



# זכרונות *ZichronNote*

## The Journal of the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society

Volume XXXIV, Number 3

August 2014

### **Persistence (with help from the Internet) Pays Off**

**The question that started someone on his genealogical journey is finally answered but leads to a delicate situation. See page 5.**

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*Comments from members,  
the vote at the annual business meeting,  
and 2014 award winners*

**ZichronNote**  
**Journal of the San Francisco Bay Area**  
**Jewish Genealogical Society**

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**Membership** in SFBAJGS is open to anyone interested in Jewish genealogy. Dues are \$23 per calendar year. The Society is tax-exempt pursuant to section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code. Make your check payable to "SFBAJGS" and send to SFBAJGS, Membership, P.O. Box 318214, San Francisco, CA 94131-8214.

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Note: All URL's are valid as of the time of publication.

**President's Message**  
**No Postconference Blues!**

Jeremy Frankel, SFBAJGS President

As Gary Mokotoff stated in his postconference edition of "Nu? What's New?", the 34th International Jewish Genealogical Conference is now history.

I made a more concerted effort to attend the lectures this time around and was more than surprised to see a number of contributions from eastern Europe. To be honest I was expecting a program slightly biased perhaps to the U.S. western states.

Much of my interest lay in finding out what was new this year (such as new or expanded databases) as opposed to new research techniques. The vendor hall was much smaller this time, but that didn't stop me from supporting it by buying a subscription to MyHeritage and carrying out several tests offered by Family Tree DNA.

One of the more enjoyable aspects of the conference is of course the opportunity to see old faces and schmooze over either lunch or dinner (or both!) as we catch up on the latest news.

I was extremely proud and impressed at how many society members were in attendance. Kudos to Shellie for roping us all together on Monday afternoon and to Preeva for getting a room at short notice. (But no one took a photograph!)

I'm not going to name them all (for fear of missing someone), but I would like to single out Dale Friedman, Beth Galleto, Heidi Lyss, Janice Sellers, Preeva Tramiel, Shellie Wiener, and Avner Yonai, seven of your eleven board members, who were there as well.

Furthermore, along with Janice, several other society members, including Judy Baston, Robinn Magid, Ron Arons, Roy Ogus, Stephen Morse, Valery Bazarov, and Vivian Kahn were not only attending the conference but were also giving one or more lectures! Hence I think the society acquitted itself extremely well.

Next year's conference is being held in Jerusalem. Although a number of attendees were enthusiastically saying they will be there, it will be "interesting" to see in the coming months how things develop and whether an air of calm will prevail in time for us to enjoy a safe conference.

For those who don't think they will go to Jerusalem, there is always 2016, when the conference will be in Seattle. As I always exhort folks, if you've never been, you ought to go at least once. Hence having another conference on the West Coast is as good as it's ever going to get for the next few years.

*Continued on page 14*

## SOCIETY NEWS

### Member News

**Steve Morse's** One-Step Website was named one of the 101 Best Genealogy Websites for 2014 by *Family Tree Magazine*, in the category of Tracing Immigrant Ancestors: <http://familytreemagazine.com/article/best-genealogy-websites-for-tracing-immigrants-2014>.

### We Need Volunteers for the Cemetery Project!

Members of the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society have transcribed more than 35,000 cemetery records that have been added to the Jewish Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR) managed by JewishGen. We applaud the volunteers who have done this tremendous amount of work, and we now have new sets of burial records to transcribe. Send a message to [cemetery@sfbajgs.org](mailto:cemetery@sfbajgs.org) if you can help.

### Personal Family History Web Sites

Do you have a Web site for your family history? Remember, one of your member benefits is the ability to have a link from the SFBAJGS site to your page. This might help you connect with more cousins!

### Your Story Belongs in ZichronNote

Have you had a breakthrough in your family research, solved a family mystery through painstaking research, discovered a better way to use resource materials, or walked where your ancestors walked as part of an interesting family history trip? Have you had success or made progress at the Genealogy Clinic with the Mavens?

We want to read about it in *ZichronNote*! Please submit materials to [newsletter@sfbajgs.org](mailto:newsletter@sfbajgs.org).

### Family Finder Update Coming!

The SFBAJGS Family Finder is being updated. Please help us make sure it is as accurate as possible.

A list of the family names and locations you have previously submitted will be sent to you as part of your membership renewal materials this fall. To ensure that our information is accurate and up-to-date, **please** take the time to look carefully at this list and return any changes with your membership renewal. Also make sure that the e-mail address we have for you is correct, because that's how your potential cousins will try to contact you.

The plan is to deliver the new revised Family Finder via e-mail as a PDF file. This PDF file will not be available online and will be distributed only to current SFBAJGS members. If you do not want your family names included in the Family Finder PDF file, you **must** send a message to [newsletter@sfbajgs.org](mailto:newsletter@sfbajgs.org) by **31 December 2014** to let us know.

### Help Spread the Word About Jewish Genealogy and SFBAJGS

Members of SFBAJGS who are hooked on the search for their Jewish ancestors may want to share their passion with others. If you want to make a presentation to your synagogue or other interested group, SFBAJGS President Jeremy Frankel and Vice President Janice M. Sellers will be happy to assist you. The society is always looking for new members, and there is always a chance that someone in your audience will turn out to be a long-lost cousin. For contact information see page 2.

In order to continue to receive the SFBAJGS e-blast and *ZichronNote*, please send e-mail address updates to [newsletter@sfbajgs.org](mailto:newsletter@sfbajgs.org).

### Meeting Times and Locations

Unless otherwise indicated, the SFBAJGS meeting schedule is as follows.

**San Francisco: Sunday. Doors open 1:00 p.m. Program begins at 1:30 p.m.**

Rhoda Goldman Plaza, 2180 Post Street.

Parking available in Rhoda Goldman Plaza garage with entrance on Sutter Street.

**Oakland: Sunday. Doors open 12:30 p.m. Program begins at 1:00 p.m.**

Oakland FamilySearch Center, 4766 Lincoln Avenue.

**Los Altos Hills: Monday. Doors open 7 p.m. Program begins at 7:30 p.m.**

Congregation Beth Am, 26790 Arastradero Road Room 5/6.

