



Shattil Schattil Schattil

FAMILY NEWSLETTER

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Our Family's Visit to Lithuania in 1922

by Alexander Schattil, with comments by Leslie Comaroff

This story is told through the eyes of an 11-year-old boy who accompanied his family on a journey from Rhodesia to Lithuania and back in 1922. Seventy-eight years is a long time, so the young Alexander can be forgiven if his memory has become a little blurred here and there over the passage of time.

In 1922 father (Joseph) was in business at the Wankie Colliery situated in a low lying area not far from the world-famous Victoria Falls. It was hot in the summer and malaria fever was prevalent.

Joseph was not in the best of health at the time, so he decided to sell the business and take his wife (Dina) and their children, Ralph (14), Lena (12), Alexander (11) and Ida (8) on an extended holiday to Europe to see relatives, especially his mother Miriam and Dina's mother Malka. This was the first time Joseph and Dina had been on a holiday since their marriage and it was also the last.

It must have been in early April, 1922 when we were told of the proposed holiday and we happily tossed aside schoolbooks and prepared for a long break.

We left Bulawayo by train and the journey to Capetown took three days and two nights. It was an exciting time for us as we had never been on such a long journey before. We ran up and down the corridors of the passenger coaches from one end of the long train to the other and had our meals in the dining car.

The train passed through dense bushland and we occasionally saw wild animals such as antelope and giraffe. It also passed through interesting towns such as Mafeking, famous in history for its siege by the Boer army in the Boer war of 1899-1901, and Kimberley, once the diamond mining capital of the world and famous because of its association with Cecil John Rhodes and Barney Barnato. Fairly long stops were made at these and other places along the journey and the passengers usually stepped off the train and took a leisurely stroll on the station platforms.

The rail journey ended in Capetown and the family spent a couple of weeks at Bermans's Kosher Hotel where we recovered from our arduous train trip. The hotel was situated in the Gardens, a beautiful suburb of the city. We made some excursions to the beaches at Muizenberg and Sea Point. In 1922, A railway line connected Sea Point to Capetown but it has long since disappeared and is now only a memory.

Soon we were on the move again and we boarded RMS "Walmer Castle" of the Union Castle Line for the two weeks journey to Southampton, England. The passenger liners no longer sail the seas as they have been supplanted by the Boeings and other large aeroplanes which take a fraction of the time to do the journey.

It was a wonderful time for the children to roam about the ship and enjoy its amenities. I can recall the delicious ice cream served on deck at eleven every morning. Joseph and Dina, keen bridge players, soon joined other passengers to indulge this pastime. We were terribly excited when we saw whales and porpoises and also shoals of flying fish all very strange to landlocked children.

"Walmer Castle" docked at Southampton and the family traveled by train to Waterloo Station in London. We stayed at the White House Hotel in Finchley, a London suburb.

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The Windmill in Telse, Lithuania, photographed by Victor Dubowitz on a recent trip.

Assasination may have saved family from Holocaust

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(Leslie adds that next to the Hotel was a school and the Schattil children would look through the intervening fence and talk to the students. Leslie says the students thought they were lying when told that they were from Africa. "But you're not black," they argued.

Another wondrous event was the way the Hotel gardeners would transplant a bed of blooming flowers in a patch of soil that was previously barren. The children marveled at what seemed to be flowers that could grow and bloom over night.)

We must have spent a week or so in London where we met relatives, I can now only recall Barney Smith, an elderly gentleman and a jeweler by trade, but cannot remember how he was related to us. (Leslie thinks he was Joseph's uncle and that he had a son who moved to New Hampshire, USA.)

The next step of our journey, now in early May, was to travel by train to the channel seaport of Hawich where we boarded the cross-channel ferry to Hook of Holland. Then by train along the coast to Danzig (now Gdansk) and on to Memel on the Baltic Sea.

Memel in 1922 was under French mandate, having formerly been part of Germany before the 1914-1918 war. Memel was a bustling seaport and here we stayed at the Victoria Hotel which seemed to be a luxurious establishment.

