

# JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF CENTRAL JERSEY



Fall 2015

NEWSLETTER

Kislev-Tevet

## Kosher Meat Strikes in New Brunswick

by Deborah Cohn

In the early 20th century, the cost of kosher meat began to rise, and a number of meat boycotts were reported [see JHSCJ Newsletter, Fall 2010, at <http://www.jewishgen.org/jhscj/NewsletterFall2010.pdf>.] At the end of the 1902 strike on New York City's Lower East Side, the cost of beef stabilized at 14 cents/pound. Seventeen years later, in 1919, the cost of kosher meat, affected by a general rise in prices during World War I, had risen to 26 cents/pound in large cities. In New Brunswick, butchers were selling meat for an astronomical 40 cents/pound.

On Sunday, June 23, 1919, members of the New Brunswick Jewish community gathered to discuss the high cost of meat. About 300 people met at the Labor Headquarters on Albany Street, and after much discussion, they agreed that they would be content to pay 30 cents a pound for "New York meat" and 25 cents for "Jersey meat." Those at the meeting asserted that the butchers of their city could make a living at these lower prices. A committee of 20 women was appointed to make sure that all the Jewish families of New Brunswick would stand for the principle of obtaining meat at these prices.

Large gatherings were held in front of the butcher stores on Monday evening, and by Tuesday, the "Kosher Meat War" had become front page news. "Meat strikers" were picketing the shops of the Jewish butchers, who were protesting that they could not make a living at the prices demanded by the strikers. A spokesman for the butchers explained that the stores purchased meat only from New York, which cost

them anywhere from 35 to 45 cents. They said that New Jersey meat was more expensive, and that the price of 26 cents, which the strikers claimed they paid in New York, was for meat from Baltimore, which was not as fresh as the meat sold in New Brunswick.

As the day progressed, the butchers threatened to close their shops, and the women said they could continue to protest until their demands were met. A suggestion was made to open a cooperative butcher store where meat could be purchased for lower prices. The strike was endorsed by the Workmens Circle and supported by Rabbis Ratner and Dobin, who said they would not slaughter any chickens without the permission of the strike committee, and only in cases where someone was sick.



Yazbin's Butcher Shop on Burnet Street, c. 1920

By Wednesday afternoon, the butchers had agreed to bring the price of New York meat down to 35 cents, but the strikers were adamant and the strike was at a deadlock. The Daily News reported that meat was selling in Perth Amboy for 30 cents, and in New York for 26 and 24 cents. The strikers said they were willing to pay the difference of 4 cents because of the distance the meat had to be transported. The strike committee issued a statement declaring that they had investigated the costs, and that the wholesale price of meat was 16 to 18 cents. The committee continued to hold meetings each evening at Congregation Poile Zedek on Neilson Street.

The butchers began to waver by Thursday. With all the shops  
*(continued on Page 3)*

## PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

When I first became involved with our Society in the mid-1990s, we had a thriving Genealogy Club. The persons who coordinated the club moved out of the area and the club unfortunately withered away.

We are now in the process of reestablishing the club. The club recently had its organizational meeting at Congregation Ahavas Achim at 216 South 1st Ave. in Highland Park. Those who were present decided to have meetings on the second Thursday of each month at 7:00 p.m. We anticipate that the meetings will include presentations by members and by invited guest speakers, as well as open forums where members can exchange information with one another.

If you have an interest in genealogy—whether you are a beginner or an expert, or somewhere in between—join us! If you know someone who might be interested in joining, whether or not they are a member of the Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey, please let them know. If you would like to receive email announcements of the club's meetings and other activities, you can do so by simply sending a blank email message to [gccj-subscribe@yahoogroups.com](mailto:gccj-subscribe@yahoogroups.com).

*Nathan Reiss*

## ARCHIVES CORNER

Shortly before this Newsletter was completed, we heard the heartbreaking news of the devastating fire at Poile Zedek Synagogue on Neilson Street in New Brunswick. As our cover story makes clear, downtown New Brunswick was home to a vibrant Jewish population which supported dozens of commercial enterprises while contributing to the government and social institutions of the city. Poile Zedek served from its inception as a central location for worship and community activity.

As the years passed, the other four congregations that had their beginnings in the crowded Hiram Market neighborhood relocated their houses of worship. The neighborhood was redeveloped, and many of the old streets were obliterated, even their names forgotten. Only Poile Zedek has remained, the sole visible reminder of the downtown birthplace of a Jewish community that has now spread throughout Middlesex County. Our next Newsletter will feature a history of Congregation Poile Zedek. If your family was involved in this congregation, please call me. We would be so happy to share your memories.

Our thoughts and prayers go out to Rabbi Mykoff and his congregants, who have kept this important part of our heritage alive while the world changed around them.

