

Southern New Jersey
SYNAGOGUES

A SOCIAL HISTORY

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

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Mizpah

It is doubtful that May's Landing ever had a Jewish congregation. But Jewish settlements did develop nearby and outside of May's landing. Rachel Widlansky, Morris wife helped in the humanitarian needs of Jews in May's Landing. In the early 1890's, she would bring two Jewish men Passover dinners in the city jail. They refused to eat the meals provided not because they were Jews but because it was Passover! Keeping to the Kosher dietary laws were more practiced at this time than most of the regular year then as now. Their crime was that of being accused of stealing harnesses in a common stable. The penalty as handed down by the Constable in May's Landing was 60 to 90 days in jail.

Mizpah was founded as a Jewish settlement some 6 miles outside of May's Landing. A New York cloak manufacturer conceived the idea for finding cheap labor for his business. The community was laid out as a town. Streets were drawn and lots were sold. The railroad that ran into May's Landing on its way to the shore was convenient for development along its right of way. The Railroads wanted this kind of development. The idea of real estate for the Railroads turned out to be very profitable. This same railroad would connect to Philadelphia via Camden.

The idea of an agricultural settlement was limited by the nearby swamps but not ruled out. This would be a factory town. Mizpah in Hebrew means Lookout. In Biblical times a community named Mizpah existed. This community would be a center of Jewish Life as the Biblical town by the same name.

Blumenathal and Daniels manufactured children's clothing and arrived in town soon after it started. Many different Jewish societies were interested in the success of this community. But this settlement was to be no different than the one founded and started by a now-Jew in R.C. Burbridge. True independent communities would need a tremendous amount of capital to guarantee their success. The Jewish societies of the era did help in allotting money for Mizpah in early 1891. A post office was established here in June of 1892. Mr. Moses Lerman was the post master at that time.

This community had real hope in their future. But the Baron De Hirsch Fund was newly created about this time. The experience of the success of the Jewish Colonies of Southern Jersey needed to be duplicated in other parts of the country. This concept of a successful Jewish immigrant colony was an ever evolving proposition. Maurice Baron De Hirsch wanted to see this dream come true for many more Jewish immigrants to America. But the idea of agriculture as the only means to this end was disputed only ten short years after the founding of the Alliance and Carmel Colonies. Something of substance and a more long lasting nature had to be done to impact on the newly arriving Russian Jews as immigrants. A community planned and laid out with agricultural and factories was this next step in this evolutionary process.

This model town and community was conceived as Mizpah was coming to life. The names of the streets of both communities were similar. Both would be located on a Railroad line.

Mizpah

Both would have industry and factories. But the main difference would be found in their benefactors. Woodbine was totally supported by the Baron De Hirsch Fund whether it would fail or succeed. Capital was needed for Mizpah to insure the continued success of the settlement.

There was a keen sense of competition between these towns. They would draw from many eager Russian refugees. Bigger meant better in this case. The Baron De Hirsch fund would privateer away businesses that agreed to come to Mizpah and set up shop there. Free lighting and low cost energy to run the factories were offered as incentives to lure these factories into Woodbine and not Mizpah. This worked but Mizpah survived this unfriendly attack and managed to create a small independent Jewish community or settlement. Its success would be measured in the number of years it took to build its own Jewish house of worship. The idea of a such a lure was hopeful. The decision to go ahead and build a synagogue was a bold one! By December 31, 1895, the Mizpah synagogue was dedicated and opened. Rev. DR. J.B. Grossman of Philadelphia consecrated this shul a full year ahead of Woodbine's Synagogue. Good advertising and promotion of one community in the end amounted to success or failure. But the amount of funds each benefactor had or was willing to spend was the cutting edge.

Thirteen houses were built and some factories were opened in Mizpah. Twenty five to thirty five Jewish families would call Mizpah home. But the age of the factory gave way to more agriculture in the early 20th century. The idea of the communal Jewish settlement helped this community get its start. But the evolution of this process to better serve the needs of the newly arriving Jewish immigrant was still emerging in the early 1900's. This did not include factory work as the basis for the immigrant community to survive. Funds did run out in Mizpah and Atlantic City's Jewish community was prospering. Some Jews chose to go there, too. Mizpah failed to attract new immigrants and the businesses moved to more prominent locations. That being in Woodbine. The families followed the factories to Woodbine. This left Mizpah in a sad state of affairs.

Thus Mizpah became a place where individual Jews could live. That meant that the benefactor stopped supporting the concept of settlement and with drew his capital and left Mizpah. The railroad, the post office and the synagogue were still there but the backbone of the plan was missing for future growth and development. Mizpah continued to be an individual Jewish settlement.

The post office became the center of Mizpah. Isaac Aaron followed Moses Lerman in 1893. Isaac remained the post master until 1907. Then came along Paris Aaron. In time Paris Warwell took the job in 1915 and served until 1942. The old post office building was only a one room house and out lasted even the synagogue itself. By the 1930's, both buildings were demolished.



Mizpah

Mizpah has a legend that goes along with its name. This name was considered to be a good luck happening. A coin that was separated into two pieces came to symbolize this community. This was a settlement that was made up of tight knit Jewish families.

Unity and the Jewish religion was what keep them together. Marget Bromley Aaron was born in 1897. Her family came to Mizpah when she was eight years old in 1905. Morris Aaron, her husband in later years was already living in the community. Morris was born in 1897 to Paris and Dora Aaron. Paris being post master at the time was considered to be a communal leader. Morris had a sister who was born in 1894 and another sister born in 1898. Paris brother, Isaac ran the post office in the 1890's. Paris came to Mizpah as a manufacturer of clothing.

Pieces of clothing were sent from New York for the farmers to work on them in their own homes at night in Mizpah. Originally the factory made ladies wear. Paris Aaron as Margaret recalls came from Russia in the early 1890's and quickly settled in Southern New Jersey. He spoke no English.

The synagogue for the community was located one block over from the main street named for Baron De Hirsch. The shul was located on the left hand side of Jefferson Avenue between what is now Route 40 and Railroad Boulevard. The synagogue served the colonists from the 1890's until the period before the First World War. It was then used as a residence and occupied by a black man named Mr. Mc Coy.

The development and movement of families according to Jewish Colony preference in the Aaron family was representative of the community. In the early 1900's, Paris two brothers, Moses and Solomon lived in Mizpah. Later they migrated to Carmel to be with other Jews.

The Aaron's were one of the last Jewish families in Mizpah and were the keepers of the synagogue. They would watch over the synagogue and insure it was open for services. Other families would leave for May's Landing in the early 1940's when Jews came to the area as Refugees and became poultry farmers.

By the 1930's, few Jewish families lived in Mizpah. One such family was the Dietch family. Another family was the Rathblatt's. Nathan Rathblatt was a realtor. He made up pamphlets of Mizpah to help him with his business.

Maraget tells of the story of Dr. Goldstein from Woodbine. He had relatives in Europe during the Second World War. As children in Europe they shared a amulet or coin. Each one had half of this coin. Upon not hearing from one another for a long time, letters were exchanged and signed, MIZPAH!

Morris and Maraget were married for many years. Morris passed away in 1974 at age 81. He is survived by his wife Maraget, who is 90 years old. All the Aaron's are buried in the Carmel Hebrew Cemetery.

Reference Source Credit

TELEPHONE INTERVIEW
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