

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Fall 2014

NEWSLETTER

Kislev-Tevet

The Jewish Colony at Woodbine

“No Jail, No Trouble, but All Sweetness, Light and Labor
Among These Happy People”

Excerpted from an article printed in The New Brunswick Daily Times, September 29, 1905

Woodbine, New Jersey, has the unique distinction of being the only Jewish community in the world with a political status. To travelers who pass it on the trains to and from Cape May, it appears a prosperous manufacturing village. But if you happen to be on an accommodation train that stops at Woodbine Station, you are apt to see a bundle of newspapers printed in Hebrew and bearing the names of the New York Jewish daily press and to hear the newsboys cry *Tageblatt* and *Vorwärts*, cries familiar to the heart of the lower East Side. The most casual observer notices that the long-bearded men who stand in groups on the streets are the same type as the pushcart peddlers of Hester Street and Grand Street, and even the farmers who drive their products to the freight depot bear the stamp of citizens of the Ghetto. The population is something over two thousand, and besides the factories and public buildings there are nearly two hundred and fifty houses. The town is lighted by electricity and one of the institutions is a Russian and Turkish bath.

Fourteen years ago, Woodbine was a railroad junction; nothing more. Today Woodbine has developed into a thriving community, with all the varying interests of a much larger and longer established town. There are five factories—a knitting goods factory, a hat factory, a clothing factory, a ladies' waist factory and a machine shop. Altogether these factories give employment to several hundred hands.

The village itself supports four schools. Last year the average attendance in the twelve classes was 413, with thirty-seven additional enrolled as night school attendants. Altogether this year there are nearly 700 children enrolled in all of the classes.

There is one element very much in favor of the Jewish farmer. Once convinced of the profitableness of farming, he will work tremendously, enduring years of hardship, in order to ultimately win a successful livelihood. The difficulties encountered by the early colonists of Woodbine form a chapter of pioneer history which might well be chronicled with the chapters of the pioneer work of the early colonists of this country.

At the beginning these people lived in shacks and small houses; they lived on little; they worked, and worked and worked, till the land was reclaimed and fertilized, till the crude houses were replaced by larger and more attractive homes, until schools were built and synagogues; in short, until they had established and attained a standard of living which now compares more than favorably with the standard of living found in the average New England farming or industrial community of equal size.

They are trying to make good citizens at Woodbine. The parents of many of the children speak no English, but the children are not allowed to speak the jargon or any other tongue within the school buildings and everything is done to encourage the quick assimilation of American customs and ideas.

An agricultural school under the auspices of the Baron de Hirsch Fund is probably the most important institution in Woodbine, for through it the problem of the Jewish farmer is being solved. There are accommodations for 110 pupils. The regular course is two years.

The crops of the school farm are many and varied. One

(continued on Page 3)

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey archives include a set of newsletters published from January 1944 through November 1946 by the Jewish War Veterans Post 133 “in the Interests of Our Men in the Armed Forces from New Brunswick, Highland Park and its surrounding vicinity.” The newsletters contain updates on the whereabouts and welfare of the young men fighting in Europe and the Pacific fronts, and were distributed by subscription to servicemen throughout the world as well as to families at home. Many of the “boys” from the local Jewish community wrote letters to the Newsletter editor, expressing their gratitude for the chance to hear news of their friends stationed in other parts of the world, and sharing their own experiences.

The soldiers described their living accommodations, their adventures, their thoughts and their feelings. They also frequently reported unexpected encounters with others whom they had known from back home. S/Sgt Max Handeli wrote from Paris, “The other night, before I came to Luxembourg, at my last stop in France I went to the show and a fellow tapped me on the shoulder. I turned around—and so help me, there I met a fellow formerly from New Brunswick. We didn’t remember each other’s names but recognized each other at once. I went to Hebrew School with him when Mr. Dardick was our teacher.”

Other soldiers wrote of encountering familiar faces in faraway places. Heim Nefussin was stationed on the U.S.S. Carolinian in San Francisco in 1945. He wrote, “Last Sunday I went to visit a girl I know who lived in New Brunswick and she now lives in Venice, Cal... We had a long talk about New Brunswick and what’s new. Where my ship is now at anchor, the town is small and really nothing to do but go to a show.”

