

## MY SEARCH FOR MY ANCESTORS

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I am still amazed at the information I have managed to discover about my ancestors when, at the beginning of my research, all I knew were the names of both sets of grandparents. I have also discovered several second cousins, some of whom I've managed to meet and others with whom I am in email or postal contact. I find that the more I find out, the more I want to find out. Genealogy is a fascinating subject and brings one in touch with hitherto unknown relatives all over the world. I'd like to tell you about some of the ways in which I have achieved this.

In 1998, I decided that, since I was 12,000 miles from the majority of my relations, my two older children had only met them once and my youngest had seen only a couple of them, sooner or later my descendants were going to want to know where their ancestors came from. So, I started to compile two family trees, at first just putting in the names of various aunts, uncles and cousins. Eventually, I thought it would be a good idea to add their dates of birth, marriage and death. Accordingly, I wrote to or emailed each of my cousins, asking them for whatever information they could give me. Gradually, most of the information I needed was sent to me, after many reminders and a fair bit of nagging.

Then I was told that there was a Jewish Genealogical Society in Adelaide where I live and, since by now I was quite interested in my quest, in January 1999, I decided to join and see what other information might be available for me to discover.

A whole new world opened as I realised there was help available on the Internet and also discovered where I might find certain records. I went to the State Library in Adelaide and found that they hold, among other records, English birth, marriage and death records on microfilm. There I searched for the birth dates of my mother and her siblings and made the discovery that their surname had been spelt both Ouzner and Osner for each of them and, when I sent for their birth certificates, I saw that my grandmother's maiden name was spelt differently on each of them!

My maternal grandparents came from Bessarabia – my grandfather, Henoah and his two brothers Yossel and Yankel were born in Khotyn. Their parents were Fradl and Israel Moische. My grandmother, Ester, was born in Kamenets-Podolskiy in Ukraine. Her father was Chaim Fischel Borziansky. My grandparents were married in Vinnitsa.

I also found that my father and his siblings had all been registered as Borkovsky and not Samuels as I had previously thought. Well, at least I found them all eventually!

My paternal grandfather had travelled to New York in 1888, when he was only eighteen and had then returned to Kolno in Poland, married his sweetheart and they then both travelled back to New York. They arrived in January, 1891. By December of that year, they had their first son and went on to have three more boys - my father's half-brothers. Sadly, his wife, Freida, died giving birth to twins in May, 1893. After a while, my grandfather decided to go to Paris so he could learn Parisian tailoring, leaving the boys in an orphanage.

I have cousins living in New York and, when one offered to help, I asked if she could try and trace in which orphanage the boys were left. She didn't get around to it but I eventually found the twins online (name spelled Bergofarky) in an orphanage in New York at the time of the 1900 census.

Among photos my cousin showed me on our visit to New York, was one of my grandmother which had been taken there. I had no idea that grandma had ever been in New York and, when I queried this, Joan asked her mother (a first cousin of mine – a daughter of one of the twins) and found out that *both* my paternal grandparents had gone to New York, presumably to collect the boys. I decided that they must have gone sometime between 1901, when their second child was born and 1905 when my father was born – the longest of the gaps between the births of their children. Online, I managed to find the name of the ship (SS New York) and the date of arrival in New York – 12<sup>th</sup> September, 1903. The strange thing is that I can only find grandpa and not grandma as having sailed to America from England. I've looked for her under Samuels, Borkovsky and even her maiden name, Goldenberg – all to no avail. As I spoke with my older cousins and my one remaining maternal uncle, I started gathering some information on the family history and a friend suggested that I should tape these conversations, which I did. At the same time, I had entered all the various spellings of my family names and possible places where they had lived into the Family Finder on the Jewishgen website. This is a most important thing to do, as Jewish people worldwide look through this list to check whether anyone is looking for the same ancestors.