(Leslie says that during their stay, the children began singing "Deutschland Uber Alles." The hotel management, sensitive to French reaction, severely scolded the youngsters for their politically incorrect choice of music. Leslie recalls that the family arrived on Shabot, and rather than contact their relatives in Memel, they went to the Victoria Hotel. The children were told not to disclose to the relatives that the family had traveled on the Sabbath.

After leaving the hotel, they stayed with one of Joseph's cousins in Memel. These may have been the Cohen branch, cousins on Miriam's side of the family, who Leslie recalls as being very religious. While the Schattils were visiting the Cohens, Cohen cousins from America were also visiting Memel.)

Along the coast was the well-known seaside resort of Schwartz-Ort, famous

for its seafood and strawberries and cream. I remember we went to Schwartz-Ort by a small coastal ship, paddling on the beach and I can still recall the delicious strawberries and cream, I don't think I have ever tasted better. To the best of my memory, I cannot remember meeting any relatives in Memel.

Joseph now decided it was time to visit his mother Miram in Telse, a town some distance from Memel and also Dina's mother in Tavrig, also known as Tarrogan. We traveled by train to Gorz, a small town near Memel and a hired car was to meet us next day.

In Gorz, we met an aunt, a sister of Joseph, and her husband. Unfortunately, I cannot remember their names. (Leslie says this was Zelda) We were to spend the night in Gorz and we were soon bedded down.

The children began singing "I Am Forever Blowing Bubbles" when suddenly there was a loud commotion outside. We heard shouts and screams and somebody shouted "Pogrom." Joseph immediately got us all out of bed, made us dress and rushed us to the railway station. However, it soon transpired that a villager who had gone off to the forest to cut wood had not been murdered as was first thought but had accidentally fallen off his horse which had returned riderless to the village. After the fright we received that night, we never sang "I Am Forever Blowing Bubbles" again.

The hired car never arrived as it broke down on the way so we completed our trip to Telse in an open wagon pulled by a horse. (Leslie remembers seeing numerous Christian shrines along the side of the road for the whole length between Gorz and Telse.)

In Telse, we met our paternal grandmother, Miriam, who was staying with her daughter Zelda and her husband. (Leslie thinks their children may have included a daughter named Beryl, who married a man named Katz in Israel. Beryl survived the slaughter of Jews by the Nazis because of her parent's shrewdness. When the Nazis herded the Jews of Telse into the woods, they told them to strip whereupon they were shot. Beryl's parents piled their clothes over her and she escaped the

Nazi's attention. Joseph tracked Beryl down in Israel after the war and arranged for her to receive a stove and refrigerator as she had requested. Beryl's whereabouts have been lost.)

Grandmother Miriam was an old woman at the time and she was very excited to meet her grandchildren. She was about 70 years old and was very spritely, about 5'-3" tall and she had a good sense of humour.

The only language I heard her speak was Yiddish, of which I could barely speak, although I could understand what she said. (Leslie says that she didn't understand enough Yiddish to make sense of it, and in fact, her parents used Yiddish as a secret language to discuss things in front of the children that they wanted to keep confidential.)

I think Siegfried must be mistaken when he wrote in his memories of his trip to Lithuania that Miriam died in 1920. She was alive and well when we visited Memel in 1922. In the grounds of the house where Miriam lived with her daughter and son-in-law, was a large windmill which probably accounts for her son-in-law being called "Miller." I don't think that was his real name. We had never seen a windmill before and had lots of fun exploring its interior and clambering on its sails.

(Leslie recalls that the family made a side trip to Plungian about 12 miles from Telse, to visit another of Joseph's brothers, who's name Leslie says began with the letter "H.")

(Leslie's memories of Miriam; Miriam was small and walked very fast. Being the proud grandmother, she took Leslie around the shtetl to show her off. They went to innumerable shops and at each one, the shopkeeper would give Leslie a treat of chocolate, or ice cream. By the time she got back to Miriam's home, she was sick.

During their stay in Telse, Miriam threw a party for her visitors. The women prepared delicacies all day and the whole shtetl was there, singing and drinking and eating. Houses in Telse were primitive, like Rhodesia, lacking indoor toilets and electricity. The women wore the traditional wigs ((sheitel)) and dark clothing.)



