Finding Your Family's Past

Jeremy Frankel of Oakland, California has a family background that includes 130 years in London. Using the Jewish Chronicle, he has found 512 paid announcements for members of his family. Naomi Barnett of Melbourne, Australia has been successful in using the Manchester-Leeds area British newspaper, Jewish Telegraph. She says, "Using the newspaper was the most rewarding part of my early research. I made contact with the people who ... Reuben and Esther and their three children. I tried the Cherem Kadisha in Sydney with no success, so my last resort was a letter to the editor." He asked her permission to publish and as a result, the spouse of one Reuben and Esther's children contacted her. "I now have all the history of that branch, too," she concludes.

Finding the Newspapers

The JewishGen Web site (www.jewishgen.org/databases/) features several databases that index American and eastern European newspapers. Most database searches invite you to enter the surname and choose between a standard search and one using the Daich-Mokotoff Soundex System.

Eastern Europe

If your family has Warsaw roots, you can search more than 2,700 death notices from 1923 and 1937-38 issues of Nasz Przeglad ("Our Review"). The indexing database of Glos Gminy Zyłowskiej ("Voice of ...
the Jewish Community) includes 3,000 marriage announcements from August 1937 until May/June 1939.

There were two Hebrew newspapers widely circulated in Lithuania and Latvia in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Hamagid ("The Narrator" or "The Preacher") began in 1860 as a weekly paper in Odessa and ceased publication as a daily in St. Petersburg in 1904. The HaMelitz ("The Advocate" or "The Morning Star") was published in East Prussia but its coverage and readership extended to Russian Poland and Galicia. Each typically listed donors among its back pages. JewishGen features two databases indexing such lists. The first from HaMelitz consists of Lithuanian Donors to Persian famine relief in 1871–72. The second from HaMelitz includes about 20,000 donor names from Lithuania and Latvia between 1893 and 1903.

America

Jewish newspapers of selected major U.S. cities appear on JewishGen. Two databases index more than 23,000 obituaries and 27,000 wedding announcements issued in the Boston Jewish Advocate from 1905 until the present. David Rosen, compiler of the two databases, scrutinized nearly 6,000 microfilmed issues covering nearly one hundred years. He says, "While searching the database entries, I took the opportunity to make copies of 138 news items relating to my own genealogical records. These items included weddings, engagements, obituaries, bar and bat mitzvahs, births, commercial advertisements, and assorted social notes. Thirty-five photos, mostly brides and brides-to-be, appeared with the items."

Users of the databases agree with the information's value. Cynthia Surprise of Acton, Massachusetts has used the database for the Jewish Advocate to locate specific information about vital events. She says, "Reading the wedding announcements has given me information such as names of siblings or other family members participating in the wedding, educational and professional information about the bride and groom and where they and their parents lived. Obituaries have provided me with information about the deceased's background, and married names and residences of sisters. They have also helped me figure out which siblings were alive at the time of the other sibling's death."

Other databases include more than 24,500 obituaries from 1964 until the present for the Cleveland Jewish News; 8,800 obituaries from a Chicago paper from 1894–98; and 5,000 obituaries from the Connecticut-based Jewish Ledger from 1975 until the present.

If you had family in the United States during 1859–67, you may want to consult Don Canaan's three-CD set of the Cincinnati, Ohio-based Israelite. It was a national news-
Connecting to the Present

Not only can you rely on Jewish newspapers to help you gather information on your family's past, you can use current newspapers to locate family. For instance, Diane Glazer Jacobs of New York tells of the success she's had in using the Detroit Jewish News. Her husband's first cousin, whom he had never known, was the offspring of a first marriage that barely anyone in the family discussed. Glazer Jacobs had tried to search for this cousin. She knew some information about him, but the Jacobs name was fairly common and presented a challenge. She learned the first wife's family name and that they had come from Detroit. Using the 1920 and 1930 U.S. census and Detroit city directories, she identified the first wife's parents' and siblings' names. Still, she could not find the missing son, her husband's cousin. She then subscribed to the Detroit Jewish News and they both quickly e-mailed him. Glazer Jacobs says, "After speaking with him by telephone ... he learned of the existence of his half sister and her family in New York. They have subsequently ... begun a wonderful family relationship."

Whether outside or within the United States, Jewish newspapers can help you find your family's past and connect with your family's present. One final word: Volunteers have spent numerous hours indexing newspapers to benefit Jewish genealogy at large. Consider developing a project to index announcements from your local Jewish paper. Consult guidelines at www.jewishgen.org/databases/ddescription.html.

The Israelite
1859-1867

Barbara Krasner-Khait specializes in Jewish genealogy and serves on the Board of Directors for the Jewish Records Indexing - Poland Project, a large-scale, Internet-based initiative to index all Jewish vital records from Poland. She writes frequently for genealogy and history publications. Books she has authored are Images of America: Kearny, New Jersey, and Discovering Your Jewish Ancestors.

Discovering Your Jewish Ancestors

This book from Barbara Krasner-Khait is a jewel for Jewish researchers in that it provides a blueprint for success. Carol Skydell, VP of JewishGen Web site, exclaims, "She lays to rest the often heard comment, 'There are no records...that place was wiped off the map.'" A must for Jewish researchers!


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