

Efim Yakovlevich Tseitlin



This photo was taken in 1897 in Kremenchug. Father is 21 here: a young handsome man, dressed up for taking a picture.

My father Efim was born in 1876 in Smolensk beyond the Jewish Pale of Settlement. As a matter of fact, his mother and my grandmother Genessa helped her husband and my grandfather Yakov with his commercial business, which was often connected with various trips. Being pregnant, she went on one such trip, thinking to be back home on time. However, when in Smolensk, premature delivery started, and Father was born in that town. He spent his childhood and youth in the town of Mstislavl.

My father moved almost simultaneously with Grandfather, they broke away from the Pale of Settlement. Although it cost great efforts, as my father used to say, they managed to settle in Russia. It was before the revolution, at the end of the 19th century, when my father was newly married and decided to take advantage of the opportunity, which presented itself then – of course, they had to bribe some officials to be able to leave. Since Jews were authorized to settle only in some cities, he chose the town of Saratov on the Volga River. Grandfather followed right after him.

Father had to take examinations for a trade, because without a profession Jews were not allowed to move. He had passed an examination for drugstore assistant. It meant being able to prepare distilled water, make mixtures, obtain goods for a drugstore, in short being a worker in a drugstore. In order to do so it was necessary to pass an obligatory examination in Russian, and Father had not studied in school, he studied at home. Father did not learn Russian at school, since he did not attend it; he studied it at home with a teacher. They were rather well off, able to hire a melamed for him. The teacher taught him various subjects, and besides, he taught him all prayers properly. He was capable of learning, grasping things fast. He learned Russian and wrote correctly. I keep an album of my sister's from when she was but a schoolgirl. Father wrote verses for her and put them down in her album himself.