Jews in Portland--

The Eastern Tinware Community

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When the immigrants finally landed at Ellis Island, the ground still seemed to sway under their feet as they dragged children and bundles along the walk toward the imposing red brick building. "This way! Hurry up!" an interpreter shouted in several languages. Although they did not realize it, they were already passing their first test as they hastened down the corridor in single file. Twenty-five feet away a doctor was watching them carefully as they approached him. All children who looked over two years old were taken from their mothers' arms and made to walk.

It took only a few moments for the immigrants to reach the doctor, but that was time enough for his sharp eyes to notice one man who was breathing too heavily, a woman who was trying to hide her limp behind a big bundle, and a young girl whose shuffle and bewildered gaze might have been symptoms of a feeble mind. As each immigrant paused in front of him, the doctor asked short questions about the immigrant's age or work to test his alertness. When a mother came up with children, each child in turn, starting with the oldest, was asked his name to make sure that he was not deaf or dumb.

In the doctor's hand was a piece of chalk; on the coats of two out of every ten or eleven immigrants he scrawled a large letter indicating suspected mental or physical defects... those whose coats bore chalk letters were pushed aside into a "pen," to wait for more detailed medical examinations... If they had any of the diseases proscribed by the immigration laws, or seemed too ill or feebleminded to earn their living, they would be deported. One sobbing mother was pushed into the enclosure to wait with her little girl of eight or nine. The law said a parent had to accompany any very young child who was deported; but children of ten or older were sent back to Europe alone and simply released into the port from which they had sailed. Several weeping families in the hall were trying to make a terrible decision—"Shall we all go back together? Who will stay?"

(Ann Novotny, Strangers at the Door, cited in Butwin's The Jews of America, p. 136-7.)
The Jewish cemetery on William Street in Portland, now overgrown and unrecognizable, was recently honored with a plaque from the Portland Historical Society. The names of those buried there, gleaned from the sexton's records, were read to the gathering of Jews and non-Jews who came for the unveiling of the plaque. "Lillie Zogorskie, Ida Silberman, --- Hoffman, Rosa Ellis, Bessie Masser, Samuel Fierberg, Charles Luntz, and Samuel Markowitz." Old peoples' names; that was what most people thought. A desire that nameless Hoffman should have a name sent this researcher to Portland's Vital Records in the hope of finding more information.

Hoffman, it turned out, was a one day old baby, dead too soon to be named, born to a Hungarian shoemaker and his wife. Lillie Zogorskie was three days old—her twin brother "Jo" had survived. Samuel Markowitz was three months old, and Samuel Fierberg was fifteen months old, having been born in "Rumania." Charles Luntz was listed in East Hampton's Vital Records—he was 2½. Rabbi Morris Silverman's extensive book on Hartford Jews suggests that Rosa Ellis may also have been a baby, born in Middletown (p. 152). Only Ida Silberman and Bessie Masser were adults; they were 26 and 23 respectively, both housewives, the latter leaving a two-year-old daughter born in Portland. A cemetery of babies.

Rabbi Silverman's book mentions Middletown Jews buried in Hartford's Beth Israel cemetery as early as the 1840's and 1850's (p. 11); the earliest Jewish burial in Indian Hill appears to be four-year-old May Strauss in 1879. This section of Indian Hill was used all through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, so why an 1897 cemetery in Portland? It was suggested that perhaps people could not travel across the river in the winter—this explanation accounts for the 1712 founding of the first Portland cemetery. But the Jewish deaths happened between April 25th and December 9th, primarily in July and August. Another possibility might be that bereaved
young mothers did not want to send their children's bodies so far away; perhaps. Perhaps it is just coincidence that only children and two young women died during the four year period (1897 to 1900) that the cemetery was used; perhaps the community was primarily a young one. Or perhaps someone who had occupied only a few months of his family's time, with a coffin small enough to be carried by one person, didn't warrant a trip all the way to Hartford or Middletown. However 1897 seemed to be the peak year for the Portland Jewish community—perhaps they anticipated continued growth and so set down a root in the form of a cemetery. If so, why did they stop using it in 1900?

Whatever the explanation, the cemetery provides proof that there really was a turn-of-the-century Jewish community in Portland.
Who is a Jew? While the rabbinical courts and the Israeli government wrestle with this question, this study defined a Jew as anyone with a family member married by a rabbi or buried in a Jewish cemetery, or, in one case, affiliated with a synagogue. Birthplaces, listed in the census and vital records, were marginally helpful: Aaronson from Russia turned out to be Jewish, but Abrahamson? he was born in Sweden and married by a minister to an Anderson. There were many hints of Jewishness: surnames like Osserman, Klein and Lifshitz; names like Abraham or Jacob, Harry or Louis, Sadie or Tillie. But not Frank or Stanislaus. Very soon it was obvious that the more Jewish sounding names tried to be located on or near Freestone Avenue, and to be working for Eastern Tinware, so these traits were considered in the decision to copy or not copy a name from the City Directory. Thus an Abraham Smith, for example, whose real surname the man at Ellis Island couldn't spell, would probably be missed even if he worked for Eastern Tinware. A Joseph Rogalsky would be similarly ignored if he had chosen to work in the quarries; an Abraham Bloom in the quarries might not, however. And all these men could well have been married by rabbis according to their marriage certificates. Joseph Rogalsky (that proved to be a Jewish surname), if he were a peddler, would probably have been copied down from the city directory, because the trade of peddler seems to be linked as closely with the Jewish immigrant community in general as the tinware industry was linked with Portland's Jewish immigrant community.

