

# CLEVELAND Jewish News

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Candlelighting 8:07 p.m.

## CH-UH levy facing organized opposition

DOUGLAS J. GUTH  
Staff Reporter

Organized opposition is forming against the Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district's May 6 operating levy, which once again asks residents to raise their property taxes. The levy will pay for administrative salaries and benefits, supplies and other day-to-day costs.

At the same time, the 5,600-student Shaker Heights school district will vote on a 9.6-mill levy, a tax increase of 15%. School officials in the district have not been confronted with organized opposition to that levy.

Levy opponents contend that while CH-UH already has the second-highest property taxes in the state (Shaker Heights is first), the 7,000-student district's academic performance ranks in Ohio's lowest 10%. CH-UH is currently on "Academic Watch," the second lowest category as measured by the state Department of Education.

Some Orthodox Jews are also against the levy because they want the district to adopt a dual-enrollment policy, whereby students enrolled in private schools can use certain services in the CH-UH public school system (See related story on p. 49).

Three community opposition groups in

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## Letters from Gelvan

Papers hidden in tallit bag  
unravel mystery about  
family's life in shtetl.

ELLEN HARRIS  
City Editor

For years, Geraldine (Gerry) Adelman Powers Volper suspected there was a mystery surrounding the green tallit (prayer shawl) bag her father kept out of sight in his bottom dresser drawer. As a child, she occasionally spotted the velvet pouch among his possessions and had a vague impression it contained important papers, rather than a prayer shawl. Her father, Morris Adelman, however, never discussed its contents or encouraged his daughter's questions.

When his wife (Gerry's mother) died in 1963, Morris moved into his daughter's home in Beachwood. Among the treasured possessions he brought with him was the tallit bag. Even at

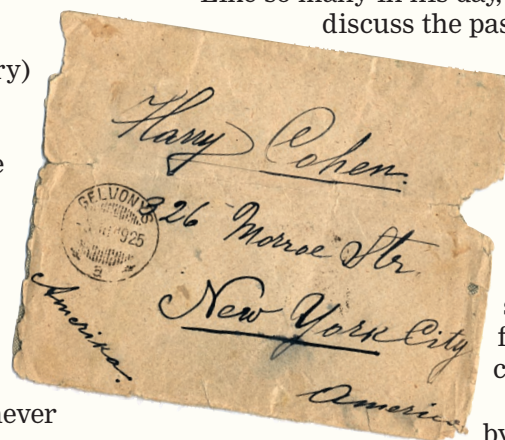
this point, he declined to discuss its history. Gerry, who by now had children of her own, knew very little about her father's background, except that he had been born in Lithuania and came to the U.S. as a young man.

"Like so many in his day, he never wanted to discuss the past," says Gerry, of

her late father, who owned a used-furniture store on East 55th Street and belonged to Taylor Road Synagogue. After he retired, he served as a cantor for several local congregations.

As the years went by and Morris' health declined, his

daughter's curiosity about the tallit bag became infused with a sense of urgency. By now, she had discovered they contained nearly two dozen



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## Letters from Gelvan

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letters written in Yiddish.

"I was desperate to get them. I knew they had to be vital links to the family's past," says Gerry, who was the founding librarian of Solomon Schechter Day School, now Gross Schechter School located in Pepper Pike.

In 1973, the last year of his life, Gerry pleaded with her father to translate and read the letters to her.

"Every day, he'd say, 'We'll do it tomorrow.' When tomorrow came, he said, 'We'll do it next week.' I finally realized he was so emotionally involved with the letters he couldn't face sharing them with anybody."

Morris, 83, urged Gerry to bury the letters in his coffin, a promise his daughter could not bring herself to make.

Gerry finally took matters into her own hands and arranged to have a Yiddish scholar translate the correspondence. Morris, whose yahrzeit is May 28 this year, passed away a week before the project was to begin. However, his daughter and the translator, Sender Wajzman, pressed ahead.

The long-hidden correspondence turned out to be a series of tender, often heartbreaking letters that span the years 1910-25. They were written to Morris from his father, David Peretz Adiman, who lived all his life in Gelvan, Lithuania. The letters paint a vivid portrait of Jewish *shtetl* life during the period preceding and following World War I, and lead up to a shocking revelation.

Following are excerpts from the letters (now housed at the Western Reserve Historical Society) along with Gerry Powers' italicized notes of explanation.

