

Chapter 2

Noteworthy Jewish Descendants of Mariampole and Vicinity

INTRODUCTION Some Mariampolers managed to survive not only the difficulties of life under the Russian Tsar and the Communists, but also the far more murderous designs of the Nazi regime. Those who managed to save themselves by immigrating to America and other parts of the world multiplied, and, in time, prospered as well. Within two or three generations, their descendants contributed to society in a great number of professions and community services. Some Jewish Mariampoler descendants have risen to high levels of achievement. By recognizing the work of those who have survived, we can surmise how much poorer our world is for the loss of those whose lives were cut short.

While this is by no means a complete account of all of the descendants who have made valuable contributions, it is my hope that these biographical sketches will encourage others to share with me their stories so that they can be included in a subsequent edition of this project. If you know of someone who should be included, contact the author listed above or the Chicago History Museum.

NOTEWORTHY DESCENDANTS Biographies of a few notable Mariampolers and their descendants are incorporated here in alphabetical order:

Aron Abelheim — Physician	Jacob Berkson — Businessman
Joseph Achron — Musician	Izis (Izrael) Bidermanas — Artist
Yitzchok Achron — Teacher	Sam Borenstein — Artist
Max Band — Artist	Samuel Brittan — Economist
Dvora Baron — Author	Leon Brittan — British Politician
Shlomo Batnitzky — Rabbinic Judge	Abraham Braunstein — Medical Researcher
Jonathan Batnitzky — Journalist	Sam J. Cohen — Businessman
Solomon Batnitzky — Physician / Professor	Elkes Elhanan — Physician
Leora F. Batnitzky — University Professor	Irving Fields — Physician
Sam “Shmai” Berkson — Policeman	Harry W. Fisher — Attorney / Judge
Morris “Moe” Berkson — Manufacturer	Alan Frank — Physician
Abraham “Abe” Berkson — Businessman / WWII Military Hero	Benjamin Frankel — Founder of Hillel
David H. Berkson — Physician	Peter E. Gordon — University Professor

Joseph Gottfarstein — Author
 Julius Hillel Greenstone — Author
 Lawrence R. Hamilton — Attorney
 William “Bill” Hamilton — Rabbi
 Judith Issroff — Psychoanalyst
 Saul Issroff — Dermatologist,
 Holocaust and So. African Historian
 David V. Kahn — Attorney
 Celia Kaplan (Booth) — Teacher
 Yitschok Ben Meyer Kaplan — Pharmacist
 Raphael Kaplan —Physician
 Mordechai Kaplan — Businessman
 Solomon Baruch Komaiko — Author
 Julius Kushner — Businessman
 Harold S. Kushner — Rabbi, Author
 David Libai — Attorney, Politician
 Chaim Joseph Lurie — Educator
 Chayem Mergushelsky — Artist

Danny Newman — Public Relations Agent
 Ralph Paiewonsky — Governor, Virgin
 Islands
 Isidor Paiewonsky — Businessman
 Michael Paiewonsky — Businessman
 Meyer Paradise — Public Relations Agent
 David L. Passman — Educator
 Bert Rabinowitz — WWII Military Hero
 Dov Baer Ratner — Author
 Aba-Yitshak Rosenthal — Political Activist
 Moshe Rozentalis — Artist
 Benjamin Harrison Swig — Legislator,
 Banker, Real Estate Tycoon
 Sam Trivash/Travis — Businessman
 Moyshe Zundel Trivash and Dvora
 Shilobolsky/Jacobson — Business
 Baruch ben Yehuda (Leibovitz) —
 Educator

**ARON
 ABELHEIM**

Aron Abelheim, M.D. ¹ (birth date unknown–1869) was born in Mariampole and graduated from Kharkov University. He was a member of “Bilu,” a group of Jewish idealists aspiring to settle in the Land of Israel with the political purpose of redeeming the country and re-establishing the Jewish State. After immigrating to Johannesburg, South Africa, he practiced medicine there and lectured at the university.

**JOSEPH
 ACHRON**

Joseph Achron ² (1886–1943), violinist and composer, was born in Mariampole and began violin lessons from his father at age five. His father was an amateur violinist and recited prayers at the synagogue. At age 8, Joseph Achron toured Russia as a prodigy violinist.

Achron studied with Auer and Liadov at the St. Petersburg Conservatory and began his career in Russia, teaching at the Krakow Conservatory (1913–1918). He associated with a group of Jewish writers and musicians who founded the Society for



**JOSEPH ACHRON
 (NEW YORK, 1929)**

Jewish Folk Music. This brought a change in his musical interests and manifested itself in his *Hebrew Melody* in 1911.

After attempting to settle in Berlin (1918–1922) and Palestine (1924), he immigrated to New York in 1925. There he wrote music for Yiddish plays and was commissioned to compose the *Sabbath Evening Service* for Temple Emanu-El in 1932.

His *Golem Suite* was presented in Venice at the International Society for Contemporary Music, an organization dedicated to the dissemination of contemporary classical music throughout the world.

In 1934, Achron moved from New York to Hollywood, where he wrote music for films as well as continuing serious composition. He composed more than eighty works including three violin concertos and violin sonatas. He performed his *Violin Concerto No. 1* with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. The bulk of his manuscripts are preserved in the National and University Library, Jerusalem.³

**CHATZEL/
YITZCHOK
ACHRON**

Joseph's brother, Chatzel/Yitzchok Achron, (birth and death dates unknown) was a Hebrew teacher in South Africa. His granddaughter, Adina Achron, lived in Jerusalem.

MAX BAND



**MAX BAND, (LOS ANGELES,
1941)
SELF PORTRAIT**

Max Band⁴ (1900–1974) was a famous painter who taught art at the Mariampole *gymnasium* [high school], although he was born in Naumestis, Lithuania. He described the beginning of his interest in art this way:

“For three lumps of sugar the peasant’s boy took me along to bathe the horses. Soon after dawn, the sun was barely up, we were galloping through narrow sandy paths to the Sesupa [Sheshupe]—my little river which, then, seemed to be ever so deep and wide, and which was the first to show me images, pictures of trees and skies and clouds, stranger and more vibrating than life itself—life as

seen through the personality of the river.

“Later, in school, still blue from the morning chill and not quite dry yet, I listened to the teacher’s deep, velvet voice. He spoke of truth and justice. Our small voices chanted back to him: Happy the man who can sit under his vine and his fig tree, with

none to make him afraid, and who is free to walk in the name of his God.—my Three Freedoms of twenty-seven centuries ago.”

“After school, perched on a cart piled high with freshly cut hay, I breathed, I lived the eternity of the Book—it was one life, it was timeless. Arthur Milliers’ *The Art of Max Band*.”⁵

According to a *Time Magazine* article:⁶ “One day when [Max Band] was seven, he took his only pair of shoes to the village cobbler for soling. While he waited, barefoot, the cobbler fashioned a crude brush to varnish the new soles. He did it by pounding the tip of a stick until the fibers were separated and soft. Afterwards, Band ran home as fast as his new soles would carry him, made his own brush, and set to work on his first oil painting—using salad oil.

His paintings led Band from his Lithuanian village to Berlin in 1920, where he acquired a wife, and then to Paris, where he made his reputation. Finally, he came to the U.S., where he spent six days at the White House in 1934, when he was commissioned to paint a portrait of Franklin Delano Roosevelt among others.

Band authored the *History of Contemporary Art* in 1935. He studied at the Berlin Academy and Paris, where together with Chaim Soutine, Marc Chagall, and other Jewish modern artists, all foreigners, he founded The School of Paris. His works were represented in museums worldwide.

Band immigrated to the U.S. in 1940, settled in Hollywood, and was the Artist in Residence of Fine Arts at the University of Judaism in Los Angeles. In 1942, he painted the “Day of Atonement,” which appears in Arthur Millier’s book, *The Art of Max Band*.⁷ “His pictures in 1948 looked a little as if they had been painted with a stick and salad dressing (he used dark pigments, thickly smeared on), but the best of them had a melancholy force.

“One small, Rembrandt-like study of a bearded old Jew outshone some of the more ambitious canvases. Band had illuminated the hoary, disconsolate head as if with a Gestapo searchlight. Journalist Pierre van Paassen said that with such somber understatements Band “indicted a civilization.” But Band took a differing view of his work. “Although I paint sadness,” he said, “I don’t paint ‘against’ anyone. There can be no hatred in art. I paint the oppressed only because I love him; never do I paint the oppressor.”

Band lived in California until his death in November 1974.

DVORA BARON

Although Dvora Baron ⁸ (1887–1956) was not born in Mariampole, she attended one of the two private high schools there. There were no known quotas for Jewish girls in Mariampole's Russian high schools, unlike the quotas for Jewish boys in the Russian state schools. Baron began publishing stories in the Hebrew and Yiddish press in 1902, at the age of fifteen. This was the beginning of a prolific literary career of more than fifty years in which she published eighty short stories and a few longer novellas. In 1905, Baron organized a youth group in Mariampole called *Pirchei Zion* [The Flowers of Zion], later renamed *Tikvath Zion* [The Hope of Zion]. From age 15-23, she lived in Minsk and Kovno and then Mariampole.



DVORA BARON
(EASTERN EUROPE, 1907)

The first half (1902–1923) of Baron's literary career was an eventful time in her life, full of professional transitions and geographical dislocations. After spending some years in major Jewish cities in the Pale of Settlement, she immigrated to Palestine in December 1910, having already made a name for herself as a Hebrew writer. In Palestine, she met and married Zionist activist Yosef Aharonovitz, editor of *Hapo'el hatza'ir* [The Young Laborer], the influential journal of Labor Zionism. Baron became the editor of the journal's literary supplement. In 1914, she, her husband, and their small daughter Tzipora were exiled to Egypt by the Ottoman authorities. They returned to Palestine only after the end of World War I, in 1919.

After her beloved brother died in 1923, Baron spent the second half of her career just secluded in her apartment except for contact with acquaintances and other writers while she continued to write and translate. She lived the last thirty years of her life as a recluse, tended only by her daughter.⁹

Baron was the first woman to enter the modern Hebrew literary canon, born into the period of the renaissance of Hebrew literature, when writers mined the Jewish cultural tradition for materials from which to construct a modern language and literature. Unusual for a woman of her time, she received a thorough childhood grounding in Jewish texts, enabling her to make skillful use of Hebrew literary allusion and to employ it as a subtle, gendered tool of cultural critique. She was a writer before it became fashionable for traditional Jewish women to write. She was respected among writers even though they did not know her personally.

