

The Rabbinic Ancestry of the Koblenz Family of Lithuania and New York City

Preliminary Narrative: March 2024
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This narrative is based on documents available in the United States and is intended to serve as a basis for future research, especially in European archives. Recent generations of descendants are omitted in the interest of privacy.

Lithuanian Origins

The earliest generation identified so far is that of William Koblenz and his wife Augusta Levine, who were born in the early 1800s, probably in the area around the city of Kovno (today called Kaunas) in Lithuania, which was then within the northwestern border of the Russian Empire.¹ By 1835 they were married, and in October of that year their son Philip was born.

If their Koblenz forebears were typical of this part of the Ashkenazi Jewish population—which they very likely were—they had arrived in Lithuania in the 17th century as part of the great migration of Jews from western and central Europe as they fled the political and economic turmoil of that period and responded to the inducements offered to them by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Broadly speaking they became part of the “Litvak” population, who comprised about twenty percent of eastern European Jews. As described in the YIVO Encyclopedia,

Litvaks, who for the most part were *Misnagdim* [“opponents”], rejected Hasidic religious enthusiasm and emotionalism and all forms of mystical superstition. In contrast to Hasidim, who maintained a worshipful and unquestioning attitude toward the *tsadik* or rebbe, the Misnagdic Litvaks tended to question all authority, a tendency encouraged and reinforced by the culture of the yeshivas, where critical learning was prized above piety or blind faith, and no one was above criticism. . . . [T]he towering influence on Lithuanian Jewry of the Gaon of Vilna (Eliyahu ben Shelomoh Zalman, 1720–1797) is, according to most historians, responsible for many if not most of the distinctive aspects of Litvak culture. . . .

The creation in 1803 of the fabled yeshiva in Volozhin by . . . one of the Gaon’s leading disciples, and the subsequent emergence throughout Lithuania of numerous eminent yeshivas modeled after Volozhin . . . , established Lithuania in the late nineteenth century as the world center of advanced rabbinic scholarship. . . . From the mid-nineteenth century on, Lithuania was the region of Eastern Europe most receptive first to the *Haskalah* (Jewish Enlightenment) and later to the Jewish socialist movement and to Zionism.²

William Koblenz was virtually certainly a rabbi, given that his three emigrant descendants became rabbis in the United States: son Philip, grandson Sigmund, and great-grandson Adolph. Rabbinic lineages were hereditary, usually passing from father to first-born son, and they were

typically ancient in origin. It is generally acknowledged that a majority of Ashkenazi rabbinic families derive directly from a core group of the descendants and disciples of the sage Rashi (Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki), who flourished in the late eleventh century in France.³

While the ancestries of many rabbinic families have been studied in great detail and published over the years, particularly those of the especially famous and influential ones, most have not, and the Koblenz rabbinic lineage is (so far) among the unstudied and unmentioned. Perhaps if William's very eminent great-grandson Adolph, who died in 1949, had been interested in celebrating his rabbinic heritage and had married and produced a son and heir, we might know more today.

In fact, there may be a clue to the lineage's origin in its surname. While almost all Jews in the Russian Empire were without surnames until required to adopt them in the early 19th century, rabbinic surnames were exceptional and of great antiquity. Perhaps the Koblenz forebears had been established on the Rhine, in or near the city of that name, hundreds of years earlier. It might be possible to learn more about the early Koblenz ancestry, but it would likely involve extensive on-site research in the archives of Lithuania, Russia, and Israel.

It should be noted that the emigrant descendants of William may have been in some way estranged from him. The only source of his name is the 1914 civil death record of his son Philip, and it is considered extraordinary that he was not included in ancestries on the headstones and in the published writings of his descendants. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries controversies over doctrine, ritual, and leadership had been endemic among the Ashkenazi population, and perhaps these came between William and his descendants. As we will see later, they were outspoken advocates of Zionism, and perhaps this contributed to their apparent estrangement from him.

William and Augusta were both deceased by the 1890s, which we can derive from the custom of naming grand-children or great grand-children after earlier generations following their deaths. Their first American-born descendants were their namesakes Augusta (born in 1895) and William (born in 1897), children of their grandson Bernard Koblenz (1876-1951).

The First Immigrant Generation

Philip (Meshulam Feivel) Koblenz, son of William Koblenz and Augusta Levine, was born near Kovno on October 20, 1835.⁴ We know just a few details of his life before he brought his family to America in 1888, at the age of 53. In about 1857 he married Fannie (Frume Hinda) Aaron, daughter of Yehuda Leib David Aaron and his wife Rivka.⁵ In 1858 their first son and heir Sigmund was born, and they had nine more children over the succeeding twenty years.

As the designated successor to his father's rabbinic lineage, Philip received rigorous instruction in yeshiva and was trained for the many demanding aspects of a rabbi's life. We don't know if he had acquired a congregation before his departure for America, but it is likely that he would at least have been employed in various related functions in the community: cantor, teacher, shamas, shochet, mohel, and the like, probably for his father's congregation as well as for others.

Philip's decision to depart for America with his family was motivated by momentous events in the Russian Empire in the 1880s. Conditions had deteriorated for Jews following the Russian annexation of the former Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 1770s. They were forced to live in the newly created Pale of Settlement, their opportunities for work and education were severely limited, and their sons were conscripted into the army and induced to convert to Christianity. But their tradition of community cohesiveness and support as well as their ingenuity in hiding their sons helped them to survive the increasing demands placed on them by the repressive Russian administration. Conditions even improved somewhat during the 25-year reign of the liberalizing Czar Alexander II, who eliminated special taxes on Jews and relaxed restrictions on their living and working outside the Pale.

