

L'Dor V'Dor

from generation to generation • the newsletter of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society

THE TRUNK IS FINALLY HOME

By Marti Snyder

And Now For the Rest of the Story – In the Summer/Fall 2010 edition of L'Dor V'Dor on the bottom of page 4 was a small article about an Immigrant's Trunk.

Our cousin, Shirley Greenberger, who now lives in Chicago, saw the article and immediately recognized the address of her parents' in Omaha. Although the spelling of her father's name was NOT Spar, she knew that the address was where she was born. She called the lady in Chicago, Belinda Bremner, and asked if perhaps the last initial could be an "R" instead of a "K".

Shirley called us in Arizona and asked how my husband spelled his name when he came to the states. (Shirley's family sponsored his family here in 1951). The spelling was as my husband spelled his name before becoming a citizen. Shirley put us in touch with Belinda. Shirley then with her sons, Jeff & Dan, picked up the trunk and sent it.

The trunk now sits in our bedroom. I have started to use it with thoughts of what my mother-in-law must have felt as she packed the trunk in Germany. In 1960 my in-laws moved to Chicago, being how the trunk ended up in Chicago. But we are not sure when this lovely antique found its way into the shop where Belinda found it. Our daughter, Linda, who loves to do research, is trying to find out where this trunk was before it was bought in 1990.



My in-laws lived in two different apartments in Chicago, and maybe there was a storage area in the basement? When my mother-in-law moved to Israel in 1971, neither Joe nor I remember seeing the trunk. In fact, we never saw the trunk! And that is the real shame as I could not ask my mother-in-law questions.

It is so amazing that something that came across the ocean on The USS General I.H. McRae, a Liberty ship, on October 14th 1951 is in such good condition. Someone must have been taking good care of it all these years.

I am writing this story so people will realize how a small article at the bottom of the page can get such BIG results.

It is a piece of our family history and one that our daughters will always treasure.

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The Nebraska Jewish Historical Society is deeply grateful to the Milton S. & Corinne N. Livingston Foundation, Inc. for their generosity in the funding of this newsletter.

MESSAGE FROM DEBBI JOSEPHSON, NJHS BOARD PRESIDENT

Thank you!

Thank you!

THANK YOU!

Without you, our loyal members, the **Nebraska Jewish Historical Society** would not be here. We need each and every one of you for financial and moral support. Thank you for renewing and/or increasing your membership level. Are your children and siblings members? Did you know the **NJHS** is not an agency of the Jewish Federation--no funds from the Federation Campaign are directed to the **NJHS**--the Society relies on dues, donations and grants to operate?

You may not realize what goes on in the office daily, but here is just a little glimpse:

Renee Corcoran, our committed Executive Director receives letters, emails and phone calls from people out of town who are trying to locate relatives. Sometimes given very little information, she is able to link people together.

The office receives calls from non-members as well as members wanting to do a genealogy search. *Sue Millward* graciously works with folks to introduce them to the best websites and procedures, which she is so passionate.

Have you visited the Reikes Museum at the Jewish Community Center? If you want to, please call Renee or the capable *Kathy Weiner* in our office for a guided tour. Many people have. Plenty of tours are given to those who don't even have an Omaha/Jewish connection.

We are very grateful to Mike Silverman at the Rose Blumkin Jewish Home for allowing us to utilize the display area south of the main entrance at the Home. Maybe you saw the Rose Blumkin exhibit. *Midge Bowers, Jenny Gordon, Nan Katz and Renee* are working on future exhibits.

Our Historical Society is there for you --- to preserve our history.

Our next newsletter will be available later in the year. The subject of our next edition of Memories of the Jewish Midwest is Mom and Pop Jewish grocers of Nebraska, Council Bluffs and surrounding communities. Your memories and financial support are making the project a reality. Every member of the NJHS will receive a copy of the publication as soon as it becomes available.

NJHS MISSION STATEMENT

The Mission of the Nebraska Jewish Historical Society is to preserve the histories of the Jewish families who settled in Nebraska and Council Bluffs, Iowa. The NJHS will promote the acquisition, cataloging and use of the collected materials which depict this history by: participating in conferences; issuing publications to members and professionals; fostering research; and promoting museum projects and related education and cultural activities.

Archive Information

By Kathy Weiner

The past 2 ½ years I worked in the Carl Frohm Archive Center to make the collection easier to access. The information is cataloged by Biographic, Jewish Business, Military Information, Synagogues, Education, Jewish Federation, Senior's, Jewish Community Center, Cemeteries, and Groups & Organizations etc. This was a time consuming and rewarding project. I enjoyed cataloging the Biographic and Synagogue materials, learning more information about the history of our Jewish Community. The process gave me the opportunity to give my son more about our ancestors and their journey to the United States. Our families had to embark on a new and exciting adventure. The photos in our collection had a profound impact on me as these treasures contain their hopes, dreams & of our early community.

Archiving the different Jewish Businesses was very interesting. It brought back many personal family memories.

