

## EARLY JEWISH AGRICULTURAL COLONIES IN NORTH DAKOTA

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Although the first evidence of a Jewish community in the United States dates back to 1654 in New Amsterdam, some Jews undoubtedly were among the earliest settlers of our country.<sup>1</sup> In fact, there is strong evidence that some Marranos (people who practiced their Jewish faith in secret for fear of their lives) were members of the crews that brought Columbus to our shores in 1492.<sup>2</sup>

Just as Jews were among the first settlers in our country's early history, they were, according to documentation, present in the Dakota Territory shortly after Federal troops had pushed the Indians across the Missouri River and opened the territory for settlement in 1864. The earliest reported Jewish settler was Dan Eisenberg who started a trading post along the Missouri River south of Bismarck in 1869.<sup>3</sup> North Dakota did not receive statehood status until 1889, seven years after large numbers of Jews had attempted to make the territory their permanent homes. These Jews came primarily from Germany and Russia.

Reasons for the large Jewish migrations from Germany and Russia lie in part in the history of these countries and in those laws aimed at depriving the Jews of first class citizenship. The harshness of the life in Germany caused large numbers of Christians as well as Jews to migrate (this is in contrast to the migration from Russia which consisted basically of Jews). In most instances the German immigrant was from the lower economic class and was poorly educated. The very wealthy and educated Jews managed to survive in Germany. Thus, prior to 1848, the Jewish immigrant from Germany was poor and uneducated.

In 1848, however, an unsuccessful revolution brought many German intelligentsia to the shores of the United States. These Jews comprised some of the best educated minds in Germany.<sup>4</sup> But after 1850, the German immigrant once again came from the lower economic and poorly educated class.

Most of the Jewish immigration to the United States from Germany began in 1815 and ended in the 1890's. The reasons for the early Jewish migrations to the United States from Germany can best be understood when the political, economic and social conditions in the nineteenth century are studied.

After the Napoleonic Wars, Germany was a loose federation of states with each state vying for supremacy. The Napoleonic Wars left Germany

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<sup>1</sup>Rabbi Lee J. Levinger, *A History of the Jews in the United States*, (New York, 1956), p. 62.

<sup>2</sup>Levinger, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Alfred Thal, *Mandan Pioneer* (December 5, 1964), p. 13.

<sup>4</sup>Levinger, p. 178.

and her people in dire poverty and great despair. The "Metternich System", adopted throughout Europe, opposed nationalistic sympathies and in Germany resulted in the "Carlsbad Decrees" which suppressed all liberal views and thought.<sup>5</sup>

Some nations foresaw something dangerous in the fervent (sometimes fanatic) German nationalism as indicated in the penetrating and foreboding comment of Heinrich Heine in 1823, "Although I am a Radical in England and a Caronarist in Italy, I am no Demagogue in Germany for the accidentally and trifling reason that with the triumph of the latter, several thousand Jewish heads, and precisely the best ones, will fall."<sup>6</sup>

Medieval laws (abolished during the Napoleonic Era), which kept the Jew in a subservient position, were restored. Thus, the emancipated Jew was deprived of his rights by laws which forced him into a ghetto, burdened him with excessively heavy taxes, restricted his freedom of movement, prevented him from marrying except at specified dates and excluded his children from the public schools. These laws also served to create a hostile attitude toward the Jew on the part of the non-Jewish population; as a consequence, many Jews, with the help of philanthropic monies, migrated to the United States.

An interpretation of these historical events can be made as follows. During the Napoleonic Era, freedom became important to the German Jew, a concern that was reflected in his religious attitudes as well as in his secular life. It was during this period that the Jew became "German" and developed a strong feeling for his German homeland and its culture. Reformed Judaism, perhaps the most influential segment of modern Jewish spiritual thought, was born in Germany in 1810.

The religious changes, basic to Reformed Judaism, included shorter prayer books, services in the German language instead of Hebrew (a reflection of nationalistic feeling), and accompaniment of organ and choir to the singing and chanting parts of the service. Soon the philosophy broadened to include the idea that the Reformed Jew was a German first and had no desire to return to a Jewish Nation, namely Palestine, which most Jews up until this time had prayed for. The most important concept of this new approach to the oldest monotheistic religion was that of a Messianic Age in which all people live in harmony and happiness.

After Napoleon's defeat, fears of another French Revolution (and its aftermath) kindled the fires of reaction in Europe. In Germany, all liberal thought was suppressed. Laws imprisoned the Jew in the ghetto, thus depriving him of any education except that which the home or synagogue could offer. Crippling taxes kept him poverty stricken and travel

<sup>5</sup>Definition of liberal as used in this study: freeman, not restricted.

