



Family Legacies

Linking the past with the present and the future

Jewish Genealogy Society
of Southern Nevada - West

Vol.2, No.3 1999

Standards for Sound Genealogical Research

Recommended by the National Genealogical Society

Remembering always that they are engaged in a quest for truth, family history researchers consistently –

- record the source for each item of information they collect.
- test every hypothesis or theory against credible evidence, and reject those that are not supported by the evidence.
- seek original records, or reproduced images of them when there is reasonable assurance they have not been altered, as the basis for their research conclusions.
- use compilations, communications and published works, whether paper or electronic, primarily for their value as guides to locating the original records.
- state something as a fact only when it is supported by convincing evidence, and identify the evidence when communicating the fact to others.
- limit with words like “probable” or “possible” any statement that is based on less than convincing evidence, and state the reasons for concluding that it is probable or possible.
- avoid misleading other researchers by either intentionally or carelessly distributing or publishing inaccurate information.
- state carefully and honestly the results of their own research, and acknowledge all use of other researchers’ work.
- recognize the collegial nature of genealogical research by making their work available to others through publication, or by placing copies in appropriate libraries or repositories, and by welcoming critical comment.
- consider with open minds new evidence or the comments of others on their work and the conclusions they have reached.

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Jewish Newspapers at The Center for Research Libraries University of Chicago

The Center for Research Libraries at the University of Chicago has copies of the Jewish Newspapers that were printed in Chicago. Reference Librarian Susan E. Swanson, at Brandeis University, provided the following information to member Charlotte Showell.

The Jewish Daily Courier
from
Nov. 1917 to Nov. 1944
Hard Copy File #7s20-7s22
(OCLC#9769364)

The Jewish Daily Forward
from Volume 1,
Jan. 1919 to July 1951
Microfilm MF-7389
(OCLC#8807936)

These can be researched only at the Research Center and you must call to make an appointment to see the documents and films. They are not available for inter-library loan. For more information you can check their website at <<http://www.crl.uchicago.edu/>>



The Midwife

By Janet Farino

Well into the 19th century the midwife served America's rural communities as obstetrician, visiting nurse, pharmacist and comforter. Hardship and drama were routine for the midwife who was "on call" in her community in summer's heat, winter's cold, and stormy weather in any season. Crossing rivers by boat, from time to time being thrown from horseback, or wading through mud while racing night or day to her neighbor's aid, she tended sufferers with everything from "canker rash" or scarlet fever, to swollen feet, fits, shingles, abscesses, dysentery and numerous other complaints. She had to be familiar with a roster of traditional cures and reliefs for specific ailments, but in many instances – often emergencies – she relied solely on common sense in drawing from a selection of such homegrown remedies as tinctures, purges, and plasters.

The typical midwife, in her mid 50s after her many children were grown, was schooled in midwifery and herbal medicine through years of informal apprenticeship, and preferred to specialize in childbirth. Though often working alone, at childbirth she was assisted by six or more of the woman's female relatives or neighbors. Some childbirths were exhausting and traumatic, weakening mothers for months and often resulted in infections due to unhygienic conditions. While one of her assistants might ply the laboring mother with rum to relax muscles, the others distracted her with conversation, jokes and words of sympathy. Technical skills were only part of the midwife's arsenal. Being calm and reassuring through the ordeal was just as important, for suffering and even death often went hand in hand with childbirth. Infant mortality was ever present. One white American infant in six or seven did not survive to age one.

The standard fee for a birth was a modest six shillings, with no surcharge for arduous travel or extended care. Even so, payment was often long in coming and then not in cash. One father paid "with

1-1/2 bushl of apples in the fall and not very good," and another settled his account the "2lb coffee, 1 yd ribbon and a cap border." The midwife was not heard to complain, however, for she and the community saw her trade as offering rewards beyond mere money.

When Americans became sick, they often turned to their own resources and to lay healers and folk medicine. In the isolation of farms of tiny communities, rural America often lacked or distrusted doctor's skills – or wanted to avoid their fees – and so relied on neighbors or family members who practiced with herbs and used almanacs to dose by astrological correspondence.

