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Outside the Colony: Jewish Farmers on the Prairies[1]

Abstract

Jews who immigrated to the Canadian prairies before 1914 mostly gravitated to urban areas. Those who chose to farm usually located in Jewish agricultural colonies where a full Jewish life was possible. A minority voluntarily settled in small farming communities among non-Jews. Jewish merchants in prairie towns also became involved in agriculture both as farmers and as agricultural traders and dealers. Few Jews chose to settle on homesteads where they were isolated from Jewish social and religious life. In the interwar period, attempts to circumvent restrictions placed on Jewish immigration led Jewish philanthropic agencies to place Jewish refugee immigrants on scattered farms, often isolated from Jewish communities. Although economically unsuccessful the strategy achieved its humanitarian objectives.

Résumé

Les Juif.ve.s qui ont immigré dans les Prairies canadiennes avant 1914 se sont principalement tournés vers les zones urbaines. Celles et ceux qui choisissaient d'exercer une activité agricole se trouvaient généralement dans des colonies agricoles juives où une vie juive était possible. Une minorité s'est volontairement installée dans de petites communautés agricoles parmi des personnes non-juives. Les marchands juifs des villes des Prairies se sont également impliqués dans l'agriculture, à la fois en tant qu'agriculteurs et en tant que commerçants et marchands de produits agricoles. Peu de Juif.v.es ont choisi de s'installer dans des fermes où ils étaient isolés de la vie sociale et religieuse juive. Dans l'entre-deux-guerres, les tentatives visant à contourner les restrictions imposées à l'immigration juive ont conduit les agences philanthropiques juives à placer des réfugiés juifs dans des fermes dispersées, souvent isolées des communautés juives. Même si elle a échoué sur le plan économique, la stratégie a atteint ses objectifs humanitaires.

Almost all Jewish immigrants into Western Canada gravitated to already existing towns and cities. They had every reason to do so. To observant Jews the advantages of urban life were not merely desirable, they were essential. In an urban setting a full Jewish life could be created, but when scattered across the land on isolated farms, it was difficult for them to engage in Jewish life, follow the rules of kashrut, assemble a minyan on the Sabbath, or have access to the services that facilitate religious observance.

Secular Jews also desired the companionship of their fellows and the vibrancy of a familiar social environment. Thus, Jews who went on to the land, whether by choice or circumstance, mostly sought out, or were placed in, clusters in locations that in some measure enabled them to circumvent the limitations of rural locations and maintain elements of Jewish social and cultural life.

From the outset, Jewish philanthropic agencies working in the settlement field realized Canada's urban centres did not have the capacity to absorb an influx of penurious Jews. They concluded they must either colonize or cease promoting immigration altogether.[2] Rather than scatter settlers across the prairies, the Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society (YMHBS) and, later the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA), elected to form clusters of Jewish settlers in colonies, where elements of Jewish religious and cultural life could be created. They, and individuals working in the settlement field, helped to establish colonies at Moosemin, Hirsch, Sonnenfeld, Lipton, and Edenbridge, in Saskatchewan; Rumsey, Compeer, and Sibbald, in Alberta; and at Gruber, Bender Hamlet, Pine Ridge and Camper, in Manitoba.

There is now an extensive literature dealing with Jewish agricultural settlement in Western Canada, examining the process from various standpoints.[3] There remains, however, a lacuna, since Jews who settled outside colonies have not been the focus of any scholarly study. Although comparatively few in number, they played a critical but often overlooked role in the development of the rural prairie economy. Their ventures into social and economic *terrae incognitae* demonstrate the complexity of their decision-making, and the variety of responses by those who were set on becoming farmers. The history of these Jewish pioneers challenges the image of Canadian Jews as reluctant farmers and emphasizes the role of politics and antisemitism in shaping Jewish settlement strategies, particularly in the inter-war years.

The Dominion Lands Act and Jewish Settlement

The European occupation of Western Canada was undertaken under immigration policies of both Conservative and Liberal governments. Although British Protestants were favoured by all administrations, there were never any official restrictions placed on the immigration of any Europeans, regardless of their religion. Potential farmers were sought after, ethnicity and religion were secondary. This was especially true during the administration of Prime Minister Wilfred Laurier, when Clifford Sifton was Minister of the Interior.[4]

