

Venturing Into Our Past

JGSCV

The newsletter of the Jewish Genealogical Society of
the Conejo Valley & Ventura County



2025, Q1

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Greetings Jewish Genealogy enthusiasts,

I hope that you enjoyed our recent meetings that are summarized in this newsletter. Please note our September presenter, Marlene Trestman, has a newsletter about the history of The Jewish Orphan's Home of New Orleans. You may view it at <https://marlenetrestman.com> under *News & Newsletters*. A free subscription to the newsletters can be found at the end of her current issue. Several members won copies of her book "Most Fortunate Unfortunates" at our holiday party in January.

I recently attended a talk by Elizabeth Keating, Professor of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin. She authored "The Essential Questions: Interview Your Family to Uncover Stories and Bridge Generations." Many of us, as family historians and genealogists, lament the fact that we didn't ask our parents and other family members questions about their history. Well, to paraphrase the comics character Pogo – "we have met the ancestors, and they are us." Many of us are the "older generation" that can share history with the next generation. Elizabeth advises projecting yourself into the past and then record your earliest memories: first house; social life; evening meals; school days; and many other unique recollections. I'm sure that your kids, grandkids and other family members would be interested about your "deprived days" before microwaves, DVRs, and the internet. As Elizabeth says, the data gathering process begins with *us* as the interview subjects. Use cell phones to record videos and computers to prepare PowerPoint demonstrations to share what we know with our families.

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

Mission Statement: JGSCV is a non-profit organization run by enthusiastic volunteers dedicated to the sharing of genealogical information, techniques, and research tools with those interested in Jewish genealogy and family history. Members include beginners and experienced genealogists who share with each other.

WWW.JGSCV.ORG

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, continued:

Speaking of technology, we had a few interesting glitches with our first attempts toward hybrid meetings. Our initial one in September had to be cancelled due to the unexpected illness of our presenter. (We scheduled an alternate speaker later in September who provided a Zoom-only talk.) Our next hybrid meeting was scheduled for January, but unforeseen events interrupted our online offerings. Numerous power outages in Thousand Oaks left us without power in the morning. Though it was restored by noon, the internet remained non-functional. Fortunately, we were able to hold the meeting in person. Our speaker, Hal Bookbinder, gave his live talk that day and a week later, graciously repeated a Zoom session for attendees shut out of the initial meeting. Our most recent attempt at a hybrid meeting also did not go as planned. Our speaker's laptop was unable to connect his Apple laptop to the library Wi-Fi. We improvised and used a camera to mirror his PowerPoint session on Zoom. Regardless of these complications, we are committed to providing both hybrid and Zoom-only presentations in the future. We hope to give every member an opportunity to experience our meetings.

RootsTech is one of the largest genealogical conferences in the world. The three-day event is a "one-stop-shop" for all things genealogical, including class sessions, product demos, and the chance to connect with other family researchers. According to the FamilySearch website, "RootsTech has always been a celebration of connection—past, present, and future." The dates of the conference are March 6 -8, 2025. See the conference agenda and register for free online attendance at: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/rootstech/>

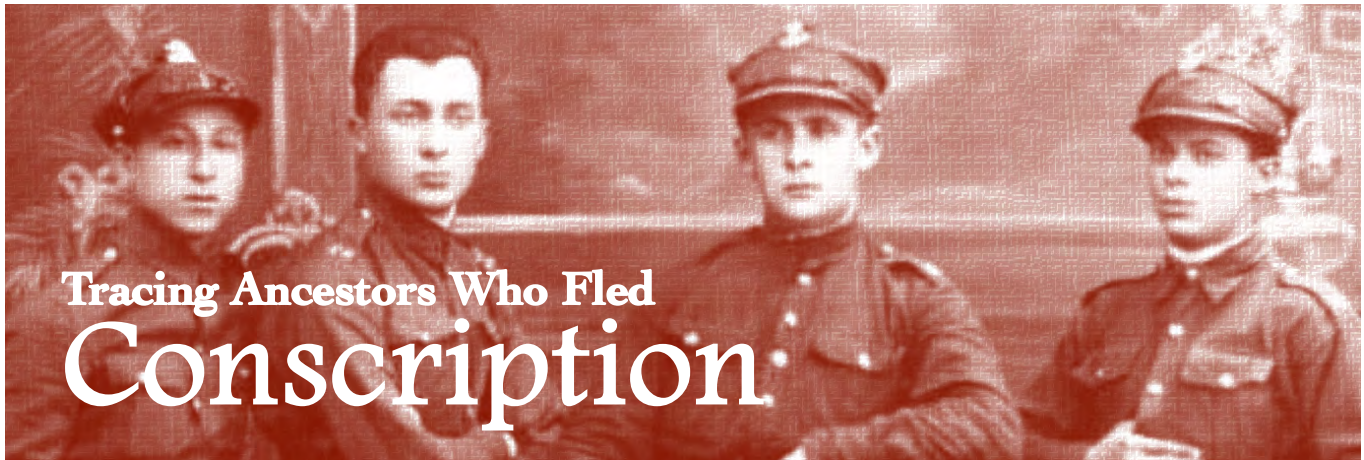
I look forward to seeing you at our next Zoom meeting on March 9 at 1pm, "Tracing Ancestors Who Fled Conscription in the Russian Empire" with David Brill. See page 3 for details.

We also continue to work with the Thousand Oaks library to shelve the books from our former traveling library, making them available during library hours. The books were previously only seen at in-person meetings. These books, and many others, are shelved and indexed in the TO library genealogy reference and lending library sections.

I would like to thank all the members of the Board of Directors for their invaluable assistance during my first year as JGSCV President. You can see their names on the banner to the left of this letter. Furthermore, thanks to David Oseas, our webmaster, for maintaining and updating our website. Finally, I'd like to acknowledge Jan Meisels Allen for her many years as JGSCV President, and leaving the organization in such fine shape.

Am Yisrael Chai.

**Issie Perel,
JGSCV President**



in the Russian Empire



David Brill

Sunday, March 9, 2025

1pm on ZOOM

www.JGSCV.org for membership, news, projects and links.

The reign of Tsar Nicholas I (1825-1855) is infamous in Russian Jewish history for the brutal conscription of minor boys. This presentation explores ways to connect the “runaway” to his birth family using strategies including analyzing revision lists, 19th century Russian-language documents, multi-generational name comparisons, and genetic genealogy. David uses his own ancestors who fled their shtetls as children in the 1830’s-1840’s, to show how genealogy can piece together the stories of their journeys.

A self-taught translator of pre-revolutionary Russian-language genealogical records, **David R. Brill** manages the Rovno District Jewish Records Project for JewishGen’s Ukraine Research Division, and is the JewishGen town leader for his ancestral shtetl of Tuchin, Ukraine. A longtime member of the Jewish Genealogical and Archival Society of Greater Philadelphia, David coordinates its Russian Interest Group. David has been researching his family history for over 30 years and is a civil engineer with the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration.

ABOUT FACE

JEWISH REFUGEES IN THE ALLIED FORCES

*JGSCV's December meeting with
Director/Producer/Writer
Steve Karras*



By Diane Goldin

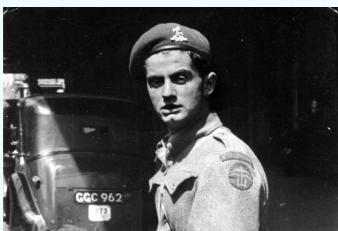
JGSCV hosted a documentary screening and follow-up discussion with Steve Karras, creator of *About Face: Jewish Refugees in the Allied Forces*.

