

Breaking Through the Brick Wall

by Boris Feldblyum

The following article was adapted from a talk delivered at the 18th Annual Seminar on Jewish Genealogy held in Los Angeles, July 12-17, 1998.

This article concerns problems encountered in the course of your genealogical research. I could begin with the Big Bang, also known as Creation, but the actual story I want to relate happened much later, long after G-d created the fish, the birds, the light bulbs, and the State of New Jersey. My story takes place during the 1960s or the 1970s.

There is a theory that suggests that our universe began as the result of an enormous thermonuclear explosion, and, as with every nuclear explosion, it must have produced an enormous amount of radiation, traces of which can perhaps be found in space even today. An astrophysicist from a Philadelphia university set about trying to find traces of interstellar radiation, but was not successful.

At the same time, a hundred miles away in the State of New Jersey, two young scientists working at Bell Labs were trying to decipher certain types of signals from the universe. One of the problems they encountered was a particular background noise that interfered with their signals and that they could not eliminate. They tried pointing their telescope in different directions, looked during different seasons, and even cleaned bird droppings off the telescope—all in vain. Finally, someone suggested that they talk to a professor in Philadelphia who had considerable experience in the field. The professor took the call, listened to their story, agreed to meet, then hung up the telephone, turned to his staff and said, "Boys, we've been scooped!" He understood at once that the "back-

ground noise" the two Bell Lab scientists complained about was the very space radiation he had failed to detect.

How is this story relevant to genealogical research? To paraphrase yard-sale bargain hunters, one man's background noise is another man's great-great-great-grandfather. It occurred to me some time ago that we often miss the very information we seek when it is literally under our noses. Whether it is a stack of old letters we read 10 years ago, a tape recording of an old aunt's recollections, or a dozen newly acquired records from Vilna or Odessa, we often are obsessed with finding *new* information, *new* records, *new* names. Pause, go back and reread that stack of old letters. You may realize for the first time that the very first letter in the stack about your grandfather listed not Zhizhmory near Kovno, but Zhitomir near Galicia! So, you are not 100 percent Litvak; neither am I. No one is perfect.

Uniqueness of Jewish Genealogical Research

As we all know, Jewish historical research is difficult to conduct because of the dearth of sources, especially pre-20th century sources. We have been uprooted too often. That is why, more than any other group, we need

to be careful to read, analyze, and draw proper conclusions from the documents we do find. As genealogists, we are different from the French, British, or Japanese. We are chosen to achieve more with less. Nothing illustrates this point better than a little story that recently appeared on a (non-Jewish) Internet-based genealogical conference:

Here's a census idea that really worked for me! Because the men in my line married late, my own grandfather was born in 1848 in England. I wrote to his address on the 1851 English census, got a letter back from the present owner of the house who had all the deeds and contracts for the home, built in 1697, and copied some for me showing that my family had bought it in 1802 and sold it in 1914. When I visited England, the family invited me for dinner and showed me throughout the home. One of the greatest adventures of my life!

Can you imagine? "Built in 1697...lived from 1802 to 1914...." Our ancestors did not have this luxury of peace and tranquility. In 1697, they were trying to heal the wounds inflicted by the bloody pogroms of Bogdan Khmel'nitsky and his Cossacks. In 1848, they were hiding their 10-year-old sons from the czar's army; in 1914, they were expelled from their homes throughout Lithuania or were struggling to earn a piece of bread in the New World.

I conduct genealogical research for others. This has given me exposure to a variety of problems and challenges rarely faced by a single researcher. It also puts me in the unique position of being emotionally detached from the research, for I have no expectations or preconceived

notions about the search results. My primary goal as a "hired gun" is to find as many ancestral records as possible, based on the information given to me by genealogists. By doing this, I have learned to look critically at the information given to me by genealogists and also to devise new strategies of research.

Two Principles

Let us concentrate on two principles that are hardly new, but often overlooked. First, consider the possibility that you already have the data you seek, but simply do not see it. Many genealogists have been trained in disciplines that require clear, analytical thinking and employ this regularly in their daily work—but not when it comes to their own personal genealogies, when they embark on a quest to find new documents in the U.S. National Archives or in the archives of the former Soviet Union. Then, we often hamper our efforts by inadvertently misguiding and limiting the scope of research and its outcome.

