



The Kasher Koala

Newsletter of the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc

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Inside This Issue

Page

Coming Events

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

By Rieke Nash

2

EDITORIAL

By Miriam Shifreen

2

ORGANISING A FAMILY REUNION

By Gael Hammer

3

RESOURCES FOR ANGLO-JEWISH RESEARCH – WHAT'S NEW AND WHAT'S COMING – A visit by Laurence Harris

5

BOOK REVIEWS AND WEBSITES

6

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON JEWISH GENEALOGY, Canberra, October, 2008

8

**A Supplement To Jewish Genealogy
Downunder and The Kasher Koala,
Aug-Sept, 2008**

A VISIT TO BAD AROLSEN, GERMANY

Liz James 2

Peter Nash 3

Rieke Nash 4

Debbie Jurblum 5

Gary Binetter 6

Lionel Sharpe 7

WORKSHOP DATES 2008

**Sunday 14 September
2 p.m. Lindfield**

DIANE ARMSTRONG
*will talk about her new book
NOCTURNE*

**Sunday, October 5
from 9.30 a.m.**

**Monday, October 13
from 10.00 a.m.**

**OCTOBER, 26 – 29
ACT CONFERENCE**
(see back page)

**Sunday, November 2
from 9.30 a.m.**

MARTHA LEV-ZION
Research in Latvia

**Monday, November 10
from 10.00 a.m.**

**Sunday, December 7
from 9.30 a.m.**

**Monday, December 15
from 10.00 a.m.**

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

After much discussion and research, the members of the Committee have unanimously decided to update our methods for communicating with our members. With the pressure of increasing costs for the printing and posting of a hard copy of *Kosher Koala* and the amount of work involved in its production, we have decided to move to an online model that will allow more flexibility and more opportunities for members to participate in information exchange. This move also means that membership fees can remain the same, despite the increase in the cost of books, other resources and other expenses. In the December issue, which will be the last printed edition, we will detail our new look communications package. We appreciate that over the last fifteen years *Kosher Koala* has been enjoyed by many of you and we thank all who supplied us with articles in the past.

Recently I have experienced two good examples of how genealogical research sometimes requires many years of patience.

Last week I had a call from a researcher, Brian, who had never been able to track down the sisters of his grandfather. So when the death certificate for his grandfather arrived, he was thrilled to see that the informant was a son-in-law. With the information on that surname he tracked down and has made contact with the missing family. Incredibly a member of this family, who had joined our Society in February, 1992, was looking for Brian's family but had dropped out over the years.

For over ten years I had been trying to get information unsuccessfully about a burial in the Warsaw cemetery. I had found it listed on a website but with no details except the name. A few weeks ago, I noticed a reference in an article in Avotaynu to a new website (cemetery.jewish.org.pl/lang_en) for the cemetery, entered my name and voilà, up came a photo of the tombstone! The text was in Hebrew, so Society member, Michael Taub, translated the information for me: the name, father's name, date of death and unexpectedly that he had been a respected teacher and scholar.

Rosh Hashana this year is late in September so we take this opportunity now to wish you a Happy New Year and Well over the Fast.

And hope to see you in Canberra in October.

Rieke Nash
President
president@ajgs.org.au

EDITORIAL

We have had some very interesting talks in recent months. Our third visitor from Britain this year addressed the Society and we had another great presentation from our member, Gael Hammer.

If you were unable to be present when Gael gave her inspiring talk on *Organising a Family Reunion*, you can read all about it on page 3. Organisers of the Blashki family reunion produced some detailed historical images as well as good hints for others planning a reunion.

Our third British visitor this year, Laurence Harris, Chairman of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain gave his talk on *Resources for Anglo-Jewish Research – What's New and What's Coming?* You can read all about it on page 5. Following on from visits from Kathryn Michael and George Rigal, Laurence added to our knowledge of resources for English research and in early September, Anthony Joseph will be in Sydney for the lunch celebrating the 70th birthday of the Australian Jewish Historical Society.

See page 6 for New Resources in Our Library: *Every Family Has a Story*, *Jewish Life in the Middle Ages* and *The Blashki Family CD*, and also for New Resources Online that you may find helpful in furthering your research.

As you know in May, Rieke and Peter and four other Australians went on the first and largest organised visit to the Red Cross International Tracing Service at Bad Arolsen, Germany. A special supplement is included with this issue of *The Kosher Koala*, where those participating in this extraordinary tour of the recently opened-up Shoah related archives share their experiences and discoveries, and give advice for others to get information from this source.

This year has gone very quickly, and it is almost Rosh Hashana, the Jewish New Year again, and this New Year we have something exciting for our members, our conference, *Jewish Genealogy in the 21st Century*, to be held in Canberra, from Sunday to Tuesday, 26 - 29 October, 2008. See all the details and registration forms with this issue of *Kosher Koala* and come along and join in this exciting experience. Hope to see you there.

Happy New Year to you all and success with your researching.

Miriam Shifreen
Editor
ed@ajgs.org.au

ORGANISING A FAMILY REUNION

A Talk by Gael Hammer, Sunday 22 June, 2008 at the Jewish Council On Ageing Centre

Reviewed By Miriam Shifreen

After a successful 150th anniversary family gathering of the Michaelis family, Gael Hammer was urged to help organise a family gathering of the Blashki Family.

In 1986 Gael had written the family saga: *Phillip Blashki - A Victorian Patriarch*, about her paternal grandmother's family, after having gathered family information since the 1950s.

