

Leonid Krais' Father Avrum Krais And His Uncle Yankel Krais



My father Avrum Krais (on the left) and his younger brother Yankel Krais in Lipkany in 1916. My grandparents came from the town of Lipkany. Lipkany was part of Romania before 1940, and now it's in Moldova. Lipkany was a small provincial town, very cozy and picturesque. Jews constituted the majority of its population and lived in the central part of the town. Richer Jewish families resided in very beautiful houses. There were about ten synagogues in Lipkany. The members of

each synagogue united in guilds: there was a synagogue for tailors, shoemakers and cabmen. These synagogues were located in neighborhoods inhabited by craftsmen in the outskirts of town. Richer Jews didn't mix with poorer Jews in the synagogues. They had big synagogues in the center of town. During the war the town, including almost all synagogues, was burnt down by the Germans. Most of the Jews in Lipkany were craftsmen: tailors, barbers, shoemakers, carpenters, furniture manufacturers, cabmen, roofers, tinsmiths, blacksmiths that had their own forges, and so on. Jews were very good at their professions. It was customary for a son to follow into his father's footsteps. A boy began to learn his father's profession when he was small. These were family businesses that were transferred from one generation to another. Richer Jews were doctors and lawyers. Almost all stores in town were owned by Jews. However, there weren't that many really rich Jews. Most of them were just wealthy. My grandparents had three children. My father Avrum was the oldest. He was born in 1902. The next son was Yankel, born in 1904, and their daughter Rivka was born in 1906. Their family was religious, of course. At that time it was the only way of life for Jewish families. Every Jewish family celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. My grandmother followed the kashrut strictly. My father Avrum and his brother Yankel finished cheder. They studied the Talmud and the Torah and also Hebrew and general subjects such as mathematics, literature and history. There was anti-Semitism in Romania making the admission to secondary schools difficult for Jewish children, and the cheder provided secondary education to them. The cheder was a Jewish school for the advanced study of religion. Girls didn't attend cheder. My aunt Rivka was educated at home. She had a teacher from cheder teaching her all subjects. They spoke Yiddish in my grandparents' family. All members of the family had a good knowledge of Romanian, which was the national language [of the country at the time]. My father and his brother didn't really want to become tailors. My grandfather didn't mind and let them make their own choice in life. My father became an apprentice to a mechanic at the mill, and Yankel became an apprentice to a locksmith. My father later continued to work as mechanic at the mill. There was a lot of equipment at the mill, and he was responsible for its maintenance. He liked his work. Yankel opened a locksmith shop. I remember his lathe, which was pedal-driven.