For about eighteen months, I heard nothing positive from these entries but then I received an email from a lady in Israel who wondered whether we could be related as her father had had an uncle with the surname of Borkovsky who lived in Berne, Switzerland and who had been a clock-maker. Since *my* father had also had a Borkovsky uncle living in Switzerland, a watchmaker and jeweller by trade, it did seem quite possible that we *were* related. I didn't know his given name but I *did* remember my parents discussing my great-aunt Maria, to whom he was married. We were both very excited as we told each other little bits of information which did seem to tie up a possible relationship. Galit emailed me the names of

all of my paternal grandfather's siblings, their descendants, *and* the names of his parents, none of which I had previously known. *Her* great-uncle Moshe was married to a lady called Maria. Was this a match? We were sure it was.

One of my older cousins had told me the only information I knew about that side of my family which was that my great-grandmother Borkovsky was buried on the Chinese side of the Russian Chinese border and I had wondered what on earth she had been doing in China! Galit also told me about another cousin, Dina, who lived in Melbourne (about 800 miles from Adelaide) and I 'phoned her and discovered that she was a first cousin of my father. She was born in Hailar, China. We were *so* excited as we chatted, and I promised that my husband and I would go to Melbourne and have lunch with her and her son and daughter. In February, 2003, complete with trusty cassette recorder, we went to Melbourne to meet Dina. She told me that she had been in Australia since 1958. I arrived in 1959 and my parents in 1968. What a shame we hadn't known of each other's existence before 2003. However, without the Internet, we probably would *never* have met, nor even heard of each other. After an enormous lunch, we settled down to talk and she told me about the horrific time she and her family had suffered during and immediately after World War II. They had been living in the north of China, in Hailar, when the Japanese arrived. She told me of imprisonment, torture and murder of family members by the Japanese.

Dina took out a box of family photos. The first one she showed me was one of my grandparents and, would you believe, I took a photograph out of my folder to show to Dina and it was a copy of the same photo?!! Even my rather skeptical husband was convinced of the relationship after that! Dina told me that the family were Ashkenazi and originated from Irkutsk in Siberia, before they moved to Hailar.

By this time, I had downloaded a free family tree programme from the Internet and entered all the information I had been given, offering copies of the trees to my cousins. Some said they would love to have the relevant tree and others that they were only interested in the history, which I was discovering bit by bit. Some even said that only the future was of interest to them! Surely it's the past which makes us how we are today!

I started to collect photographs and birth, marriage and death certificates of various relations and entered all the details into the trees.

My father had a photograph of his older brother, Morris, holding a violin. He told me that uncle was a talented violinist who was killed in World War I. Apparently, my grandparents were informed that he was missing, believed dead. My grandmother went to France after the war and visited many hospitals in the hope of finding him, perhaps with amnesia. She was

unable to discover any news of him and it wasn't until Morris' violin was returned to them, that they finally understood that he must be dead. They never knew where he was buried or exactly where and when he died. In November, 2001, I decided to see what information I could find about Morris and typed his name into the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website, where I found that he had died on Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1918, at the age of 19. He is remembered on the Soissons Memorial, Aisne, France.

Later, when I was trying to find information on my paternal grandmother's Goldenberg siblings, I decided to try typing the male siblings' names into the website and, thus, I found that my great-uncle Jack, Grandma's youngest brother, had also been killed – on the 17<sup>th</sup> December, 1918 – in Kantara, Egypt. He, too, was only 19. His certificate online, gave the names of his parents *and* their address at the time of his death.

I knew that a paternal uncle (the oldest son from my grandfather's first marriage) had gone, with his second wife, to South Africa. I thought they had gone to Johannesburg and I searched online until I discovered, quite by accident, that my uncle had died in Durban and even in which plot and which cemetery he was buried. I then emailed the South African Digest (through the Jewishgen website), asking whether it was possible for someone with a digital camera and who lived in Durban to go to the cemetery and photograph their headstones. To my amazement and delight, I received a reply from a gentleman, saying that he remembered my uncle and aunt, as they had been friends of his late grandmother, and he agreed to go and take the photographs I required. Not only that but he also remembered seeing a plaque that my aunt had put up in the Jewish Home for the Aged, in memory of her husband. He took a photograph of that as well and emailed it to me. From the headstones and the plaque, I now had their dates of birth and death and my aunt's maiden name.

