BEFORE US

Studies of Early
Jewish Families in
St. Lawrence County
1855-1920

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Louis Greenblatt
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Dedication

In memory of Rose Leah Greenblatt

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We wish to thank all the families and friends of those people whose lives we have chronicled, who so openly gave of themselves for the sake of this volume. We wish to thank Mr. Louis Krupkin of Watertown, New York, who knew these people and provided us with a great deal of background information.

We would like to thank Dawn Dobbie, who thought of the title, *Before Us;* Angela Thaler, whose editing skills helped tie all this together; Herman Thaler, who shared his knowledge of Shtetl life and of Yiddish; Dr. Max Thaler, who gave moral support and rum balls; and Andrew Dobbie, without whose patience in allowing his mother to type, type, and type, rather than to feed him, play with him, and put him to bed, much of *Before Us* would not have been written.

We thank Mr. William Krebbs, who allowed us the use of his copy machine. We thank also the Congregation Beth-El for publishing this volume and those many Potsdam friends who helped out with child care and who kept coming by and saying, "Of course you can do it."

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION i

OGDENSBURG

The Ogdensburg Congregation 3
Nathan and Mathilda Frank 6
The Younger Franks 16
Aaron and Fannie Abel Wolff 28
The Dobisky Family 29
The Dinberg Family 37
The Fisher Families 40
The Sperlings 47
Eli and Fanny Rosenbaum 57
The Rothenberg Family 69
The Kopita Family 76
Conclusion 80

GOUVERNEUR

Gouverneur's Jewish Community 83
The Eckmanns from Bavaria 87
The Family Katzman 93
The Ruderman Family 99
The Glazer(off) and Glazier Families 108
The Kaplans of Gouverneur 117
The Saidel Family 127
The Levinson Family 135
Conclusion 139

MASSENA and NORFOLK

The Jewish Community of Massena 143
Levine Family 147
Jacobs and Rossoff Families 154
Slavin Family 159
Shulkin Family 163
Clopman Family 169
Landsman Family 175
Rosenbaum Family 180
Friedman and Stone Families 183
Kauffman Family 186
Abe Cohen Family 191
Halpern Family 194
Rubin Family 196
Brennglass Family 197
Mallinson Family 200
Other Families 202
The Norfolk Kauffmans 203

POTSDAM

The Potsdam Community 209
The Sussman Family 211
The Sverdlow Family 218
Conclusion 221

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Joan Dobbie 222
Louis Greenblatt 223
Blanche Levine 224

INTRODUCTION

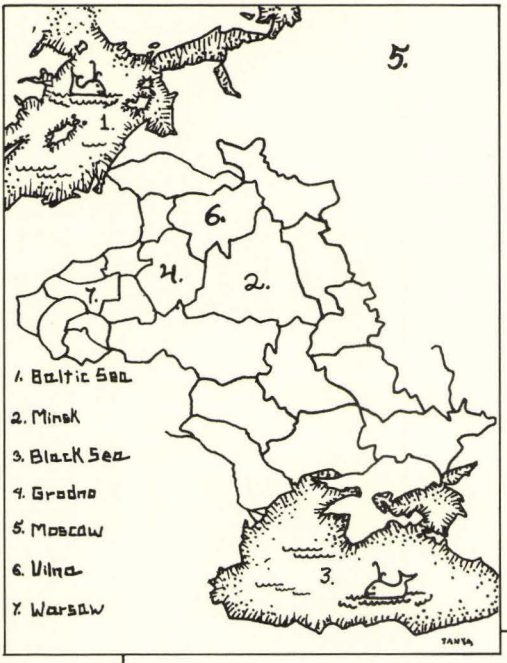
Who were the Jews who came to the North Country before us? Why did they stay? What did they become? We are attempting, in this publication, to record the history of North Country Judaism, particularly in four communities of St. Lawrence County, from its beginning, around 1855, through World War I. We are hoping to pass on a record of the lives of most of the Jewish families in this area who came within this time period. In studying the records, the one criterium we used in choosing families to include was: Did they take root? Did they remain in the community at least long enough to raise one generation of children?

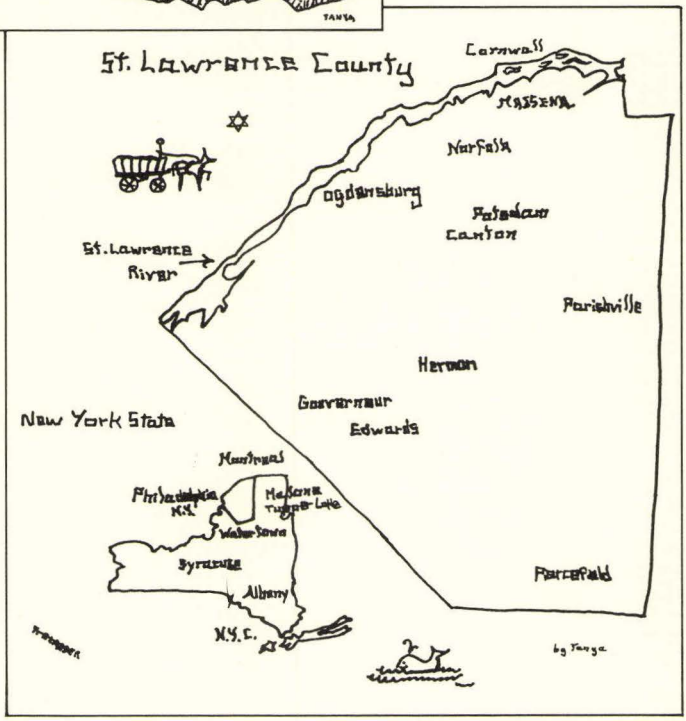
Background

Although a few of our Jewish families came between 1855 and 1900 from German-speaking states, most of those we have chronicled came from that area in Russia known as the Russian Pale. Formerly a part of Poland, it was in this time period a part of Russia. Under the Russian Czars, Alexander II, Alexander III, and Nicholas II, life became increasingly intolerable for the Jews. A conscription policy that took Jewish boys from their families as young as 12 or 13 had long been in effect. The "May Laws" enacted under Nicholas II prohibited Jews moving from one village to another. With the start of the Russo-Japanese War, Jews were being conscripted for unlimited service, whether they had previously served or not, and sent to the front with little training as "cannon-fodder." Through various underground methods a mass exodus of Jews took place from the Pale.

During the Passover Service we say, "Do not speak of 'Them' who came out of the land of Egypt, but of 'Us.' " And so, in another time of transition, not they, but we, left a land of oppression. We faced dangers and hardships as we followed our dream to America, the land of opportunity. Most of us started out as fresh immigrants in America's urban centers: New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Chicago. A few of us left the cities to make our way up to New York State's St. Lawrence County. Although some of us tried factory work, a scattering tried farming, most of us began our North Country lives as peddlers and wives of peddlers. We made our homes and raised our families; we formed religious congregations. Often we became prosperous merchants, known, respected, and loved by our communities. These are some of our stories.

The Russian Pale





OGDENSBURG

by Joan Dobbie & Louis Greenblatt

Nathan & Mathilda Frank
The Younger Franks
Aaron & Fannie Abel Wolff
The Dobisky Family
The Dinberg Family
The Fisher Families
The Sperlings
Eli & Fanny Rosenbaum
The Rothenberg Family
The Kopita Family

THE OGDENSBURG CONGREGATION



Interior of Ogdensburg Synagogue Anshe Zophen.

In the late 1850's there were already enough members of the "Hebrew"[1] faith residing in the Ogdensburg area to form the beginnings of a congregation. Services, in these early years, were held in people's homes. By 1873 the Jewish community had expanded to the point that it warranted the formation of a formal congregation, and "Anshe Zophen" (People of the North) was formally incorporated on April 6, 1873.[2] Among the founders were Nathan Frank (the first President), M. Berwin, Charles Paris, Aaron Wolff, William Wolff, A.M. Laevison, Lewis Eckmann, A. Epstein, P. Goldstone, E.B. Friedberger, M. Tumposky, C.J. Prager, and Henry Lyons. Information on many of these earliest of Ogdensburg Jews is scarce since their descendants, if indeed they had any, have disappeared from the area.

The newly incorporated congregation purchased grounds for a Jewish Cemetery on Heuvelton Road (this would be expanded with the purchase of adjoining land in 1942), and space was

rented on the third floor of a building on 207 Ford Street, then owned by Charles Paris, one of the original members. For nearly half a century, services were held here, and Cheder classes were taught.

With the great influx of Russian Jews in the early twentieth century, the space on Ford Street became too small and inconvenient. For nearly 50 years the Jewish congregation had been walking up two flights of stairs to gather. Now, for $100.00 a year they rented a vacant Universalist Church on Green Street. Young Hyman B. Fisher, in 1923, was the first boy to be bar mitzvahed in the new Synagogue.

In 1925 Julius Frank and Reuben Dobisky (president and vice-president of Anshe Zophen) met with members of the Universalist Assembly, then headquartered in Canton, and at a purchase price of $5,000.00 (which would equal about 50 or 60 thousand dollars today) arranged for the Jewish congregation to buy the church. They paid $500.00 down, and then organized an intense drive among the members to raise money to get the building into good condition. The mortgage for the unpaid balance was placed with what is now the North Country Savings Bank, then known as the St. Lawrence Savings Bank.

Although there were a lot of problems—maintenance, insurance, little money for renovations—the congregation was pleased with its new quarters. There was a special feeling of closeness among the members now, as everyone pitched in to make it work. They felt, as Hyman B. Fisher describes it, that "at last they had something of their own."

Although a hired man was payed $6.00 a week to maintain the coal burning furnace, "many was the time" when the boys attending Cheder classes took turns chopping up logs for kindling when the furnace went out. The sisterhood, at that time called the Ladies Aid Society, played a vital role in the life of the new Temple. The women scrubbed floors, cooked, and decorated. Although the synagogue basement was hardly equipped for "parties" they managed to make it suitable for all sorts of social functions. And it was very much due to their diligence that the congregation was able to draw membership from Gouverneur, Potsdam, and Canton. In 1942, when Morris Ruderman of Gouverneur died, he bequeathed $500.00 to the Ogdensburg congregation. That $500.00 was used to pay the final mortgage on the building, and at last it belonged to "Anshe Zophen" free and clear.

For most of the early years, rabbis (many of whom were

actually schochets) came and went without actually settling in. From 1912 to 1950 seven different rabbis conducted services and taught the young ones, with limited success. Then, at last, in 1952 Rabbi David Kozak joined Anshe Zophen, and he still today (1981) officiates over the congregation. In the words of Hyman B. Fisher:[3]

"Rabbi David Kozak's rabbinate has been the longest and most fruitful in the history of the Congregation. He has provided great spiritual inspiration to every family and especially to the children of the members. He has been the catalyst that united the Congregation in its efforts to improve and modernize the Synagogue."

Rabbi Kozak is very much loved in Ogdensburg.

Anshe Zophen's character has changed with the times. Today Canadian members from Cornwall and vicinity have replaced the Potsdam group which has formed its own congregation, Beth-El.

The lives of some of those families that made up Anshe Zophen in the "old days," when it was young and growing, are recorded in the following pages, so that those Jews who made their homes in Ogdensburg, before us, will be remembered.

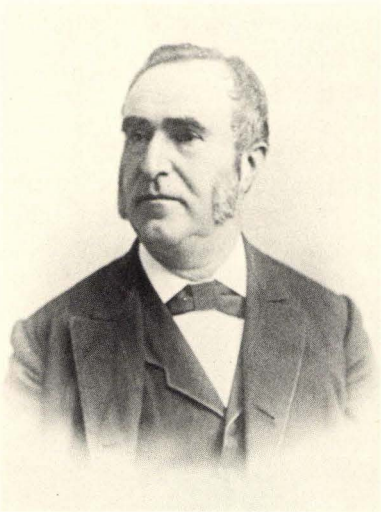
FOOTNOTES

[1]In their applications for citizenship, most of the early settlers listed themselves as belonging to the "Hebrew" faith.

[2]Mr. Hyman B. Fisher, from whom most of this information was derived, lists 1875 as the date of formal incorporation; according to documents found by Mr. Greenblatt in the Canton City records, however, the date seems to be 1873.

[3]From Hyman B. Fisher's "History of Congregation", published at the event of "Anshe Zophen's" 100th Anniversary Celebration in 1975.

Nathan and Mathilda Frank



Nathan Frank
August 4, 1829-May 28, 1919



Mathilda Friedburger Frank
April 20, 1840-March 2, 1913

The designation "first" or "most prominent" Jewish family in St. Lawrence County could be applied to Nathan and Mathilda Frank and their family. From the time Jewish people were first recorded in the county in the census of 1850 to the present year, 1981, the uniqueness of this family has been unparalleled. To illustrate: When a Jewish congregation in Ogdensburg was formally incorporated in 1875, Nathan served as its first and continuous president for the remainder of his life, 44 years, until 1919. He was succeeded by his son, Julius,[1] who served for the next 29 years, until 1948. Together they served a total of 73 years! Nathan and Mathilda's son, Julius, as well as serving 29

years as president of Anshe Zophen, served two terms as mayor of the city of Ogdensburg (1914-1918)—the only Jewish mayor in St. Lawrence County to this day.[2] Their daughters-in-law, the sisters, Marion and Sarah Sanger Frank, were active suffragettes, of national reputation, instrumental in convincing New York State legislators to ratify the women's suffrage amendment in November of 1915.

During his years in Ogdensburg, Nathan Frank built from a lowly peddling business a large retail establishment, the main store being a five story department store, one of the largest in the city of Ogdensburg; a store which, in various forms, remained in business for over 100 years, an offshoot of which remains in business today;[3] a store which was so popular that in its heydays people traveled from all the surrounding area, Canton, Potsdam, Massena, even Cornwall, to shop in it.

In addition to this very successful retail career, and aside from a multitude of community activities, Mr. Frank was involved in a private bank established by him and chartered by New York State to make mortgage loans; an excursion steamboat which carried passengers to and from Ogdensburg, Waddington, Massena, and several Canadian communities from 1887-1890; owning and personally managing a number of farms in the Ogdensburg area—12 at one time, five at the time of his death. A lifelong Democrat, he served on the "Poor Board" of the Town of Oswegatchie from 1894, the year of his official retirement from business, until he died.

In the "Personal Sketches" section of the *History of St. Lawrence County,*[4] his character was painted in glowing terms:

"All this (his material success) is the fruit of a successful business life, and is a fine exemplification of the ultimate success of honorable business methods when coupled with business and executive ability. Mr.Frank is a man of the highest integrity and his business reputation is gilt-edged."

For 53 years Mathilda Frank shared in the life of her husband. She contributed to their business, she managed their home, she bore and raised their children. And while he received the public acclaim, as a 19th century man would, in terms of the social life of the Franks, the children, and the business, her success played a large part in his success. They were a winning team.

Their Life

Nathan Frank was born in Sickenhofen, Germany, on August 4, 1829.[5] (This was prior to consolidation of the Independent

German states into a United Germany.) Accompanied by two brothers, Isaac and Manassa, he emigrated to the United States in 1848, probably to escape the military draft. His family may have been in the merchantile business in Germany, and it is possible that they had some connections with a wholesale dry goods firm, Claflin Bros. in New York City, for when the Frank brothers arrived in New York, they were met at the dock by a representative of that firm. And it was a good thing indeed for young Nathan that there was someone there, as he had arrived in the New World more "naked" than he had expected to—all his money had been stolen on the boat. "He must have been glad of an opportunity to work." According to his granddaughter, Eleanor Frank Schwartz,[6] "The Claflin Bros. representative presented him with a pack and sent him up North." As Eleanor's husband, Edgar, put it, "They told him that the streets up North were paved with gold."

Actually, family legends and other sources of information clash on exactly what Nathan and his brothers did in New York City, how long they stayed there, and who came first to Ogdensburg, he or his brothers[7] but all agree that by the 1850's all three could be found in Ogdensburg, New York, then a thriving port city on the St. Lawrence River, peddling merchandise, according to the family, supplied by the Claflin Bros. Firm. They had begun peddling on foot, as did most immigrant peddlers; later they went with horse and wagon.

Nathan Frank was not a tall man, but imposing nonetheless. He had an aristocratic face, with aqualine nose and arching eyebrows. He was intelligent and winning, strong-willed, scrupulously honest and forthright, and evidently an excellent salesman. Said Eleanor Schwartz, "I guess he was (quite a salesman). I think people liked him, welcomed him. I think he was a breath of something else . . ."

It seems that all three did quite well as peddlers, managing to accumulate some capital. In 1858, in association with Isaac and Manassa, Nathan opened his first retail store in the Judson block in Ogdensburg. Although his two brothers shared in the business, the store was named "Nathan Frank's".

Again the chronological order of events gets a bit hazy. Nathan apparently did not stay only in Ogdensburg. According to the *Ogdensburg Journal* (March 2, 1894) he opened a branch store in Potsdam, New York around 1860. He spent time also in New York City. While Isaac and Manassa can be found in an 1860 Ogdensburg census report, Nathan cannot. And, on Octo-



Original Frank Store, ca. 1858.

ber 4, 1860, not in Ogdensburg, but in New York City, Nathan Frank married Mathilda Friedberger.

He was 31, she was 20, eleven years his junior. How they met, or where, is another mystery. Mathilda was herself a German Jewish immigrant (born April 20, 1840 in Laupheim, Germany). It could be that either they or their families had already known each other in the old country. Or they could have met in New York. In any case, he brought his bride back with him to live in Ogdensburg.

Obviously used to the ways of the upper classes, Mathilda had "culture," intelligence and education as well as a good strong sense of the practical. She spoke several languages fluently and her "grasp of business matters made her a valuable helpmate"[8] to her husband in the managing of *Nathan Frank's.* Those who remember her describe a practical, orderly person, who ran a household that would come to include an assortment of relatives, clerks and boarders, six children, and a couple of servants, with smooth efficiency.

It was not long after their marriage that the Frank household began to expand. Mathilda's mother, Charlotte Blumen-

thal Friedberger, and her brother, Elias B. Friedberger, came over from Laupheim.[9] Several of the store's clerks, a couple of whom (Henry and Herman Frank) were probably related to Nathan, lived with them. And, by 1865, Mathilda had born her first two children, the girls, Hattie and Ida.

With all this growing family one might expect that Nathan would stay peacefully put in Ogdensburg, attending the shop. But, again, he didn't. It seems there was some conflict between himself and his brothers. Nathan set out in search of "greener pastures." In 1864, selling his interest in "Nathan Frank's" to his brothers and promising not to open another business in the Ogdensburg area for a year, he left for Oswego to check into the possibility of opening a store there.[10] But the Oswego venture was a dead end. According to a report in the *Ogdensburg Daily Journal* (Oct. 1907), "He also went to Chicago and other western cities to look over the field with a view of entering the wholesale business, but Ogdensburg offered the strongest attraction and he returned . . ."

So it happened that when the year was out, in 1865, Nathan was again in Ogdensburg. He bought out his two brothers, who moved back to New York City.[11] He rented space on Ford Street from the druggist, Joseph Thompson. As sole owner of *Nathan Frank's* he set to work.

The business flourished. Mathilda and Nathan prospered. They eventually became the parents of six "living"[12] and apparently well-disciplined children of whom their parents could be proud. All born in Ogdensburg, their futures would be diverse.

Two daughters had arrived first:

Hattie (1863)—who would have an artistic bent; who would remain home helping run the household for many years before finally marrying Abraham Stahl, a State senator from Berlin, New Hampshire.

Ida (1865)—who was to graduate from Vassar College, then marry Louis Guttman of New York City, where she would become an active member of New York's Temple Emanuel.

Four boys followed:

Julius (1868)—who would succeed his father as prosperous Ogdensburg businessman and renowned citizen; who would marry and bring to Ogdensburg Marion Sanger Frank of New York City, a lady whose ability as an orator would help bring American women the right of suffrage.

Leo (1872)—who would remain throughout his life in the shadow of his brother Julius; who would live life, perhaps, on a more emotional and less pragmatic level; who was to marry Sarah Sanger, the younger sister of Marion Sanger Frank, Julius' wife.

James—who was to graduate from Yale University, move to New York City and practice law there; who would meet in New York at the Temple Emanuel a lovely young society girl, Marion Sanger, only to lose her attentions to his oldest brother, Julius; who would finally marry an Adele Morganthau and remain in New York.

and *Lawrence* who also went to Yale, eventually becoming associated with the Standard Varnish Works in New York City; who would marry twice, first a May Cohen and then an Ethel Hendricks, both of New York City.

Of the six Frank children, only Julius and Leo would remain all their lives in Ogdensburg. These two would join their father in the retail business and when he retired, take over the operation of the store.

Nathan and Mathilda, both products of the Germanic philosophy of orderliness, pride, exercise of discipline, organized planning, etc., apparently raised their family within the realm of such concepts. According to his granddaughter, Nathan had his young sons working in his business at minimum pay and maximum hours.

However, this is not to say that theirs was a dry and dreary life. The Frank offspring, as adults, were known for their brightness and optimism. How could this have sprung from any but a household where good feelings reigned? They knew how to work, but they also knew how to play. They were an artistic family. Hattie painted; Nathan enjoyed the piano (and a ride behind a fast horse);[13] Mathilda sang. There were frequent celebrations, parties, dinners. Mathilda enjoyed entertaining, took pleasure in arranging the affairs, and in her younger years she herself would sing for the guests in classic operatic style.

Perhaps because they were German Jews (as opposed to the later Polish or Russian Jewish immigrants) the Franks were not zealously attached to the rituals of Judaism. While they didn't eat ham or approve altogether of baking cake on Passover (despite the fact that their little granddaughter's birthday fell on Passover) they certainly weren't kosher, nor did they

isolate themselves socially from the surrounding Christian community, having gentile friends as well as Jewish friends.

Still, they were in their own way, devoted and definitely influential Jews. Nathan Frank was instrumental in creating an incorporated Jewish congregation, Anshe Zophen, in 1875 for the purpose of "forming a more perfect union and the furtherance of the Mosaic religion."[14] He himself served as president of that congregation until his death in 1919 when he was succeeded by Julius. Also, according to family sources, it was Nathan who purchased the land for the Jewish cemetery in Ogdensburg, and keeping a plot for his family, turned the rest over to the congregation.

The business continued to prosper and grow; the family thrived. Nathan Frank invested capital locally in a banking firm, an excursion boat, farm properties. He was active in civic organizations. For 40 years he was treasurer of the Arch Masons, for many years a member of the "Ogdensburg Lodge" and of the "Ogdensburg Club." And so on. The name "Frank" was often seen in the society pages of the local papers.



Interior of Nathan Frank's new store on Ford Street, early 1900s.

As his children grew to adulthood he sent them to the best universities. They did well. Ida married; James and Lawrence found careers in New York City; Julius and Leo entered the family business. For years, even after all the younger ones had married, Hattie remained home with her parents, but at last she too married and moved to New Hampshire.

In 1910 the Franks celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary amidst much fanfare in Ogdensburg. But Mathilda was not well. As early as her mid 60's she had begun suffering from arteriosclerosis with the senility that sickness sometimes

entails. To her little granddaughter, Eleanor, she appeared, even then, a very old lady. Yet she was only 73 when, only three years after the golden anniversary, she "fell asleep and passed away peacefully" . . . on March 1, 1913, surrounded by all the members of her family except for one son, James of New York.[15]

Nathan, who was already 84, lived on for six more years. And not only did he live, but his mind remained sharp and clear, his humor good. He still advised his sons in the running of "Nathan Frank's Sons", still went every day to the store to inspect its operation. Until his death he managed his own properties, served on the "Poor Board" of Oswegatchie, and served as president of Anshe Zophen. A newspaper article printed on his 87th birthday spoke of "that kindly cheerfulness that seems to be the secret of his Octogenarian youthfulness."

And he may have been old, but he was no less strong-willed and independent. After Mathilda's death, Nathan spent many an evening playing Whist. "He loved to play cards. In those days the streets weren't well lit . . . so he'd carry his little lantern and light his way to the clubhouse . . . and every night he'd go out and play cards," reminisced Edgar Schwartz. When there was something Nathan Frank wanted to do, he did



Front Row, L to R: Julius, holding son Richard, daughter Eleanor, Harold (Leo's son), James. 2nd Row: Nathan, Mathilda, holding James Jr., Leo. Back Center: Lawrence.

it, and neither the elements nor his age would stop him. He lived to see his son mayor of Ogdensburg, his family important in the women's suffrage movement; he lived to see the world go mad with the outbreak of World War I. He lived to see the war end. On his 89th birthday the *Ogdensburg Journal* hailed him as "Ogdensburg's Grand Old Man." On May 28, 1919, at the age of 90, Nathan Frank died.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The personality and activities of the descendants of a few Jewish immigrants precipitated a change in the title of this effort from *Studies of Jewish Immigrants in St. Lawrence County* to *Studies of Early Jewish Families in St. Lawrence County, 1855-1920.*

[2]There is only one other Jewish person who served as mayor of his community in northern New York (in an area adjacent to St. Lawrence County) but no other in St. Lawrence County. Fred Futterman was mayor of Tupper Lake, N.Y. for two terms in the middle 1950's. If Cornwall, Ontario, Canada, across the St. Lawrence River from St. Lawrence County, is considered, the very popular Aaron Horowitz was a mayor of that community for a multitude of terms until his retirement from politics in 1956.

[3]Although the main store was always in Ogdensburg, there were at various times branches in Canton and possibly Potsdam. In 1961 when Edgar Schwartz, Nathan's grandson-in-law, retired, and, after over 100 years of business closed the Ogdensburg *Franks*. Edgar's son, Frank Schwartz, who had been running the decorator's department, opened his own decorator's shop *(Frank's Decorator Corner)* on Caroline Street. This *Frank's*, as of 1981, is still in business and doing well.

[4]The 1894 edition of the *History of St. Lawrence County* is a so-called "mug book," nicknamed that by some collectors and professional historians. Note it was "edited by" Gates Curtis, not "written by". Curtis merely took existing historical data and embellished it with photos or "mugs" of prominent citizens and/or biographical sketches for which fees were charged, depending upon space used, etc. This, plus the built-in market of family and friends for the sale of the volume, was the profit source for the editor and the publishing company. These "historical books" have since become important sources of information to historians, both professional and amateurs. Original editions have acquired considerable value.

[5]Although there are some variations concerning years of birth (one biographical sketch reports it was 1824, another, indicates 1828), most agree that 1829 is the correct year.

[6]Background data was supplied by Nathan's granddaughter, Eleanor Frank Schwartz and her husband, Edgar Schwartz. The biographical sketches in some newspaper articles (i.e. *Ogdensburg Journal* 3/2/1894) and books such as *History of St. Lawrence County* (Gates Curtis, 1894) make no mention of the Claflin Bros.

[7]Great granddaughter, Sally Frank, reports that they remained in New York for some time peddling for the Claflin brothers, in fact that Nathan not only peddled for a time there, but made some money doing so and then lost it when a business partner either poorly invested or embezzled the lot. On the other hand, an article in the *Ogdensburg Journal* dated May 2, 1894 (the year of his business retirement) states, "When he arrived in New York a liking for music inclined him toward the purpose of learning the trade of piano maker . . ." Was he studying rather than peddling? According to Eleanor and Edgar Schwartz, Nathan Frank came directly to Ogdensburg, then sent for Isaac and Manassa. Sally Frank, however, writes, "Nathan . . . within a few years moved to Ogdensburg, New York. He had two brothers there, Isaac and Manassa, who were merchants." One article indicates that he went to Potsdam before arriving in Ogdensburg.

[8]Taken from Mathilda's obituary in the *Ogdensburg Advance*, March 1913.

[9]In a letter to Louis Greenblatt (12/19/1973) Eleanor Schwartz mentions that Mathilda's mother, Charlotte Blumenthal Friedberger, and her brother, Elias B. Friedberger, came to live with the Franks. Charlotte was born April 20, 1806 and died in 1878. Elias was born in Laupheim on December 24, 1841 and died in 1911 in Ogdensburg. An 1865 census taken by the Town of Oswegatchie lists as living in the Frank household: Nathan

Frank (merchant), Mathilda (wife) and two children, Hattie Frank (daughter), Henry Frank (boarder), Eli Friedberger (boarder), George Wright (clerk), Herman Frank (boarder), Sigmund Klingenstein (boarder), and Nancy McLean (servant). Baby Ida is not listed individually.

[10]An article in the *Ogdensburg Journal* dated May 2, 1894 reports that he went to Potsdam around 1860 and does not mention the Oswego venture. Some ledgers kept in the home of Edgar and Eleanor Schwartz, dated 1864, indicate that Nathan was in Oswego at that time.

[11]The *Ogdensburg Journal*, May 26, 1869, reported that Manassa Frank returned to Ogdensburg about 1869 and rented a store at the corner of Ford and State Streets. This business was short-lived, as Manassa passed away in 1871. Isaac died in his 80th year in New York City.

[12]A term used by the granddaughter, Eleanor Frank Schwartz in her notes of 1974 which would indicate others may have been born and died, possibly at birth or in early childhood.

[13]From *Ogdensburg Journal*, May 2, 1894. "He retained his taste for music and, scarcely less than a drive behind a fast horse, he likes to sit down at a piano and play such classics as "America" or "St. Martin's Hymn."

[14]A very interesting history of the Congregation can be read in *The History of the City of Ogdensburg*, written by the Right Reverend P.S. Garand, published by the Mason Printing Corp. of Syracuse and New York City, 1927, pp. 298-9. In addition, one can also refer to the *History of St. Lawrence County*, edited by Gates Curtis (see note 4), published by Mason & Co., Syracuse, N.Y., 1894, pp. 388-9 under the subheading of "Israelite Organization." The most recent resume of the congregation's history was compiled by Hyman B. Fisher, Chrmn., 100th anniversary celebration of Congregation Anshe Zophen (1975). It is a major section of the program prepared for that event. The article was re-published in the *St. Lawrence County Historical Association Quarterly*, Vol. XXI, No. 2, April 1976, pp. 16-17.

[15]From *Ogdensburg Advance*, March 1, 1913.

The Younger Franks

Julius Frank
July 20, 1868-February 12, 1956

Leo Frank
August 18, 1872-October 1946

Marion Sanger Frank
April 20, 1876-May 21, 1960

Sarah Sanger Frank
November 19, 1878-1956

Julius Frank

Nathan Frank's dry goods store at its new location on Ford Street was proving itself a success in the late 1860's. The shelves were well stocked with cloth materials, notions, cooking utensils, appliances, and more—all under one roof. Mr. Nathan Frank, the store's owner, had come far from his days as a greenhorn immigrant peddler.



Nathan Frank's on Ford Street.

He and his wife, Mathilda, had a large frame home on 64 Green Street where they lived comfortably with their two little daughters, Hattie and Ida, a home so large that they were able to share it with several boarders, including relatives that they had been able to bring over from Germany and clerks who worked in the store. There were even servants.[1] On July 20, 1868, Julius, their first son, was born with the proverbial silver spoon in his mouth. There would be no door to door peddling for this one.

Not that he was spoiled. Three more little boys, Leo (1872), James (about 1874), and Lawrence (about 1876) soon joined the family, and all six children were brought up strictly, taught to respect hard work and self discipline. Before they were very old the boys were working after school and on vacations in *Nathan Frank's* alongside their father. The steadily growing[2] business must have been as much a part of their lives as their home.

At 18, after graduating from the Ogdensburg Free Academy (OFA) in 1886, Julius left Ogdensburg to attend the Eastman Business College in Poughkeepsie, N.Y. Since a business education in those days lasted only one or two years at most, what else Julius did between 1886 and 1889 besides attending school is anybody's guess. Perhaps he went off in search of adventure; perhaps he tried to go into business on his own. After three years, in 1889, he reappeared in Ogdensburg. At this point George Wright, a former clerk, had a certain amount of interest in what was now called *Nathan Frank & Co.* Julius joined the business; when Mr. Wright retired in 1890, Julius replaced him as his father's partner. The store was now *Nathan Frank & Son*, a father and son enterprise. Julius' younger brother, Leo, entered the business as well, and in 1894, when Nathan Frank officially retired from business, Julius and Leo took over.[3] For Julius, it had all come together smoothly. The store was there; he was capable. And while he was an excellent merchant, he could perhaps also have been an excellent politician, commented Mr. Greenblatt, who had known him. "In my opinion, Julius' heart and real interest were not in the retail business. I do not know why he did not make politics his career, but, from my later acquaintance with him, he had that kind of personality and natural inclination."

With his strong outgoing personality the young businessman easily took his place in the community. Following in his father's footsteps he became a member of the Ogdensburg Lodge of

Masons (1892). Two years later he joined the local National Guard as a charter member and was soon appointed Quarter Master Sergeant.[4] In 1895, as a member of the Ogdensburg Board of Trade, Julius Frank first entered public service. In this realm, especially, he was to excel.

Despite a general recession in the late 1800's, business at *Frank's* was doing so well that in 1899 the brothers again enlarged the store by purchasing the neighboring dry goods business from S.W. Wilson and expanding into it. The store was literally growing. So was the family of Julius Frank. For in 1897, after having remained a bachelor throughout his twenties, he had brought home to Ogdensburg an attractive young wife from New York City, and by 1899 he was already the father of one child, and soon to be the father of another.

Marion Sanger Frank

Julius' tiny wife (she was barely 4'11") had a lovely face. If she was a bit vain, she was also charming. Her daughter Eleanor recalled, "People would tell me, 'Oh, we can remember when your mother came. She was so beautiful.' "[5] Marion brought with her into the marriage a bright impetuous nature, a keen intellect and a sense of quality that permeated everything she did. Eleanor continued, ". . . and we always said that the line, that the things at the store, changed an awful lot (with her coming). She insisted on better things, higher grade, higher quality things, more expensive things."

Her Roots[6]

Her mother had been a "southern belle". Always sickly, always pale, tall, beautiful, and asthmatic, Sarah Levy was "descended from a long line of Spanish Portuguese Jews who came to America shortly after Columbus' first voyage."[7] When she was 18, only a few years after the Civil War, she met, and fell in love with a prominent young New York lawyer, Adolph Sanger, a Jew of German extraction. Her family opposed their marriage, perhaps because of prejudice between Portuguese and German Jews, but ostensibly on the grounds of her ill health. Young Adolph insisted, saying he would marry Sarah if she had "one foot in the grave". And marry her he did. And if her foot wasn't firmly planted in the grave on the day of their wedding (Dec. 15, 1870), five pregnancies within the next eight years insured that it would be. A little girl, Nellie; a boy who died; then three more little girls, Clara, Marion, and Sarah,

followed in rapid succession. She herself died within a month after the birth of their fourth daughter, leaving behind the "four little orphans".

Marion was only two at the time of her mother's death. A tiny slip of a girl, she was bright and quick as well as cute, with a strong tempestuous energy which she threw wholeheartedly into everything she did. Raised by her father, paternal grandmother, and maiden aunts, in "the best of Jewish society," she was pampered, overprotected, adored, and thoroughly spoiled by father, sisters, grandmother, aunts, teachers and all the world that she knew. Said her father, ". . . Sarah is the youngest, but Marion is the baby."

Adolph Sanger, small in stature but "perfectly proportioned," deeply involved in civic life,[8] had a profound effect on the character of his daughter, Marion. She looked up to him, idolized him. From him she acquired (along with her petite physique) a taste for politics, a love of the arts, a respect for public speaking, and even the skills of social chit-chat. She was given a lady's education in a world of fine clothes, genteel entertainments, all amidst the thrill and hubbub of New York political activity.

When she was 17, just "coming out" socially, tragically, unexpectedly, Adolph Sanger contracted pneumonia, and died. She had loved him so dearly. It was during the financial crash of 1893; he had not left them much money. Sarah went to live with her married sister, Nellie, in Chicago. Marion and Clara stayed with the New York grandmother "in what was truly a house of mourning." The two girls attended school and bore their loneliness as best they could. Two years passed.

At 19 Marion had finished her education. She taught Sunday School in New York's Temple Emanuel (where her father had headed the Congregation, of which Ida Guttman nee Frank was an active member). And, after her very protected childhood followed by the years of mourning, she "began making up for lost time" in terms of her social life with a "host of devoted admirers" one of whom was the brother of Ida Guttman, James Frank, from Ogdensburg.

The Sangers were not so wealthy now as they had been when Adolph lived, but they were still society. Hers could have been a life of concert halls and great affairs, but love (is the capacity for romance inherited?) interfered.

Julius and Marion Frank: Their Life

Julius Frank, a North Country businessman in his late twen-

ties was in New York visiting his relatives. It happened quite simply. According to their daughter, Eleanor Frank Schwartz, "My father came to New York and met Mother, and James was out." Julius swept her off her feet, and after a grand wedding in New York's exclusive restaurant, Delmonico's (Nov. 25, 1897), brought her out of the city to set her down, both feet flat on the ground, in Ogdensburg, New York. Needless to say, Ogdensburg life was a bit less colorful than New York City life. Under the auspices of a more practical mother-in-law (who didn't hide the fact that she found her eldest son's bride somewhat extravagant and worldly), little Marion settled in as best she could as wife, later mother, and member of the family Frank.

In some ways life wasn't all that different. After all, the Franks were "society" in Ogdensburg. There were maids to help with the housekeeping; there were social events (the Franks were indeed a celebrating family). And her husband was, in many respects, what her father had been. As Adolph Sanger had been, Julius Frank was civically and politically involved; as Adolph Sanger had done, Julius Frank cherished Marion, respecting her keen intellect yet pampering her and catering to her vanities. Still, Ogdensburg was not New York. And life as an Ogdensburg matron was certainly not nearly as fulfilling as her imagination, background, and education had allowed her to dream of.

Within the next year a son was born. They named him Adolph Sanger, after his maternal grandfather, but they called him just "Sanger". He was not strong, requiring constant care. Hardly more than a year later, in April of 1900, Marion again gave birth, this time to a daughter, Eleanor. She was a devoted mother, but it must have been difficult for her, with two babies, one so sickly. Little Sanger died. He was buried in the cemetery that had been donated by her father-in-law to the congregation of Anshe Zophen.

Marion herself, always so dainty and pampered, was in ill health. Her heart had never been strong, and probably the two pregnancies so close on top of each other, the strain of a sickly baby, the death, weakened her further. She became withdrawn. She suffered from headaches, depression. In 1905, when Eleanor, who was a strong, healthy, normal child, was five, another weak little boy was born. As had baby Sanger, Richard Lionel demanded constant attention and care; they did not expect him to live. Although there were nurses to help care for the chil-

dren, the constant strain and worry must have been physically and emotionally draining.



Marion with Sanger and Eleanor at Cedar Island, summer 1900.

But Richard did not die. In fact, he is alive and well at the time of this writing, and at 77 is still working as a successful psychoanalyst in New York City. And if his health was a constant source of worry, his intelligence soon proved a great source of pride. He was exceptionally bright.

True to character, whether it was for herself, for the store, or for her children, Marion demanded only the best. From Eleanor, "My mother always wanted things. I mean, she wanted something better all the time. The children had to go to the best schools. My brother went to Exeter. He went to Yale. It had to be along lines like that. And, I guess Father sort of thought it was beyond us, but he did it anyway."

If Julius gave in to Marion's demands for quality, perhaps we should credit Marion's strength of will. Because Julius was not a giving-in sort of person. In later life, as president of Anshe Zophen, it was Julius Frank's say so, not 5000 years of custom, that decided when the Jewish cemetery would be open, or who would be buried in it. If Julius Frank said the cemetery should be open on Saturday, then the cemetery was open on Saturday; if Julius Frank said a Christian could be buried there, then buried there she was. He must have seen the reason behind Marion's arguments, for Julius was a reasonable man who would listen to reasonable arguments, who was able to make others listen to reason as well. "He was a peacemaker,"

explained Eleanor. "At meetings, if there was any problem, my father could straighten it out, smooth it out." And he used this ability not only in the store, which by 1907 had expanded to include three neighboring stores and was one of the largest department stores in the area,[9] but first and foremost in the service of the city of Ogdensburg. He was active in the Chamber of Commerce, president of the Ogdensburg Fair and Horse Show (1903-04), secretary of the Ogdensburg Fair (1911-12), president of the Ogdensburg Businessman's Association (1912). He was a Mason, an Odd Fellow, a Maccabee, a member of the Independent Order of Foresters, a Charter Member of the Knights of Phythias.[10] He was a member and officer of the New York State Council of Retail Merchants.[11] Speaking of her father's public life, Eleanor exclaimed, "Oh, he was the head of everything!"

As was his father, Julius was a leader, and a staunch Democrat. Now reaching beyond his father, he entered the political arena in Ogdensburg. One day, in the year of 1914, "some of the Democrats suddenly came to him and said that they had been talking and thought that he would be a good candidate. Would he run? It was quite a surprise to him.[12] That year and again two years later, Julius Frank was elected Mayor of Ogdensburg. He was a grand success as mayor. Newspaper articles hailed him as the best Ogdensburg mayor in 25 years and he was credited with correcting the city's financial problems.[13] And he used his influence as a popular mayor to further an unpopular cause that he, nonetheless believed in absolutely, that of the equality of women with men. Wherever possible, in those times when the question of women's suffrage was "blowing in the wind" Mayor Frank let his views be known. "He was very active (in suffrage). I don't think he was loved for it," said Eleanor.

In his own home, his little wife, Marion, was making her personal bid for an equal life. For motherhood alone, with all its challenges, was not enough outlet for Marion's intense energies. She had two children, and still she was not fulfilled. It was a doctor who suggested she "get involved in things" outside the home, but one might doubt if he himself realized to what extent his advice would be taken.

She was 38 years old, the wife of a well-known public figure. She was also an individual. Marion stepped out her front door and began organizing. No longer the withdrawn little homebody, she was a changed person. She became interested in

child psychology, began working for the Ogdensburg State Hospital and soon was on its board of directors. She organized a women's Democratic Club in the area. She remembered the speaking skills she had learned as a child and stepped forward at her husband's side on behalf of women's suffrage.

Marion traveled around the state speaking on behalf of suffrage; she wrote articles in the *Ogdensburg Journal;* she spoke weekly over New York City radio. She developed a reputation as "one of New York State's most delightful speakers." As Eleanor put it in practical terms, "Mother could raise money like nobody . . . and that's what she did in suffrage. She'd go out all over and make money."

Thus, husband and wife together moved beyond the small worlds of "home" and "home town". As mayor during the era of World War I, as head of the Chamber of Commerce, Julius came into contact with world famous political leaders. "I can remember Father coming in one day and he had Herbert Hoover with him." Eleanor spoke of Hoover as the first "famous" visitor. Soon there were others. One thing led to the next. An acquaintance with Rabbi Stephen Wise, a leader of American Jewry, led the Franks to conduct fund raising on behalf of Polish and Russian Jews displaced during World War I. And so it went.

Through the suffrage movement Marion met and became very close with Eleanor Roosevelt, and Franklin, who was then governor of New York, and Julius became close friends. "It went on for many years. When the Roosevelts came up here (the north country) they would stop at our house. They'd bring the boys . . ." When F.D.R. was United States President he appointed Julius Frank to a post on the Judiciary Committee.

Life was a whirlwind of activity. The Frank's traveled constantly between New York City and Ogdensburg, often on business, but also because Marion's heart had never quite left the city. In New York they would gulp down the "culture" that she, especially, missed in Ogdensburg. Eleanor said, "We'd see 17 shows in two weeks in New York when I was growing up." But then they would return to Ogdensburg, to the business, to the family, to the life of the community.

With the death of his father in 1919 Julius became president of the Jewish Congregation in Ogdensburg. For 29 years he presided over Anshe Zophen. "And he had everything to say about it. But everything. If they spent any money, it was my father (who said to) . . . but if he wanted anything that wasn't

according to the Jewish law of the synagogue, he changed the law." In these years it was Julius' "darling little baby doll" who, unheard of at that time for a woman, often gave the Yom Kippur Service to the congregation.

At the sides of Julius and Marion Frank lived Leo and Sarah Sanger Frank.

Leo and Sarah Sanger Frank[14]

Leo, Julius' younger brother, had married Sarah, Marion's younger sister, only a few years after the marriage of Julius and Marion. They too spent their lives in Ogdensburg, living in close conjunction with their well-known siblings.

Even as a child, young Leo, the second son, had looked up to, and followed after, his big brother.[15] While Julius and Marion made the "big time" in terms of civic activities and social acquaintances, Leo and Sarah remained much more down home. According to their granddaughter Sally Frank, "Leo was a sweet, gentle man. While Julius loved the theater, Leo loved the movies. He would go to every movie that would get into town, and he would cry his heart out at anything that was sad." In the store, Leo was the "greeter." He was sociable. He knew everyone by name. Julius Frank would be up in the office, but Leo would be on the main floor seeing to it that the customers were satisfied.

He had met Sarah, perhaps, at the wedding of Julius and Marion. He enjoyed people. He liked to dance. They fell in love and they married; she moved from Chicago, where she had been living, to Ogdensburg. The two families were very close.

Sarah and Leo had two children. A daughter died. A son, Harold, lived to be the "apple of their eye." If Julius and Marion went away, their children stayed with Leo and Sarah. If Leo and Sarah went on a trip, Harold stayed at Julius and Marion's. Through their successful brother and sister, Leo and Sarah met the Roosevelts and the Hoovers, the names of the times. And in their own rights, they too contributed to the community of Ogdensburg.

While Leo was not a leader, he was an active follower. He liked to be an organization man. He too was a Mason, a Rotarian, an Elk. And once he was the president of an organization that "had something to do with getting a factory organized in Ogdensburg." But mostly, Leo was not a "president" type of person. He loved to play whist, he loved the movies, he loved people.

Redheaded and earthy, Sarah also loved people. While her

petite and dainty sister had turned out to be a superb organizer after a hard personal struggle to feel at home in Ogdensburg, Sarah fit in with little effort. She was immediately popular. "She was a much better mixer. I think people knew her better," Eleanor explained. In the suffrage movement Sarah also did her share of public speaking. And she wasn't afraid to get her hands dirty. If there was a job to be done, Sarah did it. Marion might have presided over a fund raising event, but it would be Sarah who sat from morning till evening at the food booth. If there was a charity, "she'd be right in there doing. She couldn't do enough for people."