The use of midwives declined from 1790 on, and by 1840 childbirth was almost universally physician-assisted in the North. However, rural families in the West and South, almost all slaves, and the urban poor continued to "call the women together" rather than use doctors.

Sources: A New England Midwife's Diary; and "Discovering America's Past – Customs, Legends, History and Lore Of Our Great Nation," Readers Digest, 1993, pg. 22; and "Early Medical History, by Roseann Hoguean, Ph.D., Ancestry Magazine, Nov./Dec. 1997, pg 36.

Member Janet Farino's interest in midwifery stems from two ancestors – Amelia Brand Platka, who was a midwife in the late 1880s and Fannie Phillips Platky who was in need of a midwife or medical assistance but managed to do the job alone.

Library Donations

From Joan Rimmon

Research Binder: LDS Film Numbers to the
New York Naturalization
and

Research Binder: Index to Jews Appearing in
the US Emergency Passport Application 1915-1926



International Association of Jewish Genealogy Societies Announces 1999 Awards at 19th Conference on Jewish Genealogy in New York City

The 1999 awards were announced and presented at the Banquet on the last evening of the 19th Conference on Jewish Genealogy in NYC. Below are the six awardees, the wording from each plaque, who accepted the award and notes.

IAJGS LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Presented to Arthur Kurzweil -- In deep appreciation of your trailblazing work which teaches us that learning about Jewish family history is possible, despite ages of community destruction, Diaspora and the Holocaust. We will always be grateful that you showed us the way, and for your past and continued inspiration to all Jewish genealogists and new Jewish genealogical societies that continue to be created worldwide because of your vision.

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO JEWISH GENEALOGY VIA THE INTERNET AWARD

Presented to Jewish Records Indexing-Poland (Stanley Diamond accepting on behalf of all who have worked on this project) -- In recognition of an extraordinary database, available via the Internet, which recently reached a half-million entries and continues to grow. This database not only helps countless researchers but also demonstrates what can be accomplished through the cooperative energy of many volunteers and is an inspiration and model for databases covering other geographical areas.

OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION TO JEWISH GENEALOGY VIA PRINT AWARD

Presented to Miriam Weiner for her book Jewish Roots in Poland -- In recognition of your book Jewish Roots in Poland. Your success in presenting the first officially sanctioned lists of Jewish documents in Polish archives makes it an extraordinarily valuable resource tool. The accompanying pictures and illustrations bring the vanished world of Jewish Poland to life once again.

OUTSTANDING PROGRAMMING THAT ADVANCES THE OBJECTIVES OF JEWISH GENEALOGY AWARD

Presented to The Jewish Genealogical Society of Michigan (Stephen Rosman, President accepting) -- In recognition of programming which demonstrates a high level of creativity, organizational talent and cooperative spirit. We commend your ability to offer your members such a diverse range of stimulating activities which cannot help but energize novice and experienced family researchers alike.

OUTSTANDING PUBLICATION BY A MEMBER OF THE IAJGS AWARD

Presented to Israel Genealogical Society (Jean-Pierre Stroweis, President accepting) -- In recognition of Sharsheret Hadorot, Family Roots Research Periodical for excellent coverage of topics ranging from scholarly articles based on original research to news items about genealogy activities and resources in Israel, and for generously sharing that information with genealogists around the world by presenting those articles in both Hebrew and English.

OUTSTANDING PROJECT THAT ADVANCES THE OBJECTIVES OF JEWISH GENEALOGY AWARD

Presented to Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc. of New York for initiating the Jewish Genealogical Family Finder. (Estelle Guzik, President accepting) -- Since its inception, the Family Finder has been an invaluable resource for countless genealogists. By making it possible to link up with others via surname or ancestral town connections, scattered family members have found each other and much knowledge has been shared. Through this award, we wish to show our deep appreciation to those who conceptualized and implemented the original Jewish Family Finder project.

