

The Feldbin / Rabinowitz Family from Pogost

by Carola Murray-Seegert, Ph.D



*Biff with his mother and aunt Mary at Jones Beach, Long Island NY, 1954
L-R: Mary Rabinowitz Rosoff, Rose Rabinowitz Liff, Biff Liff*

This story is dedicated to my godfather Samuel "Biff" Liff, to his mother Rose Rabinowitz Liff, and to their large and wonderful family. May their names live on in our memories.

The Feldbin / Rabinowitz Family

Rose Rabinowitz was born in 1882 in Pogost, a small shtetl 56 miles east of Minsk in the Igumen District, Minsk Province, which was then part of the Russian Empire. Because 'pogost' is a generic term meaning 'enclosure' or 'walled area,' several towns in the region share this name. We know, however, that the "Pogost" where Rose grew up was the shtetl located 6 miles east of the town of Byerazino ('Berèsin' in Yiddish), on the Berazina River.



Under the Tsars, this region was known for its dense forests and exceptional timber, which was tall and strong enough to supply masts for sailing ships. Rose's grandfather Israel was a timber merchant who owned a turpentine factory. Her father Herschel was the foreman for a logging company that shipped tree trunks to ports downriver. Hersch's half-brother Leizer (whose son would later be known as Alexander Orlov) ran a successful lumber business in Bobruisk, a port on the Berezina river, some miles downstream from Pogost (Gazur, 2001), and Hersch's son Isaac later owned forests and a sawmill near Minsk (Losman, R. 2002) It is likely that most of Rose's relatives were involved in the timber trade in some way.

According to the first all-Russian census conducted in 1897, Pogost had a Jewish population of 511 persons (Shtetls of Belarus, 2012). Based on the number of relatives identified in the 1973 Ohio Probate Court settlement of Alexander Orlov's estate (55 persons, and the list was not all-inclusive), it is possible to imagine that almost every Jewish resident of Pogost was somehow connected to Rose's family.

The family patriarch, Zalman Felde, was born in Brody, Galicia (then part of the Habsburg-Austrian Empire). Brody was an extremely important center of Jewish culture; its flourishing economy, stimulated by special status granted to the city in 1779, gave Brody's merchants the right to trade tax-free all over Europe. Nevertheless, Zalman left this large, vibrant Jewish community and moved to Pogost in the first decade of the 19th century, at some time before the Napoleonic Wars (Feldbaum, S. 1989). It is as if he abandoned one of the comfortable American East Coast cities of the Federal period to pioneer a clearing in Kentucky. We don't know why Zalman made this move, but a possible motivation may have been business prospects spurred by completion of the Berezinsky Water System (begun 1797,

completed 1805). This was a series of dams, lochs and canals linking the Western Dvina River at Ulla and the Berezina River at Borisov, thus creating a navigable waterway between the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea (Babitsky, 2002). The improved transportation will have had a positive effect on commerce along the valley of the Berezina, and especially on the timber trade. I speculate that this development may have attracted Zalman to Pogost.

