

Captain Joseph Freschl: An Immigrant's Story

By Judith Berlowitz

(Some passages are drawn from the article, "A Sock in the Foot is Worth Two in the Jaw: The Freschl Family: Rags to Roots," Published in *Roots-Key, Newsletter of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles*, Summer/Fall 2005.)

The Bohemian Background

*The Habsburg-era order of 1726 "Familianten Gesetz" attempted to limit the number of Jewish families in Bohemia to 8,541, by allowing only the first-born son of each family to marry.ⁱ At about the same time, Jews were forced to assume German surnames. The "first" Freschl born in Mořina (Gross-Morschin or Gross-Morzin), was my great-great-great-great grandfather Sender Zodek, son of Zodek Belle - in this case a matronymic (Zodek, "son of Belle"). Sender took the name Alexander (Talmudic tradition held that Jews born during the time of Alexander the Great be named for him, after he reportedly bowed to the High Priest of Jerusalem; the tradition extended to surnames)ⁱⁱ and, for a reason yet unknown to me, the German surname, "Froeschl," meaning "little frog." His 1785 marriage to Chelle (Anna) Ginzburg is registered in the Familianten book issued at Dominium Koenigsaal - Zbraslav, Czech Republic.ⁱⁱⁱ In the birth record of his first son, Jonas (Jacob), his occupation is listed as Merchant (Handelsmann). Between 1785 and 1805, Alexander and Chelle had eight children. As Alexander's second-born son, my great-great-great grandfather Abraham would not have been entitled to marry. But there was an escape clause in the Familianten rules: one could purchase the coveted license from someone who was not using it, and Abraham bought his, License #28797, from a Mr. Jakob Hermann Pick in Mořina, on June 9, 1815. One month later, he married Rosalia Fischl of Mořina, and they moved, shortly thereafter, to Řevnice, located on the Berounka River about a mile away. With the children of Abraham and Rosalia, **the flight to America began.***

The Freschls were selling clothes out of their homes in Bohemian villages in the early 1800s. The family was German-speaking, although the inscriptions on the Freschl tombstones located in the Czech Republic are in Hebrew. Abraham and Rosalia gave all their children European names, in the fashion of the time. The firstborn son, Philip, my great-great grandfather, benefited from the Familianten laws, and in 1841 married Karoline (Caroline) Lederer, also of Řevnice. Philip and Caroline remained in Řevnice for about thirty years, and their seven children were born there.

The Freschls in America

The Familianten order was finally rescinded in 1848, around the time that Abraham and Rosalia's second-born son, Josef (called "Pepi") left for America. Since the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, Jews were restricted in where they could live, what professions they could practice, whom they could marry, and what they could own. So Josef (now called "Joseph") immigrated to the U.S. and settled first in Lowell, Massachusetts, home of the burgeoning textile industry. Located between the Merrimack and Concord rivers and dubbed the "Venice of America," Lowell attracted many immigrant workers, most of them women. Among them was a young Canadian woman,

Elizabeth Bragg, whom Joseph married in 1850, in Derby, Vermont, on the Canadian border.^{iv} He was thus perhaps the first one in the family to marry outside the faith. Joseph and Elizabeth **relocated to Manchester, New Hampshire**, which became the U.S. textile capital after the Civil War. Joseph became a wool-sorter and ran a small store.^v Their first child, Mary Elizabeth, was born in Manchester in 1851^{vi} or 1852.^{vii} Their son, Albert Carroll, was born in 1857.^{viii}

