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The Family of Aron Leib Machnes, founders of Petach Tikvah, in Ottoman Palestine, circa 1890. The photo in the photo shows Rav Asher-Zelig Blum, who was living in Chicago at the time.
See Page 18.
From the Editors

In this Issue
by Daphnah Sage, Jay Sage, and Carol Bogin

This issue of Mass-Pocha provides an example of the interconnectedness of genealogy, family history, and just plain coincidence. The city of Chelsea, immediately north of Boston, was a center of Jewish life, commerce, and activity in the first half of the 20th century. Our regular column, “The Way We Were,” introduces busy Chelsea.

One of the teachers in Chelsea who prepared boys for their Bar Mitzvah ceremony was Michael Kiminkovitz, the grandfather of Sharlene Kamens Finkel, who connected with expert Aaron Ginsburg at our February “Hands-On Problem Solving” meeting. Two of our other writers, Clingan and Saunders, have Chelsea roots, as do many members of our Society.

Another theme in this issue is connecting the “here” with the “there.” At the December program we learned that long-established American families with Russian origin, newly immigrated Russian Jews, and relatives who did not come to America can find each other. David Rosen’s “Boston Queries” column provides an additional example, as he relates how he reconnected a family branch living in Russia today with an American branch that came here 100 years ago. The initiative was taken by the Russian branch! You, too, might be surprised to find family abroad, descendants of relatives long thought lost.

Another theme in this issue is the genealogist’s joy in helping others, even if they are not in one’s own family. Fay Bussgang, who met a photographer while visiting in Lviv, ended up connecting him with his American family (and secured a good home in YIVO’s archives for his treasure trove of photographs of old Lviv). Saunders helped an Israeli family and a Chicago family find each other by doing genealogical detective work purely out of the joy of pursuing the clues that make for that final “Aha” moment. And, of course, Rosen is always ferreting out just how someone fits into a family’s history.

If you could use some help, turn to these kind people or come in August to the international conference in Washington and enjoy the variety of folks who attend and the subjects that are covered. It does not matter whether you are a novice, an intermediate, or an advanced researcher; there is plenty for everyone. Over a thousand participants are expected. Talk about finding interconnectedness!
February Meeting

A Success at the Belarus Table

by Sharlene Kamens Finkel and Aaron Ginsburg

Our February program every year is a practical, hands-on afternoon session, during which members can receive advice and translation help from more experienced members. The following is one example—as told by the person helped and the person helping—of the many successes that have resulted.

The Story Begins, by Sharlene Kamens Finkel

On many a Shabbat morning at Temple Emanuel, Newton, a number of my friends would talk enthusiastically about the Jewish Genealogical Society of Greater Boston. I had an interest in learning about my roots and the lives of my grandparents in their formative years. Although I knew three of my grandparents very well, I knew very little about where they were born, when they married, and even less about my great-grandparents.

Finally, my husband and I attended a lecture of the Society and were captivated by the speaker who reviewed the techniques she used in locating her family. We immediately joined the Society. However, a year went by, and I did very little with the information I had learned at that lecture.

This changed dramatically in February when I attended a help session of the Society. Armed with the names of my grandparents and the cities of their birth, I gingerly sat down at the Belarus table. I asked the man at the table, Aaron Ginsburg, whether he had ever heard of the small city of Dokshitsy, because I was looking for information about my grandfather Michael Kaminkovitz, z’l. He looked stunned. Then he told me that his father hailed from Dokshitsy, that Kaminkovitz was a common name in that town, and that I probably had relatives in Sweden, Russia, and the U.S.

Later I learned that Aaron is the president of the Friends of Jewish Dokshitsy, which recently held a reunion of Dokshitsy descendents. (See jewishdokshitsy.org) Aaron had even visited Dokshitsy! Since that February program, Aaron has provided me with much information about Dokshitsy and with leads to possible new relatives. He has found original documents for my grandfather and has spent much time on my behalf.

