

# **The De Limas of New York**

**by**

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## **Introduction**

In May of 1870, David A. de Lima and his young family arrived in New York City from the Dutch Caribbean island of Curaçao.<sup>i</sup> He was one of more than half a million Jews who immigrated to the United States between 1870 and the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>ii</sup> Most of these Jews were Eastern Europeans, also referred to as Ashkenazim, who had escaped pogroms and poverty in their countries of origin. The large majority settled in New York City.

In 1825, the Jewish population of the city had been only about 500, but it had grown rapidly prior to David's arrival and stood at 60,000 in 1870. During the three decades that followed, this section of the population continued to increase at an unprecedented rate, and by the year 1900, around 550,000 Jews were living in the New York metropolitan area.<sup>iii</sup> People of many nationalities and religious persuasions flocked to America during these transforming years. Immigrants from Italy, Ireland, Germany, Austria, Russia, and many other countries sailed up the Hudson River on a daily basis with only their hopes and aspirations to nurture them. The total population of New York City shot up from 942,292 residents in 1870 to more than 3.4 million in the year 1900. By the turn of the century, almost 37 percent of the city's residents were foreign born.<sup>iv</sup>

David came to New York with many aspirations as well, but contrary to the greater part of the Jewish immigrants of the time, he had not escaped persecution in his place of origin nor had he ever known poverty and destitution. Born in Curaçao in 1837<sup>v</sup> to a Sephardic<sup>\*</sup> family whose ancestors had been living on that island since the early eighteenth century,<sup>vi</sup> he grew up in a close-knit Jewish community that was well respected by the Dutch colonial government. The Jews of Curaçao enjoyed freedom of religion and were active participants in the island's economic and cultural affairs. David's Curaçaoan ancestors were merchants, traders, and landowners and were considered upper middle class and learned. As a young man, David appeared to be following in their footsteps and had a managerial position at one of the most prestigious trading companies on the island, S.E.L. Maduro & Sons, where he was held in high regard by the founder, Mr. S.E.L. Maduro.<sup>vii</sup> He was thought of as one of the young leaders of the Jewish community into which he was born and, had he chosen to stay on the island, it is likely that he would have been a figure of considerable influence in this insular society of merchants and traders.

### **David A. de Lima - Curaçao**

In 1860 David married Sarah Wolff, daughter of an Ashkenazi Jew and a Sephardic woman. Their family soon grew to include a daughter Esther, born in 1861, a son Elias, born in 1865, and yet another son Edward, born in 1869. The young couple and their children formed part of a large extended family. David's brother Haim and his ten

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<sup>\*</sup> Sephardic Jews are descendants of the Spanish and Portuguese Jews who used to inhabit the Iberian peninsula.

daughters as well as his brothers Jeudah and Salomon and their young families lived nearby, as did many aunts, uncles, and cousins who were all counted among their nearest and dearest.<sup>viii</sup> The families socialized frequently and celebrated holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, and other festive occasions with great relish.<sup>ix</sup>

The early Sephardic Jews who settled in Curaçao in the mid seventeenth century had founded the Mikvé Israel synagogue in 1651, and by the end of the eighteenth century, the community had grown to be one of the largest Jewish communities in the Americas. The nineteenth century saw many disagreements among the congregants. A few years after David and Sarah were wed, a large number of the members of the original Mikvé Israel synagogue of Curaçao seceded from that congregation and formed a liberal Jewish congregation called Temple Emanu-el. David's father, Elias A. de Lima, and all his children were among the secessionists. Elias A. de Lima was one of the elders of the new religious entity and was one of the four Jews who were given the honor to lay the first stone for the new temple structure in 1865.<sup>x</sup> David's older brother, Haim, was the secretary of the first governing board of Temple Emanu-el.<sup>xi</sup> And David himself was the secretary of the liberal precursor of Temple Emanu-El called *El Porvenir* – The Future – which was in charge of publishing the pamphlet *Shemah Israel* where the new ideas and concerns of the secessionists were discussed quite dramatically.<sup>xii</sup>

An example of such writing can be found in a letter directed to “you who until yesterday were our brothers”( meaning the congregants of the Mikvé Israel community) which was published by the secessionists in the fifth issue of this pamphlet. The letter ended as follows:

... just like a daughter who leaves her paternal home to create a new family may feel profoundly moved and may lament the hard necessity of separation, so too is our parting from you. Yes, our hearts are oppressed, our lips tremble, and our eyes are swollen with tears as we look at you one last time and bid you our final farewell. But a great consolation is ours: we have planted in you the seed for improvement and progress: that seed cannot be lost and, in spite of everything, it has to grow and produce abundant fruit.

Holy synagogue, beloved temple, alma mater, farewell!

Once more, farewell!

God be with you, with us, with all! Amen!<sup>xiii</sup>

The style of this letter is very similar to a letter published in a later issue of *Shemah Israel* signed by D.A. de Lima in which he apologizes for being overcome by emotions on the 13<sup>th</sup> of August 1864 when he gave a lecture discussing accusations aimed at the secessionists – accusations which had appeared in articles published in the local press.<sup>xiv</sup> David's letter in *Shemah Israel* reflects on the feelings that were released by this split and the subsequent acrimonious letters read by one and all on the island in the *Curacaosche Courant*. He explains that the tears he shed on the occasion of his lecture were tears of “noble indignation mixed with that religious compassion that inhabits all generous souls when they see the sad extremes of which mankind [is capable] when it allows itself to be ruled by its passions.” It is likely that other opinion pieces published in *Shemah Israel* and left unsigned were also written by David in his capacity of secretary of *El Porvenir*.

At the celebration of the first anniversary of *El Porvenir*, David was one of the featured speakers at a splendid gala held at the home of David Senior Jr. The festivities included speeches, toasts, fireworks, music, song, dance, and delicious food. Jan Gerard Palm, a famous Curaçaoan composer and the organist of the liberal community, wrote a new march called *El Porvenir* for the occasion, and the party continued until the sun had risen and only ended when the new march was played once more and the last stragglers finally left for home.<sup>xv</sup> David de Lima was also a member of the Curaçao committee for the

*Alliance Israélite Universelle*, a charitable organization headquartered in Paris which collected funds worldwide for the education of Jewish children in the Middle East.<sup>xvi</sup>

It is fair to say then, that prior to David's decision to settle in the United States, the De Limas, and David in particular, were practicing Jews and leaders of the new liberal congregation. While conceivably in America the name De Lima might not necessarily have revealed the fact that the family was Jewish, their lives in Curaçao had been one of intense involvement in religious affairs. The family's full name was Abinun de Lima, often shortened to just De Lima and typical of some of the names of the Sephardic Jews of the Caribbean. These last names combined a name of Jewish or Hebrew origin with a name more acceptable in Spain and Portugal where these Jews had been persecuted. Names such as Cohen Henriquez, Semach Valencia, Abinun de Lima, Jesurun Pinto, and Levy Maduro were quite common and used either in full or in the shortened Henriquez, Valencia, De Lima, Pinto, and Maduro version, depending on the circumstances. The De Limas of Curaçao always used A. de Lima, maintaining a strong affinity for this Jewish part of their name by never dropping the initial A. And so, although New Yorkers may not have thought of lumping these new arrivals with the many other Jewish immigrants that were settling in their city, David A. de Lima and his family were to continue their Jewish involvement in New York, although they do not appear to have affiliated themselves with a particular congregation in the city.

Based on the membership dues assessed to Elias Abinun de Lima and his sons by the Mikvé Israel community in 1862 prior to the formation of the liberal congregation, it appears that they had some wealth, although their assessed contribution was still only a

fraction of that of the wealthier members of Mikvé Israel, such as the Jesuruns and the Seniors.<sup>xvii</sup> This communal tax or *finta* was first introduced in Curaçao's Jewish community in 1810, and it was customary since those early days for the Council of Elders to tax each member according to his or her financial ability.<sup>xviii</sup> This custom is still in place in the Mikvé Israel – Emanuel community of Curaçao.

The degree of David's wealth and his connections in the business world would become more apparent upon his arrival in New York City in 1870. Less than two months after settling in the city, this new immigrant established an import and export business of his own. And shortly thereafter, a credit report prepared by R. G. Dun made it quite clear that David de Lima had come to the United States with sufficient funds and ample backing to embark on this new enterprise. Dun stated that De Lima claimed to have access to:

... a capital of \$12,000 gold of his own and \$5,000 gold loaned him at the risk of the bus., also has a running credit of 5000 pounds sterling + will do only a commn. [commission] Business with South America. He comes with excellent letters to first class parties here, who speak of him as an honorable stfd. [straightforward] good bus.man, not likely to go beyond his means + believed worthy of confidence and credit.<sup>xix</sup>

David's personal wealth represented a considerable fortune for a young man 33 years of age, and his credit line and business loan coupled with the "excellent letters to first class parties" pointed to an already successful business career and important personal connections, warranting the trust of his guarantors.

