



# זכרונות *ZichronNote*

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

Volume XXXV, Number 2

May 2015

### Could you spell that for me, please?

The names we are seeking in our research can be misspelled, and that problem can be exacerbated by different languages and alphabets. See page 5.

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*The tombstone on which the surname of John Althouse's great-grandfather is misspelled in Ukrainian*

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

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ZichronNote is published four times per year, in February, May, August, and November. The deadline for contributions is the first day of the month preceding publication. The editor reserves the right to edit all submissions. Submissions may be made by hard copy or electronically. Please e-mail to [newsletter@sfbajgs.org](mailto:newsletter@sfbajgs.org).

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

**President's Message**  
**What I Did on My Holiday**

Jeremy Frankel, SFBAJGS President

Every couple of years or so I traipse 5,300 miles from California to London to see my mother and two younger brothers. I try not to tell too many other people I'm coming because otherwise my visit will consist of rounds of tea, cake, and biccies (biscuits) in the living rooms of friends and relatives. This March my visit was going to be brief, just one week, and it was already packed with places to visit and things to do.

I did let slip to Jeanette Rosenberg and her husband Mark Nicholls that I would be coming. They live about five minutes from my mother's home in Edgware, northwest London. Jeanette is a big mover and shaker in the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain (JGSGB), and Mark is the secretary of the IAJGS. They're good friends but I see them only at the IAJGS annual conferences.

Jeanette immediately wrote back, "Sorry we won't be home that weekend because WDYTIA 2015 is taking place in Birmingham, oh and would you and Victoria like to help out at the JGSGB booth?" Jeanette was referring to the annual "Who Do You Think You Are?" event that took place this year at the National Exhibition Center (NEC), just outside the city of Birmingham. There would be some 200 exhibitors, mainly UK-based local genealogical and historical societies, but also some "big boys" such as Ancestry.com, FindMyPast, the Society of Genealogists, and others.

That was how I found myself standing in the cold on the station platform at Watford Junction way too early on a Saturday morning waiting for an express train. I had arranged for my youngest brother to first drive us the 20 minutes out of London to catch the train. Birmingham lies about 90 miles northwest of London, but the journey took only 56 minutes. I'll leave it to you to do the math as to how fast the train was going.

After a scenic ride, we arrived and proceeded through covered walkways connecting the station to the NEC. Waving our exhibitor passes, we entered a cavernous hall and found the booth where people wearing JGSGB blue T-shirts were milling around. We were already wearing ours so we fit right in, even if Victoria's accent didn't!

Jeanette drilled us on our jobs—answering queries, selling society subscriptions and books on display. We said our "hellos" to the other volunteers and figured out the most important things: where to get

*Continued on page 11*

## SOCIETY NEWS

### New Members

Deborah Barr ..... [Deborah.Barr@rocketmail.com](mailto:Deborah.Barr@rocketmail.com)  
Deborah Blankenberg .... [dtb.commerce@gmail.com](mailto:dtb.commerce@gmail.com)  
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In order to continue to receive the SFBAJGS e-blast and *ZichronNote*, please send e-mail updates to [newsletter@sfbajgs.org](mailto:newsletter@sfbajgs.org).

### Your Story Belongs in *ZichronNote*

Do you plan to attend this year's IAJGS conference in Jerusalem? Consider writing about your favorite session that you attend to share with those of us who will be staying at home.

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

Tell us your story, share your discovery! We want to read about it in *ZichronNote*. Please submit materials to [newsletter@sfbajgs.org](mailto:newsletter@sfbajgs.org).

### Member News

**Preeva Tramiel** has published *Liberation from a Shoah Ghost: The Girl on the Wall*, a memoir about herself and her father's life. She will speak about the memoir at the 15 June meeting in Los Altos Hills.

### We Need More 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.

### SFBAJGS on Social Media

SFBAJGS has a new YouTube channel, at [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWKB5\\_oyV0jP0TbSmBgq20A](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCWKB5_oyV0jP0TbSmBgq20A). This gives us an opportunity to share our activities, lectures, meetings, participation in events, Mavens, etc. So far we have one video, which was shot at the 2015 San Francisco History Expo and includes an appearance by Emperor Norton himself! If you have any videos of society or other genealogical events you would like to share online, contact membership director Avner Yonai at [membership@sfbajgs.org](mailto:membership@sfbajgs.org).

SFBAJGS also has a Facebook page: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/San-Francisco-Bay-Area-Jewish-Genealogical-Society/54214774804?ref=ts>. Friend us and visit often for announcements and updates between meetings.

### 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

Saturday, 13 June 2015. Richard Rands, "Finding a Living Ancestor." Silicon Valley Computer Genealogy Group. LDS Family History Center, 875 Quince Avenue, Santa Clara. <http://www.svpafug.org/>

Tuesday, 16 June 2015. Richard Rands, "Midwest Research." San Ramon Valley Genealogical Society. Danville Family History Center, 2949 Stone Valley Road, Alamo. <http://srvgensoc.org/>

Thursday, 18 June 2015. Gail Martin, "The Orphan Train." Napa Valley Genealogical Society. NVGS Library, 1701 Menlo Avenue, Napa. <http://www.napavalleygenealogy.org/programs.html>

Saturday, 20 June 2015. Christine Green, "Homestead Records." San Mateo County Genealogical Society. Menlo Park Grace Lutheran Church, 2825 Alameda de las Pulgas, San Mateo. <http://www.smcgs.org/>

Saturday, 20 June 2015. "Reunions and Research Trips." African American Genealogical Society of Northern California. Dimond Branch, Oakland Public Library, 3565 Fruitvale Avenue, Oakland. <http://www.aagsnc.org/>

Saturday, 27 June 2015. 239th anniversary of the Second Anza Expedition. Los Californianos. Pershing Square, Presidio, San Francisco. <http://www.loscalifornianos.org/>

