

**Research Methods in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century
American Jewish Genealogy
Presenter: Rachel Unkefer**

Main Points of Presentation

- **In the mid-19th century, think of your research subjects as Americans 1st, Jews 2nd**
 - Few official religious records available, some communities no official institutions

- **Geography: Ignore it at your peril**
 - State lines are not magic boundaries
 - Outside of large urban areas, counties are main unit of geography
 - Remember in the 19th and 20th centuries the population is highly mobile
 - Acquaint yourself with the history, economics of local area (industries)

- **Some of the best resources are not online**
 - Local historical societies
 - Local public libraries
 - Historical society journals/publications
 - Academic publications, dissertations, etc.
 - University libraries, archives, and special collections
 - State libraries
 - Newspaper archives
 - Local synagogues/nursing homes (ask about elderly long-time residents)
 - Interlibrary loan is your friend

- **Look sideways at siblings, neighbors, etc. (chain migration)**
 - In census, city directories, etc. pay close attention to others in the vicinity
 - If your ancestor's obituary didn't list a hometown, his brother's might!

- **Sources of birthplace/hometown information:**
 - Headstones
 - Obituaries
 - Local History Books (especially around 1880)
 - Articles in historical society journals
 - Birthplaces of Neighbors/Relatives
 - Network with other researchers

- **Share, give back**
 - Donate copies of photos, business records to local historical societies, archives

Online Resources (Free)

U.S. GenWeb (<http://www.usgenweb.org>)

- Local sources of information (addresses, phone numbers, etc.)
- Volunteers who will do lookups
- Message boards, surname registries, searchable archives
- Insight into geography, local history
- Organized by state, then county

Used book sites, price comparisons (<http://used.addall.com>)

- Search for town name, county name for local histories

WorldCat (<http://www.worldcat.org>)

- Search for physical locations of books and journals in libraries worldwide
- Request via interlibrary loan from your local library

Center for Jewish History—New York City (<http://www.cjh.org>)

- Umbrella organization for 5 Jewish institutions: American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardi Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, Yeshiva University Museum, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research
- Searchable database for all 5 collections simultaneously
- Some require a visit to NYC, others are digital and online or copies can be requested

American Jewish Archives—Cincinnati, Ohio (<http://americanjewisharchives.org>)

- Online catalog
- Microfilms of the American Israelite newspaper from 1854-1927. Although this paper was published in Cincinnati, it contained news articles, obituaries, etc. from all over the U.S.
- Some institutional records (synagogue minute books, records of sisterhoods, brotherhoods, fraternal organizations, etc.)
- With exact dates and names, archivists will send copies for a fee. For larger projects, visit the archive in person
- Malcolm Stern's book "First American Jewish Families" scanned pages online (<http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/fajf/intro-how.php>)

LDS Church (Mormons) Website

- Transcriptions and abstracts of records, some digitized records
<https://familysearch.org/search>
- Catalog of microfilmed records worldwide, organized geographically
<https://familysearch.org/catalog-search>

Cyndi's List (<http://www.cyndislist.com>)--Massive index of thousands of genealogy websites

Find A Grave (<http://www.findagrave.com>)--Searchable index of cemeteries, some images of stones, many Jewish cemeteries

Italian Genealogy New York City Vital Record Indexes (<http://www.italiangen.org/VRECLIST.stm>)

- For all boroughs of New York City
- Deaths: Manhattan 1868-1894, Brooklyn 1862-1897, All Boroughs 1898-1948
- Grooms Index: Kings County 1864-1907, Manhattan 1866-1907, Richmond 1898-1907, Bronx 1898-1907, Queens 1905-1907, New York City (All Boroughs) 1908-1937
- Bride Index: Bronx 1899-1937, Kings 1871-1937, Manhattan 1866-1937, Richmond 1898-1937, Queens 1905-1937
- Marriages: Nassau County 1908-1936, Suffolk County 1908-1935
- Births: Kings and Manhattan: 1880-1900, All Boroughs 1880-1909
- With exact date, microfilms of registers can be ordered from your local FHL (Mormons)

Fee-Based Websites

Ancestry (<http://www.ancestry.com>)

- Passport applications
- Military Draft Records

Fold3 (<http://www.fold3.com>)

- Military Records
- City Directories

General Books for Early American Jewish Historical Background

American Judaism: A History, by Jonathan D. Sarna, Yale University Press, 2005

We Lived There Too: In Their Own Words and Pictures Pioneer Jews and the Westward Movement of America 1630-1930 by Kenneth Libo and Irving Howe, St. Martins Press, 1985

A Time for Planting: The First Migration, 1654-1820 (The Jewish People in America) by Eli Faber, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992

A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880 (The Jewish People in America) by Hasia R. Diner, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992

A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920 (The Jewish People in America) by Gerald Sorin, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992

The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South by Eli N. Evans, The University of North Carolina Press, 2005