

Southern New Jersey
SYNAGOGUES

A SOCIAL HISTORY

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

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Lebanon Williamstown

The Williamstown Land and Improvement Company was organized on April 4th, 1892. Its certificate of incorporation was recorded in book number 158 on page 472 in the county seat of Gloucester County at the Court House in Woodbury. The company set up an office at 204 South Seventh Street in Philadelphia. The purpose of this company was to sign up newly arriving immigrants to purchase land in Southern New Jersey for their future.

A company of Jews devised this land plan in Gloucester County in 1892. They purchased 1100 acres of land from M.M. Chew for \$ 1525. Mr. Chew had relatives in Gloucester County near Malaga. Jews would buy land here, too. It was by no accident that this proposition was spread by word of mouth to Mr. Chew's relative for the new settlement of what was to become Zionsville in 1892.

Joseph Greenbaum and wife Sarah, Herman Milder and his wife Tillie and David Amram of Philadelphia purchased land in Monroe Township outside of Williamstown. David Amram's family was prominent in Philadelphia's Jewry. David was the commissioner of Deeds in the State of New Jersey at this time. The Amram family was Austrian Hungarian in ethnic background. The Amram family started Mt. Carmel Hebrew Cemetery in Philadelphia up on the Frankford Pike.

Fifty acres of the land in Monroe Township laid along the North East side of the Williamstown-Winslow Road. The territory butted up against the Williamstown branch of the Atlantic City Railroad on its most Northern edge. This was a good distance past Jefferson Street. The Railroad had only been in existence for a short period of time before this era. The Railroad that ran West ended in Mullica Hill. Thus a connector line was accessible to Philadelphia.

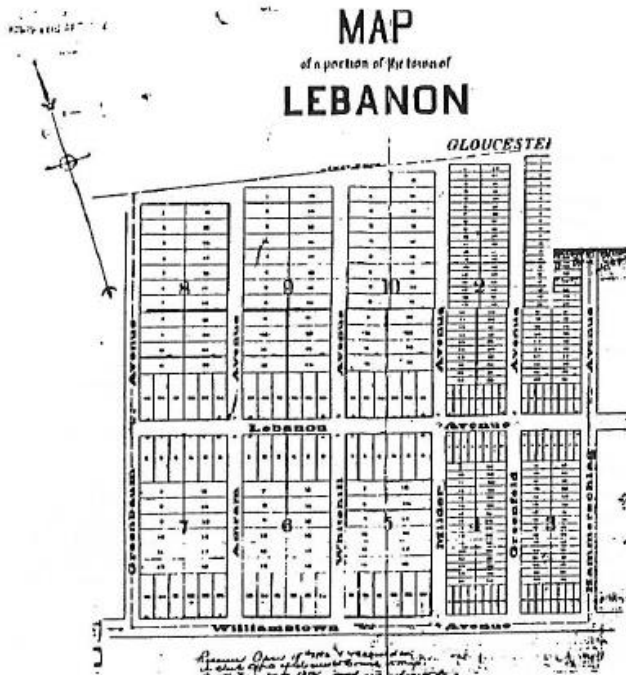
The land was laid out into lots and surveyed by Henry A. Gardiner Engineers at 329 Walnut Street in Philadelphia. This the town of Lebanon was projected for newly arriving Jewish immigrants. This land was targeted for a Jewish settlement but some lots were sold to non-Jews in the early period that the settlement was started.

Lots were sold in the usual 25 feet by 150 feet sizes for \$ 50. H.E. Waldman, Nathan Bershinsky, Louis Pomerantz, Herman Casparry, Harris Chasanowich, Meyer Markenwisch, Herman Schermer, Joann Falkenstein, Morris Satinsky, Samuel Goldman and Morris Zinman all bought lots.

The idea that newly arriving Austrian-Hungarian immigrants were settling in this area was a direct result of the benefactor found in David Amram. This was the time that the great Austrian Hungarian Synagogue in Philadelphia purchased and renovated the Wheatley Dramatic Hall at Fifth and Gaskill Streets.

A woman by the name of Ada Levy bought a lot. Phillip Sternberg bought two lots for \$ 75. Morris Fineman was the first settler in Lebanon. He bought three lots for \$ 100 on August 24, 1892.

MAP
of a portion of the town of
LEBANON



Lebanon Williamstown

The area developed and the racially slurred name of "Jewtown" was given to the area by the native population. Settlements and transactions of deeds occurred here until the early 1900's. Some Jews stayed on the land until the early 1910's. The Jews of Lebanon were numerous enough to conduct Jewish public worship services which requires 10 men or a quorum. A house was used for this activity and a Torah could easily be in the possession of one of the settlers. One of the settlers, Morris Satinsky relocated to Brotmanville by the year 1900.

