

The Life of Nissan Amdur aka Nathan Emdur

Kamai-Kovno:

The Jewish community of Lithuania dates back to the fourteenth century. Through the centuries the conditions under which the Jews lived were as difficult as those in other eastern European countries. Their fortunes were usually dependant on the attitudes of local or national princes. For much of its history Lithuania was tied politically to Poland, which was threatened and often divided by its larger neighbors, Russia, Prussia and Austria/Hungary. In the third partition of Poland in 1795, The major Jewish centers including Lithuania were ceded to Russia and incorporated into Russia's notorious Pale of Settlement where special anti-Jewish laws and restrictions were imposed. Despite the persecutions and pogroms, Jewish life in Lita/Lithuania, continued and grew. This growth was particularly evident in the numerical growth of Yeshivot/Academies of Higher Learning. The Litvishî yeshivot became world famous and its graduates, rabbinic and lay, were known for their outstanding Jewish knowledge.

Knowledge of the Kark family begins in the early nineteenth century with Chaim Yaakov Nachman Kark who served as a Chazan/Shochet in the city of Kamai which was near the city of Divinsk (also known as Donnenberg). He married Mina Neche Perel _____. The couple had five children. Chaim was known as a great scholar, a God fearing person, and a man of great integrity. The couple had three sons; Yisrael Nissan, Ephraim, and Avraham, and two daughters; Nechama and Devorah.

Kovno was located near the border of what is now Lithuania, Russia and Belarus and its governance changed hands all too often. The Russians being the most powerful, came to Kovno and many other areas mainly to collect taxes from business people and landowners and to conscript young men into the Russian army, the later event most often led to service far from home, high risk of death and loss of connection to family forever. According to Russian law, one son of a given family was exempted from the draft. To minimize the impact on families and the Jewish community, families often gave their male sons different surnames (last Names) and when a census was taken claimed they were visiting friends, neighbors or nephews.

Because of the danger of being conscripted into the Russian army, the Kark family used the accepted method of changing names. Yisrael Nissan retained the family name of Kark. Ephraim took the name Gafanovitz. Avraham took the name Amdorsky, later Amdur. Most of this large family lived in and around Kovna (Lithuana/ Russia). At the turn of the century, 1900, the Jewish population of this area was near 25,000 and made up about 35% of the total population.

The first generation of Kark known to their widely dispersed descendants therefore consisted of:

1. Nechama who married? Dribin
2. Avraham Amdorsky who married Etter (Esther) Telg
3. Devorah who married Moshe Morris Smith
4. Ephraim Gafanovitz who married?
5. Yisrael Nissan who married Chana, daughter of Eliyahu and Dina Abramovitz, a banking family in Kovna

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This first generation lived through the terrible period of pogroms and persecutions initiated by the Russian empire under Tzar Alexander II. It was the period, approximately 1880, that saw the beginnings of millions of Jews fleeing Russia. Many came to America, Western Europe, and South Africa. A handful went to Palestine.

There is a family tree put together in 1999 by descendants of Yisrael Nissan Kark showing the above information which is being used to contact descendants and as a base for further study and investigation with the hope of filling in as much detail as possible.

Nathan in Kovno & England:

Nathan Amdur was born in Kovno, sometimes Covnia, Lithuania or perhaps Kamai around 1870 as Nissan Amdur. His parents were Avraham Lieb Amdur and Etter (Esther) Telg. Avraham was probably the eldest son of Chaim and Mina (Necha Perel) Kark. Siblings of Avraham were Nechama _____?, Devora (Nettie) Kark Smith, Epharaim Gafanovitz, and Rabbi Yisrael Nissan Kark, who later became a very prominent Lithuanian Rabbi. The Kark family placed a strong emphasis on education, study and learning. Many descendants pursued Jewish, rabbinic and secular educational careers. Even those that did not, generally continued the family values emphasizing study, education and knowledge.

Avraham and Etter had four children, Noah later known as Nathan Amdur Abbey, Nissan later known as Nathan Emdur, Michael, Hanna and Leah.

Nathan's youth was spent in Kovno where he was educated, studied Torah and developed skills as a cabinetmaker. Kovno had a robust Jewish community and its inhabitants had a wide range of occupations and avocations necessary to make the community self sufficient because they could not depend on the non-Jews to support them. The Jewish community maintained all the institutions for daily Jewish life including synagogues, schools, hospitals and cemeteries.

