



Roots and Branches

BY MIRIAM WEINER

What was our name in the "Old Country?"

Like millions of Americans, I joined in the anniversary celebration of the Statue of Liberty last summer. As I gazed at the Statue on July 4, I thought about my grandfather, Morris Weiner, seeing her for the first time when he arrived at Ellis Island on that cold day in December, 1912 on the SS Celtic. He was still Moishe Winikur then. It was much later that he was to become Morris Weiner.

Moishe/Morris came from a large family which owned a flour mill on the edge of a small village called Sudilkov located in the Province of Volhynia, in the western Ukraine. His prospects were not bright there and for Jews, there was the continuing threat of pogroms which were to occur again in 1919. Like the millions before him, my grandfather sought a better life in the United States.

Morris died almost fifty years ago--before I ever knew him or could share in his life. As far as anyone knows, none of his brothers or sisters came to this country.

A few years ago I began researching the history of the Weiner family from Sudilkov and the neighboring town of Shepetovka where his cousins lived. Many cousins from the Shepetovka branch did come to the U.S. and I have interviewed almost a hundred of their descendants.

Early in my research, I was told by my father that our name was not Weiner, but was originally Winikur. I wanted to verify this through documents connected with my grandfather and was able to do so from several sources. First, I contacted the United States District Court in St. Louis where my grandfather was naturalized and requested a copy of his naturalization documents, including his "first papers."

These consist of the Declaration of Intention and the Petition for Naturalization. The Declaration included a photo of my grandfather and biographical data which was

also included on the Petition. The Petition included the date and place of birth, the date and port of arrival in the U.S., the name of the ship and where it sailed from, the name of his wife and the date/place of marriage; the names/dates of birth of his eight children and lastly, the piece of information that I wanted--that his name upon arrival in this country was "Moische Winikur." The petition even included the signature of Moische Winikur, soon to become "Morris Weiner."

Now that I knew the exact date and port of arrival in this country, I was able to obtain a copy of the Passenger Manifest of the SS Celtic which arrived on December 29, 1912 in New York Harbor.

I wrote to the National Archives in Washington DC and requested a photo copy of the record. The charge was \$5.00 and soon I received the "Manifest of Alien Passengers for the United States" which included at line 18, page 27, a reference to my grandfather's arrival under the name of "Moische Winikur," age 29, last residing in Sudilkov, destined for Boston and the name of the nearest relative in the old country along with their town of residence. The passenger record also indicated that my grandfather was able to read and write.

Thereafter, I wrote to the Public Record Office in England which holds passenger records for the United Kingdom beginning in the year 1890. I again requested a copy of my grandfather's passenger record and received a reply verifying the information contained on the U.S. passenger record.

From the above three sources, I was able to substantiate the exact name of my grandfather in the "old country." Now I was ready to learn something about Sudilkov and Shepetovka--where were they on a map--what was life like there and what did Morris Weiner leave

behind?

The journey into the past is not predictable and along the way, events continue to bring me back to the present. I continue to learn of new family members as well as details about the lives of my ancestors. The pursuit of my "roots" is challenging and fun. I hope it never ends.

For a beginner's kit on how to start researching your family tree, send \$5 to: Miriam Weiner, 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094 (includes ancestor chart, list of archives and libraries, maps, bibliography, family group sheets and more).



Miriam Weiner