Phillip Blashki, was born Favel Wagczewski in Blashki, near Kalish in Poland, on 21 February, 1837. He left home at the age of 18 and went to Manchester, and took the name Blashki. After marrying Hannah Feigel Potash, a young widow, he travelled with her and her infant son to Australia, having missed the ship to America. Arriving in 1858, he began life in Melbourne, soon moving to Geelong to be closer to the goldfields before moving back to Melbourne with his family about 1868.

In spite of living in Geelong with only a small Jewish presence, and isolated from the mainstream Jewish community, he nevertheless remained an orthodox Jew, making sure he spent every Shabbat and every Jewish Holiday with his family.

Gael spoke with energy and enthusiasm as she related various anecdotes about Phillip and many others of this family of 14 branches.

Phillip founded a dynasty of business and professional people. He was involved with a wide range of activities including the Freemasons and many Jewish organisations, such as The Montefiore Homes for the aged and the East Melbourne Hebrew School where he was the first President.

He was appointed a Justice of the Peace and ultimately elected by his peers to be Victoria's Chief Stipendary Magistrate. For a man with no legal or English education, this was a remarkable achievement. Gael's book with its history, many photographs and family tree can be borrowed from our Library.

In organising the Sesquicentenary celebration of the Blashkis' arrival in Australia, Gael was supported by a singularly energetic and committed group consisting of her sister and four of their cousins who met in Melbourne about four times a year for two years, and were in constant email and phone contact. During this time, they chose the date for

the reunion and encouraged family members to spread the word. Over four years, an invitees-only data programme with ultimately 281 family and individual names was set up by Blashki computer genius, Rick Harvey. Contact is being maintained by the family through a Google Family site, where family members are adding their information and stories.

Creating the data base for news and hype as the dates approached, and then the creation of the committee, was just the beginning. A full weekend programme was planned and as the word spread more and more people wanted to come, including relations of relations. A special beautifully edited *Souvenir Programme for the Sesquicentenary Gathering of the Blashki Family* was distributed to all participants containing event details, family photos, two of Hannah's recipes, the special Blashki family song from the pageant performed at the Main Event, and street maps showing old Blashki addresses to be visited during the weekend. The book contained greetings from those unable to attend, acknowledgement for those who had worked so hard to make the event so successful, and finally puzzles to keep the kids occupied.

In all, over 425 family members from around the globe came together for the Reunion. They came from Britain, Israel, USA Spain, New Zealand, China, Germany and from six Australian States and Territories.

To honour, Phillip and Hannah, the gathering began with a Gala Shabbos dinner for 120 people, on Friday night at the St Kilda Synagogue hall. Everyone joined in the various Jewish Shabbat rituals that were explained for the non-Jews. Family Charts of the 14 children of Phillip and Hannah on the wall were colour coded to match the name lanyards everyone wore, so people could see where they fitted on to the Family Tree. These also avoided the need for introductions.

Saturday, began with a Shule service at the St Kilda Shule, and as for some descendants this was the first time they had visited a synagogue a buddy system was to be arranged for them to sit with someone who would explain the procedure, but this became an explanatory running sheet on each seat, as the numbers became too great. Page numbers were read out so everyone knew the place in the *Siddur* (prayer book).

After a Kiddush that was really lunch, there was a conducted walk of an hour about the area where Phillip and Hannah had lived (even being invited into one of the homes), ending up at the Montefiore Home for Mincha and Maariv (the afternoon and

evening Sabbath service) to the delight of residents at the home.

The Saturday programme concluded with an evening at the Jewish Museum of Australia. Here a display of Blashki mementos included Hannah's candlesticks from 1840s Poland, Phillip's walking stick, the Hordern Cricket Shield from NSW, 80 books written by Blashkis, and a famous painting *Art on the Beach* by Blashki grandson Philip Evergood. Don Behrend launched *Clara Behrend Remembers* a book of memoirs which Gael had edited from the letters she had received from Blashki granddaughter Clara over a five year period when Gael was writing the Blashki book.

The main event was a brunch, where relatives met, many for the first time on the Sunday at *Leonda*. For entertainment, a pageant was written with musical compositions arranged and produced entirely by Blashkis, including Blashki editors, composers, the wardrobe mistress, stage manager and the actors. And of course the Family Trees were again displayed. A Blashki bag of goodies containing a program, pens, notebooks and a chocolate box with the photos of Phillip and Hannah, were given to attendees. Photographs of everyone there were taken, of course.

After the brunch there was a bus trip to places of Blashki interest: East Melbourne Shule, addresses where the Blashkis lived and worked, and the Melbourne General Cemetery where the graves of Phillip and Hannah were visited, stones placed and "Kayl Molay Rachamim" the memorial prayer, sung.

On the Monday, an emotional event took place at 20 South Wharf. It was here that Phillip and Hannah with her little son, Hyman Potash arrived after their long boat journey on the "Alice Walton" to Australia. So flowers were tossed into the sea to commemorate that event.

A double disc DVD made by Blashki descendants Jane and Bob Harvey documented the history of the family and the highlights of the Reunion. This disc collection can be viewed at any of our Sunday morning workshops. The first disc opens with a scene from the pageant depicting the first generation of Blashki children with Hannah and Phillip welcoming the Shabbat. This tape explains how Gael and the other five members of the planning committee worked and organised the Reunion.

They also related stories from their branch of the family. Other family members with a story to tell are introduced. These stories are illustrated with

photos of memorabilia such as the Shabbos candlesticks Hannah brought with her. There are photos of ships' arrivals and the houses where Blashkis lived, and worked. Photos of family events such as family tennis matches, important family occasions and Family Trees illustrating the branches of the family are included. And there are remarkable movies showing Melbourne streets in 1896 compare with the scene today of those family sites.

