

ROOTS – KEY

*Journal of the Genealogical Society
of Los Angeles*



Summer 2006

Volume 26 Number 2

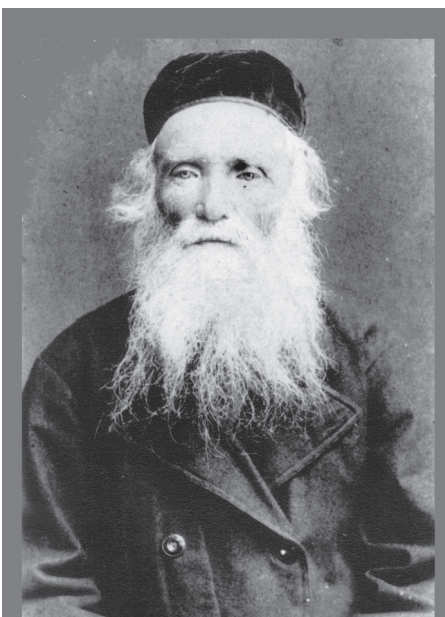
ISSN 0895-6472

A Touch of History

The Chandler School's seventh grade, end-of-year project was to be "An Eye-Witness to History." When my grandson chose Napoleon, I immediately thought of my great-great grandfather who "saw Napoleon." Of course, my grandson chose Armande de Caulaincourt, the eyes and ears of Napoleon, as his witness. Caulaincourt spent most of Napoleon's career by his side, to be the sole occupant of the coach ride from Smorgoni to Paris in their December escape in 1812 and lived to write his memoirs. But I was not discouraged. I started reading everything I could about where and when Napoleon and his armies might have encountered the lives of our ancestors.

Like our own Civil War, the short campaign of 1812 disrupted and touched the lives of all those living in his path.

No matter how isolated the village, no family grows unaffected in its small world, unformed by its culture, unformed by the historical actions surrounding its time. Only we, the descendants are absent of the events. If we want to understand the mysteries behind the documents, we seek out the archivists in Lithuania, Belarus and France to gather our information with the sensitivity of a pilgrim in a foreign land. Taking into account our own psychology and our own educational insights is often not enough. And browsing through the Internet or historical texts, will not always help in understanding the particular pain and progress our family made from there to here. As we read the documents, the dry revision lists, the vital statistics, the headstones, if we are not skilled historians, we are not aware of the omissions, and we have no context to put the daily life in place. Viewed through the prism of the historian's eye, we often do not have either accuracy or truth. Napoleon and his Campaign of 1812 is a cause in point. No one's sorrows bleed from the dry page. Food, weather, forage, horses, bartered weapons, gold, coats, furs, stolen treasures, wagons lost, coaches lost, bodies—piles on piles of bodies in the drifts of snow. In



Boroch Chaikel Horowitz 1812-1915

time, it is the archeologists who help us witness the loss.

All we have left, if we are lucky, are the scraps of tales, Isaac Beshevis Singer-like tales; if we are lucky, little odd sentences to mull over in our sleep and search endlessly through archives and dead-ends. Many of you have sent your recollections (those repeated stories) carried forward from a time when every village and villager, Gentile and Jew was confronted with Napoleon's adventure and left in a new world that would affect their names, their freedoms, and their pocketbook.

My tale, like the short remnants of hundreds of others, is too brief to lend much hope for facts or research. I cannot even decide if it is one story told by various branches of the family so many times that it has become two stories or if the two separate stories

give me two sightings. One story asserts that my great-great-grandfather was held up to wave at Napoleon. The other, that he saw the Russians fighting. At the start of the campaign, in both Vilna and in Svencionys, we hear tales that people were awed, happy, lifted momentarily by the thought of freedom and, it is true, Jews might have stood waving but certainly not by Smolensk, Berezina, or Bobruisk in the coldest winter known to man! And where could one have seen Napoleon on the way to Moscow and also on the way back? In the 1834 Revision Lists, as a 22 year-old father and son-in-law, he was in Svencionys District but where was he in 1812, the newly born son of Tzvi Hirsh? So far no database on JewishGen reveals him; no archivist in Lithuania or Belarus can find him. Yet, even if the first quarter of his life is yet to be unveiled, these memories are not inconsequential, no matter how short. They are our touch of history and their voices our own eyes and ears.

This JGSLA project is a tribute to the power of the Internet and those researchers who answered our call.■

Nancy Holden, Editor

Why a Special Issue on Napoleon?

Our goal as genealogical researchers is to take our families back in history. History itself is a major clue to their destiny. And the stories they left behind take us to the records. Whether this is a blind alley or the gold at the end of the rainbow, we do not know until we start.

By recording your stories here, we are laying a trail that allows you to open your history books. The precise dates and locations of Russian and French units are recorded in books and on internet sites. Due to space constraints, we have not put in the exact date to accompany these stories. Cossacks from the Ukraine, Saxons, the Polish Cavalry, the famous commanders Kutuzof, Ney, Oudinot and MacDonald all had their say in the lives of our ancestors. From Riga to Moscow, from Warsaw to Mogilev, follow their trail.

Prelude to War

- 3 Documenting Family History Stories in 1812 by *David B. Hoffman*, JGLSA
- 5 Napoleon's Sanhedrin suggested by *Hadassah Lipsius and Andre Convers*
- 6 Napoleon or the Czar by *Rabbi Simon Jacobson*
- 6 Napoleon and Rabbi Moshe Meisels of Vilna by *Lainey Melnick*
- 7 Jewish Soldiers in Napoleon's Army: Prisoner of War by *Mathilde Taggert*, Two Brothers from France by *Barbara Kaufman*, The Brothers Mushkat by *Barbara Mushkat*
- 8 Napoleon's Finest by *Janice Sellers*
- 9 Jewish Soldiers in Napoleon's Army by *Pierre Lautmann*
- 11 Charles Joseph Minard: Mapping Napoleon's March by *John Corbett*
- 12 Simon Scheuer: Jewish Soldier in Napoleon's Army by *Paul King*
- 16 The Start of the Russian Campaign by *Rabbi Jeffrey A. Marx*, JGSLA
- 17 An Archivist Looks at Family Legends by *Vitalija Gircyte*, Letter to Editor from *Jerome Seligsohn*
- 18 Napoleon's Campaign of 1812 Map and Timeline
- 20 Tilsit by *Ellen Jacobson*, Merkine by *Yale Reisner*, Fact or Apocrypha by *Sheldon Benjamin*, Recommended Reading by *Robert E Mitchell*, Search Google by *Ted Hyman*
- 21 Commodore Hornblower by *C.S. Forester*, War and Peace by *Leo Tolstoy*, The Road to Moscow by *Nigel Nicolson*, Pokroy (Pakruojis) told by *Adam Katzeff*, Napoleon's Jewish Mistress by *Sarah L. Meyer*, Chorostkow, Eastern Galicia by *Marc D. Machtinger, Esq.*, Sompolno, Poland by *Rica B. Goldberg*, Jedwabne by *Saul Marks*, Kaunas to Riga, Salant by *Chaim Freedman*, The Red and the Black by *Stendhal*
- 23 Alexander I and the Jews by *David Meltser and Vladimir Levin*
- 23 Search "Napoleonic History" on JewishGen: An Index

March to Moscow

- 24 Where He Marched by *Chester Cohen*, JGSLA, Simnas, Suwalki by *Shirley Holton*, Shavli (Siauliai) by *Judy Segal*, Vilkovishk by *George Mason*, Zagare by *Mark Gordon*, How our Family Got its Name by *Barbara Meyers*, Olkienik (Valkininkai) by *Marcia Paillet-Abrams Jaffe*, Olkieniki by *Rieke Nash*, Lost Jewish Worlds—Olkieniki by *Rahel Grosbaum*, The Legend of the Family Plaine by *Patricia Prinz*, Dusiat or Birzai, Lithuania by *Olga Zabłudoff*, Eishyshok Horse Fair from There Once was a World by *Yaffa Eliach*, Raguva/Troskunai by *Ruth Kovitz Ellin*, Svencionys by *Marjorie Rosenfeld*, Postovy by *Andi Ziegelman*, Russian Strategy, Assault by *Richard Sapon-White*

Retreat from Moscow

- 27 The Jalowayski Odyssey by *Irene Jalowayski*
- 28 Berezino: Recollections of Matthew Elkin submitted by his daughter, *Frances A. Bock, Ph.D.*
- 29 The Return of the Jewish Volunteer painting by *Moritz Daniel Oppenheim*
- 29 One Soldier—Many Stories: Grazutis/Volpe by *E. E. Blecker*, Gershon Wolpe by *Goldie Silverman*, Nadel/Volpe by *Eileen Douglas*
- 30 Count Nikolai Tolstoy's Loyal Soldier by *Norman Zelvin*, Moscow by *Ilene Kanfer Murray*, French Troops Smashed Near Koidanovo by *Les Evenchick*, The Battle of Smolensk by *Andi Ziegelman*, Smolensk to Bobr by *Melvin B. Redmount*, Napoleon's Coat by *Neil Rosenstein*, Napoleon Rescued by *Aviva M Neeman*, Every Turn a Brick Wall! by *Harold Krom*, The Bug Division, The Retreat from Moscow by *Jenni Buch*, Drohitzyn by *Esther Buchsbaum*, Svislovitch by *Michael M. Miller*, "The Jewish Community of Borisov" by *Yehudah Leib Lipkind—translated from Hebrew by Israel Pickholtz*, Bobruisk by *Steve Jaffe*, In Remembrance—Excerpts from: *sefer zikaron le-kehilat Bobruisk u-veneteha*
- 33 For Further Reading suggested by *Melvin Redmount*, *Saul Isseroff*, *Leslie Reich*, *Jonina Duker*

The Lonely Road Home

- 34 Napoleon 1812 by *Nigel Nicolson*, Gosciniac Napoleonski by *Mike Glazer*, Veliouna by *Todd Lerner*, Rasiennai, Kovno by *Deborah Hatch*, Myadel, Belarus by *Arye Geskin*, Keidan by *Peter Arnold*, Telz suggested by *Chaim Freedman*, Distortion and Disbelief! by *Bramie Lenhoff*
- 35 They Are Not Forgotten by *Joseph H. Miller*

Documenting Family History Stories from 1812

by David B. Hoffman

Can we document the effect of Napoleon's 1812 invasion of Russia on the Jewish population in towns and shtetls in his path? Can we find evidence of Jewish involvement in the war on either the French or Russian side? Can we determine the effects of Napoleon's Campaign on particular Jewish lives in the records of Lithuania and Belarus?

Family Stories

Bubbe Meises—Yiddish for our grandmother's tales and 'fantastical' stories or superstitions with just enough truth, sentiment and humor to create an emotional bridge to our past—are often the basis for developing an interest in our family history. They are the beginning of our search for the recorded evidence which will substantiate them. Genealogy requires us to provide documentation as we follow the paper trail to test these hypotheses, to distinguish fact from fiction, the grain of salt from exaggeration. Documentation makes family lore significant genealogy.

Many documents exist from the early nineteenth century that have been translated and are readily available in online databases. Others have not yet been translated, but are often available on LDS microfilms, or by ordering personal research from the archives in Eastern Europe.

Vital Records

Kehillah (*kahal* or Jewish community) records exist for Vilna—a major encampment site for Napoleon's Grand Army both on the way to and retreating from Moscow—from 1800 on through the 19th century. Many Jewish birth, marriage and death records for the 1812 period are mixed in with 1808-1825 Catholic parish records. Jewish Records Indexing-Poland has extracted the Jewish records and translated them for more than forty towns. The Suwalk-Lomza Interest Group is also publishing translations of early vital records in its journal, *Landsmen*. These records are in Polish, with Latin letters, making it possible even for the novice researcher to transliterate them especially with the assistance of aides.¹

Revision Lists

Revision Lists (*Reviskie Skazkie*) of the Russian Empire were ordered every few years for the purpose of taxation, and after 1827, conscription. (Very young children may not have been recorded). These lists contain names, relationships, ages, often with accompanying comments such as "died," "missing" or "unknown," "sick or hospitalized," and "moved" (usually to a particular place). This was done to account for the movement of taxpayers and to provide more detailed information for heads of households and adult males. The 1816 revision lists record events that had taken place after the previous



revision in 1811. Therefore, there may be comments for the years 1811, 1812, 1813, 1814, 1815 and part of 1816. If no 1811 revision census was declared, the previous one would have been ordered in the year 1805 or 1795.

By studying the 1816 revision lists for about fifty towns in Lithuania and Belarus, we were able to focus on the dates and the comments which were made. Comments such as "died," "missing," "ran away," "disappeared," were rarely specific, leaving us to infer the causes. Even where detailed information is lacking it is possible to compare the number of men and boys who appear on the earlier 1784 censuses of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania² and other documents, such as registration of tavern owners in 1805, and the 1811 revision, with the number of males on the lists in 1816. In Dunilovichi, Belarus, for example, there were 66 males of all ages in 1811 but only 39 males by 1816, a 60 percent decrease. It is also useful to compare findings in towns along the attacking and retreating pathways across Lithuania and Belarus, with towns that were not anywhere near these routes.

Many translated 1816 revision lists are available on the website of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania Project, and in the country databases of JewishGen, the Litvak and Belarus SIGs. Untranslated 1816 revision lists for Belarus exist for every major town in Minsk Guberniya, and some for Grodno and Mogilev Guberniya according to Oleg Perashkevich (*Roots-Key*, Winter 2003). To find the archives that hold source information about revision, census and vital records see *Routes-to-Roots Foundation* website. <<http://www.rtrfoundation.org>>

In order to track an ancestor to the 1800-1816 time period, there are also many other kinds of records available, some of which are already microfilmed or translated, including residents and property owners lists, candle and box taxes collected to meet the religious and communal needs of every Jewish community. There are court documents and wills which sometimes provide information not only on date of death, but also the cause. There are detailed summaries of Jews who worked on the estates of wealthy magnates and noble families, such as the Radziwill family, which dominated territory in Poland, Belarus and Lithuania for five centuries. Literally hundreds of villages with large Jewish populations were owned by this family, and Jews played important roles in managing their estates, providing income from taverns

and inns, and conducting most of the commerce with the rest of Europe. Hundreds of feet of shelf space in the State Historical Archives in Vilnius and other archives are occupied by the papers of this family, and many other noble families.

Data does not seem to exist which would verify whether a soldier in Napoleon's army (Jewish, French, Austrian, Polish, Italian or Prussian) became part of a Jewish family in Belarus or Lithuania as told in many family tales. It is interesting that the Russian word *sharomyzhnik* (шаромыжник: a beggar) comes from French *cher ami* (dear friend), as the soldiers begged the locals for help during the unusually cold winter. It is likely that any deserting soldiers would have taken the surname of the family they joined. Spies worked on both sides and many who were suspected of spying were hung or tortured by the other side. Therefore, it seems highly unlikely that anyone who lived under Czar Alexander would have wanted to be known as an associate of Napoleon.

We examined over forty 1816 revision lists, including lists for Kovno and other towns where Napoleon encamped or through which the troops marched. We also looked at records for a number of towns which might have been involved in providing provisions and munitions for both sides in the war. The following information is a sample, meant to illustrate the kinds and limitations of available documentation.

In our small study, it is clear that there were significantly more Jewish men who died or were missing in 1812, and even more so when the tally for 1813 was added. On the 1816 revision list for Lachowicze (Lyakhovichi), Belarus, of 215 men and boys, 45 or 21 percent "died," "ran away" or "disappeared" in 1812-1813, compared to 13 or 6 percent in the next two years, 1814 and 1815. In larger towns, further from the direct path of the conflict, this pattern was still found. Out of the 38 households in Myadel, Belarus, only 17 were unaffected by the conflict. In larger towns such as Mir, Belarus, which had a Jewish population of nearly 900 in 1816, 9 percent of the men and boys died or were missing during 1812-13 compared to 4.5 percent in 1814-15. In the Lithuanian town of Kovno, of 266 men and boys, 29 or 11 percent died or were noted as "missing" in 1812-13 compared to 15 or 5.6 percent in 1814 and 1815. In a smaller town, Cekiske, Lithuania, 12 percent of men died or were noted as having "run away" in 1812-1813, compared to only 6 percent in the next three years.

A similar pattern was found in the other towns along the path of the Grand Army. It is not known if these Jews died fighting or as civilian casualties of fighting; they may have succumbed to starvation or contagious diseases (typhus, dysentery), along with many of the nearly one million soldiers who died on both sides of the conflict. However, Jews from Poland did fight, at least in Napoleon's earlier campaigns. The Jewish light cavalry regiment had 800 volunteers in 1806. We were unable to confirm whether or not these soldiers were involved in the campaign to Moscow.

In addition to the extraordinary death rates, there was also an unusual amount of movement to and from towns throughout the region during 1812 and 1813. In some

towns, nearly everyone seemed to evacuate, perhaps getting out of the way of the fighting, only to return after the war. The scorched earth policy and the scavenging for food by the troops on both sides made remaining in many villages impossible. There are written accounts of stores of food having been looted by Napoleon's troops, especially on their return in the winter of 1812-1813, so it may have been necessary for the residents to go elsewhere to avoid starvation. Moving may have been facilitated by the fact that most Jewish families had relatives—at least in-laws—in other towns. Of the 295 Jews in Vilkija in 1816, 81 or 28 percent of them had come from Oshmiany, Mogilev, Minsk and "from across the Nieman River" in 1812. This reflected a move out of the direct path of the army. No more people died or were missing in 1812-1813 than in 1814-1815. While it is not possible to explain all of the patterns of movement from shtetl to city to town throughout the region, it is clear that there was a great deal more moving around during the war, than at other times.

While revision list comments usually do not give reasons for events ("died," "missing") sometimes the comments are very specific. In the small town of Lioliai, Lithuania, 18 of 35 residents "Came during the war of 1812." In other towns, comments included (Пропавший без вести 1812) "Missing in Action 1812."

Clearly records for many important towns touched by the war, such as Vilna and Oshmiany, have not been cited, and are not yet available. But record translation is proceeding at a rapid pace by Jewish genealogical groups. JRI-Poland has more than 2 ½ million vital records in its online database. JewishGen has over 600,000 records in its Lithuania country database and another 300,000 records for Belarus. Several vital record translation projects are making significant headway for these countries. If you are having difficulty documenting your family's treasured story, do not give up. Explore the online databases and check them regularly for updated records. Join and support a research group or volunteer to translate or transliterate Russian and Polish records. Even if you discover that the truth is somewhat different from the tale, documented grains of salt are enormously satisfying.■

1. Judith Frazin's *A Translation Guide to 19th-Century Polish-Language Civil-Registration Documents* (Birth, Marriage and Death Records). Northbrook, Illinois: Jewish Genealogical Society of Illinois, 1989 or William F. Hoffman and Jonathan D. Shea's *In Their Words* (A Genealogists Translation Guide to Polish, German, Latin, and Russian Documents). Language and Lineage Press: 2000.
2. Lithuania and Belarus, part of Grand Duchy of Lithuania prior to the partitions of Poland, poll tax lists for 1765 and 1784 are useful for identifying ancestors and estimating the size of the Jewish communities. The estimate based on the 1765 list is 200,000 Jews. <<http://www.jewishfamilyhistory.org>>

Napoleon's Sanhedrin

Napoleon's Call

Suggested by Hadassah Lipsius post on JewishGen 1996

After the success of the French Revolution, the Constitutional Assembly, in 1791, issued the Declaration of the Rights of Man and pointedly extended all civil rights to the Jews of France. This led to the promotion of these rights to all the Jews living in areas conquered by Napoleon, including Holland in 1796, Venice in 1797 and various German states in 1798.

