



Miriam Weiner, CG Emeritus

Posted on **December 17, 2015** by **Cari Taplin**

BCG offers Emeritus status to a certified person who has had a long and distinguished career with BCG and who is retired or semi-retired. In 2015 the Board of Trustees voted to offer this designation to Miriam Weiner.

In 1985 Miriam Weiner was the first Jewish genealogist certified by BCG (no. 293). Since then she has earned the high esteem of the genealogical community. Noted rabbi, historian, and genealogist Malcolm H. Stern, FASG, considered her “the most valuable person in the field of genealogy” and “a standard bearer of all that BCG upholds.”^[1] Her work centered on locating documents that had been hidden by the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe and whose access was complicated by changing political boundaries. At a time when such a task seemed impossible, she successfully traveled to Eastern Europe, met with regional and local archivists in the Soviet Union, and brought information about their holdings to the world’s genealogical community.



— Miriam Weiner, CG
Emeritus

On becoming a Board-certified genealogist Miriam comments:

In the early 1980s, when I began thinking seriously about my own family history and perhaps a career in Jewish genealogy, there were very few books on the subject, no Jewish genealogy conferences and really very little to guide me at all. I became aware of the BCG very early in this process and was very impressed by the professionalism, the experience required for certification, and the continuing education.^[2]

It became clear to me that I wanted to be a part of this, and I began the certification process, resulting in the 1985 BCG certification. My thirty-year relationship with BCG included the five-year renewals where I had to submit extensive material about my work and continuing education in this growing field. The comments from the BCG renewal judges resulted in my focusing on aspects that needed attention and encouraged me to “push the envelope” in my work. With prospective research clients, the BCG certification provided a credibility and affiliation that frequently resulted in clients asking about BCG.

Working with Jewish and Eastern European records was not easy for Miriam. “At that time, there were no computers, no e-mail, and the archives were closed in the former Soviet Union.” For someone to fly to these Eastern European countries in the 1980s and create relationships with archivists for the benefit of all future Jewish-researching genealogists is a trailblazing miracle the genealogical community may never see again. Not only was the work difficult due to the politics of the time, but Miriam also faced three major hurdles of Jewish research. First, in Eastern Europe at least, Jewish families did not have last names until the late 1700s, and instead were known by their family relationships such as “Abraham the son of Jacob.” Second, family names were often changed during the immigration process. Third, and possibly the most tragic, a significant amount of vital records and archival documents were destroyed during the Holocaust. Researchers of Jewish families often have to use other documents to trace their families and be creative with their research process.

Miriam's work in Eastern European records opened genealogical doors to many families impacted by political turmoil in the countries of Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Ukraine, and Romania. This research led to the publication of her books, *Jewish Roots in Poland* and *Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova*.^[3] She also established the Routes to Roots Foundation, Inc. a not-for-profit corporation that publishes her books and owns the Routes to Roots Foundation website with its gem, the [Eastern European Archival Database](#). The database includes Jewish and civil records from archives in Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Moldova, and Ukraine.

Miriam continues:

In 1989 I began an official collaboration with the state archives in Poland to produce a town-by-town inventory of archive documents (subsequently published in *Jewish Roots in Poland*). Shortly thereafter, I signed similar agreements with the archive director of the National Archives in Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus and Lithuania. The result of this historic collaboration resulted in my second book, *Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova* and the [Routes to Roots Foundation website](#). On this website, you can search the archive database by town name to see what Jewish and civil records have survived the Holocaust, the years available, and which archive has them. The website includes more than 500 pages, consisting of maps, articles by archivists and Jewish community leaders in Ukraine, Poland, Belarus, Moldova and Lithuania, and related links. There is no cost for using this website, which is sponsored by a not-for-profit foundation. I continue to update the website and databases. The above work for more than twenty-five years was not compensated, and I served as a volunteer for the Routes to Roots Foundation.

