

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

OF

COLCHESTER, CT.

A CENTURY OF

MODERN SHTETL LIVING

SEYMOUR S. WEISMAN

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Also by Seymour S. Weisman

Case Study of a Flood Stricken City

BASHERT: Five Decades of Jewish Community Service

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To my wife's parents

Edward Scott

and the late

Malvena Scott

For more than a half century, they dedicated themselves to
sustain the Colchester Jewish Community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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During World War II, he served as a combat infantry officer with the 104th Timberwolf Division, holding the rank of captain on discharge. He was the first American to rescue Jews in Nazi Germany.

Dr. Weisman is married to the former Betty Scott of Colchester, CT.

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PROLOGUE

It was a balmy April day in 1952, just after Passover, when I departed New York City for my first journey to Colchester at the invitation of Betty Scott, daughter of Edward and Malvena Scott. While I received a warm reception from the Scotts, I wasn't prepared for the chilly mountain air. Colchester, I would later learn, was in the "Catskills" of Connecticut.

Betty and I had been dating prior to this first visit to meet her parents. The success of the venture can best be attested by noting that four months later, in September, Betty and I were married. Over four hundred Colchester neighbors sprawled over the lawn on the Scott farm at our wedding reception.

Thus, I became by marriage a Colchesterite, known euphemistically to most people in the community as the Scott's son-in-law. It took many years before I achieved a personal identity.

Betty and I settled in Norwalk, Ct. Our children enjoyed visiting their grandparents on the farm which, for them, was a second home. Now successful yuppies, they retain fond memories of their Colchester experiences.

Let me fast forward some four decades to the Spring of 1991 when Mr. and Mrs. David Hurwit, longtime Colchester residents, (Mrs. Hurwit is the sister of Ben and Paul Schuster who ran a trucking operation in Colchester for over sixty years) were entertaining the Scotts and the Weismans at a dinner party in their Palm Beach, Florida home.

During the after dinner conversation, Mr. Hurwit, whose family settled in Colchester in the early 1900's, commented that the first Jewish families came to Colchester almost a hundred years ago with the financial assistance of the Baron de Hirsch Foundation. I observed that whereas the Foundation started many Jewish agricultural settlements in the United States as well as other countries, (most notably, Argentina), few of those Jewish communities managed to survive.

That conversation sparked my interest to determine what factors could account for continuity of Jewish communal life for over a century in Colchester. As I conducted my research for this project which turned out to be far more complex and involved than originally anticipated, several themes emerged for study and analysis.

First, what prompted the wealthy Baron Maurice de Hirsch, living in Paris, to finance the settlement of Jews from Eastern Europe on farms?

Second, who was Baron de Hirsch and how did he establish an organization to launch his project for Jewish settlement? Who did he recruit as volunteer trustees in the United States and what organizations assisted in administering his plan? How much money did he invest in the project? What training programs did he establish?

Third, why was Colchester selected as a community for Jewish settlement?

Fourth, how were the Jews recruited to settle in Colchester?

Fifth, why and how did other Jews, not sponsored by the Baron de Hirsch Foundation, settle in Colchester?

Sixth, what was the socio-economic background of the first Jewish settlers?

Seventh, how did the Colchester Jewish community grow economically, socially, culturally? What Jewish institutions were developed to satisfy community needs?

Eighth, after one hundred years, how many current members of the Jewish community can trace their roots to the founding families?

Finally, to what extent is there an historical link between the Jewish community in Colchester and the Jews from Eastern Europe who lived in shtetls* during the latter half of the nineteenth century? How has the mentality of shtetl life from that period influenced Jewish community life in Colchester?

In embarking on the research for this project, I made a conscious decision that the goal of this undertaking was to relate the history of Colchester Jewry as educational enlightenment for past and current Jewish residents of Colchester. Although this study may be of interest to Jewish historians, its acceptability by scholars would require careful notations of research sources.

I opted to present this study in a more popular style for the edification of the reader who is not a specialist in American Jewish history. However, in the Acknowledgments after the Epilogue, I explain the methodology in collecting the data. Note also the Bibliography on sources that were consulted.

Colchester Jews endured many hardships during the past one hundred years. Nonetheless, they experienced a tranquil, placid life style that generated warm, inner satisfaction. For them, Colchester provided a wonderful community for enjoyment with family and friends. That is the story I tell in the ensuing chapters.

* See next chapter for discussion of shtetl life in Eastern Europe.

CHAPTER ONE

SHTETL LIFE IN EASTERN EUROPE:

THE ROOTS OF COLCHESTER JEWRY

As noted in the 1910 census study of Colchester Jewry (see chapter five), Colchester Jewry emigrated to the United States primarily from Russia, mostly from small towns and villages in the western sector called the Pale (currently segments of the Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland and Hungary).

Jewish life in the shtetl, best romanticized in "Fiddler on the Roof," was regulated thru control by shtetl leaders of the religious, educational and welfare activities in the community.

Jews were a minority in a Christian society, limited in their economic endeavors by government regulations.

Relatively few Jews engaged in agriculture directly, since with some exceptions, they were not permitted to own farmland. As with many restrictions under the Tsarist regime, Jews found loopholes to avoid the regulations and managed to engage in farming.

However, the restrictions against ownership of farmland did not apply to those engaged in dealing with cattle. Thus, Jews were permitted to produce and sell dairy products. Many Jews became cattle dealers.

More often, Jews in the shtetl were tailors, furriers, shoemakers, leathersgoods craftsmen, blacksmiths, innkeepers, clerks, artisans, grocers, butchers, peddlers, middlemen in buying and selling farm products, coachmen, petty traders in buying and selling goods and services, jewelers and watch repairers.

As throughout Jewish history, shtetl life demonstrated the acculturation of Jews to their environment. Confined geographically by government policies which restricted Jews from moving into urban centers (here again, Jews were often successful in bypassing these regulations) the Jewish leadership in the shtetl somehow found a modus vivendi for Jewish survival.

The shtetl provided for the Jewish cemetery; the mikveh for ritual bathing; the cheder for educating Jewish children; and the synagogue as the central institution of the community which determined religious observances. The shtetl ordained the sanctity of the Sabbath; maintained strictures for dietary observances; and regulated the celebration of Jewish holidays.

The shtetl supported institutions for burying the dead known as "Chevra Kadisha;" maintained a home for the aged; encouraged the growth of Zionist organizations; provided for the disbursement of charity to indigent Jews; sponsored a Matzo Fund prior to Passover; organized a loan society for those with financial problems.

Individuals in the shtetl achieved status thru the generosity of their charity contributions. The rich viewed their charitable donations as both a duty for the shtetl's survival and as a means for social climbing.

However, all Jews, rich and poor alike, were beseeched to give charity as a religious obligation ("tzedakah") as well as a reminder that all Jews are responsible for each other. Thus, almost every household in the shtetl had a tin charity box for token contributions.

The shtetl rabbi, usually appointed for life, was the official arbiter of Jewish affairs. His powers were limited by the shtetl lay leadership composed of the rich and the educated, those steeped in Jewish lore and tradition. These leaders, mostly self-anointed, maintained their decision-making authority by dominating public opinion in the shtetl and control of the shtetl institutions.

Oddly, one of the lesser known but influential power brokers in the shtetl was the shochet (ritual slaughterer of animals). The shochet was a major source of income for financing of shtetl activities since he paid a "kickback" fee to the community for each animal that was slaughtered. Much local political intrigue took place before the appointment of the shochet. Frequently, the shochet also served as the mohel for the circumcision of new born males.

The shtetl leadership recognized intuitively the necessity for accommodating to changing times. To use the American vernacular, the shtetl leaders "rolled with the punches" as unforeseen developments required flexible adjustments to new community events.

To the shtetl leadership, it was paramount that they maintain community cohesion thru promoting loyalty to God and Torah. If the people, the flock, would demonstrate "menschlichkeit" (be a Jew and be a man) and behave with "yiddishkeit" (uphold the tradition of Jewish life) then the continuity of Judaism from biblical antiquity to modern times would continue to prevail.

This was the heritage of the many Jewish settlers when they arrived in Colchester one hundred years ago. As the saga unfolds of their communal activities in Colchester since 1891, the impact of this cultural baggage of shtetl life will become apparent.

