

*This issue contains articles about Estonian Jews  
and the review of an IAJGS Conference session!*



**ATSMI UVSARI**  
**“MY BONE AND MY FLESH”**

**עצמי ובשרי**

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## The Rodker Family and the Great Migration

*by Patrick Monson*

Samuel Rodker and his wife, Simma Grunlen, lived in the Russian Empire during a time of change. Although Jewish life and culture were burgeoning, anti-Semitism was on the rise. Both affected the Rodker family. Born somewhere in the vast Czarist Empire, Samuel and Simma married and had ten children. Samuel worked as a house agent, woolen dyer, innkeeper, and publican (tax-collector) and his wife worked to support their large family. The family likely spoke Yiddish at home, since 97% of the 5,215,000 Jews living in the Russian Empire declared Yiddish as their native tongue. They probably spoke Hebrew as part of their religious worship, and were likely able to speak Russian, perhaps even Polish, so as to communicate with the local population. A diary of the family, written in Yiddish and Russian, has been preserved.

During the latter half of the 19th century, life became uncomfortable for many Jews as their means of livelihood became restricted. In 1881, shortly after the birth of their last child, Betsy, Samuel died; Simma now had to take care of the children alone.

The May Laws (1882), promulgated after the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II, demanded that Jews move into urban areas from villages and rural settlements. In their new locations, they had few prospects for employment and the general economic and social conditions were bleak. Jews could not buy or rent property, other than their own residences, were ineligible for civil service jobs, and were forbidden to trade on Sundays and Christian holidays. In subsequent years, more restrictions were added, further degrading the conditions of life for Russia's five million Jews. The tsar's tutor and over-procurator of the Holy Synod, Konstantin Pobedonostsev, remarked that "the only way for the 'Jewish Question' to be solved in Russia was for one-third to emigrate, one-third to convert to Christianity, and one-third to perish." This led

many Jews, possibly the Rodkers, to seek better lives elsewhere. From 1881 to World War I, "fully half of Eastern European Jewry migrated westward from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empire, Romania, and, to a lesser degree, from the Ottoman Empire."

Many or all of the Rodker family members immigrated to England in 1897. They joined the ranks of hundreds of thousands of Jews who immigrated to Britain; from 1882 to 1914, more than 250,000 Jews lived in Britain. In 1903, Moses Rodker became a naturalized citizen of England, and Isaac in 1920. In the Russian Empire and many other European countries, Jews lacked the legal status that full-fledged citizens of the Empire held.

Michael Rodker, a grandson of Isaac, wrote that the family was very poor, especially immediately following their immigration. For economic reasons, Isaac and his wife had to send their eldest two or three children to live with grandparents. In fact, Isaac and his wife, Mary Smithson, lived with Mary's parents during the first few years of their marriage.

It seems, however, that the Rodker family and other Jews worked hard and were able to get on their feet. In England, tailoring made up 40% of the trades in which Jews worked and upholstery made up 12%. Isaac was involved in both of these trades, working as a corset maker, tailor, and upholsterer. He also owned a barber shop. Many children graced the Rodker families. With their spouses, the children of Samuel and Simma had at least 34 children. According to Pamela Rodker, a granddaughter of Isaac, the family became "well-to-do, with TWO horses pulling their carriage!" Although their beginnings in Poland were humble, the descendants of Samuel Rodker and Simma Grunlen became prosperous after moving to England, as did many Jewish people who left their homes in Eastern Europe.

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**Who We Are**

The Utah Jewish Genealogical Society is a non-profit organization which provides a forum and assistance to members researching their Jewish ancestors. Our goal is to bring together all Utahns interested in pursuing their Jewish genealogy, regardless of faith.

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UJGS regular meetings are held every other month at 7:00pm usually on the second Tuesday of the month at the Jewish Community Center in Salt Lake City, Utah. Please check our calendar for exact dates and locations as they sometimes change.

**Atsmi Uvsari**  
**My Bone & My Flesh**

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UJGS members are encouraged to submit their genealogical research experiences for possible publication in Atsmu Uvsari. The editor reserves the right to accept, reject, or publish in revised form.

We welcome comments, submissions, and questions. Send them via email to our Editor, Banai Lynn Feldstein, at [editor@ujgs.org](mailto:editor@ujgs.org).

We strive for accuracy, but cannot be responsible for unintentional errors. Views and opinions expressed in articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of Atsmi Uvsari or the Utah Jewish Genealogical Society.

## Message from the President

*by Banai Lynn Feldstein*

Ask not what your JGS can do for you, ask what you can do for your JGS.

I know, I know, I'm stealing the most famous quote from JFK. But it really points out what I want to do with this society. I have spent the past year trying to bring in more members, sort of in the hope that with more members will come more volunteers so that our society can not only grow in size but in scope of what we do.

Maybe I've been going about this wrong. Maybe what I need to do is concentrate on the members we already have and try to get them to step up, and to get some of the less active to be more active. That's right, I mean YOU, the person reading this.

As we come to the end of my first year as president, in the eighth year of our society, I think we're doing a pretty good job, but there is so much room for improvement. We had some great speakers again this year and I hope we can do the same next year. Our Genealogy in the Round session was possibly one of the best meetings -- and we didn't bring in an outside speaker at all! See what we can all do if we put in just a little bit of effort? We brought in a few new people, not even counting the crowd for our session the day before the NGS Annual Conference began, but we haven't seen them all join as new members. Why are they not joining and contributing? This is what I've been trying to figure out.

Some of our officers have been doing a great job. Really, the UJGS stuff does not take up that much of anyone's time (except for mine sometimes, but I am more than three board members all by myself), so I hope that we can maybe get a few more people to take on some responsibilities (and take a few away from me).