<sup>6</sup>G. Bruun and H. S. Commanger, *Europe and America Since 1492*, (Massachusetts, 1954), p. 492.

laws restricted his movements. Ideas and philosophies advocating change were suppressed as revolutionary. These conditions were the underlying basis for the migration of five million Germans to the United States from 1815 to 1890. Of these five million people, a quarter of a million were Jews.<sup>7</sup>

The torrent of Russian and East European immigrants began in 1881 and ended in 1920 with a population of 3,500,000 Jews in the United States by the end of that period.<sup>8</sup> The reason for this massive migration can be found in the history of nineteenth century Russia.

After the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, his son Alexander III became Czar. He followed the fifty year old conservative tripartite maxim: orthodoxy, autocracy and nationality. Russian Orthodoxy was the dominant religion; the Czar reigned supreme over the land and anything Russian was superior. This policy of Russian superiority served as a stimulus to a new wave of anti-semitism extending from the lowly peasant classes to the government ministers and even to the Czar himself.

Restrictive laws of 1882, had forbidden Jews to live, buy or rent land outside The Pale (an area in Poland and southern Russia to which Alexander I restricted the Jews). Under similar laws, Jewish artisans were no longer allowed to work outside The Pale. In 1887, under the minister Pobedonostsev, The Pale was diminished in size and great hardships resulted for those Jews living outside of and in this area. In the same year, Jews were excluded by newly imposed quotas from service in the Zemstvos (local administrative bodies) and municipalities. It became a criminal act for a Jew to use Christian given names, a custom practiced by the educated Russian Jew.

Although democratic reforms reorganized the Army in 1874 (a reduction in the length of service had been made in 1861 from 25 to 16 years), in 1880 the bulk of long years of service still fell on the poor, the peasant and the uneducated who could not buy or earn their freedom. An unusually large number of Jews were sought for military service.

In 1881, pogroms (organized massacres or attacks on Jews) were carried out, sanctioned and abetted by the legal authorities.

The Russian pogroms, which broke out on a large scale in 1881 and lasted intermittently until 1905, were primarily responsible for the Jewish migration from Russia to the United States. Almost 2,000,000 Jews entered the United States between 1880 and 1920 from lands now part of Russia.<sup>9</sup>

In 1883, a special legislative committee, appointed by the Czar, reported that 650 anti-Jewish laws were part of the Russian statutes.

<sup>7</sup>Levinger, p. 176.

<sup>8</sup>Levinger, p. 265.

<sup>9</sup>Levinger, p. 265.

In addition, it made the following recommendation: "The very history of Russian legislation teaches us that there is only one way and one solution – the emancipation of the Jews and their assimilation with the rest of the population under the protection of the same laws." The reaction of the government to this recommendation was the formulation of a policy which opposed the report – a policy of adamant discrimination against the Jews.<sup>10</sup>

Many of the basic philosophies of the Russian Jew (religious and secular) differed greatly from those of the German Jew. The reasons for these differences can be interpreted on the basis of differences in Russian history and the attitudes of the Russian people and government as compared to the history and attitudes of the Germans. The Russian Jew of the nineteenth century was not a Russian citizen, he was only a Jew. He was never encouraged to have a nationalistic feeling for Russia, such as the German Jew felt for his homeland. His life centered around his religion and the synagogue. He was forced to live in specified areas and there he set up his communities with its own schools, organizations, synagogues and courts, with Jews at the head. His contact with non-Jews was with the tax collector, business man and persecutor.

The Jew constituted the lowest economic and social class in Russia: he was straddled with harsh taxes, not permitted to travel in Russia without a passport and forced to serve in the Army for many years. He had never known the freedom that the German Jew experienced during the Napoleonic Era.

An interesting distinction can be seen in the nineteenth century Russian attitude toward the Jew and the twentieth century Hitler concept. In Russia, Judaism was considered a religion and not a race. Any Jew who *converted* to Russian Orthodoxy was granted all the rights of a Russian citizen: he could obtain an education, enter the business of his choice, live and travel where he desired and avoid the draft by legal means. On the other hand in Germany, Hitler attempted to identify Judaism biologically as a race and on the basis of his attempt, he embarked on his policy of genocide. There was no way of rejecting one's Judaism in Nazi Germany.