The NJHS archives are used by various agencies in and out of our Jewish Community. The Nebraska Jewish Historical Society is always looking for information and photos to preserve of the Jewish communities of Nebraska and Western communities. I look forward to more projects in the future.

CORRECTION - 2010 Spring/Summer Edition of L'Dor V'Dor

The spelling and grammatical errors in Mr. Richard Fellman's article titled, *It's Still Lechovitz To Me*, were made by the NJHS.



Moving? Please notify us of your address change!

Your Membership is Needed

NJHS membership envelopes have been mailed for your consideration.

Your membership helps us plan programs, exhibits and continue our goal of preserving the history of Jewish families for future generations. Your continued support is very important to us. We receive no funding from the Jewish Federation of Omaha and depend entirely on memberships and donations. Our membership year is January 1st through December 31st.

We welcome your suggestions of potential new members. Also, NJHS memberships make excellent gifts and often give a former Nebraskan the opportunity to get reacquainted with our community.

Dick Rochman,
Membership Chairperson

This article is dedicated to Ben Nachman, who as always was a joy to share a slice of life with - and also a hamburger or two. We had talked about his grocery store project and this article.

Everything I've Learned Has Been at the Grocery Store, Kitchens and Tables...

By Lois Friedman

My earliest grocery experiences were at small Texas stores. Our grade school joke was that Piggly-Wiggly and H. E. Butt were going to merge and call the grocery store... heehee...wiggly butt. (Charlie Butt, a school



Lois Friedman

contemporary, went on to transport this Corpus Christi business into a statewide force. In recent years I was at the exciting opening of the new Central Market, the high-end, state-of-the-art Dallas store, where I experienced grocery cart grid-lock in the produce section and up and down all the aisles.

Visiting Omaha in the 40s the corner mom and pop market was a little walk down 16th Street from my grandma's, where I headed to take back empty bottles and buy treats with the pennies refund...or maybe save for the Reed's Ice Cream across the street that night. I didn't realize that my love affair with grocery stores had begun or where it would take me. Come along the aisles with me.

After seeing the chaotic LA movie Grand Canyon and how every aspect of life was wild and crazy, I decided right on the spot "that's why I like going to grocery stores". Further exploring this thought, I figured that I love the organization - all the cans of corn or whatever all face forward, the ketchup bottles march in rows, the stacks of this and that are neatly gathered, the fresh fish and meat displays are mouthwatering and the best lettuce is always in someone else's cart!

Married and returning to Omaha in the 60s has memories of my first delis and markets where we'd go on Sunday mornings with my husband Coke's parents...Roffman's, Diamond's, Forbes', Omaha Kosher Meat Market, Stoller's Fish come to mind. It was years before I ever went by myself or on any other day. I loved the hubbub, the smells,

the pressed corn beef, the colorful stories of this one and that one, the broom at the checkout counter that was sold over and over (so the story goes) if you didn't notice...and did the butcher accidentally have his thumb on the scale? (Much later I learned that modern supermarkets scales are strictly checked to protect the innocent!) Then there was the sawdust covered floor at the downtown Central Market...my kids always called it the "smelly store". I loved it.

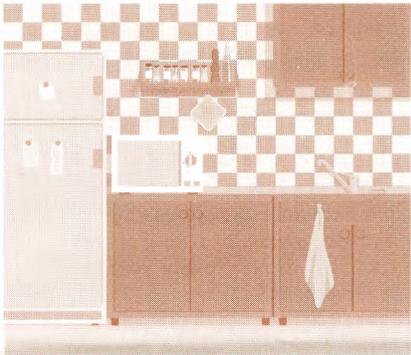
Grocery stores I learned were part of our families. Uncle Max Cohn, who I remember was a handsome man, owned one in Council Bluffs. I don't think I was ever in his store. Coke's Uncle Morris Klein had retired from his store when I moved here and was one of the first members of the family I met. He was the most welcoming man I've ever known... little did I know that many, many years later the family would gather after his funeral around our dining room table and maybe in some small way I could honor his warmth and kindness.

As the children arrived I remember trips to the store brought manna from heaven...adults to talk to if only for a moment. Then as the family grew and all four of the kids went with me, trying to field the questions, (Many were the bananas I peeled to quiet them.), keep track of them, remembered what I had come to buy, and sort coupons. Usually in Food City when they would beg for this or that usually junky stuff, I would reply, "No, I didn't bring enough money." A lovely nearby woman who overheard the conversation once asked so kindly if she could buy it for them! All quiet was the rule at the checkout so I could watch the prices carefully...no broom for me! When our youngest went off to kindergarten on her first day, I went immediately to Food City to experience the comfort, got my cart and tears suddenly rolled down my cheeks realizing that I wouldn't have anyone sitting in the seat anymore.

From the shelves of this or that store I had favorite brands and items. Looking back the memories are like ghosts... Safeway's raspberry jam was the best, Albertson's fried chicken was over-the-top, returning pop bottles and wooden cases for refunds (Graystone had the regular milkman who delivered milk to the little white box on the front porch. Paul, our milkman, not only picked up the empties but kept an eye on our kids walking to school.).

