

The Posner Family

By: Will Johnson

Three important Antillean families came from humble beginnings right here on Saba. Three of Georgianna Evelina Simmons' daughters who lived in perhaps the smallest house in Windwardside, all became mothers of important families. Their mother Georgianna was a very poor woman and suffered from depressions brought on by the stress of trying to survive back in those days.

The Posner family, prominent on both Curacao and Aruba, the family of Mr. Antoine Johannes Maduro and a Dutchman Mr. Lambert Wever who married Augusta Simmons and whose descendents on Aruba like Maggie Wever are all prominent in business there.

On December 11th, 1907 Mr. Antoine Johannes Maduro (26) married Anita Augusta Simmons (20). Their son Antoine who died some years ago is recognized as the most important expert on the Papiamentoe language. Once in Parliament when I said that his mother was a Simmons from Saba, the Curacao people had me to kill. But when he died and the newspapers mentioned the same thing you should have heard them singing his praises.

Mr. Levie Posner was born in Amsterdam of Jewish parents in 1893. His parents were Israel Posner and Grietje Elsas. He came out to Saba as a marechaussee when he was 19 years of age. On May 21st, 1919 he married Imogene Simmons when he was twenty six years of age and she was twenty seven. When they got married their parents were already deceased. Imogene was a niece of Mrs. Helen Johnson born

Simmons, and so the Posners' are related to the family of the late Edwin Johnson whose grandson is Saba's present Lt. Governor Jonathan Johnson.

In his book "Crossroads of the Buccaneers" published in 1957 by Arco Publishers Limited, the author Hendrik de Leeuw has the following to say about Levie (or Louis) Posner.

"Today;" as Mynheer Schutte informed me, "not one Jew remains." The last Jew to bid this island adieu and leave it to its decay was Mynheer Louis Posner, dubbed by me "Trader Horn of the Caribbean." He left Statia some fifteen years ago for Aruba, a very prosperous island renowned for the large plants of the Standard Oil and the Shell, lying on a six hours' ship's run westward of Curacao.

"Louis Posner a most versatile trader, rotund and loquacious, hearty and keen, with a sense of humor that keeps one howling with laughter at all times of the day and night, has a most colorful career. He, like me, has roamed the seven seas and has had a perfectly grand time while doing it. When he came from the Dutch East Indies, he settled first on Saba as the island's Chief of Police, and there took unto himself a Saba bride, later becoming established in Statia, which proved much too dead for this live wire. So that, with a true nose for business, Louis betook himself and his family and all that he possessed to Aruba. Through hard work, courage and endurance, he attained a position in society of no mean prominence.

And while it may be said that rolling stones gather no moss, Posner has gathered around him not only his Saba vrouw (wife), "Mamma Jennie" (as everyone lovingly calls her), but also eleven little and bigger Posners – for Jennie has blessed him with six sons and five daughters,

one of whom is Lientje, the eldest, a fine young lady and a great help to her dad, whose private secretary she is.

“I hope I am not betraying a confidence when I relate a rather curious incident pertaining to Louis, who almost despaired after his fifth-daughter-in-succession, had arrived on the scene. One day, while reading an American health publication, he came upon an announcement that promised precious counsel to would-be or expectant fathers. Forthwith, he wrote to the publisher-editor over here, whose name I venture to say is known far beyond the length and breadth of our land. While I do not know what health prescription was given Louis or what magazine was sent him, the fact is that since his receipt of the proffered advice, he has become the father of six additional children- ALL SONS!

“Reluctantly, I must take leave of my friend for the time being, but I hope to come back to him on another occasion, when describing the island of Aruba.”

The Posner family spread out on Aruba and Curacao and established themselves in different businesses. There is even a street on Curacao named after Posner. The famous “La Linda” store on the former Nassaustraat in Oranjestraat, belonged to Mr. Posner and his large family lived upstairs.

I was in Aruba when the son Israel (“Oikee”) Posner celebrated his 77th birthday two years ago on October 19th. My brother Guy and his wife Angela were visiting with him at the time. Orders were issued to me that if I did not come to the birthday party that he was done with me. His brother Harry was then 81. These two brothers were married to

two Salas sisters from Curacao. They were the sisters of the recently deceased former FOL Minister Ricardo Salas.

The Aruba Aloe products company is owned by “Oikee’s” son Louis A. Posner. “Oikee” is a big charmer. When you meet him and listen to all his jokes and observe his rapport with the ladies, you can imagine what his father must have been like.

The various Posner off-spring visit Saba from time to time. I remember years ago that a young couple came into the Tourist Bureau looking for me. The lady said that she was from the Posner family and that they were looking for their Johnson relatives. At that time I did not know anything about the Posners. Since then of course things have changed and through research I have acquired a reputation for knowing these things.

Just the other day as I was on my verandah writing this article, I received a call from the Planning Bureau saying that two young ladies wanted to see me about their great grandfather Eric Hassell of Barbados. They were on Saba for only a few hours. Eric used to be a Captain (son of Capt. Frank Hassell of St. John’s and a lady from Barbados). Eric also owned the business Hassell Shipping which dealt with agencies and importation of cement into Barbados. By the time the young ladies left my house they were amazed at how much I knew about their great grandfather. His sister Earla is alive and in her nineties. She lives between England and Barbados and was here on Saba several years ago with her family.

The Posner’s, their late cousin Antoine Maduro, and their other cousin Maggie Wever are all well-known people on Aruba and Curacao. They all started from humble beginnings here on Saba. When I showed

Dr. Posner (son of “Oikee”) the photo of Windwardside and the house of his great grandmother all he could do was exclaim “Ay mi Dios” and remark that it was the poorest house in a village of at that time nearly all poor people.

And so now you know about the Posner family, a Jewish family, originally from Russia, then via Holland and Saba ended up on Aruba and Curacao and made a name for themselves on those islands.