CHAPTER TWO

JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES FROM EASTERN EUROPE

1880-1910

The first Jewish settlers arrived in New Amsterdam (New York City) in 1654, then under Dutch rule. They were Sephardic Jews who were escaping persecution in Brazil.

Until 1720, most Jewish immigrants seeking refuge in North America were fleeing from persecution they encountered in Central America, the West Indies and South America.

Subsequent to 1720, a majority of Jews migrating to the thirteen colonies under British rule were of Ashkenazi origins- Great Britain, Germany, Holland, Austria-Hungary and Eastern Europe.

At the beginning of the American Revolution in 1776, there were approximately two thousand Jews in America living mostly in seaboard communities from Boston to Savannah.

From the aftermath of the Revolutionary War until the political upheavals in Europe in 1848, there continued to be a trickle of Jewish migration to the United States. After 1848 until the beginning of the Civil War, the pace of Jewish immigration, mostly from Germany, increased. In 1861, there were approximately 150,000 Jews in the United States.

Then came the biggest surge of migration in Jewish history. More than 1.5 million Jews, primarily from Russia, Romania and Austria-Hungary, entered the United States during the period 1880-1910. (See Table 1 at end of chapter).

Two factors account for this unprecedented wave of Jewish immigration. Following the assassination in 1880 of the liberal Tsar Alexander II, his successor, Alexander III, instituted a series of repressive acts in 1882 (called the May Laws) which placed harsh restrictions on Jewish economic activities and required the expulsion of Jews from urban centers in Russia. Specifically, the laws limited Jewish trade with Russian peasants, banned areas where Jews could legally settle, denied Jews rights to purchase property, prevented Jews from managing estates and prevented Jews from conducting business on the Christian Sabbath or holidays.

Further, the government placed severe restrictions on Jewish enrollment in higher education, denied Jews the privilege to enter certain professions. (Subsequently, most Russian Jews went to Switzerland or Germany for medical or professional education).

The second factor that prompted Jewish migration was the wave of pogroms that swept Russia with the benevolent approval of the Tsar's administrators. Before 1880, there had been previous episodes of pogroms under prior Tsarist regimes but the new wave was more widespread and the destruction and loss of lives more pervasive. The pogrom machinations reached its zenith in 1903 in Kishinev

where there was a week of protracted violence. President Theodore Roosevelt called on the Tsar to terminate the pogroms as did the heads of state of other Western nations.

Thus diminishing economic opportunities and threats of personal security became motivating factors for this unprecedented Jewish migration not only to the United States but to Great Britain, France, Australia, Canada, Mexico and countries in South America. There was also a limited migration to Palestine sponsored by Zionist organizations.

It is important to note that between 1880 and 1910, concurrent with the Jewish immigration to the United States, there was also large scale admission of Gentiles from Italy, Austria-Hungary, Poland and Russia.

The profile of the Jewish immigrants presents valuable clues as to their potential for successful resettlement. The Jewish male/female ratio was 57% male versus 43% female while for all immigrants, it was 70% male versus 30% female. It is evident that more Jews than non-Jews came as families.

For every ten Jewish immigrants, six were from small towns and villages (shtetls) while four came from urban centers. Four of ten Jewish males were engaged in manufacturing; three of ten earned their living in commerce and only three percent listed their occupation as farmer or farm laborer.

Approximately ten percent of all Jewish immigrants who came to the United States between 1880-1910 returned to their country of origin.

How the Jews were received in the United States is discussed in the next chapter.

TABLE 1**JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES**

	1881-1910 (a)		
	RUSSIA	RUMANIA	AUSTRIA (b)
1881-1890	135 000	6000	45 000
1891-1900	280 000	13 000	83 700
1901-1910	704 000	47 000	187 000 (c)
TOTAL	1 119 000	66 000	315 700

(a) Data compiled by Samuel Joseph, " Jewish Immigration to the United States" doctoral dissertation, Columbia University 1913

(b) Immigration mostly from Galicia Province

(c) Estimated

CHAPTER THREE

RELIEF AGENCIES ORGANIZED TO COPE WITH

MASSIVE JEWISH IMMIGRATION

There was initially near universal hostility from the organized Jewish community leadership in the United States, France, Great Britain, Austria and Germany to the hordes of Jewish immigrants that sought admission to the Westernized countries. Fears were expressed in the Jewish press of these countries that the Russian Jews were doomed to "permanent pauperism" and that their presence would lead to increased anti-Semitism. This hostility had become vocal even prior to the mass migration. Many B'nai Brith chapters and the Young Men's Hebrew Association (YMHA) affiliates in the United States excluded East European Jews from their ranks.

As early as 1855, B'nai Brith attempted to organize a program to settle immigrant East European Jews in rural areas.

An editorial in a Jewish magazine during this period noted, "The thoroughly acculturated (Westernized) Jew....has no religious, social or intellectual sympathies with them (referring to East European Jews). He is closer to the Christian sentiment around him than the Judaism of these miserable darkened (sic) Hebrews."

But cooler heads soon prevailed. The Jewish community leadership faced with the reality that the waves of immigration were unstoppable came to the prudent conclusion that the Jewish community should assist in the settlement of these immigrants and to promote programs for their assimilation.

The Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society (HEAS) was the first American relief agency to be organized (1881) to attend to the needs of the new Jewish immigrants. The American Jewish leadership was forced to acknowledge that the United States "is the only land which has room enough, is free and generous enough, which offers an unobstructed field for all occupations and handicrafts and which knows neither prejudice nor intolerance, but welcomes the laborer and enables him to develop all his faculties."

However, the American Jewish leadership pleaded, without much success, that European Jewry accept an appropriate share of the burden in accommodating the hordes of immigrants.

HEAS established local branches in cities throughout the United States for the purpose of resettlement of Jewish immigrants from the eastern seaports of the United States, mostly New York where they initially landed.

One of the first problems that cropped up was how to deal with the aged, the paupers, the physically and mentally handicapped among the new Jewish immigrants. As a solution, the American Jewish leadership attempted to set up an European Committee to screen potential immigrants at ports of embarkation. The aim was to permit only those who were able bodied and capable of supporting themselves to enter the United States. This voluntary screening procedure was never successfully implemented.

American Jewish leadership appealed for assistance in the immigration crisis to the Alliance Israelite Universelle (AIU), located in Paris, representing the largest and wealthiest Jewish community at that time. As with its neighboring German Jewry, the French Jewish leadership viewed with alarm the Russian Jewry immigration and sought to deflect their migration to France. The French Jewry sent missionaries to the Russian Jewish communities to report that French Jewry was willing to provide economic aid and job training if the Russian Jews would remain in their homeland.

Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a member of the AIU Central Committee, stated that he was prepared to donate vast sums to establish programs to educate Russian Jews in their communities and provide them with manual training (similar to ORT programs that were subsequently developed).

Since the primary goal of the AIU was to divert Jews from seeking entry to France, it adopted a program for assisting East European Jews to settle in the United States. Initially, it sponsored the migration of two Am Olam (Eternal People) socialist groups to establish agricultural colonies in the United States.

The Am Olam movement, founded in Odessa, Russia in 1881, sought a "normalization of Jewish life" by establishing self-supporting agricultural colonies. Whereas the Zionists in Russia were sending agricultural colonists to Palestine, Am Olam favored settlement in the United States. Am Olam leaders believed that democratic America would be more fertile soil for collective agricultural settlements than Palestine under Turkish rule. Thus, Am Olam formed colonies in Russian cities who moved as a group to resettle in farm communities in the United States. Many of the Am Olam groups had socialist or communist leanings and favored collective living as on a kibbutz.

Between 1881-1884, 24 Am Olam colonies were organized in the United States. They settled in Louisiana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Oregon, Washington, Arkansas, Kansas, Indiana, Ohio and New Jersey. The HEAS provided funds and staff supervision for these colonies.

Several Am Olam groups organized in Russia disbanded after arrival in New York.

Few of the above 24 colonies survived. Several factors account for their failure. Settlers could not adjust to the climate. They lacked skills for farming. They could not endure the hard labor conditions. They lacked adequate capital for their enterprises. They complained of social and cultural isolation. They yearned for city life. They could not cope with the internecine friction among the settlers which was triggered by ideological and personality differences.