**SHLOMO
BATNITZKY**

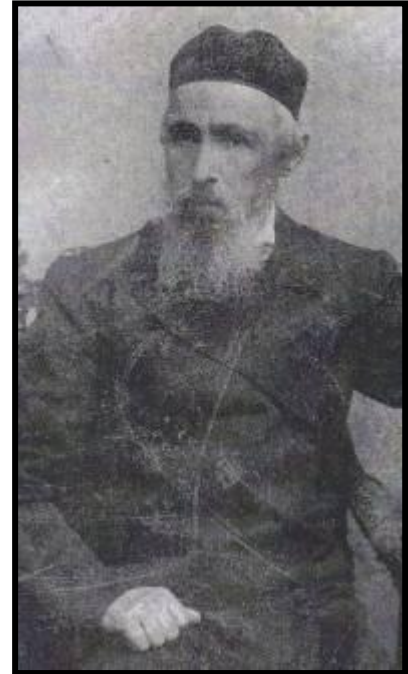
Reb [rabbi] Shlomo Batnitzky ¹⁰ (1830–1920) was a much loved, compassionate *dayan* [judge of religious law] in Mariampole. He was the *dayan* of the town for close to half a century. Although he was a great Torah scholar, prayer and the study of the Talmud were not the only things that occupied his energy. Much of his time was spent caring for other people's troubles. He was a poor man's champion who knew those who needed help and saw to it that they received it.

R' Shlomo was the "father" of the orphan and widow. He had the soul of a saintly person, but his saintly behavior did not mean that he cut himself off from others. His flowing white beard, his tall lean figure, dressed in a long, black *kapota* [jacket usually worn on the Sabbath] with the shepherd's cane he constantly carried, was a familiar sight. His walk was brisk and fast, lest he would miss helping someone in need.

R' Shlomo did not speak much to anyone. He was as great a silent person as he was a Torah scholar. He believed that when one speaks, one often talks foolishly and sometimes is guilty of *lashon tiara* [bearing tales]. Therefore, he considered it best to speak as little as possible. In Mariampole many people had never spoken to R' Shlomo. They had only greeted him from afar. He would respond with a cheerful and smiling 'Good Day' or 'Be well' and would walk on.

R' Shlomo spent sixteen hours a day in the *Beis Midrash* [house of prayer and study] four on the street, and four sleeping. As early as a Jew might come for the first *minyán* [prayer circle], he would find R' Shlomo standing in a corner by a *shtender* studying, and late at night, when the town was asleep, a person passing would see the glimmer of light from the windows of the house of study and would hear R' Shlomo's sweet voice. He sat alone and studied aloud. When others entered, he would study silently. No one disturbed him, unless they needed to ask him a question about Jewish law.

The people in the town did not say, "One o'clock" or "two o'clock," or "three o'clock" but "an hour" or "two hours" or "three hours" since R' Shlomo had left the house of



**RABBI SHOLOMO BATNITZKY,
DER DYAN
(MARIAMPOLE, ABT. 1885)**

study. Just as he was the first to come, he was the last to leave. In R' Shlomo's position as a *dayan*, he was lenient to help others.

Once, just before Passover, a poor butcher's axe became unkosher and made him unable to earn his living. The butcher was distraught. In the family's distress they went to R' Shlomo who listened to their troubles. R' Shlomo consulted another rabbi saying, 'Let me take responsibility to rule the axe permissible.' R' Shlomo then ruled that the axe was permissible. R' Shlomo was more concerned about whether people were 'kosher' in their actions than whether an axe was kosher. Although he separated himself from the tumult of daily life, he knew what was happening with people. He knew when a wagon driver needed a horse, an orphan needed a dowry, a poor father could not afford to pay tuition for his children. He looked after those who could not afford medicine, and those who were broken hearted and needed comforting. Despite his reserved behavior, he knew what was happening in the town, and for him, knowing meant attending to those in need.

Dr. Emma Saludok tells this story about R' Shlomo:¹¹ "One morning, R' Shlomo left the *Beis Midrash* [house of prayer and study] earlier than normal. The people, fearing that he might not be well, followed him out of concern. To their surprise he went to the market square packed with peasants and horses and went to a Jewish horse trader. The horse trader inspected the horse's mouth, picked up its hoof and R' Shlomo followed this with great interest. Eventually, R' Shlomo bought the horse. They led the horse through the town alleys, until they reached the home of Eli, a wagon driver. R' Shlomo gave the horse to the wagon driver, wished him good luck, and returned to his studies. It happened that Eli's old horse fell as it was pulling a load, leaving Eli without a way to support his large family. After he told R' Shlomo his tale of woe, R' Shlomo went to the town's wealthy man and asked him to pay the 25 rubles for the horse. Out of respect to R' Shlomo, the wealthy man did so immediately.

"R' Shlomo also served informally as the trustee of the town. If a person did not know where to keep his money, he would bring it to R' Shlomo. To leave something with him was to have it as safe as if it had been deposited in the Bank of England. He was thought of as [one of] the great personalities of [Lithuanian Jewry] in his generation [during that time]."

R' Shlomo was respected and admired by Mariampoler Jews and non-Jews alike. When he died, leading rabbis from all over Lithuania attended his funeral. The streets of Mariampole were lined by both Jews and non Jews.¹²

**JONATHAN
BATNITZKY**

Jonathan Batnitzky ¹³ (1899–1980) journalist and early Zionist leader was the son of *Reb.* [rabbi] Shlomo Batnitzky. Jonathan [“Yohonatan” transliteration from Yiddish] was born in Mariampole. He was educated at the world famous Slabodka yeshiva in Kovno, known colloquially as the mother of yeshivas, and devoted to high level study of the Talmud.

In 1919, Jonathan was elected Secretary of the Jewish National Council of Lithuania and then Secretary General of the Lithuanian Hechalutz (Zionist) Movement (1924-1926). He wrote for *Undser Wort*, the organ of the Lithuanian Zionist Socialists, and also for the *Yiddisihe Shtime* in Kovno.



**JONATHAN BATNITZKY,
(JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH
AFRICA, ABT. 1970)**

In 1926, he made an *aliyah* [Hebrew, “going up” referring to immigration to live in Palestine, the Holy land] and after two years was called to serve as principal of a Hebrew-Yiddish School in Porto Allegro, Brazil. In 1931, he moved to Johannesburg, South Africa and became the editorial writer and then the editor of one of the Yiddish newspapers in South Africa, the *Afrikaner Yiddish Tzaitung*, *The African Jewish Newspaper*. In the same year he married Chaya R. Abramowitz. She was born in Marianpole but grew up in Kovno where her father was a well known cantor.

Jonathan was a prolific writer. The range of topics he dealt with revealed his extensive knowledge. He was a Talmudic scholar and was steeped in the Hebrew and Yiddish languages and literature. He also became the editor of the monthly Hebrew journal *Dapim*, as well as the *South African Rosh Hashanah Yearbook* which he published with his wife, Chaya. He was the South African correspondent of the Israel Labor Daily Newspaper *Davar*. He edited the Hebrew supplement of the *South African Zionist Record*, the major Jewish weekly newspaper in South Africa published in English. He was a regular columnist for the Federation Chronicle, the organ of the Federation of Synagogues of South Africa. He was a regular contributor to American Jewish Journals. For 10 years he served as Secretary General of The Histadrut Ivriith of South Africa. He wrote and published a book in English and Yiddish: *Israel Between East and West*, Pacific Press 1951.

For 33 years, he worked in South Africa as a journalist. He convened the Mariampolers and their descendants in South Africa to form the Mariampoler Society, served as its president, and published the South African Mariampoler

yearbooks. He also authored, *The First Year of Jewish Liberation*.¹⁴

**SOLOMON
"SOL"
BATNITZKY**



**SOLOMON BATNITZKY,
(KANSAS CITY, KANSAS,
2007)**

Solomon "Sol" Batnitzky, M.D.,¹⁵ (1940 —) is the grandson of *Reb.* [rabbi] Shlomo Batnitzky, after whom he is named and he is the son of Jonathan and Chayna/Haya Batnitzky.

Solomon was born in Johannesburg, South Africa. He earned his degree in medicine in 1964 from the University of the Witwatersrand School of Medicine in Johannesburg, where he also completed his post-graduate training in diagnostic radiology. He immigrated to the United States in 1971 and was awarded a two-year special fellowship in neuroradiology by the National Institutes of

Neurological Disease and Stroke, which he completed at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York City.

In 1974, Solomon joined the Department of Radiology at Indiana University, School of Medicine as the Chief of Neuroradiology. In 1977, Solomon was appointed Chief of Neuroradiology and Professor of Radiology at the University of Kansas Medical Center in Kansas City, Kansas. After a national search, he was appointed Chair of the Department of Radiology at the University of Kansas Medical Center, which was named as one of the five best Academic Medical Centers in the United States.

Solomon is the author or the co-author of four Radiology or Neuroradiology textbooks, and 361 scientific publications and scientific exhibits. He has done over 300 invited talks and/or scientific presentations at national and international radiology and neuroradiology meetings. He has held numerous leadership positions in local and national radiology and neuroradiology societies. He has also been an investigator on numerous funded grants dealing with topics such as HIV infection, multiple sclerosis, MR contrast agents, 3D display systems, and pediatric brain tumors.

He has achieved national and international recognition for his clinical and research efforts, which include imaging of stroke, head and facial trauma, cervical spine trauma, multiple sclerosis, pediatric brain tumors, subarachnoid hemorrhage and contrast agents in radiology.

His extensive publications include topics such as: *Radiology of Maxillofacial Trauma*, *Computerized Three-Dimensional Reconstruction and Measurements*, and *The*

Radiology of Cervical Spine Trauma.

**LEORA F.
BATNITZKY**



**LEORA BATNITZKY,
(PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY,
2007)**

Solomon's daughter, Leora F. Batnitzky, (1966 —) is a tenured Professor of Religion at Princeton University. She has also been Visiting Professor at University of Tokyo and New York University Law School and has received awards from the Andrew Mellon Foundation and the Woodrow Wilson Foundation, among others. In 2002, she received Princeton's President's Award for Distinguished Teaching, the only teaching award given at Princeton. She is the author of *Idolatry and Representation: The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig Reconsidered* and *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophy and the Politics of*

Revelation, as well as the editor of *Martin Buber: Schriften zur Philosophie und Religion*. Her forthcoming book is *Modern Jewish Thought and the Invention of the Jewish Religion*. She is the co-editor of the journal "Jewish Studies Quarterly" and is currently the acting director of Princeton's Program in Judaic Studies.

Leora is especially proud of her two active young sons.

**MORRIS "MOE"
BERKSON**



**MORRIS "MOE" BERKSON
(CHICAGO, 1937)**

Morris "Moe" Berkson (1896–1937) was born and educated in Mariampole, Lithuania. At age 15, Morris sailed to America. At 18, he came to Chicago, where he eventually became a successful manufacturer of ladies' dresses. He headed his firm as president for 37 years until 1962 when he retired. Next, he published the *Chicago Fashion Buyers Guide*, a directory for the Chicago ladies ready-to-wear and accessories industry.

In addition, during his final seven years, Morris served as the financial secretary of Stephen S. Wise B'nai B'rith. He was an active member of the Associated Talmud Torahs since its inception, member of Congregation Rodfei Zedek, and finally member of Anshe Emet Synagogue. He was affiliated with the Chicago Loop Synagogue where he attended lectures regularly. He was active in Chicago's Mariampoler Aid Society.

