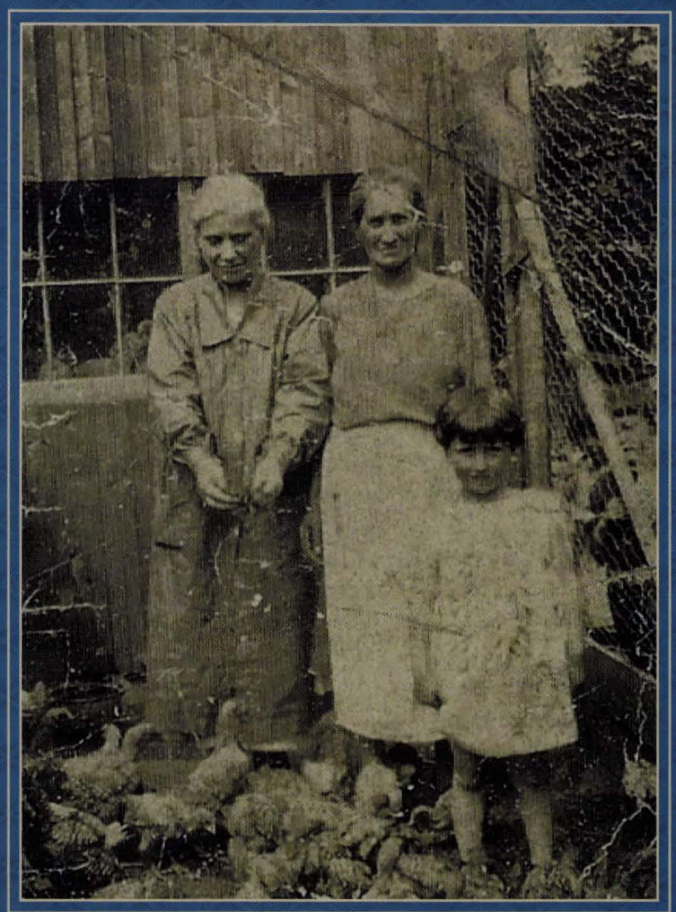
SOIL AND SHUL *IN THE* BERKSHIRES

The Untold Story of Sandisfield's Jewish Farm Colony



Lorraine J. German

Soil and Shul in the Berkshires
The Untold Story of Sandisfield's Jewish Farm Colony

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For the Linder family.
They welcomed me into their home in Montville
in 1975 and my heart never left.

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Foreword

When several Yiddish-speaking families from New York's Lower East Side went "back to the land" in the southern Berkshires in the early decades of the twentieth century, they were eager participants in modernization of the Jewish people. While the rest of America seemed to be abandoning the farm in order to begin a new life in the city, this small group of recent immigrants from Eastern Europe was doing its part to reverse the trend. They made the move for many reasons, and their experiments in rural living took many forms, but their actions had in common the fact that they were bold and unprecedented.

Like all good collective histories, *Soil and Shul in the Berkshires* reveals the variety of circumstances that led to the creation of the Sandisfield colony, as well as the myriad outcomes that attended upon the lives its participants. From start to finish, however, the story it tells is unified by its thematic attention to how adaptable, dynamic, and determined the colonists were in their collective effort to break the mold of Jewish history. They had already done so by leaving their *shtetlach,* moving to cities, and crossing the Atlantic to America. Their attempt to wrench a living from the stony pastures of southeastern Berkshire County, with little or no agricultural training or equipment, distinguished them even further from their fellow Jews. Not since biblical times had significant numbers of Jews farmed, let alone owned their own land. From a Jewish perspective, this recurrence to rural existence was indicative not of regression but of forward movement.

If their story is largely unknown, it is in part because it has gotten lost in amongst all the other stories of Jewish modernization. The mass immigration to the United States that took place between the 1880s and the 1920s yielded enormous changes in the religious life, economic activity, educational achievement levels, cultural affiliations, and political status of Jews.

Jewish American life has been one of constant transformation, and a result that was once unthinkable is now established fact: Jews have made it in America. The path was not an easy one, however, and the stories of the Sandisfield farmers offer the truest confirmation of that reality. New England's agricultural heyday had occurred in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and because the Berkshires had some of the thinnest, least arable soil in a region that was already known for the paucity of its farming potential, the farms that these Jewish farmers acquired had long since been abandoned and given up upon as devoid of any economic value.

As religious, cultural, and often linguistic outliers, they had to struggle to overcome the demeaning stereotypes that their neighbors often used to hold them at arm's length. For all of their gumption, the Sandisfield Jews faced long, basically impossible odds. The handful of them who met with relative economic and social success as farmers did so as the result of a powerful combination of good fortune, extreme adaptability, and business savvy. The majority acted upon their survival instincts and headed back to the city when they needed to. Their common determination to make a go of life in this rural pocket of America without relinquishing their Jewish identity makes for a stirring story.

- Michael Hoberman
2018

Michael Hoberman is a professor of English Studies at Fitchburg State University. He is the author of several books, including *How Strange It Seems: The Cultural Life of Jews in Small-Town New England* (UMASS Press, 2008) and, more recently, *A Hundred Acres of America: The Geography of Jewish American Literary History* (Rutgers University Press, 2018).

Preface

In the summer of 2012, Sandisfield celebrated its 250th anniversary. One of the products of that celebration was *Sandisfield Then and Now: 1762-2012*, a book by local author Ron Bernard that chronicled the town's history. As extensive as the book is, it didn't sufficiently tell the story of the Jewish community that has been part of Sandisfield since the early 20th century.

Three years later, in the fall of 2015, Sandisfield Arts Center board member Sandy Parisky and his wife, Flora, invited Albert Stern, editor of the *Berkshire Jewish Voice*, to visit the Arts Center. Sandy and Flora asked Ron to join them to provide some historical background on the building, first as a Baptist church and later as a Jewish synagogue. That visit prompted Sandy, Flora, and Ron to take another look at documenting a long-neglected piece of Sandisfield's history. In February 2016, Ron asked me if I would write the story. Flora's article about Sandisfield's historic synagogue in the April 2016 issue of the *Berkshire Jewish Voice* helped generate interest in the book project.

The project's first step was to form an advisory committee and this book wouldn't have been possible without the efforts of its members: Ron Bernard, Nina Carr, Steve and Lorraine German, Joanne Olson, Flora and Sandy Parisky, Cindy Pinsky, Anita Shapiro, and Charlotte Westhead. Many of the members are descended from the original Jewish community. Others joined because they believed it was a story that needed to be told. Sadly, Sandy didn't live to see the publication of the book he had championed for so long.

The Board of Directors of the Sandisfield Arts Center arranged for the Arts Center to be the project's fiscal sponsor. Our committee is deeply grateful to them for their support. We would also like to thank the Wasserman Streit Y'DIYAH Memorial Fund of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation, the Sandisfield Cultural Council, the Otis Cultural Council, and the Feigenbaum Foundation for their generous grants.

The story of Sandisfield's Jewish community is a story of families, and our committee members were gratified to hear from so many families who had ties to that community. My thanks to Michael Barrie, Gertrud Michelson, Eleanor Skolnick, Rose Petrokofsky, Robert Schachter, Marvin Sandler, Jerry Jacobson, George Rothstein, Marilyn Leiman, Nina Carr, Joanne Olson, Steve German, Cindy Pinsky, Trudi Reisner, Helen Nejfelt, Madeline Johnson, Paul Newman, David Moss, Martha Conway, Joan Petrokofsky, Bernice Jensky, Arie Haller, Linda Boteach, Barbara Boas, Carol Kessler, Sheila Gamradt, Fred and Michelle Harwood, Ron Linder, Andrew and Lynn Pyenson, Paul and Lucille Siegel, Toni Conn, Miriam Bazensky, Nina Hryckvich, Walter Linkovich, Norton Fletcher, Keith and Brenda Larson, and Linda Kaplan for sharing their stories, memories, and photographs.

I'm also indebted to Charlotte Westhead for providing me with much of the information she's accrued over the years, to Nadav Sela and Arie Haller for their help translating Hebrew text, and to Elizabeth Strauss of the Amenia Historical Society.

Additionally, I would like to thank my editor, Bill Price; my graphic designer, Tina Sotis; and our grant writer, Liana Toscanini.

To my husband, Steve, I am more appreciative than I can express for his love and support during my two-year mission to transform countless hours of research into the story of real people.



Ron Bernard, Nina Carr, Cindy Pinsky, Sandy Parisky, Flora Parisky, Lorraine German, and Steve German.

Not pictured: Joanne Olson, Anita Shapiro, and Charlotte Westhead

Introduction

The Berkshires.

The words evoke images of a summer performance at Tanglewood, the charm of Norman Rockwell's Stockbridge, and brilliant fall foliage. For a Jewish immigrant living in one of the overcrowded tenements of New York City in the early 1900s, the words evoked images of a life free from sweatshops and a piece of land they could call their own.

Long before the Berkshires were a destination for modern tourists, towns like Stockbridge and Lenox were summer getaways for visitors who could afford to spend their leisure time enjoying the pleasures country life had to offer. Other towns, like Great Barrington and Pittsfield, were busy commercial centers. The one thing they had in common was their proximity to the railroads and the access the rails provided.

Unfortunately, towns in the remote reaches of Berkshire County didn't fare as well and their landscapes were littered with farms long abandoned by owners no longer able to make a living. Typical of these was Sandisfield on the Connecticut border, which had been in a steady decline since the 1860s. By the end of the 19th century, so much farmland had been abandoned in Sandisfield and elsewhere in the county that local leaders began to encourage outsiders to buy the thousands of available acres.

It was against this backdrop that the first Jewish immigrants arrived in Sandisfield, Yiddish-speaking pioneers who had left the overcrowded neighborhoods of New York City to become part of a bold agricultural experiment. Many Jewish leaders at the time believed Jews should return to their ancestral farming roots and called for moving them from the congested cities to rural communities where they could lead productive lives as farmers.

By the turn of the 20th century, this "back to the land" movement had gained momentum, much of it facilitated by the Baron de Hirsch Society and its offshoot,

the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society. The Baron de Hirsch Society had provided the financial backing for several Jewish agricultural colonies since 1892 and Sandisfield, with its many abandoned farms, was a promising addition.

Although Jewish families weren't common in Berkshire County, they weren't unheard of. Two Jewish congregations served the community of Pittsfield and a scattering of Jewish immigrants from New York City had already begun to reclaim some of the county's deserted farmland.

Nevertheless, this new farm colony in Sandisfield was unprecedented. Never before had the Berkshires been the setting for a colony of Eastern European Jews, and the neighboring towns looked at this new settlement with a mixture of curiosity and suspicion. The following pages follow the progress of this farm colony from its founding in the early 20th century until 1996, when the remaining members of Congregation Sons of Abraham deeded its synagogue to the newly formed Sandisfield Arts and Restoration Committee for use as an arts center.

Little has been written about the history of Sandisfield's Jewish community and too much has been forgotten. A few individuals still remember Baranoff's Dance Hall and Montville's one-room schoolhouse, but mostly lost to memory are the struggles of those early colonists whose hard work and willpower revived a dying town. Theirs is a story that for too long has gone untold.

Part I

1

The Immigrant Issue

The flood of European immigrants who arrived on American shores in the late 19th and early 20th centuries created an uncomfortable dilemma for a country whose symbol of refuge and opportunity stood prominently in New York Harbor. Many Americans demanded an end to the constant stream of refugees, and debates over immigration restrictions played out both in Washington and in the press. Some who favored restrictions feared for the security of the country, claiming most of the paupers and criminals in America were foreign-born. Others argued that immigrants were a threat to American workers because they were willing to work for lower wages. Still others complained that our country was in danger of becoming Europeanized instead of the immigrants becoming Americanized.

Those who opposed immigration restrictions pointed to the labor shortages in industry and farming and insisted immigration was necessary if the country was to realize its full manufacturing and agricultural potential.

The one thing both sides could agree on was that too many immigrants were living in the overcrowded slums of the cities.

In Search of a Better Life

Two primary reasons for the surge of Jewish immigration from Russia in the late 19th and early 20th centuries were a series of anti-Jewish laws enacted by the government and the violent wave of anti-Semitic uprisings, or pogroms, throughout the Russian Empire.

Only a small number of Jews lived in Russia until the partitions of Poland in the late 18th and early 19th centuries annexed large Jewish settlements into the Russian Empire's

new borders. Now home to some five million Jews, Russia responded to their presence by passing a succession of anti-Semitic laws. Jews were barred from owning real estate, working at certain trades, conducting business on Sunday, and speaking the Hebrew language. They also were forbidden to hire Christian domestics because it was believed that living in Jewish households would lead to moral and religious corruption. Although there were exceptions, the majority of Jews were relegated to living in a designated area within the empire's western boundaries known as the Pale of Settlement. Most Jews within the Pale were prohibited from residing in rural areas and certain cities but instead were required to live in small towns, which gave rise to Jewish neighborhoods or villages called shtetls.

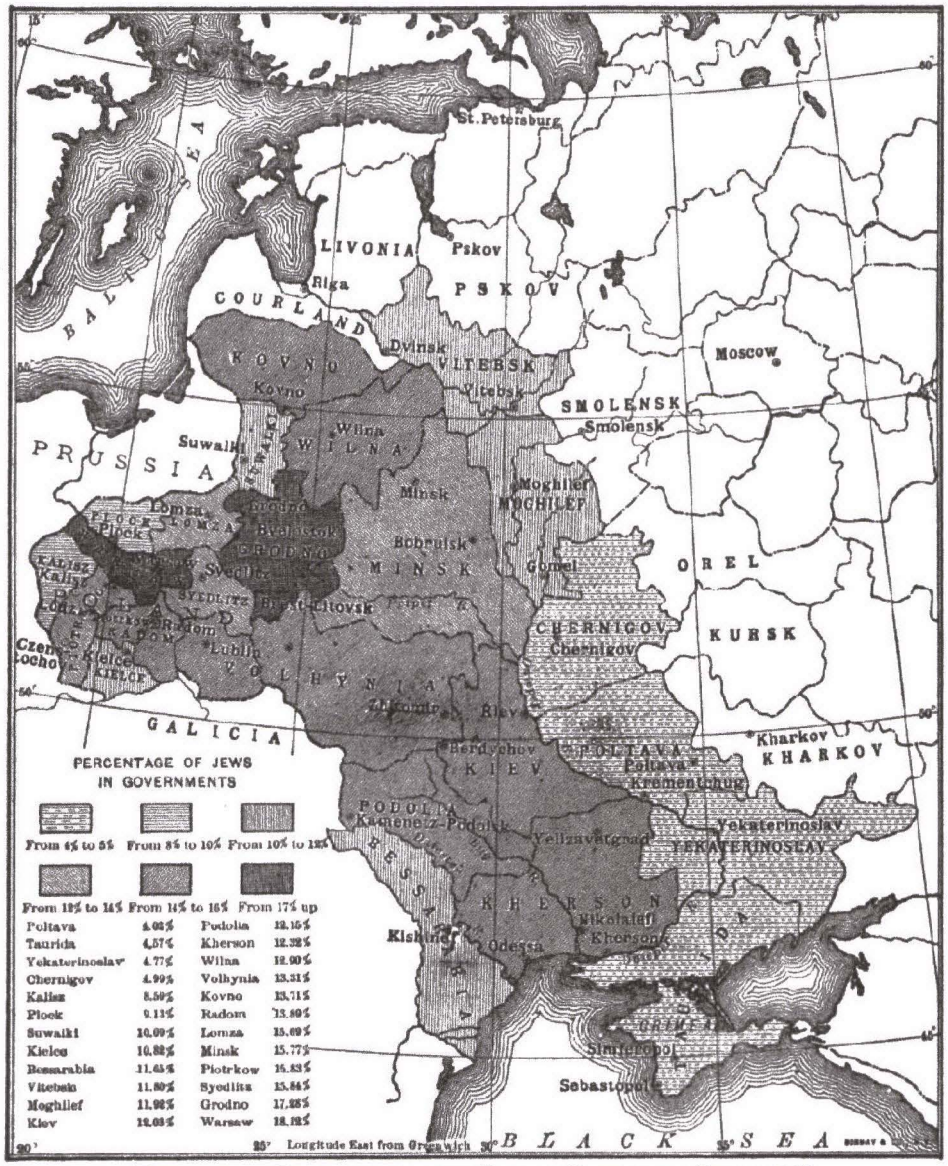


Zishe Greenglass Cherepacha, Saul Cherepacha (Charney), and Moshe Cherepacha, circa 1900 Byerazino, Russia (George Rothstein)

The first wave of anti-Jewish pogroms followed the assassination of Czar Alexander II in 1881, amidst widespread rumors that Jews had been involved in his death. Enraged rioters targeted Jews and Jewish-owned businesses in cities like Kiev, Odessa, and Pereyaslav as the violence spread throughout the southwestern portion of the Russian Empire. Local authorities seized the opportunity to expel Jews not only from inside the Pale, but outside of it as well in cities like Moscow. An even bloodier wave of pogroms took place in the early 20th century, including the infamous pogroms of Kishinev, Kiev, and Bialystok, driving thousands more from their homes.

While the majority of Jewish immigrants to America came from Russia, a large number also came from Romania and the Galician region of Austria-Hungary. Jews in Romania had been the target of discrimination for generations and were looked upon as aliens in their own country. As such, they were forbidden to own real estate and restricted in where they could live and how they could earn a living. In 1877,

MAP OF WESTERN RUSSIA SHOWING THE JEWISH PALE OF SETTLEMENT.

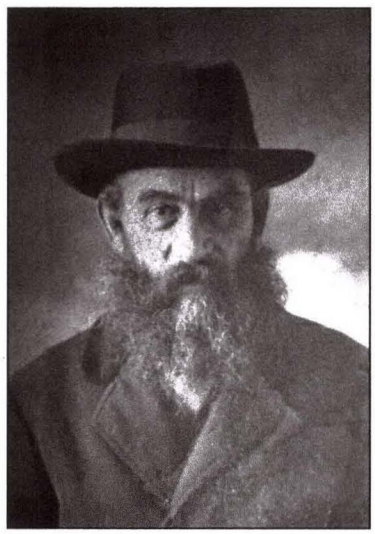


ETHNOLOGICAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE RUSSIAN POPULATION: CENSUS 1913

Race	European Russia	Poland	Caucasus	Siberia	Central Asia	Total
Jews	5,715,061	1,267,194	46,739	32,648	8,543	5,070,205
Aryans	81,513,580	8,121,607	4,901,412	4,711,672	1,083,245	100,331,516
Slavs	76,120,172	7,304,712	3,188,870	4,688,782	702,197	92,089,733
Lithuanians	2,766,805	310,631	6,687	8,666	1,680	3,094,469
Germans	1,388,668	407,780	57,502	5,895	8,947	1,612,717
Latins	1,126,786	7,072	8,955	898	295	1,143,000
Armenians	49,829	182	1,116,094	629	4,892	1,173,006
Iranians	2,066	17	418,055	457	364,181	784,746
Miscellaneous	116,739	1,218	108,949	6,421	1,188	233,755

The Pale of Settlement
(The Jewish Encyclopedia)

the multi-nation Congress of Berlin attempted to address the problem by granting Romania recognition as an independent state on the condition it give all of its citizens civil and political equality, regardless of race or religion. The idea of Jews having political rights outraged the majority of Romanians and the government successfully circumvented the issue by giving Jews a legal status as foreigners who were not subjects of any foreign power. It also enacted laws that deprived Jews of their livelihoods and expelled them from rural areas.



Ytzak Linder
Bukowina, Austrian Empire

Jews living in the Galician region of Austria-Hungary didn't fare any better. Not only were they prohibited from owning real estate and working at certain trades, like the Jews in Russia and Romania, they were subject to special Jewish taxes as well. A rise in anti-Semitism followed a financial crash in 1873 involving several Jewish-owned financial houses. Seen as representing the evils of a capitalist society, Jews were accused of exploiting those who worked the land.

Attempts to relocate Jews to other parts of Europe failed as one government after another denied them entry. It's little wonder, then, that many Eastern European Jews saw America as their only hope. Between 1883 and 1903, half a million Jews came to America. By 1910, this number had grown by a million more.

Immigrants in a New Land

While some of those who arrived in New York moved on to Jewish neighborhoods in Chicago, Philadelphia, or Boston, most never left Manhattan, which now had the largest Jewish population of all of the world's cities. Immigrants from Russia, Romania, and Galicia settled in the rapidly growing neighborhoods of the Lower East Side. Although they all shared the Yiddish language, each neighborhood was a village unto itself, much like the shtetls of their homelands, with synagogues, shops, and charitable organizations.

Life on the Lower East Side challenged the American dream of opportunity and prosperity. Large families were forced to share small rooms in run-down buildings five or more stories high that were poorly heated in the winter, stiflingly hot in the summer, and firetraps in any season. The streets outside the tenements were filled with filth and the threat of disease was as much a constant as the threat of crime. Some



Ellis Island
(Library of Congress, LC-B2-5338-1)

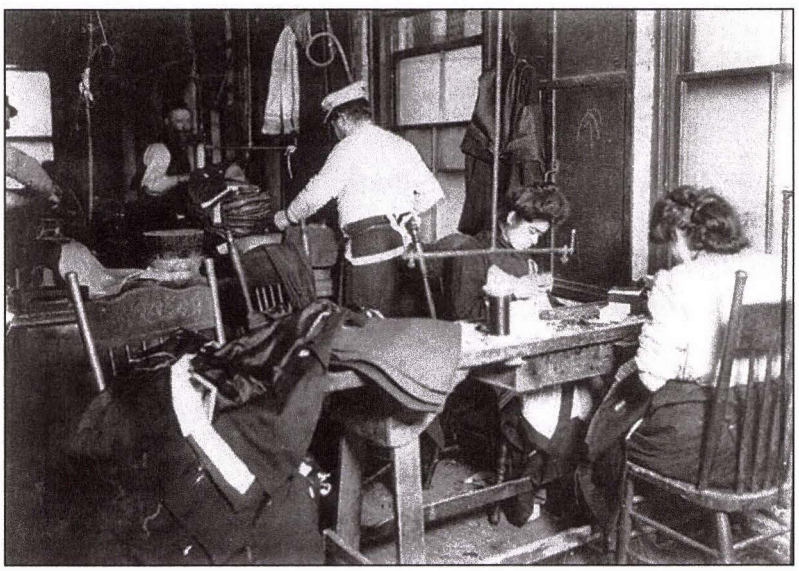
Jews, deciding that the ghettos of New York were no better than the ones they had left behind, returned to their homelands in Eastern Europe. The squalor and despair of the slums took their toll on family life, and it wasn't uncommon to find households that had been abandoned by one or both parents. Children were the youngest victims of the slums; lacking adequate hygiene or parental supervision, countless children succumbed to disease or the temptation of criminal activities.

Settling in this part of Manhattan didn't occur by accident. German Jews had lived on the Lower East Side a generation earlier, building synagogues and starting businesses, including garment factories. Since garment work was one of the few trades open to Jews in Eastern Europe, it was natural they would gravitate to the one area where they could find jobs. The Lower East Side soon became the first entirely Jewish neighborhood in New York City, even though Jews had been living in Manhattan since the 17th century. Sephardic Jews from Spain and Portugal had been the first to arrive and had assimilated quickly into non-Jewish society, while more recently, Jews from Germany had settled within the larger German immigrant community.

The garment industry was at its height when Jews began flowing in from Eastern Europe and even an unskilled worker could find a job in the factories. In fact, most of the Jews in New York worked in the garment industry. For newcomers, it meant not only working with others who spoke Yiddish but working for employers who observed the Jewish Sabbath.

Unfortunately, as is often the case among successive groups of immigrants, the relationship between the two Jewish groups was an uneasy one. While German Jews, now firmly integrated into uptown life, considered these new immigrants their inferiors, they also felt obligated to hire fellow Jews as an act of charity. This condescending attitude wasn't lost on the newcomers, who became resentful and hostile toward the factory owners. The relationship became even more strained as skilled workers scraped together enough money to open their own garment factories, putting them in direct competition with their previous employers.

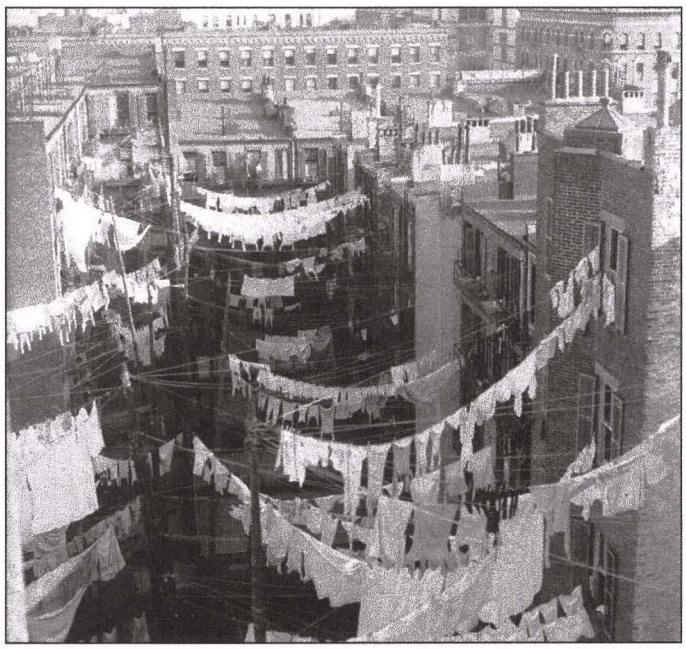
These new businesses were designed to undercut the costs of the established factories, and the owners used any means whatsoever to accomplish their goals. Most often they were set up in the owners' tenement apartments with family members making up part of the workforce. Since the work took place in the apartments they weren't subject to the labor laws that regulated conventional factories. Working conditions in these tenement sweatshops were unimaginable. Men, women, and children worked for 12 or more hours a day in the same small rooms where the families cooked, ate, and slept. In 1890, journalist Jacob Riis wrote that anyone walking the length of any block on the Lower East Side could hear the whirr of a thousand sewing machines from early in the morning until late at night.



Group of sweatshop workers, 1908
(Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-26027)

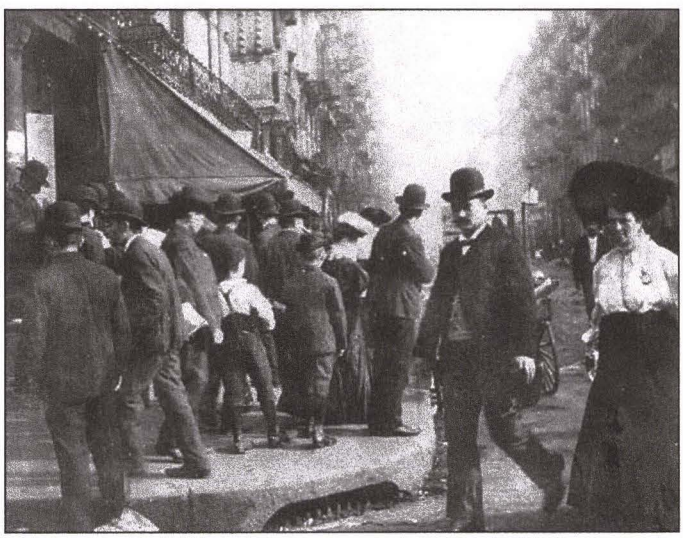
Riis' account of life on the Lower East Side described a ghetto of tenements where 330,000 immigrants lived within a single square mile. Jewish leaders worried about a widespread public backlash if Jews continued to live in neighborhoods where it was inevitable that the competition for jobs would increase as opportunities decreased. Many Americans already considered Jewish immigrants as undesirables of questionable character and wanted to restrict immigration to those who met specific educational or moral

standards. Although Jews weren't persecuted the way they had been in Eastern Europe, they still faced bigotry here in America, where they were ridiculed in newspapers and prohibited from participating in certain activities. Both Sephardic and German Jews worried that if the flood of Jewish immigrants wasn't stopped then they, too, would be caught up in a wave of anti-Semitism.



New York tenements
(Library of Congress, LC-D4-36489)

Unlike other immigrant groups who merely passed through New York on their way to new lives in other parts of the country, most of the Jews from Eastern Europe didn't want to leave the city. Much of this was due to the proximity of the garment industry. Other factors included a long history of urban living and the security of staying among fellow Jews. Jewish charitable organizations like B'nai B'rith and United Hebrew Charities helped with housing and employment, but it was obvious the Lower East Side couldn't continue to support the growing number of immigrants.



Jewish New Year, Lower East Side, 1905
(Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-72468)

Not everyone agreed that restricting immigration was the answer. Immigration advocates continued to argue that a country the size of America should be able to accommodate anyone who sought a better life and there was still plenty of opportunity available. They believed the real problem was an

over-concentration of immigrants in the cities, which could be solved by relocating them to parts of the country where there was less competition for jobs and housing. Proponents of this redistribution contended that moving immigrants to areas that needed labor for factories or farming would allow them to be productive members of their new communities, and once their own circumstances improved they would encourage their friends and relatives in the city to join them.

Giving Jews the opportunity to become farmers appealed to many Jewish leaders, even though most of the immigrants had never been allowed to farm in their home countries. The leaders pointed out that Jews had been an agricultural society before they were driven out of Palestine, and it was fitting they should return to their agrarian roots. An experiment of moving individual Jewish families into non-Jewish rural communities met with mixed results because while some families adapted easily to their new lives, other families felt isolated and returned to the city. A number of Jewish leaders advocated farm colonies where Jews could live and work together. Some attempts at colonizing had been made in the West and the South as early as the 1880s but they had failed because of poor planning, insufficient training, and a lack of money. The first successful Jewish colony on the East Coast was started near Vineland, New Jersey in 1882, when 250 immigrants moved there with help from the Hebrew Aid Society of New York. Other colonies in South Jersey tried to follow Vineland's lead but were soon abandoned.

Baron de Hirsch and Farm Colonies

One of the biggest proponents of immigrant colonization was Baron Maurice de Hirsch, a Jewish philanthropist. Although born into wealth in Munich, Germany in 1831, he became a successful businessman in his own right, making his fortune in banking and railroads. He donated large sums of money to charities of all religions and in 1872 began a relationship with the Alliance Israélite, an organization in Paris dedicated to protecting the human rights of Jews around the world.

After Russia refused his offer of a $2,400,000 gift to improve schools for Jews and non-Jews, he decided Jews would have to leave the anti-Semitism of Europe and Asia behind if they were to have any hope for a future. In 1891, he organized the Jewish Colonization Association to provide for the emigration of Jews from Europe and endowed the Baron de Hirsch Fund in New York with a capital investment of that same $2,400,000 to address the needs of Jewish immigrants in America.

In an interview with Reuter's Agency that year, Baron de Hirsch addressed the treatment of Russian Jews and his future plans. "Though it may seem strange to

you, the measures now being enforced against the Jews, which are equivalent to the wholesale expulsion of the race, do not appear to me to be altogether a misfortune for the Russian Jews. I think that the worst thing that could happen to these unfortunate people would be to continue, for an indefinite period, the wretched existence which they have led up to the present time ... The only means to raise their condition is to remove them from the soil to which they are rooted and to transport them to other countries, where they will enjoy the same rights as the people among whom they live, and where they will cease to be pariahs, and become citizens."



Baron Maurice de Hirsch (The Jewish Encyclopedia)

Baron de Hirsch maintained that in those countries where Jews were allowed to devote themselves to agriculture, they proved to be competent farmers. He stated his case for moving Jews into agricultural areas in an article he wrote for *The Forum* magazine. "These convictions led me to my activity to better the unhappy lot of the poor down-trodden Jews, and my efforts shall show that the Jews have not lost the agricultural qualities that their forefathers possessed. I shall try to make for them a new home in different lands, where as free farmers, on their own soil, they can make themselves useful to the country. If this should not come to pass among the present generation, the next will surely fulfill this expectation."

Because Baron de Hirsch believed Jews couldn't take advantage of the opportunities this country had to offer if they stayed in congested cities, one of the Fund's goals was to give them training for a trade or agricultural work. Prospective farmers received information about available farmland and the necessary financial aid. They were also required to invest some of their own money, on the assumption they would be less likely to default on their loans if they had a financial interest in their success.

In 1892, fifty Jewish families arrived in Woodbine, New Jersey to live in the first Baron de Hirsch agricultural colony. Under the auspices of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, which provided planning and financial support, Woodbine was able to succeed where previous colonies had failed. Hirsch Sabsovich, a Russian agronomist who had studied in Switzerland, was chosen to oversee the founding of the colony. In his capacity as

agricultural adviser he was instrumental in starting the Baron de Hirsch Agricultural School to train new farmers.

Quickly discovering that Woodbine would have to be more than an agricultural colony if it was to survive, the founders took the necessary steps to ensure its success. Before long, Woodbine became the home of several factories which were intended to attract non-agricultural immigrants to the colony. Industry soon overtook agriculture as the immigrants' primary source of employment, and between 1892 and 1909 the



Woodbine Agricultural School students
(New-York Tribune, April 5, 1908)

number of farm families dropped by fifty percent. While Woodbine is generally considered a successful implementation of Baron de Hirsch's vision of redistribution, a 1911 report by the Senate's Immigration Commission concluded that the settlement was a failure from an agricultural standpoint because it hadn't fulfilled its original purpose of creating a purely agricultural colony.

At the same time the Baron de Hirsch Fund was establishing Woodbine, a group of Jewish immigrants was taking over abandoned farms around the town of Colchester, Connecticut, by investing whatever savings they had to buy land, livestock, and equipment. The immigrants even established their own night schools where they

learned the English language and American customs so they could more easily socialize with their neighbors. Like the colonists at Woodbine, the Jewish farmers found that agriculture alone wasn't enough to support their families so they added milk production and home industries to supplement their incomes.

Four years after Baron de Hirsch's death in 1896, the Baron de Hirsch Fund's agricultural and industrial removal work had grown so large that it was spun off into a new organization called the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society (JAIAS), later known as the Jewish Agricultural Society (JAS). The JAIAS took over the agricultural side of the Baron de Hirsch Fund and was funded in part by that organization and the Jewish Colonization Association.

The Society's goals were laid out in its Articles of Incorporation:

1. The encouragement and direction of agriculture among Jews, residents of the United States, principally immigrants from Russia, Roumania and Galicia, the removal of such persons dwelling in the crowded sections of cities to agricultural and industrial districts, and provision for their temporary support.
2. The grant of loans to mechanics, artisans and tradesmen, to enable them to secure larger earnings and accumulate savings for the acquisition of homes in suburban, agricultural, and industrial districts.
3. The removal of industries now pursued in tenements or shops in crowded sections of the cities, by aiding manufacturers and contractors to transfer their shops and business to agricultural and industrial districts where their employees may continue to labor and acquire individual homes.
4. The encouragement of cooperative creameries and factories and of storage houses for canning and preserving fruit and vegetables and making wine.

A Jewish farming community that started in the small eastern-Massachusetts town of Medway was more successful in remaining a purely agricultural venture, thanks to fertile soil and easy access to Boston's markets. With later assistance from the JAIAS, the community grew from a single immigrant family in 1894 into a sprawling settlement that extended to two neighboring towns and supported two synagogues.

Although not all attempts at colonization succeeded, Woodbine, Colchester, and Medway were proof that despite generations of urban living many Jews were able to adapt to rural life. By the turn of the century, a "back to the land" movement had

sprung up, spurred on by Jews who had come from an agricultural background in Europe and by leaders in the Jewish community.

This growing movement didn't go unnoticed in Washington, where the government was still trying to deal with the immigration crisis. In 1901, the Immigration Commission reported on the new trend of Jews as farmers. It concluded that while the work of the Jewish agricultural societies was admirable, it didn't believe the removal of a few hundred immigrants to farms could compare with the thousands still arriving, and a more practical solution was to relocate them to areas where they could find factory jobs. Undeterred by the critics, a B'nai B'rith lodge convention in 1901 adopted a resolution stating that the only feasible way of bettering the condition of New York's Jews was to move them onto farms. In spite of its earlier reservations, the U. S. government eventually joined Jewish aid societies in their attempts to persuade as many immigrants as possible to leave city life behind and become farmers.

The Appeal of the Berkshires

The Berkshire hills of Massachusetts offered Jewish farmers much of what they needed if they hoped to be successful.

The hotels and boarding houses in the area were popular destinations during the summer months and gave local farmers a ready-made market for their meat and produce. In addition, the Berkshires had a large number of farms that had been abandoned by owners who had left behind its stone-strewn soil to find more productive land elsewhere or pursue more lucrative occupations. By 1891, legislators in Massachusetts were so concerned about the growing number of abandoned farms that the Board of Agriculture was authorized to collect and circulate information on all of the abandoned land in the state. The first catalog of available properties by town, published that December, listed 140 abandoned or partially abandoned farms in Berkshire County alone, consisting of over 27,000 acres. Word of the catalog's publication reached across the Atlantic Ocean to London, England and inquiries came from as far away as Nebraska and Canada.

The Jewish real estate boom in the Berkshires began when some farmers who were on the verge of abandoning their farms decided instead to sell them through Jewish real estate agents in New York City. Divided into smaller inexpensive parcels, the land was sold to Jews living on the Lower East Side. This plan was so successful that agents acquired more abandoned farms and the migration began. Some Jews bought their farms outright, while others received mortgages from the seller or through the JAIAS.

Unfortunately, much of the farmland was sold "sight unseen." When the new

owners arrived, many of them discovered their farms consisted of run-down houses and overgrown fields. Disillusioned, some gave up and moved back to the city, their dreams of owning their own farms nothing more than pipe dreams. Many more, though, chose to stay on rather than return to their old lives.

By the early 20th century, the Berkshires had become home to a new generation of pioneers, most of whom had never tilled the soil of their homelands. What the immigrants lacked in farming experience, however, they made up for in perseverance and sweat as they tried to transform ramshackle homesteads into working farms.

In 1902, the first Jewish families from New York arrived in the once-prosperous town of Sandisfield and other families soon followed. Determined to succeed as farmers, they cleared the land, rebuilt the houses, and fought the elements. Their inexperience in farming matters nearly led to the colony's failure but within a few years this little agricultural colony in the southeastern corner of Berkshire County began to thrive and more immigrants joined them, starting farms of their own and opening boarding houses.

It didn't come easily, but hard work and willpower eventually succeeded in transforming this small settlement of Eastern European Jews into a vibrant Jewish community that would flourish for many years to come.

2

The Sandisfield Colony

Like many other towns in New England, Sandisfield's best days were behind it when the first Jewish immigrants arrived from New York City.

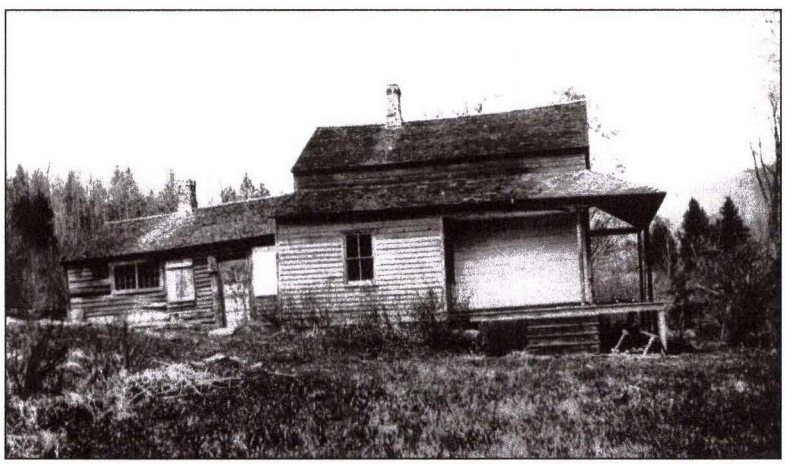
The largest town in Berkshire County, Sandisfield at one time had been the most prosperous town as well, its several villages home to stores, tanneries, and mills. During the early years of the 19th century, the busy turnpike between Hartford, Connecticut and Albany, New York passed through the Sandisfield village of New Boston, where shopkeepers did a brisk business and its 18th century inn offered food and rest to the travel-worn. Sandisfield's apple orchards and dairy farms provided the cider and cheese the town was famous for and each year its maple trees produced over 100,000 pounds of maple sugar.

But that was before the farms were abandoned for more promising lands to the west and the railroad was built too many miles away to help those who remained reach new markets. Goods and passengers were transported on railroad cars instead of wagons and stagecoaches, making the turnpike obsolete. No longer on the trade route, commerce dropped and businesses closed. The lure of economic and social opportunities elsewhere was too strong to keep a younger generation bound to a dying town. By the late 1870s, Sandisfield had declined to such an extent its very survival was in doubt.

When the first catalog of abandoned farms was published in 1891, ten of the Berkshire County properties were in Sandisfield and almost every year afterward, the town ranked at or near the top in the number of available farms. Prices ranged from a few hundred dollars to a few thousand, but higher prices didn't necessarily mean more acreage or better amenities. In 1894, for instance, $1,500 could buy 97 acres with a house and no barn in the village of Sandisfield Center or 315 acres with a house and five barns in New Boston.

Berkshire's abandoned farmland had been a source of concern for local community leaders for several years. In 1889, the Pittsfield Board of Trade explored different options in its own attempt to solve the problem. One idea was to encourage people to buy the farms as summer homes, where they could grow food for themselves and to sell. Another was to emulate the ranches in the American West by forming a company to buy large tracts of land to raise cattle, thereby encouraging the growth of local creameries and cheese factories. The most popular plan at the time, however, was to promote the settlement of Swedish farmers, whom the Board anticipated would use their agricultural skills to revive the deserted farming communities.

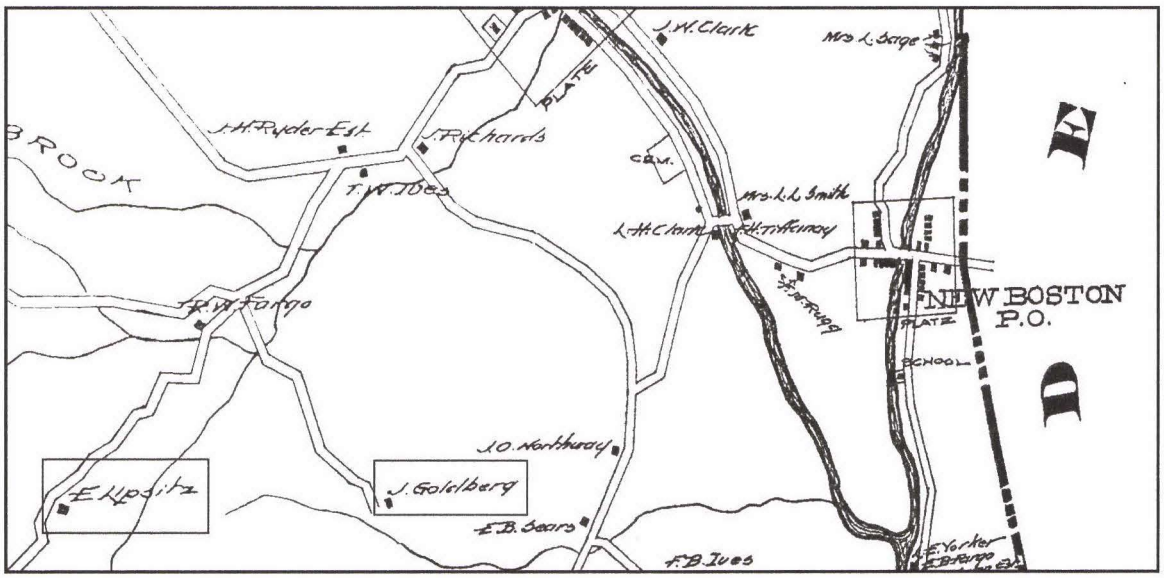
Concern over Berkshire's abandoned farmland wasn't limited to those living in Massachusetts. Burton E. Moore, a farmer and real estate agent in Winsted, Connecticut, sold properties in both Connecticut and Massachusetts. In 1900, a local newspaper printed an opinion piece in which he speculated that large parts of Sandisfield and the surrounding towns would end up as private summer resorts for the wealthy, stocked with fish and game for their pleasure. To prevent this from happening, Mr. Moore proposed building Lutheran churches to attract German and Swedish farmers in a plan similar to that of Pittsfield's town fathers a decade earlier.



Edward Whitney house, circa 1900
(Great Barrington Historical Society)

The number of abandoned farms in Sandisfield also caught the attention of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society, which saw an opportunity to colonize the town with Jews instead. Although Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe had begun to settle on farms in Berkshire County, few had found their way to Sandisfield. The Fatowsky family had lived there during the 1890s, and in 1901 a young woman named Jenny Goldberg had bought a farm near New Boston.

Not until 1902, however, did colonization begin in earnest, financed by the JAIAS and supported by wealthy businessmen like Jacob H. Schiff, a prominent German Jew and a trustee of the Society. Michael Susskind, another German Jew, served as the Society's real estate agent. That first year, Elias and Bertha Lipsitz bought Jenny



Homesteads of Elias Lipsitz and Jacob Goldberg
(Berkshire County, Barnes & Farnham, 1904)

Goldberg's 200-acre farm with a $550 mortgage from the JAIAS. The Society gave Jacob Goldberg and his son-in-law, Abraham Myerson, $200 to buy a 250-acre farm not far from the Lipsitz family. The two also assumed the $1,000 mortgage the seller had received from Burton E. Moore, the Winsted real estate broker who had envisioned a Sandisfield populated with Germans and Swedes.

The colony's boundaries weren't limited to Sandisfield; they encompassed parts of Otis, Monterey, and New Marlborough as well. In 1903, tailors Samuel Kaplan and David Conjorsky partnered on a 480-acre parcel that spanned Sandisfield and New Marlborough. Instead of financing their farm through the JAIAS, though, they obtained mortgages from Michael Susskind and the seller. After this slow start, 1904 saw a spate of farm sales and by the end of that year Jewish farmers owned more than 3,000 acres in Sandisfield, primarily in the northwestern section of town.

Not surprisingly, Russian Jews made up the majority of the colonists in the beginning because most of the families were related to each other or came from the same New York neighborhoods. Often, as was the case with Samuel Kaplan's family, the husbands spent most of their time in the city, working at their jobs and promoting the colony, while their wives and other family members managed the farms.

A lot of the families formed partnerships and pooled their money, which made it possible for them to buy more land and share the responsibilities. After Osher Berman and his brother-in-law, Abraham Diamond, bought their farm in 1904, Osher

continued to work in the city while Abraham worked on the farm with their families. While some of the partnerships were informal, others were legally binding contracts. In the case of David Liskind and David Nemirowsky, the two men agreed "to associate together as partners under the firm name of Liskind and Nemirowsky for the purpose of carrying on the business of farming, dairying, market gardening, keeping of boarders, blacksmithing, and jobbing" for three years.

Other partnerships were limited to specific real estate ventures. When Samuel Kaplan and Solomon Pollock bought 137 acres in New Marlborough in 1906, their contract stated that they had bought the farm for the sole purpose of selling it at a profit and their partnership wouldn't extend beyond its sale. The men agreed they would share equally the expense of "handling, advertising, selling and conveying said premises" and they wouldn't sell the farm for less than $1,300. Not all of these partnerships could withstand the financial and emotional pressures, however. David Conjorsky sold out to Samuel Kaplan and moved back to the city after just two months, while the partnership between Samuel Kaplowitz and Sam Serlin came to an abrupt end after Samuel injured Sam's wife, Fanny, during an argument and Sam followed up by threatening Samuel's life.



Esther Kaplowitz

Meeting the Neighbors

Local newspapers were quick to provide their curious readers with details about the growing Jewish colony. In the spring of 1904, the *Berkshire Courier* reported the problems Solomon Pollock and his family had run into when they hauled their furniture though Monterey on their way to their new home on West Street. Later that year, the *Winsted Evening Citizen* explained the role of the rabbi, who held services in the homes and slaughtered the animals according to Jewish law. The paper then went on to praise the men, women, and children of the colony for all pitching in to do their share. Although the *Citizen* commended the immigrants for paying cash for their goods and minding their own business, it also reflected the existing bias of the day by equating their financial dealings to "the typical Jew of Baxter Street," a section of New York City with a reputation for shrewd, if not deceitful, behavior. The monthly Jewish magazine, *The Menorah*, reprinted the article and proudly pointed to Sandisfield as evidence of the important role Jewish immigrants were playing in

Lou Stone, the Winsted Liar

Louis T. Stone, a newspaper reporter and editor in Winsted, Connecticut, spent his entire career working at the *Winsted Evening Citizen.* Not satisfied with reporting the mundane facts and goings-on of life, Lou decided early on to write outlandish tales about rural life which were syndicated in papers from New York to Alaska.

His preposterous stories quickly earned him the nickname of "The Winsted Liar." One of his best known was the hoax of the Winsted Wildman, a story he invented in the summer of 1895 and kept alive in one form or another for years afterward, much to the delight of his fans. Many of Lou's tall tales revolved around members of the animal kingdom: a fox hopping a ride on the mail stage, a big mouth bass with false teeth, a cat that whistled "Yankee Doodle Dandy."

In the early part of the 20th century, however, Lou turned his attention to the Jewish farmers across the state line in Sandisfield.

The following story appeared in *The New York World* in August 1906, and was reprinted by the *Berkshire Courier.* The *Courier* was well aware of Lou's penchant for exaggeration and admitted that his account of the colonists' farming methods should be taken with a grain of salt. But the paper went on to say the stories were characteristic of some of the members of the Sandisfield colony.

