

## Session 2 “Getting Started ... Guiding Principles and Effective Practices”

**Wednesday February 24, 2021 7:00 PM Zoom**

### Start your family tree in the BOR system that you selected

- Make yourself the “root” of the tree
- Unless you have a compelling reason, make the tree public
  - The networking value of making trees public is immeasurable
  - Some of the hardest to find information is discovered by finding other trees where the focus is a different branch than yours
- Start by entering yourself, your parents, and your grandparents
  - Go back later to enter your spouse or Significant Other tree branches

### Guidelines and Effective Practices

#### Search Algorithms

- Search algorithms are the computer programs written by software engineers that take a search term, (i.e. Saul Levine), and then display a results set. When you Google anything on your phone or computer, it’s the Google engineered search algorithm that produces the results list.
- Search algorithms in family tree systems like ancestry.com, are highly dependent upon the amount and specificity of the search terms. If you search for a Saul Levine in ancestry.com without any additional data, you will get over 70,000 results. If you search for a Saul Levine born in 1911 you will get around 300.
- While the search algorithms used by ancestry.com and other tools like it are proprietary and private, they can be creatively manipulated to get results tailored to your needs.
- When birth and/or death dates are unknown, enter dates that are reasonable guesses, (remember to annotate the Profile records that your dates are guesses), to get the search algorithm “primed” to yield a more usable results set.
- Understand and effectively use a search algorithms ability to yield results based on “sounds like” capabilities.
- Get comfortable with the fact that almost every document source that you look at has been indexed either by a human’s eye or by OCR/ICR software programs. Your search operates on the index, not the document itself. There are some European documents that were indexed in the period in which they were created, but they are not common.

## Names

- Enter birth surnames for men and women. Do not use marriage surnames for women.
- Enter middle names when known, or the middle initial if the full middle name is not known
- Decide on a consistent way to enter names when they are not known at initial entry
  - The letters TBD for given name
  - Blank (nothing) for surname
  - If the person was born in Europe, include the European given name, (if known), as well as the American name. (i.e., Chaim (Hyman))
- Be very flexible when it comes to using names to identify and connect people in the tree.
  - Names should be used within the context in which you find them
  - Spellings of names were changed for many reasons
    - The immigrant did not know how to spell the name
    - The immigrant did not speak English
    - The person filling out the ship manifest was unfamiliar with the “proper” spelling of some Eastern European names
    - The person creating the document index misspelled the name
    - The computer ICR/OCR system that created an index incorrectly identified the name
    - This list could go on and on.....
  - Some Jewish immigrants intentionally “Americanized” their given names and surnames
    - Some siblings intentionally came up with different Americanized surnames...very confusing

## Addresses

- Enter street addresses, when known, including the street number
- On ship manifests, pay attention to the last European residence address as well as the address of the person who is the American destination. Also pay attention to where the immigrant says they were born.
- When entering addresses for NYC, include the borough name as well as the street address.
- For European births, pay a lot of attention to the town, district, or region. Pay little attention to the country as country borders were very fungible.
- When entering European addresses, use the country that the town or city is currently in, not the country it was in in the 1800s or early 1900s.
- When saving sources provided by your BOR to Profile Facts, sometimes only partial addresses are automatically posted. Manually edit the Profile Fact and complete the address.

## Dates

- When entering dates, either directly from sources or manually, ask yourself if they make sense. For example, pay attention to childbearing years and reasonable marriage dates. If the dates do not make sense, step back

and question your decision to enter that date.

- When important dates are not known, make a guess and annotate the Profile Fact identifying the date as a guess. As mentioned in the Search Algorithm section, BOR search algorithms benefit from using reasonable dates when the real ones have not been discovered yet.
- Decide upon and adhere to a specific date format, i.e., DD Month Year (10 March 1945)
- Dates and ages on Census records are commonly incorrect at an absolute level, but they are usually correct from a relative perspective. For instance, when looking at a family unit, while the actual ages of the children may not be accurate, their age ranking within the family is almost always accurate.
- When reading European source documents, pay attention to the date format they follow, which is commonly different than our American format.

