

# **Jews in China-----**

## **a presentation by**

### **Archie Ossin**



**April 2001 –Jewish Genealogy Society – Orlando, FL**

**Oct 2001-Rhoda Goldman Plaza-San Francisco, CA**

**Dec 2001 – 39ers Club – Orlando, FL**

**July 2002– Dartmouth College-Berdakin-Ossinovsky Family Reunion- Hanover, NH**

**April 2003 - Kinneret - Orlando, FL**

**April 2005 Seminole Community College, Lake Mary Florida**

**Feb 2006 Seminole Community College, Lake Mary, FL**

**Aug 2006 – UC Santa Barbara – Berdakin – Ossinovsky-Skidelsky fam Reunion**

**April 17, 2007- Rishonah Chaverot Hadassah – Cong Reform Judaism Orlando**

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**6th-11th Century Jewish Merchants and Traders  
come back and forth to China on Silk route**

**11 th Century First Group of Jews (70 families) come  
to Kaifeng to stay. Kaifeng is Capital of China during Song  
Dynasty, Population 1.5 Million**

**1163 First Synagogue built in Kaifeng**

**1492 Spanish Inquisition**

**1500 Kaifeng Jewish population peaks at 5000**

**Kaifeng repeatedly destroyed by flooding of Yellow River**

**Kublai Khan moved capital to Peking**

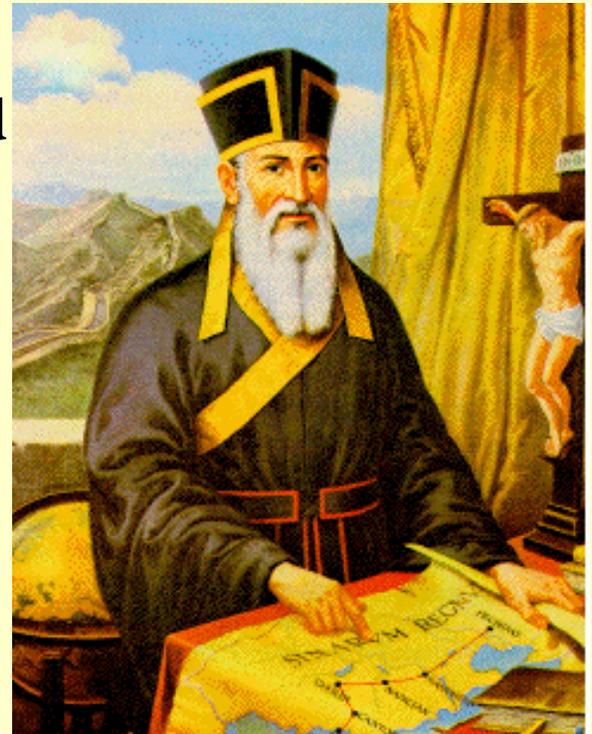
**Jews always intermarried in Kaifeng and Jewish traditions  
maintained for 700 years**

# **16 th Century -Decline of Jewish community- intermarriage and assimilation**

**1605** Jewish community first discovered by Christian Missionaries. Jesuit Priest, Father Matteo Ricci, wrote about the Jewish Community, igniting a continuing interest in this community by missionaries and scholars ever since.

**1792** **Russia**  
Jewish Pale established in areas annexed in Poland

**1800'S** Kaifeng Synagogue repaired and rebuilt several times until the 19 th Century when the last Rabbi died and Hebrew no longer taught.



**1842 Opium wars open China to Western Society**

**1842 China**

**First Sephardic Jews arrive in Shanghai**

**1850 China-- First Jewish office opened by Elias Sassoon son of David Sassoon, an Iraqi Jew, working in Bombay as a Commodities Dealer. Office opened in Shanghai with Jewish Clerks planting the seed for the Sephardic Jewish Community in Shanghai.**

**1881 Elly Kadoorie, Iraqi Jew, first arrived in Shanghai---worked for Sassoon before embarking on his own.**



**1881 Russia**

**Assassination of Czar Alexander II. Onset of Pogroms.**

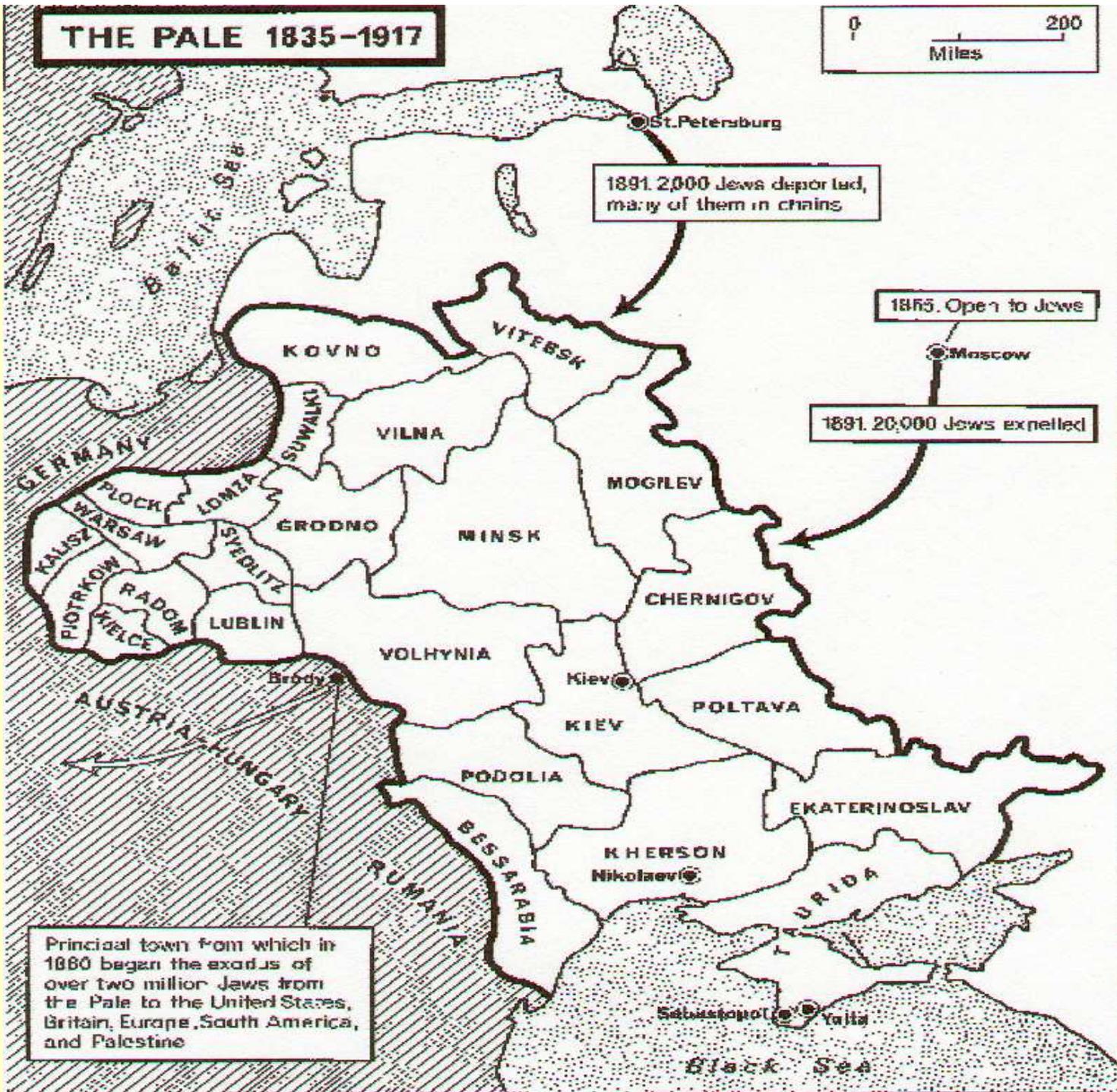
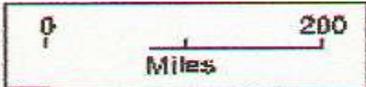
**First emigration of Russian Jews to the USA.**

