



**RHODE ISLAND  
JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES**

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#### FRONT COVER

Temple Beth-El, 688 Broad Street, corner of Glenham Street, Providence, Rhode Island, *circa* 1934. Home of Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David from 1910 to 1954. The building, somewhat altered, is now the home of Congregation Shaare Zedek, the successor of five merged South Providence Orthodox congregations. From the *Journal of the Nineteenth Anniversary of the Congregation of the Sons of Israel and David*.

# RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL NOTES

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RHODE ISLAND JEWISH HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

130 SESSIONS STREET, PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND 02906

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## JAMES JACOBS, EARLY JEWISH MERCHANT OF PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

by BERYL SEGAL AND SEEBERT J. GOLDOWSKY, M.D.

Doctor Jacob R. Marcus, dean of American Jewish historians, has cautioned against naming some Jew as the first in a given location. "There was", he said, "always one there before."

The late David C. Adelman wrote: "Providence city directories from 1824 [the first to be published] to 1850 were published every three years [not quite accurate] and are inconclusive as to the Jewish population for the reason that there are many omissions and they cannot be relied upon to establish priority. The name of [Solomon] Pareira is not the first name of a Jew to appear in the Providence Directory, although the census of 1850 shows conclusively that he was the first Jewish settler." He adds: "The eldest child of Solomon and Miriam Pareira was born in Rhode Island and was in his twelfth year [in 1850] which shows that Pareira came to Providence in 1838 and was the first Jewish settler."

The name of James Jacobs, the subject of this inquiry, appeared in the Providence Directory of 1824. He may not have been the only Jew to appear in that first issue. In the same year one Samuel Lopez, "jeweller", had a shop or residence, or both on Cady's Lane. He had attended school on Meeting Street in Providence between 1810 and 1820 with his brother Jacob and, according to Adelman, was probably a nephew of Aaron Lopez. In 1824 he married the daughter of Benjamin Tallman, Jr. of Providence in the First Baptist Church. He appeared regularly in the Providence Directories as late as 1828-9, residing or conducting his business variously on Parsonage, George, Chestnut and Elm Streets.\*

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\*David C. Adelman wrote as follows in *RIJH Notes* 2:17, June, 1956: "Mr. Clarkson V. Collins III, Librarian of The Rhode Island Historical Society has called our attention to an entry in the Master Roll of the privateer brig *Yankee* which the Society recently acquired. This entry reveals that one Samuel Lopez, 17 years of age, was a ship's boy in the wardroom mess of the brig's sixth voyage in 1815. Examination of the records of seamen reveals that he was certified as a seaman on October 23, 1819 when he was 21 years of age, that he was of dark complexion and born in Providence. The same records also disclose that Jacob Lopez was certified as a seaman on April 13, 1816 when he was 15 years of age and that he, too, was of dark complexion and was born in Providence. . . . These boys were born in 1798 and 1801 after the death of Aaron Lopez in 1783 . . . it is probable that they are the Lopez boys who attended the school on Meeting Street. This Samuel is probably the one who married the daughter of Benjamin Tallman, Jr."

Adelman also noted that David Lopez, a nephew of Aaron, conducted a trading post in Providence for his uncle, then living in Leicester, Massachusetts, during the Revolution from 1779 to 1782.

This intelligence and the story of James Jacobs which follows raise some semantic problems relative to Adelman's further statement that "There is no evidence that there was a Jewish settler in Providence until [1838]", unless both Samuel Lopez and James Jacobs were neither practicing nor ethnic Jews. We have no documentary evidence which would clarify this issue for either gentleman.

In the directory of 1824 James Jacobs was listed as having his business at 49 Westminster Street and residing at 59½ Westminster Street. The nature of his business or employment is not specified. In 1826 and 1828, however, he was listed as "Jacobs, James & Co., dry goods" with his business address given as 45 Westminster Street and his home or lodging at 49 Westminster Street.

In the March 27, 1820 issue and in later editions of the *Providence Daily Journal*, the following advertisement appeared describing Jacob's merchandise:

#### NEW GOODS

JAMES JACOBS has received and opened part of his spring assortment of seasonable Dry Goods among which are superior jet and blue, black Italian and Gros de Naples Silks, Chintz's &c. &c.

Will also receive on Saturday next, a further supply of fancy and staple Dry Goods from New York.

The year 1828 was marked by a significant event in the business life of Providence, then a town of 15,000 souls—the opening of the Arcade, a magnificent Greek revival edifice, which still survives, extending from Westminster Street to Weybosset Street with an impressive colonnade of granite monolithic columns at either end. It was one of the earlier, if not the first, galleria type building in America and had some of the same impact on the mercantile community of that time as do the shopping malls of today. The newspapers were lavish in their descriptions of the structure, and many businesses transferred their operations to this new and attractive location.

In the Providence Directory of 1830 James Jacobs was listed as conducting a "carpet warehouse" at 11 Arcade, while he resided at 24 Broad Street.

On July 7, 1830 the following advertisement appeared in the *Providence Daily Journal*:

PROVIDENCE CARPET WARE HOUSE

No. 11 Arcade

The subscriber having purchased of Mr. Solomon Pitkin his share of the stock of the Providence Carpet Ware House No 11, Arcade, will continue the business at the same place.

The present stock is very extensive, consisting of several thousand yards of *Brussels, Kidderminster and Venetian Floor* and *Stair* Carpeting of every quality, which will be sold at prices that cannot fail to please

ALSO

Imperial Wilton and Brussels Rugs, Printed Floor Cloth Printed Table and Stand Covers; Fringe, &c.

Having made an arrangement with the Agent of the Lowell Company, the most extensive Carpet Manufactory in this country, for the exclusive sale of their manufacture in this town, the attention of carpet dealers in this neighborhood, is invited to examine them, and may be assured that it will be made an object for them to purchase.

Orders for Painted Floor or Passage Carpets from the New England Painted Floor Cloth Company, will be received and furnished of any size or pattern, without seams, at short notice.

JAMES JACOBS

After this declaration of independence Jacobs continued to advertize his carpet warehouse (October 5, 1830):

PROVIDENCE CARPET WAREHOUSE

No. 11, Arcade

JAMES JACOBS, has received at the above Establishment, a large assortment of fine, superfine, and double superfine Ingrain, Brussels and Venetian floor and stair Carpeting.

Rugs, Printed Floor Cloths; Printed Table Stand and Piano covers; Painted Floor Cloth, for Carpets, of every size, without seams.

A large assortment of Damask Table Linen and napkins, 11, 12 and 13 quarter Rose Blankets; 11, 12 and 13, do Marseilles Quilts.

Jacobs had not, however, given up the dry goods business, as indicated by this advertisement of September 7, 1831.

JAMES JACOBS Wholesale Dry Good Dealer, No. 6 Arcade has received from the late Package Sales in New York and Boston, 23 packages reasonable Goods consisting of Prints, Flannels, Bombazetts, Circassians, Cloths, Cambrics; black worsted Hose, &c.

ALSO, on hand, a very handsome assortment of black and colored Gro de Berlin; Gro de Naples; Gro de Swiss; changeable Silks; every description of Muslins; Cambrics; Cravats; Brown Linen; best style grass bleached Linens; Velvets, Beaverteen; Padding; Buckram; Damask Table Linen, &c. &c.

Similar advertisements were inserted many times in the ensuing months. The following indicated a further expansion of his activities into cleaning, dyeing, and printing\*:

(October 25, 1830)

THE NEW YORK DYING AND PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT, Dye and finish in a superior manner, *Broadcloths, Cassimeres, Silks and Satins, Crape, Cotton and Linen Goods, Hosiery, &c.*

They also dye and cleanse ladies' and gentlemen's garments, of all descriptions, and in particular, their method of restoring old and faded Silks and Satins, to their original beauty, has given universal satisfaction.

They also Cleanse Shawls, Table Cloths, Carpets, glaze Furnitures, remove stains and mildews from cotton and linen goods, &c. &c.

JAMES JACOBS, Agent  
No. 11, Arcade, Providence.

\* \* \*

(March 26, 1831)

NEW YORK DYING AND PRINTING ESTABLISHMENT

Office for the reception and delivery of goods, No. 11. Arcade. They Dye and Finish in a superior manner.

BROADCLOTHS: CRAPES  
CASSIMERES: COTTON & LINEN  
SILKS & SATINS: GOODS,  
VELVETS,: HOSIERY, &c.

They also Dye and Cleanse Ladies' and Gentlemen's Garments of all descriptions; and in particular, their method of restoring old and faded Silks and Satins to their original beauty, has given general satisfaction.

They cleanse Shawls, Table Cloths, Carpets, &c. and remove stains and mildew from cotton and linen goods. Parasols dyed on the sticks.

All orders carefully attended to, by

JAMES JACOBS, Agt. 11 Arcade

Packages will be forwarded once a week through the season.

It thus appears that Jacobs operated simultaneously a carpet business at Number 11 Arcade and a wholesale dry goods business at Number 6 Arcade. There were many advertisements during this period describing the merchandise in these establishments. Not infrequently several advertisements would appear in a single edition of the paper. The following published on March 30, 1831 is a typical example:

\*According to David C. Adelman (*RIJHN* 3:148, [No. 3] Dec., 1960) John Nathan "was the first Jewish advertiser [1844] and apparently the first cleanser." There is thus reason to doubt both of these assertions.

