

Moshe LIFSHITZ: Evicted From Moscow

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Moshe LIFSHITZ was one month shy of his 12th birthday when he learned he was losing his home. An anti-Semitic law passed on the first day of Passover in March 1891 cancelled residence permits for almost all the Jews living in Moscow. While veterans of the Crimean war, wealthy merchants and academics were being allowed to remain - at least for a while - his stepfather was only an artisan. To avoid prison or worse, Moshe, his mother, his stepfather and three siblings had to abandon their home in the city, joining the tens of thousands of Jewish refugees expelled that year.

Moshe had hardly known his own father. He would later say that Alexander LIFSHITZ (born about 1840) had been a "professor" in Moscow but because Alexander died in the early 1880s, Moshe couldn't remember him very well. Around 1885 his mother Malke SHEFTEL married Jacob WEINSTEIN, a widower with two daughters: Freide, age 10, and Dwore, age 6. He and Malke had one child of their own, a son named Simon, born in 1887. We know nothing about this period in Moshe's life. Did he go to school, as he surely would have done as Alexander's son, or was he now expected to work in his stepfather's business? Whatever his life had been like up until now, everything changed suddenly in 1891.

Moshe's stepfather would have had only a brief time to shut down his business and collect outstanding bills. The New York Times reported on 17 May 1891 that other Muscovites took full advantage of the Jewish plight: "it is impossible for the wretched victims to get anything for their household goods, their tools, or for the stock they have on hand." The WEINSTEINS must have left most of their belongings behind when they departed from Moscow that summer, travelling by train to Hamburg and from there by ship via Hull, Liverpool and Cork, finally arriving at the Port of New York on 28 September 1891.

The family settled down in New York City: Jacob found work as a tailor and milliner; Malke (now "Mary") kept house; Freide (now "Fanny") married a cigar-maker; Moshe (now "Morris") went into the restaurant business; Simon (now "Samuel") became a science teacher at Boys High School in Brooklyn.



<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Moskva/>

Now, more than a century later, Moshe's descendants are trying to fill the gaps in this story. Given the stringent laws governing Moscow residence, it is likely that Alexander LIFSHITZ and Malke SHEFTEL were born somewhere within the Jewish Pale of Settlement and moved to the city only after residence requirements were loosened in 1855. Who were their parents, and where did they come from, originally? Where did Alexander teach and what was his subject? When did he die and what was the cause of his death? What happened to Dwore WEINSTEIN? Perhaps someone reading this story can give us a clue.