In its promotion of the western interior to prospective immigrants, the Dominion government portrayed the region as an unpopulated empty land awaiting settlement.[5] Immigration propaganda focused on the agricultural potential of the area and the opportunities offered for economic advancement.[6] Noticeably absent was any hint that the homesteaders' gains came from dispossession of Indigenous peoples, who were confined to reserves and prevented from obtaining other land on their former territory.[7] The presence of Indigenous peoples in Canada was not acknowledged in the correspondence of Jewish relief organizations such as the YMHBS or the JCA, suggesting that these organizations subscribed to colonial assumptions.[8] The original inhabitants were marginalized by imperial actions and the rhetoric of colonialism, becoming vic-

tims of European expansion. The extent to which this was apparent to any European immigrants is uncertain.[9] Ryan Eyford reminds us of the need to consider European settlers and Indigenous people together as "constituents of projects of imperial governance and administration" that helped create distinctions within colonial populations.[10]

With very few exceptions settlers were subject to the regulations of the Dominion Lands Act of 1872 and the constraints of the sectional survey system. Apart from areas set aside as Indian reserves, and some areas settled by Métis, most of the Prairie ecumene fell within the framework of the Act and the survey. There were some minor changes made to the Act over the years, but its intent and basic requirements remained constant. It defined the basic unit of settlement as a homestead of 160 acres (64.75 hectares). Any head of household was eligible to claim a homestead for an administrative fee of ten dollars and receive full title to it after three years, if certain conditions were met. These included demonstrating permanent residency, cultivating at least thirty acres and becoming a British citizen. Only after the settler was granted the patent (i.e., full title) to the homestead, could it be mortgaged or sold. These conditions were intended to prevent land speculation and ensure that those who obtained a homestead under the terms of the Act were, in fact, bona fide agricultural settlers. Less than half of the quarter sections in a township were available for homesteading, and those that were open for settlement were widely scattered. For Gentile settlers this was a social inconvenience but for Jews it made agricultural settlement extremely difficult and, for many, impossible.

Researching Jewish Settlement on the Prairies

Data for this study were obtained from a wide array of sources relevant to research into ethnic settlements on the prairies which, during the last several years, was focused on Jewish agricultural settlement.[11] Information pertaining to all who settled under the auspices of the YMHBS or the JCA is found in the files of both organizations held in the Canadian Jewish Archives in Montreal. Correspondence relating to the establishment of the earlier Jewish colonies in Canada is also held in the Central Archives of the History of the Jewish People in Jerusalem. The JCA conducted annual surveys of all known Jewish farmers in Western Canada, primarily to determine their economic progress and need for financial aid. The Canadian government's Department of the Interior and Department of Agriculture were deeply involved in the administration of agricultural settlement of all groups. An extensive correspondence between Dominion Land Agents working in the field, their regional administrators in Winnipeg, and bureaucrats in Ottawa, is located in record groups 15 and 76 held in the Library and Archives of Canada. Although these files sometimes dealt with individual situations, issues usually were more general in nature. These records also contain correspondence and documents germane to inter-war and postwar Jewish agricultural settlement initiatives undertaken by the Canadian National Railway and Canadian Pacific Railway.

All settlers who obtained land through the homestead system were recorded on Township Plans and in Township General Registers. The latter keep records of every person who entered for a homestead regardless of whether or not patent was eventually granted. Documents associated with every quarter-section available for settlement are accessible on microfilm. These include applications for entry, applications for patent, declarations of abandonment, and so forth. Although country of origin is usually given on such documents, religion or ethnicity is not always specified. These records are organized and held provincially in the archives of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Local histories, available in provincial libraries also provide information on Jews in rural areas. Maps depicting land ownership, including the *Cummings' Rural Directories,* show land occupation in the early 1920s. While only the first and last name of the occupant or owner are given, it is often possible to determine ethnicity by first and last name, a technique previously used by geographers and historians.[12] The Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada (JHC) has an extensive archival collection relating to Jewish rural settlement on the prairies, particularly the Manitoba colonies. It includes the correspondence of Jewish organizations involved in settlement of refugees in the inter-war and postwar periods. Its searchable database and index of regional Jewish newspapers was a valuable resource.

The census of Canada was undertaken every ten years after 1871 and, on the Prairies, was also carried out in 1915. It lists demographic information, including religion, ethnicity, and occupation. When examined in conjunction with information obtained from Ancestry.ca it was possible to trace the movement of individual Jewish farmers in Canada.

