

Rafael Eskeneza Coyas



This is a photo that my uncle Rafael Eskenazi Coyas, one of my father's brothers, sent to my parents from London as a souvenir. In this photo taken at a studio in London, you can see my uncle in the shalvar [baggy pants], cepken [special Ottoman waistcoat] and fes of the national Ottoman costume. He probably took these clothes with him when he left Istanbul but why he should have a picture taken in them, I have no idea. It could be because he felt really homesick while he was away. Rafael, like his other siblings (except my father and one sister, Rasel) left Turkey when World War I was over. He went to London first and then from there went to France and settled in Nice. Later, his other brothers Jak and Leon also went to Nice to live. Rafael married a Christian girl

named Louise. He did not have any children. My father had eight siblings, two of whom were women, and the rest were men. All of them, except his sister, Rashel Deleon, emigrated to the United States after World War I was over. [The Ottoman Empire in World War I] Nisim, Sultana, Eliezer and Elia emigrated to the States. Rafael, first emigrated to Britain and then to France, and Jak and Rashel Deleon emigrated to France. The whole family was scattered. At that time, the Ottoman Empire was going through its last and most difficult days. There was a lot of unemployment. The foreign countries provided the immigrants with a lot of facilities. During the period, it was even said that a very numerous non-Muslim community, mostly Armenians and Syrian Christian Orthodox, living in Harput, [Elazig province, Eastern Anatolia] had all immigrated to the States. All of my father's siblings were single, when they left Turkey. The ones who immigrated to France got married with Christians; on the other hand, the ones who emigrated to the States got married with Jews. All of them had children and grandchildren. All of the three siblings in France were engaged in the shoe trade. Jak and Rafael owned one shoe shop in which they were partners, and Leon owned another shoe shop which he was the sole owner. The two shops were in different neighborhoods, but "JOYAS" [Coyas spelled with French phonetics] was written in capital letters on the signs of both of them. Their houses and business premises were across each other. Rafael's wife's name was Louise. They had no children. Jak's wife's name was, Henriette, and they had a daughter named Jacqueline. Their youngest, Leon, was married to Lucienne (Loubeau), and they had a son named Michel Sami, and a daughter named Daniella. Living in Nice, a city that was not near Paris, and having Christian wives helped my uncles to survive through World War II, without being sent to the camps. [Nice was in Vichy France, a German satellite lead by Marshal Petain, and not under direct German administration like the northern part of the country, including Paris.] But they used to say that they had had very difficult days. Leon had joined the "resistance", who were fighting against the occupation forces, and he lived with them on the mountains. He had a serious complication related to his heart, probably due to the exhausting days he spent with the opposition forces. Though he was the youngest one amongst the uncles, he was the first one to die around 1970's (I don't remember the exact date). Jak died afterwards, and then Rafael. (I don't remember the dates). Later on, though we wrote a great many letters to their wives, we didn't receive any answers. I don't have any information about what their children are doing. We lost contact with them completely.