

4. Abraham Isaac⁴ Singer (Yehuda³ Chazanovich, Moshe², Yudel¹)^{67,68} was born March 05, 1869 in Miroslavas, Russian Poland^{69,70,71}, and died May 09, 1940 in Lewiston, ME^{72,73}. He married **Minnie Shohet**⁷⁴ December 23, 1892 in Boston, MA^{75,76,77,78}. She was born September 1870 in Russia⁷⁹, and died September 30, 1934 in Lewiston, ME⁸⁰.



Notes for Abraham Isaac Singer:

Abraham was probably born in the town of Miroslavas, where his family was known to have lived. It is not clear whether he or Myer was the oldest brother, because of variations and overlapping in their given birth dates.

Abraham was said to have been the first of the Singer family to come to the United States, and he sponsored 3 brothers (Myer, Max, Jacob), a sister (Sara), and a niece (Bertha) to come to the United States. According to Abraham's niece Rebecca Robinson, Abraham chose Lewiston because the immigration officials suggested the immigrants go to small towns.

It may be that Abraham's sister Esther had preceded him to America, and it is possible that Esther brought Abraham to America. A Lelansky family story is that Esther took a trip back to Lithuania to bring siblings back with her...and if so, Abraham seems the only likely candidate to have been brought to the United States at that time.

According to his petition for naturalization, Abraham arrived in New York in January of 1883. The same papers show his birth date as "on or about the 5th day of March" in 1869. This would have made him only 13 years old when he arrived in America. The birth date isn't certain though, as his brother Myer also showed his birth year as 1869 (January) in his naturalization papers, and most immigrants did not seem to know their birth dates.

Given his arrival date, Abraham would have been processed at the Castle Garden center in New York, which was the receiving center from 1855-1890. As of 2002, the only passenger records from this time period are in a database relating to "Russians to America," and Abraham was not found in that database.

If he arrived in 1883, it's possible that Abraham joined his sister Esther and may have lived in New York and Boston prior to moving to Maine. According the petition for citizenship of Esther's husband Louis Lelansky, Louis lived in New York in about 1883, and moved to Boston in about 1884. No records have been found for Abraham or for Louis in this time period.

In 2002 Judy Kamin writes the thoughts of her mother Rebecca and her aunt Goldie on this topic: "There was a Jewish Society in Boston which helped the Jews locate to different areas. They

would say there are already too many here--you should go to there. Max did not live in Boston. Maybe Abraham did for a while when he first arrived and the Society helped him. Mother wondered what his occupation is listed on his naturalization papers. He made his beginning money by selling wrappers or kimonos to houses of ill repute!! Many would not sell to 'whorehouses.' There were many of these houses in Maine, NH, and Mass."

According to Abraham's obituary in 1940, he had lived in Lewiston for 53 years, putting his date of arrival there at 1887. Abraham's brother Max arrived in America (at the port of Boston) at age 15 in 1888 (according to his petition for citizenship). The family story is that Abraham brought Max to Lewiston, so this supports the idea that Abraham was living in Lewiston by that time.

[Abraham's petition for naturalization, filed in 1890, shows his address as 70 Cross St. in Boston; but this isn't reliable. His brother Max also showed a Boston address on his petition, though it's known that he didn't live in Boston. Both brothers dealt with suppliers in Boston, and they may have used Boston addresses because their petitions for naturalization were filed in that city.]

All of the Singer brothers were said to have started out as peddlers, and the first directory listing found for Abraham, in 1893, shows him as a dry goods peddler, living at 68 Lincoln. By 1894 he had a business in Lewiston.

According to available directories from 1894-1940, Abraham started out in the fruit and confectionery business at 286 Lisbon St. [Note that this address in 2002 is part of the Lower Lisbon Street Historic District, a concentration of 18 commercial structures. "The district is significant as the only intact concentration of commercial buildings from the city's most important period of development, 1850-1915."]

This early occupation is verified by the birth certificate of his daughter Ida, which lists his occupation (in 1895) as "Confectioner." In 1897 he appears to have sold that business and started a Dry & Fancy Goods business, "Mendelson & Singer," at 255 Lisbon. In 1899 Abraham moved the business to 240 Lisbon, and it became "Androscoggin Dry Goods." His wife Minnie was listed as a "saleswoman" in the 1900 Federal Census, so she probably worked in the store.