Nevertheless, New York City was big and getting bigger every day. The ability to excel in the small business community of Curaçao, an island with a population of less than 25,000 at the time, did not necessarily guarantee success in Gotham where the population was rapidly approaching a million in the year that David decided to settle there. So it is with

interest that we begin to follow David A. de Lima's progress during his first few years in the United States.

### **David A. de Lima - New York**

David de Lima's newly formed company was known as D. A. de Lima & Co. and was originally located at 23 William Street in Lower Manhattan\* which was THE center of commerce for companies involved in imports and exports. The streets in this area were lined with offices and warehouses that offered employment to the laborers who inhabited the tenements near the docks. Since public transportation was not something the working class could afford, most ended up living near to their jobs. As such, Lower Manhattan was both the working environment and the location of the homes of many new immigrants, often in polluted areas with poorly designed sewage systems and plagued by overcrowding.<sup>xx</sup>

David de Lima, however, commuted to work and lived with his family across the East River in Brooklyn. His home at 471 Henry Street was a three-story brick building between Harrison and Dograw and was located in a pleasant upper middle class neighborhood. But wealthy New Yorkers were following the expansion of the city and were increasingly moving to the Upper East Side of Manhattan. And so, on September 5, 1874, David put an ad in the Brooklyn Eagle offering to let his Brooklyn residence through May 1 of the following year.<sup>xxi</sup> It is not known where he lived between 1874 and 1877 while his home of

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\* He later moved to larger quarters at 68 William Street.

later years at 36 East 57<sup>th</sup> Street was being built. Upon its completion, however, David and his family settled into this elegant brownstone, and it remained their home for the remainder of his life. This building between Madison and Park Avenue was one of a series of swanky residences built in the 1870s – structures which transformed 57<sup>th</sup> Street into what the New York Times reporter Christopher Grey described as “an only slightly less luminous residential address than the Fifth Avenue of the Vanderbilts, Whitneys and others.”<sup>xxii</sup>

In December 1873, R. G. Dun updated his credit report and wrote that David was the Dominican consul and was doing a considerable business in South American and West Indian goods. He also stated that the company’s capital was now estimated to be \$130,000, more than ten times the amount with which David de Lima had started his business three and a half years earlier.<sup>xxiii</sup> During those first few years, the New York Times and the Brooklyn Eagle reported numerous arrivals of ships in New York with imports for D. A. de Lima. From Demarara he received sugar,<sup>xxiv</sup> from Maracaibo, Venezuela came miscellaneous merchandise,<sup>xxv</sup> and multiple shipments of salt, goat skins, hats, divi divi, aloe, and coffee arrived from Curaçao.<sup>xxvi</sup>

Within a few years after his arrival, David A. de Lima’s extensive connections in the Caribbean and South America coupled with his financial success in the United States solidified his reputation in New York and throughout the Caribbean and the Northern part of the South American continent as a successful businessman on the way to ever-higher achievements. A contemporary, Abram Wakeman, reminisced about David de Lima during those heady days of the nineteenth century:



[He] arrived in New York with a strong determination to succeed. The business from this little start rapidly grew, and Mr. De Lima soon needed an assistant. Then, his brother, J.A., came and the firm D. A. & J. A. De Lima was formed. At their death, they were numbered among the wealthy men of our city. [...] The kind treatment to their employees was a factor in the firm's great success.<sup>xxvii</sup>

On August 1, 1876, R.G. Dun reported that David's youngest brother Jeudah had joined him in business in New York and described Jeudah and D.A. de Lima & Co. as follows:

... a man of some means [who] adds something to the pecuniary strength of the concern, which is now estimated at 175m/\$. Are doing well and are in their usual standing and credit.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Jeudah had been born in 1841 and came to New York with his wife Leah Cohen Henriquez and their five children: Estela, Amelia, Elias, Rosalynde, and David – all born in Curaçao.<sup>xxix</sup> In New York, Jeudah joined his older brother in many business and networking activities. He too chose to live among the well-to-do, and by the 1890s this younger brother had moved even further uptown than David and resided in the apartment building known as “The Fifth Avenue” at the Southeast corner of Fifth Avenue and 85<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>xxx</sup>

David's and Jeudah's older brothers Haim and Salomon remained in Curaçao and are buried there. Haim's unmarried daughters, Julia, Emma, and Eliza all eventually moved to New York City and died in that city in the twentieth century. And Salomon's son Elias, who was to play an important role in New York's world of banking and international commerce at the turn of the century and in the early twentieth century, also came to New York City in the early 1880s and worked for his uncle David. Another relative who lived in New York was David's sister Hetty (Esther) and her husband Benjamin de Sola. After Benjamin's death in 1882, Hetty returned to Curaçao where she died in 1910. Her remains were

subsequently transferred to New York and she was buried in this city where she had spent part of her married life.<sup>xxx1</sup>

The above paints a picture of a fair number of the Abinun de Lima family living in New York City in the late nineteenth century. It is known that through the first decades of the twentieth century these New Yorkers and their descendants continued to be in touch with their many relatives from Curaçao, Venezuela, Colombia, and other places in Latin America and the Caribbean.<sup>xxxii</sup> And the relatives in Curaçao thought of their adventurous and successful New York relatives with much affection and admiration. In Curaçao, Haim Abinun de Lima's daughter Rebecca de Lima Salas named two of her children after Jeudah's children: Estela Salas, born in 1895 and Rosalynde Salas, born in 1905. These were names that had not appeared in the family before Jeudah and his wife named their children thus.<sup>xxxiii</sup> Years later, in 1932, when Rosalynde de Lima died in New York City, she bequeathed \$5,000 from her estate to her namesake in Curaçao – a sign that although it had been almost sixty years since her father had chosen to immigrate to the United States, her Curaçaoan relatives remained in her thoughts.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The family ties were clearly important on a personal level as well as from a business perspective.

David de Lima's many overseas connections made him an important source of information for Americans who wanted a better understanding of U.S. trade relations with Latin America. In his capacity as the Dominican Consul in New York he made news within years after moving to the United States, when the New York Times interviewed him regarding the downfall of President Baez of the Dominican Republic in 1874. He was quick to reassure the reporter at that time that "any such changes [that might result from

Baez's expulsion] would be entirely peaceful and harm no commercial interests. Foreign or domestic."<sup>xxxv</sup> In later years he was consulted frequently about his views regarding trade with South America, and he became an active spokesperson for those wishing to increase commerce between the USA and its Southern neighbors.

Both David and Jeudah A. de Lima were members of the New York Board of Trade and Transportation. The purpose of the Board was to promote trade, commerce, and manufacturing in the United States, and especially in the State and City of New York. Eventually David de Lima was elected one of the thirty-six managing Directors who constituted the consulting element of this association, which by the end of the century had over 800 corporate members comprising about 2000 individuals – the largest body of its kind in the state of New York.<sup>xxxvi</sup>

David seems to have paid attention to many efforts that would improve international trade – efforts taking place domestically as well as in other parts of the world. One of these projects was the Panama Railroad Company. This company was originally organized by a group of wealthy New Yorkers in 1848, long before David came to the United States, in order to facilitate trade across the Isthmus of Panama. The construction of the railroad in this treacherous terrain and climate was frequently delayed and resulted in many dead among the white laborers who were originally hired for the project. Subsequently Chinese laborers were brought in to continue the work, but they too succumbed to the difficult environment. In 1881, all the company shares were sold (at a healthy profit for the American shareholders) to the French representatives of the Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interoceanique, which was at the time beginning the construction of the Panama

Canal. The terms of the stock transfer stipulated that eight of the Directors of the original company remain on the Board until the last installment payment due on the stock was paid by the French company. In 1888, when the term for the installment payments of the old stock expired, an entirely new board was chosen for the Panama Railroad Company. This board consisted of new stockholders and D.A. de Lima was one of the directors elected to this governing body of the Panama Railroad.<sup>xxxvii</sup> It is not clear how profitable this investment ended up being for him, because the French Compagnie Universelle du Canal Interoceanique ended up going bankrupt in 1889 and the railroad lay practically idle for many years thereafter. Yet, while the canal was being dug, the railroad was of utmost importance for the transport of the men who were building the canal and also to remove the dirt and other debris that were by-products of this project.