Thursday, 9 July 2015. Janice M. Sellers, "Immigration and Naturalization Research." Oakland FamilySearch Library, 4766 Lincoln Avenue, Oakland. <http://www.oaklandfhc.org/>

Tuesday, 21 July 2015. Gena Philibert Ortega, "Newspaper Research in 21st Century" and "Genealogy Roadshow Research: Five Lessons." Free. San Ramon Valley Genealogical Society. Alamo LDS Church, 2949 Stone Valley Road, Alamo. <http://www.srvgensoc.org/>

Sunday, 2 August 2015. Anna Fechter, "The Latest on Ancestry.com." Jewish Genealogical Society of Sacramento. Albert Einstein Residence Center, 1935 Wright Street, Sacramento. <http://www.jewishgen.org/jgs-sacramento/>

Saturday, 17 October 2015. California State Genealogical Alliance board meeting and joint seminar with Genealogical Society of Santa Cruz County. Wendy Elliot, "Finding Wives' and Daughters' Names"; Janice M. Sellers, "Read All About It! Using Online Newspapers for Genealogical Research"; Mary Ann Vincent, "Mapping Our Ancestors: They Went Where? Why?" Free. Santa Cruz Public Library, 224 Church Street, Santa Cruz. <http://www.csga.com/>, <http://scgensoc.org/>

Saturday, 17 October 2015. Contra Costa County Genealogical Society Fall Fling Seminar. St. Andrews Presbyterian Church, 1601 Mary Drive, Pleasant Hill. <http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~cacccgs>

#### State and National

Sunday–Tuesday, 19–21 July 2015. 25th Annual Conference of the Society for Crypto-Judaic Studies. Miami, Florida. <http://cryptojews.com/callforpapers.php>

Tuesday–Saturday, 11–15 August 2015. Eastern European Family History Conference. Plaza Hotel, Salt Lake City, Utah. <http://feefhs.org/>

Thursday–Saturday, 17–19 September 2015. New York State Family History Conference. Presented by New York Genealogical and Biographical Society and Central New York Genealogical Society. Syracuse/Liverpool Holiday Inn, Syracuse, New York. <http://www.nysfhc.org/>

#### International

Wednesday–Thursday, 1–2 July 2015. British Association for Jewish Studies International Workshop on Jews and "Small Nations" in Eastern Europe: Cultural Autonomy and Nation Building in the Western Borderlands of Russia (1905–1939). University of Southampton. <http://tinyurl.com/luausql>

Monday–Friday, 6–10 July 2015. 35th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy. Jerusalem, Israel. Registration and the preliminary program are available online. <http://iajgs2015.org/>

Saturday, 1 August 2015. East European Genealogical Society 2015 International Seminar. LDS Church, 45 Dalhousie Drive, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada. <http://eegsociety.org/Seminar2015.aspx>

Wednesday–Saturday, 11–14 August 2015. Northwest Genealogy Conference. Byrnes Performing Arts Center, 18821 Crown Ridge Boulevard, Arlington, Washington. <http://www.nwgc.org/>

14 October–12 November 2015. International Jewish Genealogy Month. <http://www.iajgs.org/jgmonth.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.

Meetings will resume in the fall.

## Not Written in Stone: Surnames on Family Documents

John Althouse

John Althouse is the third-generation descendant of immigrant families who came to Canada around a century ago. His career consisted of almost thirty-five years of classroom teaching for a major urban school board. Over the years, he has also enjoyed history, especially that related to Canada's west. He makes regular contributions to genealogy publications and does presentations on genealogy. This article originally appeared in *Relatively Speaking*, the Alberta Genealogical Society quarterly journal, Volume 39, Number 2, May 2011.

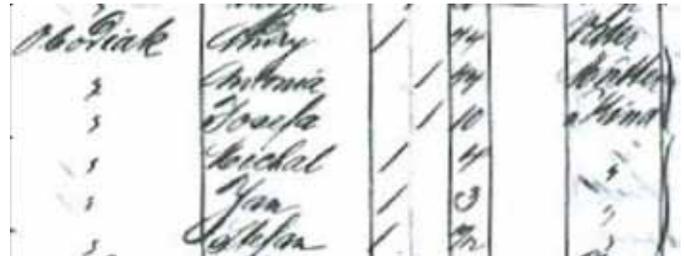
Sometimes we need to unlearn a life lesson that we have previously learned. This relearning may be general or may apply only in a certain context. During my teaching career of nearly 35 years, one of the most common questions that popped up seemed to be, "Does spelling count on this exercise?" My stock reply was that spelling always counts. This, however, is not a rule that should be rigidly adhered to in genealogy. In the genealogical context, you might need to completely abandon a previously held idea, or at least you might have to be open to the possibility that a family name may not appear with the same spelling as one expects.

One of the hardest lessons to teach the beginning genealogist concerns surnames. I don't know how often I've heard a person say, when presented with a carefully researched document, "But that's not how we spell our name." This is particularly frustrating in cases where the surname differs only slightly from the one that appears on a document, or when many vital facts in the document other than the person's surname agree in almost every detail. In genealogy, a researcher who adheres vehemently to a single spelling of a family surname severely reduces the number of documents which he will find and thereby closes many potential doors to greater knowledge of the family story.

It became evident quite early in my search for family documentation that I needed to be fairly open-minded when it came to family names. I discovered this in relation to many of the families that I am researching but especially so with respect to my paternal grandmother's clan, the Obodiak family. *The Dictionary of Ukrainian Surnames in Canada*, by F. Bogdan (Vancouver: UVAN, 1974), gives the transliteration as **Obodyak** and the Cyrillic form as **Обдяк**.

