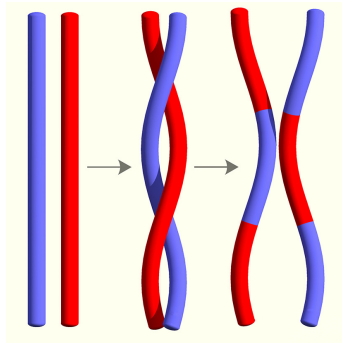


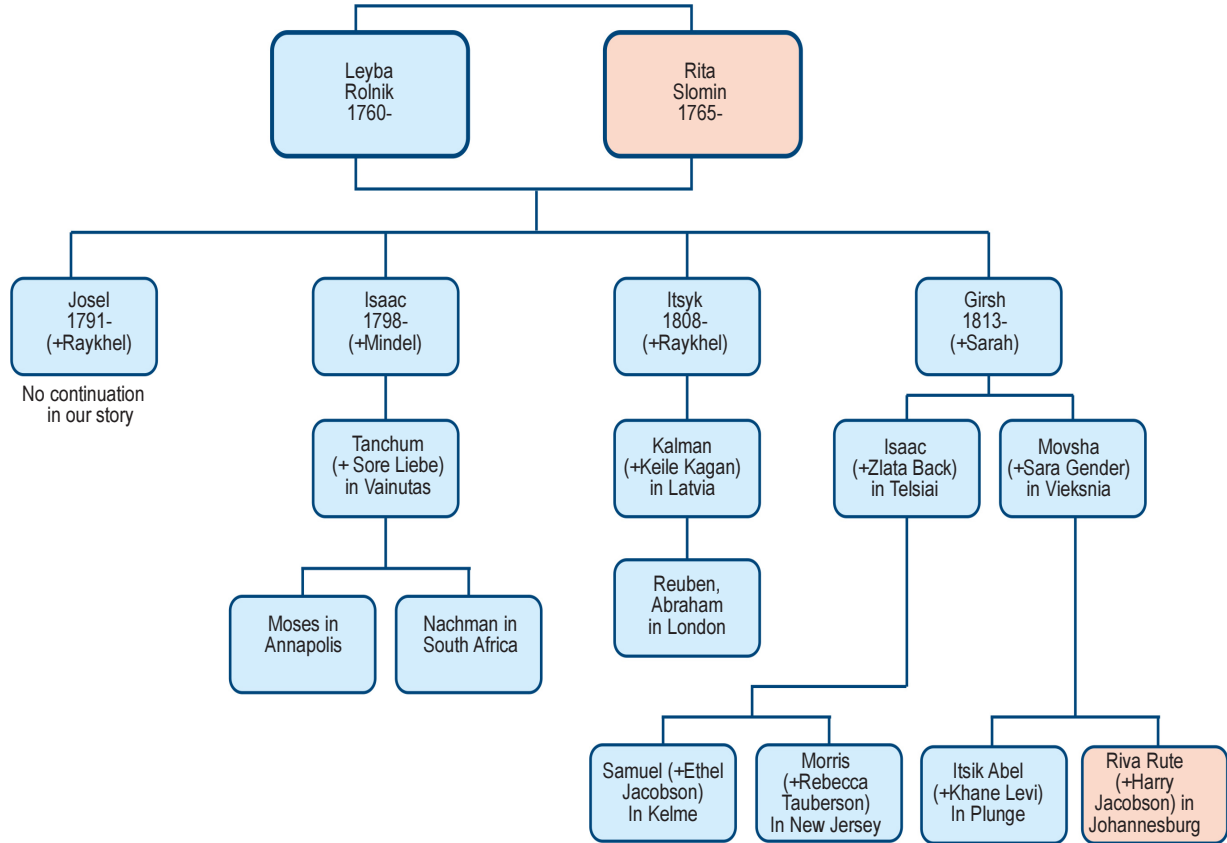
The Rolnick Chromosomes



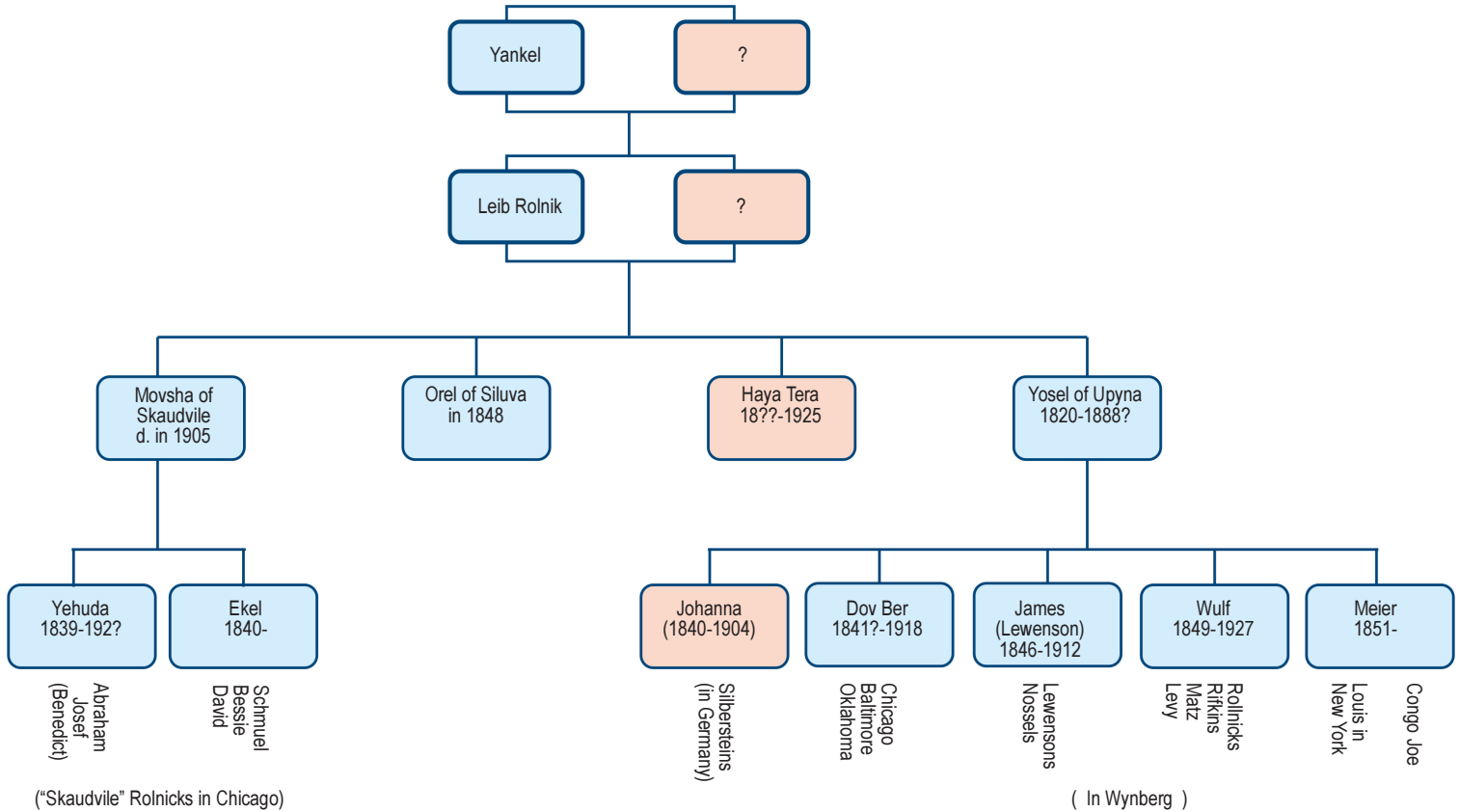
The Global Dispersion of
the Rolniks of Lithuania

Wilfred Stein

The Northern (Telsiai) Rolniks



The Central (Raiseniiai) Rolniks



To the memory of my mother
Lily Rollnick
born in Taurage, 29th February 1894.

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INTRODUCTION

I suppose that it was growing up in one of those old-fashioned families with 56 first cousins (my brother says only 48), numerous first cousins-once-removed and an uncountable number of second cousins – and these distinctions were much discussed and very important to us – that led me to take an interest in the family's genealogy. It was all very curious. My mother was the youngest of a long line of Rollnick brothers and sisters. Her niece Bubbles, daughter of her second oldest sister, was only two years younger than she was and they were best friends. Bubbles's younger daughter, Beverley, was my playmate. Was Bubbles my aunt or my cousin? Indeed, as I was second youngest of the 56, most of them treated me as one of their favourite nephews, since in years they were a generation older than me.

But the immediate impetus to begin on this History of the Rolnicks (and you will have noticed the spelling change) was an email that I received from Lucille Sher (a first cousin-once-removed). Naomi Silverton in Australia (whose greatgrandmother was a Rolnik) wanted to find other Rollnicks and knew, through a connection on Jewish Gen, that Rollnicks had come to South Africa. Finding Marissa Rollnick's address in a South African telephone directory, Naomi wrote to her. Marissa wrote to Lucille who wrote to me - and this book is the result. Lucille, Marissa, and Naomi will reappear as we proceed further with the story of the Rollnicks, but it must be already clear that we are many, and well-scattered over the globe.

In addition, I was inspired by the success of Rachel (Roch) Morgenstern, my beloved sister-in-law, in laying bare her own family's origins. Roch showed how much one could obtain from the web-based databases, although her own diligent research included examining original records in the newly accessible archives in Lithuania and encounters with archivists in Belarus. Roch moved the focus of my researches from merely drawing up a Family Tree to writing a full Family Story of the Rolnicks of Lithuania.

