

CASE STUDY: GENEALOGY OF RENEE KAUFMAN

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This lecture presents a case study using the One-Step Webpages as well as a few other websites to develop a family history. It illustrates how, with a minimal amount of initial information, an entire genealogy can be obtained. It also shows how to obtain records in spite of name misspellings, and how to avoid accepting wrong information.

BACKGROUND

I went to high school with a fellow named Jerry Levkov. We became close friends in school, but we never saw each other outside of school -- it was a subway school and he lived in the Bronx and I in Brooklyn. I transferred out of that school after one year and never saw Jerry again, at least not for the next 50 years. We reconnected at the class's 50-year reunion and discovered that we had a lot in common. Since then Jerry has visited me at my home whenever he was in the San Francisco area and I've invited him to attend my lectures whenever I spoke in the New York area.

After attending one of my lectures, he told me that he had an older sister who died many years ago. Every year the family sponsors a memorial lecture on her behalf, and he wanted to know if I would be the lecturer for the following year. I gladly accepted.

GETTING STARTED

I decided to create a special talk for this lecture and have it focus on determining the family history of Jerry's sister. And I would do so without asking Jerry any questions but rather surprise him (and the rest of his family) with the results. OK, that seemed like a good idea, but did I know enough about his sister to even get started. Come to think of it, I didn't even know his sister's name.

So what did I know? I knew that the lecture was called the "Kaufman Lecture" and it was held at B'nai Jeshurun in Manhattan. And I knew that it was in memory of Jerome Levkov's sister. So I assumed that his sister's married name was Kaufman. But I didn't know her first name.

WHAT CAN I LEARN

At this point I decided to let Google be my friend. I did a Google search on B'nai Jeshurun Kaufman Lecture and found the announcement for the previous year's lecture. It stated that it was the Renee Kaufman Lecture Series. OK, now I knew her first name.

I continue with Google, and now did a search on Renee Kaufman. Unfortunately I discovered that there are a great many Renee Kaufman's, so that was futile. But I knew that her maiden name was Levkov, so next I searched for Renee Levkov Kaufman. Now I hit paydirt -- someone had actually posted the family tree (as much as he knew of it) on line. That was the answer to

my prayers. I'm tempted to say that that doesn't happen often, but it turns out it happens more often than you would imagine. And when it does happen you should certainly take advantage of it. Was I cheating by doing so? Not at all. Recall that I intentionally refrained from asking the family any questions. So the information in the tree that I found is simply the information that I would have obtained if I initially interviewed the family.

Here is what I found on that website:

Renee Kaufman (born Levkov), born September 15, 1928, died February 2, 1987
father Joseph Levkov, mother Ruth Levkov (born Schrader)

Joseph Levkov, no date of birth, died July 29, 1968
father Abraham Levkov, mother's name unknown

Ruth Levkov (born Schrader), no date of birth, died January 25, 1998
father Yankel Schrader, mother Havashana Schrader
siblings Itka Schrader, Louis Schrader, Abe Schrader,
 Laura Leeson (born Schrader) died 1997, Rae Pinchinson (born Schrader), died 2000

Note that many of the years of birth were missing, so I was hoping to at least be able to fill those in.

While I was still on this family tree website, I found other items about the family. One of them was a Mexican work visa for Joseph Levkov. It showed that he was a musician, born in Poland, and residing in New York. And it gave his date of birth as October 15, 1889. Note that his date of birth was missing in the tree that was on the same website. So I went and filled that in.

BIRTHDATES FROM SSDI

I knew that I could get a lot of the birth information from the SSDI. So I searched the SSDI for Joseph Levkov. That was too easy, and up popped his record. It showed that he was born September 15, 1893 and died July 1968. That date of death matched the date in the tree that I found, so I knew I had the right record. But this date of birth differed from the one on the Mexican visa. So now I had two dates of birth for Joseph.

I searched the SSDI for Ruth Levkov, and found that one easily as well. Date of death January 25, 1998, consistent with the information on the tree. And it gave her date of birth, which I didn't know before -- March 12, 1893.

CENSUS HAS BIRTH YEARS

I knew that I could extract birth years from the ages given in the census, so I started by trying to find the 1940 census. But I didn't want to search on the exact name Joseph Levkov because the Joseph might have been Josef and the Levkov might have been Levkof. So I searched for first name starting with JOS (symbolically written JOS...) and last name LEVK... I found a Joseph

Levkovitz, and that was encouraging until I saw that he was born in 1928. That's the year that Renee was born, so Joseph couldn't have been born in the same year as his daughter. Next I tried to search for RUTH LEVK... I found two hits -- a Ruth Levkin born in 1925 and a Ruth Levkovitz born 1922. Both of those were too young to be Renee's mother. So next I tried to search for Renee directly. I searched for RENEE LEVK... and got no hits. Next I tried searching for JOSEPH with wife RUTH and child RENEE and no last name. I found a Joseph & Ruth Obercoln. Now I don't care how badly Levkov might be written in the census record, it's impossible that it would get transcribed as Obercoln. So this was not the family I wanted.

So I gave up on the 1940 census and went to 1930. Wanted to do that same search again -- JOSEPH, wife RUTH, child RENEE, but unfortunately the 1930 census search does not allow a search on child's name. It does allow a search by parents, so I changed the search to be RENEE, father JOSEPH, and mother RUTH. I obtained two hits. One was for a Renee Rosenberg, which is a far cry from Levkov. But the other was for a Renee Revkow. Bingo -- that's her. And other things in the record matched up (Renee born in 1928), so I knew I had the right record.

