

Current Presentations

As of 2025

Bio

Susan Weinberg is an artist, author, researcher, and frequent speaker on genealogy topics. Drawing on her long career in finance, she often applies spreadsheets as an analytic tool in her genealogy research. Her creative work often involves storytelling and frequently explores family history themes. Susan is active in organizations within the world of Jewish genealogy, as immediate past president of the Minnesota Jewish Genealogical Society (MNJGS), vice president of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) and vice president of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest (JHSUM). She developed the Jewish Identity and Legacy Project, an oral history project with elders, then authored the book *We Spoke Jewish: A Legacy in Stories* that includes oral history, artwork, and history on three groups of Jewish immigrants who spanned the 1900s. Susan has created and manages websites for the former Jewish communities of several ancestral towns. She writes frequently for publications on genealogy topics and does genealogy research for clients around the world.

Presentations

A Helping Hand to Immigrants: How Immigrants Spread Throughout the US

The Baron de Hirsch, one of the wealthiest people of his time, had ambitious goals to free the Russian Jew from constraints placed upon him in Russia. His solution was to assist their immigration from Russia. Many of those immigrants came to the United States and were assisted by programs proposed and funded by the Baron de Hirsch. Programs spanned agricultural colonies, trade schools, the Industrial Removal Office and Galveston. Many were focused on moving Jews out of New York and around the country. This talk will explore the circumstances that prompted Russian Jews to flee to America and the programs of Baron de Hirsch that facilitated their experience in America. We will focus more in-depth on such programs as the Industrial Removal Office, which moved immigrants around the country and supported them in finding employment, forming a nucleus that led to many of our Jewish communities of today.

The Fluidity of Names

Our Jewish ancestors had a lot of names — Hebrew names, Yiddish names, nicknames and often several secular names that can make tracing them challenging. Given names have a much longer history than surnames in Jewish history and often contain significant family history due to naming patterns. So how do you work back to their original name to find them in their ancestral town and how do you identify the names they took in the country to which they immigrated? Then how do you use that information to build out your tree? Could that name be hiding in plain sight? Join Susan in an exploration of the nuances of Jewish given names, how to find them, trace them, and use them to expand your genealogy. She will present sources of information and methods in a variety of cases to make sense of this often-puzzling subject!

Unraveling the Puzzle: Finding the Thread

Sometimes we have a puzzle with no easy answers, a brick wall before we even begin. Perhaps there are limited overseas records on-line or you have very limited family information to validate relationships. This presentation explores approaches to unravel challenging genealogical puzzles using seemingly thin threads of information—in one case the back of an envelope and the other a distant memory of a long-ago visitor. It may feel a bit like pulling a rabbit out of a hat, but it is grounded in an approach that you can easily apply to your own family history search. By building a foundation, identifying a hypothesis, defining a strategy, and using knowledge of available resources and how they connect, we can then take a simple clue and build out the story. We will explore key resources as well as how to search effectively on search engines such as FamilySearch and Ancestry.

Crossing the Ocean: Sources to Ancestral Towns

Using case studies based on Lithuania Latvia, Poland, and Belarus, we explore how to connect a wide variety of records and make use of many search engines. With these tools we cross the ocean from US records to locate ancestral towns and family within them. Much as with any journey, we identify where we are going, who we are going to visit, how we will communicate and how we assure we have the right luggage. Or in genealogy parlance, what is our ancestral town, who are the family members who resided there, how do we decipher documents, and how do we assure the people we are searching for are our family? This talk also addresses how to create finding tools to decipher records in Russian handwritten Cyrillic.

Immigration Related

Tracing the Manifest: Navigating a Time of Change

Immigration is a liminal state, a place of transition, bridging two worlds as the immigrant adapts to a new country and identity, often reflected in name changes. That adds complexity to our search, requiring frequent resolution of inconsistencies. This talk will take a case focused on finding the immigration manifest and through that process show how we can search and reconcile seemingly conflicting information to learn the story of the immigrant and find the related documentation. We will look at what the manifest reveals and how we validate and build on information to connect with family who were previously unknown.

Mining the Manifest

After 1906, immigration manifests offer a wealth of information, but what do you do if your family came over prior to that time? And how did they get from New York to the central United States? This presentation explores the immigration period from the early 1890s through 1906, a period which begins to offer useful information for a genealogical search. Using a case approach, we will look at derivative naturalization documents, trace contacts they were going to through the NY vital records and follow immigrants who found their route through Canada. Once in New York, we will explore how you can follow their journey to the Midwest. We will explore cases with name changes and variable spellings, work back from other documents, and resolve conflicting data.

Immigration History: Laws, Documents and Stories

This talk presents a perspective on immigration through the lens of laws, documents, and family story. With a focus on the 1900s, we explore the immigration laws that affected entry and the immigration documents created as laws changed that are available to genealogists. Juxtaposed with laws and documents are stories of the Jews of the 1900s who came to America. This multi-media presentation incorporates experiences drawn from an oral history project with Jewish elders. The stories span those who grew up in early immigrant communities, Holocaust survivors who came in the 1940s-50s and immigrants from the former Soviet Union who came in the 1970s-90s. Using video clips from those interviews, I will tell a lively story of Jewish immigration to the United States and the life of an immigrant juxtaposed with the documents and laws that framed that experience. This timely topic offers a perspective on immigration through the lens of family story set in the broader historical context while providing attendees with tools to explore their own family story.