



# זכרונות

## ZichronNote

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

Volume XXXV, Number 3

August 2015

#### Emperor Norton's True Birthday Confirmed

After several birthdates had been put forth over the years for Emperor Norton, a Jewish ritual provides the correct answer. See page 5.

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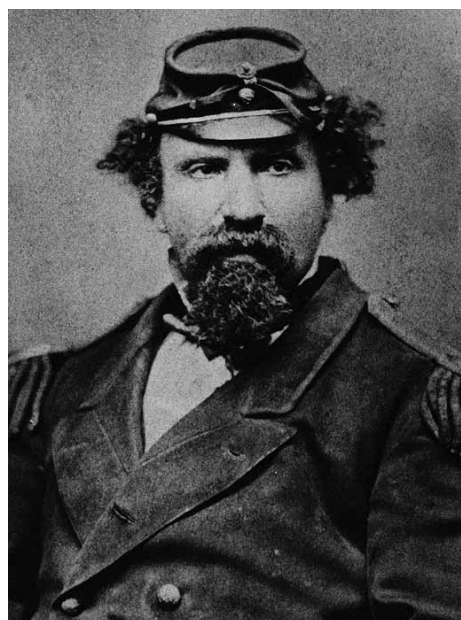
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*Norton I, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico*

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**Jewish Genealogical Society**

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Note: All URL's are valid as of the time of publication.

**President's Message**  
**And That's the Truth**

Jeremy Frankel, SFBAJGS President

I subscribe to the hard copy edition of the weekly *Jewish Forward*. When this newspaper arrives, whoever is reading it often yells out something of genealogical interest. This week it was my turn as I read Benjamin Ivry's book review of *The Selected Letters of Langston Hughes* (edited by Arnold Rampersad), which appeared in the 26 June 2015 issue.

For younger society members not familiar with his name, Langston Hughes was a black American poet of note. He was born in 1902 in Joplin, Missouri, and died in 1967. His ashes are interred beneath a floor medallion in the middle of the foyer in the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in Harlem (source: Wikipedia).

What caught my attention in the review was a comment from an earlier publication written by Hughes, *The Big Sea: An Autobiography*. Hughes wrote that his "mother's father was a Jewish slave trader in Kentucky named Silas Cushenberry." Anyone with a basic grasp of arithmetic would know this could not be—it would have to have been his great-grandfather (whatever happened to the good old fact-checker?).

Not unsurprisingly, the genealogical antennae were quivering. We put aside our research projects and began sketching out Langston Hughes' family history. It wasn't too difficult to work backward to the post-Civil War years, but the trail became murky because the 1860 U.S. Federal Census generally did not enumerate slaves by name. My partner did some "global" surveys of the name Cushenberry using the earliest U.S. census records. There were no indications of Jewish affiliation, so we looked further and came across a compilation of the history of the Cushenberry families published in 1897, *Genealogical Memoranda of the Quisenberry Families*, by Anderson Chenault Quisenberry (<https://archive.org/details/genealogicalmemo00quis>). None of the families was Jewish.

Here we have a clear example, pre-Internet, of incorrect information going "viral." This particular assertion is repeated ad nauseam throughout literature about Hughes' life. Even the University of Kentucky was taken in; its database of Notable Kentucky African Americans includes a mention of James Nathaniel Hughes (1871–1934) that states:

"He was the father of Langston Hughes and the son of Emily Cushenberry and James H. Hughes. James

*Continued on page 6*

## SOCIETY NEWS

### New Members

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Paul Concus ..... pconcus@earthlink.net

In order to continue to receive the SFBAJGS e-blast and *ZichronNote*, please send e-mail updates to [newsletter@sfbajgs.org](mailto:newsletter@sfbajgs.org).

### SFBAJGS on Social Media

SFBAJGS has a new YouTube channel, at [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWKb5\\_oyV0jP0TbSmBgq20A](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWKb5_oyV0jP0TbSmBgq20A). This gives us an opportunity to share our activities, lectures, meetings, participation in events, Mavens, etc. So far we have one video, which was shot at the 2015 San Francisco History Expo and includes an appearance by Emperor Norton himself! If you have any videos of society or other genealogical events you would like to share online, contact membership director Avner Yonai at [membership@sfbajgs.org](mailto:membership@sfbajgs.org).

SFBAJGS also has a Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/San-Francisco-Bay-Area-Jewish-Genealogical-Society/54214774804?ref=ts>. Friend us and visit often for announcements and updates between meetings.

### Your Story Belongs in ZichronNote

Did you meet a cousin at the 2015 IAJGS Conference in Jerusalem? Have you had a breakthrough in your family history, solved a family mystery through painstaking research, discovered a better way to use resource materials, or walked where your ancestors walked as part of a heritage trip? Have you had success or made progress at the Genealogy Clinic with the Mavens?

Tell us your story, share your discovery! We want to read about it in *ZichronNote*. Please submit materials to [newsletter@sfbajgs.org](mailto:newsletter@sfbajgs.org).

### Member News

**Judy Baston** was awarded the Lifetime Achievement Award at the IAJGS 2015 conference. Read Beth Galleto's article on page 10 for details.

**Steve Morse's** One-Step Website was named one of the Top 101 Genealogy Websites of 2015 by *Family Tree Magazine*, in the category of best online genealogy tools: <http://familytreemagazine.com/article/best-search-engine-websites-2015>.

**Avner Yonai** helped coordinate the appearance of the Ger Mandolin Orchestra at the inaugural KulturefestNYC, presented by the National Yiddish Theater Folksbiene on the occasion of its 100th anniversary.

### We Need More Volunteers for the Cemetery Project!

Members of the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society have transcribed more than 35,000 cemetery records that have been added to the Jewish Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR) managed by JewishGen. We applaud the volunteers who have done this tremendous amount of work, and we now have new sets of burial records to transcribe. Send a message to [cemetery@sfbajgs.org](mailto:cemetery@sfbajgs.org) if you can help.

### Meeting Times and Locations

Unless otherwise indicated, the SFBAJGS meeting schedule is as follows.

**San Francisco: Sunday. Doors open 1:00 p.m. Program begins at 1:30 p.m.**

Rhoda Goldman Plaza, 2180 Post Street.

