

The Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society

DOROT דורות

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THE DOCUMENTATION OF JEWISH RECORDS WORLDWIDE (DOJR) PROJECT

by Marlis Humphrey

“Since we founded AVOTAYNU in 1984, the two of us have inaugurated many major Jewish genealogy projects. DoJR is the unprecedented, biggest, and most valuable project of all. In one way or another, all other Jewish genealogy projects have led up to it.” Gary Mokotoff and Sallyann Amdur Sack

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the DoJR project to create JCat – a free, online catalog of every known document with Jewish genealogical information anywhere in the world – an essential gift for everyone pursuing Jewish genealogy and family history; more than that, a gift from the Jewish genealogy community to pass down to future generations that will play a central role in ensuring Jewish continuity.

What will JCat do for me?

Once up and running, a researcher will simply type the name of a location where an ancestor once lived. Up will pop a list of every and all surviving genealogical

records for every Jew known to have lived in that community, the nature of the documentation, how it may be accessed and much, much more.

Given the scope, size and complexity of JCat, the project will need considerable resources before it can be fully functional. This is a multi-year project, somewhat like building a superhighway, layer by layer. As the project heads down the road, its needs already have generated two tools of current value to genealogists: a record type taxonomy and a custodial entities taxonomy. One asks, “What is every possible document type that might hold relevant information for a genealogist?” The other addresses “What are all the repositories that might hold relevant documents?”

What is the Record Type Taxonomy and How Can it Help?

The JCat computer platform will store any and every possible category of information brought to its attention.

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PRESIDENT'S POSTINGS



I am excited to let you know that we have cautiously, after more than two and a half years of virtual meetings, resumed our in-person meetings, with some success! Where technically, logistically and organizationally feasible, we will continue to do so, with a hybrid option if we can. And if

we can't, we plan to make videos available for those of our members who cannot attend in person, whether for health or distance reasons.

I am also excited about the feature articles in this issue. One, by past IAJGS president Marlis Humphrey, is about an important worldwide effort going on in the Jewish genealogical universe to document where record collections of all kinds related to Jewish genealogy may exist, titled "Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide (DoJR) Project." Our society may choose to get more involved in this effort in the future, so it is important to know what's going on in this arena.

I am also very pleased that two of our members, Scott Kalmikoff and Robert Kern, have responded to our request to you, our members, to contribute articles based on your own experiences and innovations. I encourage more of you to do the same.

On a sad note, I note the recent passing of past JGS president Marsha Saron Dennis. Marsha contributed to our society for many years in a variety of capacities, culminating in her term as President from 1994 through 1996. Please note the tribute in this issue contributed by her son Eric.

I look forward to seeing you in the future, I hope in person!

Steve

DOROT

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THE DOCUMENTATION OF JEWISH RECORDS WORLDWIDE (DOJR) PROJECT

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JEWISH GENEALOGY

THE EMERGENCE OF A NEW ERA & A VISION

Using multiple variables – a month-long pretest project in two different archives, one Polish, one Ukrainian; an intensive survey of Australia-Jewish resources and an inventory of Jewish records from Venezuela; plus voluntary input from genealogists worldwide – DoJR has amassed a list of more than 350 different document types.

Ultimately, this taxonomy will be incorporated into the JCat platform, but the thorough genealogical researcher can use it now as a checklist to make sure not to have overlooked any possible sources of data.

The full story about the taxonomy as it appeared in AVOTAYNU may be read at <https://ldvdf.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/2021SpringPage29Humphrey-SteinFINAL.pdf>. The record type taxonomy master checklist may be downloaded from <https://ldvdf.org/record-type-taxonomy/>.

What is the Custodial Entity Type Taxonomy?

This is a “Where to Look” checklist of types of facilities that hold the records we need, many of which most

researchers may not think to include. Certainly, numerous sources were new to the project organizers. The checklist built upon the findings from our Australian Jewish Genealogical Society - Victoria (Melbourne) project and is relatively typical of what we have found in other regions as well.

Currently, this taxonomy has 12 major categories and 53 subcategories. Our next step will be to map record types to custodial entity types.

With these tools, researchers will be able to say, for example, “I am searching for birth records from Ohio,” and one specific result will be “Contact the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati.”