Two other contributing factors to the demise of the colonies merit analysis. The first issue relates to the conflict between the colonists and their American sponsors who sought to assist in the development of the colonies. While the sponsors and the colonists agreed early in the settlement period that the colonies could not survive solely from farm income but would have to engage in other commercial, manufacturing or trade activities, there was continuous clashes between the sponsors who financed these other economic ventures and the colonists who complained that the sponsors were interfering in their quest for livelihood.

Another bitter conflict erupted in the commune over establishment of Jewish roots. The commune leadership rejected proposals for establishing synagogues, religious school training, observance of Jewish holidays and traditions. Many settlers, particularly those with family ties, opted to leave over this issue.

The aforementioned Baron Maurice de Hirsch, an international banker originally from Munich, Germany who settled in Paris, had conceived a different approach to aid European Jewry to establish Jewish agricultural colonies. Hirsch, considered at the time as the wealthiest Jew in the world, came from a family background steeped in agricultural tradition.

Noted for his generosity as a philanthropist, Hirsch opposed the system of alms-giving which he stated made people beggars. His philosophy was to devote his charity giving to assist in training of individuals to provide them with skills to earn a living and to help finance those who wanted to become self-supporting.

At the urging of one of the leaders of HEAS, Hirsch donated in 1891 2.4 million dollars (equivalent in 1994 purchasing power of 240 million dollars) to establish the Baron de Hirsch Fund which had eight purposes as noted below:

- 1- Make loans to immigrants from Russia and Romania for agricultural settlement within the United States on real or chattel security.
- 2- Provide transportation of immigrants after arrival at American ports to places where they may find work and make themselves self-supporting.
- 3- Provide courses for immigrants to learn trades, contribute to their support while learning such trades, and furnish them with necessary tools to enable them to earn a living.
- 4- Improve mechanical training for adults and youth.
- 5- Provide instruction in the English language and the duties of American citizenship.
- 6- Provide instruction in agricultural work and improved methods of farming.
- 7- Cooperate with established agencies in the United States for the purposes of relief and education.
- 8- Provide such other services of relief and education which the Trustees may decide.

Hirsch looked upon the new agricultural communities to be settled by Russian and Romanian Jews as havens to facilitate their assimilation into American society and enhance their becoming Americanized ("normalization").

As officers and trustees for the Fund, Hirsch enlisted many of the most affluent and influential Jews in the New York metropolitan area and Philadelphia including Jacob H. Schiff, Jesse Seligman, Oscar S. Strauss and Meyer S. Isaacs.

In screening applicants for assistance, the Fund staff assessed the financial ability of the Jewish immigrants to succeed in America. They were often required to obtain a first mortgage from a bank before the Fund would guarantee the second mortgage for those purchasing farms.

To prepare the children of Jewish immigrants for farm life, the Fund opened in 1894 in Woodbine, New Jersey, the Baron de Hirsch Agriculture School. The school trained students to become farmers and how to manage farms.

However, the bulk of Hirsch's money was allocated for manual training and Americanization programs rather than for agriculture settlement. In 1895, the Fund opened the Baron de Hirsch Trade School in New York City to provide training in a variety of skilled trades (printing, house and sign painting, carpentry, machine and electrical work).

How Colchester Jewry took advantage of Hirsch's philanthropy is reported in the next chapter.

Baron Maurice de Hirsch
(1835-1896)



TABLE 2

POPULATION OF COLCHESTER
CENSUS TALLIES SINCE 1750 (A)

YEAR	POPULATION
1750	2300
1780	3800
1800	3100
1840	2100
1850	2500
1860	2900
1870	3400
1890	3000
1900	2000
1910	2000
1940	3000
1950	3000
1980	7800
1990	11000

(a) Figures are based on reported estimates in historical records until 1800; the other tallies are from census studies (with rounding of numbers).

Two factors account for the sharp growth from 1850-1870. First, a rubber company opened a factory in 1847 in Colchester to manufacture rubber shoes and boots. At its peak, the company's annual production exceeded two million dollars with a yearly payroll of \$300,000.

Second, the onset of the Civil War in 1860 brought new industries for the manufacture of cotton, silk and woolen goods; plants to produce wheels, carriages, wagons, sleighs and paper products.

Agriculture also experienced a boom during this period. A creamery was built in 1886 to provide milk, cream and butter for the local population. New hotels were opened to accommodate the business representatives and served a resort clientele in the summers.

In 1877, the New Haven Railroad built a spur connecting Colchester with New Haven and then to New York. The railroad provided both passenger and freight services.

The economic boom in Colchester attracted immigrants from Germany and Ireland to work in the plants and serve as farm laborers. Between 1850 and 1870, the population grew more than 35 percent.

But then the bloom of prosperity and growth had withered. The decline initially came in agriculture. Many of the old time Yankee farmers could not induce their children to continue the farming tradition. Many farms were abandoned.

The rubber plant also fell on hard times. New management was unable to operate in the black.

Probably the most fortuitous development in the first one hundred year history of Colchester was the founding in 1803 of Bacon Academy, a preparatory school for college in the town's center. A local landowner, Pierpont Bacon, left his entire estate inventoried at \$35,000 to establish and support a free school for local residents. By 1840, the school's enrollment was 425 students, of whom one third came from towns outside of Colchester including 32 students from other states.

Bacon Academy heralded many prominent alumni who graduated in the nineteenth century. Among its alumni were State governors, the chief justice of the United States Supreme Court, college presidents and the chief benefactor of the Colchester Public Library.

The presence of Bacon Academy induced the town's leaders to improve the quality of the elementary school system. Bacon graduates taught in local schools.

By 1890, Bacon Academy also faced economic hardship with a declining enrollment of outside students. As a consequence, the Town of Colchester had to assume the operating costs for the local residents attending the Academy, thereby assuring secondary education for Colchester students.

When the staff from the Baron de Hirsch Fund visited Colchester in 1891, they found a community with a two hundred year history of boom and bust; with excellent rail and road transport; with good climate suitable for farming and summer resort hotels and boarding houses. They noted availability of good farm land at depressed cost. They were aware that a few Jews on their own initiative had found employment in the town's woolen mills while others had bought farms.

Another plus for Colchester was its schools which provided for elementary and secondary education. In addition, the Fund noted the presence of medical services for the community.

Since the Fund had already invested \$3000 in 1891 to open a creamery in nearby Chesterfield for Jewish farmers in the surrounding area, the Fund staff concluded that it would encourage Jewish farmers to settle in Colchester as well.*

Between 1891 and 1910, the Fund guaranteed 21 second mortgages for Jewish settlers in Colchester. The Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Society (JIAS), founded in 1900 by wealthy New York Jews of German ancestry, replaced the Fund's Agricultural Bureau to service Colchester Jewry. During this period, many Jews, mostly from New York City, purchased farms in Colchester without financial assistance from the Fund or JAIS. Jews also came to Colchester, not to farm, but to pursue other occupations. (See next chapter for a listing of their occupations).

How these new immigrants fared from 1891 until World War I is the subject for Chapter Five.

* There was an enclave of Jewish farmers in the Exeter section of nearby Lebanon who considered themselves Colchesterites. Their economic and social life centered around Colchester because Lebanon had no Jewish infrastructure. However, they arranged for Orthodox religious services in neighbors' homes on Saturdays and Jewish holidays. Many of their offspring subsequently settled in Colchester.

CHAPTER FIVE

JEWISH COMMUNITY SETS ROOTS IN COLCHESTER

1891 TO WORLD WAR I

Analysis of Jewish Population-1910 Census

In studying the data available from the 1910 census of the Jewish population in Colchester, it becomes apparent that in the two decades subsequent to the decision by the Baron de Hirsch Fund to settle Jews in Colchester, that the Jewish community had indeed established its roots in their new surroundings.*

Table 3 notes when the head of household of Colchester Jewry immigrated to the United States. The census figures do not indicate when these Jews settled in Colchester.