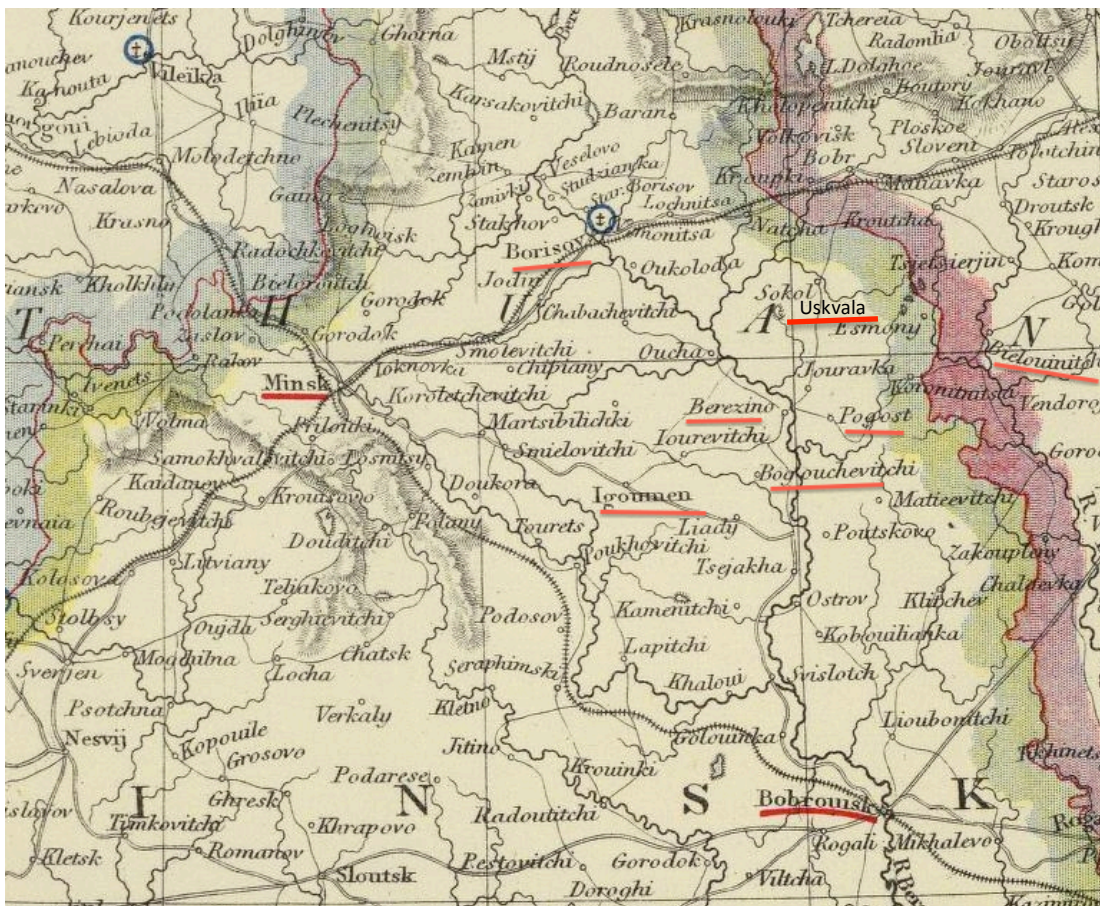
For whatever reason, Zalman settled there before 1812, married and had at least two sons, Israel and Moses. We know nothing about Moses except his name, but Israel Feldbin (or "Feldbein," as the family pronounced it) was Rose's grandfather. Israel was a very successful merchant who spoke fluent Polish and Russian in addition to Hebrew and Yiddish. He traveled far and wide on business. Israel's last, greatest coup took place in 1863 when he rode to Warsaw to persuade Count Potocki, a member of the old Polish nobility who owned the Libuscina Forest surrounding Pogost, to sell him the rights to the valuable bark of all the forest's linden trees for a period of 25 years. In the words of Israel's youngest grandson, Sol Feldbaum, "This deal was so stupendous like the Alaska Oil Strike." The Count's family contested the lease, which led to a 47-year-long lawsuit, but when it was settled in Israel's favor, the Feldbins were known in Pogost as "the New Millionaires" (Felbaum, S. 1973)

Israel married twice. Family memory says he had twenty children, but I have traced only ten of them. Israel's first wife Yenta Cohen bore three children in Pogost: Herschel (b. 1841 - later Rose's father), Rivka (b. 1846) and Bashe (b. ca. 1850). Yenta Cohen died shortly after Basche's birth and Israel married a widow from Bobruisk named Ente Mirenburg (néé Kaplan), who brought along a son from her first marriage. Israel and Ente had six children: Itke (b. 1851). Louis (b. 1856), Etke (b. 1861), Chaim (b. about 1863), Leizer (b. about 1868), and Jossl (b. 1870).

They, their spouses and children had family and business connections throughout the region of the Berezino valley, as far west as Minsk and as far south as Pinsk (see annotated map, below). But due to increasing instability in the Russian Empire and increasingly anti-Semitic attacks and pogroms, at least eight of Israel's children and forty-six of his grandchildren left Russia for the United States between 1887 and 1932. The table below gives the details of those who emigrated.