Steve had never made a film prior to this one, though he'd studied filmmaking at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and worked as a production assistant.

His interest in WWII Jewish refugees first began in 1984 at summer camp. It was then that his counselor shared the story of his father, a refugee from Germany who'd enlisted and fought as an American soldier. It was an anecdote that Steve never forgot. Later, the movie *Saving Private Ryan* similarly sparked his curiosity about his family's personal stories. He began to seek information about Jewish experiences outside of the suffering during the Holocaust. What he discovered is the lesser known, but deeply compelling stories, of Jews who fought back.

He queried veteran websites to locate Jewish soldiers who'd escaped Nazi Europe but then returned to fight it with the allies. He spoke to a distant relative who put him in touch with someone who knew many people willing to share their stories. These veterans had served in a multitude of capacities, from combat to artillery, and in Intelligence. Steve was riveted, and began to spend all his discretionary income and free time interviewing these men and women.

By 2009, he'd completed a ten-year initiative and conducted over 2000 hours of interviews with WWII veterans. His film began to take shape. He focused on 12 of the stories (sidenote: only two of the veterans are still alive, one of whom is now 98 years old!) He also ordered and sifted through archival footage -- a painstaking task before digitization. Those of us who saw the film appreciated how seamlessly his photos and videos supported his subject's stories.



Peter Masters, born in Vienna, Austria
3 Troop 10 Commando BR



Adelyn Bonin, born in Berlin, Germany
502 MAC ATS, British 8th Army

After giving background on the movie's production, Steve responded to questions from the audience. One member shared that her brother in Alaska is a fan and familiar with both the movie *About Face* and Steve's book, *"The Enemy I Knew: German Jews in the Allied Military in World War II"* (Zenith Press, 2010.) Another held up a video and a book that tell the story of about 5,000 soldiers, including her father, who served in the British Brigade. Her father served in both Libya and Italy. Steve was interested in reviewing her materials about her dad. He said the Brigades were involved in heroics both during and after the war, helping refugees make safe passage to then-Palestine.

Steve shared that his film was honored with the Audience Award at the Stoneybrook Arts Festival. When asked if he'd received criticism of his work, he said fortunately not. His worst critic is himself. He fretted about the movie's pace and whether to use a narrator, ultimately so grateful to have used the vocal talent of Peter Coyote for his film.

We agreed that one of the film's most poignant moments was the reveal that one of the veterans married a woman he'd liberated from a death camp. She'd identified herself ashamedly as a Jew, and he'd been brought to tears. "I am Jewish too" he told her.

We concluded our meeting with praise for Steve's film. He said it had been a passion project and that many things aligned in the world for him to create and complete it. We are all grateful for the finished product.

Movie Synopsis

A compelling and touching film tells the story of young German-born Jewish men and women who escaped certain death at the hands of the Nazis...and who later returned to fight Hitler and his minions across Europe and North Africa.

Told through the stories of these brave soldiers (in their 80s and 90s when interviewed), the film chronicles the journey from Nazi scapegoats, to refugees —and finally— to Allied soldiers and spies. It is a significant and fascinating piece of the history of this epic conflict.

The movie is available on DVD at
<https://xenonpictures.com/wp/about-face/>
and also for streaming (free) on Amazon Prime Video.

Hal Bookbinder presents: A Murder in Boston's West End

January Meeting Re-Cap

by Diane Goldin

Our January meeting was special for being our first in-person since 2023, as well as our first ever at the Thousand Oaks Library. We also had the pleasure of Hanukkah treats while hearing the fascinating research of our guest speaker, our very own, Hal Bookbinder.

“A Murder in Boston's West End” is the story of Hal's cousin, Louis Tennis. Hal thought he knew the details of Louis' life until he stumbled on a 1910 Census that listed his cousin as imprisoned at Massachusetts State Prison. This detail surprised Hal and fueled research to learn about his cousin's story. He discovered that his relative had been previously married, as well as arrested, tried, and sentenced for murdering his young son. Eventually his cousin would be pardoned, and go on to remarry, father children, and live a decent life.

Louis Tennis was from a branch of Hal's family that settled in the Boston area known as its West End. Hal's grandmother was second cousins with Louis, making Hal and Louis 2nd cousins twice removed.

Louis' father arrived here in the 1890s and then sent for his family a few years later. Louis came with his mother and three siblings. Hal made a point to note Louis' age varies on documents that chart his early life in the US. For example, it appears his family may have passed him off as 2 years younger to get a price break on ship fare.



Louis Tennis (28)

Mally Tennis (26)

Louis married Mally Ascnazy in 1902. Again, Hal noted that both Louis and Mally's names appear in documents and news articles with an array of spellings. Mally's name appears as Mally/Molly/Mollie and her surname, Ascnazy, shows up differently almost every time it's printed.

Hal was able to create a timeline of what happened between Louis and Mally's marriage and Louis' incarceration. Local newspapers chronicled the death of their son, Philip, just shy of his fourth birthday. Mally had served Louis with divorce papers and Louis was in a state of despair. He showed up at Mally's parents' home with a gun and fired it. One article quoted Mally as saying her corset stays stopped a bullet from hitting her. Unfortunately, a bullet did hit their young son, and he later died from his injuries.

Louis was unaware that he'd killed his son, and as he recovered from a self-inflicted gunshot wound in a police-guarded hospital room, he expressed gratitude that his son still had his mother.



Newspaper coverage

Hal found bountiful coverage of his cousin's arrest. Newspapers also chronicle his indictment, court hearings and his guilty plea. Ultimately, he was sentenced to 11-20 years and sent to Massachusetts State Prison.

The Boston Daily Globe described Louis as having deserted his family and intentionally killing his son. He was considered a dangerous man.

Louis Tennis's relatives offered a far different

version of him. They claimed that Mally had been the one to threaten Louis. She had been cruel, carrying on flagrantly with at least one man outside of her marriage. She wrote letters to Louis forbidding him from seeing her or their child again. She attempted to serve Louis with divorce papers, and his family believes he suffered a fit of insanity because of his wife's treatment.

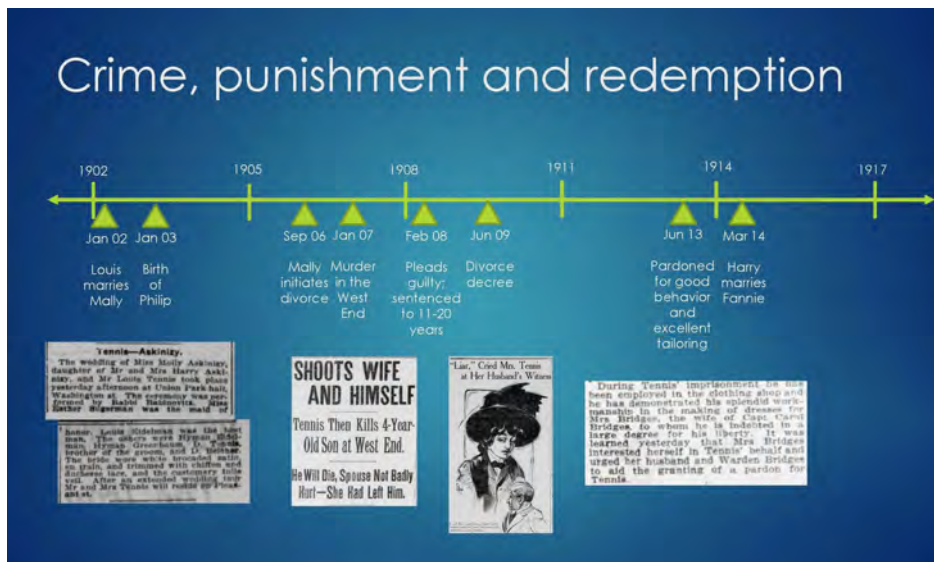
While in prison, Mally successfully sued Louis for divorce. It took time to process while the court tried to find her paramour. Ultimately, the divorce was granted, and Mally married the man she'd had an affair with.