The German Jewish immigrant and the Russian Jewish immigrant brought his own group characteristics and attitudes to the United States. Although many of the German Jews were not formally educated, they brought with them the tenets of German culture. These included a strong desire for education, organization and individualism in conjunction with liberalism. The German Jew did not, like other immigrant groups, settle in the large Eastern cities. Instead, he settled from border to border and in small and large cities. Through long hours of toil, usually in

<sup>10</sup>Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia* (New York, 1953), p. 1120.

the mercantile field, he was able to support his family and in many cases, amassed great wealth founding such large companies as Macy's, Gimbel's and Sachs'. The German Jew thrived in his new homeland because the liberty afforded him acted as a catalyst; his realistic, logical and individual thinking interacted favorably with his environment. Reformed Judaism also received great impetus in this new climate of freedom.

German organizational ability is reflected in the typical structure of a German Jewish community in its new country. The Germans first deeded land for a cemetery, formed a formal congregation which was eventually housed in a synagogue, and later established a mutual aid society for needy Jews, whether transients or residents. Numerous social and charitable organizations were formed, first on a local scale, but later on a national and then on an international scale (e.g. B'nai B'rith).

Migration to the United States was a more difficult transition for the Russian Jew than for the German Jew because he was moving from a medieval Russian civilization to a highly technological American one. Whenever possible, the Russian migrated as a family unit and in such books as Korbrin's *Lithuanian Village*, is recorded that whole towns left Russia together. The majority of the Russian immigrants settled in the larger cities (about 70 per cent in New York City) in special sections and worked in factories generally connected with the needle trade industry.

The Russian Jew was ultra-orthodox and brought an ultra-orthodox form of Judaism to America at a time when reformed and conservative congregations were flourishing. He was intensely religious and we find that under the severest conditions he kept the rituals and customs of his heritage even though it was often a grave hardship.

The plight of the Jew in Russia in 1881 had not gone unnoticed by the rest of the world. Strong objections had been voiced by the United States and England against the violent forms of discrimination perpetrated against the Jew in Russia. One man in particular, Baron Maurice de Hirsch, felt a personal moral obligation to aid his co-religionists migrate from Russia.

Baron de Hirsch (German: Moritz Hirsch) was born in Munich, Germany in 1831, and was educated in Brussels. He amassed a large fortune from banking, railroads, copper mines and various other interests. In order to distribute and use his philanthropic monies effectively, he founded the Jewish Colonization Society to which he personally donated 9,000,000 pounds sterling. The aim of the society was to move the Russian Jews to agricultural colonies in a country and area favorable to them. Many immigrants came to the United States with the help of de Hirsch money. When they arrived, they were penniless, homeless

and jobless. He started a trust fund of \$2,500,000 to aid these people.<sup>11</sup> The organization set up for this purpose was called the Baron de Hirsch Fund. In 1883, \$2,000 of this money aided the agricultural colony at Painted Woods, North Dakota.<sup>12</sup>

The de Hirsch idea of settling the immigrants on farms is an interesting one because these people had not been farmers in Russia; nor were they allowed to own land there. De Hirsch felt that the settlement of Jews on farms would disperse them over the entire country and would prevent them from congregating in larger cities. He felt that congregation in larger cities prevented their assimilation and bred prejudice. He also believed farming would make the immigrants independent and self-supporting. Another group shared this conviction. The German Jew had been Americanized by 1880 and he looked upon the immigrants from Russia as "poor, ignorant and foreign" and tried to "civilize and Americanize" them. He was of the opinion that the Russian Jew should leave the "fast becoming ghetto conditions" which were developing in the larger cities.<sup>13</sup> Others who were idealists envisioned it as a return to the soil and the simple, good life where the weak of body and spirit could build themselves as independent workers and thinkers in an atmosphere of freedom and security, similar to the ancient biblical times.

Thus, in the spring of the year 1882, the first Jewish agricultural colony was settled in North Dakota by 11 Russian Jewish families, northwest of Bismarck on the north shore of the Missouri River at Painted Woods.<sup>14</sup>

Painted Woods was also called "Wechsler's Painted Woods" after Rabbi Judah Wechsler. The perseverance, tenacity and optimism of this man were largely responsible for the agricultural colony's becoming a reality. One of his main reasons for establishing the colony was to alleviate the burden that the massive migration of Russian Jews placed on his small St. Paul congregation in the 1880's. He wrote:<sup>15</sup>

"Humanity and a common duty to care for the unfortunate refugees prompted us to do all that was possible for these people. We have spent the last cent which we could collect in this emergency."

"My congregation has but 50 members, none of them wealthy. . . . Imagine, therefore, 50 members to care for nearly 600 refugees. . . ."

