



# זכרון ZichronNote

## The Journal of the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society

Volume XXIV, Number 3

August 2004

### CALENDAR OF GENEALOGICAL EVENTS

#### Meetings of the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society

**Please note:** Unless otherwise indicated, the meeting schedule is as follows:

- San Francisco:** **Sunday, Doors open 12:30 p.m. Program begins at 1 p.m.**  
Jewish Community High School, 1835 Ellis Street. Jewish Community Library open on second floor. **Free parking: enter parking area from Pierce Street.**
- Los Altos Hills:** **Monday, Library opens at 7 p.m. Program begins at 7:30 p.m.** Congregation Beth Am, 26790 Arastradero Road
- Berkeley:** **Sunday, 12:30 to 3:30 p.m.** Berkeley-Richmond Jewish Community Center, 1414 Walnut Street, North Berkeley.

**Sun. August 15, Berkeley:** *Highlights of the 24th International Conference on Jewish Genealogy.* Come hear about the Conference experiences of fellow JGS members. Exciting announcements made at the July event are sure to impact our own genealogical research.

**Mon. August 16, Los Altos Hills:** *The Red Cross and Your Holocaust Research.* Since the end of World War II, the Red Cross has worked to trace victims of the Holocaust. Through this effort they have developed an enormous volume of files on displaced individual. Come learn how these files and the Holocaust Tracing Service can be valuable tools in your research.

**Sun. September 12, San Francisco:** *Highlights of the 24th International Conference on Jewish Genealogy.*

**Sun., October 17, Los Altos Hills, 1 to 4:15 p.m.:** (Note change of date and time) *Annual Workshop.* Special workshop for beginners: the tools one needs to get started in Jewish Genealogy. Also available: translators, Birds of a Feather groups, opportunities to have photos and documents scanned, plus snacks and camaraderie with fellow Bay Area Jewish genealogists.

**Mon., October 25, Berkeley:** (Note date change.) *Program to be determined.*

**Sun., November 21, San Francisco.** *The Jews of Singapore.* Joan Beider, Senior Lecturer in Journalism at U.C. Berkeley. Don't know of any family who lived in or came through Singapore? Intriguingly, there is a Lithuanian Jewish connection to Singapore as well as a fascinating surprise which Joan uncovered during the course of her research. Join us for this truly fascinating presentation. *(Speaker rescheduled after earlier cancellation).*

**December: No meeting.**

For the latest program information visit [www.jewishgen.org/sfbajgs](http://www.jewishgen.org/sfbajgs)

*More Genealogy Events of Interest on Page 4*

## ZichronNote

### Journal of the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society

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**Membership** is open to anyone interested in Jewish genealogy. Dues are \$23 per calendar year. The Society is tax-exempt pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code. Make your check payable to "SFBAJGS" and send to: SFBAJGS, Membership, P.O. Box 471616, San Francisco, CA 94147.

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## President's Message Blurring the Lines

By Jeremy Frankel, SFBAJGS President

As I write this column, this year's International Conference has just finished. We can now turn our attention to next year's conference, which will be held almost in our back yard, Las Vegas, July 10 through 15. When I tell people where next year's Conference will be held, I am greeted with all kinds of strange looks, not to mention the obvious comments of spending more time in front of the slots.

Las Vegas has the potential to be a great conference site because there won't be the kinds of distractions (such as major libraries) there are in Salt Lake, London, Washington, and, of course, Jerusalem. Participants will be able to devote more time to attending presentations and networking, and meeting the faces and voices behind the many emails we exchange throughout the year.

As I have written elsewhere in this issue, we have reached the midpoint of the year (already!) and the Board's thoughts are turning towards next year's talks and presentations. If you have read or seen anything you think members of the SFBAJGS would be interested in, do let me or anyone else on the Board know.

As I go about the genealogy world I have noticed that lines are becoming more blurred. Political moves taking place now in an attempt to legitimize gay marriage could potentially have huge consequences in years to come. Currently, marriage licenses and certificates are being held up and those most concerned await the outcome of local and federal legislation.

In other recent news (Los Angeles Times, 17 May, 2004), a mother filed for her daughter, born from frozen sperm, later implanted into her mother's womb, to claim Social Security survivor benefits from the deceased father's contributions. This could cause tremendous confusion in years to come, when researchers look at family trees in which children are born long after the death of their biological father.

As many of you know, I am a great advocate for the use of libraries and research institutions for genealogical research. Yes, we are spoiled because there are so many wonderful such places in the Bay Area. I usually tell folks that no matter how good the Internet is, or can be, just look around at the books on the shelves — 99.9 percent of them will never be available online. But one day I may have to eat my words. Just last week, while carrying out research for a family in Logan County, Illinois, home for 32 years for Abraham Lincoln (No, I wasn't researching THAT family, though the family I am

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## SOCIETY NEWS

### What Topics Will Get Your Genealogy Motor Running?

By Jeremy Frankel, President, SFBAJGS

At about this time of year the SFBAJGS Board begins to look at programming next year's presentations. This last year has seen a wide range of topics covered including "how to's" such as Marc Seidenfeld's illuminating talks on probate and wills and David Piff from the National Archives talking about all of the categories of records maintained at San Bruno. We had Joan Kelley-Williams (at Berkeley) and Dorian Kittrell (at San Francisco) from the San Francisco Chapter of the Red Cross talking about their work, and specifically, post Holocaust research with the International Tracing Service. Continuing the international theme, we had Joan Bieder of UC Berkeley giving a fascinating lecture on the Jews of Singapore (which will be reprised and expanded at the November meeting in San Francisco). We had Steve Harris walking us through the intricacies of research in New York City.

So what will 2005 bring? I'm not saying we cannot pull more rabbits out of the hat, but the Board would really like to hear from you if you have seen or read about any interesting topics. Perhaps you have an interesting story to discuss, perhaps a visit to a family shtetl. Maybe we could organize a visit to a museum, library, or cemetery. Should we perhaps go back to basics and simply have a more social meeting, describing research problems and seeking help among the members? Please send your ideas to me at [jfrankel@lmi.net](mailto:jfrankel@lmi.net) or (510) 525-4052.

### SFBAJGS Will Participate in Palo Alto Street Fair

As outreach to the Jewish community at large, the SFBAJGS will have a booth in the Palo Alto Street Fair, "To Life!" on Sunday, October 24 from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Last year's Street Fair had about 15,000 attendees from all over the Bay Area. According to the program's director, the SFBAJGS booth had the most foot traffic, as well as an interested and excited audience.

Generous donors who made this possible include Rosanne Leeson, Larry Burgheimer, Marcia and Henry Kaplan and Jerry Wagger. For more information or to volunteer to help out at the SFBAJGS booth please contact Rosanne Leeson at [rdleeson@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rdleeson@sbcglobal.net)

### Annual Workshop Set for October 17

The SFBAJGS will hold its Annual Workshop on Sunday October 17, from 1 to 4:15 p.m., at Congregation Beth Am, 26790 Arastradero Road, Los Altos Hills. This workshop will be held in cooperation with Congregation Beth Am.

The workshop will focus on helping newcomers and those in the beginning stages of family history research; one-on-one country experts and translators will also be available for those who are more advanced. We will provide assistance with the excellent resources in the Beth Am Library, too.

Further details will be posted on the SFBAJGS website and through email messages. If anyone is interested in helping at the workshop please contact Rosanne Leeson at [rdleeson@sbcglobal.net](mailto:rdleeson@sbcglobal.net)

### Editor's Notes: Share Your Stories

By Beth Galleto, Editor, ZichronNote

This issue of ZichronNote is special because it contains several personal stories by members of SFBAJGS. Peter Schattner and Roy Ogus describe the poignancy of finding remnants of once thriving Jewish communities in Ukraine and Lithuania that are no more, and share their excitement at finding clues that fill in the blanks in their ancestors' lives. Jan Engel presents an account of a unique memorial for the Jews in the Polish town of Czestochowa.

Lillian Wurzel provides a personal perspective on the practical side of genealogy research.

Two speakers at recent meetings of the SFBAJGS stressed the importance of researching original documents, rather than relying on search engines and what can be found on line. David Piff of the National Archives and Record Administration and Aaron Kornblum of the Western Jewish History Center at the Judah L. Magnes Museum both emphasized the importance of good, old-fashioned research. A short account of Piff's presentation is on page 4.

I invite other members to share their own stories. Each trip is unique and at the same time provides information that other people can use in planning their own genealogy travel.

