



## **How to conduct genealogical research in the Upper Midwest Jewish Archives**

### **Step 1: Getting Started**

*What should I know first?*

*Start with what you know.* Gather all of the full and partial names you know, dates and place of birth, dates and place of death, and dates and places of marriage.

*Ask your relatives.* Oftentimes pieces of different information is spread throughout the family. Ask family members if they have any documents – marriage licenses, birth or death certificates, citizenship papers. These will provide crucial details as you continue on your journey. Other artifacts such as photographs, diplomas, military papers, or prayer books can help as well. With older relatives, consider capturing an oral history to ensure family stories endure.

*Create a family tree.* This can be a very simple hand-drawn diagram, or more elaborate using online tools (such as those found on Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.com). This will help you visualize what information you know, how it's related, and what holes you may have.

*Ask yourself, what do I WANT to know?* Are you interested in zeroing in on one family member's history? Do you want to follow the family tree as high up as you can go? Do you want to know how your family arrived in America? After you determine what you *want* to know, ask yourself: what kind of records might provide this information? Where could I find that?

*Keep these things in mind:*

- When looking through sources, finding unvarying information is hard. Handwriting in naturalization records could accidentally change spelling, online transcription can sometimes be wrong, and people simply changed names over the years for various reasons. Therefore, consult various sources to ensure that you have accurate information.
- Birth dates were often not important to people in the past; do not expect age consistency in records.
- Last names are relatively recent additions to a person's name and changed over time. For example, Jews in Poland were not required to have surnames until the 1800s.
- In general, Ashkenazic Jews named family members after deceased relatives, while Sephardic Jews named family members after living grandparents. As you begin to populate family trees, remember that if you see a name of an elder appear in birth records for Ashkenazi Jews, the elder has probably passed away.



## **Step 2: Online resources**

*What can I find by myself online?*

There are many helpful resources that can be found online before you even step foot in any archives. These websites will help you flesh out more details as you continue your research. However, remember that not all information has been digitized and finding information will take extended effort, pulling from many sources.

### Need local birth and death records or state census records?

- Minnesota Historical Society has a simple **People Finder database** (<http://search.mnhs.org/?brand=people>) that searches for items across birth and death records, state census records, veteran grave registrations, World War I bonus records, as well as their own collection inventories of objects, books and photos. Some materials are freely available to search while others require a fee.
- Consult the **JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry** (<http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/cemetery/tree/cemlist.htm>) or **Find a Grave** (<http://www.findagrave.com/index.html>) to find where family members may have been buried. Tombstones will help you confirm birth and death dates and sometimes they would even list family member's names. You can also contact cemeteries and ask for pictures of tombstones if the cemetery is far from where you live.

### Need a federal census a census from states other than Minnesota?

- **Ancestry.com** provides access to many federal census records. This is a subscription-based website, however you can access the site for free from certain computer terminals at **Hennepin County Libraries** (<http://www.hclib.org/browse/online-resources?category=Genealogy-and-local-history>).
- **FamilySearch.org** also provides access to census records. Many of the search functions for historical records are free.
- **Stevemorse.org** is packed with information, including U.S. Census records, Canadian and British Census records, passenger manifests, and more. Some items are linked from Ancestry, so you do need a paid account with Ancestry, but even for these materials some find the search functions of SteveMorse.org easier to use than Ancestry.

### Want general newspaper information?

- Minnesota Historical Society has a **Newspaper Collection** (<http://sites.mnhs.org/library/content/newspaper-collection>), the largest single collection of Minnesota newspapers dating back to 1849. Some titles are only available on-site as print or microfilm, but others are freely available online through the **Minnesota Digital Newspaper Hub** (<http://newspapers.mnhs.org/>)



[web/mhsnews/web/imu.php?request=access](http://web/mhsnews/web/imu.php?request=access)). If you are looking for obituary records, look up the paper published one to three days after the date of death.

- Looking for newspapers outside of Minnesota? **Chronicling America** (<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/>) allows you to search America's historic newspapers from 1836 to 1922 for free.

Want naturalization papers or passenger departure and arrival records?

