

PROJECT ROOTS

Our Jewish Heritage

Activities designed to encourage local Jewish youth to bring the history of Jewish life in Mercer County alive by creating living memorials to those buried in our cemeteries. Students will honor our Jewish ancestors, including those who left their homes to escape persecution, '*pogroms*' and poverty in search of a better life by telling their stories.

Coordinated by:

- The Greater Trenton Jewish Cemetery Project, Genealogy and Educational Committees
- The Trenton Jewish Historical Society
- Jewish Family and Children's Service
- Board of Rabbis
- Principals' Council



For more information

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Recording Our Family Stories

Students are encouraged to “interview” their grandparents, aunts, uncles to learn the family story. The questions below are a guideline, feel free to add your own. It is important to capture the answers, some suggested methods for recording this information include:

- Record the interview. If possible, have your interviewer hold up pictures of the people or places they are describing.
- Write up the stories as articles in a newspaper; title the paper something that is connected to your family; make sure you include pictures and illustrations.
- Create a book (there are many on-line sites that can help with this). Use pictures for each story (when possible). Make an effort to label the people and places in the photos and, when possible, put a date.
- Write a short play illustrating an important episode from your family’s history

A great way to uncover clues to your family history or to get great quotes for journaling in a heritage scrapbook is a family interview. By asking the right open-ended questions, you're sure to collect a wealth of family tales. Use this list of family history interview questions to help you get started, but be sure to personalize the interview with your own questions as well.

50 Questions to Ask Your Relatives

1. What is your full name? Why did your parents select this name for you? Did you have a nickname?
2. When and where were you born?
3. How did your family come to live there?
4. Were there other family members in the area? Who?
5. What was the house (apartment, farm, etc.) like? How many rooms? Bathrooms? Did it have electricity? Indoor plumbing? Telephones?
6. Were there any special items in the house that you remember?
7. What is your earliest childhood memory?
8. Describe the personalities of your family members.
9. What kind of games did you play growing up?
10. What was your favorite toy and why?
11. What was your favorite thing to do for fun (movies, go to the beach, etc.)?
12. Did you have family chores? What were they? Which was your least favorite?
13. Did you receive an allowance? How much? Did you save your money or spend it?
14. What was school like for you as a child? What were your best and worst subjects? Where did you attend grade school? High school? College?
15. What school activities and sports did you participate in?
16. Do you remember any fads from your youth? Popular hairstyles? Clothes?
17. Who were your childhood heroes?
18. What were your favorite songs and music genres?
19. Did you have any pets? If so, what kind and what were their names?
20. What was your religion growing up? What church, if any, did you attend?
21. Were you ever mentioned in a newspaper?
22. Who were your friends when you were growing up?
23. What world events had the most impact on you when you were a child? Did any of them personally affect your family?

24. Describe a typical family dinner. Did you all eat together as a family? Who did the cooking? What were your favorite foods?
25. How were holidays (birthdays, Christmas, etc.) celebrated in your family? Did your family have special traditions?
26. How is the world today different from what it was like when you were a child?
27. Who was the oldest relative you remember as a child? What do you remember about them?
28. What do you know about your family surname?
29. Is there a naming tradition in your family, such as always giving the firstborn son the name of his paternal grandfather?
30. What stories have come down to you about your parents? Grandparents? More distant ancestors? What stories do you want me to remember?
31. Are there any stories about famous or infamous relatives in your family?
32. Have any recipes been passed down to you from family members?
33. Are there any physical characteristics that run in your family?
34. Are there any special heirlooms, photos, bibles, or other memorabilia that have been passed down in your family?
35. What was the full name of your spouse? Siblings? Parents?
36. When and how did you meet your spouse? What did you do on dates?
37. What was it like when you proposed (or were proposed to)? Where and when did it happen? How did you feel?
38. Where and when did you get married?
39. What memory stands out the most from your wedding day?
40. How would you describe your spouse? What do (did) you admire most about them?
41. What do you believe is the key to a successful marriage?
42. How did you find out you were going to be a parent for the first time?
43. Why did you choose your children's names?
44. What was your proudest moment as a parent?
45. What did your family enjoy doing together?
46. What was your profession and how did you choose it?
47. If you could have had any other profession, what would it have been? Why wasn't this your first choice?
48. Of all the things you learned from your parents, what do you feel was the most valuable?
49. What role does Judaism play in your life? What is your favorite Jewish holiday? Favorite Jewish memory?
50. What accomplishments are you most proud of?
51. What is the one thing you most want people to remember about you?