Stu Lefkowitz and his cousin Fred Cohn were lucky enough to be stationed in Italy at the same time: “I spent a couple of days with Freddie up at his place about two weeks ago. Then he came down to see me last Sunday; and this past Thursday I flew up to his place and stayed over night. I guess that will be our last get-

together for a while. Let’s just hope that “while” is a mighty short one.”

S/Sgt. Al Miller wrote from the Philippines, “Philippines—the crossroads of the east—so it seems. Believe it or not within the past few months I’ve met Ben Becker, Paul Zar, and my brother, Jerry. And today a fellow from Highland Park, Vic Holwitz, walked in on me. Over a few beers we covered New Brunswick, South River, and Highland Park quite thoroughly.”

Some unique wartime adventures from this collection will be printed in the next JHSCJ Newsletter.



SUPPORTED BY THE
JEWISH FEDERATION
OF GREATER MIDDLESEX

EDITORIAL STAFF

Contributors:

Nathan Reiss
Deborah Cohn

Graphic Artist Deborah Cohn

Visit us online at
www.JewishGen.org/JHSCJ

CONTENTS

Archives corner.....	Page 5
Editorial Page.....	Page 2
From the Archives.....	Page 2
Jewish Colony at Woodbine....	Page 1
Membership.....	Page 5
Regina Margareten.....	Page 4
Speakers Bureau.....	Page 5
Tributes.....	Page 5

JHSCJ OFFICERS

President	Nathan M. Reiss
Vice President	Harvey Hauptman
Secretary	Gloria Cohn

Visit us online at
www.JewishGen.org/JHSCJ

(Woodbine, continued from Page 1)

section, for example, is given over to corn. In that section there is every variety of corn that it is at all possible to grow in that climate. Experiments are made, too, with all kinds of fertilizers, and side by side one finds a plot of corn in rich soil and a plot of corn in used up soil. And so on, through all the crops of wheat and grains and vegetables and fruits.

After graduation the pupils are sent to different parts of the country to work out their lives as farmers. Some of them, to be sure, go to work as superintendents of gentlemen's farms, but it is the hope and the desire of the supporters of these agricultural experiments that most of them will become practical farmers themselves and in so far as it is possible, will settle in the midst of colonies of Jewish immigrants, and will thus be able to hand on what they have learned at the school to a large number of practical farmers.

In Woodbine, as in nearly every small town in the United States, one of the most difficult problems is that of keeping the young people interested in home activities to prevent their leaving and going to the cities. It is probable, however, that fewer young men and women leave Woodbine and other Jewish settlements than leave the average American farming village.

A social hall has been established, where there are weekly sociables, lectures and dances for the young people. The best lecturers procurable are brought down from Philadelphia and New York, and very much is done to satisfy the natural social instincts of the young people. The men and the women who have left the sweatshops of the Ghettos and found employment in the well-vented, airy factories in Woodbine have not the slightest desire to return to the cities.

Woodbine is a town without a jail. The Jews, on the whole, are little given to crime, and thus far there has been little or no need for a police force. In fact, most of the trouble in the town arises from the gentiles who are employed as farm hands on some of the larger farms, and a few hangers-on who stray into the village. Drunkards, like total abstainers, are practically unknown among the Jews, so that while they have saloons, they give no trouble to the inhabitants of the village.

During the berry and bean picking seasons, it is now common for the Jewish farmers to employ Italian labor in the fields. The Italians are great berry pickers

and each year more of them come into the Jewish communities and hire out for the berry season or are employed by the day, or sometimes by the month. It is probably the first recorded incident of the Italians and the Jews working together harmoniously.

The holdings of land and houses being all at the disposal of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society and the Baron de Hirsch Fund, there is no danger of over production. People come into the town as fast as there is work for them to do, and the factories are careful not to employ too many people any one season, and thus prevent a long slack season when a number of the employees might be entirely out of work. Of course, all trades have their slack seasons, but it is possible to regulate the working of the shops in such a way that those who are thrown out of employment for a short time are those who have farm interests. Consequently, the time, which in the city would be spent in idling, is devoted to the development of their small land holdings.

There is much to be said in favor of the small farm for these people, for intensive farming is where they are most successful. The rentals of the homes in the village are often six and eight dollars a month. For that amount a factory operative may enjoy a comfortable cottage with a small garden, and at the same time the rentals paid go toward the purchase of the house, so in the due course of time, all of the inhabitants will be home owners. This is a particular inducement to the Jewish people, who are so essentially a home people.

