

# Genealogist to speak at Morris County Library on Tuesday



Photo by Megan Goldschmidt

## Genealogist to speak

Mike Schwartz of Morris Plains shows blown up records of his grandmother's father's naturalization records from the Austro Hungarian empire. Schwartz will give a presentation to the Morris Area Genealogy Society (MAGS), on Tuesday, June 4, at the Morris County Library in Whippany. He will show how he used genealogy to find relatives in surprising ways.

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By MEGAN GOLDSCHMIDT STAFF WRITER |

It was never a secret that Mike Schwartz's father emigrated from Poland; Schwartz knew the fact and never really wanted to know more. However, after he retired seven years ago, Schwartz took up genealogy and uncovered some rather interesting things about his family tree.

"One of my major motivations was to be able someday to tell my grandchildren where they all came from," Schwartz said.

Schwartz will give a presentation to the Morris Area Genealogy Society (MAGS), on Tuesday, June 4, at the Morris County Library in Whippany. The presentation will show how he used genealogy to find relatives in surprising ways. He's done two presentations previously for MAGS, and other genealogy societies he belongs to.

Schwartz explains in his presentation how he researches genealogy by outlining his journey through his family records.

The first thing one must do when starting to trace genealogy is compile all of the information one knows about his or her family, according to Schwartz.

“I remembered a lot of stories and really pressed my memory,” Schwartz said, “I had some help from cousins. People of the immigrant generation didn’t talk much about it; it was like they left their life behind when they came to America. So there wasn’t a lot of information around.”

The next thing Schwartz said to do is “interview the hell out of your relatives.”

“After those start with the US census and see what you could learn out of that,” Schwartz said “The neat thing about the US census is, in different years they ask different questions. Ellis Island opened in 1892, and what’s good about those early censuses was they asked where they came from. So they asked if they were naturalized, and you could look up their naturalization papers if they were.”

Once he found the naturalization papers for his family, Schwartz was able to find the ship manifest his father was on as a child coming over. He has also disproven a popular myth about Ellis Island.

“You can find the ship manifest. So this whole myth about their names being changed at Ellis Island, it’s not true. Their names had to be recorded on the ship manifest when they boarded in Europe,” Schwartz said.

He found his father’s name, birthdate, where he was coming from, and who he came with. Schwartz also obtained a copy of his grandmother’s original passport where he father sat with her in the picture.

Schwartz said most people would just look at their relatives name, think it was cool, and move on. But, he said that checking out the other columns on the document is where he got some of his major breakthroughs.

“Those will tell you the county or province where they lived in Europe and it gives you a key to get European records,” Schwartz said, “And those records are spotty but more is coming available everyday.”

Schwartz investigated a column where his grandmother listed who she left behind in Europe; she said her brother, Aron Schudrich. Schwartz had discovered her maiden name and could now trace his grandmother’s side of the family. He said it was one of his “chills” moments.

Another one of his chills moments was when Schwartz found second cousins living in Arizona that he’d never known about.

“I found the naturalization papers for my Great Uncle Joe,” Schwartz, “I saw he had two kids Mitchell and Ida. I saw that Mitchell was only a few years older than my father, so I wondered if he was still alive. So I searched the Social Security Death Index.”

Schwartz found he had died, but an online funeral book had been listed under his obituary in the Arizona Sun Times. In that funeral book were two emails of posters who had written messages.

Schwartz took a chance and emailed both of them, asking them to connect him with Mitchell’s children. About a month later, Schwartz received an email back from Harold Michael Schwartz, Mitchell’s son, who confirmed the connection. They later met in New York.

Schwartz has uncovered a number of other cousins, how his grandparents must have met, and even that his grandfather had a sister.

Schwartz said belonging to news letters from genealogists all over the world helps in finding clues. He receives emails from GenTeam, a group of volunteer genealogists in Europe who developed an online database of records from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Schwartz also reads a lot of history books on Eastern Europe, the part that his and his wife’s families are from. It gives him a better idea of the landscape and what life was like for his family.

He said some of his relatives are ecstatic to hear of his discoveries, while others humor him or just don’t care to hear. His hobby in retirement has become a passion for Schwartz.

“I’ve gone a long way to uncover my family history, but it’s not over. Genealogy is never over.”