Name	Dates	Immigrated	Spouse and Children
Herschel "Harry" Rabinowitz	b 2 May 1841 d. 20 Oct 1934 Bronx	Sept 1910 w. Beile, Chaie and Beisse	Beile Fried (from Igumen), 13 children
Riva "Rebecca" Feldbin	b. 1 Jan 1846 d. 2 July 1944 S.F	1909	Nisan Ursditsky (from Igumen), 3 children
Bashe "Bessie" Feldbin	b. ? 1850? (a guess) d. ? New York ?	"One of the first to immigrate," but	Louis "Max" Katz (from Berezino), 1 or 2 children

		when?	
Itke "Edith" Feldbin	b. 1851 d. ? abt. 1935 in Mercer PA (son Sol had grocery there)	14 March 1922 (widow?)	Anschel Koornick, 6 children. Son Mordechai remained in Bogouchevitchi
Louis Feldbaum	b. abt 1856 d. abt 1935 NJ	about 1896-1899	Basche "Bessie" Helfand, 6 kids in US
Etke "Esther" Feldbin	b. 10 April 1861 d. 23 June 1945 Queens	1907 Husband already in NY	David Benenson (from Borisov) 6 children in US
Chaim Feldbin	b. abt 1863? d. 26 Feb 1920 in Pogost	His widow came to NY in 1922	Guta Starobinetz. Had 14 children. Sons Mowska & David remained in Pinsk
Leizer "Lazar" Feldbin	b. abt 1868 d. abt 1937 in Moscow	No, but son Leiba did in 1937.	Anna Zaretsky from Bobruisk. Daughter Freida, son Leiba (a.k.a Alexander Orlov)
Zeev Yosef "Jossl" Feldbin	b. 25 Jan 1870 d. 16 Oct 1949 in NJ	21 Feb 1898	Esther (maiden name unk.) Rose and Harry (Ross)



1835 Map of the Minsk Gubernia. The River Berezina originates north of Borisov. Borisov, Berezino and Bobruisk were important ports. Feldbin/Rabinowitz relatives lived in the underlined towns.

Rose's father Herschel was born on 2 May 1841. At that time, having a son forced into the Russian army was the fate most feared by Jewish parents: boys as young as twelve could be drafted, Jewish observance was almost impossible once recruited, and the term of service was twenty-five years. Only sons were exempt from conscription, which meant that Herschel was in danger of being drafted once his half brother Louis was born in 1856. Family historian Sol Feldbaum tells us that the family used a dramatic strategy to avoid military conscription: a faked adoption. Hersh's brother-in-law Louis Katz (Bashe's husband) was in charge of Pogost's Jewish Record Office. Louis knew of a man named Rabinowitz whose children were all female, and persuaded him to adopt Hersch. In this way, as his 'only son,' Hersch gained exemption from



Herschel Feldbin Rabinowitz (1841-1934)

military service, and in consequence changed his surname from Feldbin to Rabinowitz.

Herschel married Beile Fried (who came from Igumen) in the late 1860s. Family memory says they had thirteen children; we know that least eleven of them immigrated to the United States. Although we cannot identify a specific event that motivated Rose and her kin to leave Russia, the years between 1881 and 1887 were marred by pogroms as well as by sharply reduced educational and social opportunities for Jews (for more information, see "Timeline of the Lifshitz and Rabinowitz Families" in the Appendix). The Rabinowitz siblings began to emigrate at this time: Abraham and Samuel were the first to leave, arriving in New York in 1887 or 1888; Solomon followed in 1890. The boys worked in delicatessens or grocery stores and sent money back to Pogost so the rest of the family, including their parents, could follow (see chart, below). The last of the siblings to emigrate was Rose's older sister, Leah Rabinowitz Gutin. She and her husband Mendel arrived in the U.S. in 1932.