To learn more about both the record type and the custodial entities taxonomies, watch the 2022 IAJGS conference session presented by Eva Radding and Helen Stein at https://bit.ly/DoJR_Research_Tools.

The Ultimate Vision

Jewish genealogy is entering a new era. There have

JCat Record Types

Print, Analog, and Digital Media

VITAL EVENTS

- Birth
- Death
- Divorce
- Marriage
- Other

INSTITUTION RECORDS

- Business & Employment
- Cemetery/Funeral Home
- Communal Organization
- Rabbinical
- School
- Society
- Synagogue
- Other Institutions

HISTORICAL EVENTS

- Expulsions
- Holocaust
- Inquisition
- Persecutions

EMIGRATION / IMMIGRATION & RESIDENCY

- Assistance
- Travel

POPULATION & RESIDENCY

- Population
- Residency
- Settler

GOVERNMENT

- Citizenship
- Civil Action
- Court
- Military
- National & Local

PERSONAL

- Financial & Legal
- Owned Artifacts
- Civil Action
- Personal Documents
- Self Authored
- Other Documents

MEDIA

- Articles
- Publications

COMPILED REFERENCE

SOURCES TOOLS

- Books
- Digital Media
- Genealogies
- Published Research
- Registeries
- Context
- Facts & Figures
- Publications
- Instructions
- Locators
- Names

been many recent advances – in genetic genealogy, in the use of artificial intelligence for computer-aided handwriting recognition, automated indexing, and automatic tree generation – just to name a few. DoJR's creation of JCat and the goal to catalog all surviving records of our Jewish ancestors is one key component of entering this new era. When standing back and looking at DoJR in this broader context, here is our vision.

New Era of Jewish Genealogy

- All **historical records** of living Jews are identified and captured. All **oral histories** yet to be captured, are collected and accessible. All **DNA** yet to be collected is collected and accessible.
- All the documented genealogical data, including historical records, oral histories and DNA is mined with the use of Artificial Intelligence, connecting each of us to family across the globe.
- Everyone can **visit their ancestors in their world** – across time and space – to connect to the experiences we missed and to know and understand their life stories, the ultimate storytelling.
- All **preserved and available** from generation to generation.

For more background on the emerging new era of Jewish genealogy, watch the 2022 IAJGS Conference session at https://bit.ly/Emerging_New_Era.

How May I Help?

DOROT readers can help DoJR move toward The

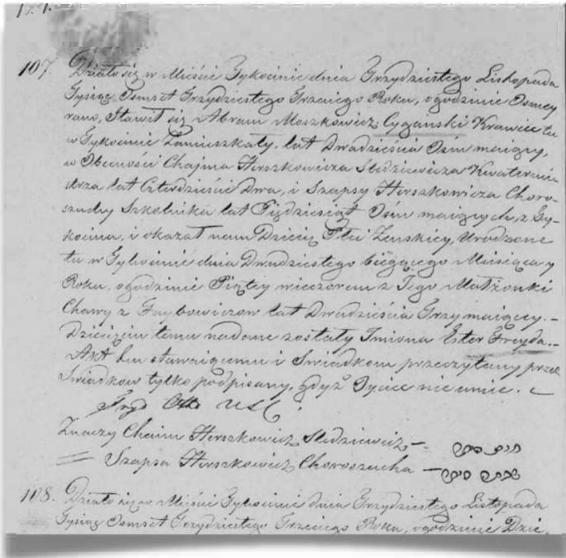
Ultimate Vision in three major ways: by volunteering, by sharing information and by donating money.

Volunteer. Join the 40-plus volunteers now working to develop Artificial Intelligence in the many different languages of Jewish records, help with our on-going Jewish newspaper project, establish your own records project or simply let us know at <https://ldvdf.org/volunteer/> and let us explore the best fit for your talents, time and interest.

