

Methodology:

How I Solved the Auntie Rosenbaum Mystery

by François Delage

Hanging on the wall in our living room is a little wooden frame holding an old photograph and an envelope. The photograph features my wife Stephanie's grandfather, Jerome Schiller, at age twelve, and his younger brother, Arnold, age nine. It was taken during the World Panama Pacific Exposition, which was held in San Francisco's marina district from February to December 1915. According to Stephanie's father, Jerome and Arnold used to sell newspapers to the visitors there. Her dad always liked to remind her of that story when they walked along the Palace of Fine Arts, the only surviving building from the Exposition.

Below the photograph is an old yellowed paper envelope. On the top of the envelope is a green stamp and the seal of the Exposition. On the left side, written in a child's handwriting is the message, "Dear Auntie, Look on the other side, with love Jerome and Arnold," and on the right side, an address, "Mrs. Rosenbaum, Ellis Street between Scott and Pierce Street." We always wondered about the identity of Auntie Rosenbaum but nothing in our ensuing genealogical research had provided us with answers about her identity.

A few months ago, we contacted a distant cousin, Sandy Ayeroff, and discovered with surprise that Sandy owns the same picture. It had been sent to Sandy's grandmother, Julia Fisher, who also was Jerome and Arnold's aunt. This exciting discovery reawakened our interest in Auntie Rosenbaum.

During my late nights spent doing genealogical research, I had quite often tried to resolve the "Auntie Rosenbaum mystery," and despite several unsuccessful attempts, I decided to give it yet another chance. First I thought to look at the 1915 San Francisco directories (at SFgenealogy.com), which are an amazing resource to learn more about your ancestors. I scrolled through the listings of names in alphabetical order: Roseman, Rosen, Rosenback and finally Rosenbaum—where I found a Bertha Rosenbaum at 1861a Ellis Street located between Scott Street and Pierce Street. This matched the approximate address written on the envelope, and for the first time I felt

that I had a serious lead. I then looked in the 1900 U.S. federal census (on Ancestry.com), and found that a Henry and Bertha Rosenbaum did live on Ellis Street (between Scott and Pierce). The census indicated that Bertha was born in Germany in 1852 and immigrated to the United States at the age of ten. Therefore, in 1915 when Jerome and Arnold wrote their letter, Bertha would have been 63 years old. This suggested that Bertha was from an older generation, too old to be their real aunt. The census also indicated, however, that Henry and Bertha had no children, leaving the mystery unresolved. At that point, I gave up.

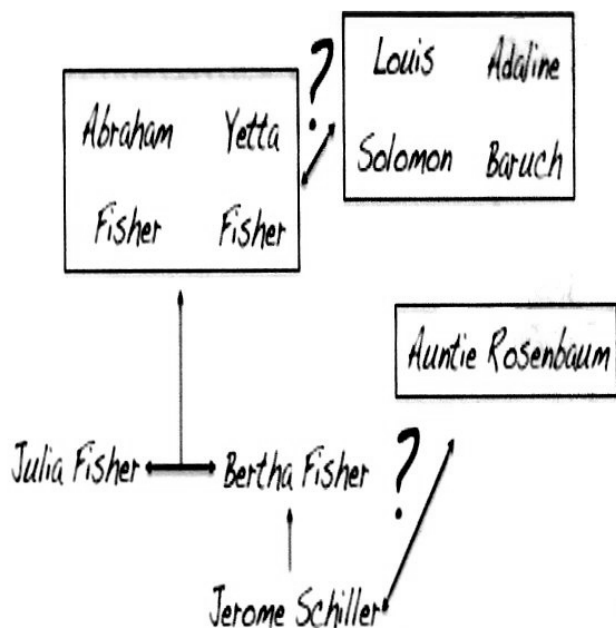
The following day, I realized that I had forgotten to check a source that has been quite helpful to me in the past. Findagrave (www.findagrave.com) is a resource for finding the final resting places of deceased relatives. Its volunteers

visit cemeteries across the United States and do a remarkable job of photographing headstones in order to make them available to anyone on the website. I entered "Bertha Rosenbaum" in the search engine and to my delight found a Bertha Rosenbaum buried in Salem Cemetery in Colma (San Mateo County, California) where almost all of my wife's family is buried. Diane Reich, the volunteer who had taken the picture, had posted a comment on Bertha's profile, "Buried alongside sister, Hannah Baruch, and mother, Pauline Baruch." With interest, I suddenly remembered that some of Stephanie's ancestors carried the surname Baruch.