*Deborah Cohn*



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*(Meat Boycotts, continued from Page 1)*

closed, they were feeling the financial effects of the strike. It was rumored that one butcher was ready to concede to the boycotters, but was afraid that if he did so, the others would “go to New York and destroy his credit.” That night, a meeting of over 200 Jewish women voted unanimously to hold their ground on their demands. Shortly before midnight, a committee of 25 women, together with Rabbi Baskin, Israel Laurie, and Joseph Marcus, met privately with the city’s five butchers. The butchers signed an agreement that they would lower their prices for New York meat to 33 cents, and New Jersey meat to 28 cents, for one year. The newspaper attributed their capitulation to the persistence of the Jewish women, and to their threat to open their own shop if their demands were not met.

Two years later, with prices once again at 40 cents a pound for meat, another boycott targeted the bakers as well as the butchers on Burnet Street. The afternoon paper on Tuesday, February 8, 1921 reported that “no few skirmishes” had already taken place since the declaration of the boycott two days earlier. One man, apparently unaware of the boycott, purchased two dozen rolls from one of the bakeries. When he left the store, he was set upon by the picketing women outside, who tossed his rolls into the road and chased him down Burnet Street! This and other similar incidents led to the police being stationed on guard outside the shops.

About 200 people attended a meeting “punctuated with wild scenes” at Poile Zedek on Tuesday night. After heated arguments with the bakers over the fact that wheat and flour

prices had dropped since the end of the war, the women threatened to continue the boycott and bake their own bread. This threat was effective, and the bakers agreed to lower their prices. The price of rolls went from 24 cents per dozen to 17 cents, and the price of bread was lowered by 4 cents.

As Shabbat approached, inclement weather caused the picketers to leave their stations outside the meat stores, but sales were almost non-existent. Arrangements were made to purchase chickens for Shabbat dinner from the New York Poultry Market on Hiram Street, while other new poultry and fish markets sprang up in competition with the butchers, who after a week still refused to lower their prices to the 30 cents demanded by the boycotting housewives.

***The picketing women...tossed his rolls into the road and chased him down Burnet Street!***

The meat boycott abruptly ended after a Sunday night meeting at Ahavas Achim with the butchers and the Boycott League, who agreed on a price of 33 cents per pound of meat. The butcher shops were doing a big business on Monday morning and “peace reigned in the Jewish section once again” until noon, when the Jewish bakers announced that they would be putting new pricing into effect the following day. Although they had agreed to lower their prices after five days of the boycott, they now planned to raise their prices by 2 cents. But “the Jewish bakers of New Brunswick were forced to bow in submission to the will of the consumers” at the threat of another strike. A meeting of over 200 people at Poile Zedek on Monday night lasted until 2:00 a.m. As of Tuesday morning, prices for challahs and a dozen rolls were set at 18 cents, corn bread at nine cents, and rye and Vienna bread at ten cents.

*Sources for this article were found in the New Brunswick Daily Home News, issues dated June 23-June 28, 1919 and February 8-15, 1921. Access to historical New Brunswick newspapers may be found at the online archives of the New Brunswick Free Public Library at <http://newbrunswick.archivalweb.com/reelSelector.php>.*

### **JHSCJ RECEIVES GRANTS**

The Jewish Historical Society of Central Jersey has been the recipient of several grants during the past six months. The Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission extended funding to the spring lectures of the American Jewish Experience Lecture Series. We have also received a History Staffing Grant from the MCCHC for the 2015-2016 grant period, which will allow us to update information on our website and make more of our collections accessible and available to researchers.

The JHSCJ has also received a two-year grant from the Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation in memory of our founder, Ruth Marcus Patt. This money will be dedicated to the Archives Development Fund.

We are most grateful to the MCCHC and the Laurie Foundation. Their generous support will enable us to continue our work of preserving the history of the Jewish community of central New Jersey.

## Macher Among the Indians

From their earliest contacts, European settlers in America represented a grave threat to North American Indians. The Europeans brought their idea of private ownership of land to the New World, obtaining vast tracts from the Native Americans by purchase, stealth and war. Almost every tribe in North America found its relations with European settlers painful, if not fatal, and few Indians trusted or respected—much less loved—the white men and women they knew.

One exception was Solomon Bibo, who won the trust and affection of the Acoma Pueblo Indians of New Mexico. In 1888, “Don Solomono,” as he was respectfully known to the Acomas, was chosen governor of the Acoma Pueblo, a position that had always been held by an Acoma Indian and the equivalent of chief of the tribe. In itself, the selection of a European as governor of the pueblo was extraordinary. Even more remarkable is that Bibo was a Jew.

Solomon Bibo was born in Prussia in 1853, the sixth of 11 children. In 1866, two of Solomon’s brothers ventured to America and settled in New Mexico, which by then was part of the United States. In 1869, at the age of 16, Solomon Bibo left Germany for America. After spending some months on the East Coast learning English, Solomon joined his brothers in Santa Fe. Soon after they moved to the tiny village of Ceboletta, where they set up a trading post to exchange goods with the Navajos.

All three Bibo brothers developed reputations for fairness among the local Indian tribes, which received a fair price for their farm produce from the Bibos. The Bibos, in turn, were under contract to supply fresh food to the army forts in the area.

