

*Return to the Land: Jewish Farming Around the World*  
*An Exhibit of the Museum of Jewish Civilization*  
*Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies*  
*University of Hartford*

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**UNIVERSITY OF HARTFORD**

Sponsored by the children of Minnie Goldenberg and the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies with support from the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Hartford

## **The Museum of Jewish Civilization**

The Museum of Jewish Civilization was founded in 2003 thanks to a generous gift by Dr. William Sherman of West Hartford and other donors. It was directed by Dr. Richard A. Freund (2003-2007) and is presently directed by Dr. Avinoam Patt of the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Hartford. The Guest Curator is DreAnna Hadash. The Museum is a teaching museum and its primary goal is to tell the story of Jewish civilization for the general and academic communities of Connecticut through exhibitions coordinated with lectures and coursework in the extensive Judaica offerings of the Greenberg Center.

The Museum of Jewish Civilization's William Singer Gallery has featured exhibits highlighting the history of Jewish interactions with Muslims and Christians; the lives of the Jews in Germany, the United States, Latin America, and ancient Israel, as well as books on and about the Jewish people worldwide and the Holocaust. The Jewish Music section features the Cantorate, highlighting the way Jews used the Arts to express their spirit, while the section on archaeology chronicles the daily and religious life of Ancient Israel and now holds the Grae Collection of Jewish Art.

The Museum is located in Mortensen Library, Harry Jack Gray Center, University of Hartford, 200 Bloomfield Avenue, West Hartford, CT. For docent led tours and Museum hours, please call 860.768.5729 or email [mgcjs@hartford.edu](mailto:mgcjs@hartford.edu).

## Return to the Land: Jewish Farming Around the World

### Jewish Farming from the Bible to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The story of Jewish farming is at once an ancient story and a uniquely modern story. In many ways, the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish return to the land was an ancient solution to a modern problem. In 1854, Judah Touro, a wealthy American Jewish philanthropist from Newport, RI, died having bequeathed money to help fund Jewish residential settlement in Palestine. Moses Montefiore was appointed executor of his will and used the funds for a variety of projects aimed at encouraging Jews to engage in productive labor. In 1855, he purchased an orchard on the outskirts of Jaffa that offered the first agricultural training to the Jews of the Ottoman Empire living in Palestine. Montefiore built the Montefiore Windmill in Yemin Moshe to provide cheap flour to poor Jews, a printing press and textile factory, and helped to finance several early Zionist agricultural colonies. He also attempted to acquire arable land for Jewish cultivation, but was hampered by Ottoman restrictions on land sale to non-Muslims.

The foundations of modern Jewish farming were laid in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, almost 1700 years after the Bar Kokhba Rebellion of 135 CE as the Jews were expelled by Hadrian from the historical Land of Israel in and around the city of Jerusalem and the area of Judea was renamed “Palestina.” With the movement of the Jews to the Galilee, Golan and finally to Babylonia, Jewish farming almost completely stopped being the main part of the rabbinic economy. In the following 200 years the Jews moved to Europe, North Africa, and Persia, small pockets of Jews farmed the lands where they lived, ending during the period of Crusades. We have examples such as the vineyards of the Bible and Talmud commentator, Rashi, where Jews prospered with industrial farms, dairies that produced milk and cheese for the region and for the most part produced family farming through their families for the needs of the local Jewish community despite clear edicts from the non-Jewish governments that prohibited official land purchases by Jews. Although some Europeans maintained vineyards and dairy farming for reasons associated with Kashrut, (Kosher wine, milk, and cheese), full-scale Jewish family farms that had existed from the most ancient period of the book of Genesis and an inherent part of the biblical laws cited from the time of Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel and I and II Kings and a part of the life of the prophets of the biblical period all but disappeared in the Middle Ages and in the pre-modern period as Jews left to the Diasporas of the Mediterranean, Europe, and the Middle East.

### Baron De Hirsch and Argentine Jewish Farming

The Jews of Eastern Europe were restricted from owning land or engaging in agricultural pursuits under the Czarist rule of the Russian Empire. In the shtetls of the Pale of Settlement, they traditionally occupied the place of economic middlemen, facilitating the trade of agricultural goods by peasant farmers or managing the estates of wealthy noblemen in the early modern period. As the Jewish population of the Pale of Settlement swelled to nearly 5 million by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and a wave of pogroms accompanied by anti-Jewish legislation broke out in the Russian Empire after the assassination of Czar Alexander II, the “great migration” of Jews from Eastern Europe began, with over 2.5 million Jews finding refuge in the United States by 1920. It was in the context that agricultural solutions to the plight of the Jewish migration from Eastern Europe were proposed by Jewish philanthropists like Baron Maurice de Hirsch, Moses Montefiore, and Lord Rothschild, as well as by the ideologues of the Zionist movement.



