wasn't until I actually saw copies of the records that I understood the solution.

The original birth record for Hercek was written in Polish (English alphabet). The subsequent birth records were after 1865 and therefore written in Russian (Cyrillic alphabet). When you transliterate from Russian to English, you find there is no Russian letter corresponding to the English letter 'H'. All occasions where there should be an 'H', it is written as 'G'.

Hence my HERZOG became GERZOG.

So when looking at original documents written in Russian, you need to think about any names (both given names and surnames) you see starting with 'G'.

DO YOUR ANCESTORS COME FROM LODZ?

And have you reached a 'roadblock' you can't seem to get past?

Have a look at the figures at the top of the next column, provided by the Lodz Area Research Group about the Jewish population in Lodz. As you can see, it was only from around 1860 that Lodz had a substantial Jewish population:

Around that time, some large textile manufacturers set up in Lodz, and Jews from all over Poland and nearby countries

Year	Total Jews
1793	11
1827	397
1857	2886
1897	98386
1921	156155

started moving to the city for work. Lodz is often compared to the English city of Manchester for this reason.

So if you've reached that 'roadblock', it's most probably because your ancestors didn't originate in Lodz, but simply came there after 1860. You need to look elsewhere for them.

Good hunting!
Allan Jankie

UNITED KINGDOM

GRAVES FROM LONDON JEWISH CEMETERIES

Gina Marks from the JCR-UK SIG has taken a large number of photos of graves from London Jewish cemeteries as part of her own research.

Because these records may not yet be online via other sources, she has kindly offered to check her collection on behalf of AJGS (Vic) members who believe they may be connected to any of the following family names appearing in the collection: *De Haan; Goldberg; Hart; Israel; Isaacs; Joel; Lazarus; Marks; Martin/Vaz Martin; Mendoza; Phillips.*

If you believe that any of these names may be connected to your family, then Gina may be able to assist. Feel free to contact her at ginagem@hotmail.co.uk.

Liz James

The quilted box

by Louise Shostak



I have in my possession some treasured documents belonging to my late maternal grandparents, Edith Manelis (born Haliczzer) and Martin Manelis. These have been locked away in a beautiful floral, quilted box, fastened with a tarnished clasp marked 'Made in Germany'.

Included among the documents in the box, which may not have been opened in 64 years, are some 100 letters, many in hand written German script and others in German type. There are also photographs, taken in Swiss labour camps between 1939 and 1945; school reports from Jewish and secular schools in Germany; passports; naturalisation documents; and restitution applications to Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

Both my grandparents were born in Leipzig, Germany, and although they had known each other before the war, they had migrated to Australia at different times – my grandmother in 1939 and my grandfather in 1946 from Switzerland, where he had spent the war years.

Most of the letters in the quilted box appear to have been written by my grandfather to my grandmother during the years that they were separated.

There are also some envelopes with postmarks from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. Some of these are marked from Switzerland and were probably sent by my grandfather to my grandmother while she was still in Germany, while others were sent to Australia. There are also copies of letters that my grandmother wrote, from Melbourne, to my grandfather.

Although my grandparents never spoke much about their past, I am encouraged to pursue finding out more about these letters and documents by the fact that my grandmother kept all of these letters.

Unfortunately, at this stage, the contents of the letters remain a mystery to me. I am yet to find someone who is willing and able to read the German script and type.

There is little doubt in my mind that, once translated, this collection of letters, which have been stored away in a bottom drawer all these years, will reveal some important information. I may be able to glean some valuable insights into my family's history and genealogy, and historians and researchers may discover some new information about life in the Swiss labour camps and the treatment of Jewish refugees by the Swiss authorities.

I am now seeking help in having my grandparents' letters translated from German into English and would be interested in hearing from anyone who is willing to volunteer their time to assist me in this task.

Louise Shostak is a member of the AJGS (Vic). She can be contacted on (03) 9822 0703 or 0419 568 569 (mobile) or by email at shostak@bigpond.net.au.

EVENTS

Broken Hill Synagogue Centenary – an update

The past two issues of *Jewish Genealogy Downunder* have reported on the coming centenary celebration of the founding of the synagogue in 165 Wolfram Street, Broken Hill, a small town in outback New South Wales.

A number of memorable historical events will take place in the town on 27 and 28 November 2010. You are invited to register, whether you are planning on attending or if you are just interested in being updated, with news of the celebration. Visit the website at www.brokenhillsynagogue.org/the-broken-hill-historical-society.aspx.