## CALENDAR, cont.

### More Genealogy Events

#### State and National

Mon., Sept. 20, 7:30 p.m. *Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles. Secret Jews: the History and Culture of Crypto Jews (Conversos) and their Search for Jewish Roots and Identity*, presented by Arthur Benveniste. Skirball Cultural Center, Magnin Auditorium, 2701 N. Sepulveda, Los Angeles. [www.jgsla.org](http://www.jgsla.org)

### One-on-One Help Resumes at Jewish Community Library

In September the Jewish Community Library (JCL), on 1835 Ellis Street in San Francisco, will resume its successful program offering one-on-one help for family history researchers the first Sunday of each month.

Whether you're trying to find your great-grandmother's elusive town or your grandfather's passenger manifest, you can take advantage of the JCL's extensive reference collection and Internet connection to countless searchable databases — all with guidance from experienced genealogists.

Longtime Library volunteer staffer Judy Baston and other veteran researchers from the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogy Society, including Ron Arons, Jeremy Frankel, Dana Kurtz and Marian Rubin, will help with brainstorming and problem-solving. For information e-mail [library@bjesf.org](mailto:library@bjesf.org)

### Jewish Genealogists Lead Research Trip to Salt Lake City

For the 12th consecutive year, veteran Jewish genealogists Gary Mokotoff and Eileen Polakoff are offering a research trip to the LDS (Mormon) Family History Library in Salt Lake City. This year's trip will take place October 21 through 28. The program offers genealogists the opportunity to spend an entire week of research at the library under the guidance and assistance of professional genealogists who have made more than two dozen trips to Salt Lake City.

It includes a specially arranged three-hour class on the day of arrival introducing the participants to the facilities and resources of the Family History Library. Visit [www.avotaynu.com](http://www.avotaynu.com) for information or reservations.

## PAST MEETINGS

### Archivist Recommends Going Back to Original Records

By Henry P. Kaplan, M.D., Esq.

At the June 21 Palo Alto meeting of the SFBAJGS, David Piff, Senior Archivist at National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) San Bruno, described the wealth of original (often paper record) resources available to genealogists at NARA. He made the point that home computer research may give us a starting point, but we still need to go to the original records — such as those at NARA, for critical details about our ancestors. NARA staff cannot do individual research, but they can provide suggestions, assistance, and access to archived documents we identify. NARA at San Bruno has six on-line computers with free access to Ancestry Plus.

NARA encourages genealogists to take full advantage of its resources. Its professional staff recognizes the importance of genealogic study and supports genealogists' research.

### International Association Presents Awards at Conference

Warren Blatt was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual conference of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, held in Jerusalem July 4 through 9. The awards included the following:

**Lifetime Achievement Award:** To Warren Blatt, Vice President and Editor in Chief of JewishGen, for his contributions to JewishGen as well as other aspects of Jewish genealogy.

**Outstanding Contribution Award:** Dr. Alexander Beider in recognition of his major contributions to the specialized science of the origins and forms of proper names and surnames. Beider is the author of *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*, *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland*, and other books on this topic.

**Outstanding Publication Award:** The Jewish Genealogical Society of New York for its compilation of "Genealogical Resources New York," Second Edition.

**Outstanding Project Award:** To David Fox in recognition of the projects undertaken within the Belarus SIG that have generated seventeen databases containing over 250,000 individual entries.

## A Unique Event in Czestochowa, Poland

By Jan M. Engel

Jan Engel, a Polish Holocaust survivor, served with the allied forces in Britain during World War II. After emigrating to the USA (1946) and completing his graduate studies he was employed as a research physicist by several companies and retired from IBM in 1984. Active in Jewish genealogy for over 50 years, he wrote the first genealogical computer program and authored several papers. He is researching **ANGEL, BARCINSKI, DOBRZYNSKI, ENGEL/ENGIEL, KOCHMAN(N), LANDSBERGER, MONIC/MONITZ.**

Czestochowa is a city of about 250,000 inhabitants, located on the Warta river and the main North-South highway linking Gdansk, Łódz and Katowice. It is best known as the site of the Shrine of *Jasna Góra*, one of the biggest pilgrimage centers of the Christian world. Prior to World War II, Czestochowa's population was about one third Jewish. The Jewish community existed under comparatively peaceful conditions and with infrequent incidents of anti-Semitism. During World War II the entire Jewish community was eliminated by the Nazi invaders, the synagogues were destroyed, and the large Jewish cemetery was reduced to ruins. Today there is no Jewish community in Czestochowa, there are no synagogues, and at most there are 50 elderly Jewish descendants still living in the city.

Last February I was attracted to an item on the Internet stating that the city of Czestochowa was planning a special exhibition honoring the Jewish community that shared its history up to the last war. Frankly, I was impressed by a Polish city, with practically no Jewish citizens, wanting to memorialize the community that once was. I had never lived in Czestochowa, but I lost a major branch of my family there, including several aunts and uncles. (See [www.kinology.org/engel/family.htm](http://www.kinology.org/engel/family.htm).) Since I am one of only three living survivors from that branch (none from Czestochowa), I considered whether I should attend the opening. I was even more motivated when I noticed that the organizing committee was expanded to include well known dignitaries from the USA, UK, and Israel. (For a list of the committee members see page 6.)

This list was matched by an equally impressive program featuring lectures by noted speakers, performances by the Czestochowa Symphony Orchestra, theatrical groups, a film premiere, and

several other cultural presentations. I decided to go.

As I was entering Czestochowa in my rented car on the eve of April 21, it became immediately apparent that special security provisions had been imposed. There were at least two police officers present at every intersection and units of the Polish army could be seen in many areas, including hotels and all important landmarks. Despite this, the reception at the hotels was warm and without any incident. On registration, each attendee received a folder detailing the programs for the next two days.

The next morning, Tadeusz Wrona, mayor of the city, gave an inspiring welcoming address, citing many of the pre-war Jews who brought industrial enterprises (and hence, a higher living standard), founded hospitals and other philanthropies for Czestochowa. It was an amazingly candid speech. While giving credit to the many Jewish contributions, he did not hide the excesses of anti-Jewish behavior that occurred in 1937 and again as recently as 1968 and expressed the shame with which the city still

remembers these incidents.

There were also talks by the archbishop of Czestochowa, Stanislaw Nowak, and the chief rabbi of Warsaw and Łódz, Dr. Michael Schudrich. The American ambassador to Poland, Christopher Hill, was called back to Washington just before the opening and was replaced by Gerald C. Anderson. There were several other notable speakers. There was a series of highly emotional and touching presentations by both survivors and first-time visitors who were responding to the legacies left by their late parents. They came from all over the world; most spoke in English.

The special exhibition was opened in a two-story pavilion of the Czestochowa Museum in Staszyc

*Continued on next page*



*Scenes from the rededication of the Czestochowa Jewish cemetery.*

*Top: Tadeusz Wrona speaks. Bottom: Chazan sings El Mole Rachamim.*

*Czestochowa*, cont. from page 5

Park. It consists of a large number of pictures, objects of art, and many documents about the old Jewish community. A special book was published describing the various collection items. I found a picture of my Aunt Sala sitting among the orphans of the orphanage she founded. I also found her signature included on an important document relating to the Jewish old people's home. Many of the other activities were held at the Philharmonic Hall, constructed after the war on the site of the "New" Synagogue burnt by the Nazis in 1939. The Upper Pedagogical Institute is Czestochowa's most advanced school and is almost ready to be upgraded to a full university. I spoke with several teachers there. They were working on special research projects on the history of the pre-war Jewish community, even though there were no Jews among them.

One of the most moving events occurred on Friday, April 23, when the whole convention was transported in special buses to the old Jewish cemetery outside the city which was the site of multiple murders of innocent Jews by the Nazis. There, with a platoon of the Polish army participating, a full military ceremony was held. Most impressive was a last Roll Call, in memory of all those who were murdered on these very killing fields or gassed at the Treblinka camps. Later the cemetery was rededicated with another stirring speech by Tadeusz Wrona and an unforgettable rendition of the *El Mole Rachamin* (God full of mercy) hymn by a noted Chazan with a fabulous voice. The traditional *Kadish* was recited at the end.

Somewhat surprising was how little the event was covered in the local newspapers. When I questioned people about it, the response was that news coverage was purposely curtailed for the sake of security, with so many important visitors present.

For me this event was a most rewarding experience. It was exceptionally well organized and well worth the special trip. The costs of the conference, associated excellent banquet, and many amenities were primarily funded by two Americans, Sigmunt A. Rolat (Canada) and his cousin, Alan M. Silberstein (USA), both with roots to Czestochowa. I owe them my sincere thanks.

See also: Jan M. Engel *Survivorship and the Revival of a Destroyed Family*, AVOTAYNU Vol. X, No. 4, pp. 30-32, Winter 1994.

