

Eastern European Jews in New Hampshire

Century of Immigration to America (1820-1924)

- By 1880, Jews in US numbered some 250,000; mostly German Jews and descendants; fewer than 50,000 from Eastern Europe
- 1924, about 4 million Jews in US, 3 million from or descended from Eastern Europeans
- Most Jewish immigrants, Russians or Poles; ideology socialist or Zionist or both; strained relations with Americans and German Jews
- Most Jews in Eastern Europe middlemen, businessmen engaged in buying from producers, selling to consumers; with modernization of economy and production for distant markets, they were not needed; prejudice, persecution led to emigration
- Jews with industrial skills, mostly in needle trades, more likely to emigrate than others in mercantile occupations; most headed for industrial cities: New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Boston homes to 70%; offered low rent and Jewish neighbors; most members of working poor; laborers in light manufacturing, especially ready-made-garment industry and building trades; some contractors or small businessmen; about 20% engaged in retail trade: pushcart vendors, peddlers, proprietors of stores; among first to show motion pictures in theaters
- 70% of Russian Jewish emigrants were between 14 and 40 years old
- 95% of Jewish immigrants stayed in US; only other ethnic group with return below 10% was the Irish; Jewish men often came to US first; over 43% Jewish immigrants were women; only numbers of Irish females higher

Jewish Immigrants in Keene

- In Keene, Samuel Finkelstein's home was first place of worship; welcomed other Jews into his home where they got advice, money, and merchandise before going on to settle in other NH communities
- In 1907, Rabbi Novich settled in Keene; services organized; in 1916, charter to Keene Hebrew Community, incorporating a synagogue; name assigned was Ahavas Achim, meaning brotherly love; by 1940's, about 30 families

Education

- Public schools embraced enthusiastically by Jews
- Many sacrificed to send children to school and college; result was some able to move into professions, particularly medicine and law; key to relatively rapid upward social mobility
- By 1920's, Harvard, Yale, and other elite institutions established quotas to keep numbers of Jewish students low

Other Jewish Institutions

- Philanthropic societies on both sides of ocean eased Jewish emigration; protective societies formed in 1880's in American cities; formation of Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in 1902
- Significant that earlier German Jews and Eastern European Jews collaborated to fight anti-Semitism, help Jews overseas; aided in defusing earlier tension; American Jewish Committee, 1906, still claims to speak for all American Jews; American Jewish Congress, 1915, founded by American Zionists, attracted mostly E. European Jews; American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee raised over \$60 million during and immediately following WWI for relief of Jews overseas
- Joined others from same European district for worship, societies, and religious schools; helped find jobs, train, provided loans, sick and death benefits, established cemeteries; provided familiar setting in strange land
- Labor organizations formed; United Hebrew Trades, 1888; International Ladies Garment Workers Union; Amalgamated Clothing Workers
- *Jewish Daily Forward of New York*, 1897; founded and edited by Abraham Cahan, graduate of Russian teacher's college; paper affiliated with labor unions and Socialist party; many services including advice on adjustment

FYI

- States like NH discriminated against Jews; were allowed to worship freely but not hold political office until late 1800's; not allowed to stay in Grand Hotels except in Bethlehem, NH

- Jews prominent as performers; composer Irving Berlin, singer Sophie Tucker, second-generation, Jerome Kern and Fanny Brice; comedians beginning with the Marx Brothers; Adam Sandler, Manchester, NH, childhood
- Prominent in field of social work/ reform; German Jewish descendants Julia Richman and Lillian Wald; Eastern European immigrants Boris Bogen, Jacob Billikopf, Belle Moscovitz; the Revson brothers from Manchester, NH, invented a cream enamel nail polish, became founders of Revlon Corp. on March 1, 1832

History of Eastern European Jews in New Hampshire Communities

- By late 1880's, about 16 Jewish families in Portsmouth; by 1900, about 30 families; in 1905 organized congregation, the Temple of Israel; hired leader to conduct services, teach Hebrew school; cemetery established by 1908; by 1912, new synagogue for 38 families; settled mostly in Strawberry Banke area
- Families came to work during WWI at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard; others opened businesses; after war, 50 Jewish families; now about 300 families with Hebrew school serving 100 children
- First synagogue in Manchester, B'nai Jeshurun, 1890, antecedent of today's Adathe Yeshurun, incorporated 1900; by 1891, 21 adult working Jewish men; synagogue of immigrants, most from Lithuania, few from Ukraine; split in 1897, with Ukrainians forming Congregation Anshe Sephard; both groups had "Sisterhoods" which helped less fortunate in community by fund-raising to provide money, food, clothing; through 1940's, needy Jewish travelers helped by Manchester Jewish Federation to get to the next town
- Most of Manchester's Jews in 1890's were peddlers who, over time, made enough money to be able to save for a home or business
- In 1913, Manchester's Jewish community started the Young Men's Hebrew Association (Y.M.H.A.); provided a meeting place for activities; there was also a Y.W.H.A.

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