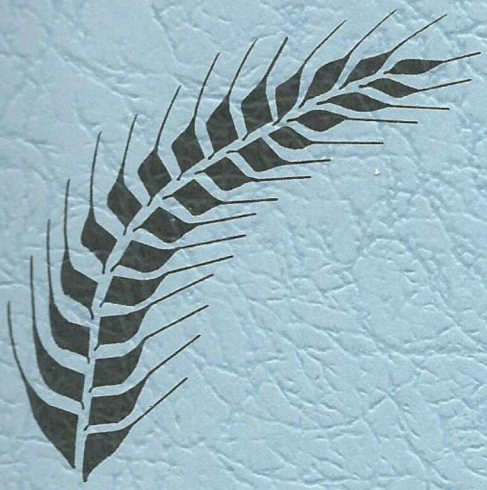
קאיז אטמן

תולדות משפחת קומיסרוק (קומיסרוב)

מאת: חיים פרידמן



OUR FATHERS' HARVEST

A HISTORY OF THE KOMISARUK (KOMESAROFF) FAMILY

BY: KEITH FREEDMAN

בס"ד

קציר אבות

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A history of the Komisaruk (Komesaroff) Family

Compiled by Keith Freedman

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"Children's children are the crown
of old men;
And the glory of children are their
fathers."
Proverbs 17,6

תולדות משפחת קומיסרוק (קומיסרוב)

מאת חיים פרידמן

נדפס פתח תקוה, תשמ"ב

"עטרת זקנים בני בנים,
ותפארת בנים אבותם"
משלי י"ז, ו'

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The task of compiling the history of the Komesaroff family began some twenty two years ago when as a youth of Barmitzvah age I began to develop an interest in my 'roots'. From an early age I was exposed to stories told by my late grandparents KHANA-REIZEL and ZALMEN Komesaroff (Kaye) as well as many other relatives of their experiences in Russia. So I decided that I should record these anecdotes for the sake of posterity. I can recall many family gatherings when my grandparents would talk of their youth in Russia and of their parents and other relatives. A place of particular honour and affection was held for stories of their grandfather Rabbi PINKHAS Komisaruk.

Unfortunately my recording of these stories was delayed too long and the untimely deaths of my grandparents deprived me of a rich source of information. With the help of my mother I began to piece together a family tree. My mother spent many patient hours as I picked her brain trying to draw out all her memories of relatives and events connected with them.

My early family trees were based on charts my brother NEVILLE had compiled with my grandmother's guidance. One day I discovered a box full of old letters and documents that had belonged to my grandfather and albums full of photos taken in Russia. Letters written in Yiddish my mother was able to translate. The Russian ones posed a problem so I began to teach myself elementary Russian and with the help of a dictionary I was able to translate them.

My first communication with the many branches of the family living around the world was in 1964 when I wrote to an old address of the Luban family in Seattle. Thereafter ensued a fruitful correspondence with the late ROKHEL Luban who filled in many gaps in the family tree.

I was now determined to write an overall history of the family. Of immense assistance was my greatuncle WILLIAM (KHAIM-VELVEL) Komesaroff whose vivid memory provided me with details of my greatgrandparents, their brothers and sisters and hordes of cousins. Since he was already thirteen years old when he left Russia, he was able to recall many details of Grafskoy, the Jewish agricultural colony where the Komesaroffs lived, even to the extent of reconstructing a map of the village. His descriptions of life there are a valuable source of information on the history of the Jewish agricultural colonisation experience in Russia, a fragment of Jewish history so sparsely recorded. Likewise his recollection of the suffering the family underwent during the Russian Revolution and Civil War had to be recorded lest the future generations forget them.

From Australia an extensive correspondence with relatives throughout the U.S.A. and Canada provided a wealth of material and I was able to crosscheck stories of events from different sources.

After arriving in Israel in 1977, considerable source material became available and many hours were spent at the libraries of Tel Aviv University, the Diaspora Museum, and the Rambam Library. There I was able to sift through rare source material of the period involved. Of particular value was my discovery of a history of the town of Rassein in Lithuania wherein details are recorded of Rabbi PINKHAS Komisaruk, his father and grandfather. Sources on the colonies in Southern Russia were hard to come by, but I found two rare books in Russian which provided detailed statistics of the colonies, enabling me to expand the history of the family to encompass a general history of the colonies.

Having settled in Israel I had the opportunity of meeting my former source, ROKHEL Luban, and was able to enlarge on the information of the Russian period.

A subject which required considerable research was the family's connection with the Gaon of Vilna. I made contact with members of the Rivlin family and of particular value were several books sent to me by BENYAMIN Rivlin of Jerusalem, including the genealogy of the Rivlin family and the Gaon of Vilna, written by his late father ELIEZER Rivlin.

I owe a debt of gratitude to many people for their assistance in providing information. But I could not have seen the project through to its conclusion without the encouragement and patience of my wife JANE who was prepared to give up all the time necessary for my research and writing. Of practical help I must thank her for editing and

proofreading.

Next I want to thank my parents and brother NEVILLE for their encouragement; in particular my mother for providing the framework for the initial research and much information she recalled from my grandparents. Likewise my brother for several items he had heard from my grandmother, as had also my uncle PETER Kaye. My richest source in Australia was my greatuncle WILLIAM Komesaroff. Details of the Zmood family were provided by MOSHE (MORRIS) Zmood and the late RAYMOND Grinblat.

Of the relatives living in the U.S.A. and Canada, after ROKHEL Luban my next source was VELVEL (WILLIAM) Komisaruk of New York. He confirmed aspects of the origins of the family as well as providing details of his branch of the family. Through him I was able to contact YOKHVED (EVA) Karlan of New York, MOSHE-KALMEN (MORRIS) Winnikoff of Los Angeles, VELVEL (BILL) Comisarow of Viking, Canada, PAUL Comisarow of North Vancouver, LUBA (LILIAN) Wainberg of Montreal, ROSE Greenberg of Winnipeg, ARLA Strauss of Winnipeg, ED Komisaruk of Sacremento, RICHARD Komisaruk of Lafayette, California, BEN Winnikoff of Redwood City, and CLARA Berchansky (who provided much information on the relatives in the U.S.S.R.)

Of considerable support from the time of our arrival in Israel was MOSHE Luban who, aside from providing information, was ever ready to assist in assessing and interpreting information.

Since most of the information available concerned my own branch of the family, this is reflected in the history. However their experiences and descriptions of their way of life were common to other branches of the family where I was unable to obtain the same detailed information.

I would hope that this history will serve as a memorial to all those of the family whose strivings to improve their lot merited recording, and to the many who met their death על קידוש השם both during the Russian Civil War and at the hands of the Nazis.

Above all I dedicate this history to the memory of my grandparents KHANA-REIZEL and ZALMEN Komesaroff who contributed so much to my formative years.

בס"ד פתח תקוה תשמ"ב

הקדמה

תולדות משפחת קומיסרוב הוא פרי מחקר של יותר מעשרים שנה. כנער בגיל בר מצוה התחלתי להתעניין בעבר המשפחה. כל שנות ילדותי נוכחתי באירועים משפחתיים רבים שבהם התאספו קרובים שונים ומפיהם שמעתי סיפורים ואגדות על בני המשפחה שלא הכרתי מעולם ולא ידעתי מיהם ומה היו מעשיהם ברוסיה הרחוקה. בהערכה רבה ביותר דברו וספרו סבא וסבתא ז"ל על סבא שלהם מוהר"ר פנחס קומיסרוק זצללה"ה.

לצערי דחיתי את רישום הסיפורים האלו עד למאוחר מדי, ורק לאחר פטירת סבא וסבתא ז"ל התחלתי לשחזרם. בעבודה זו תחילה עזרה לי אמא שתה"י. יותר מאוחר יצרתי קשר עם הרבה מענפי המשפחה המפוזרים ברחבי תבל. דודי זקני ר' חיים זאב קומיסרוב נ"י תרם בהרבה בזכרונותיו מרוסיה, ובעזרתו הצלחתי לבנות תמונה שלמה של צורת חייהם של תושבי המושבות החקלאיות היהודיות בדרום רוסיה שבהן גרו בני המשפחה.

למעשה, תולדות המשפחה אינו רק איסוף של סיפורים נחמדים, אלא גם רשום יקר של פרקים בהיסטוריה היהודית, של שמחה ושל סבל, ושל מאורעות שראוים לא להשכח, כגון הקמת המושבות על ידי אבות המשפחה, בעיקר מוהר"ר שלמה זלמן הלוי קומיסרוק זצללה"ה בשנת ת"ר, תקופת הפוגרומים, גלי המהגרים שברחו לארצות הברית, קנדה ואוסטרליה, סבל והרג בימי מלחמת האזרחית הרוסית ועל ידי הנאצים, ומאמציהם של כל ענפי המשפחה להתבסס בארצות מגוריהם החדשים.

ראיתי לנכון לשמור את כל הפרטים שהצלחתי ללקט למען הדורות הבאים ולעילוי נשמותיהם של כל בני המשפחה שמסרו את נפשם על קידוש השם בימי המלחמה האזרחית ועל ידי הנאצים.

יתרה על כן, הנני מקדיש את תולדות המשפחה לזכר סבאי וסבתאי ר'שלמה זלמן בן ר'מנחם מנדל הלוי זצ"ל וחנה רייזל בת ר'מאיר הלוי ע"ה שתרמו כל כך הרבה להתפתחותי ושערכי חייהם ישפיעו עלי לנצח.

חיים קאפל ב"ר יעקב ראובן פרידמן

CHAPTER FOUR: A NEW LIFE

~~At this time~~ political events were taking place in the Russian capital which were to change the whole course of the lives of the Komisaruk and Zhmood families. Towards the end of his reign Tsar Alexander I had reversed all of his liberal policies and proceeded to place numerous restrictions on the Jews. The Pale of Settlement, an area which had been established in 1772 and in which Jewish residence was confined, was further tightened and many areas were withdrawn from it. When Tsar Nicholas I came to the throne he continued Alexander's policies towards the Jews with added vigour. In 1827 he instituted Priziv: compulsory military service for all male Jews over the age of twelve, for a period of twenty-five years. The object of this policy was to uproot young Jewish boys at an inpressionable age from the Jewish influence of their homes, and either convert them to Christianity or kill them off. To implement this policy, the Jewish communities were constantly being raided by the Tsar's Cossacks who captured all the young boys they could lay their hands on, regardless of age.

Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN and YOKHVED were frantic with worry about the safety of their four sons, as were DAVID and KHANA-REIZEL Zhmood. They were constantly on watch for news of an impending raid by the Cossacks in order to collect their children from the streets and confine them to the comparative safety of the house. Time and time again they heard of the grief of their neighbours whose children had been swooped up while at play in the streets. Such was the case with the Pogorelske family who were later to intermarry with the Komisaruks. The Shokhet ~~of nearby Mir~~ , SAADIAH-MEIR Pogorelske, lost a six year old son SELIG at the hands of Cossack abductors.

Then a means was found to save the family from a terrible fate. In an attempt to persuade the Jews to leave the cities the Tsar offered to give land to any Jews prepared to farm it. Usually this land was in remote areas far from the main centres of Christian settlement. Many Jews, amongst them the Komisaruks and the Zhmoods, saw this as an opportunity to escape from persecution. The decision to give up his life in Kovno was not an easy one for Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN. There he was surrounded by family and friends and most important, there he had access to the great centres of Jewish learning. But even though it meant giving up all his home comforts, even though it meant travelling to a region about which he knew nothing and where up to date there had been no Jewish settlement, Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN realised that there was no alternative if he was to save his sons from forced conversion and even death.

Following a statute which was put into law in 1804, Jews were permitted to engage in agriculture. To encourage them to leave their urban existence, monetary loans and tax reliefs for lengthy periods were offered. In 1807 the first settlements were founded in Novorussiya (New Russia), that vast area of the south-eastern Ukraine which had only recently come under Russian dominion. The first region to be opened up was in the Government of Kherson where 300 families were settled (16). By 1810 their numbers had grown to 600 families spread over eight colonies. To maintain these settlers 145,000 rubles had been spent by the government. Then a change of heart on the part of the ministry responsible halted further development. Contemporary reports stated: "The Jewish colonists are dying of hunger and cold in the midst of the steppes. 5000 out of 10,000 died in a few years."(17).

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(16) The history of Jewish agricultural colonization in Russia has been sparsely recorded.Thus the experiences of the Komisaruk family provide an invaluable record of a little known aspect of Jewish endeavour.

(17)The only English sources are 'The Jewish Encyclopaedia'- Funk and Wagnal; and 'The Russian Jews- Emancipation or Extermination', a translation of a work written in 1893 by L.Errera.

Following the unrest in the cities caused by the institution of military service in 1827, it was suggested that agricultural development recommence as an alternative means of getting more Jews out of their urban way of life. It was not until 1833 that a further contingent of would-be settlers set out from the northern cities. This time they were directed towards Siberia in order to populate another newly developing area. 1317 families were settled there by 1837 when further emigration was stopped.

A new site for colonization was found in the Government of Yekaterinoslav. Under Tsar Nicholas I, the minister of Domains Count Kesseler urged Jews from Lithuania and Courland to settle in Yekaterinoslav. Between 1846 and 1855 seventeen colonies were established in the region. Amongst these first settlers heading for the Yekaterinoslav colonies were Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN and YOKHVED with their five children. Travelling with them were DAVID and KHANA-REIZEL Zhmood as well as ~~Rabbi~~ (MOSHE Yuval) from ~~Svir~~ PLUNGIAN and SAADIAH-MEIR Pogorelske, both of whose families married into the Komisaruk and Zhmood families.

The journey was a lengthy and arduous one. Public transport in 1846 (18) in Russia was virtually non-existent. The new settlers travelled in large wagons laden with their household possesions along the rough roads leading south. They were exposed to the weather and to the dangers of attack by thieves and bandits. Periodically the journey was hastened when the travellers were able to transfer to river barges. Food was difficult to obtain and disease was rife. Many died on the roadside. Months passed as the fragile caravan wended its way south following the Dnieper River and finally arrived at the city of Alexandrovsk. This was the gateway to the wide unknown plains of Novorussiya. From there they once again boarded wagons and headed east for 70 miles until they finally reached their destination — the colonies (19).

Vivid descriptions of the experiences of the colonists of those times are given by Rabbi Yaakov Lipshitz of Kovno in his book 'Zikhron Yaakov'. Sections of a chapter entitled 'The Yekaterinoslav Movement in the year 5604-5605 (1844)' are quoted as follows:

"In those days, His Majesty the Tsar Nicholas the First published his noble desire to enlarge the settlement in the region of Yekaterinoslav, whereby all who desired to settle there the government would give land, freehold gratis, as well as assistance and support for the needs of settlement on it, such as : oxen, ploughing harvesting and sewing tools. And another advantage the government would give to advance the cause of settlement and preparadness there: all settlers in the plains of Yekaterinoslav would be given freedom for their sons from army service for the twenty-five year service period.

"Those who absorbed from the atmosphere exaggerated rumours, related of the great cheapness there, whereby the price of a chicken was a coppeck and a half; a goose's price 10 coppecks and so on, according to these values. The values of the masses in those days were to praise the essence of cheapness of all commodities .....

"And even though the truth of the matter was peculiar in view of the essence that in labour of the soil they had not engaged at all, but because of the great pressure which prevailed in those days, and more so relieve their sons of army service, many flocked to register themselves on the government lists, to qualify for work on the land on the plains of Yekaterinoslav.

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(18) The date of 1846 is held to be the year of the families' migration as written in an inscription in a book which belonged to MENAKHEM-MENDEL Komisaruk: "This book Khokhmat Adam belonged to the distinguished and wonderful, my father and teacher - from the year our teacher the Rabbi PINKHAS, the son of our teacher the Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN of blessed memory, Segal, (came to) Kolonya Grafskoy in the year 5600 (1840) from Lithuania."

(19)RAYMOND Grinblat of Melbourne related his mother's recollections of stories told by elderly relatives, probably her grandfather KOPPEL Zhmood, recalling the events of the journey from Lithuania.

"In those days there were no steel railways, no stone roads in our land. To transfer a complete family over such a vast distance, by means of carts from city to city, took several moons, and the outlay would be an exhorbitant sum. So the settlers bought horses, prepared wagons for themselves with hoods of cloth, and so arrayed, family after family set off for Yekaterinoslav. And all who saw the wagons immediately recognised that they were the travellers to Yekaterinoslav. And those of wisdom and knowledge had great reservations in the depths of their hearts and discreetly said: would that their return be as their exodus - because they knew in advance what would be their fate."

Before leaving Lithuania the new settlers had been assured by the officials that they would be given every assistance during the initial period of colonization to build houses and establish their farms. They were led to understand that some sort of dwellings already existed on the colonies and that agricultural experts would advise them and teach them farming methods. How great was their shock when they arrived to find nothing but the rolling plains to greet them. The colonies were merely names on a map: no buildings existed and no officials came to welcome them. What were the settlers to do ? They had come almost one thousand miles; they could not turn back now. So they settled down and made the best of things, living in their wagons and in the open.

Eventually an official did arrive, bringing with him tents, sacks of grain, and a few primitive tools. He informed the settlers that they would have to live in tents until they built their houses themselves from the surrounding trees. As for his agricultural advice, he merely handed over the seed, told them to plant it, and left never to be seen again. The settlers had no option other than to struggle on in their ignorance. Being city dwellers they knew little of planting crops or building houses. However they set to work, pitched their tents, ploughed up the land and planted the seed, praying that by some miracle their efforts would be rewarded by a successful crop. Then began the long wait. The weeks and months passed. The settlers were exposed to the rigours of the weather in their flimsy dwellings. Besides the physical discomforts there was the inevitable mental strain due to the complete metamorphosis in their way of life. For centuries their ancestors had lived in cities, rarely seeing green fields or an unbroken skyline. Now they had given up all their urban habits and comforts and tranferred themselves to a remote and isolated region. Many settlers simply could not adjust to the change.

Lipshitz continues with a description of the development of the communal structure:

" On their arrival at their destinations there came not rest nor settlement, and immediately it was obvious that their freedom had been taken from them because they were placed under the rule of clerks of the realm,according to the regulations which were enacted by the government, to supervise them and to sustain the settlement there. The clerks behaved towards them almost according to military regime and style of that time, and also physical punishments were not lacking for all misdemeanours and slight errors in the order of behaviour and labour, to which they had not yet become accustomed to the need for.

"Menashe Margolis tells in his memoirs and relates the words of Russian reporters and commentators, that the clerks did not pass on to the colonists the support which the government had allocated to them; to buy animals, to plough, to sow and to plant, and so on. And so they were forced to eat the remnants of their toil which they had brought from their homes. By these means the clerks stood over them and behaved towards them with all the severity of the law. For example, those returning from there relate: by law it was the duty of the men to engage in field work and upon the women fell the work of the house, to draw water and cut wood and so on. Once a colonist woman weakened and a clerk saw that her husband was carrying water home. So he beat the woman with a whip before the eyes of her husband and sons, one of whom fainted from distress at his mothers pain and cries."

For Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN in particular the change in life-style was particularly marked. He had spent all of his life entirely within the walls of the Yeshiva. Rarely, if ever, had there been the need to do any physical work. Now he found himself in the position where, if his family were to survive, he would have to personally provide them with the food to do so.

Disappointment came early in the new life of the settlers: the crops failed resulting in famine and many deaths. Many families despaired. Once again they packed their belongings, left the colonies and headed for the nearest towns or villages, there to pursue a life they had been accustomed to as traders and craftsmen. This was the case with the Zhmood and Yuval families who settled in the village of Andreyevka. There DAVID Zhmood and his son KOPPEL served the community and the surrounding settlements as Shokhetim.

Lipshitz's summing up of the early agricultural endeavour is almost entirely pessimistic:

"So many of the settlers on the plains of Yekaterinoslav escaped from there and returned naked and bereft of everything. From much stress of the journey and their great troubles, their faces were blackened. And all who saw them lamented for them the dirge of the mourner: 'their exodus from Courland and their return from Yekaterinoslav'. Only isolated remnants stayed there. After a number of years their messengers moved about to gather them books, and also money for support to establish their schools to teach Torah. Only after the passage of many years did the condition improve a little of those who had the means to remain in their places."

But there were many who were determined to make a success of their farms. Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN, being the religious leader of the small community in Kolonya Grafskoy, and of the whole Kolonya region for that matter since it was many years before other rabbis arrived, used the position of respect in which he was held to unite his fellow settlers in their resolve to succeed. Strengthened by the spirit of optimism which Judaism had provided its adherants for thousands of years, Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN urged his community not to give up hope since only their determined efforts and their faith would enable them to triumph eventually. As the years passed the flimsy dwellings were replaced by more permanent structures, crops began to flourish, and by trial and error the city dwellers learnt the skills necessary to tranform them into farmers.

At this time legislation, which had previously been enacted compelling Jews to adopt surnames, was enforced on the Kolonyas. When Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN went to the official responsible for registering surnames, he was given the name 'Komisaruk'. This was derived from the term 'Komisar' meaning an official. The 'uk' suffix converted it to a diminutive form, indicating a minor official. This arose from Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN's leadership of the Kolonyas. In later years some of his descendants changed the name to 'Komisaroff', the 'off' suffix being adopted to give some distinction to the name since the diminutive form conveyed some derogatory connotations. This change took place particulary when members of the family moved amongst Russians in the towns and cities, and not solely amongst the insular Jewish communities of the Kolonyas (20).

x name of father 1816 census

Since the Kolonyas were a rich source of food, the military authorities required that they supply the army with a set quota of their harvests. In order to administer this arrangement the army ordered the farmers to appoint their own official who would be responsible for ensuring that the quota was filled. The choice of such an official was obvious; there was only one man capable of bearing such an onerous task: Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komisaruk. Upon him fell the task of having the grain quota from all the farms in the Kolonya region collected and delivered to the army.

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(20) Various traditions explain the origin of the surname. It seems that the form 'Komisaroff' or 'Komesaroff' was not exclusively a Jewish name as there are instances of Russian families bearing it, including a Tsarist police officer renowned for his involvement in the activities of Rasputin.

Realising that dire consequences lay in store for the Jewish farmers if the quota was not filled, Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN applied himself diligently to his task.So successful was he that a local official who was amicably disposed towards the Jews praised Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN in his reports to the government and recommended that his diligence and service to the country be suitably rewarded. Despite the prevailing anti-Jewish attitude of the authorities, they had no choice but to comply with this request from an official who must have been influential. Thus Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN was called before the local potentate and ceremoniously decorated with a gold medal which was inscribed with a commendation for his services to the Crown (21).

Grafskoy, the colony on which the Komisaruks had settled, was one of seventeen colonies in a region located about 50 miles north of the city of Berdyansk, a port on the Sea of Azov. This land had once belonged to a German absentee landlord and then passed into the hands of the government. This explains the origin of the name Grafskoy; being derived from the German term for a nobleman - Graf (22). The total area of land was 910 desyatins (2457 acres), of which the Komisaruk family received 30 desyatins, the statutory allocation for each family consisting of at least six persons (23).

