

14-Jul-2002  
 From: Harry L. Katz  
 To: my beloved grand children

## JAKE KATZ AND HONUS WAGNER

I found this book about Honus Wagner<sup>1</sup> and I thought I would like to read about his association with your great-grand-father of blessed memory, my abba<sup>2</sup>, Jacob Katz.

Sometime during the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, my abba had a used furniture store on Carson Street<sup>3</sup> in the South Side of Pittsburgh, Pa.



<sup>1</sup> **Honus Wagner**, John Peter Wagner, *The Flying Dutchman*. One of the Hall of Fame's five original inductees in 1936; Pittsburgh Pirates shortstop. Stocky, barrel-chested and bow-legged.

<sup>2</sup> Hebrew for father

<sup>3</sup> *Carson Street*. -- South of the Ohio and Monongahela Rivers, Carson Street is a continuous thoroughfare from Ormsby on the east, to McKees Rocks and points down the Ohio River, on the west. All thoroughfare lines from the south and west feed into Carson Street and are thence distributed to the bridges leading into the city proper. This street is of varying width, nowhere (except for ten blocks east of South Seventeenth Street) more than 50 feet and often much less. (Frederick Law Olmsted report to The Pittsburgh Civic Commission, 1910)

It was next to a beer garden, a favorite watering hole<sup>4</sup> for locals and Honus Wagner. During the long winter, they would gather in the dimly lit back room of dad's furniture store, around a big pot belly stove and shmooze<sup>5</sup> about baseball, politics, religion, etc, etc. Honus lived in Carnegie Pa, a suburb 10 miles<sup>6</sup> from Pittsburgh, and he used to take a streetcar to my father's store.

Wagner regaled them with baseball stories about his feats, about Ty Cobb<sup>7</sup> and others. Dad had stories to tell about life in Poland, and his contacts with famous people in Washington, D.C. where he lived for several years. Also his background in Yeshivas for many years contributed to the discussions. Dad was a frail man 5-feet 3-inch tall. Honus was a powerful 5-feet 11-inch shortstop and bowlegged.

### **JAKE KATZ AND A YOUNG ARTIST**

Another story that would be of interest. A young lad, about 14 years old, brought in a picture that he painted for dad to look at. Dad liked it and put it in the window of his store. Someone saw it and bought it for \$5.00, an enormous price in those days. The boy was Jim Nesbert<sup>8</sup> who went on to become a famous painter. He established an art school that is still flourishing in Pittsburgh. He painted a portrait of dad's mother, my grand-mother, Rebecca Katz. I am including a copy of the painting with the book. He also did a beautiful painting of the burning bush (Exodus). I don't know what happened to it.

### **JAKE KATZ'S BROTHER MOSHE**

One of the things dad must have talked about was his oldest brother, Moshe. He was one of the first pioneers to go to Palestine, Inspired by Theodore

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<sup>4</sup> Watering Hole. A small town friendly bar.

<sup>5</sup> **shmooze**. (Yiddish) a warm heart-to-heart talk.

<sup>6</sup> Carnegie to Pittsburgh is about 6 miles.

<sup>7</sup> **Ty Cobb**. Tyrus Raymond Cobb, *The Georgia Peach*. Elected to Hall of Fame by Baseball Writers in 1936.

<sup>8</sup> Possibly Vincent Nesbert, 1898-1976 (Gaslight Association of Shadyside; Polish Arts League of Pittsburgh; Art Institute of Pittsburgh)

Hertz at the First Zionist Congress in 1897. He died of malaria in his twenties. This land of the Hebrews was swampy and desolate having been laid waste by a series of conquerors. (Tel Aviv was a desolate sand dune). My brother Will's middle name is Moshe, named after his uncle. Will (Zev) is named after his father's father. I am named Aryeh Zvi after Henach Horvitz's father. I think Dovid is named after Henach's brother. Eliyahu is named after Bobbi's father. Elias Gordon.

## YITZCHAK LABZOFISKY AT YESHIVA

My father attended Slabodka Yeshiva<sup>9</sup> for many years. One of his classmates was Maxim Litvinov<sup>10</sup> who was Russia's foreign minister 1930 - 1939. Litvinov was the grandson of Reb Shepsel, the Rosh Yeshiva of Slabodka Yeshiva.

## HOW YITZCHAK LABZOFISKY BECAME JACOB KATZ

You might wonder why my father, Yitzchak Isaac Labzofsky, became Jacob Katz. He was orphaned at age six and spent all his youth in Yeshivas. Sleeping on benches at the Yeshiva and eating one meal a day at different homes. When he was about to be drafted into the Polish army, he was able to

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<sup>9</sup> **Slabodka yeshiva** (*Knesset Yisrael*), was known colloquially as the "mother of yeshivas" (rabbinical seminaries). It was located in the [Lithuanian](#) town of Slabodka, adjacent to [Kovno](#) (now-Vilijampole, part of Kaunas). It was functioning from the late [19th century](#) until the [Second World War](#) and was named after its location, a suburb of [Kovno](#).

<sup>10</sup> **Maxim Maksimovich Litvinov** ([ru: Макси́м Макси́мович Литви́нов](#)) ([July 17, 1876](#)–[December 31, 1951](#)) was a [Russian revolutionary](#) and prominent [Soviet diplomat](#).

Born *Meir Genoch Mojsiejewicz Wallach-Finkelstein* (simplified into *Max Wallach*, *Макс Ва́ллах*) into a wealthy [Jewish](#) banking family in [Białystok](#) in [Congress Poland](#), he joined the [Russian Social Democratic Labour Party](#) in [1898](#). The party was an illegal organization, and it was customary to use [pseudonyms](#). He changed his name to Maxim Litvinov, but was also known as *Papasha* and *Maksimovich*. His early responsibilities included carrying [propaganda](#) work in [Chernigiv](#) region. In [1900](#) Litvinov became a member of [Kiev](#) party committee, but the entire committee was arrested in [1901](#). After 18 months of captivity, he led an escape of 11 inmates from [Lukyanovskaya prison](#) and lived in exile in [Switzerland](#), where he was an editor for the revolutionary newspaper [Iskra](#).

get enough money to get to Liverpool, England. Standing at the dock, agonizing over how he could get to America, he observed a family embarking for the trip to Baltimore. The mother and small children first, and when the oldest son balked about leaving England, his father tried to pull him but he wouldn't budge. My father, standing nearby, asked, "can I use his ticket?" In anger, the father handed Yitzchak (Isaac) the envelope with the ticket and instantly he became Jacob Katz. Later, he brought his mother, his brother, and his sister as Katz's.

With Love,  
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14-Jul-2002

[Edited and footnoted by Andrew I. Sverdlove 26-Jun-2005]