

*THE SAGA OF AN AMERICAN JEWISH FAMILY*

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*IN THE BEGINNING...*

## ***THE SAGA OF AN AMERICAN JEWISH FAMILY***

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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Because so much of the basic research and organization of the 1964 edition of *We Remember* remain almost intact in this year 2000 version – particularly the first three chapters – it seems appropriate to acknowledge again the invaluable work of the major contributors to the first edition of the Baum-Webster-Crohn Saga:

Lawrence Crohn and Marcella (Crohn) Rubel worked together for many, many months organizing and writing the warm, nostalgic, delightful first edition.

Ruth Dickler spent many hours updating the 1964 book and editing the 1979 updated version. She has also been a valuable source of knowledge, photographs and documents for the 2000 edition. She and her daughter Jane Lebow carefully went over the text, making valuable corrections and suggestions.

Frank and Helene Crohn who fully understood the need for a new and updated family book, and who found the resources needed to edit, publish and distribute this book.

My friend Amy David who, in her professional capacity, edited the book. She designed the trees and rewrote much of the material I had gathered. And also, she dealt with the continual changes that took place when new information was found (e.g. census records). Little did she (or I) know the tremendous amount of work that would be invested in producing this book.

Our cousin Joseph Ruskay kindly consented to my request to quote from his book *Leaves from a Family Tree* (a memoir chiefly about the Baum, Webster, Crohn and Ruskay families).

I particularly want to thank Babette Samuels, the trustee of the Corsicana Hebrew Cemetery (whom I later found out is related to the Rubel branch of our family) for researching old records and photographing the graves of Joseph and Bettie Baum.

I would also like to thank members of the Texas and Dallas Jewish Historical Societies who, in their private capacity, voluntarily went through census records, obituaries, etc. and also Helen Nestor (related to the Nordlingers) who never let me down when I needed a census or other record checked.

Many, many volunteers who subscribe to the Jewish Genealogy website ([www.jewishgen.org](http://www.jewishgen.org)) helped by checking census records, obituaries and addresses which enabled me to trace various family branches and members.

I found helpful information in *Jewish Burials in Texas* compiled by Donald and Gertrude Teter (every Jewish cemetery was documented including those in Palestine, Rockdale, Corsicana and other localities where Crohns, Crowns and Baums had resided).

But most of all, there were those of our family who helped me push and nudge and remind everyone else until I received information about almost every adult member of the family.

To all of you, thanks.

*Eliezer (Edward) Kroll*



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### **FAMILY GUIDE**

The Crohn, Baum and Webster families are so intricately intertwined that finding a natural order to present family members is difficult. In some cases there are nine generations on record beginning with **Nathan Baum**, our first known ancestor (born about 1770). Families were large: **Abbe** and **Goldie** (née Webster) **Baum** had ten children; **Theodore** and **Leah** (née Baum) **Crohn** had 12 children, while **Israel Baum** and his wife **Lena** (nee Crohn) had 'only' fifteen (seven of which survived childhood). Several new generations have been added to both the tree and the Family Book since the 1964 edition, with more than 1500 direct descendants. Being a modern American family there are numerous divorces and second marriages with children resulting from both spouses.

It is impossible to learn about a family without knowing something about the members' backgrounds and the times in which they lived. I have included several introductory sections, which give the family's early history in America as well as a description of the 1870s New York Jewish community and the role that the synagogue and Judaism played in it.

Perhaps having 'lived' the family for the past two years, I am best equipped to introduce the reader to it. There are three main branches: the **Baums**, the **Websters** and the **Crohns**. The first Baums and Websters came to the United States in the 1840s, while the first Crohn (Morris) probably arrived about ten years later (unknowingly followed by his wife and three children). But that is a story in itself.

