

You Can't Find the Records – Now What? What to do When the Records You Need Don't Exist or Can't Be Found

I. Overview

This is a discussion of alternative sources, with the assumption that one or more original records from a primary informant do not exist to answer your research question

- Don't forget to check nearby jurisdictions – the event you are searching may have taken place in a jurisdiction other than where you have looked.
- Ensure you are being flexible in your online searching and are checking multiple websites; some records must be ordered through the mail or viewed onsite

II. Methodology Overview

- GPS, Sources, Information and Evidence
 - Use *indirect evidence* to answer research questions when direct evidence isn't available.
 - Some of alternative records may be “lower quality” records – derivative or authored works, with secondary or unknown informants, but that doesn't necessarily mean they aren't true – need to verify, use as hints.
- Note that even if you “can” find the sources, these additional resources can still enhance your research and should be part of the “reasonably exhaustive search.”

III. Obituaries – found in newspapers, funeral homes and obituary aggregator websites (e.g., Legacy.com, Canadian - <https://www.genealogiequebec.com/necro/home>)

- May list ages, family members (including living relatives), residences
- Informants usually unknown – likely family, but errors and misspellings may be due to the obituary writer
- Military – Fold3, websites honoring fallen soldiers in specific wars

Example – site (in Russian) honoring Jewish soldiers who died in the Red Army:

“Memorial - In Memory of Jewish Warriors Lost in the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945” - created by Alexander Zaslavsky of Ashkelon, Israel) - <http://jmemory.org/Memorial/Memorial.htm>.

British Jews in The First World War - We Were There Too - <https://www.jewsfww.uk/index.php>

IV. Cemeteries and Funeral Homes

- Large cemetery websites – Findagrave, Billiongraves, JOWBR and Jewishdata.
- Mitzvatemet.com – a commercial grave maintenance service that has photos and translations of gravestones in the former Soviet Union, mainly Belarus and Ukraine.
- Some cemeteries have listings of burials, but no photos:

<https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/krosno/NYCEM.htm> has a list of New York cemeteries that fall into this category

- Smaller cemeteries may have been inventoried and cataloged independently – especially true in Canada. Google the cemetery name
- Cemeteries may be willing to photograph headstones for a small donation, or can request from larger sites (may need to wait)
- Funeral homes can provide background information or clarify discrepancies.

You Can't Find the Records – Now What? What to do When the Records You Need Don't Exist or Can't Be Found

- Can contact JOWBR compilers/transcribers for further information. Email Nolan Altman (JewishGen) for contact information/permission.
 - Caveat: Gravestones are frequently inexact and not entirely accurate
- V. Wills and probate** – Ancestry and FamilySearch (many of the latter unindexed)
- If will isn't available, check local newspapers for summaries (subject to error)
 - UK Probate calendar – summaries of probated wills
- VI. Historical Newspapers**
- Source of obituaries, birth and marriage announcements, legal transactions (including real estate trades, probate summaries), local news and gossip (society pages – include trips, changes of residence), military postings of local residents.
 - Jewish/ethnic newspaper collections – *Canadian Jewish Review*, *Chicago Sentinel*, *Jewish Chronicle* (UK), *Detroit Jewish News*
 - Overseas newspapers, e.g., Latvia *Periodika* website
 - Where to find: Ancestry, newspapers.com, Chronicling America, MyHeritage, ProQuest, libraries, universities, historical societies, archives, etc.
 - National Library of Israel, Tel Aviv University, "Historical Jewish Press", <http://web.nli.org.il/sites/JPress/English/Pages/default.aspx> - Includes *The Sentinel* (Chicago) and *B'nai B'rith Messenger*
 - Ancestor Hunt list of Historical Jewish American Newspapers Online <https://bit.ly/2RpYhXy>
- VII. Holocaust resources**
- Yad Vashem – Pages of Testimony – filled out by relatives, town survivors
 - Other documents – often not sourced – check Yad Vashem Archives – "residence lists", etc.
 - Country-specific resources, e.g., Latvian Names and Fates <http://names.lu.lv/en.html>
 - Yizkor books and testimonies – who wrote the YB, did they know your family, was it a person or committee?
 - Memorial websites – Kehilalinks and other external projects, e.g., Shtetl Shkud and Mosedis Shtetl Project
- Sources of Yizkor books: Libraries – academic and other
1. NYPL digitized copies - <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/yizkor-book-collection#/?tab=about>
 2. Yiddish Book Center - <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/collections/yizkor-books/city-or-town>
 3. JewishGen Yizkor Book Project - <https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/>
- VIII. City and Business Directories**
- Business and residential addresses, occupation, other family members
 - New directories being digitized all the time
 - Many sources – Ancestry.com, university collections, public libraries (e.g., NYPL, LAPL), Internet Archive (archive.org), Logan Kleinwaks' Genealogy Indexer, JewishGen
 - Search Google "<city name> historical city directory"
 - Examples of foreign directories:

You Can't Find the Records – Now What? What to do When the Records You Need Don't Exist or Can't Be Found

1. Genealogy Indexer holds searchable business directories, telephone books, etc. from various countries in Europe and Russia: <http://genealogyindexer.org/>
2. 1930 Libau/Liepaja Firm and Trade List: <https://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Liepajalat/Liepajalat.htm>
3. JRI-Poland – 1929 Polish Business Directory <https://jri-poland.org/bizdir/start.htm>

IX. Passports and Passport Applications

- U.S. Passport applications on Ancestry and FamilySearch
- Foreign passports – internal or otherwise – e.g., Latvia and LitvakSIGs, Yad Vashem
- Also as artifacts (privately held)
- May be the only photo you have of an ancestor.
- Availability and format varies by jurisdiction.

X. Voter Lists – domestic and overseas

- Source of residency, age, occupation – males only prior to women's suffrage
- US (selected states, including CA – FS has index), Canada, UK –Ancestry.com; Duma and other Russian Empire, Grodno Gubernia 1912 Voters List – JewishGen SIGs; Knesset voter lists - Israeli Genealogy Research Association (IGRA).

XI. JDC Archives – reports, lists, descriptions of places (mainly post-WWI), photos.

Name search: <http://names.jdc.org>

Database search: <http://search.archives.jdc.org/>

XII. Genealogy reports, family trees, local histories

- Many family trees copy the same information multiple times over from unverified trees; use as hints.
- Tracing descendants/living relatives – Google, MyHeritage and Ancestry trees, obituaries naming living relatives
- Are trees, genealogy reports and local histories sourced?
- Use local histories for background, possible family references
- Local history sources: Internet.org, public libraries, heritage websites, local societies

XIII. Miscellanea

- Use Google search
- Wide range of digitized books on various topics (Google Books and others), e.g., Nova Scotia legal “private act” for name change, UK Jewish Year Book 1907 (section on synagogues and their officers), UC Berkeley graduation programs, Report of the Immigration Commission on steerage conditions (1911). Note that Google Books may have copies that are available elsewhere, on the website of the body that originated the item, in a format that may be easier to use.
- Internet Archive (archive.org) can be a source of unexpected treasures

XIV. Letters, photos, artifacts, personal effects

- Ketuba – Hebrew/Yiddish names, names of parents
- Photos with captions (names and dates). It pays to have others professionally evaluated – note photographers' stamps