

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Summer 2010

NEWSLETTER

Tammuz/Av

DNA Analysis Helps Reunite A Family

By Mark Belafsky

Six years ago I started genealogical research on my Belafsky and Buckner Families. I was a true novice. The Internet is an amazing resource, and soon I was no longer a novice. The usual Jewish research sites were perused for hours and hours. I was retired and had the time, but my family thought I was “nuts” as I announced a new-found relative a day! Those of us who have this “bug” will understand. You cannot go to sleep without completing the current task!

My Buckner family still eludes me prior to New Brunswick and Highland Park. All I know about my Grandfather Hyman is he lists “Kovno” on one census record. I can’t find any immigration records. I still do not know if the Buckner name was the original. I do know he had a half-brother, Benjamin, also in New Brunswick. His offspring also have no knowledge of the past. One sister, Anna Kushner from Washington, D.C. has been lost to us (census records available, no more).

If you are interested in finding out more about DNA and its role in assisting genealogical researchers, don't miss the American Jewish Experience Lecture Series in November. See page 3 for more details.

My Belafsky family is another story. My great-grandfather's brother, Abraham, was the first to arrive in 1880, to Perth Amboy. My grandfather, Abraham, arrived in 1906 with my grandmother Matilda. My great-grandfather, Isaac, and my great-grandmother Leah, arrived in 1914 from Lubny (Lublin?). This was the easy part. What I found out next surprised me. My great-grandfather's brother Abraham moved to Matawan around 1920 and opened a meat market. In 1927 his son changed the family name to “Bell” and were lost from our family until I tracked down his descendants four years ago. They are a wonderful family, and we have become fast friends. Our cousins club was growing!

I was also surprised to find out my grandfather, Abraham, had three sisters, all in Perth Amboy. These Golub, Kaminsky and Frankel families I knew growing up, but had no idea we were related! Faith was in my graduating class at Woodbridge High School. We were friends, and I never knew we were close cousins! I knew Avi from the YMHA in Perth Amboy, never realizing we were close cousins. We have remedied

that now; the reunions were wonderful. I guess all families have their feuds.

DNA entered the picture when it became affordable. I was anxious to find my Belafsky roots. My grandfather's brother, Joseph, listed “Konotop, Chernigov, Russia” as his home town on his WWI draft registration. I had a starting place. I Googled “Konotop” and found out that Temple Beth Israel in Skokie, Illinois, had adopted Konotop as its Sister City. I contacted Rabbi Weinberg of Temple Beth Israel, explaining my family's roots. He gave me the name of his contact in the Konotop Jewish community. I emailed him and several months later heard from his grandson, as the patriarch does not speak English. He apologized for the delay, explaining he wanted to get his research correct. He told me there were multiple “Belyavsky” graves in the old Jewish Cemetery in Konotop, and that he personally knew two families that had left Konotop. Alexander Belyavsky took his family to Ashdod,

Israel, and Genrich Belyavsky took his family to San Francisco. I had two potential relations, despite the fact this was the first time I had ever seen the spelling “Belyavsky.”

My next step was to initiate contact. Through the Ashdod white pages I called Alexander. He hung up on me twice. I placed a message on the JewishGen Forum, and several wonderful Israelis from Ashdod contacted him for me. The first contact resulted in a hang up also. I found out later that Alexander spoke no English, and thought he was being chased by the KGB. Eventually we made contact with his daughter, and finally his grandson, who speaks English. After much discussion, I asked the grandson if he thought Alex would be willing to do a DNA test. To my surprise, Alex said “yes.” I had the DNA kit sent to Alex. He did not want to “mess it up,” so he took it to his physician to scrape his mouth. Lo and behold, this 83 year old man, who while serving in the Russian army, lost his leg at Stalingrad, is a perfect 67-marker match to me. Through his family, I now have 200 new cousins in Israel.

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President's Message

Our well-attended reception on April 13 honoring Ruth Patt was a happy gathering of members, friends, and colleagues. Everyone that I spoke to there appeared to have been enjoying themselves.

Each person who arrived was invited to write greetings on pages that were later assembled into an album and given to Ruth. The afternoon began with an hour-long reception, where everyone was certain to meet some old friends and colleagues. We then migrated to the other end of Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple's spacious Reitman Hall, where our Society's Vice President, Harvey Hauptman, welcomed the group. He then went on to introduce five speakers who spoke of Ruth's many contributions to our Society and to the community at large: Adelaide Zagoren, Ruth's twin sister; Nathan Reiss, President of the Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey; Lee Livingston, President of the Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County; His Honor, Jim Cahill, Mayor of the City of New Brunswick, and Rabbi Bennett Miller of Anshe Emeth. Ruth then spoke to acknowledge the tributes and to thank those who attended and who contributed to making the event a success.