From this 1930 census I learned some new information. Specifically, Ruth and Joseph were married in 1927 or 1928 (probably 1927 since Renee was born in 1928). I learned that Joseph immigrated from Russia in 1922 and Ruth from Russia in 1914. I learned that Joseph was born in 1900 and Ruth in 1902. Of course that contradicts the birthdates found in the SSDI and on the Mexican visa. I need more opinions.

Now I really wanted the 1940 census. So in desperation I searched the 1940 census for JOS..., wife RUT, and child REN, and no last name. I got four hits. One was the Obercoln family that I saw previously. Two others were the Bell and Kusic families, which I rejected. But the fourth was a family transcribed as Leakos. That could certainly be Levkov, and indeed it was. Things in that record matched what I already knew about the family. And the child's name in that record was Renel, which is why I couldn't find it when I searched for the full name Renee. This record showed that Joseph was born in 1900 and Ruth in 1902, consistent with the 1930 census.

RUTH AND JOSEPH'S MARRIAGE RECORD

Now I wanted Ruth and Joseph's marriage date. So I searched the New York City marriage index for a groom with last name LEVKOV. None found. Next I searched for a bride with name of RUTH SCHRADER. Found one, and her groom was listed as Joseph Levkor. That's why I couldn't find him when I searched for LEVKOV. And from this record I learned that the date of marriage was November 24, 1927. That's consistent.

The familysearch website has a free service, whereby they will email you a certificate if you can provide them with the certificate number, date, and roll number. I requested that and a few days later received the certificate. The certificate gave me some new information. Specifically it showed that Joseph's father was Mordechai (that contradicted the Abraham that I found in the tree) and his mother was Eva Kaufman (Eva is obviously an anglicization for Havashana). Of course the Kaufman was interesting because Eva's granddaughter Renee would marry a Kaufman, but that appears to be purely coincidental.

BACK TO THE CENSUS

I've already found the family in the 1940 and 1930 US censuses, so next comes the 1925 New York State census. Ruth and Joseph weren't married yet, so I'll search for Ruth alone. A search for RUTH SCHRADER gave nothing. A search for her brother LOUIS SCHRADER also gave nothing. And sister LAURA SCHRADER gave nothing. But then I tried RUT... with sibling LAU... born 1898 +/- five years. Bingo. I brought up the record and it had the family name of Schrager, which is why I couldn't find it when I searched with the last name. The record gave me the following new information. Ruth and Laura were living with their parents Jacob (an Anglicization of Yankel) and Hannah (another Anglicization of Havanshana). Jacob was 66, Hannah 65, Ruth 22, and Laura 21. The kids were in the US 12 years, Jacob 6 months, and Hannah 8 months. So the kids came before the parents, which is atypical. But the good news is that Ruth's age is consistent with the other census records.

I was on a roll, so I went looking for the 1920 census. I tried RUTH SCHRADER, born 1893 to 1903, residing in New York. I got it. But it was a very strange record. It was for a Hyman Nagorney, with a daughter Sadie Schrader and a son-in-law Louis H Schrader. So Ruth's brother Louis married Sadie Nagorney and they remained living in the Nagorney household. Also in the household were Ruth Schrader, niece, and Laura Schrader, niece. Now obviously Ruth and Laura were not the niece of Hyman but rather the sisters of his son-in-law. I guess that relationship was too difficult for the census taker so he just wrote down niece. More new information on the record was that Louis was 28, immigrated in 1907, Ruth was 23, and Laura was 20. So this gives us yet another year of birth for Ruth.

Ruth wasn't in the country in 1910 (she immigrated in 1914) but Louis was. So I went for the 1910 census and found the Nagourney family. There was Hyman with daughter Sadie. And in the same household was Louis Schrader, nephew. So Louis was living with his uncle, and the designation of "niece" for Ruth in 1920 was correct after all. And Louis wound up marrying his first cousin, whom he was living with all along. I next pulled Louis and Sadie's marriage record, and I found out that they got married on November 10, 1918.

The only census that I'm still missing for Ruth is 1915. So I looked for RUTH SCHRA..., born 1895 +/- five years, and found only one record. It was for a Ruth Schrader living at the New York State Training School for Girls. So Ruth was obviously at a vocational school to learn a trade. When I looked at the line for Ruth, I saw that it listed her as a prisoner. So this wasn't a vocational school after all but rather a reform school. That brings up an important point -- if you can't handle bad news, don't do the research. But then I looked more carefully and saw that this Ruth was born in England and has been in the country for 15 years. That's not our Ruth -- she was born in Russia and was here only one year at the time. Try as I could, I was unable to find any other record that could have been our Ruth.

I'm running out of space here, so let me quickly summarize what else I found. I found the 1915 census record for the Nagourney family (spelled Nygirolie), and the 1930 record for Laura and Rae, living with their mother Eva, a widow. So Jacob died between 1925 and 1930. Eva

(Havashana) was 65 in 1925 and 65 again in 1930! I searched the New York City death records for Jacob and found a Jacob Schroder who died February 14, 1930. I didn't know if that was the correct person, but with information that I found later, I confirmed that it was. I found Eva Schrader in the 1940 census, and discovered that she was on the same page as Joseph and Ruth Levkov (I didn't notice that before when I found Joseph and Ruth's record, but I should have). I found the New York City marriage records for sister Laura Schrader and for brother Abe Schrader. I also found brothers Abe and Louis in the 1930 and 1940 censuses, and was able to fill in a lot more about their families. And I found numerous other records as well.

CONCLUSION

All these records were found online. It took about four hours spread out over two days. It's not magic, and you can do it too.

There were several lessons to be learned. (1) Names are never spelled the way we think they should be spelled. (2) The record you find might not be the right one, and if you don't confirm it you might wind up putting your mother in a reform school. (3) Some records are un-findable, such as Ruth's 1915 census record. And (4) never trust a woman's age.