TABLE 3

IMMIGRATION OF COLCHESTER JEWISH HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD

TO THE UNITED STATES 1910 CENSUS

WHEN ENTERED UNITED STATES NUMBER-HEAD OF HOUSEHOLDS

Before 1880	4
1880-1889	14
1890-1899	34
1900-1910	49
Not listed	8
	<hr/>
	109

The overwhelming majority of Colchester Jews (over 80 percent) came to the United States from 1890 to 1910. Most of these immigrants had originally settled in New York City and subsequently decided to migrate to Colchester.

Table 4 contains the data on the country of origin for Colchester Jewry. (See next page).

* By 1910, there were Jewish farmers who settled in Chesterfield, Salem, Ellington, Norwich, Leonard's Bridge, Hebron, Lebanon, Moodus, Stepney, New Haven, Hartford, Cornwall Bridge, Williamantic, Niantic, Tolland, Rockville, Montville and Oakdale.

TABLE 4
COUNTRY OF ORIGIN OF COLCHESTER JEWRY
1910 CENSUS

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN	NUMBER
Russia	305
Austria	18
Poland	5
Germany	3
Hungary	2
 Born in USA	 204
No data	58
	595

Nearly fifty-eight percent of Colchester Jewry migrated from Russia to the USA. Thirty-eight percent (mostly children under age 20) were born in the USA. The balance entered the country from Austria, Hungary, Poland and Germany.

(It is difficult to explain why the census takers in 1910 omitted the information on country of origin or birth in USA on about ten percent of the residents).

Table 5 provides information on the family composition of Colchester Jewry, namely how many individuals in each family unit.

TABLE 5
FAMILY BREAKDOWN OF COLCHESTER JEWRY
1910 CENSUS

NUMBER IN FAMILY HOUSE HOLD	NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLD UNITS
1	4
2	15
3	22
4	19
5	18
6	15
7	15
8	7
9	4
10	2
11	1
12	1
	123

Approximately thirty-five percent of the Jewish families in Colchester had four or more children. Only four Jews lived alone while fifteen households consisted of two people. The pattern of large families that prevailed in the shtetls of Eastern Europe was replicated by the early Jewish settlers in Colchester.

Table 6 reports on the age distribution of the Jewish population.

TABLE 6

AGE DISTRIBUTION OF COLCHESTER JEWISH POPULATION

1910 CENSUS	
AGE	NUMBER
Under 10 years	203
11-20 years	116
21-30 years	97
31-40 years	86
41-50 years	45
51-60 years	32
61-70 years	8
Over 70 years	5
	592

Nearly 54 percent of the Jewish population in 1910 was under age 20 and 38 percent were between 21 and 50, the prime years for occupational activities. Only five Jewish residents were over age 70. Thus, it is apparent that the Jewish community in 1910 was composed of young, vibrant families seeking to fulfill their dreams on American soil.

Table 7 reveals the occupational distribution of the Jewish population. All those recorded below are males except for two female teachers and one domestic. (See next page).

TABLE 7
OCCUPATION OF COLCHESTER JEWS
1910 CENSUS

OCCUPATION	NUMBER
Baker	2
Bartender	1
Blacksmith	1
Boarding House Operator	2
Bookkeeper	1
Butcher	3
Cattle Dealer	2
Capmaker	1
Carpenter	1
Domestic	1
Farmer (a)	60
Furrier	4
Gardener	1
Grain Dealer	1
Grocer	1
Handyman	3
Horse Dealer	1
Jeweler	1
Junk Dealer	2
Laborer (other than farming)	6
Leather Goods worker	1
Liquor Dealer	1
Locksmith	1
Merchant	6
Painter	1
Paper Maker	1
Peddler	5
Rabbi	3
Realtor	1
Retail Clerk	8
Schochet (b)	1
Shipping Clerk	1
Shoemaker	1
Tailor	7
Teacher	2
Upholsterer	2

137

(a) includes farm laborers

(b) religious slaughterer

Of the 137 males who were employed, 60 (45 percent) were farmers or farm laborers. The other males were engaged in a diversity of occupations which contributed to the economy of the community. Only four males were listed as unemployed in the 1910 census.

Statisticians have historically asserted that the census figures are understated but usually the count is not off by more than ten percent. In reviewing the names of Colchester Jewish families in the 1910 census tally sheets, they coincide substantially with the Colchester town clerk records on land purchases by Jews from 1890 thru 1910. (See Appendix A for the listing of Colchester Jews included in the 1910 census. Since the records were handwritten, some names may have been misspelled in the copying or omitted due to illegibility).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

By 1910, more than half of the Jewish farmers had bought farms on their own initiative without assistance from the Baron de Hirsch Fund or the Jewish Agriculture and Industrial Society (JAIS). The non-farming Jews were attracted to Colchester for the economic opportunities and did not rely on outside agencies for sponsorship.

The Jews arrived in Colchester during a depressed economic period. Many old time Yankee farmers sought to sell their property because of declining income and the lack of interest by their children to remain in Colchester. The devalued farm property appealed to the Baron de Hirsch staff as bargains for prospective Jewish farmers.

More devastating to the local economy was the financial instability resulting from the closing of the U.S. Rubber Co. plant (successors to the Colchester Rubber Co.) in 1893. Some 600 employees lost their jobs due to the closing. Then in 1898, the main business center in Colchester was ravaged by fire including segments of the old rubber factory. (According to the published records, no Jewish property owners suffered direct losses from the fire). Finally, a second fire in 1908 reduced the rubber factory to rubble.

Several manifestations of this depressed economy were the closing of the local Colchester bank, the bankruptcy of a canning factory, the shutdown of the creamery serving the local farms, and the folding of the town newspaper.

It is comprehensible why the Colchester town leadership looked with favor when the Baron de Hirsch Fund staff sought to settle Jews in Colchester. The Fund's guarantee of second mortgages on farms helped stabilize property values. (The average price paid for farms including the buildings thereon was \$500!).

Efforts were made by the Fund staff to find investors to attract new industries to Colchester. While it has been alleged in prior studies of Colchester Jewry that an English based lace curtain manufacturer opened a plant in Colchester in 1900 and employed 150 to 300 (the reported figures vary) Jewish immigrants, the census tallies for 1910 would indicate that either the allegation was false or that the plant closed prior to 1910 and that these mill workers left Colchester. The records contained in the Baron de Hirsch historical files reveal correspondence with the lace curtain firm in England but no conclusive evidence that the deal was consummated.

The Colchester town officials also sought to bring industry to Colchester. A group of business leaders were induced to open a shoe factory in 1895 which, due to mismanagement, went bankrupt two years later.

The Baron de Hirsch Fund investigated proposals to revive the rubber factory operations but the fire in 1898 decimated substantial segments of the unused factory buildings which terminated interest in this project.

The newly arrived Jewish farmers encountered many difficulties in adjusting to their rural environment. They had to contend with an unfamiliar soil; they suffered from inexperience in American farming techniques; they manifested ineptness in handling and maintaining farm machinery; they complained of the high cost of shipping their products to market which limited their ability to compete for sales.