I am now a dedicated genealogy sleuth, and several family members have joined me in this quest. As a result of Aaron’s assistance, I am now in contact with relatives who hail from California, Virginia, and...
Connecticut on a daily basis! Dokshitsy is no longer just a name to me but a very real place where my ancestors once lived.

**The Story Continued, by Aaron Ginsburg**

I was stunned when Sharlene told me that her grandfather, Michael Kaminkovitz, was born in Dokshitsy. My genealogical journey has taken me from researching my own family to helping to restore the Jewish cemetery in Dokshitsy. Not only did I know of many Dokshitzers with the name Kaminkovitz in their family history, including a large family with descendants in Sweden, but I also was interested in how they might be connected. I told Sharlene that the Dokshitz-Parafianov *yizkor* book was translated into English and was available online.

At the February program, Sharlene also mentioned that her grandfather was very involved in the Onikchty Society and that more information about that society could be found online. I quickly pulled up information about Aniksht, Lithuania, on [jewishgen.org](http://jewishgen.org). I asked Sharlene to return at the end of the session, as we had a lot to talk about. When she returned, we exchanged email addresses, and I asked her to put her grandfather’s story in writing.

A few weeks later, Sharlene sent me some more information about her family’s history:

“My grandfather, Michael Aryeh Kaminkovitz, was born in Dokshitsy in 1877 to Jeremiah. The name of his mother is unknown. He had one sibling whose name is also unknown. His mother died in childbirth during the delivery of her third child. His father Jeremiah soon remarried, and the stepmother did not want to care for him, so he was sent to a nearby yeshiva at the age of 5. From 5 to 18 Michael depended on the kindness of the nearby women for clothes and food. One month a year he lived well at a wealthy Jewish farmer’s house. There he would teach the farmer’s children.

He was drafted into the Czar’s army, and while doing sentry duty, he fell asleep. He later claimed that his deceased mother woke him up to see that his rifle was gone. That would have meant a death sentence, so he ran away and went from shtetl to shtetl teaching and finally, with enough money, he traveled to London, England, where he met my grandmother, Kate Widetsky, the daughter of a shochet, Hyman Widetsky and Rachel Moosa Schneider Widetsky. They married around 1903 in England, and in 1905 they traveled to Chelsea, Massachusetts, with their infant son Jeremiah and lived with Kate’s parents at 23 Walnut Street. They had six children, two of whom died young. My father, Israel M. Kamens, was one of their children.”

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**Program Report**

Restored Jewish cemetery

Translation on marker:

*They should know there was once a shtetl called Dokshitsy where Jewish life flourished.*
After searching on ancestry.com using various spellings of Kaminkovitz, I found both the marriage registration of Michael Kimenkovitz and Kate Widetsky in 1903 in St. George Parish, London, and the registration of the birth of their son Jeremiah Kimenkovitz in 1905 in the Whitechapel district of London.

Later in 1905, Michael, Kate, and the infant Jeremiah immigrated to the US, arriving in Philadelphia on April 11 on the SS Friesland from Liverpool. The ship’s manifest showed that they were going to Kate’s father, H Widetsky, in Chelsea, Massachusetts. In the 1910 census, the family, which now included a daughter Goldie, is listed as living at 46 Walnut Street. Next-door, at 47 Walnut Street, lived Kate’s parents, Hyman and Rachel Widetsky, with their four grandchildren, Philip, David, Morris, and Sarah Madesky.

According to the census, Hyman and Rachel Widetsky immigrated in 1903, the Kimenkovitzes in 1905, and the Madesky grandchildren in 1908. Sharlene confirmed that the Madeskys were children of Minna Widetsky Madesky, a deceased daughter of Hyman and Rachel.

Michael’s WWII draft registration card, also on ancestry.com, gave his birthplace as Dokshitz. On jewishgen.org I found that Michael Kimenkovitz was buried in the Onikchty cemetery in Melrose, Massachusetts, in 1945.

On geni.com I found a Chaim Widetsky from Aniksht. I realized that Kate Widetsky’s parents were from Aniksht, which explained Michael Kimenkowitz’s interest in the Onikchty Society. In 1930 he was the recording secretary of the organization, which at its height had 800 members.