Later Times

Mathilda Frank first, and then Nathan, had died before the twentieth century was too far underway. Julius and Marion, and Leo and Sarah, were directing their intelligence and their energies into the civic life of their community. The store, *Nathan Frank's Sons*, continued, but it was not the be-all and center of their focus.

The third generation took its place in the office of *Nathan Frank's Sons*. Shortly after World War I, young Eleanor Frank went to Cornell to visit her cousin, Harold. She met there a fraternity brother of Harold's, Edgar Schwartz, just back from the War. In time they married. Edgar came north where he entered into his father-in-law and uncle's business. Harold, too, when he graduated, returned to Ogdensburg to work in the store. From approximately 1920 to 1940 Harold Frank was assistant manager.

But the spiral of the store's lifetime (if a store can be said to have a lifetime) was winding its way down. The business was no longer the great Ogdensburg attraction it had been. With the building of Highway 81, Watertown was within easy reach of shoppers. Other department stores were growing up in Ogdensburg, taking business from the Franks. In the 30's the Depression also took its toll. Julius sold part of the store to *Woolworths*, and they moved into smaller quarters; what had been the Hippodrome Theatre now became *Frank's*. When Julius retired on October 6, 1950, he sold the business to Edgar and Eleanor Schwartz.[16]

For Julius, retiring from business, however, should not be equated with a retiring from active life. Just as his father had, Julius Frank remained active, enthusiastic, and influencial until his death at the very advanced age of 89. Louis Greenblatt

met him in association with the N.Y.S. Council of Retail Merchants when he was already in his 80's. "The personality of this man was overwhelming. I listened to him when he was the principal speaker at a banquet of the N.Y.S. Council of Retail Merchants. He had a prepared text which he discarded because, he claimed, his eyesight was poor and he could not read it. He then proceeded to talk without notes. He was superb." In their retirement years Marion and Julius traveled. There were vacations in Florida and an around-the-world tour.

But even the most auspicious of lives comes to an end. On February 12, 1956, Julius Frank died. In a full page obituary the *Ogdensburg Journal* mourned the loss of "Mr. Ogdensburg."

Marion moved into her daughter's home on Jay Street. She, who had never given up her love of the city of New York, now found a special closeness with her son-in-law who had also been raised there. For hours at a time the elderly Marion would reminisce with Edgar about the city that was so much and so unshakably a part of her. Now, when Marion traveled alone, it was invariably to New York City. But she always returned to the North Country. Marion died peacefully on May 21, 1960 in Ogdensburg, New York.

The home of Edgar and Eleanor Frank Schwartz, where Marion lived her final years, almost breathes with the spirit of her. The Schwartzes keep paintings, photos, scrapbooks, even ledgers—mementos of all the Frank families who lived before them. Theirs is a history very much interwoven with the history of Ogdensburg. To visit the Schwartz home is to experience that history.

FOOTNOTES

[1]1865 census

[2]The *Ogdensburg Journal*, March 2, 1894, relates that in 1885 "Frank's" was enlarged to include the adjoining store. Also in this year Nathan Frank took George Wright as a partner.

[3]Much later, in January of 1932, the store was incorporated as "Nathan Frank's Sons" with Julius as president of the corporation.

[4]The Ogdensburg National Guard unit would have more information on this aspect of Julius' career.

[5]Conversation with Edgar and Eleanor Frank Schwartz, October 24, 1980.

[6]The information on Adolph and Sarah Levy Sanger, the parents of Marion and Sarah Sanger Frank, and the history of Marion's youth, come from an unpublished autobiography written by Marion Sanger Frank about 1930 and kept in the home of her daughter, Eleanor Schwartz; the autobiography describes in detail Marion's childhood experience, ending, unfinished, about the time she married.

[7]This and other direct quotes on Marion's childhood are taken from the autobiography.

[8]He had been, among other things, president of the New York City Board of Aldermen, President of the Board of Education, acting Mayor when the Statue of Liberty was



The Frank Family.

received from France. He was president of the Jewish Congregation at the Temple Emanuel in New York City.

[9]In October, 1907, the *Ogdensburg Daily Journal* sang praises of the latest "Frank's" expansion, describing each department of the now huge department store in detail.

[10]Julius was instrumental in having a Phythian Home for the Aged locate in Ogdensburg in 1913. Eventually he became Grand Chancellor of the Lodge and a trustee of the Phythian Home.

[11]It was in this capacity that Louis Greenblatt first became acquainted with Julius, who was already an elderly man.

[12]Conversation with Edgar and Eleanor Frank Schwartz, October 24, 1980.
There is only one other Jewish person who served as mayor of his community in northern New York (in an area adjacent to St. Lawrence County) but no other in St. Lawrence County. Fred Futterman was mayor of Tupper Lake, N.Y. for two terms in the middle 1950's. If Cornwall, Ontario, Canada, across the St. Lawrence River from St. Lawrence County, is considered, the very popular Aaron Horowitz was mayor of that community for a multitude of terms until his retirement from politics in 1956.

[13]In an Ogdensburg paper, around 1918: "He has given the city an efficient administration and for the first time in a quarter of a century the finances of Ogdensburg are on a sound basis. It is conceded that Frank is the best financial man the city has had at its head for many years."

[14]Interview with Edgar and Eleanor Schwartz, October 24, 1980.

[15]Leo thought Julius was wonderful.

[16]In 1960, when Edgar retired, he closed the business, although the Schwartzes' son, Frank Schwartz, continues to run a decorator's shop, *Frank's* in Ogdensburg.

Aaron and Fannie Abel Wolff

Barely Visible Through Time

The Wolff family was one of the earliest Jewish families to settle in Ogdensburg. When the Hebrew congregation of Anshe Zophen was formally incorporated, Aaron Wolff was a trustee of that corporation.

Since no Wolff descendants are left in the area, details of their lives have been lost to us. We find the family recorded in an 1865 census of the Town of Oswegatchie.[1] Surprisingly for such early Jewish immigrants, the Wolffs came not from German states, but from Poland. As of 1865, Aaron was 50 years old (which indicates that he was born in 1815); Fannie was seven years younger, born in September, 1821.[2] The couple was apparently married in the old country, as the first of their two sons, William, was born in Poland in 1844. Their second son, Albert, was born in 1857 in St. Lawrence County, which shows that the Wolffs came at least to the area, if not to Ogdensburg, before 1857. As his profession, Aaron is listed as a peddler.

The Wolffs lived out their lives in Ogdensburg, at least in their later years, at No. 12 Isabella Street. Fannie Wolff was 72 years old when, on the 4th of July, 1893, she died. The funeral was held at 8:00 p.m. the next evening at the family home. She was buried at the Jewish Cemetery of Anshe Zophen.[3]

If our calculations (accepting the census date of birth rather than that on the cemetery record) are correct, Aaron Wolff lived on another sixteen years, expiring at the ripe old age of 94. He, too, was buried in the Jewish Cemetery of Anshe Zophen.

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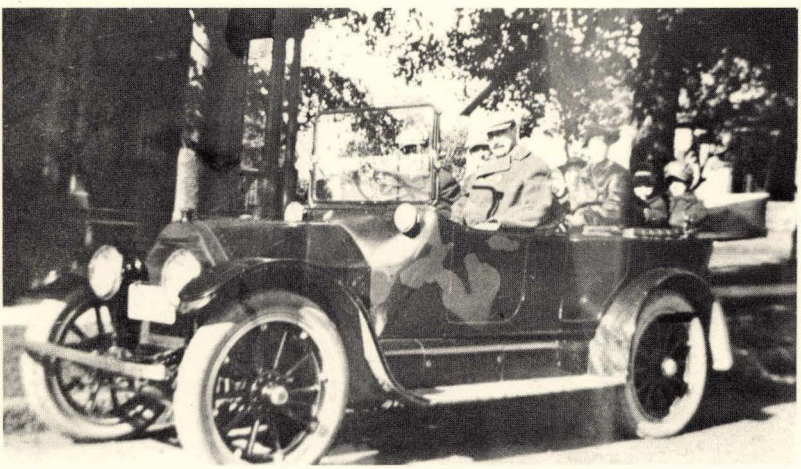
[1]1865 census; family #298, pg. 43.

[2]The cemetery records of Anshe Zophen indicate that he was born in 1821, the same year as his wife, Fannie. Apparently this is a mistake.

[3]Obituary; July 13, 1893; *Ogdensburg Journal.*

The Dobisky Family

Reuben Dobisky was the kind of man whose very presence demanded respect. He was tall, 6′1″ or 2″, dignified, he spoke softly, and people listened to what he had to say. There was the air of the aristocrat about him. People who knew him remember him as the man who always had a chauffeur-driven automobile. He was an exceptionally prominent and respected merchant in Ogdensburg, and an active Democrat, many times invited to run for mayor.[1] Mr. Dobisky was at one time awarded a 50-year medal as member of the Acacian Lodge (F & M Masons); he was, although he never drove, a pioneer member of the Ogdensburg Automobile Club; he was a member of the Elks Club, of the Odd Fellows, an honorary member of the



Reuben Dobisky in his Cadillac, vintage 1914, one of the first cars in Ogdensburg. The children in back are Ed and Sally.

Rotary Club, a prominent officer of Synagogue Anshe Zophen. And he was, from its incorporation in 1902, until his death on February 29, 1955, one of the founders, and in time, the president, of the *Surpise Mdse. Company*, which grew from a small shop into one of the largest department stores in the North Country.

Reuben's wife, Anna Simon Dobisky, was president of the Jewish Ladies Aid Society; she was for many years active in the Girl Scouts of America, a member of the Ogdensburg Girl Scout Council, she was active in the League of Women Voters; she belonged to the Phythian Sisters, the Eastern Star, and to several community bridge clubs. But first and foremost, she was a housewife and mother: a loving mother, not only to the one daughter, Irma, whom she herself bore, but also to the two children, Sally and Edwin, offspring of Julia Pray Dobisky, Reuben's first wife, who had died soon after Edwin's birth. Anna also found time to help out with the business, to go on buying trips, to share in her husband's career.

All three Dobisky children, Sally, Edwin, and Irma, now live in Ogdensburg—Sally and Irma, in the old family home at 404 Riverside Avenue. In back of the house grows a beautiful peony bush, planted 50 years ago by their mother, Anna Dobisky; sharing the house with them is Kim, a beloved German Shepard dog, just as, 50 years ago, when the family was growing up here, a German Shepard dog was always a part of the household.

Their Story

In Poland (presumably in that area known as the Russian Pale, where most Jews lived), unknown to each other, two Jewish children were born, and each emigrated from Poland as a child.

Abram Dobisky, to avoid the Russian conscription (that took Jewish children in an attempt to convert or kill them) had for some time now been living in Sweden, when, around 1868, at the age of 16, he left Sweden for America. Fourteen year old Esther Bergman, who had been living in Manchester, England, where her father was a rabbi, also at this time was immigrating to America. They met on the boat. Not long after they docked, presumably at Ellis Island, the young couple was married.

Exactly where the wedding took place, or when, is not clear. Abram apparently had landsleite in Syracuse, and went directly from the boat to Syracuse. Whether the two simply kept in

touch, and then married at some later date, and whether the wedding took place in New York, or in Syracuse, is not certain. But wherever, and whenever it took place, it was a joyous occasion. There were lovely wedding gifts. Up over the front door of the family home on Riverside Avenue, Irma and Sally keep a lovely handpainted jug. This, they tell us, was a wedding gift to their grandparents, a gift meant to bestow fertility upon the newlyweds.

Apparently the jug did its work well. The young couple was, over the years, to produce seven children. Their first son, Reuben, was born on November 28, 1872, in Syracuse, and within the next four years two more children, Lyman and Ida were born, also in Syracuse. Then, around 1876 the Dobisky family moved north to a little house on Ford Street in Ogdensburg, New York. Four more children, Sue, Harry, John and Minnie were born in Ogdensburg.

Abram made his living as a peddler, and it seems to have been quite a good living. But especially good, was the fact that here, in America, Esther and Abram could live without fear. There is a memory that they have passed on to their children and grandchildren: It happened during the Seder Service that there was a loud, official-sounding police knock on the door, and that the family, remembering police harrassment in Poland, was frightened. But all the police wanted, to the relief of the Dobiskys, was Abram's help in translation, because there was a Swedish immigrant with whom they must communicate, and Abram Dobisky was fluent in Swedish.

But Ogdensburg was not totally good to the Dobiskys. Two tragedies occurred here. Their youngest son, Johnny, died on July 12, 1886, of what today would probably be diagnosed as a ruptured appendix, but at that time could not be diagnosed. And their second son, Lyman, in 1891, apparently drank some contaminated water, contracted typhoid fever, and died. Ogdensburg was now, for Esther and Abram, filled with the ghosts of painful memories. Around 1895 they left, to make their home once again in Syracuse.

Reuben, the oldest son, however, already in his early twenties, stayed on in Ogdensburg. He was working for Charles Paris, one of the very earliest Ogdensburg Jews, who ran a men's store at 207 Ford Street, where later the Fishers would have their business.[2]

In 1902, together with I.M. Bregstein (whose family manufactured coats in New York City), Joseph Frank (whose son

later was to marry Minnie Dobisky) and another man, Robert Kamber, Reuben opened a small store at 12 Ford Street (where, previously, a Louis Hoffman had had a clothing store). The enterprise was financed by the Bregstein Company; Reuben was the general manager. They called the store, the *Surprise.*

Over the years the *Surprise* flourished and expanded into a huge department store, featuring clothing for men, women, and children, known throughout the North Country for its reliable merchandise and lowest of prices. In 1908 the *Surprise* took over the Vilas Store; in 1914, the Bell Block was purchased; in 1917 a new front was built, and in 1918 the Bromlow property, adjoining the *Surprise* was purchased. The *Surprise* had now taken over four large stores in "the city's most desirable location."[3]

Sometime before 1908 Reuben married a gentile woman by the name of Julia Pray. She was, her daughter Sally thinks, a nursing student at the Ogdensburg State Hospital. Very little else is known about her. The couple had a baby girl (this was Sally) born in 1910. Then, less than two years later, on April 21, 1912, a son, Edwin, was born. About two weeks later, Julia died. (A neighbor-aunt Elsie—told Sally the story as she saw it. Julia, just home from the hospital, heard her husband's car pull into the driveway, arrived at the doorway just in time to see the car strike and kill their little dog. She fainted, began to hemorrhage. Medical facilities were not then what they are now. She died.) In the years that followed, Reuben rarely was to speak of his first wife.

Reuben's sister, Sue, left Syracuse and the fine job she held there with the Dey Brothers Company in order to help care for her little niece and nephew in Ogdensburg. (Sally still has in her possession, a letter written to Sue from her boss, Mr. Dey, in which he wishes her luck, but asks if she realizes how much she is sacrificing in terms of her career to do this.) For the next two or three years, Sue lived with Reuben and the children, giving the love and care of a mother.

Anna Simon was a distant cousin of Reuben's. She lived in New York City, where her family ran a little store, and Reuben made frequent business trips to New York. Perhaps they started seeing each other then. And Sally can remember "Aunt Anna" sometimes came to visit the Dobiskys in Ogdensburg. One of Sally's earliest memories, when she was perhaps four or five, occurred when her Aunt Sue took her and little Edwin aside. "Aunt Anna is going to come and be your mother," she

explained to them. "Do you want to call her 'Aunt Anna' or do you want to call her 'mother'?" Sally smiled with the recollection: "So we voted for 'Mother'." And that is how it was. When Anna Simon married Reuben Dobisky she did become for Sally and Edwin a real mother. The family was once again complete.

In 1919 another daughter, Irma, was born. Then when Irma was four or five, in the early twenties, Anna gave birth to a son, whom they named "Johnny," after Reuben's littlest brother, who had died. But this Johnny too, was not destined to grow up. He lived only two or three days. There were no more children.

Small in stature, with lovely auburn hair, Anna Simon Dobisky appears to have been made of strong fiber. When she put her will to something, she could do it, whether it was surviving a loss (not only did she lose her infant son, but long before that, even before her marriage, both her parents had passed on, leaving her and her three sisters orphaned) or driving a car (the Dobisky daughters relate, with a note of pride, their mother's automotive adventures; how she never drove well, but, by Heavens, she drove!) or suddenly becoming the mother of two preschool children, or giving a speech. When she was involved in the League of Women Voters, Sally and Irma remember, "She was always making speeches, and trying them out on us . . . Ed would kid the life out of her . . . and she knew she was nervous, but she made herself do a lot of things." Perhaps one of the reasons Anna was able to get involved in so many community functions was that the family could afford to have, and always did have, hired help in the house. But having a cook or a maid didn't stop Anna from dipping her hands in household affairs: "She was a housewife. She was always cooking and doing things around the house." And when they had a garden, not only the cook, but Anna as well, got involved in the canning.

The older Dobiskys, Abram and Esther, when they began to get on in years, moved back to Ogdensburg. They lived at 220 Franklin Street with Ida, their oldest daughter, who never married. In Syracuse, she had stayed with her parents, and now lived with them back in Ogdensburg, "making sure they were alright; getting their meals." Sally and Irma remember their grandparents with much love and affection. Both grandparents "loved all the grandchildren" and Grandpa Dobisky always had his pockets stuffed with Beeman's gum, and little round peppermint candies for the children. (Not that their

parents always approved!) When, on November 1, 1929, Esther Dobisky died of a stroke, Abram moved into 404 Riverside Avenue with the Reuben Dobisky family. In less than a year, he too passed on. "The doctor said it wasn't anything but a broken heart." With both her parents gone, Ida moved to New York City, and there she worked until she retired at the age of 72.



Abram Dobisky with grandchildren Ed and Sally around 1915.

And so, it was a warm, busy, household in which the children grew up, peopled with active, respected parents, loving grandparents, servants, and pets. (The sisters, Irma and Sally, tell of the time their first shepard jumped into a parked car, then wouldn't let the owner in, and how the police had to fetch Anna to come take the dog.)

As Jews, the Dobiskys were more "conservative" than "orthodox". Unlike so many Jews of Polish background, they did not keep a kosher household, but they did observe all the religious holidays, and were, from the start, involved with the Jewish Congregation. Sally remembers, in the earliest years, attending services upstairs over the Fishers' Store on Ford Street. And then, in 1919, Reuben was among those who organized the renting, and later the buying, of the Universalist Church on Green Street, and its conversion to a Synagogue.

The Dobisky children attended the new Synagogue for religious instruction, and laughingly remember Rabbi Kimball, who was such a nice man, but whose broken English was impossible for the children to understand. Since, in those days it was considered important to prepare the boys only for their bar mitzvahs, the girls were under less pressure to learn. Actually, "he used to bribe us with candy to stay there, and keep quiet so

he could teach the boys," Sally and Irma recall. As far as actual training goes, the girls learned more about the Girl Scouts (which met the same day as Hebrew School) than they did about their religion.

Reuben's life was very much wrapped up with the *Surprise*. And as Edwin grew up, he too became involved in the running of the business. By 1949 or '50, when Reuben was already semi-retired, they opened a branch of the *Surprise* in Potsdam, and this store would remain in business for almost 30 years. They also opened a branch in Gouverneur, but it seems they had difficulty finding a manager for that store, and after about 12 years, they closed it down. After urban renewal, Edwin moved the *Surprise* into the new downtown mall, and opened a showplace department store in May, 1973. The *Surprise* closed its doors and went out of business in 1979, after 77 years of serving the North Country.

Anna died in 1938 at a comparatively young age, but Reuben lived on for 17 more years, and although he retired from "active management" around 1945 (passing his interest to his children) he always kept in touch with the business. As an old man, Reuben Dobisky was just as imposing, and commanded just as much respect, as he had in his younger years. (There is the story of the soldier, during World War II, who, upon seeing Reuben, started saluting wildly—obviously thinking he had come face to face with some high-ranking officer.) By the time Reuben died in 1955, all the other founders of the *Surprise* had been for some time deceased, but descendants of the Bregsteins, who were now all living in New York City, kept an active interest in the business until the 1970's when the Ogdensburg urban renewal bought the building on Ford Street.

Edwin is now Executive Director of the Ogdensburg Chamber of Commerce. Irma and Sally, who worked at the *Surprise* until its closing, are now retired. Both Irma and Sally had been married and divorced during World War II. Sally had no children. Irma had a daughter, Ann, who is now married and has twin sons and a daughter. Edwin was married on July 21, 1940 to Willis M. Parks. They had three sons: Frank, William and Robert, and one daughter, Nancy. William died in 1969 at the age of 26, leaving a wife and six year old son, Andrew. Frank is a Public Relations Official, headquartered in Keene, N.H. Bob is in business in Ogdensburg, living with his parents. Nancy is working at the Public Television station in Plattsburgh, New York.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Obituary for R.W. Dobisky; *Ogdensburg Journal;* Feb. 21, 1955.

[2]There is a chapter on the Fisher family in this volume.

[3]*The History of the City of Ogdensburg;* Rt. Rev. P.S. Garand, D.D., V.G., Ogdensburg, New York, 1927.

The personal information comes from two separate interviews, one between Louis Greenblatt and Edwin Dobisky on December 2, 1973, and the other on June 4, 1981, between Joan Dobbie and the sisters, Sally and Irma Dobisky. There was some discrepancy in terms of when the older Dobiskys, Esther and Abram, first came to Ogdensburg. The sisters said that their father, Reuben, arrived first in Ogdensburg, and then brought the rest of his family; in Louis Greenblatt's notes, taken from his conversation with Edwin, there is no mention of this happening.

The Dinberg Family

It was around 1882 when the entire Trupin family, including twenty one year old David, his wife, Rosa (later called Rose), his parents, and several other relatives ("a group of nine, ten, or eleven") arrived at Ellis Island from their hometown of Denenburg, Latvia (now Russia). In Denenburg the older Mr. Trupin, David's father, had owned about eight or nine houses, and it was by selling these houses that he had made enough money to bring over the family. The escape from Russia had been difficult and expensive. But enthusiastic letters from landsleite who had broken free ahead of them, letters praising life in America, had prompted them to risk it. The Trupins wrote that they were coming, sold the properties, and arranged things. They had to be smuggled "in the middle of the night over the border into Germany. And then they got to Hamburg, and they took a sailing boat from Hamburg to New York City."[1]

None of the family was particularly fluent in English. They could neither understand the English spoken by the customs officials, nor could the customs officials understand them. Through the confusion of languages, the Trupin family was assigned the name "Dinberg," after the town from which they had come, Denenburg. And this name they kept.

David and Rose

David probably had several jobs as a fresh "greenhorn" in Brooklyn, but eventually he settled into the business of buying and selling woolen clips (the bottoms of trousers), while Rose settled into the role of kosher housewife. It appears that they waited until they felt they could support a family before starting one, because they had no children for their first seven years

in America. Then, in 1889, a first son, Michael, was born. And the children kept coming. There was Nathan in 1892, Harry in 1894, and in 1897, the twins, Israel and Ida, made their appearance.

If it is true that they held off starting their family for financial reasons, it was now an ironically bad time to be having twins. Because now "during the second administration of Cleveland's time . . . the country went into a severe panic" and the business in which David was involved went under. Somehow they strugled on.

But city life was taking its toll. By the turn of the century, the older boys were beginning to grow up, and they were not growing in the direction that Rose wished for them. (Says Harry, "We were getting 'tough and ready'.") She wanted to get her family out of New York, to a more healthy environment. The Dinbergs began to scan the papers for job opportunities elsewhere, where their children could be free of the slum influences. And they found, in the Jewish "Forward" an advertisement by a Mr. Kornblatt from Ogdensburg, New York, who was looking for help (as a junk peddler?). In 1902 David, Rose, and the children took the New York Central north to Ogdensburg.

In 1904, in Ogdensburg, they had another daughter, Elsie; in 1906 there was Goldie; and the last child, Morris, was born in 1911. As the new babies were growing into children, the older children were becoming adults. They attended Cheder in the Schul on the third floor of what was now the Friedman and Fisher building on 207 Ford Street. When they became old enough they were bar mitzvahed there.

They found work. Michael, like his father, went into the "waste material business," and Israel also started out as a junk dealer, but "then he decided that was no good. We all decided that was no profession for American born boys." Israel decided that he wanted to have a trade, so he went to Gloversville to learn about glove making. There, in six or seven months, according to brother Harry, he "picked up all that it would take the average person a year and a half or two years to learn."

He came back to Ogdensburg where, in cooperation with Nathan and Harry, who were silent partners (president and vice president of the firm, while Israel, who actually ran the business, was secretary and treasurer), he formed the *Dinberg Glove and Mitten Mfg. Co.* on May 1, 1920.[2] By 1924 their

business had expanded to such an extent that they had to find larger quarters. Israel bought out the *McIntosh Glove Company* on 213 Catherine Street and continued to run a successful business, selling gloves to such well known companies as *Sears and Robuck* and *Montgomery Wards.*

As well as sharing in their brother's glove business, since 1914, Harry and Nathan had been involved with the retail shoe business, running a shoe business on Ford Street in Ogdensburg.

In 1922 Rose, with Ida and the younger children, Elsie, Goldie, and Morris, moved back to Brooklyn.[3] Since the older boys were already on their own, this left David "alone in the two story dwelling near the New York Central train" (No. 1, Spring Street). Time and again the four sons, who lived in Ogdensburg tried to convince their father to move in with one of them, rather than pursuing his "hermit existence." But David seemed content to live alone.

He lived almost entirely in the kitchen, while the rest of the house was cluttered from floor to ceiling with various and sundry forms of junk. His life formed a sort of pattern. Every morning, with horse and wagon, he passed Nathan and Harry's shoe store on Ford Street; every evening he sat peacefully at his kitchen table, "smoking his pipe and composing Jewish songs."[4] He was popular with the Ogdensburg children. "He paid a cent a pound more than any other junk dealer here; it is said, and for this reason many children brought him junk. He was . . . kind . . . and a friend of the children, and on Saturday afternoon many children visited him to dispose of the junk they had gathered."[5]

In January, 1926, this peaceful life ended. David was killed by an intruder. Four years later, Rose Dinberg died in her home, in Brooklyn.

The youngest Dinberg boy, Morris, eventually became a physician. He graduated from St. Lawrence University, and from a university in Kingston, Ontario. Morris is now a pathologist in Oil City, Pennsylvania.

FOOTNOTES

[1]This, and other direct quotes, was taken from a taped interview with Mr. Harry Dinberg, conducted by Louis Greenblatt on December 2, 1973.

[2]*The History of the City of Ogdensburg*, by Rt. Rev. P.S. Garand, D.D., V.G.; Ogdensburg, New York, 1927.

[3]Obituary of Mrs. Rose Dinberg; *Ogdensburg Republican Journal*, May 3, 1930, pg. 5.

[4]Obituary of David Dinberg; *Ogdensburg Republican Journal*, January 30, 1926.

[5]Article in *Ogdensburg Republican Journal*, February 4, 1926.

The Fisher Families

Some time in the early 1890's a tall, handsome young man with reddish brown hair (and perhaps already the beginnings of the large handlebar mustache that would later distinguish him) arrived at the port of New York City. Hyman S. Ribnick, he had been called in the Province of Grodno Gberna, Poland (now a part of Russia), where he had been born around 1871, the oldest of six children. Perhaps it was to avoid conscription into the armed forces that he left Russia (this was often the case, in those times) or perhaps he came to America as an adventurer with dreams of freedom and opportunity. In any case, when Hyman S. Ribnick, the young Polish/Russian Jew, arrived in New York City, he became Hyman S. Berenson (it was common practice in those times to give immigrants new names) and started out his new life in the New World as a cigar maker. Records, or memories, are not quite clear as to how this came about, but for the next three or four years he made cigars in New York City.

The Friedman brothers, also from Grodno Gberna, had been for some time living in northern New York.[1] Hyman S. had known the Friedman brothers in the Old Country, and obviously remained in touch with them from New York City, as it was the Friedmans, according to his niece, Pauline Fisher, who "convinced my uncle that this would be the spot for him."

Around 1895 Hyman S. Berenson arrived in Ogdensburg to begin another new life, this time in the way of many young Jews of the time, as a peddler. Pack on back he traveled between farmhouses selling sewing notions, cooking utensils, soft goods.

Then in 1901, when the Friedmans bought the building that

was then 207 Ford Street from another early settler, Charles Paris, Hyman S. joined them in the opening of a store. The story goes that when he and the Friedmans decided to go into business together they felt that *Friedman and Berenson* on a sign would take much too much space over the front of the store. There was a discussion, and Hyman S. Berenson became Hyman S. Fisher (which was a shorter surname, and, they felt, had some relationship to the original name Ribnick, which, freely translated into English, means "one who fishes"). The rest of the family, as they arrived in America, followed suit, and from 1901 to the present day, when we speak of this family, we speak of the Fisher Family.

He had a strong, forceful personality. He was intelligent and must also have had his share of ambition. The store prospered. In 1925 Hyman S. Fisher, a 1/3rd partner in *Friedman and Fisher*, purchased the two-thirds interest owned by the Friedmans, and the store name was changed to *H.S. Fisher Co.* Hyman's youngest brother, Joseph, had joined him in 1919, and the two brothers and their families ran a successful store that remains in business today. It had remained in the Fisher family until 1978 when Hyman B. Fisher, Joseph's son, retired.



Joseph and Hyman S. Fisher around 1905-07.

Hyman S. and his younger brother, Joseph, were active in the religious life of the Jewish community. The third floor of the building on 207 Ford Street had actually been the site of congregation meetings since 1875, long before the Fishers arrived in Ogdensburg. But their involvement was far more than one of proximity alone. Both Fishers were dymanic members of the religious organization. In 1919, at the time when the Universalist Church on Green Street was rented and converted into a synagogue, Hyman S. was vice-president of the congregation; Joseph, its secretary.[2] The first bar mitzvah conducted in that Synagogue was that of Hyman B. Fisher, Joseph's son, in 1923.

However, while his business and civic life thrived, the personal history of Hyman S. Fisher was less happy. We are not sure exactly when, but probably in the early 1900's after he had left the peddler's path and begun to succeed in business, Hyman S. decided it was time for a family. Eligible Jewish women were a rarity in upstae New York at that time; someone (we don't know who) knew him and that he was looking for a wife, and also knew of a young Jewish woman in Boston. Photographs were exchanged; a match was arranged.

Celia

Could it have been a disappointment from the very first meeting? Pauline Fisher remembers her aunt (in her later years, of course, since Pauline was born much, much later) as a short, unlovely woman "who didn't have much sense of humor and didn't really know how to get along with people," a woman, in fact, who in no way resembled the photograph that had been sent to Hyman S. Pauline clearly remembers, as a child in her uncle's home, wondering if that photograph was indeed her aunt, or if perhaps a fake picture had been sent to entice her uncle into the marriage. Could it be that years of sorrow changed the features beyond recognition? For whether or not the early years of the marriage were happy ones, the later years certainly were not.

Celia (we do not have her maiden name, or in fact any information on her family, except that they lived in Boston) was probably a first or second generation immigrant as she spoke Yiddish and didn't seem to have complete mastery of the English language. Pauline Fisher recalls, ". . . if she had just received a letter from one of her relatives she would ask me to read it . . . and then would I please write a reply because she'd

broken her glasses, or she didn't have them . . ." It appears that she had trouble reading and writing, at least in English. Hyman S., on the other hand, was an intellectual, a scholar.

From Celia's point of view, it must have been difficult leaving her family, the life she had known, and to take up a new life in the rural North Country, with a strong, domineering husband. Says Pauline, "She may have been a capable woman. This I do not know. My uncle's personality was such that she never had a chance."

Thus mismatched, the seeds of the later marital tensions may have been planted along with the marriage. Or perhaps they were happy at first; it could be that the young Celia was truly as lovely as the photograph that later didn't even resemble her, and that time and sorrow so changed her.

Approximately 1900, Celia gave birth to a daughter, Sarah, whom they adored. We can only guess at the degree of their happiness in those years. The business was doing well; the child grew strong and healthy and beautiful. When Sarah was in her fifth year, Celia became pregnant for their second child. Nevertheless, if they were happy in those years, it was the last of their happiness.

It seems that Hyman S. had to go on a business trip. The local paper had advertised some sort of immunization clinic, and before leaving on his trip he had instructed his wife, "Sarah is so healthy; please don't take her to the clinic." Celia agreed to his request, but by the time the clinic arrived she had received some company from New York. They had children, and put pressure on Celia to disobey her husband and have Sarah immunized. She took the child to the clinic.

No one knows whether this was the cause, but within a short period of time Sarah developed spinal meningitis. Perhaps the serum was stale, or the needle dirty. Hyman S. spent a fortune trying to help his little girl, but in vain. She died; and shortly afterward Celia lost the second child, which would have been a son. They had no more children.

Hyman S. buried himself in his business, and his lodge work. He was very active in the Masons, in the Foresters, in the Elks. Toward his wife he was cold and unforgiving.

She, on her part, became bitter, withdrawn. For whatever reason, his family was not her family. Throughout the years, when the Joseph Fisher family had celebrations, special occasions, the Hyman S. Fishers didn't come, or Hyman S. came alone. Celia took trips to visit her family in Boston; Hyman S.

went alone to concerts, plays, on trips. The bitterness between them could be felt, almost a tangible thing. It lasted throughout their life together. Less than a year after Hyman S. died in 1938, Celia moved back to Boston where she still had relatives living. She passed away in Boston, and was buried there.

As Pauline Fisher recalls, perhaps the one thing her aunt and uncle had in common was a jealousy of the Joseph Fisher family, whose home was as warm and loving and filled with children as their own was cold, loveless, and barren.



Esther Rachel and Joseph Fisher, wedding photo about 1909, Ogdensburg, New York.

Joseph and Esther Rachel Jablonsky Fisher

Around 1903 a ship crossed the Atlantic from Poland to New York City. Among the passengers were the Jablonsky family (mother, father, and three daughters) from Grodno Gberna, Poland, as well as 20 year old Joseph Ribnick (the youngest brother of Hyman S. Fisher, then living in Ogdensburg, New York), also from Grodno Gberna. Probably the Jablonsky's and Joseph had known each other in Grodno Gberna, perhaps not. In any case, during the long transatlantic journey, young Joseph was not unaware of the youngest Jablonsky daughter, 14 year old Esther Rachel (Ray, as she was called by close family and

friends), with her jet black curls and huge dark eyes. (He always claimed, in fact, that the moment he laid eyes upon her there on the boat he decided he was going to marry her.) And perhaps the child, Ray (although she never would admit to it with more than a blush) was also attracted to Joseph, a modest, friendly youth with "beautiful auburn curly hair and lovely blue eyes."

After the ship arrived in New York City, Joseph (who became Joseph Fisher) and the Jablonsky family remained in contact. Over the next few years, as Ray grew into a young lady, Joseph, who worked as a tailor in New York City, was probably a frequent house guest. In time he began carrying out his plans of courtship. "And," says daughter Pauline, "he had quite a hard road ahead, because she was the youngest in the family and her mother did not want the youngest daughter to marry before the older two. So, he made believe he was calling on one of the older sisters, and then when he had finished calling on the older sister, my mother would run out of the house to meet him, and they would do their courting that way." Eventually the older sisters found husbands. Joseph and Ray were married in 1909, when she was only 19.

The young bride put her heart into her marriage and the wifely responsibilities that were open to her. She kept a rigorously kosher home, preparing all food with utmost care and attention. She cherished her husband; as children came, adored them. The couple, in direct contrast to the Hyman S. Fishers, went to plays together, on trips together. And they kept the sabbath always as an important and precious time for sharing with friends and family.

Children came quickly. On June 10, 1910, Hyman B. Fisher (named Hyman after his mother's brother, Hyman B. Jablonsky) was born. Two years later another son, Bernard, arrived. But then, in 1917, tragedy struck. Five year old Bernard died of diptheria. Even the birth of a third son, Louis (10/20/17), could not help Ray adjust to her child's death. Her pain could not be soothed; she thought she saw him everywhere. Her sorrow was overwhelming. On August 15, 1919, she gave birth to their first daughter, Minnie B. Fisher, and still Ray could not find peace.

Hyman S. Fisher, Joseph's oldest brother, suggested they leave New York City and begin again in Ogdensburg, Joseph could join Hyman S. in the business. Perhaps a change of scenery might help. And thus, in September of 1919, the

Joseph Fisher family moved to Ogdensburg.

And in time, her pain healed, or at least settled down to a deeper place within her. Their life in Ogdensburg was a happy one. Young Joseph took his place in the store alongside the much older Hyman S. Fisher. Joseph, with his tailor's experience, did nearly all the alterations, and the store began to lean from general merchandise to men's clothing in particular. They became established Ogdensburg citizens. Joseph was an officer in the congregation of Anshe Zophen (secretary) and Ray was a member of the Ladies Aid Society. Their last child, another daughter, Pauline, was born on November 5, 1923.

At home their was always warmth, a sense of happiness and love. Ray was a busy housewife who took a great joy in cooking especially. Unfortunately, her marvelous recipies have been largely lost, since she carried them all in her head and never wrote them down. Everything was strictly kosher, strictly homemade. On Friday, as she prepared for the Sabbath, she did all the baking for the week—the smell of baking filled the house. And Friday night, with the candles lit and the best silver out, was company night. Sometimes, on a Friday night, Hyman S. and Celia came for dinner, but they were difficult guests; the tension between them all too evident. Other times, Hyman S. would come alone, his wife having gone back to Boston visiting her relatives, and he seemed to relax a little more then, perhaps to almost enjoy the family life that could never be his own.

But their family happiness did not continue on into a mellow old age. In 1936, when she was only 47 and her youngest daughter, Pauline, only 12, Esther Rachel Fisher died of a heart attack. Her brother-in-law, Hyman S. died two years later, and her beloved Joseph died in 1940, also of a heart attack. He was 57.

Hyman B. Fisher, the oldest son, took over the business, and ran it successfully until his retirement in 1978. The other children eventually left the Ogdensburg area, except for Pauline, who remains in Ogdensburg working as a Housing Assistance Coordinator for the Ogdensburg Housing Authority. Pauline was kind enough to share with us these many memories and anecdotes of her family's past.

FOOTNOTES

[1]A chapter on the Friedmans can be found in the Massena section of our volume.

[2]Congregation of Anshe Zophen, *100th Anniversary 1875-1975;* pamphlet, history by Hyman B. Fisher.

The Sperlings

Some people grow up fast and settle down early. Others take a long time to find their place in the world. Mayer Sperling was one of those who grew up fast, but he had been through nearly as many jobs and life styles as the 29 years he had lived, before he finally settled down as an Ogdensburg merchant. And even then, he continued to grow, and change, and follow his dreams, and even now in 1981, at age 85, he is still dreaming, and growing. Perhaps the secret of Mayer's creativity, and longevity as well, is linked to the fact that he never did, in the mundane sense of the word, grow up.

All his years he vascillated between the rural life to which he had been born, and the urban life, which drew him. Before finally settling in Ogdensburg, he had gone from the little Shtetl of Opatow, Poland, to Warsaw, the capital, back to Opatow, across the sea to Montreal, to New York City, to the hamlet of Parishville, N.Y., to Potsdam, to Canton, back to New York City, to Canton, back to Montreal, to Canton, and at last to Ogdensburg. And in Ogdensburg, where he has lived for the last 56 years, on the edge of town, he constantly vascillated between the life of an exceptionally innovative and successful businessman, and the life of a less successful, but happy farmer.

The farmland that the Sperling family still owns has now gone very much to housing, and the horses (of which they at one time owned twenty) and the chickens (of which they had "thousands")[1] are gone; but the business, now a family corporation called *Sperlings Inc.*, continues to be a growing and very successful concern.

Born on October 24, 1896, Majer (that was the Polish spelling) Sperling left his home village of Opatow as soon as he was

bar mitzvahed (at 13, he was now a man), for the city of Warsaw. He lived in Warsaw for a couple of years, but he lived, as did all Jewish boys, under the threat of the Russian draft. In America, a Jew could be free. Always above his head hung the threat of conscription. Always before his eyes dangled the dream of America. At about 16 he returned to his village of Opatow, where his family helped him gather the money to emigrate.

In August of 1913, by way of an elaborate underground system, using his younger brother's birth certificate,[2] Mayer made the break. He was smuggled out of Poland through Vienna, from Vienna through Germany, and from Germany to Antwerp. And in Antwerp, due to a series of mishaps and confusions, he missed his boat, was taken to Rotterdam, and from Rotterdam, packed into a cattle ship with several hundred others, he made the long, weary trip to Quebec, Canada. When Mayer speaks of the journey he recalls long, seasick days, a toothache that caused his face to swell, the filth, the discomforts, the miseries, but he also recalls the kindness of the Polish people who traveled with him; how they took care of him, a young Jew, "just like I was one of them."[3]

He arrived in Quebec with six dollars to his name, which was not enough to get through customs. Luckily, the Jewish Aid Society was used to this sort of situation. They would meet new immigrants at the dock, and if need be, loan them enough to make up the $25.00-minimum required for immigration. Mayer accepted their help with gratitude.

He made his way to Montreal, and in three years in Montreal he went through enough jobs, adventures, and experiences to fill several books. There was a tailor's job: he ran a needle through his finger the first day and decided tailoring was not for him. Besides, he was earning $3.00 a week and the room he lived in cost him $2.00 a week. So he left. There were other jobs. Eventually he found work in a French speaking Cold Storage Provision Company. The official "bosses" were a Colonel (and he did call himself Colonel) Gunn, and a Mr. Langolais, but they were rarely present in the every day work situation. His immediate boss was the English speaking Mr. Bates, a man who became to the immigrant boy not only a friend, but a role model, an idol. Mr. Bates, as Mayer would later speak of him to his children, took on larger than life proportions.

Mayer worked for a time in the poultry division of the storage company at $6.00 a week, definitely an improvement over

$3.00 a week! Then, with the help of Mr. Bates, he found work at a chicken and duck farm at $8.00 a week (plus room and board).

He was saving some money, learning some English. (It was Mr. Bates who encouraged him to learn English rather than French.) Mayer Sperling was a small-built man and, being a foreigner, some of his fellow workers used to tease him a bit. On one occasion when Mayer threw a frozen turkey in the direction of one of these fellow workers, Mayer was fired. Mr. Bates arranged for him to go to New York City.

Walking along a New York street, he happened upon a "Landsmann". Mr. Goldfein had been Mayer's friend in Warsaw, and now he owned a shop in New York. For a little time Mayer worked for him "for nothing." "But," said Mayer, "I can't work for nothing."

"You want to make some money?" replied Goldfein, "I'll introduce you to a fella; he's a landsmann of ours."

On looking back over this period of his life, Mayer commented: "You know, you run into a good landsmann, and he'll do anything for you. I was lucky enough to run into two or three of them."

The "fella" Goldfein introduced him to hired Mayer as a longshoreman, loading and unloading freight. It was high paying work all right, but these were the days before cranes and derricks. "They put you in line, about 15 to 16 people, you stay in line, they load up your wheelbarrow, you take it up and they unload it, and you go back down again, just like a chain gang." After about two weeks of that, he knew he'd had enough. The boss paid him $60.00 which was good money in those days. With this $60.00 in his pocket, Mayer set about looking for work again.

He thought now he might enjoy farm work. So he went to the Jewish Agricultural Association, a non-profit organization maintained by the Jewish Aid Society. He told them he would like to work on a farm. They showed him letters from people looking for farm help. One in particular intrigued him. It was a place called Parishville, way up north in the foothills of the Adirondacks. Mayer noticed on the map that it was not so far from a place called Philadelphia. The young greenhorn did not yet have a very good sense of the United States geography. A farm near Philadelphia, he thought (thinking of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania), would be ideal for him. He could have the country and the city right nearby. Mayer made the arrangements

and boarded the train which in those days made connections in Philadelphia, N.Y. When they stopped at Philadelphia he was shocked to find no city at all, but a few houses, a saloon, and a bar. And it was night; everything was closed. Somewhat disappointed, he continued on to Potsdam.

Then came the next surprise. He'd expected to find, since a dairy-farm has cows, a cowboy all spiffed up with stetson and spurs, waiting for him at the Potsdam depot. There was no such person in sight. Instead he noticed ambling along the platform a bearded old man, chewing tobacco. "Your name Mayer Sperling?" asked the old man. "I'm Byron Parker. I'm the one you've come to work for." It was February. With horse and sleigh they struggled for an hour and a half through unplowed roads until they finally arrived at the Parker farm in Parishville Center. Mayer was beginning to wonder what he'd gotten himself into. "But when I came into the house I began to think a lot different. That house was so clean and nice, you could eat off the floor." The Parkers gave him a good, hot meal and a nice room, and "when I woke up in the morning, after having slept in the New York East Side on one of those cots, it looked to me like a kingdom!"

Mayer learned the farm life. He shoveled manure, he pumped water, he milked cows. Up at 5:00 a.m., dropping into bed exhausted at 8:00 p.m. and up again at 5:00 a.m. It was a good life, but a hard one. At the end of the first month he received his $14.00 pay, which wasn't much, but then he wasn't spending anything either, and the Parkers were such warm people. Mrs. Parker was helping him with his English. "Read the *Watertown Times*," she'd say, "and then tell me what you've read."

For another month Mayer stayed with the Parkers, but with spring came the desire to move on. His English was quite good by now, his hands were numb from the milking, and time was passing without him getting anywhere on $14.00 a month earning. He had been, all this time, in touch with his friend, Mr. Bates. Now Mr. Bates sent him a letter of introduction for *Swift & Co.* in Chicago.

Mayer went into Goldsmith's clothing store in Potsdam to buy a new shirt and pants for his trip. "You the boy who works for Mr. Parker?" asked Mr. Goldsmith. "Well, yes," Mayer replied, "but I'm leaving now. I'm going to Chicago." "You don't have to go to Chicago to make a living," said Goldsmith, "You could make a good living right here, peddling." A man by

the name of Max Swerdlow had just walked by the store, a pelt under his arm. "See?" Mr. Goldsmith pointed him out to Mayer. "He's making lots of money."