We will first get to know the founding generations, beginning with David and Eva Baum's six children: **Lazar**, **Abraham** (Abbe) (married a Webster), **Israel** (married a Crohn), **Geneshe** (married a Webster), **Joseph** and **Amelia**. Of their eldest son, **Lazar**, there is no information; the next son, **Abbe**, and his wife **Goldie** (Webster) had ten children; **Joshua** never married; **Esther Jane** married Sam Ruskay and their offspring were many; **Leah** married Theodore Crohn, so details about them will be found in the Crohn section; **Rebecca** married Vincent Horowitz but left no descendants; three daughters, **Rachel**, **Millicent** and **Mallie** remained spinsters; **Sara** married Edward Epstein and had a large family; the two youngest, **Joseph** and **David**, also married and had families.

David and Eva's third son **Israel** married Lena Crohn and had fifteen children of whom only seven lived to maturity: **Rebecca**, **Gertrude** and **Amelia**, the three eldest, were either born or raised in Oil City, Pennsylvania during or immediately after the Civil War. **Gertrude** married Abe Schlosss and upon his death married his brother Sol; **Amelia** married Harry Geigerman; **Daisy** married David Levine and their offspring are well represented in this book; **Esther** married Samuel Reinhardt; **Arthur** (Altie) died in his thirties, while **Irma**, Israel and Lena's youngest daughter, married Saul Seides.

**Geneshe**, David and Eva's first daughter, married Jacob 'Yank' Webster and had nine children. Although five of them married, only **Ray** and **Myron** left many descendants. They are found in the Webster section. **Raizel Webster**, Jacob's sister, is also included in this section, although the available information is limited.

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More information has been uncovered about **Joseph**, David and Eva Baum's fifth child, who, according to the 1964 Family Book, remained an enigma and had, for all purposes, disappeared by the late 1800s. **Amelia**, the youngest of the Baum daughters, married Nathan Zeman. Their granddaughter Mary Ann (daughter of Victor) married and settled in Jamaica. While the information regarding her descendents is correct, we lack biographical information.

We now reach the section devoted to the **Crohn** branch of the family. **Morris** and **Ernestine Crohn** had three children: **Lena**, **Theodore** and **Marcus**. **Lena** married Israel Baum and **Theodore** married Leah Baum, while **Marcus** married Julie Rosenzweig. Much of this book will deal with Theodore Crohn and his descendants. Theodore and Leah produced 12 children, eleven of whom lived to maturity. Well over one hundred years ago, when people traveled by stagecoach and horseback, Marcus and Theodore, together with Israel and Joseph Baum, went out West to Colorado and Texas. Their adventures are described in the section entitled "Arrival in America: Our Sturdy Intertwined Roots".

I have taken the liberty of including a section on the **Crown** family. From Manchester, England, to Oil City, Pennsylvania and down into Texas, these cousins are intertwined with the Crohn and Baum family histories. Their names appear in the original Family Book a number of times: new information is now available about them and their descendants.

As far as possible I have included dates. In a few cases there was little or no information found about the descendants of various members of our family.

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### **FOREWORD TO THE 1964 EDITION**

This is the story of the Baum-Webster family, based on meager information, recollections, anecdotes and perhaps even legends. Some 150 or more descendants of our progenitors now reside mostly in and around New York. This account will record what is remembered by my generation. Our children and grandchildren will doubtless be intrigued by the customs and traditions of a family which had its American beginnings before the Civil War. This is one good reason for the effort to put down on paper this family chronicle. For it now appears from the record that ours was one of the first East European Jewish families to settle on these shores. This account is really one generation too late. Some of our parents should have told this story, while their recollections were still fresh. But we shall attempt to piece together the record as best we can.

We all are products of the past, creatures of the present, and foreshadows of the future. As individuals we reflect the mores of our nation and of our associates and friends. But primarily it is the institution of the family that prepares us for the struggles and the pleasures of life. Where family ties are weakened, there is a void which often leads to emotional instability. And when the inheritance is a good one, we may expect to meet life's challenges with strength and faith. The family can be the source of a unique experience, as each generation succeeds the other with a meaningful heritage.

The Baum-Webster-Crohn family emigrated to this land and left no ties in the old country. Our forebears fitted easily into this wonderful America naturally and gracefully. They never seem to have been concerned with the problem of Americanization. Far from any uneasiness about their foreign background, America was for them a real land of opportunity. The immigrant complex didn't disturb them. Thus they helped to lay the foundations of American Jewish life, while incorporating themselves into the great traditions of the past, and projecting themselves into the future of their beloved adopted country. Something in the family 'chemistry' prompted them to retain the traditions of their fathers. While they became rapidly acclimatized, they clung to the values that had molded their past.