One of the things I am thinking about is the mentoring program. Probably since the very first meeting I ever attended in 2004, the UJGS has been discussing having a mentoring program but no one has ever volunteered to run it. It's difficult to ask people to be mentors if no one will organize the program, but I bet several members would be willing to help, so long as they don't have to be in charge. I hope no one is shying away from the responsibility because they think it will be a lot of work. I don't think it will be. It should be as simple as being a point of contact and keeping an organized database or list of available mentors and simply matching them up with mentees. Can you spare an hour or so to figure out how to organize the mentor list (I'll help you) and a few minutes every now and then to consult the list to match up a couple of people? And then to follow up to make sure things went well? I really don't think it will be very active at the beginning and you can slowly ease your way into it. Over time, if the program grows, then hopefully so will our membership and you can recruit more help.

Other possibilities include indexing projects. In our early days, a couple people indexed the Jewish cemeteries in Salt Lake City, but nothing has been done with that for at least five or six years, with the exception of photographing some of the headstones. I was recently made aware that the cemetery office at Kol Ami has been updating the JOWBR database online. I'd like to see us work with them to get all the stones photographed and combine that with their database.

Another idea that has been requested is to see what might be available for early Utah Jewish records and to index those. I am helping with an indexing project for Bessarabia, Marelynn Zipser has indexed tens of thousands of

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*(President's Message, Continued from page 4)*

Hungarian records, and Robert Neu has been a Hungarian indexer. I don't know who else in our society has contributed to JewishGen, FamilySearch, or Ancestry indexing projects, but you probably waste more time watching goofy videos on the Internet than it would take to index a few records a day. (I hope that's not just me.) Get a few of us working together and who knows what we could accomplish!

But again, it would help if someone would volunteer to be in charge. As genealogists, we probably all have a little OCD (some more than others), and you have to have some organization skills or you would research

around in circles, so why not put a little of that towards helping out your society?

Part of my job as president is to delegate these positions to members of the society and not to try to do it all myself. I'm thankful for the other officers and board members who do their part and other members who step up when it's really needed. I just hope that I can figure out how to get more of you involved. It really is fun running this society and I don't want to keep all that to myself. Spread the joy!

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year!

And don't forget to let me know what you'd like to do to contribute to your Utah JGS.

### Upcoming Meetings

Our meetings have been moved to the second Tuesday of the month, even numbered months, except for August for the IAJGS Annual Conference.

We are arranging to continue to meet at the JCC. Watch your email for the invite to our meetings in 2011 or check our web site.

Mark the dates!

February 8

April 12

June 14

September 13

October 11

December 13



***Our April 2010 meeting attracted a large crowd; many were in Salt Lake City for the NGS Annual Conference.***

**Presentation Review: "Going to Poland with My Baba's Yizkor Book"**  
**by Ruth Behar**  
**from the 2010 IAJGS Conference in Los Angeles**

*by Rochelle Kaplan*

I just listened to and watched this talk by Ruth Behar. Ruth, a cultural anthropologist and writer who was born and lived as a little girl in Cuba, then left there for Israel and afterwards for the United States. In Cuba, she lived in Matanzas Province, in a small town with a strong African influence, where her family was the only Jewish family.

She was the product of a mixed marriage, a Sephardic father and Ashkenazic mother. Her mother's family was from Goworowo, near Warsaw, in Poland. Her grandma was Esther Levin. Ruth's mother and her maternal parents spoke Yiddish, but Ruth and her parents spoke Spanish to each other. They had been acculturated to Cuban life. Ruth's father was Sephardic, of Turkish origin. He spoke Ladino and didn't know Yiddish. Ruth's family left Cuba in 1961, after the Cuban Revolution. When Esther died at age 92, Ruth inherited the Goworowo Yizkor book. She decided to visit Poland with a student of hers who spoke Polish. Ruth felt mostly ghosts of Jews and signs of death everywhere: in Treblinka, in the memorial to the Warsaw Ghetto, in the decaying cemeteries. The day before Ruth and her student left for home, an email arrived mentioning a Mr. Grinberg, who was from Goworowo and now lived in Warsaw.

Ruth spoke on the phone with the gentleman, now 86 years old, who grew up in Goworowo, and spoke eight languages, among them Spanish, but had moved back to Poland, to Warsaw, eight years prior. She arranged to meet



**Ruth at the JCC In Havana**  
 Photo from ruthbehar.com

him at his apartment and they spoke of the town. He translated pages of the Yizkor book, finding photos of his family and her Levin and Galant families, which she had no idea of before because she didn't read Yiddish. He had no time to take her to Goworowo before they left, but he, his wife and she had lunch together, and he invited her back for a longer visit. He had not seen the Yizkor book since he left Brazil (after his first wife and child died in a plane crash) and wept when he turned to the page with photos of his parents.

Ruth wrote, directed, and produced *Adio Kerida/Goodbye Dear Love: A Cuban Sephardic Journey*, an 82-minute video documentary distributed by Women Make Movies <<http://www.wmm.com/>>. The film focuses on the life stories of Sephardic Cuban Jews living in Cuba, Miami, and New York. The film was shown at the IAJGS Conference.

About 1000 Jews still live in Cuba and some of them also speak Yiddish. Sephardic Jews also remain in Cuba. Other Cubans have married Jews and become Jewish. There is a kosher butcher shop in Havana. Jews get a double beef ration, since they cannot eat pork. Fidel Castro may be of Sephardic Jewish ancestry. Castro Ruz is the family name; an estranged daughter of Fidel says that her grandfather was a Turkish peddler who moved to Cuba. Fidel does not deny or support the claim of being of Jewish ancestry.

