# Prenumerantn:
# A Valuable Resource for Shtetl Research
*by Tom Chatt*

Researching an ancestral shtetl in Eastern Europe can be challenging because many of the pre-WWI census and vital records may no longer exist. However, an unusual but useful source of genealogical information is more likely to have survived. It is called "*prenumerantn*," a Yiddish word meaning "pre-subscribers." It refers to an aspect of the book publishing business in the 19th and early 20th century.

In our great-grandparents' time, the business of getting books published typically required the author to provide front money to the publisher. Since the author would seldom have the money himself, it was a common practice for the author (or his agent) to travel to towns and villages, soliciting people who were willing to make advance payments for the proposed book. Then, when the book was published, the *prenumerantn* (pre-subscribers) would all be personally acknowledged in the printed edition of the book. A typical *prenumerantn* list would be found at the back of the book, and may contain several pages. It would be organized by the name of the town or village, and under each town, it would list the names of the individual subscribers. The names would often include titles or occupations, or relationship to the author. Thus, these lists can be a very useful resource in documenting at least some of the people residing in a given town at a particular time (and what they were reading!).

The seminal work in cataloging these prenumerantn lists is *Sefer HaPrenumerantn (Hebrew Subscription Lists)* by Berl Kagan (New York: Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary and Ktav Publishing, 1975). Kagan sifted through numerous 19th century Jewish religious books, and essentially created an index by town name to the books in which the towns are listed. (As head librarian at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Kagan was in a good position to do this.)

*Sefer HaPrenumerantn* is one of the sources used in compiling reference books on Jewish geography, such as *Where Once We Walked* by Gary Mokotoff and Sallyann Sack (New Jersey: Avotaynu, 2002) and *Shtetl Finder* by Chester Cohen (Los Angeles: Periday, 1980). In researching a shtetl, you may encounter a reference to the town's "Kagan number." This is a reference to the numbering of nearly 9,000 towns made by Kagan in his work. If the listing for your shtetl in *Where Once We Walked* includes "HSL" in the list of sources, this means that your shtetl is listed in Kagan's book (HSL = Hebrew Subscription Lists).

### How to Use the Kagan Book

It must be noted that although there is an English introduction, and brief bits of text in Roman letters, the book is primarily written in Yiddish and Hebrew, using the Hebrew alphabet. However, because the book is highly structured (such as a phone book or a dictionary), you may be able to find the information you need without being fluent in Yiddish. As long as you have a very basic ability to "decode" Hebrew letters (and patience in inverse proportion to your skill), you can make use of this book, following the step-by-step instructions below. (If you are not completely familiar with Hebrew letters, it will be useful to bring along a "crib sheet," both to help with "decoding," and to show you Hebrew alphabetical order.)

The Kagan book itself is rare, and it can be hard to find a copy. Fortunately for us in Los Angeles, there is a copy of this book at the UCLA Southern Regional Library Facility (SRLF). The SRLF is a closed-stack library, but anybody can request the book just to look at it in the adjacent reading room (where a copy machine is available).

### Step 1: Find Your Town Number

Each town has a number associated with it in Kagan's system. Start with "Appendix 5," located around page 340. (Note that being a Yiddish book, the pages turn in the opposite direction to what non-Hebrew readers are used to.) Appendix 5 is an index of geographical names, mapping onto their "Kagan numbers." This appendix is printed in the Roman alphabet ("English" text), with the town names in alphabetical order, so you should be able to find your town name without trouble. (Just remember that even in this "English" part of the book, the pages still turn "backwards," as you pursue the alphabetical order. If you're not used to it, you will probably trip over it several times as I did!)

Also, keep in mind that the spelling of town names was never precise, neither in the original language, nor in the "English" transliteration. You should be prepared to recognize variations in the spelling of your town name.

If you have previously looked at *Shtetl Finder* by Chester Cohen, which references the Kagan number, you already know your Kagan number. However, it still may be helpful to verify it. (In my case, I had copied the number down incorrectly from Cohen.)

### Step 2: Find Your Town's Subscriptions

Now turn to the main body of the book, where you will find a listing of towns in numeric order, from 1 to nearly 9,000. (The numeric order actually coincides with alphabetical order, but unless you're really sharp with Hebrew alphabetical order, the number will get you to the

same place faster.)  These entries are all in Yiddish, except for the numbers, which are "English-style."  Next to the number, you will see the name of your town written in Yiddish, in bold print.  If your town had alternative spellings or alternative names, these will be listed in parenthesis immediately following the primary name.  Then there will be a dash, followed by a list of "subscription entries."

