

## Adrienne's impressions of IAJGS 2019 Cleveland

What follows is a description of some my experiences at the IAJGS 2019 in Cleveland, including the presentations I participated in and my impressions of them and how I found the names of my maternal second great grandfather and his siblings. Yay!

It was difficult sometimes to decide the lectures and seminars I wanted to attend because even though there were many sessions overall, some of my choices were scheduled at the same time. However, for those who missed sessions they wanted to attend (or to see even the whole conference in absentia), a nice option at the conference was the ability to purchase videos.

One particularly wonderful and productive session I signed up for at the conference was a one-on-one with an expert, in my case, our own Bessarabia SIG chairperson, Yefim Kogan.

I had prepared and emailed to Yefim ahead of the conference a few questions whose answers I hadn't found on my own, including

1. How to get my paternal ancestors (surname: NUCH) added to JewishGen (a handful are on there now)
2. What did he think of me hiring a professional genealogist to help me find anything more about my paternal grandmother's ancestry (I had found her married name on a ship's manifest with my father's, an aunt's, and an uncle's and a few censuses with their names, a photo of the headstone she shares with my grandfather in a Jewish cemetery in New York, and a couple of documents of my two uncles that showed her maiden name, KRATSLEIN, which I still can't find in any major genealogy database)
3. How to get documents about my father and his family from his hometown of Rezina, Moldova (formerly Bessarabia).

Knowing Yefim's superior organizational and motivational skills already, I should have known also I would come away from our session with jobs to do! This time to create and share a KehilaLink page about Rezina. I plan to contact all the people who have a Rezina entry on the JewishGen Family Finder and ask about people who lived there and dates. I will request introductions, stories, and old photos. And I will ask what followers of the new KehilaLink page want to see on the page. Stay tuned. The answer to the second question is a bit more complex. I will save it for another day. To the third question, I can only say, *fuhgeddaboutit*.

An equally favorite session, however, wasn't in any conference room. It was in my hotel room using the laptop I lugged all the way from Southern California. Even though there were plenty of computers in the conference resource room, all loaded with links to top genealogy websites and open to conference attendees for many days and many hours (exceptions: Fold3 [for military records] wasn't functioning; ProQuest was available only on one day), I found Hirsh David LEVINGER, my maternal second great grandfather on ancestry.com on my laptop in my hotel room while searching family trees I didn't know existed. Mind you, I might have found him at my house (I have a current subscription), but the inspiration and renewed energy I received at the conference and extended uninterrupted time (no doggy barking, no telemarketers, no friends dropping by) did the trick, I think. Great great great grandpa Hirsh was from Germany; his grandson, my maternal grandfather, was from Austria (you already know about country boundaries and names changing, right?). I also found Hirsh's siblings, including a brother who died in early childhood. (My Bessarabian roots are on my father's side, but because finding information about

ancestors who lived in the former Russian Empire has proven so difficult, I decided to work on the other side of my family for a break.)

I also enjoyed very much Renee Stern Steinig's "Scandals, Shandehs, and Lies: The Stories Families Don't Tell." So much fun! The presenter, a genealogist with over 40 years' experience, shared cases of skeletons in the closet: mental illness, illegitimate births, infidelity, abandonment, and even murder, all kept secret for decades. She entertained us with the stories, the tools she used, and the reunions and reconciliations that often followed her research.

The JewishGen Bessarabia SIG Meeting was a treat! It is always wonderful to see in person people I know generally only by their names written on websites and in email messages. Sheli Fein gave a fascinating and uplifting presentation about the poet Eliyahu Meitus, who was born in Kishinev. Besides telling us about Ella Romm's *My Jewish Bessarabian Roots*, published in 2013 (the author is a great grandniece of the poet), she inspired us with snippets of his poetry. In this session, I also learned from Yefim Kogan that back when Bessarabia declared its independence, it had asked Romania to care for it. At the time, Romania agreed to give Jews full citizenship but that never happened. I also was reminded about the [Bessarabia map](#) on the JewishGen website and the really productive research tool at JewishGen, "Unified Search," which I hadn't noticed before.

Following the SIG meeting and in the same room was the presentation by Inna Vayner, "History of Jews in Transnistrian Region of Moldova." I know Inna from the terrific Facebook page [Bessarabian/Moldovian Jewish Roots](#). Inna was born in the region. And although I don't know exactly where he was born, my paternal great grandfather and his family lived in Transnistria. I think the town name was Rybnitsa (or it might have been a suburb), which is across the Dneister River from Rezina, Moldova, where my father and his siblings were born. Side note: In Springfield Gardens, Queens, New York, there is a gated section at the Old Montefiore Cemetery, where my parents, grandfather, grandmother, and other relatives are buried. Both towns are spelled out in the name of the burial society on the rusty old gates at the front of the section.



