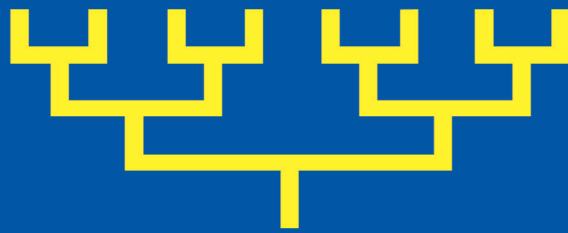


Ephemeral and Eternal

**Josef Gelles
a brief life**



Edward Gelles

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Preface

In the first half of the twentieth century the unity of our ancient family was shattered – externally through war and persecution and internally through diverging paths to perceived salvation.

Josef and Giza Gelles were first cousins who vanished in the holocaust. Until quite recently I had no idea that they ever existed.

The following articles record my studies that have rescued their memory from seeming oblivion.

These articles were first published in an abridged form in *The Galitzianer* (volume 16. No.1 and volume 17. Nos. 2 and 3).

London, May 2010



Panoramic view of Stanisław 1912

Josef Gelles : End of the Gelles rabbinic line

In the long search for my ancestral roots I have been frustrated repeatedly by the apparent loss or inaccessibility of primary sources, but then again encouraged by serendipitous discoveries in old texts, newspapers, and other ephemera. The present article describes a series of such findings that have enabled me to reveal in outline the story of a first cousin whose very existence was hitherto unknown to me. I believe that this story is relevant to the development of genealogical methodology as well as to aspects of Jewish history in the 20th century.

From the end of the 17th to the early 20th centuries rabbis of my name made their home in Brody and other Galician towns. A scholar of the prestigious Brody *Klaus*, called Menachem Mendel Levush married a daughter of a Rabbi S. Gelles. The name Levush was indicative of descent from the 16th century Rabbi Mordecai Yaffe of Prague, whose epithet derived from the title of his *magnum opus*. After his marriage (Moses) Menachem Mendel Levush was also known as Moses Gelles. His direct fifth generation descendant was my grandfather Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles (1852-1934). He married Esther, a daughter of Hirsch Leib Weinstein the *Av Beth Din* (ABD) of Solotwina near Stanislau and succeeded his father-in-law on the latter's death in 1884 (1,2).

Nahum Uri Gelles and Esther Weinstein had six children (at least one more died in infancy). The eldest son was Efraim Fischel, who trained as a rabbi but died at a young age. Then came a daughter Bertha (Feige Rivka), who emigrated to America in 1910 and whose issue flourishes there. My father David Gelles, was the second son. He was sent to the Munkacz Yeshiva in Hungary but opted for a secular career, studied law at Czernowitz and Vienna and became an advocate

there in 1916. He brought his younger siblings Max and Lotte to Vienna. These three were all doctors of law of Vienna University. They distanced themselves from the orthodox branch of the family and hardly ever talked about family history in the presence of their children.

In the course of searching for my mother's cousins some years ago I asked a Jewish scholar in Lviv to look out for local records on the Taube family, who had over a period of time proliferated in that city. In due course Jacob Honigsmann sent me some material including a few newspaper cuttings referring to members of that family. In one cutting from a Yiddish daily newspaper published in Lvov [its Polish name, previously the Austrian Lemberg, and now the Ukrainian Lviv] I found to my amazement a brief notice about Solotwina and the succession to my grandfather's post (3) : *"Solotwina – Our town does not yet have a successor to the deceased rabbi, Rabbi Nachum Uri Gelles of blessed memory. A number of factions have developed in the town, who are arguing whether Solotwina needs a rabbi at all. In fact, it is the ultra-orthodox who say No! One faction wants to appoint a grandson of the old rabbi, but there are very many who oppose this"*.

This newspaper entry was at first a great puzzle to me as I was unaware of any rabbinically qualified grandson. However, this discovery was very soon followed by another more enlightening one. The son of my Hebrew translator Yissochor Marmorstein, was reading a book by the eminent Polish Rabbi Yehudah Meir Shapira, the founder in 1929 of the Lublin Sages Yeshivah (4). In the appendix to this book he came across a list of students. It had an entry "*Josef Gelles, son of Efraim Fischel Gelles of Solotwina*". Here was the grandson who was a candidate for the Solotwina post in 1935. This was indeed a lucky find, considering the chances of anyone who knew my name coming across this list and being sufficiently interested to study it.

Josef was never mentioned by my father or my uncle Max, though they did tell me in passing that their elder brother Efraim Fischel had died at a young age. Efraim Fischel's other son Leo (Ahron Leib) visited us in Vienna. Leo later went to America and died there in 1973. He appears to have maintained his adherence to the Chasidic Czortkow connection of his forebears, but he made the necessary concessions to outward western forms (5). Much later, I gathered from relatives on his mother's side that his father, Efraim Fischel, had married a Leifer from the rabbinical family of Nadworna. I suspect that the uncompromisingly orthodox Josef and his easy-going Viennese relations were embarrassed by each other. This must be seen in the context of the history of Europe in the earlier part of the 20th century and of Austrian conditions in the 1930's.

The Jewish records for Solotwina in various archives have proved of little help. Much has been lost and some existing files in Warsaw have proved very difficult to access. Birth records at Mielnica Podolskaya (6), death records of Kolomea (7), and sundry other findings on the JRI-Poland data base have provided relevant information, but it is the series of exceptionally lucky discoveries that has provided essential leads as well as introducing an element of adventure into the methodology of this genealogical research.