In the 1888-9 Portland City Directory appeared the first probable Jewish name: "Connor H. Horwitz." He was a peddler, living in "City District," the totally inappropriate name for the rural northern sector of Portland. His name appeared like that until 1893 when it became "Chone Horwyüt." By then he had moved to Prospect Street in the Gildersleeve area of Portland,
still quite rural. An Abraham Horwytz lived with him, a fellow peddler and almost certainly a relative. The change in the spelling of Horwytz's first name may represent the linguistic difficulties which the Jews presented: \( \text{likely} \) quite, he told the city directory information seeker, "It's Chone, (\( f\text{ônˈ} \text{ah} \)) with an H!" And faithfully the city directory man transliterated the breathy Germanic \( \text{h} \) in to a C, the final -o (pronounced-eh or -ah) into an -or--then, dutifully, he added the H. Connor with an H. Unfortunately Chone left no recorded births, deaths or marriages. Abraham, however, did record the birth of a child, Harry, in 1891 (PWS 4:170). At that time he was listed as 28 years old and born in Russia. His wife, the former Esther Markowitz, was 33 and born in Germany. Such a union constituted a mixed marriage with more potential for linguistic and cultural incompatibility than the present-day combination of an American Jew and an American non-Jew. However, shifting national boundaries and pressures on ethnic groups in eastern Europe could have meant that these two people came from similar backgrounds but were geographically separated at birth. Whatever their differences and similarities, little Harry was their fourth child. In 1897 or-8 Chone Horwytz moved to Hartford where a sizable Jewish community had existed since the 1840's. Abraham disappeared around 1894 to parts unknown.

The first verifiable Jewish name occurred in the 1889-90 Portland Directory: Wolf Furshpan, sometimes spelled Furchpan. Wolf may be assumed to have been Jewish because his 43-year-old wife Sarah was buried in the (Jewish) Capitol City Lodge Cemetery in Hartford in 1905, with a notation that she was the wife of Wolf. (Here the name was spelled Furchpan.) Wolf typified the majority of Portland's 1890's Jewish community in that he came to work for Eastern Tinware, a factory on eastern Freestone Avenue which had for some years produced stamped and enameled tin kitchenware, decorative ware and "self-righting cuspadors." (City Directory Ad.) Eastern Tinware had been
the Heath and Smith Manufacturing Company until 1871, when it went bankrupt (PLR 10:96-97). It was acquired by a New Yorker named Joseph Scheider in January of 1874 (PLR 10:222) and remained under his name through the 1870's. In 1879 Scheider's creditors sold out to the United States Stamping Company, but Scheider appears to have remained in control. Most years the company took out a half-page ad in the city directory, an indication of its importance; the 1887-8 ad proclaimed its New York ties. The 1888-9 directory contained no mention of a tinware company, however. Apparently Joseph Scheider was re-organizing the company to create Eastern Tinware, as it was called the following year. "Eastern" probably referred to the fact that the company's several offices were all east of the Mississippi, although it might also have been a reference to the eastern European origin--Jewish or otherwise--of most of the work force.

Wolf Forshpan boarded on "Prospect Hill," (not to be confused with Prospect Street two miles north in Gildersleeve), a street no longer in existance to the northeast of Eastern Tinware. By 1892 Forshpan had moved onto Freestone Avenue near High Street. Freestone Avenue had been opened up in the mid-nineteenth century and sold off in building-lot size pieces. Architectural styles ranged from late Greek Revival style buildings from the 1850's to domestic Victorian styles, all relatively fashionable quarters for immigrants. There were also late nineteenth century tenements, built horizontally rather than vertically, on the east end of Freestone, not far from Eastern Tinware. These tenements, containing six two-story units each, housed many of the company's workers. Forshpan's name did not appear in the 1893-4 directory; he was not even accorded the usual "rem[oved] to Hartford [or wherever]!" Perhaps, as one of a scant handful of Jews, he had few acquaintances, and even fewer who spoke English--no one to tell the city directory man where he had gone. Two pieces of evidence point to Hartford, though:
his wife's 1905 gravestone and the Connecticut Roster 1917-1920, the list of World War I veterans. Enlisting in 1918 and honorably discharged in 1919 is one Morris Purshpan, born in Hartford on July 4, 1895. "Purshpan," however spelled, is a sufficiently uncommon name to suggest that Wolf Purshpan had relocated to be near the large Hartford Jewish community by 1895.

A second peddler of probable Jewish origins must have been in Portland in 1890; the first entry of his name reads, "Himelfraab, Kopel, removed to NYC." He returned to Portland according to the 1900 and 1901 directories, living on Freestone Avenue near High Street. Probably he arrived after June of 1900 when the Census was taken, as he was not included on Portland's careful Census records. Two years later he was gone.

Meyer London first appeared in Portland's City Directory in the 1891-2 edition, under two listings. The first was his occupational and residential listing: he worked at Eastern Tinware and boarded on Freestone near High. The second mention of "Maer London" occurred in the column that the City Directory publishers ran for a few years, listing the marriages of that year; "Maer London" married "Mary Godrich." Their marriage license spelled her name "Goodrich," a name going back to 1740 in Portland. At the births of the couple's three children, she was Woodwick, Herwick and Stockshark. Both she and Meyer were born in Russia, in 1867 and 1863 respectively. Lacking a rabbi and eschewing a minister, they were married by Portland's Judge John M. Murdock. According to their marriage license, it was the second marriage for each of them, and their son, born the following year, was Mary's third child (FVS 4:172). Quite likely either or both carried memories of an earlier family brutally destroyed in the pogroms or the long hard journey to freedom. Meyer and Mary moved to a rented house on Prospect Hill, had another son in 1893 and a daughter in 1895, then moved to Hartford by 1898. Merely being married by a justice of the peace and having one's name misspelled in Vital Records does not constitute proof of Jewishness, however. The Londons' 1893 son, Michael, died in 1906 and was buried in the Jewish
section of Indian Hill cemetery, confirming that the Londons were Jewish as well as suggesting that they had moved from Hartford to Middletown by 1906. Hinde or Hende London also lived and died in Portland to be buried in the Jewish section of Indian Hill cemetery. She was born Hinde Zalzaly in Russia in 1837 and was the widow of Samuel London at her death in 1920, living in a single family house in Portland. She may have been Meyer's mother.