At the time of this presentation, the following comments were added and the individuals asked to stand: This is the 20th anniversary of the Family Finder. It was conceived in early 1979 under the leadership of Dr. Neil Rosenstein, the JGS's first president, and it was compiled by David Fiedler, a JGS founding member. The first edition, manually produced, was issued in July 1979. In 1982, Gary Mokotoff, then a new member of the JGS, volunteered to computerize the information. He and his wife Ruth, continued to nurture the Jewish Genealogical Family Finder as it grew into what it is today. In 1996, ownership of the JGFF was transferred from the JGS, Inc. (New York) to Jewishgen headed by Susan King, where it has become a cornerstone of the Jewishgen website.

1999 IAJGS Awards Committee: Anne Feder Lee, Honolulu, Chair; Carol Baird, San Diego, member; Henry Wellisch, Toronto, member



What Is A Cantor?

By Murray Leitner

Originally, at the time of the Mishnah and Talmud, the Chazan was a caretaker of the synagogue and a functionary at religious ceremonies. Today, the term Chazan or Cantor is applied to one who chants the religious services at Temple or Synagogue.

Before the advent of modern printing, the Chazan chanted the prayers as a substitute for those without books or who were unable to read the Hebrew. In the late 1800s, several Chazanim, such as Salomone Rossi, Salomon Sulzer and especially Louis Lewandoski, helped develop the cantorial music used extensively in synagogues to this day.

A professional Cantor is one who is employed full time in this capacity and, in most cases, is considered a member of the clergy. His duties would consist of conducting the services, preparing Bar and Bat Mitzvah students and assisting the Rabbi in the clerical functions of their congregation. He or she may have attended a Cantorial School or may have studied under other Cantors to attain the appropriate proficiency for the position. In all probability, the individual has become a member of one of the Cantorial Assemblies, depending upon the congregational affiliation.

A Lay Cantor, considered by some as a Ba'al T'filah (Master of the Prayers), conducts services, but not necessarily on a full time basis, may or may not be involved in the training of the Bar and Bat Mitzvah students, is not considered as a member of the clergy and probably not a member of any Cantorial Assembly. I consider myself to be a Lay Cantor since I did all of the above while still working at other employment. In fact, I have participated in every life cycle event from a Brit and Baby Naming to a funeral and unveiling. The only thing I could not do was pronounce to a bride and groom "By the authority vested in me by the State of _____ I now pronounce you man and wife". You see, it is not necessary to be a Rabbi to conduct any of the life cycle events in Judaism. The only important thing is to be knowledgeable.

Recently there has evolved the concept of the Cantorial Soloist, an individual who is musically talented, may or may not know Hebrew but can enhance the service with beautiful renditions sung from music sheets or learned from tapes. While this approach may make the service more palatable to some, to others it lessens the dignity and true meaning of Prayer. As Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin writes in his book *To Pray as a Jew*, "To transform reading into prayer, there must be at least a sense of standing in the presence of God." The Hebrew word for this is Kavanah and without Kavanah, one is merely saying words.

A properly trained Lay Cantor or a Clerical Cantor must have the Kavanah to fulfill his or her function as a true emissary of the congregation.

Photos Of Family Lots and Gravestones

New York City, Queens, Long Island

Photographer Barbara Field

**\$20 Per Hour Including Travel Time
Plus Film Developing and Postage.**

**Contact: RitaBarb@aol.com
Barbara Field
6 Wooleys Lane
Great Neck, NY 11023**



Great Grandmother's Occupation

By Janet Holt Farino

The grandmother I barely knew was the fourth (living) child of my great grandmother, Amelia Brand Platka. I've come to know Amelia only through correspondence with those who had contact with or were told about her.

Amelia, who "spoke only enough English to get by,"¹ was born in Strasbourg, Alsace, France, ca. 1837, when the Alsace-Lorraine region was under German occupation. Her first language was German, and with "the most beautiful voice," she not only sang lullabies to her children and grandchildren, but also "sang in church." Amelia was raised in the Catholic faith; it is not known in which church she sang.