In 1904 Abraham apparently opened two additional clothing stores, one at 326 Lisbon, and the "Singer Clothing Co" at 162 Lisbon. Max took over the store at 326 Lisbon in 1904 or 1905. [Note that this 326 Lisbon address is also part of the Lower Lisbon Street Historic District.]

In 1906 Abraham relocated and renamed his stores again, this time as "The Fashion" at 204 Lisbon & at 22 Pine.

By 1912 Abraham was still proprietor of "The Fashion," and still located at 204 Lisbon, and he retained this store until some time between 1926 and 1932. In 1912 his daughter Nettie worked for "The Fashion" as a bookkeeper, and worked there through 1919. She returned in 1924 as a clerk. Son Samuel became manager in 1922. Some time between 1926 and 1932 Samuel became the proprietor, and his brother David became the manager. Abraham (who was now listed as "Abram") started a real estate business.

In 1933 Abram first appears as the President of Singer Realty Co, located at 198 Lisbon. Samuel had become the treasurer-clerk of this company, and David was still manager of "The Fashion," now renamed "The Lucille" (no address shown). In 1935 David's wife Sadye was listed as the president-treasurer of "Lucille's Inc."

In 1940, with Abraham's death, Nettie Singer Bramson became president of Singer Realty Co, and Samuel continued as the treasurer-clerk. The clothing store was no longer listed, and David Singer was manager of Main Collection Service. The occupation listed by his son Sam on Abraham's death certificate was "Real Estate Agent."

Laurie Graf Singer (wife of Abraham's grandson Dick) writes in 2002, "As far as the money in the family, it very much diminished over time. Most of the properties on Main Street in Lewiston were owned by Singer Realty. Uncle Sam managed all of it long after Abraham's death. The property declined in value after the WWII years. Some of the large factories in Lewiston closed. The shoes that had been produced there were now imported. The downtown shops were left vacant due to shopping malls just outside of the city and the economy of Lewiston dropped dramatically."

It appears that Abraham was not close to his siblings, despite having brought some of them to America. According to Jay Berger, Abraham's poor treatment of his sister Sara as a household domestic caused a rift between Abraham's family and that of his brother Max. Jay wrote, "In return for the payment, the newly arrived sibling often worked in servitude, as was the case of my grandmother, Sara. Rebecca has told me how upset her father and mother were by this, and how much they wanted to help Sara, but they were poor at the time and could do nothing." It appears that Sara lived with Abraham for at least 3 years. The fact that their brother (and new immigrant) Jacob was listed as a dry goods salesman in 1900 probably indicates that he worked for Abraham upon his arrival, too. A rift eventually occurred between Jacob and Abraham also.

Niece Rebecca explained, "Abraham was impressed with people who had money. He was not liked even though he brought his siblings over. When they got here he and his wife were not hospitable. They made them work very hard. Also, in the case of Max, he did not even stay one night with them. He was sent to a boarding house full of strangers. Here was a boy who missed his parents in a strange country and he did not even have the comfort of being with his brother."

The latter part of this family story regarding Max seems not to be completely accurate, in that Abraham wasn't yet married when Max arrived in America. (Max arrived in America in 1888, and Abraham was only 19 years old.) Judy Kamin presented this paradox to her mother Rebecca and aunt Goldie, and after some discussion they concluded that it might have been the case that at some later time Abraham wanted Max to live with him and Minnie, but that Minnie wasn't in agreement. It does seem to be the case that Max lived alone in a boarding house when he first arrived.

Because they lived nearby, Rebecca's family felt more strongly what they perceived as a lack of generosity. For example, Rebecca related that Abraham had said that he was going to visit Lithuania and take Max with him, and that her mother Bessie had replied, "That'll be the day." Rebecca said that Bessie's comment was indicative of how she felt about Abraham.

According to Rebecca, Abraham's niece Bertha also worked for him for a year as a domestic to pay back her passage.

Another family story from Rebecca suggests that Abraham operated as "head of the family" in America. Rebecca said that a nice young woman in Brunswick named Sadie was interested in Abraham's brother Jacob, but that after Sadie's father lost his business Abraham's wife Minnie influenced Jacob to instead marry Fannie Waterman, whose sister had a prosperous jewelry business. Later, when Jacob ran into financial problems with his dry goods store in Brunswick, Abraham arranged for his brother Max to take over Jacob's store, and told Jacob to take a position as Max's employee. Rebecca said that Abraham's motivation was that he wanted his brother Max to leave Lewiston so that there wouldn't be two Singers running dry goods businesses there. All of this may indicate a family hierarchy where Abraham had authority over his siblings, either because he paid for their passage, or because he was the older brother. In any case, Jacob left Brunswick and apparently never spoke of Abraham. Jacob's son Maurice had never heard of an Uncle Abraham until he took a trip to Maine at the age of 70.