Almost twenty years after David de Lima's arrival, when he was already an influential businessman in New York City, he became involved in the preparations for the International American Congress scheduled for October 1889 in Washington, DC. In anticipation of the Congress he sent a long letter to the Secretary of the special committee of the Board that was assigned to deal with the issues to be discussed at the October event. In this letter, which was published in its entirety in the New York Times, he explained that:

The greatest obstacles to the advancement of our commercial relations with South America are those which are provided by our own laws. I know of no bias, no prejudice, no restriction on the part of South American States which would prevent the rapid increase of our trade with them; and it must be conceded that we have ourselves built up those insurmountable barriers to that ready communication which should exist between ourselves and our sister republics of the south. Not the least of the difficulties which we put in the way of trade is the retention of the laws whereby our traders are prevented from acquiring and Americanizing vessels that have once sailed under foreign flags. This law, good in its day, served its purpose

well, but to retain it under the plea of protecting the industry of our shipbuilders is but penny wise and pound foolish.<sup>xxxviii</sup>

In fluent English, which was at best his third or fourth language, he added recommendations for the adoption of a uniform system of customs regulations and a uniform method of determining the classification and valuation of merchandise. De Lima ended by unequivocally chastising the State Department for sending out unqualified professionals to represent the United States in South America.

In almost every instance they do not possess any knowledge of the Spanish or the Portuguese language. Thus prepared and equipped do we send down our representatives. It was one such in Venezuela who assured me with great gusto that before his appointment he did not even know where Venezuela was.<sup>xxxix</sup>

He was not one to mince words.

The International American Conference must have lasted for many weeks, and when the Spanish-American delegates finally arrived on a special train from Washington in New York City on December 16 for a four-day stay, it was a dreary day that required the New York reception committee to “wade through the mud to Cortlandt Street and across the ferry to Jersey City” to receive them. Among the first to bid them welcome to New York were the Chairman, Cornelius H. Bliss and committee members William H. T. Hughes, D.A. de Lima, R.A.C. Smith and Howland Robbins.<sup>xl</sup> Jeudah de Lima also participated in the important visit of the Pan-American delegates and was a member of the entertainment committee that planned the activities for the international visitors in New York.<sup>xli</sup>

Not all of David’s activities were centered on his business affairs and his visions of improved trade relations with South America. His family was of utmost importance to him. When he and his wife Sarah first migrated to New York in 1870 they had brought with them

their three children born in Curaçao: Esther, Elias, and Edward. In the seventies the family grew with the birth of Charles in 1873, followed by the birth of a daughter called Lylia in 1875.<sup>xlii</sup>

In 1883 David de Lima had the shock of his life when around three in the afternoon of September 17, a messenger boy handed him a letter that informed him that his eight-year old daughter Lylia had been kidnapped. The writer of the note indicated that the little girl's throat would be cut unless \$26,000 in bills were sent in an envelope to be delivered to Daniel de Leon. As it turned out, Lylia had not been kidnapped and was found to be safe in the company of her mother.<sup>xliii</sup> Mr. De Leon subsequently stated that a man unknown to him, who called himself Spofford, visited him three times that September. On the third visit, Spofford asked him if he knew David de Lima. When he answered that he did, Spofford gave him a sealed envelope, telling him to send it to De Lima. He sent it by messenger boy. Once De Leon found out what the letter contained, he tried to work with De Lima and the police to find out who exactly this Spofford was. The story becomes fairly confusing thereafter, but by January 11, 1884, the flamboyant Daniel de Leon filed a \$100,000 suit against David A. de Lima in New York's Superior Court for alleged slander, indicating that De Lima had injured his reputation by telling the inspector of police that De Leon was party to a scheme to blackmail him.<sup>xliv</sup>

Daniel de Leon was also a Sephardic immigrant from Curaçao and was fifteen years younger than David de Lima. He had studied in Hildesheim, Germany and had also spent some time at the university in Leiden, Holland.<sup>xlv</sup> In the 1870s he migrated to New York and was offered a job in the offices of D. A. de Lima & Co.<sup>xlvi</sup> By the 1880s, at the time of

the aforementioned incident, he was no longer working for David, but the two parties knew each other well. Subsequently, in the 1886 mayoral campaign of Henry George, De Leon became a committed socialist, and in 1890 he joined the socialist Labor party and quickly rose through its ranks. He is regarded as the forefather of the idea of revolutionary industrial unionism in the United States.

What Daniel de Leon's precise involvement was in the blackmailing attempt that affected David A. de Lima and his family is not clear, but the two parties broke off all communication with each other in October of 1883. Suffice it to say that David de Lima, although relieved to find his daughter unharmed at home, was greatly disturbed by this peculiar affair, and a detective was posted at his home for several days after his receipt of the threatening letter. Little Lyliá's siblings, however, appeared to take the whole blackmailing issue as a lark. The New York Times reporter who interviewed their father at his home on Fifty-seventh Street reported that her brothers tried to frighten their little sister by telling her that Mr. Spofford was coming to get her, but she laughed and showed no fear.<sup>xlvii</sup>

While David may have missed his brothers and sisters who had stayed behind in Curaçao, he maintained close contact with them and visited the island often. On one such occasion, in December of 1886, a "soirée musicale" was held by Salon Capriles in honor of "Monsieur et Madame David A. de Lima" with friends offering classical piano and violin performances as well as operatic arias.<sup>xlviii</sup> These social events in Curaçao were often organized for special occasions at the home of Dr. David R. Capriles and drew on the artistic talents residing in Curaçao at the time, including in this case Lelia Capriles,

Ephraim S. L. Maduro, Julio Blasini and several others. It would appear that David's Curaçaoan friends considered his December visit to the island that year an event to celebrate.

Also the business correspondence between Curaçao's largest trading company of the time, S.E.L. Maduro & Sons and D.A. de Lima reveal the underlying friendship between the two parties. In a letter dated October 8, 1886, Mordy S. L. Maduro, one of the sons of the founder of S.E.L. Maduro & Sons wrote to David:

Mr. D. A. de Lima  
New York  
My dear friend

I was very happy indeed to learn, before I have been favored with your kind lines of the 17<sup>th</sup> ult., that you and your dear family returned well from Europe. I hope you will again have many times there, together with those children of your's [sic] from whom you have lately been separated.

Many, many thanks for the informations [sic] you have been kind enough to give us on business and not less for your offer to supply us with funds in case we may see any chance for speculating in produce.

In fact, it is like you say, that we have been doing very little with your house [meaning D.A. de Lima & Co.] in your absence. But this was not only with you, the same was the case with other friends there. Such high prices have been paid in Coro for skins and coffee by some speculators who, as it seems, are compelled to make shipments at all events, that we cannot compete with them. By last steamer, however, we sent a small lot of skins to your consignment, as also an order for lumber.

I assure you, it is a pity to see how we are losing our time here, having all kind[s] of facilities to work in any other place and being so many brothers.\* But there is something which I cannot explain, but which binds us to this poor island.

My mama and Elias beg to be kindly remembered to you and your's [sic]. Elias was very sorry he had to leave that city before you came back, having your friend as such been deprived of the pleasure of embracing one of his father's good friends.

With friendly greetings to you and your esteemed family I remain, dear friend  
Very affectionately yours  
Mordy S. L. Maduro

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\* S.E.L. Maduro had five sons.



It is clear from this letter that David had become an important businessman in the eyes of his Curaçaoan counterparts, and one might read a tinge of jealousy into Maduro's suggestion that he and his brothers might be losing their time in Curaçao. He may have felt this way because of David's well known success in New York or because David appeared to be flush in cash and enterprising enough to suggest supplying the Maduros with funds for a speculative transaction. Yet, the something Mordy Maduro could not explain and which he said bound him and his brothers to the little island, endured. The firm still continues to operate in Curaçao.

Beyond their attention to family and business affairs, the De Limas were also active in charitable and Jewish organizations. One of David de Lima's favorite organizations was the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA) of New York. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Board of this non-profit group and attended its meetings regularly. In its early years, the YMHA served primarily as a reading room for its members, but the influx of immigrants into New York in the last decades of the nineteenth century brought about a change in focus. Soon the YMHA began to offer English and citizenship classes to the newcomers and reached out to help the immigrant Jews in any way it could. At the annual meeting held on May 14, 1882, the Executive Committee of which David was a member reported that employment had been obtained for 62 young men during the preceding year, as the YMHA clearly extended its mission beyond its library.<sup>xlix</sup>

In February of 1891, David de Lima was one of the patrons of the Purim Ball that was held at the Metropolitan Opera House that month. Among the other patrons that year were

such prominent Jewish New Yorkers as Nathan and Isidor Strauss, Jacob H. Schiff, and others.<sup>i</sup>

David was also a member of the Lotos Club, one of the oldest literary men's clubs in the United States. It was founded in 1879 to include members of the artistic, literary and musical worlds, but also "men of all professions, business men, men of leisure, the admirers, judges and promoters of literature and art, frequenters of the theater and buyers of paintings and books, as well as critics, artists, and authors."<sup>ii</sup> De Lima also belonged to the Reform Club<sup>iii</sup> which was organized to provide a forum for discussion of the reform of the existing tariffs and taxation laws.<sup>liii</sup> This, of course, was a topic close to David de Lima's heart, since his imports were greatly affected by these regulations.

