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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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Page 2 of 2 -- Izenberg and Clingan, whose maiden name is Isenberg, recently discovered their mothers were classmates in the Chelsea High School Class of 1933.

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Izenberg is using the databases to learn about her grandmother, Esther Goldman, and her great-uncle Saul Goldman, who went to Argentina 90 years ago instead of to the Boston area as his family did.

Through leads discovered in the lists, and with the help of friends and others, Izenberg has unveiled the South American side of her family and is leaving for Buenos Aires in a week to meet them.

"The databases help you put the puzzle together," she said. "You never know what little bit of information is important."

Solomon Franco was reportedly the first Jew to arrive here in 1649, according

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to a history written by Woodle. Unable to support himself, he returned to Europe. Others followed over time but it wasn't until the mid-19th century that Boston had a permanent Jewish community, first made up of waves of German and Russian Jews.

Then, families from many ethnicities fanned out to Roxbury and Dorchester, to the North Shore, Newton, and Brookline, and then around the state.

Brandeis professor Ellen Smith, who wrote "The Jews of Boston," called Clingan's list stellar.

"I've never seen a better one," said Smith, also a museum curator. "It is as comprehensive as the moment allows."

Synagogues on the list are not about bricks and mortar, she said, but about what went on inside them and the lives spent in community and worship. Similarly, Jewish cemeteries organized by congregation, trade union, or hometown in Europe offer a sense, by the grouping of their deaths, of who they were in life, Smith said.

Woodle, who compiled the cemetery list, knows family histories can be a mystery. "But it's always nice to pay it forward with help for others," he said. "It's amazing people are still finding each other 60 years after the war."

Rosen's search has been simpler because scores of his father's ancestors arrived in Boston in 1889 from a part of Russia that is now Poland.

"They founded a business in the North End selling used clothing and then moved to the West End, selling new clothes," he said. The company, H. Glaser and Son, is still in business in Holliston.

Like Rosen, Marjorie Short of North Chelmsford used the synagogue database to find information about relatives on one side of her family, a large clan from Lithuania who, in 1890, also landed in the North End and were packed into a one- or two-room tenement before eventually moving to Roxbury.

"I'm doing this because people are forgetting," she said. "And the third generation thinks everyone grew up middle class. They don't know how difficult it was."

Short is so good at unearthing old clues that people ask her to help with research on their families.

"I'm not a detective," she says, shyly.

But she may as well be. Short has a keen ability to track people down, including one baffling blank on her own family tree that was resolved earlier this month.

A distant relative who emigrated to the North End from Lithuania died in 1935, leaving a 1-year-old daughter, Short said. No one knew the name of the child or what had happened to her. After searching the databases, and posting an inquiry online, Short found someone who knew the lost daughter, and she and the woman, now 75, had a friendly lunch last week.

Another chapter closed, Short said: "I don't have very many relatives, so this is very meaningful to me."

Links to the databases are located at JGSGB.org. Michele Morgan Bolton can be reached at mmbolton1@verizon.net. ■



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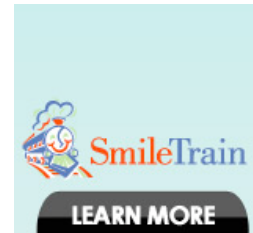
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