

A Proposed Standard for Names, Dates and Places in A Genealogical Database

by Gary Mokotoff

Every industry has standards, and the family history industry should be no exception. Standards permit interchangeability between independently created works and make it easier to understand the intent of the creator when the creator and the observer both know the standard. There is already a standard for citing sources in genealogical databases. It is published in *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, by Elizabeth Shown Mills (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2007). Currently, there are none for citing names, dates and places.

Described below is a proposed standard for names, dates and places in a genealogical database. It is a working document. The author would be happy to receive comments and improvements. Send them to <garymokotoff@avotaynu.com>.

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Introduction

It is difficult to create a standard in an established industry because every family historian has his/her way of recording data. No standard is going to be perfect; it will be easy to find cases where the rules appear to be improper. The standards may merely work for the vast majority of cases.

There are number of important criteria that should be considered in creating a standard for retaining genealogical data:

1. The standards must be acceptable to the researcher entering the data. If the researcher finds the standards objectionable, s/he won't conform to them. *Example:* A standard that the name of a location be spelled in English would be unacceptable to an Italian researcher who would insist on entering "Roma, Italia" not "Rome, Italy."

2. The standards must be acceptable to the *major* genealogical software systems; otherwise, users will be incapable of conforming to them. A significant example is Family Tree Maker where the date field is not free form. It will not accept "Easter 1810" as a date.

3. The standards must be intelligible to non-family historians. Genealogical software systems have the ability to publish reports or total family histories from the data they contain. The results must be intelligible to the reader.

Place Names: Contemporary Name vs. Name at Time of Event

Reasons for using the contemporary name as the standard. There are many arguments to support a standard that the name of a place should be its contemporary name.

1. The *de facto* standard for place names is the contemporary name of the place. Examining the Ancestry World Tree database, Davey Crockett, who was killed at the Battle of the Alamo in 1836, is listed in every case as having died in "San Antonio, Bexar County, Texas." The reality is there was no state of Texas in 1836 when the battle took place, and certainly no Bexar County. The event took place in "San Antonio, Texas Territory, Mexico." (In reality, Texas Americans declared their independence from Mexico during the Battle of the Alamo and did not become part of the United States for nearly ten years. It could be argued that Crockett died in "San Antonio, [in the country of] Texas.")

2. This is the standard for the Family History Library. They have the peculiar problem that they catalog record groups as a range of dates that may incorporate more than one name for a town during the time period and that may be their motivation. If they had the vital records of L'viv, Ukraine, for 1870–present, they would be forced to break up the record group into four different sections because the city had four different names during that time period. They do, however, identify all names during all time periods. For example, they catalog L'viv records as follows:

Poland, Lwów, Lwów - Jewish records
Austria, Galizien, Lemberg - Jewish records
Україна, Львів, Львів, Львів - Єврейські записи
Ukraine, L'viv, L'viv, L'viv - Jewish records

3. It may be difficult for a researcher to determine the political subdivisions at the time of the event. This can be resolved in many cases by the online catalog of the Family History Library. Their collection is so extensive that many towns and cities are cataloged with their full description as the city of L'viv is defined above.

4. There are cases where the political power of the time was considered an occupier, and researchers would be reluctant to use the occupier's name for nationalistic reasons. For example, Germany was considered to be an occupier of countries during World War II, not the political power in charge. No Polish researcher would say an ancestor died during World War II in "Warschau, Generalgouvernement, Germany."

5. Historians sometimes favor anachronistic names. For

example, they refer to the Łódź ghetto of World War II, not the Litzmannstadt ghetto. (During the period of time when Germany occupied Poland, they changed the name of the Polish city of Łódź to Litzmannstadt.)

6. When Napoleon conquered much of Europe, during that brief period, documents of the city of Kassel, Germany, were spelled Cassel. Using the place name at the time of the event could create the situation that the children born to a family in the early 1800s would have children first born in Kassel, then in Cassel (Napoleonic period), and finally in Kassel.

Reasons for using the name at the time of the event as the standard.

1. The contemporary name is anachronistic.
2. Certain well-known cities would look silly if identified by their modern-day name. It would wipe Leningrad off all family trees. Did the early Dutch settlers of New York have children born in New York, New York (modern-day) or Nieuw Amsterdam, New Netherlands?