Photo of Joseph and his family taken about when they went to Lithuania. Pictured (R to L) in the back row are: Ralph, Lena (Leslie), Joseph. Front row: Ida, Dina, Alexander.

Soon we said "Goodbye" to Grannie Miriam and traveled to Tavrig. I cannot remember how we got there, probably by horse and cart, as the countryside did not appear to boast a railway.

(Leslie adds that while in Telse, Joseph wanted to bring his brother Jacob's wife and three children out of Lithuania to Rhodesia. He arranged for them to join him upon their departure from Telse, but instead of the wife and children showing up, only the wife's brother appeared. He informed Joseph that he wouldn't allow his sister and her children to leave Lithuania. They all must have perished with most of the rest of the Jews of Lithuania in World War II).

In Tavrig, we met Grannie Malka and her household. Unfortunately, we do not have any photographs of our visit, these must have been lost in the many moves made by the family after our return to Rhodesia. Memories of Tavrig were of a

town still showing scars of the 1914-1918 war which had only ended four years before our visit. We must have met relatives of Dina but cannot recall any names.

On our return to Memel, Joseph was in consultation with an estate agent and it soon transpired that he was negotiating to purchase a nearby farm. He was thinking of settling in Lithuania and being near his mother. We all went to see the farm, which boasted a water mill, but to me the house adjoining the mill had an odour of dampness.

Negotiations must have got to an advanced stage, Joseph had paid a deposit equal to about L500, fortunately in German Marks, on the farm, when suddenly something happened which changed the course of our lives and probably saved us from extinction if we had remained to live in Lithuania.

News came through that the Minister of Finance in the German government had

been assassinated. The Minister was a Jew and it was generally accepted that this could be an expression of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitic riots broke out in nearby Germany. Joseph, upset by the news, immediately terminated negotiations, forfeited his deposit and before long, the family was back in London. (Leslie adds that Dina, Joseph's wife, refused to live in Lithuania and wanted no part of the farm.)

On our return journey to London we stayed for a few days at the Grand Hotel, later made famous by Vicki Baum in her novel of that name

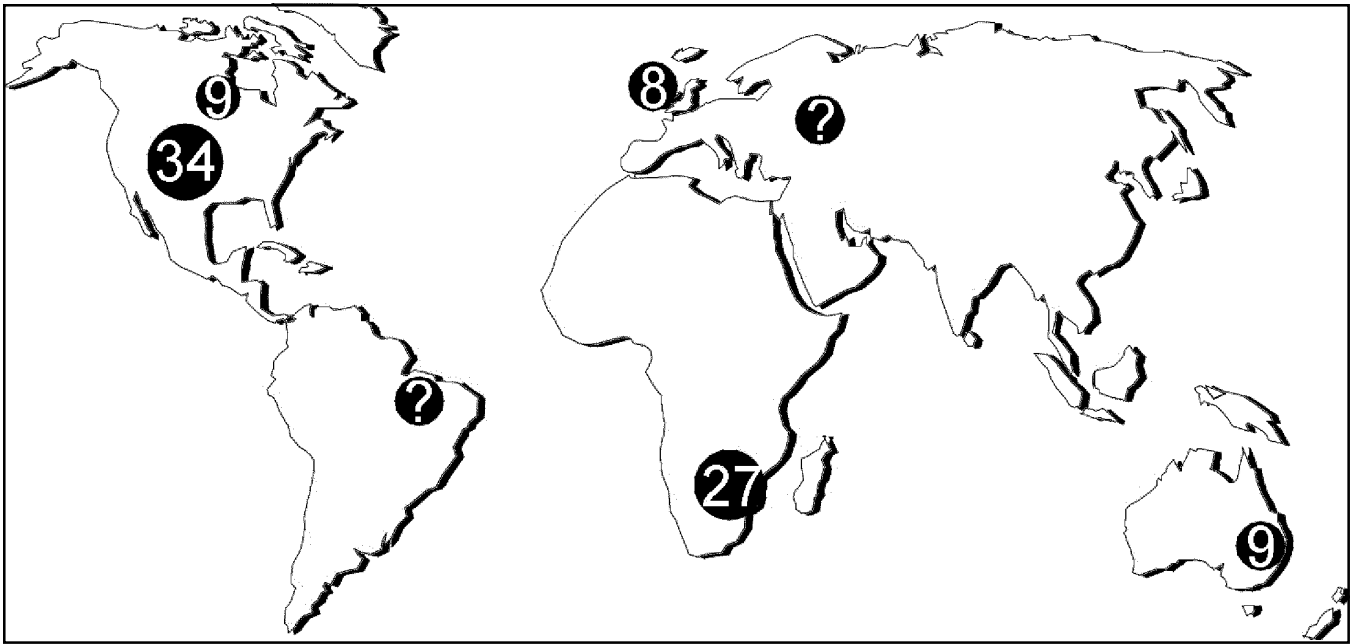
In London, we stayed at the Regent Palace Hotel in the West End. This hotel formed part of the Lyons group and to us it seemed the last word in luxury. It boasted a lift (elevator), the first we had seen. We spent as much time as we could in being taken up and down until the operator, tired of our demands, sent us packing.

