

Yakov Brodowski And His Wife Johanna Brodowski



These are my father's parents. My grandfather Yakov Brodowski and my grandmother Johanna Brodowski. They were photographed in Tallinn in the early 1910s. I gave a copy of this photo to the Jewish community of Estonia. They are going to establish a museum of Estonian Jewry. My father's family lived in Tallinn. Estonia was then the Estland Province of the Russian Empire, and Tallinn was called Revel. I don't know where or when my paternal grandfather was born. He was commonly addressed with the Russian name of Yakov; his Jewish name was Yankel. His surname was

Brodowski, and my grandmother's name was Johanna Brodowski. In 1884 my grandfather Yakov graduated from the Pharmaceutical Faculty of the Moscow State University with honors. Perhaps, for this reason the tsarist government awarded the title of 'citizen of honor' and the right to reside in Tallinn to my grandfather. There was a Pale of Settlement during the tsarist regime, and only Jewish merchants, lawyers or doctors were allowed to live in bigger towns. Our family kept my grandfather's gold medal for his university successes for a long time. My father wore it on his watch chain. My father was a middle son of three children. He was born in 1890. His name was Max. His Jewish name may have been Moshe or Moisey, I don't know. His older sister's name was Dora, and his younger brother was Leon. My father's family was very religious. In Tallinn my grandfather was a rabbi in the synagogue of Tallinn. My grandfather's photograph was there in the Tallinn synagogue office until the early 1940s. My father had a similar, but enlarged, picture over his desk. The family did observe Jewish traditions, followed kashrut and celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays. It couldn't have been otherwise in a rabbi's family. My father and his brother received Jewish education, as was common with Jewish families. I don't know what language they spoke in my father parents' family. When I first saw my grandmother Johanna in 1937, the only language she spoke was German, and my father could speak fluent Yiddish. My grandfather died in 1914. He was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Tallinn. My grandfather's grave is still there, and there is also an engraving in Yiddish on the gravestone. In 1917 a revolution took place in Russia. During the revolution my grandmother and her older daughter Dora moved to Rostov-on-the-Don in Russia. I don't know why they decided to move there. All I can think is that they wanted to move where nobody knew them and where they could feel safer, considering that my grandfather was a rabbi. My grandmother and my aunt may have been afraid that Bolsheviks might question this part, while when they moved they might have changed their family name.