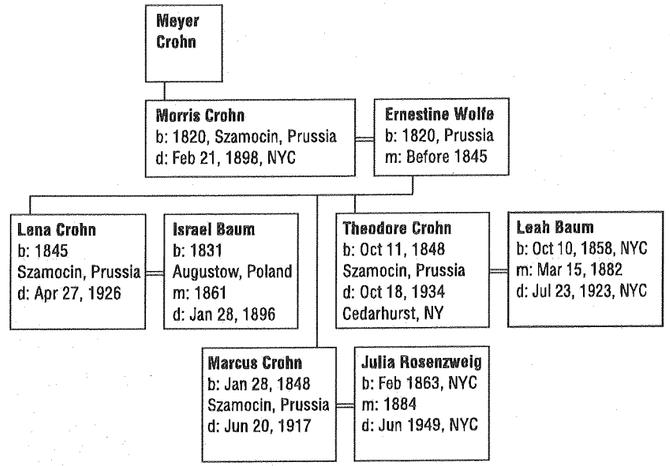
The Founding Generation: The Children of Morris & Ernestine Crohn

Morris Crohn was the first Crohn to emigrate to America, probably during the late 1840s. He was the son of Meyer/Myer Crohn and came to America to seek his fortune, leaving his wife behind in Prussia. Apparently he was in California during the Gold Rush.

(Although the original Family Book does not devote a section to him, I have tried to reconstruct some background information from various sources. - EK).



The following is an excerpt from the 1964 Family History:

"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 got over to America. Well, an uncle in Manchester, England, was the angel. The Crohns left their home in Szamocin (65 miles north of Posen, Poland) and made their way to Manchester. The English relatives (called 'Crown') helped them on to America where they could try to find Morris. They found him in a remarkable, dramatic way. Once, while Israel Baum was visiting his mother-in-law, Ernestine Crohn, she asked him if he had met a Morris Crohn in California (1849-1850). Amazingly, he had! This was her husband Morris who had left her with two young children and another one on the way many years before. They were never reunited. Either Grandma had died by the time Theodore and Marcus brought him back to New York or she never forgave him and they remained estranged."

Marion Lippman wrote an article entitled *Memories of Marcus Crohn, My Father*, in 1979. It is reprinted below. In it she also wrote about her grandfather:

"My grandfather, Morris Crohn, married my grandmother, Ernestine Solomon Wolfe, in a small town in Germany. Probably in 1847 or 1848, just before the California gold rush, he left his wife and children to make his fortune in America. He arrived in New York and some time later reached California where he went into business selling supplies to the miners. Evidently he was not successful and was too embarrassed to write home of his failure. Ernestine never did hear from him. After waiting some years, she finally decided to go to

America with her three children, stopping along the way to visit the Crowns in England. She settled in New York, and it was only many years later that Morris finally was heard from. A travelling salesman who had had some business dealings with their son Marcus mentioned to Ernestine that he had met a man named Crohn in Texas and wondered whether he was any relation. Morris, who by this time was older and lonesomer, got in touch with his son, left California and went to Texas. He lived with Marcus until he died. Ernestine never forgave him. She lived in New York with her daughter Lena until she died."

It is a shame that we know so little about Ernestine, such a brave and obviously resourceful woman. The 1870 United States census had her living with her daughter Lena and son-in-law Israel Baum in Oil City, Pennsylvania. She lived with Lena and/or Marcus until her death. She and Morris had three children: **Lena**, **Marcus**, and **Theodore**.

Lena Crohn married Israel Baum in 1861 and her story appears with the Baums'.

Marcus Crohn married Julia Rosenzweig, a stately, aristocratic woman whose family was among the founders of New York's Central Synagogue in 1884. He was a very tall, handsome man. Unlike his brother Theodore, he was soft-spoken and calm. They had five children: **Esther**, **Ruby**, **Marion**, **Milton** and **Jacob**.

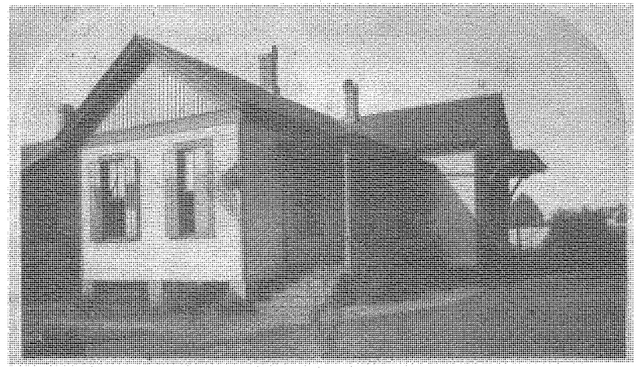
Julia Crohn

Marcus had an adventurous life. Associated with his brother and uncle in Central City's Temple of Fashion after the Civil War, he and friends would ride up Pike's Peak on horseback.

Marcus Crohn

They would camp out to see the sunrise and bury bottles of champagne in the snow on the Peak (in August) to keep it cool. Marcus joined the Masonic Lodge in Central City, one of the earliest in existence. When fire swept the city during a Chinese New Year celebration; $25 in paper money was all that remained of the $50,000 in the safe and the clothing shipped from New York. He returned to New York for a while; met and married Julia. He brought her to Palestine, Texas, where he had a dry goods store and owned some farm acreage. He had to be tough in the barren frontier town, and was soon appointed Deputy Sheriff.

Uncle Marcus loved to tell us the following story: One evening during dinner, the maid from the house next door ran in breathlessly to get help. Her master was away, and her mistress was being held up by bandits.



The Crohn house in Palestine, Texas

As Deputy Sheriff, Uncle Marcus rushed over, overpowered and disarmed the intruders, and, holding a pistol to their heads, marched them to the Sheriff's office in the center of town.

Marcus Crohn's store in Palestine, Texas, about 1890.

Young men must have faced a pretty wild and rough country in those days, especially compared with the vicissitudes our children face today! Later Marcus joined his brother and brother-in-law in Rockdale, Texas.