The second disc begins at the Main Event with the full musical pageant; The Reunion speeches, interviews with those at the reunion and photos of the whole gathering. Of all the mementos of this gathering, this tape will surely be the most cherished of all. The total effect of all the events of this ingathering, of old and new associations of Blashki family members, will fulfill the cherished dreams of Hannah and Phillip Blashki to begin a family in a new land and to maintain strong family and Jewish values

Gael Hammer, a member of our Society since its inauguration, has been lecturing on Family Research since 1992.



RESOURCES FOR ANGLO-JEWISH RESEARCH – WHAT’S NEW AND WHAT’S COMING?

By Laurence Harris, Chairman of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain

From a talk given by Laurence to the Society in Sydney on 24 July, 2008.

With nearly 1,000 members, the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain is one of the largest Jewish societies in the world and has contributed significantly to Jewish research opportunities. The interests of the descendants of the mainly European Ashkenazi and Sephardi migrants over the last three hundred years with their varied backgrounds are reflected in their excellent quarterly journal, *Shemot*, their newsletter and the series of beginner publications.

Information and databases are available on their website at www.jgsgb.org.uk, even for non-members, and the Jewish Communities and Records site, a collaboration with Jewishgen is available at www.jewishgen.org/jcr-uk

Probably one of the most significant new resources to become available recently is the Chief Rabbi’s Marriage Authorisation Certificates. That elusive place of birth may be recorded there. These United Synagogues records for 1880-1886 are now online at www.theus.org.uk/support_services/find_your_family/marriage_records/

Another stumbling block in English research, the change of surname, might be helped by the London Gazette site www.gazettes-online.co.uk/AdvancedSearch.aspx?GeoType=London Currently being digitised and added to this site are bankruptcies, military information and naturalizations.

From www.ancestry.co.uk, those World War I Army Service Records that have survived may produce results while, from the National Archives, online requests can be made for medals awarded at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/medals.asp

The Knowles Collection, created in part from the Mordy collection, is growing and can be downloaded as a GEDCOM or PAF file. It can be accessed from the Jewish page on www.familysearch.org.

Civil records can be searched for on freebmd.org.uk/cgi/search.pl where District Registrar Projects are recording Birth, Death and Marriage records. With nearly all of the 1837 to 1913 records added and nearly half of the 1914 to

1927, this is a good check on the General Register Office (GRO) sites and is free. A few counties have their own records and references online at www.ukbmd.org.uk

For Australian researchers, the Old Bailey Trials from 1674 to 1913 of 200,000 criminal trials is a valuable source, not only for the information on the accused but also for the victims and witnesses. See www.oldbaileyonline.org.

As with Ancestry, the Find My Past site is not free but can be valuable. Outbound passenger lists for the years 1890 to 1960 from the UK are gradually being added to the site www.findmypast/passengerListPersonSearchStart.action

For Jewish records now available, the old Chaplain cards for 1939 to 1960 for Jews in the Armed Forces at www.ajex.org.uk and the 19th Century database, www.jgsgb.org.uk/1851/Introduction.asp can provide some vital missing clue.

The recently published book with 7,000 Jewish Births which were registered at the Great and Hambro Synagogues for the years 1770 to 1862 can be purchased from Harold and Miriam Lewin at hamir908@gmail.com

Two new resources to be available in the next few years will be a significant addition to current sources.

The database of burials recorded with the United Synagogues will be upgraded from its present restrictive search capabilities to expand the options for finding a burial regardless of the cemetery and the year. As well more information fields and photographs will be added.

The 1911 UK Census is due to be released in 2012 but there will be a phased release from 2009 to 2011. A special request for information in advance of the release is now possible if the address is known and for a cost of £45.

A number of projects to digitise and make available online records and certificates have been delayed. They include the Wills and Probate Calendar from 1858 onwards and from the GRO, the Digitisation of Vital Events (DOVE), Electronic Access to GRO Legacy (EAGLE) and Multiple Access to GRO Published Index Events (MAGPIE). For more details see:-

www.gro.gov.uk/gro/content/aboutus/lookingahead/Digitisation_of_Vital_Events.asp#0

Laurence particularly extended an invitation to our Society members who may be visiting London to make contact to arrange a visit to the JGSGB library outside of the advertised opening hours. chairman@jgsgb.org.uk

**LAURENCE AND ELIZABETH HARRIS
SYDNEY HARBOUR, JULY 2008**



EVERY FAMILY HAS A STORY

Tales from the Pages of Avotaynu
Editor Gary Mokotoff, 2008 Avotaynu

The latest interesting read is a wonderful collection of personal stories from past editions of Avotaynu, the International Review of Jewish Genealogy. Although these stories have already been published, each story is special and an inspiration for all genealogical researchers and a good read even for those other members of the population who have little interest in their own family history. The story from our founding President, Sophie Caplan, is included in this edition. The book would be an excellent gift and is available from www.avotaynu.com.

JEWISH LIFE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

by Israel Abrahams,
Dover Publications, Mineola, NY 2004.

This is a republication of a work originally published in 1894 by Macmillan, New York. From historical records, the author, a former President of the Jewish Historical Society of England, has created a very readable description of Medieval Jewish customs and social life in Europe. His observations of late 19th Century England add to its interest.