(See appendix for Morris Berkson's memoir written in the 1960s describing leaving Mariampole and immigrating to America.)

Morris is the father of David Berkson and Gloria, a University of Michigan graduate and wife of Dr. Samuel Schall.

**JACOB
BERKSON**

Moe's cousin, Jacob Berkson (1884–1962), was born in Mariampole and came to America in 1904 with his twin brother, Meyer. Jacob and Meyer took up the junk business and eventually set up full-fledged scrap metal businesses, which prospered as a result of the demand for metal during World War II. Jacob married Sam's (*Shmai*) Berkson's niece, Ethel Rogoff and the families of Sam and Jacob Berkson remained close through the years.

Jacob was a founding member and early president of Chicago's Mariampoler Aid Society.

**ABRAHAM
"ABE"
BERKSON**

Jacob's son, Abraham "Abe" Berkson,¹⁶ (1910–1999) became a lawyer and also the operator of the family metal business.

After graduation from John Marshall Law School in the 1930s, Abe started his own law practice, but that was cut short when he was drafted to serve in the Army. Abe told his daughter that he had lived through hell. During World War II, he was on the front lines. When his U.S. Army company crossed the bridge into Nancy, France, his company came under German fire.

Many soldiers were wounded, including Abe, and others were killed. Despite his injuries, Abe used the body of one of his comrades as a shield and carried eleven men to safety. He then removed the personal belongings of the dead soldiers to return them to their loved ones. "He was like a John Wayne guy," said his daughter. "He was totally about his country, God and family."

When Abe returned to Chicago, he was honored with the Silver Cluster, Bronze Star and the double cluster of the Purple Heart. He spent several months at the naval hospital in North Chicago recuperating from his injuries suffered in Europe, and was later honorably discharged. He and his wife settled in the West Rogers Park neighborhood, before he was recalled to Ft. Sheridan to help train soldiers for the Korean War.

After his military career, Abe declined to restart his law practice and went into the scrap metal business.

Beginning in the 1950s, he and his wife volunteered for Blind Service of Chicago. The couple read aloud to law students and helped 10 students pass the bar exam.

Abe was an active member of the Mariampoler Aid Society until its dissolution in 1997.

**DAVID
BERKSON**



**DAVID BERKSON
(CHICAGO, 1960)**

David Berkson, M.D.¹⁷ (1928 —) son of Morris “Moe” Berkson served in the U.S. armed forces as a physician. David later specialized and taught as a professor of Medicine and Preventive Medicine at Chicago’s Northwestern University Medical School. He then served as Chief of Cardiology at St. Joseph Hospital on Chicago’s north side.

For 27 years, David Berkson was Heart Disease Control Officer for the Chicago Department of Health, where he established and supervised programs detecting and treating hypertension and other cardiac risk factors. He served as President of the Chicago

Heart Association, was a member of its board and chaired several committees. He was active in cardiovascular research and served as Director of the Cardiovascular Research Unit at St. Joseph Hospital for 30 years, during which time he served as principal investigator in over 20 clinical trials and drug investigative studies dealing with the detection, treatment and prevention of coronary heart disease. He authored or co-authored over 140 articles in medical journals and lectured extensively on heart disease prevention, and for 42 years he had an active private medical practice.

**SAM “SHMAI”
BERKSON**



**SAM “SHMAI”
BERKSON
(CHICAGO,
ABT. 1930)**

Sam “*Shmai*” Berkson (1867–1937) was a founder and early president of the Chicago Mariampoler Aid Society.²⁹ He was born in Mariampole to a family that had lived in Mariampole since the eighteenth century. *Shmai* came to America in 1884, at age 16. He settled in Chicago, presumably because a fair number of Mariampolers already living there (including some Berkson cousins who had arrived as early as the 1850s and 1860s and had become relatively prosperous).

By 1892, *Shmai* had become a naturalized U.S. citizen under the name of Sam Berkson, although within the

Mariampoler community he was still known as *Shmai*. That same year, he was joined in Chicago by a bride chosen for him by his family – Lena Scrinopskie, a native of the town of Shaki, located about 35 miles north of Mariampole.

By 1901, Sam's eight younger siblings and his father had joined him in Chicago. Sam's profession, like that of many other Jews starting out in America, was a junk peddler. He spent his days riding his horse and wagon up and down the alleys of Chicago, calling out 'Rex-O-Line' (a heavily accented description of what he was looking to purchase: 'Rags, Old Iron').

According to Lawrence Hamilton, Sam Berkson's descendant, "Sam was a tall and well-built man, known for his scrupulous honesty, he was recruited to become a policeman, but declined the opportunity because he was unwilling to work on Saturdays. He was also known for his singing voice and even served as *chazan sheni* [assistant cantor] at the Beth Hamedrash Hagodol shul (the one that split to form the Mariampoler shul)."

Sam Berkson's descendants continued to support the Chicago Mariampoler Aid Society throughout its existence, including his daughter Sara Contarsy, who died in 1995 at age 98, and Larry Hamilton, who is the grandson of another daughter, Ann Hamilton.

**LAWRENCE
R. HAMILTON**

Lawrence "Larry" R. Hamilton (1957 —) is a Chicago attorney specializing in mergers and acquisitions, insurance regulation and securities law.

Larry graduated from Harvard College and the University of Chicago Law School. He is also an amateur genealogist who has been tracing his Mariampole roots since 1991.

In addition, he serves as *pro bono* counsel to the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies and the "LitvakSIG" Special Interest Group for Lithuanian Jewish Genealogy.



**LAWRENCE R.
HAMILTON
(CHICAGO, 2007)**

**IZIS (IZRAEL)
BIDERMANAS**



**IZIS (ISRAEL)
BIDERMANIS (FRANCE,
ABT. 1970)**

Izis (birth name, Izrael) Bidermanas ¹⁸ (1911–1980), a French photographer and writer, was born in Mariampole. In 1930, he went to Paris. During World War II, he was captured by the Nazis but escaped and joined the resistance. He taught himself to produce expressive human studies with a small, fast camera. In 1946, Izis held his first exhibition in Paris. A second exhibition four years later brought him a contract with the French magazine *Paris Match*. His roving mission, which took him throughout Europe and the Middle East, resulted in beautifully designed photographs that were lyrical, humane, and exciting. His book of this period, *Paris des Rêves* (1950), with text by 40 French poets, remained in print through many editions. His other collections include *Charmes de Londres* (1952), *Paradis terrestre* (1953) with text by Colette, and *Israël* (1955) with a preface by André Malraux. In 1963, Chagall designed a frontispiece for *The Circus of Izis*, for which Jacques Prévert wrote the text. In 1968, Izis published *The World of Marc Chagall*.

**SAM
BORENSTEIN**



**SAM BORENSTEIN
(MONTREAL, CANADA,
ABT. 1921)**

Sam Borenstein ¹⁹ (1908–1969), a Canadian artist, was born in Kalvarija, Lithuania, a town about 22 miles (18 kilometers) southwest of Mariampole. At age 4, he moved to Suwalki, Poland, where his father, a rabbinical scholar, had a job with the Singer Sewing Machine Company. In 1921, he immigrated to Montreal, Canada where for 15 years he worked in the garment factories. He studied art in his spare time at the Monument National during 1928 and 1929, and by the 1930s he held solo and group exhibitions in Montreal and Toronto.

Borenstein's paintings transmuted the ordinary reality of the mainly Jewish working-class district of Montreal where he lived and turned them into colorful images of material and natural energy. In the 1940s, in addition to painting portraits of his family, Montreal Yiddish poets, and other artists, Borenstein concentrated on landscapes. His



**SAM BORENSTEIN'S
MOTHER (KALVARIJA,
LITHUANIA, ABT. 1915)**

paintings of rural Quebec transformed the Laurentian villages into idealized images of town life reminiscent of his memories of the shtetls of Eastern Europe. In his landscapes, he focused on how they were changed by the sun and wind, as well as autumn hues and seasonal aspects. He focused on the color and texture of the local ice and snow. He believed that the earth was a cosmic manifestation reflected in individual consciousness, where even the simplest forms of nature could speak directly to the artist. “Art,” he said, “is my religion. Just as one prays, so does one paint for spiritual satisfaction.”

Borenstein became an antiquarian dealer who played a pivotal role in developing the first public collection of Judaic ceremonial objects in Canada. This collection is now housed in the Aron Museum located at Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom in Montreal. *The Colours of My Father: A Portrait of Sam Borenstein* (1991) is an animated film created by his daughter, Joyce Borenstein, and produced by the National Film Board of Canada and Imageries Inc. The film won nine international awards and was nominated for an Academy Award.

ABRAHAM BRAUNSTEIN

Mariampoler Professor Abraham Braunstein / Bronstein²⁰ (Abt. 1876–1969) distinguished himself in medicine through his search to find a cure for cancer.

Until the age of nine, Braunstein attended *khyeder* [Hebrew School] in Mariampole. His father was a *podriatchik* [a supplier of produce] to the military near Vilna, Lithuania. Braunstein graduated from a *gymnasium* [Russian high school] and attended the University of Charkov. From there he went to Berlin, where he studied under professors Wirbow, Koch, Wasserman, Senator, and Paul Ehrlich. Young Braunstein’s teachers predicted that he would become a great scientist, a prediction which later became a reality.

During the Russian-Japanese War in 1905, Braunstein served as a military doctor with the Tzarist armies. He was later appointed *privatedozent* [visiting lecturer outside of the university hierarchy] at Moscow University. He also worked in the school’s laboratory under Dr. Popow. Being Jewish, Braunstein was not allowed to have the title of professor, at first. Later, because of his great knowledge, he was promoted to Director of the Moscow Cancer Institute. After the October Bolshevik Revolution, Braunstein returned briefly to Mariampole and was invited to become professor at the University of Kaunas. Later, with the help of Lithuanian President Dr. Kazys Grinius, also a native Mariampoler, Braunstein went to Berlin, where he furthered his cancer research. Between 1919 and 1934 his research took him to Berlin and Moscow.

Among Braunstein's well-known patients were Maxim Gorky, Pawel Milukov, and Professor Hessen. Braunstein was believed to be the first to treat cancer with radium. During the tragic Hitler days, Braunstein went to Paris and became associated with Madame Marie Curie's Radium Institute. In 1940, Braunstein immigrated to America and carried on his research at the Bellevue Hospital in New York City. He celebrated his 80th birthday in 1954, marking 50 years of cancer research, most of it as a therapeutic radiation specialist.

**SAMUEL
BRITTAN**

Sir Samuel Brittan, (1933 —) served as an economic commentator at the British *Financial Times* where in 2008 he continues to work.²¹

Brittan wrote on his website: "My father was a general practitioner in north-west London. Both he and my mother were of Lithuanian Jewish extraction, although naturalized before I was born. As a child I was precocious without being a prodigy. For instance, I worried that the hottest places were not always those nearest to the equator and that the coldest were not always at the poles. Then I switched from an obsessive observance of Jewish rituals to proclaiming my disbelief in religion. What I have retained from this period is a selective liking for ceremony and observance.