Rebecca also noted, though, that Abraham loved his children very much. She related stories of his bringing them small gifts and treats and their running to him when he arrived home.

Abraham also seems to have sponsored his brother-in-law Jacob Schohet to come to America.

Laurie Graf Singer (wife of grandson Dick) writes in 2002: "I do wish I had more stories about Abraham. Even Dick didn't really know very much about him. He died when Dick was 10 or 12. I guess to his siblings he was rather elusive.....although his heart seemed to have been in the right place if he was instrumental in bringing so many of his family here to this country."

Abraham had Parkinson's disease in his later years. This was confirmed by his death certificate, which noted that he had died of Parkinson's disease and had suffered from it for 15 years. Frances Bigman remembered him only as an invalid. Many people remembered his male attendant, Joe, who took care of him and chauffeured him around. One person recalled Abraham as having been "sharp" even when he was ill. Abraham died in 1940, apparently at home at 7 Central Ave.

As an interesting historical footnote, Abraham's obituary in the Boston Jewish Advocate appeared next to that of Emma Goodman, the noted anarchist.

According to his obituary, Abraham was a past president and charter member of Beth Jacob synagogue in Lewiston. He was also a member of the Knights of Pythias, a 32nd degree Mason and member of all Masonic lodges, including Kora Temple Shrine.

More About Abraham Isaac Singer:

Burial: May 10, 1940, Auburn, ME^{81,82}

Cause of Death: Parkinson's disease

Emigration: January 1883⁸³

Location: Lewiston, ME

Medical Information: Suffered from Parkinson's disease for 15 years. Death record also noted Diabetes Melitis.⁸⁴

Occupation: Owned dry goods store

Notes for Minnie Shohet:

According to Rebecca Robinson, Minnie came from the Boston area and had no family in Lewiston. According to the 1900 Federal Census, Minnie immigrated to the United States in 1890.



Her obituary, in the Boston Jewish Advocate, said that she was born in Lithuania, but had lived in Lewiston for 45 years, which would have placed her there in 1889. (This date is probably incorrect if she was considered to be from Boston when Abraham married her a few years later.)

Minnie's maiden name was listed on the birth certificate of her daughter Ida (in 1895) as "Sherer." The 1908 birth certificate of her son Peretz lists Minnie's name as "Sarhet," and finally Minnie's obituary lists her brother's name as "Shohet." It appears that the original family name was probably Schochet or "Schokhet" (spelled in a variety of ways).

Minnie was called Michala (pronounced "MICK-ella"), suggesting that her Hebrew and Yiddish name was probably Mikhle.

Minnie's parents' names were listed as Simon and Sara on her marriage certificate. But according to Marilyn Singer Sternick, Minnie's father is listed as "Rabbi Avram Schlomo" on her headstone. Since the marriage certificate had other errors, the latter name for her father is more reliable. But "Simon" could also have been the Anglicized version of "Schlomo" and her father might have gone by his middle name.

According to niece Rebecca Robinson, Minnie always had a maid, and needed one because she wasn't well, having had rheumatic fever.

Rebecca said that Minnie was "tight with money." She related the story that Abraham paid a Polish girl \$2/week as a maid. One day Rebecca's mother Bessie (who lived upstairs) heard screaming, and the maid came running up the stairs. The maid said that she had started to make herself an egg for breakfast and that Minnie had blown up at her, saying that eggs cost \$.20 per dozen, and the maid couldn't have one. The girl was upset, and Bessie made her breakfast, including an egg. Later Abraham secretly gave the girl \$3/week (a very good salary for her work) "plus all the eggs she wanted," so that she would come back.

According to her 1934 obituary, Minnie was a member of the Pythian Sisters and the Beth Jacob Auxiliary. She "was a member of a family noted for its number of rabbis. There is a brother, the Rev. J. N. Shohet of Roxbury; the following nephews, Dr. Gabriel Shohet also of Roxbury; Dr. Harmon Shohet, Newton; Dr. David Shohet, Haverhill; Dr. Samuel Shohet, Chicago; Rabbi David D. Shohet, Yonkers, NY; Rabbi M. Shohet, Palestine; and a cousin, Chief Orthodox Rabbi M.S. Margolies of New York."