One day the kids loaded up the red wagon with Kool-Aid, paper cups, cookies and such in their door-to-door drink stand, took off and seemed to be gone forever. With relief I saw them returning at the end of the block. Just then the mobile ice-cream truck turned the corner and headed their way...the rest was a lesson in economics. (My Texas ice-cream truck memory was a horse drawn cart with an old guy that spit all over us when he talked...no bells, no music.

Far too soon, everyone was in school and mealtimes were more scheduled. Breakfast was always at 7:15 for all of us even though the three schools they attended started at different times. From the boys' camping experience in Minnesota, we borrowed the menu mantra "pancakes, French toast, pancakes, French toast, pancakes, French toast, eggs (must have been lots cheaper to feed all those campers anything but eggs). Assignments were also part of the camp life we borrowed...for dinner we had washer, wiper, bitty (set and cleared the table) and off (the boys always thought their sister got by with murder in an unfair advantage). Somewhere along the way after reminding everyone at dinner countless times to chew with their mouths closed, not to talk with a mouthful, elbows off the table, napkins in your lap, we created Slop Night, which was outside and consisted of applesauce, Spaghetti O's, cottage cheese, jello, ice cream and anything else soft and mushy with no serving pieces, forks, spoons or napkins. You wanted some; you had and ate a handful. Followed by playing in the hose and sprinkler.



Cooking was a family affair with a chair pulled up to help. Outings to watch candy being dipped in chocolate, bread being made and other kid food tours followed from as early as I can remember. Kitchen

memories have filled my life...helping safari cooks in Zimbabwe, watching the cooking experience at Janos, a fabulous restaurant in an old historic Tucson building, the Canyon Ranch demo kitchen, touring the vast kitchens at the Ritz Carlton Hotel, Lowe's Ventana resort, the WOWs of the walk-in freezers and 'frigs packed with amazing ingredients, watching chocolate creations and ice sculptures formed, helping bake in Lucy's kitchen at Beth El, this and that with Flo in the Joslyn kitchen, getting to make a pizza at the grand opening of a Pizza Hut, learning Mexican cooking from Enindina and eventually helping cook for her daughter's wedding dinner, planning Bar Mitzvah parties with Siegler (his first one) while he was still at the Blackstone Hotel.

All of my volunteer work in the community and schools seem to revolve around food...especially establishing Omaha-Meals-On-Wheels to deliver five holiday meals to homebound elderly. (The irony of having Abate motorcycle club deliver the Mothers' Day meals while most of us rode in Ollie the Trolley.) Cub Scouts, Brownies, homeroom mother planning holiday parties. Holiday meals were always special and shared with extended family...groaning tables

and sideboards filled with everyone's specialties – matzo this and that (Mrs. Nadorff told me about her haroiss at a chance meeting in one of the aisles at the grocery store.), turkey and trimmings, latkes.

Then all the kids were off to school and I went back to work reping and selling Cuisinarts (so much more sophisticated learning), and teaching cooking which eventually led me to David and my radio program, Taste of the Town, on KIWR and reviewing cookbooks for publications. What treasure troves filled with everything old and new? But I do see changes because of the internet, websites, cell phones and other technology. How the world has flown by bite by bite. In this high profile, high tech world...interactive magazines (still haven't figured that one), ecookbooks (I hope to load one to review on my new Kindle), barcode scans at the checkout which tests my memory at the checkout since I can't compare the price tag that is no longer on the item, and the anticipation of other electronic amazements...like the "sophisticated electronic ID tags to track individual pairs of jeans and underwear" to control inventory (hmmm). Why just a moment ago, the doorbell rang and a young woman was at the door who said she had traced her cell phone to this address via the GPS...I stood in amazement. While out for a walk this morning, I had found it on the street.

So much to learn, so little time! So many aisles to discover. Go with the flow...I always had my favorite checker and produce-man, like Sidney, but not anymore...mostly the faces are always new. The stores are new, too...Whole Foods, Costco box store (and their \$1.50 kosher hot dogs with a drink), and I really think I'll apply for a job at Trader Joe's and learn all their secrets...because the idea reminds me of my young granddaughter many years ago cutting some veggies with my favorite orange knife and her dad asking if I knew she was using it when she proclaimed, "I'm learning all of Mama's secrets!"

I'm off to yet another grocery store or farmers' market to check the aisles, see what's new and what the future holds...



Charles Peguy - Nationalist, Traditionalist, Mystic, and All to Rarely Remembered Friend of the Jews

By Michael Gendler, Associate Professor of History, College of Saint Mary, NJHS Board Member

Charles Peguy (1873-1914) has not lacked attention from scholars from the time of his death in World War I up to the present. He was, in his time, a widely known poet, essayist, and editor of a biweekly literary journal, *Les Cahiers de la Quinzaine*. He grew up in a working class family near Orleans, France; his academic talents prompted government scholarships to the best universities in Paris. He studied philosophy with Henri Bergson (a Jewish born anti-rationalist who was a profound influence on Peguy) and after failing his doctoral exam decided to become a writer instead of following his original plan of becoming a teacher. Peguy, after his father's death when he was a child, never forgot what he regarded as the profound dignity and traditional beauty of his mother supporting the family by mending chairs. He saw her patient, long-working hands as a kind of liturgical celebration of tradition, as they weaved threads of cane into the seat of a chair. He carried such memories with him after he made the choice to study in Paris.