We Already Have What We Seek

Obviously, a system for documenting one's research is of vital importance. My definition of "system" goes be-

"One man's background noise is another man's great-great-great-grandfather"

yond creating manila folders or computer files. It is important to have a system ingrained in our minds, with points of reference, milestones, and goals, a system that will help define what we need to do today and where it might lead us tomorrow. This must be a system to establish not only names and dates of specific individuals, but also people from particular generations.

We know that different sources often provide contradictory names, places, and dates for the same people. This raises the question of how to evaluate each document on its merits. I am not prepared to devise one universal system here, but I will share one example of how a system might be developed for the dates we use when we try to attach specific people to our family tree. A simple and logical approach to estimating dates was suggested by Professor Gerald Esterson of Israel. His system works best when a family tree has a number of known birth dates, more or less evenly distributed. That is, you have benchmarks for interpolating the birth dates of people one or two generations up or down the descendants list.

These are the rules:

1. Men married at the age of 25.
2. Woman married at the age of 20.
3. The first child was born two years after the marriage.
4. Subsequent children were born at two-year intervals.
5. In very observant families, men married at 22, women at 17.

Of course, one should be alert to cases of uncles marrying nieces (or other unusual combinations), in which cases the ages could be completely wrong.

These rules would not be applicable today, when many men and women marry much later—except again in the case of very observant families. But since we are speaking of Jewish vital events that occurred a century ago, this approach works well enough. My own observations of hundreds of Jewish marriage records from throughout the Russian Pale of Settlement prove Esterson's assumptions. In fact, I noticed that the number of individuals who married younger than age 20 was relatively small.

Very often we do not know, or are not totally certain of, our ancestors' places of origin. If we consider that family ties were stronger then than today, and that associations with *landsmen* (residents of the same town) occurred more often than among our generation, we may start to ask the proper questions. For example, was it significant that our grandfather lived at a specific address? If yes, why? If no, why not? How much do I know about the lives of immigrants to understand or guess their actions correctly? Do I know who lived in the same or neighboring building (e.g., people with the same last name)? Are some surnames traceable to a particular area in Russia? We may use Alexander Beider's works¹ to analyze this. If we learn that this is true, then is it possible that my grandfather was from the same area? To what synagogue did my grandfather belong? Who else belonged to it? If that is not known, what synagogue(s)

or prayer houses were situated within one block? two blocks? Why was my grandfather buried in this particular area of this particular cemetery? The answers to such questions may result in a chart that is much more complicated than any family tree, but the alternative may not be much of a tree to talk about.

It is vitally important to develop a system, follow it and not yield to the temptation to bend the rules because we want—oh so much!—to fit a specific record into our tree.

Comprehensive Approach: There is No Substitute

Over the years, I have become convinced that the only way to increase one's chances of productive genealogical research is to employ what I call a comprehensive research approach. By way of contrast for a moment, we often hear and ask ourselves such questions as "What are my chances to...?" The following examples taken in the aggregate illustrate the absurdity of such questions as well as their humorous aspect:

- Where am I likely to find more information on great-grandmother; her 1885-ish marriage license or her 1895-ish death certificate?
 - Do I flush these Silberbergs from my files, or is there a good chance I'll find a blood connection after all?
 - Would the death certificate have information on where he was born and his parents' names?
 - Why do people try to get naturalization papers and declarations of intent? What types of information do you find there?
 - I am preparing for the first time to request immigration records. I have two questions: (1) What kind of information am I actually going to get? In other words, is it worthwhile to get such records? and (2) I can't figure out: Will it cost me money to do this?

Vadim Altskan, at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, who often researches World War II records for elderly Jews seeking compensation from Germany, has developed the following answer: "The chances are 100 percent if we find something and 0 percent if we don't."

Seriously speaking, how do we answer such questions? Can we answer them at all? Are they the right questions to ask in the first place? I once attempted to express "the chances" in mathematical terms:

Typical Research Case:	The Chances Are:
Possible surname (Greenberg or Goldberg)?	0.5
Possible city (Minsk or Pinsk) x 0.5 =	0.25
Possible birth year (1873 +/- 1) x 0.33 =	0.08
Event not recorded (10% probability) x 0.9 =	0.07
or 1 in 28 chances.	