Rollnick or Rolnick or Rolnik and even sometimes Ralnik or Rulnik are the variant spellings of the Yiddish ראַלניק. Even with all these variants it is a rare name. When I began my researches, there were only some 150 citations of Rolnik (etc.) among the more than a million records in the Jewish Genealogy Lithuanian database. We knew of no other Rollnicks in South Africa, although I have since found information on one small family that lived "up country". With such a

small crop, I thought it would be possible to take on the challenge of identifying the descendants of the Rolniks of Lithuania and writing up our history. To the extent that I have managed to do so, this book records the wanderings of the Lithuanian Rolniks during the Great Emigrations of the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries to Germany, the USA, UK, South Africa and Palestine and their later escapes from the Holocaust (those who were lucky enough to do so) to the USA, UK, Russia, Israel and Australia. The book records also the fate of those who were murdered in the Holocaust and the travails and heroism of the survivors.

I thought when I started on this project that all the Rolniks of Lithuania were one tribe, descended from the earliest holder of the name that I could find in the Jewish Genealogy database, one Leyba Rolnik, born in 1760 and father of four sons, Josel, Isaac, Itsyk and Girsh. I found an almost convincing paper trail that linked up these four sons with most of the other Rolniks that could be found on that database, including the Rolniks of my mother's family. As a biologist myself, when DNA testing became available I went into this eagerly, fully expecting my paper trail to be confirmed, and at first it was. Each of the first three cheek-swab donors was a greatgrandson of a Lithuanian Rolnik: one from California, descended from Morris Rolnick of Telsiai; the second from Wisconsin, greatgrandson of Moshe Rolnick from Vainutas; and the third from Jerusalem, greatgrandson of Icik-Abel Rolnik from Plungyan. They shared a closely-matching DNA pattern on their Y (male-determining) chromosome. I was elated – the DNA results had fully confirmed what my painstaking documentary trail had established. But then the fourth result came in. The Y chromosome of a greatgrandson of Wolf Rolnik of Upyna (my own grandfather) showed a completely different pattern. There had to be at least two tribes among the Lithuanian Rolniks. The fifth and sixth results, from donors that family lore had told were related to Wolf Rolnik, matched the fourth swab and confirmed this.

Thus, this book - originally called "The Rolnick Chromosome" - had to become "The Rolnick Chromosomes". The front matter contains my schema for the Northern Rolniks, based originally in Telsiai, the famous town that we know as Telz, home of the Telzer Yeshiva. These Northern (Telzer) Rolniks have left descendants in the USA, the UK, Australia, Israel, and that one small family in South Africa. The front matter shows also my schema for the Central (Raseyn) Rolniks based in the little shtetels of Upyna and Skaudvile in the Raseniai/Raseiniai district. Their descendants, too, live in the USA, the UK, and Israel, with a substantial presence in South Africa, but include also

contingents in Australia, one coming from Germany and the others from England and South Africa.

The first to arrive in the New Countries mostly became peddlers, then storekeepers. Some worked in the garment industry. A few were rabbis or cantors. The children became pharmacists, teachers, accountants, doctors, lawyers, farmers, truck-drivers, handymen, industrialists. They served and suffered in both World Wars. Some Rolnicks were honorable people, others were scoundrels. Theirs is everyone's story, and it is always worth telling.



The Upyna Rolnicks in Chicago, around 1915. Top row, Myer, Michael, Jake. Below, Lena (Gardener), Dora (Feldman), Etta (Gardener), Hannah (Fisher).

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Deborah Weiner (Research Historian & Family History Coordinator, Jewish Museum of Maryland).

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Chapter Seven – Mary Jane Roth (the Lieberman family).

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Chapter Ten – My thanks to the many people who joined the Rolnik/Rolnick/Rollnick Surname Project at FTDNA.com and contributed cheek-swabs for DNA samples, and to Gabor Balogh for material reproduced in the Appendix.

USEFUL SOURCES:

JewishGen at

<http://data.jewishgen.org/wconnect/wc.dll?jg~jgsys~allcountry2>

Yad Vashem (Central Database of Shoah Victims' names)

<http://db.yadvashem.org/names/search.html?language=en>

South African Jewish Rootsbank

http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/CGI/CGI_ROOTWEB

National Archives of South Africa at

<http://www.national.archsrch.gov.za/>

Cape Town Jewish Cemetery at <https://www.jewishcemetery.co.za/>

Italian Genealogical Group (not just Italians but all NYC records)

<http://www.italiangen.org/>

Old Fulton Postcards (an excellent source of New York material) at

<http://fultonhistory.com/Fulton.html>

Cook County Clerk's office (official records)

<http://www.cookcountygenealogy.com/>

Ellis Island Foundation <http://www.ellisland.org/search>

Find a Grave (millions of gravestones world-wide, often with photographs) <http://www.findagrave.com>

US Library of Congress newspaper archive

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov>

British Library Newspaper collection

<http://www.bl.uk/welcome/newspapers.html>

Chicago Tribune Archives at

<http://pqasb.pqarchiver.com/chicagotribune/help.html>

New York Times Archives at

<http://www.nytimes.com/ref/membercenter/nytarchive.html>

Ancestry.com (fine world-wide – commercial -database)

<http://home.ancestry.com/>

Family Search (often complementing Ancestry.com)

<http://familysearch.org/>

Source material for this book will be found on the Rolnick website

<http://rolnicks-of-lithuania.com/>