

EXODUS FROM ROMANIA

A Diary by Heinrich Yesianu, June 1, 1900

Foreword by Robert S. Sherins, M.D.

Could any of us imagine traveling at the age of 16, leaving our parents, siblings, and extended family' and then journeying alone for 6,000 miles to a new nation and culture, yet unable to speak the new language? Heinrich Yesianu' did! In fact, he left us his diary of those events.

Several characteristics about this young man become evident as one reads his account. There is youthfulness in his language and thoughts, yet at the same time I noted rather sophisticated words and observations. While as a teenager he reported taking his comforting evening snack of sugared strawberries and milk, at other times he was more daring and enjoyed an evening coffee with his relatives. When he finally arrived in Vienna, he preferred a good stiff beer in the beer garden.

Jewish life in Romania 2 was becoming increasingly stressful by 1900. Economic security was waning. Political and governmental support was eroding and many Jews were considered Sudits or guest workers of Romania and had never been granted full citizenship! Lastly, at age 16, all male children were subject to military service, sometimes up to 25 years.

Romania was no longer the country to provide prosperity or religious freedom for Jews. Therefore, among many, Heinrich Yesianu, with the blessing of his parents, at the age of 16, left for America. Fortunately, sufficient funds for the journey were available and Heinrich was able to proceed by coach, train and steamer. Less fortunate and desperate Jews had to walk out of Romania. Hundreds of thousands of refugees walked across Romania and Europe on their way to America.

I found several factors about Heinrich's travels to be fascinating. There were no express routes of travel and certainly no airplanes prior to the inventions of the Wright brothers. Trips between villages were by horse-drawn coaches called *birja*. Main routes were traveled by trains. However, they rarely extended long distances. Therefore, Heinrich often changed trains on his route. It is apparent that there was a network of sympathetic relatives to offer aid, food, lodging, and encouragement. He was made part of each family. They ate and prayed in the synagogues together. Some helped to pack his valise; others ironed his handkerchiefs. Even in distant villages, strangers walked him to the correct address of his relatives. When possible an aunt or uncle would also buy a ticket on the *birja* so that they could accompany Heinrich as far as possible. They were obviously sensitive to his anxiety about leaving his family and were concerned about his uncertain future.

Many tears were shed by all at Mihaileni, where he boarded the train for Siret, the village where he would walk across the frontier into Austria, on his way to Czernowitz.⁵ Now he was truly alone, without relatives as companions. He waited alone and frightened in the night, as an agent appeared to walk him across the border. He relied upon strangers to bring him to the next connecting transport, exchange money or to sneak around the Armory or Police Station. Heinrich did this fearfully but trustingly. Thereupon, he was met by other agents. All along the route, Jews and sympathetic strangers aided him. Only once did he report an incident when his cane was stolen. Even after a drenching rain when he was soaked thoroughly and muddy, Heinrich retained his dignity by talking about being washed by the rain rather than the river. He stumbled in the muddy roadside ditch while crossing the border.

Lastly, as Heinrich left Romania, he wrote, "Thanks to G-d and Adio Miserable Romania." Now he was on his own. Yet, he never forgot to say his prayers, writing "Amen" each evening. Often he wished himself, "Doma *Dulce*."⁷ Yes, Heinrich Yesianu, you were remarkable, mature, daring, and desperate to leave Romania and its anti-Semitic evils. Your family of the future enjoyed the freedoms and opportunities of America because of your capabilities and willingness to take risks to leave your Romanian family and seek a new life in the United States.⁹

Heinrich arrived at Castle Gardens, New York, in July or August 1900 as Heinrich Yesianu.¹⁰ He apparently stayed with Goldenberg relatives. He adopted the Americanized name of Henry Goldberg, preferring Goldberg to Goldenberg." He changed his name legally, for which he was required to pay a \$25.00 fee to the Civil Court in Brooklyn, New York.

Heinrich married Leonore (Leah) Storch. Their daughters are Rhoda and Hilda. In 1929, he suffered vague symptoms, which baffled his Brooklyn physicians for a few days. Leonore called Dr. Abe Korzweig to request urgent assistance. Upon his arrival in Brooklyn, Abe immediately recognized Heinrich's dire condition. After prompt ambulance transport to Mt. Sinai Hospital in Manhattan, the diagnosis was established, a ruptured retro-cecal appendicitis with peritonitis. His appendix was located behind the bowel and, therefore, much more difficult to diagnose. In that pre-antibiotic era, he was operated upon and surgical drains placed to permit constant irrigation of the infection. However, it was too late and inadequate. He perished of the sepsis five days later.

His widow survived until January 11, 1974. Her devotion to Heinrich was so great that she saved every fragment of his documents and memorabilia. Those treasures have been passed to their daughter, Hilda Goldberg Weiser. Thank you, Heinrich and Leonore, *Dome Dolce!*

¹ Heinrich Goldenberg referred to himself as Yesianu after the family moved from Hiriau, also spelled Harlau, Romania, to the nearby town of Bivolari near Iasi. *Yesianu* means from Iasi. The “s” is pronounced "sh." Iasi (Yash) or Jassy (Yassi), city (1989 est. pop. 330,000), E. Romania, in Moldavia, near the Moldova border. Other spellings are Jassi, Jasi, and Yassi.

² Romania is also spelled Roumania.

³ The articles in **ROM-SIG NEWS** have been an extremely valuable resource in understanding the political and economic background of our family in Romania. It is necessary and proper to thank the staff of this international quarterly publication for allowing us to photocopy and distribute several of the articles.

There were two categories of Jews in Romania: resident or native families of long standing and *Sudits*, who were of non-Romanian origin, without citizenship. These *Sudits* were middle-class merchants who enjoyed a privileged tax-exempt status. Only 15% of the Jews were *Sudits*. However, Jews comprised 31% of the total *Sudit* class. The remainder was from other European ethnic origin. Refer to: "The *Sudits* of Romania: Invited And Privileged Guests?" **ROM-SIG NEWS**, Volume 4, Number 3, Spring 1996, pp. 11-12 and Volume 4, Number 4, Summer 1996, pp. 10- 12.

⁴ Ronald Sanders, *Shores of Refuge: A Hundred Years of Jewish Migration* (New York: Schocken Books, 1988, Ch. 22, "Rumania, Rumania," pp.173-180, Reprinted in "The Fuszgeyer Story" (Pedestrian Refugees from Romania) *ROM-SIG NEWS*, Volume 2, Number 4, Summer 1994, pp 5-8.

⁵ Former capital of Bucovina, near Galicia.

⁶ Goodbye or farewell.

⁷ Sweet dreams.

⁸ Heinrich's mother, Rachel, died shortly after he exited Romania and while he was still en route to New York. Eds.

See article of explanation about Castle Gardens and Ellis Island.

I' From personal conversation with his daughter, Hilda Goldberg Weiser on August 3, 1996, when she and her husband Ted visited Robert and Marlene Sherins in California.

12 He was the husband of Chifra Goldberg and the father of cousin Francine

Kornzweig Margulies. Dr. Kornzweig was a general practitioner, who later specialized in Ophthalmology and was renowned for his expertise in retinal diseases.

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