Members of the Honorary Committee under the auspices of the Mayor of Czestochowa, Dr. Tadeusz Wrona, included Prof. Elisabeth Asch Mundlak, University of Caracas, Venezuela, ret.; Prof. Wladyslaw Bartoszewski, Chairman of the Council for the Preservation of Memory of Combat and Martyrdom; Prof. Janusz Berdowski, President Upper Pedagogical School, Czestochowa; Arye Edelist, Chairman, Association of Polish Jews in Israel; Konstanty Gebert, publisher of *Midrasz*, (monthly) and columnist of *Gazeta Wyborcza*; Sir Martin Gilbert, historian; Christopher Hill, United States Ambassador to Poland; Ramez Jaraisy, Mayor of Nazareth; Richard M. Joel, President, Yeshiva University; Wladzimierz Kac, Chairman, Jewish Community in Katowice; Piotr Kadlcik, Chairman, Association of Jewish Communities in Poland; Hon. Frank Lautenberg, United States Senator; O. Marian Lubelski, Prior of Jasna Gora; Stanislaw Nowak, Archbishop of Czestochowa; Jan Nowak-Jezioranski, publicist and writer; David Peleg, Ambassador of the State of Israel to Poland; Prof. Antony Polonsky, Holocaust Studies, US Holocaust Memorial Museum and Brandeis University; Sigmund A. Rolat, President, Oxford International Corp. and sponsor of the Days of Remembrance; Dr. Dov B. Schmorak, Ambassador-at-large of the State of Israel; Dr. Michael Schudrich, Chief Rabbi of Warsaw; Alan M. Silberstein, President of Silco Associates, Inc. and sponsor of Days of Remembrance; Steven Solarz, Former United States Congressman; Prof. Feliks Tych, Director, Jewish Historical Institute; Halina Wasilewicz, Chairwoman of the Czestochowa Branch of the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland; Prof. Shewach Weiss, Chairman of Yad Vashem and former Ambassador of the State of Israel to Poland; Prof. Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate; Samuel Willenberg, sculptor, Tel Aviv; Eli Zborowski, Chairman, World Societies for Yad Vashem.

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## Holocaust Center Relocates

The Holocaust Center of Northern California is moving in late September to 121 Steuart Street in downtown San Francisco, where it will share a building with the offices of the San Francisco Jewish Community Federation.

As the organization's brochure states "...the move provides the community with a vibrant state-of-the-art resource center, expanded programs and services, community-wide visibility..."

For more information call (415) 751-6041

## Report on an Emotional Genealogical Trip to Ukraine

by Peter Schattner

Peter Schattner is a computational biologist at the University of California, Santa Cruz. His current research interests are in developing computer methods for detecting non-protein-coding RNA genes. His genealogical research includes surnames **SCHATTNER** and **SCHMERLER** from Galicia and Bukovina and **STEINHERZ**, **LANDEIS/LANDESMANN** and **SCHWARZ** from Vienna and Hungary.

My wife Sue and I flew into Krakow from Copenhagen on Thursday, July 26, 2001. After unloading our bags we went on a quick visit of Krakow's tourist sites, winding up at the remnants of the old Krakow Jewish quarter. I remembered visiting the district when I was in Krakow some 20 years ago. At that time the only visible indications of former Jewish life were a few street names (eg "Jacob Street") and occasional buildings with Hebrew letters, or a spot where a mezuzah used to be. Now we were able to see several somewhat-restored synagogues (which are essentially museums, since there are almost no Jews in Krakow), the Jewish cemetery and a Jewish Community Center (JCC) — used mainly by visiting groups and local non-Jews. There are even a few "Jewish restaurants" — though they didn't look especially Kosher to me. Probably the most interesting was an antiques and used bookshop in the JCC. The bookshop — which is run by a very friendly non-Jewish man — carried a remarkable collection of varied items that evoked strong images of a world that has disappeared.

The next morning we met Alex Dunai, who was to be our guide/translator/driver/bodyguard/friend for the next eight days. We loaded our bags into Alex's car and set off for our first stop, Auschwitz-Birkenau Concentration Camp, located about one hour from Krakow. I had visited Auschwitz 20 years ago and did not especially want to see it again. However, Sue had never seen Auschwitz, so we decided to go.

There are no words to describe the horror of the place. Still, if our intent was to connect with the reality of Jewish history in this part of the world, then it was probably appropriate for us to see Auschwitz. At the least, we had the knowledge that whatever sights of the destruction of Jewish life might await us in the Ukraine, nothing could be as depressing and overwhelming as seeing Auschwitz.

From Auschwitz, we headed directly to the Polish-Ukrainian border. The trip was slowed by heavy traffic and flooded roads from Poland's most severe rainstorm in years. The border crossing itself was bizarre, with long lines of stationary cars (we were told some people waited up to three hours) which Alex was able to talk his way past in 20 minutes. He

was especially proud that he was able to sweet-talk his way through customs without needing to use the \$10 which we had given him for bribes.

Saturday, July 28, Alex led us on a visit through Lvov, including stops at the Jewish cemetery, the JCC and the synagogue. The Jewish cemetery, which is quite large and well preserved, consists mainly of graves of Jews who came to Lvov after World War II. The JCC was closed for Shabbat, but the two watchmen let us in and told us a bit about the activities of the JCC and also about their own lives. One of them had actually immigrated to the U.S. a few years previously but had returned because he had been unable to learn English and had found life in the U.S. too difficult.

We arrived at the synagogue in the afternoon, and services were already over. While at the synagogue we encountered a Western Jewish tour group. I listened as their guide admitted to one of the locals that he had never been to this synagogue before and knew very little about it. He didn't realize that I understand Russian, which he was speaking. I was again very happy that we had Alex as our guide!

Sunday morning we checked out of the Grand Hotel and headed straight for Ivano-Frankivsk (formerly called Stanislav), a large town where both Schattners and Schmerlers had lived, located about two hours south of Lvov. Upon checking into the Roxolana Hotel, I was shocked to realize that I had left our passports in the safe in the Grand Hotel. (In 25 years of international traveling, I'd never forgotten or lost a passport before.) Not having a passport in the Ukraine is a big deal and I was envisioning, at the least, wasting a day going back and forth to Lvov to pick up the passports. Fortunately, we were able to contact Alex's brother-in-law in Lvov and hire him to deliver the passports to us.

In the meantime, we visited Rabbi Kolesnik, the only rabbi in the area and (I believe) the only rabbi in the entire Western Ukraine who was born and has lived his entire life there. He was extremely helpful, supplying us with the names and addresses of Jewish families in both Kutly and Kosov, villages we were going to visit. He also showed us lists of Jews registered in some of the ghettos in local

*Continued on next page*

*Ukraine, cont. from page 7*

villages during WWII. There we found listings for three Schattner families and three Schmerler families. He said he recognized the name Schattner as that of the former director of the Stanislav Jewish high school. I knew that Jacob Schattner had been the director of that school. When asked if any of the school buildings remained, he took us next door to see that the buildings were still there (though no longer a Jewish school). Moreover, he showed us copies of the architectural blueprints of those buildings, in which it was clearly shown that they were built as a Jewish high school.

Monday, July 30, we headed southwest to visit several of the villages near Stanislav, where the Schmerler family — and to a lesser extent the Schattner family — once lived. We went to Bogorocharny, Solotvina, Nadvorna and Delyatin. In each town, the only remnant of Jewish life was what was left of the Jewish cemetery. Just finding these cemeteries was an adventure. Generally we would start with Alex approaching old people on the street until he found someone who knew where it was. Then we would follow them, or their directions, to some overgrown field with broken-down tombstones. Most of the inscriptions were unreadable and those that could be read were usually in Hebrew only. Even when Sue or I could decipher some of the Hebrew, the names were often of the form “Chaim ben Mordechai” without any surname at all.

I consider almost miraculous that we were nevertheless able to find two tombstones in Solotvina with the name Schmerler clearly marked on them. One belonged to a Sara Schmerler, who died at age 75 and was the daughter of a Yosef Schmerler. The other tombstone was entirely in Hebrew, but we could still make out the name Menachim Chaim Schmerler (in Hebrew). In Delyatin we were amazed to find a tombstone for a Rivka Schmerler, also listed as a daughter of a Yosef Schmerler, described as a “tzadik.”

Late in the afternoon we stopped briefly in the picturesque mountain village of Yaremcha in the Carpathian National Park. Yaremcha has no particular family or Jewish interest, but after hours viewing broken down and neglected Jewish cemeteries, the beautiful scenery of Yaremcha provided some much-needed change.

On Tuesday, after a brief visit to the Ivano-Frankivsk Jewish cemetery, we headed south towards Czernowitz, the city where my father was

born. Our first stop was at a forest near Kolomea, about an hour south of Ivano-Frankivsk. There we visited a memorial commemorating the tens of thousands of Jews murdered there during the war.