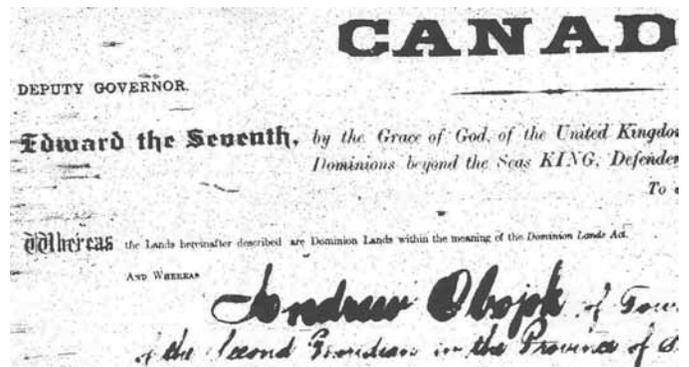
In the first five documents I found that chronicle my family's initial years in Western Canada, I found four different spellings of that surname. The first document was a Hamburg passenger list showing departures on the SS *Bulgaria* on 15 April 1902. On this document, the surname is spelled **Obodiak**, as it is today.

The next document to show the family surname was a page from a homestead file. I acquired the



The 1902 passenger list from the SS *Bulgaria* shows the spelling as it is today, Obodiak.

homestead records for the original family farm (at coordinates NW -34 -31 -4 -W2), applied for, according to the land office stamp on the form, on 2 July 1902 and granted 8 January 1908. On these documents the surname is **Obojak**, which to my ear would sound closer to the name as I've heard it pronounced in Ukrainian.



The homestead record page has a different spelling.

A few years after this, the 1906 census of western Canada was taken. According to the homestead information, the family should have been on that homestead during the enumeration of that particular census. After going through the pages for the area, I found no entry that I can even begin to think might be the family. Yet, I'm not so sure that they were not there. As I looked through the pages, it became evident that the census taker, whose primary language most certainly was English, had neither knowledge of nor an ear for Slavic names, be they Ukrainian, Polish, Russian, or Romanian. People of all these ethnicities lived within the area assigned to this census taker. Many of the names recorded by this particular census taker might as well have been

written in Klingon, as they have no apparent basis in reality. Often, when an immigrant and the person recording his name were not of the same linguistic group, the name on the census or the migration point record was misspelled—not deliberately, but because that is the way that the recorder thought he heard it.

Did this particular clerk simply not deal with those whom he could not understand, or did my great-grandmother, whom I have been told was quite a feisty little woman, run him off? The latter seems a little unlikely, given her overall nature. So the reason the family was not recorded on this census remains a bit of a puzzle.

The family name does appear on the 1911 census of Canada. Here, the name for the very same family is spelled **Obeyank**, which varies considerably from the original. This census taker appears to have had a little better grasp of Slavic names, both surnames and given, than his predecessor. By this time, my grandmother had married my grandfather and was living on his farm just down the road from her parents' homestead.

The next document that I encountered for my Obodiak relatives was the 1916 Census of Western Canada. On this document, the family name appears as **Obageck**. Then I located the draft papers for my grandmother's two brothers, both in their early 20's at that time, in the last months of World War I. The name on both is **Obodiak**. Finally, it appears that the name was beginning to be spelled more uniformly.

The wider the difference between the languages of the speaker and the recorder, the greater the chance for an error to occur in the recording of a name. When an alphabet with different letters is used, the likelihood increases that a variation in spelling will take place. For example, if in the process of record-keeping, an English-language recorder encounters the German surname Völker, how will the clerk record this spelling, when ö does not exist in the English language? It could become Volker, Voelker, or

perhaps even Voulker. A number of possibilities exist. If the recorder is dealing with a completely different alphabet, such as Cyrillic, the chance of variation in spelling increases again. If you saw a surname in Cyrillic with no other information, how would you record that name on an English-language document?

Even in death, my great-grandfather was unable to escape the problem of how differences in languages and alphabets create varied forms of a surname. The lady who graciously translated the Ukrainian inscription on his tombstone informed me that his name was misspelled on it, as **Об/АК**.

If Canadian documents can be a problem for surnames, documents from Europe can be even more confusing. The Obodiak family came from the village of Antonów or Antonivka in Czortków in what is now Ukraine. There was no formal Ukraine, however, when Andreii and Antonia Obodiak, along with their then four children, emigrated in 1902. The region in which they lived was the District of Galicia within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The recordkeeping was done in either the German or Polish language. Neither of these languages uses the Cyrillic alphabet, which led to deviation of the surname on records. Records were also kept in Latin by the Catholic church.

This changed in 1919, when the area from which the family emigrated became part of Poland. It would remain so until the end of World War II. Just prior to that war, my grandmother's brother Mike acquired his baptismal certificate. The document was based on 1894 church records recorded in Latin. After the Polish nation was reconstituted, the responsibility for Greek Catholic records appeared to continue to lie with the Roman Catholic Church. When transcripts were made of the original Greek Catholic records, they were copied from Latin, complete with all its wonderful endings. In addition, the Ukrainian names were rewritten in their Polish equivalents. Surnames passing through this could be changed from their original versions. Such a process could be a virtual

minefield for a researcher. A name could be entered one way and come out differently at the end of such a process. To translate such documents and get names back to their original spellings may require a great deal of skill and a knowledge of the three languages involved.

This was not the sole reason for differences between the actual surname and the versions which may appear on family documents, however. If the person giving the information could neither read nor write, as with my great-grandparents, how could they check or even know if the name is spelled correctly?

119	119	Obeyank	Julia	34	31	7	11	11
142	143	"	Antonia			7	11	11
		"	Mike			32	11	11
		"	John					
		"	Gonia			7	11	11

On the 1911 census the name appears as Obeyank.

5	174	176	Obageck	Andre	31	4	12
6				Antonia			
7				Mike			
8				John			
9	170	179		Gonia			

In the 1916 Census of Western Canada, it is Obageck.

