

## JEWISH COMMUNITY

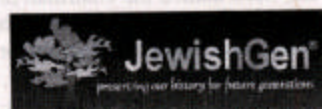
# Playing Jewish geography in cyberspace

By MIKE KARSEN *Special to JUF News*

**THE INTERNET PROVIDES** us a totally new dimension for playing Jewish Geography to research our family's history. The vast World Wide Web allows us to find people around the globe who may be able to help us in this endeavor. We may even be able to locate long-lost relatives. While more actual records are being digitized daily, the Internet still contains only a small percentage of the records that family historians need to complete their research. If we simply consider the Internet a great tool for finding the location of information about our families, we will not be disappointed.

### Where to look

We genealogists are blessed to have the mega-website Jewish Gen, which has become the central hub for researchers worldwide to interchange information. JewishGen has a myriad of



resources, but here we will touch only on the Family Finder as a sample of what is possible. Let's send a query into Jewish cyberspace: "Does anyone know the Pekarskys from Zhitomir?"

### The Family Finder

The JewishGen Family Finder (JGFF) is a database of surnames and ancestral homes with data contributed by over 67,000 researchers worldwide. At [www.JewishGen.org](http://www.JewishGen.org), look on the main menu under Research for JewishGen Family Finder, and then select the Search option. Here you can look for other genealogists who are researching your family surname and/or ancestral town. The following Search Screen will appear:

SURNAME	TOWN	COUNTRY
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	Any Country

SEARCH TYPE

Search all entries

Search only entries added/changed since

By simply entering your surname, town, and country, and then clicking the Search button, a list of all the entries matching your request will appear. Unfortunately, my search for Pekarsky in Zhitomir (Ukraine) yielded only one hit, which was my own entry.

When I clicked on the drop down arrow, four options appeared:

- Standard - match on *exact* spelling only
- Wildcard - match based upon a *prefix*
- D-M Soundex - match based upon a name's *sound*
- Partial Text - match based upon text matching *anywhere* within surname or town

I now searched using the D-M Soundex option to look for alter-

nate spellings of the same sound.

Here I found a second entry for Pekarsky from Zhitomir with a slightly different spelling. (I have omitted the name and e-mail here for privacy concerns.) Now I would be able to contact P... and see if any of our family given names matched.

What if you do not even know where your family originated? Searching for Pekarsky worldwide without naming the town or country yielded the following:

This is only a partial list of the 62 matches found, which also included entries by researchers in Brazil, Australia, Israel, France, and Argentina.

After finding a match, I could contact each of them by e-mail, snail mail or through Jewish Gen

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to see what connections we might have. JewishGen Family Finder's database contains over 335,000 entries with 90,000 unique surnames and 20,000 town names. As this number continues to grow, our chance of reconnecting with family also grows.

If you are interested in finding more information about your ancestral town, you can omit the surname and simply search the town's name to find others who are researching the same town. By writing to one of these researchers, you might find some historical information about your family's ancestral town. Once you're comfortable with Family Finder, you will probably want to register all of your family names and towns so someone could find you.

As you uncover more of your family's history, you will find that the rewards for playing Jewish Geography are many. Through honoring our ancestors and reconnecting with living relatives, we bring the family back together.

If you are now ready to delve more deeply into your family's history, attending a meeting of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois (JGSI) would be a good idea. JGSI has monthly programs covering various aspects of Jewish genealogy, and its members are always willing to help others. For information about the next meeting, call (847) 666-0100 or visit [www.jewishgen.org/jgsi](http://www.jewishgen.org/jgsi). ■

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*Key resources for the Jewish genealogist*

- Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois: (312) 666-0100
- [www.jewishgen.org/jgsi/](http://www.jewishgen.org/jgsi/)
- Illiana Jewish Genealogical Society: (708) 947-9457
- [www.lincolnet.net/ijgs](http://www.lincolnet.net/ijgs)
- JewishGen® [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)
- [www.jewishgen.org/jgff](http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff) (Family Finder)