

Neama Eskenazi Coyas



This is a studio photo that my paternal grandmother Neama Eskenazi Coyas sent to my father Yasef Eskenazi Coyas after she moved to New York. At the back of the photo is an inscription in her handwriting that says, "souvenir de maman" [French meaning souvenir from Mum]. She is wearing black from head to foot because she is a widow. In those times, a woman who lost her husband would go into mourning and wear black for a whole lifetime sometimes. My grandmother had nine children: two girls and seven boys. My paternal grandparents lived in Haskoy. I never got to know

them. After Haskoy they moved to Yedikule. My grandfather died a long time before I was born, in 1917, I think. My grandfather was buried in the Haskoy Cemetery, but I couldn't find his name in the files. My grandmother, on the other hand, emigrated to the United States with my uncles after World War I was over in 1918. My grandfather must have been an educated man. He was working at the Kazlicesme Leather Factory as an accountant. As you can see, being an accountant is the family business. My grandmother, Neama Eskenazi, would dress up in a very stylish way. She wouldn't go out without wearing all of her jewelry. That is why, they would say, "Esta pasando la de las djoyas" meaning "the lady with the jewelry is going by", when she went out. In time, "Coyas" [Meaning jewelry in Ladino] had become the nickname of the family, and started to be used with Eskenazi. Because "Eskenazi" was a very widespread surname, we were given only the surname "Coyas", when the "Surname Law" was passed, in 1934. There is no other family in Turkey bearing this surname. As far as I can remember, my grandmother died in New York, during the years 1936-1937.