A Historic Look at the Families of Jewish Trenton Historical Fiction Based on the Lives of Those Buried in the Greater Trenton Jewish Cemeteries

So much family history is contained in our historic Jewish cemeteries. Because families tended to be buried together, it is easy to connect relatives to each other and to the period in which they lived. This research project will pair interested students with members of the GTJC Genealogy Task Force who will help them find the historic documents necessary to flesh out the lives of these families. Students will also be encouraged to work with the National Archives (Philadelphia) to obtain other primary documents related to the family and/or the times in which the family lived. Students may also see advice from their history teachers for guidance about other sources to use to learn about the specific time period.

Researching these families will help to create a fuller picture of Jewish life in Trenton during the time period these families lived. When possible, students will seek out descendants of the family being researched.

Completed projects for this assignment could include:

- Written histories of the family; may be in the form of a family tree; a journal or other written presentation
- Poem or song about the family – highlighting an interesting fact or accomplishment
- Student may dress up in period costume and tell the story from a first-person perspective
- Timeline of the family's life superimposed with historic events from local/national history
- Biography of the family – may be based on facts or a composite of the family and history of the time
- Gravestone rubbings with information about the family (can be presented in digital form)
- Short story about a member of the family

Family Tree

Students with an interest in researching their family history will work with living relatives and historic documents to create a family tree. As part of this research, students should add as much information as possible about each person on the tree (birth and death dates; occupation, picture, anecdote, etc.). Members of the GTJC Genealogy Task Force will be available to assist with advice on best practices for finding out information. Students should feel free to use the questions from the interview project when talking with family members to find out stories. When possible, students should attach pictures.

The tree can be presented in a graphic format or using digital media. Students may also want to create a “pop up” style book to tell the story or a “lift the flap” style book or poster.

There is also an option to research the genealogy of those buried in the GTJCs for those students interested in local genealogical research.

Honoring The Stories of Those Who Came Before Us Through Social Media

Social media has become a mechanism for telling stories. TikTok, Facebook and Instagram are used to share opinions and spread messages. This project brings history to life by creating a social media presence for a person/topic.

Using the GTJCs as a guide, students will choose either a person, a time period, an occupation – any piece of Jewish history from the Trenton community, and bring it to life through social media. For example, students could choose a person (person prototype, based on history) from Trenton in the late 1800's and create an Instagram story to reflect that person's daily life. Students could use TikTok to mark a historic event – real or imagined, or use Facebook to make an event for a B'nei Mitzvah ceremony at Har Sinai from 1905. Students will be encouraged to use archival photographs whenever possible.

This project combines a love of history and social media. Completed projects will be saved to a website designed to be used by schools, students and lovers of history.

Trenton Jewish History through the Arts

After researching a part of the history of Jewish Trenton – a person, a place, an incident, a time period, a building, an organization, etc. – students will be given the opportunity to create a performance, a presentation or an artistic representation to become part of a travelling history exhibit.

Ideas include (and are not limited to):

- Interview a member of the Jewish community and...
 - create a collage depicting their story and values
 - paint a portrait
 - write a poem about their life
 - write and perform a monologue or a playlet
 - compose a song
- Focus on a historic Jewish site and...
 - Create a 3-D model
 - Build a diorama
 - Create a display showing where the building was/what is there now
 - Build it out of Legos or other building materials
 - Create a “doll house” model showing the life inside
- Research a historic Jewish event...
 - Write a first-person account
 - Perform a first-person account
 - Create a newspaper
 - Explain the impact of the historic event on our lives today

Resources with Explanations for Cemetery and Genealogy Project

General Genealogy:

[Tracing Your Jewish Roots \(americanjewisharchives.org\)](http://americanjewisharchives.org) A 13 page PDF by author Malcolm H. Stern. Includes how to set up a family tree, oral family history with sample interview questions, documents, headstone information, etc.

[\(367\) Beginning Genealogy: Search These 5 Records](#) A short you Tube video on which sources to use when starting research on your family tree.

