



Growing American: The Alliance Agricultural Colony in South Jersey

- **Opening Reception:**
Third Thursday,
October 21, 2021
5:00 – 7:00 pm

OVERVIEW: This is the story of Alliance and related Jewish farming communities in Southern New Jersey, which had their inception during the initial years of refugee crisis, 1882 and 1883. Fueled by a desire to escape violence, suppressed freedoms and prejudice, Eastern European Jews fled Russia seeking the opportunity to become “Tillers of the Soil” and, eventually, American citizens. The development of the Alliance Agricultural Colony, as well as its sister communities, reflects a variety of challenges faced by the families who built these communities. Their adoption of American pastimes show their desire to embrace American culture while maintaining their religious beliefs.



Nine year old Joseph Greenblatt in his garden, 1907.

IMMIGRATION:

Assassination of Tsar Alexander II

Throughout the nineteenth century, Jews in Russia were generally restricted to living in the Pale of Settlement, a western region of the Russian Empire that included such cities as Minsk, Lodz, Kiev, Odessa and Elizavetgrad. Here permanent Jewish residency was allowed. In other territories, residency, permanent or temporary, was mostly forbidden. Throughout the Pale opportunities for education, occupations, and religious freedom were distinctly unequal to the non-Jewish population.

Alexander II of Russia, Tsar of Russia from 1855 until his assassination in 1881, attempted to steer the Russian empire toward modernity. He abolished serfdom in 1861, giving Russian peasants their freedom and allowing them to purchase land from landlords; he reorganized the judicial system; promoted self government; and curbed some privileges of the nobility. He sold Alaska to the United States. His liberal tendencies, however, did not placate all of Russia. Throughout his reign, revolutionary and anarchistic movements required suppression, especially after the Polish Uprising of 1863. On March 13, 1881, he was assassinated by a team of bomb-throwing anarchists.

Under Alexander III, who succeeded his father and had witnessed the assassination, the Russian Empire returned to autocratic and repressive rule with freedoms heavily suppressed. In May of 1881, the *May Laws* were enacted, severely limiting the rights of Jews throughout Russia: Jews could no longer settle

outside of towns or boroughs, could not hold mortgages or deeds to property, were forbidden from doing business on Sundays and principal Christian holy days. The limited tolerance that had developed allowing Jews to live outside of the Pale was largely restricted.

The pogroms of 1881, carried out by Christian Russians, began shortly after the assassination of the Tsar. Violent riots erupted in waves across southwestern Russia, first in Elisavetgrad on April 15, and then in other cities including Odessa, spreading from the large cities to surrounding villages. Contemporary scholars believe much of the destruction was aimed toward Jewish property rather than bodily harm. Millions of rubles worth of Jewish property was destroyed. Contemporary descriptions of the pogroms, printed in newspapers across Europe and America, were shocking:

During the year 1881 in 160 towns of southern and western Russia there prevailed a fierce persecution of religion and of race. Murder, rapine, arson and theft swept these communities like a conflagration. The helpless Hebrews were slaughtered, their women outraged, their children's brains dashed upon the pavements; property was plundered, homes were burned to ashes. For nine horrid months these Christian saturnalia prevailed, and finally at Warsaw Christmas day was celebrated by the pillage and desolation of 300 Jewish homes and 600 Jewish shops. (From *The Jewish Tribune*, March 16, 1883)¹

When news of these atrocities reached Western Europe and the Americas, charitable aid organizations went into action, in particular the Alliance Israélite Universelle, founded in Paris in 1860, which pledged to defend the honor of the Jewish name and to assist Jews anywhere in need. Working with various levels of efficiency and support, agencies began to prepare for an influx of refugees. Families who could flee the Pale did so, arriving in Western Europe, where they were soon redirected to North and South America.

Arriving in America

In late 1881, Russian Jewish emigrants began arriving in America by the thousands, with most disembarking at the New York City docks in lower Manhattan. Castle Garden, located in Battery Park at the tip of Manhattan, became the emigrant landing depot, functioning as the New York State immigrant registration center and de facto entrance point for most of the East Coast.

Remembering this day many years later, founding settlers described being “dumped” at the rail station. Carrying all their earthly belongings from Russia, not much, they tramped two miles on foot to three long, wooden barracks, recently built in anticipation of their arrival. These barracks, situated on a hill overlooking the Maurice River, were dubbed “Castle Garden,” an ironic nod toward the initial point of entry for immigrants into the United States. The better known Ellis Island took its place as the emigrant landing center in 1892. The Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society of New York (HEAS), had purchased twelve hundred acres from the Leach brothers and paid them to make initial preparations for



Interior of Castle Gardens, *Harper's Magazine*, Mar. 1871, p. 551. Courtesy of the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

¹ “Russian Refugees,” *The Jewish Tribune* (St. Louis, Missouri), March 16, 1883, p. 9.

the colonists, first building the barracks and later building houses for each family.