The occasion was capped by a thought-provoking lecture by Dr. Douglas Greenberg, Executive Dean of Rutgers University's School of Arts and Sciences, "*If You Didn't Hate Me, Would I Still Be Jewish?: The Holocaust, Anti-Semitism, and Jewish Identity in Post-War America*". The event was a fitting tribute to the many years and great variety of leadership and support that Ruth has given to our Society.

Nathan Reiss

A Word from Ruth

I'd like to briefly thank all those friends and supporters who were unable to attend the program tendered to me in April by our Society. It was such a memorable afternoon for me, although it was not necessary, of course, because I enjoyed every one of the thirty-three years I have spent sharing the work with so many talented and wonderful people. This reception was just icing on the cake. Wish you all could have come!

Ruth Marcus Patt



Archives Corner

Researching our archival collection becomes easier every month as information on more of the JHSCJ holdings are uploaded to our website. All of our synagogue and service organization collections are now online, with much more still to come. I invite you to browse on our website at www.jewishgen.org/jhscj. In addition to details about our collections, you will find a page listing members of our Speakers Bureau, in many cases including abstracts describing their topics in more detail. Perhaps you are a member of another organization and would like to invite a speaker from the JHSCJ. The modest honorarium each speaker receives directly supports the operations of the Historical Society.

This summer, Rutgers student Stacy Hecht is interning at the JHSCJ. Stacy grew up at the East Brunswick Jewish Center and is working on enlarging that particular collection. If you have documents from EBJC, please don't hesitate to contact her.

Deborah Cohn

THANK YOU

We are grateful to the Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation and Adelaide Zagoren for a generous contribution in honor of Ruth Marcus Patt.

We thank these members for their donations to our Endowment Fund:

Edith Neimark Eleanor Webber

Welcome to New Members
Richard and Ellen Diamond

We are proud to announce that the Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey is now a recipient of funding by the

Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County

EDITORIAL STAFF

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Dr. Nathan Reiss
Ruth Marcus Patt
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JHSCJ OFFICERS

President Nathan M. Reiss
Vice President Harvey Hauptman
Treasurer Susan Marchand

The American Jewish Experience Lecture Series

Our 13th Annual Lecture Series is currently running at two locations. The schedules for the remaining lectures are as follows:

Series #1	
Monroe Township Jewish Center (Etz Chaim)	
11 Cornell Drive Monroe Township	
Lectures are held on the 2nd Monday of the month 10:00 - 11:30 a.m.	
ALL LECTURES ARE FREE OF CHARGE	
July 12	Shirley Reich <i>Surprising Jewish-American Connections</i>
August 9	Mildred Goodwin <i>Fascinating Jewish Women and their Fabulous Salons: A Congenial Haven for New Ideas in a Changing World</i>
September 13	Marilyn Mix <i>A Retrospective of Jewish Newark</i>
October 11	Harvey Hauptman <i>Media Moguls: William S. Paley</i>
November 8	Dr. Nathan Reiss <i>The Role of DNA in Jewish Genealogy</i>

Series #2	
Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple	
222 Livingston Avenue New Brunswick	
Lectures are held on the 3rd Wednesday of the month* 10:30 a.m. - 12:00 noon	
ALL LECTURES ARE FREE OF CHARGE	
July 21	Shirley Reich <i>Surprising Jewish-American Connections</i>
August 18	Mildred Goodwin <i>Fascinating Jewish Women and their Fabulous Salons: A Congenial Haven for New Ideas in a Changing World</i>
September 15	Marilyn Mix <i>A Retrospective of Jewish Newark</i>
October 20	Harvey Hauptman <i>Media Moguls: William S. Paley</i>
November 17	Dr. Nathan Reiss <i>The Role of DNA in Jewish Genealogy</i>

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Genrich Belyavsky, in San Francisco, was easier to find. He, his daughter, son-in-law and two young teenage grandchildren came to San Francisco to his son-in-law's sister in the early 1990's with \$195 in their pocket. Genrich always knew he had relatives in New Jersey, but could not get letters out, nor receive letters in Russia, as the KGB would not allow it. I had a DNA kit sent and lo and behold, he is a near-perfect 67-marker match to me. We have become very close over the last three years. His family is part of the upper-middle-class and have done extremely well (that's another story!) Genrich has a brother in Israel, with a family of over 200 new cousins.

His son still lives in Kiev. Interestingly, Alexander and Genrich knew each other in Konotop, but did not think they were related.

Through the power of the Internet, and the remarkable DNA testing, long lost families have been reunited.

Author Mark Belafsky, who grew up in Perth Amboy, is the grandson of Hyman and Sadie Buckner of Commercial Avenue in New Brunswick. Sadie was one of the first Sisterhood Presidents at Congregation Poile Tzedek.

