

Dear Friends;

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Sent by Larry Daks 12/06

I am most blessed and privileged to present to you what is no less than a miracle. Great Grandfather Abraham's Torah from Krasna has been found by searchers from the Torah Rescue Foundation in a monastery just north of Nadworna. The provenance is clear and unmistakable. Further, the sofer has confirmed that the Torah is Italian in origin. Please allow me to tell the story.

There is a family legend – and, up until now, only a legend – that we had origins in Northern Italy. For years, I have been researching the Cavalieri/Cavaglieri families of Ferrara and Venice. The family took their name from the Silk Worm from which the legendary Italian silk comes – the Cavalier. The family that tended them - Cavalieri.

In brief, it would seem that two of the four sons of Davide Cavalieri, namely Moise and Yakobe had begun a lumber business and ran a small “tavern” in Udine and points north. Somehow, most likely thanks to Napoleon, though it could be possible they were looking for more forest land, they found their way into the Carpathian Mountains to an area that was then part of the Hapsburg empire known as Galicia (today in the Ukraine), and settled in Solotwina and Maniawa. Our early family was in the very same business in those towns. It is likely that either these two men or their children, operating in the land of Ashkenaz, changed their name to the Polish Kawal(with a line through it)er. The Hebrew-script spelling of both families are spelled the same.

At least one of their children, Aryeh, took his Ashkenazic name “Leibish” and married a lady named Rebecca. He had 7 children, whose names match, in the proper generations, those of the Italian family, with the exception of a few names that likely came in through his wife's side of the family. My branch of the family comes down from Jacob (possibly named after his grandfather) who named his children, to include two names that also appear in the Italian family, Sholom Yitzchak, and my great grandfather Abraham (matching Abramo), named, possibly, after a great uncle. He, in turn, named his boys Efraim (from his mother's side of the family since it does not occur in the Italian family) and Moshe after his Italian great grand uncle or great grandfather.

Up until now, we had no paperwork to support this – only conjecture.

We roll the clock ahead to Abraham and his wife, Sarah, and their family in Krasna, just south of Nadworna. Abraham, his wife and his children were farmers there, with an orchard along a creek that wound through the property. Because his house was one of the larger ones in the area, Jews from the area would gather at his house in order to “daven.” He kept all the accouterments needed for services in a locked area, including a small Torah. Abraham died in July of 1939. His wife had died in 1912 and been buried in the Jewish cemetery in Nadworna (her grave was found by the above mentioned searchers!) There were several children that did not survive, and they, too, were buried up there. His daughter Rachel Menschenfreund had died in childbirth, and was also buried in Nadworna. His daughter, Esther, still lived in the house, but her children, Sarah and Clara, had married and moved away. Many of the Jews that used to pray at Abraham's house also had either died or moved on. So when the time came to transport

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(DESCENDENT OF SOLOTWINA
KAWALERS)

Abraham's remains up to Nadworna, Esther took the little Torah up to the main synagogue in Nadworna for safe keeping.

Then Nazis invaded in 1939 and "captured" Nadworna. The families in the South were murdered by the men of Einsatzgruppe C, and the city of Nadworna was ghettoized, with its Jewish population sent to Treblinka and, for the most part, gassed.

The synagogue in Nadworna was of unique construction. Because it was built in the day when no Jewish structure could be higher than a Christian structure, the Jews of the day dug down some 15 - 20 feet and THEN built up, so one would go downstairs to get in, but find themselves in a lovely sanctuary with appropriately high ceilings. The Nazis trashed the place and burned it out. We have some Nazi aerial reconnaissance photos taken in 1940, that show the roof of the synagogue missing. Unbeknownst to the rest of the population, monks from the nearby monastery had gone into the synagogue and spirited away the Torahs, the silver, and everything they could get their hands on.

Roll the clock forward to May 18th of this year.

I was at my local pistol range. It seems I've become a pretty good shot, and I've been getting involved in some competition, but that's another story. My cell phone rang. It was a friend of mine from Silver Spring, Maryland, Rabbi Menachem Youlas. He and his father own and operate a Jewish book store. Vivian and I have known him for close to 30 years. He is also a Sofer and heavily involved with the Torah Rescue Foundation.

He started off asking me some questions about our family in the Ukraine – the part that was once known as Galicia – and after I described some of the situation, he revealed that I had just confirmed that the stone that they had just found was, indeed, my great grandmother's stone. And then he dropped his first bomb. "And I think we found a Torah that belongs to you."

You can imagine my reaction. "No, I don't think so." He said "Well, it all points to your family. The provenance is here." I then told him the story about how my great grandfather had conducted services in his house, so he must have had a Torah, but no one knows what ever happened to it. "We all thought that the Cossacks or the Nazis got to it!" He then told me about the monks having emptied the synagogue, and had protected everything they could get their hands on from the Nazis and later the Communists. There were a number of Torah's that were the tall, thin, heavy Ukrainian scrolls, but there was this one Torah that "belonged to a Jewish farm family from further South that was apparently being kept for safekeeping. It's got to be yours."

Then came the second bomb. Menachem continued "It's different from the other Torah's in several ways." I interrupted him. "Tell me it's a Sefardi Torah!" I blurted out. Now, understand that he has no idea of our possible Italian roots and my Cavalieri research. His answer: "How did you know!" He further describe it as an Italian Torah. They can tell this by the "ktav" (writing style), the form (Shulchan Aruch or Ari, etc), and the treatment of the parchment. It was also on Atzei Chaim (handles) as opposed to being in a case.

At this point, I dropped the phone and had to steady myself. But the best was still to come.

Menachem continued "Now that you've identified it so well, I can tell you the best part. The Torah was wrapped in a sheet. When we took the sheet off, we found the Torah was in really good shape, and with a few hours of Sofrut work, IT WOULD BE COMPLETELY USABLE. Furthermore, they found a tag on one of the Atzei Chaim, WITH MY GREAT GRANDFATHER'S NAME ON IT!

We have recovered the family Torah, which was thought to have been lost in the Holocaust, AND we have "snapped the link" with the Italian family.

The Torah is now in Menachem's shop in Silver Spring. He obtained a stamp from the Israeli Government identifying and assigning the Torah to us, and he is completing the sofrut work and having the scroll dated. The Torah will be gloriously welcomed here in Shreveport some time in the next three weeks. It is NOT going into a glass case for people to gawk at! We are going to use it! We will have the chance to read from the same Torah that my grandfather read from, my great grandfather, my great great grandfather, and perhaps even his father read from – and we will dance with it on Simchat Torah! There is no greater honor for a sefer Torah to be used for the purpose for which it was made.

Praise G-d, who lives, and watches over his people, Israel.

Foster E. Kawaler