The names of the other sixteen colonies were:

Bogodarovka
Gorkaya
Khlebodarovka
Krasnoselka
Mezhirech
Nadyezhnaya
Nechayevka
Novozlatopol
Priyutnaya
Roskoshnaya
Rovnopol
Sladkovodnaya
Trudolyubovka
Veselaya
Zatishye
Zelionoepole

Many of the colonies were known also by other names, usually in Yiddish. These included:

Trudolyubovka	-	Engels
Zelionoepole	-	Myadla
Nechayevka	-	Peness
Nadyezhnaya	-	Dvilne
Sladkovodnaya	-	Kobilnye
Bogodarovka	-	Kovalevskaya

Others were simply known as 'Pervenumer' - the first one, since it was the first colony established. Likewise were the 'second', 'third' and 'fourth'. To many of the colonists, the official names were often completely unknown through common disuse (24).

In the year 1847 the colonists were smitten by a severe outbreak of scurvy. This was a result of a poor harvest which in turn failed to provide a balanced diet. The outbreak reached epidemic proportions and many died. Amongst them seems to have been Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komisaruk. Although the cause of his death has not been known in family tradition, the date of his death coincided with that of the scurvy epidemic. Since he died at an early age, in his thirties, it is reasonable to assume that the causes were not natural.

(21) This medal is in the possession of the Usher (Ushkatz) family of Detroit. It passed to Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN's son VELVEL, then to the latter's daughter HENIE Ushkatz who took it to the U.S.A. (22)WILLIAM Komesaroff, Melbourne. (23) Errera (24)RAKHEL Luban

The sudden loss by the colonists of their spiritual and communal leader must have been sorely felt. He had been held in high respect for both his scholarship and his efforts to encourage the establishment of the colonies on a sound basis. He had made many sacrifices to further the wellbeing of his family in leaving his home in Kovno and setting out for the unknown. Such a move must have taken great courage. Even the Christians whom he came into contact with held him in great respect as evidenced by his decoration by the Crown with a gold medal. The name and reputation of Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komisaruk was remembered and treasured not only by his family, but by the colonists for as long as the colonies continued to exist in southern Russia.

The death of Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN placed a heavy burden on his sons. Barely having reached the age of independence, they were faced with the task of managing their late father's land and supporting themselves and their mother. At the time, the eldest PINKHAS was only seventeen years of age and the youngest son YOSEF was about eleven. With limited experience in the agricultural skills necessary to keep the farm functioning, they had to unite their energies in what was a struggle for survival.

By 1856 there were 766 families on the Yekaterinoslav colonies. A comparison of some statistics for the years 1851 and 1865 gives an indication of the rate of growth: (25)

	1851	1865
Public buildings	2	98
Private houses	269	922
Expert farmers	58	295
Oxen	-	4
Horses	499	1034
Cows and calves	788	1668
Sheep	-	1230

In 1869 the Russian government inspector Clauss reported:

"How much better the foreign colonies of Germans and Bulgarians were treated than the Russian Jews. 60 desyatins were allowed and new lots were allocated on family growth. For the Jews, each family of six persons had 30 desyatins allocated by the administration. No foreign colonists of other nationalities would ever have been willing to settle under these conditions. Later 7 desyatins were removed. No further land was allowed with familial increase and augmentary occupations were forbidden" (26).

The Komisaruk family seem to have managed to overcome the land problem to some extent since we know that in the early twentieth century at least five members of the family each possessed 30 desyatins. Therefore the original 30 desyatins given to Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN must have been increased by the acquisition of land from families who left the Kolonya.

Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN's ~~eldest~~ son PINKHAS was educated by his father and became a rabbi. He was also trained as a Shokhet. Despite the efforts of his parents to save their sons from military service, Rabbi PINKHAS was conscripted into the army in the early 1850's, even though farmers were supposed to be exempt from such service (27). Although the duration of service had been shortened from the original twenty-five years, it was still a harsh fate as it compelled Jews to serve for long periods which were often drawn out to over ten years. Rabbi PINKHAS was particularly unfortunate in that his service was lengthened by the outbreak of the Crimean War in 1854. In one respect he had been fortunate: he had not been required to serve in a combatant unit but had been assigned to the commissariat corps, responsible for feeding and clothing the troops.

At the outbreak of hostilities the Russian army was desperately in need of recruits. In an attempt to fill these needs, thousands of Jews were conscripted, often being abducted in large groups during raids on Jewish settlements by the military authorities.

(25) Jewish Encyclopaedia, Funk & Wagnal. (26) Errera

(27) Rabbi PINKHAS' army service and activities during the Crimean War were related by his granddaughter KHANA-REIZEL to her son PINKHAS (PETER Kaye) of Melbourne.

These Jews found themselves in an awkward situation with regard to acquiring Kosher food and fulfilling their other religious duties. In the absence of any authorised person, Rabbi PINKHAS took it upon himself to attend to these needs. It was very difficult to obtain the cooperation of the Russians in these matters, but Rabbi PINKHAS managed. It must be remembered that the provision of food for soldiers in those days was rarely a concern of the military commanders. The soldiers had to rely on the countryside to support them, much to the misfortune of farmers who had their crops and livestock pillaged by the troops. This method of obtaining food was an advantage to the Jewish troops in that they could get live animals before they had been killed by Christian butchers. One of Rabbi PINKHAS' activities was acquiring animals for slaughter, he himself being a Shokhet.

During this period the Jewish troops would have been in need of much moral support. Rabbi PINKHAS did his best to fulfil this need. He travelled around the battlefields wherever there were Jewish soldiers, gathering them together for religious services. He soon became a familiar figure, wandering around the battlefields of the Crimea, Alma, Balaclava, Sevastopol; searching for Jewish soldiers, tending to the wounded, burying the dead, and doing his utmost to relieve the misery and suffering which surrounded him. He spent two years going about his self-appointed mission until the war ended in 1856.

It appears that Rabbi PINKHAS was not released from the army immediately on cessation of the war since he did not marry until about 1861. After returning to civilian life he rejoined his brothers in Grafskoy and resumed his work on the land. In addition he was appointed by the community as its rabbi and Shokhet.

In c.1861 Rabbi PINKHAS married KHAYA-SARAH Levin. She was the daughter of ~~ZEV~~ MEIR and ROKHEL Levin who lived in the town of Mariupol, a port on the shores of the Sea of Azov. The origins of the Levin family have not been traced, but it would seem probable that, like the bulk of the Jews living in Mariupol, they had come from Lithuania in the 1850's to found this urban community (28).

Rabbi PINKHAS and KHAYA-SARAH bore their eldest son in ~~c.1862.~~ 1855 He was named ZALMEN to perpetuate the memory of his grandfather. The ~~second~~ 3rd son, born in 1864, was named MENAKHEM-MENDEL after his great-grandfather, Rabbi MENAKHEM-MENDEL, the cabbalist of Rassein. Then ~~followed~~ MEIR in c.1866, ESTHER in c.1868, and SIMKHA in c.1870. Then tragedy struck. In 1872 KHAYA-SARAH gave birth to a daughter and died during childbirth. The daughter was named DINA.

Griefstriken as he was at the loss of his young wife, Rabbi PINKHAS had little time for sorrow as he had to concern himself with the problem of raising six children deprived of the benefit of maternal care. Furthermore, tradition prescribed that the rabbi of a community was not permitted to remain unmarried (29). Therefore Rabbi PINKHAS set about seeking a second wife as soon as the period of mourning was over. His second wife's name is not recalled, or perhaps the family chose to wipe it out of their memory for reasons soon to follow.

Rather than fill the place of the deceased wife and mother, this woman was soon revealed to be a shrew (30). She set about making life a misery for Rabbi PINKHAS by her behaviour. As far as the children were concerned, she treated them most cruelly. The evilness of this woman culminated in an attempt on the life of her husband. A bottle of poison was found under her bed and when confronted with it, she admitted her plan to poison Rabbi PINKHAS. He soon put a stop to the family's suffering by divorcing her.

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(28) The Levin family -recollections of RAKHEL Luban as related by her mother DINA Namakshtansky. The name of ~~ZEV Levin~~ is to be found in an inscription recording his daughters death. See appendix.

(29) WILLIAM Komesaroff, Melbourne. (30) RAKHEL Luban. Incorrect MEIR

Once again he was faced with the need to find a suitable mother for his children and this time he made a wise choice. His third wife was a widow called BASSIE. She was to prove both a devoted wife and a loving stepmother. She and Rabbi PINKHAS had one child together, a daughter REIZEL born in c.1874. BASSIE took up the task of raising the children as if they were all her own and was regarded by her stepchildren as their true mother (31). The enlarged family also included a son from BASSIE's first marriage who was simple-minded.

The landholding of the Komisaruk family was divided amongst the sons of Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN following his death. It appears that there was insufficient land to support the four of them since the youngest ~~YOSEF~~ left Grafskoy and settled in the nearby village of Tokmakh (32). The remaining brothers, PINKHAS, LEIBL and VELVEL set up their homes in Grafskoy.

YANKEL remained in Lithuania his son lived in TOKMAK

Grafskoy was located between two small rivers, the Gaytsur and the Yanchul, on fairly flat countryside with sparse vegetation. The nearest settlements were Kobilnye, Engels, Myadla, and Peness — all Jewish Kolonyas, and Marenfeld, a German Kolonya.

The roads passing through Grafskoy were not of any great importance as major routes for transportation. In fact, the entire Kolonya region was completely "off the beaten track". The nearest towns were Berdyansk (50 miles south), Mariupol (50 miles south-east), Yuzovka (70 miles north-east) and Alexandrovsk (70 miles north-west). The nearest railway station was at Rozovka (formerly a German Kolonya Rozenberg) 20 miles from Grafskoy, where there was a regular market and flour mills.

To reach Grafskoy by train one alighted at Rozovka where a wagon would have to be hired to reach the Kolonyas. Approaching through Marenfeld, the boundary of Grafskoy was marked by a large plantation of trees (33). Immediately inside the plantation the road was flanked by a number of houses. It led to a small bridge which crossed the creek. This creek flowed from a reservoir (Stavok) located on the outskirts of the Kolonya which supplied water for the farms. The creek ended in a marshy area in the centre of the village. Soon after crossing the bridge the road branched at a T-intersection. Heading right towards Myadla, the fifth block of land on the right belonged to the Komisaruk brothers. In the opposite direction, towards Engels, in the centre of the village was an area of land called Kolsher. It was owned by the Crown and was the location of the communal buildings such as the school, synagogue, post-office and courthouse (Prikaz), animal pound (Hok), communal orchard (Sod), and a water well (Brunim). A road branched here to Kobilnye. The cultivated land surrounded the village and was divided into family holdings, except for an area which was set aside for common grazing. On the outskirts of the village, on the road to Engels, was the cemetary.

There were few home comforts on the Kolonyas. In most cases the men built their own houses which, although small, were hardy enough to withstand the rigours of the Russian climate. Water had to be drawn from wells or from the creek. Lighting was provided by oil lamps and heating from fires which burned wood if it was in good supply, but more often, dried animal manure mixed with straw.

The three Komisaruk brothers led similar lives spending most of the daylight hours on the land and the evenings with their ever-increasing families. The ~~second~~ eldest, LEIBL married earlier than his elder brother PINKHAS, and had only one son SHABBESAI (known by the diminutive forms of SHEPSEL or SHEPA) in about 1855. The third brother VELVEL married FEIGEL Winnikoffsky from Kobilnye whose family had emigrated from Lithuania at the same time as the Komisaruks. They had six children: BEREL in 1861, HENIE in c.1863, LEAH in 1869, KHANA in 1871, ESTHER in 1873 and MEIR in 1878.

(31) RAKHEL Luban, WILLIAM Komesaroff. YANKEL's son ABRAHAM-DOV-BER
(32) RAKHEL Luban, who recalled a visit of ~~YOSEF~~ to Engels.
(33) Descriptions of Grafskoy according to WILLIAM Komesaroff and RAKHEL Luban. See map.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE POGROMS

In 1881 Tsar Alexander III came to the throne and issued his infamous Ukase known as the 'May Laws'. These were proclaimed on May 3rd.1882 by Count Ignatieff:

"The Committee of Ministers, having heard the report of the Minister of the Interior on the execution of the temporary orders concerning the Jews, resolved:

1. As a temporary measure and until a general revision has been made in a proper manner of the laws concerning the Jews, to forbid the Jews henceforth to settle outside the towns and townlets, the only exceptions admitted being in those Jewish colonies that have existed before and whose inhabitants are agriculturalists.
2. To suspend temporarily the completion of instruments of purchase of real property mortgages in the name of Jews; as also the registration of Jews as lessees of landed estates, situated outside the precincts of towns and townlets, and the issue of powers of attorney to enable them to manage and dispose of such property.
3. To forbid Jews to carry on business on Sundays and on Christian holidays, and that the same laws in force, about the closing on such days of places of business belonging to Christians, shall, in the same way, apply to places of business owned by Jews.
4. That the measures laid down in paragraphs 1,2, and 3 apply only to the Governments within the Pale of Settlement.

His Majesty the Emperor was graciously pleased to give his assent to the above resolutions of the Committee of Ministers, on the 3rd.of May, 1882."

This Ukase, which provided for the furthur segregation of the Jews and placed them under constant surveillance, had been seen by the Tsar as a precursor to a wave of government-aroused anti-semitism. Due to the appalling living conditions, the Tsar needed something to divert the peasants' discontent. The Jews provided just such an ideal diversion. Spurred on by government-backed rabblerousers who spread anti semitic propoganda throughout the Jewish Pale, numerous pogroms broke out. The Jewish settlements were constantly at the mercy of ignorant 'moujiks' (peasants) who were ready to blame the first available scapegoat, namely the Jews, for all their misfortunes. On realising the success of his policy, the Tsar saw a furthur benefit in the pogroms: the eradication of the Jews from the Russian Empire. His plan, expertly enunciated and administered by his advisor Pobedonostsev, was to rid 'Holy Mother Russia' of the Jews for all time: one third by conversion to Christianity, one third by emigration, and one third by starvation. Hundreds of thousands of Jews fled overseas, but the vast majority would not leave the country which they considered to be their homeland.

With the upsurge of the pogroms, in the absence of practical aid the Jews were in constant need of spiritual solace. Once again Rabbi PINKHAS answered the call of his people, dedicating himself to helping the persecuted. Since his sons were old enough to manage the farm, he was free to go about his duties as a rabbi. Over the years since he had left the army and established himself as rabbi of Grafskoy, he had gained a valuable reputation amongst the surrounding Kolonyas. With the frequent occurence of pogroms, he became a familiar figure as he travelled around the south-eastern Ukraine (36).

Whenever word reached Grafskoy of a pogrom in one of the settlements, Rabbi PINKHAS would saddle his horse, pack a few necessities , farewell his family, and ride off as quickly as possible to the devastated settlement. On arriving he would behold a shocking sight. What had once been a thriving community had been reduced to ruins. In one foul swoop a mob of moujiks, spurred on by a government agitator or the hate-filled sermons of the local priest, and filled with liquor, had fallen upon a helpless Jewish settlement and proceeded to murder

(36) Rabbi PINKHAS's activities during the pogroms were related by his granddaughter KHANA-REIZEL Komesaroff of Melbourne.

and pillage everyone whom they could lay their hands on, without consideration for age or sex. Such pogroms usually lasted for a few days before the moujiks took their leave, laden with loot. There was little that Rabbi PINKHAS could do of a practical nature to relieve such suffering. His immediate task would have been to assist in the burial of the dead. Once the dead had been taken care of, his attention turned to the living. What could he say to console them? He sought suitable words to inspire these innocent victims of bestiality to rebuild their homes and to start life afresh. Throughout the Pale, wherever pogroms occurred, inspired men like Rabbi PINKHAS restored the faith of their people and urged them not to lose hope. With the loss of material possessions, the only remaining source of strength for the Jews was their faith with its optimistic hope for a brighter future. Without this faith, and without men like Rabbi PINKHAS to keep it alive, The Jews of the Russian Empire would have given up all hope and doomed themselves to utter extermination.

During the period of the pogroms many outside Russia felt that the Jews were depressed to such an extent that all advancement had ceased and the community had become reactionary. In reply, Rabbi Moshe Reines wrote in 'Otsar Hasifrut':

'He who claims that a spirit of reaction has affected our people as a whole is greatly mistaken. That the children of the poor from whom learning cometh forth still forsake their city and country and acquire knowledge, that societies for the spread of Haskalah are formed every day, that strict and pious Jews send their sons and daughters to where they can obtain enlightenment, that rabbis dayanim and maggidim urge their children to become proficient in the requirements of the times, write for the press, and deplore restrictions regarding admission to schools, all this proves convincingly that they do not see right who complain that our entire nation is going backward.'

In the early 1880's the death occurred in Grafskoy of YOKHVED Komisaruk, the widow of Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN. She had led a hard life, having to flee from her birthplace and start a new life in such a remote and primitive region. The early years in Grafskoy were arduous ones for her, raising her family after the early death of her husband. Even during her last days she must have been grieved to see the place she had considered to be a haven from persecution being turned into the same sort of hell she had escaped from in Lithuania. She must have been a strong woman, possessed of a pioneering spirit which enabled her to overcome the trials which had beset her.

Often Rabbi PINKHAS would be away from home for long periods, riding from village to village. His wife BASSIE and children had to become accustomed to such long absences as they were aware that their needs were of secondary importance to those of the suffering. However Rabbi PINKHAS was compelled to turn his attention to a pressing family problem at this time. In the early 1880's the spectre of conscription began to hover again over the family since the eldest son was of a conscriptable age. Yet it was not clear who was liable for conscription. On the one hand Rabbi PINKHAS's eldest son was ZALMEN, from his first marriage. However BASSIE's son from her former marriage was older than ZALMEN and since the children were considered as being of one family, it was assumed that he would be conscripted as the eldest son. On the other hand this son of BASSIE's was a simpleton and for that reason would have been disqualified from army service. This might have resulted in ZALMEN being conscripted in his place.

Already at a young age ZALMEN excelled himself as a scholar (he was later to become a rabbi). His father feared the effect army service would have on his son's scholastic advancement and so sought a means to ensure that he would not be conscripted in his stepbrother's place. The only course open to him was to take action to prevent ZALMEN being considered a brother of the simpleton and hence liable to stand in for him. Rabbi PINKHAS and his wife agreed to undertake a 'conditional divorce' (Tnai Get) whereby a bill of

divorce was drawn up which provided for their divorce to become operative on condition that the simpleton son be conscripted. Until this condition was fulfilled the divorce had no effect. If they were divorced then ZALMEN could therefore not be considered a brother of the simpleton.

Despite Rabbi PINKHAS's legal intrigue, fate thwarted his efforts. The simpleton was not called up and ZALMEN himself, being his father's eldest son was conscripted in his own right. Despite the family's distress at the turn of events, ZALMEN adjusted positively to the situation. He was assigned to the supply corps, like his father had been 30 years previously. He exploited this opportunity to serve the needs of Jewish soldiers. Despite difficulties in obtaining official approval from anti-semitic officers, ZALMEN was able to set up a Kosher kitchen in the city of Nikolaev which helped to ease the dietary problems of Jewish conscripts. He also served as a medical orderly. On the completion of his military service ZALMEN returned to Grafskoy, resumed his studies and was ordained as a rabbi. (37)

As Rabbi PINKHAS's sons reached adulthood a problem arose in connection with the future ownership and farming of his land. Since he possessed only a small area of land and could not acquire more, it was inconceivable that his few desyatin could support the future families of his four sons. This situation did not concern his daughters because it was customary for couples to live in the husband's town after marriage. The only solution to this problem was for several of the sons to live elsewhere. It is not known how Rabbi PINKHAS decided which of his sons would remain on the land; it was probably a matter of mutual agreement. It was decided that there was only sufficient land to support two families.

As the eldest son ZALMEN was by then a rabbi he was able to support himself by means other than farming. He left Grafskoy and settled in the town of Vasilkovka where he was appointed Rabbi. There he married MINDL and they had seven children: KHAIM-SHOLEM, MOTTEL, KHAY-ROKHEL, LUBA, MEIR-YITSKHOK-ELKHONON, ITKA and another daughter.

Rabbi PINKHAS's second son MENAKHEM-MENDEL remained in Grafskoy and received a half share of his father's land. MEIR, the third son settled in the village of Andreyevka where he was a butcher. The youngest son SIMKHA remained in Grafskoy and received the other half share of his father's land.

The same situation did not confront the families of Rabbi PINKHAS's brothers to the same degree since they had fewer sons. LEIBL had only one son, SHEPE so his land did not have to be divided. SHEPE farmed his father's land as a whole until his sons grew up and needed shares in the land.

The third brother VELVEL divided his land equally between his two sons BEREL and MEIR. In addition BEREL operated a small general store, the only one on the kolonya, so he farmed his land with hired help.

~~As mentioned previously, the fourth brother YOSEF had left Grafskoy and settled in the village of Tokmakh.~~

Rabbi PINKHAS's second son MENAKHEM-MENDEL married in 1882. His wife BEILA-REEVA was the daughter of VELVEL Pogorelske, a son of SAADIAH-MEIR HaLevy Pogorelske ~~who had accompanied the Komisaruks from Lithuania~~ from NEZHIN and settled on Kolonya Kobilnye where he and his family were Shokhetim. MENAKHEM-MENDEL and BEILA-REEVA's eldest son KHAIM-VELVEL was born in 1884. He was followed by SHLOMO-ZALMEN in 1886, YAAKOV-LEIB in 1888, a child who died soon after birth in c.1891, YOKHVED in 1893, BENYOMIN in c.1895, BASSIE in c.1896, PINKHAS in 1897 who died in the same year, ZLATR (LOTTIE) in 1902, another PINKHAS in 1905, and another KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) born in 1908 after his eldest brother's death.

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(37) RAKHEL Luban.

It was customary for men who intended to marry to prepare for their family's future before actually marrying. Jewish tradition decreed that a man should first educate himself, then provide himself with a livelihood, and finally build a house for his future family. Thus MENAKHEM-MENDEL at the age of eighteen, built his own house in readiness for his impending marriage (38). He was very adept with his hands and was able to build all the furniture for the home. It was situated on the Grafskoy-Myadla road, next to his father's house.

The house was rectangular and was divided into three sections. In the front was the living area. This was partitioned into two bedrooms, each measuring about fourteen by fifteen feet; a main living room, measuring about fourteen feet long and running right across the width of the house; and a washroom leading off the main room (39). As the family enlarged all three rooms were used as bedrooms, the beds being cleared out of the main room during the day. In the centre of the living section of the house there was a large oven which was used to heat the entire house during winter. There was another oven in a corner of the main room which was used for cooking.

The second section of the house was the Shtal, situated behind the living area. This was used to house the livestock. The third section, behind the Shtal, was the Saray (barn). The house like most houses on the kolonya had a gabled roof which was tiled. The timbered walls were plastered over and whitewashed. At the side of the house was a brunim, a well, which provided drinking water for the houses on the Komisaruk block, which included that of Rabbi PINKHAS and his brother VELVEL. Rabbi PINKHAS's house ran across the front of the block, close to the street, whilst the houses of MENAKHEM-MENDEL and VELVEL were set back from the road and at rightangles to that of Rabbi PINKHAS (see map). At the far end of the block flowed the creek which separated the village from the fields.