PARENTES  
et conditio

Andreas  
Cbediak  
fil. Nictae et  
Apolloniae natae  
Wisniewska.-  
Antonina fil.  
Crispinae Hryny-  
seyn et Felice  
Weselin'ska  
labrissi Antonij  
viceses.-

*This copy of a baptismal record from 1894 church records is written entirely in Latin.*

Transcribers also face problems with languages and alphabets. I have found my family surname, which was originally Althaus, transcribed as Althans, Allhaus, Althous, Althausen, and an array of other spellings. Ancestry.com and other genealogical databases are not always sensitive to such variations. At this point, you will become thankful for the wildcard which will readily help you uncover such variations in your searches, which a regular search may totally miss.

Sometimes it is not outsiders but rather family members themselves who are responsible for changing the spelling of a surname. Family members see the difficulties that their neighbors are having with spelling or saying their surname, and change it. Some of my Reinhardt relatives had their surname legally changed to Reinhart, as many community members were already spelling it. My distant Lenartz relatives changed their surname to Lenards.

Finally, beware translation buttons when dealing with surnames. They pose another problem. Once pressed, they translate every word in the language being translated—including surnames. I've seen people surprised when in their translated searches they encounter people who show no apparent connection to their search, or better yet find a new family of relations by another surname. Search for "Heinrich Schnelle", and once the list of possible documents comes up, press the translate button. You will discover that you have a multitude of relatives named either "Henry Quick" or "Henry Fast." *Schnelle* is the German word for "quick" or "fast." Unfortunately, such translated names sometimes make their way into recorded family trees and even databases. To overcome this problem, once you have a sense of what a document says, press the button for "original", which will take you back to the original text, where you will be able to again see the true surname.

At times, a surname may be changed to escape certain ethnic or national associations. My grandfather, one brother, and their families, who were German or Austrian in origin, were classified as "enemy aliens" and had some unfortunate experiences during World War I. As World War II loomed on the horizon, our family name was anglicized and became "Althouse" instead of "Althaus", one measure as the family attempted to distance itself from any German association. Strangely enough, the two related Althaus families who remained in Canada made this change, while three related families who had returned to the USA retained the original German version of the name and still use it to this day.

Even surnames from the British Isles were changed for similar reasons. A McCue family member who was attempting to make a life for himself in England in the late 1800's or early 1900's might drop the "Mc" from the surname and become simply "Cue" to avoid any connections to his Irish roots and the stigma or limitations that might result from that connection. Often, the mists of time have erased knowledge of such a connection from the family's collective memory. Once the original name is determined, the genealogist may take different paths in his search and make progress by going to sources he had never considered before this.

As you can see, surnames can and do change on documents related to the history of a family for a variety of reasons. It is imprudent to expect that your family name will always be spelled in the way in which the family presently spells it. If you harbor this misguided conception, you are closing doors, shutting off paths that will lead you to new and often important clues in your personal quest for your family record. Records may, and commonly have, recorded surnames which vary from the one currently in accepted use in a family. Also, simply by realizing that a change of surname has taken place and what the change may have been might lead you in a completely different direction. Once "Cue" has been discovered to have originally been "McCue", you may shift your focus from strictly English records and expand into Irish records as well.

Sometimes, the spelling of a surname can help you unravel a chapter of your family history which you previously had not investigated. So remember when searching for your family records, in genealogy, spelling does not always count! When it comes to the spelling of a family name, the exact spelling is not necessarily "written in stone"—except perhaps on a tombstone.



## Creativity in Recording Names: A Cautionary Tale

Jeff Lewy

Jeff Lewy became interested in genealogy to make sense of family photos going back four generations in the U.S. and Europe and to learn about the people in the photos. Most of his family lines arrived in the U.S. in the 1840's and 1850's, mostly in Alabama, before settling in Chicago by 1870. His tree now includes seven or more generations for most of his family names. He is the Treasurer of the San Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society. He wrote this short piece independently of John Althouse's article, but they go well together.

Nowadays, we assume that names are fixed and consistent. Mistakes may happen, but each of us feels that there is one right way to spell our names.

This is a modern aberration. For centuries, spelling was an art, not a science, and no dictionaries existed to set firm standards. Different languages used different letters to represent similar sounds in names, and different dialects with their varied sounds often forced the use of other letters to represent the changed sounds. When people moved from one language or dialect area to another, the spelling (and pronunciation) of their names might change.

Even in more modern times, recording of names is subject to error, either through mishearing or miswriting. In looking for records, we often use indices that contain misinterpretations of the handwriting on original records. Names can be a puzzle, and the more creative you are, the more likely you are to find the person you seek in the records you find.

One of my family lines is now known as Kahnweiler and has kept that spelling since it was first taken as a surname in 1808, in Grünstadt, now in Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany. So I have always looked for that spelling in the records I searched. I didn't always find it, even when I knew the family "had" to be there.

Over time, I became more creative in looking for the name, helped by the use of wildcard characters that

work in many databases. Typically, a question mark in a name returns any letter in that position of the name. For example, K?hnweiler would find Kehnweiler, Kohnweiler, Kihnwieler and Kuhnweiler—and I have found my family with each of those spellings. An asterisk (\*) returns any number of letters for the \* character in the name. For example, Kahnw\*ler would find Kahnwiller, Kahnweeler, and Kahnwaler, another batch of actual misspellings.

Sometimes the transcription will be even further from the correct spelling. Thanks to elaborately handwritten initial letters, I have found Hahnweiler, Rahnweiler, and Bahnweiler. To give you an idea of how badly mangled a name can be, I have also found Kahnwellen, Kahnweiles, Kanellen, and even Kitsmiller.

First names can be just as much of a problem. I have found one ancestor, Leopold Kahnweiler, recorded or indexed as Leo, Lee, Leop, Loepeld, and Lio.

So use wildcards throughout the name, and be creative. Think about alternative letters, missing letters, added letters, and how an indexer might record a scrawled name or squiggle or blot.

The moral of the story is that you should be as creative as you can in looking for your ancestors. They may well be there, hiding in plain sight.