Like all businesses in those days, they had their ups and downs. Ultimately he returned to New York City with his wife and first-born baby Esther, where he delved into real estate, but his main source of income and support for his family came from royalties he received from the invention of a safety catch for men's tie pins. At the time, it was the vogue for men to wear elaborate stick pins in their ties. Theodore had a pin with a sapphire surrounded by diamonds, and Uncle Marcus' had genuine diamonds and rubies. Details of this safety catch may be found in the New York Public Library, in the Inventors' Section. We nieces and nephews often remember those pleasant Sunday afternoon visits to kindly Uncle Marcus and Aunt Julia in their home on Fifth Avenue at 126th Street near Mount Morris Park.

MEMORIES OF MARCUS CROHN, MY FATHER

June 1979

by MARION LIPPMAN

Marcus was my father. He and his brother Theodore, my uncle, and Israel Baum all lived and did business in the Southwest for many years. Israel Baum married Lena Crohn, my aunt, and Theodore, of course, married Leah Baum.

My father was a great lover of nature. He spoke over and over of his travels through the west and the Rocky Mountains, particularly of the "Colorado Canyon". Years later I went to Colorado to see this wonderful canyon only to learn that the Colorado Canyon was in Arizona and known in the east as the Grand Canyon. Westerners still often call it the Colorado Canyon because it is, after all, the canyon of the Colorado River.

My father was an affectionate and interested parent. I can remember that he taught me a child's German folk song, the *Wiegenlied*. While I sat on his lap of a Saturday afternoon, he would read the Bible to me and try to explain it, and on Sunday afternoons he would take us to the aquarium or the zoo.

Sometimes, as the days became warm, we would go on a picnic. Trolley car schedules were worse than the buses of today. We would wait for ages, and sometimes the trolley would go right past us. Then my father would jump on the car while it was still moving and pull the cord furiously to stop it. And we would all run as fast as we could and get on.

We weren't as religious as Uncle Theodore, but we did go to synagogue and my father was a member of the Sunday School Board. At Passover my father led the service in English, with a few Hebrew prayers over the wine and matzoth, and we always sang the traditional songs. But we observed only one day. I was proud to be the one to ask the four questions.

And all of us were always together for the first night of the Jewish New Year, the Day of Atonement and Thanksgiving. I do remember that my father used to bring home a white Easter egg with a pink candy-like braid around the middle and a scene inside when you looked through the hole on the end. At Chanukkah he would let me light the candles. How wonderful it all was!

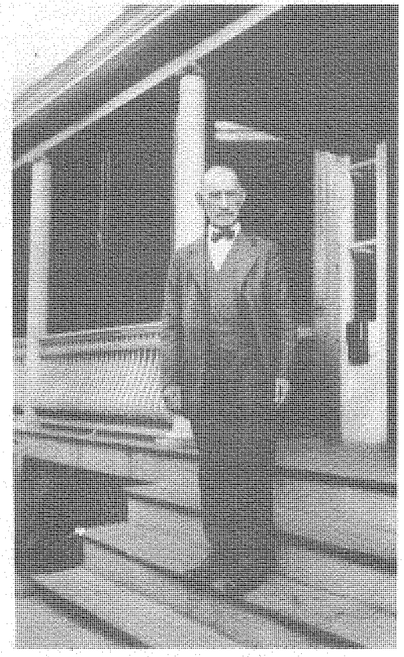
My father died very suddenly on a Saturday morning, two days after my high school graduation. I still treasure the small ring he gave me on that occasion. Uncle Theodore came over and taught me to say the Kaddish and told my mother that he thought someone as young as I should not be required to wear black.

Uncle Theodore's visits always produced a new wave of religious

fervor in our house. For a while after he came, I wasn't allowed to play the piano on the Sabbath and we would be very careful to keep the meat and milk dishes separate, but then after a while that was all forgotten until Uncle Theodore turned up again. After Father's death, as Mother's family belonged to reform Judaism, all dietary laws and customs were given up.

One last memory of interest: Father used to tell us about the panic of 1907, when he realized that there was a run on his bank, the Emigrant Savings Bank on Maiden Lane, which he used for his business accounts. He evidently was a highly respected businessman, so when he went to the bank and conspicuously made a large deposit, many of the people on line and others who heard what he had done, left without withdrawing their money and the bank was saved from bankruptcy.

Theodore Crohn married Leah Baum in Esther Ruskay's home on East 86th Street, Manhattan, in 1882. She was Abbe and Goldie Baum's fourth child, and surely didn't anticipate that her husband would take the biblical injunction to "be fruitful and multiply" so seriously! Leah bore twelve children, six boys and six girls: **Esther**, **Burrill**, **Ada**, **Gurtha**, **Myron**, **Joshua**, **Lawrence**, **Naomi**, **Daniel**, **George**, **Marcella** and **Rosalie**. During Theodore and Leah's lifetime only our sister Ada died at the age of seven.



Theodore Crohn

Let us first take a look at Leah before her marriage. She had a most happy life at home, surrounded by her brothers and sisters. There was always company; there were always parties and celebrations. She never forgot hearing Jennie Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale" brought to the United States by P. T. Barnum.

The concert was in Bryant Park (at 42nd Street) on a Saturday evening, and since her parents did not ride on the Sabbath, they started out early, walking uptown from their home on Norfolk Street to get there on time.

As a young girl she was frequently a soloist at Jewish meetings. She and her sisters sang in the Harlem Philharmonic Choral Group. Leah was a member of the first New York Oratorio Society, but before being accepted she had to audition for its director

and conductor, Dr. Leopold Damrosch, father of Walter and Frank.

Mother had a beautiful, lyric soprano voice which thrilled her family and their many guests who came especially to hear her sing. With professional training she might have achieved great heights, but she couldn't read a note. She was so familiar with the arias that people thought she was highly trained. On Sabbath mornings she sang in the Temple Emanuel choir, and on Sundays in Saint Thomas' church – her orthodox father often went to hear her. Later she sang in the choir of the Bnai Jeshurun synagogue. Someone in the family has a picture of Mother singing in the chorus of the first performance of *The Damnation of Faust* under the baton of Leopold Damrosch in the old Metropolitan Opera in the Academy of Music building on 14th Street.

