

From Dorpat to “Amerike”. ***Estonian Kruskal family in USA.***

**From “Two Baltic Families Who Came to America.
The Jacobsons and the Kruskals, 1870-1970”**

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with some additions.

THE KRUSKALS, 1870-1891

Some marriages, it is said, are made in heaven, but the marriage in March, 1879, between Moses David Kruskal (1850-1892) and Rosa Jaffe (1862-1924) was arranged in Dorpat (the present-day Tartu), Estonia. Moses David was twenty-nine; Rosa was barely seventeen. Her father, Rabbi Dov Ber Jaffe, and her older brothers, Rabbi Joshua Höshel and the merchant Abraham David, were all in straitened circumstances, so they believed that they could not afford to pass up the prospect of marrying Rosa to Moses David Kruskal, a solidly-established Dorpat white goods merchant. The fact that she was in love with a young man in her home town of Schaden was not permitted to interfere with the match. Abraham David Jaffe had himself recently married Moses David's younger sister Yetta, and he liked both the family and its solvency. Rosa was young, pretty, and headstrong, but it was believed she would outgrow her earlier infatuation. Moses David was already very much taken with her, and given his solid, mature qualities as well as his affection and gentleness, she would, they were sure, learn to love him. Rosa, who did not get along with her stepmother, was in no position to defy her father and brothers, and so accepted their arguments and Moses David Kruskal¹.

Though their social ranks were roughly comparable, she was, in a sense, stepping down to marry Moses David. The Jaffes came from a most distinguished family of rabbis and scholars who traced their descent back to

¹ This paragraph is based on Miriam Jacobson Kruskal (MJK) recollections and on the following contemporary letters: Dov Ber Jaffe to Rabbi Joshua Hoeshel Jaffe, Dorpat, Wednesday, 3rd of Adar (no year given, probably 1879); Abraham David Jaffe to Rosa Jaffe Kruskal, Schaden, March 20, 1879; Dora Jaffe to Rosa Jaffe Kruskal, Schaden, March 20, 1879. Original copies of these letters are in the possession of Professor William H. Kruskal, Dept. of Statistics, University of Chicago.

the great Mordecai Jaffe (1530-1612), a renaissance scholar who studied philosophy, astronomy, and mathematics at Prague and Venice before becoming head rabbi in Posen and Grodno. At Lublin, in 1590, Mordecai Jaffe had published the *Lebushim*, an important rabbinical code distinguished for its emphasis on logic, its unequivocal opposition to usury, and its scientific explanation of the calendar, complete with tables and illustrations. Mordecai Jaffe himself was said to be descended from the great eleventh-century biblical commentator Rashi of Troyes (1040-1105)². Thus, in their genealogy at least, the Jaffes far outshone the Kruskals. More immediately, two of the Jaffes actually were rabbis, the most respected of occupations among Jews.³



Moses David Kruskal Dorpat, ca. 1879

² Information on Jaffe genealogy (including Rosa's father, Dov Ber Jaffe) and Mordecai Jaffe is from *JE*, VII, 53-63.

³ It is significant that, in 1879, Dov Ber Jaffe wrote a personal letter to his son in Hebrew rather than the more common Yiddish. This suggests that the Jaffes were participants in the *Haskala* ("enlightenment") movement of the nineteenth century and were advanced and progressive rather than traditional in their cultural orientation. See Rischin, *Promised City*, pp. 38-42, for a sketch of the *Haskala* and its significance.



Rosa Kruskal (Jaffe) Dorpat, *ca.* 1879

Moses David Kruskal, on the other hand, could claim a background which was merely respectable. His father, Isaac Kruskal (born Klüber-Kruskal), a native of Krettingen (the present-day Kretinga), a small town of less than 2,000 close to the Baltic coast, had moved northward out of the Pale to Dorpat in the 1840's.⁴ Later Isaac Kruskal married his niece or cousin, Hinde Kruskal; Moses David was their eldest son. He was raised in Dorpat in a comfortable Yiddish-speaking home, and after his marriage he was able to provide similar comforts for his own family.⁵ Rosa Jaffe may have missed romance, but there were other compensations.

⁴ The origin of the name "Kruskal" is not definitely established, but appears to be taken from the name of a tiny cross-roads village in Latvia nine miles northwest of Zagare, today called "Kruskalne" (United States Board on Geographic Names, *Official Standard Names, Gazetteer No. 42*, 2nd ed., *U.S.S.R.*, III [Washington, D.C., 1970], 710). According to family legend the name had previously been Michaelson but had been changed in order to avoid administrative identification as Jews.

