

The Man Who Plucked the Eagle

Joseph Schechter

Ben's great-grandfather · Schechter line · 1896 – 1968



Schechter brothers, of Brooklyn, live poultry dealers, and their lawyer, snapped as they review that the Supreme Court of the United States had upset a conviction under the NIRA, unconstitutional. Those thrust into the national spotlight were: seated, Alexander Schechter, Reiser, Joseph Schechter. Standing: Martin, left, and Aaron Schechter.

A Brooklyn kosher poultryman, Joseph Schechter and his brothers took their case to the Supreme Court in 1935 and, in the famous ‘sick-chicken case’, brought down a central pillar of the New Deal.

József Schächter was born in Budapest on 15 September 1896, the son of **Rabbi David Schechter**, a poultry slaughterer (shochet) from the Podhajce district of Galicia, and **Malka Halpern**, of Zborów. The family lived at Nádor utca 25. His birth was registered only in October 1904, after his parents, already married religiously, had their civil marriage in Budapest. On 27 May 1920, in Vienna, he married **Leontine (Lea) Knoll**, daughter of **Osias Knoll**; that one register entry ties the Schechter and Knoll families together.

His mother had brought the younger children to America in 1921. Joseph and Lea followed from Le Havre on La Lorraine, landing at New York on 11 October 1922, bound for his father in Brooklyn and leaving behind his sister **Rosa Herzmann** in Vienna. Their son **Hyman** was born a month later. Joseph worked as a butcher in the poultry market, declared his intention to become a citizen in 1926 and petitioned in 1929, with his father as witness. He ran the Schechter Live Poultry Market at 257 Brighton Beach Avenue and guaranteed the credits of the A.L.A. Schechter Poultry Corporation, run by his brothers **Martin**, **Alex** and **Aaron**, whose slaughterhouse stood on East 52d Street.

In July 1934 a grand jury indicted the four brothers and their two companies on 60 counts of violating the New Deal's ‘Live Poultry Code’; Joseph was named in six, far fewer than his brothers. The trial court threw out 19 counts, the brothers were convicted on others, and the Court of Appeals upheld most of the convictions, though Judge Learned Hand wrote that slaughterhouse work in Brooklyn was local business, beyond Congress's power over interstate com-

BORN	15 September 1896, Budapest
DIED	1968
PARENTS	Rabbi David Schechter and Malka Halpern
MARRIED	Leontine (Lea) Knoll, Vienna, 27 May 1920
ARRIVED	New York, 11 October 1922, on La Lorraine from Le Havre
TRADE	Kosher poultry: Schechter Live Poultry Market, Brighton Beach Avenue, Brooklyn
KNOWN FOR	A.L.A. Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States, 295 U.S. 495 (1935)
CHILDREN	Hyman; Estelle

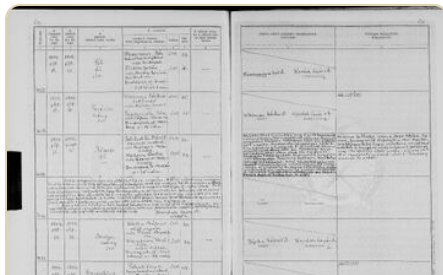
merce. On 27 May 1935 a unanimous Supreme Court threw out the convictions in *A.L.A. Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States*, and with them struck down the National Industrial Recovery Act. It became one of the most famous cases in American legal history: the ‘sick-chicken case’.

The next day the Brooklyn Times Union ran the brothers’ photograph under the headline ‘Their Squawk Killed the Blue Eagle’, with Joseph at front right. He told the paper he felt most happy that the highest court had found him not guilty of misconduct in business, but the fight had cost ‘every nickel I had’, and he would have preferred jail had he known the price. Days later Lea received an anonymous letter in Yiddish threatening her for ‘breaking the NRA’; she answered with a defiant poem, and Joseph called the letter cowardly. When the Brooklyn Daily Eagle spent ‘A Day With the Schechters’, it found Joe ‘tall and gaunt’ at his store, Lea ironing his trousers, and neighbors who called them ‘nice people’. A year on, newspapers reported the brothers broke and the bank foreclosing on their father’s house.