MENAKHEM-MENDEL was very tall, over six feet, and walked with a limp. He worked very hard to make a living out of his land. For most of the year he awoke at sunrise, worked hard throughout the day, and returned home at sunset exhausted. But he was content with his life because he knew that unlike the vast majority of Jews he was priveledged in owning a section, however small, of Russian soil. His land was divided into two sections. One section was located near the cemetary on the Grafskoy-Engels road. The other section was located near his house on the opposite side of the creek. All farms in Grafskoy were likewise divided into sections because rotation farmimg was practised. Due to the lack of chemical fertilisers, the land had to remain fallow periodically in order to retain its fertility. Thus MENAKHEM-MENDEL would farm one section of his land for a period, leaving the other fallow, and then alternate. There were no fences around each farmer's land; the division of the plots was marked by small heaps of stones at the corners of each boundary.

Agriculture in Grafskoy was extremely varied. In the immediate vicinity of the house. MENAKHEM-MENDEL grew some potatoes and other vegetables, as well as keeping his seventy to a hundred fowls. In the fields he grew wheat, sunflower, corn, cucumbers, melons, oats, tomatoes, and other crops. After the wheat was harvested it was taken to a nearby mill to be crushed into flour. Since money was rarely used on the kolonya, payment was made in kind. The mill-keeper would take a proportion of the grain in return for crushing it. Sunflower seeds were crushed to make oil which was used mainly for cooking, although prior to the introduction of kerosene it was used in oil burners for lighting. In addition the seeds or Semachka were eaten as a delicacy (similar to 'garinim' in Israel). Corn and oats were used as feed for the livestock. Another source of feed was made by mixing straw from wheat with pollard (dried wheat husks). This mixture was also used as fuel for heating and cooking. Cucumbers, tomatoes and melons (dinya) were grown mainly for pickling. MENAKHEM-MENDEL had a huge barrel in the cellar, over seven feet high, which he used for pickling at the appropriate seasons of the year.

(38) TESSIE Freedman, as heard from her father SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komesaroff of Melbourne.

(39) Descriptions of MENAKHEM-MENDEL's house and farming activities: his son KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) Komesaroff of Melbourne.

Most of the produce was kept for household use and the surplus was sold. After each harvest, twelve month's supply for the family was stored in the Saray and the rest was taken to the nearby town of Rozovka. This was one of the highlights of the year. Everyone, young and old, lent a hand to harvest the crops then store them carefully to avoid spoilage during the long months ahead. Once this was done they would set off for Rozovka where a market was held periodically for the farmers to sell their produce. Here again money was rarely used and the farmers would obtain clothing, household goods, farm implements and other necessities in exchange for their produce. This time of the year was a critical one for if the weather changed unexpectantly or other unforseen events interfered with the harvest, thousands of people would have to exist on the bare minimum until the next season.

The climate of the kolonya region was one of short mild summers and long severe winters. When snow fell the houses of the kolonya were often completely buried. For this reason each household kept a spade just inside their front door which was used to dig their way out of the house after a snowfall. Winter usually lasted for eight to nine months during which the livestock could not be left in the open. During this entire period MENAKHEM-MENDEL's three horses, three cows, and his fowls were locked up in the Shtal. Throughout the winter he had to handfeed the animals. Because of this it was vital that sufficient grain was produced during the short summer to support the animals as well as the family. Every few days the Shtal had to be cleaned out. The manure and straw were taken outside and piled up. During the summer it was spread out to dry in the sun. A heavy stone was dragged across this mixture to flatten it and then blocks were cut and stacked into heaps ready to burn as fuel.

The difficulties which beset the farmers were numerous. They never knew from one year to the next if their families were going to spend a well fed year or whether they were going to starve. It only needed a sudden change in the weather or the destruction of the crops during a pogrom for an entire kolonya to nearly starve. It was difficult to obtain livestock, so if an animal died the farmer had to do without it until another was born. Life was on the surface dreary and uninteresting. For three months of the year they worked unrelentlessly in preparation for the long winter. Then they spent nine months mostly confined to their houses. But despite these conditions the farmers managed to brighten their lives with simple pleasures. Whenever the occasion presented itself, whether it was a birth, a wedding or other family celebrations, the whole kolonya participated in celebrating the event. During the long hours of winter families would get together and amuse themselves as best they could. This period provided an ideal opportunity for the men to utilise the time for study. This was one of the reasons for the high level of scholarship which prevailed.

Despite the difficulties, the Jewish farmers gained a reputation for the successes they achieved. In 1892 a survey was conducted of the kolonyas in Yekaterinoslav and Inspector Clauss reported:

'The Jewish colonists give a picture of true peasant life, and many of them are in comparative easy circumstances compared with other Russian colonists' (40).

He stated that the Jewish colonists were far better furnished with tools than the Christian peasants - 'who did not always possess a good plough. In comparing the Jewish colonies with the most prosperous Christian villages in the district, the evidence is decidedly in favour of the good farming of the Jewish colonists. If we consider all the difficulties and the distress which have handicapped our first colonists we can affirm that they have solved in a most satisfactory manner the question as to the aptitude of the Jews for agriculture. In a Jewish population of more than 5000 souls of which the colonies at Yekaterinoslav are composed, we find no foreign elements and the work is accomplished exclusively by Jewish colonists.'

(40) Errera.

Chart No.4: Population of the kolonyas in the government of Yekaterinoslav based on the census of 1890. (41)

KOLONYA	AREA (desyatins)	MEN	HIRED HELP
Bogodarovka	1050	288	4
Gorkaya	780	252	16
Grafskaya	910	181	3
Khlyebodarovka	570	81	1
Krasnoselka	1260	319	3
Mezhirech	1110	290	24
Nadezhnaya	1230	351	12
Nechayevka	630	206	5
Novozlatopol	1860	458	20
Priyutnaya	870	169	5
Roskoshnaya	780	178	-
Rovnopol	1190	219	4
Sladkovodnaya	840	193	2
Trudolyubovka	960	292	11
Veselaya	810	244	7
Zatishye	1600	233	-
Zelionoepole	1170	370	4
TOTAL	17620	4310	121

A quantitative picture of life on the kolonyas can be obtained from statistical charts provided in two surveys carried out on the region. The earlier of the two was published as:

'Pobzdka ve Yuzhno-Russkiya Yevreyskiya Kolonii' - An Excursion in the southern Russian Jewish colonies, written by L.M. Bramson and published (in Russian) in St.Petersburg in 1894 (42). The author describes his journey through the kolonyas briefly noting the character of several of them and the conditions of farming. A large part of his work is taken up with the following statistical charts:

Chart No 5: Population according to the census of January 1.1894

KOLONYA	REGISTERED FAMILIES	MEN	WOMEN	TOTAL	JEWISH HOUSES
1.Novozlatopol	62	411	367	778	90
2.Veselaya	27	215	184	399	47
3.Krasnoselka	42	306	283	589	71
4.Mezhiretz	37	257	258	515	62
5.Trudoliubovka	32	249	236	485	75
6.Nechayevka	21	179	174	353	58
7.Grafskoy	26	174	172	346	46
8.Zelenoepole	39	351	361	712	88
9.Nadezhnaya	40	332	319	651	93
10.Sladkovodnaya	28	168	167	335	46
11.Priyutnaya	29	143	131	274	32
12.Roskoshnaya	26	152	140	292	44
13.Bogodarevka	35	260	251	511	72
14.Gorkaya	26	210	193	403	53
15.Zatishe	40	298	235	533	73
16.Rovnopol	42	240	235	475	70
17.Khlebodarovka	19	100	98	198	39
TOTAL	571	4045	3804	7849	1059

(41)'The Jewish Encyclopaedia' - Funk and Wagnal.
(42)Tel Aviv University Central Library, catalogue No 933.5 (4771) BRA 26504

Chart No.6: Wheat -land area sown (in desyatins), 1893

KOLONYA	SOWN		HARVESTED *		SOWN -Winter bread crop 1894
	WINTER	SPRING	WINTER	SPRING	
1.Novozlatopol	22	1468	40	5517	27
2.Veselaya	13	580¾	11	2433	86
3.Krasnoselka	7	1085¼	20	3890	66
4.Mezhiretz	8	999½	23	4035	38
5.Trudoliubovka	28	881¾	84	4836	43
6.Nechayevka	49	780½	196	4367	34
7.Grafskoy	32½	691¼	80	3245	79
8.Zelenoepole	15	985½	45	5455	145
9.Nadezhnaya	42½	979	110	5635	57
10.Sladkovodnaya	22	784	65	3958	51
11.Priyutnaya	12	710	36	430	75
12.Roskoshnaya	10	645	35	3730	40
13.Bogodarevka	40	1220	169	6680	176
14.Gorkaya	20	1000	70	5600	90
15.Zatishe	60	880	219	3545	62
16.Rovnopol	55	652	366	3307	82
17.Khlebodarovka	37	499	86	1373	50
TOTAL		14841	1646	71936	1201

*unit of weight uncertain

Chart No.7: Other crops -land area sown (in desyatins), 1894

KOLONYA *	TOTAL AREA	RYE	WINTER MILLET	SPRING MILLET	BARLEY	OATS	MILLET	CORN	POTATO
1.	1570	8¾	8⅛	506	288	19	½	⅛	190 5/8
2.	745½	41¼	12⅛	226	105¾	11	-	-	102 5/8
3.	1155½	27½	13¾	354	210¾	-	-	-	152 5/8
4.	996¼	20½	3⅛	308	178¼	25	⅛	-	97 5/8
5.	778½	27½	6¼	253¾	203¼	-	-	3¼	132
6.	722¼	27½	-	178	136	15	⅛	5½	72
7.	777¼	37	13⅛	168	169⅛	10	¼	2¼	108
8.	933	58¾	37⅜	214	226½	12	-	½	154½
9.	1017½	29	6½	300½	160	36½	⅛	1	183
10.	763½	23¾	8¼	225½	157½	-	-	-	111
11.	732	27	20	200	150	25	2	-	160
12.	723	15	10	220	157	10	1¼	-	130
13.	1426	50	60	420	240	40	2½	-	260
14.	1010	45	11	280	210	50	2	-	200
15.	1200	64	7	481	464	26	-	15½	23¾
16.	920	102½	45	419	364½	7	-	2	26⅛
17.	750	27	23	281	202	28½	-	6	7¾
TOTAL	16220¼	631	285	5035¾	3623	315	8¼	35¼	2112

* Kolonyas numbered as above Chart 6.

Chart No.8: Livestock and Equipment , January 1st. 1894.

KOLONYA	HORSES	OXEN	MILK COWS	CALVES	HINNY	PLOUGHS	HARROWS	CARTS
1.Novozlatopol	198	-	225	118	55	69	60	77
2.Veselaya	145	-	130	68	34	54	54	42
3.Krasnoselka	174	-	150	97	35	64	66	71
4.Mezhiretz	165	-	133	51	48	50	35	58
5.Trudoliubovka	130	-	130	75	22	41	35	60
6.Nechayevka	144	-	123	61	34	41	35	50
7.Grafskoy	99	-	86	45	39	31	23	41
8.Zelenoepole	196	-	207	78	14	62	53	83
9.Nadezhnaya	215	-	198	101	62	72	67	86
10.Sladkovodnaya	116	6	105	84	23	44	40	46
11.Priyutnaya	100	4	83	60	25	45	40	32
12.Roskoshnaya	110	-	90	65	36	33	30	36
13.Bogodarevka	170	-	156	85	35	61	60	65
14.Gorkaya	140	4	110	76	27	50	45	60
15.Zatishe	122	-	108	72	24	46	43	49
16.Rovnopol	106	-	101	51	9	32	24	36
17.Khlebedarovka	70	-	48	44	28	22	27	20
TOTAL	2400	14	2183	1237	540	817	737	912

Chart No.9: Mills Land on lease (desyatins), 1894

KOLONYA		
1.Novozlatopol	3	-
2.Veselaya	-	450
3.Krasnoselka	-	-
4.Mezhiretz	3	390
5.Trudoliubovka	3	805
6.Nechayevka	1	654
7.Grafskoy	1	385
8.Zelenoepole	2	637
9.Nadezhnaya	2	980
10.Sladkovodnaya	-	964
11.Priyutnaya	2	476
12.Roskoshnaya	-	1954
13.Bogodarevka	-	661
14.Gorkaya	-	501
15.Zatishe	1	480
16.Rovnopol	2	-
17.Khlebedarovka	1	730
TOTAL	21	10070

of which 19 windmills, 2 water mills

Since the majority of the Komisaruk family lived in Grafskoy, the figures appertaining to that kolonya alone have been abstracted as follows:

1.POPULATION: 1894

Registered families	26
Total families (Jewish houses)	46
Men	174
Women	172
Total Population	346

2.LAND AREA SOWN (WHEAT):1893 (desyatins)

Sown - winter	32½	
spring	691¼	
Harvested -winter	80	(weight unit)
spring	4836	

Sown 1894 winter bread 79

3.OTHER CROPS: land area sown (desyatins), 1894

Total land area	777¼
Rye	37
Winter millet	13⅛
Spring millet	168
Barley	169⅛
Oats	10
Millet	¼
Corn	2¼
Potatoe	108½

4.LIVESTOCK AND EQUIPMENT: January 1st.1894

Horses	99
Milk cows	86
Calves	45
Hinny	39
Ploughs	31
Harrows	23
Carts	41

5.MILLS: One

6.LAND ON LEASE: 385 desyatins

By 1898/99 the area of cultivated land over all the kolonyas had risen to 17660 desyatins and the population was recorded as 8597 (43)

A second source of statistics appertaining to the kolonyas is 'Yevreyskiya Zemledelcheskiya Poseleniya Yekaterinoslavskoy Gubernii' - Jewish Agricultural Settlements in the Yekaterinoslav Government, published by B.D.Brutskus in 1913 (44). The author presents extensive charts detailing all aspects of agricultural and social activities. The following figures were extracted from these charts as they relate to Grafskoy alone. Figures relating to Grafskoy as shown in the charts above for 1893 and 1894 are reproduced here for comparative purposes (where available)

Chart No.10: Population (Grafskoy)

	1913	1894	
Jewish houses (families)	52	46	
Registered families	?	26	
Men	160	174	
Women	171	172	
Total Population	331	346	plus 16 non-colonist families - 74 persons

(43) 'The Jewish Encyclopaedia' Funk and Wagnalls.
(44) Tel Aviv University Central Library

Chart No.11: Age Distribution (Grafskoy), 1913.

Age Group	Male	Female	Total	%	
0 - 7	40	39	79	24	58
7 - 14	41	39	80	24	
14 - 18	16	19	35	10	
18 - 60	58	63	121	37	
60+	5	11	16	5	
TOTAL	160	171	331	100	

Chart No.12: Literacy Rate (Grafskoy), 1913. (45)

	RUSSIAN			YIDDISH			
	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL	
Read and write	85	46	131	97	53	150	
Read	4	3	7	10	9	19	
Illiterate	31(25%)	83	114(45%)	13(11%)	70	83	(33%)
TOTAL	120	132	252	120	132	252	

Chart No.13: Buildings (Grafskoy), 1913.

Houses	48
Rooms	177
Stables	40
Cellars	37
Wells	39
Mudhuts	6
Other structures	12
Leased buildings	4
Insured farmhouses	42
Value of insured farmhouses	13695 roubles (46)

A further aspect of agricultural activity on the colonies was the cultivation of trees. The following is a free translation of Bramson's description of this project:

"The planting of trees on the Jewish agricultural estates was started in the spring of 1892 under the instruction of the trustee for all the 17 colonies. 35,577 single trees were planted. In the spring of 1893 a second planting of 35,137 trees took place under the direction of the hired horticulturist Brushkin who had served for 12 years in the village of Belmanki cultivating the forests of the noblewoman Sviyagina. At that time, with the assistance of the noblewomen Sviyagina, nurseries were set up in the colonies Nadezhnaya and Grafskoy. From these nurseries an allotment of ¼ desyatin was assigned to the manager.

"The nursery on the colony of Grafskoy was founded in the autumn of 1892 on an area of 9 desyatins on the site of the old nursery which had been founded in 1862 and which had perished on account of insufficient attention. The nursery, or Plantation, as it was called, served eight districts.

(45) The figures have obviously taken into account children below the age of literacy.

(46) The average value of each insured farmhouse was therefore 326 roubles.

"Varieties of tree included: apple, pear, plum, apricot, peach cherry ,fir , acacia, birch, grapevines.

"Furthur plantations were developed as follows: Nadezhnaya 10 desyatins, Novozlatopol 15 desyatins, Zatishe 10 desyatins.

"In November 1893 a total of 75096 trees produced 21,118 saplings."

Chart No.14: Trees (November 1893)

Novozlatopol	9075
Krasnoselka	5464
Bogodarevka	5260
Mezhiretz	5192
Gorkaya	4944
Zatishe	4882
Trudoliubovka	4651
Veselaya	4572
Zelenoepole	4360
Sladkovodnaya	4311
Nadezhnaya	3942
Roskoshnaya	3760
Priyutnaya	3529
Rovnopol	3436
Grafskoy	2606
Khlebedarovka	2582
Nechayevka	2530
TOTAL	75096

Intensity of family life characterised the kolonyas. MENAKHEM-MENDEL was strict with his children, particularly YAAKOV-LEIB who was the scapegoat of the family, always embroiled in mischief and blamed for all the mishaps. MENAKHEM-MENDEL demanded absolute cleanliness in the house and when he returned from the fields at night he would take out a knife and run the sharp blade along the cracks in the table in order to clean out any dirt which may have collected (47). Because his wife was frequently indisposed due to pregnancy, MENAKHEM-MENDEL was often obliged to prepare the meals when he came home late in the day, resulting in his becoming a skilled cook. Although he was tired from farmwork during the day he still found time to study. After the evening meal he would get out his books, light a candle, and sit long into the night pouring over the intricacies of the Talmud. Nevertheless he was still able to get up early in the morning, ready to cope with another day's work.

MENAKHEM-MENDEL was no fanatic in religious matters; he believed in religious adherence not only to the letter of the law, but also in accordance with the sincerity of its spirit. One of his aversions in this respect was the custom of auctioning various honours in the Shule. It was traditional for the honour of being called to the reading of the Torah being auctioned amongst the worshippers. In addition on Simchat Torah other sections of the service were put up to the highest bidder. This custom was abhorred by MENAKHEM-MENDEL (48). Whenever it took place he would sit silently taking no part in the bidding. However, one year on Simchat Torah he surprised the congregation. The section being auctioned was that preceeding the Hakafot beginning with the words 'Ata horeyta ladaat ..." - it was taught to you that you might know. The bidding began with the usual low bids: "I'll give three kopeks to say Ata Horayta." "I'll give four kopeks." So it went on and one, each bid barely higher than that preceeding it. As time passed it seemed that there would be no settlement. As the bidding reached fever pitch, MENAKHEM-MENDEL, who could control his famous Komisaruk temper no longer, jumped up from his seat, slammed his fist down on the bench and shouted: "I'll give three roubles not to say Ata Horayta ! "

For a moment there was silence. Then turmoil broke loose as the amazed men asked him: "What do you mean Reb Mendel ? Surely you

mean that you will give three roubles to say Ata Horayta."
"I mean what I said," replied MENAKHEM-MENDEL adamently. The stunned congregation did not know what to do as MENAKHEM-MENDEL sat down and refused to discuss the matter furthur. The service could not proceed since he had in affect acquired possession of 'Ata Horayta' being the highest bidder. Eventually when the commotion died down, he gave the honour of saying the section to the rabbi (his father's successor since Rabbi PINKHAS was already dead at the time). From that time onwards the bidding for honours no longer occupied the prominence it had done in Grafskoy. In the true sense of the words MENAKHEM-MENDEL had indeed 'taught them that they might know'.

Religion played a vital part in the daily life on the kolonyas. Not just on Shabbat and YomTov, but every day of the year religious practices dictated the daily program. Early in the morning the entire male population of the kolonya would gather in the Shule for Shacharit. Then they would return home to snatch a bite to eat before setting off for the day's work. Late in the afternoon they would assemble once again for Mincha and Maariv. On Shabbat and Yom-Tov the women joined the service. In Grafskoy the service was presided over by Rabbi PINKHAS who occupied the most honoured position in the Shule: on the 'Mizrach' eastern side in the front of the Shule, surrounded by his sons, brothers and relatives. MENAKHEM-MENDEL and his sons occupied seats diagonally opposite Rabbi PINKHAS on the opposite side of the Bima.

The women's section was situated such that it was difficult to hear the service properly. Therefore they brought Yiddish books written for women. They would spend the time reading and discussing the contents of these books. After the midday meal, the rest of the day was spent in rest. The men would gather together to study in groups, or to hear a shiur from Rabbi PINKHAS, or they would study with their families. The women also would get together with their Yiddish books. For the very young childfen the afternoon was spent in play. As the day concluded the colonists would gather outside the Shule and watch for the stars signifying the close of the day, Shabbat and Yom Tov were highlights in the colonists lives. These days of devotion and rest provided a welcome change in the endless routine of kolonya life, which provided the strength to cope with the weekday toil.

One thing dampened their enthusiasm during prayer: the everpresent knowledge that their Christian neighbours might arrive in the kolonya to shower curses and abuse upon them whilst they were at prayer. For this reason, particularly on Simchat Torah when the sound of their rejoicing filled the air attracting any moujiki who might be about, a man was placed in the doorway of the Shule to warn them to lower their voices if he saw strangers entering the kolonya.

Rabbi PINKHAS's third son MEIR married his second-cousin TYBEL, the daughter of KOPPEL Zhmood from Andreyevka. They settled in the village of Andreyevka where their eldest daughter KHANA-REIZEL was born in 1887. She was followed by a daughter who died shortly after her birth. Because of the poor standard of medical attention, the infant mortality rate was very high. The next child was TSIPORA (CILYA) born in c.1890. She was followed by twins, a boy and a girl, who both died soon after their birth. The next child, born in 1896 was SHLOMO-ZALMEN. He was called ALTER meaning 'the old one' since it was the custom in families where several children had died to name the succeeding child 'Alter' supposedly to confuse the 'Angel of Death', who was said to prefer taking young children, into thinking that this child was old and therefore not worth taking.

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(47) TESSIE Freedman as related by her father SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komesaroff of Melbourne.
(48) KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) son of MENAKHEM-MENDEL, who related numerous incidents of his childhood in Grafskoy and vivid descriptions of life on the kolonyas.

