

Isador Molk

1893 - 1965



Born Itzchok Molkho on March 5, 1893 to Abraham and Irla Molkho, the man later known as Isador Molk came from the tiny town of Ponievez in Lithuania, at that time a province of Czarist Russia.

Itzale (the diminutive form of his name) was known as an “illu”, a child prodigy among his people; a reputation that would later follow him to America. After a few years in school, Itzale joined his next-door neighbor’s family that was coming to America. Being too young to get a passport of his own, he traveled as one of their sons. Once in America, Itzale changed the spelling of his name to Isador Molk, as it was easier for people to spell.

In New York, Isador entered the Orthodox Yeshivah school, receiving a regular stipend of \$4 a week to teach while continuing his own studies. He spent his free evenings preparing for high school and college. At 16, he was the first to graduate as an ordained rabbi from this school, later known as Yeshivah University. At the same time, he completed his high school education.

He began college at Ohio State University in 1911 studying forestry. Later he also attended Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, while teaching at nearby Utica Hebrew School.

During this time, he found time to write articles published in *The American Citizen* and other periodicals. When he secured a position as principal of the Hebrew school in Middletown, Connecticut, he attended Wesleyan University in that city. He also taught Hebrew at Berkley Divinity College and did some private tutoring; one student paid for his lessons by teaching Molk how to play the violin.

Molk did his senior work at Valparaiso University, now becoming interested in structural geology. He expressed a desire to go into business to a fellow rabbi. When asked if he had any money to start with, he answered, "No, all I have to lead me on is fortitude and faith in myself."

His formal education complete, Molk now found himself, by a strange set of circumstances in El Dorado in 1917, when oil was gushing everywhere and the population had swelled from 4,000 to 25,000. He later wrote that El Dorado still looked like a frontier town, with many people sleeping in barns.

Isador first became a dealer in junk and supplier of used oil field equipment. Knowing nothing of the ways of petroleum or business procedure, he slowly and persistently overcame all handicaps to succeed. Later he bought and sold leases and later began companies of his own, in partnership with others, becoming a full-fledged oilman.

In 1924, Molk returned to New York in the hopes of finding a wife. Wishing to find one with the virtues that would please his mother, he agreed to be introduced to the sister of a friend of his half-sister and brother-in-law. An intelligent girl of character, Sophia Berman had emigrated with her family from Lithuania two years earlier than Isador, and now worked as a bookkeeper. Molk delayed his return to El Dorado to spend some time getting to know Sophia. Looking for a girl with true heart and soul, he found Sophia to be that girl. They were married just one week after meeting and returned to make a home in El Dorado.

Through the years, the Molk's contributed large sums to the local junior college. When the nursing department was in jeopardy, money from the Molk's helped greatly. The Molk's provided for more scholarships over the years than any other single contributor to the college.

With the establishment of the Molk Endowment, generations of students are a living testimony recognizing Isador and Sophia Molk. In 1982-1983 alone, their funds were responsible for the higher education of approximately 25 students.

Isador Molk was an outstanding member of the Hebrew Synagogue in Wichita. He also held membership in Patmos Lodge No. 97, A. F. & A. M. in El Dorado, El Dorado chapter No. 35 of the Royal Arch Masons, the Wichita Consistory, the Midian Shrine, and B'nai Brith Lodge No. 857. In politics he was a Brown-Derby Democrat.

Isador Molk continued to operate his company until the spring of 1967. He died Sept 17, 1967, after a severe illness. His body was shipped to N.Y., where, by Jewish custom, he was buried in a wooden casket held together with wooden nails.

CONNECTION TO BUTLER COUNTY

Following his college graduation, Molk began thinking of a man he'd met a few years earlier, an oilman from Marietta. His pursuit of connections that would help him learn the oil business led him to El Dorado, KS right in the midst of the oil boom.

Without capital, and knowing nothing about ways of petroleum, he worked persistently with his two hands and brain in the supply business. Oil supplies were at a premium; only the major oil companies could obtain new pipe. Used pipe often sold at higher prices than new. Molk engaged in supplying secondhand pipe and supplies from a rented pipe yard by the tracks, keeping very busy. At the time, he had never written a check, could not drive an automobile, and was without knowledge or experience in business procedure. Yet slowly and persistently, he overcame all these handicaps to achieve a solid success.

Fascinated by the opportunities offered by the oil industry, Molk began buying interests in leases and productive properties. Many of these investments proved profitable. When the oil boom began to cool and drilling supplies became more plentiful, Molk began drilling. Buying leases and drilling wells, experiencing both honest deals and deals that went sour, he became an oil man.

“Money never fired my imagination. My desire was to find comfort and satisfaction in my work, and use my acquisitions for research . . . to the enlightenment of humanity”, he wrote. Yet money came to him as his strong and unbending spirit surmounted every obstacle. He gained both personal wealth and widespread respect.

Operating largely as an independent, Molk was connected with several companies which were prominent in the development of the Butler County oil field. One of these, organized in 1930 in partnership with several friends, was known as the Cosmic Oil Company. When asked why he named his new company “Cosmic”, he replied, “If Henry Doherty (of Cities Service Co.) could create empires, Isador Molk can create cosmos!”

In July of 1933, with the local oil industry seriously affected by the Depression, Molk sent the following message to President Franklin D. Roosevelt:

“We, a representative group of the independent oil producers of Kansas, while heartily in accord with and anxious to support your lucid and coordinated plan of recovery, are helplessly embedded in the quicksand of ruinous prices for crude. Though our employees have magnanimously taken cut after cut in their wages, and not even considered the depletion of our capital assets, we are still producing at a loss. How can we pay a reasonable wage under unreasonable prices for crude?”

- Isador Molk

A reply was issued from White House official J. H. Ward, of the soon completion of the oil code which would bring about a rise in crude oil prices. Molk was impressed with the wonderful country in which he now lived, where he could write the President of the United States and receive a reply from one of his direct subordinates. In Russia, he would have never dared to contact even a minor official.

Cosmic Oil Co., built in the days of the Depression, led the way in improvements, such as changing over from the obsolete gas and oil engines then used to pump wells to electric motors. Molk was also the first to use acid in the local oil field, a process that dissolved limestone, increasing the porosity for a greater oil yield. The company never operated in the red; bills were always discounted due to early payment.

Due to increased difficulties with his partners, Molk chose to dissolve Cosmic Oil & Gas Co. in Dec. 1936. After Cosmic was dissolved, Molk Petroleum was organized.

Molk built up properties seen by others as unfavorable, or properties viewed as being condemned for future profitable development. Molk, however, held firm faith in their value; that faith was justified with total production of between 200 and 300 barrels daily.

Isador Molk wrote many profound articles and published two books. His book, "The Making of an Oilman", published in 1958, relates many colorful stories experienced on his path to becoming a full-fledged oil producer. The book attained wide interest and circulation in sales.

A second book, "Of Man and Psalms and Science", was published in 1965.

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