"My early political instincts were more childlike. I started to say I was a Liberal because my mother was one. One family legend has it that I said to a 16-year-old girl: 'The Liberals gave you your old age pension.' But I did as a postwar teenager declare that I wanted to be an economist. That was because I supposed it to be the part of politics from which one could make a living.

"Nevertheless, I did believe even in these tender years that mass unemployment was not merely an evil, but a huge illogicality: unsatisfied wants existed side by side with unused labour."

Brittan has been awarded the George Orwell, Senior Harold Wincott and Ludwig Erhard prizes. In 1993, Brittan was knighted 'for services to economic journalism'.²²



**SAMUEL BRITTAN
UNITED KINGDOM**

LEON BRITTAN

Samuel's brother, Leon Brittan (1939 —), a British politician, was born in London to Jewish Mariampoler parents, Joseph Batnitzky [note the surname was simplified] and Rebecca Lipetz.²³ The Brittans are cousins of the Batnitzkys of Mariampole.

Leon was elected to Parliament as a conservative in 1974. An advocate of the closer integration of Britain with Europe, he served (1988–1992) on the European Commission of the European Community and European Union, responsible for external economic affairs and trade policy; He was vice-president of the Commission

Sir Leon was knighted in 1989 and made a Peer Baron Brittan in 2000. He retired as Honorable Leon Brittan.



LEON BRITTAN
(NORTH LONDON,
UNITED KINGDOM)

SAM J. COHEN Sam J. Cohen (1872–1967)²⁴ was born in Mariampole and when he was 13, he came to the United States. While on the boat, he celebrated his bar mitzvah. After arriving in the United States, his father, Pesach Cohen, opened a department store in South Bend, Indiana. In 1920, Sam and his brother-in-law, (first name unknown) Bernstein, formed Chicago's Bernstein-Cohen Company, manufacturers of childrens' playclothes.

Sam founded a Jewish Home for the Aged in Chicago. While he was president of the congregation (1920–1947), he was instrumental in building Chicago's southside synagogue, Congregation Rodfei Zedek.

**ELHANAN
ELKES**



ELHANAN ELKES
(EASTERN EUROPE,
ABT. 1940)

Elhanan Elkes²⁵ (1879–1944), chair of Kovno *Aeltestenrat* [Council of Elders under the Nazis], was born in Kalvarija, Lithuania, across the Shesupe River from Mariampole. He received both a traditional Jewish and a private secular education. Elhanan studied medicine in Koenigsberg, Germany, was a village doctor in Belorussia, and then served as a physician in the Russian army during World War I. Then he came to Kovno, Lithuania, where he was director of internal medicine at Bikkur Holim. A respected physician, he treated prominent non-Jews as well as Jews and thus had excellent contacts

which he used when the Soviet Union occupied Kovno to assist in the emigration of Polish Jews stranded in Lithuania.

Although an ardent Zionist from youth, he was not active in Jewish public life until

the German occupation (June 1941), when he was unanimously elected chairman of the Kovno *Aeltestenrat*, a position he accepted with great reluctance. Thus, he derived the legitimacy of his administration from the Jewish community and not from the Germans, who routinely appointed the Jewish leadership. Despite his failing health, Elhanan guided the council for more than three years, during which time he took upon himself fateful decisions involving the future of the community while actively furthering the local resistance movement.

He was a man of unquestioned integrity, who conducted the affairs of the *Judenrat* with equity and fairness, in marked contrast to other ghettos where corruption and the enticements of power were rampant. [The *Judenräte* were administrative bodies that the Germans required Jews to form in each ghetto in the German occupied territories. They were an important extension of Hitler's government charged with solving the problems that arose in the occupied community. The *Judenräte* operated post offices, hospitals, soup kitchens, day care centers, and vocational schools. They also collected taxes and paid salaries for certain types of work.]

Also in contrast with other *Judenrat* chairs, Elhanan cooperated with the resistance. In Kovno the Jewish police directly assisted the partisans who were part of the resistance. In 1942, word of the fate of Polish Jews reached Kovno through Irena Adamowicz, a non-Jewish courier for the underground. From then on the members of the Jewish Council understood they would lead the battle for survival even without knowing if their efforts could postpone or prevent the day of destruction. Despite the *Judenräte* best efforts, only 2,000 Jews—eight percent of the ghetto's original population—survived, a rate little different from that of other ghettos whose internal governance was more corrupt and less benignly guided.

By his personality and dignity of bearing Elhanan represents an outstanding example in the history of imposed Jewish “self-government.” According to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 2nd edition, on October 19, 1943, he wrote of his fate in a letter to his children, who were safe in England:

“I am writing these lines, my dear children, in the vale of tears of Vilijampole, Kovno Ghetto, where we have been for over two years. We have now heard that in a few days our fate is to be sealed. The Ghetto is to be crushed and torn asunder. Whether we are all to perish, or whether a few of us are to survive, is in God's hands. We fear that only those capable of slave labor will live; the rest, probably, are sentenced to death.

“We are left, a few out of many. Out of 35,000 Jews of Kovno, approximately 17,000 remain; out of a quarter of a million Jews in Lithuania ... only 25,000 live ... The rest

were put to death in terrible ways by the followers of the greatest *Haman* of all times and generations. [In a biblical story, Haman and his wife instigate a plot to kill all the Jews of ancient Persia. Haman attempts to convince the king to order the killing of all the Jews of the lands he ruled.]

“We are trying to steer our battered ship in furious seas, when waves of decrees and decisions threaten to drown it every day. Through my influence I succeeded, at times, in easing the verdict and scattering some of the dark clouds that hung over our heads. I bore my duties with head high and an upright countenance. Never did I ask for pity; never did I doubt our rights. I argued our case with total confidence in the justice of our demands.

“The Germans killed, slaughtered and murdered us in complete equanimity. I was there with them. I saw them when they sent thousands of people, men, women, children, infants, to their death, while enjoying their breakfast, and while mocking our martyrs. I saw them coming back from their murderous missions, dirty, stained from head to foot with the blood of our dear ones. There they sat at their table, eating and drinking, listening to light music. They are professional executioners.

“I am writing this in an hour when many desperate souls, widows and orphans, threadbare and hungry, are camping on my doorstep, imploring us for help. There is a desert inside me. My soul is scorched. I am naked and empty. There are no words in my mouth.”

Following the liquidation of the ghetto, he was deported to Lansberg, where he served as a physician before succumbing to illness on October 17, 1944.

IRVING FIELDS Irving Fields, M.D.,²⁶ (birth and death dates unknown) a Mariampole descendant, was born during the early years of the 20th century. He was an outstanding surgeon working at the University of Southern California’s Medical School. A friend, Dr. Alan Frank, reported, “Dr. Irving Fields, possibly originally named Finkelstein, came to the United States at about age 16. He went to the University of Minnesota and graduated from its School of Medicine. Fields served as a medical officer in the U.S. Army in the Second World War, finished his training as a surgeon, and practiced in Los Angeles. [. . .] He was a senior attending surgeon at the University of Southern California Medical School, Los Angeles County Hospital, and the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center.”

HARRY W. FISHER Harry W. Fisher²⁷ (birth and death dates unknown) was born in Mariampole around

the end of the 19th century. He immigrated to Chicago when he was only 10. At age 13, to help his family's finances, he sold newspapers. Young Harry became a capmaker, and when the capmakers went on strike in 1901, he was their leader. While he worked, he went to night school, studied law, and in 1904 was admitted to the Bar. He was elected to Chicago's Municipal Court in 1912. In 1931, he became Chief Justice of the Criminal Court. Judge Fisher was an ardent Zionist and championed the cause of a free Israel. Fisher, along with his friend Captain Ike Harris, Mariampoler Aid Society president for several terms, was instrumental in organizing the Knights of Zion. This was a Jewish semi-military uniformed unit, which was the first to carry the flag of Zion next to the U.S. flag in Memorial Day parades on Chicago's Michigan Avenue.

ALAN FRANK

Alan Frank, M.D.²⁸ (1922 —) reported, "I am a sixth generation direct descendant of Havish Frank, who was attached as a provisioner to Napoleon's army during the French invasion of Russia in 1812. During the disastrous retreat from Moscow, he left the army which passed through the small village of Mariampole, where he married into the Jewish community. Having no last name he was simply known as Havish, the Frank (Frenchman).

"My father came to Detroit in 1914. In time, I applied to medical school and despite quotas for the number of Jewish students that medical institutions would accept, I was admitted. In 1945, I graduated from the Wayne State University School of Medicine. I then served a 12-month internship at Grace Hospital in Detroit and practiced medicine there for about two years. Subsequently I moved to Los Angeles and resumed training in internal medicine at the Los Angeles County Hospital and the Veterans Administration Hospital. In 1951, I initiated my private practice of medicine."

He was a clinical professor of Medicine at UCLA School of Medicine and participated in teaching medical intererns and residents for many years.

In 2008, Frank said, "I am proud that at the age of 86 I am still active in a kind of pro bono medical work, namely serving as a medical expert witness in social security hearings and appeals. This means that I attend such hearings and assist the judges who preside over them in arriving at decisions in many of their cases."



**ALAN FRANK
(BEVERLY HILLS, CA,
1966)**

**BENJAMIN
FRANKEL**



**BENJAMIN FRANKEL
(CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS, ABT
1923)**

Benjamin Frankel,²⁹ (1899–1929), a Mariampole descendant, known for his warm disposition, directed the world's first Hillel Foundation at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana.³⁰

The B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation started inauspiciously at the University of Illinois in 1923, when a local Jewish woman encouraged a promising young man, Benjamin Frankel, to reside in Champaign Urbana as Sinai's part-time rabbi. Three years earlier, he had come to Champaign as another in a long line of rabbinical students from Hebrew Union College serving a part-time, two-year internship with Sinai. The Congregation was still too small to

support a full time rabbi. When he completed his studies and was ordained in 1923 at age 26, five or six of the greatest pulpits in America were open to him. He was a charismatic speaker, with a gorgeous voice, fine vocabulary, and a presence that enabled him to dominate any gathering. However, he was attracted by the noble idea that had emerged which compelled him to choose the risky, less remunerate task of service to Jewish college students. He realized that they needed rabbinical leadership not only at Illinois, but at every campus through the country. Benjamin Frankel agreed that Jews like other religious groups could profit from the example of those who pioneered the concept of the religious foundation as an agency enabling college students to express their religious loyalty, especially at tax-supported schools where church and state were clearly separated.

Frankel together with an English professor persuaded a philanthropist to provide the seed money for the Jewish student organization modeled after those for students of Protestant and Catholic backgrounds. Frankel chose the name Hillel to symbolize devotion to Jewish learning. The student organization began on the second floor of a barbershop.