There are lamentably few memoirs by Canadian Jewish pioneer farmers. Michael Usiskin's account of homesteading at Edenbridge is perhaps the best known.[13] Others, usually shorter and less informative, are found in the archives of the JHC, which has a collection of recorded and transcribed interviews with "old timers." I was also fortunate to be able to interview some former Jewish farmers and their descendants in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

Colony Settlement

The first Jewish settlements on the prairies were established under the auspices of philanthropic organizations endeavoring to alleviate the plight of refugee Jews from Europe. The YMHBS in Montreal proposed the formation of a colonization society to facilitate the settlement of Jewish refugees in Canada. With the assistance of the Mansion House Committee, twenty-six Jewish families were placed on land near Moosomin in 1882. The colony, handicapped by scant farming experience and distance from markets, was dogged by misfortune and abandoned after seven years.[14] In 1888, twenty Jewish families took homesteads near Wapella. They did not receive any aid from any sponsoring agency. Although not all the initial settlers remained, the

settlement endured well into the 1930s.[15]

In 1892, unable to cope with an influx of Jewish refugees in Montreal, the YMHBS established the colony of Hirsch, Saskatchewan.[16] Attrition rates were high from the outset, as many settlers did not wish to become farmers and looked for opportunities to migrate to more promising locations, most often cities in the United States. The YMHBS and later the JCA, supervising colony progress from Montreal, doled out aid in an overly parsimonious fashion, building mistrust and resentment among many unwilling settlers. The difficulties of maintaining Hirsch as a viable colony contrasted with the success of independent Jewish farmers in nearby Oxbow, who maintained a stable population with far less assistance or oversight.[17]

Other Jewish colonies established on the Prairies around the turn of the century included Lipton, Edenbridge, and Sonnenfeld in Saskatchewan. All—even Sonnenfeld, which was founded by idealistic graduates of JCA agricultural training schools in Galicia—experienced difficulties retaining settlers. Alberta's Rumsey settlement began to lose farmers within a few years of its establishment: it declined from ninety-nine Jewish farmers in 1910, to thirty-six in 1914, with the land owned by Jews halved.[18] In Manitoba, a farm-village settlement founded by Rabbi Gruber in 1898 was an administrative disaster, lasting barely eight years.[19] The settlements of Bender Hamlet and Camper had completely collapsed by 1923; the settlement at Pine Ridge was in decline. Even Jewish farmers who were doing well in Lorette and Ste. Annes sold out and left around the same time (Figure 1).

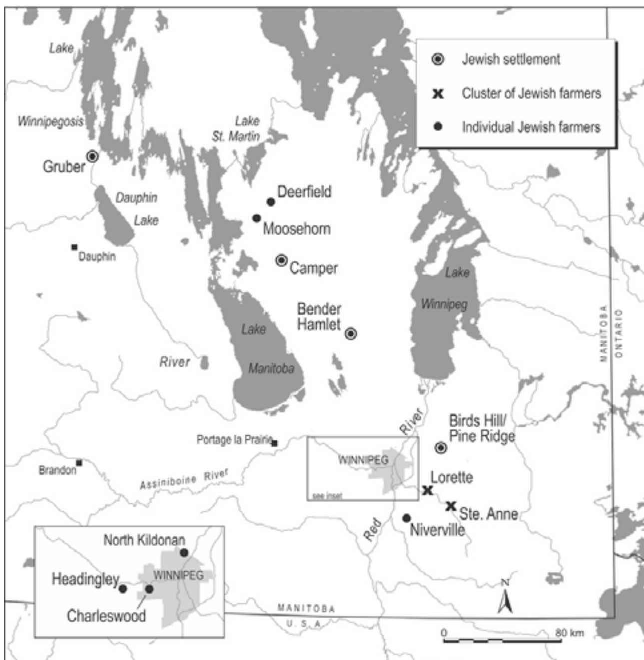

Figure 1. Jewish farm settlements in Manitoba.

Cartography: Weldon Hiebert

Isolated Settlers

Isolation from Jewish life was a formidable deterrent to Jews homesteading among non-Jews, so it was rare for Jews to settle away from their fellows. Nevertheless, some did enter and obtain patents to homesteads far removed from the nearest Jewish community. For example, in 1887 the Pierce family, recently immigrated from Russia, bought a farm at Middlechurch, a few kilometers north of Winnipeg. Within two years they moved to Oxbow in Saskatchewan, where they homesteaded and farmed for over two decades.[20] Early in 1887 Moses Goldstein entered for a homestead near Niverville, Manitoba, on NW 28 Township 7 Range 4 East, in a district that had been settled in the early 1870s by Métis and Mennonites. Six months later Hersh Polinovsky homesteaded on the adjacent SE quarter (Figure 1).[21]