⁵ These inferences are drawn from Moses David Kruskal's surviving letters, facts known about his Dorpat lifestyle, and by the survival of a few pieces of heavy mid-nineteenth-century Russian silver marked with the initials of Hinde Kruskal, Moses David's mother. MDK was born with a clubfoot and limped; this defect may have been due to the kinship of his parents.

A houseful of children came quickly. One year after their marriage, in 1880, Rosa presented her husband with a son. They named him Isaac Kruskal, for Moses David's father. A year later came a second son, Aaron Herman, and in 1883 and 1885 two more sons were born, William and Joseph Bernard. Within six years after their marriage, Rosa had borne four sons, and three years later, in 1888, she was to give birth to a fifth, Eugene. It was remarkable. With such a string of sons, Moses David might found a dynasty, and Rosa was only twenty-six.

For a while it seemed like a real possibility. Dorpat in the 1870's and 1880's was booming. In those years the population was rising sharply from around 10,000, when Moses David's father had come, to around 35,000 in 1890. Moses David was an enterprising and successful merchant who dealt mostly with Gentiles, since the population was overwhelmingly Lutheran (96 percent), Estonians primarily, with a few Germans, Russians, and Swedes, and only a handful of Jews,⁶ In the 1880's his children were being educated by German schoolmasters in the Dorpat schools, and if the assimilationist trends of the previous generation had continued, his sons would probably have remained in Dorpat for a third generation. But the same political pressures which were facing Jews elsewhere in the Russian Empire reached them also at Dorpat. Even before the expulsion of privileged Jews from Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev in 1891, it is apparent that Moses David Kruskal was looking out for a friendlier environment in which to raise his family. Life was still good in Dorpat; and the family was still spending the summers at the *dacha* (country house) they rented on the Peipus See, where the boys so admired the fishermen with their spears; but Moses David had his eye on the future. If he could liquidate his business in Dorpat and bring his capital to New York, then he could make a secure home for his darling Rosa and the children (now six, since Deborah was born in 1890). Over forty, he was no longer young. It would be hard to leave his birthplace and the *dacha*, but the lives of his sons were more important. So in 1890 or 1891 he and his younger brother Nicholas Kruskal, a Dorpat-trained pharmacist, and their brother-in-law Abraham David Jaffe decided to join forces and go together to New York. They left Estonia in the summer of 1891 and arrived in New York on September 15.⁷ Abraham

⁶ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (11th ed., Cambridge, England, 1910): articles on Courland, Estonia, Lithuania.

⁷ MJK, Letters and Memoirs, n.d., information supplied by Isaac Jaife (b. 1882), son of Abraham David Jaffe and nephew of Rosa Jaffe Kruskal. Moses David was not the first Kruskal to emigrate to America. His first cousin, Mordecai Moshe Kruskal (1847-1911), eldest son of Hinde Kruskal's older brother, Wolfe Kruskal, had settled in Cincinnati, Ohio, around 1880 after having first spent the years 1876-1880 seeking opportunities in South Africa. Since Moses David Kruskal had been raised

David Jaffe brought his family with him, but Moses David Kruskal left Rosa and the children in Dorpat, planning to bring them later to a real home in New York.

NEW YORK in THE 1890's

The city to which the Jacobsons and Kruskals came in the early 1890's was a booming congeries of disparate economic activities, neighbourhoods, and ethnic groups. Boss Tweed and his gang had been put out of business twenty years earlier, largely by the *New York Times* and a few crusading reformers, but the conditions which had produced Tweed continued to dominate New York City public life. Divided and localized by ethnic and economic relationships, the people of New York seldom perceived "the general good" and instead thought about and voted for their short-term, immediate local interests. It was on this base that Irish New Yorkers, together with Germans and some upstate and out-of-state Yankees, created the Tammany machine, a mechanism which provided stable, predictable government (and non-government), as well as a modicum of social security, from the mid-1800's to the emergence of Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia in the 1930's.⁸

The population statistics for the period 1870 to 1900 give some indication of the explosive magnitude of New York City's growth. Already by 1870 it was one of the world's largest cities with 1.5 million inhabitants; by the turn of the century its population had more than doubled, and now stood at 3.5 million. Native New Yorkers were in a minority, and of the many foreign ethnic groups which had flocked to the city, immigrants of German and Irish birth were the most numerous.

