



Bessarabia SIG

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Levitt family history reunion:

Family heritage from Kishinev to Montreal to Los Angeles.

Several things jump out at you when you look at our early family history. Our name was not Levitt, it was Levit. Throughout most of our common ancestry, anti-Semitism was a pivotal influence on where we lived, what we did, and whether we survived. A 14-year old relative was killed by Nazis who heard her playing the piano, burst into her home and shot her. As her parents rushed in to see what happened, they were beaten to death with rifle butts. Another relative starved to death fleeing Hitler's troops. Shaya had part of his ear sliced off by an anti-Semitic Russian army officer. Months later, as Shaya was riding with his father, Yontel, Russian hooligans attacked Shaya. Yontel's arm was cut and broken after being hit by an iron rod while defending his son. He eventually died from the infection that set in.

A majority of our ancestors were self-employed and ran small businesses instead of working for others. Many had names beginning with the letter "M," and a large number lived to be quite old. Most were unpretentious. Our ancestors were resourceful, and possibly foresighted to leave when they realized their plight. They were the very fortunate minority in the communities in which they lived.

Finally, despite their being raised in difficult times, sometimes with very strict, even emotionally distant parents, despite many leaving their homes in their early teens to strike out on their own, many Levits and Levitts shared one important value – a feeling of family connection. As Levits immigrated to Montreal and Detroit, they helped parents, siblings, and other relatives in Kishinev come across the ocean for a better life. Some helped pay the expenses and provided temporary or long-term hospitality in their homes. The same trait was observed in the next generation, as Levitts moved from Montreal to Detroit and Los Angeles. Several, including Ben Levitt, with his new wife Faye, welcomed other Levitts into their home - for as long as a year. Levitts helped other family find jobs or employed them in their own businesses. And for three or four Levitts, they were introduced to their future spouses via other Levitt relatives.

All of the above and much more shaped the trajectory of our family's history. And whether you are connected to a Levit by blood or not, you likely would not be reading this now if these values and events were not part of our collective past.

This little slice of family history was cobbled together over 35 years with the help of occasional discussions with relatives (who shared memories, records and documents) and a little historical and genealogical research, made easier by the Internet. Probably more can be learned in future years as files/rolls of microfilm from other countries are translated and digitized. It is remarkable what can be done already. I have gone to this length because perhaps some current or future relative will be interested and use bits of information here as clues in their own detective work, and fill in and share more of our heritage with future generations. There are lots of gaps in the story below, and there is a sequel that is occurring in your own family – right now.

Alan Levitt October 22, 2009
Father (with Marilyn Katz) of Shia Michele and David Benjamin
Son of Morty Levitt and Sylvia (Shapiro)
Grandson of Shaya and Nekhama (Gurman) Levitt
Great Grandson of Yontel and Kenya (Broitman) Levit
Great Grandson of Mechel and Hinda Gurman
Great Great Grandson of Mechel Broitman
Great Great Grandson of Monas (or Yidl) and Roochal Levit

KISHINEV

(now called by its Romanian name, Chisinau)

Our common ancestors are from the city of Kishinev in the country of Moldova, sandwiched between the Ukraine and Romania, about 100 miles from the Black Sea. When our ancestors lived there, Kishinev was part of Russia in the territory called Bessarabia. It first came under Russian rule in 1812 when it was annexed to Russia from the Principality of Moldavia, which was under the control of the Ottoman Empire.

The city became the capital of the government of Bessarabia, a rich agricultural region. At that time it had about 7,000 inhabitants including 144 Jews.

The earliest ancestor we can trace today is Monas Levit, who would have been born around 1830. We do not know anything about him, except that he was listed in a Bessarabia death record as the father of Yontel/Yontil Levit (note: a researcher hired by a distant Levitt relative believes Yontel's father was named Yehuda, but known as Yidl (a Yiddish diminutive of Yehuda). Yidl/Monas married a woman named Roochal. Yontel had one sister, Chana Levit.