It has been announced that the Royal Australian Historical Society has provided a grant to help establish a permanent exhibition in the Broken Hill Synagogue, which is currently the home of the Broken Hill Historical Society.

We can now report that so far more than 100 people have registered their interest. If you are not on the internet and wish to receive information by post, contact Liz James on (03) 9822 2849 or Lionel Sharpe on (03) 9523 6738.

Key events include a morning Shabbat service in the synagogue, a walking tour of Jewish places of interest, a book launch, the Mayor's civic reception, and visits to galleries, the silver mine, the Living Desert Sculpture and more.

Over the past few months, a dedicated organising committee, under the umbrella of the Australian Jewish Historical Society, has been meeting and emailing each other in preparation for the event:

Broken Hill: Margaret Price.

Melbourne: George Ermer, Dr Howard Freeman OAM, Liz James, Ruth Lew, Professor Leon Mann, Lionel Sharpe OAM, Syd Shenker and Margaret Wise.

Sydney: Helen Bersten OAM, Robyn Dryen, Gary Luke, Associate Professor Suzanne Rutland OAM and Kate Mannix.

A major by-product of the centenary event will be the publication of a book, edited by Associate Professor Suzanne Rutland, Professor Leon Mann and Margaret Price, on the history of the Broken Hill Jewish community. This has been made possible by a generous donation from The Pratt Foundation.

Some 140 surnames of people who have been associated with Broken Hill are being researched. (These names were listed in the March/June edition of this newsletter, page 12). Names have been culled from personal contact with descendants of the settlers, word-of-mouth through this newsletter and other publications, surviving membership receipt books from the synagogue, 39 headstones in the Jewish section of the cemetery and other records.

This comprehensive list of surnames challenged the family historians and genealogists on the committee who, with help from others, searched the files of the National Archives of Australia, the Public Records Office in the state jurisdictions, published and unpublished articles by historians, family trees, Jewish cemetery records including tombstones and early Jewish and local Broken Hill newspapers dating back over 100 years.

In addition, a questionnaire has been distributed by internet to known descendants to record the recollections of the life of the Jewish community. A number of oral histories were recorded.

Commonwealth census statistics have been invaluable in noting the fluctuating Jewish population since Jews settled in the town in the 1880s. The community reached its zenith of about 100 to 150 by the turn of the 20th century.

There has been the challenge of name changes and the identification of personalities in photographs, especially where the exact first name was not known.

When published, the book, 'Jews of the Outback: The Centenary of the Broken Hill Synagogue 1910–2010', will be available for sale to those who are unable to attend the event.

Suzanne Rutland on a visit from Sydney meets with some members of the Melbourne committee: From left, Liz James, Leon Mann, George Ermer, Suzanne Rutland, Ruth Lew, Howard Freeman (behind the camera, Lionel Sharpe).



From: NU? WHAT's NEW?

The E-zine of Jewish Genealogy from Avotaynu

ITS publishes annual report

The International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen, Germany, recently issued its annual report for 2009. In that year they received 11,768 requests, an increase of more than 1500 from the previous year.

Humanitarian requests still represent the largest group of inquiries (58%). Germany is the largest source (31%), with the US second (10%), followed by Poland, France, Ukraine, Netherlands and Russia. Israel is eighth, with about 4.5% of the inquiries. The majority of inquiries (56%) came from survivors or relatives of survivors/victims.

More than half the people who visit the ITS facilities are tourists. About a quarter are researchers. Survivors and their families represented less than 8%, making most of their inquiries by mail.

ITS employs more than 300 persons, of which one-third process humanitarian requests. The largest group, 136 persons, is designated as 'Archives' and includes those who are working on the digitising projects.

There are now more than 84 million images digitised, which covers 85% of their collection. Under way is the digitisation of the three million correspondence files. The process is expected to take a number of years.

The ITS plans to publish to the internet this year finding aids that will describe its archival holdings.

There is consensus among the commission that determines ITS policy that the international character of the institution should be maintained and that the humanitarian mandate of the tracing service in Bad Arolsen should continue to be fulfilled as long as a need exists and is voiced by former victims and their relatives.

Digitising historic British newspapers

- *Mass digitisation to make millions of newspaper pages available online and in the Library's reading rooms.*
- *Innovative deal will help safeguard the future of the world's greatest newspaper archive.*

The British Library's chief executive, Dame Lynne Brindley, has announced a major new partnership between the library and online publisher brightsolid, owner of online brands including findmypast.co.uk and Friends Reunited. The 10-year agreement will deliver the most significant mass digitisation of newspapers the UK has ever seen: up to 40 million historic pages from the national newspaper collection will be digitised, making large parts of this unparalleled resource available online for the first time.