> "Reports have been received from Sandisfield, Lee and Becket in the Berkshire Hills, where hundreds of immigrants have acquired farms. One man said he could make lots of money on maple syrup, but he had to stop and plug the holes in his trees because the haying must be done.
>
> "Another is credited with having the profits of the crops on a ten-acre lot figured down fine. At present the land is covered with a crop of hard hack. Still another says he sees lots of profit, but doesn't have time to do his farming, as he has so much work."

Lou Stone was probably responsible for a good many of the comical stories about the Sandisfield colony that appeared in newspapers during those early years. He spent a lifetime entertaining his readers with tales of life in and around Winsted. When he died in 1933, newspapers across the country mourned the passing of the man one editor called "the most beloved liar of modern times."

rescuing the abandoned farms of New England.

By the summer of 1904, Sandisfield's colony of Jews was common knowledge. Another colony made up of Finnish farmers had settled in the northern part of town and both had been met with approval by *The Berkshire Gleaner*, a newspaper published in nearby Lee. The paper recounted the challenges faced by the two groups of immigrants, who had moved to an unfamiliar town that was far from the markets to farm on land that had been overworked for years. It also applauded their willingness to do the hard labor that native-born Americans were reluctant to do. It was *The Gleaner's* position that colonizing the county with foreigners would keep its abandoned farmland from going to waste, provide the immigrants with a means of support, and make the local population less dependent on agricultural products from other states.

Newspapers around the country saw Sandisfield's Jewish colony as a source of both admiration and ridicule. The colonists were admired for the efforts they made to tame the neglected farmland, while their ignorance of farming methods became the subject of many comical anecdotes. One story was about a man named Louis Rubin, who had traveled by train from New York City to Hudson, New York with provisions for the colony. In Hudson he hired a horse and wagon to continue on to Sandisfield, but because he didn't know how to manage the horse, found it necessary to lead the animal on foot the entire 42 miles. Another told about a farmer who had tried unsuccessfully to use his field plow to cut ice from a pond. Whether these and other stories had any basis in fact is debatable, but nevertheless, the newspapers were happy to provide their readers with the latest exploits of the hapless Sandisfield Jews.

A Clash of Cultures

Although Jews from Eastern Europe weren't what the local Yankees originally had in mind when they called for foreigners to rescue the deserted farms, the arrival of the immigrants hadn't really bothered them at first. By the end of 1904, however, Jews owned about thirty farms in Sandisfield and Monterey. As the colony grew, so did resentment and hostility towards these newcomers, most of whom didn't speak English.

The immigrants were seen as clannish and tightfisted and people claimed they shipped whatever they grew to New York in exchange for provisions instead of dealing with local tradespeople. Adding to the growing list of grievances were reports in local newspapers that the colony was planning to build the first synagogue in Berkshire County. This revelation wasn't welcome news in a town where New Boston and South Sandisfield hosted gospel tent meetings every summer. Relations between the locals and the Jewish immigrants became so strained that many sales were brokered

anonymously through real estate agents in Winsted and Great Barrington.

Things came to a head in February 1905 when local farmers met to find a way to stop what they saw as an invasion of Jews. They all signed an agreement that no one would sell their farm to a Jew without first calling a meeting and offering it to other farmers for the same price the Jewish buyer was willing to pay.

Two days after an account of this meeting appeared in *The Berkshire Evening Eagle*, the newspaper ran an editorial in defense of the Jewish colonists. The editor maintained that what some people considered penny-pinching behavior was nothing more than an attempt by these poor immigrants to be self-supporting. He went on to say that once Jews become prosperous, their nature is to be generous. He was confident public sentiment would change once the colonists were more financially secure. The editorial ended on an ironic note by advising those who had spent so much time worrying about the fate of the county's abandoned farmland not to be so critical of the very people who had come to help solve their problem. *The Berkshire Evening Eagle* was published in Pittsfield, a city with an old, well-integrated Jewish community, so it was no surprise the paper would have a more tolerant view of the newcomers.

Another show of support came from Luna Dean of New Boston, who wrote a letter to the newspaper denouncing those who would condemn the Jewish colonists. In a long recitation of Old Testament history and Christian doctrine, she defended the Jews as God's chosen people, whom Americans who "so proudly boast of the flag of the free" should welcome to our shores.

A few days after the editorial was published, *The Berkshire Evening Eagle* received a letter from Michael Susskind's real estate company in New York, disputing the allegation that the Jewish colonists didn't spend their money locally. The letter contended that other than meat, which was prohibited by religious law, the colonists bought whatever they needed from local tradespeople. It went on to say that farm sales for 1904 had exceeded $42,000 and much of that money had gone back into the local economy as well. According to the real estate company, one storekeeper had told Mr. Susskind that he attributed his $1,500 increase in business over the prior year directly to the growing Jewish population.

Just days after the farmers' meeting, the JAIAS announced another eighteen families would arrive in Sandisfield by early spring, putting the farmers' controversial agreement to the test. But the farmers' resolve was no match for the financial backing of the Society. Farms continued to be sold to the immigrants because the locals couldn't compete with the cash prices the New York benefactors were willing to pay.

Wealthy landowners in towns like New Marlborough, who also were eager to keep

Jews from moving next door, proved more successful than the farmers. Unlike their neighbors, they could pay whatever price was necessary to buy all of the available farmland that was adjacent to their properties. One such landowner was H. K. Bloodgood, a New York broker with a summer home in New Marlborough. Early in the 1900s, he had bought hundreds of acres of land in the town to use as a game preserve for himself and his friends. He continued to buy whatever adjoining land came on the market so he could keep his Jewish neighbors as far away as possible.

Headed for Failure

Accounts of the farmers' meeting were reported in several newspapers across the country, contradicting the rosy picture of life in the colonies that Jewish publications tried to portray. The month after the story first appeared, *New Era Illustrated Magazine* was quick to refute it, insisting that many of the locals had offered their assistance to the newcomers until they were settled, and stressing that the condition of Sandisfield's Jewish settlers was "very satisfactory."

The truth was, the condition of the Jewish settlers was anything but satisfactory and their strained relationship with the locals was the least of their problems.

A few of the colonists, like Samuel Kaplan's family, had been successful raising cattle and selling the meat to butchers in nearby towns like Great Barrington. A few others raised chickens, shipping them to Jewish markets in New York City. Most of the farmers, though, depended on crops for their livelihood. Because of their inexperience and the area's rocky soil, they struggled to grow enough to sell. Those who succeeded then struggled to find anyone with whom to do business. Many grocers would only take their goods in trade, with no regard for the farmers' financial obligations.

Adjusting to life on a farm was hard for these immigrants, accustomed as they were to life in the city. Their difficulties weren't limited to growing and marketing crops. Agents from the humane society were called in on numerous occasions to investigate charges of animal cruelty. Furthermore, frequent lawsuits between colony members and local residents aggravated an already bad relationship. There was also discord within the colony itself, arising from personal quarrels or disputes over real estate deals, with the squabbling parties often appearing before the court in Great Barrington.

Sadly, the colonists' inexperience with country life helped contribute to tragedies both large and small. Sixteen-year-old Myer Berman was fatally injured helping his uncle, Abraham Diamond, load wood onto a sleigh. Samuel Kaplan's flock of sheep was decimated by the packs of stray dogs that roamed the countryside. As if these ordeals

weren't enough, some families had to endure the heartbreak of losing a young child. Isaac and Dora Goldberg's baby son died of cholera just 14 days after they moved to town and scarlet fever took the life of Louis and Lena Bessel's toddler, Harry.

Most of the colonists couldn't grow enough crops to earn a living or feed their families, so they did whatever was necessary to put food on their tables. Families gathered spruce and laurel branches to sell to decorators in New York City, the men cut firewood, and the women cured fox skins and made them into muffs and stoles. Jacob Goldberg and Samuel Kaplan were lucky enough to find work with the town, clearing ice and snow from the roads over the winter.

In spite of their determination and hard work, the immigrants' ignorance of farm life nearly led to the colony's failure. Without the basic knowledge needed to work farm equipment, care for the livestock, or cultivate the land, conditions in Sandisfield deteriorated badly. In the winter of 1905/1906, families were so poor they risked defaulting on their mortgages. Animals died of starvation because their owners couldn't afford to feed them. Some families gave up altogether, abandoning their farms and moving back to the city.

One of the most critical cases was that of Jacob Solomon's family. Jacob had bought their farm, including the livestock, in the fall of 1905, but unlike many other farm sales, hay or feed hadn't been included. Because the family couldn't afford to buy feed over the winter, four of their animals starved to death.

In February 1906, a desperate colony appealed to the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society for help. The Society retained Great Barrington attorney H. C. Joyner to provide immediate aid to the colonists and to keep the Society apprised of their progress and future needs.

Reports of Sandisfield's dire circumstances appeared in newspapers across the country. A grim headline in the *Saturday Globe* of Utica, New York read "Hebrew Colony Fails, Experiment at Sandisfield Mass., Proves Disastrous." Conditions were so bad, the writer believed the Jewish colonists would be forced to abandon their farms and return to the city. Locally, the *Berkshire Courier* observed that the one thing in the colonists' favor that winter was its mildness, but even this small mercy was taken away when the Berkshires were hit with a major snowstorm in the middle of February, followed by another a few weeks later.

When word of the newspaper stories reached the Sandisfield colony, Samuel Kaplan, Solomon Pollock, and several other men wrote a letter to the *Jewish Daily News* in rebuttal. Their letter claimed that reports of the colonists' desperation in the secular press weren't true and were due to the prejudice of their non-Jewish neighbors. The men maintained that everyone in the colony made a respectable living and blamed

one family's poverty on the husband's laziness. They ended the letter by writing "... we know that this colony will in the future shine as a brilliant star among all the Jewish colonies in America."

Back from the Brink

The Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society's timely assistance saved the fledgling colony from certain failure. The farmers learned from their mistakes and made the necessary changes to avoid another disastrous year. For the most part, they succeeded. Their achievements were noteworthy enough for the *Winsted Evening Citizen* to remark on them that fall: "The Jewish colony in Sandisfield has been prosperous this year, for the crops have been good, and in a great measure the mistakes have been avoided ... The farmers have been very successful in raising vegetables and in fattening cattle for the market."

For some families, like that of Jacob Solomon, the changes came too late and they had no other option but to return to New York. In fact, 1906 saw an unusually large number of real estate transactions as some colonists left and even more arrived to take their place. Many who left did so because they couldn't make their mortgage payments and one of Michael Susskind's responsibilities was to find new buyers who could take over the mortgages as quickly as possible. Elias Lipsitz and his son Joseph took advantage of this turnover to buy several more properties, part of the growing trend among the colonists of buying houses for speculation. Unable to own property in their homelands, the Jewish immigrants made up for lost time once they got to Sandisfield, buying, selling, and trading properties among themselves. Some, like the elder Lipsitz, stayed in the city to sell farms to Jewish buyers. Those who were better off often took it a step further and provided mortgages to buyers who didn't get financing from the seller or the JAIAS. Solomon Pollock's son-in-law, Henry Kosberg, who owned The Berkshire Real Estate Company in New Boston, advertised he would pay farmers who were willing to sell him their farms, livestock, and tools anywhere from $200 to $25,000. All of this real estate activity wasn't lost on the local residents. Ed Deland, who had sold a 250-acre farm in the northern part of town to Kallman Geller and Aaron Hendler, was quoted as saying the men couldn't understand English, but traded mortgaged property like anything.

Settling In

One of the most valuable lessons the Jewish farmers learned after the difficulties

of those early years was cooperation. Whereas in the past the farmers had worked independently of each other, they now realized they had to work together if the colony had any hope of surviving. They decided to trade labor during the busy seasons and also agreed that those who were better off financially would come to the aid of anyone who needed it.

David Pyenson, a farmer in Otis, stood out among the other farmers because of his background in agriculture. Unlike the other Jewish colonists, David had trained to be a farmer and had graduated from an agricultural school in Minsk, Russia shortly before he came to America. He knew that one of the biggest obstacles his fellow farmers faced was the fact that crops alone weren't enough to support their families, so he advised them to raise cows and chickens as well. Most of the farmers heeded David's advice.



David Pyenson, circa 1905
(Andrew and Lynn Pyenson)

Although farming was the colonists' main occupation, they still had to find other sources of income to survive. Most of them made extra money during the summer months renting rooms to Jews seeking to escape the heat of the city. Sandisfield's fresh air and pure spring water had made renting rooms a profitable business ever since the colony's founding and families opened their homes to boarders, no matter how primitive or cramped the accommodations. Some, like Solomon Pollock and Joseph Lipsitz, opened larger summer hotels. Regardless of size, all were filled to overflowing and the *Winsted Evening Citizen* gave regular updates on how many boarders were staying at the various Jewish households. While the lack of modern conveniences in the Jewish homes would have alarmed the typical Berkshire visitor, Jews from the city cheerfully shared sleeping quarters and outhouses with friends and strangers alike, happy just to be out of the tenements. The *Berkshire Courier* wrote about this phenomenon in the fall of 1905, observing: "It is doubtful if any class of people who have come to the Berkshire Hills in the past years have enjoyed themselves any more than the New York East Side Jews who last summer visited Sandisfield in such large numbers."

The JAIAS recognized the importance of boarders to the economic survival of

the farmers but remained adamant that its loans were intended only for applicants who chose farming as their primary occupation. The Society's annual report for 1906 explained the reason it had granted fewer loans in Massachusetts than the year before was because loans were refused to anyone whose main interest was renting to summer boarders.

Overall, the JAIAS was pleased with the progress of its New England colonies, including Sandisfield. Its annual report for 1907 pronounced the farmers to be in better circumstances than in past years and the Society was optimistic that the settlements would be permanent.

Sandisfield's own economic recovery appears to have been striking enough to give the Society confidence in the colony's future. The annual report for 1909 showed more colonists living in Sandisfield than either of the other two JAIAS settlements in the state. The Society's continued support of the colony by loaning money to its farmers was significant. The JAIAS didn't take its financial support lightly and was careful to give loans only to those farmers it believed would succeed. Aside from the monetary losses from failure, the Society feared that the harm done to the agricultural movement by a single unsuccessful farmer returning to the city would far outweigh any number of success stories.

Small Steps Forward

Little by little, the colony became more established as living conditions improved and more families traded New York's tenements for Sandisfield's countryside. The demand for farms continued to increase. When the catalogue of abandoned farms was published in 1910, prices were double what they had been in 1901. Otis, New Marlborough, and Monterey saw their share of new arrivals as well, but Sandisfield remained the center of the colony. In fact, the JAIAS itself acknowledged Sandisfield as its center, or hub, identifying those farmers who lived in the surrounding towns as part of the Sandisfield farming community.

As the settlement grew, so did its diversity. Immigrants from Austria and Romania joined those from Russia – refugees bound by religion and language rather than homeland. Some bought farms for their own use or to rent out, while others moved in with relatives until they saved enough money to buy farms of their own. Turnover, foreclosures, and part-time ownership remained high, however, and by 1910, barely more than a dozen families were living in Sandisfield full-time.

As the editor of *The Berkshire Evening Eagle* had predicted, relations between the

immigrants and their neighbors began to improve once the Sandisfield colony gained its footing. This was evidenced by the growing inclusion of Jewish families into the social columns that correspondent Henry S. Manley submitted to the local papers. In fact, much of what we know about the early families is because of Henry's columns, which he wrote until his death in 1920. Serving as the town's inspector of slaughter, he would have had the chance to get to know the colonists personally. His columns reported their comings and goings with respect, not ridicule, and reflected a genuine amity on his part. The newsy items served to humanize these foreigners and further integrate them into Sandisfield's social circles. One of the most poignant demonstrations of the Jewish immigrants' desire to embrace the traditions of their adopted country appeared in the *Winsted Evening Citizen* in December 1908. Henry wrote that Samuel Kaplan's wife, Tillie, and her daughter had joined Joseph Lipsitz and his family for Thanksgiving turkey. Once Henry even wrote what amounted to an advertisement for Samuel's new partnership with a real estate broker in New York, saying "anyone having a farm to sell would do well to call Mr. Kaplan." Eighty-three-year-old George Hulett, a Sandisfield native, gave voice to this growing acceptance of the Jewish colonists when he told Henry he believed they would make good citizens and farmers and was confident the younger generation would do even better.

Further confirmation of the colonists' acceptance came with the opening of the Valley View Dance Hall at Joseph Lipsitz's Valley View Farm on New Year's Eve in 1907. Joseph hired John Austin's band from Winsted for his grand opening and Jews and non-Jews alike came to dance and have a good time. The dance hall turned out to be so successful that dances were held every Friday night, with Sandisfield native Carlton Sage calling out the steps. The dances often had themes, such as Valentine's Day, poverty dances (with prizes to the man and woman who displayed the most poverty), and ice cream socials. The Lipsitz family also hosted games of that all-American pastime, baseball, on the grounds of Valley View Farm. The popularity of the dance hall and the baseball games wasn't only evidence of the immigrants' social inclusion, it was also an indication of their increasingly favorable economic condition; with their lives no longer a matter of sheer survival, they could finally relax and enjoy themselves.

Sandisfield's farmers continued to battle the hardships that came with farm life but the more they learned, the more their achievements overshadowed their failures. The outside world noticed. In 1909, *The Christian Science Monitor* pointed to Sandisfield as unique among the farm colonies because of what the immigrants had managed to accomplish in spite of the town's isolation from the railroad. In October of that year, several of its farmers traveled to Manhattan's East Side to join delegates from Medway and other farm colonies for the first annual convention of the Federation of Jewish Farmers of America. The



Exhibition of Jewish Farmers of America, 1909 (Library of Congress, LC-B22-348-2)



Exhibition of Jewish Farmers of America, 1909 (Library of Congress, LC-USZ62-52617)

JAIAS had formed the Federation the previous January to create a farmers' cooperative that would improve the material, educational, and social conditions of Jewish farmers. The convention was intended to encourage more Jews on the Lower East Side to leave the city and pursue farming. It was held, appropriately enough, during the week-long Jewish harvest festival of Sukkot and included an agricultural fair on the roof of the Educational Alliance Building, where delegates exhibited their wares. A local newspaper described a typical country fair where chickens hatched in incubators and rosy-cheeked housewives beamed over their preserves. New-found farmers proudly showed off the produce they had grown, their tanned, muscular bodies in stark contrast to the pallid complexions of those who lived in the neighboring tenements.

Whether it was due to the success of the agricultural fairs or the growing word-of-mouth about the opportunities Sandisfield had to offer, the following years saw a steady rise in the town's Jewish population. Although most of the original families had moved on to neighboring towns or back to the city, a few still remained. The Kaplan, Penziner, and Rosner families served as reminders of that nascent farm colony which had persevered against all odds. The new arrivals shared the same ambitions and grit displayed by those first colonists and some would figure prominently in Sandisfield's future, helping to mold its religious, social, and economic character.

The Strange Trial of Joseph Lipsitz

In March 1906, New Boston resident Joseph Lipsitz was the subject of one of the most spectacular demonstrations ever seen in an American courtroom. It had all begun three years earlier, when the train Joseph had taken home from New York City collided head-on with a runaway train engine near Waterbury, Connecticut. Two people were killed and 16 others were injured, including Joseph, who was thrown from his seat and broke three ribs.

Joseph later sued the New York, New Haven and Hartford Railroad for $20,000 in damages. He claimed he had been thrown against the ironwork of the car platform and, in addition to the broken ribs, had suffered a spinal cord injury that didn't manifest itself until several months after the accident. His lawsuit alleged that damage to his sensory nerves had caused him to lose all feeling from the neck down, although he could still move and walk.

The railroad company refuted his allegation, maintaining his injury was a sham, and the case went to trial in Brooklyn, New York.

Neurologist Dr. William Hirsch testified on Joseph's behalf and explained that the loss of feeling was due to a hemorrhage of the spinal cord. He added that it was possible the damage to his motor nerves could lead to total paralysis in the future. Joseph's lawyer, Abraham Oberstein, told the court that before the trial he had blindfolded Joseph and pushed him against a red-hot stove. He said Joseph hadn't felt any pain and continued to lean against the stove until he was pushed away. He then showed a scar on his client's body that was alleged to be from the burn.

To further prove their case to the jury, Mr. Oberstein suggested that a bizarre test be performed on Joseph, which the railroad's lawyer agreed to.

In a demonstration compared to something out of the Dark Ages, Joseph was stripped to the waist, and he then stood in front of the courtroom while Dr. Hirsch touched his body in over 50 places with a special needle that had been heated to white-hot. Joseph never flinched or gave any other indication he felt pain, although the odor of burned flesh permeated the courtroom. This unorthodox exhibition had the effect Mr. Oberstein had hoped for and the railroad company settled the lawsuit, paying Joseph $5,000 in damages.

The day after *The Springfield Republican* reported an account of the trial, the newspaper printed a letter that provided an interesting postscript to this strange story.

According to the physician who wrote it, when metal is heated to white-hot and applied to the skin, it destroys sensation so quickly the victim never feels any pain. It was clear that he believed Joseph had shammed the railroad company after all.

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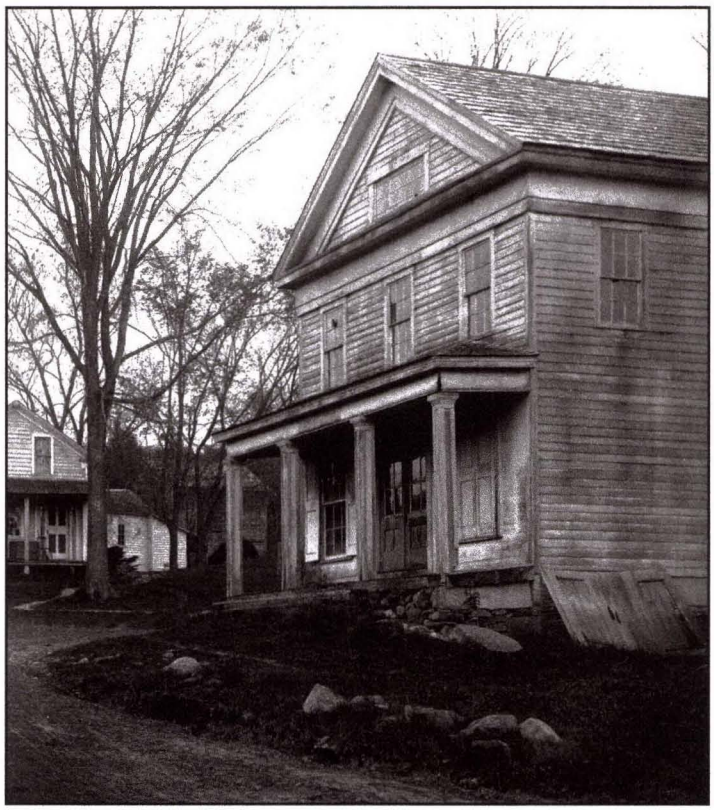
From Colony to Community

As the first decade of the 20th century drew to a close, Sandisfield's Jewish colony showed the promise of longevity. While the town's overall population decreased over the coming years, the Jewish population increased. According to the U. S. Census Bureau, Jewish families made up less than ten percent of Sandisfield's 155 families in 1910. Thirty years later, they would account for almost a quarter of the remaining 119 families. Each census was taken in the early spring before the seasonal residents returned for the summer, so the actual number of Jewish families was somewhat higher than what was represented in the census records.

The outside world continued to follow the colony's progress. When *Western New England Magazine* printed an article about the condition of immigrants living in western Massachusetts in 1911, it included Sandisfield. The piece cited the success of its Jewish residents as an example of what could be accomplished through determination and hard work. The article finished with a rather pointed comparison between the work ethic of Sandisfield's Jewish immigrants and that of American-born youth.

Farming in one form or another remained the Jewish immigrants' primary occupation, although most of the farmers had given up general farming in favor of cows and poultry. In fact, chicken farming soon became an integral part of the colony's economy, especially in the village of Montville, and for the next 50 years or so that village was synonymous with chickens.

Some immigrants decided farming wasn't their calling after all and supported themselves by taking on other roles in the community. Aaron Hendler bought the old general store in Montville and Isadore Rosner was a kosher butcher who provided his Jewish neighbors with much of their meat. Samuel Tropp, a fruit peddler in New York before coming to Sandisfield in 1918, decided early on he wasn't cut out for farming. Instead he built a bakery that supplied most of the bread in the neighborhood, filling



Montville General Store, circa 1910
(Great Barrington Historical Society)

a need that had been neglected since the bakery wagon from Winsted had stopped coming.

As the colonists became more successful in their chosen occupations, the second decade of the 20th century saw the settlement as a whole becoming more comfortable financially and some even prospered. While many in Sandisfield still used a horse and buggy to travel along the dirt roads, Solomon Pollock and Meyer Kaplan drove around the countryside in new automobiles. Even so, most of the Jewish families who lived in Sandisfield year-round needed to supplement their seasonal incomes. Nathan Pinsky and his brother-in-law, David Pollock, were among the many husbands who were forced to look farther afield during the winter to earn enough money to support their families.

Sandisfield continued to be a welcoming beacon to Jews living in the city, especially in the years between the First and Second World Wars. The summer boarding business thrived, as did the real estate business. The years between 1910 and 1940 saw hundreds of real estate transactions involving Jewish sellers and/or buyers in Sandisfield alone. There was also something of a baby boom among the town's Jewish population in the 1910s and 1920s, with the 45 babies born to Jewish families accounting for almost twenty percent of all of the births during those years.

Immigration and Resistance

While the living conditions of Jews in the Sandisfield area saw steady improvement, the same couldn't be said for those living in Eastern Europe, where the violence against Jews continued. Max Linder's wife, Ida Weintraub, was one of the thousands who had

fled Russia for the safety of America. In 1909, 14-year-old Ida and her younger sister, Anna, left their family's home in Podolia Province, fearing for their lives because of the unrelenting pogroms perpetrated by the Russian Cossacks. They lived with cousins in New York City and eventually their mother, brother, and sister left Russia to join them.



Anna, Ida, and Katie Weintraub (Cindy Moss Feldman)

Jews weren't the only victims of Russia's atrocities: Finns, Poles, and non-Jewish Russians were also subjected to the brutalities of the Russian Empire, forcing them to flee as well. Members of the Russian Orthodox Linkovich family were among the non-Jewish immigrants who left their homeland in search of a safe haven in America and found their way to Sandisfield.

The thousands of immigrants arriving in America each year remained a point of contention, both in government and among the public, just as they had at the turn of the century. Between 1913 and 1914 their numbers had been reduced by almost 600,000, mainly because of the war in Europe, but many Americans believed the thousands of immigrants allowed into our country was still too high.

In 1915, there was a renewed push to pass an anti-immigration bill that included a literacy requirement designed to exclude immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe, who were considered genetically inferior. A bill to bar anyone who couldn't read or write English had already been debated some years earlier but hadn't gone anywhere. This new bill passed the Senate by an overwhelming margin of 50 to 7 but President Wilson vetoed it because he opposed the literacy requirement, calling it a "radical departure from ... the very mission and spirit of the Nation in respect of its relations to the peoples of the world ..."

The bill was reintroduced in 1917 and once again it was vetoed by President Wilson but this time Congress overrode the veto. Included in the new immigration law was a literacy test that excluded anyone over 16 who couldn't read at least 30 words of any language or dialect, including Hebrew or Yiddish, unless they were joining relatives who were already here.

The inclusion of Hebrew and Yiddish was significant because many Jews in Russia and Romania were prevented from attending schools where they would have learned to

read and write the national language. Because Hebrew and Yiddish weren't considered living or legitimate national languages, any literacy test that omitted them would have fundamentally barred a large number of Jews from entering the country. Not surprisingly, their addition to the bill infuriated those factions in Congress who had railed for years against what they saw as Jewish influences in government and had sought to keep those languages out of the bill's final wording.

The immigration issue was still at the forefront during the 1920s. A 1921 government report showing immigration numbers were back to the levels they had been between 1910 and 1914 prompted Congress to pass the Emergency Quota Act. The Act established immigration quotas and limited annual immigration for each country to three percent of that country's representation in the 1910 U. S. Census.

Representative Albert Johnson, chairman of the Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, co-sponsored a bill with Senator David Reed that revised the existing law to limit immigration even more. Representative Johnson, a staunch proponent of immigration restriction, submitted a report on behalf of his committee that included a statement from a member of the State Department. The statement described emigrating Polish Jews as being of the "usual ghetto type ... They are filthy, un-American and often dangerous in their habits." J. C. Box, a representative from Texas who supported the bill, wrote a vitriolic opinion piece against immigration in general and Jews and Armenians in particular, voicing an opinion held by many Americans at the time.

> "One hundred thousand immigrants a month are entering the country, chiefly through the Ellis Island gateway at New York City ... The vastly greater number are the offscourings of Europe, the criminals and the parasites whom exhausted countries are throwing out in the gasping hope of saving their own land even though the measure means sinking of another country...
>
> "Happily, religious persecution has passed from the world, although Jews and Armenians, two of the races which furnish the greatest menace to the present American immigration, are fond of ascribing their unpopularity to religious grounds, rather than to industrial oppression in which they themselves have been the oppressors.
>
> "This claim to religious persecution has been capitalized repeatedly under the present literacy test law. It now furnishes the chief hope of Jewish influences in the campaign already begun for "exceptions" in the proposed new immigration law."

The Johnson-Reed Act, signed into law in 1924, limited immigration for each country to two percent of that country's representation in the 1890 Census. Following its passage, Representative Johnson announced that America's role as asylum and melting pot had come to an end. Since the majority of immigrants from Eastern Europe had come after 1890, Jewish immigration effectively had come to an end as well, dropping by almost ninety percent. Although these immigration laws were revised in subsequent years, Jewish immigration never returned to what it had been prior to the enactment of the quota laws.

Local Viewpoints

Closer to home, *The Berkshire Evening Eagle* also bemoaned the thousands of immigrants who were allowed into the country each year. In 1921, the *Evening Eagle* added its own voice to those calling for stricter immigration laws. The newspaper believed that given the state of the post-war job market, the country was in no position to absorb nearly a million immigrants a year. It argued that allowing more foreigners in wasn't fair to native-born workers or to those foreigners who were already here.

Sandisfield's Jews had made great strides with their neighbors over the years but editorials like these were evidence that anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic attitudes had by no means disappeared, even locally. Jews in Berkshire County still faced social exclusion and were barred from many of the hotels and boarding houses, including some as nearby as Monterey, New Boston, and South Sandisfield. On the other hand, Sandisfield's oldest hotel was owned briefly by a Jewish couple from Dorchester, Massachusetts, who actively encouraged a Jewish clientele. Julius and Anna Holland bought the New Boston Inn from Charles Strickland in 1924 and soon began advertising in the *Jewish Advocate*, a Boston-based newspaper. The Hollands only stayed in New Boston for two years. In 1926, they sold the hotel back to Charles Strickland. The advertisements ceased.

While opinions remained divided regarding the Jewish residents in the Sandisfield area, a more tolerant view often came from a distance. In 1922, *McClure's Magazine* wrote about the social and economic difficulties the Jewish farmers in Berkshire County had faced and overcome, calling it "a story of faith and courage, of resourcefulness and dogged persistence." Among the success stories were profiles of several Sandisfield and Otis residents including Samuel Kaplan, Isadore Rosner, Samuel Tropp, and David Pyenson.

That same year, a feature about Sandisfield in *The Springfield Republican* contained less flattering language. The author wrote "The Jews in Montville have not kept up the farming tradition of the countryside. They know little or nothing about agriculture

and the farms are going to rack and ruin. Most of the families keep summer boarders – Jews from New York. During the winter they apparently do nothing but make cider." Sandisfield's town assessor, Edman H. Strickland, echoed these sentiments, providing additional confirmation that tensions still persisted among some of the locals. He asserted that the majority of Jews had done nothing to increase the value of their properties but devoted their time to trading or summer boarders. It was his belief that the town's deliverance from its economic woes would come from its Polish farmers and not the Jews.

There were also those who chose to ignore the fact that there were any Jews in Sandisfield at all. In 1926, Sandisfield was featured in a book about Western Massachusetts but the chapter on the town made no mention of the Jewish residents who made up a significant portion of its population, focusing instead on the virtues of its Yankee inhabitants.

While the presence of Jews in Sandisfield and the neighboring towns was sure to elicit a variety of responses, none was as chilling as the incident that occurred on a Saturday night in May 1926. At midnight, a loud explosion jolted awake the residents of Monterey. When they left their homes to investigate, they were greeted by the sight of a burning cross lighting up the night sky on a hill behind the schoolhouse in the center of town. Suspicions immediately centered on the Ku Klux Klan, which was very active in western Massachusetts at the time. In fact, the Klan's influence had been growing throughout New England in a nativist response to the influx of Jews and other immigrants to the region.

It was common practice in the Berkshires for the Klan to set off a bomb to bring people's attention to the blazing cross. The visibility that the hilltop offered allowed the cross to be seen from a distance. The significance of a burning cross wouldn't have been lost on the Jews in the neighborhood and must have left many of them wondering if they had become the target of a Klan-led pogrom.

It was generally believed the cross had been put up in response to a contentious town meeting that had been held the previous Monday. The problem had started at the annual town meeting when the townspeople had voted to instruct the selectmen not to grant any slaughtering licenses for the year. The only current licensee was a Jewish butcher named Barney Mirman, who had lived in Monterey since 1907 and owned a slaughterhouse in the Corashire section of town. Losing his slaughtering license would have put him out of business, so Barney circulated a petition to call a special town meeting. He enlisted the support of his neighbors to rescind the original vote. Opposition had been strong but Barney's side won by a vote of 46 to 42, and the selectmen allowed him to renew his license.

Barney's elation over his victory was short-lived. Not long afterward, his 17-year-old son, Samuel, was killed by his cousin, Michael Sacks, in an accidental shooting. A little more than a year later, the Mirmans sold their farm and moved to Brooklyn, where Barney peddled fruit.

A Spirit of Cooperation and Friendship

Although the cross burning in Monterey and disparaging comments from men like Ed Strickland were unsettling, they weren't necessarily representative. Having lived in Sandisfield since the turn of the century, Jews were no longer the outsiders but had assimilated into what had become an ethnically diverse rural community that included non-Jewish Russians, Germans, Finns, Poles, and Italians.

In 2002, long-time resident Roberta Meyers wrote a letter to the editor of *The Berkshire Eagle* contending that Sandisfield was special because of that very same ethnic diversity, which manifested itself in a multicultural community that took care of its own. Typical of this spirit of cooperation was a story she cited from Bob Ives, who was descended from one of the town's earliest families. Bob reported that when his entire family was stricken during the influenza epidemic, Israel Albert, one of the elders of the Jewish community, walked up the hill to their house every day to feed and water their cattle until the family was back on their feet.

Bonds were also forged between unlikely allies, such as Sandisfield's Jews and the settlement of Russian Orthodox farmers in the western part of town. Oral history has credited the Jews with bringing the first members of the settlement from New York to Sandisfield in the early part of the century. Although it was unlikely the Jews and the Russians would have associated in Europe, in this corner of the Berkshires, they made a story of mutual support. The Russians came from an agricultural background and were able to make a living from farmland that had, for the most part, defied the attempts of the Jewish farmers. Since the majority of Jews in Montville and West New Boston had given up on general farming, they turned to their Russian neighbors to supplement whatever dairy products and vegetables they didn't produce themselves.

A piece that appeared in *The Berkshire Hills* in 1939 illustrates the generosity of the Jewish community to those who might have been adversaries under different circumstances. The writer interviewed a Russian Orthodox woman who explained that her family had moved to Sandisfield from New Haven, Connecticut after her husband had become too ill to continue working at the typewriter plant. Seeing their plight, one of the Jewish men in town hired the husband as a handyman and later presented the family with the gift of an old farmhouse.

According to lifelong resident Walter Linkovich, Solomon Pollock was responsible for bringing the Linkovich family to Sandisfield. Walter's grandparents, father, and three uncles had decided to leave Russia after the Cossacks burned their farm. They sent Victor, Walter's uncle, to America first, with instructions to find a farm to buy. While Victor was in Brooklyn, he met Solomon, who suggested he go to Sandisfield because of the low price of farmland. In 1911, Victor and his brother, August, bought David Walpiansky's farm outside of New Boston. Three years later, Walter's father, William, and his uncle, John, bought the house and farm in the western part of town where Walter still lives.

Anne Pinsky Hoffman, who grew up in the 1930s, often spoke of the noticeable absence of anti-Semitism in Sandisfield, which she said set it apart from some of the neighboring towns. This view was echoed by Norton Fletcher, Rose Linder Petrokofsky, Marvin Sandler, and others who grew up in the 1930s and 1940s. These children were already a generation removed from the bigotry and hostility experienced by the first colonists. Many of the locals' attitudes had changed in the intervening years. Anne attributed this lack of anti-Semitism to the growing diversity of the community and a shared spirit of cooperation. Norton Fletcher said as a general rule Jews and non-Jews got along very well with each other, to the extent that Jewish families even went to the church suppers at the Congregational Church in New Boston. He still speaks warmly of Harry Lifshitz, the kind neighbor from down the road, who used to stop and give a young Norton a ride to the general store in his Model A Ford so the youngster wouldn't have to walk.

The cooperative spirit that had developed between Jews and non-Jews in Sandisfield could be seen in any number of ways. Farmers helped each other out when weather threatened their hay crops and they united to work toward common objectives. When a storm caused a washout on Town Hill Road in April 1936, Samuel Steinbauch, Max Margulies, and Benjamin Weiss joined Sandisfield native Charles Phelps and the other egg and dairy farmers along the road to write a strongly worded letter to the county commissioners after their complaints to the town selectmen fell on deaf ears.

Neighbors also looked out for each other, especially when times were hard. Alford Rowley, who owned a farm on Town Hill Road, knew that Ida Linder depended on summer boarders even more than usual during the Depression because her husband was out of work so often. When he heard she hadn't been able to rent her rooms, he sent a family with two children down to see her and they ended up renting for the whole season.

Better relations meant better outcomes when innocent mistakes and misunderstandings occurred. One of the more humorous ones involved David Pollock,

who had partnered with Nathan and Hyman Pinsky to buy some property in Montville in 1915. Shortly afterward, David went out to mow the grass. Not knowing the exact boundaries of his property, he accidentally cut an acre belonging to his neighbor, Herbert Fargo, as well. Herbert was good-natured about the blunder, happy to have one less acre to cut.

As with any community, though, not everyone got along and some disagreements still ended up in court. Most of these involved breaches of contract or some other business transaction, but a few cases were peculiar, such as the lawsuit brought by Harry Kosberg against his in-laws, Rebecca and Solomon Pollock. Harry alleged that the Pollocks had been responsible for the alienation of his wife's affection and sued them for $10,000 each. Another lawsuit that must have created some tension within a household was filed by Tillie Kaplan against Edith Filansky, who taught at the West Street School and boarded with the Kaplan family during the school year. Apparently, Edith had fallen behind on her room and board, and Tillie sued her to collect the $59 she owed.



Rebecca Pollock

David Walpiansky's Last Ride

David Walpiansky and his wife, Minnie, moved to Sandisfield in the fall of 1904, where the David and his family began new lives as dairy farmers. Several years later, David became ill with tuberculosis; he died in May 1914. Instead of burying him in Pittsfield like a few other Jewish families in town, his family chose to have his body shipped from Great Barrington to a Jewish cemetery in Brooklyn. Unfortunately, poor David had the misfortune of dying during a wet period. The road to Great Barrington from his house on West Street was so muddy the undertaker refused to come to Sandisfield to pick up his body. Undaunted, his friends found a car and sat David in the back seat between two of his friends, while another friend drove.

It was said that the sight of a dead man riding through the main street of Great Barrington caused a stir among those who witnessed the episode. David Walpiansky's unconventional car ride got him safely to the undertaker in Great Barrington. The spectacle of his trip was so extraordinary that accounts of it were printed in newspapers across the country.

Some in the Jewish community also ended up on the wrong side of the law. Nathan Kalman and Abraham Kravitz were arrested for having an illegal brandy still up on Town Hill Road. Oscar Shenkman went to federal prison for stealing army blankets from the Civilian Conservation Corps camp in Sandisfield. But these were the exceptions and the criminal actions of a few Jews weren't representative of the Jewish community as a whole.

Assimilation

When the first Jews arrived in Sandisfield, many of them spoke little or no English because they had had no need to do so when they lived in the Jewish neighborhoods of New York. Once in Sandisfield, however, the men had to learn English in order to deal with the locals. The women, on the other hand, rarely ventured outside the familiar confines of the colony and had no need to speak the language. Very often, as with other immigrant groups, it wasn't until the children went to school and learned English themselves that they brought the language home to their mothers. One of the exceptions was Samuel Kaplan's wife, Tillie. The Kaplans were in the cattle business and Tillie had to learn English quickly so she could deal with the local butchers and other tradespeople because Samuel was away so often attending to his business in the city.

For many immigrants, assimilation into American culture included changing their foreign-sounding names. Some changed them formally through the legal process but many just started calling themselves by an American name that sounded similar. Aaron Hendler called himself Harry and Zalman Plotkin became known as Samuel. The late Milt Barrie said the locals all called his father, Abe Baranoff, Benny because they thought the name Abraham was too Biblical for such a terrific guy. The entire Baranoff family later shortened their last name to Barrie. In the 1940s, Morris Moskowitz and his sons, Israel, Saul, and Isadore, legally changed their names to Murray, Irving, Sol, and Edward Moss.



Samuel Weinstein and Abe Baranoff, 1929
(The William Barrie family)

The opening of Joseph Lipsitz's dance hall in 1906 had been one of

the early ice-breakers for the Jews. Henry Manley's down-home columns with its chatty items about Jewish families also helped make them seem less "other." Henry's columns have shown that not only were Jewish families included in local gatherings, the Jews very often included local families in their own gatherings and celebrations.

Joseph Lipsitz, the first colonist to get involved in town politics, was elected to the position of town selectman in 1906. Over the next two years he was also named the town's pound keeper, superintendent of roads, and fence viewer.

By the 1930s, more of Sandisfield's Jewish men had become involved in civic affairs, where they worked alongside the other men in town. Some of the positions they held were characteristic of life in a rural town, such as Sam Steinbauch's appointment as field driver. It was his responsibility to round up and impound farm animals that were found roaming freely in Montville. Other positions were more conventional: Morris Levine was appointed the town's tax assessor, Max Margulies was tax collector, and Harry Weiss became a police officer. These positions not only provided another source of income to families struggling through the Depression, they gave members of the Jewish community a voice in town matters.

Maintaining Jewish Identity

Assimilation into the larger Sandisfield community didn't mean the Jews had sacrificed their identity or their own shared sense of community. Yiddish was still spoken in their homes, where religious holidays and dietary restrictions were strictly observed. While the Jewish community did mingle more with the locals as the years went by, they still socialized primarily within their own circle. Most of the families had clustered in Montville and West New Boston, a distance of almost three miles, and the two groups maintained a close relationship. Evenings often found Montville families gathering at Israel Albert's home in West New Boston and then walking back home late at night, tired but happy.

By far, the most significant event for the Jewish community came in 1922, when Congregation Sons of Abraham purchased the old Baptist church in Montville as its synagogue. For years, Jews in the Sandisfield area had lacked a central gathering place to worship. The synagogue established a permanent Jewish presence in the town, especially in the village of Montville. It also served to draw other Jews to Sandisfield, whether they were summer boarders or people looking to move out of New York City to a place where they were free to observe their religion with other Jews. The synagogue soon became more than a house of worship, serving as a community center for both the Jewish congregation and the town.

Courtship and Marriage

By now, friendships between Jewish children and their schoolmates had become commonplace but dating was another issue altogether. No matter how much they socialized with others, teenagers and young adults were expected to date and marry fellow Jews. Centuries of persecution and anti-Semitism had left Jews wary of people who weren't of their faith and choosing a life's partner who shared the same heritage, traditions, and values ensured the survival of both the Jewish religion and its culture. Young Jews dated others not only from the immediate Sandisfield area but from nearby towns in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Several marriages from the 1910s through the 1930s included a husband or wife from New York because of the many relationships, familial and otherwise, that existed between that city and Sandisfield. Love and marriage weren't reserved only for the young, either. When Israel Albert married for the second time in 1926, he was 65 years old and his new wife, Eva, was 73.

Although marriage outside of the faith was discouraged, it did happen. The parents of one young girl opposed her marriage to the son of a local family, so the couple chose to be married by the Congregational minister in Otis. The two were devoted to each other for the rest of their lives and died within months of each other.

"Life in Our Rural Berkshire Hills"

Sandisfield offered very little in the way of modern improvements. As late as 1913, there was talk of a trolley line that would connect New Boston to other towns in the southern Berkshires. The trolley never materialized, and the town's isolation from the rest of the county continued. Most homes lacked telephones even though the phone company had run lines from Winsted in 1911. Western Massachusetts Electric Company didn't provide service to Sandisfield until the mid-1930s. Farms in the outlying areas of town weren't fully electrified until the late 1940s.

Without electricity, food storage depended on ice boxes, and ice boxes depended on ice houses. Thick blocks of ice were cut from the frozen ponds in the winter and taken to the ice house for storage. The floor of the ice house was lined with a thick layer of sawdust, followed by a layer of ice blocks. This was repeated until all of the ice was stored between the insulating layers of sawdust. Esther Charney Rothstein recalled that her mother, Rebecca, had a system for organizing the family's perishables. After she put the food on the top layer of ice and covered it with sawdust, she kept track of what was buried by putting paper labels on sticks and placing them next to the food.

Most of the old houses where Jewish families lived were heated by wood stoves or fireplaces instead of furnaces. Winters were especially hard because the houses had

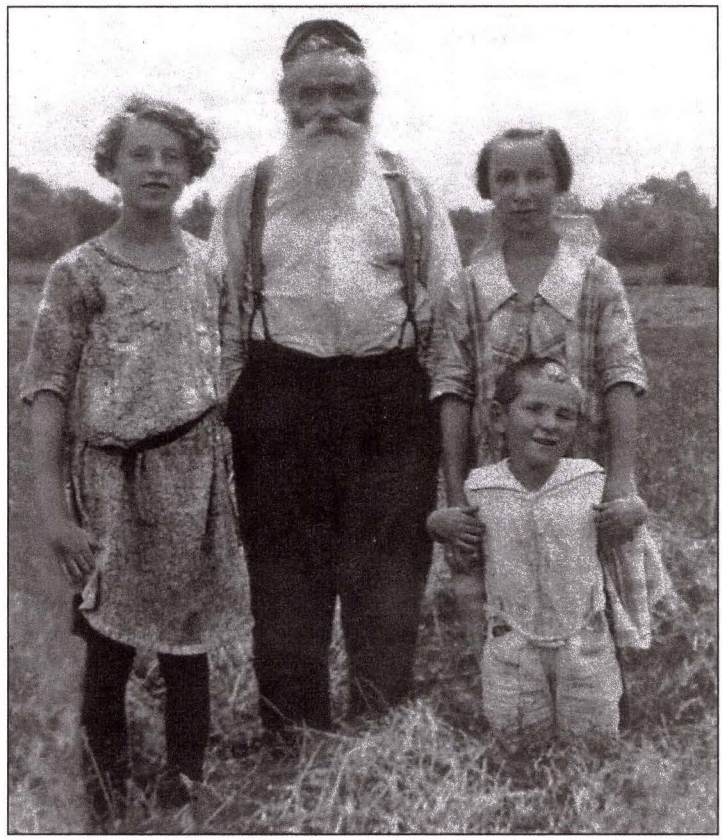
Sandisfield and the Great War

In April 1917, the United States declared war on Germany, abandoning its neutral stance and entering into a conflict that had been waging in Europe for the prior three years. Americans were implored to support the war effort by eating less bread and meat. They were told that if they weren't making sacrifices to support the war effort they were supporting the enemy instead.

Shortly after the declaration, the selectmen of Sandisfield took steps to safeguard the town by calling a special meeting at Town Hall to discuss the formation of a Home Guard. All citizens were asked to attend, especially those 18 and over. Towns around the country were forming Home Guards to fill the protective role of a state militia in the event its State National Guard was called to active duty. Home Guards were responsible for protecting local water supplies, factories, electric plants, bridges, and any other sites that could be targets of an attack. In addition to Sandisfield's Home Guard committee, the meeting resulted in the creation of a committee for Public Safety and another for Food Production and Conservation.

Sandisfield, like the rest of the country, quickly felt the effects of the war through rationing and higher prices on goods. Henry Manley summed up the situation in one of his columns, writing "What bothers me is what we are going to live on. One paper will say we must eat less bread; the next paper says cut out meat; the next says be sparing of the potatoes ... so what in thunder are we going to eat?"

Several of Sandisfield's young men served in the war, including those from Jewish families. Samuel Kaplan's son, Joseph, joined the Army and was sent to France as an ambulance driver. Joseph had been born in Russia and after the war was awarded citizenship in recognition of his service. Herman Goldberg, the nephew of Zalman and Rebecca Plotkin, served with the Army's American Expeditionary Forces in France. He was wounded during the Battle of Argonne Forest. When he returned from the war, his proud aunt and uncle in Montville welcomed him home with a surprise party that included locals like Charles Whitney and his wife as well as friends and relatives from as far away as New York City.



Esther Charney, Samuel Shenkman, Sadie Charney, and Morris Charney, circa 1923
(George Rothstein)

little or no insulation against the weather, and chinks in the walls and floorboards let in drafts that undid any benefit the heat provided. Food froze in the pantry. Pails of water froze in the kitchen if set too far from the stove. Fortunately, the one thing these families didn't lack was firewood.