Note that Rabbi M. Margolies performed the marriage for Abraham and Minnie, and also for Abraham's brother Max. And Max's daughter Rebecca was married by Rabbi Moses Shohet, from Portland, who also may have been related to Minnie.

It appears that Minnie's brother "J.N. Shohet," as listed in the obituary, was really Jacob M. Shohet, who was a rabbi. He first appears in census records in 1910. Of most interest is passenger ship manifest from the Ellis Island database, which shows him arriving in America on December 10, 1903. He is listed as "Jankel Schoched," age 40, and married. His destination is listed as his "brother" Abram Singer, at 240 Lisbon St in "Lewison, Mass." His occupation may be "butcher," which is a hint about the original family name. "Shochet" was not an uncommon family name among Lithuanian Jews, where the term refers to someone who slaughters animals and poultry according to Jewish ritual. Jacob (Jankel) is listed as being from Russia, from what appears to be the town of "Wahove." ("Washove" is what has been recorded in the transcribed version of the record; in reality the town name is difficult to make out on the original manifest. It could also be "Wahosec" or "Wahove") Minnie's obituary said that she was born in Lithuania, and one of the only possible matches there is the town of "Wajgowa" (the "j" would be pronounced like an "i" and "w" like a "v."). This town is now called Vaiguva and is located near the city of Siauliai.

Another Schochet family was found in the passenger ship manifests as having moved to Haverhill, MA. Though they are not known to be related, Minnie did have other family in Haverhill. This Schochet family was from Lithuania, from the town of Schadow. This town is now known as Seduva, and records from Lithuania show that an Abram Shokhet, son of Yankel, lived in Seduva in 1846. (The significance is that the same given names appear in Minnie's family.)

Perhaps not coincidentally, Seduva is only about 40 miles to the east of Vaiguva. The towns are on either side of the larger city of Siauliai. So, this is possibly the area where the family had lived.

In 1904 Jacob Shohet's wife and children arrived and are listed on their manifest as having the destination of "Jankel Schochet" at 140 Chesnut St in Chelsea, MA. There is a notation of a "Mr. A. Walker," who may have been someone Jacob was staying with at the time, or even a relative. Jacob's wife is listed as Feige, age 37, and the children are: Chaje G. 17, Mensche 11, Roche R. 9, Chaim 7, Leah 5, and Benjamin 3.

In the subsequent 1910 census Jacob is listed with wife Fannie and children Helen, 21, David M. 18, Ruth 16, Hyman 14, Lillian 12, Benjamin 10, and Frederick 4.

David M. was later listed in 1930 as a dentist in Haverhill (this is "Dr. David Shohet" of Minnie's obituary). He attended Abraham Singer's funeral services in 1940 and still lived in Haverhill at that time. Hyman (Harmon) was listed as a dentist in Boston in the 1930 census. Benjamin (then going by Bernard) and Fred were listed as manufacturers of neckties. (Note that they are not listed among the nephews in Minnie's obituary.)

Rabbi David D. Shohet, listed as another of Minnie's nephews in her obituary was actually listed in the 1930 census as David M. Shohet, rabbi in Yonkers. He presided at Abraham Singer's services in 1940. Gabriel Shohet was listed as a doctor in Suffolk County, MA. In 1940 Gabriel Shohet was listed in Abraham Singer's obituary as Dr. Gabriel Shohet of Dorchester, MA.

All of these relatives, however, seem to have come to America between 1903 and 1914, -- well after Minnie's arrival. That brings up an interesting question as to what family Minnie might have had in Massachusetts when she married Abraham in 1892. There is no "Shohet" "Schochet" or "Shochet" listed in the 1900 census in Massachusetts. (The 1890 federal census was lost.)

Marriage Notes for Abraham Singer and Minnie Shohet:

The marriage record for Abraham and Minnie appears on a ledger, very faint (almost like a smattering of dots) and almost impossible to read. However, someone at the Massachusetts Archive wrote over the record in pencil to create read-able information. The good news is that the information can now be read. The bad news is that we must trust the interpretation of the archivist.