Jews, however, were also present in large numbers and visible well before 1890. At the end of the Civil War, there had been some thirty synagogues in the city, and twenty-five years later, in 1890, there were 134.⁹ A Jewish ghetto

in Dorpat and his cousin Mordecai in Lithuania (probably Plungian), and since Moses David went to New York rather than Cincinnati, there is no reason to believe that the cousins were in contact. Subsequently, however, in the years between 1900 and 1920 there were significant contacts between the New York and Cincinnati Kruskals, including occasional visits in both cities. See note 68 below. All information on this branch of the Kruskal family comes from a series of letters from Reva Sussman Olch of Dayton, Ohio, to the author during February, March, and April, 1971. Mrs. Olch's mother, Gail Gertrude (Gella Gita) (1882-1970), was Mordecai Moshe Kruskal's daughter.

⁸ Seymour J. Mandelbaum, *Boss Tweed's New York* (New York, 1965); Rischin, *Promised City*, p. 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4. According to the U.S. Census of 1890, there were 125 Orthodox and nine Reform congregations in Manhattan. See Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census: Report on Statistics of*

had emerged on the Lower East Side, with a distinctive character and community life. It was not as large or as culturally developed in 1890 as it would be ten or twenty years later, but it had already become the largest and most diverse “Jewish city” in the world. Here Jews from all over Central and Eastern Europe, and even the Mediterranean, were brought together in close proximity. Old ways and new ways, a thousand localisms, dozens of variants of Yiddish and Hebrew, all came together under the pressure of immigration and adaptation to a new world. The “ghetto” of New York was like no other ghetto in the world— for it was, like the rest of New York, highly fluid, a polyglot, diverse community. As in the ghettos of Europe, its inhabitants were Jews, but in New York they were not bound in their Jewishness by external governmental restraints, or by self-generated, centuries-old internal constraints. The structure, the cohesion, the tradition of a European ghetto were all absent. Instead, the ghetto resembled the larger New York City, a helter-skelter, laissez-faire environment of competitive enterprise.

All of the immigrants must have found the city a bewildering, even frightening place. Separated from the familiar and traditional, they were brought into immediate contact with a society of rapid, kaleidoscopic change. For some, however, the shock was greater than for others. Moses David Kruskal was doubtless confused by much of what he saw, but his surviving letters, written only a few months after arrival, indicate that he was adjusting to New York quickly. He was mastering a most exciting challenge, and his letters express the confidence of one who knows he is being tested and who believes himself equal to the test. Dorpat was not New York City, but Dorpat was an expanding commercial center which had already grown to a size where urban anonymity existed. Moses David Kruskal was used to dealing with strangers in business, and even before leaving Dorpat, he had often travelled in the course of his work. Now he was engaged in similar work, and past experience, as well as personal chemistry, enabled him to take hold in New York.

For Isaac Jacobson, however, it was a different story. Raised in Zagare, he had regarded provincial Goldingen as a large, cosmopolitan place. There he had worked as an employee in a single outfit for twenty years, seeing the same faces and making the same decisions again and again. His world had been almost entirely stable. The contrast with New York City was overpowering. His response would be to withdraw into the safety and intimacy of his own family, where his identity was secure and the competitive struggle of American life could be shut out. It was his sons who would fight those battles.

Churches in the United States (Washington, D.C., 1894), pp. 416, 418.

THE KRUSKALS IN NEW YORK, 1891-1908

When Moses David Kruskal arrived in New York in September, 1891, the American economy was booming. Every industry was expanding and modernizing, and the textile and garment industries were no exception. The only shortage was capital, and he and his Jaffe in-laws had brought their own. It was a propitious moment to launch a new enterprise, and their plans rapidly took shape.

Abraham David Jaffe, by virtue of a Kruskal connection, had been placed in charge of a boarding house for immigrants owned by the United Hebrew Charities. It was located on East 12th Street near University Place, and it was there that Moses David Kruskal, his brother Nicholas, and his sister Yetta Kruskal Jaffe and her children lived briefly when they first arrived. Within four months, however, both Abraham David Jaffe and Moses David Kruskal were already doing business and beginning to turn a profit. They were already taking hold in the competitive world of the garment trade.

In January, 1892, Moses David wrote in Yiddish to Rosa describing his circumstances:

I am at business all day [until 9 or 10 P.M.] and work hard. I have reason to hope that my business will develop very nicely. However, one must have patience. The income is fair. ... I prefer to open a dry-goods business with Jaffe. First of all, I know this line. . . . The dry-goods business here is very prosperous; they manufacture all sorts of articles.... Nicolai [Nicholas] and I live in back of the business. We prepare our own breakfast and supper. We are trying to arrange now about dinners.