But the assassination of Alexander II in 1881 changed everything. His death was widely blamed on the Jews, and three years of pogroms ravaged the community, accompanied by the reintroduction of harsh laws, the express goal of which was that, "One third of Jews will die out, one third will leave the country, and one third will be completely dissolved in the surrounding population." Thus began the great migration: More than two million Jews fled the Russian Empire over the following years, most of them to America, increasing the Jewish population of the United States twenty-fold.

Philip joined the migration, arriving in New York City in 1888 with his wife and four youngest children, Mendel, Sarah, Bernard, and Anna.⁶ He found lodging and work on the Lower East Side, moving several times to various tenements between Delancy and Madison Streets.⁷ For about fifteen years he supported his family as a shoet and butcher, while seeking employment as a rabbi by one of the many congregations forming to serve the growing immigrant population. By about 1906 he had finally found success, relocating to Brooklyn as rabbi of the recently established congregation Agudath Achim Anshei Liebowitz, at 195 Watkins Street in Brownsville.

Sadly, Philip had just a few years to savor his long-sought achievement. On May 10, 1914, he died in Brooklyn at the age of 78, following his wife, who had died in Brooklyn the previous year, on January 20, 1913.⁸ They were buried near each other in their congregation's plot at Bayside Cemetery in Queens, where their headstones can be seen today.

One further aspect of Philip's narrative needs to be considered. While he brought his four youngest children to America with him, we have no information about their five older siblings born following son Sigmund, who in 1888 would have been between the ages of 18 and 28. It is possible that they had remained in Russia with young families of their own or had migrated elsewhere, although there is no indication that any of them or their descendants came to America. By 1900 they were all deceased, according to Philip and Frume, but perhaps their families survived them.⁹ An interesting clue is that in 1923 their son Sigmund and grandson Adolph obtained passports, declaring that their primary intention was to visit relatives in Germany.

The Second Immigrant Generation

Philip's oldest son and heir, Sigmund (Yehuda Zundel) Coblenz, who chose to spell the surname of his family with a C, was born on April 15, 1858, in Riga, today the capital of Latvia.¹⁰ In about

1885 he married Fannie Altman, and by 1898 they had five children, the first of whom was their son and heir Adolph, born in 1887 near Kovno.¹¹

Sigmund left Kovno at the same time as his parents and siblings, in 1888, but rather than emigrate to America he took his family to Frankfurt am Main, in Germany. We don't know all of the reasons that may have been involved in this decision, but a primary goal appears to have been a desire to affiliate with the growing Zionist movement that was flourishing in Germany at that time. Specifically he associated himself with the branch that in 1902 became the Mizrachi movement, which advocated for a strong national entity in Palestine on a foundation of strict orthodox theology and maintenance of traditional Jewish culture, in contrast with the assimilationist secular Zionism of Theodor Herzl. During his sixteen years in Germany, Sigmund was an active advocate and spokesman for the creation of a Jewish state, notably addressing a 1902 conference in Altona, a suburb of Hanover, where in 1905 a branch of the Mizrachi movement was established.

In 1903 Sigmund departed Frankfurt for New York City, arriving on November 3, accompanied by his five children, Adolph, Erich, Minnie, William, and David.¹² Several factors indicate that this was a good time for emigration to America. His wife had recently died, his heir Adolph had just completed his secondary education, and it was far more likely that Sigmund would attract a congregation in the growing Jewish community in New York than in Germany. The 1903 passenger list described him as a cantor and teacher, which is how he had supported his family in Frankfurt, but the rabbinate was his goal.

He settled initially on the Lower East Side three blocks from his father and in 1904 was listed in the annual city directory as a teacher. By 1910 he had relocated to Williamsburg in Brooklyn, where he was briefly associated with two congregations on thriving Moore Street: Chono Dovid at number 46 and Chevra Kadisha at number 93.¹³ But by 1913 he had moved to Utica, New York, near Syracuse, where his son Adolph had been appointed rabbi at Congregation Adath Yeshurun.

While living in Utica, he probably devoted his energies to editing and publishing his well-received 1915 book of lectures, addresses, and sermons, "Rigshe Yehuda" (רגשי יהודה: "Yehuda's Sentiments"), about which a prominent bibliophile remarks that Sigmund displays "a wide knowledge of Talmud, Medrashim, and Tanach and shows as well his great worldly knowledge: Socrates, Ptolemy, Freud, Schopenhauer, etc. . . . An avid Zionist, he also was active in the fight against Reform Jewry, and his sermons are sprinkled with urges to prevent assimilation."¹⁴

By 1918 he had settled in the Bronx, where he had been chosen as rabbi of the recently organized Netzach Israel Jewish Center, at 1078 Kelly Street (also known as the Kelly Street Synagogue).¹⁵ In June of that year he married Esther Lieberschitz, widow Silver, in Hartford.¹⁶ On November 30, 1922, he officiated at the wedding of his nephew William Koblenz, son of his brother Bernard, held at Lexington Hall, 109 East 116th Street in Manhattan.¹⁷

In June 1923 Sigmund and his son Adolph applied for passports and planned to travel together to Germany "to visit relatives" and to tour Palestine, but their plans were cut short by Sigmund's illness and death, on October 13, 1923. A brief obituary reported that he was "a prominent member of the Jewish clergy, . . . a supporter of the Zionist movement, . . . and was a famous

lecturer and on several occasions spoke to the Jewish populace in this city [Passaic, New Jersey] at the Y.M.H.A.”¹⁸ He was buried at Mount Zion Cemetery in Queens, where his headstone can be seen today.