Donated by member, Adele Schaverien

THE BLASHKI FAMILY

This set of two CDs commemorates the recent Blashki reunion. (See article on page 3) It can be purchased from Gael Hammer or from the producers at www.rangeairevision.com

NEW RESOURCES ONLINE

AUSTRALIAN ELECTORAL ROLLS

The website www.ancestry.com.au has added some electoral roles for most States in Australia for years between 1901 and 1936. Search results can be inconsistent so trialling different search criteria may give different results. A successful list can be viewed for free and with a 14-day free trial, the detailed results can be accessed. Although limited to Australian citizens, the information could help determine a date of death or area of residence. With women having the vote, it is especially useful.

ROOTS COLUMN ONLINE

The Australian Jewish News (AJN) has created an online people search facility on their website at www.ajn.com.au. While not as easily accessible as their previous Roots column that was published in their printed edition, it will still be helpful, particularly for overseas people trying to trace family or friends in Australia. To find the Roots section you need to Scroll down the Home page. Also included on this site are obituaries dating from 2005 and past articles that can be accessed from the archives for a particular category.

NEUE FREIE PRESSE (NFP) 1864 to 1939

New Free Press, Vienna
<http://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=nfp>

All pages for the years 1864 to 1939 for this Viennese publication have been added to the above website. The NFP was a daily publication and the site is organised by year, month and day so it is particularly useful for finding Death Notices if one knows the approximate date of death. These notices contain vital information about family members and can be easily read although in German. Scanning the pages can be informative but, here, a knowledge of German is necessary.

JRI-POLAND ORDERING DOCUMENTS

For help in acquiring documents that JRI-Poland have indexed.

Our Order FAQ will answer most of the questions about obtaining copies of records including those microfilmed by the LDS Church:
www.jri-poland.org/psa/orderfaq.htm

Our procedure for "Ordering Records from the Polish State Archives" gives the researcher step-by-step suggestions for ordering records not microfilmed by the LDS directly from the regional Polish State Archive branches:
www.jri-poland.org/psa/neworder.htm

Mark Halpern, JRI-Poland

**The Australian Jewish
Genealogical Society, Inc.**

*Our aim is to encourage and assist those with
Jewish ancestry to research their family
histories*

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SYDNEY WORKSHOPS

All workshops are usually held at the Rev Katz Library,
North Shore Synagogue, Treatts Road, Lindfield, once a
month on Sunday mornings, from 9.30 a.m. to 12.30
p.m. See front page for dates.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

New South Wales

Meegan Lea

Bernie Press

Queensland

Scott Morwitch

David Markowich

Norma Solomon

Annual Membership \$Aust 35.00
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IAJGS CONFERENCE DATES

2009 Philadelphia 2 – 7 August

The Sheraton Philadelphia City Center Hotel will
be the venue for the 2009 IAJGS Conference
organised by the IAJGS and the JGS of Greater
Philadelphia.

2011 Washington

will be hosted by the JGS of Greater Washington

Annual Trip to Salt Lake City, 2008

with Gary Mokotoff and Eileen Polakoff will take
place this year from 23 to 30 October. This is an
opportunity to spend a whole week researching in
the LDS Family History Library with the assistance
of experienced genealogists and in the company of
an enthusiastic group of like-minded researchers.
www.avotaynu.com/slctrip.htm or
email: mokotoff@earthlink.net for details of cost.

JOIN US
for our first ever
NATIONAL CONFERENCE
to be held in Canberra
26 – 29 October, 2008

Hosted by the ACT Jewish Community at their Centre and organised jointly by the Sydney and Melbourne Jewish Genealogical Societies, it will be a rewarding experience for all family history researchers.

EXPERTS

in the main geographic areas for tracing the family's origins
headed by our guest speaker from Israel

Dr. Martha Lev-Zion

former Board member of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, convenor of the 24th International Conference in Jerusalem, founding member of the Latvian Special Interest Group.

PROGRAMME

An innovative, interactive programme that focuses on helping the individual's research interests. Up to four concurrent sessions dealing with specific countries in small groups will allow in-depth exploration of currently available resources and techniques. A beginner's session has also been scheduled.

One-to-one consultations with knowledgeable mentors will be available.

EXCURSIONS

to Canberra places of interest such as the National Archives, the National Library, War Museum and Parliament House have been arranged
as well as a cocktail party at the Israeli Embassy

RESOURCES

As well as the local archives, there will be a reference room with books, folders, maps, online computer access, a Conference Family Finder with all the research names and places of all the attendees and some help with translations

and most importantly

NETWORKING

opportunities to meet informally with an enthusiastic like-minded group.

A Conference Banquet will complete the experience.

Register early as we have limited space.

