



# Venturing Into Our Past

JGSCV

The newsletter of the Jewish Genealogical Society of  
the Conejo Valley & Ventura County



2026, Q1

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*by Israel Perel*

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Dear Genealogy Enthusiasts,

We are enjoying a mild Southern California winter while our friends and relatives, from New York to Florida, contend with snow and cold temperatures. It's no wonder California is nicknamed "The Golden State." This harkens back to the phrase "Goldene Medina" (or *Goldene Medine*). That was Yiddish phrase meaning "Golden Land" or "Golden Country," which was used by Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to describe the United States. It represents the promise of prosperity, freedom, and opportunity that awaited them, contrasting with the poverty and persecution they fled. Today, it can be used to describe our Southern California ambiance.

I am pleased to share the latest information on the 2026 IAJGS conference:

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

**Mission Statement:** JGSCV is a non-profit organization run by enthusiastic volunteers dedicated to the sharing of genealogical information, techniques, and research tools with those interested in Jewish genealogy and family history. Members include beginners and experienced genealogists who share with each other.

**WWW.JGSCV.ORG**

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*PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE, continued:*

IAJGS recently conducted a survey and found 59% of respondents preferred in-person conferences while 41% preferred virtual. Potential travel difficulties and costs factor into the preference for virtual options for live conferences.

There is also the challenge of cost versus a “good destination” city. Cities on either coast can be cost-prohibitive, and the bigger the city, the higher the cost. The cost must be weighed with the likelihood that some destinations lend more to pre- or post-conference vacations, and as such attract more attendees. Finally, the choice of conference dates was cited as a factor that could increase attendance. This year’s conference dates were chosen to evaluate the scheduling of the conference after the Jewish holidays and outside of the usual summer vacation months. They summarized that:

- In-person conferences offer invaluable networking, spontaneous hallway conversations, and a sense of community that can’t be replicated online. They also provide access to local archives, libraries, and cultural sites that can enrich the research experience. The downside: cost, logistics, and physical challenges.
- Virtual conferences allow greater accessibility. No travel costs, no wrestling with airports, and no worries about whether family responsibilities, physical limitations, or budgets will keep you from attending. They also make it far easier for international participation. At home, you can zoom in on slides instead of squinting at a small font-size text in a dimly lit ballroom. Finally, you may not have to choose between conflicting sessions—recordings mean you could watch multiple ones.

Speaking of Virtual Learning, this month’s newsletter is full of ways to grow your understanding of genealogy on your timeline and at your own pace. See page 8 for an article written after an inspirational Zoom lecture attended by our editor. Look on pages 7 and 12 for additional paths to grow and deepen your family history knowledge. Also participate in our March meeting: an exclusive movie screening that documents one woman’s search for her Jewish ancestry in “Between the Stone & the Flower.” See flyer on page 3.

I wish to encourage you to submit ideas for future JGSCV presentations. Are you interested in the use of Artificial Intelligence for your research or are you hankering to learn more about Sephardic genealogy? Perhaps a presentation from a commercial DNA or software company? Hands-on help? Data sources? Please send any comments to me at [president@jgscv.org](mailto:president@jgscv.org) or to any of the board members listed in this newsletter.

**Am Yisrael Chai.**

**Issie Perel, JGSCV President**

Get Your Popcorn Ready for a screening  
of Genie Milgrom's film in the comfort of your home

# Between the Stone & the Flower

Director Roberto Otero

## **Genie Milgrom**

The author of *My 15 Grandmothers: The Journey of My Soul from the Spanish Inquisition to the Present* has put her amazing genealogical discoveries on film, and JGSCV is screening it.



A Cuban-born woman raised Catholic embarks on a decades-long journey across Europe to uncover her hidden Jewish ancestry, unraveling centuries of family secrets in a powerful search for identity and truth

Available

**Friday, March 20 to Sunday March 22, 2026**

Members will receive their link via email.

Membership is available at [JGSCV.org](http://JGSCV.org)

# JGSCV Updates

Exciting new local resource:

**The FamilySearch Center Thousand Oaks** is now open!  
1600 Erbes Rd in Thousand Oaks  
on the campus of *The Church of LDS' Stake Center*

FamilySearch Centers offer a vast network of locations worldwide, with access to a wealth of genealogical records from over 80 countries.

