Directed Surname Research

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Cover story, page 5
Edith Schulman and Jose Valle at the Orlando library.
Directed Surname Research
by James Gross*

As part of my genealogy research, I have found it to be advantageous to spend some time directing my attention to a few specific surnames in my family tree. Over the course of time, my research has led me to joint collaboration with a few distant family members. This has enabled me to build on my existing data. I have been compiling immigration on relatives from 3 verified shtetls. These verified surnames and shtetls include: Bloch from Vabalnikas or Vobalnik, Lith. Geringer or Geringer from Zalescikia, Ukraine (formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian empire), Saidek or Seidel from Postavy or Pastavy, Lith, and Saidek or Seidel from Panevezys or Ponevezys, Lith. I am using the wide net of this directed research to enable me to identify potentially related distant relatives.

Zalescikia, Ukraine was formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. As part of my shtetl research, I had copies made of several maps. For those interested in getting maps, I used maps at the National Archives, Cartographic department (NWCS), College Park, MD. They have a number of high quality WWII US Army maps. Per their website, "The largest series of maps covering foreign areas consists of topographic maps of various scales published by the Army Map Service beginning in 1942. I used a few map series including M641, M651, and N501."

During the course of my research, I mainly relied on information garnered from naturalization papers and ship manifests, as seen in various National Archives microfilm rolls. In the past, it was usually necessary to perform on-site research at the various National Archives locations. I used the regional archives in NY, Philadelphia, Pa. as well as Washington, DC. Depending on your location, you may find it best to use the resources available to you locally.

Fortunately, thanks to technology, Ancestry.com has indexed and digitalized a number of the needed microfilm rolls. Ancestry.com is available via paid subscription. Their library version may be available via your local library (call for availability).

To date, I have created several binders of material. With regard to the Seidel material, I have I "floating" tree plus a binder of relevant ship manifests. I refer to them as "floating" as I believe they are related, but I can't yet prove it to my satisfaction. My Bloch material is less plentiful as I've had to mainly rely on record indexes found in Jewishgen.org and South Africa's online national archives indexes as the majority of this known family emigrated to South Africa from their shtetl of Vabalnikas, Lith. With regard to my Geringer, I have several "floating" trees of Geringer material. For those of you who are also engaged in a bit of surname and shtetl specific research, I would be remiss if I didn't question the logic of this time expenditure. There is a point where the researcher must ask himself or herself regarding the limits of surname specific research. Though it can assist in discovering new branches of family members, it can also serve to subtract time away from researching gaps in one main tree. In conclusion, as long as you can justify the time and effort, it can be both helpful and rewarding to concentrate some of your finite research time on one or more of your family's known surnames and shtetl's.

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JGSGO MEETING- March 19

The meeting held in the mini-sanctuary of CRJ was devoted to brief comments by Jay Schleierkorn about his experiences with cemeteries. Jay recalled his early childhood visits with his mother to his grandparent’s graves at Mt. Hebron Cemetery, Queens, NY. He also referred to visits at Arlington, Vicksburg, Natchez, Verdun France, St. Louis, and Aruba. He spoke of being a “aphrophiliac”...one who likes cemeteries. (see pages 6, 7, in this issue). "No matter which cemetery I visited," he said, "it was always a place for peace and quiet and time for recollection."

Jay referred to several sites on the Internet for all kinds of cemetery information. (see page 14) Check out: "The Sepulcher" Looking at Death in a Different Light. (http://freepages.genealogy.rootsweb.com/~staryjosepulchr.htm). A video, "A Cemetery Special" was also shown. It highlighted several historic cemeteries throughout the U.S.