Alter was followed by PINKHAS in 1899, YEHUDA-LEIB (LOUIS) in 1901 and KHAYA-SARAH (KHAYALAH) in 1906. MEIR went into partnership as a butcher with his brothers-in-law (and cousins) MOSHE and MANYIK Zhmood. He loved horses and travelled a lot around the nearby villages to visit the shops operated by the partners. On his travels he would pick up passengers who were destined for the same village as he. In this way he met a number of Russian Orthodox priests and made friends with them. This was unusual considering the animosity which existed between Jews and the Church at the time. However MEIR was a very tolerant man and respected other people's beliefs. He used to say: "I would rather travel with a Christian who keeps his religion than with a Jew if he does not." On these journeys MEIR was in danger from certain moujiki who often waylaid and robbed defenceless Jews travelling alone in the countryside. Thus he preferred to have company with him. He would say: "I feel safer in the company of a Galuch (priest) than in the company of a Meshumad (Jewish convert to Christianity). Although MEIR was a butcher, amongst his pet food dislikes were livers and kidneys. He said: "If you were to see them in the condition I see them you would never eat them." (49)

MEIR's children received a traditional Jewish education. Unlike most parents, he believed in education for girls. Therefore he sent his daughters to a Cheder for girls, together with their Zhmood cousins in Andreyevka. TSVI and DAVID (sons of MOSHE Zhmood) were very fond of their cousin KHANA-REIZEL and fought with each other to be able to do her favour. On the way to Cheder the children had to cross a river which was frozen in winter. Every day there would be an arguement between TSVI and DAVID over which of them would help KHANA-REIZEL to skate across the ice.

KHANA-REIZEL's ability at her studies was such that her teacher tried to encourage her to seek a higher education and perhaps take up teaching as a career. Her parents attempted to have her admitted into a secular high school. This was difficult as strict quotas restricted Jewish entrants to Russian schools. The assistance was enlisted of TYBEL's sister-in-law ESTHER Zhmood who was a teacher in Mariupol. Through her intercession with the necessary officials she had KHANA-REIZEL admitted to a Gymnasium in Mariupol.Furthurmore she offered to provide board for her niece during the school term in Mariupol. So KHANA-REIZEL went to live with her aunt ESTHER and uncle MANYIK Zhmood. The years which she spent with their family were very happy ones and provided her with some of her fondest childhood memories. Her aunt and uncle treated her as their own daughter. KHANA-REIZEL's outlook on life was broadened by the secular Russian education she was fortunate to receive, unlike most of her brothers, sister and cousins. Most Jews from villages only learnt to write in Russian when they needed to for business purposes. This was the case with KHANA-REIZEL's cousin SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komesaroff from Grafskoy whom she later married. Amongst her teachers was the later renowned Zionist leader Mossensohn. Her uncle and aunt, whilst strictly orthodox Jews, enjoyed the finer points of Russian culture such as music and literature. This love of Russian culture, despite the excesses of antisemitism, was passed on to KHANA-REIZEL and remained with her throughout her life.

As Rabbi PINKHAS's daughters grew up, they exhibited the same concern for the welfare of others as did their father. The Jews of the Kolonyas received little or no assistance from the government in caring for widows, orphans, the sick and the poor. They had to rely on their own limited resources to help the afflicted of their community. The three Komisaruk sisters, ESTER, DINA and REIZEL were always ready to help those in need (49). Whenever they heard of a woman who had been widowed or a family which had been orphaned, the three sisters would waste no time in collecting food and clothing to help them. If they heard of somebody who was lying ill with nobody to nurse them, the three sisters would volunteer their services to nurse the person back to health. No matter where the unfortunates lived, ESTER, DINA and REIZEL would not hesitate in riding off to help them. These 'angels of mercy' earned a reputation for themselves and a warm place in the hearts of the Jews of the Kolonyas.

ESTER, Rabbi PINKHAS's fourth child, or ETL as she was known, married KHAIM-MOSHE Luban. KHAIM-MOSHE came from a family of wealthy and devout Chassidim who lived in the town of Mikhailovka. There his father Aharon Luban appears to have settled after the family's migration from the town of Luban in Lithuania (hence the origin of their surname). The Lubans, who were leather merchants lived at various times both in Mikhailovka and nearby Melitopol. In the latter place KHAIM-MOSHE's brother occupied the position as rabbi of the town.

The marriage of a Chassid with a daughter of the Komisaruk family was a landmark in the history of that family. It was in fact the first such marriage since the time of the bitter feud between the Misnagdim and Chassidim in the days of the Vilna Gaon. Despite a long tradition of non-association with Chassidim, Rabbi PINKHAS welcomed his son-in-law into the family. It appears that an attachment of mutual respect developed between them as evidenced in a dedication inscribed in a book presented by Rabbi PINKHAS to his son-in-law. This dedication refers to him not only in familial terms but also makes note of what must have been his his scholastic achievement in referring to him as 'Morenu ha Rav', our teacher the rabbi (50).

ESTER and KHAIM-MOSHE Luban had twin daughters in c.1886 who died shortly after birth. They were followed by a son YOSEF-DOV (latter called ALTER) in 1892.YOSEF-DOV was given this name in memory of the famous scholar Rabbi Yosef-Dov Soloveitchik, the news of whose death reached the family just before the child was born (51). The Lubans' fourth child, a son died soon after birth in c.1894. At this time medical knowledge was very limited and rarely available to Jews. If anyone became seriously ill there was little chance for recovery. ESTER and KHAIM-MOSHE lived in fear, following the death of three of their children, that their only remaining child YOSEF-DOV might be taken from them. For this reason they began to call him ALTER for the same reasons as those explained regarding his uncle MEIR's son ALTER.

ESTER and KHAIM-MOSHE badly wanted another child. But fate had decreed otherwise, ESTER was unable to bear any furthur children. When she was told this she said: "I would gladly give up all my money and become a pauper, if only I could have another child".(52) In desparation she took the only step open to her. She decided to consult a 'Gooter Yid'. This was a Chassidic Rebbe who was revered by his followers as a miracle-worker. Such superstitions were not accepted by the Misnagdim. Nevertheless ESTER was desperate. She was prepared to use any means to have a child. She went to the local 'Gooter Yid' and he pronounced certain prescribed formulas over her and presented her with amulets which were supposed to have divine power. But all his efforts were of no avail . As time went by ESTER gave up all hope of having another child.

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(49) TESSIE Freedman as related by her parents.
(50) The book was in the possession of RAKHEL Luban in Israel.
(51) MOSHE Luban as related by his father YOSEF-DOV. This may add weight to the claim of a familial relationship.
(52) This episode related by ESTER's nephew KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) Komesaroff.

But ESTER was bothered by one thing. Due to her upbringing her concience was troubling her that she had, in a moment of weakness, consulted a 'Gooter Yid'. To relieve this feeling of guilt she went to see her father. She told him of her troubles and said: "Father, I went to see a Gooter Yid," (literally, a good Jew). Rabbi PINKHAS, realising the torment his daughter was enduring, answered in his characteristically tolerant manner: "Mein kind, yeder yid iz goot", (My child, every Jew is good). One could also interpret this to mean that he did not recognise the uniqueness of the 'Gooter Yid'.

Rabbi PINKHAS's fifth child SIMKHA married KHAVA-ROKHA and their children were KHAY-GITTEL (TATIANA), BEILA, and PINKHAS. SIMKHA initially lived with his father until he built his own house on the Marenfeld-Grafskoy road, soon after it entered the Kolonya. He farmed a section of the family's land. His wife KHAVA-ROKHA was a well-known character on the Kolonya as both midwife and hairdresser.

Rabbi PINKHAS's sixth child DINA married AVROM-HILLEL Namakshtansky and they settled on the nearby Kolonya Engels (Trudoliubovka in Russian). There AVROM-HILLEL was occupied in farming. Their children were KHAIM, SHMILIK, ROKHEL, twins PINKHAS and VELVEL, YOKHVED (EVA), ZALMEN (SAM), and LEIBL (LOUIS).

Rabbi PINKHAS's youngest daughter REIZEL was very attached to her father, being the only child of his wife BASSIE. Also being the youngest, she was the last of their children to be left living with her parents. She married KOPPEL Kogan and they settled on Kolonya Bakhers. Their children were YOKHVED (EVA), BASSIE, LEAH, MOSHE, PASHA, PINKHAS and RAFAEL.

By 1896, with the growth of MENAKHEM-MENDEL's family, it became increasingly difficult to accomodate all the children in his small house. For this reason he decided that one of them would leave home for a short period. The one chosen was SHLOMO-ZALMEN. MENAKHEM-MENDEL decided that this was an opportunity of furthuring his son's education and so decided to send him to his brother Rabbi ZALMEN (53). Although grieved at having to part with her son, BEILA-REEVA prepared him for the long journey to Vasilkovka where his uncle lived. Then his father took him to a nearby town where a coach which passed through Vasilkovka periodically stopped. MENAKHEM-MENDEL put SHLOMO-ZALMEN aboard the coach, wrapped him warmly in thick blankets, gave him a parcel of food, then blessed him before bidding him farewell. SHLOMO-ZALMEN was terrified after the coach set off. He looked around but could find no familiar face. He was freezing from the cold and was being shaken violently as the coach passed over rough, unsurfaced roads. Throughout the journey he remained motionless in his corner, beneath his pile of blankets, afraid to speak to anyone. He felt as if he was travelling to the ends of the earth as the coach travelled on through unfamiliar country. Eventually it pulled into a small town and as the door opened, SHLOMO-ZALMEN was relieved to see the familiar long-bearded figure of his uncle Rabbi ZALMEN who had been waiting to collect him.

SHLOMO-ZALMEN soon recovered from his harrowing journey and settled into his uncle's household. During the period which he spent in Vasilkovka he acquired much of his religious knowledge through the guidance of his uncle. Rabbi ZALMEN, like his father, was a devout Misnagid and saw to it that his nephew attended to his studies diligently. However life was not all work. ZALMEN had plenty of time to enjoy himself with his seven cousins whom he had previously seen rarely. Rabbi ZALMEN's eldest son KHAIM-SHOLEM followed in his father's and grandfather's scholastic footsteps. To furthur his education he was sent to one of the prominent Yeshivot in Lithuania to study and qualify as a rabbi. There he remained, married and had a family. Contact with Rabbi KHAIM-SHOLEM was lost during the Russian Revolution and his fate is not known. It is possible that a Komesaroff family living in Vilna during the Second World War was his family(54)

After spending twelve months in Vasilkovka, SHLOMO-ZALMEN returned to his parents in Grafskoy.

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(53) Related by SHLOMO-ZALMEN to his son PINKHAS (PETER Kaye) of Melbourne.

(54) RAKHEL Luban.

Upon returning home SHLOMO-ZALMEN resumed his studies under the supervision of his grandfather to whom he was particularly attached. Rabbi PINKHAS, in his capacity as Av Din, was consulted from time to time to solve disputes or settle matters of religious law. On one such occasion he was asked for his opinion of a marriage match which had been proposed for a daughter of a family living in Grafskoy (55). The prospective bridegroom was a scholar from Lithuania. Rabbi PINKHAS interviewed the youth to ascertain his suitability. Something about him seemed out of place. Withholding his decision Rabbi PINKHAS wrote to the rabbi of the youth's town with whom he was acquainted. He enquired whether the scholar was known to the rabbi and if so, whether he would give him a character reference. The rabbi replied that he knew the scholar only too well since he had just deserted his wife and child !

Not satisfied with simply revealing the man as a fraud, Rabbi PINKHAS was determined to see justice done to the deserted wife. Once again he wrote to the rabbi in Lithuania and asked him to arrange for the wife and child to travel to Grafskoy. In due course the woman arrived and Rabbi PINKHAS staged a confrontation with the errant husband. In this way the girl from Grafskoy was saved from a bigamous marriage and the deserted wife was assured of compensation.

In 1897 tragedy struck the Komisaruk family. Rabbi PINKHAS's life was suddenly cut short as a result of a freak accident. One day, in the depths of the severe Russian winter, Rabbi PINKHAS went out to draw water from the well which stood in the yard of his house. As he was hoisting the bucket up, he slipped on the icy ground, lost his balance and fell forwards into the well. He struggled to free himself in order to climb out but to no avail. He began to shout for help but no-one heard him. Hours passed until a passerby heard his weakening plaintive cry. Quickly his sons were alerted and they lowered ropes to haul him out. This was no easy task; his great height meant that he was wedged tightly into the narrow well. Eventually he was freed and they wasted no time to rush him inside to be dried and warmed. But his constitution was not strong enough for him to overcome the ordeal. He became ill and over a few short days developed pneumonia.

It was apparent to Rabbi PINKHAS's family that he did not have long to live. Wasting no time, all of the family who were living elsewhere returned to Grafskoy to be with the patriarch of the Komisaruk family during his last hours. On the 26th of Adar Rishon the end was approaching. All of his family were gathered around his bedside and the street outside was full of people anxiously awaiting news of his condition. After farewelling his wife, children and brothers, Rabbi PINKHAS looked around to the large group of his grandchildren. His eyes came to rest on MENAKHEM-MENDEL's son YAAKOV-LEIB. He called him over, blessed him, then passed away (56).

The news soon spread throughout the Kolonyas that the life of Rabbi PINKHAS Komisaruk had come to an end. Thousands of people came to Grafskoy to attend his funeral including sixteen rabbis from the surrounding district. They had come to pay their last respects to the man who had done so much good and helped so many people in those terrible days of the pogroms. Rabbi PINKHAS wrote no philosophical books. Yet he was a great man in other ways. Almost his entire life he had given up to the service of others. From the battlefields of the Crimea to the pogrom-devestated Kolonyas, he constantly strove to help those in need and to bring spiritual guidance and strength to help relieve the suffering of his people. He was beloved by his family and his grandchildren passed the memory of him on to their grandchildren with the stories they told of their recollections of him. Wherever his descendants and relatives live, the memory of him will remain sacred.

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(55) Incident related by RAKHEL Luban.

(56) Rabbi PINKHAS's death and the events surrounding it were related by his grandchildren RAKHEL Luban of Israel and SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komesaroff of Melbourne. A former resident of Grafskoy, living in Melbourne, recalled the funeral (Meerkin).

Rabbi PINKHAS's death was reported in the Hebrew newspaper HaMelitz (57):

" HAMELITZ No. 59

20 Adar Two, 5657
12 (24) March, 1897

Grafskoy - (Jewish settlement in the Government of Yekaterinoslav)

The 27th day of Adar I was for us a day of mourning and grief because during it passed from life in the sixty-seventh year of his life, the Rabbi, the Gaon, Av-Din of here, our Rabbi PINKHAS Komisarov, who officiated to the glory of our settlement as Rabbi and 'Shokhet and Examiner' more than thirty years. Great honour was shown to him in his death, all the rabbis of the surrounding settlements gathered, came to pay him the last honour and eulogised him according to the Law. He was great in Torah and the Fear of Heaven, and in peace and righteousness he walked with his brethren the farmers.

Peace be unto his dust and may his soul be bound up in the bond of everlasting life.

Kalman Bruser "

A day or so after Rabbi PINKHAS's death, MENAKHEM-MENDEL and BEILA-REEVA gave birth to another son. He was named PINKHAS after his late grandfather. Although in mourning for his father, MENAKHEM-MENDEL adhered to the tradition which held that the welfare of the living had preference over respect for the dead. So he arranged for the 'Briss' and the customary celebrations which accompanied the birth of a child. In fact, the same people who had come for the funeral attended the Briss. However the rejoicing was not for long. A few weeks after its birth the baby died.

Not long after the death of Rabbi PINKHAS, his wife BASSIE also passed away. The exact year is not known, the date was Rosh Chodesh Iyar. Soon after her death the house she and Rabbi PINKHAS had lived in was demolished as it was no longer safe to live in due to its age. This may indicate that it was the original house erected by Rabbi PINKHAS's father, Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN soon after his arrival in Grafskoy (58).

To relieve her sorrow and loneliness after the death of her children, ESTER Luban asked her brother MENAKHEM-MENDEL if he would send his son ZALMEN, whom she was very fond of, to live with her. MENAKHEM-MENDEL gave his consent because he was finding it hard to support his large family. He also realised that ZALMEN would have more opportunities to make a living in a town than on the farm. In 1897 ZALMEN went to live with the Lubans who had moved from Mikhailovka and settled in Melitopol, a small town situated on an inlet of the Sea of Azov. At the age of eleven ZALMEN started to earn his own living. His uncle KHAIM-MOSHE found him a job in a factory. During the winter it was his job to set up a stall in the market. This was situated on the frozen lake and early each morning ZALMEN would set out in the freezing cold to assemble the stall before the market opened. Some mornings the cold was so intense that his hands froze to the crowbar he was using. ZALMEN led a difficult life in those days but there were also happy times. He was very attached to his aunt and uncle and was the greatest of friends with his cousin ALTER. Whenever ZALMEN was free from work, he and ALTER would run off and enjoy themselves, getting into all sorts of trouble through their escapades. Those years which ZALMEN spent in Melitopol provided him with some of his happiest childhood memories.

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(57) The original of this newspaper was kept by Rabbi PINKHAS's daughter ESTER Luban and is now in the possession of her grandson MOSHE Luban in Israel. The author, Kalman Bruser was a grandson of David-Moshe Bruser, the Chasan of Grafskoy. The date should have been 26 Adar I.

(58) The foundations were still visible when KHAIM-VELVEL Komesaroff was a child.

One particular incident took place while ZALMEN was at work on the stall in the market. The news suddenly spread that the Starista of the town was going to visit the market. A Starista was usually a retired army officer who had been made mayor of the town as a reward for his military service. The market was in an uproar. Quickly everyone tidied up in preparation for the arrival of this illustrious personage. The owner of the stall where ZALMEN worked ordered him to go inside a shed and stay there until the Starista had departed. An insignificant boy like ZALMEN was not to be allowed to get in the way of the Starista. Disappointed but resigned to his fate ZALMEN went into the shed. Soon he could hear cheering and the sound of horses riding into the marketplace. He was longing to see what was happening. As time passed he became less and less able to restrain himself and when he could bear the suspense no longer he peeped through a crack in the wall of the shed. Outside he could see the crowd gathering around a man on horseback: the Starista. He was indeed an awesome sight, a tall man dressed in an elaborate scarlet uniform with a plumed hat. ZALMEN was overjoyed. Now he could boast that he had seen the Starista. He became so worked up with his excitement that he could hardly keep still. He longed to get out of the shed and run to tell ALTER. He began to jump up and down, and when he could contain his emotions no longer he flung open the door and ran through the marketplace shouting: "I've seen the Starista . I've seen the Starista." We can imagine what happened to ZALMEN when he got back to work and his employer caught him.

Although ZALMEN had very little secular education, having only learnt to write in Russian as he gained experience later in his own business, he had the usual Jewish education. Aside from learning at home with his father and grandfather, and for a period with his uncle Rabbi ZALMEN, he went to Cheder together with his cousin ALTER, who being somewhat younger was in a lower class. ZALMEN learnt not only what he had to but because he had a love of his studies. As a teenager he set himself the painstaking task of writing his own Megillah for Purim. This entailed long hours of care and concentration as he copied the Megillah word for word onto a parchment scroll and then decorated it. ZALMEN also acquired a different type of knowledge from his uncle KHAIM-MOSHE Luban. This saintly and pious man introduced his nephew to the ways of the Chassidim with their devotion at prayer and their love of song and dance. Much of ZALMEN's later traditional practices, particularly at the Seder table, may have been influenced by these Chassidic customs. Thus he was fortunate in gaining a good background in study in the Misnagid background of his home, tempered by the Chassidic environment of the Luban home.

ZALMEN was an outstanding student, well ahead of the rest of his class. Eventually the teacher told him that he could teach him no more of the normal course of studies and suggested that he teach him to translate the Bible into Russian. When ZALMEN next saw his father and told him of this, MENAKHEM-MENDEL was furious. He forbade ZALMEN to contemplate studying the Bible in Russian saying: "There will be time enough when you grow up to learn to be a Goy ! "(59)

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(59) ZALMEN was a great storyteller and delighted telling these anecdotes of his childhood to his children and grandchildren.

CHAPTER SIX: THE NEW CENTURY

The beginning of the Twentieth Century was marked by tragedy for the family of MENAKHEM-MENDEL. In 1901 the eldest son KHAIM-VELVEL became ill and did not respond to any of the usual home remedies. As Jews could rarely obtain the services of a doctor, they had to resort toan infamous character called the Feldsher. Such men usually received their scant medical knowledge whilst serving as orderlies in the medical corps of the army. On demobilization they continued to use their incomplete knowledge to treat the Jews in their home towns. In desparation, MENAKHEM-MENDEL called the local Feldsher to attend to KHAIM-VELVEL. The Feldsher entered the room alone to attend to the sick boy. At this time ZALMEN, his brother, was resting in the adjoining room. Suddenly he heard the Feldsher cry out: "What have I done ? I've given him the wrong medicine ! " The parents, upon re-entering the room, found their son dead. Although ZALMEN told his parents what he had overheard, the Feldsher denied that he had caused the child's death.

In 1908 MENAKHEM-MENDEL and BEILA-REEVA had their youngest son whom they named KHAIM-VELVEL in memory of his brother. An amusing incident occurred on the day that the baby was born. Towards evening MENAKHEM-MENDEL was riding home after the day's work, anxious to find out if his wife had given birth yet. As he rode up to the house, he saw some of his children waving to him excitedly at one of the windows. Thinking that this meant that the baby had been born, he rode quickly towards the Saray (barn), waving back happily. However this was not what the children had been trying to tell him. They were frantically trying to warn him that the top half of the Saray door was closed. Completely oblivious to any danger, MENAKHEM-MENDEL rode on without looking where he was going, but looking back towards the house. The horse headed straight for the doorway as it was accustomed to, ducked under the upper part of the door, and commenced munching its food without a care for its rider who lay sprawled out on the ground having been knocked off the horse by the top half of the door.

Despite the tensions and trials of the period, life on the kolonyas followed its unchanging course. In between occasional outbursts of violence there was little to alter the routine of life. For the children particularly, life was just one big game. True they had to attend Cheder which was always a trial for them, but they managed to brighten even this dark spot in their day with all sorts of pranks. The teacher led a hazardous existence trying to avoid the many pranks played on him. He had a fruit tree in his back yard which was the object of temptation of his pupils. One day, MENAKHEM-MENDEL's youngest son KHAIM-VELVEL and a friend could not resist the temptation to acquire some of this fruit. In the midst of a lesson they asked to be excused from the room. Thinking that the teacher was occupied with the rest of the class, they crept around the back of the house and commenced to fill their pockets with fruit. Unbeknown to them, their exploit was being observed by the teacher through the window. They returned to class confident that they had got away with it. But at the end of the lesson the teacher ordered them to remain behind. He took the boys to the back of the house. They were terrified that he was going to beat them. But instead he made the boys drop the fruit, piece by piece into the toilet, thus ignobly relieving them of their illgotten gains (60).

Even the older children were no exception when it came to mischief. One day BEILA-REEVA had to leave the house for a while to visit a friend. In her absence, her children YOKHVED and BENYOMIN decided to do her a favour. They would make Latkas for the evening meal. Confident that they were capable of doing what seemed to them an easy task, they set to work. They had seen their mother make Latkas many times so they did exactly as she had done. Unfortunately they made one slight mistake. BENYOMIN had gone out to the Saray to get a tin of oil, but he had mistaken the tin for one containing kerosene. Completely oblivious to any danger they proceeded with their cooking.