Parking available in Rhoda Goldman Plaza garage with entrance on Sutter Street.

**Oakland: Sunday. Doors open 12:30 p.m. Program begins at 1:00 p.m.**

Oakland FamilySearch Center, 4766 Lincoln Avenue.

**Los Altos Hills: Monday. Doors open 7 p.m. Program begins at 7:30 p.m.**

Congregation Beth Am, 26790 Arastradero Road Room 5/6.

**See Back Cover for Calendar of Upcoming SFBAJGS Meetings**

## CALENDAR

### Genealogy Events

#### Local and Regional

Tuesday, 15 September 2015. Jim Hodges, "Photo Recovery Workshop." Santa Clara County Historical and Genealogical Society. Margie Edinger Room, Santa Clara City Public Library, 2635 Homestead Road, Santa Clara. <http://www.l-ags.org/>

Saturday, 19 September 2015. James Baker, "Peripatetic Germans." San Mateo County Genealogical Society. Grace Lutheran Church Hall, 2825 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo. <http://www.smcgs.org/>

Saturday, 26 September 2015. Janice M. Sellers, "Ashes to Ashes, Dust to Dust: What's Buried in Cemetery Records." California Genealogical Society and Library, 2201 Broadway Suite LL2, Oakland. <http://californiaancestors.org/>

Sunday, 27 September 2015. Glenn Kurtz, "Three Minutes in Poland: Discovering a Lost World in a 1938 Family Film." Jewish Genealogical Society of Sacramento. Albert Einstein Residence Center, 1935 Wright Street, Sacramento. <http://www.jewishgen.org/jgs-sacramento/>

Saturday, 10 October 2015. Family History Day. Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group. LDS Family History Center, 875 Quince Avenue, Santa Clara. <http://www.svpafug.org/>

Thursday, 15 October 2015. Sierra Pope, "Genealogy Blogs: How They Can Help Your Genealogy Research." Napa Valley Genealogical Society. NVGS Library, 1701 Menlo Avenue, Napa. <http://www.napavalleygenealogy.org/programs.html>

Saturday, 17 October 2015. CSGA board meeting and joint seminar with Genealogical Society of Santa Cruz County. Wendy Elliot, "Finding Wives' and Daughters' Names"; Janice M. Sellers, "Read All About It! Using Online Newspapers for Genealogical Research"; Mary Ann Vincent, "Mapping Our Ancestors: They Went Where? Why?" **Free.** Santa Cruz Public Library, 224 Church Street, Santa Cruz. <http://www.csga.com/>, <http://scgensoc.org/>

Saturday, 17 October 2015. Fall Fling Seminar. Contra Costa County Genealogical Society. St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, 1601 Mary Drive, Pleasant Hill. <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~caccggs>

Sunday, 18 October 2015. Susan Miller, "Jews in the Moslem World." Jewish Genealogical Society of Sacramento. Albert Einstein Residence Center, 1935 Wright Street, Sacramento. <http://www.jewishgen.org/jgs-sacramento/>

Tuesday, 20 October 2015. Cheryl Tier, "Using One Note or Evernote in Genealogy Research." San Ramon

Valley Genealogical Society. Alamo LDS Church, 2949 Stone Valley Road, Alamo. <http://www.srvgensoc.org/>

Saturday, 24 October 2015. Steve Morse, "One-Step Website: A Potpourri of Genealogical Search Tools" and "One-Step Website: A Hodgepodge of Lesser-Known Gems." Tuolumne County Genealogical Society Workshop. LDS Family History Center, 19481 Hillsdale Drive, Sonora. <http://www.tcgsonline.org/>

Friday, 13 November 2015. Janice M. Sellers, "They Wouldn't Put It on the Web If They Didn't Want Me to Use It: Copyright Issues for Genealogy." Oakland FamilySearch Library, 4766 Lincoln Avenue, Oakland. <http://www.oaklandfhc.org/>

#### State and National

Thursday–Saturday, 17–19 September 2015. New York State Family History Conference. Presented by New York Genealogical and Biographical Society and Central New York Genealogical Society. Syracuse/Liverpool Holiday Inn, Syracuse, New York. <http://www.nysfhc.org/>

Saturday, 24 October 2015. Ukrainian Genealogy Conference. Ukrainian Historical and Genealogical Center of New Jersey, 135 Davidson Avenue, Somerset, New Jersey. <https://www.ukrhec.org/civicrm/event/info?id=22>

7–12 August 2016. 35th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy. Seattle, Washington. <http://www.iajgs2016.org/>

3–6 November 2016. The Holocaust in the 21st Century: Relevance and Challenges in the Digital Age. Claremont, California. Call for papers deadline: **1 December 2015.** <http://goo.gl/3DGfsU>

#### International

14 October–12 November 2015. International Jewish Genealogy Month. <http://www.iajgs.org/jgmonth.html>



#### **Brainstorming with the Mavens**

The San Francisco Jewish Community Library hosts a free genealogy clinic every month (except July and August) from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m. Bring copies of family charts, documents, and other information and let experienced SFBAJGS Jewish genealogists help point you in the right direction in your research. 1835 Ellis Street, San Francisco. There is free, secure parking in the building. Call (415) 567-3327 x704 or write [library@jewishlearningworks.org](mailto:library@jewishlearningworks.org) for more information.

Upcoming dates:

11 October 2015

1 November 2015

## Establishing the Correct Birthdate of Emperor Norton

Judith Leff

Judith Leff is the Director of Arts and Cultural Programs at San Francisco's Temple Emanu-el, where Emperor Norton attended services.

San Franciscans are fiercely proud of their city, past and present. In the true SF way, we care not one whit about your Mayflower lineage or how many doilies were left to you by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Most of us don't even care where you went to college; if a San Francisco native asks what school you went to, we mean high school, with elementary and junior high thrown in for good measure. It tells us where you grew up and how, and how to start asking if you knew so and so.

We know darn well that the less than auspicious genesis of this city included gold fever, shanghaied sailors, opium dens, smuggling, the not-so-Maiden Lane, and a host of eccentric characters. Other cities can point to Ben Franklin, George Washington, Nathan Hale, but give us Oofy Goofy or give us death!