**See Back Cover for Calendar of Upcoming SFBAJGS Meetings**

## CALENDAR

### Genealogy Events

#### Local and Regional

Thursday, 18 September 2014. Christine Bell Green, "U.S. Naturalization Records." Napa Valley Genealogical Society. NVGS Library, 1701 Menlo Avenue, Napa. <http://www.napavalleygenealogy.org/programs.html>

Sunday, 21 September 2014. Janice M. Sellers, "City (and Other) Directories." Jewish Genealogical Society of Sacramento. Albert Einstein Residence Center, 1935 Wright Street, Sacramento. <http://www.jewishgen.org/jgs-sacramento/>

Saturday, 18 October 2014. Digging for Your Roots Family History Seminar. Concord FamilySearch Center, 3700 Concord Boulevard, Concord. Jackie Hein, [lejaki1957@aol.com](mailto:lejaki1957@aol.com)

Saturday, 1 November 2014. All-day seminar with Judy Russell, the Legal Genealogist. San Mateo County Genealogical Society. Menlo Park LDS Church, 1105 Valparaiso Avenue, San Mateo. <http://www.smccgs.org/>

Wednesday, 5 November 2014. Janice M. Sellers, "Jewish Genealogy: Why Is This Research Different from All Other Research?" Oakland FamilySearch Library. 4766 Lincoln Avenue, Oakland. <http://www.oaklandfhc.org/>

Thursday, 6 November 2014. David Laskin, "The Family: Three Journeys into the Heart of the Twentieth Century." Jewish Community Library, 1835 Ellis Street, San Francisco. <http://www.jewishlearningworks.org/library/adult-events>

Monday, 17 November 2014. Glenn Kurtz and Leslie Swift, "Rescuing the Evidence: Three Minutes in Poland." Jewish Community Library, 1835 Ellis Street, San Francisco. <http://www.jewishlearningworks.org/library/adult-events>

Thursday, 8 January 2015. Elizabeth Rynecki, "A Great-granddaughter's Search for Her Lost Art Legacy." Jewish Community Library, 1835 Ellis Street, San Francisco. <http://www.jewishlearningworks.org/library/adult-events>

#### State and National

Saturday, 25 October 2014. "Nashi Predky—Our Ancestors" Fall 2014 Conference. Ukrainian Historical and Educational Center of New Jersey. Ukrainian Cultural Center, 135 Davidson Avenue, Somerset, New Jersey. <https://www.ukrhec.org/civicrm/event/info?reset=1&id=17>

Wednesday–Saturday, 11–14 February 2015. Federation of Genealogical Societies 2015 Conference.

Salt Palace Convention Center, Salt Lake City, Utah. <http://FGSconference.org/2015>

#### International

25 October–22 November 2014. International Jewish Genealogy Month. <http://www.iajgs.org/jgmonth.html>

Monday–Friday, 6–10 July 2015. 35th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy. Jerusalem, Israel. <http://www.iajgs.org/2015.html>.



### Brainstorming with the Mavens

The San Francisco Jewish Community Library hosts a free genealogy clinic every month (except July and August) from 12:00 noon to 2:00 p.m. Bring copies of family charts, documents, and other information and let experienced SFBAJGS Jewish genealogists help point you in the right direction in your research. 1835 Ellis Street, San Francisco. There is free, secure parking in the building. Call (415) 567-3327 x704 or write [library@jewishlearningworks.org](mailto:library@jewishlearningworks.org) for more information.

Upcoming dates:

12 October 2014

2 November 2014

7 December 2014

4 January 2015

1 February 2015

1 March 2015

### *The Galitzianer* Request for Submissions

*The Galitzianer* is the quarterly journal of Gesher Galicia. Submissions may be articles and/or graphics, both original and previously published, relevant to Jewish genealogical research in Galicia, such as articles about recent trips to Galicia, reports on your own research, research techniques, historical and recent pictures relevant to these matters, lists, book reviews, etc.

Electronic submissions are preferred, though not required. Submissions are accepted from both members and nonmembers of Gesher Galicia.

Though submissions are accepted year-round, the deadline for the December 2014 issue is **15 November 2014**. To send a submission, or if you have any questions, contact editor Janice Sellers at [janicemsj@gmail.com](mailto:janicemsj@gmail.com). For more information see <http://www.geshergalicia.org/galitzianer/>.

## Twenty-nine Years Looking for the Answer

Jeremy Frankel, SFBAJGS President

I could almost quite happily stop now and retire from my genealogical pursuits (but of course I won't). Why? Because Saturday, 14 June, was a crowning pinnacle of achievement in my 29+ years of genealogical research. What started me off all those years ago and had remained a simmering back-burner puzzle has now been solved.

At the risk of alienating my friends who have already heard this story countless times, I will repeat here for the rest of you how I first became involved in researching my family history. Imagine that scene in a movie where swirling fog wafts you back in time, in this case to 1985.

It was seder night, April 6, 1985, at my parents' home in Edgware, northwest London. The service and meal were over. My two younger brothers, Laurence and Warren, were upstairs. My father, David, and Brian, his brother-in-law, were in the living room having a conversation (usually it was something to do with cars), and my mother, Helena, and her mother, Sadie, were in the kitchen washing up. My grandfather Israel and I were still sitting at the dining table, munching on the remaining pieces of matzo.

I obviously had no idea what was going through his mind at that moment, but my *zaide* looked up and asked, quite out of the blue, if I knew that his brother Charles had been previously married?

Of course I didn't. Up to that moment I really hadn't taken any interest in the family genealogy (like so many of us). My mind was, however, already well attuned to solving unusual problems—"connecting the dots", as they say. I had spent ten years studying the history of Edgware, my hometown: Who built the houses and when? How did the streets derive their names? (I won't bore you with the years I spent researching the tile patterns on the platform walls of London's tube system, built in 1903!)

I knew Uncle Charlie very well, his wife, Kitty, and daughter, Maureen, who had been born four years before me. But what was this? Uncle Charlie had been married "before!" Living in blissful ignorance I had grown up unaware, naive you could say, of such things as adoption, divorce, etc. in our family.

And now here was another problem that needed solving, this time joining up the dots that represented the people in my family. How did one go about this? Where would I begin?

Actually the "where" part was sort of obvious—I would ask my father. You see, Dad had inherited the family printing business from his father, who had

started it about 1910. (That grandfather had passed away in 1945, so I never got to know him.) It was probably by default and an oft-heard refrain in our family whenever a bar mitzvah or wedding was in the offing—"Oh, David can do the printing!"