Nathan Amdur at some point in his life in Kovno married Rachel Hendler (Hindler) who was also from Kovno. Rachel's father was a Reb/Rabbi named Moshe, and her mother was named Malka. In the late 1890s they traveled to London with Nathan's younger brother Michael. They lived together and with other cabinetmakers and worked from their homes. The 1901 London Census indicated the following information:

- 54 Church St. Bethnal Green
- Nathan Amdur, head, age 33, occupied 2 rooms cabinetmaker, employer, works at home, born Russia Covnia
- Rachel Amdur, wife, age 36, born Russia Covnia
- Michael Amdur, brother, age 21, cabinetmaker, worker, works at home, born Russia Covnia
- Appears 2 boarders also lived with them, Solomon Miller, cabinetmaker form Covnia and Louis Gendler from Minsk

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Nathan had other relatives from Kovno that also traveled to London around the same time period. These included first cousins Samuel, Anna, Max and Louis Kark Smith, who were young orphans who had gone to London near the turn of the century and were headed to the United States. Because of their ages it is presumed other family members or friends from Kovna preceded or accompanied them to London. There is some unsubstantiated evidence that one or more of their parents may have made it to London as well. A significant family interconnection between the cousins Kark Smith and Nathan Amdur occurred in London sometime between 1903-1907. Samuel Smith, the eldest at age 16-17 in 1903, was preparing to go to Boston where he had some relatives and friends from Kovno. He made this journey in 1905. The plan was for Anna, Max and Louis to stay in London with relatives and others from Kovno and to come to the USA at a later date when Samuel had secured work and enough money for their passage. Samuel, Anna, and Max along with first Cousin Nathan Amdur decided that young Louis, born in 1895, should stay with Nathan and his wife Rachel who had the ability to care for him while his older siblings looked for work to support themselves and ultimately to get to the USA. Anna eventually stayed in London where she had met and eventually married _____ Raphaelson. Nathan who later for unknown reasons changed his name to Emdur, perhaps to differentiate himself from his brother Noah Amdur Abbey who had also changed his name to Nathan, was called "Uncle Emdur" among the Smith family from the time he came to the USA in 1907 until his death in 1937. Uncle was used rather than cousin most likely because he was so much older than these Smith cousins who were 16, 20, 23, and 25 years younger than he was. Nathan and Rachel effectively "adopted" Louis and he took their surname, Emdur.

Nathan Comes to USA and Bar Harbor Maine, 1907-1920

Nathan came to the USA in 1907, arriving at Ellis Island from Liverpool aboard the "New York" on 9/28/1907.

Exhibit A contains the ship and passenger records.

Nathan traveled to Bangor, Maine where friends resided and he then lived in the Boston area, but often returned to Bangor for visits. In Boston he spent time with close first cousin Samuel Smith and others from Kovno. Samuel and Nathan pursued their Torah and Hebrew studies continuing the family traditions of study and scholarly pursuits. Nathan had acquired the capabilities of a Chazan or Cantor, very accomplished at chanting Hebrew, leading worship services and, performing synagogue duties. Samuel was a Hebrew educator, Torah scholar and synagogue leader.

We do not know when and how Rachel and Louis Emdur came to the USA. The 1920 USA census is difficult to read and appears to have an incorrect date for Nathan's arrival in the USA. However, the date shown for Rachel and Louis appears to be 1914, but this seems like a long time for Nathan to have been separated from his wife and Louis. They most likely arrived through the port of Boston where many of Nathan's relatives also arrived, and because Nathan lived in the area.

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Around 1915 Nathan was hired to conduct the Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services for the Bar Harbor Jewish community. He provided this service for a couple of years and then decided to move there in about 1916. He must have seen a business opportunity and he had Jewish friends who lived in Bangor Maine only 45 miles away.

In 1920 Bar Harbor, located on Mount Desert Island in Downeast Maine, was a town of about 3600 people. It was a major wooden ship building center and fishing port for many decades, though the shipbuilding had begun to decline rapidly as large wooden ships became outmoded for commercial purposes in the latter part of the 19th century. From the mid 1880s it also became a popular summer community for wealthy socialite business and professional families from big northeastern cities, especially New York and Philadelphia, getting their families away from the hot humid city weather. During the time the Emdur's lived there, it continued its fishing tradition and the building of wooden fishing and pleasure boats, and its summer community grew with the addition of middle class families who increasingly could afford to travel there especially when automobiles became affordable and better roads were built. So many came that it swelled the area population to double and triple its year round population and required large numbers of summer workers to support, wait on and entertain the summer residents and visitors. The year round community beyond the major fishing and shipbuilding activities provided basic services for the local community and rural communities around them and caretaking for the estates of the "summer people".