This decision resulted in a life devoted to the pursuit of ideas with a passionate intensity. Although raised as a Catholic, during his younger years he leaned away from religion and more toward a secular, socialistic, and nationalistic view of the world. In his later years he returned to Catholicism, albeit in his own mystical, individualistic style. However, he is best known for his devotion to the memory of Joan of Arc, about whom he wrote literally hundreds of pages, many of which took the form of poetry celebrating the purity of Joan's love for France and how she should be a model for all Frenchmen regarding their connection to the soil of their country. Peguy's love for Joan of Arc may in fact have equaled his devotion to his wife and four children. He equated the glory of France with the heroic life of the sainted Joan. Peguy certainly acted upon his values celebrating France and its soil. He spent most of his adult life in Paris and never left France. It is said that when he heard that France was at war he stopped writing in the middle of a sentence so that he could rush to battle. He volunteered for the front lines and was shot in the head on September 5 during the First Battle of the Marne.

Typically, during the late 1800s in Europe, when a writer focused upon the importance of being rooted to the soil of one's nation, and saw this rootedness as a kind of mysterious bond that transcends reason, one usually finds references to Jews as negative counter-examples. For example, in 1886, the virulent anti-Semite, Edouard Drumont (1884-1917) published his 1200 page best-seller in Paris, *La France Juive* (Jewish France) in which he lambasts French Jews for not being

rooted to French soil and for being foreigners to the French nation. Drumont's mystical patriotism was inextricably linked to a hatred of Jews. Indeed, the man who coined the term "Anti-Semite" in its modern sense, meaning a hatred of Jews based upon their ethnicity or race rather than their religion was Wilhelm Marr (1819-1904), who, in 1879 published *The Way to Victory of Germanicism over Judaism*. Like Peguy and Drumont, Marr was a writer who believed that cultivating a passionate connection between patriots and their homeland would be salvific for the generations to come. One might easily imagine that given Peguy's fundamental values, he might have spewed something like this from Drumont in *La France Juive*:

The fatherland, in the sense that we attach to that word, has no meaning for the Semite. The Jew, to use the energetic expression of the Israelite Alliance, is characterized by an inexorable universalism. I can see no reason for reproaching the Jews for thinking this way. What does the word "Fatherland" mean? Land of the fathers. One's feelings for the Fatherland are engraved in one's heart in the same way that a name carved in a tree is driven deeper into the bark with each passing year, so that the tree and the name eventually become one. You can't become a patriot through improvisation; you are a patriot in your blood, in your marrow.

Can the Semite, a perpetual nomad, ever experience such enduring impressions?

. . . the first requirement for adopting a new fatherland, is to renounce the old one. Now, the Jew has a fatherland he never renounces: Jerusalem, the holy and mysterious city Jerusalem. In triumph or persecution, joyous or sad, it serves as a link uniting all of those children who say every year at Rosh Hashanah: "next year in Jerusalem!"

Aside from Jerusalem, every other country, whether France, or Germany, or England, is only a residence for the Jew, any old place, a social agglomeration, in the midst of which he may find himself at home, whose interests he may even find it profitable to serve for the moment, but which he joins only as a free agent, as a temporary member.

For Peguy, this interpretation of the Jews was precisely wrong! Rather than seeing Jews as foreigners to be purged in order to make France more French, he saw in them a great example and inspiration for France to follow as far as ethnic survival is concerned. He wrote this in a 1905 essay, *Louis de Gonzague*, where he went on to argue that the Jewish people actually see the survival of their people as a prize of infinite value ("une oeuvre, une operation d'un prix infini . . ."). Despite Peguy's anger at the modern world and its financial corruption, unlike so many writers of the time who blamed the Jews for economic disasters and the displacement of many artisans by the factory system, one searches Peguy's work in vain for any discussion of the Rothschilds or any other Jewish names on whom to cast blame. He was much more concerned with the broader technological and spiritual crises that he saw in modernism generally. In his later writings he was especially critical of what he considered the growing preoccupation with money in the modern world and the accompanying vice of the worship of material things at the expense of the spiritual.

What is so interesting about Peguy is that his concern about the decline of spirituality in the world is sweeping and

universal. His emphasis is not upon a particular element of society causing the malady, that need only to be excised in order to set things straight. He saw symptoms of what he considered a kind of spiritual illness among liberals, conservatives, Protestants, Jews, and Catholics. In his essay *L'Argent (Money)* Peguy listed those whom he considered opposed to the values of himself and his followers. The list included all those who "cheated." He notes that this includes Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and free thinkers. This preoccupation with the general value system of an entire population, rather than the gene pool, or what percentage of finance capital comes from which group of people represents a significant contrast between the traditionalism of Peguy and that of Drumont.

