



A brief history of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Orlando.
by Tom Hirsch, July, 2017

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Orlando formed in the Fall of 1990. The JGSGO's first president, Gene Starn chronicled the early times of the society in the group's first newsletter, published in March, 1991:

"The enthusiasm for a genealogical society in our Orlando area has been just short of phenomenal! And what amazing progress we have made!

After just five months, we have some 27 paid members, and another several dozen showing interest in learning more about tracing their families' histories.

At our monthly meeting we have all learned something we never knew before about tracing family backgrounds, either from people like Sarah Sladin, of the Latter Day Saints Family Library at Lake Mary, or Ann Osiseck, vice-pres. of the Greater Orlando Genealogical group, or from our own experienced members like Carl Frey, Doug First, Harry Katzman, Janet Friedman and Polly Horwitz.

It was less than a month after our local society was organized, that our very own world-wide link, with Jewish genealogy was established through a computer bulletin board in Winter Park, thanks to Silom Horwitz. Local genealogical computer buffs can now send and retrieve messages, view the Jewish Family Finder, and get a vast amount of useful information via their modems and a local phone call.

Our first public exposure came at the JCC's Chanuk-Arts Festival, where Gwen Persin, Teresa Finer and Claire Miller spearheaded face-to-face explanations of Jewish genealogy and signed up dozens of would-be-members.

Our membership in the Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies gives us an immediate link with other societies throughout the world, including an exchange of newsletters, and input of our own family names and places into the Jewish Family Finder, the largest family research tabulation ever assembled and growing each month."

He concluded his message in the first issue with this optimistic prediction:

"And because of this meaningful launching, we can look forward to a Society that will grow in value to all of its members, value in helping to find our heritage through our Jewish ancestry."

The JGSGO grew over the years to a membership of 57 households in 2009. A number of talented genealogists led the society. Our presidents have been

Gene Starn 1990-1994
Gladys Friedman Paulin 1994-1996
Jay Schleichkorn 1996-1999
Sim Sechbach 1999-2003
Jerry Kurland 2003-2005
Edith Schulman 2005-2007
Larry Morrell 2007-2009
Raeburn Wallen 2009-2011
Jerry Kurland 2011-present

Thanks to the efforts of the late Jay Schleichkorn, the late Raeburn Wallen, Marcie Wallen, Larry Morrell, and others, the JGSGO accumulated a significant research library, which was housed at the Congregation for Reform Judaism, on Malone Avenue. However, the CRJ's need for space required us to remove the hundreds of books, photos, videos, audio tapes, and other materials to temporary storage at the Jewish Academy in Maitland, in January, 2012. We were unable to find a suitable location for a library, and in October, 2012, we donated the collection of books to the Orange County Library System, with a label in each book, noting that this is part of the JGSGO's Jay Schleichkorn collection, honoring the longtime JGSGO leader and editor of our Etz Chaim newsletter. This donation was done to make this important material available to JGSGO members and other researchers.

November 12, 2012, the JGSGO had its meeting in the genealogy section of the downtown Orlando library genealogy center, where Jay's widow Marianne and son Ray unveiled a sample of the books.

These books are in the library, the majority of them at the West Oaks Library and Genealogy Center in Ocoee. The library moved its genealogy collection from the downtown Orlando library to Ocoee in February, 2015. We had a meeting at the West Oaks branch in May, 2015, to acquaint our members with the facility and its staff, to help JGSGO members learn and use these important resources.

Jay died in the third quarter of 2010, leaving a gap that no one was able to fill. Since his death, only a few issues of Etz Chaim were published, and the last one was the Summer 2011 issue. Thanks to the efforts of member Marlis Humphrey and intern Jessica Zalmanovich, two online multimedia issues were produced in 2017.

The JGSGO had a near-death experience in the summer of 2011. At that time, due to health issues, most of the elected officers of the JGSGO resigned, leaving a leadership crisis in September. Edith Schulman contacted a number of members to encourage them to fill the vacancies, and continue the work of the organization. A few people met at the CRJ, and agreed to serve as leaders, to continue the work of the society. Jerry Kurland of Longwood was named President, Marlis Humphrey of Melbourne Beach became VP of Programs and Publicity, Tom Hirsch of Winter Park became VP Membership, Dave Rowitt of Orange County became Treasurer.

We were very fortunate to have Marlis provide essential leadership to the JGSGO at this crucial time. She is an internationally-known genealogist, who has contacts with important speakers, vendors, and other important resources. She helped the society adopt important technology and leadership principles. Her contacts resulted in numerous world-class speakers giving presentations either in person or via internet feeds. Because of her leadership, she was elected president of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies. That also resulted in the IAJGS holding its annual conference at the Swan Resort at Walt Disney World in July 2017, with the JGSGO serving as host society.

Technology moves rapidly, and computer bulletin boards that were used in the 1990's were replaced by the internet. The society launched a web page that was hosted on Rootsweb. In 2012, our web presence moved to a website/blog, and about three years later, Marlis, along with JGSGO webmaster Barry Sieger moved our internet home to our own website, www.jsgo.org, and established jsgo.org email addresses for the society, officers, and principal volunteers.

During its existence, the JGSGO has helped hundreds of members in their genealogy research, providing expertise, research, and other assistance that have helped our members find treasured details that otherwise may have been undiscovered.

The JGSGO welcomes all IAJGS conference attendees, to IAJGS 2017. We are glad you are here, and will answer questions and help you as we can. We hope you make lots of new friends at the conference, learn a lot, and find interesting and exciting new details of your family history.

from your friends at the JGSGO

Diane Jacobs, Local Conference Co-Chair and board member

Jerry Kurland, President

Charla Miller, VP Membership

Tom Hirsch, VP Programs

Dave Rowitt, Treasurer

Barry Sieger, Webmaster and board member

Marilyn Macklin, Board member