This settlement served as other Southern New Jersey settlements to distribute the newly arriving Russian Jews. But in other parts of Southern New Jersey, settlements of this kind were just land schemes. This community was far more than that idea but it lacked the financial backing of the Baron De Hirsch Fund or the other Jewish Philanthropist who bought land for the resettlement of the newly arriving Jews. Jews stayed and built houses but by the early 1910's these Jews had scattered and disappeared from Lebanon.

It is known that the Clayton Jewish community was starting to take form and evolve some six miles west of this settlement in the early 1910's. The Jews quit the land early and returned it to the original land owners except for the Lebanon Tract.

Years after this event had occurred this road to the settlement would be known as Jewtown Road on the other side of New Brooklyn.

In Williamstown proper, some Jews did settle about this same time in the late 1910's. New immigration of Jews from Europe had brought more people to this area. Most of the newly arriving immigrants were Italians with some Jews mixed in.

The Greenberg's followed the early Jewish settlers to this area. The Greenbergs lived on Sicklerville Road leading out of Williamstown. These Jews were in the cattle business. The cattle were brought in on the trains that ran into town. These were dairy cows which were herded up Main Street and turned onto the Sicklerville Road to the Greenberg's place.

Harry and Isadore Greenberg were amongst the people that lived here. The Greenbergs brought other Jewish families to the area. Later, the Greenbergs resettled one by one to the Mt. Holly area. The Railroads ran out there from Camden to Trenton in Burlington County.

Another early time Williamstown Jewish family was found in Harry Slotnick. He had a small cattle business on the other side of town. Mr. Slotnick dealt in cattle behind the General store that existed where the Community Center in Williamstown is today. Behind the General store on Blue Bell Road that ends at the intersection of Main Street is a Bank which was built in the early 1900's. Harry's house and barn were back from the road up on the hill.

The Weiss family came town in the early 1920's. David Weiss and his family moved to Williamstown for health reasons. The town and area in those days had only some 900 folks. Today in 1987, Williamstown has grown to some 26,000 people. To David and his wife were born two boys and a daughter. Ben has lived near Williamstown all of his life.



Lebanon Williamstown

Ben was near Bar Mitzvah age by the time the family moved to this area. The Black Horse Pike as we know it today was not built yet in those days. It ran right down Main Street in Williamstown. Travel to the area was not by car but mostly by train. Later the buses would run in the late 1920's to the area from Philadelphia.

Ben's family being Jewish would mean that the whole mispoah would attend his Zayde's shul in South Philadelphia. His grandfather, Leon Weiss had organized the Roumanian Shul on South Sixth Street some two blocks above of Synder Avenue on the right hand side of the street going North. His Bubbe, Hannah, watched over Ben as he stayed in Philadelphia until his Jewish education and Bar Mitzvah were complete.

David Weiss was a tailor and opened up a shop in Williamstown. He started in a store on Main Street near the big white Methodist Church building. Later, David would expand the shop to include the making of work pants. The Italians started settling into the area to tend the glass making factory. There was a ready market for these pants!

The store grew into a market for Men's and Boy's wear. David Weiss would even incorporate a toy line as his Department store expanded. They would deal with my mother's family. Louis Ponnock was in the wholesale toy business at Fifth and Market streets at the end of the 1920's. The toy line was put in only for the Christmas season.

The family would return to Philadelphia for Yontav. Later this was shortened by attending the Clayton Synagogue some short distance from Williamstown.

After the Second World War, a German refugee family moved in and settled on a chicken farm outside of town.

By the 1960's, Ben's father passed away. He was buried at the Montlefore Cemetery outside of Philadelphia in Rock Ledge. Ben ran the store until retiring in the early 1970's. Ben had some thoughts on being Jewish in a non-Jewish environment. He says, " that people go along with their upbringing." They tend to lose their habits after a period of time. His parents stopped keeping a strictly Kosher home in Williamstown. But you don't lose your Jewish feelings ever!

Since the late 1960's, a number of Jewish families have moved into the Williamstown area once more. New housing started to go up in the town and nearby and more Jews came to settle. In the late 1980's, there is a boom in housing taking place and Congregation B'nai Tikvah in Washington Township has attracted these Jews in the opposite direction only six miles away!

Reference Source Credit

Map of the area courtesy of the Monroe Historical Assoc.

Material on Jewtown in a pamphlet on the history of Monroe Township
Telephone Interview with Ben Weiss December 1st, 1987

Information leading to the discovery of Jews in the area by conversion with my mother and father-in-laws: Gloria and Bob Manusov who moved to the area in the spring of 1987 on Malaga Road off of Route 322.

Deeds and Records at the Gloucester County Court House in Woodbury.

History of the Hungarian Synagogue, Emunath Israel-
Oheb Sholom by Harry Beichtman : 1967; Jewish Archives, Philadelphia