

# My Favorite Artifact: Census of Jewish Families



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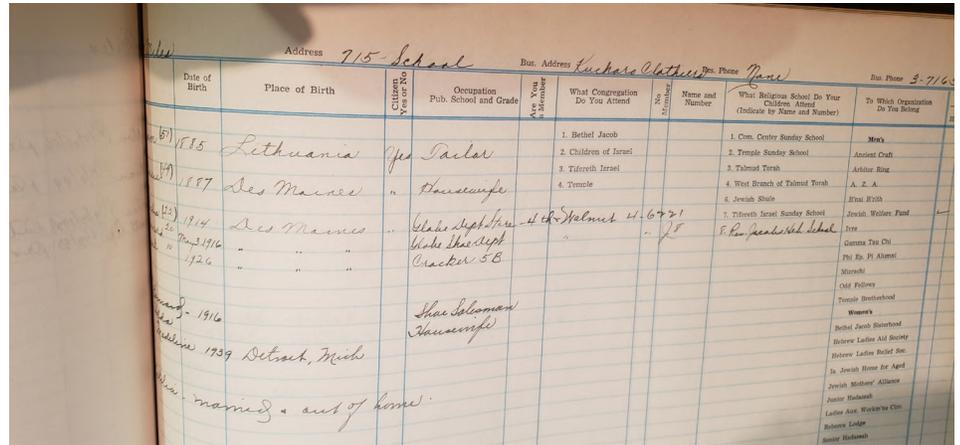
Most people who know me, will be surprised by what I have to say about my experience with the Iowa Jewish Historical Society. I absolutely love this museum. Not why you might think—great artifacts and history. I love being behind the scenes looking at the shelving and conservation boxes. The sense of order and cataloging fill my heart with joy, especially when done with the combination of care and best practices like at IJHS.

I have a history of conservation work, collaborating with the Smithsonian and Wayne State archives to preserve the private office of Cesar E. Chavez, the United Farm Workers founder and civil rights leader. I have preserved a few private art collections. When preservation is done well, I truly appreciate and respect the work.

I also have a great passion for the actual displays. I love the plexiglass and wood construction that houses artifacts. Stay with me, I am getting to my favorite artifact (which was more of my favorite experience).

When my cousin David Feinberg, the family historian, was visiting from New York, we went with my Aunt Janice Rohwer, to visit the IJHS Museum. This is when the magic begins.

There is a large display case holding a census of Jewish families in Des Moines. Sandi Yoder, the Director, gave us the privilege to see the artifact! Sarah Carlson, the IJHS

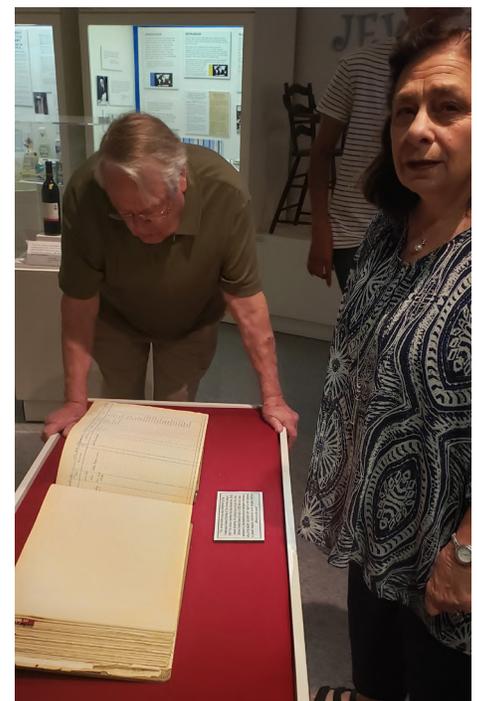


The Census open to the Feinberg listings.

Curator and Manager of Collections, came out with some large handles that she attached to the sides of the plexiglass case. I was so in shock that 1) they were opening the case and 2) that I was going to have access to this beautiful historic treasure. Like a child, I waited in awe until I heard the case open with a hiss of air. With gloved hands, they found the page with the Feinberg listing, identifying family members, employment, and an accounting of their very existence. To this day, words are hard to express what sharing this with my family meant to me. To feel the connection not just to them, but to feel the connection to the larger community, and history, was overwhelming.

Maybe it was the excitement from my family visiting, the thrill of being in the comfort of the museum setting that made the artifact and experience so special. However, I truly believe, as a mixed-race/religious woman, not usually recognized as Jewish, the connection with the census rooted me in an immense way to my families' shared story and history in Iowa. When I visit the museum, and I walk by that case, I can sense my ancestors in my heart. I am grateful that my sons will have a place to share with their children our ancestors' history in Des Moines because the Iowa Jewish Historical Society is preserving the Feinberg/Miles legacy.

*As Executive Director of Al Éxito, Dawn mentors and empowers hundreds of middle and high school-aged Latinos throughout Iowa. In addition to her critical work with Latinx students, Dawn is the former Arts Education/Community Programs Coordinator with the Iowa Arts Council. Dawn joined the IJHS Board in 2017, bringing with her deep roots in Des Moines on both the Jewish and Mexican sides of her family and extensive connections across Iowa.*



Dawn's family visiting IJHS and seeing the Census.