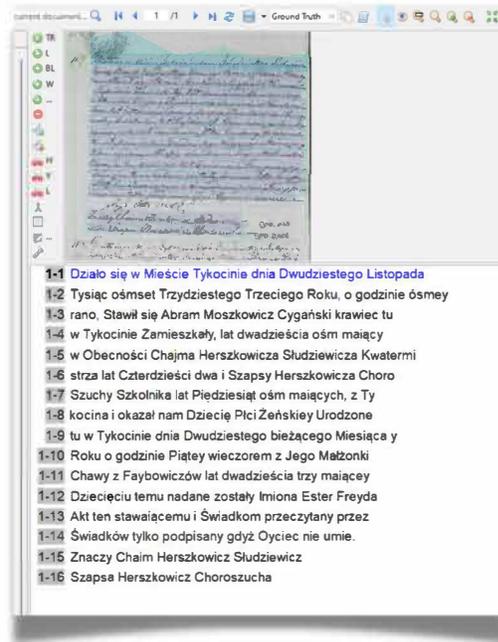
Share. From time to time many of us stumble across a previously unknown priceless piece of data – filed incorrectly in an archive or library, stored away in a museum or languishing in a trunk of family records up in a relative's attic. Workers on the Australian project, for example, came across a precious collection of personal information about Russian-Jewish would-be emigres to Australia who never actually left Russia. That team is now digitizing the files. Ultimately, JCat will direct someone seeking information about a relative from say, Minsk, to look in a database from Melbourne. Add what you know so it will not be lost. Do you know about a record collection, a project, an online resource that others should know about, or a great idea for Jewish genealogy? Your info tip may end up in JCat. Share it now at <https://bit.ly/SomethingIKnow!>

Donate. Conceived at the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) Orlando conference in 2017, DoJR, a project of L'Dor V'Dor Foundation and in partnership with the IAJGS, is headed by CEO and past IAJGS president, Marlis Humphrey,

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Handwriting Recognition
Example



Step 1 - Scan of original record. This one is a birth record from 1833 recorded in Polish handwriting.



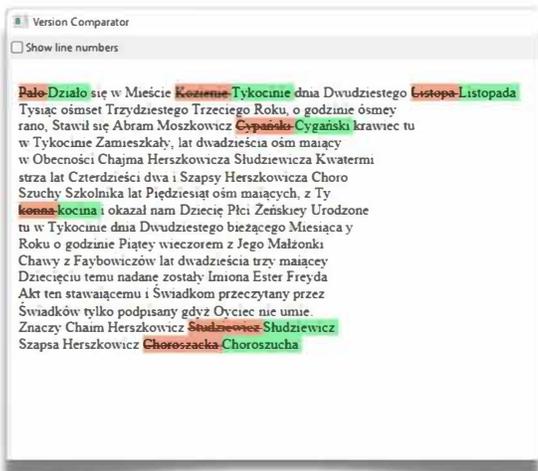
Step 2 - Use LDVDF developed Polish handwriting recognition model to auto-transcribe the record – line by line.

AVOTAYNU editor Sallyann Amdur Sack and JRI-Poland Executive Director Stanley Diamond.

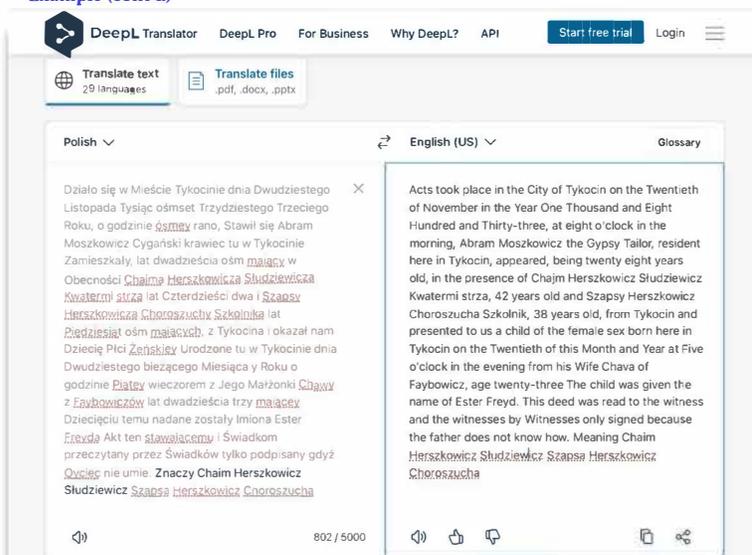
DoJR now needs major funding to reach the next stage of development. It is fundraising for software development to place 30 researchers worldwide to survey repositories where records are hidden in plain sight and

are often at risk; run a million scans through artificial intelligence handwriting recognition technology, and much, much more. In this way, we build JCat. You can help with this Mitzvah of Memory. Donate at donate.ldvdf.org. L’Dor V’Dor Foundation is a 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization and your donation is tax deductible within the guidelines of U.S. law.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Handwriting Recognition
Example (cont'd)



Step 3 - Identify any errors and train the AI model for improvements.