From Kolomea we continued south to Zablotov and Sniatin, two other villages which had been home to Schattner and Schmerler families. Again we asked people to point us in the direction of the Jewish cemetery. In Zablotov, the old man we asked for directions turned out to be the last remaining Jewish man there. Mr. Wasserman was a delightful man who had come to Zablotov shortly after WWII. His children were able to create new lives for themselves abroad, but Wasserman himself felt his health and age were not up to starting a new life anymore. The Sniatin cemetery was also completely overgrown with weeds and grass. Again the tombstones were often unreadable and nearly always in Hebrew.



*Stanislaw Synagogue*

Late in the afternoon we arrived in Czernowitz and checked into the Chermosh Hotel. After the Grand Hotel in Lvov and the Roxalana in Ivano-Frankivsk I wasn't prepared for the Chermosh (though I had been warned.) It was like being transported back 20 years to the Soviet-era hotels I had known (but not loved). The hotel and rooms were drab and ugly, the food mediocre, and there were lots of bizarre rules. Still, it was the best hotel available and provided a roof over our heads.

On the morning of Wednesday, August 1, we went to the Czernowitz archives. There I hoped to find the current name and number of the house where my Father had been born (I knew the address had been “12 Dr.Reichsgasse,” but I also knew that all the street names had been changed since then.) Fortunately the woman who ran the archives found an old street map from which she was able to figure out the current street name. Unfortunately the house numbering system had also been changed and we were only able to guess which house along the three block street was the actual one in which my father had been born, assuming it was still standing.

Our next stop was the Czernowitz Jewish cemetery. Since the Czernowitz cemetery is far larger and in much better condition than the “shtetl cemeteries” we had been visiting, I was optimistic that we would find additional family graves. In addition, the Czernowitz cemetery had an index file from which we were given the names and locations of seven

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## A Visit to my Ancestral Shtetls in Lithuania

By Roy Ogus

A San Francisco Bay Area JGS member for over 10 years, Roy Ogus is researching the surnames **OGUS**, **ALPERSTEIN**, **RODKIN**, **PERLOFF**, **BLACKER**, and **WILLIAMS**, from Lithuania and Belarus. Roy is also on the board of the JewishGen Southern African Special Interest Group (SA-SIG) and is involved in its activities. When not researching his family history, Roy works as a computer engineer.

### Introduction

In July 2001, I was part of a Jewish group that visited Lithuania for about two weeks. There were 26 participants on the tour, consisting of smaller family groups of one to three members. At least one member of each family group was a genealogist with roots and connections to Lithuania, so the trip had a definite Jewish genealogical focus. The visit was organized by Howard Margol, former president of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies.

Although we spent most of our visit in the two main cities of Vilnius and Kaunas, each family group went its separate way on an individual "Roots Tour" of two or three days. The aim of the Roots Tour was to provide an opportunity to visit a set of shtetls where we could explore the ancestral towns of our own families. The selection of the Roots Tour towns had been pre-arranged, and each group was provided a personal guide and driver for the visit.

During our visits to Vilnius and Kaunas we were taken to a variety of sites covering modern and historic, Jewish and non-Jewish, points of interest. We were also given a close and personal insight into the stories of the Jewish communities that lived in the country before World War II, as well as contact with the new Jewish communities that have flourished in Lithuania since the end of the Soviet rule (during the early 1990s). We experienced intense encounters with the horrors of the Holocaust through the personal stories of our tour guides, many of whom were Holocaust survivors, as well as through visits to the former Jewish ghettos and to the museums set up to preserve the stories and artifacts of the former communities in the country.

For my Roots Tour, I selected four towns. I chose the towns of Paberze (known in Yiddish as "Podberezhe") and Giedraiciai (pronounced "gied-eye-chi," which was also known by the Yiddish name of Gedrowitz) for the first day of the Roots Tour, and Ukmerge (formerly called Wilkomir) and Vievis for the second day. These towns were selected because I have traced my paternal Ogus family to all four of the shtetls, but also because I also have some maternal family connections to these towns. The

town of Paberze was of particular interest to me, since I knew that most of the Ogus families in Lithuania had lived there during the 19th Century, and were a strong presence in the community.

In this article, I will first give a short overview of my general impressions of the visit and then concentrate on the genealogical aspects of the trip, based largely on my experiences during the visit to my Roots Tour towns.

### General impressions of the trip

In Vilnius (Vilna) and in Kaunas (Kovna) we visited many of the interesting areas and landmarks, but focused on the stories of the former Jewish communities that lived in these towns, and on the tragic events that took place in there during World War II. There was much exposure to the extreme suffering of the Jewish communities in the country, and on the story of their ultimate destruction by the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators during the period of 1940 to 1943 during the Holocaust.

We learned about the present-day revitalization of the Jewish communities in both Vilnius and Kaunas since the end of Soviet rule in the early 1990s, and we met a number of people from these communities. Today there are about 5,000 Jews living in Vilnius.

As we all well know, the story of the Jewish communities in Lithuania during the first part of the 20th Century is a heavy and emotional one. However, visiting first-hand the areas where these people lived, seeing the tangible markers of their demise, and hearing the stories told by the Jewish guides (many of whom were Holocaust survivors themselves), hugely increased the impact of what we were seeing and hearing. We took walking tours of the former Vilnius and Kaunas ghettos and could see stark reminders and remaining artifacts of the communities that lived there during the War.

There were about 250,000 Jews living in Lithuania before the World War II; over 200,000 of whom were killed during the Holocaust. There were about 100 synagogues in the city of Vilnius before the war. The city was a major world center for Judaism called the Jerusalem of Lithuania. Today only one synagogue remains in Vilnius, run since 2001 by a

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*Lithuania, cont. from page 9*

Lubavitcher Rabbi from Boston. We attended a Friday night service there, and I found it to be a very emotional experience to participate in this very orthodox service in the old and beautiful synagogue.

We also visited two of the Lithuanian Archives (the large Historical Archives in Vilnius, and the Regional Archives in Kaunas), and met several of the archivists with whom I have been working for a number of years. I met Galina Baranova in Vilnius, and Vitalija Girchyte in Kaunas. It was most exciting and interesting to see the original old documents in these repositories, copies of which I had been using for my genealogical research for some time.

### Roots Tour

#### Paberze and Giedraiciai

On the first day of my Roots Tour, I visited the towns of Paberze and Giedraiciai. A large number of my Ogus family members lived in these towns during the 19th and in the 20th centuries, up to the beginning of World War II. The Ogus family was a prominent part of the Paberze Jewish community during the 1800s. My research has shown that for most of the 19th Century, the Rabbi of the Paberze Jewish community was a member of the Ogus family.

Both towns are located very close to Vilnius (only about 17 miles north of the capital). I had at my disposal my own guide and a driver. It would have been impossible to get around without someone who could fluently speak several of the languages used in this area. I was fortunate that my guide and driver were both very effective in their jobs, as well as very personable. My guide spoke at least four languages fluently: Lithuanian, Russian, Polish, and English. During my two-day visit to the four towns, all four languages were greatly needed! My driver also spoke good English, providing me with an additional source of information and stories about the local communities.

The first town of call was Paberze. It was thrilling to see the sign denoting the entrance to the town! It seemed unbelievable to me that this was the place where all the Ogus families had lived so long ago, and that I was finally visiting the town I had been researching for so many years. As I entered the town, I wondered whether I would be able to find a trace of those families there now.

The town was very small, drab, and quite rural. Although there were a number of what appeared to be very old houses, my guide told me that most of these structures had been built since World War II.

We followed a basic strategy in each of the Roots towns. After driving around to form an overall

impression of the layout of the town, we headed for the central town administrative building. We asked the authorities there (often this was just a sheriff or equivalent official) about their knowledge of the old Jewish community, whether there had been a Jewish cemetery, and whether there were still some older people living in the town who might remember the former Jewish inhabitants. In each of the towns, we were amazingly successful with this strategy, and the local townspeople were most helpful. Many of them would just hop in our car and direct us to the places we'd asked about.

In Paberze, we scored on all fronts. We found a Christian cemetery, obviously well maintained, and showing some recent burials. We stopped an elderly woman walking on the road nearby, and asked if she knew whether there had been a Jewish cemetery in the town. After some thought, she directed us to an area behind the Christian cemetery, telling us she recalled that there had been a Jewish cemetery there.

(The older people walking along the roads looked as if they had come right out of *Fiddler on the Roof!* While they probably weren't that old, some of them seemed quite ancient. They were very weather-beaten, wearing very shabby, well-worn clothes, and most were missing many of their teeth. A number of people were driving horse-drawn carts, which again would have been quite appropriate in Tevye's town in *Fiddler*.)

Behind the Christian cemetery we found a terribly overgrown and decrepit area and the remains of a number of gravestones. At the front of the field was a relatively new government sign with inscriptions in both Yiddish and Lithuanian, noting that this was the site of the town's former Jewish cemetery.

