

# Jewish Surnames

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## 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.: “Warszawski” = 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. }

Faiguenboim, Guilherme and Paulo Valadares, Anna Rosa Campagnano. *Dicionário Sefaradi de Sobrenomes - inclusive cristãos-novos, conversos, marranos, italianos, berberes e sua história na Espanha, Portugal e Itália*. [*Dictionary of Sephardic Surnames*]. (Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu, 2009). 528 pages. OCLC #469917195.

Kaganoff, Benzion C. *A Dictionary of Jewish Names and Their History*. (New York: Schocken Books, 1977). 250 pages. ISBN 0-8052-0643-4. { Highly readable layman's view, but error prone and no references given. }

Guggenheimer, Heinrich W. and Eva H. *Jewish Family Names and their Origins: An Etymological Dictionary*. (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1992). xliii+882 pages. ISBN 0-88125-297-2.

Hoffman, William F. *Polish Surnames: Origins and Meanings*. (Chicago: Polish Genealogical Society, 2012). Two volumes: 260 + 936 pages. Third edition. OCLC #819111273. [Second edition was 1997, 592 pages]. { Excellent discussion of Polish language constructs. }

Hanks, Patrick, ed. *Dictionary of American Family Names*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). 2,816 pages, in 3 volumes. ISBN: 978-0195081374.

Singerman, Robert. *Jewish Given Names and Family Names: A New Bibliography*. Edited by David L. Gold. (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001). 245 pages. ISBN 978-9004121898. { A subject-organized list of over 3,000 books and articles on Jewish given names and family names throughout history. Earlier edition was: *Jewish and Hebrew Onomastics: A Bibliography*. (New York and London: Garland, 1977). 132 pages. ISBN 0824098811. }

Smith, Elsdon Coles. *Personal Names: A Bibliography*. (New York: New York Public Library, 1952). 226 pages. ISBN: 978-1258265007. { 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* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987). 198 pages. ISBN: 978-0313238178, and
- *More Names and Naming: An Annotated Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1996). 320 pages. ISBN: 978-0313285820.

### Online:

- JewishGen Family Finder (JGFF):  
<http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff>  
100,000 different surnames actively being researched
- Avotaynu Consolidated Jewish Surname Index (CJSI):  
<http://www.avotaynu.com/csi/csi-home.html>  
700,000 different surnames found in 42 databases