The most numerous immigration wave of Jewish farming began in the late 19th century and lasted up until the early 1920's in Argentina. In the case of Argentina, the Jewish Colonization Association established (in coordination with the Argentine government) a plan for a mass immigration of Eastern European Jewry. The farming collectives which were set up in northern Argentina and which even Theodore Herzl pondered as a possible Jewish homeland in his 1896 book, *The Jewish State*, brought over a hundred thousand Jews to Argentina. The main reason why Herzl was able to consider Argentina as the possible new "Jewish State" was because of the efforts of Baron Maurice de Hirsch. De Hirsch, like Montefiore and de Rothschild and other Western European Jews of the period, were shocked by the situation of the Jews in Russia after the rise of Czar Alexander III. A new blend of anti-Semitism and Russian nationalism doomed the possibility of a Jewish integration into a Russian Industrial Revolution. Starting with the infamous May Laws of 1882, the Western European Jews began to look to new locations for new possibilities for Jewish immigration. In 1891, Baron de Hirsch founded the Jewish Colonization Association (ICA) with \$10 million dollars and later an additional \$40 million in assets and he anticipated as many as 3.5 million Jews immigrating to the Pampas. His agents purchased vast tracts of Argentine land in the Entre Rios area of northern Argentina and provided an infrastructure, tools and personnel. The first few years of the agricultural experiment were a disaster both in numbers of Jews who came (and stayed) and agricultural successes. By the first part of the 20th century, however, the ICA colonies proved to be one of the great agricultural success stories of the century and increased the general immigration to Argentina as a result. Baron de Hirsch's motivations represented the pinnacle of Jewish philanthropy and religious (biblical and almost messianic) ideology. Writing in the *North American Review*, no. 461, July, 1891 he stated his motivations for creating the ICA clearly:

It has become a maxim and typical reproach against the Jews that they have no inclination for agriculture or manual labor. That is an error which is contradicted not only by modern examples, but by history... The Jews, as long as they were politically independent, cared for their fields, as I have said. They drove their herds, and were

handicraftsmen. ...In considering this plan, I naturally thought of the United States, where the liberal constitution is a guarantee of happy development for the followers of all religious faiths. Yet I was obliged to confess that to increase to any great extent the already enormous number of Jews in the United States would be of advantage neither to country itself nor to the exiled Jews; for it is my conviction that this new settlement should be scattered through different lands and spread over a large space, so that there shall be no opportunity for social or religious rupture. I made a study, therefore of different countries, and after careful examination I have become convinced that the Argentine Republic, Canada and Australia, above all others, offer the surest guarantee for the accomplishment of the plan. I expect to begin with the Argentine Republic, and arrangements for the purchase of certain lands for the settlement are now being made...And all through the matter I have the certainty that he who frees thousands of his fellow men from suffering and an oppressed existence and helps them to become useful citizens, does a good work for all humanity. (Baron Maurice de Hirsch, "My Views on Philanthropy")



*The New Jew: Gauchos Judios*

Among the colonies established on the 198,000 acres of land purchased by the ICA in Argentina are Colonia Lapin and Rivera in the Province of Buenos Aires and Basavilbaso in Entre Ríos. Most of these immigrants were from Podolia and Bessarabia, in Imperial Russia.

The first eight families arrived in Argentina in October 1888. In August 1889, 824 Jewish immigrants arrived from Russia on the steamer "Weser", and settled in the Moïseville colony (today the town of Moisés Ville) in the province of Santa Fe. After considerable conflict with native gauchos, the Jewish immigrants came to be reluctantly accepted by them. The colonists

also began to pool their resources to buy seeds, and in Basavilbaso in 1900 they founded the Sociedad Agricola Israelita, the first cooperative in Latin America. But the same trends that brought the Jews from Europe to the Provinces later brought them to the major cities of Argentina one and two generations later. Today, however, there is little to see of the town's once-thriving Jewish community. The "Jewish Center" in most of these provincial towns has been turned into a "social club," open to Jews and non-Jews alike and vestiges of synagogues like the Baron De Hirsch synagogue in Mosesville and the Sinagoga Nueva of Basavilbaso now serve as pilgrimage and tourist sites rather than serving as religious institutions. Writing in South American Explorer magazine in 1978, author David Schneider states: "In less than 80 years, thousands of Jews crossed an ocean, settled on the Argentine pampa, reared children, prospered, and moved on, leaving behind weathered and empty synagogues, boarded-up schools, closed libraries."