Polinovsky, his wife, and daughter left Winnipeg in the summer of 1888 with a cow and a horse pulling the framework of a small shanty. He was fortunate to be able to select an easily workable plot that was mostly free of timber, considered to be some of the finest agricultural land in Manitoba.[22] But even on good land, homesteading in the 1880s was difficult, and the Polinovskys experienced plenty of hard luck. The horse died and their cow became tubercular. They survived their first winter living on a diet of bannock made from bitter flour milled from frozen wheat, purchased for twenty-five cents for one hundred pounds. Potato kugel was made from frozen potatoes donated by their non-Jewish neighbours.[23] In a memoir, Polinovsky's daughter recalled that because she had no presentable clothing to wear, she had to feign sickness and remain in bed over Shabbat while a Jewish peddler was visiting.[24] In his first year Polinovsky broke and cropped twelve acres, in the second year twenty-eight acres, and forty acres in his third year, a remarkable rate of progress. He never left his land during the time he was "proving up," that is, while he was developing his farm sufficiently to qualify to receive full title to the property, except for "brief periods" to market his grain. He was reported to have a thatched-roofed log house, a stable, and a large shed.[25] Goldstein applied for and received the patent to his homestead in 1891; Polonovsky received his patent a year later.[26] Both mortgaged their properties shortly after receiving their patents.[27] Goldstein cleared the mortgage in 1893 and sold to August Schultz, his Mennonite neighbour, in the same year for $520. Polinovsky sold his property for $800 in 1904 and moved back to Winnipeg, where he operated a dairy farm on the city margin.[28]

Goldstein's decision to sell his farm so soon after obtaining the patent suggests that his entry into farming may have been driven by a desire to generate capital quickly. At the time he sold, a labourer would have been lucky to receive $1.25 for a ten-hour day working for the CPR, from which the company took half for room and board. His progress suggests he may have received aid from his Mennonite neighbour who, incidentally, attested to fulfilment of his homestead obligations, and to whom he later

sold the property. For Goldstein and many others, homesteading represented a way to amass capital quickly without being apart from one's family. This supposition is supported by the behaviour of settlers at Gruber, a Jewish farm-village founded near Winnipegosis in 1899. After receiving the patent to their homesteads all the Jewish settlers sold their property to move back to Winnipeg. By 1907 all the Jewish farmers had left. Their gentile neighbours remained on their farms.[29]

Jewish Merchant Farmers

Across the prairies, Jewish merchants in the villages and small towns that developed around the station halts of the railway companies developed an intimate relationship with agriculture, not only serving as vendors of household and agricultural supplies but buying and selling livestock and dealing in grain. They constituted a vital part of the rural economy. In Plum Coulee, Manitoba, for example, by 1901, thirteen of the seventy-six households were Jewish. Most were involved in trade as general merchants or as hawkers, plying their wares in the surrounding agricultural community, but some were listed as farmers.[30] Merchant Sam Rosner, with his business partner Abraham Brownstone, ran a store in town, but also dealt in horses, breaking, and trading them. Rosner eventually came to acquire several farms in the area.[31]

The settlement trajectories of some of these Jewish merchant-farmers were surprising, to say the least. Ukrainian-born Isaac Sirluck came to Canada in 1906 from Argentina, where he had settled in the Baron de Hirsch Colony. He left there for New York, but hearing of opportunities in Manitoba, came to Canada, settling in Winkler where he worked as a peddler for four years before establishing a store. In 1922 he purchased a farm near Neuenburg from a Mennonite who was re-migrating to South America. Sirluck and his partner eventually bought a total of 4000 acres which they worked while simultaneously operating a store and grain business. Sirluck was passionate about farming and known as an agricultural innovator who introduced corn and buckwheat to the area.[32]

Sirluck represented the Jewish merchant-farmers who combined their skills in commerce with a deep desire to establish a connection with the land. Some merchants merely had a cow and a small plot of land for a garden. Others, like Sirluck, used their success in commerce to buy farms close to their stores, while others first farmed and entered commerce gradually, graduating from selling surplus produce to operating full-time grocery stores where they marketed the produce from their own, and other, farms. Jewish merchants often became horse and cattle dealers, operating as middlemen forming a vital part of the agricultural economy without directly working the land.