JAMES JACOBS

WHOLESALE DRY GOODS STORE, NO. 6 Arcade

Will open this morning, bales of Russia Diapers, 100 groce Ladies' Buttons; best quality black Italian Sewing Silk; Colored Linen Thread, &c. &c.

Manufacturers and dealers in Dry Goods will find an assortment of desirable goods at the establishment, the whole of which are fresh, and have been purchased at the late package sales in New York, and will be sold at the low prices as can be had in that city.

On June 8, 1831 a cotton factory in Glens Falls, New York was advertized for sale. Information could be obtained from the factory or inquiries made either in New York City or from James Jacobs at Number 6 Arcade! On July 2 he advertized two bales of twilled jeans "for sale by the piece only." On other occasions he offered "Ladies' printed Cotton Hose, low priced" and "Corded Shirts", gloves, hosiery, threads, "Gilt Buttons of every description", and many other items.

The prestige of the Slater Mills is reflected in the following (January 1, 1833): "Always on hand, a supply of those very fine Shirtings (in flat and linen folds) manufactured by Samuel Slater, Esq. at the Steam Mill in this city." Steam, it would appear, was already challenging the water power of the historic Slater Mill in Pawtucket.\*

On October 5, 1831 the following advertisement listed items in a newly arrived shipment of merchandise:

JAMES JACOBS, Wholesale Dry Goods Dealer, No. 6 Arcade, has this day received from New York, 25 packages fresh imported seasonable Goods, which with his stock on hand, (all of which has been recently purchased) makes his assortment very extensive and are offered on the most favorable terms, among which are

2 cases Merino Circassians, desirable colors,  
2 do common do do do,  
2 do black and colored Bombezett  
Bales assorted red, white and yellow Flannel  
Do fine scarlet; 5 bales Bedticking  
2 cases colored Cambric  
Black and slate Worsted Hose  
Fancy Random do new style  
Prints, of every style and price  
Blue, black, olive and brown Broadcloths, Satinets, &c. &c.

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\*Professor William G. McLoughlin of Brown University states: "Samuel Slater built the first large steam-driven cotton mill in 1827 in Providence. At first, steam engines merely provided power in the summer, when streams were low and the water wheels did not turn as fast as desired. But manufacturers soon discovered that steam engines were efficient all year around." (*Rhode Island, A Bicentennial History*. W. W. Norton & Co., Inc., New York and American Association for State and Local History, Nashville, 1978. P. 122.

In the Providence Directory of 1832 James Jacobs's establishment was listed at Number 10 Arcade and his business as "dry goods". His residence at that time was at Dorrance and Pine Streets. Also listed was Samuel Jacobs, doing business in "dry goods" at the same location, and residing on High Street. This is the only time that Samuel appears in the Directory. In fact it was, but for one strange exception, as we shall see later, the last listing for either James or Samuel.

During August and September of 1832 James appears to have had another location in the Arcade (*Providence Daily Journal*, September 14, 1832):

JAMES JACOBS  
WHOLESALE DEALER, NO. 8, ARCADE

OFFERS on the most accommodating terms, every variety of brown and bleached domestic cottons, by the package or piece. Just received 5 cases Slater's Superior Steam Loom Shirting. Also 5 bales red, white, and yellow flannels.

Jacobs continued to advertize through 1833, but his advertisements often were shorter. On April 9, 1833 he noted that his "Wholesale Store" at Number 10 Arcade would offer "a desirable style of Prints. Also, Damask and Cotton Diaper and Table Cloths of all sizes."

A new item appeared in May of 1833 in the way of "1,000 Palmleaf Fans at Wholesale." There was, perhaps a fateful warning when on July 23 Jacobs offered for sale "30 Shares in The Arcade Bank" and "11 do do in The Arcade Corporation".

The following advertisement appearing in The *Providence Daily Journal* of August 30, 1833 provides an intriguing glimpse at modes of transportation. (There were two other brief insertions in the same issue, also offering dry goods at Number 10 Arcade):

WHOLESALE DRY GOODS STORE  
No. 10 Arcade

*James Jacobs* is receiving by steam-boat and wagons, daily, additions to his well assorted stock.

Through most of 1833 and as late as December 30 the *Providence Daily Journal* carried advertisements of James Jacobs's wholesale dry goods establishment at No. 10 Arcade. On January 13, 1834, apparently for the first time, Samuel Jacobs, who, it will be remembered, had been listed in the 1832 directory as being in business at the same address, inserted a brief advertisement stating "REMAINING a few pieces co'd black and blue black Gro de Swiss, Poult de Soie and other silks to be sold low at No. 7 Arcade. SAMUEL JACOBS" On the next day (Janu-

ary 14) Samuel advertized that he would retail "at reduced prices" at No. 7 Arcade the stock from the store at No. 10 Arcade. A long list of merchandise followed. In the same issue the following appeared:

NOTICE—The subscriber having received from JAMES JACOBS, an assignment of his stock of Foreign and Domestic Piece Goods, Debts, &c. has appointed James Jacobs, his Attorney to close the business. The Stock of goods will be sold at reduced prices, offering an opportunity to any person wishing to purchase the whole or part, on very advantageous terms. Country dealers, factory agents and others, will do well to call and see, before purchasing. All persons indebted are called upon to make settlement as soon as possible, to Mr. JACOBS at No. 10 Arcade.

JOHN F. DYER, Assignee

On January 18, 1834 Samuel Jacobs was advertizing merchandise at both Nos. 7 and 10 Arcade, while John F. Dyer advertized the Providence Carpet Warehouse, which had formerly been Jacobs's establishment. On April 23 the following appeared:

TO PROPRIETORS OF HOTELS AND BOARDING HOUSES

JAMES JACOBS offers at reduced prices, a variety of extra large damask table cloths suitable for public houses, at No. 10 Arcade.

A variety of advertisements appeared during the next several weeks:

(May 13, 1834)

JAMES JACOBS will offer for a few days longer, his stock of Dry Goods at wholesale. There are yet many desirable articles which will be sold a great bargain, to close the stock.

ALSO FOR SALE

50 shares in the Arcade Bank,

11 shares in the Arcade Corporation,

5 shares in the Boston and New York Steam Boat Co.

1 lot on Broadway, Federal Hill, in the rear of the residence of Joseph Grant, Esq.

400 acres of land, near the Borough of Vincennes, Indiana, of an excellent quality, and in a good settlement.

Also—several lots in the Borough of Vincennes.

\* \* \*

(June 10, 1834)

VALUABLE SALE OF DRY GOODS AT AUCTION.

The subscriber will close at auction, at his store No. 6 Arcade, on WEDNESDAY, the 18th inst. his entire stock of Foreign and Domestic Piece Goods, consisting of a well selected variety of seasonable Dry Goods.

This opportunity will offer to merchants in the country, many advantages for replenishing their stores with desirable articles. The sale will be without reserve and great bargains may be expected.

JAMES JACOBS

\* \* \*

(June 20, 1834)

NOTICE. The sale of Dry Goods advertised by the subscriber, to take place on the 18th inst. is postponed to Wednesday 25th, at the same place, No. 6 Arcade.

JAMES JACOBS,  
Attorney

While we have not documented the meaning of all of this obscure maneuvering, it is clear that significant changes were taking place in the mercantile career of James Jacobs. He had abundant competition from old and established Yankee merchants such as Gladding, Weeden, Buffington, Burr, Tillinghast, Olney, and John F. Dyer, who was close at hand at Numbers 16 and 6 Arcade. Undoubtedly, with the rapid turnover of merchandise, his credit would have been under considerable strain.

The following ominous advertisement appeared in the *Providence Daily Journal* as early as August 30, 1834 and ran until February of 1835:

NEW CARPET STORE  
C B ARNOLD & CO.

Having purchased of Mess Jacobs & Co their entire stock of *Carpeting, Rugs, Table and Piano Cloths* and taken the store No. 46 Westminster Street, a few doors west of the Arcade, solicit the patronage of the former customers of the store, their friends, and the public.

NB They will continue to keep a general assortment of French and American *Paper Hangings* and Borders, of the latest fashions, at their old stand No. 61 Weybosset Street, for sale at reasonable prices.

Also on August 30, 1834, the following appeared:

REMOVAL

JOHN F. DYER has purchased the entire stock of Dry Goods in the store formerly Cheney's, which in addition to his own has removed to the large and continuous store No. 6 Arcade, formerly occupied as a carpet warehouse; both stocks will ensure to persons in want of rich fancy and Dry Goods, a selection greater and more desirable than has been exhibited in this city, and to which additions are made almost daily.

J. F. Dyer will be assisted by Mr. Samuel Jacobs.

The former customers of each concern are particularly invited to continue their accounts and the same exertions to give satisfaction will be continued. Every description of Goods usually kept in a Furnishing Warehouse can be obtained as above.

On January 1, 1835 the following brief notice appeared in the *Providence Daily Journal*:

STOCK OF DRY GOODS FOR SALE

A small stock contained in one of the best stands in the city, will be sold on favorable terms. For further information inquire at the Journal counting room.