A last-name search on Yad Vashem led to a Page of Testimony submitted by Yakov Unigofski of Beer-sheba, Israel, for his grandfather Isaak Kimenkovitz, who was killed in Borisov, Belarus. Isaak’s father was Yirmiyahu Kimenkovitz, essentially the same name as Sharlene’s great-grandfather, Jeremiah Kaminkovitz. The page was recent and in Russian. I checked my files and discovered that Boris Gitlin of Toronto, who emigrated from Belarus about 15 years ago and who traced his roots to B’goml, was also a Kaminkovitz. I asked Boris if he could provide any more information.

Boris replied that his grandfather, Isaak Kaminkovitz, was killed in the Holocaust in Borisov, and he confirmed my guess that he and Yakov Unigofski were related. He had lost touch with Yakov, a professor at Ben Gurion University. With the help of Google, and a friend in Israel, I located Yakov. Boris and Yakov were now in touch after 14 years. Yakov reported as follows:
“I do not know when and where my grandfather Isaac was born. Nazis killed him in 1941 (1942?) in Bykhov, Belarus. In accordance to my nephew Boris Gitlin, he was born in Dokshitzy, Belarus. His oldest daughter Khaya was born in Dokshitzy in 1902. Maybe he was born in 1882. He graduated from yeshiva and could become a rabbi, but he began and worked all time as a specialist in the field of the wood processing (wood harvest).

My mother Dora Unigovski (Kamenkovitch) 1915‑2006 was the youngest, 9th child in her family; three of the children died when were very young. She said in Nov. 1979: Her father Isaac and his older brother were very young when their father Irma [short for Yirmiyahu, Ed.] died. Their mother left the children and married to a wealthy Polish Jew. She did not like children and when went to her, not let him into the house.

Escaping from the service in the Russian army, his brother emigrated in America where he became a lawyer. Mom remembered his photo in the mantle and the doctor’s hat. He had 3 children, 2 boys and a girl.”

In another message Yakov said, “Irmiyahu had two sons, my mutti [mother] didn’t know his name and the name of his mother, but she related me that another lived abroad and helped to her mother Dveira in 20s & 30s.”

Following up with Sharlene, I learned that Michel Kimenkovitz was a melamed [teacher] and that his son Jeremiah was a lawyer. Sharlene’s sister wrote to Yakov as follows:

“In thinking about your family history, I see several similarities. Although Michael was not a lawyer, his son Jeremiah was. It is possible that the lawyer you mention was a reference to the son. You speak of the brother (Michael) having three children, 2 boys and a girl. Michael had three children - Jeremiah, Goldie, and Israel - and then there was a gap of a number of years preceding the birth of two more children. In addition, there is the common theme of the mother rejecting her children, as Aaron pointed out. Also, in reading something my dad had written about his father’s (Michael’s) emphasis on giving charity, I would not be surprised if he assisted his brother.”

Boris and Yakov trace their family to B’goml, which is near Dokshitsy. The evidence that Sharlene’s family is connected to that of Yakov and Boris is not conclusive, but the similarity in names, locations, and stories is suggestive.

The story, of course, is not complete. Sharlene is continuing her research and following some tantalizing leads.

Sharlene Kamens Finkel is researching all four branches of her family: KIMENKOVITZ from Dokshitsy, WIDETSKY from Anikst, LEVINE and SHUSTER (SZUSTER) from Grodno. Her husband is researching FINKEL from Slavuta and MEZERVETSKY and SAPOTNITSKY from Vasilishok. Sharlene will be attending her first international genealogy conference in Washington this August. She can be reached at finkel@jgsgb.org

Aaron Ginsburg grew up in Newport, RI, a transplanted Dokshitsy. In addition to his Dokshitsy families, GINSBURG and KUSINTZ, he also is researching the POKROSS family from Gorodische, Ukraine, and Fall River and the KARNOWSKY of Providence and Ukraine. He may be reached at ginsburg@jgsgb.org