The business was located at 126 East Broadway, at the southern edge of the Jewish quarter. Kruskal was a prudent entrepreneur and husbanded his capital, believing “it is better to start small and have things develop.”¹⁰ But he was basically confident, and it is this confidence which forms a prominent theme in his letters: “one hopes that things will work out for the best”; “one is bound to prosper”; “the dry-goods business will undoubtedly develop”; “business is progressing nicely”; “prosperity is in the offing”; “my business is prospering and I am able to provide for the future.” Labour, he reported, was

¹⁰ Moses David Kruskal to Rosa Jaffe Kruskal, New York City, January 13, 1892. This and the MDK letters cited below are written in Yiddish and are in the possession of Prof. William H. Kruskal, University of Chicago.

“very cheap and the output very great.” These were the conditions that enabled capitalists to flourish; and Kruskal and Jaffe were petty capitalists experiencing the first thrill of a booming economy which was free of social and political constraints. After the first months he and Jaffe ran the business themselves, and Nicholas was able to take up “a very good position” as a pharmacist.¹¹

Moses David Kruskal worked so hard that he had little time for homesickness. From morning until night, Monday through Saturday, he was busy. He accepted American custom and took his day of rest on Sundays, and it was only occasionally that he could afford to “go out in the evening” during the week, and then only for a short visit with one of the relatives or friends from Dorpat. He longed for Rosa and his children and became increasingly impatient for them to join him. When Rosa’s letters were delayed, he fretted, and when the children were slow to write, he was quick to ask why. He was eager to learn about “everything” at home, and he treasured the photographs they sent. Concentrating all day on becoming established, he found that whenever his mind wandered and his imagination was active, his thoughts were filled with visions of his family and domestic happiness¹².

Rosa also had an imagination, and she was anxious. She was fearful of the unknown, and occasionally a disturbing letter from someone else would arrive in Dorpat giving rise to worrisome rumours. So Moses David was reassuring. They were merely “painting the picture in dark colours. Pay no attention to this, everything in America is in perfect condition. I have a good business and trust it will prosper.” Concern and reassurance were in all his letters, and his love for Rosa was visible in his eagerness to have her with him. He expressed his dreams with certainty: “I wish we could be here together this very moment, it is the great hope of my life. Shall build a nice home, be comfortable.”¹³

By the end of the winter his dream seemed to be nearly within his grasp. After Passover, in May, he planned, they would all come over to the new homeland. On Rosa’s birthday he wrote that it was an American holiday: “They call it in our country ‘Washington’s Birthday,’ ” and he sent a dollar as a gift and with it the “hope that next year we will celebrate your birthday together.”¹⁴ But suddenly his dreams were cut off. In March, just two months

¹¹ Moses David Kruskal to Rosa Jaffe Kruskal and Hinde Kruskal, New York City, letters of January and February, 1892.

¹² Ibid

¹³ Moses David Kruskal to Rosa Jaffe Kruskal, New York City, February 5, 1892.

¹⁴ Moses David Kruskal to Rosa Jaffe Kruskal, New York City, February 22, 1892.

before the expected reunion, Moses David Kruskal contracted typhus together with Yetta's ten-year-old son Isaac Jaffe. Both were sent to the hospital for contagious diseases on North Brother Island in the East River, and it was there on March 14, 1892, that Moses David Kruskal died.¹⁵ He was, according to an outsider who knew him, the "nicest of all the Kruskal men," a fine man who had "all of the qualities" his sons were to develop, "but none of their failings."¹⁶ Rosa, whose baby Deborah had just died of diphtheria, was now a widow at the age of thirty, and her five sons were fatherless.

But there was no turning back. The ties with Dorpat had already been severed and the Kruskals no longer possessed any livelihood there. Rosa, together with the children and her mother-in-law Hinde Kruskal, had already departed. So it was on to America, Moses David's new country where, fortunately, Nicholas and the Jaffes were already established. Only when they arrived in New York in the summer of 1892, did Rosa learn that her husband was dead and that her boys, twelve-year-old Isaac, eleven-year-old Aaron Herman, nine-year-old William, seven-year-old Joseph, and four-year-old Eugene were now fatherless.¹⁷

Their survival was tied to the family. For two women to come to New York with five young boys would otherwise have been a horror in 1892. In the following year, the United States sank into the deepest depression it had ever known, a depression which lasted until 1897. Public social agencies were virtually non-existent, and the private organizations were few and under-financed. Without Nicholas Kruskal and the Jaffes to fall back on, there is little doubt that Rosa's family would have dissolved. The women would have been sewing in sweatshops if they were lucky, and the boys growing up in the street. Instead, the assets Moses David had left behind were liquidated and used to purchase a pharmacy which Nicholas operated to support the family. The pharmacy, and Nicholas' good health, provided a crucial decade of maintenance until Isaac, Herman, and Joseph Kruskal were self-supporting.