In May 1806, Napoleon convened the Assembly of Jewish Notables which consisted of 111 leading Jews from France, Germany and Italy. He ordered them to consider the relationship between Jews and the state and to rule on certain issues for his own political ends. Napoleon's Sanhedrin was tasked with coming up with answers to twelve questions including: Are Jews polygamous? Do they allow the marriage of Jews to Christians? Do the rabbis claim the right to grant divorces independent of the civil authorities? Do the Jews consider usury lawful? Napoleon made known to the assembly that he wanted to reinstate the ancient Israeli Sanhedrin which had not met since 66 CE.

On the 9th of February 1807, Emperor Napoleon I of France gathered together seventy-one Jews including thirty-six rabbis in Paris and declared them to be a Sanhedrin. They assembled in the *Hotel deVille* in Paris. Later, he used these rulings as a justification for granting limited rights to Jews. The rabbis answered that Judaism prohibits polygamy; marriage to Christians is permitted; divorce must be approved by civil authorities and usury is not allowed in Jewish law. They ratified the answers given by the earlier assembly and urged Jews to end all animosity to Christians. The Sanhedrin told the Jews of France to enter military service, end all usury, become farmers and participate in arts and handicrafts. This Sanhedrin had no validity in Jewish law because it was formed outside Israel, the members were not *smuchim* (ordained) and were coerced into making these rulings.

Then, in March 1808, Napoleon announced religious freedom for Jews, granted them political rights in all of France (except Alsace and Lorraine) and demanded that all Jews take a family name.

In 1812, Napoleon entered Russia expecting Jews would ally themselves to him. On his campaign through Russia, he visited many shtetls, viewed the synagogues and tried to enlist Jews to his cause. Stories persist of great gifts to individuals and synagogues and inspired speeches by Napoleon. However, the Jews, following the rabbis and loyal to the Czar, did not join him.■

Napoleon's Sanhedrin

Posted by Andre Convers - Louveciennes, France

As per order of Napoleon. Rabbi David Sinzheim opened the Sanhedrin with a tribute to Napoleon: "Graces soient rendues, Israel, au liberateur de ton peuple, au heros qui a enchainé les passions humaines comme il a confondu l'orgueil des nations."

The list of the members of the Grand Sanhedrin who took place in Paris between the 9 of February and the 9 of March 1807

David Sinzheim, President

M. Segre, First Vice President

Abraham Cologna, Second Vice President

Ventura Foa, Scribe

Members: Avigdor, Rodriguez Fils, Theodore Cerf Berr, Baruch Cerf Berr, S. Wittersheim, A. Furtado, Marq Foy, Friedberg, Aron Schmol, S. Costantini, Ab. Cahen, Benoit Fanno, Saul Cremieux, S.M. Levy, I. Carmi, Ab. Mouskat, Nathan Salomon, Ab. Samuel, M. Roccamartino, Libermann Samson, M. Cohen, A. Salomon, Jacquie Todros, A. Worms, Judas Bloch, Moise Aaron, Lazare Hirsch, J.E. Cracovia, Bonaventura Modena, Sal. Delvecchio, Wolf Eger, Moise Kanstad, J. Mayer, L.R. Feuzi, C.I. Lorch, Cerf Jacob Goudchaux, I. Rodriguez, Lypmann Cerf Berr, Olry Hayem Worms, Mayer Nathan, Lyon Marx, M. Formiggini, David Levy, Israel Cohen, Berr Isaac Berr, Aaron Latis, A. Montel Fils, J. Brunswick, E.A. Latis, E. Deutz Graziadio Neppi, Bordi Zamonani, Moise Milhau, J. Roccamartino, Lazare Wolf, I. Calmann, B. Gugenheim, M.P. Ariani, Sam Wolf Levi, Ab. Andrade, Seligmann de Paris, Seligmann Durmenach, David Guntzbourg, Isaac Samuel, I. Ouri Levi, Seligmann Moise, Elias Spire, Jonas Vallabregue Blotz, Michel Beer.

Substitute rabbis: Mendel Prague, Moise Hertz Mosbach, Betsallel Milhau.

Substitute laics: J. Emmanuel Ottolenghi, Sam Ghediglia, Emilio Vita, J. Dreyfoss, Jeremie Hirsch, Felix Levi.■

1. Ancient Jewish legal and religious institution in Jerusalem that exercised the functions of a court between c.63 BC and c.AD 68. The Jewish legal system consisted of a large Sanhedrin of 71 judges (high court) and small Sanhedrins in each city consisting of twenty-three judges and batei din (law courts) of three judges.

Napoleon or the Czar

Excerpts from “The Giver” by Rabbi Simon Jacobson

Which is the greater evil—the constraints of dictatorial authority or the dangers of freedom? Are the rewards of freedom worth its risks? Indeed, is man capable of realizing the potentials of freedom without falling prey to its pitfalls?

In the first two decades of the 19th century, this issue was embodied by two massive armies slaughtering each other on the battlefields of Europe. On one side stood Napoleon, heir of the French Revolution, espousing the ideals of “liberty, equality and fraternity” and promising emancipation to the oppressed peoples of the continent. Against him stood the monarchs of Europe, claiming a divine right to rule, casting themselves as defenders of the family, institutionalized religion, law and order—indeed, of civilization itself—and warning of the havoc the apostasy of freedom had wreaked in France.

The leaders of European Jewry were likewise divided. There were rabbis and Chassidic masters who eagerly awaited liberation by Napoleon’s armies. No longer would the Jewish people be locked into ghettos and deprived of their means of earning a livelihood; no longer would the state be allied with a religion hostile to the Jewish faith. Liberated from the persecution and poverty that had characterized Jewish life on European soil for a dozen centuries, the Jewish people would be free to deepen and intensify their bond with G-d in ways previously unimaginable. Indeed,

there were those who believed that a French victory would ready the world for the coming of Moshiach and the final redemption.

But there were other voices in the Jewish community as well. Voices that prophesied the exchange of material poverty for spiritual woe. Yes, the ghetto walls would fall; yes, the financial centers, professional alliances and universities of Europe would open their doors to the Jew. But at what price! The demise of the shtetl would mean the destruction of the spiritual center of Jewish life, the breakdown of the Jewish family and community, and the compromising of the Jew’s commitment to Torah. Yes, Napoleon would free the Jewish body, but he would all but destroy the Jewish soul.

A major force in the Jewish opposition to Napoleon was Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, founder of Chabad Chassidism. He did more than warn against the dangers of emancipation; he battled Napoleon on all fronts, interceding on high to effect his downfall and aiding Russia’s earthly effort to defeat him. ■

Napoleon and Rabbi Moshe Meisels of Vilna

by Lainey Melnick

My great-great-great-great-great-great-grandfather was Rabbi Moshe Meisels of Vilna who was a Chassidic spy. He was originally a disciple of Rabbi Eliyahu, the Gaon of Vilna, and a member of the opposition to the Chassidic movement. He later became a devoted chassid of Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi, and, after the latter’s passing, of Rabbi DovBer of Lubavitch and of Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Lubavitch. Rabbi Moshe served as the leader of the Chassidic community in Vilna until 1816 when he made *aliyah* (ascent) to the Holy Land and settled in Hebron, where he passed away 1849.

Rabbi Moshe Meisels¹—an extremely learned man—was fluent in German, Russian, Polish and French. At Rabbi Schneur Zalman’s behest, he worked as an interpreter for the French High Command and relayed their battle plans to the Czar’s generals. During Napoleon’s war on Russia he served as a translator for the French High Command. Rabbi Schneur Zalman had charged him to associate with the French military officials, to attain a position in their service, and to convey all that he learned to the commanders of the Russian army. Within a short while Rabbi Moshe had

succeeded in gaining the favor of the chief commanders of Napoleon’s army and was privy to their most secret plans.

It was he, Reb Moshe, who saved the Russian arms arsenal in Vilna from the fate which befell the arsenal in Schvintzian. He alerted the Russian commander in charge, and those who tried to blow up the arsenal were caught in the act.

“The High Command of the French army was meeting,” related Reb Moshe “and hotly debating the maneuvers and the arrangement of the flanks for the upcoming battle. The maps were spread on the floor, and the generals were examining the roads and trails, unable to reach a decision. Time was short. Tomorrow, or, at the very latest, the day after, the battle on the environs of Vilna must begin.

“They were still debating when the door flew open with a crash. The guard stationed inside the door was greatly alarmed and drew his revolver. So great was the commotion, that everyone thought that the enemy had burst in in an attempt to capture General Shtaub.

“But it was Napoleon himself who appeared in the doorway. The Emperor’s face was dark with fury. He stormed

into the room and raged: 'Has the battle been planned? Have the orders to form the flanks been issued? And who is this stranger?' he continued, pointing to me. In a flash he was at my side. 'You are a spy for Russia!' he thundered, and placed his hand upon my chest to feel the pounding heart of a man exposed.

"At that moment, the aleph of Chassidism stood me by. My mind commanded my heart to beat not an

increment faster. In an unwavering voice I said: 'The commanders of His Highness the Emperor have taken me as their interpreter, as I am knowledgeable in the languages crucial to the carrying out of their duties.'" ■

1. From the writings & talks of Rabbi Yosef Yitzchak of Lubavitch. Used with permission.

Jewish Soldiers in Napoleon's Army

Prisoner of War

by Mathilde Tagger, Israel

During Napoleon's Campaign in Russia, a French soldier was caught by the Russian army and put in jail. The soldier was Jewish. When the Jewish community heard that there was a Jew in jail, they collected money for the ransom and the Jew was freed. The Jewish soldier was a very young man so the community found a *shidukh* for him. He got married, had children and grandchildren, totally mixed up in this Jewish Russian community. At the end of the 19th century the descendants left Russia and settled in England. In the 1960s, one member of the family left England and settled in Israel.

Being an active member of the Israel Genealogical Society, one day I received a letter asking for help from a descendant of this French soldier in Napoleon's army.

When I read his whole story, something caught immediately my eye: the surname Babot. This is how, step by step, my mind worked: because of the Russian pronunciation O as A, it is possible that the name was Bobot and if it is so, the real name of the French soldier was Bohbot. The French do not pronounce the letter H and Bohbot is a well known surname among Moroccan Jews. With the right spelling of the surname, this person could now write to the Historical Archives of the Armies in France. Three weeks later he received the complete documentation on his ancestor. The documents said that the soldier most probably died in the Russian jail. It also gave the name of the soldier's parents, his birth date and place, and many other personal details.■

Two Brothers from France

by Barbara Kaufman, New York

Two brothers Rosett (Roseth, Rozet, Rozett) went to Russia with Napoleon. One branch settled in Hungary, the other stayed in Russia. I heard the story from two different branches that descend from Moritz Rozett born about 1820 in Veszto, Hungary and from a descendant of Leopold Rosett born in the same era but we don't, as yet, know where. The more research we do, the more we believe all Hungarian Rosetts are related. My great-great-grandfather was Benjamin Roseth who, I believe was born about 1814 in Bogdany, Hungary, now Bohdanovce, Slovakia. I have recently discovered a Deborah Rozett, born in the same town as my great-great-grandfather,

Benjamin, and whose descendant married Leopold's son Moritz (not the Moritz born c.1820 in Veszto). Is it any wonder I am confused by it all! As to the other brother who stayed in Russia we have discovered Rosett's from Vitebsk! ■

The Brothers Mushkat

by Barbara Mushkat, Ohio

My foray into genealogy began in 1993 when I read a spy novel, *Dark Star* by Alan Furst. Felix Dzerzinsky, head of the NKVD (Narodnyi Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del) married Sophie Mushkat. Until that time we thought we were the only Mushkats. My husband is an historian and author who, like most authors, always checks the card catalog in every library he visits. In his searches, he found Marian Mushkat, a professor of international law and peace studies at the University of Tel Aviv. We called when we were in Israel to no avail. Shortly thereafter, an attorney, also from the University of Tel Aviv, spoke to a group of attorneys in Akron, Ohio, where I live and practice law. I was quite surprised and pleased when she told me Marian was her father's best friend.

I wrote a letter to Professor Mushkat and requested she give it to him. A few weeks later I received the first of many letters from the professor. Over a period of time,

I learned he was born in 1915 in Suwalki, served in the Polish army in WW II, and headed the Polish military delegation at the Nuremberg war-crimes trial. We had the same family story about two or three Mushkat brothers who marched from France into Russia with Napoleon in 1812! The professor confirmed that Sophie Dzerzinsky was indeed our cousin Sophie. He wrote that the Mushkat brothers were injured during the war: one stayed in Vilna (my husband's family), one returned to France (possibly a member of Napoleon's Sanhedrin), and the third ended up in Poland—the subject of Isaac Bashevis Singer's book, *The Family Moskat*.■



Napoleon's Finest

by Janice Sellers



A friend of mine helped start a company to publish military history books from original source material and asked if I would like to do work for them, which led to my recent work on a book about the military campaigns of Napoleon's 3rd Corps, *Napoleon's Finest: Marshal Louis Davout and His 3rd Corps: Combat Journal of Operations 1805–1807*. The index has three sections: persons, locations, and military units. The location index contains almost 1,000 names. Even though several spellings are questionable, it is obvious that many places in JewishGen's ShtetlSeeker appear in the list (in fact, I was able to correct one misspelling due to information from ShtetlSeeker). Some of these are locations my own ancestors came from: Grodno, Kamieniec, Kreutzberg. Several were relevant again in 1812 during the march to Russia: Kovno, Vilna, Borodino, and the Niemen River. It is clear that many of the towns in which our ancestors lived were affected in 1805–1807 as they were again in 1812.

This book is a translation (unfortunately, a very literal, stilted one) of Davout's combat journal and of military reports and orders between him and many other men in Napoleon's army. It covers the campaigns and battles of Ulm-Austerlitz, Auerstädt, Prussia, Poland, Czarnowo, Pultusk, Golymin, Jegothén, and Eylau. The last chapter deals with events leading up to the peace treaty at Tilsit between Napoleon and Emperor Alexander of Russia. The original publication was assembled and published by Davout's nephew in 1896 and had a decidedly pro-French slant.

When Napoleon attempted to invade Russia in 1812, it was not the first time that his *Grande Armée* had marched through this part of Europe. His army had traveled through most of the same territory during the campaigns discussed in this book. During this time period, when an army campaigned, it took supplies with it, but it also relied heavily (*i.e.*, imposed) on the towns it passed through. Men were sent to forage for food in the neighboring countryside. They went into towns and asked for or demanded support from the local residents. This support could range from food and supplies to quarters for troops. It could also include information. If the support was not given when first requested, threats and imprisonment were often used as incentives for cooperation. An example of this is an order from General Charles Étienne Gudin to General Claude Petit on April 7, 1807:

The mission for your reconnaissance is to conduct a large forage in Przykop, Wuttrienen, Balden, and Kaletka. ... You will collect as many carts as possible, in addition to the ones from the corps, in order to bring back all the forage and the food that you will find. You will do the same for all the animals you will find. The mayors of the villages you will go through, or some of the prominent inhabitants, will be arrested and taken to the Marshal's headquarters."

The index of the book contains many towns mentioned in this book, but no individual from any of the towns is named. The reports refer only to positions, such as *burgomeister* and *bailiff*. Two specific references to Jews, however, are made in the chapter on Pultusk and Golymin. Both appear in orders from Claude-Marie Hervo, Davout's Assistant Chief of Staff, to General Nicolas-Léonard Becker, from the 5th Dragoon Division. At the time Becker also commanded the 3rd Corps' light cavalry. The orders are dated January 23 and 24, 1807 and were sent from the 3rd Corps' headquarters in Pultusk. Becker appears to have been quartered somewhere on a peninsula near the Narew River. He had recently been given orders to have the light cavalry scout the surrounding area. Towns mentioned are Borawe, Brok, Czerwin, Dombrowo, Goworowa, Gnasdowo, Gumowo, Krostowo, Miez-Borawe, Nowgorod, Ostrolenka, Porshendse, Przelize, Pulvi-Bruck, Pyski, Sniadow, Stroszyn, Tyszki, and Wyschkow.

Any individual coming from the enemy's side and trying to return there will be considered and treated as a spy, unless he holds a passport from the general commanding the advance guard. This applies to all the country's inhabitants, and especially the Jews.

Your [General Becker's] officers must continue to inform you of all the rumors running among the Jews, the Polish landlords, and the farmers; they are often used, when compared to other information, to uncover the truth.

The swath of destruction that Napoleon's army cut through Europe in 1812 was merely a repeat of what had happened a few years previously.■

Jewish Soldiers in Napoleon's Army

by Pierre Lautmann

Historians generally concur on the number of some 40,000 Jews residing in France on the eve of the 1789 Revolution. As an amateur genealogist, searching my own family roots, I have sought unexplored sources to compensate for the lack of vital records prior to Year Two of the Revolutionary Calendar (September 1792). Thus I have begun delving into various military archives.

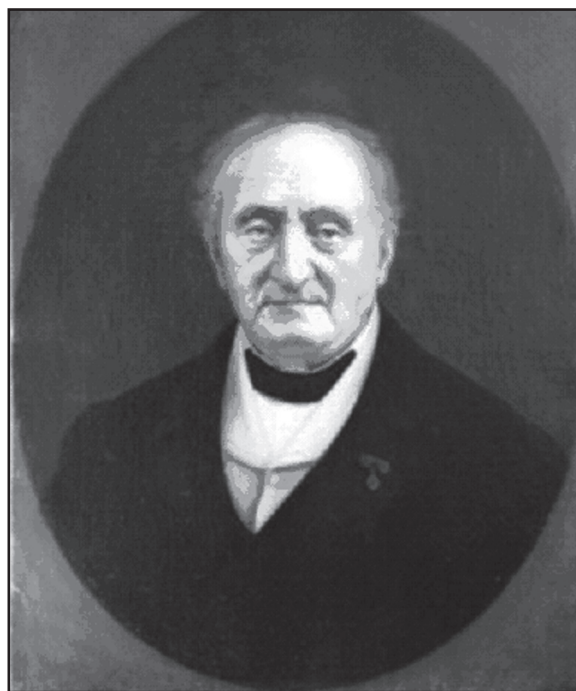
To my surprise, they are full of Jewish surnames. Thereupon I have wondered who these new citizens were, what part they had taken in the events, and what had been the consequences on our ancient communities.

They had barely enjoyed civil emancipation, after centuries of isolation in the Metz ghetto or, for most of them, in the *carrières* (Jewish streets) of the *Comtat Venaissin*. These Jews had suffered pogroms in Alsace and had paid a huge personal toll. Now they were being propelled into the torments of the Revolution and later into the wars of the Empire. Enlisted as clerks, soldiers, officers, health and administration officers in the armies of the Revolution and the campaigns of Napoleon they were quickly followed by Jews from the countries conquered by Napoleon—Belgians, Germans, Italians, Dutchmen, Swiss, some born in Corfu or even England. Not only were these Jews enlisted in the French Corps but in the armies that fought alongside them—the Italian Corps, the Prussian troops and the Polish Cavalry.

It is useless to estimate how many joined the armed forces, and this shows the limit of the enterprise in the sense that many were followers and not enlisted in the regular service, many had no surnames, and many enlisted under other names, died in battle or deserted without records being reliably kept.

Nevertheless, the content of the archives is often original and moving, and thus should be appreciated by genealogists. In the past, some researchers had stressed the courageous behavior of the Jewish soldiers of the Empire, notably Moïse Ginsburger and General Denner. At that time, Jews were fighting anti-Semitic attacks, *leitmotivs* which blamed lack of participation in the armed services on the supposed cowardice of the Jews and their dodging of military obligations. These publications are scarce and discuss only some individuals.