The Third Immigrant Generation

Adolph (Avraham) Coblenz was born on January 9, 1887, in the town of Ponevez (now called Panevezys), near Kovno, son of Sigmund Coblenz and Fannie Altman.¹⁹ Soon after his birth, his family left for Germany, settling in Frankfurt am Main, where they lived for sixteen years. There Adolph received a traditional cheder primary education and then attended secondary school at the Realschule der Israelitischen Religionsgesellschaft (also known as the Samson-Raphael-Hirsch-Schule), a revered institution that had been founded in 1852 and that “taught its students both traditional Jewish values and a secular education, making it a model for Modern Orthodox Jewish schools.”²⁰ It is likely, in fact, that the opportunity to enroll Adolph there was an important reason for the family’s relocation to Frankfurt am Main.

Soon after completion of Adolph’s secondary education, Sigmund emigrated with his family to New York City, arriving on November 13, 1903, and settled on the Lower East Side. After applying himself to learning English, Adolph enrolled in 1905 at the City College of New York, graduating in 1909 with a BS degree and an award for proficiency in German.²¹ He then attended the renowned Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York, where its acting president wrote about him in 1910 that, “The only scholarship that became available . . . was awarded, after consultation with the Faculty, to Coblenz, who as you know is very poor and is decidedly a very able student. He promised to be regular in his attendance and industrious in his work.”²²

Adolph received a rabbinic degree from JTS in 1912 and, after serving briefly as spiritual director at the Manhattan YMHA, accepted appointment, at the age of 26, as rabbi of Congregation Adath Yeshurun in Syracuse.²³ He evidently benefited from the recommendation and support of his JTS classmate Eugene Kohn, whose older brother Jacob had recently left Adath Yeshurun to become rabbi at Congregation Anshe Chesed in Manhattan. In 1920, when Adolph announced his departure from Adath Yeshurun, the *Syracuse Journal* described him as “one of the foremost lecturers and public speakers in the city” and praised his tenure with the congregation:

During his six years’ service in Syracuse the rabbi has achieved prominence as an orator and has been in great demand at public gatherings. Proficient in five languages, his wide reading made him a brilliant conversationalist and pulpit orator. . . . Doctor Coblenz is one of the foremost Zionists of the present day . . . and represents Syracuse in the Zionist Congress established several years ago.²⁴

In 1920 Adolph accepted appointment as rabbi of the prominent Congregation Chizuk Amuno in Baltimore, “one of the wealthiest and most influential of the Orthodox congregations of the South,” where he served for the rest of his life.²⁵ He had received, among other things, a 1919 recommendation letter from the JTS registrar stating that, “I have known Rabbi Coblenz throughout his student days in the Seminary and have found him not only an excellent scholar in Jewish subjects, but also well equipped in general culture. I consider him one of the best orators that the Seminary has graduated.”²⁶ Just three months after his arrival at Chizuk Amuno, a

member of the congregation wrote that, “Rabbi Coblenz is doing very well and stirring up the dry bones of our congregation. It is livelier than I have ever known it.”²⁷ Interestingly, in receiving the new appointment Adolph evidently again benefited from the support of his JTS classmate, Eugene Kohn, who had recently left Chizuk Amuno after six years as rabbi there.

A recent history of the congregation summarizes his career: “Adolph Coblenz would spend the next twenty-eight years as the spiritual leader of Chizuk Amuno Congregation, guiding them through the relocation of their synagogue, massive internal growth, the horrors of the Shoah, and dramatic ritual changes.”²⁸ He was the first rabbi in the 44-year history of the congregation who was not only foreign-born but also of non-German ancestry (although his youth spent in Germany had equipped him both linguistically and culturally). During his rabbinate the congregation grew from a membership of one hundred families to more than one thousand.²⁹

Adolph, who considered himself Orthodox, was closely associated with and often led and represented the United Synagogue of America, founded in 1913, whose orientation was traditionalist and whose purpose was to acclaim “loyalty to the Torah, to promote observance of Shabbat and Jewish dietary laws, to preserve Israel’s past and promote its restoration, to maintain traditional Jewish prayer in Hebrew, to promote traditional Judaism in the home, and to encourage the establishment of Jewish religious schools whose instruction includes the study of the Hebrew language and its literature as a bond that unites Jewish people worldwide.” Today called the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, it is the major congregational organization of Conservative Judaism in North America and the largest Conservative Jewish communal body in the world.³⁰

Chizuk Amuno was one of the founding congregations of the United Synagogue, but it continued to describe itself as Orthodox until 1947. In that year it was one of just four congregations, out of a total membership of three hundred seventy six, that still retained the mehitzah, a screen separating men and women during services.³¹ In 1948 it attracted national attention when, with the counsel of Professor Louis Ginzberg of JTS and with Adolph’s concurrence, it adopted “family seating” and announced that it was henceforth to be considered Conservative. Soon the congregation also had a mixed choir, and in 1952 bat mitzvahs for girls were approved.³²