### Letter No. 1:

1910 Thursday,  
Parshe Va'ereh (January), Gelvan

*L*ong life and Peace to my dear as my own life, Moishe-Joissef. I hope to God soon to hear good things from you.

I received the six rubles from you. I also received five rubles from our nephew. From Uncle Shloimeh (*Levine*) I got 10 rubles. I can tell you, my dear son, that I was going barefoot and I had a pair of shoes made, but they cost me 40 rubles. Thank God for all his goodness and wonders. But, I still owe the Gentile 30 rubles, for which I have to pay one groshen per ruble interest.

Please ask Nechameleh to write about her health and her living standards. (*Nechama was my father's sister. She settled in New York.*) And, most important, she should observe the holy day.

Your father, David Peretz

The Bobbe (grandmother) wishes you a lot of happiness always.

Be well dear child, Moishe-Joissef.

(*My father's grandmother was too old to travel, and that was one of the reasons my father's parents could not immigrate as they would not leave her behind.*)



From 1910-1925, David Peretz Adiman, pictured, wrote a series of poignant letters from his shtetl in Lithuania to his family in America.

### Letter No. 2:

Monday, February 1910

*Y*our dearest mother remembers you and speaks about you every Shabbes. If she could speak to her son, she would ask him one favor. He should get married and not be lonely. The same about our daughter. Maybe it is possible to get for her a husband. See to do the good deed and exert yourself in her behalf exactly as a father would do.

### Letter No. 3:

May 5, 1910

*M*y son, study a page of Talmud every week and at least see to it, to study daily a little of the code of Jewish Law, because (since) the Holy Temple was destroyed, God has nothing left but four cubits of Religious Law. It is a commandment and a duty upon me to write to you that you should pay reverence to the law, to serve Him with all your heart. And then you shall be successful.

Fulfill the commandment of God that is written on the Torah; a man should leave his father and mother and cleave unto his wife, because it is no good for a man to be alone.

### Letter No. 4:

September 5, 1910

*I*n your letter, you wrote that there was a strike of all the workers. You said that if God will be willing, you will be able to earn five dollars more a week. Now, my loving son, let me know if you are back at work.

### Letter No. 9:

July 2, 1912

*M*y dear son, Moishe-Joissef, you should live and be well and my dear daughter, I demand of you that you get married.

We are unable to eat meat every day because meat costs 30 kopeks a pound. Our income is very small. The little goat gives, thank God, three quarts of milk a day.

### Letter No. 10:

Sept. 2, 1912 - Gelvan

*M*y dear son, Moishe-Joissef, try to make a good match for your only dear sister. And now, as long as she is young and pretty, it will be easier to find a husband. Maybe it is an Idea that Shmuel Michl should take her (marry her). (*They were first cousins*).

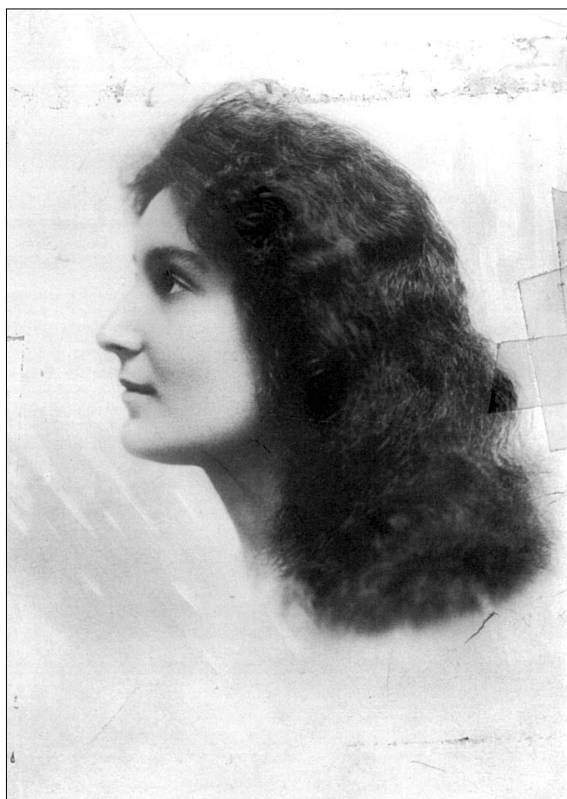
Be well from your father who wishes you a good and sweet year, and from your mother who blesses you with a good year of peace and prosperity.

### Letter No. 11:

(*Four years have elapsed since my father first arrived in America from Gelvan*).