I wanted to complement these studies and, therefore, I have systematically scanned the records for Jewish surnames. I have found them mainly in the pension files (of wounded soldiers) kept at *Service Historique de l'Armée de Terre*, in Vincennes, a Paris suburb. I also browsed through the matriculation register, and thus



Bernard Berle Dietenheim

Born July 4th 1794 in Hegenheim (Alsace), he was the son of Aron & Brendel Bloch. He married Marie-Anne Woog daughter of late Marc Woog from Buschwiller (Alsace) & Sara Hirtz (Levy) from Niedehagenthal (Alsace) on June 6th 1814 at Buschwiller (Haut Rhin). He was merchant in Hegenheim (Alsace). He served in the Grande Armée as a Fusilier and was decorated with the Médaille de Sainte-Hélène N°323. He died on March 3rd 1867 at Saint Imier (Switzerland) at the house of his son Gabtiel.

discovered other Jews, who had not been wounded and had no pension docket. The father's and mother's name made it easy to check that I was in presence of a Jew and rule out surnames that only sounded Jewish.

I then continued my search in the files of the military academies founded by Napoleon, *Ecole Polytechnique*, *Ecole de Metz*, *École Spéciale Militaire de Saint-Cyr*. Each produced new names of conscripts. The same search in the files of the *Legion of Honour*, also founded by Napoleon, yielded similar results.

I have also searched the name adoption lists of 1808, which mention a number of soldiers—sometimes with the number of the Regiment. I also found several civilian employees with the armies—butchers, bakers, and tailors.

The Jewish press of the 19th century produced some obituaries, for example, Victor Fribourg who was born near Metz around 1793. After taking part in many battles, notably Waterloo where he was wounded, he emigrated to the New York City where he later died.

Presently, I have gathered some 1200 individuals who served with the French army in the times of the Revolution or the wars of the Empire between 1792 and 1816. The information varies greatly from case to case. Studying individuals in specific files opens various tracks for investigation.

In addition to the numerous Jews from conquered territories already mentioned, the remaining records originate in the four major zones of settlement: Alsace, Lorraine, Comtat-Venaissin and, for the Portuguese, in south-western France. New communities were consolidated, among which are Paris, Dijon, and Lyon.

The Documents

Personal files, as well as the regimental matriculation registers, supply a wealth of details: date of birth when known, name of the father and the mother, place of birth, place of residence, trade, date of being drafted or having volunteered. The following physical description was noted: size, shape of the face, colour of the eyes, hair and eyebrows, the shape of the nose, chin and the mouth; the presence of pock marks, or any specific mark, and sometimes colour of the skin.

Some military information is also recorded: events such as battles, awards, condemnations, defections, wounds, death and return from enemy prisons—often English ones. Several volunteer engagements date back to the Monarchy, and French Jews can be traced in the American War of Independence.

Pension files include many moving documents: vital data confirmed by a *mappa* (circumcision diaper) or record originating in the community vital registers of Metz or Carpentras, prior to the establishment of civil vital records, several hand-written documents, by the very pensioner or his widow, baptismal attests in case of conversion or excerpts from last wills.

All these documents show a significant change in the customs of the Jews. In 1808, on the occasion of adopting stable given names and surnames, many members of the army abandoned their Jewish given names—for example, Sayoun Levy became François Levy, the brothers Jacob

Moÿse and David Moÿse became Armand and Maurice Romain, while Aron Judas Aron was changed to Arnold Aron.

The records show that a large proportion of soldiers returned to their previous place of residence, though some chose totally new destinations, with inter-community marriages—for example, an Alsatian Ashkenazi Jew married a Portuguese (Sephardic) woman—or even marriages with non-Jews.

Our Napoleonic veterans were mentioned during the Second Empire (1851-1870) when all surviving soldiers from the Revolution and the First Empire were awarded the famous *Médaille de Sainte-Hélène*. The files show how these soldiers ultimately fared: happily for some, while others were burdened by the sequels of their wounds or even reduced to the life of beggars.

In 1791, during the French Revolution, Jews at once became citizens with the same rights and obligations as all other Frenchmen. They were allowed to settle where they wanted, mainly in larger cities where they could more easily earn a living.

Adoption of Family Names: Decree of 1808

A further difficulty seems to originate in the Semitic use of names, where permanent names are the rule only for the descendants of the priests (Cohanim) and the Levites. For most of the people (beni Israel), the normal naming practice was to add the father's given name to the child's, e.g. David ben Moshe, whose father could be Moshe ben Efraim.

In order to avoid the problems raised by this continuous change of second name, Napoleon, in a Decree given in 1808, ordered that all Jews adopt stable family names, a practice that was already in use in several places. In every town where Jews lived, these adoptions of names were registered at the Town Hall, and a great majority of the records have survived. They provide a bridge from present names to those in use prior to 1808. They also constitute a comprehensive, detailed census of the French Jewish population in 1808, allowing researchers to reconstruct the families. In fact, the head of the family registered himself first, then his wife, specifying that she was the spouse, and thereafter the father registered his children one at a time. When known, the birth date and birth place of the children may be present, and also, in some cases, the father's trade.■

Repositories and Sources:

1. 1897 Library Alliance Israélite Universel

45, rue La Bruyère - 75428 Paris Cedex 09 – France
info@aiu.org
<http://www.stehelene.org/>

2. Archives Départementales de la Seine,

18, boulevard Sérurier, 75 019 Paris France.

3. Service Historique de la défense. (S.H.A.T.)

Château de Vincennes BP 107 00 481 ARMEES France.

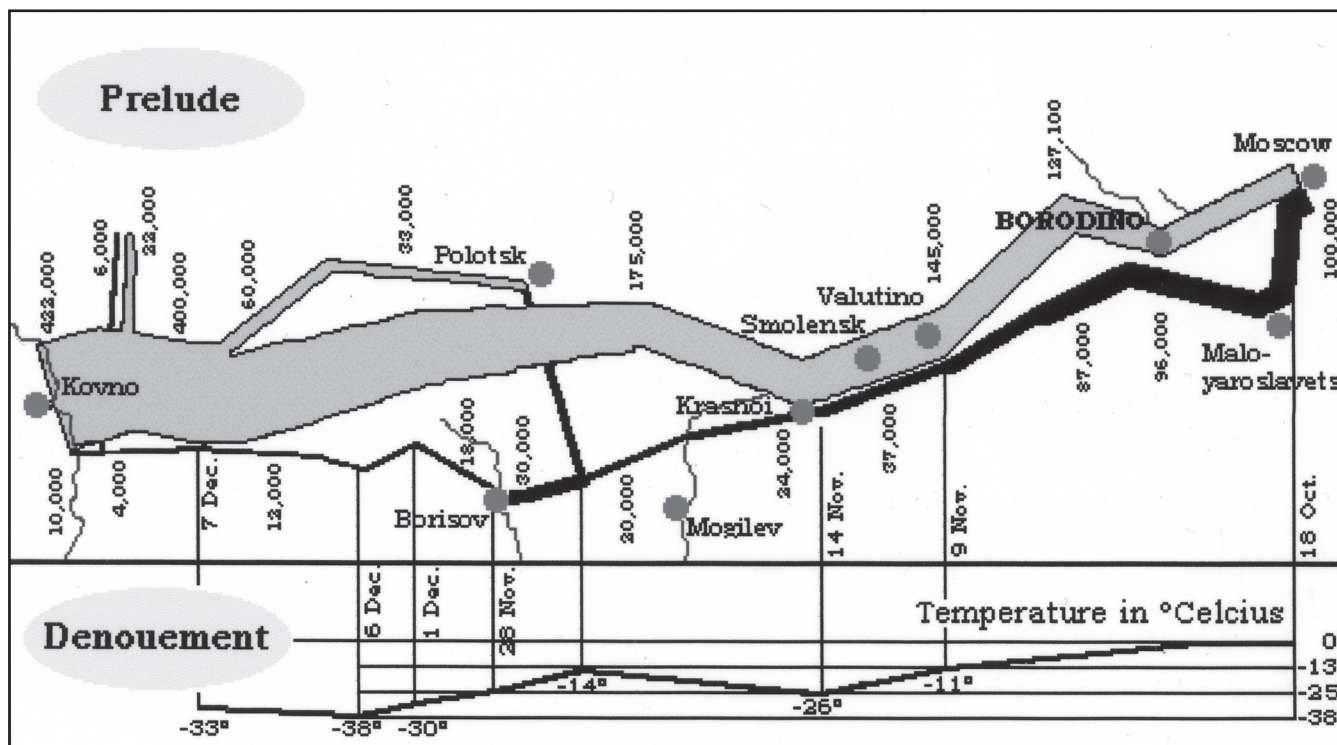
4. You can order Pierre Katz works published by « **Le Cercle de Généalogie Juive** ». His work about the 1808 "Jewish changes of names law" concerns Alsace (Bas-Rhin (2 vol. 800 p. & Haut-Rhin (1 vol. 401 p.) & Lorraine (Moselle, Meurthe-et-Moselle (2e édition 1999—1 vol. 320 p.). More detail on <http://www.genealoj.org/> Chapter: « Les Publications ».

Charles Joseph Minard: Mapping Napoleon's March

By John Corbett

Used with permission

<<http://www.csiss.org/classics/content/58>>



"It may well be the best statistical graphic ever drawn." Charles Joseph Minard's 1861 thematic map of Napoleon's ill-fated march on Moscow was described thusly by Edward Tufte in his acclaimed 1983 book, *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*. Of all the attempts to convey the futility of Napoleon's attempt to invade Russia and the utter destruction of his *Grande Armée* in the last months of 1812, no written work or painting presents such a compelling picture as does Minard's graphic.

Charles Joseph Minard's Napoleon map, along with several dozen others that he published during his lifetime, set the standard for excellence in graphically depicting flows of people and goods in space, yet his role in the development of modern thematic mapping techniques is all too often overlooked.

This map shows the devastating loss of Napoleon's army in the fields of Russia during the winter of 1812-13, when Minard was thirty-one. Here he uses the same proportional line to track Napoleon's Grand Armée as it made its way across the Russian plains toward Moscow. We see a fraction of the troops splitting off from the main group and pausing at Polotsk (known in English as Polotsk in the modern country of Belarus). Although the thickness of Napoleon's army diminished somewhat by the time it arrived at Moscow, it was still formidable. Unfortunately for Napoleon and his troops, Czar Alexander I and the residents of Moscow had fled and burned the city, leaving little for Napoleon to conquer. Up to this point, Minard's map bears many of the same qualities as the Hannibal map. But an additional, tragic

chapter of the campaign enabled Minard to add even more depth to his already incredible map.

Like a scorned groom whose bride never showed up at the altar, a frustrated Napoleon had little choice but to return back to the part of Europe he controlled for food, shelter, and supplies. Minard now traces the remnants of the *Grande Armée* as it makes its way back toward the Nieman River. In doing so, the parallel tracks of the advancing and retreating army are set next to one another, making the continuing deterioration of the army all the more visible and heart wrenching. As the army slowly made its way across barren earth (the Russians had burned food along this path while blocking other escape paths), one of the worst winters in recent memory set in. Minard tracks the plummeting temperature against this trek on a horizontal axis at the bottom of the page, even more profoundly capturing the dire straits that the retreating army found itself in. Not surprisingly, the pitiful band of troops that returned from Russia marked the onset of the collapse of Napoleon's Continental Empire.

Edward Tufte identified six separate variables that were captured within it. First, the line width continuously marked the size of the army. Second and third, the line itself showed the latitude and longitude of the army as it moved. Fourth, the lines themselves showed the direction that the army was traveling, both in advance and retreat. Fifth, the location of the army with respect to certain dates was marked. Finally, the temperature along the path of retreat was displayed. Few, if any, maps before or since have been able to coherently and so compellingly weave so many variables into a captivating whole. ■

To Moscow and Back: Historical Background to a Jewish Soldier's Participation in Napoleon's Army

by Paul King

On the eve of the Napoleonic invasion, Shneur Zalman, the leader of Russian Hassidism, reflected on the consequences for his followers of alternative military outcomes:

Dubnow in his *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*, wrote "Should Bonaparte win, the wealth of the Jews will be increased, and their [civic] position will be raised. At the same time their hearts will be estranged from our Heavenly Father. Should however our Czar Alexander win, the Jewish hearts will draw nearer to our Heavenly Father, though the poverty of Israel may become greater and his position lower."

Many of Shneur Zalman's followers retreated eastward as the *Grande Armée* of Napoleon pushed toward Moscow anticipating the decisive battle that never took place. Among the advancing earthly host was Simon Moses Scheuer, first born son of Isaak ben Simon and Esther bat Cerlina of Thalfang. Why he donned the uniform of the French and how he survived will be explored in the following article that straddles the tenuous seam between sparse biography and thick history. What for Schneor Zalman was the height of alarm was for Simon Scheuer an apotheosis.

The historian, Simon Dubnow, had argued at the opening of the paragraph in which the above quotation is located that "Napoleon's halo had been considerably dimmed even in the eyes of the Jews of Western Europe, now that the results of his 'Jewish Parliaments' had come to light." Dubnow is referring to the summoning of a Jewish Sanhedrin in 1808 and the formation of thirteen regional communal bodies consisting of religious and lay representatives of the various Jewish communities throughout France and its Empire (Rhineland and Italy).

The granting of autonomy to Jewish communities posed a threat to conservative forces in Judaism. While the Hasidim had managed to extract separate rights for their sect within the Russian Jewish community, they felt that a Napoleonic victory would grant autonomy to a native Jacobin majority, and that the leadership of this majority would express the wishes of the regime through an organized Consistory of state-appointed rabbis.¹ While Dubnow had placed the opposition between religious and secular values in the mouth of a pious orthodox Jew from Russia, he had in fact propounded that Jewry, east and



Simon Scheuer (Shire)
1794-1884

west, were not favourably disposed to Napoleon. Dubnow then utilizes another Russian spokesman to show that Jews abetted the Russian cause, providing vital information on French troop movements as the latter passed through Poland.

A Jewish Soldier

Simon Scheuer (Shire in America) was born in mid 1794 at the time of the French invasion of the Rhineland. He was the first of ten children born to Isaak Scheuer and Esther Ackermann. Simon's first marriage was to Sarah Salomon. His second marriage was to Sarah Kahn on 30 December 1833. He fathered four or five sons and three daughters. His family arrived in North America in the 1850s, most of his children preceding him and settling first in up-state New York and then

in Hamilton, Canada West. In the mid-1860s he moved to Chicago and spent the last years with his youngest son. He died in September 1884.

Simon Shire's participation as a soldier in the Moscow Campaign was noted in his lengthy obituary written by his youngest son, Adolph, and published in Isaac Mayer Wise's *American Israelite* 19 September 1884.

"He ... joined the armies of Napoleon I, and went through the entire Russian campaign, which ended so disastrously for the great soldier. Mr. Shire was one of the few survivors who returned from Moscow..."

The Shire family's respect and admiration for Napoleon are clearly revealed in the wording. Further information about Simon's military assignment came to light recently from papers of the estate of the late Marion Megill (1912-2000), a great grand-daughter of Simon Shire. Simon was recruited into a regiment of soldiers whose principal qualification was their height. Not only, then, was Simon tall, he was the only Jewish member in his contingent and the only one among them who could read and write. Uniform height in a regiment provided some mobility advantage to the extent that wearing apparel could be more or less standardized and would lessen the number of unused items of different sizes since there was near maximum exchangeability and replacement of attire amongst the troops. Whether this favoured their survival rate is moot. Another factor that might have provided a safety net for this contingent in the retreat from Moscow was the fact that Rhineland recruits were attached to French, rather than

Allied forces. Thus, they may have received preferential treatment in the retreat and maintained a cohesiveness that was lacking in the chaotic flight westward. Finally, that Simon became a teacher can probably be attributed to the vital role he had to play in his unit, conveying written orders and writing outgoing messages for his immediate superior command.

French Control of the Rhine Left-Bank

The French Revolutionary armies occupied the entire left bank of the Rhine by the end of 1794 and consolidated their political hold over this area in 1797. Trier was captured on August 10, 1794 and became the consistorial diocese for this region of the Moselle. A census conducted in the consistory listed 261 Jews in Trier and 3,553 within the boundaries of the Consistory. Initially, the Left Bank of the Rhine was to be granted the status of a Republic but French policy shifted to outright annexation.² Declarations of loyalty were forthcoming from these Rhineland communities, but the numbers were altogether unimpressive. Nevertheless, oppressive economic conditions, such as the poll tax (Leibzoll), were waived. When the Sanhedrin convened in Paris on February 7, 1807, rabbis and laymen from the four départements of the left bank of the Rhine were present as deliberating representatives.

Among the issues that would occupy the Jewish communities was the manner in which Jewish citizens could practice their religion when mobilized into the armed forces. Lion Bernkastel and the rabbi Samuel Marx, representatives for the Jewish consistory in France's newly-amalgamated Saar Department centered in Trier, ask whether Jewish soldiers had to obey the Jewish religious codes during their time in the army. Jakob Bernkastel, the father of Lion, and his son Meir, were involved in supplying goods to French forces. The Berncastels stood near the acme of a pyramid of Jewish army provisioners. In 1812, Napoleon's mass army required an historically unprecedented quantity of supplies, and drew substantially upon Jewish purveyors.

The Role of the Jewish Army Purveyor

Because of their intra-regional networking and geographical mobility in a relatively stationary feudal society, Jewish merchants and money-lenders were crucial to European economies in crisis situations such as wars and famines. In the Napoleonic Wars (1802-1815), the Jews of north-eastern France played a key role as army purveyors, supplying food, wearing apparel, medicine, fodder for army beasts of burden, and credit for financing military activities.³ In the 1812 Moscow Campaign, at least one memoir survives of a Jewish purveyor who followed in the rear of the Grand Army.⁴ Werner Sombart in a characteristic generalization notes that "under the Revolutionary Government, under the Directory, in the Napoleonic Wars, it was always Jews who acted as purveyors." Szajkowski notes that the army and its Jewish purveyors were of great importance to the government and the local authorities. On many occasions they saved entire cities and provinces from starvation

and they obtained many favorable decrees on Jews. The most prominent French Jewish provisioners, the Cerf Beer brothers, were reputed to have had a network of 67 Jewish subcontractors many of whom were linked to local Jewish suppliers.

Simon Scheuer's father, Isaak (1765-1846), was one of several brothers who rallied to the service of the French during the period of the Revolutionary Wars as provisioners of cattle. Many Jewish families in the village of Thalfang and surrounding hamlets on the southern edge of the Hunsrück hills of the Rhineland-Pfalz were cattle merchants. Vital records show a predisposition for intermarriage among them and the prevalence of adopted surnames associated with farming and agriculture, such as Scheuer (barn), Ackermann (farmer), Baum (tree). Thus, with the outbreak of the French Revolution, these merchant vocations based in the agricultural economy suddenly faced major opportunities for expansion. Simon Scheuer's son explains developments and the acquisition of the Scheuer surname.

At the time of the French Revolution, the Church properties which had been confiscated were sold at auction. Our grandfather [Isaak Scheuer-1765 – 1846] and his brothers, who were prominent traders in horses & cattle, having contracts to supply the French armies, were delegated by the farmers around Thalfangen to buy the land and divide it up among them. They did so, and an older brother of our grandfather (having kept some of the land) built a large barn (Sheyer), an unusual thing for a Jew. So people called him 'Scheuer Itzig'. Shortly thereafter, the law compelled the Jews to adapt family names... This old man kept or selected the names he was known by since building the barn; all the family followed.