## When I Almost Cooked Dinner for Leonard Nimoy

Janice M. Sellers

Janice started researching her family history at the tender age of 13 and still has her original notes from interviewing her relatives then. When she isn't working on genealogy, either professionally or on a volunteer basis, she does freelance editing, indexing, and translation. She is the vice president of SFBAJGS and editor of *ZichronNote*.

Leonard Nimoy (z"l), probably one of the most famous Jewish actors in the U.S., passed away on 27 February 2015. While I am a long-time, dedicated fan of *Star Trek*, my favorite memory of him is the time he almost enjoyed my kosher cooking.

During the 1988–1989 academic year, I worked as the kosher cook at the University of Southern California Hillel. USC had a Jewish graduate film students association that held a meeting at the Hillel

once each semester with an industry guest. Before the meeting the grad students enjoyed a kosher dinner, and it was customary to invite the guest to the meal. Most of the time, the guest declined.

For the 1989 spring semester, the industry guest was Leonard Nimoy. I was told that he enthusiastically accepted the invitation to dinner. I was excited, but nervous at the same time. Meeting a favorite celebrity is one thing, but cooking for one?

*Continued on page 15*

## Displaced Persons Camp Housing in Post-World War II Europe

Daria Valkenburg

The author is compiling a history of Camp Ohio in Burgdorf and its inhabitants. If anyone has a connection to the camp, contact Daria at dariadv@yahoo.ca. This article originally appeared in *Galizien German Descendants* #82, April 2015, pages 1-4.

After World War II ended in 1945, twelve million displaced persons—refugees, former prisoners of war, forced laborers, and concentration camp survivors—were left in Europe. They were homeless and starving, many with medical and psychological problems. Four million had a homeland to go to, but eight million had no place to go.

My father, Wasyl Makota, was one of the eight million. Born in 1928 in Poland, now part of present-day western Ukraine, his province of Ivano-Frankivsk became part of the Soviet Union after the war. The Soviet Union had invaded in 1939, acting with brutal oppression and forcing widespread starvation. Not long afterward, also in 1939, the Nazis marched in. After the war, my father had no country to go back to and he determined that no one was going to force him to live under Soviet occupation. He was not alone.

### Why Where There So Many Refugees?

The aftermath of World War II is not clear to many of us today. For most people, the war ended and that was that. This was not the case for millions of people who ended up in countries not their own after the war ended. Millions fled from Nazi aggression or were forced out of their homes. There are many stories about Polish people displaced by Nazis so that Galizien Germans could take over their farms and homes following their own resettlement from the former Galicia in 1939.

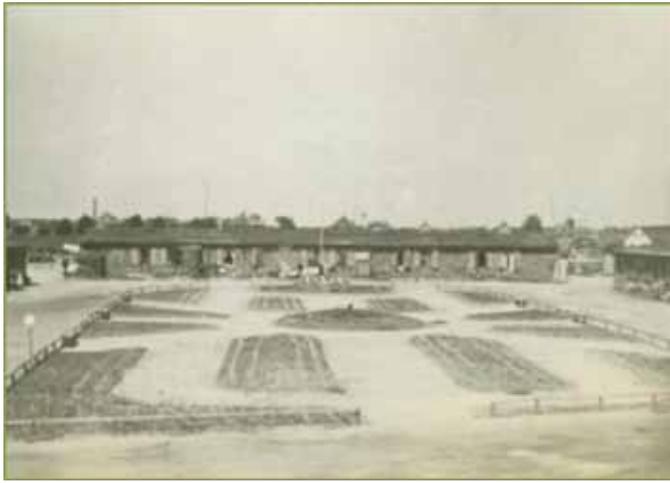
Millions were also forced from their homes and sent to Germany to work as slave labor on farms and in factories. Another group of displaced persons (DP's) were young men who had been conscripted into the German army under threat of death by the Gestapo and SS troops. At the same time, the USSR invaded several countries in Eastern Europe, causing millions of refugees to flee in an attempt to escape the terror of the invading Soviet armies.

The Allied Forces that had won the war needed to deal not only not only with official citizens of countries newly occupied by the Allies, but also with displaced persons located in the occupied zones. Germany and Austria were divided up into zones administered by the British, French, Americans, and Russians. Camps were quickly set up to feed, house, clothe, and provide medical services to these unfortunate people. Seventy-five percent of the displaced persons were in camps in western Germany, in the British, French, and American zones.



In countries destroyed by war, where do you put millions of people? Camps were set up in former concentration and slave camps, abandoned army barracks, and damaged school buildings. Many of these had been damaged by bombing during the war and were not repaired by the time displaced persons were moved in. Some buildings had no windows replaced, as glass was impossible to get at the time! Most repairs were done by camp inhabitants themselves, using whatever supplies they could scrounge up.

Although the situation was not ideal, the displaced persons were protected by the armies and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA), and later by the International Relief Organization (IRO). Displaced persons received housing, food, clothing, medical care, and administrative and legal protection. Schools were arranged for children, and many people worked or



*Camp Ohio barracks and central area for meetings and games.*

did volunteer work while waiting for a new life in a new country. By the end of 1946, millions had been resettled, leaving 1,600,000 who still needed a place to go.

The military governments running the camps quickly learned that tensions existed among many displaced persons, and although all were in a similar situation, they did not necessarily get along easily. In addition, they spoke various languages. As the populations decreased due to repatriations, displaced persons were eventually separated into camps by ethnic groups. This eased tensions and outbreaks of violence. The fact that DP status was dependent on nationality, followed by separation into separate camps, encouraged nationalist loyalties among DP's, however. Anyone labeled a Soviet citizen faced the possibility of forced repatriation.

One couple, born in eastern Ukraine, which was part of Russia before World War II, insisted they were born in western Ukraine, part of Poland before the war. With the help of sympathetic resettlement officials, they were able to immigrate to Australia. Since their deaths, their son is now trying to discover his family history by following the clues left behind in the DP camps. People formally identified as Volksdeutsche were labeled citizens of ex-enemy nations and excluded from DP status, although many later were able to reverse this label.