At its height in the 1940's, Moises Ville had four synagogues, a Yiddish theater, Jewish schools, and the oldest Jewish cemetery in Argentina. At its peak, about 40,000 Jews settled in these colonies founded by the ICA, but this did not last more than a few decades as the second and third generations moved to more urban areas. Today, 90% of Argentinian Jews live in Buenos Aires.

## Jewish Farming in Connecticut, by Kailee Shraiberg:

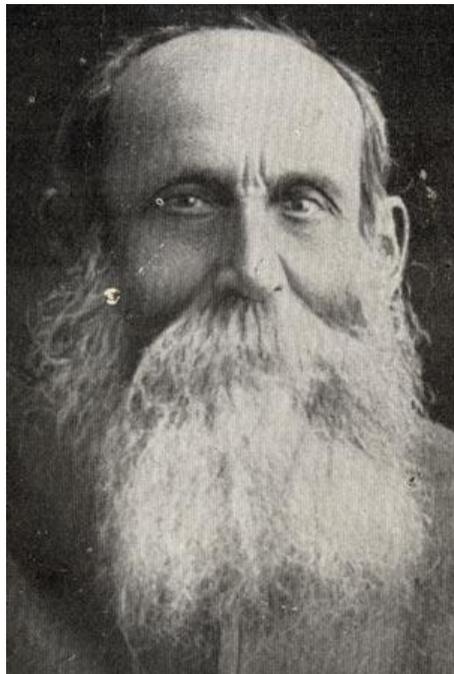
Eastern Connecticut may be the place Jewish farmers found the most success in the United States. In 1897, about 20 Jewish families settled in the Connecticut River Valley. By 1909, Connecticut was the largest state association in the Federation of Jewish Farmers of America. There were seven town chapters in the association: Ellington (72 members), Colchester (143 members), Chesterfield (63), Fairfield (58), East Lyme (40) and Litchfield (20) (Raider, 1995). That's 396 members of Jewish Farmers associations in Connecticut in 1909. It's safe to estimate that the 396 farmers had families averaging 6 people and that there were therefore around 2,376 Jews living on Connecticut farms at the turn of the last century (Donohue & Greenfield).



The Jewish Agricultural Society in New York began an effort in the 1880's to settle new immigrants, mostly Eastern European Jews, on farms in places like Colchester, Lebanon, and Montville, Connecticut. "With its proximity to New York, Connecticut developed a substantial Jewish community. By 1910, Hartford counted more than 6,500 Jews among its citizens, with approximately 5,000 having arrived from Eastern Europe within the preceding three decades" (Donohue & Greenfield, 9). Many Jewish immigrants came to America fleeing from Russia and Germany where they had been persecuted, prohibited from owning land, and forced to live in ghettos. Although Jews typically were not associated with farming, they did have some agricultural skills from cattle dealing and tenant farming. They came here with no money and no connections. The goals of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society, later shortened to the Jewish Agricultural Society (JAS) were to take the Jews that were living in urban areas and help them find work on a farm. This was because the cities that were densely packed with Jews, such as the lower east side of Manhattan, had terrible living conditions and they were worried that these Jews might be the subject of Anti-Semitism because they had not quite assimilated into American society with the way that they dressed or the language they spoke. The organization gave loans to tradesmen so that they could acquire homes in agricultural societies, get farm equipment, trucks, and furniture and in return the farmers were responsible for keeping the property insured, cultivating the farm, and paying the taxes. The organization also published a magazine called, *The Jewish Farmer*, which was written in both Yiddish and English. "The magazine helped explain simple farming techniques, such as how to stack hay, or plow a field, and it helped to relieve the loneliness of farm life by reporting on social events, fairs, and prize-winning crops, all in a familiar language" (Donohue & Greenfield, 15).

## **The Second Aliya (1904-1914): The Zionist Return to the Land**

The Second Aliyah is the term historians of Zionism have given to the wave of migration to Palestine from 1904-1914. By 1905 there were 50,000 Jews in Palestine but only 5000 lived on 20 rural colonies. The large majority of these immigrants, 94.3% of them, came from Russia. During the 2<sup>nd</sup> Aliyah, 30,000 Jews entered Palestine, while hundreds of thousands more went to the US and elsewhere. Although some had other reasons for moving to Palestine, the great majority of these immigrants were motivated by idealistic reasons. Why Palestine and not America? The 2<sup>nd</sup> Aliyah came to be characterized by the Labor Zionist socialist ideology of thinkers like Aaron David Gordon, who preached in almost prophetic terms of the need to come to land, work it, and build a socialist society there. Their ideology had a romantic-mystical element to it—that there was a thread connecting them to previous Jewish fighters who had built an active life on the holy soil of the Land of Israel.