## Jewish Immigration to the United States from Estonia: The Interwar Period

by Patrick Monson

On July 15, 1927, Jankel Aronovitsch arrived in the United States. The 47 year old jeweler was accompanied by his 39 year old wife, Bassa, and three daughters. His oldest daughter, Anna, was 16 years old, Cilla was 14, and Rebecka was 13. Jankel was able to read Estonian, German, Yiddish, and English; his wife and children could read Estonian and Yiddish, suggesting that they were a well-educated family. Jankel had already been residing in the U.S. for a few years, having immigrated to San Francisco, California, no later than 1925. His wife and daughters, however, had last resided in Tallinn, Estonia. Jankel was bringing his family to live with him. When they emigrated from Europe, they left a brother of Jankel's in Tallinn, but joined another brother of his in San Francisco. Their nationality was Estonian and their race was Hebrew (Jewish).

The migration of the Aronovitsch family is not unique. It is estimated that from 1880 to 1914, "fully half of Eastern European Jewry migrated westward from the Russian and Austro-Hungarian Empire, Romania, and, to a lesser degree, from the Ottoman Empire. Most of the emigrants went to the United States." Jews from Estonia took part in this turn-of-the-century migration, but because Estonia was part of the Russian Empire until 1918, many of the Jews emigrating from Estonia were considered Russian.<sup>4</sup> Most scholars have not differentiated Jews of Estonia from Russian and East European Jews.<sup>5</sup> Scholars have suggested that post-World War I Soviet emigration restrictions slowed the surge of Jewish emigration from the Soviet Union, while newfound Estonian independence exempted Estonian citizens from the Soviet Union's emigration policies. This allowed Estonia's Jews a continued opportunity to emigrate. On the other hand, the U.S. placed restrictions on immigration.

In the period spanning the years 1918-1939 --

the interwar period -- European Jews, including those from Estonia, continued to immigrate to the States despite restrictive policies. Ship manifests provide evidence. The records also indicate that some Estonian Jews only came to the U.S. to visit.

Many Jews lived in Estonia and the surrounding area prior to the interwar period. Estonia first saw Jews in the Middle Ages. The northward extension of the Hanseatic League along the Baltic coastal lands brought trade, cultural changes, and new peoples, including Jews, to the area. Distinct Jewish communities, however, were not established until later. Jews were not allowed to permanently settle in the area until the mid-1800s. In 1791, almost all Jews of the Russian Empire were required to move to an area of southwest Russia known as the Pale of Settlement; Estonia was a part of the Russian Empire but outside the Pale. In 1820, only 36 Jews lived in the country. Alexander II, Czar of Russia, began to formally allow limited Jewish settlement in Estonia in 1859. Gradually, people of wealth, doctors, certain craftsmen, retired soldiers and their families, and other privileged Jews took up residence in parts of Estonia. It was not until 1917 that the Pale was abolished and all Jews formally allowed to reside in Estonia.

Soon after their arrival, Jews established homes, synagogues, and communities. By 1881, 3,290 Jews resided in the area of Estonia. Although the Jewish community in Estonia was relatively young, its numbers rose above 4,000 in the early 1900s. During the interwar period, the number of Jews in Estonia hovered around 4,500. The population was 4,566 in 1922, 4,434 in 1934, and 4,435 in 1939. In addition to immigrating to the U.S., Jews went to Palestine (as part of the Zionist movement), South Africa,

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(*Estonian Immigration, Continued from page 7*)

the Soviet Union, and other countries in Europe.

Few scholars have written about Estonia's Jews. Mark Rybak, an Estonian Jew and a founder of the Estonian Jewish Museum, states, "To my knowledge, nobody has researched [Jewish immigration to the U.S. from Estonia], and no books on the subject exist." Rybak has begun to compile information about Estonia's Jewish immigration to the U.S., and suggests a need for research on the immigration of Estonia's Jews to the U.S. during the interwar period.

Secondary sources pertaining to the larger migration of European Jews to the States can be used in order to view the immigration of Estonia's Jews in a larger context. In his book, *Central Europe: Enemies, Neighbors, Friends*, Lonnie Johnson refers often to Estonians and Jews, but not specifically to Estonian Jews. He lays out a concrete context of the political, social, and religious conditions in which all Jews of Europe lived during the interwar period. He details numerous pogroms which occurred in many European countries. Persecution of Jews was much greater in other European countries than in Estonia. While German and Russian aggression against Jews was a primary cause of Jewish emigration from Europe, one 1936 source claimed, "Estonia is the only East European country where Jews are not discriminated either on the government level or in the every-day life... The cultural autonomy is in full force and gives the Jews a free and dignified life, according to their national and cultural principles." The causes of emigration from Estonia included economic difficulties, impending pogroms, family reunions, and Zionism. Nazi persecution was a major cause of emigration after World War II broke out.

A 1955 article by Bernard Weinryb covers the entire span of Jewish immigration to the U.S. from Estonia. He discusses the impact of the

Immigration Acts of 1921 and 1924 on immigration. He also states that in the early 1930s, the Depression hindered immigration.

Richard D. Breitman and Alan M. Kraut, in *American Refugee Policy and European Jewry, 1933-1945*, focus on the political, social, and historical context of Jewish immigration to the U.S. during the interwar period. They explore the complex motives of Franklin D. Roosevelt and other U.S. politicians. Their book suggests that while restrictive immigration policies brought immigration levels down from previous levels, the U.S. government made exceptions for Jewish intellectuals and Jews with family members already residing in the U.S.

