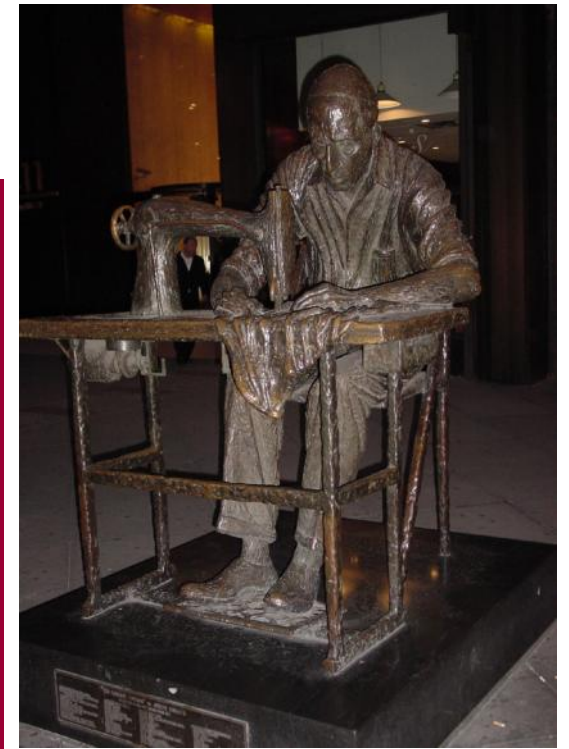


Needle Trades

Whether they worked in a tenement shop or a loft factory, for a day or a decade, almost every generation of immigrants to the Lower East Side has been touched by the garment industry. For workers and entrepreneur bosses alike, work in the needle trades was — and continues to be — a fundamental part of the experience of immigrating to America. Newcomers arriving with little English, few job skills, and limited connections turned to the needle trades to find a first foothold in their new country. By the turn of the 20th century, the Lower East Side had emerged as both the center of the nation's garment production, and the center of its immigrant life. Each generation since then has transformed the industry, which has changed from independent tailors to industrialized factories to global corporations. But just as immigrants across the years have shared the challenges of settling in a new home and navigating a new language and a new culture, they also have in common the memories of long hours hunched over sewing machines, the hiss and heat of pressing irons, the sometimes desperate scramble for profits, and the constant goal of making a better life.

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Statue near Times Square, New York City honoring needle trade operators

Samuel and Dora Smuckler (Smukler) arrived in America in 1910.¹ As young Russian Jewish immigrants they arrived in America seeking a better life for themselves and for their future family. Married at 21 and 17 in the old country, Samuel now 23 and Dora being just 19 and expecting their first child, Beatrice, arrived in America sometime before Bea's birth, June 26, 1910. Family tradition has them arriving in Boston, MA and settling nearby in Malden. Ship records verifying that arrival have not been found. Samuel was born in Russia, March 15, 1886⁴ and Dora born in Odessa, Russia October 15, 1890². Their mother tongue was Yiddish¹ but according to Beatrice, Dora was fluent in several languages. Dora's parents were Baruch Boura and Sarah Gaspris.² Samuel's parentage is not known but the 1920 Federal Census indicates that both their parents were born in Russia.²

According to Dora's social security application her maiden name was Boura and her mother's maiden name was Gaspris. The surname Boura and Gaspris are both unusual surnames. Google searches came up with few references. Daughter Beatrice claimed that the family originated in France. Some information was found indicating that the surname Boura originated in eastern Europe with some migrating to eastern France. Nothing was found to verify the origin of either surname.

Their four children Beatrice, Anne, Sarah and Michael were all born in Massachusetts between 1910 and 1915.¹