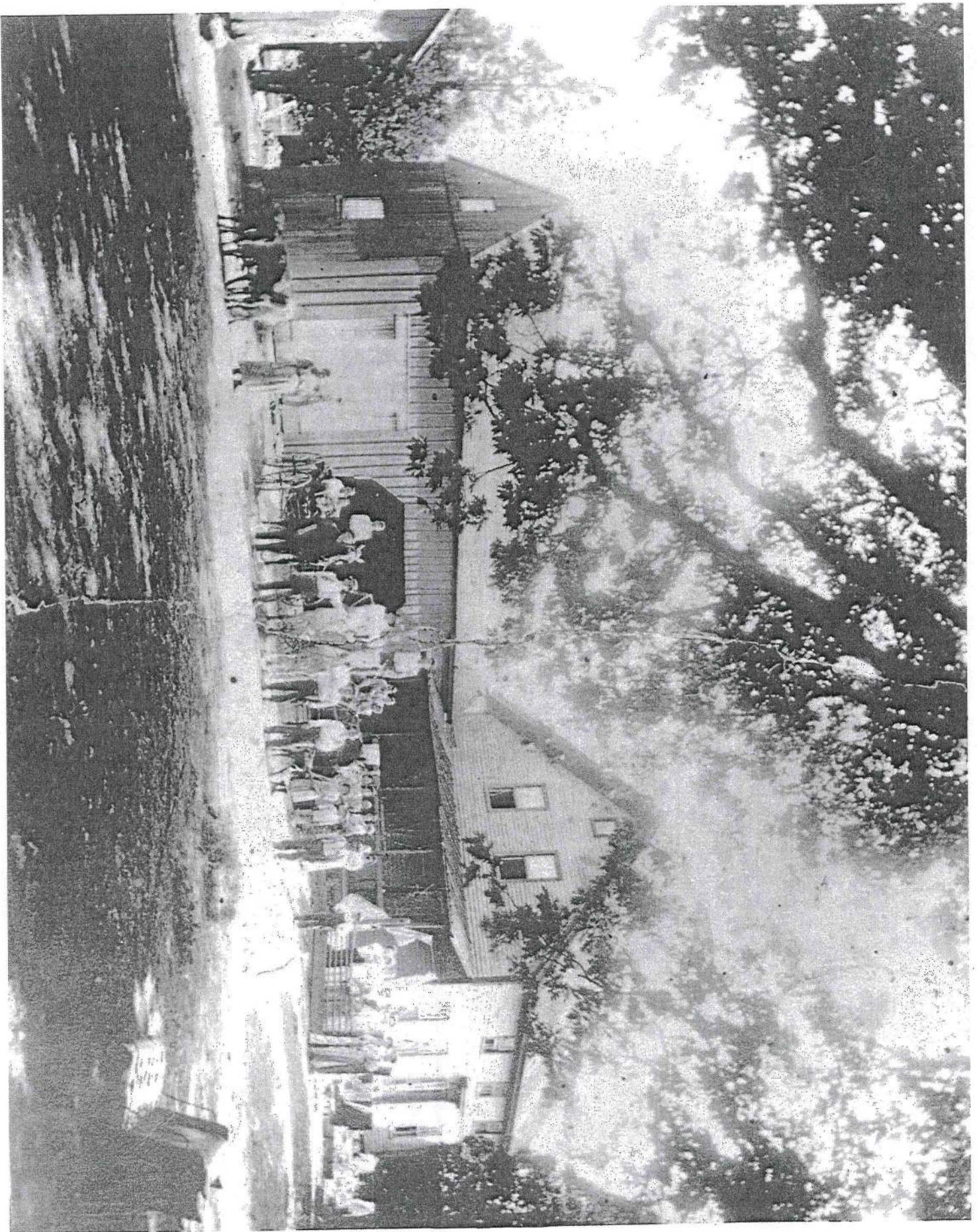
But these innovative immigrants found several avenues for relief of their problems. Thru subscription to "The Jewish Farmer," a monthly magazine founded in 1908 written in English and Yiddish, they could read of current advances in farming and could learn of practical tips to cope with their production and marketing problems. The publication provided a means for exchange of views with their peers in other farming communities.

In 1909, the Federation of Jewish Farmers was organized with the help of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Society (JAIS). A local chapter was established in Colchester that year. Thru the Federation, JAIS provided assistance to farmers on property management, how to develop cluster groups for cooperative activities in production and marketing. Prospective farm purchasers were encouraged to settle in areas near other Jewish farmers to take advantage of the latter's knowledge and to be able to join in cooperative ventures.

The Baron de Hirsch Fund staff and the JAIS looked with satisfaction on the progress made by the Jewish farmers in Colchester. While most operated dairy farms, others branched into poultry farming and raising produce for local markets. In 1898, a Fund staff member submitted the following report on his visit to Colchester.

I had an opportunity of visiting somewhat carefully the farms of Mr. R and Mr. Z. R has a dairy farm and raised cows. His farm is in a good state of cultivation, and his stock appears to be in excellent condition, about 40 head. He raises and sells hay and other produce and has enough vegetables for his own family use. He has reduced the mortgage on his property by about \$250 in 1897 and 1898. His family consists of himself and wife and two children under 5 years of age. He hired help at haying time. A local market would be of great benefit to him.

And this was the same story told by Mr. Z. His specialty is poultry. He has from 500 to 600 chickens; has some cows, and 139 acres of which a portion under cultivation or pasture. His frame house is of superior character. His family consists of wife and 5 children, the oldest being 11 years of age, his parents and his wife's parents, and they are very industrious, all hands uniting on the farm, even the little ones. He sells quite a quantity of chickens, costs 50 cents each, averaging two pounds. His poultry yard is ample and business like. He has separate houses and even provision for isolation in case of sickness among chickens. He is quite intelligent. Had been in



JACK BERMAN'S FAMILY FARM
(circa 1912)

business in New York, suffering himself as well as his wife from chronic illness, and now his family appear in uncommonly good health, and he and Mr. R. must be admired for the courage and cheerfulness and persistence which they show. (Unedited by the author).

Jack Berman, who still maintains a residence in Colchester, was born in 1904, and reared there. In recalling his childhood experiences, he related how the Jewish farmers cooperated in marketing their products, in purchasing supplies, in supervising the children's transportation to local schools. The highlight of the week was the Saturday night social gatherings when the Jewish farmers and their families would hitch up their wagons and visit with relatives and friends. These informal gatherings provided the infrastructure for community communication and for discussion of farm transactions for mutual benefit. The families rotated who would host the Saturday night collations. The practice continued until the onset of World War II.

In 1910, several Jewish farmers approached their Gentile neighbors to solicit their interest to sell milk collectively to the dairy industry. In so doing, the farmers were able to negotiate a better price for the milk.

Later in 1916, the same group collaborated in organizing the Colchester Farmer's Produce Co., a marketing agency which had total sales exceeding \$50,000 in 1917.

The Colchester Jewish Farmers Cooperative Credit Union was founded in 1912. Initially, 27 members took out loans amounting to \$1,490 with an average loan of \$64. On March 31, 1913, the loans outstanding amounted to \$1,570.

The JAIS helped monitor these loans because its staff sought to discourage incompetent or disreputable applicants from receiving assistance. Where appropriate, the JAIS acting for the Baron de Hirsch Fund foreclosed on farmers who failed to meet their obligations. This occurred on about ten percent of the Fund and JAIS loans.

The problem of collecting on outstanding loans is revealed in the correspondence between Mr. C. and A.S. Solomons, general agent for the Fund, written originally in Yiddish and translated into English.

Colchester, Conn. June 14/1900

Hon. A.S. Solomons:

Dear Sir:

I have written you several times saying that I would remit money due you as soon as possible. At present, everybody is busy and needs every dollar he has. I beg to ask your kind indulgence and repeat that I will pay you, without being asked, as soon as I can.

Yours very truly,
M.C.

Seeking to provide financial aid to farmers, the Federal Farm Loan Act was passed in 1916. This legislation opened up new avenues for prospective Jewish farmers to purchase farms with federal loan guaranties.

In the period 1911 to 1920, Colchester Jews explored other sources of income. Some Jewish farmers encouraged relatives and friends from New York City to take their summer vacations on the farm for which the farmer received payment for room and board. A few entrepreneurs (the Elgart family and the Jaffe family) operated small hotels catering to a summer clientele. Other Jews opened small factories for leather making or to serve as contractors for clothing manufacturers in New York City.

The onset of World War I and the economic expansion that followed brought prosperity to Colchester Jews. The farmers received higher prices for their products. At the same time, some Jewish craftsmen and artisans returned to New York City to take advantage of better job opportunities.

In the three decades from 1890 thru 1919, Colchester Jews laid down solid economic roots in the community which gave them confidence of their ability to earn a modest living in their new setting. They could not foresee the economic prosperity that ultimately awaited them and their offspring.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

On August 27, 1894, three self-appointed Jewish community leaders, two of whom purchased farms with support from the Baron de Hirsch Fund, paid \$300 to acquire land for a Jewish cemetery in the name of the Love of Brotherhood (Ahavath Achim) Association. The property was located off the New London turnpike road. Thus the Jewish community in Colchester was established. (See Appendix B).

Four years later, Congregation Ahavath Achim was founded. Initially, daily and Sabbath religious services were held in the home of Hirsch Cohen, the local butcher. For the High Holiday services, the congregation used Grange Hall. Subsequently, a building was rented in town for Hebrew classes. Those farmers who observed the Sabbath but could not walk to town organized local minyan at neighbors' homes where they conducted services.

