

Grigoriy Stel'makh's Father Isaac Stel'makh's Family



My father Isaac Stel'makh's family. From left to right: my grandmother Yenta Stel'makh, my father Isaac Stel'makh, my grandfather Abram Stel'makh holding my father's sister Sarrah, my aunt Adel Stel'makh, my uncle Moisey Stel'makh. This photo was taken in Khmelnik in 1916 on the occasion of my father's birthday. He was born on 28 February. This is a studio photo.

My grandfather Abram was born in Kovel, 370 km from Kiev, a small Polish and from 1939 - Ukrainian town, in 1878. He received Jewish education in a cheder, and then finished a 7-year Jewish school. He also studied music and could play the accordion. He also studied theory: solfeggio and history of music. At his young age he left his home for Warsaw where his distant relatives lived. He studied there for over a year and received the profession of accountant. Then he moved to Khmelnik, Vinnitsa region, in 300 km from Kiev. My grandfather moved to Khmelnik and having good education he went to work as an accountant and estate manager for landlords and timber merchants. My grandfather was a rather wealthy man and belonged to the 'beau monde' of the town, I would say.

My grandfather met my grandmother Yenta in the town. I don't know anything about her origin or her parents or her maiden name. Yenta was born in 1881. My grandmother was a slim blue-eyed beauty of a girl, and my grandfather fell head over heels in love with her. She treated him with quiet and unseen authority. My grandfather told me an episode: he was smoking some sweet scented tobacco and my grandmother mentioned that this was unpleasant. My grandfather never

smoked again after getting married. My grandfather built a nice house. He had his horses and a carriage and this was a sign of wealth. Besides, he had red reigns to decorate the harness, and this was also a sign of wealth like a nice car nowadays.

My grandfather was religious. He wore a kippah and a nice big hat. My grandmother also covered her head. She had few wigs, lace shawls and kerchiefs. They went to the synagogue together, observed all Jewish traditions and celebrated holidays. My grandfather knew the Torah very well and read Talmud and wise books. We still have his books in the family. My grandfather was an authoritative man in the Jewish community of Khmelnik and with the Russian, Ukrainian and Polish population. They celebrated religious holidays Pesach, Yom Kippur and others with the family. All the boys in the family had the ritual of brit milah, circumcision, on the eighth day after they were born. My grandfather said it was a big holidays. Jews were praying and the boy became a real Jew. Then there was a meal with guests.

There were six children in the family. Moisey was the oldest. He was born in Khmelnik in 1908. He worked as goods manager. The next was Adel, born in 1910. I don't know where she studied. She had a secondary professional education. She worked as an accountant. After Adel my father Isaac was born. The next was Sarrah, born approximately in 1914. She finished the Faculty of Economics of a college in Leningrad, got married and moved to Leningrad [present St. Petersburg] where she worked as an engineer/economist at the Kirov machine building plant. Grandfather Abram was trying to teach his children the Torah following his firm convictions, but life was changing and the communist propaganda happened to be stronger than grandfather's lectures and the children grew up to be atheists.