Hence my father was quite well acquainted with the various families, who the parents were and who their children were. I sat him down and "interviewed" him. I drew family trees on scrap-paper off-cuts that still lay around from the days when he used to bring them home from the shop for us, his three sons, to draw on. (I still have that binder with the scrap paper containing my first efforts at compiling our family tree.)

But all this was back in 1985. Fast forward to the 21st century, and like so many things, genealogical research has migrated to the Internet and a whole new world has opened up and beckoned to us.

I am the "self-appointed family historian" and have become the virtual "begatter" as I discover new relatives and attach them to my ever-growing tree. But in the background was that simmering back-burner puzzle that had started me on this journey.

Every once in a while I would bring that pot to a front burner, stir the ingredients, and see if anything new on the "net" was available that might help solve the puzzle—nada!

Then a few weeks ago I tried again, this time making a more concerted, educated effort. I searched online and found someone I thought might be a descendant. It's a long story—okay, okay, I'll explain.

My Uncle Charlie was originally born Solomon Levy, and he married Sophie Ost in 1930. A daughter, Leatrice, was born in 1931. Searching forward in time I found a Leatrice Levy who had married and the couple had several children, who had grown up and they themselves had married and had children. The descendant I found was one of the grandchildren.

I found her on the English LinkedIn site; her name matched. She also had a business: baking cakes! She had a Web site, so I clicked on it (I had nothing to lose) and was confronted with pictures galore of cakes she had baked for friends and clients. Round cakes, square cakes, multilayered cakes, cakes for all occasions! I studied each image looking for clues, and near the end of all the images I noticed one for a 94 year-old grandmother named Betty.

A bit more research and yes, the cake-baker did indeed have a grandmother named Betty! I made contact with her via her site and then contacted her





his parents—and furthermore, the parents of nine children!

But the icing on the cake was his further confirmation that Leatrice’s parents were indeed Charlie Leader and Sophie Ost. This was tinged with the very sad news that Leatrice had never known her father—her parents had separated before she was born. The couple had been married for less than a year.

Andrew filled me in on the family story. Shortly after Charles Iwobi’s college education as an engineer in south London was completed, the couple were married on Leatrice’s birthday, in November 1957. By the beginning of 1958 they were in Nigeria, where they lived and raised a family.



Charles and Leatrice Iwobi

Leatrice had done very well, having been a principal of the premier all-girls secondary school in eastern Nigeria. She was then transferred to the State Education Commission, where she served as a supervising principal and then as Deputy Director (Science and Technology), a position she held until her retirement in 1991.

Charles rose to be in charge of the Electrical and Mechanical Department of the Nigerian Ministry. Later, he joined the military government and served as Commissioner for Commerce and Industry and then as Commissioner for Finance. He also later ran his own engineering company.

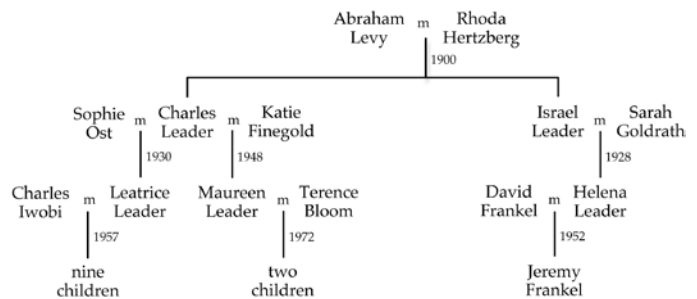
Andrew and his wife, Uzo, had both qualified as barristers and lawyers and were called to the Nigerian bar. In 1991 Andrew and Uzo relocated to Swansea. Two children, Ify (now 20) and Chuka (19), were born in Swansea.

Perhaps the sprinkles on the icing on the cake was discovering, after several more e-mails between us, as well as clueing in my mother and brothers Laurence and Warren, that Ify is currently studying classical music at Brunel University in Uxbridge, west London.

And why was this fact the sprinkles? My brother, Laurence, is an extremely talented classical musician and teaches in a private school. He and his wife Susan (who has been a bassoonist in the BBC Symphony Orchestra for the past 34 years) not only live in Uxbridge, but their backyard backs on to—Brunel University.

Oh, and it gets even better. Laurence naturally checked out Ify’s Facebook page and discovered that her best friend Michael just happens to be one of Laurence’s piano students.

After Leatrice left England in 1958, apart from her mother (who also later relocated to Nigeria and passed away there in 1998), she had never known anyone in either her mother’s or father’s family. She had known only the Iwobi side of the family.



I mentioned at the beginning that Uncle Charlie later remarried. In 1948, at age 45, on English Boxing Day, Charles Leader married 41-year-old Katie Finegold. The following year they had their only child, a daughter named Maureen. This was the family I had grown up with, never knowing about Uncle Charlie’s secret past life.

Today Maureen is happily married with two children and a grandmother six times over. How was I to gently break the news that her much older half-sister was living in Swansea with her children and grandchildren?

Furthermore, how would Leatrice feel knowing she had a half-sister who had grown up and known her father for 34 years (he passed away in 1983), whereas Leatrice not only had never known her father, but had never even seen a photograph of him?

To be continued . . .

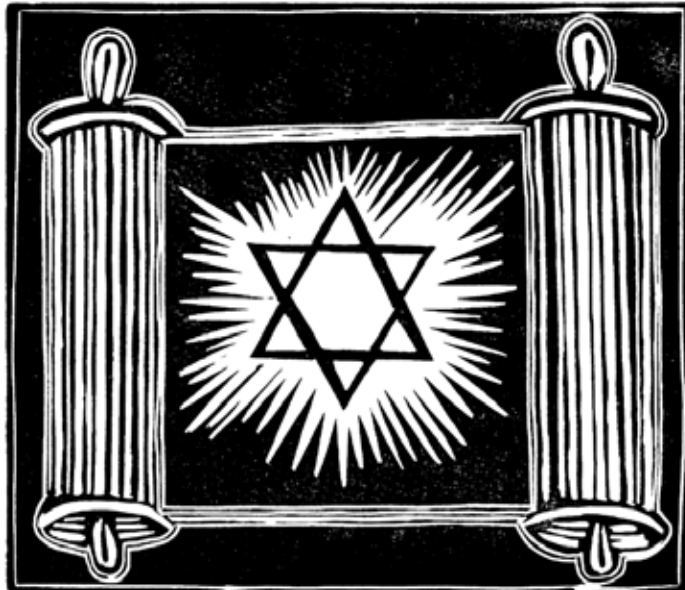


## My Grandfather, the Torah Scribe

Loren Kantor

Loren Kantor is a passionate, curious woodcutter/writer living in Hollywood with a love for movies, music, and old Los Angeles. His blog is <http://woodcuttingfool.blogspot.com/>. This story first appeared on Loren's blog at <http://woodcuttingfool.blogspot.com/2014/02/the-torah.html>.