The next extraordinary find came only a few months ago. It was an old postcard addressed to Josef, care of his brother Leo Gelles, by his future father-in-law (8). It is post-marked Tarnopol 31.12.1934 (8). Remarkable, not only that the card survived for 74 years but that it should surface this year on the eBay auction web site ! The card is not only a welcome confirmation of Josef's existence, but gives an insight to the contested election of a new rabbi. My grandfather died at the Rothschild Hospital in Vienna on 18th November 1934 (9). My cousin Josef must have come to Vienna to look after him during his illness or for the funeral and was still there at year's end when he received this

urgent call to return to Solotwina in order to secure his grandfather's old post. Both sides of the postcard are shown in the illustration and the Hebrew – Yiddish text reads thus in translation :

With the help of G-d.

Monday [in the week of the Torah reading] Va'erah.

Greetings and all the best for ever to my future son-in-law, the distinguished Yosef. may he live long good days, Amen !

When I came to Stanislaw in connection with my business affairs, I had [discussions ?] regarding the Solotwina rabbinate, and I heard that they want to organize a meeting regarding the elections for the appointment of a rabbi. There are already six significant candidates who have made a great impression in the town and they make light of your claims [to the rabbinate]. Therefore, my opinion is that at all costs, without any delay, you should immediately return home. You should not even wait for the [fur coat ?]. Presumably your brother will provide whatever you need. You should let me know immediately when you are travelling home and with G-d's help, I will meet you in Lemberg, just let me know which train you will be taking so I should know where to meet you. We will then discuss everything.

Regards to all the family, especially to your dear brother.

From your future father-in-law,

[?] Spiegel

It was well-established Galician practice that in communal appointments, such as those of a rabbi, preference would be given to a qualified son or son-in-law. There appeared to have been strong competition from several candidates for the Solotwina post. A kinsman, Rabbi Yoel Babad, was finally appointed after considerable delay. We do not know enough about the candidates and their supporters to make more than the tentative suggestion that Josef Gelles may

have been too young and inexperienced at that time. His father Efraim Fischel was born in 1879 and the Lublin Sages Yeshivah opened in 1929. One could hazard a guess that Josef might therefore have been born just before the outbreak of the first world war and that he would have been in his early twenties at the time of the contested rabbinical election in 1935.

The number of Jews in Solotwina had fallen from a high of more than 2,000. The hold of the old religion had declined, and many young people emigrated to America, among them many descendants of my Weinstein great-grandfather. A grandson Sam Weinstein married a Gussie (Gittel) Spiegel from Solotwina. His brother Jake married her sister Clara Spiegel. It is interesting to discover that Josef's prospective father-in-law was a Spiegel from nearby Zloszow. There is little doubt that these various Spiegels in or near Solotwina were closely related (10).

A month after the appearance of the first postcard a second card was displayed on eBay by the same vendor (11). It was from Ch. Gelles of Solotwina and addressed to Josef Gelles at Boryslaw, not far from Solotwina and Stanislau [Stanislawow – now called Ivano-Frankivsk]. Written in Hebrew and Yiddish it calls on the “Dear Children” to come to Solotwina post-haste to help the writer in her argument with a Mr Haller. It is signed *Horabonis* [the Rabbi's wife] Chaya Gelles. The postmark is unclear. On its own, this card would have been difficult to interpret. However, a few years ago I had obtained from the Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem four microfilms of Solotwina files covering community affairs for the period under discussion. One of these contained some correspondence between Malke Chaya Gelles, widow of Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles, and the local authorities regarding the inadequacy of her pension. A letter bearing a 1936 date complained about this Mr Haller (12). This was the first evidence I had that my grandfather had taken a second wife, though it was not entirely unexpected since my grandmother Esther

Weinstein died in 1907 and my grandfather survived her for 27 years. The correspondence suggests that the second postcard, which has just turned up, was written in late 1935 and that Josef was then staying in Boryslaw (in a house probably inherited from his parents). As his step-grandmother addresses them as “Dear Children” one might surmise that Josef had married his Spiegel fiancée and obtained a post in Boryslaw or perhaps had relatives there (13,14). The possibility that Josef had a sister cannot be discounted.

The above findings were published in the November 2008 issue of *The Galitzianer* (15). More information has come to light from diverse sources which now allows me to add a post-script.

A brief entry in the *Jüdische Presse*, an orthodox Jewish newspaper published in Vienna, revealed the years of birth of Josef Gelles and of his brother Leo as 1912 and 1913, and that by 1921 they had lost both their parents (16).

A list of unpaid water bills in Drohobycz – Boryslaw for the years 1941 / 1942 indicated the many Jewish residents who were either deported or murdered at that time. The name of Giza Gelles of Lukaszewicza Street 18, Boryslaw is marked “vermisst” i.e. missing. The address is the same as that of Josef Gelles on the postcard sent to him by his step-grandmother from Sobotwina.

Giza’s precise relationship to Josef was still unclear at this juncture (17).