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(60) Anecdotes of Grafskoy at this period were, in the main, related by KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) Komesaroff of Melbourne.

It is not hard to picture their horror when the Latkas exploded in their faces, and the look on BEILA-REEVA's face when she returned home to find a ruined kitchen.

A character in Grafskoy who was feared to some extent by the children was SIMKHA's wife KHAVA-ROKHA. It was to her that the children had to go whenever they needed haircuts. Her sharp tongue and brisk manner resulted in the children doing all they could to postpone a visit to her. Once, after he could delay no longer, KHAIM-VELVEL set off to his aunt's house for the dreaded haircut. He sat in the chair motionless. KHAVA-ROKHA clipped away furiously, with little or no regard for KHAIM-VELVEL's comfort. Suddenly she accidently cut a small piece off his ear. Terrified of being rebuked for interupting her, he bore his pain in silence for a while. Then he began to whimper. At this KHAVA-ROKHA snapped at him: "What are you crying about ?" Then she caught sight of the blood and hurried to patch up his ear. "Why didn't you tell me'?" she asked. "I thought that you'd be annoyed with me, " KHAIM-VELVEL abashedly replied.

One of the favourite characters of the children was BEREL Komisaruk. This kindhearted man always had a soft spot for children. They knew that if they came to his grocery store they could expect to receive some treat. Whenever his wife SONIA, who dissapproved of his generosity, was not looking, BEREL would sneak outside the shop and distribute handfuls of sweets or lump sugar to the eagerly awaiting children.

BEREL and SONIA (nee Golosoff) lived firstly with his father VELVEL (the third son of Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komisaruk). Then they built a large house with an adjoining shop at the main crossroads of Grafskoy. They had six children between 1892 and 1906: ZALMEN, LEIBL, SHEINDEL, SHMILIK, VELVEL and NEKHAMA.

After the death of their father VELVEL in c.1900, the two brothers BEREL and MEIR shared his land. MEIR married RIVA (nee Lev) who came from Kolonya Novozlatopol. Their children were LUBA, VELVEL, ZALMEN, AVROM and PERETZ.

Of VELVEL's daughters, three lived in Grafskoy: HENIE married to GERSHON Ushkatz (their children were VELVEL, MOSHE, REEVA and DAVID); KHANA married to AVRAHAM Amiton (their children were VELVEL, ROSE, JIM and MAURICE); and ESTER married to VELVEL Pogorelsky (their children were BASSIE and YOKHVED). VELVEL's other daughter LEAH married her cousin BEREL Winnikofsky and they lived on Kolonya Kobilnye (their children were YOKHVED, SARAH, ZALMEN, MOSHE-KALMEN, YODEL, ZLATR and ROKHEL).

A furthur branch of the Komisaruk family which lived in Grafskoy was that of Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN's second son LEIBL. His only son SHABBESAI (SHEPE) married MALKA (nee Eseritz) and their children were SHLOMO-REUVEN, BASSIE-GITTEL, ESTER, HERSHEL, DAVID-MOSHE, ROKHEL and LEIBL. SHEPE's four sons lived in Grafskoy initially. The head of this branch of the family SHEPE had a reputation as a saintly man. In his later years when he was able to leave the care of his farm to his sons, he devoted himself to study. He had an air of dignity about him and when he walked in the streets people said that he walked as if the 'Shekhina' (presence of G-d) rested on him. He died in 1917.

The extensive families of the descendants of LEIBL and VELVEL Komisaruk are furthur elucidated in the genealogical charts and their subsequent activities in the United States, Canada and the U.S.S.R are covered in later chapters. ~~Likewise the families of the youngest brother YOSEF and sister KHANA Kroll are covered separately.~~

One of the highlights of the family's social life in Grafskoy came when ESTER Luban and her family came for a visit. Since she was much more prosperous than her relatives on the kolonyas and lived in a town, they felt it necessary to have everything in perfect order for her visit in order to impress her. For days beforehand everyone would set to work to clean up their houses and yards. Then ESTER would arrive. She always dressed in the best of clothes, usually a long black lace dress (61) and, especially to the children was an impressive sight. On such occasions the children had strict instructions to be on their best behaviour. After a number of years however,

(61)Recalled by KHAIM-VELVEL Komesaroff of Melbourne.

KHAIM-MOSHE's leather business suffered a setback and the Lubans lost most of their money, yet another trial to add to their sorrow after the loss of three children.

The happiest time of the year was Yom-Tov. On the day before Rosh Hashanah all the elder children returned home to the Kolonyas from the cities where they had been working during the year. All work stopped and preparations were made for the coming festive season. For some three weeks, from before Rosh HaShanah until after Sukkot, little or no work was done on the farms. The intermediate days of the festive season were a time for the family to get together after long periods of separation. In Grafskoy, MENAKHEM-MENDEL and SIMKHA with their families loaded themselves into their wagons and set off for Kolonya Engels. There they would spend the day visiting their sister DINA Namakshtansky and her family. This was a particularly joyous occasion as dozens of people crowded into the small house. The festivities were presided over by the lively DINA. She was always concerned that everyone enjoy themselves and anxious to discuss the events and gossip of the past year with her relatives. Although the Namakshtansky family struggled to support itself, DINA was renowned as a generous hostess.

With the Komisaruk family spread far and wide throughout the southeastern Ukraine, this was one of the few opportunities they had to get together. At some stage during the holidays, Rabbi ZALMEN from Vasilkovka, MEIR from Andreyevka and ESTER Luban from Melitopol would come to visit their brothers and sisters on the kolonyas.

One fear marred the celebrations each year on Pesach. This was due to the presence of the Christians living in the surrounding villages. Since Pesach usually coincided with Easter the Christians natural distaste for the Jews was transformed into violent hatred by the fiery sermons of the priests denouncing the Jews as the 'murderers of Jesus' and urging that they be made to pay for their 'crime'. In their zealous hatred the priests spread the age-old misconception which held that Jews used the blood of Christian children as an ingredient for Matzot. After being conditioned by a series of such sermons throughout the period of Lent, the Christians were ready to give vent to their fury and hatred. On the first two nights of Pesach particularly, the Christians would set out for the nearest Jewish settlement to claim their vengeance.

In Grafskoy, MENAKHEM-MENDEL's older children and their families would return home from the cities on the eve of Pesach to be with their parents. As the time to commence the Seder drew near, MENAKHEM-MENDEL would close all the windows, lock the outside shutters securely, and then bolt the door once all the family were safely inside. Not until he had ensured that all means of entry had been barred would he commence the Seder.

The family were usually in high spirits. Happily they joined MENAKHEM-MENDEL as he conducted the Seder, the volume of their singing getting higher and higher. Then suddenly someone would stop and say: "What was that noise ? " Instantly the Seder was interrupted. Everyone would sit still, scarcely breathing, listening for any sound from the outside. If none could be heard the Seder continued. Once again the fervour increased until suddenly there was a loud bang. The Seder stopped. There was another bang, and another, and soon a torrent of them. Fearfully the family sat still as they listened to their Christian neighbours throwing stones at their houses and shouting abuse at them. Occasionaly screams could be heard as the Christians broke into other houses, smashed windows and furniture, and beat up the occupants.

When the commotion died down and the Christians departed, the Seder would resume as if nothing had happened. Determined not to let anything interfere with their celebration, MENAKHEM-MENDEL's family sat far into the night recalling that great day when their ancestors were delivered from their oppressors of bygone days, undetered by the present-day oppressors clamouring for their blood.

After the conclusion of Yom-Tov life returned to routine on the Kolonyas. The elder children returned to their jobs in the towns, visitors went home, and farmwork commenced once again.

Crime was relatively unknown on the Kolonyas and for this reason there was no 'Nachornik' (policeman) in Grafskoy. If one was required he had to be called from Myadla. There was however a courthouse, housed in the 'Prikaz' (municipal building). This building was very rarely used. In fact KHAIM-VELVEL (MENAKHEM-MENDEL's son) could only remember it being used once during the time he lived in Grafskoy. That was in connection with a petty squabble involving his brother BENYOMIN. One summer's day BENYOMIN and a friend were walking in the orchard near the Prikaz. They had a difference of opinion over a matter they were discussing. Tempers flared leading to BENYOMIN striking his friend. Later the friend's father accused BENYOMIN of thereby insulting his son and insisted on calling the Nachornik from Myadla to settle the dispute, since BENYOMIN refused to apologise. The Nachornik arrived and opened the disused courthouse. There he heard the case, found BENYOMIN guilty and passed sentence: BENYOMIN was to walk through the prison cell; not to be confined to it, but merely to walk through it ! Despite the seemingly light punishment, MENAKHEM-MENDEL was appalled and would not speak to his son for some time as even to walk through the cell he considered as a slur on BENYOMIN's character and the family's good name.

The Prikaz also incorporated a post office, but this too was kept locked as mail was brought in a few times a week by a Jew who had the government contract to deliver mail.

During the slack season, throughout the long winter months, MENAKHEM-MENDEL did not have enough work to keep him occupied. To fill in time and to earn some extra money he bought a Tatchanka. This was a four wheeled cart (also referred to as a Britchka) which had upholstered seats. MENAKHEM-MENDEL used it to pursue his part-time occupation as a Balegolah (carrier). He used to travel to Rozovka where he would meet the trains at the station and collect parcels and passengers wanting to reach the Kolonya region from the train.

In 1904, the Russo-Japanese War broke out. At this time ZALMEN, the son of MENAKHEM-MENDEL, was working for a leather manufacturer Rosenshein in Melitopol. He had acquired this position with the help of his uncle KHAIM-MOSHE Luban who was engaged in that trade and with whom he was still living. When the war broke out this company was given a contract to supply the Russian army with boots, blankets and other equipment. The company sent shipments to Manchuria but they never reached the army. In order to investigate the fate of the shipments, Rosensheins sent ZALMEN as their representative to Harbin in Manchuria.

The country was in a state of upheaval as ZALMEN set off on his long journey across Asia. Bribery and corruption flourished and ZALMEN had to bribe his was onto the Trans-Siberian Railway as tickets were unobtainable through normal means. When he arrived in Harbin a shocking sight awaited him. Outside the city were long lines of open railway trucks. At first ZALMEN thought that they were animal transports, but on closer scrutiny he found that they carried thousands of wounded Russian soldiers. They were lying exposed to the weather, on filthy straw, in torn clothing, with little or no medical care.

ZALMEN could not understand how this situation could have occurred. What had happened to all the clothing which Rosensheins had sent ? When the train finally reached the station, ZALMEN set out to try and find an answer to this mystery. He walked through the town until he arrived at the market place. It was crowded with hundreds of Manchurian peasants who seemed to be clamouring towards one particular section of the market. Interested in finding out what was the cause of the commotion, ZALMEN made his way through the crowd. There, in the centre of the crowd he found the answer to the puzzle of the missing clothing. All the clothing which Rosensheins had sent for the troops was piled high in the market place and the Russian officers were selling it to the peasants while their own soldiers were dying of exposure.

All over the vast Russian Empire similar instances of corruption occurred. The atmosphere was ripe for revolution. For many years the Communists had been preparing for an opportunity to come out into the open. By 1905 public opinion was aroused against the government of Tsar Nicholas II. Numerous uprisings broke out throughout Russia in which many people were killed and much property was looted. On resuming work at Rosensheins after returning from Manchuria, ZALMEN was involved in one of these uprisings. While going about his usual work in the store ZALMEN heard sounds of a disturbance in the streets of Melitopol. A group of Communist students who had come from the Moscow university were demonstrating and raiding the shops. Some of them burst into Rosensheins brandishing revolvers and shouting "Rooki Vyerk" (hands up!) All the staff were lined up against the wall with their hands in the air. Then the leader of the students told them that he was collecting money to finance the coming Communist Revolution. ZALMEN was terrified; his hands were shaking and as one of the students passed him and noticed his terror, the student whispered that he could put his hands down. Suddenly ZALMEN realised with astonishment that this student was in fact one of Rosenshein's sons who had been away at university for some time and had now come back to raid his own father's shop.

Even after the students had departed, taking with them the contents of the safe, Rosenshein was afraid that this would not be the last he would hear from them. So he issued pistols to some of his staff. On his way home ZALMEN decided to test his pistol because he had very little idea how it worked. Standing up in his droshky, and lifting the pistol high in the air, he pulled the trigger. There was a loud explosion, then everything went black. The next thing ZALMEN knew was that he awoke and found himself lying on the road in the middle of the forest. There was no sign of the droshky. Evidently the horse had bolted when it heard the shot, throwing ZALMEN onto the road and knocking him unconscious as a result of the fall. ZALMEN picked himself up and walked the several miles home to the Lubans. (68)

Despite the efforts of the Communists, the revolution was doomed to fail. The Tsar's loyal troops were able to put down the revolt and restore law and order. But public discontent had not abated. In order to divert this rebellious spirit which could break out again at any moment, the Tsar needed a scapegoat. Who better than the Jews ? Everyone hated them anyway so it would be easy to blame them for all the country's troubles. The Tsar and his advisers activated a program of government inspired pogroms on numerous Jewish settlements. Thousands were massacred and many others fled the country.

Besides the horrors that the Jews were subjected to by pogroms there was another evil: Priziv. compulsory military service. Every male on turning twenty-one, commenced a period of four years in the army. Under normal circumstances, and in a country which had not devised a program of persecution of the Jews, this situation would have been of little consequence. But this was not so in Russia. One of the most terrible things that could happen to a Jew was to be conscripted into the Tsar's army. Conditions for Christian soldiers were bad enough, but for the Jew, Priziv was almost a sentence of

(68) Retold by ZALMEN to his son PETER Kaye.

death. Usually the conscript was sent many miles away from his home to the remote regions of Siberia. There he was subjected to the most shocking conditions. For a Jew living with conscripted peasants life was a continual hell. The peasants blamed the Jews for all their grievances and the authorities did nothing to stop the persecution of the helpless Jewish soldier. Because of this they did everything they could to avade Priziv. When their efforts to avoid it failed the only course open to them was to leave the country. This situation initially did not affect the Komisaruks or their relatives who lived on the Kolonyas because farmers were considered to be essential to the economy and thus were supposedly exempt from Priziv. For this reason ZALMEN, although no longer living on the Kolonya, registered his home as Grafskoy and his occupation as a farmer. But his ruse was shortlived as it was likewise for various others of his cousins who were living in the cities.

In the village of Andreyevka, on November 13, 1906 (69) TYBEL and MEIR Komisaruk gave birth to their youngest daughter KHAYA-SARAH. Following the birth TYBEL was very ill. Her condition worsened and ten days later (November 23rd) she passed away. The cause of her death has never clearly been established; it was said to have been due to a'twisted intestine'. Her untimely death at the age of thirty-nine not only plunged the family into grief, but left her six children in difficult circumstances. Her husband MEIR was heartbroken at the loss of his wife. He was unreconsilable to such an extent that he lost all interest in living. He rarely ate and as a result was seen to be steadily wasting away. The burden of caring for the family fell on his eldest daughter KHANA-REIZEL. Aged only nineteen, with little experience in coping with a household, she was forced to rally her natural skill to care for the needs of the younger children, particulary the baby KHAYALAH.

KHANA-REIZEL was engaged to be married to her cousin ZALMEN, the son of MENAKHEM-MENDEL. The unexpected death of her mother however delayed the marriage plans. Despite the fact that the bride was in mourning for her mother, tradition held that a marriage could not be postponed (70). The date was set for the 13th of Nisan 5667 (1907). But the young couple's impending celebration was to be marred by the death of the bride's father MEIR. His gradual decline over a period of a few short months following his wife's death had culminated with his own death. No medical cause could be atributed; rather it was held that he had died of grief. The date of his death is not known exactly save that it was a few days prior to his daughter's wedding (her marriage certificate refers to him as 'of blessed memory').

On this occasion the marriage was not postponed. It took place on Kolonya Grafskoy since ZALMEN's parents lived there. The couple made their home in the town of Berdyansk, a port and resort on the shore of the Sea of Azov. The early days of their marriage were difficult ones for KHANA-REIZEL and ZALMEN since they had to care for all of KHANA-REIZEL's brothers and sisters. KHANA-REIZEL found caring for the baby KHAYALAH particularly difficult due to her inexperience. She was however determined that the family should not be split up. Time and time again her uncles MOSHE, FULIK and MANYIK Zhmood tried to persuade her to seek adoptive parents for the baby. But she persevered for some time. However after several months she found she simply could not manage and gave in to her uncles' pressure. They advised her to give the baby to a cousin who was unable to bear children and was anxious to adopt KHAYALAH. The cousin was KHASA, a daughter of LEIZER Zhmood of Andreyevka. LEIZER was a brother of KHANA-REIZEL's grandfather KOPPEL Zhmood (who it appears was still alive at the time) (71). KHASA and her husband ARON Abramovitch who was a tradesman, took the child into their home on Kolonya Prishib near the village of Mikhailovka.

(69) November 13 = November 26 current calendar.
(70) The date on the marriage certificate seems to have been altered, probably due to the death of TYBEL.
(71) None of his grandsons born around this time were named after him, thus indicating that he was still alive. The first to be named after him was the present author, born in 1947.

ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL had settled in Berdyansk because ZALMEN had opened a business there (72). Having gained sufficient experience in the leather trade during his employment at Rosensheins in Melitopol, and having gained considerable knowledge from his uncle KHAIM-MOSHE Luban, he was ready to take the step of starting his own enterprise. At this time the leather trade was predominantly a Jewish trade and was particularly widespread in the southeastern Ukraine. ZALMEN took a partner into his business, his friend Avraham Lamdansky. From time to time it was necessary for ZALMEN to travel for business purposes. Conditions for long distance travel in Russia were far from comfortable and for Jews certain antisemitic regulations added to the difficulties. On one occasion ZALMEN travelled to Moscow by train. When he arrived he found that his business was going to take more than one day and so he would have to stay overnight. ZALMEN went to a hotel but was informed that because Jews needed a residence permit he could not sleep in the hotel or any place in Moscow. Angered by this but knowing there was no authority to whom he could complain, ZALMEN went to the railway station and spent the night sleeping on the platform.

Shortly after his return to Berdyansk, ZALMEN received notification from the army that because he was twenty-one he was being called up for military service. ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL were horrified to receive what could have been his death sentence. ZALMEN went to the military authorities and explained that he was newly married and had the responsibility of providing for his wife's family. But all his pleading was to no avail. The army was adamant; there were no exemptions from Priziv. ZALMEN was called to present himself for medical examination prior to being enlisted. At his wits end he resorted to drinking vinegar in order to make himself too sick to pass the medical requirements.

In 1909, March 19th (Erev Pesach), ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL's first child TYBEL (TANYA or TESSIE) was born. ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL had a difficult early married life. Besides the problems connected with raising their own family and the responsibility of looking after KHANA-REIZEL's four brothers and sisters, they lived in constant fear that any day ZALMEN would be called up for Priziv again. Periodically he was ordered to appear for a medical examination and each time he managed to fail the examination by drinking vinegar.

In 1911 their son MEIR was born.

When ALTER and PINKHAS, KHANA-REIZEL's brothers reached their early teens they worked for a cabinet maker in Berdyansk, Leib Palyekov, who with his wife Rivka were friends of ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL. Thus the brothers were able to help contribute to the family income.

In 1912 KHANA-REIZEL received a letter from Australia from her cousin DAVID, a son of her uncle MOSHE Zhmood. The purpose of his letter was to ask KHANA-REIZEL's permission for her sister TSIPORA to come out to Australia to marry him. DAVID had been very fond of KHANA-REIZEL and he said that seeing he could not marry her he would do the next best thing and marry her sister. Although KHANA-REIZEL did not want to be separated from her sister she decided to let her go to Australia, accompanied by her brother ALTER who was to look after her. Once in Australia she would decide for herself whether to marry DAVID or not. TSIPORA and ALTER set off on their journey, first travelling north to the Baltic Sea, there to board the German ship 'Kaiser Wilhelm Der Groser' bound for Australia.

Shortly after arriving in Melbourne TSIPORA wrote to her sister telling her that she intended marrying DAVID and asking KHANA-REIZEL and the rest of the family to come to Australia. KHANA-REIZEL and ZALMEN did not know what to do for the best. It would be very difficult for them to give up the life they had been used to, their family, friends, business and go to live in a strange country. Yet KHANA-REIZEL wanted to be with her sister and brother. Since her parents' death KHANA-REIZEL had always gone to her uncle and aunt MANYIK and ESTER Zhmood in Mariupol to ask their advice whenever she had a problem. So she went to them to seek their opinion now. MANYIK and ESTER were very much against the idea of their favourite niece leaving Russia and going so far away.

(72) Details of these years related by TESSIE Freedman.

Then KHANA-REIZEL and ZALMEN had their minds made up for them: ZALMEN was called up for Priziv again. Over the past few years ZALMEN had made himself so sick by drinking vinegar that a doctor warned him that unless he ceased he would eventually kill himself. As it was he was in such a state that the doctor advised him to seek a warmer climate since the Russian winter was too severe for him.

ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL no longer had any choice; they had to leave Russia. ZALMEN set about making the necessary arrangements. Firstly he sold his share in the business to his partner Lamdansky. Then he divided his money in half; one half was to pay for the journey and subsequently to set himself up in business in Australia, and the other half (3000 Roubles) he put in the bank in case they found life in Australia too unbearable and returned to Russia. Finally there was the matter of a passport. In order to acquire one ZALMEN had to go to Simferopol, the capital of the government of Tavrich in which Berdyansk was located. On his return ZALMEN passed through Melitopol where he farewelled his aunt and uncle whom he had been so attached to, ESTER and KHAIM-MOSHE Luban and his cousin ALTER. He returned to Berdyansk and set about making preparations for the journey.

Before leaving Berdyansk KHANA-REIZEL tried to contact her sister KHAYALA. Over the years since she had been adopted, they had heard from her adoptive parents only rarely. Unfortunately, just before KHANA-REIZEL wrote to Kolonya Prishib, the Abramovitchs moved elsewhere without leaving a forwarding address. In any case, KHASA and ARON had written previously in reply to a request from KHANA-REIZEL to let KHAYALA come with her to Australia, that they would not dream of parting with her because they regarded her as their own child. So KHAYALA was never to see her brothers and sisters again.

ZALMEN, KHANA-REIZEL, their children TYBEL and MEIR, together with KHANA-REIZEL's brothers PINKHAS and YEHUDA-LEIB (LOUIS) farewelled their relatives in Berdyansk and set off on the first leg of their journey in August 1913 from Berdyansk to Mariupol. There they farewelled MANYIK and ESTER Zhmood who had been like parents to KHANA-REIZEL. From Mariupol they went to Grafskoy where they spent their last days with ZALMEN's family. During their stay in Grafskoy they visited their many relatives in the district, their aunt DINA in Engels, uncle SIMKHA in Grafskoy as well as their many cousins. Finally they arranged for a photographer to come from Pologi to take a group photograph with ZALMEN's parents and his brothers and sisters.