Few of the homes had indoor plumbing. When winter storms left the snow piled too high to reach the family's spring or well, they resorted to melting snow on the stove for cooking and washing until they could shovel a path to their water.

All of the roads in town were unpaved, creating a variety of perils for anyone traveling on them, especially in very wet or icy conditions. Route 8, which passes through New Boston, was part of the New England Interstate Route by 1922, but even that was a dirt road until it reached Connecticut. Sandisfield's mail was processed in Winsted and in the winter, it had to be taken by horse and sleigh south to the state line, where it was transferred to a car and driven to the Winsted Post Office.

Connecticut's paved roads also made shopping trips easier. Most people in Montville, West New Boston, and New Boston took their business to Winsted instead of traveling along the dangerously rutted roads to Great Barrington or Lee.

While life in Sandisfield could be challenging at times, it never stopped people from enjoying themselves. In summer the boarding houses were filled with guests and the air rang with laughter and music. An example of how lively things got was a party hosted by Zalman and Rebecca Plotkin at their home in Montville. One summer day in 1919, the couple held a huge barn dance that featured entertainers from New York and a person who communicated with the spirit world.



Baranoff's Dance Hall, circa 1933
(The William Barrie family)

Things got even livelier on a hot July night in 1927. That was when Abe Baranoff opened his new dance hall in Montville. Music for opening night was provided by the band that Abe's son, George, had put together with some of his friends from Great Barrington. According to Abe's son, Willie, the natives liked country music for square dancing so, whenever possible, Abe hired local celebrity Sammy Spring to play his fiddle and call the dances. If Sammy wasn't available, then the Stewarts came over from Lee, with Pop Stewart on the drums, Virgil Stewart on the piano, and Tommy Nugent playing the saxophone.

Any night the dance hall was open, Baranoff's was sure to draw a crowd. Abe didn't stop at dancing. Popular welterweight boxer Dave Shade had been living in Sandisfield since 1926 and the local boys all flocked to his training camp. When Abe saw all the interest



Dave Shade's training camp
Back row: Unidentified, Toby Polley,
George Baranoff, Unidentified,
Front: Milt Baranoff
(The William Barrie family)



George Baranoff
(The William Barrie family)

Dave's presence had sparked in the neighborhood, he added boxing bouts to his nighttime line-up.

"Our Pleasures Were Delightfully Simple"

For Jewish children, growing up in Sandisfield wasn't much different than it was for other children. Once schoolwork and chores were done all the children went outside to play with their friends. Every change of season brought new activities and new places to explore. They scampered over rocks, skated on frozen ponds, and sped down Moskowitz's snow-covered hill on homemade sleds (Isadore Moskowitz always went down backwards). The new ski jump in New Boston was a source of fascination during its construction and continued to be one after it opened, with the added excitement of potential spills that could produce broken bones. Brothers George, Willie, and Milt Baranoff joined other local boys at the training camp that Dave Shade ran near Sandisfield Center and learned to box from Dave himself.

Young playmates knew no ethnic or religious barriers. They didn't care if their friends were fellow immigrants or the children of Sandisfield's founding families. Sid Pinsky and Leo Taslitt, the sons of Russian Jews, played with Walter Linkovich, the son of a Russian Orthodox family. The Pinsky boys hung out with Norton Fletcher, the American-born son of a chauffeur. Israel Moskowitz and Milt Baranoff played with the Riiska boys, whose parents came from Finland.

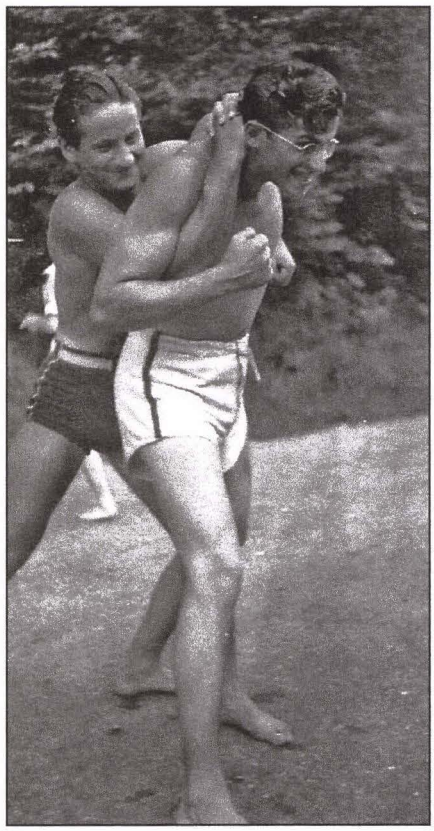
When summer came the number of youngsters swelled as families returned to Sandisfield to open their houses for the season. The addition of boarders and extended family members increased



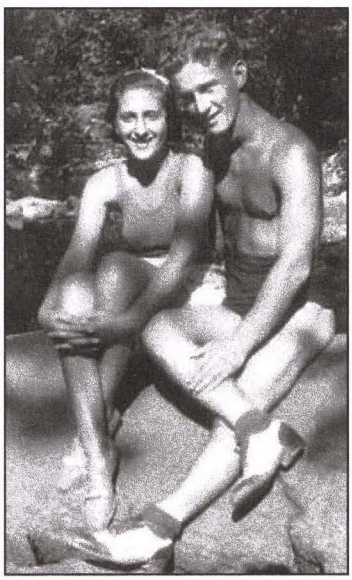
Israel Moskowitz, a Riiska son, and Milt Baranoff, 1931
(The William Barrie family)

those numbers even more. Girls and boys who hadn't seen each other all winter stayed outside from early morning until long after dark. They cooled off at the falls on the Buck River, picnicked at Jones Knoll, and played baseball in the field across from the Pinsky house. Dark nights meant trips to the cemetery near Sandisfield Center, where they donned the sheets they'd taken from linen closets and flitted between the gravestones, pretending to be ghosts.

For the teenaged boys, rough-housing was the order of the day and someone always had a camera handy to record the antics of Marty Pinsky and Joe German. Come Saturday night, the youngsters joined their parents at Baranoff's Dance Hall to swing their partners around the floor to the tune of Sammy Spring's fiddle. Sometimes, when the song was over, teens like Pauline Linder and Willie Baranoff paired off to take a walk under the stars, away from the watchful eyes of their parents.



Joe German and Marty Pinsky, 1938



Pauline Linder and Willie Baranoff, 1931 (The William Barrie family)

The friendships forged during those years often lasted a lifetime. Eleanor Pinsky Skolnick speaks for more than just herself when she says her days growing up in Sandisfield were some of the happiest of her life.

The Depression

Many of the Jewish men in Sandisfield worked in New York City as furriers. Ida Linder wrote in her diary that theirs was one of the first industries to notice a change in the economy a full year before the stock market crash in 1929. It's possible that this change was what prompted Morris Moskowitz to make the decision to move his family from the city to live full-time in Montville.

Whatever the reason for Morris' decision, it turned out to be a wise one. Following the crash, his brother-in-law, Max Linder, and Max's brother, Benny, followed his lead and brought their own families to Montville to live full-time. Although Max and Benny had lost their fur businesses, they still considered themselves lucky because they had their homes in Montville. While most of the families in New York's Jewish neighborhoods were at the mercy of landlords, those with houses in Sandisfield had the option of moving out of the city and move they did. Home ownership didn't only provide protection from greedy landlords – more than one family mortgaged their Sandisfield home in an attempt to remain self-sufficient.

With their families safely in the Berkshires, husbands stayed in the city, living with relatives or renting rooms. They took whatever work they could and sometimes were lucky enough to find a job that lasted more than a couple of weeks so they could send some money home. Benny Linder expressed the hope shared by many during those lean times when he wrote in a letter to his wife "maybe next week they will call me."

Meanwhile, the families in Sandisfield carried on as best they could while the men were away. Most of them had relied on the summer boarding business in the past but boarders weren't as plentiful as they'd been before the Depression. Fortunately, a few Jews in the city still managed to scrape together enough money to come to Sandisfield, if only for a couple of weeks. Now, though, their flight from New York wasn't so much to escape the summer heat as it was to escape the growing fear of polio that had gripped the Jewish neighborhoods.

Local merchants understood the desperate spot their customers were in and let them buy what they needed on credit until their husbands could send money. Sometimes payment was a long time coming. New Boston butcher Max Nager voiced concerns over his continued ability to serve his customers in Sandisfield, saying everybody in town wanted meat but nobody had the money to pay for it.

Neighbors helped neighbors in this tight-knit community by loaning what little money they had. Very often repayment was in the form of milk, butter, or cheese. Ida Linder earned extra money for her family by selling the antiques that had been left in the house by previous owners to antiques dealers who knocked on her door. She also sent recipes and short stories to *The Jewish Daily Forward*, a Yiddish-language newspaper, and wrote in her diary with pride when she received a five-dollar bill in the mail for a recipe the newspaper had printed.

The adults often got together in the basement of the synagogue where they shared concerns about their mortgages, their ever-growing debts, and life in general. But in spite of all the hardships, optimism was never very far away. Every family in Sandisfield was thankful for the home that provided a roof over their heads, and the

kitchen garden that kept them from going hungry. Ida Linder summed up this resilient spirit when she wrote in her diary "We live in hopes and God willing, we shall have better times, I am sure."

The country continued to feel the effects of the Depression throughout much of the 1930s. By the middle of the decade, though, things had improved enough for some families to return to the city during the winter. But at the same time that Max Linder and Morris Moskowitz were resuming their old jobs, others were choosing to leave the unemployment lines and move to Sandisfield to try their hands at chicken farming. Between 1930 and 1940 the number of Jewish families increased by more than forty percent. So many chicken farms were started in Sandisfield that its reputation as a chicken town was secure for years to come.

Growth and a Troubling Trend

What had started as a Jewish farm colony had evolved over the course of four decades from an isolated settlement of Yiddish-speaking immigrants into a rural Jewish community fully integrated into what had become a culturally diverse town. In Montville, the long-hoped-for synagogue was finally a reality and was now as much a part of Sandisfield's character as the Congregational Church in New Boston.

While the synagogue drew more Jews to Sandisfield, turnover was a fact of life and had been ever since the first Jewish families had arrived in 1902. Farms changed hands from one owner to another, stores opened and closed. Samuel Kaplan moved to the other side of New Marlborough. Samuel Tropp returned to New York after his house and bakery burned down in a fire. Newcomer Sarah Rich reopened Harry Hendler's old general store in Montville, while down in New Boston, Max and Dora Nager sold their store to Morris Immerman and bought another one in Quaker Springs, New York.

Among the younger generation, a trend was taking shape and it was one that Sandisfield had seen before. Children who had grown up working on farms alongside their parents saw no reason to stay on after high school when better opportunities beckoned elsewhere. As America approached the eve of World War II, the number of Jewish families moving into town still outnumbered those who left, but for Sandisfield's Jewish community, a troubling trend had begun that would accelerate over the coming decades.

The Great Sandisfield Moonshine Raid

To the casual observer, Nathan Kalman and his neighbor, Abraham Kravitz, were just another two Jewish immigrants from New York City who had moved to Sandisfield in search of a better life. But the relative seclusion of the old Berkshire Pleasant View Inn up on Town Hill Road provided the perfect cover for one of the largest illicit brandy stills in the state.

Making illegally distilled liquor, known as moonshine, was a lucrative source of income during the early 20th century because it evaded the $1.10 per gallon tax legitimate distillers had to pay to the Internal Revenue. Illicit kosher brandy was especially profitable because the large Jewish population in New York provided those who made it with a market eager for their product. In fact, the investigation into the source of the moonshine began after large amounts of kosher brandy started showing up in the Jewish neighborhoods of the Lower East Side, disguised as maple syrup.

The Internal Revenue agent assigned to the case was Green Miller from Boston, a man who had been instrumental in uncovering illicit stills in his home state of Kentucky. After a month following various leads, he finally tracked the illegal brandy back to Nathan and Abraham. He discovered that a firm in Great Barrington had been shipping large quantities of grape sugar in boxes marked "soda" to Nathan's farm in Sandisfield. Agent Miller and Revenue Officer Walter Carter left Boston for Springfield where they obtained warrants for the two men and enlisted the help of Deputy U. S. Marshal Edward Leyden.

On a cold February day in 1911, the three officers headed to Nathan's house on the outskirts of Sandisfield, first by train and then by sleigh. They arrived late in the afternoon and found Nathan and Abraham at the farm, along with another man and several women and children. Nathan didn't object to the men searching the house but denied making any recent purchases of the ingredients needed to make brandy.

A strong odor of fermenting liquor pervaded the house, especially in the living room, where a bathtub was hooked up to a well outside. As the officers searched for evidence, they came upon a locked door, which Nathan, in broken English, tried to dissuade them from entering. Ignoring him, they broke open the lock and went down the stairs into the cellar where they discovered a well-constructed still, capable of holding 150 gallons. The still was connected to the bathtub upstairs in the living room. Stacked around the cellar were containers marked "soda" that

held grape sugar and copper-lined crates marked "maple syrup." The still proved to be too large to move, so Agent Miller destroyed it with an axe before the officers returned to Springfield with their prisoners and the evidence they had collected.

Brought before U. S. Commissioner John L. Rice, both Nathan and Abraham pleaded not guilty. Nathan claimed the property and still were owned by others and he only rented his wagon and team to them. Abraham maintained he was just a farmhand employed by Nathan and had no knowledge of the still. He said he had no idea what was written on the crates he carried to and from Great Barrington because he could neither read nor write. Several of Abraham's neighbors and relatives came forward to testify on his behalf, including Julius Mishkin, the local rabbi. Two of Sandisfield's town officials provided a statement attesting to his good character and honest reputation.

In spite of their denials, both men were indicted for conducting an illicit still. Max Frankel, a syrup salesman and Nathan's brother-in-law, was indicted for conspiracy to violate Internal Revenue laws because he received the brandy once it reached New York. Nathan was sentenced to five months in jail and Max received a three-month sentence, which was suspended until Nathan's release so he could care for Nathan's family. The case against Abraham was filed as pending, and it's unclear if he ever received a sentence.

The raid in Sandisfield uncovered one of the most important illegal distilleries ever found in the United States. Authorities believed it had been in operation since Nathan moved into the house four years earlier. Six months after the raid, Nathan sold the house to Max and Sarah Diamond of the Bronx. Nathan and his family returned to the city, where he sold real estate. In 1913, he was involved in a partnership lawsuit over The Grand View Hotel, a summer hotel he owned in Colchester, Connecticut. Abraham and his wife, Rose, moved to Monterey and opened a summer boarding house. Max remained in New York and continued with his syrup business.

4

Years of Change

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor shocked our nation to its core. For several years America had watched from a distance as Japan exerted its dominance over Asia and Hitler's army spread death across Europe. While we gave material aid to Great Britain and France, we stayed out of the war they had been fighting against Germany since 1939. But on December 7, 1941, the Japanese brought the war to our doorstep. Japan was part of the Axis Alliance with Germany and Italy so in one fell swoop we were at war on two fronts.

Sandisfield, like the rest of the nation, banded together in support of the war effort. Residents planted war gardens to save commercially grown food for the troops, and the Victory Garden Committee encouraged them to show off their patriotism by entering those gardens in contests. The women in town donated their old silk stockings to Great Barrington's Salvage Committee so they could be remade into powder bags. The Riiskas, Dixons, and Schachters all did their part to raise money for the Red Cross war fund.

It's still not clear if everyone in Sandisfield supported the Allied efforts during the war. In her book *Sandisfield: Biography of a Town*, Anne Hoffman addressed the undercurrent of pro-Hitler sentiments that some in Sandisfield believed existed at the time. There had been reports of pennies scratched with swastikas circulating in town in the late 1930s, and during the war there were unsubstantiated rumors that a few German residents were using short-wave radios to stay in contact with Nazi Germany.

They Served with Pride

Almost half of Sandisfield's youth served in the Armed Forces. Just as they had in the First World War, families proved that no matter where their forebears were



Jacob Jensky
(Cindy Pinsky)

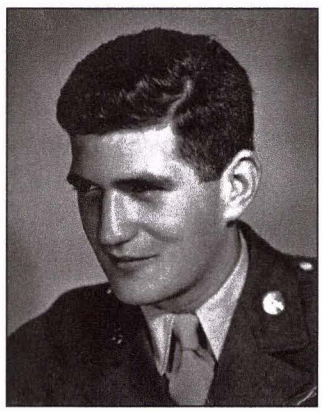
from, first and foremost they were Americans. Several families had two or more children in uniform. By the time the war was over, Sandisfield had its share of Gold Star families as well.

Benjamin and Rebecca Jensky's son, Jacob, was all too aware of what was going on in Europe. In 1941, he was working in New York City for the Great West Colonization Company, which was planning a colony of Jewish refugees in the British West Indies. The plan for the colony had come about in 1938 after meetings between Britain's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and U. S. Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy had culminated in Britain agreeing to open 10,000 square miles in British Guiana to Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany.

Just days before the attack on Pearl Harbor, Jacob left New York. At 32, he was too old to join the U. S. Army Air Corps so he went to Montreal to enlist in the Royal Canadian Air Force. After training as a pilot in Canada, he was promoted to flight sergeant and assigned to a squadron in England. On August 31, 1943 he was returning to the RAF airfield at Skipton-on-Swale when his plane crashed, killing all on board. Jacob was buried in the Rheinberg War Cemetery in Germany. Canada memorialized his name in the *Second World War Book of Remembrance,* a book that commemorates the men and women who died in defense of that country.



Marty Pinsky
(The Pinsky family)



Daniel Pinsky
(Cindy Pinsky)

Marty Pinsky was in New York City attending New York University when he left college to join the army in February 1942. Marty was sent to Europe, where he was wounded twice while fighting in Germany and Northern France. During the course of his service he received three battle stars, the Combat Infantry Badge, and the Purple Heart.

Marty's cousin, Daniel Pinsky, was stationed in Germany. During his time in the army he served as a driver and chaplain's assistant and received a medal for his

sharpshooting skills. When the war was over, he stayed in Germany as part of the occupation before being transferred to London.



Al Lazarowitz (Joanne Olson)

Al Lazarowitz enlisted at Fort Dix, New Jersey in February 1942. He served with the 179th Infantry under General George S. Patton in Europe and North Africa and saw combat in Italy and Sicily. While in Europe he contracted malaria and was discharged in December 1944.

Max and Regina Margulies' sons, Milton and Seymour, both served in the war. Milton returned safely, but Seymour was badly wounded in Germany. In addition to the Purple Heart, he received the Silver Star, our nation's third highest award for bravery in combat.

Eighteen-year-old Peter Schutack left Lee High School to enlist in the army in 1944. His brother, William, had joined earlier. The Schutack family wasn't Jewish but they were well-known in the Jewish community. Peter's mother, Anna, was especially popular. She knew her Orthodox Jewish neighbors were prohibited by their religion to turn on their electric lights during the Sabbath, so every Friday after sundown she went to each of their homes and turned their lights on for them. She spoke Yiddish as well as any Jew and as she left she would wish her friends "Gut Shabbos" (Good Sabbath) before closing the door.

Peter was killed in Belgium just before his nineteenth birthday. Eleanor Skolnick says the Jewish families in Montville cried as hard as everyone else when they heard the news. She still remembers his rosy cheeks and contagious smile and says his death hit the young people in that close-knit village especially hard because it was the first time they had lost a playmate to war.

Sandisfield's sons weren't the only ones who served. Max and Ida Linder's daughter, Pauline, enlisted in the Women's Army Corps in October 1942 and was assigned to work with our British allies at the Medmenham Royal Air Force Station in Buckinghamshire, England. She attained the rank of first lieutenant and worked alongside Winston Churchill's daughter, Sarah, in the aerial photo map interpretation unit. That November Pauline assisted in the invasion of North Africa by American and British troops, which went by the code name "Operation Torch." She later helped discover where Hitler's V-2 rocket program was being developed at the Peenemunde rocket site in the Baltic Sea.



Pauline Linder

A Hard-Fought Peace

The war in Europe ended on May 8, 1945, with Germany's unconditional surrender. Locally, parades broke out in the streets, factories closed for the day, and workers at the General Electric plant in Pittsfield snake-danced through town. Before long the first prisoners of war started to return to their homes in the Berkshires. The country was still fighting the Japanese in the Pacific but Americans were beginning to see an end to the long years of war.

At Memorial Day observances that year, Rabbi Galpert of Pittsfield's Temple Anshe Amunim said the "best memorial we can create is for us to live here in America the democracy for which our boys have died." Sandisfield observed the holiday by paying tribute to two of its own, with a memorial service for Peter Schutack and Charles Bay at the Congregational Church in New Boston.

Four months later, Japan's surrender signaled the end of the war in the Pacific. Marilyn Haferling Leiman, who was a boarder at David and Libby Pinsky's house in West New Boston that summer, remembers everyone in Sandisfield gathering at the big bonfire that had been built to celebrate the war's end.

The Holocaust Hits Home

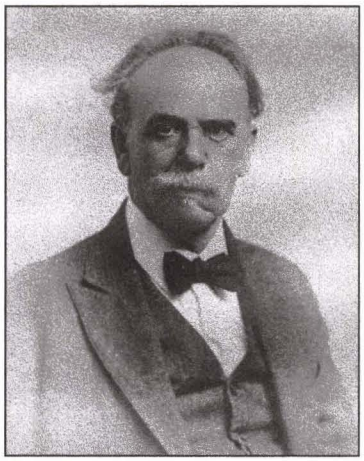
Long before the United States entered World War II, the atrocities in Europe were more than just newspaper headlines for Sandisfield's Jewish families. They knew the stories about the victims of Nazi brutality weren't about faceless people but the relatives and friends they had left behind. All too often the full extent of the horrors didn't become known until the war was over.



Franziska Boas
(Barbara Boas)

Gertrud Michelson, who married Daniel Pinsky in 1952, knew about these horrors first-hand because they had happened to her father's family. Nikolai Michelsohn was a physician who had been born in Riga, Latvia. When he left the country in 1923, his sisters, Mary and Dina, stayed behind.

Nikolai settled in New York City and in 1928, he married Franziska Boas, the daughter of noted anthropologist Franz Boas. Gertrud was born the following year. By then Nikolai had changed his name to Nicholas Michelson and was working at Columbia University. He was also assisting his father-in-law in his anthropological research.



Franz Boas
(Barbara Boas)

Franz Boas had been born in Germany and received his doctorate from the University of Kiel in 1881. Much of his life was spent studying race and environment, both in Germany and the United States. In 1925, he wrote a magazine article called "This Nordic Nonsense" that challenged the policy of immigration restriction based on race and national origin. He later used his years of research to debunk the Nazi myth of a superior Aryan race. In response to his heresy, the Nazis burned his books in a bonfire at Kiel in 1933.

During the 1930s, Nicholas and his father-in-law dedicated themselves to saving Jews from the growing threat of Hitler's brutal regime. As the horrors facing Jews in Europe became more apparent, Nicholas returned to Riga, hoping to persuade his sisters to leave the country. Unfortunately, he wasn't able to convince them. Mary and her husband chose to stay in Riga because they didn't believe their lives were in danger. Dina also refused to leave. Nicholas had no other choice but to return to New York alone.

Neither of his sisters could have imagined the atrocities that were to come. Once the Germans occupied Latvia they began to exterminate those Jews who hadn't been deported or imprisoned. Bikernieki forest outside of Riga became the scene of one of the country's most horrific massacres, with 46,500 Jews tortured and murdered. Another 2,000 Jews were locked inside synagogues which were then set on fire. Nicholas eventually learned that Mary and her husband had been among those killed by the Germans in Riga but was never able to find out what happened to Dina.

The barbarism of the Nazis also hit close to home for the Linder family. Max Linder's sister, Klara Haller, and her husband were living in a shtetl in the Bukowina region of the Austrian Empire with their two children when local Nazi sympathizers began killing the Jews who lived there. To escape the carnage, they fled into the



Shmuel Haller and
Livana Rosner Linder
Bukowina, Austrian Empire

forest with their neighbors. Several days later, word reached them that it was safe to leave the forest and return to their homes but when they did so, they found they had been betrayed. The local military, which was working with the Nazis, captured them as they returned to the shtetl and marched them to a ghetto in Ukraine. Klara's aunt and uncle, who lived in the same shtetl, died on the way and their bodies were left on the side of the road.

Not long after they arrived in the ghetto, the Haller family contracted typhus and Klara's husband died. Unable to support her family, Klara escaped the ghetto with her two-year-old son, Arie, leaving twelve-year-old Shmuel behind with friends. Klara found refuge and work with a family some distance away but again they were betrayed. Klara and Arie were put in prison for three months before being sent back to the ghetto.

A year or so later, Klara heard about a relief agency that saved orphaned Jewish children by bribing officials. Hoping to save at least one member of her family from almost certain death, she gave Shmuel up for adoption as an orphan.

Klara and Arie survived their time in the ghetto and after the war they returned to Bukowina. Klara spent the next three years trying to find Shmuel and with the help of the International Red Cross she finally found him in Israel. He had been living in a kibbutz for Eastern European Jews ever since he had been smuggled into what had then been Palestine. Smuggling Jewish refugees was a common practice at the time because Palestine was under British rule and Great Britain had strict limits on how many Jews were admitted.



Ida Linder, Max Linder, Klara Haller, and Arie Haller, circa 1961

In 1949, Klara and Arie received visas to join Shmuel in Israel. But two weeks before the family's long-awaited reunion, a teacher at Shmuel's kibbutz informed them that he had died from a heart ailment. He was only 20 years old. Klara and Arie lived in the kibbutz for 12 years before moving to the United States, where Klara was reunited with Max and Benny, whom she hadn't seen in 50 years.

Max, Benny, and Klara were the lone survivors of the Linder family. Their mother, Livana, and brothers, Shimon, Moishe, and Gedale, all died during the war.

The Sandler family also experienced the horrors of war. When Max and Feiga left Poland they never imagined that their hometown of Stanisławów would someday be the site of the Holocaust's largest massacre of Polish Jews.

There were more than 22,000 Jews living in Stanisławów when it came under Hungarian occupation in 1941. The Hungarian army was complicit with the Nazis, who planned to enclose the Jews in a walled ghetto within the city. Before they did, though, the local German administration was determined to decimate as much of the city's Jewish population as possible. On October 12th of that year, they gathered thousands of Jews into the market square and marched them to the Jewish cemetery, where mass graves had already been dug. Once they reached the cemetery, the Jews were forced to show their papers and relinquish their valuables. A few Jews were released but the others were stripped of their clothes, walked over to the graves, and shot. Any Jews who were still alive by the end of the day were allowed to return to Stanisławów.

The massacre that day, which became known as "Blutsonntag" or Bloody Sunday, killed between 8,000 and 12,000 Jews. Among the victims were most of the members of the Sandler family.

The stories of the Michelson, Linder, and Sandler families weren't unique in Sandisfield; every Jew who had loved ones in Europe had a story. One of the enduring tragedies of the Holocaust is that some in Sandisfield would never know their story because no one was left to tell it.

Post-War Immigration

The immigration quota restrictions that were in place at the beginning of the war were still in effect after its end, and more anti-immigration measures were before Congress waiting for a vote. President Truman realized it wasn't likely that anything substantive would be passed in the near future to address the millions of refugees who had been driven from their homelands or released from concentration camps. On December 22, 1945 he took matters into his own hands and issued the Truman Directive, which said existing immigration quotas must give preference to these displaced persons. In May 1946, the first group of nearly 800 displaced persons arrived in New York harbor aboard a former troop ship. By 1947, almost 23,000 displaced persons had been admitted to the United States, more than two-thirds of whom were Jewish.

In President Truman's opinion the United States still wasn't doing its share to accept Europe's refugees, and he called on Congress to pass new legislation in his 1947 State of the Union message. After more than a year of foot-dragging, Congress finally passed the Displaced Persons Act of 1948 on the last day of its session. The bill allowed for more than 200,000 displaced persons from refugee camps to become permanent residents over the next two years, but some of its features were blatantly biased.

While on its face the bill appeared to be a reasonable attempt to address the problem of displaced persons, it's apparent one of its objectives was to restrict the number of Jews admitted into the country. Among its many discriminatory aspects was the stipulation that refugees were ineligible for visas if they entered the refugee camps after December 22, 1945, the date of President Truman's directive. This essentially excluded the thousands of Jews who had survived the war and concentration camps but for one reason or another hadn't reached a refugee camp until after that date. The bill also mandated that thirty percent of the 200,000 displaced persons be farmers, a requirement that most Jews in Europe couldn't meet. President Truman signed the bill but he also included a strongly worded statement about its discrimination towards Catholics and Jews. He made it clear the only reason he had signed it was to expedite the settlement of refugees and called on Congress to remove its discriminatory language when they returned in the fall.

Although President Truman had wanted Congress to amend the Displaced Persons Act when they reconvened in the fall of 1948, it wasn't until 1950 that an amended bill was finally passed. When President Truman signed it he also signed an executive order authorizing the Displaced Persons Commission to investigate refugees of German ethnicity. This order closed a loophole in the Act that could allow Nazis to enter the United States as displaced persons.

Sandisfield in a New Era

Soldiers returned home to a country on the brink of a new prosperity. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill of Rights, made college affordable for these veterans and brought the promise of better-paying jobs after graduation. It also made it possible for them to buy one of the many new homes being built in the suburbs, where they raised their growing families and produced a generation of children known as "baby boomers." The new cars in their driveways took them on vacations to places their parents never could have afforded.

But coming back to work on the family's chicken farm wasn't what most of these returning soldiers had envisioned for their future. They had learned new skills while

they were in the service and the outside world offered opportunities to turn those skills into more money than they could earn in a rural town like Sandisfield. The dream their parents had had of a life in the country wasn't their dream. Parents were left with the responsibility of running their farms alone or with whatever help they could find.

Marty Pinsky was one of the few who returned to Montville to make a life for himself and his future family. He was also a member of the younger generation, though, and was open to new ideas and modern technology. He and his father, Nathan, put all their efforts into making their farm a success and within a decade the Buck River Poultry Farm was one of the most prosperous chicken farms in the area.

While Sandisfield's poultry business continued to thrive, the same couldn't be said for its popularity as a vacation destination. As the 20th century neared the halfway mark, changing lifestyles transformed the way people vacationed. Jewish families no longer wanted to go to a boarding house in the country when they could stay at a hotel that offered far more amenities than a boarding house ever could. And they didn't want to spend their evenings sitting on the porch of an old farmhouse when they could go to towns with nightclubs and movie theaters.

Summer boarders no longer came by the trainload from New York City as they had in earlier years. Back then the town's Jewish population could triple in size between June and September, and it wasn't unusual for some households to have 40 or more boarders at a time. The number of boarders had already started to decline by the Depression and this trend continued after World War II. In the 1940s and 1950s, the Pinskys, Pollocks, and Alberts were among a handful of Jewish families who still rented rooms in the summer. Goldstein's Berkshire Mountain House on Town Hill Road was the only Jewish summer hotel left, but even that closed in 1955.

In spite of the drop in the summer boarding business, the Jewish population still increased during the summer as homeowners from the city opened their houses for the season and relatives and friends came up to join them. One summer a woman came with her two children to stay with Annie and Benny Linder in Montville. She had survived the Holocaust and was one of the war's displaced persons; the tattoo on her forearm was a silent testimony to the brutality she had endured. No one now remembers her name, but they remember her tattoo.

Jewish Summer Camps

Even as the summer boarding business declined, Sandisfield was becoming home to a new type of country get-away: the Jewish summer camp. Camps had become

a big business in the Berkshires, both for poor children from the cities and more affluent children from the suburbs. A generation of upwardly-mobile parents wanted to give their children the best of everything and this included an eight-week stay at a summer camp where they played sports and made handicrafts. Parents who wanted their children to learn about their Jewish religion and culture sent them to one of the many private Jewish camps in Western Massachusetts.

In the summer of 1941, the National Council of Jewish Women in New York City opened a 180-acre camp for underprivileged children on Sears Road between New Boston and South Sandisfield. It closed six years later and in 1948 the property was sold to Alan and Beatrice Nathans, who reopened it as a private Jewish camp named Camp Woodcrest. Alan was a teacher at Christopher Columbus High School in the Bronx and he and fellow teacher, Arthur Halper, served as its directors. The camp offered a progressive co-ed program that emphasized aquatics, drama, and tennis. Children came from as far away as Louisiana and Washington, D. C., and as nearby as Montville. Alan's success at the camp was the basis for his book, *The Handbook of Camp Maintenance*, which advised directors on camp management. Camp Woodcrest remained a fixture in Sandisfield until it was sold to private owners in 1970.

Not all of the summer camps in the Berkshires were for children. In 1955, Camp Wynbrooke, a children's camp just over the Sandisfield border in Tolland was sold to new owners who opened an adults-only Jewish camp named Zimra. The camp promoted a "Sabbath atmosphere" while offering campers a variety of activities. Its kosher meals were prepared under the supervision of the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations. Seeking to provide the best of both worlds, it advertised itself as a camp that combined rustic living with hotel service.

Zimra closed after its first season. The following year, Silas Birnbaum and his son-in-law, Edward Greenbaum, a faculty member at Arnold College in the Bronx, opened a children's camp on the property and named it Camp Spruce Hill. Campers were provided with a strict kosher menu and Sabbath services. Camp Spruce Hill stayed open until the mid-1970s, when it was sold to neighboring Camp Kinderland. Jewish union activists from New York City had started Camp Kinderland in 1923 to give Jewish children in the city a place to go for the summer and it's still going strong today.

Hurricane Diane

In August 1955, Southern New England was hit with back-to-back hurricanes and by the time everything was over, the destruction done to the town of Sandisfield dwarfed the damage it had suffered from the hurricane in September 1938. It had all started

with the arrival of Hurricane Connie on August 13. The storm dumped several inches of rain that saturated the ground and raised water levels in the rivers and streams. In an ordinary month all of that water would have drained away in a matter of days, but this was no ordinary month. While Connie's rains were pounding New England, Hurricane Diane was making landfall near the Carolinas.



West New Boston
(Edna Leavenworth)

At first, the Weather Bureau didn't see Diane as much of a threat and on Tuesday, August 16, it reported that the hurricane presented "no cause for alarm in the Northeastern states." The Bureau expected the hurricane would break up once it hit land and said the Northeast should see nothing more than some widespread showers on Thursday. Instead, conditions changed quickly and Sandisfield residents woke up Thursday morning to unrelenting, torrential rain.

The Farmington River overflowed its banks and the water at the Otis



Route 57 West, Montville

reservoir was so high the dam was in danger of breaching and washing away everything downstream. In New Boston, the rising floodwaters forced the village to evacuate, but elderly patients at the nursing home had nowhere to go except up to the second floor to wait for help. Help came in the form of a "duck," an amphibious vehicle that carried the state police and Coast Guard down Route 8 from Otis. They had come equipped with food, cots, and blankets and once they reached the nursing home they decided it was safer to leave the patients where they were instead of risking their lives taking them back to Otis.



The Siegel house, Montville
(Paul and Lucille Siegel)

Further up in Montville, the raging waters of the Buck River and its subsidiaries tore out bridges and roads and cut the village off from the rest of the world. Among the casualties was the popular dance hall that Walter Galaske had bought from Abe Baranoff. Telephone service was knocked out as poles and lines came down. The entire village lost power, except for those who lived on Town Hill Road because their electric lines came from Otis. While Jack Sandler's house at the bottom of Town Hill Road sat in darkness, his chicken houses had the light and power they needed to keep his hens alive. Across the way, Morris Levine's poultry farm was one of the lucky few with a generator. Farmers who had become used to a post-war, mechanized farm life had to return to doing all their chores by hand until the power was restored.

At the Linder home, Sylvia German and her sister, Rose Petrokofsky, were caring for Rose's sick nine-month-old twins while keeping a watchful eye on the water that continued to rise up the cellar steps. Later in the day, a state trooper knocked on the door to check on them. When he heard about the two sick babies, he arranged for an Air Force helicopter from Westover Air Force Base in Chicopee, Massachusetts to take Rose and the twins to Otis, where an emergency hospital had been set up at the school. When the helicopter arrived, though, Rose refused to leave without the rest of the family. The helicopter was sent away but the medic on board gave Rose medicine for the twins.



Montville
(Joanne Olson)

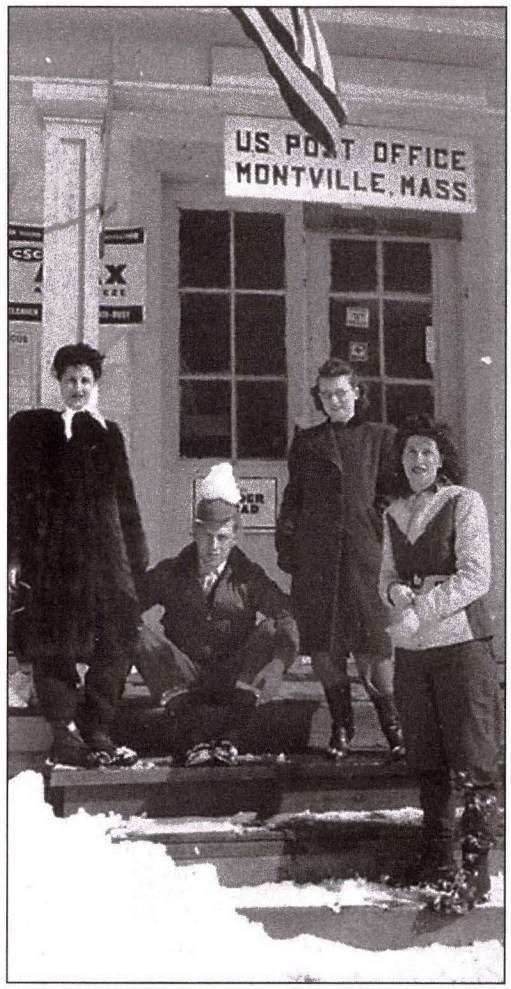


Michael and Sylvia Rothman, 1955
(Toni Conn)

One of the many heroes of Hurricane Diane was Harry and Sylvia Rothman's son, Michael. The Rothmans owned a poultry farm in a low-lying part of Montville and sustained a substantial amount of damage to their home and their chicken coops. Michael was an Explorer Scout and despite the losses he and his own family had suffered, he joined his fellow scouts from Troop 71 to help the Red Cross bring emergency supplies to the residents of Montville and West New Boston. He later spent 22 hours working with other volunteers to repair the washed out roads.

The following month, Michael and his mother were flown by private plane to New York City, where he appeared on "The Ted Mack Show." Michael told a national television audience how he and the rescue workers had braved floodwaters and other dangers to help their community. Michael proved to be such a good spokesman, he was asked by the local chapter of the Red Cross to assist with their fund-raising drive the following year.

People who lived through Hurricane Diane still talk about it. The floodwaters swept away houses and destroyed farmland but amazingly enough, no lives were lost in Sandisfield. Many of the chicken farms in Montville suffered extensive damage but most were able to recover. For the Rothman family, though, the ending wasn't as happy. Although Harry Rothman rebuilt his coops and tried to rebuild his poultry business, he died in February 1958 and the farm went into foreclosure later that year.



Montville General Store, 1948
Sylvia German, Jerry Davis,
Pat Davis, and Rose Linder

Reisner's General Store

Talk to anybody who lived in Montville from the 1940s through the 1960s and one of the first things they'll tell you about is the Montville General Store, which was owned by the Reisner family. For 21 years, the Reisners provided the village with groceries, gasoline, and gossip. Children satisfied their sweet tooth with the penny candy on the counter and teenagers spent more than a little of their allowances honing their skills on the pinball machine in the back.

Louis Reisner's arrival in Sandisfield was much like that of so many others who had found their way to the town: somebody told him about it. Louis had been working at his father's sheet metal shop in the Bronx during the war when a back injury prevented him from returning to his old job. He was looking for another way to support his young family

when his friends, the Moss family, told him about Montville and its empty general store.

For most of its history, the 19th century building had served as a store but more recently it had been used by Walter Galaske as a bar and grill in the 1930s. It had stood empty ever since Walter had moved his business down the road to Baranoff's old dance hall. Louis bought the building in 1944 and reopened it as a general store, offering everything from canned goods to beer. Louis's wife, Edith, waited on customers and did the bookkeeping. In 1945, the Montville Post Office was moved from Morris Schachter's home to the Reisners' store. Louis served as postmaster until the post office closed in 1956.



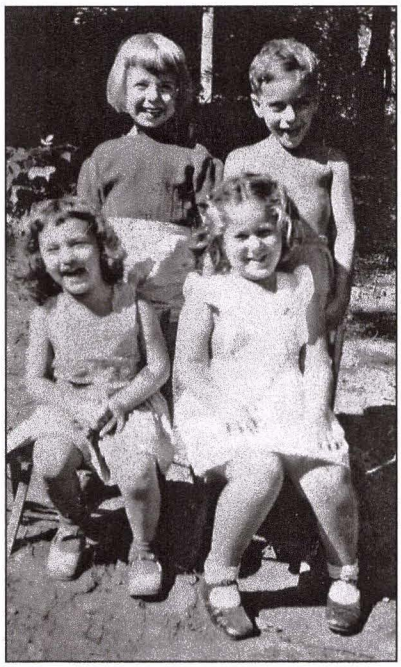
Aura, Edith, and Trudi Reisner, 1955 (Trudi Reisner)

Louis and Edith sold the Montville General Store to the Dupres in 1965. The Reisner family moved to Farmington, Connecticut, where Louis opened laundromats in two nearby towns.

The Bonds of Friendship

Childhood didn't change much from one generation to the next. Jewish children still played with non-Jewish children and at any given time during the school year you could find Aura and Trudi Reisner, Gilda Pinsky, and Paul Sandler with Maybelle Riiska, Jackie Kelley, and the O'Brien boys. When nighttime came, the Lazarowitz house of the 1950s was one of the most popular homes in Montville, thanks to the arrival of a brand-new television set. It was the first one in the village and Marvin Sandler recalls how he and the other neighborhood kids all crowded around its small screen to watch its single channel.

The arrival of the summer families increased the town's population of pre-teens and teens and the circle of friends expanded to include the offspring of the Lazarowitz,



Back row: Jane Kaiserman and Ron Linder; Front row: Michelle Linder and Felice Sandler, circa 1949 (Fred and Michelle Harwood)

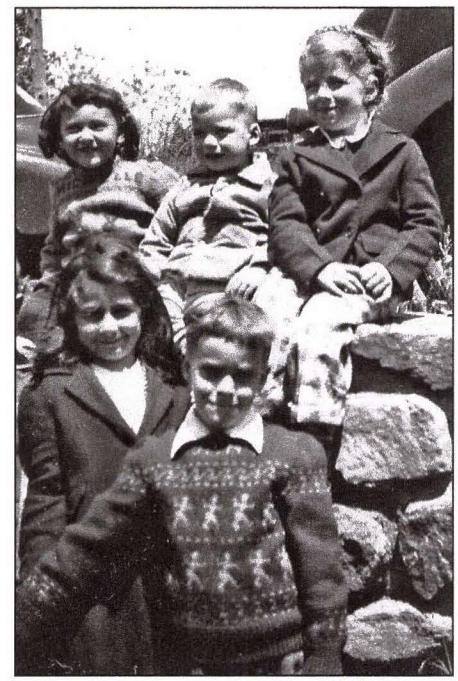
Skolnick, Jensky, Kaiserman, and Linder families. The slamming of screen doors in the morning signaled their exits to freedom, and their days were filled with swimming at the falls, walking up to Jones Knoll, or just hanging out at one another's house.

In the 1960s, the teenagers in Montville spent most of their evenings at Mike Lazarowitz's house or Gilda and Nora Pinsky's place because their parents weren't as strict as some of the others. Steve German and his cousin, Marty Kaiserman, spent many an evening at the Pinsky house and says they always made sure to leave for home well before 10 p.m. That was when the Tatro family, who lived between the Pinsky house and their grandparents' houses, let their Doberman Pinscher out. The boys had learned from experience that it was prudent to avoid an encounter with the dog.

Fridays brought a change to the gang's usual routine because they loved to dance and Friday nights were square dancing nights at Otis Hall. The teens could always count on one of their parents to lend them a car or drive them over to Otis so they could spend the night dancing to the fiddle music.

One summer, as the teens reunited, they found that a member of their crowd was missing. Marty, one of the most popular boys in the group, had died from leukemia that spring. For most of them it was their first experience with the death of a friend and they all took his loss hard.

There was one significant difference between this generation and that of their parents. Children who had grown up playing with their friends and cousins in the 1930s and 1940s remained close as adults and visited with each other whenever they



Back row: Michelle Linder, Paul Sandler, and Felice Sandler; Front row: Marlene Sandler and Ron Linder, circa 1949 (Fred and Michelle Harwood)

came back to see their families. This wasn't the case for most of the teens who grew up in the 1960s. They tended to lose touch with each other as they moved on to college, new jobs, and new families. Although they still came back to visit their relatives, they didn't get together the way their parents had. Times were changing and the children of Sandisfield's Jewish community were changing as well.



Michelle Linder and Arthur Jensky (Fred and Michelle Harwood)

Moving Out

Unfortunately, the poultry boom of the 1940s and 1950s couldn't be sustained through another decade. By the end of the 1950s, increasing costs, competition from commercial growers, and worker shortages had begun to take their toll on Sandisfield's chicken farmers. Even if they could have afforded more modern equipment, there was no guarantee their farms would be any more profitable. Chicken farms began to close as their owners went bankrupt or sold out to move on to more profitable employment. Former poultry farms stood empty or were turned into second homes for people from the cities and suburbs.

Marty Pinsky, who had been one of the most successful poultry farmers in the 1950s, tried to keep his family's business going by taking out one mortgage after another. He secured loans from friends and banks and, in 1961, received what would be the last mortgage the Jewish Agricultural Society issued to a farmer in the Berkshires. Marty was able to pay off some of the loans, but the bank foreclosed in 1963 and the Pinsky farm was sold at auction. Marty and his wife, Frances, left Sandisfield and moved to California with their four children. Ruben Toplitz bought the Pinsky farm at the bank auction and sold it to Adriel Bidwell, who started a poultry farm of his own.

The loss of the poultry farmers and an aging population left very few Jewish children in the elementary school. The number of Jewish families who lived in Sandisfield continued to decline as families left or died out. Part-time homeowners who came for the summer or intermittently during the year weren't enough to sustain Congregation Sons of Abraham. It had become hard enough to gather ten people for services, never mind the ten men required to make the minyan needed to hold those services. Especially hard hit were the High Holidays in the fall because there were no

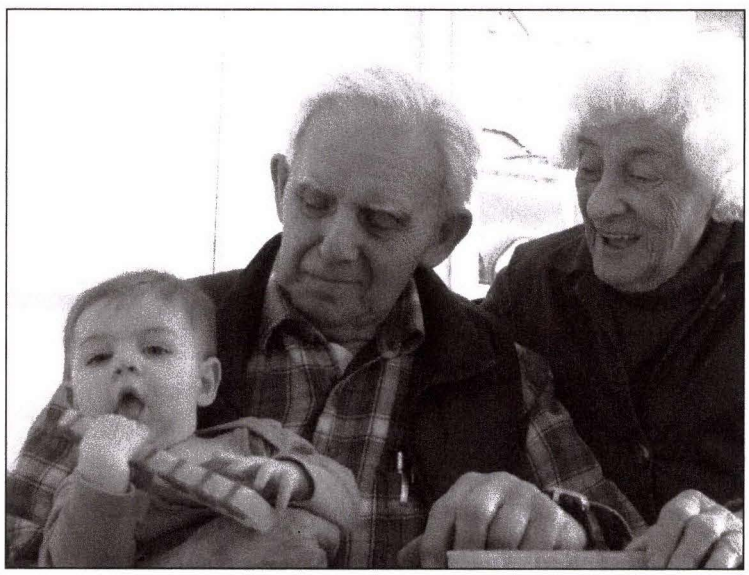
summer residents to fill out the congregation. Several attempts had been made over the years to increase the synagogue's membership, but all had fallen flat. Synagogue president Jack Sandler and vice-president Joe German were faced with the problem of what to do with the synagogue when there wasn't enough of a congregation left to pay for its upkeep.

The greatest blow to the Jewish community came in 1976, when their beloved synagogue held its last service.

A Change in Direction

In the 1970s and 1980s, something curious started to happen in Sandisfield. Some of the same children who couldn't wait to shake Sandisfield's soil off their shoes, began to move back in their later years.

David and Libby Pinsky's daughter, Anne, had left Sandisfield after high school to attend City College in New York City. She married Phil Hoffman, a native of Toronto, Canada in 1947 and the couple settled in the city. During the 1960s, Anne taught elementary school in Harlem to children who had been considered unteachable. She later taught adult literacy classes in the South Bronx. Anne gained widespread recognition for her innovative teaching methods, which combined her students' life experiences with music and the arts.



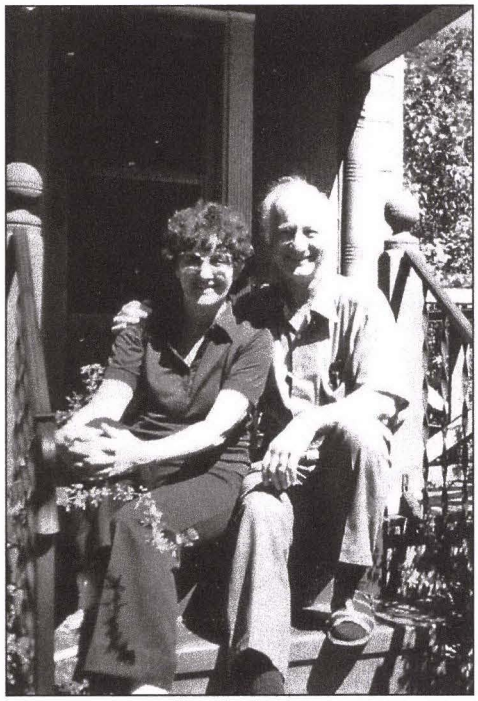
Phil and Anne Pinsky Hoffman
(The Hoffman family)

Phil had received his doctorate at Rochester University and spent his scientific career conducting research at Columbia University, the Hospital for Joint Disease, and Stony Brook University. He was passionate about his integrity as a scientist and spoke out against pseudo-sciences that supported racism and sexism. He eventually left the research field to teach math and science at a high school in the South Bronx.