Leah (Baum) Crohn

To learn about mother's life after her marriage, we should see her in the context of Theodore-the-rugged-individualist's wife. His was an unusually adventurous boyhood. From the moment he landed in America without benefit of a father, he helped support his mother and sister as an itinerant peddler. When he was a bit older, he and Marcus joined Israel Baum in Oil City, Pennsylvania, where Israel had a dry goods store. Papa used to tell us how he watched soldiers being mobilized for service in the Civil War, and that he beat a drum for them during training. Sometime around 1870, he, Israel and Marcus went to Denver, Colorado and thence to Central City. Silver had just been discovered in the region, and a new boom was under way. Papa used to enthrall us with stories of scalpings and other exciting experiences during the overland voyage. Their store, the Crohn Brothers & Hall Temple of Fashion in Central City, was successful until the silver excitement subsided.

They joined the Silver City Masonic Lodge. Papa told us how a fellow mason once saved his life when an irate drunkard threatened to kill him during a game of pool. Gambling and liquor went with the pioneering spirit. (Theodore was an expert pool player and even when elderly would demonstrate his ability to the admiration of his grown sons). After the silver mines were depleted, Central City became a ghost town. A group of businessmen reconstructed it some years ago as a summer sightseeing spot. The old Teller Opera House was refurbished and the town was made into a replica of the old mining frontier town. Here is where the boisterous

'Face on the Bar Room Floor' was celebrated in verse and song. The 'face' is still visible under glass in one of the old saloons. Tourists flock there in summer for the opera and drama season organized by the University of Colorado.

Those of us who have visited Central City have seen the Crohn store – his name was barely legible on one side. The building was razed just two years ago (1962). Although there is an excellent road to Denver, I took my family over the old mountain road described so often by Papa, as being filled with terrors, horseshoe bends and narrow passages through the Rocky Mountains. He was right. It was a terrifying experience for us in a car. Imagine what it must have been in an old-fashioned horse-driven stagecoach!

After Central City, Theodore and Marcus came back to New York in a Wells Fargo stagecoach. The brothers took turns sitting on the outside upper deck, next to the driver, with a rifle across their knees, to frighten off Indians and the highwaymen of Western movie fame.

In New York, Theodore visited Abbe Baum (his brother-in-law's brother) and met his daughter Leah. He was soon enamored of her, and they married on March 15, 1882, at the home of Esther Ruskay. By this time Theodore had decided to join his brother-in-law Israel (Leah's uncle) in Rockdale, Texas, with his new bride. There, almost nine months later, their first child, Esther, was born. Papa was never one to delay doing what comes naturally.

Rockdale, Texas was founded in 1874 and became a stop on the International & Great Northern Railroad. What attracted the Crohns, Baums and Crowns to Rockdale is not clear, but Theodore and Leah Crohn (whose daughter Esther was born there in 1882), Marcus and Julie Crohn, Israel Baum, Joseph and Bettie Baum (whose son Louis was born there in 1888), Harry and Irma Geigerman (whose son Harold was born there) and Meyer, Isaac and Hyman Crown all lived there in the 1880s.

Rockdale, Texas, as it was in 1874.

The town's Hebrew Benevolent Society was established in the 1870s to "feed, clothe and shelter the poor, nurse the sick, dower brides, bury the dead and perform kindhearted deeds for Jewish and non-Jewish families." A cemetery was always a first priority; the Rockdale cemetery was established in November 1878. Isaac Crown died in the Mundine Hotel fire in Rockdale in 1888 and was buried there.

Efforts are underway to restore it and have it declared a Texas Historic Cemetery by the Texas Historical Commission. There are nineteen Jewish graves; a Society of the descendents of those buried there has been established to aid its restoration. (EK)

The following are some excerpts from a magazine article describing Rockdale in 1917. Think what it must have been like in 1882!

> "Rockdale, with a population of 2,000, was a town where, on Saturday afternoon, farmers from all around would drive into town with their families in wagons hitched up to a team of horses. Mama and the girls, scrubbed and in stiff-starched Saturday's best, sat in cane-bottomed chairs. In the back were buckets of eggs, a half dozen or so chickens with their feet tied together, and the week's accumulation of surplus butter. Every house within the small business district had signposts along the curb which said 'Five dollar fine if you hitch here.'
>
> "Since cattle roamed around at large, one of them might get her front feet up in the back of the wagon and eat most of a sack of flour and strew the rest of it over the street. In the middle of the afternoon, after the men had had their fill of drink, the brawling started. People got drunk and hollered and fought each other on the main street with knives, brass knuckles, billiard cues, and white hickory ax handles. In those days, if the weevils or the droughts or the floods destroyed the cotton, we, as a community, were destitute."

This was where Israel Baum and the Crohn brothers lived in quest of a livelihood via a dry goods store! This is where Leah Crohn was brought as a bride! This is where she gave birth to her first born on Thanksgiving Day! Is it any wonder, then, that Mother found life in Rockdale empty, dull and monotonous? She was sad and missed her family. Soon she prevailed on Theodore to take her back to her family in New York. Papa left Rockdale with 25 one-thousand dollar bills sewn into his shoes. On the train he was inveigled into a poker game with strangers. By the time he reached St. Louis he had already lost $2000, but between St. Louis and New York he won back the $2000 and considerably more.

Their return to New York marked the end of their travels. Quite a checkered career! At this juncture two important things happened. Sam Ruskay convinced Theodore to join the Consolidated Stock Exchange, and for the rest of his days he traded in stocks and bonds. At the end, either his luck or his acumen left him, but in all the intervening years he supported his immense family in high style by trading, not for others, but only for

himself. As he described it, he made his living on 'eighths and quarters'.

The other event was his conversion to strict Jewish orthodoxy. In the wilds of Colorado and Texas he showed no interest in Judaism and of course didn't practice any rituals, but back in New York he was influenced by his father-in-law Abbe Baum and was then taken in hand by the Rev. Dr. Peikes. Theodore became a 'convert', and like so many converts, he became an ardent and extreme believer in his new-found doctrine. What he lacked in Jewish knowledge was more than compensated for by a meticulous observance of all the rites and ceremonies. His was always a strange combination of modernity and extreme conservatism. He had retained an undying loyalty to the Democratic Party since Texas, and was by nature careful and slow to alter existing patterns.