Louis, meanwhile, became a model prisoner. Additionally, he was a master dressmaker, impressing the wife of a well-known prison guard captain. These details worked in his favor when the governor decided to reduce the Massachusetts prison population. He sought out recommendations and Louis' name came up. The Jewish prison chaplain submitted a 14-page typewritten letter detailing Mr. Tennis's model behavior. His father signed a letter detailing their family immigration story, work, and that Louis had only intended to frighten his wife and would never purposely harm his child. The defense attorney and the district attorney did not object. Louis was pardoned in 1913.

Louis remarried a divorcee in 1914. This

marriage and its subsequent children are the family Hal had known about.

Hal needed more than newspaper articles and records to flesh out his cousin's story. He wanted to obtain the court



A Timeline of Crime, punishment and redemption

documents surrounding Louis' case.

He first contacted the Suffolk County Superior Court, followed by the Suffolk County Court Archives. These efforts yielded no information, but came with suggestions to try:

- Massachusetts Appeals Court
- Massachusetts Commissioner of Probation

- Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board
- Massachusetts Judicial Court Archives

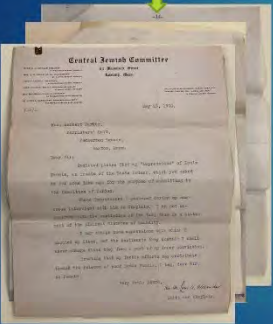
years, and lots of documents substantiate it. However, he is notably missing from the census counts until 1950.

Luckily, the last place listed was a proverbial goldmine: 120 pages that recreated his relative's story. The records were faded, so he played with the contrast until the writing was easier to discern.

There was a wealth of documentation about Louis and Mally's divorce. She tried to serve him with divorce papers in 1906 but wasn't successful until 1907.

Hal was able to chart a timeline of their marriage and Philip's birth, Mally's attempts to initiate divorce, Louis' murder of their son, guilty plea, divorce decree, incarceration, pardon, and remarriage.

Pardon support by Prison chaplain



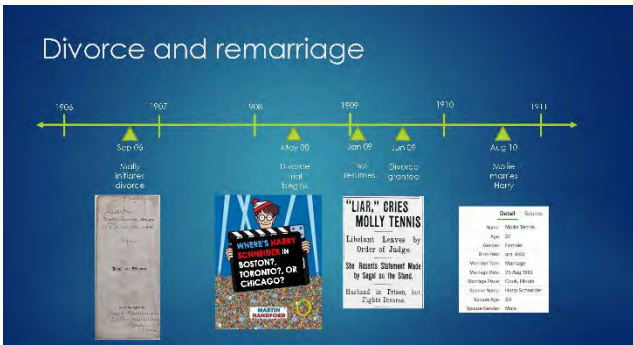
- ▶ Harry Schneider is an immoral home-wrecker
- ▶ Mally Tennis is a prostitute and adulterer
- ▶ Their acts were conscious criminal behavior
- ▶ Louis is a decent, though weak-witted, man
- ▶ He was temporarily insane when, in an act of desperation, he accidentally killed his son
- ▶ He is not a criminal, Harry and Mally are responsible
- ▶ He should be released
- ▶ Sent to the defense attorney in May 1910

Rev. Dr. Louis A. Alexander, Rabbi & Chaplain

Hal's presentation carried a twofold message: the first was to share his cousin's newly discovered early life; the second was to share the multitude of resources he required to learn the details of his relative's story. Hal shared a slide that broke down his research process. He got "the bones" of the story through Ancestry, Family Search and MyHeritage. The "flesh on the bones" came from newspaper coverage of his cousin's contentious divorce and crime. The supporting "evidence" came from the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Archives.

Handouts for this talk can be found on the JGSCV website:

<https://tinyurl.com/5h88449a>



A Timeline of Crime, punishment and redemption

One of the most fascinating discoveries was Louis' pardon request. It is how Hal learned of Louis' model prison behavior and his relative's insistence that Mally was the bad one in the sordid tale.

At the conclusion of the presentation, Hal answered questions. Someone asked who Hal sees as the "bad guy" and Hal said he believes both Mally and Louis made mistakes. Mally was promiscuous and indifferent to how her behavior hurt Louis. And Louis may have intended to kill everyone in that room when he showed up with his gun. We just can't know for sure. It is notable that his life after his pardon was unmarked by controversy. The only mystery being his absence from the 1920, 1930, and 1940 censuses. He was in Boston during those



Hal Bookbinder is a retired information systems professional who continues to teach at the university level. He is a past president of the Jewish Genealogy Society of Los Angeles (JGSLA) and the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS). He has been researching his family genealogy for more than three decades and has identified over 4,000 relatives tracing two lines back to the mid-1700s in modern Ukraine. His most current "Practicing Safe Computing" articles are in this quarterly newspaper, pages 18-20. Previous articles are available on the JGSCV website under Newsletters.

Jerry Rische presents: U.S. Immigration Law & Jewish Immigration

February Meeting Re-Cap

by Andrea Massion

The February 2025 JGSCV meeting was held in the spacious conference room in the Thousand Oaks Library with both a live and Zoom audience. The refreshments were plentiful and delicious.

Our speaker was retired immigration lawyer Jerry Rische. His topic, U.S. Immigration Law & Jewish Immigration, is a timely one given current discourse on immigration. Recent weeks have brought new restrictions and arrests, so it was eye-opening to hear Jerry Rische's historical review. It turns out there's been a cycle of restrictions and openings during the life of our country. In a quote from Ben Franklin from 1753, Mr. Rische highlighted similarities between some past and current attitudes about immigration:



"I am perfectly of your mind, that measures of great Temper are necessary with the Germans: and am not without Apprehensions, that thro' their indiscretion or Ours, or both, great disorders and inconveniences may one day arise among us; Those who come hither are generally of the most ignorant Stupid Sort of their own Nation, and as Ignorance is often attended with Credulity when Knavery would mislead it, and with Suspicion when Honesty would set it right; and as few of the English understand the German Language, and so cannot address them either from the Press or Pulpit, 'tis almost impossible to remove any prejudices they once entertain."

-Letter from Benjamin Franklin to Peter Collinson, 9 May 1753

Rische's professional experience makes him the ideal person to speak on the matter. Per the meeting flyer, he graduated from Whittier Law School and became an attorney in 1978. For the last 16 years of his legal career, he was a trial attorney with the Immigration and Naturalization Service (later the Department of Homeland Security), prosecuting people charged with violations of the Immigration and Nationality Act in Immigration Court.

