

Drexel University

From the Selected Works of James Gross

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Advantages of joining a genealogy society

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Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/jamesgross/55/>



CHRONICLES

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REFLECTIONS FROM YOUR CHRONICLES TEAM

July 2014



During the past two weeks, I took advantage of a lull in my editing responsibilities to at long last resume my personal genealogy research, focusing specifically on some unresolved issues. Years ago I had uncovered individuals in New Haven and Philadelphia with

the same surnames as two of my branches. At that time, I wasn't able to find a definitive link that would ascertain connections. I found it exhilarating to once again engross myself in the research process. I pursued these threads for hours at a time. One could say I was obsessed; I stayed up into the wee hours of the morning, completely absorbed. My great grandmother, Mollie, had a brother, Srul, who had settled in New Haven. I wondered why. When I discovered a considerable number of Mandelsteins living in New Haven before he arrived, I theorized that Uncle Srul had settled there because his sister's Mandelstein *machetunim* (in-laws) were already there, so there was a comfort level he could depend upon. At this point, I'm trying to contact descendants of those Mandelsteins in the hopes of finding a common ancestor.

I shared my newfound enthusiasm with Shelda Sander, who had experienced a similar hiatus while serving as coordinator of JGSGP's Delaware County affiliate. She is excited with every new bit of information and feels sorry for people who aren't interested in their own genealogy. "Look at all the confusion, frustration, indecision, hair pulling, and 'fun' they are missing!"

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search. Two projects I'd like to suggest involve the indexing of records from various cemeteries, and from *landmanschaften* (immigrant benevolent societies) at the Philadelphia funeral homes, Joseph Levine & Sons and Goldsteins' Rosenberg's Raphael-Sacks.

We've achieved great success in the past when members assumed responsibility and volunteered their efforts to index the ethnic bank records and Jewish *Exponent* obituaries, coordinate and lecture for the speakers bureau, organize and staff four genealogy fairs, and finally, insure the success of the 2009 conference. Note: the more records that are available online, the more everyone benefits. Please contact me at president@jsgsgp.org to get these projects started. ❖

Fred Blum, President

ADVANTAGES OF JOINING A GENEALOGY SOCIETY

by James Gross



On June 8, 2014, our genealogy society sponsored its 4th Annual Genealogy Fair at Main Line Reform Temple-Beth Elohim in Wynnewood, Pennsylvania. I was one of several JGSGP society members who hosted tables and assisted researchers with their research questions. I have been actively engaged in genealogy research since 1991 and have been a long-time JGSGP member. My participation in this year's fair made me think: Do non-affiliated genealogy researchers realize the tangible and intangible advantages of joining their local genealogy society?

I realize that some researchers may think that if their ancestors are not from the local geographic region, that joining a local genealogy society may not be helpful. However, most if not all of the members in your genealogy group are facing the same or similar geographic challenges in researching their respective ancestors and places across the world. This common need to overcome time and distance makes it logical to seek out and network with like-minded genealogists because they can share their research experience and knowledge with you.

Here are several reasons to join a genealogy society. The idea for this list and the credit go to Kathleen Hinckley; read her article, "Ten Reasons to Join a Local Genealogy Society."¹

1. You will no longer be researching alone. The advantage of joining a genealogy society, and its network of like-minded genealogists, is you are no longer researching in a vacuum. There are countless researchers out there, a few of whom are probably researching the same surname and *shtetlekh* (small towns) as you. You can share your passion by speaking with other genealogists and by networking with researchers online. Speaking from experience, it often helps to bounce ideas off of fellow genealogists and get help with seemingly insurmountable brick walls.

2. Learn tips from guest speakers. If your genealogy society has guest speakers, like JGSGP does, you may find the guest presentation or lecture to be helpful. It never hurts to learn about a new research facility, resource, or a new method for locating information.