Soon thereafter the following notices, which clearly signalled the end for Jacobs, were inserted in the issue of January 19, 1835:

NOTICE—The *Stock of Dry Goods* Store in No. 4 Arcade is offered at prime cost—among which may be found almost every article usually called for in the Dry Goods line. Persons wishing to purchase goods at great bargains are requested to call and examine for themselves.

\* \* \*

NOTICE—Persons indebted to Jas. Jacobs or Jno F. Dyer for carpeting goods from the old Providence Carpet and trimming establishment are requested to make immediate payment, as it is desirable to close the affairs of that business with dispatch. Any demands against that establishment will be paid by the subscriber, when presented.

JNO F DYER,  
No 6 Arcade

While John F. Dyer in 1832 had a dry goods shop at Number 4 Arcade, early in January of 1835, according to his advertisements, he was doing business at Number 6 Arcade, which had been the location of Jacob's wholesale dry goods emporium.

The story of Jacobs's entrepreneurial endeavors is typical of that of many early Jewish merchants. He came to a small town in New England anxious to be absorbed into the business community. He advertized lavishly and somewhat flamboyantly for his day and announced on numerous occasions the arrival of abundant new merchandise from New York, the center of commerce. He would dispose of his stock and at times change his location, sometimes under a different business name. He conducted at least two businesses simultaneously. His struggles undoubtedly involved the need for capital, competition from well-known establishments, and surely the exigencies of the business cycle.

That Jacobs did not survive in the business community is quite clear. Was he then not a "Jewish settler" in Providence? Did his departure from the scene make him less significant historically? Or indeed was he Jewish? We do not know for sure, but the suspicion is strong that he was.

#### EPILOGUE

James (and Samuel) Jacobs appeared in the Providence Directory of 1832. Both were absent from the next edition, that of 1836-7. Was this the last of James Jacobs? Not quite. Once again in the issue of 1852-3, after a lapse of twenty years, James Jacobs was listed as dealing in "carpets" at 129 Westminster Street. His lodging was given as City Hotel. Was this an apparition from the past or one last go at the old stand? To this enigma history does not provide an answer.

#### SOURCES

Providence City Directories, 1824 to 1853 published by Brown and Danforth and successors. Rhode Island Historical Society.

*Providence Daily Journal*, 1830-1835, microfilm files, Rhode Island Historical Society and Providence Public Library.

## MEMOIR OF MY LIFE

by BEZALEL NATHAN RESNIK\*

### CHAPTER I—MY LIFE IN EUROPE

Since my children have had no opportunity, with one exception, of meeting anyone of their father's family, nor have they any idea of the kind of life our Jewish people led in eastern Europe in the first two decades of this century, I have decided to put into writing as much as I can recall of my life. I sincerely hope that they and their children will enjoy reading my recollections and thereby get to know more of our recent past.

#### BIRTH

I first saw the light of day on March 15, 1891, or *Adar* 16, according to the Jewish calendar, in the city of Vilna, Lithuania, a province of Czarist Russia. My father's name was Yakov,\*\* my mother's was Deborah Abramovitch, and I was their eldest child.

My father, who had studied at the famous *yeshivah*\*\*\* of Volozin, headed in his day by Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berlin, was a *shohet*.† He was too soft-hearted to continue in that profession; so he opened a food store. He remained a lover of books, a dreamer, and running the store became my mother's task, which she fulfilled with great ability.

My city, Vilna, was outstanding in many ways. The *Kehillah*,†† the organized Jewish community, paid the tuition for the Jewish children in the government-run elementary school. The Jewish children attended this school daily during their release time from the *heder*,††† the Jewish school. In the government school they were taught to read and write Russian and arithmetic. In my time the principal and teacher of that school was Pieter Margolin, a graduate of one of the two rab-

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\*As of this writing Mr. Resnick is alive and well in his eighty-eighth year. This account is edited from the original manuscript. A limited number of bound, printed copies were distributed to members of the family. It contains a fairly complete genealogy dating back to the 18th century. This has been omitted because of space limitations. This version is printed with the kind permission of the author and of the American Jewish Archives, which provided us with a copy of the original typescript. Ed.

\*\*Jacob.

\*\*\*Hebrew academy. (Hebrew)

†Ritual slaughterer. (Hebrew)

††Hebrew.

†††Hebrew school. (Hebrew)

binical schools run by the government, one in Zhitomir in the Ukraine and the other in Vilna.

The underlying aim of these two schools was to prepare leaders for the sole purpose of assimilating the Jewish population into the Russian culture by weaning their children away from Jewish learning and general way of life. I recall how displeased our teacher was at the sight of the *tzitzis*,\* fringes, peeping out from the little boys' shirts. Mr. Margolin would invariably grasp one of the fringes, twist it around his finger, give a tug, and while pulling it off entirely, would remark with scorn, "pig's tails".

#### ENTERS YESHIVAH

At the age of twelve I entered the well-known Ramyles Yeshivah. There we were taught Talmud and the secular subjects usual for a high school curriculum, but, I am afraid, far different from any high school known today in America. Our teacher for these subjects was Mr. Kahn, who was also a product of the afore-mentioned rabbinical school. While thoroughly assimilated into the Russian culture, he yet loved the Hebrew language and was the author of a textbook of Hebrew grammar written in Russian.

We were expected to be able to translate the Prophets into Russian. One outstanding Hebrew scholar known in Russian as the *Uchoney Yevrei*—the Hebrew scholar—visited our *yeshivah* one day. Feivel Getz, the visitor, was also the official censor of Hebrew and Yiddish books and newspapers. I remember well the day of his visit as he handed me a text from the Book of Samuel in Hebrew and heard me translate it at sight.

All through my early years, and even today, I have loved reading. Since the age of eight I have read everything I could lay my hands on—Hebrew, Russian, and Yiddish. Even on the Sabbath, when I was supposed to have gone to the synagogue, I really went to the public library and passed the time browsing through Russian books. I finished studies at the *yeshivah* when I was fourteen and found myself, while well versed in Jewish learning, yet unprepared for practical life. The reasons were simply this:

All schools of higher learning, even the gymnasia, were closed to Jews. Some wealthy Jews hired private tutors to give their children the equivalent of preparation for matriculation abroad, but this obviously

\*Fringes of the prayer shawl worn by males. (Yiddish) *Tzitzit* (fringes) in Hebrew.

was the solution for only a small segment of the Jewish population. The vast majority could not indulge in that method.

Luckily for me, at about that time one of my father's brothers, who lived in Kovno, came for a visit. Uncle Abraham Rosenthal was a very religious man. While he had three daughters, he had no sons and yearned for one. He suggested to my father that I go with him to Kovno, where I could attend a very famous *yeshivah* of higher learning. As for my support, he undertook to share that expense along with his brother, my uncle Leib Zlotoyabko. It was very kind of him, of course, and I was deeply appreciative. Yet later I found out that he had a reason for his kindness. It will seem unbelievable to a modern reader, but it was not unusual for that time. My uncle firmly believed that the Almighty would reward him by granting him the fulfillment of his heart's desire—a son. Strange as it may seem, his wife did indeed give birth to a son several years later. I had never had the opportunity to meet the boy; but many years later in 1967, on one of my visits to Israel, I learned that my cousin had migrated to Israel, where he died some years later. Sad to say, by 1967 his son, born in Israel, had also died. He lost his life during the Six Day War, leaving a young widow and two children. I managed to meet her and left a gift of money, a custom that I followed for several years.

At the time my uncle came to Vilna, the revolutionary movement in Russia had become widespread and many Jewish young people were drawn into it. But as far as I was concerned, the fact that their program included atheism and anti-Jewish feeling of all kinds kept me from joining the otherwise enticing movement. Zionism, however, appealed very strongly to me. I recall vividly the one and only visit of the revered Doctor Theodore Herzl to Russia in 1904. On his way to St. Petersburg, the later Petrograd and now Leningrad, he stopped off at Vilna. So great was the outpouring of the Jewish population who wanted at least to see the great leader that the police became alarmed and forbade him and his entourage to stop and speak with anyone. They simply hustled him off to the railroad station.

#### YESHIVAH AT KOVNO

Needless to say, my uncle's proposition was eagerly accepted, and I became a student in the *Slobodker Yeshivah*, where I spent three impressionable and unforgettable years. As I have remarked, the revolutionary feeling was very strong, especially among the young idealists. After all, what was there for the Jew in Russia to keep him a loyal

subject of the Czarist regime? It kept him from all avenues of higher education, from every opportunity of economic or professional advancement. All doors were closed to him; he was forbidden to become even a simple farmer, to hold any civil service job. There was no Jewish policeman, no Jewish letter carrier, nor a Jewish janitor. He was not simply a second-class citizen, he was no citizen at all. He had no freedom of movement and was restricted to live in a narrow belt known as the "Pale of Settlement."

What then kept me, a young impressionable Jewish boy, who was fully aware of all the discrimination suffered by his people and who dearly loved his people, from becoming involved in this great upswing of revolutionary thought? That movement promised to overthrow the oppressor and free the Jew along with the rest of the population. What then kept me from becoming a leftist? Perhaps the following paragraphs will give a clue to this enigma.

