

Henry and Brana Kelman

A Family History

Version 6.0

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(Their great-grandson who is named after “Henry” Chaim)



Henry and Brana Kelman's Wedding Picture 1892

Introduction

I hope that you enjoy reading this brief history of my great grandparent's lives. I have found it a rewarding experience to compile this information. During this process, I learned a great deal about the Kelmans and other branches of my family as well as the general history of Eastern European Jewry.

Please feel free to pass this document on to anyone that you wish. If anyone who reads this has any corrections, additions, stories, anecdotes, photographs or other information that they would like to share with me or have me add to this document, please contact me. I'd like to hear from you!

I would like to thank my cousins, Bebe Kagan, Kel Cohen Todd and Kathy Binns and my mother, Pearl Kramer, for their help with this document

Early Years in Eastern Europe

Henry and Brana Kelman were my great grandparents. They were the parents of my maternal grandmother, Rose Kelman Androphy. Henry died before I was born and I am named after him as is my Uncle Howard Androphy, my mother's brother. I remember meeting with my great grandmother, Brana, who was referred to as "Baubie." It must have been when I was very young since she passed away when I was six years old. I remember that she was very ill at the time but she wanted to see her great grandson.

Henry and Brana Kelman were originally from Kishinev, the capital city of modern day Moldova, in what was then called Romania. My great grandfather, Henry Kelman, was most likely born in Kishinev¹. My great grandmother Brana Boord, was probably born in Balta² which is about 70 miles north west of Kishinev, although her son, Max Kelman, thought that she was also born in Kishinev.



Kishinev and Balta are located in the territory known as Bessarabia (Basarabia in Romanian) which has changed hands between Romania and Russia several times. I have enclosed a map of modern day Moldova that includes Kishinev. Kishinev is also referred to as "Chesnow or Chisinau" which is its original Romanian pronunciation. Jews lived in Kishinev for many years. According to the Encyclopedia Judaica, "A Jewish cemetery is known to have existed in a village near Kishinev during the 18th century." "... In 1898 there were 16 Jewish schools in Kishinev

with 2,100 students. 700 Jewish pupils attended general school.” In 1900, Kishinev had a sizable Jewish population of over 60,000. However, after the Pogroms of 1903, the population steadily declined.



Henry, was born on December 25, 1868 in Kishinev in what was then Romania His Hebrew name was “Chaim Benyamin.” This is both my Uncle Howard Androphy’s and my own Hebrew name and we are both named after him. Bebe said that her grandmother called her husband “Chaim” and she often used the nickname “Benuman” that was a variation of his middle name. His father was Moses or (Moshe) Kelman. According to cousin Kelman Cohen, he had learned from some family members that the Kelman family was originally from Spain and that they left Spain during the Spanish Inquisition sometime around 1492 and migrated to Odessa.

My grandmother, Rose, said that her father’s family were costumers in the theater. Bebe also confirmed this when she told me that Brana said that Henry’s and his family supplied costumes to the theater and that it was a very good business.

Henry’s mother’s first name was Faga but no one can recall his mother’s maiden name. He had three sisters, Rayna, Rachel and Fagel who were all younger than him. We had a visit once from the mysterious Joe Throbrieter and his wife from Copenhagen. His mother was evidently one of Henry’s sisters. (This branch of the family has just been contacted again by cousin Kel Cohen. Evidently our cousin Peter lives in Copenhagen.

Brana was born September 17, 1872. Her father was Louis Boord who was an inn keeper. Louis was probably the English version of his Hebrew name, “Eleazer”, since Brana’s gravestone says that she is Brana, bat (daughter of), Eleazer. She had at least five siblings, Shii, Jacob, Etta, Hasa and Hia. She was probably the youngest child. The inn was evidently a good business since Brana told her grandchildren that she was from a fairly wealthy family. Bebe said that the inn was a larger enterprise than just an inn. It also sold grain and other supplies. Brana also told Bebe about how her father had to hide the inn’s silver and other valuables during the pogroms. Bebe also told me that Brana’s brother Jacob, who had come to America, went back to Romania to run the inn since life in America was too tough for him.