The brothers also encouraged the various tribes to set aside their land ownership disputes and tried to arbitrate disputes between the tribes and Mexican residents of the area, who had land claims of their own. Local white American (Anglo) residents in the area also coveted lands belonging to the Acomas and other Indian tribes. The Bibos were considered pro-Indian and were not particularly favored by either the Mexicans or their fellow Anglo settlers. The Indians, however, appreciated the Bibos’ efforts on their behalf.

None of the Bibos endeared himself more to the Indians than Solomon. In 1882, he arrived at the Acoma pueblo in northern New Mexico and set up a trading post. He learned

Queres, the Acoma language, and helped the tribe fight its legal battles to restore tribal lands. By treaty in 1877, the Acomas had been granted 94,000 acres of land by the U.S. government, far less than the Indians believed was historically theirs. The Acomas were concerned that, without protection, they might lose even more.

To secure their holdings, in 1884 the tribe offered Solomon Bibo a 30-year lease to all their land. In exchange, Bibo would pay the Acomas \$12,000; protect their cattle; keep squatters away; and mine the coal under the Acoma lands, for which he would pay the tribe a royalty of ten cents per ton extracted. Pedro Sanchez, the U.S. Indian agent from Santa Fe, learned of the deal and, jealous of the success of the “rico Israelito” (rich Jew), tried to get the federal government to void the lease.

***“Don Solomono” ... was chosen governor of the Acoma Pueblo ... the equivalent of chief of the tribe.***

The Bibo family fought back. Solomon’s brother Simon petitioned the Board of Indian Commissioners in Washington to the effect that Solomon’s “intentions with the Indians are of the best nature and beneficial to them—because the men, women and children love him as they would a father and he in the same manner is attached to them.” In 1888, after a jury concluded that Bibo had acted honorably, the Indian agent for New Mexico wrote, “To the people of Acoma, having confidence in the ability, integrity and fidelity of Solomon Bibo... I hereby [accede to your wishes and] appoint [him] governor of said pueblo.”

Three years earlier, Solomon had married an Acoma woman, Juana Valle, granddaughter of his Indian predecessor as governor of the pueblo. Juana was originally a Catholic but after the marriage observed the Jewish faith and raised the Bibo children as Jews. In 1898, Solomon and Juana left New Mexico for San Francisco, where he invested in real estate and opened a fancy food shop. Their older son received his bar mitzvah at San Francisco’s Ohabei Shalome, and the younger attended religious school at Temple Emanuel. Solomon Bibo died in 1934, Juana in 1941. Solomon Bibo, Governor of the Acomas, America’s only known Jewish Indian chief, is buried with his Indian princess in the Jewish cemetery in Colma, California.

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## MEMBERSHIP

### WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS:

Linda Rosekin  
Mort and Sonia Kobrin

### THANK YOU TO OUR NEWEST "LIFE MEMBERS"

Heather and Philip Kibel  
Adele Urowsky

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

Beatrice Beck  
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Jane Brailove Rutkoff

Gloria Cohn  
Harvey and Felice Hauptman

Betty Saltiel  
David and Rachel Weintraub  
Iris Goldin

## TRIBUTES

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Irma Rockoff	Ellen Harper and Family	In memory of Claire Bezhler
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Victor Dang	William Harris and Family	In memory of Herman Harris
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Deborah Cohn	Susan Marchand	In memory of Susan's mother
Bernice Bernstein	Richard Patt and Family	In memory of Ruth Marcus Patt
Mr. & Mrs. Thomas Addy	The Harris Family	In memory of Renee Levine Harris
Lynn Perlgut and Noam Kra-Oz	The Patt Family	In memory of Ruth M. Patt
Mandelbaum Foundation	William Harris and Family	In memory of Renee Levine Harris
Jerry and Doris Kahn Gunsher	Gloria Cohn	In memory of Sanuel Schmidt
Susan Marchand	Richard Patt and Family	In memory of Ruth Marcus Patt
Susan J. Schwirck	Richard Patt and Family	In memory of Ruth Marcus Patt
Sally and Nat Hindes	Richard Patt and Family	In memory of Ruth Marcus Patt
Mel and Sally Shure	Richard Patt and Family	In memory of Ruth Marcus Patt
Edith Zamost, Marion Zamost Stern, and Judith Zamost Grossman z"l	The Patt Family	In memory of Ruth Marcus Patt
Edith Zamost, Marion Zamost Stern, and Judith Zamost Grossman z"l	The Harris Family	In memory of Herman Harris

During this past spring, the JHSCJ was happy to welcome Mouna Jouad, who participated in the Rutgers Public History Internship Program. Mouna spent her semester interviewing long-time members of the local Jewish community for our Oral History Project, adding to our large collection of personal stories. Thank you, Mouna, for a job well done.

If you would be interested in sharing your memories and recording your oral history, or if you know of someone who would be a good interview subject, please contact Debbie at 732-249-4894.

### Thank You

To Esther and Raymond Sabin, and to Harvey and Felice Hauptman, for supporting the JHSCJ Archives Development Fund.

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.

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