Arriving at the *yeshivah* in Kovno, I was immediately confronted by a different climate from that to which I was accustomed in my native Vilna. Vilna was a large progressive city, with many schools, several public libraries, museums, newspapers (Russian, and the Hebrew daily "Hazman"), theaters (Russian and Yiddish), and many publishing houses, the most famous of which was the Hebrew one known by the name, "Widow and Brothers Rome". There was also a monthly Yiddish literary periodical called "The World", whose editor, the famous Shmuel Niger, was later connected with the Yiddish press in New York. It was one of the early spots where Zionism had taken hold, grew, and flourished. Conversely, it was also the cradle of the "Bund", a Jewish revolutionary movement. It was also a great industrial and economic center.

#### THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF VILNA

At this point it may be of interest to the reader to learn something about the history of this unusual Jewish community which, to our sorrow, is no longer in existence. For this purpose I shall give, in translation, an excerpt from the *Jewish Popular Encyclopedia* by Doctor Simcha Petrushka. It may, in part, explain my nostalgia for the city of my birth:

"Vilna belonged to Lithuania, then to Russia, then to Poland. At the outbreak of the War of 1939 (World War II) it had about 250,000 inhabitants, among them more than 100,000 Jews. Jews have lived in

Vilna from as early as the 15th century. Despite repeated massacres, persecutions, and wars, Vilna became an outstanding spiritual center of Judaism and became known as 'The Jerusalem of Lithuania'. Famous were the great Lithuanian rabbis and scholars. In the 17th century there were the Rabbis Moshe Lema and Moshe Rivkes, authors of great rabbinic books, and in the 18th century Rabbi Eliyahu (the *Vilner Gaon\**), the most famous of them all. It was his disciples who created the great center of Jewish learning in that city. Even at a later date there were famous scholars in Lithuania, such as Rabbi Israel Salanter, Rabbi Bezalel Hacohen, Rabbi Shmuel Strashun, and others.

"It was in Lithuania that at the beginning of the 19th century the *Haskalah\*\** movement started in Russia, and its leaders were Adam Hacohn Levensohn, Mordche Aaron Ginzburg and others. Vilna had many synagogues, many of them extremely old. The most famous of them was the *Goan's* synagogue. In these places of worship there were many *yeshivahs* that produced thousands of scholars. Vilna was also rich in Jewish philanthropic institutions and secular schools, libraries—private and public—such as the Strashun Library and Yivo. At the end of the 19th century Vilna became the center of the *Chibat-Zion\*\*\** movement and later of political Zionism as well as for the Hebrew press and literature. Vilna had also been a center for Jewish publications. The most famous is the *Vilner Sha'as* (Talmud) edition with commentaries.

"At the end of the 19th century Jewish socialism had its beginnings in Vilna, and it was here that the 'Bund' was born. There were Socialist newspapers in the Yiddish language, later the Yiddish theater with its 'Vilner Troupe' came into being. This city was the center of the Yiddish language and culture; it had many public schools, a Hebrew gymnasium, a technical school, a teacher's seminary, the Yivo, and its priceless archives.

"The studies about Vilna are too numerous to mention.

"In 1942-43 the Jewish population of Vilna perished through the horrendous crimes of the Hitler hordes that took possession of the city in the summer of 1941."

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\**Gaon* is Hebrew for "Excellency". A leading scholar.

\*\*Hebrew for "Enlightenment". Movement among the Jews of Eastern Europe in the late 18th and 19th centuries to acquire modern European culture and secular knowledge.

\*\*\*"Love of Zion". (Hebrew) The romantic movement which developed in sharp reaction to the Russian pogroms of 1881-82. It advocated return of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel and the soil.

Picture me then, at fifteen years of age, suddenly being thrown into the strict *yeshivah* atmosphere of Slobodka, a close, rigidly religious world, isolated from modern life in all its phases. I had already by that time become acquainted with the best of Yiddish and Russian literature, as well as modern Hebrew literature, all of which was absolutely taboo there.

My fellow students had come mostly from the small towns of the great Russian empire and were completely unacquainted with the world at large.

#### LIFE AT THE YESHIVAH OF KOVNO

The principal, known as the *Rosh Yeshivah*,\* was the great scholar Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein. The instructor in *Musar* (Ethics)\*\* was Rabbi Nosen Finkel, a great thinker and philosopher. He was a disciple of the famous Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, the founder of the School of Ethics, the personal conduct of the individual. It was his concept that, by simply obeying the law and not committing an act for which one is liable to punishment, one is not necessarily thereby an ethical person. It is in refraining from doing aught that one knows is wrong or immoral, even if the act does not involve possible punishment, that puts one in the category of the righteous. Pride, for instance, was abhorred. Even performing a *mitzvah*,\*\*\* i.e. a good deed, publicly so that all may see and praise, was considered unethical.

He strongly advocated the paying of attention to one's appearance, cleanliness of person and attire, as well as good and proper behavior. He believed that the reason many Jews were not religious stemmed from the fact that they were ignorant of the Torah† and its teaching.

An interesting story has come down to our own day that aptly depicts Rabbi Salanter's great love of his people. It is told that an epidemic of cholera had broken out in Vilna. It was the Rabbi's belief that people in a weakened condition, such as those who fast, would be more apt to become ill. So he handled the matter in his own inimitable way. That Yom Kippur after the *shaharith*‡ prayer, he stood on the pulpit

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\*Head of the *Yeshivah*. (Hebrew)

\*\*Hebrew.

\*\*\*Literally "commandment". (Hebrew)

†The Five Books of Moses, or all of Jewish law and religious studies. (Hebrew)

‡Morning prayer. (Hebrew)

of the synagogue and loudly commanded the *shamash*\* (sexton) to bring him a cup of wine. He then recited the *kiddush*\*\* and ordered the congregation to go home and eat and then return to the synagogue for the remainder of the Yom Kippur service. This story has become famous, as related by the Hebrew writer David Frischman. Not all of the rabbis, however, agreed with this attitude, and he had many opponents.

A decision such as this, made by a man as deeply religious and God-fearing as Rabbi Yisroel Salanter, surely requires great knowledge of all the laws pertaining to such a condition, and an inner greatness and resolution that few people, even the rabbis, possess.

#### TEACHINGS OF THE YESHIVAH

I think it would be worthwhile at this point to describe some of the lessons we were required to learn in the *yeshivah* following the great rabbi's method of teaching:

1. The path of life for a truly good man consists of constant self-improvement in the matter of caring for one's fellow man.

2. All acts that are caused by egotism or self-aggrandizement, are to be avoided, and all inclinations leading to pride are to be suppressed. Cruelty of all kinds, whether toward another human being or a dumb creature, is to be avoided. Most important of all, one is to perform all these acts with absolutely no expectation of reward or even a 'thank you', for the very words, 'thank you', already give compensation for the action. Every night, at the close of the day's activities, one is required to examine one's actions and even thoughts of the day and determine whether he has lived up to that lofty teaching. If a slip is discovered, he must decide to correct it the next day and resolve never to repeat that faulty action, tiny though it may have been.

Obviously, this philosophy of life was not an easy one, and not everyone could hope to follow it. I have endeavored to follow as much of it as I could.

The entire atmosphere in the *yeshivah* was one of isolation, a total detachment from the work-a-day world around us. Our days and even

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\*Hebrew.

\*\*Literally "sanctification". (Hebrew) The prayer and ceremony that sanctifies the Sabbath and Jewish holy days. More specifically the blessing over wine on the Sabbath or holy days.

nights were spent in study. We not only tried to increase our fund of knowledge of the Talmud, but also took into account the type of living that was held up to us as ideal.

I left the *yeshivah* when I was about eighteen years old and returned to my home town, Vilna. There, feeling the need of furthering my secular education, I hired a private teacher. This man, a pharmacist out of a job, gave me lessons in Latin, Russian literature, and mathematics. This went on for about two years, during which time I in turn gave lessons in Hebrew and thus earned my living. It was customary for Jews living in villages and small towns to come to Vilna to get an instructor in Hebrew and other related subjects for their children, and I was one of the young men who fulfilled that need.

In 1912 I was called up for the army, but upon my physical examination it was discovered that I had myopia. Consequently I was placed in the second reserve, which meant that I would be called on to serve only during an emergency. It was lucky for me that I was called in the year 1912, as the very next year myopia was not considered sufficient reason for exemption.

With this blue certificate in my pocket, I then began to look around for means of earning a livelihood. Fortunately for me a stationery store became available at the "right price", because the owner who had purchased it for his daughter was forced to sell, as she had no inclination for that kind of business. I therefore bought it for the magnificent sum of twenty-five rubles.

#### START OF BUSINESS CAREER

Here, in my first business venture, I spread my wings. First of all I increased my stock, added magazines and newspapers, and then obtained a permit to turn it into a book store, a much more lucrative business. Since there were eight schools in the vicinity, I stocked textbooks and school materials. The pupils in school were not supplied by the schools, but were required to make these purchases on their own.