Becoming “Tillers of the Soil”

In the midst of the 1881 pogroms, a group of Russian Jewish intellectuals formulated the idea of *Am Olam*, the belief that Jews “should go to America to become tillers of the soil and thus shake off the accusation that we were mere petty mercenaries, living upon the toil of others” (Sidney Bailey, *Yoval*). According to Sidney Bailey, a founder of the *Am Olam* chapter in Odessa and an early colonist of Alliance,

Our thought was to live in the open instead of being “shut ins” who lived an artificial city life. We desired to be dependent for our living upon the elements of Father Sun and Mother Earth instead of depending upon the whims of others. We desired to lead a real healthy and honorable mode of life. We were not to be, at our farm vocation, jealous and envious one of another, but to live upon our own resources with the help only of nature. Our goal was to own a home and land as a means of earning a livelihood, and to be true citizens of our adopted country. (Yoval 12)²

For most Jews, the drive behind emigration was not a yearning for the land, but rather for safety and freedom. They poured into the port of New York, and to a lesser extent Philadelphia and Boston. Most were destitute, or nearly so, and in need of assistance in order to gain a foothold in the United States.

In New York City, in December 1881, the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society (HEAS) was incorporated and began its work as the most consequential American Jewish relief organization of the period. For a brief time the HEAS was involved in agricultural colonization; the society was the first to support the farming colonies of Alliance and Rosenhayn in southern New Jersey, as well as colonies further west. Sheer numbers overwhelmed its efforts. Immigrants arriving daily at the Castle Garden needed food, shelter, and some means of employment. The cost of supplying these immediate needs quickly precluded expenditures on resettlement to far-flung agricultural colonies.

By 1883, the HEAS, along with European efforts by the Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Mansion House Relief Fund, had turned away from colonization, disenchanted by repeated failures and the great expense. When the influx of immigrants decreased after the temporary cessation of pogroms, the HEAS believed the crisis was at an end; it closed up shop by the end of March 1883. The birth of Alliance was therefore a momentary possibility. Several farming colonies that preceded it (and followed) failed after short periods of trial.

Arrival at Alliance

In the spring of 1882, on May 10th, a train stopped at Bradway Station on the New Jersey Central Railroad, in Pittsgrove Township. Forty-three Russian Jewish families disembarked from emigrant cars. These were the inaugural settlers of Alliance Colony. Soon they were joined by other refugee families and together, with the help and support of philanthropists, government workers, and local community members, these newest of immigrants, almost wholly untrained in agriculture, made Alliance their home and the first successful Jewish farming community in America.

² Sidney Bailey, “The First Fifty Years,” *Yoval: A Symposium upon the First Fifty Years of the Jewish Colonies of Alliance, Norma and Brotmanville, New Jersey* (The Committee on Arrangements, 1932), 12.



A photo of the last barracks, c. 1889. When construction of individual houses was complete in early 1883, two of three barracks were dismantled. The remaining structure was used first as a cigar factory, then as a shirt factory; it then served as temporary, free housing for new settlers, dubbed as “Castle Garden. From Moses Klein, *Migdal Zophim* (1889).

The story of their arrival survives in two versions. One states that tents had been provided for the initial use of the new arrivals through the good efforts of Augustus Seeman, a leading Vineland citizen and commissioner of Immigration for New Jersey. Quickly, three long, wooden barracks were built.

The second version omits the tents and describes the rush to prepare the barracks before the arrival of the colonists. The largest of the three buildings was about 20 feet by 100 and housed 26 families. They were situated on a hill overlooking the Maurice River. The Leach brothers, local sawmill operators, erected the timber framing and exterior of the barracks. Colonists with carpentry experience completed the interiors. Each family had their own living space—a small, cramped room located along a central passageway. A bed, table, chairs, and storage shelves fit into these quarters. Here each family set up housekeeping. There were no indoor cooking facilities, and only one barracks had a stove.

Colonists cooked outside in a communal kettle. Visitors

described the scene as reminiscent of a gypsy encampment. Commissioner Seeman brokered the purchase of twelve hundred acres by the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society of New York (HEAS) from the Leach brothers. Seeman at the time maintained an office in Castle Garden, New York, and was in an excellent position to advertise the desirability of South Jersey. He also owned a major share of a local Vineland realty firm.

HEAS purchased the land from the Leach brothers and engaged them to make physical preparations for the colonists, first building the barracks and later individual houses. In the early days, colonists had no horses or wagons to travel to Vineland and Bridgeton. A store provisioned by the Leach brothers provided the necessities of life, paid for by HEAS.