Yontel was a buggy maker by trade and worked in related areas. He and all his family lived in the Jewish part of town in a courtyard popularly known in Yiddish as Yontel's "gass" or "dorf" - Yontel's street. He married Kenya Broitman (born about 1847). They had six children including Shaya (seven others died from accidents or disease).

In 1896, Shaya married Nekhama Gurman (called Annie, Nechama, or Bubba in Canada). It was an arranged marriage and her family paid a dowry of gold coins to Shaya. Over a 20-year period they became parents of Sarah, Rae, Ben, Yetta, Betty, Sydney, Moe, and Morty Levitt (two other children died before the age of three). Shaya's middle name is listed as Gersh in Moldavian records.

(Throughout this document, some name variations are included because they were spelled phonetically in different languages - Russian, Moldavian, Yiddish, French, and English. And so Yontel could also be variously spelled Yontil, Yankel, Jankel, and possibly other variations. When our family immigrated to Canada, the same thing happened. Immigration officials unfamiliar with these languages, tried as best they could to transliterate the names into French or English. Morty Levitt, as his friends and relatives called him, was listed as "Max" on his Canadian birth record (recorded by a Rabbi), but in other official records throughout his life he was named Mortimer. And yes, Levitt was spelled Levit then. We don't know why or how the extra "t" was added). See the end of this history why these variations and spelling could be useful in the future.)

Our family's destiny was inextricably linked to the developments in Kishinev. Under Russian rule, the city grew rapidly and became an important center. Jews played a major role in the commercial and industrial growth. They were heavily involved with the local and export trade in grain, wine, tobacco, wool, hides, lard and fruit. Trade with Odessa and Austria was largely controlled by Jews. Many were also tailors, seamstresses, shoemakers and cabinetmakers. But a large portion of the Jewish population was employed as day laborers, drivers, and farm workers.

The increase in importance of Kishinev as a trading center vastly expanded the city

and Jews from all over Russia emigrated there. By 1847 there were more than 10,000 Jews (12.2 percent of the population). But by 1897 almost half the population (46%) was Jewish - 50,000. At that time about 20,000 Jews were in the garment and timber industries and in the manufacture and trade of agricultural products for which the region was noted. In 1898, Jews owned 29 out of the 38 factories of all kinds in the city. So, it was easy to see Jewish interests had significant influence on commerce and trade. Despite this, the number of Jewish poor in the city in proportion to the total number of Jews was enormous. Russia always had discriminatory laws, but the oppressive rule of the governors of Bessarabia made things even worse. Jews were banned from certain professions. Their movements were restricted. They were not allowed to live outside of cities or boroughs. With these restrictions many of Kishinev's Jews suffered (in 1900 about 2200 Jewish families applied for assistance to obtain food for Passover).

The thousands of Jews who lived in misery were objects of charity, and a number of organizations were formed to help them. In fact, in 1898, several united to form the Society in Aid of the Poor Jews of Kishinev, an organization that helped supply cheap fuel to the poor and distributed food during Passover. It ran a dining hall and teahouse for the poor and arranged care for orphans and sick women. It also helped support a Jewish hospital, dispensary and a school. Yontel Levitt contributed often to these charities and also to the local cemetery for Jews. It pleased him to be able to contribute food and money to feed orphans during the holidays. He wasn't rich, but was better off than many.

Life started to get really bad in Kishinev around 1898 when the city's first and only daily newspaper "Bessarabetz" began a campaign of hate and violence against the Jews. It tried to create the impression that popular sentiment was against the Jews, but the entire tirade was in reality orchestrated and financed by the government. The paper was partially funded by the government for the printing of "official news." The vice governor worked on the paper, and the police chief authored articles. Many stories, editorials and features were filled with vicious lies, complete fabrications and were a major cause of the inflammatory atmosphere against Jews.

In April, 1903, the body of a young Christian child was found (it was later learned one of her own family members killed her). About the same time a young Christian woman patient committed suicide while at the Jewish hospital. This provoked even more charges and animosity and subsequent mob violence against the city's Jewish residents. The actions were fueled by news accounts and flyers that placed the blame on Jewish "ritual killings."