Previous to their arrival, the Jews who settled Painted Woods were made aware of the extreme hardships they would have to endure through

<sup>11</sup>*Universal Standard Encyclopedia*, Vol. 12 (New York, 1958), p. 442.

<sup>12</sup>W. Gunther Plaut, *The Jews in Minnesota* (New York, 1959), p. 98.

<sup>13</sup>Levinger, p. 279.

<sup>14</sup>Plaut, p. 97. It is interesting to note that Marvin S. Kirk, *A Study of the Jew's Contribution to Land Settlement and Land Credit*, (Master's thesis, North Dakota State College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, 1926), p. 35, mentions twenty families as originally settling Painted Woods.

<sup>15</sup>Plaut, p. 95.

a report of an investigation of that area made by the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society (an organization set up to aid the immigrant in establishing himself in the United States). The report enumerated the adverse conditions which prevailed and concluded that only the hardiest families could succeed. In spite of this report and because of persistent persuasion from the immigrants, Wechsler and Julius Austrian obtained land with the help of a grant. This land became the agricultural colony of Painted Woods.<sup>16</sup>

The amount of money needed for settlement amounted to \$600 to \$800 per family. The sums of money were too great for the St. Paul congregation to raise and an international appeal for aid was made. The appeal was answered by organizations and individuals from all over the world. B'nai B'rith, the Baron de Hirsch Fund, the Berlin Committee, synagogues, rich individuals such as Jacob H. Schiff and many lesser contributors made the effort a success.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of the first year, optimistic reports of the colony were mentioned in Jewish publications throughout the world; nevertheless, many applicants had to be refused because only about half of the 100 settlers were self-sustaining. The burden of supporting those in need now fell on the St. Paul Jewish Community. Food, clothing, farm implements and other necessities were transported from St. Paul and brought to the colony.

By 1884, generally regarded as the pinnacle of success, the colonists had 1,400 acres under cultivation, 53 horses, 56 oxen, 61 cows, 86 calves and some houses and barns.<sup>18</sup>

Living conditions were of the most rudimentary type. Most of the settlers shared mud hovels or temporary constructions with other families. In spite of all the privations the colonists experienced, the majority of them followed the very demanding rituals and customs required of the orthodox Jew. Plaut cites a letter from a woman who spent her childhood at Painted Woods. In the letter, she describes the tedious task the settlers experienced in making their own "mazzot".<sup>19</sup> It is also interesting to note that their religious leader, Rabbi Wechsler, who was also the leader and organizer of Painted Woods, could not completely fulfill the religious needs of the colonists. Rabbi Wechsler was a Reformed Jew, and the colonists solemnly practiced ultra-Orthodox Judaism with its many traditions, rituals and customs.

From the beginning, the colony had friends and backers from the farm settlement area. Reassurance and hope were offered by the Jewish and non-Jewish merchants of Bismarck. In the June 6, 1882 issue, the

<sup>16</sup>Plaut, p. 97.

<sup>17</sup>Plaut, p. 98.

<sup>18</sup>Plaut, p. 100.

<sup>19</sup>Plaut, p. 99.

"Bismarck Tribune" welcomed the settlers and stated that the colonists were happy to be in a free country away from the oppression of Russia. Encouragement and financial aid were granted by Asa Fisher, President of the First National Bank, who commented: "They are all industrious and hard-working people and worthy of all the aid asked."<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of all the assistance and encouragement from friends, by 1885 it was evident that anti-semitism had developed against the Jews in the area and bad feelings were flourishing. Although some pity was still expressed by neighbors, the situation deteriorated rapidly and 25 farmers on nearby farms petitioned to have the colonists removed from the village called New Jerusalem and settled on the land for which they had filed individual petitions. The Jewish settlers were appraised by some neighbors as "poor, oppressed, ignorant peasant class, uneducated, inexperienced and utterly lost in their new freedom from serfdom."<sup>21</sup> The capabilities and character of the Russian immigrant were also questioned by some Jewish visitors who wrote in the magazines, *American Israelite* and *American Hebrew*, that the settlers were not suited to farming and because of their poor education and backgrounds could not govern themselves.<sup>22</sup> A lack of leadership led to incessant quarreling and bickering, not only among themselves, but with their neighbors.

In addition to the isolation from neighbors and to the physical hardships, the Jewish settlers resented their existence as wards of charity. Their poverty necessitated their acceptance of charity which minimized their independence and initiative.