As a child, I was instantly fascinated by the tale of Emperor Norton, a businessman from South Africa who made and lost a fortune, and instead of slinking off into the cold foggy night never to be seen again, returned to us as Norton I, Emperor of the United States! I loved his uniform and his hat and his proclamations, and most of all I loved how San Francisco loved him. When I was older and learned of his Jewish background, it was a special thrill. (All Jews want everybody to turn out to be a little Jewish; that is actually the only thing we can agree on.) His few decades as the Emperor touched the lives of many in our fair city; he was even considered a tourist attraction for San Francisco travelers.

The more I read about Norton, the more I was puzzled by his ever-changing birthday. I couldn't very well have Facebook reminding me to wish him a happy birthday on four distinct days, yet it seemed there were at least four different days, from different years, that were ascribed to be the day of our Emperor's birth.



In this blessed day of online research, I was determined to see if I could find some kind of record that would corroborate one of these many potential birth dates. I decided to think "Jewishly", since it was clear that probably would not have occurred to his primary biographers. Did he perhaps have a *bar mitzvah* in Capetown? After all, his father was one of the Jews to start a community there in 1820. I reached out to a few sources in South Africa and a cousin of the Emperor's, but no record exists of this day, if it occurred.

The first Jewish event in the life of a Jewish boy is his *bris*, or circumcision, which is supposed to transpire on the eighth day after the birth. I knew Joshua Abraham Norton was born in Deptford, England; could there possibly be circumcision records

for such a small place? I scoured the Internet and struck pay dirt—somebody had digitized the records of a traveling *mohel* (ritual circumciser) named Meyer Solomon, who kept very careful track of his appointments. (The transcribed register is available at <http://www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk/susser/myersolomoncircreg.htm>.)

Here is what I found:

712 On Friday the eve of the holy Sabbath 7 Adar I '578 I c[ircumcised] Judah b [son of] Moses {Deptford; 13 Feb 1818}

What is so interesting about this is that the passenger list for the 1820 settlers to Capetown clearly shows the birthday of Joshua Abraham Norton as 4 February 1818 (transcribed online at <http://www.1820settlers.co.uk/genealogy/getperson.php?personID=1581&tree=master>). So the listed circumcision date would be just about the eighth day/Sabbath after his birth.

I shared this with a cousin of Norton. She verified that Moses corresponds to the Hebrew name of Norton's father, but she could not verify the name Judah as the Emperor's Hebrew name.



I think it is not a coincidence, and I believe that this clarifies the actual birth date of our Emperor. John Lumea, founder of the Emperor's Bridge Campaign, has presented evidence brought to him by Joseph Amster, who portrays the Emperor on his fabulous walking tour, that one of the Emperor's biographers may have actually "fudged" an article from the *Alta California* newspaper to suit the 1819 year of birth, which is the one on his headstone. From the Emperor's Bridge Campaign Web site:

"But, by manipulating the original *Alta* item to make it appear that 1865 was the occasion of the Emperor's 46th birthday—rather than his 47th, as the *Alta* item indicated—Cowan is able to 'retrofit' a source for his own claim of 1819, rather than 1818, as the Emperor's birth year."

Those interested in the saga of determining the Emperor's true birthday would do well to read the excellent articles posted by John on his page, found at <http://www.emperorsbridge.org/projects/emperors-birth-date/>.

A separate issue is that I was unhappy with the lack of response from the Jewish community of the Emperor's time when he died. San Francisco had no organized burial society in 1880, but for a man of Jewish ancestry who regularly attended services at Congregation Emanu-El on Sutter Street (he came for the music and left before the sermon), they should have stepped up.

To right this historical wrong, Emanu-El dedicated a plaque for the Emperor at Home of Peace Jewish cemetery in Colma, California, on 3 May 2015, with about 40 people in attendance. The final cementing in place will happen before the end of the summer. With the birthdate of 4 February 1818, of course!



## A Proclamation from Emperor Norton

Emperor Norton himself was in attendance at the ceremony for the dedication of the plaque at Home of Peace. After the ceremony was completed, he read the following proclamation to all in attendance:

Whereas, Judi Leff has demonstrated extraordinary service to the Empire, and

Whereas, we are gathered today in the Home of Peace to commemorate our Jewish heritage, and

Whereas, few in San Francisco, the capital of our glorious Empire, have been more devoted to honoring our memory,

Therefore, be it resolved, that We, Norton I, by grace of God Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico, do hereby declare and proclaim on this, the 3rd day of May, 2015, the 156th year of our glorious reign, that Judi Leff is an official Knight of the Empire, and bestow upon her a special appointment:

From this day forward she is granted the title and shall be known by all as Dame Judi Leff, Imperial Deputy of the Torah and Advisor on All Matters Jewish to the Government of Norton.



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### *President's Message, continued from page 2*

H. was a former slave whose mother was a slave; her father was Silas Cushenberry, a Jewish slave trader from Clark County, KY."

At least they got the generation right; it wouldn't have been Hughes' grandfather, but his great-grandfather. Still, everyone was wrong, because Cushenberry wasn't Jewish. A search online for "Langston Hughes" and "Jewish Slave Trader" brings up 414 hits in Google. It is entirely possible that there was a Jewish ancestor in Hughes' line, and he may well have been a slave trader. Sometime during the transmission of the story through generations, however, Silas Cushenberry became that Jew. Mr. Rampersad, the editor of the book that was reviewed, responded to our e-mail about this by writing, "I'm not surprised that you've come to the conclusion that the story of Cushenberry being Jewish is 'a complete fabrication.' Of course I haven't done the work to be able to comment intelligently on your conclusion but I accept it."

That an incorrect oral history became accepted as fact raises a larger concern pertinent to the

*Continued on page 11*

## **Journey to a Jewish Ancestral Town in the Old West: Corinne, the “Gentile City” of Utah, Part 1**

Heidi Lyss

Heidi Lyss delved into the world of genealogical research six years ago, on receiving a book from her father about a distant Swiss relative. She has presented seminars to Northern California genealogical societies on writing family histories and has taught creative writing and English composition at local colleges. Her published pieces include fiction, creative nonfiction, poetry, and trade/academic articles. She is a board member of SFBAJGS.

“Locust, near Montana Street?’ I don’t know of a road by that name here, but I’ll double-check.” The postmistress pulled a book down from a nearby shelf, flipped through a few pages, frowned, then looked up. “No, sorry. Maybe it was renamed.”

