

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Fall 2013

NEWSLETTER

Heshvan-Kislev

A Tangled Family History

by Elaine Haselkorn Jacob

My name is Hia Shifra, the daughter of Nisonemova Bankoff. I was born in 1866 in the town of Lehovich, in the county of Minsk in Belarus. On January 1, 1888, when I was 22 years old, I purchased a "ticket" (which was something like a visa) for 10 kopecks. The ticket described me as a maiden with dark blond hair, blue eyes, a long nose with a round chin, medium tall with a scar near my right eye. This ticket allowed me to leave my town for one month, and go anywhere that Jews were allowed to go. If I did not return to Lehovich in one month, I would be considered a vagrant.

I did not return to Lehovich. Instead, I left the town with my mother and together we sailed to the "Golden Land", America. Because we came to America through Castle Island (the immigration site in New York City prior to the opening of Ellis Island in 1892), there are no records of my arrival, no ship's name, no passenger list.

Hia Shifra, known in this country as Ida, was my step-great-grandmother, the only great-grandmother I was lucky enough to know.

I don't know if Hia Shifra met Isaak Goldberg, my great-grandfather, on the ship crossing the Atlantic or in New York City, but their meeting resulted in a life-long love affair. This sounds romantic, but Isaak already had a wife and three young daughters in Russia. Isaak had come to

America as so many young male immigrants did at that time, to earn some money and then send for his family to join him.

Isaak did earn money which he sent to his wife, but he also wrote to her and said, "Don't come!" His wife, Anna Turoff Goldberg, a brilliant woman who had attended gymnasium (a prep school for university studies) in Russia, wrote back and said, "I am coming with our three children," and come she did.

Isaak and Anna's divorce decree was dated June 9, 1891

and Anna was given care and custody of the children. This was not unusual, but the divorce decree had a fascinating twist! It included a clause in which it states, "Anna Goldberg may marry again during her lifetime but Isaak Goldberg shall not marry again until the death of Anna Goldberg."

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Isaak and Ida Goldberg, 1931

President's Column

We will shortly be completing another successful year of our long-running American Jewish Experience Lecture Series. I want to thank all our distinguished speakers, and everyone who participated in the series as members of the audience. As usual, we covered a wide range of topics. This year we began offering the lectures at the Jewish Family and Vocational Services (JFVS) facility, located at the Concordia Shopping Center in Monroe Township. These are the same lectures that are repeated at the Highland Park Conservative Temple. We hope that the new location is more conveniently located for our members who live in Monroe Township, and that there will now be more synergy between us and JFVS.

I'm pleased to report that our Society won second place in the Brochure category of the Kevin M. Hale Annual Publication Awards given by the New Jersey League of Historical Societies. This recognition was given for the brochure that accompanies our traveling exhibit on Jewish Immigration from the Former Soviet Union. Congratulations to Debbie Cohn for putting this together.

Finally, and of great importance, I want to draw your attention to the reminder elsewhere in this Newsletter regarding opportunities to make donations to our Society. Our outside funding is very limited and we very much need donations and bequests from our members to keep our organization going. Please use this opportunity to combine your donation with a tax benefit. On behalf of the JHSCJ, thanks in advance!

Nathan Reiss

Community Connections

With aid from a grant from the Jewish Federation of Greater Middlesex County, the JHSCJ has begun a collaboration with Temple B'nai Shalom in East Brunswick. The joint program will create a "living history" of the Jewish community of central New Jersey through interviews with long-term residents and seniors who live in Middlesex County and vicinity. Their experiences will encapsule the vibrancy of our local Jewish community and illustrate the variety of ways that Jews have contributed toward and influenced all aspects of life in central New Jersey. The JHSCJ will be offering help to the religious school students at B'nai Shalom on how to conduct interviews. If you would like to contribute your story to our "living history", please contact the JHSCJ office.