But time marches on. A new generation takes over. We oldsters remember the stories of yore, as told to us by our parents and grandparents. It is good that a record be made of the events and personalities that helped to shape our lives. This book is a chronicle of our family, from the earliest settlers to the present numerous growing generation. The original Tree has been enlarged by new and vibrant branches, offshoots and foliage. Our tree must be judged by its fruits. With the start of the seventh generation, our future appears to be bright.

Now that the family saga has been recorded, it will, we hope, be supplemented in the future years by the generations to follow. To this purpose, this book is dedicated.

*Lawrence W. Crohn*

*Marcella Rubel*

**FOREWARD**

For many years the history of the family has fascinated and intrigued me. As a slice of American-Jewish history our family history is unique. Perhaps, living in Israel for all these years, I have missed not being part of an extended family and this prompted me to research our large and dispersed family. Little did I know that this would involve a 12 month, intensive quest. But I was encouraged not only by the cooperation I received from family members but also from the sincere interest shown by members of the younger generations-the generation of my grandchildren-who were genuinely happy that they would have a record detailing their family roots, a document that they could pass on to their children and grandchildren. Many of them had no knowledge about their family history and were amazed to learn that our family had been in America for so many years and had actively participated in the country's history.

It was my goal in this book not to just list names and dates, but to gather as much biographical information as possible. Therefore this is not just a tree, but a history. Hopefully, it will increase knowledge about and pride in our family. There is information about almost every adult family member. Unless indicated otherwise, all the biographical sketches and dates are correct as of this year.

This is the story of an American-Jewish family. This is OUR family. Our roots go back to the synagogue, to Jewish tradition and rituals, to involvement in many Jewish organizations and causes. Our contribution to the American Jewish community has been great and is still continuing as has been our involvement in the development of the United States and Israel.

Since the first members of our family arrived in the United States in 1842 we can count some nine generations born in the United States. Before most Americans continued on to higher education, our family had a large number of University graduates. We have made our mark in many areas of American life including medicine, research, public service, university teaching, and the arts.

Members of the family served in all of America's wars from the Spanish-American War until today. Some have given their lives and others have been wounded or taken prisoner.

Once our pioneering generation returned from California, Colorado, and Texas, the family was located primarily in the New York area which made it easy for the extended family to get together at weddings, bar mitzvot, religious holidays, Thanksgiving, etc. A glance at the attached Family Directory shows that today our family has representatives in all parts of the United States and even in Israel. This makes it doubly hard for people to stay in personal contact.

As I discovered and as was pointed out to me, not all members of the first generation were as perfect as the 1964 book would expect us to believe. While I decided not to radically change the original text written by Lawrie Crohn and Marcella Rubel, I left out some of the superlatives. I however am not equipped to write a critical biography of people I never had the privilege of knowing. The biographical sketches of present relatives are much more factual. I did have to change present tense to past, in the case of those relatives no longer among the living. When



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the original text refers to 'Grandma' and other relatives, the reader will undoubtedly realize that it was written by our parents or grandparents' generation.

For the past year I have come to know many members of our family by phone, e-mail and regular mail. I have served as a family bulletin board for people looking for up-to-date addresses and information, and I have had the pleasure of discovering family members who had no idea of their roots, and even reuniting close relatives who had lost touch. Since today so many people are interested in genealogy, I hope that this book will also be a contribution towards that end.

For as long as I am able, I am hoping to keep the family information up to date. Please share with me updates to the family tree and new information about family members. I will continue to research the family and will share new information as often as possible.

