Other Excerpts on Jewish life in Horodok from D. Schreiber’s memoirs:

Father would sometimes bring an “oirech” (a poor Jewish man travelling from town to town to seek financial aid) for the Sabbath. The “guest” would be treated with the respect due a welcome relative; he would be seated at my father’s right and honored with making the “Kiddish” prayer. Because of his own occasional financial stress, father was very considerate of people in need of help. He was instrumental in establishing the town’s “Gemlas Chesed”, an organization which made loans, without interest, to needy people. He, himself, never made use of this organization because he established it. Instead, he would borrow from Uncle Chaim or Uncle Velvel (mother’s youngest stepbrothers) who were fairly successful businessmen. (Uncle Velvel used his spare time to turn the soft wooden slats which came with bolts of yardgoods — he was in the yardgoods business — into picture frames, boxes of all sizes, baskets and similar useful things, and some toys. For all of this he had a large assortment of carving knives, hammers, pliers and other tools.)

The Jewish Orthodox religion had a very strong hold on my father, as it did on some of his wealthiest and most influential Jewish clients. He ruled us with a strong discipline and was intolerant of the “free-thinkers” in the family (this included my mother, my sister Sarah, me and, in a minor way, my brothers Hyman and Jake, and my sister Jennie). He did not hesitate to punish the children physically and by “lectures”. The latter were often worse than the former, so much so, that my mother, whom he lectured often, wished he had employed the former method of assuring her a place in heaven. He was, however, inherently kind and often made amends for his harshness. When he was kind, there was a sort of holiday feeling in the air and in everybody’s faces, including his own; and this made it even harder to live through the periods of “strict constructionism”. Fortunately, there were more happy periods than the other; we expected them on Friday evenings and on holidays and were seldom disappointed. The Pesach holiday (the Jewish Easter) was of special significance. We celebrated the exodus of our ancestors from Egypt where they had been slaves for centuries. For this celebration, every male in the house was a king or prince, and every female, a queen or princess, and each was dressed in new clothes. To buy new clothes for this occasion was a “mitzvah” (a good deed), for which it was even a virtue to borrow money, if need be, and father sometimes did just that. He would borrow from Uncle Hyman or Uncle Velvel. On such occasions father would minimize his embarrassment by referring to Sholom Aleichem’s saying: “Pawn all you have, just so you are rich.”

Later, in America, my father was considerably relaxed and mellow. He was on exceptionally good terms with my oldest brother, Hyman, in whose home he lived during the last years of his life. He was less intolerant of “free-thinkers” and even allowed my youngest sister, Fanny, to trim his beard with a scissors (instead of singeing it, as my mother had to do).

My parents had not known each other before their marriage. A “Shadchen” (match-maker) made all arrangements between their families, which were about equal in social standing — economically and culturally, particularly in Jewish orientation. On the morning of the wedding-day my father’s family brought him from Solobkovitz to mother’s home in Gorodok. My mother’s youngest stepsister, Tahnte Sorka, found out which one of the guests was the groom and pointed him out to mother. She was pleased — he was handsome. I don’t know if my father had a similar experience. If he had, he must have been very pleased because my mother’s face, as I knew it, though tired, sad and worn, showed traces of unmistakable beauty in an earlier period of her life.

By David B. Schreiber

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