Nathan is briefly mentioned in a book, "Crossing Lines, Histories of Jews and Gentiles in Three Communities" by Judith Goldstein, 1992. On page 180 it states: "Other Jewish merchants included Morris Franklin, who owned a shoe store, and Nathan Emdur and Nathan Povich, who ran furniture stores. Povich, the father of five sons, was the most anxious to retain Jewish rituals and to train his sons for bar mitzvah. Frequently, he went to Boston to offer the job of Hebrew teacher to a greenhorn, fresh off a boat from Europe, and bring them back to Bar Harbor. A succession of them passed through his home." Later the book notes: "In addition to Hebrew teachers to train the boys for bar mitzvah, rabbis and hazzanim were brought from Boston to lead Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur services in a hired hall." Finally there is the comment: "The few Jewish families in Bar Harbor-never more than five to seven at one time-continued to live quietly and run their modest shops. Their religious life and Jewish communal activities remained sporadic, except in 1918, when as part of the nationwide relief campaign for Eastern Europe, the Jews in Bar Harbor raised \$2,000." It was noted that one very wealthy New York Jew, Jacob Schiff, was responsible for the goal being met.

Nathan was one of the "hazzanim" brought to Bar Harbor by Nathan Povich. Nathan was unique because he stayed, started a business and became part of this small community for an extensive period of time. This was confirmed about ten years ago in a conversation with Shirley Povich, then in his mid 80s, whose father was Nathan Povich leader of the Bar Harbor Jewish community in the early 20th century. He recalled his father bringing Nathan Emdur to Bar Harbor from Boston and meeting his wife and son. Shirley did not have a personal relationship with any of them primarily because of the age difference and because the Povich family left Bar Harbor around 1920 for larger Jewish communities in Bath and Bangor Maine. Shirley did remember that Nathan Emdur was sometimes called "Pinky" because of his red pink beard. He also said that Bar Harbor was a young thriving community of more than 2500, but had only four

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or five year round Jewish families. The Povich family sold scarp to Nathan Emdur even after they moved from Bar Harbor. An interesting sidenote is that Shirley Povich was a very well known and famous sportswriter for the Washington Post newspaper for more than 75 years. He obtained the job in the summer of 1917 when he caddied for the Post's owner, Mr. Graham, at Kebo Valley Golf course in Bar Harbor. He passed away in 1998. His son, Maury Povich is a national TV personality married to national newswoman Connie Chung.

Nathan started in business as a Junk and Used Furniture Dealer, later opening a furniture store that serviced the year round and summer Bar Harbor communities. Rental and storage of furniture was an important part of the business as many Bar Harbor dwellings were only occupied from May until October, with the busiest time being Memorial Day (fourth Monday in May) until Labor Day (first Monday in September).

Nathan's first wife Rachel took in boarders who rented rooms for the summer season. This is noted in the 1920 USA census indicating Rachel's occupation as Lodging House at home. These were most likely people like waiters, store workers, yacht club employees, farm workers etc. who supported and served the wealthy summer residents.

In 1917 Louis was one of the first 1000 men from Hancock County drafted for WWI in July-August, but received an exemption when he enrolled in Harvard Reserve Officer's Training School. His number was 711, obviously not the luckiest number for Louis. He served tours of duty in the USA in 1917 and 1918 receiving an honorable discharge in 1918 as the war was ending. He returned to Bar Harbor in 1919. Louis was very close with Rachel, the only mother he knew very well. He named her beneficiary for any veterans benefits

Around 1920 Louis worked in Novelty sales most likely items sold to the tourists and summer residents. He worked in a store owned by someone else. Sometime in the mid 1920s he joined Nathan in the furniture business as it became more successful and able to support two incomes.

Exhibit B shows entries from Bar Harbor Directories regarding the Emdur's and their furniture business.

Bar Harbor Life 1920-1930

Nathan and Louis continued to operate the furniture business. They often traveled by train to Worcester Massachusetts, a big city of around 200,000, to visit Smith family relatives, Nathan's first cousin and Louis's brother, Samuel and his family, wife Esther, and children Jules, Jacob, Aaron and Pauline Pearl. Interestingly Esther's family also came from Kovno, but she did not officially meet Samuel and then marry him until they both came to the USA, Esther at age 16 in 1904 and Samuel at age 18 in 1905. Nathan and Louis always brought presents from their seacoast Maine home and produce and fresh eggs from their more rural area. Louis is remembered as bringing toys/novelties for the children. Nathan and Samuel discussed politics, the depression in the USA, the bad things going on in Germany and Europe effecting Jews,

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Torah and Hebrew teaching. Their visits took place most often from around 1920 until 1929, then less frequently during the early 1930s depression years.

