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The Rosoff Boys: Six Orphans from Borisov

by Billie Tanner Rosoff

My father-in-law, Frank Rosoff, was the second of six boys - Max, Frank, Louis, Benjamin, Jack, and Thomas. They came from Borisov, a large town on the Berezina River, about 30 miles upstream from Byerazino, where their father was the equivalent of a judge.



The Rosoff Boys, 1909

Standing L-R: Tom, Jack, Frank, Max, Louis and Ben.

Their wives, seated L-R: Pauline, Mary, Ida, Florence and Becky

Their children, L-R: Sylvan, Ruth, Seymour, Betty and Sherman

In 1892, when Tommy was six weeks old, their father was driving through the street in a carriage when a Russian ruffian threw a beer bottle, which hit him in the head and killed him. His name was Simon (pronounced Shimon) and every one of the boys later named a son beginning with the letter 'S.'

Their mother, whose name was Rockel or Rachel (Rodor), sank into a terrible depression and never spoke another word after her husband was murdered; she died when Tommy was one year old. So six little boys were orphaned- the oldest of whom was Max at age 12 - and people in the shtetl cared them for.

Someone knew that the boys had an aunt in New York named Leah Gresser, and they were finally able to contact her. Tante Leah owned a cemetery and funeral home in Staten Island, and in 1893 she sent money to bring Max, who

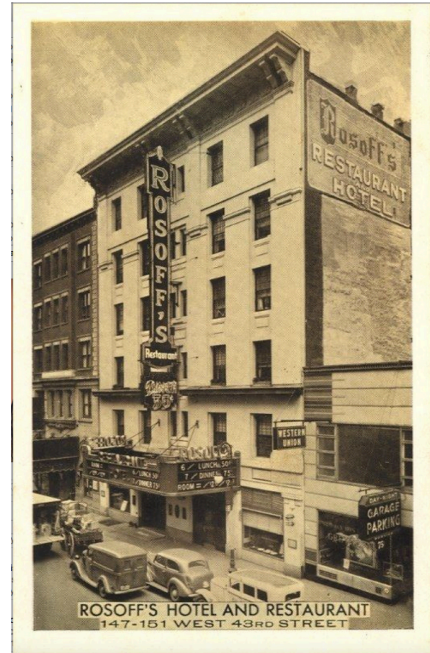
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was then thirteen years old, to New York. Max got a job washing dishes in a restaurant at \$3.00 per week. He slept on a cot in the kitchen to save money, saved \$2.00 of his salary every week, and after two years sent for Frank who also came at age 13 and did the same thing, and together they brought Louie in a year and soon had them all in the United States.

I don't know the circumstances, but only Max and Jack stayed in New York. The other four brothers came to Boston. They all ended up in the restaurant or food business.

Uncle Max owned a hotel and restaurant on 43rd street on Times Square in New York. Uncle Jack worked for him all his life.

Frank married Mary Rabinowitz (she grew up in Pogost, near Berezin). Frank owned Rosoff's Restaurant at 97 Summer Street in Boston with his brother-in-law Morris Liff (who was married to Mary's sister Rose). Louis and Ben each owned a delicatessen (and Louis had a chicken/egg farm, as well); Tommy owned a provision company that sold food to restaurants.



What a story about immigrants and what they added to the gene pool of the country!!! I knew all of them but Louis, who died in 1943, one year before I married Frank's son Arnold. They were the kindest, finest, most elegant men. My father-in-law was the finest man I had ever known - he was elegant, almost regal. They had all gone to night school. I don't know how they managed, since being in the restaurant business, they all worked at night, but somehow they learned to read and write English. In fact my father-in-law Frank had the most beautiful penmanship I had ever seen. Maybe school was in the morning, but they always used the expression "night school" because that is where he met my mother-in-law, Mary.



Both Frank and Mary were very smart and extremely well read. All their lives I was amazed at what they had accomplished, coming here, both at 13, not knowing the language or the culture, orphaned in Frank's case, going immediately to work, going to night school. They all acquired homes and cars, educated their children and lived lovely middle class lives. You can't give that generation enough credit.