Joseph's Military Career

With the outbreak of the Civil War, Joseph, having received early military training before emigrating from Bohemia,^{ix} was mustered into the U.S. Service on December 14, 1861, as Captain of Company "I," 7th New Hampshire Volunteers, to serve three years. Joseph sustained no actual war-wounds, but before his enlistment period was over, he contracted illnesses which were to destroy his health and involve him in battles over his pension for the rest of his life. During the battle of the confederate stronghold, Fort Wagner,^x on Morris Island, South Carolina, Joseph and his company spent two weeks in a "bomb-proof" (shelter) flooded with two feet of water. This exposure, Joseph believed, caused him to feel "an exceedingly severe pain in my spine in the small of my back." The Assistant Surgeon of the regiment, Moses S. Wilson, administered "a monstrous dose of calomel," a drug otherwise known as mercurous chloride, which has potentially toxic side-effects.^{xi} Now experiencing leg pain, in addition to back pain, Joseph requested a leave of absence the following month and returned home, where, under a doctor's care (for the first time in his life, as he later states), he recovered somewhat and returned to his regiment two months later. His symptoms returned, with the addition of chills and fever, for which he received quinine (he was later diagnosed with malarial poisoning). When doctors told him he would not recover in hospital, Joseph resigned his commission at Bermuda Hundred, Virginia, on July 7, 1864. His pension payments of \$10 per month began in December, 1866.

Around this time, his nephew Karl (Carl), Philip's eldest son (and my great-grandfather), came to America, to help his uncle. He lived in the household and worked as a clerk in Joseph's clothing store and helped Joseph in the wool business.^{xii} Ten years later, even though Joseph was still suffering from crippling symptoms, he was dropped from the pension rolls. The following year, 1877, Carroll died at 19. The remaining years of Joseph's life were spent fighting to collect arrears from the time his pension was stopped, as he was accused of falsifying his disability, and he in turn accused his attorneys of forging his signature on receipts. Joseph died on January 25, 1890. According to his obituary, Joseph was a member of Lafayette Lodge of Masons, the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic), a past commander of the War Veterans and past president of the Seventh Regiment Association. He died in 1890 and was buried with full military honors in the Piscataquog Cemetery in Manchester, New Hampshire.^{xiii}

Joseph's Descendants

Joseph and Elizabeth's daughter, Mary Elizabeth, married William A. Truesdale of New Hampshire, son of John Truesdale of England and Harriet Truesdale, of Canada,¹ around 1863. William was a clerk in a store, perhaps the Freschl clothing store. William and Mary had five children, Harry, Bertie, Albert, Edward Richardson, and Genevieve R.

¹ 1880 US Census

Truesdale. Genevieve married A. Franklin Scribner of Canada and they had two children, one of whom was Ruth Scribner Skryzowski, who died around 2004.

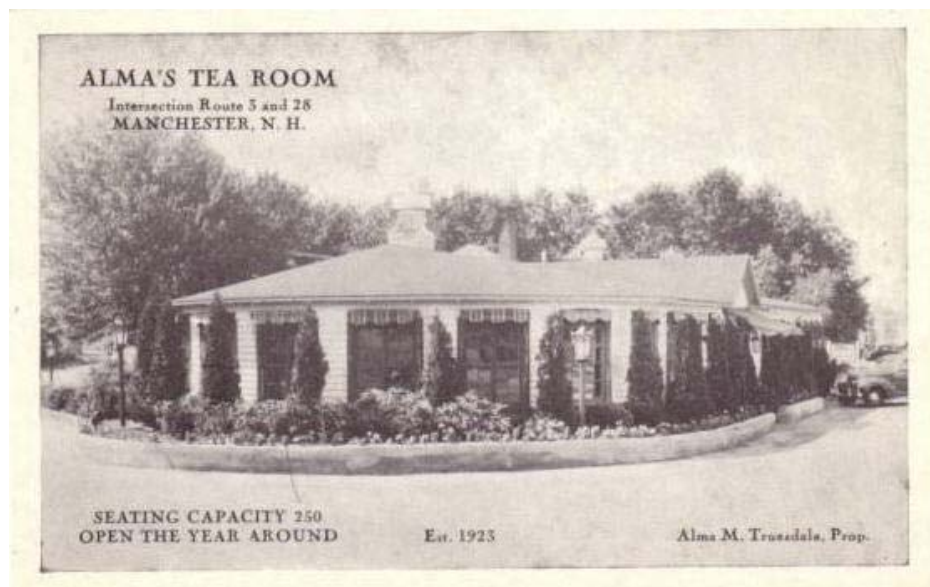
Edward Richardson married **Alma Cavagnaro**, born in Massachusetts of Italian parents,² around 1899. Alma was an enterprising woman and went into business with Edward, dipping chocolates and making ribbon candy on the large marble table in the cellar of their home, according to Alma's daughter-in-law, Hope Thomas Truesdale. Edward and Alma bought land in the northeast part of Manchester, where they built **Alma's Tea Room**, located on the Intersection of Routes 5 and 28, in 1923. The charming Tea Room "became well-known throughout New England, [not only] for its delicious homemade food but also for the cleanliness and attractive atmosphere. They were noted for [their] orange rolls, pecan rolls, homemade pies and cakes. They hired many women during the depression years. [Alma] sold the restaurant in the early or mid 50's... They bought land on North Union St. soon after and built a charming brick home."³