**1885 The Russian Pale 4 million Jews live in the Pale**

**1887 Shanghai**

**First Russian Jewish permanent resident in Shanghai**

# THE PALE 1835-1917



1891. 2,000 Jews deported, many of them in chains

1855. Open to Jews

1891. 20,000 Jews expelled

Principal town from which in 1880 began the exodus of over two million Jews from the Pale to the United States, Britain, Europe, South America, and Palestine



# Map of the Ukraine



# Shtetls in the Ukraine

## SHTETLS

- Ekaterinoslav
- Osinova
- Osinovka
- Poltava
- Kovtuny



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# **1894      St. Petersburg, Russia**

**Nicholas II becomes Czar of Russia**



**Dec 1894 Alsace, France**  
**French Army Captain Alfred Dreyfus**  
**falsely found guilty of espionage.**  
**Austrian reporter, Theodore Hertzl**  
**sent from Vienna to cover news**  
**story.**



**Dreyfus**



**Hertzl**

# **1896**

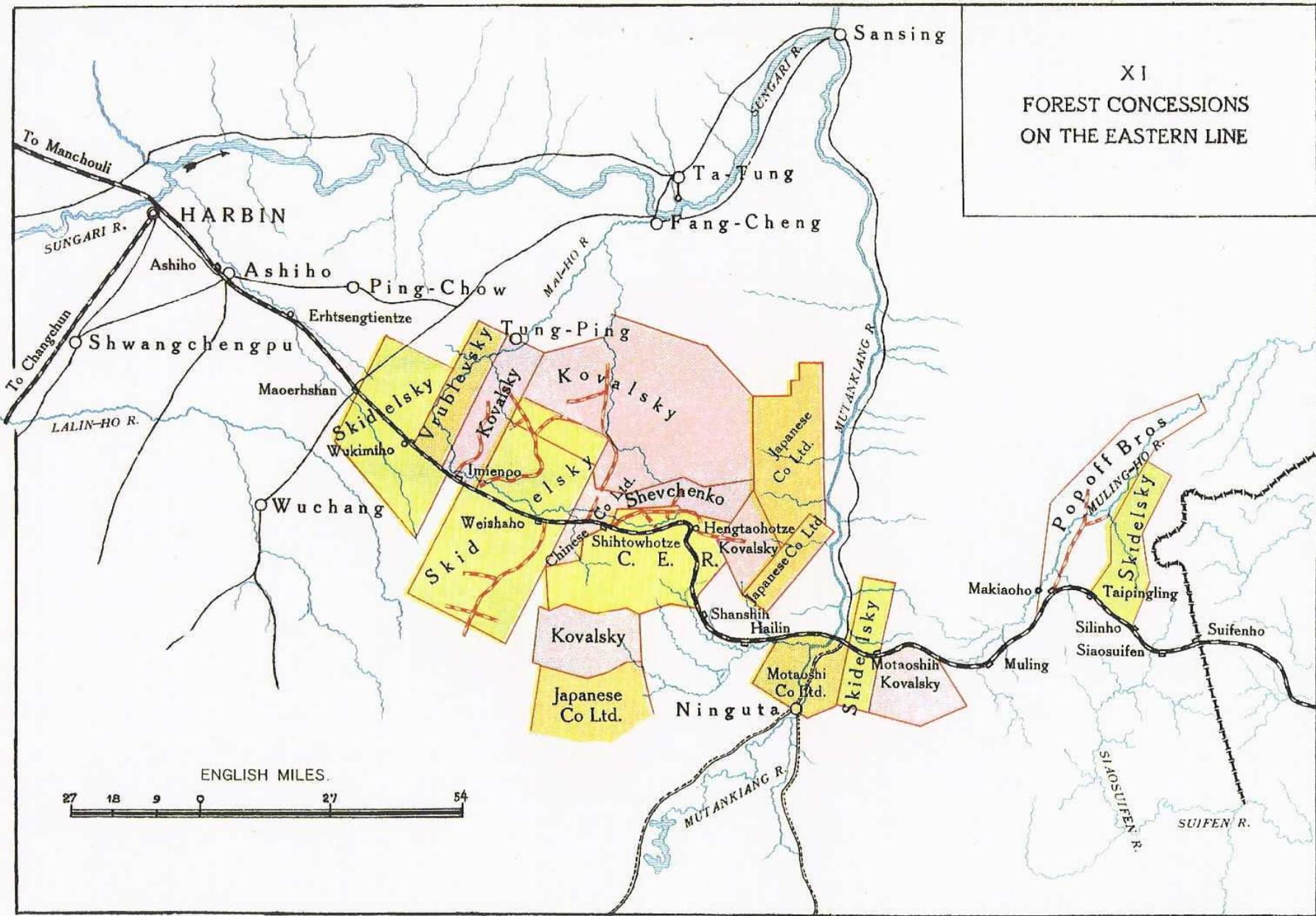
**Theodore Hertzl stunned by the Dreyfus case, recognizing that a political solution is needed for “the Jewish Problem”, writes book, entitled “*The Jewish State*”.**

# **1898 Harbin**

**Chosen as Headquarters of East China Railway**

**China signs treaty with Russia --construction of Chinese Eastern Railway one of provisions, bringing a nucleus of Russian Jews to Harbin.**

**1898 Harbin - Skidelsky & Sons (Leontiy Skidelsky) gain 1.25 Million acres of forest concession rights along Chinese Eastern Railway. (Gita Lyon Skidelsky and Lisa Lyon Skidelsky--daughters of Sonia Ossinovsky).**