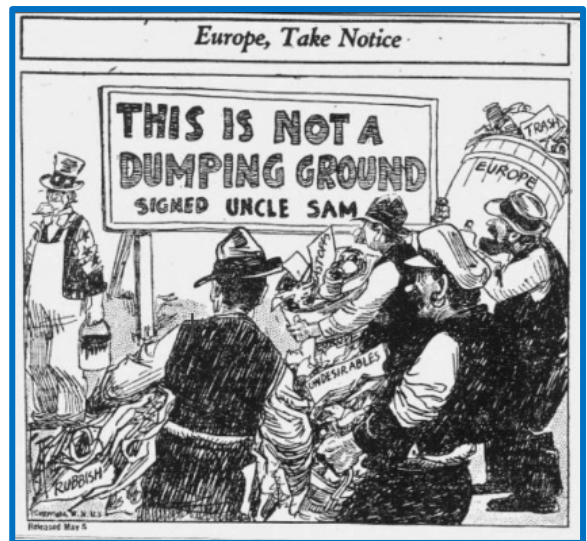
Mr. Rische presented information on the *Johnson-Reed Immigration Act of 1924* and led us through decades of restrictive policy and quotas before, during and after that act. He covered so much history in his presentation that the following is only the highlights of what was covered.

Included in his historical review:

- In 1882, Congress passed the Chinese Exclusion Act meant to last 10 years. This was after thousands of Chinese workers helped build the Trans Continental Railway. It was not lifted until 1943.
- In 1907, Congress approved a million dollar 3-year study called the United States Immigration Commission led by Sen. William Dillingham of Vermont, With a staff of over 300, they concluded in a forty-one volume report that Eastern and Southern Europeans were not assimilating and were degrading civilization in the U.S. Soon after, the Klux Klux Klan was formed and racial propaganda grew against Blacks, Jews, and others through the 1920s.

- The Emergency Quota Act of 1921 written by Dillingham and enacted by Congress applied caps of 3% to immigrants' countries of origin based on the 1910 census for quotas. Fears of increased immigration after the end of World War I and the spread of radicalism propelled Congress to enact this "emergency" measure. Western Europeans were not "capped."

- The Immigration Act of 1924 drastically curtailed immigration from almost everywhere. It set maximum quotas of just two percent based on the 1890 census data to form the most exclusionary race-based immigration policy the nation had seen. "It will mean a more homogeneous nation," wrote Senator David Reed, the bill's co-sponsor, in an essay for *The New York Times* entitled "America of the Melting Pot Comes to End."



President Calvin Coolidge, in his first message to Congress in December 1923, agreed:

"New arrivals should be limited to our capacity to absorb them into the ranks of good citizenship. America must be kept American. For this purpose, it is necessary to continue the policy of restricted immigration. It would lie well to make such immigration of a selective nature with some inspection at the source and based either on a prior census or upon the record of naturalization. Either method would ensure the admission of those with the largest capacity and best intention of becoming citizens. I am convinced that our present economic and social conditions warrant a limitation of those to be admitted. We should find additional safety in a law requiring the immediate registration of all aliens. Those who do not want to be partakers of the American spirit ought not to settle in America."



Rep. Emanuel Celler

Among those who fought against the 1923 law was Rep. Emanuel Celler of New York. His efforts to halt the bill's passing failed and on May 26, 1924, President Coolidge signed the bill into law. In Celler's 53-year career in civil and human rights, he was finally able to propose and steer through the House the *Hart-Celler Act of 1965*, which eliminated national origins as a consideration for immigration, profoundly shaping modern America. Celler's long career included his fight to eliminate national origin quotas as a basis for immigration restrictions and his battles for civil rights legislation through the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's.

Rishe shared personal family examples from his own genealogy to show how Jewish relatives with skills, family and a job awaiting immigration were rejected from entering the U.S. So instead these family branches established lives in Uruguay and Canada.

Less than ten years later, the Nazi Party was gaining strength in Germany, and emigres' requests for visas to the states multiplied. In 1933, HIAS and the American Jewish Committee approached President Roosevelt to open immigration for German Jews, if they could show that they would not be a burden in the states. This was denied. Yet the quotas went unfilled. Rishe quoted from Arthur Morse's book, *When Six Million Died* (see "Jerry's book list" in this article.) What WAS fulfilled outside of quotas was the saving of many academics such as Einstein. Academic immigrants during this Nazi era had to be teaching for two years and have a guaranteed college or university position awaiting them. Schools established in Black communities hired Jewish professors during pre-WWII. This saved numerous lives, and

cemented relationships between Jewish and Black leadership that continued throughout the Civil Rights Era of the 1960's.

From an article African American Registry website:

"For the Black colleges, including Howard University, Hampton Institute, and Tougaloo and Talladega Colleges, these refugee professors provided the opportunity to add great talent to their faculty; for the professors, the arrangement provided a new home, a classroom of students eager to learn, and an insider's look at an America that few had ever seen."

<https://aaregistry.org/story/jewish-profs-and-hbcus/>

- In 1940, Samuel Breckinridge Long was serving as Assistant Secretary in the US State Department. Many of the policies implemented by the Visa Division of that department, which Long supervised, slowed immigration to the United States for hundreds of thousands of refugees attempting to escape persecution and murder by Nazi Germany. His testimony at a Congressional hearing about assisting refugees was proven to be false, and he was dismissed in 1944. According to the US Holocaust Museum's website, Long was later labeled an antisemite.

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/breckinridge-long>

In conclusion, Mr. Rishe returned to Rep. Emanuel Celler and his life-long service to the fight for immigration and civil rights. On October 3, 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson, sitting at the base of the Statue of Liberty, signed the Hart-Celler Act. Known also as the Immigration and Nationality Act, it abolished quotas based on race or nationality and created a system that focused on immigrants' skills and any family relations with citizens or U. S. residents.

Jerry Rishe's lecture was heartfelt, engaging and packed with history. His review of attitudes and policies around US immigration challenged the audience to consider our nation's past -- its successes and its shortcomings – in creating the most reasonable immigration policies for our country's future.

Jerry's Book List

- While Six Million Died: A Chronicle of American Apathy by Arthur D. Morse
- In Search of Refuge: Jews and US Consuls in Nazi Germany by Bat Ami Zucker
- It Can't Happen Here by Sinclair Lewis

Jerry Rishe was honored as the 2008 Employee of the Year at the Department of Homeland Security. His other presentation topics include Torquemada & The Spanish Inquisition and The People vs Leo Frank regarding the Jewish manager of an Atlanta pencil factory prosecuted for the murder of a 13-year-old girl in 1913. When Frank's sentence was to be commuted, he was taken from his cell and lynched. Another admitted the murder years later. Leo Frank and the antisemitism that ensued inspired the formation of the Anti-Defamation League. (The Tony-winning musical theatre production, Parade about Leo Frank, will return to the Center Theatre Group this year.)

Portuguese Sephardic Roots in America, The Azores, and Abroad

by B. C. Carlson



The view from Forte de Santo Antonio, a fort in Porto Judeau (Port of the Jew) in Terceira, Azores

I grew up with a Jewish best friend who also happened to be my neighbor. She and her family jokingly nicknamed me “The Honorary Jew.”

From the age of four, I grew up between two households, participating in Christmas and Easter with my father’s side of the family, descendants of Swedish immigrants who had converted from Mormonism to Christianity. The other half of the time, I participated in Shabbat and Passover at my Jewish neighbor’s house. To add to the religious diversity, I regularly shared Eid festivities with my Muslim Palestinian neighbors.

By the time I reached adulthood, I developed a fascination with Israel-

Palestine. This was understandable given my exposure to a wide variety of religious and political viewpoints.