Genealogical guidebooks, post-1990, after Estonia regained independence, contain useful information. In *Avotaynu Guide to Jewish Genealogy*, Len Yodaiken wrote an article on Jewish genealogical work in Estonia and provided a short history of Jewry in Estonia. The establishment of the Jewish community is described, its destruction during World War II, and its subsequent reconstruction. Yodaiken, however, does not mention Jewish interwar period emigration. He cites a 1930s statistical study of the Estonian Jewish population which could contain valuable information about Jewish emigration during the period of Estonia's first independence.

The lack of secondary sources pertaining specifically to Estonia's interwar period Jewish migration suggests that primary sources, including original documents and records, be researched. One type of record available is ship manifests.

According to the July 15, 1927 Berengaria ship manifest, many Jews accompanied the Aronovitsch family. On board were 39 mostly European Jews.

In addition to the Aronovitsch family, other

(Continued on page 9)

*(Estonian Immigration, Continued from page 8)*

Jews from Estonia immigrated to the U.S. during the first half of the interwar period. Itzik Ber, a 24 year old Jewish immigrant, a shoemaker from Tartu, arrived in Boston December 20, 1922. He came to join his brother, Philip, in Portland, Maine. Another young Jewish person, Schore-Taube Kuschnerow, arrived in the U.S. on June 26, 1936. She was an unmarried 26 year old saleswoman from Võru, Estonia. She obtained a visa from Tallinn 17 March 1936. She was going to Brooklyn, New York, to join Jack Custer, her brother-in-law.

Moisei Dolinsky, 17, arrived in New York City on February 17, 1926 with his mother, Rosalie, 48. Moisei was a native of Tartu, Estonia, but his mother was Russian-born. They were to join Rosalie's husband and Moisei's father, Ruvin Dallen Dolinsky, in Chicago.

In 1938, Sophie Hoefler, a Jewish physician, immigrated to the U.S. She was able to write in German, English, and French. While she is listed as a citizen of Germany, she was born in Tallinn, Estonia and that was her last permanent residence. She mentioned her brother, Henry Goutkine, living in Tallinn. Her intent was to take up residence in Boston, Massachusetts, with her son Paul Hoefler.

On April 15, 1936, Dora Kagan, a 52 year old housewife, left Cherbourg, France, as a passenger on the ship Berengaria. Although a native of Cherson, Ukraine (then a part of the

Russian Empire), Dora immigrated to Estonia at some earlier time. She arrived in New York to visit a friend, T. Zarotschenzeff, a resident of New York City and to stay in the U.S. for 60 days.

Other cases are similar to that of Dora's; some Jews from Estonia only came to the United States to visit. Hirsch Grinstan, a native of Tartu, Estonia, left his wife in Tallinn and planned to stay in the U.S. for 55 days. He gave the address of his sister, Mrs. Rosa Schneider, who was residing in the Bronx, New York. A record of his return has been found.

Lazar Gulkovitsch, a professor, also claimed to be in the U.S. only to visit. He was born in Jgeren, Russia, but was a citizen of Estonia. He stated that he was going to be in the States for 55 days, joining Professor F. Boas of Columbia University in New York, likely the famed anthropologist Franz Boas. Robert Hofe, a 27 year old merchant, born in Viljandi, Estonia, but dwelling in Tallinn, claimed to be visiting the U.S. for 60 days.

Throughout the interwar period, European Jews immigrated to the United States. Ship manifests suggest that Estonia's Jews followed other European Jewish migratory patterns of the time; Estonia's Jews immigrated to and visited the U.S. throughout the interwar period. It is possible the people who claimed to be visiting may have actually stayed in the U.S. much as many immigrant workers today overstay their visas.

Anderson	Martha	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Occupation	Religion	Country of Birth	Country of Origin	Country of Residence	Country of Destination	Remarks
Kagan	Luba Elka	55	f	widow		hebrew polish	Estonia	Hebrew	Estonia	Reval	b 5
Kagan	Toffi Leibe	15	f	child		Germ. & Hebr.	"	"	"	"	
Kagan	Fride	13	f	"		"	"	"	"	"	
Kagan	Joseph	23	m	"		"	"	"	"	"	
Kagan	Abraham	19	m	"	clerk	"	"	"	"	"	W

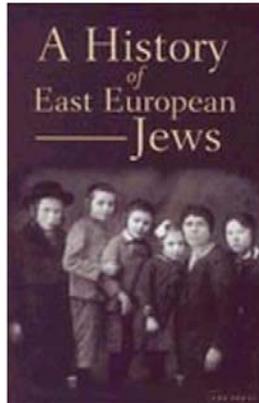
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**Portion of a Ship Manifest of the Hellig Olav in January 1922 showing a Jewish family from Estonia.**

## Book Review: "A History of East European Jews" by Heiko Haumann

by Patrick Monson

"When we remember the world of the Jews in Eastern Europe in its multifacetedness; when we recall the ways of life, the culture, the customs, and the rituals of the Jews; we hope for a continuation of the inner strength of the Jews" (p. 250). Heiko Haumann's history gives genealogical researchers context in which to do their ancestral research by delving into just such topics. It informs researchers of historical events and situations that affected the creation and preservation of records pertaining to Jewish research. For example, if a researcher finds documentation of a Jewish family in the 1911 UK Census, which claims that the family came from Warsaw, Russia, the researcher will have learned from reading this book that the Partition of Poland in the late 18th century, along with the partition's consolidation at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, brought Warsaw under Russian rule.