In the Ukrainian settlement of southeastern Manitoba, a commercial vacuum was first filled by Jews. In the villages of Stuartburn and Vita, for example, a succession of Jewish merchants ran stores. Nathan Rosenstock operated a store in Vita from 1900 until 1919, when it was taken over by Nathan Schwartz. Jacob Schwartz owned a store in nearby Tolstoi, and Louis Tuberman had a store in Ridgeville.[33] All of them sold general goods and dealt in livestock. They prospered until the early 1920s when a wave of Ukrainian nationalism, and the founding of a local Ukrainian-owned co-operative store, led to the decline of their businesses.[34] By 1921 the Tubermans and Rosenstocks were living in Winnipeg.[35]

Close to larger settlements, where there was a ready market for their produce, some Jews engaged in market gardening. Typical of these was Jacob Harris, formerly a farmer in Russia. In 1914 Harris purchased ten acres in Charleswood, some miles west of Winnipeg, where he operated a market garden.[36] He quickly moved into retailing his produce from a store on his property.[37] Other isolated Jewish farmers could be found at Deerfield and Moosehorn in Manitoba, and Jewish merchants in nearby Ashern maintained close economic and cultural ties with farmers in the Jewish colony of New Hirsch (Camper) (Figure 1).[38]

The reports of the JCA in the early 1920s suggest there were only thirteen isolated Jewish farmers in Manitoba, most of whom were located adjacent to Jewish farm colonies.[39] The decision to leave centres of Jewish life was economic, but was an option chosen by very few.

Settlement among the Franco-Manitobans

At the close of the century, several Jewish families purchased small farms on river lots in the French-Canadian settlement of Ste. Anne des Chênes and the Métis settlement of Lorette, some forty-two and thirty-one kilometers southeast of Winnipeg respectively (Figure 1). The first Jewish farmer in Lorette was David Katz, a farmer from Russia who arrived in Canada in 1902 and purchased a river lot in 1906.[40] In 1918 he was reported as debt-free and had seven horses, and nineteen cattle.[41] By 1918 there were eight Jewish farmers there. Some, like Katz, had an agricultural background. Isaac Kniasansky, for example, was a Hebrew teacher and *shochet* (ritual slaughterer) who moved from the Jewish settlement at Bird's Hill, thirty-two kilometers north of Lorette. With brother-in-law Harry Chaperatack, who worked in Winnipeg, he had purchased seventy acres, but he had only a few cattle and a small area under cultivation.[42]

Ely Levi and his son Harry worked adjacent lots in Lorette. Both had previously farmed in the Hirsch colony in Saskatchewan. Eli purchased his land in Lorette in 1915 for $3,400, using the proceeds from the sale of his farm at Hirsch. With capital

he was able to make good progress: Every year he increased the area cropped and expanded the number of livestock. Eli's son, Harry, who was also previously a farmer at Hirsch, rented an adjacent lot for seventy dollars a year. He possessed three horses, nine cows and eight heifers.[43] Although it is difficult to draw comparisons between Jewish and non-Jewish farmers, since conditions varied by year, location, and type of agriculture, by the standards of the day the Jews at Lorette were making good progress.[44] By 1921 only two Jewish families remained in Lorette: David and Rosea Katz and their seven children, and Huey and Fanny Cooperstock.[45] After they also left the area in the mid-1920s, memory of the Jewish presence in the community faded.[46]

Jews began to purchase land in Ste. Anne in 1909 when Abraham Henteleff, attracted by the easily worked high-quality alluvial soil along the Seine River and proximity to Winnipeg, purchased a 160-acre river lot.[47] For some years Henteleff retained a residence in Winnipeg where he worked as a peddler.[48] A flurry of land acquisition by other Jews intent on entering farming followed over the next five years, creating a loose amalgamation of twelve Jewish mixed farming operations scattered along the Seine river. In 1914, according to a report of the JCA, Jews were cultivating 683 acres. They had 56 horses, 185 cattle, 134 young stock, and 500 poultry. They harvested potatoes and had put up some five hundred wagonloads of hay. Oats, barley, and wheat were the principal cash crops, but to augment incomes wild horses were imported from Alberta, broken, and sold in the Winnipeg market. These farmers performed well, with a comfortable surplus of assets over liabilities. [49]

The Jewish farmers in Ste. Anne were reputed to lack a sense of Jewish community and never established a synagogue or any other significant Jewish social organizations. Most were secular and politically socialist, taking pride that they were farmers, owned their own land, and were economically independent.[50] All the Jewish children attended the local public schools, where Roman Catholic priests and nuns served as instructors.[51] However, with the assistance of the JCA, the community organized a Hebrew school, which for a few years offered ten Jewish students after-school instruction in Hebrew and Bible studies. [52] The Henteleffs were socialist and secular but maintained a good relationship with their fellow Jews and the French Roman Catholic community.