These findings, as the others previously reported, are remarkable for several reasons, including the extraordinarily serendipitous sequence of discovery over a relatively short period of time, and how the interpretation of the information each contained depended critically on that found in earlier discoveries. The variety of sources is also remarkable – a Galician newspaper cutting from 1934, a list of students in the appendix to a rabbinical monograph, a letter in the Sobotwina files at the Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People in

Jerusalem, two postcards written in 1934 and 1935 which separately appeared in 2008 on an e-bay auction web site, a paragraph in a Viennese newspaper in 1921, and a list of unpaid water bills from the holocaust period in Galicia.

Notes

- 1 Edward Gelles, *An Ancient Lineage* (Valentine Mitchell, London 2006)
see Chapters 27 and 28 for the families of Rabbis Nahum Uri Gelles and Hirsch Leib Weinstein
- 2 *idem, Family Connections : Gelles-Horowitz- Chajes* (Shaker Publishing B.V., The Netherlands, 2008) - see Table 2 for the Gelles – Shapiro connections including Friedman of Czortkow and Rabbi Yehuda Meir Shapira, the teacher of Josef Gelles - also Tables 14 and 15 for possible connections of Horowitz to Weinstein and Gelles.
Yehuda Ahron Horowitz was a rabbi in Sopotwina. He moved to the Bukowina in 1858-59 and at that time Hirsch Leib Weinstein became ABD of Sopotwina. His daughter Esther was born in 1861 in the Bukowina while her elder siblings were born at Sopotwina.
Hirsch Leib Weinstein died in 1884 and was succeeded by his son-in-law Nahum Uri Gelles. On the latter's death his grandson Rabbi Josef Gelles competed for the post which went to Rabbi Yoel Babad
- 3 Der Najer Morgen Tagblat, 26th December 1934, page 4.
this Yiddish daily was published in Lemberg (Lvov).
- 4 Rabbi Yehuda Meir Shapira, *Imrei Da'as* (Bnei Brak, Israel 1990)
A list of students at the Lublin Sages Yeshiva is appended
- 5 A Commemorative Dinner was held by the Czortkow Chasidic connection in New York on December 7th, 2003. (followers of Rabbi David Moshe Friedman of Czortkow and of his son Rabbi Israel Friedman). A memorial tablet to Leo (Aryeh Leib) Gelles who died in 1973 is illustrated in the programme see *An Ancient Lineage* (v.s.) Chapter 35, note 11 on p. 257
- 6 Birth records at Mielnica Podolskaya of my father David Isaac and of his elder sister Bertha (Feige Riwka) in 1883 and 1881 state that their mother Esther Weinstein was born in 1861 in the Bukowina.
- 7 The death record of Abraham Weinstein at Kolomea in 1904 indicates that this elder brother of Esther Weinstein was born in Sopotwina in 1856 - see Notes 6 and 2 above.

- 8 Postcard sent by S. Spiegel from Tarnopol on 31. 12. 1934 addressed to Josef Gelles c/o Leo Gelles in Vienna. Sold on eBay on 9th May 2008, Reference:
 cgi.ebay.co.uk/Judaica-Postal-Card-Tarnopol-Vienna-Yiddish-Hebrew_W0QQitemZ130219663055QQihZ003QQcategoryZ3514QQssPageName ZWDVW
 I am greatly indebted to my translator Yissochor Marmorstein for finding the two postcards on the eBay site (see note 11).
- 9 Letter from the Israelitische Kultusgemeinde in Vienna dated 20.10.1999 confirming that Nahum Uri Gelles, born at Narayow on 18 February 1852, died in Vienna on 18 November 1934.
 see *An Ancient Lineage* (v.s). Fig 4 and p. 258 for details of my grandfather's tombstone and grave.
- 10 Rabbi Hirsch Leib (Zvi Aryeh) Weinstein was Chief Rabbi (Head of the Rabbinical Court of Solotwina for 32 years until his death in 1884. His eldest son Chaim went to America but decided to return to Solotwina where he died in 1927. A number of Chaim's children emigrated to the US, some of them at quite a young age. Sam and Jake Weinstein, who married the Spiegel sisters from Solotwina have been mentioned above. Two brothers of Sam and Jake also came over at about this time. They were Izzy and Hirsch Leib (born in the year of his grandfather's death and named after him). The connections between Solotwina emigrants and the "home town" were maintained until the eve of the second world war.
 I am indebted to Elaine Beth, a daughter of Philip Weinstein, for information about the later Weinstein cousins (see appended chart). The First Solotwina Rabeini Hirsch Leib Weinstein and Rabbi Mordecai Leifer Sick & Benevolent Societies are further sources of information, as are the Ellis Island records and the burial records at Mount Hebron Cemetary, Flushing, N.Y.
 Photographs of tombstones at Solotwina with translations of their epitaphs are now being published on the web site of the Jewish Galicia Cemetary Project - www.jewishgalicia.net/Database/Solotwina%20Cemetary%20List.aspx
 The inscription on Rabbi Hirsch Leib Weinstein's stone reveals that his father was Rabbi Israel Yaakov Weinstein (see below). Tombstones of Rabbi Hirsch Leib's children Chaim, Hanna, and Sarah have also recently appeared on this site (2010).
- 11 Postcard sent by Ch. Gelles of Solotwina to Josef Gelles in Boryslaw, Galicia. The card is postmarked Solotwina but the date is illegible.
 The eBay reference is (note the incorrect spelling of Boryslaw) :
 cgi.ebay.co.uk/Judaica-Postal-Card-Solotwina-Bozyulaw-Father-Yiddish_W0QQitem Z350068261125QQihZ022QQcategoryZ3514QQssPageNameZWDVWQQrdZ1
- 12 Central Archives for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem relating to the history of the Jewish community in Solotwina, Galicia, Microfilm : Roll No. HM2 Start 8663 (1-19) Solotwina - Part 2 contains correspondence of Malke Chaya, widow of Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles (copies in Edward Gelles Family Archive)

- 13 JewishGen Shtetlinks – Boryslaw.
www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/drohobycz/shtetls/shtetls_Boryslaw.and
 Drohobycz Administrative District – Map of Boryslaw 1880-1900.
 Key to Map prepared by Valerie Schatzger lists houses with names of
 owners. House No. 32 : Gelles & G-----.