Before leaving for the U.S., Morris Adelman posed with his sister, Nechama, left, and their grandmother, Ettleleh, in this 1895 photo.



Nechameh Adelman, the subject of many of her father's tender letters, left the Lithuanian shtetl with her brothers and settled in New York.

1913

I am, thank God, well. But, about your mother, I can write that she is failing in health. She cannot eat coarse foods. She has to have meat, chicken and a bit of good wine, daily. God should have pity and give me enough earnings. I received the medicines that you sent. If God will grant that the medicines will work, I will let you know.

Letter No. 14:  
January 1920

You know the troubles we are having for the past six years. Because up to the first month that the Germans entered into Russia, I had had a goat. Wild dogs killed her in the field. And, since then, I cannot buy a goat and I cannot help myself. Have God in your hearts, you should all together support me and send money for Passover that I should be able to buy a goat and be able to stay alive.

...

God has given and God has taken. Blessed be His name.

Now I write you, my son, Moishe-Joissef, that your mother, Feigeh Giseh, died on the third day in the month of *Cheshvan* (October). I was sick and couldn't write. Now, you should go to say Kadish for your mother, Feigeh Giseh. Don't forget to send support because the inflation is very high. Everyone is sending money for their families and food packages and I don't receive any letters from my children.

(Mail delivery to Lithuania was erratic during this period of WWI).

Letter No. 16:  
Feb. 25, 1920

I request of you, my dear son, that you write and tell me if you got married. (My father, Morris Adelman, and mother, Lena Gitlin, were married on Dec. 11, 1920).

Write and tell me how my son Feiveh is (Feiveh, Morris' brother, had settled in Indianapolis); and how is my daughter Nechameh – since I had not received any letters from them. My heart is very embittered. I suffer from extreme poverty, hunger, and I am barefooted.

When you will send money, send it to Vilna, to the address of the Community Federation, but check it with the Gilvaner Rabbi's son.

Inflation is very high here. I am wearing boots that are in very bad condition. It costs 400 rubles for a pair of boots.

Letter No. 17:

(Five years have elapsed since Letter No. 16. In the following correspondence, we learn for the first time that my grandfather has remarried. This letter is to his brother, Shloimeh Levine, in New York City.)

Tuesday, Erev Pesach, 1925

Maybe you have the address of my son Moishe-Joissef. Send it in the next letter you write. Because my heart aches very much, since he went to Cleveland, I didn't receive any letters from him.

My dear brother, I have no strength to teach students and in this city of Gelvan, there are very few students. In the entire city, there is one teacher. He has about 14 students. Therefore, I don't have the chance to teach and also no strength.

Be healthy; write about your son-in-law's family – whether they were born in America; if they are observant.

Letter No. 18:

(This letter from my grandfather is very defining as it contains the first references to my birth. Also, he seems much more calm in this letter.)

Year 1925 (July)

Good luck and happiness to my devoted son. I was very worried that you weren't writing letters to me. I am a sexton in the Gelvan Synagogue, but a full living I can't make at the sextonry. I don't earn even half in order to make a living. But, Feiveh sends \$5 occasionally and it makes it easier.

Write, my dear son and dear daughter-in-law if you make a living. Do you have a nice home? And how old is your daughter? Whom does she resemble, the father or the mother? Our dear God be willing, you should raise her with great success for many good years.

Letter No. 19:

(This letter is very pivotal. My grandfather refers to me twice, reinforcing the knowledge that I was named after his deceased wife, Faigeh Gisseh. It haunts me that I will never know what she looked like).

September 7, 1925

God grant that we soon hear good news from you, my dear daughter-in-law and grandchild, Feigeleh. You should live good and long years.

I received your letter on Saturday. I thank you very much for the present of \$10.

Now, I will write and tell you about the guest that I had. Uncle Shloimeh's son, Michl David, came to see me from America shabbos eve, at the end of July. Uncle Shloimeh sent him to see how I spend my days and what kind of life I have.

I kiss all of you from afar.

Erev Succot 1925 (October)

Happiness and good luck to my dear son, Moishe Joissef. Write and tell me how your daughter Feigeleh is. Tell me if you had an easy fasting on Yom Kippur. I received the check before Rosh Hashanah and I thank you for your good heart.

P.S. Tell me if Feigeleh is a healthy child and how old she is, till 120 years. Can she talk? Can she say Mama, Daddy?