### Ship Manifests

- Search Baltimore, Boston, Philadelphia, and Canadian ports for ship manifests if manifests are not found for NYC
  - Use the Steve Morse website ... <https://stevemorse.org/ellis/passengers.php>
- When reading Ship manifests, scroll forward and backward from your target document. Some manifests are 2 pages wide with valuable information about the passenger on the second page.
- When reading ship manifests pay attention to the passengers immediately before and after the person you are looking at. In many cases, they are relatives.

### Census Records

- Federal and State Census Records provide the primary “glue” that identifies the family unit.
- For most European immigrants, the Census records that you will be looking at are:
  - 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930, and 1940 Federal Census
  - 1905, 1915, and 1925 New York State Census
  - Maybe Rhode Island as well
- For immigrants who landed in the US in the mid to late 1800s, (not a lot)
  - 1860, 1870, and 1880 Federal Census. Almost all the 1890 Federal Census records were destroyed in a fire.
- When reading Census records look at the families living next to the one you are focused on as it is quite common to find relatives living next door or in the next apartment.
- For a variety of reasons, it is common to not find a specific census record you are looking for. At some point just give up or get highly creative and edit the search input and change names. If you are feeling very creative and have lots of time, use one of the Steve Morse tools, (<https://stevemorse.org/index.html>), to find Census records by address.
- Census records , for adults, contain occupations and other valuable information. Record the occupation in profiles as it can be used as connective glue.

## Naturalization Documents

- Naturalization documents are usually the richest source of information available.
- Scroll backwards and forwards within the document file as you will commonly find related documents.
- Read the Naturalization documents with a fine-tooth comb. Pay attention to everything written down, including the information about the witnesses.
- Naturalization documents may contain references to name changes and commonly refer to the name that the petitioner used on the ship manifest. These are unbelievably valuable factoids!

## Cemeteries and Burial Markers

- Use the Find A Grave website, [www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com), to locate burial locations and markers that have been catalogued by the Find-A-Grave volunteer effort. Find A Grave data is also a core ancestry.com data source
- The Find A Grave effort is a long-term ongoing volunteer effort. Most US gravesite markers have not been catalogued yet.
- If the gravesite markers were photographed, determine if the father, and maybe the mother, were written on the marker
- Access cemetery specific online databases
  - i.e. <http://www.mountzioncemetery.com/>, for the Mt Zion Cemetery in Maspeth NY.
  - Pay attention to the name of the burial society and grave location if given, as it can help locate and identify other family members.

## City Directories

- Online City Directories exist for many towns and cities in the US starting in the early 1920s and extending to the early 1960s
- These directories, in addition to street addresses, contain other valuable information such as occupation, company worked for, deaths, notices of moving to another town, and implied marriages.
- While most of these directories have been indexed by given and surname, they can also be browsed to find people whose names did not yield a search result.
- When looking at a City Directory entry for your person(s) of interest, browse others with the same surname looking for anyone else living at the same street address as your person(s) of interest. This can be a powerful connective tool.

## Family Trees built by Others

- Most of the BORs contain links to existing family trees as potential sources for your effort. These trees show up in many query results sets.
- A word of caution...At least 50% of all family trees that I have looked at contain errors of one or more of the following: omission, duplicated profiles, dates that just don't make sense, marriages that didn't happen, and on and on. While I must believe that the tree authors were well intentioned, you should be careful about copying information from other trees unless you can confirm it independently. One approach I have used with some success, is to message the tree author and engage them in a discussion to see if they have personal family information that they did not attach to their tree as a source. In that message discussion you can assess whether the information in that other tree is reliable.
- One of the more frustrating things about using existing family trees as sources is what I call the "Source Circle". I'll look at another tree only to find that its sources were yet another family tree. I then look at that tree only to find that its sources are yet another family tree. In the extreme I traced one tree that eventually circled back to itself!
- In determining the informational value of other trees look at the following:
  - How many sources, (not other trees), are attached to the profile?
  - Are there photographs that are sourced by the tree owner?