Name	Immigrated (Age)	Comment
Abraham	abt 1887 (14)	Moved to PA 1910
Samuel	abt 1888 (11)	Died 1918 MA
Solomon	abt 1890 (18)	Surname later "Rabb"
Molly	abt 1895 (14)	Later "Krainin"
Sadie	abt 1895 (5)	Later "Feldman"
Rose	15 Dec 1897 (15)	Later "Liff." Travelling with Sheine Katz & 3 children.
Mary	22 July 1900 (15)	Later "Rosoff." Travelling with mother Beile.

Sidney Helman	5 July 1906 (15)	Moved from steerage to 2nd class on ship
Chaie	26 Sept 1910 (40)	Husband Isaac Zaretsky already in U.S. Arrived with parents Hersch & Beile & daughter Beisse
Isaac	1 Aug 1921 (43)	With wife Berta, children Abraham, Rebecca
Leah	9 March 1932 (61)	With husband Mendel Gutin. Children Seymour and Ruth (Shifrin) already in U.S.

Roda on the Road

Rose was called 'Roda' or 'Rodl' in Pogost. In the fall of 1897, when she was 15 years old, the family arranged for her to travel to America in the company of Mrs. Sheine Katz, 27 years old, who came from the nearby town of Byerazino (in Yiddish, Berezin). Sheine (née Feldman) was Rose's first cousin; her husband Sam Katz lived on Grand Street in Lower Manhattan and she was bringing their three children, Edel, 5, Bashe, 3 and Frenkie, 2 to join him. Although Hersch and Beile could be sure that her brothers would watch out for Rose once she got to Gotham, it would not have been proper (or safe) for an unmarried girl of 15 to make such a long journey on her own. This was the second time Mrs. Katz had traveled back and forth between Russia and the US, and she knew she would need help with the little ones. Arrangements were made. Hersch bought Rose's ticket and Beile sewed coins into the lining of her daughter's skirt.

Beginning in the 1860s, major steamship companies began sending Yiddish-speaking agents into the towns of the Pale. They offered package tickets, which included rail travel and ship's passage. The route via Germany and England was the cheapest, but it was slower and passengers had to stop and wait for connections, staying for several nights in Hamburg and Liverpool. The Red Star line, operating from the Belgian port of Antwerp, offered direct travel from Europe to the U.S. Although these tickets were more expensive, Rose and Mrs. Katz chose this alternative. Since observant Jews would not travel during the high holidays, they waited until the end of October to start their journey, although this increased the likelihood of encountering early winter storms.

Rose and her companions began their journey in a horse-drawn wagon, travelling 6 miles west to Berezin, and then about 30 miles north to the nearest railway station, which was probably Bobr, a stop on the Moscow - Minsk - Warsaw line. Covering a distance like this could take one to two days, depending on weather conditions. Fall and spring were the worst, because the unpaved roads were very muddy and it was easy for a wagon to get stuck. Perhaps the little party of travellers stopped for the night in Uchvala, where Rose's sister Leah lived with her husband Mendel Gutin.



At the time, Prussia only granted transit visas to passengers who held tickets on German steamship lines. This meant that, to reach Antwerp, Rose had to take a circuitous route in order to avoid Prussian territory. The modern map (above) gives an idea of their route.

The travellers had to change trains several times along the way, with all the attendant difficulties of keeping track of young children and finding new seats at each juncture. The local train from Bobr brought them to Minsk, where they boarded a long-distance train headed for Warsaw. In Warsaw, they changed trains again, travelling south to reach the Austrian border. Passing through Vienna, they continued on their long journey through Switzerland and France on the way to Belgium.