Website: www.ajgs.org.au/conf2008/

Contact: conf2008@ajgs.org.au

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**A Visit to Bad Arolsen,  
Germany**  
~~~~~



From May 5th to 9th six Australians, Rieke and Peter Nash and Gary Binetter from Sydney, Liz James, Debbie Jurblum and Lionel Sharpe from Melbourne, joined a group of 40 genealogists from USA, Australia, Israel and Great Britain on a visit to the Nazi archives located at the small town of Bad Arolsen, just over two hours drive north of Frankfurt, Germany.

This well known and extensive collection of Holocaust records was finally unlocked to the public in November 2007 and this organized visit was the first and largest to gain open access to the archive at this point of time. The visit was organised by well known Jewish genealogists, Gary Mokotoff of Avotaynu Inc. and Dr Sallyann Sack, editor of the international genealogical journal 'Avotaynu'.

Summing up his experiences in the email newsletter (Nu? What's New?) last May, Gary Mokotoff wrote: *'Have you ever wished you could go on the perfect genealogical research trip? One on which you had ready access to the records of the archives - there was a friendly staff at the archives that was anxious to please - the staff used their skills to personally assist you in searching the record collection of the facility - there was an excellent hotel within walking distance and good restaurants in the area - the camaraderie of being part of a group meant evenings sitting at an outside café, a restaurant, or in the lobby of the*

hotel discussing successes and failures - there were trips to local sites of interest - the weather was perfect; temperature in the 70s (25C) and not a cloud in the sky.

That was the experience of 42 genealogists who made a trip to Bad Arolsen, Germany, last week to do five days of research at the International Tracing Service—the first group of any type to be welcomed by ITS. Most of the researchers were veterans of family history research including a number of present and past presidents of Jewish genealogical societies and three past presidents of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (Howard Margol, Sallyann Amdur Sack and me). There was one Holocaust survivor (Peter Nash of Australia) and at least 11 second-generation Holocaust survivors.'

The archive is massive. There are 26,000 metres of shelf space containing 50 million index cards and records on 17.5 million civilians persecuted by the Nazis. These records are contained in five separate buildings in the small picturesque town which once housed a training school for SS officers.

The group worked in pairs and each pair was allocated a computer and a personal assistant. English speaking interpreters were available on call and a courier service delivered requested files either the same afternoon or the following day. Scanning and photocopying was carried out by the staff and researchers were permitted to use their own digital cameras to reduce the high demand for copying. Individual CDs of the records requested were distributed before departure.

Participants were able to view and handle documents including original lists from concentration camps and transportations. Briefing sessions were held regularly and a two way learning exchange took place between the ITS staff and the researchers. The ITS staff learned additional searching techniques well known to veteran genealogists.

Additional activities included a walking tour of Bad Arolsen, led by a local historian with an interpreter from the ITS. Among the high lights was a visit to an old Jewish cemetery dating back to 1779 and information about this ancient Jewish community. There was also a bus tour to the nearby town of Vöhl to visit a restored synagogue now serving as an art gallery.

Lionel Sharpe (Editor) <ajgs@exist.com.au>

Message received from Erich Oetiker, Deputy Director of the International Tracing Service.

-
*I would like to thank you all again in the name of our staff for the many nice e-mails and cards we have received. We feel very grateful for having been useful in your various searches. We already know that with your visit in Bad Arolsen and the experience we have gained from it, the ITS will be able to serve many other genealogists from all over the world in the future.
Erich Oetiker*



The Australian participants:
Back row: Peter Nash, (Sydney) Lionel Sharpe, Liz James and Debbie Jurblum (Melbourne).
Front: Rieke Nash and Gary Binetter (Sydney)

Liz James (Melbourne)

There were many reasons that I chose to go to Bad Arolsen, but perhaps the main one was the opportunity for me to search for the names of members of my family who had been victims of Nazi persecution and atrocities.

I am very fortunate that no members of my immediate family were directly involved however I knew of three related families who had lived in Germany and who had all perished, and it was these families that I was seeking information about.

Given my small list, I invited some relatives and friends to give me more names to search. So, armed with my list of sixty four names, I set off for a week to Bad Arolsen filled with some trepidation, but excited that I might be able to shed some light, for my own family and friends, on the sad secrets of the past and offer some closure.

Debbie Jurblum and I met our fellow travellers including Gary and Ruth Mokotoff at Frankfurt airport, which was the meeting point for some of us for our bus journey to Bad Arolsen. It was not long before we arrived in a beautiful little spa town that was to be our destination for the week. We were very happy later that afternoon when Lionel Sharpe arrived from Paris to join us. Australia now had six representatives including three from New South Wales.

That evening our group of forty genealogists met the representatives from the International Tracing Service (ITS) who were to be instrumental in our researches in the following days. Sallyann Amdur Sack and Gary Mokotoff from Avotaynu, had worked tirelessly for many months to get us to this point.

The next day I was astounded when our assistant handed me fifty-eight T/D files. How could this be so? We were told that on average the ITS were only able to locate details on 25% of requests.

On speaking to representatives of the ITS, there were two factors that I had not anticipated which suggested prospects of getting real information about the three families was good.

First, it was evident that the ITS had much more data available in their records of people who had been in Germany and surrounding areas. The further east a family lived or were deported, reduced the likelihood of

detailed information being readily available.

Second, the files I were given were “extended,” in that prior requests about a particular family were logged and recorded on the file, thus linking requests. In this way I had been provided with the files of spouses, siblings, children and members of the extended family who related to my initial search request.

What was so interesting about these files? From a genealogical point of view, they are a rich source of information. For example, I found a letter sent by an enquirer in Canada requesting information from a list comprising twenty-three names. In the correspondence, the enquirer listed the names of each person he was searching for, their birth date, the particulars of what he thought their fate had been, and not only did he describe how they were related to each other, but also how they were related to him.