My paternal grandfather was a Torah scribe. He spent his days carefully drawing the Hebrew letters that make up the Torah, the most sacred of Jewish texts. Writing on thin parchment paper made from the skin of a kosher animal, he began by marking thin pencil lines that served as a guide. He then dipped a feather quill into an inkwell and scrawled each Hebrew letter, abiding by the calligraphic guidelines of *Ktav Ashurit* (Ashurite script).



Each Torah contained exactly 304,805 letters scribed on about 80 sheets of parchment. Only black ink made from gall-nut juice and gum was acceptable. The height and width of each letter had to be perfect. Small mistakes could be scraped away and redrawn, unless a mistake was made in writing the name of God, in which case he'd have to start over, since God's name could not be erased. If one letter was missing or appeared smudged, then the Torah was considered invalid, or not kosher.

The scribing of a Torah took up to one year. Once scribed, the sheets of parchment were sewn together to form a continuous scroll. The Torah was then sewn onto wooden rollers called *eitzei chayim* ("trees of life"). The Torah was dressed and shipped to a designated synagogue, where it was blessed and dedicated in a sacred ceremony.

As you can imagine, my grandfather was a serious man. Scribes were supposed to be devoted and pure. He started each day with a *mikvah*, a ritual bath in a sacred pool in a temple. The immersion in water was a purification ritual to cleanse the scribe before he channeled sacred text. After praying that his holy work would be imbued with sanctity, he began each day of writing.

My grandfather was a survivor. He'd escaped the Nazis by moving his wife and son (my father) from Austria to Portugal in 1933. After the war, he gathered his savings and sent my father to America. My father

settled in Los Angeles and brought over my grandparents in 1954. They lived in the Fairfax District, the hub of the Los Angeles Orthodox Jewish community.

Growing up, I spent many weekends at my grandparents' home with my brother and sister. We were allowed to play in the back yard or run around the house. The only area off limits was my grandfather's study. He was doing "important work", we were told, and he needed his privacy.

My brother and I were curious about my grandfather's secret work. We were always sneaking behind him, trying to scare him, to divert his attention. He did not take kindly to these interruptions. He would scream in a mixture of German and Yiddish and threaten to throw a paperweight or a heavy book at us. On one occasion he threw a chair.

Presumably this nullified his purity for the day.

At the end of his workday, he finally relaxed. He'd make himself a cup of tea and watch cartoons with my brother, my sister, and me. Often he'd read comic books, laughing at his beloved Katzenjammer Kids and their juvenile hijinks.

Once I asked my grandfather what it was he did in his study. "I work for God," he said.

"What do you mean?"

"I write God's story so we don't forget who He is."

He could tell by the look on my face that I didn't understand.

"You know the Hebrew letters, *aleph*, *bet*, *gimel*? They are living things. They are the building blocks of creation. Like oxygen and hydrogen, God formed the world through combinations of the Hebrew letters." He reached for a sheet of paper and scrawled the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet. "This is *aleph*," he said. "It tells us that God is one, that He is the Master. It

*Continued on page 14*



## How Was the 2014 IAJGS Conference Different from All Other Conferences?

SFBAJGS Members

### Beth Galletto

I had a good time at this conference, learned a lot, and managed to fill in some of the holes in my family history at the FHL. I have attended at least six previous conferences, and over time I have learned to relax and not push myself to attend everything that is going on because sometimes schmoozing with other attendees in the halls is the best thing you can do.

At the banquet someone asked me what my favorite presentation had been. I couldn't choose, because I attended so many that taught me something and that I particularly liked, for different reasons. There were two how-to-do-it talks (from Ron Arons and Janice Sellers, two SFBAJGS members) that I liked because, although I had heard much of the content before, there is always something new or forgotten to try. I really enjoyed Bennett Greenspan's and Elise Friedman's discussions of uses of DNA testing in genealogy. They managed to make this complicated subject very understandable.

But what I want to report about here were three talks that really set this conference apart from others I have attended.

Because the hundredth anniversary of the beginning of World War I (at the time called the "Great War") took place during the conference, that war became the conference theme. At first I had a "ho hum" attitude toward this, thinking it meant that people would only be looking at ancestors who served in the military during the war. And yes, attendees had submitted photos and stories that were posted on the (real, not virtual) wall (and, I believe, will be made into a book or an e-book for later distribution).

But there was much more to learn. Before this conference I had not been aware of what happened to Jews in Eastern Europe during and after the Great War. There were two reasons for this. Most of my relatives were already in America or Israel before 1914. For those who remained in the old country, the events of the 1930's and World War II overshadowed those of the previous war.

What I learned was that between 1917 and 1921 more than 2,000 anti-Jewish riots took place throughout Eastern Europe. These pogroms resulted in injuries, death, and economic destruction to Jewish residents on a much larger scale than the many pogroms that had taken place before the war. In some villages that had been inhabited by a majority of Jews, the entire Jewish population was killed or

driven out. To me it seemed like a dress rehearsal for the Holocaust.

Judy Baston (another member of SFBAJGS) spoke about the Cohen and Morgenthau investigative missions from the U.S. to towns in what are now Poland and Ukraine to document pogroms against Jews that took place between 1917 and 1918. Judy described the documents that resulted from these missions and how they can be accessed and used in genealogical research.

In another presentation, Nadia and Oleksiy Lipes discussed documents relating to these atrocities that can be found in Ukrainian archives. In a moving moment Nadia told how she used to wonder what became of her relatives and how she had found the answers through these documents. She refused to let her husband describe in detail the kinds of outrages that took place in these Ukrainian pogroms. Suddenly unable to continue, she paused and the room went completely silent as Oleksiy put his arms around her and comforted her. It was clear that this research is personal for the two young Ukrainians.