Her year of immigration to America and who traveled with her is still a mystery. A 1920 Vermont census shows a Brand nephew was born in New York City in 1869. Amelia's first child, a son David Joseph Platka, was born 29 July 1854 in New York City, thus assuming a marriage year of 1853 at age 21. Her Jewish husband, Joseph Platky, born ca. 1830 Austria, could have emigrated with some of his relatives as a teenager. There was much turmoil in Europe throughout history and the mid-1800s were no exception. Cholera and other epidemics, peasant uprisings, revolutions, poor crop yields, starvation, natural disasters and wars all played a part. The first great wave of Germans crossing the Atlantic lasted from 1846 to 1858. My Platky and Brand families must have been on one of the early ships to leave for America during this period.²

The Platka/y family included five (living) children by 1873. Two of their residences on the Lower East Side of Manhattan are found in City Directories. To know that New York City in the 1850s was not a pleasant place for those who came to America says much about how tenuous their lives in Europe must have been. New York's overcrowded tenements, shared bathrooms, and streets filled with animals such as pigs and cows helped to spread whatever disease was rampant in any particular season. "Absent refrigeration, the city's on-the-hoof meat supply had to be kept close at hand,"³ for those who could afford to buy meat. "In August 1853 alone, the city's contract scavenger reported clearing away 690 cows, 577 horses, 883 dogs, 111 cats, 14 hogs, plus 1,303 tons of 'butchers' offal'

and 62 tons of refuse bones from the slaughterhouses."⁴ Life in New York City was a daily challenge. However, the Platka/y family managed to raise three sons and two daughters, the two oldest were bar mitzvah and the elder, David, "was educated in Europe."

Joseph Platky's occupation in the 1870 Federal Census, was that of "traveling agent-dry goods" or pedlar in the 1871 City Directory. He made trips to Europe for his merchandise and maybe visited family who remained there. It is reasonable to assume that son David's education was near these relatives. Joseph's last trip sometime between 1877 and 1879 ended possible disaster, details of which are unknown to us. Family lore says that Joseph drowned on his return trip but doesn't say under what circumstances. Did he contract a disease and was his body tossed overboard (a common practice to avoid spreading contamination)? Maybe it was foul play for his goods. Did his body arrive in New York City where a search for a gravesite might prove worthwhile? Or, did he decide, at about age 47, that New York City and family life was not to his liking? We may never know the truth.

Amelia was listed on the 1880 Vermont census as a widow, living with her son David, his bride and the three youngest Platka children, including my grandma. Grandma was then 15 years of age, her right arm paralyzed from scarlet fever. David, who was afflicted with TB, was supporting a pregnant wife with his clerk's job at a woolen mill. With no formal training and speaking little English, Amelia must have decided that her experience with at least six births qualified her for the profession of midwife. Survival was the driving force; home gardens and the animals supplemented their food needs but in northern Vermont the summers are short and the winters long and often stormy. Traveling to the bedsides of laboring women in any season at a moment's notice must have been both physically and emotionally difficult, and not very profitable. She relied on the assistance of her family and in turn helped care for her three grandchildren and raised her younger children, all while on-call as a midwife.

—continued on page 6



Great Grandmother's Occupation, continued

When David's disease progressed to near a critical stage, he and his wife Nellie, now pregnant with their fifth child (their second child died soon after birth), traveled to her sister's home in Chelsea, MA in the hope of receiving the latest treatment for TB from a large Boston hospital. David was treated and sent back to his sister-in-law's home where he died at age 33 on 5 Nov 1887. Three months later his last child was born. Nellie was just 25 with four children under the age of seven to care for without her husband's support.

By the time my grandmother was 22 and newly married, her sister was 18, and the youngest of Amelia's children was 14. Amelia's whereabouts are unknown following her son David's death. It is presumed she returned to New York City alone where relatives could help and where the winters were not as difficult. Amelia was 55 in 1888, her husband was deceased, and her children settled elsewhere. She had only herself to care for.

