

Matriarchal Lines: Textile Memory During Assimilation

To Whom It May Concern:

I am conducting interviews of first- and second-generation Ashkenazi Jews of Chicago in order to learn about which kinds of textile crafts Ashkenazis were making when they immigrated and how the products of craft labor changed over time. My name is Elena Solomon and I am a native Chicagoan and a Masters Candidate at Western University in London, Ontario. My thesis is titled, “*Matriarchal Lines: Textile Memory During Assimilation.*” The research seeks to understand how processes of immigration and assimilation affected what people were making. The research also seeks to understand what people have kept in their homes as handmade heirlooms. As part of the research, I am conducting hour-long interviews in order to hear further context around textile work among first- and second-generation Ashkenazi immigrants to Chicago.

I am reaching out because I would like the opportunity to speak with descendants of textile makers and/or textile makers themselves, and I’m wondering if the synagogue would be open to notifying members of the project. Eligibility extends to those who can check off all of the following boxes:

- You are a first- or second-generation Chicagoan on one or more sides of the family.
- You have one or more Ashkenazi ancestors who did textile work, either in a professional or non-professional capacity.
- Your ancestor(s) immigrated to Chicago between 1882 – 1924.
- You have any knowledge of what they made. This may include being taught a skill by your ancestor, their professional work, possession of anything they’ve made, family stories or memories about someone’s creation, or any other type of knowledge.

“Textiles” can include sewing, clothing design, embroidery, *shpanyer arbet*, crochet or knitting, lace making, or any number of thread-based craftsmanship. Such insight would deeply enrich my approach to this topic.

Given the context of the pandemic, all interviews will be conducted online. If desired, participants and their families will be allowed to keep a copy of the interview as a record of family history. If congregation members know someone who might like to participate, please feel free to forward this email.

Those who are interested in participating may contact me directly. I will send a “Letter of Information & Consent” that outlines this project in more detail. Requesting the “Letter of Information & Consent” does not obligate anyone into a commitment to participating in this project. If someone is unsure as to whether they qualify, please have them reach out and I will gladly discuss things further.

I can be reached at esolomog@uwo.ca or at 847.902.6952. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Elena Solomon
Masters Candidate
Western University
(Formerly the University
Of Western Ontario)

Dr. Kirsty Robertson
Principle Investigator
Kirsty.Robertson@uwo.ca

SUGGESTED SAMPLE TEXT FOR WEEKLY SYNAGOGUE EMAIL

Research Study on Textiles and Jewish Assimilation in Chicago

Masters Candidate conducting one-hour interviews of first- and second-generation Ashkenazi Jews of Chicago in order to learn about what they were making when they immigrated and how craft labor changed over time.

Eligibility extends to those who can check off all of the following boxes:

- You are a first- or second-generation Chicagoan on one or more sides of the family.
- You have one or more Ashkenazi ancestors who did textile work, either in a professional or non-professional capacity.
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Definition of textiles is flexible. Interested parties please contact Elena Solomon at esolom09@uwo.ca.