Bebe said that Brana told her that she first saw Chaim (Henry) when he came into her father's inn. Although she already had a boyfriend who was a "cobbler", which probably meant that he was below her in class and financial status, she was attracted to Chaim from the beginning because he was very handsome. For whatever reasons, posted on the walls of the inn were the names of those who were killed, raped or otherwise injured during the pogrom? Chaim evidently made some type of humorous or sarcastic comment about Branas' name not being on the list and she slapped him! (I've have also heard that she hit him with a beer bottle!)



Henry Kelman (I looked a lot like him when I was younger!)

Despite this somewhat rocky start, from all the accounts that I have collected, it is reasonable to assume that Henry and Brana were married in Kishinev about 1892 or 1893. Henry was about 24 and Brana was about 20. The picture that is included on the first page was supposedly taken on their wedding day. They look very well to-do in the picture that seems to have been taken in a photographer's studio. Henry is holding a book, but I am not sure of what. Perhaps it is a prayer book or some sort of scholarly text. Henry also seems to have a large watch fob attached to his vest. Brana is wearing a large necklace and is holding a flower of some sort in one hand and a large pocketbook in the other. It is amazing how much my sister Ellen looks like Brana and Cousin Elliot Androphy looks a bit like Henry.

While in Kishinev six of their eleven children were born. I am including the women's (my great-aunts) married names for easier reference. These were Maurice (Morris) born in 1894, Mary Kelman Kolen born in 1896, Max born in 1898, and my grandmother Rose Kelman Androphy born in 1900. Grandma sometimes claimed that she was born here in 1902, but Max wrote that she was actually born in Russia, probably around 1900.

The United States

Uncle Max Kelman wrote that his father left Kishinev in 1901 because of the pogroms. He came to this country first, evidently, by himself, leaving Brana behind with the children. He came separately, most likely because they did not have the money to send everyone at once or perhaps they felt it would be better to send Henry first to see if they could accommodate themselves to living in America..

He came to USA in a ship called the "Westerland" that sailed from Liverpool England. Cousin Ronald Androphy checked and, regrettably, there is no copy of the ship's register on file. He arrived in Philadelphia on either August 21 or 31, 1901 as was met by cousins who lived there. One of the Philadelphia cousins kept in touch with the family for years. Her name was Sylvia Feldman and she was a granddaughter to Henry's sister Faga (Fannie).

Shortly after arriving in Philadelphia, he moved to Carmel New Jersey. Bebe said that Baron de Hirsch was the person who made the arrangements to send the newcomers to Carmel. Baron Maurice de Hirsch was a Jewish philanthropist. His Jewish Colonization Association (known as ICA) enabled colonies of Jewish immigrants primarily from Russia and Romania in Argentina, Brazil and the United States. Henry's resettlement in Carmel was assisted by the Hebrew Aid Society. Carmel is located in Cumberland County in Southern New Jersey south of Philadelphia. I don't know the reason that he moved to Carmel.

However, I have learned that in those days, many new immigrants were sent to rural areas to assimilate American culture. They were often considered too "green" to stay with more assimilated and sophisticated relatives in the city. Maybe there was a job waiting for him in Carmel and that is why he moved there. Max lists his father's profession as a "cloth salesman" which confirms that he and his family sold clothing in Europe. Uncle Max was also in the clothing business (he had a clothing store in Ansonia Connecticut) so he was influenced by his father. I have just received a great deal of information from Todd and Kathy Binns about the Jewish Farming Colonies in Southern New Jersey that included Carmel. They were called YOVAL.

I also don't know how well Henry spoke English. My grandmother also said that her father always regretted having a foreign accent and he worked hard at speaking English well. She also told me that her father spoke three or four languages. These were probably Romania, maybe Russian and definitely Yiddish. He was known as an educated man who was very intellectual.