The next day, Mayer moved to Potsdam. He met other Potsdam peddlers; Sussman, Krupnek, and he learned from them. From Fred Williams, who sold them, he bought a horse and wagon. He bought some feed bags, resold them. On his first day out on the road Mayer made five dollars. "If I can make five dollars this easy," the young man said to himself, "then this is the job for me."

For the next few years he traveled all of St. Lawrence County, and part of Franklin County as well. Not actually peddling, but buying hides, furs, wool and bran sacks, and selling them in turn to such companies as the *American Hide & Leather Co.*, the *Burlington Rendering Co.*, and *John L. Paige* in Binghamton. In summer he used horse and wagon; in winter he drove a sleigh.



Mayer Sperling as a young man.

It was not as easy as he had thought. As a young man on the road, Mayer lived by his wit and determination. There were the horses to deal with: the one that wouldn't stop, and the one that wouldn't go. There were the fur buyers who promised high prices for a fur and then backed off. There were the farmers, and the trappers with whom he bargained for their products. He developed relationships, close ones, with the people in the North Country. There was "Joe Injun," whom they named the pond after; there was a Mr. Kingsley, who once threatened to shoot Mayer, "but we always made up and did business again." And in each farmhouse he entered, Mayer Sperling made friends with the farmers, their wives, and their children. (They called him the "little fella.") And he never forgot . . .

1916 Brought Canton, Anna, and the Truck

There lived in Canton, in the fall of 1916, two Jewish families, the Kaplans, who had two daughters and a son, and the Bennett

family. The Bennetts, who had just moved up to Canton from Watertown in March, ran a small clothing store on Main Street. They also had three children, two sons and a daughter, Anna, who was a sophomore in high school.

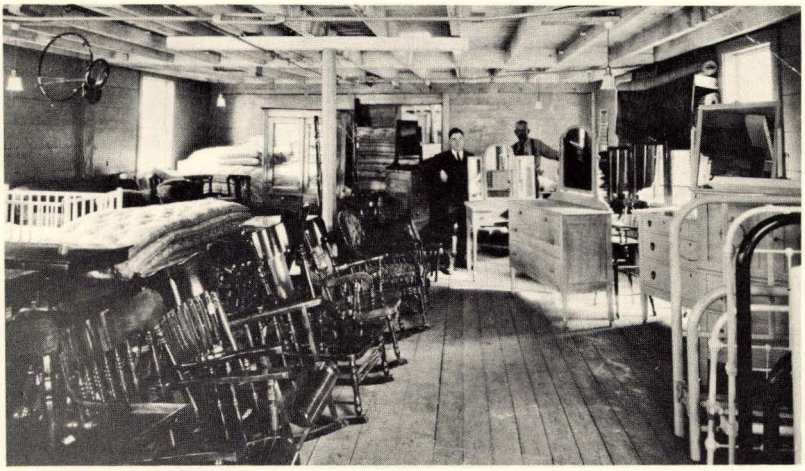
For the High Holidays that year these families and the other Jews in the surrounding area decided to hold services in Canton. They hired a rabbi from Rochester and since there should be no driving over the High Holy Days, those people who came from out of town found places to stay in Canton. Mayer stayed with the Hyman Kaplan family, and Anna Bennett, who was friendly with the Kaplan daughters, came by. This was their first meeting. There were no bells ringing or wheels spinning. Neither Mayer nor Anna had any premonitions of a future marriage.

A friend, Mark Whitney, had told Mayer that Canton was a good place, a nice town. Soon after that Yom Kippur, Mayer moved there. He became close with the Bennett family, spent a lot of time in the Bennett Store, played pinochle with Mr. Bennett. Mayer was by now quite an experienced buyer, and he had also, in this year of 1916, bought himself his first truck. From now on, except during the harshest winter months, it was by truck that he traveled.

World War I

With World War I the fur market fell. Mayer made some money on scrap metal, which was at a premium, but he did not turn in this direction for a career. He was drafted, and in the American Army he would have been happy to serve; instead, he caught the flu, and by the time he finally had recovered and was called in, enthusiastic and patriotic, his group was being shipped to training camp when the armistice was signed and the war was over. "I was always disappointed in not going," he says.

Mayer went to New York City with $12,000 he had saved. For about eight months he and a partner ran a button manufacturing plant in the city, but due to his partner's affinity to the races, the business and the money were lost. He returned to Canton. His next venture was in Canada. With another partner Mayer bought a movie house in St. John, Quebec, complete with chorus girls and ice cream parlor. That, too, fell through and he returned to Canton once more. In 1919, with advice from an acquaintance, Max Katzman of Gouverneur,[4] Mayer Sperling opened his first furniture store in Canton.



Interior of Mayer's first store, Riverside Drive, Canton, N.Y.

Anna Bennett Sperling

Anna's family had been among the original Jewish settlers in the North Country. They had "culture" but they were not wealthy. In Canton both parents worked in the store.

While her husband-to-be was living three or four different lives, one more exciting than the next, Anna too was growing up. After her high school graduation in 1918 she attended what would later be called Canton ATC, then known as the Aggie School. She was learning to be a dietician.

After college she, too, left Canton for a while. She worked in Rochester for six months as a student dietician in the Highland Hospital. But, back in Canton, her mother was very ill. Anna came back, took care of the family and never returned to Rochester.

During the nine years since Anna and Mayer had met, when they both were in Canton simultaneously, they were family friends. As Anna puts it, "I didn't go steady with Mayer, he was just like one of the family to me." Now he had a furniture store in Canton, and she lived in Canton again with her parents. Their friendship grew into a commitment. Anna's mother was still very ill. they had no fanfare or wedding. Instead, the young couple eloped. It was Sunday afternoon, August 11, 1925. They stopped at the home of friends in Watertown and Mayer called a rabbi. Since Mayer was on a business trip anyway, the newlyweds had a week or ten days of traveling honeymoon to look forward to.

Ogdensburg

Roy Vilas, an Ogdensburg native, was making his mark in the financial world. While visiting in Canton, he suggested to Mayer that he set up his business in Ogdensburg rather than remain in Canton. Says son, Bernard, "Mr. Vilas apparently felt that the community would be good for my parents and they would be an asset to the community."[5] Ogdensburg was the shipping, freighting, lumbering, and retail center of the North Country. Here the railroads crossed and the mighty St. Lawrence River provided shipping traffic. Anna's parents were planning to move to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where their two sons were practicing law, so there was no reason to stay in Canton.

Mayer opened his first store on the 200 block on Ford Street. It was an immediate success. People remembered "the little fella" who'd been buying their furs and hides. And Mayer remembered everybody by name, what their mother cooked best, who their sister had married. His success mounted.

Around 1929 he felt the need to have a larger store. He bought out his competitor, a Mr. Wiedy, and moved his furniture into Mr. Wiedy's store on the 100 block on Ford Street. It was a big old building, several floors and a squeaky elevator. Anna would later describe it to her children as "full of rats." Although Anna did not work in the store, she came by often. The employees, "a convivial group," would tease her and tell her that "the rats were coming out of the woodwork." Anna was pregnant at this time and she remembered "they had me near hysterical most of the time."

Son Bernard was born and Anna settled into motherhood. Bernard would later describe his mother in these terms: "She was delightfully modern in many ways. She epitomized the traditional housewife; her responsibility was with the house and with the children. Always interested in my father's business and his career, she contributed from the sidelines, but pointedly refrained from being an active participant in the business."

Around 1931, when Bernard was still a toddler, Mayer moved to a building on the corner of Ford and Isabella Streets. From this new location Sperlings became "*the* Furniture Store of Northern New York." Over the next ten years the business grew and grew. Mayer opened branch stores in Malone, in Massena, in Potsdam, and although he "took his lumps" during the Depression, with the help of area bankers, because he had

"a wonderful reputation for integrity," he was able to extricate himself. In 1935 a daughter, Rena, was born, and the family was complete.

But also in these years, the late thirties, while the Sperlings stores were expanding, the world in general "was kind of winding up to a pretty horrible climax." Mayer Sperling, the successful businessman, was trying, in vain, to bring his relatives over from the Old Country before it was too late. But the America of the late thirties was not nearly as hospitable to new immigrants as it had been years before. In 1938 Mayer got word that his father and mother had died, within a month to the day of each other. Mayer met what was perhaps his first "real sadness." He corresponded with sisters and nieces for a while, but after 1940 there were no more letters at all from the Old Country . . .

With the involvement of the United States in World War II, at the end of 1941 Mayer decided that life "was going on at a pace that he really wasn't enjoying." He began to think of the farming life, of the tranquility in the Parker household, of his rural upbringing in Opatow. On April 1, 1942, he sold his Ogdensburg store to one of his employees, bought two farms near the Sperling home on the eastern end of Ogdensburg, and went into farming in a big way.

He had horses, up to 20 at a time, over 60 dairy cows, "literally thousands of chickens, running loose on a range" and a "little" ten acre vegetable garden. "Although the farm was a lot of fun," says son Bernard, "I suspect it was a financial disaster."

As the war was winding down, because he didn't feel good about the way the furniture business was being handled by the man to whom he had sold it, Mayer, perhaps somewhat reluctantly, stepped back into the retail business. He acquired a large warehouse building. "My father was perhaps 15 or 20 years ahead of his time. The warehouse store had not yet been born, except in my father's mind. Later the Levit family in Pennsylvania was to create a revolution in the furniture industry by doing much the same as my father thought of in 1944." Later Mayer bought the National Bank building in Ogdensburg and converted that to a furniture store. Though "his heart wasn't really in the retail business" he seemed to succeed almost in spite of himself.

By 1950 Mayer might have actually stepped out of the retail business altogether, but now his son, Bernard, a graduate of St. Lawrence University, became involved in the business. Mayer

had been suffering for quite some years from asthma and emphysema. He gradually turned responsibilities over to his son. Under Anna's "expert nursing care" he could continue to live a more relaxed and perhaps pleasurable life.

Although they were not Jews of the Orthodox variety, the Sperlings were strong supporters of the Synagogue Anshe Zophen, and for some time Mayer was president of the Congregation. He was also a strong supporter of the Boy Scouts, and at one time was chairman of the St. Lawrence County Council of Boy Scouts. And always, even in his later years, when Mayer came into the store, he remembered by name, or by face, the children or the grandchildren of the farmers he had visited in the days when he was on the road.

Today, Mayer and Anna live a more private life in their home on Proctor Avenue. Their son, Bernard, is president of *Sperlings, Inc.* Their daughter, Rena Goldberg, whose husband, Milton, is with the firm also, lives in Ogdensburg too. And there are grandchildren working in the business: Bernard's son Mark and Carry Welt, his son-in-law. The third generation of Ogdensburg Sperlings . . .

FOOTNOTES

[1]From a taped conversation with Bernard Sperling, June 4, 1981.

[2]Mayer's younger brothers Harry and Carl did eventually emigrate to Canada, the only other members of his family to leave the Old Country.

[3]This and other direct quotes from Mayer Sperling himself are taken from a taped conversation between Mayer and Louis Greenblatt on December 3, 1973.

[4]A history of the Katzman family can be found in the Gouverneur section of *Before Us*, a history of early Jewish families in St. Lawrence County.

[5]Ibid. #1. This and the following unnoted quotes come from the conversation with Bernard.

Eli and Fanny Rosenbaum of the Hippodrome Theater

Gentle People, Who Worked Hard, and Loved Well

Around 1888 Eli Dov[1] Rosenbaum would have been a little boy of no more than 10 or 11, but he already had a job. In his simple home in the rural village of Antopol (Province of Grodno, White Russia), this fifth child of the village scribe spent long hours hand-rolling cigarettes for "a meager wage of a few pennies a day."[2] And these few pennies he gave to his mother to help with the family income.



Moishe Rosenbaum, father of Eli, taken mid-late 1800 in Antopol, Poland.

Eli had been born probably in December of 1878.[3] His father, Moishe (Morris) Rosenbaum, was a master of the Torah who, because he was literate, kept local records, wrote letters for the townsfolk, and taught the children (at least his own) the Yiddish equivalent of the three R's. There were, at this point in time, four other Rosenbaum children: Amelia, called Michle by the family, born 1865; David, born 1875; Lena, who would marry Abraham Friedman (brother of Isaac) and make her life in America, born 1877; and Israel, the musician, whose birthdate is not known. Their mother, Ruth Roslyn, was "the

real breadwinner for the family," Eli would later tell his children. With horse and wagon, she made the rounds of nearby farms, buying produce (eggs, milk, chickens) which she then would sell in the surrounding villages. By 1888, Eli's sister, Michle, had already been five years married to Isaac Friedman, was the mother of a two year old daughter, Rose, and may have already joined her husband, Isaac, in America. By 1888 Eli's mother, Ruth, was soon to die.

In the shtetl of Antopol there was no public school. And although they lived in what was now Russia, the Rosenbaum children "learned very little of the Russian language. Their everyday language was Yiddish, and the language of the synagogue, and of serious study, was Hebrew." Aside from what their father taught them, the only formal education they received was at "the synagogue, where they studied Hebrew by reading and memorizing the Talmud and the Torah." And because Russian life, with the Czars' bizarre and inhumane conscription policies,[4] was fast becoming unbearable for the Polish Jews, the boys also were trained in skills which might help them were they to make their way to America. "It was customary for a boy to be partially trained in some trade, tailoring or shoemaking, or to hammer brass into articles for everyday use or decoration." Eli received some training as a tailor.[5]

In the late 1880's (we do not have an exact date) Eli's mother, Ruth, died. His father married again, this time a widow, Sarah Jemerin, with a small daughter, Molly, about four years old. (Molly would later marry Samuel Noah Livshatz, and with her husband make her life in New York City.) Moishe set about raising a second family. Besides Molly, there were soon born two more children, Edith (1892) and Saul (who would eventually settle in Massena, New York; born 1895—17 years after his half-brother, Eli, and 27 years after his half-sister, Michle).[7] Sarah did not live long as Moishe's wife. She died in 1896. Moishe married a third time, this time a woman by the name of Riva Gittel (who, according to townsfolk, remained barren as punishment for her cruel treatment of the little Rosenbaum children). But Eli had nothing to worry from Riva (in fact, he may never have met her) because around 1896 (according to his application for citizenship, already in 1894)[8] he left Russia, probably by steerage across the Atlantic to dock at Ellis Island.

America

Eli's eldest sister, Michle, and her husband, Isaac Friedman

met him at Ellis Island. As soon as he had been cleared by customs, they brought him north to their home in Syracuse, New York. Here in Syracuse Isaac had managed to establish a women's skirt factory, where women's clothing was made by hand and sewing machine, later to be peddled throughout the surrounding countryside. Eli worked in his brother-in-law's factory, and it was here that he fully mastered the tailor's trade. But it was not an easy few years, this apprenticeship period. He worked long and hard for little pay, and aside from the perfecting of his tailoring skills, there was English to be learned, and the citizenship exam to be studied for. And somehow, he must save money, for he must have some capital if he was ever to go into business on his own. Eli was bound and determined to push himself forward, despite the odds. He economized by buying cartons of the cheapest canned foods available, and subsisting on them:

"He would go to one of the large department stores and look for canned goods on sale at the lowest price, live for the next week or more on this canned food, and then repeat the process. One time he told me (his son, Maurice) that he could not stand the taste of canned pears. This was one of the cheapest items he could buy. He had had so many canned pears as a youth in Syracuse he never wanted to see a canned pear in our home."[9]

In the future (at least by the time Saul was working for Isaac)[10] peddlers would buy skirts from the factory wholesale, later to sell them at a profit, but in those early days, Isaac himself traveled about the North Country selling the clothing produced in his factory. In this way he became familiar with the area. Isaac was especially impressed with the fast-growing towns of Ogdensburg and Massena, so that when, having mastered his craft, young Eli felt ready to start out on his own, Isaac suggested Ogdensburg as a possible location.

By 1900 Eli was an Ogdensburg resident. A 1900-01 Ogdensburg directory lists him as boarding on Patterson Street, and working as a tailor on 85 Ford Street. And that same year, on August 4, he received his American citizenship. The next year or so he moved from Patterson Street to Caroline Street, but continued his business at 85 Ford Street, and on January 27, 1901,[11] he purchased the tailoring establishment at 85 Ford Street from Frank Josephson, who had until then been either his employer or his landlord.

Eli, who "was ambitious and anxious that his business venture grow," added to the tailor shop a men's haberdashery

store, in which he sold "men's shirts, neckties, derby hats, underwear, socks and collars, jewelry, collar buttons, cuff links, handkerchiefs, necktie pins, and all sorts of men's clothing accessories."[12] The custom tailor shop was in back.

As a tailor, Eli took great pride in his work. "He would take the measurements, make the paper patterns, cut the cloth, and do the tailoring by hand and by sewing machine." According to his half-brother, Saul, "often Eli would work half through the night to complete a suit on time as promised to a customer and . . . the suits he made were the finest."

By 1904 Eli had worked very hard and prospered, and "the time came when it was suitable for him to have a wife."

Fanny Goldufsky (Gordon or Golden) Rosenbaum

Fanny Goldufsky (in America, called Gordon) had been born in Syracuse in July of 1882 of immigrant parents, Israel and Flora Goldufsky. She was the oldest of six children, and had to help raise the family, but she did attend grade school in Syracuse, and possibly even high school (which was quite a lot of education for a girl of her time). Fanny grew up in a household where the sharp delineations of sex role were perhaps a little blunted by individual personality. Her father, a tailor, was "a soft-spoken, thin, gentle, quiet person," while her mother was "the dominating influence of the family." (Could this help explain why later, Fanny could so easily take her place as Eli's wife, not beneath, but beside, her husband?)

The Goldufskys had done well enough financially to purchase two houses on Grape Street in Syracuse, one in front of the other. They lived in the rear and rented the front house. Grandson Maurice describes them as "an average, middle class, American family of that period." By 1904, their little daughter, Fanny, with her thick dark hair and lovely soft eyes, had grown into a woman of 21, definitely of marriageable age.

The Shiduch

The Goldufsky family rented the front house at 911 Grape Street to a Rosenthal family. The Rosenthals were somehow related to the Friedmans. Mrs. Rosenthal, Michle Friedman, and Mr. and Mrs. Goldufsky "got together and decided that the couple (Eli and Fanny) would be suitable for each other." There were many things taken into consideration. (The fact that Eli had less formal education than Fanny, for example, was balanced by the fact that Fanny would have little in the

way of a dowry to bring into the marriage.) In this way, the families arranged the Shiduch (marriage plans). Eli was invited to Syracuse to meet his bride.

He was around 25; she was 21. Yet they had, so think their children, neither of them before had a boyfriend or a girlfriend. One can imagine their shy anticipation, their eyes meeting at that first introduction. And they obviously did please each other. There were visits and letters.[13] The wedding took place on May 15, 1904, in Syracuse.



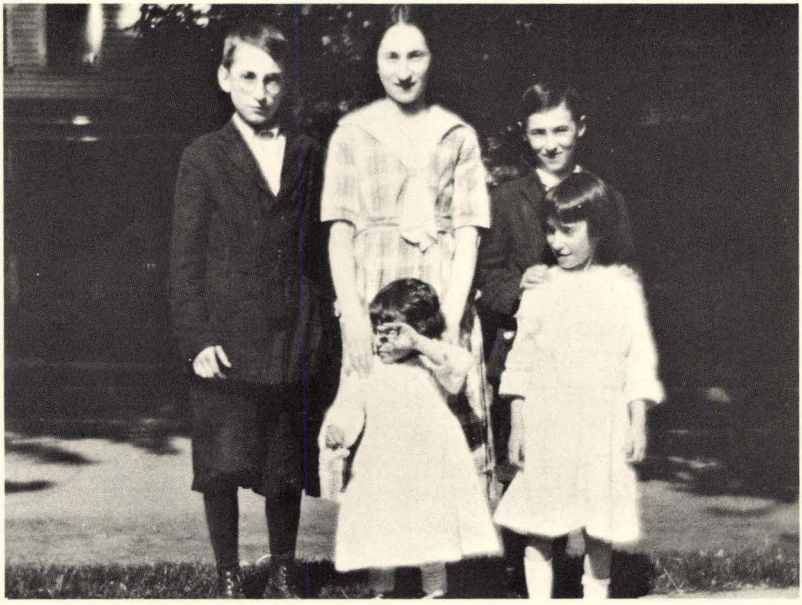
Wedding photo of Eli Rosenbaum and Fanny Goldufsky, 1904.

Fanny came to Ogdensburg as a young bride. They were from the start, close, and in every way, equal. Eli was, had always been, as Saul put it, "a gentle person, always cheerful, optimistic, and hopeful for the future." In regards to Fanny: "He held her in greatest respect." They discussed everything together so that there were no one-sided decisions. And Fanny, in turn, in the earlier years helped out in the tailor shop, and later, in her middle years, worked side by side with her husband in the movie theater which they were to own and manage.

In 1905 the couple bought their first home, a small house on Hamilton Street. That same year, on March 16, in the Hepburn Hospital, a first son was born. But what should have been a joyous occasion was tragic instead. Either at birth, or soon afterward, the child died, and, whether rightly or not, Fanny

blamed the hospital. She would never again make use of a hospital for childbirth.

Almost exactly a year later, on March 20, 1906, a second child, Ruth Roslyn, named after Eli's mother, was born, at home, in the house on Hamilton Street. She must have given her parents a good deal of joy, because they were soon thinking in terms of more children. In May of that year, "realizing the Hamilton Street house would not be large enough for a growing family" the Rosenbaums bought a very large, two-story house, on the corner of Franklin Street and Lafayette Street (at that time, 114 Franklin Street, today, 728 Franklin Street) directly across from the St. Mary's Cathedral. Eli was later to tell his children that when he purchased the house "a couple of the Fathers came over to watch the house being painted . . . Asked him why he wanted such a large house; he responded to them that since he was living in a Catholic neighborhood he expected to be like his neighbors, to fill the house, all four bedrooms, with children."[14] Four more Rosenbaum children were born in the house: Myron Gordon, November 21, 1907; Maurice Milton, June 14, 1909; Betty Belle, November 20, 1912; and Edith Sarah, May 27, 1917.



The Rosenbaum children. Front row, L to R: Edith, 3 years; Betty, 8 years. Back row: Myron, 12 years; Ruth, 14 years; Maurice, 11 years. Summer 1920.

And here, in the Irish Catholic neighborhood, the children grew, and played. Says Maurice:

"All the neighbors were Irish Catholics. As kids, our playmates were the Kellys, O'Briens, the Belgards, etc. The cathedral, a very beautiful building across the street from our home, was surrounded by large lawns on which we children played ball and other games in summer. In the winter we used our sleds to slide down a churchyard slope, across Franklin Street and then downhill east on Lafayette Street, past the mid-block lane."[15]

Ruth Roslyn remembers a less idyllic childhood:

"My comment on growing up as a girl in a predominantly gentile environment in a time when rules for girls' conduct were very strict and straight-laced, is that I was a lonely child and lacked friends my own age. I also had to wear glasses from the age of 10 years, and had the usual adolscent pimples, so that my own image of myself was not the best! I compensated by reading a great deal and excelling in school studies. The boys in the family had more freedom. We had a lot of music at home, our own homemade group, and that pleased our parents, and enhanced our lives."[16]

Eli had as good friends many of the Fathers who lived in the rectory adjacent to the cathedral, and made clothing for them. The tailoring business continued to expand. According to son Maurice, "It was said in Ogdensburg that if you did not wear custom made clothes by Eli Rosenbaum, you were not in style in the early 1900's." The shop on 85 Ford Street, as the children remember it, was a busy place, buzzing with sewing machines. Eli had at least one woman employee working with him, and according to Saul, at one point he rented a part of the shop to a dressmaker, who herself had employees and sewing machines.

Around 1908 Eli purchased a block on Ford Street.[17] Four years later, on February 11, 1912, the building on what was then 64 Ford Street (at that time occupied by R.H. Hulett and W.E. Church, Jewelers) caught fire, and was gutted.

It had been happening, since the turn of the century, that motion picture theaters were springing up throughout the United States. Eli was aware of the trend. Now he took advantage of the burn-out to jump up onto the movie theater bandwagon. Borrowing money from St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York, he (with the help of a local builder) designed and built in place of the burned building, a movie theater:

"This building was five stories high, and was the tallest

building on this city block. High on the front of this was inscribed *Rosenbaum Block 1908.* The building held a billiard parlor in the basement, then . . . two stories for the theater and its balcony. The theater seated approximately 250 people. The fourth floor was occupied at one time by dental offices and then by the Moose Lodge, and later a business school. The fifth floor was a large hall where square dances were held, and was even used for playing basketball.[18]

In these years Saul Rosenbaum (who in 1906 had also immigrated to America and gotten a start with the Friedmans, who themselves, in 1909, moved north to Massena)[19] was peddling in the Ogdensburg area, and living with Eli and Fanny on weekends, and also during the cold winter months, when deep snows and muddy roads made peddling close to impossible. It was at Saul's suggestion that the new theater building be named *The Hippodrome.*



Ford Street, 1921. The Hippodrome is the tallest white building on the right. (Published in *Ogdensburg Journal* in 1974.)

Fanny and Eli shared the responsibilities of the theater in true partnership. Writes Maurice:

"I have always known my mother to have been present daily, supervising the lobby and the theater. Thus, the two worked together in the operation of this family business. I can recall Eli always dictating his business letters to Fanny and her writing them in long hand for him. She kept all the books and accounts. She was present at the theater for each matinee and then for each evening show. I wonder now what they talked of each night as they returned home from the night's show to-

gether, walking the seven or eight short city blocks from the theater to their home through the lovely maple tree lined streets of Ogdensburg. They never had a horse and buggy, nor did they ever own an automobile when such became available in later years. They never had a telephone in the home or in the theater."[20]

They shared the responsibilities of home life in the same sense of true partnership. Behind the house on Franklin Street, Eli had his garden. "He raised vegetables, radishes, lettuce, cucumbers, tomatoes, beets, carrots . . . coming home from his work at noontime, hoeing for a bit in the garden, taking a short nap, and then back to the shop or theater for his afternoon and evening of work." These vegetables, and also vegetables and fruits brought into town by farmers from the outlying countryside, Fanny would spend long late summer days canning "and storing in 'innumerable' Mason jars in the food cellar cupboards for winter months' food." The taste of her canned food would remain in her children's memories. Even her pears were so deliciously prepared that, despite his Syracuse experience, Eli would enjoy them.

But Eli shared in the home with more than his garden. Unlike so many men of his era, Eli did not spurn the kitchen. It was he who got up first thing in the morning to cook breakfast for the children:

"He would start up the fire in the kitchen wood and coal stove in order to warm up the kitchen that it be pleasant for the children when they got up. He would cook the children's breakfast, making them hot oatmeal and hot cocoa, eggs, etc., taking great pleasure in seeing that all were fed before going off to school. I can recall Papa's specialty being the baked apple. He loved to make large pans of apples, baked with brown sugar. I guess he felt an apple a day kept the doctor away."[21]

For the Rosenbaum family, the Sabbath meal was especially precious:

"At sundown our father would read the Hebrew prayer, welcoming the Sabbath 'like the bride,' as the prayer states. Then came the blessing of the bread and wine. In place of wine, Fanny's delicious homemade Concord grape juice was used. With the blessing of the bread, our father would break off a small piece for each. In unison we would repeat the blessing in Hebrew, 'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who causes the earth to yield food for all.' The bread was

eaten. Then a small glass of grape juice was poured for each and again, in unison, the prayer for wine was given in Hebrew: 'Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, Who created the fruit of the vine.' Then the 'wine' was drunk, and the dinner served."[22]

And so they lived, and so they grew older. On May 11, 1928, a newspaper clipping reports that at last, after 25 years of vacationless marriage, the Rosenbaums were to take a wedding trip. Retirement years were fast approaching. Now, with three of the children in college, or already graduated from college, their youngest, a big girl of 11, they could rightfully slow down. In 1931 Eli and Fanny sold *The Hippodrome* to Julius Frank and B.A. Evans. The theater building was now transformed into the new *Frank Department Store.*[23] And they had long since disposed of the Ford Street business. Although still quite young people, only in their 50's, the Rosenbaums were able to enjoy a more relaxed pace. They had divided their large house into apartments, and from these apartments they had enough revenue to live their simple, but comfortable life.



Fanny and Eli converting their home into an apartment house, January 1932.

In November, 1942, Eli Rosenbaum died of cancer. Fanny died of a heart attack fourteen years later, on March 30, 1956. They were both buried in the cemetery of Anshe Zophen in Ogdensburg.

The Younger Rosenbaums

The three girls, Ruth Roslyn, Betty Belle, and Edith Sarah became social workers. Ruth attended St. Lawrence University in Canton, and became a social worker. She married Louis Redstone, architect and artist. Both she and her husband are listed in *Who's Who in American Jewry.*

Betty graduated from the University of Buffalo, and from Smith College School of Social Work. She recently retired after 25 years as a social worker in Boulder, Colorado, where her

husband, Harold Bloom, has recently retired from a professorship in geochemistry. They had two children, William, who died in 1955, and Lillian, who studied social work. Lillian and her husband, a classical guitarist, live in Portland, Maine.

Edith attended Wayne University in Detroit, became a social worker. She married Phillip Eisenberg, a hydronautic engineer, moved to Washington, D.C. and for many years was school attendance officer there. While raising their two daughters in Washington, she was president of the local Hadassah, and editor of the Hadassah newspaper for the greater Washington area.

Both Myron G. and Maurice M. attended Medical School at the University of Buffalo, the first time in the history of the Medical School that two brothers were admitted simultaneously to their freshman program. Myron eventually became an orthopedic surgeon, Maurice specialized in abdominal surgery. Myron and his wife, Florence, have two children, Ralph, a doctor of physics, who lives in Israel, and Michele, whose husband is an internist.

Commented Angela Thaler, our editor: "It is interesting that all five turned in their careers to fields that involved solving the problems of others, whether emotional or physical."

All of the younger Rosenbaums devote much of their effort to Jewish causes and commitments. Could growing up in a caring family have given them the desire to help others? Perhaps having had a childhood where memories of close family Sabbaths reigned, even in a predominantly Christian environment, gave the young Rosenbaums a firm love of their faith and heritage.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Eli is spelled variously, "Eli" or "Ely". I have chosen "Eli" simply to be consistent. "Dov" in Hebrew means "Bear".

[2]This direct quote, and the others not noted, were taken from a family history written by the Rosenbaum's son, Maurice, in 1976. Much of the information comes from his own memories, and those of his father's half-brother, Saul Rosenbaum, of Massena.

[3]Maurice believes that the date, April 18, 1877, given in Eli's obituary in the *Ogdensburg Journal* is inaccurate, and believes December of the next year is more probably true.

[4]From the 1976 History: As Saul Rosenbaum explained it to Maurice—In the 1800's Jews were conscripted into the Czar's army by the age of 12 and up, "many were forced to serve from twenty to twenty-five years before being permitted to return to their homes. Whenever possible, the youths tried to avoid this severe, degrading, laborious, slave-like army service. In the army the rations would be mostly pork. This desecration of the dietary laws was unspeakable for the Jewish soldier. The taking of the young Jewish child was part of the ruling class's plan to separate them from their families and force Christian assimilation on them.

[5]Ibid. #2.

[6]I am assuming she died in the late 1880's, since Eli remembered her around the age of 10 (which would have been after 1887) and since Moishe remarried around 1890.

[7]Eli's half-brother, Saul, came to America in 1906. After spending a little time with his half-sister, Molly, in New York, he also came to Syracuse, to the Friedmans, and there worked in the skirt factory. While there, he saw well-dressed peddlers coming in to buy clothing. He too, he decided, would become a peddler. A section of the life of Saul Rosenbaum is included in this volume under "Massena."

[8]According to Louis Greenblatt's research.

[9]This is taken from an essay on "The Early Life" written by Maurice Milton Rosenbaum on August 29, 1975.

[10]See note #7.

[11]From *Ogdensburg Advance*, January 27, 1921, pg. 3, under "Twenty Years Ago."

[12]See note #2, also for the following, unnoted quotes.

[13]A touching letter written to Fanny from Eli during their courtship period is in Maurice Rosenbaum's possession.

[14]See note #9.

[15]See note #2.

[16]Letter to Joan Dobbie, June 10, 1981.

[17]I am assuming the date, 1908, since that is the date Eli put on the inscription.

[18]See note #2.

[19]See section on the Friedmans, under Massena section.

[20]See note #2.

[21]See note #2.

[22]Family memories by Maurice Rosenbaum.

[23]See section on Frank families.

Historical research on the Rosenbaum family was done by Mrs. Elizabeth Knapp in February 1977 and by Mrs. P. Boyesen in 1978 and '79, both of Ogdensburg. The fruits of this research have been shared with us by Dr. Maurice Rosenbaum.

Rothenberg Family

Lady Bird

Large families were the norm for Orthodox Jews of the 19th Century Russian Pale. In the village of Logishon, Poland (or what had been Poland but was now a Russian territory), Marsha, the wife of Aaron Yonkel Kletenik (Kline) bore 10 children, of whom seven lived to grow up. The Klines were comparatively well-off for shtetl Jews—they lived in a "fine brick house"—but still they suffered the hardships that were for that time and place as much the norm as were large families. The town of Logishon had its share of pogroms (organized attacks on the Jewish population); and, of course, one by one the Kline sons were inducted into military service; at one point their family was evicted from the brick house—the Russians took it over as troop headquarters. In Logishon, as in the other Polish/Russian shtetls there circulated the rumor that across the Atlantic, in America, a Jew could live in peace.

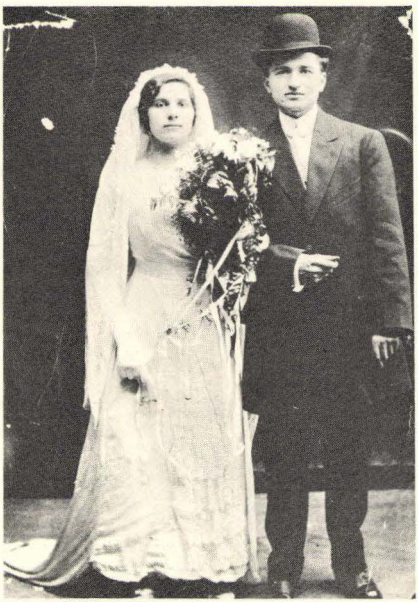
One of their older daughters, Esther, had married a Yussel Schwartzburg, and emigrated with her husband and children to New York City. In 1903 the Klines sent their youngest daughter, 13 year old Yetta Fagel, to join the Schwartzburgs in New York. When translated literally from the Yiddish, "Yetta Fagel" means "Lady Bird". The name, if one judges by memories of her adult personality, was in itself a fitting description of her. She was "diminutive"[1], "attractive", light hearted and quick witted. And she must have been brave as well to make the long, irreversable journey on her own.

Her mother packed her enough food to last a week. Yetta lied about her age (you had to be 15 to emigrate legally), and took the train to Antwerp. From Antwerp she got on a boat, prob-

ably traveling by steerage, to New York City, where the relatives were expecting her. She later recalled drinking beer for the first time on the trip, and even though it made her nose red, she would have a fondness for a "little" drink all her life.

Young as she was, Yetta Fagel was soon a working girl. She got a job as a piecemaker in a clothing factory. And young as she was, she turned out to be an excellent seamstress, graduating from "piecemaker" to "finisher," which was like being the head of the class. (The "class", of course, was an overcrowded tenement factory.) "She was very well acquainted with the building where the 'Triangle Fire' occurred."

Rubin Rothenberg



Rubin and Yetta Rothenberg wedding photo, December 1911.

Yetta would have been about 15, around 1906, when she met the young immigrant tailor, Rubin Rothenberg. They made a striking couple: she, so tiny, dark, with olive skin, black hair and eyes; he, tall, with red hair and gray eyes. Rubin had a shy, quiet way about him; he was an intellectual, a philosopher by nature, as different in personality from Yetta as he was in appearance.

Rubin was born on February 27, 1885, in Zaremba, Poland (now Russia), had apprenticed there as a tailor. At 16 he had escaped Russia and the imminent draft situation by making his way to America. Like Yetta, Rubin had been helped by his family. Two brothers, already in the U.S., had contributed to pay his passage over. Now, at 21, he was working in a New York shop, where he specialized in making tailored clothes for women. Rubin was naturalized on July 6, 1911; their wedding took place on December 21 of that same year, after five years of courtship.[2]

As a married man, Rubin wanted to start out on his own; and they both wanted to get out of the city. There was a close friend

of Rubin's, Sam Zeitlin, who lived in Watertown, New York. Watertown might offer some opportunity, Sam had written. They did come to Watertown, stayed for a while with the Zeitlins, but Rubin couldn't seem to locate a place to set up shop there. Sam suggested he try Ogdensburg, where, apparently, there was need for a tailor. Rubin looked around Ogdensburg, finally finding a spot on the second floor of a building in downtown Ford Street, "the only place that was available in the whole community for the shop." In later years, when asked why he decided to settle in Ogdensburg, Rubin said he had fallen in love with the St. Lawrence River.

Ogdensburg

It was the beginning of a very precious time in their lives. At last out of the city and on their own, both of them "very young eager beavers," they leapt enthusiastically into their new independent life, away from the congestion, the factories, the tensions. They rented a house on Morris Street, and immediately started a garden by the side of the house. "No one had ever seen two young people work that hard on a garden." And their hard work soon bore fruit (vegetables, that is). The Rothenberg garden "apparently became the envy of the whole neighborhood." Soon Yetta Fagel also "bore fruit'. In 1914, into the hands of Ogdensburg's "most proper of proper gentlemen", Dr. Cooper (who was to deliver all six of the Rothenberg children, and become a dear family friend), a first son, Joseph, was born. Within two years they had a daughter, Sarah, and in another two years a second son, Abe, was born.

These were fast moving, positive, years. Because Rubin's skill was good, his business was good. It was not long before some of Ogdensburg's finest ladies were sporting suits tailored by Rubin Rothenberg. While Yetta applied her sewing skills to her present occupation, that of a young matron; she sewed all of the children's clothing. She also became an excellent kosher cook. They moved several times: from Morris Street, to Knox Street; from Knox Street to Denny Street. They were busy with the children, busy with their various homes, busy with their work, and with the community.

They devoted time and energy to Congregation Anshe Zophen.[3] Rubin, who had attended Cheder in the Old Country, could daven well; Yetta joined the Ladies Aid Society. And though they were active in the Jewish Community, though they spoke Yiddish at home or with their Jewish friends, the Rothen-

bergs did not confine their social life to the Jewish Community. They quickly learned English, and began to make "friends of all religions, and of all social standings in the community."

The Ogdensburg sun might have continued to shine on the Rothenberg family, but for one small quirk of fate. Ladies fashions changed. It happened during the post-war years, right around 1919, that women lost their interest in wearing tailored suits. The ladies tailoring business collapsed.

Rubin became a peddler. And then he turned to the fruit business. For a short period of time he worked in partnership with Abe Kopita, but the partnership didn't last. After that, his wife was his partner. Husband and wife together supported the family with a retail, and later a wholesale, fruit business.

Twice a week, this philosopher of a man, who "should have been a teacher," would make the four or five hour trip to Syracuse to pick up fruit. He spent the night there, usually sleeping in the truck, sometimes in a hotel room nearby. The market would open about 4:00 a.m. He would load up his ton and a half truck, leave Syracuse around 6:00 or 7:00 a.m., arriving home at around noon to begin his rounds, selling large quantities of fruits to stores in Ogdensburg and the outlying communities, and to such institutions as the Ogdensburg State Hospital.

Yetta, meanwhile, handled the retail end of the business. The store was in a separate building about a half a block away from the house. She took care of the horse, who was stabled about three blocks from the house. And she took care of the children, who lived in the house. And so, "she had to learn all the shortcuts." Which she did. She not only continued to cook, to sew, to be active in the community, but she was such a business woman that her son, Abe, remarks, "I've always said that if my mother had been the business manager rather than my father, the Rothenbergs would have wound up being a wealthy family."

In 1921 the family was forced to face another kind of hardship. Three-and-a-half year old Abe came down with polio. For three months he was bed-ridden. When he had recovered, but lost the use of his legs, he was sent to the Elmira Reconstruction Home for rehabilitation—to learn to function with his handicap. Although the Ogdensburg Rotary Club helped pay for the hospitalizations, for Yetta and Rubin, their child's illness was a severe strain. They were torn between the business and the illness. He was such a young child. And Elmira was so far. Only on rare occasions could they leave the business for the

length of time it took to visit him. These were 11 difficult months. And there were other separations for subsequent operations.

The separations were especially difficult because theirs was a sharing, close family. When Joseph grew old enough, he worked with his father before and after school. Sarah and Abe helped on the retail end. The Rothenbergs became known throughout the county as the people with the fruit business. And when the Depression hit, they never had to worry about going hungry: "We always had something to eat. It might have been an apple or a banana that was getting a little ripe, but there were always vegetables and fruit available."

Two more children, Ethel (1923) and Edna (1929) were born. While all the children "thought a great deal of their father," it was busy, active, Yetta Fagel who "brought up the family . . . set the tone . . . and the standards." From his many days and nights on the road, Rubin had learned "what it was like not to be kosher," but Yetta kept a strictly kosher home, and at home "he was just as kosher as she was." She saw to it that her children took piano lessons; she taught the girls how to sew. ("She would have taught the boys too, if we'd permitted it.")

From their father, the children learned to love books. While both parents religiously read the Yiddish "Forward," Rubin also had quite a library of Jewish stories and philosophical books, and used to do a great deal of reading, in Yiddish. With her father's love of literature, Abe remembers, his sister Sarah would bring home from the public library four or five books a week, "everything from detective stories to romantic adventures." And they would read. And read. and read.

While they participated only slightly in sports, the Rothenberg children indeed enjoyed exercising their minds. "One of the greatest things that happened in our house when we were growing up was the political discussion and argument that ensued over the breakfast table. We all took different sides. You really had to know your history." And the parents? Rubin called himself a *Socialist*—a shocking word! (He really was a *Liberal.*) Yetta agreed. They remembered the New York Sweatshops, the exploitation of labor.

Not only on the political level, but on the personal level, they were caring people. They never forgot the family in Russia; no matter how hard the times, they never forgot to send money, clothing, whatever goods the Russians would allow. Ethel recalls:

"I remember packages being prepared to send to Russia. Weeks went into the planning—nothing but good clothing and little goodies in the pockets. Then packing it all together, and addressing it properly, and then praying it reached the proper people. A huge project, but really a sacred trust. They (back there) had so little. As poor as we were, they had nothing at all, and looked to their American relatives for help."

In Ogdensburg the Rothenberg home was noted for its hospitality. Says Abe:

"Ours was the first place a new rabbi would visit . . . not only rabbis . . . beggars . . . any wandering Jew. They all knew how to find our home. My mother and father never turned anyone away."

In 1927 the family moved to 1005 Ford Street, buying a house, and at last, in this new location, they were able to have the shop in with the house. Here, in the new home on Ford Street, the youngest Rothenberg, Morris, was born in 1934.

But with the Depression of the '30's the wholesale fruit business died. The retail store held up for a few years longer. Abe, who was now in his teens, tried to convince his father to take up that new business that was just emerging after the prohibition era, the beer business. But, "he wouldn't have anything to do with alcohol." Instead, Rubin became a dealer of junk and scrap metal. And a junk dealer he remained until, when he was in his sixties, his son, Abe (who had secured employment with *Sperlings Furniture Store*)[4] eased him out of business. In his retirement, Rubin turned more and more inward, living as he perhaps would always have liked to live, in his books and within his own mind, or socializing with the few remaining older Jewish families: the Joseph Fishers, the Cohens, the Bakers, and the Rabbi Kimballs.

The children stepped out to get the educations their parents wished for them. Joseph started law school at Syracuse University, but a serious blood infection interrupted his law studies. Writes Ethel:

"When they serviced the Hepburn Hospital with fruits and vegetables, our mother became close friends with the nuns in charge of the food. When Joe was so ill in Syracuse, probably near death . . . the nuns told Mom they would add their prayers to hers—and fortunately it all worked out fine."

After a lengthy period of recuperation he received his B.A. degree from the University. Joseph went into business, married Frieda Gusfield, and moved to Chicago. They had one

daughter. Sarah graduated from Cornell, became a teacher. Abe studied radio, but remained with Sperlings until June 1981, when he retired as Vice-President of Finance. Abe is now president of Anshe Zophen, and devotes much of his life to charity. He and his wife, Gertrude (nee Spencer), live in their lovely new home on Williams Street in Ogdensburg. Ethel became a secretary, married Oscar Goldman, an engineer with IBM, moved to Rochester, and then Poughkeepsie, New York, where they raised one daughter and two sons. Edna became a nurse; and Morris, the youngest, "the tallest and the fairest," graduated from Cornell as a civil engineer. Morris and his wife, Margaret (nee Mintz), have two sons.

In 1955, at 70, Rubin died. Although Yetta must have missed him painfully, she kept her home and continued on. And although rheumatism weakened her, still she kept up her good humor. Even when senility began to confuse her, and she had to live in the United Helpers Home, still she was always pleasant and friendly. After being bed-ridden for over a year she died on January 3, 1979. It had been a hard life, but a good life. She had given it her best energy.

The Rubin Rothenbergs of Ogdensburg will be remembered as hard working, kind, warm, charitable people who loved their new country.

FOOTNOTES

[1]This and other quotes and anecdotes come from two separate conversations with the Rothenberg family, and later notes:
a) Louis Greenblatt spoke to Abe and Sarah Rothenberg on October 12, 1975.
b) Joan Dobbie spoke with Abe and his wife, Gertrude, on May 5, 1981.
c) Notes from Ethel Rothenberg Goldman; July 1981.