On April 19 and 20, 1903, the first major pogrom occurred in Kishinev during which 49

Jews were murdered and more than 600 injured, about 100 of them severely. But the losses in material possession and livelihoods were staggering - 700 homes were destroyed, 600 stores looted and burned and 2,000+ families left homeless.

The riots were planned beforehand and systematically carried out by the authorities. They began at about the same hour at almost 200 different locations in the city. The chief of police mingled with the gangs and exhorted them to violence. Christian homes and stores were avoided, although some suffered. The rioters were mostly Russians and Moldavians, and some actually were brought from outside the area for the violence. At the time of the riots 5,000 Russian troops stationed in the city sat idly by. Had orders been given, they could have easily quelled the disturbance.

Public indignation arose around the world against the Kishinev government and caused the Russian government to demand a trial, but it was a mockery. Prosecutors were appointed who were openly hostile to Jews. In the secret trial, it was made to look in the newspaper accounts, as if it were a spontaneous, popular uprising. More than 100 people were actually accused of various charges. However, most were dropped or defendants acquitted. The longest sentence handed down was seven years at hard labor.

Jews didn't stand idly by. Their counter activity took two forms – one group sought Jewish self-defense (fighting back, etc.) while others entered more intensively the struggle for the destruction of the tsarist government.

The atmosphere was no doubt a reason why, later in 1903, Edel (Idel, Eidel) Moishe and Manus (Monas) Levit and their families decided to move to Montreal. Their departure point was, as it was for many others, Frankfurt, Germany.

There were many other incidents between 1903 and 1905 - much harassment beatings, robberies, rapes, and murders from both drunk and sober Russians. Jews were keenly aware of the fate that might befall them at any time, and they looked suspiciously at any stranger who came into their neighborhoods. But the Levits, like most Jews in Russia, were Orthodox, and as such could not light fires on the Sabbath. Non-Jews were usually paid to come and light a fire and one of Yontel's stable employees was paid to light the Shabbat candles.

Yontel was fairly well known in his community and the cluster of buildings where he lived, known as Yontel's "dorf," was accessed through a somewhat obscure lane off a main street. He ran a buggy business, building and repairing them, and hiring out carriages with drivers. Yontel's dorf was actually a group of buildings surrounding a courtyard. There was an ice house, stables, an area for the

ironsmith, chicken cages and several small buildings which housed 10 or 11 families and tenants. Yontel had 13 carriages and enough horses to go with them. He employed about 10 people to tend them and do other work. He hired himself out to take rabbis from one village to another (a distance of about 25-35 miles), carried vegetables and fruit, and generally made a better than average living in relation to the times. Yontel's dorf was called that as late as 1972, but shortly after, the government bought up the area and the name was not used. Max Fanschell, Nekhama's nephew, made trips there and found a sports stadium had been erected.

Yontel and Kenya had 13 children, but only six survived, Idel Moishe (the oldest), Rifka, Monas, Benjamin, Shaya, and Willie (the youngest). The others died because of illness or were accidentally killed. Yontel's wife, Kenya, was as hard working as he. She fixed up cottages (all had mud floors) and white-washed them for tenants, made huge vats of wine (red and white), and did a lot of cooking. Her son Willie remembered barrels of sauerkraut and pickles in the cellar. Periodically one could see ducks, geese, salami and pastrami hanging from the rafters. Kenya would make pillows from the duck and geese feathers. She wore a "sheitel" – a religious woman's wig. All that is known about Kenya (Kenna, Kennie, Kenyeh) is that her maiden name was Broitman. She had a brother Laib who, with his wife, dyed material for a living. They had two sons. Another brother, Pinya, had a horse and carriage trade, like Yontel. He immigrated to Montreal with his wife and daughter, but his wife and daughter returned to Russia because apparently Montreal didn't agree with them. His daughter was later killed.