COLONIES:

Early Struggles

The Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society, with financial support from the Alliance Israélite Universelle in France and the Mansion House Relief Fund in England, financed the purchase of the initial land, supplies, and provided living expenses for the Alliance farmers. Between May and November 1882 expenditures by HEAS were significant:

Land and improvements	\$12,129.92
Maintenance and “Final Relief”	\$19,049.02
New Housing	\$9,897.77
Transportation	<u>\$883.72</u>
	\$41,960.42

Sixth months after arriving at the colony, the settlers were in homes, with mortgages set at \$350 payable over ten years with interest. They had begun working their land, but there would be no harvest for at least six months. They were going to be strapped to survive. Throughout the initial harvest season, with few crops of their own to tend, the settlers walked long distances to serve as harvest labor

for Salem and Cumberland county farmers. Often walking eight miles one way, or more, they picked berries, scooped cranberries, and did whatever they could to find work.

The first full planting season at Alliance was difficult. The inexperienced farmers were still preparing their lands, sometimes plowing around stumps. HEAS had provided seed, but the need for continued support was quite real. Life was hard. Remembering those early years, Sidney Baily described “when many a rib was broken as we ran into a stump while plowing or cultivating” (*Yoval*). During 1883, the Alliance Colony property was brought under the control of the Alliance Land Trust, whose members drew largely from the recently dissolved HEAS.

Documents, part of the Judge I. Harry Levin Collection, graciously loaned by Marsha Levin Schumer, suggest the growing impatience between the supporting philanthropists and the colonists. Many of these documents are addressed to Moses Bayuk who was a lawyer in Russia before his emigration to America; he was skilled in several languages. In the early years, Bayuk served as secretary to the colony, corresponding with aid agencies in Paris, London, New York, and Philadelphia who helped to support the colony. In later years, Bayuk served as a justice of the peace in Pittsgrove Township.

In a printed letter dated December 31, 1884, Henry S. Henry of the Alliance Land Trust addresses Moses Bayuk and all other colonists announcing that no more support could be provided. A second full planting season had arrived and passed. The Trust, as of yet, had received no mortgage or interest payments from colonists. Nor had the colonists been responsible for tax payments. A purchase of land from the Leach brothers is mentioned: this was additional farmland purchased by new colonists who arrived after the original 1,200 acres had been allocated. Nothing would give the Trust greater pleasure, says Henry, than that the colonists should become independent without aid. This letter suggests that the time for that independence had arrived.

In an eloquent four-page response to Henry S. Henry, signed by secretary of the colony, Moses Bayuk, and printed for distribution, the colonists reply to the Alliance Land Trust. In brief, they describe their inexperience, language barriers, and a difficult growing season in 1884.

“With our very limited resources in actual money we have not been able to plant all the fruit trees and vines that ought now to be growing. We have no horses to do our plowing and no plows with which to plow, even if he had the horses, and no money to employ others to do our plowing. It is now time to be making preparations, but being without seed and without ways to earn money, how can we get along?”³

By the harvest of 1887, Alliance Colony, though not wealthy, was becoming self-sufficient. Farms were productive and livelihoods were adequate. In September, representatives from the Alliance Land Trust visited from New York on an eagerly looked-for visit. Believing that the colony was finally on a solid footing, they distributed to the colonists deeds for their farms. They were also celebrating the chartering of a new synagogue that would be completed the next year, Eben Ha 'Ezer Synagogue (Emanu-el). At this date, Castle Garden was still in use as the synagogue. By the early 1890s, many Alliance farmers were secure in their finances, though not all as letters from Simon Muhr, of

³ Moses Bayuk for the Colonists, “Printed Report on the Alliance Colony,” undated, but with handwritten notation dated January 1, 1885.

Philadelphia, suggest. As late as 1909, the Alliance Land Trust was writing to colonists asking those in arrears to pay their debts.

Rise and Collapse of the Estellville Colony

The colonies established in 1882 each experienced severe hardships: Alliance, Rosenhayn, Carmel and Estellville. Only one failed, Estellville, also called Burbridge, and its history is not well known. Luckily, Carl Farrell, Andrew Almanza and Mark Demitroff, three talented local historians, have worked diligently to uncover the history of this colony. The details that follow derive from their research.

Estellville Colony was an inadequately financed venture located in southeastern Atlantic County, New Jersey, near present-day Estell Manor. At its start, the principal players included Stephen G. Burbridge, Matthew Whillden (or Whilden), the Estell family, and the HEAS.

Stephen Gano Burbridge, whose name was associated with the colony, was born in Scott County, Kentucky, in 1831. He attended Georgetown College and Kentucky Military Institute, practiced law, and engaged in farming. In the Civil War, he fought for the Union, being commissioned as colonel of the 26th Kentucky Infantry on August 27, 1861, and brigadier general of volunteers from June 9, 1862. Burbridge took part in the battle of Shiloh, the expedition which reduced the Post of Arkansas, and the Vicksburg campaign. Early in 1864 he succeeded General Jeremiah T. Boyle in the command of the District of Kentucky. In this position he was deeply unpopular. He held extensive civil and military powers over the citizens of Kentucky. Among his arbitrary measures were the arrest of persons suspected of opposing the reelection of Lincoln; the regulation of commodity prices to force farmers to sell to the Federal government at figures below the Cincinnati market; and the establishment of a system of reprisals against civilians to suppress guerrilla depredations. Relieved from his command in January 1865, Burbridge resigned his commission that year. After the Civil War, he and his family were socially and financially ostracized in Kentucky and he found it necessary to move east.

