

# GUIDE TO JEWISH GENEALOGY IN CHICAGOLAND

by Mike Karsen

## Drexel Home (Home for the Aged Jews)

The Drexel Home (Home for Aged Jews, as it was originally called) opened in 1893 at Sixty-second Street and Drexel Avenue in Hyde Park on the south side of Chicago. It was mostly used by the Reform/German Jewish community. It closed in 1981.

JGSI became interested in the Drexel Home when Co-President, Debbie Kroopkin, had discussions with members of Spertus College concerning materials housed in the now closed Chicago Jewish Archives. She learned that they had a book that the Drexel Home kept that logged all of their admissions from 1894 through 1943. Once we were able to actually turn the pages of the book, we realized that this was a genealogical treasure-trove.

The home opened in 1893 with its construction made possible by a gift of \$50,000 from Abraham Slimmer, a cattle merchant and financier from Waverly, Iowa. When the home closed in 1981 many of its residents were transferred to the new Lieberman Geriatric Health Centre in Skokie.

At the time of its closing, the average age of its residents was eighty-seven with forty-five of them over ninety years old.



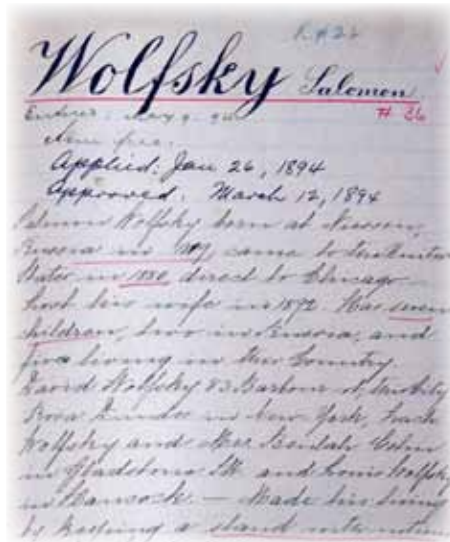
Note: The photo is labeled 66th st. and Drexel Ave. but the address was 6140 South Drexel Blvd. as shown in the 1910 and 1920 censuses.



The book was divided into two sections. The front was a listing by letters of the

alphabet of the residents as they were admitted. The back section contains one page biographies of the residents taken as they were admitted and updated with information including when and where they were born, when they came to the U.S., medical conditions, date of death, and place of burial.

The page on the right is an extract from the biography of Salomon Wolfsky (the great-great-grandfather of JGSI member Barry Wolf, who lives in Michigan).



As you can see, even with cropping, the image is still difficult to read and requires magnification. Salomen's biography states that he was born in Niessen, Russia in 1819 and came to the U.S. in 1880. He was admitted to the Drexel home in 1894 after the death of his wife in 1892. His biography indicates he had seven children, (two in Russia and five in the U.S.) and gives us the names of the children in the U.S. It states that he died on 8 Dec 1895 and is buried at Waldheim Cemetery. Barry Wolf had seen an article mentioning that JGSI had gained access to the book, and remembered that Salomen's death certificate listed that he was a Drexel resident. He contacted us and we were able to send a copy even though we were in the process of making the book available to our members. This short biography provided information that Barry could not have found in any other source. That's the good news and, of course, as in most genealogical finds, it asked more questions than it answered.

Now back to the process. After a preliminary review of the condition of this very old and frail book it was decided that taking digital photos of the entire book would be the best plan to capture the information. On October 5, 2016 Wendy Hauser and I went to Spertus and took 518 photos of the entire book. This took a little over three hours. The next part of the process was to crop and edit the photos of the biographies which was accomplished by Marcia Hirsch. Ron Miller and

I then designed the database so that it would be compatible with our new JGSI Jewish Chicago Database (JJCD). The names and some birth and death dates would be indexed and the actual biographies would be online and could be viewed with one click. Dennis Aron and Terry Taylor then read through the over 700 biographies extracting the key dates. Ron Miller then took all of the files and integrated them into the new JJCD.

<http://jgsi.org/databasesearch>

By clicking on the intake Biography, the image of the biography (shown earlier) appears. Since the book layout had four biographies across the page, you may have to scroll to find your individual.



If you have any questions you can e-mail us at [DrexelHome@jgsi.org](mailto:DrexelHome@jgsi.org).

JGSI is working on additions to the new JJCD and is looking for volunteers to help. Also, if you have any ideas of other databases that could be made available to our members, or your congregation has a computerized inventory of their memorial plaques that they would share with us, please let us know. E-mail us at [JJCD@jgsi.org](mailto:JJCD@jgsi.org).

The results are:

Surname	Given Name	DOB	DOD	Burial	Database	Notes-1
Wolfsky	Salomon	1819	December 8, 1895	December 10, 1895	Drexel Home	intake Biography

References: *The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb* by Irving Cutler, 1996