

# Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What does the Center for Jewish History (CJH) have about my family?

The CJH is home to millions of archival documents and hundreds of thousands of books, housed in the archives and libraries of the partner organizations. These include family histories, memoirs, correspondence, personal papers of prominent and less well-known individuals, and records of communal, cultural, political and professional organizations. Among these sources are many documents with information about individuals and families.

Many of the documents and books at the Center are in languages other than English, such as Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, German, Russian, Spanish, French, and Hungarian. Most of the document groups are not indexed or catalogued by family name, but it is possible to identify records about individuals and families. Please see FAQ #4 on finding genealogical resources at CJH to learn how to identify sources for your family history research.

While CJH does not have ship passenger manifests, U.S. census records, U.S. vital records, or most U.S. naturalization records and European vital records, we do provide access to many such records through our electronic resources and our microfilm loan program. To learn more about those kinds of records, see our research guides at [www.cjh.org/collections/genealogy/factsheets.php](http://www.cjh.org/collections/genealogy/factsheets.php).

### 2. What does the Center for Jewish History (CJH) have about my ancestral town?

Among the collections at CJH are many sources from or about Jewish communities worldwide. These include encyclopedias, *yizkor* books, landsmanshaft records, newspapers, memoirs, and records of communal, cultural, political and professional organizations. Many of these records are in languages other than English, such as Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, German, Russian, Spanish, French, and Hungarian. Please see FAQ #4 on finding genealogical resources at the Center to learn how to identify sources for your town.

### 3. Does the Center for Jewish History (CJH) have an online catalog?

Yes! Our online catalog (<http://search.cjh.org>) integrates all the partners' library and archival collections.

### 4. What genealogical sources are available at the Center for Jewish History (CJH)?

To learn what sources are available at CJH, search our online catalog at <http://catalog.cjh.org>. You may search by town name and/or surname. You may also consult our research guides, which describe the genealogical resources available here, at <http://cjh.org/p/60>. After consulting our research guides and searching the online catalog, you are welcome to submit a specific inquiry to the Institute.

### 5. Can Genealogy Institute staff and volunteers research my family for me?

Our staff and volunteers will be happy to guide you to appropriate resources. After searching our online catalog and consulting the research guides available at [www.cjh.org/collections/genealogy/factsheets.php](http://www.cjh.org/collections/genealogy/factsheets.php), you are welcome to visit the Center or write us a specific inquiry. CJH also offers a Genealogy Membership program featuring research services as one of the benefits of joining.

### 7. How do I start my family history research?

See the research guides under Getting Started, U.S. Research, and Jewish Research, available at <http://cjh.org/p/60>. After you read them, you are welcome to write us and we will try to provide some helpful advice. You are also welcome to attend one of our genealogy workshops for beginners.

### 8. Can I find my family tree on the Internet?

Most family trees are not on the Internet. There are several places, however, where some family trees or connections to other researchers can be found.

**Family Tree of the Jewish People:** This database consists of family trees that individual researchers have chosen to share with others. It is **not** an all-encompassing family tree of all Jews everywhere. To search this database, you must be registered with JewishGen. For security and privacy reasons, dates are not included for living people, nor is the name of the submitter provided; however, you may contact him/her by sending a message using the provided link. [www.jewishgen.org/gedcom/](http://www.jewishgen.org/gedcom/)

**JewishGen Family Finder:** This is a database of genealogists with the surnames and towns they are researching. An exact spelling or soundex search may be made for a specific name, town, or both. The results give the researcher's name and contact information. The most useful results will be obtained by searching both the name and town, unless the name is unusual or the town small. You must also be registered with JewishGen to search this database. [www.jewishgen.org/jgff/](http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff/)

**WorldConnect Project:** Genealogists from a variety of backgrounds have posted their family trees here. <http://wc.rootsweb.ancestry.com/>

**Personal Web Pages:** Some families have created web pages containing genealogical information. To search for these, simply enter the surname you are researching into a search engine (Google, Alta Vista, etc).

## 9. What does my family name mean?

Most Ashkenazi families adopted surnames between 1780 and 1850. Jews living in Frankfurt and Prague and many Sephardic families used surnames much earlier. Some surnames were based on patronymics, matronymics, occupations, physical characteristics, or places of origin. Others were words borrowed from the Bible or other Jewish literature. The Genealogy Institute and Reading Room reference collections have a number of useful surname and given name dictionaries and other sources. These are listed in our research guide on Jewish Names, available at [www.cjh.org/collections/genealogy/factsheets.php](http://www.cjh.org/collections/genealogy/factsheets.php).

## 10. How do I learn the names of the towns my ancestors came from?

To identify the towns your ancestors were from, please see our research guides on Starting Your Family History Research, Immigration, Naturalization, Census Records, and Finding an Ancestral Town, available on CJH's web site at [www.cjh.org/collections/genealogy/factsheets.php](http://www.cjh.org/collections/genealogy/factsheets.php). Other suggestions may be found on JewishGen's web site, [www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/faq.html#Towns](http://www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/faq.html#Towns).

Besides the name, it is helpful to obtain additional identifying information about the town. What type of industry or trade took place there? What languages were spoken? Was it near any rivers, forests, or borders? What larger city was it near? Interviewing relatives is the best way to find out this information.

For ancestors who immigrated to countries other than the United States, see our research guides on those countries to find out if there are any census, naturalization, or immigration records available. Geographically-based Special Interest Groups are also excellent sources of information.

## 11. I know the name of my ancestral town, but I don't know where it is. How do I find it?

Please see our research guide on Finding an Ancestral Town.

## 12. How do I get genealogical records from countries outside the U.S.?

Our country-by-country fact sheets and reference books like the *Avotaynu Guide to Jewish Genealogy* and Jeffrey S. Malka's *Sephardic Genealogy* (both available at the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute) provide information on how to obtain foreign records.

Many international vital records, census records, and other documents useful for family history research have been microfilmed by the Church of Latter-day Saints (LDS, or Mormons). You may search the online Family History Library catalog at <https://familysearch.org/> to find out which records are available. Please keep in mind that these microfilms are copies of original records, mostly handwritten in languages other than English.

The Institute administers a loan agreement with the LDS Family History Library in Salt Lake City, so that researchers can order microfilms through CJH and study them here. Over 1,500 reels of microfilm containing records specifically useful for Jewish family history are now available on indefinite loan at the Institute. You can see a list of these films at [www.jgsny.org/microfiche.htm](http://www.jgsny.org/microfiche.htm).