**Aug 2, 1897 Ekaterinoslav**

**Joseph Ossinovsky is born**



**1897**

**Theodore Hertzl holds first of eight Zionist Congresses**

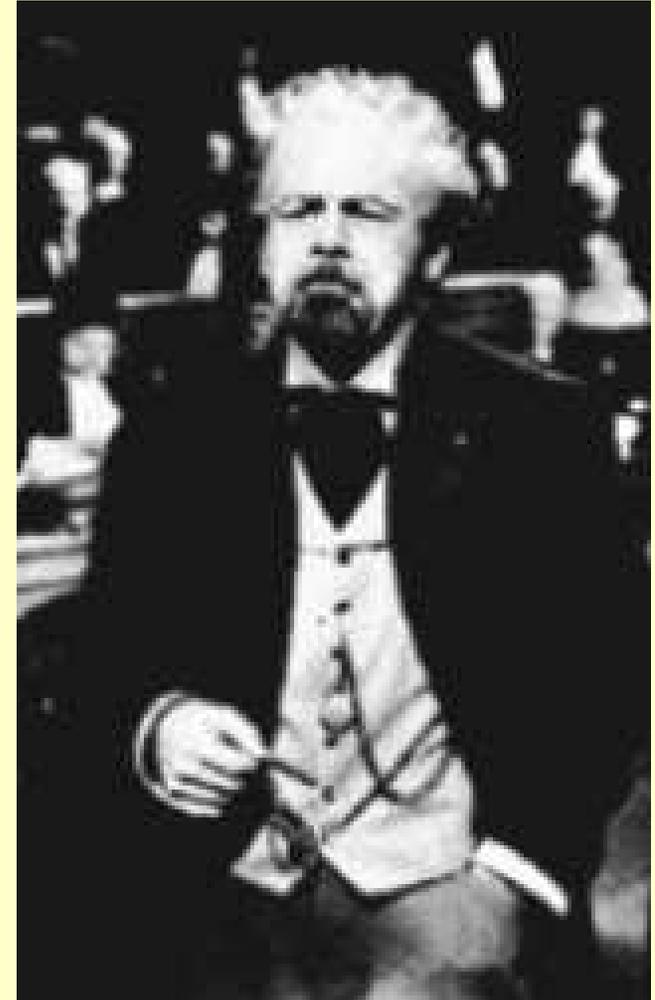
## **1898 Paris, France**

**French writer Emile Zola publishes open letter  
“*J’accuse*” in defense of Dreyfus.**

## **1898 Paris, France**

**Zola accused of libeling French  
Army. Zola flees to England,  
later granted amnesty**

**French Nobel Laureate, Anatole  
France joins Zola in support of  
Dreyfus.**



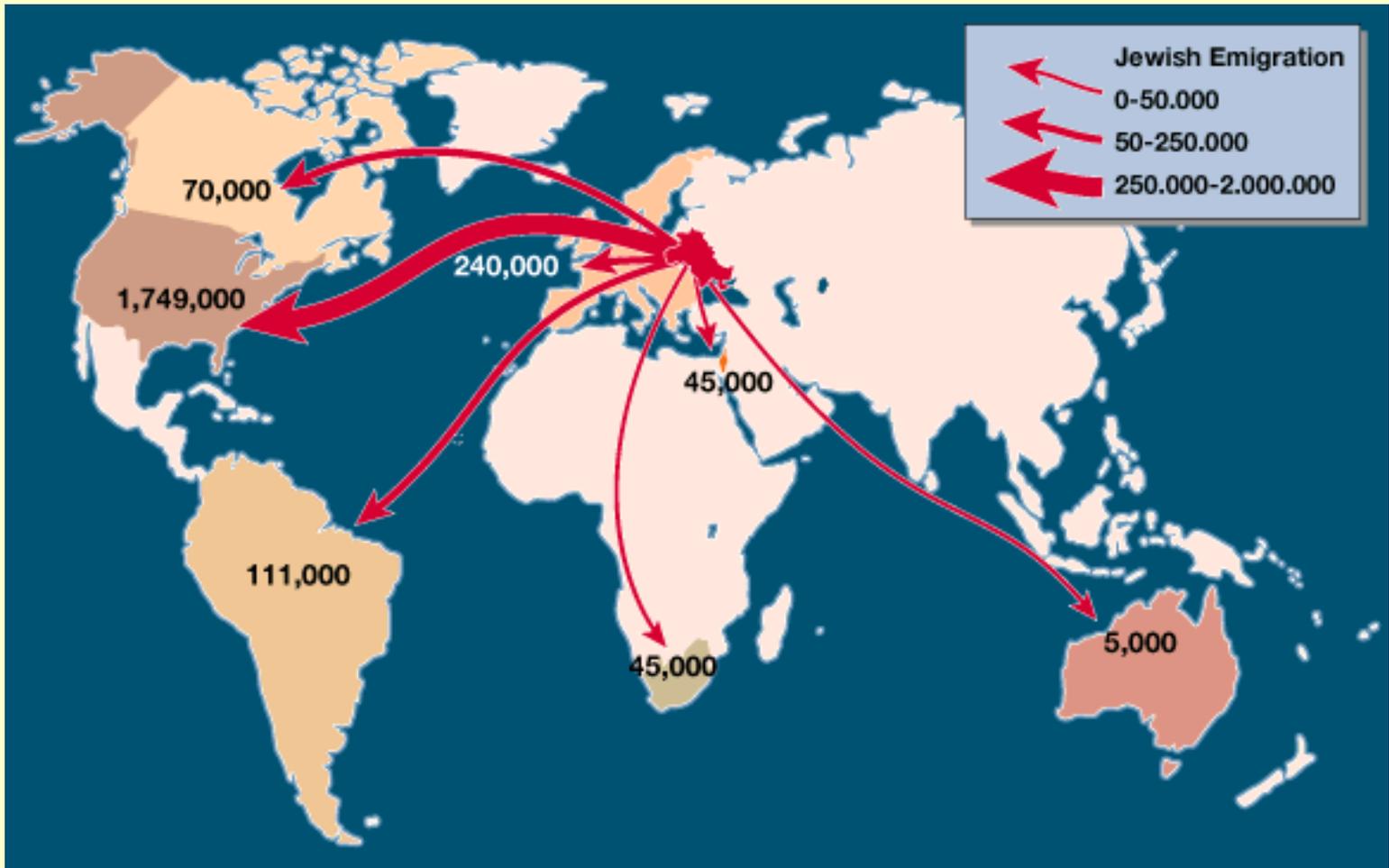
## **1903-1905      Bessarabia; Ukraine**

**Extremely violent pogroms took place in 1903 and 1905 in Ukraine and Bessarabia. Hundreds killed, thousands injured, some buried alive, hundreds of homes and businesses destroyed. Jews in mass leave Russia.**

## **1905      Mukden, Manchuria**

**Japanese fleet defeats Russian Baltic Fleet and annexes Port Arthur, Manchuria.**

**1905 Harbin---      Russian Jewish soldiers stay in northern China rather to return to anti-Semitism in Russia**



# Jewish Emigration from the Russian Pale

# 1905 Harbin

**Kovtun family moves from Poltava to Harbin  
Manchuria.**



**Isaac Kovtun (Sarah Ossin's Father)**

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**Circa 1906**

**Skidelskys build Harbin  
Talmud Torah**

**1909-1922**

**Skidelsky and Sons operate  
Chalinor Coal Mine (largest  
mine in Northern Manchuria)  
for the Chinese Eastern  
Railway.**

