Three Presentations at the Boston Conference that Taught Me New Approaches, Immigration and Naturalization Service Citizen Records: Beyond the Basics

James Gross, *Drexel University*
While including our usual features (Techniques, Tools, & Tips, meeting summaries, and queries) we are focusing in this issue primarily on impressions from the IAJGS-Boston conference, held August 4-9, 2013. Our contributors share what they learned during formal sessions and informal gatherings; in other words: “What Happened in Boston Doesn’t Stay in Boston.” The article entitled “The Road to Philadelphia Goes Straight through Jerusalem” demonstrates how a random act of genealogical kindness can provide significant assistance to a researcher. Consider similarly helping a genealogy colleague in the future. We also pay tribute to esteemed member, Steve Schecter, who died on September 30th.

At least twenty-four members of the JGSGP family gathered on October 4th to bid a sad farewell to Steve Schecter, our vice president of programming. He died unexpectedly as a result of a tragic fall. Our members were joined by many others at the funeral which was a significant testimonial to the man whom we all considered to be “a good guy.”

I have many wonderful memories of Steve, going back at least seven years. I don’t recall remember exactlly when we met, but I vividly remember standing outside in the parking lot at Reform Congregation Kneseseth Israel after one of our society meetings and discussing his surname, which was also one of interest to me. I learned that Schecter wasn’t the original surname which meant we weren’t related. “Nisht geferlich, “not so terrible,” because that discussion was the first of many, many extended conversations (Continued on page 3)
and the South Pacific.

The great advantage of the Knowles Collection is that it links together into family groups, thousands of individual Jews (over 600,000 as of January 2013). Until now, these records were available only at the Family History Library or from private archives or individuals. As a Jewish genealogist and a volunteer at my local LDS family history center, I have seen firsthand how the LDS Family History Centers provide a very useful resource for researchers, regardless of faith.

I encourage everyone, regardless of where they live, to go and visit their local family history center.


THREE PRESENTATIONS AT THE BOSTON CONFERENCE THAT TAUGHT ME NEW APPROACHES

by Steve Schecter (z”l) (zechet l’vrachah = may the [i.e. his] memory be a blessing) with additional comments from James Gross

Probate Records: Wills and Estates. Why to Search and How to Search

By Allan E. Jordan.

Prior to 1916 probate was used mostly for wealthier people but afterwards changed to include a much broader population. Mr. Jordan explained the two types of files:

• Those who left a will are testate.
• Those who had assets but no will are intestate and the court records are known as an administration.

Using probate records often requires a genealogist to search two separate indexes; if one finds no will, one may still find administration records. He also alerted us that these are court records, and each court decides where records are housed (the court, an archive, a historical society, etc.) These are all public records unless a family has had a court seal the records.

This presentation opened a new source of information I did not previously appreciate. Mr. Jordan both explained probate records and gave extensive "how to information."

Mr. Jordan and I spoke after his presentation, and he agreed to speak at a future JGSGP meeting.

Immigration And Naturalization Service (INS) Citizen Records: Beyond the Basics

Reviewed by James Gross

Mr. Wilske, a knowledgeable historian in the Historical Records Branch of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), spoke about record files and research help available through his office. While many records are available through the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) many additional records are only available through the USCIS because of privacy reasons, nuances in law, and regulations. Searches can be requested at a nominal cost.

There are five types of records which could have been generated by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service and are available through the USCIS: certificate files, alien registration forms, visa files, registry files, and A-Files.

A secondary USCIS resource entitled “U.S. Subject Index to Correspondence and Case Files of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, 1903-1959” has recently been digitized and is available at www.ancestry.com. Check with USCIS if you have reason to believe that an unusual issue affected your relative, such as being detained overnight at Ellis Island, questions about his/her immigration status, etc.

This presentation opened a new and previously unknown source of information for me. This may help me find several ancestors who "went missing" after they had arrived in the U.S.

City Directories for U.S.: Finding And Charting Unique Uses

By Diane M. Freilich, JD.

Ms. Freilich showed how city directories are often underutilized. She emphasized the content of the directories and listed seven genealogical uses. She also showed a technique for mapping ancestors from directories. Briefly, she suggested using a spreadsheet and listing people by year. She emphasized listing names of potential relatives and trying