

Searching For Your Jewish Ancestors in Portland, Oregon

by Polina Olsen

Thousands of Jews came to Oregon around the turn of the 20th century and the Oregon Jewish Genealogical Society frequently receives queries from people tracing their ancestors. Here's some tips on finding information:

1. Checkout these books. If you can't find them, ask your local library about Interlibrary loan:
 - Lowenstein, Steven; *The Jews of Oregon*; ISBN-10: 0961978600.
 - Toll, William; *The Making of an Ethnic Middle Class*; ISBN 10: **0873956095**
 - Miranda, Gary; *Following a River: Portland's Congregation Neveh Shalom, 1869-1989*; ISBN: 0962496200
 - Olsen, Polina; *The Immigrants' Children, Jewish & Italian Memories of Old South Portland*; ISBN: 0-9787183-1-3
 - Olsen, Polina; *A Walking Tour of Historic Jewish Portland*; ISBN: 0-9787183-0-5
 - Outside Portland - Levinson, Robert; *The Jews of Jacksonville; The Jews of Eugene; The Jews in the California Gold Rush*; google around for copies of these.
2. Portland City Directories – are located at the Multnomah County Library, the Oregon Historical Society, and the Oregon Genealogical Forum. This may be the best source of information but these organizations cannot search for you. Note, before 1930, they are organized by address not name.
3. The Jewish Review links Jews throughout Oregon. If you are searching for someone, this might be a good place to advertise. <http://www.jewishreview.org>
4. The Oregon Jewish Museum is a repository of Oregon Jewish history archives. <http://www.ojm.org>.
5. Census Records: Check local libraries for free access to Ancestry.com. Multnomah Cty residents have access to Heritage Quest through the Mult. Cty Library.
6. Google - Oregon Genealogy for numerous helpful websites. Here are a few favorites;

A Place Called Oregon: <http://gesswhoto.com/index.html>

Oregon State Archives: <http://genealogy.state.or.us/>

Morning Oregonian Archives: Free for Multnomah County Residents through the Mult. County Library website. Also available on Ancestry.com

5. For a list of Portland synagogues visit the Jewish Federation of Greater Portland's website at www.jewishportland.org and select community directory. For a brief history of Portland synagogues check a Jewish Review article by Polina Olsen at <http://www.jewishreview.org/1856-cemetery-started-boom-of-Portland-Jewish-organizations>
6. Are your ancestors from Germany? German Jews started coming after the 1849 California Gold Rush and spread out to small towns around the state. Most belonged to the Reform Movement of Judaism and affiliated with Temple Beth Israel. <http://bethisrael-pdx.org/>. Jacksonville, Oregon was another center. Many German Jews settled in Nob Hill, now part of the Northwest Portland neighborhood.

From Prussia? They may have belonged to Congregation Ahavai Shalom, which merged to become Congregation Neveh Shalom. <http://www.nevehshalom.org/>

Sephardic? Try Congregation Ahavath Achim <http://ahavathachim.com/>. (Also see Eastern Europe).

From Eastern Europe? Eastern European and Sephardic Jews settled in the South Portland neighborhood. Before 1900, few Jewish lived there; by 1920 there were about 6000.

They may have belonged to [Congregation Shaarie Torah](#) or [Congregation Kesser Israel](#).