I had a commercial business wherein I offered customized individual and family tours to the “old country” and also conducted archive research in Eastern European countries on behalf of clients. I found all of the foregoing to be among the most satisfying work I had ever done—because of the archive discoveries, reuniting of clients with previously unknown family members, and the experience of “walking in the footsteps of their ancestors” as they visited their ancestral towns. I treasure my experience of helping numerous families create and pass on their own unique family histories to their descendants.

The whole focus of my life changed with this career change. I have experienced a renewed commitment to my Jewish heritage and a strengthening of my Jewish identity. I feel very strongly about the importance of documenting family history and hope others will also explore their roots.

Miriam's thirty-year career included lecturing at a wide array of Jewish genealogical and Holocaust survivor organizations. She is the former executive director of the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors, and she served on the advisory board of The American Red Cross Holocaust and War Victims Tracing and Information Center.

In 1991 Miriam received the Federation of Genealogical Societies award for Distinguished Work in Genealogy and History. Also in 1991 she received the National Genealogical Society Award of Merit for publishing *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Genealogy*.^[4] In 2003 she received the Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies.

Lest you think Miriam Weiner is all about Jewish genealogy, you may also like to know that she loves mystery novels and especially the series by Janet Evanovich featuring a bounty hunter in New Jersey. The female lead is interested in two main male characters, Ranger (a dark, tough, almost stereotypical “bad boy”) and Joe Morelli (a clean-cut police detective). Through the entire series she can't decide between the two, and readers lean one way or another. (Miriam, by the way, is pro-Ranger.) Recently she and a girlfriend took a road trip from New Jersey to Orlando, Florida, to attend a one-day conference with Evanovich.

Becoming a policewoman was Miriam's youthful dream, but by adulthood she had reached the lofty height of five feet one inch. At the time there were strict height requirements to be a cop, and Miriam was not tall enough. Instead she became a licensed private detective learning skills that would later prove beneficial to her genealogical work.

There is no doubt that the genealogical community at large and the Jewish community specifically have benefited from Miriam's work. She has been a trailblazer when that could have been impossible or dangerous. Her love of challenge, mystery, and heritage has served her career well, and her level of commitment will be difficult to match. Miriam is "still in denial" about retiring from this field but is now looking forward to researching her own family again.

[1] Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern, American Jewish Archives, New York, New York, to Board for Certification of Genealogists, letter, 13 September 1990; privately held by BCG.

[2] Quotes in this article come from either an email or a phone interview. Miriam Weiner, New Jersey (email address for private use), to Cari A. Taplin, email, 19 November 2015, "Re: BCG Emeritus Status—Short Interview Request." Also, Miriam Weiner, New Jersey, phone interview by Cari A. Taplin, 3 December 2015.

[3] Miriam Weiner, *Jewish Roots in Poland: Pages from the Past and Archival Inventories* (New York: Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, 1997). Also Miriam Weiner, *Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova: Pages from the Past and Archival Inventories* (New York: Yivo Institute for Jewish Research, 1999).

[4] Arthur Kurzweil and Miriam Weiner, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Genealogy*, Vol. 1 (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1991).

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12 THOUGHTS ON "MIRIAM WEINER, CG EMERITUS"



Gladys Friedman Paulin, CG

on **December 18, 2015 at 9:36 am** said:

I thank the Board for recognizing the immense amount of devotion Miriam has provided for not only Jewish genealogists, but for all researchers of Eastern European families. Her travel to and work with foreign archivists, and insistence on records access for the past thirty+ years have enabled me and others to find their own family heritage. May she continue to provide this help to us all

through her web site, books and personal encouragement for many years to come.



Marilyn Newman

on **December 18, 2015 at 6:07 pm** said:

Thank you dear Miriam for your help way back in 1988 to help me learn even the correct spelling and pronunciation of my two towns (14 miles apart) in Moldova. Thus, I was able to move forward to the present with my maternal family research. Continued success.



Sara Scribner

on **December 20, 2015 at 3:21 pm** said:

Anyone researching Jewish families knows Miriam's name and her work. Her pioneering and visionary endeavors benefit us all now and for generations to come. I am so glad she'll now have time to do her own family research.



