

The tongue-in-cheek commentary below was written after returning from the July 2000 International Conference on Jewish Genealogy in Salt Lake City. Of course, some things have changed in the intervening years. For example, you can now copy images from microfilms directly to memory sticks using special microfilm readers, so the first warning no longer applies. But the others do!

## **Don't Ever Go to Salt Lake City**

by Jay Sage

Take my advice: don't ever go to Salt Lake City if you have any interest in genealogy. If you do, the Family History Library will ensnare you, and you'll suffer endless miseries.

First of all, if you go to Salt Lake City you'll end up as broke as a gambler in Vegas. The Library charges only a modest 20 cents for each page printed from microfilm, but that's just a trap. You'll end up finding so many exciting records to copy that you'll be out of money in no time. On our way to the Library the first day, we stopped at a bank and cashed a twenty dollar bill for several dollars in dimes and the rest in singles. The coins disappeared in no time, so we turned to the Library's dollar-bill changer. Unlike most of those machines that I've used, this one accepted every dollar without the slightest hesitation. I've never seen one of those machines swallow bills as greedily. By the end of the day our money was gone. To make matters worse, we later discovered that the Library office will make change for large bills. Fortunately, their sense of shame keeps them from driving desperate researchers into debt by accepting credit cards—or mortgages on their houses.

Second, if you go to Salt Lake City you will starve to death. The problem is not a lack of restaurants; there are plenty of them. Most of them are not very exciting, but that's irrelevant; you'll never even get to try them out. Just when you think you might be able to take a meal break, you'll discover another lead that you just have to follow up immediately. Since they have every microfilm you need within a few feet, there's just no way to escape for a meal. On our first day at the Library, when we looked at our watch to see if it was time for lunch, it was already 5 p.m. The only reason you'll get to see your hotel room is that they throw you out of the Library at 10.

Finally, the Library makes sure that you'll never escape their clutches as a result of reaching a dead end in your research. In their sneakiest move of all, they have a help desk staffed with experts who seem to be able to solve all your problems and find endless new leads. No matter what little village you're looking for, someone there will have the gazetteer that lists it. No matter what language you are trying to decipher, someone there will know how to read it. My wife's family came from a place in East Prussia that we could not find in the catalog. No wonder: it was a village so small that even the nearby bigger village was considered tiny. Nevertheless, the Library experts managed to find not only the village but the microfilm reel with its Jewish records. That film kept us busy for a whole day—and used up our first twenty dollars in copy charges. My wife knows German quite well, but she was stumped by some of the old Gothic handwriting in those records. Again, there was no chance for us to just give up and go home. The Library experts helped us decipher everything we could not read on our own.

So, take my advice: if you are interested in genealogy, don't ever go to Salt Lake City. You may never be heard from again.