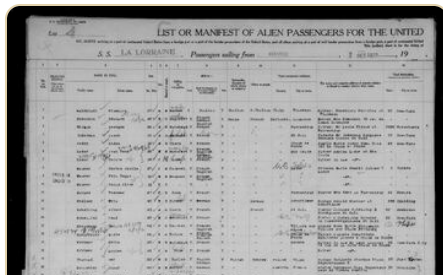
Life went on in Brooklyn. Their daughter **Estelle** was born there in 1936, and in 1942 his draft card found him, at 46, still at Brighton Beach Avenue and in business for himself. He died in 1968. A new scholarly history, *The Sick Chicken Case* (2025), is the fullest published account of the brothers.

The identification rests on the records: his Budapest birth entry, the Vienna marriage register, the La Lorraine manifest and his naturalization papers, and the 1921 manifest of the SS Chicago, whose Schechter children match three of the four brothers. The court opinions and a shelf of 1935 newspapers, from Brooklyn to Honolulu, tell the rest.

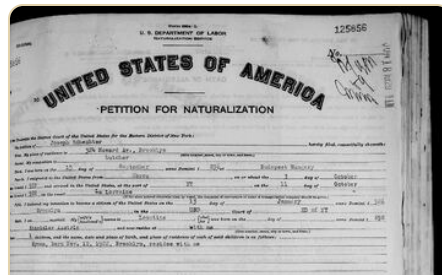
FROM THE ARCHIVE



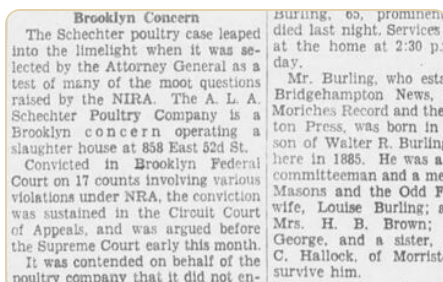
Budapest civil birth register (district V-VI), entry 3029, registered 18 Oct 1904: József, born 15 Sep 1896; father Dávid Schächter, poultry slaughterer, 32, born Podhajce, Galicia; mother Malka Halpern, 33, born Zborów, Galicia; of Nádor u. 25, Budapest V. Margin: the parents' civil marriage in Budapest, 4 Oct 1904



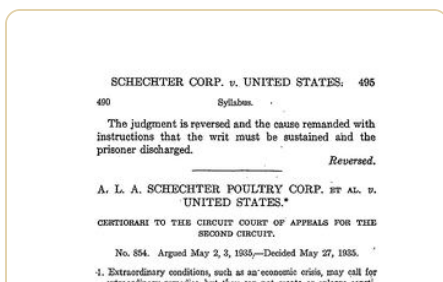
Ellis Island manifest, S.S. La Lorraine from Le Havre, Oct 1922, list 4, lines 20-21: Josef (26) and Leontine (24) Schachter of Vienna; left behind his sister Rosa Herzmann, Engertstrasse, Vienna XX



His Petition for Naturalization, EDNY no. 125856, 13 Mar 1929: wife Leontine, born 1898 at Stanislav, Austria; witnesses his father Rabbi David Schechter and Nathan Weiss



Supreme Court victory — Brooklyn Eagle, 27 May 1935



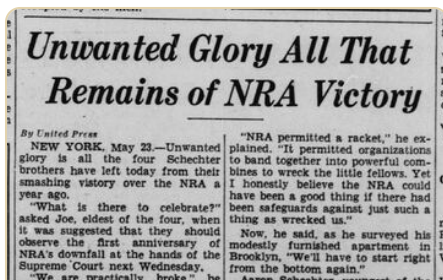
Schechter Poultry Corp. v. United States, 295 U.S. 495 (27 May 1935): the Supreme Court opinion (U.S. Reports, Library of Congress)



Joseph's wife threatened over the NRA win — and her poem in reply (Times Union, 31 May 1935)



'A Day With the Schechters': at home with Joe and Lea, a year after the conviction (Brooklyn Daily Eagle, 16 Jun 1935, full page)



'Unwanted Glory All That Remains of NRA Victory': Joe a year after the win, 'practically broke' (Indianapolis Times, 23 May 1936)

Read online, with every record: https://ouryichus.com/featured.html#sc_joseph · Family tree card: https://ouryichus.com/tree.html#p/sc_joseph
Ben Soffer (Goldberger) Family Archive · ouryichus.com