Matthew Whillden was born in Philadelphia in 1827. He graduated from the University of Pennsylvania Law School and was very briefly associated with the firm of J. R. Dickerson before he moved to Cincinnati to become a schoolteacher early in 1855. He enlisted in the 83rd Ohio Infantry Regiment in 1862 and during the Arkansas campaign served as personal aide to General Burbridge. After the war he pursued work as a newspaper editor in Galveston, Texas. His writing was partisan, and at least once he had a very public bender when he was supposed to pursue an important news story. News articles in the 1870s connect Whillden to shady railroad/immigration schemes, in particular Peirce's (or Pierce's) Road to be built around San Antonio.

Whillden's father was born and lived in Cape May County, New Jersey. We presume that Matthew was familiar with that county and southern Atlantic County. It was probably through family connections that he and General Burbridge approached Rebecca Smith Estell and/or her daughter Annie Estell about the purchase of a large tract of land owned by them.

Recognizing the plight of Jewish refugees who were arriving in large numbers throughout 1882, and perhaps sensing a profitable venture, Burbridge and Whillden devised a plan to purchase land from the Estells and to create a colony similar to Alliance, Rosenhayn and Carmel. Their plans are first mentioned in *The Jewish Messenger*, October 13, 1882. Burbridge had met with the executive committee of the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society, presented a plan for a colony near Vineland, "suggesting very liberal terms," and impressed the committee who quickly agreed. Although late in the year, implementation

moved rapidly. By October 26, 1882, it was reported in the *Vineland Evening Journal* that General Burbridge and Colonel Whilldin had made a contract with the HEAS to locate sixty new families on the Estell tract. This was the same week, in late October, that houses and farms were being distributed to the sixty-seven families at Alliance.

With the support of HEAS, colonists at Estellville would be furnished with fifteen acres of land, a cottage house with necessary household furniture, farming implements, and domestic animals. General Burbridge, who had considerable farming experience, planned to reside at the colony and instruct the colonists in agriculture as A. C. Sternberg had been doing at Alliance.

The essential features of their plan, described in an article in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* dated November 4, 1882, were that the colonists were not to be left in large cities, but placed in comfortable homes, with every provision absolutely necessary for their success, and then placed entirely upon their own peculiar resources, not one dollar of further relief being extended. "Their manhood is respected and their right to fully dispose of their time and property fully recognized. No doubt is entertained of the success of this magnificent undertaking." Doubt should have been entertained. Approximately twenty families from the Alliance colony, only six months old at the time, split off from that colony and settled in Estellville.

Despite the promised resources, life in Estellville did not go smoothly. The first colonists arrived at the end of the year, when no planting could be done and laborious wood chopping was the only readily available job. The HEAS provided very modest stipends, yet soon at least some of the colonists were going hungry. In late January of 1883, two months after the arrival of settlers, seventeen families, comprising seventy men, women, and children were reported to have walked back to Alliance, with what bedding, bags, and bundles that could be carried. Arriving in Alliance they took up residence in one of the three large barracks, recently abandoned as Alliance colonists moved into their own homes. Newspaper articles reported that they took possession of the barracks "by breaking the doors and windows." The next day these pitiable refugees, upon being told by an agent of the HEAS to abandon the building, instead held him hostage until \$50 was produced.

Those who remained at Estellville did not do so for long. The land was poor for farming, and a drought that first growing season of 1883 made it nearly impossible to produce adequate crops. A cottage fire in August of that summer killed two children, an eleven-year-old girl and eight-year-old boy, while also severely injuring their mother. To make things more bleak, General Burbridge was not as present on-site as he had promised to be. Because of these factors, many of the refugees could not make payments on the \$600 each family owed to the HEAS and colonists began to move to larger cities for work. Reports of the colony's dissolution began to appear in June of 1883. By December of that year, only a year after its founding, Estellville Colony was deserted by nearly all of its inhabitants.

Sister Colony - Rosenhayn

Rosenhayn, like Alliance, was established and for a brief time supported by the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society. It was located about six miles south of Alliance on the New Jersey Central Railroad, midway between Bridgeton and Vineland. Six families were first settled on the site, but lack of funds, poor soil, and disease led to abandonment of the site until a second effort was made in 1887, when Jewish settlers, attracted by the growing success of Alliance, returned. The economy of Rosenhayn was more inclined to industry, although Jewish farms were always part of the community. By 1889 close to 300

Jews lived in Rosenhayn, most employed in nearby Vineland or Bridgeton or the local shirt factory. The colony continued to develop and by 1900 it had developed into a handsome village of 800, with the population about equally divided between industrial and agricultural pursuits.