Edward and Alma had three children, Edwina, Albert Edward, and Frederick Joseph. Albert, born around 1917, married Hope Thomas. Albert was an Engineering Technician at Pease Air Force Base in New Hampshire, and died in Manchester in 1998. According to his obituary, kindly sent to me by Mrs. Hope Truesdale, Al was a veteran of World War II, taking part in the Italy and France-Germany campaigns, for which he received service stars. He was also a member of the Disabled American Veterans and the American Legion and was a charter member of the WWII Memorial. He was also a member of the Pawtuckaway Beekeepers Association.

I welcome correspondence from any remaining descendants of Joseph Freschl.

Judith Berlowitz

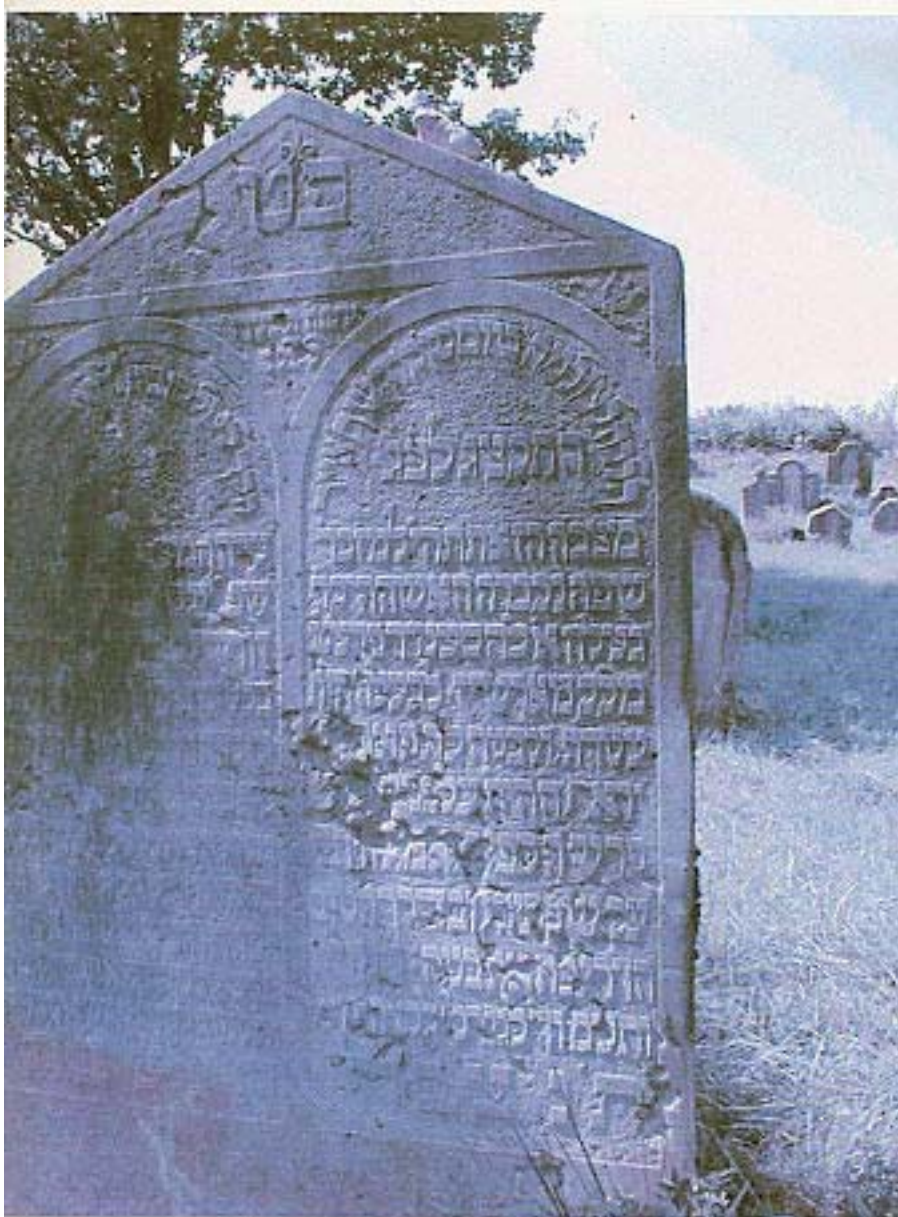
judigenie@yahoo.com



² 1920

³ Private correspondence, Hope Thomas Truesdale, June 14, 2005.

PHOTOGRAPHS



Alexander & Anna Freschl's tombstone



Joseph Freschl's tombstone



Elizabeth Bragg Freschl's tombstone

ⁱ See "Bohemian Familianten Town Index," <http://www.jewishgen.org/AustriaCzech/familianten.html>;
also the article in the Jewish Encyclopedia, "Familianten Gesetz,"
<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?artid=31&letter=F>

ⁱⁱ Rabbi Ken Spiro, Chanukah Basics, in
http://www.aish.com/chanukahbasics/chanukahbasicsdefault/Alexander_and_the_Jews.asp

ⁱⁱⁱ No. 1767. I am grateful to Julius Muller of the Jewish Family History Centre, <http://www.toledot.org/> for facilitating my use of the Czech Archives and for taking me to see the Freschl ancestral villages and cemeteries.