Another point of difference between Peguy and Drumont was in their attitude toward government. Unlike Drumont, Peguy was a strong supporter of the French Revolutionary tradition in the form of "republican" values that included liberty, equality, and most importantly to Peguy, justice. This was the reason why he supported Dreyfus so strongly during the famous "Dreyfus Affair" when a French Jewish army captain was unjustly accused of treason (based upon trumped up charges from anti-Semites in the French military at the time). He was tried and convicted. A few years later Peguy and his other supporters were vindicated when Dreyfus received a pardon from the French government. Thus, Peguy looked to Jewish, Christian, and French traditions to contribute to what he called the "mystique republicaine," that is, the mystical, spiritual, pure spirit of justice and liberty.

To be sure, Peguy did not look upon the Jews in the same way that he did other Frenchmen. He sees them as a distinct people with an ongoing tradition, rather than as a genetic "race;" it is important to note that when the word "race" was used by many in the 1800s and early 1900s, they often meant "ethnic group" rather than race in the anthropological sense of a separate gene pool. For Peguy, it was a shame that rich Jews were often too concerned about their own security to support Dreyfus. However, he never linked such behavior to Jews alone. In his essay *Notre Jeunesse (Our Youth)* he explicitly refers to anti-Semites and their relationship with Jews. He notes that these people simply do not know the Jews. For himself, he writes that he knows mostly poor Jews. He goes on to relate a powerful story of a personal experience with creditors. The only creditor who ever treated him in a horrible way ("right out of Balzac's novels") was a Frenchman and a Christian who was a millionaire thirty times over. After telling this story Peguy concluded:

"Que n'aurait-on pas dit s'il avait ete juif."

Translated, this says, "What would not have been said had that Christian been a Jew." He goes on to tell analogous stories about issues of patriotism as well, concluding with the same hard hitting sentence, "Que n'aurait-on pas dit s'il avait ete juif." The repeated use of this sentence results in a parallelism that is very effective as a persuasive attack against anti-Semitism.

In regard to Christianity itself, Peguy saw its roots in the Jewish spiritual experience as well. Perhaps it is not too

surprising that someone so concerned with "mystique" and the preservation of spirituality should place great value on a spiritual tradition such as Judaism that could trace itself back over three thousand years. Jules Isaac, a close Jewish friend of Peguy's, devoted an entire volume of memoirs to him. He points out that Peguy saw Christianity as a religion saving all souls, including those of Jews. As far as the famous charge of deicide, Peguy felt that all of man's sins were responsible for Christ's death, not the Jews alone.

A fundamental tenet of Peguy's attitude toward the maintenance of the traditional was that life should consist of spiritual values guarded by the temporal. He maintained that the best way to safeguard spiritual values was to keep up concrete earthly institutions. For Peguy, the Jews, as a people, have presented the only example he know of a "race spirituelle" that had passed their beliefs down without the aid of a nation state or an army. He argued that much could be learned from a people who have held to a tradition for such a long period of time. Indeed, for Peguy, the real "mystique" carried by France was a culmination of three "mysticisms," — the Jewish, the Christian, and the French. Considering Peguy's longing for continuity with the past, his fear of times changing too rapidly, and his penchant for thinking symbolically, it is little wonder that he regarded the Jews, whose ancient traditions still lived, as a last bastion of the eternal that he so badly wanted to grasp.

An example of one particular element of Jewish tradition that Peguy respected was that of literacy. In an essay written in the same year as his death, he wrote the "the Jew is a man who has always read, the Protestant is a man who has read since Calvin, the Catholic is a man who has read since Ferry." (My translation). Jules Ferry was a French politician who was a contemporary of Peguy. Related to this observation, was his assertion that the Jews, because of their long history of suffering and their responding to it with a cry for justice, were a people who would not lose what he called their "inquietude" or "moral anxiety." This link of the Jewish people with a profound sense of moral consciousness was an integral part of what became Peguy's philo-Semitic outlook. Well, so what? Why should we care about a Frenchman who died nearly one hundred years ago? For one, he might help us to better understand and appreciate the support that comes to the Jews today from many associated with the so-called "Christian Right." This includes, of course, a wide range of individuals. However, among them are many who, like Peguy, genuinely appreciate and value the Jewish people and their tradition as a model for their own sense of tradition, patriotism, and support for Israel. Sadly, many American Jews still tend to have a reflexive response in opposition to such individuals, associating them with ignorant super-patriots and ultra-conservatives who will turn America into a theocracy where some of the freedoms that we value today will be eroded by religious fanatics. In the 21st Century, America's freedoms are not endangered by the "Peguys" of today. In fact, given the real enemies we face, in form of militant Islam, these "Peguys" should be looked at objectively and then, unless there are good reasons to do otherwise, embraced and supported. Heaven knows, we need them.

