

Abraham Eskenazi



My grandfather Abraham Eskenazi. Photo was taken in Bjeljina, 1910.

My paternal grandfather was a lawyer in Bjeljina. He was Sephardi. He observed the traditions. He was not orthodox but like the rest of the Jews from his generation, he observed the holidays, went to temple and socialized with others. It was not a ghetto, but all the Jews, especially from smaller places, socialized in the communities or at the holiday parties for Purim, Hanukkah. At that time, in Bjeljina, there were about 150 Jews. The Jewish community organized cultural activities and people

gathered there, not only on holidays but even during the rest of the year when there was a lecture or a guest. They were very close.

All the Jews were from the middle class, maybe there was a group who were poorer, maybe 20%, most likely those who were tradesmen. But Jewish solidarity was well-known then and later and our fellow citizens looked upon this with envy. Rich Jews helped the poorer ones and it was not just with alms but with substantial help for their children-- clothing and shoes. During the holidays the children would get all they needed from the richer members of the community. I do not remember if there was ever anti-Semitism there, as I do not remember it in the whole of Bosnia.

My grandfather died and was buried in Bjeljina. My aunt, his daughter, went there after the war went to visit his grave and she could not find it. The Jewish cemetery had been dug up. My grandfather had three daughters: Vikica, Perl and Heda. All of them were born in Bjeljina. His first two sons, Mihael, known as Mikica and Jakov, known as Jakica, were born nearby in Brcko. Since there were no descendants there to maintain and visit the graves the graves were dug up and new gravesites were made from them.