Finally, there were presentations aimed at preparing us to attend the 2015 conference in Jerusalem. Some attendees at the Salt Lake conference had come from Israel, and they spent a lot of time reassuring the rest of us, in light of current events at the time, that we would be safe at next year's conference. But I found Rony Golan's discussion on how to communicate with Israeli relatives particularly instructive.

Much of Rony's advice actually applies not just to Israelis but to anyone who does not speak English as a native language. Even if my relatives speak English, they will have cultural and educational differences that make their English different from mine. Some examples of useful advice: They will prefer talking to writing. If writing, don't use cursive. Use short sentences. Don't use idioms. If calling, remember the time difference, and don't call on Shabbat. Remember that they use the European system of expressing dates (day, month, year) and the metric system for measurement. Because their country is geographically small, distances seem longer to them than to us.

I have many relatives in Israel with whom I have lost contact over the years, and I plan to locate them during the coming months and arrange to meet some time next summer. Rony's information should be very helpful. Next year in Jerusalem!

## Heidi Lyss

Among the many informative presentations at this, my first IAJGS Conference, I felt especially compelled by Genie Milgrom's account of her discovery of her crypto-Jewish roots in her session "From the Spanish Inquisition to the Present: A Search for Jewish Roots." As her story engaged me so fully, and as it seemed to equally enthrall other audience members, judging from their focused attention and postsession feedback, I will share only a few details so as to not broadcast any plot-spoilers. I recommend instead downloading Genie's talk or reading her books (see below for more information).

Genie grew up in Florida in a Cuban Catholic family, and yet inexplicably, both to herself and her mother, felt drawn to Judaism from a young age. When in her 20's, she converted to Orthodox Judaism, much to the disappointment of her Catholic mother and to her Catholic husband at the time. Upon the death of her maternal grandmother a few years later, Genie received a box with family items her grandmother had willed to her. Inside the box lay a hamsa and a Star of David earring. Upon this discovery, Genie embarked on a personal and genealogical journey to trace her maternal roots, seeking her likely Jewish lineage, with the ultimate goal of being recognized as Jewish by birth, rather than by conversion.

She shared her trail of research and journey through Inquisition records, trips to Spain, and interactions in her ancestral village and her efforts to prove to rabbis that she was indeed Jewish by birth. I felt surprised and disturbed by the thoroughness of both the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisition records, although that deeply disturbing thoroughness means more information is available to researchers today.

For anyone interested in Genie's story, crypto-Judaic studies, and/or Sephardic Jewish history, you may access her story following the recording links at the IAJGS Web site (recording 23659). Genie also has written two books. The first is *My Fifteen Grandmothers*, in which she shares her journey. The book is short, and since writing it, she has discovered seven more grandmothers, so her IAJGS session recording may offer a more complete story (I have not yet read the book so cannot be certain). The second book is *How I Found My 15 Grandmothers/ Como Encontré a Mis 15 Abuelas*, a bilingual English-Spanish volume in which Genie describes her research approaches and sources. Both can be obtained via Amazon (they are not available on other book sites at economical prices, and I have not yet found them via interlibrary loan).

Genie shared more of her experiences in the "Crypto-Judaic Studies Panel, Part 1", a session that also included a discussion by Schelly Talalay Dardashti

of lesser-known Jewish communities in Iran and elsewhere (recording 23643). The "Crypto-Judaic Studies Panel, Part 2" contained a helpful review of Jewish genealogy and DNA testing by Bennett Greenspan, founder of Family Tree DNA, along with his plea to rabbis and congregations to welcome back into the Jewish fold those who have discovered their crypto-Jewish roots, as they may hesitate to approach anyone in a synagogue (recording 23647). The second panel also included a presentation by Art Benveniste on some Benveniste genealogy findings which may be of interest to those with Benvenistes in their family tree.

## Robinn Magid

Ron Arons' presentations at the IAJGS summer conferences are always delightful, and this summer in Salt Lake City was no exception. On Tuesday, July 29, I attended "Evaluating Evidence: Ask a Mini-Minnie Question." The central idea was that Ron was trying to prove (or disprove) something specific about his grandfather in the face of a lack of evidence. His colorful, bigamist grandfather married a woman named Minnie, and the "mini-Minnie" question was whether this couple had any children together, even if none are known to exist according to family memory.

So, the question was, in effect, "Is it possible to prove there were no children by their absence from the documentary record, and if so, when can one claim to have exhausted the search for nonexistent offspring?" Highly intriguing, and I'm sure useful to contemplate even if one didn't have a bigamous grandfather!

To pursue this speculative research "beyond a reasonable doubt", Ron had consulted Rhoda Miller, Certified Genealogist®, as his foil and devil's advocate. Unfortunately, Rhoda couldn't be there in person, but Ron managed to conjure her up and spliced her perspective, advice, and criticism into his entertaining and informative presentation anyway. Even long distance, Ms. Miller proved to be a high-standards, harsh taskmaster, driving Ron to follow the genealogist's "GPS." Ron skillfully explained how his research and analytical process measured against the points of this theory as he sought to prove that his grandfather did not in fact father any children with "the other woman" in his life. Did Ron exhaust all possible sources of evidence in trying to prove this negative assertion? Well, it seems like there's always room for more genealogical digging according to Ms. Miller, but most of us in the well packed room thought Ron did a thorough job and were ready to declare there to be no offspring from that union! Great job, Ron! Can't wait to see what you're going to prove didn't happen next!

At the JewishGen evening presentation, Warren

Blatt, Michael Tobias, and Avraham Groll gave a spirited tour of the additions and changes happening around JewishGen's Web site and databases. I listened without taking notes, so this report is merely an impression of what they said.

Data acquisition continues, and the men described many projects which have made significant information gains during the past year. They made an earnest appeal to us to extract and submit data from *yahrzeit* plaques in our local synagogues in order to help the JewishGen Yahrzeit Plaque project grow quickly in the coming year. They also announced a program to inform descendants of upcoming *yahrzeits* in their families. Check the JewishGen site for details.