- **Online Searchable Naturalization Records and Indexes** (<http://www.germanroots.com/naturalization.html>) – many of these records still only exist in paper or on microfilm, but this website lists all of the available sites online, listed by state. Learn more about the process of naturalization and citizenship from **FamilySearch.org** ([https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Naturalization\\_and\\_Citizenship](https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/United_States_Naturalization_and_Citizenship)).
- **Ellis Island Foundation Inc.** (<http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org/>) – A common arrival place for immigrants who came between the 1890s and 1950s. Look for relative's names in the Ellis Island arrival database to determine when families came to the U.S. and who they stayed with once they arrived, as well as family members they left behind. Remember, however, that some people entered the U.S. unauthorized, and so written records may not be found.
- **Castle Garden** (<http://www.castlegarden.org/searcher.php>) – another point of entry for immigrants through New York from the 1850s until the 1890s when Ellis Island took over.

Looking for local business information?

- **Minneapolis City Directory Collection** (<http://box2.nmtvault.com/Hennepin2/>) – available through Hennepin County Library, this allows you to search through directories from 1859 to 1922.
- **St. Paul City Directories** ([https://www.fold3.com/title\\_665/city\\_directories\\_st\\_paul/](https://www.fold3.com/title_665/city_directories_st_paul/)) – available through Fold3 by Ancestry.com, does require a subscription. Physical copies of directories are available for free at the **St. Paul Central Library**. (<http://www.sppl.org/research/special-collections/saint-paul-collection/city-directories>).

Looking for general photographs?

- **Minnesota Reflections** (<http://reflections.mndigital.org/cdm/landingpage/collection/jhs>) – many of the photographs in the Upper Midwest Jewish Archives have been digitized and are available through this statewide repository.
- **Digital Public Library of America** (<http://dp.la>) – gathers digitized photographs from libraries, archives and museums across the United States.



Looking for information on Holocaust victims or survivors?

- **Yad Vashem Central Database of Shoah Victims' Names** (<http://db.yadvashem.org/names/search.html?language=en>) – here you can find the most comprehensive list of victims of persecution during the Holocaust.
- **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** (<http://www.ushmm.org/remember/the-holocaust-survivors-and-victims-resource-center/holocaust-survivors-and-victims-database>) – here you will find a database of names of victims as well as search archival items in their collection.
- **International Tracing Service records** (<https://www.its-arolsen.org/en/homepage/index.html>) – this is useful for locating survivors – the site houses interviews, transport lists, displaced persons lists, and more. For a fee, survivors and next of kin can file a request to obtain copies of records tracing survivors.

Need help translating materials?

- **JewishGen ViewMate** (<http://www.jewishgen.org/ViewMate/>) – this site allows JewishGen participants to post photographs and documents online and request help in translating or identifying information.
- **Stevemorse.org** (<http://stevemorse.org/>) – includes links to sites that help step-by-step with translating Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, Greek, and more.

**Step 3: Visit the archives**

*What can I find in the Upper Midwest Jewish Archives?*

**1. Search our archival collections**

- Visit our web page “**Search Collections**” (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/umja/where-begin>) to find a list of all of the collections for which we have inventories. You can use the search box to type in any search item you want, or you can scroll through the list of collections.
- **Family names** – search directly for known family names.
- **Synagogues** – do you know what synagogue your family attended? Look through the synagogues’ records. You will most likely not find a member file that includes your family name. However...
  - Could they have been active in a group (Sisterhood, Brotherhood, Youth Programs, local camps)? You could request those folders to look for family information.
  - Do you know the year they were confirmed? Look for confirmation files. Do you know when they were married? Look for synagogue bulletins for that year.
- **Social organizations** – could your family members have been active in social or advocacy organizations? We have plenty of records from local



organizations – B’nai B’rith, Hadassah, National Council of Jewish Women, Jewish Community Relations Council, Hillel, and more. Search the records during years you believe they may have been members.