The Hillel organization, originally viewed as a rival to other Jewish groups, became instead as a clearinghouse for the separate and often conflicting views and activities of Jewish groups. By 1928, Hillel began to overcome the indifference of Jewish college students who were now willing to identify as Jews during fall registration. Frankel also organized Hillels on several other campuses.

Tragically, in 1929, at the early age of 30, Rabbi Frankel died from a heart attack.

**MOYSHE
ZUNDEL
TRIVASH**

Moyshe Zundel Trivash (1862–1920) and Dvora Shilobolsky/Jacobson (1861–1942) moved from their parents' homes in Poland and settled in Mariampole in 1885. There they raised their five girls and five boys and operated the family business.

**DVORA
SHILOBOLSKY /
JACOBSON**



**MEISCHE ZUNDEL TRIVASH
AND
DEVORAH SHILOBOLSKY/JACOBSON,
(MARIJAMPOLE, LITHUANIA)
(MARRIAGE PHOTO ABT. 1885))**

**SAM TRIVASH /
TRAVIS**

Sam Trivash, their youngest son, born in Mariampole at the turn of the 20th century, only received the minimum *kheder* [religious school] education and worked in the family business. He immigrated to America about 1922 or 1923, when a wave of oppression and discriminatory measures rose against the Jews in Lithuania. The family surname Trivash was anglicized to Travis at the port of entry to the U.S., possibly a decision determined by the authorities. Immigrants usually followed those from their hometown. Sam settled in Chicago where his two older brothers were established in the tavern business.

Sam, typical of new immigrants, lived economically. At first, he was a household boarder. Early in his marriage he and his wife lived in a one-room apartment in a run-down section of town. Sam took every opportunity to earn and save money, including collecting and reselling discarded materials such as tin cans from an alley near his place of business, the Manhattan Grill. Sam became a successful business owner and investor and provided his children with the best university education of their choice.

Sam Travis and his wife, Doris, were active in Chicago's Mariampoler Aid Society (M.A.S.) in Chicago. Sam served as its vice-president in the mid-1950s and supported the Society financially. Doris provided her artistic talents, making decorations for the Society's annual events.



**SAM TRIVASH
/ TRAVIS,
(CHICAGO,
ABT. 1930)**

The Travis daughter married Milton P. Gordon, who became a distinguished biochemistry professor at the University of Washington and their son Peter E. Gordon made his career in academia also.

PETER E. GORDON

Peter E. Gordon (1966 —) ³¹ is a third generation Mariampole descendant of maternal Trivash great-grandparents; and his grandfather is Sam Travis.

As a young child, some of Peter's favorite activities were creative dramatics class and writing stories. In later years, Gordon enjoyed composing on the piano.

Gordon earned a position as a tenured professor of history at Harvard University. His first book,

Rosenweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy (2003) received the Salo W.

Baron Prize for Best Book in Jewish History, The

Godstein-Goren Prize for Best Book in Jewish Thought, and the Forkosch Prize for Best Book in Intellectual History.

He is on the editorial boards of both the *Journal of the History of Ideas* and *New German Critique*. He is co-editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Jewish Philosophy* (2007), and his next book, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, is in progress. Gordon is co-chair of the Harvard Colloquia in Intellectual and Cultural History. As a Harvard educator, Gordon was honored with two teaching awards as well as named the favorite professor by the University's class of 2007.



**PETER E. GORDON
(CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS,
2007)**

JOSEPH GOTTFARSTEIN

Joseph Gottfarstein ³² (1903–1979) grew up in Mariampole although he was born in Prenen, south of Kovno. His boyhood name was Yoselle Moshe Ansheles. His father was a country peddler and an orchard owner and, in season, a matzo baker. His father also dealt in crockery and other products. Gottfarstein said he remembered the Mariampole *Shpatsier Gorton* [garden] and the Sheshupe River where he said he showed off his swimming abilities and played boyish pranks.

Gottfarstein wrote, "Our family lived on Klaus Gaas in a small brick building in Mariampole, owned by us and Welvel *der fisher* [fisherman]. It was opposite Hachnosas Ohrcheem Klaus. My mother's name was Mariashe. I left Mariampole in 1923."

Gottfarstein studied philosophy and violin in Berlin, participated in the anarchist-literarischer circle, and published in the Jewish magazine, *Di Tswelfe*. He told an interviewer in 1977, "Since 1925, I lived in Paris, France. During the war years, I lived in Switzerland. I am an author and write for French-Jewish publications. I also

published several books in the French language.”

Gottfarstein was a historian and a scholar of Yiddish culture, language and literature. One of his articles on the *Folklore of Lithuanian Jews*³³ appeared in *Yaadus Lito Israel*. He lectured at a university in Paris and was active in Jewish cultural organizations. He said he wanted to publish a book on Mariampole but to-date no such a book has been identified.

**JULIUS HILLEL
GREENSTONE**

Julius Hillel Greenstone³⁴ (1873–1955) was an educator, Philadelphia rabbi, and author. Greenstone, son of Prisch Dovid Greenstone, was born in Mariampole and immigrated to the United States in 1894. He studied at City College of New York and the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he was ordained in 1900. From 1902 on, he maintained a modest Jewish bookshop in his home, toward which rabbis and those interested in Jewish education gravitated to obtain books as well as advice and guidance.

In 1905, he joined the faculty of Gratz College and taught Jewish education and religion. He was the college principal from 1933 to 1948.

Greenstone was among the first American Jews to produce books of popular Jewish scholarship in English. He contributed articles to the *Jewish Encyclopedia* (1901). His *The Religion of Israel* (1902) was later rewritten and expanded into *The Jewish Religion* (1920). *The Messiah Idea in Jewish History* (1906) was the first work in English to examine historically the messianic idea in Jewish literature. His commentaries on the biblical books *Numbers* and *Proverbs* appeared in the series *Holy Scriptures with Commentary*, published by the Jewish Publication Society (1939).

For about twenty years he contributed a popular though scholarly column to the Philadelphia weekly, *Jewish Exponent*. Some of these essays were collected and republished in *Jewish Feasts and Fasts* (1945).

At one time, Greenstone was president of Dropsie College, a teacher’s college in for Jewish Studies in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

**CELIA KAPLAN
(BOOTH)**

Celia Kaplan (Booth) (1936 —) was born in Des Moines, Iowa and worked as a teacher of young children in Des Moines and later in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Celia's family, dating from the early 1800s, came from the Mariampole area. Celia's grandmother, Esther Miriam (Malki) Kominsky, was born in 1861 in Virbalis, Lithuania. Her father, Kalman Kaplan, was born in 1893 in Mariampole and her mother, Miriam (Darisky) Kaplan was born in 1902 in Kybarti, Lithuania. Six months after their civil wedding in Kovno in 1922, Kalman left for America with his mother, leaving his wife in the old country for six long years. He joined his brothers Sam, Louis, and Elisha Kaplan in the United States. In due time, they started the Kaplan Hat Company, a landmark in Des Moines. In 1928, Celia's mother, Miriam, joined the family in America and gave birth to Irving and Celia.



**CELIA KAPLAN BOOTH
(SANTA MONICA,
CALIFORNIA, 1980)**



**SAMUEL KAPLAN (1886-1929)
AND LEAH BERKSON (KAPLAN)
(1889-1967) (PHOTO IN IOWA)**

In 2005, Celia and her husband Larry traveled to Kovno, Mariampole, and Virbalis, Lithuania to walk in the shoes of Celia's ancestors. Only a handful of Jews were living in Lithuania at this time. Celia and her husband secured as a guide Daniel Gurevich, a young man who grew up in Russia. His grandparents had left Lithuania and spent the war in the Russian air force. The Booths created a DVD of their tour, showing synagogues and schools where Celia's parents grew up.

**WILLIAM
HAMILTON**



**WILLIAM "BILL"
HAMILTON
(BROOKLINE, MASS.)**

Rabbi William "Bill" Hamilton (1962 —), born in Highland Park, Illinois, is the grandson of Ann Hamilton and great-grandson of Sam "Shmai" Berkson discussed in an earlier entry. William is the rabbi of the Brookline Congregation, Congregation Kehillath Israel. "In terms of what I do as a rabbi," Rabbi Hamilton said, "A mourner once suggested something to me. 'As a rabbi, you get to meet people when they're at their best.' I've often returned to that observation. To the extent that Judaism punctuates life's most profound moments with holiness, I am indeed blessed by the inestimable privilege of seeing the glowing humanity in people all the time. I am

nourished by listening to their stories, and, on occasion, by playing a supporting role in the way those stories unfold. It is an honor for me to be included in the multi-generational 'feast of plenty' that is 'the story of Mariampole'."

**LEAH AND
SIMEON WOLF**

Saul and Judith Issroff's maternal grandparents, Leah and Simeon Wolf, left Mariampole as penniless refugees, a dressmaker and watchmaker. Leah taught Russian and German to the British officers fighting in World War I. "They indeed were achievers," granddaughter Judith Issroff said, "We owe our contributions to their courage and foresight."

JUDITH ISSROFF



**JUDITH ISSROFF
(JERUSALEM, 2005)**

Judith Issroff (1939 —) was born in South Africa, trained in England and lived in Israel. She is an independent psychoanalyst who works with children, adolescents, and groups and is also a social psychiatrist.

Judith qualified in medicine in Johannesburg (1961), and after doing biochemical research for a time, she emigrated to England in 1965 to study psychoanalysis, becoming a consultant in adolescent psychiatry at London's Tavistock Clinic and School for Family Psychiatry and Community Mental Health (1970–1977).

Judith said, "Affected by Holocaust studies, and by pediatrician and psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott's ideas about democracy and trauma – that insight without action is spurious – I emigrated to Israel as a committed Zionist."

She qualified as a tourist guide in order to learn Hebrew and a lot more. In Israel she was in psychoanalytic practice, taught, consulted to various organizations, engaged in ethnographic research, founded and ran a Non Government Organization for mental health and allied professionals interested in finding non-violent ways of dealing with projects that were handed over to the Palestinian United Nations Development Program

Judith said that her work with survivors of trauma and in cross-cultural and social psychiatry in the Middle East and elsewhere is extensive. Her experience includes professional work in a variety of situations and countries, and publications, for example, introducing the concept of "affect contagion phenomena in delineating the unavoidable after impact of trauma and its inter-and trans-generational transmission," and drawing attention to the parallels between psychoanalyst

Winnicott's late theories and traditional Jewish concepts of *Yahweh* was / is / will be, and other streams of traditional Jewish thought. Judith is the author, along with John Reeves and Steve Hauptman, of *Donald Winnicott and John Bowlby: Personal and Professional Perspective*.

Funded by the United Nations Children's Fund, she consulted in post-civil war-devastated Mozambique. Beyond her work in psychiatry, her poetry, art work and writings cover a range of diverse areas. Publications include three books, dozens of chapters in books, articles, and reviews covering a broad spread of areas. She says she is devoted to friendship, art, music, cooking, film, forestry, and reading.