Availability of national property at public auction stemmed from the parcellation of land, principally land of the Church and the nobility. Jews were encouraged by revolutionaries and attacked by reactionaries for their interest in purchasing national property. Propensity to procure this property was motivated both by pragmatic economic considerations and politico/symbolic stimulations. Many military suppliers found themselves in possession of extensive cash during a period of inflation and economic uncertainty. The best hedge against depreciation of their net worth was to purchase landed property. Its purchase was also an act of patriotism to Revolutionary France. Moreover, it expressed the aspirations of the rising bourgeoisie, namely individualism and republican freedom. These values could also find their realization through acts of courage and sacrifice. Napoleon's Grand Army, the first mass army in modern history, afforded an opportunity for the peasant, the day laborer, and the petit bourgeoisie to exhibit their personal loyalty to the regime and its ideology.

At the commencement of the Russian campaign, the French armies included 184,000 army horses and 150,000 requisitioned horses that hauled army supplies. A brief account of that campaign from the perspective of a Jewish provisioner, Isidore Lehmann, refers to bad supply tactics and the loss of up to 40,000 horses before the army reached Vilna. The Russian scorched-earth

policy aggravated the situation. Lehmann also describes the disarray of the army in retreat.

The Survival of a Jewish Soldier

Simon Scheuer, the eldest son of Isaak Scheuer, joined the *Grande Armée* at age 18 in the historic and fateful Russian Campaign of 1812.⁵ Whether he was conscripted, was a replacement bought at a price for another soldier, or volunteered is not clear.⁶ This Army was estimated at 625,000 soldiers, of whom half were French and the other half allies consisting mostly of Germans, as well as Poles, Lithuanians, and other contingents. A report of the Central Consistory in 1810 gives Jewish enlistment at 462 out of a total French population of 36,663 Jews. Szajkowski points out that in one department (Meurthe) the proportion of Jews serving in the army was higher than the rest of the population. From the department of Vaucluse, 52 Jews served between 1798-1810, of whom 6 were volunteers.⁷ Lautmann (2001) claims to have a list of 1,350 Jews involved in the Napoleonic campaigns from 1792-1815 but no separate figures were provided for the 1812 campaign.

Mr. Shire was one of the few survivors who returned from Moscow. It is entirely possible that Simon owed his survival during the retreat in part to assistance from the local Jewish population. Napoleon's army was in complete disarray by the time it passed through Smolensk and then Vilna, two towns which were not laid waste in the 1812 War.⁸ Both had sizeable Jewish populations which provided succor for the fleeing troops. Rene Bourgeois, a surviving combatant, writing shortly after the campaign, recalled that during the retreat shared language...*was the exclusive determinant bringing them [soldiers] together. Thus, they formed national entities, indicating amongst themselves who were foreigners by token of estrangement and hate. All these peoples, far from engaging in mutual assistance were overwhelmed by reciprocal abuses and bad treatment.*⁹

Jewish residents provided temporary haven for coreligionists and saved them from the Cossack forces which were inflicting heavy losses on the French troops. Isador 'Itzik' Lehmann, the aforementioned Jewish provisioner, owed his life to assistance provided by coreligionists residing in the main centres along the line of Napoleon's retreat. Philippe-Paul Segur describes the saving role of the local Jews, sometimes in uncomplimentary language. *Returning from Moscow, the army found Smolensk in chaos. When we had succeeded in establishing some sort of order, the Jews were the first to furnish some provisions. In the retreat to Vilna ... a few doors were opened to the fugitives thanks to ... the avarice of the Jews.*¹⁰

After the Beresina battle, which followed the retreat from Moscow, about 8800 soldiers remained in the ranks. We can only speculate, but Simon Scheuer's survival may have been due to the refuge and protection provided by coreligionists in the major Jewish centers of Smolensk and Vilna.

For most youth coming of age in the years before the Russian campaign, the lure of glory and the charisma of Napoleon were sufficient attraction. For many Jews,

Napoleon embodied the ideals of freedom and equality espoused in the French Revolution. He was also the Corsican outsider who could stand as the archetypal continental soldier, loyal to ideals rather than to the nation. Beresina, Tilsit and Waterloo would bring that short cosmopolitan era to an end. However, prior to Napoleon's military decline, Jewish communities issued mobilization appeals to their coreligionists. Hopes were dashed by the reaction which set in when the Rhenish territories were returned to Prussia in 1815. Many Jewish parents harbored ambitions for their children, sending them to the French academies for their instruction. The children, in their turn, were aware of the career and social barriers which their parents endured. Nonetheless, living in a Prussian-dominated Rhineland and possibly encouraged by liberal developments, individual family members elected for different destinies. Descendants of the Scheuer clan would serve on the side of Germany in the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871, while others sided with France.

Although we lack written documentation from the Scheuer family which would shed direct light on their political views, we have an interview (in 1932) probing his orientation toward Germany during World War I:

"Mr. Scheuer, which part of Europe did you come from?"

"From the French frontier—it was Prussian territory, of course, a Rhenish province."

"Was French your native tongue?"

"Oh, no, German. I was born under Prussian rule."

"Did this tend to German sympathies on your part during the late war?"

"No, no," (he said very vigorously.) "For one thing, my father was a born Frenchman."

"Did your early German service result in any embarrassment to you here in Toronto during the war?"

"None whatever. My whole attitude is toward liberty. We Jews, in Prussia, were under great disability. My father was always an ardent Frenchman. But, under German aegis, his Jewish principles always stood in the way of just recognition, by appointments such for instance, as that of mayor." It is frustrating, and indeed peculiar, that there is no written record from Simon of these historic events. Did he keep silent, traumatized by the horrors of war? His youngest son chose recollections of this military episode in his long life. Perhaps the story was told and retold in the confines of the family, ebbing away as a European memory in a land where the everyday and the ordinary had become heroic.■

Notes

1. Hillel Levine develops an elaborate interpretation of this quotation, arguing that in the last analysis the Hassidic leader considered it better to bargain with the autocratic political capriciousness of the Czarist regime than to confront Napoleonic administrative order. Of course, Dubnow promoted national self-preservation through cultural development and viewed with disdain Napoleon's cosmopolitan outlook and the ideals of universal humanity.

2. Peace of Campo Formio in 1797, incorporates urban entities such as Cologne, Aachen and Crefeld; the Treaty of Lunéville in 1801 marked the integral cession of the Left Bank of the Rhine to France. The administration division was: 4 Departments: each department divided into arrondissements (admin. districts) and each arrondissement was divided into cantons and communes – cantons were electoral and judicial units; communes were local administrative units = parishes. Small villages were combined into a commune, several communes might be included in a canton. Large towns were both communes and cantons. All communes were headed by a mayor and several aides. The prefect appointed the mayor and aides for communes of less than 5,000 inhabitants.
3. For an account of the economic role of Jewish purveyors from Alsace during the Napoleonic Wars, see Michael Graetz, "Jewish Economic Activity Between War and Peace: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Army Suppliers," *Zion* 56 (3), 1991: 255-273. [Hebrew] Even in the preceding half-century, Jews from this area were in the economic thick of things because of the need for military provisions. Hertzberg notes that "since the region remained a theater of war, it was always heavily garrisoned ... [T]he policy of the state towards the Jews in eastern France ... was rooted in military considerations." Arthur Hertzberg, *The French Enlightenment and the Jews*, New York: Schocken, 1968: 114. The pervasive activity of Jews in much of Europe as army provisioners is well documented. For the Habsburg Empire in the first half of the eighteenth century see Anat Peri, "The Activity of Jewish Army-Suppliers in the Kingdom of Hungary in the First Half of the Eighteenth Century," *Zion* 57 (2), 1992: 135-172.
4. See "Un Juif Fournisseur Militaire de Napoleon Ier: contribution à l'histoire des campagnes de 1812-1813," *Revue des Études Juives* LVII 1909.
5. An interesting speculation is whether Simon joined Napoleon's army as a purveyor and thus was motivated by economic gain. It would appear that even the secondary, small-time purveyors could make do by following in the wake of the Grand Army, supplying from the distant rear. Such was the case of the Jewish purveyor, Isadore Lehman (1782-1856), from Bischheim, who wrote his memoirs of the Russian Campaign, but did not accompany the troupes on the march to the outskirts of Moscow and did not experience the full force of the disastrous retreat. Upon arriving in Minsk, Lehman received word of the Grand Army's retreat from Moscow. However, the ensuing chaos in the region and his impaired health immobilized him and he was captured by the Russians. Lehman relates how he managed to survive with the assistance of fellow Jews who provided food and shelter to him in a number of towns [See M. Grunwald, *Die Feldzüge Napoleons, nach Aufzeichnungen jüdischer Teilnehmer und Augenzeugen*, Wien 1913, pp. 59-126; M. Grunwald, "Un juif fournisseur militaire de Napoleon Ier," *Revue des Études Juives* LVII 1909. Of Simon Shire's war experience we have no memoir, only the related fact of his youngest son that he accomplished the entire round trip.
6. Conscription was instituted under a compulsory military clause of the 17 March 1808 for which Jews could not

supply a replacement. This Napoleonic 'Jewish' decree was altered two years later allowing inductees to find a substitute recruit. Information about Jewish soldiers in the Russian campaign is hard to come by. Israel Cremieux's army entered military service in 1793 and served in a number of campaigns including that of 1812. Contingents from the annexed Rhineland departments numbered at least 92 including two lieutenant-colonels (See *L'Univers Israelite* 68 (1), 1912-13).

7. Other figures are given in Szajkowski (1957) which show considerable discrepancy in estimated total Jewish population, as well as selective military enrollment numbers for specific departments at different time periods. In his conclusion, the author rejects Jewish claims that "they fought in great numbers" as apologetics.
8. Jewish property was vandalized during the French advance through Vilna but the political orientation of the local Jewish population exhibited little favor either toward the French or the Russian regimes.

Bibliography

1. *Archives Israelites de France* 96, No. 80-81, jeudi 2 Aout, 1934: 112-13, "Les Israelites dans l'armée française sous Napoleon Ier". [List of 79 soldiers updates to 1812]
2. Bourgeois, Rene. *Tableau de la campagne de Moscou en 1812*. J. G. Dentu. Paris: 1814
3. Denney, General J. (1912-13) "Les Officiers juifs de Ier Empire." *L'Univers Israelite* 68 (1): 21.
4. Dubnow, S. M. *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland*. Philadelphia: JPSA, 1916: 356-7)
5. Graetz, Michael. "Jewish Economic Activity Between War and Peace: The Rise and Fall of Jewish Army Suppliers." *Zion* 56 (3) 255-273. [Heb.]
6. Grunwald, Max. "Un Juif: Fournisseur Militaire de Napoléon Ier." *Revue des Études Juives* LVII: 73 – 92.
7. Kober, Adolph. "The French Revolution and the Jews in Germany," *Jewish Social Studies* 7: 291-322.
8. Lautmann, Pierre. "Des Juifs dans les armées de la Revolution et de l'Empire: quelques portraits, quelques chiffres." *Revue du Cercle de Genealogie Juive* 61 (17):18-26.
9. Levine, Hillel. "Should Napoleon Be Victorious: Politics and Spirituality in Early Modern Jewish Messianism." <http://failedmessiah.typepad.com/failed_messiahcom/files/Hillel.levine.pdf>.
10. Rowe, Michael. "The Napoleonic Legacy in the Rhineland and the Politics of Reform in restoration Russia," *Napoleon's Legacy*. David Laven & Lucy Riall (eds.). New York: 129-145.
11. Sombart, Werner. *The Jews and Modern Capitalism*. M. Epstein (trans.). New York: Collier Books, 1962.
12. Szajkowski, Zosa. "French Jews in the Armed Forces During the Revolution of 1789." *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* XXVI: 139-160.

The Start of the Russian Campaign

by Rabbi Jeffrey A. Marx, JGSLA

My Bregshstein family (today: Bregstein, Breakstone, and other, similar variants) all originated from the town of Panemune (today, known as Aukštoji Panemune, Lithuania.) Panemune means, in Lithuanian, “on the Niemen River,” for it is located on the left (west) bank of the Niemen, southeast and across from Kovno (Kaunas). Documented Jewish settlement in Panemune goes back 1765.¹ At the beginning of the 19th century there were approximately 400 Jewish inhabitants.²

Among members of the Bregstein/Breakstone family, there were many legends concerning Napoleon Bonaparte. In one, he had billeted his soldiers with family members and gave them duchies in Sweden and France as a reward.³ In another, he had been given shelter by the family and hidden from the Russian soldiers. He rewarded them by bestowing the Bregstein name upon them or by giving them a piece of land. Still other stories, have him cutting through someone’s backyard, using family members to help him build a bridge across the Niemen to attack Kovno, demanding grain and horses for his troops or fathering children by one or more of the Bregstein women. Finally, a family legend has him signing a treaty with the Czar in Panemune.

Like all legends, these family stories do have a kernel of truth within them, for Napoleon was, indeed, in Panemune.

In 1807, as a result of the Peace of Tilsit, and in 1809, as a result of his victory against Austria, Napoleon seized New East Prussia, as well as Austrian territory to the south, and called this new conquered area, “The Grand Duchy of Warsaw.” The Niemen River was its Eastern-most boundary with Russia, a boundary upon which was perched the little town of Panemune. In fact, the Russian Campaign of 1812 was launched from Panemune, which it is still called.



On June 23rd, 1812, Napoleon and his army arrived at the Niemen River. Napoleon spent the night outside of Panemune, camped out on a high hill which overlooked Kovno.⁴ During the night, his corps of engineers built three pontoon bridges across the river. Early the next morning, Napoleon marched his soldiers across the bridges into Russian territory to attack Kovno, launching the first battle of the Russian Campaign.⁵

Following his disastrous defeat at Moscow, and the final destruction of the *Grand Armée* at Paneriai, some of the French soldiers may have passed through Panemune on their retreat.⁶ Napoleon, however, did not do so. He had left his troops at Smorgonys (Smorgon), which is Southeast of Panemune, and turned his sled towards Paris, thus traveling even further South.⁷ ■

Notes

- ¹ See 1765 list of Jewish tavern owners in Vilkiya Kahal. (LVIA, 56).
- ² Kagan states that in 1797, Panemune had 490 inhabitants, mostly Jews, who lived in 51 households, but his source is not given. 51 households means an average of nine to a house, which seems excessively high. (Kagan, 382). Dov Levin, also gives the figure of 490 inhabitants, but gives the year as 1792 and does not indicate how many of the 490 families were Jews. (Levin, 496). Neither Kagan nor Levin indicates how many were Jews. Jan Wasicki’s figures, however, seem more accurate: 844 inhabitants in 1799, of which 393 were Jews. (Wasicki).
- ³ The “Duchies in Sweden” legend was based on the migration to Sweden in the early 1870s, by several family members.
- ⁴ This hill was, in all probability, the high hill once owned by Zev, the son of Daniel of Troki. (*Yahadut Lita*, Vol. III, quoting the Lithuanian Metrica). Several maps of the late 19th century, label this spot as “Napoleon’s Hill”, and the inhabitants of

Panemune, to this day, call the hill: “Napoleono Kalnas.” (Marx).

- ⁵ His (Napoleon’s) reconnaissance completed, he gave the order that the following nightfall three bridges should be thrown over the river near the village of Ponienmen...he spent part of the day in his tent and part in a nearby Polish mansion, lying without energy in the breathless, muggy heat...perched on the highest hill, about three hundred feet from the river (Niemen), we saw the emperor’s tent.” (Townsend, 5,7).
- ⁶ Some of the Grand Army, under the command of Murat, retreated through Kovno on Dec.9/10, 1812. (*The Cambridge Modern History*, 490-505). “It was not without some difficulty that we climbed the almost perpendicular slope which one must surmount on leaving Kovno for Mariampol.” (Caulaincourt, 275; Townsend, 257, 264).
- ⁷ (Sliupas, 14).

Bibliography

1. "Napoleon." *Cambridge Modern History*, vol. IX, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1906.
2. Caulaincourt, Armand-Augustin-Louis de. *Memoires du General de Caulaincourt*. Ed. Jean Hanoteau, abridged, translated and edited by George Libaire, W. Morrow and Co., 1935.
3. Denniee, le Baron. *Itineraire de L'Empereur Napoleon Pendant la Campagne de 1812*. Paris: 1842.
4. Kagan, Berl, *Yidishe Shtet, Shtetlekh un Dorfishe Yishuvim in Lite*, New York: Simcha Graphic Associates, 1991.
5. Levin, Dov, ed., *Pinkas HaKehillot*, Poland, vol. IV, Warsaw and its Region, 1989; Lithuania, 1996, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.
6. "Jewish Tavern Owners in Vilkija Kahal." *LVIA* 28 and 29.
7. Marx, Jeffrey A. "Trip to Paniemunias and Patamulshelis, Lithuania." January 19th, 1990. Unpublished.
8. Sliupas, Vytautas J. "Napoleon's First and Last Steps in Lithuania," *Lithuanian Heritage*, July/August, 2002: 14.
9. Townsend, J. David. *Napoleon's Russian Campaign*, 1958, Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston, (abridged version of *De Segur, Philippe-Paul, La Campagne de Russie, Memoires d'un Aide de Camp de Napoleon*, 2 vols., 1824, Nelson, Paris.
10. Wasicki, Jan. *Prussian Descriptions of Polish Towns From the End of the 18th Century: Bialystok Department*. Poznan: Adam Mickiewicz University, 1964. (Based on Prussian archive data compiled by August Carl von Holsche 1799/1800).
11. R. Hasman, D. Lipek, et al. *Yahadut Lita*. vol. III, IV. Tel Aviv: Igud Yotzai Lita B'Yisrael, 1967, 1984.

An Archivist Looks at Family Legends

by Vitalija Gircyte

Chief Archivist—Kaunas Regional Archives

Napoleon legends were very popular in Lithuania in the first half of the 20th century, and I have seen some official records of that period from families who consider themselves to be the descendants of a Napoleonic soldier. These theories are very popular among Lithuanians and Russians, as well as Jews, with unusual family names.

We see very little evidence to support these theories where "there might have been many Napoleon's soldiers left behind." To my mind, if there were any, they were few and I would suggest that there were other reasons for the French settling in Russia. French émigrés, soldiers and aristocrats, artisans, tradesmen, teachers and governesses fleeing the French Revolution or acquiring property (for example, a certain de Toulouse Lautrec was the head of Panevezys police for some time in the 19th century). In southern Lithuania and Prussia, there was massive colonization by German and French settlers after the plague at the beginning of the 18th century. Even Vincas Kudirka—one of the leaders of our national revival movement—descends from a French Couderc family. It must also be pointed out that a large part of Napoleon's army invading Russia in June 1812 was not French—perhaps as much as one half—therefore one would expect to hear stories of families descended from Italian, Dutch, Prussian and Spanish Napoleonic soldiers who were much more likely to desert.

The records in Lithuanian archives are not explicit about the origin of the family. When a complete family is listed in 1816 or a similar revision list, (father and other ancestors before the date of a potential enlisted man) this son of the family cannot be a foreign soldier. These lists are even better proof that these stories are not true.

Religious orientation was a serious consideration in those years: Jewish soldiers serving France would have been granted all civil rights upon returning to France. A non-Jewish soldier, changing his religious orientation to become Jewish would present a serious problem, one that it is hard to find credible. In Russia, converting to Judaism from any Christian denomination at that time, would be a criminal offence that would endanger, not only the convert, but also the whole Jewish community which accepted him. Why would one choose to remain in a hostile country secretly, become a member of a discriminated Jewish community, and yet give their surname to the family?