*Eliezer (Edward) Kroll*

## ***SEEDS OF THE TREE***

### **OUR EUROPEAN ORIGIN**

Our forebears resided in the town of Augustow in what was then Russian Poland. For centuries the ancient Polish nation was a pawn of the great European powers. In 1793, the third partition of Poland occurred and the country was parcelled out to Russia, Prussia and Austria. Augustow, or, as the natives called it, Yagustov, remained in Russian Poland. And Szamocin, where the elder Crohns originally hailed from, became part of Posen, then part of Prussia. They went to German-oriented schools and spoke German throughout their childhood.

Augustow was a small town with a population of only 5500 as late as 1887, of which one half were Jews. The name Augustow was in honor of the former King Augustus of Poland. It was situated close to the Prussian border. Our grandma Goldie Baum told us that her mother used to take her for a walk to the border each Saturday. The town was directly in the path of invading armies. Napoleon's massive thrust into Central Europe and Russia passed through Poland. Grandma also told us how her grandmother saved two French grenadiers from the avenging Cossacks, who were then rampaging the countryside in search of fleeing French soldiers after Napoleon's defeat. The flight of these armies was immortalized by Robert Schumann in his epic song, "The Two Grenadiers".

What first impelled our ancestors to settle in Augustow is of course unknown. And the circumstances which caused them to depart from their birthplace can only be conjectured. But the historical documents point to a bloody uprising in 1830, and again in 1848. No doubt all able-bodied men were required to join the army. Service in the army by orthodox Jews was unthinkable, due to their dietary principles and preservation of the Sabbath. The Jewish community of Augustow always had a reputation for learning, but Poland had a reputation for classic anti-semitism. So it takes little imagination to picture the situation of this little settlement. Already the reports of America, the golden land, were seeping through to the Jewish Pale.

There were four thousand Jews in Augustow before World War Two. Few survived the Holocaust.

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Abbe Baum



Goldie Baum

## OUR STURDY INTERTWINED ROOTS

### ARRIVAL IN AMERICA

Israel was the first of the Baums to take up his staff in 1842 and depart for America. Since then eight generations of our family have lived in America. All but the first two were born here. Israel escaped from Europe under bushel bags of potatoes supplied by a kindly Christian neighbor. Once in America, he soon sent for his brother Abbe. Then the brothers sent for their parents, David and Eva, and their neighbors, Jacob Webster and his parents, Bernard and Eva (nee Gardner). We can surmise that on the same ship were the Baum sisters, Geneshe (Lena) and Amelia, and their brother, Joseph. There was another brother about whom nothing is known except that I was named for him. His name was Lazar, and about him only legends survive. He disappeared, possibly killed by rough frontiersmen or Indians. Or he may be the brother who is said to have gone to the jungles of Africa or Australia. Alas for the poor souls in those times, who strayed from the family hearth!

Grandma Baum used to describe the 56-day voyage down in the hold of the Chester. She was only ten years old when they arrived in New York. Since these pious Jews would not eat the ship's provender, they took their own food with them.

When David and Eva Baum passed away they were buried near an old apple tree in the deserted end of Union Field Cemetery in Brooklyn, where all later members of the family were also buried. We once found the stones on which the weather-beaten lettering was barely visible, but we could never do so again.

The Baums' first home, purchased from P. T. Barnum, was at 42 East Broadway, in the heart of the Jewish ghetto. Israel worked in a buttonhole factory, and Abbe, by nature artistic, soon found employment with a small manufacturer of hand-painted ornaments. However, he had brought a nobler and more unique skill with him from Europe. He was a 'sofer', a scribe. His talent for drawing, along with his Jewish erudition, made this a natural choice of vocation. Imagine him, the patriarch with a snow white beard, poring over a blank parchment roll, inscribing the words of the sacred Torah with an old-fashioned quill pen. The work had to be perfect, since any mistake would make it unfit for use. The completed scrolls became the most holy objects of the Jewish faith. It must have taken many months to complete a single Torah. The scribe was then paid by a synagogue. Many of Abbe's Torah scrolls, as well as his Purim megillas (handwritten scrolls for use on Purim), were used in New York synagogues.

Soon after the brothers started working, there were wedding bells, or what passed for marriage festivities in those days. Whether Abbe Baum was interested in Goldie Webster and Jacob (Yank) Webster in Geneshe (Lena) Baum in Augustawa, can only be surmised.