Warsaw would remain under Russian rule until the shifting borders of World War I found it in a newly created Polish independent nation. It would then be conquered by Germany, followed by the Soviet Union, and ruled by the Communist party until the 1990s. Researching a family from Warsaw, a researcher would also have to keep in mind that some or all Jews were driven from Warsaw several times, including the years 1483, 1775, and 1790; pogroms occurred many other times. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Russian Empire's May Laws and ensuing pogroms were major causes of Jewish emigration from the Russian Empire. The reader will also learn that the Pale of Settlement, to which many Jews were confined, was abolished during World War I, allowing increased emigration from that area. Not only does the book contribute to an understanding of border changes and political machinations, it gives researchers a broad view of Jewish

history in Eastern Europe by delving into many aspects of Jewish life, including language, education, occupation, family life, etc. It gives the reader a feel for what everyday life was like in Eastern Europe.

Haumann begins his engrossing history of East European Jews by pinpointing Poland as the major center of medieval and modern Jewish history. As Jews fled persecution during and resulting from the Crusades, they found refuge in the Kingdom of Poland, which would at one point stretch from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Polish monarchs and nobility took Jews under their wing, passing laws for their protection. Haumann states that money was likely the reason why Jews were welcomed into Poland, and that Polish nobility benefitted greatly as they employed Jews to act as their intermediaries to the lower classes.

This relationship of middleman between noble and peasant was both beneficial and bad for the Jews of Poland. It was in Poland and what was formerly Poland that the Chmielnecki Massacre and other pogroms took place, largely resulting from the lower classes' anger at the Polish nobility. As many Jews were ousted from their positions as intermediaries between nobility and peasantry, they found themselves at the lower rungs of society. Haumann cites Prussian statesman Otto von Bismarck, referring to the Jews of the Russian Empire's Pale of Settlement (much of which was formerly Poland) as saying, "This sad situation of the Jews could probably be traced back to the restriction of their political and civil rights" (p. 197). To a large extent, Poland was the site of other tragedies, such as the following of false Messiahs, the Shoah, and communist

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*(East European Jews, Continued from page 10)*

oppression.

In many ways, however, Poland and Eastern Europe provided a golden age for Jews. Many Jews prospered as they managed nobles' estates, obtained monopolies on certain industries, and established inns. They had many good relations with the Polish people. One source says that the peasants of one area trusted the Jew more than government and military officials, and consulted him for council on personal and family matters. Hungary, in large part, established "government policies [that] were relatively friendly to the Jews" (p. 191). In

Poland, Hasidism was born and Orthodox Judaism flourished. The Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment) contributed to the burgeoning of a new Yiddish culture. Zionism developed here as hundreds of groups adopted the concept of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. Today, East European Jewish communities again flourish, and their former and current influence can be felt throughout the Jewish world.

Haumann is Emeritus Professor of East European and Modern General History at the University of Basel and former Interim Head of the Institute of Jewish Studies at the University of Basel.

## **Jewish Heritage Trip to Lithuania**

*from Harold Margol*

Peggy Freedman and I are organizing our 18th annual Jewish Heritage Trip to Lithuania for July, 2011. The group spends time in Vilnius and in Kaunas. During the trip, two days are set aside during which group members can visit the areas of their personal choice. A car, driver, and guide/interpreter are arranged. From Vilnius, it is easy to go to Latvia, Belarus, and Eastern Poland as the distances are not great. The size of the group will be limited to 25 members.

This is not a commercial venture. Neither Peggy nor I receive any personal remuneration from the trip. The trip is sponsored by the American Fund For Lithuanian-Latvian Jews, Inc. If there is any profit from the trip, 100% of the profit goes to various Jewish communities in Lithuania. For full details about the trip, please go to <<http://www.litvaktrip.peggyspage.org/>>.

The Fund has become a major contributor to the Jewish communities in Vilnius, Panevezys, and Siauliai. Over the years, the American Fund has contributed thousands of dollars to the various Jewish communities in Lithuania as well as the Jewish Hospital in Riga, Latvia. During the past four years, the Fund has contributed \$50,000.00 each year to the Jewish community in Vilnius. The majority of the money has been to the soup kitchen, and meals on wheels, for the elderly, needy Jews.

Last winter, we winterized windows in many apartments of Jews, particularly those who were mainly homebound. The winters there are very cold and, open cracks around windows allow a lot of cold air in. To make matters worse, most are pensioners who cannot afford high heating bills. We do what we can to make their remaining years more comfortable.

### Book Review: "Lost Boryslaw: Memories of a Galician Youth" by Meilech Schiff

by Rochelle Kaplan

I bought this out-of-print book at the last IAJGS conference because I knew that Boryslaw was close to Sambor, where my paternal grandparents and their two oldest daughters, Leicie and Malkie Schreckinger, were born. My grandfather Elias/Elya came to NYC in 1910, and his wife and daughters came a year later. Elya never talked about Sambor; I came to know he was one of 14 children but I'd never heard about his siblings and never thought to ask. I hoped the Boryslaw memoir might give me a better idea about life in Sambor and Meilech Schiff delivers, in an episodic way:

"I was born on May 25, 1893, in the town of Boryslaw, in Austria-Hungary. This I don't remember, but they told me so and I have to take it for granted. They also told me that when I was nine months old my mother stopped breast-feeding me. There was no bottle-feeding in that time, so after a couple of weeks of starvation I felt very sick and the doctor came to see me. He told my mother that if she did not continue to breast-feed me I would die. It shows you that I loved breasts even when I was less than a year old...

...I finished two and a half years of public school and then I began the Talmud Torah. And that was really horrible, with the three rabbis I had. The first was Reb Kutzy Moishe; Kutzy (Shorty) was a nickname we boys christened him with. He was the most miserable bastard on earth. All he knew was to walk around with a big stick and bang, bang, bang, whether you deserved it or not. The second rabbi's name was Yankev Hersch, a short, miserable creature. He didn't hit with a stick; he only pinched you with two fingers and that was really torture. Your arms got black like soot. And here is the third rabbi; Reb Mechel was his name; we called him Michoyle mit die

figlis (Michoyle the clown). He was a clean-cut man, more learned than the others, but a real dictator. He once beat up my older brother Lipa so that his body was black like crude oil, and when my mother went to complain about that horrible beating, they gave her this answer: "Mistam hot er zich fordient." (He probably deserved it.)"