During times when Cossacks or others would rampage down the streets and attack Jews, women and children in our families would be herded to Yontel's empty ice house to hide. In the midst of one such rampage, two drunk Cossacks with scimitars were being egged on by the Romanian gypsy boy (he was a hunchback) who the Levits paid to light the fire on Shabbat. He pointed the way to Yontel's dorf in an effort to coax them to attack the Jews (our family) who lived there, but for some reason the Cossacks went in a different direction or decided not to enter the gate to the courtyard. (note: another version of this story indicates that the Cossacks tried to molest one of Yontel's daughters). The gypsy and his actions had been seen by Yontel, his son Shaya and a cousin Shayki, who knew what the boy was trying to do. As he climbed over the gate, Shaya threw a rock at a sign to distract him and he ran. They caught him, and Yontel, Shaya, and Shayki killed him with an axle from a wagon, put his body in a sack, and dragged him to the blacksmith's area, later disposing of his body.

Sometime after the above incident, Yontel was riding in a carriage (Shaya was driving since he helped his father with the carriages and hauled produce from

village to village) when they were accosted by a group of Russians. One of them took an iron pipe, part of a bench, and began to attack Shaya. While Yontel was defending his son, Yontel's own arm was broken. Weeks later, in the fall of 1905, he died from the resulting paralysis and infection that had set in.

Yontel is not known to have had any brothers, only a sister, Hannah, who married Paris Baker. They had four boys and two girls with one boy dying at a young age.

When Shaya worked in the Russian army tending horses, an anti-Semitic Russian army officer once forced him to pick up some horse manure with his bare hands. On another occasion, another officer sliced a tip of his ear off for insubordination or another trumped up charge. At one time Shaya was arrested for hitting a man over the head and cutting him severely because he would not pay for some work Shaya had done for him.

Yontel wanted his children to be educated and religious. They kept kosher and celebrated Passover. A rabbi visited the home to teach Shaya and the others. He sent his children to Hader and Shaya attended Sunday school to learn Hebrew. Yiddish was the predominant language spoken around the house although most knew Moldavian and Russian. Many later learned French. Birthdays were not observed - no presents. Because of his business, Yontel associated with many non-Jews. He took care of himself, too, and non-Jews would not pick fights with him because of his size and ability to defend himself. He helped others (weaker men) when they were being picked on or harassed. He was a good storyteller, according to his youngest son Willie (William).

In 1896, Shaya had married Nekhama Gurman (1879-1963), who sold laces and trimmings in Kishinev. Her mother's name was "Hinda" (1831-1921), who was a chicken farmer and sold eggs. Hinda and her husband Mechel Gurman had a small farm. Both were hard working. They had at least four children. Rifka, Mottle, and Moishe were Nekhama's older sister and brothers. Rifka is thought to be the only child to have remained in Kishinev. She and her husband Meyer Fanshel lived in Kishinev and owned a vineyard until 1942, when he was evacuated from the city to flee the Nazis. He went to "Asia Russia" past the Volga near Stalingrad where he died of hunger that same year. The family endured even further tragedy during WWII. The Fanshel's had at least one daughter and three sons. The daughter had married and raised a 14-year-old daughter herself who was a noted pianist in the Jewish community of Kishinev. One day, while practicing, she was heard by the Nazis outside, who burst into the home and shot her. Her mother rushed into the room and fainted. She and her husband were then beaten to death with rifle butts. Max Fanshel, who died in

1978 in Pennsylvania, related the story to me and had newspaper clippings describing the incident.

Mechel Gurman's parents (names are not known) were also from Kishinev. The Gurman's lived in a court near the Levit's. Nekhama was known as Annie in Montreal (Bubba to her grandchildren).

On October 19-20, 1905, large-scale riots broke out again in Kishinev, beginning first as a protest against the czar, but deteriorating into an attack on the Jewish section of Kishinev. Twenty nine Jews were murdered, 56 injured and 1300 homes and shops were looted and destroyed. During one of the pogroms, the house of Rifka, one of Yontel's daughters, was set on fire, and much of it and its furnishings were destroyed.