#### **Description of a "Typical" Displaced Persons Camp**

Doris Yanda, a Canadian journalist, visited 20 DP camps in West Germany in 1949 as the social welfare representative for the Ukrainian Canadian Relief Fund Committee. Her report of a "typical DP camp" was as follows: "There are large long brick buildings with broken windows and bombed walls, standing in

long or square rows. Families of displaced persons live crowdedly in bare, shabby, narrow long rooms partitioned by thin walls of paper-board or often by dark grey army blankets, and such blankets are also used as door and window-blinds. There is no furniture in such 'rooms' except narrow and hard army cots, hand-made tables, chairs, and benches made by the D.P.s themselves. In most cases there are no individual stoves or sinks. The inside appearance of the camps is usually depressing, except for the beautiful embroidery, paintings and other artistic decorations, the handwork of the inmates."

My father ended up in a DP camp called Camp Ohio in Burgdorf, near Hanover, in West Germany. The camp was originally a training school for the fire police and consisted of wooden barracks. As a single man of age 17 in 1945, he lived in a barracks with other men.

Married couples had a bit more space. One couple, still alive in the late 1990's and living in the USA, recalled that they even had an extremely small space of land on which they planted seeds for fresh vegetables.

DP camps were organized into communities. The population of a camp was, on average, 3,000–5,000, so they were not small. Camp Ohio in Burgdorf was quite a bit smaller, with a population averaging around 1,300.

There were schools, as camps had children as well as teenagers who had missed years of schooling and needed to catch up with their education. There were also adult education classes that taught new skills and languages to help prepare people for resettlement.

My father's schooling had stopped in 6th grade due to being sent to Germany to work. He didn't go back to elementary school at age 17, but went to driving school and earned a permit allowing him to drive a truck. With the permit, he found a job with the British-run North German Timber Control company as a driver.

Camps had cultural and sports activities, churches and synagogues, benevolent societies looking after the sick and needy, and womens' groups. My father belonged to a mixed choir and was part of a theatrical group. Every camp had at least a nursing station, and some had small hospitals.

Camp residents did the work of the camp. They collected firewood for heating, cooked food for community meals in a mess hall, and did the various services we take for granted—washing and mending clothes, altering donated clothing to fit various residents, shoe repair, carpentry. They even published camp newspapers.



*Saying goodbye outside the barracks in Camp Ohio, circa 1947. The men dressed in suits were moving on to new lives. Do you recognize anyone in the photo?  
(W. Makota collection)*

Although people were determined to make communities, life in a DP camp was not easy. Conditions were crowded, food was not plentiful at first, and everyone was on edge as no one knew what the future held for them. Many people were separated from family, creating much loneliness. Many had family members and friends who were missing or who had not survived the war. Although liberated from the Nazi regime and protected from Stalin's Soviets, they were not really free people, as their resettlement depended on being able to qualify for a program that

allowed them to immigrate to a new country and begin a new life.

One comment made in an article about Canadian nurses working in DP camps (Susan Armstrong-Reid, "Soldiers of Peace: Canadians in UNRRA's German Nursing Brigade, 1945-1947", *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History* 27:1, 2010, pages 102-122) was poignant: "Many Canadian nurses wrote that their work had a dark side filled with pathos and paranoia: the caches of food carefully hidden under the displaced persons' pillows as insurance in the event of forced repatriation back to Russia . . . ."

My father and his cousin grew up during periods of mass hunger in Ukraine, followed then by the war period. Food was scarce in the DP camps. To his dying day, having a full fridge and cupboards was important to my father, even when he couldn't eat at the end. Whenever we traveled, the first place he wanted to visit was the grocery store! In a hotel, with a restaurant nearby, he still needed the comfort of food in his hotel room.

For my father and his cousin Alexander Czech, grandsons of Galizien German Emilia Hepp, their new lives began in 1947 when both went to England to work in coal mines under a program called Westward Ho. They were on the road to freedom.

For more information on displaced persons camps, visit <http://www.dpcamps.org/>. The Burgdorf page is <http://www.dpcamps.org/burgdorf.html>.



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

coffee and where the loos (toilets) were located. At 9:30 a.m. the hordes were let in, and soon we were accosted by family genealogists asking the usual questions ("I think my grandfather might have been Jewish; he looked Jewish in the photograph" and "My grandfather's name was Katz and his wife was Goldberg; do you think they were Jewish?").

Shortly before the fair opened we saw a familiar face approaching—Ron Arons. After we agreed to volunteer we had seen his name on the list, but it still seemed strange to be working the booth in England with our Bay Area friend!

The fair was certainly different than those we've attended in the States. There were the usual vendors of books and supplies, and the major genealogical companies, but almost every booth was for a small region of England and offered historical and

genealogical information. The JGSGB booth was the only "ethnic" entry.

At the end of the day all the volunteers helped with break-down and carried the handsome display and boxes of materials to Mark's tiny car, where he miraculously crammed it all in. We grabbed a bite with Ron while we caught up with stateside news, and then it was back to the station to catch the early evening train back to Watford, where my recruited chauffeur brother was waiting to return us to our hotel.

It had been a long day, mostly on our feet, but we did have time to visit with our English friends and had a delightful opportunity to get to know Leigh Dworkin of the JGSGB a bit better. Saturday was checked off and now we had to face Sunday, and my Nigerian Jewish family reunion!



## Finding My Brother, Jack

Rebecca Elliott

Rebecca is a member of SFBAJGS. This story first appeared on the Ancestry.com blog in 2012.

My sister and I always knew we had an older brother but did not know his name, where he lived, or if he was even alive. All we knew was that our father arrived in America married to an American citizen and that they had a son. In fact, I thought my brother had been adopted when his mother and our mutual father divorced and so I never tried to locate him, as I felt it would have been an impossible task.

