

Galicia, Ukraine, and Caucasus through Family Chess Notes

by Edward Gelles

My paternal uncle Dr. Max Gellis (1897-1973) was my father's younger brother. He held the degree of Dr Juris from Vienna University and practised as an advocate in that city (*An Ancient Lineage*, pp 190, 192-194). He wrote a definitive work on Austrian company law (*Kommentar zum GMBH Gesetz*, Linde Verlag, Vienna, 1965 to its 7th revised edition in 2009). Max was a gifted amateur chess player. He spent the war years in Australia. In the late 1940's he went to New York to stay with his daughter and later returned to his practice in Vienna. During his years in Australia Max continued to play chess and some of his games are recorded in the literature, notably the game against Yerhoff in the 1947 Australia v. Canada Radio match won by Gellis with a Queen's pawn opening in 44 moves. A photograph of Gellis playing in this match comes from the Melbourne Herald, 14th June 1947. (*An Ancient Lineage*, loc.cit. p.193). A group photograph of Australian players including Dr Max Gellis from the 1946 Australia v France match is on the web site of the Melbourne Chess Club. The website of *chessgames.com* has details of six games played by my uncle.

Oscar Chajes was born in 1873 in Brody (Austrian Galicia) and died in New York in 1928. His distinguished rabbinical family was descended from the 16th century Chief Rabbi of Prague, Isaac ben Abraham Chayes. Oscar was a cousin of my maternal great-grandmother, Sarah Matel Chajes of Kolomea. He became a Chess Master, ranked at one time as No.10 in the world. Details of his games can be found on *chessgames.com*. These include his defeat of world champion Jose Raul Capablanca, in 1916. Chajes (white) won in 66 moves with a French opening – McCutcheon / Duras variation (see my book, *An Ancient Lineage*, Vallentine Mitchell, London, 2006, p.321).

My paternal great grandfather Zvi Aryeh Weinstein was Chief Rabbi of Solotwina in Galicia He died in 1884. His father was Rabbi Israel Jacob Weinstein of Solotwina whose line was believed to have connections in the neighbouring province of Bukowina, and points further east (*Meeting my Ancestors*, Shaker Publishing, 2011, chapter 7).

While the name of Weinstein was fairly widespread, it is a noteworthy curiosity in the context of the chess world and its connections that world champion Garry Kimovich Kasparov, born in Baku in 1963, started life as Harry Chaimovitch Weinstein. His father was Chaim Moiseyevich Weinstein and his Armenian mother was Klara Shagenovna Kasparyan aka Kasparova.

Jews and Armenians lived side by side in little *shtetls* of eastern Galicia for many generations. This area was in

economic decline at the end of the 18th century when new opportunities beckoned first from Odessa on the Black Sea and later from Baku by the Caspian Sea

There have been Jewish communities in Azerbaijan since early times, but Ashkenazi Jews first settled in Baku around 1811 and substantial numbers came in the third quarter of the 19th century at the time of the city's economic upswing. There was considerable Jewish involvement in the development of the oil industry. This influx was not confined to Jews from the Russian Pale. With Kasparov's father, an engineer, and his grandfather Moses Rubinovich Weinstein, a distinguished musician, the family goes back in Baku for some generations.

Neither my Weinstains nor Kasparov's appear to have been traced back far enough but, given the known mobility of our families over the past centuries, it is conceivable that there is a distant genealogical connection.

Autosomal DNA tests show that I share DNA segments with Weinstains having known ancestry in Lithuania and also in Odessa in the Ukraine. The matches are sufficient to identify these Weinstains as distant cousins.

DNA tests on myself and my close cousins also indicate that we have some ancestral connections across Anatolia and the Caucasus all the way to the Caspian Sea

But no DNA test results are known to me for individual Weinstains of Baku. It would be very interesting to see results of "Family Finder" autosomal DNA tests for Garry

Kasparov and his close family. Not only for family reasons, but comparisons might shed more light on Jewish and Armenian migrations in recent centuries.

References

Edward Gelles, *An Ancient Lineage*, p. 21, pp 196-198 and *Meeting my Ancestors*, loc. cit.

Wikipedia articles on *Garry Kasparov* and on *Jews in Azerbaijan*

Chessgames.com for details of 2,341 games played by Kasparov

(Incidentally, this website records Oscar Chayes with 228 games and Norman Weinstein - one of several noted players of that surname – with 126 games)

Daniel Johnson, *White King and Red Queen*, Atlantic Books, London 2007