

Report on Descendants of Rabbi Gershon Epstein (1878-1950)

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Summary: Rabbi Gershon Epstein came to the United States from Russia and arrived on 26 August 1923, followed three years later by his wife, Rose. They settled in Los Angeles, California where Rabbi Epstein's sister, Anna Epstein Rifkin, resided with her husband Louis Rifkin, a furrier, and with their two sons Rubin (born in New York in 1910) and Samuel (born in New York in 1912).

Gershon Epstein's 1924 petition for citizenship states that his four sons were born in and still resided in Russia. Birth months and dates are provided for each son. Rose Epstein's 1927 passenger list noted on page 2 that her last residence before emigration was with her son Chaim Epstein in "Kharkoo, Russia."

A reasonably exhaustive search in United States documents has revealed no likely candidates matching the names and birth information for the four sons of Gershon and Rose Epstein. The conclusion is that they remained and lived in Russia and did not emigrate.

After Rose Epstein's death in 1935, Rabbi Epstein (then 54 years old) married Ida Goldstein (then 48 years old) in 1936 in Los Angeles. The online database "California Birth Index, 1905-1995" (via Ancestrylibrary.com) reveals no children subsequent to that marriage with the surname Epstein and the mother's maiden name Goldstein. The conclusion is that Gerson Epstein and his wife Ida had no children together. In Rabbi Epstein's 1950 newspaper obituary no descendants are listed, although it notes that his wife Ida and sister Anna Rifkin survive him.¹

However, descendants of Rabbi Epstein's sister, Anna Rifkin, can be identified from existing sources within the United States. Both Rubin Rifkin and Samuel Rifkin/Sam Lewis married. While the online database "California Birth Index, 1905-1995" (via Ancestrylibrary.com) does not reveal any children born in California to Rubin Rifkin and his wife Selma Ruth Kaufman, it does include the names of the two female children of Samuel Rifkin and Jean Kopf.

Moreover, a 1958 newspaper obituary for Anna Rifkin confirms that she had two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. It also suggests a name change for her son Samuel.

A 2001 online obituary for Jean Kopf Rifkin/Lewis, widow of Samuel Rifkin/Lewis names their children.

¹ Los Angeles Times, 5 October 1950, via ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times p. A-24 [database online].

Documentation analysis

Mrs. Anna Rifkin

Funeral services for Mrs. Anna Rifkin, 67, of 32 Brooks Ave., Venice, will be conducted at noon tomorrow at the Malinow & Silverman Mortuary, 818 Venice Blvd. A Los Angeles resident for 33 years and a founder and member of many philanthropic and charitable organizations, Mrs. Rifkin died Wednesday. She leaves two sons, Rubin Rifkin of Los Angeles and Capt. Sam Lewis, Israel National Airlines pilot and holder of the world's New York-to-London speed record for commercial aircraft; two grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Obituary for Anna Rifkin: The 9 August 1958 edition of *The Los Angeles Times* included an obituary for Anna Rifkin, widow of Louis. She lived at 32 Brooks Avenue in Venice, California, a local suburb of Los Angeles.² This is the same residence address associated with Louis Rifkin on his World War II draft registration.³

A note about her survivors: her elder son Rubin Rifkin is known via his birth name from Los Angeles city directories from 1928-1942, associated with his father Louis in the business Rifkin & Sons, proprietors of fur garments, and from the 1920 U.S. federal census in New York and the 1930 U.S. federal census in Los Angeles.

The reference to Capt. Sam Lewis, with specific references to his standing in Israel National Airlines (now El Al) and his speed record accomplishment, helps us place him as Samuel Rifkin, Anna's younger son. Using a pseudonym, he built a career as a pilot, flight instructor, and had a role providing ammunition to Israeli forces in the 1948 Arab-Israeli War.⁴

Documents related to Samuel Rifkin/Sam Lewis:

The 1934 Los Angeles city directory is useful by listing the spouses, where relevant, of those included. This is the first indication that Samuel Rifkin was married.⁵

² *Los Angeles Times*, 9 August 1958, ProQuest Historical Newspapers: Los Angeles Times, p. 10 [database online].

³ U.S., World War II Draft Registration Cards, 1942 for Louis Rifkin, from World War II Draft Cards (4th Registration) for the State of California; State Headquarters: California; Microfilm Roll: 603155 via Ancestrylibrary.com.

⁴ *American Veterans of Israel: Volunteers in Israel's War of Independence*, Winter 2004 page 2, online newsletter: <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~sklausne/NWin04.pdf>.