A Jewish Settlement in Cotopaxi, Colorado

By Sue Friedman Millward, NJHS Board Member

In 1892 a group of 64 people (22 families) left the Pale of Europe for the religious tolerance and homestead opportunities in America. These Russian Jews came from the provinces of Volnyia, Kiev and Ekaterinslav and had farmed the land there for several generations. They called themselves the "Haskalah" or Enlightened, and sought a middle ground between the religious extremes of the "Hasidim, and the cultural assimilation of the "Maskilim".

Prior to the reign of Czar Alexander II, the Jewish population was afforded a relative peaceful period in their Russian homeland. But, by the 1870's their way of life was threatened. There was a growing reoccurrence of Anti-Semitism throughout the country. And, the policies of the Czar were prejudiced against the Jews. Many Jewish farmers and their families were evicted, and their lands were distributed to newly-emancipated serfs. In addition, food was in short supply as Christian farmers were forbidden to sell their produce to Jewish wholesalers. The situation continued to deteriorate and a wave of Jewish Emigration began.



The "Haskalah", lead by Sam Baer Milstein, their spiritual leader and business advisor, were encouraged by reports they had received of the religious tolerance and freedom of worship in the Americas. The colonists plan to emigrate started as a seed in the late 1870's when Saul Baer, a wealthy businessman, warehouse owner sent his nephew, Jacob Milstein to New York in order to scout out the political attitudes in America towards Jews, to find out about the Homestead Act, and locate land. In addition to this, a search was made to seek out interested relatives and friends for the eventual emigration. Milstein planned to sell his business in order to finance the endeavor once the appropriate arrangements were made.

Jacob Milstein arrived in New York City in 1778 to begin his investigation, but within the first year, he broke his uncle's trust by coaxing Saul Milstein's daughter, Nettie, to join him in America so they could be married. Milstein was infuriated by this. Nettie was his oldest daughter, and he had trained her and counted on her to take over much of the work in his business. Immediately Saul Baer Milstein cut off the funds to his nephew, and Jacob was forced to find work in a tin factory in New York City in order to survive.

It was during this period that Jacob met Emanuel H. Saltiel, an American entrepreneur who had prospered in mining and milling in Colorado. This friendship was one of the factors that eventually led to the establishment of the colony at Cotopaxi.

(The name of Cotopaxi had been in common use since the arrival of local miner, Henry Thomas, aka Gold Tom in the late 1870's. After traveling and mining in South America, he was struck by the similarities of the mountains around Cotopaxi to the Ecuadorian volcano called Mount Cotopaxi, and in the end Cotopaxi is the name that stuck.)



Sam Baer Milstein

Jacob Milstein and Saltiel recruited Michael Heilprin, a Jewish activist and a highly respected American academic of Polish heritage. He became the bridge between Hebrew Emigrant Aid

Society (HEAS) and the Russian Jews. He professed that Jewish emancipation and Jewish agriculturalism were intimately linked, and he wrote articles that were widely-read about this subject.

Saltiel offered to settle a colony of Jewish farmers on his lands in Wet Mountain Valley near Cotopaxi, in Fremont County, Colorado. He proclaimed that the fertile land in Wet Valley, would be just the place for this adventurous group. Saltiel wrote an eloquent and convincing letter to Heilprin, offering to construct houses and barns, provide farm implements, livestock and seed for the colonists. He would keep the cost under \$10,000 and all the colonists would have to raise would be living expenses and transportation costs en route to Colorado. So, with this encouragement, the first of the Russian families set off to fulfill their dreams of tilling the soil in this new land.

The Jewish Russians arrived at Castle Garden, New York's port of entry in 1882. They were transported to their Colorado destination by the modern wonder of the Iron Horse and arrived in the early spring. When they disembarked at Cotopaxi, they were quite unprepared for what they found. Though the town had some residences, a blacksmith's shop, a hotel store and meeting hall, the land was very rugged and harsh, not at all as it had been represented to them.

The houses they were promised were two miles south of town, and only twelve of the promised twenty-four were completed. Four homes were located on an arid plateau, the others eight houses were higher up the mountain on dry rocky soil with no available water source. The houses were unfurnished. And, only four houses had cooking stoves.

Clearly Saltiel should have known that the lack of water, the high altitude, the isolation, and the lack of roads and supplies would be major obstacles for the success of the immigrants. Saltiel, though, had conveniently "left the country on business" and the colonists were left to cope with the situation on their own.

Fortunately, the townspeople in Cotopaxi were generous. They extended credit for the purchase of food and goods, provided seed and loaned equipment to the new settlers so that crops could be planted before winter arrived.



Cotopaxi Valley

Rocks were cleared, crops were planted, chimneys were built, and windowless houses were made into homes. The New York Orphans Asylum donated a Torah to the colony and a synagogue was established in one of the empty buildings of the town. There were marriages, births, music and plenty of hard work for them all.

Just as they were beginning to feel hopeful in their new life, an early frost put an abrupt end to their growing season and many of the crops failed. The colonists had to find other work to pay off their debts to the store, and to provide food and clothing for the winter. Many of the settlers found jobs in the mines owned by Saltiel, others found work with the railroad. The Jews persevered that winter despite encounters with wandering starving Ute Indians and roaming hungry mountain bears.

