

Hiram Adelman

"Nobody told Hiram Adelman he would need boots and ear muffs when he left Kominitz Podolsk, Ukraine, to come to America," said his son-in-law, Jack Mazer. Hiram was nineteen years old (born in 1878), depending on a cousin in New York to help him adapt to the New World because he knew no English. After painting a building, sewing sleeves in a loft, and trying to sell in a hardware store, Hiram said, "This is not for me."

One day while he waited for a train, he heard men talking about Houlton, Maine. He knew no one in Maine but was told there were a few Jews in Bangor, which was not too far from Houlton. That was enough for Hiram. "Jews are attracted to Jews," said his son, Yale. When Hiram went as far as his ticket allowed, he was in Houlton, where Ben Green had a clothing store. Hiram spent the night with the Greens, who advised him that he could support himself by peddling household items to farmers. In the morning he started to walk north. By nightfall he encountered a settlement of Seventh Day Adventists and felt at ease—they too celebrated the Sabbath on Saturday. He walked thirty miles to and from Ashland in the summer and six months in winter without boots on roads with snow six feet deep. He could have used boots and ear muffs.

He prospered to the level where he could rent a team of horses and a wagon. When Yale asked him, "What was the high point of your life?" (hoping he would say when Yale was born), Hiram replied, "When I bought a horse." Yale said his father was

a short man but very strong. When he drove a car in later years, he could not see above the steering wheel.

In 1903 Hiram opened a dry goods store in Mars Hill on St. Patrick's Day with green ribbons on every item. Customers came in four-generation groups to buy from their former peddler. They asked politely if he was an Irish Jew. When automobiles were needed, Hiram sold automobiles. "He knew as little about cars as I do about medicine," laughed Yale. Yet Bill Class, a customer, trusted Hiram enough to buy a car from him even after it stalled on the road test and had to be towed back to town. One traveling salesman overheard Hiram buying a crop of potatoes from farmer Bert Taylor. The story went all over the East how the deal was struck—no contract, no witnesses—just a handshake. Hiram bartered fertilizer, manufactured sprayers for potato plants, and managed farms in addition to running the store.

Yale would ask his father what he remembered from childhood. Hiram talked about sowing grain in groups of fifteen to twenty young people, singing as they moved across the field. When the plants came up, they formed a geometrically straight row.

Hiram loved the country life and the people living around him, but he tried to observe the traditions and ceremonies of Judaism as well. He went to Bangor for Sabbath services and met Kate Goldsmith, his future wife. He brought Kate and her sister to the apartment above the store in 1908. Hiram and Kate had four children: Elizabeth (Mazer), Yale, Gertrude (who died in 1949), and Milton. Elizabeth attended a business college; Gertrude and Milton graduated from college; and Yale came home to manage the farms after three years at the University of Alabama at Tuscaloosa when Hiram was in the hospital. Yale worked in the store on Saturday nights when the farmers came to town. He played semi-pro baseball and basketball in his teens. All the children helped the parents in the store, but Elizabeth and her husband came from New York to take over the business when Hiram was diagnosed with cancer. Hiram's reputation was so pervasive, Jack said that customers advised him to leave the same name your father left.

When everything seemed to be going well, fire destroyed the new merchandise for summer, the upstairs apartment, as well as the store on Easter Sunday in 1921. Yale remembers the fire vividly. He was eight years old. The family thought he left the building with them, but he had gone back to bed. The dentist, Dr.

Dickens, saw the fire from the hotel and rescued Yale with a burned blanket. Yale relived this escape many years as he looked at the blanket, which was kept by the family for a long time.

All the wholesalers offered credit. The Green family in Presque Isle took them in while Hiram started over again in what used to be a filling station. Horses hauled the stones and soil for the foundation of the building Hiram built to start again. Later it was rented by J. J. Newberry and Fleet Bank. Soon after the store opened, Hiram became ill. From 1941 until they died, Hiram and Kate spent winters in Florida, remembered Sandra Fisch, Elizabeth's daughter, who proudly displays the old cash register from the store in her home in Atlanta, Georgia. When Sandra was in a boarding school in Connecticut, her grandmother Kate visited her often.

The symptoms of cancer were apparent to the doctors in Maine, but treatment was not available in Mars Hill. Hiram made the trip to the Sloan-Kettering Institute in New York but died at home in 1951 at seventy-three years of age. Elizabeth said all of Mars Hill came to see him when he lay ill at home. One man brought \$100 he said Hiram had staked him two years ago. Hiram told him to forget it, but the man insisted. "People had a lot of pride in those days—more so than now," commented Yale. The money was donated to the Seventh Day Adventist Church. Hiram used to bring children into the store to give them shoes. He contributed to the National Council of Christians and Jews, the Jewish Home for Incurables in New York, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Levi Memorial Hospital in Little Rock, Arkansas, and the synagogue (Aroostook Community Center) in Presque Isle.

As a member of the fire department—Yale and Milton served too—he even pulled the hose at a fire. He served as chairman of the building committee for the high school gymnasium, as director of the Trust Bank, as well as president of the Mars Hill School District. In addition he was president of B'nai B'rith and belonged to the Knights of Pythias, and as president of the Chamber of Commerce he helped to rebuild Mars Hill.