Adolph was always a firm advocate for girls and women in the congregation. With his strong support, girls’ confirmation classes were initiated in 1930, and he repeatedly supported inclusion of women in the congregation’s governance.³³ An early address on the women’s suffrage movement, given soon after his graduation from rabbinic school, displays the breadth of his views:

The position of women in civilization may be considered the barometric index of the development and maturity of that stage of civilization. . . . The case of the daughters of Zelophehad is the first instance on record of women struggling for their rights in the face of prevalent conditions. They were the first suffragettes, and God was on their side. . . . The very soul and logic [of Judaism] would be defeated if the free personality of woman remained restricted and shackled in the exercise of its rights because of the biological accident of sex. The free human personality has no sex, even as it has no birth certificate and no purse. Woman suffrage is an intimate part of one great world movement away from artificial,

mechanical, accidental aristocracies of noble birth and high finance toward the great, eternal, worthy, inward, and inevitable aristocracy of personality. . . . God is on our side even as on the side of the daughters of Zelophehad.³⁴

Adolph was an enthusiastic organizer and public speaker, with a wide range of interests from history and culture to philosophy, and he clearly enjoyed making traditional Judaism accessible and attractive to the widest audience possible. Newspaper archives currently available on line list hundreds of his public speaking engagements, and he was especially active as an advocate for Zionism, traveling internationally to represent various organizations and attend major conferences, and serving from 1940 to 1945 as president of the Baltimore Zionist District. In 1926 he spoke from his heart about Zion:

A great revolution is taking place among the Jewish people today—a change of country, of language, of outlook, and of creation—and all this change has been brought about by the desire and hope of a Jewish homeland, and the work of the Zionist movement is to fulfill this great desire. It is a providential dispensation that the Holy Land remained for 2,000 years untraceable to its inhabitants until by neglect and misrule the land ‘flowing with milk and honey’ was allowed to deteriorate into a desert. It is only with the coming of Israel to Zion that the touch of Jewish labor and Jewish love, like the wand of a magician, has stirred the land into a new burst of life and beauty, thereby realizing the visions of the prophets, ‘the desert and dry places shall rejoice, and the wilderness shall be glad and blossom forth like the rose.’ Palestine is today radiant with the bloom of a multitude of Jewish settlements and colonies.

The conscience of humanity made a glorious revelation before the tribunal of world history when it proclaimed the famous Balfour declaration, which aims at the rehabilitation of the Jewish people in the Jewish land. It was a supreme moment and a holy moment in world history when the conscience of civilization spoke out clear and strong above the din of war and bloodshed. It was the salvaging of the soul of man. Israel must not and shall not fail to respond to this challenge of the conscience of mankind. . . . If you want Judaism, make sure of Judaism in Palestine, for good Judaism in Palestine means good Judaism in America and the rest of the world.³⁵

And he gave an early and explicit warning about the future to an audience in Washington D.C. in December 1942:

There is too much silence, too much ignoring of the tragedy befalling us before the beasts of Germany. Five million people are dying on the block, and they don’t know why the response throughout the world is so cold, so silent. Not only Jews are failing in this duty: the honor of the conscience of civilization is at stake. We must unite and go before the tribunal of justice for the world united when the war is won.³⁶

Adolph never married and lived simply in a rented room or small apartment near his congregation. “He lived alone, among his books, which were his only hobby. . . . Never was he

austere, he was ever friendly and considerate of others. It was said of him frequently that his pocketbook was forever empty since he gave financial aid to those needing help, never considering denominational lines.”³⁷ His only significant expense appears to have been an annual trip to Europe every summer from 1924 through 1938, which was both for tourism and to address conferences and meetings of Jewish organizations. On at least one of his European sojourns he toured Palestine, where he evidently purchased a plot of land that eventually reverted to the State of Israel after his death, as he left no will or descendants.³⁸

He annually visited his sister, Minnie Coblenz Levine, in New York City to enjoy his extended family and devote a few days to theater and cultural events while he was there. After a performance of “Death of a Salesman,” he returned to his favorite hotel, the New Yorker, where he died in the early morning of October 28, 1949, with a doctor and nurse in attendance.³⁹

Adolph’s funeral was held at Chizuk Amuno on the afternoon of October 30, 1949, with more than 1,500 in attendance. Among the honorary pallbearers were Maryland Governor William Lane and Baltimore Mayor Thomas D’Alessandro (father of future House Speaker Nancy Pelosi) as well as other local dignitaries.⁴⁰ Rabbi Israel Goldman, who had succeeded Adolph upon his retirement in 1948, presented the eulogy:

People began to call him a man of intellect, which he was, for he possessed a profound and well-stocked mind. People began to refer to him as a scholar, which he was, steeped in learning; as a philosopher, which he was, for his mind delved into the higher realms of human thought. People spoke of him as a poet, which he was, for he had great gifts of literary expression. People thought of him as a linguist, which he was, because he mastered ancient and modern languages. People thought him a brilliant conversationalist, which he was, because people young and old delighted to sit and chat with him and enjoy the treasures of his brilliant mind and jolly wit.⁴¹

