

## Lecture Topics *updated 3/13/2025*

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- A variety of topics are informative and educational.
- Content is flexible and can be delivered as stand-alone lecture, ongoing course, workshop, mentoring, or other formats.
- Ellen will travel out of state, conduct live webinars, or provide mp4 recordings.
- For established topics, the base speaking fee is \$300-\$500 depending on the topic and prep time. The standard length is 20-60 minutes with an optional Q&A period and handout.
  - \$100 will be added to the base fee for Zoom or Room events that are recorded and made available for up to 60 days behind a paywall on a password-protected member website.
  - For Colorado presentations, \$50 will be added for venues located over thirty miles away.
  - For out-of-state lectures, please inquire about travel expenses.
  - New topics can be developed upon request and are priced higher than the base.
  - Additional fees are added for keynotes, workshop, or multi-day event formats, lengthier presentation slots, large audiences, and rush engagements.
- All handouts, slides, recordings, and script are copyright protected.

#### **Additional lecture topics can be developed upon request.**

**Bio:** Ellen Kowitt is founder and principal genealogist at Sole Searching Genealogy & Historical Research. Specializing in American records and Jewish ancestry, she is a frequent presenter at national conferences and has published articles in *Family Tree Magazine* and *Avotaynu: The International Journal on Jewish Genealogy*. Topics include getting started in Jewish genealogy, methodology, Jewish institutional records, comparing Jewish resources on the genealogy giant websites, Russian Empire research, and Holocaust in Ukraine. Ellen received her B.A. from Alfred University and spent twenty-five years working in marketing management and communications before transitioning into full-time research. She has completed the ProGen study program and several genealogical institutes, and Ellen is a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists. While accepting clients, she continues to volunteer and is JewishGen USA Research Division Director and D.A.R. Jewish Specialty Research National Vice Chair. In 2022, Ellen launched *Shul Records America* for JewishGen, a unique finding aid pointing to the location of synagogue records in over 130 repositories. Originally from New York and Washington DC, Ellen resides in Colorado with her husband and is mother to two college students. For more information and lecture dates, visit [www.EllenKowitt.com](http://www.EllenKowitt.com).

#### **I. *NEW in 2025!* Nancy Drew's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Guide to Foreign Language**

Solving family mysteries by accessing genealogy materials in foreign languages can be a challenge worth tackling. Adventure around the world with Nancy Drew books as a guide to explore various foreign language tools and resources including Google Translate, Deep-L, Steve Morse One-Step Tools, and Transkribus, as well as an introduction to developing custom multilingual chatbots with artificial intelligence technology.

## II. **NEW in 2025! The Ultimate Guide to Jewish Newspaper Access**

With digitization, optical character recognition (OCR), and artificial intelligence (ai) technology evolving at lightning speed, many historical Jewish newspapers can be accessed online; some are free and others for a fee! Where to look, how to navigate, and what to expect will be covered for online as well as offline materials. Differentiate between the many options available from finding aids to browsable images to names indexes and even translations, as we explore the National Library of Israel's *Historic Newspaper Press*, Library of Congress *Chronicling America*, Google, newspapers.com, newspaperarchive.com, *Genealogy Bank*, *Ancestry*, *FindMyPast*, *MyHeritage* and *JewishGen*.

## III. **U.S. Synagogue Records as a Genealogical Resource**

A primer on how to find synagogue records, what genealogical material they include, and what they look like. Finding synagogue records can be problematic and time consuming as they are hard to find, sometimes with errors in catalogs and a variety of ways materials are described. To make it easier, and in one place, JewishGen starts the search for you with *Shul Records America*. This new finding aid points to the location of American synagogue records. Launched in fall 2022 with over 1,250 collections identified to date and held at over 125 repositories, about 10% include URLs for digitized materials. Not only a historical resource but important as modern-day synagogues merge or close, *Shul Records America* also encourages congregations to preserve records with genealogical value.

## IV. **Surfing USA: Jewish Archival Collections**

Be inspired to locate unique Jewish genealogical gems found in American archives, universities, libraries, and on commercial websites. Demonstrating large and small collections found nationwide to provide a roadmap, learn how to uncover archival treasures utilizing WorldCat, Archivegrid, FamilySearch, Ancestry, and a variety of institutional catalogs. Examples will include American Jewish orphans, hospital patients, veterans, synagogue records, Jewish newspapers, and an introduction to navigating JewishGen's *Shul Records America* finding aid.