A grave in Indian Hill Cemetery also identifies Abraham Blumer as a Jew—not his own grave, but his five-year-old daughter Rachel's. Abraham and Annie (Fierberg) Blumer were Romanians, married in 1874, when Annie was thirteen and Abraham, sixteen. (1900 Census) In 1891 Abraham left Romania. By 1893 he was listed in the City Directory as working at Eastern Tinware and renting a house near the railroad depot in Pacousett (southern Portland near the Connecticut River). Annie joined him in 1893 with eight-year-old Sarah, four-year-old "Attie," (possibly Yetta--the census taker had trouble with that name) and probably three-year-old Rachel, and Ida, in her early teens. Perhaps more children made the voyage with their mother, since Portland Vital Records list her last three children as her twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth; on the other hand, the child born in Portland a year before the twelfth is listed as the sixth—possibly meaning the sixth living, with five dead, presumably in Romania. After losing little Rachel in 1895, the Blumers lost a baby daughter Katie in 1896. The family moved to Prospect Hill around that time, then settled in a combined house and grocery store on Freestone Avenue near High Street for the next seven years. In 1899 Mrs. Blumer had her "fourteenth" child; the 1900 census tallied three daughters including the baby, and two young sons living with the Blumers, as well as two boarders, Bessie Kroll and Leo "Faiberg." Bessie was a twenty-year-old 1896 immigrant from Russia, working as a dipper at eastern Tinware, and Leo was a thirteen year old student, probably Anna Fierberg Blumer's brother or nephew, allowing for creative spelling of the name.
In 1899 the Blumers' daughter Ida was married to Jacob L. Supove by Middletown's Rabbi J. Blumstein. Although Ida had been born in Romania, her husband was a native of Russia—another "mixed marriage." Jacob was listed only twice in the City Directory. In 1893-4, he was working for Eastern Tinware and boarding off Ingersoll Avenue, a long-gone street north of Eastern Tinware. In 1896-7, still with Eastern Tinware, he was boarding on Freestone near High, near Abe Blumer's house and grocery. By 1899, when he married, Jacob was described as a resident of New York City and a "Deckorator (sic)"—most likely a decorator of tinware rather than an interior decorator. Ida may have been a clerk in her father's store, since the 1900 Census lists fifteen-year-old Sarah, the then-oldest child, in that occupation. By 1905 Abraham Blumer had moved his family and business to Middletown; his daughter and her husband seem to have lived there also: in 1914 Ida Blumer Supove was buried in the Jewish section of Indian Hill Cemetery. Forty years later Jacob was buried beside her.

The only land ever purchased by the 1890's Jewish community was purchased by two men whose names first appeared in the 1893-4 City Directory, Samuel Meirowitz and Benjamin Ewnowitch. (PLR 15:512) That land was a one-acre Cemetery lot, purchased March 13, 1897 from Portland's tobacco-growing Hale family. The co-operation of Ewnowitch and Meirowitz is extremely curious, since the former was a Polish clothing peddler (PVS 4:206) and the latter was Austrian and worked in the tinware plant (PVS 4:200). Not only was there the ethnic difference, but the difference in occupation represents a probable personality contrast between the two. Many Jews in the 1880-1920 wave of immigrants were willing to work in the factories where they could find employment with relatively little skill or English—some were not. A study of Hartford Jews by Sandra H. Becker and Ralph L. Pearson explains that "there was only one reason to become a peddler: you had no skill and wanted to stay out of the shops." (p. 201) Meirowitz worked for the tinware factory for all of the seven years he lived in Portland; Ewnowitch peddled for
the same amount of time, afterward settling into the clothing store which
must have been his dream during the long years with the pushcart. No
family relationship linked the two men from all appearances: Meirovitz's
wife was the former Bertha Guttenberg, born in Austria in 1861. Probably
they were married in Austria, since their 1893 son, born in Portland, was
listed as their sixth. Annie Ewnowitz's maiden name was never given, but
the 1900 Census shows that she was born in Russia/Poland and married in 1889,
presumably there. Benjamin immigrated to America two years later and set
to work immediately to raise the money for Annie to join him. The census
tells us he was never unemployed, and by 1900, was a naturalized citizen.
In 1895 Annie was able to come to America. Their first daughter was born
in August of 1896 and a second in January of 1899. Curiously, no Ewnowitches
were buried in the little Portland Jewish cemetery; Benjamin, Annie, and their
daughters are buried in Middletown's Indian Hill. The couple had more
children in Middletown where they had moved by 1904. Saul, living 1903 to
1916, was most likely born in Middletown, since he was not recorded in
Portland's Vital Records. The 1904 Middletown City Directory lists Benjamin
as a clothier in partnership with Roger Kennedy, an interesting blend of
an older ethnic group with a newer one. The partnership with a more established
immigrant faction may have been a triumph; however, the next decade was a
hard one for the Ewnowitches. In 1914, fifteen-year-old Julia died. Two
years later, it was thirteen-year-old Saul. In 1918 Benjamin died, about
55, and Minie, only twenty-three, followed the next year. (An undated grave
for an Esther Enowitch is also arranged within the family plot.) Mother Anna
died in 1929. Ewnowitz's son Eliot lived in Middletown until a few years
ago.

