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Salt Lake City Conference Reflections

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JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA MEMBERS REPORT ON THE 27TH IAJGS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON JEWISH GENEALOGY FROM SALT LAKE CITY

IAJGS AND JGSGP CONTINUE TO EXPLORE HOSTING OF THE 29TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE IN PHILADELPHIA IN 2009
pleasant and supportive in my contacts in SLC and their local Family History Center in New Jersey and I have never been proselytized.

However, my approach to working with the Mormons is utilitarian. I need them and their data even if I don’t care for their religious practices. Similarly, I often approach a distant family member I don’t really know. I’m not likely to hang out with them, or love them, but I sure want their knowledge and documents! I’m more interested in their old collection of stories and paperwork than hearing about contemporary family issues!

I acknowledge that being a Rabbi researching in Mormon institutions is a theological compromise and merely a marriage of convenience. I admit to using them for my own satisfaction in this one-sided relationship. But it’s sure fun finding new data ... and after a couple of intensive dates we can then go our separate ways! ☺

Salt Lake City Conference Reflections

by James Gross

I have been to previous conferences in Washington, DC and New York City.

Prior to my leaving for Utah, I studied the online lecture schedule and examined the items available in the Resource Room. I decided to devote my Conference time to the Resource Room and concentrate on the Find My Past [http://www.findmypast.com/home.jsp] database that could be used at no cost in the Resource Room. This is a database of UK ship departures and other records that are searchable by many criteria, including surname. Individual records are accessible with payment per record. This is currently an expensive database for those of us who pay in US Dollars as prices are in UK Pounds and the exchange rate is not favorable.

Prior to my departing on this trip, I decided to bring two forms of portable data storage in order to prevent loss of data. I brought along a portable 20GB hard-drive, as well as two PNY thumb drives. Both connect via USB ports. My hard drive later died back in New Jersey and the thumb drive crashed my home computer. Apparently PNY and Dell are not compatible. I suggest that before going on such research trip, you get comfortable with data storage and backup as a crash will occur when you least expect it.

It turned out that the Conference Resource Room had many laptop computers, each with two USB ports. I had also brought four thin binders of information, but, due to space issues, I only brought along a limited number of my lists. However, during my trip, I was able to access my personal genealogy webpage [https://www.geocities.com/Heartland/6721/] and utilized this information for additional Find My Past surname searches.

As part of my trip, I also spent some time at the LDS Family History Library. I had brought some material on my South African SEIDLE and SEIDEL families. On their webpage, the LDS Library recommends that people request “vault” microfilms prior to arrival. “Vault” microfilms are stored in the LDS Granite Mountain storage vault and must be pulled for usage at the Library. I had emailed the LDS Library prior to my trip, but the email was apparently never received. I was still able to look at a number of South African films, but did not find any specific items.
While at the LDS Library, I bumped into Rabbi Gary Gans of Marlton, NJ. He is distantly related to me via a STEINBERG marriage. He advised me of the recent LDS Library acquisition of microfilmed rolls from the L'viv, Ukraine region. As I was burned out from South African research, I decided to take a crack at these L'viv films. The films were in a foreign language, probably Cyrillic or Polish. Nevertheless, I approached the film with a gung-ho enthusiasm and decided to scan one specific film section. I had found an entry in the LDS Library Catalog, which showed records for Radekhov, Ukraine. I looked through the whole section and found a record for Selma Neubauer's family (we are very distantly related) and a record for my BADNER family.

I have found that there is a definite social and informational advantage of going to a genealogy conference. In my case, I decided to focus on my relatives and hunt for records. This is my personal choice, as I love collecting records. There is nothing wrong with listening to knowledgeable lecturers. As a practical suggestion, I personally advocate that you do some work organizing your family tree. If you can establish what records you do have, then you can begin working on getting the rest.

Archives of the International Tracing Service
The Conference Keynote Lecture from Paul Shapiro
by Mark Halpern

Paul Shapiro is the Director of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington DC. [http://www.ushmm.org/research/center]. Shapiro is credited as the driving force behind the efforts to gain access to the International Tracing Service (ITS) Archives [http://www.its-arolsen.org/english/index.html].

Immediately after World War II, when survivors were scattered throughout Europe, a common collection point of information about both survivors and victims was established by the Allied powers and later became the International Tracing Service. This was the first attempt to identify the fate of the millions of persons, both Jewish and non-Jewish, who were displaced or murdered during World War II. To this day, data is still being discovered and accumulated by ITS. The Archive now contains between 35 and 50 million records documenting the fate of some 17.5 million people (only about 25% were Jewish) at their facilities in Bad Arolsen, Germany.

Paul Shapiro was the keynote speaker at the opening ceremonies of the International Conference on Jewish Genealogy in Salt Lake City on Sunday, July 15, 2007.

Paul Shapiro started his talk with his genealogy. His father's family was SHACHET from Russia and his mother's family were CARTEGENE, originating in the Spanish town of Cartagena, who settled in Rozdol, a Galician town now in Ukraine, during the Inquisition.

Shapiro talked about the diplomatic and political efforts to open the ITS Archive and the contents of the Archive, illustrated by the records that documented the Holocaust era life of Miki Schwartz, a Hungarian survivor now living in the US. Miki Schwartz was one of three survivors profiled on the 60 Minutes television program. For more information about the show, go to http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/12/14/60minutes/main2267927.shtml.

In 1998, the International Commission of the ITS (made up of representatives from eleven countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Greece, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Poland, UK, and US) publicly committed itself to take steps to open the ITS Archive. However, there was strong resistance from the Governments (especially Germany), the ITS Director and the International Red Cross. In May 2001, Shapiro attended the annual meeting of International Commission set up to oversee the ITS. He impressed upon the Commission that the actuarial life expectancy of Holocaust survivors made it critical to open the Archives immediately. The Commission responded with the promise to write detailed procedures for onsite access that proved to be extremely restrictive and based on privacy guidelines that were consistent with the most restrictive laws of the eleven member countries. There was no more discussion until 2002.

Shapiro visited the ITS in Bad Arolsen and saw the files. There was a backlog of over 400,000 inquiries, many from Holocaust survivors, and no sense of urgency to address this backlog. He asked for a summary of the ITS holdings, but this request was considered inappropriate. He found that the member countries, for the most part, were uninterested and not concerned about the slowness of response from the ITS. His heartfelt feelings about the moral and historical importance of the ITS Archive was not shared by the Commission members.

The eleven-country International Commission meets only once a year. In 2003 and 2004, the US took a more aggressive stance as a result of Shapiro's involvement. At the 2004 meeting, Shapiro suggested that copies of the ITS Archive be placed at members country archives, who would determine access rules.

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