This store developed into a fine, though small, enterprise. I ventured into carrying small musical instruments such as balalaikas and mandolins. I stocked picture postcards and even started a lending library. The best customer of the library was *its owner*.

There had been rumors and talk of war for about two years. These rumors increased and spread daily, until by this time, war became a

certainty. We daily saw transports of soldiers stopping at the station. Soldiers would stop a short while, overrun the stores in the vicinity, clamoring for food and hot water with which to make their tea. One must understand that this was the only way they got their necessities while en route to their destinations. My store was right next to a sausage store. The soldiers would get their pork sausages there and then come to me to purchase indelible pencils, writing paper, and picture postcards to send home. Since pens required ink, which was impossible to use while traveling, the indelible pencil was the only answer. As a small insight into the kind of life that was lived at that time, I need only mention that my neighbor, the sausage man, would wipe off the green mold from the sausages with a cloth dipped in oil (naturally there was no refrigeration of any kind).

#### WAR BREAKS OUT

Then it happened! In August of 1914 the Germans marched eastward. The first casualties were those provinces nearest to the border. Jews in those towns were evacuated eastward. The Russian Czarist government considered its Jewish population untrustworthy and was afraid that they would spy for the Germans. The following year, on Yom Kippur, the German army entered Vilna. The night before the invasion a strange warning made the rounds. No one knew where it originated, but everybody obeyed: that Jewish young men should not go to the synagogue for the *Kol Nidrei*\* service. It was believed that the Russian army people would enter the synagogue to round up the young men for army service.

That *erev*\*\* Yom Kippur morning I had a frightening experience. My Uncle Leib had been expelled from Kovno along with all the other Jews there, and he had come to Vilna. He lived not far from us, and I was on my way home after visiting my uncle's family. Suddenly I was stopped by a Russian policeman and ordered to follow him to the police station. Realizing the danger of the situation (of being taken into the Russian army and shipped eastward) I gave him thirty kopeks, all the money that I had with me. For this paltry sum, the price of three packages of cigarettes, I bought my freedom and my life, and am here to tell the story!

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\*The prayer ushering in the Yom Kippur Service. (Hebrew)

\*\*Literally "Eve". The holiday begins at sunset. Consequently the morning of that day. (Hebrew)

## GERMAN OCCUPATION

The next morning, Yom Kippur, we were drawn by curiosity to the center of the city, and there, in front of the City Hall, we saw German soldiers, now in full possession of the city. We then understood that they had entered during the night without firing a shot! The Russians had retreated, and Vilna was now conquered territory.

All private business dealings stopped abruptly. The Germans took away all raw materials and all the merchandise they could find use for. My business ended completely. All the schools had been evacuated to Russia; and whoever wished to study changed over to the German or Polish language. In order to earn some money I obtained a job with the census bureau, but it didn't last long.

Since most of the doctors had been mobilized by the Russian army, many towns remained without medical service. In our section the Germans sent in a military doctor twice a week for the civilian population. Knowing German, I secured employment as interpreter and record-keeper for the doctor. My pay was one and a half marks a day. (The price of bread was two marks a pound). Later on the Germans, fearing an epidemic of typhoid fever, opened a school on the German border where people were instructed in the prevention of the spread of disease. Two people were chosen from each district to take these instructions, and the "Amtsforshterher"\* (the representative of the German military government to the civil population) selected me as the one from our district. He thereby proved to be my own "good angel", for by doing so he enabled me to meet my future wife.

I was given a permit to travel and a railroad ticket, and I arrived in the small border town of Kretinga where such a school was located. Each one of our group was assigned quarters in a private home. I was placed in the home of Zundel and Minna Priest and their two daughters.

The method followed was for each of the students to be housed and fed during his course of study, six weeks, and the German government compensated the householder for that expense. At the end of the course each of us received a certificate, and we were ready for our duties as members of the medical corps.

In the meantime I had kept my eyes open and noticed that the town offered unusual business opportunities. Since it was a border town and merchandise passed through on the way from Germany, there

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\**Amtsvorsteher*. (German)

were many potential customers for each item. I bought what I could and, having a travel permit, was able to sell my goods in Vilna. Because all items of daily use were scarce, it netted me a good profit. In time I accumulated a goodly sum of money.

#### CAUGHT UP BY THE WAR

When I disclosed to my father that I was interested in a young lady in whose father's house I had been lodging, he came back with me in order to meet her family. With his approval we made plans to get married right after the war. Unfortunately, the war for that entire region did not end so quickly. On the last trip the train that usually took me to Vilna turned around and went back to Germany. We stopped in Tilsit. I continued my journey through Germany and came out at Verballen, a town near Kovno. I thought I could take a train there direct to Vilna, but this train, too, traveled only half way. The Russians were on the march to overtake the Poles and retake Vilna.

The other merchants, three in number, and I hired a sled and its driver (it was winter time) in an effort to get to Vilna. We could not travel along the main highway because the Russian army was on that road and we certainly were not anxious to meet up with them. Our driver, trying to avoid the Russians, took side roads, and so we traveled on for a couple of hours until we were spotted by a Russian patrol. "Stoy!" (stop) he yelled, "Where are you going?" "Do you have any guns?" We naturally did not have any guns and said so. "Well," he said, "let's go to the commandant." As the soldier was riding on a horse and he *did* have a gun, we had no choice in the matter but to follow him. Everyone of us, we were all "in the same boat", had merchandise which he hoped to sell in Vilna, and that was absolutely forbidden under the Russian rule. I do not know what would have happened to us had we gotten to the commandant.

Again we were saved by a good angel, and unbelievably the angel was in the form of a horse! We arrived in the town where the commandant was stationed in tow of the armed soldier, and started climbing the steep hill on top of which the house stood. At that moment we saw a horse hitched to a long sled, without a driver, running down the hill, zigzagging wildly, apparently out of control. Realizing the danger we were in, all of us, including the soldier, ran down to a side street in an attempt to avoid clashing with the horse, we on one side of the road and the soldier on the other. Our drivers, being natives of the neighborhood, knew all the highways and byways. Seeing that they

were rid of the soldier, they quickly turned the horses on to another road, whipped them up, and we were on an alternate road to Vilna.

#### ESCAPE

But we were not yet "out of the woods". After that fortunate escape from the Russian soldier, we came upon a second one who asked the same questions and received the same answers. Only this one wanted to know whether we had some sugar, which we did not have. But we got the message, and each of us gave him some item out of his stock; I for instance gave him warm underwear. He took whatever each one gave him and rode off with the warning, over his shoulder, that we should be sure to hide whatever weapons we might be carrying. We sighed with relief at his departure, and suddenly realized that we were tired and hungry. It was getting dark, and we began to look around for an inn or some other place where we might spend the night. What happened next seemed like a nightmare, and I still can't believe it actually happened.

We came upon an inn which we knew was run by a Jew, but when we got nearer to the place we saw that the door was locked. One of us knocked on the door, requesting the right to enter. A childish voice from within called out that the parents, who ran the inn, were away and had instructed the children, whom they left behind, not to open the door for anyone until they returned.

To all of us this seemed so natural and reasonable that we immediately turned aside and were ready to continue on our way, disappointed though we were. Inexplicably, one of our number, perhaps he was a bit hungrier than the rest of us, shouted at the children, ordering them to open the door. Before we could stop him, he picked up some stones and began hurling them at the windows. The tinkling of shattering glass made my skin creep, so reminiscent was it of the sounds of pogroms. With all our might we pulled the man away from the house and hastily rode off.

We soon came upon a house in a nearby village, and the owner, a peasant, kindly permitted us to enter and immediately put some bread and tea on the table for us. We gladly accepted his hospitality and started to put the ugly episode at the inn out of our minds. Or so we thought!

Suddenly the loud clatter of horses' hooves was heard, and a man burst into the little cottage, brandishing his whip. He loudly demanded to know whether we were the "hooligans" who had broken his windows

and frightened his children. What could we do but admit the fact and plead for forgiveness? With understandable anger he shouted that we had better watch out, that he would report the matter to the police in Vilna in the morning. After he left, we furtively glanced out of the window, thinking that we might have a chance to make our escape during the night. To our horror we saw that there was a ring of armed peasants surrounding the house. All plans of escaping were abandoned. Who could then think of eating or sleeping, hungry and tired though we were!

Imagine our surprise and amazement then, when early in the morning we looked out the window and saw no one there! All the armed peasants, apparently, had gone sometime during the night. Why they had disappeared and what they planned to do about us I still can't figure out. We just left quietly, gratefully, and never heard about the incident again, but my career as a smuggler had definitely ended. Nothing could make me continue this "business", lucrative though it was. I realized that I was just not cut out to be a smuggler.

So as not to be conspicuous, we entered Vilna one by one on foot. I walked straight home, as I somehow had the feeling that this would probably be my last chance to see my family, conditions being so uncertain. I found only my mother at home and gave her 5,000 marks of the 9,000 that I had with me, and told her of my plans to get married.

