

A Voice Carried Across Borders

Eugene (Jenő) Goldberger · Yaakov

Ben's great-grandfather · Goldberger line · 1903 – 1989



Cantor in Vukovar, Troppau, Copenhagen and Montreal, Eugene Goldberger moved his family to Denmark before the war, escaped with them by fishing boat in 1943, and sang on two continents.

Eugene (Jenő) Goldberger was born at Hlohovec (Galgóc) on 27 August 1903, the youngest son of the cantor **Emanuel (Manó) Goldberger** and his second wife, **Hanni (Anna) Klein**. He was given the Hebrew name Yaakov, the name the family remembers for Emanuel's own father, **Markus**, who had died in 1879. As a youth he studied Torah at Topoľčany and Pressburg, and as a boy he sang as a soloist in the choirs of the cantors Frankel and Abramson in Topoľčany. In 1926 and 1927 he was a student in Vienna, registered in Leopoldstadt, training in music and at the cantors' seminary; by the family's account he met **Helena Berkovits** there. They married in Senica in December 1927.

His first post was at Vukovar, where he was Oberkantor and taught in the Hebrew school, and where his eldest son, **Milan**, was born on Hoshana Rabbah in October 1928. In 1932 he became chief cantor of Troppau (Opava), with Helena's brother **Gabor Berkovits** as his assistant and later his successor. Then, by his son's memoir, he watched Nazi thugs assault an elderly Jew in Troppau and decided to leave. He answered a Copenhagen newspaper advertisement for a cantor, won the post over 120 applicants, and in 1934 a moving truck carried the family to Denmark. It was the step that saved his wife and sons; the siblings who stayed behind were murdered in the camps. In Copenhagen he sang as a soloist at the Tivoli Concert Hall and on state radio.

Under the occupation he was once taken in by the Germans after being overheard talking about music with another Jew, and released that evening. In 1943 a sympathetic Danish neighbor blocked his ar-

BORN	27 August 1903, Hlohovec (Galgóc)
DIED	20 August 1989 (19 Av 5749), Jerusalem; buried Har HaMenuchot
HEBREW NAME	Yaakov son of Menashe
MARRIED	Helena Berkovits, Senica, December 1927
ROLES	Cantor of Vukovar; chief cantor of Troppau (Opava) and of Copenhagen; cantor of Adath Israel, Montreal, about 18 years
ESCAPE	Copenhagen to Limhamn, Sweden, by fishing boat, 2 October 1943

HONOURS	Honorary fellowship, Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary, 1964
CHILDREN	Four sons, the eldest Milan

rest. On 2 October 1943, at 9 p.m., Eugene, Helena and all four boys left Copenhagen in a fishing boat steered by its owner and landed at Limhamn in Sweden around midnight, stateless, with 700 Danish kroner and no passport. In Göteborg he found a small synagogue that needed a cantor. The family returned in June 1945, and at the rededication of the Great Synagogue he sang the prayer of thanks with his sons in the family row. With none of his relatives in Czechoslovakia left alive, he took the family to America in 1946.

In Montreal he became cantor of the Adath Israel congregation in Outremont, which he chose over better-paid offers and served for about eighteen years, founding music education and a youth choir. He was sought as a concert cantor: in April 1953 he headlined the Saint John, New Brunswick, celebration of Israel's fifth anniversary before a capacity crowd, and that summer he toured six countries on his congregation's behalf, meeting cantors and musicologists. In March 1964 a testimonial concert marked his eighteen years, and trees were planted in his honour as the Cantor Goldberger Grove in Israel. That June the Cantors Institute of the Jewish Theological Seminary made him an honorary fellow, one of five cantors so honoured. Two of his sons followed him into the profession.

In October 1964 he and Helena arrived in Israel to settle, welcomed at the airport by the World Mizrachi centre, and the Tel Aviv daily HaTzofe ran a full profile of 'an immigrant cantor'. He later served a congregation in San Diego, stayed for a time with Milan in Long Beach and with cousins in California, and settled in Jerusalem for good in 1986. He died on 19 Av 5749 (20 August 1989), in his 86th year, and was buried at Har HaMenuchot beside Helena. His matzevah names him 'the Rabbi-Cantor Reb Yaakov son of Rabbi Menashe' and praises his pleasant voice.

His life comes down to us through his Vienna registration, the Swedish police report taken on the night of the crossing, Montreal and New Brunswick newspapers, the Hebrew press in Israel, a memorial tribute from the Cantors Assembly, and the memories of his sons, among them Milan's interview for Yad Vashem.

FROM THE ARCHIVE



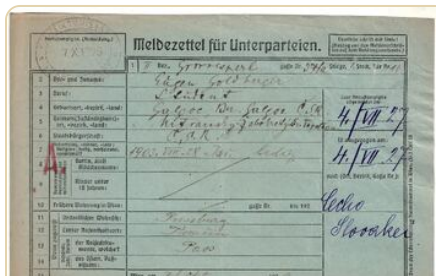
Eugene and Helen Goldberger with their sons Milan, Leo and Gus (studio portrait; USHMM Photo Archives, courtesy Leo Goldberger)



Cantor Eugene Goldberger with his sons Milan and Leo (USHMM Photo Archives, courtesy Leo Goldberger)



Eugene Goldberger on vacation at Luhačovice (USHMM Photo Archives, courtesy Leo Goldberger)



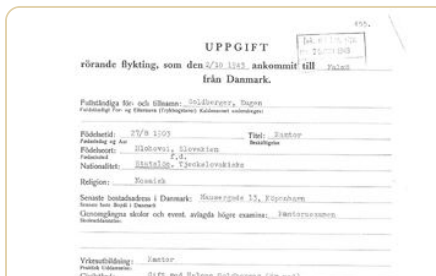
Vienna Meldezettel 1926



Family in Troppau, 1933-34 (Eugene, Helen, Milan, Leo)



Family in Copenhagen, c.1935 (with Milan, Helene, Gustav, Leo)



Swedish police arrival report, Malmö 2 Oct 1943



Saint John coverage + portrait (Telegraph-Journal, 17 Apr 1953)



In cap & gown — his JTS Cantors' Institute fellowship (Montreal Star, 16 Jun 1964)



'Yaakov Goldberger, an immigrant cantor': profile with his portrait on his arrival in Israel (HaTzofe, 20 Nov 1964, p.19)

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