Aharon David Gordon (1856-1922)

The non-Marxist labor Zionist party, Hapoel Hatzair, was guided in its ideology by the teachings and example of A. D. Gordon and his call for redemption through the working of the land. For Gordon, Labor Zionism meant an attempt to create an economic infrastructure for a Jewish community in Palestine founded on the Jews' own labor. It was not sufficient for Jews to simply move to Palestine. For Gordon, emigration to the Land of Israel without radically revolutionizing Jewish social structures was nothing more than a transference of the Exile to Israel. For Gordon, being cut off from labor represented a deep historical flaw in the Jewish people. It was not the Exile that created this alienation from labor, but it contributed to the continuation of the Exile by enabling the Jews to adapt to and accommodate the Diaspora way of life. In the words of Gordon, the Jews as “a people that was completely divorced from nature, that during two thousand years was imprisoned within walls, that became inured to all forms of life except to a life of labor, cannot become once again a living, natural working people without bending all its willpower toward that end. We lack the fundamental element: we lack labor (not

labor done of necessity, but labor to which man is organically and naturally linked), labor by which a people becomes rooted in its soil and its culture. Therefore, the only way in which the Zionist enterprise can succeed in Palestine is to enact a complete transformation of the Jews—economically, culturally, and socially. Only then would the Jews be prepared for national redemption.” Many who made Aliyah during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Aliyah, including the future prime minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion, were attracted by the appeal of *Halutzit*: the desire to become pioneers. For this group, the “Conquest of Labor” was a kind of secularized messianism. Their motto: “Anu banu Artza, liv’not u’l’hibanot” (we’ve come to the Land to build and to be rebuilt). During the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Aliyah, the first real successful collective settlement, Degania (cornflower) was a success and numerous other kvutzot, the organic cell of the new society with collective socialist values to build an agricultural society. These kvutzot were the forerunners of the kibbutz (large scale collective agriculture) movement. Ein Harod, among the first kibbutzim, was established in 1918. During the time of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Aliyah, the new agricultural settlements also developed self-defense groups that would become the forerunner of the Haganah and eventually, the Israel Defense Forces. In 1907, rather than rely on hired Arab guards, Israel Shochat, organized a small secret society of Jewish watchmen which expanded and became Hashomer, The Watchman, to protect settlements throughout Yishuv. The group demanded rigorous training, use of the Hebrew language, and embodiment of the Socialist doctrine—self-defense, communal living, nationalist solidarity. Kibbutzim grew and flourished in the 1930s and 1940s. In 1922 there were 700 people living on kibbutzim in Palestine. By 1927 the number had risen to 2,000. When World War II began in 1939, 24,105 people were living on 79 kibbutzim, comprising 5% of the Jewish population of Mandate Palestine. In 1950, the figures went up to 65,000, accounting for 7.5% of the population. In 1989, the kibbutz population peaked at 129,000. By 2010 the number decreased to about 100,000; the number of kibbutzim in Israel was 270. After almost two decades of an economic and social crisis in most sections of the Kibbutz Movement, resulting in a sharp decline of the kibbutz population, the last few years are indicating a fresh and a new trend. Many kibbutzim report of growing numbers of youngsters – singles and families – seeking to join kibbutzim, either as permanent members, or as non-member inhabitants.



*Kibbutz Ein Harod* (est. 1918), courtesy Hadass Rubin

## Background on Jewish Farming in postwar Germany

(excerpted from Avinoam Patt, *Finding Home and Homeland: Jewish Youth and Zionism in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, Wayne State University Press, 2009)

Some five months after the liberation in Germany, a group of young Holocaust survivors, barely removed from years of persecution and torture at the hands of the Nazi regime, moved to the estate of the virulently anti-Semitic Nazi propagandist Julius Streicher. As Streicher awaited trial in nearby Nuremberg, this group of young Zionists set about transforming his estate into a pioneering training farm or *hakhsharah*, in preparation for what they hoped would be their future lives in Palestine. In the December 21, 1945 issue of the Landsberg DP camp newspaper, Baruch Cheta, the leader of this group, summarized the accomplishments of Kibbutz Nili:

Not long ago, Pleikhershof was the estate and seat of one of Hitler's most high-ranking associates, the editor of the notorious *Der Stürmer*, Julius Streicher. In the office, where for many years the great Jew-hater sat and wrote his vicious diatribes against the Jews, calling for their blood [...] where Streicher wrote to the German people, "*Di jidn zajnen unzer umglik*" (the Jews are our misfortune) is today the home of the secretariat of an agricultural pioneering school for Jewish boys and girls that have come from all corners of Europe to learn agriculture, to cultivate the land, raise cattle, etc., those things most crucial to build the Land of Israel. This is one of the greatest Jewish satisfactions... to be able to see Hebrew writings and slogans, such as "*Am Isroel chaj*," [The Jewish people lives] "*Necach Isroel loj jeszaker*" [The Eternal of Israel will not lie] hanging on the walls in Streicher's mansion; we have named our new kibbutz the first agricultural school in Bavaria. (YIVO, DP Periodicals, Reel 1-1, *Landsberger Lager Czajtung*, #11, December 21, 1945, Baruch Cheta, p. 4.)



And so, the members of the new kibbutz were using the “modern Haman’s” own personal lands to prepare themselves for life in the Jewish state, beginning each day at four in the morning with

the milking of cows, learning by heart the Hebrew words for cow, horse, various agricultural implements and other essential terms related to farm labor. The satisfaction the young survivors drew from the revenge they exacted on Streicher's estate was unmistakable. However, the powerful political value of young Zionists working to build their futures in Palestine had profound implications that went far beyond the gratification the members of Kibbutz Nili experienced. By the middle of 1946, thousands of young kibbutz members representing all streams of the Zionist movement inhabited forty such training farms (*hakhsharot*) and revived political and cultural life in the DP camps of post-war Germany. Farms and *kibbutzim* like Kibbutz Nili and Kibbutz Buchenwald acquired widespread visibility among the DP population as a whole, to the point where military and civilian officials and workers often viewed the kibbutz and *hakhsharah* populations as encompassing the overwhelming majority of Jewish youth. The Agricultural Department of the Central Committee of Liberated Jews in Bavaria provided resources and an agricultural guide for the untrained and inexperienced young farmers. Even so, most of the young people who joined such kibbutz groups had little prior experience of Zionism and next to no understanding of Zionist ideology. For these youth, the early kibbutzim that the survivors organized in Germany and the youth movements in Poland provided warmth and a sense of community, and gave them the sanctuary and security they so yearned for after the war. Membership in the kibbutz gave them an opportunity for Jewish education and to study Zionist history, as well as to internalize the ideology of the movement they had joined. Zionism then provided them with the opportunity to experience the community life of the kibbutz, education and work, and was also a symbol for them of their hope to leave Europe. Their membership in the movement became bound up with the heritage of courage of the resistance and heroes of the movement during the Holocaust. As they gained a greater understanding of Zionist ideology and increasingly identified with it, their excitement and anticipation regarding their future life in Israel soared. In this way, Zionism not only provided an interpretation of the heroism of the past and activities for the present, but also focused their hopes for the future.



The *refet* (cowshed) on Kibbutz Nili

## The Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies

Founded in the 1984-85 academic year through the generous gift of Arnold C. and Beverly Greenberg, the Maurice Greenberg Center is a dynamic center which offers three different undergraduate degrees, maintains the Museum of Jewish Civilization and through a consortial agreement with the University of Connecticut offers a graduate program. The undergraduate major in the Maurice Greenberg Center for Judaic Studies provides a unified and cohesive major within the College of Arts and Sciences and utilizes the established resources of two other colleges (College of Education and the Hartt School for the Performing Arts). The Bachelor of Arts in Judaic Studies allows students to focus in three pivotal areas: Judaic Studies; Judaic Studies and Elementary Education; and Judaic Studies and Pre-Cantorial Studies. Judaic Studies is an interdisciplinary program of study which focuses on the Jews and Judaism, including but not limited to, historical, linguistic, religious, sociological, political, and philosophical perspectives. The chronological scope of Judaic Studies spans the periods from the beginnings of ancient Israel through the modern Jews and modern Israel. In addition to the academic studies, the Center maintains an active community outreach division that runs teacher workshops on the teaching of the Holocaust and the teaching of Israel and the Middle East, and has an active lecture, concert, exhibition, and symposium schedule that is open to the public. In cooperation with the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford, the Greenberg Center has offered an Israeli visiting professor who works both in the university and in the community during the past decade. Summer programs at our field school in Israel at Kibbutz Ginosar are a part of the Bethsaida Excavations Project Consortium and students study archaeology, Hebrew and Arabic in summer terms. For more information on the Greenberg Center, please visit: <http://www.hartford.edu/greenberg/>



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