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A Useful Resource for Tracing Immigrants Who Entered the US Through Ellis Island

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REFLECTIONS FROM YOUR CHRONICLES TEAM

Did you ever wonder about the idiomatic expression, "see the forest for the trees"? When engrossed in the various projects we're working on, our vision is often limited to the mass of details confronting us, and we miss the broader picture.

Likewise, as *Chronicles* editor, I often get bogged down in verifying historical details, or clarifying content so I miss picking up some wonderful points of similarity among the articles we publish in a single issue.

Almost all of this issue's articles reflect personal involvement, on the parts of the authors and the subjects of those articles. I highlight this observation because I believe personal involvement is what distinguishes genealogy research and related accounts from history. All of us delve into research in order to glean what happened within our respective families. Hopefully we go the next step and cull the reams of information we've collected into a narrative that we can share. In essence, we breathe life into dry facts and transform them into a family chronicle in which we've been significantly engaged.

Consider how James Gross personalizes his "techie" article by citing his own genealogical pursuits to illustrate how Steve Morse's "Gold Form" works. Stan Sandler also humanizes the research tools he used in order to solve mysteries about his aunt and cousin. Ross Schriftman and Selma Neubauer describe the circumstances that launched or energized their respective genealogical journeys.

Martin Kessel. Since then, leaders of the Yizkor Book Project, including Susannah Juni, Joyce Field and Lance Ackerfield have succeeded in developing the Yizkor Book Project to the invaluable source of information that it is today. Additionally, kudos should be given to Michael Tobias, who created automated email systems, which facilitated data acquisition. He was also indispensable in combining the aforementioned databases and InfoFiles into one, consolidated database. ❖

Len Markowitz has lived in the Philadelphia area his entire life. A former aerospace engineer, he contributed to programs such as Star Wars, the International Space Station, and a number of classified programs. He has also made presentations to and worked with both the military and intelligence communities.

Len has been active in various aspects of the Jewish community, including service as president of Congregation Beth Chaim in Feasterville, Pennsylvania, president of JGSGP, and a board member of JewishGen Inc and the Jewish Community Council of Lower Bucks County. He published a book about the histories of his and his late wife's families and ancestors. Contact Len at: priluki2@verizon.net

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A USEFUL RESOURCE FOR TRACING IMMIGRANTS WHO ENTERED THE U.S. THROUGH ELLIS ISLAND

by James Gross

The topic of this column is to share a useful search technique which can be used when trying to trace Ellis Island immigrants from Europe to the U.S. I selected this topic as I recently finished developing two new family branches: a Seidel family from Postavy, Belarus, and a Steinberg family from Panevezys, Lithuania. Postavy was also known as Pastavy and Postavy. It was located in Disna uyezd, Vitebsk Gubernia. (1) Panevezys was located in Lithuania in the Panevezys District, Kovno, Lithuania. (2)

My primary tool, which I often use to locate relatives from the "old country", is a passenger list search engine developed by Steve Morse who has a number of search engines on his website. (3)

This Steve Morse search engine is called the "Ellis Island Gold Form." (4) which conducts an automatic deep search of the Ellis Island database. (5) Users need to have or create

a free Ellis Island user name and password as the user is prompted for this information when transferred to the Ellis Island website by the Steve Morse generated index link.

As Dick Eastman noted, the "…Ellis Island search form is capable of searching through the entire 25 million passengers in the Ellis Island Database for ships' passenger lists." (6)

The Steve Morse "Gold Form" is very useful as it can be modified with screen listed options to search for family or relatives. There are a number of options to choose from including town of origin, year of immigration, and age of the immigrant.

The reason I typically use the "Gold Form" for my initial search is that I prefer to narrow down my choices based on the passenger's surname and his/her town of origin. Though there is never 100% accuracy, many passenger lists include the passenger's shtetl of origin and the person or relative to whom he or she is traveling.