Tributes		
From:	To:	Occasion:
Irma Rockoff	Bob Milch and Family	In memory of Ruth Milch
Sybil and Arthur Levine	Ruth Marcus Patt	In honor of her birthday
Gail Kroop	Ruth Marcus Patt	In honor of Ruth M. Patt
Betty Saltiel	Seymour Vogel and Family	In memory of Irene Vogel
Adelaide and Terry Brenner	Seymour Vogel and Family	In memory of Irene Vogel
Arline Schwartzman	Ruth Marcus Patt	In honor of Ruth M. Patt
Renee and Herman Harris	Ruth Marcus Patt	In honor of Ruth M. Patt
Eleanor Borow	Ruth Marcus Patt	In honor of Ruth M. Patt

The JHSCJ Celebrates with Ruth Marcus Patt



Ruth Patt, Dr. Douglas Greenberg, and Adelaide Zagoren



Signing Ruth's Memory Book



Ada Bloom, Adelaide Brenner and Jodi Marcus



Bernice Bernstein, Susan Marchand and Rose Reiss



Lee Livingston announces Federation grant



Nathan Reiss, Ruth Patt and Harvey Hauptman



David Greene, Gus Molnar, Sharon Karmazin, Patricia Fazekas, Lee Livingston



Shelley Strauss, Laura Singer, Connie Landis, Philip and Jane Cantor

The Red Cross' Jewish Star

The American Red Cross is indelibly associated with its founder and first president, Clara Barton. Not as well known, but vital, was the role of Adolphus Simeon Solomons, an American Jew whom Barton called her “good vice president and kind counselor.” With Barton, Solomons laid the foundation of America’s leading humanitarian relief agency.

A member of a long-established Sephardic-American Jewish family, Adolphus Solomons was a prominent businessman in Washington, DC. In the 1870s, his firm, Phillip and Solomons, held the contract for federal printing. In 1892, Solomons was one of the original founders of the American Jewish Historical Society. He was best known, however, for helping to establish hospitals, public health programs and poor-relief agencies. His concern for the relief of suffering drew Solomons to work toward the creation of an American Red Cross.

The International Red Cross had been formed in Europe in the early 1860s. Inspired by the ministrations of English nurse Florence Nightingale during the Crimean War, a group of Europe’s leading humanitarians created a quasi-official agency whose activities were sanctioned by the Geneva Conventions. Most of the nations of Europe had signed the conventions, but an isolationist United States Senate refused to ratify them.

Through the 1870s and early 1880s, a small group of Americans inspired by Clara Barton lobbied for Congressional approval of the Geneva Conventions. Their meetings were often held in Solomons’ home, where he helped draft a Senate resolution endorsing the conventions. Eager to be ready when and if their efforts were successful, Barton and Solomons drew up the constitution of the American Association of the Red Cross. At the first meetings of the organization in 1881, Barton was elected president and Solomons a vice president, a post he held for 11 years.

In March 1882, the Senate finally ratified the Geneva Conventions and President Chester A. Arthur signed them. Within days, Solomons and eight others issued the first American Red Cross appeal for funds, clothing and supplies to relieve the suffering caused by disastrous floods along the lower Mississippi River.

In 1884, President Arthur named Barton and Solomons to be the first American delegates to the International Congress of the Red Cross in Geneva. Delegates there, representing 37 nations, elected Solomons a vice president.

Through the 1880s, Barton and others worked in the field to help people whose homes and lives were endangered by a series of epidemics and natural disasters, such as the Johnstown Flood. Solomons labored diligently behind the scenes in Washington and New York, using his business, political and journalistic contacts to generate funds and publicity to heighten public awareness of the good works being done by the Red Cross. The extensive correspondence between Barton and Solomons in the archives of the American Jewish Historical Society documents their close work together.

*Solomons
feared the czar
would divert
Red Cross
Funds.*

As famine swept the Russian empire in 1892, a rift developed between Solomons and Barton. By 1891, Solomons had become the American agent of the Baron de Hirsch Fund in

charge of aid programs for Jewish immigrants. The Baron de Hirsch Fund was an international philanthropy whose mission was, and remains, to assist Jews in need. Having experience with Russia’s treatment of its impoverished Jews, Solomons was reluctant to undertake American Red Cross efforts toward Russian relief because funds would be distributed by the Russian Red Cross, a creature of the imperial government. Solomons feared that the czarist regime would divert humanitarian aid from those who needed it, especially impoverished Jews. Barton insisted that aid pass through official channels, and Solomons questioned her judgment.

The disagreement soured their relationship, and at the subsequent election of American Red Cross officers, Barton and her supporters did not renominate Solomons for vice president. Thus ended Adolphus Solomons’ official ties with the institution he had done so much to establish.

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To learn more about your American Jewish heritage, become a member of the American Jewish Historical Society.

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For your convenience, this form is for your tributes.

TO: Name : _____
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Enclosed: \$ _____

In honor of: _____

In memory of: _____ Other: _____

Major featured articles and events from this newsletter are available on our web site: www.jewishgen.org/jhscj approximately two weeks before it reaches you by mail.

