



The Miriam Weiner Jewish Genealogy Collection Donated to the SMMJA

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**Renowned Jewish Genealogist Miriam Weiner
Donates Collection to The Sherwin Miller Museum
of Jewish Art**

by Phil Goldfarb, President Jewish Genealogy Society of Tulsa

At the annual membership meeting of [The Sherwin Miller Museum of Jewish Art \(SMMJA\)](#) on May 13, 2026, it was announced that a massive genealogy collection and archival material spanning five decades will be donated to the Museum by internationally renowned Jewish genealogist Miriam Weiner.

Miriam has been called "A Rock Star in the Jewish Genealogy World," "The Genealogist Who lifted the Archival Iron Curtain," and "The First Lady of Jewish Genealogy."

Some of her achievements include:

- Founder and President of the [Routes to Roots Foundation](#), an internationally recognized Jewish genealogical website that has received numerous awards.
- Co-editor of [The Encyclopedia of Jewish Genealogy, Sources in the United States and Canada \(1991\)](#).
- Syndicated columnist of *Roots and Branches* published in over 100 newspapers and periodicals worldwide (1980s-1990s).
- The first Jewish genealogist certified by the Board for Certification of Genealogists (1985).
- Executive Director of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors (1985-1986).
- The first recipient of the National Genealogical Society's *Individual Achievement Award* (1991) as well as their *President's Citation Award* (2019); and the *Genealogy in Tourism Award* (2023).
- Recipient of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Society's *Lifetime Achievement Award* in 2003; as well as their *Outstanding Contribution to Jewish Genealogy via Print* for her two definitive books, *Jewish Roots in Poland* (1999) and *Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova* (2000); and most recently, the *Outstanding Resource Award* for her website: rtrfoundation.org (2024).
- Recipient of the *Reference Award* (of the Year) from the Association of Jewish Libraries (2000).
- Recipient of the *Malcolm H. Stern Humanitarian Award* from the Federation of Genealogical Societies (2020).

One of the most important archives of Jewish genealogy in the world, **The Miriam Weiner Jewish Genealogy Collection** consists of books, town & region maps (some 200 years old), ancestral town videos, photographs, paintings (Judaic & Holocaust themed), published articles, antique postcards, archive inventories (from six countries in Eastern Europe and Israel, Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People/CAHJP), U.S. Holocaust & Memorial Museum; document copies, and various items of Judaica, all connected to archives and towns in Eastern Europe. Eventually, Miriam's website will also become part of the Collection and the website will be hosted by the Museum. Some of her surname lists and document copies are not available elsewhere or online and will be searchable by surname as well as by ancestral town name.

From a Jewish genealogical standpoint, this is a historic and monumental contribution, unique unto itself. When I asked ChatGPT, 'Who has made the greatest impact on Jewish Genealogy?' the answer was: 'The strongest case is usually made for Miriam Weiner because of her ground-breaking archival access work across Eastern Europe.' The Museum's accession of Miriam's collection follows two previous unique Tulsa acquisitions: **The Bob Dylan Collection** and **The Woody Guthrie Collection**.

YOU MIGHT BE ASKING YOURSELVES...WHY TULSA? Because genealogy, history, and one's "roots" go hand-in-hand. Miriam has deep roots in Tulsa, as her maternal grandparents, Alexander and Miriam (for whom she is named) Rabkin moved to Tulsa in 1918 from Albany, New York, along with their three children: Helen, Ruth, and Eddie, all of whom grew up in Tulsa.

Miriam states, "In my teens, my mother told me the story of her mother, Miriam Odnopozov Rabkin's death, who I had just assumed died from 'natural causes.'"

One night, my grandmother was taking a walk and as she walked down the alley to return home, her neighbor called to her from her kitchen window and they began chatting over the fence. At this time, a neighbor opened a window in his house and shot my grandmother in the head. She was gravely wounded and died the next day. I have newspaper articles from almost every day that week — the first one where the neighbor claimed at the trial that he thought my grandmother was a prowler peeking in his window (untrue & ludicrous) and in several more days, the 'not guilty' verdict came in.

Helen said, "Many years after my mother was killed, a local man told my father: 'I was formerly a member of the KKK, but when they shot your wife, I quit the Klan.' Also, some others told Alexander that in the 1920s, there was a \$100 bounty (\$1,950 in 2026 dollars) paid to Klan members for killing a Jew and that my grandmother 'wasn't the only one.'"

Through the years, countless people have asked Miriam if she was a child of Holocaust survivors because of her passion for this work. Her reply, "It was the same antisemitism – whether [my] grandmother died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz or in an alley in Tulsa — the hate was the same and the resulting pain and loss were the same for those she left behind."

Helen Rabkin graduated from Tulsa Central High School in 1931 along with other notable Jewish Tulsans including Rosetta Froug, George Renberg, Cecile Kahn, and Celia Livingston. Helen played the ukulele, sang at events around town, and also on local radio stations. She was president of the Junior Hadassah and active in other Jewish organizations here in Tulsa in the 1930s.

Alexander (known as "Pops") Rabkin and his business partner, Abe Stekoll, opened the first outdoor silent movie theater (not a drive-in ... people had to park their cars next door) on August 3, 1923, located at 5th & Detroit; he owned a bathhouse, built a hotel, and ran buses during WWII from outlying towns like Sand Springs and Sapulpa to the Douglas Aircraft plant. Rabkin was the first Jew to be employed by Southern Hills Country Club as a night clerk for 10 years, decades before Jews were even admitted as members! They even gave him a gold watch when he retired.

Alexander and Miriam Rabkin, Eddie and his wife Jessie Rabkin, as well as Miriam's first cousin, Lillian, and her husband Bernard Roberts from Nowata, are all buried at Rose Hill Cemetery.

The current library within the SMMJA will be renovated and remodeled to accommodate the Weiner Collection. According to Tracey Herst-Woods, Deputy Director of the SMMJA and Chief Museum Officer, "The Museum is humbled and grateful for Miriam's life's work to make the SMMJA its home. The work now starts to create a space that is worthy of her collection." An official opening of the Collection for the entire Jewish Community will be announced at a future date.