

Boots for the Russian Army

by Elaine Socol



Varvarsky Gate in Zaryadye district,
Moscow, 1880

My father's family lived in Wlodawa on the Bug River in the province of Lublin, a city that was alternately in Poland and Russia (now in Poland).

My grandfather was a boot maker and was invited at some point to come to Moscow to make boots for the Russian army. My understanding is that this was by special invitation, possibly because Jews could not generally live in Moscow at the time (as I'm sure you know, Jews could not live for a time in Kiev, either; my mother's family lived in a "shtetl" on the outskirts of Kiev).

According to my father, his father accepted the offer from Moscow. Not only do I not know the years in which this took place, but I also do not know if he took his family or went there by himself. He didn't stay in Moscow permanently, because I believe he left from Wlodawa in November 1907, heading for Liverpool, Portland, Maine and Canada.

Thank you for inviting me to include "my story", but as you can see, there's not much detail. However, knowing there was a time when the skills of the Jews were helpful and important to the Russian army, and the army could force government officials to make exceptions to the rules of residency because of this, does add a little color to the history of Moscow.