Experiences in Coming to America
By Leon Boonin

Boonin Family Papers collection [3186].
Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
“Experiences in Coming to America”

In the early-twentieth century, the methods of transportation people used to move from one region to another were different from today. It used to take days, weeks, and even months to travel. It also implied multiple points of control in the borders.

Have you travelled outside Philadelphia?

What kind of transportation did you use?

How long did it take you?
Republique Francaise

Passport

Relations Commerciales

Etats Unis d'Amerique

Charles Bournon

Signature

Lieutenant-Colonel

Chef des Recherches

Sous le sceau du Commerce

Amerique du Nord

Date

Adresse

Membre de la Mission

Signature

Chef du Commerce

Au siecle de la Revolution

Amerique du Nord
Passport from the nineteenth century. It belonged to one of the members of the Besson Family, French immigrants that moved to Philadelphia.

Passports from the United States and from France nowadays.

Besson family papers [#1722]. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
Slutsk was part of the Russian Empire, that existed between 1721 until 1917.

The Russian Empire was one of the largest empires in history.

It extended over three continents: Asia, Europe, and Antarctica.

Towards the West, the Russian Empire neighbored with the German and Austrian-Hungarian Empires.
Map of Belarus Nowadays: The Boonin Family was from Slutsk. This town was located at the south of Minsk, which is the capital of Belarus.

Map of Belarus in 1911: Since present-day Belarus was part of the Russian Empire, the Boonin Family’s nationality was Russian.
Growing up Jewish in the Russian Empire

Of all the ethnic and national groups that lived under the rule of the Russian czars, the Eastern European Jews were the most isolated and endured the harshest treatment.

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.

According to the census of Slutsk in 1847, there were 5,897 Jews. By 1897, the census for Slutsk indicated a population of 14,349 inhabitants. For this total, 10,264 were Jewish.

What percentage of the population was Jewish by 1897?
From Russia to the United States

By the 1880s the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe were the target of state-sponsored attacks.

When the czar was assassinated in 1881, the crime was blamed 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 Jews were slaughtered by Russian soldiers and peasants.

By 1911, different political conflicts also increased the tension within the European regions until World War I began in the year 1914.

The main participants in the World War 1. Map courtesy of Maps on the Web: http://mapsontheweb.zoom-maps.com/image/90163815859
Between the years 1880 to 1920, a vast number of Jewish people living in the lands ruled by Russia—including Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and the Ukraine, and neighboring regions—started moving to the United States.

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.
Along with New York, Philadelphia was one of the main ports of entrance to the country.

The Washington Avenue Immigration Station operated from 1873 to 1915.

Between 1910 and 1914, it is estimated a quarter-million Jews arrived in the Washington Avenue Immigration Station.

The volume of immigrants decreased significantly with the beginning of the World War I in 1914.

The Boonin Children

After the death of their parents before 1911, the Boonin children left their hometown in Russia looking for better opportunities in the United States.

Two of the brothers, Mendell and Abe, already lived in Philadelphia and helped the youngest siblings to arrange their journey.
DEAR LEON

THE BIRTH RECORDS THAT YOU REQUEST ARE
FROM A LETTER I HAVE THAT MENDELL WROTE TO
THE "TAGEBLATT" IN 1912:

MENDELL NOV. 30 1885
LEON SEP. 27 1887
ABE APR. 5 1890
SAM MAR. 3 1894
SARAH 1896
LEOPOLD AUG. 8 1900 20TH CENTURY BABY
JEAN OCT. 1 1902
JACK FEB. 25, 1905

I WAS THINKING THAT WE OUGHT TO GET TOGETHER
AND PUT DOWN ON PAPER THE LITTLE DATA WE HAVE
ABOUT OUR ANTECEDENTS. I AM WILLING TO DO THE
WORK BUT I NEED THE INFORMATION.

NO NEWS OTHERWISE,

REGARDS

SAM

Dear Leon,

Here is still a change in going
To Shain's funeral, if he goes
to will contact you in a day or
so.

Jack
Between 1940 and 1944, Leon Boonin (the second oldest brother) wrote the memories of his family’s journey.

The text details his thoughts and concerns during the travel, the places they visited, and the methods of transportations they used.
Crossing Europe

Read the first part of the Leon’s memory and identify:

Which cities did the Boonin Family cross in their journey through Europe?

What method(s) of transportation did they use?

How far did they travel?
## Crossing Europe

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<th>Distance (Miles)</th>
<th>Transportation</th>
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Look for the countries the Boonin family crossed in Europe. The ★ indicate an approximated location of some of the cities. Draw a line to connect the places.
Crossing the Atlantic Ocean

Read the second part of the Leon’s memory and identify:

What was the last city “The Dominion” touched before sailing in the Atlantic?

How many nautical miles are between Ireland and the United States?

Where did the Boonin Family arrive in the United States?
# Crossing The Atlantic Ocean

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Write down in the map:
Name of the Port A.
Name of the Port B.
Total distance in nautical miles.
Welcome to Philadelphia

Read the last part of Boonin’s memoir and identify:

Which river did “The Dominion” cross? Where did they land?

What problems did the family face before entering the country?

How did Leon feel after meeting his brothers and uncle?

How did they get to their new house?
Following Boonin’s memoir:

*Draw a line marking the route from the bayfront until their new house.*

*Identify the places with an arrow.*