

## HOW THE HELL DID THEY END UP IN SEATTLE?

The story of five Jewish families who arrived between 1874 and 1928.

By Karen Treiger

Last newsletter, I introduced you to the Singermans and the Staadeckers and told how they made their way to Seattle. It is remarkable that they ended up here when the vast majority of Jews arriving at Ellis Island during these peak years of immigration, stayed in New York.

So now, I will introduce you to the other three branches of my family tree: Friedlander, Steinberg and Treiger.

### SAM AND AUGUSTA FRIEDLANDER

They were children, really, when they got married – 16 and 17 years old. The year was 1886. The place was Latvia.

Augusta's parents bought the new couple two tickets on a steamer to America and kissed them goodbye.

"My grandfather [Sam] was afraid of being taken into the [Russian] army," Jack Friedlander (my grandfather) explained in a 1975 interview with the Jewish Archives. When asked why Sam and Augusta left Europe, he added "there was no opportunity there."

I try to imagine arriving at Ellis Island, as teenagers, not knowing the language (they spoke Yiddish, the language of most European Jews) and trying to figure out how to get to Rochester, NY where they had relatives.



Paul, Sam, Louis, Jack Friedlander

Well, they did indeed make their way to Rochester and settled there. Young Sam began his career as a peddler. It was a hard life, but it put food on the table.

Augusta gave birth to their son Louis in 1887, naming him after Sam's father. Their second child, Anne, named for Sam's mother, was born six years later in 1893.

So, how did the Friedlander family end up in Seattle and build Friedlander & Sons Jewelers into the grand store it became?

Well, first, they moved to Columbus, OH, where Sam opened a small jewelry shop. I don't know why they moved to Columbus, except that they heard that there was more opportunity out west. It was here that an acquaintance, Hugh Harrison, mentioned to Sam that he was heading to Seattle to strike it rich. They cut a deal – Sam gave him some valuable jewelry; Harrison would sell the merchandise and they would split the profit.

Well, Harrison disappeared into the wooded lands of the northwest and Sam never heard from him. Sam sent his son Louis on a mission – go to Seattle and find out what happened with the jewelry.

Young Louis found Harrison alright. But Harrison didn't want to hear from a Friedlander.

"Get away from me boy," Harrison told Louis, "you're bothering me."

Defeated, Louis caught the next train back to Columbus and reported the encounter to his father. Incensed, Sam bought a train ticket himself and headed to Seattle. It wasn't hard to find Harrison in this small town. When confronted Harrison admitted that he "sold all the jewelry and spent the money gambling, drinking and on women. He confessed, 'I have no money left at all.'"

Harrison said he'd make it up to Sam if he moved to Seattle.



Augusta (Borenstein) Friedlander

“I’ll introduce you to everyone I know,” Harrison assured him, “it’ll get you started in business.”

“You bet, you will,” Sam said, “I’m your new partner.”

The year of the family’s arrival in Seattle was 1906. Seattle was a growing town with 80,000+ residents. By this time, the dirt roads were paved, electric trolleys ran up and down the streets, the steep hills were being refashioned with huge regrade projects, horses and buggies were everywhere, but automobiles were also seen, and electric lights lit up the homes and shops. The buildings put up after the Great Fire of 1889 were all made of brick, so the city had a more permanent feel to it.

Sam joined Harrison in running a pawn shop in Gerald’s Café, located at the northeast corner of 1<sup>st</sup> and Marion. The café was a

long, narrow restaurant with the customer counter running the length of the space with bar stools to sit on. Given Gerald’s central location in Seattle’s bustling core, I imagine business was brisk.

In 1909, they changed the name to Friedlander, Hugh Harrison, Jeweler and Pawnbroker and moved the business to 925 1<sup>st</sup> Avenue. Hugh died a few years later and Friedlander Jewelers was born. My grandfather, Jack, said he “drank himself to death.”

Louis joined Sam in the business and they called it: Friedlander and Son’s Jewelers. They located their store at 2<sup>nd</sup> and University and ran a successful business, which remained in that location until 1928 when they moved to 5<sup>th</sup> and Pike.

Augusta died in 1928, while Sam lived another 15 years, dying in 1943. Sam was blessed with six grandchildren (one of whom was my grandfather, Jack). He left a legacy of honesty and hard work behind and the magnificent store on 5<sup>th</sup> and Pike.

### CHAYIM LEIB AND CHAYA TZIVIA STEINBERG

1911 was the year my paternal grandmother, Rose Steinberg, crossed the Atlantic Ocean to start a new life. She was seven years old. Don’t worry she didn’t come alone – she came with her mother, Chaya Tzivia, two sisters, Ettie and Goldie and brother Reuben. Her father, Chaim Leib and oldest brother Sam, settled in Seattle a year earlier.