To find a Baruch in my wife's family tree, I must go back two generations to Jerome and Arnold's grandparents on their mother's side. Abraham and Yetta Fisher (see tree) immigrated to the United States in the early 1850s from Poland, settling first in New York,

and then, soon after, moving to San Francisco. Around 1855, during the most perilous time of the Indian wars, the couple made the trip to Oregon and finally set up in Jacksonville, Oregon, where a gold strike had occurred a few years earlier. There, Abraham started a general retail store with his brother and his sister's husband. The Fishers were well integrated in the Jacksonville Jewish community and were close to several families, in particular Louis and





Adaline Solomon. In the early 1880s, because of diminishing returns in the local gold fields and the decision of the Oregon and California Railroad to bypass Jacksonville, the town's prosperity declined. Like many Jews, the Fishers and Solomons resettled in San Francisco. In San Francisco, Abraham opened a dry goods store and around 1894 finally retired. Yetta died soon after, and Louis Solomon, now a widower, moved in with Abraham.

In my family history research, I repeatedly found the Fishers and Solomons associated with each other and had long wondered about the relationship between the two families. When I discovered that Yetta Fisher's maiden name was Solomon (by consulting her daughter Julia's death certificate), I assumed, therefore, that Louis and Yetta had been brother and sister. This is where the Baruch surname appeared and where the two stories coincide. Louis Solomon's wife's maiden name was Baruch.

To recapitulate, in my research for "Auntie Rosenbaum," I found a Bertha Rosenbaum née Baruch and also an Adaline Baruch who married Louis Solomon, Yetta Fisher's brother. Jerome and Arnold, therefore, probably sent their letter to a great-aunt by marriage. This, I thought, concluded the "Auntie Rosenbaum Mystery."

I then looked at Bertha Rosenbaum's mother's profile on Findagrave. (Diane Reich had mentioned that they were buried next to each other.) Bertha's mother's name was Pauline Baruch, and Diane had taken a picture of her tombstone. The tombstone read, "Pauline Baruch born in Kolmar Prussia, mother of Yetta Fisher and Bertha Rosenbaum." For a moment I was confused and could not make sense of what I just read. Suddenly all the strings linking the members of the family seemed to materialize. Genealogists frequently need to question sources when conducting research. Previously I had thought that Yetta's maiden name was

Solomon because of her daughter Julia Fisher's death certificate. Julia's children probably made this assumption because their mother's uncle and cousins were both named Solomon. In fact the children were mistaken; their grandmother's maiden name was Baruch. This finding demonstrated what tied the Fisher and Solomon families together; Yetta Fisher and Adaline Solomon were sisters.

This discovery finally resolved the "Auntie Rosenbaum Mystery" and completed my wife's family tree. Thanks to a little message written to a mysterious aunt by two small boys, we know now about Stephanie's three-times great-grandmother, Pauline Baruch, a midwife born in Kolmar in the province of Posen in 1817, who died in San Francisco in 1890. We also discovered the link between the Fishers and the Solomons, and learned that Yetta had three sisters. She seemed to have a strong affection for her siblings and her family of origin, for she bestowed her maiden name on her son Baruch and gave her daughters the names of her sisters, Adeline and Bertha.

François Delage was born in Brittany in France in 1979. Since 2009, he and his American wife Stephanie have been living in Melbourne, Australia, where François works as a climate scientist. He is keenly interested in family history and spends many happy hours doing genealogical research.

JEWISH GENEALOGY SEARCH

MICHAEL GOLDSTEIN

BA, MSW, Israeli-based Genealogist

- Oral histories
- Brick wall mentoring
- Yiddish translations
- Cemetery searches

- o Guides family research using Israeli databases & archives
- o Locates Israeli Family & submitters of Pages of Testimony
- o Facilitates North American and Eastern European Research

michael@jg-search.com

www.jewishgenealogysearch.com

North America: 1 (617) 275 4246

Israel: + 972 (52) 861 0489 or + 972 (2) 581 3902