How do I find my great-grandfather's ancestral town?
Part 2 – Immigration Records
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This month we'll continue our search for great-grandfather's ancestral town. We'll focus on immigration records. These can tell us what towns or villages are ancestors lived in just before they left the old country. First we have to understand a little about the immigration process. There were 5 major "waves" of Jewish immigration to the U.S.

1654-1825	Jews of Spanish origin (Sephardic) followed by Germanic Jews
1825-1880	Second wave of Germanic Jews; Jews from Hungary
1880-1929	Eastern European Jews (Russia, Poland, Romania, Austro-Hungary)
1929-1945	European Jews fleeing the Nazis
1945 onward	Holocaust survivors; Immigrants from the (former) Soviet Union

Emigrants from the old country travelled on foot, by wagon, and by rail, generally to north European seaports like Hamburg, Bremen, Rotterdam, and Antwerp. As they boarded passenger ships for their journey, the ship's Purser created a passenger manifest listing each passenger's name and other information. Most of these passenger lists have been preserved. Manifests from 1890 onward (and some before 1890) include the town where the immigrant last resided, the name and location of the closest relative left behind, and the name and address of the person who would meet them at their destination. The recorded names almost always are the old country names, transliterated to the English alphabet (e.g. Yakov or Yankel instead of Jacob, Jake, or Jack). As "JewishGen's Passenger List" InfoFile notes, "The names were written down the way that they sounded. Do not expect to find your ancestor's name spelled as it is today — realize that your immigrant ancestor wouldn't be able to recognize the written name even if it were shown to him/her, if they read only Russian and/or Yiddish/Hebrew." (http://www.jewishgen.org/InfoFiles/faq.html#Passenger)

In 1880, only 280,000 Jews lived in the U.S. But, between 1880 and 1925, about 2.4 million Jews entered the U.S., mostly through New York City, but also at Boston, Baltimore, Philadelphia, New Orleans and Galveston. I'll focus on the period 1880-1929, and on immigration to New York City ports. Contact me (rondoctor@earthlink.net) if you need information about other ports, or other time periods.

Before Ellis Island began operations in 1892, immigrants to NYC landed at Castle Garden at the lower end of Manhattan. Passenger manifests for ships disembarking at Castle Garden (1855-1891) are available on microfilm at the National Archives branches and can be ordered through Mormon Family History Centers. The easiest way to access these manifests is through Ancestry.com, a fee-for-service website. It is excellent, but pricey. You can get a 10 day trial subscription free, or you can subscribe monthly, quarterly, or annually. You also can get *free*

access to Ancestry.com on the computers at Multnomah County Library branches. Ancestry has a good search engine, but Steve Morse's One Step website (stevemorse.org) is better. On Morse's website just select Castle Garden in the search box at the upper left corner, and have your Ancestry ID and password ready.

Ellis Island passenger manifests (1892-1924) also are on the Web and access to them is free (http://www.ellisislandrecords.org/). Steve Morse's One Step website (stevemorse.org) offers a better way to search the Ellis Island records. Be sure to read the "Overview" which will guide you through the search process. You can do a Basic Search (white form) or an Enhanced Search (gold form). Here are some suggestions for using Morse's search forms:

- I prefer the gold form.
- I usually begin by putting a minimum amount of information into the form.
- Type in your best guess of the immigrant's surname, as it would have been in the old country. Since the database is riddled with transcription errors, the same surname may be spelled differently for different family members. Recognizing this, Morse allows you to select "starts with", "sounds like" or "contains" when you fill in each search box. Try each one to get a feel for the kind of results that each produces.
- If you are fairly sure of when your immigrant arrived, specify the "Year of Arrival" search box, but bracket it by one or two years. So, if you think your grandfather arrived in 1907, specify a search for 1905 to 1909). Be aware that some manifests extend over two pages, so when you view a manifest page, also check the preceding and following pages.
- Select 200 hits/page (the maximum allowed).
- You can narrow your search by selecting "Jewish" in the ethnicity section. This will show you records in which ethnicity is designated as "Hebrew" on the passenger manifest. Although you greatly reduce the number of irrelevant results, you run a risk of "losing" some relevant records. Try both ways, with and without ethnicity selected.
- Leave the other search boxes blank for now.

Hit the search button. When the results appear, scan the list of names, towns, birth years and arrival years. When you find a likely candidate, you will have several choices for examining the record: passenger record, text manifest, and scanned manifest. Click on the word "view" in the scanned manifest column. The manifest will appear. Record the "page" and "line number". Clicking on the image magnifies it allowing for easier reading. Note the information in the manifest header: ship name, departure port and date, arrival date, and column headings. Scroll down to the line number for your immigrant and see if the data matches what you know to be true. Some manifests extend over two pages, so be sure to check the preceding and following pages.. Repeat the process for another passenger name if the person you selected is not your family. This is a very time consuming exercise, but when you finally find an ancestor, your exhilaration will make the effort well-worthwhile.

Here is an extract from the manifest for my paternal grandmother, Reise Doctor from Kremenets (incorrectly transcribed as *Kronsnistr*), going to her uncle, Joseph Kornfeld at 263 Rivington Street in NYC.

Passenger manifests from other ports also are available at Ancestry.com. The Galveston database is available free online at http://www.galvestonhistory.org/immigration-login.asp. Also, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) and its predecessors helped many immigrants on their journey to America. They have records dating from 1909 through today and will do searches for you. Contact information is on their website, www.hias.org/programs/find-family.

In my next column, I'll discuss naturalization records and other sources for locating your ancestral town. In the meantime, if you have any questions, contact me at rondoctor@earthlink.net.