Step 3 - Copy/paste transcription into online text translator.

Note: this translator treats the surname as a word and inadvertently translates the surname "Cyganski" to it's meaning in Polish, "Gypsy" – otherwise the meaning of the document in English is clear and useful to researchers.

Societies can help through their project work: by identifying and digitizing records in their local regions – especially records at risk – by recording oral histories, and by promoting DNA testing. Just like the Australian Jewish Genealogical Society – Victoria, societies can spearhead a DoJR Survey project. Contact ceo@ldvdf.org for more information.

We don't have time to waste. Our DoJR focus to date has been outside of the U.S., but as David Rencher, CGO at FamilySearch, reminds us, “Of 3,200 counties in the U.S, 640 of them are considered ‘burned counties,’ meaning they have suffered significant damage to historical records.” And after receiving a 911 email from a JGS president concerned about a synagogue folding, I read, “More than one-third of Conservative synagogues and an estimated one-in-five Reform synagogues have closed in the past two decades.”

Our Jewish historical records, constituting our Jewish heritage, are at risk. As Stanley Diamond says, “every record counts,” including the ones in your own backyard.

Marlis Glaser Humphrey is the industry's foremost expert on next generation family history publishing, a professional genealogist, and a frequent speaker at NGS, IAJGS, and RootsTech conferences. She is President of the Florida State Genealogical Society, Director of the National Genealogical Society, and Past President of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies. Marlis was co-chair of the IAJGS 2013 conference in Boston and served on the JewishGen Board of Governors. Marlis is CEO and President of the L'Dor V'Dor Foundation (LDVDF) and Executive Committee Chair of the Documentation of Jewish Records Worldwide (DoJR) Project. Marlis holds a MS in Management of Technology and a BA in Russian.

Upcoming Events

Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc. (New York)

19 March 2023, 2:00 PM

“The Kindertransports: The KTA, the 80th Year Commemorative Journey, and New Research”

Speakers: Melissa Hacker, Amy Williams and Wendy Henry

Location to be announced

From December 1, 1938, through September 1, 1939, nearly 10,000 children, most of them Jewish, traveled from Nazi Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Danzig to England, alone, without their parents. This rescue mission became known as the Kindertransport.

In 1990, more than 50 years later, a group of Kindertransport survivors in New York City came together to found the Kindertransport Association (KTA - www.kindertransport.org). This unique volunteer-run organization was founded not solely as a survivor group, but as an intergenerational group with the missions of connecting these child Holocaust survivors and descendants, educating the next generations on the Kindertransports as an important part of Holocaust history, and supporting and advocating for children at risk today, especially refugees and those without parents.



Photo of the 80th Year Kindertransport Commemorative Journey, at Berlin Parliament

In 2019 KTA president Melissa Hacker, whose mother fled Vienna on a Kindertransport in January 1939, created and organized an 80th year commemorative journey. Over two weeks in the summer of 2019, four Kindertransport survivors, now in their late 80s and early 90s returned to the countries they fled, accompanied by 14 members of the second generation. Traveling by train and ferry from Vienna to Berlin, Amsterdam to Hook of Holland, Harwich to London, the travelers traced the Kindertransport journey, visiting memorials, learning from scholars, and conducting family research along the way. The trip received international press attention and led to new connections, insights and memories for the participants.

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JGS, founded in 1977, is the first organization of its kind – helping people discover their Jewish ancestors.

Dorot: The Journal of the Jewish Genealogical Society, a premier quarterly journal for Jewish genealogy, was awarded Outstanding Publication by the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS) multiple times, most recently in 2019. Having been in publication since JGS's inception, [Dorot](#) was first published under that name in 1985.