All services are free, including personalized help and access to technology and exclusive records.

Website: <https://locations.familysearch.org/en/us/ca/thousand-oaks/1600-erbes-rd>

Email: [CA\\_ThousandOaks@familyhistorymail.org](mailto:CA_ThousandOaks@familyhistorymail.org)

The grand opening is slated for May 2026. Current hours are on Tuesdays from 10:30-1PM and 7PM-9PM (and by appointment.)

For a list of **Free Premium websites** at the Thousand Oaks location, please see the following two pages.



...IN CASE YOU HADN'T HEARD:

***Venturing Into Our Past*** was recognized as the  
**IAJGS Outstanding Publication 2025**

<https://www.iajgs.org/awards/achievement-awards/iajgs-awards-2025/>

AND NOW YOU

have the *exhilarating* opportunity to **contribute to this year's outstanding issues!**

➡ Calling for submissions (of any length!) on your research discoveries and inspirations

Write what you know or about what you're learning, or use one of the following prompts to get started:

Describe:

- an object that holds a family story, or a photograph that revealed more than expected
- how you found your ancestral town
- a record that changed everything
- when research took a surprising turn
- the first time you saw your ancestor's handwriting

These are but a few launching points for YOUR story.

For the Quarter 2 issue, please send by May 3, 2026 to Diane Goldin, Editor: [newslettereditor@jgscv.org](mailto:newslettereditor@jgscv.org)

Andrea Massion leads "Jewish Genealogy Jeopardy" at JGSCV's Jan meeting. The game was challenging and fun! Thank you, Andrea, for all your work creating the game, and thanks to her assistant, Steve Goldin.





## Premium Family History Websites

Free access to premium family history websites is available in FamilySearch Centers.

### 19th Century British Library Newspapers

This fully searchable database of the British Library's newspaper holdings provides a complete run of 48 national and regional Victorian British newspapers for the 19th century from 1800 to 1900.

### Alexander Street

*Social and Cultural History*—Personal accounts of well-known historical figures.

The American Civil War—Letters and Diaries

Contains approximately 100,000 indexed pages of diaries, letters, and memoirs, including 4,000 pages of previously unpublished manuscripts, such as the letters of Amos Wood and his wife and the diary of Maryland planter William Claytor.

*The American Civil War*—Images, Photographs, Posters, and Ephemera

Provides a vivid history of the American Civil War with over 1,400 images.

*Women and Social Movements in the United States*—Organized around the history of women in social movements in the United States between A.D. 1600 and 2000.

### American Ancestors

Created by the expert staff at the New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS), America's founding genealogical organization, AmericanAncestors.org is the portal to the nation's leading resource for the highest quality, comprehensive family history services.

### Ancestry Institution

Ancestry gives you access to thousands of collections of records from around the world, including immigration, census, voter, vital, and military records; newspapers and periodicals; family trees; photos and images; directories, maps, court records, land records, wills and financial records, stories, memories, and histories; and detailed records about births, marriages, deaths, landownership, and much more. Ancestry is the largest for-profit genealogy company in the world.

### ArkivDigital

ArkivDigital is the largest private provider of Swedish Church Records and other historical records online! All images are newly photographed color images of the original documents.

### FamNet

The online family history network for those who have New Zealand roots.

## Findmypast

Findmypast makes it easy to research your United Kingdom ancestry and create your family tree. Search census records, and trace births, marriages, and deaths to bring your family history to life. Please note that not all the content from Findmypast is available in family history centers.

## Fold3

Search or browse millions of historical documents and photos. Fold3 has refocused their efforts on gathering the best online collection of military records and stories. The Fold3 name reflects military history and honor, since traditionally, the third fold in a flag-folding ceremony honors and remembers veterans for their sacrifice in defending their country and promoting peace in the world.

## Geneanet

With 3 billion referenced individuals and 600,000 trees online, Geneanet is the first site dedicated to genealogy in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Germany. The Geneanet community has 2 million members who exchange genealogical information.