At 18, I went on my first visit to Israel. Seeking both personal and professional development, I studied International Relations at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem before eventually changing my profession. I also ended up in a long-term relationship with an Israeli. Never once did I believe myself to have any personal connection to the land of Israel, let alone to being Jewish. My journey was more of religious questioning and political intrigue than anything having to do with my family history.

"I'm not Middle Eastern at all," I confidently told people. *"Not even one percent."*

"Then why are you here?" joked my Palestinian friends, who loved to ask me blunt questions. We sat together on plastic chairs before a rickety tea table on their balcony, overlooking their busy neighborhood.

I paused. *"Honestly, I just like studying here."*

"Hmm," they replied, folding their arms. This answer, for obvious reasons, did not satisfy them. They narrowed their eyes at me, like I was being interrogated.

"She's clearly a spy for America," said one of two sisters, a slighter, a curlier haired version of the first.

"Maybe she has Jerusalem Syndrome," said the other, referring to a rare psychiatric disorder in which someone who visits Jerusalem believes themselves to be the Messiah.

"Yep, I'm definitely a spy," I chimed in, sharing a laugh with all of them. Yet despite the jokes, I still had no good answer.

Truthfully, I was upset that I had no direct connection to this place. It was disorienting to live somewhere and embed myself into their society but still feel like an outsider. It was like I was stuck being an observer rather than a participant. I felt like I was throwing mental darts at a target, believing that if I could only hit the bullseye, my connection would be revealed. I couldn't quite get to it. I continued telling people: *"I'm not Middle Eastern at all."* I was in Israel because of my degree, and that was it. And, although true at that time, that statement would later prove to be highly inaccurate.

A few months shy of the October 7th tragedy, I returned home from a visit to Israel with my partner. She'd asked me about my maternal grandmother's background, and I realized I did not have much information to share.

I knew that my grandmother's parents were descendants of Portuguese and African American immigrants who sailed to Hawaii in the 1800s. (Hawaii was not yet a US state.) They labored there on sugarcane plantations, in the city of Hilo, where my grandmother married an Irish American World War II soldier and flew back to the United States mainland. However, she had kept the African American side of our family secret until I was a teenager.

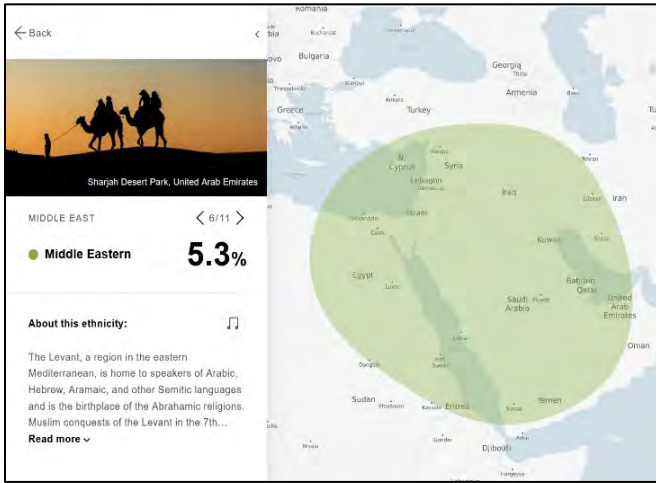
"I didn't want you to be persecuted," she'd told me. When I asked for more information about our ethnic background, all she said was, *"My mother didn't tell me anything."* She passed away in 2019 at the age of ninety-two.

This cryptic conversation sat with me until my partner's questions about our background. My grandmother's words sparked what became fuel for my future genealogical quests. A new door of intrigue suddenly opened.

I began by taking my mother's DNA sample and importing it into multiple DNA websites. I hoped to gain as much information as possible via GEDMatch, Ancestry DNA, 23andMe, and MyHeritage. After that, I started the laborious process of translating and transcribing records, the majority of which were in Portuguese.

Everything revealed in my mother's initial DNA test seemed accounted for based on what I knew about my grandparents, except for a seemingly insignificant chunk of DNA. Specifically, from the region including Israel

and the Arabian Peninsula, labeled as simply “Middle East” by MyHeritage.

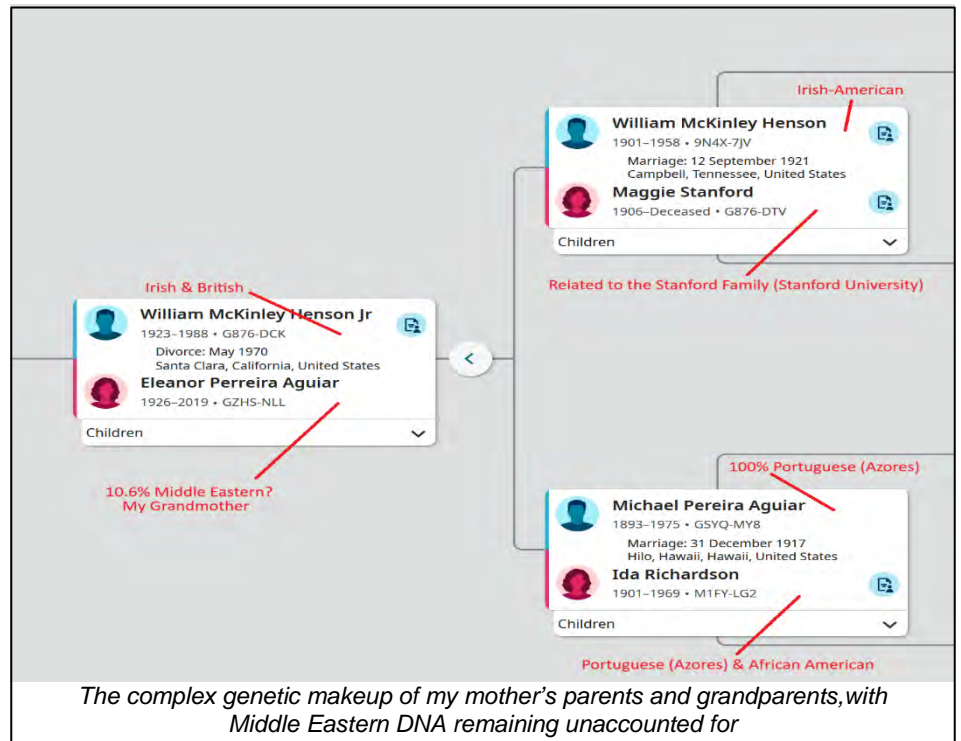


Although small, this piece of DNA piqued my interest. It could not be accounted for by what was known of my mother’s heritage. We knew of no connection to the Middle East on her father’s side, and it wasn’t known on my grandmother’s African American side from Nigeria and nearby regions, and traceable to one primary ancestor. Genetic testing was also done by many members of my extended family. However, based on my mom’s DNA, someone or a combination of someones with at least 20% Middle Eastern heritage -- should have been present in the generation of my great-grandparents.

One reasonable explanation (based on my loose knowledge of Jewish history) was the Portuguese side of the family, from the Azores. The Azores, a collection of

islands far off the coast of Portugal, yet owned by Portugal, are known for being a melting pot of exiles. Those fleeing the mainland during turbulent historical times often included North African Arabs and *conversos*, or converts, from Judaism fleeing the Portuguese Inquisition. These populations had significant chunks of Middle Eastern DNA, which is present in the current Azorean population.