I was very excited to find this cemetery, a tangible link to the former Jewish community in the town. It obviously had been long-abandoned and was overgrown with grass and bushes. I crawled through the dense brush and rocks, trying to find and read the remaining gravestones. Only a few were still intact.

It was very depressing to look back and see the fine Christian cemetery behind me, and then look at this miserable field that obviously hadn't been touched or maintained since before the war. This was a common theme in all the towns that we visited — a sad story that we experienced repeatedly.

My excitement soon faded when I realized that most of the stones were broken with large parts missing, or bore inscriptions that were virtually unreadable due to weathering and the passage of time. All the stones were inscribed in the Hebrew language only. (In contrast, the stones in the Jewish cemetery that we saw in Vilnius, which is well maintained and

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## Tales From a Self-appointed Family Genealogist

by Lillian Wurzel

Born in 1912, Lillian Wurzel is probably the most senior member of the SFBAJGS. She is researching **RIZENTHAL** and **TRAXLER** from Nadsd, Slovak Republic, and **WURZEL** from Tiszadob, Hungary, New Jersey, and New York.

I've been interested in genealogy for a long time. As a first generation American (mother came at age 19 in 1901, traveling with a family from her village) while my father came in 1905 at age 24, after military service in Hungary. They met and were married in New York, where I was born, in 1912. By 1916 my parents and baby brother and I had moved to Los Angeles.

Since 1936 I've lived and worked almost continuously in northern California. So my father and I had a regular correspondence going. My mother never learned to read or write English. All during the week he made notes on the backs of used envelopes and then on Sunday morning, after laying tefillin (of course, he did this every day) he sat down, after breakfast, and used this outline to write me a newsy letter.

His January 5, 1950 letter began:

"Today is the 45th anniversary of my arrival in the U.S." That's when I decided to learn more about my extended family, both the paternal and maternal sides.

And that's how I became the self-appointed family genealogist. Now, when new babies arrive in various branches of the extended family, I send two presents. One for now — pajamas, a toy, or maybe money — and for later, a copy of an abbreviated family genealogy chart on acid free paper with a note: "You and baby may not be interested in this now, but put it in your safe-deposit box. He/she may be pleased to have it in the future." With younger generations coming along, on a few of these I can list seven generations.

Here are a couple of examples of how a family genealogist functions: Number 1: One of my cousins and her husband had twin sons and then another son. The twins grew up to be handsome, talented men, but less successful in love and romance. Both have been married and divorced. I'll call them X and Y. X was working and living in Colorado. There, in his middle years, he went back to his Jewish roots and became active in a synagogue. Then he met and fell in love with an attractive, charming Jewish divorcee who had one son. Eventually they decided to marry.

When they spoke with the rabbi about the wedding details such as information for the Ketubah, the rabbi asked X for his "Shem Hakodesh" (religious or holy name.) He didn't remember it! He phoned his mother, my cousin in Los Angeles, and she couldn't remember

it either. (So, not all the family are religious.)

She called me. "Nu, so you're the family genealogist. Do you know what X's Hebrew name is?"

"Not off hand," I said, "But I'll get to work on it right away."

And now to the search: I remembered that this cousin, her husband, the twins X and Y, a younger son and a niece they were raising had moved to Cleveland years ago when her husband was transferred there for a two or three year stay.

I also remembered the twins had had their bar mitzvahs in Cleveland. I had not attended the event, but my parents had. (By this time my parents were dead. My father, good family historian that he was, would have known their Hebrew names.)

It would have been ridiculous to write every Cleveland synagogue, or to the social pages in all the Jewish newspapers there, looking for information. Instead, I remembered I had other relatives on my mother's side in Cleveland. Although I didn't know her, I called my second cousin. Yes, she remembered X and Y's family, had visited with their family when they had lived in Cleveland. And yes, she and her family had attended the bar mitzvahs and the social event that followed. She remembered the names of the temple and of the social hall. I called both. No, they didn't keep old records of bar or bat mitzvahs. Remember, by now it was over 15 years since this event had taken place. I wrote to social columns in the local Jewish newspapers. No luck.

So I had to report to X's mother, my cousin, that their genealogy detective had failed.

Postscript. X married his new love. I still don't know his Shem Hakodesh. I think it should be "Abraham," after our first father, who started our family tree.

Number 2: Another cousin, a male, on my paternal side (his mother was my father's older sister) lived in New Jersey. He and his wife had two sons, both very bright. (Of course, we have only bright kids in my family.) One son went to MIT and the other one, the most religious member of my current living family, went to Yeshiva University in New York. He studied accounting but did mitzvas all the time. On the Sabbath, he walked many blocks to help conduct services for a small struggling synagogue whose

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handful of remaining members were older people.

He became a CPA and worked for the IRS. From time to time he received awards for innovations he had suggested. But this maven was still a bachelor.

One year, he signed up for a "See Europe" trip with the Geshher Travel Agency in New York. ("Geshher" means "bridge" in Hebrew.) This travel agency can arrange trips almost anywhere and can assure you of kosher food at every stop. Here, I suggest you look at a map that includes Europe and Israel. See how close Israel is to Europe and Africa. When things are peaceful, Israelis travel, too.

Jack took the "See Europe" trip and I began getting postcards and notes from him from France, Italy, Toledo in Spain.

Now, skip a month of two. I'm in New York to attend the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association. Of course, I visit with Jack's family. When I plan to leave New York, Jack's family say they will see me off at the Newark airport. I meet them there, including the just-returned European traveler, Jack.

He hugs me. We chat about his European adventures. Then he says, a bit shyly, "I fell for a charming Israeli woman on the trip. I think I'd like to marry her. So, I've decided to take a three-month leave of absence and go to Israel next month to court her."

Now, this all takes place in the midst of one of the perennial debates in Israel on "Who is a Jew?" This is an important issue because at Israel's founding, the basic laws include the right of return. Anyone who can prove he is a Jew has a legal right to immigrate to Israel and become a citizen. A few years back a large group of Ethiopian Jews were repatriated (I suppose we should use that word) to Israel.

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**Ukraine**, cont. from page 8

Schattner gravesites and one Schmerler gravesite. Unfortunately, we then found out that the map of the cemetery had been lost and no one knew where the "locations" listed in the directory were actually located. All we could do was hire one of the cemetery workers who said he'd look for the sites.

In the afternoon, we drove out to Vishnitz, a town about 50 miles east of Czernowitz. Vishnitz, which once was 80 percent Jewish, was famous as the home of the "Vishnitzer rabbis," as well as being the former home of my branch of the Schmerler family. Upon arriving in Vishnitz, our first stop was the town hall, where the mayor and the city council happened to be in session. When they became aware that my grandmother was born and raised in Vishnitz and that my great grandfather had apparently been the mayor,

Currently, Russian Jews, Spanish Conversos, other African or Indian Jews are coming to Israel.

So Jack goes to Israel and courts Hadassah. She says "Yes," but her family asks, "But is he a Jew?" (Remember, this is asked about one of the most devout of our family members.)

Jack calls his father in New Jersey. "Can you help, Dad?" In turn, "Dad," my cousin Wolf, calls me — who else but the family genealogist?

My first suggestion — check your synagogue records. Next, go to the two cemeteries in New York and New Jersey where Jack's grandparents are buried and take pictures of the tombstones.

Cousin Wolf calls back in about a week, elated and wanting to thank me. He has Polaroid pictures of his mother's and his father's tombstones (you know, of course, he didn't need his father's tombstone picture, since Judaism is based on the matrilineal line — a pretty smart concept — if you remember wars, captures, rapes, and murders over the centuries of our history.)

Then Wolf adds, "I also checked my safe deposit box. Guess what I found? Apparently, our synagogue did give out certificates of each bris, and there was one for Jack! I'd forgotten that."

So, Jack (that is, Yaakov) married Hadassah, made Aliyah to Israel, and now works for a government agency there. They have three children. They have dual citizenship, U.S. and Israeli.

Yaakov visits his widowed mother in Munsey, New York about every six months. He calls or writes me, too.

All is well. We know his family are all good Jews. So that's how being a family genealogist in your family might be useful instead of boring.

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we were received with great warmth and enthusiasm. (Indeed, I must say that we were treated with helpfulness and kindness by all the Ukrainians we met during our travels.) The mayor attempted to help us in my search for a birth record for my grandmother as well as town records for the years between 1860 and 1900 when my great grandfather was said to have been mayor. Unfortunately, no birth records survived for the year of my grandmother's birth, and — to my amazement — there were absolutely no records left indicating who had been mayor of the town between 1860 and 1900.