Rose, Sheine Katz and the children finally reached Antwerp at the end of November. Their ship, the S. S. Noordland sailed on the 27th of the month. The travellers spent



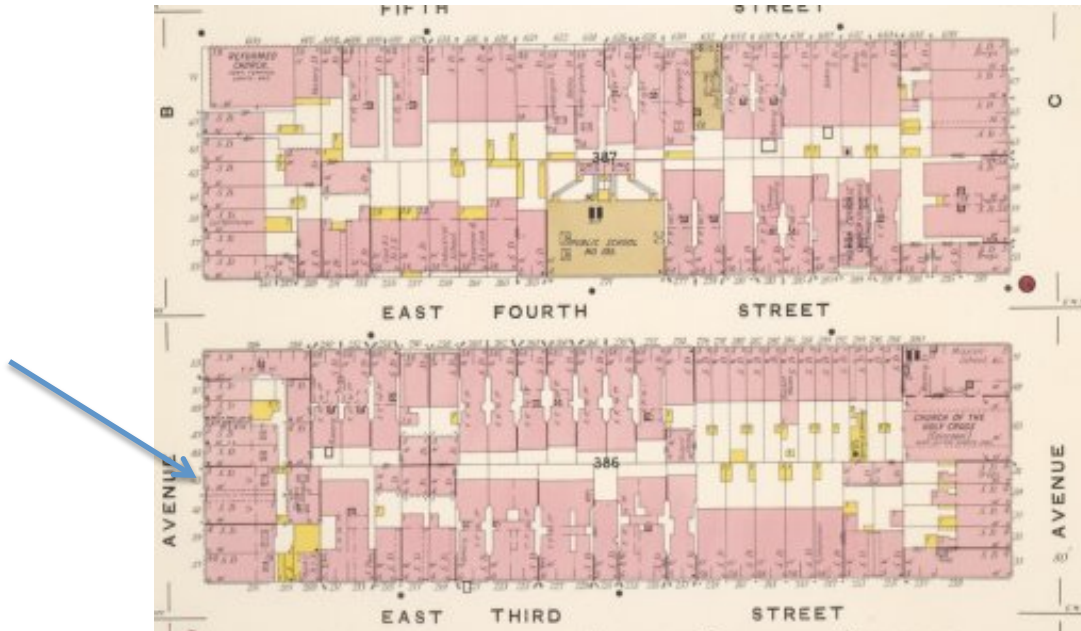
S.S. Noordland of the Red Star Line

twenty days at sea, arriving at Ellis Island on 15 December 1897. Decades later, Rose still remembered how seasick they all were. Mrs. Katz took to her bunk, leaving Rose to cope with the toddlers. Travellers complain, today, when forced to sit next to young children during an airplane flight of a few hours: imagine spending days on a crowded train, and

then three weeks on a ship with three little ones. Rose survived, no doubt with the same sense of humor and twinkle in her eye her family remembers.

The Delicatessen on Avenue B

When Rose arrived in New York, her brother Abe and his wife Rebecca were running a delicatessen at 43 Avenue B on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The map below shows the location; their shop is on the left side of the lower block in the image, between East 3rd and East 4th Streets.



Original 1903 Sandborn map at
<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/id?1996113>

Tightly packed buildings lined Avenue B. A tailor shop occupied the courtyard behind Abe's storefront. There were two bakeries and a junk dealer nearby; at the far end, fronting on Avenue C was the Church of the Holy Cross and its rectory. PS 105 was just around the corner at 271 East 4th street; Abe's eldest children, Willie and Rosa, probably went to school there.

The Rabinowitz delicatessen was one of five storefronts in a row extending from 43 to 51 Avenue B; it was constructed in 1880 and is still standing (see photo below). The 1900 U.S. Census shows that Abe's family lived on the first floor above the store, while four of Abe's employees shared rooms under the roof. Rose lived several blocks away, boarding with a family named Abramowitz in their apartment at 91 Allen St. from which she would walk to work each morning. One of the young men working for Abe was Morris Lifshitz, an immigrant from Moscow. Morris worked behind the counter, Rose was the cashier. They fell in love. Within the next two years, Morris and Rose would elope to San Francisco, marry, and then return to New York where their first child, Alexander, was born in April 1903.

No one remembers why Morris and Rose decided to elope, but it must have been a dramatic step for a traditionally raised couple to take. Did her big brothers have another husband in mind for her? Unless there's a trove of old letters somewhere, containing the details of this story, it will forever remain a puzzle.



