Jewish Surnames

Warren Blatt

Lecture Outline:

1 - Introduction – Mythology associated with Jewish surnames.
2 - History – Patronymics, House signs, Surname mandates, Border changes.
3 - Classifications – Types of surnames: e.g. geographical, occupational, artificial, etc.
4 - Sources – Where you can learn about your surname: Books and online sources.
5 - Research Issues – Interpreting names in records; spelling & linguistic issues; Soundex.
6 - Americanization – Name changes, in the USA, and Israel.
7 - Demographics – Most popular surnames, in USA, Russian Empire, and Israel.

Surname Mandates:

- Austrian Empire (1787)
- Russian Pale (1804, 1835, 1845)
- Congress Poland (1821)
- West Galicia (1805)
- Frankfurt (1807)
- Baden (1809)
- Westphalia (1812)
- Prussia (1812, 1845)
- Bavaria (1813)
- Württemberg (1828)
- Posen (1833)
- Saxony (1834)
- Romania (1870s)
- Ottoman Empire (1934)

Surname Classifications:

- **Patronymics / Matronymics**: Based on a parent's given name:
  - Slavic suffixes “-owicz”, “-ovitch”, “-off”, “-kin”, Germanic suffix “-son”.
  - e.g.: “Abramowitz” = son of Abram, “Mendelsohn” = son of Mendel.

- **Toponyms**: Based on a geographic place name:
  - Slavic suffix “-ski”, Germanic suffix “-er”.
  - e.g.: “Warshawski” = one from Warsaw, “Wilner” = one from Vilna.

- **Occupational**: Based on vocation:
  - e.g.: “Reznik” [Polish/Yiddish], “Shochet” [Hebrew] = butcher,
    “Shnyder” [German/Yiddish], “Kravits” [Polish/Ukr], “Portnoy” [Russ] = tailor.

- **Personal description or characteristics**:
  - e.g.: “Schwartz” = black, “Weiss” = white, “Gross” = big, “Klein” = small.

- **Religious**:
  - e.g.: “Cohen” (“Kahn”, etc.), “Levine”, “Segal”, “Katz”...

- **Artificial**: Fanciful or ornamental names:
  - Many names ending in “-berg”, “-stein”, “-feld”…
  - e.g.: “Rosenberg” = mountain of roses, “Finkelstein” = glittering stone.
Bibliography on Jewish Surnames:

Beider, Alexander.
• **A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire.** Revised Edition. (Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, 2008). 1,008 + 118 pages. OCLC #231745576;
• **A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Kingdom of Poland.** (Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, 1996). 608 pages. OCLC #751194427;
• **A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from Galicia.** (Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, 2004). 624 pages. OCLC #55106438.
  { The most comprehensive scholarly studies of Jewish surnames in Eastern Europe. }

Menk, Lars. **A Dictionary of German-Jewish Surnames.** (Bergenfield, NJ : Avotaynu, 2005). 824 pages. OCLC #57751170. { 13,000 Jewish surnames from the area of pre-World War I Germany. }


  { Highly readable layman's view, but error prone and no references given. }


  [Second edition was 1997, 592 pages]. { Excellent discussion of Polish language constructs. }


  { Over 3,400 annotated bibliographic citations on all aspects of names and naming. }
Supplemented by: Lawson, Edwin D.:
  • **Personal Names and Naming: An Annotated Bibliography**
  • **More Names and Naming: An Annotated Bibliography**

Online:
• JewishGen Family Finder (JGFF):
  [http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff](http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff)
  100,000 different surnames actively being researched

• Avotaynu Consolidated Jewish Surname Index (CJSI):
  700,000 different surnames found in 42 databases

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