So, why do we pursue genealogical research if our chances of finding something are often closer to 0 than to 100? Because the question of chance really is irrelevant to genealogical research. We continue to break through brick walls, despite the headaches. Yes, it is very time consuming, frustrating, and terribly expensive to search through the entire record collection of, say, the Oshmiany district of Lithuania because the grandfather was not

found even once in the records of his hometown of Volzhin. Yes, it is easy to have a minor heart attack when you learn that the 1858 Odessa tax census is a 14-volume, 1,000 page-per-volume collection in which Jews and non-Jews are mixed together and the name index will exist only when you compile it. But what is the alternative?

The following example from the JewishGen digest illustrates how we must respond to the "1 in 28" challenge:

Subject: What's in a Name

I have been tearing my hair out trying to locate Cecilia GROSSMAN.... Then mom says, "Funny that you called her Cecilia. I always called her Sarah when I lived with her in New Jersey." So I check the 1920 census for all Tolchinskys in MA, NJ, NY, and PA and there I find Sarah Tolchinsky, my grandfather, and his stepbrothers, living with their widowed mother/stepmother who only spoke Yiddish. And in MA not NJ like I had been told. "Oh, that's right. She moved to MA, but I thought that was a lot later." And "I thought her husband died around 1930, but I could be wrong." Sarah. Cecilia. It's close.

There's a moral to this, but I won't be that obvious.

I actually do not mind being "that obvious." It is a prodigious task to research the records from Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania, but where would this researcher be if he had chosen to ignore the fact that his ancestors *may* have lived somewhere other than New Jersey? The problems involved in searching Russian documents are tenfold when compared to researching the 1920 U.S. census. First, we do not always know what sources exist; all too often we believe that none exist. When we do find some records, we often do not know where to begin. Should we start with vital records, census records, family lists, what? We want to pinpoint the single record group that must have what we seek. And then, when we find what is, or what might be, our ancestral record, we still have reservations about the accuracy of what we have because it contradicts what we knew from before.

What I earlier called "emotional detachment" from search results has led me to conclude that we cannot assume that any single document created a century ago reports absolute truth, simply because we were not present at the time of its creation. Early on, most of us were taught in school not to believe everything we read, but this injunction often is forgotten when searching for documents about ancestors. Some types of records probably are more likely than others to have accurate information (e.g., a birth date on a birth record); other types of information are not as likely to be accurate (e.g., an individual's age on his death certificate). To quote one author:

Each source, whether primary or secondary, has to be evaluated in its own right and in its own context. It would be foolish to assume that one record type is always right as opposed to some other type of record. You should always examine the other entries in the same record and determine

an overall value for what is there....

One of the first orders received by FAST Genealogy Service was for vital records for a given family name. Before we were tempted to copy all records for that last name, we asked "What exactly is the family name?" Very often, we do not know, even though we think we do.

Two Misconceptions

Consider the following two messages that appeared on JewishGen within the past year:

Subject: Name Changes at Immigration

My understanding is that passengers changed their names when they entered the U.S....so it is most likely that the original name is the name recorded on the passenger list and not the name acquired during their processing through Ellis Island.

And:

I have discovered that my great-grandmother's first cousin, Mark MARKOFF, was a voice coach in Los Angeles in the 1920s and 1930s. The surname MARKOFF is certainly a stage name, as the original last name was likely FARBER, and the family stems from Zhitomir, Ukraine.



David M. Fox, AVOTAYNU Internet Editor, Boris Feldblyum, and Vitalija Gircyte, chief archivist of the Kaunas State Archives in Lithuania.

Name change mysteries present one of the most difficult challenges of Jewish genealogical research. Despite common belief to the contrary (as non-Jewish genealogist Richard Pence correctly observed), most immigrants did not change their names when they came to the United States. It is more realistic to say that for one reason or another, the name "was changed, not upon arrival, but sometime later." We would be hard-pressed to present a credible document stating that someone arrived at Ellis Island as Moishe Golsztejn and left as Morris Goldstein or Morris Cohen. Just the same, the cruel truth is that some of us may never discover what a family name was in the Old Country, but some genealogists have a difficult time reconciling themselves to that fact.

To my knowledge, no medicine exists for those unwilling or unable to reconcile not knowing the “before” name and who continue to try to break through that particular brick wall. No universal recipe exists, but I would suggest:

- Make reasonable assumptions.
- Collect all possible information from relatives and old family friends, even the wild and improbable stories. Sort them out and review them often.

- Remember that not all ancestors changed family names; the more people with whom you talk, the greater the chance of finding information that may lead in the right direction. (Thus, four Linowitz brothers took the name Linowes; the oldest, however, kept his father’s name.)