(Leslie adds that one night the children went around the hotel and picked up all the shoes that guests had left outside their door to be polished. They then redeposited the shoes, but at random and diverse guest rooms.)

What else we did in London is now forgotten but one small thing is still remembered: a visit to a Kosher Restaurant by the name of Bloch's. Here we were served stuffed chicken necks. I have not since had a taste for this delicacy.

It was now the end of May, 1922 and our holiday was coming to an end. Soon we were on the train to Southampton where we boarded RMS "Edinburgh Castle," larger and more modern than the "Walmer Castle."

After two happy and carefree weeks, the sea voyage was over and we were back in Capetown on our way to Bulawayo. Before we realized what had happened, we were back in boarding school and our holiday had become another memory.



Map of living descendants of Miriam and Mordecai Schattil

Each circle shows the number of descendants living in the country in which the circle is located. The questionmarks in Brazil and Russia refer to possible relatives. **Israel Shattil** was supposed to

have emigrated to Brazil. A family of Shatils in St. Petersburg, Russia traces its ancestors to Kovno Lithuania.

April Brings Surprising News on Missing Ancestors

New research into the genealogy of the Shattil family has revealed remarkable new links to our distant ancestors.

Two exiting new discoveries have pushed back the number of generations to which we can trace our lineage.

The first of these findings introduces us to Bongo F. Shaatl, our common ancestor going back some 60,000 generations. The accompanying artists sketch,



Bongo F. Shaatl

derived from the fossil remains of our multi-great-grandfather, reveals a striking resemblance to his present day descendants. True to his pedigree, Bongo was apparently a great leader and innovator in the realm of science, technology and agriculture.

Found among the fossilized bones of old Bongo were artifacts that suggest that our ancestor was the inventor of fire, the wheel, crop cultivation, and an early version of the Internet.

Another extraordinary development was the recent discovery of our most ancient forebearer, Mbh

Schtlll, (this was before the invention of vowels). Mbh was a single celled organism estimated to have lived 3 billion years ago. The remains of great...grandmother Mbh were found among ice core samples retrieved from holes drilled in the Zed research station in Antarctica. Because she was frozen all this time, scientists maintain that it is possible to clone Mbh from DNA that is still intact in her body. Soon we may be able to meet and greet our oldest relative.

Have a foolish April.

Reunion Excitement Builds

Plans are coming together for the first Shattil/Schattil/Schattel family reunion in 120 years.

Cousins from four continents are responding with expressions of great interest in the reunion scheduled for October 20, 21 and 22 in San Francisco, California. Many of the 77 surviving descendants of Miriam and Mordecai Schattil from all over the world will be there. Will you?

Be sure to check out the Reunion web site at <http://www.shattil.com> and send your thoughts, suggestions, articles for publication to the **Reunion Committee**, c/o Ron Shattil, 9200 Skyline Blvd., Oakland, CA 94611, USA ron@shattil.com