Samuel Meirovitz and his wife had a son in Portland in 1893 and daughters
in 1895 and 1898. By 1900 they had moved to Derby. Thus the two cemetery
purchasers had come from different countries, lived markedly different lives,
and gone their separate ways, never using the little cemetery. Exnowitch
supposedly quit claimed his interest to the Independent Order of Brit Abraham,
who changed their name and left the Middletown area for Meriden and eventually
New York. No one knows who owns the land today. The eight burials which
took place there have either been transferred to Middletown (Indian Hill or
the Jewish Cemetery on Pine Street, established in the 1930's), or
forgotten. The partnership between the polish peddler and the Austrian tin-
worker suggests, if not the quirkiness of friendship, either a spirit of unity,
or an attempt for unity, on the part of the various elements in the little
community. Probably no record was made of whatever was occurring within the
group, though. Even the Congregation Adath Israel in Middletown, established
in 1889, was not recorded with the other religious organizations in the city
directory until 1910. The people getting into print were largely the Yankees.
There would really be no evidence of Portland's Jewish community if it were
not for the one-acre cemetery.

The first burial in the cemetery was three-day-old Lillie Zogorskie.
She and her twin brother Jo were the fourth and third children (respectively)
of Michael, sometimes Maurice, Zogorskie (spelled several different ways)
and his wife Rosa. Michael, a Russian, first appeared in the City Directory
in 1893-4, boarding on Prospect Hill and working at eastern Tinware. He
wasn't mentioned again until 1897-8, when he was renting a house on High Street
near Marlborough Street, but the omission probably represents poor canvassing
rather than a move out of town. After the birth of a son, "Ezzy," in 1898,
he apparently moved from the area.

One last 1893-4 entrant to the community was Meyer Michael Markowitz
and his wife, the former Bessie Faber. They were Russians, in the early
 twenties. It is likely, though unproven, that they were Jewish; not only did they have Jewish-sounding first and last names, but Meyer worked at Eastern Tinware.

The Jewishness of Harry and Karpel Markowitz can be established by the marriage of Harry's daughter by Kadoz Frank, who, the town clerk carefully notes, is a "Habre." Karpel Markowitz's baby son Samuel was the eighth and last burial in the little Jewish cemetery. First appearing in the 1895-6 City Directory, the Markowitzes (it is uncertain whether they were related) seem to have had a problem with English. Karpel is also Karl, Carl, Corporal, Karrale, and Kopel; Harry is Hais, once. Their wives, both Anna and Annie, are once Hannah, and once Celia. At one point Carpel's surname is just Kowitz; later it is Smerkowitz and Smarkowitz. It is also m-a-r-c/k-o-w/v-itz in various combinations. The 1900 Census, listing only Carl (Karpel), states that his Annie cannot speak English. But the finest misspelling of all comes from Portland Vital Records. Anyone skimming the Vital Records index for Jewish surnames could ignore the "Mc's" in theory. They should all be Irish, shouldn't they? Not necessarily. When, in 1895, Harry and Anna (Merkyan) McCitz had a little boy whom they called Benjamin, closer inspection was warranted. Sure enough, Harry was a floorwalker in a tin shop. The "McCitzes" were ostensibly German. One particularly benighted record keeper had sounded out their strange name: "M[AR]C-O-[W]ITZ....MC-O-itz." Further along amid the Patricks and the Colleens were Harry and Annie McCwith (did one of them lisp, too?) and Meyer and Annie Mcowitz.

Harry and Annie had had a child in Portland in 1893, so they were probably earlier arrivals than the City Directory suggests. This child, Mayasa (later changed to Beatrice) was the fourth of eight. Harry evolved from a "laborer" (1893) to a floorwalker in the tin factory (1895) to a grocer (1898) on Freestone Avenue beyond East Main Street. By 1904 he had moved his grocery to Union Street in Middletown. Oddly, he wasn't apparent in the 1900
Census although he was in the City Directory until 1902; he may have been partially moved to Middletown and counted there, or he may have been missed by either the Census taker or this researcher.

Karpel Markowitz was included in the Census of 1900. He had been born in 1863 in Russia and married there in 1882 to Annie/Anna/Hannah Bares/Peters/Levatsky, two years younger than himself. (Interestingly neither he nor his wife could give the Census taker the month of their birth.) After twelve years and three children Karpel immigrated to New York. He told the Census taker he had never been unemployed, so quite likely he was hired straight off the boat to go to Eastern Tinware. One area resident, anonymous at her own request, tells of industrial "recruiters" who greeted the immigrants with offers of employment as they stepped off the boat. In this way her own father came directly to New Britain to work in the factories there. By 1896, when Annie and the children joined him, Karpel was operating a press in the tin-shop. He lived on Prospect Hill until 1899 when he moved to Ingersol Avenue near the factory. The couple had their eighteen- and thirteen-year-old daughters living with them and attending school in 1900; another child born in Russia was dead. They also had a four-year-old daughter and a two-year-old son, both born in Portland. On July 31, 1900, just days after the Census taker had passed through, Annie gave birth to a son whom they named Samuel. Little Samuel lived three months then died of gastroenteritis (PWS 4:156) on November 5, 1900. In the Orthodox tradition he was buried the same day, the eighth and last burial of Portland's Jewish cemetery. The Markowitzes had a daughter in 1901 then moved to Middletown to follow the tinware business after its shutdown in Portland.