They talked about the current JewishGen computer hardware situation, discussing the cyber attack that Ancestry.com suffered this summer and how it affected the JewishGen site for a number of days. They also outlined their most significant challenges, which center on the problem of longer wait times for search responses. Michael demonstrated a beta version of "what's coming next", and JewishGen believes that it will cut our wait times. They strongly advised that researchers should take care not to initiate multiple searches concurrently. Apparently while investigating why some researchers report frustration with response times, JewishGen discovered that many people open additional windows and initiate additional searches when they think the system is responding slowly, and Michael reminded us that this only slows the response time further. Apparently many of us also hit enter repeatedly. So, the take-away message was to be patient for now, but to know that better things are coming.

The presentation was entertaining as well as informative, which is not surprising since these three men are talented, and their style was helpful and friendly. But the most memorable line of the evening occurred when Warren was explaining how records from towns or cities are assigned to countries based upon where they are now on the map. He went on to explain that the exception is Crimea, which in JewishGen-land is still in Ukraine, and not recognized as Russia. The chuckling crowd of more than 300 people responded with rousing applause!

### **Preeva Tramiel**

My favorite session of the Utah conference was "How to Better Communicate with Israeli Researchers and Relatives", given by Rony Golan on Thursday morning. If you have Israeli relatives who cooperate with you and with whom you communicate easily, congratulations. My cousins in Israel are a challenge. Their father fled Transcarpathia in the 1930's or 1940's because he was the most literary of a large family of auto mechanics, and he read the

newspapers and deduced that was the best course of action. As a result, he was the only brother to escape the concentration camps.

But back to Mr. Golan.

Rony Golan is a lawyer in Tel Aviv who is also a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists. In his capacity as a lawyer, he finds relatives and heirs for a living. He maintains a Web site at <http://www.genealogy.co.il/> and is active on the Family Roots Forum at <http://forums.tapuz.co.il/roots>. Both of these sites are in Hebrew, but Google Translate handles them well.

Golan began his talk by explaining that while learning English is rewarded in Israeli schools, some people do better at learning English than others, and in general, people who are older and/or who have lower income will be less likely to speak English well.

He discussed the different preferred means of communication about sensitive subjects such as family. He observed that while Americans prefer to correspond by letter about such matters, Israelis much prefer phone and e-mail, but if you MUST write a letter:

1. Don't write in cursive. (I have made this mistake.)
2. Be brief. (Oops.)
3. Start by explaining who you are, how you found their address, and what you want. (I could have been more direct, I guess.)
4. Suggest that you speak by phone or e-mail. Israelis will take phone calls anywhere, anytime, and often carry TWO cell phones. (Um, I don't. I think calling after 9:00 p.m. is rude. Oops again.)
5. Don't use idioms, such as "pocketbook" or "hard nut to crack."
6. Be careful with prepositions. In Hebrew, the words for in, on, at, and to are all the same.
7. Dates are different. Use names of months instead of mm/dd/yy, because the Israeli style is dd/mm/yy.
8. Refrain from typing the number "1" next to the letter "l." They look identical to an Israeli.
9. Don't be too courteous.

The guidelines for e-mail are the same as above, with the following additional caveats: You should always expect and get a very quick response (see #4, above). If you wait to respond, an Israeli will take that to mean "no." Be brief, and write short sentences.

Expect your accent to be misunderstood. Mr. Golan played a clip of the very entertaining Amy Walker, who has a series of YouTube videos on American dialects. I didn't note which one he played, but if you are an American, you may have an accent. You will likely

*Continued on page 15*

## 2014 IAJGS Annual Business Meeting

Jeremy Frankel, SFBAJGS President

As many of you will recall, my last “President’s Message” (*ZichronNote* Volume 34 #2, May 2014) was about my response to being informed that Shipley Munson and Quinton Atkinson were two of the nominees for the IAJGS Board.

They are employees of two of the world’s largest genealogy companies, FamilySearch (part of the LDS church) and Ancestry.com, respectively. Daniel Horowitz, an existing board member, was also up for election and is an employee of MyHeritage (now owners of Geni). If all three were to be elected, more than one third of the IAJGS Board would be employees of the world’s largest genealogy companies.

Something else I did in response to learning of this situation was to send an e-mail to all 75 JGS presidents around the world, alerting them too, and saying that to me this was a clear case of a conflict of interest.

On Saturday afternoon I arrived at the conference. Almost right away I was met with furtive whispers from some of the other attendees, wondering what “fireworks” might take place at the annual meeting. Truth be told, I had no idea. I didn’t know whether anyone else was going to take up the issue. As Saturday morphed into Sunday and then Monday and the conference got into its stride, there was an undercurrent (admittedly by those “in the know”) about what might ensue.

Come Tuesday I knew I couldn’t back down and so prepared a three-page “speech” that I would read out loud at the annual meeting—if I were permitted to do so.

The annual meeting began on schedule on Wednesday afternoon with quite a bit of time given over to a roll call by IAJGS Secretary Mark Nicholls. Several reports were given, and eventually it was time for the Nominating Committee to offer the slate for election.

As an unintended anticlimax to the whole proceedings, Mark Nicholls then took another roll call of those present. (Some attendees had been moving in and out of the room during the meeting.)

Unusually, even though there were no competing nominations for a position, unlike previous years, instead of the slate being voted *en masse* everyone was given voting slips which contained the names of each nominee with a check box next to each name. Proxy forms were also provided (though there were no

takers—or should that be “offers”?). Before the vote, nominees were allotted a few moments to describe themselves. When that was over, time was then made for any “discussion.”

As I looked around I could see no one was eager to make the first move, so I did. Walking up to the microphone with my small sheaf of papers, I turned to face the fifty-five attendees and said in no uncertain terms that this was not in any way to be seen as a personal attack on the three employees who were nominated, but that my general feeling was this was a big mistake and an obvious conflict of interest. If any other employees were to be elected in future years the IAJGS Board would not be seen as anything other than an industry trade group, rather than an organization representing a specialized niche of genealogy.

Another person then took the microphone and not quite “hijacked” my opinion but turned it around as if I were in fact making personal attacks on some of the nominees. Others spoke as well. I knew right from the get-go that the vote would go the way of the slate. And then the vote was taken.

When all was said and done, however, not all nominees received all 55 votes from the attendees. Some votes were as low as 43. So it was democracy in action, and afterward I congratulated all the “winners.”