Inna mentioned that in Tiraspol, a fortress was built in 1792, a time when Jews didn't have surnames. Jews from Kiev, Podolia (former Poland), and other areas were given land in the area in the 1800s along with Cossacks (groups of predominantly East Slavic-speaking people who became known as members of democratic, self-governing, semi-military communities), gypsies, and others. It was interesting to me that around 1796, people migrated from Austria, Turkey (my father and I look like we could have been

Turkish, or maybe Greek or Italian, DNA tests notwithstanding), Romania, Bessarabia, and Podolia. Also that military records showed Rybnitza as being part of Balta. Who knew?

I attended the “Luncheon: JewishGen Ukraine SIG” hoping to find out a bit more about the environment in which my paternal great grandparents, grandfather, and his siblings lived. You see, they resided in what is now the breakaway state of Transnistria, which at one time was part of the Ukraine (sort of still is according to the rest of the world). Instead of that expectation being realized, Kateryna Duzenko of Yahad-In Unum discussed the organization’s methodology of investigating mass murders, in particular a case study of the mass shooting in Vinnytsia—kind of a Ukraine CSI—at the same time fascinating and sad. I didn’t learn much about my ancestors’ lives because the ones I knew of from the Ukraine emigrated a couple of decades before the Holocaust. Still, the archival research and eyewitness accounts could easily have applied to the pogroms that may have been the last straw before my ancestors moved to America. Also someday, I might find out that some of my paternal ancestors never made it out, and were, too, victims of atrocities. Who knows what future research holds in store!

I enjoyed the session, “Discovering the Treasures of the Yizkor Books: Using Yizkor Books in Genealogy Family Research,” presented by Yefim Kogan and Sheli Fain. More than 1,200 Yizkor (Memorial) books have been written, each representing a town or other geographic area where Jews lived, and each written by the collective efforts of former residents and survivors. Published immediately after World War II, and in the 1950s, ‘60s, and ‘70s, Yizkor books vary considerably from each other but contain a wealth of historical resources, including personal details, stories about community and family events, economic and cultural contributions to communities, reminiscences about hostilities, pogroms, wars, and achievements, and a whole lot more. Some Yizkor books can be found on JewishGen and the Dorot Jewish Division of the New York Public Library. The one that I am most familiar with is [\*My Memoirs and Thoughts \(Rezina, Moldova\)\*](#), written by Solomon Shaposnick, 1964, and coordinated by Anne Barash. In this one, I first read about the mamaliga and brinza cheese that my father talked about eating when he was a child. Long ago, I had heard from my father that his father was a foreman on a tobacco farm. The Rezina Yizkor book mentioned the proliferation of tobacco farms in that part of Bessarabia. Other information sources were shared in this session as well as the caveat that sometimes mistakes were written in Yizkor books.

“The Nature and Consequences of Jewish Migration – The Pamela Weisberger Memorial Lecture” started out with a thought-provoking discussion of Jews as a migratory people and how migration and dispersal profoundly influenced Jewish culture, economy, and politics. Little by little, however, and then a lot, the session seemed to go off on a tangent about the Jewish religion and language, leaving Jewish genealogy in the dust, in my opinion. I didn’t come to Cleveland for a religious education. I feel strongly that as Jewish genealogists, our goal is to warmly welcome and share information and tools with others interested in Jewish genealogy no matter what religion or no religion they profess. I was disappointed in this session and eventually walked out of the conference room.

In a fast-moving, comprehensive overview of tools and documents to research Jewish ancestry, Janice Sellers presented “Jewish Genealogy: How Is This Research Different from All Other Research?” Lucky for us, she also supplied a very helpful handout. I wish I saw it before I started

to write like a maniac, worried I might miss a few points. Here are her lists of what makes Jewish research unique and resources (you can find additional information on her handout):

### **Unique in Jewish Research**

- Bubbe meises*
- Many languages and alphabets
- Naming patterns
- Patronymics (no family names)
- Often not citizens
- Few religious records
- Rabbinical “genealogies”
- Community (*kehillah*) records
- Yizkor* (memorial) books
- Records from a Jewish perspective
- Landsmanshaftn/burial/benevolent societies
- Tombstone (*matzevah*) symbols

### **Resources**

- JewishGen.org
- SephardicGen.org
- Routes to Roots  
(<http://www.rtrfoundation.org/index.shtml>)
- Cleveland Jewish Archives  
(<https://www.wrhs.org/research/library/significant%20collections/jewish-american/>)
- Access Jewish Cleveland  
(<http://accessjewishcleveland.org/jewish-cleveland-cemeteries.aspx>)
- Cleveland Jewish News  
(<http://www.cjn.org/archive>)
- Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage  
(<http://www.maltzmuseum.org>)

My notes show Janice Sellers as a speaker for “Finding Maiden Names.” I don’t remember if that was the same session as the one described above (and I named it incorrectly in my notes) or was a different session not in the official program. Anyway, this presentation enumerated all kinds of genealogical records, one-by-one, some of which I hadn’t thought about, or at least not lately.