0. General Standards

0.1 Contents of source documents. A genealogical database should faithfully record the contents of the sources of information. Where the source contents have been interpreted or evaluated, then the actual contents must be documented in the database in some manner to alert the reader that the information provided was not exactly what the source stated. *Example:* A family bible states the person was born on Easter 1810. It is determined that Easter occurred on April 22, 1810, and that date is used in the database. There should be documentation in the database to the effect that “The source of the birth date is a family bible that states he was born on Easter 1810.” *Example:* The source recorded a date as 6/2/1947 and the document came from France. The researcher interprets this as 06 Feb 1947. Additional documentation should note that the date on the document was shown as “6/2/1947.”

0.2 Alphabet. The Latin alphabet is the standard alphabet. Information in other alphabets is to be transliterated into the Latin alphabet.

0.2.1 Russian. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names Standard will be used to transliterate Russian Cyrillic into the Latin alphabet. Currently it can be viewed at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanization_of_russian>.

0.2.2 Hebrew. The Hebrew Academy 2006 Standard will be used to transliterate Hebrew into the Latin alphabet. Currently it can be viewed at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romanization_of_Hebrew>.

0.3 Diacritical marks. Diacritical marks are optional; the alphabetical character optionally may appear without the mark. When the mark is an umlaut over a vowel, the vowel should be followed by the letter “e.” *Examples:* François or Francois. Münster or Muenster.

1. Names of Persons

1.1 Men. A man who is living is identified by his current legal name. A deceased man is identified by his legal name

at time of death. *Examples:* Shimon Peres, Joseph Stalin

1.2 Women. For unmarried women, the rule for men applies. Married women are identified by their maiden name, that is, their legal name at the time just prior to their first marriage. *Example:* Jacqueline Lee Bouvier (not Jacqueline Lee Kennedy or Jacqueline Lee Kennedy Onassis). Their given name(s) are the legal name(s) for living women or the legal given name(s) at time of death. *Example:* A woman was married in Europe with the name Frusha Cernick. She came to the U.S. and changed her given name to Rose. She would be listed in the database as Rose Cernick. It would be noted somewhere in the database that her birth given name was Frusha.

1.3 Everyday name. If a person was known when living by a given name other than his/her legal name, then it is placed in parentheses following the legal given name. *Example:* Jaqueline (Jackie) Lee Bouvier. *Example:* If there were more than one everyday name, they are in parentheses separated by commas. Elizabeth (Betsy, Lizzie) Smith.

1.4 Other names. Any other names used by individuals, such as birth name, should be documented in the appropriate fields of a genealogical software system, or, if none are available, they should be documented in the Notes section. *Example:* His birth name was Icek Fajnsztajn.

1.5 Unknown portions of name. If the given name or surname of a person is unknown, but the other portion is known, the unknown portion is represented by a question mark (?). If the name is totally unknown, it is left blank. *Examples:* Sarah ?, ? Smith.

1.6 Name in doubt. If the veracity of the given and/or surname is questionable, a question mark is placed immediately after the questionable portion—with no intervening space—and the Notes section for the individual explains why the name is in question. *Examples:* Sarah? Smith, Sarah Smith?, Sarah? Smith?

1.7 Alternative Spellings. If a source contains a spelling other than the standard as described above, including misspellings, it should be specified in the Notes section. *Example:* Note: His marriage record lists his given name as Salamon rather than Solomon; probably a misspelling.

1.8 Syntax. All portions of the name will be presented in upper/lower case.

2. Dates

2.0 Calendar. The Gregorian calendar is the standard calendar for dates. Prior to the adoption of the Gregorian calendar in a particular country, double dates should be used where the initial date is the non-Gregorian (usually Julian) date and the second date is the Gregorian date. Where only one date is given in the source and it is known not to be the Gregorian date, it should be converted to the Gregorian calendar and double dates should be shown. The date as shown in the source should be identified in the Notes section.

2.1 Standard date format. (SDF) The standard date format will be a two-digit day, followed by a three charac-

ter abbreviation for the month, followed by a four digit year. Each sub-element is separated by a space. The three character month will be in the native language of the researcher. *Examples:* 02 Jan 2007 (English); 01 Ene 1823 (Spanish).

2.1.1 *Date unknown.* Where the date is unknown, it is omitted.

