

The Mikelsky Story

It was the kindness of a non Jewish Bath man, a total stranger to the Mikelskys, that brought the first permanent Jewish family to Bath.

Isaac Mikelsky married Sarah Cohen, who was from Riga, Latvia, in Boston in 1878. Earlier histories state that he took his bride to Rockland, Maine in 1886; further research proves this to be untrue. The 1880 census lists them in Rockland under the name of Mc Cilsie (apparently the census taker was Irish.)

The Mikelskys produced twelve children. The three eldest were born in Rockland: Frank ~~was~~ in 1880, Benjamin in 1882 and Sophia in 1885. Shortly after their third child was born, the family left Rockland.

The purpose of the departure from Rockland was to go to Philadelphia to enter a business with a relative. That venture did not succeed so the family returned to Maine, ~~to~~ apparently on their way back to Rockland. Since there was no bridge across the Kennebec at the time, it was necessary for all trains to stop in Bath and be ferried, several cars at a time, across the river in order to continue ^{the} their journey.

When the train stopped for the transfer, Sophia, then a little girl, was struck with a serious attack of the croup. The Bath station master, Mr. Greenleaf, went to Hallet's Drug Store to obtain medicine for her. He then suggested that the family remain in Bath until the little girl had recovered. The Mikelskys took a room in the nearby Harbor View Hotel and, as it turned out, with a little urging from Mr. Greenleaf, they never left Bath and became the first Jewish settlers in the shipbuilding city.

In those early years, the Mikelsky family grew considerably: Harold was born in 1886, Lee in 1889., Bessie in 1890, Rachael in 1892, Ira in 1886, Arthur in 1894, Esther in 1895, Ruth in 1898, Horatio in 1900 and Freda in 1902.

Religiously the Mikelskys, who were, in all ^{it} probably, orthodox, used Portland, the nearest Jewish community, for High Holy Days and memorial services. The boys were

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taught at home until they were thirteen and then taken to Portland to be Bar Mitzahed.
There ^{were} ~~was~~ no reception^s.

The permanent address of the family in Bath was varied. They ~~seem to have~~ lived at several different ^{residences} ~~addresses~~ and had varied occupations. The Bath directory of 1887 and 1888 list ^s Issac as a rag picker with a residence on rear Vine Street, near Front; ^b ~~By~~ 1886, his occupation was called dry goods.

The 1901 directory list^s a number of Mikelskys living ^a 28 York street and holding different jobs. Ben is listed as a clerk at 160 Front street. Frank is listed as a tailor ~~also~~ at 28 York Street, Issac's ^a ~~address~~.

The Mikelsky family still lived on York street in 1910. By this time Issac's brother, Lewis, had come to Bath and was listed as a junk dealer.

Also in the 1910 directory, Issac's wife, Sarah, is listed as having a variety store at 155 Front street. This could have been the same store in which Issac ⁴ was doing business. Sophia was listed as a clerk at 11 Center street.

There is some confusion as to when the family moved to 4 Elm Street. That house was to become the long time family homestead. They are listed at that address in 1907. It is possible that the parents ^b ~~move~~ to that home while some of the children stayed at 28 York street. For a short time around 1900 the family lived at 28 Maple street. It was this year, 1907, that the first mention of the Mikelsky's Store appears. The address of the music store was once again 155 Front. The type of merchandise changed but the address ^b ~~remain~~ the same.

Not content to remain in Bath in various retail businesses, the older boys moved to further their education. Benjamin, Frank and Lewis all attended nearby Bowdoin college. By the ~~the~~ time they had entered Bowdoin all three had shortened their names to Mikels. Frank received an AB MD in 1905. He became a surgeon in the United States Public Service and later in the United States Marine Hospitals. He then practiced in Graystone

Park, NJ, Denver, CO., Honolulu, HI, San Perdo and Long Beach, CA. Frank married and had four daughters. He died in Los Angeles in 1941.

Louis graduated Bowdoin in the class of 1910 with a degree in Medical Science. He went to Texas and became an oil promoter around Fort Worth. He later moved to Long Beach, CA. From 1924 until 1926 he was in the exporting business in Hong Kong. He died in Los Angeles in 1949. He never married.

Benjamin graduated as a physician in the class of 1914. He became a pathologist in Newark, NJ, Honolulu, HI, San Pedro and Long Beach, CA. In 1918 he served in the medical corps of the United States Army.

Of the other Mikelsky men little is known. there is no record of what happened to Arthur or Ira. Harold died at the age of one year. Horatio graduated from Morse High ^{School} in the class of 1919 and was a salesman and piano mover probably at the Music Company. He seemed to have left the area and was last known ^{IN} to be living ~~and~~ California.

Of the five women ^{AND AN OLDER DAUGHTER, INA.} in the family, Rachael became a nurse in the Boston area. Freda was a teacher in Arlington, MA. She married David Smith, a lawyer from Patten, Maine, who practiced in Boston. They had one son, Robert. Sophia, Esther, Bessie and Ruth remained in Bath and ran the family businesses; first the Music ^C company and later the Mikelsky Furniture ^{STORE} Store. The furniture ^{STORE} was located at 148 Front street. In 1932 the Potter Furniture Co. was at that location. In 1934 the store became vacant and sometime between 1934 and 1937 the Mikelskys took over the space, reopened the furniture store, which became a fixture ⁱⁿ Bath, until 1980. The store was known ^{throughout} throughout the state and was a great success.

Ruth had married Louis Silverman and he became an integral part of the management of the furniture store. Ruth and Louis had one child, Sarah.

Sophie died in 1964, Louis Silverman in 1969, Bessie in 1977. With no one left to operate the store it was closed in 1980 and Ruth died a year later in 1981.

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Were it not for the kindness of Bath's non-Jews and for the ambition and desire of this immigrant family the history of the Jews of Bath might have been quite different.