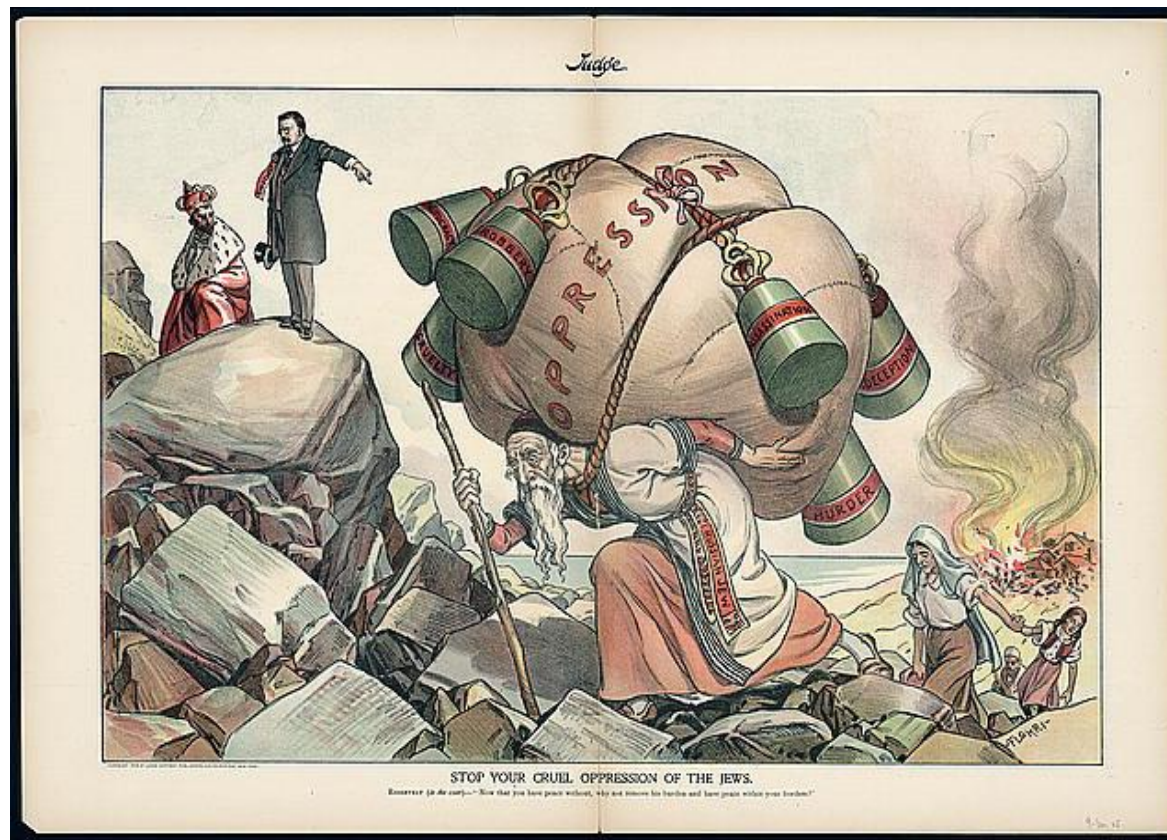
By 1920 Samuel, Dora and their family had moved and now resided on East 12th Street, Manhattan, New York, New York.¹ This area, which is known as the 'Lower East Side' was and is a popular destination for newly arrived immigrants. Both Samuel and Dora were employed in what is known as the needle trades. They were employed in the 'cloaks' industry.¹ He was an 'operator' and she was a 'finisher'.¹ 1943 finds Dora working for Sherman Bows, 1200 Broadway, New York, New York.²

Sometime after the Federal Census of 1920 Samuel and Dora were no longer a couple. The 1930 Federal Census lists Dora as a widow. Family oral history is that Samuel was killed in a train accident but that is not proven. Whatever happened; times were difficult for Dora and the children. Sometime later she married Frank Boomer. The exact year is not known. One of Frank's daughters became a best friend of Bea.

Samuel & Dora Boura Smuckler

Parents of Beatrice, Anne, Sarah, and Michael

Russian Jewish Immigrants



Editorial cartoon calling for the liberation of Jews in Russia, 1904

*In America we shall
find rest; the stars and
stripes will wave over
the true home of our
people. To America,
brethren! To America!*

Just as ethnic Russians and Poles were finding their way to American shores, one of the most dramatic chapters in world history was underway—the mass migration of Eastern European Jews to the United States. In a few short decades, from 1880 to 1920, a vast number of the Jewish people living in the lands ruled by Russia—including Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine, as well as neighboring regions—moved en masse to the U.S. In so doing, they left a centuries-old legacy behind, and changed the culture of the United States profoundly.

Jewish communities had played a vital role in the culture of Eastern Europe for centuries, but in the 19th century they were in danger of annihilation. Of all the ethnic and national groups that lived under the rule of the Russian *czars*, the Eastern European Jews had long been the most isolated and endured the harshest treatment. Separated from other residents of the Empire by barriers of language and of faith, as well as by an array of brutally oppressive laws, most never considered themselves Russians. Eastern

European Jews were socially and physically segregated, locked into urban ghettos or restricted to small villages called *shtetls*, barred from almost all means of making a living, and subject to random attacks by non-Jewish neighbors or imperial officials.