Heedless of the work by Wechsler and his encouragement and hope, one disaster after another (in addition to the previously mentioned factors) sealed the eventual doom of the colony. In 1883, a crop failure was followed by a prairie fire which destroyed the few existing buildings in the settlement. A hard winter was followed by another crop failure in 1885. By 1886, many of the settlers had left Painted Woods. Accepting full responsibility for the shortcomings of the settlement, Wechsler resigned from his St. Paul pulpit, thus publicly acknowledging the failure of the colony.<sup>23</sup>

By 1901, only three Jewish farmers remained in the area. In 1906, 42 families made a successful attempt to homestead the same area, and by 1912 the colony increased to 250 families.<sup>24</sup> This more recent group of

<sup>20</sup>Plaut, p. 99.

<sup>21</sup>Plaut, p. 100.

<sup>22</sup>Plaut, p. 99, 100. Mary Ann Barnes Williams, *Pioneer Days of Washburn, North Dakota and Vicinity*, (Washburn, N. D., 1936), p. 19 says: "these refugees were not the higher type Jew . . . without an overlord or master in charge, they did not seem to be able to care for themselves. They were an incompetent lot, to transplant in a new country, with its strange tongue and customs and were pitiable indeed. . . . They could not adapt themselves to rural American life."

<sup>23</sup>Plaut, p. 100.

<sup>24</sup>Plaut, p. 101.



settlers represented an independent venture that was not connected in any way with the colonization attempt made by the Russian immigrants who first colonized the area in the 1880's.

By 1882, another colony was established six miles from the village of Garske, which is 15 miles north of Devils Lake. Adverse weather conditions, crop failure and dire poverty caused these colonists to disband.<sup>25</sup> Some of these settlers were joined by the hardiest settlers from Painted Woods and other immigrants who originally settled in the cities, and in 1886, in a combined effort, they founded a colony at Iola, 20 miles north-east of Devils Lake.<sup>26</sup>

This settlement experienced severe weather. A hot, dry summer produced poor crops and combined with an extremely severe winter, the settlers found themselves at the charity of the St. Paul and Minneapolis Jewish Congregations.

The situation was similar to that at Painted Woods, in which the neighboring gentile population was at first sympathetic to the Jewish colonists and understood the problems which they were striving to solve. Their Christian neighbors raised money to send a committee representing the Russian settlers to St. Paul to raise funds which were desperately needed if the colony were to survive. Because St. Paul could offer only limited aid, the committee of homesteaders turned to Minneapolis which in turn sent delegates to investigate the situation.<sup>27</sup>

The committee found the settlers at Iola living in extreme poverty and in a state of emergency. They saw children standing barefoot trying to keep warm near the sunny side of the building, and fires in the mud-houses burning with dried manure because wood was too scarce and precious to burn.<sup>28</sup>

By 1889, many colonists had left Iola for larger cities or had joined railroad construction crews working toward Grand Forks.<sup>29</sup> The seriousness of the situation could not be kept from the general public and in order to prevent a failure similar to that of Painted Woods, the Minneapolis investigating committee sent out a national appeal emphasizing the needs of the immigrants. This national recognition of the plight of the

<sup>25</sup>Isadore Papermaster, "Memoirs," unpublished (1959), p. 21. One of the settlers, Ben Zion Greenberg, did not leave and became the postmaster of Ben Zion Post Office in Ramsey County. He was one of the earliest settlers of the colony at Devils Lake and lived the rest of his life in that area. He was a vegetarian and had a dynamic personality. Widely known and respected, he was appointed Justice of the Peace and was addressed as "Judge Greenberg."

<sup>26</sup>Plaut, p. 104. Papermaster describes the same colony as existing 30 miles northwest of Devils Lake near Starkweather.

<sup>27</sup>Plaut, p. 105.

<sup>28</sup>Plaut, p. 105.

<sup>29</sup>Papermaster, p. 23. Some of these people were the early settlers of Grand Forks, North Dakota: Michael Fishman, Nathan Greenberg, J. Aronovitch, Moses Goldstein, Joseph Horwitz, David Horwitz, Pincus Schreierman, Max Rabinovich, S. Linetzky, Nathan Frankel, Sam Levy, Moshe Sprung and others.

colony created hatred and prejudice for the colonists by their neighbors who did not want the bad publicity which reflected poorly on the area. In spite of the fact that the appeal for help antagonized the surrounding neighbors, it was a financial success and money was contributed from all parts of the country: Jew and non-Jew, private individuals and organizations. The few remaining homesteaders were joined by new settlers who persevered under difficult economical and social conditions, and in ten years the colony was considered a success.