It was a turbulent household in which Rosa's boys grew up. Grandma Hinde lived with Uncle Nicholas behind the pharmacy, and Rosa's family had a separate apartment. Though Uncle Nicholas did his best to serve as a father for his nephews, discipline was bound to suffer with no man at home. Rosa, while

¹⁵ MJK, Letters and Memoirs, n.d., information supplied by Isaac Jaffe.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* MJK reports the judgment of her eldest brother John Jacobson.

¹⁷ This is the traditional family account of the sequence of events and it squares with surviving data. See letter of William H. Kruskal to author, November 28, 1970.

frequently demanding, was also indulgent with the boys. They were all she had, and since her future with Moses David had abruptly ended, her dreams and aspirations cantered on her sons. And generally they did not let her down, although they each paid a personal price and their rivalry as brothers was often intense.

They all went immediately into public school, where they quickly learned the language and manners of their Jewish-American peers. Isaac, the eldest, and William, the third son, both finished high school and went on to become pharmacists in the family drugstore. But shortly after 1900, Isaac opened his own pharmacy uptown on 57th Street, and when in 1905 he began to attend Bellevue Medical College, he gave up his drugstore to devote himself full time to medicine. He became an intern in 1907 and so fifteen years after his father's death and his own arrival in America, he had succeeded in entering a learned and honoured profession, medicine, which he would practice until his death forty-five years later.

Aaron Herman Kruskal, the second son, left school in 1896 at the age of fifteen to go to work. He had attended Public School No. 2, and in 1896 he was awarded the medal for "Department," but although he would have liked to continue in college and study law, money was needed.¹⁸ That autumn he got his first full-time job. Now playtimes were over, and the vacation summers spent barefoot, picking blueberries, and savouring nature on a farm in Chesterfield, Connecticut, like the summers at the *dacha* on the Peipus See, were over. The well-behaved A. Herman Kruskal became a workingman at \$2.50 per week.

Herman worked for A. Beller and Company, a manufacturer of ladies' coats and suits; and it was from Mr. Beller that he learned the standards of an honourable businessman. Beller grew to like Herman, who was honest and sensible and a hard and imaginative worker. Before long Herman was promoted to become Beller's assistant. By 1905, shortly before he left Beller to start his own business at the age of twenty-five, he was earning a handsome salary, \$80 per week in a time when the average man was earning about \$12.¹⁹ It was largely on the strength of Herman's salary that the family moved to 340 East 18th Street and that Rosa toured Europe in 1906. As yet none of the boys

¹⁸ Medal now in possession of the author; judgment as to reasons for decision comes from MJK, Letters and Memoirs.

¹⁹ MJK, Letters and Memoirs, reports AHK salary. For the comparative statistics, see *Historical Statistics of the United States to 1957* (Washington, D.C., 1960), p. 91.

were married. Isaac was involved in medical education, and Eugene was still in high school. The others, Herman, Willy, and Joe, all contributed to the household. Joe was already “on the road” much of the time, selling.

From a personal standpoint, Herman’s rapid success and the move to East 18th Street had important consequences, since it brought the Kruskals and Jacobsons together. They had known of one another’s existence for many years, and the two families had previously been linked, but in 1904 they both moved into the same apartment building.²⁰ Within two years Herman Kruskal was engaged to Miriam, the youngest of the Jacobson girls, and in 1908 they were married.

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Family Patterns, 1900-1930

The most striking feature of the Jacobson and Kruskal families during their first full generation in America is their continuing commitment to bourgeois values and a bourgeois life style. In this, at least, the continuity with the values of the first immigrants and even the European ancestors was unbroken. Secure, comfortable families in secure, comfortable homes, education and respectability, these were the common denominators. Far from being unusual in this regard, the aspirations of the Jacobsons and Kruskals were typical and represent merely one microcosmic example of the kinds of motives which spurred hundreds of thousands of families in Europe and America.