When the departure could be put off no longer, ZALMEN farewelled his mother BEILA-REEVA and his brothers and sisters. Then MENAKHEM-MENDEL drove the family to the railway station in his Britchka. In later years this was the only incident that TYBEL, ZALMEN's daughter could remember of her early life in Russia: riding along the country road, sitting on her grandfather's knee as he drove the cart. After a tearfull farewell the train pulled out of Rozovka station, and as ZALMEN looked back at the tall bearded figure of his father on the platform gradually fading into the distance, little did he know that he would never see his father again.

From Rozovka the family went to Yuzovka. Then a journey of over a thousand miles north to Libava in Latvia lay ahead of them. The train passed through Kharkov, Gomel, Minsk, Shavli, Vilna; along much the same route that their greatgrandfather Rabbi SHLOMO-ZALMEN Komisaruk had taken in the opposite direction some seventy years before. After many weeks of travelling they arrived at the port of Libava on the Baltic Sea. Here they had to wait until October before they could book passage on a ship. On October 3rd they departed the shores of Russia.

From Libava the ship went to London where they had to wait for a short while until they could arrange passage on a small boat which took them across the English Channel to Antwerp. In Antwerp they boarded the German ship 'Koenigen Louisa' which was to take them to Australia. This was only a small ship but was crowded with hundreds of Jews who were leaving Europe. Jewish activities aboard ship were organised and religious services were held regularly. YEHUDA-LEIB had his Barmitzvah on board ship at the age of twelve as was the

custom for boys who were orphans. Life on board ship was not very pleasant for the Jews because of the strong anti-semitic feeling which existed amongst the crew. They openly insulted the Jews, walking up and down the decks shouting 'Verfluchte Juden' (dirty Jews) and singing 'Deutschland Uber Alles'.

From Antwerp the ship sailed to Gibralter, then across the Mediterranean to Port Said in Egypt. Here a large number of Jews who had come from Palestine boarded the ship (including the Feiglin family of Melbourne). The journey was very slow, and because it was a small ship, very rough. Consequently most of the passengers were continually seasick. From Port Said the ship went to Colombo in Ceylon, then to Australia calling in at Fremantle and Adelaide before finally arriving at Melbourne on December 8th 1913. At last, after a journey of over four months, KHANA-REIZEL and her brothers were reunited with their brother and sister.

On first arriving in Australia the family lived for a short period with cousins of KHANA-REIZEL's mother, SHILLEM and KHANA Joel, in Drummond Street, Carlton, a northern suburb of Melbourne predominantly inhabited by immigrants. Not long after her sister arrived, TSIPORA married DAVID Zmood and all the family went to live with them. DAVID hated the Russians so much because of the suffering he had undergone at their hands, that he forbade everyone to speak Russian in his house. He referred to the language as 'Dos Chazisher Sprach' (that piggish language). Everyone had to speak Yiddish. This made things particularly difficult for ZALMEN's children because in Russia they had spoken only Russian and knew very little Yiddish. Added to their struggles to learn English, they had to learn Yiddish.

After a while, ZALMEN and his family moved into a house by themselves and TESSIE and MYER soon commenced attending school. There also they led a difficult existence because of their total lack of comprehension of English. MYER became embroiled in a number of fights with other children because he thought they were stupid when they could not understand his Russian. Despite all these difficulties TESSIE and MYER gradually began to pick up the language.

Early in 1914, YAAKOV-LEIB, ZALMEN's brother, came out to Australia. He had left Russia because of a disagreement with his parents-in-law over his dowry. He left his wife BESSIE and son NEYKA (NORMAN) in Russia with the intention of sending for them when he had made enough money to pay for their passage. (BESSIE was the daughter of a miller Svidla from Myadla). Finding it difficult to make a living in Melbourne, YAAKOV-LEIB went to Sydney. But there also he had little luck in finding a suitable job. After a long period of unemployment he was prepared to take any job offered him. In desperation he went to work washing bottles in Woolloomolloo, the slum area of Sydney. He led a very hard life during this period, separated from his family, and struggling to make ends meet. It was probably due to these hardships that he began to be attracted by Communism.

The first few months after arriving in Australia were very difficult ones for ZALMEN. With the money he had brought with him from Russia he went into business travelling around the country towns selling drapery. Unable to speak a word of English he found it very hard to make himself understood. His business kept him away from his family for long periods. Because of these hardships, KHANA-REIZEL was very unhappy in Australia. She was homesick and longed for the life she had led in Russia. At this period Australia was isolated from the rest of the world and had few of the cultural facillities of European society. KHANA-REIZEL had been used to the gay life of Tsarist Russia with its operas and concerts. She found Sunday in Melbourne particularly dull. In Berdyansk every Sunday afternoon, the entire town, dressed in their best clothes, would promenade along the boulevade which ran along the sea-shore to listen to the Naval band playing and to watch all the fashions and activities. In sharp contrast, the people of Melbourne spent Sunday at home and the streets were deserted.

In 1914 the First World War broke out, bringing with it another reason for KHANA-REIZEL to return to Russia. This was the resentment which was shown publicly by many Australians towards foreigners during the war. One day while travelling on a tram, KHANA-REIZEL and

her sister TSIPORA were insulted by an Australian woman who called them :"Filthy Krauts" because they had been conversing in Yiddish and the woman thought that they were Germans.How ironic it was that they should be abused in Australia because they were thought to be Germans after they had been abused by the Germans as 'Dirty Jews'.

KHANA-REIZEL could put up with the boredom no longer; she was determined to return to Russia. Despite all efforts by her relatives to dissuade her, passage was booked on a ship bound for Europe. All the preparations were made whilst her sister and cousins tried desparately to persuade her to change her mind. In the end she gave in and decided to try for a while longer. The ship sailed without them and a few weeks later news reported that it had been sunk in European waters, one of the first casulties of the war. Realising that they all might have been killed, KHANA-REIZEL felt that fate meant them to be in Australia and never again talked of returning.

In 1915 KHANA-REIZEL and ZALMEN had their first child to be born in Australia, a son PINKHAS (PETER).

KHANA-REIZEL's brother PINKHAS enlisted in the Australian army almost as soon as war broke out. He was under age, only fifteen, and had to falsify his age to be accepted into the army. In 1915 he was sent overseas with the Anzac Corps and participated in the landing at Galipoli in the campaign to capture the Dardenelles. After the evacuation of Galipoli he was sent to France where he was wounded in the leg by a piece of shrapnel. He was sent to London to convalesce. There to his surprise he found his cousin VELVEL (WILLIE) Zmood who had also been wounded whilst serving in the Australian army. They had been in contact spasmodically but for some time had not heard from each other and had been concerned for each others welfare. After a period in London, PINKHAS was sent back to France where he spent the rest of the war as an interpreter attached to army headquarters.

Meanwhile in Russia ALTER Luban left Melitopol shortly before the war broke out and travelled across Asia via the Trans-Siberian railway to Harbin in Manchuria. Harbin was an international trading centre at the junction of the railway to Vladivostok, controlled predominantly by Russia. It also had a large population of Jews who had fled from persecution in Europe. ALTER worked there for some time in his aunt's business (his father's sister whose married name was Baranov). He had been fortunate in getting out of Russia when he did because once war broke out it was difficul t to travel freely. Europe was in chaos, families were split up, one member in Europe, others in America or Australia, now prevented by war from joining their loved ones.

In 1917, ALTER Luban left harbin and settled in Seattle, USA. He intended setting himself up in business and when he had saved enough money, he would bring his parents out from Russia to join him. However his plans were interrupted by an event which had been gradually brewing for many years, the Russian Revolution.

CHAPTER SEVEN: REVOLUTION

In March 1917, years of planning by the Communists culminated in the outbreak of open revolution against the corrupt and hated government of Tsar Nicholas the Second. The Tsar was overthrown and subsequently killed, and a Provisional Government set up with Kerensky at its head. The Jews of Russia and their expatriots throughout the world rejoiced; at last centuries of oppression under the Tsarist yoke had ended. The Pale was abolished and Jews were granted equal rights with all other peoples of Russia. Many Jews joined the various factions of the Communist movement, eager to take advantage of the first opportunity they had ever had to shape the destiny of their country. SHMILIK (ANDREI), the son of MANYIK Zhmood, had joined the Bolshevik Party in 1915 and by the time of the Revolution had become influential as a planner of party policy and propagandist. He was later to rise to the uppermost heights of the government heirarchy under the assumed name of ANDREI ALEXANDROVITCH Zhdanov. Many Jews who had fled from Russia to escape persecution returned now, confidant that a new life and freedom for the Jews would be firmly established and eager to lend a hand to shape their country.

The reaction of the Jews living on the Kolonyas was somewhat more restrained. Isolated as they were from the mainstream of political activity, their feelings were less extreme than those of their relations living in the cities. Certainly they were overjoyed to learn of the overthrow of Tsarism, but it took a while for the effects of the Revolution to be fully felt (73).

In Grafskoy the news of the Tsar's abdication arrived one Friday evening. MENAKHEM-MENDEL's family were sitting around the table awaiting his return from Shule. The door opened and he walked in with a solemn expression on his face. Standing in the doorway he stared at his wife and said: "Arop Nikolka fun prestolka".

BEILA-REEVA looked at her husband quizically. What on earth was he talking about ? His language had been a strange mixture of Yiddish and Russian. She thought that he was complaining that she was sitting on his chair so she started to say: "What are you so fussy about .." But he interrupted her and repeated with greater emphasis: "Arop Nikolka fun prestolka ! "

Suddenly BEILA-REEVA understood what he was trying to convey. He had said: "Nicholas has been removed from his throne." He had heard the rumour whilst at Shule. The reason for his obscure way of relating the news was that the event was still unconfirmed and he was frightened that someone might overhear his conversation or that the children would understand if he spoke clearly in Yiddish and would spread the story. Thus if it were found to be untrue he could be accused of treason.

It is obvious that the fall of Tsarism was a momentous occasion. For three hundred years it had stood as a symbol of 'Mother Russia', seemingly immovable and eternal. No wonder MENAKHEM-MENDEL found it hard to believe that the Tsar had really fallen.

In contrast, the reactions of the peasants showed no restraint. They wasted no time in taking advantage of their new found freedom. On an estate near Grafskoy the moujiki rose up en-masse and murdered their landlord and his family. Such outrages were common throughout Russia as the moujiki took their vengeance for all past abuses by the landlord.

Then came the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 and Kerensky was removed from power. Numerous factions strove to control the country: the anti-revolutionary White Guard and the Cossacks who were loyal to the old regime of the Tsar; the Bolsheviks led by Lenin; the Mensheviks and many others. The country was in turmoil, allegiances changed from day to day. This chaos eventually developed into outright Civil War.

The Jews soon realised that their lot was not going to be any easier under the Communists. In fact it became far worse. The Jews were in the middle of all the opposing factions, preyed upon and exploited by them all. As always the Jews were an everpresent scapegoat to blame whenever anything went wrong.

(73) Recollections of the period related by WILLIAM Komesaroff of Melbourne.

As well as the various political parties there were many groups of bandits led by Petlura, Skoropadsky and Makhno . These parasites sided with whichever political party would bring the most benefit to them, time and time again changing their loyalty, but always consistent in one aspect of their activities: persecution of the Jews.

During the Christmas holidays of 1918, ROKHEL and GRIGORY Berchansky with their baby daughter KHAYA (CLARA) travelled from their home Genichesk in the Crimea to Kolonya Engels to visit ROKHEL's parents DINA and AVROM-HILLEL Namakshtansky. It was a happy occasion; the family were glad of the chance of spending some time pleasantly with each other in those hard times when occasions for relaxation were few and far between. This was particularly so as the family was only just recovering from their grief at the loss of the eldest son KHAIM in 1917

KHAIM had married his cousin KHAY-ROKHEL, the daughter of Rabbi ZALMEN Komisaruk of Vasilkovka. The couple settled in the village of Nikitovka. However they had not been married long when KHAIM contracted meningitis and died. At that time his sister ROKHEL was due to visit her parents. As she was pregnant at the time, her family were anxious to break the news of her brother's death to her gently. As her husband GRIGORY was serving in the army, her brother PINKHAS came to Genichesk to help her travel home to Engels. Their father AVROM-HILLEL met the train at the station in Konstantinovka and drove them back to the Kolonya. He kept the sad news from ROKHEL and joked with her as was his nature during the journey home. She asked after her brother KHAIM and her father replied that he had not heard from KHAIM for a while. That evening, being Friday night, whilst making Kiddush, AVROM-HILLEL began to weep. Astonished, ROKHEL asked him why and he replied: "From joy my child ". Only after the conclusion of the Sabbath did he break the news to her of KHAIM's death. Later the eldest son SHMILIK performed the ceremony of Khalitza whereby he relinquished his rights to marry his brother's widow KHAY-ROKHEL should she chose to remarry. DINA was griefstriken at her son's death and wrote to her brother Rabbi ZALMEN for consolation. His reply was that such was G-d's will.

Once again, on that December day in 1918, the Namakshtansky family(74) was gathered together. Little did anyone realise that this day which had started off so happily was to end in tragedy. Suddenly without warning, the peace of that holiday mood was shattered. All chaos broke loose as a band of wild horsemen swept down on the Jewish Kolonya: the Makhnovtsi on one of their numerous raids.

The terrible events of that day were recorded by a witness and reported in a history of the period: 'The Scroll of the Slaughter' by A.D.Rozental, page 110:

'<u>Trudoliubovka</u> (a Jewish colony,district of Yekaterinoslav):

In the month of May (?) in the year 1919 there burst into the colony Trudoliubovka, a large camp of partisan peasants from the surroundings, about eight hundred armed men. They deployed in the streets, broke into the houses, dragged the Jews outside, clubbed them with the butts of the rifles and drove them to the "Assembly". In one barn they collected about one hundred and fifty people and demanded from them that they should hand over to them the weopons which they possessed. When the Jews handed over to them the small amount of weopons which they had, the partisans closed the barn and set it alight on all its sides. They set guards around the barn. Anyone who tried to escape via the roof, the guards slashed them with their sabres. Six Jews who made an attempt to flee were stabbed and the remainder were all burnt. And whilst one gang was engaged with the burnt ones, another gang was deployed on the houses and raped all the women and young girls who were in the colony. And the weeping and shrieking of the tortured ones mingled with the cries of the burnt ones, and a sharp choking odour of the flesh of the men roasting in the fire was carried in the air.' (75)

(74) This date, as recalled by ROKHEL, is in conflict with that recorded in the report published by Rozenthal,

(75) A description of the pogrom by WILLIAM Komesaroff of Melbourne closely follows this report with certain omissions. He claimed that all males over the age of fifteen were collected in the

Word soon reached the Komisaruks in nearby Grafskoy that Kolonya Engels had been attacked. Quickly the men mounted their horses and rode over to see if they could be of any assistance. On arriving, a tragic sight greeted them. An atmosphere of grief hung over the Kolonya as weeping women and children told them how all the adult males had been killed. DINA Namakshtansky could barely compose herself to tell her brothers how her husband AVROM-HILLEL, sons SHMILIK, PINKHAS and VELVEL, and son-in-law GRIGORY had been murdered. All that remained of her once large family were her younger sons ZALMEN and LEIBL, daughters YOKHVED and ROKHEL, and ROKHEL's baby daughter KHAYA (CLARA).

The remnants of the family were taken back to Grafskoy where they moved in with DINA's brother SIMKHA. There no effort was spared to care for them despite the cramped circumstances of SIMKHA's small house. Once again DINA wrote to her brother Rabbi ZALMEN to tell him the tragic news and once again he replied that such seemed to be G-d's will.

The family in Grafskoy had been fortunate in not being subjected to a similar massacre. It had been Makhno's intention to proceed to Grafskoy after finishing his work in Engels. However a messenger from the battle lines which were engaged with the White Army rode up and announced: "Whilst you've been busy killing Jews here, the Whites have been slaughtering us up ahead"(76). So Makhno quickly gathered his men and rode on to the front, passing through Grafskoy without stopping. It should be noted that certain historians of the Civil War attempted to whitewash Makhno by claiming he was not anti-semitic. This is totally untrue as any member of the Komisaruk family who lived through the Civil War would know. His headquarters in the village of Gulyai-Polye, just past Engels were a base for frequent raids on the Kolonyas. His very name struck terror in the hearts of the Jews. One member of the family actually met him face to face, although without being aware of it. Once KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) Komisaruk was buying certain produce in the market from a strange, very short man. As he left people told him the man was Makhno whose custom it was to appear incognito in various places to gather information.

The age old feelings of mistrust for the Jews were still deeply ingrained in the minds of the various groups struggling for power in the Civil War. As a result, whenever a Jewish settlement was captured by a particular group, they attacked the Jews for alleged collaboration with the group who had been in command of the village previously. And then another group would capture the village and also attack the Jews. And so it went on; the Jews being accused of treason by all sides. The Jews were driven from pillar to post without letup. ESTER and KHAIM-MOSHE Luban had been living in Melitopol. When the town was captured by one particular group they were ordered to leave and go to Mikhailovka. They led a life filled with sorrow because of the many years they had been separated from their only son ALTER. ESTER wrote the following letter to her nephew ZALMEN in Australia:

'My dear and loving children:

I beg anyone into whose hands this letter falls, send me an answer. I do not know where to begin. To speak with you will help me. I hope that I will receive a letter from you. I will write about everything. We were in Melitopol; now we are in Mikhailovka. We were chased out and had to go wherever they told us. I am opening my heart to you with the help of this letter.

With G-d's help and a lot of hard wishing we will get to Harbin and to our only child. He is in America, in Seattle. But G-d will bring us to Harbin. We will soon know all, whatever happens.

My dear ones, I would like to know your address and how you all are living. It can be that maybe you know something more about our close relatives.

(75)continued:
barn and killed. The identity of the group as being Makhnovtsi has also been omitted by Rozental, a fact clearly known to the survivors.
(76)WILLIAM Komesaroff of Melbourne.

I beg you to understand by sorrow.
Keep well my nephew ZALMEN Komisaruk. I will await your letter.
This will be my address, write to me quickly there.

With lots of luck,
ESTER Luban

Harbin Landing
Yanskaya No.12 Ya.G.Baranov, for Luban '

(The above letter is a translation from Yiddish and Russian)

A furthur insight into the conditions of the times can be gained from a description of of her childhood written by KHAYALA, KHANA-REIZEL Komisaruk's youngest sister who had been left in Russia:

> '12/3/1917 in my land was a revolution. The Tsar was disposed of. We walked with flags and cried: 'Hoorah'.It was a very happy day. Furthur the hardship started which affected not only me but the whole land and all the people.On our fatherland from abroad all the capitalists came to help the White Guard. Our village was on the road to the Crimea. The armies went through the village. I went in the morning to the school. The village is quiet. I sit through the classes and I hear rifle shots. We run home but there are bullets flying in all directions. One morning there came the Whites to the village, the next morning the Reds. We lived through a lot of hardship. In the cities the schools had closed but in our village school went on. The crop was bad. The people were starving. It was very cold. No clothes. Father was very sick, especially after one of the Cossacks, a White Guard came to our apartment at night and started to search for some secret papers. I jumped out of the window and mother after me. We ran to a German family we knew to ask for protection. Another Cossack called his officer and said that my father is a spy, that he feeds information to the Reds and that way they are losing their battles. The Cossack put father against a tree and shot at him but missed. We heard the shot and started to cry. We and our acquaintences started to run and cry and that saved father. But father got very bad. After that, hunger and sickness, and in April 1922 he died. He was 56 years old. There was only the two of us left. I left school, couldn't study any more, started to look for work, did anything whatever I could find, peeled potatoes, wound cotton, kept on selling things which were left after father, just to survive those horrid times, not to die. After that was organised in the village an organisation to help the starving. Uncle from New York sent a parcel. Everybody started to live a bit better. Parents started to think that it is time to teach the children. I gave private tuition for which I was paid. We started to live better and at the end of 1923 I received from Roza the first letter' (77)

During the early stages of the Revolution, one of MENAKHEM-MENDEL's children had a first hand experience of the barbarism which had been unleashed. With the breakdown of all law and order, everyone was free to act as they chose. As a result, many people took the opportunity of 'getting even with' people whom they bore a grudge against. One afternoon, MENAKHEM-MENDEL's youngest son KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) was in the Shule in Grafskoy during afternoon prayers. As is often the case with young boys, he found his attention wandering. He looked out the window and longed to be able to go outside and enjoy the sunshine Suddenly he caught sight of a carriage approaching the Kolonya. He could see it travelling along the road outside the plantation.Quickly he finished his prayers and ran outside to investigate. He stood on the side of the road and watched the carriage approach. When it drew

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(77) Translated from a letter written in Russian in 1976. In referring to 'father' or 'mother' KHAYALAH means her adoptive parents KHASA and ARON Abramovitch, see page 41.

abreast of him it stopped and a man got out and approached him. He asked KHAIM-VELVEL how to get to Marenfeld. KHAIM-VELVEL gave him the directions but the man could not understand him. "Get in," he said in a commanding tone. KHAIM-VELVEL became frightened and tried to run away. But the man caught him, pulled out a 'Sashka' (sabre) and forced him into the coach. Keeping the blade against his side, the man forced KHAIM-VELVEL to direct the coach to Marenfeld.

On arriving in Marenfeld the coach stopped outside a large house and a few of the men went inside. Shortly afterwards they returned dragging a man between them. The coach started off again, then stopped near a large tree. Everyone got out including KHAIM-VELVEL who was still being guarded by the man with the Sashka. The man they had abducted was tied to the tree and KHAIM-VELVEL was forced to watch as his captor raised the Sashka and slashed the man to pieces. Apparently the man, who was a German, had once been the employer of the men, and their action was revenge for illtreatment at his hands.

After completing their work the men turned to KHAIM-VELVEL and said: "Wait here until we have gone, and if you tell anyone who did this, we will come back and do the same thing to you." Then they rode off. KHAIM-VELVEL ran home terrified to tell his parents of the experience which was to remain forever ingrained on his memory.

Added to the horrors of the Civil War was the First World War. After the initial outbreak of war, the German army had progressed rapidly across southern Russia. This region was particularly valuable because of its resources of coal and wheat. In the region of the Kolonyas, little fighting took place; the main concern of the Germans being to collect as much grain as they could. One of the few incidents which occurred was on Yom Kippur in Grafskoy. This particular year MENAKHEM-MENDEL was sick and unable to go to Shule. So his sons PINKHAS and VELVEL were there without him. During the course of the service, the congregation were shocked to discover that a German soldier had entered. The man walked over to KHAIM-VELVEL and stood next to him. Although terrified at first, KHAIM-VELVEL's fears were soon allayed as the soldier,who was Jewish, commenced praying. Other than this incident there was little contact with the Germans. Eventually, when the Red Army advanced into German held territory, the Germans beat a hasty retreat.

Aside from those who were killed in pogroms, the poor living conditions claimed the lives of many members of the family. On the 9th of Av, 1919, SIMKHA Komisaruk died in Grafskoy, prey to disease rampant at the time. Soon afterwards, consumption claimed the life of his daughter BEILA. Thus his widow KHAVA-ROKHA was left with her son PINKHAS and daughter KHAYA-GITTEL together with the remnants of the Namakshtansky family who lived with them.