Dr. Nathan Reiss, the President of the JHSCJ, will be speaking at the Highland Park Public Library as part of a lecture series on Family Genealogy Research. He will introduce the series on October 31 with a general talk on "How to Start Your Genealogical Research." His topic on November 21 will continue with "Your Life's Stories." Both talks are open to the public and will be given at 7:00 p.m. at the Library, 31 North 5th Avenue, Highland Park.

Our Speakers Bureau continues to send speakers to organizations all over central New Jersey, including Hadassah chapters, synagogue clubs, and community groups. Does your group need a speaker for one of its meetings? Contact the JHSCJ office, or visit our website for more information.

The Jewish Historical Society Seeks Artifacts and Archival Material

Does your family have a story like Elaine Jacob's story on Page 1? The Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey continues to build its collection of original photographs, documents, and artifacts relating to Jewish life in Central New Jersey. In order to continue to document our community accurately, authentically, and powerfully, the Society seeks original material. We are looking for letters, diaries, original works of art and music with a local connection. Clothing, home movies and other artifacts would be welcome additions to our archives. The JHSCJ assumes full responsibility for its long-term care and storage and commit itself to making this material accesible to the community. Please call Debbie Cohn at 732-249-4894 if you have something that you think we might be interested in for our collection.



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EDITORIAL STAFF

Contributors:

Nathan Reiss
Deborah Cohn
Elaine Haselkorn Jacob

Graphic Artist Deborah Cohn

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Researching the Story of Jewish Farmers

The Jewish Heritage Museum of Monmouth County is exploring the possibility of publishing a history of the Jewish farmers of central New Jersey, and is seeking the cooperation of the members of the Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey in this endeavor. If you have any information, documents, objects, family memoirs or photos pertaining to the Jewish farming experience in this part of our state, please contact Jean Klerman, chair of the JHMOMC's history committee, at the museum by phone at [732-252-6990](tel:732-252-6990) or by email at info@jhmomc.org.



exhibit, which includes the showing of Dr. Gertrude Dubrovsky's film "The Land Was Theirs: The Jewish Farmers in the Garden State" has proven to be one of the most popular of all the museum's offerings and the museum is eager to expand upon its studies of Jewish farmers throughout the region. At the time that New Jersey was considered "The Egg Basket of the East" (mid 20th century), 75% of all the state's egg farmers were Jewish.

The Jewish Heritage Museum, located in the Mounts Corner Shopping Center, Route 537 and Wemrock Road in Freehold Township, is open Sundays (11 am - 3 pm), and Tuesdays and Thursdays (10 am - 3 pm). For more information call the museum or visit the museum website at www.jhmomc.org.

This proposed study is an outgrowth of the Jewish Heritage Museum's current exhibit, "The Land Was Theirs: The Story of the Jewish Farmers of Monmouth County," which runs through December 2013. This

(Continued from Page 1)

Only four days after the original divorce decree, there was another, even more unusual twist. On June 13, 1891, another legal document was issued. Anna Goldberg gave custody of their three daughters to Isaak. In return, Anna was given visitation rights, and Isaak gave Anna \$600 in alimony. Shortly after her divorce, Anna married a widower named Morris Goodman, who had 5 children. Maybe that was why she relinquished her daughters. After the children were grown and Morris died, Anna lived with her daughter Pauline, my grandmother.

Meanwhile, Isaak and Ida continued to live together as Mr. & Mrs. Isaak Goldberg until the end of their lives. I am not sure what Isaak did for a living, although I do remember seeing a picture of a butcher shop with a sign on the window that said, "Butcher Shop Kosher Meat, I. Goldberg".

Anna Goldberg Goodman did die before Isaak, but I have been unable to find a marriage certificate for Ida and Isaak. They both lived long enough to attend the wedding of my parents and to see their first great-granddaughter – me. They are buried together in Washington Cemetery, Brooklyn.