IAJGS has several major issues that it faces in the near future, not the least of which is its solvency in putting on the annual conferences. Fewer people than expected attended in Salt Lake City. I hope it will break even. Jerusalem is a big question mark, both from a safety standpoint as well as financial. Then the conference returns to the West Coast in 2016, to Seattle. Will that be a repeat of Salt Lake? Who knows? 2017 is penciled in for a conference in eastern Europe, possibly Warsaw. That too could turn into an expensive exercise.

IAJGS is trying to line up sponsorship money to underwrite conference costs. This year it came from Ancestry and FamilySearch. “Next year in Jerusalem” sees MyHeritage, the Israeli commercial genealogy company, providing the sponsorship. Where does IAJGS go from here? Will the “big three” take turns at underwriting conferences?

Is that what we have come to? We shall see.



## Yiddish: A Nation of Words

Book Review by Beth Galletto

*Yiddish: A Nation of Words* by Miriam Weinstein. Ballantine Books, 2002 (reprint edition). 336 pages. ISBN 978-0345447302.

Here's a good rule for Jewish genealogists: When exploring a used book sale, always check the "World History" section for books relevant to your research. That's something I learned from SFBAJGS president Jeremy Frankel, who occasionally writes in his column about book treasures he discovers at such sales.

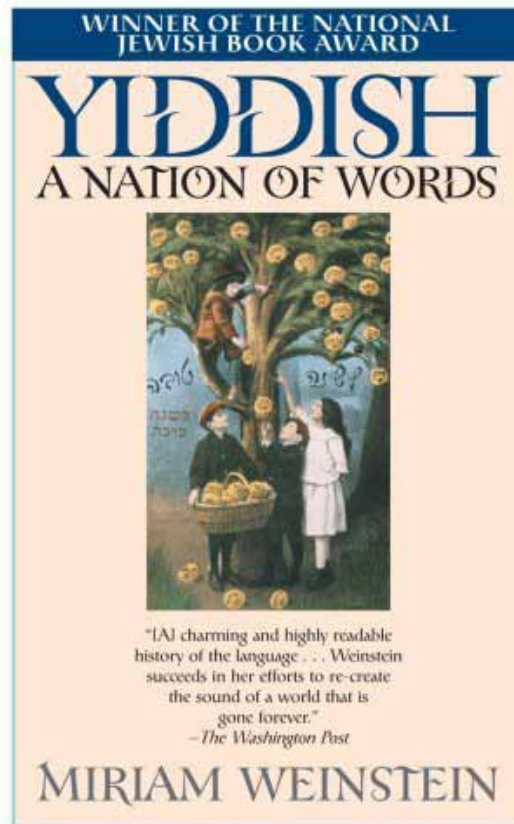
One book treasure I recently found is *Yiddish: A Nation of Words* by Miriam Weinstein. Not a new book, it was published in 2001, but to me it was a new discovery, and one I'd recommend to anyone researching Yiddish-speaking Jewish families.

This book filled in blanks in my episodic understanding of Jewish history. I suspect that many others, like me, learned Jewish history as a child on a holiday-by-holiday basis. It is an old joke that our history has been reduced to "They tried to kill us, but we survived. Let's eat."

Then there was my after-school religious education. For some reason one of the few things I remember from those sessions was the rabbi talking about the *Haskalah*, also called the Enlightenment. It sounded important. But what, when, and where was it? I hadn't a clue.

My knowledge of Jewish history was like the view of a city you get while riding on subways. Occasionally you go up and see what's happening above ground, but you don't really have a sense of how it all fits together. Through my years of research I have greatly increased my understanding of the continuum of Jewish history, but I frequently still have trouble fitting together what I have learned about different places in different eras.

In telling the story of the Yiddish language, Weinstein outlines the history of European and Russian Jewry. She does so not as a scholarly presentation but in a conversational style that makes the book a joy



to read. She clearly loves her topic. As she puts it, "I have written history-as-story, filling the tale with flesh-and-blood people with obsessive humor, visionary courage, brilliant desperate causes, and glorious flaws. As will immediately be obvious, I am a journalist, not a historian, linguist or any kind of scholar."

She traces the beginning of Yiddish back to the 9th century, when Jews from France and Italy moved into the area that is now Germany and managed to communicate using words from each of the three regions, together with a contribution from the language of prayer, Hebrew. The first written Yiddish turns up in marginal jottings in Hebrew texts from Rashi, who lived in northeastern France in the 11th century.

Over time Yiddish became the everyday language, used by women, who were not usually educated in Hebrew as were their husbands and sons. It became the *mame loshn*, or mother tongue.

Weinstein discusses the centuries of *shtetl* life and how the way of life and the Yiddish language were reflections of each other. She talks about Jews being invited into Polish territories and then finding themselves under the rule of the Russian tsar as national borders changed.

She continues to the 18th century and the opposing movements of the *Haskalah* and Hasidism. Yes, now I know more about that bit of Jewish history that my rabbi was trying to explain to his teenage students. Supporters of the *Haskalah*, the Jewish version of the European Enlightenment, wanted Jews to expand their viewpoint and learn about literature and knowledge beyond Jewish traditions. They took a dim view of Yiddish because they hoped for more integration of Jews into the modern world. Developing at about the same time, the Hasidic movement went in the opposite direction and encouraged increased

use of Yiddish as an expression of joy in Jewish life. These kinds of opposing attitudes toward Yiddish repeated as history moved on.

I was fascinated by the conflict over whether Yiddish or Hebrew would become the language of the state of Israel. Weinstein's discussion of Eliezer Ben Yehuda demonstrates what an amazing accomplishment it was to take Hebrew, long restricted to study and prayer, and transform it into a language of everyday usage.

Another interesting chapter describes the brief flowering of Yiddish culture in Birobidzhan, an area near Russia's Chinese border set aside as a Jewish autonomous region in 1934. Many Russian Jews saw Birobidzhan as a rare opportunity to expand Yiddish literature and life, but eventually, as Stalin turned on and purged his former supporters, he had the community's leaders imprisoned or executed.

I felt a sense of dread as history moved toward the dark days of the Holocaust, in which most of Europe's Yiddish speakers were exterminated. Add Israel's rejection of Yiddish in favor of Hebrew, the Soviet Union's fear of and repression of Yiddish speakers, and the eagerness of the children of American immigrants to put the past behind them by turning against their parents' language—and prospects look dim for Yiddish continuing as a living language.