This makeshift arrangement persisted until 1902 when the congregation purchased a home on Windham Avenue and converted it into a synagogue, named Pische Tshuvoh. A mikveh was built behind the synagogue.

With the growth of the Jewish population, Hirsch Cohen and cohorts advocated erecting a new synagogue building on Lebanon Avenue. The synagogue was dedicated in 1913 under the name of Ahavath Achim Pische Tshuvoh (combining the name of the cemetery with the old synagogue). At some later date (?) the Pische Tshuvoh was dropped.

At this time, the synagogue organized a "Chevra Kadisha" to take responsibility for Jewish burials.

As noted earlier in the 1910 census tallies, there were three rabbis living in Colchester, namely Eli Atlas (age 35), Aaron Kantrowitz (age 44) and Abraham Super (age 56). Super and Kantrowitz were neighbors. To the best recollection of those interviewed for this study, none of the above rabbis held pulpits in the synagogue. Rabbi Atlas was probably the shochet and Rabbis Kantrowitz and Super were Hebrew teachers. The presumption is that one or more of them also served as mohels.

Thus, within the first quarter of a century in Colchester, the transplanted Jews from the East European shtetls had replicated their social and religious life adapting, as Jews have throughout their five thousand year history, to their local environment. Yiddishkeit and Menschlichkeit prevailed triumphantly in the Colchester shtetl.

Who were these early leaders of the Colchester Jewish community?

It is difficult to identify all of them due to the lack of written records and the sparsity of those who had links to that older generation. The role of Hirsch Cohen has already been noted above. A dominant figure in this early period was Chaim Meir Cutler who after early financial reverses emerged as one of the more affluent Jews in Colchester. One of his relatives, Leo Broder, became a successful grain dealer and later a key leader in the community after World War I.

The Elgarts (David, Harry and Abraham) were early settlers in Colchester (1893). They were affluent business entrepreneurs with several ventures including operating a hotel. They were generous contributors to charitable causes. Harry Elgart was the prime mover in establishing the Jewish Aid

Society which offered loans at low interest rates to those in need and the indigent who could not afford burial plots.

Two other leaders in the community were David Wolchansky noted for his charity and Hyman Mintz, a liquor dealer and bar owner, who was the so-called "tumbler" (activist) in Jewish affairs.

In comparison to other Jewish settlements in rural communities sponsored by the Baron de Hirsch Fund, Colchester provided a well-developed educational system where the Jewish children were warmly received. The school board offered free education thru twelve grades, the final four years at Bacon Academy. In the Academy's eleven student graduating class in 1911, five were Jewish including the valedictorian, Rachel May Himmelstein. The classes of 1915 and 1916 also had Jewish valedictorians, Ann Bernstein and Hyman Weinstein, respectively.

Observing the children's interest in farming, the school board arranged for agricultural lessons once a week. The instructor, R.A. Storrs, organized a poultry club and encouraged the students to enter local fairs. Several Jewish students won prizes for their entries.

Colchester students were also admitted to the Baron de Hirsch Agricultural School, founded in 1894, and located in Woodbine, New Jersey. The sons and daughters of Jewish farmers in Colchester received scholarships to attend the school.

To its credit, the Colchester school board also provided for free evening school adult education courses. In commenting on the success of this program in 1916, a writer for "The Jewish Farmer" observed: "The Jewish people have grasped the opportunity with enthusiasm...The Jewish pupils of the school are never satisfied with their accomplishments. They wish to go on and on for as long as possible. They never seem to tire of studying."

A big boost to the community's effort to advance its educational standing occurred in July 1905 with the dedication of the Cragin Memorial Library on Linwood Avenue. The library building was a gift to the town by Dr. Edwin Cragin of New York City in memory of his father, Edwin T. Cragin, a Colchester native. The building's basement was filled with athletic equipment and became the home for a local boys' club. Many of the Colchester residents interviewed for this study reported fond memories of services rendered by the library staff. It was haven for those who enjoyed reading.

The Jewish community demonstrated its integration in Colchester's affairs by sponsoring on July 4, 1917 an Independence Day fair held on the town green. The event was organized under the auspices of B'nai Brith, the JAIS and the Federation of the Jewish Farmers of America. Among the non-Jewish speakers were clergy from the local Congregational and Baptist churches, a Civil War veteran and the town clerk.

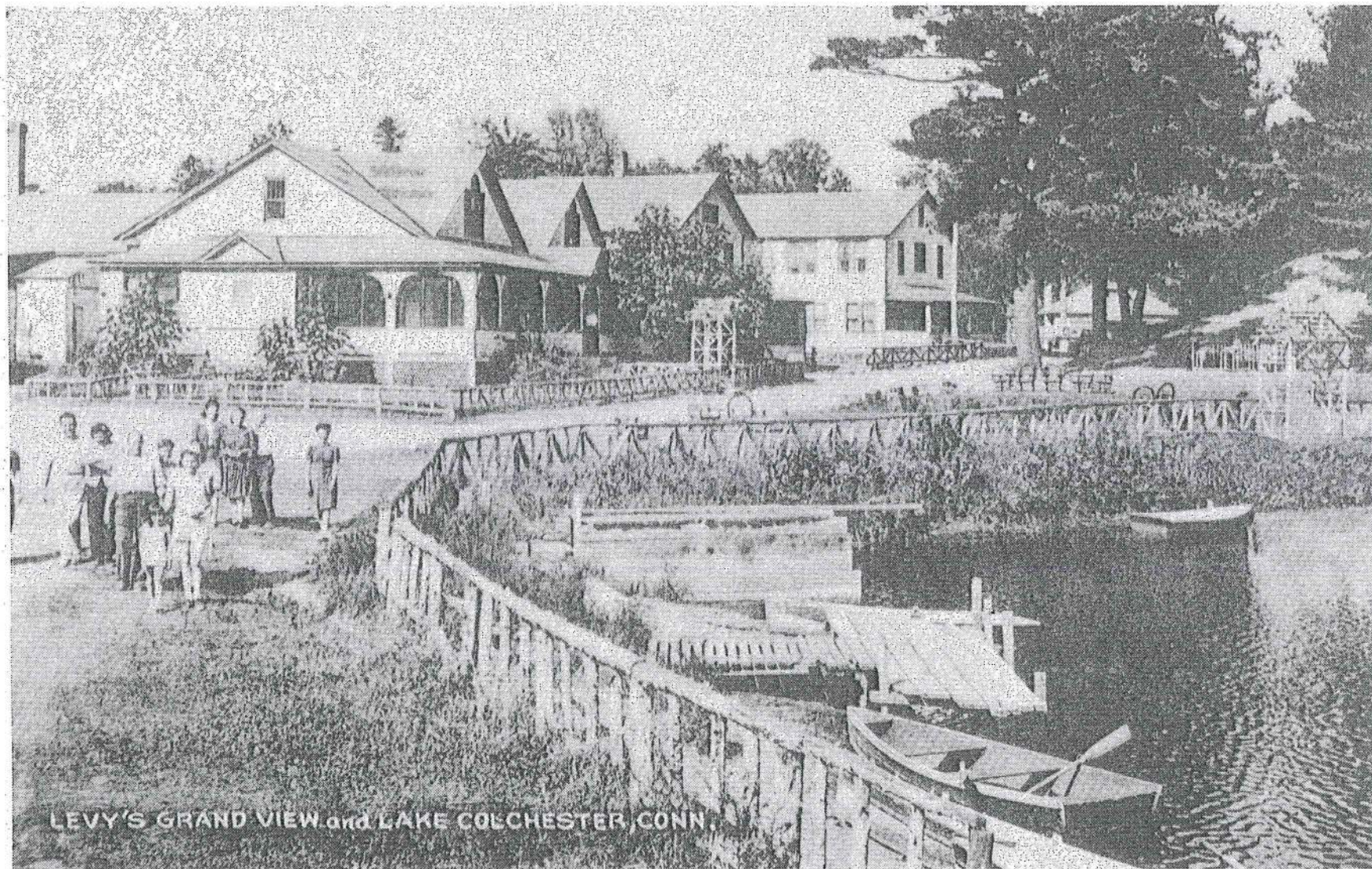
During World War I, several Jewish men entered military service, including two of the Hurwit brothers. (Unfortunately, the record book containing the names of Colchester men who served in WW I was missing from the Town Clerk's office on the day that the author visited. That explains why there is not a complete listing of Jews who served in WW I).