Thus he presided over the large Crohn family's growth and development. We grew up immersed in an atmosphere of repetitious prayers and minute religious practices. Later on Papa became president of the Kehilath Jeshurun synagogue on East 85th Street which, as you've read, was founded by Abbe Baum. During his presidency, a young man, fresh out of the Theological Seminary, became Rabbi. His name was Mordecai M. Kaplan. Our father was rigid in his religious practices, and was determined to coerce his sons into following in his footsteps, but it didn't work. Mother, who had inherited her father's spiritual and more aesthetic approach, was a far greater influence. Life was nevertheless fun for us, and Sabbaths and holidays were central, memorable occasions, as we shall see.

The Crohn children, about 1893.
Back row, L to R: Burrill, Ada May, Esther. Front row, L to R: Josh, Gurtha and Myron.

Our first house was on East 86th Street, now the site of the Corn Exchange Bank. Soon we occupied a brownstone at 216 East 82nd Street where all but Esther were born. Papa's recently discovered father lived in this house until his last day. I remember my grandfather Morris Crohn distinctly. He was a little old man with a rounded white beard. He would sit at the dining room table with dry cereal spread out on a newspaper in front of him, busily looking for insects and/or worms. In those days cereal, sugar, coffee, etc. was packaged loose in brown paper bags. Often it crawled.

Morris Crohn never seemed to achieve anything. His faithful sons Theodore and Marcus supported him, once they found him. He lived to a ripe old age and was given a respectful burial in our family plot. Papa never failed to observe his Yahrzeit. When his eleventh child was born, he named her Marcella for Morris.

A further example of my father's loyalty was his visit to his cousins, Sissy and Louisa Crown in Manchester, England, the family who had made it possible for him to get to America as a boy. He stopped off on the way back from a visit to Samoczyn, his birthplace, during which he also visited his old school.

(Crown relatives from Manchester settled in Texas and worked with Theodore and Marcus. According to the 1880 census, Theodore lived in a rooming house in Rockdale together with Meyer Crown. See the separate section on the Crowns. EK).

GROWING UP WITH TEN SISTERS AND BROTHERS

From Esther to Rosalie was a long period, but finally our parents had fulfilled the biblical commandment to be fruitful and multiply. All the children were delivered at home. All that was needed was an old-fashioned home nurse and a quick messenger to get Dr. Meltzer or Uncle Joe Baum. Uncle Joe delivered most of us in mother's huge old-fashioned carved bed which she had for many years, and which all of us remember. The famous Dr. Samuel J. Meltzer was one of the founders of the American Gastro-Enterological Association. When Mother was in labor with Burrill, Papa rushed out in a horse-driven carriage to get Dr. Meltzer, but when they got to the house, the baby had already emerged. Little did Dr. Meltzer think that this baby would some day be his successor as president of the American Gastroenterological Association!

Burrill tells of being sent to get Dr. Meltzer when the younger children were about to be born. He had to rush by streetcar to 122nd Street and Madison Avenue to get him, since there were no telephones in those days. Riding back with Dr. Meltzer, he looked with amazement and amusement at the bottom of the carriage where the doctor kept guinea pigs for experimentation while he made his calls.

Whenever a new child was born, Theodore would thumb through the Bible for names. There was one significant mistake. I, who was born on Washington's birthday, should have been named George, but my father objected that too many Negroes had that name (the Texas influence, no doubt). Yet, years later, the last boy was named George. After using up the Bible for names like Esther, Naomi, Joshua

and Daniel, Mother decided to be more original. She devised the name Burrill after a great-grandfather, Berl; Gurtha (for Gittel) from the name of the shepherd in *Ivanhoe*, and Marcella for Morris Crohn.

THE HOUSE ON 92ND STREET

The life of a large family in New York was exciting and eventful. Most of the brood matured on 82nd Street, the rest at 76 East 92nd Street.

There were five stories, all heavily populated. The basement was entered through an iron gate. You pulled the old fashioned chain bell to gain entrance. In the front was the family dining room with a huge table and 13 chairs around it, a large wooden rocker, and a black leather-covered couch where Papa would occasionally relax after a tough day on Wall Street. A hall connected the dining room with the kitchen which contained a large coal-and-wood-burning stove and an icebox, also three wash tubs. Behind the kitchen was the back yard with a small grass plot which somehow managed to survive despite the laundry hung up to dry, and children playing games. There was an outhouse too, very necessary since there was only one toilet on the third floor and one other on the fourth, serving the needs of eleven children, two parents and three live-in help, sixteen people in all!

The second floor, which could be entered from an outside high stone stoop, was the formal part of the house. Here was the long front parlor furnished in Victorian style, large oil paintings on satin damask walls, an antique gilt curio cabinet with a carved frame, filled with ivories, jewelled snuffboxes and other objets d'art which my mother used to love to seek in antique shops. This was her hobby. And of course there was our ebony Steinway piano. We were very proud of this classic formal room where the 'swell' company was entertained. Here Ben Shapiro courted Esther, Moe Roth called on Gurtha, and various suitors courted Naomi. In the rear of the second floor was the grand dining room with the massive carved oak furniture upholstered in rich blue plush velvet, which Mother picked up at an auction. A dumbwaiter up from and down to the kitchen was operated by a hand rope to bring up meals for very special occasions such as Rosh Hashanah or Passover, or when some distinguished guests were entertained. Our finest silver, china and linen were reserved for these occasions.

THE THIRD FLOOR

Our parents' bedroom was in the front on the third floor. We kids looked forward to getting sick so that we could share the huge old bed with our mother. In back of the bed were two enormous oil paintings of our father's grandparents. The library, of which we were very proud, was at the back of the house. We dearly prized our special Shakespeare editions, the beautiful volumes of *The Arabian Nights*, the sets of Dickens, George Eliot, Washington Irving, Charles Reade, and the *Encyclopedia*, most of which mother bought from a book peddler on the installment plan for 25¢ a week. Papa kept his big wooden roll top desk in the library, and had a supply of

macaroons and Mirror's hard candy (which we can still taste to this day) locked up in one drawer. We kids discovered that by removing the drawer above it, and putting our hands down into the locked drawer, we could extract the goodies. Papa was always mystified at their disappearance and attributed it to mice which might have gotten in through the back of the drawer. When he questioned us, we all wore innocent, deadpan faces.

The Fourth and Fifth Floors

The rest of the house was occupied by bedrooms – two double beds side by side in each room. Thus four of us slept in each bedroom, and often we had overnight guests, who probably slept in the crack between the beds. Talk about multiple dwellings!