I have subsequently written to this person in Canada (found through JewishGen), and established how we are related to each other. We have been corresponding and sharing data ever since.



Liz James and Debbie Jurblum with staff assistant (centre)

The other amazing find for me, came from a correspondence file written by someone in 1952. When reading about the birth place of the people in question, I realised that I possibly had some photos belonging to this family at home.

On my return to Australia, I was able to confirm that I did in fact have their photos! I have now posted the four photos to the only living member of this family - an eighty-two year old cousin of my mother who, as it turns out, had not seen these photos since 1938. Her father and brother had perished in the camps, and her and her mother had fled Europe to the U.S.A., losing all of their possessions on the way.

By having had access to these TD-Files at Bad Arolsen, I could now return the photos to their owner and my family's role as custodian (for 70 years) was complete.

A full international report on the Bad Arolsen visit will appear in the summer issue of AVOTAYNU: The International Review of Jewish Genealogy, <http://www.avotaynu.com>



From right: Peter and Rieke Nash

Peter Nash (Sydney)

Before leaving for Bad Arolsen it was apparent that Rieke and I were part of a very special group of Jewish genealogists. As it turned out I was the only Holocaust survivor in the group of 42.

In late 1938, just after *Kristallnacht*, my parents and I were evicted, under threat of severe punishment, from our apartment in Charlottenburg, Berlin, forcing us to find refuge in Shanghai soon after.

The feeling of something poignant about this journey to Germany was heightened when my family passed through Charlottenburg station just before disembarking at Berlin's main station, as on that same day close to 70 years earlier, we started our journey to the Far East in 1939 - and now I had just travelled back from the Far East.

I submitted the names of victims of my immediate and extended family, fifty in all. This was requested by ITS so they could do preliminary case searches prior to our arrival, although my expectations of new information was not high. At that stage I also did not realize the significance of their records for survivors and also enquirers for victims or survivors. So after the group was briefed by way of a power point presentation and Q & A followed, I felt that I needed also to focus equally on survivor records.

No matter how adequate the briefings were, only hands-on searches with the aid of assigned staff, one per two researchers, were likely to yield any sort of results. The staff was quite nervous - about their limited spoken English, which was soon overcome by at-call translators, but with my still fluent German I could help Rieke as well as translating for the assigned assistant. Still it took a while to understand how the records inter-related to particular names and the

need to be mindful of their soundexing methods for spelling variants.

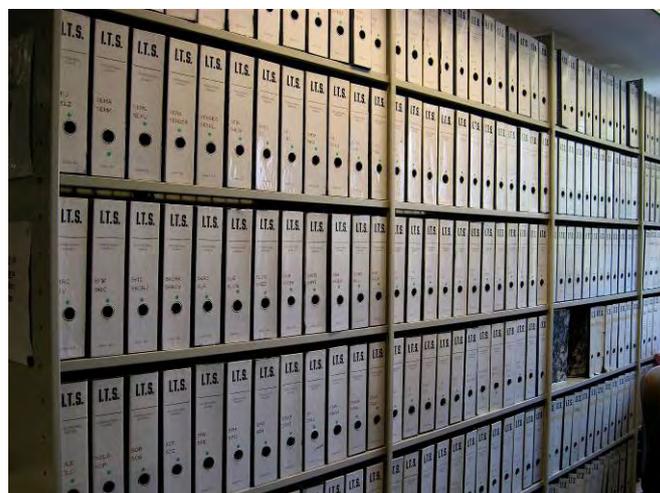
The case files (T/D Files) asked for prior to arrival were on hand. However, my genealogical 'finds' were small. Some names of cousins were different to my previous understanding - as were event dates. The significant, but not much, 'new' information included dates and how and where died, such as my mother's first cousin who died on a certain date after being "shot in the water" at a previously unknown place on the Baltic Sea, the circumstances of which I need to follow up. This, as in many other cases (not of my own family) resulted from evidence submitted by other survivors.

What I found very interesting and potentially genealogically helpful were lists and other data attached to case files for survivors. This was so for one of my Nachemstein cousins who survived in Sweden but had lost his wife and daughter in Auschwitz. Also given were names of other family.



I was surprised that ITS did not exchange or have access to Holocaust related files kept by the many national Red Cross organizations, one of which I found to be very valuable. For example, through the Australian Red Cross I got a set of documents from the Lithuanian Red Cross relevant to the victims of one branch of my family. None of these names were on the Central Name Index at ITS.

In summary, without doubt ITS is a major potential source of primary family history data – but it is incomplete. After their program of digitization of its T/D files is completed in 2010, funding permitting, it will yield even better outcomes.





Arlene Sachs from Washington DC with Rieke Nash

Rieke Nash (Sydney)

On the eve of our visit to the Red Cross Archives in Bad Arolsen, my expectations were not very high for finding documentation on the fate of my Szulman grandparents, uncles and aunt from Poland and, unfortunately, it turned out to be so. At least I had confirmed that there were, indeed, no records for them in the Archive.

It seemed that the chances of finding information increased if the person was a survivor, if a restitution claim had been made or if a search enquiry to the Red Cross had been requested at a date a few years after the immediate post-war period. As there were exceptions to these criteria it is difficult to be dogmatic about the chances of success.

From my long list that I had submitted prior to the trip, there were a few that had document files, some of which proved very interesting even though most did not have new information.

One detailed file for a cousin, who had survived and migrated to Melbourne after the war, had a list of the names and dates of the labour and concentration camps where he had been during the war. There were documents in the file that confirmed his experiences and one document that noted the fate of his wife and two children.

In his file there was a reference to a record where he is listed as an arrival in Auschwitz. Others on this arrival list may not have been individually recorded in the Name Index unless they had survived or there had been an enquiry for them. With the birth date included on the list it appeared that these were men who were selected for work as there were no children or elderly listed.

From the records I was able to establish that he was related to another victim who had the same last name, place of birth and parents' names. I had been unaware of this brother and that he had been living in Paris although I may have found him on the Yad Vashem site.

Unexpectedly I found a reference to a young Templinski that I didn't know about. He was on a post-war list of survivors who had been released from a Frankfurt-am-Main

hospital soon after the war. With this unusual name, he had to be related.

Meeting up with the others in the group, some of them old friends, was an extra bonus. The arrangements by Gary Mokotoff and Sallyann Sack were excellent and the Arolsen staff was friendly, helpful and, after the initial nervousness, relaxed.

During the week there were interesting side trips to two small local towns where a group of volunteers are documenting the Jewish history of the region, memorialising the Jewish families who had lived there and their fates.