The Colchester town officials organized a home guard during WW I. Joseph Agranovitch and Sam Jaffe were among the Jews who volunteered for duty.

By the end of WW I, Colchester Jewry had obtained a community identity and gained recognition as an integral component in the town's affairs. As discussed in the next chapter, they were prepared to assume more active roles in the Colchester's political life, economic development and fraternal activities.

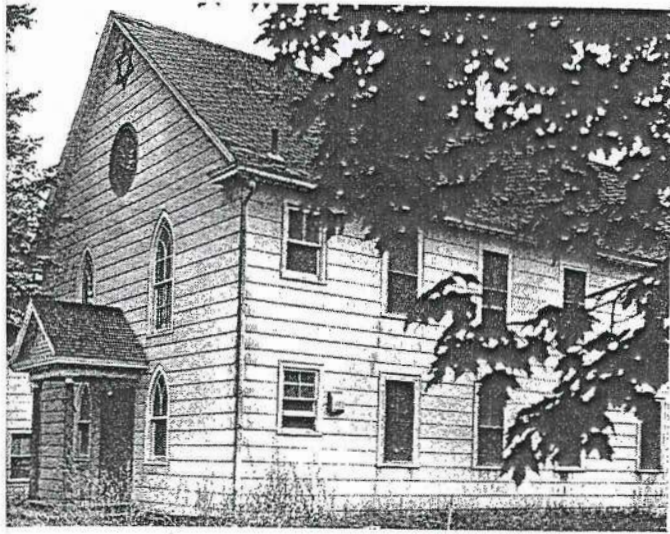


Cragin Memorial Library
From postcard dated 1922

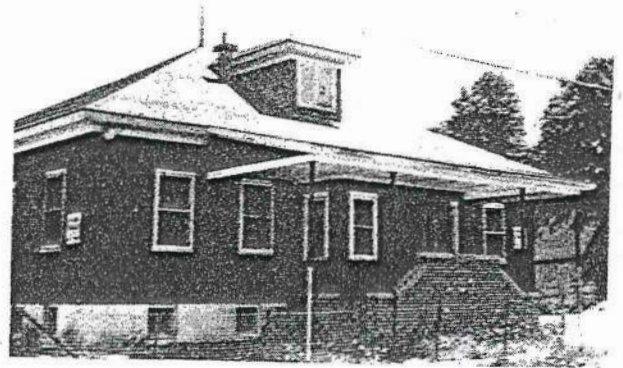


LINCOLN LAKE LODGE, PREVIOUSLY LEVY'S GRANDVIEW HOTEL AND LAKE,
ORIGINALLY ELGART'S HOTEL AND CASINO

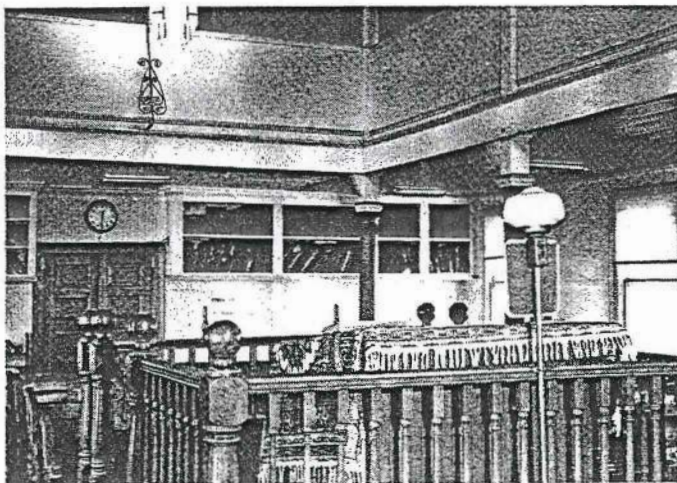
HISTORICAL NOTE: THE FAMOUS BIG BAND LEADERS "LES AND LARRY ELGART" GREW UP HERE AT THEIR FAMILY'S HOTEL.



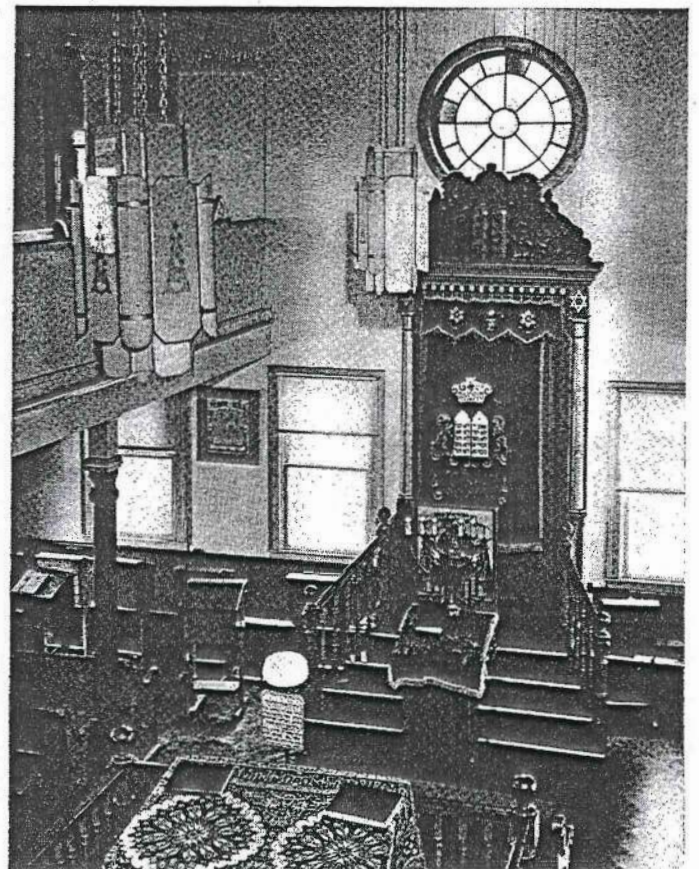
CONGREGATION ACHIM AHAVATH
(Exterior-built in 1913)



ZION HALL
(Exterior-built in 1922)



CONGREGATION ACHIM AHAVATH
(Interior-built in 1913)



CHAPTER SIX

COLCHESTER JEWRY-1920 THRU WORLD WAR II

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Colchester's economic development from 1920 to the end of WW II stemmed primarily from the investments of Jewish entrepreneurs.

Jews expanded their clothing manufacturing plants under contract to New York City firms. The Levines (Harry and two sons, Hy and Edward) produced ladies' coats. Ike Cohen operated a dress factory. There were also several smaller manufacturers who worked seasonally. Subsequently, the Levines operated a discount factory outlet store for retail sales which attracted a large out of town clientele, especially on Sundays.

The Schwartz family, later joined by Leo Sesserman, developed a successful leather manufacturing business.

The Liverant family opened a furniture outlet store in the early 1920s. As years progressed, they switched to selling antiques and attracted a clientele beyond Colchester's environs.

To provide transportation for the budding industries in Colchester, the Schuster family launched a trucking firm with its first terminal based in Colchester.

With the increased interest in Colchester as a resort area after WW I, several new boarding houses were opened by Harris Cohen, Barnett Dember, the Schwartz, Kessler and Horowitz families and other Jewish landlords scattered throughout the town. More enterprising Jews opened hotels including Levy's Grandview on Lake Colchester, Shady Nook Hotel (Max and Mollie Cohen) and Julian Sultan's Hilltop Lodge. In addition, local Jewish farmers catered to a "koch-a-lein" (Yiddish for cook for yourself) clientele.

In an oral interview, one old timer, Jewish farmer described how his "koch-a-lein" operated. His family consisted of four adults and one child under ten years of age. He rented out four bedrooms in his house to four families each consisting of two adults and two children. He built a summer kitchen which had large tables where the boarding families ate their meals. Two families shared one ice box. (This was before refrigerators were a standard kitchen appliance). The women had small stoves to prepare the meals. The farmer assisted the boarding families to go to town for shopping. Dairy products and bakery goods were delivered daily to the farm. The farmer sold the boarders produce from his garden. One indoor bathroom was available for the farmer's family and the four boarding families! At night, the summer kitchen served as a recreation area mostly for card playing.