Spanning three centuries and including 52,000 local, regional, national and international titles, the British Library holds one of the world's finest collections of newspapers. Each year the Newspaper Library at Colindale is used by 30,000 researchers in subjects ranging from family history and genealogy to sports statistics, politics and industrial history. This vast resource is held mainly in hard copy and microfilm, necessitating a trip to the north London site for people wishing to use the collection.

The partnership will enable the digitisation of four million pages of newspapers over the first two years. Over 10 years, the agreement aims to deliver up to 40 million pages as the mass digitisation process becomes progressively more efficient and

as in-copyright content is scanned following negotiation with rightsholders.

Delivering the keynote speech on 19 May 2010, Dame Lynne Brindley outlined how the partnership would transform access to this vital part of the national memory: "I am delighted to announce the British Library's partnership with brightsolid to embark upon the most significant programme of newspaper digitisation this country has ever seen," she said. "Historic newspapers are an invaluable resource for historians, researchers, genealogists, students and many others, bringing past events and people to life with great immediacy and in rich detail. Mass digitisation unlocks the riches of our newspaper collections by making them available online to users across the UK and around the world. By making these pages fully searchable, we will transform a research process which previously relied on scrolling through page after page of microfilm or print."

Digitised material will include extensive coverage of local, regional and national press across three and a half centuries. It will focus on specific geographic areas, along with periods such as the census years between 1841 and 1911. Additional categories will be developed looking at key events and themes such as the Crimean War, the Boer War and the suffragette movement. The aim will be to build a 'critical mass' of material for researchers - particularly in the fields of family history and genealogy.

brightsolid, a subsidiary of Dundee-based publisher DC Thomson, was selected following an EU procurement process. The firm will digitise content from the British Library Newspaper Library, which it will then make available online via a paid-for website as well as integrating it into its family history websites.

This resource will be available for free to users on-site at the British Library and copies of all scanned materials will be deposited with the library to be held in the national collection in perpetuity.

Chris van der Kuyl, chief executive of brightsolid, said: "We're delighted to be working with the British Library on such an exciting project. Digitisation will mean that those people who haven't previously been able to access the physical resource will now be able to access it from anywhere at any time. In particular, it is an important resource for the genealogy community, which we are closely involved with through our brands findmypast.co.uk and genesreunited.co.uk, helping them to bring to life how their ancestors lived. It will also offer a unique insight into major events and key periods of historical interest."

International conference on genetic genealogy

Family Tree DNA will host its Sixth International Conference on Genetic Genealogy on 30–31 October 2010, at the Sheraton North Houston in Houston, Texas. Each year, experts in genetics and science present the latest developments and applications at this two-day educational meeting.

This year's conference will focus on the new Family Finder test, which allows customers to find relatives across all ancestral lines. With over 300,000 individual records, Family Tree DNA has the largest DNA databases in genetic genealogy. The databases encompass more than 95,000 unique surnames and nearly 6000 lineage and geographic projects.

Conference program and registration information is available at www.familytreedna.com/conference.

Gary Mokotoff

Getting Started in Jewish Genealogy: 2010 Version

by Gary Mokotoff, Avotaynu, NJ, 2010, Softcover, 92 pp

Some months ago, I asked AJGS (Vic) committee member Liz James, who was attending the IAJGS Conference in Los Angeles, to purchase a book, *Getting Started in Jewish Genealogy: 2010 Version*. The author is the renowned publisher Gary Mokotoff, and I thought this 83-page inexpensive book would be a valuable addition to our library, even if it covered much of the ground which is readily available on JewishGen and other websites.

This is a completely rewritten version of the popular *Getting Started in Jewish Genealogy*, published in 1999, which sold more than 2000 copies. With the expansion of resources on the internet during the past decade, this book takes us into a new era, even for the experienced researcher.

My eye soon caught the first few words of the introduction, which, to my surprise, states: 'This book is not a beginner's guide'. This seemed a strange opening sentence to a book titled 'Getting Started'. Reading on, it explains: 'It is a getting started guide; a guide meant to convince the reader that tracing one's Jewish ancestry can be done'.

Gary Mokotoff is thus addressing an audience who have not begun serious research but who may need convincing that the effort is feasible and worthwhile. Thus the prime focus of the book is on how to locate documents and explaining what they may contain.