When Anne and Phil retired from teaching, they returned to Anne's childhood home in West New Boston, where they spent their time enjoying the outdoors and becoming involved with the community. Even in retirement they remained committed to social and political activism and their home was the scene of many spirited debates.

Sandisfield's history ranked among Anne's many interests and after years of research she published *Sandisfield: The Biography of a Town* in 1998. Anne and Phil's next project was researching the struggles of the farmers and tradespeople in Western Massachusetts during and after the American Revolution. They were still researching the subject when they died in a car accident in 2011.

Sylvia German hadn't been born in Sandisfield like Anne and except for a few years during the Depression hadn't even lived in the town full-time. But she had always considered the house in Montville her home, no matter where in the world she lived.



Sylvia and Joe German

Sylvia had been born in New York City and the city was where the Linder family spent most of their time during the year. It wasn't life in the city that she would remember as an adult, though. The happiest days of her youth were the days she spent in Montville. She even met her husband, Joe German, when he came to Montville as a summer boarder. They were married just before he joined the U. S. Army Air Corps in World War II. After Joe reenlisted in the Air Force after the war, she spent the next 21 years moving from one base to another, but she always found time to come back to Montville. Every summer, she and Joe brought their son, Steve, to Montville to stay with his grandparents. When Joe retired from the service in 1968, it was understood that they would leave Hawaii, where Joe was stationed, to return to the Berkshires and the old house she loved.

Toby Jensky came back to Sandisfield because there was no other place she'd rather be. Toby moved into the family home in Montville after she retired from nursing at Beth Israel Hospital in New York City. She had served as a nurse in the Lincoln Brigade during the Spanish Civil War in the late 1930s and while she was there she dreamed of the day when she could return to the solitude of Montville.

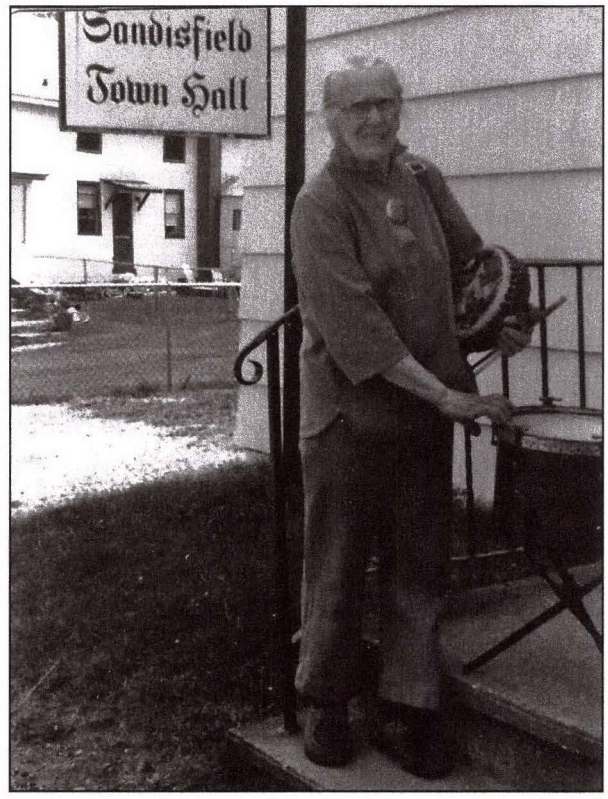
Toby kept her promise to herself after she came back from Spain and spent as much time as she could in Montville. After she retired, she moved back permanently and indulged in her countless interests and hobbies, everything from auctions to rug braiding to quilting. She was also a fierce Scrabble competitor and would spend hours at a time with Sylvia German as they tried to outdo each other with obscure words. Her devotion to her friends was as strong as her devotion to her family and she was always ready to dispense advice, sympathy, or food, as needed. Her death in 1995 came as a surprise to everyone who had taken her presence for granted, with no thought to her age.



Toby Jensky (Nina Carr)

Others came to Sandisfield not because of childhood memories but because the town offered a sense of community they couldn't find elsewhere.

Franziska Boas moved to Sandisfield after she retired from teaching modern dance and dance therapy at Shorter College in Georgia. Franziska knew the village well because she had stayed with Gertrud and her family during the many summers they had vacationed in Montville. She grew to love Montville almost as much as her first love, Lake George. Franziska later rented Annie and David Pollock's old stone farmhouse for her own summer vacations before buying it from the Jensky family in 1970. The house had been empty for years when Franziska first rented it but she knew it could be brought back from its derelict condition and become the home she imagined. Little by little, with a lot of help from local contractors Rudy Annecharico and Walter Linkovich, she restored the house as well as the old barn where the Jewish farmers had brought their cows and chickens to the shochet on slaughtering days.



Franziska Boas (Cindy Pinsky)

Franziska was deeply committed to her adopted town and taught dance

therapy and physical activity classes at Town Hall. She was also one of the founding members of the Sandisfield Arts Council.



Emma Hunt and Franziska Boas, 1986
(Barbara Boas)

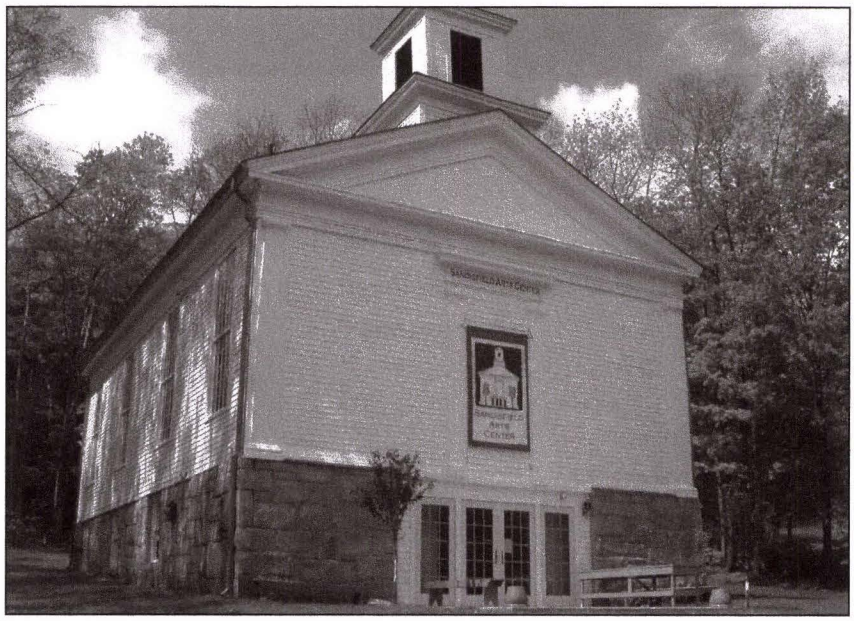
Two years before she died, she traveled with her family to Vancouver Island, British Columbia to attend a reunion of the Boas and Hunt families. George Hunt, a member of the Kwakiutl Indian tribe, had acted as a consultant to Franz Boas during his ground-breaking research on Native American culture in the Pacific Northwest. The families' reunion commemorated the one-hundredth anniversary of the first meeting between the two men in 1886.

The Sandisfield Arts Center

The return of a few Jewish families in the 1970s and 1980s wasn't enough to revive Congregation Sons of Abraham. For almost two decades the synagogue stood empty while the few Jews left in Sandisfield attended services in Great Barrington, Pittsfield, or Winsted. Lenny Dryansky and Sid Pinsky had approached Jack Sandler with the idea of turning the building into a community arts center, but when Jack died in 1990, there was still no resolution to the synagogue's fate. Negotiations with members of the congregation continued after his death and in 1995, they reached an agreement to turn the synagogue over to the Sandisfield Arts and Restoration Committee for use as an arts center. Many of the members of the Committee were descended from the synagogue's original congregation.

Montville's shul had been the heart of Sandisfield's Jewish community since 1922 and the building was revered by those who had worshipped there. Echoes of the

cantor's chants, children's laughter, and grief-stricken sobs were all preserved within its walls. For Sylvia German, the sense of loss was almost tangible. She had been among the descendants who turned the synagogue over to the Sandisfield Arts and Restoration Committee and was one of the Committee's original officers, but she never reconciled herself to the building's secular role. She continued to refer to it as "the Shul" until her death in 2015.



Sandisfield Arts Center
(Richard Migot)

Part II

5

Shul and Religious Life

The Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society believed the best chance a Jewish farmer had for success was to form a community with other Jews. Not only was there a feeling of camaraderie that came from living among others who shared the same religion and traditions, but faithful adherence to the tenets of Judaism required communal worship.

Aside from these social, cultural, and religious considerations, practical ones existed as well. One of the most important, according to the JAIAS, was maintaining a large enough pool of eligible Jews to allow for marriage within the community, otherwise the children of farm families would leave to look elsewhere. Therefore, the success of these colonies depended on building a community that followed Jewish observances and customs in order to attract more Jews.

The JAIAS didn't expect its colonists to build a synagogue as soon as they settled in an area, and that was true for the Sandisfield colony as well. Lacking a formal house of worship, families gathered in one of the homes to observe the Sabbath and High Holidays. A rabbi had moved to New Boston by 1904, but even before he arrived it's likely someone in the village was qualified to lead the services for the local families.

A minimum of ten men, aged 13 or older, were needed to make a minyan for these communal prayers. When this wasn't possible, each family prayed in their own home. Most of Sandisfield's families were Orthodox but it's apparent some belonged to either the Conservative or Reform movement. In April 1905, *The Springfield Republican* reported that a rabbi had been brought up from New York City for Passover and "there were two different classes, which had separate ceremonies."

Communal spirit was also crucial to the survival of the young colony and towards that end, the men joined with other Jewish men in the area to form a social organization called the Israel Berkshire Hills Society. Solomon Pollock served as its president and

Aaron Pomerantz, a tailor from Great Barrington, its treasurer. In 1906, Solomon and Aaron signed a 10-year-lease with Michael Liss of Monterey to rent a corner room on the first floor of Michael's house. The room was to be fitted as a bathroom with a hot water boiler and all the fixtures and bathtubs needed to provide the members of the society with a warm bath whenever they desired, for the price of 50 cents a bath. Unfortunately, little else is known about the society or how long it remained in existence.

The Shochet and Shechita

An essential member of the Sandisfield colony was the shochet, or butcher, who slaughtered the colony's livestock according to Jewish law in a ritual called shechita. Sandisfield's shochets came close to losing their ability to perform shechita in 1911, when the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals proposed a bill to the state legislature that would have changed the state's slaughtering laws and prevented the kosher slaughter of animals.

The bill stated "No animal shall be slaughtered for food, or for rendering or other disposal, unless such animal is first effectively stunned or otherwise deprived of sensation before being cut or bled, and such stunning or deprivation of sensation shall be done in as humane a manner as practicable and so as not to cause such animal unnecessary pain or fright. No animal in the process of slaughter shall be caught up or hung up, by its legs, ears, tail or otherwise, before it is so stunned or deprived of sensation."

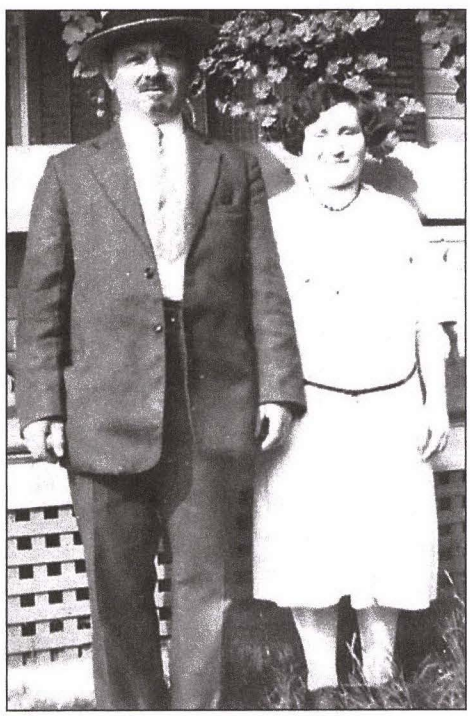
The Committee on Public Health held a hearing in Boston and Jewish leaders rallied a large number of supporters to attend the hearing in opposition to the bill, which would affect all of the 150,000 Jews living in the state. Jewish and non-Jewish authorities spoke on the Jews' behalf, including the state's chief inspector of slaughter houses. The authorities all asserted that shechita was more humane than other forms of slaughter. Furthermore, opponents of the bill claimed that the law would be the most anti-Semitic measure ever passed by an American legislature. Their impassioned arguments were compelling, and when the chairman of the committee asked the audience for a show of hands, only four were raised in support of the bill. The bill went no further, but had it passed, it not only would have meant the end of kosher slaughter in Massachusetts, it would have meant the end of the Sandisfield colony itself.

Early Religious Leaders

The first rabbis of whom there are any record are Rabbi Knotvitch and Julius Mishkin. Rabbi Knotvitch gave Sandisfield as his residence when he married Rose Goldstein and Jacob Moses in 1909, but there's no other trace of him. Rabbi Mishkin was a Russian immigrant who was living in West Otis by 1910 and was one of the character witnesses who testified on Abraham Kravitz's behalf the following year, after he and Nathan Kalman were arrested for operating an illegal still.

It appears there was no rabbi available in Sandisfield when Anna Pinsky and David Pollock, and Anna Pollock and Jacob Matlowsky (Matlow) were married in November 1912. Usually, when a rabbi was unavailable, one would come from a nearby town or the engaged couple would go to New York City to be married. The two couples chose neither option, but instead were married by Stephen Coldwell, the pastor of the Congregational Church in New Boston.

A young immigrant named Hyman Charney also served some of the colony's religious needs. Hyman and his wife, Rebecca Shenkman, moved to Sandisfield from New York City because Rebecca's father and brothers had already settled in the area. The first family members came to Sandisfield after Rebecca's sister-in-law had been diagnosed with a lung disease and her doctor had told her to move to the country for the fresh air. In 1907, Rebecca's father, Samuel, and brother, Oscar, bought a 137-acre farm in New Marlborough from Solomon Pollock and Samuel Kaplan. That same year, Samuel's son, Louis, and son-in-law, Barney Mirman, bought a 180-acre farm in Monterey from Joseph Kunkin and Abraham Abramowitz. Hyman and Rebecca followed soon afterward. In 1911, Hyman acquired a 200-acre farm in the northwestern part of town from his father-in-law and brother-in-law, Isaac Sacks.



Hyman Charney and Rebecca Shenkman Charney, 1923 (George Rothstein)

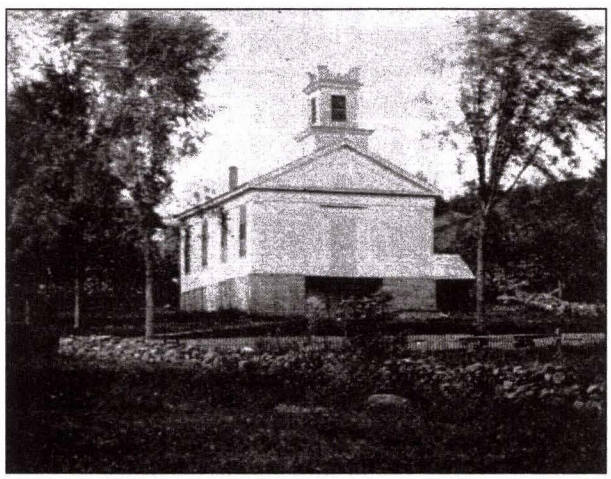
Before he left Russia, Hyman had received a religious education and training to be a shochet and he listed his occupation as a rabbi on his World War I registration card and his citizenship papers. According to his descendants, Hyman traveled to the homes of his neighbors on the Sabbath and held services in his own home on

the High Holidays. As a shochet, he always showed compassion for the animals he slaughtered. When he found out that his young daughter, Esther, had been responsible for the needless deaths of two animals, he taught her that she should never take an animal's life unless it was for food. Hyman's benevolence toward all living creatures extended to those outside of his faith. In 1912, his family boarded William McKenney, one of the town's paupers, and looked after him until he died the following year.

Even though the colonists had qualified religious leaders to lead their communal worship, they didn't have a synagogue or organized congregation. Some families chose to belong to the Gathering of Israel in Pittsfield. Now known as Knesset Israel, the Orthodox congregation had been incorporated in 1893; in 1906, it built Pittsfield's first synagogue. The family of Jacob and Rebecca Held in Montville were among the Sandisfield colonists who were members of the Gathering of Israel. In 1908, their 19-year-old son, Max, accidentally shot himself and died at the House of Mercy hospital in Pittsfield. Jacob and Rebecca didn't have enough money to pay for their son's burial so the congregation covered the expense of burying him in their cemetery.

Congregation B'nai Abraham

As the Jewish community continued to grow, no single home could hold everyone for services. The Jews in Sandisfield had formed the Berkshire Sons of Abraham as a charitable organization in 1912, but they still had no synagogue.



Montville Baptist Church, 1893
(Picturesque Berkshire)

In 1917, Henry Manley informed his readers that one of the Jews was thinking about buying the old Baptist church in Montville. The church had been built about 1840, but its congregation had dwindled throughout the latter part of the 19th century. In 1894, the building was turned over to the Berkshire Baptist Association in Pittsfield. In the early 20th century, the church was known more for school graduations and the ice cream socials the Ladies Aid Society held in its basement than for religious services. Reverend Benedict, the last Baptist pastor, closed the pastorate in 1912, but Sunday School classes continued to be taught at the church through 1915.

Henry scoffed at the idea of anyone wanting to buy the old building, saying he didn't know what the buyer would use it for, other than a place to keep his horse. But the idea wasn't as far-fetched as Henry believed. The Jewish colony had had its eye on the church almost from the beginning, but the dream of turning it into a synagogue didn't start to become a reality until 1921, when Benjamin Jensky bought both the church and the parsonage next door from the Berkshire Baptist Association for $1,500. Benjamin moved his family into the parsonage and the following year sold the church to Congregation Montville Sons of Abraham, also known as Congregation B'nai Abraham. A contractor converted the interior of the church into a synagogue, removed the bell from the belfry, and took off the decorative elements from the bell tower. Inside the new synagogue, a sequined burgundy velvet valance adorned the Ark that held the Torah.



Benjamin Jensky (Robert Schachter)

Benjamin Jensky was elected to be the synagogue's first president and Ben Aber was elected secretary. Isadore Lavenberg, who had been rabbi of the Rivington Street Synagogue on the Lower East Side, came to lead services for the High Holidays that fall. He stayed on afterward to become the synagogue's first rabbi. Rabbi Lavenberg taught Jewish history and Hebrew to the children of the congregation and led Sabbath services every other week during that first winter.



Typical Jews Who Have Settled in Sandisfield. Left to Right: Benjamin Jensky, Who Lives in the Baptist Parsonage; Sam Linder, J. B. Aber.

Isador Lavenburg, Who Came a Month Ago From New York to be the Montville Rabbi

The Springfield Republican, October 15, 1922

The synagogue was formally dedicated in July 1923. In October 1928, Sons of Abraham Congregation of Sandisfield was legally organized as a corporation by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Even though Jewish families were spread throughout the neighboring towns, Sandisfield was the center of the Jewish community. Now, with the presence of the

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Be it Known That whereas the resident members of the

Jewish Church of Sandisfield

of twenty-one years of age and upwards, have organized with the intention of forming a corporation under the name of

Sons of Abraham Congregation of Sandisfield,

for the purpose of establishing and maintaining the public worship of God, in accordance with the principles and doctrines of the Jewish religion;

and have complied with the provisions of the Statutes of this Commonwealth in such case made and provided, as appears from the certificate of the

Trustees

of said corporation, duly approved by the Commissioner of Corporations and Taxation, and recorded in this office:

Now, therefore, I, FREDERIC W. COOK, Secretary of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts, **Do Hereby Certify** that the resident members of the

Jewish Church of Sandisfield

of twenty-one years of age and upwards, their associates and successors, are legally organized and established as, and are hereby made, an existing corporation under the name of

Sons of Abraham Congregation of Sandisfield,

with the powers, rights and privileges, and subject to the limitations, duties and restrictions, which by law appertain thereto.

Witness my official signature hereunto subscribed, and the Great Seal of The Commonwealth of Massachusetts hereunto affixed, this twenty-third day of October in the year of our Lord one thousand nine hundred and twenty-eight.

Frederic W. Cook

Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Incorporation document for Sons of Abraham Congregation of Sandisfield (Robert Schachter)



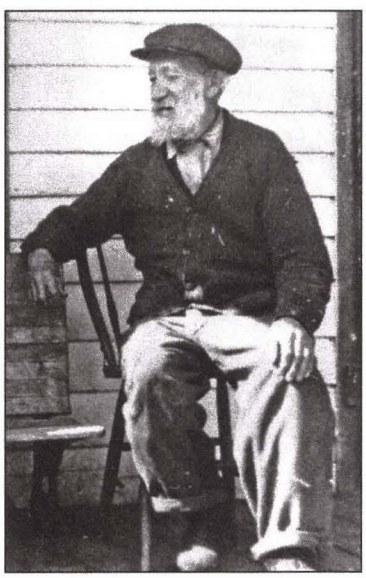
Sons of Abraham Synagogue (Charlotte Westhead)

synagogue, it was even more so, and Montville was its heart. Congregation B'nai Abraham's new synagogue wasn't just a building where Sandisfield's Jews went to pray, it was the *shul*, a house of worship and learning, with all of the rich history and traditions that are embodied in that simple Yiddish word.

Montville's Jewish population increased as more Jews moved to the village so they could be within walking distance of the synagogue. Summer boarders also flocked to Montville, and the adjusted rates for boarding during the High Holidays was another reflection of the synagogue's popularity.

Congregation Ahavat Hazedek

The purchase of the synagogue was the proudest accomplishment of Sandisfield's Jewish community. But for families living in New Boston and West New Boston, the distance to Montville proved to be too far to walk, especially in bad weather, so they formed a congregation of their own and named it Ahavat Hazedek, or Love of the Sick. The members bought a handwritten copy of the Torah, called a Sefer Torah, and installed it in a building on Israel Albert's property in West New Boston. The building served as the congregation's shul and Israel led the services. Less than three weeks after the purchase of the synagogue in Montville, several of the men of Congregation Ahavat Hazedek drew up an agreement that decreed the Sefer Torah would "remain within the boundary of East and West New Boston forever." This boundary extended from Harry Kosberg's home in West New Boston to the New Boston home of Max Nager. The agreement also gave specific instructions regarding the disposition of the Sefer Torah should the congregation ever dissolve.



Israel Albert (Madeline Johnson)

An anecdote about the congregation appeared in a 2011 article by Bob Grigg for the *Winsted Journal*, which

October 13, 1922, according to how we count in the United States.

We, the undersigned, members of Congregation Ahavat Hazedek, residents of East and West New Boston, Massachusetts and its environs, have determined with the agreement of all, that the Sefer Torah that we bought for East and West New Boston will remain within the boundary of East and West New Boston forever and it is not to be separated from the founders of the congregation and the purchasers of the Sefer Torah, we who live here today. To those who come newly and those who come after us: The Sefer Torah is the purchased property of Congregation Ahavat Hazedek and the privilege is given to each Jewish man who comes to live here in East and West New Boston, to consider himself a member of the congregation and the Sefer Torah, if he takes upon himself total agreement to observe the laws and terms of the statutes of the congregation.

We do not have members of the congregation in general, and to no one of us, those who come newly and those who come after us, is authority given to remove the Sefer Torah from the boundary of East and West New Boston, forever!

The boundary shall remain from West New Boston from the house of Zvi Dovid Kosberg to the house of Max Nager in East New Boston. If there will be Jewish houses from there and further on they shall be included in the boundary with the agreement of the congregation. And if there should be houses of worship or minyanim in the neighborhood of East and West New Boston and Congregation Ahavat Hazedek should agree to combine with any synagogue or minyan even then the Sefer Torah shall remain in its designated place, and this document shall remain in force.

If all the Jews leave East and West New Boston to live wherever it may be, then the obligation shall fall on the one Jew, the last one who remains here, in whose possession this present document shall be, to bring the Sefer Torah to New York and give it to some synagogue in the name of Congregation Ahavat Hazedek of East and West New Boston, Massachusetts. Each one of the residents of East and West New Boston of whom the congregation shall choose to keep the Sefer Torah in his home is obliged to pledge of $300 in the name of congregation as a guarantee that he would not do any wrong or be deceitful. And everything is correct.

Pinsky
Yisrael Albert
Solomon Pollock
Abraham Kleiner
Ephraim Orinstein
David Pinsky

Congregation Ahavat Hazedek

is in the collection of The Colebrook (Connecticut) Historical Society. The article tells the story of a Mr. Osborn, who drove for the Leonard Grain Company in Winsted during World War II. Mr. Osborn spoke Yiddish and was familiar with the Jewish religion because he had worked for a Jewish storekeeper during high school. His delivery route included the Jewish farmers in New Boston and West New Boston and every Friday he delivered their grain. He became friendly with the Jewish farmers on his route and every once in a while, when the congregation didn't have enough men to make a minyan for Friday services, he would be flagged down on his way back to Winsted and asked to fill in.

Congregation Ahavat Hazedek eventually did dissolve, although when it did isn't clear. When Israel Albert died in 1954 at the age of 93, his funeral service was held at the synagogue in Montville. The Alberts' property in West New Boston passed to their descendants. When a new owner demolished the house and outbuildings in 1968, the Sefer Torah was discovered in the building that had housed the shul. The Torah was given to Jack Sandler, who was president of Sons of Abraham Synagogue at the time, and it was reported that he had it interred in a local Jewish cemetery.

The Children's Hebrew School

In October 1926, the women from both of Sandisfield's Jewish congregations held a dinner dance to raise money for their free Hebrew school, with music provided by an orchestra from Hartford. Max Weker, one of the synagogue's benefactors, had long dreamed of a Hebrew school for the children in Montville and New Boston and now that dream had been fulfilled. The guest list that night was a Who's Who of the Jewish community and included Samuel and Minnie Steinbauch, Leah Goodman, Sofia Weiss, Rebecca Pollock, and Anna Moskowitz. Leah Goodman's son, Max, was named the Hebrew school's secretary and treasurer. Since Rabbi Lavenberg was no longer in Sandisfield, the Hebrew school hired Rabbi Nathan Klein, from Winsted's Beth Israel Synagogue, to teach Hebrew and the Jewish religion.



Hebrew School book
(Charlotte Westhead)

Rabbi Cohen

With Rabbi Lavenberg's departure, Congregation Sons of Abraham needed a resident rabbi to replace him. According to Abe Baranoff's son, Milt Barrie, his father was charged with finding an "all-around rabbi" who could hold services, teach Hebrew school, act as shochet, and fill the role of shamas by taking over the day-to-day affairs of the synagogue. Abe decided that Max Cohen, a Hebrew teacher from Colchester, Connecticut, fit the bill. The Baranoff family had vacationed in Colchester before coming to Sandisfield and it's very likely the two men had met there. Rabbi Cohen accepted the congregation's offer to lead the synagogue and he and his family moved to Sandisfield about 1927, eventually settling in West New Boston.

Rabbi Cohen was very popular with most of the members of the congregation, and he took on the responsibility of teaching the congregation's youth with enthusiasm. Maybe a little too much enthusiasm, to hear Milt Barrie tell it. One day, while Rabbi Cohen was giving a young Milt his lesson, the rabbi proceeded to explain in detail where babies came from. As it turned out, Milt wasn't the only one who learned the facts of life from Rabbi Cohen and his parents weren't the only ones who had not appreciated the rabbi's candor.

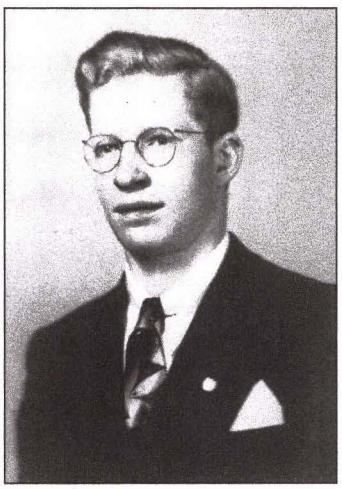
Shortly after Rabbi Cohen came to Sandisfield, the synagogue held what might have been the most stylish wedding ever to take place there. On an October day in 1927, Rose Goodman married Aaron Pomerantz's son, Sam, in a ceremony performed by Jacob Axelrod, a rabbi from Sam's hometown of Great Barrington. According to a young eyewitness to the wedding, Rose and her mother, Leah, made a memorable entrance when they arrived at the synagogue in the chauffeur-driven Rolls Royce that belonged to Dave Shade, Sandisfield's well-known boxer.

Rose Petrokofsky, who grew up in Montville during Rabbi Cohen's tenure, says the congregation at that time was made up of Orthodox and Conservative members. A cantor led prayers on the High Holidays, and it was often Koppel Shusterman from Pittsfield who filled this role until his death in 1935. Because the synagogue followed Orthodox practices, the women sat in the balcony at the back of the building, separate from the men, and weren't permitted to handle the Torah. Rose and the other children who didn't understand the Hebrew service were allowed to play in the basement of the synagogue while their parents prayed upstairs.

Even though the synagogue had a full-time rabbi, making a minyan on a regular basis proved to be a challenge. In March 1933, Ida Linder wrote in her diary that the *Megillah*, or Purim prayers, would be read in New Boston because there weren't enough men in Montville to make a minyan during the winter months. Since it was too far for the Jews in Montville to walk down to New Boston for services, the neighbors

celebrated Purim that year at the Linder home.

Rabbi Cohen and his family moved to New York in the early 1940s, and the synagogue never had another full-time rabbi. Even before he left, though, the congregation had begun to lose members as families left Sandisfield for better prospects and men left to serve in the war. Without a regular minyan, the synagogue discontinued Sabbath services, but it still tried to hold services on the High Holidays. Rabbi Axelrod came from Great Barrington whenever he could, or Rabbi Fuhrman came from Pittsfield, but there were many times when the congregation had to look to Hartford or as far as New York City for a rabbi to lead their services.



Leo Taslitt
(Brenda and Keith Larson)

A Brief Resurgence

Membership continued to decline after World War II. In the early 1950s, there was an attempt to revive interest in the synagogue under the presidency of Max Margulies. Services were held every Saturday morning, and in an effort to expand the synagogue's role in the Jewish community, it became known as The Jewish Center. On the front of the building was a new blue Star of David made by Montville residents Nathan Taslitt and his son Leo.

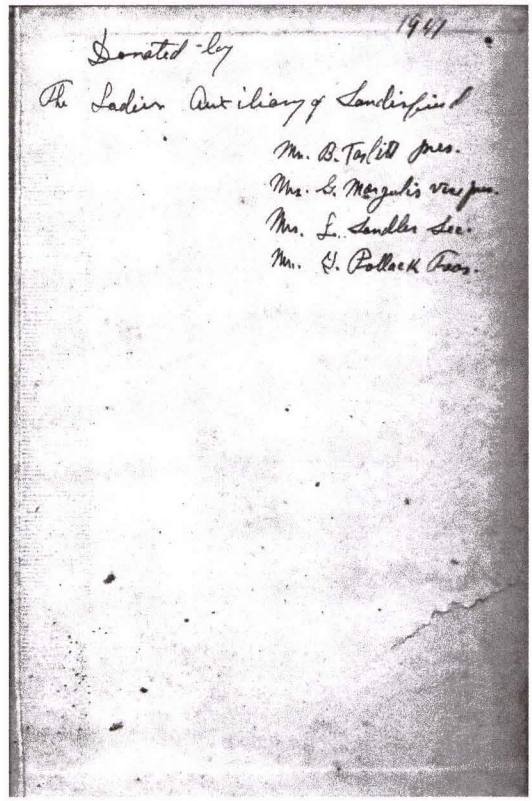
Beginning in the fall of 1951, a rabbi came from Hartford twice a week to teach Hebrew school at Pearl Levine's home in West New Boston. The following year, a decorator was hired to renovate the interior of the synagogue. Central heating was installed so Hebrew school and social activities could be held during the winter. The Ladies' Auxiliary hosted a benefit supper in the basement of the synagogue to help raise the $600 needed to pay for the furnace and Nathan Taslitt volunteered to install it for free.



Pearl Taslitt Levine
(Brenda and Keith Larson)

The Ladies' Auxiliary, under the leadership of Selma Stein, Frances Cohen, Lena Sandler, and Diane Schieb, played an important role in the synagogue during the 1950s. They held benefits for the United Jewish Appeal and hosted card socials, Memorial Day dances, and parties for Hanukkah and Purim. When the synagogue needed to raise money for the Hebrew school's Talmud Torah, the





Rosh Hashanah Prayer Book, donated by the Ladies' Auxiliary of Sandisfield, 1947

Ladies' Auxiliary responded by selling aprons they had embroidered themselves.

Ever since it had first opened its doors, the synagogue had been more than a house of worship. In addition to the dances and benefits held by the Ladies' Auxiliary, there were Bingo games, English language classes, and meetings of the local poultry farmers. The synagogue even held graduation exercises for the town's elementary school after Town Hall was forced to cancel the event when it was struck by lightning.

The congregation also came to the aid of its members whenever necessary. One such instance occurred on a cold winter's night in 1952 when Abe and Diane Schieb's home in South Sandisfield burned to the ground, leaving the family of seven with nothing but the clothes they were wearing. Without hesitating, the synagogue gave Abe and Diane $300 to help them get back on their feet, while others in town donated food and clothing.

While much of the congregation still considered themselves Orthodox, the younger Jews tended to be members of the Reform movement, although they still attended services at the synagogue. Some of the Orthodox practices had been relaxed over the years, and now the women no longer sat in the balcony, but together on one side of

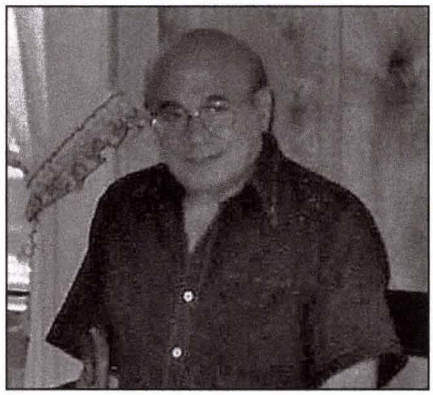


Sons of Abraham Synagogue
(Charlotte Westhead)

the synagogue. Because the congregation didn't have its own rabbi, services were usually held by the members themselves, often led by David Stein. He had belonged to the synagogue since coming to Sandisfield in the early 1920s and had been one of the community's shochets for many years.

In the late 1950s, David was elected president of a synagogue that was in decline yet again. Its revival earlier in the decade had been greeted with enthusiasm but was all too brief. Once more, the members of the congregation found it harder and harder to make a minyan, even for the High Holidays. Typical of the synagogue's situation was an item that appeared in *The Berkshire Eagle* in May 1959, when only ten men had attended Yiskor memorial prayers, barely making a minyan.

Jack Sandler was elected president in 1960, and he, too, tried to revive the synagogue, if only for the High Holidays. By then, the synagogue had returned to a more traditional Orthodox service. The women resumed their seats in the balcony, sitting behind a black curtain. The Sandlers generously housed visiting rabbis in one of their bungalows and Jack's wife, Lena, cooked their meals. In 1967, Jack was able to raise enough money to make repairs to the synagogue's foundation, but nothing



Jack Sandler

could repair its dwindling membership. Like the Baptist church before it, the synagogue was forced to close its doors.

Another Revival

Three years after the synagogue had stopped holding services, Jack Sandler and the remaining members of the congregation tried to bring new life to the synagogue by turning it into a community center as well as a house of worship. Jack also wanted to preserve the historic building itself, and in the summer of 1971 began a campaign to raise the needed funds. Within two months, he had raised $2,000 towards paint, a new roof, and other repairs. Contributions came from Jews and non-Jews throughout Berkshire County. Many of those who gave money were descended from the original members of Congregation Sons of Abraham. By the time Jack was done, he had raised $6,000 and had found volunteers willing to donate their time to do whatever work was necessary.

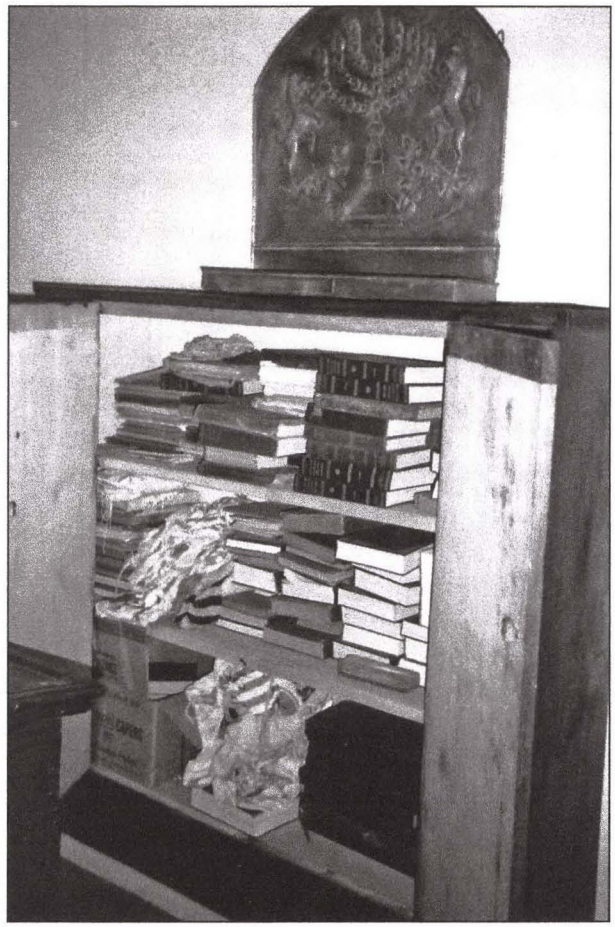
That September, Jack won unanimous re-election as the synagogue's president. Joe German, Max Linder's son-in-law, was elected vice-president and Lena, treasurer. The three hoped to generate enough interest within the Jewish community to keep the synagogue open, if not year-round, then during the summers when more people were in town. Later that month, services for Rosh Hashanah marked the synagogue's re-opening, followed days later by Yom Kippur services. For the Sukkot festival in October, the entrance to the synagogue was decorated with the traditional Sukkah to commemorate the temporary shelters the ancient Jews had built during harvest-time while they wandered in the wilderness.

Unfortunately, whatever interest there had been initially couldn't be sustained. In March 1973, the synagogue was vandalized for the second time in as many years when vandals broke into a side door and smashed dishes and the jukebox. After the second break-in, Jack realized the Torahs were in danger of being vandalized, so he took them out of the Ark and stored them in the family's china closet for safekeeping.

The synagogue continued to limp along, trying to become the community center that Jack, Lena, and Joe had hoped it would be. The Sandisfield Youth Group held its winter dance there in January 1974, and when the town launched its bicentennial events in the summer of 1975, the synagogue was included in the tour of local homes and houses of worship. But none of these efforts to rekindle the community's interest

could save the failing synagogue. The last service was held in 1976.

In the years that followed, Jack and Lena put much of their energy and money into preserving the synagogue and the Sandler family continued to pay the insurance costs out of their own pockets. In 1984, they became part of a steering committee that included Lenny and Virginia Dryansky, Joe and Sylvia German, Phil and Anne Hoffman, Toby Jensky, Bernie and Carol Kessler, and Sid and Terry Pinsky. The steering committee was tasked with the responsibility of reaching an agreement on the synagogue's future.



Sons of Abraham Synagogue (Charlotte Westhead)

That August, the newly formed Sandisfield Arts Council sponsored a benefit performance of folk music by Bill Crofut and Ben Luxon to raise funds for the building's restoration and preservation. Terry Pinsky, chairperson of the Arts Council, stated that the organization's goal was not only to restore the building architecturally, but to restore its role in the cultural life of the community.

Both Jack and Joe died in the fall of 1990. Bernie Kessler, who shared the men's vision for preserving the historic building, took over as president of the synagogue. He also took on the responsibility of the synagogue's fate. Terry had organized a series of coffee houses at Town Hall to highlight local talent and Sid and Lenny hoped the synagogue could replace it as a venue for these performances. While Jack had agreed with Sid and Lenny that the synagogue would make an ideal arts center, he had wanted assurances that the Ark and its Torahs would be treated with the reverence they deserved.

By 1995, the momentum that had been generated over the past few years culminated in the formation of the Sandisfield Arts and Restoration Committee, a non-profit



Mouse damage to the synagogue artifacts
(Charlotte Westhead)

corporation whose goal was to restore the building and repurpose it as an arts center. The original officers of the Committee were Lenny Dryansky and Erika Fay, co-chairs; Joyce Campetti, treasurer; Anne Hoffman, clerk; and Nina Carr, Sylvia German, and Cindy Pinsky, directors. Of the seven officers, Lenny, Anne, Nina, Sylvia, and Cindy were descended from members of the synagogue's original congregation.

In October 1995 and May 1996, Bernie Kessler met with the remaining members of the congregation to vote on the proposal to sell the synagogue to the Sandisfield Arts and Restoration Committee. The sale was approved, with the stipulation that the building be preserved and used as an arts center. On June 10, 1996, Congregation Sons of Abraham sold the building to its new owners for one dollar.

Jack Sandler's determination to safeguard the synagogue's religious artifacts was shared by the remaining members of the congregation and they took steps to ensure their preservation. For some of those artifacts, though, help came too late. The synagogue had been vandalized once again, but this time the vandals were mice, not men. In the years since the synagogue had closed, they had found their way into the Ark and destroyed most of the beautiful jewel-toned velvet coverings beyond repair.

The preservation committee, made up of Irene Conley, Sylvia German, Anne

Hoffman, Bernice Jensky, David LeBeau, Irving Levine, and Peter Levine, inventoried those artifacts that remained. Some of them were kept by the committee to be used for a future display in the new Arts Center. The Torahs, which had been stored at the Sandler house since the 1970s, were given on permanent loan to Knesset Israel in Pittsfield and Chabad Lubavitch in Boca Raton, Florida. Knesset Israel still remembers Congregation B'nai Abraham in its Yahrzeits (memorials) every October. Chabad Lubavitch showed its appreciation by inscribing the names of Jacob Sandler and Joseph German onto a new velvet Torah cover that was purchased in their honor.



Sons of Abraham Torah (Knesset Israel)

Cemeteries

As with any community, death is a part of life in Sandisfield and it's necessary to bury the dead. The first recorded death in the Sandisfield colony was Isaac and Dora Goldberg's three-month-old son, Samuel, in 1904. The baby was buried in the Gathering of Israel's cemetery in Pittsfield, but his funeral was one of the exceptions for the Sandisfield colony in those early years. Most often, families chose to send their loved ones back to one of the Jewish cemeteries in New York's boroughs. Presumably, this was because they wanted them to be with other relatives, but it's also possible the family thought they, too, would move back to the city someday, as many of them did.

Closer to home was the Sons of Jacob Cemetery in the northern part of Torrington, Connecticut. It had been established by Congregation Sons of Jacob about 1901 and Sandisfield's Jewish community began holding funerals there two decades later. The funeral of Louis and Fannie Albert's three-year-old daughter, Sylvia, in 1921 may have been the first, followed three years later by Israel Goodman and Hannah Albert. From then on, more and more families from Sandisfield chose to have their loved ones buried in Torrington and it's still used today by some of the descendants of Sandisfield's early

Jewish families.

For many years the Jewish cemeteries in Torrington, Pittsfield, and Great Barrington were the only options available to the members of Congregation Sons of Abraham. That changed when Joseph Blaufox died in the summer of 1965. Joseph and his wife, Sylvia, had been full-time residents of Sandisfield since 1959, and Sylvia wanted her husband to be buried in the town he loved, instead of one of the other cemeteries. Jack Sandler, who was president of the synagogue, presented Sylvia's request to Town Hall. He received permission to have a separate section of the Sandisfield Center Cemetery consecrated as a Jewish cemetery and Joseph Blaufox was buried there on August 18. In the years since, many prominent members of the congregation have been buried there, including Jack and Lena Sandler, Lenny and Virginia Dryansky, Toby Jensky, and Bernie Kessler.

6

Back to the Land

For Jewish leaders, the "back to the land" movement was more than an effort to remove Jewish immigrants from the sweatshops and tenements of the Lower East Side. It was a way to restore dignity to a group of people who had been subjugated by years of persecution in their homelands. Hirsch Sabsovich explained the motivating force behind the Baron de Hirsch farm colonies in 1897: "The idea in the whole plan of all these colonies is to give the Russian Jew the chance to regain the self-esteem and the self-dependence that has been crushed out by the Old World's oppression."

While the objective of the colonization movement was noble, most Jews in Europe had worked in occupations unrelated to agriculture and were woefully unprepared for life on a farm. Some immigrants took advantage of the training provided by Woodbine's agricultural school before venturing out as farmers. This wasn't the case with Sandisfield's colonists. Many of the farms they bought had included farm equipment, tools, and livestock, but with little or no knowledge about how to use that equipment or care for their animals, it's not surprising that this Jewish farm colony nearly failed.

Learning to Live Off the Land

The challenges of working Berkshire County's farmland had driven more seasoned farmers westward, and the colonists were anything but seasoned. These city-bred immigrants weren't equipped for the hardships they would face as New England farmers, not the least of which was Mother Nature. Sandisfield's weather was unpredictable and could change drastically from one day to the next, often without warning. An unexpected snow, rain, or wind storm could wreak havoc on crops and livestock. Further underlining the precariousness of their situation were unforeseen

difficulties, like the potato blight in the fall of 1904 that rotted most of that year's crop and eliminated any hope for a profitable harvest.

Burdened with farms that failed to provide adequate incomes, these industrious immigrants found other ways to make money. The men hunted fox for their pelts and families gathered the blackberries and chestnuts that native farmers had disregarded and sold them to markets in New York City.

A handful of colonists were more fortunate than their neighbors because they didn't rely on crops as their means of support. Samuel and Tillie Kaplan raised cattle and sold the meat to local butchers. Other families raised chickens that the rabbi slaughtered before they were shipped to New York's Jewish neighborhoods. Some, like Elias and Bertha Lipsitz, owned acres of forested land and sold the timber to Burton Ives for his sawmill. During the summer, salvation for most of the families in the colony came in the form of boarders from the city.

The colonists' treatment of their farm animals led to frequent complaints of animal cruelty. Some offenses were relatively minor and the result of inexperience, such as pairing a cow with a horse to pull farm equipment. Other offenses, though, were much more serious. Max Schubert and Henry Lerner were found guilty of beating and underfeeding the horses in their care. Isadore Rosner was charged with animal cruelty after he used a horse with a broken leg.

A story that appeared in the *Berkshire Courier* in the summer of 1905 illustrates the immigrants' lack of understanding of acceptable farming methods and marketing practices.

> "A Great Barrington butcher was offered three veals a few days ago. It was brought in from Sandisfield by one of the Russian Jew families lately settled there. The veals were in a wagon driven by a woman. She asked the butcher to step out and look at the meat. He did so and at once mentally decided it to be too youthful. "How old?" he asked. The woman replied one of the calves was three weeks old, the other three days and the third "stillborn." The butcher expressed regret but explained that his customers were a trifle notional in regard to their meats and generally liked their veal a little older than that offered and especially older than the youngest of the trio."

By the winter of 1905, the majority of families were barely scraping by. Not only were their farms mortgaged, so was much of their livestock. As a result, families who couldn't afford to buy the hay to feed their animals were prevented from selling them. Instead they lost them to starvation. The only thing that saved the colony

from extinction following that long winter was the financial support of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society.

After surviving their brush with disaster, it was obvious the farmers would have to band together and help each other if the colony hoped to survive. Over the next few years, a good many of them followed David Pyenson's advice and turned their attention to cows and chickens for their livelihood. Sandisfield's hillsides and pastures provided fertile grazing land and the colony's cattle and poultry farmers had already proven there was a market for their products.