Esther Markowitz was Harry's daughter, born in Russiz in 1881. In January of 1900 she married jeweler and watchmaker Joseph Pinsker, born in Russia in 1872. The marriage was performed by Kadoz Frank, previously designated "Rabbe." Late in November of 1900 they had a son whom they named Samuel David Pinsker. Here could be an indication of the relatedness of Harry
to Karpel. It is Jewish tradition to name children after the dead rather than the living. Three weeks before the birth of Esther's child, Karpel's son Samuel had died. If Karpel were, for example, Esther's uncle, she might honor the dead child by including his name, Samuel, with the David already picked for a male child. Birth records show that middle names were not common in this community at this time. Similarly, Esther's father and mother (Harry and Anna) had a child seven months later, who was entered in the birth records as Samuel, then crossed out and changed to Philip. "You can't name him Samuel, Poppa—we already have a Samuel!" Hardly conclusive evidence that they were brothers...

Joseph Pinsker had first appeared in the Portland Directory in 1897-8, listed as a mechanic. His marriage license listed him as a jeweler, however, and the census of 1900 described him as a watchmaker, never unemployed. He had come to the United States in 1889 from Russia and was a naturalized citizen. By 1901, the Pinskers had left Portland for Torrington, another small town with a handful of factories and no outward sign of a Jewish community.

Ignatz Hoffman, like Joseph Pinsker, first appeared in the City Directory in 1897-8. That year he worked as a clerk, living and working on Main Street near Wolcott Street, quite near the river, and relatively far from the rest of the Jewish community. Born in Austria in 1869, he had immigrated in 1884. Even though he had not come to Portland until 1897, he had never been unemployed—his was a trade which could be practiced anywhere, as the following year's directory indicated: he was a shoemaker. He then worked near the railroad depot on Marlborough Street although he still lived near the river. By 1900 he was living and working on Main Street below Silver Street, still southward of the small Jewish community. The 1900 Census shows that the Hoffmans lived in a two-family house shared with the family of August Segegren (Scandanavian), and located between Joe Brauski (Polish non-Jew) and James
Taylor (probably Yankee, English or black), a truly mixed neighborhood.

Hoffman's wife, the former Hermina Roth, had been born in Austria in 1875 and brought to America at age 13 (1888). The Hoffmans were married about 1896 and had a baby son the following year. He lived one day, becoming the third person buried in the little Jewish cemetery. In 1898 they had a daughter then a son in 1901, and another daughter in 1904. According to the 1905 city directory they had moved to Middletown by that year, but their stillborn son Samuel was listed in Portland's vital records in 1906. And, unless the burial was not recorded or a stone never put on the grave, Samuel Hoffman was not buried either in Portland's Jewish cemetery or at Indian Hill.

The Aaronson brothers, Louis and Samuel, arrived in Portland around 1898. Louis, born in Russia in 1872, had come to America in 1889; his brother younger by four years, immigrated in 1891. Apparently they had made good progress in acquiring skills and fluency in English between Ellis Island and Portland, because Samuel worked as a bookkeeper, and Louis as a timekeeper and later a foreman, in the tinware factory, all relatively high-status positions.

On August 6, 1899, Louis was married to 18-year-old Dora Michaelowitz by Rabbi J. Blumstein. Seven months later, Samuel married Rosie Battalin, twenty-one. Their service was performed by "G.Blumstein per S.Blumstein, Rev." (Certificate, Town Clerk, Portland) The use of the term "Reverend" may have been an attempt to translate the function of the Jewish clergyman, or it may have been an indication that the individual was not fully certified as a rabbi.

Both young wives were Russian immigrants also. Rosie had arrived in 1896; Dora had come with her mother and father in 1890. Initially the Aaronson brothers boarded on the south end of High Street, but after their marriages they took up residence on Freestone Avenue beyond East Main Street. The Census taker recorded the family arrangement: house #313 was Samuel and Rosie. House # 314 was Samuel and Sophia "Michaelson"—note the Americanization of Michaelowitz—and "daughter" Dora and "son-in-law" Louis Aaronson. (Census takers's designations.)
The Michaelowitz/Michaelsons were born in 1857 (him) and 1861 (her) in Russia, and married there in 1875. Like the Blumers they wed in their mid-teens. Living with them in 1900 were their twenty-four year old son Joseph who immigrated in 1896, another son Joseph Edward, born in 1885 and immigrated in 1899, their daughter Dora and her husband, and a son Harry, born in 1895 in Portland. At the time he was born he was listed as their fourth child, which, counting Dora, is accurate. The census indicated that a fifth child was no longer alive. The Michaelowitz's story, told by those dates, indicates a life of sadness and separation—they had only five children, one dead, after twenty-five years of marriage. They had fled their native land with a nine year-old daughter, leaving behind two young sons. The six-year delay in Joseph's immigration suggests that he might have been funneled into the army despite his youth; the reason for leaving five-year-old Edward behind for nine years can only be a sad one. Michaelowitz, a house painter, was one of the few census participants who admitted unemployment—two years worth. Surely their lives must have been harder than those of many others who came to Portland. The very fact that they left Russia together indicates that the town where they had lived may have been one which persecuted its Jews more severely, allowing them no time for Samael to set himself up then send for his family. Of the ten probable Jewish couples in the 1900 Census who were married in the old country, only three emigrated together. The other seven husbands their wives by one to three years, in order to find employment and living quarters. This delay strongly suggests that conditions overseas were generally bad, but not usually desperate, except in cases such as the Michaelowitzes.