The success of the colony was attested to by the following report by Philip Greenberg, a farmer in the colony:

"We had a very good crop this year and all of the Jewish farmers were greatly benefited by the threshing machine which the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Society of New York placed here. All of the farmers threshed in good season. This is the first time that the crop of the Jewish farmers had been threshed before November since they have been here."<sup>90</sup>

The following letter from Mr. Davis Rubin, a furniture store owner in Devils Lake, North Dakota gives some insight into the conditions under which the immigrants existed:

"I settled in 1892. I took a homestead and bought land (a quarter section). Got money from the Jewish Society of N. Y. at six percent. We got money from the local banks at twelve percent and a bonus of ten percent, so can't wonder why a Jew couldn't farm. The first Jewish settlement was founded by Baron de Hirsch. He was a millionaire and left money for these settlements. He built them homes and got them farming outfits, but most of them left in '88 and '89.

There was no donations. When I come in in 1892 all the colonial settlers left except three or four. Most of the Jews that came in in the '90's made good.

The colonial settlers had a rabbi and everything in their religious line. But there was very little or no improvement in the county and very little to do. When they threshed, they slept in the straw piles, and drank slough water, and they decided most anything would be better than farming, so they left.

<sup>90</sup>Plaut, p. 108. It is interesting to note the different histories attributed to the same colony. Kirk, p. 39, notes that "Mr. Henry Hale, in 1901, with the cooperation of the county and the Great Northern Railroad, secured transportation to St. Paul for the last of the original settlers, excepting of course, those who had already gone into some kind of business in the vicinity. In the list of names of the early settlers are names of some who have since become successful business men in the Twin Cities and elsewhere." Kirk on p. 35 lists the settlers who came in 1887 and 1888: Jake Freedman, Bennie Greenberg, Jake Olswing, Gilman, Charles Colloff, Myer Colloff, Eidelman, Grassman, Aaron Freedman, Phillip Greenberg, Peter Olswing, Max Muhl, Moses Colloff, Isaac Sperior, E. Minger, Max Koehn, Simon Clitchen, Schemson, "Old Man" Muhl, John Colloff, Slummerson, Walk. The spelling differs from that of other sources; for example, in the Papermaster "Memoirs", Colloff is spelled Caloff and Neel could be Muhl.

The Jewish Relief (Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Society) would lend \$500 to \$800 on a quarter section of land.

My home was in Overland Township, T. 857, R. 62, Section 30."

(signed) Davis Rubin<sup>21</sup>

Davis Rubin's story runs parallel with many of the other immigrants. After working for seven years, he saved enough money to send for his family which was still in Europe. To make ends meet he contracted to work for a neighboring farmer for 80 cents per day for eight months, but was never paid for his labor. In 1907, after 15 years of farming, he left a half section of land with a mortgage of \$4,200 against it and moved to Devils Lake. His first job in Devils Lake was herding cattle. At a later date, he went into the junk business which included the buying of wool and hides. His final and most successful business venture was the retail selling of furniture. The answer to the question of why so many Jews entered the mercantile world can perhaps be found in Rubin's brief biography; monetary success in the mercantile world came faster and more easily than in farming.

Kirk gives some basic reasons why some of the colonies failed:

"They were sent here with no knowledge of farming and insufficient means of support to keep them until they had learned to farm, and could obtain machinery and other equipment."

"Most of the colonies were located in places which were not convenient to market, had poor soil, were subject to drought, hail storms, prairie fires and high rates of interest."

"Most of the settlers knew some trade or business at which they could make a living, and since most of them were unable to do that on their farms, it was only natural that they should go back to the cities or to the nearby villages and towns."<sup>22</sup>

The following letters are placed in this study to indicate the attitudes of some of the local dwellers of the area and to show how some of these people have stereotyped all people who adhere to the Jewish faith.

Mr. E. E. Giedt, cashier of the Farmers and Merchants Bank of Lehr stated: "About 15 years ago there were quite a number of Jew farmers in McIntosh County, but practically all of them made a failure of it and quit and moved off the farm to town or to the cities. Right now, I know of just one Jew farmer, who lives a few miles west of Lehr; in my opinion he is doing just a little better than any of the other Jew farmers in this county, but one could hardly say he is successful at it. He is just holding his own. . . . They all or nearly all filed on homesteads, farmed a few years, and most of them managed to get into debts

<sup>21</sup>Kirk, p. 37.

<sup>22</sup>Kirk, p. 44.

which they were hardly able to pay, with the result that they had to sell out, or were foreclosed on; it is hard to say just what the reasons were, but it appears to us that they don't work hard enough, don't manage right, too impatient to wait for crops that do not always grow, and in fact don't know very much about farming anyway, as that does not seem to be their line; they do much better as merchants, peddlers, etc.