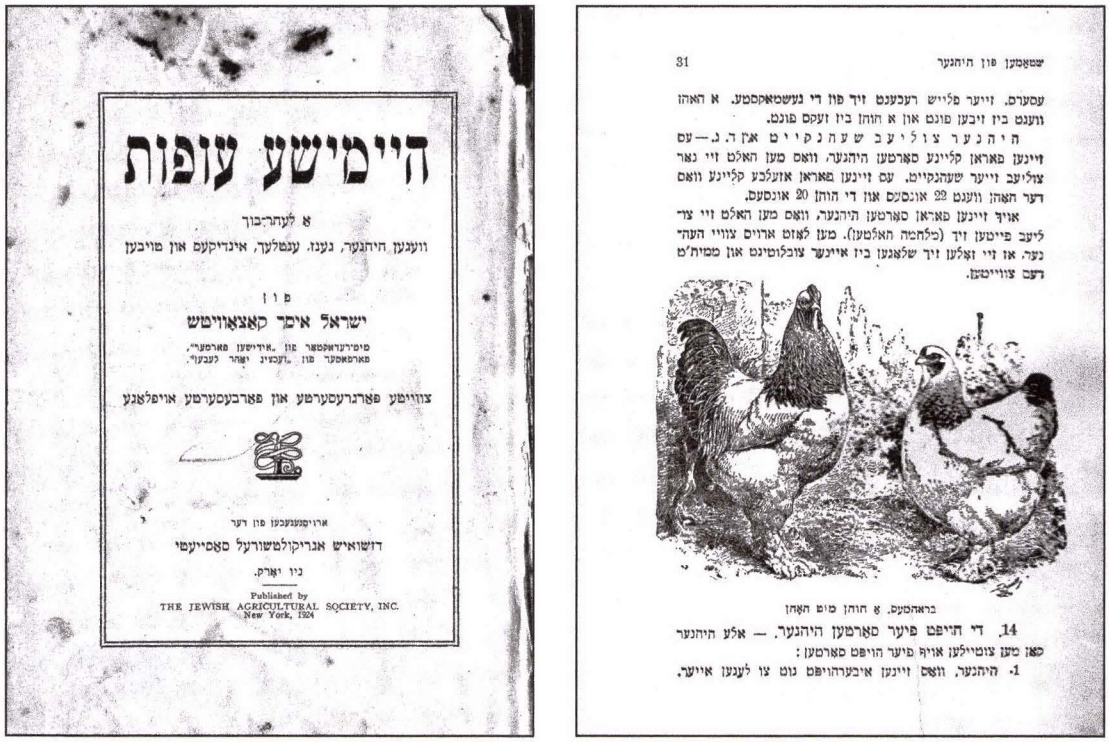
Not everybody gave up on general farming, though, and some even succeeded. David Klein moved from New York City to a farm in South Sandisfield in 1908. At the cattle show in New Boston the following year, this novice farmer won first prize for his radishes, second prize for his cabbage, and another prize for his turnips. Five years later, David's farm was so productive he grew a mind-boggling 380 bushels of potatoes, 2,000 heads of cabbage, and 30 bushels of tomatoes with only his wife, Yetta, to help him.

Farming Education and Support

Education was the tool most needed to ensure the success of Sandisfield's Jewish farmers and it was one of the things most lacking. Well aware that the enthusiasm of their new farmers was no match for the pitfalls of inexperience, the JAIAS started a multi-faceted educational program in 1908 to train Jewish farmers in the basics of agriculture. In May of that year it published the first issue of *The Jewish Farmer*, a monthly magazine that was printed in Yiddish for Jewish immigrants who couldn't read English. In addition to providing information on various farming topics, it was intended to


דער אידישער פארמער
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The Jewish Farmer
(Charlotte Westhead)



היימישע עופות

א לערנ־בוך

וועגען היהנער, נעזנ. ענגלעך, אינדיקעם און מויבען

פון

ישראל איסר קאצאוויטש

פרעזידענט פון „אידישען פארמער".
פארמאסטער פון „קאבזינ יאהר לעבען".

צווייטע פארגרעסערטע און פארבעסערטע אויפלאגע

ארויסגענעבן פון דער

דזשואיש אגריקולטשורעל סאסייעטי

ניו יארק.

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שטאמען פון היהנער 31

עסערס. זייער פליישׂ רעכענט זיך פון די געשפּאקסטע. א האהו
וועגט ביז זיבען פונט און א הוהן ביז זעקס פונט.

היהנער צוליעב שענקיט אין ה. נ.—עס זיינען פאראן קליינע פארטען היהנער, וואס מען האלט זיי נאר צוליעב זייער שענקיט. עס זיינען פאראן אזעלכע קליינע וואס דער האהן וועגט 22 אונסעס און די הוהן 20 אונסעס.

אויך זיינען פאראן פארטען היהנער, וואס מען האלט זיי צוליעב פייטען זיך (כילחמה האלטען). מען לאזט ארויס צווייי העהנער. אז זיי זאלען זיך שלאגען ביז אייגער צובלוטיגט און מכּות'ט דעם צווייטען.

בראהמעס. א הוהן פון האהן

14. די חיפּש פיער פארטען היהנער. — אלע היהנער פאר מען צוטיילען אויף פיער חיפּש פארטען:

1. היהנער, וואס זיינען איבערהויפּט נוט צו לעגען אייער.

Jewish Agricultural Society poultry book, written in Yiddish

give farmers a place to turn to for encouragement, provide them with a forum to express their feelings, and give them a way to keep in touch with their fellow "tillers of the soil."

The success of *The Jewish Farmer* was followed by a series of pamphlets on specific farming topics that also were written in easy-to-understand Yiddish. The series was known as the *A, B, C of Farming* and the first pamphlet was the *A, B, C of Poultry.* Given the colony's lack of preparation as farmers, it's likely that dog-eared copies of *The Jewish Farmer* and the *A, B, C of Poultry* were found in more than a few of Sandisfield's Jewish households.

The JAIAS also started its own itinerant educational training program. Joseph Pincus, the editor of *The Jewish Farmer,* made periodic visits to Jewish farming neighborhoods to teach the farmers about different farming methods and to organize farmers' societies through the Federation of Jewish Farmers of America. One of those societies was the Berkshire County Jewish Farmers' Association, which was started in Great Barrington in 1911. Isadore Rosner, a butcher from Sandisfield, served as the Association's secretary.

The following year, a handbook called the *Guide to the United States for the Jewish*

Immigrant gave advice to new immigrants on a wide variety of subjects, ranging from the benefits of citizenship to the geography of their new country. Although the handbook didn't cover other work opportunities, it unabashedly promoted the financial, health, and religious benefits of farming under a section titled "There is Prosperity and Health on the Farm." The Berkshire County Jewish Farmers' Association with its 79 members was included in its list of principal farmers' associations in the Northeast.

The JAIAS wasn't the only institution that saw the need for education. *The Berkshire Gleaner* had seen the influx of untrained foreign farmers as an opportunity for the local agricultural colleges as early as 1904. In 1911, the Massachusetts Agricultural College in Amherst responded to the increasing number of foreign farmers by offering agricultural courses through its Extension Service. In the summer of 1913, an instructor from the Extension Service drove throughout Western Massachusetts to train farmers on their own farms. He spent two weeks in the area around Monterey, Sandisfield, and New Marlborough working with Jewish farmers. The instructor provided books and training on the subjects each farmer was most interested in and gave demonstrations on how to use such farming apparatus as pruning tools, spraying devices, and dairy equipment.

Beef and Dairy

By 1913, Sandisfield had become known for its Jewish-owned cattle farms. Local farmers gladly sold their yearlings to cattlemen like Samuel Kaplan and Solomon Pollock for $14 to $15 apiece. This was as much as the farmers usually got for their two-year-olds and they were more than happy not to have the expense of feeding their animals for another year. Samuel expanded his cattle enterprise to include buying and selling beef and dairy cows. He went on to become one of Berkshire County's most successful cattle dealers.

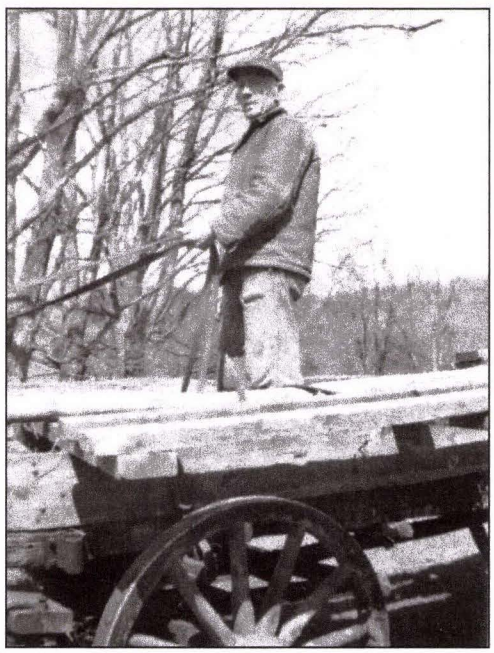
As well as the cattlemen were doing in those early years, they weren't immune to adversity. Solomon lost two valuable cows in September 1907 when someone sprinkled a form of rat poison called Paris green on the ground where they grazed. This deliberate act enraged Henry Manley, who said "hanging would be too good for the scamp" if the person who perpetrated the crime were ever found.

For Gershon Goldstein and Moses Rolnick, tragedy struck in the form of a thunderstorm. The men lost a calf, tools, and some 30 tons of hay when their barns burned down after being struck by lightning in 1916. Damages totaled about $2,000 but because the farm was insured for only $400, Gershon and Moses were forced to

sell their livestock at auction. Unable to recover from their losses, they paid off their mortgage to the JAIAS and sold their farm to Abe Baranoff the following year.

Sandisfield's cattle business began to wane over the next few years. After Samuel Kaplan moved to New Marlborough in 1920, Benjamin Jensky was the only large-scale cattleman left in town.

Some cattle farmers, like Samuel Steinbauch, concentrated on raising dairy cows. Samuel had started out in the dairy business after he came to Sandisfield in 1911, but dairy farming was never as lucrative as he had hoped it would be. One of the biggest problems Sandisfield's dairy farmers faced was getting their milk to the producer. A creamery in West New Boston had opened in 1886 but closed in 1919. The creamery in Monterey wasn't profitable enough, so farmers started taking their milk to New Boston, where it was shipped to Winsted. Later, farmers were paid $1 for every can of milk they brought to a dealer in West New Boston, but if they weren't there on time, they had to haul their milk to the Borden Company in Otis themselves. Samuel and most of the other dairy farmers gave up trying to make a living from their cows and turned to raising chickens instead.



Louis Albert, 1947
(Madeline Johnson)

One farmer who didn't give up was Israel Albert's son, Louis. Louis and his wife, Fannie, started out in the dairy business in 1913 after buying a farm on Beech Plain Road from Israel. They lived there for 10 years before moving to another farm on Sandisfield Road in West New Boston.

The couple bought their first milking machine about 1950. Before that, mornings for the Albert family began before 5 a. m., because the milking had to be done by hand.

Louis and Fannie stayed in the dairy business for almost 50 years. In 1961, they sold their farm to James and Eloise Carr and moved up the road to Montville, where Louis died two years later.

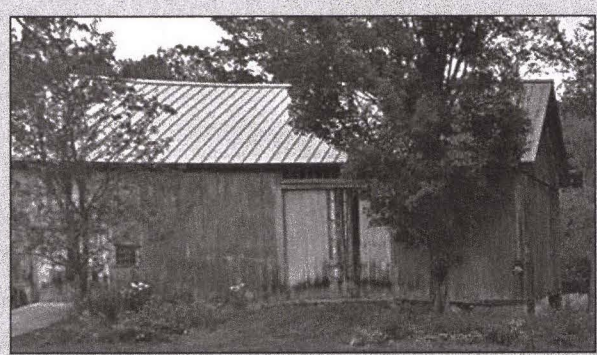
On a smaller scale was David and Libby Pinsky's dairy farm, with about ten cows. The Pinskys owned a popular boarding house on Silver Brook Road in West New Boston and whatever milk they didn't use for their family and summer boarders was sold to the Borden Company.

The Slaughtering Barn

Thursday was slaughtering day in this Jewish farming community. In the 1930s, the farmers brought their cows to the Pollocks' barn in Montville, where the shochet (probably Rabbi Cohen) performed the kosher slaughter.

Jerry Jacobson, who as a youngster stayed at the Pinsky farm in West New Boston, describes the day's activities as seen through the eyes of a nine-year-old.

"One day a month, possibly two, like the last Thursday of the month or something like that, the shochet would come. There would be great commotion in preparation for this event. The first time I followed the small stream of farmers, each walking with a single cow, toward a particular barn in Montville for the event, I had no idea what I was getting into. I didn't even know what a shochet was until I saw him in action. The shochet, sporting a yarmulke, full beard and sideburns, and wearing a black frock coat, exuded an Old Testament air as he greeted the handful of farmers briefly. Then the barn door was opened, and the first unsuspecting cow was teased in with a sprig of hay, while this particular unsuspecting onlooker (me) watched the unfolding developments with benign curiosity. The cow and I seemed to be the only ones ignorant of what lay ahead. As the cow's rear leg stepped into a small noose that had been laid on the floor, two muscular farmers suddenly pulled on a rope, raising the now petrified cow up off the floor by that hind leg. The shochet then murmured a brief prayer and with a knife that had magically (to me) appeared, made a slit across the bellowing cow's exposed throat. Oy gevolt! The cow bled out, kicking and bellowing as it did so, and then the butchering began. I'll never forget the peculiar aroma that all of this caused to arise - the poor cow's terror, the blood, the cut beef. Over the two summers we spent there, I took pains to be present at each of the slaughter days, partly because I looked upon it as a mandatory rite of passage and partly out of simple horrified fascination. After each of these sessions I would lose my usual enthusiasm for beef for a few days."



Most Jewish families in Sandisfield kept a cow or two for their own use, especially if they had summer boarders. Ida Linder's diary entry from 1934 tells of one of the harsher realities of rural life. The Linders owned only one cow and except for those times when she went into her dry period before giving birth, they relied on her for their milk, butter, and cheese. One day in early June their cow had a calf and began producing milk again. Ida needed the milk for her family and boarders and couldn't afford to share it with the calf, so she sold him to their butcher, Max Nager. The transaction took place while the cow was up in the pasture. Ida described in heart-wrenching detail the cow's reaction when she returned to find her calf missing and her obvious pain as she continually called for him. Ida wrote "... When she found her calf gone, she became wild, she started running all over the place. It was a pity to watch her. She called for her calf all the time ... just by looking at our cow in her misery. It really was terrible, but what can we do. We humans need the milk, so we must be inhuman sometimes."

Sandisfield Becomes a Chicken Town

If any one word describes the legacy of Sandisfield's Jewish community, it's chickens, especially in the village of Montville. While David Pyenson was encouraging his fellow farmers to turn to poultry, the Massachusetts State Board of Agriculture was promoting the financial benefits of poultry farming, citing the growing demand for eggs and chicken meat as people left rural communities to work in the cities.

The idea of chicken farming was especially appealing to the Jewish farmers in Sandisfield. Unlike crops or cattle, chicken farms required very little start-up capital and a fairly small amount of land. Poultry farming also provided a relatively quick return on the initial investment because improvements in transportation meant that farmers in the southern Berkshires had easy access to critical markets in Hartford, Boston, and New York City.

Before long, Sandisfield was on its way to becoming a chicken town. This wouldn't be the first time, though. In the 19th century, a section of town south of New Boston became known as Roosterville because it was home to so many roosters. It was said that the cacophony of their crowing was so loud it woke up everyone for miles around. The roosters have long since gone, but the name has remained.

This budding industry had a close call just before Thanksgiving in 1914. An outbreak of hoof and mouth disease in several Massachusetts towns prompted the Commissioner of the State Bureau of Animal Husbandry to prohibit the shipping of live poultry within the state. The quarantine was designed to prevent the spread of

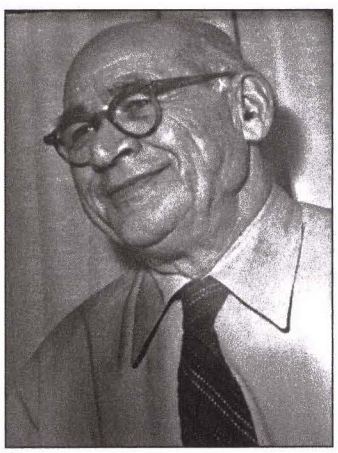
the disease, but it would have had devastating economic consequences for Sandisfield's poultry farmers, who shipped live hens to cities and towns throughout Massachusetts. Fortunately, the quarantine was revised three weeks after it was put into effect. The revised regulations only prohibited shipments of poultry from outside the state, allowing Sandisfield's poultry farmers to continue about their business.



Eva Moskowitz, Clara Weintraub, Sylvia Linder, Rose Linder, and Isadore Moskowitz, circa 1927

In the years following World War I, chickens became the livestock of choice among the Jewish farmers in Sandisfield. One coop after another went up as old-timers and newcomers tried their hand at chicken farming. David Pinsky, no longer raising chickens only for his family and boarders, built a new hen house and ordered 1,000 chicks. David's neighbor, Joseph Baszem, owned several hundred laying hens and sent 600 broilers at a time to New York City. Even Samuel Tropp experimented with geese and turkeys as a way to supplement the income from his baking business.

The Depression years brought more Jewish farmers, as men who were out of work saw raising chickens in Sandisfield as a desirable alternative to the unemployment line. Others came for the same reason so many others had come over the years: their families were there. Morris Schachter was a butcher in East Haddam, Connecticut when his son, Max, married Ida Jensky of Montville. In 1938, Morris and his youngest son, Harry, bought a poultry farm of their own.



Morris Schachter (Robert Schachter)

By the time the members of the Federal Writers' Project came to Sandisfield in the late 1930s, most of the chicken farms in town were owned by Jewish farmers and the bulk of them were in Montville because of the synagogue.

Some of the better known chicken farms didn't get their start until the 1940s and 1950s. Max Margulies bought his

farm on Town Hill Road in Montville in the early 1940s. A year or so later, Harry Rothman traded his furrier business in New York City for a chicken farm of his own and was so successful he had to build more coops. One of the most prosperous farms was Marty Pinsky's Buck River Poultry Farm. Marty was the son of Nathan Pinsky and a second-generation Montville farmer who had started out breeding minks in the mid-1940s. He soon gave that up and concentrated on his father's chicken and egg business.

Further up the road, Max Margulies had convinced Jack Sandler to make the change from dealing in chickens to growing them. Jack started off with a 150-foot-long hen house in 1953. His poultry business was so successful he needed two more buildings to house his 20,000 chickens.

By the middle of the 1950s, Sandisfield had become the center of Berkshire County's poultry industry, with an estimated chicken population between 75,000 and 100,000. Farmers in Montville shipped 200,000 eggs to market each week, and the number of poultry houses continued to multiply.

All of Sandisfield's farmers were dealt an unexpected blow when Hurricane Diane hit in August 1955. The heavy rains flooded fields, destroyed farm buildings, and threatened livestock. Roosterville, on flat land along the Farmington River, was especially hard hit.

In spite of their losses, most of the poultry farmers fared better than the other farmers because of the very nature of poultry farming. After the floodwaters receded they were able to build new hen houses, buy more chickens, and resume their poultry farms. For the farmers in Roosterville, though, it was a different story because they relied on their farmland and pastures for their income. Diane's devastating floods had stripped the topsoil away, leaving debris and barren gullies in their wake. Topsoil was the lifeblood of these farmers. With their soil gone, so were their farms and many of them never fully recovered from the loss.

Education and Experimentation

Poultry farming had its rewards, but it was also labor-intensive, with no time off for vacations or holidays. Eggs had to be gathered three times a day and feeding hundreds, if not thousands, of hens every day was time-consuming. Sandisfield's chicken farmers were always looking for ways to improve their farms and farming methods. They often met in the basement of the synagogue to talk about what was going on in the poultry business. It was there that they shared news on the latest research, watched movies about the poultry industry, and attended classes provided by the Berkshire

County Extension Service. Several of Sandisfield's farmers were on the forefront of the county's poultry industry and made valuable contributions to its growth.

For Morris and Harry Schachter, the answer to their feeding problem was found in automation. They installed automatic chicken waterers and connected mechanical feeders with the grain room on the second floor of their hen house. Instead of spending hours each day feeding and watering their chickens, Max and Harry were able to care for 3,000 chickens in less than an hour. Poultry growers in Berkshire County watched the Schachters' innovations with interest. Mechanical feeders, which had been slow to catch on in the area, soon found their way into more and more farms throughout Western Massachusetts.

Marty Pinsky was another of Sandisfield's farmers who did his part to advance Berkshire County's poultry industry. His two-story laying house was famous among local poultrymen. He continued to make news when he planted an experimental field of Ladino clover to save on the cost of grain and installed little doors in his hen houses to ventilate them in hot weather.

In the early 1950s, brothers Irving and Sol Moss joined other poultrymen in the area to test out White Leghorn hens at their farm in New Boston. Until then, Sandisfield's farmers had preferred the hybrid sex-link birds because they were easy to separate by gender after they hatched, were prolific producers of the brown eggs that were so popular in the Berkshires, and provided a good amount of meat when their laying days were over. Although White Leghorn hens laid even more eggs than the hybrids, farmers in Western Massachusetts had scorned them in the past because of their white eggshells and paltry amount of meat. The result of the Moss' experiment was so promising that Sandisfield farmers Marty Pinsky, Jerry Cohen, Jack Sandler, Morris Levine, Sam Katz, and David Stein tested them out on their own farms. By 1955, these six men alone were raising over 25,000 Leghorns, ten times more than the total number of chickens in the entire town 80 years earlier.

Sandisfield's thousands of chickens also created unforeseen problems, such as what to do with all of the chicken manure that the farms produced each day. Leon Katz of West New Boston brought up this issue at a meeting of the county's poultry growers in 1952. Chicken manure was a better source of nitrogen and other important nutrients than cow manure, which made it a superior spring fertilizer for hayfields and pastures. In spite of its obvious benefits, Leon and the other poultrymen in the area were hard-pressed to find farmers who were willing to haul the valuable chicken manure back to their own farms, even though Leon and the others offered it for free.

The End of an Era

Unfortunately, Sandisfield's days as a major poultry producer were numbered, and a major factor in its decline was basic economics.

New England's chicken farmers were hurt by actions the federal government took in the 1950s to protect certain other farmers. A collapse of farm prices during the Depression had had a devastating effect on farming and, to prevent a re-occurrence, the government put a floor under the price of some crops. One of those crops was the Western-grown feed grain used by most of the poultry growers in New England. However, there were no corresponding price supports to protect eggs and poultry from price fluctuations. The high cost of grain coupled with the rising cost of production made it nearly impossible for small poultry farmers like those in Sandisfield to make a profit.

The development of refrigerated trucks also put Sandisfield's farmers at a disadvantage. Marvin Sandler credits these trucks with the ultimate demise of the town's poultry business. Farmers who were already operating at a loss couldn't compete with the cheaper eggs being trucked in from the big egg producers in the Midwest.

Even when Sandisfield's poultry business was at its height, there were signs that the town's poultry farms were headed for trouble. Farmers both old and young were growing tired of a business that needed their attention 365 days a year. Rising costs and unforeseen hardships forced some farmers into bankruptcy. Other farms simply died out with their owners, like those of Harry Rothman and Max Margulies.

Little by little, Sandisfield's poultry farms began to disappear from the landscape. In 1953, Harry Schachter married and moved to Carmel, New York. Not long afterward, he and his father sold their farm in Montville to Jerry Cohen. Jerry's attempt at poultry farming failed, and he filed for bankruptcy four years later. A suspicious fire in 1954 destroyed one of Leon Katz's poultry houses in West New Boston, killing 3,000 laying hens. Rather than rebuild, Leon and his wife, Ray, sold their farm and moved to Torrington. Murray, Irving, and Sol



Helen Katz in front of the destroyed hen house, 1954 (Helen Nejfelt)

Moss, owners of the well-known Moss Brothers farm, declared bankruptcy in 1955, and their farm in New Boston was sold at auction the following year.

The decline in the poultry business accelerated in the early 1960s as skyrocketing costs and a shortage of workers forced more farmers out of business. When Marty Pinsky couldn't keep up with his mortgage payments in 1963, he and his family moved to California. Two years' later, Sandisfield lost another poultry farmer when Harry Katz retired because of poor health.

By the end of the 1960s, most of the chicken farmers in Sandisfield had given up, gone bankrupt, or passed away. The Sandler farm, with its 11,000 laying hens, was the only large-scale poultry business left in town. When Jack and Lena Sandler decided that the time had come for them, too, to retire in 1969, it marked the end of an era. After years of being the center of Berkshire County's poultry business and years more of decline, Sandisfield's role as a chicken town was officially over.

Life on a Dairy Farm

by Paul Newman



Fannie Albert, 1940 (Madeline Johnson and Paul Newman)

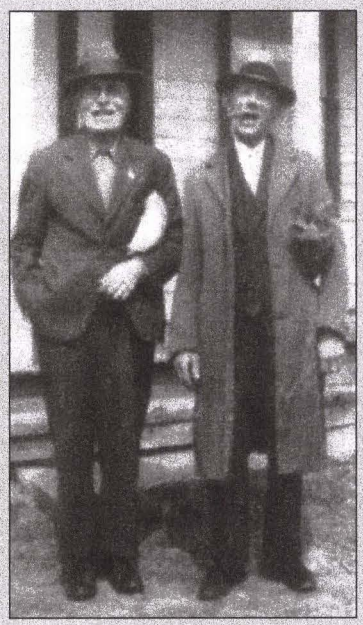
My grandfather, Louis Albert, and my grandmother, Fannie, owned and operated a farm in New Boston, Massachusetts. The business aspect of the farm consisted of selling milk from the 24 dairy cows that they fed and milked each day. The milk was sold to a local dairy, Sealtest, that sent a pickup truck every few days to pick up the milk in metal cans from the farm and take them to the processing plant. More about the details in a moment.

The first point I want to relate is that my grandparents were definitely of the old school. As you'll see in a few minutes, the farm was essentially run by hand, muscle and animals, with a minimum of machine help.

Another point to be made, that is still true today, is that farmers are extremely dependent on the weather. This was certainly true of my grandparents. To begin with, the herd needed to be fed. In the summer, that was not a problem; they simply put the cows out in one of the three or four pastures surrounding the central farmhouse and barn. In the winter, it was more problematic. The herd needed to be fed using hay stored in the loft over the barn. The hay was obtained by harvesting hay from the farm's fields by allowing one field at a time to go fallow, then harvesting the hay and storing it for the winter. They also harvested hay from neighboring fields throughout New Boston.

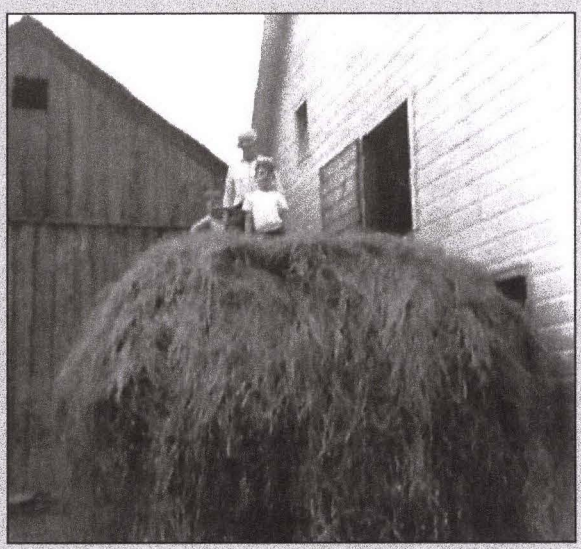
The harvesting, as I said, was done with a minimum of engine powered machinery. When it was harvest time, grandpa would hitch up the horse to his mower and proceed to go slowly up and down the field mowing the hay. Next, he unhitched the horse from the mower and hitched him up to the rake – a device with a row of curved tines that when dragged across the mowed hay would rake it up. Grandpa then raised and lowered the rake as he went to rake the hay into rows. Now the weather became a real factor. A lesson that farmers often unfortunately learned the hard way is that you never put away green hay. It ferments and that

process can often generate enough heat to enable spontaneous combustion and that's how you lose your barn and perhaps your entire farm. So, the hay had to be mowed at precisely the right time, and left out in the sun for four to six days while it dried. In between, grandpa would come down the rows again with the rake and turn them over to assure drying. If it rained during this time, the entire harvest could be ruined, as the hay would turn moldy and rot. Assuming the weather held, the next step got interesting.



Abraham Kleiner and Louis Albert, 1944 (Madeline Johnson)

Haying time was the one time grandpa and grandma could not do it all alone. In order to get more hands on the project, they did several things – first they hired a migrant worker "Happy" Houghlihan who wandered up to New Boston each year to work for my grandparents, and then they would put the word out to the village and usually several neighbors would respond. Several of my cousins and I would usually go up to the farm for the summer and we would pitch in as well. My grandfather would hitch the horse up to a flatbed wagon, put a straw in his mouth, take the reins and proceed to drive the wagon slowly up and down the rows as the rest of us would use pitch forks to toss the hay up on to the pile. One or two people would get to ride on the wagon and build the load. When the wagon couldn't hold any more, we would all jump up on the pile or walk behind, as grandpa slowly drove the wagon back to the barn. (This of course was the original hay ride which people now do for fun with a tractor driven wagon with hay bales).



Brian Newman, Louis Albert, and Paul Newman, circa 1956 (Madeline Johnson)

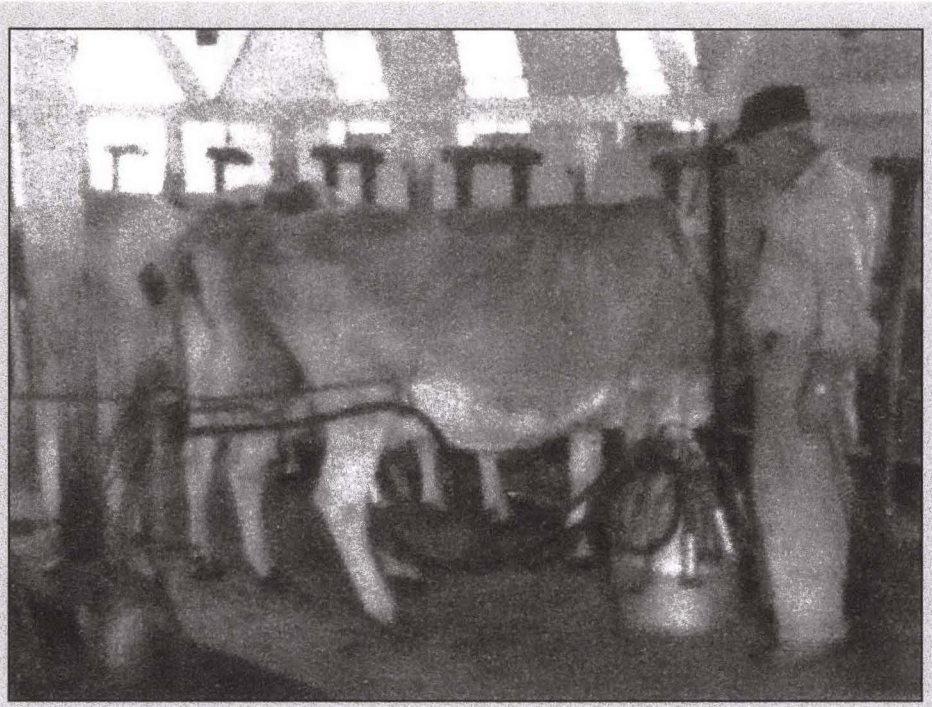
When the wagon got back to the barn, it was backed under one end of

the barn and parked. The horse was unhitched from the wagon and then hitched to a rope that went into the barn at ground level, across the floor, up the stairs to the loft, and out over the loft to the very end over the awaiting wagon, where it was connected to a four-pronged "fork" that was lowered down from a pulley attached to the eave of the barn. The horse backed up until the fork was lowered into the pile of hay on the wagon, and was then locked with a load in its tines. Then the horse was led forward and the load was raised up and into the loft. When it went into the loft, someone in the loft had to jerk a trip line that released the fork and dropped the load. This was how the hay was distributed throughout the loft.

Enter Happy Houghlihan. He was usually given the job of jerking the trip line. Should have been straightforward one would think. The problem often was, Happy was an alcoholic and on occasion would show up for work well "lubricated." When this happened, we would often see the load go up into the loft, hear the line being tripped and then nothing. We would have to scramble up the stairs into the loft, paw through the hay, and dig poor Happy out as he had usually dropped it right onto himself.

When the loft was finally filled, the horse was led to feed and water and then to the barn, and then grandpa and everyone got to relax – often involving a bottle being passed among the volunteers. That was how the cows made it through the winter when the fields were feet deep in snow.

Now milking was equally labor intensive. The only machine grandpa and grandma had was a single electric milking machine, bought about 1950. The milker was slowly led up and down the rows of cows, twice a day as I recall, at milking time. As that process was slow, grandma would hand milk the remaining cows to get the milking finished faster. The milk from both sources was passed through a paper gauze filter placed over a stainless steel milking pail. The pails were in turn emptied into a milk can (what we now know as an "antique" milk can). The cans held 10 gallons and weighed nearly 90 pounds. Why is the weight important? Because the cans had to be individually lifted up several feet and lowered into a water bath in a cooler for storage. Now you try doing that three or four times, twice a day! My grandfather was pretty strong I would say. Then several times a week, the truck from Sealtest would come and together with the young man truck driver, they would lift the cans into the truck for the journey to the dairy. As time went on, Sealtest wanted to modernize its operations by having all of their farmers install 50,000 gallon stainless cooler tanks that could be emptied through a hose into a tanker truck. This of course would have been an extreme expense for my



Louis Albert, circa 1950
(Madeline Johnson)

grandparents. Sealtest, however, in recognition of my grandparents' ages, knowing that they only had a few more years of farming, and the fact that their milk had the highest butterfat content of any farm around, gave them a pass and they continued to operate using milk cans and the pickup truck right up until they retired.

A hard life from dawn to dusk, but one that my grandparents pursued with dignity and strength for many years.

7

"Rooms Rented for the Season"

The summer boarding business was essential to the economic survival of Sandisfield's Jewish population.

Any farmer who opened his home gained a ready-made market for his produce and meat. Even families with nothing more than a kitchen garden, a cow, and a few chickens could make some extra money. Summer boarding also provided owners with a dependable source of income since boarders tended to come back year after year. Most importantly, it helped contribute to the long-term success of the colony because boarders very often turned into residents who then spread the word to others.

This was the case with Max Linder, a furrier from New York City. Max first came to Montville in 1918 to stay at the Berkshire Mountain House on Town Hill Road, run by his friend Samuel Goldstein. The clear air and rolling green hills of the village reminded Max so much of his native Austria that he and his family continued to come back each summer. He persuaded his brother, Benny, and brother-in-law, Morris Moskowitz, to move to Montville. By 1922, Max had saved enough money to buy an old house for his family and started renting rooms himself.



Berkshire Mountain House
(Steve and Lynn Rubenstein)

The Catskills of the Berkshires

Sandisfield's success as a Jewish summer resort was no mystery.

Anti-Semitism was widespread among the hotels and boarding houses in the Berkshires and the owners made sure Jews knew they weren't welcome. Locally, Monterey's Laurel Lodge plainly stated "No Hebrews" in their advertisements. In New Boston, Wesley Clark of The Overlook was a little more subtle, advertising that his cottage was "near stores and church." Even as late as 1928, Paul Knapp made it clear he only rented rooms in his South Sandisfield home to Christians. That the influx of Jewish immigrants was responsible for these blatantly anti-Semitic advertisements can be seen in the change in wording made by Elizabeth Rockwell, the owner of Maplewood Farm in Otis. In 1899, she advertised pleasant rooms, daily mail, boating, fishing, and fresh vegetables. In 1903, she added the word "church" to her list of amenities.

Sandisfield was the one place in the Berkshires where Jews had their choice of any number of places to stay, and it became almost as well-known as New York's Catskill Mountains as a destination for Jews looking to escape a city summer. Each year, hundreds of Jewish visitors from Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx flocked to Sandisfield between June and Labor Day. Its isolation from the clamor of nearby towns may have been as much of a draw as its pure mountain air and fresh spring water.

Some owners relied solely on word-of-mouth to bring people to their doorsteps. Others advertised in Jewish newspapers or handed out business cards that touted their superior accommodations.

Samuel Kahn, the owner of the Berkshire Hill Farm House, had cards printed in English on one side and Yiddish on the other to promote his "high grade summer resorts" that offered products from his own farm. Max Linder's business card for The Montville Summer Resort featured bathing and fishing as well as his own vegetables and dairy products, with the added inducement that Montville was 1,500 feet above sea level.





Berkshire Hill Farm House (Sandisfield Historical Society)

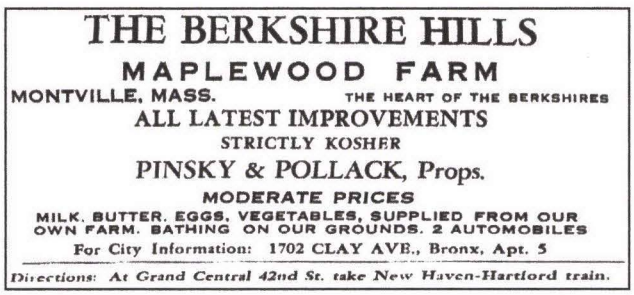
Among the attractions Nathan Pinsky and David Pollock included on their card for Maplewood Farm (no connection to the earlier Maplewood Farm in Otis) were a strictly kosher household, all the latest improvements, and *two* automobiles. Most boarding houses also offered transportation to and from the local railroad and bus stations as an additional convenience for their guests. Acceptance to a particular boarding house wasn't necessarily a given. David and

Libby Pinsky required application letters so they could screen prospective guests and only accepted those they thought would fit in.



The Montville Summer Resort

The cost of staying in Sandisfield varied. Sam Steinbauch charged $20 a week for room and board in the years following World War I, considered high at the time. In the 1940s, it cost a family $20 to stay at David and Libby Pinsky's farm in West New Boston for two months. Large hotels, like the one owned by Samuel Goldstein, accommodated more guests and provided more amenities. This was reflected in their prices. In 1940, rooms at the Berkshire Mountain House cost $20 a week. Three years later rooms were $30 a week and by 1952 it cost $22 to stay just three days.


THE BERKSHIRE HILLS
MAPLEWOOD FARM
MONTVILLE, MASS. THE HEART OF THE BERKSHIRES
ALL LATEST IMPROVEMENTS
STRICTLY KOSHER
PINSKY & POLLACK, Props.
MODERATE PRICES
MILK, BUTTER, EGGS, VEGETABLES, SUPPLIED FROM OUR OWN FARM. BATHING ON OUR GROUNDS. 2 AUTOMOBILES
For City Information: 1702 CLAY AVE., Bronx, Apt. 5
Directions: At Grand Central 42nd St. take New Haven-Hartford train.

Maplewood Farm
(Gertrud Michelson)

Boarding House Life

Boarding house owners frequently lived in the city during the winter and returned to Sandisfield for the summer boarding season. Many of the husbands continued to work in the city during the week and came out on weekends. The daily responsibility of running the boarding house was left to the wives and children. They typically moved into a single room in their homes to accommodate more renters. David and Libby Pinsky's daughter, Anne Hoffman, spoke of sleeping in the barn with her brothers during the summer. Max and Ida Linder's daughter, Rose Petrokofsky, remembers sharing their large chicken coop with her mother, twin sister, and older brother.

According to Rose, their guests fell into two groups: *koch-alein* roomers who rented a room for the whole summer and cooked their own meals, and boarders who came up for a week or two and ate meals prepared by her mother. This differentiation was echoed by Anne Hoffman when she described her own family's accommodations. As a general rule, though, all were referred to as boarders.

Springtime was always a busy time for families who rented rooms. The men painted and made repairs to the home while the women cleaned the house from top to

bottom, aired out mattresses, canned endless jars of food, and made breakfast cereals. Every family's goal was to ensure that their guests were as comfortable as possible. If they enjoyed their vacations, they would be certain to come back the following year.

Every summer, even the smallest Jewish household grew by four or more families, with the husbands coming to join them on the weekends. A boarding house usually was set up as a *koch-alein* and the boarders had to buy their meat, vegetables, and dairy products from the owner. All of the families shared the single ice box. Carol Plotkin Kessler, Zalman and Rebecca Plotkin's granddaughter, has spent every summer of her life in Sandisfield. As a child, she heard the frequent arguments that took place as families accused each other of taking food from the ice box that didn't belong to them. Families also shared the wood stove. Carol recalls that the kitchen at mealtime was the scene of many arguments as several wives vied for the use of its four burners.



David and Libby Pinsky's house, circa 1936
(Jerry Jacobson)

Food was an important part of the boarding house experience, regardless of who cooked the meals. The objective of many boarders was to gain as much weight as they could during their stay in the country. In an era when being overweight was a sign of good health and well-being, boarders aspired to return to the city in the fall and show their friends how much their health had improved over the summer.

Leisure time in those days before television was spent visiting with neighbors, playing cards or chess, and sitting on the porch. Some of the more fortunate households had radios. At David and Annie Pollock's boarding house, Helen Pinsky played the piano and Nathan Pinsky joined in on his clarinet. The adults also enjoyed playing pranks on each other. Ida Linder put on the Victorian dresses that had been left in the attic and tried to scare her guests into thinking they'd seen a ghost. The synagogue was the setting for mock marriages, masquerades, and dances.

Boarding house porches saw their share of casual gossip and intense debate. When Anne Hoffman was young she would often sit with the adults and listen to their



Maplewood Farm
(Cindy Pinsky)

discussions on communism, socialism, and the Spanish Civil War. She later credited the education she received on the porch of her parents' house with inspiring her lifelong mission of fighting for workers' rights and social justice.

Of all the boarding houses in Sandisfield, the Pollocks' stone farmhouse in Montville was considered the most sophisticated because of the professional people from the city who stayed there. Among some of their more memorable guests were a dentist-turned-psychiatrist who painted the local scenery and a Viennese baker who arrived with his life's savings hidden inside a loaf of bread.

Childhood Trips to the Country

If summer in the country was a welcome respite for the grown-ups, for their children it was positively magical. They couldn't wait for school to be out so they could return to the country to see their old friends again and do the things they couldn't do in the city, like jumping out of a hayloft and fishing for trout.

Jerry Jacobson, who spent two memorable summers at David and Libby Pinsky's farm in 1936 and 1937, still remembers that first morning when he woke up to the



Jerry Jacobson and the Pinsky calf, 1936
(Jerry Jacobson)

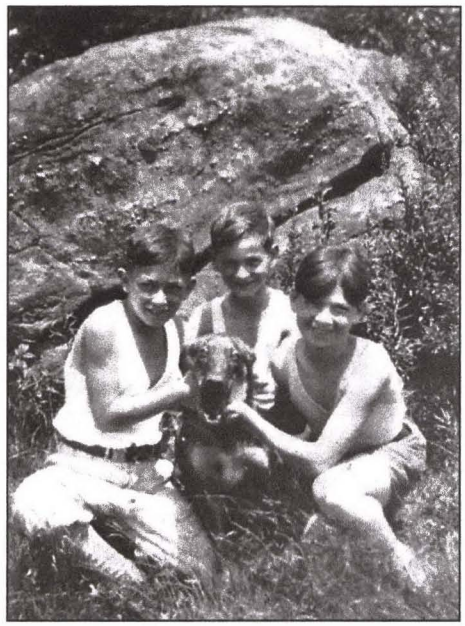
sound of roosters crowing. As a city kid, he marveled at the idea of Jews living and working outdoors. He became great friends with one of the Pinsky calves during his first visit and still tells of the many escapades he and his playful companion shared that summer.

Marilyn Leiman stayed in West New Boston with both the Alberts and the Pinskys during the 1940s and 1950s. She has vivid memories of the five-hour bus ride that took her and her grandmother from the streets of Brooklyn to "Camelot."

If only for a few short weeks, city youngsters could trade broken pavements and crowded apartment buildings for pitching horseshoes, picking berries, and splashing in the Buck River falls. Collecting eggs from the chicken coops and bringing the cows in for milking, their bells tinkling as they made their way to the barn, were daily delights for these children that their hosts' own children couldn't fathom.

Their days were filled with baseball games, walks along dirt roads, and sunbathing in the meadow on Jones Knoll. At the end of the day there were square dances at the

dance hall and ice cream sodas at the general store. And there was romance – summer flirtations that faded with season's end and teenage friendships that deepened into love. Jack Sandler, Carol Plotkin, and Sylvia Linder were just a few of the town's young people whose future spouses first came to Sandisfield as summer boarders.



Nate, Joe, and Abe German, circa 1928

Changing Tastes

Not surprisingly, the Depression took its toll on the summer boarding business. Jobs in the city were hard to come by and families never knew from one day to the next where they would find the money to pay for essentials, never mind trips to the country. Homeowners in Sandisfield struggled to find enough renters to fill their rooms for the summer. After World War II, the demand for summer boarding dropped off even more. The post-war economy led to changing tastes and even in the cities fewer people were interested in spending their vacations cooking their own meals and sharing overcrowded houses. Unable to meet the needs of the modern vacationer, Max Linder stopped renting rooms in the mid-1940s.

Staying in business during those changing times required innovative thinking. In Montville, Jack Sandler came up with a plan. His father, Max, had started renting rooms soon after he arrived in the late 1920s and Jack had continued with the business after his death.

Jack was well aware of the changing trends and the preference for more private accommodations. He bought an old barn, dismantled it, and used the wood to build several bungalows on his property, which he advertised in New York papers like the *New York Post.* According to Jack's son, Marvin, his parents continued to rent their bungalows until the mid-1950s, when the advent of faster, more powerful cars made it possible for travelers to go farther afield for their summer vacations. Undeterred, Jack adapted once again and converted his summer bungalows into year-round rentals for factory workers employed in nearby towns like Winsted. It was a solution that served the Sandlers well until the factories closed and the workers moved away.

The Berkshire Mountain House was the longest-lasting summer hotel because

Samuel Goldstein also saw the need to adapt to the changing tastes of his guests. He continued to highlight the hotel's Jewish-American kosher cuisine and added amenities like private baths, tennis courts, and counselors to keep the children busy. He also emphasized the hotel's proximity to cultural destinations like Tanglewood and Jacob's Pillow. In the 1940s and 1950s, several Jewish camps sprang up in the area and Samuel took advantage of their popularity by offering a children's day camp as well as a music camp. Samuel died in the spring of 1955 and his widow, Luba, continued to run the hotel until it closed at the end of the season.

David and Libby Pinsky's farm was one of the last holdovers from Sandisfield's boarding house days, continuing to welcome boarders and roomers until the 1960s. The couple had started renting rooms in their home almost 40 years earlier. At the peak of Sandisfield's popularity, as many as ten families at a time stayed in their 13 rooms. Families from the city came back to Pinsky's year after year and some, like the Leonard Dryansky and Irving Levine families, returned to become residents of the town.

The economic growth that followed World War II brought prosperity to the country but sounded the death knell for Sandisfield's summer boarding business. More and more Jewish families had moved from the cities to the suburbs, and they owned cars that would take them to the Catskills or the seashore, where hotels offered all the modern conveniences.



Anne Pinsky Hoffman and Jerry Jacobson, 1988
(Jerry Jacobson)

Boarding house owners weren't the only casualties of those changing times. The next generation of children would no longer experience the tangy scent of the wood stove in the morning air, the taste of sun-warmed blackberries picked straight from the bush, or playing with friends in a swimming hole. Many of the children who spent their summers in Sandisfield have returned to visit over the years. Even those who haven't been as lucky still carry the memories of those summers with them. If any further proof is needed, it's found in the number of people who enthusiastically reached out to our committee members to share stories and photographs of their long-ago summers in Sandisfield.

After the Summer, 1934

by Ida Weintraub Linder

Now that all our guests have gone back to their homes and we have rested our nerves from the tumult, we can now dress up in our holiday clothes and all the neighbors get together in one home to discuss events. This is our "theater, movies and all the worldly pleasures."

When we farmers get together, we really discuss very "important" topics, such as the flies and mosquitoes, and the women brag to each other as to who has more ducks sitting on eggs and who has more chickens. When this subject is done, they start another discussion as to who has more cows and how many calves were born over the summer. The talk on chickens and cows is very lively and when everyone is satisfied that the correct report was given, another subject comes up. "Who made the biggest garden and who has the most vegetables." When all questions were answered then everyone knows exactly what was accomplished.

Now starts a new discussion, this one about "boarders" and "roomers." Did anyone rent their rooms for the next season? And to what kind of families? Do they have many children? They all start complaining that there must be a better way to earn one's bread. They start complaining and cursing the boarders and the roomers and bemoaning the fate of the farmers who have to take all the guff and noise and complaints all summer from these people who leave the city and come to Montville for vacation. However, should one family not have any prospects for the following summer, he is very solemn and sad about it. They would all like to have a good "season." Our farmers are always in trouble; they always have big problems as you can tell by their discussions after the guests have left.

The truth is that this is really a very difficult way to earn one's living. A farmer's life is very hard with not nearly enough income and with lots of heartaches and headaches in order to gather up enough money to pay the mortgages and the taxes.

8

"The Children Are Bright"

Sandisfield's schools were the one-room schoolhouses of rural folklore. The school year was about eight months long, give or take a month, depending on factors such as weather, road conditions, and epidemics. In addition to regular school vacations, events like mud season and the agricultural fair in Great Barrington were occasions for school closures as well.

Schoolrooms were lit by kerosene lamps and heated by wood stoves. Sanitary facilities consisted of outhouses. In those days before school buses, Sandisfield paid residents like Solomon Gottleib and Hyman Charney to transport children who lived too far from their school to walk. This accommodation became more and more frequent as students moved away and the town's school districts consolidated.

The West Street School

The first Jews to settle in Sandisfield in any numbers came to the northwestern part of town. Their arrival had an immediate effect on the school district. While the school in Sandisfield Center closed in 1904 because of a lack of students, *The Berkshire Evening Eagle* reported that the number of students at the West Street school had increased from three the previous year to twenty-four that year.

Although most of the new students didn't speak English, they were described as "bright, well dressed and anxious to learn." The fact that the children were bright and anxious to learn wasn't unique to the Sandisfield colony. Jewish immigrant families placed a high value on education, possibly because so many of them had been deprived of that opportunity in their homelands. Parents passed on to their children the expectation that they would take their schooling seriously. This was borne out in studies by both the JAIAS and the U. S. Senate's Immigration Commission. Both

studies concluded that wherever Jewish immigrants settled, they set a high educational standard for the schools in their community.