The Woodbine experiment, therefore, indicates glorious possibilities for the future of Jewish immigrants in this country. With a hundred thousand Jewish people coming into American ports annually, some such solution of the problem of distribution is obviously necessary. The Jew is not naturally a farmer, but Woodbine and the other South Jersey colonies prove that with proper training, with aid at the outset and with sufficient encouragement, he can acquire a farming talent. The Jews are notably generous in caring for their own who are in trouble, and this distinctly intelligent way in which the influential Jewish people of this country are helping to solve the problem of the Jewish immigrant is a high tribute in the character of the people as a race and indicates that, in so far as it is possible, the Jews themselves will work out their own salvation, caring for their own poor and establishing among themselves American standards of living as they may come to understand them.

Regina Margareten, “The Matzoh Queen”

Every Passover we are reminded that American Jewry has developed its own traditional means for celebrating the holiday. Among these traditions are food products that have become staples on countless American Jewish seder tables: sweet red Manischewitz wines, Barton’s candies, Rokeach gefilte fish and Horowitz-Margareten matzohs. The enduring success of these products is attributable, at least in part, to the driving force of their family founders. Regina Horowitz Margareten and her matzot are a case in point.

Born in Hungary in 1863, Regina came to America as the 20 year old bride of Ignacz Margareten. The newlyweds were accompanied by Regina’s parents, Jacob and Mirel Horowitz. The two families went into business together, opening a grocery store on Willett Street on New York’s Lower East side. Remaining true to their Orthodoxy, the families baked matzoh for their first Passover in America. The following year, they purchased fifty barrels of flour, rented a bakery and produced extra matzoh for sale in their store. According to historian Shulamith Z. Berger, writing in the American Jewish Historical Society’s *Jewish Women in America: An Historical Encyclopedia*, during that first year of baking matzot commercially Regina Margareten “lit the fires, worked the dough and found the customers.” Within a few years, the matzot were so popular that baking it became the sole family business.

In 1885, two years after the family arrived in America, Jacob Horowitz, Regina’s father, died. Regina, her mother and four brothers and her husband Ignacz continued to run the now-named Horowitz Brothers & Margareten Company. In the early years, according to historian Berger, Regina Margareten worked through the night at the company’s Manhattan bakery, and for weeks at a time saw the light of day only on the Sabbath. Her mother died in 1919 and her husband died in 1923, at which time Regina Margareten formally joined the company board of directors and took the title of treasurer. The business grew steadily. In 1931, the company used 45,000 barrels of flour and grossed the then-considerable sum of \$1 million.

In effect, Regina Margareten became the head of the business and, according to *The New York Times*, the “matriarch of the kosher food industry” in the United States. She would arrive at the plant on New York’s Lower East Side each day at 8:30 a.m., taste the matzoh, and have samples sent to her office throughout the day—a one-woman quality control department. She was instrumental in the company’s 1945

decision to relocate from the Lower East Side to a larger plant in Long Island City, so there would be room for future growth. Her influence also pushed the firm to diversify its product line to include noodles and other kosher food products.

Regina Margareten was a model of tzedakah. Throughout the Depression years, she made certain that any beggar who came to the Horowitz Brothers & Margareten factory left with something to eat. She supported more than 100 charitable organizations and took an active role in many of them. Among her favorites was an organization that supplied indigent boys at a Talmud Torah with new clothes at Passover and another that provided for needy women during pregnancy and childbirth.

Regina Margareten became the head of the business and, according to *The New York Times*, the “matriarch of the kosher food industry” in the United States.

Margareten was a courageous woman with a sense of adventure. During the 1920s and 1930s she traveled annually to visit relatives in Hungary. Family lore has it that one year in the early 1920s she flew the London to Paris leg of the journey in

an open cockpit airplane. On another visit, she helped a relative purchase a coal mine in Edeleny, Hungary, so that family members in the area would have jobs. When World War II began, she directed her son Jacob to complete affidavits promising her European relatives jobs at the company so they could escape to America.