It was clear that the colonists would need outside help. The promises Saltiel had made for the additional houses and supplies were never met. The colonists wrote numerous letters to the HEAS without response, and made appeals to the Jewish community in Denver who sent food, winter clothing, and medicine. At this point, the predicament of the colony became the subject of much debate. Reporters from Denver newspapers came to Cotopaxi to investigate the truth of the rumors that the colony had been mismanaged and ill-prepared.

Throughout the debate, the colonists endured. They celebrated their first Passover in April with flour purchased by walking 26 miles to Salida. Once again they borrowed seed and equipment for a second crop, but were unprepared for the late spring snowstorms in the Colorado mountains. A large part of the second crop was destroyed leaving the colonists discouraged and further in debt.

After the dissolution of the colony in 1883, many of the Jews remained in Colorado and became successful farmers and ranchers in places such as Rocky Ford, Longmont, Pueblo, and Montrose. Others moved to Denver and became successful businessmen and leaders in the West Colfax Jewish community.

The Cotopaxi colony itself was short-lived, but the legacy of the "experiment" has survived. The colonists of Cotopaxi proved the pioneer dictum that stepping into the unknown requires courage and faith, and while their journey did not end where they imagined, taking the first step eventually led to the new lives they desire.

In the fall of 1883, a year after their first appeal to the HIAS, the colonists received \$2000 in removal funds. A few families took their share and relocated. Among these, the Snyders, along with the Morris' and the Namens made their way east to the Omaha and Council Bluffs communities. The continuation of their story will be found in the next newsletter.

A summary of the Cotopaxi Colony by Flora Jane Satt in her thesis states:

"Despite its failure, its remoteness, its impermanence and its long submergence in undocumented oblivion, the Cotopaxi Colony did have significance in the shaping



Ruins of Settlement at Cotopaxi

of American-Jewish agricultural history. In the immigrant Jew's attempt to return to the soil, to return to his ancient national character of the agrarian, the colony experiment played a definite and important role. This colony at Cotopaxi happened to be the first of more than sixteen similar Jewish colonies, located in Louisiana, Arkansas, the Dakotas, Kansas, Nebraska, Oregon and Michigan. Although individually Jews had long been active and successful in American agriculture, the colony plan, as demonstrated by successful groups during the 1870's, such as the Union and Chicago colonies in Colorado, seemed better suited for the conquest of the arid high plains and the distant Mountain and Pacific Coast regions, especially for newly-arrived Jews."

"Analyses of the histories of these other Jewish Colonies, many of which experienced even worse hardships and exploitation schemes than the one at Cotopaxi, show the same underlying causes for failure. Most of them were conceived in haste, under great pressure, emotional and political, without adequate consideration of those factors upon which successful colonization or even profitable private farming, depend."

Our thanks to Nancy Oswald, a teacher and writer living with her husband, dogs, cats, cows and goats on a family ranch in Cotopaxi, Colorado. She provided much of the information used in this article. Her book "Nothing Here But Stones" based on the Jewish colony in Cotopaxi in 1882 won the 2005 Willa Literary Award, was a Spur Award finalist, and was also named a Notable Book for a Global Society by the IRA.

List of Cotopaxi Colonists In no particular order

1. Benjamin Zalman Milstein 40 (Milkstein, Milchstein, Millstein)
2. Hanna Milstein
3. Henry Milstein
4. Jacob Milstein 19 (son of Benjamin Zalman Milstein)
5. Nettie Milstein 20
6. Jacob Milstein 18 (son of Saul Baer Milstein)
7. Isaac Leib Milstein Shames
8. Hanna (daughter of 7)
9. Rachel (daughter of 7)
10. Michael Milstein Shames 23 (son of Isaac Shames) (Shames)
11. Frieda Shames (wife of 10)
12. Esther Mary Shames (dtr of 10)
13. Sarah Bessie Shames (dtr of 10)
14. Joseph Washer 22
15. Nettie Washer (wife of 14, dtr of 7)
16. Charles Prezant 24
17. Keile Milstein, wife of 7, cousin to Milsteins
18. Isaac (alternate spelling (Zarel) Prezant, son of 16 & 17 (alternate spelling Prstrand)
19. Max Shuteran 19
20. Hannah Milstein (sister to 17, wife to 19)
21. Solomon Shueran 21 (bro of 19) (alternate spelling Chuteran, Chuturan, Schuteran)
22. Rachel Shuteran (wife of 21)
23. Baby girl Shuteran, died/buried in Cotopaxi
24. David Korpitsky 37, widower (alternate spelling Grupitzky)
25. Korpitsky daughter 1
26. Korpitsky daughter 2
27. Korpitsky daughter 3
28. Korpitsky son died/buried in Cotopaxi
29. Samuel Schneider 48 (alternate spelling Syder, Sneider)
30. Alta Schneider (wife of 29)
31. Nechama Schneider Newman (dtr of 29,30)
32. Abraham Newman (husband of 31)
33. Sarah Schneider Morris (dtr of 29,30)
34. Berel Morris (husband of 33)
35. Helen Morris (daughter of 33, 34)
36. Samuel Shradsky 65, widower (alternate spelling Chorovsky?)
37. Sholem Shradsky (son of 36)
38. Mindel Shradsky (wife of 37)
39. Asna Shradsky (dtr of 37, 38)
40. Sarah Shradsky (dtr of 37, 38)
41. Hiram Shradsky 19, (son of 37)
42. Max Shradsky 18 (son of 37)
43. Riva Shradsky Toplitsky (dtr of 37)
44. Herschel Toplitsky 23 (husband of 43)
45. Toplitsky, daughter (dtr of 43/44)
46. Chrales Moscowitz
47. Wife of Charles Moscowita
48. Moscowitz, daughter 1
49. Moscowitz, daughter 2
50. Moscowitz, daughter 3
51. Moscowitz, daughter 4
52. Morris Needleman (alternate spelling Nudelman)
53. Rivka Needleman (wife of 52)
54. Needleman, daughter 1
55. Needleman, daughter 2
56. Needleman, daughter 3
57. Needleman, daughter 4
58. Max Tobias
59. Bessie Tobias (wife of 21)
60. Ed Grimes, 18
61. Loeb Zadek,
62. Henry Lauterstein
63. Hirsch Dubltzky
64. Sigmund Vositzer