**1900-1935 Skidelsky and Sons  
operate Muling Coal Mine.**

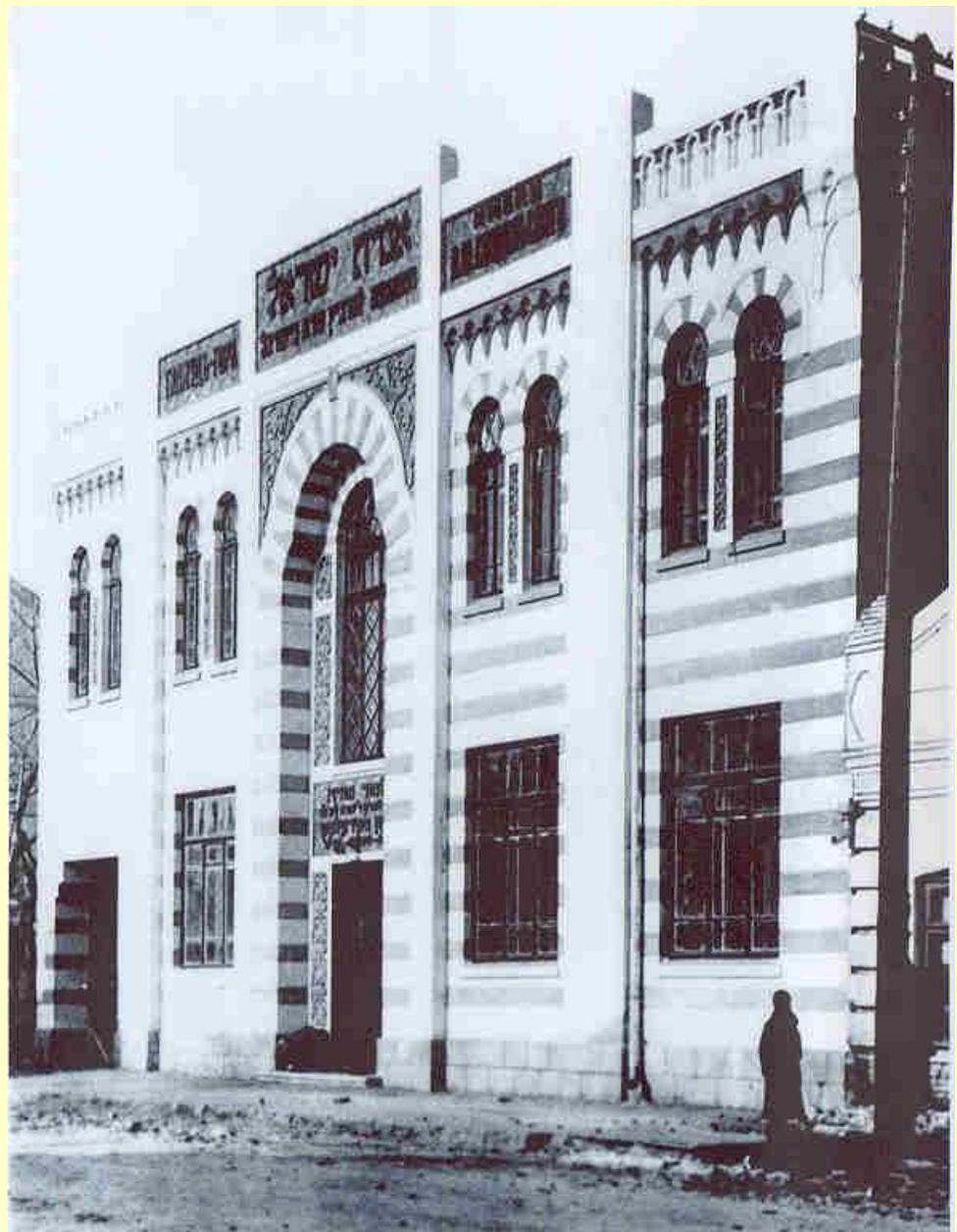


The Skidelskis build the *Skidelski Talmud-Torah School*

located at

22 Konnaya (Horse) Street

(now Dongfeng Street).



## **1905 Ekaterinoslav, Russia**

**Ossinovsky family flees to Nimes France.**

## **1907 Paris France**

**Embarrassed French authorities acquit  
Capt. Alfred Dreyfus.**

## **1907 Nimes, France**

**Ossinovsky family moves to Vladivostok, Russia. S. Ossinovsky  
becomes Trustee of Skideldky and Sons, and Director of Mulin  
Coal Mines.**

**1907 Shanghai--First Ashkenazi Synagogue (Russian  
Jewish) founded in Shanghai**

## **Muling Coal Mine Corporation**

Operated jointly by S.L. Skidelsky and Jilin Province. The headquarters was in Ashihe Street, Nangang District, Harbin.





**S. Ossinovsky**

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**Nadia Spivak**

**Aug 12, 1909 Harbin,  
Manchuria**

**Sarah Kovtun born.**

**1912 Vladivostok  
Sebastian Ossinovsky buys  
property in Harbin, Manchuria.  
Purchases 2.7 Acres on  
62-74 Uchastkovaya St. in the  
Center of the Japanese Business  
District for \$15,000 US.**



**1914-1918 WW I**

**1917 Russia Bolshevik Revolution**

**Russian Jewish soldiers and civilians trekked to China  
escaping atrocities of Russian Revolution**

**1920 Peking**

**Chinese President, Dr. Sun Yat-sen,  
publishes letter supporting Zionism**



## **1921 Vladivostok, Russia**

**Joseph and Jack Ossinovsky leave for Troy, New York to enter college at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. Two Ossinovsky sisters leave to enter the Music Conservatory in Strasbourg, Austria.**



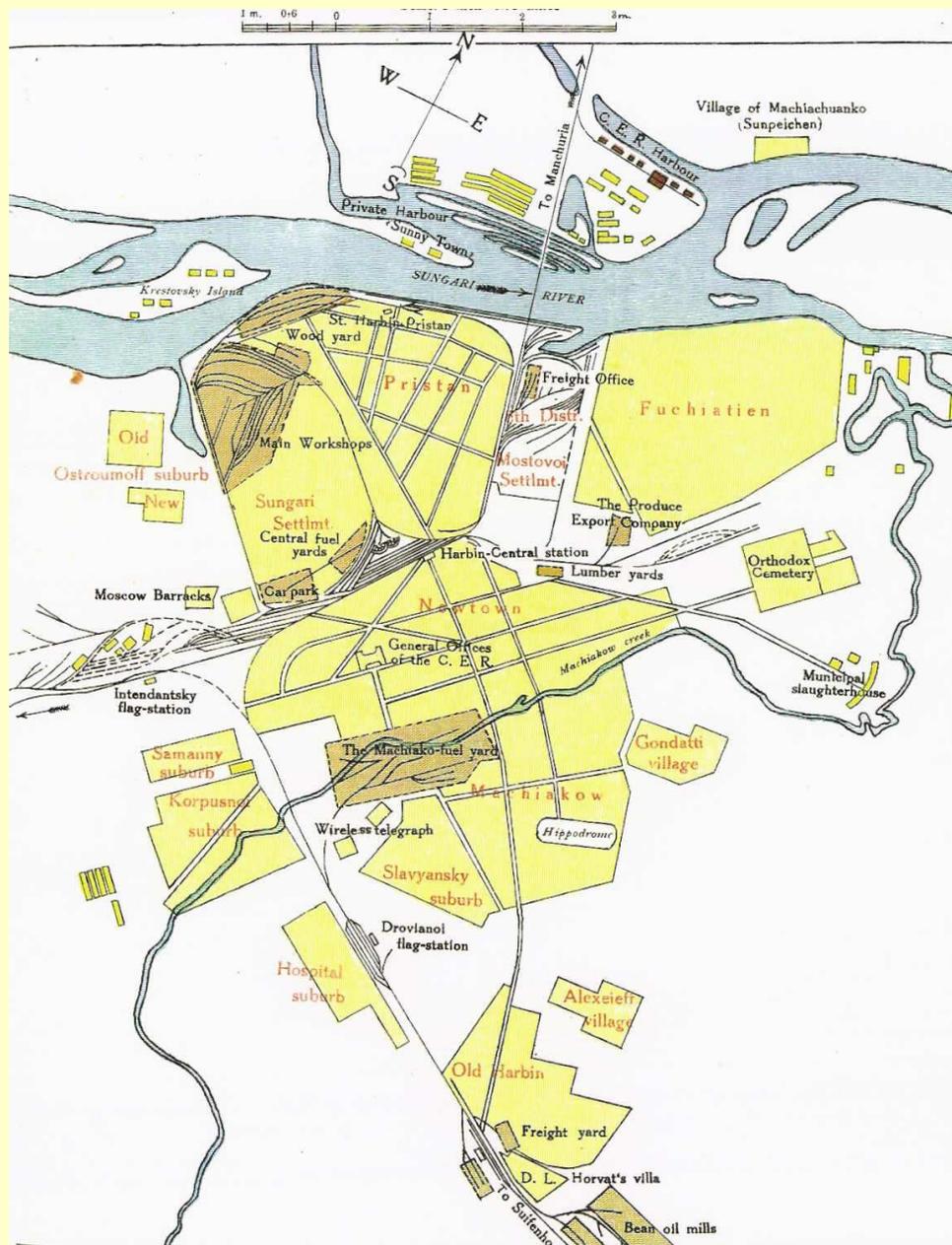
**Rensselaer Polytechnic  
Institute.**

## **1921 Vladivostok, Russia**

**Ossinovsky family moves to Harbin, Manchuria.**

**1921 Shanghai-- 500 Russian Jewish Settlers living in Shanghai**





## **1922 Vladivostok**

**Bolshevik occupation of Vladivostok**

## **1922 Harbin**

**Sebastian Ossinovsky builds one commercial building and 5 houses on property for \$30,000 US.**

## **1924 Shanghai**

**Number of Russian Jews reach 800---settling in the International Settlement--later in the late 20's moving to the French Quarter**