Despite the terror and general situation for Jews in Kishinev, relatively few had left by 1905 (although some of Yontel's children had left for Canada earlier). In 1902, the Jewish population had been 60,000, but in 1905 there were still more than 53,000 there. To avoid induction into the army, Jews hid, tried to pass themselves off as crippled, changed their names, and tried to move out of the city. But things looked like they were getting worse, and after the 1905 pogrom, thousands more left for good. It got to the point that they were afraid for their lives. People wanted to leave and began to accumulate money for passage abroad. The consequence of all this was that economic development of the town was at a standstill.

On December 28, 1905, for a fee of 20 rubles, Nekhama, 27, and her three children (Rae, Sarah, Ben) aged 8, 5 and 2, were issued an external passport to leave Bessarabia. It is believed Shaya was issued a passport at the same time. But they didn't leave Bessarabia for Montreal until January 24, 1906 (they originally wanted to go to NY, but could not get in). They were very happy to leave. Our name was spelled Levit, not Levitt on the passport (in both Russian and French). Nekhama could neither read nor write; so she had to have had some other official document to have a passport issued. They landed in Halifax and traveled to Montreal.

It was the foresight of our ancestors that ensured their survival (and our existence), for as bad as the situation was in Kishinev in the early 1900s, the tragedies and horrors grew progressively worse.

During WWI, when Russian units retreated from the Rumanian front, they looted Jewish homes. When the Rumanian army entered the town, they were no less savage. But the Jewish population grew anyway because of the influx of Jewish

refugees from the pogroms in the Ukraine during the Russian civil war. More anti-Semitic newspapers were established. In 1924 certain groups of Jews were deprived their citizenship. Still the area was a training ground for Zionists learning agricultural practices before immigrating to Palestine.

The Soviet Union occupied Bessarabia in June of 1940 (it was part the Treaty of Non-Aggression between Germany and the Soviet Union, 1939 - Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact) and subsequently almost all Jewish institutions were closed down and the Zionist movement outlawed.

All those who were declared enemies of the state – often wealthy Jews and Jewish activists - were sent to Siberia. In July 1941, Bessarabia was occupied by German and Rumanian units, and Jews were rounded up and concentrated in a ghetto, where thousands were killed. By the end of WWII, 53,000 of the 65,000 Jews of Kishinev then residing there were slaughtered by Nazis. In 1947 there were 5,500 Jews in Kishinev, and the population began to grow again. But the 1960s saw more anti-Jewish measures imposed by the State. Bar Mitzvahs were forbidden in 1961. In 1964, all synagogues but one were closed, and ceremonial circumcisions were banned.

MONTREAL

When Shaya arrived in Montreal in about 1906, an immigration official apparently couldn't pronounce his name; so he summarily recorded it as Jack. He was also known as Jacob in some documents. Shaya was blue-eyed and quite big (6'+, 235 lbs.) and strong. He would usually wear big black laced up boots that nearly reached his knees, reminiscent of "Fiddler on the Roof" garb. Sometimes he wore a derby hat and a blue serge suit. When young, he was seen to lift 100 gallon wine casks on his back. His son Moe said he could lift a wagon by himself while others put a wheel on. Sometimes he worked as a taxi-driver. His nephew Dave wrote "your grandfather was a diamond in the rough – quite a guy, and a lover of horses. While working for the Russian military, he accused his superior officer of abusing a horse, and he was slapped on the ear and became deaf in that ear." An early riser, he used to hang around the "tea house" and drink after his work was done. He was a strict, distant, father, who insisted on his boys wearing shirts when in the house. Yet, some of his grandchildren recall their parents telling them of pony or carriage rides he took them on. There is a photo, circa 1923, of six-year old Morty next to Shaya both posing in front of a poster advertising a vaudeville comedian's show. Looking closely, there is a smile on Morty's face and his left hand (he was a lefty) is holding his Daddy's fingers. Another photo is of Shaya holding the hand of Howard, who was then about one, with a lovely smile on his face.