Going right-to-left, each subscription entry will have the title of a book, a long dash, a number (represents the number of people in this town who subscribed to this book), and a period.  Each entry in this list is terminated by a period.  Within a town's list, there are no line-breaks.  Each entry follows the previous one with only a space separation.

Note that some popular books may have had several editions or printings, and that the subscriber lists are specific to the edition. (That is, if a book had a "second edition," they would have had to raise new money and have a new set of subscribers.  Those who pre-subscribed to the first edition would only be acknowledged in the first edition, etc.)  At the "end" of a book title, you may see a "word" in parenthesis which has three letters, followed by a double-apostrophe, followed by a fourth letter, e.g., TRM"B (that is, tav-resh-mem''bet).  These are Hebrew notations for the year of publication.  Note that in Hebrew, the "letters" do double-duty as numbers.

Here is an example of what the structure of the entries looks like:

The above entry for town 4660 is transliterated as follows (rearranged left-to-right):

4660 MAKHNIVKA (Makhnovka) — Harei Besamim (TRS"B) — 12. Zichron Yehoshua — 1.

This entry lists two books for the town of Makhnivka.  The first book is entitled "Harei Besamim" published in Hebrew year TRS"B, which had 12 subscribers from this village.  The second book is entitled "Zichron Yehoshua," which had one subscriber.

Make a photocopy of this entry (and/or carefully transcribe it).

### Step 3: Get the Full Bibliographic Information

Now turn to the first appendix, which starts around page 310.  In this section, you will find a list of all the books mentioned, providing more detailed bibliographic information for each.  This section is all in Yiddish/Hebrew, in alphabetical order by title of book.  By matching up the Hebrew letters (and using a crib-sheet to show Hebrew alphabetical order, if needed), you should be able to locate each of the books mentioned for your town.

A typical bibliographical entry has: the title of the book (in bold), which matches up to the listing from your town, a comma, the name of the author of the book, a period, the place of publication, a comma, the year of publication, and a final period.  The year of publication is typically a Hebrew year using Hebrew letters, but is sometimes an "English" numeral CE year.

Following the example above, I would look for the title

"Harei Besamim" in the section for the Hebrew letter "hey," and would find the following entries:
Here is how the entries would be transcribed:
HAREI BESAMIM, Shachna Tsvi Lichtman. Berditshov, TRN"Z (1895).
HAREI BESAMIM, Shachna Tsvi Lichtman. Berditshov, TRS"B (1902).
HAREI BESAMIM, Yaakov Yosef Tsinz. Budapest, TRF"Z (1925).

Note that in my case, the town entry had included a title and an edition year.  Because we find that there were three books with the same name (two editions of the same book, and one different book with the same title), the year is important to correctly identify the proper entry.  For the town of Makhnivka, the second edition of *Harei Besamim* by Lichtman is the right one, because we had to match TRS"B (the year 1902).

### Step 4: Check the Other Appendices

Kagan also includes a few appendices which **may** contain information about your town.
- **Appendix 2** (starting on page 321) is an index of book authors to the towns they came from.
- **Appendix 3** (starting on page 334) is an index of congregations who subscribed to books collectively.  Sometimes a whole congregation, such as the "Kalter Schul" or the "Bratslaver Shtiebel", would pre-subscribe to a book (especially prayer books), rather than an individual.
- **Appendix 4** (on page 337) is a similar index of "chavarot" (fraternal lodges) that collectively pre-subscribed.

Each of these appendices maps Hebrew names (of authors, congregations, and lodges, respectively) onto town numbers.  The good news is that you can easily scan these pages for your town number.  The bad news is that these appendices are not ordered by number, they are ordered alphabetically by name (of author, congregation, or lodge), so you just have to scan through the whole thing looking for your town number.  However, it isn't all that long (only about a dozen pages of authors, three pages of congregations, and one page of lodges), and it will be worth it if your town is mentioned here.  Your town may or may not be mentioned in these appendices, but you won't know unless you look.