By 1916, Ste. Anne's Jewish population had expanded to sixty-three through natural increase but shortly after the end of World War I the Jewish farmers began to leave Ste. Anne to pursue other opportunities.[53] Abraham Henteleff, for example, moved to Reddit, Ontario, where he operated a store for a few years. In 1921 he returned to Winnipeg to work in a St. Boniface meatpacking plant and as a butcher in Winnipeg's North End, before purchasing a river lot in St. Vital in a 1933 tax sale. The Henteleffs farmed there until the 1960s.[54] Only two Jewish families remained in Ste. Anne in 1921.[55] All left by 1925, most probably victims of the general economic down-

turn that followed the Great War and, perhaps, of the tendency of ambitious farmers to be overly eager to mechanize, incurring liabilities during the "boom years" that became intolerable when agricultural prices fell. Isaac Tennenhouse, whose family homesteaded at Camper, Manitoba, noted that "the day we bought a tractor was the day our way of life changed. Before that we were independent and free. We grew our own food, raised our stock and their food. When the tractor came, it had to be bought with cash and we could not raise it or the fuel and parts it needed . . . we found we could not make enough . . . to feed the tractor and ourselves. So, we had to leave [our farm]."[56]

The Jewish Congress and Scattered Jewish Farmers

World War I was a watershed for immigration and settlement in Canada. The war years saw high demand for Canadian grain and prices were high. Many farmers had mortgaged their farms in order to mechanize and take advantage of wartime prices. Shortly after the war's end, in the early 1920s, demand for agricultural products slumped and prices fell. Farmers who had borrowed against their property to mechanize during the boom years struggled to repay loans. Their economic misfortune was compounded by environmental issues: drought, soil drifting, and crop failure. Cash was scarce: farms were sold or repossessed, and rural populations shrank, exacerbating the trend of re-migration to the cities already evident even before the outbreak of war.

Farm consolidation, over-extension into sub-marginal areas, and competing opportunities in the industrial heartland contributed to the drift from the land.[57] Federal and provincial governments were alarmed. Cities were seen as hotbeds of radical socialism, and an increase in the numbers of discontented unemployed was a frightening prospect. Their response was predictable: attempt to halt the drift from the land while addressing unemployment by offering incentives and programs to place people back on the land.[58] Soldier settlement schemes aimed at placing veterans on prairie farms were costly failures, since soldier settlers faced the same problems as other settlers, namely lack of farm experience, large debts, and poor soils.[59] The outcomes were the same.

The drift to the cities was most clearly seen in the smaller Jewish settlements, though it was evident in all. For example, all but one of the Jewish farmers near Rosetown, Saskatchewan, left by 1923; even the larger settlements, such as Hirsch and Edenbridge, lost settlers (Figure 1). In Alberta, the formerly prosperous Jewish settlements of Compeer and Sibbald lost most of their population. In Manitoba, Camper (New Hirsch) and Bender Hamlet had ceased to exist by 1925.[60]

During the settlement era, the government of Canada had rewarded railway companies for building tracks in the prairies with grants of land. Some of the land granted

to the Canadian Northern Railway (CNR) was never sold, as it was too poor for arable farming or too far from a railway branch line for economical grain hauling.[61] Falling immigration rates caused the CNR to shift its focus to internal colonization work.[62] It became involved in the Dominion-Provincial Land settlement scheme, the Dominion-Provincial Training Farms Plan, and the "Back-to-the-Land" movement. The CNR Land and Colonization Branch eagerly sought opportunities to sell its unsold land. In the late 1930s it partnered with the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) to place Jewish refugees from Europe on CNR-owned farms in Manitoba. This was very different from the efforts of the JCA to establish Jewish agricultural colonies on the prairies. For its part the JCA remained interested in establishing farm colonies in Western Canada and toyed with the idea of resurrecting the then defunct colony of Bender Hamlet. It reluctantly abandoned the idea after the JCA's director, Simon Belkin, reported that resettling Jewish refugees there was impractical.[63]

The assumption of power in Germany by the National Socialist party in 1933 unleashed a wave of antisemitism that drove many Jews to seek refuge outside the nation's borders. Unfortunately, few countries, including Canada, were prepared to accept them. In the interwar period, Canadian immigration policy sought to discourage non-agricultural immigration and few Jews had an agricultural background. Unfortunately, many members of the Jewish establishment accepted the official line that Canada could accommodate only agricultural immigrants. This reasoning held that wealth could be created only in the primary sector of the economy. Even veteran Jewish member of Parliament Samuel Jacobs, speaking at the sixth session of the First Canadian Jewish Congress in 1919, had cautioned against admitting those whose skills lay in the retail and manufacturing sectors, lest they swell the ranks of the unemployed and foster further antisemitism.[64] Jacobs emphasized that most Canadian agriculture was capital intensive and Jewish immigrants lacked the capital and experience to contemplate farming with any hope of success. He noted that intensive farming (market gardening and dairying) was a possibility, but opportunities were limited.