## V. **Endgame Genealogy**

Is it the journey or the destination? Many enjoy the process and camaraderie that comes along with the act of doing genealogy research. Others have goals to answer a specific question, find a living relative, build a family tree, or publish a book. But, what happens when you move onto other pursuits or suddenly depart midstream before completion? End of life planning typically does not include instructions for hard-earned and meaningful genealogy research. How would loved ones or fellow landsman find and navigate your online passwords, final version of a family tree, photos, acquired documents, translations, instructions on next steps, or manuscript in process? Let's explore big picture questions about setting expectations, create a planning checklist to ensure your intentions are honored, and start organizing today for tomorrow. This lecture will allow time for participants to share best practices.

**VI. Comparing Jewish Resources on the Genealogy Giant Websites (Ancestry, FamilySearch, MyHeritage, FindMyPast & JewishGen)**

Enjoy this comparative overview of Jewish record collections and research tools found on the global powerhouse websites referred to as “Genealogy Giants.” Comparing Ancestry, *FamilySearch*, *Findmypast*, and *MyHeritage*, this lecture includes many substantive record examples. Learn how each site can be helpful for documenting Jewish families and get tips on each site’s best features or challenges. Current *JewishGen* partnerships with *Ancestry* and *MyHeritage* are featured.

**VII. The Quest for Hidden Ancestors: Genealogy Tips from Nancy Drew**

For fans of the girl sleuth, or newcomers to her mysteries, this entertaining “then and now” lecture showcases genealogy resources found in the text of the classic Nancy Drew series which profoundly influenced generations of future genealogy enthusiasts. Contemporary digitized records, photographs, and maps, as well as archival collections, cemeteries, and newspapers that Nancy would use today are detailed. Join us on an adventure around the world exploring old and new tools of the trade including tackling foreign languages and finding clues and records in non-traditional places!

**VIII. Researching Jews in the Pale of Settlement**

Comprised of parts of modern-day Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine, east-central Poland, Latvia, and what is now the western Russian Federation, the Pale of Settlement was a western region of the Russian Empire from 1791 to 1917 where Jews were allowed to live and work. From market to mohel and melamed, an overview of roles and lifecycles within the Jewish community will be introduced including the synagogue and rabbi, the process of military conscription, and burial practices. Resources to document families will be introduced including JewishGen’s Communities Database, KehilaLinks, Yizkor Book Project, and research division websites; FamilySearch, J-Roots, Genealogy Indexer, reference books, government websites, and notable third parties such as Alex Krakovsky, TKGen, Chabad, and modern Jewish communities. Challenges in language will be addressed. Takeaway strategies to update your research plan for success.

**IX. Getting Started Tracing Your Jewish Roots**

Starting with yourself and working back through civil records is the same strategy for Americans of all faiths, but that is when the *meshuganah* fun begins with Jewish records. After identifying an immigrant and jumping the pond can be challenging with multiple languages, geographic border changes, and religious traditions to navigate. Explore strategies and resources for tracing Jewish families in the US and abroad including definitions of lifecycle events, naming patterns, archival collections, newspapers, web resources featuring *JewishGen* and elsewhere, documenting victims and survivors of the Holocaust, rabbinic dynasties, and more!

**X. What’s Jewish About Jewish Genealogy**

This variation on *Getting Started Tracing Your Jewish Roots* is designed for audiences who are not familiar with Jewish traditions and culture, Jewish languages, the Jewish calendar, naming patterns, religious denominations, and resources typically used for researching Jewish families.

#### **XI. Tips & Tricks for Navigating JewishGen**

JewishGen.org is the global home for Jewish genealogy with over thirty million searchable records and indexes, educational and language tools, networking, and more. This free website contains a wealth of treasures to navigate through the complexities of Jewish names and origins, but where to begin? Or what are you missing? Some geographical resources are valuable for researchers of any faith background and should not be overlooked. Join veteran Jewish records pro and Director of JewishGen's USA Research Division, Ellen Kowitt as she provides an overview and shares examples of hidden gems to help maximize your time and search.