Likewise, Rabbi ZALMEN Komisaruk fell victim to an outbreak of cholera in the town of Vasilkovka. Conditions in that town were so disorganised that his widow MINDL was unable to arrange that he be given a proper Jewish funeral. So the late rabbi of the town was cast into a mass grave together with other victims of the plague. MINDL remained in Vasilkovka with her family of whom MOTTEL, MEIR-YITSKHOK-ELKHONON and ITKA were married. Contact with this branch of the family was lost after the Civil War and it appears that those who survived perished at the hands of the Nazis during the Second World War. X SURVIVED see MEMOIRS MORDEKHAI Komisaruk

In 1919, MENAKHEM-MENDEL became ill. At first he became hoarse and found it hard to talk properly. Then he began to have trouble eating. His son BENYOMIN, who worked as a cap-maker in Yuzovka, would bring him delicacies when he came to the Kolonya for a visit, but MENAKHEM-MENDEL could not eat them. Gradually his condition worsened; he became physically weak and was unable to continue with the farmwork. Finally he was unable to rise from his bed. On the 24th of Av, 1919, MENAKHEM-MENDEL passed away, two weeks after his brother SIMKHA. Although his family were not aware of the nature of his illness at the time, the symptoms seem to point to cancer of the throat.

MENAKHEM-MENDEL had led a hard life. From the time that he was a young man he had had to arise early each morning and work his fingers to the bone until sunset, trying to make a living out of his small farm. He had barely been able to support his large family. But he was an optimist. Where other men would have given up the struggle, MENAKHEM-MENDEL always hoped for a brighter future. He used to say: "What the time brings, the mind cannot imagine."(78) Although a busy man, he never lacked the time to study and attend to his religious duties. Probably due to his hardships he was inclined to be short-tempered. But despite this he was loved and respected by all his family. All his life he had been spurred on by the knowledge that his land would provide for the future security of his children. Therefore it was perhaps one consolation that he never lived to see the destruction of everything he had built up.

Shortly after her father's death, MENAKHEM-MENDEL's daughter YOKHVED married ESAK Sherr. The Sherr family lived in Grafskoy directly across the road from MENAKHEM-MENDEL. ESAK was a soldier in an Ulany regiment which saw action against the Germans. It was whilst he was serving with his regiment that ESAK first saw evidence of the corruption which precipitated the Revolution. The soldiers, badly in need of equipment, would receive a consignment of rifles and ammunition. These rifles would fire about two shots before exploding in the face of their user. With such ill-made weapons, the Russian soldier was supposed to hold off the German army. ESAK found out that well-made rifles were being sold to the Germans by the Russian officers for great profits. When the hostilities between the Russians and the Germans ceased, the army disintegrated and ESAK took the opportunity of returning to live with his wife in Grafskoy. There the shocking news awaited him that his father had been murdered during a pogrom.

After MENAKHEM-MENDEL's death, life became even worse for his family. BEILA-REEVA was left with the responsibility of looking after the unmarried members of her family. They depended a great deal on the married ones to contribute to the family's upkeep. ZALMEN and YAAKOV-LEIB were sending money from Australia but this took a long time to get through the disrupted mail. Then this too ceased to arrive for about three years and the Komisaruks had no contact with their relatives overseas. In desperation, BEILA-REEVA's younger sons PINKHAS and KHAIM-VELVEL took it upon themselves to support their mother and sisters. Although aged only fourteen and eleven respectively on their father's death, they took over the farmwork. PINKHAS was not very well and could not manage strenuous work, thus leaving most of the laborious jobs to KHAIM-VELVEL. Between them they made sure that the routine work of the farm was continued as far as possible. They tended the animals, planted the crops, and brought in the harvest. Their first problem arose when the ploughing had to be done. Although PINKHAS was the bigger of the two, he could not manage the heavy plough. The job was left to KHAIM-VELVEL. But he was short and could not reach the handles of the plough properly. He had inherited the ingenuity and skill with his hands that his father had been known for and so he devised a platform which he rested across the handles of the plough from which he could steer the horse. Time and time again he fell off the platform as the horse jolted, but undaunted he would pick himself up again and continue ploughing. Little did he realise at the time that had he fallen forwards instead of backwards, he would have fallen under the sharp blade of the plough and been cut to pieces. PINKHAS and KHAIM-VELVEL persevered, knowing that the lives of their mother and sisters depended on every coppeck they could earn from their produce.

The same situation confronted SIMKHA's family. Since his father's death, PINKHAS had to support his mother and sister with the help of the Namakshtansky family who were living with them.

To add to these difficulties, the Kolonyas were constant prey to the many bandits operating in the area. Grafskoy was raided a number of times and luckily the family were able to escape just in time. However, on one occasion MENAKHEM-MENDEL's daughters YOKHVED

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(78) WILLIAM Komesaroff of Melbourne.

and BASSIE did not manage to get out of the Kolonya with the rest of the family before the bandits arrived. Terrified of their fate if they were caught, the two women looked for a hiding place. But the house was only small and provided few hiding places. At their wit's end they suddenly had an idea. Their late father's pickle barrel which was in the cellar would provide an excellent hiding place. Quickly they climbed into it and pulled the lid over them. Fortunately the barrel was empty at the time. The bandits raided the Kolonya, looting and smashing furniture. They took whatever was of the slightest value. Miraculously they omitted to look into the pickle barrel. When they had collected as much loot as they could find, they rode out of the Kolonya. The Komisaruks returned expecting to find the worst since they knew YOKHVED and BASSIE had not escaped. But to their relief the two were discovered unharmed in the pickle barrel.

Another source of danger was the Mongols. These wild horsemen had penetrated into European Russia and were harassing the inhabitants of the small towns. Unaccustomed to the conveniences of modern life, they were fascinated by the simplest of household devices. On raiding the Kolonyas they demanded to be given watches. They had never examined a watch closely and so the women were able to fool them by giving them small perfume containers which were shaped like watches.

As the stores of grain were depleted, famine set in and sickness soon followed. In KHAIM-VELVEL's case his face swelled and his eyes bulged from their sockets. As his condition worsened, the Feldsher had to be called. He took a knife and cut the skin at the level of the eyebrows to relieve the swelling.

Eventually, because of the difficulty of farming and the constant bandit raids, most of the Komisaruks in Grafskoy and most of the Jews on the Kolonyas were forced to leave their homes and settle in the cities. MENAKHEM-MENDEL's and SIMKHA's families, together with DINA Namakshtansky and her family, as well as their cousin BEREL Komisaruk and his sisters, packed their belongings, closed up their houses, and set off for the town of Yuzovka. Other relatives settled elsewhere, such as SHLOMO-REUVEN Komisaruk who settled in Mariupol. Thus came to an end eighty years of the Komisaruks' residence in Grafskoy.

On arriving in Yuzovka the Komisaruks found shelter together in the same building. There they were joined by REIZEL and KOPPEL Kogan who had come from Kolonya Bachers. Their daughter BASSIE had married BENYOMIN (MENAKHEM-MENDEL's son). But conditions in Yuzovka were not much better than they were on the Kolonyas. By early 1920 the famine had set in in southern Russia; the crops had failed and the country was suffering from a severe winter. Food was very scarse and people existed on a subsistence diet. As a result BEILA-REEVA became very ill and began to visibly wither away. BENYOMIN's wife BASSIE was pregnant at the time and the attention which in normal circumstances would have been given to an expectant mother, was simply not available.

The Komisaruks had brought their cow from the Kolonya and for a while it provided them with milk. However they barely had enough food for themselves let alone for the cow, so they decided to sell it. BEILA-REEVA, her daughter BASSIE and YOKHVED, and KHAIM-VELVEL took the cow to the Yuzovka market. All day long they stood offering the cow to passers-by, but nobody had and money to pay for it nor anything worthwhile to exchange for it. As night fell they gave up and returned home. KHAIM-VELVEL was leading the cow and on the way home a man approached him and offered a few coppecks for the animal. KHAIM-VELVEL had no choice; he had to accept this pittance and part with the animal which had once been one of his father's prized possessions.

As time went it became increasingly difficult for the large family to support themselves. BENYOMIN did the best he could but there was little demand for the caps he made. People were scared to carry money at all for if the Bolsheviks caught anyone with White money they would accuse the bearer of holding sympathies with the Whites. On the other hand if the town was captured by the Whites they would terrorise anyone found with Bolshevik money. To avoid this predicament people had to trade in kind. The Komisaruks tried to

support themselves by doing any jobs that came to hand. They made cigarettes and sold them. Likewise picture frames, small ovens and odds and ends. As KHAVA-ROKHA had been the hairdresser on the Kolonya, she taught this trade to ZALMEN and LEIBL Namakshtansky. In the case of BEILA-REEVA's family, the only adult males were BENYOMIN and ESAK, such that much of the burden had to be born by the younger children.

Eventually the situation became so intolerable that there was only one course left open in order to save their lives. This was to return to the Kolonyas in the hope of finding food. BENYOMIN, ESAK, PINKHAS (SIMKHA's son) and a Jewish neighbour gathered together as many of their possessions which they could do without, loaded them onto a cart, and set off for the Kolonyas to trade them for food.

They had travelled only a short distance when ESAK developed a toothache. By the time they reached Grafskoy the pain had become so intense that ESAK decided to remain there with his mother whilst the others continued on. It was Friday afternoon on the 25th of Adar as the trio arrived in a particular Kolonya. As Shabbat was about to commence they had to put off their trading until Sunday. The rabbi, who had known MENAKHEM-MENDEL, invited BENYOMIN to stay with him, but BENYOMIN declined the offer as he did not want to leave the others. So they found lodgings at a local inn.

Shortly after they had settled down for the night there was a loud knocking at the door. BENYOMIN got up and opened it. Outside there was a group of uniformed men who informed BENYOMIN and his companions that they were wanted at 'headquarters'. They did not say which headquarters but they appeared to be such ruffians that BENYOMIN decided not to offer any resistance. After dressing they were taken outside to where a cart awaited them. They were driven off, out of the Kolonya, along a rarely used road. After travelling for quite some time, the cart turned off the main road and headed for a ramshackle house which appeared deserted. The cart pulled up outside the house and one of the men got out and knocked on the door. A man opened the door and a lengthy discussion ensued. By this time BENYOMIN and his companions were feeling quite uneasy about the strange circumstances of their abduction. However there was nothing they could do about it as the men were heavily armed. The discussion ended and the cart drove on. It was taken around the house and down into a deep gully. The intentions of their escort soon became apparent as the three captives were roughly ordered to remove their fur coats, shoes and other valuables. The three of them were lined up with their backs to their escorts, a volley of shots rang out, and the three fell to the ground.

Back in Yuzovka the Komisaruks, and ESAK who had meanwhile returned, anxiously awaited the return of BENYOMIN and PINKHAS. Days passed and they were long overdue. Then one day there was a knock at the door. Outside were some peasants bearing in their arms a bloodstained and horribly mutilated man. On closer investigation the man was discovered to be PINKHAS. He was in a shocking condition. For days he lay, barely alive. When he regained consiousness he was unable to speak. Not knowing what had become of BENYOMIN, the family did everything they could to induce him to speak. But for a long time their efforts were in vain. Gradually PINKHAS' condition improved and by signs and the few words he managed to speak, the whole ghastly story was pieced together.

After the three men were shot, the bandits wasted no time in getting away with their loot. They assumed that the three were dead and didn't bother to check. But they were mistaken. PINKHAS was not dead. Each of the men had been shot through the back of the neck, but in PINKHAS' case the bullet had passed right through without killing him. He had, however, been terribly mutilated as the bullet passed through, tearing away part of his tongue and the lower part of his jaw, thus accounting for the fact that he had difficulty in speaking. For a long while he had remained unconscious; how long, whether it was hours or days, he did not know. When he regained his consciousness he found that he could hardly move because of frostbite. Gradually he dragged himself towards the mute bodies of BENYOMIN and his neighbour. He felt them and found that they were both dead. As his strength returned to him gradually, he managed to crawl to

the main road. Here he again lay for an indeterminable period until some passing peasants found him. Somehow they managed to find out that his family lived in Yuzovka and there they took him.

The family's immediate concern was for BENYOMIN's body. They could not leave it lying out there in the gully. But since it may have been dangerous to return to the scene of the murder, the family found it difficult to arrange for a funeral. Everyone whom they approached with the intention of collected a group of men to go and reclaim the body, was too frightened to join them. So BENYOMIN's body was to remain where he had fallen, without the benefit of a Jewish burial. Several years later, once the family had left Russia and after the Civil War had ended, a letter together with money was sent to a rabbi in the region with the request that he attempt to locate the remains. But it is doubtfull if he succeeded.

The grief of the family was inconsolable. They had been able to survive privation and hunger, but the sudden and brutal death of BENYOMIN plunged them into despair. Everyone who had known BENYOMIN had liked him. When the news of his death eventually reached the relatives in Australia they were particularly grieved at this loss. KHANA-REIZEL recalled the many happy occasions when BENYOMIN had spent a few days with his brother ZALMEN's family in Berdyansk. She had been particularly fond of her brother-in-law whom she remembered as a particularly handsome man, always immaculately dressed and ever amiable.

Shortly after BENYOMIN's death, his wife BASSIE gave birth to the baby he was never to see, a daughter. However due to the lack of medical conditions, the baby was soon to die.

In 1921 yet another member of the family was claimed by the rigours of the times. Since the tragic deaths of most of her family in the pogrom in Engels, DINA Namakshtansky had been subject to inconsolable grief. In addition the constant tensions, lack of food and disease gradually weakened her health. At last she could bear no more and passed away, once more leaving her orphaned children.

Early in 1921, unexpectantly there was a glimmer of hope. A messenger came to BEILA-REEVA telling her that if she went to the railway station she could collect a letter from her son who was in London. The family were excited by this news as well as mystified as to who was in London. Since the station was not in the city but about three miles outside it near the coal mines, the family were frightened to go there. For all they knew the entire story may have been fabricated and they might have been ambushed and killed on the way to the station. In the end they decided to take a chance and YOKHVED and BASSIE went to the station and picked up the letter. On reading it they discovered that it was YAAKOV-LEIB who was in London. However they were disappointed when he made no mention of any attempt to get them out of Russia. They made enquiries from an official on the train, which was controlled by the Red Cross, but he could tell them very little. Since the Red Cross was a neutral organisation he was not at liberty to assist them in escaping from Russia. All he was able to do was to hint that there was the possibility of escape. "If you can manage to get to Moscow you will hear more from your brother there".

By 1921 YAAKOV-LEIB had managed to save enough money to enable him to attempt to rejoin his family in Russia and to see if he could bring them to Australia. Through an immigration official in Sydney he had managed to arrange visas for his wife BASSIE and son NEYKE (NORMAN). Although he had originally intended only bringing his wife and son out of Russia, he was persuaded by ZALMEN to bring his mother and the rest of the brothers and sisters. YAAKOV-LEIB left his shop in Ballarat in ZALMEN's hands and set sail for Europe. Meanwhile ZALMEN obtained entry visas from the Australian authorities and set about making the necessary arrangements to receive the family.

On arriving in London, YAAKOV-LEIB made enquiries about getting into Russia and contacting his family. However, he was informed that this was impossible. The only way he could get them out was for them to travel to Moscow. Once there, they would have to wait until transport could be arranged to take them to Riga in Latvia where YAAKOV-LEIB could meet them and take them to London.

In Yuzovka the family did not know what to do for the best. The letter from YAAKOV-LEIB was so vague that they were hesitant about taking such drastic action as travelling all the way to Moscow on the off-chance that something might eventuate there. They knew that the journey was a long and hazardous one which could take its toll on the lives of the sick and young members of the family. After much deliberation they decided that to remain in Yuzovka would mean almost certain death by starvation, so, having nothing to lose, they would make the journey to Moscow.

The journey had to be delayed briefly since YOKHVED was pregnant. In May 1921 she gave birth to a son, MENDEL-BENYOMIN. As soon as she was fit to travel the family packed their few remaining belongings and set off for Moscow. With the easing of the Civil War, hundreds of thousands of refugees were taking the opportunity to flee from Russia. Because of this, transport was difficult to obtain. There were no regular railway services and as the number of refugees increased, the trains could no longer cope with them. Therefore they did not stop at places where they knew refugees were waiting. In some places, when the train was known to be approaching, thousands of refugees would lie across the tracks to force the train to stop. One day, one of the younger members of the family overheard two officials discussing a plan whereby the trains were to stop a few miles before the station to refuel. Quickly he informed the rest of the family and they were able to board the train secretly at the refueling point.

Because of the size of the family they were not always able to travel together. There were ten of them: BEILA-REEVA, BASSIE and NEYKA (YAAKOV-LEIB's wife and son), YOKHVED and ESAK Sherr with their infant son MENDEL-BENYOMIN, BASSIE, ZLATR, PINKHAS and KHAIM-VELVEL. BENYOMIN's widow BASSIE had decided to remain in Yuzovka with her parents, REIZEL and KOPPEL Kogan. On occasions there was room for only two or three on the train. If they waited until there was room for all of them, too much time would be wasted and they might miss the chance of getting passage on a ship. So it was decided that advantage would be taken of any place available, even if it meant leaving somebody behind. There were times when the family was dispersed over many miles. The anxiety was very high, not knowing whether somebody would be left behind permanently, unable to catch up with the rest.

One such incident occurred as the train bearing the family was approaching Kharkov. They were split into three groups. One group consisted of BEILA-REEVA and her grandson NEYKA. A few wagons down the train was another group, and still further the remainder. As usual the train did not stop in the city but passed straight through and came to a halt a mile or so further on. There BEILA-REEVA decided to disembark. She and NEYKA jumped down, but to her horror the train started to move off before the others realised she was no longer aboard.

It travelled on for a short distance and stopped again. This time the others decided to check on their mother and were horrified to find her missing. They were in a quandary as to the best course open to them. They were frantic with worry about BEILA-REEVA who was sick and NEYKA who was afterall a mere eight year old. So they loaded their belongings on their backs, no easy task as included were their bedding ('Perenes') as well as a Samovar, and headed back along the railway line by foot. It took them most of the night before they saw the lights of the city ahead. As they got closer they saw a figure sitting huddled against a pile of clothes. It was BEILA-REEVA. As for NEYKA, far from being frightened he was busying himself looking after his grandmother. He had made sure that she was settled down comfortably and then went off to find her a warm drink. As they arrived he was boiling water over a small fire he had made, full of importance at the responsibility thrust upon him. The family settled down on the station. There they spent about six days until another train arrived to take them on their journey.

Conditions for those travelling on the trains were appalling. Most of the carriages were no more than cattle trucks which provided no protection from the cold and the rain. The only attempt made to

improve conditions was the provision of fires on some trains as well as large buckets of disinfectant. Because of the unsettled political situation it was dangerous to travel by day. Thus the trains had to try and sneak through by night. This meant that it was difficult for the refugees to sleep. Often they had to spend the night sleeping on the station.

On one occasion, calamity struck the family: NEYKA contracted measles. He was placed by the authorities in a quarantine tent. It was rumoured amongst the refugees that anyone who was put in this tent was never seen again. So one night KHAIM-VELVEL took matters into his own hands. He crept up to the quarantine tent, crawled under the side, found NEYKA and dragged him out to safety.

Throughout the journey they were in constant danger from marauding bandits. Since ESAK was the only adult male he had to protect the other members of the family. In order to do so more effectively he grew an immense beard to make himself look tough and so make would-be assailants wary of attacking.

In all, the journey from Yuzovka to Moscow took over four months. On arriving in Moscow the family went immediately to the British Trade Mission (whom they had been told to contact) to see if a letter from YAAKOV-LEIB awaited them. But there was no word from him. They had no choice other than to settle down in Moscow and wait for a letter. Every day two of them went to the Trade Mission and sat outside all day in case a letter arrived. They were fed since YAAKOV-LEIB had deposited money in London for this purpose.

When YAAKOV-LEIB heard through the Trade Mission that the family had arrived, he left London and went to Berlin. There he had to remain for a time before proceeding to Riga.

After the family had been in Moscow about two months, there was a knock at the door one night. It was a messenger from the Trade Mission informing them that he had arranged places on a train to Riga. Quickly they packed their belongings and were taken to the station. The train travelled all night across northern Russia. In the morning they found themselves in Riga, freedom at last.

When YAAKOV-LEIB first saw his family he was horrified. He could hardly recognise them. Years of near starvation and the uncertainty and terror of the Civil War had left them looking like scarecrows. His mother whom he remembered as a tall, well-built woman, was now thin and haggard, as were the rest of the family. They were in such a state that if they had arrived a few weeks later, they would probably have died of exhaustion and exposure. After a joyful reunion with his wife and son whom he had not seen for seven years, YAAKOV-LEIB made plans for the rest of the journey.

The first thing he did was to collect all their bundles of Perenes (bedding) and burn them. The family were shocked at this since they had dragged them right across Russia only to be burned at the journey's end. But YAAKOV-LEIB knew that they were of no value and were lice-infested. He had bought a suit of clothing for each member of the family however he had not realised how short KHAIM-VELVEL was and had some difficulty in finding clothes to fit him. Anxious not to delay longer than necessary, YAAKOV-LEIB took his brother to the market where he had a suit made for him overnight.

Having acquired Polish visas, the family boarded a train leaving Riga for the West. Once again a long journey ensued, across Lithuania and northern Poland, then into Germany, arriving at Berlin. They spent another month in Berlin, during which they celebrated the festival of Chanukah. This delay was again due to the difficulties of arranging transport.

At some stage during the journey KHAIM-VELVEL reached the age of Barmitzvah, but due to the difficulties under which they were travelling, it was not possible to arrange a proper Barmitzvah.

Eventually transport was arranged to London. The family set off again, across Germany and Belgium to Ostend. There they boarded a ship which took them to London. A month was spent in London before they boarded a ship on the 1st of January, 1922, which was to take them on the last leg of their journey to freedom.

In March 1922, the family arrived in Adelaide, Australia, thus ending their terrible journey which had taken about eleven months. The ship was met at Adelaide by ZALMEN, After a joyful reunion, they travelled by train to Melbourne.

On arriving in Melbourne ZALMEN took the family to his home where all the family were gathered, eagerly waiting to see the family from whom they had been separated for so long.When ZALMEN's children saw their grandmother, they were so frightened by her haggard appearance that they ran away and hid behind a couch.

Soon after the family's arrival, the news spread throughout Melbourne that the first family to come to Australia from Russia after the Revolution had arrived. Newspaper reporters interviewed the family and a photo was printed in the major evening paper, the 'Herald'. The family had little chance to settle down as they were besieged by Russians living in Melbourne anxious for news of their families left in Russia. Gradually the excitement died down and the family were able to settle into the house ZALMEN had provided for them in Hawthorn, a suburb of Melbourne.