**1925 Sebastian Ossinovsky purchases property in Palestine (today a Tiberias Central Business district)**

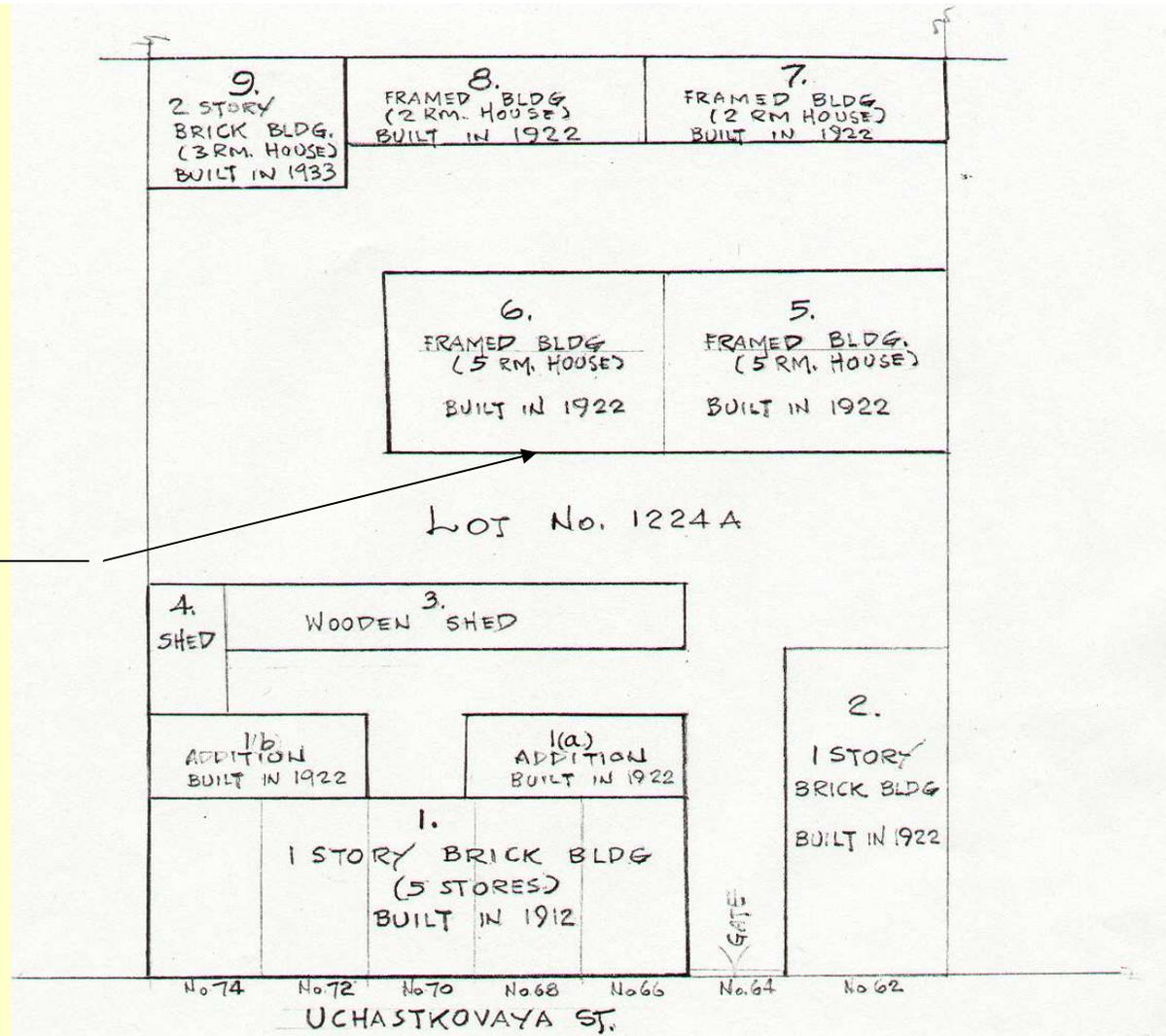


# Ossinovsky Compound and Home in Harbin

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# Ossinovsky Compound

Picture shows



- NOTES: 1. TOTAL AREA OF THE LOT  $\neq$  117600 sq. ft.  
2. TOTAL AREA OF BUILDINGS ON THE LOT  $\neq$  10441 sq. ft.  
3. AT THE TIME OF PURCHASE (IN 1913) ONLY BLDG. No. 1 WAS IN EXISTANCE..

11/9, 1969  
SKETCHED BY: J. Ossin

ENCLOSURE 3.



# Skidelsky Home in Harbin, Manchuria

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**Skidelsky Home in Harbin, Manchuria**