- 14 JRI-Poland Data Base. Spiegel in Boryslaw (Lwow Wojewodztwa)
 entries for Spiegel in late 19th century including a Spiegel – Horowitz
 marriage

- 15 *The Galitzianer*, Vol.16, No.1, November 2008

- 16 Jüdische Presse, Organ für die Interessen des Orthodoxen Judentums, Vienna,
 No.18., 27 May 1921:
Agudas (Jewish ultra-orthodox organization)
 The list of admissions to their war orphans home at Baden, near Vienna includes
 Ahron Leib Gelles, aged 8 years, and Josef Gelles, aged 9 years, from Boryslaw.
 For details of this orphanage see Thomas E. Schaerf, *Juedisches Leben in Baden*,
 Mandelbaum Verlag, Vienna 2005, pp 98-101.

- 17 JewishGen web site for Drohobycz and Boryslaw, Galicia
 Unpaid water bills in Boryslaw 1941-42, pages 13 and 126 :
 Giza Gelles, Lukasiwiczka Street 18, Boryslaw : *vermisst*

Josef's marriage in Stanislawow and his sister Giza in Boryslaw

My grandfather Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles (1852-1934) was Chief Rabbi of Solotwina near Stanislau in Galicia. He died and is buried in Vienna. His eldest son Efraim Fischel Gelles (1879-c.1920) was the father of a cousin Leo / Ahron Leib who lived in Vienna. When I started my family studies ten years ago I was not aware that Leo had any siblings. It has been very difficult to access relevant local community records on Efraim Fischel's children in Poland. So much has been lost or dispersed, but it has become possible to build up a picture of this family branch with the help of scattered entries in the rabbinical literature and through the discovery of ephemera, principally entries in contemporary Jewish newspapers and family postcards. What has survived wars and the holocaust still constitutes a great wealth of genealogical and historical material that is now gradually becoming accessible on the internet.

Two postcards addressed to Josef Gelles (1912 - ca1941-42) appeared on an e-bay auction last year and were reproduced in my first article on this subject and in my recent book *Family Connections : Gelles – Shapiro – Friedman* (1-3). A card dated 31st December 1934, was from Josef's prospective father-in-law while the second card, with an illegible postmark but probably written in 1935, came from his step-grandmother. A few other pieces of information that threw light on the life of a lost cousin turned up before the emergence of these cards. Josef studied at the prestigious Lublin Sages Yeshivah in the early 1930's. He came to Vienna in 1934, but the card sent to him there, shortly after his grandfather's funeral, by a Mr. Spiegel, to whose daughter Josef was betrothed, urged him to return to Solotwina in order to claim the now vacant rabbinical post. The postcard from Josef's step-grandmother (the late Rabbi's widow) shows him to be resident in the nearby Galician town of Boryslaw. Further

relevant information came from a seemingly unlikely source. Files of unpaid water bills for Boryslaw – Drohobycz in the years 1941-42 reveal the fate of many Jewish residents who were either killed in these towns or sent to concentration camps. Giza Gelles of Lukaszewicza Street 18, Boryslaw is listed as “vermisst” (missing i.e. deported). The address is the same as that on the postcard sent to Josef by the step-grandmother from Solotwina (4). My conjecture at this stage was that Giza was Josef’s wife or sister (2).

More postcards have now turned up on the same e-bay auction site and I am greatly indebted to my translator, Yissochor Marmorstein, for his invaluable help in their retrieval. These cards were offered by an American dealer in Jewish ephemera, who regularly enters miscellaneous items from his large stock on e-Bay, but has so far not revealed whether he holds any further related material. It seems a plausible assumption that a parcel of correspondence came from the home of Leo Gelles, who died in New York in 1973. Somehow the material survived and found its way into the hands of the present vendor. If all items are from the same parcel the question arises how a card from the step-grandmother in Solotwina to Josef in Boryslaw came into Leo’s possession. The precise date, location, and manner of Josef’s death is not presently known, but it seems that this parcel of family history was rescued by Leo when he made his way from Vienna to Switzerland and later to America.

In the first of the newly discovered cards Josef informs his brother Leo that his marriage is to take place in Stanislau in a week’s time and that he has sent him an invitation (or announcement). Josef goes on to speak of Gittel and that, with the expected improvement in his circumstances consequent upon his marriage, he will be able to give her some money and perhaps a larger sum in due course. Gittel appears to be the Jewish name of their sister (after her grandmother Gittel Weinstein and perhaps also after the latter’s grandmother Gittel HaKohen Adlersberg). Josef goes on to ask after uncle Max and aunt Leah (Dr. Max

Gellis, a lawyer in Vienna, and Dr. Lotte Gelles, who emigrated to Palestine in the early 1930's. They were siblings of Efraim Fischel Gelles and of Dr. David Gelles).