- Not finding what you’re looking for? Contact the archivist. Not everything in the collection is currently in our searchable database; the archivist may be able to find something helpful for you. But also keep in mind that the archives was organically grown over the years – materials were kindly donated by families over time. What this means is that we have pockets of materials on Jewish families in the Midwest; *we do not have something on every family.*

## 2. **Search our book collection**

- Visit our web page “**Search Collections**” (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/umja/where-begin>) and use the Library Catalog search box specific to our book collection. This includes self-published or unpublished family history books that have been donated over the years. Search not only for your family name but broader family relations – cousins, in-laws, etc.
3. **Search UMedia** (<http://umedia.lib.umn.edu/node/752030>) – all of our digitized collections live here. Photographs, oral histories, and documents can be found with UMedia, which has materials from the Upper Midwest Jewish Archives as well as other collections at the University of Minnesota. Again, look for family names, social organizations, and more.
4. **Look at our special projects** (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/umja/special-projects>) – Our growing number of digital projects allow for a different understanding and interaction with our collections. Check the Upper Midwest Jewish Archives page for updates. Currently we have:
- Near Northside Minneapolis Map project (<http://z.umn.edu/umjamap>): This map illustrates an area of North Minneapolis, where many Jewish immigrant families lived, as it was during the 1920s. In this project we are attempting to pin information found online – from photos to oral histories – to locations illustrated on the map in order to better understand a neighborhood that has passed into memory.
  - **Minnesota’s Immigrants** (<http://immigrants.mndigital.org/>): The Minnesota's Immigrants project explores the stories of the citizens who have immigrated to Minnesota. Here you will find an oral history collection -- Soviet Women: "Old Lives, New Lives" Oral History project.



#### **Step 4: After my visit**

*What can I do to get support for my genealogical research?*

There are many groups, locally and nationally, that focus solely on genealogical research. Groups trade tips and help each other with their research and can be a valuable place to gain support for your research.

- **Jewish Genealogical Society** (<http://www.jewishgen.org>) – JewishGen is not only a valuable website with lots of links to helpful websites, it also has a vibrant community of users who can help when you get stuck.
- **Minnesota Genealogical Society** (<http://www.mngs.org/>) – not specific to Jewish genealogy but can help with navigating local sources.
- Minnesota Jewish Genealogical Society – newly formed group, information available through the **Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest** (<http://www.jhsum.org/>).
- Attend the annual Family History Fair at the Minneapolis Central Library – put on with support from the Minnesota Genealogical Society, groups from all over the state gather to discuss their research. Fair happens in the fall; watch Minnesota Genealogical Society website for more information.

*Where else can I look for archival materials?*

- **Center for Jewish History** (<http://www.cjh.org/>) - home to five prominent Jewish organizations: the American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardi Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, Yeshiva University Museum, and Yivo Institute for Jewish Research. Includes lots of information on how to conduct genealogy research.
- **American Jewish Historical Society** (<http://www.ajhs.org/>) – as the oldest national ethnic historical organization in the United States, AJHS has a plethora of archival materials as well as exhibits and publications that allow you to put your research into context to understand the Jewish American experience.
- **Feinstein Center for American Jewish History, Temple University** (<http://www.cla.temple.edu/feinsteincenter/resources/>) – They host a Database of American Jewish Historical Repositories, this will help you find other archives across the United States that collect Jewish history materials.
- **Portal to American Jewish History** (<http://www.jewsinamerica.org/>) – a database that searches across Jewish historical societies and archives for digitized collections.
- **JewishGen Family Finder** (<http://www.jewishgen.org/JGFF/>) – hosted on the Jewish Genealogical Society website, search for other researchers who may be researching parts of your family tree (requires account but is free).



### Keep in mind ...

Genealogy research is hard! You will not find everything you need online, nor will you find it all in just one library. If you can, visit other archives as well. Locally, the **Minnesota Historical Society** (<http://www.mnhs.org/>) has a wide variety of helpful materials. In the University of Minnesota's Archives and Special Collections you may find materials in the **Immigration History Research Center Archives** (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/ihrca>), or **University Archives** (<https://www.lib.umn.edu/uarchives>), if a family member is an alum. Visit your local library and read up on the places and cultures your family came from. Talk to your family members and try to learn more.

At the Upper Midwest Jewish Archives we are constantly adding to our collections, digitizing existing collections, and creating helpful and interactive tools for people to understand our collections. We encourage you to continue to return and explore our holdings.

Good luck!