CHAPTER EIGHT: AUSTRALIA

ZALMEN Komesaroff's efforts to establish himself in business in Australia led him into many and varied enterprises. During the period 1913 to 1915 he worked as a hawker, travelling around the country towns selling clothing. In 1916 he bought a fruit shop. The need to be up early the morning to attend the markets proved too strenuous for him, so he sold this business before the year was out and bought a drapery in Victoria Street, North Richmond. This proved to be the beginning of a thriving business which expanded by 1918 to include a chain of shops in the Victorian country towns of Shepparton, Charlton, Yarram, Kerang, St.Arnaud, Hamilton, Ararat, Mildura, Terang, Traralgon and Ballarat. These shops were operated by a partnership known as 'Komesaroff Brothers'. Initially ZALMEN took into the business his brothers-in-law ALTER, PINKHAS and LOUIS. They were later joined by his brother YAAKOV-LEIB. Then YAAKOV-LEIB went into his own business soon after his return from Russia in 1922 together with his brother-in-law ESAK Sherr, who had taken over ZALMEN's shop in Ballarat.

As time went by, the remaining partners in 'Komesaroff Brothers' launched out on their own. ALTER opened his own shops. PINKHAS and LOUIS gave up the clothing trade altogether and became optometrists. PINKHAS opened a practice in Melbourne and LOUIS in the country town of Bairnsdale where he lived for some years before returning to Melbourne.

For BEILA-REEVA and her family the first few years after their arrival were difficult ones. Their relatives who had been in Melbourne for some years did their best to assist them. Both ZALMEN and YAAKOV-LEIB were able to find jobs for their brothers.

Until such time as the new arrivals learned English their language difficulties often resulted in amusing situations, although they would have been considered far from amusing at the time. On one occasion, KHAIM-VELVEL was trying to catch a tram to get home from the city. He walked along the street until he saw a sign which he thought indicated a tram stop. But in his confusion he read the English characters as Russian ones, a common mistake amongst the new arrivals. He believed that the sign said: "Pasta na vils", meaning that the tram stopped there; whereas it said "Post No Bills". Oblivious to his error, KHAIM-VELVEL stood waiting for a tram. Needless to say the first tram to arrive did not stop, nor did the second, nor any succeeding tram. KHAIM-VELVEL was frantic. He could not understand why these trams apparently did not want him as a passenger. No matter how much he waved they would not stop. As time passed he feared that he would never get home. So he began walking, and as he walked, the tears poured down his face as he silently cursed the trams and regretted the day he had set foot in this harsh land where even the trams were a source of misery to small boys.

In 1924 the new arrivals moved to Ballarat, a country town about eighty miles from Melbourne. Here YAAKOV-LEIB and ESAK had shops, and were able to find jobs for PINKHAS and KHAIM-VELVEL.

In 1927, BEILA-REEVA returned with her family to Melbourne, settling in the suburb of St.Kilda. Her main concern in life was her family. She was particularly interested in seeing her remaining single daughters , BESSIE and LOTTIE (ZLATR) married. BESSIE married NATHAN Rosenbaum and they settled in the country town of Geelong where they had MAX, SHIRLEY and SYDNEY. LOTTIE married BRAHAM Allen and they had one daughter, SHIRLEY.

In 1935, on the 4th of Iyar, BEILA-REEVA died. During the last years of her life she had spent her time devoted to her children and grandchildren. She was very fond of her grandchildren who held her in some awe and referred to her as 'The Babushka' (grandmother). She was the unchallengeable matriarch of the family. Whenever her relatives came to visit her she would be found absorbed in one or other of her collection of Hebrew and Yiddish books. Many happy hours were spent in discussions of religious law and custom with her children who regarded her as an authority on such matters. BEILA-REEVA was also accomplished with her hands and produced delicate crochet and embroidery.

She was a strong woman until a series of strokes weakened her.

During her last days she was cared for by her son-in-law ESAK Sherr whose family lived with her. Such was his devotion that when she was unable to walk he actually carried her around. She called him her 'Itsale'.

BEILA-REEVA was well known throughout the Jewish community in Melbourne. She supported a great many local charities but was more particularly interested in charities in the Land of Israel. In a tribute to her, Rabbi Israel Brodie, later Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, said at the funeral (as quoted in an obituary published in the local Jewish press): "She was a woman devoted to the orthodox traditions of Judaism and she would be sorely missed by the community and her family, to whom she proved herself so kind and loving."

The Economic Depression hit ZALMEN's business early in the 1930's. Gradually shop after shop had to be closed. He opened a new venture, clothing manufacture to help keep his shops running. To start with he opened a small factory behind the Malvern shop. Then the remaining shops failed and had to be closed with the exception of Shepparton. This, together with a new factory in South Melbourne enabled him to survive the Depression.

About 1933, ZALMEN opened a knitting mill trading as 'Klinker Knitting Mills'. This flourished and he sold his last remaining shop in Shepparton to help finance the mill. However, by 1936 the Klinker began to falter and eventually became insolvent. It was after this that ZALMEN opened a door-to-door time-payment business called 'The Major Distributors' which was a thriving business for him for the next twenty years.

ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL's prime concern was the welfare of their family and in particular their education. All of their children were educated at leading private schools and were encouraged to pursue academic careers. Their daughter TESSIE studied Pharmacy. She married JOHN RONALD Freedman on August 10th, 1937. Born in 1910 in London, JOHN emigrated with his parents in 1921. Following a Public School education, he graduated from Melbourne University with a degree in Agricultural Science. He was employed by the Victorian State Laboratories in various research programs. Following the birth of their elder son MENAKHEM-MENDEL (NEVILLE) on October 30th, 1939, TESSIE and JOHN spent several periods living in the country towns of Kerang and Shepparton. This was necessitated by JOHN's research into the quality of soil in these fruit-growing regions. In 1940 he completed a thesis on soil salinity to obtain a Masters Degree. Their stay in Shepparton was particularly memorable since there was a small Jewish community there engaged in the fruit industry.

With the outbreak of the Second World War, JOHN was engaged as a food technologist by the Commonwealth Food Control Authority. He was involved in research concerning food canning techniques, in particular for military rations. To this end he was associated with American army authorities responsible for this project.

Following the war, JOHN was employed by the Victorian Department of Agriculture until 1949. He then left the scientific field in order to assist his father-in-law ZALMEN in operating his business since the latter's health would not permit him to continue alone. On December 13th, 1947, TESSIE and JOHN's younger son KHAIM-KOPPEL (KEITH) was born.

MYER, ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL's eldest son, graduated in medicine in 1936. Because he felt that the bearing of a foreign surname would hamper his career, he changed his name to 'Kaye'. ZALMEN followed suit, not wanting his children to bear different surnames. In 1938 MYER left Melbourne to pursue post-graduate studies in London. There he married LENNOX Spalding and had JENNIFER and JOHN. In 1946 MYER and his family returned to Melbourne having been awarded a Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons. He had gained considerable experience in leading hospitals in London during the war, two of which were damaged during air-raids whilst he was in the midst of operations. MYER became one of Melbourne's most prominent specialists in the field of Urology until his death in 1975.

PINKHAS (PETER), ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL's second son also graduated in medicine. In his youth PETER had served in the Scotch College Cadet Corps and artillery from the age of fourteen. At the university he was a member of the Melbourne University Rifles and was commissioned as an infantry lieutenant. Before attending university he had wanted to pursue a career as a professional soldier, despite the wishes of his parents. He applied for entrance to the Royal Military Academy of Duntroon but was rejected. Only later did he find out that the reason was that Jews were not accepted at the time.

In 1939, following the outbreak of war, PETER enlisted in the 9th Division, 2/32nd Battalion, attached to the Army Medical Corps with the rank of Captain. He saw action in the Middle East, in various battles in the Levant, in Palestine, and in North Africa, including the battle of Al Alamain. In 1943 his division was recalled to Australia to undergo special training for jungle warfare before being sent to New Guinea. He too part in the capture of Lae and the drive up the west coast of New Guinea. A history of the war records his involvement: During the Japanese counter attack on Pabu on the Huon Peninsula, 'A' company 2/32nd Battalion came under heavy mortar shelling from Pino Hill, sustaining nineteen casualties. Two stretcher-bearers were killed and it was difficult to bring out the wounded. When it became too dark to move the last three,'Captain Peter Kaye, Battalion Medical Officer, came down a rough and slippery track and did what he could in pitch blackness to alleviate the suffering of the wounded, crawling around with a morphine syringe, guided only by the sounds of the wounded.'

In 1944 PETER married MOURA Belkin and they had MELANIE and WENDY. In 1945 he was promoted to the rank of Major and became Medical Staff Officer stationed at Port Moresby until the end of the war. After the war he rejoined the Citizens' Military Forces (CMF) and held various postings. He remained on the army active list and held staff positions in Southern Command Medical Corp, as well as carrying on his private medical practice as a general practitioner.

In May 1965, PETER Kaye was honoured by the Queen in her birthday honours with the decoration of Officer of the Order of the British Empire (OBE) in recognition of his valuable years of service to the Australian Army. PETER held the rank of Colonel and was Assistant Director of Medical Services. He was Senior Medical Officer in charge of CMF medical, nursing and psychology units. In the previous year he was responsible for the planning and erection of a special army medical building in Healesville.

ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL's youngest son VELVEL (WILLIAM), who like his brothers attended Scotch College, graduated from Melbourne University in Law. During the War he interrupted his course to enlist in the Navy, attaining the rank of Sub-Lieutenant. He served in the Pacific theatre as an anti-submarine officer in corvettes. He married HENRIETTA Ellinson and they had DIANA, ANDREW, STEVEN and JOHN.

WILLIAM pursued a brilliant career as a barrister following his admission to the bar in 1946. He was noted as one of Victoria's leading trial lawyers and was involved in many famous cases. In 1962 he was appointed a Queens Counsel. He was the board of inquiry into allegations of corruption in the police force in 1970. He appeared as counsel in the third party insurance royal commission, the West Gate bridge royal commission and the 'Western Spruce' marine board inquiry. He was chairman of the Victorian Bar Council, chairman of the Australian Bar Association and executive member of the Law Council of Australia. In 1972 WILLIAM Kaye was appointed a judge of the Victorian Supreme Court, the first Jew to be appointed to this position. In addition to his legal career, he was active in the Jewish community in various capacities in particular of a fund-raising nature,both for local and Israeli causes.

In 1955 KHANA-REIZEL contracted a malignancy early in the year. For six months she suffered until her death on the 5th of Sivan. Her husband ZALMEN was grief-striken by this sudden tragedy. He and KHANA-REIZEL had been devoted to each other from the time that they had been children and he could not imagine having to spend the rest of his life without her. Their home in Kew, Rozalia, in which they had spent thirty-four happy years, and which was full of memories of many parties and family occasions, was sold as ZALMEN could not bear to live in it

without KHANA-REIZEL to share these memories. His daughter TESSIE also sold her home and they moved to a different suburb, Caulfield in order to create a new life. However this was not to be. ZALMEN simply could not keep his mind off his grief. He took no interest in life. His continual fretting eventually resulted in a stroke, four months after KHANA-REIZEL's death.

For two and a half years ZALMEN merely existed, rarely taking any interest in what was going on around him. He had his ups and downs physically; for a while he seemed to be improving and there was hope that he might recover. But then he would get worse again. For a while he lived with TESSIE, but as his condition deteriorated he had to be hospitalised. Again he seemed to improve and so was taken out of hospital and sent to the Warburton Sanitorium to convalesce. Once again he seemed to take an interest in life, especially when his family visited. He became very attached to his radio, and enjoyed listening to broadcasts of parliament.

However his interest in life could not be maintained. In 1958 he worsened, was rehospitalised and passed away on the 18th of Nisan.

It is surprising how history repeats itself. There seemed to be a strong devotion between husband and wife in the Komesaroff family. There are numerous examples of how, when one partner died, the other could not go on living without their life's partner. This was seen in the cases of MEIR and TYBEL Komesaroff, DINA and AVROM-HILLEL Namakshtansky, ESTHER and KHAIM-MOSHE Luban, and now it had happened again with ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL.

The loss of ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL was felt strongly by all their family and friends. They were both well known in the Jewish community in Melbourne as a result of their work for a variety of organisations. Both were ardent Zionists and a number of visiting overseas emissaries stayed with them at 'Rozalia'. They were active in the Jewish Day School movement and held many functions to support the co-educational day school Mount Scopus College which they had fought to establish. ZALMEN was a Life-Governor of the College. They were always ready to support any worthwhile charity. KHANA-REIZEL was a member of the National Council of Jewish Women and ZALMEN was a member of various organisations. In his early years in Australia he had been connected with the Boards of Management of the Carlton and East Melbourne synagogues, and later with the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation of which he was an honoured member for over twenty years. Throughout the garment industry in Melbourne, the name and reputation of ZALMEN Kaye (Komesaroff) was a highly respected one which was remembered for many years after his death.

By far the greatest loss was felt by their family. Because ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL were the oldest in their families, they were held in great respect by their brothers and sisters. When the family came to Australia, ZALMEN was considered the head of the family because of the absence of their parents. He was always on hand to give his advice and help. Nothing was ever too much for ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL to do for their family. ZALMEN made sure that his brothers and brother-in-law were set up in business, even at the expense of his own financial security. He felt that it was his duty to look after the welfare of his and KHANA-REIZEL's brothers and sisters until they could stand on their own feet.

ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL were never happier than when they were surrounded by their family. 'Rozalia' was constantly filled with relatives visiting and enjoying themselves. In some cases, the grandchildren spent more time there than at their own homes. KHANA-REIZEL was a marvellous cook and was constantly to be found in her famous kitchen preparing the favourite dishes of one or other of her family.

The happiest times of the year were the Yom Tovim when ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL were to be found in Shule surrounded by their family who would join them at Kiddush at 'Rozalia'. On religious matters ZALMEN was an unchallengable authority for his family. Particularly on Pesach at the Seder, he would capture the interest of all the company by his explanations of the rituals and his anecdotes. By his obvious love of Yiddishkeit, he inspired a love for it in others.

The memories of many precious experiences at 'Rozalia' and the happy times spent with ZALMEN and KHANA-REIZEL will be treasured by all who knew them.

After the death of ZALMEN, his son-in-law JOHN took over the management of the business. After several years JOHN decided to return to the scientific field and began teaching biology at a secondary level in the early 1960's. This he continued until his retirement in 1981.

TESSIE and JOHN's elder son NEVILLE was one of the original students at Mount Scopus College. He matriculated in 1958, having been Dux in his two final years. He graduated in Commerce and opened a private practice as an accountant. NEVILLE was involved actively in communal affairs, having been responsible for the foundation of Mount Scopus Old Collegians Association of which he was first president. He was also the first old-collegian to be appointed to the Board of Governors of the college.

In 1952 YAAKOV-LEIB died. He had led a difficult life. When he arrived in Australia it took him some time until he was able to make a decent living. As a result of this early hardship he became a communist, one of the early members of the party in Victoria. For some reason he changed his surname to Mendelson. YAAKOV-LEIB was a man of changeable moods and beliefs. In his early years in Australia he had been fanatically religious, so much so that he used to stand in a corner of the room,wrapped in Tallit and Tefillin, beating his head against the wall. Then a few weeks later when his brothers visited him they would be surprised to see that he had thrown everything aside and declared that he did not believe in anything. Yet again, in a few weeks he had changed his mind again and when his relatives visited him they would find him back against the wall with Tallit and Tefillin. Nobody ever knew in what mood they would find YAAKOV-LEIB when they next visited him. His erratic beliefs defied explanation.

Because of a lack of formal education, YAAKOV-LEIB strove constantly to better himself. He read whenever he had the chance, anything ranging from geography books and the Darwin theory in Yiddish, to Karl Marx. He had an extensive library including many rare Yiddish books and would often lend his brothers books to read. It used to greatly upset him if they were not interested. He could not understand anyone sitting doing nothing; he felt that everyone should read constantly to broaden their education. For this reason, in the early years in Australia, when he and KHAIM-VELVEL were travelling on business in the country, he would sit reading in the truck and after the evening meal he would settle down and be engrossed in a book far into the night.

Whenever his relatives came to visit him, he would engage them in lengthy discussions involving politics or philosophy. After his embracing of communism, one of his favourite expressions whenever he saw something which did not meet his approval in society, he would say: "Under a Socialist system, this would not happen". He became such a fanatical communist that he had a 'Hammer and Sickle' inlaid into the concrete on his front porch.

YAAKOV-LEIB seemed to be searching for something. What it was is hard to really know. He tried everything, religion, communism and capitalism and found them all lacking. Towards the end of his life he was asked by the leader of the Communist Party in Melbourne whether he still considered himself a Jew. His spontaneous reply was "Of course." Not long after this he was expelled from the party because he was too much of a capitalist; he was making quite a comfortable living out of a number of shops.

Now he had nothing. He had given up religion and communism had given him up. He had spent his entire life in an endless search. He finally died of a heart attack.

Despite his eccentricities, YAAKOV-LEIB was a very likeable man. Most of his family treated his foibles lightly, brushing them off as almost humourous. Many stories are told of incidents which happened to him. One such incident happened not long after he arrived in Australia. Unable to speak a word of English, he set off one day to find somewhere to have a shave. Suddenly he caught sight of a sign on a building which appeared to him to announce 'Berd Rezid', the Russian for 'Shave'. It did not occur to him to wonder how it was that a Russian sign would appear in Australia. He opened the door of the house, marched into the front room, sat down and demanded

a shave in Russian. The tenants of the house were amazed at this madman, bursting into their living-room and apparently swearing at them in a foreign language. They told him to get out, but naturally he could not understand them. Instead he demanded even more emphatically to be shaved. This was more than the tenants were prepared to take. The men picked YAAKOV-LEIB up and threw him bodily into the street. Furious that he should have been treated in such an undignified manner, YAAKOV-LEIB rushed off to his brother ZALMEN loudly complaining of the hooligans living in this barbaric country. ZALMEN tried to pacify him and eventually they went back to the house where ZALMEN was able to explain that the sign advertised 'Board and Residence' and not 'Berd Resid'.

YAAKOV-LEIB maintained an extensive correspondence with various cousins overseas. On one occasion his accountant complained to him that he had sent a letter in a foreign language to him. On checking, YAAKOV-LEIB found that he had sent his accountant a letter in Yiddish destined for his cousin BEREL Komisaruk of New York, and to BEREL he had sent his accountants payment.

YAAKOV-LEIB was a renowned poor driver. He had absolutely no sense of direction. When he was supposed to visit ZALMEN he would often not turn up for hours. When ZALMEN questioned him as to what had happened, he explained how he had got lost. He had set out from his house to go to ZALMEN's house a few miles away. Somehow he had managed to lose his way even over this short distance. But this time he had set a record. Instead of stopping to consult a map he had continued driving, confident that he knew where he was going. At last, after several hours he thought he had arrived. But instead of being in Kew he had arrived in Geelong, some fifty miles away.

YAAKOV-LEIB was somewhat of a scatterbrain. Whenever he had to visit his brother ZALMEN he would arrive late. ZALMEN once asked YAAKOV-LEIB's wife BESSIE for an explanation. She replied: "Your meshuganer brother has to go by way of Grafskoy before he can find his directions to your place". Even after he had left Carlton, the suburb he first lived in, he would drive in that direction in order to get his bearings.

Despite his shortcomings, YAAKOV-LEIB (or YANKEL-LEIB as he was called) will always hold a place of affection in the memories of those who knew him. He was survived by his son NORMAN, a doctor and daughter MINNIE, married to SOLOMON Fisher.

YOKHVED Sherr passed away in 1937. She had always suffered from poor health and during the last years of her life had developed a weak heart. YOKHVED's death was certainly an untimely one. She had been loved and respected by all her family because of her friendly disposition and keen sense of humour. Her death at the early age of forty-four left her two orphaned children, MENDEL-BENYOMIN (BENNIE) who married MIRIAM Friedman and LEAH (LILY) who married SOLOMON Chester.

ZLATR (LOTTIE) died in 1950. She had given birth to a number of children who had not survived long after birth. One daughter, SHIRLEY survived, but LOTTIE was never well again and eventually died of a heart attack.

PINKHAS (PETER) Komsarook (as he spelled the surname) married BECKY Steinberg and they had MINNIE, BENJAMIN and SAMUEL. PINKHAS who made a living in the time-payment drapery business, passed away in 1975.

The youngest brother KHAIM-VELVEL (WILLIAM) married MARGUERITE Grant and they had BEVERLEY, MICHAEL and DAVID. WILLIAM operated a successful drapery business as well as an investment company 'Mendel Investments' until his retirement. He was greatly involved in communal affairs being a founder of the Caulfield Hebrew Congregation, of which he was a Life Governor.

Of KHANA-REIZEL's brothers, ALTER passed away in 1950 following a heart attack. He had made a living as a draper. Active in communal affairs he had been president of the Carlton Hebrew Congregation. He married RACHEL Cohen and they had MEIR (who died as a baby), MOSHE (MAURICE), TYBEL (TESS) who married MYER Green, NORMAN, DAVID

and MYER.

TSIPORA who had married DAVID Zmood and was subsequently divorced, had TYBEL, MYER and MOSSIE. TSIPORA passed away in 1972.

PINKHAS (PETER) was the most active of the family in communal affairs. He was widely known and highly respected throughout the community. His involvement commenced soon after his return to Australia after being demobilised from the army after the First World War. He joined two organisations, 'Kadimah' and'Hatchiah' as well as being an active member of the Australian Exservicemens Association. He held strong political beliefs, being involved with the Australian Labour Party throughout his life. During World War Two he was one of the initiators of the 'Jewish War Effort Circle' which worked for the Red Cross and in particular for Jewish servicemen. After the war he was associated with fund raising for the Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital. Following the realisation of the fate of European Jewry, he became active in the Welfare Society which helped support the wave of refugees arriving in Australia.

But it was the field of Jewish education which particularly attracted PETER Komesaroff. A staunch supporter of Mount Scopus College, he worked tirelessly to provide facilities for the school.

It was Israeli causes which saw his greatest dedication, in particular the Magen David Adom with which his name was virtually synonymous. Likewise the United Israel Appeal, Melbourne Jewish Philanthropic Association, WIZO, NCJW, and Montefiore Homes all benefited from his organisational skill and participation. In a tribute following his death, a leader of the community wrote in the obituary: "He was one of the most conscientious communal workers whose influence was exercised in many directions and whose advise and participation was eagerly sought by the builders of Melbourne's Jewish communal life. He was a vital force in Jewish life in Melbourne and his memory will be honoured by all who had the privelege of working with him and by the community whose life was enriched by his leadership and efforts."

PETER married SARAH Isaacman and they had TYBEL (THELMA)married to LESLIE Webberly, MIRIAM married to ROBERT Mantel, and JUDITH married to BEN Same.

The youngest brother YEHUDA-LEIB (LOUIS) was likewise active in communal affairs. He was associated with the Australian Labour Party from the days he lived in Bairndale, when he was president of the local branch. At the same time he worked for the Jewish National Fund and was involved with Magen David Adom and the Friends of the Hebrew University. He married FANNY Fineberg and they had MAX, TYBEL (TESSA) married to JOHN Silverberg, and RUTH married to GEORGE

The youngest sister KHAYALAH had not been in contact with her brothers and sisters since the Second World War. Her activities are described in a later chapter concerning those of the family living in the Soviet Union.