At mealtime, father summoned us by a loud call in his bellowing voice, and we would come jumping down the steps or sliding down the banisters. He was the undisputed master, whom my Mother used to call the 'Kaiser' (Kaiser Wilhelm of Germany was a forceful autocrat who epitomized the Prussian overlord). Yet Papa could be kind, courtly, and gracious especially towards the ladies for whom he had quite an eye.

He impressed strangers as an aristocratic gentleman, but he was an impatient, irascible person who depended a great deal upon a loud scream when he became irritated, which was quite often. The popular play, *Life With Father*, could have been a portrayal of Theodore Crohn and his numerous family. The reputation of our father for integrity and good character was of the highest. He believed in and lived by his principles.

In the early years, the Stock Exchange was open on Saturday and of course on Jewish holidays. But Pop always remained at home on those days. A good Christian friend, George Turton, would look out for his interests. His reputation on the Stock Exchange was flawless. An oft-told story must be told again in order to make the portrait of my father complete. This goes back to 1901. It was a Friday evening and we were all in the synagogue. As we left the old shul on 82nd Street, we heard newsboys crying, "Extra! Extra!" Papa, sensing some dire tragedy, told Burrill to peep at the newspaper. His intuition was right. President McKinley had been shot. Papa was panic stricken. Just that weekend he had bought and carried over a large block of stocks. Inevitably the market must crash. Supper was a gloomy affair that Friday night. Any other day he would have rushed down to sell out his stocks. But it was the Sabbath. All night he wrestled with his conscience. He talked it over with Burrill. Then he sent for Rabbi Peikes for guidance. There is an ancient Jewish law that in dire emergencies, religious regulations can be superseded. The Rabbi, a close friend of the family, counselled Papa to break the rules and take care of his business to protect his large family. Nevertheless Papa was uneasy and restless all night long. By morning his mind was made up. He told Burrill to reach his good Christian Turton friend by telephone – then a tedious and difficult task.

And off Papa went to synagogue, no doubt believing that a just God would protect

him and his family. Turton sold out his stock, but not before word had spread that the President was not mortally wounded. Thus Pop's loss was a minor one. (A few days later, McKinley lost ground and died).

Music in Our Home

Through the many family crises Mother's soft, reassuring and comforting personality relaxed the family. The omnipresence of music in the household also helped. Mother communicated her love of music to all of us. I remember the musicals in our home on 82nd Street, when our next door neighbor, Mr. Velton, an eminent concert cellist, performed, and accompanied Mother's singing for specially invited audiences. We always talked music at the table, discussing concerts and operas, and especially the Philharmonic, then conducted by the illustrious Gustav Mahler. All of us were opera buffs. When we couldn't go in style, we acted as 'supers' in the cast and received $1.00 per performance.

When the new Metropolitan opened, our parents bought subscription seats for every Wednesday night. Until the first World War, Germans were very popular in the US. When we were very young, all New York was agog over the visit of Prince Henry, brother of Kaiser Wilhelm. The Prince was to be at the Met for a gala performance. (There is a framed program of this on the mezzanine floor of the Opera House) Tickets were expensive and at a premium, But Papa, always proud of his 'Prussian' background, wanted to be there. So, dressed in their finery, our parents went to see the noble Prince and hear selections from four operas.

We remember seeing Papa in his long full dress suit and starched shirt and folding opera hat, and Mama wearing her velvet befurred garments which she bought at the most fashionable shops such as Bendel's, or had them custom made by a fine dressmaker. The hairdresser came to our home each Wednesday to marcelle her hair. She wore a beautiful diamond 'sunburst' brooch which Papa gave her, and which unfortunately she had to sell in a leaner year, to help out the sagging family budget. If a horse and carriage were not available or too expensive, they ventured out in wintry weather to the Third Avenue streetcar, then to the 42nd Street crosstown horse car, to the opera house. They trudged back by the same route. We remember hearing about the gorgeous singing of Melba, Journet, Marcella Sembrich, Emma Eames, Mme. Schumann Heink, Alma Gluck and other famous stars. This was before Caruso. Papa was sure these luminaries couldn't compare with Wachter, the two DeRezkie brothers and Mme. Maverne of European fame. Later on many of us got a chance to go to the opera in our subscription seats which remained in the family for many, many years.

Family Life

Mother also had more important things to do. She had a large house and a growing family to care for. We kids went through the gamut of children's diseases – scarlet fever, measles, dyptheria, whooping cough, etc. Immediately the rest of the children

had to be rushed off to our aunts' homes. I never forgot the two weeks I enjoyed with Aunt Esther when Naomi had scarlet fever. Today this is a three-day malady. Then it was a terrible scourge and the disease had to run its course for weeks, and often left serious after effects. After the contagious period was over, the sickroom had to be fumigated. This was assigned to Burrill. He darkened the room and sealed off the doors and windows. Then he lit sulfur candles (it was believed that the deadly fumes purged the sick room of all germs). After fumigation, our aunts returned their little boarders to their home. Times were difficult then, but closely knit ties with our relatives helped make mother's complicated life easier to bear.

Of course Mother had help. In those days women went to Castle Garden (Ellis Island) to select their household help from among the immigrants coming off the ships from Europe. We had Becky Adler, our famous cook, from Galicia. She always insisted she was Austrian, and was proud of her old Emperor Franz Joseph. I can still relish the taste of her magnificent pastries – coffee cake, molasses (honey) cake, small filled crescent-shaped cakes, and large home-baked challahs. Each Friday morning the aroma of freshly baked cake and bread filled our nostrils, but we weren't allowed to touch them until the Sabbath meal. We can still see the dozen or more challahs and plentiful cakes lined up on our three wash tubs in the kitchen, all baked in an old stove that used coal and wood. Extras were made for Grandma, Aunt Sara (Epstein), and for our elder sisters when they were married. The kids took turns delivering the baked goods to the outside family. Sometimes we got a nickel tip.

In addition to Becky, Mother brought home Agnes Dunn, and later, Nora Kelleher from Ireland, for our 'upstairs girls'. The youngest children had a governess named Amelia. We also had to have a visiting laundress – no washing machines or laundromats in those days! Nor did we wear nylon underwear or drip-dry apparel.