According to research, many Azoreans carry these small amounts of North African and Sephardic ancestry. “The detection of traces of Sephardic Jewish presence was addressed in several populations through the analysis of their possible contribution to the genetic background of the host populations...” (Santos et al., 2003).



In 2022, I met my Portuguese American cousin Linda, a genealogy hobbyist who had once been a museum curator. She had already volunteered to transcribe every baptism and marriage certificate in the Ribeira Grande region in São Miguel, Azores. Based on the few family records I'd found, I knew this was the same region that my grandmother's maternal side had lived in for centuries.



The Sahar Hassamain Synagogue, a recently restored synagogue in Ponta Delgada, Sao Miguel, Azores, Portugal

I reached out to her for help in transcribing records from their tiny town, called Fish Tail (Rabo de Peixe), a seemingly insignificant place on a beautiful island in the North Atlantic. Since I could not speak, read or write Portuguese, but wanted to

begin translating the records, I desperately needed her help. Over the next two years, she taught me enough to read the esoteric priest handwriting on my own.

By the year 1536, as the Inquisition spread from Spain to Portugal, Portuguese citizens were required to officiate their baptisms and marriages through the Catholic Church. This was regardless of their personal religion. As far as the Church was concerned, after forced conversions, imprisonments and edicts of expulsion, there were no more Jews or Muslims in Portugal by 1600. Those who secretly adhered to their original religious practices were to be rooted out and punished in cruel ways. That is, until they resubmitted to Catholicism. In cases in which the accused refused to repent, they might be exiled, their property confiscated or burned alive.

Given this persecution, proving the ethnicity or religion of a Portuguese person alive during the Inquisition is incredibly challenging. The persecutions by the Church

were heavily documented, and there are thousands of trial cases outlined in excruciating, often exploitative, detail. However, many of these accusations did not result in convictions. Even in many conviction cases, evidence was not what we today would determine to be conclusive in a court of law.

For genealogists, these accusations



Photograph of the Papal Bull Cum ad Nihil Magis (Nothing is More Pressing), outlawing the printing of the Bible in languages other than Latin and introducing the Inquisition to Portugal.

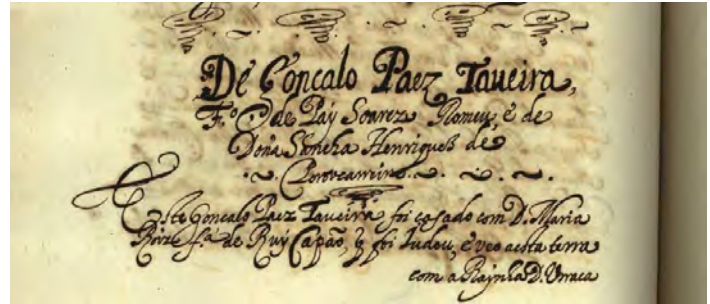
are also not enough to prove the authenticity of someone's Judaism. Nor are they enough to indicate a person's true ethnic origins. Those of Sephardic descent often found ways to alter or falsify documents with the hope of obscuring their heritage, especially those who were elevated to higher social status, or who wished to marry into a notable Catholic family.

Due to these factors, most Sephardic genealogists must trace Azorean family lines back to before 1536 in hopes of finding irrefutable proof that validates a person's ethnicity. Unfortunately, this requires dozens of documents, at least as many hours, and sometimes dozens of generations, often climbing all the way back to Medieval times.

Utilizing these techniques, I slowly began with my grandmother's maternal line. I chose the maternal line because it was the easiest one to trace, with most of her ancestors remaining in the same town, Fish Tail, since the late 1500s. So far, I have been able to validate the baptism and marriage records of six notable medieval Jews on this maternal line. I used resources from both Sephardic and non-Sephardic Portuguese genealogists to cross-verify the records.

Additionally, I was also able to trace lines back to Muslim nobles who escaped to the Azores in the 1500s following the collapse of their government in Morocco. Upon arriving in the Azores, they converted to Catholicism. (Whether this was done of their own accord or by force is unknown.)

While unable to find current modern adherents of Islam in my family, all six of the Portuguese Jews have thousands of descendants who still identify as Jewish and practice Judaism to this day. Many of my



Document describing Ruy Capao as an Italian Jew who immigrated to Portugal in the Middle Ages. He is one of the well known Sephardic Jews of Portugal and my great-great grandmother's direct ancestor. It is through him that many Sephardic Jews were granted Portuguese citizenship.

distant Jewish cousins live in Brazil and the Netherlands because of Inquisition policies that exiled Jews to foreign lands. Many have been granted Portuguese citizenship, which is being offered to descendants of Sephardic Jews. Unfortunately, as we know, three quarters of Sephardic Dutch Jews with Portuguese origins were later murdered in the Holocaust.

"So you can't say you're 'Not even one percent Middle Eastern' anymore, can you?" my partner joked with me when I told her what I'd found.

"I guess the world is smaller than I thought," I replied.

As my genealogical journey continues, I have many more questions. How did the Jewish and Muslim ancestors I've found convert: were they forced, or did some convert willingly? Who were their crypto-Jewish descendants, secretly practicing their religion, even after forced conversion? How to make sense of the small number of people I've identified with the larger percentage of Middle Eastern present in my mother's DNA? I wonder about the undiscovered ancestors who contributed to my mother's results. Who are they, and what are their stories?

SEPHARDIC ANCESTRY RESOURCES

Azores and the Sephardic Genealogy

<https://tinyurl.com/5c98ubcv>

Genie Milgrom, Crypto-Jewish researcher

Website: <https://geniemilgrom.com/> and lectures

on YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/live/TQLbnN2JkPI>



The Sephardic Genealogy YouTube channel: <https://youtube.com/@sephardicgenealogy>

and website: <https://sephardicgenealogy.com/>



American Sephardic

Federation: <https://instituteofjewishexperience.org/>

Jewish History in the Azores: <https://youtu.be/UNvAkjtRL8c>

Saudades da Terra (an incredibly important book for Azores genealogy) [https://pt.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudades da Terra](https://pt.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saudades_da_Terra)

Judeus Sefarditas Medievas (Medieval Sephardic Jews) Facebook group. Note: This group is in Portuguese:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/976892596133633/?ref=share&mibextid=NSMWBT>

Descendents do Rui Capão (descendents of Rui Capão) This is a specific group created for descendants of this unique Portuguese Medieval Jewish individual from Italy:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/292259725749992/?ref=share&mibextid=NSMWBT>

Jewish Community of Lisbon has excellent genealogists that work to provide Sephardic Jews proof of heritage for citizenship, their work is recognized by the Gov of

Portugal <https://www.facebook.com/cilisboa?mibextid=ZbWKwL>

A solid overview of the Inquisition, how the Church got to that point and how it played into the Holocaust:

https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine%27s_Sword



The Inquisition in Early Modern Spain, Portugal and the Americas: Online Archives

<https://guides.library.yale.edu/c.php?g=1366493&p=10095244>

JGSCV Updates

IN MEMORIAM

We fondly remember the following long members of JGSCV.

Sharlene Pass



A long-time resident of Simi Valley, Sharlene was an active member of her local synagogue and a dedicated participant in her genealogy group. She found great joy in her community and cherished her time with friends at the Simi Valley Senior Center.

Sharlene's warmth, wisdom, and unwavering love for her family and community will be deeply missed. May her memory be a blessing.