#### ROMANCE AND MARRIAGE

Somehow I managed to get back to my fiancée by traveling through Germany. Then she and I decided to get married immediately; we had waited long enough. My intended, Fannie,\* had a large family in town and many friends, but I, being a stranger, was all alone in that *shtetel*.\*\* I therefore said that I wanted us to be married in Memel, a German city where many Jews had settled after the war. She consented, and I arranged to have the "Salanter *Rov*†", that is the former rabbi of Salant who was serving the city of Memel at the time, to perform the ceremony. He arrived with a *minyán*‡ at the hotel, the Berliner Hoff, where I had taken a room for a week, and he took charge. Since we had no veil for the bride, he led her over to the window and used the curtain as a veil.

\*Feige in Yiddish.

\*\*Village. (Yiddish)

†Rabbi. (Yiddish)

‡Ten male Jews necessary for a religious ceremony. (Hebrew)



Left to right: Fannie's Sister Haika, Fannie and Nathan Resnik, taken in Europe.

I tried upon our return to Kretinga to engage in business, but that was difficult. The country was small, and the Lithuanians, wanting any possible business for themselves, began to harrass the Jews. They made it virtually impossible for a Jew to succeed in any effort. Lithuania had received its independence from the Germans in 1916, but had practically no resources of its own. For, whatever I tried to do, I was obliged to travel to the capital city of Kovno to obtain a permit. For instance, I tried to purchase a carload of cigarettes imported from Holland, but after I obtained a permit I was told that it was already sold to another importer. I tried then to open a cinema, called a *kino* in Lithuania, in Kretinga and was told that the only electricity they could produce was needed to light the town and could not be "wasted" in running a house of amusement.

#### EMIGRATION

I became disgusted with the situation and proposed to my wife that we abandon Europe. Since I saw no future for us in the land of our birth, we should plan to emigrate to America. To this she readily agreed. Through the helpful efforts of good friends, we obtained passports in the city of Memel, at that time French occupied territory.

From there we went to the port city of Danzig, where there was an American consulate, and obtained visas for America. I had already received an affidavit from my wife's brother-in-law, Israel Sherman, of Providence, Rhode Island and so had little difficulty on that score. With these precious papers in our pockets we then proceeded to return to Memel, where there was a German consulate, in order to obtain transit visas for Germany, since we had to traverse that country in order to get to Antwerp, Belgium, where we were to embark on the ship for New York.

I still remember with gratitude the kindness of a man in Memel who was a perfect stranger to us. Mr. Yafschitz was a prominent businessman, who had had business dealings with an uncle of my wife's, Leib Mendelovitz. At Uncle Leib's request he used his influence "in the right places" and helped me procure the Memel passports. This was no small feat.

When we had returned to Memel from Danzig, we were required to apply for the transit visas but struck a snag at the German consulate. The consul refused to issue them, arguing that our passports read "Valid only for emigration to America." Almost in desperation I turned to



Nathan and Fannie Resnik.

Mr. Yafshitz, and this good man introduced me to a French official, Captain La Roche, who happened to be a personal friend of his. The captain took our passports, kept them for two days, during which time I imagine he communicated with his German counterpart in the German consulate, and then instructed us to return to the German office. This time there was no difficulty at all, and in short order the transit visas were in our possession.

How many kindnesses from practically total strangers did we receive! We now had all the important documents needed, and we were on our way to the "goldeneh medina",\* the golden land of America!

## CHAPTER II—MY LIFE IN AMERICA

We now entrained for Berlin, where we were to spend several days. The reason for this stopover is a story in itself.

Some friends of my in-laws had a young daughter who was about to travel to New York, where her fiance was waiting for her. As she had never been out of the town of her birth, her parents were reluctant to let her travel by herself and pleaded that we let her travel with us.

Naturally we consented. How could we know the trouble that this would bring us? We didn't know that she had no visa to travel across the Polish corridor, which we must traverse in order to get to Berlin from Memel. We soon found out, however, when we reached the border and Polish officials boarded the train to check the passengers for visas. While all our papers were in order, our young lady had none, and she was unceremoniously taken off the train. I just had time to advise her to turn her money over to me for safe keeping. (We had been warned that the officials confiscate all moneys found on such passengers). I also told her that we would be waiting for her in Berlin, even though at that moment I had no assurance that she would even be permitted to get there.

We arrived in Berlin late that night and had to worry about not only our luggage but hers as well. Early the following morning I ran to the Lithuanian consulate in Berlin and told my story, asking for advice and help in locating my charge. The answer was a shrug of the consul's shoulders and a cold stare. I then knew that it was up to me to find the girl.

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\*Literally, "golden country". *Medina* is Hebrew for "country" or "land". (Yiddish)

We then started haunting the railroad station, closely examining every train that passed. Unbelievably, we finally saw a train pull in in which we spotted her standing in the doorway of the train. We ran along the slowly moving cars and yelled to her but one word—"Friedrichstrasse"—the name of the station where we would meet her. She nodded understanding. We took the following train and, when we got to the Friedrichstrasse station, found her waiting for us.

We had other difficulties with her, but we did manage finally to get her safely into the hands of her fiance in New York. Their gratitude more than compensated us for the trouble we had gone through in her behalf.

#### INTERLUDE IN BERLIN

After that first worrisome day in Berlin we spent several days during which we allowed ourselves some relaxation—rightly deserved, we felt—and acted like "tourists". We saw the sights, even attended a performance of the *Merchant of Venice* under the direction of the famous Max Reinhardt. But we had very little pleasure from the performance, masterful though it was. I can still feel the waves of hatred permeating the audience as a result of the "Jewish" references made on the stage. It seemed as if the air was thick with it; we could almost touch it.

From Berlin we traveled straight on to Antwerp, Belgium, and there again we had to wait a few days until we could embark on our ship the *Kroomland* of the Red Star Line.

I have preserved and kept as a curiosity the printed passenger list and our passports. As we traveled second class we were spared much of the discomfort of the usual immigrant of that day. Only one humiliation we were not spared—that is, the disinfection of all our clothes. We ourselves, along with all the other passengers, had to take baths while our personal attire was given "the treatment."

Our sea voyage in the main was not unpleasant and lasted fifteen days. One bad experience was the rough sea of the English Channel crossing. We found the Channel thick with fog. I think I can still hear the blowing of the foghorns and the bells ringing that entire night through.

On the ocean trip we had our usual share of seasickness, but, compared with what I have heard other immigrants tell of their passage, our trip was pleasant and uneventful.

Among our experiences the most interesting was undoubtedly our introduction to new and strange foods. Who in Vilna had ever heard of cornflakes? We had to be told to pour milk in the bowl and eat it with a spoon, and found it surprisingly palatable.

#### ARRIVAL IN AMERICA

Upon our arrival in New York we did not have to go to Ellis Island because, as I have mentioned, we traveled second class. We were advised not to try to get to a hotel on our own as we knew no English and our money was in German marks and not in American dollars. The best thing to do, we were told, was to consult the representative of HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, who was present. We did so and were taken, along with the other Jewish immigrants, to HIAS headquarters. We were then asked our destination and whether we had the necessary funds to get there. I explained that I was not in need of money, as I would be able to exchange my German money the following day. To my surprise and chagrin, the next morning I was handed a telegram from relatives in Providence accompanied by \$25 for our use. It seems that the HIAS officials, disregarding that I said I had money, and without telling me, had notified Providence about our arrival, and the wire was the result!

I had the address of my Uncle Berel Abrams, my mother's brother, and so the very first thing I wanted to do was to make contact with him. The HIAS officials were reluctant to let us go off by ourselves; so they telephoned him. In the space of two hours he was there and brought us to his home in Brooklyn. What a thrill it was for me to meet again my mother's brother, whom I had seen but once in my life before. That happened when I was a very young child when he had come to take leave of my mother just before sailing for America.

We spent five days in his home; and he, his wife, and children showed us a bit of New York. We saw Coney Island and various parks and had the life-time thrill of climbing to the top of the then world's tallest edifice, the famous Woolworth Building in downtown New York.

One of my cousins took me to a bank where I was finally able to exchange one thousand German marks for the magnificent sum of fifteen American dollars! I still have about twelve thousand German marks in my possession.

## LIFE IN PROVIDENCE BEGINS

After five wonderful days in New York my cousin drove me to Grand Central Station, where we took the train to Providence. When we arrived there both Mamie and Ida, my wife's sisters, were waiting at Union Station. We were taken to Ida's house and we stayed with her until just before *Pesach*\*, a space of about two weeks. For Passover we were invited to be with an uncle and aunt, Boruch and Chasa Riva Priest on Howell Street.

Passover morning Uncle Boruch and I attended services at the Ahavath Sholom Synagogue, the most beautiful synagogue I had seen till that time. I was particularly struck by its furnishings. I am happy to see that the fine *Aron Ha—Kodesh*\*\*\*, the Holy Ark, of the synagogue is still in use at the Mishkon Tfiloh Synagogue on Summit Avenue, where I see it every Saturday morning when I attend Sabbath services.

I recall with pleasure that my attire at that time was not at all like that of a "greener"†, and I was well received by the other worshippers to whom I was introduced by Uncle Boruch. One of them particularly pops up in my memory, Simon Klein, a friend of Feige's other uncle, Samuel Priest. Sam Priest and his family were most friendly to us, and he in particular proved himself a *real* uncle in every way, as I shall point out in the following pages.