The town of Sandisfield decided the best way to meet the needs of these new students was to replace their teacher, Fanny Winship, with one who could speak their language. In the fall of 1904, they hired Ina Wetzel, whose father, William, worked as a printer at *The New York Herald.* The family had bought a farm in Montville for use as a country home when they wanted to get away from Brooklyn. The Wetzel family wasn't Jewish, but apparently Ina was fluent enough in German to communicate with her Yiddish-speaking students. Ina only stayed through the end of that school year and Fanny came back for the fall term.

West Street hired another Jewish teacher in the spring of 1907. Dora Reingold, a young Jewish immigrant from Boston, had just graduated from high school. Dora didn't stay very long either, but left to teach in Millington, Massachusetts. She was replaced the following fall by Mary Waldstein, Dora's high school classmate and another Russian immigrant. Mary had just received a certificate in elementary education from a Normal School (a training school for teachers) in Boston and was an enthusiastic educator. She was well liked by her pupils and their parents, but her heritage still elicited comments among the locals. Henry Manley described her as "a Jew girl but anyone who knows her speaks in her praise."

The last day before Christmas vacation was a big day for the students in Sandisfield and children at the West Street school were no exception. In spite of the fact that Mary and the majority of her students were Jewish, each Christmas season during her tenure the schoolroom was decorated with evergreens and a Christmas tree. The children put on Christmas programs for their parents, with songs and recitations. Henry reported that both the children and their parents thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Mary returned to Boston in the fall of 1909 and became a staunch advocate for the immigrant children she taught. In 1917, she took part in a conference on immigration at Temple Beth Israel in Boston, which was sponsored by the Boston Section of Jewish Women. The conference included representatives from the Chamber of Commerce and The Travelers' Aid Society and was designed to address the many issues facing immigrants in Massachusetts. Mary's years of teaching immigrant children in Sandisfield and Boston had made her an expert on the subject and she spoke on "The Disadvantages and Difficulties That Confront the Immigrant Child."

The next teacher at the West Street school was Cora Stodder, whose family lived in neighboring Monterey. Cora was neither Jewish nor Yiddish-speaking. It was no longer necessary to have a special teacher because the children had proven to be

fast learners. By 1910, all of the Jewish children in Sandisfield spoke English. Cora continued the tradition of the annual Christmas program, complete with a Christmas tree and a visit from Santa Claus, who handed out presents to everyone. The Jewish children took part in all of the Christmas festivities. Ida Kaplan recited "Sly Santa Claus," May Pollock performed "Christmas Eve" and "Christmas Morn," and Eva Penziner told the story of "How Christmas Came to the Poorhouse."

Cora left the West Street school after a year and was replaced by Hyman Lieberman, a veteran of the Philippine-American War. Hyman wanted to teach his students more than just reading and arithmetic, so he organized the Right Doers Club to encourage the children in town to do the right thing. Members of the club agreed to stop using profane or impure language and fines were imposed on anyone who violated the agreement. Hyman also taught the children in his charge proper manners and how to behave in public.



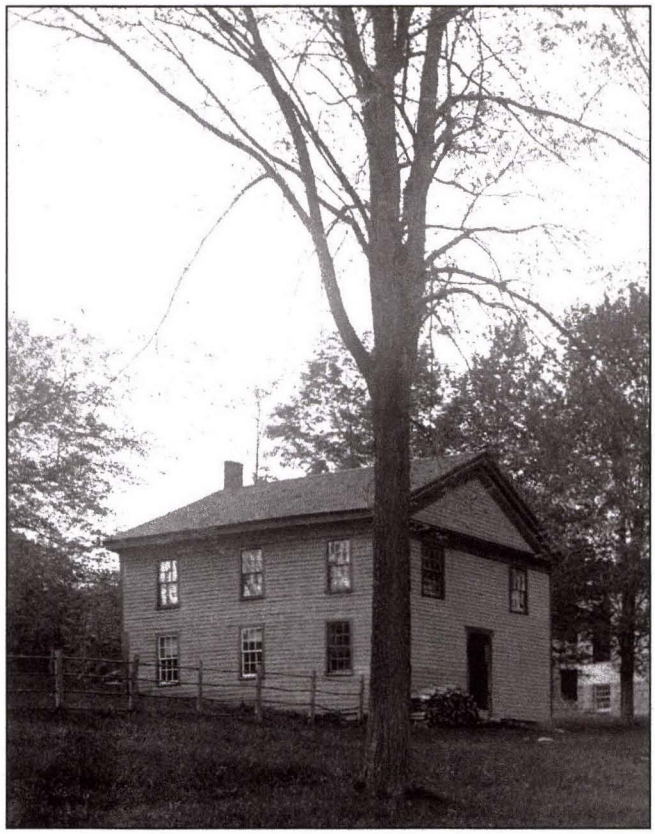
Rebecca Shenkman Charney, Sadie Charney, and Hyman Charney, circa 1910 (George Rothstein)

After Hyman left, the school didn't have another Jewish teacher for several years. During this time Esther Charney and her older sister, Sadie, started school. Neither girl spoke English and were forbidden by their teacher to speak Yiddish in class. Esther said that whenever the other children caught her and Sadie speaking Yiddish, they would report their disobedience to the teacher and the girls would be punished.

Edith Filansky was the last Jewish teacher at the West Street School. She lived with her parents in Fitchburg, Massachusetts, and during the week boarded with Samuel Kaplan's family on West Street. It seems all was not rosy for Edith in the Kaplan household. In 1920, part of her $24 a week salary was attached by a court order. The following year, Tillie Kaplan sued Edith for an additional $59.

The Montville School

The other Sandisfield school most impacted by the growing number of Jewish children was in Montville. The town didn't make the same accommodations for the



Montville Schoolhouse
(Great Barrington Historical Society)

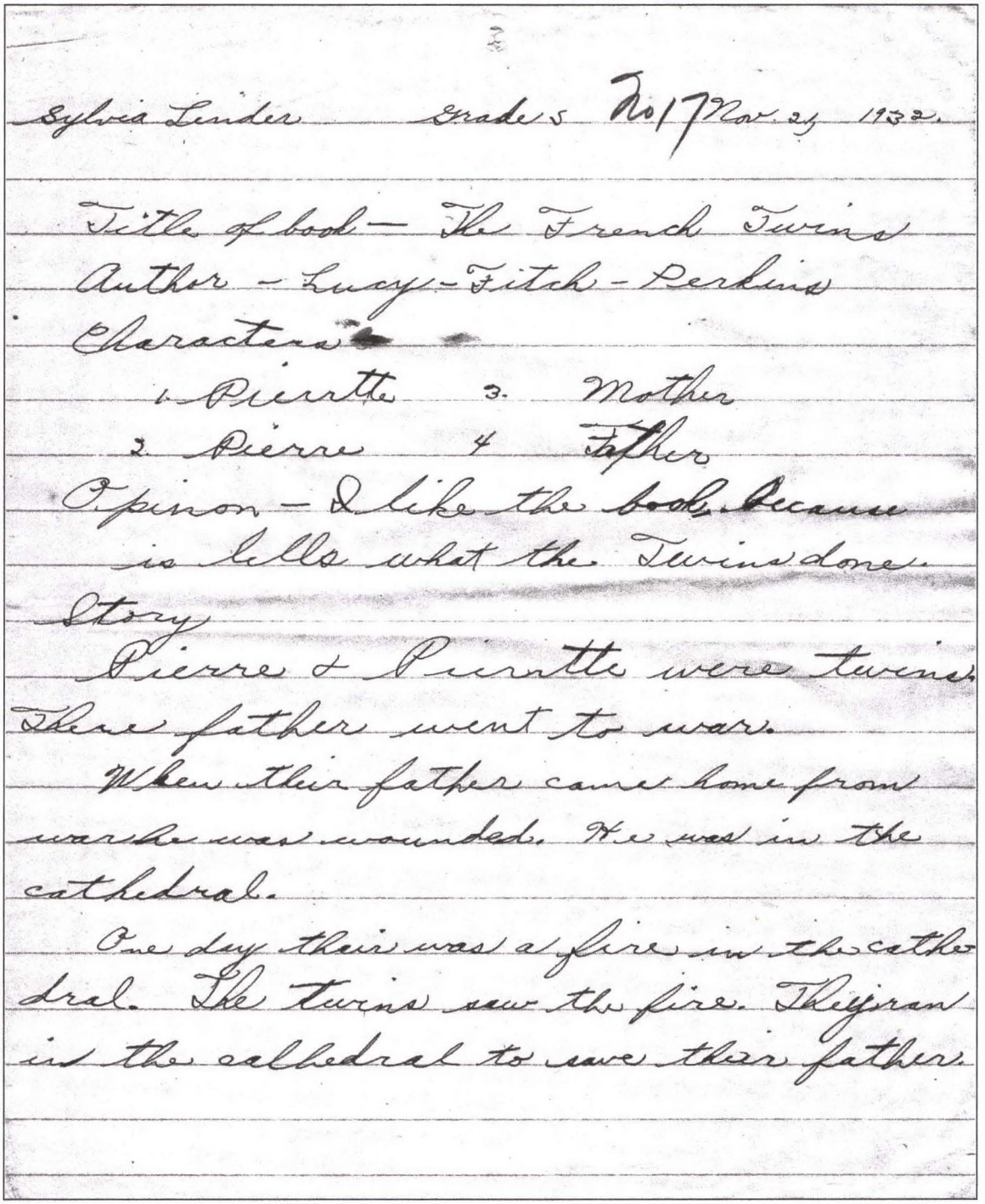
Jewish children in the Montville school as they had for those in the West Street school. It's unclear if there was a conscious decision on the town's part not to hire a Yiddish-speaking teacher or if the immigrant children were more fluent in English and didn't need a special teacher.

In the 1920s, the teacher in Montville was Emily Clark. The Jensky family lived just up the road from the school and all six Jensky children had Emily as their teacher. According to Toby Jensky, Emily had a unique way of dealing with the children who misbehaved in her class. She put the younger girls under her desk, sat the younger boys on her lap, and kissed the older boys.

Toby, a future nurse, was given the task of checking the other students' heads for lice. Her older brother, Charles, was put in charge of the wood stove. One day Charles apparently decided he had had enough of school and put a piece of rubber in the stove along with the wood. The resulting stench was so bad that Emily had to close the school for the rest of the day. Unfortunately, we'll never know which of Emily's punishments Charles received for his act of rebellion.

Montville's most well-known teacher was Sarah Cohen, the daughter of Rabbi Cohen. She had just received her teaching certificate from Westfield Normal School when she started teaching at the Montville school in 1929. It didn't take long for Sarah to discover that being the rabbi's daughter wasn't the asset she might have thought it would be. Rose Petrokofsky says the Jewish children in school "made her life miserable" because they didn't like the rabbi, who pinched them during their Hebrew lessons. They took it out on poor Sarah by making fun of her lisp and creating mischief whenever possible.

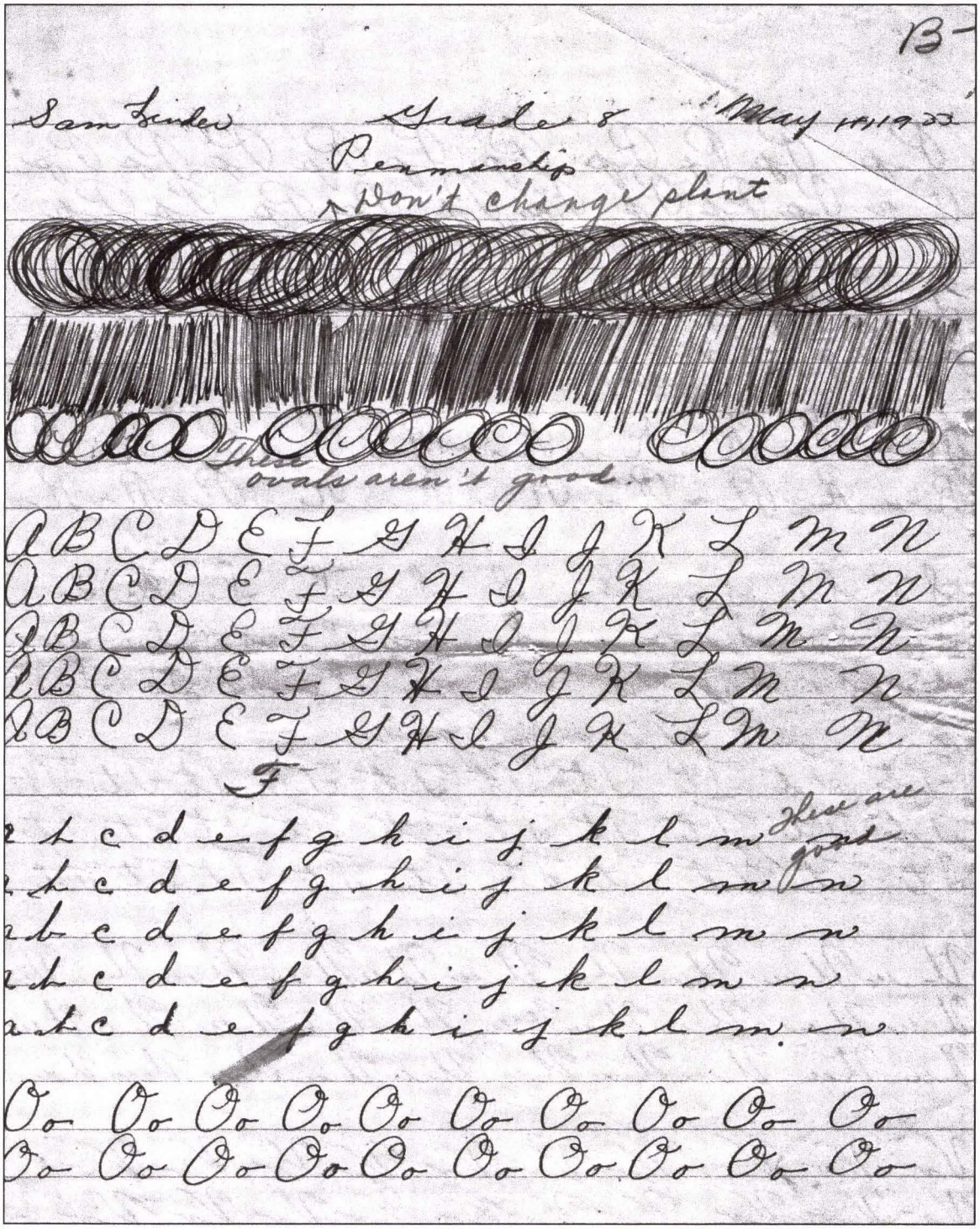
Eleanor Skolnick says the most important lesson Sarah ever taught her students



Sylvia Linder Grade 5 No 17 Nov 21, 1932.

Title of book — The French Twins
Author — Lucy-Fitch-Perkins
Characters
1. Pierette 3. Mother
2. Pierre 4 Father
Opinon — I like the book, Because is tells what the Twins done.
Story
Pierre & Pierette were twins. Their father went to wars.
When their father came home from wars he was wounded. He was in the cathedral.
One day their was a fire in the cathedral. The twins saw the fire. They ran in the cathedral to save their father.

Sylvia Linder's book report, 1932



Sam Linder's penmanship homework, 1933

was one that wasn't found in their textbooks. One December day in the early 1930s, Sarah took her students into the woods to look for a small tree to use as a Christmas tree, out of respect for the non-Jewish children in school. When the children picked out the one they wanted, Sarah chopped it down. They dragged the tree back to the schoolroom and they all had a good time decorating it. This in itself wasn't unusual, since all of the schools in town decorated Christmas trees for the holidays. Afterward, though, Sarah told the Jewish children what Christmas meant to their non-Jewish schoolmates. She then took out the Menorah and told the story of Hanukkah. When the story was over, she concluded by saying, "You must always have respect for each other's religion."

Eleanor has always been proud of the education she received in that one-room schoolhouse, where children from different religious and cultural backgrounds learned to get along and made friendships that would last the rest of their lives.

Some of Eleanor's fondest memories from her schooldays revolve around Pal, her German Shepherd. Her pet was so devoted to her, he walked the half-mile to school with her every morning. He returned in the afternoon at 3 p.m., sharp. When Sarah saw him coming up the road, she knew it was time to end her lessons for the day.

During the time Eleanor and Rose had Sarah as their teacher, there were about 18 or 20 students in the Montville school, from the first grade through the eighth. While Sarah was busy teaching one grade, students in the other grades did their assignments or read.

When the time came for recess, the children went outside to play, regardless of the season. In the winter, Sarah went sledding with the children and joined them in their snowball fights, although according to Rose, Sarah was usually the target of those snowballs. When their playtime in the snow was over, they all came back to the classroom to warm themselves around the wood stove before continuing with their lessons.

Keeping the fire in the wood stove going was now Sam Linder's job and the town paid him $10 for the school year. Every morning Sam got up early and walked around the corner to the school to start the fire in the pot-bellied stove so the schoolroom would be warm when the other children arrived.

Sarah took her role as an educator seriously and in 1934 was one of the founding members of Sandisfield's Parent Teacher Association and was elected its secretary. She continued teaching in Montville until 1938, when a drop in enrollment prompted the town to close the school and send the remaining students to West New Boston.

Graduation Day

The town's graduation exercises were held in the Baptist church until the building was sold to Benjamin Jensky in 1921. Eighth graders received their diplomas and students from all of the grades showed off what they had learned over the past year. It was a time to make their teachers proud and for the Jewish children it was a chance to honor their heritage. At Mary Goldstein's graduation in 1909 she read an essay about Romania. A few years later, Sara Kravitz's essay was titled "Life in a Russian Town."

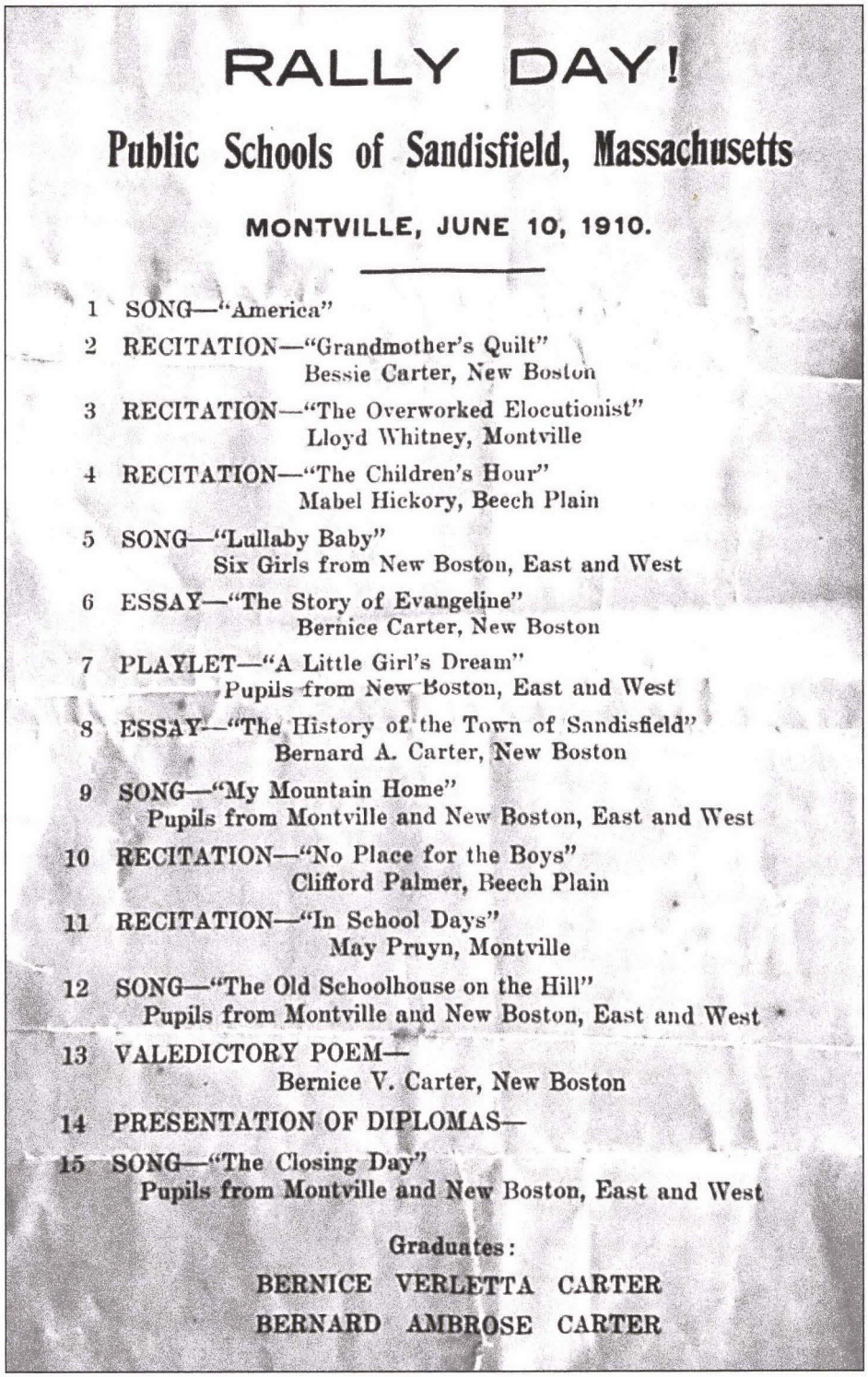
Patriotism was the theme of graduation day in 1912, with the children from all of the schools performing a military drill. Hyman Lieberman's students dressed in patriotic bunting and carried flags. Although all but one were Jewish immigrants, they saluted the flag with what Henry Manley described as "true American vigor."

The class of 1916 was the largest to date. Ida Brickman's essay "The Hope of a New Land" was especially appropriate for a graduation that included four children of Jewish immigrants.

When the next graduation day arrived, America had been fighting in Europe for two months and patriotism was on full display. Graduate Max Weinstein delivered "Our Martyred Presidents," Lena Kaplan sang "Flag of Our Union Forever," and Sarah Melamed recited Longfellow's "Ship of State."

The world was still at war the following June and graduation exercises again had a patriotic theme. Graduate Lena Kaplan talked about the Third Liberty Loan Act and fellow graduate David Penziner recited Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!" Thirteen-year-old Rachel Meltzer gave a presentation on the Junior Red Cross, an organization that encouraged schoolchildren to do their part for the war effort.

More than 200 people attended graduation exercises in 1929. Graduates included children from Jewish, Finnish, Russian Orthodox, and Italian families, a reflection of the melting pot Sandisfield had become over the previous three decades.



RALLY DAY!

Public Schools of Sandisfield, Massachusetts

MONTVILLE, JUNE 10, 1910.

1 SONG—"America"

2 RECITATION—"Grandmother's Quilt"
Bessie Carter, New Boston

3 RECITATION—"The Overworked Elocutionist"
Lloyd Whitney, Montville

4 RECITATION—"The Children's Hour"
Mabel Hickory, Beech Plain

5 SONG—"Lullaby Baby"
Six Girls from New Boston, East and West

6 ESSAY—"The Story of Evangeline"
Bernice Carter, New Boston

7 PLAYLET—"A Little Girl's Dream"
Pupils from New Boston, East and West

8 ESSAY—"The History of the Town of Sandisfield"
Bernard A. Carter, New Boston

9 SONG—"My Mountain Home"
Pupils from Montville and New Boston, East and West

10 RECITATION—"No Place for the Boys"
Clifford Palmer, Beech Plain

11 RECITATION—"In School Days"
May Pruyn, Montville

12 SONG—"The Old Schoolhouse on the Hill"
Pupils from Montville and New Boston, East and West

13 VALEDICTORY POEM—
Bernice V. Carter, New Boston

14 PRESENTATION OF DIPLOMAS—

15 SONG—"The Closing Day"
Pupils from Montville and New Boston, East and West

Graduates:

BERNICE VERLETTA CARTER

BERNARD AMBROSE CARTER

Rally Day, 1910
(Sandisfield Historical Society)

Part III

9

"I Want That My Family Should Remember"

When Ida Linder was asked why she kept a diary and wrote stories about her life, she simply said "I want that my family should remember." Every family has its own stories of struggle and triumph but all too often they've gone unrecorded and have been forgotten from one generation to the next.

The following families represent just a small portion of the Jewish families who have called Sandisfield home over the years. Their stories tell of faith, love, courage, and determination; traits shared by all immigrants who have come to America with dreams of better lives for themselves and their children.

The Baranoff Family

For anyone living in Sandisfield between 1927 and 1933, Baranoff's Dance Hall was the place to be on a Saturday night.

Abe Baranoff was born in Kiev, Russia, in 1888 and came to New York when he was 19 years old. By 1910, he was working as a house painter and boarding with the Gershowitz family in Brooklyn. The following year he married the family's 19-year-old daughter, Sonia. Their first son, George, was born in 1912; William arrived two years later. In 1915, the family moved to Hartford, where Abe opened the Manhattan Painting Company and continued in the business of house painting and hanging wallpaper. The couple's third son, Milton, was born in Hartford in 1918.

The Baranoffs returned briefly to Brooklyn before moving to Sandisfield in the fall of 1922. Abe and Sonia were already familiar with the town because they had been buying and selling property there for the past five years. It's possible they first heard of Sandisfield from Abe's cousins, the Pinskys, or during summer vacations in Colchester.

Abe, Sonia, and their three children moved into just one room at Harry and



Abe, Willie, George, Milt, and Sonia Baranoff, 1921
(The William Barrie family)

Gussie Lifshitz's house in West New Boston. Abe soon found a job as a lumberjack, making $5 a day. The Baranoff family lived with Harry and Gussie for about a year before buying a 14-room house up the road in Montville. Like most of the other houses in town, it had no electricity, no indoor plumbing, and the only heat was from a wood-burning stove.

Abe and Sonia bought a cow and a few chickens and set about fixing up the old farmhouse. Not long afterward, they opened a little general store next door to the house. Abe, a natural entrepreneur, encouraged the lumberjacks to patronize his store by putting in a slot machine.

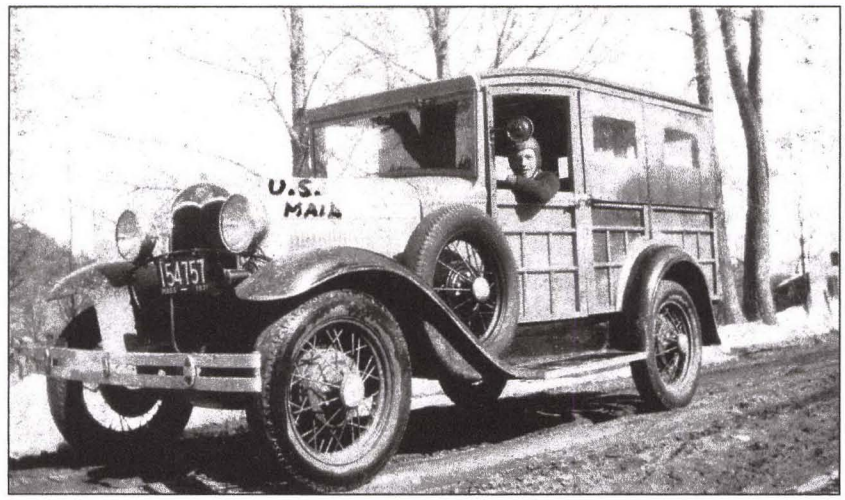
In the summer of 1926, he and Sonia signed a five-year lease for the lower floor of a building that Abe Cohen and David Stein owned in New Boston. The plan was to open a second general store and have the only gas station within 10 miles. Their New Boston store closed the following year and Abe moved the gas station to their store in Montville.

When Abe decided that the town needed a place to go for entertainment, he built a dance hall next to the general store. Baranoff's Dance Hall opened on July 16, 1927, and for the next five years locals crowded its dance floor on Saturday nights.



Sonia Baranoff, 1927
(The William Barrie family)

In 1929, Abe won the bid for a four-year contract to deliver the mail. He bought a station wagon and every morning he or one of his sons would leave the house about 7 a.m. to carry the mail from the post office in Montville to the post office in New Boston. From there they began the long route to Winsted via Riverton, Connecticut, picking up the mail along the way. Once they got to the Winsted Post Office they waited for the incoming mail to be sorted before returning to Sandisfield. Then they retraced their route, delivering the mail to Riverton, New Boston, and Montville before finally arriving home about 2 or 3 p.m.



Milt Baranoff driving the mail truck, 1931
(The William Barrie family)

The Baranoffs left Montville in 1933 and moved to the Bronx, where Abe found a painter's job at the Brooklyn Navy Yard. A few years later, the family shortened their name from Baranoff to Barrie. Abe and Sonia continued to come to Sandisfield to see relatives and friends until her death in 1951. After Abe remarried, he and his new wife visited town for several years afterward.

All three of the Barrie sons went into some aspect of the cosmetics and hair business. They each became successful in their professions and were well respected by their peers in the industry.

George had hoped to become a professional musician, but put his music career on hold after he married Lucille Schlussel in 1937. With a young family to support, he took a job as a salesman for the Raymond Laboratories cosmetics company, which later became Rayette. George left Rayette to start his own cosmetics company, naming it after his two children, Caryl and Richard. Caryl Richards became so successful that George turned around and bought Rayette. In 1964, Rayette bought Fabergé. One of Fabergé's best known products in the 1970s was a men's cologne named Brut. George hired football great Joe Namath to serve as its pitchman in commercials.

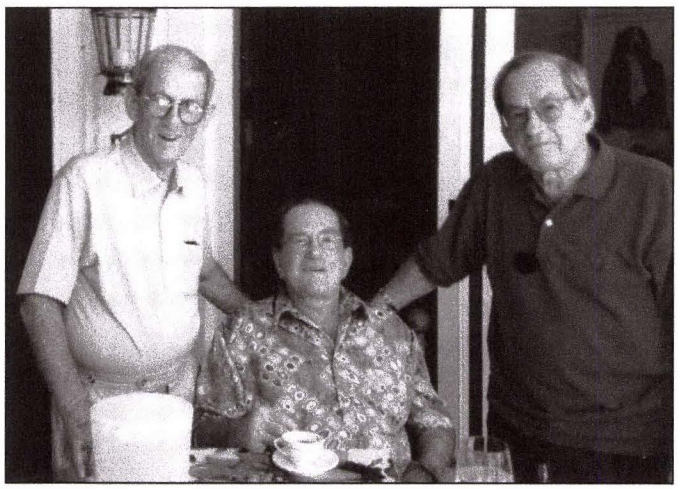
George added a filmmaking division to Fabergé and named it Brut Productions. In 1973, it produced "A Touch of Class" with George Segal and Glenda Jackson, for which

Glenda Jackson won an Academy Award. George also returned to his musical roots and wrote several songs. The song he co-wrote with songwriting great Sammy Cahn for "A Touch of Class" was nominated for an Academy Award in the Best Original Song category.

George sold Fabergé in 1984 and moved to Florida, where he died in 2002. He was the father of three children and grandfather of ten.

When George's brother, Willie, was a youngster, he spent much of his free time with his brothers at Dave Shade's boxing camp, where he developed a passion for the sport that lasted the rest of his life. He even organized prizefights for the entertainment of the servicemen while he was serving in Europe and North Africa during World War II.

After the war, Willie formed William Barrie Associates, a company that represented cosmetics companies. He married Lee Wild, the love of his life, in 1945 and their marriage lasted until his death in 2001. Willie was the father of two daughters and the grandfather of seven.



Willie, George, and Milt Barrie, 2000
(Michael Barrie)

Youngest brother, Milt, was the most easygoing of the three brothers. As a young boy in Montville, he listened to the big bands on the radio and developed a lifelong love for jazz. When the family moved back to the city, he started going to jazz clubs and became friends with many of the jazz musicians.

Milt was stationed in Texas while serving in the army during World War II. He married Marilyn Paris in New York City in 1943. During the 1950s he was vice president of Caryl Richards, working alongside George. Milt formed the Milton R. Barrie Company to represent women's hair and cosmetics companies and later started a chain of wig stores in New York named Wig City. Afterward, he returned to work with George as vice-president of Fabergé.

Milt loved Las Vegas and spent much of his time there during the Rat Pack era of the 1960s. He died in Los Angeles in 2006, the father of three children and grandfather of four.

The Cohen Family

Max Cohen was Sandisfield's longest-serving rabbi, leading Congregation Sons of Abraham from the late 1920s until the 1940s. Born Mordchi Cohen in Minsk, Russia in 1882, he came to America when he was 23 years old. Like many other Jews from Russia, he was a skilled tailor. After his marriage to Ida Chervinsky, he found work at the Providence Skirt Factory in Fall River, Massachusetts.

The Cohens left Fall River not long after the birth of their first child, Sarah, and moved to Newark, New Jersey, where daughters Bessie and Yetta were born. The family then moved to New York City, where they lived until 1921. Max took a job that year as a Hebrew teacher in Colchester, Connecticut, home to a large Jewish farming community. Their daughter, Sylvia, was born there in 1924. That same year, Max became a naturalized citizen of the United States and legally changed his name from Mordchi Cohen to Max Cohen.

When Congregation Sons of Abraham needed a full-time rabbi in the mid-1920s, the Cohen family left Colchester and moved to Sandisfield. The couple's youngest daughter, Norma, was born soon after they arrived. In 1930, the Cohens bought a house on River Road across from the Clam River bridge in West New Boston. Every Sabbath and holy day, Rabbi Cohen left his house and walked the nearly three miles to the synagogue in Montville.

To earn extra money, the Cohens leased a portion of their property to the State of Massachusetts for use as a public fishing ground. Ida also set up a candy store in the house. Long-time resident Norton Fletcher tells of the time in the 1930s when, as a young boy, he took $10 from his mother's purse and went with his friend, Bob Ives, to buy candy. A suspicious Ida allowed Norton to buy a dollar's worth of candy. She then called Bob's mother, who in turn called Norton's mother. Norton returned home to find his mother armed with the hearth broom. His mother used the broom to give him the spanking of his young life – a spanking he still remembers vividly.

As the local shochet, one of Rabbi Cohen's duties was to visit Jewish farms in the area to bless the animals before he butchered them. Carol Kessler remembers seeing him running down the road in his long black coat with the knife he used for slaughtering chickens held firmly between his teeth. Norton Fletcher and his friend, Billy O'Brien, often went to the barn at the Pinsky farm in West New Boston to watch the rabbi at work. Being mischievous boys, one of their favorite pranks was to wipe the animals' blood across their bare feet and run screaming out of the building.

Sarah, the eldest Cohen daughter, trained to be a teacher at the Westfield Normal School in Westfield, Massachusetts. She returned to Sandisfield after graduation and found a teaching job at the Montville school. Sarah made the trip between West

New Boston and Montville on foot every day. When the weather was bad she spent the night at the Linder home around the corner from the school, so she wouldn't have to make the long trek to West New Boston.

Rabbi Cohen and Ida moved back to New York in the early 1940s and Ida died there in 1945. Rabbi Cohen continued to visit his friends in Sandisfield and on at least one occasion assisted Rabbi Axelrod during Yom Kippur services at Ahavath Sholom Synagogue in Great Barrington. In his later years, Rabbi Cohen lived in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he died in 1983.

Sarah Cohen married William Harris in 1939, and the couple lived with her parents in West New Boston. When Rabbi Cohen and Ida moved to New York, she and William moved to Pittsfield. Sarah was active in Knesset Israel and served on the faculty of the Pittsfield Community Hebrew School. After living in Florida for many years, she moved to Ohio and died there in 2007.

The Dryansky Family

The Dryansky family first came to Sandisfield in the 1930s. Nathan Dryansky was working as a carpenter for the Works Progress Administration when his daughter, Vivian, became ill and the doctor recommended she get out of the city for the summer. Two of Nat's friends boarded at David and Libby Pinsky's house every year and suggested he and his family join them in West New Boston. Before long, Nat, Celia, and their three children were making the five-and-a-half-hour trip up from Brownsville, Brooklyn in Harry Weiss' old touring car. Harry, a local chicken farmer, had picked up the family and their belongings after dropping off a load of chickens in the city.

Nat soon discovered that some of the Jewish families in Sandisfield had come from his shtetl in Russia, so finding Sandisfield was like coming home. Leonard (Lenny), Vivian, and Gerald reveled in the freedom that came with being kids in the country. It didn't take long for Lenny to become best friends with the youngest Pinsky boy, Sid, whom everyone called Shyke.

The Dryanskys were hooked. Every summer they came back to Sandisfield to stay with David and Libby. In 1949, Nat and Celia bought some land in West New Boston from David Stein and soon started building a small home of their own. Building it was literally a labor of love because Nat, Lenny, and Vivian's new husband, Len Kanter, dug out the basement with nothing more than pickaxes and shovels. It was Nat's plan to work as a carpenter in Sandisfield but he passed away in 1956, shortly after the house was finished. Although Nat never lived to enjoy the house into which he had put

so much of himself, his family is reminded of his carpentry skills every time they walk up the staircase he built with his own hands.

Nat's beloved little house was Celia's home for many summers after his death. Lenny and Vivian often brought their families to stay with her. It wasn't unusual for all eleven members of the Dryansky family to be at the house at the same time, with six children sharing one small bedroom.



Nina Dryansky, Celia Dryansky, and Nancy Kanter (Nina Carr)

Lenny, the oldest of the Dryansky children, served in the Merchant Marines during World War II. After the war, he studied agriculture in college before changing his major to art history. He married Virginia D'Azzara in 1948 and the couple had four children, Anina (Nina), Michael, Nicholas, and Amy. The family lived in Ohio, where Lenny worked as the art director and scenic designer for Karamu House/Karamu Theater, an African-American arts and cultural center in Cleveland. They later moved to Syracuse, New York, when Lenny took a position teaching theater history and design at Syracuse University. Virginia went back to college in the 1960s and received a Master's Degree in social work from Syracuse University. She went on to become one of the first certified dance therapists in the country and worked as a dance therapist for Easter Seals.

Lenny had been enamored with Sandisfield ever since that first July day when Harry Weiss brought the family to the Pinskys. After he and Virginia retired, they made the Dryansky house in West New Boston their home. Lenny never lost his love for the theater and for several seasons he was the resident designer and production supervisor of the Berkshire Theater Festival in Stockbridge. He also worked tirelessly with Sid Pinsky to convert the former synagogue in Montville into an arts center and was one of the founding officers of the Sandisfield Arts and Restoration Committee.



Lenny and Virginia Dryansky, "Sandisfield Gothic," (Nina Carr)

Nat's daughter, Vivian, married Len Kanter in 1952 and they became the parents of five children, Nancy, Lindsey, Nina, Peter, and Tracey. In 1960, they bought the old one-room schoolhouse in West New Boston from the Pinskys and renovated it to use as their summer cottage. They sold it a few years later and moved into another cottage near Lake Garfield in Monterey. Vivian was a kindergarten teacher and later became the director of a nursery school. In 1977, she opened the Merokee Day School for pre-schoolers and school-age children in Merrick, New York, which she continues to run with her daughter, Tracey Ferguson.

Gerald, the youngest child, married Joanne Axelrod in 1956, and they moved to Paris, France soon afterward. Gerald had received a graduate degree in journalism from Columbia University in New York City and found a job working for the *International Herald Tribune* in Paris. He then went to work for *Women's Wear Daily.* He spent the rest of his journalism career as European Senior Editor for *Condé Nast Traveler.* Since his retirement, he and Joanne, a screenwriter, have collaborated on novels about the culinary heritage of France. They have two children, Andre and Lara.

Nat's dream home is now home to a third generation of Dryanskys. Lenny's daughter, Nina Carr, who lives in the home now, says she fell in love with Sandisfield during summer vacations when she was a child and was always sad when it was time to return to Ohio at summer's end.

Nina joined her uncle and aunt, Gerald and Joanne, in Paris following her graduation from high school. She worked as an *au pair* for their son Andre and took classes at the Sorbonne. After returning from Europe, she attended school in Ohio and Syracuse before moving to Texas. When the opportunity arose to live with her parents, Nina made the decision to leave Houston and return to Sandisfield. She's lived there ever since. She married Billy Carr, a local lumberman, in 1988 and is the mother of two sons, Jason and Ryan.

In 1995, Nina joined her father as one of the founding officers of the Sandisfield Arts and Restoration Committee. She has since become involved in a number of local

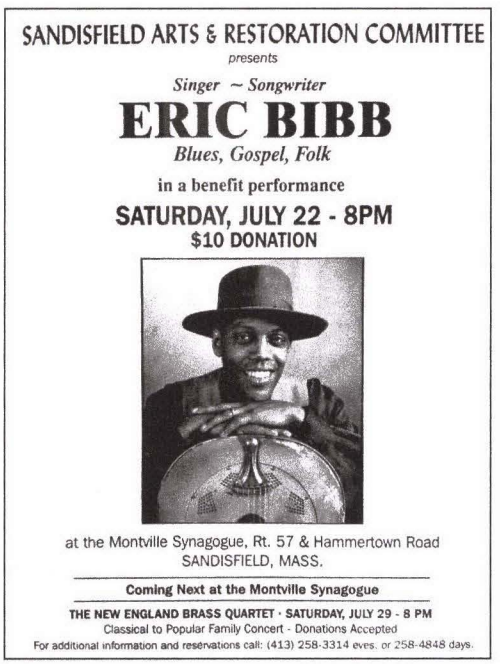
organizations. Passionate about children and teaching, Nina is past president of the paraprofessional unit of the Berkshire Hills Education Association. She's presently a member of Southern Berkshire Kids, a sponsor of playgroups. Nina has served on Sandisfield's Conservation and School Committees and currently serves on the Building and Grounds Committee of the Sandisfield Arts Center.

The Dryanskys have brought many of their friends from New York up to visit them in West New Boston over the years. Some have become Sandisfield homeowners themselves.

Lenny had been best friends with Irving Levine since their days at the Brownsville Boys Club in Brooklyn. Irving and his wife, Marion, spent many summers visiting the Dryanskys and when they had a chance to buy a home of their own in Sandisfield, they took it. In 1965, they bought the parsonage next to the Montville synagogue from Samuel Steinbauch's nephews after Samuel's death. It's still home to Irving and Marion, and their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

Other residents who came to Sandisfield because of their friendships with Lenny and Sid Pinsky include the Kronenfelds and the Silvermans. Danny and Rosalyn Kronenfeld moved into the house once owned by Benny and Annie Linder in Montville. Bert and Evelyn Silverman bought the West New Boston property that had been Joseph and Pauline Baszem's thriving dairy and poultry farm.

Marylyn Gore, who also discovered Sandisfield through her friendship with Lenny and Sid, has lived in South Sandisfield since the early 1970s. In July 1995, her son, folk and blues singer Eric Bibb, had the honor being the first performer presented by the Sandisfield Arts and Restoration Committee at what was once the Montville synagogue.



Eric Bibb poster
(Sandisfield Arts Center)

The Jensky Family

Benjamin and Rebecca Pinsky Jensky were newlyweds in Russia when they heard about the Baron de Hirsch Fund helping to relocate Jews from Europe to the United

States. Some of Rebecca's family had already left and others would soon join them.

Rebecca was pregnant with her first child as they made their way to Germany in 1906. According to family lore, Morris was born in a Catholic monastery in Frankfurt. The young family then traveled from Germany to Antwerp, Belgium, where they sailed for New York. The Baron de Hirsch fund paid for their passage.

The Jenskys settled in Lawrence, Massachusetts, where Benjamin found work as a clerk in a grocery store. Their second child, Charles, was born in Lawrence in 1907 and Jacob followed two years later. By 1910, Ben was driving a truck for one of the city's worsted wool yarn mills. Rebecca's sister, Annie, who lived with the family, twisted wool at one of the mills.

The Jenskys moved to New York soon afterward and daughter Toby was born in the city in 1911. Benjamin then moved his family to Connecticut. Solomon (Sam) was born there in 1913 and Ida the following year. For the next several years, the Jenskys moved between Winsted and Hartford while Benjamin worked at the Gilbert Clock Company, The Hartford Rubber Company, and a butcher shop.

By 1920, the Jensky family had moved in with Rebecca's brother, David, and his family in West New Boston. David's brother, Max, and his family of five also shared the house. David and Libby were used to large numbers of guests at their boarding house but having thirteen children underfoot must have been a trial even for them.



Rebecca Jensky and Bob Schachter (Robert Schachter)

Benjamin bought the old Baptist church and adjoining parsonage in Montville from the Berkshire Baptist Association in 1921. Benjamin and his family moved into the parsonage. The following year Benjamin sold the church to Congregation Sons of Abraham for use as a synagogue and he was elected its first president.

A month after he sold the church building, Benjamin sold the parsonage to his neighbor, Max Linder, who rented it back to the Jensky family. In 1926, Benjamin obtained a mortgage from Samuel Steinbauch and bought the parsonage from Max. When Benjamin could no longer make his mortgage payments, Samuel foreclosed on the property and took ownership of it. The Jenskys moved back to David and Libby's house in West New Boston. The family left soon afterward and by the spring of 1930 were living in the Bronx,

where Benjamin worked as a fruit peddler. The three oldest sons worked in a dress factory and 18-year-old Toby was a nurse in a hospital.

Two years later, Jacob Jensky bought the house in Montville that once had been owned by the Lazarowitz family and it became the Jenskys' summer residence. After Jacob's death in World War II, Benjamin and Rebecca inherited the house. It's remained in the family ever since.



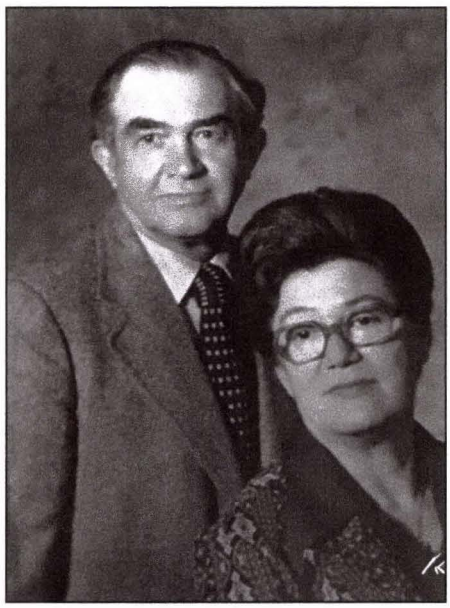
Toby Jensky
(Robert Schachter)

After they were grown, the Jensky children went their separate ways. Morris, who became a furrier, developed an interest in socialism and met his wife, Ruth Markman, while speaking at a political rally in Union Square in New York City. The couple married in 1932 and settled in Middle Village, Queens, where they raised their daughter, Barbara. Morris continued to be an advocate for equality and joined the Middle Village Action Committee to address local issues. His daughter proudly remembered him as the embodiment of justice, honesty, and integrity.

Toby was working at New York City's Beth Israel Hospital in 1936 when a civil war broke out in Spain following the overthrow of its democratically elected government by Francisco Franco's group of fascist militants. Physicians in the city who supported the Spanish people established the American Medical Bureau to Aid Spanish Democracy and arranged for the shipment of medical equipment and supplies to Spain. One of the Bureau's members was Dr. Edward Barsky, the son of Beth Israel's founder and a colleague of Toby's.

Early in 1937, Toby left for Spain with Dr. Barsky and other medical personnel from Beth Israel. They were part of a medical team for the Lincoln Brigade, a group of volunteer fighters from the United States. Toby and her colleagues were given the responsibility of setting up hospitals for the wounded. In her many letters to her family, Toby wrote of the dedication of the medical staff, the courage of the wounded fighters, and her longing for the solitude of Montville. Toby and the others worked around the clock and one time they set up five hospitals in the space of a week.

Toby stayed with the Lincoln Brigade for a year and when she returned she resumed her nursing duties at Beth Israel Hospital. Later, her photographs and letters were donated to the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives and are now part of the Special Collection on the Spanish Civil War at Brandeis University.



Max and Ida Jensky Schachter (Robert Schachter)

Solomon left for New York after high school, as did his other siblings. Morris introduced him to Ruth's cousin, Anne Gold, and the two immediately hit it off. They were married in 1940 and Ruth and Anne became sisters-in-law as well as cousins. Solomon and Anne moved to Flushing, New York, where they raised their children, Arthur and Bernice. Bernice remembers her father as a kind man, whose love of music was shaped by Sandisfield's social life, where so many evenings were filled with singing. Solomon introduced Arthur and Bernice to music when they were very young by singing them lullabies in his beautiful tenor voice.

Ida, the youngest Jensky child, loved to paint and write. Her niece Barbara spoke of how Ida had taught her to express herself through art or words and to find beauty in everything.

Ida married Max Schachter in 1936 and the following year, the war in Spain hit home for the Schachter family. Max's 21-year-old brother, Philip, sailed from New York to Spain in the spring of 1937 to join the other Americans fighting the fascists. He didn't tell his father of his plans, writing instead that he had arrived in Paris and would travel around the countryside. Philip had confided in his brothers, Max and Harry, before he left and asked for their help in keeping their father from becoming suspicious.

Once in Spain, Philip joined the newly formed George Washington Battalion and was sent to the front. Three months later he was killed outside of Madrid in a brutal battle known as the Battle of Brunete.

The Kaplan Family

The Kaplans were one of the earliest Jewish families to settle in Sandisfield. When Samuel Kaplan first came to America in 1893, his wife, Tillie, stayed behind in Russia with their children, an arrangement that wasn't unusual in those days. He returned to Russia to visit them at least twice while he was getting settled in New York before they finally joined him five years later.