So, as an example, I used the Steve Morse "Gold Form" and entered in the name of Seidel from the town of Postavy. The image below shows the generated index. (image has been split in half widthwise for space)

	Name	Residence	Age	Born*	Arrived
1	Seidel, Barneh	Bostaw	6	1886	1892
2	Seidel, Chaim	Postawy, Russia	1	1907	1908
3	Seidel, Chane	Bostaw	18	1874	1892

Passenger Record	Text Manifest	Scanned Manifest	Annotations	Ship Image
view	view	view	view	view
view	view	view	view	view
view	view	view	view	view

As you can see, the name of Postavy is shown with variations, due to the many variations in spelling of town names as found within passenger manifests. Several of the search fields, including the town field, give the user the option of selecting either "sounds like," "starts with" or "contains." In conducting the searches, users should try to use some creativity when entering the town and/or surname. It is my experience that the Ellis Island town listings often have spelling variations, so, be aware of this when doing your searches.

I usually first click the passenger record, and then click on

the scanned manifest. If I feel this person may be relevant to my research after reviewing the passenger list, I will make a hard copy of the passenger record page.

In summary, Steve Morse's, "Ellis Island Gold Form," is a very useful search engine and is well worthy of a bookmark for immigrant research. ❖

1.   http://tiny.cc/bsnkxw
2.   http://tiny.cc/oqnkxw
3.   http://stevemorse.org/index.html
4.   http://stevemorse.org/ellis2/ellisgold.html
5.   http://www.ellisisland.org/
6.   http://tiny.cc/sonkxw

Author James Gross recently graduated with a Master of Library & Information Science (MLIS) from Drexel University. He has been working on his family tree since the early 1990's and is a periodic contributor to various genealogy newsletters. James also has a genealogy website: http://tinyurl.com/gross-steinberg He can be reached at: navistar96@yahoo.com

A BEGINNER STARTS HIS JOURNEY

By Ross Schriftman

In 2009, while my brother Roy was dying, he began researching our family history. I never asked him why he started this project but I suspect he had a desire to know as much about where he came from as possible as his final project in life. He probably also wanted to provide a legacy of information for his children to help them remember him as well as their ancestors.

He used Legacy software and listed family members of each branch. He even included the family tree of his in-laws. By doing this my late brother gave me a starting point to begin my own research.

I plan to begin with the Schriftmans, my paternal grandfather's family. Roy indicated in his research that they came from Staro Konstantinov, which is in today's Ukraine southwest of Kiev. At the last JGSGP meeting I flipped through one of Miriam Weiner's books, and there were several pages of information about my grandfather's little *shtetl*. Just looking at the pictures and realizing that this was the town that the Schriftman family left back in 1908 made it all real. Of course, now I want to know the whole story. I was told

as a child that the Schriftmans walked from their village to Gdansk in Poland to board a ship to England and then another to New York. The story goes that they stuck an apple in the youngest child's mouth to keep him quiet while they snuck past various towns along the way. A foot trek across so much distance seems implausible since the journey would have been extremely difficult with small children.

How many little Schriftmans were there at the time? According to my Aunt Bea, my dad's sister, there were seven children that my great grandparents had. There was my grandfather Abraham, his brothers Murray, Jack and David, and their sisters Rose, Lena and Pauline. David changed his last name to Scribner. He was a labor attorney and also participated in the defense team for the Scottsboro Boys-- a group of nine black teenagers accused of rape in Alabama in 1931.

My grandfather went by the name of Al as an adult. He married my grandmother who I always knew as Shirley. It turns out that her given name was Sarah. So my grandparents were really Abraham and Sarah.

After researching the Schriftmans I plan to investigate the Dreiblatts (my grandmother's maiden name). They originally came from somewhere within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. My grandmother was born in New York and because of this, I'm assuming the Dreiblatt emigration must have occurred earlier than the other branches of my family.

I then will research the history of the Goldmans (my mother's paternal side). Harry Goldman was my mother's father, and the family came from Kiev.

Finally, there are the Berlows, my mother's maternal side, who immigrated from Riga in Latvia. My grandmother was Frieda Goldman (nee Berlow). Her sister, my Aunt Bettie, used to say that she was not Russian. She claimed that those people were all horse thieves. Instead, she was a proud Courlander with German ancestors. It is interesting how we get so parochial about our roots as if one group of people is better than another.

And so my journey of discovery begins. ❖

Ross Schriftman is a member of Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel, Elkins Park, PA and its brotherhood board. He is the author of My Million Dollar Mom *which chronicles the life of his mother Shirley Schriftman. He can be reached at 215-682-7075 or rfs270@aol.com*