

Iosif Rubalskiy



This is my paternal grandfather Iosif Rubalskiy. This photo was taken in Pavoloch in 1916.

My father's parents came from Pavoloch town [120 km from Kiev], Kiev province during the czarist time, which became Zhitomir region after the revolution of 1917 [Russian Revolution of 1917]. Pavoloch was a Jewish town, one of many around Zhitomir. Jews were allowed residence within the Jewish Pale of Settlement in czarist Russia, of which Zhitomir region was a part. The Jewish population in Zhitomir region reached 50% of the total population. There was also Ukrainian and Polish population in the town residing in the suburbs - this part of the town was called Kutok ('corner' in Ukrainian). All residents got along well, made friends and visited each other. There were no national conflicts in Pavoloch in the late 19th - early 20th century. There was two synagogues in the Jewish town. The bigger synagogue was called the Pavolochskaya synagogue ('Synagogue of Pavoloch'). After the revolution in 1920s the Soviet power started ruthless struggle against religion, but the synagogues in Pavoloch operated till the Great Patriotic War. Jews were engaged in crafts in the town: there were tailors, barbers, shoemakers, tanners, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, etc.

My paternal grandfather's name was Iosif Rubalskiy, and my grandmother's name was Feige Rubalskaya, nee Bloovestein. Non-Jews called her Fania. I think my grandparents were born some time in the late 1850s - early 1860s. Iosif was a tall handsome man with a big beard and right black eyes. My grandfather wore a hat to go out and a kippah at home. My grandmother was short, slender and had fine features. She must have been beautiful, when she was young. She had gray hair that she always covered with a dark kerchief. My grandmother wore long dark skirts and long-sleeved blouses like all other Jewish women in the town. I am not sure about what my grandfather

did for the living. I would think he owned a small store or a shop before the revolution. The Soviet regime must have expropriated his property. At least, I know that my grandfather spoke rather disapprovingly about the Soviet power. My grandmother was a housewife like all married Jewish women. My grandparents had seven children. Jewish families usually had as many children as God gave them. However, the infancy mortality rates were high. My father Moishe, born in 1888, was the oldest. As for his brothers and sister, I will just tell their sequential names. Three daughters were born one after another following my father: Sophia -- Sosl in Jewish, the oldest one, then came Shiva and Yeva - Hava in Jewish. Son Solomon was born in 1902, Anatoliy - Nafthole in Jewish, was born in 1904. Rachil, the youngest daughter, was born in 1909. They were all addressed by their names in the family while their non-Jewish neighbors used their Russified names.

Jews in Pavoloch were religious and observed Jewish traditions. On Sabbath and Jewish holidays they dressed up to go to the synagogue. Women wore their best outfits and silk shawls. My father's parents celebrated Sabbath and Jewish holidays at home and raised their children to be Jews. Grandfather Iosif was a rather secular man. He read religious and fiction books, was interested in politics and subscribed to newspapers. He was well-respected in the town. Before the construction of railroad to Skvira [140 km from Kiev] my grandfather went to Kiev to convince the authorities to construct the railroad via Pavoloch and managed to make them accept his point of view. My grandfather was a very decent and fair man, the man of his word and duty.