Yours truly,"

(signed) I. E. Giedt, Cashier

From the Ashley State Bank, Ashley, N. D., . . .

". . . Several years ago we had a settlement of Jewish farmers around here, but they were unable to make any headway even though they had plenty of help in a financial way, later on we had another settlement of Jewish farmers and they done no better than the first ones and at present I know of no Jewish farmer around here, they are better traders than farmers and those that are left here are in some kind of business.

Yours very truly,"

(signed) W. L. Johnson, Cashier

The following statements are from letters from Mr. Gabriel Davidson, General Manager of the Jewish Agricultural Society, who objectively explains the situation of the colonists:

"The North Dakota Jewish farm settlements did not prove successful and most of the farmers left their homesteads. This is partly due to the fact that the gap between the city and homestead farms in North Dakota prairies is too big to be easily bridged by an immigrant unaccustomed to agriculture and to country living. The condition is partly ascribable to crop failures and to the extreme depression that has existed in farming in recent years . . .

Yours very truly,"

(signed) Gabriel Davidson  
General Manager<sup>33</sup>

From Mr. Rubin's letter, Kirk's thesis, Plaut's book and other sources, we know that one of the basic problems the settlers had to contend with was the inability to be initially self sufficient. They were thus forced to borrow money at excessive rates of interest (usually 12%). This factor kept the colonists constantly in debt even though they did receive help from the Baron de Hirsch Fund and contributions from all over the world.<sup>34</sup>

The ultra-orthodox religious attitudes of the settlers can also be discerned from these sources. The Rabbi mentioned in Mr. Rubin's letter

<sup>33</sup>Kirk, pp. 47-50.

<sup>34</sup>Papermaster and interviews with people familiar with the colonists.

was Rev. B. Papermaster of Grand Forks. His first appearance at the colony was in the autumn of 1892. In order to serve the needs of the colonists, he usually spent several weeks with them preparing the kosher meat and fowl for the winter. "He made regular trips there each fall and spring beside the occasional special trip for an occasional bris or wedding. The fall trip always required his bringing along supplies of vegetables, such as potatoes, cabbages, beets, carrots, that the colonists either could not or would not raise on their own land."<sup>35</sup>

One of these trips to the Iola colony is recollected by the son of Rabbi Papermaster, I. Papermaster: "My father took me along on one of his trips there and I clearly recall that trip. We were met at Devils Lake station by one of the Caloffs with an ox-cart, that is, an ox hitched to a two wheeled sulky. There was not room enough for me on the sulky seat so I sat in front. The ox switched more flies off of me than he did off of himself. One can only imagine a 30 mile ride over a country road by ox power. I'll never forget it."<sup>36</sup>

Dr. A. Papermaster, son of Rabbi Papermaster, and longtime resident of Fargo, mentioned that some of the Jewish immigrants who left the colony dropped their Jewish religion or converted to Christianity and many people throughout North Dakota have Jewish ancestors who were the original immigrants who settled the agricultural colonies.

By 1912, Iola colony was the Northwest's oldest Jewish farm settlement with a full community life. By 1925, the families migrated to the cities to give their children a fuller Jewish life. Nothing remains of the colony today but the gravestones which attest to the once bustling colonists' community which has once again become Prairie.<sup>37</sup>

Drought, hail storms, prairie fires in the summer and extreme cold in the winter, poor soil, isolation from markets, lack of money for machinery and supplies, ignorance of farming methods, inadequate means of transportation and communication and the want of a Rabbi to administer to the religious needs of the people drove many Jews from North

<sup>35</sup>Papermaster, p. 22.

<sup>36</sup>Papermaster, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup>Plaut, p. 108. There were other colonies throughout the state of North Dakota. Kirk, pp. 40-41; A colony was settled in Burleigh County (27 miles north of Bismarck) in 1901. The settlers received financial aid from the Jewish Agriculturalist's Aid Society and the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society. In addition to farming the colonists worked in the Wilton lignite mines in winter to earn money for implements and food. In 1926, Kirk was able to locate two Jewish farmers in this area (near Wing, North Dakota) who originally homesteaded in 1902.

The Sulzberger colony, near Ashley, was settled in 1904. Although the soil was stony and not productive, the colony grew to sixty families by 1911. In 1926, Kirk was successful in locating one Jewish farmer near Lehr, North Dakota.

Other Jewish settlements were located in Bowman, McKenzie, Morton and Ward Counties. There are remains of a Jewish cemetery in Wishek, North Dakota.