Margareten was the company’s spokesperson to the community. During the 1940s and 1950s, she annually broadcast a Yiddish radio greeting to the American Jewish community at Passover, which she would then repeat in English “for the sake of the children who may be listening in.” In 1952, at age 89, Margareten’s talk served as a valedictory to what life in America had meant to her. She thanked the United States for the “freedom, prosperity and happiness we have here.” These bounties, she reminded her audience, had made it possible for American Jewry to help other Jewish communities around the world, and to build the new State of Israel. For these blessings, she was grateful to America, and urged every American Jew to be mindful of our good fortune.

As late as two weeks before her death in 1959 at the age of 96, Regina Margareten still went to the factory in Long Island City, tasted the matzoh and checked on the price of flour. Her life was defined by three values: excellence in business, charity toward her fellow Jews, and loyalty to family. She succeeded at all three.

Reprinted with permission from the American Jewish Historical Society. To learn more about your American Jewish heritage, become a member of the AJHS.

MEMBERSHIP

WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS:

Corinne Hertz
Sandra Fields
Sandra Kramer
Eliot and Barbara Spack
Ann-Ruth and Samson Rosenzweig

THANK YOU TO OUR NEWEST "LIFE MEMBER"

Kenneth Deitz

THANK YOU TO THOSE WHO RENEWED THEIR MEMBERSHIP AT THE "PATRON" LEVEL:

Beatrice Beck
Roberta Belsky
Gloria Cohn
Harvey and Felice Hauptman
Eileen Robison
Betty Saltiel
Mr. & Mrs. Melvin Shure
David and Rachel Weintraub

TRIBUTES

From	To	Occasion
Jerry and Doris Kahn Gunsher	Betty Saltiel	In honor of her granddaughter's marriage
Bernice Bernsetin	Maurice Levenbron	In honor of his 100th birthday

CORRECTION: In our Spring Newsletter, Roberta and Lawrence Fachler's tribute donation was reported incorrectly. The donation was in memory of Dr. Herman Shyken. We apologize for the error.

ARCHIVES CORNER

Do you have documents, photographs, or other artifacts relating to Jewish life in central New Jersey? If so, please consider donating them to the JHSCJ for preservation. Call Debbie Cohn at 732-249-4894 for more information. We are grateful for the following contributions to our collections:

From Marsha Goldwasser: Records, year-books, and other documents from the Solomon Schechter Day School of Raritan Valley

From the Goldstein family: Plaques honoring Herbert and Bertha Goldstein

From Arlene Fromkin: Papers and documents from Hadassah of Raritan Valley, Devorah Hospital, and Central New Jersey Jewish Home for the Aged

From Rachel Weintraub: Newsletters, Congregation Etz Ahaim

From Ann Zar: Anshe Emeth Memorial Temple directories and 85th Anniversary program

From Josh Hamerman: Program brochures from the JCC of Central New Jersey

SPEAKERS BUREAU

Our speakers have been busy recently! Dr. Nathan Reiss has given talks on genealogical research to the Seniors Club in Somerset Run and the Genealogy Club at Temple Beth El in East Windsor. He also spoke about Jews of the Bronx at the JCC in Bridgewater. After presenting her lecture on Bella Abzug for the American Jewish Experience Lecture Series, Dr. Marcia Midler went on to encore presentations for the Yiddish Club of the Ponds, Brandeis University Middlesex Chapter, and the JCC of Middlesex County. Harvey Hauptman gave a talk on David Wilentz to the JCC of Middlesex County. And Debbie Cohn gave an introduction to the JHSCJ at the JCC in Bridgewater.

If your club or organization is interested in one of our entertaining and informative lectures, please contact Debbie Cohn at 732-249-4894.

The JHSCJ is grateful to Richard Kirschner for the donation of a 3-in-1 copier and laptop computer, and to Helen Solomon, Mr. & Mrs. Melvin Shure, and Beth Levinson for donations to the Archive Fund.

Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey
222 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

(732) 249-4894
WWW.Jewishgen.Org/JHSCJ
E-mail: info.jhscj@gmail.com

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. Postage PAID
New Brunswick, NJ
Permit No. 217

For your convenience, this form is for your tributes.

TO: Name : _____
 Address : _____

FROM: Name : _____
 Address : _____

Enclosed: \$ _____

In honor of: _____

In memory of: _____ Other: _____

Major featured articles and events from this newsletter are available on our web site: www.jewishgen.org/jhscj approximately two weeks before it reaches you by mail.