Like my grandfather, Meilech saw two younger brothers die, one at six of TB, the other in infancy. He describes his father, who worked in the mines, suffering terribly; he never smiled or played with his children. He served two days in prison for stealing salt water from the mines to make salt to sell to make extra income, and was to serve a month in prison (but never did) for

(Continued on page 13)

*(Lost Boryslaw, Continued from page 12)*

finding a purse with money on the street and giving his wife the money to buy food for Pesach, instead of turning it in.

He describes the botched efforts of a local doctor to fix his leg, which had a needle stuck inside, and a second doctor urging the boy's mother to take him to the bigger nearby town of Drohobych to get better care. That doctor urged Meilech's mother to take him immediately to the hospital, but his devout mother demurred, instead heading to the local rabbi. Luckily, that rabbi concurred with the Drohobych doctor, and Meilich was successfully operated upon. All the illnesses (and there were others) did not stop the "parents from producing more and more children. It was God's will, they supposed... There was only one bedroom for all of us. There were bunk beds. The mattress on the floor we called a strawsack because it was a sack filled with straw. The intimate night life was really shocking and miserable; no shame whatsoever... To complain about any of this would have been a sin... My father used to get up in the morning and pray the first thing, not even a glass of warm water in his mouth before."

Another memory of his father, around High Holy Days:

"Yes, Father had to knock with his fist on his heart and pray *Al Chait* (My Sin), because he didn't have enough bread to quiet his hunger; *Al Chait* because he didn't have a decent piece of meat to eat; *Al Chait* because he never got a glass of milk or an orange; *Al Chait*, because he worked sometimes two or three shifts without a break, and that meant 24 or 36 hours in a row, and only a morsel of bread to eat for the entire time, and not even something warm to drink; *Al Chait*, because he came home from work his body beat because of the crude oil and the gas, and there was not even a hot bath waiting for him so that he

could wash up properly; *Al Chait*, because he didn't have a proper mattress to sleep on; *Al Chait*, because he slept on straw covered only with a black shmata -- a sack; *Al Chait*, because he never had a decent suit to put on; *Al Chait*, because they threw rocks at him in shul -- because he was poor; *Al Chait*, because Shimaly Eres and all the other big shots looked at him despisingly; *Al Chait*, because he refused to fetch the Komorno Rebbe a pail of water in the Shvitz (the steambath). There were so many other sins such as these that my father committed, and that is the reason he had to knock *Al Chait* so many times."

And his mother too had to knock *Al Chait*, for giving birth every two years, if she didn't become pregnant, for breast-feeding her own children and others, because she worried how to feed a family of nine, for having to beg credit of the grocery man, because she bought grashel (cow intestines) instead of good meat.

His sister Mathilda recounts to him a story about a winter when their father had no job, the family numbered eight, but a rich family hired the children's mother to breast-feed their baby. Hiring out wet-nurses was common then. When the mother came home, the family had a feast of bread, meat, milk and coffee. Meilech writes of grinding poverty with a few families sharing a filthy, stinking outside toilet. The home heating system was oil from the mines and sawdust mixed into round balls.

Meilech describes learning to be a carpenter and raising pigeons as a hobby. He talks of his love of nature, going to long walks in places where the corn and wheat grew and going to the forest with his secret sweetheart Brucha, whom he merely kissed.

In 1912, like my grandmother, his sister Mathilda left for America. In 1914, the Russians advanced into Galicia and "overnight

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*(Lost Boryslaw, Continued from page 13)*

we became Russians. All the signs were changed to Russian, and the streets had new names after Russian heroes and poets. And the Cossacks roamed free for 48 hours; they could do anything they wanted," and that included raping every woman they could find. The Jewish women avoided this by smearing their faces with soot and putting on dirty clothes. In 1915, the Austrian and German armies drove out the Russians. Meilech says that Kaiser Franz Joseph was sympathetic to Jews; things worsened after the Poles took over in 1918.

Meilech recalls the funeral of his pious Chassid uncle, Mordechai Schmiel, who would share even his last piece of bread and who "never criticized anyone in Boryslaw, not even the pimps, gangsters, pickpockets or the Jewish *grobe yungen* (roughnecks)." The touching eulogy for his uncle "made stones cry".

When Meilech was 14, he joined the *Forwards Ferein*, or Socialist Party, as did many youths. Pictures of Karl Marx and Ferdinand Lassalle hung on the walls and the young socialists discussed heroes like Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg and writers like Tolstoy, Sholem Aleichem, and I.L. Peretz.

He describes the characters like Alter who was quiet and backward but who always copped a feel when any woman or girl passed him by and Zelig, who would expose himself and masturbate to a nonsensical Yiddish song. Zishe Leipundig owned a brothel in a poor Jewish neighborhood; semi-retired (his sons took over the business), over breakfast, he told stories about getting girls for the establishment. A fancier brothel, with a doorman, catered to married orthodox Jewish men. Part of his breakfast was drinking a glass of ninety-six proof alcohol, while eating a raw onion with salt and pepper and a piece of bread. Herman Taus was a roughneck and pimp who stole from Jews. There were Jewish gangsters who killed but were seldom caught. And mean-spirited,

though pious and wealthy, Reb Myer Shoichet, a ritual slaughterer, cantor, and *mohel* (circumciser) who habitually refused meat fat to his cousins on the Sabbath.