**1924 Harbin**

**Luba, Gala, Sarah,  
Baba Rachel, and  
Frieda, pickling  
cucumbers**



**1927 Pittsfield, Mass  
Joseph Ossinovsky becomes  
Joseph Ossin,  
naturalized citizen of  
the United States.**



# 1927 Harbin, Manchuria

## Sarah Kovtun enters Harbin University of Legal and Political Sciences



# **1928 Harbin**

**Russian Government turns over Chinese Eastern Railway to China----Jews migrate from Harbin to Shanghai**

# **1929           Pittsfield, Massachusetts**

**Joseph Ossin returns to Harbin.**

# **1930 Harbin, Manchuria**

**Sarah Kovtun meets Joseph Ossin at Railroad Club tea dance.**



Chinese Eastern Railway Employees Club

July 6, 1931 Shanghai, China

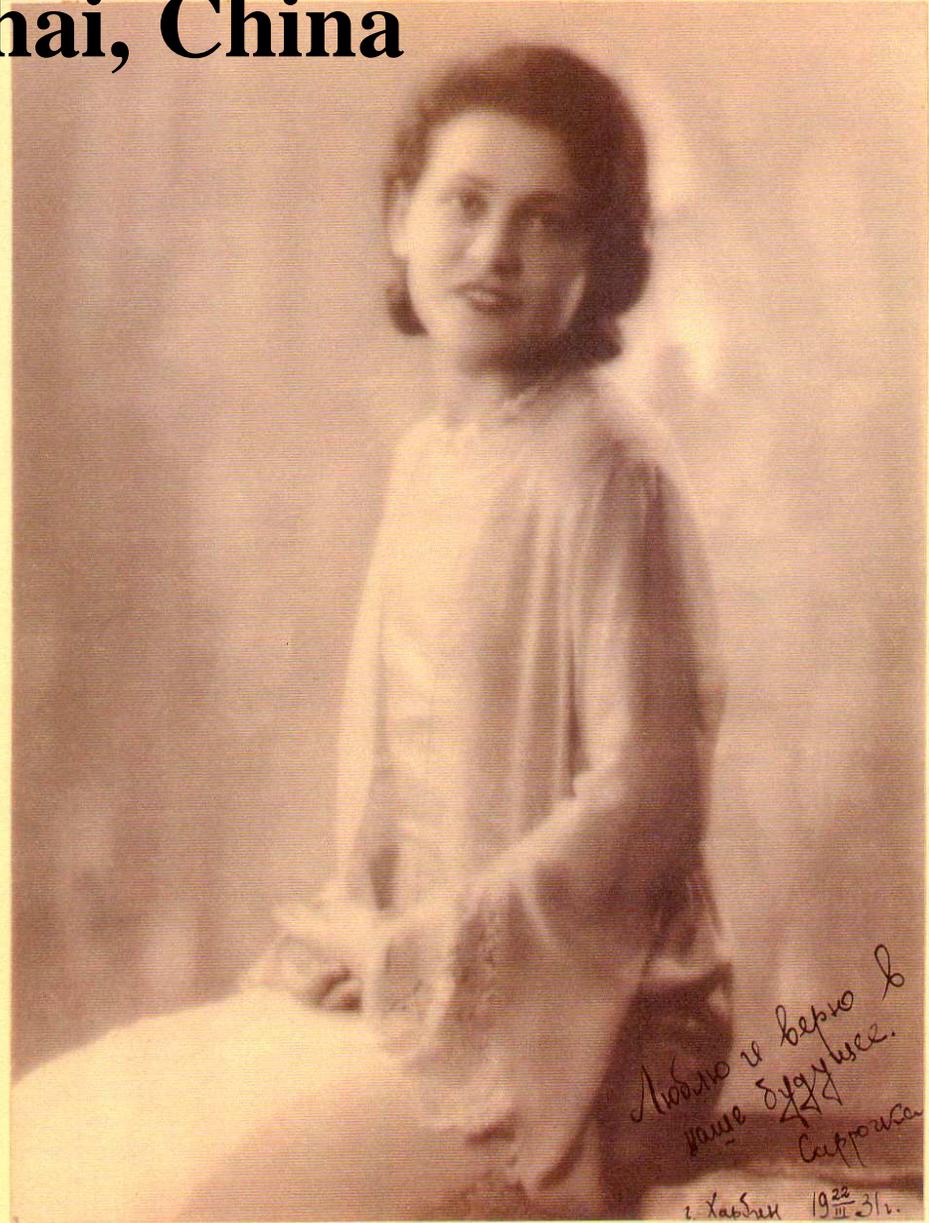


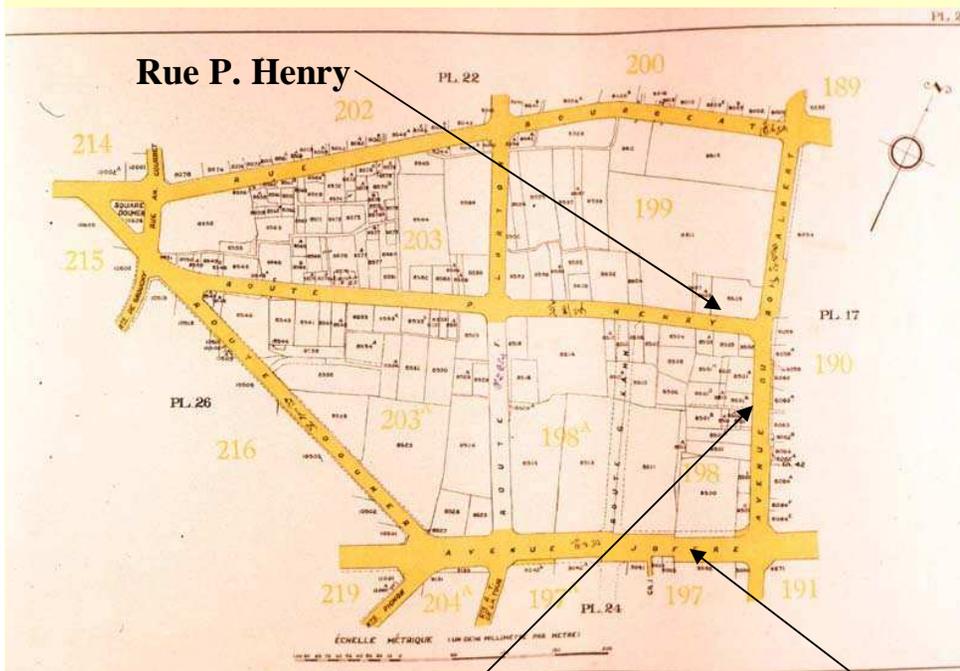
фото-ателье В. П. Никитина, Хабаровск

# Sarah Kovtun marries Joseph Ossin

**1931 Manchuria-Japanese Army occupies all of Manchuria. Sets up puppet state of Manchuko, and puts former child Emperor of China, Pu Yi, as Emperor.**



**1931 Shanghai, China- Ossins move to Shanghai -Purchase apartment in French Concession at 9/7 Rue Paul Henry**



**Avenue Roi Albert**

**Avenue Joffre**

# **1931 Sephardic Jews (Perrys and Kadoories) build Shanghai Jewish School on Seymour Road.**



**MID to late 1930s Sassoons donate millions to help Jews in Germany and Austria migrate to China**

**May 19, 1932**

**Harbin,**

**Manchuria**

**Sarah goes to Harbin to  
have child.**

**Esther Ossin born.**



## Harbin Jewish Hospital

On November 5, 1933, the first floor was completed and started receiving patients. In 1936, the two additional floors were finished.





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**I. Kovtun (Sarah Ossin's father) and workers in Fur trade**

**1937      Nanking, China**  
**Nanking massacre**  
**Japan occupies China**  
**Provisional government set up in**  
**Shanghai.**



**1938  
Shanghai**



**Sarah, Esther and Joseph Ossin**

**March 1938 ----Vienna, Austria--Nazis enter Vienna.  
Esther's 8 year old cousin expelled from school. Family flees to Shanghai 3 mos.  
before Kristallnacht.**

