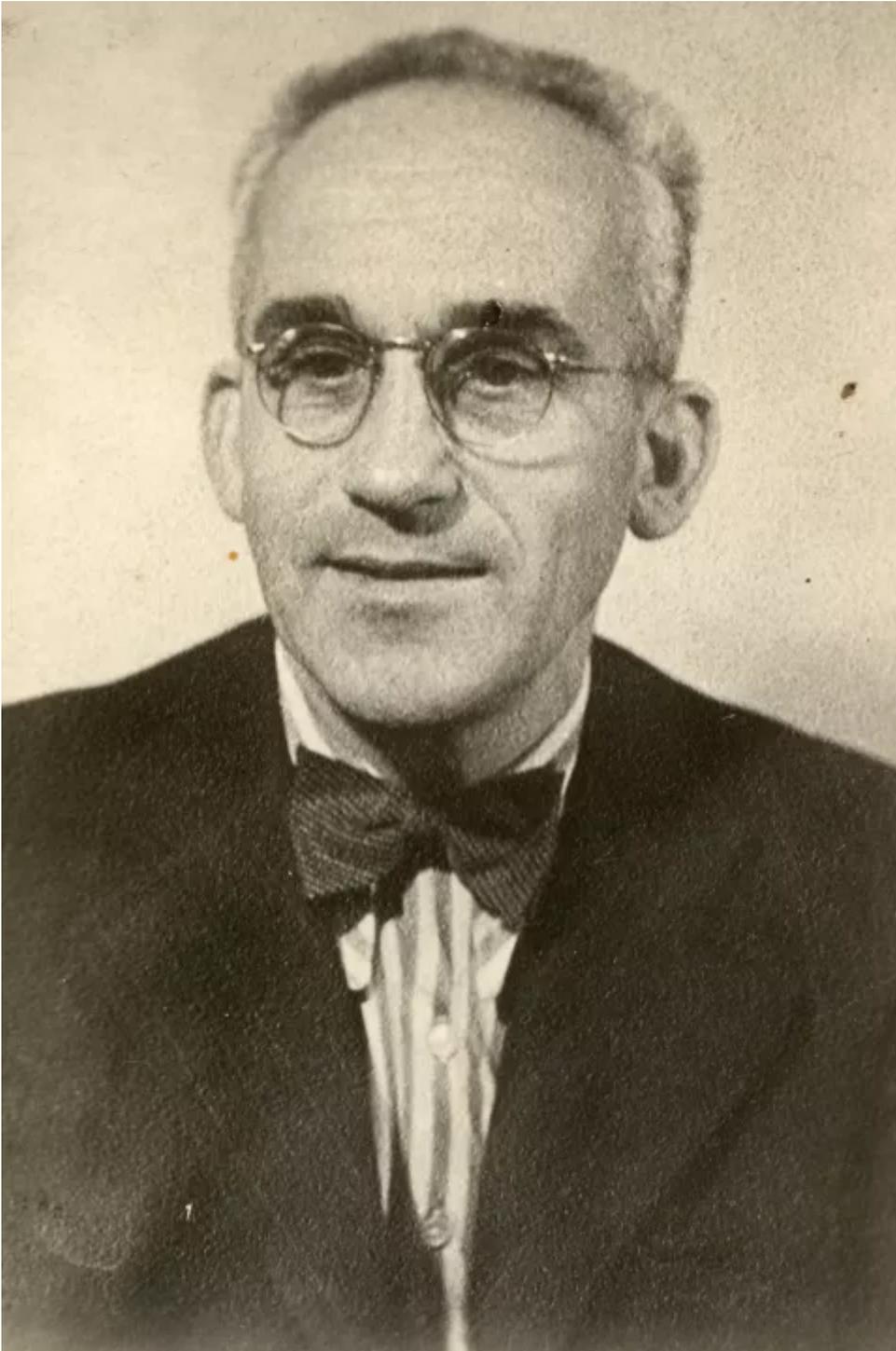


Emil Polak



This is a photograph of my father, Emil Polak. It was taken in the 1930s, but I don't know where. My father, Emil Polak, was born in 1895 in Jicin. He had two brothers, Bedrich and Josef, and a sister, Hedvika, who died as a sixteen-year-old girl. When as a child I asked how she'd died, they told me that she'd fallen out of a window, but under what circumstances, that I never found out. My father and mother were cousins. Because my father's mother [Helena Alterova, née Polakova] and my mother's father [Max Alter] were siblings. As if that wasn't enough, my mother had the same name as her future mother-in-law ? Helena Polakova, and both had the maiden name Alterova. So if I'm a little meshuga, it's my family's fault! In genetics class, one professor told us that unions like that are very dangerous, but if good qualities combine, a genius can actually be born! Could that

be my case? But I've got to say that though they were cousins, they didn't know each other as children or youngsters. It was only when my father's brother Bedrich got married in Prosec, that they went to visit Luze, where my father saw my mother for the first time. And that was that! My father moved to Luze to marry my mother. My parents ran a prosperous business, a general store with fabrics as well as some groceries like coffee, but they didn't sell bread for example, because there were three bakers in the area. The store was right in our building, made a decent amount of money and was fairly prosperous; my mother and father worked in it. But when Hitler came, my father had to close the store, and the only work they allowed him to do as a Jew was shoveling snow and similar menial activities. Our neighbor, who had a bakery next door to us, told my father at the time: "Mr. Polak, if what happened to you happened to me, if they took my store away, I'd probably hang myself!" and back then my father said to him: "As long as I'm with my family, nothing else can affect me."