[2]Copies of Rubin's Naturalization papers, and of their wedding certificate, are in the possession of Abe Rothenberg in Ogdensburg. Abe also has worked out a family genealogy.

[3]In later years Rubin would read the "Mincha" Service on High Holidays. Yetta would receive acclaim for her outstanding devotion to the Sisterhood.

[4]See section on Sperlings in this volume. When Abe got this job, he was "happy to donate his first check to the Ogdensburg Rotary Club."

The Kopita Family

Among the members of the Ogdensburg congregation in those early years were the Kopitas: Abe—tall, blonde, a handsome, jolly man. A kind man, as his daughter-in-law, Lea Kopita, describes him. And Rose—very religious, hard-working, perhaps a little nervous. A woman who, when she was a grandmother, liked to go to Watertown to visit her grandchildren, and enjoy the "action" in the larger community. There were three Kopita sons: Julius (who was to become a podiatrist in Watertown), Frank (who would become an accountant, and, with his wife, Lea, travel around much of the world, on business, to finally, in 1951, settle back in Ogdensburg and start there his own accounting business),[1] and Robert (who would become a chemical engineer, and an inventor, also, as part of his work, traveling around much of the world).

The young Kopitas had, so to speak, traveling roots. Born on March 20, 1884, in a Polish village near Warsaw, Abe Kopita began globe-hopping as a teenager. Abe had a sister, Annie, who had married an Englishman, Percy Stevens. Sometime in the late 1880's Annie and Percy moved to South Africa, and then Annie sent for her brother, Abe. There were memories that Abe passed down to his children, of plays that they used to put on in South Africa, and of him, the pretty blonde boy, playing the part of the rabbi's wife in these plays.

The exact sequence of events beyond this gets somewhat hazy. At some time Annie and her husband lived in Panama (and then, when her husband died, she moved to New York City). Abe may have gone to Panama with the Stevens, or perhaps not; he spent some time in Canada, and in England as well. Around 1905, we find him in New York City, a young

man of 21, meeting his wife-to-be, Rose.

Rose Langsam, five years his senior, had been born October 17, 1880, in Austria. Exactly what her early life had been like is difficult to deduce. It doesn't match the stereotypes. She had, as her daughter-in-law recalls, an aristocratic bearing about her. Since, often, Austrian or German-born Jews were quite well off, this might be expected of her. On the other hand, she was deeply religious in the orthodox sense that was more common among the Polish than German-speaking Jews. The one story Rose often told of her early life was that she "sold a cow" to buy her ticket to America. Apparently she came from a rural background.

Abe Kopita did not like city life. He had a friend, Sam Rossoff, who was living in the North Country community of Tupper Lake. As Lea puts it, "He took a trip up north and saw this lovely North Country, and then went back, married Rose, and brought her up here."

Their first two children, Julius (1908) and Frank (1910) were born in Tupper Lake. But, perhaps for lack of a Jewish community there, Rose was not happy in Tupper Lake. They decided to move. Abe took a job with an Ogdensburg manufacturer of cigars, an O'Connor Company. In 1911 they moved from Tupper Lake to a house on Hasbrouck Street in Ogdensburg. He did not stay long with the cigar company. A local merchant, Joseph Ferris, got Abe started as a peddler, selling such products as sewing notions, wall hangings, and cooking utensils, to the farmers in the Ogdensburg area. All week, with horse and wagon, Abe traversed the countryside, coming home only on weekends to be with his wife and sons.

As a young peddler, Abe was made welcome by the farm families. He used to speak of the warm treatment they gave him. As an interesting sideline, when speaking of his early peddling days, he would mention that he always, when he came to a farmhouse, made certain that the horse was fed and cared for, before going inside and taking food himself. The horse was an all-important partner.

In 1912 the third Kopita son, Robert, was born. (He was a large baby, and Rose would remember how the doctor had her stand up, in American Indian fashion, to deliver.) For Rose, alone all week in the house with the three children, it must have been a lonely time, as it was for so many peddler's wives of that period. But Rose was not one to complain.

Both Abe and Rose took steps to make themselves at home in

Ogdensburg. They attended night school to learn English, and they both became fluent and literate in English. In time, Abe went from the business of peddling notions to the wholesale fruit and vegetable business, and for a long while he did well with that, buying the fruits and vegetables in Syracuse and then selling them to such institutions as the Hepburn Hospital and the Ogdensburg Hospital, and to the local grocery stores. There was a story he used to tell about his days as a fruit peddler, about one particular nun at Hepburn Hospital who became his friend. She gave him a gift, a St. Christopher's medal to protect his travels (by this time, he was traveling by truck, and no longer by horse and wagon), and he, the Jewish fruit seller, always carried that St. Christopher's medal in his truck, transferring it to each new vehicle that he bought.

The boys grew up during those years, and often, summers, they would work with him in the produce business. Young Frank, the middle son, especially enjoyed the give and take of financial dealing. This was for him a kind of "on the job training" in what would become his career, bookkeeping and accounting.

The fruit business grew, and Abe had several trucks, and hired people to drive for him. One of those who worked for Abe Kopita was a Bill Woods, who in time opened his own fruit and vegetable business in Ogdensburg. Mr. Woods in now retired, and his son operates the store on West South Street.

The Kopita household was strictly kosher, and Rose enthusiastically active in the Jewish Community. Her culinary gifts and cooperation as a member of the Anshe Zophen Ladies Aid Society were much appreciated. Abe too apparently had a good deal of religious education. He served for some time as Schochet (ritual slaughterer) for the Ogdensburg Jewish Community, and to be a Schochet, a person had to have been specifically trained.[3]

Outside the Jewish Community in Ogdensburg, the Kopitas were, as was the Jewish Community as a whole, very much respected and liked. But there was one time, Rose and Abe would recall, when the Jews of Ogdensburg felt a coldness and reserve in the aspect of their Christian neighbors. In was Yom Kippur time, 1928, when a child disappeared in Massena, and the Jews were accused of having kidnapped her as a ritual sacrifice.[4] At this time, and only during this time, the Kopitas remembered feeling that they, as Jews, were being looked upon with a kind of coldness and distrust.

As boys growing up in the greater Ogdensburg community, Julius, Frank, and Robert were very much part of that community. They were popular in high school, did well in sports. Frank was the first Jewish boy, so his wife tells us, to win three varsity letters in one year. (There was a family story that Abe almost fell out of the balcony at the Armory on Ford Street once, when Frank made the last play that "saved the day" in a basketball game.) Yes, the parents were proud of their American sons. But they tried, also, to raise them within the boundaries of traditional Judaism. And in Ogdensburg, even with a synagogue, this was difficult.

They sent the boys to Hebrew School, but the cultural clash between the American-born children, and the often-changing immigrant old-world style rabbis was all too apparent. And as the Kopita boys grew into men, they let go of a lot of the traditional values that their parents had cherished. Julius, the oldest, married a Jewish woman, but both younger sons, Frank and Robert, had gentile wives.

Just about the time of World War II, with the coming of chain stores in the area, the fruit business collapsed, and, already in his fifties, Abe Kopita was on the verge of bankruptcy, but determined to pay his debts in full. He became a dealer of scrap metals, furs, and junk. Meeting with moderate success, he paid his debts. The Kopitas now had a home on Ford Street, their garage filled with furs and scraps. They had "just about reached a good plateau" when Rose became ill, and, on April 30, 1950, died.

After his mother's death, Frank, who had traveled for most of his adult years, settled in Ogdensburg. He became interested in learning of his own heritage, perhaps, finding his roots. He began to study Hebrew, to learn what he could of Judaism. David Kozak, then a new rabbi in Ogdensburg, was his teacher.

Abe continued on in the scrap business until he became ill, and on December 15, 1957, died.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Frank would meet his wife in New York City through the "Aunt Annie" who first brought Abe to South Africa.

[2]Robert, with Peabody Engineering, invented the snow melter used in New York City; the machine sucks up snow, and then flushes it away.

[3]Louis Greenblatt's notes.

[4]There is a book written about this happening: *The Incident at Massena*, Saul S. Friedman, Stein & Day Co., 1978; New York, New York.

Conclusion

We have touched here only a sort of core group of families. The others, as deserving, whose lives we have failed to chronicle, were left out because of lack of information, and time, rather than to their lack of importance in the group. There was a Baker family who ran a second hand business on Patterson Street. They were religious people who played a large part in the early congregation, who raised five children in Ogdensburg, who would have been included had we had the time at our disposal to find their descendants, their records, the few traces forty or fifty years have not yet erased. There was a Goldstein family, an Abelove family, the Wiedys (whose furniture business Mayer Sperling bought out); there was a Kerstein family—he was a tailor. There were forty or fifty families at one time, all told, who made up the body of Anshe Zophen.

This work is far from complete, but perhaps no work, in time, can be complete. Perhaps we have opened a little crack in the dense barrier between *now* and *then.* We leave it to the families themselves, or to another chronicler, in some future time, to widen the space, and allow more of the light of that time to fall on this.

What little we have accomplished is due almost entirely to the cooperation and help of members of the families involved. We thank you for sharing your memories with us, for trusting us with your photographs, for the time, energy, and enthusiasm that has kept us feeling, even in those times when the task seemed impossible, that it was indeed, worthwhile.

GOUVERNEUR

by Joan Dobbie & Louis Greenblatt

The Eckmanns from Bavaria
The Family Katzman
The Ruderman Family
The Glazer(off) & Glazier Families
The Kaplans of Gouverneur
The Saidel Family
The Levinson Family

NOTES & CORRECTIONS
GOUVERNEUR

Pg. 83, Photo Caption: "Mr. Jacobs" was "**Samuel** Jacobs" (Letter to Joan Dobbie from Albert Kaplan 1/84)

Pg. 83, #1, line 11: By their very presence, the Eckmanns did much toward establishing a Jewish Community in Gouverneur.

Pg. 85, #2, line 4: The Levinson family was in the **clothing** business, not in the furniture business.

Pg. 93-94-95: The Katzmans were a pivotal family of major importance in the creation of Jewish communities in Gouverneur and in the North Country in general. Their help and encouragement to newcomers deserves more than passing credit. I offer sincere apologies to the Katzman family for directly quoting statements made in jest or perhaps frustration, and for expressing my own difficulty in piecing together information in such a way that it might have thrown more shadow than light on the facts. Certain passages which were included for the sake of liveliness or color may have shown the family in a less positive light than was intended. To the extent that this is so, I beg pardon. (J. Dobbie)

Pg. 93, #2: **Fannie** married Sam Suskin and moved to Watertown in 1906; **Max** married Lilliane Goldfarb of N.Y.C. and eventually moved his business to N.Y.C.; **Sam** took over the furniture business and with his wife Leonore eventually moved to Watertown with the business; **Jimmie** was **never** known as Morris. For many years Jimmie was National President of Zeta Beta Tau fraternity. He became a well-known Insurance and Real Estate broker in Florida. **Esther**, now 78, lives in Florida (1984).

Pg. 94, line 3: Nate Katzman was 15 when he arrived in 1903. He peddled with a pack all through the Adirondacks, using Abe and Slevie's home as base.

Pg. 94, #2; Pg. 95, #3:The Katzmans left Russia to escape the Russian pogroms (organized attacks on the Jewish population) and to escape the Russian draft. Abe with 13 year old Max came first, and then Nate followed, each of them earning funds to bring the rest of the family over. Slevie remained in Vilna until 1904, since she had a little business that supported her family there, and keeping the boys out of the army was a priority.

Pg. 95, #1, line 3: Jacob Katzman married **twice**. (Doris Katzman Gold, '84)

Pg. 95, #2, line 3: should read "around the same time as her uncle **Hymie**." She was one year older than her uncle Nate.

Pg. 97, #2, line 21: The Rubens of Massena were also related to the Katzmans and the Kaplans. (See pg. 196)

Pg. 117, #3, line 2; Pg. 119, #3, line 16: "My father told me that he never peddled by foot with a pack on his back. I think he knew that this was what was said of him, and he always said that that was not so at all. The first day, he told me, he had a horse and wagon." (A. Kaplan, 1984)

Pg. 118, #2, line 7; Pg. 127, #2, line 1; Pg. 127, #3, line 1; Pg. 126, Footnote 7; Pg. 134, Footnote 1: The lake may have been in or near the town of Berezin. Dokshitz was a town near Berezin. "My father (Sol Kaplan) occasionally mentioned it in jest . . . The name amused him." (A. Kaplan, 1984) Thus the Kaplans, Mollie & Sol, were connected with Berezin **not** Dokshitz.

Pg. 118, #5: ". . . the point should not be overlooked that the Rabbi's beard was of a length to make this feat possible." (A. Kaplan, 1984)

Pg. 97, #2, line 23; Pg. 119, #3, line 14; Pg. 120, #4; Pg. 128, #2: Sol left N.Y.C. with the intention, as he told his son, Albert, of visiting his sister, Mollie, in Gouverneur, planning then to return to Russia. Thus Mollie, **already** lived in Gouverneur in 1910. This information conflicts with that obtained from Ben Saidel in a taped interview on 2/18/81. According to Ben Saidel, Mollie and Hyman Saidel **followed** Sol Kaplan to Gouverneur.

Pg. 124, #1, line 2: He was named "Samuel." Sam was a nickname.

Pg. 124, #2, line 2: Sol Kaplan's earliest real estate purchase was the Freeman Block on Clinton St. which became the main Kaplan store building. He paid $40,000.00 for it and bought it from his close friend, Henry Freeman. Sol said that Henry Freeman was the best friend he ever had. (A. Kaplan)

Pg. 124, #5, line 4: Sol ran the main branch in **Gouverneur**, not Ogdensburg.

Pg. 124, #6, line 3: should read "At the dedication of the new synagogue he was given the honor of carrying the Torah."

Pg. 126, line 5: Albert **emigrated**. (He now [1984] lives in N.Y.C.)

GOUVERNEUR'S JEWISH COMMUNITY



Seder at the Kaplan home. Starting at lower left, around the table: Bertha Kaplan, Leo Eckman, Dorothy Eckman, Bennie Saidel, Hannah Saidel, Sam Kaplan, Sol Kaplan, Esther Kaplan, Mr. Jacobs, Morris Hoffman, Albert Kaplan, Eleanor Kaplan Simon, Priscilla Simon, Sam Simon.

Gouverneur's is a dwindling Jewish population. It began with a sprinkling of German Jews, peddlers who mostly passed through, and vanished, usually to settle in the larger communities of Watertown, Utica, or Malone. One or two stayed. Thus, one of Gouverneur's earliest Jewish settlers was a gentleman from Bavaria, Germany, Lewis Eckmann. Having arrived around 1855, quite some time before the Civil War, he later brought a wife over from Bavaria and raised three children in Gouverneur. But while the Eckmanns were people of culture, and very much involved in the Ogdensburg religious community, they did little toward establishing a Jewish community in their own town of Gouverneur.

It was not until the great Russian/Jewish Migration of the

early 20th century that the Gouverneur Jewish population grew and flowered into a large, close, thriving community. It began with the Katzman family of the Dokshitz area, White Russia. The Katzmans opened a junk business in Gouverneur, and began bringing over from Europe one new immigrant after the other, setting him up with horse and wagon, teaching him a few English phrases, and sending him out to peddle junk. One by one these "greenhorns" (nearly all of whom were related one way or another to the Katzmans) broke free of their sponsors and went into business for themselves, some in neighboring communities, and some right in Gouverneur. And, of course, the new settlers attracted other new settlers. Until, within the north country community of Gouverneur, there existed a Yiddish speaking, orthodox, Jewish colony, a little ghetto transplanted from the Russian pale. For the course of one generation, this transplanted Jewish population thrived.

In the early 1900's, on the second floor of a store on 69 East Main Street, the congregation held its services in what was listed in the *1907-08 Moore's Standard Directory of Gouverneur* as the "Russian Jewish Temple." Here children received Cheder education. Bar mitzvahs were performed, and High Holiday activities took place. For a period of years, from approximately 1903 until after World War I, aside from Ogdensburg, Gouverneur was the most important Jewish Religious Center in St. Lawrence County. The congregation could boast at least 13 or 14 Jewish families, some from Gouverneur itself, a few (like the Edison families) from neighboring townships such as Hermon or Edwards, and some families from as far off as Massena, who preferred to attend High Holiday Services in orthodox Gouverneur rather than in Ogdensburg.

In these years, many a Jewish family passed through Gouverneur, but the Katzmans, the Rudermans, the Kaplans, the Glazier families, the Saidels, and the Levinsons stayed at least long enough to rear their children here.

And a very homogeneous group they were. All of these families originated from Shtetls within a 75 mile radius of Vilna, White Russia. The pattern, with minor variations, continually repeated itself: A young man, often hardly more than a child, escapes from the Russian draft. He arrives in New York City. Here he works until he can bring over from the Old Country his wife and children, or, if he has none, here he marries a woman, another Russian/Jewish immigrant. The couple has a relative in Gouverneur. They come north. The man peddles

around the neighboring countryside, usually at first either notions or junk, then furs, hides, meats, or whatever else he branches into. He is welcomed by the farmers—a bearer of news, strange customs, a hint of excitement. He stays overnight with one farmer, then the next along his route, and often the farmer's wife is even thoughtful enough to prepare acceptable food for her kosher guest.

For the peddler traveling his route, it is a difficult life, but an intriguing one. For his wife, it is as difficult and less colorful. Because she, speaking no English, knowing almost none, stays alone in the house. He is gone for days, sometimes weeks at a time. She carries water; she carries wood; she cares for the children; she cleans; and what with kosher meat available only at rare intervals, large quantities of meat to prepare in a kosher manner and cure at once, what with the Sabbath always to prepare for, she cooks, and cooks, and cooks. It was a lonely life, that of a peddler's wife.

Eventually most of these immigrant peddlers left the road to set up their own business in Gouverneur. And they did well, those who stayed. The Katzmans, the Saidels, and the Levinsons moved into the furniture business; Sol Kaplan became a wealthy man through the clothing trade; Morris Ruderman went from scrap into clothing, and in time he branched out as the owner of a restaurant; Sam Glazeroff became a well-to-do cattle dealer; while Ben Glazier managed quite well as a dealer of junk and furs. In general, they were pushers, these men. Determined to make their fortune in the "land of opportunity" perhaps for their children's sakes. But they were good men as well—known in their struggling years for their honesty; known in their years of success for their philanthropy. (Three of the men covered, at various times, received the Gouverneur Good Citizen Award.) And their wives, even in their years of plenty, remained hard-working matrons, known generally for their hospitality and community spirit.

In school and on the streets, the children of these newly established Jewish merchants learned the English language. And although there was a certain amount of prejudice that the children had to face in the public schools, in general they were easily assimilated into the community. While at home Jewish was the spoken language; at home the Sabbath must be kept; at home only kosher food must be eaten—in the outside world they were normal north country kids. As they matured, some of these children rebelled against the duties of their religious

upbringing. By the time they were in high school the sons often resented having to "daven," and daughters dated gentile boys despite their parents' shock and disapproval. (And a couple of the sons actually married gentile women.)

Some of the children of Gouverneur's early Jews followed into their father's businesses, but it was more common for them, the children of now well-off parents, to attend colleges, often in far distant states, to enter the professions, and to leave the area. With the Americanization of the children, with their leaving, the living entity that was the Gouverneur Jewish Community withered. In 1930 the Temple closed its doors; those Jews left joined with Ogdensburg or Watertown for religious services. And now there are only a few Jews left in Gouverneur. And even memories of that once thriving Jewish community are growing dim.

The Eckmanns from Bavaria

On the west side of the village of Gouverneur there is an Eckmann Street, named after Lewis Eckmann, one of the first Jewish settlers in Gouverneur. A pioneer in Gouverneur's marble industry, one of the founders of the Ogdensburg religious congregation of Anshe Zophen, Lewis Eckmann was described by Gouverneur's Dr. Fred Drury as "a man one had to look up to." Says Bertha Eckmann Alex, granddaughter of Lewis and Babette Eckmann, "They were fine examples of their time. They were born into a hopeful and adventurous age—the Victorian era. They crossed an ocean to find a new life. They were fine citizens of their new country—loyal to its institutions, proud of its ideals and heritage, and active members of their community, Gouverneur."

Born in Bavaria, Germany on August 14, 1838, the son of Bernhard and Clara (nee Sigbart) Eckmann,[1] Lewis was hardly more than a child when, in the spring of 1853, he came to America. Not yet 15, he made the trans-Atlantic voyage alone from Germany to New York City, not by oceanliner, but in a sailboat. The journey, which took about two months, was a long, exhausting, and yet exciting, adventure. As an old man he was to share with his grandchildren vivid memories of that crossing: thrilling stories about storms that delayed the voyage, and another memory—that of celebrating Passover on the boat.[2] Once landed in the port of New York City, he joined his two older sisters, Sarah, who was married to a Mr. Maier, and Hannah, whose husband was a Mr. Bechhold, both of whom had preceded him to America and were living in New York.

For about a year Lewis stayed with his sisters in New York. He found work in an upholstery firm, making seats for railroad

cars (the Pullman Company) and in this manner, he learned the upholstery trade.

However, it seems Lewis was not content in the city. Within a year or two he left New York for the North Country, and a new style of life. Hannah's brother-in-law, a man by the name of Sigmund Bechhold, was at that time living far upstate, beyond the Adirondacks, in Gouverneur, New York. Young Lewis joined Mr. Bechhold in Gouverneur. At first, with horse and carriage, he sold merchandise to farmers.[3] Then he re-entered the furniture business.

There used to be, in those years, down by the bridge over the Oswegatchie River in Gouverneur, a furniture maker by the name of Stephen Brown Van Duzee, one of Gouverneur's most prominent citizens of that time. In 1858, a now 20 year old Lewis Eckmann, applying his knowledge of the upholstery trade, went to work for Mr. Van Duzee. As young employees often did then, he lived with his employer's family in the house that later became the Stephen B. Van Duzee Hospital, of which Lewis' son, Morris, was one of the first trustees.

The relationship between the young Jewish immigrant and the nearly 50 year old S.B. Van Duzee was clearly a close one, and Lewis must have shown a good deal of business acumen, as well as knowledge of his craft. For six years he worked as an employee of Mr. Van Duzee, and then in 1864, they entered partnership under the name of *Van Duzee and Eckmann.* (Later, in 1882, they would incorporate their business under the name of *The S.B. Van Duzee Mfg. Co.*)

By this time, Lewis would have been in his late 20's, by his standards, or ours, for that matter, of a definitely marriageable age. In 1867 he left Gouverneur for his homeland, to return again from Germany with a young bride of 17, Babette Loew, of Eichstadt, Bavaria.

Babette was a small-built young woman, petite and somewhat fragile-looking, with a strong character and an air of culture about her. She had come from "quite a wealthy family"[4] and had lived in Eichstadt in a house formerly owned by a count. A son, Bernhard, named for his Bavarian grandfather, was born to them on June 3, 1868, and on St. Patrick's Day, 1870, in the midst of a March blizzard, their second son, Morris, arrived. Clara, their youngest, was born on February 2, 1872.

The Marble Industry[5]

The partners, Eckmann and Van Duzee, extended into the

marble business. Since the first settlement of Gouverneur at the start of the 19th century, Gouverneur stone had been used for monuments and in the building of homes, but it wasn't until the mid 1870's that a large scale quarry operation was conducted. Two brothers, D.J. and T.J. Whitney, in partnership with a Mr. Honeycomb, began mining operations on a property belonging to a Mr. James K. Barney. Another, less successful, quarry was opened on "the old Hamlin Farm" in the summer of 1881. And then, in the fall of that year, Lewis Eckmann and his partner, S.B. Van Duzee, incorporated with T.J. Whitney and 10 other Gouverneur businessmen to form the *Whitney Marble Company.* In this third mining venture of the area, they used a diamond core drill on land purchased from a Mr. McCean. Despite its share of problems (a boiler explosion that claimed six lives; poor quality marble taken from the McCean property), the mining business survived and eventually prospered. In 1887 the Whitney Marble Company, which by this timed owned three acres of land from the original Barney property, went bankrupt. But the next year, this time in cooperation with only two other Gouverneur businessmen, Lewis Eckmann and S.B. Van Duzee reincorporated the business into the successful Gouverneur Marble Company. Lewis Eckmann was the original and continuous treasurer of that corporation, and became its president. By 1905, at 67, Lewis Eckmann was the only surviving member of the original Gouverneur Marble Company. He was succeeded, upon his death, by his son, Morris Eckmann, who would continue as president until the business was sold in 1930.



At the Marble Quarry. Front Row, L to R: R. Ormston, Morris Eckmann, Lewis Eckmann. Back Row: Dave Bulger, Ed Martin, D.J. Whitney, Andy Johnson, and Ed LaPoint.

Family and Community

Thus, the Eckmanns prospered. They were greatly respected and looked up to in Gouverneur. While they mixed easily with Gouverneur's Christian population, they also had close contact with those other earliest Jews who had come to the area, in particular, the German-speaking Jews of Ogdensburg. They were especially close with the Frank family.[6] As far back as 1858, in Ogdensburg, Jews had been holding religious services in their own homes, and by 1875 a Jewish congregation was first incorporated there. Lewis Eckmann was one of the founders of that congregation.

Then, in the 1900's the flood of Russian Jewish emigres began. Esther Katzman Levine (whose parents were among the first of these newly-come Jews) remembers the Eckmanns as "people of culture" and she remembers "how much they (the Katzmans) loved to be with them."[7] In later years, however, when Russian Jewish immigrants boosted the Gouverneur Jewish population to the point where Gouverneur formed its own little congregation, the Eckmanns remained somewhat separate. They had little contact with the orthodox, Yiddish-speaking, Shtetl-born, membership of that congregation.

They maintained their Jewish faith in the context of the Ogdensburg congregation of Anshe Zophen, and in their own home. Bertha Eckmann Alex, daughter of Morris, remembers, "They were truly religious. They held their own prayer services on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings. When my brother Albert and I were old enough, we accompanied our parents to our grandparents' home Friday evenings. When we were old enough to go alone on Saturday mornings, we listened to the services read by my grandmother. My grandfather by then had such poor eyesight that my grandmother read the services. Later my brother or I read aloud much of the Saturday morning services."

The Children Grew Up in Gouverneur

Bernhard went into the Van Duzee furniture business, running a retail store in Gouverneur. When he came of a marriageable age, he fell in love with a Christian girl, a Gouverneur girl descended from an early, established, Yankee family, Harriet (Hattie) Rickerson. They married. In 1903 the Bernhard Eckmanns had a son, Leo, who still lives in Gouverneur. But in 1910 the young businessman, father of seven year old Leo, at only 42 years of age, died. Leo looks back and tries to remember his father. He remembers a cane with a golden handle; he

remembers the man who took him for Sunday walks.[8]

While Bernhard followed his father into the furniture business, Morris followed Lewis Eckmann into the marble quarry. After spending two years in Salt Lake City, Utah, in 1890, Morris had returned to Gouverneur. He became a member of the Gouverneur Marble Company, and for the next 40 years "his life was the marble quarry."[9] It was a close relationship between Morris and his father, one that extended beyond family into business, so that in later years, when Lewis had become too frail to function as an official member of the corporation, he continued to advise Morris on company matters.

On November 8, 1905, Morris Eckmann married Miriam Rheinstrom in New York City. Miriam had been born in Bridgeton, New Jersey, on March 23, 1873, the daughter of Aaron and Sophia Livingston Rheinstrom.[10] Morris and Miriam Eckmann had two children: a son, Albert, and a daughter, Bertha. As a grown man, Albert left the area. He is the father of three children: Barbara, Betsy and David, and lives in Larchmont, New York. Bertha became an English teacher, teaching at the Gouverneur High School until her marriage to Mr. Elmer Alex of Wallingford, Connecticut. She and her husband now live in West Hartford, Connecticut.

Leo Eckman, who dropped the second "n" from their name, is the only descendant of Lewis and Babette to remain in Gouverneur. As a young man, he joined his uncle Morris in the marble quarry. In 1928 he met Dorothy Glasser from Chicago (who was here to see her newborn niece, the baby of Jack and Pauline Glasser Ruderman).[11] For the next 12 years Leo and Dorothy saw each other only "off and on." Then they decided to marry.

Leo's father, Bernhard Eckmann, had had a family home built on Rowley Street in Gouverneur shortly before his death. It was in this home that Leo had grown up, and it was to this home that he brought his wife, and it was here that they raised their daughter, Rosanne. But Rosanne as a grown woman left the Gouverneur area, and now a married woman with children of her own, she comes back only on vacations to visit her parents and the old homestead.

FOOTNOTES

[1]The maiden name Sigbart comes from a so-called "Mug Book"; the 1894 *History of St. Lawrence County;* edited by Gates Curtis (see footnote #4 of this section on Nathan and Mathilda Frank in this volume). Lewis Eckmann's mother is listed as "Getta Sigbart Eckman." According to family sources, her name was Clara, not Getta, Eckmann.

[2]An interview with Leo Eckman, Lewis' grandson, conducted by Lewis Greenblatt on September 30, 1975. During this interview, Leo read to Mr. Greenblatt a letter, apparently written by one of his cousins, which relates experiences of Lewis Eckmann's early life.

[3]See note #2.

[4]See note #2.

[5]Gates Curtis; *History of St. Lawrence County;* 1894; pp. 115-118.

[6]See chapters on the Frank families in this volume.

[7]Letter written to Joan Dobbie by Doris Katzman-Gold, May 1981.

[8]Conversation between Joan Dobbie and Leo and Dorothy Eckman on May 2, 1981.

[9]See note #8.

[10]From the *Watertown Daily Times*, November 7, 1955, titled "Morris A. Eckmanns Married Fifty Years."

[11]See chapter on Ruderman family in this volume.

The Family Katzman

Who had a lot of relatives

Around 1906, alongside the Eckmanns in Gouverneur, there lived a Jewish family, the Katzmans, who for some time had been running a junk and scrap business, and were now involved in a used furniture store. The husband, Abe, was a "great big, easy-going fellow,"[1] often found tipped back in a comfortable chair, feet on the table "schmoozing with the boys."[2] But his wife, Sylvia (called Slevie by the family) "was a vibrant business-woman."[3] Her brother-in-law, Nate Katzman, was later to describe her to his children in somewhat less flattering terms, as a constant nag. "Oh, she knew what she was doing every minute," marvels Louis Krupkin, a landsmann who at one time lived with the Katzmans. According to Mr. Krupkin, it was Slevie who was the driving force behind the business.

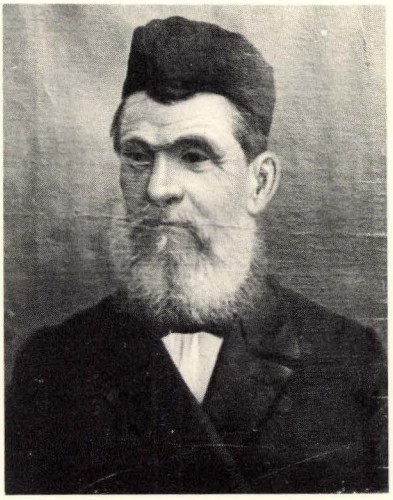
The Katzmans had five children, some of whom were still living at home in 1906. There was Fannie, who at 19 may have already married Sammy Suskin and moved with him to Watertown; Max, who would enter the scrap metal business and begin to invent, becoming among other things the inventor of the well-known *Kaz Vaporizor;* Sam, who would remain in the family business until he married Lenore Schwartzmann, became the father of twin girls, and finally settled in Watertown in the furniture business; Morris, called Jimmy, who was to attend Syracuse University. Along with his brother he was to become a "big dealer" of real estate;[4] and baby Esther, born in Gouverneur in 1905, who would marry Joe Levine of New York City.

Their household included, besides the children, a long series of newly arrived landsleite, mostly relatives, who lived with the

Katzmans for a time, peddled, and later left the Katzmans to strike out for themselves. And off and on, until recently, there had been Nathan Katzman, Abe's half-brother (a good 20 years younger than Abe) who had been, since his arrival in 1903, in and out of Gouverneur, and in and out of business with the Abe Katzmans.

Except for the Eckmanns, who had come from Bavaria in the 1850's (and possibly also a Bechhold family), the Katzmans were probably the first Jews to settle and raise a family in Gouverneur, and it was through them, either directly or indirectly, that nearly all of the Jewish families that would later comprise the congregation of Gouverneur's "Russian Jewish Temple" would come to be here.

The History



Rabbi Jacob Katzman
Vilna, Russia, ca. 1850.

How and when the Katzmans themselves first arrived in the North Country is difficult to ascertain. According to what his nephew, Jerry Katzman, had always heard, Abe first peddled in northern New York as a very young man in the 1870's. And yet, according to Jerry's older sister, Doris Katzman Gold, Abe did not come to America until the very tail end of the 19th century, when he brought with him his teenaged son, Max. It could be that Abe came to America alone, peddled for a time, then returned to Russia, married, fathered children, and then crossed the Atlantic again, this time with Max. To further complicate matters, George Katzman, Jerry and Doris' brother, remembers being told time and again that Slevie, not Abe, made a couple of trips between continents: "This is what was so confusing about the family. I've heard this story so many times and never could figure it out. She didn't like America, apparently, and she went back to Europe to live. And then she came back here." To this, Doris Katzman Gold says, "Bologna! One trip was enough hardship and money!"[5] And Louis Krupkin, in his account of the

Katzmans' lives never mentions either of them returning to Russia.

In the province of Vilna, White Russia, there lived an old "Rebbe," Jacob Katzman, who, over the period of his life, married two or three times. With his first wife, who was a Kaplan, Jacob had two children: a son, Abe, and a daughter, Celia. By the second wife, Dora, whom he married close to a generation later, he fathered six more children: a daughter, Chana, then Hymie, Nate (Nathan), Sophie, Bernie, and Harold.[6]

Abe, the first son by the first wife, married Sylvia Reichler, and began to raise a family. A first daughter, Fannie, was born in 1887, around the same time as her uncle Nate. Within the next decade the Abe Katzmans had three more children: Max, Sam, and Morris (Jimmy). The ages of these children were roughly the same as those of the children born of Dora Katzman, his father's second wife.

Slevie had a business. (According to Mr. Krupkin, she was a "Markt-frau"—a woman who sold goods on the market.) Her daughter, Fannie, helped her while her sister-in-law, Chana, cared for both babies, Jimmy, Slevie's son, and Harold, Dora's son.[7] When Max, Abe and Slevie's oldest son, became a teenager, perhaps to protect him from the imminent Russian draft, his father left with him for America. According to Mr. Krupkin it was Slevie's business that brought in money for the passage.

Father and son arrived in Glens Falls, New York.[8] From there they made their way to Watertown. Long before Gouverneur had a Jewish Community, there were Jews making their homes in Watertown, and it seems to be through some connection with a Mr. Ellis, one of Watertown's earliest Jewish settlers, that Abe and Max got their start. They lived in the Ellis household for a time, and Mr. Ellis "helped Abe by giving him a pack to sell on the road."[9]

By 1903, Abe, with his son Max, had for some time been peddling in the North Country, around Gouverneur, Watertown, and also in the Malone and Plattsburgh area, and he had accumulated enough money to send a ticket over to Russia for his oldest half-brother, Hymie (the first son by Jacob's second wife). Unfortunately Hymie, whom the Czar didn't like because he "had an education and would shoot his mouth off"[10] was out of commission in Siberia when the ticket arrived. So, instead of Hymie, Nathan (the second son by Jacob's second wife) used

the ticket. As Jerry Katzman, Nathan's son, heard it told, when his father arrived, Abe didn't recognize him, but called him "Hymie."

Abe, Max, and now Nate, peddled junk and scrap, sometimes with other partners, at other times forming partnerships with each other. At one point Abe and Max, without Nate, went off the road to open a little scrap metal business in partnership with a Mr. Stebbinsky of Watertown, but when that didn't work out ("They didn't get along.")[11] father and son went on to Gouverneur to start in the scrap business there. Off and on, Nate joined them.[12]

In 1904, the year after Nate had come, Slevie and her three other children, Fannie (who was now 17), Sam (in his early teens), and Jimmy (a little boy of five) arrived in Gouverneur. The trip to America had been a nightmare, "horrible steerage. They never forgot the horror . . . how horrible the trip was—that was one thing the family spoke of for years."[13] The reunited family: wife, husband, children—and Nate—settled into Gouverneur and the scrap business. In 1905 Slevie gave birth to another child, Esther, born in Gouverneur, about 18 years after Slevie's first child, Fannie.

Nate, as opposed to easy-going Abe, was a "real worker. A driver, not necessarily of other people, but of himself.[14] He set about earning a lot of money, and, as Abe had a family to support, it was Nate's money that often went into the buying of tickets to bring people over from the Vilna area. The Katzmans brought the Alperts (Slevie's sister was married to an Alpert), the Slavins (They were related to the Alperts.), the Koffs (Abe's sister, Celia and her husband, Bennie Koff—who either had, or were soon to have, two children, Arthur and Ann); they brought their other siblings, Sophie, Bernie, and eventually the real Hymie Katzman, having escaped the Russian army. And others. Gouverneur, however, offered little in terms of cultural support for the Orthodox Jews (no kosher foods; no Schul; no Jewish community) so, after staying a very short time with the Katzmans these people moved on to the larger communities: Watertown, Malone, or Utica.

Around 1906 Abe and Nate broke up their partnership for the last time. At this point, Abe, along with his grown son, Max, was running a used furniture store, *Katzman and Son*, in the building that now houses the *Gouverneur Tribune Press*. Nate, too, had been a partner, but he had simply had enough of "doing all the work while Abe sat around gossiping." Saying,

"This isn't big enough for the both of us," he moved to Utica, this time for good. And from Utica, he continued bringing over relatives—the youngest brother, Harold (who was to become a well-known doctor), among others, so many others, in fact, that Nate Katzman "at one time counted up something like 40 or 50 people that he had brought over, all told." Nate remained in Utica. He found there the success and happiness that had evaded him in Gouverneur. In 1915 he married a girl by the name of Jennie Cohen (of Albany) and there, in Utica, he and Jennie raised their own family.[15]

From their base in Gouverneur, the Abe Katzmans continued to bring in people as well. (If they didn't actually buy the tickets, they provided a place to stay, a job, some backing.) Esther Katzman Levine still remembers their six room house in Gouverneur "where everyone was welcome." The new peddlers, although most of them had already spent from several months to several years in New York City, usually came to the Katzmans with almost no knowledge of English. It was Slevie Katzman who helped acclimate the newcomers to the North Country way of life. She taught them enough rudiments of the English language for them to get by, then sent them to work. According to one source, she taught them first the all-encompassing phrase, "Please look in my basket." With that phrase, a peddler was ready to start. It became known in the Vilna area that any Jew, relative or not, who wanted to come to Northern New York, could expect help from the Katzmans. The Rudermans were the first to settle and raise a family alongside the Katzmans; then, because Morris Ruderman was in Gouverneur, Ben and Chaika Glazier (nee Ruderman) settled in Gouverneur, and because Ben Glazier was there, Sam Glazeroff and family came. Sol Kaplan (a cousin) got his start with the Katzmans, and eventually settled and made his success in Gouverneur; the Saidels came because of Sol Kaplan (Mollie Saidel was Sol's half-sister). In this way, the Jewish population in Gouverneur blossomed.

In his last years, in the midst of the now bustling Jewish Community, Abe Katzman was still the same Abe Katzman. There are still those in Gouverneur who remember the old man, hat tipped forward, feet propped up on the table, sipping his tea. But that the Katzmans had prospered is evident in the fact that during World War I, they were able to donate $500.00 to aid Polish Jews—one of the largest single contributions made in this area. In 1923 Abe died, and was buried in Utica,

where his son, Max, was then living.

After Abe's death, Slevie moved to Watertown. Here, where several members of the Katzman family were now residing, she was known as a "fun" lady; somewhat of the matriarch of the family, who remained alert even into a ripe old age. She died in her 80's in New York City, where she had been living with her daughter, Fannie, in the apartment next door to that of her youngest daughter, Esther. Slevie was "alert and smart until the end, as was Fannie, who died in 1979, at the age of 92."[16]

FOOTNOTES

[1]This description and much of the information on the Katzmans was taken from two taped interviews with Louis Krupkin of Watertown, N.Y., one between Louis Greenblatt and Mr. Krupkin on 10/4/74 and the other conducted by Mr. Greenblatt, Blanche Levine, and Joan Dobbie on 11/12/80. Mr. Krupkin was born in Berezino, White Russia, around 1900, and Jacob Katzman was the Rabbi who taught him his Cheder lessons. After emigrating to America he was, for many years, a road salesman for a firm in Syracuse, and in touch with nearly all of the Jewish peddlers in the area. Eventually he became the founder of the Acme Army & Navy Store in Watertown, N.Y. Mr. Krupkin also provided background on other Jewish families in the area.

[2]Interview with Jerry Katzman, 3/26/81.

[3]Ibid. #1.

[4]Taped interview with George Katzman, 3/26/81.

[5]Letter written to Joan Dobbie from Doris Katzman Gold, May, 1981.

[6]According to Mr. Krupkin, the last son, Harold, was born of another, third, wife.

[7]Ibid. #5. Chana did not emigrate to America. In 1937 her brother, Harold, visited her in Russia, and told of his visit to her and of her family.

[8]Abe Katzman was naturalized in Malone, New York, and buried in Utica, New York. Perhaps records could be found in these cities to help a chronicler with that time space between when he left for America and he appeared in Glens Falls.

[9]Ibid. #5.

[10]Ibid. #2.

[11]Ibid. #5.

[12]Ibid. #5. "My father, Nate, had some rough years his first years in the North Country, and not only would not talk about it, but would not visit there for years.

[13]Ibid. #5.

[14]This and the next two direct quotes come from Jerry Katzman. Ibid. #2.

[15]Ibid. #5: "My father (Nate) left Abe and went into business with a friend; they dissolved partnership before 1917. (My parents) were married in 1915, went to St. Augustine, Florida, on their honeymoon in 1915. I (Doris) was born in 1917. My father was considered rich in those days."

[16]Ibid. #5.

The Ruderman Family

Jewish Roots in Gouverneur

Of all the immigrant peddlers that the Katzmans were introducing to the North Country, one after the other, Morris Ruderman "was the first one to actually put Jewish roots down in Gouverneur."[1] Described by his third son, Jack, as "the Patriarch of Gouverneur's Jewish Community,"[2] he was instrumental in the establishment of the small Schul on 69 East Main Street. Morris Ruderman tried, and for some years actually succeeded, in creating a Jewish environment in Gouverneur where the Orthodox Jews, transplanted from the Russian Pale, could feel at home. While the Katzmans played a large part in bringing new Jews to the area, often it was Morris Ruderman who helped them establish themselves in business, advised them, and tried to induce them to stay.



Morris Ruderman

Mr. Ruderman was a strong man, an imposing man, not actually as huge as he appeared (only 5′8″ tall)[3] but his presence was immense. With erect soldier's stance, and deep booming voice, he seemed a true giant of a man. And, as was his bearing, his life story is large, full, and colorful.

Beginnings

Born in the town of Uraboke, Province of Vilna, White Russia, on July 10, 1874, Morris Ruderman was raised primarily by his mother, who ran a grocery store to support herself

and her children. His father had been conscripted into the Russian army, and then escaped from the army, across Siberia, to Japan.[4]

As a young man, Morris too was conscripted into the army, but he did serve out his term. According to his youngest son, Joe Ruderman, he was in the Russian Guards, and actually worked up to being a noncommissioned officer, which "was pretty good for a Jew in the Russian army."[5]

And still in Vilna, probably after his term of military service, he married Bessie Gordon, an educated girl, the daughter of a "very high ranking rabbi,"[6] "a very learned man."[7] She was apparently (as can be seen in the photos of those of her children who are said to resemble her) an intensely attractive woman, small, with black hair and strong, piercing black eyes. The couple had three sons: Abe, born around 1899, with his father's light hair and blue eyes; Isaac, later called Charlie, born in 1901, dark and intense like his mother; and Jack in 1903, another fair child. Morris was in his 30th year when the Sino-Japanese War broke out, and he was probably called back into the Russian service.[8] Leaving behind his pregnant wife and three little sons, somehow he made it to Liverpool, England, where he boarded a ship which brought him to America. The boat docked in mid-March, 1904, at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.[9]

From Philadelphia Morris seems to have gone directly to New York City, where, according to daughter-in-law, Louise Ruderman, "He worked as a window washer." He also worked, Joe Ruderman was told as a child, as a guard in a fur loft. "While he was there," Joe recalls being told, "a couple of thieves attempted to get in; he proceeded to give them a pretty bad beating, and he was given a reward for this. I believe it was $100.00. He then decided to go to Gouverneur, because his friend, a very old gentleman named Abe Katzman, was in the scrap business up there."[10] Having made use of the reward money to purchase a horse and wagon, Morris started north toward Gouverneur." As he went along he would buy scrap and junk and things. He used to go along until he got a wagon load. Then he'd stop at the railway station and send the scraps back to New York. They (the company in New York) would wire him the money at the next place. It took him, I think, several months to arrive in Gouverneur. And during that process, he learned English."[11]

The Family

It is not certain whether Morris sent for Bessie from New

York City or whether he was already in Gouverneur when she arrived, nor is it clear how she came to Gouverneur, whether by train or perhaps with him in the wagon. But it is quite certain that she came to America not too many months after he had left Vilna, because their fourth son, Sam, so go family stories, was born on the boat, in transit to America.

The three older boys entered the South Side School in Gouverneur. As Louise Dixon Ruderman (Charlie's wife) heard it told, "They had Hebrew names, but they all got new names in school. The teacher named them, so they told me. She named them Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. So those were the names they went under. But, "Charlie", where he (Isaac) got that name, I don't know." A school photo taken around 1908 shows how European-looking the Ruderman children still were, dressed in Russian-style high necked shirts.



Abe (2nd row, 4th from left), Charlie (3rd row, 2nd from right), and Jack Ruderman (3rd row, 2nd from left) in grade school, 1908.