In the following year the congregation commissioned the creation in Carrara, Italy, of a marble memorial pulpit, which was installed in the sanctuary in November 1950. Adolph’s personal library of over three thousand volumes was donated to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, where it became the basis of the Rabbi Coblenz Library of the seminary student center.⁴²

Engraved on Adolph’s stately marble gravestone at the congregation’s Arlington Chizuk Amuno Cemetery in Baltimore is this spare and striking epitaph:

Adolph Coblenz
1887-1949
Rabbi Chizuk Amuno Congregation
1920-1949
Servant of God
Lover of Israel
Teacher of Torah

Descendants of Philip Koblenz (1835-1914)

1 Philip Koblenz b: October 20, 1835 in Lithuania, Russian Empire d: May 10, 1914 in Brooklyn, New York

+Frume Hinda Aaron b: Abt. 1836 in Lithuania, Russian Empire m: Abt. 1857 in Lithuania, Russian Empire d: January 20, 1913 in Brooklyn, New York

2 Sigmund Coblenz b: April 15, 1858 in Riga, Latvia, Russian Empire d: October 13, 1923 in Bronx, New York

+Fannie Altman b: Abt. 1860 in Lithuania, Russian Empire m: Abt. 1885 in Lithuania, Russian Empire d: Bet. 1899 & 1903 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany

3 Adolph Coblenz b: January 9, 1887 in Ponevez [Panevezys], Lithuania, Russian Empire d: October 28, 1949 in New York, New York

3 Erich Coblenz b: Abt. 1890 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany d: Bet. 1903 & 1909 in (New York)

3 Minnie Coblenz b: February 21, 1896 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany d: April 14, 1965 in New Rochelle, Westchester County, New York

+Louis B. Levine b: Abt. 1888 in Russian Empire m: Abt. 1917 in (New York) d: 1960 in New York

3 William Altman Coblenz b: January 8, 1897 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany d: November 11, 1972 in Massachusetts

+Constance Grady b: Abt. 1910 in Boston, Massachusetts m: February 8, 1943 in Norfolk, Virginia d: June 1973 in Washington, D.C.

3 David Coblenz b: December 28, 1898 in Frankfurt am Main, Germany d: March 25, 1969 in Lyons, New Jersey

*2nd Wife of Sigmund Coblenz:

+Esther Lieberschitz b: Abt. 1870 in Russian Empire m: June 25, 1918 in Hartford, Connecticut d: Bet. 1918 & 1923

2 Mendel Koblenz b: October 1871 in Lithuania, Russian Empire d: April 27, 1950 in Paterson, Passaic County, New Jersey,

+Yetta Tompken b: May 1876 in Russian Empire m: Abt. 1900 in New York or New Jersey

3 George Koblenz b: June 20, 1902 in New York d: May 1968 in Union, New Jersey

3 Sophia Koblenz b: Abt. 1903 in New York

3 Rose Koblenz b: Abt. 1904 in New York

+Jack Margolis b: Abt. 1896 in New York

- 3 Harry Koblenz b: Abt. 1905 in New Jersey
- 3 Jacob (Randolph) Coblenz b: April 13, 1905 in New Jersey d: July 1983 in Cook County, Illinois
- +Lillian Swan b: December 12, 1906 in Toledo, Ohio m: October 5, 1925 in Detroit, Wayne County, Michigan d: March 29, 1979 in Fort Walton Beach, Okaloosa County, Florida
- 3 Abe Koblenz b: Abt. 1912 in New Jersey
- 2 Sarah Koblenz b: May 1874 in Lithuania, Russian Empire d: Aft. 1950 in (Passaic, New Jersey)
- +Max Schurr b: March 1869 in Russian Empire m: Abt. 1891 in (New York) d: Bef. 1950 in (Passaic, New Jersey)
- 2 Bernard Koblenz b: April 1876 in Lithuania, Russian Empire d: November 1, 1951 in Bronx, New York
- +Dorothy Appel b: Abt. 1876 in Neisantz [Nowy Sacz], Galicia [Poland], Austro-Hungarian Empire m: Abt. 1894 in New York, New York d: January 2, 1950 in Bronx, New York
- 3 Augusta Koblenz b: April 21, 1895 in Manhattan, New York d: September 20, 1995 in Delray Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida
- +Harry Aaron Golden b: February 2, 1897 in Minsk, Belarus, Russian Empire m: February 15, 1920 in Bronx, New York d: January 1983 in Beverly Hills, Citrus County, Florida
- 3 William Koblenz b: November 22, 1896 in Manhattan, New York d: February 2, 1961 in Bronx, New York
- +Cora Elizabeth Hall b: December 2, 1898 in Lynn, Massachusetts m: November 30, 1922 in New York, New York d: June 28, 1978 in Manhattan, New York
- 3 David Koblenz b: March 6, 1898 in Manhattan, New York d: July 24, 1970 in Bronx, New York
- +Rose Schmidt b: Abt. 1891 in Canada m: September 7, 1926 in Manhattan, New York d: September 1, 1961 in Bronx, New York
- 3 Ethel Koblenz b: Abt. 1902 in Nyack, Rockland County, New York d: Aft. February 1997
- +Leonard Edward William Lau b: December 29, 1905 in Klemme, Hancock County, Iowa m: May 1, 1934 in Mason City, Iowa d: October 24, 1989 in San Diego, California
- 3 Esther Koblenz b: September 2, 1904 in Manhattan, New York d: January 30, 1997 in Aventura, Miami-Dade County, Florida