“I’ve seen family references to them living on a farm too. And I saw, on Sanborn fire insurance maps from 1890, some other streets all grouped together that seem to be gone now but which had plant and tree names like Willow and Rush,” I said, hoping that one or both of these associations might spark a new idea on Locust Street’s possible location. The postmistress searched for the additional road names, then shook her head again, smiled apologetically, and wished me luck. I stepped back outside into the hot August sun, ready to explore the now small outpost of Corinne, Utah, birthplace and childhood hometown of my great-grandmother Lillian Keller. She and her family appeared in the 1880 census on the elusive Locust Street, which the census taker had surveyed following his tour down Montana Street. Although I could not identify exactly where my great-grandmother had lived, I would still stroll the main streets where she would have often walked with her family and friends and explore their one-time community.

After six days of stimulating sessions on Jewish genealogy at the 2014 International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) conference in Salt Lake City, and hours passed poring over microfilm in the large air-conditioned rooms of the Latter Day Saints’ Family History Library near Tabernacle Square, I departed downtown Salt Lake in a rental car on that bright summer afternoon and traveled 60 miles north to the small town of Corinne, nestled next to the banks of the meandering Bear River at the northern reaches of the Great Salt Lake.

While driving on the interstate highway, I periodically glanced to the right, searching without success for the railroad tracks I knew ribboned alongside the highway. Amid the noise from the cars around me, I imagined the rumble of trains moving on the north-south line and pictured my great-grandmother and her family on board more than a century ago, traveling from Corinne down to Salt Lake City to shop, make social calls, and conduct business

in the then-Utah Territory’s capital. Perhaps they visited Salt Lake City’s Congregation B’nai Israel Synagogue, or joined in the activities of the local Hebrew Benevolent Society or the Ladies’ Hebrew Benevolent Society.

As I traveled, I occasionally glimpsed the Great Salt Lake shimmering silver-blue in the distance to the west, but the most visible part of the natural landscape, the Wasatch Mountains, dominated the eastern skyline, rising with enduring rocky fortitude above the modern traffic-ridden freeway. Cars spit in and out of the lanes, and I tried to picture another earlier era, when the very road on which I journeyed did not yet exist, and people, like my family, traveled by train, horse, carriage, and wagon.

I had first learned of Corinne years earlier, from my mother and my grandfather John, who both had shared that Lillian Keller, my grandfather’s mother, had grown up in this unlikely remote Utah settlement before relocating, along with her two sisters, to the San Francisco Bay area. Corinne held a place in our family lore, but more as a footnote than a highlight, and as a remote and almost forlorn-sounding place from another era. Ironically, however, though my family did mention Corinne from time to time, a fundamental aspect of our heritage was not communicated down through the generations: My great-grandmother Lillian, an enthusiastically practicing Christian Scientist, had been raised Jewish. Only five years ago, when researching our family history, did I stumble upon our Jewish heritage. I also learned that my great-grandmother and her two sisters, Hannah and Dora, whom my mother knew as a young girl, had had three additional elder siblings: Sarah, Mamie, and Abe Keller. (See the *ZichronNote* issues of November 2013 and February 2014 for further details.)

By ironic coincidence, my first IAJGS conference attendance was in Salt Lake City in the summer of 2014. While Salt Lake City is not an area most of us immediately think of when considering Jewish settlement in North America, it served as a key location in my Jewish ancestors’ story. After living during the Silver Rush in and near Virginia City at the same time Mark Twain wrote for the *Virginia City Territorial Enterprise*, as well as in the short-



1869 photographs of Corinne by William H. Jackson.

Left: "Street view in Corinne. Box Elder County, Utah" (NARA 517300; [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Street\\_view\\_in\\_Corinne,\\_Box\\_Elder\\_County,\\_Utah,\\_1869\\_-\\_NARA\\_-\\_517300.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Street_view_in_Corinne,_Box_Elder_County,_Utah,_1869_-_NARA_-_517300.jpg)). Right: "View in Corinne, Box Elder County, Utah" (NARA 516652; [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:View\\_in\\_Corinne,\\_Box\\_Elder\\_County,\\_Utah\\_-\\_NARA\\_-\\_516652.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:View_in_Corinne,_Box_Elder_County,_Utah_-_NARA_-_516652.jpg)).

lived boomtown of Hamilton, Nevada, my Prussian immigrant great-great-grandparents, Joseph and Rosalia Pinschauer Keller, moved the family to Corinne in the Utah Territory<sup>1</sup>, where they resided for almost 30 years, from 1869, right when the transcontinental railroad was completed and the Golden Spike laid in nearby Promontory Summit (about 25 miles west of Corinne), to about 1898. Joseph, a merchant, ran a business that included sending staples and other supplies by train up to the gold mines in Montana. In the course of researching my family history, an 1895 article in the *Daily Tribune* of Salt Lake City, announcing the death of my great-great-grandfather Joseph and his burial in the Jewish cemetery of Salt Lake City, provided me with the key proof that unlocked the secret of my family's one-time Jewish identity and practice.

The IAJGS venue therefore gave me the perfect opportunity to blend information and analysis with what I hoped would be a more embodied sense of my forebears' experience. As we genealogists know, while we can find wonderfully edifying information in libraries, archives, courthouses, and places of worship, physically visiting the home areas of our ancestors can yield understandings and impressions that we cannot discover so easily, if at all, in written records. Such visits can help us move beyond facts and perhaps begin to feel our way into some of our family's possible physical and day-to-day experiences.