Morris got his start peddling for his old friend, Abe Katzman, but in time he began buying scrap on his own, and "eventually he formed what was known as the *Gouverneur Hide, Fur, and Junk Company.*[12] In the years to come he opened an army surplus store near his home on Grove Street, and in later years this evolved into a general clothing store, which was then moved to Main Street, with a branch in Hermon.[13] Although he could barely write his name in English, he, like most of the other immigrant merchants, came to be a

highly respected member of the business community in the area. It was understood that Morris Ruderman's word was always good.

In 1907 a first daughter, Ida, was born; two years later, another son, David, and in 1911, a last daughter, Anna. Seven Ruderman children there were now.

Other Jews, most of them relatives of either the Katzmans or the Rudermans,—Sol Kaplan, the Saidels, the Glaziers and the Glazeroffs, the Levinsons, the Simons—arrived and made their homes in Gouverneur. Morris helped them settle in, presided over the growing Jewish congregation, arranged for the importing from Utica and Watertown, of Schochets, and teachers for the children. In 1911, as an incentive, to induce orthodox Jews to settle in Gouverneur, he built a Mikvah (Jewish ritual bath) in the basement of his home on 157 Grove Street.[14] Here, for the next five years or so, for a fee of 25¢, the Jewish women of Gouverneur gathered to take their ritual baths (with, Jack Ruderman acknowledged, occasionally one or another of the Ruderman boys trying to sneak in for a peek at the ladies!)

It also happened, in 1911 or '12, not long after the birth of her last daughter, Anna, that Bessie Gordon Ruderman became demented, and was committed to the Ogdensburg State Hospital for the Insane. What actually happened, or why, is not clear. Such things weren't spoken of in those days. But she lived out her life there, and died in the Ogdensburg Institution.

Rose Koplovitz Ruderman

Rose Koplovitz also was a "Litvak," originally from the Vilna area, an orphan. At the age of 13 a brother brought her to New York City, where she worked, "I think at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel,"[15] as a scullery maid. She worked there "for years," commented her son, Joe. Having been on her own for well over 20 years, Rose was already in her late 30's, somewhat on the heavy side, when she and Morris Ruderman married. He brought her home to the house in Gouverneur, to his seven children. The homecoming was a shock. Rose had not been forewarned about all the children. She was overwhelmed and bitter. She was not a mother to them. In all her years as Morris Ruderman's wife, the only child she cared about, the only one she showed affection for, was the one son she herself bore on May 31, 1914. There were other children in the household, but Joe was her only son. Over him she watched closely, and on him she showered her affection, and also on him she placed her

hopes. Joe was an excellent student, and when he graduated from high school, "My mother absolutely insisted that I get an education. I was the only one of the whole group that went to college. Actually my father wanted me to go into business, but my mother insisted that I go to college; and I went to Ohio State. I stayed there for seven years, studying combined arts and dentistry. I graduated in 1938." Joe Ruderman had worked summers to pay for his own education. At present he is still a successful dentist in Watertown, New York.[16]

But his mother never saw him graduate. Since 1926 she had suffered from diabetes. In 1937, when Joe was a junior at Ohio State, Rose Koplovitz Ruderman died in a diabetic coma.[17] Morris was once again left without a wife.

The Later Years

And again he remarried. Within a year or two, Alice Goldsmith from Ottawa became the third Mrs. Morris Ruderman. A "buxom, dark-haird, very pleasant"[18] person, she brought with her to Gouverneur a son and daughter from a previous marriage. A third son was already grown and living in California. In his third marriage Morris seemed to be a mellowed man. His third household was more relaxed than the other two had been. He began to spend time with his own grown children, to invite them to dinner, for cards. As an older man, Morris Ruderman finally found time to relax from his business, and socialize a little.

But Morris was a heavy chain smoker. In June 1941 his son, Joe, finally persuaded him to go to Johns Hopkins Medical Clinic for a check up. Morris Ruderman died instantly of a heart attack, while sitting in the heart specialist's office. A $500.00 contribution willed by him to the Congregation of Anshe Zophen provided for the final payment on the Synagogue on Green Street in Ogdensburg.[19]

Alice remained in Gouverneur until she herself suffered from a stroke, and although she was a comparatively young woman, only in her forties, she became incapable of caring for herself. She moved to California to live with her son, and there, eventually, she died.

The Bessie Ruderman Children

From the time that they lost their mother, the seven children, Abe, Charlie, Jack, Sam, Ida, David, and Anna, had been pretty much fending for themselves. Sometimes neighbors

helped out. As they grew older, the boys worked for their father in the scrap business, did odd jobs wherever they could find them, and then went into business on their own. Abe moved to New York City, got involved with army surplus, was a millionaire by the time he was 27, and dead of a brain tumor before he was 30; Sam died young; David had T.B., died at 27; only Charlie and Jack survived beyond their young adulthood. Of the girls, Anna graduated from high school, married a Mr. Wolf, but then something went wrong, and like her mother, she too needed to be institutionalized. Ida left Gouverneur for New York City, where she worked for a time as a secretary for the IRS before marrying a Mr. Abe Checkman, who owned a building in New York. Together they opened a candy store, which they operated for many years. In time they sold the building and moved to Florida, where Abe is a highly respected stockbroker. Of all the Bessie Ruderman children, only Ida is alive today.

Both Charlie and Jack worked for a time for their father, for a time for their brother Abe, in New York, worked at different things in different places. Then, as he married, each of them returned to Gouverneur to settle.

Jack

Jack had an auto parts business and lived out his life in Gouverneur. "Perhaps he wasn't the smartest businessman, but he was a fine man, a good man, with high ideals," so his wife, Pauline, describes him. A gentle man, he had once won the Gouverneur "Good Citizen's Award," and said his half-brother, Joe, "He deserved it!" Perhaps he was too kind for his own good. "He might have been a millionaire if he'd collected one third of the money people owed him."[20]

In 1926 Jack was working for his brother Abe, in New York. On a business trip to Chicago (on a blind date) he met Pauline Glasser. Within a month they married and moved to Gouverneur. Their home became a refuge for the Ruderman family, a warm home, where anybody who needed a place to stay, could stay. And, yes, it was a Jewish home, though rituals were not practiced with the Orthodoxy or fervor of the Morris Ruderman home. Those days were past.

Charlie

As opposed to his kindly brother Jack, Charlie Ruderman was indeed "the smartest businessman." A capitalist capital-

ized. "Ah," smiles Watertown's Mr. Krupkin (one of the few Jewish old timers left alive in the North Country), "Charlie was the hero of the Ruderman family!" With his mother's dark wavy hair, and deep "little boy eyes"[21] that never seemed to grow up, and as years passed, never grew old, Charlie had a charisma that—along with his bounding energy—gave him the kind of life fantasies have a hard time keeping up with.

As a child he did odd jobs where he could. At 11 (or thereabouts) he ran away from home. At 15, with the outbreak of World War I, he lied about his age to join the army. An injury sent him back into civilian life where, "he always lived big: the biggest cigars, the biggest car . . . and when he didn't have any money he scrounged . . . then he'd go out and buy a lot of furs or a lot of scrap. And he'd make a hundred dollars, a couple hundred dollars." Charlie did odd jobs for, and became very close with, such people as Edward J. Noble, of the Life Saver Company.

Then in 1936, while doing odd jobs for a Dr. Locke in Canada, Charlie met Louise Dixon, the daughter of a neighborhood bank manager. Louise was beautiful; she was a very special girl. But she was not Jewish. Still, neither her religion, nor the fact that he had all of $8.00 to his name, stopped him from marrying her and bringing her home to Gouverneur, where his father promptly disowned him. (With time, and a bit of charm, Louise did eventually manage to win over her father-in-law.)

As a married man, Charlie set about making a steady living. He bought some machinery and resold it at a profit. "From then on," Mr. Krupkin tells us, "everything Charlie touched turned to gold." "Well, not quite," says wife Louise, "but once he got started, I don't know how, but he always did very well."

Buying machinery. Selling machinery. Shortly after World War II Charlie bought not only machinery from the International Paper Company in Piercefield, N.Y., but the entire ghost town of Piercefield itself to go with it! That purchase, and his attempt to donate the village to disabled veterans, brought him national recognition.[22]

Charlie Ruderman's scrap book reads like an adventure story. He became a breeder of race horses. Once a huge fire destroyed his stable. He and Louise owned an island in Alexandria Bay. Once a huge fire wrecked their island. The family vacationed by yacht. Once their yacht sank. Everything happened at top speed. But always, somehow, Charlie came out on



Charlie Ruderman (right) campaigning for his project of a Veterans' Village in Piercefield, N.Y.

top. Until at 71, in the Gouverneur Nursing Home, he died. He too was buried in the Jewish Cemetery of Anshe Zophen in Ogdensburg.

Charlie and Louise Ruderman had raised four daughters in Gouverneur, but of the four, only one is a practicing Jew, and none have remained in the area. Jack and Pauline Ruderman raised one daughter in Gouverneur, but she too, as a grown woman, left the area. Of 11 Ruderman grandchildren, none have settled in the North Country at all, except one of Charlie's daughters, who lives in Carthage, N.Y. And of all the Ruderman family, only the two sisters-in-law, the widows of Jack and Charlie, still make their homes in Gouverneur.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Interview with Louis Krupkin, 10/4/74.

[2]Interview with Jack Ruderman, 7/23/74.

[3]Morris Ruderman's "Declaration of Intention" to become a citizen, registered in Canton, New York, 4/4/17.

[4]Ibid. #2.

[5]Interview with Joe Ruderman, 3/27/81.

[6]Ibid. #5.

[7]Interview with Pauline Ruderman, February 1981.

[8]In an interview on 11/12/80, Louis Krupkin explained the Russian military system: "In Russia a man automatically goes in the army for four years and six months, and then he

remains in the army until he is 50 years old, as a reservist. And when the Japanese war broke out" many regiments were called into active duty. It seems reasonable to suppose that Morris Ruderman's regiment was, or was about to be, called into service.

[9]Ibid. #3.

[10]Ibid. #5.

[11]Ibid. #5.

[12]Ibid. #5.

[13]Eventually the clothing store was moved to Main Street, where Morris had bought a building block. Then later, after he had prospered, Morris bought another block next to the theatre, which for a time was rented as a restaurant with living quarters on the three floors above.

[14]Ibid. #2. The ruins of this Mikvah can still be seen in the cellar of 157 Grove Street.

[15]Ibid. #5.

[16]Joe Ruderman is also the father of four successful children: two boys are attorneys, one girl is married to an attorney, and the other girl works in a stock broker's office.

[17]Says Joe Ruderman of his mother: "It was one of the tragedies of life that the thing she had longed for was not hers to see. She felt that her great achievement in life was her son Joe." How proud she would have been had she lived to see her son, and her grandchildren, enter the professions.

[18]Ibid. #7.

[19]Also in 1941, Joe Ruderman had been called into service, and was serving as a dental surgeon for the famous "First Infantry Division Artillery." In October of that year Joe was seriously injured, and retired from the army.

[20]Ibid. #5.

[21]Interview with Louise Dixon Ruderman, 2/3/81.

[22]Not only were the papers filled with articles about Charlie Ruderman, philanthropist, but he was also invited to speak on national radio, and used the opportunity in an attempt to push through his project of using the town of Piercefield as a veteran's community.

The Glazer(off) and Glazier Families

Henya Glazier had red hair. She was the wife of a poor Jewish farmer in the town of Dokshitz, Province of Minsk, White Russia, in the late 19th century. Not much else is known about her, or her husband, Nuchum, except that they were devout Jews who barely eked out a living, peddling (presumably produce from the farm). They were the parents of at least five children, four boys and one girl, whom they brought up strictly, with a deep and narrow orthodoxy. In the early 1900's, one by one, the boys migrated to America. The girl, Tzippa, made her life in Dokshitz. Of the boys, Aaron (whom the family affectionately called "the judge") became a New Yorker; Ben came to Gouverneur, New York; Herschel migrated to the Catskills, and Sam followed Ben to Gouverneur.

Shmuel (Sam) Glazer(off)

Born around 1888, Sam Glazier apparently was the youngest son. His three brothers were already in America in 1905 or '06 when he arrived, having deserted the Russian Army. In the old country Sam had been drafted, and because he had knowledge of horses he became, in the army, "a horse trainer for the Czar."[1] For a salary of approximately two cents a day he trained the Czar's horses. And Sam Glazier, even as a young man of about 17, did not want to work for two cents a day, nor did he want to eat the "trefe" army food. "So one night," as he put it to his children, "I jumped right over the fence and ran away."

He stopped at his home farm to say goodbye to his mother. In parting "all she gave him was a piece of bread, which was probably all she had to give him." From there he went on his

way to Berlin, Germany; from Berlin to Liverpool, England; from Liverpool he got a boat to New York City. He arrived in New York with two dollars in his pocket.

Sam's older brother, Aaron, was working in a New York pants factory. Sam got a job pressing pants for a tailor. For a while he did that, living with his brother Aaron. But Sam was not satisfied. He didn't like city life, and he didn't like working for the tailor, and he definitely didn't like "not being paid much."

In the Glazier family, Aaron was nicknamed "the judge." This is because he was a "wheeler/dealer" in terms of family affairs. It was Aaron who settled family disputes; it was Aaron who, whenever he could, made decisions for his siblings; it was Aaron who arranged things. Now Aaron decided that his dissatisfied brother needed a wife to take care of him. "Oy," said Aaron to Sam, "have I got a girl for you!" Her name was Fannie (Ifkeh) Feldman. She was a very short girl, a little pudgy, perhaps, but cute, with dark curls (which for her early married life she would wear pulled back in a bun and later, with more modern times, wear short and wavy). She worked in a shirt factory.

Fannie

Fannie was already almost an "old maid" when she met Sam Glazier. After all, she was past 18, perhaps even 20, and not yet married! In terms of Jewish Shtetl tradition, where a girl married as young as 13 or 14, this was a bad situation. They were introduced. "Shall I marry him?" she asked her mother. Now Sam Glazier was a slight young man, not more than 5′5″ or 5′6″ (hardly tall, dark and handsome), and he was far from well-to-do, but there must have been something about him that promised success. Mrs. Feldman's appraisal became a piece of family folklore, "He'll always make a good living for you," she replied. And so they married.

And for a while they continued on in New York City, now in their own apartment—a walk up, where in winter they carried coal up several flights of stairs for heat. In the year 1912 a first son, Nathan, was born here. "Some living," one might imagine Mrs. Feldman shaking her kerchiefed head. From the walk up they moved to Parksville in the Catskills, to try to make a living at farming. In Parksville they lived in a chicken coop. "That's what my mother told me," says daughter, Helen. "And Mother didn't lie. She scrubbed it until it was pretty." "Some living," one might imagine Sam Glazier shaking his frustrated

head.

Now, another of Sam's brothers, Ben Glazier, had married "Chaika" Ruderman, the sister of a Morris Ruderman who had a junk business in Gouverneur, New York. Mr. Ruderman was making a point of creating in Gouverneur a comfortable place for the Orthodox families to settle.[2] He had helped his brother-in-law, Ben Glazier, get started in the junk and scrap business, and now family reports had it that Ben was doing quite well peddling junk in the North Country. Sam also should give Gouverneur a try, decided Aaron, the "judge." So, at his brother's suggestion, with wife and child, a still ambitious and no way discouraged Sam Glazier headed for Gouverneur.

Two Glazier families in one small town of Gouverneur? This should never be, proclaimed "the judge" from his bench in the Garment district. And so, officially, Sam Glazier changed his family's name to "Glazeroff." Of course, they continued to use the name Glazier, but officially, there lived in Gouverneur not two Glazier families, but a "Glazier" family (that would be Ben's family) and a "Glazeroff" family (that would be Sam's family).

Sam Glazeroff (alias Glazier) set to work peddling; according to his brother's nephew, Joe Ruderman, at first he peddled junk, hides, rags, and later furs, and later meats; according to his daughter, Helen, he started right out peddling meat. Whatever the case, he borrowed just enough money to buy horse and wagon and began to peddle. Because he was not only poor, but also very proud (which means he would not borrow any more money than absolutely necessary), he moved with his wife and son into a ramshackle shack on Depot Street.

While Sam seems to have enjoyed the peddler's work, for Fannie the first months in Gouverneur were generally lonely, at times, terrifying. Sam was often gone for long stretches of time, "leaving her with a little baby and another one on the way, in what was for Gouverneur, a very bad neighborhood. Sometimes drunks would peek in the window at her. And she couldn't speak a word of English."

Fannie was a woman who loved things "cultural." One of the greatest moments of her life had been when, in New York during their courtship, Sam took her to see the opera *Rigoletto.* She loved the Yiddish theatre; she spoke and read fluently in both Yiddish and Hebrew. And here she was, alone in the shack on Depot Street, now with two young babies (Baby Anne was born in 1914.)

But then, Fannie had never led a princess's life. Her parents, the Feldmans, had been a devout couple in the small White Russian Shtetl in which she'd been born in 1888. Her father, a scholar of the Torah; her mother, "a brilliant woman," supported the family with a store. As true Orthodox Jews, they had "multiplied and replenished" the earth with nine or ten children. Fannie was the oldest girl. Only one son had preceded her, and he was a Yeshiva boy, with no responsibility save studying. It had been, from the time she was very little, Fannie's responsibility to mind the younger children. And Fannie's responsibility to keep house. And to cook. "I remember her telling me," Helen Heller recalls, "that once when she was a little kid in Europe, all the kids went down to the river to play, and she went down with them instead of staying home and watching the babies. My grandma went and got her; took a stick and beat her in front of everybody. So, she knew her place . . ."

Although they later became comfortable, when the Feldmans first came to America they were far from wealthy. They settled in Woodbine, N.J., a popular settlement for Jewish immigrants. Fannie worked in a garment factory earning money for tickets to help bring to America her seven or eight younger siblings. While her father, as he had in Russia, continued to study the Torah. Her mother opened a store, did well, and in time became the financial head of the family. But Fannie, except for a short respite in the sweatshop, was, as she had always been, the homemaker.

And so she kept house on Depot Street in Gouverneur. And, as she had always done, she cared for babies. And sometimes Sam would come home with tales of his experiences with the farmers, with news of the North Country. Once he came home with a recipe for ice cream. (Because she knew that Fannie couldn't read English, the farmer's wife hadn't written down a recipe, but rather, she'd taught Sam how to make the ice cream, and Sam, in turn, taught Fannie.) The Glazer(off)s had never heard of ice cream before, but they loved it, and Fannie learned to make it so well that her daughter, Helen, still remembers how delicious it was.

As a peddler, Sam Glazer(off) was at last beginning to earn the "good living" Mrs. Feldman had predicted for him. He was a hard worker, a man who would not stop and relax, because he was determined to make a financial success of his life. And he did. Eventually they found a nicer house at 181 Clinton

Street. They bought it. And there, in what the rest of the family called a farm (although it wasn't really a farm—they had perhaps one cow, some chickens), they raised their children. In 1918 their second son, Morris, was born, and nine years later, in 1927, their last daughter (who was named Helen, after the grandmother whose red hair she had inherited).

The farm on Clinton Street was the center of all sorts of activity. Fannie's brothers and sisters and their families came, Sam's brothers and their families came, Fannie's mother, the now widowed Mrs. Feldman came. "They never let us know they were coming. They just dropped in. Sam and Fannie have a farm. We don't have to worry. We can just come . There was one summer I don't think I slept in my bed once," Helen spoke humorously. The farm on Clinton Street was also an important landmark within the Gouverneur Jewish Community, because it was here, at the one Jewish farm in the area that animals were brought to be slaughtered by the Schochet, so that the Jewish community could have fresh kosher meat.

As he prospered, Sam got out of the peddling business to become a dealer of cattle. Gathering up cattle from local farmers, he would fatten them, and sell them live to such companies as *Wilson & Co.* and *Swift & Co.* And more money began to accumulate. He bought several farms in the area, in Hermon, and in Gouverneur. Now, as a dealer, as a landowner, he did not need to travel, or to be away from home so much any more. For Fannie this was a blessing, because her husband was her best friend.



The Glazeroff Family, 1935. L to R: Morris, Sam, Nathan, Helen and Fannie. Absent: Anne.

Except for the relatives who came summers to stay on the farm, and except for a close friendship with the Saidels, Hymie and his second wife Nettie,[3] the Glazer(off)s were very much each other's social world. They depended upon each other to such an extent that they actually shared one pair of glasses. "They couldn't see why they needed two pairs."

Fannie did most of the reading anyway. Every Shabbath she would real aloud "with such expression she could have been an actress." Together they would discuss what they had just read, the advice column from the "Forward" perhaps, or a "continued" story. On Sabbath afternoons, especially during the cold Gouverneur winters, when no fire could be lit (unless a "Shabbath Goy" was hired) Fannie would sometimes go visit Nettie Saidel, who always had a cup of tea warm for company. And Sam, who wouldn't work or do business on the Shabbath, would go downtown, sit in the hardware store, swap stories with the farmers. He called it "going amongst the farmers."

That was the day of rest. The other six days of the week were strictly work days. Sam had a brilliant mind, the powers of which he aimed directly and consistantly toward his goal of becoming a wealthy man. Perhaps in a different culture, at a different time, he might have become a mathematician, a scientist, a scholar, but being who he was, he merely became successful. He left it to his children and his grandchildren to enter the professions.

For Fannie Glazer(off) life never became easy, even when perhaps it could have. Because Fannie, in her own way, was also a "workaholic." "My mother," Helen explains, "never thought she was much of anything of importance. Her duty was to stay home and do the work." She started at dawn every morning (except Friday, when she was up before dawn, "hacking gefilte fish") and she dropped into bed exhausted every night. For relaxation she did beautiful handiwork.

Until the Schul on Main Street closed, the family attended services there, being amongst the most learned of the participants. Later, on High Holidays, the family stayed in Saratoga or Massena, which was a break from their general routine. And when they grew older, when all the children had grown and left, Sam and Fannie bought a home in Florida, where the Glazer(off) children hoped their mother would relax and not work so hard. Of course, she worked just as hard keeping the Florida home up. "Twice as hard," commented son-in-law, Sandy Heller, "because everybody came to visit." On February

28, 1951, in Florida, Fannie's heart gave out.[4] Said Helen, "She'd just worked herself to death."

Although he lived for nearly 10 more years (he died on December 28, 1960), Sam Glazer(off) was never the same after losing his wife. They had been very much halves of one whole.

The Young Generation Moved On

As adults, the younger Glazer(off)s moved in diverse directions, only one (Morris) going into business, and the others entering the professions: Nathan, who died on the second of March, 1981, was a lawyer. (He had been a captain in the Air Force in World War II—never married.) Anne (Zall) graduated from Syracuse University as a French and Latin teacher. (Now a widow with three daughters and four grandchildren, she lives in Framingham, Mass.) Morris entered the hardware business. (During World War II he was a sergeant in the Air Force in Africa, and he now lives in Wilmington, Delaware, with his wife, Amelia; they have three sons and two grandsons.)

Only Helen now lives in Gouverneur. She is a graduate of Ohio State University, with a Masters Degree from Potsdam State University, and teaches English, speech and drama. Helen is married to Sandy Heller, a lawyer. They have four sons. It is very much thanks to her and the afternoon she spent sharing memories, that this chapter has been written.

Ben and Chaika (nee Ruderman) Glazier

The Glaziers had been Gouverneur residents for some time before the Glazer(off)s arrived. But from 1913 on, the two brothers and their families both lived here. Yet, although they lived side by side in Gouverneur, and although in many ways their lives paralleled one another, the Ben Glaziers and the Sam Glazer(off)s were not close. In the Schul they stood side by side reading from the Torah.[5] But there their relationship ended.

"I think it was mostly their wives," said Helen Heller, who described Chaika Ruderman Glazier as a very different style of person than Fannie Feldman Glazer(off). Chaika was less of an intellectually oriented person than her sister-in-law, and less devoted to culture, perhaps a rougher-cut person. And, on the Glazier side of the family, although it was Ben who had his mother's red hair, the one with a temper was Sam. Sam was the one with the driving desire to be a success, while Ben was a more easy-going fellow. Ben worked not to become rich, but

simply because work was necessary for him to live and to feed his family.

When the Ben Glaziers came to Gouverneur around 1911 or '12, Morris Ruderman set Ben up in the business of peddling junk, and a junk and scrap peddler he remained throughout his life. Of course, as time passed, Ben graduated from horse and buggy to truck. But his work was always that of a junk dealer. He was not an outgoing person, not a community oriented person, nor was he trying to pull himself up in the world.

Like the Glazer(off)s, the Glaziers had four children, two boys and two girls. And even their names were roughly parallel to the names of the Glazer(off) children. While the Glazer(off)s had two sons, Nathan and Morris, and two daughters, Anne and Helen, the Glaziers had two sons, also Nathan and Morris, and two daughters, Bessie and Anna. But with the names, the similarity ends. As Helen Heller put it, "We just didn't have a lot in common. We had different outlooks on things."

Even more than the Glazer(off)s, the Glaziers separated themselves from the non-Jewish community. Their ways were almost entirely old world ways. As Max Levinson, a neighbor and family friend remembers, the children were brought up in an exceedingly strict household. The girls, when they reached their teens, were not allowed to see boys, or to bring boys into the house. In no way were the children allowed to mix in the gentile community. And while Sam Glazer(off) "went out among the farmers," Ben Glazier managed his business, but that was all.

Even within the Jewish community, however, the Glaziers were less social than others. They seem to have been somewhat of a closed family, and certainly, they had their sorrows (both girls, as grown women, developed emotional problems).[6] And when they grew older, and Chaika died, Ben's pain was deep. He died not long afterwards. After the death of the parents, Morris continued on with his father's junk business. He never married and until his death, he never left Gouverneur.

Nathan Glazier was the only one of the four younger Glaziers to marry. He was a graduate of St. Lawrence University in Canton. A captain with the M.P.'s in World War II, he served in Burma. After the war, Nathan returned to Gouverneur for a short period of time, then married and moved with his wife, Sylvia, to Florida. Nathan died in Florida, but his widow still lives there, and three of their four children still survive. There are no descendants of the Glaziers in Gouverneur.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Direct quotes are taken from a conversation with Helen and Sandy Heller at their home on Natural Dam Road, Gouverneur, on February 22, 1981.

[2]This volume includes a section on the Ruderman family.

[3]The Saidel family is also included in this study.

[4]The dates of death were taken from the Plaque in the Ogdensburg Synagogue. Thank you, Rabbi Kozak.

[5]Max Levinson, neighbor and friend, remembers the Glaziers.

[6]It seems proper to note that Bessie Glazier, not just her brother, Nathan, had a college degree. She attended Syracuse University.

The Kaplans of Gouverneur

Not just a merchant prince, Sol Kaplan was both a prince and a prince of a merchant. He was a successful man, a good, kind-hearted man, and an enjoyable personality. "His was an exuberant and effervescent personality. He literally bounced at times as he traveled from village to village supervising the department stores he owned."[1] In a published tribute to Sol, taken from a newspaper clipping (unlabelled) written shortly after his death, the following words describe his life:

"Inherently friendly, kind, thoughtful of others, absolutely honest, generous to a fault, he worked his own way to success in a new country, to find not just the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, but, more importantly, great happiness in home and family and children and in the friendship and respect of his contemporaries."[2]

In terms of material success, Sol Kaplan started out in Gouverneur peddling by foot, pack on his back. By his prime years he "owned and operated stores in the villages of Gouverneur, Massena, Canton, Watertown, Ogdensburg, Tupper Lake, Star Lake, Theresa, and Malone," and in his lifetime was "said to have bought and sold more stores than any man in Northern New York."[3]

In terms of his civic achievements and affiliations, Sol Kaplan was an active member of Gouverneur's "Russian Jewish Temple," and when that closed down, he joined Watertown's Degel Israel Synagogue, and also in his later years, a conservative Jewish synagogue in Ventnor, New Jersey. He was a "life member of Richville Lodge F&AM, I.O.O.F., the Media Temple shrine, Watertown, the Ogdensburg Elks club, and the Gouverneur Chamber of Commerce."[4]

In terms of his humanity, Sol was a philanthropist who donated generously to one cause after the other; the anecdotes of his generosity are seemingly without end. Nor did his generosity go unrewarded. One of the proudest moments in Sol Kaplan's life occurred in 1950 when he was the recipient of the "Good Citizenship" award granted by the Gouverneur V.F.W. "as a tribute to his community service."[5] His daughter, Bertha Segal, speaks aptly when she says, "It seems that by giving, he received."

His Beginnings

Sam and Lina Kaplan, of the Province of Minsk, White Russia, had a son whom they named Louis. Louis married and had a daughter, Mollie, and perhaps other children too; his wife died. He married a second time, this time a cousin, Brina Friedman (whose parents were Avram Friedmann and Barseva Kaplan Friedmann). The Kaplan family lived by a very large fishing lake in the town of Dokshitz, where they owned a busy Hotel Rooming House. On April 25, 1888, a son, Sol, was born, not in Dokshitz, but in the nearby town of Berezino.[7]

When Sol was still very young, his mother had another son, Boris, and died in childbirth. Louis remarried again and there may have been other children. Little is known about his third wife.

Sol was a happy, rambunctious little boy, who admired the strong people on the lake. He was an outdoorsman by nature, who resented the stuffy Cheder, where Jewish boys sat day after day studying Torah and Hebrew under the strict guidance of an old bearded "Rebbe:"

"He wanted to run and play. As the rabbis were old men, they would fall asleep. One day when the Rabbi was asleep, Sol tied his beard around the leg of the table and then ran away. When the Rabbi woke up, he couldn't get his head up and he screamed. They finally caught Sol and gave him a licking."[8]

Sol loved telling stories about how naughty he used to be. It seems to have been a light-hearted childhood, with candy (which he would hide under his cap), with a huge black dog, so huge he could ride it. It was the kind of childhood that left lasting graphic memories.

When Sol was around 13, his father (at only 36) died. And Sol went to live with his maternal grandmother, Barceva Kaplan-Friedmann, "the grandmother that he loved."[9] In her home, even as an orphan, Sol lived a secure life, surrounded by family.

But life did not continue so smoothly for any Jewish boy of the Russian Pale—there was the Russian conscription, that "was considered practically death." And Sol was now 19. In the fall of 1907 he left by way of the Caspian Sea, via Turkey.[10] From Turkey, by boat, in the lowest class steerage passage, he came to America:

"He slept on the top berth, and he was nervous because there was a light on by his bed, which he was afraid would catch fire. Thinking it was a kerosene lamp, all night he kept trying to blow out the light—in vain. This was Sol's introduction to electricity."[11]

Young Sol landed in New York City on Septmber 15, 1907 "with $25.00 in his pocket."[12] He stayed with his sister,[13] and soon had a job as an apprentice "boy's clothing cutter for the *Julius Schwartz & Sons* firm."[14] For two and a half years, Sol worked for *Schwartz & Sons.* But he was an outdoor person. Sol could not abide by the poor factory conditions, or the bad air in the factory. It was in New York, he was later to tell his children, that he lost his hair. He left the cutter's job to get a job selling rugs from door to door. He did that for a while, but still he was unhappy. He needed to get away from the city altogether. There were relatives, the Katzmans,[16] doing well up north, in Gouverneur, New York. Rumor had it that anyone coming north would find work and backing from the Katzmans. In the year 1910, Sol Kaplan left the New York City area to begin life as a country peddler.

With pack on his back, so Gouverneur residents remember their parents telling them, Sol Kaplan began peddling, on foot. But quickly he graduated to horse and wagon (perhaps lent to him by the Katzmans). This was the life for Sol, who, in his own words, "was strong as an ox, and worked as hard as a horse."

He bought a horse of his own:

"His first purchase of a horse occurred in the area of Edwards. He was bargaining with the owner, who kept repeating, 'the horse don't look (see?) too good.'

Sol replied, 'The horse looks good to me.' He purchased the horse and started home with it—with difficulty. The horse turned out to be blind."[17]

With wagon behind his blind horse, Nellie, Sol Kaplan made his rounds of the countryside surrounding Gouverneur. Sol liked people, and people liked him. He was scrupulously honest; he was clean—and "he had such a sense of humor!"[18] In those

early years, as a young bachelor, Sol lived in a boarding house in Gouverneur. There were other young boarders: Pearl Orvis, who worked in a local bank, and some students from Richville who were attending high school in Gouverneur. These young friends taught him English.

And it happened in Richville that there was a big fire:

"A factory burned down. And one day as Sol was traveling through Richville, a man came up to him and said, 'Sol, we've got a factory that's burned down, and there's a lot of junk there. Do you think you could make any money if you came and carried it away for us?'

'Yes, I think I could.' They put a very low price on the junk. Sol went to the bank of Gouverneur, where Pearl Orvis worked. Someone in the bank gave Pearl the O.K.; Pearl gave him the money, and he gave the money to the man in Richville. Sol made three or four or five times that, and then came back to the bank to pay off his debt. They had no record of the loan, and they didn't want to take his money, but Sol insisted."[19]

With this transaction, Sol began to make large profits, and to establish himself in the community with a reputation for scrupulous honesty. He wrote letters to New York, to his half-sister, Mollie, and her husband, Hyman Saidel. They should come North, wrote Sol, "This is virgin country." The Saidels arrived and soon Hyman too, with horse and wagon, peddled junk around the Gouverneur area.[20]

Around 1914 Sol and Hyman together opened a furniture store on West Main Street. This partnership lasted about a year. Sol was unhappy with the furniture business, as he would later tell his children, because he hated having to go into people's homes and repossess furniture.

It was sometime during this same period of his life that Sol decided it was time to marry. In 1915 he returned to New York City, where there were eligible young Jewish women, and employed a matchmaker. Says Bertha, "I'm sure that Dad was introduced to several women," but when he met the twenty-five-year-old, auburn-haired beauty, Esther Chodosh, his choice was made. They were married on November 20, 1915.

Esther Chodosh Kaplan

There are no newspaper articles eulogizing Esther Chodosh Kaplan, although she was as kind, and caring, as her outgoing husband. Esther was simply a "sweet old-fashioned girl." Lou

Greenblatt describes her:

"Esther was a quiet, dedicated wife and mother. She loved her family and her home, devoting all her resources to a stable home atmosphere and the needs of her husband and children. This was her dimension, to be as much respected as, rightly, that of those who sought women's rights. There were and are many like her for whom this role is the ultimate plateau of success and happiness."

According to her daughter, Bertha:

"Perhaps she had an inferiority complex, because she didn't feel educated. She was an Eastern Star, a member of the Ladies Aid, the Haddassah, and of the Rebecca Lodge, but she seldom attended meetings. Yet everyone loved her; she was a refined, quiet lady with an aristocratic air. She was always wanting to do for others, always had something good to say. I can never remember being forced to wipe dishes, or to do chores. She just did everything, and never complained. There was no such thing as the ERA, Women's Rights. I remember taking a friend of mine home in the fifties. My friend was studying for her Ph.D in psychology. Mother said to her, 'You know, too much education isn't good for a woman.' "

Her Beginnings

In the Minsk area of White Russia, George and Esther Chodosh had a son, Jack, who became a carpenter, and married the daughter of Harry and Hannah Horowitz. On June 10, 1890, a daughter, Esther, was born to them. (There were already other children as well, at least one sister, but their names, and who they were, have been lost to us.) The Chodoshes were a poor family. The house they lived in had a dirt floor and at night, during the cold Russian winters, they brought in the goat, and the chickens, and "whatever animals they had, so that they wouldn't freeze." And in this same town, up on a hill, there was a big house, with a beautiful garden, and it was a rich, Russian family that lived there. The little Jewish Esther, with her gleaming auburn hair, liked to walk in the wonderful garden. The woman of that big house adored Esther, wanted to adopt her, and tried to get her to come and live with her. But Esther refused.

When Esther's father, Jack, was 36 years old, he had a carpentry job in a neighboring town. He died there of "very bad pains in the stomach." (Could it have been appendicitis?) He came back "in a box." His widow, Eleanor, took care of the

family alone.

Some years had passed when, in the area there came a "plague," some sort of epidemic. Eleanor's sister, who lived in a neighboring town, was taken sick, "with many young children in the house, and no one to care for them." Eleanor left her own children (who were now a little older) to take care of her sister's family. The sister died, and then Eleanor became sick, and she also died. The Horowitz children, and the Chodosh children, were left orphaned.

Esther, now about 16, went to live with a married sister. There she stayed for the next few years. But the sister's home was never a real home for her. She never felt at ease there.

"Tante Mariasha," a beloved aunt, another of Eleanor's sisters, had, with her husband, sometime previously immigrated to America. Having no children of their own, they began bringing over to America the Chodosh and Horowitz orphans, and "took care of them when they arrived." There came over Esther's cousins, Lily, Harry and Al, two of Esther's brothers, Harry and Max, and Esther herself. She was, at this point, 19.

Esther got a job sewing in a garment factory. She went to night school to learn English. "School was a big part of her life in those days." For six years Esther lived in New York's Jewish community, working and studying.

Not until she was 25 did she meet the man she would marry. It was an arranged match, but, says Bertha, "mother shows that she had free will." There had been other suitors, including "a very handsome man who threatened to throw himself off the bridge if she refused him." She did refuse him, but she did not refuse the short, tough, and merry Sol Kaplan. He had appealed to her, Esther was later to tell the children, "because he had a sense of humor. He made her laugh. And he was honest. She knew that whatever he said was true."

Gouverneur Life

Sol had purchased the *Andrew Kinney Clothing Store* on East Main Street, but this first clothing operation was far from successful. "Here," according to the *Watertown Times*, "he operated a clothing store through two lean years."

With his beautiful bride ("Everybody that knew her as a bride when she came to Gouverneur talks about how beautiful she was."), Sol moved into an apartment complex. While Sol tried to make a go of the store, Esther found herself often alone. It was difficult. Says Bertha:

"After all, she had left the Jewish community. She had left the relatives that she'd known from Russia. Although she was speaking English, from what I understand, it wasn't easy. She told me of her longing for certain foods, when she was pregnant for her first child, that she was terribly hungry for smoked fish. So she bought a fish and went down in the basement where there was a combined furnace for the different apartments and started smoking the fish. Sol was furious that in America, his wife would send the smells of smoking fish through all the apartments."

In 1917 their first son, Louis, was born. He was a strong, healthy baby. When the time came, a Moyil was called in from Utica to perform the ritual circumcision. Esther was later to say that she had "hated the sight of the Moyil, because he was so dirty." The circumcision did not heal properly. The baby developed blood poisoning, and died when he was two weeks old.

This death changed Esther and Sol. They abandoned many of the traditional rituals of Orthodox Judaism. They no longer kept a kosher house, and they "were deathly afraid of circumcision." In this way they became a little set apart from the other, so very traditional, members of Gouverneur's Russian Jewish Temple.



Esther and Sol Kaplan with baby Sam, 1918.

Within about a year, in 1918, Esther gave birth to another son, whom they named Sam. And life took a turn for the better. According to the *Watertown Times*, Sol went back into the junk business for a time. He sold the clothing store back to the Kinney family:

"He then made his first real estate purchase in the village of Gouverneur, buying a small building on the site of a supermarket on Clinton Street. This launched him into buying property."[21]

With Ed Shaw, his good friend and employee, at his right hand, Sol set about establishing himself, this time successfully, in the clothing business. The store on Clinton Street prospered. And he began buying property, selling property, rebuying property. The bankers were by now aware of Sol Kaplan's honesty, and his business sense; if Sol needed capital, the capital was there.

When baby Sam was still a toddler, the family moved out of the apartment block into a house of their own, and later from that house, with the help of a Mr. Parker (who became a neighbor and close friend), into a large, beautiful, house on 208 E. Main Street. Eleanor was born in 1921; in 1925 there came another daughter, Bertha, and seven years later, in 1932, Albert, the youngest Kaplan child, made his appearance.

The original Kaplan store had by now expanded to include branches at Massena, Norwood, and Ogdensburg, and soon six other northern communities would also have their Kaplan's stores. Sol ran the main branch in Ogdensburg. "The hours in those days were from about eight in the morning until nine at night. He left very early, came home for lunch, then went back to the store, came home for supper, then went back." While Esther never worked at the store, the children, when they reached high school age, did. Bertha remembers, "Oh, I loved it. I would be the cashier at Christmas time." Every Sunday the managers from the other branches of "Kaplans" would call the Kaplan home. "How's business?" Sol would invariably ask. And then, "What's moving?"

When Gouverneur's temple closed, the Kaplans joined the congregation of Degel Israel in Watertown. Sol was a force in that Synagogue, and "when they built the new synagogue, he was asked to carry the Torah."

For many the thirties were years of terrible hardship:

"We believe that the hobos who traveled through the area put a mark in front of our house as so many men came asking for

food. When Mother would run out of food, she would call a local restaurant—usually the diner on Clinton Street and tell them to feed whoever she was sending down.

There were men eating on the back porch almost every day. If they were clean, or if it was cold weather, Mother would feed them in the kitchen."

Esther and Sol gave where they could, and they gave much and generously. The children grew up in a household where caring was the norm. "Kindele," Sol was known to say in the event of a family squabble, "remember, the kind way is the best way."

With the second World War, and his son, Sam, in the service, there came a more personal problem for Sol. Whether it was the result of worry, or of a bad cold caught at Sylvia Lake, Sol began to suffer from chronic asthma. He and the family spent extended periods in Atlantic City where the salt air brought some relief. And there was a long trip to Arizona, for its pure, dry, air. But there never was a cure.

The years passed quickly. The children grew up, married. Sol transferred the store in Ogdensburg to Eleanor and her husband, Sam Simon; the Massena store went to Albert; the Potsdam store to Sam; and the Canton store went to Bertha and her husband, Abner Segal. Says Bertha, "We all had a business. Mother and Dad loved it. Everyone used to tell my mother and dad how lucky they were that their children were all nearby, and she'd always smile and say, 'Well, Sol planned it.' " As she grew older, Esther's health became precarious, and traveling impossible. But Sol Kaplan, in 1958, for the first time since having left in 1907, returned to Russia—this time on the great oceanliner, the Queen Mary; this time first class, in style. Having gotten special permission from the Soviet Government to return to the Province of Minsk, he went in search of his family—and he did find a sister, Sophie, after a separation of 51 years. The trip had been a success—all he could have hoped it would be.

Upon his return to America, it was evident to all that Sol Kaplan was very ill. He died soon afterward of cancer. Esther moved to Massena with her son, Albert. Within six months, she too had passed away.

Without their parents, the North Country held less of a grip on the younger Kaplans. And also, in the years after the deaths of Sol and Esther Kaplan, changes were taking place in the commercial constructs of St. Lawrence County villages. Shop-

ping centers were growing up in the outskirts of the towns; the Kaplan stores began to fade out. After 25 years in Ogdensburg, Eleanor and her husband, Sam, moved to California; Bertha, with her husband, Abner Segal, went to Skaneateles (near Syracuse); Albert immigrated to Israel, where he is a stockbroker. Of all the Kaplan children, only Sam, who lives with his wife, Betsy, in Potsdam, remains in the North Country. There are no descendants of the Kaplans living in Gouverneur.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Louis Greenblatt's notes; Mr. Greenblatt knew the Kaplans personally.

[2]This clipping was loaned us by Sam Kaplan of Potsdam.

[3]Obituary of Sol Kaplan; *Watertown Daily Times;* January 5, 1959.

[4]Ibid.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Conversation with Bertha Segal; May 18, 1981.

[7]According to his application for citizenship, Sol was born on April 25, 1888, in Berezino, White Russia, just east of Minsk. The document is dated August 16, 1911. As Sol was only 23 years old at that time, his written data is considered accurate. It indicates he arrived in New York City on September 15, 1907. (The application is on file in the County Clerk's office, Canton, N.Y., Vol 4—#321.) Is it possible that the parents *had lived* in Berezino, and the grandmother in Dokshitz?

[8]Ibid. #6

[9]Ibid.

[10]It is not clear why he chose this route. According to daughter, Bertha Segal, "I don't think it was difficult for him to get the money to leave Russia." According to Louis Greenblatt's notes, ". . . instead of using the underground route through Germany, which he could not afford to pay for on his own, he went south to Turkey, and came to the United States from there."

[11]He told this story to his family in 1958, as he boarded the "Queen Mary," now as a wealthy, successful businessman.

[12]Ibid. #3

[13]Sol Kaplan's obituary: the *Tribune Press*, Gouverneur, N.Y., January 8, 1959. Could this sister have been Mollie? Could it be, then, that she had preceeded him to America? See section on Mollie and Hyman Saidel.

[14]Ibid. *Tribune Press* Obituary

[15]Ibid. #3

[16]According to Watertown's Louis Krupkin, Jacob Katzman's first wife was a Kaplan. (See section on Katzman family) Louis Krupkin, the founder of the Army-Navy Store in Watertown, N.Y., was a road salesman for many years. He sold merchandise to storekeepers and peddlers, and knew many of the early Jewish families personally.

[17]Louis Greenblatt's notes.

[18]Ibid. #6. "We met women who used to live in the same rooming house with him in Gouverneur . . . they told us such nice things about when Dad lived in the boarding house."

[19]Ibid. #6

[20]See article on Hyman and Mollie Kaplan Saidel in this volume.

[21]Ibid. #3

The Saidel Family

When Mollie Kaplan was a little girl she used to sit on the front doorstep of the Cheder, listening as the boys received their lessons inside. And so, she learned some Hebrew, Jewish law; and she managed to become fluent in Yiddish, Polish and Russian as well. Jewish children in those days were barred from the Russian schools, and only boys attended the Jewish Cheders. For a Shtetl girl of the Russian Pale in the late 19th century she was, due to her own determination, quite well educated.

Mollie had probably been born in the village of Dokshitz, White Russia, around 1887, the daughter of Louis Kaplan and his first wife.[1] Her own mother had died when she was a baby, and two stepmothers (the first, Brina Friedmann, the mother of Sol Kaplan, died in childbirth) followed. When she was in her early teens her father died. What she did after her father's death, or where she lived, is not known until sometime around 1906 or '07, when she migrated to New York City. Her half-brother, Sol Kaplan, also came to New York around this time period, and it is not quite clear who came first, or whether they came together.