SAUL ISSROFF



SAUL ISSROFF
(LONDON, 2006)

Judith and Saul Issroff's (1943 —) parents were from Mariampole. After their father died, their mother, Phoebe Gellman-Issroff, moved Saul and his sister to Johannesburg, South Africa.

Saul is a historian and co- author of *Holocaust in Lithuania, a Book of Remembrance* and the *Jewish Memorial (Yiskor) Books in the United Kingdom*.

Saul said, "I spent my formative years involved in the Habonim, a Zionist Youth Movement, as my friends and I spent three months in Israel at the end of school. I spent a little over six years studying medicine." Issroff specialized in dermatology. He said he was always involved in

things other than his medical practice, and eventually went onto the board of his late father-in-law's steel tubing business, while at the same time keeping involved in private and hospital medical practice.

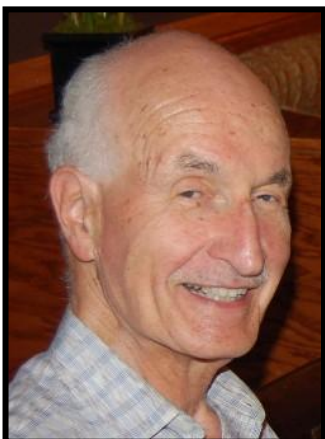
Saul left South Africa in 1980 for Britain, ended his career in medicine and became involved in commercial real estate projects, including developing a game farm and a rural eco estate in the eastern cape in South Africa on land his father bought in 1941.

Saul said, "I am obsessed with Jewish History, South African, Lithuanian, USA, Holocaust, Migration and such. I am an honorary vice-president of the Jewish Genealogy Society of Great Britain, and have been deeply involved internationally in genealogy, direct a migration and genealogy project at Kaplan Centre for Jewish

Studies at the University of Cape Town.”

Saul is a devoted father of three children and served many people who have benefited from his research and generosity.

DAVID V. KAHN



DAVID V. KAHN
(EVANSTON, ILLINOIS, 2006)

David V. Kahn (1930 —) is a descendant of Albert Z. Kahn and Sarah G. Berkson, both natives of Mariampole. They each immigrated as teenagers in the early 1900s. Albert and Sarah first met in Chicago and married in 1915. They had fled from imperialist Russia and pogroms.

Several of David’s aunts and uncles immigrated to the United States before World War I.

After David Kahn graduated from the University of Chicago Law School he served briefly in the military. He became a partner in the prestigious law firm of Altheimer and Gray, where he served for 50 some

years in a business oriented and international legal practice. Along the way, he was active in many Jewish organizations and activities, most notably, the American Jewish Congress. He served as its national president from 1994 to 1998, during which time he represented the Congress in several meetings involving U.S. and foreign leaders, observing the Israeli-Palestinian search for peace, as well as local issues the Congress stood for, notably the separation of church and state and religious freedom.

The Congress was recognized as an appropriate organ representing the interest of a large portion of the American Jewish community. Thus, its leader David Kahn was chosen to observe the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. In his position, Kahn traveled through the Middle East and met with Arab leaders during a 15-year span between 1980 and 2001.

In 1999, Kahn and a friend in the medical supply firm flew to Cuba and delivered medical supplies for Jewish citizens who attended each of the four synagogues. At this time, Kahn met Cuban dictator Castro. The secretary of state had arranged access for Kahn and his colleague.

In the mid-1980s–early 2000, Kahn worked for almost fifteen years behind the scenes to help the University of Chicago and Northwestern University bring Israeli scholars and teachers who specialized in Middle Eastern issues, social and political

science, and Islamic and Iranian studies to the local universities. Kahn reasoned that these Israeli scholars would counterbalance the Palestinian and Arab educators. Kahn worked to arrange funding and support the protocol required to support the Israeli educators. He arranged with the Israeli's home institution to receive two semesters leave.

**YITSCHOK BEN
MEYER KAPLAN
AND SONS:
RAPHAEL AND
MORDECHAI
KAPLAN**

Yitschok Ben Meyer Kaplan (1870–1955) was known in Mariampole as *der apteiker* [the pharmacist].³⁵ He helped found the Hebrew Gymnasia in Mariampole, headed its parents' group, and was one of the pioneer Mariampoler settlers in Israel.

Yitschok's older son, Mordechai Kaplan, was one of the founders of the Barzaliah factory in Israel, and Yitschok's younger son, Raphael Kaplan, was a physician in Israel.

**SOLOMON
BARUCH
KOMAIKO**

Solomon Baruch Komaiko ³⁶ (1879–1957) was a *Litvak* [Jewish Lithuanian] from Annixter. He was a writer, mainly about Jewish life. He wrote *Here to Stay; a Collection of Jewish Short Stories*.³⁷ Together with a friend, he also helped organize Chicago's Knights of Zion. This group carried the flag of Zion during Memorial Day downtown parades at the turn of the 20th century. Komaiko was a founder of Chicago's Jewish Home for the Aged and was active in other local and national organizations.

At the end of World War I, Komaiko was instrumental in getting the United States to recognize the Republic of Lithuania.

**JULIUS
KUSHNER**

Julius Kushner (1900–1984) was born in Mariampole. His wife, Sarah, is the daughter of Shlomo Batinizky, the beloved Mariampoler Rabbi dyan.

Julius left Mariampole in 1920 and went first to Palestine and then in 1923 to St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. He immigrated to New York City. In later years, he became president of the Mariampoler-Lidvinover Society of New York. Julius owned a toy and plastics factory in Halon, Israel as a way of helping Israel's economy and providing materials for the Israeli government. His main business was the toy and children's book company in New York City.

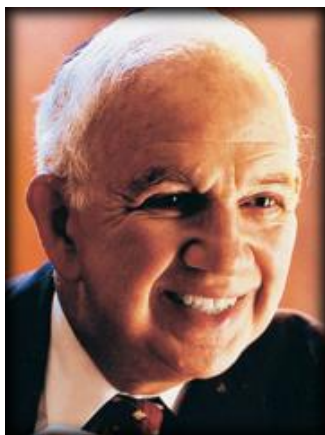
Julius was elected president of Histadruth Ivrit of America, an organization which



**JULIUS KUSHNER AND WIFE,
SARAH,
(DURING VISIT TO ISRAEL,
1955)**

sought to spread the Hebrew language.

**HAROLD
S. KUSHNER**



**HAROLD S. KUSHNER
(MASSACHUSETTS, 2002)**

Best-selling author Rabbi Harold S. Kushner³⁸ (1935 —) was born in Brooklyn, New York, son of Mariampoler Julius Kushner and Sarah Hartman. Kushner is the great-grandson of Shlomo Batnitzky, the dayan (religious judge) of Mariampole.

Kushner said, “I have always been proud of my Lithuanian heritage.”

“My mother left Lithuania as a very young girl and returned only once briefly to visit. My father was born in 1900 and lived in Mariampole until 1920, when he left first for Palestine and then for the United States. When I was growing up, my father was president for life of the New York branch of the Mariampoler Aid Society (mostly a burial organization).

“My father did not speak very much about daily life there [Mariampole]. The only conversation I remember was about surviving the bombing during World War I, when southern Lithuania was fought over between the Germans and Russians. My father represented a second stream of Jewish life in Mariampole, alongside the Orthodox one. It was Haskalah-oriented, Hebraic and Zionist rather than yeshiva-oriented. He attended the [Mariampole] Hebrew gymnasium and in 1920 left with his entire graduating class and the teacher on *aliyah* (immigration to what was then Palestine).”

Kushner’s 1981 book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, has been translated into at least a dozen languages and into audiobooks on tape, CD, and MP3 download. It was named by the Book of the Month Club as one of the most influential books of its time. In 1985, Kushner was awarded a Christopher Medal, given by a Roman Catholic organization to fifty individuals who made the world a better place in the second half of the 20th century. He was cited for his second book, *When All You Ever Wanted Isn’t Enough*, for its “contribution to the exaltation of the human spirit.” In 1999, Rabbi Kushner was recognized by Religion in American Life as the clergyman of the year.

Kushner has written, *The Lord Is My Shepherd*, a healing meditation on the Bible’s most consoling psalm. In *Living a Life That Matters*, Kushner explains that the path to a successful and significant life is through friendship, through family, through acts

of generosity and self-sacrifice. He describes how, in affecting the life of even one person in a positive way, we make a difference in the world and prove that we do in fact matter. His book, *How Good Do We Have To Be?* combines psychology and spirituality to invoke the power of acceptance and forgiveness as a way to overcome the consequences of a preoccupation with perfection and self-image..

DAVID LIBAI



DAVID LIBAI
(TEL AVIV, ISRAEL,
2001)

David Libai, ³⁹ (1934 —) born of Mariampoler parents in Tel Aviv, is a lawyer and law professor, holding a Ph.D. in Law from the University of Chicago.

Libai has served as the head of the Israel Bar Association, Deputy Attorney General and Director of the Institute of Criminology and Criminal Law at Tel Aviv University, where he later served as Dean of Students.

He has also been a member of the National Commission of Inquiry on Prison Conditions, chairman of the Constitution Committee of the Labor Party, member of the Press Council, and chairman of the Israel-Britain Parliamentary Friendship Association. Libai became the Israeli

Minister of Foreign Affairs in 1992.

As a member of the Knesset [the Israeli legislature] since 1984, Libai participated on the Committee on Constitution, Law and Justice (1984–1992), the House Committee (1984–1988), and chaired the State Audit Committee. He has written many articles on legal topics. From 1992–1996, he served as Minister of Justice, and in that capacity proposed a repeal of a 1986 law that prohibited meetings between Israelis and P.L.O. members. Libai was reelected to the Knesset in June 1996, but decided to retire a year later.

CHAIM JOSEPH LURIE

Chaim Joseph Lurie ⁴⁰ (late 1800s–1933) taught in the Hebrew gymnasium in Mariampole. He arrived in South Africa in 1925, and instilled in South African born young Jewish men a knowledge of Jewish culture, reading Hebrew and Yiddish.

CHAYEM / CHAEM LEIB MERGUSHELSKY

Chayem Leib Mergushelsky, ⁴¹ (birth and death dates unknown) was a professor of the Vilno Art Academy and a noted artist. He was born in Mariampole in the mid-19th

century. He graduated from the Hebrew gymnasium located in the Braunstein's building. Mergushelsky wrote in the Mariampoler Aid Bulletin, "My father, Shemel, owned several houses near Labensky's on Prenen Gass."

Chayem Mergoushelsky remained in Lithuania throughout the German occupation and he witnessed the Lithuanian Jewish tragedy in its entirety. He has since lived in Israel with his wife and two children.

DANNY NEWMAN

Danny Newman ⁴² (1919–2008), a Mariampole descendant, was the founding press agent and public relations counsel of Chicago's Lyric Opera.