In any case, these two couples became husbands and wives, and thus began the double relationship of the Baums and Websters. A brother and a sister married a sister and a brother. Later on our roots became further intertwined when Israel Baum married Lena Crohn. And to further complicate the relationships, to the complete mystification of all future generations, Theodore Crohn (Lena's brother) married Leah Baum, Israel's daughter. If you're as confused as the authors are, perhaps this chart will help you:



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In chronological order, two Baums married two Websters and two Baums married two Crohns;

Abbe Baum married Goldie Webster in 1853

Israel Baum married Lena Crohn in 1861

Geneshe Baum married Jacob 'Yank' Webster in 1863

Leah Baum married Theodore Crohn in 1882

### **THE GOLD RUSH TREK TO CALIFORNIA**

In New York, Grandma Baum watched the soldiers marching off to the short Mexican war of 1848 which led to the annexation of huge territories. The West began to beckon, and suddenly the whole of America was electrified by the discovery of gold in California. Stories of quick riches kindled the imagination of old and young alike. Israel and Abbe Baum caught the fever and decided to join the Western trek. This was before the railroad was built, and long before the Indians were driven into closed reservations. At best, this must have been a back-breaking journey, but for these pious Jews it was still more difficult. According to Professor Salo Baron of Columbia University, they were accompanied by a 'shochet' in order to have kosher meat en route. They also carried a sefer torah in order to observe the Sabbath and holidays.

There was the long sea voyage to Panama; then they joined a caravan of covered wagons to the West Coast which was led by a military escort on horseback. They met General Fremont, whose assignment was to clear the route from marauding Indians and to push the Mexicans out of California. The brothers finally arrived in Sacramento and set up a small store. Most of the Jewish settlers were bent more on trade than the laborious mining of gold. There are few extant records with details of this period. An eyewitness account describes the 1850 leave-taking of an East Coast group of Jews for the West:

"The steamer which left our Port took amidst its crowd of passengers a large number of Israelites... We do not recollect in our experience, the departure of any vessel which saw the quay so lined with members of the Faith, each hurrying to join the heart-stirring shout with which many thousands of spectators hailed the casting off of the steamer, seeking thereby to cheer the dispirited and incite the hardy to bold adventure."

The following account is taken from a book about the Jews of California, by Rudolph Glanz:

"The Israelites entered this land of promise by arms and established themselves. They are a sturdy band whose enterprise will cover the fertile hills with golden harvests."

Another account describes a typical store set up by the pioneers.

"The Jew-shops were generally rattle-trap erections, so small that one half of the stock had to be displayed from projecting poles outside. These poles were filled with red and blue flannel shirts, thick boots and other articles suited to the wants of miners, along with Colt revolvers and bone knives, brass jewelry and diamonds like koh-i-noors." And further, "The Jews could tell at sight the color and fineness of gold, its value per ounce, and the locality from which the gold was dug."

## ***OUR STURDY INTERTWINED ROOTS***

Aside from the certain knowledge that the Baums had a store in Sacramento, little more is known. We used to hear about the gold nuggets they sent back to their families. There is one specific record of a Moses Gardner who was related through the Webster branch: "Moses Gardner, born about 1815 in Suwalki Province (which includes the town of Augustawa), came to New York in 1849 and became a glazier. He went to California in about 1851 and bought a farm near Sacramento. The river overflowed and caused much damage and they had to abandon the farm. They then went to San Francisco." (He must have eventually returned to New York because Burrill and I remember Moses Gardner, the glazier. I have a mental picture of him to this day).

In doing some research for this record, I discovered that the exploits of the Baums were not unusual. According to old reports, there were more Russian Jews in California in the early 1850s than in New York. It seems that many immigrants left Europe with the idea of California uppermost in their minds, although few remained for long. Some wandered off to Montana and set up shop there. Israel Baum was one of them.

Israel and Abbe apparently met with some success in California but Israel came down with yellow fever and was cared for by kindly nuns. When he awoke from his delirium, he saw the sisters in their strange habits and jumped out of bed, determined go home at once.

