

29. Will you write a page of interesting anecdotes dealing with your parents, ancestors, and their generations? Please make a distinction between what you know to be true and what is hearsay.

Because of your profound interest in what you call the Agricultural Colony, you no doubt would be interested to know how it came into existence.

Following the pogroms in 1881 in Odessa, as well as in other cities of Russia, its victims (of which my father was one) following many secret consultations and meetings resolved to leave Russia, some for America and others for Palestine. Organizations for that program were formed in several cities. While they exchanged information each city was on its own.

Much pressure was brought to have my father join the Palestine group. He was to have been one of a committee to go to Palestine to investigate. He chose America, and he joined the organization called Am Olam.

The main ideal of this organization was its determination upon reaching America to follow the life of a farmer for themselves, their children and their grandchildren.

The first Am Olam group left Odessa January, 1882. It consisted of about 65 young men and women. The second group (our group) left in May, 1882, about 400 in number. Most of them families. To the best of my knowledge they all traveled on their own, perhaps a number receiving some assistance.

This group left Odessa by train to Hamberg where it embarked on ship to America. When we passed the borders of Russia and as we entered the various cities on our way we met with pleasant surprises. It was as if we were celebrating the occasion of our leaving Russia. The good Jewish people of those cities represented by their leaders met us as we entered the depots where tables, in some cities 100 feet long, were covered with every conceivable food, fruit and drink, with men and women in charge replacing the food as fast as it was absorbed. They showered us with wearing apparel for men, women and children and last but not least with money.

My father, Leon Swett, was the treasurer of this group of 400. It was his responsibility to properly handle all gifts including moneys. From the day we left Odessa to the day before our ship landed in New York my father, as treasurer, concealed its gold in two money belts (leather) strapped around his body. He was always well guarded. At night my mother was always awake when he slept. On the last day of our voyage on the ship all money and goods were distributed share and share alike to all members of the group.

The Am Olan group dissolved, and as we landed in Castle Garden, New York, each went his way. My father and a few others joined the remnants of the first Am Olan group. Together they constituted the group which founded the Agricultural Colony in Odessa, Oregon, (city name not of record).

Again, because of your interest, I am enclosing two photostat copies of letters written 16 years ago, both relating to Am Olam. Mr. Abraham Cahan was then recognized and well known as a national writer or columnist in the Yiddish Press of America. The copy of Mr. Cahan's letter is not very clear, but I am sure you will follow it through and enjoy reading its contents.

As I stated, I knew each and every member of the Colony, they were a fine group, 90% of them former students of Russian Universities.

In addition to our family of six there were two families with one child each and two other couples. The rest were single men and women. There were three young women. They married three of the young men in the group. Sonia Kremont married Mr. Kislik, a mechanic. They were blessed with three sons and two daughters with whom I correspond.

As you know nearly all immigrants thought they would follow farming in America. Many groups were settled in Kansas and New Jersey. How our group was destined for Oregon is not known to me. But I, however, distinctly remember that our New York group dealt with a man named Halperin of whom they spoke very highly, who must have been a leader in Jewish Welfare Work.

Upon reaching Portland not all went to the farm immediately. Most of them remained in Portland accepting any kind of common labor living very economically to save and help those on the farm. Eventually they all joined them.

Having read its history by Davidson and Goodiam you know its history and its demise. When you read the letter to me by Mr. Abraham Cahan written 16 years ago but expressing his views as of 1882, 76 years ago, you must admit he was a good prophet. It was "idealistic". Its disintegration was not due to neglect or lack of appreciation on their part. To my knowledge they were men of honor who possessed a conscience which no doubt troubled them much before taking the step to give up the farm. That they were men of ability is proven by their successes in the fields they followed after leaving the farm.

Feierman who was one of its leaders became a man of wealth. He was an inventor and manufacturer of electric devices. Others entered the professions of medicine and dentistry with high success.

An effort after leaving the Colony by some was in the laundry business on a communal basis and proved successful. I know of none who ever sought relief.