Danny's father, Jacob Newman, arrived in Chicago in 1888 at the age of 15. Jacob became an entrepreneur, supplying choice fruits and vegetables to wealthy families in mansions south of Chicago's business center. Eventually, he became a wholesale tobacconist, prospering briefly.

Danny's mother's family came to the U.S. early in the 20th century. Danny's maternal grandfather, Benjamin Waldman, was an economically ruined, uprooted old-country distiller. This was because the Russian Czar Alexander II nationalized the empire's lucrative vodka industry, making Ben's work obsolete. After Ben immigrated to America, he began his business in Chicago as a Halsted Street wholesale-grocer, in the neighborhood of Jane Addam's Hull House.

When Danny was 10, he made deliveries for his father's tobacco-supply business and soon after began selling school supplies to peers at high school. Next, Danny managed theater companies, movie houses, and also worked as a publicity agent for burlesque shows. He sponsored a variety of acts ranging from Sally Rand, a provocative fan dancer, to Roy Rogers, a performing cowboy.

Newman was decorated with the Purple Heart for his military service in France during World War II.

Danny Newman has been associated with Chicago's Lyric Opera since the company's inception in 1954. In 1977, he published *Subscribe Now! Building Arts Audiences through Dynamic Subscription Promotion*, which teaches nonprofit groups to create and maintain large audiences. The book became a bible for arts management and has been published in 31 countries, including Japan, with at least



**DANNY NEWMAN
(CHICAGO, ABT. 2007)**

eleven editions.

“He is the ‘father’ of modern subscription sales for the arts,” said the reporter who wrote Danny’s obituary.”He has also been an international consultant to the Ford Foundation’s Division of Humanities and the Arts.”

**RALPH MOSES
PAIEWONSKY**



**RALPH M. PAIEWONSKY
(ST. THOMAS, VIRGIN ISLANDS,
ABT. 1962)**

Ralph M. Paiewonsky ⁴³ (1906–1991), Virgin Islands governor, legislator, and business executive, is one of four children of Mariampoler mother, Rebecca Kushner, and father, Isaac Paiewonsky, of one of the nearby Lithuanian towns.

Ralph’s parents met and married in the Danish West Indies and subsequently established a chain of businesses in the islands which through the years have included: A. H. Riise Distillery, Inc., A.H. Riise Liquor Store, Apollo Theater, Center Theater, A. H. Riise Gift Shop, Apothecary Hall, and others.

Ralph received his early education at the Convent of the Sacred Heart, run by the Roman Catholic Church, one of the earlier private schools on St. Thomas of the Virgin Islands, and he completed high school in the United States. In 1930, he received a bachelor’s degree from New York University with majors in chemistry and mathematics. Later in life, Ralph was awarded honorary degrees from Tufts University and Fairleigh Dickinson University.

President John F. Kennedy appointed Ralph governor of the Virgin Islands, a U.S. possession. Paiewonsky was sworn into office on April 5, 1961 and served for eight years.

According to the website of the twenty-five most prominent men and women of the Virgin Islands, “The administration of Governor Ralph M. Paiewonsky, 1961–1969, has been described as one of the most progressive periods in the history of the Virgin Islands. These eight years marked improvements in the social, economic, political, and cultural growth of the islands. Paiewonsky was also a delegate to all Democratic National Conventions between 1940 and 1960 and served as National Democratic Committee representative from the Virgin Islands.

“He was deeply involved in establishing the Islands’ economic base as a tax-free port. Paiewonsky led the successful efforts to provide fresh water and electrical

power to homes throughout the island and build low- and moderate-income housing for island residents. His administration established the Department of Housing and Community Renewal in 1962, and began a program of land acquisition and home construction. One of the major achievements of the Paiewonsky administration was in the field of housing. Between 1961 and 1966 approximately 8,000 Virgin Islanders were relocated in new homes.

“In addition to encouraging the growth of the Island’s economy, the Governor upgraded the educational system. Gains were made in classroom construction and the upgrading of the only public high school on St. Thomas, Charlotte Amalie High School, for its accreditation by the Middle States Association of Secondary Schools. In addition, he contracted with New York University for a three-year program designed to upgrade the entire educational system. “Excellence in Education” became the motivating slogan. He also supported public education reforms.

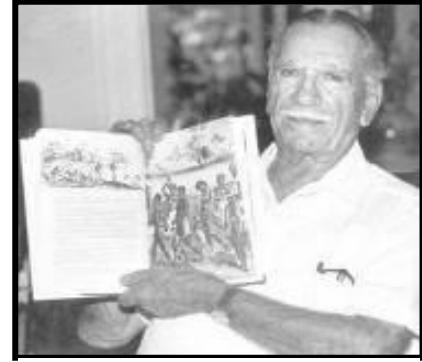
“To meet the need for higher education in the Virgin Islands, the Governor supported plans for a local college. Under his administration the College of the Virgin Islands was established in 1962, and by 1972 the four-year liberal arts college was designated a Land Grant College.” He served as chairman of the university’s board of directors until his death.”

“The Governor said that his proudest achievement was the creation of the University of the Virgin Islands,” said his cousin, Harold Kushner. In 1969, the Ralph M. Paiewonsky Library was established at the University of the Virgin Islands as a tribute to his efforts in establishing that institution.

In 1990, Ralph published, *Memoirs of a Governor*, in which he detailed the story of his life, including the service, struggles, and decisions of both his private and professional experiences. He said he had enjoyed the opportunity of travel and meeting people.

**ISIDOR
PAIEWONSKY**

Raph's brother, Isidor Paiewonsky ⁴⁴ (1909–2004), a self-trained scholar of Virgin Islands history, wrote several books on the subject. He owned a pharmacy and wrote a weekly newspaper column in a way that was universally appealing. When he began to weave a tale, people became wrapped in the fabric of his characters. The characters were both historical people he had read about and people he had known in his youth. He told about having beetle races in the sand on the synagogue floor and carving ancient petroglyphs in stone at Botany Bay.



**ISIDOR PAIEWONSKY
(ST. THOMAS, VIRGIN ISLANDS,
1987)
DISPLAYING HIS BOOK,
“EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT OF
SLAVERY IN DANISH WEST INDIES”**

Isidor played a role in the emergence of the U.S. Virgin Islands as a major tourist destination. He used his resources to better the lives of the people in the territory and promote regional commerce. At the same time, he safeguarded open spaces of the territory through balanced growth and careful preservation. One of his efforts succeeded in stopping construction of an airport on concrete pads over the lagoon on the east end of St. Thomas.

Isidor loved the Virgin Islands and people of all races and creeds. Some called him a “Renaissance man,” so diverse were his talents as a historian, a poet, a businessman, a horticulturist, and a humanitarian. Isidor left his mark on many lives, especially the young people whom he coached, trained and mentored in his commercial enterprises.

**MICHAEL A.
PAIEWONSKY**

Michael Albert Paiewonsky ⁴⁵ (1940–2004) was a publisher, historian, art patron, politician, author, and Virgin Islands native son. The son of historian and businessman Isidor Paiewonsky, Michael inherited his father's passion for preserving the history of the Virgin Islands through the medium of print. His political bent was reflective of Ralph Paiewonsky, his uncle, who as governor of the Virgin Islands in the 1960s created the infrastructure for its tourism industry.



**MICHAEL A PAIEWONSKY
(ST. THOMAS, VIRGIN ISLANDS,
2001) IN HIS GRAND GALLERIA
OUTLET**

Michael started a publishing house to produce and market museum-quality reproductions of historic maps, books and artwork, as well as to reprint historic documents and publish new works on Virgin Island history, including books written by himself and his father.

**MEYER
PARADISE**

Meyer Paradise,⁴⁶ (1876–1957) the son of Mariampoler Jonah, *der schlosser* [the locksmith], lived in Chicago. He organized the Hebrew Culture Society there and was the biblical instructor at the Adas Bnei Yisroel Congregation in town. He was a director in the advertising section for the Samuel Phillipson Company.

**DAVID L.
PASSMAN**



**DAVID PASSMAN
(CHICAGO, 2007)**

David L. Passman⁴⁷ (1943 —) is an educator at the Fasman Yeshiva High School in Chicago. The Passmans are a well-known orthodox Jewish family in Chicago whose ancestors came from Mariampole. The first Passman, immigrant Harris Pascemensky, settled in Chicago around 1886. His brother Simon joined him in 1889 or 1890. The name Pascemensky was simplified to Passmansky, and Harris' nephews legally changed the name to Passman in 1911.

David Passman reports a family anecdote, "I have a copy of the passenger list of the S.S. Amsterdam in the late summer of 1900, which includes my grandmother Ella Margowsky, then age 15, although she told the authorities that she was 18. She was headed to a close cousin [she told them 'uncle'] in Chicago, and wound up marrying into the Passman family," as she married the Margowsky's third son, Jake, in 1906.

Ella's mother, Shayna Leah Margowsky, who remained in Mariampole and only had a photograph of her children after they left for America, referred to these pictures as her "*papierene kinder*" [paper children].

Five consecutive generations of the The Passman family have been members of the "Mariampoler *shul* [synagogue]" in Chicago, which was renamed Anshe Sholom Bnai Israel Congregation. The Passman offspring of Mariampole descendants celebrated their weddings and bar mitzvahs at this synagogue. David served as its president from 1975 to 1979 and from 1981 to 1983.

Albert Margowsky, David's uncle, initiated and edited the *Mariampole Aid Society bulletins* from 1944 until his death in 1962. Next, David's father, Harold Passman

served as editor from then until his death in 1975. Finally, son David continued publishing the bulletins until the Mariampoler Aid Society disbanded in 1997.

**BERT
RABINOWITZ**

Bert Rabinowitz ⁴⁸ (1916 – death date unknown) was born in Illinois, the son of Harry Rabinowitz, a plumber born in Mariampole. As a sergeant in the U.S. invasion of Italy in World War II, Bert earned the Presidential Citation and Bronze Star. He returned to Chicago in 1945. In civilian life, he worked as a recording engineer and radio or movie electrician.

**DOV BAER
RATNER**

Dov Baer Ratner ⁴⁹ (1852–1917) was a Talmudic scholar born in Kalvarija, Lithuania, a town approximately 22 miles from Mariampole across the Shesupe River. Ratner studied at the *yeshivot* [rabbinical school] of Mir and Volozhin, and acquired a wide secular knowledge by independent study. In St. Petersburg and Vilna, he engaged in commerce, but later he devoted himself entirely to scholarly research.