<https://everloved.com/life-of/sharlene-pass/obituary/>

Edwin A. Jones

THOUSAND OAKS - It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Edwin "Ed" Jones on January 24, 2025, at the age of 94. Ed was a prominent figure in Thousand Oaks politics and community service. His legacy in Thousand Oaks spans decades, marked by significant contributions to the city's development and governance.



He is survived by his loving wife of 28 years, JoAnn, his children Donna (Jones) Stinson, Cary, Robin, Lisa, Robert and his step-daughters Crystal, Cindy and Susan. Ed and JoAnn had 18 grandchildren between them and Ed had 17 great grandchildren. He is also survived by his brother Hal, as well as numerous nieces, nephews and cousins.

Ed was born in San Jose, CA on September 6th, 1930 to Hugh and Florence Jones. His father was a Presbyterian minister and his mother was a teacher. Ed had a happy childhood spending many hours in church with his family. He loved sports, playing touch football with friends as a youngster and played on his high school basketball team. Later in life he enjoyed playing golf.

He earned a bachelor's degree from Occidental College and a master's degree from California State University, Los Angeles. He began his career as an elementary school teacher and later became a professor of Political Science at L.A. Pierce College.

Ed, his first wife Patricia and their children moved to Thousand Oaks in 1964. He quickly became involved in his neighborhood after being elected president of the homeowner's association. In 1968, he and his neighbors won a fight to save their new homes (Janss Road had been planned to run through their housing tract, which would have taken his home and four others). Later, he was appointed to the city's general plan committee, charged with drawing up a development plan for Thousand Oaks.

Upon completion of the master plan for Thousand Oaks, he was elected to the Thousand Oaks City Council in 1970. Following his term on the city council, he served as a Ventura County Supervisor from 1975 to 1987. From 2010 to 2018 he served on the Conejo Valley Parks and Recreation Board. He later returned to the Thousand Oaks City Council, serving from 2018 to 2022.

During his tenure in public service one of his greatest pleasures was walking door to door and talking with members of the community. Ed played a pivotal role in shaping Thousand Oaks' future. He was instrumental in implementing crucial land-use and environmental protection measures. His efforts in preserving open space and implementing strict development standards helped maintain the area's natural beauty.

Ed will be deeply missed by his family and the community he loved. A memorial service will be held to celebrate Ed's life on Saturday, February 22nd at 2 p.m. at Emmanuel Presbyterian Church, 533 Camino Manzanitas, Thousand Oaks.

Thank you again to our Hanukkah raffle sponsors including MyHeritage, Family Tree Maker 2024, and Ancestry.

Raffle winners attended our January 2025 meeting:

Ancestry DNA kit: Cheri Wrigley

My Heritage DNA kit: Stephen Weinstein

My Heritage one year membership: Paula Poll

"Most Fortunate Unfortunates" by Marlene Trestman

- Carole Flesher
- Steve Goldin

"From Our Springtime: Literary Memoirs and Portraits of Yiddish by Reuben Iceland

- Barbara Finsten

Family Tree Maker 2024: Rikki Horne

Practicing Safe Computing #107: Chinese Hacking Dangers

By Hal Bookbinder



On 12/27/2024, the AP reported that, a ninth U.S. telecommunications company had been hacked “[as part of a sprawling Chinese espionage campaign](#)” and on 12/30/2024 Reuters reported that, “[US Treasury says Chinese hackers stole documents in 'major incident'](#).” While the focus of these hacks were Federal agencies and people associated them in the Washington, D.C. area, we are all at risk of disruption, identity theft, propaganda, and disinformation.

Much of the electronics included in smart appliances, telecommunication equipment, and even automobiles, is sourced from China. Your Alexa and Siri listen for your commands. Your computer, TV, thermostat, lights, refrigerator and automobile may do so as well. Who might be listening in? While I do not suggest being paranoid, we should all exercise caution.

TikTok, used by over 170 million people in the U.S., is owned by ByteDance, a company controlled by the Chinese military. It processes messages on its servers in China, undoubtedly extracting and maintaining enormous amounts of customer data. It is required, by Chinese law, to respond promptly, and fully, to all requests by the Chinese government.

We are all aware that Facebook, Google, and other online applications, make significant revenue from the data that they collect on their customers. Along with this, much of the telecommunication equipment on which our Facebook, Google, email and text data flows are subject to data mining by big tech, cybercriminals, and by hostile foreign governments.

We are not about to stop using online applications and all forms of smart appliances. While we can hope that our government works to limit the exposure, the issue will likely only get worse. Each of us should take sensible precautions to protect ourselves:

- Be careful what you share in texts, emails, and Facebook postings.
- Use a browser and search engine like DuckDuckGo that does not track your every action.
- Satisfy yourself that messages are from the indicated person or institution.
- Carefully assess information you read, see, and hear before accepting it.
- Monitor news media, to be aware of current cyber risks.
- Use different complex passwords for each financial, medical, email, and social account.
- Use a password manager, with a complex master password that you regularly change.
- Agree to two-factor authentication, even if it is annoying and slows you down.

Consider using a passphrase rather than a complex password for the master password to your password manager. Passphrases are longer than complex passwords and easier to remember. As they have more characters, they are more difficult to crack. [Click here to read more about passphrases vs. passwords.](#)

Some argue that we should not protect our critical applications with a password manager. Rather, we should use and memorize passphrases, noting that if a password manager is hacked, all of the passwords stored in it are at risk. While passphrases are easier to remember than complex passwords, if we have unique ones for each application, we will likely need to still write them down. Weighing the risks, I will continue to rely on long, complex passwords managed by a password manager.

JGSCV founding member, Hal Bookbinder, Past President of JGSLA and IAJGS. He is the 2010 recipient of the IAJGS Lifetime Achievement Award, and his online skills are well documented. All the Safe Computing articles by Hal Bookbinder are available on the JGSCV website

<https://www.jgscv.org/noteworthy.html>

Practicing Safe Computing #108: Disaster Scammers

By Hal Bookbinder



We just witnessed terrible destruction in Los Angeles due to wind-driven fire storms. Here is a picture that I took from my home looking east over the hills towards the Kenneth Fire. Thankfully, firefighters were able to stop it before it came over these hills into my neighborhood.

While there are heartwarming stories of neighbors helping neighbors and people giving generously to assist the victims of the Palisades and Eaton Fires, a disaster often brings out scammers who aim to fleece both those who have been directly affected by the tragedy and those who compassionately donate to disaster relief.

After a disaster, those directly impacted may seek government assistance, create GoFundMe pages, engage contractors, and purchase items to repair the damage. Each of these provide opportunities for scammers to take advantage of desperate and susceptible homeowners. This is especially true for elderly homeowners who are often more trusting than their younger counterparts.

Some unscrupulous scammers will pretend to be a government agency, reaching out to the homeowner, others may present themselves as professionals who, for a fee, can ensure and facilitate rapid delivery of aid, still others may present themselves as contractors who can, for an up-front fee, prioritize your repairs. While some such contacts are genuine, many are not.

Be cautious when you are solicited. If you receive an email or text message with a link, think twice before pressing it. It may take you to a scammer's website that looks quite official. Don't allow yourself to be so pressured by the situation that you don't take normal precautions, like checking references and asking for multiple bids. Of course, be wary of up-front fees.

GoFundMe opportunities can be traps. Sometimes, some or all of the money collected is siphoned off by those who set up the GoFundMe site. Also, if you receive recovery assistance through a GoFundMe site, you may be ineligible for government assistance. Laws preclude the government from providing aid when the victim is receiving aid from another source.