Stanley Diamond

on **December 27, 2015 at 10:30 am** said:

All of us who have been involved in the research of our Jewish roots in Poland owe a heartfelt thank you to Miriam Weiner for her groundbreaking "Jewish Roots in Poland; Pages from the Past and Archival Inventories" publication.

As only an experienced and far-sighted professional genealogist could do, Miriam recognized a need and seized the opportunity to create a unique resource for researchers.

With the passage of time, and the advent of the Internet, it is easy to forget that in the early days of research of Jewish records of Poland, "Jewish Roots in Poland" was the go-to source for information about the location and span of available Jewish records. Miriam's second volume, "Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova" served researchers for these areas in the same way.

Thank you, Miriam...and thank you to the organizations and individuals who recognized your vision and valued the importance of your work.



Jill Sagarin

on **December 27, 2015 at 11:45 am** said:

It think it is hard for people to really fathom what Miriam accomplished in her work with the Archives in Eastern Europe. She turned upside down the common belief that records in those countries had been destroyed during the Holocaust and by Soviet authorities. She went where there was only darkness and revealed in the light of day that millions of records existed and that those of us at home could, in fact, with the help of professionals, find documentation on our families. We are all grateful to her for this.



Anne Feder Lee

on **December 28, 2015 at 9:28 pm** said:

This is a very well deserved honor for Miriam. Among all her wonderful work, I want to highlight here her many contributions to the annual IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy. Her sessions were always overflowing and very educational! I know that I personally benefited from her work and have heard from others who did as well. Anne Feder Lee, Past President IAJGS.



William Fern

on **December 29, 2015 at 11:24 am** said:

In addition to making a significant positive difference in the field of Jewish, especially Eastern European, genealogy, Miriam has had a similar impact on my own genealogical research, and ultimately, on the life of my larger family, and on me.

Besides the achievements of her publications mentioned above, Miriam Weiner was the first to publicize the specific Jewish holdings of important European archives, something which they themselves had never done. By establishing those vital records publicly she created international accountability for them and thus

stabilized those holdings.

In the days before widespread computer use and long before on-line availability of vital records from Poland and Austria-Hungary (my own ancestral lands), Miriam researched and supplied birth/marriage/death records that allowed my research assistant and me to discover family branches we had only vaguely suspected and to construct family trees we had only hoped possible. From there we were able to locate living descendants, numbered now in the hundreds, who formed the invitation list of our first international family reunion. Not all could attend, but 230 cousins did come from all over North America, Western Europe, and Israel. We gathered for a long weekend, many meeting each other for the first time. Miriam was a featured speaker at that reunion. Teenagers from different countries sat up half the night, intensely getting to know each other and integrating the shock that they were blood relatives and members of a fascinating, international family.

After that reunion the family changed forever in a way it never imagined it would. It now sees itself through truly cosmopolitan eyes. We continue to meet periodically in the States and in Israel, all stemming from that early work made possible by Miriam's help in locating and supplying essential, basic documentation.

Several years after beginning work with Miriam and the first international family reunion, she then changed me and my own view of family and self. She arranged a trip for me and friend to visit all the ancestral towns and villages in Western Ukraine where the various branches of the family had lived. She engaged for us an excellent driver of a comfortable van and a multi-lingual guide experienced in working with American tourists. Through the guide we met with local mayors, town officials and numerous villagers. He translated skillfully so conversations were accurate, rapid and easy. And, he was a competent video photographer. We now have videos of all the family's ancestral towns and many interviews with older people who, as children, remembered Jews from before the war. In several cases they even told us about some members of our family before the Holocaust and pointed out houses where they had lived. In all we traveled to 32 towns, met and photographed countless locals, and thanks to Miriam, remain deeply impacted to this day by the experience. Like my larger family after their first reunion, I too never saw my world in the same way again.