My research is ongoing, seeking more answers and expecting to find whatever documentation is extant in New York City, New York; Chittenden County, Vermont; and eventually Alsace, France. I would be delighted to find Amelia's gravesite... and maybe a gravesite for her Joseph.

¹ Quoted phrases are from family correspondence and a diary kept by Nellie's youngest sister.

² Joseph and his second son used the "y" ending while others in this family spelled the name Platka.

³ *Gothan, A History of New York City to 1898*, Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace.

⁴ *Ibid*

Prepare For The Census!

A note from Janet Farino -

In the year 2000 the next Federal Census will be taken. After truthfully completing the questionnaire, we should make a photocopy for our descendants before returning it to the Government. It will be 72 years or the year 2072 before this Census will be released.

Twentieth Century Research

School Records

By Mary Barkan

School records can contain valuable clues for family researchers.

For example, one of the questions I didn't ask my father was when he graduated from high school. I was almost certain that he had left school early, exaggerated his age, and joined the military. Other family members were positive that he had graduated.

To determine which memory was correct I wrote to the school secretary of the Scranton Technical High School in Scranton, Pennsylvania. I explained that my father was deceased and that I would like to know when he graduated. I estimated the years during which he might have attended.

I wrote in May. The months passed with no reply. In September I wrote to the school principal, enclosed a copy of my May letter, and asked that my request be directed to the correct office.

Ten days later a reply arrived. My father had indeed graduated. He was a graduating member of the class of 1940. Family members were pleased to let me know that "I told you so." I was glad to have a family story corrected.

There are numerous school records which can help in twentieth century research.

I have written to medical schools asking about students. In some cases I have received a list of classes taken (along with the grades earned!), club and/or society memberships, honors conferred, and class standing. The National Genealogy Society (4527 17th Street North, Arlington, VA 22207-2399) maintains the AMA Deceased Physician File which contains information on physicians who died after 1906 and before 1969. For a research fee of \$15.00 per name the society will send you information which can include date and place of birth and death, medical school attended, place of practice, hospital affiliation, and citation to an obituary. I used such information to write to the medical school for more information.

To confirm family stories, to provide new leads, or to round out family information, school records can help.

Donation To Yad Vashem

Members Charlotte and Sam Showel have donated their Yampol Yiskor book to Yad Vashem. The Showels responded to the call to help replace Yiskor books missing from the Yad Vashem library. The necrology from the Yampol Yiskor book was printed in a previous issue.



Background Books

Locations

Jackson and Meridian Mississippi
*Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign
Against the Jews*, Jack Nelson 1993,
Simon & Schuster
ISBN 0-671-69223-2

New York City, East Side
*World of Our Fathers: The Journey of the
East European Jews to America and the Life
They Found and Made*, Irving Howe,
1976, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,
ISBN 0-15-146353-0

Milwaukee, Wisconsin
The History of the Jews of Milwaukee,
Louis J. Swichkow and Lloyd P. Gartner, 1963,
The Jewish Publication Society of America,
Library of Congress Card
Number: 63-13260

Gloversville, New York
*Shtetl in the Adirondacks: The Story of
Gloversville and Its Jews*,
Herbert M. Engel, 1991,
Purple Mountain Press,
ISBN 0-935796-22-3

Atlanta, Georgia
*Strangers Within The Gate City: The Jews of
Atlanta 1845-1915*, Steven Hertzberg, 1978,
Jewish Publication Society of
America, ISBN 0-8276-0102-6

The South
Our Southern Landsman, Harry Golden, 1974,
Putnam, Library of Congress Number:
72-97293

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local public library for information on their
holdings and their participation in inter-library
loan. For purchase, check the internet at www.alibris.com or your local book store.

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\$3.50 each.

Calendar 1999

JGSSN-West Meeting Schedule

Sahara West Library 9600 W. Sahara 1pm

**October 17th Film—The Long Way Home, with Comments
by David Berkovits**
November 21st—Vital Records Research—Carole Montello
December 19th—Me and My Genealogy

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