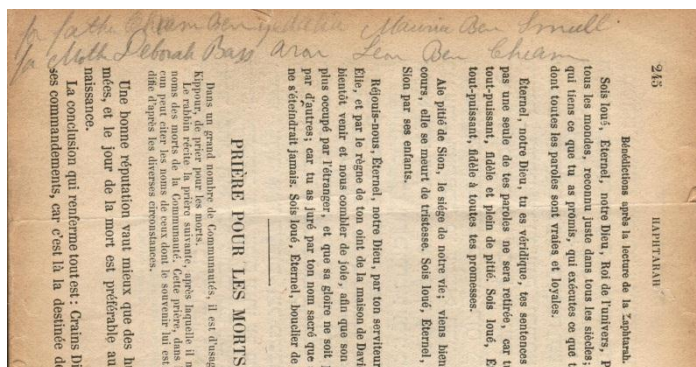
Fantastic.

Meanwhile, I was asking questions on various websites and had a reply to my query on whether someone who had access to the 1901 British Census would be prepared to look there for my maternal grandparents and for my mother who was born four months before the census and I also wondered whether my *father's* parents had arrived from Paris before the Census. I searched through the Free BMD website and discovered that my father's older brother, Morris, was born in London in March, 1899. I ordered a copy of his birth certificate online and now I knew the name of the street where he was born. I had previously believed that the family had landed in Liverpool, so I thought perhaps the baby arrived while the family was on its way there.

In response to my query, I heard from a lovely lady who said she had also found the Goldenberg family – my paternal *great*-grandparents and their children - living in London on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1901. Until then, I hadn't even known that *they* had moved from France to London. She gave me the children's names, which I already knew from an old wedding photo and the help of a cousin, and, what was even more helpful, their ages and place of birth – Paris, France - and, of great interest, their address at the time of the census.

The Goldenberg great-grandparents were the parents of my father's mother. I knew already that my paternal grandparents were married at the time of the census but my newly-found friend also discovered that my grandmother, her husband – Samuel Borkovsky (registered as Berkopsky in the census – no wonder it was difficult to trace them!) - and their first-born child were living very near to her parents' home, that she was the oldest child and her youngest brother, Jack, was only a year older than her own son, Morris (the two 19-year-olds who died within six and a half months of each other, right at the end of World War I).

While we were visiting one of my cousins in England in 2002, she showed me a French prayer book which had belonged to our grandmother, Rochelle Goldenberg. I flicked through the pages and found that Rochelle had written, under prayers for the dead, the names of her parents – Chaim and Deborah - her father's father – Gedalje, and her mother's father - Aran. What was really strange was that I had called one of my daughters, Deborah, and *she*



had then called *her* daughter Rochelle. How's that for coincidence?

At that time, the lady from London who had been helping me, had been unable to find my mother and her parents on the 1901 census. Some time later, when I gave her a couple of possible addresses where the family might have been living at the time of the census, she found them registered as Uzenia, not Osner! That explained why she hadn't been able to find them earlier!

Back to the paternal family. The next Borkovsky child was a daughter, Bluma, born in London in May, 1901 (her surname was given as Bokowsky). My father, Joseph, was born in Cardiff, Wales in April, 1905, so I knew they had moved from London to Cardiff between

1901 and 1905 and then to Liverpool, between 1905 and September, 1907, when the next daughter, Sarah, was born. I knew the Borkovsky family (by then known as Samuels) had lived for some years in Liverpool as the next two daughters, Perle and Eva were born there in June, 1910 and January, 1913, respectively.

I had found Perle on the Free BMD website. Prior to that I hadn't heard of her but, since the only Borkovskys I found in Liverpool had been family, I decided to take a chance and send for Perle's birth and death certificates in the hope that she was "one of ours". Sure enough, my grandparents were named as her parents and I discovered that Perle had died of pneumonia at only three months of age.