In his conclusion to the second chapter, where he describes how he got started on a search for his ancestry, he states: 'If I can trace my ancestry back eight generations to a man named Aronben Question Mark, there is a strong likelihood that so can you'.

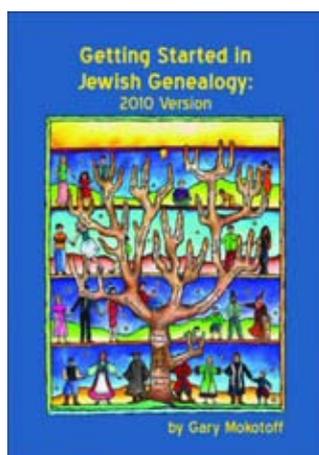
Avotaynu intends to update the book every year to keep up with the rapid advances in genealogy, so we can anticipate a new edition in December.

Flicking through the pages, my eye soon caught Appendix B on page 61, a case study titled 'The Paternal History of Bernard Madoff'. I asked myself, 'Isn't he the New York financier who went to jail over an investment scandal last year?' Gary Mokotoff has reproduced an article he wrote for the international journal, *Avotaynu*, Summer 2009, demonstrating how he himself was able to trace Bernie Madoff's family back five generations and was able to confirm that Madoff was not the family name when his ancestors arrived at Ellis Island.

Having read more chapters of the book, I get the impression that even those who are well on the way with their research will pick up many tips and ideas when they revisit well-tread websites.

As the author points out, the book is deliberately small, only 92 pages, and is filled with illustrations: 35 in total. The cost is only US\$14.50 plus shipping and handling. Further information can be found at www.avotaynu.com/books/gettingstarted2010.htm.

Lionel Sharpe



Avotaynu publishes its 60th book

From: NU? WHAT's NEW?

Avotaynu has published its 60th book since it first started publishing in 1991 with the award-winning *Where Once We Walked*.

"Not every book that Avotaynu publishes is done because we think there is wide interest and the book will be profitable," says Avotaynu founder Gary Mokotoff. "Some books are published because we feel they must be published. Such is our 60th book, *Jews of the Kasiadorys Region of Lithuania*, by Rolandas Gustaitis."

This book provides a history of the Jews of the region between Lithuania's two largest cities – Vilnius and Kaunas. While it covers the history of Jews from their earliest presence, it also "focuses primarily on the time period just before the Holocaust and explicitly describes the events during the Holocaust".

"I am very sensitive to Holocaust-related matters," Gary explained. "It began when this second-generation American realised that more than 300 members of the Mokotow family were murdered in the Holocaust. (I know of fewer than 30 survivors.) One concern I hear from many survivors is that the Holocaust will be forgotten once the last survivor dies. I assure them that the Holocaust will not be forgotten, not because Jews will not let it happen, but because Christianity will not let it happen."

Gary says there is a misconception among the general public that the Holocaust was perpetrated by the Nazis. "When one reads histories of the Holocaust ... you come to the horrible realisation that the Nazis were not the sole perpetrators, but it was done with the consent – and often participation – of the local Christian population.

"This realisation that the local citizenry participated in the Holocaust has led to a growing trend among the emerging, younger leaders of European countries – the under 40 years-of-age set – who recognise that their own countrymen participated in the Holocaust, possibly including their own ancestors.

"*Jews of the Kasiadorys Region of Lithuania* is the first book I have seen written by a Lithuanian that admits Lithuanian Christians participated in the Holocaust," Gary says. "It explicitly states that local civilians, in addition to the German Einsatzgruppen, plundered and systematically murdered the Jews."

Yet, Gary says, the author falls into the trap that has been one of the underlying seeds of anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe through the centuries; that Jews are thought of not as part of the local population, but a group apart.

"The author refers to two groups of people who lived in the area: Lithuanians and Jews. This was dramatically brought to my attention by the caption in one of the more than 200 pictures in the book. It originally said: 'Jews and Lithuanians form the junior football team in Žiezmariai circa 1937'. I had the author change it to 'Jews and non-Jews form the junior football team in Žiezmariai circa 1937'."

Gary says the book is a translation of the author's work that was originally published in Lithuanian. "The author took the opportunity to improve the English-language translation with additional material," he says. "The book ends with a newly added chapter describing how selected Lithuanians saved the lives of their Jewish neighbours. They were recognised by Yad Vashem as Righteous Among the Nations."

