

International Institute of Jewish Genealogy Formed

New Year's Day 2004, ten prominent Jewish genealogical activists from around the globe created a founding committee to establish an International Institute of Jewish Genealogy (IJG) in Jerusalem. Members include Alexander Beider, (Paris, France), Claire Bruell (Auckland, New Zealand), Sophie Caplan (Sydney, Australia), Stanley Diamond (Montreal, Canada), Professor Ladislau Gyemant (Cluj, Romania), Ambassador Neville Lamdan (Jerusalem), Professor Dov Levin, (Jerusalem), AVOTAYNU publisher, Gary Mokotoff (Bergenfield, New Jersey) and AVOTAYNU editor, Sallyann Amdur Sack (Bethesda, Maryland). Dr. Sack serves as chair of the group with Ambassador Lamdan as Israeli Coordinator.

The concept of an institute devoted to academic research into Jewish genealogy has been circulating for some years. In the 1990s, AVOTAYNU published several articles exploring the topic. In 1999, Sack and Mokotoff teamed up with (now retired) Israeli Ambassador Neville Lamdan, who had written a detailed proposal on the subject. Lamdan subsequently was charged by supporters to prepare a feasibility study and try to advance the project among Israeli institutions. In recent months, the initiative has gathered considerable momentum. The founding committee is working to establish the Institute in Jerusalem within the coming year.

The Institute's Aim and Mission Statement (below) notes that currently absent from the Jewish world is an institute wholly devoted to studying, researching and teaching Jewish genealogy and family history. The committee proposes to fill that gap and, indeed, answer a need of the Jewish people as a whole, by establishing an independent institute with close academic ties to institutions of higher learning in Israel and strategic partnerships with institutions and archives involved in genealogical work throughout the world. The institute will serve to complement, and not compete with, the many-faceted endeavors of Jewish genealogists at the grass roots level and the important local, national and international organizations already active in the field.

Institute activities will focus initially on resource gathering, research, teaching, conducting academic seminars and colloquia, creating scientific publications and serving the general public.

This is an ambitious undertaking whose time has come. The committee is dedicated to making it happen.

The Aim

To establish in Jerusalem a research Institute for Jewish Genealogy.

In recent years, there has been a marked upsurge of interest in Jewish genealogy. The reasons are many and probably involve complex cultural and sociological factors affecting, even preoccupying, the Jewish world today. They may range from a simple thirst among individuals to explore their "roots," to a collective sense that a deeper knowledge of Jewish family history may help strengthen the group's future—in other words, that Jewish genealogy may contribute to Jewish continuity.

From a scientific point of view, major forces behind the burgeoning growth of Jewish genealogy have been the collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent access to vital archival resources in Eastern Europe, which previously had been virtually out of reach. The growing access to cyberspace has also played its part. As a result, the foundations and scope of Jewish genealogy have been transformed and enhanced. Having once been regarded with reserve and even skepticism by serious historians, the field now has emerged as a legitimate area of academic endeavor and as a subsience within the evolving field of Jewish studies.

At the grassroots level, activity is vibrant. The Internet is replete with well-developed sites for Jewish genealogy. Local, national and even international societies abound. Popular periodicals are not lacking. But all this interest is essentially amateur, since a key element is absent. Nowhere is there a professional institution wholly dedicated to studying, research-

ing and teaching Jewish genealogy and family history.

We now propose to fill that gap and answer a need of the Jewish People as a whole by establishing in Jerusalem an independent research Institute for Jewish genealogy which will have close academic ties to institutions of higher learning in Israel and strategic partnerships with institutes and archives involved in genealogical work throughout the world.

We hope you will join us in this bold endeavor. Its time has come.

Mission Statement

1. *Resources.* To locate, acquire and make available relevant primary and secondary source materials from all quarters, with the eventual goal of creating a central repository of Jewish genealogical records and resources

2. *Research.* To conduct systematic research into Jewish genealogy and family history and to carry out academically approved projects on an interdisciplinary basis in pertinent areas, encompassing the whole of the Jewish world in different eras

3. *Teaching.* To offer approved courses at university level in Jewish genealogy with a view to offering certification for Jewish genealogists

4. *Seminars.* To conduct academic seminars on ongoing research and related topics

5. *Publications.* To publish a scholarly journal of Jewish genealogy on a periodic basis, together with a series of scientific monographs on an occasional basis

6. *Colloquium.* To hold an annual colloquium for specialists on a relevant theme or themes, with a view to promoting further academic and professional interest in Jewish genealogy and family history

7. *Serving the General Public.* To offer non-specialists practical courses, primarily by Internet, on Jewish genealogy and the techniques required to embark on family research.