Although my family tree (a work in progress) had been on Ancestry.com for quite a number of years, I had only recently added photographs, including one of my father. One night soon after adding the photos, I received an e-mail from David Zubatsky, a Jewish genealogist in Pennsylvania who thought his friend, Jack, might be my brother. I was stunned, to say the least, and very excited at the same time.

David included Jack's contact information in his message, and when I read the message the next morning I picked up the phone and called. Alas—all I got was a message machine. I left a message and when Jack called back he got my message machine. When we finally connected and he said he'd call me that night, I told him I was e-mailing him a photo of my father with a very beautiful woman. I did not know who she was and was hoping he might recognize her.

When I picked up the phone at 7:00 p.m. I heard, "Hello, Sis. The picture cinches it. The lovely woman is my mother, and I have the same photograph on my mantel."

Needless to say, once we got over the shock, my sister and I were ecstatic. Words cannot sufficiently describe our joy and excitement. My sister and I "met" Jack and our new sister-in-law Julie via Skype the next weekend. My children and grandchildren met Jack and Julie via Skype on Thanksgiving. My cousins made contact with him, as well. Jack, who grew up as an only child, now had siblings and cousins, a niece and a nephew, and great-nieces and nephews.

Many phone calls and e-mails later, my sister and I boarded a plane for our first in-person meeting with our brother and his family, who live in Pennsylvania. Our niece and her family came from Washington, D.C., and our "new" nephew lives near his parents. We had a glorious visit; it was so natural and wonderful. We have so many years to catch up on and so much information to share and questions to be asked/answered. I've been for another visit and hope to go again this year. We continue to call every week and e-mail.

I still marvel at this connection, this completion, if you will, of my heritage and lineage. It was exciting to learn that Jack is a world-renowned Holocaust scholar, writer, and lecturer. My sister and sister-in-law are both speech therapists. Our political agendas are the same, as is our taste in movies and other cultural activities. Our families and friends are thrilled that we have found each other. As for me, I've filled in some gaps and expanded my family, and continue on the journey of discovering my heritage.



*Me, Jack, and my sister*



*My 2014 visit to see Jack and his family*

## Kirkuty: The Jewish Cemetery Web Site for Poland

Krzysztof Bielawski

Krzysztof is very modest about the *mitzvah* he is doing by photographing *matzevot* in Polish cemeteries. He has twice received an award from the Israeli embassy in Warsaw for his work.

I started the Kirkuty Web site, <http://www.kirkuty.xip.pl/>, in autumn 2005. It is hard to believe it was almost 10 years ago. At the time I was a sales manager in a travel agency in Warsaw. One day I decided I needed a break. I started to visit different places in Poland. I took some photos, including some at a few Jewish cemeteries. After a few months I decided to put photos of these cemeteries on the Internet. I paid some money to a young Webmaster to teach me how to make a Web site. The site was ready in December 2005, with just 40–50 photos from a few Jewish cemeteries. Not very much. I thought that maybe once or twice per month someone would look at these pictures. But since the very beginning many people started writing to me, sending information and asking to add their photos. It became my hobby. Not only photographing the cemeteries but also gathering information about their locations, number of *matzevot*, and the histories of these sites.

According to different sources, about 1,200 to 1,400 Jewish cemeteries are in Poland. So far I have published information—or at least mentioned—about 800 of these cemeteries. During the first years I was very busy. I visited many cemeteries, took photos, and wrote a lot of descriptions. In 2009 the Museum of the History of Polish Jews invited me to join its team and to become involved in a similar project, the Virtual Shtetl. My private site still grows, though, as I add new information, new photos, and so on.

On <http://www.kirkuty.xip.pl/> you can find information about approximately 800 Jewish cemeteries in Poland and of course thousands of photographs of general views and of individual tombstones. There are also my writing about Jewish cemeteries and

funeral customs, some advice for people who would like to take care of a cemetery in their own towns, and *yahrzeit* dates of famous rabbis and *tzadikim*. My Hebrew is basic, but sometimes I compile lists of names from preserved *matzevot*. Last year I created such lists for Niepołomice, Szczytno, and other towns. It is very important work, because many people look for graves of their ancestors, especially Americans, grandchildren of Jews who emigrated from Poland in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Sometimes finding a grave changes someone's life. For example, in 2008 a woman from Denmark visited my site and found a photo of her cousin's grave in Włocławek. She thought he had been killed during the Shoah. They had lost contact. But he lived in Poland and passed away in the 1960's in Włocławek. So when the woman found a photo of his tombstone, she was in shock. I contacted a friend who knows a few Jews from Włocławek now living in Israel. My friend found an Israeli branch of the man's family. After a few months the woman from Denmark met her cousins in Israel. This is how one photo on my site helped reunite members of a family.

In 2006–2007 my project had a small editorial team: Małgorzata Frąckowiak, Katarzyna Nocek, Artur Cyruk, and me. But now I work alone. Of course, the continued growth of the site would not be possible without the support of the many correspondents who send information and photos. In particular, I should mention Małgorzata Płoszaj from Rybnik and Jacques Lahitte from Warsaw, a Frenchman who came to Poland because he fell in love with a beautiful Polish woman and then started to explore the Jewish heritage of our country.

For many years I covered all the costs of my hobby: server, books, travel expenses. After three or four years I decided to add a PayPal button to my site. Many people wrote that they liked the project, so I thought they might also send some money. Very few people gave any donations, but that did not change anything; I continued my work. Sometimes my friend Herman Storick from Larchmont, New York, and another friend sent me some donations. In 2014, thanks to Herman Storick's generosity, I produced thirteen plaques to mark a few totally devastated cemeteries and graves of Jewish soldiers of the Polish Army who were killed during the war in 1939. The situation has become better since 2012, when the San



Francisco Bay Area Jewish Genealogical Society decided to support the site. These donations help me visit more cemeteries and document surviving tombstones. I appreciate it.