(This was the last letter Morris Adelman received from his father. The following newspaper clipping, carefully preserved in Morris' tallit bag for nearly 50 years, explains why.)

JEWISH FORWARD,  
175 E. Broadway, NY 10002 1925

(Paraphrased from the Yiddish version; translated by Sender Wajzman)

### THREE BANDITS SENTENCED TO DEATH FOR MURDERING AN OLD SEXTON AND HIS WIFE

Recently, there took place in Vilkomir the trial of three murderers of the old sexton and his wife of Gelvan, Lithuania. The murderers were all sentenced to death.

These are the circumstances:

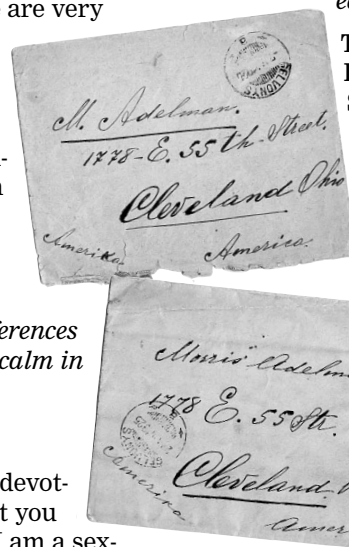
In the town of Gelvan, there lived the old couple Eideman (Adelman) both 70 years of age. Before the war, they owned a house near the market place. They raised, educated, and married off their children. The whole town respected and admired them.

During the war, they were ruined. Their house was shot up by the cannons, and their children scattered all over the world. Out of pity, the town found a job for the old man as a sexton in the synagogue.

On the last day of Succos, the sexton and his wife were found in a pool of blood ,, stabbed to death.

The sexton was neatly dressed; apparently he was prepared to open the synagogue. The old lady was curled up in bed, naked. Clothing was strewn around them. The horrible news soon spread over the whole town. The chief of police came to investigate. An old water carrier reported that when she was going to the river at dawn, she saw five drunken men coming from the sexton's street, carrying packages of assorted sizes.

The police caught one of the five the very next





# Cover

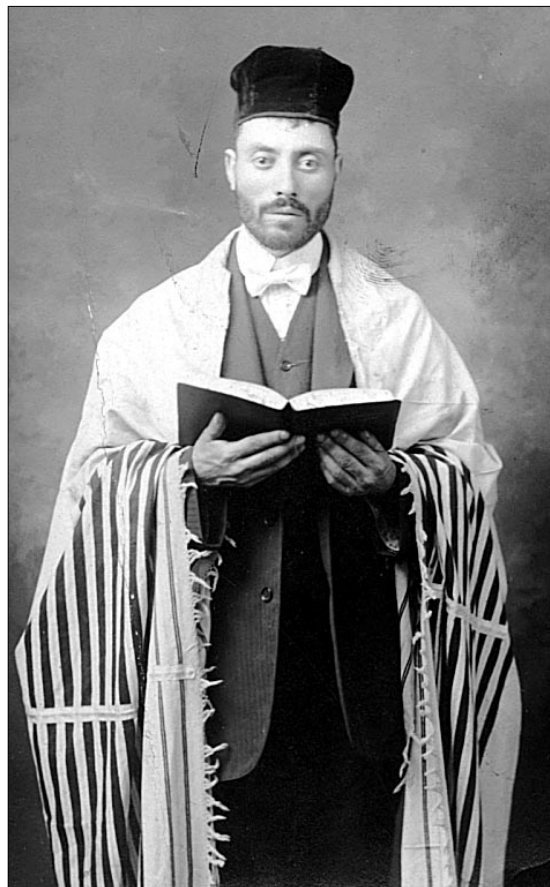
day. During the hearing, he confessed how the murder took place.

In the Gentile neighborhood, there had been much talk about the rich Jewish guest who had certainly left a lot of money for his uncle. The thugs decided to take it away from the sexton and studied his movements. They found that on holidays he would arise very early in order to open the synagogue for morning services.

On the morning of the murder, they stood by the house waiting for him to leave. When the old sexton opened his door and saw them, he ran to the window to call for help. The bandits broke into the house, tore him away from the window and stabbed him. The old lady was awakened by the loud noises and was stabbed and killed.

The thieves searched the house but did not find any money. Angry, they drank wine set aside for Shabbos, ate the tzimmes the wife had prepared for the holiday, drank all the whiskey the sexton had made ready for Simchat Torah, and removed clothes, silverware and linen from the house.

