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New databases ease tracking of Jewish roots

Mass. records inventoried



Judy Izenberg's research turned up piles of documents. (Dina Rudick/Globe Staff)

By Michele Morgan Bolton
Globe Correspondent / August 23, 2010

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Carol Clingan's hunger for connection with her Jewish ancestry sparked a daunting two-decade quest to track her forebears' emigration from Ukraine and Belarus to New England generations ago and then find clues about their lives here.

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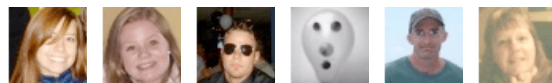
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Many people tracing Jewish roots find stories with heartbreaking gaps as families were split apart by immigration and the horrors of the Holocaust, and records of birth, marriage, and death are often missing or deliberately destroyed.

Now, three new databases compiled by Clingan, who lives in Dedham, and others with the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston are about to go public to help Jews all over the world track their Massachusetts roots.

In the lists, every synagogue in the state is inventoried, as well as all Jewish cemeteries and newspapers, rendering the search for family a little more

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manageable for those starting out.

Clingan's labor of love, which included searching through dusty archives and tapping the foggy memories of strangers to trace her grandparents' emigration, two to Chelsea and two to Burlington, Vt., honors basic Jewish principles, she said.

"We are all enjoined to remember the exodus from Egypt as if it happened to us," she said. "Genealogists take it a step further. Many, like me, want to not only find the names, dates, and places but the stories underneath them. Like, why did they come here? What were their lives like?"

The 568-item database Clingan compiled contains a listing of every congregation in the state, past and present. It says when and by whom it was founded, the various locations it occupied, as well as when it closed and what happened to its records, and tracks the many mergers among congregations, to the last surviving one.

That list is cross-referenced to a cemetery database compiled by Groton resident Alex Woodle, and a third database prepared by David Rosen of Boston that lists the state's Jewish newspapers. The plan is eventually to convert all the information into a database format and to make it accessible using a one-step search tool, but that may take time to implement.

A history that chronicles unfathomable loss of life, hardship, and struggle makes it difficult to bridge the lost generations, but also that much more necessary, said Heidi Urich of Cambridge, the genealogical society's president.

"So many families were severed, and so many lost or left behind, that each piece you find is precious," she said.

For Judy Izenberg of Framingham, sorting out a scattered family history has become a compulsion. She tracks her leads — and fills in gaps — on a handful of large, tri-fold poster boards in her home. Each clue is treasured like gold.

Izenberg's parents came to Massachusetts separately in 1922 from Novograd Volynsk and Olinka, in what was then Russia. Like two of Clingan's grandparents, they settled in Chelsea, where they attended the Orange Street Shul. [Continued...](#)

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