Meilech tells of two Jewish millionaire families: the Blochs and the Lichtenshteins, both wealthy from the oil mines. Bloch was a hunchback with a plain wife. Mrs. Lichtenshtein was sexy, beautiful, and lively but her husband was quiet and unromantic. She and Mr. Bloch began a romance that the whole town knew about. No divorce was considered and Mrs. L and Mr. B wed and moved to Vienna after their spouses died, one in a horse and buggy accident and the other perhaps of a broken heart. He talks of Leizer Getzeles, president of the cemetery, the *gabbe* (trustee) of the shul and, at Passover, the divider of the matzohs at the distribution of the matzohs to the poor. Whoever had pull with him got more. It didn't matter who had more children or more need.

Special foods mentioned are *pierogen* (mashed potatoes wrapped in dough and fried, a delicacy) and *bulbis mit anbren* (potato soup with onion and animal fat). Holidays are remembered. Since the family didn't have a menorah for Chanukah, Meilech's mother cut a potato in half, dug out a bit on the insides and poured some oil in each. She took some cotton stuffing from an old coat and rolled it into two wicks. We dipped them into the potato halves filled with oil, one end sticking out. The father lit the "candles" and made the prayer. On Purim the boys put on masks, and visiting neighbors, sang songs about Biblical characters hoping to get a few cents. One song went:

Heint iz Purim un morgen iz ois,  
Git mir a gratzer un varft mich arois.  
Today is Purim and tomorrow is out; give  
me a penny and throw me out.

And another song for a neighbor dying of TB:

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*(Lost Boryslaw, Continued from page 14)*

Yehuda Leib zoll lang leben  
 Er geht shoin die por kronen geben  
 Yehuda Leib should live very long, He's  
 about to give a few kronen for our song.

Meilich describes Pesach preparations, whitewashing the house, preparing the shmaltz (goose fat), making borscht (his mother fermented the beets) and raisin wine.

His sister Mathilda saved enough money for Meilech to come to Montreal, and together they saved up enough to bring over their brother Lipa and his family and in 1931, his parents and the rest of the family. Although I would have liked more information about the synagogues, Jewish customs and layout of the town, Meilech gives a flavor in his book of the people of the town and so I now feel I know more of what life might have been like in Sambor at the time.



a family photograph sent to Mathilda in New York  
 standing from the left: Lipa, Genya his wife, Chana, Meilech, Usher  
 seated from the left: Pessel, Mother, Father, Schiye Wolf

### ***Schiff Family, Boryslaw, 1920***

## **United Jewish Federation of Utah Applauds LDS-Jewish Baptism Agreement**

The recent agreement regarding posthumous baptism reached between The Church of Latter-day Saints and Jewish leaders is applauded by Utah's United Jewish Federation. "This agreement signifies another important step in Utah's interfaith relations," said Dr. Martin Gelman, president of the United Jewish Federation of Utah. Gelman expressed appreciation for Church efforts to address the issue of proxy baptism of Jewish victims of the Holocaust through friendship, open dialogue and mutual understanding.

Federation leadership was honored to be invited to early meetings between LDS General Authorities and Jewish national leadership on the topic. "We are gratified to see this process come to such an acceptable resolution," said Gelman.

For more than 50 years, the United Jewish Federation of Utah has served as Utah's coordinating body for fundraising, planning, and communal services. Through a network of partnering organizations including synagogues, Jewish communities, and service agencies, the United Jewish Federation of Utah builds and sustains a vibrant Jewish community that cares for those in need, deepens engagement in Jewish life, and strengthens bonds among Jews in Utah, Israel and throughout the world.

## ***Nu? What's Nu? is Changing***

Beginning in 2011, Gary Mokotoff's email newsletter will no longer be available for free. Because of the amount of time he puts into each issue, and because he has found that the amount of information available is enough for a weekly e-zine, he will be charging \$12 per year for a subscription. You can subscribe easily through Paypal at <<http://www.avotaynu.com/SubscribeNWN.htm>>.

## UJGS Meeting Highlights

### August, October, and December 2010

*by Rochelle Kaplan*

*December and parts of August by Patrick Monson*

#### 10 August 2010

Twelve people attended

1. FEEFHS conference ended a week ago. Kahlile Mehr involved and reported.
  - a. 37 registrants; farthest domestically was Vermont, internationally was Australia.
  - b. The idea was for FEEFHS to provide individual assistance doing research in the Library.
2. BYU and FEEFHS conferences overlapped by 2 days; 4 conferences overlapped during the week of NGS.
3. Next meeting is October 19, coincides with International Jewish Genealogy Month
4. Next IAJGS conference is in Washington DC; 2012 in Paris, 2013 in Boston, 2014 in Jerusalem. Banai mused, should UJGS bid for SLC in 2015?
5. FGS conference next week, Family History Expo in Sandy at end of the month.
6. Kahlile Mehr presents on Research in Poland
  - a. Poland has 30 archival districts.
  - b. A district region is a wojewodztwo. PRADZIAD database has parish and civil registration. There are no lists of names but one can research a town. There are many filmed records at the FHL, when the LDS Church had permission to film in Poland (from 1968-1998). Some state level archives have affiliates; there are 93 state archives and affiliates. One can search filtered by religion or event type.

Mojzeszowe indicates Jewish records. A fond is a group of records created by a single institution.

