



*Harry and Leah Day with Son Israel*

## Harry and Leah Day

Harry Day, self-named when the banker he applied to for a loan couldn't spell Zion Kodesh, was born near Vilna, a favorite birthplace for immigrants from Lithuania. Although he had no skills like carpentry, farming, or teaching, at nineteen years of age he married Rachel Leah, perhaps ten years older. She had raised her younger siblings when her mother died—as well as supervised a large farm. Day made himself useful to Leah's uncle, who owned a farm and lumber business nearby.

When Day was born in 1878, Jews could own land and engage in manufacturing, but by the time he had four children, he realized he would never move up to the level of Leah's uncle. Actually, this uncle wanted him to go to the village to become a rabbi. Every day from 2 A.M. to 5 A.M. he studied Torah. He wanted to go to college but was not admitted in Moscow. His formal education absorbed his interests from age five to age eighteen—anything he learned after that was by reading and talking to people wherever he happened to be.

Day married Leah, but the household also contained Leah's grandmother and most of her thirteen siblings. After a few years one of Leah's brothers was given a house in town with the provision that any member of the family would be welcomed there. Leah's dowry enabled her to build a house on the farm. Within the family there was much sociability. Unusual for the culture at that time, the marriage was a love match, not arranged by a matchmaker. In later years in America his wit and sociability saddened Leah, but she never reprimanded him or demanded that he change his behavior. His youthful behavior led to a serious accident to one leg as he jumped from one log to another. This required three hospital stays. He loved action; Leah found life tough and at all times, serious.

Women were expected to work for the family though there was no feminist movement to limit their energy to household duties alone. Leah managed the farm, took care of the children, and made sure there were enough resources for everyone. Harry worked on his sister-in-law's farm for his cousin, Lapidus, a foreman of a lumber operation for whom he kept the books, and on Leah's farm. "I never saw a farm so well managed and with flowers as Leah's farm," he told his granddaughter Frances.

When he was approached by an uncle with an offer to accompany him to America with the help of HIAS (Hebrew Immigration Assistance Society), he came to Maine in 1906. At first he peddled like most immigrants, but he soon learned that land was valuable. He missed the real bargains available after the American Revolution, when the General Court of Massachusetts (the legislature) offered every soldier who had served three years either twenty dollars or two hundred acres of land in the wilderness of Maine. Veterans could purchase additional land for one dollar per acre. In 1786 the General Court organized a lottery to dispose of land, six miles square, between the Penobscot and

St. Croix rivers. The lottery towns were exempt from the taxes by Massachusetts for fifteen years. William Bingham of Philadelphia purchased all the unsold tickets and everything else he could buy—a total of two million acres at twelve-and-a-half cents per acre. In 1792 one of the settlers bought 100 acres for thirty shillings, four and one-third cents per acre. Harry Day did own very valuable land in Auburn on Washington Avenue and Minot Street, where he built a large gasoline station and an unusually large residence.

Harry developed a bottling plant in Bath with his sons, Israel and Meyer. He speculated in sugar after World War II and lost a lot of money. He owned an apartment house, he owned two gas stations and gave Israel one station. He also owned acreage that he left to his son Donald. Meyer was killed in an auto accident on the way home from Bath in 1920.

Four years after Harry came to Maine because the climate duplicated his own in Europe, Leah and the four children arrived. She came with fifty yards of linen—she grew flax on her farm—and many quilts, pillows, embroidery, pots and pans, etc. She was a gifted cook and kept a shiny clean house. Harry kidded her, "If you want to like your wife, you have to like her cooking." She was both religious and observant but not a fanatic. Not many people understood why she was silent and never laughed, but her granddaughter, Frances, thought she knew what took the joy out of her life. On Friday evening and Saturday she never talked to anyone on the telephone. Frances walked to her home every Friday and heard Leah say, "Frances is here," but that was all.

Grandma taught Frances Yiddish, never to use sharp language, never argue, live in peace. Although she did not need to speak English since her world consisted of her sisters and cousins, she attended night school with her aggressive sister, Mrs. Graffman, who drove all the sisters to school. In Europe a teacher lived on the farm with them. Leah had no community except her relatives. She was in control of her life when Harry was away. She had brought money to the U.S. from the sale of the farm. All property in America was bought in both names. She did not need the small talk of her poorer relatives and could care less that they said, "She was no one to talk to."

Tragedy struck Leah's life and the lives of those she loved. First her daughter Dora, who had married her first cousin Pete Isaacson, died in childbirth. Her granddaughter, Frances, feels

that was caused by misuse of forceps. Then her son Meyer (whose twin brother died at birth) was killed as an adult. Her son Donald, a great swimmer, dived into a lake at night and hit a rock. Harry called a doctor in Boston who drove all night to get there. Donald had broken his neck and was immobilized for a year. Frances thinks Leah's life stopped then. Her silence was her defense. She stayed home alone and did not complain. Donald Day later became mayor of Bangor and practiced law, became a judge, and spent several years as a real estate broker. Two of her grandchildren—Irvig, a lawyer and judge, and Frances Miller—live in Maine. Shirley Nadel, the youngest, lives in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile, Harry, who had been a socialist in an Arbeiter Ring chapter with Sholem Aleichim in Europe, became active in the Workman's Circle in Maine. He was an intellectual who read by moonlight and for a half-hour after lunch. He talked to everyone he met—"even an idiot, what did he think?" He had many books, including a whole set of Sholom Aleichim. He was also an active person, as a founder of a synagogue (Beth Abraham), as a guarantor of loans to help newcomers, and as a fisherman who brought togue home for Leah to cook. He retired at age fifty, went to Florida in the winter, built a boat in his basement that he couldn't take out, and was amused at his own foibles. He died seven years after Leah of cancer of the glands.