Henry sent money back to Kishinev for Brana and the children. Brana came over in either 1903 or 1904 with five of her children, Morris, Mary, Max, Rose (my grandmother) and baby Julia who died, probably of SID, in this country. Her son Lazar, who was born between Mary and Max, died in Kishinev. According to my mother, my uncle Lenny Androphy is named after Lazar. In a letter to Ronald Androphy, Bebe wrote that Brana blamed the loss of her son, Lazar, on her husband's family. Lazar was left with Henry's family when she went home to Balta to her father's funeral. Brana told her that they didn't watch him carefully and "he fell and died soon after."

Henry Kelman

The trip to America took my great grandmother about three weeks and she landed at Ellis Island. According to Aunt Rae Schoenberg, Henry's sister Rayna came with her. Evidently, Brana had traded down to a lower class ticket so that her sister in law Rayna could also come over without spending any additional money. She joined Henry who was already living in Carmel New Jersey. Four more children were born here: Francis Kelman Arthur was born in Carmel 1902; Rae Kelman Schoenberg was born in Philadelphia in 1904; Joseph in 1906, Lillian Kelman Levy in 1908, and Ida Kelman Cohen in 1910 all born in Carmel.



Brana Kelman in Bridgeport, CT

Henry became a U.S. citizen on March 2, 1915 (Max's writing is not very legible here!) in Cumberland County in Bridgeton, New Jersey. Brett Binns sent me a copy of Brana's Naturalization papers. It is difficult to read but it appears that Brana became a U.S. citizen when she was 42 years old in 1915. She became a citizen automatically because she was Henry's wife and he had already become a citizen. The documents lists her as being 5' 5³/₄" tall (this is not her correct height, my mother says that Brana was less than five feet tall), fair complexion, brown eyes, and "mixed" hair color. Her name was surprisingly listed as "Blanche" Kelman. It appears that at the time some of the children lived with relatives in Camden while the majority lived with her in Carmel. Bebe said that Aunt Frances told her that this was because there was some problem with the schools in one of these communities.

The family moved to Bridgeport in 1916 because they had relatives living there. Bebe also said that her father, Jack Kolen, was good friends with the family (this was before he married her mother, Mary) and convinced them to move to Bridgeport because there was plenty of work there with the Singer Sewing Machine Company. My grandmother was then about 16 years old. They lived on 5th Street near the junction of Connecticut Ave. and Stratford Avenue. Brana was also a good business woman, a talent that she probably learned from her father. She evidently had multiple garages built on her property and rented them out for additional income.

Max also wrote that other Boord family members that lived here were “mother’s sisters” aunts, Ratner, Nerochick and Rosenthal along with brother Shii Boord and Yankel Boord. The Ratner family members were named Anna and Harvey. The other Ratner family was Miriam and Leo Ratner. She also had a sister named Etta Merochanik who had two sons Hyman and Sam Meyer who lived in Hollywood, Florida. The Meyer brothers are supposedly the founders of the “Pet Boys” auto store chain. A daughter, Mary Rosenfield also lived in Florida.

My mother also told me that Aunt Mary and Bebe also lived in Bridgeport with Brana since Aunt Mary and Uncle Jack separated. That’s why Bebe knows so much about Brana and Henry since she lived with her grandmother for many years. My mother also remembers that whenever she visited her grandmother’s house, her grandmother was always cooking. I still remember how well my grandmother cooked, so Brana must have taught her daughters the necessary skills.

Brana died July 30, 1954 at the age of 81. At that time she was living next to my grandmother in Derby because Brana was very ill. That’s where I met her. She is buried at the Loyalty Cemetery in Fairfield Connecticut along with many other of our relatives on the Kelman side of the family.



Henry died October 17, 1919 at the age of 51 of accidental mercury poisoning while he has hospitalized for a minor ailment. Cousin Kel, who is a doctor, said that the doctor actually gave Henry the wrong medicine that was intended for another patient. Henry thought the the medicine was wrong but Brana told him to take it. He said that he thought Brana may have felt guilty about this the remainder of her life.

Henry Kelman’s grave in Carmel NJ

He is buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Carmel New Jersey in the town where he lived when he first came to this country. I always wondered why he was not buried with Brana in Bridgeport. According to my cousin Todd Binns, his grandmother (my great aunt) Rae Kelman Schoenberg, said that her father was buried in Carmel because he was instrumental in helping to build the synagogue and the congregation there, so he was sent back to be buried there. Bebe told me that she and her son visited Carmel and actually saw the Synagogue that Henry helped start. It is a brick building that was still used at that time. Bebe visited her grandfather's grave in Carmel, and incredibly enough, met a man there who knew the Kelman family when they lived in Carmel.