A few weeks later another card turned up on the web site. This card is clearly postmarked Stanislawow 13 September 1935, which is also the written date on the card. It is from Josef and Giza to Leo. Josef writes (in Yiddish and Hebrew): "*Mazeltov and may you be inscribed and sealed for a good year, my precious brother Ahron Leib. I greet you warmly. My wedding is to take place in a few hours. May the Almighty grant that it should be with good luck and blessing for us and for all the Jews.*"
Your brother Josef."

Giza addresses Leo (in German) as "*Dear Brother*"

She describes her disappointment that they have not received a letter from him [which may have gone astray], mentions that they travelled the previous day from Boryslaw, are now waiting for relatives in the hotel in Stanislawow [for the reception], and expresses her joy to Leo at their brother's wedding.

The newly discovered cards provide documentary proof that Giza (Gittel) was indeed a sister of Josef and his brother Leo.

Notes

The two appended postcards were purchased through e-Bay auction on 15th September 2009 for US\$ 32.60 and on 13th October 2009 for US\$ 14.95 respectively.

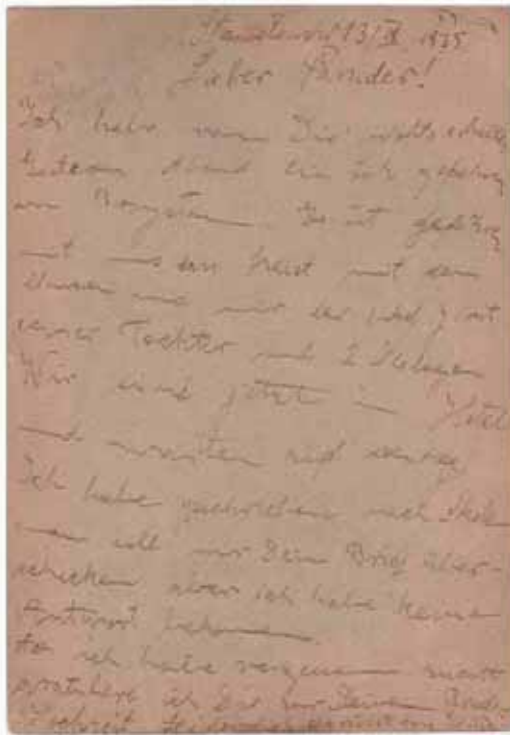
1 Edward Gelles, *An Ancient Lineage*, Vallentine Mitchell, London 2006, pp 189-192

2 *Idem*, *The Galitzianer*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (November 2008)

3 *Idem*, *Family Connections: Gelles – Shapiro – Friedman*, Shaker Publishing B.V, The Netherlands, 2009, pp 67 – 82 (two postcards are shown on pp 76-77 and the identity of Giza is discussed on p 72 and in note 20 on p 75)

4 Boryslaw –Drohobycz Delinquent Water Bills 1941-1942, JewishGen Web Site

For information on the above-mentioned books and purchase of copies please contact the author on < edward.gelles@btinternet.com >



Card postmarked 13 September 1935 written by Josef and Giza Gelles to their brother Leo Gelles in Vienna on the day of Josef's wedding in Stanislawow.

Josef Gelles and the Rabbinate of Solotwina

Postcards and contemporary newspapers have been significant amongst the manifold sources I have drawn on during my study of family history. In my first book I described how a postcard written in 1916 from the eastern front by Austrian army doctor Abraham Loew to his cousin Regina Griffel opened up a trail that led from Vienna via London to New York and Chicago, back to Strasbourg, and finally to Tarnobrzeg in Austrian Galicia. It was only in this round-about way that I managed to locate the family of my maternal grandmother Chawa Wahl and, in due course, scores of cousins of the Griffel, Loew, Taube, Safier and other related families (1).

More recent discoveries of old postcards and other ephemera have revealed much about paternal first cousins of whose very existence I had been unaware. These sources are also shedding new light on the life of my grandfather, Nahum Uri Gelles who was Chief Rabbi of Solotwina near Stanislau (Stanislawow). He succeeded his father-in-law in that post in 1884 and held it until his death in 1934. It now emerges that he spent much time away from Solotwina visiting other Galician communities. More importantly, he was among a considerable number of Galician rabbis who came to Vienna at the outbreak of the first world war. He remained there for about ten years and played a prominent role in its orthodox community.

In my latest book on Gelles, Shapiro, and Friedman family connections I detailed some of these new findings (2).

Various Jewish newspapers published in Vienna in the inter-war years recorded my grandfather's flight from Galicia to the Imperial capital in 1914, his work in aid of Galician refugees who had come to that city in their thousands, his activities as a teacher and examiner at orthodox seminaries, as a speaker at public functions, and his close association with the leader of the Czortkow chasidic connection, the Grand Rabbi Israel Friedman, who had also taken up residence in Vienna in 1914 and remained there after the war as one of the leaders of orthodox Jewry, while maintaining close contacts with his followers in the lands that were incorporated in the post-war Polish republic.

My book also relates the discovery of postcards that bring to light two first cousins in Galicia, who were the orphaned children of my grandfather's eldest son, Efraim Fischel Gelles. The first postcard is from a Mr Spiegel who writes from Galicia on the last day of 1934 just over a month after my grandfather's death. The card is addressed to Josef Gelles care of Leo Gelles in Vienna and the sender, who describes himself as his prospective father-in-law, urges Josef to return to Solotwina as quickly as possible to stake his right by ancient custom to the now vacant position of his grandfather.