This is 43 -51 Avenue B, where Rose and Morris first met. The Rabinowitz' delicatessen was the storefront on the far right, now boarded up.



This is the building at 91 Allen St (corner of Broome), where Rose lived in 1900, boarding with the Abramowitz family.

The Rabinowitz and Lifschitz Families in Boston

Morris and Rose moved from New York to Boston around 1905. Their second child, a daughter named Florence, was born there in 1907. By 1910, they were living at 65 Intervale Street, an attractive triplex that was only 5 years old at the time. Each of the building's apartments had three bedrooms and a bathroom, while the two upper floors had large open porches. Rose's sister Mary had married Frank Rosoff in Boston in 1904 (he was an immigrant from Borisov). They and their children lived in the same building, in a separate apartment. Abe Rabinowitz, who had been Morris' boss in New York, was starting a new business in Philadelphia; his wife Rebecca and their children were staying with the Rosoffs at this time, waiting until they could join Abe in their new home.



65 Intervale, home of the Lifschitz and Rosoff families in 1910, is the pale blue building in the center of the photo.

By this time, Frank and Morris had gone into business together, opening the Rosoff & Lifschitz Delicatessen at 839 Washington Street. Sam Rabinowitz, who had been a bachelor when Rose arrived from Russia, was now married to Jennie Koslichuk. Around 1905, the couple also left Manhattan and Sam opened his own delicatessen near Boston's City Hall.

The baby of the family, Sidney Rabinowitz, arrived in the US in 1906. He initially stayed with his brother Solomon in New York, but by 1910, he was boarding with Sam and Jenny at 34 Causeway Street, near the North Union Station, and working for Sam as a salesman. The building at Causeway St. must have been a large one, since it

housed ten members of the Rabinowitz and Koslichuk families, as well as six restaurant employees.

Household	Name	Age	Sex	Marital Status	Occupation	Place of Birth	Year of Immigration	Language Spoken at Home	Language Spoken Outside Home	Religion	Education	Value of Real Estate	Value of Personal Effects
3437116	Rabinowitz Samuel Head	33	M	W		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Rabinowitz Rose	25	F	W		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Rabinowitz Chaie	16	F	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Rabinowitz Bessie	14	F	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Rabinowitz George	12	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Rabinowitz Sidney	10	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Krainin Samuel	22	M	S		Brooklyn	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Feldman Sadie	20	F	S		Brooklyn	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Levy Joseph	18	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Levy Isaac	16	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Levy Morris	14	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Levy Samuel	12	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Levy Isaac	10	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Levy Samuel	8	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Levy Isaac	6	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Levy Samuel	4	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500
	Levy Isaac	2	M	S		New York	1877	English	Polish		High School	1000	500

Excerpt from 1910 Federal Census showing the residents of 34 Causeway St, Boston.

Solomon Rabinowitz was the last to join the clan in Boston. After his marriage to Jenny Koslichuk's sister Rose in 1897, the couple lived in New Jersey, Manhattan and Brooklyn. When his parents Hersch and Beile Rabinowitz arrived in New York in September 1910, accompanied by Sol's sister Chaie and her daughter Bessie, Sol's address at 136 Watkins St. in Brooklyn was the one given to the Ellis Island officials. Once Hersch and Beile had settled down (probably near one of their married daughters - either Molly Krainin, who lived in Brooklyn, or Sadie Feldman, who lived in the Bronx), Sol and Rose left for Boston. There, they opened a delicatessen on Mass Ave. Your family was rapidly expanding its involvement in the city's restaurant and wholesale food sector: see the Boston Business Directory (below), which shows the Rabinowitz, Rosoff and Lifshitz names among the Delicatessen listings.

- REVOC BIRME, 1031 DORCHESTER AV.
- ☞ Pure Food Delicatessen Buffet Lunch Co. Inc. 136 Mass. av.
- Rabinowitz Solomon, 277 Mass. av.
- Rabinowitz & Co. Inc. 130 Summer and 10 City Hall av.
- Regan & Davis, 2 Haviland
- Ripple Harry, 67 Beach
- Rosen Joseph, 40 N. Russell
- Rosenblum & Porter, 102A Leverett
- Rosoff Benjamin, 447 W. B'way
- Rosoff & Co. Inc. 97 Summer
- Rosoff & Lifshitz, 839 Wash.