The two brothers worked their way back to New York. Their actual route is unknown, although they probably stopped in Virginia City, Montana, where Israel had previously established a business, leaving someone else in charge. That someone might have been his brother Joe. Milton Levine, his grandson, visited Virginia City, which is not far from Yellowstone Park, and brought back a snapshot of his grandfather's store.

### **BACK IN NEW YORK**

Abbe and Israel returned home in 1851. Israel immediately took some gold nuggets to the United States Mint in Philadelphia to exchange for paper bills. He later told his children that he was worth \$25,000 – a huge sum in those days for a man only 30 years old! In New York he met an old friend, a Mr. Marks, who had a second-hand store on Sixth Avenue, called Marks & Naftel. Mr. Marks invited him to a party. There he met Lena, daughter of Ernestine and Morris and sister of Theodore and Marcus Crohn. He promptly fell in love with her and got permission from her mother to marry her. This was our Tante Lena who bore 15 children and lived to a ripe old age, despite a difficult life tinged with tragedy.

Once while Israel was visiting his mother-in-law she asked him whether he had met a Morris Crohn in California. Yes, he replied, he had. Behold, this was her husband, our grandfather, who had left her in Europe many years before. She then had two children, with another on the way. In those days it was not unusual for young men to desert their families to go to America. I can hear you asking how this brave mother and her three children came to America. An uncle in Manchester, England, was their angel. The Crohns left their home in Szamocin and made their way to Manchester. The Crown family, our English relatives, helped them on to America to try to find their husband and father. What a remarkable coincidence! Grandma Crohn's new son-



in-law helped her locate her long-lost husband, but they were never reunited. Either Grandma had died by the time her husband was brought back to New York by his two sons, or she never forgave him and they remained estranged.

**THE CIVIL WAR YEARS: TREK TO THE PENNSYLVANIA OIL FIELDS**

Next came the terrible Civil War, and unfortunately the family history for that period is almost a complete blank. Like thousands of others, the Baum brothers legitimately paid some \$300 to young volunteers to serve for them. They witnessed the Draft Riots of 1863 in Central Park. Our mother Leah was a little girl in hoop skirts but remembered seeing Negroes hanging from lamp posts, and standing on a barrel on the streets of the Lower East Side to witness Abraham Lincoln's funeral cortege. All the shades were drawn and thousands of common folk walked behind the coffin.

During the war or shortly thereafter, the Baum brothers, along with Jacob Webster and Theodore and Marcus Crohn, were off again to Western Pennsylvania. They settled in Oil City and opened a store. Apparently Jacob Webster owned a store in nearby Tar Farm. How long they stayed in Pennsylvania is unclear, but Gertie Baum (Schloss) was born there in 1864, as was Millie Baum (Geigerman) in 1866. An amusing story about the store was often told by my father. A shoemaker, on whose land oil had recently been discovered, came into the store. He bought five dollars worth of merchandise and left a twenty dollar bill. Father chased him around town all day to give him his forgotten change. When he found him, the shoemaker said: "Why, that's your tip, little boy."

They also owned an oil well, said to have netted them \$500 a week. An agent of John D. Rockefeller, Sr. demanded that they sell him their oil well, and when they refused, he said: "You'll see, in a few days you won't find a drop of oil in your well." He was right. Rockefeller's agent had his men drill new wells which surrounded theirs and syphoned off their oil. Years later we used to listen to our father's tales about the unconscionable Standard Oil. History seems to have borne him out.

The family did not tarry long in the new Klondike, but Rebecca and Priscilla Davis, Baum cousins, did remain in Titusville, Pennsylvania. By a remarkable coincidence, Elizabeth (Mrs. Josh) Epstein, who was born in Titusville, had Priscilla Davis for a teacher. Two other Davis cousins moved from Pennsylvania to Pueblo, Colorado, where Judith Epstein, Marcella Rubel and Josh Crohn met them. (The cemetery records of Bnai Gemula Cemetery in Titusville show that a number of Davises are buried there. The earliest records are for Newman Davis 1844-1907 and Rosa Davis 1858-1907).