The mayor did provide us with the name and address of the only Jew he was aware of still living in Vishnitz — Sasha Tauscher. After wandering about a little, we finally found him. Besides being a physician, Sasha had also taken upon himself the task of attempting to

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preserve as much as he could of Vishnitz's Jewish heritage. So in addition to telling us what he knew about Vishnitz's Jewish history, Sasha showed us around the town, pointing out what remained of the town's former vibrant Jewish life: the former synagogue which was now a theatre, the buildings that once housed the school of the Vishnitzer rabbis, and the site of the mikvah which was said to have been used by the Baal Shem Tov.

The next day we headed directly to Kutu, the village adjacent to Vishnitz that for generations had been the home of most of the Schattner family. Again we started at the town hall. The mayor of Kutu was also quite friendly and helpful, but once again we were unable to find any birth records (this time of my grandfather).

Accompanied by the mayor, we next tried to find the former home of Sonia Schattner, whom we had met a few years ago in Argentina. The directions we had were limited ("Our house was on the Welniana street 50m from the Armenian Church.") Eventually, with the mayor's guidance, we found the street, but we couldn't determine which house she had lived in. None of the people we spoke with remembered the name Schattner.

We then went looking for the Lateshevs, the Jewish family we had been told about by Rabbi Kolesnik. Unfortunately, when we finally located the right house, no one was home. Next stop was the Kutu cemetery. Again the cemetery was in very bad shape. The tombstones — when readable at all — were almost exclusively in Hebrew and often didn't include surnames. Amazingly, we were still able to find tombstones for a Chaim Schattner, his wife (whose first name we couldn't decipher) and a Michel Schattner. (The three tombstones are all at the end of the cemetery near a farm.) How many other Schattner graves are lost in the Kutu cemetery we'll never know.

Finding the Schattner graves in Kutu was very moving for me, and — despite the fact that I'm about as unreligious a Jew as there is — I felt compelled to ask Sue to help me recite Kaddish at the gravesite.

Before we left Kutu, Alex stopped some old people in the street, asking them if they remembered any Jews, any Schattners or the inns my father's aunt and uncle ran before WWII. But we had no luck. Most people had come to Kutu only after WWII and if they knew of any Jews at all, they were always the one

family that we hadn't found at home.

From Kutu we went off to Kosov, a village a few miles away where other branches of the Schattner family had lived. There we looked for the Waxmans — the other Jewish family that Rabbi Kolesnik had told us about. This time we had more luck. After some searching (street signs in the Ukraine are very rare), we found the Waxman home. Mrs. Waxman and her Ukrainian husband welcomed us warmly into their modest home. An elderly couple with grown children no longer living in the area, they clearly felt quite isolated — especially from the Jewish community with whom their primary contacts were periodic visits organized to bring them food and other necessities.

Coincidentally, while we were at their home, one of these visits from the Jewish community took place. And one of the visitors was Alek Lateshev — of the Kutu family we had tried unsuccessfully to find a few hours earlier. Clearly, the Jewish community in this area was pretty small! Alek said that when he and his family had heard that there were foreign Jews in Kutu looking for them, they had all gone into the village to look for us and that is how we had missed each other!

We decided to go back to Kutu with Alek to meet his family. On the way, Alek showed us a small, hill-top memorial marking the spot where hundreds of Kosov Jews had been killed in the Holocaust. (Like all the other Ukrainian Holocaust Memorials we saw, this one was built with Western Jewish funds in the last ten years, since the fall of the Soviet Union.)

I asked Alek whether he recognized the name Schattner. Leah Schattner, who only left the Ukraine for Israel ten years ago, had originally been from the Kosov area. He didn't recognize the name, but he asked me whether I recognized his grandmother's maiden name — which was "Sender." I was stunned, because I knew from my father that one of his uncles who was killed in the Holocaust was named Chaim Sender. Although we were unable to determine the relationship between Chaim Sender and Alek's family, knowing that Kutu was always a very small village, I was convinced — and amazed — that I had found a Jewish person there who was some kind of distant relative.

The Lateshevs welcomed us with great excitement and shared their sad and poignant life histories: How they had barely survived the Nazis; their difficult lives



*Tombstone of Chaim Schattner in Kutu cemetery*

*Continued next page*

**Ukraine**, cont. from page 13

after the war; and how they could not immigrate to Israel (as much as they dreamed of it) because Mr. Lateshev was Ukrainian (not Jewish). They had been married in a church and hence were not “Jewish enough” to qualify under the Israeli “Law of Return.” On the other hand they were Jewish enough to have felt hostility from many of their Ukrainian neighbors for many years.

Tearing ourselves away from the Lateshev family was not easy, but we needed to return to Czernovitz before nightfall. (Driving in the Ukraine after dark can be quite dangerous — cars drive without headlights, and people or cows may be in the middle of unlit roads.) On the way back, we stopped briefly at the Vishnitz cemetery, hoping to find a gravesite of one of the Schmerlers from my branch of the family — but this time we were not successful.

In the morning, we returned to the Czernovitz archives. The director had made us a copy of the old Czernovitz street map. (She hadn't been able to give us a copy on our previous visit because they had no photocopying facilities at the archive.) She also showed us some old Czernowitz “Addressbooks” that she had found. (An Addressbook is like a modern telephone book, but without the telephone numbers because few people at that time had telephones.) I studied the 1913 Addressbook with astonishment. There were four Schattners listed, including my grandfather Schulim at 12 Dr-Reichsgasse. The

other three names (Pinchas, Nuchim and Mendel Schattner) were also familiar to me from my genealogical charts as ancestors from other branches of the Schattner family. In addition there were listings for Schattners and Schmerlers in the the 1915 Addressbook.

Armed with the old street map, we next went in search of 12 Dr-Reichsgasse, the house where my father was born. Finding the street was easy, and the houses all looked old enough, so that the house was probably there. However, not knowing which house number was which, I had to content myself with the knowledge that at least I was on the street where my father had been born.

Returning to the Czernovitz cemetery was also somewhat disappointing. Even with the cemetery directory information, the cemetery worker had been unable to find any of the Schattner or Schmerler gravesites. Since we still had a long drive back to Lvov, we had to leave with these family gravesites unvisited.

We reached Lvov in the evening, in time for Shabbat services at the Lvov Synagogue. The rabbi and his wife — a young Chassidic couple from Brooklyn — graciously invited us to their home after the services. Attending these services and seeing that Jewish spirit and community are again alive in the Western Ukraine in 2001 felt like a fitting completion to this emotionally powerful “journey to the past” for the two of us.

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**Lithuania**, cont. from page 10

again active as a result of the resurgence of the Jewish community there, are usually inscribed in both Hebrew and Russian.)

A few stones were still whole, but I couldn't read the inscriptions because they were too faded or damaged. (Unfortunately, I had forgotten to bring with me some means to enhance the readability of the stones, such as flour.) However, I took many photos, in case they might be more legible.

(I also later commissioned a friend at the Jewish Museum in Vilnius to return to the Paberze cemetery, and to enhance and photograph for me each of the possibly readable stones in the cemetery. This second set of photographs has since yielded most of the information from the remaining stones.)

Finally I came upon one stone that was quite readable. I gasped in amazement to read on the stone that the deceased's surname was “Ogus”! I couldn't believe the serendipity that the one stone that was still in fairly good condition turned out to be a stone for an Ogus family member! It almost seemed that this stone was just waiting there for me to discover it.

I looked at the name carefully, and saw that the full name of the individual was *Shimon Yitzchak ben Yechiel Michel Ogus*. It turned out that this individual was one of the more elusive members of my Ogus family tree. My research had shown that he had lived in nearby Giedraiciai, but I had thus far not managed to find any original records that explicitly referred to him, and at times I had wondered whether this person had actually existed. With the discovery of his gravestone, I had finally found tangible proof that he had existed.

Calculating from the Hebrew date of death on the stone, I determined that Shimon had died in 1895. The stone was in remarkably good condition, given that it was over a hundred years old.

I also wondered why Shimon had been buried in Paberze when I had believed that he had left the town early in the 19th Century, probably to live in the nearby town of Giedraiciai. I later discovered that there was no Jewish cemetery in Giedraiciai, and that the Jewish dead from there were usually buried in Paberze. Thus, even if Shimon had moved to Giedraiciai, he would have been buried in Paberze when he died.

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I was very excited to find this very tangible trace of not only the Jewish community, but also of the Ogus family, and this was really a wonderful start to my Roots Tour.

Our second stop in Paberze was at the marker of the spot where the Jewish inhabitants of the town had been killed by the Nazis. (These memorial markers have been erected by the Lithuanian government, and can be found outside nearly all the towns and shtetls. It is horrific to look at the map of the mass exterminations that took place in Lithuania during the Holocaust. Nearly every town in the country was affected. In the large cities such as Vilnius and Kaunas the numbers of those killed were appallingly large.)