Ratner began serious writing at the age 16. He contributed studies, learned notes, and book reviews to a variety of publications, particularly to *Ha-Meliz*. In 1894 his *Mavo le-Seder Olam Rabbah* appeared in Vilna and was followed three years later by a critical edition of the text of the *Seder Olam Rabbah*. From 1901 until his death, he published 12 parts of *Ahavat Ziyon vi-Yrushalayim*, on the entire orders of *Zera'im* and *Mo'ed* of the Jerusalem Talmud, except for the tractate *Eruvin*, containing variant readings and explanations culled from the writings of early authorities. Selections from this work were subsequently included in the Vilna (Romm) edition of the Jerusalem Talmud. An early adherent of the Zionist movement, Ratner was among the Vilna community notables who welcomed Theodor Herzl on his visit to the city in 1903. Ratner left his books to the Straschun Library of Vilna, of which he had been a director.

**ABA-YITSHAK
ROSENTHAL**

Aba-Yitshak Rosenthal (1875–1948) was a Zionist activist leader who served as the Mariampole delegate at several Zionist Congresses. He was also the delegate at the second All-Russian Zionist Conference and the representative on behalf of the Suwalk Region at the Zionist Conference in 1908.

**MOSHE
ROSENTHALIS**

Moshe Rosenthalis (also spelled Rozenthalis) ⁵⁰ (1922 —) was born in Mariampole. In 1928, he started Hebrew School in Mariampole. From 1940 to 1941, he studied at the Art Academy in Kovno, Lithuania. During the war, 1942–1945, he served in the Lithuanian unit of the Soviet Army. In 1945–1950, he earned an M.A. degree from the Academy of Plastic Arts in Vilna, Lithuania, and in 1950, he joined the Lithuanian

Artists Association.

In his youth, Rosenthalis was influenced by the social-realism of the post World War I Soviet Union. As a soldier in the Red Army during World War II, he illustrated propaganda posters. Later as a student, he was influenced by the teaching atmosphere at the Academy of Art in Vilna.

His immigration to Israel in 1958 brought about a change in his artistic perspective. The exposure to western and local painting, the colors, and especially the bright, dominant light of the country, freed him from the conventions of realism and inspired him to try his hand at abstract works. In the special colorfulness of his paintings, which focus on the landscape and on the human image, he succeeded in developing a free interplay between dark and bright shades and forms. In the 1970s, having gained complete artistic freedom, he reintroduced the elements of drawing into his paintings.⁵¹



MOSHE ROSENTHALIS
(ISRAEL, 2004)

BENJAMIN HARRISON SWIG

Benjamin Harrison Swig (1893–1980) is the son of Simon Swig (birth date unknown–1939) who was born in Prienai, about 20 miles northeast of Mariampole. Simon came to America in 1877.

His son Benjamin served in the Massachusetts legislature and founded the Tremont Trust Co., a bank that paid its depositors a fair rate of return on their money (in effect, he devised the notion of the money market account). Benjamin Swig was a real estate tycoon, who was involved in founding the Israel Bond campaign and Brandeis University. He bought the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco in 1945, and thus, depending on the time of year, may have hosted the founding of the United Nations.⁵²

BARUKH BEN-YEHUDA

Barukh Ben-Yehuda⁵³ also known as Boruch Leibvitch,⁵⁴ (1894–1990), is the son of Yankel *der shohet* [ritual slaughterer, not merely a butcher, but one who is an expert in Jewish law so that the animal or bird is kosher, suitable for eating by Jews].

Barukh, an Israeli educator, was born in Mariampole. He left for Israel in 1911. During World War I, he joined *Kvuzat Deganya* (one of the earliest *kibbutzim* [cooperatives] in Israel), teaching there and at Rosh Pinnah. He then studied at the University of Brussels and, after earning a doctorate in mathematics and physics in

1924, he returned to teaching. He became the principal of the Herzlia Gymnasium [high school] in Tel Aviv. In 1927, he helped found the pioneering high school youth movement, Hugim, later known as *Mahanot Olim*. He also founded the Teachers' Council for the Jewish National Fund. He was director of education of the *Va'ad Le'ummi* [national committee] in 1947, and the first director general of Israel's Ministry of Education and Culture until 1951. In 1979, he was awarded the Israel prize for education. His books include: *Toledot ha-Ziyyonut* [The History of Zionism] 1943; *Ha-Keren ha-Mehannekhet: Tenu'at Morim Lema'an Ziyyon u-Ge'ulatah* [The Educating Fund: The Teachers' Movement for Zion and its Redemption] 1949, 1952; *Ta'amei ha-Mikra le-Vattei Sefer* [Biblical Cantillation for Schools] 1968; *Kol ha-Hinnukh ha-Ziyyoni* [The Voice of Zionist Education] 1955; and *Yesodot u-Derakhim* [Fundamentals and Ways] 1952. He also wrote on teaching mathematics: *Hora'at ha-Matematikah be-Veit ha-Sefer ha-Tikhon* [The Teaching of Mathematics in High School] two volumes 1959 and 1960 and mathematics texts. He presented the principal address at the World Congress for promotion of the Hebrew language. One of his three daughters was attached to the Israeli embassy in England. Another daughter distinguished herself during the Israeli-Arab war.⁵⁵

**OTHER
NOTABLE
NATIVES**

Among other illustrious natives of Mariampole ⁵⁶ who deserve acknowledgment are:

- The poet Alter Abelson, later a rabbi in Brooklyn, New York.
- His son, Lionel Abelson, a New York playwright and essayist.
- Shmuel-Zvi Peltin / Samuel Zvi Paltin (1831–1896), a writer who for 31 years in Warsaw published the periodical *Israelita* in the Polish language.
- Moshe ben Ya'akov Goldshtein, who translated the *Hagada of Pesah* and the *Machzor* [The holiday prayer book] into the Russian language.
- Avraham-Aba Rakovsky, a writer and translator of works into Hebrew.
- Avraham Frank (1884–1941), a journalist and writer of Hebrew books for youth.
- Moshe-David Heiman, who established the first concrete products factory in Mariampole.
- Yehoshua Bronshtein, professor physician.
- Eliyahu Segal (1891–1963), the first sports doctor in Lithuania, also active in the sports organization “Maccabi” and author of articles on medical subjects

printed in the Israeli daily press.

- Aryeh Leib Margushelsky ⁵⁷ (1914–1982), the painter who founded the high school for painting in Tel-Aviv.
- Rabbi Zev Heller, who served as representative from 1923 in the Lithuanian first seim [parliament].



MEMORIAL AT NAZI KILLING FIELD IN MARIAMPOLE
(1941 INSCRIPTION IN HEBREW AND LITHUANIAN)

MEMORIAL



This is the field in Mariampole where Jews were murdered by the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators. The memorial in Lithuanian reads: "About 8,000 Jews and 1,000 people of other nationalities were murdered here, children, women, and men. They were killed in August 1941 by Nazis and local collaborators."

Had these Jews survived, many of their descendants might also have made noteworthy contributions to the world as have other Mariampoler descendants mentioned in this document. We do not want the memory of these murdered people to be lost.

CONCLUSION The persons discussed in the entries here were Jews who lived or worked in Mariampole, Lithuania, or nearby towns, or their descendants. Some of these individuals later lived in Chicago and participated in the Mariampoler Aid Society.

EPILOGUE Speaking for descendants of Mariampole, many of us wish we could have met and known our ancestors who left their family home in Mariampole and its surroundings. Now in the 21st century living lives of relative comfort, we can only imagine the difficulties our ancestors surmounted so we could be here today and strive to make a difference in *our* world.

Some left their Lithuanian towns to escape the brutalities of the imperialist Russian leaders around 1900, others left prior to the rise of Nazism and World War II.

Our ancestors crossed the borders between countries, gained the necessary documents for passage and immigration, and survived long voyages by sea (as described in the chapter “Everyday Life in Mariampole.” They embarked on a new life, made a living in the best way they knew how, and saved money, and in many cases also sent funds back home so that other family members could follow them to their new world. Once they arrived, many of them faced severe linguistic limitations, tried to master a new language, and struggled to be understood despite their strong Yiddish accents. They had to scramble to make a living and become part of their new society.

Yet, in most cases, they succeeded in the new homes. Perhaps one of the contributing factors to their success was the Jewish cultural value on education and hard work. Because of East European social policies, Jews had been barred from owning land and rural occupations. Consequently, they moved into professions and developed skills in business and trades. These skills were rewarded in the countries to which the Jews immigrated, like the United States, Great Britain, Virgin Islands, and others. In Chicago, many Jewish immigrants of Mariampole and vicinity congregated. They bonded with people from their hometown, and the mutual support organization of *landsmen* [townspeople] may have been another factor in the new immigrants' success.

The perseverance of our earliest ancestors made it possible for their progeny and future generations to make noteworthy contributions to society as mentioned in this chapter.

“In time after reaching the shores of their new country, these immigrants became productive citizens. These new Americans established careers, built successful businesses, families, and made many positive contributions to the social and economic fabric of our communities.”⁵⁸

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<<http://www.milkenarchive.org/about/docs/achron.pdf>> (accessed Oct. 2007).

³ **Achron, Joseph**. *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 1. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 355-356.

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- ⁵ **Band, Max**, and Arthur Millier. *The Art of Max Band*. (Los Angeles, Calif: Borden Pub. Co, 1945).
- ⁶ **Band, Max**: "No Hatred." Time Magazine On-Line. first published June 7, 1948.
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- ⁹ **Dvora Baron**: Lieblich, Amia, Devorah Baron, Naomi Seidman, and Chana Kronfeld. *Conversations with Dvora: An Experimental Biography of the First Modern Hebrew Woman Writer*. (Contraversions, 6. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.)
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- ¹¹ "Mariampoler Aid Society Annual Yearbook," 1961:
- ¹² **Sholomo Batinitzky**: *The Mariampoler Aid Society Bulletin*, Oct. 1952 (no. 94); May 1954 (113); June 1954 (114).
- ¹³ **Jonathan Batinitzky**: Solomon Batinitzky correspondence with author by e-mail, Dec. 8, 2007.
- ¹⁴ **Jonathan Batinitzky**: *The Mariampoler Aid Society Bulletin*, Dec. 1949 (no. 62).
- ¹⁵ **Solomon Batinitzky**: correspondence with author Dec. 8, 2007. "Program Biography," University of Kansas School of Medicine, Arch W. Templeton Distinguished Professor Award Ceremony 2007.
- ¹⁶ **Abraham "Abe" Berkson**: Craven, Karen. "Abraham Berkson, Hero of World War II Battle," *Chicago Tribune (IL)* June 8, 1999, Obituary.
- ¹⁷ **David Berkson**: Lawrence R. Hamilton, correspondence with author by e-mail, Sept. 20, 2007.
- ¹⁸ Pollack, Peter. "Izis" *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 10. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 825-826.
- ¹⁹ Lerner, Loren. "**Borenstein, Sam**" *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. Eds. Michael Berenbaum and Fred Skolnik. Vol. 4. 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 84.
- ²⁰ **A. Braunstein**: *The Mariampoler Aid Society Bulletin*, April 1954 (no. 112) abstracted from "Jewish American," Feb. 26, 1954.
- ²¹ **Samuel Brittan**: "Samuel Brittan." Wikipedia. April 5, 2008.
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Brittan>.
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