

THE GENERAL MUIR

The Origin of "The General Muir"

Jennifer's mother, Trudie, and her grandparents, Sonia and Sol Jollek arrived in this country as refugees.

Sonia Schuster and Sol Jollek married in 1938, around the time Sol graduated from medical school at the German University in Prague. They settled in Sonia's hometown of Zloczow, Poland, now a part of Ukraine, where Sol began his medical practice. They had a son, Marcus, in 1939.

On September 1, 1939, Nazi Germany invaded Poland from the west. Two days later, Britain and France declared war on Germany. On September 17, pursuant to the secret Molotov Ribbentrop Pact between Hitler and Stalin, the Soviet Army invaded Poland from the east, sealing Poland's fate and launching Europe fully into World War II. Although the Soviets did curtail the rights and activities of Jewish citizens, Sol was able to continue his medical practice. However, on June 22, 1941, Germany broke its pact and turned on the Soviets.

The Germans began pushing east into the Soviet controlled territories and took Zloczow on July 1, 1941, killing thousands of Zloczow Jews. The Germans set up a Jewish ghetto in Zloczow and a forced labor camp outside of town in Lackie Wielkie. Because Sol was a doctor, with Sonia acting as his nurse, the Jolleks were allowed relative freedom to travel between the ghetto and the camp to attend to the sick. Hunger and disease claimed many lives, and Sol was instrumental in fighting a typhus epidemic. Family lore has it that Sol downplayed the severity of the epidemic to the commandant of the labor camp, convincing him it was just a flu outbreak, to prevent the

Germans from liquidating the camp to control the epidemic's spread. In 1943 Sonia and Sol learned that the Jews of the Zloczow ghetto and labor camp were going to be liquidated. They managed to escape, slipping into the forest to join the resistance. Unable to take a young child, they hid their son Marcus with a Polish family.

The Jolleks headed east with the partisans. Sol provided medical support, even veterinary assistance for the horses they appropriated for transport. The conflict between Germany and the Soviets was still underway, with Soviet forces pushing westward into German-occupied territory, re-taking Zloczow in July 1944. Largely forgotten to history, the larger struggle between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union unleashed long-simmering ethnic tension in the area and gave dark license to Ukrainian nationalists who targeted Jews and non-Jewish Poles alike. Hearing word of mass killings by the Ukrainians as the Soviets advanced, Sonia and Sol rushed back to Zloczow only to learn that everyone they had known – including their son – had perished.

The fighting in Europe ended with the German surrender in May 1945. In addition to Marcus, the war claimed Sonia's parents, her twin brothers, Herschel and Benjamin, her sister Rosa, and Rosa's husband. Her brother Solomon survived, but his wife and daughter were killed. Sol's sister and her children also perished.

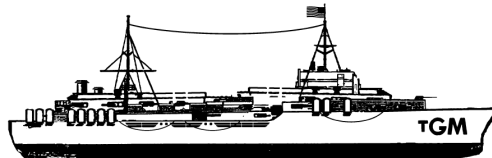
Sol got word that his younger brother Aaron, who had served in the Polish army and eventually ended up fighting for the Russians, had been wounded but was alive and posted in Uzbekistan. Sol managed to track down Aaron in Uzbekistan and convinced him and his wife, Eugenia, to return to Zloczow. However, with their family and property gone and the Soviets in control, they decided there was nothing left for them in Poland and together made their way west towards Prague and then the American-controlled zone in Germany.

Sometime in late 1945, the Jolleks arrived at Deggendorf, Germany, entering the displaced persons (DP) camp operated by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). Sol went to work for the U.N. as the chief medical officer for the camp. Aaron and Genia, who had been pregnant during the journey from Poland to Germany, had a son Marc in

early 1946. Sol and Sonia had a daughter, Trudie – Jennifer's mother – in August 1946.

In 1947, Sol testified at the Nazi war crimes trials at Nuremberg about the German invasion and the atrocities he witnessed in 1941. Asked if he hoped to return home to Zloczow, he replied "I have lost everything there. I have nothing to look for there and I don't want to live on graves."

Meanwhile, what to do with the displaced persons of Europe became a crisis. While most returned to their home countries, between 1 million and 2 million displaced persons, both Jews and non-Jews, could not be repatriated. Not until 1948, with the creation of the State of Israel and the passage in the U.S. of the Displaced Persons Act, were there opportunities for many of those displaced persons to leave the camps and begin new lives. Aaron, Genia, and Marc emigrated to the U.S. first, settling in New Jersey. Sol, Sonia, and Trudie followed in March 1949, arriving in New York aboard the refugee transport ship General C.H. Muir. Like so many other refugees and immigrants throughout history, they hoped to build new lives in the new world.



The Jewish delicatessen has become an icon of New York, its history rising and cresting as subsequent waves of Jewish immigrants came to America during the first half of the 20th century. Around the start of that century, thousands of Jews settled in the tenements of New York's Lower East Side, bringing memories of foods from their homelands with them. Foods served from pushcarts moved into storefronts, which turned into the restaurants we know today.

Delis provided a sense of community for newcomers to a strange land and combined far flung food traditions from the Jewish diaspora into something uniquely American. After the Holocaust decimated the remaining Jewish populations in continental Europe, many of the Jews remaining there sought new lives in America. It would be the last major wave of European Jewish immigration to this country. It was both the heyday of the Jewish deli as well as the start of its decline.

Over time, many of those Jewish communities became increasingly assimilated into the American mainstream, their children moving from crowded tenements and dispersing around New York, to the suburbs, and to the rest of the country. The small delicatessens and appetizing stores that dotted New York began to close as their customers moved on. The rise of industrialized food in the U.S. following World War II took a toll as well, as supermarkets supplanted corner grocery stores of all types and packaged and prepared foods eliminated the need for the daily trip to the market. Traditional methods and small-scale purveyors were lost as consumers chased convenience and lower prices. Today, only a few of the old-school Jewish delis remain in operation.

The General Muir is an unusual name, but one with deep meaning for us. It is a link between the old and the new. We want the past to inform the future, to honor tradition but not be bound by it. Bill Addison, in his review of the restaurant in the May 2013 issue of Atlanta Magazine, perhaps said it best: "The name informs the restaurant's tone: familial, and respectful of the past but with an eye on new horizons."