

Rebecca and Henry Weinbaum



In April of 1871, in the small town of Lublin, a rabbinical center, Rifka (Rebecca) Stockman was born. Her father, Morris Stockman, had a successful business. Her mother Shendla worked hard at home caring for Rebecca, her older brother Abraham and her younger sister Rachel. When Rebecca was 18 years old, in 1889, she left for Warsaw to marry a very wealthy man named Samuel Lichtenstein. We have a photograph of Rebecca as a young woman. She was attractive and well dressed with dark hair and olive skin. She was only 4 feet 10 inches tall. Rebecca and her new husband did not wait long to have children (few people did). Morris Stockman (who was named after Rebecca's father) was born in 1891 and Eva Stockman was born in 1893. Then tragedy struck. Rebecca's husband died leaving Rebecca with two young children. Rebecca did not get along well with her wealthy in-laws who were in Warsaw.

Nachman Henoah (Henry) Weinbaum, who was her age or perhaps a couple of years younger, began courting her. Henry had never been married. He was the son of Mendell N. Weinbaum and Gitl Stignits. His family was poor, but Henry was a skilled craftsman. He wove pig bristles into brushes. By the standards of the time, that made him a good provider. The two were married in about 1895 and together they had six children between 1897 and 1909. Jack was the oldest. Then came Fanny (Feige Gitl), Dan (Gdalja), Ted (Tadeus) and Harry (Chemua) and Harry's twin brother. All of the children were born in Warsaw.

Eventually, however, life got so bad that Henry, like thousands of others, decided to go to America. In about 1912, he moved to America with his oldest son Jack and Eva, who had fallen in love with a man who had TB in the family. TB was very dangerous and thus a social stigma. To keep Eva away from her young suitor, she was sent to America. Henry had sisters in New York, but stayed there only a very short time. They first moved to Toledo where Owens Corning had a glass factory. Henry made brushes and Jack became a streetcar conductor. They did not stay long. Toledo was not a great place for a brush maker or for a Jew, Henry decided. Henry moved with Jack and Eva to Detroit where the auto industry had created opportunities. Henry started Detroit Quality Brush Factory and sold brushes to Ford, GM, Chrysler, Parke Davis and various schools too.

In WWI, Jack became so worried about his family that he enlisted in the U.S. Army in hopes of finding his family. Instead he was sent to Texas. WWI was very hard for the family in Europe. They had no food. They stood in line for frozen potatoes. Although they were Russian citizens, they had to hide from the Cossacks, who treated Jews savagely.



Rebecca kept her eldest son Morris out of the Russian army by paying off someone. Morris was highly educated and became a clerk or bookkeeper for the wartime joint distribution committee. During those years, Rebecca became very sick and her teenage daughter Fanny took care of the family. There was little or no communication with America during the war years. In 1919, the first letters went through. They included pictures of Eva's first born child, a son named Sam who had been born in 1915. He was probably named after Eva's father, Rebecca's first husband. This was Rebecca's first grandchild. In 1918, Harry's twin brother died of a Typhus epidemic at the age of about nine.

By 1920, Henry had saved up enough money to bring the rest of his young family to America. They were living in Ostrolenka. Rebecca came with Fanny, who was 20, Dan, who was 16, Ted, 15, and Harry, 11, on a Holland America ship called the Ryndam. Only Morris stayed in Europe. The ship left Rotterdam on November 12, 1920. The ship arrived in New York Harbor, after a very rough voyage, the day before Thanksgiving, on November 25, 1920. Like most Jews coming from Europe, they traveled in steerage. The family came to America with \$300. Rebecca and her family were taken off the ship by Max Durr, a relative from Newark, N.J.

Henry's brush factory did well. They lived in a nice brick home at 3444 Wesson (south of Michigan Ave., near 31st street) in a Polish neighborhood. Henry had already furnished the

home by the time Rebecca arrived. The house even had a player piano.



This was the family home until 1937.

After eight years apart, Henry and Rebecca were reunited. The passing of time and the difficulty of her life took its toll on Rebecca.