Klein, on learning who I was, and that I was a new immigrant, asked me whether I had already seen my other uncle, Sam Priest. When I answered in the affirmative, he wanted to know whether my uncle had offered any assistance in getting me established in Providence. I told him that Priest had offered me a choice of either a job in his mill or his help in starting in business for myself, but that I had not yet made up my mind which offer to accept.

I can still see Klein's sly smile as he said, "Don't take any job! Go into business!" And that proved to be good advice.

Immediately after Passover we went to Mamie's house, where Herman, Boruch's son, introduced me to other relatives. Through his recommendation I managed to acquire two pupils for Hebrew tutor-

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\*Passover. (Hebrew)

\*\*The shrine or closet in the synagogue in which the Scrolls of the Law are kept.

†Greenhorn. (Yiddish)

ing. During this time Alfred A. Fain, at the urging of Sam Priest, accompanied me while we inspected a number of empty stores with the intention of finding one that I might decide on to open as a grocery store. Since Fain was the owner of a wholesale grocery business, he was the logical person to help me to decide.

#### IN BUSINESS IN AMERICA

We finally settled on a store on Middle Street in Pawtucket, and Sam Priest, true to his promise, bought it for us for five hundred dollars. And so we were in business in America! What was more, there was a tenement in back of the store where we could and did make our home.

Early in June of 1915 we opened the store, not knowing the language of the country, the names of the items we were to buy and sell, or their prices. It took us about six months to realize that this was not "our cup of tea"; so I started looking around for something to do to augment our income.

On the same street, near the store, there was a spinning mill where several hundred people were employed in day and night shifts. This gave me an idea: These people must surely eat during lunch periods! I therefore went to the head office and inquired if I would be permitted to come and sell food to their employees. Think of the *chutzpa*\* of a greenhorn!

To my happy surprise permission was granted immediately, and I went to work. I discovered that the main items wanted by the people there were soda, chewing tobacco, cigarettes, candy, and similar items. And these things, then, were to be my stock in trade. I loaded myself with a case of 24 small bottles of soda, harnessed to my back and, together with the other items on my person, walked throughout the mill, upstairs and downstairs, both mornings and afternoons. After a while I was even permitted to use one of their "indoor trucks" to transport the loads. Since the truck could go into the elevators, I was relieved of the job of lugging the merchandise on my shoulders, and thus made my life a bit easier.

However, this did not last long. Across the street from the mill there was a rival store run by a man who begrudged me the business of the mill. He persuaded the elevator man, by what means I don't know, not

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\*Gall, brazen nerve, effrontery. (Hebrew)

to allow me to ride the elevator, so that I had to go back to lugging the loads again.

After a while the superintendent suggested to me that, as long as there were full facilities in the mill for cooking and serving meals, there was no reason not to take advantage of them and serve the men with real hot meals.

This indeed sounded sensible to me and a real opportunity. But the move entailed quite an undertaking, since neither my wife nor I had any knowledge of, or experience in the preparing of non-Jewish foods. We didn't even know what American non-Jewish people like to eat. We therefore had to hire a woman to prepare the food and even to decide on the menus. It was my job to purchase whatever she said was needed. I continued my soft drink project, which continued to be very profitable. The mill was kept at a high temperature because of the nature of the manufacture, and the men were always thirsty. Some weeks we sold from eighty to a hundred cases, and this was an enormous amount.

On the other hand, the dinner business was a ruination. We sold only about six or seven dinners a day. At the thirty-five cents a meal which we charged, the cost of the food plus the wages of the cook more than ate up the profits. So we decided to go into the mill at night also after we had closed the store for the day and serve the night shift. This proved to be financially profitable, since the cost of the cook remained the same as before, but it almost ruined our health. We then planned to close the store altogether and devote all of our time to the mill, but our good relative, who had done so much for us, advised very strongly against the move. We therefore continued working in the store and in the mill, totalling about seventeen to eighteen hours a day out of the twenty-four! We took it for about two years. Then, come hell or high water, we could take it no longer and quit the mill. We stayed on in the store until May of 1925, meanwhile looking around for another suitable business, but to our dismay were unsuccessful in our search.

At about this time a relative of Fannie's had difficulties with partners in his business and had to go through bankruptcy. Sam Priest, who held the mortgage on the business, suggested that I step in as a partner. I did so, and after six months we moved to Providence. We found a flat on Somerset Street in Providence after selling the store in Pawtucket.

We lived there for about a year and then moved to a nicer flat on Reynolds Avenue. It was there in 1930 that our first child, Sol Leon,

was born. From there we moved to Ontario Street; and there in 1934 our daughter, Beverly Ann, was born, and our family was complete.

#### EMBLEMS AND BADGES

My relative and I formed a corporation to manufacture emblems, medals, badges, and related items, and I was the one who made the capital investment needed to start the venture. In order to give the business a chance to become established, a clause was written into the bylaws that neither of us was to draw any salary for the first six months.

Imagine my dismay, then, when the very first Friday of our venture my partner threatened to leave and look for a job unless I permitted him to draw a weekly wage that very day and every week thereafter! This was the first of a long line of aggravations resulting from broken pledges and incompetence, and I soon realized that I had been "taken for a ride". As I was new to this sort of business I had no choice but to let him do so, even though I myself adhered to the agreement and drew no money for the six-month period.

After that initial breaking in period I started traveling to other cities by myself and acquired new customers, and thus enlarged the business. We had our ups and downs, but every time new money was needed for anything I was the one who had to supply it.

This situation continued until 1932, when I felt that I had had enough. I decided once and for all that I was through and urged my partner either to buy me out or sell to me. I was so anxious to sever the business relationship that I offered to give him more than I demanded for myself if he were to buy me out.

My presence in the business evidently was valuable enough to keep my partner from wanting to see me leave. I had to threaten to throw the business into receivership before he consented to buy my stock in the corporation and thus let me off the hook. This he finally did, and I was once again my own man.

#### ESTABLISHES OWN BUSINESS

So in 1933 I founded my own business and called it Emblem and Badge Manufacturing Company. Now, although I no longer own the company, the name Emblem and Badge still exists and stands for a prosperous and going concern, one with which people deal with confidence and satisfaction, exactly as I had established it so many years ago. This has given me no end of inner satisfaction.

On Richmond Street in Providence I found suitable premises for a small shop; and I acquired the necessary equipment, hired the necessary help, and started manufacturing. In 1934 I was able to buy out Arno Wrazlowsky's factory on 220 Eddy Street, which proved to be a good venture.

One of my first successful achievements was acquiring as a customer a large military supply house in New York. Just filling its orders was enough to keep me busy. In the year 1935 this one customer gave me over twenty thousand dollars worth of business, which was certainly a great sum for a small business such as mine. However, competitors quickly found out who my customer was and started to undersell me. They cut prices, which resulted in my losing that valuable account.

#### WORLD WAR II

By this time the world political situation had become uncertain, the breath of war was in the air, and the demand for military items increased. I soon was able to replace some of my lost business by getting smaller military firms as customers.

Fortunately I had bought about four thousand pounds of brass, which at this time was becoming difficult to obtain, and so had the necessary materials for manufacturing the insignia required.

In 1940 all copper stock was frozen by the government, and a declaration of amount on hand had to be submitted. The War Production Board permitted me to make use of this material for their insignia. After I had used up that reserve stock, and being unable to get a priority to purchase more, I was again in trouble.

In order to stay in business I had to shift to making costume jewelry. For this, however, we were to use only silver, and this material was allotted by the government to each individual manufacturer. I was allowed to purchase two thousand troy ounces of silver every three months, which kept me going through the war years.

In 1936 we had cashed in a life insurance policy and used the money to purchase a home at 96 Moore Street in Providence. That house was to be home for us during our children's growing-up years, their school years, and subsequent marriages.

All through the years I was in communication with my family in Lithuania and knew of the doings of the various members. My brother

Shmuel\* had graduated from the Vilna Gymnasium and wanted to continue his studies so as to become an agronomist. He was accepted as a student in the University of Nancy, France, from which he was subsequently graduated. He remained in France for a while, having found work on various farms, even as far away as the island of Corsica, even though as a foreigner he could not get a formal work permit. (He was not the only foreigner who worked in France without a permit). However, he had the misfortune of becoming ill with appendicitis, had to undergo surgery, and then was told politely to leave France.

When I heard that he had returned to Vilna, I wrote to him urging him to come to America, naturally with my financial help, as the heavy war clouds seemed to hang over Europe. His letter, in which he refused to leave his home town, explained his reason all too clearly. He told of the hardships he had had during his student years in France in a country whose language and way of life were strange to him; how he had agonized trying to learn French well enough so that he could pursue his studies in that language, and after all that being forced to return to his native Lithuania and revert to his old life-style. He wrote:

“And now you suggest that I come to America, go through that agony again trying to learn yet another language, get used to yet another culture. No, brother, that is too much to ask from one lifetime. You would do better if you were to send for our youngest sister, Miriam. For her there is no future in Lithuania.”

This I did, and in 1937 my sister Miriam arrived. Besides myself, she is thus the only other member of my family to have escaped the Nazis. She lived with my family, and in 1943 Fannie and I had the pleasure of seeing her married. She now lives in New York and has two daughters. At this writing her daughter Dvorah is married and is the mother of two little girls. Needless to say, this is a source of great satisfaction to me. At least I have succeeded in saving one member of my family. Would that there had been more!