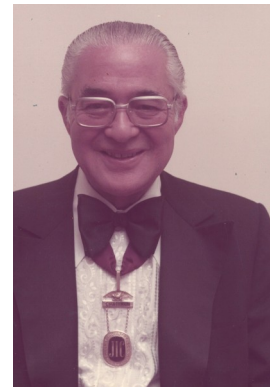
How did this family of seven from a tiny farming village in Russia (now Belarus) end up in Seattle?

Chaim [or Chayim] Leib, a short, bearded middle-aged man left his home in Samke and traveled across the Atlantic Ocean and the north American continent – twice!

The first time was in 1907, when his brother, Zalman Reuben Steinberg



Friedlander’s on 2<sup>nd</sup> and University



Papa Jack (above)

Chayim Leib & Chaya Tzivia Steinberg (below)





asked him to escort his wife and son to Seattle. Zalman Reuben had been invited to move to Seattle in 1904 to serve as a Shoichet, a Jewish ritual slaughterer. Without a Shoichet, the Jewish community had no Kosher meat or chicken. It was common for newly formed Jewish communities in America to hire a Shoichet from Europe and bring him to their city. This is how the first of the Steinberg brothers came to Seattle.

Zalman Reuben encouraged his brother to stay in Seattle and bring his family over. However, after spending a bit of time in Seattle, Chaim Leib decided to go back home.

His wife, Chaya Tzivia, was furious. “Why,” she asked, “did you come home? You were supposed to stay and make some money to bring the rest of us.” “I didn’t like it there,” he responded. “It was too rainy and there are no jobs for people like us who keep Shabbes [Jewish Sabbath]. I didn’t want to stay.”

Well, Chaya Tzivia [or Tsvia], a strong-willed woman, packed some sandwiches and sent Chaim Leib back across the ocean. Now, it was 1910 and Chayim Leib and their eldest son, Sam, traveled over 5,000 miles back to Seattle.

Chayim Leib was a traditionally religious Jew and was not willing to work on the Jewish Sabbath. So, to be his own boss, he got a horse and buggy and he and his son, Sam went around collecting junk and buying and selling small objects. With the money he made peddling and the money from the sale of their farm in Samke, the rest of the family was able to come to America in 1911.

They settled in the heart of Seattle’s Orthodox community. Due to discriminatory housing practices, known as “redlining” Jews were restricted to a certain part of the city. This led to a uniquely tight knit community that is beautifully described by *A Family of Strangers: Building a Jewish Community in Washington State*.

“Seattle’s distinctive neighborhood,” *A Family of Strangers* explains, “lay between Twelfth and Twentieth Avenues, bounded on the south by Yesler Way and on the north by Cherry street. . . . The Yesler Way-Cherry Street neighborhood contained a mixture of ethnic groups which included Jews, Scandinavians, African Americans, and Asians. . . . During the decade after World War I, a visitor to Yesler Way would have encountered the impressive Bikur Cholim sanctuary looming at Seventeenth Avenue. Three more synagogues lay to the north within a block or two of Yesler Way: Herzl, Ezra Bessaroth, and Sephardic Bikur Holim. By 1930, Machzikay Hadath’s little sanctuary appeared at Twenty-sixth Avenue and Spruce Street.”

I attended the old Bikur Cholim Synagogue as a girl and remember counting the seemingly endless marble

steps as we walked up to the front door. America’s foremost theater designer, Benjamin Marcus Priteca was the architect of this magnificent structure. Today it serves the community as the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute.

Chayim Leib graduated from peddling to a retail store. His first was on 6<sup>th</sup> and Jackson. They sold men’s clothes and furnishings.

The tall man is Mitchell Ketlach, who married the oldest of the Steinberg children, Ettie, and the super short man, Chayim Leib. This photo tells us all we need to know about this immigrant’s first store.

The Steinbergs opened additional retail stores but also began a



**Mitchell Steinberg and Chayim Leib  
in 6th & Jackson Street Store (UW)**

wholesale business and made it to a middle-class life, giving their children and grandchildren a solid foundation in this country. All their children (including my grandmother) married and settled in Seattle's Jewish neighborhood. Chayim Leib died in 1940 and Chaya Tsivia followed in 1944. They died with a legacy of bringing the warmth of a small business to the city of Seattle and ten grandchildren, the youngest of which was my father, Irwin Treiger.

### YISROEL ARYEH AND TILLIE TREIGER

The fifth and last branch of my family tree is the one whose name I carry – Treiger.

The Treiger family came from the *Shtetl* of Demydivka, in the Vohlynia region of what is today Ukraine. My grandfather, Sam Treiger, was the third child born to Yisroel Aryeh (a goose feather merchant) and Rivka Treiger.