David's wife Sarah was active in charitable affairs as well, particularly in the Hebrew Sheltering Guardian Society which had been founded in 1879. In September of 1883 the Society was taking care of 243 children and had in the previous year furnished over 8,000 free meals to poor persons. Sarah de Lima attended the annual meeting held on September 23, 1883, where the president of the organization told those present that because of the sharp increase in the number of commitments, the society had to lease a large building on Fifty-sixth street besides the two it already had.<sup>liv</sup> Mrs. De Lima remained active in this organization through most of her lifetime.<sup>lv</sup> Her husband, her brother-in-law Jeudah, and her sons Elias and Edward were also regular donors to this charitable organization.<sup>lvi</sup>

Even though the family was clearly involved in Jewish causes, they summered in places where few Jews might have thought that they would be welcomed. Coming from Curaçao where the De Limas in the nineteenth century were considered part of the upper class, it probably did not occur to them when they first arrived in America that their presence might not be appreciated in certain circles. Yet, after some years in New York City, they must certainly have been conscious of the fact that prominent Jews were on occasion turned away from hotels in Saratoga Springs, the Union League Club (which had Jewish members), and exclusive prep schools.<sup>lvii</sup> But the De Limas did not seem to have such problems. In 1881, Mr. & Mrs. David A. de Lima stayed at the elegant Ocean House in Newport, Rhode Island,<sup>lviii</sup> and in 1883 they enjoyed the healing waters of Richfield Springs in Otsego County, New York.<sup>lix</sup> Later, in the summer of 1890, they rented a cottage in Saratoga, New York, with the New York Times reporting that "... the coming season [was] going to be remarkably fashionable and successful ..." in this place that the Times reporter considered "one of the most delightful Summer idling places on the continent" in spite of "its outrageous railroad nuisance and its towering bills."<sup>lx</sup>

This summer season in Saratoga was to be David's last summer. On May 5, 1891 he died at his home, leaving behind his grieving widow and five children.<sup>lxi</sup> He was 54 years old at the time of his death and appears to have been active into the last year of his life. Based on the degree of his involvement in business networking events and summer outings during the year and a half preceding his demise, it is likely that his death came fairly unexpectedly. D.A. de Lima & Co. continued under the direction of the partners: Jeudah A. de Lima (David's brother), Elias A. de Lima (David's eldest son), and Elias S. A. de Lima (David's and Jeudah's nephew). David's son Edward also worked in the enterprise.

When a few years later, Jeudah died in 1895,<sup>lxii</sup> the younger generation remained in charge.

### **The Younger De Limas**

The three young De Limas who ran D.A. de Lima & Company in the nineties had been born in Curaçao. Yet, David's sons could hardly be considered immigrants. The eldest son Elias was only five years old when his father immigrated to New York, and Edward, born in 1869, was an infant. David's children attended school in the United States and Elias graduated from Cornell University in 1886 and from Columbia Law School three years later.<sup>lxiii</sup> Edward went to Harvard, but it is not clear whether he completed his studies there.<sup>lxiv</sup> Their cousin, Elias S. A. de Lima was born in 1862 and attended a Dutch school in Curaçao until the age of fourteen. Then he was sent to Germany where he completed his secondary education at Gymnasium Adreanum in Hildesheim. Subsequently he came to work for his uncle David in New York in 1880 and became a partner at D.A. de Lima & Co. in 1883.<sup>lxv</sup> In the nineties when the older generation passed away, the two Eliases had been in the business long enough to allow for a smooth transition.

Elias, David's son, had married his first cousin, Jeudah's daughter Estela, and they had four children: Beatrice, Edith, Estela, and Ernest.<sup>lxvi</sup> Elias, Salomon's son, also married his first cousin, his uncle David's daughter Esther.<sup>lxvii</sup> They had three sons, Clarence, Herbert, and Arthur, and a daughter Agnes.<sup>lxviii</sup> Esther A. de Lima died in 1899,<sup>lxix</sup> and Elias S.

remarried in 1901, choosing Lucie Robinson Spaneut as his second wife. This marriage ended in divorce and produced no offspring.<sup>lxx</sup>

It seems that Jeudah A. de Lima's offspring did not end up working at D.A. de Lima & Co., although the eldest, Estela, was married to her cousin Elias who, as mentioned above, was one of the principals in the firm after David's death. Jeudah's other daughter, Amelia married Joseph (Mordechay) Henriquez and they had one daughter by the name of Anita.<sup>lxxi</sup> Jeudah's daughter, Rosalynde, married Oscar I. Mayer and they had two children, Oscar and Edwin, who both decided to change their last name from Mayer to A. de Lima.<sup>lxxii</sup>

Both these men were very accomplished. Oscar's obituary in the Times in 1987 states that he was a graduate of M.I.T. and that he was

.... President of the Roger Smith Hotels Corporation. [He was also] an active member of the Stamford Area Commerce and Industry Association, the Stamford Museum, and the Bartlett Arboretum of Stamford. He was a member for many years of the Council on Foreign Relations and served the Eleonore Roosevelt Institute and the United Nations through the UNA/USA.<sup>lxxiii</sup>

His brother, Edwin was a graduate of Columbia University and lived in Scarsdale, New York for most of his adult life.<sup>lxxiv</sup> Here he took great interest in urban planning with a focus on adherence to the building codes and the prevention of environmental hazards inherent in the postwar new construction that was taking place in Scarsdale.<sup>lxxv</sup>

Jeudah's son David attended Cornell like his cousin Elias and was a member of the Class of 1896. He studied mechanical engineering, but later, in 1929, he founded a monthly financial magazine, *Wall Street*, of which he was the publisher. He died on December 13

of that same year and was survived by his wife Maude Eckhardt de Lima. The couple left no descendants.<sup>lxxvi</sup> It is believed that Jeudah's son Elias died as a young adult.

As the century rushed to an end, Elias A. de Lima, David's son, and Elias S. A. de Lima, David's son-in-law and nephew, continued to operate D.A. de Lima & Co. but also kept their eyes open to other opportunities. After receipt of a letter from D.A. de Lima & Co. informing S.E.L. Maduro & Sons of David's death, the Maduros of Curaçao hastened to write back expressing their feelings of deep regret, and indicating that the deceased had been their friend as well as a true friend of their beloved father.<sup>lxxvii</sup> Subsequently business correspondence between the two firms continued unabated.

Also the business ties with Isaac A. Senior e Hijo of Coro, Venezuela remained of interest to the De Limas in New York. In the 1890s the De Limas reported their take on the market conditions in the United States for coffee and goat hides – two key export commodities for the Coriano businessmen – several times a month to the Seniors. But as Brazilian coffee became increasingly available in the U.S. market, the demand for Coriano coffee declined and its price fell precipitously between June 1895 and July 1897.<sup>lxxviii</sup> Somewhat later, in 1897, correspondence between the Venezuelan exporters and the De Limas in New York indicate interruptions in the trade of goat hides as well.<sup>lxxix</sup>

In 1896, a letter from D.A. de Lima & Co. announced to Isaac Senior & Hijo that Edward de Lima had been made a partner at the firm.<sup>lxxx</sup> A few years later, the De Limas were instrumental in helping the Seniors and the Capriles of Venezuela float new bonds in New York, London, and Caracas to finance the ill-fated Coro-La Vela railroad under

construction at the time.<sup>lxxxix</sup> And throughout the first few years of the twentieth century, correspondence between the Seniors of Coro and the De Limas of New York pertaining to the prices of hides and coffee imported by D.A. de Lima & Co. from Venezuela to the United States was maintained.<sup>lxxxii</sup>