Becky Adler stayed with us on and off for forty-three years. Mother was an expert manager. She received $25 a week for food and help and other sundry expenses! Imagine running a household of sixteen, without benefit of refrigerators (the ice man came every day), electric ovens, freezers, washing machines, frozen foods, toasters, blenders, etc. Even the pressing irons had to be heated on top of the coal stove.

As we look back to the days when we grew up without benefit of movies, radio, television or automobiles, we wonder how we enjoyed life. Fortunately we all were healthy. We weren't considered rich, but in those days so many people were living in abject poverty that we were fairly well off. Nonetheless Papa always shouted about the bills from the department stores. Mother's shopping bills were of course heavy, especially twice a year, once at the High Holy Days and once for Passover, when we were newly outfitted. She bought assorted sizes in dozen lots – cheaper by the dozen?

How often our bell would ring and Nora the 'servant girl' would throw packages from Siegel & Cooper, Wanamaker's, Stern Bros. or B. Altman, into the ash can closet and

shut the door, "to hide them from Papa", who was reading the Psalms in the front dining room. We were six husky boys. Our trousers always wore out or grew too tight sooner than our jackets, so Mother would take us to Uncle Eddie Epstein's factory to replace the trousers. If they didn't match the surviving coats it was just too bad. Little sympathy was wasted. Yet Papa went into tirades over the bills. Mother was never unduly perturbed. Having borne 12 children and experiencing the tensions of a huge household with no tranquillizers on hand, she finally had a nervous breakdown. She recovered in due time, thanks chiefly not to the science of modern psychiatry, but to the ministrations of Mrs. Held, an old fashioned practical nurse who instinctively knew how to handle her patient.

THE CROHN SUMMERS

New York has always been hot in summer. We had neither electric fans nor air conditioners. Our clothes were hot and stuffy. We were fortunate to be able to afford summer homes. I remember the homes we rented in Tuckahoe, New York and Point Pleasant, New Jersey and then in Tannersville in the Catskill Mountains. How we looked forward to the train ride and then the horse and buggy to take us to our summer home! We had no electricity, just kerosene lamps and wood-burning cooking stoves. Our father came out on Friday afternoons. In Tannersville, Mother had a vacation. We ate only breakfast at home and had our big meals at the old (kosher) Fairmount Hotel, owned by the Jacobson family (who later operated the Spofford Lake Hotel). Josh had his bar mitzvah at the Fairmount. The Zionist movement in America was launched at the Fairmount. Dr. Harry Friedenwald of Baltimore, Professor Richard Gottheil of Columbia University, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, Louis Lipsky, Israel B. Brodie and other architects of the Movement, were delegates.

Dr. Solomon Schechter, now regarded as one of the greatest Jews of modern times, was a guest at the Fairmount and often sat at our family's table. In addition to his great learning and stature, he had a wonderful sense of humor. He was the founder of the United Synagogue of America (Conservative Judaism), but his chief claim to fame was his discovery of ancient Hebrew documents in the genizah (storage room for old documents) in the Ibn Ezra Synagogue in Cairo. This discovery was of immense importance to Judeo-Christian history.

Later on, our summers were spent in the Rockaways – first in Hammel's, then at Arverne at 6 Straiton Avenue. This was a truly beautiful home which was purchased for $9000 from the Dutch architect who designed it. Each year we went there in May and stayed until the beginning of the High Holidays. It was two short blocks from the ocean, and half a block from the railroad station.

What a gang of people benefited from this summer abode! In addition to the Crohns, Grandma spent the summers with us. I remember looking into her trunk and seeing quantities of loose candy, and, of all things, her burial shroud – just in case! Aunts

and cousins spent weeks at a time with us. In addition, each child was permitted to invite a special friend for one weekend during the season.

When Esther and Gurtha married and had children, they rented rooms opposite our house, but only to sleep in. They had all their meals with us! When we had a lot of company, a small table called the 'kid's table' was set up in the corner. This was for the four youngest: Dan, George, Marcella and Rosalie, the baby. Relatives didn't bother to notify us in advance. On Sunday they calmly trooped in. Poor Becky just piled on more food, and the boys were sent to the ice house to get more tremendous cakes of ice.

Our bath house cost $20 a season. The family took turns using it, but of course Papa always had priority. Arverne was the fashionable resort for upper and middle class Jews. The Liebowitz and Unterberg families owned mansions, as did Moe Levy, the prosperous clothing tycoon. The Lewkowitz and Pels families had a large home up the block right on the ocean. Here Burrill met his first wife Lucille Pels, a most beautiful young woman. Here Cecil Ruskay left his tent in Edgemere to court Sophie. Later on Marcella was courted here by Samuel I. Rosenman, special advisor and writer for two Presidents.

Judith Epstein used to come here for her daily piano practice (the Epsteins had their own house in Arverne, but no piano). We can still hear her virtuoso playing of Chopin, Beethoven, Schumann, Liszt, etc. Here Judith and Moe were married, under the beautiful large Japanese umbrella which hung from the ceiling of a circular

Back row, L to R: Ben Shapiro, Grace Rubel, Josh Crohn, Lal Rubel, Florence Rubel, Millie Baum, Dan Crohn.
Front row, L to R: Lawrence Crohn, Leah Crohn, Naomi Crohn, Rosalie Crohn (1917).

balcony that divided the artistic winding staircase. There the bride and groom stood, against the background of a huge triple stained-glass bay window. It was here that Burrill started the practice of medicine. It was at this beach that Josh and Myron swam out into deep water to save a one-armed swimmer and were awarded a special medal for heroism by the Mayor of New York.

The boardwalk on Friday night was a mecca for the successful dress, cloak and suit manufacturers. It was also the rendezvous for boy-meets-girl. Yes, Arverne meant a happy, exuberant summer for all of us. Years afterward, our beautiful house burned down in a conflagration that destroyed that entire section of the town. Now uniform red brick apartments stand there, row on row. But many of us still have dreams about lovely 6 Straiton Avenue.