What was unusual was not the nature of their goals, but the degree of success which they met in achieving them. Certainly they enjoyed a head start, beginning in the middle class of immigrants who were neither illiterate nor poverty-stricken, but their accomplishments were also substantial. Several amassed capital sums of hundreds of thousands of dollars, and they could all afford to provide their children with more than the average level of education. In the period before the Second World War, college degrees were still a luxury enjoyed by a comparatively small percentage of the population—not more than 10 percent even as late as 1940. The fact that roughly half of the children born in the first generation completed at least four years of college is a significant indicator of the success both families had in establishing themselves

²⁰ The immediate link between the two families was between Hinde Kruskal and Pauline Mandelstamm, who were first cousins. Hinde’s mother, Rochele Berman, was an elder sister of Pauline’s mother, Sara Berman Mandelstamm.

in America. If one looks at the Kruskals alone, the statistics are even more startling, since seven out of eight completed college, and five of the seven took higher degrees.²¹ In life style as well, both families enjoyed a high standard—the European tours, country houses, country clubs, and household servants characteristic of the upper end of the middle-class spectrum. There was, moreover, a perceptible shift from commerce and manufacturing to the learned professions—a shift with ambiguous consequences in terms of status, since the former were more rewarding financially, while the latter carried greater prestige. In any case, they never broke out of the middle class entirely into the topmost echelon of American society where wealth and power are combined and endure beyond a single generation. Though their levels of income and education rose, together with their consumption patterns, some of the rise was merely part of a general rise and proportional to the level at which they had begun. For a few individuals, the rise was fairly spectacular, but for the group it was moderate.

One aspect of the bourgeois mentality which pervaded this generation in making its life in America was its profound involvement in personal concerns. One's occupation, family, and leisure generally bounded the horizons of members of both families. The connections with Europe rapidly melted away. After Loeb Jacobson's death in 1896, Isaac Jacobson's ties were ended. Pauline Mandelstamm Jacobson had brothers in Russia, but both of the physicians, David and Leopold Mandelstamm, died in the nineties—Leopold of tuberculosis and David in a duel while he was serving with the Russian army in the Caucasus. Only Moritz Mandelstamm survived, but after the Soviet Revolution of 1917 it became almost impossible to maintain connections even had the desire been there. Among the Kruskals there were significant efforts, largely confined to the period between the First World War and the Depression. Nicholas Kruskal, who now operated a pharmaceutical laboratory, organized a Kruskal Fund, dunning himself and his nephews, Kruskal and Jaffe, \$10 per month, the money being used to aid sick or needy family members on the Continent, from Paris to Leningrad. The fund was actively operated through the 1920's and the 1930's, but the Depression reduced its magnitude, and the migration in 1928 of Nicholas Kruskal to Tel Aviv, where he died, removed its founder and chief impetus.²² For the most part, both the parents and the

²¹ Of the seven who went to college, at least four were elected to Phi Beta Kappa and several were graduated with Latin honors.

²² The Kruskal fund was perhaps maintained beyond 1940. William H. Kruskal reports in his letter to the author of Nov. 28, 1970: "I'm not absolutely sure of the linkage, but my Uncle Eugene maintained a Kruskal fund that my sibs and I continued and that still, I believe, has some contingent viability." Between 1900 and 1920 it is apparent that Nicholas Kruskal served as a leader in

children of the new generation had little interest in maintaining past connections which grew more and more distant with each passing year. Today and tomorrow were much more important than yesterday and the day before yesterday.

A similar bourgeois preoccupation with immediate personal concerns kept both families out of public affairs and indeed out of most external institutional involvements, whether they lived in New York, Baltimore, or New Jersey. Like most middle-class Americans, they voted regularly and discussed politics at home. They all admired first Theodore Roosevelt and then Woodrow Wilson, but that was the limit of their participation. The private, personal sector absorbed their energies and attention, as was characteristic of most Americans. When the Jacobsons and the Kruskals regarded public affairs at all, it was usually from afar, with little sense of personal involvement or active commitment. They made donations to charity, to Jewish philanthropies before 1910 and later more broadly, but the donations were to aid the sick and the poor, not to promote political causes.²³ Politics and public service were not their area of responsibility. Not until the third and fourth generations would active engagement in public affairs become visible to any significant degree and then as part of a general reform awakening among American youth in the 1960's.