Eventually the firm D.A. de Lima & Co. was dissolved and the two Eliases made apparently easy transitions into the banking business. Elias A. de Lima founded the Battery Park National Bank which opened for business on November 20, 1904 at 24 State Street with a capital of \$200,000 and a surplus of \$100,000. He was the president of the new concern.<sup>lxxxiii</sup> In September of 1908 the bank moved to a new locale, described by Bankers' Magazine as: "... larger and better quarters on the ground floor of the Produce Exchange Building, just opposite the new Custom House. The new rooms are fitted up in excellent style and provided with all modern conveniences ..."<sup>lxxxiv</sup> As of September 2, 1915, the bank's total assets stood at \$4.92 million and it boasted individual deposits of \$3.57 million.<sup>lxxxv</sup> A year later, the institution's capital was raised to \$400,000 and the surplus to \$200,000. Two thousand additional shares of new stock were issued at \$150 a share.<sup>lxxxvi</sup> And so the Battery Park National Bank continued to grow until, eventually, it was merged into the Bank of America in 1923. Elias A. de Lima became a vice president of the consolidated entity that continued under the name of Bank of America.<sup>lxxxvii</sup> He held that position until his ill health forced him into retirement in 1929.<sup>lxxxviii</sup>

After the dissolution of D.A. de Lima & Co., Elias S. A. de Lima became president of another import/export company called De Lima, Cortissoz & Co., partnering with the Jewish Cortissoz family of Barranquilla, Colombia. In 1908 he was also named president

of the Hungarian-American Bank in New York. In 1910 he sold out his control of that bank and became the head of one of the largest financial institutions in Mexico City, the Banco Mexicano de Comercio e Industrias.<sup>lxxxix</sup>

This younger generation, like their elders before them, participated in civic and policy issues and was active in charitable organizations. Perfectly comfortable and well known in New York society, they worked hard at doing everything they could to facilitate foreign trade – always with a special interest in all that pertained to Latin America and the Caribbean.

Like David and Jeudah, both Elias A. de Lima and Elias S. A. de Lima were members of the New York Board of Trade. Elias A. de Lima was more involved in other associations, however, and was an active member of the Merchants' Association of New York. At a meeting of this association in 1917, he argued for the use of trade acceptances for all classes of business transactions. These trade acceptance instruments had already been used successfully in the Midwest, but had not yet been widely introduced and accepted on the East coast.<sup>xc</sup>

Elias A. de Lima also made an effort to uphold his academic ties and attended and organized many meetings of the Cornell University Club.<sup>xcj</sup> His connections at Cornell were important ones. When Ernest Wilson Huffcut, Dean of Cornell University's Law School, committed suicide in 1907, the New York Times reported that Governor Charles Evans Hughes of New York identified the body and then waited for two hours beside it for Dean Huffcut's sister and "an old friend, E.A. de Lima" to arrive and make the necessary



arrangements. A letter left by Dean Huffcut instructed his sister what she should do with his remains and that, were she to have any difficulty in executing the instructions pertaining to his cremation, she should call on his friend De Lima who would assist her.<sup>xcii</sup>

Elias also taught a course on foreign trade together with professors of the University of Pennsylvania, the editor of Dun's International Review, and other New York bankers.<sup>xciii</sup>

He concerned himself with public policy as well, and was a vice president of the Tax Payers' Protective Union of Greater New York, which attempted to hold the city accountable for squandering the taxpayers' money.<sup>xciv</sup> And, of course, foreign trade was never far from his conscious thought. He was one of the founders of the Pan-American Chamber of Commerce incorporated in Trenton, New Jersey in November of 1911.<sup>xcv</sup> Indeed, he was a member and executive of many civic organizations in New York City and sat on the board of several financial and public policy institutions. His obituary summarized some of his key accomplishments as follows:

In the World War period he was treasurer and a director of the United States Equalization Board.

Mr. de Lima had also been vice president of the Union Hispano-American Insurance Company and of Vazquez, Correa & Co., a director of the South Porto Rico Sugar Company and president of the Maracaibo Electric Light Company.

On his retirement as president and treasurer of the Netherlands Chamber of Commerce of New York he was made a Knight of the House of Orange Nassau by the Dutch Government. Mr. de Lima's clubs included the Lotos, Reform, Theta Delta Chi and India House.<sup>xcvi</sup>

The activities of the other Elias de Lima, who is always referred to as Elias S. A. de Lima or E.S.A. de Lima, paralleled his cousin's. It is not clear if the cousins maintained a friendly relationship into the twentieth century. Elias S. A. was married to Elias A. de Lima's sister Esther who died at age 38 on June 30, 1899.<sup>xcvii</sup> In January of 1900, a notice of a pending lawsuit appeared in the New York Times, pertaining to the residence at 36

East 57<sup>th</sup> Street. The suit was brought by “Elias A. de Lima against Elias S.A. de Lima, individually and as executor, and others, ...”<sup>xcviii</sup> Most likely this was merely a legal action that had to do with the estate of the deceased Esther A. de Lima, because from proceedings during the following year it would appear that the two Eliases were still working together. In March of 1901, they and Edward A. de Lima received a summons from the City Court of the City of New York as a result of a lawsuit brought by Pablo Emilio Obregon against the De Limas as “co-partners doing business under the firm name of D.A. de Lima & Co.”<sup>xcix</sup>

Shortly before that, D.A. de Lima & Co. filed a lawsuit against George R. Bidwell, collector of the port of New York, to recover back duties alleged to have been “illegally exacted and paid under protest upon certain importations of sugar from San Juan, in the island of Porto Rico, during the autumn of 1899, and subsequent to the cession of the island to the United States.” The action was originally instituted in the Supreme Court of the State of New York by the firm, but ended up in the U.S. Supreme Court. There the case *Delima v. Bidwell*, 182 U.S. 1 (1901) was argued between January 8 and January 11, 1901. The argument hinged on whether or not import duties could be levied on merchandise that had been brought from one domestic port to another in view of the fact that as of April 1, 1899 “the island of Porto Rico had ceased to be a ‘foreign country’.”<sup>\*</sup> The case was decided on May 27, 1901 and the De Limas won the case.<sup>c</sup> Restitution of the funds was somewhat more complicated,<sup>ci</sup> but the decision resulted in a significant increase in trade between the United States and Puerto Rico, not only for the De Limas, but also for others who now benefited from the tax-free status of such transactions.<sup>cii</sup>

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<sup>\*</sup> Even though he was an attorney, it is not believed that Elias A. de Lima argued the case.

In 1897 Elias S. A. de Lima was a member of the Executive Committee in New York City that was making preparations for the arrival of seventy merchants representing the Boards of Trade of almost every Central and South American country in the United States. These representatives were traveling to various U.S. cities to investigate the country's business methods.<sup>ciii</sup> The festivities organized for these visitors in New York City were only a dry run for a much larger event that E.S.A. de Lima was to chair ten years later.

By 1905 Elias S. A. de Lima had become a very active member of the New York Board of Trade and chaired the Committee on Foreign and Insular Trade of this Board. In that capacity he presented a report protesting the plan of conferring the power of regulating railroad rates upon the Interstate Commerce Commission.<sup>civ</sup> And then, in 1907 he chaired the Organization Committee of the National Convention for the Extension of the Foreign Trade Commerce of the United States, a gathering held in New York City and attended by representatives of the Boards of Trade of every State and Territory in the Union. In the opening address to this convention De Lima stated:

... the United States is to-day in a greater degree than ever before a land of wonders, the marvel of the ages. But we should not be slow to recognize that permanent progress cannot be made only in the direction of internal development, and, if we would extend our power, we must become possessed of the means to which this power is annexed, a dominating influence in the commerce of the world.<sup>cv</sup>

This convention was a true feather in De Lima's cap. He conceived of the idea for the event and brought it about through his position on the New York Board of Trade and with the cooperation of other leading business organizations of the country. Bankers' Magazine called it "the most important national commercial convention ever held in Washington for the purpose of considering measures and disseminating information best calculated to

develop our foreign commerce.” The participation of prominent men connected with the national government, such as former President Theodore Roosevelt, Secretary of Commerce and Labor Oscar Strauss, and Secretary of War Taft, added to the prestige of the conference.<sup>cvi</sup>

In 1908 Elias S. A. de Lima introduced a resolution which was approved by the New York Board of Trade to restructure the rules and regulations of cable communications in the United States. With international business growing ever more rapidly, the Board of Trade charged the Committee of Foreign and Insular Trade with investigating the possibilities for reform of the cable industry and instructed the committee to report its findings back to the board at an early date.<sup>cvi</sup>

The public policy initiatives of both Elias A. de Lima and his cousin Elias S. A. de Lima are remarkable for their uninterrupted focus on improving the foreign trade potential of the country. Many had come before them and after them and had gone from poverty to wealth. But these two men were more than first generation Americans (or, if one were to be technically precise, immigrants) who had managed to become rich in their new place of residence. They worked in a steadfast manner to affect policy changes in the area of foreign commerce, enhancing the work that their father and father-in-law had begun and continuing as best they could to educate their peers about the huge world that existed beyond America’s shores. At the same time, there was no doubt that they were proud Americans and that they were appreciative of the freedoms and opportunities available to them in this “land of wonders,” as Elias S.A. de Lima referred to it.