By 1901 the Aaronson brothers had moved to Ansonia. If Samuel Michaelowitz was the Samuel Matthewlevitz of the city directory, he too left, albeit unrecorded. Possibly he went to Ansonia also, to stay with the family he'd long been denied.
About the same time that the Aaronsons came to Portland, Max Kutner arrived also. Max's Jewishness is ascertained by the fact that he served as financial secretary for the Congregation Adath Israel for several years beginning in 1911. Unlike the others in this study, Max was born in New York, in 1874. His parents were born in Germany, as was his wife, Ida Tannenbaum/Lenenbaum. Born in 1877, she had come to America when she was thirteen. The Kutners were married in 1896 or7 (not in Portland) then settled on Main Street near Wolcott Street with a confectionary, fruit and cigar store. In 1899 Max moved to High Street above Freestone Avenue and went to work for the tinware company as a clerk—a white collar job. Oddly, he was listed as an enameler of tinware by the census taker; perhaps he served as a clerk in that department or worked briefly there in 1900. By 1901 the city directory described him as a "rec clerk" (records or recording). Obviously he was an upwardly mobile young man. But the census suggests that the Kutners were unusually ambitious: Ida worked, as a dipper in the tinware plant! And who took care of two-year-old Hattie? Probably one of the EIGHT boarders. Five worked in the tinware company, two worked in the quarries, and one was a young woman, no occupation listed—very likely a babysitter when necessary.

Eastern Tinware had become the National Enameling and Stamping Company by 1899. In 1896 a judgment had been handed down against the old United States Stamping Company which had to be absorbed by Eastern Tinware (PLR 17:332). Volume 17 of Portland's land records contains several indications of financial trouble for the tinware plant, under various names. Apparently the Portland operation was shut down in 1902 and a similar company, employing many of the same people, established as the New England Enameling Company, on River Road in South Farms in Middletown. In 1901 the Kutners had a little boy whom they named Abe. Soon after, Max and family followed the tinware business to Middletown to work as a clerk there.
Louis Rosenwasser, a baker, also came to Portland around 1898. Born in 1874 in Hungary, he came to America at the age of sixteen and was a naturalized citizen by 1900. On November 7, 1899 a double wedding took place in Portland: Louis Rosenwasser married Jennie Mittleman, and Louis Mittleman, her brother, married Bertha Rosenwasser, sister of Louis. Twenty-year-old Jennie, also Hungarian, had been in America for six years. Her brother was twenty-six and her new sister-in-law was just seventeen. Esther Rosenwasser signed an "X" of permission for her daughter to marry. The clergyman who performed the service was a "Rev. H. Kopelman." More than likely he was Harris Kopelman, cited in Rabbi Silverman's book on Hartford Jews as a cantor and a shohet (ritual slaughterer) for turn of the century eastern European Jews. He would possess the power to marry people while lacking the complete training and certification to be a rabbi.

Louis Rosenwasser's bakery was located on Freestone Avenue near Main Street; his house was further east, beyond East Main Street. His mother Esther (also Ethel and Atta) lived with the young couple. Born in Hungary in 1840, she was the widow of Moses Rosenwasser. Five of her eight children were still alive. She had come to America in 1897 and was unable to speak English although the census taker said she could read and write. Her X of consent for her 17 year old's marriage would suggest otherwise.

The Rosenwassers had five sons in Portland between 1900 and 1907; one died in 1902 although neither Jewish cemetery indicates the burial. The family remained in Portland until sometime shortly before 1912, when a deed gives their address as Bath Beach, Brooklyn (PLR 19:648).

Louis Fierberg came to Portland in 1899 to work for the tinware plant which was by now the National Enameling and Stamping Company, although he also worked as a carpenter according to both the census and the vital records. Born in 1865 in Romania, he had married Yetta/Katie Wasgoodrich, five years his junior, in 1890. He was probably Abe Blumer's brother-in-law. In 1897 he left his pregnant wife and three children to seek a better life
in America. "Never unemployed," (Census) since his arrival in New York, it took him only a year to earn the money for his family's passage. Yetta, 8-year-old Mina, Leo, five, Nathan, three and baby Samuel came to America in 1898. Samuel died in December of the following year from "pulmonary congestion" (PVS 4:152) and was buried in the Portland Jewish cemetery. The couple named their son born the following October after the dead baby. By 1902 they were gone, no longer listed in the City Directory. The Connecticut Roster 1917-1920 and the Capital City Lodge Cemetery show that they went to Hartford eventually, however. On January 30, 1917 Louis Fierberg died in Hartford. That July, young Samuel enlisted in the National Guard. He gave his age as 18 and 8/12—approximately what the first Samuel would have been. He was only 16 and 10/12. Unfortunately he did not live to see 18 and 8/12—he was killed in action April 20, 1918 with the American Expeditionary Forces. Word of his death was sent to his mother, Yetta, on Avon Street in Hartford.

In December of 1917 his brother Nathan (the 3-year-old immigrant) had been drafted, giving his birthplace as Bucharest, Romania. (This was the only town of origin discovered in this work.) Nathan served until 1919, then returned home to Avon Street.

Morris Morrell was the last of the verifiable Jews to appear in Portland in this group. He first appeared in the 1900 city directory, living and working as a barber at 3 High Street. Quite likely he lived in Portland earlier because his 1897 marriage to Rosa/Rosie Rogolsky is filed there. "Rabre" Kadoz Frank officiated. Born in Russia in 1873, Morrell had immigrated in 1890 and was a naturalized citizen. Rosa had immigrated at age fifteen in 1891 and lived in New York City at the time of her marriage. As of 1900 the couple had one child, a two-year-old son. He was not mentioned in Portland Vital Records; perhaps Rosa stayed with relatives out of town for her confinement. Alexander, born in 1901, was recorded in Portland as the Morrells' third child. In 1904, the Morrells were listed in the Middletown section
of the City Directory, as "removed to New York City."