Other institutional commitments were similarly limited. Among the eight sons of Isaac Jacobson and Moses David Kruskal, only two joined synagogues, both Reform—John Jacobson in Brooklyn, and Joseph Kruskal in New Rochelle. David Jacobson and his wife became members of the Ethical Culture Society, as did Herman and Miriam Jacobson Kruskal, and Miriam also joined the Child Study Association as a young matron. But almost without exception these links were partial, temporary, and not passed on to the children. Assimilationist in many ways, neither the Jacobsons nor the Kruskals ever became “joiners,” or absorbed themselves in group activities.

maintaining family connections. Reva S. Olch reports that her mother (Gail Gertrude Kruskal Sussman) often visited Nicholas in New York and also went “up to the fur emporium to see Joseph who called us his ‘mishpocha’.” They also had their eyes examined by Dr. Isaac Kruskal. After Nicholas departed for Tel Aviv the connections collapsed. Mrs. Olch reports: “My real belief is that Cousin Nicky held all together” (letter to the author of March 18, 1971). More recently William H. Kruskal has been interested in preserving family connections and maintained a sporadic correspondence with Nicholas’ daughter Victoria K. Youdin in Tel Aviv.

²³ According to MJK, family members opposed all parochial schools, including Jewish ones. It is notable, however, that the pharmacist Nicholas Kruskal, who settled in Tel Aviv in the late 1920's, willed his house as a charitable bequest to the University of Tel Aviv on the death of his daughter Victoria Youdin.

In the decade 1920-1930, the older generation passed away. Pauline Mandelstamm Jacobson died in 1922 at the age of seventy-two, and in 1924 the sixty-two-year-old Rosa Kruskal died. She had been active to the end, and the new passport she had just secured for still another European tour was never used. Isaac Jacobson lived on until 1930. In many respects, old age was easier for him than the first years had been. Now his refusal to speak English and his reluctance to compete in the world no longer mattered. He could talk politics and philosophy with his nieces and nephews, and John had found a place for him as a bookkeeper in his shop, so he went there several mornings a week. Pauline and he had always lived near Miriam, and after Pauline's death, Miriam looked after him. He delighted in his grandchildren, and the affection he had felt for his own children when they were little was renewed. When his health deteriorated in 1926, it was believed best that he move in with Clara Jacobson Pirosh in Baltimore, so that Dr. Pirosh could supervise his care. There, at the age of eighty-two, he died quietly and peacefully, with the anxieties of youth and middle age already laid to rest.²⁴ With his death in 1930, the last link to the life of centuries was broken. He had been the last one raised within the Pale of Zagare and educated in a ghetto yeshiva.

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Retrospect: The Meaning of Family Experience, 1870-1970

When Moses David Kruskal and Isaac Jacobson left the Baltic region and the Russian Empire, they acted primarily for their children's well-being. Both middle-aged, they wanted to protect their children from the hazards a Jew faced in Russia and to provide them with greater opportunity. They could not see into the distant future; they saw only the prospects which lay immediately ahead in the Romanov empire—repression, declining status, a contraction of their liberties. Had they foreseen the Soviet Revolution and the two world wars, their decisions would have been confirmed. They were, in 1890 and 1891, wiser than they knew. Of all the countries they might have chosen, the United States turned out to be best suited to their aspirations. They were not Zionists or "political" men; for each, his first interest was the well-being of his immediate family.

Within a generation their aspirations had been substantially realized.

²⁴ Judgment based on MJK recollections and on Isaac Jacobson's last letter to MJK written (in German) the day before his death (this letter is in the author's possession).

Their offspring enjoyed better material status, greater personal liberty, and broader freedom for individual development than their counterparts in Russia. The goals of the fathers were fulfilled beyond their expectations. But it was these same elements of American life which destroyed the delicate balance which had helped to provide family cohesion and identity. Already in the second half of the nineteenth century, the family was facing serious challenges as an institution, but it was still, for the Jacobsons and Kruskals, the Mandelstamms and Jaffes, a vital, cohesive organism which provided lifelong security—psychological, social, and economic. In America, however, it gradually lost most of its positive functions. In the early years, family members called on their kinfolk when they were in need—in personal crises and also in business dealings.²⁵ But in time these needs were provided for in other ways, by voluntary friendships and social institutions—banks, insurance companies, social agencies—and so the extended family became an empty husk. Its strength, both for nutrition and constraint, was soon exhausted. Even the nuclear families which survived lost many of their functions. Peer groups replaced the family as sources for children’s norms, and parental authority lost much of its weight as well as its rationale. Nuclear families survived, but largely as incubators for individual development rather than as conduits for the transmission of familial norms. Only in their individualism and assimilationism can parental norms be said to have survived; yet even here the story is ambiguous. Between 1870 and 1910, marriages had been contracted between people with family connections, and parental consent played an active part. Today, however, parents play virtually no role in marital choices; they are spectators, and this most crucial decision from the perspective of family identity and continuity has been entirely individualized.