The third De Lima who worked at D.A. de Lima & Co., Edward A. de Lima, David A. de Lima's second son, had only recently returned from his studies at Harvard at the time of his father's demise. Although he worked at his father's firm, he was not yet part of the management team when David died. There was an unusual interlude when, on January 5, 1892, less than a year after his father's death, Edward suddenly disappeared.<sup>cviii</sup> His family and friends had no idea of his whereabouts and the New York Times speculated that "young de Lima had wandered off in a fit of mental aberration," indicating that when he was at Harvard, he had suffered from nervous complications and had taken a South American trip to relieve his mental state. In March of 1892, the family reported that a cable dispatch had been received from a friend in Paris saying: "Edward safe; will write."<sup>cxix</sup> And finally, in August, the Times managed to get a statement from Elias A. de Lima who indicated that his brother Edward was still in France with his mother and that his sudden disappearance from home earlier in the year had been "due to nervous prostration and mental weakness resulting from an attack of the grip," but that he had "almost entirely recovered."<sup>cx</sup> A few years later, in 1897, when his sister Lylia was married in New York, both Edward and his brother Charles served as ushers.<sup>cxii</sup> And, in 1901, Edward, who had been a partner at the firm in 1897, was a codefendant in a lawsuit along with his brother Elias and his cousin Elias S. A. de Lima brought against the partners of D.A. de Lima & Co.<sup>cxiii</sup>

In 1910, after the dissolution of D.A. de Lima & Co., he was named manager of the Paris branch of the Guaranty Trust Co. of New York and eventually was promoted to vice president of that financial institution. Thus Edward too, became a banker, although his achievements were not highlighted as often as those of his brother Elias and his cousin Elias S.<sup>cxiii</sup>

During the First World War, Edward was stationed in Paris and was assistant paymaster in the U.S. army. As such, he was one of the leading distributors of Red Cross funds during the war.<sup>cxiv</sup> It is not known when he returned from Europe after the war to live in the United States again, but by the 1920s he appears to have been back in New York. He and his wife were present at a ball that was held on November 15, 1927 at the Waldorf Astoria to benefit the Pan-American Hospital and Hispanic Medical Center.<sup>cxv</sup> The couple did not have any offspring, and when he died at age 61, his obituary noted that he was survived by his widow, two brothers, and a sister (his older sister, Esther, had predeceased him). The death notice indicated that he passed away at his summer place in Saco, Maine in 1931 after an illness of several years.<sup>cxvi</sup> His brother Elias died in New York City the following day.

David A. de Lima's youngest son, Charles A. de Lima, chose a very different career path from that of his brothers. Born in Brooklyn in 1873, he attended Columbia University and studied medicine. He abandoned his medical studies to pursue his interest in the theater and became an actor and playwright.<sup>cxvii</sup> Very young, possibly as early as 1894 or 1895 when he was 21 or 22 years old,<sup>cxviii</sup> Charles married a Cuban woman by the name of María del Carmen de Céspedes, daughter of Carlos Manuel de Céspedes who was the first president of Cuba.<sup>cxix</sup> Charles's father-in-law, who in Cuba was considered "*padre de la patria*" – father of the nation – had by the time of this marriage long since been assassinated by the Spanish in 1874 after being deposed. Before that he had also divorced María's mother and remarried.<sup>cxx</sup> At some point, Charles's mother-in-law moved

in with his mother Estela de Lima, and in December of 1895, the ladies announced in the New York Times that

Mrs. De Lima, Miss De Lima [Lylia], and Mrs. De Cespedes of [the Dakota at] 1 West Seventy-second Street will be at home on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month during the winter.<sup>cxxi</sup>

Between 1908 and 1915 Charles filed copyrights for ten dramatic compositions, mostly comedies, some of which were adaptations to plays originally written in other languages.<sup>cxxii</sup> He sometimes wrote under the pseudonym of “Challam” and often collaborated with others. His translation of “Papa Lebonnard” adapted from the French was performed at the Bijou Theatre in New York City in April of 1908.<sup>cxxiii</sup> In 1915, “A Live Wire” written by Charles and Legrand Howland was produced in the Cort Theatre in Atlantic City.<sup>cxxiv</sup> And “A Second Look,” a comedy by C.A. de Lima, as he often signed his plays, was performed by the students of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts in January of 1918.<sup>cxxv</sup> Charles was a member of The Lambs,<sup>cxxvi</sup> America’s first professional theatre club,<sup>cxxvii</sup> and The Players, a club for actors and those involved in other arts.

Charles and María del Carmen had two children, Jean and Edward.<sup>cxxviii</sup> Eventually the couple divorced and Charles remarried.<sup>cxxix</sup> His new wife was Florence Burchard of New York. She predeceased him in November of 1952 and died in Paris at the age of 68.<sup>cxxx</sup> There were no children from this second union.

Charles lived a long life, moving between New York, France, and Italy, writing plays, acting in character roles, and for many years living in a chateau in the province of Eure et Loire near Paris, where he kept open house for theatre and literary personalities. On his visits to

New York, the flamboyant Charles de Lima would entertain his nieces and nephews and their offspring with his outrageous acts. The New York De Limas also visited him in France and recall him quite fondly.<sup>cxxxix</sup> He died in Nice, France on August 8, 1954 at the age of 82. Among his best known plays were “John Curtis,” “Rouge et Noir,” and “Vingt et Un.”<sup>cxxxix</sup>

And then there was David’s youngest daughter, Lylia, who had been totally unfazed by the commotions surrounding the threat to her life when she was eight years old. At the time of her father’s death in 1891 she was in her teens and still in school. The summer after David died she summered with her mother and brother Edward in Sharon Springs. Later they moved from their 57<sup>th</sup> Street residence to the Dakota on 1 West 72<sup>nd</sup> Street.

On May 20, 1897, Lylia married G. Osgood Andrews with her four little nieces as her attendants. Reverend H. Pereira Mendes officiated at the ceremony held at the home of Lylia’s widowed mother.<sup>cxxxix</sup> Osgood Andrews was a descendant of Haym Salomon, renowned Jewish financier of the American Revolution, and Major Benjamin Nones, who had been an aide to Washington and Lafayette. He was a member of the Sons of the American Revolution.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

The couple lived at 220 West 107<sup>th</sup> Street in New York City and G. Osgood Andrews worked in the glass industry. Osgood and Lylia, who by now was consistently referred to in the New York Times as Lydia, had one daughter called Leonora. Lylia’s husband predeceased her on March 2, 1944.<sup>cxxxix</sup> It is not known when and where Lylia died.



## The Third Generation and Beyond

Most impressive among the children of the younger De Limas was Agnes de Lima, daughter of Elias S. A. de Lima and his cousin Esther A. de Lima, and granddaughter of David A. de Lima. Agnes was born in New Jersey in 1887 and grew up in Larchmont, New York where she attended private school.<sup>cxxxvi</sup> Her mother died when she was twelve and her father remarried a few years later. She entered Vassar College at the age of seventeen and graduated in 1908.<sup>cxxxvii</sup> At Vassar Agnes was exposed to socialist and feminist thoughts, and upon graduating, she moved to New York City where she became involved in education reform and liberal journalism.

Whatever conservative ideas Elias S. A. de Lima had hoped to instill in his daughter seem to have been pushed aside once she was on her own in New York. Her articles written for the liberal journals the *New Republic* and the *Nation* focused on Progressive Education, a movement which aimed to develop more flexible and interactive educational programs by encouraging students to learn away from the classroom and its school desks. Some of these articles were collected in a book published in 1924 entitled *Our Enemy the Child*.

In 1926 Agnes de Lima became involved with a lengthy strike by the textile workers of Passaic, New Jersey. In August of that year, after more than six months of striking, the textile workers finally voted to appoint a committee to negotiate a settlement with the mill owners and to work towards unionizing the workers. Agnes attended and spoke at meetings of the committee.<sup>cxxxviii</sup> It is likely that her sympathies lay with the strikers,

because that same year she co-authored an article in a new magazine called *The Square Deal* that billed itself as “a champion of justice and the people’s rights.” The article was entitled: “Strike! A Symposium on the Textile Strike in Passaic” and was written by Margaret Larkin, Helen Fox, Henry T. Hunt, Agnes de Lima, and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise.<sup>cxxxix</sup>

In the years that followed, she continued her work in the field of education, taking great interest in the “Little Red School House” which began as an experimental offshoot of the New York Public School System, but was later privately financed by parents and others in Greenwich Village where it was located. The idea and development of the school was the brainchild of a friend of Agnes de Lima’s by the name of Elisabeth Irwin who believed in grouping school children according to their abilities. Emphasis was placed on the physical, social, and emotional welfare of the children and supplementing book learning with practical exposure to life outside the classroom.<sup>cxl</sup> In January 1942 Agnes wrote and published a book called *The Little Red School House* that described the achievements of this progressive school.<sup>cxli</sup>

From 1940 to 1960 Agnes de Lima was the director for the New School for Social Research in New York City. She was married briefly to Arthur MacFarlane – a marriage that ended in divorce in the 1920s.<sup>cxlii</sup> When she passed away at age 87 on November 27, 1974, she was survived by one daughter who went by the name Sigrid de Lima. By the time of Agnes’s death, Sigrid was already a recognized author and had published five novels.<sup>cxliii</sup>

Detailed information about Agnes de Lima's brothers, Clarence, Herbert, and Arthur, was not available to the author at the time of this writing and has not been included in this essay.