- c. ELA are population lists and include resident lists and revision (census) lists. None have been microfilmed by the FHL. Some records are indexed on JewishGen at JRI-Poland.
- d. SEZAM is info on national records. Search by name of archive or by record type.
- e. Wyznaniowe is Polish for belief. This word may come up in search. Metrical acts are Akta metrykalne and include parish records and vital records kept by churches. These records existed prior to civil registration. The description here is broader than in PRADZIAD or ELA lists. You need to know some Polish to decipher. Alegata are marriage supplements, used to prove a couple intending to wed were not closely related.
- f. IZA permits you to see the text inventories for more than 22,600 fonds, or 28% of all the fonds in the Polish State Archives. How is it arranged? The Sygnatura is the unique ID of the archive, fond, series, and item. For example, 10/349//1 means Gdansk Archive (10), Fond 349, No subdivision series (0), Item 1.
- g. Inventories are in IZA. PDF info is on the bottom of the page. Databases are done annually and web site is regularly updated.
- h. Review: SEZAM is all collections, IZA is inventories, PRADZIAD is vital

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(*Minutes, Continued from page 16*)

records, ELA is lists of people.

- i. Preservation of records is key, secondary purpose is research.

### 19 October 2010

More than twenty-six people attended (some did not sign the attendance sheet)



**Gary Mokotoff**

1. Gary Mokotoff presents The Paternal Family History of Bernie Madoff.
  - a. Gary Mokotoff researched the paternal ancestry of Bernie Madoff. He was able to trace Madoff's ancestry back five generations in a few hours using his computer.
  - b. Sites used include: Google, Wikipedia, SteveMorse.org, JewishGen, JRI-Poland, and Ancestry.
  - c. He found Madoff's parents' names in Wikipedia, then searched the censuses on Ancestry, followed by immigration and naturalization information using SteveMorse, discovering the original family name of Miodownik in Poland.
  - d. JRI-Poland was consulted and Madoff's pedigree chart went back five generations.

- e. Publishing in *Avotaynu*, Warren Blatt continued the research with more indexed records in Poland, reaching back two more generations.

1. Upcoming events: IAJGS conference in Washington DC is accepting papers; Salt Lake Institute of Genealogy is January 10-14; Medicine and Morals at the Chabad; ICAPGen Conference; JCC dinner with Auschwitz survivor and author.
2. Agenda for 2011 meetings in being planned. Ideas and projects suggested: updates on new developments from FamilySearch, work on a project such as continuing Rochelle Kaplan's photograph of gravestones, cataloging/indexing Utah synagogue records, offer a beginning genealogy class, mentoring program, "in the round" meeting should repeat, invite David Litvack, Minority Leader of the Utah House, to a meeting to raise awareness of our organization.

### 13 December 2010

Fourteen people attended.

1. Todd Knowles presented *Find Your Jewish Ancestors*.
  - a. He began with two family histories, one about a homely daughter and the other about a hunchback, both obtained from American Jewish Archives, and a quote by Arthur Kurzweil about the Nazis taking away Jews' names and giving them numbers and our task being to get back the names.
  - b. Suggested <[https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Jewish\\_Search\\_Strategies](https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Jewish_Search_Strategies)>, "Tracing Your Jewish Ancestors", and JewishGen.

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(*Minutes, Continued from page 17*)

- c. On Jewish customs, he divided Jews into three groups.
    - i. Ashkenazic: Yiddish speaking, from Central and Eastern Europe. Took surnames in late 1700s and 1800s. Named children after dead relatives. Headstones go straight up.
    - ii. Sephardic: lived in Spain before 1492, later large groups lived in London, Amsterdam, the Caribbean, and the American South. Sephardim took surnames much earlier, name their children after living relatives to honor them, and headstones lie flat.
    - iii. Oriental or Eastern Jews: from Turkey, North Africa, Yemen. One famous family was Sassoun; the hairdresser Sassoun is of this family. The Sassoun family lived in Iraq but was also found, thanks to banking, in India and China.
  - d. Types of records: census, civil registration, vital records, gazetteers.
  - e. Todd mentioned a photo site documenting Jewish life around the world <<http://www.jewishphotolibrary.com/>> and the Malcolm Stern collection at AJA <<http://americanjewisharchives.org/>>.
  - f. He also mentioned the Knowles Collection, available at the FHL, which specializes in Jews of the British Isles, and his blog <<http://knowlescollection.blogspot.com/>>.
  - g. In 1939 in Germany there was a Minority Census, which catalogued Germany's Jews, available at the FHL.
2. Todd became our new treasurer during the meeting. Gerald suggested we should discuss what to do with our assets at the next meeting.
  3. IAJGS conference in DC in August; call for papers open until 15 January; special hotel rate for three night before and after is \$99, still \$199 during the conference.
  4. Other upcoming conferences in SLC: SLIG in January, RootsTech in February.
  5. TV series *Who Do You Think You Are?* returns in February.
  6. IAJGS conference will take place in SLC again in 2015 with UJGS as co-host.
  7. Changing meetings in 2011 back to second Tuesday of the month in even months, except August, September instead, for IAJGS conference.
  8. Kol Ami cemetery office has been updating JOWBR database of SLC Jewish cemetery.
  9. Mark Balk wondered about the derivation of his last name. Rochelle's research in her Beider book that revealed that Balk in Yiddish is from *balkn* for log or ceiling or from German *balg* for pelt or skin. Mark's family is from Ukraine.
  10. Lynn Cohne wanted assistance with how to organize her research and her growing Ancestry tree. Todd offered to help.



# Application for Membership in UJGS

## Utah Jewish Genealogical Society

Please enroll me as a member for one year as:

- An Individual \$10  
 A Couple \$15

Mail to: UJGS Treasurer  
Todd Knowles  
1956 East 2125 North  
Layton, UT 84040

Enclosed is a check payable to UJGS.

Name(s) \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Phone (       ) \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_ @ \_\_\_\_\_

Surnames of interest: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Locations of interest: \_\_\_\_\_

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_