In 1936, Frederick Blair was appointed as deputy minister responsible for immigration. Blair was openly and rabidly antisemitic. Under his watch restrictions on Jewish immigration were further tightened. He removed responsibility for processing Jewish applicants from railway company personnel to his own department and personally scrutinized each application. Independent Jewish immigration became difficult, if not impossible. From thousands of Jewish applicants Blair approved only a few hundred, from which both the CNR and Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) were each permitted to select only fifty farm families annually.[65] Only those with agricultural experience, or those that the railway companies assumed were farmers, managed to immigrate under the companies' land settlement projects. For example, the Steele family from Zhornov near Rivne in Poland were accepted by the CPR which incor-

rectly assumed they were a farming family because the father, who was a lumber dealer, owned land.[66]

Refugee families who were fortunate enough to be selected and admitted to Canada were directed on to railway lands in the West. Those claiming prior agricultural experience and who had some capital, received further financial assistance from the (CJC) and the Jewish Immigration Aid Society (JIAS), and were placed on developed, or partially developed farms, in Manitoba. For example, with assistance from the Western Division of the CJC, fifty-three-year-old Jacob Kraut and his twenty-nine-year-old son, Mendel, and their families, purchased a 290-acre farm, including a house, stock, and equipment at St. Ouens, Manitoba, for $4,000.25. The house and ancillary buildings were old but otherwise adequate and serviceable. Judging from photographs in CNR reports, the house was typical of the second-generation one-and-a-half story wood-frame farmhouses found across the prairies until the 1970s.[67]

The two Kraut families were supported by the CJC in the amount of $661.25 and were repaying their mortgage to the CNR at $200 a year with interest at five per cent per annum. In 1939 they were cultivating 106 acres and had a promising crop of wheat yielding forty-four bushels an acre but still owed $1,250 on the property. Nevertheless, in addition to a full line of farm machinery they had five horses, three colts, seven cows, eight calves, and "a large flock of poultry." Although the price of butter fat was extremely low in 1939, their cream revenue amounted to $2.50 a week.[68]

Under this scheme several other Jewish families purchased small eighty-acre developed farms in the Red River Valley, south of Winnipeg. Other farms purchased in eastern Manitoba at Stonewall, and near Lydiat, Ladywood, and Beausejour, were in the range of 160 acres or larger.[69] Approximately twenty-five refugee families were placed on farms in Manitoba with financial assistance from the CJC in the form of loans in the range of $500 , some also carrying second mortgages from commercial lenders.[70] Another eight families were settled in Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia.[71] Two families were sent to the Edenbridge colony where they successfully settled on land abandoned by earlier Jewish settlers, but two other families sent to Lipton colony were unsuccessful, soon returning to Winnipeg "at considerable cost to the local community."[72]

The settlement trajectories of these few immigrant families who were admitted in the 1930s varied considerably. In 1939 JIAS brought in nine families from Poland, placing them on farms in and around the Winnipeg area. Szloma Sztul (Steele), his wife and two children, who emigrated from Volynia (then in Poland) in May 1939, originally intended to settle in Saskatchewan, but were dissuaded from doing so by longer-established members of Winnipeg's Jewish community, who argued that

Saskatchewan was a desert and advised them to settle in Manitoba. JIAS placed them on a fifty-acre farm located on Pipeline Road in Old Kildonan, on Winnipeg's outskirts, which it had bought for $1,055.[73] After a brief sojourn on their rented dairy farm on Pipeline Road, with assistance from JIAS they purchased a farm at Stonewall, about twenty-five miles north of Winnipeg where they joined the Kaplan, Glow, Arbor, and Tennenhouse families to form a loose cluster of Jewish farmers, some of whom had a long association with agriculture in Western Canada.[74]

Despite their claims, many of these refugee families, mostly from Poland, had minimal experience as farmers. At best, some had been small-holders or estate managers and had no desire to eke out a living on a marginal farm removed from Jewish life. CPR officials suspected that some who had been placed on farms had no intention of farming, intending instead to make a living as cattle dealers.[75] Congress officials also expressed frustration with arrivals who did not fulfill their expectations. One who requested additional funding to purchase a better farm aroused their ire:

> "He [Berel Kraut] has bought a cottage in Beausejour, where he intends to live during the coming winter. With the money he paid for this cottage he could have made a down payment on another farm without asking for our assistance. He has purchased a truck in partnership with [another recent arrival] and engages in cattle buying."[76]

Kraut's decisions dd not meet with CJC approval, but his desire to make a living as a cattle dealer was sensible: there was no road to his farm, obliging him to pass through his neighbour's land; without a water well, he obtained his supply from a neighbour. Clearly, this was a poor location for someone with limited capital and little farming experience.