The experience was very unique; handling original documents, trying to understand the quite complicated indexing and reference systems used by the ITS and actually seeing the extent of the pieces of paper that document this devastating event in history.



Jewish memorial stone erected after World War II at the Bad Arolsen Jewish cemetery which dates back to 1779. Many old headstones dating back two centuries still remain intact. The group stood for a minute's silence at this cemetery on Yom Hazikaron most wearing a Magen David button – a very moving experience.



Valery Bazarov, (left), Director of the Location and Family History Service of the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in New York, said it was the most fantastic research trip he has ever made. The group are examining personal belongings and documents of Holocaust victims. Where possible these are returned to survivors or descendants of victims.



Debbie Jurblum (Melbourne)

If anyone would have told me that I would be travelling this year to Poland as well as Germany I would not have believed them. Last January, I was very excited when I found out that there was an opportunity to join a group of Jewish genealogists on a visit to the Red Cross International Tracing Service in Bad Arolsen.

At the same time, my mother-in-law Judy Jurblum was seriously ill and I was not sure I should make the trip. Unfortunately she passed away in early March.

She had lost all her immediate family and I had spent many years trying to find some family information for her. A trip like this was my opportunity.

The timing of this trip was incredible, as the 'March of the Living' was taking place in Poland a few days before our visit to the ITS was due to begin. Since my daughter was taking part in this educational trip with her school, I decided to join them on this special excursion. This was an amazing prelude, as we were to visit Auschwitz/ Birkenau and to have the experience of being in a devastating place of torture and death.

On my arrival in Bad Arolsen I was filled with excitement and apprehension. I was excited about the possibility to find out about those of our family about whom I had little information as well as more about family of whom I already had some answers. My apprehension was due to not knowing what kind of welcome we would receive and the quality of the information we would find.

On Sunday 4 May, we met up with other members of the group. The next day we had our first briefing meeting by ITS staff.

The people there were so warm and inviting and they seemed as nervous as we were. This put me at ease. We were then introduced to our research assistants. One researcher was allocated to a pair of visitors. Liz James, my colleague from Melbourne, paired with me and we even had two research assistants, who divided the work in half day sessions.

They were so helpful and could not do enough for us. I was so lucky to pair with Liz who spoke some German. Together with a little help with three amazing translators who roamed the room, we all hit it off wonderfully. It really felt like there was no language barrier.

I was asked by some of our co-researchers whether I was upset or really devastated when I found some distressing information. My feelings were that whatever happened in the past cannot be changed and, as terrible as the events were that brought us here, I was so glad to find out whatever information the ITS held on our family members. Every small piece of information added to my knowledge about their fate. It meant that at last, after all these years, I had some answers however meager they might be.

My grandmother, Soche Rechtschafner (nee Feiweil), had a sister we knew as Regina. Regina's husband, Herman Unger, died of typhus in Gurs camp in the south of France. We never knew what happened to Regina and her three-year-old daughter Marguerite.

My first breakthrough was to find out that Regina's Hebrew name was Rivka and that she was sent on a transport with her daughter to Auschwitz. There was no further information on Marguerite, so I have to assume that as she was three years of age, she was sent to her death. Rivka was sent on another transport where she perished before the transport arrived at its destination. It is not the outcome I wanted, but our family finally had an answer.

Again my late mother-in law, Judy, had lost all her family during the war. She was smuggled as a 15 year-old out of her town of Kutny to Czernovice (now in Ukraine) and never saw her family again. My second big breakthrough was to find a document relating to her grandmother, Rivka Druck. Albert Jurblum was my father-in-law's brother and we knew that he survived the war and that he had later found my father-in-law and his wife in Israel.

We also knew that they had all lived together in Paris but my husband and his sister had no idea that Albert had been in four concentration camps. After I was taken to the so-called 'Camp Room' at the ITS and shown the drawer and envelope that contained the original documents, I realised how much he must have suffered going through all of these camps and losing his first wife and child.

There were many members of our family where I had no success in finding information, but to find even a few important index cards or files was so precious to our family. What more can I say, but doing our family research at the Red Cross International Tracing Service was an incredible and memorable experience.

History of the ITS

Mission Statement: 'The International Tracing Service at Bad Arolsen (ITS) serves victims of Nazi persecutions and their families by documenting their fate through the archives it manages. The ITS preserves these historic records and makes them available for research.'

In 1943 on the initiative of the Allied Forces Headquarters at the British Red Cross in London the Department of International Affairs was transformed into a Tracing Bureau. The new service began with the task of tracing and registering missing persons.

As the year progressed and the outcome of the war became increasingly clear to the Allies, more exact investigations into the situation of prisoners, forced labourers and refugees in Central Europe were carried out. This task was undertaken by SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces), which established the Central Tracing Bureau on February 15, 1944. The location of the bureau moved along with the Front, from London to Versailles, and then on to Frankfurt am Main, to begin with the work of repatriating the first wave of liberated prisoners and deportees.

Concern for the care and immediate repatriation of these people led to the creation of assembly centres, where Displaced Persons (DPs) were housed until they could be returned to their homelands.

The UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration) carried out the principle task of caring for and repatriating the millions of non-German refugees, from the end of the war until June 30, 1947.

Meanwhile, in January 1946, the humanitarian organisation was moved to Bad Arolsen, because of its central location between the four occupation zones and because its infrastructure was still intact.



The ITS headquarters in Bad Arolsen