**Jan 7, 1940**

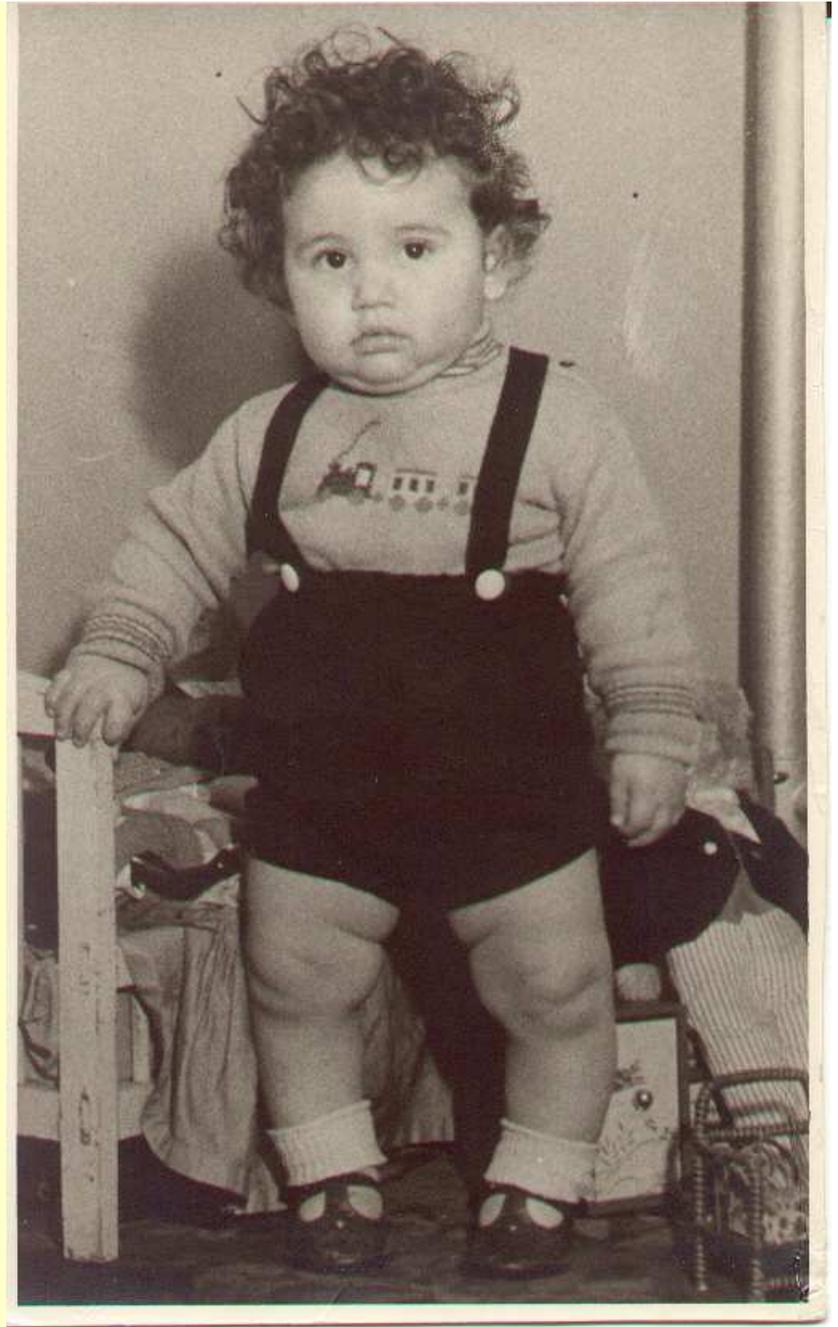
**Shanghai, China**

**Isaac Arcadi (Archie) Ossin  
born at Country Hospital**



**Feb 1940 Harbin**

**Sebastian Ossinovsky dies**



## **October 1941 Shanghai, China**

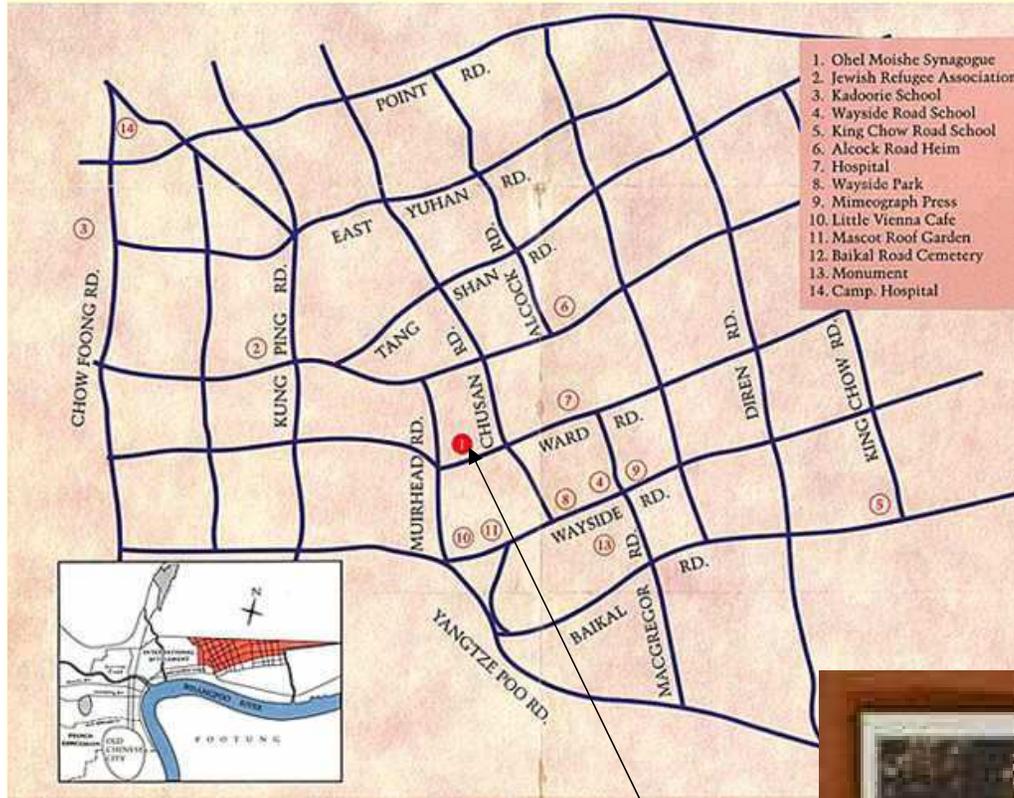
**Joseph Ossin sails to United States.**

## **Dec 7, 1941 Pearl Harbor, Hawaii**

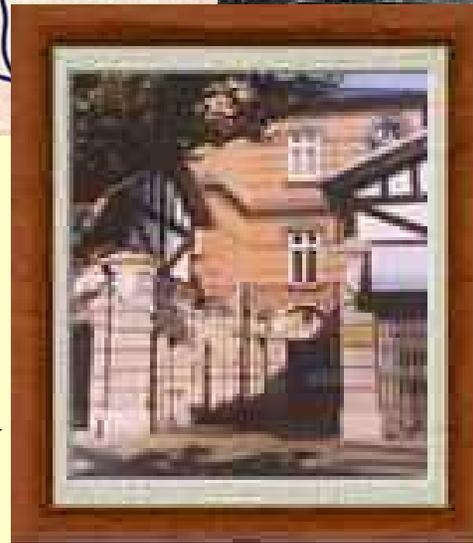
**Japanese Pacific Fleet attacks Pearl Harbor. United States enters World War II. Ossin family separated for four years. Sarah, Esther and Archie are in Shanghai. Joseph is in San Francisco.**

**Feb 1943 Japanese plan to isolate European Jews to island in Yangtze River. Dr. Abraham Kaufman, leader of Harbin Jewish Community and developer of the Jewish Hospital, travels to Tokyo, and meets with Japanese leaders. Dr. Kaufman is instrumental in getting European Jews confined in a suburb of Shanghai.**

# 1943 Shanghai, China--Japanese Occupying government sets up district for European Jewish refugees in Hongkew, a suburb of Shanghai.



Mrs. Bliss, a Jewish refugee from Austria, walks through a typical Chinese lane in Hongkew –European Jewish refugees, as well as Chinese, lived together in overcrowded lanes.