Jewish immigrants operated under tight supervision that was not always welcome. James Colley, the superintendent of the CPR Immigration and Colonization Department, urged Samuel Belkin, JCA director, to restrict visits to newly settled Jewish farmers, which he felt were drawing unwanted attention to the new arrivals and might result "in considerable harm to the movement." Colley thought that the farmers had enough knowledge to work out any problems for themselves with the aid of CPR supervisors. Inspection visits by the JCA took the farmers away from their work and did little to further their progress.[77]

Religious and social needs strongly argued in favour of Jewish immigrants settling in large urban centres that provided for their religious needs and offered better economic opportunities. Assessments of the high attrition rates in Jewish colonies frequently cite the difficulty of reconciling demands of religious observance with the reality of living on dispersed farms, even when within the bounds of a farm

colony. While difficulties of religious observance were a factor, economics played a more important role. The examples cited here show that Jews were not slow to seize economic opportunity, even when it conflicted with the demands of their religion.

The nature of aid proffered by various Jewish philanthropic bodies was an important element in the Jewish flight from the land. The JCA mostly dispensed aid in the form of loans with interest at prevailing rates that had to be repaid in full within a fixed term. Given the vagaries of the prairie climate, international commodity prices, and variations in the cost of borrowing, these terms were unrealistically onerous. Ironically, the most progressive and ambitious farmers were most affected by the slump in agricultural prices since they had invested more heavily in farm mechanization during the wartime boom years. Decline in commodity prices hit them hard. Access to credit through the JCA was a mixed blessing for Jewish farmers.

In her analysis of the Sonnenfeld colony in Saskatchewan, Anna Feldman argued that Jewish farmers were no less able than non-Jewish farmers settled in the same locality, and Jews were less likely to leave the district than their non-Jewish neighbours.[78] The documentary evidence reviewed above supports her contention that the collapse of Jewish farm colonies had less to do with religious obligations than their response to economic conditions.

Jewish immigrants rarely chose to settle beyond the bounds of a Jewish community. Before World War I Jewish philanthropic agencies, primarily the JCA, advocated agricultural settlement knowing that they had to either do so or turn away refugee Jews from Europe. Colony settlement was adopted in an attempt to ensure that crucial elements of Jewish religious life were accessible. Most who settled in the larger colonies, if not pushed towards them, were lured there by the prospect of aid and easy credit from the JCA. In the inter-war period Jewish aid agencies again embraced agricultural settlement as the only way to circumvent the antisemitic immigration policies of the Canadian federal government and offer refuge to Jews threatened by antisemitism in Europe.

Although Jewish colonies were struggling to retain farmers even before World War I, the dramatic rate at which Jewish farmers left the land in the early 1920s was due to external environmental and economic factors over which neither the Jewish farmers nor Canadian government agencies had much control. Furthermore, the debate about the best way to provide a safe haven in Canada for Jewish refugees was driven by the need to achieve economic integration and avoid the appearance of competing for jobs with the established population for fear of fostering antisemitic sentiment. Dispersal of Jewish immigrants among the non-Jewish rural population avoided this, as did placing them on abandoned farms in Jewish colonies. Most importantly it enabled the immigration of European Jews who would have otherwise been exclud-

ed on the grounds that they were competing for scarce jobs in urban centres. Building a Jewish agricultural population also served to combat pejorative views of Jews as being shopkeepers and peddlers, unused to hard manual labour. Jewish farmers were venerated as antidotes to antisemitism, reinforcing positive opinions of the Jewish community.[79] Placing Jewish immigrants on isolated farms in the 1930s was a strategy borne of necessity, although like federal and corporate policies promoting rural (re-)settlement, it defied powerful economic and social forces driving rural-urban drift. For Jewish agencies working in the settlement field, their acceptance of and participation in these efforts meant tactical failure but, viewed in the broad sweep of history, strategic victory.

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