2.1.2 *Partial date.* Where only the year is known, the other elements are omitted. Where the month and year are known, the day is omitted. Where the day and month are known, they are represented in SDF except the year is replaced by a question mark (?). For all other partial dates, the date field is left blank and information known about the date is identified in the documentation. *Examples:* Jan 1940, 1855, 25 Dec ?

2.1.3 *Dates prior to the year 1000.* The year portion of a date prior to the year 1000 is represented as a three-digit number with leading zeroes if there are only one or two meaningful digits. *Examples:* Jan 623, not Jan 0623; Feb 099.

2.1.4 *Double dates.* Where there is a double date caused by the source document including a date other than a Gregorian one, if the difference is only in the day, then the format is dd/dd mmm yyyy. If the difference includes different months, the format is dd mmm/dd mmm yyyy. If the two dates differ by year, the format is dd mmm yyyy/dd mmm yyyy. In all cases the second date is the Gregorian date.

2.2 **Probable date.** If the date is not certain, but evaluation has determined it is the probable date, the date will be represented in SDF immediately followed by a question mark (?) with no intervening space. Documentation will describe the reason why the date is in doubt. *Example:* 15 Nov 1921?

2.3 **Estimated date.**

2.3.1 *Before a given date.* “Bef” followed by the SDF. *Examples:* Bef 1776; Bef 04 Jul 1843.

2.3.2 *After a given date.* “Aft” followed by the SDF. *Examples:* Aft 1776; Aft 04 Jul 1843.

2.3.3 *About a given date.* “Abt” followed by the SDF. *Examples:* Abt 1776, Abt 04 Jul 1843.

2.3.4 *Range of dates* “Bet” followed by one SDF followed by a space followed by a dash (-) followed by a space followed by a second SDF. “Bet” stands for “between.” *Examples:* Bet 1842 – 1855, Bet 12 Dec 1940 - Feb 1941.

2.4 **Series of possible dates.** Where evidence is not conclusive as to the date of the event, the date is either left blank or the most likely date is used—based on evaluation of evidence—and documentation identifies all possible dates and their sources. *Examples:* Abt 1888 (with all dates found in evidence described in the documentation); 12 Feb 1743 (with all dates found in evidence described in documentation and perhaps justification why the shown date is the most likely).

2.5 **Dates before the Common Era.** Dates before the

Common Era will have a SDF followed by a space followed by “BC” or “BCE.” If the year is less than three meaningful digits, leading zeroes are used to make the year three digits. *Examples:* 200 BC; 200 BCE; 15 Mar 044 BC.

2.6 **Dates known only by events or holidays.** Sometimes family lore or documentation only knows that an event occurred on a specific holiday, for example, Easter Sunday 1875 or Yom Kippur 1902. Every effort should be made to convert this description to an actual date. There are resources on the Internet to do such conversions. The Notes section of the individual should document the date as defined in the source. *Example:* Yom Kippur 1875 was October 9, therefore, the date field shows 09 Oct 1875 and the Notes section states “The date of birth is calculated. The family legend is that he died on Yom Kippur in 1875.”

2.7 **Special considerations**

2.7.1 *Dates based on the Hebrew calendar.* Identical to SDF except the months will be the three-character abbreviations of the Hebrew months. Abbreviation of Hebrew months are Tis, Hes, Kis, Tev, Shv, Ad1, Ad2, Nis, Iya, Siv, Tam, Av, Elu. Note: In years that are not leap years, Ad1 will still be used for the month of Adar.

2.7.1.1. *Interpreting Hebrew calendar dates.* If the intent of the researcher is to convert Hebrew dates to secular dates and post the secular dates to the database, the following rules apply. The Hebrew calendar is based on the start of the day being at sundown. If a document provides only the Hebrew date and not the time of the event, then for purposes of converting the Hebrew date to a Gregorian (secular) date, it will be assumed the event occurred after midnight. In any case, the actual date (and time, if present) must be documented in the database with a statement similar to “The actual date of death on the tombstone is 14 Kislev 5645.”