In the 1880s, however, the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe were overwhelmed by a wave of state-sponsored murder and destruction. When the *czar* was assassinated in 1881, the crime was blamed, falsely, on a Jewish conspiracy, and the government launched a wave of state-sponsored massacres known as pogroms. Hundreds of Jewish villages and neighborhoods were burned by rampaging mobs, and thousands of Jews were slaughtered by Russian soldiers and peasants. The pogroms caused an international outcry, but they would continue to break out for decades to come.

For tens of thousands of the Empire's Jewish residents, who were already struggling to survive famines and land shortages, this represented the



In this Rosh Hashanah greeting card from the early 1900s, Russian Jews, packs in hand, gaze at the American relatives beckoning them to the United States. Over two million Jews would flee the pogroms of the Russian Empire to the safety of the US from 1881-1924.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_the_United_States

Still, no one was prepared for the tremendous influx of Jewish immigrants that arrived from Eastern Europe. The social welfare institutions of the German Jewish community, accustomed to dealing with much smaller numbers, struggled to cope with the thousands of needy cases that stepped ashore from Ellis Island each year. Many established Jewish Americans were several generations away from their own immigrant roots and were sometimes shocked by the threadbare, provincial figures who appeared on their doorsteps. The Eastern European immigrants quickly established many of their own support structures, coming together to form aid societies based on the burial societies and congregations of their home villages. Soon, new arrivals had somewhere to turn for advice, modest financial assistance, and aid in finding someplace to settle down.

Unlike every other immigrant group, however, the Jewish immigrants of Eastern Europe overwhelmingly chose to remain in New York City. The close ties of *shtetl* life led many immigrants to stay close to neighbors from their old villages. For many others, the strict religious practices of Orthodox Judaism required that they live near an existing Jewish community. Around the turn of the century, nearly one-half of the Jewish population of the United States lived in New York City. There, they would create a world unlike any other in the annals of American immigration.¹

¹<http://memory.loc.gov/learn/features/immig/alt/polish5.html>

breaking point. In an article for *The Atlantic*, the journalist Abraham Cahan described a meeting of the Jewish community of Kiev, during which one speaker proclaimed:

There is no hope for Israel in Russia. The salvation of the downtrodden people lies in other parts, in a land beyond the seas, which knows no distinction of race or faith, which is a mother to Jew and Gentile alike. In the great republic is our redemption from the brutalities and ignominies to which we are subjected in this our birthplace. In America we shall find rest; the stars and stripes will wave over the true home of our people. To America, brethren! To America!

The cry “To America!” spread across Eastern Europe and launched a massive human migration. Jewish immigrants came to the United States by any possible means, defying the *czar*’s laws against emigration. Many fled by night, eluding Russian border guards and murderous highway gangs and bribing officials to allow them passage to Western Europe. From there, they endured a weeklong ocean voyage, generally crammed into stifling steerage compartments with little access to kosher food.

In the 1880s, more than 200,000 Eastern European Jews arrived in the U.S. In the next decade, the number was over 300,000, and between 1900 and 1914 it topped 1.5 million, most passing through the new immigrant processing center at Ellis Island. All in all, between 1880 and 1924, when the U.S. Congress cut immigration back severely, it is estimated that as many as 3 million Eastern European Jews came to the U.S.

On their arrival, they found themselves in the midst of a tremendous wave of new immigrants from all over Europe and Asia. The Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe, however, were different in two crucial ways. First, they fled the old country at an astonishing rate; by 1920 more than one-third of the Jewish population of the Russian Empire had emigrated. Perhaps more important, their rate of return migration was close to zero—lower than any other major immigrant group. Many of the other immigrants of the turn of the 20th century came to the U.S. as sojourners, planning to stay for a while, earn a nest egg, and return to their ancestral homeland. The Jews of Eastern Europe had no such intentions; they had abandoned the Old World once and for all. The United States was to become their new homeland.

Jewish immigration had been a part of U.S. history since its earliest years. The first Jewish congregation in North America was formed in 1654, and Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal arrived throughout the colonial period. Since the early 19th century, Jewish immigrants from Germany had built a substantial presence up and down the Eastern Seaboard.