Holidays in the Crohn Household

Though our life was generally routine and not very adventurous, there was always the excitement of the Sabbath and holidays. The Friday night meal was a gala affair. Mother served everything at table from tureens and platters in front of her: gefilte fish, chicken soup and other dishes served in huge portions. She would generally only manage a few mouthfuls herself before we demanded second helpings. There were never less than three oversized pies for dessert. Before the meal began, Papa individually blessed each child. Starting with Esther, he placed his hands on her head and recited the words: "May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachel". To Burrill and the boys he intoned: "May God make you like Ephraim and Menashe." All of us stood in line in chronological order. It was a chore for us, since we had to kiss Papa after the blessing, and his whiskers tickled us. But we were always respectful. Woe betide us if we weren't! On the whole, these parental blessings bore good fruit, although it is questionable whether the boys followed the example of Joseph's sons Ephraim and Menashe. The girls couldn't go wrong, though, since our mother Leah's three sisters were Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel, all notable examples of women of valor.

After the sumptuous meal, there was Grace After the Meal, en masse. Singing the traditional melodies Grandpa taught us made quite a chorus – Mother with her lyric soprano, Naomi's contralto, Laurie the baritone, Myron's basso profundo, and Marcella's childish piping. It must have sounded impressive because passersby stopped in front of the house to listen to the Crohn Chorus and remained there until the end. After Friday supper, Papa took out the Bible and read the portion of the week in English. Some of the stories made salacious reading, so he lowered his voice and brushed over those passages. But later on, you may be sure that we investigated for ourselves.

After the Bible session we all walked down Madison Avenue. Our faithful cat Nellie would often follow us, and always found her way back alone. There are many stories

which have become verbal heirlooms, like this one: One Friday night when bedtime was announced, the gas jets had to be turned off. Our Irish maid was out. Josh and Myron were directed to go outside to find a stranger (a *shabbes goy*) to come in to extinguish the lights. Presently, a big, burly Irishman came in. After turning off the jets, he turned to the six strapping Crohn boys and exclaimed, "What the hell is wrong with you guys? Couldn't you put them out?"

On Saturday, the boys were to be in synagogue. Papa would leave early and depended on Mother, Gurtha or Nora, our Irish maid, to get us up. But as soon as we heard the iron gate close behind Papa, all hell broke loose. The two large double connecting beds on the top floor became a football field with a pillow for the football. Gurtha would cajole and plead, and eventually off we went to shul. We had our own family pew, and as each one of the boys passed Papa (who always sat in the aisle seat) he got a vigorous poke with his knees for arriving late.

One Saturday afternoon we were playing in the back yard. Little Marcella wanted to test her aim. She threw an iron bed caster from the fourth story window and hit Dan in the head. Dan had been swinging on the clothes line. He was rushed off to Uncle Joe for a number of stitches, and he still has the scar. This was only one example of the accidents incurred by us kids as we grew up.

The Sabbath came to a close in the evening, but not before three stars were visible and we heard the closing Havdalah melody. One child held the multicolored braided candle, and all of us were permitted to sniff the spice box. Immediately after supper, we all dispersed for our separate forms of recreation – Josh and Mike to the prize fights, Dan to play cards, George to take out a girl, others to the 25¢ vaudeville show at Hurtig & Seamon on 125th Street. More often than not several of us gathered around the piano to have a singalong led by Mother, or to listen to opera from Edison wax cylinders on our new victrola.

And then there were the Jewish holidays. It need hardly be said that in addition to Jewish holidays we regularly and faithfully observed all the national American holidays in every traditional detail. Shortly before Rosh Hashana came *selichot* services. Papa would wake us up at 4am to attend synagogue. I generally went along obediently, but Josh and Mike resisted. One morning, Papa and I emerged from the house at the crack of dawn. Along came Josh who, on seeing us, quickly buttoned his overcoat and turned up his collar. As it happened, he was returning from an all-night revelry and was wearing his tuxedo. Papa scowled suspiciously and asked him where he was coming from. "Nowhere," Josh said, thinking fast, "I'm on my way to shul with you." Needless to say, he didn't dare remove his overcoat all through services.

Rosh Hashanah was a festive holiday, with gifts for all. In the afternoon, Papa went to the Central Park reservoir, where he performed *tashlich*, the casting away of sins

into the sea. A few Psalms were recited, and the words of the prophet Micah intoned. They threw either pebbles or leaves into the water, symbolizing a remission of their sins. Jews used to congregate on the Brooklyn Bridge to perform this rite, but were frequently harassed by local Irish toughs who threw stones at the Jews' stove pipe silk hats, hoping to toss them into the water. The custom of *tashlich* goes back to the 14th century, and is more a folkway than a religious observance.

Shortly before Yom Kippur, a strange ritual took place. Live chickens were delivered to our cellar. Papa would wave a screeching chicken over the head of each child, and intone a prayer. Supposedly the poor animal was expected to assume our sins which we transferred to it when it was waved over our heads. Next morning, a little bearded man, the *shochet* or ritual slaughterer, would come and slit the throats of the doomed chickens. This was my first terrifying experience with death. The strange ritual dated from the Middle Ages when Jews would hear about the Christian doctrine of blood and atonement, and of the animal sacrifices in the ancient Temples. A bag of money was substituted for the chicken in later years, and each of us got 10¢ which we promptly spent for two ice cream sodas apiece.

After the long fast of Yom Kippur was over, we would rush home, ravenous. But we would have to wait until Papa had washed his feet, a ceremony usually reserved for Friday afternoons, before we could eat.

Another quaint ceremony was the ushering in of the full moon each month. Papa and the boys repaired to the back yard for this blessing. We held a round robin of *shalom aleichem*, each taking his turn to voice his wishes for health, prosperity and peace during the coming month. There was much *sub rosa* mirth, since we became sceptics and iconoclasts at an early age. But in retrospect we enjoyed these ceremonies, and today we become nostalgic in remembering them and describing them to our children and grandchildren.

Before Succoth, old Mr. Shamach the carpenter would come to the house to build a Succah booth in our back yard. The bible enjoins us to live in booths for the seven days of Succoth, the Feast of Tabernacles. All thirteen of us would squeeze into the little booth for our meals, and there was always room for company. We decorated the Succah with fruit, vegetables and paper chains which hung from the evergreen branches that formed the lattice-like roof. It was delightful to eat in this temporary habitation, but when a sudden downpour came, we would grab our food, bread and wine, and scurry indoors. Thus we emulated the children of Israel as they wandered through the wilderness of Sinai.