Corinne holds a somewhat unusual history among the towns of Utah. Former Union Army generals and officers founded the settlement in 1869 on the new transcontinental rail line less than 30 miles from the Golden Spike<sup>2</sup>, naming the new town for General

Williamson's teen-aged daughter Corinne. As an officially non-Mormon community, Corinne attracted Jewish settlers as well as other people who practiced religions different from that of the Mormons. The Utah Territory's Mormon population therefore referred to Corinne as the "Gentile" town, the term they use to refer to non-Mormons. During its boom years in the early 1870's, Corinne served as a railroad transit hub and a distribution point for goods flowing up to the mines in western Montana. The second largest town in the Utah Territory, after Salt Lake City, Corinne hosted an array of shops, mills, banks, hotels, boarding houses, theaters, brothels, and breweries, an opera house, and a winery. According to city lore posted near the rail depot buildings, the city charter was drafted and signed in 1870 by Ulysses S. Grant. A political movement to relocate the territory's capital from Salt Lake City to Corinne also took root. Mormon political interests fought the potential shift, however, and Brigham Young and Mormon business leaders shepherded the construction of a rail line from Salt Lake City to Ogden, bypassing Corinne and taking over the distribution routes to Montana. Corinne's small Jewish and larger non-Jewish communities all subsequently dwindled. My family, however, after following the silver booms in Nevada, stayed in Corinne long after its apparent decline, with Joseph Keller establishing a farm and continuing his trade business (though he moved his business headquarters to Rock Springs, Wyoming in 1888).

Over the years, I had traveled to several destinations in Utah prior to my 2014 IAJGS and Corinne visit, driving across the glistening white expanse of the Bonneville Salt Flats, winding north across rugged





Corinne circa 1870

and arid landscapes to Pocatello, Idaho, rafting down the Green River through Dinosaur National Monument and its beautiful yet relatively dry river terrain, and exploring the great national parks in southern Utah: the stark red desert beauty of Canyonlands, Arches, and Bryce, and my favorite, Zion, the “lushest” of the four. I also had come across some photos online of Corinne itself as it formed in 1869 that reveal a tumbling of tentlike buildings on flat dirt plains devoid of plants and trees, and images of people whom I imagine likely wanted to dive into the Salt Lake or the Bear River to remove the dust that inevitably would have coated their skin and clothing. All of my Utah experiences have conveyed the drier, desertlike qualities of the land, the value of each drop of water.

Family references, for the most part, had reinforced my images of Corinne as situated in an arid, rough landscape. In 1897, my great-grandmother’s youngest sister, Dora, then age 11, wrote a letter to the *San Francisco Call* newspaper’s children’s page describing earthquakes<sup>3</sup>, a nearby farmer’s concern about a sheep camp on fire, and possible volcanic steam rising from a local lake. In the 1970’s, my mother received a postcard from her aunt Irma, Lillian Keller’s daughter and my grandfather John’s youngest sister, that raised my hopes that even with the absence of any family address in Corinne, I might still be able to stumble upon possible spots for their residences if I could find an obscure pond, bridge, and set of weeping willows (possibly still standing after 40–125 years) in the midst of the stark terrain.

The postcard shows an image of the rail depot of Corinne illuminated by blazing sunshine. Irma wrote (referring to her mother, Lillian, as “Grandma”):

This is where Grandma was raised as a Child. There is very little left in Corinne. John and I stopped there on our way to Boise. I had a wonderful time. We went to the place where their farm was — only thing left are the huge weeping willow trees and the bridge which goes over the river. Grandma played on it.

The old Post Office and General Store are still standing but boarded up.

The Railroad Museum is very interesting. The depot where my uncle worked has been restored. We are moving to Boise. Will send our address when I know it.

Ginger (the dog) and I will stay here until the house is sold.

### Endnotes

1. The Nevada Territory split off from the Utah Territory in 1850 and Nevada was admitted to the Union as a state in 1850. The Utah Territory became the state of Utah in 1896.
2. The Transcontinental Railroad line’s final “Golden Spike” was driven into the earth on 10 May 1869, connecting the western Central Pacific Railroad with the eastern Union Pacific.
3. The north-south Wasatch Fault runs several miles to the east of Corinne.

*To be continued next issue.*



## Judy Baston Recognized for Lifetime Achievement

Beth Galleto

Beth Galleto has been working on her family history since a distant cousin made an unexpected visit in 1978 and sketched out a makeshift family tree on a napkin. When not working on genealogy, she is a freelance copywriter and editor. She was formerly the editor of *ZichronNote* and is currently the SFBAJGS Webmaster. She attended the ceremony where Judy Baston received her award.

“All the information was destroyed, and there is nobody left to tell the story.” That’s what many Jewish genealogists heard from their families before they began their investigations and only later found out it was not true. It’s what SFBAJGS member Judy Baston was originally told by her father, who was born in Eishyshok (now called Eišiškes, Lithuania) and who lost his parents, three brothers, a sister, and other family members in the Shoah.

But then in the mid-1980’s Judy watched the documentary *Genocide* on the Bravo channel. Among other things, this film, narrated by Orson Welles and Elizabeth Taylor, described the Eishyshok massacre. As Judy heard the testimony of one of her cousins being read by Elizabeth Taylor she realized that there was information out there that she could learn. This cousin was a survivor and a person she knew, who could tell her more about her family’s past.

She went to Vancouver to visit him, and he showed her photos of first cousins she had never met. She also learned a family secret: She had a half-sister who had died in the Shoah. “I decided I wanted to find as many people as possible who had lived in Eishyshok, to find out as much as I could.” This was the beginning of Judy Baston’s involvement with Jewish genealogy.

Judy was recognized with the Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2015 conference of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS), held in Jerusalem in July 2015. The award is presented to a living individual for outstanding contributions of major significance and benefit to Jewish genealogy.

The award presentation at the conference’s Thursday evening banquet cited Judy’s work as a member of the board of LitvakSIG, moderator of the LitvakSIG Discussion Group, member of the board



of JRI-Poland, Lomza Archive Coordinator, and moderator of the Lodz Area Research Group and BialyGen discussion groups. It also mentioned her contributions as editor and proofreader of *yizkor* book translations for Ciechanowiec, Eišiškes, and Ostrów Mazowiecka and noted that she is a sought-after speaker.

Judy has visited her ancestral *shtetlach* in Lithuania, Poland, and Belarus and was involved in the filming of *There Once Was a Town*, about Eishyshok. She has moderated the discussion group for LitvakSIG for 16 years and for JRI-Poland for 14 years. She has volunteered at the Jewish Community Library in San Francisco for 23 years and coordinates the “Brainstorming with the Mavens” monthly genealogy clinic at the library.

“I’ve worked a lot in the background,” Judy says. “I was stunned to receive this award. I’ve worked hard and done a lot, but it’s not always the kind of work that gets the most attention.”