Although it is not my main activity, sometimes I try to do something about preserving Jewish cemeteries. For example, in 2007 I went to the small town of Nowogród. The local Jewish cemetery was completely devastated, with only one remaining *matzevah*. Not far from the cemetery I found an abandoned, ruined house. Its owner had used some *matzevot* to build the foundation. I informed the local newspaper and TV. The town mayor promised to negotiate with the owner. After a few months the town authorities transferred all *matzevot* from the foundation to the cemetery.

I have inspired some similar projects. A few years ago Duvid Singer, a Bobover Chassid from Borough



Park, New York, asked me for help in searching for graves of famous *tzadikim*. We were involved in such projects in Parysow, Żelechów, and now in Mielec.



### SFBAJGS Family Finder Update

The surnames and towns being researched by our newest members are listed below. This database is maintained for the benefit of our membership. If you have a correction or update, please write to SFBAJGS at [familyfinder@sfbajgs.org](mailto:familyfinder@sfbajgs.org) or at P.O. Box 318214, San Francisco, CA 94131-8214.

<u>Surname</u>	<u>Town, Country</u>	<u>Member</u>
Abramson/Abramczyk	Pultusk, Poland	Deborah Barr
Barr	Moghilev-Podolski	Deborah Barr
Blinder	Russia; New York	Deborah Blankenburg
Bloch	Germany	Deborah Blankenburg
Braunstein/Bronstein	Poland or Austria-Hungary	Alana Shindler
Chambre	Lich, Germany; Kassel, Germany	Erica Chambre
Elster	Chelm, Poland	Deborah Barr
Frohmann	Griesheim, Germany	Erica Chambre
Goldberg	Russia	Joyce Donahoo
Gurefsky	Rascov, Moldova; Kamenets-Podolsky	Deborah Barr
Holtzman	Pultusk, Poland	Deborah Barr
Jankowicz	Riga, Latvia; Pennsylvania	Anna Young
Kanter	Bender and Odessa, Ukraine	Alana Shindler
Kusher	Poland; New York	Deborah Blankenburg
Lumer	Rascov, Moldova	Deborah Barr
Marcus	Russia	Joyce Donahoo
Papkin	Russia, United States	Joyce Donahoo
Ralsen/Rolzen/Rosen	Bender, Ukraine	Alana Shindler
Rojansky/Rosensky/Rosinsky	Slonim, Poland; Russia; London	Anna Young
Rothenberger	Baden, Germany; Giessen, Germany; Gedern, Germany	Erica Chambre
Schindler/Shindler	Varklanni, Latvia	Alana Shindler
Shure	Riga, Latvia; Pennsylvania	Anna Young
Steifel	Baden, Germany	Erica Chambre
Voehl	Gedern, Germany	Erica Chambre
Young	Riga, Latvia; Pennsylvania	Anna Young

**Leonard Nimoy**, continued from page 8

I've forgotten now what I made for that dinner, because Nimoy arrived late due to a business call. He apologized specifically about missing the meal, however, and also spoke to the group longer than had originally been planned to help make up for it. For two hours about ten of us enjoyed hearing him talk on a personal level about his life and work. He told us he got his first paid acting gig because the cast needed a young man who could speak Yiddish (apparently difficult for casting directors to find even that long ago!), and that the favorite project he had worked on was *A Woman Called Golda*. He also mentioned that when Kennedy was running for president in 1960, he was somewhat confused about all the fuss made about the possibility of a Catholic becoming president. Growing up in Boston, his world had been half Catholic and half Jewish; a Catholic president seemed like no big deal.

When a well known Jew passes away, it often feels like losing a close member of the family. Even though I have no (known) direct family connection to Leonard Nimoy, as many of us who use DNA in our research have learned, Eastern European Jews are related in many ways due to endogamy. A study released in 2014 even claimed that we're all at least 30th cousins. So in one sense I did lose a member of my family.

LLAP, Mr. Nimoy. Thanks for the memories.



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 Website Development  Congregational Liaison  Meeting Coordination

**Family Finder information.** This will be maintained on file with the SFBAJGS and periodically shared with the membership.  
**Please print clearly.** New members: Please fill in as completely as you can.  
Renewing members: No need to repeat, just update with new information and changes.

Surname	Location
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_____	_____

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The Journal of the San Francisco Bay Area  
Jewish Genealogical Society

Volume XXXV, Number 2

May 2015

Calendar of Upcoming SFBAJGS Events

**Sunday, 14 June, Oakland:** *Social Media for Genealogists.* SFBAJGS member Meredith Sellers will illustrate how social media sites can assist your genealogy research efforts, discuss the pros and cons of different platforms, and outline ways to maintain a secure online presence.

**Monday, 15 June, Los Altos Hills:** *Liberation from a Shoah Ghost: The Girl on the Wall.* SFBAJGS board member Preeva Tramiel will discuss her recently published memoir and her research into her father's life.

**Sunday, 19 July, San Francisco:** *20th Century Immigration and Naturalization Records.* Marisa Louie, formerly with the National Archives, will discuss Alien Case Files and how to obtain them, and Jewish refugees who were detained at Angel Island.

**Sunday, 16 August, Oakland:** *Bring Your Own Brick Wall.* Bring your problems, questions, and documents (copies, please, no originals), and experienced SFBAJGS researchers will try to provide information and suggestions that may help you solve some family mysteries.

**Monday, 17 August, Los Altos Hills:** *JRI-Poland: Go for the Record!* JRI-Poland board member Robinn Magid will demonstrate how easy it is to download actual images of records relating to your ancestors.

**Sunday, 20 September, San Francisco:** *Researching Your Litvak Roots.* Judy Baston, Vice President of LitvakSIG, will give an overview of sources online and in various repositories for researching your Litvak heritage.

See page 3 for meeting locations and times and page 4 for other events of interest.

For more program information visit <http://www.sfbajgs.org/>.

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