⁵ Los Angeles City Directory 1934, p. 1407 column 2, available online: http://rescarta.lapl.org/ResCarta-Web/jsp/RcWebImageViewer.jsp?doc_id=040428be-8b21-4de1-9b1e-3421068c0f1c/cl000000/20150604/00000004&pg_seq=1&search_doc

Rifkin Boris r1516 N Nmdie av
 " Chas (Bernice) clk r204 N Soto
 " Jennie Mrs h811 Forest av
 " L & Sons (Louis, Rubin and Saml) mfg fur-
 riers 719 S Los Angeles R1012
 " Louis (Anna) (L Rifkin & Sons) h2707 Win-
 ter
 " Morris S h1327 Magnolia av
 " Nathan (Sybil) slsmn Harry Shapiro h1007 N
 Evergreen av
 " Nathan serv sta atdt r2520 Wabash av
 " Rubin (L Rifkin & Sons) r2707 Winter
 " Rubin (Sadie) tailor h2520 Wabash av
 " Saml (Jean) (L Rifkin & Sons) h2721 Win-
 ter

His wife is listed as Jean. They lived at 2721 Winter Street, few doors down from Louis and Anna Rifkin. Louis and Anna are at 2707 Winter Street, the same residence that Rose Epstein listed on her 1927 ship manifest as her destination. During the 1920s and 1930s this region, Boyle Heights, was the preferred home of the Los Angeles Jewish community, although it was shortly to move westward by about ten miles.

In the 1940 U.S. federal census Sam Rifkin (transcribed as Riskin by the enumerator) is listed with his wife Jean and daughter Sandra.⁶ Sam's occupation is listed as flight instructor. He was no longer associated with Rifkin & Sons and in fact resided at a rented home at 7928 West 4th Street in the newly developing west-side Jewish community known as the Fairfax District.

By the 1940s, according to recollections by colleagues who worked with him, Samuel Rifkin was apparently known as Sam Lewis.⁷ An Internet search for any obituary for either Sam Lewis or Samuel Rifkin proved inconclusive, but a search for his wife as Jean Lewis provided a transcript of a Los Angeles Times obituary published on June 1, 2001.⁸

The transcript reads: "Lewis, Jean Beloved mother of Sandra (Richard) Brown and Elaine (Stephen) Aronoff. Cherished grandmother of Leslie (Michas Sadzak) Brown and Ron (Jeanne) Brown. Great-grandmother of Amy and Sam Brown. Also survived by her brother Morris (Lillian) Kopf and sister Ida Grobman. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Concern Foundation, 8383 Wilshire Blvd., #337, Beverly Hills, CA 90211 or American Diabetes Association, 6300 Wilshire Blvd., #100, Los Angeles, CA 90048. Funeral Services will be held Friday, 10:00 AM at Eden Memorial

⁶ Ancestrylibrary.com, 1940 United States Federal Census [database on-line].

⁷ Aliyah Bet & Machal Virtual Museum: North American Volunteers In Israel's War of Independence (website): http://www.israelvets.com/hist_air_forces.html

⁸ <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/latimes/obituary.aspx?pid=54603>

Park. Malinow & Silverman Mortuary. Published in the Los Angeles Times on June 1, 2001.”

This transcript is the source for Jean’s maiden name, Kopf.

For further verification of the daughters of Samuel Rifkin and Jean Kopf, a search was done using the database “California Birth Index, 1905-1995” and searching for any children of a Rifkin father and a Kopf mother. Two candidates were found, one of which was born in a year consistent with the daughter of Sam Rifkin in the 1940 census record.⁹

The daughters of Samuel Rifkin and Jean Kopf are:

Name: Sandra Mae Rifkin
Birth Date: 6 Mar 1933
Gender: Female
Mother's Maiden Name: Kopf
Birth County: Los Angeles

Name: Ruth Elaine Rifkin
Birth Date: 4 Jul 1941
Gender: Female
Mother's Maiden Name: Kopf
Birth County: Los Angeles

These names are consistent with the married names of Jean Lewis’ daughters. Sandra Mae is now Sandra Brown; Ruth Elaine is now Elaine Aronoff. Their married names are further verified in the online newsletter *American Veterans of Israel: Volunteers in Israel’s War of Independence*, Winter 2004 page 2, online newsletter: <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~sklausne/NWin04.pdf>.

⁹ Ancestrylibrary.com, California Birth Index, 1905-1995 [database on-line].