+Irving A. Rudder b: Abt. 1907 in New York m: June 6, 1929 in New York, New York d: September 18, 1960 in New Jersey

3 Rose Koblenz b: August 2, 1906 in Port Chester, Westchester County, New York d: June 11, 2011 in New Rochelle, Westchester County, New York

+Morris A. Goldberg b: July 15, 1905 in New York, New York m: April 11, 1937 in Manhattan, New York d: July 16, 1997 in New Rochelle, Westchester County, New York

3 Herbert Koblenz b: December 20, 1909 in Bridgeport, Connecticut d: February 15, 2008 in Brooklyn, New York

+Frances Zuckerman b: Abt. 1907 in New York m: April 4, 1936 in New York, New York d: January 22, 1950 in Brooklyn, New York

*2nd Wife of Herbert Koblenz:

+Rose Robbie m: January 7, 1951 in Brooklyn, New York

2 Anna Koblenz b: April 1879 in Lithuania, Russian Empire d: Aft. 1900

Notes

¹ The single source of their names is the civil death record of their son Philip, dated 10 May 1914, in Brooklyn. An image of the certificate is available from the New York City Office of Records and Information Services.

² See section “Litvak” in *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*
<<https://yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/litvak>>

³ Freedman, Chaim, “Rabbinical Genealogy,” *Avotaynu Guide to Jewish Genealogy* (Bergenfield NJ, 2004), pages 77-89.

⁴ See his civil death record, dated 10 May 1914, in Brooklyn. An image of the certificate is available from the New York City Office of Records and Information Services.

⁵ The source of her full name, Frume Hinda Aaron, and parentage is her civil death certificate, dated 20 January 1913, in Brooklyn. The given names of Frume’s father were יהודה ליב דוד הכהן: “Yehuda Leib David, the Kohen [priest],” as recorded on Frume’s 1913 cemetery headstone. His surname was not given, as was customary. Frume’s son Sigmund was likely the informant for the headstone, since the same name appears on the second page of his 1915 book, on which he describes his ancestry. The surname Aaron was recorded on Frume’s 1913 civil death certificate, for which her husband Philip was likely the informant, and then on Sigmund’s 1918 typescript civil marriage license, where it appears as “Baron,” a defective transcription of Aaron.

⁶ No passenger list has yet been found. But we know from several documents that Philip and three of the children came to America together in 1888 while his wife came separately later with one of their daughters, arriving in January 1890.

⁷ Known addresses: 80 Essex Street (1893-97), 27 Attorney Street (1899-1901), 305 Madison Street (1903-1905).

⁸ The cause of Philip’s death was bladder cancer. The cause of Frume’s death was stomach cancer. Images of both death certificates are available from the New York City Office of Records and Information Services.

⁹ Their 1900 U.S. census listing, repeated in 1910, reported that they had had ten children, only five of whom were still living.

¹⁰ See Sigmund’s 1909 petition for naturalization, available on line at Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org.

¹¹ Fannie Altman’s identity as Sigmund’s wife is provided by several documents, among them the marriage record of their son William Altman Coblenz, 9 February 1943 in Norfolk, Virginia. An image of the record is available on line at Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org.

¹² Images of their passenger lists, both departing Hamburg and arriving in New York, are available on line at Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org.

¹³ See the lively discussion about Sigmund at the site of Kevarim of Tzadikim of North America:
<<https://kevarim.com/rabbi-yehuda-zundel-coblenz-koblentz/comment-page-1/>>.

¹⁴ The following extended discussion of Sigmund’s book is by Israel Mizrahi, Mizrahi Book Store, Brooklyn.
<<https://judaicaused.blogspot.com/2013/08/1915-rigshe-yehuda-by-rabbi-yehuda.html>>:

“Skimming through his prenumeranten (pre-subscriber) lists, I discovered some noted people who are listed, including Rabbi Meir Bar-Ilan, Max Reisin, J. D. Eisenstein, Rev. Tzvi Hirsch Masliansky, and J. L. Magnes, along with many other American rabbis of the time. Pretty diverse selection, including all streams of Judaism. In addition,

Ephraim Deinard, who in general hated nearly everyone who ever wrote anything, has nothing but praise to say about him in *Kohelet America* and wishes that the author produce more such works.

“His Sermons are filled with a wide knowledge of Talmud, Medrashim, and Tanach and show as well his great worldly knowledge. Socrates, Ptolemy, Freud, Schopenhauer, a Harvard professor, etc, all appear in his lectures. When demonstrating great rabbis of the day, he uses Krochmal, Shadal, and Rival as examples (page 25). One sermon in his book is in response to Police Commissioner Bingham's remark in 1909 that 50% of New York's criminals are Jews. Another lecture was given in 1914 on the visit to NY of Rabbi Meir Hildesheimer and Rabbi Ahron Walkin.

“His Drushim show a brilliant ability to adapt teachings of H"azal to modern day and age problems, including a brilliant analysis of the revulsion of Western Europeans to the masses of Jews converting to Christianity. An avid Zionist, he also was active in the fight against Reform Jewry, and his sermons are sprinkled with urges to prevent assimilation.”