Sadly my great-grandmother, Rivka, died in childbirth with her fourth child. Yisroel Aryeh remarried – a woman named Tillie. Tillie and Yisroel Aryeh had one son, Zindle.

I can't imagine the courage it took for Yisroel Aryeh and Tillie to immigrate to the United States – to Portland, Oregon. They were in their 50's and they had five children. When Yisroel Aryeh arrived in Portland in 1910, he peddled junk with a horse and wagon. Three years later he brought Tillie and children to join him. My grandfather, Sam, was 13 years old.

Why did the Treiger family go to Portland, Oregon, of all places – so far from the center of Jewish immigrant life in New York city? Relatives. The Shank family lived in Portland and sponsored them to come, setting them up with a small home right next to their own.



Yisroel Aryeh and Tillie Treiger

To better understand what life was like for the Treiger family, I researched Portland and Jewish life there in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Portland that welcomed Yisroel Aryeh in 1910 had experienced rapid growth. While the 1900 census count was 90,426, it swelled to 207,214 by 1910. This was, in part, thanks to publicity and renown generated by Portland's 1905 world's fair – the Lewis & Clark Centennial Exposition.

Eastern European immigrants mostly settled in South Portland, a poor immigrant neighborhood – a mix of Jews and Italians. The neighborhood was on the “West side of the Willamette River, between the river and 5th Avenue and between Harrison and Curry Street.” Within these few blocks, *The Jews of Oregon: 1850-1950* explains, there were “synagogues, a mikvah, public schools and a Hebrew school, the Neighborhood House with its myriad activities, and many small shops that served the community.”

Peddling was a common trade among South Portland's Eastern European Jewish emigrants. For Yisroel Aryeh, who took up this trade, it was a hard life. Day in and day out, he hitched his horse to a wagon and went collecting. At the end of the day, tired and dirty, he



Irwin Treiger



Treiger Family: Sam Treiger, Sonny Treiger, Henry Treiger. Front Row: Bert Treiger, Claire (Treiger) Kaufman with daughter Lina Kaufman.



sold the collected scraps to junk dealers. His tireless work was insufficient to care for his family of seven.

To care for the family, the eldest son, Bert, got a job, first as a teacher at Portland's Hebrew School and later as its Principal. Sam and Henry were newsies – selling papers on the street corners before school each morning.

I visited Portland in March of 2023 with two of my adult children, Shoshana and Esther. My first stop in South Portland was the Neighborhood House, which, thanks to Landmark status is preserved (mostly) as it was in the early 1900's. It's currently occupied by a school and, after I explained why I was visiting, they graciously took me on a tour.

It's sturdy red brick exterior gives way inside to warm and inviting dark wood doors, exposed pipes in the ceiling and a wide wooden staircase that leads up three flights. I climbed the stairs, imagining these hallways and rooms filled with school children, packed with Yiddish speaking immigrants learning English, learning to cook, playing basketball in the gym, studying Hebrew and other Jewish subjects, and enjoying a night out with friends, a true community center.

After my visit, I sat in a park across the street and imagined this place in 1915 – bursting with people speaking Yiddish, but eager to learn English, eager to learn a trade and meet new friends. I imagined my great-grandfather, Yisroel Treiger, trying – not so successfully – to learn English. Imagining that each night before he went to sleep, he said to himself – “this is hard; I miss my family back home; I do this so my children will have a better future.”

After their children grew up and left Portland, Tillie and Yisroel Aryeh moved to Seattle to live near my grandparents, Sam and Rose who had married in 1928. Yisroel Arey died in 1931 and Tillie followed in 1932. They are both buried in the old Bikur Cholim cemetery in north Seattle.



Rose, Karen, Sam, Louis

Yisroel Aryeh remained in poverty for his adult life in America. But his children succeeded and made it to the middle-class. My grandparents, Sam and Rose Treiger, built a successful small business with a mom and pop store on 23<sup>rd</sup> and Jackson. They helped create a culture of warmth and caring in Seattle's central district and left their family a legacy of honest, hard work and community involvement.

I am so grateful to all of my ancestors who made their way to Seattle. Researching their lives has given me the opportunity to look deeper into myself, wonder about who I am and I became the adult that I am today. I encourage all of you to look into your family history. It might surprise you.

*If you would like to subscribe to my blog in which I delve into these histories and the history of Seattle more, send me an email at [karen@treiger.com](mailto:karen@treiger.com) and I will send you an invitation.*

[Her new book will be coming out in August 2025, **STANDING ON THE CRACK: THE LEGACY OF FIVE JEWISH FAMILIES FROM SEATTLE'S VIBRANT GILDED AGE**. In addition, see her website [My Soul Is Filled With Joy - karentreiger.com](http://karentreiger.com)]



Karen Treiger outside neighborhood house – now a school



Karen Treiger's Grandchildren