Oral History:

[\(359\) Instructional Video - YouTube](#) Instructional video made by teenagers to give tips when using cell phone to record interviews with ancestors.

[Oral History Questions.pdf - Google Drive](#) Oral history questions to use when interviewing ancestors.

Time Lines:

[History of the World - By Date \(1800 to 1900\) \(lukemastin.com\)](#) Lists events that happened in the world from beginning of the universe to 1999.

<http://www.ourtimelines.com/index.shtml> This web site generates truly fascinating personalized timeline that can be used in web pages or is printable. It shows how your ancestors' life fits into history as we know it.

<https://www.onthisday.com/history/events.php> Searchable timeline of what happened in history from beginning to 2016

Person Search:

Old Jewish Trenton Cemeteries by Name Area Jewish Cemeteries - Pitman Avenue Cemeteries (Workers of Truth, People of Truth, Workingmen's Circle, Young Judea

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1PZf8catw5gxqnQtils-crCN_ADS8W2jBNbrFh0EoDMw/edit

[Passenger Search - The Statue of Liberty & Ellis Island](#) Website where you can search ancestors who came to the United States through Ellis Island.

<https://www.jewishgen.org/> JewishGen serves as the global home for Jewish genealogy. Featuring access to millions of records, it offers unique search tools, along with opportunities for researchers to connect with others who share similar interests.

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/> Website that you can search and offers you millions of records from the Mormon Church. Contains a lot of Jewish information.

<https://www.findagrave.com/> free site to look up cemeteries

<https://www.genealogybank.com/> paid subscription service but useful to look up obituaries and newspaper articles

Surnames:

[200 Common Jewish Last Names Or Surnames With Meanings \(momjunction.com\)](https://momjunction.com/200-common-jewish-last-names-or-surnames-with-meanings/) 200 common Jewish surnames with the meanings of each

[10 Keys to Understanding Many Ashkenazi Surnames - Lifecycle Events \(chabad.org\)](https://chabad.org/10-keys-to-understanding-many-ashkenazi-surnames-lifecycle-events/)
Explains where some Jewish surnames came from.

Citations:

https://www.genealogy.com/articles/research/19_wylie.html This article explains the necessity of citing and the correct way to site whether it is a published source, unpublished source and records. This is extremely important to know where information came from.

Writing Family History:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWPgp9GQGBA> Writing a Family History Book: How to Add Drama Without Being Creative This is a 5:48 minute video with a suggestion on how to make your story more interesting

Paperback books that can be ordered on Amazon:

Carol Baxter, Writing and Publishing Gripping Family Histories; Charles Sturt University, Bathurst 2016 A book that gives you ways to write creative nonfiction dealing with your family history

Sharon DeBartolo Carmack, You Can Write Your Family History; Genealogical Publishing Company 2008 A book that goes into detail how to write your family history. Includes ideas with examples.

Finkle, Arthur L., Trenton's Jews: Beginning, Adaptation and Achieving the American Dream; Hadassah Press 2016 An account of a small industrial city, Trenton, that became a haven for immigrating Jews.

Research Forms:

Family Group Sheet [Family Group Sheet for Genealogists \(archives.gov\)](https://www.archives.gov/family-group-sheet/)

Family Group Record [famgrec-49b7a3c9.pdf \(ancestrycdn.com\)](https://ancestrycdn.com/famgrec-49b7a3c9.pdf)

Pedigree Chart [PedigreeChart.ps \(williams.edu\)](https://williams.edu/pedigreechart.ps)

Pedigree and Family Group with directions and ability to type right onto document [Free Charts and Templates - National Genealogical Society \(ngsgenealogy.org\)](https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/free-charts-and-templates/)

Research checklist [06-0118 MGC-research checklist \(mymcpl.org\)](http://06-0118 MGC-research checklist (mymcpl.org))

Pdf filler family tree (you can type onto this Pdf) PDFfiller - family tree template.pdf

Other:

Jewish Genealogy Club - Mercer County

Mr. Lew Meixner

Cherry Brook Ln # D

East Windsor, NJ

609-448-5581

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Following available at a cost through the club

You receive:

www.ancestry.com A website accessing more than 20 billion ancestry records.

<https://www.newspapers.com/> Provides more than 100 million new articles.

Fold3.com Access to 500 million records on American War Registrations and veterans