The family had been comparatively well-off in Dokshitz, but America had held promises of the kind of future no Jew could expect in Russia. America, the land of dreams! Yet, despite any hopes she may have harbored of a fine future in Golden America, Mollie, as did so many others, found poverty and confusion in New York's lower East Side. "Things were rough in New York City"[2] for immigrant Jews in these years. They lived in crowded tenements, the air thick with the sounds and smells of poverty. Not long after her arrival she was introduced to

Hyman Saidel, another young immigrant from the Russian Pale. They met, courted, and married. Now she was a lower East Side wife. Her husband was still a "greenhorn," not fluent in the English language, only 5'4", but nevertheless determined and tough; he had no intentions of remaining a poor slum-dweller.

Since his arrival in 1905, Hyman Saidel had been working in a foundry for $3.00 a week. In order to save the nickel which was carfare, he used to walk the three or four miles between his home (he was staying with relatives) and the foundry, morning and night. In order to eat cheaply, he took advantage of New York Saloons, where you "bought a beer for a nickel, and then all the eats: beef, bread, and everything, were spread out." When they married, he left the foundry to become a helper in an apartment house, doing maintenance and plumbing. In this way, he learned the plumbing business. But it was still hard to make a living. In 1910, their first son, Louis, was born.

Around this same time (approximately 1910) Mollie's half-brother, Sol, left the city for the upstate village of Gouverneur, where cousins, Abe and Slevie Katzman ran a scrap and furniture business. Now Sol was writing back enthusiastically. "This is virgin country." Here, in the less populated north, a Jew could make a living. In 1912 Hyman and Mollie Saidel boarded the train, rode through Syracuse, Utica, and north to another new life. For each of them it was the second major uprooting of their young adulthood.

Yet for Hyman this second major transition must have been far less traumatic than his first. Having been born in 1884 in the small village of Kublich, Province of Vilna, not far from Mollie's hometown in that narrow corridor which was once Poland and was now a part of Russia, he had been slated by the Russian Czar, as were all Jewish boys of that time, for indefinte military service. En masse the young Jews were fleeing Russia. Already 21, Hyman may have been evading the service for some time. Now he left by underground:

"They traveled mostly by night, in groups. By day they hid in haystacks. The (Russian) troops that were on the alert for them went through the farm houses. They suspected that the boys were hidden in these haystacks, and they kept sticking them with their swords and pitchforks, trying to see if they could get anybody to come out. But eventually they made their way out."

Or at least Hyman Saidel made his way out. First to Ger-

many. Then he crossed the Atlantic, crammed in with a mass of other immigrants, by steerage, with just enough money in his pocket to enter America legally. He had come to New York alone, in need of refuge; he had found refuge, but a lot of frustration and poverty as well; he was leaving New York now, a married man with a family to support, and with fresh hopes of success and self-fulfillment.

Mollie, one might imagine, could have been somewhat less enthusiastic about this latest move. She had left her childhood home to find the poverty of New York slum living, but despite the poverty, at least the East Side was Jewish. Now she was leaving the security of New York's tight Jewish Community for a pioneer's life in an area where Jews were few and far between. It is clear how isolated she had been from mainstream America when you look at the language situation. Despite at least five years in America, despite an obvious knack for languages, Mollie Saidel arrived in Gouverneur without a functioning knowledge of English.

The Katzmans got Hyman started with horse and wagon. He began to peddle junk. In the way of the North Country peddler he traveled from farm to farm selling his wares. His English was poor, but as long as he could count, as long as he could say, "Please loook in my basket," and "Thank you," he could manage. Sylvia Katzman was known for teaching new peddlers all they would need to know to start on the road.

And it worked out for him. He made money, and the farmers were kind. Said his son, Bennie Saidel:

"According to both my father and uncle (Sol Kaplan) the farmers were very kind. They were tickled to death that the peddlers had come, and they went out and put the horse away, and gave them a nice bed to sleep in, and they were very understanding about what the peddlers ate (kosher food). The farmers were pleased to see them because they carried news. Maybe two farmers lived 20 miles apart and a cow got sick; my father would tell them about the sick cow. And to the farmer this meant a better line of communication as well as having people in they probably otherwise wouldn't have."

Hyman became a successful peddler, but Mollie was lonely.

Her husband would be gone for three, four, five days at a time, sometimes even more. In 1913 a second son, Bennie was born. She was often alone in the house with the two children. It was a helpless feeling for little Bennie, even as a tiny child, knowing something was not right with his fragile-looking

mother. "You knew something was wrong when she'd cry. It was lonely for her. No question about it. Not having friends; not being able to speak, but there was nothing we could do. We were only just little kids."

Around 1914 Hyman and his brother-in-law Sol Kaplan opened a furniture store together, but that partnership didn't last more than a year or so. When it dissolved, Sol went into clothing[3] while Hyman stayed in the furniture business. Thus, Hyman was off the road.



Saidel's Furniture Store, 1927.

As years passed the Saidels settled into the Gouverneur community. And with time more relatives and landsleite filtered up, so that the Gouverneur Jewish community grew. The Saidels were much involved in this growth. Just as the Katzmans and Sol Kaplan had sponsored them, they now helped new settlers establish themselves. And they actually brought people over from Europe. Even in the earliest times Hyman sent money back to Europe. He brought over one or two brothers, two sisters, his mother. One of the brothers lived with the family for a while. Bennie could remember his grandmother

staying with them, "an old lady, wearing a black shawl." In this context, Mollie was "a ball of fire! There wasn't anybody that came into the community that didn't wind up at our house. It didn't matter whether you were related or friends of a Jewish family —she was so very hospitable that everyone that came made it a point to come and see her." Eventually she learned English as well and could read and write and function in Gouverneur.

Hyman, on the other hand, energetic businessman that he was, never did master the written language. "I used to read his letters; he wrote it as it sounded, that's all there was to it. And, you know, we used to laugh. But everybody understood what he wanted. He was in business. He had to write letters to order stuff and everything. And they understood him." He didn't need grammar and spelling to succeed, so he didn't need grammar and spelling. "He was a strong-willed man. I mean, you could only do it one way, his way. God help you if you didn't."

By the '20's about 13 or 14 Jewish families had established themselves in the Gouverneur area. These years were the heyday of the "Russian Jewish Temple." "Both Mollie and Hyman Saidel were active in the schul and their home was always open to visiting particpants. Everybody in the area came over (to Gouverneur) for services and those that didn't have a place to stay, or a place to eat, often stayed with us."

The Saidel furniture business continued to grow, and for Hyman Saidel, Gouverneur had meant success, but all was not well with Mollie. Although she kept busy and active, her life seems to have been plagued with disillusionment and loneliness. She was sick, suffering from what today might have been diagnosed as cancer. She must have found it more and more difficult to keep up with the home, her two young sons, the community . . . and yet she did keep up, until in 1928, at only 41, Mollie Kaplan Saidel died. She was buried in the Watertown Cemetery. That chapter closed.

Hyman did his best to raise his sons along the strict moral and religious lines his wife had followed. But he was no kosher cook. ("It was impossible to keep us going in the same line.") He was a strong-willed man, a driving businessman; he had no time or energy to be a gentle "mother." The home was a radically changed place for the now teenaged boys. And the community also was changing. The Gouverneur Jewish community was no longer able to sustain a synagogue. When, in

1930, the synagogue was closed, Hyman Saidel was entrusted with the Torah cabinet and the two Torahs. He took them home, later donating them to the Carthage Congregation. Another chapter ended.

Louis was gone. He had married Blanche Sverdlow, and the couple had moved to Potsdam. But Bennie was still at home, a young man of about 18, when his father remarried.

Hyman made periodic trips to visit his two younger brothers, Morris and Harry, now living in New York City. It seems that the brothers felt it wasn't a healthy thing for a Jewish man to remain long without a wife. On one of Hyman's New York trips, two or three years after Mollie's death, one of the brothers introduced him to Netti, a widow from Englewood, New Jersey. He married her and brought her home. Bennie had had no idea that his father was even planning to marry.



Netti Saidel and Fannie Glazeroff, 1948.

A second generation Jew who had grown up in Brooklyn, Netti was more Americanized than Mollie had ever been. She was very different from Mollie, with stylish clothes, high heels, and blonde hair. The Jewish matrons of Gouverneur welcomed a new resident[4] who shared many new recipes and stories with

them. She proved to be a kind and loving wife to Hyman. Despite her New World style, she was an excellent cook, a spotless housekeeper, and a thoughtful friend. Still, for Bennie, she could be no substitute for his real mother.

The '30's brought a changed lifestyle to the Saidels. More and more Bennie took over in the store. His father began to mellow and take life easier. "Gradually I began to get him out of the place (the store). In the summertime, by one, two o'clock, he would go home and putter around in the garden."

But life would not allow Hyman Saidel to relax into a pleasant retirement. In 1938, a painful shock. Louis Saidel, at 28, was dead. And then the war came. "If the war hadn't come along . . . I was just getting to the point where I began to take over responsibility for the business," Bennie explained, "though he was reluctant to let go." But the war did come along and in 1941 Bennie joined the army. Hyman never did retire, but continued on until, in 1943, he died suddenly of a stroke. Said Bennie, ". . . and I was so far from home it took me probably six months before I ever got back here to settle affairs." Netti stayed. Hyman had left her the house. It had become home. She stayed on in Gouverneur for the remainder of her life.

Bennie might never have re-settled here. "I had given it a considerable amount of thought. I had no ties. My mother was dead. My brother. My father. What did I have to come back here to?" But then, in Baltimore, while he was still in the service, Bennie Saidel met Hannah Needle. "I still had the business up here. And we decided to settle back up here." Bennie prospered in the North Country, eventually owned and operated several furniture stores and bowling alleys in the area. The Bennie Saidels raised seven children (Howard, Michael, Louis M., Robert, Karen, Deborah, Melissa and Grace) in Gouverneur; now these children have grown, and all but Robert have left Gouverneur.

On March 28, 1981, Bennie Saidel, who was kind enough to share with us these memories of his family, died suddenly of a heart attack.

Bennie left a much revered memory in Gouverneur, for he and Hannah maintained a home of open and generous hospitality. Bennie's philosophy was one of devotion to his family, his community, and his religion. He developed a new area in Gouverneur where comfortable housing could be built. To provide decent recreation for Gouverneur's young people, he built and maintained new bowling alleys. He supported sports activi-

ties (he had been a fine athlete as a student in Gouverneur High School). One of his pet projects was the American Field Service, which brought exchange students from foreign countries to Gouverneur. He and his family were supporters and active members of Congregation Anshe Zophen, the synagogue in Ogdensburg.

As Helen Heller put it, "In this day of mobile societies, it is unusual for generations of families to be as close as we were to the Saidels. Bennie and Hannah were like family to us; his parents and my parents were also very close; his grandparents and my grandparents were friends in Europe. Hannah Saidel always says the most important thing we can give our children is roots and wings; I guess you could say that's what we have tried to accomplish with the last generation of Gouverneur Jews."

FOOTNOTES

[1]In his application for citizenship, dated August 16, 1911 (see footnotes re Kaplan family), Mollie's half-brother, Sol, lists himself as having been born in Berezino, not Dokshitz. It is possible, then, that Mollie, who was older, was also born in Berezino, and that the family later moved to Dokshitz.

[2]This, and other direct quotes are taken from a taped interview with Bennie Saidel dated February 18, 1981.

[3]See section on Kaplan family.

[4]Taped conversation with Helen and Sandy Heller, February 22, 1981.

The Levinson Family

(Who were not related to the Katzmans!)

Morris and Alta Levinson did not come to Gouverneur through the Katzman/Ruderman relation chain, but rather probably through a kinship with the Friedmans of Ogdensburg and Massena. Nor did the Levinsons live out their lives in Gouverneur. But, yes, they were active members of the Gouverneur Jewish Congregation, and, yes, for some 15 years Gouverneur was their home. And although in 1930 his family moved to Syracuse, the Levinsons third son, Max, as a grown man returned to Gouverneur and has, since 1946, carried on a legal practice here. Max Levinson is one of the few Jewish residents of Gouverneur who remembers the days when the Jewish old timers held services in the Schul on Main Street, and was, himself, one of the children who studied Hebrew in that Schul, and, in fact, was one of the last of these children to be bar mitzvahed there.

His parents, he tells us, came originally from the White Russian Province of Grodno, 40 miles from the Lithuanian border. (This was the hometown of the Friedman family, and of the Ogdensburg Fishers.)[1] How to describe them? His father, Morris Levinson, was light complected, with a mustache, "and a sort of reddish streak to his hair."[2] His mother, Alta (nee Seigel) was dark. They were married and already the parents of one son, Irving,[3] when, in 1903, the Sino-Japanese War sent Morris fleeing across the Atlantic to America. He became one of the thousands of immigrant Jews trying to make a go of it in New York City. It was six years before Morris was able to send for his wife and son. Perhaps *patient* and *determined* would be good words to describe them.



Alta Levinson



Morris Levinson

Sometime after 1909 the reunited Levinson family moved to Syracuse. And in Syracuse, on December 25, 1912, Christmas Day, a second son, Harry, was born to them. "Exactly when my father left New York, or how long he was in Syracuse, I really don't know." says Max. Nor is he certain about what the family did for a living in Syracuse, although it seems probable that Morris peddled, because he apparently had some connection with a *Syracuse Dry Goods Company.* Sometime after 1913 he came north to the Gouverneur area as a peddler for that firm. He didn't actually represent them, but "they advanced him the merchandise; he'd go out and sell it, then go back and get more." Neither Max Levinson nor his brother, Harry, is certain whether their parents settled in Gouverneur simply because it was a good area for peddling, or whether it was due to the relationship with Leon Friedman that they settled. Leon was Alta's nephew, and already living in the North Country, in Ogdensburg.

But, whatever their motives for coming, the Levinsons stayed for quite some time in Gouverneur. With horse and wagon, Morris peddled dry goods in the area; eventually he opened a small store of his own on West Main Street. The family grew. Max, born in 1915, was the first of five Levinson children to be born in Gouverneur. Following Max were Rogena, 1916; Paul, 1919; Pearl, 1921; and then, in 1926, the "unexpected baby," Leonard.

The Levinsons were, as were most of the other Polish/Russian Jews, Orthodox in their traditions, and Yiddish speaking. They were very much a part of the Gouverneur Jewish Community, and depended upon that community as a cultural base for them as Jews. But still, as the years passed, they became more Americanized. In 1917, when Max was learning to talk, Yiddish was the language he learned. "My native language is not English," he explains. "The first language I learned was Yiddish. I didn't learn English until I went out on the street." But by the time Leonard was born in 1926, the whole family was speaking English in, as well as out of, the house . . . "so that my youngest brother never learned to speak Yiddish."

Max remembers, as a child, going to the Main Street "Temple" for Holidays; he remembers going with his brother to visit a paid Rabbi who was staying "down near where the Rudermans lived" for Hebrew lessons. He remembers the closeness that was felt in Gouverneur's Jewish community, the sense of extended family. Only the Eckmanns were a little on the outside. "Their background was German . . . they didn't concern themselves with us." When newcomers arrived by train, it was often one of the young Levinsons who met them at the station.

In 1928, when he was 13, Max Levinson was bar mitzvahed in the temple on the second floor of 69 East Main Street. By this time the Jewish Community was already beginning to lose its strength. As they became Americanized, sons of the earliest settlers (the young Katzmans, the Ruderman boys, the Glazier's sons) had been attending services more because their parents expected it of them than because of any sense of reverence or tradition.[4] By 1928 these boys were grown men, no longer under their fathers' jurisdiction. And young Jews, in general, were leaving the area. It became more and more difficult to maintain a minyan (the 10 bar mitvahed men traditionally required to hold a Jewish service). Gouverneur's "Russian Jewish Temple" was soon to close its doors. In the fall of 1929, not long before the temple closed, the Levinson family left Gouverneur to eventually resettle in Syracuse.[5] Morris and Alta never came back.

But Max, much later, after World War II, did return to his home town. He had been in the service, he tells us. Although he had become an attorney in 1940, the war had interfered with his career, leaving him in post-war 1946 an attorney in search of a place to open a practice. In a large part influenced by his

good friend, now a successful (nigh on famous)[6] businessman, Charlie Ruderman, Max Levinson decided that Gouverneur was the place for him. Thus, with his return, Max reversed the general pattern of young Gouverneur Jews. Instead of becoming a professional person and leaving Gouverneur, after leaving with his family, he came back to set up a professional practice in Gouverneur.

FOOTNOTES

[1]There are, in the sections devoted to Massena and Ogdensburg, chapters on the Friedman and Fisher families.

[2]This quote, and any other direct quotes, are taken from one of two separate interviews with Mr. Max Levinson in Gouverneur. Louis Greenblatt spoke with him on September 30, 1975, in reference to this subject, and he was interviewed again on January 19, 1981 by Joan Dobbie. Mr. Levinson has been very, very helpful to us on several occasions.

[3]Irving, as an adult in America, would eventually marry Blanche (Sverdlow/Saidel, the widow of Louis Saidel). He and Blanche would become the parents of two daughters.

[4]This bit of information comes from an interview with the Hellers of Gouverneur on February 22, 1981.

[5]Morris and Alta did not move from Gouverneur directly to Syracuse, but rather, at the urging of the Sverdlow family, from Gouverneur to Potsdam. In Potsdam, in the summer of 1929, Morris opened a dress shop. The dress shop failed, and in the summer of 1930, their oldest son, Irving, convinced his family to come to Syracuse. They did, and stayed.

[6]Charlie Ruderman's story, and that of his family, can also be found in this volume.



Ruins of Gouverneur's Jewish Ritual Bath (Mikvah) still exist on 157 Grove Street.

Conclusion

These accounts have been, as nearly as we have been able to make them, the true stories of the real people, the early Jewish families in Gouverneur. Because we limited our effort to those families who lived in Gouverneur itself, we left out, for example, the Edison family, who lived in Hermon; because they had to have come between 1855 and 1920, we left out the Adlers who came later; because they had to have stayed to raise a family, we left out the many transient peddlers. Because of the time element, and the difficulty in tracing down sources, our effort has been far from perfect. There was a Simon family, who perhaps should have been included, and reaching further back, a Bechhold family. There was an Abe Harris (but did he arrive before 1920?), the Rothenbergs (of Clayton?). We have not given a full picture, but perhaps we have given at least a glimpse of those who made up Gouverneur's Jewish Community, before us.

Whatever measure of success we have attained is entirely due to the helpfulness of those relatives and friends of the early families, who have shared their time, their memories, their photographs and documents, their knowledge of history, in some cases their editorial skills, and in all cases a piece of themselves, so that this project could be completed.

MASSENA

by Blanche Levine & Louis Greenblatt

The Levine Family
Jacobs & Rossoff Families
The Slavin Family
The Shulkin Family
The Clopman Family
The Landsman Family
The Rosenbaum Family
Friedman & Stone Families
The Kauffman Family
Abe Cohen Family
Halpern Family
Rubin Family
Brennglass Family
Mallinson Family
Other Families

NORFOLK

by Joan Dobbie & Louis Greenblatt

The Norfolk Kauffmans

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF MASSENA



Adath Israel Synagogue, West Orvis and Church Streets. (Courtesy of Massena Historical Society)

The first Jewish settlers arrived when Massena was on the threshhold of change. For a hundred years, Massena was an agricultural community with a sulfur-springs spa that drew tourists. By the end of the century, its population of 3,000 was mostly white, Anglo-Saxon Protestants from New England; French-Canadians who had crossed the St. Lawrence River; and Irish immigrants fleeing the potato famines of their native land. There were no Jews.

In 1898, construction was started on a power canal between the St. Lawrence and Grasse Rivers. Within a few years, Alcoa built its first aluminum reduction plant in Massena, and the insularity and remoteness of the village ended. Workers from 52 countries of the world came to fill the manpower demand caused by these projects. Amongst the wave of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe were the founders of Massena's Jewish community. They were all from an area com-

posed of several hundred square miles which belonged at various times to Lithuania, Poland, and Russia, and they were all seeking to escape the pogroms, conscription in the army, official governmental persecution, and the poverty of their homelands.

Although a few entered the labor contingent, most became tailors, peddlers, or merchants. They got along with both the natives and immigrants and were soon sending for kinfolk, marrying, and starting their own families. There followed a dizzying interrelationship, some of which they imported.

Although today there appears to be more widows than widowers, in the last century the reverse was true. Many wives died young, some at childbirth or shortly after, some from overwork and poor nutrition. The husband, needing someone to care for him and his motherless children, remarried, often to a sister of the deceased wife. More children were born, and half-brothers and sisters lived in the same house. When they came to the United States, they sought each other out and settled nearby.

The "Americanization" process of the Jewish newcomers seemed to develop more quickly than that of other immigrants, and they were frequently called upon to serve as interpreters for the various tongues. In order to accommodate the many needs of the newly arrived workers, those who operated stores kept them open through the evenings although the unpaved streets with wooden sidewalks were dark. In 1914, the village installed electric lights on Main Street, making it "a great White Way." There were few cash registers and, since Saturday was payday, the crush of customers necessitated storing the money in paper bags to be counted on Sunday and taken to the banks on Monday.

By 1912 there were enough Jewish men for a minyan. Services were conducted without a rabbi, at various times in the Army of the Republic headquarters, the old I.O.O.F. lodge room above Main Street and later in the Town Hall, the old Macabee Hall, and the Y.M.H.A. clubrooms over a garage where the post office now stands.

The first minutes of the "Adas Yesrael of Massena" were recorded on May 17, 1914. The record is filled with accounts of seeking places to hold these meetings and services; of discussions of dues; of the hiring of Reverend S. Braverman of Gouverneur as teacher, then schochet, and spiritual leader at $10.00 a week; of later disagreements with him over money and finally, in 1918, requesting his resignation; of members

"pitching in" 10¢ for a party to follow the meeting, with which Mr. Slavin purchased two quarts of ice cream and a box of Nabiscoes with the 90¢ thus raised.

The first officers were: President, Nathan Nadler; Vice-President, Alex Rossoff; Secretary, Nathan Cohen; Trustees, Isaac Friedman, Joseph Stone, Jacob Shulkin, J.I. Mallinson, J.J. Mallinson, and Samuel Levine.

Meetings were held in members' homes, in the old Universalist Church which stood on the corner of West Orvis and Andrews Streets, or in places where services were held, while the members wrangled over whether to buy a building or to build one, how much to spend, and how much dues to charge. The record also reveals the intensity of the attitude of most of them towards orthodoxy and the seriousness of their intention to remain a viable religious group.

The Y.M.H.A. was primarily a social organization and functioned between the mid-teens and 1920, when there were 18 to 20 families. In 1919, the group organized as a religious corporation with the name "Adath Israel," (meaning the Community of Israel) under the laws of the State of New York and purchased the Congregational Church building on the corner of Church and West Orvis Streets. It officially became the synagogue in 1920 with the Reverend Berel Brennglass, who was engaged the previous summer, as schochet, teacher, and rabbi until his retirement in 1941.

It was through the courage and determination of this one man, perhaps more than any other element, that the Jews of Massena survived and overcame the "Blood Libel" of 1928, the only time and place where an accusation of ritual murder was directed at a Jewish community on this continent.* When it ended, the rift between Jew and Gentile healed, at least superficially, and the former good relations resumed.

The flu epidemic of 1918-19 hit the village hard. Some families had all of its members ill at one time. The Baptist Church was converted to an infirmary, but it is not known if any Jews required its facilities. The recession of 1921-23 also hit hard, and a number of Jewish families were forced to move away. Meat was purchased locally and slaughtered by the schochet, cut up by local butcher stores, and sold to the Jewish families. In 1932, land was bought from the F.C. Mason family on Maple Street for a cemetery.

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*See Shulkin Family, p. 163.

It was not easy being a Jew in the isolated North Country during the early decades of the century. Some prospered; some eked out a living. A closeness, a camaraderie, a determination for Jewish identity, which may be diminishing today, existed. Although some remained on the periphery of Jewish life, for most there was a bond of origin, of struggle, of kinship, of belief, and of hope.

Levine Family

The fireworks on the Fourth of July welcomed an emigre to the North Country of the New World. The year was 1899, and the frightened youth was 20 years old.

This was Sam Levine, patriarch of the Levine family and founder of the store that is known throughout the area. He is remembered today, by customers and family both, like the portrait of him that hangs over the "office" part of the store, with small, round, steel-rimmed glasses, aquiline nose, greying moustache, on a dimunitive frame, perhaps 5'3" or 4".

So long as he was able, even after his sons had taken charge, Sam stationed himself by the cash register, making change for the sales clerks. With his failing eyesight, he distinguished coins by touch and paper currency by holding the bills close to his eyes. Until the time when he was confined to his home, he went to the store daily and maintained contact and camaraderie with his customers and employees.

Sam was born in Dokshitz, north of Minsk, east of Vilna, in 1879, when the territory belonged to Poland. Both of his parents had died by the time he was eleven, but not before they had imbued him with a knowledge and love of scholarly teachings, traditions, and prayer. Within five years, he was a traveling Hebrew teacher, servicing students in nearby hamlets. In his later years, he blamed his poor eyesight on these years of intense study.

At 17, he journeyed to Koenigsberg, East Prussia, where he supervised the kosher process in a butter plant for three years. He then went by boat to Huss, England, where he was delayed for two weeks before crossing the ocean. The next stop was Canada, where organizations and individuals came to the aid of

itinerant travelers. Sam disembarked in Quebec City, where a Mr. Eliasof, who welcomed immigrants from Europe, generously took him into his home for a week while he awaited the next stage of his trip to the United States. In Montreal, he was cared for by an immigrant aid society, which saw to it that these travelers were fed. When given a banana, which he had never seen before, he proceeded to eat the skin and all.

Sam arrived in Tupper Lake on July 4, 1899. He remembered the exact date because he had never seen fireworks before and was startled by the noise. His step-brother, Moses Ely, father of Alice Mallinson and known as "Moshe der Schwartzer," was already there, and his older brother, Alex, who had been married in Europe, came later and settled in St. Regis Falls. A family anecdote has Alex's daughter, Martha, pronouncing Tupper Lake as "Tooper Lahkey."



Eva, Martha, and Anna Ely, daughters of Moses Ely.

Sam started to earn his living as a rags peddler with a back pack. His first day on the road brought him a profit of eight dollars, which was a far cry from earned income in the old country. He purchased a horse and wagon from a Mr. Kriff and peddled out of Tupper Lake, selling clothing to the populace of hamlets as far as Helena and to lumber camps. Although speaking only Russian and Polish at first, he did not encounter anti-Semitism. He found that his customers were not bigoted, respecting his religious views and even at times offering him a meal of tea in a glass and eggs. Being very orthodox, he prayed three times a day with tefillin and said the blessing before and after meals.

Moses Ely persuaded Sam to go into partnership with him in a saloon that he owned. This Sam did while continuing his peddling. Soon it became his custom to stop in the saloon on his return from the road to have a glass of whiskey. Afraid of becoming an alcoholic, Sam sold back his share to Moses.

While Sam lived in Tupper Lake, he became aware that many names ended in a vowel, so he added an "e" to his name,

which was originally Levin.

One of the hazards of peddling was the uncertainty of overnight accommodations. While staying in a room on the second floor of a five-story hotel in Santa Clara where indoor plumbing had not yet been introduced, he was made aware that a roomer above him was using an open window to answer nature's call.

In 1903 there arrived in Tupper Lake the man who was to become Sam's father-in-law, Chaim Friedlander. Chaim's parents came from Basagula, and most of their relatives lived in Kuvna in Lithuania. The male members of the family were all educated and did not have to engage in manual labor. Chaim had six brothers and seven sisters. All of the girls died of childhood diseases, and all of the boys lived into their seventies and eighties.

The young woman whom Chaim married, Rosa Freidel Levine, came from a town known as Stalin, where her parents ran a small store. The people in this community were pious to the point of fanaticism. During the year, the women drew water from a well close to their homes. At Passover, however, they walked to another well far away and carried the water back over this long distance. When Chaim was visiting his prospective bride, he inquired about the reason for this self-imposed hardship and was told that the well close to home was not kosher for Passover. Disbelieving, he walked several miles to the next town and explained the situation to the rabbi, asking what could not be kosher about a well of fresh water. The rabbi's comment was "If that is their law, then you will have to abide by it."

After Chaim married and had a family, he left them in Basegula and journeyed to South Africa to earn money to move them to America. He passed along to his children a tale of this voyage. The ship on which he was traveling stopped in Spain, where many persons came on board to sell their wares. Chaim noticed that one was dressed like a Lamedvovnik. Some religious Jews believe that the world would not exist if the Lamedvovnik did not exist. The myth holds that they are 36 men who were put upon earth by the Lord to take upon their shoulders the suffering of mankind without any reward. Chaim attempted to approach this man, but he "disappeared into the air." He ran all over the ship in his search, but the stranger did not reappear. To his dying day, he regretted missing the chance encounter and attributed it to the wish of these holy men not to be

noticed.

Another of Chaim's anecdotes concerns the illnesses which befell European immigrants on their arrival in the dark continent. After an accidental overdose of medication, he discovered he had limited vision. One day, while strolling in a field covered with flowers and weeds, he lay down to rest. Soon he was bathed in perspiration to the point of soaking his clothes. Suddenly, he said, his vision was restored, and he credited this medical miracle to the many herbs in the field about which the doctors were not familiar.

Chaim went into business with a partner, and after their initial success, he returned to Russia to prepare the family for the move to the United States. Going back to South Africa to close out the business, he found that the partner had fled the country with their money. He went back to Russia and, with what money he had managed to salvage, left for the United States in 1903 and later sent for the family piece-meal. There were eight surviving children plus two who had died in infancy. Chaim settled the family in Albany and looked northward for work in his capacity as teacher and schochet. The Jews of Tupper Lake hired him, and he moved part of the family there. Two daughters, Jennie and Lena, remained in Albany where they worked by day and attended school at night. They journeyed to Tupper Lake occasionally for visits.

Sam's relatives arranged an introduction to Chaim, and the story goes that Chaim offered him his pick of his daughters. Jenny was a peppery redhead, and Lena was brown-haired and quiet. Sam said, "I'll take that one," designating Lena. There was no courtship. Sam said that he had never kissed a woman prior to his marriage, which took place two weeks after the meeting. It was at their wedding that money was collected and given to Sam Rossoff to enable him to go to New York City where he became famous as a builder of subways.

A salesman suggested to Sam that they move to Santa Clara, which they did, opening a small grocery and clothing store. Martha was born there in 1904 and Simon in 1906. Another move was to St. Regis Falls with the opening of another store. Sam preferred to continue peddling and hired Abraham Friedman to run the St. Regis Falls store and Dave Castroll, who had been working for the railroad, to run the Santa Clara store. Sam was related to these two men by marriage.

Sam had an older half-sister named Hanna. When Hanna was 16, her mother died and her father married the mother's

sister (Hanna's aunt). This second marriage produced Sam. Hanna later became Mrs. Katz and her daughter, Bessie, married Dave Castroll, and another daughter, Dora, married Abe Friedman. These two sons-in-law of Hanna became the managers of Sam's stores. Earlier, Sam had sent to Europe for Hanna, who was widowed, to keep house for him prior to his marriage to Lena.



Simon Levine, about four years old.

Another twist in this relationship occurred in 1932 when Dave and Bessie Castroll's daughter, Sara, who was born in St. Regis Falls in 1910, married Sam's eldest son, Simon.

For Simon's bris a moyel was imported from Albany. Dave Castroll remembers getting drunk at the bris, dancing on a table, and being unable to hitch his horse to the buggy after the celebration.

The economy in the area was slackening about this time. The woods were becoming depleted by the local logging camps, and a government treaty permitted imports of Canadian lumber at reduced prices with which the American companies could not compete. This led to a chain reaction that hurt all kinds of small businesses.

Meanwhile, Jerry McCarthy, a grocery salesman (he later bought property in Potsdam known as the McCarthy block and sold it to Lou Greenblatt for *Lewis & Co.*) was urging Sam to move to Massena for the business opportunities offered by Alcoa. Six months later, when Sam still had not taken his advice, Jerry wagged his finger at him, saying, "Sam, I *told* you to come to Massena."

The family made the move in 1907 when Simon was less than one year old. They opened a clothing and grocery store in the present location on North Main Street and lived in an apartment over the store. Harry was born there in 1908; Abe, in 1911; and Alice, in 1913. Morris was born in Albany in 1917 while Lena was visiting her sister.

The census of 1915 was taken by individuals who called on

families and wrote down the answers to their questions in a ledger. Sometimes misunderstandings due to foreign accents on the part of the person questioned or hearing impairment on the part of the questioner led to inaccuracies which were recorded and remain today in the archives. For example, Harry Levine, Sam's second son, is listed as a daughter named "Hattie." Lena's occupation is recorded as "housework" whereas she was a vital part in the functioning and success of the store. She had it swept out every morning before opening at seven, and Indian customers sought her out to wait on them. One day, a thief entered the store brandishing a pistol, and Lena, with her broom in her hands, screamed. The man fled. Sam, unable to comprehend the situation because of his deteriorating eyesight, was not aware of the attempted holdup.

In addition to Lena's services, Sam enlisted the aid of his children. Much of their before and after school hours and vacations were given over to the store.

True to his orthodox tradition, Sam made his own wine for Passover and dispatched his children to a farm for fresh milk. Besides English, he acquired a working knowledge of French and Italian to communicate with the newly arrived immigrant workers at Alcoa. He established a credit system and, during the Depression of the thirties, rarely refused credit to anyone. Sometimes years elapsed before payment was made, and often it was in the form of farm produce. He phased out the grocery section of the business, and it remained wholly as a clothing store.



Sam Levine and daughter Alice in front of Levine's store, 1940.

In later years, cataracts developed in both eyes, but Sam continued to work in the store until he was forced to seek ophthalmologic help in New York City and Philadelphia, leaving the store in the hands of Lena and Simon. After graduating from high school, Simon gave up the prospect of college to help run the business with his mother.

Simon was the quintessential successful merchant. People pointed to him as a "comer." With free reign as manager, he expanded the credit system and enlarged the inventory. Both tactics worked because he accurately judged the faith and loyalty of his customers and because he realized profits were to be made with small mark-up volume sales.

Bob Cline owned the property next to the store and around the corner on to Maple Street. He stipulated in his will that the Levines were to have the first option to purchase it. After his death in the mid-forties, Sam and Simon pondered the value of the purchase for $15,000. Had they not decided to risk it, they would be without parking space today.

Simon managed the store until his death in 1974. Martha remained at home and helped in the store until her death in 1975. As testimony to the esteem and prominence Simon enjoyed in the community, a memorial service was held at St. Mary's Church and an editorial was printed in the *Massena Observer.* Harry graduated from Johns Hopkins University and returned to the store. Abe graduated from Syracuse University Medical School and practices medicine in Massena. He married the former Blanche Bromberg in 1950. Alice married Milton Rosen of Utica and settled there. Morris ran his own shoe store for a time and then returned to the family business, which he and Harry operate today. The slogan on their business envelopes reads: *"Levine's—The Store that Sam and Simon Built."*

Simon and Sara had two daughters, Marcia and Roberta. Roberta died in 1950; Marcia married Lee Rothschild of Syracuse, and they have three children. Abe and Blanche have five children: Lenore, Louis, Alan, Sam, and Shirley. Lenore is named for Lena; Alan is named for Sam's brother, Alex; and Sam is named for his grandfather, Sam. The other two children are named for relatives on their mother's side. Alice and Milton have two children, Irwin and Marilyn, and one grandchild, son of Marilyn and Allen Hymes.

Lena died in 1950; Sam, in 1958.

A descendant of the Friedlander family is married to Itzak Pearlman, the violinist.

Jacobs and Rossoff Families

The blood relationship between the Rossoff and Levine families illustrates how such relationships alter lives. If one did not have a relative in a certain area, one might not have moved there. If one did not move there, perhaps a specific business opportunity would not have arisen. If one were not in a certain business in a certain place, one might not have met the person one married.

The Rossoffs and the Levines go back several generations to a common ancestor named Levine. This Levine had two sons, one of whom passed down the Levine name, and the other, the Rossoff name. These two brothers were Samuel and Shabshi Levine. A story that has traversed the generations has it that Shabshi was fond of goat's milk and cheese while Sam and his family had a distinct distaste for goat products. One day, Shabshi invited Sam and his wife to a dinner where all the courses included goat's milk and cheese in some form. After a pleasant meal, Shabshi revealed the deception, whereupon his angry brother and sister-in-law went outside and got rid of the food they had consumed.

Samuel had a daughter named Edith who married a Rossoff. The Rossoffs had three sons, Alex, Meyer, and David; and one daughter, Rebecca, who married Nathan Jacobs. The Jacobs had one son, Samuel, and two daughters, Edith and Shirley. Shabshi had a son, Moses, and a daughter, Hanna, by his first wife, and a son, Shlomo (Sam), by his second marriage. Sam married Lena Friedlander, and they had four sons, Simon, Harry, Abe, and Morris; and two daughters, Martha and Alice. These six Levine children are the third generation to be descended from the original Mr. Levine, while the three Jacobs

children are the fourth generation, making them first cousins once removed.

To further illustrate the entanglement of the Massena settlers and relatives, Sam's half-sister, Hanna, married a Katz and had two daughters, Dora and Bessie. Sam's half-brother, Moses, had a daughter, Alice, who married Joe Mallinson and moved to Massena. Bessie married Dave Castroll and had a daughter, Sara, who grew up and married Simon, Sam's son.

Alex Rossoff, born 1889, was the first of his family to emigrate from Russia to the United States, arriving in 1906. He soon discovered that he had relatives—Levines, Castrolls, Friedmans—living in the North Country, and within three or four years, he moved to Massena. Cousin Sam Levine hired him to clerk in his store. Eventually, the incentive of "If I can work for him, why not for myself?" prevailed, and he struck out on his own, opening a clothing store on Main Street (where Paul O'Brien's shoe repair shop now stands next to the movies).

Meyer, born 1891, and Rebecca, born 1895, came over from Europe together in 1907. They landed in Boston and boarded a train for New York City. For five years Becky worked in the sweat shops of the garment industry. Within a year or two of her arrival, she started a correspondence with Sam Levine in Massena, Bessie Castroll in St. Regis Falls, and Dora Friedman in Santa Clara. These two women invited her to spend some time with them during the summers and, as she later told her children, she learned to cook from these baleboostehs.



Rebecca Rossoff, age 17.

This change from her urban existence appealed to her. When she visited her brother Alex in Massena, he urged her to remain to keep house for him and to help in his store. Rebecca agreed and made the move in 1912. Before moving in with him, she lived for a while with the Levines; with the Kauffmans, where Ida Kauffman used to entertain her with stories of her life; with the Clopmans; and with the Sam Cohens, where a fire

swept the house destroying all her belongings.

Four or five years after Becky came Meyer and David. Meyer had been employed in tailoring establishments in New York City. David had been a butcher by trade but could not find work in Massena. He was inducted into the army in World War I and, upon discharge, returned to New York. Meyer became Alex's partner, and Rebecca worked for them in the store. By the beginning of 1918, she set up housekeeping for herself, Meyer, and Alex.

Nathan Jacobs was born in the Ukraine in 1895 and was taken as a small boy to London, England. There were 13 children in the family, 12 boys and one girl, who was the youngest. Most of them died in infancy. Those who survived were the younger ones, which fact is possibly attributed to the improved health conditions and nutrition in England.

At age 20, Nathan worked his way on a ship across the ocean to escape from the family trade of tailoring. Once in the United States, he traveled around the country for more than a year. Back in New York City, he responded to the call by employment agencies and ads in the *New York Times* for workers needed in Massena late in 1916. Alcoa was paying the train fare and required the recruits to show up carrying a suitcase to prove their good intentions of remaining. Nate purchased an inexpensive suitcase made of cardboard, filled it with newspapers, and climbed aboard. He made a stab at working at Alcoa but quit in two and a half days because of the severe working conditions. He then tried his hand at other types of work. He helped other Jewish men make their rounds of farm houses for the purchase of rags, burlap bags, junk, and cattle. He peddled, not with a back pack, but with a horse and wagon.

Nate lived for a while with the Clopmans, and it is possible that he met Becky there towards the end of 1917. They were married in June of 1918. Since there was no rabbi in Massena at that time, they rode the train to Syracuse and were married there. On their return, Nathan moved in with the Rossoffs. Then started the drive to get the brothers married and out of the burgeoning household. Alex met Florence Bain in New York City in 1920. Meyer brought several girls home also before he met and married Lena Cohen in Watertown in 1924. As the brothers married, they moved out of the jointly occupied house.

Early in the 1920s, Meyer and Alex split up their partnership. Meyer opened a men's clothing and tailor shop on the

corner of Main and Water Streets and installed a large cash register which apparently tempted burglary. One day when Meyer was alone in the store, an armed robber came in and demanded all his money. Meyer appealed to his sympathy, pleading that he had a wife and baby to support, and offered him half of the contents of the cash register. The thief relented, accepted the offer, and put away his gun. As he left the store, Meyer called the police, and they captured the perpetrator near the Harrowgate School on Main Street. His pity cost him a stretch at Dannemora prison.

Meyer later relocated his business on Center Street. He and Lena had two children, Harold, now married and living in Bristol, Virginia, and Edith, now Mrs. Ira Zimmerman and the mother of two children. Meyer died in 1965, and Lena, who was losing her eyesight, went to live with Edith in New York City until her death in 1974.



Alex & Florence Rossoff, 1949.

Alex sold out the clothing store two or three years after he and Meyer separated. He bought a grocery store on Main Street which did not prosper. The family struggled through the Depression and, early in the next decade, bought a small grocery and fruit store near the Racquette River bridge, which they operated until retirement two years before Alex's death in 1956. Florence died in 1973. They had five children: Clarence, married and living in Toronto; Isaac; Roslyn, Mrs. Harold Fahn of Liverpool, New York; Doris, Mrs. Joseph Rosenzweig of Wilmington, Delaware; and Louis, who died in 1961 at age twenty-eight. Isaac is the only Rossoff remaining in Massena. He and his wife Minnie, of Montreal, own and operate Isaac'c Interior Decoration. They have three daughters and four grandchildren. One son is deceased.

Nathan progressed from a horse and wagon to a truck with solid rubber tires, being one of the first in Massena to own such a vehicle. The "junk business" was a loose term, and it included the purchase of items like rags, bottles, inner tubes, chickens, and apples to be sold in Massena, Watertown, Ogdensburg, or wherever there was a market. In 1933, the Jacobs moved into what became the permanent family home on East Orvis Street. Nathan stored scrap metal behind the house until he rented a

yard on Cook Street in 1939. He purchased it in 1942, and the business eventually became *N. Jacobs and Son.*

The Jacobs' first child was Samuel, better known as Jack, born in 1919. He was graduated from Syracuse University as valedictorian and from Yale University School of Law. During World War II, the army sent him to the University of Michigan to study Japanese, and he saw active duty with the G-2 Intelligence in the South Pacific theater. After being discharged, he practiced law in New York City for a time, then returned to Massena and went into business with his father.

The next child was Edith, born in 1924. She is Mrs. Harvey Marmor of Dewitt and has three children. The third child was Shirley, born in 1927. She is married to Bernie Cohen, TV writer-producer with the American Broadcasting Company. They have one daughter.

Becky died in 1973. Nathan and Jack retired in 1979 and still live in the family home on East Orvis Street.

Slavin Family

A large oil painting of Sam Slavin hangs above the mantel of the family home on Bridges Avenue. It portrays a handsome face with straight features, brown eyes, and thick, dark hair, combed back in waves. What it does not reveal is a peppy, aggressive, portly man of diminutive stature, with a protective, loving demeanor.

Sam was born in Polozk, Russia, on November 10, 1892. As a youth, he worked in a leather factory. At age 18, when facing military conscription, he arranged to be smuggled out of the country by hiding under a wagonload of hay as it crossed the border.

He arrived in New York City on October 19, 1910, on the vessel *Uranium*. His older brother, Jake, was already married and living in Carthage, New York, where he operated a business with two cousins, selling clothing, furniture, and junk. Jake bought a horse and wagon for Sam, and he peddled notions, mainly safety pins, thread, socks, gloves, out of Carthage into the countryside. During bad weather, farm families took him in to spend the night. Sam found that these people were not bigoted and they respected his religious views, offering him tea in a glass and eggs for repast. There were times during snow storms when the horse was given free rein and found the way back to Carthage.

In addition to studying English, Sam found time for violin lessons. One of the first conversational phrases he was taught was vital to his livelihood: "Please look in my basket." As he became secure in his work, he and Jake sent for the rest of the family in Europe. They were the parents, another brother, and four sisters. When they reached Grand Central Station in New

York City for the trip to Carthage, the father urged the children to help themselves to fruit which was being sold by vendors, assuming it was free to all. "Dus iz a country!" he exclaimed happily.

The father, Louis Slavin, had been a "Rov" in Russia and now became the "Rov" and schochet of Carthage. It is believed he brought with him from Europe a Torah, which eventually became the first Torah of the newly formed congregation in Potsdam, New York, in 1955. It was presented to the congregation at no cost and was subsequently renewed and made "kosher" by scribes in New York City. New handles and cover were provided. It was dedicated to the memory of Rose Leah Clopman Greenblatt (1913-1965) and funded by her father, Louis Clopman.

It was during this time in Carthage that Sam met petite, 16-year-old Minnie Yaffe, who was visiting her sister, Mamie (Mrs. Sam Alpert). Minnie was born in Reading, Pennsylvania, and was living in Glens Falls, New York, at this time. The Yaffe family operated a grocery store, and Minnie helped out in the store after school. She also took piano, sewing, Yiddish, and Hebrew lessons. Energetic herself, she was impressed by Sam's ambition.



