Rabbinical Genealogy: Sources at the Center for Jewish History

Introduction

Many people have an ancestor who was a rabbi, or whom they believe was a rabbi. Because Judaism is decentralized, with many yeshivot, rabbinical schools, denominations and leaders, there is no one repository for the personal papers of rabbis or biographical information about them. Further, a learned ancestor may have been called “rabbi” or may be remembered as such, even if he did not lead a congregation or possess a degree from a rabbinical school.

There are several obstacles for researchers of rabbinical families:

- The lack of knowledge of the Hebrew language.
- Vital records were kept in the Russian Empire only in the early 19th century, except for censuses complied in the 18th and 19th Centuries.
- In Lithuania some Jewish families hid their Yikhus (lineage); and since there was frequently no oral history, much information was forgotten over time.
- Rabbinical families did not include sons and son in laws who were not scholars in their pedigrees.
- Families who are descended from rabbis who refuse to publish their pedigrees.

However, the compilation of many rabbinical family genealogies makes it easier for rabbinical researchers to trace their rabbinic ancestor/s. Moreover, books composed by rabbis often include genealogical information in their introductions that assists researchers.

The Center for Jewish History partners—American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardi Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, Yeshiva University Museum, and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research—hold the personal papers of many rabbis. These collections can be identified by using CJH’s online catalog at http://search.cjh.org. The sources below contain biographical information; for congregational records, see our Synagogue Records fact sheet.

The Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute Resources

In NYC, some congregations are also listed by associated town as well as by the name of the congregation.


Also available online at http://www.horabis.blogspot.com./ (Hebrew/English interface)


**American Jewish Historical Society Resources**

Kallah Convention of Texas Rabbis . Year book. ([Fort Worth, 1928]-). Short presentations by selected rabbis with names and photos of rabbis. List of attendees. BM 111 .K15

National Jewish Welfare Board, Military Chaplaincy Records, 1917-1984. Includes detailed questionnaires completed by chaplains providing name, date/place of birth, date of entry into the U.S., date of citizenship, marital status and wife’s name including maiden name, education, rabbinical positions held, military service record and a short history. Photographs are frequently included [Boxes 42-45]. Questionnaires are arranged alphabetically in two alpha series. AJHS I-249

Rabbinical Alliance of America . Registry. 1949, 1953/54. Alphabetical list of ordained rabbis who are members with names, addresses, and names of congregations. BM 60 .R2

Rabbinical Assembly of America. Proceedings of the Rabbinical Assembly of America. 1927. Presentations at the annual conference. Pages 97-107 list alumni of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and additional members of the Rabbinical Assembly. BM 11 .R1

Stephen Wise Collection. Rabbi Stephen Wise, 1874-1949, was the founder of the Free Synagogue of New York. He also helped to found the American Jewish Committee, the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York City, the NAACP and the ACLU. This collection of his personal papers is organized by subject, including: personal affairs; speeches, sermons and articles; American Jewish Affairs; refugees; Zionism; and individual correspondence. There is a surname index to the collection. AJHS P-143

American Sephardi Federation Resources


Leo Baeck Institute Resources

Biographisches Handbuch der Rabbiner. (Muenchen: Saur, 2004-) Biographies of rabbis from Germany, Bohemia, and Poland. REF BM 750 B 561


The Leo Baeck Institute possesses hundreds of memoirs and biographies of individual rabbis, and histories of the rabbinites of particular cities or regions. Consult the LBI catalog on CJH’s public computers or at www.lbi.org by typing the family name or town name into the subject category, or by browsing the listings under the subject “rabbis.”

**YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Resources**


Alfasi, Yitsa . Mamlekhet ha- okhmah: toldot Bet-Ropshits - Dz'i ov (624 tse'etsa'im). (Yerushalayim: Karmel, 1994). Includes history of Ropshits - Dzykow Hassidic dynasty in Poland. 00087812

American Jewish Yearbook 5668 (1907-1908) (Philadelphia: American Jewish Committee, 1907). Contains a city-by-city Directory of National and Local Organizations in the United States, including synagogues. In NYC, some congregations are also listed by associated town as well as by the name of the congregation. REF DS 101 .A5

Eisenstadt, Benzion. *Dor rabana e-sofra*. (Warsaw: Bi-defus Hal er e-‘Aizen sh ad [1895-1903]). Biographies of rabbis in America (in Hebrew). REF DS125.3.A2

Feder, Y. Shim’on. *Seyfer Mishpo e’ rabonim in Ungarin*: api lekh ar i len bashriben in "Der Id". (Bene Ber : Seminar Be’er Ya’a ov, 754-756 [1993 or 1994-1995 or 1996]). Includes Hungarian rabbis’ genealogy. YIVO 00087246

Friedmann, Nathan Zebi. *Otsar ha-rabanim*. ([Bnei-Brak?]: Agudat Otsar Ha-rabanim, [735]). Rabbis’ encyclopedia. Includes indexes. REF 750 F75 1975


*Sefer akhme Polin : otsar toldot e-sipurim ye arim meha-ge onim eha-tsadi im she-he’iru et erets Polin*. (Yerushalayim : Yi’sra’el Avraham Grinboim, 769- [2008 or 2009]). Includes biographical information about rabbis in Poland. REF BM 750 G73 2009


Kohen-Zedek, Joseph. *Sefer dor yesharim: o er me-geza’ Lurya e-netser me-shorshe ribish ha-’eshel ha-gadol Rashi*. (Berdichev: ha-Me’orot, [1898]). Genealogy of the families Loria, Pollak, Helin and Katsenellenbogen, which claim descendant from Rashi and produced a large number of rabbis and rabbinical writers. 000059326 (HEB)


Rand, Oscar Z. Toldot anshe shem: Toldot ha-rabanim e-ha-admorim ha-mefursamim she-nismekhu mi-ge’one e-tsadi e eropah. (Nyu Yor: Be-hots’a’at ever ha-ma’arekhet ’al yad evrat toldot anshe shem, 710- [1950- ]). Biographies of rabbis. REF BM750.R3

Spira, Roman. Rabbis and Jewish Scholars in Poland in the 16th, 17th, and 18th Centuries: Biographies. R.Spira, 1985. YIVO 83718


Samuel Ephraim Tiktin Collection. Papers of a Yiddish and Hebrew writer, 1930’s to 1940’s, including several hundred biographies of rabbis from the United States, Palestine, Poland, Germany, England, Hungary, and other countries, compiled for the never-published Universal Rabbinical Biographical Encyclopedia. YIVO RG 495

Eichenbaum, Jacob. Tsiyunim metsuyanim be-vate ha- evarot: ha-yashan ehe- adash asher le-‘adat Yiśra’el be-‘ir Odessa. (Warsaw: [s.n.], 648, 1888). Includes Odessa’s rabbis’ genealogy sources. 000049217 (HEB)

ers i, Yits a Me ir. Sefer Admore malkhut Bet shernobil. (Flushing, N.Y. : Genealogy research Center of the Twersky Chernobyl Dynasty; Lakewood, N.J. : Makarov-Chernobyl Foundation, 5763 [2003]). Grand rabbis of the Chernobyl dynasty. 0000113079


Rabbinical Manuscripts: The YIVO Library has a large collection of rabbinical manuscripts in Hebrew, some of which date back to the 16th century. These are usually responsa and religious texts rather than
genealogies, but some do contain genealogical information. See YIVO’s “Rabbinics” card catalog under the author or title.

Web Resources

Rabbinic Genealogy SIG. The Rabbinic Genealogy Special Interest Group (SIG) is a forum for those interested in rabbinic genealogy or researching rabbinic ancestry within any geographic area or time period. [http://www.jewishgen.org/rabbinic/](http://www.jewishgen.org/rabbinic/)


American Jewish Year Book Cumulative Index of Obituaries. A compilation of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) from volumes 51-96 which includes names of over 3,000 prominent Jews who perished between 1948 to 1998. [http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/USA/ajybweb.htm#Index](http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/USA/ajybweb.htm#Index)