In general, there is very little evidence in the records of the Lithuanian archives explicit to the origin of a family or to a change in religious orientation. Records sometimes show a former residence when the move had legal or tax implications. The lack of records does not indicate proof these family stories are false but it does mean that in seeking documentaion, the researcher may have to look elsewhere.■

Letter to the Editor from Jerome Seligsohn

Having seen the notation of the JGSLA study on Napoleon in what is currently Belarus, I took out my oversized biography of Napoleon and looked at the maps of the campaigns and read the descriptions of the Grand Army burning and pillaging what was in their path. It reminded me of the brutal actions of the Nazis in that area in 1941. Towns and shtetls [Vitebsk, Orsha, Mogilev] that I have mentioned in my archiving of landsmanshaften for the Belarus SIG sprang up before my eyes. Too bad I was unable, at the time to question my Mogilever grandparents whose own grandparents were there at the time of the French invasions. Think of all the family history we missed because our interests were stirred after our last links to an early history were cut off. ■

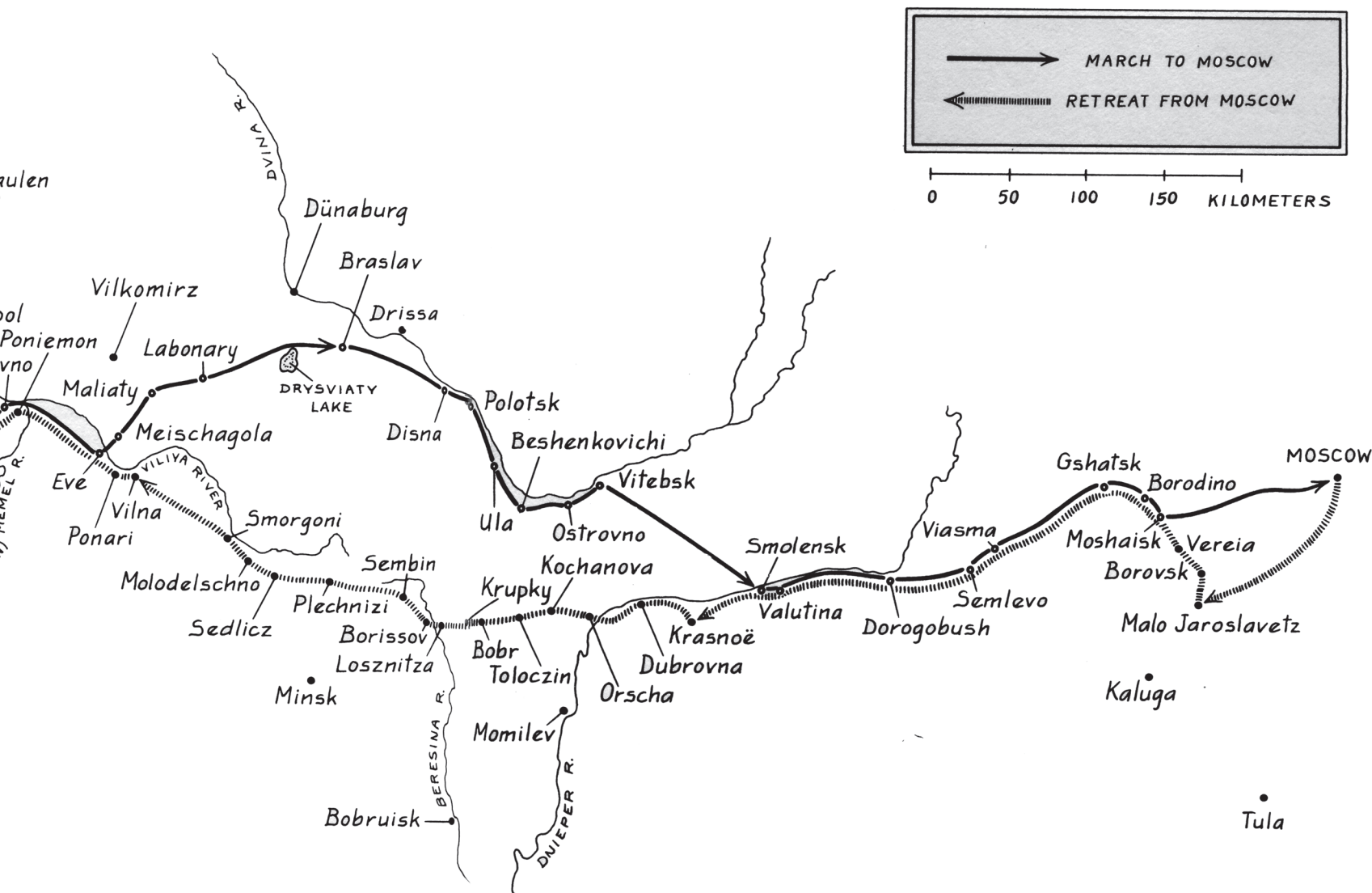
Napoleon's Campaign 1812 June 23—December 15 175 days

Across the Niemen to Moscow

- 20 Jun—(Russians) Alexander in **Vilna**. Bagration in **Volkavysk**.
 23 Jun—Crossing the Niemen at **Alexioten**—Napoleon with the Guard; Duvout's I Corps; Oudinot's II Corps; Murat's Reserve Cavalry; Ney's II Corps and MacDonald charged with the capture of **Riga**.
 23 Jun—**Pilony** (Belarus) Eugene waited to cross the Neimen to march toward **Grodno** via **Volkavysk**.
 26 Jun—Alexander left **Vilna** for **Svencioyns**. (Svensziany) not yet aware of Napoleon's intent.
 27 Jun—Bagration (Russians) sent to **Vileyka** Rain followed by heat and dust.
 28 Jun—Rain, dysentery and influenza. Light skirmish at **Vilna**; (French) Ney and the II Corps on the Road to **Suteva** on the left bank of the Vilja River. (French) Oudinot and Cuirssier Division on the other side of the Vilja River toward **Bubtai** and **Ianova** (Janova).
 29 Jun—Rain. At **Grodno**, Jerome (French) moves from **Pilony** to **Novi Troki** and **Osmiani** (light fighting). Barclay (Russians) sets fire to the magazines and the Vilja. River bridges are dismantled and he begins his retreat to **Niemenczin**. MacDonald (French) with X Corps moves toward **Rossieny** (Lithuania). Wittgenstein (Russians) near **Keideny**. Bagration and Platov (Russians) ordered to withdraw toward **Sokol-Sviencianny-Kobylniki**. III Russian Infantry moved from **Novi-Troki** and IV Russian Infantry from **Olkieniki**. Russian IV Infantry evaded in the direction of **Olszani** and **Woloczyn**. French Reynier's VII (Saxon) Corps to **Bialystok** via **Brok** and **Tykoczyn**. **Battle at Vilkimir** near **Develtovo** between the rear guard and the I Cavalry. Wittgenstein (Russians) at **Perkele**. Platov (Russians) to **Lida** and on to **Smorgoni**.
 01 Jul—Mud.
 03 Jul—Sun. Corps III in **Bialystok**. Bagration reaches **Novogrodok**. Austrians in **Pruz hany**, **Muchavetz** and **Pina** and **Pinsk**.



- 04 Jul—Bagration at **Nikoliaev**.
 05 Jul—Bagration at **Kokrliczcy**. **Battle of Dziana**.
 06 Jul—Thunderstorms. Bagration at **Mir**.
 08 Jul—At the Gates of **Mogilev**.
 09 Jul—Fighting at **Mir**. Heat and humidity of oppressive magnitudes interspersed with torrential rains. Sunstroke and heat prostration. Fighting at **Mir**. **Battle of Borislow**.
 10 Jul—**Battle of Mir**.
 12 Jul—**Battle of Khaloni**.
 15-29 Jul—Dysentery raged. Mass desertions, excesses and looting. French advance toward **Michaliszki**. Light fighting at **Oszmiana**. Doctorov and the Russian Cavalry to **Djunaszev**.
 15 Jul—**Battle of Romanovo**.
 15 Jul—**Battle of Drissa**.
 23 Jul—**Battle of Saltanovka** (Mogilev).
 25-27 Jul—**Battle of Ostronovno**.
 27 Jul—**Battle of Kobryn**.
 28 Jul—**Battle of Vitebsk**.



- 28 Jul—**Battle of Jakubovo.**
- 28 Jul—**Kliastitzy First Skirmish.**
- 30 Jul-1 Aug—**Second Skirmish of Oboarszina**
(This may be the same as the **Battle of Drissa**).
- 08 Aug—**Cavalry Battle of Inkovo.**
- 11 Aug—**Svolno.**
- 12 Aug—**Prujani (Battle of Gorodectcha; Battle of Podobno).**
- 14 Aug—**First Battle of Krasnoi.**
- 17/18 Aug—**Battle of Polotsk.**
- 19 Aug—**Battle of Valutina.**
- 16-18 Aug—**First Battle of Polotsk.**
- 17-18 Aug—**First Battle of Smolensk.**
- 19 Aug—**Battle of Valutina-Gora (Battle of Loubino).**
- 22 Aug—**Battle of Dahlenkirchen.**
- 05 Sep—**Battle of Shevardino (Battle of Kolaga).**
- 07 Sep—**Battle of Borodino (The Moscowa).**

Moscow to the Nieman

- 14 Sep—Moscow evacuated by the Russians. Napoleon enters. Burned by Russians, fire destroys two-thirds of the city.
- 14 Sep—**Battle of Vinkovo.**
- 18-20 Oct—**Second Battle of Polotsk.**
- 24 Oct—**Battle of Maloyaroslavets.**
- 03 Nov—**Action of Fiodoroivskoy.**
- 03/04 Nov—**Battle of Viasma.**
- 14-18 Nov—**Second Battle of Krasnoi.**
- 15 Nov—Napoleon's troops smashed near **Koidanovo.**
- 23 Nov—**Battle of Lochnitsa.**
- 23 Nov—**Battle of Borisov.**
- 24 Nov—The "**Studianka ford.**"
- 26-28 Nov—**Battle at and Crossing of the Berezina.**
- 29 Nov—Combat at **Plechenitz.**
- 05 Dec—**Smorgon** Napoleon abandons the remains of the Grand Armée in Russia.
- 14-15 Dec—French recross the Nieman. ■

They Saw Napoleon

Tilsit

by Ellen Jacobson, Illinois

This story was told by my grandfather Philip to my Aunt Lil. It states that my great-grandfather Hershel-Leib Segal was about twelve at the time when the French troops marched through Tilsit. It is said that Hershel Leib “saw” Napoleon. The family lived in Upyna, Lithuania which would have been just southeast of Tilsit. The area of Upyna where he came from was filled with apple orchards. The family had an orchard and Hershel’s profession, when he was married, was to estimate how much would be produced by the orchards in the area. Hershel had at least one brother who was a tailor for the local “count”. Hershel was known to later take in boys who were drafted and sneak them out of the country.

Merkine

by Yale Reisner, Warsaw, Poland

My grandmother, Rebecca Lifschitz a”h, insisted that Napoleon stayed in her family’s home in Merkine/Merecz on the Niemen during his campaign. Merkine is located at the confluence of the Neiman and Merkys Rivers. Since her family had the largest house in town—her father was the rabbi—and we know that Napoleon was in Merkine, so perhaps it is true.■



Merkine, Lithuania

Search Google

by Ted Hyman

Google “Napoleon+any town” to find his presence there. I remember seeing Vitebsk on the *Arc d’Triomphe*. “Napoleon+Vitebsk” gave me the history.■

Fact or Apocrypha

by Sheldon Benjamin, Massachusetts

In our family, it is said, we come from a long, long line of *prostse mentschn* (plain folk) with no *yikhus* (heritage) whatsoever. No one in my direct lineage was educated, was a professional, an artist, rabbi, or writer. We were plain. With one exception!

My great-great-great-great-grandfather, Yehudah (Yudl) Bentsianov born in 1770 the father of Zalman, father of Mordechai, father of Nesoneyl, father of Aaron, father of Yehoshua—my father. Yudl, whose father was our first traceable ancestor and appears to have arrived in Belarus from Turkey in 1730 according to one story, or was orphaned that year according to another, was known for his wisdom. We are not certain which town he lived in. His descendants were mostly in the little town of Vorotin south of Bobruisk, not far from Parich but his father, known only as Bentzion (hence the origin of the name), lived in Bobruisk. Yehudah appears to have been in Bobruisk as a child—beyond that it’s hard to say. Our family’s sole claim to fame was that *der zeyde* Yudl “was sought out by Napoleon for his wise counsel” during the Napoleonic invasion of Russia. Our presumption was that Napoleon formed one of his Jewish “sanhedrins” somewhere in the vicinity of Bobruisk. If Jewish leaders were invited to take part, perhaps Yudl was invited. The exact year would be a stretch for us to know when we are not sure how much of the story itself is apocryphal.■

Search Google

by Ted Hyman, Maryland

Google “Napoleon+any town” to find his presence there. I remember seeing Vitebsk on the *Arc d’Triomphe*. “Napoleon+Vitebsk” gave me the history. ■

Recommended Reading

by Robert E. Mitchell and Editors

There are many first-hand accounts in *1812:Napoleon in Moscow* by Paul Britten Austin. He has maps and a good bibliography.

The best sources for daily accounts by town and military units is *1812: Napoleon’s Russian Campaign* by Richard K. Riehn.

Nigel Nicolson’s *Napoleon 1812* was used as a background for much of this issue. It is also available in sound recording.

Moscow 1812: Napoleon’s Fatal March by Adam Zamoyski.

Napoleon and the Jews

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleon_and_the_Jews>■

Prelude to War

9 May 1812 - 23 June 1812

Commodore Hornblower

by C. S. Forester

An enormous mass of men was obviously accumulating on the frontier between Bonaparte's empire and Russia. Bonaparte would have the Prussian and Austrian armies under his orders too. Half a million men—six hundred thousand men—the imagination failed to grasp the figures. A vast tide of humanity was piling up here in eastern Europe. If Russia failed to be impressed by the threat it was hard to believe that anything could survive the onrush of such a mass of men. The doom of Russia appeared to be sealed; she must either submit or be destroyed. No continental nation yet had successfully opposed Bonaparte, although every single one had felt the diligence of his attack; only England still withstood him, and Spain still fought on, although his armies had ravaged every village and every valley in the unhappy peninsula.■

War and Peace

by Leo Tolstoy

Early in the morning of the twelfth of June he came out of his tent, which was pitched that day on the steep left bank of the Niemen, and looked through a spyglass at the streams of his troops pouring out of the Vilkaviski forest and flowing over the three bridges thrown across the river. The troops, knowing of the Emperor's presence, were on the lookout for him, and when they caught sight of a figure in an overcoat and a cocked hat standing apart from his suite in front of his tent on the hill, they threw up their caps and shouted: "Vive l'Empereur!" and one after another poured in a ceaseless stream out of the vast forest that had concealed them and, separating, flowed on and on by the three bridges to the other side.■

The Topography of Russia

Napoleon 1812 by Nigel Nicolson

The topography of Russia was quite well-known to Europeans—Napoleon had maps printed in Paris on the scale of 1:500,000 which correctly positioned all the rivers, towns and main villages (Borodino but not Studienka on the Beresina). It did not show the forests and marshes and marked all roads as if they were equally viable. The Russian frontier lay along the Niemen and the Bug. Beyond lay generally level ground all the way to the Urals, but it was locally broken by wooded ravines and small undulations, and the cultivated lands were separated by vast swampy forests of birch and pine which effectively canalized traffic along tracks which often took two days march to traverse before emerging into open country. Those tracks were unmetalled, laid on sandy soil or clay, dusty in hot weather, boggy after rain,

and slippery in frost.

There was one major obstacle between Brest and Kiev, 150 miles North to South and 300 miles in width, crossed by only three causeway roads in poor condition.

Pokroy (Pakruojis)

Told by Adam Katzeff, Sweden

I have no Napoleon stories in my own family, but some years ago I was told a fascinating story by an elderly woman living in Gothenburg, Sweden: During the Napoleonic war a French (Christian) soldier named Josset was stationed somewhere in the Baltic countries where he met a Jewish girl and fell in love—in the late 19th century they lived in Pokroy (Pakruojis) in Ponevezh uyezd, Kovno guberniya. After the French soldier agreed to convert to Judaism the father of the girl approved the marriage. From then after in Pokroy there was a Jewish family named Josset in Russia!

In the late 19th century one branch of the Josset family moved from Pokroy to Dorpat/Yuryev (Tartu) in today's Estonia. Later on some of them emigrated to Sweden and France. One member of the French branch, Leo Josset, met a Frenchman named Josset. They were both surprised because the surname is uncommon in France. They started to discuss their family background and, when Leo said his family was from Russia and Jewish, the Frenchman said that he knew that one member of his family had moved to Russia during the Napoleonic era. Leo was so surprised that the Frenchman had heard this story too, that from then after he definitely believed the story of the Russian-Jewish Josset family descended from a French soldier in Napoleon's troops.■

Napoleon's Jewish Mistress?

by Sarah L. Meyer, Texas

My mother's mother was a Karmelek and her father was a Perlstadt. Both were Warsaw families. My mother said that she had heard that the Jews were emancipated by Napoleon because one of the Karmelek women was Napoleon's Jewish mistress in Warsaw. In his later years, my uncle Sidney, thought that perhaps the mistress was from the Perlstadt side of the family. The only mistress that I have ever found referred to in history books on Napoleon was non-Jewish and nowhere have I been able to verify any truth in this family story.■

Vilna

from Masha Greenbaum's *The Jews of Lithuania*

Vilna was termed the "Jerusalem of Lithuania" by Napoleon as he contemplated its ecclesiastical splendor.■

Prelude to War

Chorostkow, Eastern Galicia

by Marc D. Machtinger, Esq., Illinois

This story is one of the treasures in my genealogy. It relates to Napoleon, and how an army medic from France lived a Jewish life in East Galicia. The East Galician town of Chorostkow was once Austro-Hungarian Monarchy territory, then Poland, and is currently part of the Ukraine. The oral tradition along one of my family lines is that my great-great-grandfather, Mendel Messite (pronounced "Meh-see'-tuh") was a Converso/Marrano who was born in France—his ancestors having left Spain during the Inquisition. One relative named Blanka Messite was told by her relatives that her name meant "little white table."