2.7.2. *Dates during Russian Czarist period.* The Czarist Empire never accepted the Gregorian calendar, but instead kept with the Julian calendar. Consequently, in most records of the Russian Empire, the Julian date is specified. Where double dating occurs, the Julian date is followed by the Gregorian date. *Example:* January 3/15 1883. In this circumstance, the second, Gregorian, date should be used. When a single date is found in the source document and there is no evidence to the contrary, it will be assumed to be a Julian date, and the date is to be converted to the Gregorian date according to the following schedule:

1 Mar 1638 - 28 Feb 1769 — add 11 days

1 Mar 1769 - 28 Feb 1900 — add 12 days

1 Mar 1900 - 31 Jan 1918 — add 13 days

1 Feb 1918 - present — Gregorian calendar used

The actual date on the document will be noted with a statement similar to the following: “The (date of birth) shown is based on the modern-day Gregorian calendar. The actual date on the document is dd mmm yyyy and is assumed to be based on the Julian calendar.”

2.7.3. *Other calendars.* There are numerous other calendars that may have been used to identify the date of the

event. Examples are the Quaker and the French Revolutionary calendars. In these cases, the date should be converted to the conventional calendar and a statement made that explicitly describes the contents of the document.

2.8 Abbreviations of Months of the Year

Eng.	Fr.	Ger.	Heb.	Ital.	Port.	Span.
Jan	Jan	Jan	Tis*	Gen	Jan	Ene
Feb	Fev	Feb	Hes	Feb	Fev	Feb
Mar	Mar	Mär	Kis	Mar	Mar	Mar
Apr	Avr	Apr	Tev	Apr	Abr	Abr
May	Mai	Mai	Shv	Mag	Mai	May
Jun	Jun	Jun	Ad1/A d2	Giu	Jun	Jun
Jul	Jul	Jul	Nis	Lug	Jul	Jul
Aug	Aoû	Aug	Iya	Ago	Ago	Ago
Sep	Sep	Sep	Siv	Set	Set	Sep
Oct	Oct	Okt	Tam	Ott	Out	Oct
Nov	Nov	Nov	Av	Nov	Nov	Nov
Dec	Déc	Dez	Elu	Dic	Dez	Dic

* The first month of the Hebrew calendar, Tishri, coincides with the secular months of September/October.

3. Place Names

3.0 Contemporary name vs. Name at Time of Event.

The place where the event occurred will be the name at the time of the event followed—in parentheses—by the contemporary name preceded by the word “Now.” *Example:* Leningrad, Leningrad, USSR (Now St. Petersburg, St. Petersburg, Russia).

3.1 **Syntax.** A place is identified by its name, followed by the names of all political subdivisions within the country in which it is located, followed by the name of the country in which it is located. For example, in the U.S., a place is identified by its name, county, state followed by “United States.” *Example:* New York, New York, New York, United States. That is, New York (city), New York (county), New York (state), United States.

3.1.1. **Abbreviations.** No component of the place name will be abbreviated with one exception. The countries United States of America, United Kingdom and Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, may be abbreviated USA, UK and USSR respectively.

3.2 **Spelling.** All components of the place name are spelled in the manner of the country in which it is located with the exception of “Country” which is spelled in the language of the researcher. *Examples:* Berlin, Germany; Berlin, Deutschland; Berlin, Allemagne. Warszawa, Poland.

New York, New York, Etats-Unis.

3.2.1 **Multi-lingual countries.** In countries that have more than one official language, the spelling of the official (predominant) language of the province in which the town exists will be the standard spelling. *Example:* Antwerpen, Belgium.

3.2.2 **Non-Latin alphabets.** When the language of the political power in control does not use the Latin alphabet, then the generally accepted Latin alphabet spelling at the time the event occurred is the standard. *Examples:* Jerusalem, Israel, not Yerushalayim, Israel. Warszawa, Congress Poland, not Varshava, Congress Poland.

3.2.3 **USSR.** During the period of the existence of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Russian name for towns of the republics—transliterated into the Latin alphabet—will be used.

3.3 **Events as Place Names.** When the exact location of an event is not known, but the place is associated with an event, then the event name can be used as the place followed by the time period of the event placed in parentheses. *Examples:* Holocaust (1939–1945), World War I in France (1914–18). If the time period of the event is known to be more exact, then it should be used. For example, if a soldier went to France during World War I in 1917 and died in unknown circumstances, then it would be more correct to list his place of death as “World War I in France (1917–1918).”

3.4 **Change in Place Name.** If a place name changes subsequent to the creation of the information in the database, the database will be updated according to the rule in 3.0.

Ashkenazi and Sephardi Research in France, especially Paris

- French Vital Records
- French Naturalizations
- Jewish Consistory Archives
- Quai d’Orsay (Foreign Office) Archives
- Alliance Israélite Universelle Library
and other sources

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