

MORRIS AREA GENEALOGY SOCIETY

General Meeting

May 8, 2001

The meeting was called to order and moderated by President Carol McCloud. Treasurer Janet Meissner reported a balance on hand of \$1,602.18. It also was announced that MAGS now has tax exempt status. Those making purchases on behalf of MAGS should obtain a copy of the MAGS Tax Exempt Certificate to provide vendors in order that sales tax not be applied to the purchases.

President McCloud then introduced the speaker of the evening Gary Mokotoff, noted author and lecturer on Jewish American Genealogy. His book, Where Once We Walked, is considered one of the classics on the subject of Jewish genealogy. It currently is out of print.

Gary indicated the Jewish Genealogy differs from other genealogies in that 95% of all immigrations took place after the assassination of Czar Alexander in 1881. It is greatly influenced by Jewish culture and the Holocaust and is highly organized with its own resources. Typically Jewish genealogist document their family i.e., start with the earliest known reference to their family and bring it up to the present rather than trace their ancestry back to the earliest known relative.

Because the map of Eastern Europe changed so drastically after World War I, the names of towns of origin are far more useful in making family connections than countries or origin.

The conventional Soundex system is of little use as it contemplates Americanized names. Jewish names given verbally to immigration officers were recorded phonetically on Naturalization Records thereby losing any distinction that derived from their form in Yiddish. The Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex System was developed to accommodate the Americanization of names from the Yiddish. The 1920 Federal Census is particularly useful because it shows names in their Americanized form and the years of an immigrant's arrival and subsequent naturalization.

In many cases naming patterns can be very helpful. About 99% of all Ashkenazic Jews have "given names" of deceased relatives. Unfortunately, prior to the 19th century Ashkenazic Jews did not use "surnames." Sephardic Jews have used "surnames" since the 15th century. They name the 1st son after the father, the first daughter after the mother, the 2nd son after the mother's father etc.

Two projects of particular value have been undertaken to recreate records lost during the Holocaust. First are the "Yizkor Books," memorial books by towns of survivor recollections, which now total over 1,200 in number. The second are the "Yad Vasam," individual pages of testimony for each Jew lost in the Holocaust, which today includes records for fully half of the more than 6 million Jews lost.

Internet sites of particular interest to Jewish genealogists include:

The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies at <http://iajgs.org>

Jewish Gen at <http://www.jewishgen.org>

Avotaynu at <http://www.avotaynu.com>

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