- Very often, the only clue to reconstructing a family tree is the first name pattern. Hence, we must know the Old Country names—how they were pronounced and written. Morris Goldstein is not a Russian or Polish-Jewish name; it is an American transliteration of Moische Goldsztejn.

Genealogical research for a particular family name can benefit greatly from an analytical study of the name. The steps are simple enough, but the work can be tedious—like practically everything else in genealogy or any other type of research:

1. List the surname and its variant spellings.
2. Research the meaning and comments on the variants.
3. Study the surname distribution and migration patterns.
4. Study statistics of the variants.

Forget writing to the “Ask the Experts” column in AVOTAYNU. You will have to become an expert on Goldsteins, Feldmans, or Slutskers. Only then will you be able to ask the right questions, make the right conjectures, and increase not only your “chances” of success, but the quality of your research.

No Substitute for Knowledge

Consider the following posting to JewishGen that appeared early in 1998:

Recently, I received tape recordings made by my grandfather’s niece when she was 80 years old. They have been a gold mine of information about the family history as she was the last surviving member to actually have lived in Kovno. In the tapes, she refers to the death, in 1906, of her aunt (either in Vilna, Kovno, or Brest Litovsk) as being caused by a group that sounds, phonetically, like the “Pit-u-lar Band.”

The “grandfather’s niece” superimposes a number of unrelated events. Pogroms occurred in Brest Litovsk in 1906, but not in either Kovno or Vilna. The pogroms of Petlyura (the “Pit-u-lar Band”) came 12 to 14 years later and in a different place: in Ukraine. There were, however, pogroms carried out by the Poles (who ruled Vilna after World War I) during the same civil war. The information from the tape points to three distinct geographical areas of research: Vilna/Kovno (Lithuania); Brest Litovsk (Poland/Belarus); and Ukraine. Other evidence is needed.

This example summarizes many of the problems that

genealogists encounter that may be traced back to one simple cause: lack of knowledge of the history and geography of the area they research. This lack of knowledge often leads to misconceptions and erroneous premises. Often, it derails the research effort. The following is an example:

Can someone answer a question? Ever since I was a child, I was told that my grandparents came from Lutowiska, Galicia. Now there is evidence to suggest that this may not be 100 percent correct. It now appears that they came from a smaller town called Lokiec, but, as the post office for Lokiec was in Lutowiska, they used that name. Is that reasonable?

Yes, it may be that a post office existed in Lutowiska and that Lokiec, a smaller nearby town, did not have a post office. It may also be true that if the Jews of Lokiec wanted to use a post office, they needed to use the one in Lutowiska. But why should we assume that was the reason someone said they were from Lutowiska and not Lokiec? The issue of the post office is irrelevant. If records exist for both towns, I would check records of both towns.

We often try to second guess the motives and reasoning behind our ancestors’ actions, but this is not an easy task for an American or Australian living at the end of the 20th century. AVOTAYNU readers, by and large, do not live in an openly anti-Semitic society.

Even the USSR where I grew up was different from czarist Russia. The Soviet Union had no explicitly anti-Jewish laws on its books, and anti-Semitism was officially nonexistent, so it was impossible to prosecute anyone for such behavior. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism flourished on all levels of the society, and the best Jews could do was to cheat the system whenever possible. In this sense, I think, our mentality may not have been much different from that of our grandfathers. To illustrate why we may fail to find records we are sure must exist, I offer the following personal story.

How I Committed a Forgery

For about nine years we lived, the four of us, in a one-room apartment on the outskirts of Kiev—a total living area of 194 square feet. My parents and my brother were registered in this apartment, and I was registered in another city. For years my parents tried to improve our living conditions; all in vain. No amount of bribes would help. Finally, we decided to move to another city. Moving to another city meant exchanging apartments, since everything belonged to the government. Our apartment was small—but it was “almost in Kiev,” and it had a telephone, a valuable commodity.

Once, on a Black Sea beach, my father happened to speak to a Jewish man from Vilnius who described his city and Jewish life there in such bright colors that we decided to visit Vilnius. I remember that we landed on a rainy, cold spring day, but I loved it at once. Yet who in his right mind would have wanted to move from Vilnius to Kiev?

Exchanging apartments in the Soviet Union was a tricky business. If you lived in City A and could not find a trading partner in City B, you looked for someone from City C who wanted to move to City A, and another family that wanted to move from City B to City C. In our case, we found a small

family in Nikolaev who wanted to live "almost in Kiev" and a man in Vilnius who was transferring to Nikolaev.