## Goldie May

Goldie May is a suite of software power tools for genealogists. Keep your research in your FamilySearch or Ancestry tree and see how Goldie May can multiply your efforts. Organize your research with an automatic research log, screenshots, projects & tasks, and bookmarks of your windows & tabs. Analyze your ancestors' facts and relationships using a new timeline tool called the Subway Map. Find and easily navigate to new collections relevant to your ancestors.

## Irish Ancestors

Irish Ancestors aims to be the one-stop starting point for all Irish ancestral research, mapping surnames and surname variants in all the major sources and providing easy links back to all the underlying records.

## MyHeritage Library Edition

Used by millions of people worldwide to help research family history, build a family tree, and add photos, historical records, and more.

## NewspaperArchive

The largest historical newspaper database online, contains tens of millions of newspaper pages from 1607 to present. Every newspaper in the archive is fully searchable by keyword and date, making it easy for you to quickly explore historical content.

## Paper Trail

Provides access to 19th-century westward American migration documents.

## Puzzilla

Find new research opportunities on descendant lines in Family Tree.

# Genealogy Odds and Ends

1. **Israeli researchers crack century-old mystery of cone-shaped vessels found near Dead Sea.**  
<https://www.jpost.com/archaeology/article-888214>
2. **Convoy 73: The Light of Memory**  
On May 15, 1944, 878 men were torn from their families and left Drancy for a journey of no return to Lithuania and Estonia. Even today, a veil of mystery shrouds their story: <https://yiuc73.org/>
3. **Preserving *shtetl* life erased by the Holocaust**  
Lithuania's new Lost Shtetl Museum on the history of Jewish life in Lithuania, local complicity in the community's execution and how the past can help illuminate the present:  
<https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/jolanta-mickute-preserving-shtetl-life-erased-by-holocaust-2025-09-18/>
4. **Why Jewish law cares about mother birds, baby goats and the bonds of animal families**  
How the Torah and Talmud notice the ties between animal parents and their young:  
<https://www.jta.org/2026/02/01/ideas/why-jewish-law-cares-about-mother-birds-and-baby-goats-and-the-ethics-of-animal-families>
5. **Jewish actor discovers her family's unknown Holocaust story in PBS genealogy series "Finding Your Roots."** Lizzie Caplan learns that one of her ancestors survived four camps and that his wife and baby were murdered. <https://www.jpost.com/judaism/article-884648>  
PBS show link: <https://www.pbs.org/show/finding-your-roots/>
6. **Vast trove of medieval Jewish records opened up by AI**  
<https://kelo.com/2025/11/26/vast-trove-of-medieval-jewish-records-opened-up-by-ai/>  
and here: <https://www.jpost.com/science/ai-news/article-876236>
7. **New study puts hominins in Israel 1.9 million years ago, rewriting earliest human migration**  
Team redates prehistoric Ubeidiya in Jordan Valley to same age as oldest Georgian site, suggesting at least two distinct groups of human ancestors left Africa at roughly the same time:  
<https://www.timesofisrael.com/new-study-puts-hominins-in-israel-1-9-million-years-ago-rewriting-earliest-human-migration/>
8. **60 Minutes: "The Holocaust's youngest survivors: born in a labor camp, on a death train, and in a concentration camp"**  
<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/youngest-holocaust-survivors-born-to-women-who-hid-pregnancies-60-minutes-transcript/>
9. **Scientists want you to smell ancient Egyptian mummies**  
Scientists can now detect ancient smells on artifacts, leading to a multisensory museum experience.  
<https://www.yahoo.com/news/articles/scientists-want-smell-ancient-egyptian-050000082.html>
10. **Silver linings: Beyond names and dates — The surprisingly personal power of genealogy**  
Researching family history and genealogy can provide profound personal benefits, including a deeper sense of identity and purpose.  
<https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/articles/silver-linings-beyond-names-dates-234354100.htm>

# Jewish Heritage in Jamaica

by Diane Goldin

A little background:

The Caribbean may seem an unlikely spot for Jewish genealogy research, and yet for more than 400 years, Jewish communities flourished there.

Following expulsions from Spain and Portugal, Sephardic Jews followed new routes — to Amsterdam, Brazil, and across the Caribbean. Dutch and English colonial powers allowed Jews to settle in these areas since they were seen as “useful.”