I wondered whether perhaps the Goldenbergs (my great-grandparents and their family) had also lived in Liverpool and so I posted yet another query – this time in the British Jewishgen digest - to ask whether anyone knew of a Goldenberg family living in Liverpool sometime after 1905. One of the replies I received was from a lady who asked whether I was aware that there was a Jewish regional newspaper which was published in several cities, including Liverpool. She said that the editor would publish my query with a photograph, at no charge. I emailed the question and my great-aunt's wedding photograph, which had her parents and all her siblings in it. Within a fortnight, I received several emails from excited second cousins, living in Liverpool, Manchester, America and even Sydney, Australia! They said they just couldn't believe it when they saw their surname in the paper and a photo of their grandfather or their grandmother – two different branches of the Goldenberg family. I have now traced all but one of my Grandmother's siblings. My newly-found cousins thought that the remaining sibling, Leon, had been a publican in London. Unfortunately, I just didn't have enough information to trace him when I was in London – there are just too many pubs there!! Nor have I been able to trace him since that time.....no marriage; no death.

What really put the icing on the cake was that my husband and I were due to go to England that year – 2005 - and I was determined to arrange a weekend in Liverpool to meet these newly-found second cousins, some of whom still lived in Liverpool, one in Manchester and one in Westcliff-on-Sea. Since then, in June 2006 I also met my cousins in Sydney. In our itinerary, we included the Liverpool weekend and thoroughly enjoyed meeting the cousins who entertained us beautifully, making sure that we met everybody we should and feeding us to bursting point with delicious food.

We swapped information and photos and we all got on very well with each other. I also managed to make time to go to the library in Liverpool to check through some directories, seeing what I could find out about my Borkovsky (Samuels) grandparents and their business

activities. I found their business and residential addresses from the directories and a description of their trade – my grandfather Samuels described himself as a Parisian Ladies' Tailor and my grandmother as a Ladies' Tailor. Each of their businesses was at a different address. Two of my newly discovered cousins had a photograph of *their* grandparents' wedding in 1913 and, in it, among lots of other family, were my father and some of his siblings as children and, also, of course, my grandparents, great-grandparents and – probably – my great-great-grandparents.

I had previously discovered – years ago - the name of one of my grandmother's first cousins, Etta, when one of *my* first cousins had taken me to see a descendent of Etta. This descendant had shown me part of her family tree and had also given me a photograph taken in 1929 of a family gathering for a 21<sup>st</sup> birthday.



At that time, although I scribbled down some of the names she showed me, by the side of my equally scribbled paternal tree, I didn't think I would ever really be interested in knowing any more names than those of my first cousins, aunts and uncles. However, I kept the bit of paper on which I had written the names of some of Etta's descendants and, several years later, typed their names at the end of my paternal family history.

In 2005, when I emailed the family history to my "new" Goldenberg cousins, some of these names were recognised by one of them as being very good friends of his whom he'd known for *years* and were, much to his amazement, among these descendants. Neither couple had any idea that they were cousins!!

Incidentally, there was a young girl in that photograph (seventh from the left, back row) who was the image of me when I was a teenager! Extraordinary! I would love to know who she was. Later on, when I had been shown photographs of my Goldenberg great-grandparents, I was able to identify them in that birthday photograph, sitting next to the birthday girl. I knew she was the birthday girl as she was holding a 21<sup>st</sup> key! I've since discovered her name

and know that she was a grand-daughter of my great-grandparents. I asked one of my Goldenberg cousins to put me in touch with his friends – the ones who turned out to be relatives - and now I'm in contact with them too.

The main reason for going to England in 2005 was to be with my mother's only surviving brother as he celebrated his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday. Of course, I also took the opportunity to ask him more questions about the family.

We spent ten days in London in 2005 and several of those days were used in searching the Records Office at Kew, the National Archives and the London Metropolitan Archives. Before we left, I had searched the naturalisation records online to find whether my paternal grandfather and his Goldenberg father-in-law had been naturalised. In spite of a cousin telling me previously that she was sure that grandpa Samuel Borkovsky hadn't applied for naturalisation, I found that he had. Unfortunately, none of the Goldenbergs had or, if they had, I haven't traced their records.

Three years prior to that, a cousin on my mother's side of the family, told me that our grandfather had applied in for naturalisation in 1930 and, on a previous visit to Kew, I had looked this up in a large book and taken a photocopy of his certificate of naturalisation, which gave his parents' names and where he was born. This was information that none of us had known before this time.