Hia Shifra Bankoff's ticket out of Russia

Genealogy:
 Issue of Marriage of Isaak Goldberg and Hannah (Anna)
 Second daughter Pauline Goldberg m. Nathan Shapanka
 Daughter Sylvia Shapanka m. Irving Haselkorn
 Daughter Elaine Haselkorn m. Alex Jacob
 Daughter Laurie Sue Jacob, named for Hia Shifra

Harvard's Jewish Problem

During and after World War I, American Jewry became the target of anti-Semitism by a variety of social groups, including the Ku Klux Klan and various immigration restriction advocates. Ivy League universities were no exception, and several of these venerable schools moved to restrict Jewish enrollment during the 1920s. Some Jewish students at Harvard, the bellwether in American education, did not take admission restrictions lying down.

Nativism and intolerance among segments of the white Protestant population were aimed at both Eastern European Jews and Southern European Catholics. In higher education, Jews were particularly resented. By 1919, about 80% of the students at New York's Hunter and City colleges were Jews, and 40% at Columbia. Jews at Harvard tripled to 21% of the freshman class in 1922 from about 7% in 1900. Ivy League Jews won a disproportionate share of academic prizes and election to Phi Beta Kappa but were widely regarded as competitive, eager to excel academically and less interested in extra-curricular activities such as organized sports. Non-Jews accused them of being clannish, socially unskilled and either unwilling or unable to "fit in."

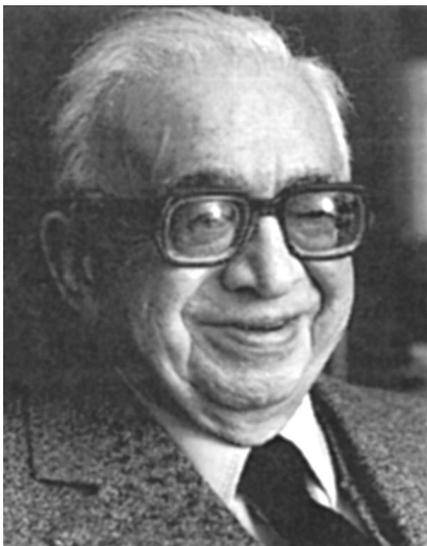
In 1922, Harvard's president, A. Lawrence Lowell, proposed a quota on the number of Jews gaining admission to the university. Lowell was convinced that Harvard could only survive if the majority of its students came from old American stock.

Lowell argued that cutting the number of Jews at Harvard to a maximum of 15% would be good for the Jews, because limits would prevent further anti-Semitism. Lowell reasoned, "The anti-Semitic feeling among the students is increasing, and it grows in proportion to the increase in the number of Jews. If their number should become 40% of the student body, the race feeling would become intense."

The fight against Jewish quotas at Harvard was led by Harry Starr, an undergraduate and the son of a Russian immigrant who established the first kosher butcher shop in Gloversville, New York. As president of the Menorah Society, Harvard's major Jewish student organization, Starr organized a series of meetings between Jewish and non-Jewish students, faculty and administrators to discuss Lowell's proposed quota. The meetings were frequently heated and painful. As Starr recalled in an account published in 1985, which can be found at the American Jewish Historical Society, "We learned that it was numbers that mattered; bad or good, too many Jews

were not liked. Rich or poor, brilliant or dull, polished or crude—[the problem was] too many Jews."

Starr insisted that there could be no "Jewish problem" at Harvard or in America. Starr observed, "The Jew cannot look on himself as a problem... Born or naturalized in this country, he is a full American." If admitting all qualified Jews to Harvard meant a change in the traditional social composition of the student body, so be it. Starr refused to hear any hokum about "pure" American stock as a way to limit Jewish admissions to Harvard. "Tolerance," he wrote in the *Menorah Journal*, "is not to be administered like castor oil, with eyes closed and jaws clenched."



