

Dov Menachem Konwiser (1887- 1936)

The cantor, Dov (Bernard) Menachem Konwiser, was born in Minsk, Byelorussia (Belarus) in 1887. His exceptional vocal talents were discovered during his adolescence and he was accepted into the local school where he received education as well as training for cantor and choir.

When Dov Menachem matriculated, he travelled to Konigsberg where he was taught cantorial singing in the style of the famous cantor, Israel Weintraub, where he learned musical concepts which widened his abilities within this profession.

On his return to Minsk at the beginning of the 20th Century, he at first worked as a conductor in the great synagogue, and was then promoted to the position of cantor in the Town of Kowary. Around this time he married Rosa Chaimova; the oldest of their seven children was Rivka. Cantor Dov Konwiser was wounded in the First World War and evacuated to hospital in Siberia.

From 1922-1925 he held a senior position in the synagogue in the town of Zgierz near Lodz. In the meantime, the family of the Cantor and his wife expanded: Rivka's arrival was followed by that of Ester (b. 1923), Yohevet, Feiga, Bella, Basia (b.1926), and Herzl.

The family moved to Reisha (Rzeszow, Zheshuv) where he became the Cantor and served 1925-1931. During that period, he devoted his time to training the choir in the melodies of the famous Solomon Sulzer (1804-1889) as well as in his own compositions. (Photo: the Cantor Dov Menachem Konwiser and his new choir, July 1931. Photographed: Haim Greenfield, Moshe Spiegel, The Cantor's son Herzl Konwiser, Shechter and others.)

Sadly, Rosa Konwiser died in 1928 leaving the Cantor a widower with seven young children. In 1931, Cantor Konwiser left his daughters in the care of the eldest, Rivka, and took his son, Herzl, to South Africa in search of a better life for the family. They settled in Cape Town where the Cantor died in 1936 before bringing his daughters to join him. Of the six Konwiser daughters, only Ester Rachel survived the Holocaust.

Ester Rachel married in Russia where her descendants live today. Herzl married and raised a family in Johannesburg; like his father, Herzl became a Cantor. All his descendants today live in Israel.

This article was originally prepared by Cantor Herzl Konwiser and later amplified and edited by his children in Israel and grand-niece in Russia.