The census brings to light one more facet of the Jewish immigrant picture. Over half the Jews in Portland worked for Eastern Tinware, which was owned by Joseph Scheider. Scheider was born in 1841 in Bohemia. When he was seven he was brought to the United States and was (by 1900) a naturalized citizen and a "capitalist," the occupation stated on the census. He had married in 1868, purchasing the facilities for the tinware company in 1874. By the 1890's his company was New York based, with nine branches between Portland and St. Louis, Missouri, Scheider lived for a time in Portland, in the elaborate Italianate-style Erastus Brainerd Jr. house, now the easternmost of Elmcrest Institutes's three beautiful old houses on the south side of Marlborough Street. Was Joseph Scheider part of the enterprising earlier wave of German Jews, well-established in the community by the time the eastern Europeans came? (The Jews in the Making of America, p. 123) Perhaps New York City Vital Records and synagogue records offer an answer. (New York City is only slightly easier territory for Vital Records research than Moscow or Bucharest.)

Scheider's wife was the former Louise Stine born in New York in 1855. Her parents came from "Baden"--Germany, her father, Lewis, born in 1827, and her mother, Caroline, in 1833. They had immigrated in the early 1850's. Although her father had died in 1896 (PYS 4:138) her mother lived with the couple, and both of Louise Stine Scheider's siblings were still alive. One of them was a brother Edward, born in New York in 1860. He had never been unemployed, due in part to the fact that he served as manager in his brother-in-law's tinware factory for many years. He had a spacious house built on East Main Street for himself (Portland's History and Architecture, p.96) then moved to Buffalo in 1902, the year the plant closed down. Were these Jewish Stines? (Named Caroline, Edward and Lewis?) Maybe. Maybe they weren't. The German Jewish community generally resented the old-country ways of the eastern European Jews. Yet Scheider hired Jews by the dozens, probably three to four times as many as this paper has been able to document. Did
he hire them out of a feeling of kinship or simply because they would be ambitious and highly moral? He also hired many non-Jewish eastern Europeans and some Scandinavians. It is a situation which can be considered from many perspectives.
The following chart summarizes the Jews studied in this paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Born</th>
<th>Moved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>* Chone Horwytz</td>
<td>Peddler</td>
<td>north</td>
<td>1888-97</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>Hartford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Abraham Horwytz</td>
<td>Peddler</td>
<td>north</td>
<td>1891-92</td>
<td>Rus.1863</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Kopel Himelfrab</td>
<td>Peddler</td>
<td>Freestone</td>
<td>1890,1900-1</td>
<td>?</td>
<td>NYC?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meyer London</td>
<td>E.T.</td>
<td>Prospect Hill</td>
<td>1891-98</td>
<td>Rus.1863</td>
<td>Hartford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abrahm Blumer</td>
<td>ET-grocer</td>
<td>Freestone</td>
<td>1893-1905</td>
<td>Rom.1858</td>
<td>Middletown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob L. Supove</td>
<td>&quot;Deckorator&quot;</td>
<td>Freestone</td>
<td>1893-97</td>
<td>Rus.1873</td>
<td>Middletown?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Meirowitz</td>
<td>ET</td>
<td>Prospect Hill</td>
<td>1893-1900</td>
<td>Aus.1860</td>
<td>Derby</td>
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<tr>
<td>Benjamin Ewnowitch</td>
<td>Peddler--clothier</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1893-1904</td>
<td>Pol.1862</td>
<td>Middletown</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Zogorskie</td>
<td>ET</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1893-98</td>
<td>Rus.1871</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>* Meyer Markowitz</td>
<td>ET</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1893-4</td>
<td>Rus.1869</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harry Markowitz</td>
<td>ET--grocer</td>
<td>Freestone</td>
<td>1895-1903</td>
<td>Rus.1863</td>
<td>Middletown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karpel Markowitz</td>
<td>ET</td>
<td>Prospect Hill</td>
<td>1895-1902</td>
<td>Rus.1863</td>
<td>Middletown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Pinsker</td>
<td>Jeweler</td>
<td>Freestone</td>
<td>1897-1901</td>
<td>Rus.1872</td>
<td>Torrington</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignatz Hoffman</td>
<td>Shoemaker</td>
<td>Main</td>
<td>1897-1906</td>
<td>Aus.1869</td>
<td>Middletown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis Aaronson</td>
<td>Timekeeper-performan</td>
<td>Freestone</td>
<td>1898-1901</td>
<td>Rus.1872</td>
<td>Ansonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Aaronson</td>
<td>Bookkeeper</td>
<td>Freestone</td>
<td>1898-1901</td>
<td>Rus.1876</td>
<td>Ansonia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samuel Michaelowitz</td>
<td>House painter</td>
<td>Freestone</td>
<td>1895-1901</td>
<td>Rus.1857</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Max Kutner</td>
<td>Clerk</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1898-1902</td>
<td>N.Y.,1874</td>
<td>Middletown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis Rosenwasser</td>
<td>Baker</td>
<td>Freestone</td>
<td>1898-1910?</td>
<td>Hun.1874</td>
<td>Brooklyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis Fierberg</td>
<td>ET &amp; carpenter</td>
<td>Freestone</td>
<td>1899-1902</td>
<td>Rom.1865</td>
<td>Hartford</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morris Morrell</td>
<td>Jeweler</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>1900-1903</td>
<td>Rus.1873</td>
<td>Middletown--NYC</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* not proven to be Jewish

The Horwytzes and Himelfrab were included because they represented the peddler element and, given their names, were almost certainly Jewish; Meyer Markowitz was mentioned because the other Markowitzes were.
Probably this sample of people is less than half of the existing community. The 1893-4 City Directory shows at least forty tin workers with Jewish-sounding names; only six of these are included in this research.

The primary Jewish neighborhood in Portland in the 1890's consisted of the four streets within a one block radius of Eastern Tinware, Freestone Avenue east of East Main Street, southern High Street, Ingersol Avenue, and Prospect Hill.