Early in her own research experience Judy saw the value of helping others. In the 1990’s she began ordering LDS microfilms to research her mother’s family from Nur, Poland. She was able to find records pertaining to her great-grandmother’s family. Then at an IAJGS conference she met Michael Richman, who had looked at the LDS microfilms for a number of towns in the Łomża gubernia and created family trees from the information he found. “It was probably at the Washington D.C. conference in 1995. He saw the name Konopiaty on my badge. The next day he handed me a chart with early generations of the Konopiaty family he had put together from the microfilms.”

Judy realized how long it would have taken her to find this out by herself, and it made her want to help other people in the same way she had been helped. She got involved with JRI-Poland’s indexing projects

very early in the organization's history. "It gave me access to information for a number of different towns. What good is information if I don't share it?"

Judy became active in SFBAJGS, serving on its board in the 1990's. She became librarian for the traveling library the society had at the time, and she also volunteered at the Jewish Community Library in San Francisco. When the JCL moved to its current location 12 years ago, she saw that the library and the SFBAJGS together could fill a need, and she started what was first called "One-on-One Help" and is now called "Brainstorming with the Mavens" to bring experienced researchers together with beginning Jewish genealogists—or those who have hit brick walls—to share knowledge about resources and research techniques.

Memorable finds in Judy's own research history include three particular cases where she found relatively little-known sources of information and prepared presentations about them in order to share with other researchers. These include records of the Morgenthau Mission to Poland to investigate pogroms in 1919, the American Jewish Yearbook, and the Vilna Ghetto Library, about which she spoke at the 2015 conference.

On a more personal level, an amazing discovery was finding a living first cousin of her mother. At the 1995 conference she had a meeting with Alexander

Beider, an authority on Eastern European Ashkenazi names. Investigating the name Jaskolka, she learned that the family of Jankel Jaskolka had lived at a certain address in Warsaw. Even though Judy was sure all children of Jankel had been murdered in the Shoah, she decided to find as much as possible about the family.

An investigator in Warsaw was able to find that in 1959 her cousin Jeremiah Jaskolka, Jankel's son, had requested a duplicate of his 1920 Warsaw birth record, and later Judy was able to find an address for a Jeremiah Jaskolka near Tel Aviv. She wrote him a letter asking whether he had an aunt named Rifka Jaskolka Garfinkle and several other relatives she knew about. A few days later she got a call saying, "This is your cousin Jeremiah from Israel." After the connection was made, Judy sent her "new" cousin photos of his mother and brother that he hadn't seen for 50 years. She visited him in Israel, and together they visited Poland. Jeremiah died four years ago. Judy says that finding him was her most satisfying discovery.

Volunteering in the Jewish Community Library and helping people with their genealogy feels right to Judy, and the award just adds to the satisfaction. "I feel I'm doing exactly what I was put on this earth to do," she says. "It's great to get outside affirmation for doing something you love so much."



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**President's Message**, continued from page 6

genealogical community. Are we now moving into an arena in which the easy availability of online data causes people to simply accept what is "out there?" Technology seems to have changed the standards of personal genealogical research. Where once an amateur researcher had to make a determined effort to retrieve records, visiting archives and slogging through microfilm, now all he has to do is copy someone else's dubious family tree.

We see examples of this all the time on Ancestry.com. When we're researching an individual and see a hint for "Family Trees" we click on it and view a list of perhaps a few or as many as twenty trees. Looking at the number of record sources for each tree it's clear that most of these researchers have copied the information from the person's tree with the most sources. The ability to copy data from one tree to another is obviously enticing to family genealogists, and this can be helpful by providing a framework for research, but the practice inevitably leads to errors being repeated and accepted as truth, much in the way that Hughes' story became "fact."

Every day the media (and, by extension, sometimes civil authorities) present us with stories and "facts" that we accept as truth (although often the stories change or are discredited as time goes on). Governments rewrite history according to their agendas, which become accepted as fact by each particular generation or nation; the perfect example of this is the denial of the Holocaust. As genealogical investigators it is up to us to uphold a clear vision of excellence in our efforts to uncover the past. Although the truth that we discover may be uncomfortable or conflict with oral family tradition, our self-appointed job is to find the truth.

Ben Bradlee was executive editor of the *Washington Post* from 1968 to 1991. During an interview with Tom Lehrer (broadcast on NPR) Ben said, "[I]t changes your life, the pursuit of truth. And at least, if you know that you have tried to find the truth and gone past the first apparent truth towards the real truth, it's very exciting."

As I pen this on 4 July 2015 I feel this is indeed food for thought.



## Personal Memories of the IAJGS 2015 Conference

Beth Galleto

The experience of IAJGS 2015 began for me before the actual conference started. In fact, it began even before I arrived in Jerusalem—in the departure area at the Newark airport for the trip to Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport. I had flown from SFO to Newark as the first lap of my journey.

Admittance to the boarding area was blocked except through one entrance, where a man made sure all who entered had boarding passes for TLV. All who came in were checked with an electronic wand, and their carry-on baggage was hand inspected—even though we had already gone through regular TSA inspection in order to be in that part of the airport.

A large proportion of those who came into this boarding area wore the beards, long side curls, visible fringes on their clothing, long black coats, and large hats that marked them as ultra-Orthodox or Hasidic. Their accompanying women wore head coverings, long skirts, and long sleeves. Perhaps seeing a large number of such Jews in one place does not seem unusual if you live in the New York area, but coming from the Bay Area, I felt as if I were already in a very different kind of place—or perhaps a different century.

Once on the plane for the nearly 11-hour flight there were more differences. Two meals were served during the flight, and of course a large number of passengers had ordered kosher meals. After the first meal we all settled into our seats to sleep—or try to sleep. I don't sleep well on planes. When the sun started to seep through the spaces between the cabin's window shades a few hours after our departure, I watched as many of the men stood in the aisle, in *tefillin* and *tallit*, to recite morning prayers.

It reminded me of the first time I had come to Israel, as a teenager with a United Synagogue Youth group. Though Conservative, our group was quite religious and had similarly stood in the aisles to recite morning and evening prayers.