After the war the metal supplies were unfrozen, and the fever of the war jewelry trade came to a close. New fine jewelry was being manufactured by regular jewelry houses. The jobbers or dealers, who in the past had flocked to Providence, no longer needed to do so. From a seller's market it had turned into a buyer's market. There simply was not enough business to go around.

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\*Samuel.

In 1953 it came to our notice that a larger silver manufacturer in Connecticut was also manufacturing trophies. Until that time trophies were an expensive product, being made of real silver. However, now a line of inexpensive trophy items had begun to flood the market. The Connecticut firm found it impossible to compete with the cheaper line. They then decided to liquidate that portion of their business. A representative of the firm came to see me and offered the entire stock, tools, molds, and other items for \$25,000.

Since I was alone in my business, I did not think I could possibly manage so large an undertaking, and asked him to offer it to me again the following year when my son would be through with his studies and would be in a position to enter my firm. However, an Attleboro jeweler, who had never previously manufactured trophies, took advantage of the offer, and I lost out.

My business remained a one-man affair. I printed a small catalog, ran some advertisements in the newspapers, and engaged in some direct mail advertising. I sensed that the business could be expanded into something quite large if I only had the proper additional management assistance.

#### SON ENTERS BUSINESS

My son Sol had been a student at the University of Rhode Island in Kingston. He did very well in his studies there and was incidentally able to support himself. He obtained a cigarette agency for the school, corrected student papers, and managed the school radio station. His obvious management abilities prompted his professors to prepare him for enrollment in the Wharton School of Business and Finance of the University of Pennsylvania, from which he obtained his Masters degree. Although busy with his studies and academic achievements, he managed to maintain his interest in Zionism and synagogue affairs. Shortly after graduation he married the former Esther Petersohn and then formally entered the business.

Beverly graduated cum laude from Classical High School. She followed in her brother's footsteps in Young Judea leadership and was eventually elected to national office. She graduated from Pembroke College in Brown University.

## STARTS RETAIL OUTLET

My location in the heart of the jewelry manufacturing area had been perfect until now. But as I saw no future solely in manufacturing now that conditions had changed, I resolved also to enter the retail trade. I realized, however, that in order to sell as well as manufacture, I must locate in a spot more convenient for shoppers.

In 1954 I therefore rented a store on Pine Street in Providence, at that time a very busy thoroughfare. I decorated a couple of windows with displays of my stock. I even obtained permission, through the kindness of the late William White of the Hospital Trust Bank, to have a display case in the lobby of the bank building, and then also in the main branch of the Old Stone Bank.

The landlord of the building where I had my business, the late Henry Hassenfeld, was also very kind to me. Since the rest of the building was unoccupied, he allowed me to use this area in addition to the space I was renting without any additional charge. Even this was not easy for me to manage since the rental on the Pine Street premises was double that of my old quarters on Eddy Street.

On August 14, 1954 Providence experienced an event it would long remember, and I certainly shall for many, many years. The second hurricane of the twentieth century came to our city that day, and the entire downtown section was flooded, almost as extensively as in the hurricane of 1938. Both my son Sol and I were on the premises when the "big blow" struck and the water started gushing in. We realized that our business records, which were in the store, which faced Pine Street, would be ruined by the water if they were not immediately put at a higher level.

## HURRICANE OF 1954

However, we were not in the store itself at the time and in order to reach them we must somehow find our way around the building to the front door. The connecting door between the shop and the store was always kept locked for security reasons. I can still see the picture of Sol swimming in the street in order to reach the front door to unlock it, pick up the records, and put them on a higher shelf to keep them out of the water. All around us people were paddling in boats as if we had suddenly been transported to the midst of a river. Warren Walden of radio station WJAR and other radio announcers and reporters of the local newspapers cruised by in a boat in order to obtain firsthand

views of the catastrophe. The manhole covers in the streets had been blown out, and the Providence River was gushing all through the streets.

The Internal Revenue Service was at the time located in a building on Dyer Street near the river, presently the offices of the Social Security Administration, and I recall as in a nightmare seeing many drawers and folders floating around on the water.

I remained on one side of the building, not knowing whether Sol had made it to the other side, the front of the store. The fifteen minutes or so until I heard Sol's voice from the store still seem an eternity to me!

In 1956 we had the great pleasure of seeing Beverly married to Andrew Blazar, the son of Evelyn and Milton Blazar. Soon after Beverly and Andy were married they left Rhode Island so that Andy could pursue his medical studies, first in Boston and then in Philadelphia, where their first child, Judith, was born. They returned to Rhode Island in the early 1960s.

#### BUSINESS EXPANDS

Sol's joining me was the "shot in the arm" that Emblem & Badge needed. His ideas were fresh and ambitious, and our ventures proved successful. Our first step was to get loans for expansion, and here my good credit record stood me in good stead. My bank extended loans of sizeable amounts, and this was a flow of fresh blood to the business.

In 1961 we were suddenly confronted with an important decision: the building on Eddy Street was put up for sale by its owner, and we were given first choice. However, the price demanded was beyond our means, especially the down payment of \$40,000, and again we found ourselves in search of a new home for our Emblem & Badge. At that moment of crisis, having to leave the premises on Eddy Street where we were running a well-established business, both retail and manufacturing, there seemed to be no place available for us. Then almost as if by a miracle, we were offered a golden opportunity of purchasing a large building on North Main Street in Providence on very favorable terms. It seemed almost God-sent to us. Naturally we seized the chance, and it is still home to Emblem & Badge.

Several years later Sol made a proposal to take over the running of the firm by himself. I decided to give him that opportunity. Both Beverly and Andrew had assured me that they had no interest in the business, and both agreed that Sol's work in and devotion to the busi-

ness of many years merited reward. This assurance enabled me to proceed to turning the business over to Sol. I remained an officer of the corporation, but only as a consultant.

In 1958 Fannie and I had the pleasure of realizing an old dream—we went on our first pilgrimage to Israel and thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it. On the return trip we visited several countries of Europe, and I still have the movies I made to prove it. We made a second trip in 1962, equally as enjoyable.

In 1964, wanting to be near the children, both of whom were living on the East Side of Providence, we sold our home on Moore Street and rented an apartment in Pawtucket, almost within walking distance of them.

Then in 1967 I lived through the greatest tragedy of my life. My dear Fannie, who had been ailing for quite some time, passed away. When I was left alone I stayed on at my apartment on Unity Street in Pawtucket for a short time. Eventually I moved in with Sol and Esther.

#### VISIT TO ISRAEL

In an attempt to forget a bit, I made another trip to Israel in the fall of 1967, and found much comfort in seeing the results of the Six-Day War, especially the fact that Jerusalem was now united and once again the whole city was the capital of Israel.

Every winter since then I have spent some time in Miami Beach and renewed acquaintance with old Zionist and Hebrew-speaking friends. My next visit to Israel, the fourth, came early in 1970. I had learned that a very dear and devoted friend of my family, Morris W. Shoham, had died. Morris Shoham had been both Sol's and Beverly's Hebrew teacher. But this was not all. Both Morris and his wife, Jeannette, had been as close to Fannie and me as people who were not blood relatives could possibly be. The four of us had spent almost all free time together. They were frequent guests in our home at holiday time, and our children were as attached to them as if they indeed had been their uncle and aunt. In 1958 they "made *aliyah*"\* (moved to Israel) and

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\**Aliyah* means "ascent" or "going up." (Hebrew) In this context it means ascent to the Land of Israel for permanent settlement. Probably related to the comparative geographical elevation of Israel (e.g. in relation to Egypt), it was extended to apply to journeys from any country to Israel, whether in pilgrimage or for permanent settlement.

had lived there ever since. I learned that my friend Morris had died. During this visit I naturally paid a condolence call on Jeannette, and together we recalled the old days when we both had led such happy lives with our respective mates, both of whom had now left us.

The following summer Jeannette came to visit her sisters in Providence, and we saw each other frequently. I made my fifth trip to Israel in the fall of 1971, again saw Jeannette, and at that time we came to the conclusion that we should spend the rest of our lives together. I wrote to my children informing them of our joint decision, and received their prompt and warm agreement.

Jeannette, who had to make arrangements for leasing her house, stayed on until February 2, when she arrived in Providence. We were married ten days later at Mishkon Tfiloh Synagogue. Jeannette, an old time Hadassah and Zionist worker, who had also done much lecturing and writing, soon found her niche in Rhode Island. She continues these activities, both in the literary field and in Zionist and other organizational areas. We rented an apartment not far from my previous one, and we are still the Resnik family in Rhode Island, together with our children and grandchildren.

#### EPILOGUE

I have reread the above, the account of the events of my life, and as the memories crowd in on me, and I relive them all, one enormous fact imprints itself on my mind. At every turning point, whenever I was faced with a seemingly insurmountable difficulty, even when death literally stared me in the face, somehow, from somewhere, had come succor and help at the right moment. It seems as if a rescuing angel always stood ready to help, to save, and to point the way.