When I asked to see my *paternal* grandfather's naturalisation papers, I thought that the certificate was all I would see. However, much to my delight, it was his actual application, full of information, names dates, places, etc. Most exciting.

Then I thought "This is wonderful. I wonder whether I can get the same for my *maternal* grandfather, Henoch". I applied to see his application but was informed that because of the privacy act, it wouldn't be released until 2030, 100 years after the original application.

However, I was told that I could apply to the Home Office to get an early release. This I did and, unfortunately, it took *so* long to be released that I was back in Australia before I received notification that I would be able to see the document. Good old Internet - I ordered the application online and, eventually, it arrived – full of more lovely information. For instance, that illusive surname of my maternal grandmother – spelt differently on each of her children's birth certificates – I now know was Borziansky. I decided that this is far more likely to be correct than the names on the birth certificates as, by 1930, my grandfather's English was much better than it was at the beginning of the century when the children were born. On the naturalisation application was also the date and place of his marriage and the



date when they arrived in England. Unfortunately, he didn't state the ship on which they arrived. More for me to research.

While I was at the National Archives, in Kew, waiting for my husband to finish looking up his family, I wandered into the library and found a book called British Jewry Book of Honour World War I. I thought I might as well have a look through it to see whether I could find the names of my uncle Morris and my great-uncle Jack. Also, there were lots of photographs towards the back of the book. I could find was no mention of Morris, even though I knew which regiment he had been in. However, when I looked through the index of names, to my delight I found Jack's name and, there, on page 244 – In Memoriam – was a photograph of Private Jack Goldenberg, Lancashire Fusiliers and 38<sup>th</sup> Royal Fusiliers.



The latter regiment was formed at Plymouth on the 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1918 from Jewish volunteers. In April, 1918, they left England for Egypt. During September, 1918, they were attached to an Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division in Palestine.

With regard to that book, a while ago, while sorting through all the little bits of paper I had accumulated during my searches – trying to put everything in some sort of order, I found where I had written the name of a book I had reserved from the reference section of the South Australian State Library – the British Jewry Book of Honour World War I! I then remembered searching through that book, several years ago, looking for mention of my uncle Morris. At that time, I hadn't even heard of great-uncle Jack!!

A few weeks later, I was reading through back issues of an Australian Jewish Genealogy newsletter, when I noticed the name of a man living in Melbourne who, it was said

"researched widely the available resources for tracing the former Jewish communities of China". I thought "nothing ventured, nothing gained" and sent him an email – which bounced!! I re-sent it, using the email address of the newsletter and asking that it be forwarded. The very next day, I received a very helpful email, directing me to a website [www.jewsofchina.org](http://www.jewsofchina.org), where I could access some information about Hailar, the town where my Borkovsky ancestors lived (and some were born) and also add my details in the Family Search section.

I looked through the previous postings and could hardly believe my eyes when I saw the name of a cousin, David, and the information that he was looking for family. The only reason I knew his name was because it had been sent to me by the Israeli cousin I had previously discovered through the Jewishgen website. I sent him an email and, much to my disappointment, it bounced. I had sent a copy of these emails to two of my cousins who live in Israel and one wrote back to me, saying that one of the letters in the name of the ISP, in the email address, was incorrect. I re-sent it and it didn't bounce. The other cousin wrote to me that she saw David from time to time and she would contact him to check his email address!! All that possible accessible information and I didn't realise that Galit knew this cousin and could put me in touch with him! Oh well – I've heard from David now. I had a very excited email from him (I think that maybe he had asked someone to write for him) and I wrote back, asking for dates and places of his part of the family (sending a copy to my English-speaking cousin in Israel). I also suggested to him that maybe it would be difficult for David to understand English and he offered to translate my questions for David and David's reply to me. This he did and, since then, he has met both David and Galit. I've asked if David knows more Borkovsky family history, as he was born in Hailar, China. And so the information goes on – just as I think that's it – I'll never be able to get any further – more turns up or I think of another way to search for something or I read about some research someone else has done.