At last we arrived, waited a very long time in lines to go through customs, got our luggage, and, groggy from lack of sleep, headed out. I took a shared van, called a *sherut*, from the airport to the Jerusalem Ramada. Such a ride is always interesting because the van goes to neighborhoods one might not otherwise see to drop



off its riders. After we arrived in Jerusalem we passed through one neighborhood where I guessed from the inhabitants' clothing and appearances that they may have come from Yemen or Ethiopia. Next we dropped off an Orthodox couple in a large religious neighborhood with many synagogues and yeshivas. This was my third visit to Israel, and I did not remember previously seeing such a large

number of people who dressed according to Orthodox custom. Many such families were also staying at my hotel.

The next day was Friday. After a generous breakfast buffet with colorful fresh vegetables and fruits and delicious soft white cheeses, I took off with two other conference attendees to try to find a cell phone to use while in Israel. We successfully accomplished our mission at a shopping area in the crowded central bus station.

Many of the early conference arrivals, including me, had signed up for something the conference organizers called a Shabbaton. Friday afternoon this included a tour of the Mechane Yehuda market. We took a bus to the entry of the market area, and it was interesting to watch drivers maneuver through the busy and unruly traffic and into tiny parking spaces on narrow streets. The market area itself is pedestrian only. It is open all week, we were told, but the crowded streets become frenzied on Friday afternoon as people do their shopping before everything closes for Shabbat.

As part of our tour the leader had arranged for us to be provided with samples of foods from many of the small stalls and restaurants in the market place: stuffed grape leaves from Iraq, freshly baked pita from Kurdistan, falafel (of course), juice from citron and other fruits, and ice cream. It looked as if you could get every kind of food product and many other types of goods from all parts of the world at this market. I saw colorful spices, grains, and exotic fruits and vegetables that I couldn't identify.

The Shabbaton included a Friday night dinner with many courses. Rabbi Prof. David Golinkin made an after-dinner speech about Yiddish autobiographies and what they can tell genealogists, giving examples of what could be learned about Jewish life in earlier

times from the well known autobiography written by Gluckel of Hameln, a woman born in 1646, and from a relative of his who wrote about his life in Rzeszów before World War II. The dinner closed with singing of the grace after meals, which reminded some of us of our time long ago in Jewish summer camp.

The accommodations made by the hotel so that religious people would not have to do things they considered breaking the Sabbath were extremely interesting. For example, two elevators were specially programmed for Sabbath only to open automatically, one on all even-numbered floors and the other on all odd-numbered floors, so that people would not have to push the buttons. The hotel's ATM was turned off and the hotel shops were closed. A screen was placed in front of the registration area so that people did not see other people writing things and perhaps handling money and credit cards. One room of the hotel was used as a synagogue.

Saturday morning, after another great breakfast buffet, the Shabbaton featured a guided walking tour of a mostly religious neighborhood called Kiryat Moshe. There was hardly a car on the roads we crossed on our way. We saw large families walking back from synagogue services to their homes, in what looked like multifamily buildings with six to ten apartments. As with all buildings in the city, they are constructed from the sand-colored Jerusalem stone. Many of the men proudly wore their *tallit* like capes as they walked. This was probably the same neighborhood I had first viewed from the *sherut* on my way to the hotel. Our guide told us it began in about 1924, originally funded by Moses Montefiore, for whom the area was named. The peace of Shabbat was seductive, and I found myself thinking that I could enjoy living in such a neighborhood.

Afternoon activities included a visit to the Israel Museum, which has many amazing collections. Its Judaica collection includes intricate and beautiful objects from Jewish cultures worldwide, showing how each culture expressed itself in its own way. Four synagogues from different parts of the world are recreated in the museum. I saw some of the many archeological finds displayed in the museum, including a collection of Roman glass from different eras. This museum houses the Dead Sea scrolls. It also has a nano-Bible on which the entire Bible is written on a tiny chip, but I didn't see it. There was not time to see everything.

At about 9:00 p.m. traffic began rolling on the streets once more and the city came back to life.

On Sunday I participated in a walking tour of Jerusalem's old city. Our group walked for six hours in the intense Israeli sunshine, stopping only for a box lunch in a park. Some highlights of the tour

included ancient walls, paving stones polished by centuries of feet, the supposed tomb of King David, a wall pockmarked by bullet holes from the Six Day War, the lively market in the Muslim section, and of course the holiest place: the standing Western Wall of the ancient Jerusalem temple. Returning to the hotel red-faced and exhausted, I registered for the conference and then tumbled into bed for the night.

The conference officially started on Monday. I wanted particularly to attend presentations by speakers who were less likely to travel to meetings in the United States, such as those from Israel and Eastern Europe. I also attended presentations on DNA and genetic genealogy, since this is a current interest of mine.

One lecture that excited me was called "Evacuatzia: Searching for Documentation on Those Evacuated to the Depths of the USSR during WWII." This had personal meaning for me because several of my mother's cousins survived the Shoah by being evacuated from their towns in the Bryansk oblast of Russia to towns in the Ural Mountains, deep in the Russian interior. This saved them from being massacred by Nazi killing squads with Jews from their towns who were not able to escape.

The speaker was Sima Velkovich from Yad Vashem. She said that the invasion of Russia began on 22 June 1941, and by 2 July of that year 210 trains had been organized for mass evacuations to the Russian interior. A total of 17 million people fled or were evacuated, nearly half of them Jews. They were sent to Central Asia, Central Volga, Siberia, and the Urals. Working and living conditions in these places were difficult. Evacuees lived in barracks and were resettled among the local population. They had ration cards in order to eat.

Yad Vashem has a number of sources for records of these events. For example, records from the State Archives of the Russian Federation list about 600,000 names of Jews who were evacuated, searchable online. Yad Vashem also has testimonies of survivors, of which around 3,000 are about the evacuations. The library includes books, diaries, and memoirs written by evacuees. Materials are still being acquired and posted online, and if you don't find your names now, search again later.

Oleksy Lipes from Ukraine spoke about Russian military databases from World War II. A database for those killed or missing in action whose records are in the Moscow archives (<http://www.obd-memorial.ru/>) has a search for which one must spell the name correctly in Russian. There is no Soundex. Another database (<http://www.podvignaroda.mil.ru/>) shows those who did not die in the war and were awarded with medals for military service. Oleksy and his wife, Nadia, have been



building a massive database of Jewish records from numerous Russian sources. They can be reached through their Web site (<http://Jewua.info/>).

