

# 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 JewishGen<sup>®</sup>, which has become the "central hub" for researchers worldwide to interchange information. JewishGen<sup>®</sup> 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 the 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 <input type="button" value="v"/>

**SEARCH TYPE:**

Search all entries  
 Search only entries added/changed since

Start by simply entering your surname, town, and country, and then clicking the Search button. You will then be asked to “Login to JewishGen” as a security measure. Fill in the necessary personal information to become a registered user. You will then be returned to your search with a list of all the entries matching your request.

Unfortunately, my own search for Pekarsky in Zhitomir (Ukraine) yielded only one hit, which was my own entry.

### Searching for Surname PEKARSKY in Town ZHITOMIR in Ukraine

Number of hits: 1				
Surname	Town	Country	Last Updated	Researcher (JGFF Code)
Pekarsky	Zhitomir	Ukraine	11 Jun 2000	Michael Karsen (#44891) <a href="mailto:MikeFamHistorian@aol.com">MikeFamHistorian@aol.com</a>

Realizing, however, that there may be more than one way to spell Pekarsky, I went back to the Search Type option.



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 alternate spellings of the same sound.

Searching for Surname PEKARSKY (D-M code 759450) in Town  
ZHITOMIR (D-M code 436900)  
in Ukraine

Number of hits: 2				
Surname	Town	Country	Last Updated	Researcher (JGFF Code)
<a href="#">Peckarsky</a>	Zhitomir	Ukraine	5 Apr 2002	P... (name omitted for privacy) private@private.net
<a href="#">Pekarsky</a>	Zhitomir	Ukraine	11 Jun 2000	Michael Karsen (#44891) MikeFamHistorian@aol.com

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:

Searching for Surname PEKARSKY  
(D-M code 759450)

Number of hits: 62				
Surname	Town	Country	Last Updated	Researcher (JGFF Code)
<a href="#">Pickersky</a>	<a href="#">Chisinau</a>	Moldova	Before 1997	L... (name omitted for privacy) Canada
<a href="#">Bachrack</a>	Brooklyn, NY	USA	Before 1997	L... (name omitted for privacy) United States
<a href="#">Pekarsky</a>	Any	Any Country	Before 1997	B... (name omitted for privacy) United States
<a href="#">Bucharasky</a>	Any	Ukraine	Before 1997	B... (name omitted for privacy) United States
<a href="#">Picarsky</a>	<a href="#">Bialystok</a>	Poland	Before 1997	P... (name omitted for privacy) United States

This is only a partial list of the 62 matches found, which also included entries by researchers in Brazil, Australia, Israel, France, and Argentina. I could contact each of them by E-mail, snail

mail or through JewishGen® 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).

*Mike Karsen is a local genealogy lecturer and instructor. He is a board member of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois (JGSI) and is on the faculty of Dawn Schuman Institute. Mike can be reached at 847.803.4446 or MikeFamHistorian@aol.com.*

## **Box Insert**

### **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.lincollnet.net/ijgs](http://www.lincollnet.net/ijgs)

JewishGen®: [www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)

[www.jewishgen.org/jgff](http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff) (Family Finder)