Ohel Moishe Synagogue on Ward Road

## **1943-1944 Shanghai, China**

**Esther in a French School from 1937-1941, and  
Shanghai Jewish School from 1941-1945.**

**Sarah rents extra rooms at #9/7 Paul Henry**

## **1944-1945 Shanghai, China**

**Shanghai frequently bombed. French Quarter  
Bombed. Some close calls for Ossins.**

**Hongkew takes a hit.**

**Sept 2, 1945 Tokyo Bay, Yokohama**  
**Attack Transport Flagship, USS Lavaca, steams into Tokyo Bay for Surrender Ceremonies**

**Sept 8, 1945 Shanghai Harbor**  
**Sarah, Esther and Archie board USS Lavaca, headed for Okinawa, Guam, Pearl Harbor, and San Francisco**

**1945--The Bund at Shanghai Harbor**



**Nov 5, 1945 San Francisco, Calif**  
**USS Lavaca arrives in San Francisco. Sarah, Joseph, Esther and Archie Ossin are reunited.**

# Summer 1948 Jerusalem-Israel declares Independence



**1949 China---Communists takeover China  
-- all Europeans forced to leave**

**Circa 1995  
Sonoma, California**

**Sarah Ossin and  
daughter -in -law  
Myrna Ossin  
in the Wine Country**



# EPILOGUE

In 1945, near the end of WWII, Russia declared war on Japan, invaded Manchuria, and took over Harbin. At the end of the war, the Russians invited all of the leaders of the minority communities to a Black Tie reception. Dr. Kaufman attended this reception. His driver, who was waiting to take Dr. Kaufman home, was himself told to go home since he would not be needed any more that evening. That night the Russians kidnapped Dr. Kaufman and sent him to the Gulag. Since Dr. Kaufman's college roommate was Chaim Weitzman, a Passport to Palestine was immediately issued to Dr. Kaufman, but the Russians would not let him go.

# EPILOGUE

Kaufman spent 10 years in the Gulag, practiced his medicine, and wrote a book on his experience. In 1955, he was finally released, and went to Israel to live, where he joined his other son Teddy, who had a high position in the Israeli government. Teddy's wife, Rasha Segerman, is Esther Ossin life long friend from the Shanghai Jewish School. Dr. Kaufman spent the rest of his life practicing medicine in Israel and is buried there.

The Russians kidnapped members of the Skidelsky family. It has been reported that Solomon, who assumed the the role of the head of Skidelsky and Sons upon his father's death in 1916, and Simeon, and possibly Moses were kidnapped. Solomon was said to have died in prison in Khabarovsk and Simeon in prison in Nikolsk Ussuriysk.

# EPILOGUE

In 1949, China is taken over by the Chinese communists. All Europeans leave China. The new Chinese Communist Government “Nationalizes” all the Ossinovsky properties and businesses. Anatole and Henrietta Ossinovsky stay on in Harbin to run these operations for the Chinese, and are one of a few Europeans to stay. Anatole is instrumental in financially aiding many Jews leaving Harbin to emigrate to other countries. In 1955 the Ossinovsky’s only son, Lyoka, dies of a kidney infection at the age of 8, and is buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Harbin. Although it is difficult to leave their child’s grave in Harbin, Anatole and Henrietta leave Harbin in the 1964 and resettle in Switzerland. The Ossinovsky siblings decide to sell the property their father bought in Tiberias, Israel, and give the proceeds to Anatole and Henrietta so that they could start again in Switzerland.

# EPILOGUE

Today the Skidelsky House in Harbin is used as a Club House for High Ranking Chinese Communist Party and Government officials.

The Ossinovsky house is the home for 20 Chinese families.

Joseph Ossin passed away in October 1975.

Esther Ossin is married to Don Woll. They have been married for 53 years, have three married children, and have three grandchildren. Esther and Don live in San Rafael, California.

Archie Ossin is married to Myrna Shulman. They have been married for 37 years and have 4 children and one grandchild. Archie and Myrna live in Altamonte Springs, Florida.

## **EPILOGUE**

Armund Klein, grandson of Sonia Ossinovsky, and son of Gita Klein (formerly Gita Skidelsky), lives just outside of Washington D.C., in Annandale, Virginia.

Robert Skidelsky, great- grandson of Sonia Ossinovsky, and Grandson of Liza Skidelsky, was made a peer by John Major in 1991, and took a seat in United Kingdom's House of Lords.

Teddy and Rasha Kaufman are the heads of Igud Yotzi Zin, an organization in Israel that helps Jews in Israel, who were formerly from China.

Sept 22, 2004 Sarah Ossin passed away at the Jewish Home in San Francisco, California at the age of 95.

## China Resource List

- **BOOKS**

- *China Legacy*- Marion Cuba (a novel)
- *Echoes of Chinese History*- Hope Willis Rathbun
- *China Emerges*-Steven Warshaw
- *Strangers Always*-Rena Krasno (a novel)
- *The Jews of Harbin Live on in my Heart*-Teddy Kaufman
- *Escape to Shanghai*-James R. Ross
- *Jewish Genealogy*-Gary Mokotoff and Warren Blatt
- *Secrets and Spies – The Harbin Files*--- Mara Moustafine
- *Hotel Bolivia*—Leo Spitzer
- *The River at the Center of the World*—Simon Winchester

- **WEBSITES**

- <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org>
- <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsources/vjw/Chinatoc.html>
- [www.JewishSightseeing.com/shanghai/china/19980410-shanghai\\_ liberman.htm](http://www.JewishSightseeing.com/shanghai/china/19980410-shanghai_ liberman.htm)
- [www.jewsofchina.org/communities/index.asp](http://www.jewsofchina.org/communities/index.asp)
- [www.stevemorse.org/](http://www.stevemorse.org/)
- [www.docurama.com/productdetail.html?productid=Nv-NVG-9695](http://www.docurama.com/productdetail.html?productid=Nv-NVG-9695)
- [www.han-yuan.com/](http://www.han-yuan.com/) -- Deke Erh and Tess Johnson -- Old China Hand Press
- [www.jewishgen.org/](http://www.jewishgen.org/)
- [www.jewishgen.org/ShtetlSeeker/](http://www.jewishgen.org/ShtetlSeeker/)
- [www.jewishgen.org/DNA/](http://www.jewishgen.org/DNA/)
- <http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/harbin/index.htm>

# China Resource List

**PASSAGE THROUGH CHINA: The Jewish Communities of Harbin, Tientsin and Shanghai.** Beth Hatefutsoth, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora. Tel Aviv, 1986.

**Jonathan Goldstein, THE JEWS OF CHINA.** M.E. Sharpe, Armonk, NY, 1999.

**Yaacov Liberman, MY CHINA: Jewish Life in the Orient 1900-1950.** Judah L. Magnes Museum, Berkeley, CA. Gefen Publishing House, Jerusalem and New York, 1998. [Click here for excerpts.](#)

**Mara Moustafine, SECRETS AND SPIES: The Harbin Files.** Random House Australia, 2002.

**Qu Wei and Li Shuxiao, THE JEWS IN HARBIN.** Social Sciences Academic Press, China, 2006.

**Esther Robbins-Hutton, SOJOURN: A Family Saga.** Esfir Books, 1997.

**Rabbi Marvin Tokayer and Mary Swartz, THE FUGU PLAN: The Untold Story of the Japanese and the Jews During World War II.** Gefen Publishing House, 2004.

**Amleto Vespa, SECRET AGENT OF JAPAN.** Garden City Publishing Co., Garden City, New York, 1941.

**David Wolf, TO THE HARBIN STATION: The Liberal Alternative in Russian Manchuria, 1898-1914.** Stanford University Press, 1999.

## ARTICLES & PAPERS

**Boris Bresler, HARBIN JEWISH COMMUNITY (1898-1958): Politics, Prosperity, Adversity.**

Paper presented at the Symposium on Jewish Diasporas in China, John K. Fairbank

Center for East Asian Research, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, August 16-18, 1992.

**Dan Ben-Canaan, "NOSTALGIA VS. HISTORICAL REALITY.**

Speech given at the International Forum on the History and Culture of Harbin Jews, Harbin, China, June 17-19, 2006.