The second postcard written some months later is from Ch. Gelles in Solotwina to Josef Gelles in Boryslaw asking the "dear children" to come quickly to Solotwina to help her secure a modest pension as the rabbi's widow. Chaya Malke could be identified as Nahum Uri's widow from letters between her and the local authorities that are in the Solotwina files at the Central Archive for the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem. Nahum Uri's first wife, my grandmother Esther Weinstein, was the daughter of Zvi Aryeh Weinstein, the Rabbi of Solotwina to whose post my grandfather succeeded. She died in 1907 and as community rabbis needed to be married it came as no surprise to find

that he had later taken a second wife. Nahum Uri's eldest son Efraim predeceased him, so it was his grandson Josef who now put forward a claim as a qualified successor, having studied at the prestigious Lublin Sages Yeshivah under Rabbi Yehuda Meir Shapira (3).

The third and fourth postcards turned up on e-Bay a few months later and are the subject of an article in a recent issue of *The Galitzianer* (4). Josef wrote from Boryslaw to his brother Leo in Vienna on the 6th September 1935 announcing his impending marriage and talking about his concern for Gittel. A card sent to Leo a week later, on the 13th September, has greetings from Josef and separately from Giza Gelles. It is written from Stanislawow on Josef's wedding day and thus not only confirms the place and date of Josef's marriage but also proves the identity of Josef and Leo's sister, referred to variously by her German name Giza and Jewish name Gittel.

The fifth and sixth postcards that have now come to hand extend our knowledge of Josef's brief life and the protracted issue of the succession to my grandfather in the Solotwina rabbinate.

A card from Jacob Juran to his friend and relative Selig Sobel appears to date from the beginning of 1935. Mr Juran was looking after matters relating to the settlement of the late rabbi's affairs in Solotwina. He expresses his opinion that Josef has a very good chance of gaining his grandfather's post but urges him not to delay his return (from Vienna).

The name of Mr Juran comes up again some months later in a card from Josef to Leo Gelles, dated 10th November 1935. It gives Josef's address as Rynek 20 in Stanislawow, that is in the market square of the town in which he appears to have settled after his recent marriage there. Josef expresses the hope that aunt Reize (Rosa) has passed on his greetings to Leo (Rosa may have come from

Vienna to attend the wedding in Stanislawow). Josef continues to describe to his brother his daily routine of opening the shop in the morning and locking up at night. The rest of his time is devoted to study in preparation for his rabbinical ordination. The long drawn out arguments that finally led to the appointment of a distant kinsman, Rabbi Yoel Babad as Av Beth Din of Solotwina still lay in the future. As for the shop, the 1931 Polish Business Directory lists a drapery goods store at No. 18 of the square in the name of T. Spiegel. It is a plausible assumption that it was owned by Josef's in-laws and run by his bride and that the newlyweds lived next door at No. 20. Neither house has survived the war (5). His sister Giza (Gittel) presumably continued to live at the Gelles family home, Lukasiewiczza Street 18 in Boryslaw, where her residence was still documented as late as 1941 (2,3). In this latest card Josef is pessimistic about his economic prospects in Poland and considers emigrating to Palestine, where his aunt Lotte (Leah) has settled. He goes on to report on outstanding financial matters, such as the inheritance he expects from the Court and the sum of 2,000 zloty owed to grandfather by the (Solotwina?) Jewish community but there are also claims of smaller sums due to Tanenzap(f) and Oliver for performance of religious services and numerous small amounts that are owed to tradesmen and others. He considers the possibility of giving Oliver authority over a part of the afore-said sum of 2,000 zloty to settle debts. He mentions the help of Mr Juran again and some payment that the latter has received. He asks Leo to obtain uncle David's opinion on the proposed settlement of sundry debts from the moneys still owed to the estate by the community. He concludes by asking about the erection of grandfather's tombstone in Vienna as the first anniversary of his death is nigh (6).

The postcard history of Josef Gelles puts his home firmly in Boryslaw where he lived as a boy and where he returned after years in an Agudas orphanage near Vienna followed by further years of study at the Lublin Yeshivah (7). A

postcard has now confirmed marriage to his Spiegel bride and a base in Stanislawow. At this juncture it seems reasonable to assume that Josef's in-laws were closely related to the Spiegels of Solotwina who married our Weinstein cousins (see the chart) and indeed to some Spiegel, Gelles, and Weinstein found in near-by east Galician towns such as Boryslaw and Rohatyn (8).

We have documentary evidence that Josef's sister Giza disappeared from Boryslaw in 1941 or 1942. The end of Josef's life is still shrouded in mystery. His residence in Stanislawow raises the question whether he may have perished there in October 1941 or at a later date. Documentation on National Socialist persecutions of Jews in eastern Galicia 1941-1944 is to be found on the Yad Vashem web site (9)

I am indebted to Yissochor Marmorstein for his help in the acquisition of the postcards and translation of Hebrew and Yiddish texts.