And, indeed, the Jewish refugees helped boost local economies. They built synagogues with sand floors, spoke Portuguese and Ladino, and maintained Jewish life far from Europe’s centers. By the 1600s–1700s, thriving Jewish communities existed in Curaçao, Jamaica, Suriname, Barbados, St. Thomas and Nevis. Caribbean Jewish families often carry Sephardic names such as:

- De Souza / Souza
- Henriques
- Pereira
- Mendes
- Cardozo
- Nunes
- Lopez
- Rodrigues

Jews were a small minority of Caribbean settlers, but their legacy includes constructing schools, extensive trade networks, cultural blending (Sephardic, Dutch, African, Creole influences), records of manumissions (freeing enslaved people), and Jewish cemeteries that contain both European and African names.

I knew very little about this chapter of Jewish migration and survival but became fascinated after an online lecture by the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience (MSJE). This article is a summary of that presentation, led by Marina DeFour-Harris, a self-described heritage advocate from Jamaica. She is a founding director of the Jamaican Jewish Cemeteries Preservation Fund and serves on the board of Jamaica’s Jewish community (United Congregation of Israelites). (Her thesis was on representing Jewish heritage in Jamaica.)

I hope you enjoy my highlights of this Zoom lecture. Links can be found at the end of the article.

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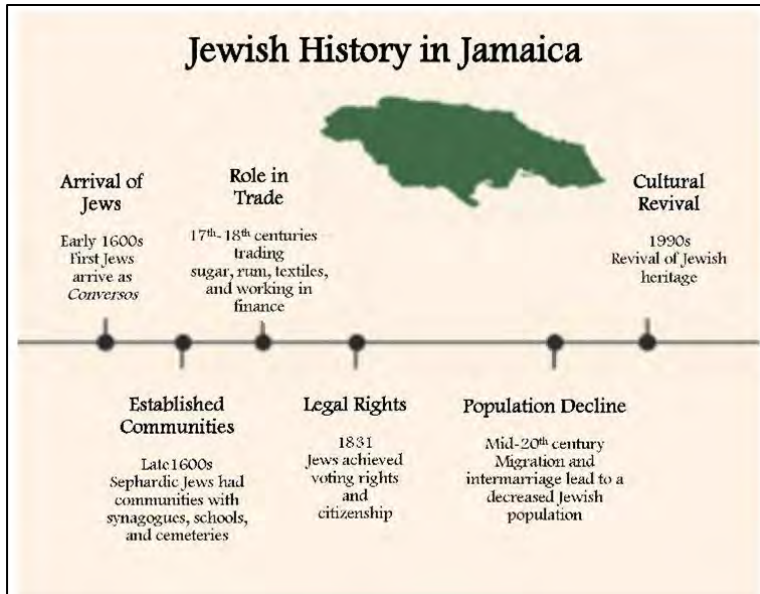
## Early Jewish Presence in Jamaica

Jamaica’s Jewish presence officially began in 1655, although Portuguese conversos (crypto-Jews) likely arrived earlier during Spanish rule (1509-1655). When England took the island from Spain, Jews came from Amsterdam, Bordeaux, Barbados, and Recife, Brazil. A year later, in 1656, some Jews passed through Jamaica en route to New Amsterdam (New

York), where they established America’s first Jewish community.

Port Royal, then a wealthy and infamous trading post, hosted the first official Jewish settlement. After the 1692 earthquake destroyed most of the town, the Jewish population moved to Spanish Town, building synagogues and establishing burial grounds.

By the 1700s, Jewish communities had spread to numerous port and inland towns: Alligator



Pond, Black River, Savannah-la-Mar, Montego Bay, and Falmouth, among others. While some Ashkenazi Jews arrived earlier, they did not establish formal communities until 1788.

### Cemeteries as Cultural Testimony

Caribbean Jewish cemeteries are among the richest genealogical sources. They often include:

- Hebrew and Portuguese inscriptions
- Full names of parents
- Places of origin (Amsterdam, Livorno, etc.)
- Detailed family relationships

Many stones date to the 17th and 18th centuries, making them some of the earliest Jewish records in the Americas.

In Jamaica, there was once over 30 Jewish cemeteries, though only 13 remain today due to encroachment, natural disasters, and urban development. Cemeteries bear witness to Jewish settlement patterns and cultural assimilation.