¹⁵ The congregation was reportedly founded in a storefront in 1908, formally organized in 1914, and in about 1920 acquired the site of the First Norwegian and Danish Methodist Episcopal Church, at 1076 Kelly Street. By 1918 Sigmund had relocated his residence to 918 East 163rd Street in the Bronx to be near the congregation. By June 1923 he was living at 1076 Kelly Street as its rabbi (as recorded in his passport application of that date). The congregation disbanded in 1965, and the building that it constructed at 1078 Kelly Street, completed in 1926, is still standing and is today the premises of a Christian church. In about 1940 Sigmund's grandson, Arthur Levine (son of his daughter, Minnie Coblentz Levine), had his bar mitzvah at the Netzach Israel Jewish Center in honor of his grandfather.

¹⁶ Civil marriage license number 689, Hartford, Connecticut, dated 18 June 1918. Esther was born in about 1870 in the Russian Empire and was a daughter of Aaron Lieberschitz and Gitel Abramson. Her first husband was surnamed Silver, but his given names are not known, and no further information about her has been found. She was evidently deceased by October 1923, since Sigmund's civil death record lists him as a widower.

¹⁷ *Harlem and Bronx Journal*, 11 December 1922, page 1.

¹⁸ *Passaic Daily Herald*, 15 October 1923, page 2. Sigmund had been “seriously ill with a complication of diseases, and a month ago he suffered an attack of double pneumonia.” He died, at the Bronx Hospital, of a cerebral hemorrhage. Letters of administration filed by his children in 1924 reported that his total assets at death were less than five thousand dollars.

¹⁹ See Adolph's handwritten 1917 military draft registration card, on line at Ancestry.com and FamilySearch.org. He sometimes said that he was born a month earlier, and sometimes that he was born in Riga, but the handwritten military draft card information agrees with several other documents and appears to be the most carefully expressed and reliable. He entered the same information on his handwritten 1942 military draft registration card.

²⁰ See <<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samson-Raphael-Hirsch-Schule>>

²¹ *The Daily Standard Union*, Brooklyn, 24 June 1909, page 14. Adolph was not above lightly padding his resume when he was certain that it would not be verified. He often claimed that he had attended Columbia University (not CCNY) and that he had graduated “with honors in philosophy and literature,” which was not the case. The cited news article on the 1909 CCNY graduating class was very thorough in detailing awards granted, and Adolph was recognized only for proficiency in German (a language that he had spoken regularly, along with Yiddish, for the first sixteen years of his life).

²² Schein, Jan Bernhardt, *On Three Pillars: The History of Chizuk Amuno Congregation, 1871-1996* (Baltimore, 2000), page 140.

²³ *The Sun*, New York, 3 June 1912, page 14; *Syracuse Journal*, 7 August 1920, page 2.

²⁴ *Syracuse Journal*, 6 August 1920, page 2.

²⁵ *Syracuse Journal*, 12 November 1921, page 2. Adolph's initial annual salary was \$4,000, raised by 1930 to \$6,500, reduced in 1932 to \$5,000 because of the Depression, and raised again by 1945 to \$6,450. (Schein, *On Three Pillars*, pages 144, 170, and 202.)

²⁶ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, page 139.

²⁷ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, page 139.

²⁸ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, page 139.

²⁹ *The Sun*, Baltimore, 5 March 1948, page 32.

³⁰ See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Synagogue_of_Conservative_Judaism>

³¹ Golinkin, David, *The Responsa of Professor Louis Ginzberg* (New York-Jerusalem: JTSA, 1996), page 95, quoted in David Golinkin, "The participation of Jewish women in public rituals and Torah study 1845-2010," *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues*, issue 21, spring 2011.

³² See Schein, *On Three Pillars*, pages 209-212; and Elfenbein, Jessica, "Uptown and Traditional," in *Southern Jewish History—Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society*, volume 9 (2006), pages 85-86.

³³ See Schein, *On Three Pillars*, pages 169 and 180 ff.

³⁴ *Syracuse Journal*, 30 October 1915, page 18.

³⁵ *Daily Press*, Newport News, Virginia, 21 December 1926, page 12.

³⁶ *The Evening Star*, Washington DC, 14 December 1942, page 1.

³⁷ *The Sun*, Baltimore, 29 October 1949, page 5.

³⁸ Email correspondence, February 2014, between Robert Jackson and Fahn Kanne & Co. Grant Thornton Israel, "an accounting firm authorized by the Administrator General of Israel to search for heirs of any abandoned property in Israel, that is, property whose owner is unknown or cannot be located."