Like Jews in the South, the Adelmans socialized with Jews living in widespread communities in the north of Maine, including nearby Canada. At one time thirty-eight families came to Presque Isle for services. A rabbi came from Woodstock, New Brunswick, to teach bar mitzvah boys. When Hiram's son Milton celebrated

his coming of age, all of the Aroostook County Jews filled the Adelman home.

Milton said he waited for his father to die before he married Gloria, the nurse he loved, because she was not born a Jew. "She studied before the wedding to convert—she's more of a Jew than I am," averred Milton. Their six children have all moved to warmer climes. One daughter, Toby, an administrative nurse, lived in Israel for three years.

Milton still owns the farms he managed when he graduated from Rensselaer as an engineer; he bought Yale's share when Yale, who is ten years older, retired. While potatoes, grain, and peas were growing, Milton served as president of the Aroostook Health Center that he helped to build.

Kate belonged to the Literary Club, the neighborhood bridge club, and Star (the women's division of the Masons).

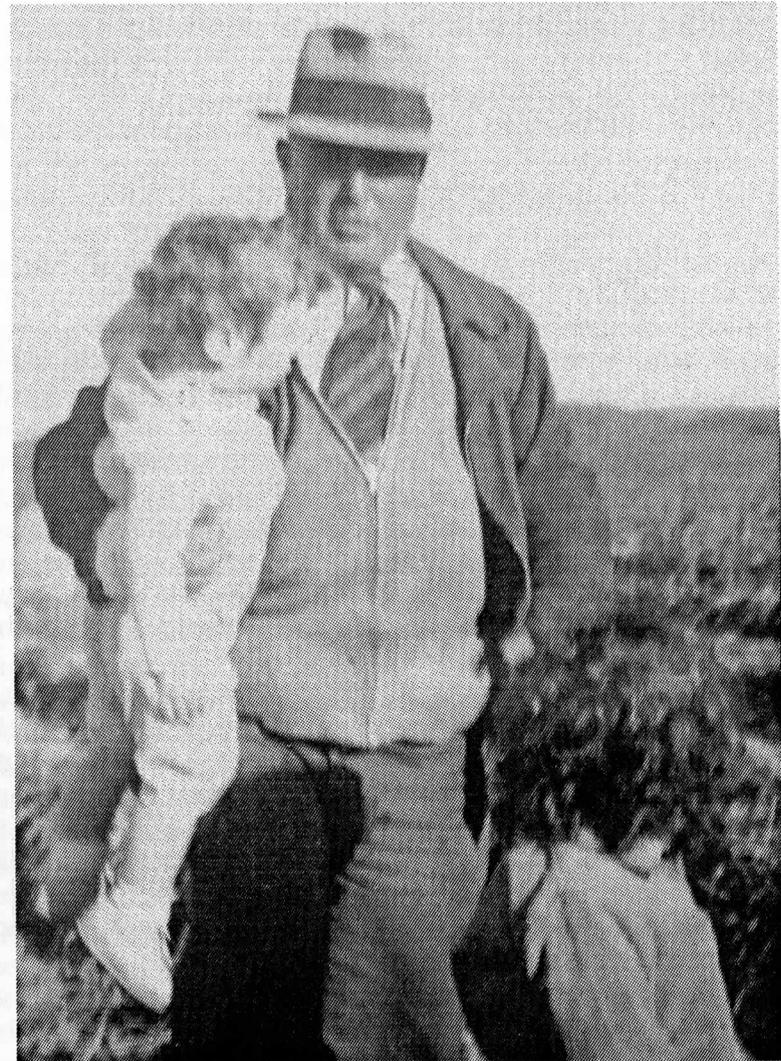
Yale displays the Dresden China plate Hiram gave as a souvenir when the store was twenty-five years old. When the family celebrated fifty years in business, the Adelmans offered to buy back the plates for twenty-five dollars. Old customers and their descendants brought the plates to show their affection but not one plate was returned. In Yale's den he also displays the square, wood-framed mirror that hung in the store. On two walls he mounted his collection of 3,000 golf balls from different tournaments and clubs all over the world. Golf is his retirement hobby.

Yale and Milton managed 350 acres. They had a seat on the New York Mercantile Exchange when they dealt in futures of potatoes; Yale served as second president of the Rotary Club, director of the Mental Health Association for many years, and first president and founder of the Aroostook Health Center.

As he looks back on his career as a potato farmer, Yale says, "There was too much rain or hail—the price could drop, but we suffered no real disaster." Even when the Canadian crew pulled a strike in the middle of the harvest season, we turned it to the advantage of all the growers by buying a conveyor machine that replaced the crews, recalled Yale. The Adelman brothers, along with Hershel Smith and his brother-in-law, formed a manufacturing company, WASA, to sell the conveyors to all the farmers who came to see the first machine. WASA employed 130 people to supply machines to the community. "In winter we packaged 200 to 300 trailer loads of potatoes to Publix, the

supermarket in Florida. Before I retired, we sold the WASA company," mused Yale.

Milton served in the U. S. Navy, but Yale could not go to war while Hiram was in the hospital, and the country needed all the food that could be produced. Hiram left a good name and his children have a good name to leave to their children.



Hiram Adelman carrying Yale's son David with Elizabeth's daughter Sandra in his potato field in Aroostook County, Maine