A certain amount of interrelatedness existed within the community. The Aaronsons and the Michaelowitzes, the Fierbergs, Supoves and Blumers, the Pinskers and the Markowitzes, and the Mittleman-Rosenwasser sibling swap are the only documented examples—undoubtedly others existed. Like the incredibly inbred English settlers of the 1600's, these people had only a handful of their own kind from which to choose their mates. Unfortunately, there seemed to be no information on towns of origin; it would be interesting to know if the Portland settlement was a partial reconstruction of Kobrin or Kiev or Anatevka.

In all probability this group of people formed a close-knit Orthodox community. Reform Judaism was the province of the older, more "Americanized" German Jews; the recent immigrants tried to carry on the life they'd had to abandon in the shtetl. The Bicentennial booklet of the Adath Israel states that within the community many old traditions continued into the 1920's. Yiddish epithets were used to distinguish men of the same first name—"Herschel the Black Beard" versus "Herschel the Shammes (sexton)". Men used their first names but women, no matter how long their friendship, addressed each other as "Mrs." Until the 1930's and 40's, younger daughters were not permitted to marry before older ones, and a matchmaker was employed to pair off young people (p.9). According to the same booklet (p.3), religious services were held at private homes and an occasional hall. Emerald Hall, formerly at 258 Main Street, and Keane Dance Studio at 249
Main Street are reputed to have been sites of turn-of-the-century services, and Waverly Hall, no longer extant, on Waverly Avenue, served as the location for the 1900 wedding of Samuel and Rosie Aaronson. (PVR) Tradition maintains that Harry Shapiro, founder of Shapiro's Department Store in Middletown, was Portland's first bar mitzvah boy in 1902. (The Shapiros do not appear in this paper because of the sketchy records on their family in both city directory and vital records. Once again, befuddled spelling plays its part: "Izak Zaperia" is quite likely some relation to Middletown's present-day Shapiros.)

How did the community respond to these people? Aside from the frequent misspelling and occasional overlooking of names, it is difficult to say. Once the eastern European Jews had left their villages, they made their way to a port of exit to board a steamship, travelling in steerage, for America. Such a port was Hamburg, mentioned in the Jan.10, 1893 Penny Press as having an epidemic of cholera. For this reason emigration was temporarily suspended. The Penny Press from Jan. 7, 1893 observed somewhat morosely, that "immigration is not likely to be restricted..." by legislation then under consideration, so it appears that native Americans and even other immigrant groups were becoming alarmed by the newest mob of foreigners. As if their several guttural languages and their desperation were not sufficiently unappealing, these people were not even Christian! However, immigration was not severely restricted until 1924 in the face of a rising tide of xenophobia.

The School Visitors Reports (Portland Town Clerk) for the 1890's give a slight indication that District 6, where the Jewish children would have gone to school, had its problems. By 1891 this apparently two-room school house, already considered old and in poor condition, had "20% more scholars" than it was designed for, and no desks, only benches. 1892's school visitors
declared that "the school building is not worthy of the name." Most of the names on the perfect attendance records were Scandanavian, but in 1893 "Esther Mcowitz" had perfect for one term, as did "Rebecca Shapiro" in 1894. In 1897 not only was the school overcrowded but many children were "unacquainted with English." However "in the spring many families left town for work elsewhere." That year Nathan Meirovitz, Samuel Tonesky and Mary Marcowitz had perfect attendance for one term, and Maxy Meirovitz, for two. This was no small accomplishment in a time when the head of the family was earning $1.50 a week for his 60-hour work week, and any child old enough to do schoolwork was probably old enough to do factory work to ease his family's burden. Rent for 5 rooms with no improvements in Portland cost $6 per month in 1901. (Bicentennial Booklet, pp. 3 & 5) 1898 saw the removal of more families from town, as did 1899. Also in 1899, irregular attendance was attributed to sickness and stormy weather. However, Miss Strickland, the teacher was praised for "object teaching" in 1898 to the children who spoke no English, and in 1899, thusly: "She does not neglect any, no matter what nation they come from, or what unintelligible language they speak."

Perhaps if Eastern Tinware had continued to thrive, this little community would have stayed and evolved within the larger community. But Eastern Tinware died and seemed to be resurrected in Middletown, so the people took their Orthodoxy and their "unintelligible language" and left. (Adath Israel was an Orthodox synagogue until 1945, when it became Conservative.) Of the people studied in this paper, eighteen could be traced to other towns. The percentages calculated for various destinations may offer some clue as to where the community as a whole went. Of the eighteen, seven, or 39%, went to Middletown. 22% (4) went to Hartford, and 17% to New York. 11% went to Ansonia and 5 1/2% each went to Derby and Torrington, or more accurately stated, 22% went to various other towns.
As testimony to the pain of the immigrant experience, the 1900 City Directory records that Isaac Jusman, Harry Losman and Mike Sach returned to Russia that year. It's not totally certain that they were Jews; it's not certain that they were injured or killed in the violence of the next two decades. But it would probably be safe to say——better they should have stayed in Portland.
JOSPEH SCHEIDER.

(Middlesex Tribune Souvenir Edition)

THE ERASTUS BRAINERD HOUSE.
(The Architecture & History of Portland)
THE EDWARD L. STINE HOUSE.

Built in 1897

(All architectural pictures taken from the Architecture and History of Portland)
HALL'S STORE/BELL'S STORE.

(now Keane Dance Studio- religious services are reputed to have been held on the third floor in the early 1900's)

FREESTONE AVENUE TENEMENT - 102-112 Freestone Avenue.

This and the next two tenement buildings provided housing for Eastern Tinware employees.)
The people who lived, according to the city directory, "on Freestone near High" lived in those buildings.
The Jews who lived on "Freestone Beyond East Main" probably rented these relatively nice-looking ca. 1850 buildings.
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