To provide for this influx of vacationers mostly from New York City and New Haven, the railroad added additional passenger service to Colchester during the summer months. On Labor Day, the railroad operated an express excursion service direct from Colchester to New York with only one stop in New Haven. Labor Day marked the end of the vacation season.

Jews were predominant in running the taxi service from the railroad station to the hotels and boarding houses.

During the 1930s, Jewish mobsters from Brooklyn would seek accommodations in Colchester as a sanctuary for their henchmen to escape the heat from rival gangs or police authorities. On occasions, the mobsters used Colchester as a hideaway for their illicit liaisons. Local Jewish residents who catered to the mobsters were well remunerated for their services.

Although some Jews continued to engage in dairy farming until WW II, many Jewish farmers switched to poultry enterprises. In 1924, A.M. Gottlieb conducted an all day Poultry Institute on his farm in Colchester to discuss advanced techniques that could be employed by poultry farmers in their production and marketing.

There was a constant turnover of farm property. Among the Jews who purchased farms were Morris Stollman, Isadore Brounstein and Edward Scott. New Gentile immigrants from Poland, Russia and the Ukraine also bought farms after WW I.

Farmers endured economic hardships during the depression years of the 1930s. To alleviate their problems, some sought to market their products directly to the consumers and cut out the middlemen who took a big share of their potential profits. Others relied more heavily on income from summer boarders. Many children who left the farms for employment in cities returned to the farms when they could not find jobs.

Colchester farmers took advantage of New Deal legislation to save their farms from foreclosure.

After Hitler came to power in 1933 in Germany, Jewish refugees fleeing from Nazi tyranny on arrival in the United States sought assistance from Jewish charitable agencies. Approximately 25 of these refugee families were induced to settle on farms in Colchester. While they faced many hardships in their transition, most prospered during the WW II years and thereafter.

Three Jewish families (Einhorn, Broder and Cutler) served as grain dealers catering to the farm population in Colchester and its environs.

"Up Street" Main Street and the surrounding area attracted Jews who operated grocery, butcher, hardware, clothing, jewelry and variety stores. Jews managed real estate offices, established auto dealerships, gas stations, served as physicians, dentists and pharmacists, maintained law practices and insurance agencies. To sum up, the Jews played a vital part in sustaining the town's economic infrastructure.

One of the more popular summer hangouts was Harry's Stand located on Broadway and operated by Ruby Cohen. His hot dogs and hamburgers also drew as customers many vacationers traveling from Hartford to the resort beaches (New London to Lyme) on Long Island Sound. For many out of towners Harry's Stand was synonymous with Colchester.

The only cinema house in Colchester was owned and managed by the Markoffs, a local Jewish family.

The 1940 census tallies reported 3000 residents in Colchester, roughly identified as follows: Yankee American 20%; Jewish 25%; Slavic background (Polish, Ukranian, Russian) 45%; Irish 3.5%; and the balance (Italian, Afro-American, other) 6.5%.

By the end of WW II, the Jews had replaced the native Yankees as the economic driving force in Colchester. The Yankees had white collar jobs and were predominant in government and education. The Slavic residents served as blue collar workers, teamsters, laborers and factory employees engaged in manufacturing. Relatively few were involved in white collar endeavors. While both Jews and Gentiles were engaged in farming and contributed to the town's economy, its importance receded with each passing decade except for the boom resulting from the food shortages during WW II.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

A concomitant of the increased Jewish impact on Colchester's economy was a more influential Jewish presence in the town's political affairs. In the two decades after WW I, Sam Friedman emerged as the town Republican most identified with the Jewish community. He held a government position which appeared to be a patronage payoff. Until the 1932 presidential election, most Jews registered and voted Republican to sustain favor with the incumbent Yankee officeholders who dominated the town's politics since the Civil War.

Then in 1932, the Jewish community split its vote with a large majority supporting Franklin D. Roosevelt. Subsequently, Jews supported Republican candidates for local offices but went Democratic for state and national elected officials.

More important than the Jewish vote was the impact of Jewish contributions to political campaigns. Both the Democratic and Republican parties sought out Jewish contributors as a major source for their campaign budgets. Thru the generosity of their campaign donations, the Jewish community leadership had valuable input into the town's political decision-making, whether under Democratic or Republican rule.

During this period, Jews were elected to political office on Democratic and Republican slates. Many were appointed to town boards and commissions. Thus, Jews became wheelers and dealers in the town's political battles.

Another penetration into the bastion of community power was the appointment in 1921 of Rachel Himmelstein as the first Jewish elementary school teacher. In later years, Nettie Cohen Koppelman and David Shedroff were appointed. Jews were soon selected as members of the school board and thus helped shape educational policy. Harris Minsk received the first contract to provide bus service for Colchester children.

Overall, with few exceptions, the Jews looked with favor on the educational system in Colchester. They thought that their children received excellent training. Some more affluent Jews dissented from this assessment and sent their children to out of town boarding schools.

Jewish youth competed on the school's athletic teams. Later as young adults, many participated on the baseball and basketball teams that represented Colchester in regional competition.

With increased prosperity, the Jewish community found funding to expand its operations. In 1922, the community leaders built Zion Hall on Mill Street. It served as a community center, recreation hall, and Hebrew School. A mikvah was also installed and services provided for steam baths.

Hebrew School teachers were hired to prepare boys for their bar mitzvah. Few girls attended the Hebrew School in the 1920s and 1930s.

The Zion Hall operation was independent of the synagogue management but there was cross-fertilization of leadership for both ventures. Not until the 1930s was a full time rabbi hired for the synagogue.

As has occurred in other Jewish communities, internal conflicts developed which required the judgment of a Solomon for resolution. One perennial problem related to controlling the appointment of the shochet (religious slaughter of animals for food consumption). Daniel "Zaydel" Goldberg, the local kosher butcher who also operated a kosher meat slaughtering house, did not want to countenance any interference in his choice of shochet. The reason was self-evident. The shochet had the sole authority of determining whether the animal was slaughtered according to religious law (shechita). If the shochet was not beholden to Mr. Goldberg, then the former's independence could be costly to Mr. Goldberg if the shochet declared that the meat was not kosher. On the other hand, a shochet under Mr. Goldberg's thumb could be compromised in determining shechita. The battles over the shochet were intense until some accommodation could be reached between the community leaders and Goldberg.

Goldberg and his supporters also clashed with the triumvirate of synagogue leaders (Ike Cohen, Leo Broder and Harry Levine) over the latter's dominance of synagogue affairs. A perennial conflict stemmed from the triumvirate's control over which congregants would receive honors ("Aleeyahs") during religious services. These disputes represented differences between the haves (wealthy, powerful Jewish leaders) and the have nots, (the less affluent, vocal dissidents).

In the WW II period, the dissidents succeeded in organizing a new synagogue under the name of the Colchester Jewish Aid Congregation. In addition to Goldberg, this congregation included the Herman family, Mel Scott, his mother and sister's family, Jack Balaban, Sam Cutler, Abe Zubow, William Miller among others. The group met initially at Felner's shoe store off Windham Street. Its attendance at this time probably never exceeded 25 to 35 congregants. The group conducted its weekly services without a rabbi. For the High Holidays, a cantor was hired to conduct services. The children were enrolled in the Hebrew School at Zion Hall or went to Norwich for study. The congregation owned burial grounds on Gillette Lane.

Colchester Jewry displayed an early interest in supporting Zionist organizations. Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah, visited Colchester in the early 1920s, to organize the Hadassah chapter. Rose Jaffee and Razel Agranovitch assumed leadership for the chapter in its early years. Louis Lipsky, a prime mover in the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA) since before WW I, came to Colchester to address the local affiliate. Colchester Jewry sent large delegations to the ZOA state conventions where they engaged in the deliberations.

The Colchester Jewish Ladies Aid Society provided welfare support for needy Jews. Mrs. Phyllis Schuster and Mrs. Malvena Scott were the prime movers in this group in the thirties and forties. Their hospitality program welcomed new arrivals in the community.