

The Interface Between the
International Institute for Jewish Genealogy
And the Jewish Genealogical Societies
by Rose Lerer Cohen

The following are remarks made at the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy priorities symposium in Jerusalem, September 2006—Ed.

When Neville and Sallyann asked me to speak about the relationship between the genealogical societies and the International Institute for Jewish Genealogy, I didn't realize what a daunting task this was to be. The majority of the founders of the Institute are leading members of genealogical societies from all over the world.

When the Israel Genealogical Society was established in Jerusalem about 20 years ago, its founders envisioned an academic umbrella organization over genealogical research. This is even mentioned in the by-laws of the society. We are pleased that this vision is being fulfilled.

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Genealogy Society and a member of the board of the International Conference held in Jerusalem in 2004, I am particularly aware of the creativity of the Israel Genealogical Society and its contribution to research and database details. The Society has embarked on a number of indexing projects such as the Montefiore records and the gravestones on the Mount of Olives. These records focus largely on Eretz Yisrael, although the majority of members do not have roots in Israel. A listing of the archives in Israel, which serves as a researcher's tool, has been compiled. These are just a few of the projects that contribute to Israeli genealogy and genealogy as a whole. All these projects are carried out on a volunteer basis. There are individuals in our society whose family research has led them to initiate projects that are unrelated to their immediate family research. This has resulted in the publication of articles and books.

Projects are not peculiar to the Israel Genealogical Society; all societies have embarked on varying projects, for example *Genealogical Resources in New York*, published by the Genealogical Society of New York. In Great Britain, the Jewish genealogical society has published a series called *Jewish Ancestors*, and there have been private initiatives such as the book by Cyril Fox and Saul Issroff, *Jewish Memorial (Yizkor) Books in the United Kingdom*. I have named just a few, the list is endless. These are all social history projects and are interdisciplinary, touching on areas such as history, education, sociology and anthropology.

Gary Mokotoff, in his presentation, spoke of the way in which genealogy has evolved over the years. Today, the Special Interest Groups play a dominant role. The SIGs, as they are called, are an international group of members from all over the world who, as a group of volunteers, are in the position to take archival records of a certain area and transcribe and translate them into data, thus furthering the aim of enhancing genealogical and social research.

This brings me to the question of the relationship be-

tween the genealogical societies in Israel and abroad, the umbrella organization of genealogy societies—the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies, the Special Interest Groups and the Institute. It would be fitting that there be a synthesis between the Institute and the aforementioned groups. They share a common interest, that of investigating the social and religious mores of the Jewish community.

A number of the speakers referred to “academic genealogy.” Is it the place of the Institute to provide a book of rules—to standardize research and to make research rigorous? Will the Institute take genealogy beyond the hobby? Will the inception of the Institute affect future research within the societies? What is the place of future projects initiated by individuals and by societies in relation to the Institute? What is the place of the large number of academics in the societies who are capable of carrying out rigorous research?

At present, we are witnessing a process. In my opinion, at the moment, there is and should be, as Dr. Gur Alroey recommended, “cooperation between genealogists with academia,” particularly in the field of social history. We should complement each other.

This may change over the years as the Institute gains academic credibility. It may have its own Masters and PhD students, produce its own research and gradually become less dependent on the genealogy societies.

It is my view that the genealogy societies should not feel threatened by the Institute. At this point in time, there should be a synthesis between the genealogical societies with their decades of research experience and the Institute, in order to contribute to the aims that the Institute has put forward. Time will tell as to how the relationship will develop and change in the future.

Rose Lerer Cohen, PhD, born in South Africa and now living in Jerusalem, is chairman of the Jerusalem Branch of the Israel Genealogy Society. She has been researching her Lithuanian roots for many years and is coauthor with Saul Issroff of Holocaust in Lithuania 1941–1944: A Book of Remembrance. Gefen 2002. She has an interest in oral history and is participating in an International Oral History Project of the University of Hagen, Germany, and has recently embarked on the Southern African Oral History Project. She is a member of the Association of Professional Genealogists (APG) and specializes in Holocaust research.

Presenters at the symposium included: (back row) Neville Lamdan, ILJG director (Israel); Gary Mokotoff (U.S.); Ruth Mokotoff (U.S.); Saul Issroff (England); Milton Shain (South Africa); Stephen P. Morse (U.S.); Alexander Beider (behind Morse) (France); Jeffrey Malka (U.S.); Thomas Jones (U.S.); Jean-Pierre Stroweiss (Israel); Rose Lerer Cohen (Israel); Jean-Claude Kuperminc (France). (Front row) Mathilde Tagger (Israel); H. Daniel Wagner (Israel); Rabbi Meir Wunder (Israel); Sallyann Amdur Sack (U.S.); Chanan Rappaport (Israel); Claire Bruell (New Zealand); Prof. Israel Bartal (Israel).