



The Rolnick Chromosomes - The Global Dispersion of the Rolniks of Lithuania: Part One - Introduction and Congo Joe

Wilfred Stein

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“The Rolnick Chromosomes” tells the stories of the Rolniks of Lithuania, their origins and their dispersion over the five continents. Illustrated with many original photographs and with numerous historical documents, it tells of their life in Lithuania, why they left and why some stayed. They called themselves Rolniks or Rolnicks or Rollnicks. Most Rolnicks had already left Lithuania well before the Nazi invasion. Those who remained suffered when the Nazis overrun Lithuania, others escaped in dramatic circumstances that the book describes. Some, who early on had left Lithuania for Germany, were soon proud and patriotic German citizens but were caught up in the Holocaust and their escapes and sufferings are also part of this history. Rolnicks went to the USA - many to Chicago and Baltimore, others to New York and New Jersey with one family to Oklahoma. South Africa was the destination of one branch that included the author’s family. Pre-Israel Palestine sheltered Rolniks, and others arrived in later years. A small contingent arrived in England early in the 1900’s to be followed by others who had originally moved to Germany and South Africa. Some Rolnicks and their descendants eventually settled in Australia. The first Rolnicks to leave Lithuania included Congo Joe, an adventurer who fought in the Boer War and then in East Africa in the first World War, before coming wealthy in the Congo until reaching a sad end. Other Rolnicks were peddlers, junk dealers, shopkeepers, garment workers. Their children entered the professions as lawyers, doctors, pharmacists, teachers, accountants. Some became businessmen, farmers or blue-collar workers. Some were scoundrels. Most were fine and honorable people. All were Rolnicks.

The book also explains how to use the results of DNA analyses and what can be learnt from them. The “Chromosomes” in the title describes how DNA methods were used to distinguish between the two tribes of the Lithuanian Rolnicks and to link together the members within each tribe.

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