

Samuel Birger's Uncle



This is my father's brother passport picture. I do not know his name. The picture was made in Kaunas in the 1920s.

My ancestors are from a small Lithuanian town Jonava, located about 20 kilometers away from Kaunas. Jonava was very small, consisting of several streets. The population of town was mostly Jewish (editor's note: in the 1930s there were about 10 thousand Jews in Jonava). They mostly lived in the downtown area. There were their shops as well- grocery stores, cobbler and tailor shops. There were great carpenters in Jonava. Jonava cabinet-makers was famous all over Lithuania. Jews owned a small furniture mill. There was a match production workshop, where waste materials from furniture were used. There was square Liberty in the heart of the town. There were two big two-storyed stone synagogues by the square. Apart Jews there were also Russians, mostly Old Believers [1] who appeared in Jonava in the seventeenth century. Old believers lived in the suburbs. They mostly were farmers- tilled the land and bred cattle. They brought dairy products, potatoes and other vegetables in town. Poles and Lithuanians also lived in town, but there were not many of them.

Both my paternal and maternal grandparents were cabmen. My paternal grandfather Samuel Iosif Birger was born in Jonava in the 1870s. I did not see Samuel Iosif as he died in late 1920s. My paternal grandmother Shifra was about five years younger than my grandfather. She had always been a housewife. She took care of the household and raised children. Both of my grandparents were illiterate, but very religious. None of them knew how to read in Ivrit, but they said prayers as they knew them by heart. The family was poor, but not indigent. Grandfather's earnings were

enough for the family to get by. The Birgers had their own small house, consisting of three rooms, a kitchen and many larders. There was a big yard, where there was a stable with two - five horses, depending on the season. Grandfather took good care of them. Samuel Iosif did not get his children educated fairly thinking that there was no use in finishing lyceum to drive a cab with horses and transport people and luggage.

There were four children in the family of Samuel Iosif and Shifra: two daughters and two sons. I do not remember the name of my father's younger brother. I saw him only once, when he visited us in Jonava. Father's brother lived in Kaunas. He owned kerosene lamp there. Father's brother was married and had children. I do not know their names either. My father's brother family perished in Kaunas in the 1940s during occupation.