

# **A story of an old family photograph**

**Edward Gelles**



**Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles with Lotte, Max, David, and Bertha**

My grandfather Nahum Uri Gelles (1852 –1934) was Chief Rabbi of Solotwina in Galicia, an outlying province of the Austrian Empire from 1772 to 1918. My grandfather married Esther, the daughter of Rabbi Zvi Aryeh Weinstein and Gittel Horowitz.

### **The Photograph**

The photo shows four of my grandparents' six children, including my father David Itzig Gelles who was born in 1883 (standing to the right in the photo). He held the degree of *Dr Juris* of Vienna University and practised as an advocate in that city. He was a leading member of the Viennese Jewish community and of the Austrian Zionist movement.

My father's younger siblings Lotte and Max (born in 1895 and 1897) followed him in obtaining their degrees of *Dr. Juris* in Vienna. Max was a practising advocate, wrote a standard Commentary on Austrian Company Law, and was an outstanding amateur chess player. He left a daughter Elsa who lives in New York, and who is followed by her son, the medical specialist Dr. Peter Schmaus and his issue.

Lotte married twice, to the lawyer Dr. L. Ostrer of Vienna and secondly to the physician Dr. Kurt Kalmann in Tel Aviv.

Bertha was born in 1881 and emigrated to America shortly before the First World War. She married Nathan Resnik in January 1914. Two children followed in 1915 and 1916 and a third in 1921. Her daughter Edythe, had two sons, Dr. Stuart Rothenberg, is an authority on Ayurvedic medicine and Dr Robert Rothenberg is a family physician. Stuart's daughter, the journalist Jennie Rothenberg Gritz, recently sent me this photo which appears to be a valedictory record taken prior to Bertha's departure for America.

## **References**

References to these members of my wider family and many more are included in my < Papers of Edward Gelles at Balliol College Archives & Manuscripts >

where most of my published books can be read in digitised form.

See particularly my first book “An Ancient Lineage : European Roots of a Jewish Family” (2006), chapter 37, and my latest book “Photographs relating to my family and ancestral background” (2020)

## **Cousinly and other correspondence**

A cousinly correspondence following my receipt of the photo has centred on the movements of my father’s elder sister : Bertha Feiga Rivka Gelles.

We speculated about the age of the several siblings in the photo and what light this could throw on other matters. Evidence we considered included US immigration records, marriage records, and passenger lists for ships arriving in New York. Bertha’s great –granddaughter Jennie contributed information under these headings. My friends happened to have immediate access to other web sites which gave more details of “Bertha Gelles” on passenger lists for 1910 and 1913. In summary, it appeared that <Bertha Gelles of Solotwina, daughter of Nahum Uri Gelles of Solotwina> arrived in New York on the liner “ Potsdam “ on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1910, and that a Bertha Gelles, stated to be a resident of New York, arrived on the ship “Kronprinz Wilhelm” on 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1913. Some entries of “Bertha Gelles” on other passenger lists had added details which showed clearly that they were not our immediate relative.

## **My preceding family studies**

It should be mentioned at this point that the ages of passengers on these lists are generally speaking not always reliable. I had more reliable knowledge of such vital data from a study of community archives. My publications on family genealogy go back about 20 years and a booklet entitled “Ephemeral and Eternal - a brief life of Josef Gelles” published in 2010 has now become very relevant to new questions of family history. My book succeeded in bringing two cousins who vanished in the Holocaust back from oblivion. Josef and Giza (Gittel) Gelles were children of my uncle, Efraim Fishel Gelles, the eldest of the six siblings who was born in 1878 and who, with my aunt Rosa made up the full complement of siblings with those on the photo.

My little book dealing with the Second World War, Holocaust, and aftermath is based on the discovery and acquisition of lost family post cards and the study of old tombstone inscriptions, and it now enables me to outline Bertha’s story on the eve of the First World War.

### **References from “ Ephemeral and and Eternal “**

On page 11, Note 6 : Birth records at Mielnica ( Podolskaya) of my father David Isaac and his elder sister Bertha (Feige Rivka) in 1883 and 1881 state that their mother Esther Weinstein was born in 1861 in the Bukovina.

n.b. Mielnica ( in different spellings) held the Jewish archives for an area of eastern Galicia.

On pages 9 / 10, confirmation that following the death of his first wife Esther Weinstein in 1907, grandfather Nahum Uri married again, his second wife Malke Chaya outliving her husband who died in 1934.

On pages 15 -16, - postcard written in 1935 by Malke Chaya Gelles, from Solotwina to Josef Gelles of Boryslaw regarding her widow’s pension..

## **Bertha's story and a possible history of the family photograph**

My grandfather became Chief Rabbi of Solotwina in 1884 and brought up his family there with his wife Esther. When she died in 1907 it fell to their eldest daughter Bertha to look after her father and her young siblings.

It was very much the custom for a town's active Rabbi to have a wife by his side, so it was not surprising to learn that he had married again, but I have not established when this happened. However, it has been suggested that when this new wife took charge of the family household, it may have led to tensions between her and Bertha which made her decide to emigrate. Bertha had reached an age when the prospect of finding a husband in America may have played a part in her decision to go there in 1910. This may not have been quite so much of an adventure into the unknown. Esther's Brother Chaim Weinstein had gone to New York and eventually returned to Solotwina. His son Sam Weinstein was in New York since 1906. He and his wife Gussie Spiegel were progenitors of Weinstein in New York and Boston. When Bertha got to America she had relatives to hand and would have found other Jewish Solotwina immigrants.

When in due course Bertha became engaged to Nathan Resnik it seems highly plausible that she might have wanted to see her father on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday or to visit the family in Solotwina before settling down to married life in America.

The evidence of the above-mentioned passenger lists for 1910 and 1913 arrivals in New York suggested that she did indeed make such a visit in 1913, returning to New York in good time to marry in January 1914.

While present day descendants doubt whether she had the necessary funds for this journey, I believe that she could have had the support of relatives at the time of her engagement and anticipation of her wedding.

In 1910 aunt Lotte and uncle Max were 15 and 13 years of age but they indubitably look older in the photograph.

If Bertha returned to New York from visiting her family in 1913 the photograph could have been taken when Lotte and Max were about 18 and 16 years old, more in keeping with their appearance on the photo, and thus consistent with other available evidence for Bertha's journeys in the years leading up to her marriage.