Sometimes, I just read the information I have already typed and notice the name of a place which had skipped my mind. For instance, a few years ago, a cousin in London was good enough to send me a photograph he took for me of our maternal grandparents' tombstones. I was looking through all my photos on the computer some time ago and noticed there was quite a bit of Hebrew on the tombstones. I emailed the photograph to one of the rabbis in Adelaide and asked whether there were any names on the photo – apart from those of my grandparents, of course! Back came the reply that my grandmother's father was called Chaim Fishel. Now I had not only her maiden name (which had been in her husband's

naturalisation application) but the given names of her father! Who knows? With this I might be able to find where he lived and where and when he died, perhaps where and when he was married.

It's now 2012 and, after much searching when I thought I had discovered more about this great-grandfather and did a lot of research about a family with the same surname, only to find that the possible cousins weren't 'mine' after all. Never mind, *they* now know a lot more about their ancestors than they did before I came on the scene!

My now almost 97-year-old uncle told me that his father, my maternal grandfather, Henoah Uzner, had two brothers who had also travelled to London. He remembered seeing his aunts but not the uncles. He did, however, know their names – Yossel and Yankel.

In 2005, one of the days I'd spent in London doing research, I had spent at the London Metropolitan Archives, looking for school records for my mother and her siblings. I couldn't find *her* name at all but I found information about her siblings (even the fact that one of my uncles had had measles before he started school!). What was even more exciting was my find of their cousins' names, together with their address and the names of their parents – Joseph and Sarah. So, here was Yossel registering his children at the school each year – until 1915 when, suddenly, Sarah was registering them! I wondered whether perhaps Joseph had died. When I returned home, a search in ancestry.co.uk revealed that he had indeed died. I sent for his death certificate and that revealed he was only 35 at the time of his death. I also sent for various certificates for their children and managed to trace living descendants for this family. I have, only today, found their passage to London with their first-born son in March, 1909.

Yankel's descendants were a different matter. I searched and searched without finding anything about them. My uncle told me that Yankel's wife's name was Reyzla. They weren't in the 1901 census nor in the 1911 census.

I suddenly remembered my mother taking me, as a little girl, to meet a cousin of hers called Freda. We met her several times, together with her daughter who was a few years older than I. I didn't know Freda's married name but realised that, since she wasn't Yossel's daughter, she must have been Yankel's. I also remembered the daughter's name. Knowing Freda's maiden name and the name of her daughter, I did a search on ancestry, looking for the birth of a daughter and just putting in those two names. Bingo, I now knew Freda's married name. I found a son for her, as well. I phoned my uncle in London and he remembered Freda and both her children - nothing like jogging a memory! I sent for Freda's marriage certificate

and there as a witness, was my grandfather's signature – proof positive that I had the right person.

My uncle also told me that the daughter had met a tragic end, having been accidentally shot. He'd been to the funeral. After several months, it occurred to me that I could ask him if he remembered in which cemetery the daughter was buried. Sometimes the brain works slowly!! Having now discovered where she was buried, although I didn't know her married name, I asked in a Jewishgen digest if it was possible to find a grave when one only had the given name and not the surname. One of the replies was from a lady who had already photographed all the stones in the cemetery and could do a search of her database using either name. She discovered the grave and sent me the photo by return. Amazing. I now had my cousin's married name, hitherto unknown, and also I had a date of death and the names of her two children.

A friend, with a subscription to The Jewish Chronicle in England, found all the obituaries for my cousin and, from *them*, I found many names of her other relations. I sorted through all of these and, in those days, peoples' addresses were often also added to the names in the J.C. I found an address which was a few houses from where the sister of one of our friends here in Adelaide was living and emailed her to ask if she would mind calling in to see whether they still lived there. They didn't - but the people who lived there now had bought the house from the relative I was looking for. They put me in touch with her and *she* gave me several other family names, together with a couple of email addresses.. I searched through ancestry and then through facebook to see who I could find.

Eventually, through a series of coincidences, I traced all of the descendants of Yankel and hope to meet them whilst I am briefly in London this year!

I have discovered that there are several qualities one has to have to do family research –

1. patience (sometimes very difficult)
2. persistence (never give up)
3. the ability to think laterally