In Montreal, Shaya carried on a similar type of work that his father Yontel did in Kishinev. Sometimes he worked as a taxi driver transporting people and tourists around the city and up Mt. Royal. One large carriage (a “kalesh”) that he called “Lord Renfrew” was pulled by two horses and had leather seats and lantern lights. He had a party sleigh that could accommodate 20 people and he took them for rides at night. But he did more dealing in horses, training wild ones often brought in from western Canada (10 at a time) for use as work horses (on his death certificate, Jack (Shaya) Levitt’s occupation was listed as “horse dealer”). Normally, he had 30-35 horses in his stables. Most had been or were untrained wild horses that he broke for riding, pulling carriages and wagons that were used in his excavation work for the city. He suffered several broken legs because of the kicks he received. “ In the winter, Shaya would remove snow from intersections with a horse drawn plough, pushing snow up to ten feet high on the sides of a street. Shaya’s nephew Moe Levitt recalled, “Visiting your Grandpa and Grandma was always an adventure. We lived in the outskirts and they usually had a few goats, a cow or two, and of course, lots of horses and vehicles such as sleds that probably held 20 or more passengers, as well as party carriages.” At one time Shaya did excavation foundation work and had 20 men working for him, but usually the number was between four and 10. He delivered materials for foundations in “dump wagons,” which opened underneath. He worked for the city a lot and sometimes for the Canadian Bank of Commerce. For his time, Shaya was industrious, but apparently, his lack of business acumen (his family believed he was also sometimes cheated in business), coupled with the coming of the automobile, prevented him from making any real headway, financially.

Shaya didn't smoke or play cards, but would go to the Bessarabia Hebrew Sick Benefit Society almost daily after work. It included a club where immigrants from Kishinev would gather in the afternoons to be with friends. He'd drink four or five cups of tea with cookies, talk, and watch his friends play cards. It was a life where he saw the same friends day after day. The club helped out with loans, medical care and was a focal point for social affairs. One day while sipping tea outside the club, he saw his son Ben driving a carriage, and someone harassing him. Shaya ran to the carriage and jumped on the French person and hit him. On another occasion, Shaya and a friend were sitting on some steps, when two French Canadians were walking down the street and one went over to Shaya’s friend and pulled his beard. Shaya got up, grabbed them, and banged their heads together. Police at the station knew him. His nephew Moe, whose father Willie, was Shaya’s younger brother, said “Shaya was somewhat weathered looking because he spent most of his working years outside. He was active in local politics and Frenchmen liked him and referred to him as ‘Dolly.’” Typically, however, Shaya had good relationships with his French workers and friends. He spoke

French fluently.

Shaya could be gruff and quiet, and was not too demonstrative with his feelings. Although he had eight children with Annie (what Nekhama was called in Montreal), most accounts from their children suggested that they didn't have a good marriage. He was not close with his children, could be "tough" with his sons, and didn't know his grandchildren very well. He worked hard to provide for his family, didn't talk a lot, and by all accounts was quite frugal with his money. His giving money to Annie for household expenses was a source of friction. Their home on City Hall St. had holes in the walls.

Shortly after their youngest daughter married and left home, Annie left Shaya and moved to Los Angeles, where most of her children and grandchildren lived (along with two of Shaya's brothers). Shaya visited his family there only once or twice in 15 years.

Annie was a very strong lady, too, and although she spoke mostly Yiddish and could neither read nor write, she was very smart and quite adept at bargaining in a market – she knew the prices in her head. She was forced to be frugal. Her son Ben remembered that when she needed a bag of onions, for example, she would go to the market at the end of the day, because she knew she would be able to bargain better for remaining food. Syd remembered that he and his brothers and sisters were not allowed to butter their own bread in Montreal. Annie didn't want them to take big slabs. She would take a butter knife and skim it along the length of a bar of butter, and would very lightly butter the bread for her kids. One of her grandchildren recalled a phone book instead of toilet paper (which was reserved for guests). And in Los Angeles, when Morty embarked at the Santa Monica pier after a day long fishing trip, by coincidence Annie was there trying to buy fish from the fishermen coming off the boat, apparently trying to get a good deal on an ingredient for her gefilte fish.

