



## Buslovich Ancestors: Two Families Reconnect After Almost 100 Years

by Howard Blue

This is the story of how I researched the paternal family of my great-grandmother, Alta Chernye Buslovich, and found my long-lost relatives from Byerazino.



Shier Buslovich in the Jewish cemetery in Berezino - the photo that reconnected our family.

Alta's father, Shier Buslovich was allegedly born in Nikolaev from which at some point he emigrated from Ukraine to Berezino in Belarus. Apparently his first wife died young and he remarried. Alta's mother apparently lost a couple of pregnancies so when Alta was born, to deceive the evil eye, she was given her name, which meant "the older one." Likely in her very early 20s Alta married my great-grandfather, Shmuel Perress who it is said was born in Kovno, Lithuania. Alta also had a brother, Shmuel Zalman.

My paternal grandmother, Dora (Leshia Dvera) was born in Berezino in 1894. Her father served in the Russian army for at least several years. One day when Dora was about five years old, she was on the street when a man with a beard

came towards her house. Seeing her he greeted her as her father. Terrified by the beard, and not recognizing him, Dora ran into the house. For some time she continued to refuse to recognize him and would not call him father, "Tate."

At that time, the family was boarding a mentally disturbed tenant who periodically was visited by a doctor. The visits were apparently marked by the tenant's screams. One day, after Dora's father told the doctor about his problem with Dora, the doctor approached Dora and said, "He is your Tate, you should call him that." Associating the doctor with the tenant's terrible screams, terrified, Dora blurted out, "Tate, Tate, Tate, Tate, Tate."

Shier's house was an old clapboard affair. It had the usual large oven used for cooking, baking and heating the house. Frequently a string of goat cheese was hung to dry near it. It also had windows that reached all the way down to the floor and were covered inside with wooden shutters for protection from the severe winters. Shier used to sit at a crude table near a side window where he repaired shoes for a living.



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An outhouse stood behind the house and behind it, there was a large garden and an orchard with plum and apple trees which Yurka, an old Belarusian, worked for Shier.

Like all of Berezino's residents at the time, Shier paid a man to periodically bring buckets of water to the house in a wagon. The water was stored in a barrel located in a small vestibule on the side of the house, which served as its entrance. Shier's wife also used to get fresh water for tea from a well located two blocks away. She washed the family's clothes in huge pots on the stove. Some people used to regularly rinse their laundry in the river, next to which was a large stone and a big piece of wood with a handle. But Alta did this only once that Dora recalled, one winter when she and her mother pulled the wash-laden pots to the river on a sled. But the river proved to be too far from the house.

In about 1900, Dora's parents moved with her and her younger sisters, also born in Berezino, to the city of Bobruisk. They traveled aboard a paddlewheel boat on the Beresina River. At one point, because the river was low, some of the passengers had to get out into the water so that the boat could proceed into deeper water.

Arriving in Bobruisk, the family settled into their new home. But in 1905, during the Russo-Japanese war, Dora's father became aware that he was about to be drafted again. So he left his family behind and immigrated to America, promising to send for them as soon as he could.

Some time later, at the invitation of her father who knew that she would be leaving soon to join her husband in America, Alta returned to Berezino for several months. Dora remembered going to the river and hearing stories related to Napoleon's army, which had passed through the region in 1812 during its retreat from Russia. A number of French soldiers died near the nearby town of Studienka and now, more than 80 years later, skulls and other remnants of the French retreat were still being fished out of the river. According to one source, a village boy found a bronze helmet with an eagle insignia. Also, one of Shmuel Zalman's sons found a long rusty saber with French writing on it.

Dora had been close to her father and missed him very much after he left for America. She was about 11 years old one day, when she went to the post office to check whether they might have had a letter from him. While she was there someone came running in, saying, "The Cossacks are coming. Quick run to your homes." But when Dora ran outside, she found that the Cossacks were already at the post office. While trying to run to her house, she was



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struck on the back of her neck by a piece of lead which was at the end of one of the whips that the Cossacks were using to strike out at the Jews. When she came running home crying to her mother, Alta, quite upset, chastised her. "Why did you go there, we got a letter from him yesterday. You know there was no chance one would be there today."

Dora had one other pronounced memory of their last stay at her grandfather's house. At Passover, when the moment came to open the door for Elijah to come in, Shier's goat walked in, sending everybody at the Seder into peals of laughter.

Finally the time came for Alta to leave for America. Her father took her departure hard. Dora remembered Shier running some distance alongside the horse-drawn wagon in which Alta and her children were traveling to a train station to begin their journey via Rotterdam to America.

Over the years, periodically Alta sent either money for ship's passage or actual tickets to her brother Shmuel Zalman, so that he could come to America to be with his family. But each time the brother would write back explaining that his wife was too ill to travel.

However, Alta's half-sister Ida, Shmuel Zalman's daughter with his second wife, did immigrate to the US in about 1910.

Over the years, in the 1920s and later, Alta and her brother corresponded. The family had several pictures of Shmuel Zalman's children in their late teens and early 20s, wearing typical Russian clothing.

Both Alta and Shmuel died several years before World War II, and after the war, there was only silence from the family in Russia. I started researching my family history in the 1970s. One of the pieces of it that intrigued me most was to find the relatives who never made it to the US. Did any of them survive the Holocaust? I wondered.

A persistent researcher, I worked on the problem. In the 1980s I spent some time in Moscow where I contacted the Soviet Red Cross. As a result, one day I was put in touch with a Buslovich family in Minsk who only six months later immigrated to Brooklyn. We had a wonderful "reunion" despite the fact that they had no known link to Berezino.

One day, checking JewishGen.org on the Internet I found a message, "Seeking Buslovich family from Berezino." I responded quickly and soon was speaking to the poster's father, who was just a couple of years older than I. He and his family emigrated from Leningrad to Minnesota in the 1970s



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“My father always told me that I should try to find the family of his Aunt Alta,” Joseph told me. He added, “They will likely have a photo of my grandfather, Shier, one taken in a cemetery with his gray beard blowing in the wind.”

Looking at the table next to my desk, I said, “I’m looking at that photo right now.” And so began the reconnection of two branches of the family that had been separated by almost 100 years.



**The Buslovich Family in Berezino (L-R): Ida Buslovich (Shier's youngest child), Shier Buslovich, Shier's stepson, Shier's second wife, the stepson's wife, Shmuel Zalman Buslovich (with baby), Shmuel's wife.**