Samuel had been a tailor in Russia and would have had no trouble finding work

in the city's garment district, but, like many others living on the Lower East Side, his dreams of a better life for his family didn't end there. In 1903, he and fellow tailor, David Conjorsky, bought 480 acres in Sandisfield and New Marlborough that included a farm on West Street. Their partnership was short-lived, however. David sold his half share to Samuel only two months later and Samuel had to go to his brother, Harry, to help finance the buyout.

Samuel, who owned his own tailoring business in New York, continued to work in the city while Tillie and their children ran the farm. Running the farm apparently required more manpower than Samuel had anticipated and it seems he found a novel solution to his labor problem. Shortly after moving to West Street, he was charged with kidnapping two teenage boys from the Lower East Side. According to newspaper reports, Samuel Smith and Louis Lefkowitz came into his tailor shop one day to peddle some goods and Samuel convinced them that they could do better by working for him on his farm.

The following morning, the boys were taken by wagon to Grand Central Station where they boarded a train to Connecticut. Neither boy had told his parents about the arrangement with Samuel. It was several weeks before Samuel Smith's father found the expressman who had taken them from the tailor shop to the station. Mr. Smith persuaded Samuel to let his son return to the city. After he got back, the boy accused Samuel of abusing and overworking him. Louis, however, stayed on the farm and when Mrs. Lefkowitz took her complaints to the District Attorney, he charged Samuel with kidnapping. The charge must have been an overreach on the District Attorney's part because nothing ever came of the matter.

Tillie proved to be as capable as more experienced farmers when it came to running the family's cattle business. She and her wagon quickly became a common sight along the road to Great Barrington, where she sold the butcher fresh beef from the Kaplan farm. All of the family's hard work paid off. It didn't take long before their dream of a better life, far from the tenements of the Lower East Side, was realized. Samuel left the tailoring business to devote his time and efforts in Sandisfield to raising and butchering cattle, buying and selling real estate, and running a summer boarding house. Their boarding business thrived, with 80 or more boarders staying at a time, and Samuel had to convert an old wagon house to keep up with the demand for sleeping quarters.

Henry Manley's gossip columns frequently included reports of the activities at the Kaplan household. Especially popular were the Kaplan daughters, for whom Henry always had a kind word. When oldest daughter, Bella, married Jacob Penziner before 300 guests at the Kaplan house in 1909, Henry attended the wedding and went into

great detail describing her wedding dress and bouquet.

The Kaplans stayed on West Street until 1920 when they sold their farm with its remaining 105 acres to Charles and Becky Frankel and moved to another farm on Lake Buel Road in New Marlborough.

Samuel was very active in Great Barrington's Jewish community and in 1923 helped establish the Ahavath Sholom Synagogue on North Street. He brought in a Hebrew instructor and donated a valuable Mikra, or Hebrew Bible, to the society. He was so respected that when he died in 1927, more than 100 cars made up the funeral procession from Great Barrington to the Knesset Israel Cemetery in Pittsfield.

Tillie died seven years later. She named Rabbi Morris Fuhrman of Pittsfield as the executor of her estate and he sold her farm, including household furnishings, farm tools, and cows, at a public auction.

Bella moved back to New York City after her marriage to Jacob, who was in the clothing manufacturing business. He later became the president of Penziner, Snofsky and Company, a clothing business he formed with Louis Snofsky to make women's cloaks. In 1924, the company ran into some financial problems and closed. The following year, Jacob and Bella started their own manufacturing business called the Bel-Pen Cloak Company.



Joseph, Freda, Fannie, and Edyth Kaplan (Linda Kaplan)

Of the Kaplans' five daughters, Pauline was the only one who stayed in the area as an adult. In 1916, she married Ruben Toplitz from Winsted. According to Ruben, he and Pauline were set up on a blind date by a man he knew in New York City. Ruben was working at Winsted Hosiery at the time and after a brief courtship, the two were married. The couple lived in Winsted, where they opened a clothing store and Ruben sold real estate. Ruben was a business associate of Jack Sandler for a time and every week or two, the men would fill Jack's truck with chickens and deliver them to New York City.

Pauline volunteered in a number of civic organizations during World War II and throughout her life was active in the Sisterhood of Temple Beth Israel in Winsted.

Two of the Kaplan sons followed in their father's footsteps and raised cattle. Joseph, the last of the children born in Russia, served in World War I. After he returned, he partnered with his younger brother, Leo, in the cattle business.

Joseph married Fannie Greenfield from Lenox, Massachusetts in 1919 and the couple lived in Great Barrington, where he owned a butcher shop. Joseph was active in a variety of community organizations and served as commander of the Jewish War Veterans in Pittsfield. In 1946, he and his family moved to Millerton, New York, where he ran a large cattle farm and livestock auction company. His son, Sanford, joined the family business after college.

In December 1996, their barn burned. It was one of several suspicious fires in the Millerton area that year. They lost 80 Holstein cows and suffered $350,000 in damages. Joseph and Sanford decided not to rebuild the farm after the fire, but instead focused their attention on their auction business.



Joseph, Leo, and Harry Kaplan (Linda Kaplan)

Leo, the youngest of the Kaplans' eight children, was the only child born in Sandisfield. He arrived to much fanfare and Henry Manley was among the nearly 50 guests who attended Leo's bris, or circumcision ceremony.

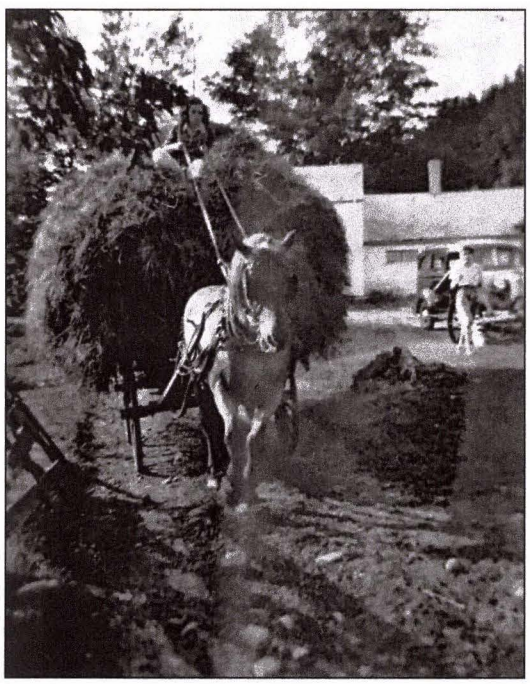
Leo was twelve when his parents left Sandisfield for New Marlborough. He moved to Great Barrington after his father's death, where he married a local girl named Mary Whalen. In addition to being one of the area's most prominent cattle and horse dealers, he and Mary owned the well-known Merrilea Farms dairy farm.

Like Joseph, Leo was very active in his town's affairs and in the 1950s sponsored a little league team under the Merrilea Farms name. Leo and Mary were also well known for their charitable contributions. In 1957, they donated land along the Green River for the town to use as a bathing area and in 1975, Mary gave 125 acres she owned in New Lebanon, New York to the local school district. When Leo was asked to comment on his wife's generosity, he simply said "when people are nice to you, you're nice to them." A modest but compelling philosophy.

The Kleiner Family

Abraham Kleiner and his wife, Klara Shapiro, were immigrants from Austria who met while living in New York City. They married in August 1921 and four months later bought a 100-acre farm in New Boston and started their new lives as dairy farmers. Their daughter, Freda, was born the following year; she was soon followed by her sisters, Martha, Julia (Julie), and Lena (Lee).

When Abraham and Klara bought the farm from Nellie Wilbur, they did what many other Jewish farmers did and financed the purchase through the seller. They paid off their $1,500 mortgage to Nellie in just three years. The following day they received a $1,200 loan from The Federal Land Bank of Springfield, financed through the Federal Farm Loan Act. The Act had been passed by Congress in 1916 to provide loans to farmers to improve their farms, but very few farmers in Sandisfield took advantage of these loans. Borrowers had to agree that the money would be used only for farming purposes. The terms further stipulated that the farm and all its buildings were to be maintained in good condition, no buildings could be demolished, and no timber could be removed other than what was needed for domestic purposes. Abraham and Klara took an additional $400 loan from the Jewish Agricultural Society in 1928.



Lee driving the hay wagon, circa 1940 (David Moss)

There were more than a dozen cows on the Kleiner farm and every morning and evening, Abraham and his daughters milked them by hand. But cows weren't their only business. The Kleiners also grew corn, oats, beans, and potatoes, as well as enough hay to feed their cows over the long Sandisfield winters. Their property was heavily wooded and the trees also provided for them. They tapped the maple trees in late winter and boiled the sap in a huge vat over an open fire to make maple syrup and maple sugar. When fall came, the family picked apples and brought them to Campetti's Cider Mill to be squeezed into cider.

The location of their property – bordering on the Clam and Farmington Rivers – provided another source of income. Abraham started leasing that portion of the land

to the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Game in 1938 to use as a public fishing ground during fishing season.

The Kleiner daughters later spoke of the strong sense of community that developed among the farmers, regardless of ethnic background. Abraham and his neighbors, Charlie Strickland, Earl Church, and Louis Albert, all helped each other out at haying and harvest times or whenever there was an emergency, such as when the Kleiners' horse got stuck in a swamp.

Even though Sandisfield was miles from any urban area, the Kleiner family had no lack of excitement. One day in 1939 there was a knock on the Kleiners' door and boxing heavyweight champion Joe Louis stood there asking to buy two gallons of milk. The opening of the Suicide Hill ski jump south of New Boston brought even more excitement. The four sisters loved to watch the ski jumpers. Martha developed a lifelong love of skiing and continued to ski into her late 80s. Once summer arrived there were always new faces and playmates, as mothers and their children came to board for a week or two to escape the city heat.



Klara Kleiner, Abraham Kleiner, and Louis Albert, 1944 (David Moss)

Abraham had been one of the founders of Congregation Ahavat Hazedek and every Sabbath he walked to the Albert house in West New Boston for services. The congregation usually had enough men to make a minyan, but every once in a while, they were short a man. When that happened, Joe O'Brien, the town constable, cheerfully filled in.

After the Kleiner girls graduated from Lee High School, they left New Boston for jobs in New Jersey and Washington, D. C. The farm became too much for Abraham and Klara to manage on their own, and in 1942 they sold their animals and farm equipment at auction. The following year they repaid their loan from the JAS and in 1944 paid off their loan from the Federal Land Bank of Springfield. That same day, no longer prevented by the terms of their loan, they signed an agreement with Arthur Martin of Plainville, Connecticut to sell the timber rights on their property.

Abraham and Klara sold their farm in 1945 and moved to Winsted, where Klara died in 1949 and Abraham in 1954.



Lee, Freda, Klara, Abraham, Martha, and Julie Kleiner, early 1940s
(David Moss)

Two of the Kleiner daughters married sons from local families. Lee married Eddie Moss and lived in Winsted before moving to Florida a few years later. Martha married Norman Taslitt, the son of Nathan Taslitt from Montville, and they lived in the Washington, D. C. area before moving to Florida to be near Lee and Eddie. Martha and Norman later divorced and Martha married Richard Conway in 1976.

Freda married Haldene (Dean) Stevens from New Hampshire and lived in Winsted before moving to Maryland, where they spent the rest of their lives.



Freda, Martha, Julie, and Lee, 1940
(David Moss)

Julie married Ellsworth Doughty, a native of New Jersey, in 1951 and moved to Florida. They were divorced in 1973 and she later married John England.

The four Kleiner sisters often shared their stories of growing up in New Boston with their families. These stories continue to be passed down through the generations. The women always spoke fondly of their years on the farm – the inconveniences of outhouses and frozen bedrooms outweighed by the freedom they had and the friends they made.

The Lazarowitz Family

Joseph and Rebecca (Becky) Brill Lazarowitz were still newlyweds when they came to America from Romania in 1905. They spent the first few years in New York living on the Lower East Side, where Joseph worked as a tailor in a cloak shop. In 1915, the family, which now included children Lily, Louis, Fay, Dave, and Abraham (Al), was living in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Joseph and Becky had already lost their son Jacob, as well as another child.

It's possible that Joseph moved his family to Brooklyn because that was where the work was. The opening of the Williamsburg Bridge in 1903 had facilitated the move of Jewish immigrants away from the overcrowded Lower East Side. Many of the garment factories moved across the East River as well, driven out of Manhattan by rising costs.

The Lazarowitz family, which had grown to include Carl, Paul, and Rose, was back on the Lower East Side by 1920, living in a neighborhood known as the Roumanian Quarter. They moved to Sandisfield soon afterward and Dorothy was born there in 1922.

Joseph and Becky bought their first home in Montville in 1924. Unlike many of the other husbands who continued to work in New York, Joseph set up his sewing machine in his new house and became the town tailor.

Daughter Eleanor was born in Montville a few years later. Their last child, Esther, was born in 1930. She died just 13 days after her birth and Eleanor died that September.



Al Lazarowitz and Willie Baranoff, 1929
(The William Barrie family)

Two years later, Joseph and Becky sold their home in Montville but remained in Sandisfield, renting houses in West New Boston and later in Montville. Fay, her husband Harry Glassman, and their daughters Thelma and Irma, rented a house up the road from



Rose Lazarowitz
(Joanne Olson)



Dorothy Lazarowitz
(Joanne Olson)

her parents around 1940 to get away from the polio epidemic in New York City.

It was during this time that Al and Rose both found jobs at the Gilbert Clock Company in Winsted. When war was declared, Al left the Berkshires to enlist in the army. Not long after he enlisted in February 1942, he met Sylvia Schachner in Brooklyn. They married that summer shortly before Al shipped out to Europe.

The Gilbert Clock Company later recognized all of their employees who left to serve their country with a plaque engraved with their names. Al was among those honored.

After leaving the service in 1944, Al returned to Sylvia in Brooklyn and began working as a kosher butcher. Their first daughter, Sandra, was born there in 1945. She was followed over the next years by sisters Rochelle (Shelly) and Joanne.

Carl married Sylvia Shapiro in Brooklyn in 1940. Their son, Joel, was born in 1942 and daughter, Lois, in 1946.

Paul married Selma Yakerson in October 1944 and the couple lived in the apartment where Selma had grown up. Michael was born in 1948 and Francine four years later. Al and Sylvia moved to the same apartment building and lived across the hall from Paul and Selma. Selma and Sylvia became such close friends that they were more like sisters than sisters-in-law.

Dorothy married Billy Reid after the war ended in 1945 and moved to West Virginia. Their son, Robert, was born in 1946 followed by sons Billy, Jr. in 1956 and Dale in 1958.

In 1949, Joe and Becky bought the home in Montville that they had been renting for many years. The extended Lazarowitz clan flocked there during the summer, and the home took on the look of a boarding house as it filled with in-laws, children, and grandchildren. The fathers only came to Montville for weekends and during their two-week vacations, so responsibility for entertaining the children fell to the mothers. As Al's daughter Joanne observes, with all those kids around to keep entertained, it's no wonder the Lazarowitz family was the first in town to own a television set!



Sylvia and Al Lazarowitz, 1942
(Joanne Olson)

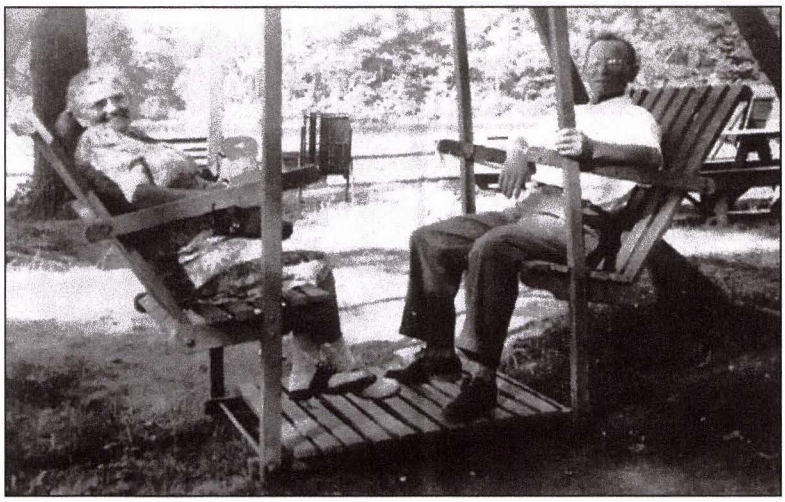
When the fathers arrived in Montville, Paul and Carl, who were furriers, sometimes brought their work home with them. Walter Linkovich remembers watching them as they sat outside sewing fur pelts. Al, the butcher, enjoyed spending his free time talking shop with Milton Chernick, a kosher butcher from Springfield.



Selma Yakerson and Paul Lazarowitz, circa 1944
(Joanne Olson)

The Lazarowitz family's favorite summer activity was fishing in the Farmington River and fresh fish was a dinnertime treat. The men's waders were waiting for them in the front closet when they returned from the city each weekend. Visits from neighbors and games of Mah Jong on the porch followed close behind fishing as family favorites. Sylvia's mother, Beckie Schachner, spent her days kibitzing with Fannie Albert and Rose Krasner, Irene Linder's mother.

Joe died in the winter of 1956. Carl and his family moved to the San Francisco Bay area in California



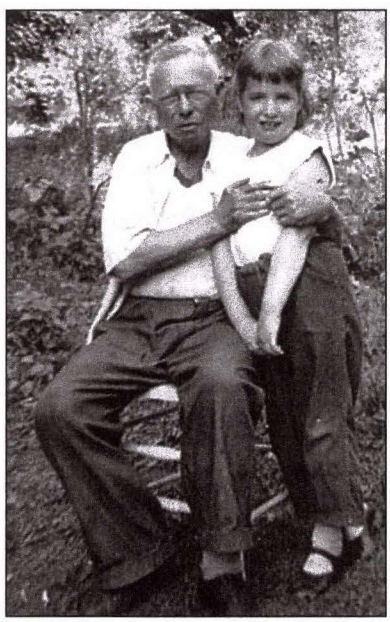
Becky and Joe Lazarowitz (Joanne Olson)

shortly afterward. Becky remained in Montville until the end of the decade and then she and Rose moved to Southern California to be near Fay.

Al and Paul decided to keep their parents' home for vacations. For the next few years, any time the families weren't in Brooklyn they could be found in Montville.

Every summer, Al and Paul's children were joined by their extended family of cousins. Their days were spent swimming at York Lake or Lake Buel, watching the horse races in Pownal, Vermont, and joining Sam and Irene Linder's family at Tanglewood. Evenings often meant fish and chips at the Red Barn in Sheffield and standing on line for ice cream at Friendly's.

Al and Paul sold the Montville house in 1967 but Al and Sylvia kept coming up to the Berkshires until Joanne turned 16. They rented cottages on the lake in South Egremont or stayed with the Sandlers on Town Hill Road.



Grandpa Joe and Sandra Lazarowitz (Joanne Olson)

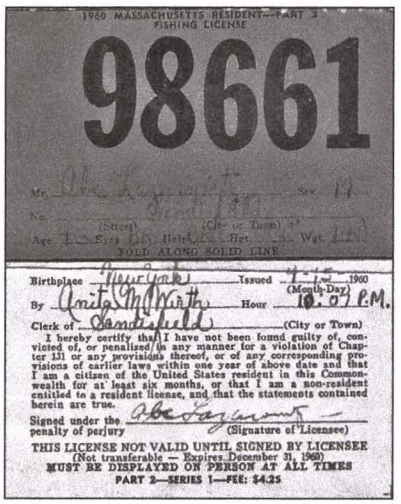
Dorothy's son, Robert, died tragically in a car accident late in 1967; both Dorothy and Becky died just weeks later.

After Paul retired, he and Selma moved back to the Berkshires for a few years. They then followed their friends, Sam and Irene Linder, to Arizona.

For Joanne Lazarowitz Olson, an attorney in New York City, Sandisfield is in her blood. As the granddaughter of one of the early families, she developed a keen interest in the story of Sandisfield's Jewish community. She began interviewing its elders after her father's death in 1993, and was an early proponent of documenting the community's history.

Joanne had fallen in love with the Berkshires as a child and had never forgotten the idyllic summers she

spent there. She and her husband, Dennis, brought their children, Justin, Dylan, and Kassidy, to York Lake every summer, and Joanne dreamed of coming back to Sandisfield. That dream finally came true in 2008 when she and Dennis bought an old house in New Boston. Joanne and Dennis come to Sandisfield throughout the year, often joined by her sisters. She loves being a part-time homeowner in the town she loves.


1960 MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENT — PART 3
FISHING LICENSE

98661

Mr. Abe Lazarowitz Sex M

No. (Street) (City or Town)

Age 70 Eyes Blu Hair Gry Ht. 5'8" Wt. 170

FOLD ALONG SOLID LINE

Birthplace New York Issued 4-1-1960 (Month-Day)

By Anita M. Martin Hour 10:07 P.M.

Clerk of Sandisfield (City or Town)

I hereby certify that I have not been found guilty of, convicted of, or penalized in any manner for a violation of Chapter 131 or any provisions thereof, or of any corresponding provisions of earlier laws within one year of above date and that I am a citizen of the United States resident in this Commonwealth for at least six months, or that I am a non-resident entitled to a resident license, and that the statements contained herein are true.

Signed under the penalty of perjury Abe Lazarowitz (Signature of Licensee)

THIS LICENSE NOT VALID UNTIL SIGNED BY LICENSEE
(Not transferable — Expires December 31, 1960)
MUST BE DISPLAYED ON PERSON AT ALL TIMES
PART 2—SERIES 1—FEE: $4.25

Al Lazarowitz's fishing license (Joanne Olson)

The Linder Family

The Linder family has owned the same home in Montville ever since Max and Ida Linder bought it in 1922.

Max, born in the Bukowina region of the Austrian Empire in 1890, left Europe when he was 20 years old. Not long after he arrived in New York City, he opened a candy store with his friend and roommate, Nathan Schiesel. Max met his wife, Ida Weintraub, when she and her family moved into Max and Nathan's apartment building in 1914. Max and Ida married early in 1916 and their daughter, Pauline, was born that December. Sam arrived two years later. Max was no longer in the candy business but was working as an apprentice to a furrier.



Max Linder with his furs

Max heard about Montville from his friend, Samuel Goldstein. Samuel had bought the Edward Smith house on Town Hill Road from Max and Sarah Diamond in 1913 and had turned it into a summer boarding house. Samuel told Max about all of the modern amenities Montville had to offer, including a five-and-ten-cent store. But when Max came up to see for himself in 1918, he found that Samuel had embellished more than a little.

Nevertheless, the village continued to draw him back over the next few years because the countryside reminded him so much of his native Austria. In June 1922, six days after the birth of his twin daughters, Rose and Sylvia, Max signed the deed on the old Robinson house in Montville.

He moved his family up from New York five weeks later.

By now, Max owned his own furrier business and was making a good living, so he had no intention of becoming a farmer. Instead, he was another type of Jewish homeowner: the part-timer whose family lived in the city during the winter and moved to Sandisfield for the summer. Max planned to use his new house in Montville to make a little extra money by renting rooms to summer boarders. He also entered the real estate business, buying houses and selling or renting them to family members and friends.



Max and Ida Linder, 1921

The year after buying the Robinson house, Max bought the Newton Phelps house from his brother-in-law, Morris Moskowitz. The Linders moved across the road and rented out their first house. They returned to it in 1928 after Max sold the Newton Phelps house to his friend, Max Sandler. Although Max and his wife, Feiga, were pleased with the sale, Ida was less so. After having her home sold out from under her, she swore she would never allow it to happen again. She insisted Max turn the deed to their house over to her, which he did.

The stock market crash in October 1929 changed all of Max's plans. The fur business, like other luxury goods, was one of the first to feel the effects of the Depression, and Max lost his business as his customers left him. He tried various ways to earn a living, in both New York and the Berkshires. He opened a women's apparel store in Winsted with former Montville resident Ben Aber, but like most new businesses at the time, it didn't last long. Instead of spending money they didn't have on an apartment in New York, Max and Ida decided that she and their four children would live in Montville year-round, while Max stayed in the city to look for work.

The old house was a far cry from a city apartment because it had never been electrified and had no plumbing. The only light came from kerosene lamps. Water had to be carried up from the spring in buckets until the plumber installed a pipe from the spring to a hand pump by the back porch in 1934. Although these rudimentary living conditions were fine for the summer, the winter months were a different story because the house had no furnace, either. The only sources of heat were the cooking

stove in the kitchen and the wood stove in the living room.

Ida rented rooms in the summer to anyone who could afford to leave the city during those hard times. She also found a way to earn extra money by doing something she loved. Ida had many hours to herself after the chores were done and the children were asleep, so she sat by the light of her lamp and wrote short stories about life in Montville that she sent to her favorite Yiddish newspaper, *The Jewish Daily Forward.* It's partly because of these stories and the diary Ida kept during those years that we have a fairly complete picture of what life was like in Montville during the Depression.



Back: Pauline Linder
Front: Sylvia Linder, Isadore Moskowitz, and Rose Linder, circa 1927

By 1936, Max's business prospects had improved enough for Ida and the two children still at home to return to the city during the winter. Their summer boarding business never really recovered after the Depression, though, and by the mid-1940s, they had stopped renting rooms.

When World War II started, Pauline joined the Women's Army Corps and was sent to England to work alongside the British. While she was there, she met Albert Vada, a second lieutenant in the U. S. Army, and they married in 1945. During the course of Al's long army career, he, Pauline, and their son, Jay, lived in Italy as well as the United States.



Al, Pauline, and Jay Vada, circa 1947

Pauline and Al divorced in 1975 and she later moved to Israel, where she spent several years working as a tour guide and local historian. After she returned, she lived briefly in Sandisfield with her second husband, Israel Simsovic, before settling in Florida in the 1980s. She moved to Ohio shortly before her



Barry Linder, Michelle Harwood, Sam Linder, Irene Linder, and Ron Linder, 1980

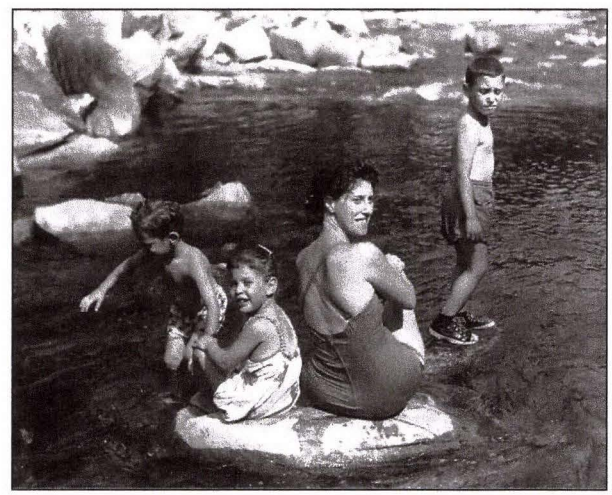
death in 2013 to be closer to Jay and his family.

Sam married Irene Krasner in 1940 and after living in New York City for 10 years, they packed up their children, Ron and Michelle, and moved to a farm in Great Barrington to raise chickens. After three years as chicken farmers, Sam and Irene decided their future wasn't in poultry. They sold the chickens and Sam found a job as a salesman. Their third child, Barry, was born in Great Barrington in 1956. Twenty years later, the Linders sold their farm and moved to nearby Lenox Dale. They spent their winters in Florida before moving to Arizona, where Sam died in 1998 and Irene in 2000.

Rose is the older of the Linder twins. She and her husband, Sam Petrokofsky, met at a USO dance in Manhattan after the war and were married in 1949. They moved into an apartment in Queens, New York and their first child, Carl, was born there three years later. The birth of their twins, Joan and Robert, in 1954 prompted the family to move to a larger home in West Orange, New Jersey. Sam spent his career working at RCA and in the mid-1970s was transferred to an RCA facility in Moorestown, New Jersey. Sam passed away in 2008 and, at 96 years old, Rose still lives in the same house she's called home for more than 40 years.

Sylvia started dating her future husband, Joe German, when she was 14 and he was 16. Joe came from New York City to Montville every summer with his friend, Louis Leifer, to stay with Louis' Aunt Annie, who was the wife of Sylvia's Uncle Benny Linder.

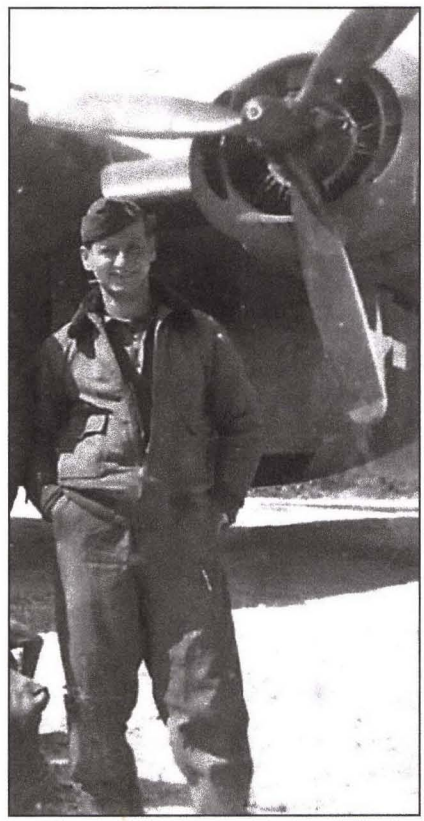
Sylvia and Joe married about a month after the bombing of Pearl



Robert, Joan, Rose, and Carl Petrokofsky, circa 1957

Harbor and he enlisted in the Army Air Corps soon afterward. Joe served as a navigator on a B-24 bomber in Europe, completing 50 bombing missions when the average number of missions was 25. He was so deeply committed to his Jewish faith that he refused to remove his mezuzah from around his neck in spite of the risk he faced if he were captured.

Joe left the service after the war but re-enlisted in 1948 and became a career Air Force officer. For the next 20 years, Joe, Sylvia and their son, Steve, moved from one base to another, including bases in Italy and Hawaii. No matter where she lived, though, Sylvia always thought of the house in Montville as her home. Sylvia and Joe bought the house from Max and Ida in 1962 and her parents continued to live there during the summer for the rest of their lives. Following Joe's retirement from the Air Force in 1968, he and Sylvia also spent their summers in Montville, a tradition that Sylvia continued after Joe's death in 1990. Sylvia died in 2015 and the house descended to Steve, who's now the third generation of the Linder family to own it.



Joe German with the Boise Belle, circa 1943



Pauline Simsovic, Sylvia German, and Rose Petrokofsky, Sandisfield Firehouse Steak Roast, 2008

The Lipsitz Family

When Elias and Bertha Lipsitz bought the 200-acre Frederick Smith farm in 1902, they received the first mortgage given by the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society to a member of the Sandisfield colony.

Elias and Bertha had been married in Russia and came to America in 1885, settling on New York's Staten Island. Elias worked in a dry goods store and the purchase of the Frederick Smith farm was more than just an agricultural venture. It was an opportunity to leave the dry goods business and enter the real estate market. Elias and Bertha moved to the Lower East Side, where Elias sold off portions of his farm to Jews living in the city and acted as an attorney for local real estate sales.

Elias Lipsitz became a very successful businessman. After his death in 1928, it turned out that he was a very generous one as well. He left an estate valued at $10,000. In addition to the usual bequests to family members, he left money to Jeshivath Yirah Vodaath, the Zion War Orphanage, Congregational Sons of Telsh, and the Hebrew School of Williamsburg.

The couple had eight children, five of whom were born after they arrived in America. Their oldest son, Joseph, married Sophia Klauber in 1896. After Elias bought the Sandisfield farm, they moved up from the city and Joseph went into business with his father buying and selling farms. Not long afterward, Joseph was involved in a deadly train accident outside Waterbury, Connecticut on his way back from New York. He was seriously injured in the crash and in the spring of 1906, he received a cash settlement from the railroad company.

Joseph put the money he received from the settlement to good use, buying and selling even more real estate. To quote Henry Manley, Joseph was "a hustler" and he worked hard for every penny he earned, whether it was buying and selling real estate or working for the town repairing its roads and bridges. He was also the one member of the colony during those early years who took an active part in town affairs. In 1906, he ran on the Democratic ticket and won, becoming one of Sandisfield's three selectmen. That same year he was appointed the town's pound keeper and named the superintendent of the New Boston Agricultural Fair. Two years later, he was appointed superintendent of roads, as well as fence viewer.

In November 1906, Joseph bought the old Elizur Deming farm in New Boston and named it Valley View Farm. He and his family moved to the farm and rented rooms to summer boarders. Joseph built a dance hall on the property, which held its grand opening on New Year's Eve of 1907. The Valley View Dance Hall was a success from the start and Joseph enlarged it the following year. Unfortunately, all of his hard work burned to the ground on a snowy night in March 1909, when a fire destroyed

most of the buildings on his property. The family woke up in time to escape injury and ran outside clad only in their nightclothes. Although they managed to save what furniture they could in the house, they lost most of their belongings. Fortunately, about a dozen friends and neighbors heard their calls for help. They were able to save the big cattle barn and rescued the horses, cattle, sleighs, and wagons from the horse barn before it, too, was consumed by the fire. Joseph and Sophia were so appreciative of the help they received that they asked Henry Manley to use his column to thank everyone for their kindness.

Joseph received a $3,500 payment from the insurance company after the fire. The Lipsitz family moved into another house in New Boston but they decided not to stay in Sandisfield. By the end of the year they had moved to Bridgeport, Connecticut, where Joseph became a successful real estate developer and saloonkeeper. For many years, Joseph and his family returned to Sandisfield to visit friends. Sophia died in the 1920s and following her death, Joseph and their children moved back to Staten Island.

Elias and Bertha's daughter, Lena, also lived in Sandisfield for a brief time. In 1898, she married Louis Bessel, the son of a wealthy horse dealer in Glen Cove, New York. Louis was a horse dealer on Staten Island and the couple remained there until Louis opened a furniture store in Hempstead, New York. They moved back to Glen Cove in 1904. Not long afterward, Louis ran into some legal difficulties and the Bessel family moved to Sandisfield. Sadly, Louis and Lena's young son, Harry, died there in July 1906. The family left Sandisfield and moved to a farm in nearby Tyringham. Several years later, they moved to neighboring Lee, where they opened a second-hand store. After Louis died in 1922, Lena continued to run the store with the help of one of her daughters. She died in 1952 and was buried next to her husband in Ahavath Sholom Cemetery in Pittsfield.

The Pinsky Family

The Pinsky family never would have come to Sandisfield if Benjamin Pinsky had found the Catskills the least bit appealing.

Benjamin's sons, David, Hyman, and Nathan, were already living in New York City when he and his wife, Anna, left Russia in January 1911. They didn't come alone. Their daughter, Gussie, joined them and so did their son, Max, and his new wife, Anna.

The Pinskys weren't planning to stay in New York for long. They had heard about the farm colonies sponsored by the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society and they wanted to move to one of those colonies. The family was given the choice

of North Dakota, the Catskill Mountains in eastern New York State, or Sandisfield. They immediately dispensed with the idea of moving to North Dakota, choosing to stay in the Northeast.

The sons first brought their father to the Catskills, where its green hillsides were conducive to dairy farming and the summer boarding business had started to take hold. As Eleanor Skolnick tells it, her grandfather wasn't impressed and refused to move there. Their next stop was Sandisfield and for Benjamin, it was love at first sight. Four months after arriving from Russia, he bought the first of the several properties he and his sons would own over the years.

Little by little, the family began to settle in Sandisfield. Among the first to arrive were Benjamin and Anna's daughter and son-in-law, Rebecca and Benjamin Jensky, who had been living in Lawrence, Massachusetts. Rebecca's sister, Annie, who had lived with them in Lawrence, moved with them. In 1912, Annie married David Pollock, the son of Solomon and Rebecca Pollock, in a double wedding with David's sister, Annie, and Jacob Matlowsky (Matlow).



Back: Norman, Abe, Sylvia, Morris, Anne, and George Pinsky
Front: Sidney Pinsky, circa 1936
(Jerry Jacobson)

David married Libby Snofsky in New York City in 1912, and they moved to Sandisfield soon after their daughter, Sadie (Shirley), was born in 1914. Their twin sons George and Abraham (Al) were born in Sandisfield the following year. In 1918, they bought a farm in West New Boston, where they opened a boarding house and went into dairy farming. Morris was born that year, Anne in 1921, and Sidney in 1928.

Hymie married Helen Diamond, the daughter of Max and Sarah Diamond, in June 1914. Nathan married Sarah Kaufman in Perth Amboy, New Jersey the same year. In 1915, the brothers partnered with their brother-in-law, David, to buy the Twining's old stone farmhouse in Montville. David and

Annie opened their new home as a summer hotel and Benjamin and Anna moved in with them.

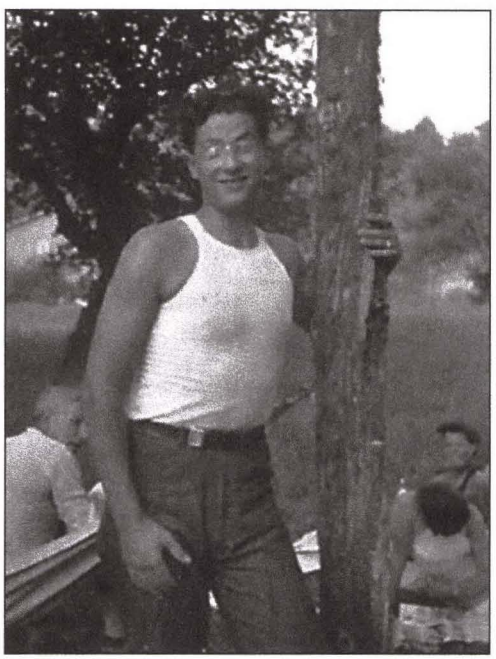


Sarah, Ann, Harold, Kenneth, and Max Diamond (Cindy Pinsky)

Nathan and Sarah moved up to Montville to help David on the farm during the summer months. Winters were spent in Hartford so Nathan could work as a painter. Their daughter, Frances, was born there in 1917. Their second child, Morris (Marty), was born in Perth Amboy two years later, possibly because Sarah wanted to be with her mother when she gave birth. It was common practice in those days for pregnant women to stay with relatives in the city instead of going through childbirth in rural Sandisfield.

In the early 1920s, Nathan and Sarah moved to the Bronx with Frances and Marty. They shared an apartment with Sarah's siblings, and Nathan found work painting automobiles. Their youngest child, Eleanor, was born in the Bronx in 1922.

Eight years later, Nathan and his family were ready to move back to the safety of Sandisfield. According to Eleanor, two events precipitated their move from the Bronx. One was the murder of an organized crime figure next door to their apartment building. The other hit much closer to home. The Pinskys had an extra room in their apartment that they rented to a young man. Nathan had told the boarder that his brother-in-law was a jeweler and the boarder said he would like to meet him because he wanted to buy his girlfriend a ring. Eleanor's uncle brought a selection of rings to the apartment to show the man. The boarder asked if he could take the rings to show his girlfriend so she could choose the one she wanted and Eleanor's uncle consented. The



Nathan and Marty Pinsky, 1940s

following morning, the family discovered that the boarder had moved out during the night, taking the valuable rings with him.

Not long afterward, Nathan was riding on the subway when he saw the thief. He notified the conductor and when the subway reached its stop, the police were there to arrest the man. He was convicted of the theft and sent to jail. Although Eleanor's uncle recovered some of his rings, many others had already been sold.

After these two incidents, Nathan said he couldn't trust anybody in the city anymore and decided it was time for the family to move back to Sandisfield. In 1930, Nathan and Sarah bought property in Montville that had once belonged to Henry Manley and built a new house. The family moved in the following year. Nathan put up some chicken coops in the backyard and became a chicken farmer.

Hymie was a 28-year-old cutter in a shoe factory in New York City when he married 18-year-old Helen in an arranged marriage. Their first son, Julius, was born in 1916 and Norman the following year. Daughter Miriam (Mitzi) followed in 1919, but died before her fifth birthday. Arthur, born in 1925, died when he was three years old. Their youngest child, Daniel, was born in 1926.



Norman and Helen Pinsky (Cindy Pinsky)

Hymie and Helen lived in the Bronx and every summer Helen worked at David and Annie's boarding house. Daniel, being the youngest, came with her. Toby Jensky was put in charge of watching him while Helen worked. In the evenings, Helen played the piano and sang in her operatic voice. Daniel shared his mother's musical talent and entertained guests with his piano playing when he was older.

Hymie and Helen eventually divorced and Helen moved to Maryland with the boys. Hymie stayed in New York, where he continued to work as a shoe cutter. He came to Sandisfield for the summers and moved back permanently when he retired. He was living at the nursing home in New Boston when Hurricane Diane hit and was among the patients who had to move to the second floor to escape the floodwaters. He died at the nursing home the following year.

Daughter Gussie married Harry Lifshitz, a carpenter from Hartford, in 1917. It was the second marriage for them both. The couple made their home in West New Boston, where Gussie died in 1935.

Max and Anna and their four children, Philip, Hyman, Helen, and Edith, lived

in Sandisfield off and on. In the spring of 1920, they were living with David's family in West New Boston, along with Rebecca and Benjamin Jensky and their children, but they soon returned to the Bronx, where Max worked painting buses. Max died in New York in the early 1940s.



Daniel, Julius, and Norman Pinsky (Cindy Pinsky)

All of the Pinsky children had the enviable experience of growing up in a town filled with extended family members. The Baranoffs, Kaufmans, Plotkins, Jenskys, and Pollocks were all related to the Pinskys through blood or marriage, providing a limitless supply of playmates and doting aunts.

When Nathan and Sarah's son, Marty, returned from Europe after World War II, he married Frances Bleier, who had grown up in New York. The newlyweds made their home with Marty's widowed father and helped him run the poultry farm. Their children, Gilda, Nora, Jeffrey, and Richard, grew up in the same house their father had.

After losing their farm to bankruptcy in 1963, Marty and Frances moved their family to California, where Marty died in 1988. When Frances passed away in 2006, her children paid tribute to the family's farming roots with a grave marker that read "The Farmer's Wife."

Marty's sister, Frances, married Milton Chernick, a kosher butcher from Springfield, in 1946. They didn't live too far from Sandisfield and brought their daughters, Mura and Nadine, to visit whenever possible. Frances and Milton retired to Florida in 1971, where she indulged in her hobbies of gardening and painting. Her beloved Milton died in 1995 and she died in 2012.

Eleanor married Dr. Charles Skolnick, an ophthalmologist, in 1944. He was the only man she had ever dated and was the love of her life. The couple lived in Yonkers, New York, but always found time bring their children, Sheila and Neil, to Montville to visit Marty and the rest of the family. Eleanor and Charlie moved to Florida after he retired. They had been married for 64 years when he died in 2008.

David and Libby's youngest child was named Sidney but anyone who knew him called him Sid or Shyke. Sid grew up working on his parents' farm and after leaving Sandisfield he went to Washington, D. C. He was in Sandisfield one summer visiting his sister, Anne, when he met Terry Chapman, a young dancer who was studying at Jacob's Pillow Summer Dance School.

Sid and Terry continued to date while he served with the National Guard in the Korean War and during his time at Rochester University. One summer, while visiting Sandisfield, they drove to Pittsfield and were married. Sid and Terry moved to New York City, where he completed his undergraduate work in sociology and received a master's degree in social work from New York University. He later received a doctorate from Columbia University. At one point during his long career, Sid worked alongside other social activists on the Lower East Side to combat juvenile delinquency. At the time of his retirement, he was director of the Hillside Hospital division of the Long Island Jewish Medical Center.

Sid and Terry returned to Sandisfield with their children, Daniel and Nina, every summer. Later, Terry held free dance classes for children at Town Hall and opened her own dance studio in Great Barrington.

Terry died in 1991 and Sid in 2015. Their children have remained in Sandisfield. Nina is married to Victor Hryckvich, a descendant of one of the Russian Orthodox families.

Norman Pinsky remained in Maryland. He married Judith Harris and they were the parents of Janice, Linda, Michael, Miriam, and Robert. He passed away in 2003.



Valerie Pinsky, Cindy Pinsky, Ann Chapman, and Toby Jensky (Cindy Pinsky)

Norman's brother, Daniel, married Gertrud Michelson in 1952. The couple lived in New York City, where they raised their daughters Valerie, Carol, and Cynthia. Daniel had turned his love of music into a career and was a music editor for the movie "Arthur" with Dudley Moore and Liza Minelli, as well as other movies and television shows. Daniel and Gertrud always came back to Sandisfield for their vacations, a ritual Gertrud continued after Daniel's death in 1994. Annie Pollock's old stone farmhouse in Montville is now back in the Pinsky family, with Gertrud and her children using it as their vacation home.

The Pyenson Family

David Pyenson knew what he was doing when he advised his fellow farmers to grow chickens instead of crops. The poultry farm he started in the early 1900s has been a landmark in Otis for three generations.

David was born in the Vitebsk region of Russia in 1885, the son of Jankel (Jacob) and Musha (Minnie) Paienson. Although he was already trained as a carpenter, he attended the Minsk Agricultural School in the nearby city of Minsk. The school had been founded by the Jewish Colonization Association in 1900, and David was a member of its first graduating class in 1904.



David Pyenson's graduating class, 1904
Front left: David Pyenson
(Andrew and Lynn Pyenson)

An agricultural school for Jews in a country where Jews were prohibited to farm or own land would appear to defy logic. Jews in agriculture accounted for fewer than four percent of Russia's Jewish population at the turn of the 20th century. But the Minsk Governorate was somewhat of an anomaly in the Russian Empire. More Jews in this region were involved in agriculture than almost anywhere else within Russia's borders.



Rebecca and David Pyenson, 1905
(Andrew and Lynn Pyenson)

David was studying in Minsk when he met Rebecca Golub and they decided to go to America. Rebecca came to New York in 1904 and worked in the garment district so she could save enough money to send for David. In May 1905, he sailed from Hamburg, Germany to join her.

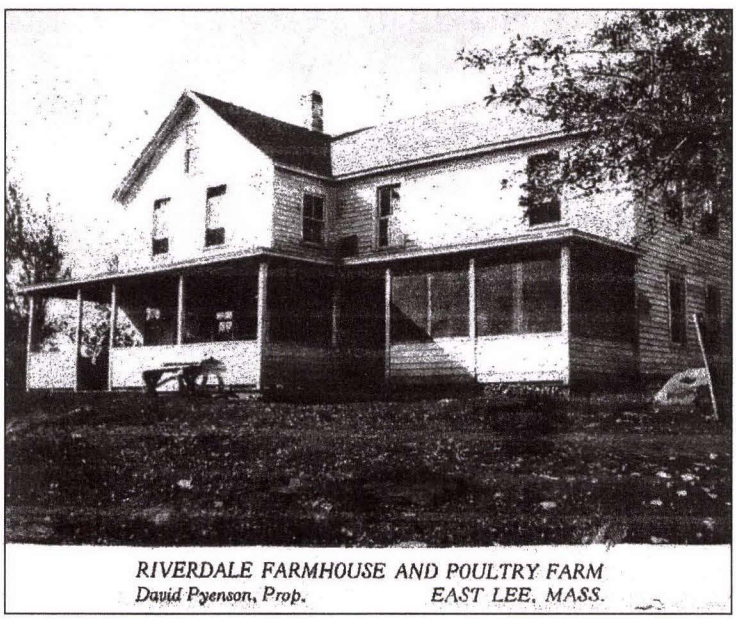
David and Rebecca married not long after he arrived, and they moved to Brooklyn, where they found jobs in a candy store. David made extra money by doing

carpentry work. While they were living there, they heard about Abraham Wolin and Morris Valensky, who had bought a 300-acre farm in Otis in the fall of 1906. The men were planning to open a summer boarding house, and they hired David to oversee the farm.

The Pyensons moved to Otis, where David worked on the farm and Rebecca worked as a domestic. The next year, a 35-acre farm adjoining the Wolin property came up for sale and they bought it that December. A little more than a month later their daughter, Rachel, was born. Louis followed in 1909, Harry in 1913, and Maxwell (Max) in 1916.

David put his agricultural training to good use and raised produce, dairy cows, and poultry. From the onset, he and Rebecca avoided the pitfalls some of the other immigrant farmers had made when dealing with their new neighbors. Rebecca made a point of getting to know the local farmwives and David didn't compete with the farmers for their customers and markets. Instead of bringing his products to local towns like Lee, he developed a market of his own in Springfield.

The other Jewish farmers looked up to David and respected his opinion, especially in farming matters. Not long after he arrived in Otis, the farmers, discouraged by all of the problems they faced, held a meeting to decide whether to stay or return to the city. David spoke up and offered his thoughts on how they could become more profitable by adding cows and chickens to their farms. The farmers agreed to try David's suggestions and decided to stay.



Riverdale Farmhouse postcard (Andrew and Lynn Pyenson)

In 1910, Jacob and Minnie arrived from Russia with 24-year-old Freide (Fanny), 14-year-old Henach (Henry), and 11-year-old Broche (Bertha). The family joined David and Rebecca in Otis, and Jacob worked on the farm until his death in 1919.

The Pyensons knew that if they were to succeed and not merely survive, they had to run their farm as a business. In 1911, they took out the first of several loans from the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society. A



David Pyenson, 1935
(Andrew and Lynn Pyenson)



Rebecca Pyenson
(Andrew and Lynn Pyenson)

few years later, they received a mortgage from The Federal Land Bank of Springfield, financed through the Federal Farm Loan Act, to make improvements to their farm. David and Rebecca supplemented their farm income by renting rooms to summer boarders. In the 1930s, they built rental cottages and advertised them in local newspapers like *The Springfield Republican.*

All three of the Pyenson sons attended Massachusetts State College, now the University of Massachusetts Amherst. Max was the only one who returned to Otis.