Sister Colony - Carmel

The colony at Carmel was always a bit different from Alliance and Rosenhayn. It was located on land owned by W. H. Miller, a land developer who had first attracted German immigrants to the property, which straddled Millville and Deerfield townships, about two and a half miles southeast of Rosenhayn. Productivity did not meet the Germans' expectations and they returned to Philadelphia. Miller then worked with Michael Heilprin, an ardent supporter of Jewish agricultural colonies, who in 1882 brought seventeen Jewish families to restart the colony.



Irving Avenue, Carmel, c. 1907. While the building on the right looks like a schoolhouse, it is actually one of the settlement's garment factories. *Image courtesy of Mickey Smith.*

The families began by renting houses from Miller and working the land as tenants. The stony ground was difficult to farm and as some families left they were replaced by others. Heilprin, who had been a member of HEAS, after its dissolution in 1883, provided modest support for the colony through his Montefiore Agricultural Aid Society. MAAS did not have the resources of other aid agencies and was not able to purchase land or houses for the settlers. Accordingly, the settlers, as they grew accustomed to the area, began to build their own homes with mortgages chiefly obtained from the Bridgeton Building Association. At Heilprin's death in 1888, Carmel had 286 colonists and was in dire financial straits with the Building Association foreclosing on properties. Only the timely aid of a \$5,000 grant from the Baron de Hirsch allowed the community to survive and, eventually, succeed.

Carmel had the reputation of being the colony for radicals and intellectuals. Arthur Goldhaft, a well-known veterinarian in the area and son of Alliance settlers, described Carmel as "composed of intellectuals, even atheists, anarchists and the like. It was actually whispered that certain couples among them were unmarried and were practicing free love" (Goldhaft, *The Golden Egg*, 50–51).

Lessons

In the aftermath of the Russian pogroms of 1881–1882, some eighteen or twenty thousand Russian Jews arrived in America. These refugees were examined at ports of entry, but no governmental programs existed to support, educate or acclimate them to America. What support they received was from family and friends who had arrived before them, often slender support, and from philanthropic agencies, mostly Jewish in origin. During these first years several hundreds of thousands of dollars were raised for this assistance, a significant portion going to the creation of agricultural colonies. Colonies were established in Louisiana, Oregon, Virginia, Arkansas, the Dakotas and Oregon. Even with Estellville in mind, the New Jersey colonies fared better than nearly all the rest. The expense of creating and maintaining colonies until such time as they would be self-sufficient was simply too great.

GAINING CITIZENSHIP:

Not long after the event, Moses Klein reported that no less than eighty Alliance farmers made their way

to the Salem County Courthouse on October 22, 1889 and signed their second petitions for naturalization (the first being made two years previously). With this, they became United States citizens. Having examined the “Petitions for Naturalization 1888–1895,” we only find 44 petitions for citizenship that day. Still, this a large portion of the Alliance community, all men, the heads of households.

George W. Leach served as witness to nearly all the petitions. His signature attests to his oath that he was acquainted with each petitioner, and that to his knowledge and belief that petitioner had lived in New Jersey for five years and “that during the same period he has behaved himself as a man of good moral character, attached to the principles of the Constitution of the United States, and well disposed to the good order and happiness of the same.”

On subsequent dates, other Alliance, Norma, and Brotmanville community members received citizenship; the names of those that we have identified through 1895 are included here. For witnesses, these later citizens had other colonists—in particular Joseph Rudnick, Israel Opachinsky, Isaac Krassenstein and Solomon Salonsky—who had received their citizenship on October 22, 1889.

A GROWING AMERICAN SOCIETY:

Feshel Stavitsky & Family

Elias and Riva Gital Stavitsky arrived in Alliance on May 10, 1882, one of the forty-three founding families. Along with Moses Bayuk, Eli had scouted out the ground that was selected for Alliance. From Russia, he and his wife had brought among what little they could a *Sefer Torah*, a scroll containing the five books of Moses. It was important to the community. They were successful, cultivating a productive farm of fifteen acres, described as one of “the best little farms around here,” by neighbor J. C. Reis, who also describe Eli as a cheerful man. He and Riva Gitel had two sons and a daughter.

Their oldest son Feshel (nick named Fish) married Shifra Hoffman and by 1900 had two sons. Living on Eli’s small farm with a growing family, Fish hoped to purchase his own farm but his loan application to the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society (JAIAS), the lending arm of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, was denied. Needing to support his family, which by 1905 had grown to four sons and a daughter, Fish found work in a Philadelphia factory where in 1907 he died in an typhoid epidemic. He was thirty-three years old.