Photographs from the 1920's show her as old and plump and grey. Henry, by contrast, was thin and dapper. Henry was a meticulous man who was always well dressed with nicely shined shoes. Henry and Rebecca were generous. After shul, they often brought home less fortunate people and gave them food. Rebecca was a bright woman, but she stayed away from the family business. However, at home, she was in charge. She was a sweet, quiet housewife. Rebecca was chronically ill with myocarditis and hardened arteries. She died on November 5, 1929. She was 58 years old. She is buried in the Aron Moshe cemetery in Roseville, Michigan.

Rebecca lived long enough to see her youngest son Harry graduate High School. Henry and Rebecca helped all of their children and they went on to be quite successful.

Morris, Rebecca's son by her first marriage, didn't come to America until 1922. Morris married Sally, a woman he had met in Europe. In America, he was not treated like a full brother and was made to feel he was somehow inferior. In Europe, he had been a man of prominence. Eventually, in a move highly unusual for a Jew, Morris went back to Europe. However, life was difficult there, so he eventually returned to America. He had odd jobs as a shoe salesman and a bookkeeper at Cadillac Motors, but never achieved the status he had as a younger man in Europe.

Eva, who had been taken out of Europe to break up a budding romance, met Hymie Lefton in Detroit. She married him, and they had three children. She was a proper person and played piano. Eva, however, had high blood pressure like her mother. In 1933, she died. She was only 39 years old.

Jack took over the family business. Jack was shrewd and knew how to get things done. He bribed the purchasing agents, as was common in those days. The factory did quite well. His son is still running the Detroit Quality Brush Factory.

Fanny was 20 when she came to America. She lived with her parents on Wesson Street.



Nathan Levinson and his wife, Molly Goren Levinson lived upstairs. Shortly after Molly's brother Sam Goren arrived from Europe, he was fixed up with Fanny. Fanny and Sam got married in January 1925 and had Helen in early December 1925. Their second child, Robert, was named after Rebecca.

Although there was some pressure for all the Weinbaum boys to help with the family Brush business, Dan rebelled. He wanted to be in the tire business. He

didn't want to help with the brush factory. Dan married a friend of Fanny's, who Fanny had met while on the boat to America. Lillian Diem Weinbaum is still alive today.

Ted went to Wayne State University. Ted became the brains behind the business and he also did the socializing. He would go out and drink with the suppliers. Ultimately, Ted became an alcoholic. He married a woman named Ruth who was not Jewish, which was scandalous at the time. They did not have any children.

Harry started a school newspaper that became a hand-flier and ultimately the West Side Courier, which had a peak circulation of 60,000 copies each week. Henry helped Harry with the funds to start the enterprise. Harry became quite successful and politically prominent. He was a friend and business partner of Mayor Cobo. He was appointed to the board of the Detroit House of Corrections. He was later fired reappointed and fired again. "I have never been, nor will I ever be, a rubber stamp for anyone," he defiantly told the press after his second firing. "Scrappy" was the way the Detroit Free Press described him in his January 24, 1982 obituary. Perhaps he was, but he remained lovingly devoted to his wife Shirley and raised two children, Robert and Barbara.

Nine Months after Rebecca died, Henry remarried, to a woman named Dina Tanaser, who was about 8 years younger than him. She did not have any children. Fanny called her Tanta ("aunt"), but never was close to her and treated her like an outsider. Henry gave money to Fanny and her husband Sam, who was a struggling grocer. However, he did it secretly, never telling Dina. Henry became overweight in old age and suffered from cardiovascular disease, which caused a stroke and senility. He died on July 1, 1948. He is buried in Beth Tefilo Cemetery in Ferndale. His exact age at death is not known. According to his death certificate, he was 77. His marriage license with Dina from 1930, however, said he was 55 years old, making him only 73



at death. Dina was 65 when Henry died and she lived until October 6, 1961. She was 82. She is buried next to Henry at Beth Tefilo in Ferndale.

In some ways, Henry adopted quite well to America. Financially, he was quite successful and his children became influential. He was clean-shaven and dressed in stylish American clothes. He did not wear a yamulcha. Henry remained Old World in other ways. He was a devout orthodox Jew: he prayed every morning before work, he kept kosher and he observed the Sabbath. He never drove and did not own a car. In fact, although he made a good deal of his money from the auto industry, he never really understood cars--or, "the machine" as he would call it. In many ways, he is the prototypical immigrant--hard working and successful, he was changed by America without ever totally adapting to it.