The apprehended thief identified the other four in the gang. After six weeks they were brought to trial and the judge sentenced three of them to death. The others were sentenced to life terms of hard labor.



Feivah Adelman, Morris' brother, became a cantor and teacher in Indianapolis.

especially in our dreary town.

May God console you, and you should have happiness and joy. As wishes you, your best friend,

Your friend,  
Mayer Shachat

**November 20, 1925**

*T*oday, at four o'clock, the three murderers of your blessed father – blessed should be his memory – were shot in front of the entire assemblage.

...

Although 30 years have passed since Gerry Pow-

ers first read the letters from her grandfather to her father, her eyes still fill with tears as she looks at the correspondence. "My father used to tell me he couldn't even go into the garden in Gelvan and pick a carrot. It had to stay in the ground and get bigger so his mother could use it for soup. When I think of what they didn't have, it eats me up."

At the time the letters were translated, Gerry was taking a class at the Cleveland College of Jewish Studies (now the Siegal College). She submitted the correspondence as a term paper, along with explanatory notes and research she had conducted into the history of the Jews of Lithuania. She occasionally shared the story in area classrooms and synagogues.

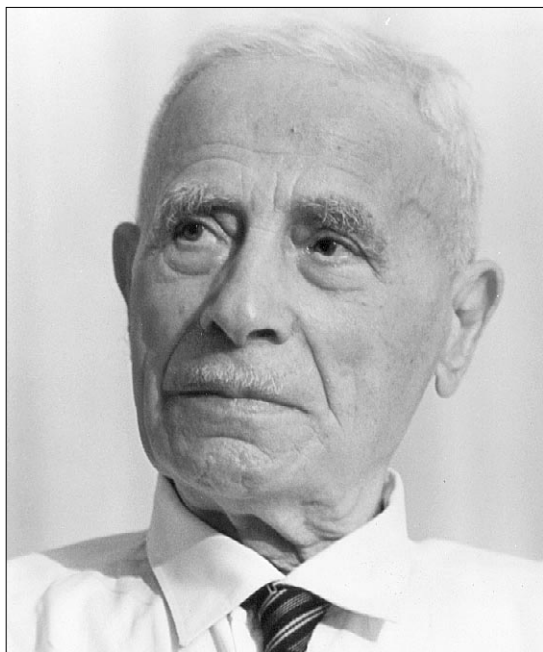
Two years ago, at the urging of her son, David, a professor at Cornell University, and her husband, Daniel Volper, Gerry contacted an online special-interest group whose members were tracing their Lithuanian roots. She posted a few of her father's letters, and got e-mails from all over the world from people who wanted the rest of the story.

Gerry posted the remaining letters, weaving them together with explanatory notes, commentaries and research. The result was an online book, *Letters from Gelvan*, which can be read at [www.jewishgen.org/Litvak/gelvanletters.htm](http://www.jewishgen.org/Litvak/gelvanletters.htm)

To this day, Gerry, a longtime member of Park Synagogue, is unsure she should have published the correspondence her father guarded so carefully. "They had been sequestered so long," she says. "I can't imagine how the writers would feel if they knew their letters were open to the whole world."

Last year, Gerry and her sisters, Etty Adelman Hoffman and Ruthy Adelman Schwartz of Beachwood, unveiled a memorial at Park Synagogue that is dedicated to their Lithuanian grandfather and grandmother. The reverse side of their father's tombstone bears David Peretz Adiman's name and that of his first wife, Feigeh Gisseh Adiman. The Yiddish on it reads, *tzum end tzuzamen* (at the end, together again).

<mailto:eharris@cjn.org>



Morris Adelman kept the letters he received from his father hidden from his own children.

## LETTERS FROM GELVAN ~ THE AFTERMATH

(The following Yiddish letter was carefully labeled by my father, saying "I received this letter from Gelvany after the tragic death of my father and his second wife Mary").

**November 19, 1925**

Dear Friend Mr. Moishe-Joissef Adelman:

*R*ecently, I received your letter. After the tragic occurrence, we are all as dead. Such a Jew who was pious, who all his life had very little enjoyment in the world.

Dearest friend, do you remember how I studied Gemareh with a sad melody? It is true that now I still study with that sad melody, but a greater percentage sadder. Oh, you can't imagine how our situation has changed in Lithuania in general, and



The family of Morris Adelman dedicates a memorial to him at ceremony at Park Synagogue.