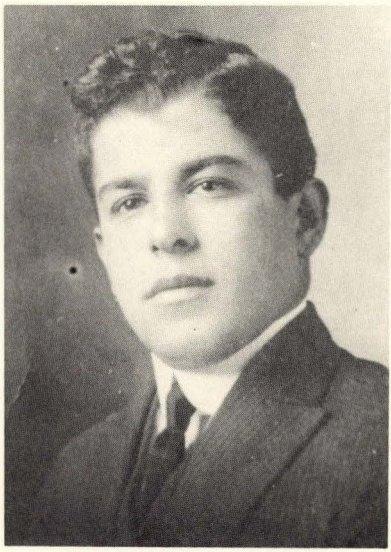
Minnie Yaffe Slavin, age 16.

Carthage was a junction-point of the New York Central Railroad. There were times when Sam Slavin met Sam Katzman, from Gouverneur, on the train. Sam Katzman's advice to Sam Slavin was "Peddling is not for you, Sam. Why don't you open a business in Massena?"

Years before, Jake Slavin had worked in a factory in New York City with Jake Shulkin. At the time that Sam Katzman was urging Sam Slavin to move to Massena, Jake Shulkin was getting ready to leave New York. Relatives in Gouverneur advised him to come to the North Country. Through Jake Slavin's auspices, Sam Slavin and Jake Shulkin met and agreed to form a partnership to be known as *Slavin and Shulkin.* They

pooled their resources of Shulkin's five hundred dollars and Sam's horse and wagon and moved to Massena in October of 1913 with Sam boarding with the Shulkin family. The Gouverneur relatives helped them find their first store, which was the original employment office of Alcoa. The location was crucial because the business consisted of clothing for the workers. An early inventory listed "men's dress shoes, men's work shoes, boys' shoes, men's lumber oxfords, men's pants, men's flannell (sic) shirts, small notions (combs, pocket books)." Shortly thereafter, they moved to Main Street near the corner of Water Street, then known as Mill Street. The next move was across the street next to the St. Lawrence Inn in an old carriage shed, which they first rented, then purchased and enlarged. This was for the purpose of selling furniture, first used, then new, and eventually the clothing part of the business was phased out.

Sam made semi-annual trips to New York City to attend furniture shows. Enroute, he stopped in Glens Falls and stayed with the Yaffe family, continuing his courtship of Minnie. Five years after they met, and with their mothers' encouragement, they were married in Glens Falls in 1917. Sam brought his bride back to Massena, and the local Y.M.H.A. put on a reception for them. They had three children: Albert, better known as Abby, born in 1918; Shirley, 1922-1940; and Ruth (Mrs. Lawrence Schwartz), born in 1927.



Sam Slavin, age 18.

Expansion of the partnership continued with the acquisition of real estate holdings. The store was enlarged again in 1927. In 1938, they purchased the Ball Coal Company building on Water Street and converted it into a warehouse. Also in the thirties, they ventured into the gas business. In 1955, the store was expanded in the direction of Main Street on the site of the former St. Lawrence Inn, which had burned down in 1922.

In 1956, the partnership was dissolved, with Sam retaining the store and warehouse, thereafter known as *Slavin's Furni-*

ture Store; and Shulkin, the real estate and gas. Sam died in 1963. The business and the additional real estate holdings continued under the joint ownership of Albert Slavin and Lawrence Schwartz until 1968, when they separated. Abby kept the store and warehouse; Larry, the real estate. In 1970, Larry opened *L. Schwartz Furniture* on East Orvis Street. Today, his son, Philip, is in the store with him. Larry and Ruth have three sons; Abby and his wife, the former Helen Rivkin of New York, have a son and a daughter.

Shulkin Family

The other half of the Slavin-Shulkin partnership was Jacob Shulkin. He is remembered by his descendants as a warm, generous, caring person. In appearance, seeming less than his actual 5′9″, with rounded shoulders, large hands hanging from long arms, wispy hair, and elfin-like ears, all incongruously set off with a snappy bow-tie. In contrast, his early image in Massena was that of a young, vigorous, hard-working, intelligent man with a keen sense for business.

Jake was born in an inn 12 miles from the city of Polotsk, located northeast of Minsk and northwest of Vitobsk, in 1881, the youngest of nine children of his father's first marriage to Gelye Devorah Rosen. The Shulkins considered themselves "Litvaks."

Jake's parents were married as teenagers while his father was still a student. The father, Tzvi Hirsh, supported his family by selling, possibly making, whiskey from his home, which he operated as an inn. Gelye Devorah died in her late 30's, in 1884, and Tzvi Hirsh married Mach Raisl two or three years later.

Jake's education consisted of Hebrew school plus two years of public school starting at age 10. By 13, he was learning the trade of "tassenmacher," which was making the upper portion of shoes.

Conflicting stories mar the reason, but it is certain that Tzvi Hirsh was sent into exile somewhere north of Leningrad in 1907. He was allowed to take his wife and unmarried daughters with him to support them by any means he could since there was no imprisonment. He served as shammes of the synagogue, imported fruit from the Crimea, and accommodated

boarders. They remained there about three years, during which time Joseph Stalin also was banished to the same community. By the time of his release in 1910, Tzvi Hirsh asked to be allowed to stay but this time was expelled from the place of exile and returned to Polotsk, where he remained a traditional, scholarly follower of the Mishna.

At age 20, Jake escaped the fate of military conscription imposed by the czars on Jewish youth. Tzvi Hirsh had made several unsuccessful attempts to keep him out of the army, including surgery to cripple his leg, but to no avail. Jake was inducted, and it was through the efforts of two of his sisters that he was rescued from the army base. The two young women managed to enter the compound, either by bribing the guards or by posing as prostitutes, with a wagon full of straw and an extra set of women's clothing. Jake put on the clothes and concealed himself in the wagon as it left the base. He hid in an attic until he could arrange passage to America. The girl to whom he was engaged turned over to him the money she had been saving for their marriage with the understanding that he would send for her and they would marry in the United States.

By means of the Jewish underground, Jake sailed from the North Sea across the Atlantic to Quebec. He arrived in the United States by train in Buffalo, New York, in April, 1902. He continued on to New York City and lived for a time with another family from Russia. Because he brought with him his skill in the needle trade, his first job was on a sewing machine in a factory that made boys' knickers. Here he met Jacob Slavin, who later was to play a role in guiding Jake's business career.

Meanwhile, his first cousin, Sarah Saidel, the tenth and youngest child of his mother's sister, arrived in New York from Disna. Jake fell in love with this pretty, dark-haired girl and changed his marriage plans. He wrote to his fiancee in Polotsk, asking to be released from his promise. She bitterly replied that, with the dowry that he had usurped, she was putting a curse on him and his family.

Sarah's father had died when she was 13, and she went to Warsaw to work in a stocking factory to contribute towards dowries for her older sisters, as was the custom. She had no dowry of her own when she married Jake on November 27, 1906. Their first three children, William, Benjamin, and Dora were born in New York City. To support his expanding family, Jake went into business for himself, his theory being that there



Wedding picture of Jacob Shulkin and Sarah Saidel.

was no fortune to be had in someone else's employ. He opened a newspaper and candy stand in a subway station. The dampness exposed him to rheumatism, Sarah was frail, and the children appeared to be susceptible to tuberculosis. A doctor advised him, for all their sakes, to leave the city and move "to the country."

Sarah's nephew, Hymie Saidel, and Hymie's brother-in-law, Sol Kaplan, already were situated in Gouverneur and advised Jake to come to the North Country. Another advocate of the move was Jake Slavin, who by this time was living in Carthage and arranged for Shulkin to get together with Sam Slavin. Sam was peddling with a horse and wagon out of Carthage and thinking of going into business.

In the Fall of 1913, the Shulkins moved to Massena, where their two youngest children were born, Mamie and Harold

(named in memory of Tzvi Hirsh). The Slavin and Shulkin partnership began with a clothing store which was later discarded as their energies were channelled into the sale of furniture and the acquisition of real estate. Sarah's health was always frail, and she found a good friend in the wife of her husband's partner. Minnie Slavin frequently helped out with the care of the five Shulkin children.

The notorious Blood Libel event of 1928 brought a double burden to Jake. This was the only authenticated case of a ritual murder charge to be leveled against a Jewish community in North America. Not only was Jake the president of the Adath Israel Congregation at this time, but his eldest son was involved.

Earlier that year, Jake and his son Ben, out of curiosity, attended a meeting of the Ku Klux Klan that was held at the hall of the Masons of which Jake was a member. Father and son were shocked at its ready acceptance by those present but did not yet fathom the depths of the disaster which it forbode.

On the day before the eve of Yom Kippur, a four-year-old Christian girl vanished from her home. A search was organized by the Volunteer Fire Department, which was known to include members of the KKK. The State Police were called in, and the two assigned troopers happened to stop for coffee at a restaurant owned by a volubly anti-Semitic Greek immigrant. In front of these sentinels of authority, his inciteful words hinted a "going after the Jews when such things happened in the old country."

That evening the police questioned Jake's 20-year-old son, Willie. Although it was known that he was mentally impaired and irresponsible, they seriously considered his oblique responses which seemed to support the Greek's slurs. The police escorted him home, where his rambling account of the evening alerted his parents to the danger that could erupt.

Jake got on the phone and summoned other leaders of the Congregation to a meeting at his home late that night. From there, they called New York City to speak to Louis Marshall, head of the American Jewish Committee. He agreed with the seriousness of the events and promised to dispatch help on the next train.

The following morning the troopers questioned another Jewish person—Morris Goldberg, Alcoa's "token Jew," known to be on the periphery of the Jewish community. His evasive answers, like Willie's, reinforced their suspicion of a ritual murder.

Massena was unfortunate at that time in having an ignorant,

bigoted politician as mayor, Gilbert Hawes. He is considered responsible for the decision to call in the rabbi for questioning. However, they were not aware of the caliber of the man with whom they were dealing. When the trooper arrived at his door to escort him to the police station, the rabbi admonished him for daring to disturb him so soon before the onset of the most holy day. Denouncing the charge of ritual murder, he refused to be taken down but said that he would volunteer a statement later.

That afternoon he strode alone to the station and, alone, castigated the mayor, the troopers, and all within earshot for daring to vilify the whole Jewish community with such a culpable accusation from out of the Middle Ages. Not long after his abrupt departure without submitting to interrogation, the child emerged from the woods in which she had been lost.

That evening Rabbi Brennglass challenged the congregation to fight anti-Semitism in any form. The religious services of Yom Kippur offered an extra measure of gratitude.

Mr. Marshall and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise of the Free Synagogue in New York City agitated for apologies from the mayor and the trooper to the Massena Jewish community in general and to Rabbi Brennglass in particular. It was not until the intervention of Governor Alfred E. Smith that these apologies were forthcoming.

With his success in business and place of respect within the community, Jake Shulkin remained a man with strong family ties. True to the spirit and letter of Jewish law, his generosity extended towards those less fortunate. He helped his brothers and sisters and relatives both here and in Europe.

In the thirties, Slavin and Shulkin entered the retail gas business. In 1941, shortly before the start of World War II, Jake's son-in-law, Lou Cohen, husband of Dora, built a gas plant on Railroad Avenue for the sale of wholesale gas. In 1956, Jake sold out his interest in the furniture store and warehouse to Sam Slavin and retained the real estate, which became known as Shulkin Realty. He remained in the realty and gas ventures until his death in 1964, although by this time he was dividing his year between Massena and Florida. Sarah died in 1977 in the Jewish Home for the Aged in Syracuse. Lou Cohen ran the gas and real estate business until his retirement in 1967.

The oldest and youngest sons, Willie and Harold, are deceased, Harold in 1954 and Willie in 1978. Willie had an adopted

daughter and two grandchildren. Ben retired in 1980 from the wholesale and retail propane gas service in Rome, New York. He has three sons and four grandchildren. Dora and Lou, who also spend their year in Florida and Massena, have three sons and five grandchildren, one of whom is the first girl born into the Cohen family in over 40 years. Mamie, who died in Florida in 1981, had one daughter and one granddaughter.

Clopman Family

Louis Clopman may have been the only immigrant without a foreign accent to settle in Massena, according to his son, because he mastered the language through sheer determination as a result of an embarrassing moment.

Louis was born in Ben, a small railroad junction north of Vilna in Lithuania on January 7, 1890. He had two older brothers, Henry and William, and two sisters who died as children. The only other Jewish family in this community was that of Meyer Schine. When the Clopman children were old enough to attend cheder, the family moved to nearby Zagar.

For generations the Clopman men were glaziers, traveling to outlying houses and churches where this work was in demand. During the winters, when travel was restricted, they painted gold leaf on carriages of wealthy estates. Louis helped his grandfather in this work for a while, then switched to pack peddling.

When Louis was 16 years old, Henry, who was already in the United States, sent him funds to aid in his escape from conscription. Via the underground, Louis fled to Liverpool, England, and after an eight-day journey on the vessel *Umbria*, arrived in New York City on June 17, 1906. Henry died six weeks later of typhoid fever, and Louis went to the home of an uncle, Abraham Orb. His real name was Avrum Mazlor, but in his difficulty with the English language, he used the word "or" a great deal, and a companion took to calling him "Orb."

Mr. Orb, or Mazlor, operated a farm in Pamelia, outside of Watertown. Although a bachelor, he taught his housekeeper how to observe the orthodox dietary laws for him. At mealtimes, the hired help were fed trefe meat, while he and any

visiting relatives sat at a "kosher part" of the same table.

Louis stayed on the farm for two months, then joined Joseph Solomon of Clayton as an apprentice peddler. Mr. Solomon was an Englishman and helped Louis with the language. Once, when they were in Watertown, they saw a large sign reading *Taylor Thermometer Company.* Mr. Solomon read the words to Louis, and he attempted to pronounce it. It came out "thermopometer" and drew laughs from those within earshot. At that moment, he made up his mind to speak perfect English and eventually lost all trace of accent.

The apprenticeship lasted approximately two months; then Louis struck out independently. He purchased a horse and wagon and peddled an area of a 40-mile radius from Watertown. A necessary adjunct of peddling was to stay overnight with rural customers. When asked how he accommodated the laws of Kasruth on the road, he admitted to consuming food that was not kosher, adding this classic observation: "The sin of eating trefe food is not so much in the eating. The sin is if you enjoy it."



Louis Clopman, about 1918.

From 1907 to 1908, he sold primarily tinware which he purchased from Abe Katzman of Gouverneur. In 1909, he began to trade in rags, rubber, hides, and metal in the Harrisville, New York area. During the summers of 1910 and 1911, he sold fruit in the Thousand Islands region.

By 1911, automobiles were becoming a factor in the economy, and Louis began to buy junked auto parts and batteries. He stayed in the Watertown area about eight years, until 1914. it was here that he met and married Rebecca Landsman in 1913.

Rebecca has handed-down accounts of her ancestry in Europe and of her determination to leave it. Her great-grandfather was a Rov in Vilna. The Russian army expropriated the Jewish cemetery in order to build barracks on that spot. The Jews were given another piece of land, and the graves were dis-

interred and moved. When the last grave was transferred, her great-grandfather and two other rovs said Kaddish in the shul. During these tragic services, he died on the bimah, leaving his wife and several children (exact number unknown). One was Rebecca's grandfather, then three years old, an older boy, and a married daughter. Another married son had been killed by the Russians. The widow and the youngest child (Rebecca's "zayde"—grandfather) went to live with the married daughter. The other son disappeared. Years later, just one week after the death of the great-grandmother, came a letter from America—from the missing son! The survivors wrote back telling him of his mother's death. He wrote once more asking the date so that he could observe Yahrzeit—and that was the last they heard of him.

Three years after Rebecca's arrival in the United States, she read in a newspaper an account of a hurricane in Texas which washed out a bridge named "Landsman Bridge." In her elder years, she reflected that, had she not been a "greenhorn" at the time, she would have known how to make inquiry about the name and felt that she had lost her only opportunity to track down her great-uncle.

Rebecca's grandfather had been a mashgiyach (supervisor) at a dairy, and her father was a chasid (a pious man). Rebecca was born in Aran (a suburb of Vilna) in Lithuania on December 29, 1889. It amused her, in her eighties, to reveal to people that she was nine days older than her husband. Her parents lived near an army barracks through which passed thousands of soldiers with diverse dialects.

Rebecca's departure from Europe at 21 was a direct result of anti-Semitism. Her trade was dressmaking and she employed four Polish girls as seamstresses. Her clientele included the wives and mistresses of the Russian army officers who were stationed in the barracks near her home. The officers could marry only those girls who were titled, rich, or the daughters of other officers. If one fell in love with a woman who did not meet these requirements, one could live with her but not wed her.

One of these aristocratic ladies whom Rebecca sewed for was abundantly endowed. The corsets of the time were made with steel stays which cut into her ample flesh. Rebecca went to great pains to make her an undergarment which would be comfortable. After the work of the day was finished and the employees had gone home, she stayed up late to sew in 100

hooks and eyes. The next day, the wife, overjoyed with Rebecca's handiwork, hugged and kissed her and promised to pay later the fee of 65 rubles. When it was not forthcoming, Rebecca approached her and was countered with insults.

According to Rebecca, the Catholic clergy of the area were allowed to marry and were called "pope," not "father." She made clothes for one such wife and maintained friendly relations with the couple. After the unhappy confrontation with the army wife, the clergyman's wife tried to cheer her up, fearing she was ill. The "pope" extracted the story from her and promised, "Rebecca, don't worry. You'll get your money."

The following week, the servant-soldier of the officer delivered to her an envelope containing the full amount of the fee. A few days later, he returned to ask her to go with him to the home of the officer to do more sewing for the wife. She sent back with him a note, in Russian, stipulating that the wife would have to come to her, that she would never set foot in the wife's house as long as she lived. The wife acquiesced and came to Rebecca with a bolt of black satin material. Rebecca's procedure was to take the client's measurements on the first visit, then have her return for one fitting. The fitting took place on a Thursday and was satisfactory. On Friday morning, the servant-soldier came to pick up the dress. Rebecca sent back another note insisting that she have her money first. That afternoon, the angry wife showed up, and Rebecca reminded her that she had insulted her before. This time the wife spouted epithets against all Jews and left without her garment.

Rebecca recalled the argument this way: "The wife said, 'Even if the Russians will scratch the Jew's nose till it bleeds, the Jews will remain in Russia' " (meaning, no matter how the Russians harass the Jews, they cannot leave.) Rebecca responded, "You better shut your mouth. Don't forget, you can't insult me. You're on my premises. You should live so long as I'll remain in Russia."

Later, the soldier returned with Rebecca's money. She related this incident to her father and said she would not remain in Russia. She urged her parents to flee with her to the United States, saying, "Any Jew who has a chance to leave Russia has no business staying here with the pogroms."

Her father was in agreement, saying, "In a free country, you are a free man. America is a free country. You don't have to work on Shabbos if you don't want to." Her mother, however, refused because she was afraid to cross the ocean. When they

were first married, the young couple lived in Riga near the sea, which instilled a fear that never left her.

Rebecca arrived in the United States on August 21, 1911. She was staying with her older sister, Choska (Tessie), and her husband, Sam Glickstein, in Watertown when she met Louis Clopman. Louis was peddling junk and living with the Glicksteins. Their marriage took place in 1913, and their first child, Rose, was born the same year.

Meanwhile, news was reaching Watertown that Massena was becoming a "boom" town. A Watertown barber attempted to convince Louis that prosperity lay to the North. One day in July of 1914, Louis, in his horse-drawn wagon, picked up a hitchhiker bound for Massena who confirmed the optimistic rumors. He decided to travel to Massena to see for himself but did not let the trip interfere with his work. He peddled the distance between Watertown and Massena, spending five days enroute.

Satisfied with the prospects of Massena, he moved there that month and brought his wife and infant daughter in September. A son, Harry, named for Louis' brother Henry, was born there in 1914; another son, Simon, in 1917; and a daughter, Goldie, in 1920.



Rebecca Clopman, late 1920, with youngest child, Goldie.

Louis continued to peddle until 1919, buying and selling, at various times, hides, furs, auto parts, and scrap. He housed his horse in a barn behind Levine's store. He bought for scrap a foundry where Walsh's Trucking is now located and a brickyard on Bayley Road, moving the scrap in his wagon. His only competitor was Sam Cohen, and business was prospering. From fall until spring, he traveled the whole North Country buying furs from hunters and trappers. Via the Grand Trunk Railroad, he rode to Montreal and checked into a hotel while he bought furs from dealers. The furs were baled and shipped to New York City where they

were sold at fur auctions.

From the time of his arrival in Massena, he was befriended by J.J. Taylor, a prominent businessman. Over the years, Mr. Taylor found him a home, accompanied him to Canton for the naturalization process, and helped him to buy a Ford truck to replace the horse.

His first business location was in the house where the Rubin brothers live today. From there, he moved to a building on Water Street which doubled as the residence for the family.

In the recession of 1921, he lost a substantial sum in the hide market. Shortly after, he disposed of the automotive parts business. As the economy picked up, he started to recoup his losses. In 1928, he bought out *Charles Weidy and Sons*, a furniture store where the Masonic building now stands. Mr. Weidy was a Hungarian Jew who sported a red handle-bar moustache. At the time of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's first term, Mr. Weidy's son decorated the White House. In 1929, Louis was hit hard again by the crash. In the following years, he continued on with the furniture and scrap business. In 1930, his eldest son, Harry, went into the furniture business with him, and in 1937 Simon entered the scrap business with him. The sons are credited with the success of the businesses.

Louis was the only other Jewish person in Massena besides Rev. Brennglass who knew how to devein meat. Tony Smith, father of Charlie and Herman who today own *Smith's Meat Market*, got delivery of kosher meat and would call the rabbi for the deveining process. When the rabbi was indisposed, Tony turned to Louis, who had learned the procedure in Europe. Despite his distaste for the chore, he felt obligated to the community to perform the traditional practice.

Rose Clopman married Louis Greenblatt of Potsdam and had three sons, Sam, Joel, and Matthew, and seven grandchildren. She died in 1965. Harry married Rose Cohen of Boston, and they have one son, Joseph, named for Louis' father, and a daughter, Miriam, named for Rebecca's mother. Harry and Joe own *Clopman's Furniture and Appliance Store.* Joe is married to Marilyn Cohen, and they have one son. Simon married Rhoda Miller of Montreal, and they have two daughters, Janet and Frances (Mrs. Scott Fine of Rochester). Simon owns *Massena Iron and Metal Company* and *Simon's Used Trucks.* Goldie married Max Finkelstein. They live in Williamsport, Pennsylvania, and have one daughter, Paula.

Louis died in 1967; Rebecca, in 1979.

Landsman Family

There are several accounts of the events surrounding the emigration of Hyman Landsman to the United States. Hyman, Rebecca Clopman's older brother, was born in Aran, Lithuania, in 1880 and educated in a Yeshiva. When he was a young man of 22 or 23, according to Rebecca's memory, he was disturbed by the sad letters of his sister, Choska (Tessie), who, with her husband, Sam Glickstein, and child was the first member of the family to reach America.

With 300 Russian rubles, Hyman purchased a railroad ticket and bade farewell to his mother at the depot. As the train started to move, she started to cry. Standing on the steps of the train as it picked up momentum, he called out to her: "Mama, why are you crying? You know well that I'll be home for the Seder at Pesach." That was the last she saw of him.

According to his son, Milton, Hyman remained in Liverpool, England, for six months before crossing to Boston in 1903. From there, another vessel took him to New York City. He found the new country to his liking and decided to remain.

His first job was collecting money from customers for an agency. He traveled all over the city each day at the cost of only one trolley ticket. This was accomplished by requesting a transfer each time he got off which enabled him to board again without charge.

After two years, says Milton, Hyman moved to Watertown, where the Glicksteins resided. He went into the business of selling clothes by means of a store and by peddling to outlying farms, where the farmers were obliged to furnish their hired hands not only with food and lodging, but with work clothes.

According to Harry Clopman, Hyman's nephew, Hyman nev-

er went to New York City. Upon landing in Boston, he went to work selling jewelry door to door, first for a company, then for himself. He met the Bloomsburg family in Boston, and when they moved to Watertown, New York, where they went into the wholesale junk business, Hyman moved too.

Harry says that, at this time, Choska was not yet in Watertown. Her husband, Sam, was a learned man, having been trained in the rabbinate in Europe. His uncle was president of a Yeshiva in New York City and advised him to come over with his wife and daughter to teach. When the uncle died, Sam lost his position. It was at this time that Hyman brought them to Watertown and taught Sam to peddle. Rebecca's memory was that Hyman would return to Europe after he had accomplished this job-training. Some time later, Sam got word from Poland that, during a pogrom, his parents' home was set afire and the entire family was wiped out. The news shattered Sam, and eventually he was institutionalized. He spent 55 years in the Ogdensburg State Hospital before his death.

In January or February of 1909, the slow season for peddling, Hyman discovered that an excursion ticket to New York City could be purchased for only $3.00, with several days allowed as a lay-over. He decided on the spur of the moment to take advantage of the bargain and to return to New York to visit a cousin. This cousin, a Warsaw native, had emigrated at age 21 in order to avoid conscription. He expediently married a young woman of 26 who had the necessary funds for the trip, and they settled in New York City, where he worked as a tailor.

In his eagerness to make the journey, Hyman parked his horse and wagon in a stable and hastily boarded the train in his working clothes, only to find on his arrival that the cousin has moved to New Jersey. He tracked him down and stayed with him for a few days, during which time the cousin scolded him about his appearance and proceeded to take his measurements and make a suit for him.

There are two accounts of what happened next, although they both have the same happy ending. According to another relative who was alive at the time, the cousin also berated Hyman for remaining single, since he himself was younger and already married. Hyman's response was that, if he found the right girl, he would be willing. At that time, he noticed a beautiful, barefooted girl next door. "If I found one like this," he said to his cousin, "I would marry her." The designing cousin immediately repeated this to the girl's father. The father

was enthusiastic at this prospect for his eldest child and encouraged them to be married right away in court. When Hyman returned alone to Watertown, his sister, Tessie, persuaded him that he had made a mistake by rushing into marriage. He wrote to his father-in-law, offering him a bribe of $500 for a divorce. The terse reply said that even $1,000 wouldn't help.

Recently, Milton, Hyman's son, gave a more romantic version of the events leading to the marriage of his parents. While the two cousins were strolling in the town one day, a young girl emerged from a house and proceeded to sweep the front steps. Hyman pointed to her and said to his companion: "See that girl? I'm going to marry her." Three days later they were engaged, and within another few days, he took her to the Justice of the Peace to seal their intentions and to preclude the possibility of his being replaced while he returned to Watertown alone. In October he went back to New Jersey, and they were married again, this time in a Jewish ceremony. They always dated their anniversary from this second time, October 9.

The happy ending of both versions comes about with the bride's true admiration for her groom and their mutual love which developed in the ensuing years and lasted their lifetimes.

The bride was Maggie, born in 1892. She was a third generation American with a contrasting background to her husband's. Shortly after the Civil War, an American salesman traveled to Lithuania and Poland carrying glowing tales to the desperate Jewish villagers of beautiful, fertile pine woods available in the State of New Jersey in this wonderful country at a remarkably low price. The Jews of three villages were taken in by this proposition, liquidated their meager possessions, and jointly purchased the property from this salesman. Anticipating the proverbial "streets paved with gold," they journeyed across the ocean together and settled in South Jersey near what is now Vineland about 1870.

The land proved to be scrub pine and unsuitable for farming. The group separated into the three communities that they had originally been part of in Europe and divided up the land amongst them with each family being allocated a plot. The communities were given the names of *Norma*, *Alliance*, and *Brattsmanville*. These became true Jewish communal settlements with their own governments. All the inhabitants were Jews with the exception of one Italian man who fell in love with a Jewish girl, married her, and converted. The settlers

farmed as best they could. Maggie's grandfather cultivated an orchard.

As the children grew up, they left to attend schools in Philadelphia, New York City, and other areas of New Jersey, and many did not return to the hard life of the farm. Among the descendants were Fels of Fels-Naptha, Bayuk of Bayuk Tobacco Company, and Gilbert and George Seldes of the theater. As the original settlers died off, the succeeding generations, reluctant to remain, eventually sold the property. It is now owned by Italian farmers.

The Landsmans' two eldest children, Milton and Esther, were born in New Jersey before the family embarked on a series of moves and relocations starting in Norwood, where twin daughters were born. They remained there through Milton's kindergarten year of school, then moved to Pierrepont Avenue in Potsdam. Maggie's father and brother came up from New Jersey to help Hyman in business (the exact nature of the business is unknown). Milton briefly attended a school which was the practice-teaching school of Potsdam Normal until they moved to Massena about 1915 or 1916. A son, Morris, was born in Massena. The Landsmans lived first on Water Street, and Milton attended school on Maple Street, now the I.O.O.F. building. The next move was to Cook Street where the father bought a farm. From this location, Milton went to a school in Massena Springs which contained two grades in one large room. His friends were the Charleston and Sharlow families on nearby farms.

In 1918, Hyman sold the farm and bought a rooming house and grocery store on Liberty Avenue, where they remained for about 10 years. Rebecca Clopman bought this business from her brother when he wanted to buy the Bert Russell meat market, where the Key Bank of Northern New York now stands. Her son, Harry, remembers being sent to collect the rents from the roomers.

The next transaction was the sale of the meat market to Tony Smith, father of Charlie and Herman who run the store today. Hyman moved the family to Syracuse, where daughter Miriam was born. Milton was graduated from high school and won a scholarship to the Forestry School of Syracuse University. Meanwhile, Hyman's undiscerning business sense led to a poor investment in real estate and he lost his money. When the family moved again, this time to Delaware, the Clopmans invited Milton to stay with them in Massena and financed the

start of his education at St. Lawrence University. He became a college student for a month, then joined his parents. In Delaware, Hyman again went into the grocery business. Young Morris died in Delaware.

In 1932, when their financial resources were exhausted, Rebecca sent funds to Hyman to buy a car, and they drove back to Massena. After staying for a while with the Clopmans, they returned to the grocery-meat-rooming house business on Liberty Avenue.

Maggie, twelve years younger than Hyman, died in 1939. Hyman survived her for nearly 10 years. Milton married the former Lee Kauffman of Norfolk. She died in 1979.

Rosenbaum Family

A cherubic, unlined face masks the mystery of Saul Rosenbaum's age. Most of his friends presume him to be in his nineties. Until his recent failing health prevented it, Saul and his wife, Jeannette, could be seen daily on the golf course or strolling downtown, with his cane more as a jaunty accessory than an actual walking aid. His disposition, even now when he is apt to be confined to bed, is cheery and optimistic.

For more than 25 years, Saul and Jeannette have wintered in Florida and summered in Massena. Saul says that the outdoors is essential to his well-being, and Jeannette is always willing to accompany him, even hovering over him to tend to his needs.

Saul was born in Grodno Geberna, in the extreme northwest corner of White Russia near Lithuania. His father was a learned man in the village, and Saul had promised to become a rabbi. However, faced with conscription in the army, he fled the country in 1906 by means of a forged passport and payment to an underground agent who smuggled him out by hiding him under a passenger seat on a train bound for Germany.

He arrived in New York City and within months struck out for Syracuse to work in a skirt factory owned by relatives, Isaac and Michle Friedman. After another few months, he wanted to be independent and moved on to Ogdensburg, where his brother, Eli, lived. With his savings plus a bank loan guaranteed by his brother, he purchased a horse and wagon and was in business for himself.

Although a novice vendor, Saul traveled by train to Syracuse and New York City to purchase merchandise to peddle. The merchandise was shipped by train to Ogdensburg, and Saul picked it up at the station with his wagon and stored it at a

farmer's house which he used as a warehouse. This farmer's family looked upon him as a son and continued their affection down through the years, even visiting him years later in Massena with gifts of farm produce.

Saul traveled on the road all week, staying overnight at the farms where he solicited business. At first, while his English was hesitant, he learned the meaning of key phrases, such as "How much?" He made a habit of reading and re-reading newspaper articles until he grasped their meaning.

He enjoyed a good relationship with the farmers, never experiencing anti-Semitism. He was not disturbed by orthodoxy and ate trefe food when he had to. Sometimes, farmers' wives prepared egg dishes for him. On at least one occasion, he stayed at the home of a minister who gave him a copy of the New Testament.

Saul bought and carried with him sheet music and records, and he and his host families enjoyed song-fests with organ or piano accompaniment. Sometimes there was card playing. Gregarious by nature, he attended church functions and ice cream socials.

Between Christmas and Easter, he halted his peddling. During this break, he occasionally traveled to Syracuse by sled and resided at the Y. By 1916, he was feeling the urge to end the peddling and to settle down in one place. He moved to Massena, where the Friedman and Stone families had already relocated. Together with Isaac Friedman, he bought out the former Chittenden store and started a men's clothing store known as *Friedman and Rosenbaum.*

During his early years in Massena, Saul's expectations were that he would remain a bachelor, and as a bachelor, he was active in the local Y.M.H.A. and traveled in a group socially. He remembers that young women came in from Ogdensburg, Norfolk, and Norwood for dances at the Y.

In 1918, during World War I, Saul was drafted into the army and sent to Fort Dix in New Jersey. When it came to K.P. duty, he kept himself hidden and unavailable. He also managed to drink water earmarked for officers instead of that for enlisted men. After three weeks, he was discharged for poor eyesight and given $18.00 to return home. This was a satisfactory arrangement for both sides.

During his absence, Eli Friedman ran the store. In 1919, Saul purchased his first car, a second-hand Scripps-Booth. This was a pleasure car with no top.



Interior of Friedman and Rosenbaum Store, Massena.

During one of his post-Christmas trips to New York City, in January of 1924, Saul met Jeannette Lipschutz, whose older sister was a friend of Saul's sister and arranged the introduction. Jeannette was born December 25, 1902, in Manhattan. She was the youngest in a family of eight, all the rest of whom were born in Europe. When she met Saul, she was doing social work for the Travelers' Aid Society on Lexington Avenue. On September 7, 1924, she and Saul were married at Lorber's, across the street from the old Metropolitan Opera House. They moved to Massena, residing temporarily at 57 North Main Street while their permanent home was being constructed on Clark Street.

The store partnership was dissolved in 1955 with Saul operating the store by himself until his retirement in 1962 when he sold out to *Ken's Men's and Boys' Shop.* Their children are Ruth Sarah, Mrs. Charles Goldman of Auburn, New York; and Joel Louis, a professor at Yale. Joel was named for Joe Stone, who died several months before Joel's birth. Another son, Paul, died in 1945 at age 14. The Goldmans have three children, and Joel and his wife have three children.

Friedman and Stone Families

Eli Friedman was a familiar figure in the summer days in Massena, walking briskly and sure-footed, though somewhat bent, his head always covered. In his 80's now, he no longer put up with the North Country cold. He arrived from Florida in the spring and departed in November. Much of his time was spent in daily prayer while a housekeeper looked after his needs. His sister, Sara Rubenstein, spent part of the summer with him and challenged him to a daily Scrabble game. A peaceful, pious man, Eli died a violent death when he was struck and killed by a car in Miami Beach in January, 1981.

Eli was born in Syracuse in 1893. His father, Isaac, born in Grodno, Poland, September 16, 1863, came to the United States first, and his mother and older sister, Rose, followed later. While in New York City, Isaac sewed children's sleeping garments by night and sold them by day. One working night, he was approached by strikers and barely escaped with his life. During much of his time in New York, he was in mourning and attended shul daily.

For a time, Isaac and his brothers owned a skirt factory in Syracuse. It was here that Rose graduated with the first class of the new Syracuse High School and that Eli was bar mitzvahed in 1906 after Hebrew training in Ogdensburg with Abraham Friedlander, brother of Lena Levine. Isaac was the road man of the family, traveling in the North Country area of Alexandria Bay, Hammond, and Brier Hill. The factory eventually moved to New York City.

His first store venture was in Alexandria Bay. He sold this store and, together with his brother Abraham, purchased a store in Ogdensburg, which they called *Friedman Brothers.*

Mr. Fisher joined the partnership, and the business is still known today as *Fisher and Son.*

Joseph Stone was born in Austria in 1884. His uncle in Utica sent for him, and it was there that he met Rose Friedman when they were both guests at a wedding. They married in 1906 and moved to Syracuse, and then to Ogdensburg to replace Mr. Fisher, who was planning to retire.

Meanwhile, one of Isaac's customers from his peddling days, Morris Goldberg of *Goldberg and Ginsberg* of Tupper Lake, had branched out to Massena where he bought the G.W. Ball business. Because of his wife's illness, Goldberg planned a trip to Europe and approached Isaac to buy out the Massena store. Isaac made the purchase for $1,000 for his daughter and son-in-law. The Stones moved to Massena in April, 1909, and operated the store as *Stone & Co.*



Stone & Co., Main Street, Massena

Eli attended Massena High School for a year, then he, his mother, and his younger sister, Sara, returned to Syracuse to continue the children's education. They rented a home, and Eli graduated in 1912; Sara, in 1913.

Eli attended McGill University in Montreal for two years. A

registered letter was sent to him from Cornell University, offering him the unused portion of a scholarship valid for two years. He transferred to Cornell, graduating in 1917. He moved on to New York City to study medicine but withdrew after two months of what he recalls as a "horrible experience." However, he remained till his death a contributor to the medical school. He returned to Massena in 1918 and went into the Friedman and Rosenbaum business of which Joe Stone was also a partner.

Eli remembers the Y.M.H.A. at this time as being a social organization not affiliated nationally. People met in rooms in his father's building, over a garage, where the post office now stands. He says that it was a lively organization, sometimes holding dances in the Sons of Italy Hall. He was elected treasurer but was relieved of the position because he insisted on paying bills! The organization lingered on for a time after the first congregation was established, then faded away. Services took place in the Odd Fellows Hall on Maple Street and in rooms over Kinney's drug store. Isaac persuaded the community to buy the old Congregational Church building for $5,000 or $6,000 and donated the first Torah. It took some persuading because the members thought it a burdensome undertaking. Eli initiated a Young Zionist group in the '20's that met in the loft of the shul.

Isaac helped out in the *Stone & Co.* and *Friedman and Rosenbaum* stores until his retirement to Orlando, Florida, in 1919. His wife, Eli's mother, died in 1938; and Isaac died in 1944. Both are buried in Florida.

Joe Stone was very active in community affairs. He headed a committee to create a Jewish cemetery and, ironically, was the first to be buried there, in 1933 at age 49. The funeral was attended by members of the Massena Volunteer Fire Department, Masonic and Odd Fellows lodges, and by many others. Louis Krupkin of Watertown refers to Joe Stone as "the finest Jewish man in America," and the Jewish people of today who knew him are in agreement.

After Joe's death, Eli operated *Stone & Co.* alone until he retired in 1961, ending the business after 52 years and selling the building to Stan Natowitz.

Kauffman Family

The infamous blizzard of 1888 followed on the heels of the arrival of Jesse J. Kauffman to the United States. He was born in Bielica, Poland, in 1872 and, with an immigrant's visa, came over at age 16 to seek new opportunity. His memories of the blizzard include vivid descriptions of five to six days of steady snowfall followed by a month's duration of traffic brought to a standstill. The snow rose to a height of two stories, forcing apartment dwellers to dig tunnels through the snow to get out.

In the aftermath of that natural disaster, Jesse found his first job in the new country: grocery-delivery boy, mostly to walk-up apartments in six- and seven-story buildings. This was followed by a stint of peddling photo enlargements until 1890 when wanderlust, which tempted him most of his life, took over. First his peddling took a southerly direction, as far as Florida, then turned northwards, pursuing a route to Albany, Utica, Watertown, and Ogdensburg. It was here that he met Ida Tarshis.

Ida was born in 1870 in the same area as Jesse and in the same shtetl as the Landsmans. She came to the United States with her brother, Louis, and his family. They lived first in Boston, then Barre, Vermont, and Burlington, Vermont, before settling in Ogdensburg in the early 1890s. She opened a small general store on Ford Street where St. Mary's Academy was later built. The land belonged to Dr. Madill, who took a proprietary interest in this gutsy woman who could not speak English well. The rent was $20.00 a month. She and Jesse were married in 1895. Harriet (Hattie) was born in 1897 and Sadie in 1898.

That same year, the Kauffmans moved to Massena, attracted by the business opportunities offered by the construction of the



Jesse and Ida Kauffman with daughter Harriet, 1897.

power canal that eventually brought in Alcoa.

Their first location was where *Stan's Men's Shop* is now. About a year later, the owner of the property decided to build the present building and had the old structure picked up, literally, and carried to the back of the lot. This left the Kauffman store with no access to Main Street, so Jesse looked around for a new location. Robert Cline, a blacksmith, owned the lot at the north end of the Grasse River bridge, and he agreed to build a store and to rent it to Jesse for $15.00 a month. At this time, the road was dirt and the sidewalks were wooden. In 1914, the road was paved. Part of the building was rented to a barber, Joe Petti, who later moved upstairs.

The Kauffman family moved from their first home on Center Street to an apartment over the store, then to a house next door which they bought in 1910. In 1918, the store was knocked down and rebuilt. Jesse and Ida operated the business in an old-fashioned, conservative manner. At first they did not extend credit to their customers, and although their location was more favorable, their business did not develop as fast or as well as Levine's.

Abe Kauffman was the first Jewish child born in Massena—in 1900, the year that Jesse became a citizen. A moyel was brought in from Montreal for the circumcision. Anne was born in 1903.

When Alcoa began operations, business expanded in Massena and the labor market tightened (approximately 1910-1917). Jesse returned to New York and placed ads in *Der Tog* to recruit young, single immigrant men to work in the store and to teach Hebrew to the children in Massena. Eventually, these workers left Massena after they learned to speak English.

Meanwhile, Ida's brother, Louis, and his family had moved to Cornwall, Ontario, and then to Massena in 1910. They opened a furniture store on the corner of Center and Willow Streets and

also dealt in junk. They moved to Montreal in 1914 and went into the scrap iron business, where they became vastly successful because of the war, with the government as chief customer.

Ida's parents migrated to the United States in 1915 when her father was 70. They lived in Syracuse for 10 years until the death of her mother. The father then moved to Massena and lived with the Kauffmans for a few years, then to Montreal with his son, Louis. He outlived his son and remained with his grandchildren, spending most of his time in the synagogue, until his death at close to 110.



Kauffman's Dept. Store, Massena, around 1908.

A Y.M.H.A was organized in Massena about 1916 with 25 to 30 members. It was located where the post office now stands. Jesse is remembered today as being one of the best pool players in the Y.

At age 12 Abe was sent to Burlington, Vermont, for a year to prepare for his bar mitzvah. At that time, Burlington was the principal Jewish community of the North. Ida accompanied him on the train trip and, when the train made a stop at Norwood, she got off for a moment to telephone her husband. The train took off with Abe, without Ida. Such were the tribulations of maintaining Yiddishkeit in the North Country!

Abe graduated from high school as valedictorian in 1918 in a class of 18 students. He enlisted in the S.A.T.C. (Student Army Training Corps) at Cornell University. The government paid tuition costs and put the young men up in dormitories and

fraternity houses, while their part of the pact was to study and to undergo military training under army personnel. Many casualties at this time were caused not by bullets but by the "flu of 1918," which caused sudden deaths. Abe remembers his drill sergeant collapsing during a drill and dying the next day. The war ended three months later, and the S.A.T.C. was disbanded in 1919. Abe's formal education continued peacefully until 1922.

Abe moved to New York City that year and started a wholesale business. His father went to New York City at that time also and stayed four years selling coal. Abe returned to the family store in 1924 when the country was emerging from the recession and business was improving.

Meanwhile, Hattie moved to Syracuse for two years to study music and business. She returned to Massena and became secretary for the St. Lawrence Power Company, forerunner of Niagara Mohawk. She married Edward Berenson, a chemist at Alcoa, in 1918. Edward left Alcoa and went into the family business. For a while, the Berensons had their own store (next to the movies) but didn't like it and returned to the family store. The Berensons helped Ida, who was the main worker, run the store during the absence of Abe and Jesse. They had one son, Dr. Norman Berenson, of Pennsylvania. Ed died in 1935, and Hattie subsequently remarried.

Sadie attended Potsdam Normal School and taught first grade to three generations of students in Newark, New Jersey, until her retirement. Her oil paintings adorn the walls of Abe's home.

Anne attended Syracuse University and became an actress in the Chatauqua System, a cultural summer program in New York State which sponsored plays, concerts, and lectures. She appeared in a play in New York City before her marriage to Dr. Milton Malev, a psychiatrist, in 1931. They have a son and a daughter.

In 1946, Abe married Rose Wendrow, a registered nurse who was assigned to Massena by the U.S. Public Health System. Jesse had looked her up and introduced her to his son, and the newlyweds moved into a house that was owned by Ida. They have two daughters, Judith, now Mrs. Brook Baker of Dorchester, Massachusetts, and the mother of a son, and Jessie (named for her grandfather) now Mrs. Richard Kaplan of Chicago, and the mother of a daughter. Like her father, Judy was valedictorian of her high school graduating class. She was

selected as a Presidential Scholar and was invited to the White House for the presentation. She was graduated from Radcliffe College as a Merit Scholarship winner. Also like her father, Jessie went to Cornell. Both women met their husbands in college.

Jesse died in 1950; Ida, in 1953. Rose and Abe opened a ladies' shop in the Harte-Haven Shopping Center when it was built in 1958. They operated it until 1965, then incorporated it into the Main Street store. They retired in January, 1979. Rose died in December, 1979.

Abe Cohen Family

In the words of Louis Krupkin of Watertown, Abe Cohen was "a 'macher,' a man about town, a bombastic fellow, a politician." Although this was a first-glance impression, the other side of the coin revealed a man with close-knit family ties, a man who won the respect of Jews and Gentiles alike, a man who was a true believer in community involvement. He was a slender, quick-footed man with a hawk-like appearance, thin face, aduncous nose, about 5′7″ or 8″. His gruff voice belied his heedful, generous nature.



Abe Cohen around World War I.

Abe was born in New York City in 1893. His parents, Sam and Bessie, had emigrated from Russia in the 1880s. Seeking a means of livelihood to support their growing family, they moved to Massena about 1903 and started a junk business. Abe was the second son in a family of six children. In order, they were Herman, Abe, Ruben, Minnie, Isadore, and Ethel.