Agnes's contributions which were summarized above are acknowledged and known to those who study the history of education reform in the United States. Less known outside family circles, perhaps, are the achievements of her cousins, Elias A. de Lima's children: Ernest, Beatrice, Edith, and Estela.

Ernest A. de Lima's early career seemed to follow in his banker father's footsteps. He attended Cornell University, graduating in 1914, and kept in touch with his alma mater, regularly sending in notices for the alumni news magazine and doing so as late as 35 years after he had graduated.<sup>cxliv</sup> On March 1, 1917 he married Enid Eder Jacobs in New York,<sup>cxlv</sup> and the couple had two daughters, Judith and Virginia, born in respectively 1920 and 1924.<sup>cxlvi</sup>

Ernest had gone to work for his father at the Battery Park National Bank after he graduated from Cornell. Yet he also enjoyed writing. In 1916 he co-authored the text for a course on Foreign Trade that was published by the Business Training Corporation of New York City.<sup>cxlvii</sup> Beyond this course book, he often wrote letters to the editor of the New York Times, expressing his opinion about such issues as "Chicago's Unpatriotic Mayor" who had refused to invite the French mission to Chicago and who, according to De Lima, was also obstructing the ongoing Liberty bond campaign.<sup>cxlviii</sup> Another time, clearly taking pleasure in sharing his opinion with the general public, he expounded on the "questionable practice" of sending food supplies to neutral countries during the First World War.<sup>cxlix</sup>

In 1920 he was appointed manager of the Foreign Department of the Battery Park National Bank,<sup>cl</sup> and in 1922 he was elected Assistant Vice President of the bank.<sup>cli</sup> He traveled frequently to execute his duties in the bank's Foreign Department, and was stationed in Colombia for several years in the twenties.<sup>clii</sup>

After the merger of the Battery Park National Bank with Bank of America, Ernest did not stay on the staff of the merged entity and moved to San José, Costa Rica, where he joined the firm Sasso and Pirie, Sucs., a private banking establishment.<sup>cliii</sup> From a letter he wrote to the editor of Time Magazine in 1937, it appears that he lived in Costa Rica for several years from 1924 on.<sup>cliv</sup> During this stay in Costa Rica, Ernest and Enid were divorced, and Mrs. De Lima returned to the United States with her two daughters. In the early thirties Enid de Lima lived in Washington, DC with the two little girls, and in 1933 she married Everard F. Perkins in her Washington home in a ceremony performed by Rev. Allen Stockdale.<sup>clv</sup> Several years later, her two daughters were both married as well – Virginia three times and Judith, somewhat late in life, only once. They had no descendants.<sup>clvi</sup>

At some point in the late twenties, Ernest met and fell in love with a widowed Costa Rican woman by the name of Olive Le Franc. They married in 1929 and continued to live in Costa Rica for another year or two. In 1931 Ernest returned to Cali, Colombia with his new family and the couple settled there with Olive's daughter of her first marriage and their first born daughter Norma.<sup>clvii</sup> Ernest adopted his wife's daughter, Yolanda, but she tragically died during an appendix operation in Cali in 1936 when she was twelve years old.<sup>clviii</sup>

When Estela de Lima, Ernest's mother passed away on November 12, 1938, her estate was divided as follows:

To Beatrice de L. Meyers, 44 Oliver St., Rochester, N.Y.; Edith de L. Talbot, 640 West End Ave., and and Estela de L. Luria, Sierichstrasse 64, Hamburg, Germany,\* one-fourth residue each. To Ernest A. de Lima, son, Cali Columbia [sic], South America, life estate in one-eighth residue; Judith de Lima and Virginia de Lima, 19 Duval Ave., West Moreland Hills, Washington, D.C., grandchildren, one-sixteenth residue each. Olive Le Franc de Lima, Cali, Colombia, South America, one-eighth residue.<sup>clix</sup>

There must have been some problems in probate with this wording, since the fractions of the estate to be distributed among her survivors add up to one and one-eighth. A subsequent appraisal of the estate, more than a year after Estela's death, left one-fourth residue each to the three daughters and one-eighth residue each to "Olive Le Franc De Lima, widow, and Ernest A. de Lima, son."<sup>clix</sup> Ernest's children of his first marriage are not mentioned in this new distribution scheme. The bulk of Estela de Lima's estate was tied up in the country home in Lakeville, Connecticut that Elias had designed and where the family spent all their summers. Although the outings to this home are fondly remembered by the entire family, Carlos Luria, Elias and Estela de Lima's grandson, indicated that in the design of the house, his grandfather "neglected to provide either closets or bathrooms - - which had to be added after the fact. The family agreed that it was just as well that he [Elias] pursued banking."<sup>clxi</sup>

Ernest died unexpectedly in Cali, Colombia on September 20, 1953 at the age of sixty.<sup>clxii</sup> His obituary in the New York Times indicated that he had been engaged in the real estate and coal business in Colombia. A few years before his demise he published a book of

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\* Estela Luria actually managed to get out of Germany shortly before her mother's death.

fiction in Cali entitled *The Devil is Wiser*. (1948).<sup>clxiii</sup> He appears to have been a man of multiple talents.

Ernest's Colombian family grew to be very accomplished and influential in Cali and beyond. Norma de Lima Le Franc, born to Ernest and Olive de Lima in 1931 during their stay in Costa Rica, married Orlando Sardi at a young age and is today involved in many charities in Cali. Ernesto de Lima Le Franc was born next in 1932, and became a pioneer in the insurance industry in Colombia.<sup>clxiv</sup> In 1954 he formed an insurance company and early on affiliated himself with the giant international insurance firm of Marsh & McLennan, changing the firm's name to Delima Marsh. In 2009 the company was bought out by Marsh & McLennan. Ernesto is a well-known personality in Cali and in the rest of the nation as well, having served in Colombia's national government in a number of capacities. Today, in his seventies, he continues to be Chairman of the Board of "Organización de Lima," the holding company for his many business enterprises in Colombia.<sup>clxv</sup> His younger brother, Eduardo de Lima, is a medical doctor and also lives in Cali. Although Ernest's daughters of his first marriage left no descendants, his Colombian offspring had many children: Ernesto had ten, Eduardo had two, and Norma had seven. They too continue to make their mark on the world.<sup>clxvi</sup>

Elias and Estela de Lima did not only send their son Ernest to college, but all three daughters were offered that opportunity as well. This was only to be expected from someone of Elias's academic background and social standing. Beatrice graduated Vassar College in 1908 at the same time as her cousin Agnes de Lima<sup>clxvii</sup> – they had been born in the same year. She made a socially appropriate match and married Walter S. Meyers on

January 8, 1908.<sup>clxviii</sup> Walter S. Meyers descended from a Jewish family in Rochester, New York and after they were married, the couple resided in Rochester, where they raised their two children, Walter and Ruth.

In Rochester, Beatrice became involved in the Council of Jewish Women. In November 1920, she attended the Ninth Triennial Convention in Denver, Colorado and presented a paper in which she eloquently suggested definitive steps that might be taken to increase the strength of the National Council. These included the suggestion of regular visits by Field Secretaries to the various Sections in different locales and a Council Bulletin issued once a month or once in two months which would report on Section activities. She believed that such changes would greatly improve the feeling of solidarity and cooperation between the Sections and with the National Council.<sup>clxix</sup>

Beatrice became most well known as an authority on children's books. Publisher's Weekly, a book trade journal published by Harper's, indicated that Beatrice

... believed that children had a right to choose their own books in their own shop, a shop in which everything from the furnishings to the promotion and selling of books should be planned for the children.