It says:

City of Boston for the year eighteen hundred and ninety-two

Date and Place of Marriage: December 23

Date of Record: December 28

Names, Surnames and Color of Groom and Bride: Abram Singer, Minnie Wolper

Residence of Each: Lewiston, ME; Boston

Age of Each: 23; 23

Occupation of Each: Pedler; none

Place of Birth of Each: Russia; Russia

Names of Parents: Isaac and Ida; Simon and Sara

What Marriage: first; first

Name of Person by Whom Married: M. Margoliass, Boston

This is a curious combination of information. On the one hand, this must be Abraham, because there was hardly anyone else in Lewiston at the time that was born in Russia. There is no other Abraham Singer listed in all of Maine in the following 1900 census. The idea that there could have been another Abram Singer who was a peddler, who was 23 years old, born in Russia,

living in Lewiston, and who married a Minnie of the same age in Boston, at this particularly time, seems almost impossible. Additionally, the couple was married by "M. Margoliass," and Minnie was known to have a cousin, Rabbi M. Margolies. So it is curious that Minnie's surname is not what was expected (it should be Shoher or Shohet, not Wolper), and that the names of Abraham's parents are both incorrect.

Abraham and Minnie changed addresses on several occasions while living in Lewiston. It appears their children lived with them until they married. Sam, who didn't marry, lived with them until they died. It appears that for some period Abraham and Minnie took in lodgers. The 1900 census shows 2 lodgers living with Abraham and Minnie at their home at 39 Ash Street. Abraham's sister Sara is also shown living in the household, and the 1900 Lewiston directory lists her as boarding at the address. The census also indicates that Sara had been living in the United States for 3 years.

The 1900 census also shows Abraham's brother Jacob living at the same address, and working as a dry goods salesman. He is listed as a separate Head of Household and "renting." He is listed as having arrived in America that same year, but a later census shows his arrival 2 years earlier.

Abraham and Minnie's home addresses throughout the years were shown as:

1898-99...49 Spruce
1900-01... 39 Ash
1902-08...51 Pierce
1912-1917...176 Pine
1918-1926...174 Pine
1932... 52 Howe
1933... 384 Main
1935-39... 5 Central

According to the 1900 Federal Census, Abraham and Minnie had been married 7 years at the time of the census, which place their marriage date in 1892 or 1893, matching the marriage record that was found. The same census says that Abraham had come to America in 1886, and Minnie in 1890.

However, Golda Sneider had apparently commented during an interview with Jay Burger that Abraham and Minnie were married in 1893 in Lithuania. That is probably incorrect, as it seems highly unlikely that they would have returned there, plus there is the Boston marriage certificate noted above.

Looking at the 1900 Lewiston census, it appears that the town's main industry was a cotton mill, and that the residents were largely of Canadian ancestry, and overwhelmingly English speaking (from Canada, the US, Ireland or England). A very small number of Polish immigrants appear, and even fewer of Russian/Jewish descent. According to niece Rebecca Robinson, there was discrimination against Jews and French Canadians in the early days, so it doesn't sound like an easy place to have settled, especially if Abraham and Minnie were class-conscious.

The birth certificate of Abraham and Minnie's child Ida (in 1895) shows that she was the second child of Abraham and Minnie. The birth certificate of Peretz born in 1908 shows that he was the 7th child, suggesting that Abraham and Minnie may have lost two children between 1895 and 1908.



L-R: Ida, Nettie, Peretz

In response to a question about the religious orthodoxy of this side of the family, Laurie Graf Singer writes in 2002, "As to the religious aspects of Abraham's family, I don't think they were Orthodox.....more of the conservative I would think. I do believe they attended synagogue for the high holidays and other occasions. But (grandson) Dick was never Bar Mitzvahed."

Children of Abraham Singer and Minnie Shohet are:

- + i. Nettie⁵ Singer, born February 11, 1894; died April 02, 1990 in Lewiston, ME.
- + ii. Ida Judith Singer, born July 27, 1895 in Lewiston, ME; died April 19, 1967.
- + iii. Samuel Louis Singer, born September 28, 1898^{89,90}; died March 12, 1984 in Lewiston, ME^{91,92}. He met Ruth Small.
- + iv. David G. Singer, born June 29, 1900; died December 11, 1978 in Lewiston, ME.
- + v. Peretz Singer, born April 16, 1908 in Lewiston, ME; died January 1975 in Newton, MA.