

Southern New Jersey  
**SYNAGOGUES**

A SOCIAL HISTORY

HIGHLIGHTED  
BY  
STORIES  
OF JEWISH LIFE  
FROM THE  
1880'S - 1980'S

Written By  
ALLEN MEYERS

**HISTORIAN**  
of the  
Jewish Community  
Greater Delaware Valley  
Philadelphia, PA.

The Jewish Frontier : Independent Jewish Settlements Burbridge

Jewish settlements came into being in Southern New Jersey in a variety of ways. Some started, some survived and other flourished. The individual settlements spoke of a new beginning for the newly arriving immigrants. Each one attracted Jewish settlers for a short period of time. Failure rested not in its location or the loyalty of its settlers but in the weather, the lack of provisions, money and work. These settlements played a developmental role in the newly arriving Jewish immigrants and their adjustment to a new environment.

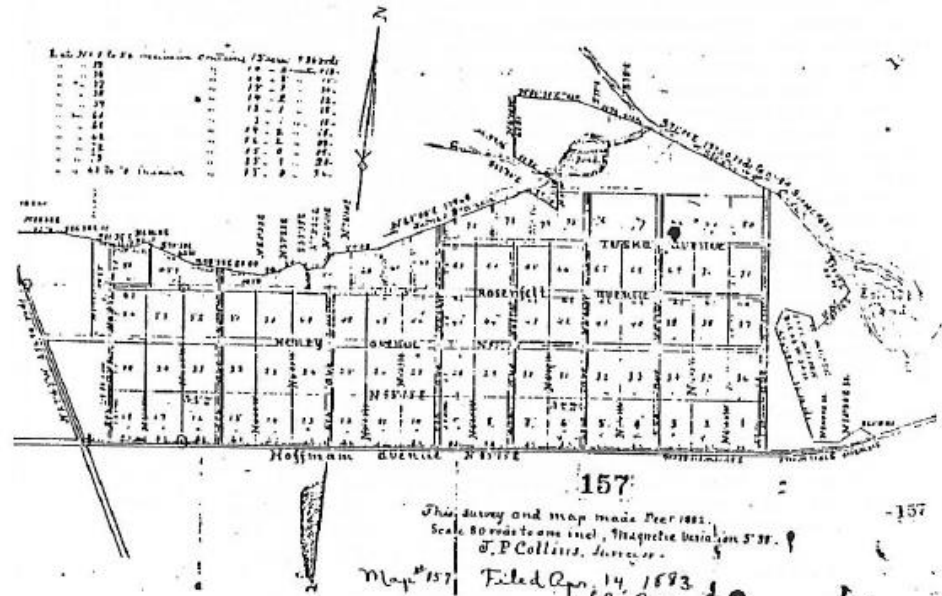
Progress was made in the wilderness of Southern New Jersey by the pride these Jews took in their attempts to transplant themselves in America in the 1890's. The main Jewish Colonies of Southern New Jersey were organized and financed much better than these settlements. But Jewish families helped to support this concept of resettlement in a new land. When work and weather failed, so did the settlements.

Initially, these areas of Jewish self independence were created as agricultural settlements along major railroad lines. The advent of the Railroads through the wilderness was a key development in itself. The arrival of the Jews only shortly after these railroads were laid presented a great opportunity in developing vast uninhabited regions in Southern New Jersey. The evolution of this type of settlement spanned about 25 years starting in 1883. Its trade mark of this era would be the development of an industrial factory on the grounds of the new settlement. The town was usually named after the Jewish factory owner and or proprietor. It longevity would be measured in the number of months or perhaps years the settlement existed. These areas soon became Jewish ghost towns consisting of a few wooden frame houses around a three story factory building that was abandoned. Many locations had a Jewish connotation about the area for years to come and long after the Jews quit the individual settlements. This developmental stage of Jewish settlements in the wilderness of Southern New Jersey spanned four counties including Atlantic, Cumberland, Salem and Gloucester.

The Burbridge settlement was planned as a Colony. This was the first of these types of settlements at the time. These first attempts of colonization of Russian Jews in Southern New Jersey was near May's Landing.

General R.C. Burbridge of Atlantic City established this settlement by buying land in this area in early 1882. By 1882, he had the area surveyed into a town. Nearby Estelle's Pond was virgin territory. Eighty six colonists would come to the area after the enactment of the May Day Laws in Russia took effect.

But this idea was only a land scheme. R.C. Burbridge could not financially support a community in its early beginnings. His idea was to sell small parcels of land to the newly arriving immigrant in ready anticipation of a large profit. These immigrants wanted to find a home not a piece of land! The land was barren and unproductive. A Christian missionary and accounts of this episode are familiar in the literature of the day.



## Burbridge

The Burbridge settlement had enough land for 150 families to be settled. Estellville was located on the railroad line from Winslow Junction to Cape May. Men worked at cultivating sorghum at Rio Grande in nearby Cape May County. By the spring of 1883, 22 homes were built. Fifteen acre lots were allotted per family. The Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society helped these settlers. Mr. Jack Hauser, an Evangelical missionary visited six Jewish families to see their conditions. The Jewish societies would come to the aid of the Russian Jews in seeing they could leave for other places to live.

A Jewish presence was maintained here even as the settlement failed. Individual Jews stayed and worked in various jobs nearby. Later, a Jewish burial ground was consecrated. This cemetery was known as the Believers in Israel.

When the settlement failed, Sam Widlansky's father, Morris approached the remaining individual Jews to follow him to Atlantic City. This would occur in the late 1880's and early 1890's. During the off season, the population of Absecon Island would settle in land for the winter. For Morris, this area was near Mizpah. His family and other relatives including a brother would live here during this period. Morris brother took part in the pioneering efforts to carve out a town off the railroad line that ran through May's Landing.

The first orthodox congregation to be established in Atlantic City was named Amunath Israel or the Believers in Israel. This was the name of the cemetery created near Burbridge by the Jewish pioneers. The Jews who moved to Atlantic City continued to be buried in this old Jewish cemetery into the 1930's. Besides the fact that there was a loyalty attached to this Jewish cemetery it was impossible to bury people on Absecon Island because the water level was too high

Morris Widlansky persuaded the remaining Jewish settlers to follow him to Atlantic City to build a new Jewish community. The congregation was recreated in Atlantic City under the guidance of Morris Widlansky. The cemetery stayed in operation after the abandonment of the Burbridge Colony. Forty three Jews were interred in the Cemetery from 1882 until 1932 in Weymouth Township. This number by coincident represented exactly 50 % of the original settlers who came to this area

This cemetery was in constant use until the early 1920's. This coincides with the creation and use of Jewish burial grounds for the Atlantic City Jews closer to the Absecon Island. The new Jewish cemetery outside of Pleasantville was created by the Rodeph Sholom Congregation which Morris Widlansky was a proud founder.

The remaining part of the Burbridge Colony would lay untouched until vandalism awakened this eternal community in the 1960's just off Route 50 outside of May's Landing. The Atlantic City Jewish Federation in conjunction with the Jewish funeral director Edwin Roth re-interred 46 graves to the Rodeph Sholom Hebrew Cemetery near Pleasantville in 1982. This was a rejoining of a people after 100 years had elapsed since the first Jew was buried in these parts.

### Reference Source Credit

Cemetery Records at the Atlantic County Historical Society  
Journal of American Cemeteries, 1982 by Samuel Borenstein

Courtesy of the May's Landing Public Library  
County Court House of Atlantic City in May's Landing, Deeds Dept.