The oldest, Hunts Bay, was created by Port Royal's Jews in the 1660s and is one of the

oldest Jewish cemeteries in the Western Hemisphere.

Other key sites include:

**Savannah-la-Mar:** Community decimated by the 1780 hurricane. Tombstones date back to 1780.

**Black River:** Rediscovered in 2013. Contains tombstones of notable Jews including Hyman Cohen.

**Falmouth:** Mixed Sephardic and Ashkenazi burials, showing signs of assimilation. Few tombstones feature Hebrew inscriptions.

**Rose Corner (Alligator Pond):** Established by Rebecca Samson in 1822, it has over 30 burials.

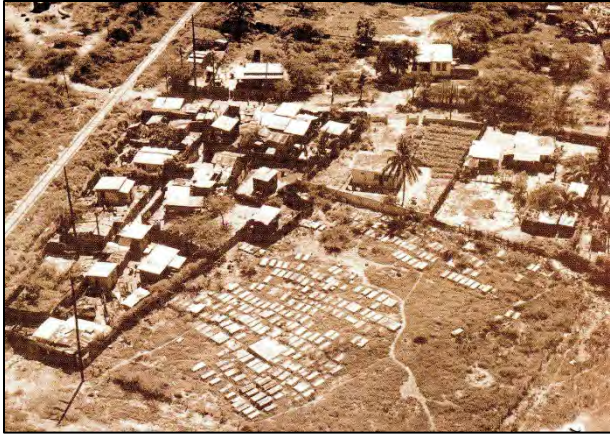
Kingston hosts two primary cemeteries:

1. The Second English and German Congregation Cemetery, active by 1872.
2. Orange Street Cemetery, still active, contains graves from multiple Jewish traditions.

### The Synagogue and Modern Community

Today, Jamaica's only active synagogue is Shaare Shalom in Kingston, built in 1888 and rebuilt in 1911 after an earthquake. It features a rare sand floor, a tradition shared by only a few synagogues globally.

Although the community is small (fewer than 300 members), it remains vibrant. It shifted from Orthodox to Progressive Judaism in 1974, allowing women to participate fully. Community members continue to celebrate holidays, hold bar/bat mitzvahs, and contribute to Jamaican society.



*Aerial view of Hunts Bay Cemetery, Jamaica*

### Preservation Efforts

Jamaican Jewish Cemeteries Preservation Fund (JJCPF) leads three major projects:

1. Cemetery Database (Semify Project): Provides digital access to maps, photographs, inscriptions, and genealogical data
2. Nameplate Project: Restores identity to unmarked graves in cemeteries, particularly at Orange Street
3. Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR): Used to identify unmarked graves at historic sites like Hunts Bay and Lovia.

### Conclusion and Vision

Ms. DeFour-Harris's mission is to ensure Jamaica's Jewish heritage is documented, preserved, and shared. She aims to educate future generations and dispel myths and erasures. Her work ensures that, against centuries of predictions, Jamaica's Jewish community not only survives but contributes meaningfully to the island's multicultural identity.

She reminds us that Jamaica's national motto, *Out of Many, One People*, is not just aspirational—but is seeped in its history. Her ongoing preservation efforts, community outreach, and global connections make her a

vital steward of Jewish Jamaican memory and legacy.

### Article Links

**Jamaican Jewish Cemeteries Preservation Fund**

<https://www.jjcpf.org/>

**United Congregation of Israelites**

<https://ucija.org/>

**Shaare Shalom**

<https://www.jewsofjamaica.org/>

**Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience**

<https://msje.org/>

**Jeff Malka's Jeff Malka's SephardicGen Resources**

[https://www.sephardicgen.com/carib\\_sites.htm](https://www.sephardicgen.com/carib_sites.htm)

**Ancestors of Paradise**

<https://www.ancestorsofparadise.com/>

**Video:**

***The Jewish Community of the Caribbean:  
The Roots of Jewish America***

<https://www.familysearch.org/to/rootstech/session/the-jews-of-the-caribbean-the-roots-of-jewish-america>

# GROW YOUR KNOWLEDGE

BY ANDREA MASSION

## ***What are you listening to?***

Crista Cowan, the Barefoot Genealogist, Ancestry rep and IAJGS Board member has another podcast called *Stories That Live in Us*. Knowing how full of life Crista is, you can bet she beautifully creates a way to share a legacy of resilience, healing, and connection by interviewing researchers, each one representing one of our 50 states of America.