Rachel died in January 1928. According to her obituary in the Bar Harbor Times “Mrs. Emdur was a woman who was reserved and retiring, seldom leaving her home but she was known as a kindly neighbor ever ready to extend aid or favors to all who knew her and her death brings deep sorrow to many”. Rachel had taken her own life having become despondent as a result of failing health and, she is buried in a Jewish section of Mount Hope Cemetery in Bangor Maine. Her headstone says in Hebrew:

“Dear woman, the crown of her husband,
God fearing woman, Mrs Channa Rachel the daughter of Rabbi Moshe
Died in the prime of her years
5 Tevet”

Exhibit C contains Rachel’s very detailed, but interesting obituary and related items.

On 6 January 1929 Nathan married a young widow from Boston, Rachel Goldfurb (her maiden name) Kalemusis at the Endur home in Bar Harbor. Nathan was 58 and Rachel was 28 and had a young daughter. Since Nathan had friends in Bangor only 45 miles from Bar Harbor, and Rachel’s mother lived there, it is assumed that Nathan met Rachel due to these relationships. According to the Bar Harbor Times after the wedding Rachel and her daughter Julia Kalemusis moved to Bar Harbor.

Exhibit D includes marriage information.

On May 23, 1929 Nathan Emdur and Rachel M. Emdur were divorced. The Hancock County Maine Supreme Judicial Court records show Rachel M. Emdur, Bar Harbor Maine “Libelant” and Nathan Emdur, “Libelee” with “Cause of Divorce” as “Cruel & Abusive Treatment”. This cause appears frequently as the cause of divorce in these Court records.

Exhibit E shows the divorce record.

Bar Harbor and Bangor 1930-1937

Rachel’s death in 1928 and Nathan’s short lasting marriage to a much younger widow with a young child put strains on his relationship with Louis and the Smith family. In addition, the depression affected business negatively and made travel less affordable. These strains were evident in the fact that after the marriage in 1929 Louis had to move out of his long time residence with Nathan, and then Nathan had to move out at least temporarily after the divorce. It is not known how long Rachel and her daughter stayed in Bar Harbor as no records of them there in Bangor or Boston have been located.

After the divorce Nathan and Louis did not live together again. Nathan moved to Bangor in 1933 or 1934 leaving Louis to manage the business. Some periodic visits to Worcester relatives continued until Samuel’s death in 1935 brought these visits to an end. Some contact continued

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between Louis and his nephews and niece in Worcester and perhaps his brother Max in New York as well. Though Samuel taught hundreds of young men Hebrew and prepared them for their Bar Mitzvahs, he also taught young women Hebrew. He believed that this was important to them to part of the Jewish community in America. When he died an untimely death at age 50 during Passover 1935 he saddened the entire Worcester Jewish community. The Worcester Deutsche Shul donated his cemetery plot and headstone where he had donated enormous amounts of time in addition to his occupation as Hebrew teacher. His headstone inscription begins, Ish Maskil (learned man) and then notes his name as Reb Shalom son of Moshe. Reb was used to denote a man held in high esteem in the community.

Louis died quite suddenly in February 1936 of pneumonia. There was a brief ceremony at the American Legion Post and Jewish funeral and burial in Bangor. Jules Smith, Louis's nephew from Worcester attended the funeral and reported that "Uncle Emdur" was there and quite upset at Louis's death. Also a woman who said her name was Rachel had a conversation with Jules which was curt and unfriendly. She claimed nothing of value belonging to Louis remained at Nathan's home in Bar Harbor. This encounter implies that Rachel remained in Bar Harbor after the divorce at least until 1936.

After Louis's death visits appear to have been made between Nathan and his Worcester relatives. Nathan died in Bangor Maine on November 3, 1937 and was buried on that same date. He is buried in a Jewish section of Mount Hope Cemetery in Bangor Maine. His headstone says in Hebrew:

"A dear and generous man
Nathan the son of Abraham
29 Cheshvan"

No obituary could be located either in the Bangor or Bar Harbor newspapers. The Bar Harbor Times newspaper dated November 4, 1937 noted: "News of the death of Nathan Emdur, which occurred in a Bangor Hospital, was received here Wednesday. Mr. Emdur was for years a resident and businessman of the town, and has many friends to mourn his passing." His death certificate notes the following information:

Resident of Bangor 3 years

Age 67

M for married*

Occupation Junk Dealer

Cause of Death Arteric Sclerosis, duration of cause 6 years

Place of Death Bangor State Hospital

*No corroborating evidence can be found to support Nathan being married at the time of his death

Exhibit F includes death related information.

This ends the story of Nissan Amdur, aka Nathan Emdur.