Harry Starr

Lowell received a great deal of public criticism, particularly in the Boston press. Harvard's overseers appointed a 13-member committee, which included three Jews, to study the university's "Jewish problem." The committee rejected a Jewish quota but agreed that "geographic diversity" in the student body was desirable. Harvard had been using a competitive exam to determine who was admitted, and urban Jewish students were scoring highly on the exam. Urban public schools such as Boston Latin Academy intensely prepared their students, many of whom were Jewish, to pass Harvard's admissions test. The special committee recommended that the competitive exam be replaced by an admissions policy that accepted top-ranking students from around the nation, regardless of exam scores. By 1931, because students from urban states were replaced by students from Wyoming and North Dakota who ranked in the top of their high school classes, Harvard's Jewish ranks were cut back to 15% of the student body.

In the late 1930s, James Bryant Conant, Lowell's successor as president, eased the geographic distribution requirements, and Jewish students were once again admitted primarily on the basis of merit. Harry Starr, who lived until 1992, became a national Jewish communal leader, including a term of service as a trustee of the American Jewish Historical Society. Professionally, he became the director of the Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, which was established by a Jewish congressman from Gloversville and which over the years has given many generous gifts to Harvard. Harry Starr held no grudges against the university which in 1922 he lovingly battled on behalf of his fellow Jews.

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MEMBERSHIP

Welcome to our NEW MEMBERS:

Robert Arky
Rhoda Bregman

Phyllis Freed
Mr. & Mrs. Jack Kurland
Evelyn Kruger

Sydell Seiden
Michael Sleppin

Thank you to those who renewed their membership as LIFE MEMBERS:

Bernice Bernstein Francine Derman

Thank you to those who renewed their membership at the PATRON LEVEL:

Beatrice Beck
Roberta Belsky
Gloria Cohn

Richard and Ellen Diamond
William Gorelick
Harvey and Flip Hauptman
Larry Riemer

Eileen Robison
Betty Saltiel
David and Rachel Weintraub

TRIBUTES

From	To	Occasion
Stan & Muriel Haber	Phyllis and Bill Pollak	In honor of their Anniversary
Gloria Cohn	Bernice Bernstein and Family	In memory of Jill Bernstein Welsh
Debbie & Joe Cohn	Bernice Bernstein and Family	In memory of Jill Bernstein Welsh

DONATIONS

The JHSCJ is grateful to Mr. & Mrs. David Weintraub and Mr. & Mrs. Raymond Sabin for their generous contributions to the Archives Development Fund.

Donate to Our Society and Save on your Income Tax

The Jewish Historical Society needs financial help in order to continue and to enhance its valuable activities on behalf of the Jewish community of Central New Jersey. If you have considered making a donation to the Society, there are some painless ways of doing it that could also save you money at the same time.

- If you have investments (stocks, for example) that have increased in value, you may be reluctant to sell them because you will be taxed on your gains. If you donate such investments to the Society not only will you avoid the capital gains tax, but you may also be eligible for a charitable deduction equal to the value of stock at the time you DONATED it.

Example: You purchased some stock for \$1,000 and its price has increased to \$1,500. If you were to sell it, you would be taxed on this \$500 gain. If you are in the 25% bracket, the tax would be \$125. If you donate the stock to the Society, you receive a tax DEDUCTION of \$1,500, which would reduce your taxes by \$375. In other words, by donating something for which you paid \$1,000, you come out \$500 ahead on your taxes

If you are interested in exploring this beneficial way of making a donation to the Society, please contact your tax advisor and/or our office for assistance in transferring your stock or other investment to us.

- In preparing our wills, an important consideration frequently is the desire to transmit our values to the next generation. This desire is one of the central reasons for the existence of the Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey. Consider making a bequest to the Society and safeguard the history of our community.

Remember: Tax-deductible contributions to the JHSCJ should be made before December 31, 2013. Thank you!

Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey
222 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

(732) 249-4894
WWW.Jewishgen.Org/JHSCJ
E-mail: info.jhscj@gmail.com

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