



Shattel Shattil Family Newsletter Schattil

February, 2000

How the Leopard Got its Spots: the Etymology of the Shattil Name

by **Judith Schattil Stern**

As described by his children, **Leslie Comaroff** and **Alexander Schattil**, **Joseph Schattil** was a pioneer in every sense of the word.

He was a man of action, a gentle family man, generous to a fault and his adventures were legion. One of 13 siblings, five girls and eight boys (only nine of whom have been identified to date), Joseph emigrated to Cape Town, South Africa from Telse, Lithuania in 1896 at the age of 20.

Like many Jews of the era, Joe was escaping the staggering oppression endemic in his homeland for



Joseph Schattil

the promise of freedom and reward for those who were willing to take risks and work hard.

Joe walked from Cape Town to Bulawayo with his childhood friend Harry Sussman, a distance of some 1,700 miles through uncivilized territory, alive with wild animals. He quickly staked claims for several gold mines, including



Jacob Schattil

The Lonely Mine, which was out in dense bush about 36 miles from Bulawayo.

Once established, Joseph sent for his brother **Jacob** with whom he discovered the Golden Snake Reef mine. Joe also sent for his brother, **Victor**, and later young **Julius** who, at the tender age of 16 was in imminent danger of being drafted into the Russian Army.

Victor became the proprietor of hotels in Heidelberg, and later in Muizenburg, South Africa, while Joe, Jacob and Julius successfully prospected and panned for gold in the raw 'new country' of Rhodesia. Joe also became involved in the Wankee Coal Mines and owned several General Dealer or Concession Stores and various other mines.

Now, you may ask, where is all this background leading us?

With all this gold and money floating around, banks were a good idea, and the three young J. Shattils all had accounts at the one and only bank in Bulawayo, The Standard Bank. With such similar names, the bank

manager was having great difficulty keeping his records straight.

Indeed, Joe and Julius had similar signatures, whilst Jacob's signature was quite distinctive. The bank manager suggested that Julius retain the original spelling 'Shattil' while Joe and Jacob were to adopt an 'sch' as was the Dutch custom, spelling the name 'Schattil'.

The word "Shattil" may derive from a Hebrew word which means a young tree, a sapling, or a branch, perhaps of a tree or a river. Interestingly, the major waterway connecting the Persian Gulf with the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers in ancient Mesopotamia is known as "Shatt al Arab," (the Arab coast). The confluence of these three important waterways has traditionally been designated as the site of the Garden of Eden. So the etymology of our name may well point to the geography of our family's origins!

There are other opinions on the meaning of the word "shattil." According to "A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire," "Shatel" originated from Cherkassy, near Kiev. In Ukrainian it means liar. It could also mean "from the village of Shatily" (in the Minsk district).

Reunion to be in San Francisco

The reunion committee will announce a date for the gathering of the descendants of Miriam and Mordecai Schattil in the next newsletter. All consideration is being given to accommodating the schedules of as many of our busy cousins as possible.

The first family reunification will be in San Francisco, California. It turns out that the San Francisco area claims the greatest number of Schattil descendants. There are seven cousins living there and 13 in all of California.

Events at the reunion will include a presentation of the Schattil family history, a recounting of significant events in the lives of our kin, a poll of genetic, demographic and character trait data, a family portrait, a performance of the Schattil family theme song, and sharing of historic family photos.

What ideas do you have? Contact the Reunion Committee at:

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**Julius Schattil
South Africa**

Sig Shattil remembers boyhood trip to Lithuania

By **Siegfried Shattil**

On May 15, 1926, I took a trip to Germany with my mother and two brothers, **Art**, 11, and **Melvin**, 6.



Passport photo of Ann Rabinowitz Shattil with sons, from left, Melvin, Sig and Art.

The trip lasted four months, so we were out of school for half of the months of May and September. Dad did not come along because he had to stay with the hardware store while we were away.

We took the train from Chicago to New York City, stayed at the Pennsylvania Hotel overnight and took the Albert Ballin, the Hamburg-American line vessel, to Hamburg, Germany.

While we were tied up at the pier, waiting to disembark, I was impressed by the caps with visors that were worn by all the men and boys. I had only seen the visors before on policemen's hats in Chicago.

We checked into a hotel in Germany for five days so we could get oriented and sight-see. All the cars there had turn signals made with a six inch arrow mounted on a disc that would turn right or left. There were no turn signals yet in the United States. Art and I enjoyed for hours working the self-operating elevator in the hotel.

We visited my mother's relatives in Leipzig, Dresden and Memel--which was mother's original home. Memel was lost by Germany during World War I and was occupied by France as a protectorate. In 1922, the area became Lithuania and Memel's name was changed to Klaipeda.

Mother's mother lived in Memel with her youngest daughter, Rahle. They had a comfortably sized house to accommodate us all. Across the street was a jewelry store run by a man named Segall, who had a son my age. We spent a lot of time together.

Every afternoon we went swimming and then had tea or cocoa and cakes. But the swimming area, on the Baltic Sea, was outside of Memel. We had to take a boat across an isthmus to walk across a three block wide island to get to the beach. We rented lockers for our clothes and then went swimming. Afterward, we went to the seaside cafe for refreshments. At the age of 12, the charge for riding the boat went up to the adult's price, which we paid until I saw a boy at least one head taller than me buy a ticket at the child's rate. From then on, I, too, bought a child's ticket.

I wanted to buy mother a box of candy. I bought some from a store I found but mother would not keep it. She returned it for a refund and learned that this shop hadn't sold a box of candy in 2 1/2 years, ever since the French left.

We could not locate any Shattils in Memel, so mother hired a car and driver to drive us into the interior of Lithuania, to Plynyan--dad's (**Julius**) birthplace. We



Passengers enroute to Germany in 1926. Melvin Shattil is in the life buoy with Art Shattil standing directly behind and Sig Shattil seated second to the right of Art.

knew enough about the Shattil family to locate their homestead. But it had been abandoned. There no longer were any Shattils in Plynyan, nor was the mill that was used to grind grain there. Mother spoke with everyone she could find, but no one had knowledge about the family. They had just vanished.

We do know that all the children had left Plynyan, probably to have gone to Africa. I do know that dad's mother (**Miriam**) died in 1920, when we had the grocery store because he had received a telegram informing him of the death. I know, because I was in the store playing when the telegram arrived and he told me what it said.

In September, we left Memel for Hamburg and took a train to Cookshaven to board the Resolute for our return to New York. Dad met us at the boat and we all returned to Chicago by Sept. 15.

I had to start studying for my Bar Mitvah because it was scheduled for the beginning of February.

Newsletter Notes

Included with this newsletter is an outline of descendants of Miriam and Mordecai Schattil. Please let **Ron Shattil** know of any corrections and additions.

The Schattils on the envelope on last month's newsletter are, from left, (back row), **Ralph, Leslie, Joseph**. (Front row) **Ida, Dina, Alex**. The photo on the top of the newsletter was **Julius Shattil**.

