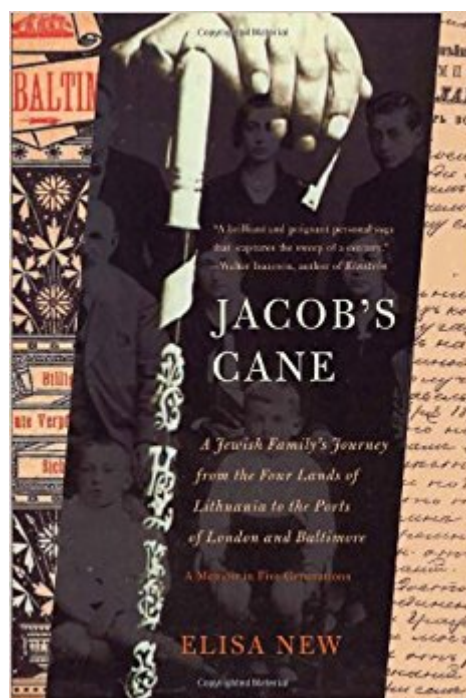




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Jacob's Cane: A Jewish Family's Journey From The Four Lands Of Lithuania To The Ports Of London And Baltimore; A Memoir In Five Generations



Synopsis

Drawn to an image of her great-grandfather's ornately carved cane, scholar Elisa New embarked on a journey to discover the origins of her precious family heirloom. Treading back across the paths of her ancestors, she travels from Baltimore to the Baltic to London in order to find and understand an immigrant world profoundly affected by modern German culture, from the Enlightenment through the Holocaust. Deeply ambitious in its narrative sweep, Jacob's Cane captures the rich texture of life on several continents as New's family searches to establish itself in the tobacco trade. A fascinating history of one family's story of progress, innovation, and struggle, Jacob's Cane will change the way we think about the Jewish American experience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Harvard English professor New (*The Line's Eye*) is the wife of former Harvard president and current Obama adviser Larry Summers. She traces the journeys of two family patriarchs from Eastern Europe as she unravels the mysterious etchings on her great-grandfather's elegant cane. Great-grandfather Jacob Levy and great-great-uncle Bernhard Baron, both Jewish immigrants from the Baltic states, met in Baltimore, become friends and joined their families through marriage, but later became bitter rivals. Bernhard moved to London, where he became a tobacco magnate and legendary philanthropist who implemented a progressive set of workers' benefits. His Black Cat London factory is hailed today as a great art deco achievement. Jacob was a scholar, inventor and businessman who made a quixotic 1914 congressional run as the Socialist Party candidate. He founded a firm

that today is a giant textile processor. But three of his sons chose to join Bernhard in London and changed their names to Baron. Although meandering and wordy, this engrossing memoir/family history vivifies the singular successes and tragedies of a memorable clan and should inspire readers to seek out their own family stories. B&w illus. (Oct.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

The danger in writing personal family chronicles is that they can become the literary equivalent of home movies. New, who is a professor of English and American literature at Harvard, largely dodges this trap, although she does provide a few superfluous, even confusing details. For the most part, this is an engrossing and fast-moving story that traces her family's joys and heartaches over five generations and two continents. Her search was provoked by the puzzling, intricate carvings she found on her great-grandfather's cane. He was Jacob Levy, who left Lithuania for Baltimore, where he gained success as an entrepreneur and later sought a political career. In Baltimore, he met Bernhard Baron, another Jewish immigrant. It was the friendship, and later the enmity, of these two ambitious and creative men that drives this narrative, especially after Baron moved to London, where he prospered in the tobacco business and attracted three of Levy's sons to join him there. New's account of these men and their progeny is often emotionally stirring, especially as they interact with the great events of the last century. --Jay Freeman