#### **XII. Yosef, Yosel, Yekhiel, Joe: Navigating the Complexities of Jewish Given Names**

There are many name variations encountered in records during the search for a Jewish relative and linking them together to identify the same person can be a challenge. Learn about tools, resources, and patterns to guide your journey through alternate spellings, languages, nicknames, and more.

#### **XIII. An Overview of Jewish Records in the Golden Medina/USA**

Documenting Jewish communities in the United States not only includes Jewish cemeteries and synagogue memorial plaques, but also congregational records including vital records and Sephardic-liturgy Escabot lists, mohel registers, Jewish hospital and funeral home records, Jewish clubs and organizational materials, and more. This lecture showcases search techniques and websites where these Jewish genealogical gems may be found in archives, newspapers, rare books, or elsewhere. Featuring examples from the American Jewish Historical Society, the American Jewish Archives, regional Jewish historical society archives such as The Bremen Museum and DU's Beck Archive, state archives, *FamilySearch*, *WorldCat*, and more.

#### **XIV. Identifying Early American Jewish Families Pre-1880**

Similar to "An Overview of Jewish Records in the Golden Medina/USA" but focusing on the earliest Jewish communities in America prior to 1880. Methodology and sources for identifying individuals and families are explored.

#### **XV. Documenting Jewish Families or Communities Lost in the Holocaust by Bullets**

English speakers can learn details about what happened to relatives or a community in the Holocaust by Bullets. Knowing and sharing your story is more important than ever with modern-day anti-Jewish activities, and as a generation of survivors and eyewitnesses pass away. Review documentation from this important era including access to Russian Extraordinary Commission files; Yahad-In Unum eyewitness video; USC Shoah Foundation and other recorded survivor testimonies; Yizkor Books; Yad Vashem; USHMM; National Library of Israel; local community resources; and more.

**XVI. Babyn Yar Victims and Survivors Found in the Tracks of Smoke and Water**

Naming each of an estimated 100,000 victims at Kyiv's Babyn Yar ravine during 1941-1943 may never be possible, but through the work of academics and personal testimonies, stories about Jewish survivors and victims, prisoners of war, and others surface. Through exploration of the extraordinary tale of Yakov Kaper, who was one of 18 Jewish survivors at Babyn Yar, review available resources including military databases; the importance of survivor testimonies; detail and analysis presented by academics; archival materials in Ukraine and the U.S.; and future opportunities at the new Babyn Yar Museum as well as the National Museum of the History of Ukraine in the Second World War. This historical recap will navigate language challenges and feature materials in English.

**XVII. Shoestring Strategies for the Thrifty Genealogist**

Genealogy database subscriptions and retrieving foreign documents are expensive, and hiring professional researchers and translators are luxury products. What is a budget-conscious family historian to do? Fortunately, freebies, discounts, and shortcuts exist. Resources, methodology, and best practices will be shared. Whether you are a beginning researcher or seasoned veteran, spend time exploring tips and best practices to save money.

**XVIII. Inside America's Alligator Family: The David Crystal Story**

Presented as a case study based on a book by the presenter, *America's Alligator Family: The David Crystal Story* blends together snapshots of a family man and the NY clothing empire he founded, mixed with extended family chronicles, and highlights of company operations over seven decades. David Crystal Inc. was a major 20<sup>th</sup> century clothing manufacturer famously distributing IZOD Lacoste alligator apparel that defined the American polo-wearing era. This tale of resilience and tenacity is an extensively researched family genealogy originating in the east European shtetl of Jedwabne, Poland, formerly part of the Russian Empire when David and his ten siblings emigrated. Genealogy resources utilized and the process of writing and producing a family history book will be discussed.

**XIX. *COMING in 2026!* Update on Denver's Jewish Tuberculosis Hospital Records**

Thousands of immigrant Jews from throughout North American cities journeyed to Denver between 1898 and the 1950s chasing the cure for tuberculosis, and a gold mine of genealogical information was recorded in patient applications and supporting documents including birth places abroad, names of family members, occupations, death dates, and burial location. Sometimes, there are photos, signatures, newspaper clippings, handwritten notes from landsmanshaften or family members, inventories of belongings, and even health evaluations. All have been preserved, indexed by name, and are now being digitized. Access the documents, and learn colorful details about sanitarium life, personal drama, and redemption that you can add to your family narrative.