NOTES

- 1 Edward Gelles, *An Ancient Lineage : European Roots of a Jewish Family* (Vallentine Mitchell, London 2006), Chapters 9-11.
- 2 *Idem, Family Connections : Gelles – Shapiro - Friedman* (Shaker Publishing B.V., The Netherlands, 2009)
Chapter 4 on my grandfather's activities in Vienna 1914-1923. Additional references to Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles in Vienna (1914 – 1923) include:
“A List of Rabbis from Galicia & Bukowina residing in Vienna during the first world war” by Rabbi Nathan Nata Leiter of Duniow, published in Pressburg 1915. It includes “Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles of Solotwina”
Another reference to Rabbi Nahum Uri's teaching activities in Vienna in this period is to Avraham Moshe Ochs “ a student of Rabbi Benzion Katz who was examined on Tractate Chulin by Rabbi A.M. Steinberg, ABD of Brody, and also studied under Rabbi Gershon Hager and Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles” - see Meir Wunder, *Meorei Galicia*, Volume 6, pp 39-40. All the above mentioned rabbis were of the Chasidic Czortkow connection.

Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles was among eleven Galician rabbis, including some of the Friedman Sadagura dynasty, who signed an appeal in Vienna in 1918 for the establishment of a religious society in the Holy Land – see Gelber, *Toldot*, 2 : 803.

Chapter 5 on Josef Gelles (see note 7 below for additional references)

- 3 *Idem*, End of the Gelles Rabbinic Line, *The Galitzianer*, Vol.16, No.1, Nov. 2008.
The present study starts with a fuller revised version of this article with the addition of notes and references..The first two postcards are illustrated in this article as well as in my book *Gelles – Shapiro – Friedman* (2). The references include those to students at the Lublin Sages Yeshivah and to Chaya Malke, the widow of Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles.
- 4 *Idem*, Postcards and other Ephemera in Genealogical Research. Josef and Giza Gelles (see *The Galitzianer*, Vol.17, No.2, Feb 2010)
- 5 The Rynek or market square of Stanislawow :
No. 18 - drapery goods shop, proprietor T Spiegel, from Jewishgen.org web site of Stanislawow addresses based on the 1931 Polish Business Directory.
The list of shops at No.20 is also given
- 6 My father, Dr. David Gelles, second and eldest surviving son of the late Rabbi, would have taken care of the erection of the tombstone in the Zentral Friedhof in Vienna. The tombstone is shown in Fig 4 (p.19) of “An Ancient Lineage”
Rabbi Nahum Uri Gelles is buried next to Rabbi Israel Friedman of Czortkow and his wife Ruchama Shewa Friedman - see Table 12 of my book “ Family Connections : *Gelles – Shapiro – Friedman* (ref 2 above), pp 64-65
- 7 Additional references to Josef Gelles as a student at the Lublin Sages Yeshivah are in a two volume illustrated history of the Yeshivah published by David Avaham Mandelbaum, Bnei Berak Israel. A funding appeal for the Yeshivah in 1931 is signed by students including “Josef Gelles, grandson of the Rabbi of Solotwina”. His signature also appears on a presentation made by the students to Rabbi Meir Shapira in 1931 as “Josef Gelles of Boryslaw” and on another to Rabbi Moshe Friedman of Boyan-Cracow in 1934.
- 8 A Spiegel – Weinstein marriage in Boryslaw is recorded on the JRI- Poland web site. A noted Rabbi of Rohatyn in this period was Abraham David ben Yitzchak Spiegel. He was born in 1885 and became Rabbi of Rohatyn in 1910 (see the Rohatyn Yizkor book and S.N. Gottlieb, *Ohalei Shem* (Pinsk,1912), p. 286

9

Shoah Resource Center. www.yadvashem.org

Dieter Pohl, “ Hans Krueger and the Murder of the Jews in the Stanislawow Region “ Yad Vashem Studies, 26 (1988), pp 239-264.

http://holocaustcontroversies.blogspot.com/2008_07_01_archive.html

Comments on above posted by Jonathan Harrison on 16 July 2008.

**Postcard History of
Josef Gelles (1912-1941?)**

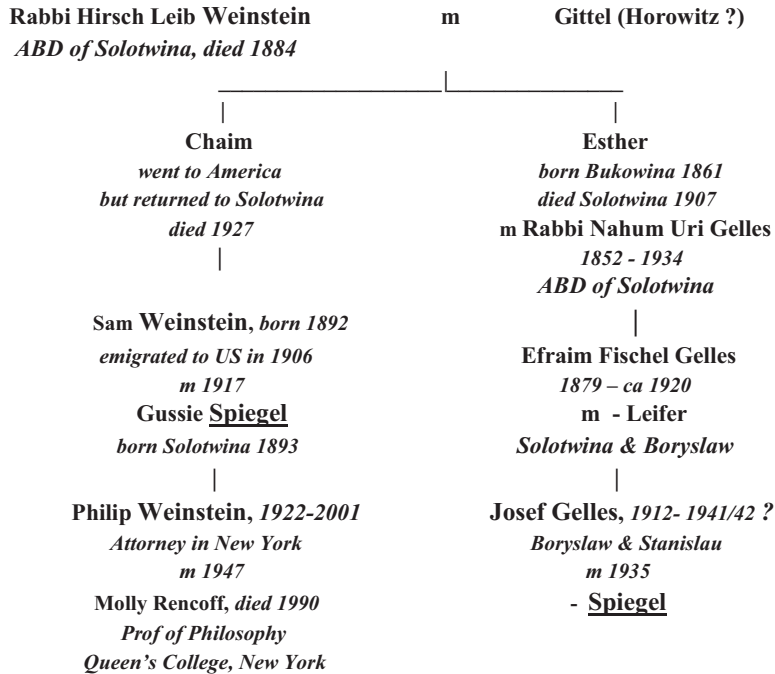
- 31.12.1934 Card from S. Spiegel of Zloszow to Josef Gelles c/o Leo Gelles
in Vienna
- 1935 Card from Chaya Gelles of Solotwina to Josef Gelles in Boryslaw
6. 9. 1935 Card from Josef Gelles in Boryslaw to Leo Gelles in Vienna
13. 9. 1935 Card from Josef and Giza Gelles in Stanislawow to Leo Gelles
in Vienna
- 1935 Card from Jacob Juran in Solotwina to Selig Sobel in Boryslaw
- 10.11.1935 Card from Josef Gelles in Stanislawow to Leo Gelles in Vienna

