

The Charney Cherepacha Family

by George Rothstein

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My maternal great-grandfather was Moshe ben Mordechai Cherepaxa, (b. circa 1860, d. 1912). He was a shoemaker in Byerazino. His wife (my great grandmother) was Zisha Greenglass Cherepaxa (b. ca 1860). The photo shows Zisha at Moshe's grave in Byerazino.



'Cherepaxa' means turtle in Russian. It is also the name of a town in the Ukraine near Chernobyl, which suggests that the family may have originally come from there.

Moshe and Zisha had at least five children. My grandfather -their son Yemiyawhu (Jeremiah) ben Moshe - was born on 4 February 1886 in Byerazino. My grandfather had both religious and secular education. He studied in a 'gymnasium' (an academic secondary school) to be a pharmacist's assistant and could read and write in Russian and Yiddish. He also had religious training as a shochet (ritual animal slaughterer). I understand that my grandfather studied and lived in a nearby town and was shuttled amongst local Jewish families who volunteered to take turns feeding students and providing shelter. I think he continued to come home for Shabbas and holidays.

Jeremiah emigrated from Byerazino in 1904, travelling with his brother Saul and sisters Faiga Leiba (Fanny) and Tsvia (Sylvie). Another brother and sister remained behind in Russia. The four siblings arrived in NY from Hamburg aboard the S.S. Blucher on 9 Jun 1904. On the ship's manifest, his name was listed as Irme Czerapachow, but in the U.S. he was known as Hyman Charney. When he came to this country, his education as a pharmacist's assistant was of no use to him and his first job was as a 'cutter' in the garment district in New York City. My understanding is that a cutter was a step above the more common garment worker and required some degree of skill.



An early picture (left) shows him wearing sports get-up. It is quite odd because my grandfather was very religious and very conservative and never had the time for, or the slightest interest in, any kind of sports. Perhaps that was the fashion for young single men having their pictures taken.

In 1907, Hyman married Rebecca Shenkman (here shown with her sister Tilly). Rebecca had recently come to the U.S. from Lithuania with her father Samuel Shenkman, her mother and six siblings. Through the Baron De Hirsh philanthropic foundation's Jewish Agricultural Society, the entire Shenkman family along with their spouses were relocated to the Berkshire Mountains in western Massachusetts around 1906 and assisted in obtaining a mortgage on farmland. All of these families lived together or close, near Great Barrington, Massachusetts and scratched out a living from the land.



After Hyman and Rebecca married, they too moved to Massachusetts. He bought farmland in Sandisfield, Massachusetts from his father-in-law and brother-in-law Isaac Sax. Sandisfield town records show that he also worked for the town between 1915 and 1920, driving a school wagon to take local kids to school. In 1920, my grandparents bought a farm with a large orchard in Monterey, Massachusetts. My grandmother took in boarders from New York during the summers to supplement their earnings. The photo below was taken on the farm in 1924 and shows (l - r) Hyman, Rebecca, their daughters Esther (my mother) and Sadie, and in front, their son Maishe.



My grandfather also worked as a shochet and spent much of his time traveling through northern Connecticut and the Berkshires slaughtering the occasional animal for Jewish farmers and taking pay, usually in kind rather than money. He remained very religious for all of his life and helped organize a local minyan, which met in neighbors' houses for the holidays.

When he registered for the draft in both World Wars he listed his occupation as 'rabbi,' but I think this may have been to help him to avoid being drafted. He was always considered a very intelligent, and highly educated man and he spoke a 'high' Yiddish. He tutored several nephews in preparation for their bar mitzvahs.

Around 1929, Hyman and Rebecca could no longer make a living from the land, so they moved to Brooklyn, NY and bought a heavily mortgaged apartment house. When the city passed laws requiring that apartment houses be heated they lost the house. In the late 1930s Hyman opened a butcher shop in Brooklyn, bought more real estate and became moderately successful, as seen in the photo on the right.



My grandfather had three younger siblings, who also lived in New York. Sylvie (Tsvia) Charney was born around 1897. She never married. Sylvie worked as a seamstress for the Eclipse Mattress factory in Brooklyn her entire career. She first lived with Fannie and her husband David Green and then with her niece, Mildred. She died in 1990 and is buried at New Montefiore cemetery

My grandfather's brother Saul was born in 1898. He had red hair, and worked in the garment industry. His wife was named Hannah. They lived in Brooklyn, and I know that he kept a pet turtle.

My grandfather's sister Fannie (Faiga Leiba) was born in 1890 and lived to be 100 years old. In 1909, when she was 19, Fannie married her 1st cousin on her mother's side, David Green. She died in 1990 and is buried at Mount Judah cemetery in New York.

The Charney family photo (below) was probably taken in the 30's. It shows Sylvie Charney seated on the left, Saul Charney standing directly above her and then moving across that row, Saul's wife Hannah, my grandfather Hyman Charney, my grandmother Rebecca Shenkman Charney, unknown, Fannie Charney Green and her husband and 1st cousin, David Green.



I have hundreds of pictures of my grandparents and my grandfather's siblings, as well as photos of my grandmother's Shenkman family - all of them taken in the US. I am happy to share any of information with others. If you're interested, please feel free to contact me.