### **Photographs (Photo Forensics)**

- Old photographs, especially group photos, can be especially valuable in identifying dates and relationships
- Using group photos as genealogical sources can be both exceedingly difficult but also extremely gratifying
- Old photos should be gathered at the beginning of your project and scanned at the highest resolutions possible.
- Scan the back of the photo if there is anything written at all, even if at first, it's not legible.
- With large group photos it's helpful to create a spreadsheet with columns designed to help you figure out relationships
- Pay attention to body language, who is next to who, who seems to be the center or focus, clothing, where the studio is located if it's a studio shot, and the apparent age of the photo based on color gradients and fading

### **Overall and Miscellaneous**

- Find document sources and attach them to people profiles
  - Without attached sources you will find yourself questioning your own work.
  - Other tree owners will be more willing to engage you if they see you have attached sources. These other tree owners may have useful information about branches of your tree that you were stuck on.
  - Most BOR systems will help you automatically attach sources
  - Sources that you have, outside of a BOR, such as a marriage license from your grandmother, can be scanned and manually added as a media source to a profile.

- Enter occupations when known
  - Many source documents contain occupations, including Census records, Naturalization documents, Ship Manifests, and Draft Registration documents.
  - Occupation information can be extremely helpful in breaking ties. If I'm looking at 2 different records for a Saul Levine and 1 is a peddler and the other runs a candy store, if I have a set of records that identify my Saul Levine as a peddler, then I'm closer to feeling comfortable using the new peddler record source.
- When looking at source documents, examine **EVERY** item in the document.
- Use resources outside of your chosen Book of Record repository
  - [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org) ... Free source if you chose ancestry.com as BOR
  - [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)
  - [www.newspapers.com](http://www.newspapers.com)
  - [www.genealogybank.com](http://www.genealogybank.com)
  - [www.whitepages.com](http://www.whitepages.com) (Professional subscription)
    - This source is extremely valuable in finding, (and contacting if you are brave enough), living descendants.
    - Even though whitepages.com was not designed to be a genealogy tool, there are ways of interpreting its data to locate related family members and to confirm birth and death dates
  - FaceBook, Google
  - Steve Morse website... <https://stevemorse.org/index.html>
  - "Dictionary of Jewish Surnames From the Russian Empire" ... Hardcopy only...purchase or find in library
  - Google Maps
  - Wikipedia
  - Family History Centers
    - Usually adjacent to or inside Mormon Temples
    - Open to general public
    - Computers have online access to many source documents generally unavailable
    - Closed during Covid
- Save the sources above as favorite genealogy URL links in an easy to find location, preferably within your BOR
- Use the biggest monitor you have as you will need a few screens open all the time
- When you reach a "dead-end", especially late at night, move onto something else and come back to it later
- Go sideways to enable going backwards and forward
  - By sideways I mean looking at siblings and cousins and others in the same generation.
  - This strategy can be especially useful when you have reached a dead-end on a specific person and just can't find that record you were looking for.
  - When researching a sibling or a cousin you may run across a reference to the person you were focused on, a reference that you had not yet discovered. This commonly happens with obituaries and wedding announcements.
- Decide how far backward, (and sideways), you research in-law tree branches

- Without a clear decision you will create a tree with too many people
  - In-law branches, 1 generation maybe 2, can be helpful when obituaries are examined
- Enter people profile photos whenever available
- When reading source documents with witness signatures, look very carefully at all the witness information.
- Conduct basic historical research to aid in understanding and interpreting historical documents

## **Session 3 “Putting it all Together”**

**Thursday March 4, 2021 7:00 PM Zoom**

- I will use my extended family marchisa-toman tree to illustrate topics covered in the first 2 sessions
- The format will be bouncing back and forth from screen sharing to an open Q & A