Around the same time, young Sidney started his own meat processing business. "In the first year, with a horse and wagon, he sold 500,00 pounds of cured briskets and tongues with a value of \$150,000" reported the Boston Herald. By the 1950s, the Colonial Provision Co. was one of the largest businesses of its kind in the U.S.

The Liffs

Rose and Morris' third child, a son named George, was born in December 1911 at Boothbay Hospital. The family had outgrown the apartment on Intervale St. and moved to 260 Seaver St. The Rosoff & Lifshitz restaurant was booming, and in June 1916, your parents threw a big party to celebrate Alexander's bar mitzvah. As the Boston Jewish Advocate reported:

Mr. and Mrs. Morris Lifschitz of 260 Seaver St., celebrated the confirmation of their son Alexander last Sunday. Master Lifschitz delivered an address, and the guests were entertained by Florence Lifschitz, Ruth Rosoff, Beatrice Kranin, Miss Sieff, and Miss F. Rabinowitz. The guests were: Mr. and Mrs. T. Kranin of New York, Mr. and Mrs. S. Rabinowitz, Mr. and Mrs. F. Rosoff, Mr. and Mrs. L. Rosoff, Mr. and Mrs. B. Rosoff, Mr. and Mrs. J. Plachter, Dr. and Mrs. Ettelson, Mr. and Mrs. Trodman, Mr. and Mrs. A. Finenson, Mr. and Mrs. A. Berger, Mr. and Mrs. L. Green, Mr. and Mrs. S. H. Rabinowitz, Mr. and Mrs. P. Rahlin and Harry E. Dubinsky.

I wish I could have seen Florence, Ruth and Beatrice's performance. It must have been quite the event. With so many Rabinowitz and Rosoff restaurateurs present, the catering was surely magnificent!

Rose and Morris' fourth child, Samuel (nicknamed Biff) was born in April 1919. Around 1925, the family moved again, this time choosing a large apartment on the second floor of a new building at 2021 Commonwealth Avenue in Brookline. There was room for all of the children and a live-in maid, as well.

Morris' mother Malke was a widow, living in Brooklyn with his Morris' brother Samuel Winston, who taught Biology at Boys' High School, his wife Henrietta, a dentist, and their son Gerald, who was Biff's age. Biff spent a couple of summers with the Winstons in Meyersville New Jersey, in a family compound shared with Henrietta's Romanian relatives. Biff remembered his grandmother Malke as being rather a haughty person; she creamed her face, wore large amounts of lace and slept late in the mornings, quite unlike his busy



mother. Grandmother Mary sometimes came to visit in Boston. Biff and she were alone in the apartment one Halloween evening when a policeman rang the doorbell. Biff's older brother George had been caught playing a holiday prank, and the officer had brought him home. Mary didn't speak English, so Biff couldn't understand exactly what she said to his mother afterwards, but he well remembered the harsh tone in which she castigated her daughter-in-law for having raised such a badly behaved son!

Rose kept a kosher kitchen, since her father Herschel, now a widower who lived in the Bronx with Rose's sister Sadie Feldman, liked to stay with the family when he came to Boston. Biff remembered him, "looking like God" with his long, white beard, wearing his fringed tallit and praying in front of a window - one of those pictured on the second floor (right).

By the time of the 1930 Census, the Lifshitz family had shortened its surname to "Liff." The eldest son, Alexander, was living nearby with his new wife, Alice Pick. Florence was still at home, working as a stenographer at a radio station. George was studying, and Biff was in elementary school. This seems a good point at which to end this chapter of the family story, a few years before Morris died suddenly, at only 57 years of age, and everything changed.



2021 Commonwealth Avenue, Brookline



Morris Liff
b.1876 Moscow - d.1934 Boston



Rose Rabinowitz Liff
b. 1882 Pogost - d. 1969 Boston

Resources

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