When I saw the review by Aaron Leibel on the author's web-site,[...] I knew I had to explore this tale of Jewish immigration from Lithuania to America and elsewhere -- my grandparents also grew up in Riga and, like the author's family, they too lost most of their family to the Nazis. I was so moved by the similarities that I immediately started to look through my old family papers. By the time I finished reading the book however, I realized that this was the work of a literature scholar -- I could not compete with her. Professor New's research took almost ten years she says, visiting Europe three times, England, Israel, and many stops on the Atlantic Coast interviewing her USA descendants. On many of these trips her various daughters were in tow, the oldest one, Yael, translated for her in French and Russian. Professor New herself speaks fluent Hebrew from her early childhood visits to Israel she says, and it was then used to find, converse and hold hands with the only living family member from Riga family whom had escaped the Nazis and had not previously been found. She (Rivka) is now 86 and well! This memoir is extraordinary. One or two chapters were difficult to get through, but in retrospect I see now their importance as background to the various family business ventures in the USA and London. I have read a great deal about the Holocaust and the Nazi era; this

family memoir by the author provides a new perspective, painful again to recall, but so touching for me, and the emotions cause the tears to flow.

I was interested in the setting and the personal history because my family came from the same part of the world. The book didn't disappoint: it's well written, engaging, and fun to read.

I loved this book. I like to read about other cultures and learn more about their traditions. This is an excellent book.

Have not yet finished the book.

Jacob's Cane is an ambitious book that discusses Lithuanian and German Jews in Baltimore, my ancestors exactly. The book does open a window to the milieu of my great-grandparents and grandparents. But this book is marred by numerous factual errors. Some I picked out: every Marylander who has ever vacationed at the closest Atlantic beaches knows that Bethany Beach is in Delaware; people who studied the state of Maryland in elementary school may remember that tobacco is grown only in Southern Maryland; Baltimoreans with some sense of history know that Redwood Street was called German Street during the time period the author spends pages discussing. Hometown Hero Babe Ruth lived for some time at St. Mary's (known as a reform school or orphanage) so the folks Jacob helped who were from there could not have been black in very segregated Baltimore. Now that mother, aged 87, is reading it, she calls everyday to tell me about more mistakes. The way the author describes the interiors of the houses on Eutaw Place (where my father's grandparents lived) is inaccurate; the excursion boat to Tolchester didn't leave from Locust Point and so on. She did tell me her Aunt Rae worked as a cigar roller when she was very young. But the worst factual mistake of all is something that will be noticed by many people nationwide who may want to read this book. Henrietta Szold, founder of Hadassah and one of the most important women in American Jewish history, was not the wife of Rabbi Benjamin Szold, but unmarried and childless even though she did so much for children. My mother feels that, in a number of instances, the author "took something of the facts" and surmised from there. Regrettably, this appears to be the case.

Elisa New's memoir, "Jacob's Cane", is not for the casual reader. It's not easy going for a reader; as the book's secondary title explains, it's a family's journey from Europe to the US and then back

again. The journey back to Europe is actually three journeys. After leaving the Riga area in the mid-1880's for the US, several of Jacob Levy's sons and grandsons are tempted to settle in London for economic reasons in the early 1900's. The five men - three sons and two grandsons of family patriarch, Jacob - are offered jobs at a London cigarette factory owned by a distant family relative. Jacob's sons accept Bernhard Baron's job and also take his name. The second journey back to Europe is Elisa New's own. She had grown up on family stories of life in Lithuania before her great-grandfather, Jacob, emigrated to Baltimore, along with several family members. The third journey back is done by Jacob, in 1928, when he returned to his native village in Lithuania to see family members left behind. And who were murdered by the Nazis and their Lithuanian helpers in 1942 and 1943. (How eerie and sad is it to look at a family picture with twelve or so family members in it and know that all but one ended their lives in the burial pits in Lithuania and Latvia?) New is a very detailed writer and the book covers everything from how tobacco is grown in the US and then shipped to England for manufacture into cigarettes to the science behind "shrinking" of fabric. It's never boring. "Jacob's Cane" is the beautiful hand-made cane his family members gave him to mark his return in 1928. New is a good writer and the book is worthwhile reading if the reader is interested in the subject. I wish she had included a lot more pictures in the text.

quickly. a present , very well. Definitely a good purchase. I was looking for a replacement for my chef's product and this looks to be a really well made product. Its sharp, with a nice weight to it. Will definitely recommend to anyone looking for a good product at a reasonable price. would purchase again.

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