

Roots and Branches

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Jewish Genealogy 'By The Book'

"Where do I start?" That is the question asked most frequently of genealogists. Fortunately for the family historian and those interested in learning more about their Jewish roots, the number of books on this fascinating subject is increasing as interest in the field grows.

The first major publication was Dan Rotenberg's **Finding our Fathers**. It includes a country-by-country guide to tracing Jewish ancestors abroad, a guide to Jewish sources and public records in the United States, and a description of archives, libraries and agencies in Israel along with their holdings. Also included is a list of 8,000 Jewish family names, giving their origins, sources of information about each family, and the names of related families whose histories have already been recorded.

For those trying to locate the shtetl of their relatives, the **Shtetl Finder** by Chester G. Cohen is a good place to

start. This gazetteer (145 pages) includes a listing of Jewish communities in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the Pale of Settlement of Russia and Poland, and in Lithuania, Latvia, Galicia, and Bukovina, with names of residents. Mention is also made in the town entries of additional references contained in the **Encyclopedia Judaica**, Berl Kagan's book on **Hebrew Subscription Lists**, and **Wooden Synagogues** by Maria and Kazimierz Piechotka. At the end of the book is a listing of obituaries which appeared in the Hebrew newspaper **Hatzefira** in Warsaw from 1875 to 1896.

The history of Sephardi Jewry is told in **The Road From Babylon: The Story of Sephardi and Oriental Jews**, by Chaim Raphael. Numerous illustrations and several maps, along with a survey of the life and culture of the Jews of Spain under Islam and Christianity, make this ambitious volume a valuable source for those

with Sephardic roots.

Rabbi Marc D. Angel, a scholar specializing in Sephardic history and rabbi of the Spanish-Portuguese Synagogue in New York, writes about the Sephardic experience in America in his book **La America**.

In 1971, Stephen Birmingham wrote **The Grantees: American's Sephardic Elite**, based largely on the genealogies available in Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern's book **Americans of Jewish Descent**. Birmingham tracked down many of the present-day descendants of early Jewish Americans and their stories are re-told in **The Grantees**.

The one person who has had perhaps the most influence on the growing field of Jewish genealogy is Rabbi Malcolm Stern, the genealogist of the American Jewish Archives and an expert in early American Jewish history. His book, **Americans of Jewish Descent**, consists of a collection and compila-

tion of genealogies of Jewish families who were in North America prior to 1840. The book traces these early American Jewish families from their arrival in America to the present.

An updated version of Rabbi Stern's book has been published under the title **First American Jewish Families**, which consists of 600 genealogies from 1654 to 1977. The index contains more than 40,000 names. Unfortunately, both of these books are out of print and can only be found in libraries.

In 1984, David S. Zubat-sky and Irwin M. Berent published **Jewish Genealogy: A Sourcebook of Family Histories and Genealogies**, a comprehensive compilation of Jewish families that have already been researched. The listings refer the reader to archival repositories and libraries where one can find Jewish genealogies, both published and unpublished, family histories and individual family names. The introduction contains a list of genealogical sources and valuable hints for the beginning and experienced researcher.

A book which has been described as the definitive guide for Jewish genealogists is Arthur Kurzweil's **From Generation to Generation**. Published in 1980, it helped spark the growing interest today's generation has in our past and in the Jewish lives of our ancestors. In addition to the detailed description of archival sources and

procedures for beginning research, the reader is treated to the author's warm and personal account of his own experiences in discovering the links to his past and the richness of his heritage.

In **My Generations: A Course in Jewish Family History**, Kurzweil has produced a book written especially for children which contains both things to read and things to do. There are spaces for photographs, documents, family recipes, yahrtzeit records, and family trees. This unique book, which has been used by Jewish groups of all ages as a tool for the exploration of our Jewish past, presents a wonderful opportunity for parents and children to share a project together.

In 1984, the first International Seminar on Jewish Genealogy was held in Jerusalem. The chairwoman for that event was Dr. Sallyann Amdur Sack, the founding president of the Jewish Genealogy Society of Greater Washington. Her outstanding guide to research in Israel, which was researched and prepared for the conference, resulted in **That We May Remember**. Now Dr. Sack has updated her work and has recently published **A Guide to Jewish Genealogical Research in Israel**.

I have known Dr. Sack for several years and during that time have experienced firsthand her abilities to discover sources of information and to utilize that

knowledge in her continuing efforts to share that data with those who most want to know. In her book, she includes sections on Yad Vashem, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People, Jewish National and University Library, Israel State Archives, Jewish Agency's Search Bureau for Missing Relatives, Central Zionist Archives, Jerusalem Municipality Historical Archives, and chevrot kadisha (burial societies) as well as sources outside of Jerusalem, and valuable appendices of Yizkor books, Landsmanshaftn societies and location maps for the various archives.

According to Kurzweil, "Sallyann Sack has not only written what is surely the most thorough guide to genealogical sources in Israel. She has also offered an absolutely convincing case that a trip to Israel will serve the Jewish family historian well. And, at the same time, she has transformed the genealogical quest from a pastime into a pilgrimage. Now that her book exists, many Jewish genealogists will wonder how we got along without it. I consider the book essential."

For an extensive bibliography on Jewish genealogy, Jewish history and genealogy in general, send a self-addressed stamped envelope and \$2.50 to: Miriam Weiner, 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094.