Shifra was left with five young children, and for a year the JAIAS grudgingly supported the family with a stipend of \$10 a month. Her application for a second year of support, however, was denied as the mission of the agency was to help farmers, not to provide charity. Facing necessity, Shifra left her oldest son Jacob with her father- and mother-in-law on the original Stavitsky farm; Jake was around fourteen years old and would be good help.

Shifra’s three other sons, Eddie aged nine, Benny aged six, and Barney aged five, were placed in the Hebrew Orphan Home of Philadelphia. Shifra took a room in Philadelphia, found work at a sewing factory, and kept her little daughter Rose aged two with her.

At that time, there were two divisions in the Hebrew Orphan Home, one for older boys, where Eddie was placed, and the other for younger boys, where Benny and Barney went to live. Shifra and Rosie

would take the streetcar when they could to visit the boys, making the effort to keep the family together.

When they first entered the orphanage, Benny and Barney were young enough that, upon graduation to the older division, they did not remember their bother. Both boys gravitated toward sports and baseball players and they began to hear about a terrific ball player named Sweeny Stavitsky. Only when they met him did they reunite with their older brother Eddie. When old enough to leave the orphanage, all three boys took jobs in Philadelphia and lived with their mother and sister in a rented row house on South Second Street. Shifra also rented to boarders, often the boys' friends from the orphanage.

Meanwhile, Jake remained on the farm in Alliance. He was an outgoing young man and made friends with all the young people in the area, Jewish and non Jewish. He came to enjoy the pastimes of many of his South Jersey friends—hunting, fishing, and all sorts of sports. His younger brothers, who looked up to him, came to enjoy those pastimes as well.

When Jake inherited the farm upon the death of his grandparents, he made his brothers a deal. They could come live on the farm and make it their own. Barney, the youngest brother, remained in Philadelphia, living with his mother and sister in a row house that Shifra had saved enough money to purchase. He visited his brothers as often as he could. Over time, the Stavitsky boys became well-known locally for their back-to-the-land ways. They enjoyed rural life. They lived in the farmhouse provided to Eli and Riva Gitel in 1882, slightly enlarged, but with few modernizations. The house had been wired for electricity, but the only running water came from a hand pump, and their bathroom was an outhouse.

A distinctive feature of the Stavitsky home were collages of arrowheads set into plaster on the walls. Eddie and Barney became expert at finding arrowheads in the neighboring fields. Ben set them in artistic patterns on the walls. Barney described their method for finding Native American artifacts to Rich Brotman: "Walking into the sun you can't see anything, so always keep the sun at your back. That's how we were able to find what the other guys couldn't see 'em. We come right in back of them and pick them up."

Louis Mounier

Starting in 1901, the newly formed Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society (JAIAS), a branch of the Baron de Hirsch Fund, began providing small grants in support of local farming and industry. It also worked to improve the cultural lives of settlers, hiring Louis Mounier as educational director of Alliance, Carmel and Rosenhayn. A talented portrait painter from France, Mounier moved to Vineland with his wife Gabrielle and with her help gave lectures, developed night schools for adult education, worked to improve libraries and social facilities, and even gave individual music lessons.

As a young man, Mounier (1852–1937) studied painting and sculpture at the Association Philotechnique in Paris where he received several prizes for his work. After his accomplishments in Paris, Mounier traveled to London, where he mastered English. From 1878–1894, he directed an art school in New York City, pioneering the training of aspiring painters for employment in the art industry. When Mounier and his wife moved to Vineland, his primary goal was to enhance community life throughout the colonies by sharing knowledge and artistic appreciation.

Mounier's compassion for the Jewish immigrant community is evident in an essay entitled "Trials and Hardships of Immigrants," written in 1913 and later published in *The Vineland Historical Magazine* in

1933. In touching detail, Mounier describes the arrival of Yenta Kleinfeld and her three children at the Bradway train station, two miles distant from the Alliance Colony. They were on the final leg of the arduous journey from Russia to join Joseph Kleinfeld, who had arrived a year earlier in the nascent Alliance colony. On this dark, cold and rainy evening, December 31, 1883, their arrival was unexpected. Mounier narrates the ultimately happy reunion.

Bessie Rothman, daughter of Louis and Annie Rothman, and sister of Lillian Rothman, was an industrious business woman in the Vineland area and deeply involved in the local PTA and Board of Education. She married Jake Stavitsky, grandson of founding colonists Eli and Riva Gitel Stavitsky. This portrait (pictured left) was painted by Louis Mounier and given to the Rothman family as a gift.

Sarah Bagnall Redpath (1859–1945) was the daughter of Thomas Bagnall, a successful farmer who arrived in Vineland shortly after the city was laid out by Charles K. Landis in 1861. She married Richard Redpath, and the couple lived on North Eighth Street in Vineland. Louis Mounier painted this portrait in 1925.

