

Interaction Between the IJG and the Wider Jewish Genealogical World

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The nature of the contemporary Jewish genealogical world is the first thing to recognize when we consider the possible interface and interaction between our new academic research institute and the Jewish genealogical community at large. Most Jewish genealogists typically describe themselves as being hobbyists or enthusiasts, and it is a fact that most of us pursue our research as an avocation, for fun and not to provide us a livelihood.

But what a group we are! Over the past 35 years, we hobbyists literally have created the field of Jewish genealogy. When we began, most Jews believed that it was impossible to trace their ancestral roots, an idea that seems almost absurd now. We have formed a worldwide network of Jewish genealogical societies and special interest groups, some in specific geographical locations, others operating in the ether via the Internet. We hold conferences, write reference books, discover resources, develop databases and more.

In short, it is the work of the Jewish genealogical community at large that has taken our pursuit to the point where it now merits acceptance and recognition as an academic discipline. The Institute would not exist today if the Jewish genealogical community had not brought us to this place.

A wealth of knowledge and talent exists in the Jewish genealogical community which the Institute appreciates and very much wants to engage in our research. We have, in fact, already begun to do so with our daunting, long-term project to recreate the Destroyed Communities of Europe from a genealogical point of view. In its current, pilot phase, the project focuses on three destroyed communities, working with groups of individual genealogists who have banded together to reconstruct the genealogies of the total Jewish population of a specific locality. To advance this project the Institute has completed a pilot study of Pusalotas, Lithuania, working with Jewish genealogists Gilda Kurzman and Howard Margol. It has entered into a partnership agreement with JRI-Poland and the Ostrow Mazowiecka Research Family. And in the planning stage is a collaborative exploration of Zdunska Wola in Poland headed by Professor Daniel Wagner. Over time, we expect to involve increasing numbers of individual researchers in the same way.

This is what we are already doing in the area of interaction. But we have some other ideas which still have to be thought through:

- One is to work for interface with the wider community through the IAJGS and the national associations, if they are open to that and if meaningful channels can be found.
- Another idea is to open a page on our website where individuals and groups will be invited to submit research projects which they would like to conduct under the Institute's auspices and/or in collaboration with us. We will be happy to support projects which are judged to be within our operational guidelines and to meet the highest academic standards.
- Yet another suggestion is to invite individuals to submit their research for publication under our imprint, either as an occasional monograph or in the peer-reviewed journal that we hope to publish.
- At the level of national or local societies, we would be delighted if complete sets of their publications and periodicals could be donated to the Institute which seeks to establish a repository for literature of this kind.

- At the level of personal involvement, we'd like to suggest that folk put themselves on the Institute's mailing list, so that they can kept informed of what's going on.
- And if that's not enough, we'd like to go further and suggest that people out there send us copies of their family trees (on the assumption that they are properly documented) for us to catalogue, assess and make available to researchers.
- Likewise, they could send us their published family histories, which are very often privately printed and given limited distribution, because we would like to develop a central collection of Jewish family histories (on a par with Yad Vashem which has evolved into a repository of *Yizkor* Books).

All these and no doubt more are ways for the Institute and the wider Jewish genealogical fraternity to inter-relate and interact. But before we move ahead on any of them, we'd like hear your ideas of what we all can and should do together.

We have invited Dr. Rose Lerer-Cohen, the Chair of the Jerusalem Branch of the Israel Genealogical Society, to open this discussion.