Louis graduated in 1931 and went on to earn a master's degree at Rutgers University and a doctorate at Cornell University. In 1938, he joined the faculty of the Long Island Agricultural and Technical Institute in Farmingdale, New York, now Farmingdale State College SUNY, as a professor of entomology and plant pathology. He remained in that position until his retirement and was honored after his death with the Louis Pyenson Memorial Scholarship.

Harry graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in 1934 and received his master's degree and doctorate from Pennsylvania State College. He moved to Los Angeles, where he was director of research for Redi-Whip, Inc., and head of the frozen food and new products divisions of Hunts-Wesson Foods, Inc.

Max earned bachelor's and master's degrees in science from Massachusetts State College. After graduating he taught agriculture at the high school in West Springfield.

In 1941, he was appointed Extension Agent of the Ellenville (N.Y.) Office of the Jewish Agricultural Society. Max was responsible for overseeing the Society's mission of settling Jews in agricultural positions and helping those who were already farmers. His appointment was short-lived. By the end of the year, the country was at war. Max enlisted in the army the following January.

Max married Audrey Yerman in 1942, while he was stationed at Camp Lee in Virginia. The two had met when she was a waterfront counselor at Camp Allegro on Richmond Pond in Pittsfield. When Max was discharged from the service in 1945, he and Audrey returned to Otis to work on the Pyenson farm. Their children, Steve, Beth, Sara, Andy, and Jonathan, all learned how to help out on the farm at a young age.

Max and his father went about modernizing their farm and changing their marketing strategy. They decided to give up crops and dairy and focus solely on chickens and eggs. To save labor and time, they installed a grain elevator in one of their two-story hen houses. They also bulldozed unused land and planted Ladino clover for their chickens to graze on, as Marty Pinsky had. In addition to selling their chickens and eggs to wholesale distributors, they opened a retail store. They later expanded their retail offerings to include staples like bread and milk.

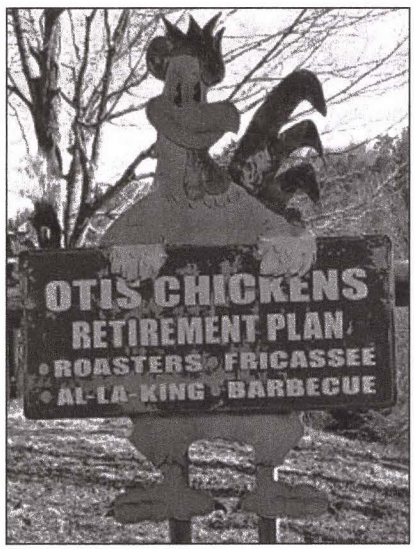
In the late 1940s, Max decided to raise chinchillas for their pelts, which was a profitable enterprise at a time when full-length coats sold for as much as $35,000. Chinchilla farms had become popular in Connecticut and New York State, but his was the first in Berkshire County. For the next year or two, Max traveled to clubs around the county giving talks on chinchilla farming. Since the Pyenson family farm has been known as the Otis Poultry Farm for many years, it's safe to say that Max's venture into chinchilla farming didn't last very long.

David retired from the poultry business in 1952 and sold the farm to Max. At a time when poultry farms in Sandisfield and the surrounding area were dying out, the Pyenson farm continued to prosper. The number of chickens increased from 3,700 in the 1940s to more than 23,000 in the late 1960s.

All of those chickens produced more than 400,000 pounds of manure over the course of a year. Max was more successful at disposing of it than Leon Katz had been. He composted it, and sold it by the truckloads to local dairy and produce farmers, who used it to fertilize their crops and pastures. In the mid-1960s, Max expanded his small retail store into a larger country store and added more local items to his offerings. He packaged some of his composted manure into smaller quantities and sold it at the store to home gardeners. He originally sold it in bags marked "Poultry Compost," but later it became known as Chicken Gickem.

The egg business took a hit in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when health concerns

about the cholesterol in egg yolks caused a drop in egg consumption. The nation's egg industry tried to counter the influence of the American Heart Association with a marketing campaign designed to promote the health benefits of eggs. At the Otis Poultry Farm, Max developed a marketing campaign of his own, using a humorous approach. He painted signs on the sides of his barns facing busy Route 8 that touted the benefits of eating eggs, such as "Egg Eaters Make Better Lovers." He also added signs around the property that were sure to produce a smile: "Otis Chickens Retirement Plan: Roasters, Fricassee, A-La-King, Barbecue," "Limited Edition Eggs. Only Laid Once," and "12 Eggs in Every Dozen." Large wooden cut-outs of cartoon chickens welcomed visitors through the doorway.



Max's sons, Steve and Andy, took over the poultry farm and country store after he retired in 1997. While business at their store continued to grow, the chicken and egg industry was under increasing pressure. It had become harder and harder for the Pyensons to make a profit when large egg companies undercut the cost of eggs produced locally. In 2006, Steve and Andy decided to sell their chickens and concentrate on expanding their store. While the Pyensons still sold eggs, they came from a farm in New York State instead of the hen houses next door.

Max died in 2010, and Steve retired the same year. Andy assumed sole ownership of the business and has remained at its helm ever since. His trademark hard hat is as well-known in the Otis area as the poultry store itself. The store has been compared to an old-fashioned trading post – stocked with everything from maple syrup and chicken pot pies to moccasins and wine, the comparison isn't too far off.



The Sandler Family

Like many other immigrants from Eastern Europe, Mendel (Max) and Feiga Sandler's family came to America at different times. Max's brother Nathan, a tailor, had come to New York in 1899. He was already married and the father of three children when Max and Feiga's 18-year-old daughter, Riwke (Beckie), came in the spring of 1913. When Beckie arrived at Ellis Island, Nathan wasn't there to meet her so she was held at the inspection station, where she was fed three meals a day and given a place to sleep. In the past, young women in her position would have been deported, but in 1904, the Clara de Hirsch Home for Working Girls established a separate residence that provided temporary housing for women whose relatives couldn't be located immediately. Four days after Beckie arrived, she was turned over to the Clara de Hirsch Home for Immigrant Girls.

Fortunately, Nathan was located, and Beckie was able to leave the Clara de Hirsch Home. She soon met Harry Dops, a young carpenter from Austria, and they were married in 1915. Their daughter, Minnie, was born the following year and their son, Max, in 1923.

Max Sandler emigrated with his brother, Solomon, in 1914. Feiga and two-year-old Jacob (Jack) stayed in Poland. Max spent most of the next 10 years working in New York and sending money back to his family.

Max returned to Poland briefly in 1922. Four years later, Feiga came to New York, leaving Jack in the care of family members. Jack and his brother planned to join their parents the following year, but because his brother was old enough for the army, he wasn't allowed to leave. In 1927, 15-year-old Jack boarded the "Alaunia" in Southampton, England alone.

The year after Jack arrived, Max and Feiga moved to Montville. Max had heard about the village from his friend, Max Linder. Max and Feiga bought the home where Max and his family lived, and the Linders moved across Town Hill Road to the other house they owned.

Soon Max, Feiga, and Jack were busy raising chickens. They also opened their home as a summer boarding house, like almost every other Jewish family in Sandisfield. Unlike the other boarding houses, though, there was no fighting over the stove at mealtimes because each family was provided with its own four-burner stove. In addition, boarders at the Sandler home didn't have to take the bus or train because Jack drove them back and forth to New York.

Jack met his wife, Lena, when she was a boarder in Sandisfield. She and her brothers had been coming up with her parents, Pincus and Molly Klein, to stay with friends since she was a child. Jack and Lena started dating when she was about 18,

and they married in 1937. Lena moved into the Sandler home and began her new life as a farm wife, learning from Feiga how to make butter and cheese from milk from the cows on their farm.

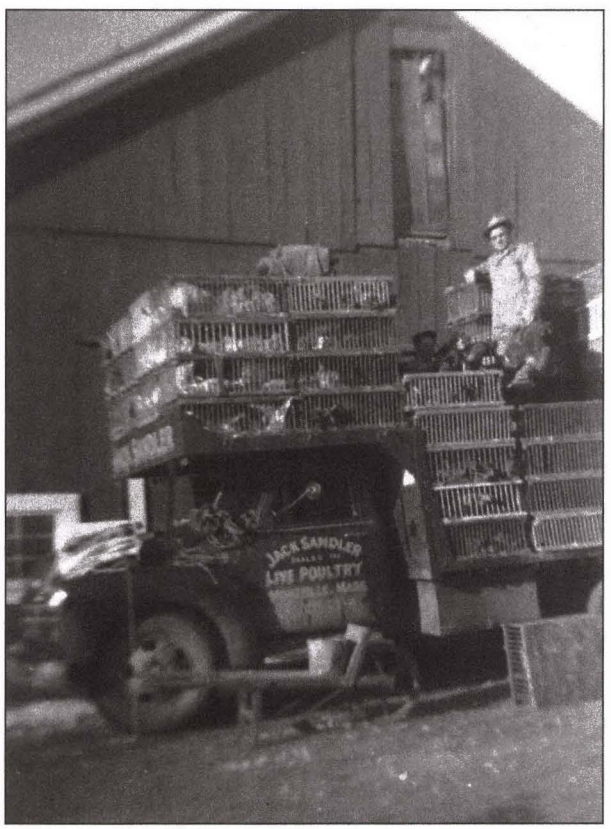
Not long after Jack and Lena's marriage, Max was killed in an accident. While leading a horse up a ramp, he was fatally injured when the horse kicked him in the chest. The responsibility of running the farm fell to Jack, but things weren't easy in those early years. In 1939, a hay barn burned down. Four years later, they lost 800 baby chicks when one of the coops caught fire.

Marlene, the first of Jack and Lena's five children was born in 1939. To help provide for his growing family, Jack took jobs to supplement their income from the farm. At first, he worked on the town's road crew and during World War II he got a job at the Torrington Brass Factory.

Jack and Lena also continued the summer boarding business his parents had started. They rented rooms in their home and Jack later built several rental bungalows on their property.

After the war, Jack partnered with Ruben Toplitz to become poultry dealers. They went around the countryside buying chickens from local farmers, which they brought to New York City and sold at the live poultry market. Jack was still working at the brass factory at the time and when his night shift was over, he'd grab a couple of hours' sleep before heading out with Ruben to buy more chickens.

To ensure that the farmers sold their chickens only to Ruben and Jack, Ruben bought grain in large quantities and gave it to struggling farmers for free. As long as the farmers continued to sell them their chickens, Ruben continued to give them free grain. Ruben finally decided it was time to get out of the business when too many chickens died en route to the city to make the enterprise profitable.



Jack Sandler, 1952
(Sharon Sandler Lewis)



Jack and Lena Sandler in front of their hen house, 1955
(Sharon Sandler Lewis)

In 1951, Jack went into the egg business. His friend, Max Margulies, had built a three-story hen house further up Town Hill Road a few years earlier and encouraged Jack to raise egg-laying hens by showing him all the checks he received from the egg companies.

Within 10 years the Sandlers' farm had become so successful they were known throughout the Southern Berkshires. When the chicken business was at its height, their hen houses held more than 20,000 White Leghorn hens. The chickens produced about 240 cases of eggs every week. When a chicken's egg-laying days were over, it was sold for its meat. Jack and his son, Marvin, packed the chickens into wooden crates and loaded them onto the truck to bring to the poultry market. The truck held 198 crates and each crate held 12 to 15 chickens.

Because Jack didn't own a refrigerated truck, he could only sell his eggs locally. One of the dealers Jack dealt with bought Jack's eggs when prices were low and kept them refrigerated until egg prices rose. He then sold them for a substantial profit, which Jack never shared in.

By the 1960s, high production costs and low profit margins made it hard to earn a living in the poultry business. When lightning set fire to their three-story hen house as they were preparing it for another batch of chickens, Jack and Lena decided it was time to get out. They retired in 1969 and turned their attention to their rental business,

buying several homes that they fixed up and rented. They also bought and sold real estate. In 1968, they bought some land on Pinewoods Road (now West Street) and sold it to Bernie and Carol Kessler so they could build a vacation home. Bernie died in 2006, but Carol returns to Sandisfield every summer.



Bernie and Carol Kessler, 1985

The Sandler family had belonged to Congregation Sons of Abraham since they had first come to Sandisfield, and Jack and Lena remained active even when the synagogue was struggling. Lena had served as president of the Ladies' Auxiliary in the 1950s. In the 1960s and 1970s she was the synagogue's treasurer. Jack was elected president of the synagogue in 1960 and held that position until his death. When the synagogue closed in 1976, the Sandlers paid for the building's insurance and upkeep out of their own pockets. They continued to do so for the next 20 years, until it was turned over to the Sandisfield Arts and Restoration Committee.

Not long after they retired from the chicken business, Lena began working with her children, Marlene and Paul, at their company in New York City. For the next several years, she and Jack divided their time between Sandisfield and New York.

It was no surprise that Lena took a job working with Marlene and Paul. The Sandlers' chicken farm had been a family affair since the days of Max and Feiga, and Jack and Lena's children had grown up working on the farm alongside their parents.

Like most of Sandisfield's youth, Marlene left Sandisfield after graduating high school. She moved to New York City and accepted a job at an investment firm. While she was living in New York, she met Haskel Schiff, a medical student at New York University. They were married in 1962 and their daughter, Melissa, was born two years later. Haskel joined the army in 1966 and moved his family to Maryland, where he served as a doctor at Edgewood Arsenal. Haskel was killed in an automobile accident the following year and Marlene and Melissa returned to New York. In 1971, she and Paul started a successful facsimile communications company, where she served as director.

Marvin was born the year after Marlene. As a youngster, he belonged to Boy Scout Troop 71 and participated in school athletics. When he was preparing for his Bar Mitzvah in 1953, he was fortunate to have his own grandfather, Pincus Klein, help him prepare for the most important day of his young life.

Marvin joined the United States Air Force after graduating from high school and spent the next four years stationed in both the U. S and England. He settled in the

Boston area with his wife, Donna Mary Studer, and their son, Mark.

Felice also moved to New York after graduating high school. She and Sheldon Lieberman were married in the city in 1970 and are the parents of Phillip and Alan. The family lived in Massachusetts and Ohio before settling in South Carolina.

Paul graduated from Boston University with a degree in public relations. From 1969 to 1970 he served with the 101st Airmobile Division in Vietnam. He then spent the remainder of his service time with the 10th Special Forces Group. He was awarded the Bronze Star and four Air Medals. After leaving the military he moved to New York, where he was President and Chief Operating Officer of the facsimile communications company he had started with Marlene. Paul married Elaine Kurtz in 1977 and was the father of twin sons, Andrew and Justin. He sold the communications business in 1989 and moved with his family to Arizona, where he started a voicemail communications company. Paul was killed in an automobile accident in 2009.

Jack and Lena's youngest daughter, Sharon, met her husband, Martin Lewis, while they were attending the University of Massachusetts Amherst. They married in 1977 and lived in New York City, where Sharon worked at Marlene and Paul's company and Martin worked as a chef at a hotel. Their first child, Joshua, was born in 1978, followed by David and Jessica. Sharon and Martin returned to the Berkshires in the late 1980s and opened Martin's Restaurant in Great Barrington, a popular restaurant on Railroad Street for more than 25 years. To the profound disappointment of everyone who had ever eaten there, Sharon and Martin retired after the restaurant burned in 2016.

Jack died in 1990 and Lena in 2013. Their generosity was well known in Sandisfield, and they were always there to help anyone who needed it. This generosity, combined with their strong Jewish faith, was especially evident in their stewardship of the synagogue. In an era when Jewish traditions and customs seemed to be slipping away, Jack and Lena embraced and preserved them. They passed those traditions and customs – along with family stories, memories, and recipes – on to their children and grandchildren.



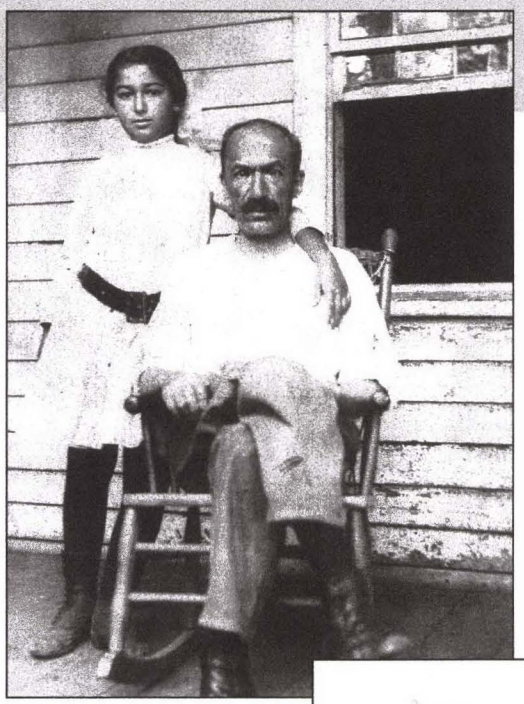
Lena Sandler, Sheldon Lieberman, Buster Hamilton, and Jack Sandler in Marvin Sandler's Chevy convertible, 1985

Sandisfield Memories

"Yes, the farmer has worries about debts, about weather, and must take care of his stock seven days a week. The animals must eat to live. No weekends off, or Sundays, or holidays. But in the long run he is better off than city folks."
– Ida Linder



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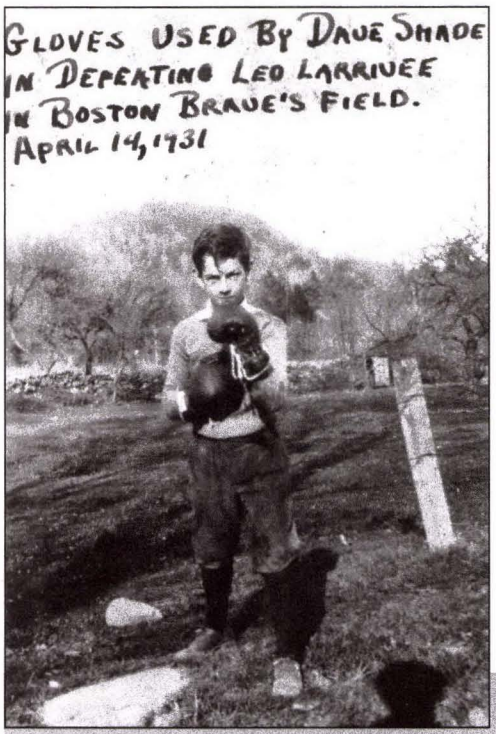


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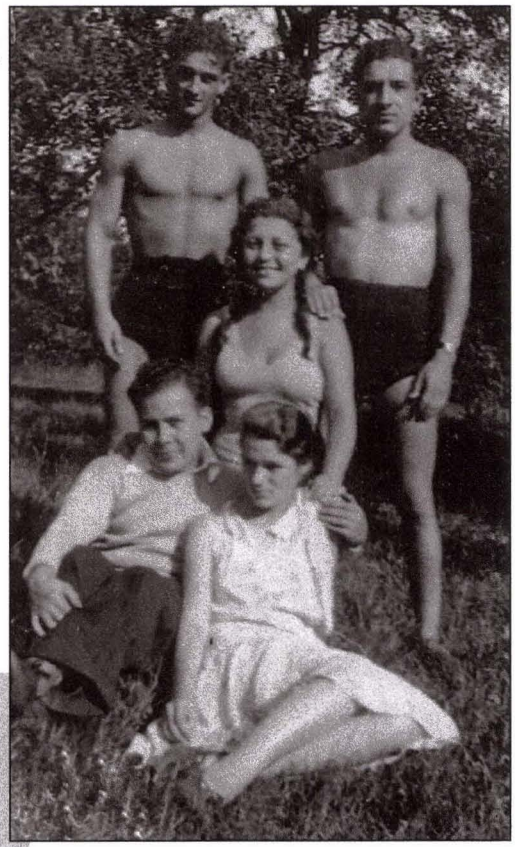
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"All of us – the whole town, Jewish and non-Jewish families, lived harmoniously together, helping each other whenever we could. Practically every home had children of the same age, who turned out to become lifelong friends."
– Eleanor Skolnick

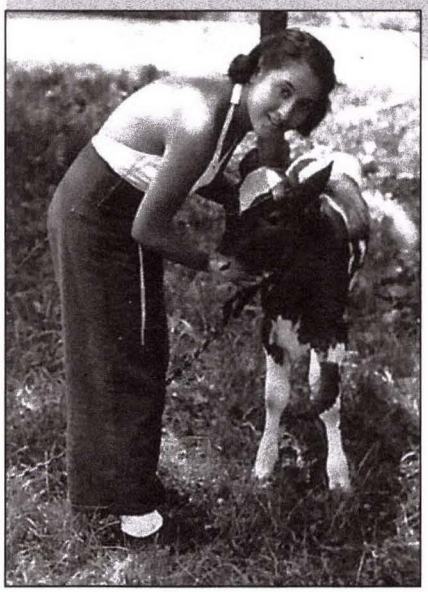


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"In the early morning we used to go into the forest beyond the barbed wire to pick eggs from hens who ran away and laid in the woods."
– Victor Conn



6.

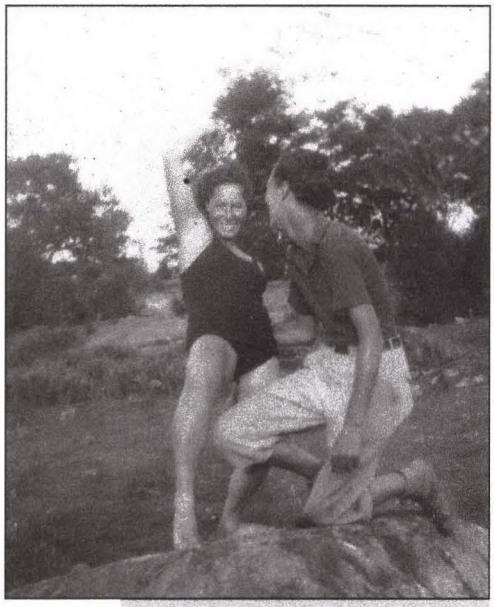
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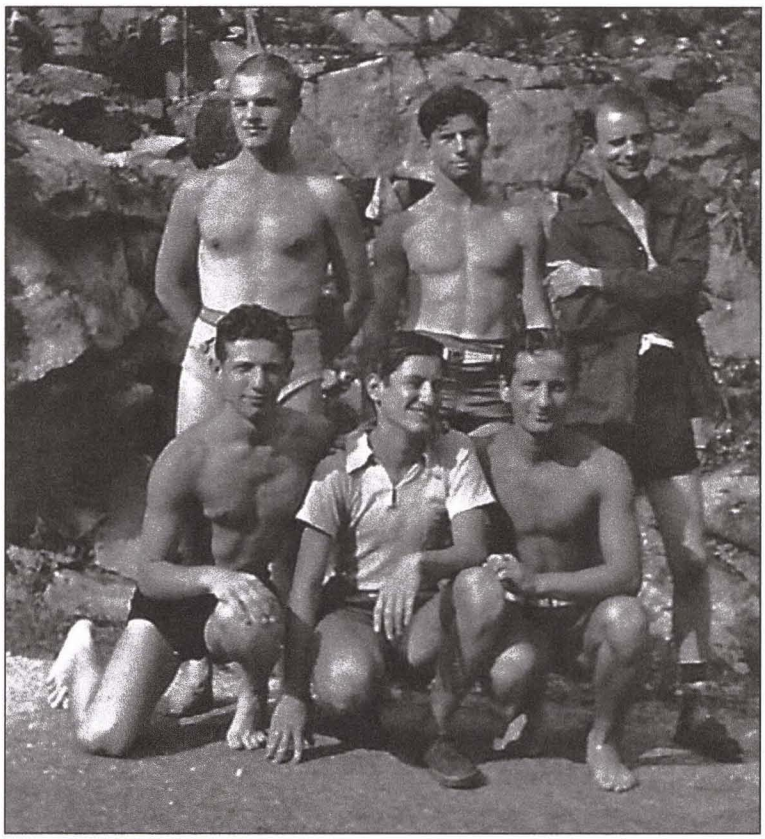


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10.



"Our pleasures were delightfully simple. Hiking up to Jones Knoll. Picking blueberries for hours – picking pails' full. As a result, we had blueberry pies, blueberry pancakes, blueberry blintzes, blueberry jelly, blueberry wine, etc., etc."
– Eleanor Skolnick



11.



12.



13.

"Pop was pretty much the leader of the community and I remember when he was an ardent Democrat pushing Coolidge for president. ... The next major election had him hustling and pushing Hoover for president! ... Well, Pop's man got in and instead of a chicken in every pot, we shortly after moved to the Bronx." – *Milt Barrie*



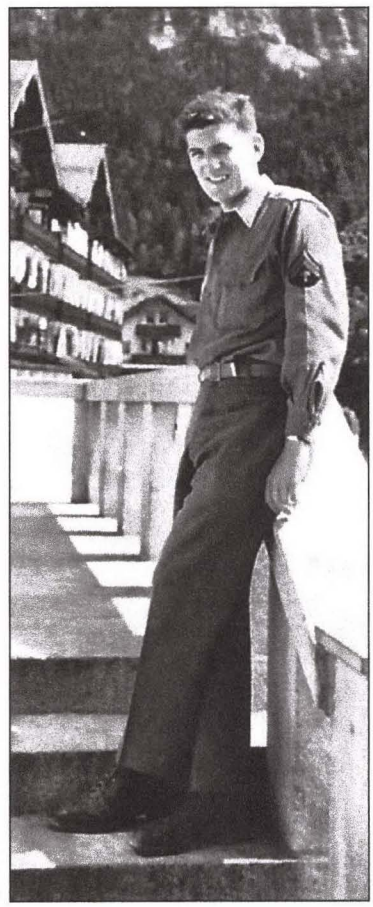
14.



16.



15.



17.

18.



"The calf and I became great friends and frequent companions that summer, playing at wrestling and me rewarding him with choice morsels of the grasses. I was enchanted at having such an exotic animal friend."
– *Jerry Jacobson*



19.



20.

21.



"... in a few miles we arrived at the hamlet of New Boston, ... and a few miles later, at the Pinsky farm. ... When I awoke the next morning to the sound of roosters crowing, the magic began. I slipped out before the family awoke, and there was a bull calf staked on the front lawn. Now this was getting interesting! Looking around at their acreage, I was struck that someone had forgotten to pave this piece of the world."
– Jerry Jacobson

"The High Holiday services were amazing! One Holiday we walked up to Temple for services, not thinking how dark the walk back would be, and I was really scared while Paul laughed. I couldn't wait to get to a street light, but there were bats flying around the lights, which scared me even more." – *Lucille Siegel*



22.



23.

24.





25.

"I remember when Sid Pinsky came home from the service, Mrs. Pinsky came running out of the kitchen, calling him by his Jewish name: 'Shyke, Shyke!' She was overcome with joy!
– Marilyn Leiman

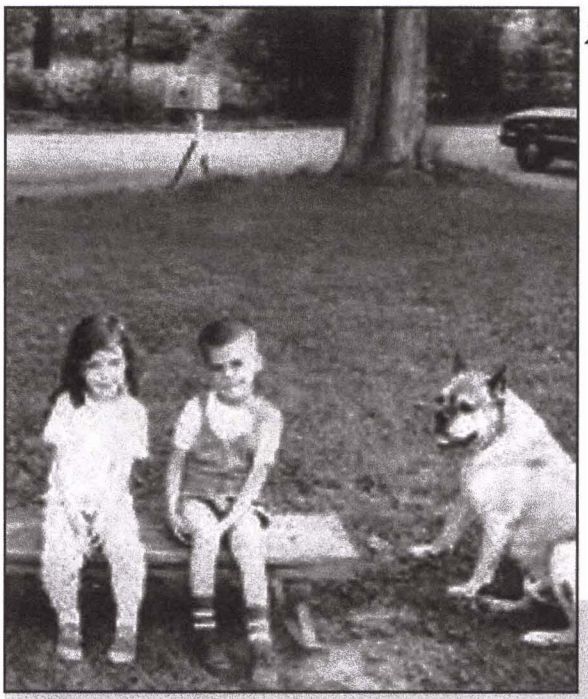
"You could always smell chicken cooking when you went to Fannie Albert's house."
– Norton Fletcher



26.

27.





28.



29.

"... our family's roots are in New Boston. The Kleiner girls told many stories of growing up on that New Boston farm and all of the stories were told with love."
– *David Moss*



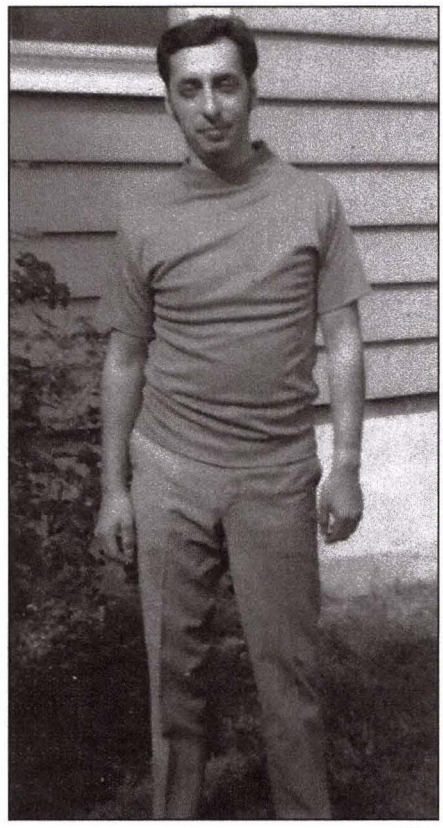
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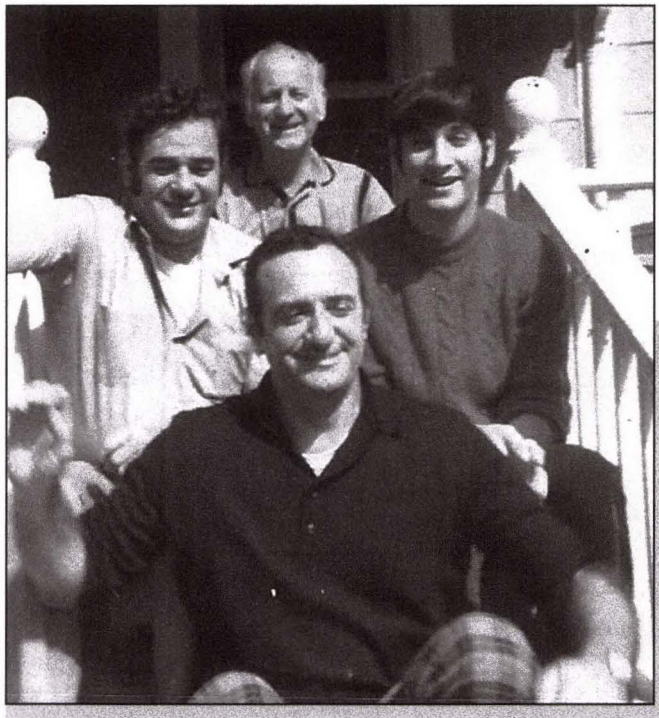
31.



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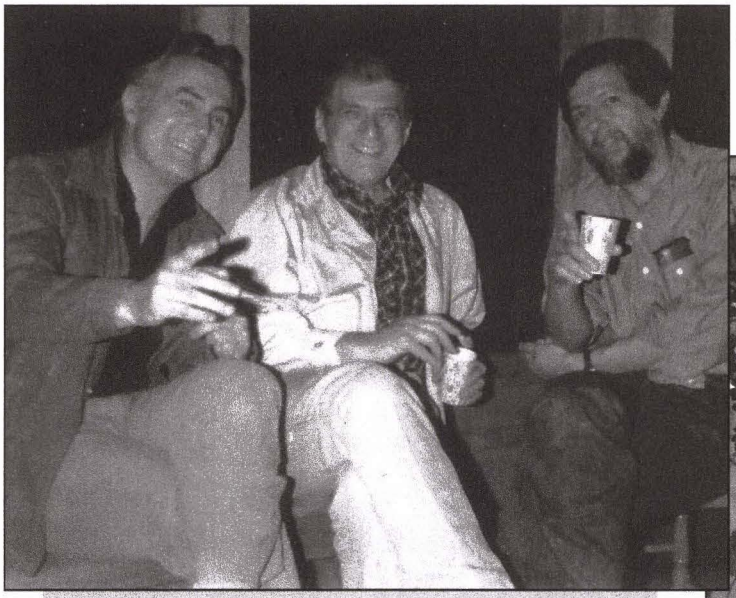


33.



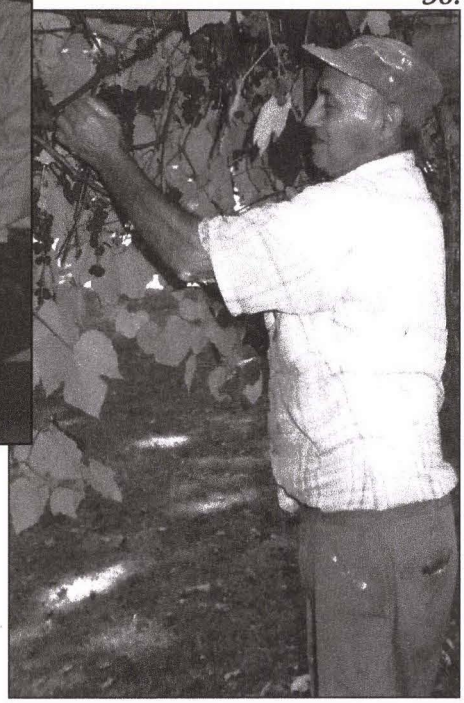
34.

"Our parents were very resourceful, hardworking people. They immediately started fixing up the old farmhouse and we had it painted and we built a big porch surrounding the house and we opened up a little general store. We put in a heating system eventually in the house, a wood-burning furnace. We put in running water, and a bathtub. There was a pump outside the house and originally we had to go out there on cold winter mornings and pump water into buckets by hand and bring it into the house and heat it up on the wood-burning stove ..."
– Willie Barrie



35.

36.



"Before the flood (of 1955), the water in the creek across the street was a great place for swimming. There was a huge swimming hole by Indian rock where the locals used to swim. Afterwards the creek wasn't used for swimming anymore."
– Victor Conn

37.



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1. Morris and Hyman Charney, 1923 (George Rothstein)
2. Elizabeth and Zalman Plotkin, circa 1920 (Carol Kessler)
3. Mary and Oscar Shenkman, 1924 (George Rothstein)
4. Milt Baranoff, 1931 (The William Barrie family)
5. Willie Baranoff, Murray Schneiderman, Ruth Jontow, Abe Bordon, and Ida Jensky, 1932 (The William Barrie family)
6. Sylvia Linder and Bessie, circa 1938
7. Milt Baranoff and Dave Shade, 1930 (The William Barrie family)
8. Joe German and Marty Pinsky, 1939
9. Sylvia Wexler and George Baranoff, 1931 (The William Barrie family)
10. Back row: Sid, Stanley, and George;
    Front row: Izzy, Arny, and Joe German, 1938
11. Anna Krasnow, Eleanor Pinsky, Pearl Linder, and Rose Linder, 1944
12. Back row: CCC Camp Worker, Pearl Linder, CCC Camp Worker;
    Front row: Jack Sandler, Hymie Linder, Sam Linder
    (Fred and Michelle Harwood)
13. Gertrud Michelson and Franz Boas, circa 1941 (Gertrud Michelson)
14. Norman Pinsky, Al, Tony, and Julius Pinsky, 1936 (Linda Boteach)
15. Sylvia German, Jane Kaiserman, and Pearl Kaiserman, 1946
16. Back row: Paul Lazarowitz, Marty Pinsky, Sam Linder;
    Front row: Mario Candida, Jack Dobrin (Fred and Michelle Harwood)
17. Daniel Pinsky in Germany, 1946 (Cindy Pinsky)
18. Sol Moss, Rose Linder, Allen Moss, and Irving Moss, 1948
19. Helen Diamond Pinsky, 1936 (Linda Boteach)
20. Clara Weintraub, Sylvia Linder, and Kate Krasnow, 1942
21. Ron, Irene, and Michelle Linder at the Town Hill berry patch, 1948
    (Fred and Michelle Harwood)

22. Michelle and Ron Linder, 1948 (Fred and Michelle Harwood)
23. Leon, Helen, and Myron Katz, early 1950s (Helen Nejfelt)
24. Back row: Sylvia Blier and Steven Blier;
Front row: Annis Goldman, Stanley Goldman Marvin Siegel, Paul Siegel, Sylvia Goldman, and May Siegel, circa 1948 (Paul and Lucille Siegel)
25. Ray, Helen, and Leon Katz, early 1950s (Helen Nejfelt)
26. Sheila and Neil Skolnick, 1955 (Joanne Olson)
27. Sharon Sandler, Bruce Cohen, Aura Reisner, Trudi Reisner, Shelley Lazarowitz, and Francine Lazarowitz (Trudi Reisner)
28. Joanne Lazarowitz, Richie Pinsky, and Scrappy the Dog, circa 1960 (Joanne Olson)
29. Paul Siegel, circa 1960 (Paul and Lucille Siegel)
30. Aura Reisner and Helen Katz, circa 1961 (Helen Nejfelt)
31. Back: Barbara Dobrin and Shelley Lazarowitz; Front: Joanne Lazarowitz, circa 1965 (Joanne Olson)
32. Mae, Sam, Steven, and Mitchell Siegel, 1979 (Paul and Lucille Siegel)
33. Bill Levine, 1972 (Brenda and Keith Larson)
34. Back: Joe German; Center: Ralph Enker and Steve German;
Front: Unidentified, circa 1972
35. Sid Pinsky, Daniel Pinsky, and Marvin Leiner (Cindy Pinsky)
36. Morris Levine, 1984
37. Pauline Simsovic, Millie Enker, Michelle Harwood, and Eleanor Skolnick

Part IV

Epilogue

The story of Sandisfield's Jewish farm colony is a story of faith and perseverance in the face of adversity. It's also a story of the resilience of the human spirit.

The first Jewish colonists arrived in a town that found it necessary to distinguish between Russians and Russian Jews when describing their neighbors. The locals made it clear that living next door to a Russian was preferable to living next to a Russian Jew. The colonists, separated from their new neighbors by religion, culture, and language, were often met with social exclusion and derision. Social exclusion was nothing new to these immigrants; they had been segregated in their homelands and in the Jewish neighborhoods of New York. The derision of their neighbors was also nothing new. What *was* new was that these Eastern European immigrants owned land for the first time in their lives. And they were willing to work hard to keep it.

For some colonists, though, the obstacles that came with ownership were too great to overcome. Unable to turn their farms into profitable enterprises, some gave up and returned to the city. Other colonists, not willing to lose the land they treasured, adapted, and many succeeded. Opening their homes to boarders during the summer, they made Sandisfield a summer destination for Jews from the city. Turning to poultry farming, they were so successful that the once-forsaken town of Sandisfield became the most densely populated poultry center in the Berkshires.

Over time the Jewish immigrants' strong work ethic and straightforward business dealings earned the respect and friendship of most of the locals. No longer excluded from the broader community, they became just another of the several ethnic groups that now called Sandisfield home. Abraham and Klara Kleiner's grandson observes that Sandisfield was where his grandparents, newly arrived in America, assimilated into American culture. Removed from the insular world of New York's Jewish neighborhoods, Jews in Sandisfield developed relationships with their non-Jewish neighbors, both groups recognizing that the issues that united them were stronger than their differences. Farmers worked together towards common goals and neighbors depended on each other in times of hardship.

It often seems as though Sandisfield's Jewish community was one big, extended family, and in many ways that was true. Each family that came to Sandisfield was joined by relatives and friends. *Landsleit*, fellow Jews from the same shtetl, were held in the same esteem as blood relatives. While the number of people in the community increased, its geographic area grew smaller. The original colony, which once encompassed neighboring towns, consolidated around Sandisfield and the Montville synagogue.



Helen Katz Nejfelt and Nina Dryansky Carr, 2018

The Jewish immigrants who arrived in Sandisfield in 1902 had no way of knowing that the community they were building would change the economic and cultural character of the town. Eventually, though, Sandisfield's Jewish community fell victim to the same fate as the original settlement: its younger generation left to pursue futures elsewhere. Jewish parents, having done their jobs well, had instilled in their children the importance of an education as well as a desire to turn that education into better lives for themselves.

But, the story of Sandisfield's Jewish community did not end with the loss of the chicken farms or the closing of the synagogue – it was too strong for that. The community had always been close-knit and the bonds have lasted lifetimes, spanning both years and miles. The community is the magnet that draws family and friends back time and time again. Years melt away as old friends reunite.



Willie Barrie and Pauline Linder Simsovic, 1980s

The story continues ...

Appendices

Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society Loans

Name	Property Location	Amount	Book	Page	Date	Paid Off	Notes
Elias & Bertha Lipsitz	Sandisfield	$550	185	234	12/29/1902	3/14/1906	
Jacob & Faney Goldberg; Abraham & Esther Myerson	Sandisfield	$200	187	1	6/3/1903	6/2/1907	
Michael & Beckie Liss; Max & Gussie Slamitzky	Sandisfield, Monterey, Otis	$525	192	65	2/28/1904	11/16/1909	
Samuel Kaplowitz; Sam Serlin	New Marlborough	$500	195	87	2/28/1905	7/27/2015	Paid by Samuel Kaplowitz
Louis & Hannah Rubenzahl; Louis & Esther Rubin	New Marlborough	$300	192	71	4/25/1905	11/27/1905	Assumed by Hyman Karp through sale
Michael & Beckie Liss	Sandisfield, Monterey, Otis	$100	192	93	2/5/1906	11/16/1909	
Samuel & Katie Weinstein	Monterey	$200	192	98	6/5/1906	8/17/1911	Paid by and conveyed to Bernard Mirman
Benjamin & Lena Joseph	Otis	$300	340	74	12/17/1906	4/8/1913	
Joseph & Sarah Konkin	Otis	$200	337	478	5/2/1908	5/26/1910	
David & Bella Liskind; David & Hannah Nemirowsky	Sandisfield	$400	192	158	6/13/1908	Default	
David & Rebecca Pyenson	Otis	$200	358	108	2/2/1911	9/26/1911	
David & Rebecca Pyenson	Otis	$300	358	276	9/22/1911	12/6/1918	
Aaron & Marion Katz	Sandisfield	$300	192	255	2/7/1912	11/11/1914	
Israel & Fannie Ogush	New Marlborough	$700	192	257	5/28/1912	8/22/1916	Paid by and conveyed to Joseph Resnick
Abraham & Rebecca Kravitz	Sandisfield	$450	192	263	6/17/1912	12/9/1925	
Lena Held; Sarah Held	Sandisfield	$1,900	220	148	4/25/1914	12/21/1920	
Sam & Yetta Akseezer	Sandisfield	$400	192	348	9/28/1914	1/20/1920	Assumed by Jacob Penziner through sale
Gershom & Sarah Leah Goldstein; Moses Rolnick	Sandisfield	$300	192	352	3/25/1915	11/13/1916	
Louis Snofsky	Sandisfield	$280	220	427	5/12/1915	9/18/1924	
Sam & Celia Shiffrin	Otis	$400	389	73	6/22/1916	7/11/1923	
Israel & Annie Albert; Louis & Fannie Albert	Sandisfield	$600	192	404	7/10/1916	N/A	
Jacob & Mushe Pyenson	Otis	$200	383	558	3/12/1917	9/13/1918	
Louis & Ida Shapiro	Monterey, Great Barrington	$460	192	467	10/23/1917	10/2/1953	
Louis & Ida Shapiro	Monterey, Great Barrington	$460	192	430	10/23/1917	3/27/1941	
Isaac & Jennie Gordon	Sandisfield	$500	192	433	11/6/1917	12/29/1920	
Samuel & Gussie Neustein	New Marlborough	$250	192	470	7/22/1918	Default	
Samuel & Minnie Steinbauch	Sandisfield	$400	192	482	3/21/1919	12/21/1920	
Aaron & Sara Morris	Sandisfield	$400	192	488	5/14/1919	3/18/1920	
Louis & Ida Shapiro	Monterey, Great Barrington	$400	192	499	8/14/1919	10/24/1923	
Alexander Friedland; Nathan Pinsky & Sarah Pinsky	Sandisfield	$1,000	187	124	5/25/1920	10/13/1920	
Benjamin (Berel) & Rachel Rosenblatt	New Marlborough	$1,500	187	163	10/5/1920	4/1/1924	
Joseph & Pauline Baszem	Sandisfield	$300	187	214	7/13/1921	3/3/1926	
Samuel & Lena Tropp	Sandisfield	$600	187	224	10/19/1921	3/25/1929	
Louis & Ethel Schochet	Otis	$500	406	222	7/4/1922	9/26/1932	

Jewish Agricultural Society Loans

Name	Property Location	Amount	Book	Page	Date	Paid Off	Notes
Louis & Fannie Albert	Sandisfield	$1,400	187	403	5/15/1923	8/24/1933	Lien removed 9/15/1925
Louis Albert	Sandisfield	$1,000	238	14	5/15/1923	8/24/1933	
Charles (Chala) Ratelman	New Marlborough	$300	187	408	5/24/1923	6/19/1934	
Sam & Celia Shiffrin	Otis	$1,100	410	165	7/5/1923	11/6/1924	
Schier & Teme Bechnider; Sam & Mollie Hausner	Sandisfield	$300	187	427	11/23/1923	6/26/1929	
Berel & Susie Weiss	Sandisfield	$800	187	430	12/10/1923	2/26/1935	
Sam & Celia Shiffrin	Otis	$500	424	46	11/15/1924	10/26/1927	
David & Rose Stein; Abraham & Lena Cohen	Sandisfield	$2,000	187	480	12/3/1924	10/17/1930	
Joe & Pauline Baszem	Sandisfield	$600	240	1	6/2/1926	8/13/1945	
Charles & Selda Ratelman	New Marlborough	$100	240	21	10/28/1926	7/8/1927	
Isadore & Bertha Kaminsky	Otis	$700	429	443	6/16/1927	2/27/1934	
Sam & Celia Shiffrin	Otis	$1,000	435	277	10/21/1927	10/25/1928	
Abraham & Clara Kleiner	Sandisfield	$400	240	108	1/24/1928	8/31/1943	
Hyman & Jennie Silverman	Sandisfield	$100	240	115	1/31/1928	10/28/1930	
Joe & Pauline Baszem	Sandisfield	$400	240	125	3/19/1928	12/12/1932	Foreclosed - conveyed to Isaac Baszem
Benjamin (Berel) & Rachel Rosenblatt	New Marlborough	$1,500	240	243	3/20/1930	7/28/1938	
Harry & Eva Moses	Monterey, New Marlborough	$1,100	240	267	8/14/1930	11/27/1935	
Edward S. & Katherine Fenn	Monterey, New Marlborough	$350	255	229	1/8/1936	7/3/1940	
Louis & Ethel Shochet	Otis	$500	470	534	4/2/1938	9/15/1941	
Gustave Goldstein	Sandisfield	$600	255	496	10/31/1938	8/25/1948	
Nathan & Sarah Pinsky	Sandisfield	$600	266	240	2/28/1941	5/13/1943	
Martin & Frances Cecilia Pinsky	Sandisfield	$3,500	325	98	1/21/1960	10/28/1961	
Martin & Frances Cecilia Pinsky	Sandisfield	$5,825	332	449	10/25/1961	Default	

Source: Southern Berkshire Registry of Deeds
Middle Berkshire Registry of Deeds

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Eleanor Skolnick
in memory of Sarah and Nathan Pinsky

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Epilogue

"Stedman Place Sold." *Berkshire Courier* 2 August 1906: 2.

In 1902, the first Jewish immigrant families arrived in the Berkshire County town of Sandisfield, Massachusetts to begin new lives as farmers. They were part of a plan by the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society to settle a farm colony in the Berkshires. These Jewish farm colonies arose from a "back to the land" movement that was designed to remove Eastern European Jews from the sweatshops and tenements of New York City. Sandisfield, with its many abandoned farms, provided these new colonists with the opportunity to own land for the first time in their lives.

Soil and Shul in the Berkshires follows the progress of this farm colony from the early 20th century until Sandisfield's Jewish community turned its synagogue over to the Sandisfield Arts and Restoration Committee for use as an arts center in 1996.

"... very well written and compelling."

– Michael Hoberman, author of *How Strange It Seems: The Cultural Life of Jews in Small-Town New England*

"The story of the migration of Jews from the 19th century pogroms of Eastern Europe to America and finally the town of Sandisfield in Massachusetts, is a moving account of a beautiful if painful journey in Lorraine German's *Soil and Shul in the Berkshires.* Beautifully written and scrupulously researched, Ms. German shoulders her way through the anti-Semitic and anti-immigration canards and the book emerges as a touching and gentle reminder of the ultimate decency and humanity of our country's formation."

– Val Coleman, playwright and author of *The Sandisfield Stories*

Lorraine German credits her sociology degree from Rutgers University with fostering her interest in the social and cultural issues that influence the course of American history. The story of Sandisfield's Jewish community is deeply personal for her and her husband, Steve German. They are proud to be third-generation owners of the home that Steve's grandparents bought in the Sandisfield village of Montville in 1922.

Cover design by Tina Sotis
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Montville, Massachusetts, circa 1927