Some of these markers are very elaborate and well-maintained, while others, such as the memorial outside Paberze, are miserable and bare, having obviously not been maintained for a long time, and from which thieves had long ago stolen all the plaques.

The one common feature I noticed about the location of several of the death markers (I saw these memorials in six or seven towns) is that they were situated in the most beautiful and idyllic locations in a remote part of lush forestland outside each town, surrounded by gorgeous trees and vegetation. As we trudged the long distance on foot to each of these remote locations, it was chilling to consider the thoughts of the unfortunate Jews who had been forced to walk this very same path more than 60 years ago.

At the well-maintained killing sites, the markers usually contained a sign with inscriptions in the Lithuanian, Yiddish, and sometimes Hebrew, indicating that this was the site where the Jewish people from this town were murdered on a particular date. On the signs, the number of people involved was usually indicated, often enumerating the specific numbers of men, women, and children separately.

We spent the rest of our time in Paberze and Giedraiciai looking for and interviewing the older residents. My guide was wonderfully helpful in this objective. All the elderly people in Paberze spoke Polish, but the people in Giedraiciai preferred to use Lithuanian. I had briefed my guide before about my interests in the towns so she asked them all my questions and tried to extract information for me.

We met one 90-year man, and several who were older than 80. Almost all the older men remembered the Jews who had lived in the town, and they spoke about their many memories of the community. I was amazed at how much they could still remember from before the war. Their stories were very similar. They recounted how badly the Jews were treated, and they

could recall specific incidents when a number of Jews were captured and marched at gunpoint to the forests, never to be seen again. They told stories of how the wooden houses and other Jewish buildings in the community were burned to the ground. None of the former Jewish structures seemed to have survived in either town.

All could remember the first names of the Jews, such as "Jankel," "Shmuel," "Gershon," "Chazkel," etc. but none could remember any of the family names, including "Ogus." Apparently at that time, the surnames of the families were not used very frequently.

The town of Giedraiciai had a similar character and feel to that of Paberze, although it seemed larger and more developed. There also appeared to be a larger number of churches and other Christian religious institutions than in Paberze. There were no traces of the former Jewish community in the town and no Jewish cemetery.

The net result of the visits to the two towns was that I learned a great deal of general and colorful information about the old Jewish families that had lived there, but found nothing tangible remaining of those communities, other than the Jewish cemetery in Paberze. I don't believe there are any Jews now living in either of the two towns.

I also found nothing specific relating to the Ogus families, other than the exciting gravestone in Paberze. However, it was amazing to hear the first-hand accounts from the local people, so vividly portraying to me what life must have been like in these old shtetls before the war and earlier in the century. It was so sad that these vibrant Jewish communities had been wiped out so cruelly during the Holocaust, and all traces of their existence razed to the ground.

### **Ukmerge and Vievis**

The third town we visited on the Roots Tour was Ukmerge (formerly called Wilkomir), a town much larger than either Paberze or Giedraiciai. Before the World War II, a fairly large Jewish community had lived there; today only a handful of Jews remains. From my research I knew that one branch of my Ogus family lived in Wilkomir, and I wanted to find some trace of their existence.

The town today is quite bustling, although generally unattractive, drab, and dreary. My guide explained that it was a typical "Soviet-looking" town that has not changed much since Lithuanian independence. Both my guide and driver described the hardships people endured under the Soviet regime.

The Soviet-style buildings are huge concrete block

*Continued on next page*

*Lithuania, cont. from page 15*

structures with no apparent attempt to look at all pleasing on the outside. The outside surfaces look unfinished — dull, gray concrete. In many places they were visibly deteriorating. There was very little glass. (Even in the modern parts of the city of Vilnius, the buildings show very little glass on their exteriors. In fact, our Vilnius tour guide had commented to us that when she visited the USA, she was amazed that the large new buildings appeared to be built entirely out of glass.)

Due to the persistence of my guide and driver, we managed to turn up a few wonderful local resources. Of course we visited the local marker of the destruction of the Jews. Unlike its counterpart in Paberze, this memorial was quite elaborate. Although we found the site of the former Jewish cemetery, I was disappointed that it consisted of an open field with a solitary memorial stone, and only one remaining gravestone. (The memorial plaque had been stolen by vandals.) My guide told me that most of the old gravestones had been destroyed by the Soviets, and that the material from the destroyed stones had been re-used as building materials. One undamaged gravestone had apparently been found later and taken back to the cemetery location. The inscription on the stone was unreadable.

My driver knew of a local Jewish man who lived in Ukmerge, and he arranged for us to meet at the central town square. I was surprised that the man appeared to be only in his 30s, and yet he seemed to know a great deal about the old Jewish community in the town. He explained to me that his father had lived there before the war, and he had heard many stories about the community from him.

He confirmed that an Ogus family had indeed lived there, and that his father had known them. He remembered that they had owned a store. He offered to take us for a walk around the town center and to point out where all the Jews had lived, and where their buildings had been located. (Of course, today no Jewish establishments remain.) He took us through alleys and backyards, explaining who had lived at each location. He showed us an old painted sign on a wall that remained intact, indicating that this building had housed a dentist. The sign was written in Lithuanian and Yiddish!

He showed us a large building that had been the old synagogue. The building, which looked very much like a synagogue, was now in a bad state of disrepair. It now houses a sports facility, and there were numerous basketball hoops on most of the outside walls. There apparently is a surviving stained-glass panel inside, but because the building was locked we weren't able to see this panel. A nearby building

was the former Jewish school, now an arts school.

I had heard of a painted sign that had survived in Ukmerge and bears the name "Ogus," and one of my quests on this Roots trip was to find it. I asked the local resident whether he knew anything about it, and he immediately said that he would show it to me! He took us down another back alley, and there it was, on the outside wall of a building. It was very strange seeing the sign — the wall had obviously been painted fairly recently, but for some reason, this painted sign had not been painted over. I was pleased to see that in this case, this old Jewish artifact had been preserved!

The building now appeared to house apartments, but I could imagine that a store could have been located in the ground floor.

The sign read (in Lithuanian): "*General Store - Ch. Galaite-Oguziene.*"

My guide explained the name as follows: the suffix "iene" at the end of a Lithuanian name indicates a married female. The suffix "aite" added to a surname denotes an unmarried female. This naming system is still used today in Lithuania. (Only the female names have these endings — called declensions — the surnames of males do not show specific suffixes. However, many of the Lithuanian surnames end in "as", which is a suffix that has been added to an original name to "Lithuanianize" the surname. For example, the telephone book entry in Vilnius for a Mr. J. Oguzas — the present-day Lithuanian form of the surname Ogus.)

The local guide explained that the first name on the above sign, "Ch.", likely indicated the given name Chaia or Chana. Thus, the proprietor of the store was Chaia or Chana, maiden name Gal, whose husband was Mr. Oguz. (All the original Ogus names are spelled with a hard ending - "z" - in the Lithuanian and Russian documents.) I thus had finally found my Ogus sign!

We then went to the local Ukmerge Museum, but found nothing about the Jewish community in their displays. My guide immediately took us to the museum offices to inquire about any Jewish materials or any old documents. For example, we had heard that they possibly owned an old pre-war phone book. The office staff did not seem too eager to help us, but my guide persisted. Finally, the staff agreed to search in their archives in the basement, and suggested that we return to the library in an hour to review their findings.

Upon our return, we were presented with an old phone book and a one-inch thick folder of documents, with the cover labeled "Jewish." With

*Continued on next page*

my guide by my side, I reviewed the file, document by document. There were a number of interesting documents about the town's former Jewish community, some of them fairly modern (including some print-outs of Internet Web page articles), but unfortunately I didn't find anything about the Ogus family. I found a page showing the graduating class photos of the 1931 Jewish elementary school in Ukmerge, together with pictures of the teachers. All the names were written in Yiddish, except for the teachers, who were obviously Lithuanian and not Jewish.

I found the Ogus entry in the phone book (it listed the name as "M. Oguzas," obviously referring to Meier Ogus), with an address exactly where the man who had shown us around had pointed out the former Ogus house. (The location is now part of the open area in the town square.) A date could not be found on the telephone book, but the staff believed that the telephone book had been published around 1939, when the Jewish community in the town was still quite large.

The last of my Roots towns was Vievis (also known as Veviya in Yiddish). This town is located about the same distance west of Vilnius, on the main highway between Vilnius and Kaunas, as Paberze was to the north. Vievis is much more modern than the other towns I had visited, perhaps since it is located on the main thoroughfare, with easier access to the city of Vilnius. We went through the same procedure in the town, and managed to link up with a Jewish family who lived there. Unfortunately they knew very little about the community from before the war, and they knew nothing about the name "Ogus."