May I Take A Message?

By Oliver B Pollak © 2008

My law office phone rings. May I speak to Mr., Doctor, attorney, professor, Oliver Pollak. He is not here, currently engaged, out of town, will be available this afternoon, Would you like to leave a message?

I pick up my message slips and try to call back the same day. If greeted by a message machine I note LM (left message), if there is no answer, it is NA. Some people throw the message slips away. Some spike them on a nail. I place most of them in the caller's file, and annually bundle the rest.

Office technology has its history. Paper clips, staples, staple removers, post its. Telephone message slips aiding communication progressed from messy carbon paper to carbonless versions. Children in a Family Circus cartoon state - "Grandma found some old mimeograph sheets. Whatever they are."

A good speakerphone solves the problem of tangled and kinked telephone cords, leaves the hands free, avoids cauliflower ears or a crick in the neck. The year 1998 closed with a bundle of 349 unfiled messages. Ten years later the brittle rubber band crumbled.

Nebraska Jewish Historical Society activities include seven messages from director Barbara Bresler, six from cofounder Mary Fellman, and three from staff including Dottie Rosenblum. Mary reminded me to invite Ken Weiner to dinner. They are both gone now, but I can still hear their voices.

There were calls from Professor Leonard Greenspoon, Jewish Press editor Carol Katzman, and Passport sales person Rini Gonsher, as well as her husband, Rabbi and social worker Alan Gonsher.

There were ten messages from UNO faculty, secretaries and librarians about meetings, committees, grade reports, schedules and books. The dentist left four messages reminding me of my appointments. The landlord left two messages. Accountants, Legal Aid, Rick Ruggles at the Omaha World-Herald left messages. There were calls from college and Navy friends on the West coast, Beryl Weiner and Reg Truman.

There were two urgent messages regarding home foreclosures. Calls from worthy adversaries included Justin Cooper, Jon Jabenis, and Meg McDevitt of the collection firm Brumbaugh and Quandahl, as well as Bob Johns at American National Bank regarding cases long closed.

There were cold calls from investment brokers, as in The Pursuit of Happiness, and salespeople pushing law books,

newspaper and telephone advertising, and insurance. Chuck Smith, Chapter 7 Bankruptcy Trustee in Iowa, left a succinct message to my inquiry, "Yes, motorcycle will pass as a vehicle."

Some messages are still pungent such as the invitation to a Sunday brunch where unbeknownst we were served Rocky Mountain oysters.

Forty-one messages were from my wife. Some were generic: "Karen called," "at work," "call me," "going home," "will talk to you later," "need to talk to you." Some were reminders about lunches, dinners and social arrangements. Some were traffic alerts: "Take Dodge home not Pacific...it gets bad after 120th." My mother and two sons, each left a message.

Karen reported from Mrs. B's funeral, "there's a huge crowd at funeral." "Bob Belgrade's father died funeral 11 am today." And a little bit lighter, "the blue car is dead." Some messages were potentially priceless: "Going to Borsheims."

Many of the messages were taken by Lupe who left our office to become a court interpreter. We witnessed Lupe and Chuck repeating their vows after 25 years of marriage, and continue to include them in our simchas. Both their daughters worked for us as clerks.

There were fewer message slips in 2008, perhaps because of cell phones and email.

Despite being a machinist my father's home contained no power tools. My earliest memory of using a telephone is at a red post office booth in London. The disembodied voice frightened me. I avoid answering the landline phone at home and the door bell has not worked in 15 years. Get the message, do not disturb.

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