- Letters
- Postcards
- Book plates
- Books
- Oral traditions
- Funeral cards
- Photographs
- Marriage registers
- Marriage licenses
- Affidavits
- Social security applications
- Religious records
- Membership lists (especially synagogues)
- Bris records (kept by mohels)
- Legal records (loans, contracts, bonds, unsealed adoption records)
- Divorces & legal separations
- Civil & criminal cases
- Prison, probation, & parole records
- Asylum & sanitarium proceedings & related court documents
- County poor farms, almshouses, county farms
- Newspaper announcements (visitors, social status events, & anniversaries)
- Land sales
- Pension files
- Civil service job applications
- Voter registrations
- Military records
- County histories (“mug books”)
- Holocaust survivors
- High school yearbooks

I found a lot to like about Jordan Auslander's "Researching New York City Resources Remotely." I learned that before there were county courts, the city was divided into 2 federal court districts: Southern (Bronx and Manhattan) and Eastern (Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island), a fact that can be a big help in researching our New York City ancestors. Did you know that ancestry.com and familysearch.org indices vary for each borough? Or that in 1898, the indices were combined? Some other tips I learned: Voter registration lists for districts can be helpful in finding out from where our ancestors naturalized; New York City directories used to list residents' professions in addition to their addresses; some passport applications came with photographs (see familysearch.org); the city's Department of Health up to 1937 and City Clerk's office have records of marriage licenses, which you can order by mail for \$15 each; fire insurance maps are another source of addresses; Brooklyn's [Green-Wood Cemetery](#) and [Mt. Zion Cemetery](#) in Queens are treasure troves for Jewish genealogy; and [Reclaim the Records](#) (free) has a lot of New York City information for researchers; and [Steve-Morse's site](#) does, too. The Department of Corrections prison records can be a source of information in some families. The most surprising information from the session was that both Liberty Island (Statue of Liberty) and Ellis Island (former immigration port of entry) are in New Jersey, not New York!

I participated in "Jewish Life in Poland: Part 2: 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Centuries," presented by Avraham Groll, JewishGen's newest executive director. I missed the first part, but boy-oh-boy, there was so much information presented in the second that I could hardly keep up with notetaking. Did you know that Jews fled from Bohemia to Silesia, Poland as early as the 1000s? And that by the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, a significant Jewish presence was established in Poland in 35 towns, having come from German speaking lands to flee from persecution? BTW: the name Poland came from *Po Lin*, which means a place where one could rest.

Well, there were both hardships and special protections for the Jewish people in Poland, for example the Council of Bishops decreed in 1267 limitations to Jews communicating with their neighbors. Yet, Henry IV granted Jews special protection. As a result of the Crusades, Jews immigrated to Polish areas, for example, Krakow, where they had their own courts, own governance, and own protection, which all encouraged future settlement. Poland needed to develop economically so opened occupational opportunities for Jews, especially as salt miners, national mint workers, tax collectors, distillery owners, flour millers, and traders in fabrics, weapons, tools, and spices (Jews traveled and developed relationships internationally so were logical choices for commerce). It didn't hurt that the Christian church forbade Christians from lending money with interest to other Christians (but the church had no prohibition to borrow from others, including non-Christians). By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, 20,000-30,000 Jews lived in Poland. In 1500, the Golden Age of Polish Jewry was said to begin, including the establishment of a Jewish Center, major Torah scholarship, mass movement of Jews to Poland, and the seeds of Hassidism and Kabbalah/Mysticism (the latter, for the masses). Later during the mid-1600s, cultures between the haves and have nots collided, and life got worse for Jews in Poland. Soon, the Golden Age of Polish Jewry declined. My notes have much more detail than I present here, but I hope you have the gist of the presentation.

“Russian-Empire Jewish Immigration: Changing of the First and Last Names and How to Trace Them” was a dynamic session. Nadiia Sarah-Beila Lipes and Oleksii Elisha-Itschok Lipes teamed up to help us conduct more productive searching for our ancestors. They explained how various letters in people’s names were transformed to other letters when names were written in a new country. For example, in name beginnings, *Ts* became *Z* or *Cy* (Spanish). In Russian territory, the German *Sch* became *Sh*; *St* became *Sht*; *Shmit* became *Smidt*. *H* turned into *G*; *Ch* to *F*; and *V* became *W*. For endings, *-ov* became *-off* and *-iy* became *y* or *i*. In the USA, it was popular to simply take off an ending. A couple of results: *Goychman=Hoffman* and *Yasnogorodskiy* became *Zinigrad*.

The speakers also told us that in 1804, Russian Jews started to use surnames, except for Sephardic family names, which came about earlier.

The Lipes created a proprietary names database ([jewua.info](http://jewua.info)), which appeared as [lipesdatabase.com](http://lipesdatabase.com) during the session. I think they are the same but am a little confused about that. During the session, I started to wonder about my own maiden name, NUCH, so I asked a few questions about it. Right then, the Lipes searched for NUCH in their database but couldn’t find it. They found and showed us data that suggested the family name might have been *Nuchomka/Puchomka*, *Nuchimovich*, *Nuchimovna*, *Nuchims*, *Nuchlin*, *Nuchlik*, *Nuchlis*, or *Moshkovich*. However, I have found NUCH as a surname in other databases as far back as the 1600s. What a puzzle!

Adrienne Escoc,

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