Many of us are moved to make charitable donations to the victims of disasters. Legitimate charities know this and ramp up their advertising. Scammers also launch campaigns to collect donations in the name of disaster victims and first-responders. We all know this; but many of us are so focused on providing help that we fail to take responsible precautions before giving.

Don't give to a charity just because the name and mailer or commercial seems appealing. Rather, understand how much of the funds actually go to aid disaster victims. Ask the solicitor to mail you this information; read their website; Google their name; review their IRS 990 filings and check their reviews and ratings on charity monitoring websites. These include [Charity Watch](#), [Charily Navigator](#), [Consumer Reports](#) and the [Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance](#).

Here are links to previous articles on charitable giving that you may find worthwhile. [Practicing Safe Tzedakah](#) & [Charity Review Websites](#). Also, check out the FTC's [How to spot, stop, and report post-disaster scams](#).

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Practicing Safe Computing #109: Mac Users are also at Risk

By Hal Bookbinder

Mac users have long been comforted, knowing that they are less susceptible to malware than their Windows counterparts. There was good reason for this confidence. Apple's architecture and market share have helped protect its users. In 2016, I explained this in, [Is it true the Apples are safer than PCs?](#) In 2019, I recommended some caution in, [Apples are also vulnerable](#). And the risk continues to grow.



Malware specifically targeting Macs have now come into the fore, including [Atomic Stealer \(AMOS\)](#) which appeared in mid-2023, [Cthulhu Stealer](#), which was introduced in late-2023, and [Poseidon](#), which came along in 2024. Fake ads, engineered by artificial intelligence, have been luring Apple users into downloading this malware that mimics legitimate apps.

These malware apps are made available to cyberthieves anonymously on the Telegram web server, often as a service that can be used by the cyberthief for a continuing fee. They are generally designed to extract information from the hacked device and transmit it to the cyberthief who can use it, or sell it on the dark web. The growing use of cyberwallets are tempting targets.

Per an article by Kurt Knutsson, "The CyberGuy," Poseidon, launched in mid-2024 and quickly became the dominant Mac stealer, responsible for 70% of infections. It can drain over 160 different cryptocurrency wallets, steal passwords from browsers and password managers and even grab VPN credentials." See [Mac users beware: AI-powered malware threats are on the rise](#).

Mac users, as well as Android/Linux, users, need to protect themselves every bit as much as Windows users. This includes:

- Having strong antivirus software running on your computer that can not only recognize and protect from malware, but that can alert you to phishing emails and ransomware scams.
- Only download from reputable sources, such as the Mac App Store, Google Play Store or official websites of trusted developers, and never from an unsolicited email or message link.
- Be sure to download the latest macOS and Android updates, especially security updates, as these address recently found vulnerabilities. Enable automatic updates so that you stay current.
- Use strong and unique passwords. As there is no way you will remember them, use a password manager, both to provide unique passwords, and to recall them as needed.
- Use two-factor authentication for all critical accounts. Yes, it is annoying to wait for the text message and enter the code provided. But the impact of being hacked is far worse.
- Take care what you share on social media platforms as you never know who might be listening. With each piece of information, AI's profile of you grows stronger, increasing the risk.

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Genealogy Odds and Ends

1. **The Galveston Movement, Jewish immigration** is discussed on a podcast. Listen here: <https://www.visitgalveston.com/blog/galveston-movement-jewish-immigration-podcast/>
2. **JRI-Poland and Yad Vashem Team Up to Retrieve the Names of Thousands of Jews Who Perished in the Holocaust.** Read last week's press release: <https://www.yadvashem.org/press-release/25-february-2025-06-47.html>
3. **Investigative Genetic Genealogy Identifies 1988 Homicide Victim as Paul Richard Davis.** After more than 30 years, police have the victim of a 1988 homicide case in Quincy, CA. Thanks to advancements in forensic technology and the hard work of law enforcement, the victim has been confirmed as Paul Richard Davis, a former resident of Kern County. <https://tinyurl.com/24j6969z>
4. **Magnificent hoard of gold and silver coins sheds unprecedented light on medieval Israel.** New research examines artifacts from two vessels found in 2018 next to the synagogue at Huqoq. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/magnificent-hoard-of-gold-and-silver-coins-sheds-unprecedented-light-on-medieval-israel/>
5. In the last few years, a new form of life has come to Warsaw's main Jewish cemetery. Young people stand in between the gravestones, chattering, laughing, and digging with shovels. **Archaeology students excavating Warsaw's main Jewish cemetery are uncovering a forgotten world.** <https://www.jpost.com/archaeology/article-844104>
6. **A matter of security:** An unauthorized website, familyreedna.ae, is impersonating FamilyTreeDNA—a practice known as spoofing—in an attempt to deceive users into providing sensitive information, such as kit numbers and passwords. How to Stay Safe:
 - Access FamilyTreeDNA only through our official websites, which always include "familyreedna.com" in the address:
 - Be cautious of emails or messages directing you to any website other than those listed above.
7. **S.2492 - Ending Improper Payments to Deceased People Act.** Introduced last year by Senator John Kennedy (R-LA) and cosponsors: Senator Thomas Carper (D-DE)., Senator Margaret Wood Hassan (D-NH). Senator Gary C. Peters (D-MI). The bill would permanently authorize the Social Security Administration (SSA) to share access to the full death data file with the Do Not Pay (DNP) working system at the Department of the Treasury. The current authorization to share this information is temporary and expires in 2026. <https://www.congress.gov/congressional-report/118th-congress/senate-report/252/1>
8. **10 Jewish highlights and controversies from 100 years of The New Yorker.** These Jewish writers and artists became the talk of the town. <https://www.jta.org/2025/02/24/ny/10-jewish-highlights-and-controversies-from-100-years-of-the-new-yorker>
9. On March 3, 2025, **Jewish Life Television (JTL) premiered "Generations," the first-ever Jewish genealogy TV series**, produced in collaboration with the Museum of Jewish Heritage and JewishGen, an online resource with more than 30 million Jewish genealogical records. The debut episode follows Emmy-winning actress Camryn Manheim and her son, actor Milo Manheim, as they uncover their Jewish ancestry through DNA testing, historical records, and heirlooms. <https://www.jltv.tv/>
10. **Digging: How Archaeology Debunks the Israel 'Colonizers' Libel,** The libelous claim that Israel is a colonial project causes harm to Jews worldwide and is simply not rooted in reality. Scores of archaeological finds reveal a Jewish community in the Land of Israel that has lasted for millennia. <https://honestreporting.com/keep-digging-how-archaeology-debunks-the-israel-colonizers-libel/>



Jewish Genealogical Society of the Conejo Valley and Ventura County (JGSCV)

A member of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS)
www.JGSCV.org

2025 Membership/Renewal Form

Dues paid now are good through December 2025

Date _____

Check one: This is a New Membership_____. Renewal_____

Check one: Individual \$25.00_____ or Family \$30.00 _____

Family is defined as two people living in the same household.

Name _____ Telephone (____)_____

Mailing Address _____

City _____ Zip _____ State _____

E-mail address _____

Talents that you might share with JGSCV (accounting skills, translation or language skills, (please specify) computer tech, library maven, greeter, other.)

Known areas of research?_____

Pay by:



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or



Check payable to JGSCV and mail it WITH this form to

Steve Feldman, Membership
1535 Rugby Circle
Thousand Oaks CA 91360

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$ _____

Return or email this form to Steve Feldman membership@jgscv.org (address above)