Communities Rally Around Baseball

At the turn of the century, there was limited entertainment beyond daily interactions with family and friends. Farm chores were a constant. Yet living close to the river there were outdoor diversions. Elizabeth Rudnick Levin, born in 1885, describes the joy of swimming in the Maurice River. Most of the activities she fondly remembers were labor intensive: berry picking in the hot sun and working in the canning factories. Saturday morning services at the synagogues were seemingly the only recreation for the wives of the young colony. There was no radio or television, no movies or card parties. Walks to the post-office “to get the mail” provided opportunities for young sweethearts to develop their relationships (and these walks resulted in at least one happy marriage).

There were dramatic presentations in Alliance Hall, located in the basement of Eben Ha 'Ezer Synagogue, but not many. Baseball was the one entertainment that all could enjoy, whether they attended the games in person or enjoyed game-day heroics second hand.

Local communities were baseball crazy with teams in nearly every town. A 1904 notice of the upcoming baseball season promised teams fielded by Williamstown, Glassboro, Millville, Pitman Grove, Clayton, Haddonfield and Merchantville, “but the most of these will not begin the season until after Decoration Day [Memorial Day], when the glass houses close for the season, as the majority of the players are employed in these places” (*Bridgeton Evening News*, Jan 28, 1904).

“The Norma A. A. included among its members residents of Norma, Alliance and Brotmanville. The baseball team was the major activity of the association. That, more than anything else,



The Norma Athletic Association's baseball team, 1904. Front row (left to right): Sam Curlett, Joe Doran, Toots Peterson; middle row: Andrew W. Beebe, Israel Goldstein, Jacob D. Spiegel, Emanuel Doroshow, Moe Spiegel; back row: Nathan Spiegel, Jacob Dittus, George H. Beebe. *Image courtesy of Marsha Levin Schumer for the Judge I. Harry Levin collection.*

gripped our youthful imagination, which showed that we were really Americans. The original team was uniformed in knickers and golf hose, the official bicycle uniform of the day. Every member of the team was literally worshipped by the youngsters. Connie Mack, Eddie Collins and Ty Cobb may have had their own admirers, but first in our hearts ranked “Jake” Dittis, “Jake” Spiegel, George Beebe and Bill Beebe, and the other members of that gallant team: Ben Dorshow, John Levin, Moe Spiegel and others whose names escape the memory.” Herman Eisenberg, Esq., in “The Golden Age,” *Yoval*, 1932 ⁴

Years after they had left, the Stavitsky boys maintained their connection with the Hebrew Orphan Home. Ed and Barney both played on the 1922 team: Ed was twenty-three and Barney, nineteen. Ed continued to play for many years.

Swimming

Swimming in the Maurice River was a community tradition passed from generation to generation. All who speak of it have fond memories. Elizabeth Rudnick Levin describes the first generation of settlers swimming “in the clear, cool, shallow waters of the Maurice River . . . Bathing suits, of course, were out of the question, and there would naturally result all sorts of embarrassing predicaments, when the more daring boys would disregard the rights of ‘possession’ and usurp the waters occupied by the weaker sex.” Later generations donned suits and trunks at the Norma-Alliance Beach, at the end of Eppinger Avenue, as shown below. By the 1950s the beach had a pavilion. Ruth Weinstein describes the pavilion this way: “The food concession was at the end to the right as one entered from the beach. Couples, gaggles of kids, and men and teen boys, taking breaks from their card games, ate their hotdogs and hamburgers, drank sodas or licked ice cream cones and popsicles. Two or three pinball machines occupied a strategic location near the jukebox in its out-of-the-way corner near the counter where we stood to order our food. Booths lined the walls most of the way back, leaving a longer than wide strip of space where we could dance on the wooden floor” (*Back to the Land: Alliance Colony to the Ozarks in Four Generations*).⁵

Norma Grade School

Education was very important to the growing community. A snapshot of the day-to-day school experience is found in three hand-made yearbooks that have survived from the early 1930s. Public School No. 9 on Gershal Avenue, the Norma Grade School (since razed for a replacement school), was a four-room wooden structure with two classrooms downstairs and two upstairs. The first and second grade room was located on one side of the first floor; across the hall were third and fourth graders. The yearbooks show that upstairs the fifth and sixth graders shared a room with Miss Lillian Rothman as their teacher; the seventh and eighth graders were across the hall taught by Miss Rose Sternberg. The school was heated with a pipeless heater with large metal grates in the floors, designed to allow the heat to rise and circulate. Students and teachers made use of outhouses.

How did combined classes function? After morning exercises, each classroom teacher gave an overall introduction, then assigned work to one group while teaching the other group reading, writing, or another subject. After a time, the arrangement was reversed. Students were respectful of teachers, and

⁴ Herman Eisenberg, “The Golden Age,” *Yoval: A Symposium upon the First Fifty Years of the Jewish Colonies of Alliance, Norma and Brotmanville, New Jersey* (The Committee on Arrangements, 1932), 25.