<https://www.cristacowan.com/stories-that-live-in-us-podcast>

And on YouTube - The Barefoot Genealogist: This is the primary channel for Crista's educational videos, tutorials, and "Watch Me Work" sessions, often focusing on AncestryDNA and ThruLines.

## Locals on a National Podcast

The Dardashti sisters, daughters of Cantor Fareed Dardashti, were interviewed on the Family History podcast:

<https://familyhistoriespodcast.com/2024/11/26/so8ep04-the-nightingale-with-danielle-and-dr-galeet-dardashti/>

and are guests of the Jewish Women's Archives podcast, *Can We Talk?* sharing their musical family's Iranian history and influence.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBBMMpyfY-s>

## ***What are you reading?***

### IJG.org's First Online Journal

The International Institute for Jewish Genealogy has published their first online journal with a wide range of exciting topics. <https://ijg.org/magazine/>

Adam Brown and Michael Waas write about Avoteynu's DNA project. An excerpt:

*The importance of NGS testing (next generation sequencing) cannot be understated; it allows us to precisely identify the timing of population events and identify other populations that share that common ancestry. The concept we at Avotaynu DNA hold as our guiding North Star is that within each of us lies a unique archive of Jewish history, that by conducting targeted NGS on the DNA of our participants, each person represents someone else's genealogical ancestor, no matter how distant.*

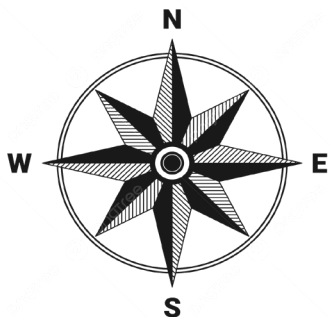
Bernard P. Markowicz writes about creating deeper meaning from our research:

*The central argument of this monograph is that Jewish genealogy must and can, with today's tools, extend toward interpretive engagement and move toward meaningful interpretation.*

Registration is free.

Do you have some favorite sources for Jewish Genealogy Knowledge to share?

Write to board member [Andrea@jgscv.org](mailto:Andrea@jgscv.org) and share or ask her to call you. Thanks.



# The Research Compass

• webinars • workshops • conferences • events •

## IAJGS Global Calendar

Comprehensive listing of Jewish genealogy programs worldwide. Search by day, week or month:

<https://www.iajgs.org/calendar>

## Family Tree Webinars

Live and recorded presentations given by leading genealogists and speakers. A paid membership site with many free webinars. See their many outstanding offerings:

<https://familytreewebinars.com/webinar-library/?free=1>

## Avotaynu Online

One of the most reliable sources for database releases, digitization announcements, DNA developments, and methodology insights:

<https://avotaynuonline.com>

## Special Interest Group (SIG)

Focus on a region:

JRI-Poland: <https://jri-poland.org>

Gesher Galicia: <https://www.geshergalicia.org>

LitvakSIG - Lithuania resources: <https://www.litvaksig.org>

## Israel Genealogy Research Assoc.

The IGRA offers Israeli civil records, Mandate-era documents, Holocaust survivor and immigration databases.

Webinar library:

<https://genealogy.org.il/videos/webinars>



**Jewish Genealogical Society of the Conejo Valley and Ventura County (JGSCV)**

A member of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS)  
[www.JGSCV.org](http://www.JGSCV.org)

**2026 Membership/Renewal Form**

*Dues paid now are good through December 2026*

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Check one: This is a New Membership \_\_\_\_\_ . Renewal \_\_\_\_\_

Check one: Individual \$25.00 \_\_\_\_\_ or Family \$30.00 \_\_\_\_\_

*Family is defined as two people living in the same household.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address \_\_\_\_\_

Talents that you might share with JGSCV (accounting skills, translation or language skills, (please specify) computer tech, library maven, greeter, other.)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Known areas of research? \_\_\_\_\_



**Pay by:**

PayPal to [membership@jgscv.org](mailto:membership@jgscv.org) and mail this form

to **or** \_\_\_\_\_

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