In addition to the Jewish colonies, there were individual Jewish farmers throughout the state of North Dakota who homesteaded land beginning about 1880 until World War I: Jacob Thal, Lakota; Nathan Papermaster, White Earth; Mr. Porter, Russel; Nick Kitch and Jacob Wolf, Devils Lake; Louis Rubin, Bismarck.

Dakota farms. But many persevered through these hardships. They exerted vigorous efforts and these farmers gradually increased their live-stock of oxen and added a horse or two. The dugout grew into a more comfortable dwelling. But money was still scarce and few farmers owned farm machinery. The settlers sacrificed many necessities in order to pay to bring a Rabbi to their farms to slaughter the meat according to the Orthodox dietary laws, and to perform other ceremonies, such as weddings and funerals. In time, enough farmers lived in the area of Wishek, North Dakota, so that a full time Rabbi could live among them and fulfill their religious needs.<sup>38</sup>

Any attempts to answer questions about the actions of masses of people in a given era of history is pure speculation. This study has attempted to present background material which may provide a sound basis for speculation as to why Jews migrated en masse from Germany and Russia to the United States and why they established Jewish settlements in North Dakota in the 1800's.

There is little doubt that the conditions depriving Jews of their basic rights and forcing them to live as deprived peasants in constant fear for their physical well-being contributed greatly to their emigrations from Europe. A people must have hope and this hope was self-evident for many who migrated to the United States. In the United States, political and social freedom as well as economic opportunity and intolerance of physical violence was a reality.

To evaluate whether the hopes and expectation of the Jews who attempted to settle in North Dakota were fulfilled is a difficult task. If one considers social acceptance, economic security and political and social freedom as the basis for fulfillment, it appears that the hopes and expectations of the German Jews were fulfilled. If the preservation of a people's identity is considered as one of the yardsticks for the fulfillment of hope and expectation, the German Jews were not as successful as their Russian counterparts.

Most German Jews actively endeavored to assimilate within their communities. They appeared to assimilate quickly because they settled independently in non-Jewish communities throughout the United States. Although the German Jews had to overcome the obstacles of a new language and a different culture, they achieved financial success early. This financial success was due largely to the fact that they remained in the mercantile field where they had had previous experience. Whereas the Russian Jews attempted to preserve their orthodox faith and did not

<sup>38</sup>Papermaster, p. 22. The first Rabbi in the state of North Dakota was Rabbi Papermaster who became the Rabbi of Grand Forks in 1891. Rabbi Julian Hess served Wishek and the central and western part of North Dakota as Rabbi. Rev. David Lesk was the first Rabbi to serve Fargo permanently. He served his congregation from 1900 until his death.

intermarry, the German Jews established Reformed Judaism and participated in community life around them, breaking down barriers which prevented them from intermarrying.

The Russian Jews who settled the North Dakota agricultural colonies in the 1880's were a people out of place and time. They were thrust unprepared into an alien culture to work at an unfamiliar occupation under severe conditions. They left a medieval Russia and entered nineteenth century America in the space of time it took to cross the ocean. The adjustment was extremely difficult for most of the Russian immigrants.

Those Jews whose hopes and aspirations could not be fulfilled as farmers, attempted to find their expectations in the larger cities where they lived with their own people and worked in the needle trade industries.

The two letters previously quoted from the areas of Ashley and Lehr indicate a stereotyped idea that Jews do not make good farmers. This conclusion is disproved by men such as Thal, Wolf and Kitchand and others who are recognized as successful Jewish farmers from various parts of North Dakota. Perhaps more families would have remained on the land if they had not been so concerned for the future of their children. One aspect of Judaism is the importance of a close family relationship. Many immigrants living on isolated farms were concerned about educating their children in the Jewish tradition and having them actively carry out these ideas in their everyday life. They felt that there would be few or no relationships with other Jews and that the Jewish ways of life would be lost to posterity.

Perhaps a method of judging the fulfillment of the hopes and aspirations of the immigrants would be for one to examine the achievements of the immigrants and their children. The immigrants who Americanized, in all probability, experienced greater fulfillment because they and their children were able to live, accept and contribute to American culture. A few examples of these Jews are: Albert Einstein, Henry Morgenthau, Irving Lehman and Oscar S. Straus. Many of the immigrants who maintained most of their European culture found living in the United States different and frustrating. Many were unhappy when their children not only became Americanized but became Reformed Jews or converted to Christianity. For these, the hopes and expectations were not fulfilled.

One might conclude, then, that as in the cases of groups of people, both individual differences and socio-historical differences might act as determinants in the feelings of success and failure experienced by members of the group, especially since expectations vary according to these determinants.

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