Everything was great except for one little detail. We had to submit to the authorities a list of the occupants of our apartment, but I, who lived with my parents, was not registered. If I was not registered in Kiev, I would not be registered in Vilnius. But, how do you slip someone in? There was no way we could let the authorities know that I had lived there, unregistered, for nine years.

The list of occupants could be obtained only in one place—from the office of the superintendent of our apartment building. Superintendents served only one purpose: to make our lives miserable. They were almost never in their offices and were always very, very busy. So, I went with my mother to the office of our superintendent and asked for the affidavit. Since comrade superintendent was very, very busy, we suggested that I would write a copy of the occupants' list and he would only have to verify it. The comrade did not object.

So, with pounding heart, I wrote the list of occupants of our apartment, replacing my brother's name with mine. The superintendent knew my face—I lived there after all—so he did not bother to check the affidavit against what was written in the book. He just signed, thus verifying the accuracy of the affidavit. We moved to Vilnius and lived there happily for three years until we decided to immigrate to the U.S.

The moral of this story, as it applies to genealogy, is that when we cannot find some ancestral records, it is for a reason. People knew who they were, how they related to others in their immediate (or extended) family, and they did not bother to leave a perfect paper trail with the government. How can we still find their trail? Only by becoming an expert in our small geographical area of interest, or in ship passenger records for a given year, or study immigrants from the Jewish theater who lived in New York City, etc.

Finding Living Relatives

Strange as it seems to me, in the six years that I have been conducting and managing genealogical research in the former USSR, I have had only one customer who asked me to look for living relatives. Happily, we succeeded. The story of how it was done might be useful to others. The e-mail from Australia said:

I am trying to find out if there are any surviving relatives from my grandmother's family in the former USSR. We know they originated from Dnepropetrovsk in the Ukraine in the early 1900s. Several then moved to Moscow around World War II, but nothing has been heard of them since. We have names of about 11 families and the addresses of a few. We also have some correspondence in old Russian that might help define the spelling of names.

I advised Adrian (the man who wrote to me) that the only guaranteed outcome is the expenditure of considerable time, and I suggested that he commit to 10 hours and evaluate the situation after that. In reply, I received a check and a long list of names, but I did not like what I saw: Gorodetsky, Boltyansky, Tarnopolsky, Umansky, Volynsky, Morokhovsky, and a few others. With the

exception of Morokhovsky, the name from Dnepropetrovks, the names were too common. In addition, there was something about Uncle Sasha, the doctor, and his daughter Mira and son Lyusik, college students in the early 1930s. I read the papers carefully and then started to rock in my chair. I needed to devise an approach tailored to this case.

As a first step, I decided to take a sample of names from the U.S. telephone directory. I did not go online as one might think; that takes too long because the names appear on screen in groups of 10. Instead, I went to my local library and checked the phone disk; I obtained a list of 650 names. Every name was well represented except Morokhovsky. My conclusion? Never mind the 150 Gorodetskys and 55 Umanskys. If I find one Morokhovsky, the chances are good that he is related. Later, I found out that I was smart, but wrong.

I checked all directories on the Net that are known to me; nothing. Then I saw the light in the form of the U.S. Library of Congress catalog. I had never before thought to use it as a name source. (Several weeks later, someone else suggested using amazon.com the book seller on the Internet—also a great idea.) The Library of Congress catalogue revealed two books, interestingly both on the subject of the English language, and both published in Kiev in the 1970s. The first name of one of the authors may have been Jewish, I thought; the other almost certainly was not.

Since I live in suburban Washington, DC, it was easy to go to the Library of Congress, where I copied the introductions to both books. Aside from the obligatory praises to the Communist Party's contribution and wise guidance in whatever field the book was about, books printed in Soviet times also include the names of reviewers and other data that might be useful.

My next step was to call Kiev telephone information. No Morokhovskys listed. I carefully reread both introductions, trying to estimate chances; I called Kiev information again and this time was given a number. "May I talk to Professor Zhluktenko (the reviewer)? "He died



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several years ago; I am his daughter." I told the daughter my little story, that I am just trying to help a man who does not speak Russian to find traces of his family. She listened. Yes, she knew both Morokhovskys, husband and wife. They also had died. No, they had no children. We talked a bit more and she said, "Call me back in half an hour. I will talk to the lady who assumed the department when Dr. Morokhovsky died." Half an hour later she said, "You know, they did have a son; here is his telephone number."