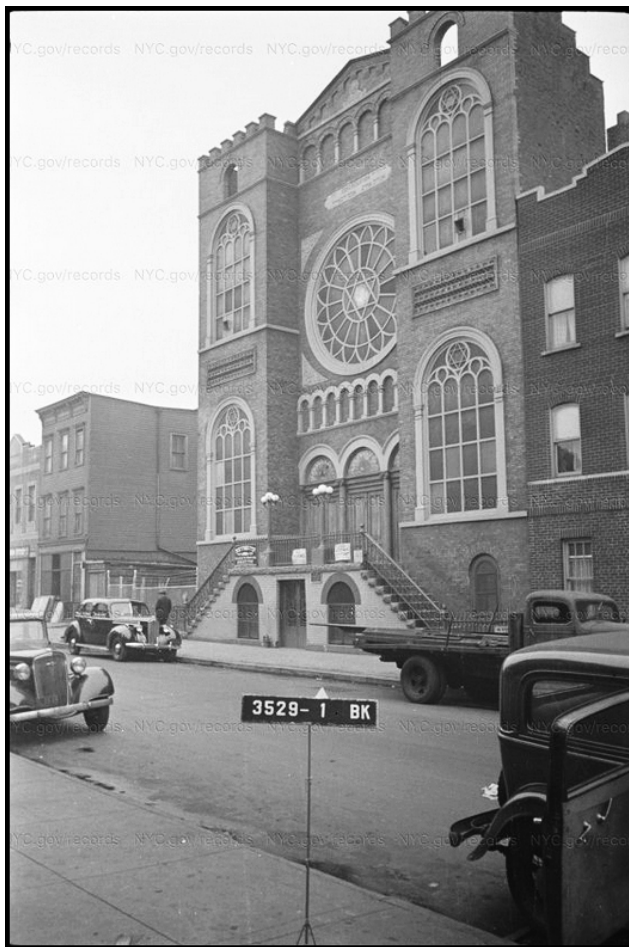
³⁹ *Evening Sun*, Baltimore, 28 October 1949, page 60; Schein, *On Three Pillars*, pages 192 and 203. Adolph had been increasingly ill and under a physician's care since 1939. By April 1947 his condition had worsened to the point that he could no longer fulfill his services, and he was elevated to Rabbi Emeritus at full salary. He suffered a heart attack in September 1947 and was hospitalized for several months. His death a year later was caused by another major coronary incident. Details have been added to the events surrounding his death based on an interview in 2014 with his nephew Arthur Levine/LeMay.

⁴⁰ *Baltimore Sun*, 31 October 1949, page 7.

⁴¹ Schein, *On Three Pillars*, page 141.

⁴² Schein, *On Three Pillars*, page 237.

Photos: Philip Koblenz (1835-1914)



**Agudath Achim Anshei Libowitz, 195 Watkins Street, Brownsville, Brooklyn
Philip's congregation from about 1906 to about 1913**



**Philip (Meshulam Feivel) Koblenz
1835-1914**



**Fannie (Frume Hilna) Aaron Koblenz
ca 1836-1913**

Bayside Cemetery, 80-35 Pitkin Avenue, Queens, New York

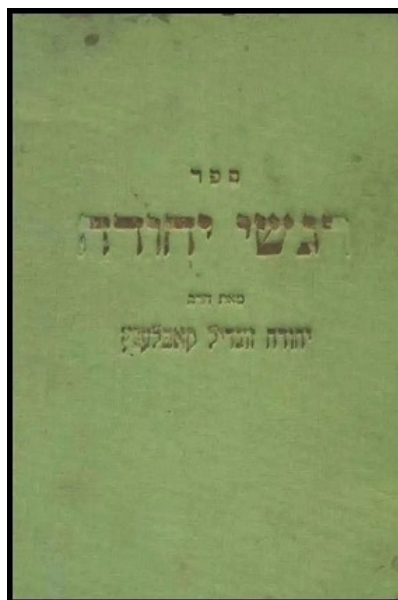
Photos: Sigmund Coblenz (1858-1923)



Netzach Israel Jewish Center, 1078 Kelly Street, Bronx
Sigmund served here as rabbi from about 1916 to 1923



Sigmund (Yehuda Zundel) Coblenz
in 1923



"Rigshe Yehuda"
Published in 1915

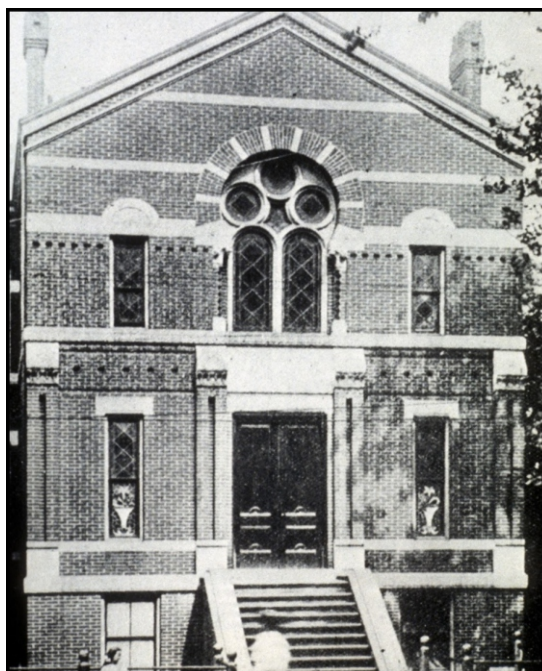


Sigmund's Headstone
Mount Zion Cemetery, Queens

Photos: Adolph Coblenz (1887-1949)



**Adolph (Avraham) Coblenz
in about 1917**



**Adath Yeshurun, 75 Mulberry Street, Syracuse
Adolph's first congregation, 1913-1920**



**Chizuk Amuno, 2501 Eutaw Place, Baltimore
Adolph's congregation from 1920 to 1948**

Photos: Adolph Coblentz (1887-1949)



Confirmation Class at Chizuk Amuno in 1945

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Passover at Chizuk Amuno in 1947

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Photos: Adolph Coblenz (1887-1949)



Adolph (Avraham) Coblenz
1887-1949
Gravestone, Arlington Cemetery, Baltimore