Mendel was a physician and became a medic in Napoleon's army. He traveled across Europe with Napoleon. When he arrived in Poland, he sought counsel from the rabbi asking where he could settle, seek a Jewish wife and live a Jewish life. He was directed to the town of Chorostkow, where he met his bride to be. The story goes on to tell that he stayed with her because "she had big lips and a lot of money." He was apparently well-received as a physician by Count Sieminski who owned the land in the area. The rest of my Chorostkow ancestors on my grandfather's side were Ashkenazi Jews.■

Sompolno, Poland

by Rica B. Goldberg, UK

My husband's great-great-grandmother, Chana Levy threw bagels to Napoleon's army as it marched through her city in Poland. Chana was buried in Manchester, UK in 1896 and on her stone it states that she was 100 years old. That would mean that she was born in 1796. Her son was born in Sompolno, Poland about 1835. Sompolno is East of Poznan and directly South of Torun on Napoleon's route to Danzig. Chana's age differs on all documents relating to her. Therefore, the statement on her gravestone that she was 100 years old cannot be correct. I don't think Rachel got it right—old she certainly was—but not 100 years old. More likely 92 which means that she would have been eight years old in 1812. Quite likely she remembered throwing bagels to Napoleon's army.■

Jedwabne

by Saul Marks, Liverpool

Max, like his brother Daniel, was a very mild-mannered, loving man, and his cousin, the late Lucy Cohen, once described him as "the most beautiful man in the world." People in Max's family were, in general, very long-lived. Max himself lived to the age of 95 and his only remaining son is still in fine health, aged 98. Max's eldest son, born Elias but known in the West as Alexander, was an eminent doctor, and lived to be 101. He wrote a very short autobiography, in which he mentioned an interesting event in the Tyszkowski family history. He said that Max had a grandfather who lived to be 103 and this grandfather had directed Napoleon Bonaparte towards Warsaw on his army's march towards Moscow in 1812.■

Kaunas to Riga

excerpt from Berl Kagan's *Yidishe Shtet, Shtetlekh, un Dorfishe Yishuvim in Lite*

MacDonald marched to Vilna through Kaunas. The local headquarters of Napoleon's army was in the town of Koltinian, near Rasein, close to Shavel. Shimon Cohen relates a story that General MacDonald wanted to see a Jewish wedding and the community notables acceded to his request. They found a bride and groom and conducted a wedding ceremony under a Chupa (wedding canopy) in the presence of the French generals. They gave the happy couple many presents. One of the descendants of the couple was living in Shavel in 1938, known as "Leibtshe Bonapart."■

Salant

by Chaim Freedman, Petah Tikvah, Israel

I heard from an elderly relative that one branch of my family fled Salant before the invading MacDonald's (Napoleon) armies who looted livestock to feed the army. They moved to Lutzin (Ludza), Latvia where they took the surname Zhmood (or Szmudze) based on one of the alternative names for Courland.■

Napoleon Prepares for War

<<http://uts.cc.utexas.edu/~jrubarth/gslis/lis385t.16/Napoleon/Prelude.htm>>I

Napoleon assembled the French Grand Armée in Poland, just to the west of the Russian border on the Niemen (Neman) river between Kovno (Kaunas) and Grodno. The army consisted of ten army corps, the Austrian Secondary corps, and four reserved cavalry corps. With reserves it numbered approximately 678,000 men. Fewer than 200,000 of the troops were French. The remainder were troops from the armies of allied states (Poles, Austrians, Italians, Saxons, Prussians, Spanish, etc.). In addition to the infantry, the Grand Army consisted of 96,000 cavalry, 20,000 sappers, a siege contingent, and others. A reserve army of 160,000 was held in the rear between the Vistula and Oder rivers. The plan was launch war on a front reaching from the Pripet marshes to the Baltic Sea. The French would crush the Russian armies in swift encounters, march on Moscow, let Alexander sue for peace, then return to France with Napoleon as the undisputed power in Europe.■

The Red and the Black

Stendhal's masterpiece is the story of Julien Sorel, a young dreamer from the provinces, fueled by Napoleonic ideals, whose desire to make his fortune sets in motion events both mesmerizing and tragic. Book Review

Stendhal was commissioned a second lieutenant of dragoons. In 1812, he endured, and survived, the devastating retreat from Moscow.■

Alexander I and the Jews

Excerpts from *The Black Book with Red Pages*¹

by David Meltser and Vladimir Levin

When Napoleon invaded Russia in 1812, the Jews of Belorussia, obeying the feeling of civic duty, rendered all conceivable assistance to the Russian Army. The first information about the forced crossing of the Niemen river by the French was delivered to Alexander I by the so-called Jewish mail a day before the official notification by the courier from Barclay de Tolly. Suppliers of Russian Army Zundel Zonnenberg from Grodno and Leizer Dillon from Nesvizh, who were for the whole war at the headquarters of Alexander I, rendered invaluable services.

In the course of the war Jews displayed heroism and valor. Although military conscription did not apply to them, many fought as volunteers in the intelligence services of the Russian army. History has preserved many examples of their exploits. Intelligence officers Haim Ratner from Mogilev, Nison Katznelson from Bobruisk, and Ruvim Gummer from Grodno, risking their lives, supplied the command with important information about the enemy. A group of Jews from the town of Babinovichi caught and sent to St. Petersburg a French courier who was carrying an important letter from Paris to Napoleon.

According to the testimony of General A.P. Yermolov, Chief of Staff of the First Russian Army, thanks to the help of a Jewish intelligence officer from Oshmyany, the Ataman of the Don Cossacks, M.I. Platov, almost captured the Emperor of France himself. Etingon from Shklov categorically refused to be a guide to a French detachment heading for Mogilev, giving the reason that such a role is contradictory to Jewish laws. He was hanged.

An inhabitant of the town of Borisov, Ruvim Gummer accomplished a feat similar to that of Ivan Susanin.² French soldiers shot him. There are other persuasive testimonies to the devotion and patriotism of Belorussian

Jews. Emperor Alexander I was one of those [who] acknowledged it. He enjoined to express to the kagals [kahals] "his kindest disposition" for the conduct of the Jews during the years of hard tribulation and promised to soon give "a decision in regard to their wishes and requests, concerning the complete improvement of their condition." Nicholas Pavlovich, the Heir to the throne and future Tsar Nicholas I, upon completing a trip through Belorussia two years after the war wrote in his diary: "It is surprising that in 1812 they [the Jews] were superbly faithful to us and even helped as they could with danger to their lives." The surprise of the Heir was because during the war many Belorussians were on the side of the invaders, since Napoleon removed serfdom from conquered lands.

The most outstanding personality among Belorussian Tzaddiks was Rabbi Schneur Zalman from Lioszno who founded a special movement of Hasidism —Chabad ...

During the war of 1812 Schneur Zalman, fearing that the foundations of Judaism would be shattered with the victory of Napoleon over Russia, called upon his followers to render all possible support to the Russian army. He predicted the defeat of the French Emperor in the war. Alter Rebbe, already ill, abandoned Lyady. Unable to endure an exhausting move to Kursk province, the forefather of the Schneersohn rabbinical dynasty died in 1813.■

1. *The Black Book with Red Pages (Tragedy and Heroism of Belorussian Jews)*. David Meltser and Vladimir Levin, translated by Kevin Mulloney. VIA Press: Cockeysville, MD, 2005. 34-36

2. [Susanin] A Russian national hero who decoyed [an] enemy detachment into the impenetrable forest.

Search for Napoleon on JewishGen

<<http://www.jewishgen.org>>

Poland

Bedzin, Brzeziny, Chmielnik, Ciechanowiec, Czestochowa, Debin, Dembitz, Gdansk, Krinki, Mlawa, Piotrkow Trybunalski, Plock, Plotsk, Przasnysz, Sejny, Sochaczew, Sokolow Podlaski, Stawiski, Sosnowiec, Strzyzow, Suwalk-Lomza, Tarnopol, Turek, Ryki, Wolbrom, Wyszograd, Yedwabne, Zabłudow, Zamosc, Zaglembe, Zgierz.

Lithuania

Balbinishok, Dusetos, Gargzdai, Jurbarkas, Kelme, Kibart, Marijampole, Raseinuai, Rokiskis, Sudarkas, Telz.

Belarus

Bereza, Bobruisk, Cherven, (Igumen), Dokshitz, Dolhinow, Drogicin, Glybokie, Ilya, Iwie, Korelicze, Lyakhoivichi, Novogrudok, Minsk, Most, Piesk, Pinsk, Shushuchin, Vishnevo, Volozhin, Wolkovysk.

Western Ukraine

Rogatin, Podgaytsy, Lanovtsy.■

Road to Moscow

Where He Marched

by Chester Cohen, JGSLA

Shtetl Finder

The various day-by-day accounts of Napoleon's march into and retreat from Russia in 1812 are filled with references to the towns and villages where Jews lived in Poland and the Pale of Settlement. On the way to Moscow, the Emperor stayed in Kovno, Vilna, Glubokoye, and Vitebsk. His path back to France went through Liady, Tolotchinek, Bober, Staroi-Borisov, Studianka north of Borisov, Kamen, Plechnitsie, a bleak village named Staiki but nicknamed Miserowo by the French nobles, Molodetchno, Smorgoni, Oschmiana, Vilna, Kovno, Pultusk, Warsaw, and Kutno.■

Simnas, Suwalki

by Shirley Holton, London

My maternal great-grandfather was Leib Shochet. The Shochets were next door neighbors to the Mankunskys. These were my mother's grandparents. They were all born in Simnas, Lithuania in Suwalki gubernya, Kalvarje uyzed, near Alytus and Mariampol. Today it's a small market town but in grandma's time, she used to say, if a horse and cart went through it, the horse was out of there before the cart was in.

My grandmother was born about 1876. Her Napoleon story was that in Simnas, when she was a child, they still remembered the French soldiers coming through the village. They told of the cold and the freezing rain. They were so cold, they were shivering all the time; they would wrap their arms round their bodies and families in Simnas made fortunes selling sheep fleece to the army. Grandma would imitate the way the French soldiers spoke and laugh heartily. Apparently this was a source of amusement to the villagers still—more than fifty years later.■

Shavli (Siauliai)

by Judy Segal, New York

This is a report that has survived in our family for almost two centuries! My late father, Bernard SEGAL, was born in New York City in 1909 to parents who had recently emigrated from Czarist Russia. I believe that some branches of the Segal family were (relatively) wealthy farmers in Lithuania; I have heard mention of owning orchards. His father, Jacob SEGAL—who died before I was born—used to tell him that, as a tiny girl, his own grandmother (this then would be Dad's great-grandmother, and my great-great-grandmother) had been held up on her father's shoulders to watch Napoleon and his army march by her village on their way to Moscow. We have traced the Segal family back to two shtetlach: "Shavli" (Siauliai,) pronounced "Shawley" in English and "Upyna."■

Vilkovishk

by George Mason, Michigan

My ancestor's name was Liebele Kishiniski. He lived

in Wilkovichk (Vilkovishk), Lithuania. In June of 1812, Napoleon, with a huge army of about 250,000 soldiers, stayed there for four days, causing great damage to the residents of the town and its surroundings. Liebele met Napoleon when a delegation of Vilkovishk Jews approached Napoleon requesting that the army remove their horses from the synagogues. This happened before "Tisha beAv" (ninth of Av) and the Jews wanted to mourn the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem. Napoleon apologized for the fact that, without his knowledge, the quartermaster had stabled his horses in the synagogue, which had an earthen floor.

Napoleon said to them, "You Jews will never get fair treatment until you fight your way to Jerusalem."■

Zagare

by Mark Gordon, New Jersey

A legend in my family history states that a relative deserted from Napoleon's army in Lithuania. He became a synagogue sexton and took his surname of Schuldiner (Schuldiener, Shuldiner) from his new occupation. This branch of the family lived in Zagare, Lithuania near the Latvian Border. I visited this shtetl in 2005 and noted that many of its 19th century buildings are intact. Many German vital records from 1808-1809 mention Napoleon by name in that by law, the Napoleonic Code compelled a uniform European approach to recording personal data.■

How our Family Got its Name

by Barbara Meyers, New Jersey

According to legend my family originally lived in Italy and were leather merchants, tanners and craftsmen. My Alk family lived in Riga, Krynki, Bialystok, Dorpat, and Tartu. Alk was rumored to have been Alkano *because* the family lived in Italy though some say that is a romanticized story. I wish I could find out more about them, but that hasn't been the case thus far.

Here is their story: there was a yearly market-fair held in Russia and my great-great-great-grandfather would travel there to sell his wares. He met there a Russian gentleman and betrothed his son to the Russian's daughter. It was a custom at that time, when merchants met yearly, to make arrangements like this when children were still quite young. Years later, this son married his betrothed and remained in Russia, continuing in the leather business. When Napoleon came to Russia in 1812, he needed leather products for his army's horses and heard of a leather merchant who spoke Italian. The story goes on to say that Napoleon bestowed the title of Baron upon him for his good work. To avoid the draft, my great-great-great-grandfather split his five sons up, giving two sons the family surname, and two sons the surname of Baron. The third son fled to Israel.

Of course, there are very few cases when Jews earned nobility titles. The best known, Baron Ginzburg of St. Petersburg, received his title from the Tzar for his achievements in developing industry—mainly the railroad network in the Russian Empire. In the Jewish shtetlakh where most of the inhabitants were poor and wore poor clothes, a man who wore modern and neat clothes was

nicknamed "Baron." Of course, his behavior had to be other than the usual. Almost every shtetl had its "baron." I assume that is the case with our family's "Baron." ■

Olkienik (Valkininkai)

by Marcia Paillet-Abrams Jaffe

I have heard that Napoleon stopped in Olkienik (Valkininkai, Lithuania) on his march to Moscow and left a cape there which later became the ark covering for the synagogue. ■

Olkieniki

by Rieke Nash, Sydney, Australia

I have heard the story from a couple of sources that when Napoleon came to the Lithuanian town of Olkieniki, now called Valkininkai, he was so impressed with the beautiful wooden synagogue that he donated his horse's blanket to be used on the bimah. ■

Lost Jewish Worlds - Olkieniki

by Rahel Grosbaum

excerpted from <http://yad-vashem.org.il/about_holocaust/lost_worlds/Olkieniki/Olkieniki.html>

The town of Olkieniki is situated on the Marchenka River, near the estuary of the Sulcha River, in a region of virgin forests. It is conjectured that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the site was a fortress. In the sixteenth century the Polish kings, Sigismund Sary and Sigismund August, were guests at the palaces there. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the town was owned by the Sapieha and Granowsky families, both from the nobility. In the period from the third partition of Poland in 1795 until World War I, Olkieniki lay within the boundaries of the Russian Empire.

In 1765, there were 535 Jewish poll-tax payers in Olkieniki and the surrounding area. Thirty years later, when Olkieniki was annexed to Tsarist Russia, the town was known for its affluent Jewish merchants. The petty merchants also prospered. In 1798, the Kehillah was able to raise sufficient funds to build a large wooden synagogue. According to the elders of the community, the squire Granowsky also contributed his share. The building was dedicated in 1802. (The Great Synagogue of Olkieniki stood for nearly 150 years until, on June 25, 1941, it was hit by German bombs and went up in flames, together with the adjacent *beit ha-midrash*).

The Great Synagogue of Olkieniki was famed for its external beauty and its unique interior. It was a source of pride to the Kehillah, and detailed descriptions of the building were handed down from generation to generation. Among the ritual articles in the synagogue was a parokhet (curtain covering the Holy Ark) on which was embroidered, in gold letters, the name of Napoleon, who had visited the synagogue and expressed his admiration. ■

The Legend of the Family Plaine

by Patricia Prinz, Virginia

The legend in our family is that we descend from a French soldier in Napoleon's army who settled in Lithuania after the war.

The Plaines were from the small town called Linkuva, on the northern border with Latvia. About five weeks ago, a Russian gentleman named Anatolij Chayesh from St. Petersburg wrote in an email that a brother of his grandfather's married an Anna Plein of Zeimilis (5 km north of Linkuva). And their descendants reside in St. Petersburg. Mr. Chayesh went on to say, that he found in the records of Zeimilis, a Vigder ben Judel Plain who died at the age of 87 in 1879. "If the legend of your family is true, that may be your Napoleon soldier," he added. ■

Dusiat or Birzai, Lithuania

by Olga Zabłudoff, Washington, DC

In 1812, when Napoleon's army invaded Russia and went through the town of Dusiat (currently named Dusetos in Lithuania), a young French soldier turned off his route, entered the synagogue, opened the Gemara and plunged into the fountain of the Talmud. Immediately the Jews in the synagogue enveloped him: "Listen, son, you're not going anywhere with Napoleon! You'll settle here in our town." They brought him clothes and hid his uniform. Among those Jews there was a great scholar who had three daughters, all of whom were of marriageable age. One of them married the French soldier whose name was Yilber, Yibor or Zilber. The story continues that the French soldier had such a power in prayer that whenever he sang in the synagogue the windows would rattle!

My theory is that while the story is probably true and the soldier was my great-great-great-grandfather, I don't think the event took place in Dusiat but rather in Birzai, a town further north. While Napoleon may have passed through Dusiat, we know for sure that he stopped in Birzai.

I can't think of a great scholar who lived in Dusiat at that time, but I do know that in Birzai there was a Chasidic Gaon rabbi known as Reb Shimele Birzher, or Shimon-Merkel Shapiro. I believe this family later had ties to Dusiat and I suspect that descendants of the soldier lived in Dusiat. Zilber, the maiden name of my paternal grandmother, was a very common name in Dusiat up until the Holocaust. ■

Eishyshok Horse Fair

from Yaffa Eliach's There Once was a World

Beginning in the Middle Ages, Eishyshok was host to a grand biannual fair which put it on the map as a major commercial center. The Eishyshok Fair was a horse fair—the biggest in the region, attracting an international trade. Thousands of horses were brought in the shtetl's market square and there sold to members of the local nobility, to

Road to Moscow

merchants from as far away as Prussia and central Russia, and eventually to the Tzarist and Prussian calvary.

All that remained in Eishyshok from its horse fair days were hugh stables, a few nicknames that lingered for generations (such as *di praislikhe* to denote those who had traded with the Prussians), and an abundance of legends, especially about supplying horses to Napoleon's calvary as it made its ill-fated march on Moscow.■

Raguva/Troskunai

by Ruth Kovitz Ellin, Ohio

Amazingly, I have just a one sentence story but it represents a direct eyewitness account tied to a precise location. It is very moving to me, that the family has thought to retell such a memory, directly passed along through four generations, and here it is. Louis Kovitz (Leyb Ickovitz born 1888 or 1890 in Troskunai) is my grandfather. Here is his story: "Pa told me he remembers his grandfather telling him about the time when Napoleon was in Russia!"■

Svencionys

by Marjorie Rosenfeld, California

I am the webmaster for the Svencionys Shtetlinks site. I have included in the history of this shtetl, the invasion of Russia by Napoleon in the early part of the 19th century. This was an event that could have changed the status of the Jews. Napoleon had shown himself to be a great friend of the Jews in Italy, where he abolished the ghettos. He promoted the idea of a Jewish homeland in Palestine and gave the Jews civil liberties and religious equality in France. But he was, of course, coming to Russia as a conqueror. Russian Jews were suspicious of Napoleon's reforms; and the Hasidic rabbis were afraid that, in turning toward Napoleon, the Jews might turn away from God. In Lithuanian territory in the summer of 1812, Napoleon had not reckoned on the heat and rain that transformed the roads into mud, impeding the progress of supply wagons. His inadequately provisioned soldiers rioted and looted in Vilna, a fact that undoubtedly also prejudiced the local population against him.

Napoleon, proceeding to Svintsysan from Vilna, stopped for one night at the largest house in town and, in the morning reviewed his guard and troops from the balcony. The house was afterwards known as *Napoleon's House*. It was later owned by a Jewish woman, Margolia Pliner, Leyb Pliner's aunt who, prior to the Holocaust, ran it as a mini-hotel with a first-floor refreshment bar and bakery. Leyb Pliner is a Svencionys Holocaust survivor who survived by joining the Red Army ahead of the Germans. For a detailed account see: *Sefer zikaron le-esrim ve-shalosh kehilot she-nehrevu be-ezor*—Svintzian Region memorial book. Shimon Kanc, Editor. Tel Aviv: 1965.■



Postovy

by Andi Ziegelman, Israel

These passages were taken from *Family History: Lillian Shubitz Natapoff Memorial*.

David Halevi ben Sender Shubitz/Subich of Postawy was born about 1760 and died 1848 in Postawy. He was a shochet. Napoleon's army was desperately seeking food and fodder for men and horses. In the summer of 1812, soldiers roamed the countryside far afield from the main road to Vitebsk. David Halevi Shubitz received a gift of a snuffbox from one of Napoleon's generals for feeding Napoleon's hungry troops. Bullet marks from the confrontation of Russian and French Corps remained in Postawy for generations.