### Finding the Actual Prenumerantn Lists

Kagan provides some very useful information about towns you may be researching, but alas he does not get you all the way to the actual personal names of the subscribers.  For that, you need to take Kagan's information and find the actual books referenced to see the subscription lists in them.  Keep in mind that you must find the specific original editions of these books, or else you will not find the subscription list.

You may find some of these books at UCLA, either in

the UCLA Southern Regional Library Facility (SRLF) or in the Young Research Library. (In the example we've followed above, there are two books for Machnivka. One of them, *Zichron Yehoshua*, published in Zhitomir in 1900, can be found at the SRLF. It's over 100 years old, delicate, and stored inside an envelope, but they will let you look at it.) If you can not find it at UCLA, you might check the on-line catalogs for Jewish Theological Seminary, Harvard, or Brandeis. Keep in mind that there are no standard rules about how to transliterate Hebrew titles and Yiddish authors into "English" spellings, so you may have to try different variations. Just from an on-line search, you may be able to learn more about what these books and authors were that the people in your shtetl were reading.

I hope you will be able to make use of this valuable resource in learning more about your shtetl.☐
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# You've Done All the Research—Now What?
## *by Adar Belinkoff*
### *From a talk at the IAJGS Jerusalem Conference 2004.*

Now that you have completed all that great research, the question is "What can you do with it?" Of course, you could always just keep it hidden in your computer, but your Aunt Sophie would not be happy with that after all the help she has given you. Even worse, no one will be able to appreciate the brilliant work you have done. Another option is to print sections for various relatives as they request them, but that is very time consuming, inefficient, and impossible to keep updated for everyone. You can, of course, print a book, but that is very expensive; and, also since genealogical discovery never ends, it is impossible to keep current.

> **Check out my web page!**
> **View how-to instructions!**
> **http:// www.belinkoff.com**

The solution, of course, is to put your genealogy on the web. It is very inexpensive and easy to do. It is extremely versatile: you can use text, pictures, graphics, and sound, as well as family trees. It can be easily updated as new data is developed, and is available to anyone with web access, anywhere. It can even help hitherto unknown relatives find you.

Of course being available to anyone anywhere has its negative side, and security is a vital concern in creating genealogical web sites. Security concerns fall into two main categories: family secrets and identity theft. Among the possible family secrets concerns are such issues as adoptions, secret or hitherto unknown lineages, suicides, criminal activity, professions and how they are presented, and *halachic* issues. How contentious any of these issues might be depends on family sensitivities, and will vary from case to case. Two useful principles are: 1) make no changes or omissions of facts, dates or places when detailing family events and 2) make every effort to make living relatives comfortable with your presentation.

Identity theft is a serious concern. The use of *mother's maiden name* as a common security tool is a genealogist's nightmare since that is one of the key pieces of information that we are always seeking. One solution is to make only information about deceased relatives available to the general web, and put all information about living relatives under password protection. Professional password protection is available from many web hosting services (see below), usually at a modest fee. A reasonably secure free password system is available from the author via the web site <http://www.belinkoff.com>. Above all, never show addresses or birth dates of living people on an unprotected web site.

Creating a family web site involves four elements: acquiring a host, incorporating pictures and graphics, incorporating family trees, and using an editor. Web hosting services are widely available. Some well-known providers are available nationally and your local ISP may also offer such a service. Services range from free (ad supported) to modest fees such as $11.95 per month for adequate size sites—to much higher fees for commercial sites. Free sites are adequate to get started. Features that come with for-cost sites, in addition to larger size, include your own domain name, and professional password protection. The quality of the editor also varies with hosts as discussed below.

Incorporating pictures and graphics requires a scanner, a very inexpensive computer accessory. All graphics must be in the JPEG format to be used on web sites but all scanners provide software with that format. In considering, the use of graphics from other sources, some knowledge of copyright law is necessary. Almost everything that is published is copyrighted. Some sources (e.g., some newspapers), but not all, permit copying material. Purchasing material (e.g., postcard images from *Avotaynu*) usually includes permission to copy, if not for commercial use. In general, use of copyrighted material for noncommercial usages will not create problems. The important principles are to know something about copyright law and to understand the practical implications of any usage.

Putting family trees on your web site is dependent upon your genealogical software. You can always print your trees and scan them into a JPEG format, which causes some quality degradation. A better solution is to use the "Print Screen" key on your computer and then