Why did I not get the number from telephone information? It is probably listed under the previous owner's name. How could I have forgotten? A telephone is a commodity! It took me several more weeks before I reached the son, Nikolai Morokhovsky. I can only call on weekends, and on weekends the Morokhovskys went to their *dacha* (country house).

Ms. Zhluktenko, the woman with whom I had spoken and Nikolai Morokhovsky were two of the most courteous and pleasant people I spoke to during this investigation. Later, when I was checking my Morokhovsky leads in Moscow, my conversations could be summarized this way: I dial. The telephone rings. "What'dya want?" "Is this the Morokhovsky residence?" "Where ya callin' to?" "I am looking for Morokhovskys." "There is nobody here like that. What'dya want?"

When I finally reached Nikolai Morokhovsky, I had another disappointment. His family originated in Kursk province, and his grandfather was a railroad engineer. Kursk province is in the heartland of Russia, outside the Pale of Settlement, and railroad engineer was not exactly a Jewish occupation. But we talked, and he said that there was an aunt in Vologda, a city a few hundred miles north of Moscow. Yes, I could call her; here is the number. By the way, she spells her name Marakhovsky. That was a little shock. I, who preach to others that spelling does not matter, had neglected to think of other spelling possibilities.

I called Vologda. The woman was delighted. I am calling from America to look for relatives! How nice and noble it is. People treat each other like animals, and here I am doing such a nice thing. I probe a bit. No leads. The family is from Kursk, as Russian as they can be. There were no Jews in the family. Well, actually one grandfather's brother married a Jewess once and the family excommunicated him; 30 years later, they reconciled. Another dead end, but we talk a bit more and she recalled that many years ago, when in Donetsk, she was surprised to see their family name in the telephone book.

Back to Ukraine. I call telephone information again. There is one number in Donetsk. The man is very polite, but that's about it. No Uncle Sasha, no connections to Dnepropetrovsk. He has a very Russian-sounding first name and patronymic, but his speech reminds me of my own uncle, and I do not want to hang up quickly; or maybe it is because I do not have any other leads. Can I talk to anyone else in the family? Well, there is a sister.

Is she also in Donetsk? No, she lives in Haifa(!) Can I call her? Sure, here is a number. I am elated. At least he is Jewish.

Immediately I call Haifa and find myself speaking to a very talkative woman who wants to know everything firsthand. She is not the sister, she is a niece. What do you mean that Uncle Sergei did not know about Dnepropetrovsk? They came from there just three years ago. The Morokhovskys I am seeking were relatives, and Mira Morokhovsky used to visit frequently. She never married and still lives in Dnepropetrovsk. My heart paused as all those newspaper stories about old and destitute Jews flashed through my mind. I wrote Adrian that if the woman is still living, I would suggest that he buy a ticket to Dnepopetrovsk, as that would be the greatest *mitzvah* he could do. It took several weeks to receive Mira's Morokhovsky's death certificate. She actually had died three years before the Haifa family emigrated. Adrian did not go to Dnepropetrovsk, but he is in contact with the family in Haifa and wants to find others.

This experience taught me several lessons. One was that western Jewish genealogists are not doing enough to reach out to possible family members still living in the former Soviet Union. It is great that we trace roots to the 18th century; I am a proud participant in some of these ventures. But as someone once said, "Libraries can wait; people can't."

Many elderly, ex-Soviet Jews could help us build a bridge to life before the Holocaust, but their number is diminishing rapidly. Last year, I was contracted to research the entire collection of Mogilev Jewish vital records filmed by the Mormons. I cannot describe my feelings when I saw notations on some of the records from the 1950s and 1960s. Someone during those years actually had a reason to get a copy of a vital record; that was so recently. But we were not doing genealogy then. The point is that we are neglecting a resource that soon will not exist.

We all want different things from genealogy, and we conduct research on different levels, but I believe that down deep we all want to make at least one small "big bang."

Many years ago, I read in a biography of Sir Arthur Fleming, who discovered penicillin: "A chance is a gift to a mind well prepared." That is a real challenge.

Notes

1. Beider, Alexander. *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire* (Teaneck, N.J.: Avotaynu, 1993) and Beider, Alexander. *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland* (Teaneck, N.J.: Avotaynu, 1996)

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