Michael Berenbaum

on **December 29, 2015 at 5:53 pm** said:

I have known Miriam Weiner for some 35 years ever since we worked together on the American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust survivors. Her work was essential then. Over the years I have been privileged to write the introduction to some of her publications and to see the fruits of her labor as I referred people to her and relied extensively on her expertise. She has made an important contribution with grace and wisdom. I remain grateful to her, grateful, respectful and admiring.



Roni Seibel Liebowitz, Immediate Past President, JGS, Inc. (NY)
on **January 6, 2016 at 12:56 pm** said:

Even before I knew Miriam Weiner, I knew her books *Jewish Roots in Poland* and *Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova*. I heard her speak at the Center for Jewish History and searched her website *Routes to Roots*. I started going to IAJGS Conferences in 1999 and was excited to meet her in person at several of these. I was always hugely impressed and in awe of the research she did, traveling to several countries in Europe, exploring so many archives and meeting with the archivists in charge of these collections. Her ability to comprehend what she was viewing in these archives and then be skilled enough to translate it into a language that genealogy researchers (even the beginners) can understand, is a huge gift to all of us.

My involvement with the Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc. (NY) offered opportunities to hear her speak locally. She always drew in the crowds, eager to hear about her latest research. She attended an informal Lunch and Learn session we hold periodically before the formal programs. Miriam responded respectfully to all inquiries from the seasoned genealogy researchers as well as to the beginners. Her ability to provide detailed responses about towns and archives she had visited years before, was more than impressive.

We were in touch about professional issues as well as sharing some of our personal lives. Despite being a larger than life professional, she is a warm and caring human being. I am thrilled that Miriam's distinguished career has been recognized by the Board of Certification Genealogists, providing her Emeritus status.



Karen Franklin
on **January 6, 2016 at 1:00 pm** said:

By Karen Franklin, director of family research at the Leo Baeck Institute, a past chair of the International Association of Jewish

Genealogical Societies, and past co-chair of JewishGen

It is difficult to estimate the extraordinary impact that Miriam has made on the Jewish genealogy world over three decades, not only through her research and publications, but also by speaking and sharing her knowledge. It's not just that she was a pioneer, but that she has continued to be of assistance to her colleagues. She has introduced archivists to us, and taught research techniques as well as making available information about archival resources. She has imparted her knowledge not only to diehard genealogists, but also to generally interested Jewish groups. Throughout the years when people learn I'm a Jewish genealogist they always ask, "Oh, so do you know Miriam Weiner?"



Garry Ramler

on **February 22, 2016 at 1:45 am** said:

It was a chance coincidence that I ever came across the illustrious Miriam Weiner.

While browsing her publication "Jewish Roots in Poland: Pages from the Past and Archival Inventories" looking for my family's home town, Kolomyya, I was stunned to see a 1910 postcard showing the shops around the city square featuring my family name, Ramler. Within three days I had reached out to Miriam, and she was organizing a trip in 2001 for my father (a survivor), brother and myself to visit this forgotten Ukrainian village to harvest the memories of a world we thought had all perished.

For 10 days we laughed and cried together with stories and discoveries that will now remain forever, perpetuated in my father's gravestone in Melbourne with embedded fragments of his family's desecrated tombstones and the very soil from the nearby forest where his sister and father, along with thousands of other Jews, were shot and buried.

The trip to Ukraine remains one of the most significant events of my life, and I am indebted to Miriam and her local guide and friend Vitaly for granting me some of the memories of those who vanished with their stories untold.



William Connelly

on **March 7, 2016 at 8:47 am** said:

Miriam's books and websites have been essential daily reference tools in the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Library and Resource Center for nearly two decades, not just out there somewhere in the stacks or as dusty bookmarks in the web

browser, but right there handy as ready references at the desk at all times, so that we can best serve the public. Honestly, one could call me at 4 in the morning, wake me from a dead sleep, and I could still rattle off "rtrfoundation.org." For as much and as long as she's helped our staff and our Museum patrons, I really should be sending her flowers.