In the DNA category, those of us of Ashkenazi Jewish descent are often bewildered by the number of predicted close matches we get when taking the Family Finder test (which tests autosomal DNA, as opposed to the Y chromosome or mitochondrial DNA). We have many more matches than non-Jews because for centuries our population intermarried within the group, so that now we all share much of the same DNA. Jeffrey Mark Paull (who lives in Walnut Creek) said in his talk on genetic genealogy that studies have shown that the algorithm by which Family Tree DNA predicts second- or third-cousin relationships is quite accurate. If so, I still want to know why I have a dozen predicted second- to third-cousin matches, none of whom I have heard of before, when I believe I know who all my second cousins are. For me, the jury is still out on this question.

If there is one message that I carried away from the conference presentations, it is that new sources are being discovered, catalogued, indexed, digitized, and otherwise made available to researchers all the time. Just because you have searched for something in one place and not found it, do not give up. Try again, and next time it might be there.

Also of interest, JewishGen announced that it has upgraded its search mechanisms and added levels of search called *fuzzy*, *fuzzier*, and *fuzziest*. The first time I heard this I thought it was a joke, but it is completely serious. The fuzzy search finds words that differ from the search term by one letter, fuzzier by two letters, and fuzziest by three letters. These searches find only words that fall into these

categories. The fuzzy etc. searches are likely to find mistranscriptions and misspellings. For example, if I search for BOLKER, these searches find KOLKER, BODKER, BECKER, BAKER, and BALTER, among others. These searches will not find BOLKER, for which one needs to do a conventional search. The new searches are available for the all-country and all-topic databases, hosted databases such as JRI-Poland, and the Family Tree of the Jewish People.

After the conference was over I spent a few days visiting relatives in Haifa and Netanya. These cities are so different from Jerusalem they are almost like being in a completely different country. In fact, Netanya felt to me like a resort in the south of France.

On the last day of my trip I returned to Jerusalem. Since my plane left at 11:00 p.m. I had a full day to myself, and I chose to go to Yad Vashem. I had been there more than 30 years ago on a previous trip, but it is very different now. Well designed displays inside Moshe Safdie's amazing architecture tell the whole story in all its tragedy, but also bring up inspiring moments of courage and heroism. I did not bring the necessary materials to do research there, but if (when?) I return I plan to do so. I briefly visited the archives area and was told that while most documents there can be located online, a researcher may have to go to the archives to view the actual documents.

That evening, on the way back to the Tel Aviv airport, the *sherut* became stuck for a while in Jerusalem's narrow streets in a chaotic gridlock of unruly traffic, numerous buses, and black-clad pedestrians. It seemed a fitting way to say "goodbye for now" to this complex and fascinating city.



### SFBAJGS Family Finder Update

The surnames and towns being researched by our newest members are listed below. This database is maintained for the benefit of our membership. If you have a correction or update, please write to SFBAJGS at [familyfinder@sfbajgs.org](mailto:familyfinder@sfbajgs.org) or at P.O. Box 318214, San Francisco, CA 94131-8214.

<u>Surname</u>	<u>Town, Country</u>	<u>Member</u>
Berman	Jaroslav, Rybotycze	Eshel Haritan
Charytan	Jaroslav, Tuczempy, Przemyśl	Eshel Haritan
Edelman	Biała Podlaska	Margalit Ir
Eksztejn	Biała Podlaska, Niemerów	Margalit Ir
Ir	Biała Podlaska	Margalit Ir
Jekel	Tlumach, Buchach	Margalit Ir
Kauffman	Russia; Brooklyn, New York	Richard Kolbert
Landman	Tlumach, Buchach	Margalit Ir
Mejersdorf	Warsaw	Margalit Ir
Tugender	Biała Podalaska, Międzyrzec	Margalit Ir

### IAJGS 2015 Awards

Lifetime Achievement Award: Judy Baston

Project Award: JGS of Greater Boston, JewishGen Memorial Plaque Database Contribution

Outstanding Publication: Jewish Genealogical Society of Long Island YouTube channel

Outstanding Publication: Jewish Genealogical Society of Maryland, *L'Dor V'Dor* (which beat *ZichronNote!*)

IAJGS Member of the Year: Israel Genealogy Research Association

Volunteer of the Year: Jan Meisels Allen

More information on the above awards can be found at <http://www.iajgs.org/blog/?p=2159>.

Stern Grant: Foundation for Documentation of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland, [http://cemetery.jewish.org.pl/lang\\_en/](http://cemetery.jewish.org.pl/lang_en/)

Stedman Grant: Jewish Galicia & Bukovina Association, Geshet Galicia, U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, and Herzl Institute of the University of Haifa, <http://www.geshetgalicia.org/>



**Invite a Friend to Join SFBAJGS**

<http://www.jewishgen.org/sfbajgs/about.html>

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Calendar of Upcoming SFBAJGS Events

**Sunday, 20 September, San Francisco:** *Researching Your Litvak Roots.* Judy Baston, Vice President of LitvakSIG, will give an overview of sources online and in various repositories for researching your Litvak heritage.

**Sunday, 4 October, Oakland:** *Beyond Passenger Lists: Documenting 20th-century Immigrant Lives.* Come to this special meeting, where historian Zack Wilske of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services will discuss naturalization records, visa files, and more.

**Sunday, 18 October, Oakland:** *JRI-Poland: Go for the Record!* JRI-Poland board member Robinn Magid will demonstrate how easy it is to download actual images of records relating to your ancestors.

**Monday, 19 October, Los Altos Hills:** *Chasing Portraits: A Great-granddaughter's Search for Her Lost Art Legacy.* Elizabeth Rynecki will discuss her great-grandfather's art and the subject of Holocaust art restitution.

**Wednesday, 21 October, Oakland:** *Online Resources for Jewish Genealogy.* Janice Sellers will give an overview of the most useful online sites for Jewish research and the information you can expect to find.

**Sunday, 15 November, San Francisco:** *San Francisco's Own Norton I, Emperor of the United States and Protector of Mexico.* Joseph Amster will talk about the history of the man who became Emperor Norton and his long-lasting effects on the city of San Francisco.

See page 3 for meeting locations and times and page 4 for other events of interest.

For more program information visit <http://www.sfbajgs.org/>.