Chanukah was a gleeful holiday. We all went to Grandma's to play card games (21) and to dip our bread and sliced black radishes into chopped goose liver. A few months later came Purim with the family masquerade party at the Webster home. We stole and begged for dresses, nightgowns, etc. and bought masks to make merry at the Webster party. First, however, we went to shul to stamp our feet and make grating

noises with our *groggers* (wooden noisemakers) whenever the name of wicked Haman was read from the *megillah*, the story of Purim.

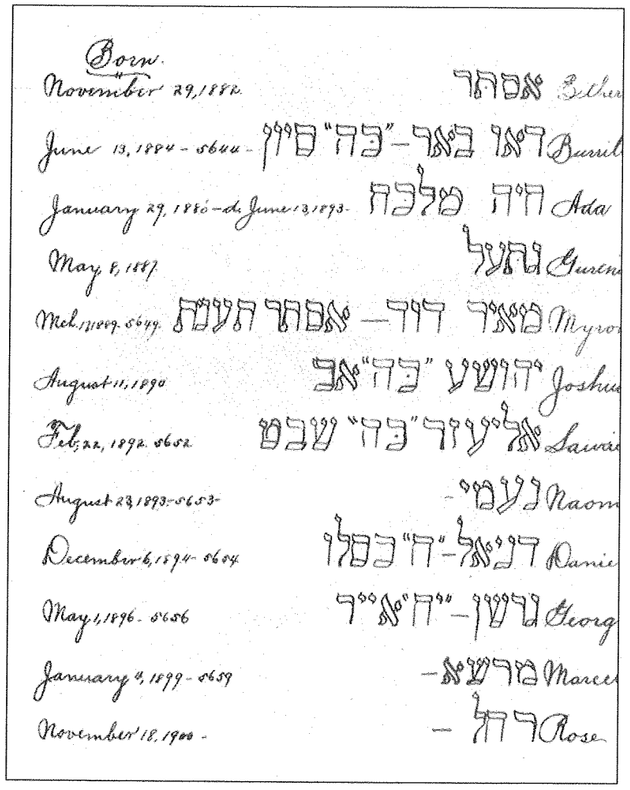
Spring meant Passover. We started the monumental house cleaning job to remove all flour-based products from our house weeks in advance. All our pockets were cleaned out: no bread crumbs, cake, candy, etc. Mother went to a special store which had been scoured clear of all food weeks in advance to make her purchases of Passover food which was delivered only after the house had been completely readied. I remember the large cone-shaped loaf of cane sugar which Becky had to pound with a hammer to break up, and the many pounds of honey in its original wax comb, which had to be held over the fire to thin out. In the early years, our wine was made in our cellar and we kids helped press the grapes.

The night before the Seder, Papa went into each room with a box and a chicken feather to gather up little crumbs which Burrill had hidden in advance. We weren't allowed to tell Papa where they were hidden; he had to find them himself. This ceremony was to symbolize the final and complete removal of all leaven (*chametz*) from the house.

Finally, Seder night brought us all together, including Becky Adler who was invited to sit with us on this great occasion. There was always a new young child to ask the Four Questions. Father read the Haggadah with serious concentration, but WE would concentrate on the wonderful food ahead. We started with the traditional hard boiled eggs. For some reason the boys tried to outdo each other stealing and consuming them. We would sneak into the kitchen unobserved and swipe extra eggs from the huge pot on the stove, hiding them in our pockets. When the time came, we put our winnings on the table. It was probably the four glasses of wine we each drank that made us so light-headed. After the meal the second half of the ceremony was on the less serious side with much singing and gaiety. The Seder was a joyous occasion at which Papa could never induce seriousness and respect from his children.

I cannot omit another day in the Jewish calendar: the Fast of Tisha B'av, that commemorates the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in ancient times. It was on the eve of Tisha B'av that our mother suffered her last agony. She died that evening in Mount Sinai Hospital from peritonitis as a result of an appendix operation. If only antibiotics had been discovered at that time, her life would have been extended. She was only 64 years old. Before she died, she said, "What a Tisha B'av this is for me!" The entire family – children, brothers and sisters – surrounded her bedside, and as Uncle Joe held her hand, we all repeated the *Shema Yisroel* prayer as she closed her eyes for the last time. Dr. Henry Morais, son of the founder of the Jewish Theological Seminary, delivered the eulogy at the funeral services in our apartment at 310 West 93rd Street. Pointing to us children, he asserted that we were not worthy of having had such a mother (he was always a dour, outspoken person). I'm sure our good mother would have disagreed.

After our mother died, Papa moved to 215 West 98th Street. Burrill, then divorced, took his daughter Ruth and together they moved in with Papa. Aunt Mallie, who had moved in with us at 93rd Street, continued to live with us at 98th Street until she died of pneumonia there. With Mallie gone, Burrill taking his own apartment and all the children married, Papa gave up the apartment and moved into Gurtha's home. By this time he had finally been defeated by Wall Street. Now most of his living expenses were seen to by Josh, always a most generous son, and by Burrill, who never flinched from filial responsibility. Papa kept himself occupied with shul, local brokerage houses and pinochle. When we visited him at Gurtha's house we would usually find him poring over his Hebrew books.



The record that Burrill, Theodore's oldest son, kept of the births of Crohn offspring.

He died just short of his 86th year, in Gurtha's home on Spruce Street in Cedarhurst, Long Island. The water in the bathroom was still running when he slumped on the floor from heart failure in front of the locked door. Martin Roth had to borrow a ladder from the nearby fire department, climb into the small bathroom window and unlock the door from the inside. The evening before he died he had played billiards with his sons followed by a game of bridge.

At the time of his death he was reading *The Life of Mohammed* and *The History of the Jesuit Priests*. In his spare moments he made a habit of reading the *Encyclopedia*. It could be said of Theodore that he was a good American, a good Jew, a good family man and a good Democrat.

As for mother, who has shared this chapter, she epitomized the best in fine

womanhood and motherhood. Each time my daughter Leah, her namesake, sings *Jerusalem* for the family (one of mother's favorite songs) we relive the memory of Mother as a true woman of valor and spiritual beauty.

This section was written by Lawrence (Lawrie) Crohn, Theodore Crohn's son, in 1964. The original text has been edited slightly.