

From Our Mailbox

National Red Cross Sources May Be Different Than ITS Sources

National Red Cross organizations operate independently of the International Tracing Service (ITS), which is run by the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) in Geneva, Switzerland. In late 1999, after years of waiting for a satisfactory response from the ITS, I submitted a request to the Australian Red Cross for information on a branch of my family whose last known whereabouts were in a place that was part of eastern Germany but post-war became Lithuania. I received a response in 2001 through the Lithuanian Red Cross with 16 documents including some photographs—but also the confirmation of a second cousin whose name with date and place I had never known. The ITS does not hold any of this information.

This means that genealogists conducting thorough Holocaust research should write to the relevant national Red Cross organizations, as well as to the ITS.

Peter Nash
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Wrong Birth Dates May Be Based on Hebrew and Julian Calendars

In “As I See It,” (Winter 2009), AVOTAYNU editor Sallyann Amdur Sack-Pikus tells the puzzling story of her father’s belief that his birthday was one month earlier than it actually was. Three independent bits of evidence: his birth certificate, the 1910 U.S. census, and the 1910 date of Passover all show April 23 as the birth date—although her father claimed it was March 23. Sack-Pikus asks readers to suggest a probable cause for the error.

I would like to suggest the following. As we know, Pesach falls on Nisan 15 in the Hebrew calendar. The month of Nisan corresponds with the end of March and beginning of April in our current civil calendar. Pesach, in the middle of Nisan, usually falls in early to mid-April.

This was not always the case. In the 19th-century Julian calendar, the date was 12 days earlier causing Pesach to fall in March. Thus, those with roots in the Russian Empire (like Sack-Pikus’ grandparents) who used the Julian calendar (in Russia), probably associated Pesach with March. I think her Amdur grandparents remembered the day (23), but understandably confused the month. As relatively recent immigrants, they probably retained much of their old thinking. Furthermore, her father was born in a Jewish leap year, making Pesach fall relatively late (April 23). Every year Pesach is increasingly earlier—until another correction is made, a leap year to synchronize with the solar calendar. Thus, Pesach would have come early (i.e., in March) in the years immediately after 1910. Likely, this fact further confused the Amdur grandparents about the previous year—

even in the U.S. And to top it off, we’re talking Pesach. Who could think straight after all the preparations topped off with going through labor and delivery!

My own family records also include records in which a one-month error is made; the date is correct, but the month is one month earlier or later. The combination of the Hebrew calendar with the Julian and Gregorian calendars seems the likely cause.

Avrohom Krauss
Jerusalem, Israel

More About Birth Date Errors

Sallyann Sack’s story about her father celebrating his birthday exactly one month early was interesting, since I have a similar example in my family—though it worked in the other direction. One of my aunts always celebrated her birthday on June 26. Late in life when my aunt applied for some government benefits and needed her birth certificate, she discovered that her birthday actually was May 26. I could only chuckle, but it must be a little mind boggling for the person in question. I suppose our birthday helps define who we are, and not only in the Zodiac sense.

Linda Morzillo
Saratoga Springs, New York

AVOTAYNU publisher Gary Mokotoff discovered that his wife’s father also celebrated his birthday exactly one month later than it really was—Ed.

Man Outlives Mentors

Perhaps AVOTAYNU readers might find interesting the following item from the *Yukon World* of Dawson, Yukon Territory, for February 1, 1905:

LIVING AT THE RIPE AGE OF 115: LEVI ROUSS SURVIVES MEN WHO PLANNED TO START CEMETERY WITH HIM

New York, January 16, 1905. Levi Rouss of Passiac, New Jersey, has celebrated what he claims as his 115th birthday. Rouss has resided in Passiac for 12 years, having been taken there from New York by local Hebrew leaders. The latter had secured grounds on the outskirts of Passaic for a new cemetery and, to follow an ancient tradition, wanted to find an old man to be the first to lie in the new cemetery. Rouss was found on the East Side, and it was thought that he could live only a short time. His fellow Hebrews promised him money, a home, and plenty of food. Their consideration was that he be buried in the new cemetery.

It took Rouss a week to get back his health, and since then, except for about two weeks last spring, he has walked about unaided. Several members of the committee who took him to Passaic, expecting that he would soon be buried in the new cemetery, are now residing there themselves.

Ronald Greene
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