3. Learn from other society members. This may sound redundant, but chances are that your very problem has probably vexed another researcher who has ideas or a useful strategy of how to approach and solve your particular brick wall problem.

4. Look into other genealogy societies. Regardless of which genealogy society you belong to, you can sometimes benefit by looking at the resources held by other genealogy societies. For example, I like the online resources and links found on the JGSNY website (www.jgsny.org).

5. Contribute to the society. You may find you possess skills which are needed by your society. Volunteer for committee positions. After all, someone has to plan the programs, take the photos, send out the announcements, write the newsletter articles, etc. I particularly appreciate the members who help with the refreshments.

6. Locate distant cousins. I have found it to be extremely helpful to compare my family tree with that of other researchers, whether in person or online via websites such as JewishGen.org², Geni.com³, or Ancestry.com⁴. These connections can result in locating and networking with others who are researching the same geographical area, the same unique shtetl, or the same surname. This connection can lead to assisting each other with resources or research strategies.

7. Develop genealogy colleagues and friendships. Common interests, such as one's ancestral shtetl, can lead to genealogy friendships. For example, I have helped a Geringer in-law advance her Canadian and United Kingdom research by assisting her with resources and ideas.

8. Use a genealogy society's newsletter as a resource. When I first began my research, I sought out genealogy newsletters via libraries and historical societies as a way to learn about existing and newly identified research sources and resources. Some genealogy societies may even have select, back issues available online as downloadable pdf files.

In summary, it is my opinion that there is immense value in networking with fellow genealogists through membership in a genealogy society. This is especially true when you need help to research further back to an earlier generation or solve a challenging thread of research. As opposed to giving up, it is more practical and advantageous to seek out assistance from a fellow colleague for that insurmountable "brick wall" research question. I have found that a genealogy society membership is a very reasonable investment given the immense value it represents. To locate a Jewish genealogy society, either in your local area or farther away, check the website of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) which maintains a list of all of the societies in the world.⁵ ❖

References:

- (1) http://www.genealogy.com/74_kathy.html
- (2) www.jewishgen.org
- (3) www.Geni.com
- (4) www.Ancestry.com
- (5) <http://www.iajgs.org/members/members.html>

Author James Gross has been working on his family tree since the early 1990s. He is a periodic contributor to various genealogy newsletters. James is a regular volunteer, helping other genealogists in their research at the Cherry Hill, NJ Family History Center. He also has a genealogy website:

<http://tinyurl.com/gross-steinberg>

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ORAN ROMANCE REVISITED

by Carol Heller



Genealogy searches can take many directions and, hopefully, yield much family history. What really started my interest in genealogy was a more recent time period. While my uncle, Joseph Kenig, was in the army and stationed for several years in Oran (northern Africa) during World War II, he worked in a military office with a local Jewish woman,

Hermance Drai, who did civilian work. He was transferred to Italy, but he returned to Oran to marry her in March 1946. He came back in June 1946 to take her to the States.



Joe & Hermance

However, she died suddenly a few days before he arrived. He and her family were devastated. He immediately returned to the States. As a child, I never knew about this marriage. In those days, my grandparents believed it was best not to talk about sorrows. After my uncle died in 2000, we found her picture, many letters written by her and by her family, and a lot of military memorabilia.

We also found an old camera with film which had not been developed. Amazingly, we were able to get these pictures



The Synagogue in Oran

developed. They were pictures of the synagogue, the wedding party, the bride, and my uncle. My uncle had also written a very detailed description of the family preparations leading up to the wedding and of the wedding itself.

My parents ultimately told me that my uncle had been married. He never remarried. He was always very close with his nieces and nephews, but we were never able to broach the subject with him.

After his death, I read and re-read the letters, looking for some clues about Hermance's family. I located some names of army buddies and posted some messages on www.ancestry.com. I was able to connect with a second wife of an army friend and share pictures, but there were no additional leads. I wrote to the consulate in Oran and received a reply from someone who happened to pick up the mail that had been