^{iv} ^{iv} Marriage information from certificate of marriage submitted by Elizabeth to support her claim for a widow's pension. Most of my information about Joseph and his family is based on his pension papers, which I obtained from the National Archives & Records Administration (NARA) at http://www.archives.gov/research_room/obtain_copies/veterans_service_records.html

^v Manchester was also called "Little Quebec," for the large number of Canadian immigrants working in the textile industry. See <http://www2.marianopolis.edu/quebechistory/pictures/textile2.htm>

^{vi} International Genealogical Index Individual Record, from www.FamilySearch.org

^{vii} In the 1880 US Census for Manchester, New Hampshire, Mary's year of birth is given as 1852.

^{viii} International Genealogical Index Individual Record, from www.FamilySearch.org

^{ix} According to the article, "Last Roll Call," *The Manchester Union*, January 27, 1890. I am grateful to Judith Aron, Senior Account Clerk of Cemeteries, Manchester, New Hampshire, for copies of Joseph's obituaries.

^x An estimated 339 US and 12 Confederate troops died in this battle, according to the Civil War Battlefield Guide, http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/civwar/html/cw_005202_fortwagnerim.htm. Other accounts place the Union casualty rate at 1,515, of whose numbers 256 were black soldiers from the 54th Massachusetts, according to the HistoryNet.com, <http://historynet.com/ah/blglory/index2.html>. This battle was featured in the 1989 film, "Glory."

^{xi} Encyclopedia.com, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/m1/mercurou.asp>

^{xii} 1870 US Census for Manchester, New Hampshire.

^{xiii} Articles, "Last Roll Call" and "Buried With Honors," *The Manchester Union*, January 27 and 29, 1890.