Yetta (Itka) Shubitz/Subich, wife of David Halevi Shubitz, 1781-1879, told this story of the passage of these armies through Postawy. "In the summer of 1812, when Napoleon's troops were in Postawy, in order to avoid the dangerous clashes between the French troops and Russian Cossacks, the Jews congregated for Tisha B'av services at a mill they thought would be far from the fighting. In the middle of the service, a French officer in uniform appeared, alone. Some trembled. Then he said, 'Ivri anochi' (I am a Jew). And, removing his leather boots, he prayed with the others in their common language."■

Russian Strategy

The operational strategies of Napoleon principally consisted of the concentration of all his forces against the enemy at a critical point, the careful preparation and the uniting of forces before the action to deliver an overpowering weight of striking power in a shock attack, and the selection of battlegrounds advantageous to his forces. This strategy necessitated a thorough knowledge of the terrain of the theatre of war, especially as quick movement precluded adequate supplying of his armies without a large amount of requisitioning in the area of operations. The answer to this strategy for Napoleon's enemies was to maintain a threat while avoiding engagements until coordination could be achieved; relying on strong lines of supply, allied armies could await opportunity while Napoleon's troops, chasing them, began to suffer from overextension of their supply lines.■-Britannica Online

Assault

by Richard Sapon-White

My great-great-great-grandfather lived in Kalisz and according to his grandson's memoirs written in the 1890's, he was accosted by a cossack brandishing a sword who was chasing Napoleon's troops in retreat. Being defenseless, my ancestor ripped open his shirt and challenged the cossack to kill him. Shocked by his actions, the cossack retreated and left him alone!■

Retreat from Moscow

September 15—December 15

The Jalowayski Odyssey

by Irene Jalowayski

When I met my husband Alfredo Jalowayski he was a student at the University of Miami on a scholarship and working at every odd job he could find. He was from a prominent Cuban family and had been sent to the United States to study when he was fourteen to avoid the many school closings in Santiago de Cuba as Fidel Castro's revolution was beginning. By 1962 when I met him, the United States had severed diplomatic relations with Fidel's Cuba and Al had been stranded in Miami with no more family funds available to him. Fortunately he was on scholarship and the University was wonderful in helping him along. He graduated and became a pulmonary physiologist, academician and researcher at the University of California in San Diego. As our family became settled we grew more interested in our genealogy. We had great curiosity about the Jalowayskis. There were only vague stories about their coming from France. Where they might have come from before that time was a mystery.

Al's aunt, Nica (Antonia Jalowayski), who had raised him after his mother died, was living in Miami. She really could give us very little new information to add to what we already knew. Al's grandfather had studied at the Sorbonne and was proud of his French heritage. When Nica died we cleaned out her apartment and found all sorts of things stuffed in drawers and boxes. Among them were some original records that she probably had forgotten she had, including a death certificate for her grandfather, Al's great grandfather. His name was Eduardo Jalowayski and from that death certificate we learned that he was born in France to Alexander Jalowayski and Zoe Soulard. We also found a single page, really only a fragment of a letter which read "he was born in St. Jean D'Angely near La Rochelle." We found La Rochelle on the map but had no clue about St. Jean D'Angely.

About a year later we made a trip to France. The plan was to tour Paris and see if we could find any records there. We thought we could go to the Sorbonne and also we thought Eduardo had lived and studied there as well. We asked a cab driver if he knew where St. Jean D'Angely was located and he knew right away saying it was a favorite vacation spot for Parisians. It was located in Pitou Charente province. There was a tourist office in Paris for the region and we went there in search of some more information. As luck would have it, we met a woman working there and she gave us the name of Madame Jeanne Drouet of the *Institut Francophone de*

Genealogie and d'Histoire in La Rochelle. We contacted her and she agreed to do some research for us. We had so little information, only that which I have already mentioned. We sent what we had to her and also sent her a deposit of 960 French Francs. (This was in 1995 before the Euro was put in place).

Then we waited. And we waited. Then we called and waited some more. It took more than a year before we began to get some information. When the packet arrived it was truly amazing. We found that Alexandre Jalowayski was a native of Lithuania and born in 1810 in Kobylnik, palatinat de Vilna. His father was Etienne Jalowayski, born in 1783 and a colonel in the Cavalry. His mother, Marie Josephine Maiewska was born in 1791. Alexandre was a student at the University of Vilna and took part in the uprising of the Lithuanians against Nicholas, Emperor of Russia. He became an expatriate refugee in France in 1832 at the age of twenty-two years. He measured 5 feet 6 inches, was blonde with blue eyes and a red beard. When he entered France he was granted a pension and was allowed to work. An educated man, Alexandre worked as a notary and later as a banker in St. Jean D'Angely and requested permission to move to Angouleme for a new job as a banker there. He married Zoe Soulard and they had 11 children. Eduardo was born in 1842 in St. Jean D'Angely.

Documents from France were detailed and specific. Since Alexandre was a refugee his every move had to be recorded. If he wanted to go to a new job or a new town he was required to ask permission. There were letters in his hand asking to move or to take a job. The original document allowing him to enter France was included which detailed his participation both as a student at the University of Vilna and in the insurrection against the Russians. This uprising at the University of Vilna is well documented in the history books and to find a relative who participated was just awe inspiring.

Alexandre's father Etienne was in the cavalry and was from the palatinate of Vilna in Lithuania. The politics at the time were confusing and Lithuania was bounced back and forth between Russia, Poland and independence. According to Seton-Watson's book *The Russian Empire*, Napoleon's goal was to make Lithuania independent of Russia and Poland. We know that somewhere between 15,000 and 20,000 Lithuanian troops joined Napoleon's army and fought with him as he battled the Czar. We don't know at this time what happened to Etienne during the battle and hope to find

Retreat from Moscow

records in the archives in Vilnius on our upcoming trip in June. We have assumed that is unlikely that he survived as only about 10,000 men out of Napoleon's 185,000 survived the battle on the Russian front in 1812.

The journey from Russian Lithuania to France to Cuba to the United States over 200 years is quite a story. It is a story that has not ended and the search for more information continues. But to know that the French welcomed Lithuanian

refugees at least twenty years after Napoleon's greatest defeat and provided them with pensions and jobs says a lot about the strong connection between the people of these two countries. To be aware that we are descendants of patriots who fought for freedom all those years ago in another place and time makes us proud and gives us pause to think in our own turbulent times.■

Berezino: Recollections of Matthew Elkin

Submitted by his daughter, Frances A. Bock, Ph.D.



I was born in the small town of Beresn¹, in the region which used to be known as White Russia. It was a very nice little town during the summer and during the winter, but in the spring there was so much mud in the streets that you had to have boots to go from one side of the street to the other, although we had sidewalks made out of wood.

We had the Beresina River running alongside of the town and we were surrounded with woods. The woods were known by the name of *Yebushchina* and they belonged to a Polish count by the name of Pototski.



My oldest brother, Folya, worked in the forest. He had a hatchet and he used to mark the trees that were supposed to be cut down, and then the lumberjacks would cut the trees, take off the branches and take them down to the river. Then they would bind them into rafts—about five or six layers high, build a nice big house on top, and my brother, with about 100 peasants, sailed the rafts down the Beresina and the Dneiper to the southern part of Russia (Ukraine) that didn't have any woods.

The river was very famous. Napoleon in the War of 1812, was defeated right there in my hometown. How do we know about it? Because they were digging a basement for a fellow who had an ice cream parlor and needed ice for the summer to keep his merchandise fresh and ice also for the sodas. So they found French coins and sabers and some remains of bones, human or animal.



I suppose in this country they would take it to a museum but in my home town, whoever felt like grabbing it, they grabbed it. That's how we know that Napoleon was defeated in my home town. As a matter of fact, in the Second World War, the German Army also was defeated in my home town on the river front.■

1. Present-day Berezino, Belarus on the River Beresina



Moritz Daniel Oppenheim

The Return of the Jewish Volunteer from the Wars of Liberation to His Family Still Living in Accordance with Old Customs, 1833-34.

The Jewish Museum, New York.
Copyright 2001, The Florida Holocaust Museum, These materials are reproduced from the www.fhholocaustmuseum.org Web site courtesy of the Florida Holocaust Museum

Jews fought in the armies of the various German states during the Napoleonic Wars. Ironically, Napoleon had brought emancipation to the Jews of Germany, which was rolled back after his defeat. Oppenheim's family scene shows the return of a Jewish volunteer who presumably has been wounded. He is caressed by his sister, while the father, dressed in a caftan representing the old ways, peers down at the Iron Cross which has been awarded to the volunteer.■

One Soldier—Many Stories

Grazutis/Volpe

by E. E. Blecker, Maryland

An old family story passed down from generation to generation re: Grazutis/Volpe. It seems a Napoleon soldier deserted the army while in Lithuania (what town I am not familiar with) and was taken in by the Grazutis family, fed and hidden from the army. He later married one of the daughters of the Grazutis clan, and the name Volpe passed on from generation to generation.■

Gershon Wolpe

Goldie Silverman, Washington

I am a descendant of Gershon Wolpe, a mercenary with Napoleon who knocked on the door of a Jewish home in Kovna and asked to be hidden from the Cossacks who were chasing him. My family hid him with the chickens. He fell in love with a daughter of the house, converted to Judaism, took the name Ger(stranger) shom (there)—a stranger there. Some in the family call him Spanish, some Italian. Wolpe, the fox, sounds Italian, but there is also a village called Wolpe in Lithuania. The one consistent note in the various stories is the chickens. My great grandmother, Golde Basheva Wolpe—a Gershon descendant—for whom I was named, married Baruch Mendel Nadel.

I heard this story many years ago from my mother in Omaha, who was contacted by a distant cousin in Hartford, Mr. Hoffenberg, who was researching his family history. Both cousins were in their 70s, and if they had lived both would now be over 100. They carried on a sweet correspondence: "Do you light candles?" "Yes, every Friday night." And so forth. The Hartford cousin ended one letter by saying, "I have identified over 1,000 living descendents to Gershon Wolpe, and you are one of them."■

Nadel/Volpe

Eileen Douglas, New York

When I was researching my family history—which was for the production of the documentary I made called *My Grandfather's House*—I was in touch with many relatives around the country. At that time a woman cousin from my Nadel line was living in Seattle. She fell into conversation with a woman she knew who, like us, was a Nadel from Kovno. It was that woman who told us the story of the Italian soldier.

My grandfather, Sam Nadel, was born in Kovno in 1895, the oldest of six. His father, Chaim Nadel, was born in Kovno, but registered to the Jewish community of Cekiske in 1870. There are many, many Nadels in Cekiske in the Kovno records I was shown when I went through the archive, so we imagine many of them were family to each other. Chaim's father, Moshe, was born in the 1840s. And, I believe, living in Cekiske. What I was not able to do was make the connection between Moshe Nadel, the tailor, and Baruch Nadel living in the time of Napoleon. I wanted to see if this Nadel family was our Nadel family and it was not actually clear, though I loved the romance of the story! Then, a second relative who was in the Nadel line asked me if I had heard the story of the Spanish soldier. All other details were the same. Not Jewish, sheltered on the family land, fell in love with one of the daughters, stayed, married. So I concluded that the Italian soldier had become the Spanish soldier in the telling or the mistelling over time, and perhaps this whole episode was a part of our Nadel family after all.

Amazing. Here are two identical stories but the details vary: the Italian soldier in one and the Spanish soldier in the other. Either we are related to these Volpes or this happened to more than one soldier in Napoleon's Army.■

Retreat From Moscow

Count Nikolai Tolstoy's Loyal Soldier

By Norman Zelvin, New York

My paternal great-great-grandfather Semyon (Solomon) Zelvin was a steward (property manager) for Count Nikolai Tolstoy, the father of Leo Tolstoy the writer. He had much property in the Moscow area, *Yasnya Polyana*, which is now an historic park with the Tolstoy family house as part of it.

All royalty who were property owners were fiefs of the Tsar and, as was the custom when an army was needed, the Tsar called on each of them to provide him troops from their serfs and employees. As Napoleon's armies approached Moscow in 1812, the Russians used scorched-earth tactics in the bitter winter to deny the French troops food and fodder. As the enemy approached Moscow, Count Nikolai's troops fought Napoleon's armies as the city burned behind them. Semyon, one of these soldiers was captured in the defense of Moscow and tortured. He was tied behind a horse and dragged through the streets. Somehow he survived—as I am the testimonial. Napoleon survived this debacle too, leaving his troops to freeze and starve, as he rushed back to France with his personal Guard to raise another army.

My maternal great-grandfather served in the Russian army in the Duchy of Finland. The history of the relations between the Russian government and the Jews is long and restrictive. Napoleon had treated the Jews well in France and included them in his liberal policies. Napoleon had expected that he would be helped by the Jews in his attack on Russia where they were oppressed by the Tsar and his oppressive laws and the practices of the nobility. However, the Jews, pressured by their rabbis, worried about the loss of religious allegiance. Like other Russians, they were patriots and did not come to Napoleon's aid.

After the defeat of Napoleon, although the Jews were still oppressed, in return for their loyalty, Tsar Alexander relaxed his policies toward the Jews. Jews who had not been able to serve in the Russian Army paid a tax instead. However, this changed, and in 1825, Russia started the cantonist system—kidnapping young Jewish children for future army service of up to twenty years. One of those Cantonists who served in the Russian Army was a maternal great grandfather of mine who served in the army in their Duchy of Finland.■

Moscow

by Ilene Kanfer Murray, Missouri

My great-great-grandfather, Yehoshua (Josiah/Joshua) Ceitlin/Zeitlin, was born in 1804 in Sklov or Lodz. However, his father was a merchant and was apparently in Moscow with his family when Napoleon came into the city. Although Joshua was a little boy at the time, he vividly remembered Napoleon marching into Moscow. He was the oldest living man in Brooklyn when he died in 1910. I have several newspaper clippings from New York newspapers

that were handed down to me. One was written when he turned 100 (July 1904) which says "As a boy of seven he saw Napoleon's army enter Moscow, and recalls the 15th of September, 1812, when the city was set on fire, and the terrible days afterward while the French pillaged the city until they were forced to retreat."

Another article, written on his 103rd birthday (July 1907) says "One thing stands out above the others in world events in my mind. I can remember that year of woe when Napoleon and his soldiers marched victoriously across Europe, sweeping everything before him, and I can remember when, like wounded animals seeking their dens, the starving, emaciated warriors filed through the snow-clad mountains after Moscow had been burned. And I recall the troublous times that followed the fall of the great Emperor, and how all Europe struggled to restore itself to some semblance of order."

It must have made an awesome impression on a little boy to have stayed so vividly in his mind for 100 years.■

French Troops Smashed Near Koidanovo

by Les Evenchick, New Orleans

Napoleon's army came in or near the town of Koidanov 20 km SW of Minsk and one of my ancestors left town to avoid being conscripted into Napoleon's army.■

The Battle of Smolensk

By Andi Ziegelman, Israel

While researching here in Israel his Lublin-area Ziegelman (Cygielman, from the profession "brick-maker" or "tsigelnik") family, my husband came across a 35-year-old fellow named Daniel Ziegelman whose story is that his family got the name Ziegelman from a French Napoleonic soldier who married an ancestor of Daniel's, and stayed in Belarus.

In our family there is a tradition that the person who established the Russian branch of our family tree was a soldier in Napoleon's army. When this soldier was wounded he was left in Smolensk by his regiment. Later he got married there.

Daniel Ziegelman was born in Israel in 1966 and he is the descendant of two soldiers. One who fought with the French in the Campaign of 1812 and the other, his grandson, a cantonist in the army of Nicholas I. This is the genealogical background for our story: Daniel is the son of Yaakov, born 1935; son of Reuven, born 1905; son of Israel, born in Liady, died 1919, son of Itche Moishe (and Freda Fruma Shneurson) of Liady, son of the wounded soldier from Smolensk, his name unknown.

My great-grandfather Israel (died 1919) was a soldier in the army of Nicholas I for twenty-five years. He was a cantonist and after his long service, like other cantonists, he got permission to reside outside of the Pale of Settlement (that is, outside of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine and Latvia).■

Retreat From Moscow

Smolensk to Bobr

by Melvin B. Redmount

Napoleon's route took him from Smolensk to Bobr where he was forced to remain because his escape was blocked by the Russians at the bridge crossing the Berezina River. There exists a letter which Napoleon wrote to his empress from Bobr. The story of his escape over a temporary pontoon bridge and over dead soldiers and horses is very gory. Several days later, he fled back to Paris and his reign collapsed. My genealogical search has been for the Axiantsoff and Jerusalemchik families of Bobr. My paternal ancestors lived in Bobr at the time but I have found no records that trace their existence. My paternal grandfather, Mattathias Axiantsoff can be traced—from immigration and other US records—to birth in Bobr about 1860, death of his wife in Bobr about 1900, and emigration to Manhattan in 1905. He had one son, my father, Joseph, and four daughters, all of whom fled Belarus 1903 to 1905. Two of these daughters, my aunts Dvorah and Tsippa, returned to Bobr. In the United States the name was changed to Redmount, which was the English translation of the maiden name of Mattathias' wife, Feiga Rotenberg. My search has been extensive with trips to Ellis Island, Washington and Philadelphia, as well as funding searches in Belarus. However, I have found no trace of my paternal family, the Axiantsoffs (Aksyantsov) in Belarus or their lives in Bobr. In the search process I have accumulated current photos of Bobr and parts of its history including Napoleon's establishment of Bobr as a supply base and his near-entrapment there on the flight from Moscow.■

Napoleon's Coat

by Neil Rosenstein, New Jersey

Mogilev was the administrative headquarters of Napoleon. According to a Lurie family story (see my book, *The Lurie Legacy*), Yoneh Lurie, who lived in this town, received the gift of a beautiful coat for helping Napoleon on his escape from Russia.■

Napoleon Rescued

by Aviva M. Neeman, Israel

This is the story of how my maternal grandmother's Zilberman-Caspi family came to Israel. It goes back to the cold winter of 1812. It was a night of freezing rain in the village of Hutim. Napoleon on his way back from Moscow, defeated, cold and wet took refuge at the family home of the Rabbi and Av Beit Din of Hutimsk, Yehuda Leib Joffe. The family took him in for the night, fed and nursed him for a cold. The story continues that they even spared a warm blanket to wrap Napoleon's shivering horse. In the morning a grateful Napoleon left them a boxful of gold. Asking what they would do with it, the Rabbi replied that it would be used to help the family get to Eretz Israel. After Napoleon left, the family was hounded both by both Russians and Jews. The Jews had sided with Russia showing their loyalty to the Tsar. The family was forced to leave their home and went into hiding, going from one

place to another. It took them many years of wandering before they made it to Eretz Israel, settling at first to Tzfat and then to Jerusalem. However it has always been told in the family that because of Napoleon's gold, they succeeded in their hiding and escape and this treasure enabled the family of Rabbi Yehuda Leib to eventually settle in Eretz Israel.■

[Editor: The only Chotimsk, located close enough to the retreat, is SE of Mogilev.]

Every Turn a Brick Wall!

by Harold Krom, Dallas, Texas

My maternal grandmother's family came from the area around Gomel, Belarus. A family story relates that they owned an inn where Napoleon spent the night. Gomel is south of the battles that Napoleon's forces were said to have fought. I have found no records to substantiate this story.

