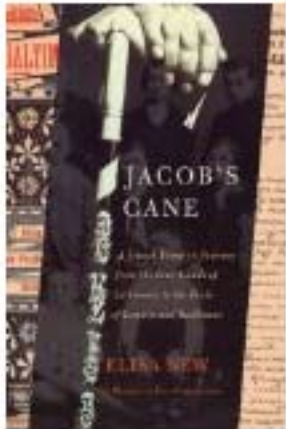


Booklist ONLINE

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Jacob's Cane: A Jewish Family's Journey from the Four Lands of Lithuania to the Ports of London and Baltimore.

New, Elisa (author).

Oct. 2009. 336p. Basic, hardcover, \$27.95 (9780465015252).929.

[REVIEW](#). First published **November 1, 2009 (Booklist)**

The danger in writing personal family chronicles is that they can become the literary equivalent of home movies. New, who is a professor of English and American literature at Harvard, largely dodges this trap, although she does provide a few superfluous, even confusing details. For the most part, this is an engrossing and fast-moving story that traces

her family's joys and heartaches over five generations and two continents. Her search was provoked by the puzzling, intricate carvings she found on her great-grandfather's cane. He was Jacob Levy, who left Lithuania for Baltimore, where he gained success as an entrepreneur and later sought a political career. In Baltimore, he met Bernhard Baron, another Jewish immigrant. It was the friendship, and later the enmity, of these two ambitious and creative men that drives this narrative, especially after Baron moved to London, where he prospered in the tobacco business and attracted three of Levy's sons to join him there. New's account of these men and their progeny is often emotionally stirring, especially as they interact with the great events of the last century.

—Jay Freeman