But as Weinstein questions whether Yiddish is doomed, she reveals a breath of hope for the *mame loshn*. This is the continuing use of the language by the Haredim, the ultra-Orthodox community. Their high birth rate is increasing the number of contemporary Yiddish speakers in New York, Jerusalem, London, Paris, Antwerp, and other locations throughout the world. Weinstein also writes about Aaron Lansky's National Yiddish Book Center, which has rescued and preserved millions of volumes of Yiddish publications, and she discusses current academic interest in the language at numerous universities.

So is there hope for Yiddish as a living language? My interpretation is that the language is not dead, but it will never be the same.

"The job of the coming years will be to reclaim the past, and to integrate Yiddish into Jewish, and human, history," Weinstein says. And isn't this similar to our task as Jewish genealogists?

The book starts with a timeline, a cast of characters, and a map of "Yiddish Lands" and ends with a glossary of Yiddish words, an index, and an extensive bibliography.

If your ancestors spoke Yiddish, you will understand them and the world from which they came much better after reading this book.



**President's Message**, continued from page 2

I was on the plane at 11:20 a.m. Friday morning, landing in Sacramento around noon. I had barely a few hours to get the house in order as cousins were flying in from Texas to visit for several days. It certainly made a change, having living relatives around for a while. Kind of balances out the time we spend with the deceased relatives.



**Torah Scribe**, continued from page 8

is silent; it is never spoken because the true name of God is never spoken. *Aleph* stands for Adam the first man, for Abraham who taught us there is only One God, and for Abba, the Hebrew word for Father."

"Look at *aleph*," he said. "It stands strong and upright. It is perfectly balanced; it cannot be knocked over. Hebrew is read right to left. *Aleph* is looking at *bet*, the second letter. And *bet*, it is looking at *gimel*, the third letter. What does this tell us? It says God is looking after us and it is our job to look after our neighbor. We do not see God but He is always present, right next to us. You understand?"

"Yes," I told him, though I didn't.

"You learn your Hebrew," he told me. "And you will learn the secrets of God. It's all in there. In the letters."

As I grew older, my grandfather and I grew apart. He only conversed with my father in German or Yiddish. Often I'd hear my name sprinkled accusingly, as if I'd done something wrong. When I stopped watching cartoons and reading comics he no longer knew how to relate to me. I couldn't relate to him either. He seemed weird and antiquated, a relic from another time and place.

He died in 1986. In his lifetime, he scribed more than two dozen Torahs. While our family sat *shiva*, the week-long mourning period after his death, a stream of rabbis stopped by the home to pay their respects. They patted me on the head and spoke glowingly about my grandfather. I smiled and nodded but couldn't wait to get out of there and be back with my friends.

I never formally learned Hebrew, but when I turned 30, I developed a fascination with the letters. I began drawing them and studying their lines and curves and perfect harmony. These days I carve woodcuts of the Hebrew letters. I haven't learned the secrets of God. But like my grandfather said, it's all in there. In the letters.





**IAJGS Comments**, continued from page 11

enjoy Ms. Walker's work, so listen to this one on the word "sure": <http://www.21accents.com/accent-tip-sure/>.

If you are lucky enough to go to Israel for a meeting, always set up times in advance, don't be late, understand that "Let's have coffee" means to set up a meeting in a public place—Tel Aviv has thousands of cafés—and be aware that everything is metric. Don't bring tuna fish, jeans, or peanut butter as gifts—Israel now has all that, and people have everything. A small present is fine. If you are dealing with religious people, consider your clothing (observe rules of modesty), don't offer to shake hands with the opposite sex, don't call or offer to drive to meet on Shabbat, and be aware of the time difference—sending an e-mail that arrives on Shabbat can be insulting to a religious person, and it won't get read, anyway.

Good luck with your Israeli relatives!



**IAJGS 2014 Awards**

Lifetime Achievement Award: Alexander Beider  
Program Award: Montefiore Census Digitization

Outstanding Publication: Jewish Genealogy Society of Long Island New York, *Lineage* (which beat *ZichronNote*!)

Outstanding Contribution to Jewish Genealogy via the Internet: Jewish Records Indexing–Poland

More information on the above four awards can be found at <http://www.iajgs.org/blog/iajgs-award-2014/>.

Stern Grant: Jewish Colonies in South America, \$3,000, [http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen-erosity/projectdesc/LA\\_Immigrants.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen-erosity/projectdesc/LA_Immigrants.html)

Stedman Grant: Odessa Document Acquisition and Translation Projects, \$3,000, [http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen-erosity/projectdesc/DB\\_Odessa.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen-erosity/projectdesc/DB_Odessa.html)

International Jewish Genealogy Month poster: Marcia Hirsch, JGS Illinois, <http://www.iajgs.org/blog/calendar/international-jewish-genealogy-month/>



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Calendar of Upcoming SFBAJGS Events

**Sunday, 14 September, San Francisco:** *Discovering My German-Jewish Heritage.* Diane Ober will talk about her discovery of how her family fared under Nazi rule, from deportation to escape to the Shanghai ghetto and to life in America.

**Sunday, 19 October, Oakland:** *A Very Short Course in Hebrew for Family History Researchers.* Vivian Kahn will provide a brief introduction to the Hebrew alphabet and the words and terms that most commonly appear in inscriptions and other family documents.

**Monday, 20 October, Los Altos Hills:** *Odessa: The Jewish Soul of a Cosmopolitan City.* Valery Bazarov will talk about the history of his native city, from its creation by order of an empress to the current rebirth of Jewish life.

**Sunday, 16 November, San Francisco:** *Assimilation and Differences in Jewish Immigrants to Latin America: Voices from My Family Tree.* Dr. Judith Berlowitz will discuss her communications with relatives who immigrated to South America from eastern Europe.

**Sunday, 11 January 2015, San Francisco:** *Writing Your Family History.* Board member Heidi Lyss will review how to share your genealogy research by writing narratives, including fun formats you can try, and what to do when you feel you have too little, or too much, information..

**Sunday, 22 February 2015, Oakland:** *The Family History of Klezmer Music.* Gerry Tenney, leader of one of the West Coast's leading klezmer bands, comes from a long line of musicians, dating back to when they lived in the Russian Empire.

Also see pages 3 and 4. For more program information visit <http://www.sfbajgs.org/>.

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