And so, in spite of the depression, in spite of the skeptical prognostications of well-intentioned friends and critics, the Children's Book Shop was opened in 1933, in one room of one of Rochester's oldest houses.<sup>clxx</sup>

This philosophy regarding the importance of the child's own ideas in his or her reading habits echoes many of the thoughts expressed by Beatrice's cousin Agnes de Lima. In 1927 Agnes had published an article in the New York Times entitled "Early School Books Contrasted with New" and subtitled "Primers Enjoining Duty and Obedience and Filled with Pious Texts Have Given Way to Volumes That Arouse the Child's Imagination." In this

article, Agnes paraphrased Bertrand Russell who had said that the insatiable curiosity of the average child would put most grown-ups to shame, and Agnes added the essence of the tenets that had guided her work in the Progressive Education movement:

But children must do their learning in their own ways, and these are not the ways of adults. Freedom, naturalness, spontaneity are the first essentials, and activities that have meaning to them as children.<sup>clxxi</sup>

It appears that Beatrice de Lima Meyers was in full agreement with these statements. From 1933 on, she dedicated much of her time to the Children's Book Shop in Rochester where she offered not only books of interest to the kids who came to buy their favorite publications, but also innovative and inspiring programming, never forgotten by the young who attended these events.

On long hot summer afternoons, once every two weeks, special invitations [were] sent to children – no grownups allowed – to attend a “Told Under the Blue Umbrella” party held on the lawn in front of the Book Shop. At times, a young Chinese lady in costume [told] Chinese folk tales; sometimes a real clown from Barnum and Bailey amuse[d] the children with real tales of circus life; an engineer from the New York Central Railroad [might thrill] them with stories of his experiences; and once an old Negro mammy regaled them with stories of her childhood, ending with singing the beautiful Negro spirituals so dear to her heart-songs which children listened to starry-eyed and enthralled.<sup>clxxii</sup>

Her bookstore was an all-encompassing experience for the children who frequented it. And as its popularity grew, it expanded from the original one-room facility to comprise the entire house.<sup>clxxiii</sup>

In 1940, Beatrice wrote an article about her experience with the selection of children's books entitled “On Common Ground with Children's Books.”<sup>clxxiv</sup> Her fame spread internationally, to the extent that the Russian Government asked her to act as an adviser in the preparation of a list of American books for Russian schools.<sup>clxxv</sup> Her belief in the importance of the opinion of children about the books they read was also clear in an



advertisement in the New York Times in 1943 for Antoine de Saint-Exupery's then newly-published *The Little Prince*. Comments by various critics and experts on children's stories were listed in this ad. Beatrice de Lima Meyers's quotation was: "Grown-ups won't like it [the book], but who cares."<sup>clxxvi</sup> In 1943 Beatrice also ran for Commissioner of Schools for the Democratic Party, but did not get elected.<sup>clxxvii</sup>

Her obituary in the American Jewish Yearbook of 1946 referred to her as an educator and civic worker who, in addition to being an authority on children's books and the founder of the Children's Book Shop in Rochester, New York, was also very active in Rochester's Central Library and a member of the Board of Directors of the Family Society of Rochester as well as a two-term president of the Women's City Club. Beatrice de Lima Meyers died of cancer on October 19, 1945 at the age of 58.<sup>clxxviii</sup>

The academic record of Beatrice's sister Edith de Lima is not as clear-cut. She attended Simmons College in Boston for two years from 1907 to 1909 and withdrew without receiving a degree.<sup>clxxix</sup> Yet she was listed in the New York Times as having received a Bachelor of Science in Education from Columbia University in New York in June of 1912,<sup>clxxx</sup> an accomplishment of which her son Peter Talbot was totally unaware.<sup>clxxxi</sup> In 1915 Edith became active in an organization to raise money for the remodeling of the Newsboys' Home in what used to be the New York Historical Society Building.<sup>clxxxii</sup>

Unlike Beatrice, Edith did not marry immediately after she left college. In 1919, however, she married the much older George Stuart Talbot, who worked as the Assistant Cashier at her father's bank.<sup>clxxxiii</sup> The couple had two sons, Stuart and Peter, and Edith dedicated her

time to raising them. When her younger sister Estela moved back to New York City just before the start of the Second World War, the two sisters became quite close. While Edith was much more reserved than Estela, she appeared to get a kick out of her outspoken younger sister and on occasion would express her amazement at some of Estela's utterances to her children.<sup>clxxxiv</sup> George Stuart Talbot died in his 91<sup>st</sup> year in 1961,<sup>clxxxv</sup> and Edith moved to Media Pennsylvania to be closer to her son and died there on April 11, 1965.<sup>clxxxvi</sup>

The youngest daughter of Elias and Estela de Lima, also called Estela, attended the prestigious Brearley School, an all-girls private school in New York City,<sup>clxxxvii</sup> and from there went to Vassar. Her stay at Vassar was short-lived, as Estela was not interested in the least in going to college. She proudly claimed that the only exam she ever got a perfect 100 on was that for an auto-mechanics course that she took during the First World War.<sup>clxxxviii</sup> And so she left her eldest sister's alma mater to dedicate her time to other activities that interested her more.

During the War, she joined the Farmerettes, a group of over 20,000 city and town women who went to work on America's farms when the men were called up to war. She mostly drove the workers to their places of work and repaired the automobile fleet that the Farmerettes used. When her mother came to visit her in the field location where she was stationed, she was appalled at her living conditions and wanted to take Estela back home. But strong-willed as ever, Estela did not return to the City with her family. She also worked for the Red Cross and drove an ambulance. In this capacity she would pick up the returning wounded soldiers as they arrived back in the USA and drive them to hospitals or

rehab centers. During the flu epidemic of 1919 she also drove the sick to Bellevue Hospital, steeling herself to the terrible injuries and illnesses that she saw.<sup>clxxxix</sup>

Estela was athletically inclined and trained horses for the New York Police Department and also began training to become a member of the U.S. Olympic fencing team. Her coach was George Santelli, a renowned Italian fencing master, who taught fencing in New York City. A botched thyroid operation prevented her from continuing this endeavor.<sup>cx</sup>

On July 1, 1927, Estela married Frank Luria of Hamburg, Germany at her parents' Park Avenue home. The Rev. H. Pereira Mendes performed the religious ceremony which united these two descendants of Curaçaoan Sephardim. After a honeymoon in the Berkshires, the couple sailed to Hamburg and made their home there until the rise of Nazism.<sup>cxci</sup> Estela hated the Germans, and the dislike appears to have been mutual, because she indicates that they referred to her as “die Wilde Amerikane.” While in Germany, Estela visited her family every summer at the Lakeville home her father had designed, saying that she looked forward to these trips all year and that they really helped her cope with having to live in Hamburg.<sup>cxcii</sup> The Lurias were fortunate to be able to leave Germany with their two sons Carlos and David in 1938, before it became impossible for Jews to obtain exit visas.<sup>cxci</sup> Son Carlos finished off his studies in England before rejoining his parents and younger brother in the States twenty months later.<sup>cxci</sup>

Leonora Andrews, Lylia's daughter and a first cousin to Agnes, Ernest, Beatrice, Edith, and Estela, attended Barnard and graduated in 1921. Her cousins knew that she always wanted to write<sup>cxci</sup> and around the time that she graduated college she published an article

in the New York Times magazine entitled “Young But of Questionable Wildness.” Whether she published anything else subsequently is not known.<sup>cx cvi</sup> . On August 5, 1926, Leonora married Karl S. Woerner at her parents’ home in a non-religious ceremony performed by a Justice of the Peace. The wedding announcement indicated that Karl was an artist, mostly active in commercial/industrial art.<sup>cx cvii</sup> Leonora and Karl Woerner had one son, Andy, but they eventually filed for divorce. After her divorce Leonora did consumer market research, probably one of the early women in this field, and remained friendly with her New York cousins until her death.<sup>cx cviii</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The history of New York City during the last decades of the nineteenth century and through the first half of the twentieth century is composed of the accumulation of experiences of people like the De Limas – movers and shakers who worked and lived in this city at a time of explosive growth. Their success stories paralleled the city’s metamorphosis from the compactly built Manhattan of the 1860s and 1870s to the skyscraper metropolis it was to become in the mid-twentieth century. On a personal level this meant a transformation for the De Limas from their original insular Caribbean background as traders and businessmen to upper class New Yorkers involved in many civic, cultural, and commercial activities. These were folks who saw opportunity and grasped it with energy and dedication. Not only did they enrich themselves in the process, but they also broadened the horizons and possibilities for the city they loved. Thus, with many others, they were an essential part of the driving force that propelled New York City to its influential twentieth century position as the global hub of commercial, financial, and cultural affairs.



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- clxxxviii Tape recording of Estela de Lima Luria, date unknown, in possession of her granddaughter Sarah Luria.
- clxxxix Ibid.
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