All of Abe's working life revolved around moving-picture theaters. While still a student in public school, he worked part-time in the Wonderland Theater, located on the west side of Main Street near Andrews Street and owned by Jerry McCarthy and Thomas McNulty. After graduating from high

school, he worked as a projectionist in a theater in Valleyfield, Quebec.

In 1913, V.A. Warren opened the Star Theater, which occupied the present St. Lawrence Gas Company and *Massena Observer* building. Admission was five cents. Abe worked as projectionist for Warren and eventually became manager.



Abe and Ethel Cohen, 1920's.

He enlisted in the army in 1917 and served in England and France. He was with the army of occupation until his discharge in March, 1919. He married Ethel Rosenfield the same year.

Ethel was born in Poland (the exact date is unknown), where her father operated a notions store. On the advice of his brother who had emigrated to Kingston, Ontario, he studied to be a rabbi at the same time. Meanwhile, the situation of the Jews was becoming increasingly difficult during the Russo-Japanese war in the early 1900s. When the position of rabbi became available in Cornwall, Ontario, the brother advised him to leave Poland and to apply for the job. Ethel, her sister, two brothers, and mother followed two years later when Ethel was about four years old. They entered the country through Montreal and became Canadian citizens automatically through their father's naturalization.

Ethel remembers that, when social affairs were held in Cornwall, some of the young Jewish men of Massena drove to Nyando (now Rooseveltown), a tiny stop on the American side of the New York and Ottawa Railroad, and from there walked across a single track of railroad bridge to Cornwall, a distance of five or six miles. After an evening of festivities, they returned to Massena the same way, whether winter or summer.

When Ethel met Abe, she was about 22 years old and teaching in a small, one-room country school near Cornwall, a job she "hated and gladly gave up" for marriage in 1919. The wedding took place in Cornwall, and they settled in Massena, with Ethel becoming a United States citizen automatically.

The Cohens had two sons, Saul, born in 1920, and Leonard, in 1925. Leonard enlisted in World War II and was killed in the Battle of the Bulge in 1944. Saul, known as "Sonny," is an electrical engineer with the *Baltimore Gas and Electric Com-*

pany, and he and his wife have two children, both lawyers.

The present theater building was constructed during World War I and was sold to *Schine Enterprises* in 1926. Abe continued as manager for Schine's and enjoyed good rapport with members of the audience who sometimes complained about the subject matter of a film, but more often congratulated him on the caliber of the movies he exhibited. In 1944, he was promoted to district manager, including Malone, Tupper Lake, Saranac Lake, and Ogdensburg.

Abe was always involved in community activities. In his younger days, he was active in the Y.M.H.A. In World War II, he was a member of the gas rationing board. He was prominent in the American Legion, served as president of the Chamber of Commerce for two years, worked closely with Father Bellamy of Sacred Heart Church, and was president of Congregation Adath Israel. He was cited by editor Leonard Prince of the *Massena Observer* as "a dynamo for activity."

Younger brother Isadore played quarterback at St. Lawrence University and later became sports editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle*. All of his brothers and sisters moved away from Massena during the 1920s.

Abe died February 15, 1966, at the age of 72.

Halpern Family

In his early days in Massena, Nathan Halpern was a dapper young man leading a bachelor's existence. He was familiarly known as "the rayteh" because of his red hair, was always well dressed, and sported a gold watch and chain.

Nathan was born in Poland, an only son with four sisters whose well-to-do father owned a hardware store. His mother was still alive at the time of his engagement to Molly but died suddenly while sojourning at a summer resort in Galicia, and his father subsequently remarried.

Nathan and Molly, a Galitzen, were married and living in Austria when their daughter, Freida, was born. Since finances were not a problem to his father, he paid for Nathan's passage to America to avoid conscription. Molly and Freida stayed behind, then were trapped by the outbreak of World War I.

Nathan arrived in New York City and found a job which did not last long. In Grand Central Station one day in June of 1915, he heard an announcement to the effect that there was work, room, and board to be had in Massena. This apparently was a form of the industrial recruitment for immigrant labor. Nathan was met in Massena on a Friday night by a Gentile man who, coincidentally, came from the same home town in Europe and had a Jewish wife. This was Mr. Schaffer who gave Nathan a job as clerk in his store on Center Street, and he eventually became manager of the grocery department.

Rebecca Clopman has told the story of how she and her husband used to speak Yiddish together. One day, while pushing their infant son, Harry, in a baby carriage on Center Street, they were approached by a man who overheard their talk. "Yich zeit Juden," he cried excitedly. This was Nathan,

happy to meet a fellow Jew, albeit with a different dialect.

In his years alone in Massena, he boarded with the Sam Cohen family (Abe's parents). Molly and Freida came over on the *Rotterdam* in 1922. Nathan met them in New York City, and they eventually moved to Fort Covington, where Nathan operated a general store known as the *Red Front Store.* A son was born here and died at age three of a mis-diagnosed ruptured appendix. The family moved to Massena and opened a clothing store in the Schaffer building on Center Street and lived in an apartment over the store. Later, they opened a store on Main Street next to White's Hotel. A fire in the hotel destroyed the uninsured store, and the family moved back to Center Street, dealing first in second-hand furniture, then in new furniture.

Freida married Ben Brown on Valentine's Day of 1935 and had one son, Lyle; while she was pregnant, she was in a serious automobile accident, necessitating a Caesarean section.

Nathan died in 1950. Molly had always helped out in the family business, and later, during her widowhood, she managed a women's clothing store owned by Mark Schuber. She was active in the Women's Auxiliary of the shul and in Hadassah. Her death followed an evening spent with the Jewish community at a Chanukkah party in 1975 at the home of Abe and Blanche Levine—a sort of final and fond farewell from the friends whose love, respect, and esteem she enjoyed during her years in Massena. She was known for her good cooking, and her kugle recipe has been handed down to grateful young women.

Ben Brown died in 1967. Freida remained in Massena until the death of her mother, subsequently moving to Deerfield Beach, Florida. Her son is an architect in Utica and has two sons.

Rubin Family

Abraham Rubin was a big bear of a man—perhaps 6′4″ and handsome—when he and his wife, Sophie, moved to Massena, where his niece, Rebecca Landsman Clopman, had already settled two years before.

Sophie's maiden name was Kaplan. She was born in Minsk, Russia, in 1888, to Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell Kaplan. In her teens, Sophie worked for three years to earn the price of a ticket to the United States. Entering the country via Ellis Island in 1905, she found work in a dress factory. Later, she moved to Rochester, where she operated her own dress shop.

Another move took her to Canton, where her brother, Solomon, resided with his family. She married Abe Rubin in Canton in 1916. They moved to Massena in 1916, and Abe went into the business of scrap, furs, and cattle.

The Rubins had two sons, Simon and Mitchell, who continue to occupy the original premises on North Main Street. Sophie died in 1956.

Brennglass Family



Rabbi Berel Brennglass conducted the bar mitzvah and marriage ceremonies of author Louis Greenblatt.

Rabbi Berel Brennglass was the spiritual leader of the Massena Jewish community from 1918 to 1941. In appearance, he was a Lenin look-alike and sound-alike. A Van Dyke beard lent dignity to his 5′2″ frame. Steel-gray hair protruded beneath a high yarmulke (skull cap), and discerning eyes stiloetted those who tangled with him. His words were powerful and commanding, and his demeanor was courageous and authoritative, as his adversaries in the Blood Libel incident of 1928 were to discover when he played a key role in the case.* It is possible the outcome of that near-tragedy might have been disastrous in the hands of a lesser man.

A more intimate picture of him reveals a loving family man devoted to his wife and four children. He was born in Troky, Lithuania, in 1876 and graduated from Slobodka Yeshiva outside Kovmo. He spent several years with his family in Cardiff, which imparted a peculiar Welsh accent to his English. Leaving the family there, he arrived in New York City alone in

*See Shulkin family, page 163.

October, 1915, when he was almost 40 years old. He regretted all his life that he had not made the move earlier so that he might have been able to prepare for the legal or medical profession.

Within two years, while he was working in Pennsylvania, his physician brother discovered that Berel had contracted tuberculosis and advised him to move to upstate New York. Saranac Lake at that time was noted for its tuberculosis sanitarium, and he accepted the pulpit at nearby Tupper Lake. He returned to Wales to fetch his family, thereby perhaps becoming the only local immigrant to cross the ocean three times. Not long after they were all settled in at Tupper Lake, Berel answered the call to service Massena. In the summer of 1918, the Jewish men of Massena voted unanimously in a standing vote to engage him, and he took up his duties with the High Holy days that Fall.

Eva Brennglass, tall and slim, presented a different image than most of the women who emigrated from Eastern Europe. She had received an unusual education for a young girl of those times and was well versed in Hebrew, Yiddish, and the Jewish religion. At times, when her husband could not be reached, she was able to answer religious questions that arose amongst the congregation's members.

Even her method of cooking set her apart from the other wives. She had a working knowledge of sound nutrition, possibly a result of her frail health which demanded it. She used salt and fats sparingly and knew how to prepare vegetables that other wives knew nothing about. Her brother-in-law in New York City looked after her physical condition, and at those times that she was away, her husband took over the cooking chores.

For his services as rabbi, schochet, and teacher, he was given $23.00 a week and a house, at 180 East Orvis Street, within walking distance of the schul. The remuneration was decreased to $20.00 during the Depression. Yet for more than 20 years, he was the driving force in the religious life of Massena's Jews, unyielding in his demands for adherence to tradition and orthodoxy. In his early years in town, he was called "the Reverend B. Brennglass." Later, after his leadership qualities and performance of duties had been established, he was granted the more distinguished title of "Rabbi."

His principal functions were that of schochet. The grown-ups of today who attended his cheder classes remember him as a

strict disciplinarian. He lacked patience for those students who were without interest, motivation, or intelligence. For them, a rap on the knuckles with a ruler or a tug on the ear retrieved wandering thoughts. But for those with an inquiring mind, he inspired, impelled, goaded, provoked, as he attempted to fire their imaginations and nurture their abilities.

When Eva died in 1941, Rabbi Brennglass retired and moved to New York City to live with his eldest son, Mark, until his death in 1966. Three of his children survive and are all in New York. Mark is not married; Vivian, a widow, has one son; Nathan died in 1940; and Sam, a lawyer, has one son.

Mallinson Family

The Mallinson family brought another convoluted relationship to the Jews of Massena. Alice Mallinson was the daughter of Moses Ely, who was Sam Levine's stepbrother. She came to the United States with her father and was living in Tupper Lake when Sam emigrated. It is believed that her mother, Elke, was also a stepsister or halfsister to Sam. She called him "Uncle Sam" and considered herself a double first cousin to the Levine children.



Alice Mallinson and daughter, Zelma.

Joseph Irving Mallinson, a tall, spare, gentle man, was born in Utica. He and Alice met through a shiddach in his hometown and were married there. Their only child, Zelma, was born in Utica. They opened a general and ladies' store in St. Regis Falls and later moved to Massena following the Levines' move.

For a time, they operated a "fine dry goods store" (in the words of Louis Krupkin of Watertown) on Main Street. Alice's sister, Anna Ely, helped out in the store. Alice was knowledgeable in quality merchandise and was particularly helpful in the sale of blouses, then called waists, and corsets. Joe's special contribution was his facility with figures. In those days before adding machines, he could add up long columns in seconds.

The store did well prior to the Depression. Later, they sold second-hand furniture in a store on Andrews Street, subsequently moving to Center Street, where they also dealt in junk. They lived on Andrews Street in a large house that contained several apartments. Other members of their family achieved a prosperity that eluded them. One of Joe's brothers founded the famous Mallinson Silks.

Zelma was graduated from Syracuse University with honors. Her first marriage to Frank Kopita of Ogdensburg ended in divorce. Her second marriage to David Weg produced a daughter, Amy. After David's death, Zelma married Maurice Melin, a widower of Rochester. She committed suicide in 1979 at the age of 69. Alice died in Massena in 1968 at age 81. Joe lived to 96, dying in a nursing home in Rochester.

Other Families

There were additional families in Massena about whom there is a paucity of information. Ben and Rose Cohen comprised the first Jewish family to settle in Massena; they arrived from New York City in 1898 shortly before the Kauffmans. The Cohens are remembered as being the only Jews not to observe Kashruth. At the time of Ben's death, there was no Jewish cemetery and he was taken to New York for burial.

Another Cohen family was Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Cohen, who were in the junk business. They had one son, Wilfred, and four daughters, Betty, Sarah, Ida, and Beulah.

A Nathan Cohen lived in Massena for only a few years. A bachelor, he initiated the movement to organize the Y.M.H.A. in the mid-teens. Some of the original members were Wilfred, Ida, and Betty Cohen; Meyer and Alex Rossoff; Eli and Sara Friedman; and I.L. Kauffman of Norfolk. Nathan clerked in Levine's store, then opened his own men's store. He was the first secretary of the Congregation.

There was another Cohen who ran a shoe repair shop on Main Street. He married a Catholic girl and moved to Ogdensburg.

In addition, there were families named Saidel (no relation to the Gouverneur Saidels); Kaner; Nadler; Tatarsky; Julius Thomas; Eugene Friedman (no relation to Eli); Max Cohen, who worked for Levine's; Mrs. Telis, who was Sophia Rubin's sister; and others who remain lost to posterity.

There was another Isaac Friedman besides Eli's father. He was a salesman for *Stone & Co.*, his wife was Emma, and they had a son, Bennett.

Morris Goldberg was a native New Yorker. He was raised in a Catholic orphanage and, although married to a Jewish woman, Rachel Miller of Cornwall, Ontario, remained on the pale of Jewish life. He was a plumber and steamfitter before becoming a truck driver for Alcoa; at the time of his death, he was a supervisor. He and Rachel had a daughter and a son, Arnold, who also works for Alcoa. Arnold and his wife, Emma, have one daughter, Brenda, who is a nurse.

The Norfolk Kauffmans



Kauffman Family, 1920. Back row: Anne, Lee, Abe, Esther, Suds. Front row: Isaac, Jane, Rebecca.

Isaac Kauffman, the brother of Massena's Jesse J. Kauffman, brought his wife and children to Norfolk, New York, and there the Isaac Kauffman family lived, managed a successful clothing store, and raised a family, close in every way to the Jesse J. Kauffmans, and close in every way to the Massena Jewish community. Louis Greenblatt recalls:

"Before the Massena Congregation was organized, families from Massena and the Kauffmans of Norfolk used to take the train to Gouverneur, staying in Gouverneur for High Holiday Services. Then, when the Massena Congregation was organized, the Isaac Kauffmans associated themselves with that Congregation.

"The two Kauffman families were very close, adults and children, and remained that way throughout their years. Particularly the two male cousins, both of whom bore the same

first name, Abe. Since Abe Kauffman of Massena was older than his cousin Abe Kauffman of Norfolk, they were known locally as big Abe and little Abe."

The Isaac and Rebecca Kauffman Story[1]

Isaac was born in the small town of Belitza, Province of Vilna, White Russia. The family operated a store on the market place, and after Isaac's marriage to Rebecca Kaplan, he opened a leather store in Belitza. His brother, Jesse, migrated to America, to Massena, New York.

Rebecca Kaplan, born in 1873, also in Belitza, was the daughter of Reuben (a baker) and Scheine Kaplan. As a girl, she had been in love with a boy from a neighboring shtetl. Her mother had refused permission for them to marry because Rebecca would have had to move out of her own village, away from her family. Seeing an older sister's unhappy arranged match, for many years Rebecca refused to marry at all. She was quite an "old maid" of 24 when she met the scholarly, soft-spoken Isaac Kauffman, who luckily was from Belitza. He fell in love with her, and "they did not need a matchmaker."

Four children were born to them: Anne, 1899; Sadie (Suds), 1901; Abraham, 1902; and Lena (Lee), 1904. Then, with the Russo-Japanese War, Isaac, who had already served in the Russian Army, feared being called back in. Rebecca convinced him to emigrate. Says daughter Jane:

"He did not want to go, but she insisted, for she could see no decent life ahead. It was not to escape poverty that this drastic decision was taken, but to obtain dignity and freedom from fear and persecution."

A mature man of 34, Isaac left wife, children, business and community, to pave the way for a new life in America. He arrived, according to his application for citizenship (on file in Canton, New York) in 1904. In 1905 he moved to Norfolk,New York, near Massena where his brother Jesse had a clothing business. Jane relates:

"Papa traveled as a peddler of clothing to surrounding farms in horse and wagon, staked by his brother. At the end of a year he had earned enough to lease a store in Norfolk, a smaller village some 12 miles from Massena, to buy a stock of clothing, and to send for (Rebecca and the children)."

Rebecca arrived:

"My mother (Rebecca) told of her terrible voyage in steerage, with her four little children cramped together with other immi-

grants . . . no privacy, no decent beds, and both she and the children were ill most of the way. She spoke of it as the greatest physical hardship of her life. (She) arrived in Norfolk, without any knowledge of the English language, to a small town without other Jews and with totally alien customs, with four small children for whom to keep a house, and a business which needed her help. She embraced it all without sorrow and set about courageously to make a good, if lonely, life."

Rebecca Kauffman was, as daughter Jane recalls, "enterprising and progressive. A small, neat woman with a lovely, calm face; cleanliness and order surrounded her person as well as her household." She was also a woman who made things happen, and so she not only managed a spotless and absolutely kosher household, but was indespensible in the business. She went with her husband and made decisions on buying trips, inspected stock, pushed special sales. While Isaac was "steeped in the study of Torah and Talmud," Rebecca "was the merchandising brains of the enterprise." Isaac, though, was the "financial brain" and he kept the books.

"Thanks to economic good times," says Jane, "the energies and judgment of my mother and the conscientiousness of my father, the family fortunes prospered." In 1913 a last daughter, named Jennie, but called Jane, was born.

In 1917 the Kauffmans built a "grand-for-Norfolk" nine room family home on 10 Morris Street. (In this house, son Abe and his wife Alice, still live today.)

Charity for Jewish causes, especially Zionism, and for family left behind in Europe, was one passionate concern which Isaac and Rebecca shared completely. The formal education of their children was another. And the children were excellent students, each of the girls in turn, head of her class. Their parents made strong efforts to provide them with a Jewish education as well. They even brought young Jewish scholars to Norfolk to teach the children, while also "helping in the store." But none of these efforts quite made up for the fact that Norfolk was far from any hub of Judaism, and the children, at least Jane, felt a separateness from the non-Jewish Norfolk children.

For a short period of time, at Rebecca's urging (Jane thinks perhaps prompted by the fact that at this time the Kauffmans had daughters of a marriageable age, and no Jewish prospects in sight) the family left the North Country. Around 1920, in partnership with brother Jesse, Isaac bought a wholesale hosiery and underwear business in New York City. In 1921 the

family followed and for two years (for Jane very happy years) the Kauffmans lived in Brooklyn where the children did not feel so strongly the sense of being different that was always with them in Norfolk.

But the wholesale business failed, and in 1926, with the two youngest children Lee and Jane not yet on their own, Isaac and Rebecca returned to Norfolk where they rented a house, as their own had been sold. (Later, in the 30s, the purchaser was unable to keep up payments, and the Kauffmans could return to their former home.)

The family went back into the Norfolk clothing business. In 1927 Abe, who had stayed on at a job in New York City, returned to Norfolk to help his father run the store, and the Norfolk *Kauffmans* actually remained in business until 1970 when Abe retired.

In January of 1942 Isaac died in his sleep. Rebecca lived until 1963, into her 90s, but, says Jane, "although she remained active and competent, I always felt that from Papa's death on, she was simply marking time until the angel of death should come for her."

FOOTNOTE

[1]The information for this article is gleaned almost entirely from a family history, *Reminiscenses and a Family History of Sorts*, written by Jane Kauffman Schwartz, published in Rockville, Maryland, 1981.

POTSDAM

by Joan Dobbie & Louis Greenblatt

The Sussman Family
The Sverdlow Family

THE POTSDAM COMMUNITY



High Holidays Services, Sept. 1968. L to R: Louis Greenblatt, Arthur Langenauer (a student rabbi), Max Sverdlow.

Before 1911 or '12 there were no Jewish families living in Potsdam, at least none that stayed for any length of time. Then the Sussmans came, and the Sverdlows, and for between 15 and 20 years they were the only long-term Jewish families to make their homes here. By 1935, when Lou and Rose Greenblatt settled in Potsdam, there were only four Jewish families. These earliest of Potsdam Jews joined with the few Canton Jews and the larger Jewish communities of Ogdensburg and Massena for religious services and social activities.

With the growth of Potsdam's universities in these years, however, the Jewish population was slowly expanding. Jewish students and staff found their way to our community. For a couple of years in the early 30s, Sam Sussman opened the upstairs of his home on Elm Street for use by the Jewish community, as a Schul.

Then, with the end of World War II and the implementation of the GI bill, many veterans (some Jewish) enlisted in local colleges. With sudden increased enrollments faculty staffs were enlarged, among them Jewish professors. World War II refu-

gees arrived at about the same time.

During the 40s and early 50s, Potsdam's Jewish community informally took on responsibilities of a congregation. Classes were organized, and children given religious instruction by mothers who volunteered their time. Occasionally services were held in people's homes, or sometimes in the civic center. By the 1950s there were about 20 Jewish families making their homes in the Potsdam area.

Then, in 1955, Dr. Saul Fliegel became aware of the fact that the building on 81 Market Street, next door to his dental practice, was available for purchase. At Saul's suggestion, the Potsdam Jewish community formally incorporated as congregation Beth-El, and purchased the building for $20,000. Five thousand dollars was raised immediately as a down payment, and the balance borrowed. Potsdam's Jewish families joined together for fund raising drives, and just plain people-power to transform the one-time grange hall, warehouse, boys' club, fraternity house, into a house of God. The Synagogue was given its first Torah by a family in Carthage, who had kept in on behalf of an extinct congregation there, the pews were donated by a local church, and Beth-El, the Johnny-come-lately of North Country Jewish communities, was born.

The Sussman Family

Slender, handsome, with dark reddish-brown hair, a pale complexion and somewhat enigmatic grey eyes, a young man in his late teens or early twenties, Sam Zussman (now Sussman) arrived at the home of his aunt Hanna and uncle Harris Minkowitz in Manhattan, New York. These were the early years of the 20th century, the years of the Russo-Japanese War. To avoid conscription into the Russian armed forces, Sam had escaped Russia by some underground route; he may or may not have entered America legally. Sam had left behind, in his hometown of Kublich, Polish Russia, his mother, a brother, and two sisters. Another sister, Fannie Zussman Holland, was already in America, living in Newark, New Jersey. She too, had first come to the Minkowitz home in Manhattan. "They took in all the relatives as they came over."[1]

Sometime after his arrival, Sam left Manhattan for the North Country village of Gouverneur, New York, where he had heard that the Katzman family would help Jewish immigrants get started as peddlers. He contacted the Katzmans, and soon, with horse and wagon, began to peddle. In the home of Morris Ruderman, another of Gouverneur's earliest Jews, Sam met Dora Simon, whose father, Sam Simon, taught Cheder to Gouverneur's Jewish children; her mother ran a little store. Dora was tiny, less than 5′ tall, and, says daughter Rose Greenblatt, "They tell me she never weighed over a hundred pounds." Sensitive and fragile, with delicate features, Dora took pleasure in singing and playing the piano. Sam and Dora were married around 1907 or '08.

In the summer of 1910 Dora gave birth to twins. The smallest, weighing only one-and-one-half pounds did not live; the



Sam and Dora (nee Simon) Sussman ca. 1910.

larger twin, two-and-a-half pound Esther, did survive. When Esther was still a toddler, in 1912, at the advice of the Kauffman family (who then lived in Gouverneur; later to move to Ogdensburg, and eventually to Massena), Dora, Sam, and baby Esther left Gouverneur for Potsdam. There, Sam opened a small furniture store on Market Street, which he operated while continuing to peddle. "He worked very hard. He peddled from three in the morning until about seven, then came back to operate the store."

In 1911, Sam's sister, Ida (who had come to America soon after Sam), and her husband, Max Sverdlow, joined the Sussmans in Potsdam. Although Potsdam had its share of transient Jews (including Mayer Sperling, who, in 1915 lived in Parishville Center with the Parker family), the Sussmans and the Sverdlows were for many years the only Jewish families to put down roots in Potsdam.

In 1914 another daughter, Rose, was born to Sam and Dora. Then, in 1918, when Esther was eight and Rose four, an influenza epidemic struck. Fragile Dora Sussman died, leaving Sam alone with their two children.

The four years following their loss of wife and mother were years filled with pain for Sam and his daughters. For a time they tried to make a new life for themselves in Syracuse, where Dora's family (Sam and Gitel Simon and their grown children) were now living. In 1922 Esther and Rose were sent to live with their aunt Fannie Holland in Newark, New Jersey.

Sam, who had a certain amount of capital saved, went to New York City, and there he opened an employment agency. But "that didn't work out at all."

He returned north, to Potsdam, with $50.00 in his pocket (and that, he had borrowed). At this juncture, luck, and friendship came to his aid. Sam had a good friend in Potsdam, Bob

Burns, president of a Potsdam bank. Bob Burns offered to lend Sam "whatever money he needed to reopen the furniture store," which Sam did. The venture was a success; he repaid the money, and after about four years Sam felt secure enough to send for Esther and Rose.

It was around 1927 when the young Sussman daughters, now 17 and 13 years old, were reunited with their father in Potsdam. At first father and daughters lived together in a boarding house run by the Killingbeck family. Rose remembers them as "a wonderful family," and remembers that Mrs. Killingbeck "cooked kosher for us, so that we never ate trefe food." Rose remembers life in the boarding house as "an enjoyable thing. It wasn't an unpleasant time at all."

Sam worked very hard, and eventually managed to buy a house for his family on Washington Street. Of the house, the Sussmans made a home. The girls helped with the chores. Says Rose, "We took over our jobs in the house. I liked to cook, and my sister liked to scrub. And so, we scrubbed and we cooked." But their father, Sam, took on the main responsibilities of father and mother to the family. He was a very meticulous man, and very religious. "We always kept the Sabbath. I can remember my father always prepared. He always made fish for Friday night, had the chickens ready, and would prepare it all." They kept a strictly kosher home, and the Holidays were strictly observed: "On Passover he would go to the farmer with his own pail and milk the cow, so that we could have milk for Passover." For the High Holidays they went to Ogdensburg, or stayed with family in Syracuse.

As Jewish father and Jewish mother, Sam had another responsibility concerning his now teenaged daughters. Living as they did in an almost entirely Christian environment, he took it upon himself to make sure they met Jewish boys:

"He did try very hard. We spent a great deal of time in Massena, because Massena had many Jewish families. And nearly every Saturday night the Massena Jewish community would rent a hall, and there they would have parties, so that the young people could meet. They would have a band, and parents would go too. They invited everybody. Nobody came with dates. We'd just go there and dance. And that way we met Jewish people."

The Sussmans became close with Massena's Jewish community. The Slavins and the Kriffs they would have known without the parties; they were cousins. But other families, the

Greenblatts for example, they met through these social occasions. And Rose did, as it turned out, marry Isadore Greenblatt. Says Rose: "I met the Greenblatt family long before I thought of marrying Izzy. They had daughters and sons. Very often I met them at these dances."

But still, as high school girls, Esther and Rose felt "very restricted." While they were allowed to have Christian friends, they were not, under any circumstances, allowed to date non-Jewish boys. While the girls never even considered marrying any but a Jewish man, they would have been happy to have been allowed to date freely. But soft spoken though he was, their father had a strong will, and he never loosened this restriction—though the girls did occasionally date their schoolmates in secret.

Close as they were with the Massena community, Rose remembers the Yom Kippur season of 1928, when in Massena, in the only such incident to take place in an American community,[2] the Jews were accused of kidnapping a Christian child:

"The accusation was a shock. Until that time I don't think anybody up here thought such an accusation could be made. We never before felt any anti-Semitism. But when that happened, we felt it. We became aware that it did exist. I think that all of a sudden we felt that our classmates were looking at us differently. Now I don't think they were, but then, I did. And I didn't like being in that kind of a spotlight at all."

Sam took his daughters' Jewish education extremely seriously. When they had lived in Syracuse and New Jersey the girls had consistently attended Hebrew School. Now that there were no formal lessons available he himself took the time to sit down with them, and teach them. And not only Hebrew. Because he still had family in the Old Country, family whom he had never lost touch with, Sam taught his daughters to read and write in Yiddish. This way they too could communicate with their Russian grandmother, aunt, uncle, and cousins.

Because of the irregularities connected with Sam's leaving Russia and entering America, he had a very difficult time obtaining his American citizenship. And without the American citizenship he could never return to his homeland to see his family. Nearly 30 years went by before he finally did get that longed-for citizenship. At last, in 1932, he did make the trip back to visit his family. "He was very happy he went because one year later his mother passed away." At least he had seen

her one more time.

Upon his return to Potsdam, Sam bought a new family home on 46 Elm Street from his old friend, Bob Burns. It was a very large duplex house. He opened up the whole upstairs, all the way across the entire building. In this hall, he established a Schul, the first in Potsdam, where Friday night services were held (although there may not always have been a minyan—the 10 bar mitzvahed men required to hold a service). During these years the colleges in Potsdam (Clarkson, Crane School of Music, and the Normal School) were drawing in a population of Jewish students, and it was these students, mostly, who attended services. When there were no services being held, the hall on 46 Elm Street was used "as a party room" where the young Jews of St. Lawrence County came to meet and to have fun together. The first Potsdam Schul, however, lasted only a couple of years. Potsdam did not yet have a large enough Jewish population to maintain such an undertaking.

1936 brought great changes to the Sussman family. That year Rose married Izzy Greenblatt, and with her husband, moved to Plattsburgh. And also that year, after all the years of bachelorhood, Sam Sussman married Fay Seidner, a widow from New York. The following April, Esther married Fred Futterman, and with her husband, took over the Tupper Lake branch of *Sussmans Furniture Store.* Fred Futterman was to become a prominent citizen of Tupper Lake, and for two terms, between 1953 and 1957, Mayor of the village—and to this day only the second Jewish person to become mayor of a Northern New York community.

Fay Sussman, as Angela Thaler remembers her from the 1950s, was "outgoing, temperamental, good looking in a kind of Slavic way." Originally from the Russian Pale, Fay had come to America as a 15 year old mail order bride. With her first husband, she had one son, Nathan.

It so happened, that as part of his business, Sam Sussman acquired a building on 81 Market Street, which he used as a warehouse. Around 1942 he sold the building to William Anderson to be used by the Potsdam Boys' Club. Ten years later a Clarkson fraternity took over the building. It had been vacant for a year when, in February 1955, the newly incorporated Jewish congregation, of which Sam Sussman was a trustee, bought the building from the Anderson estate.

The Potsdam Jewish Community, which by this time had grown to include about 20 families, put forth an all out effort to



81 Market Street before transformation into Temple Beth-El, May 1955.

pay for, then to renovate, decorate, and transform the building into a synagogue. This entailed many years of fund-raising activities, and it was at these fund-raisers, particularly at rummage sales, that the boisterous and enthusiastic Fay Sussman excelled. Recalls Angela Thaler, "Fay was a rummage sale arranger, chair person, you wouldn't believe. She could sell a bald man a hairbrush! She was terrific!" And when there was a lull at a rummage sale, Fay made certain that empty time was not boring for the ladies. She taught them songs she remembered from the old country, dances, and told stories of her early years as a girl "who didn't know from nothing" in the New World.



Fay and Sam Sussman, late 1930's.

In 1958 Sam retired from the furniture store. He lived a peaceful retirement in their beautifully furnished home on 46 Elm Street, until he died on August 18, 1967. After

her husband's death, Fay Sussman moved to Florida where she died in December, 1979.

FOOTNOTES

[1]This and other direct quotes come from an interview with Rose Sussman Greenblatt on June 20, 1981. There were also interviews with Esther Sussman Futterman of Tupper Lake, N.Y., one on August 8, 1974 with Lou Greenblatt, and another in June 1981 with Joan Dobbie.

[2]A book, *The Incident in Massena*, by Saul S. Friedman, Stein & Day Co., 1978; New York, New York, relates details of this bizzare happening.

The Sverdlow Family

In 1955 when the Jewish Congregation of Beth-El was incorporated, Max Sverdlow was a trustee of that corporation, and elected first president. A plaque by the door of the Temple on 81 Market Street commemorates his importance as a founder of Beth-El.



Max and Ida Sverdlow in the years prior to WWI. Max's brother is seated at left.

Max Lazar Motke Sverdlow was born in the spring of 1888 in Berskvitz, Province of Vilna, White Russia. He escaped Russia by way of the underground network, traveling, according to his application for citizenship, to Liverpool, England, and from Liverpool, on the vessel *Oceanic*, crossing the Atlantic to dock at the port of New York in March of 1908. A short, stocky youth, not yet 20, with dark complexion, strong features, and blue eyes, Max set about making his way in the New World, and in a New York factory he found work as a carver of designs on furniture.

He had, according to their daughter, Blanche, already known pretty red-haired Ida Sussman in the Old Country. This younger sister of Sam Sussman, quiet by nature, with fair skin and delicate, chiselled features, had been born, also in 1888, in the White Russian Shtetl of Kublitz. According to her daughter Blanche, Max sent for Ida. Her boat arrived in Boston, but she

quickly made her way to New York City, and lived there, as did each of the Sussmans as they came, with the Minkowitz family.[1] In 1909, Max and Ida married.

For a couple of years they made their home in the city, and their first daughter, Blanche, was born there. Quiet, gentle, Ida probably slipped easily into her role as Jewish housewife. Those who remember her in later years speak invariably of a sweet, motherly, exceptionally beautiful woman, who was absolutely devoted to her husband and family, and for whom her husband's word was law.

Ida had an older brother, Sam Sussman, who was in these years living in the North Country community of Gouverneur. Around 1912 Sam moved his family to Potsdam, and this same year, apparently, he advised his sister and brother-in-law to do likewise. They did. Max, Ida and little daughter Blanche, left New York City for Potsdam, where they made their first home on Spring Street.

From Charles Murphy, a local attorney, Max Sverdlow obtained horse and wagon, and got his start as a peddler, or rather, a buyer of furs (fox, muskrat, skunk, mink, etc.) which he purchased from local farmers and trappers to then sell to markets in New York City.

For several years he remained in the fur business, and did well with it. The family moved from Spring Street to Cedar Street and eventually to Water Street. Three more children, Doris, Alan, and Margaret were born to them in Potsdam. Around 1915, when young greenhorn, Mayer Sperling, was in the area, it was meeting the successful fur dealer, Max Sverdlow, that convinced Mayer that for a Jewish immigrant, peddling would provide the path to success.

As were most Jews of the Russian Pale, the Sverdlows were religious, and probably as best as they could in Potsdam's Christian environment, they kept up the orthodox traditions, but it must have been difficult with so little Jewish community to support them. There was a deep rift between the Sverdlows and the only other Jewish family in Potsdam, the Sussmans, and actually, for a period of years in the '20s, the Sverdlows were the only Jewish family to be living in Potsdam at all.

In Canton during the late teens, there lived two Jewish families, the Bennetts and the Sam Kaplan family, and with these families the Sverdlows were friendly. Anna Bennett Sperling remembers that during the High Holiday Season of 1916, when the few area Jews decided to hold Services in

Canton, the Sverdlow family stayed in the home of the Bennett family.

With World War I the fur market dropped, while iron became the premium item. (During the first World War metal was sorely needed to make weapons.) Max Sverdlow became a dealer of scrap iron, and eventually he moved into real estate.

In time, Max owned apartment buildings and other "property on the west side of Market Street; the east side of Market Street, the south side of Main Street, and considerable space on Fall Island, including *Tydal Service Station*,"[3] and including a two story building that had been the site of the first bank of Potsdam in 1849.

And as he prospered in Potsdam, Max Sverdlow took his place as a community leader. He was a charter member of the Potsdam Lions Club, a member of the Potsdam Elks, of the Potsdam Town and Country Club, of the Potsdam Chamber of Commerce, and a member of the Ogdensburg Knights of Pythias.

The Sverdlow children grew up as part of the Potsdam community, with perhaps, a little more freedom than many other Orthodox immigrant children. They were allowed to date their non-Jewish schoolmates—a freedom somewhat envied by their very restricted Sussman cousins!

The oldest daughter, Blanche, became a teacher; she has three daughters. Doris, their second daughter, died at an early age. Their son Alan, as an adult, went into business in Potsdam. For a long time he lived here with his wife and family, but eventually they moved to New York City and then to Florida. Margaret, the youngest, married Marvin Nusbaum of Haddenfield, New Jersey, where she died in January of 1964.

On January 9, 1960, Max Sverdlow, "prominent Potsdam businessman for nearly 50 years,"[4] died in the Syracuse University Hospital. Ida lived on in her quiet, inobtrusive way, for five more years. Her daughter Blanche, who had been living in Syracuse, now returned to Potsdam by Ida's side. On April 30, 1964, Ida Sverdlow passed away.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Louis Greenblatt interviewed Blanche Kanrich, daughter of Max and Ida Sverdlow, on October 31, 1979.

[2]Rose Sussman, June 1981.

[3]Obituary, *Courier Freeman*, January 14, 1960.

[4]Ibid.

Potsdam Conclusion

There are no descendants of either the Sussmans or the Sverdlows living in Potsdam in 1981. The Jewish population is now made up of those who came later, in the 1920s, the 30s, the 40s and 50s, and even within the last few years. The Potsdam Jewish community is of a different color than the Jewish communities of Ogdensburg, Gouverneur, and Massena. Potsdam, with its colleges, is one of those places where the children of peddlers turned businessmen went, after they had become professionals. It is not a dwindling, but a growing Jewish Community with young families, bubbling with child energy. Whether these children will continue on in the North Country, or find other homes in other regions, whether they will follow their parents into the professions, or find new paths for their lives, remains to be seen, as the life of the Jewish community continues on, after us.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

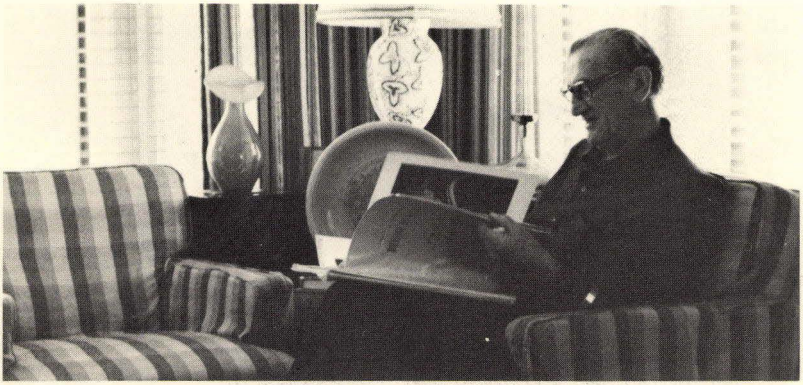


Joan Dobbie, 1981. (Photo by Mark Penell)

Joan Dobbie

Joan Dobbie is known in Potsdam as the mother of Dawn and Andy (without whose support, enthusiasm, and patience this project would never have been completed) and the foster mother of J.J., the town's biggest dog. Joan edits the *Potsdam Consumer Co-op Newsletter*, is a member of the cooperative that puts out the *Women Together* journal, does photography, and writes poetry, stories, and biographies of early Jewish settlers whenever they are there to be written.

The daughter of Dr. Max and Angela Thaler, Austrian Jews (though her dad was born in a Polish Shtetl) who escaped Hitler by way of Switzerland. Joan was born on January 12, 1946 in Switzerland, and since she was four years old, was raised in the North Country hamlet of Parishville, New York, which, she was always told, reminded her parents of Switzerland. She graduated from the Parishville Hopkinton Central School in 1963, valedictorian of her class, and attended Potsdam State University College, from which she graduated in 1967, having been granted, along with her B.A. degree, an award for "the one most likely to succeed in English."



Louis Greenblatt, 1981. (Photo by Joan Dobbie)

Louis Greenblatt

One of the founders of Potsdam's Congregation Beth-El, and off and on, over the years, its president, active in community affairs, and fascinated by area history, Louis Greenblatt has resided in St. Lawrence County since 1922, in Potsdam since 1935. In his 59 years as a North Country resident, Mr. Greenblatt became acquainted with many of the early Jewish families in the county. Tales of the early experiences of these unusual people were eventually to delight him to the point that he experienced an urgent desire to document their experiences as newcomers to a new land, particularly to this remote, isolated area of Northern New York. Hence, *Before Us* was conceived.

Here now, in his own words, is Lou's story:

"My life began in a tenement apartment on the lower east side of New York City. The date was August 7, 1912. Within three years my parents moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and then to Cleveland, Ohio. Here I grew up until age 10. In 1922 we moved to Massena, New York, where an uncle and his family had settled and were prospering. My graduation from the Massena Public School system occurred in 1930. From there I went back to Ohio and finished my undergraduate studies at Ohio State University in 1934. After a year of meandering, with the help of my parents, I started a dress shop in Potsdam, New York, which opened during August 1935. In 1936 I married my high school "steady" Rose Leah Clopman. She passed away in 1965. I have been a resident of Potsdam from 1935 until the present."



Blanche Levine, 1981.
(Photo by A.J. Levine)

Blanche Levine

Blanche Bromberg Levine is a native of North Plainfield, New Jersey. She was graduated as a journalism major from New York University and did graduate work at the New School for Social Research and St. Lawrence University. While living in New York City, she worked for the Chinese Ministry of Information and was a production assistant on television in the days when TV was live.

She is married to Abraham Jacob Levine, M.D., of Massena, N.Y. They are the parents of five children; Lenore, a psychiatric nurse in Boston; Louis, a lawyer in Syracuse; Alan, a physician in Denver; Sam, an electrical engineer in California; and Shirley, a student at Cornell University.

INDEX OF FAMILIES

GOUVERNEUR COMMUNITY 83-139
Eckmann Family 87-92
Glazeroff and Glazier Families 108-116
Kaplan Family 117-126
Katzman Family 93-98
Levinson Family 135-138
Ruderman Family 99-107
Saidel Family 127-134

MASSENA-NORFOLK COMMUNITY 143-206
Brennglass Family 197-199
Cohen Family 191-193
Friedman and Stone Families 183-185
Clopman Family 169-174
Halpern Family 194-195
Isaac Kauffman Family 203-206
J.J. Kauffman Family 186-190
Jacobs and Rossoff Families 154-158
Landsman Family 175-179
Levine Family 147-153
Mallinson Family 200-201
Rosenbaum Family 180-182
Rubin Family 196
Shulkin Family 163-168
Slavin Family 159-162

OGDENSBURG COMMUNITY 3-80
Dinberg Family 37-39
Dobisky Family 29-36
Fisher Families 40-46
Frank Families 6-27
Kopita Family 76-79
Rosenbaum Family 57-68
Rothenberg Family 69-75
Sperling Family 47-56
Wolff Family 28

POTSDAM COMMUNITY 209-221
Sussman Family 211-217
Sverdlow Family 218-220

BEFORE US, 2nd PRINTING, 1984

Louis Greenblatt, the heart, soul and driving force behind this book, who knew that multiple-published copies serve as the only buffer of memory against time, died in October 1981. This second printing, made possible by his sons, Sam, Joel and Matt Greenblatt, in cooperation with the Temple Beth El of Potsdam, New York, is done in their father's memory.

NOTES & CORRECTIONS

OGDENSBURG

Pg. 5: We apologize that we chronicled so few of the Ogdensburg families. One outstanding omission was the family of Leon Friedman. Leon operated a clothing store in Ogdensburg prior to 1920, and, says cousin Max Levinson (see Gouverneur section, pg. 135) ". . . I believe that sometime shortly thereafter he, together with his wife, operated a ladies shop adjacent to the men's shop. They had one child, Seymour, who became a physician." (Letter from Max Levinson to Joan Dobbie, 11/28/83)

Pg. 56, #2, line 6: Bernard's son-in-law is "Larry," not "Carry," Welt.

Pg. 66, #3: Louis and Ruth Redstone had two sons, Daniel and Eliel; both became architects.

Pg. 66-67, #4, line 3: Betty Rosenbaum Bloom was a social worker in **Denver**, not Boulder, Colorado, and her husband, Harold Bloom, was a professor in **Golden**, Colorado, not Boulder.

MASSENA

Pg. 147, #4, line 2: when the territory, which became Poland after World War I, belonged to Russia.

Pg. 153, #4, lines 8-9: and two grandchildren, son and daughter of Marilyn and Allen Hymes.

Pg. 153, last line: Perlman

Pg. 157, #2, line 18: five grandchildren

Pg. 174, #4, lines 3-4: Charlie and Herman who owned and operated **Smith's Meat Market** for many years.

Pg. 174, #5, line 7: They have three sons.

Pg. 178, #4, line 2: Charlie and Herman who sold the store in 1983 to their employees.

Pg. 182, #2, Add line: Saul Rosenbaum died in Massena in November, 1981.

Pg. 189, #5, line 6: the mother of two sons

Pg. 190, last #, lines 5-6: Rose died in December, 1979, and Abe eventually moved to Brighton, Massachusetts.

Pg. 202, #5, line 1: The Massena family should be spelled "**S**eidel" as opposed to the Gouverneur "**S**aidel"s.

Pg. 202, last #, line 7: who is retired from Alcoa.

Pg. 202, last #, line 8: one daughter, Brenda, who is a nurse, and one grandson.

POTSDAM

Pg. 209, Photo Caption: The caption should read Sept. **1958**, not 1968. Also, the student rabbi in the photo is **not** Arthur Langenauer! Arthur Langenauer **was** in Potsdam for the High Holidays in **1956**, and did conduct the first High Holiday Services in the then newly purchased Synagogue. (Letter to Joan Dobbie from Dr. Asher Bar Zev (Arthur Langenauer) 11/21/83)

18—
11/90
Stanley Schwartz
(cat)