Miraculously, however, her penny pinching enabled her to eventually buy a small duplex and rent out one part of it. Both in Montreal and in Santa Monica where Annie moved, the aroma in her home was of her sweet smelling dishes prepared in large amounts (varnishkas, creplach, blintzes, chicken soup, bread). There are many recollections that she "worked like a horse" taking care of her family, and cooking. She was closer with her children than Shaya, played "casino" with them, and pushed them to achieve. She wanted Ben (her apparent favorite) to become an attorney. She wouldn't let him join the Boy Scouts because it reminded her too much of soldiers in Kishinev.

In Los Angeles, nearly every weekend was a family event, and one of her children and their children would invariably visit her near the beach. Some lived close by. However, because she could not speak much English, many of her grandchildren did not really get to know or develop a relationship with her.

Kenya Levitt died July 16, 1916 of Stomach cancer. She is buried in the Bessarabia Society plots in Montreal but there is no death certificate on file. She may have immigrated to Montreal just before Nekhama, in 1905, and lived with her much of the time until her death.

Yontel's children worked incredibly hard and long, as did Shaya's children. That said something about their values. So in a basic way they looked out for each other. I recall Passover Seders at Yetta's home where all furniture in her living room and dining room was removed for long tables that would host the 40 or so relatives attending. One of Shaya's brothers first lived in Panama before coming to Los Angeles. When they left Montreal to enter the US, several went through Detroit, staying with relatives who had settled there.

The Montreal Levitts were not wealthy. But they did have hobbies, some unusual jobs, and most had nice sense of humors. Morty played saxophone (he sold it to help pay for his journey to Los Angeles when he was 19). Perhaps that hobby led to his later love of opera and classical music, as I remember him playing those records and hearing his voice in our home (he sang in the shower) when I was young. Moe played drums (even in a band that played at weddings). Ben was a boxer for a short while. Moe and Morty had a pet pony called "Shorty" that lived in the stables, and when they took it for a walk, Shorty liked to put his front legs on the sidewalk, with his back legs on the street – and just stand there. They would hitch a small carriage to its back and ride around the blocks. Morty and Moe sometimes played in the stables making tunnels under the bales of hay in the loft. Shaya took his children on rides in his carriages. Sydney left home when he was 13 and became a roustabout in a traveling circus, and also picked wheat to earn money. Yetta made caps. Betty made engines for model airplanes in a factory and worked making shoes. Sarah was a telegraph operator for the Canadian Pacific railroad. And Rae stayed home taking care of her younger siblings and mother and grandmother, until she married. Oh, one more thing. In Montreal, Morty had a job setting up ten pins in a bowling alley at a time when there were no automatic pin-setting machines. He said he made five cents for every two games that he worked, and after that he was so hot and

tired that he bought a coke for a nickel. When asked how he made any money, he replied, "Volume!"

These memories do not do our family history justice, in large part because the people who could fill in the blanks are not here, and I am sorry this effort was not begun a long time ago. As in all families, stronger memories sometimes overwhelm the entire character of experience.

Yontel Levit (1835-1905) and Kenya's (1847-1916) children:

- Yidl Moshe (also known as Moshe Yehuda and Eidel Moishe) b 1869
- Mones, b 1875
- Shaya (Shayka, Shayki, Shia, Jack, Jek, Jacob, "Dolly") b 1878 (d April 25, 1953)
- Benjamin b 1890
- Rivka b 1889
- William Levit b 1894

Hinda Gurman 1831-1921

Shaya (c 1878-1953) and Nekhama's (aka Annie, Nechama, Bubba) (1879-1963) children:

- Sarah Miriam Levitt (b 1897)?
- Rachel (Rae) Levitt b 1899
- Benjamin Mortimer Levitt b 1902
- Yetta Levitt b 1907
- Betty Levitt
- Sydney Levitt
- Morris Levitt b 1914
- Mortimer Levitt b 1916