Poland, divided between the Russian and German Empires



© Edward Gelles, 2005

Josef Gelles, Weinstein cousins and Spiegel connections



* the sisters Gussie and Clara **Spiegel** from Sopotwina married the brothers Sam and Jake Weinstein

** Efraim Gelles and Bendet **Spiegel** were comrades in Austrian Army (*Juedische Zeitung, Vienna, 12 May 1916*)

*** the siblings of Josef Gelles were and

Leo Gelles, 1913- 1973, *died in New York*
Giza Gelles of Boryslaw, *died 1941/2 ?*

Tombstone of Rabbi Zvi Arveh (Hirsch Leib) Weinstein of Solotwina, died 1884

Epitaph Translation:

The Crown of the Torah

Every passer-by will weep bitterly
At the time that the glory [of Zvi] has fallen
And our hearts [...] as the loss is great
After the day of his passing was taken to his grave
The Rabbi and Head of the Rabbinical Court of our Community for 32 years
G-d knew [the righteousness of] his ways, perfect forever
The respected rabbi, the great luminary,
The Hasid Rabbi Zvi Aryeh
Son of the late Hasid,
Rabbi Yisrael Yaakov of blessed memory
His soul ascended to heaven on Monday, 16 of Tevet (5)644 [=14 Jan. 1884]
May his soul be bound in the bond of [eternal] life

Tombstone Year: 1884

Cemetery: Solotvin

Cemetery Placement: E012

Material/Technique: tombstone: Sandstone

Material/Technique: epitaph: Protruding letters

Material/Technique: relief: Protruding relief

Directions: Facing west

Measurements: tombstone: Height 170 cm, Width 68 cm, Thickness 27 cm

Measurements: letters: -

Decoration Program: Torah ark, two lions, and a crown

Tombstone Inscription

כתר תורה

ציון כל עובר יקונן מרה
בעת נפל צבי תפארה
י[...].ד לבנו כי גדל השבר
אחר יום גועו הובל לקבר
רב אב"ד קהלתנו לב שנה
ידע דרכו ד לעד תמימה
הוא כבוד הרב המאה"ג [=המאור הגדול]
החסיד מ' צבי אריה
בהחסיד המנוח מו"ה
ישראל יעקב זלל"ה
עלתה נשמתו השמימה
יום ב טז טבת תרמ"ד
תנצב"ה



Family Connections
Gelles - Shapiro – Friedman

By Edward Gelles

Shaker Publishing 2009

ISBN 978 90 423 0370 6

(Paperback 128 pages, 14 charts, numerous illustrations, maps etc)

From medieval Spain and Provence to renaissance Prague and Cracow this study proceeds to 18th century eastern Europe, to the twilight years of the Austrian Empire, and finally to Vienna between two world wars and into the post-war world. Rabbi Nathan Nata Shapiro of Cracow was the ancestor of the great 18th century chasidic leader Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz and of the Friedman dynasty of Ruzhin, Sadagora, and Czortkow. The connections between descendants of Pinchas Shapiro of Koretz, the scholar Moses Gelles of Brody, and Israel Friedman of Ruzhin are woven into the history of the Jews in central and eastern Europe. The book contributes some interesting footnotes to the history of the Chasidic movement as well as to that of modern political Zionism.

Edward Gelles was born in Vienna and came to England with his parents in 1938. His father was a lawyer in Vienna, a liberal and a life-long Zionist. His grandfather and great-grandfather were chasidic rabbis. Dr. Gelles was educated at Balliol College Oxford and his interests include European history, art & antiques, and family genealogy. He has contributed many articles to genealogical journals and his published books include “An Ancient Lineage: European Roots of a Jewish Family” (2006) and “Family Connections: Gelles – Horowitz – Chajes” (2008).

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Ephemeral and Eternal

Josef Gelles a brief life

Born into a rabbinical family in Austrian Galicia on the eve of the first world war, Josef Gelles was brought up in an orphanage near Vienna. He returned to Galicia in the 1920's, studied at the Lublin Sages Yeshiva, and started his married life in Stanislawow (the pre-war Austrian Stanislau which was renamed Ivano-Frankivsk in post-second world war Ukraine). He and his sister Giza vanished in the darkest days of the Nazi onslaught on Poland. His brief life between the two wars, a part of which is pieced together in this study, presents in microcosm the tragic fate of so many of his generation in eastern Europe. The step by step account of this research describes a sequence of serendipitous discoveries which should be of interest beyond the circle of genealogists and family historians, while the result of this work is no less than the rescue of two souls from seeming oblivion.

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