

Zalman Tseitlin With His Family



This is the family picture of my paternal grandfather Zalman Tseitlin. From right to left: my grandfather Zalman Tseitlin, my father Ellis Tseitlin is standing next to him, my grandmother Sara-Kreina holding father's brother Aron Tseitlin is standing behind him, father's brothers Samuel and Haim Tseitlin are standing next to her. The picture was made in Smolensk in 1902.

My paternal grandfather Zalman Tseitlin and grandmother Sara-Kreina Tseitlin lived in an ancient Russian city Smolensk. Grandfather was from the Jewish town Mstsislaw. He was born in 1861. Mstsislaw is on the border of Belarus and Russia, not far from Smolensk. I do not know where grandmother Sara-Kreina was born. I think she was from Smolensk. Unfortunately, I do not know her maiden name. Grandfather moved to Smolensk, when he was a grown-up. I still keep certificate of master of bakery belonging to my grandfather. In accordance with that certificate Mstsislaw dweller Zalman Faibishev Tseitlin was given rights and royalties of a guild master as per order of the Emperor. Grandfather was permitted to live in Smolensk not within the Jewish Pale of Settlement. Grandmother was a housewife and raised children.

I heard a family legend on the origin of the last name Tseitlin. When the empress Catherine II [Catherine the Great] was touring Russia, she came to the village of Smolensk province. A beautiful buxom Jewish girl brought bread and salt to the empress. The empress told her: "What a beauty! What's your name?". The girl replied that her name was Tseit. The empress said: "Well, I wish you as the say in Russian proverb 'be healthy as a cow and fecund as a sow'". The girl was some sort of relative of my grandfather. Then she gave birth to 24 sons. All of them carried name Tseitlin. But it was just a family legend. I do not know whether it is true. Grandfather had relatives in England,

America and other countries. Unfortunately I do not know anything about them.

In 1890 my grandparents got married. Grandfather and his young wife left for England to seek fortune. They had lived in Manchester, England 4 years. Their first child, my father was born in Manchester in 1892. In accordance with the English law, the baby born in England acquires the citizenship of this country. So my father became British citizen. He was called English name Ellis.

In England grandfather was not a baker. He worked at the steam engine manufacturing plant as a mechanic. He liked the job very much as it gave him the opportunity to use his potential, but the climate was not OK with him. His health was poorer. The doctor said that he had some sort of lung disease and he was recommended to return to his motherland. Grandparents and their little son came back to Smolensk.

Grandfather bought a house in Smolensk and regained work. Grandparents had three more sons in Smolensk: Haim born in 1897, Aron, born in 1899 and the youngest Samuel in 1901. Children were raised as Jews. They went to cheder. They knew Ivrit and prayers. Jewish traditions were observed at home. Sabbath and Jewish holidays were marked at home. The family belonged to middle class. Grandfather wanted all children to get education, but he did not manage. In 1909 grandfather was stricken with pneumonia and died. He was buried on the Jewish cemetery in Smolensk. There were hard times. Grandmother received some assistance from the Jewish community for the orphaned children. Of course it was rather skimpy as compared with the earnings of the grandfather. She could not even dream of higher education for her children. It was even harder with the outbreak of the WW1. Grandmother Sara-Kreina died in Smolensk in 1919 and was buried in Smolensk Jewish cemetery next to grandfather.