Personal Notes:

I was fortunate that when I was young I spent a lot of time with my maternal grandparents, Rose and Abe Androphy. My grandmother's family was the Kelman family and I got to know many of my great aunts and uncles who are and were the children of Brana and Henry Kelman. I thought that I would write a little bit about each one so that future readers might know a little more about them than simply a name a date of birth.

Mary Kelman Kolen was my grandmother's older sister. I did not know her very well because when I grew up she lived outside of Springfield, Massachusetts. I don't recall ever meeting her husband, Jack Kolen, because they were separated. Her daughter, Bebe Kagan, was my mother's first cousin and they spent a lot of time growing up together since Bebe and Aunt Mary lived with Brana in Bridgeport, Connecticut. Bebe and my mother were close friends as well as cousins and my mother spent many winters with Bebe in Florida. Bebe supplied much of the information found in this history in a letter she sent to cousin Ronald Androphy and personal conversations with me about her grandparents.

Max Kelman and my Aunt Rose Kornblutt Kelman ran a clothing store called "Konrblutt's" in downtown Ansonia, Connecticut just down the street from my grandfather's radio/tv/appliance store. Max and Rose also had another smaller store in Derby, CT. From the time that I can remember until I was at least a junior in high school, I got all of my clothing at Uncle Max's store. I attended many poker games at the Schoenberg's house and Uncle Max was known as a great poker player. My grandmother seemed closest to this brother since he only lived a few miles down the road from her in Ansonia. Aunt Rose and Uncle Max had one son, Robbie, who is a retired math professor at Colorado State University. Rob also helped with this information. His mother, Aunt Rose, who was quite a card.

Aunt Rae Kelman Schoenberg and her husband Abe lived in Bridgeport. Many of the Saturday night Kelman family poker games were held at their house. Uncle Abe was quite a character and a real wise guy. I remember that he always liked to make jokes. Aunt Rae's grandson Todd Binns and his wife, Kathy, are both interested in family history and supplied some of the material for this history.

Aunt Lillian Kelman Levy and her husband Nat have now passed away but they were active into their 90's. Aunt Lil was my grandmother's youngest sister, but they were always very close since Lillian lived nearby in Bridgeport. Aunt Lil is famous for her cooking also and when I visited her and Uncle Nat in Florida she made me her famous stuffed cabbage. Uncle Nat was a boxer when he was younger and always seemed very energetic. He owned and operated the Nat Levy Glass Company, still located in Bridgeport. I had made contact with their son Howard Levy again when I was in Norwalk. Howard passed away unexpectedly in 2002. Howard was also named after Henry Kelman and he was a contractor/builder in Norwalk and Arizona.

Aunt Ida Kelman Cohen was married to Morris Cohen. Uncle Morris also had a department store in downtown Ansonia. I believe that it was called "Landau's I think that he went on to other larger retail establishments and had a successful career in retail management." I have met Aunt Ida's son, Dr. Kelman Cohen, who is also interested in family history.

I did not know Joseph or Uncle "Joey" Kelman very well. I met him and his wife Marge only once or twice. I know that he was a subway engineer in New York City. Whenever I went to New York with my grandfather, he always seemed to know what train Uncle Joey would be running. I also do not know Aunt Francis Kelman Arthur who lived in Phoenix Arizona. I only met her once at Uncle Nat and Aunt Lil's 50th Anniversary party and I was amazed at how much she looked like my grandmother.

Uncle Morris Kelman I did not know well at all. Maybe someone could fill in some information here. Kel Cohen did tell me that Uncle Morris died of a brain hemorrhage. I do remember his wife Sylvia, who lived near my grandparents in Derby.

That's the end of the formal history. I have supplied some additional information about Henry and Brana's descents, the history of Kishinev and the pogroms and other information. This information is contained in Part 2.