It is this pervasive individualism, the primacy of individual values and choices, which traditional families held in check. Moses David Kruskal and Isaac Jacobson, themselves operating under individualist influence, could not anticipate its development of virtually unrestrained power. The consequences of individualism, challenging, rewarding, and dangerous, will dominate the history of these families in the next century. Ironically, rampant individualism and the fragmentation of the family have created a modest interest in family history. A longing to discover their “roots” and to maintain some association with them is a reaction to the individualistic, socially fragmented environment

²⁵ In a conversation, July 25, 1970, between the author, MJK, and Isaac Jaffe this theme of familial interdependence was emphasized, together with the realization that it could also lead to misunderstandings, broken promises, rivalry, and hostility. It is no wonder, then, that people often preferred to avoid intra-familial social services, since the emotional cost was often high.

of contemporary America. But such a family history is also an anachronism. It is a testament to a once vital institution which embraced our grandparents, but has died with us.

PPS. Originally I planned to tell my own story about the “Kruskals’ clan”, but, after reading Richard D. Brown’s excellent article, it became clear that it has no point – everything was already said. Of course since 1972, when this article was written, many new Kruskals were born and some passed away – life goes on...

I warmly suggest to read the whole article here:

http://americanjewisharchives.org/publications/journal/PDF/1972_24_01_00_brown.pdf

One will get a broad picture not just about two Baltic families, but about the early years of Jewish life in USA in general.

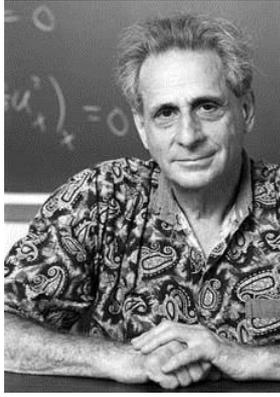
Kruskal family was dispersed over several countries: Estonia, USA, South Africa, Israel, Russia. Rabbis, business men, doctors and... many mathematicians...

„The mathematical interest and aptitude certainly suggest a genetic component in the Kruskal line. Though neither my brother or I followed a mathematical career, we each scored well in mathematical aptitude as high school students.“ - writes to me Richard D. Brown.

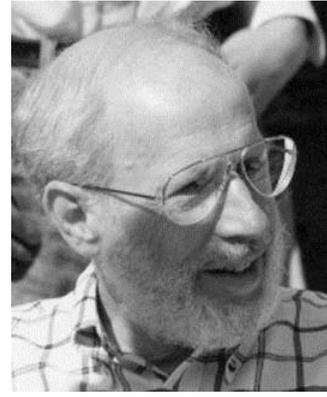
Here only some of the Kruskal (Krushkal) mathematicians:



William Kruskal
(1919—2005)
American mathematician
and statistician



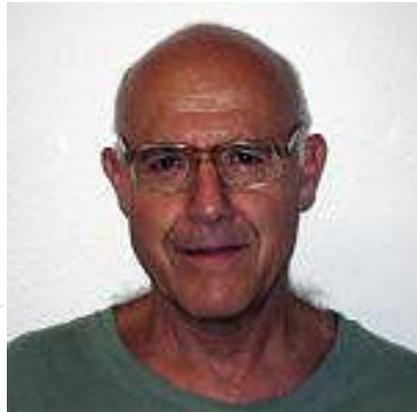
Martin David Kruskal
(1925—2006)
American mathematician and
physicist



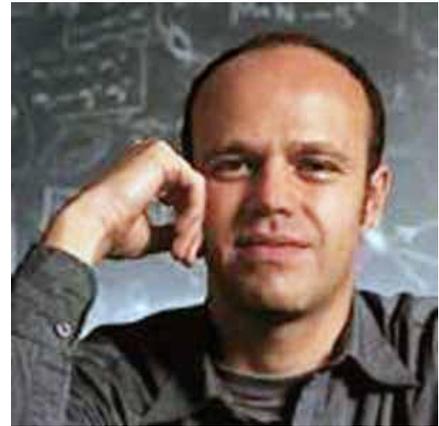
Joseph Kruskal
(1928—2010)
American mathematician and
computer scientist



Clyde Kruskal
(born 1954)
American computer scientist



Samuel Krushkal
(born 1938)
Israeli mathematician



Slava (Vyacheslav) Krushkal
American mathematician

Mark Rybak