On July 1, 1947, the IRO (International Refugee Organization) took over the Central Tracing Bureau, giving it the new name "International Tracing Service" (ITS) on January 1, 1948, by which it is known today.

In April 1951, the ITS was placed under the management of HICOG (Allied High Commission for Germany).

While preparations were being made in 1954 to revoke Germany's status as occupied territory, steps were taken to ensure the continued existence of the ITS. The service was to remain under the umbrella of an international commission and would be managed by an entirely neutral institution, the ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) in Geneva.

Based on a petition made to the president of the ICRC, Dr. Paul Ruegger, by the then German Federal Chancellor and Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, Dr. Konrad Adenauer, the ICRC agreed to take over the direction and administration of the ITS.

From: <http://www.its-arolsen.org/en/homepage/index.html>



Gary Binetter (Sydney)

It was very exciting to be part of the first group of genealogists to visit the International Tracing Service at Bad Arolsen, Germany.

I did not expect to make any great discoveries, nor did I (at least, not as yet: I'm still sifting through the information I obtained). My main motivation for going was to ensure I had covered all bases. I didn't want to always wonder whether there was something there that could assist my research and I had not bothered to confirm that there was or there wasn't.

After a thorough introduction to ITS we met our assistant. Each pair of us shared an assistant who guided us through the codes, files and different archives. I was lucky to have Lionel Sharpe as my partner. Unfortunately our assistant did not speak a single word of English. I speak some German and we managed to muddle through. In any case there were other staff and interpreters available to assist us and everyone went out of their way to do so.

There were two things that I did want to find out. My late grandfather Laci (Ladislav) Polak never knew what happened to his brother Josef, nor did my late grandmother Irma Polak know what happened to her brother, Ernst Baumhorn.

I found out that Ernst had initially been transported to Auschwitz. I actually held the original transport list with his name on it, signed by the camp authority and sealed with a swastika stamp. You can imagine the emotions I felt. Ernst was later moved to Dachau where he died the day after Liberation.

I was unable to find any information about Josef but at least I now know that the information is not there.

The trip to ITS was a moving and worthwhile experience and I would highly recommend it. It was also an interesting experience for the staff of ITS. Many of them have been dealing with bits of paper for many years (there are over 50 million pieces of paper stored at ITS). They saw some of our group crying and others jumping for joy at their discoveries and they understood how important their work is. The names on the lists became real people.



Lionel Sharpe (Melbourne)

I still recall that moment last January when I read, 'Avotaynu is sponsoring a trip of not more than 40 genealogists to do research at the ITS...'. Annita and I had already planned to visit relatives in Paris that month, so I requested a week's leave from our French family invitations.

It wasn't until the train headed east, for the seven hour journey from Paris to Bad Arolsen, that strong feelings of ambivalence about the visit overwhelmed me.

I recalled that my wife's grandmother had departed on a train in March 1943 moving in that same direction but under very different circumstances. She had been herded into Convoy 52 and was taken to a certain death in a concentration camp. I was travelling in first class comfort to seek out any small snippets of information about her grandmother, uncles, aunts and cousins, after so many years of questioning. But I of course, had a return ticket!

I was thinking - what if I found no new facts about their deaths? Would I disappoint the family? And what about her late uncle Bernard, who did return from the concentration camps and never spoke about his experiences to his family. Was I to be a voyeur and reveal that which he wanted to spare his daughter and grandsons?

Yet the other part of me was saying - 'Just a minute, you are joining a group of Jewish genealogical enthusiasts from around the world, who, while sharing their discoveries and disappointments, will be opening the doors of the ITS for future researchers. Surely one must put one's emotions aside when such an opportunity knocks on the door'.

What an opportunity this became! Our initial reception by the ITS staff was one of care and interest. Their dedication in meeting all our research needs, despite the language barrier facing those of us who did not speak German, to the final feedback session, was extraordinary. To this I must add the camaraderie of this international group of which I was one of six Australians who made the long journey. I was fortunate to pair for the week with Gary Binetter whom I had only recently met briefly on a visit to Sydney. His basic German was of great assistance.

I now ask myself - was my mission a success? On all fronts I can answer an unequivocal "Yes". Before departure many friends had provided me with names for searching and this broadened the scope of my research.

One personal discovery stands out. My 95 year old Warsaw born mother-in-law always wondered what had happened to her brother, Maurice. He had served in the French Foreign Legion and had returned to Poland from France just before the war. Nothing further had been heard about his fate. I was successful in finding his name and birth date on a list of Jews in the Polish town of Sandomierz.

I could now tell her with certainty that he was still alive in December 1941 and further research has now revealed. This example was just one of the many positives arising from this unique event on my genealogical journey.

Contact Information

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WEBSITE: www.its-arolsen.org/en/homepage/index.html

For general enquiries visit:

http://www.its-arolsen.org/en/contact_information/contact_form/index.html

Useful information about the ITS can be found on the website of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.



Well renowned genealogist and editor of 'Avotaynu', Dr Sallyann Amdur Sack, (left) assisted by interpreter, Margit Vogt (standing).



The Bad Arolsen group May 5th-9th 2008

Photo courtesy Janet Isenberg (far right)



Scanning of documents is a major undertaking at the ITS.

In the past enquiries took up to three years to process and By 2006 there was still a backlog of 140,000 enquiries. This has now been reduced to 13,000 and the turnaround time is about eight weeks. Not all records will be digitised until 2010 and very important T/D files (Trace Document files) will not be available until late 2009.



Gary Mokotoff , outstanding leader of American Jewish genealogy and organizer of the visit, distributing buttons on Yom Ha'atzmaut He recently wrote: "When the buttons arrived I stared at them. They reminded me that we were going to a country that once forced our relatives to wear yellow Jewish stars and ironically now we were going to that country willingly wearing blue Jewish stars."