[Ed.:According to historical summaries, Saxon, Russian and Polish armies fought south of the Pripet marshes although there is no documentation that Napoleon himself rode there. However, as in many stories, Gomel is both a town and an oblast very near the Beresina River where the major battles occurred. It is possible that Napoleon retreated along the road where the inn existed which was in the adjoining oblast, Due to the ravages of war, many families moved or were listed as "missing" in the first (1816) Revision Census after the war. Therefore, it might be appropriate to search for the inn in Mogilev Oblast where Napoleon was known to have had his headquarters.]■

The Bug Division

<<http://www.antiquesatoz.com/habsburg/1812/volhynie.htm>>

The Bug Division was named after the largest river in the region it campaigned in. The Division was placed under the command of General Amilkar Kosinski. As the Grande Armée had seriously depleted the Grand Duchy's manpower, the division was composed of a mixture of National Guard, veterans, Depot Battalions and miscellaneous recovered-injured and detached men. In the later part of December, Major Rzodkiewicz had a skirmish near Brest on the Bug River with four Russian squadrons of Cossacks and one squadron of Dragoons. The Russians lost about 200 men. After this battle, Rzodkiewicz retreated and evacuated Brest.■

The Retreat from Moscow

by Jenni Buch, Australia

I know that this story is pretty obscure but I clearly remember my father (born 1905 in Brest-Litovsk) telling me that his great-grandmother remembered the French soldiers falling in the river Bug when they were in retreat and fleeing from the Russian army. She said that they were crying that the water was very cold. Living to be over 100 years old, the family were very proud that she could still chop wood in her nineties. My father's Shalitski

Retreat From Moscow

family were always farmers to my knowledge. They were tenants on an estate belonging to a Polish aristocratic land owning family called Shalitski (Szalicki) outside Kamentz-Litovsk, about twenty-five miles north of Brest-Litovsk. After the first World War, the family settled in the city of Brest for work and security because two of my father's brothers were beaten to death in a robbery when Cossack gangs roamed the countryside. Brest sits on the confluence of two rivers—the Bug and the Mukhavets. The Bug river was the border between Russia and Poland—now Belarus and Poland. Because of this strategic position, Brest was subjected to many invasions and wars, and destroyed more than once. A great military garrison and fortress was built on the banks of the Bug River and the entire city moved eastwards by the order of Tsar Nicholas 1 in 1832, as Brest was the western most point of the Russian empire.■

Drohiczyn

by Esther Buchsbaum, Georgia

My father was born in Drohiczyn, now Belarus, about 60 kilometers east of Brest, on the Pripet marshes, around 1900. In his 80s, he was still able to recite a poem in Russian about Napoleon that he had learned as a young person in school.■

Svislovitch

By Michael M. Miller, Canada

Svisloch (currently Osipovich, Mogilev, Belarus) in the years 1801 to 1917 was a shtetl in Bobruisk District of Minsk Province located at 53°26' / 28°59'—66.3 miles ESE of Minsk. During the Napoleonic war in Russia in 1812, Napoleon's General Yan Khenrik Dombrovsky kept his headquarters in Svisloch. My ancestors—Beryl Litwin and his family—worked for a Polish Count, who owned land near Svislovitch in Minsk District. His late grand daughter, Rhoda Litwin Welt (the daughter of Julius and Regina Dalfen Litwin) who died about two years ago, told this story from her nursing home.

The Litwin family never suffered from lack of food in Russia due to the fact that they were well fed from the land where they worked. They always recounted that food was plentiful.

One day, while working in the fields, Beryl discovered the remains of the bones of Napoleon's horses from the retreat from Moscow.

I checked out the military maps and behold—the retreat passed through their land and villages.■

“The Jewish Community of Borisov”

by Yehudah Leib Lipkind

Knesset HaGedolah, Warsaw: 1891.

Translated from Hebrew by Israel Pickholtz

Since our city is known to the world due to the Napoleonic War, where much of his great and massive army met their deaths in 1812, and also due to the commerce that has traditionally been conducted, I find it important to include it among the communities discussed in “Knesset Hagedolah.”

The houses of our city are built facing on the right side [of the river] opposite the high hills and fortifications which recall the hair-raising events of earlier days, for there were the French who were killed as they ran from the Russians due to the world wide great cold—so say the elders. According to legend, there under the mountains the French hid the gold and silver that they brought with them and, in fact, from time to time the farmers and diggers even today find some gold *drachmas* issued by the French government.■

Bobruisk

By Steve Jaffe, New Jersey

My grandfather was born in Bobruisk in Belarus in the 1880s and immigrated to New York in 1905. He told my father that, as a boy, he saw marks on stone buildings allegedly made by artillery shells and bullets during Napoleon's invasion. Bobruisk is on the Berezina River.■

In Remembrance

Excerpts from sefer zikaron le-kehillat Bobruisk u-veneteha

In 1810, something happened that greatly influenced the fate and standing of Bobruisk. The military engineer Theodore Narbut (later known as the famous historian of Lithuania) was sent by the government to determine a site for building a fortress on the Dnieper, between Mohilev and Rogachev; but after investigating the area and the surroundings, Narbut advised the government, that the place best suited to the building of the fortress, which must fit into the complete set of defensive positions from the Baltic to the Black Sea—a part of Russian defensive fortifications against the military threat which lurked in Western Europe—was the shore of the Berezina near Bobruisk. This choice of Engineer Narbut was approved by the Chief of Military Engineers, Count Carl Operman, supervisor over construction of forts in all of Russia. The 4th of June, 1810, came the order of Tsar Alexander I to begin building the fortress. Narbut made all the preparations but due to the deterioration of his health, he had to resign. In his place came General Major Gabriel Ignatiev. The construction of the fortress, which as its foundation served the Polish fortress put up 50 years before, continued at a fast pace. Jewish contractors filled an important role in mobilizing laborers, in the organization of the work, and in furnishing building supplies. Among them also certainly was Shimon Zimel Epstein, one of the largest building entrepreneurs in the country, who conducted his business at the beginning from Brisk to Lithuania and later to Warsaw. Until the outbreak of the war with France (summer 1812), there were built five bastions and, of these, Bobruisk received the battle that summer with the invading army of Napoleon.

During Napoleon's invasion of Russia, his way to Moscow led through northern Belarus. The Second Russian Army (45,000 soldiers), under the command of Duke Bagration, was stationed in the Minsk Gubernya. Napoleon sent his best soldiers under the command of Marshall Davout and his brother, the King of Westphalia,

Retreat From Moscow

Charles Bonaparte, to surround and destroy this army. The French army advanced very rapidly in the direction of Bobruisk, in order to cut off the retreat of the Russian army.

On the 13th of July, Bagration, who was then staying with his staff in Slutsk (after retreating from Niesvich), learned that the French, who had already taken Minsk, were proceeding toward the River Berezina. He directly gave the order to his army to proceed to the Dnieper through Bobruisk. In Bobruisk itself, Major General Ignatiev took command of the city and the fort. Bagration reached Bobruisk on the 18th of July. He appointed Ignatiev as the military commander of the city, and he led the retreat of the army. Ignatiev provided him with food and gathered to the fort the wounded and sick soldiers. With this prompt retreat, Bagration saved his army from a complete defeat and had time to ferry them across the Berezina and Dnieper and connect with the main Russian army, which was stationed in Smolensk. Ignatiev remained in the fort in Bobruisk. To the city itself arrived the Polish Corps Commander of Napoleon's Army, General Dombrovski, and besieged the fortress. Four months it lasted, but the fortress held, until there began the general retreat of Napoleon's army. The whole time Ignatiev stood on watch, he collected intelligence about the situation of the French and through spies passed them to the high command of the Russian Army.

The Jews of Bobruisk, as did all other Jews in Lithuania and Belarus, generally treated the foreign soldiers coldly. We should accept with caution the

opinions of the Russian Jewish historians, who exaggerated this because of their apologizing for Jewish patriotism.

From the region of Bobruisk arose the story of a Jewish tenant farmer from the village of Stupishtse, Nisan Katzenelson, who informed the Cossacks, besieged in the area, of the approach of French units. The French, in their retreat from the village, allegedly arrested the Jew and tortured him savagely until he died from his wounds on 20 Cheshvan 1812. He was brought to burial in the city.

During the panicked flight of the French Army, the Russians obliged the Jews of Bobruisk and also of other cities of the county to quarter French prisoners in their homes. In the memoirs of these French prisoner-soldiers we find notes on conflicts between these uncalled-for guests and the Jewish hosts, usually in connection with observing the Sabbath and dietary laws. 'We had many clashes with these foolish men,' wrote a German officer of Napoleon's army, 'They didn't let us light fires on the Sabbath or on other holy days, here they refused to give us cooking dishes.'

'In Bobruisk,' related another military man, 'we received a fine apartment in the house of one Jew, a conflict began with our Jew. He did not let us light a fire on Saturday and he did not give us dishes for cooking until we called our watch-officer, who taught him a lesson with a good whip'.

Thus the Bobruisk community tasted the flavor of war.■

For Further Reading

Recommendations by Melvin Redmount, Saul Isseroff, Leslie Reich, Jonina Duker

Some years ago Bohdan Nahajlo was writing a book which included the Napoleonic Wars in Belarus and Russia. His travels took him in and out of Bobr. He is an expert on Berezino. He referred me to Heinrich Von Brandt's book entitled *In the Legions of Napoleon*, the memoirs of a Polish officer attached to Napoleon in Spain and Russia from 1808 to 1813. Translated by Jonathan North, it contains descriptions by a junior officer in a Polish infantry regiment enroute from Vilna to Minsk to Orsha to Mogilev to the battle for Smolensk, the Borodino battle, Moscow, and then the retreat back through Bobr and over pontoon bridges at the Beresina. This is one of several journals written by participants in the Napoleonic wars.

Jakob Walter, *Diary of a Napoleonic Footsoldier*, edited by and with an introduction by Marc Raeff, is recommended by Saul Isseroff. More memoir than diary, this slim volume contains the reminiscences of a young German conscript into the army of Napoleon in the campaigns of 1806, 1807, 1809, and 1812-13. Walter encounters Poles, Russians, Jews, and other groups as his unit fought its way back and forth across Eastern Europe. His observations of the progressive demoralization of the army and the instinct for self-preservation under the pressure of Cossack attacks are stark and honest. This firsthand description of the retreat of a starving army from Moscow and the attendant breakdown of discipline and morale will interest genealogists who had family living in these area at that time.

Leslie Reich recommends the stories about Rabbi Schneur Zalman of Liadi (1745-1812) and Napoleon.

Jonina Duker writes that the Chasam Sofer wrote a short memoir about what happened to him—his congregants moved him a few times to ensure he escaped—as Napoleon approached.■

The Lonely Road Home

Napoleon 1812

Excerpts from Nigel Nicolson's Napoleon 1812

Napoleon left Smorgoni at 10 p.m. that night for Paris 1400 miles away. It was the coldest period of an exceptionally cold winter, and he was travelling through countries on whose loyalty he could not rely. It was essential to keep his departure secret for as long as possible, give no advance notice of his route, take with him the minimum suite and escort so as not to arouse attention, and travel under a pseudonym. He had three coaches at the start, headed by his own with only Caulaincourt as a companion... The two men went on together, scarcely pausing for rest or refreshment, and reached Paris in two weeks. Caulaincourt's stamina was even more remarkable than Napoleon's for not only was it his duty to organize relays of horses, frequent changes of vehicle, and the Emperor's comforts, but to endure his endless conversation and make notes of it during their brief halts. He did this from a sense of duty to history, and because Napoleon told him that he was indeed fortunate to have his exclusive company for so long. It was something he could tell his grandchildren.■



Gosciniac Napoleonski

by Mike Glazer, UK

My great uncle Abraham Aginsky (originally Jarzembski) came from a very small village called Chrusciele (actually his passport says Chrusciele Folwark—Folwark is Polish for Manor House I believe) in the community of Malopole (now Dabrowka) just to the NE of Warszawa. He settled in Boston and I recall once when talking to him in 1968 that he said he had lived close to a road along which Napoleon's troops retreated in 1812. Now a couple of years ago, I visited Chrusciele, and was delighted to see a narrow road exactly there called Gosciniac Napoleonski. I have been told by locals that in the field to the left there had been a large house (possibly the "Folwark") until 1941-2 when it was destroyed.■

Velionia

by Todd Lerner, New York

My grandmother, Ida Frank Sherman, was a pretty good historian. She was born about 1898/1899 in Velionia, Lithuania, the daughter of Isaac Frank, son of Moishe ben Boruch ben Isaak. She once told me that her great-great-grandfather, Isaak, was a sergeant in Napoleon's army which had me wondering if Napoleon had Jews in his army. Isaak did not want to go back to France and ended staying in Lithuania in a small town by the river Nieman. I always

thought that my grandmother was *meshugah* with this story until I found that Napoleon's retreat from Russia followed right through the area where my family came from. The town is called Velionia. The other interesting bit of evidence is that the family name is Frank. My grandmother said that people would call him Isaak the Frank meaning he was from France. Eventually he became Isaak Frank.

I am not sure that all of this is true and never got any corroboration from any other relative. The question remains: is it just an odd coincidence about the family name and Napoleon's retreat?■

Myadel, Belarus

by Arye Geskin, Israel

History relates that Napoleon's army drowned in Lake Batorino as the ice which covered the waters was

not strong enough to support the weight of the soldiers.■

Rasienai, Kovno

by Deborah Hatch, Massachusetts

My mother, who died in 2003 at the age of 93, was the keeper of the family lore and treasured this Napoleonic war story. My grandmother, Bluma Tempkin (Bluma Titievsky in the Ukraine) was born in 1875, told of her grandmother, who was a child in 1812, still getting upset about her recollections, even as a very old woman. She remembered starving French soldiers on the retreat coming to the door of her family home asking for help. She said she was not allowed to help them and had to stay inside with the doors barred because they were the enemy.■

Keidan

by Peter Arnold, Australia

This is our family story told down the generations: Leyzer Amolsky, my great-great-grandfather, born in 1786 in Keidan, observed the retreat of Napoleon's army in 1812.■

Telz

<http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/telz>

In 1812 Napoleon's retreating army passed through Telz, leaving behind desolation as well as a big gun which can still be seen in the town park.■

Distortion and Disbelief!

by Bramie Lenhoff

My story: *On his way through Courland, Napoleon had an affair with a young Jewish lady, and the offspring of the affair turned into one of our ancestors. The story has been passed on with some mixture of amusement and disbelief, and no doubt with plenty of distortion.■*

They Are Not Forgotten

by Joseph H. Miller

Tytuvenai, Kelmes, Lithuania

In searching for my family, when our history is becoming harder to reach and maintain, I was able to piece two family stories together to find cousins lost in the Holocaust.

My uncle, Ben Miller (Menachem Mendel) was born in Tytuvenai (Tzetivion) around the year 1898. Tzetivion is a town in western Lithuania, 27 km north of Raseiniai, near the Siauliai-Taurage railroad, near Kelme, the town from which his mother, my grandmother, came. Situated along the Tytuva river between Lakes Bridvaisis and Gailius, the town borders on a large forest in the west and on a peat bog in the north and is now considered a resort area.

My uncle used to tell me that his grandmother, Chia, would tell him about seeing Napoleon's troops retreating along the road in their shtetl when she was a child.

I had been told since I was very young that my great aunt, her husband and their children had all been murdered by the Nazis. I had the Americanized version of my aunt's name and that of her husband but I had no idea of the names of their children or their fates. It was not until I was going through papers kept by my parents, after their deaths, that I found a series of letters, all written in Yiddish, from my great aunt to my father. I had them translated and was able to see the progression from introduction of an aunt to her nephew to the description of the horrors that were unfolding in their tiny shtetl as the inevitable shadow of desperation began to envelop them. My father had tried everything he could to get them out but, of course, was unsuccessful. One of the most horrible effects of the Shoah was that those who were murdered have been lost to remembrance. Not even their names are known and it is as if they never existed; that denial in some ways is the ultimate insult to the memories of those who were so brutally denied the gift of life.

Through several years of digging and following any lead that I could and by making contacts in the United States, Israel and elsewhere, I ultimately learned the correct names of my great aunt, her husband and their



four children, and how, when and where they were murdered by those who were their neighbors.

Sarah Lazurik, the sister of my grandfather, Joseph Arie Miller, did not come to America. When I set out to find the names and fates of her family, I encountered a source that described the place where the murder of the Jews took place in July/August 1941 *as the road used by Napoleon's troops*

when they fled Russia. It gave the tangible location—Tytuvenai (or as called by the Jews: Tzetivion)—and coincided with the story my uncle had told me. It must have been well known to the local populace for generations after the event.

It was a great shock, to find that the eldest of the four children (Leah Reis) survived the war hidden, along with her husband (Herschel Reis) and child (Mendel Reis), beneath the floorboards of the house of a Righteous Gentile, whose name I have never learned. I was able to trace the efforts of my surviving cousin as she went from the ghetto to Siberia to Israel and hear about her efforts to reach my father—whose name and residence she did not know and therefore never found. I was able to finally find the name of her fourteen-year old son when he made it to America.

What I found was that this son and his mother were ultimately reunited in the United States and that both of them died in 1992. A few years ago, I managed to meet the family and children of this man; as it turned out, his children knew less about what had happened to their father than I had learned because he would not talk about what had happened to him.

I now recite Kaddish for my great aunt (Sora Sprintze Lazurik), her husband (Moishe Lazurik) and their children (Hessie, Avram and Chaim) who were murdered—and to use their names to specifically identify my cousins) who were all murdered on the same road used by the troops of Napoleon so many years before.

They are not forgotten.■

JGSLA 2006

The **Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles** was founded in May 1979. Meetings are held the third Monday evening of each month or on Sunday afternoons. Guests are welcome. There are two meetings each year at the LDS Family History Center where members have exclusive use of the facility.

For meeting schedules, call JGSLA at (818) 771-5554 or visit our website <<http://www.jgsla.org>>.

Annual dues are \$25 or \$30 for two family members in the same household. Membership includes a subscription to *Roots-Key*, the journal of the JGSLA, and *Dates and Updates*, the monthly meeting notice and newsletter.

Roots-Key is published four times per year. Genealogical research articles and family history stories may be submitted at anytime. JGSLA members are encouraged to share their research. Submit inquiries to <nholden@interserv.com>.

Roots-Key back issues are available for \$5.00. JGSLA, PO Box 55443, Sherman Oaks, CA 91413.

**For changes of address, notify Bobby Furst
(818) 771-5554**

email: <membership@jgsla.org>

2006 JGSLA Board of Directors

Sonia Hoffman, President
<president@jgsla.org>
Nancy Biederman, Co-President & CFO
<treasurer@jgsla.org>
Pamela Weisberger, 1st V.P., Programs
<pamela@jgsla.org>
Barbara Furst, 2nd V.P., Membership
Gloria Burney, Recording Secretary
Hale Porter, Membership Correspondence
Marion Diamond, At-Large
Ann Harris, Publicity Chair
David Hoffman, Website Editor
Sandy Malek, At-Large
Arnie Schwartz, New Member Services
Mel Sofian, Shtetl-Group Coordinator
Marion Werle, Library Records
Gerry Winerman, Past President

Non-Board Positions

Nancy Holden, Editor, *Roots-Key*
Hal Bookbinder, Editor, *Dates & Updates*
Barbara Algaze, Librarian
Stephanie Nordlinger, Traveling Library
Allen Kwawer, Webmaster

**JEWISH GENEALOGICAL SOCIETY of LOS ANGELES
P.O.BOX 55443
SHERMAN OAKS, CALIFORNIA 91413**

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

**NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S.POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO 2327
VAN NUYS, CA**

TIME VALUE