⁵ Ruth Weinstein, *Back to the Land: Alliance Colony to the Ozarks in Four Generations* (Galloway, NJ: The Alliance Heritage Center, 2020).

there may have been “helper” teachers in some rooms. Recess was half an hour in the morning and afternoon. Generally, the boys played on one side of the building while the girls played on the other.

The yearbooks chronicle the exploits of the sixth graders in the classes of 1931, 1932 and 1933. One yearbook is doubled, also providing details about the seventh grade class that arrived from Alliance for the 1931–32 school year. The Alliance Grammar School only had six grades. Pictures of students, with nicknames and descriptions of activities, are provided. There is a wonderful student-written “school song,” descriptions of sports and club activities, and descriptions of the annual May Day Pageant.

Synagogue Stories

The history of synagogues in South Jersey is a rich one. Alan Meyer’s *Southern New Jersey Synagogues: A Social History* is an excellent resource for those interested in learning about the people who built and prayed in each. Four synagogues were built in the communities which grew from the original Alliance Colony. The first was Eben Ha ’Ezer, Emanu-El Synagogue.

Alan Meyers describe Emanu-El synagogue this way: “Its brick foundation symbolized a strong beginning in a new land. Its high steps reminded everyone in the climb upward in one’s daily life to meet the rigors of Agricultural life! For some odd reason that can be verified with old photographs there never seemed to be any railings leading up to the sanctuary doors. One is led to believe that each Jew must balance his daily life with religion if he is to succeed and thus climb the ladder of life.” The synagogue no longer stands, having fallen into disuse and been taken down in the 1920s.

Construction on the Brotmanville Synagogue began in 1900, although completion was delayed when a summer storm blew down the partially finished building. It was soon put to rights and the synagogue incorporated in 1902. It was last used in 1979 for High Holiday Services. After that, it was left unused and untouched. In the early 1980s, Jay Greenblatt, whose grandfather had helped to build Brotmanville, supervised the closing of the synagogue, transferred the three Torahs to other synagogues, and removed the Bima and Ark to the Chapel at the Alliance Cemetery. With the blessing of ex-members of the congregation, he sold the building, now the Mount Moriah Missionary Baptist Church, and proceeds were converted into a trust held by the Alliance Colony Foundation.

Bluma Bayuk Memory Paintings

Memories of Alliance are lasting. Bluma Bayuk Rappoport Purmell was born in the colony in 1888. She lived a full life as farm girl, nurse, nursing home operator, author, speaker, wife and mother, and, late in life, acclaimed artist. She learned to paint in her 80s, following cataract surgery. Here are several of her “memory paintings,” capturing the feeling of the Alliance Colony before and at the turn of the century.

Yovals

The idea of a *Yoval*, or thanksgiving jubilee, derives from Leviticus 25:8 –13:

⁸ You are to count seven *Shabbats* of years, seven times seven years, that is, forty-nine years. ⁹ Then, on the tenth day of the seventh month, on *Yom-Kippur*, you are to sound a blast on the *shofar*; you are to sound the *shofar* all through your land; ¹⁰ and you are to consecrate the fiftieth year, proclaiming freedom throughout the land to all its inhabitants. It will be a *yoval* for you; you will return everyone to the land he owns, and everyone is to return to his family. ¹¹ That fiftieth year will be a *yoval* for you; in that year you are not to sow, harvest what grows by itself or gather the grapes of untended vines; ¹² because it is a *yoval*. It will be holy for

you; whatever the fields produce will be food for all of you. ¹³ In this year of *yoval*, every one of you is to return to the land he owns.

The first Yoval was held on August 20–21, 1932, fifty years after the founding of the Alliance Colony. In the interim the villages of Norma, Alliance, and Brotmanville had matured, and many of the first generation passed into eternity. Nearly 1000 community members attended. The festivities included a get-together on Saturday afternoon at the Norma A. A. Hall, followed by a baseball game between “Old Timers” from Norma, Alliance, and Brotmanville, and a swim at Rainbow lake. In the evening there was a dance held at the Rainbow Lake Dance Pavilion. On Sunday a Golden Jubilee Banquet was held, also at the Rainbow Lake Pavilion, with prominent speakers. The event was cherished by those in attendance, and the souvenir booklet of history and memories that was produced for the occasion still provides a moving introduction to the history of this community. A second Yoval was held in August 1982, and a third was held in 2018, with several reunions held in other years. The year 2022 will be the one hundred and fortieth since the founding of the Alliance Colony.

Note from Thomas Kinsella, the Elizabeth and Samuel Levin Director, Alliance Heritage Center, Stockton University

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We hope you enjoyed the show.

Thomas Kinsella, *the Elizabeth and Samuel Levin Director*, Alliance Heritage Center, Stockton University

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