Only a small portion of the old Jewish cemetery remains in Vievis. We were told that when the Vilnius-Kaunas highway was built by the Russians in the 1960s, it was designed to run right through the center of the old Jewish cemetery. The Russians

bulldozed their way through the cemetery, destroying all the gravestones in their path, and collecting the debris of the stones for use as building materials.

As a result, only a small portion of the cemetery now remains, adjacent to the highway. To visit this remnant of the cemetery, we had to stop at the side of the freeway, turn on our emergency blinkers, and climb up the embankment at the side of the road. At the top of the embankment was a tremendously overgrown forested area, in which could be seen the scattered remains of a few gravestones. This was another very sad sight. I climbed through the brush and took pictures of the few remaining stones. None of the inscriptions was very readable, and I did not recognize any of the names on the stones.

Aside from the one or two Jewish families that now reside in the town, there appeared to be no trace of the former Jewish community that had lived there before the war.

My trip to Lithuania, and in particular, the visits to the shtetls on the Roots Tour, was an amazing, though very emotional experience. The trip had a tremendous impact on me, the extent of which I could not have predicted beforehand. I found that learning about and experiencing first-hand the wrenching accounts of the Jewish communities that had lived in the country and their fate during the Holocaust made these stories much more personal and less abstract. I had embarked on the Roots Tour to my family shtetls with the hope of finding some trace of the old Jewish communities that had lived in these towns, and possibly even a trace of my family. In fact, I found few physical traces of the old communities, but the few tangible artifacts that I found, such as the Ogus gravestone, were very exciting for me, making the visit so very meaningful. I will not forget this trip and my experiences in Lithuania for a long time to come.



*Site of the former Ogus General store*

## COMPUTER/ONLINE NEWS

### Sources for Research in the U.S.

#### Websites Celebrate U.S. Jewish History

*Diane Greenspun, Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain Newsletter*

While noodling in the website for the National Archives in Washington D.C. ([www.archives.gov](http://www.archives.gov)) I saw a link to two websites of interest marking this year's 350th anniversary of Jewish settlement in the United States. They are [www.350th.org](http://www.350th.org) and [www.celebrate350.org](http://www.celebrate350.org). The Library of Congress will be hosting a special major exhibition as well.

I also note that the Archives website has special links for Jewish-American genealogy research.

#### US Army Database lists WWII Enlistees

*Hilary Henkin, JewishGen*

A wonderful new database at NARA is the "Electronic Army Serial Number Merged File, circa 1938 - 1946." It is part of the AAD - Access to Archival Databases System. This particular database has records for close to 9 million enlistees in the U.S. Army for WWII. You can search for individual names or by state and county, or a combination. Wildcards are permitted, too.

To search by state and county, start at [www.archives.gov/aad/index.html](http://www.archives.gov/aad/index.html). Click on SEARCH, then select ALL SERIES. The Army file is the sixth entry down. From there it's pretty self-explanatory. Be sure to select the state and county codes from the code lists. Don't type the place names in.

#### State of Maryland Indexes Vital Records

*Monica Leonards, JewishGen*

Maryland has begun putting indexes to its vital records on-line: [mdvitalrec.net/cfm/index.cfm](http://mdvitalrec.net/cfm/index.cfm)

So far they have death records for the entire state (1898-1944) and for the City of Baltimore (1875-1942).

The interface is a little confusing and time-consuming, but usable. You can also generate a form to order the documents, but so far there's no on-line ordering.

#### Searchable Online City Directories

*Adelle Gloger, JewishGen*

As often happens, when looking for one thing we find something else. Recently I found searchable city directories on [www.distantcousin.com/](http://www.distantcousin.com/). Searches and results are free. The images are very good quality.

Most states are represented with selected cities. On the main page the default search facility is "whole site." Using this option and typing in a surname will bring up all hits on the site for that name.

#### AJHS Landsmanshaftn Papers Inventory Now Online

*Irene Newhouse, JewishGen*

Jerome Seligsohn's inventory of Landsmanshaftn papers at the American Jewish Historical Society, as well as the inventory of papers from locality-oriented Workmens Circle groups [all AJHS call number I-332] is now online at: [www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Lida-District/landsmen.htm](http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Lida-District/landsmen.htm)

#### Obituary Index for St. Louis, Mo

*Jeremy Frankel, JewishGen*

The obituary index of the *St. Louis Post Dispatch* newspaper can be found at [www.slpl.lib.mo.us/libsrc/obit.htm](http://www.slpl.lib.mo.us/libsrc/obit.htm). The years covered so far are 1880 to 1921, 1942 to 1945 and 1992 to 2002. Each year is organized by three letter groups, A-I, J-R and S-Z. There are also WW1 and WW2 casualty lists as well as Missing In Action and Prisoners of War. The index provides the date of issue and the page number.

#### Brooklyn Genealogy Site a Good Source

*Joan Parker, JewishGen*

The Brooklyn Genealogy site [www.bklyn-genealogy-info.com/index.html](http://www.bklyn-genealogy-info.com/index.html) includes databases, some directories, newspapers, and more.

*President's Message, cont. from page 2*

researching did know him). I checked online at the California State Library, and sure enough, good old Sutro Library has a microfiche version of the 1886 History of Logan County. But then a thought hit me. I'm a card-carrying member of the California Genealogical Society, and one of the benefits of membership is "remote access" to some of the Heritage Quest databases. I duly logged on while at home and clicked on the word "place" and typed in "Logan." A quick scroll down and there it was. HQ had scanned in all 560-plus pages, and the book could be viewed online! Boy, was I being spoiled.

This got an old thought of mine going again, which is how we genealogists expect nearly anything genealogical to be "available" for us to use. We are quick to forget that birth, marriage and death certificates actually have another function; that

census records were created for state and federal government purposes; that passenger records were created for the federal government to know who was coming into America. Here we are in the 21st century, and push has come to shove. Except one has to ask, who is doing the pushing and shoving? Is it the genealogists in our insatiable thirst for more information, or is it the commercial online genealogy companies, who can see where the next buck is coming from?

So here we are pushing the envelope. What constitutes a genealogical record? If there is a list of names in a book, does that automatically bring the item under the purview of genealogy? What was once arcane, is now mainstream. The lines may be blurred, but whatever we're looking for may one day turn up on line!

*Jeremy Frankel*

## Morse Website Adds Searchable Ship Arrival List

The brilliant Steven P. Morse has done it again. Morse, a member of the SFBAJGS, recently completed a searchable list of every ship arrival at Ellis Island with links to the associated manifest pages. The list includes a total of 84,000 ship arrivals. It can be accessed at [stevemorse.org/ellis/boat.html](http://stevemorse.org/ellis/boat.html).

Morse and a team of 50 volunteers worked on the project for two years, recording the microfilm roll, volume, frame, date, ship name, and ports pertaining to all of the 3,700 rolls of Ellis Island microfilms for ship arrivals from 1892 to 1924. Data was also provided from Marian Smith of the Immigration and Naturalization Service and from the National Archives and Records Administration Northeast Region in Pittsfield, MA.

Why was this necessary? To quote from the FAQ on Morse's website, "The most common use is to find the manifest for a particular ship arrival. From my white, blue, or gray search form you can determine the ship and date that your ancestor arrived. But when you click to see the image of their manifest, you might get the wrong one or none at all. That's because there are linking errors on the Ellis Island website.

But since you have the ship and date, you can go to my missing-manifest page and view the manifest. Use of that page is greatly simplified if you know the roll and frame number for your ship. This ship search page helps you get that information."

In addition to ship's manifests, Morse's website [stevemorse.org](http://stevemorse.org) offers on line help with censuses and vital records.

## Finding Aid for 1790s Polish Census

*Daniel Kazez, JewishGen*

Finding information from one of the 1790's census collections is no easy job! Even if one does find the material for a town of interest, it is possible that the records will have no names, just general information on the town and its population.

I thank Barbara Krawcowicz for doing all of the needed work to make a list of towns whose 1790s census data in Warsaw's AGAD (Archiwum Głowne Akt Dawnych; Central Archives of Historical Records) includes lists of Jewish names: [www.kazez.com/~dan/0127-Census1790s.html](http://www.kazez.com/~dan/0127-Census1790s.html)

Neither Barbara nor I contend that this list is necessarily 100 percent complete or accurate.

## Search Made Easier for English Vital Records

*Jill Anderson, JewishGen*

There is now a web site, [www.1837online.com](http://www.1837online.com) where you can find British birth, marriage and death records from 1837 to the present and order certificates for England and Wales. It costs 10 pence to search for one item and there's a minimum payment of five UK pounds which is valid for 45 days.

Follow the link to "ordering a certificate" and then the link to "ordering from the GRO" (General Register Office). This service is available to overseas customers.

Note that the site is commercial, it requires registration and it may be necessary to download a specific plug-in software in order to use the site.

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