

# MASS-POCMA

February 2016

Volume XXV, Number 1, Issue 82



Page 7



Page 13



Page 12

## In This Issue

<b>President's Column</b>	2
<b>Editors' Column</b>	4
<b>Course, Conferences</b>	3, 27, 32
<b>Program Reports</b>	
Belarus Research/Sephardic Roots	5
Passenger Manifests and the Immigrant Voyage	7
December Program	13
<b>SIG Reports</b>	
Bessarabia	14

## Workshops

Family Reunions: Zimbabwe	16
---------------------------	----

## News from JGSGB

The JGSGB Cemetery Project	22
----------------------------	----

## Personal Stories

Lucky Discovery	23
Bashert in China	25
Mourning and Displacement	26

## Features

The Way We Were	28
Boston Queries	33

<b>JGSGB Calendar</b>	36
-----------------------	----

## Lynn: North Shore Jewish Hub

by Deanna Mirsky

The Jewish cemeteries on the Lynn-Peabody line—Pride of Lynn and Ahavat Achim/Anshei Sfard—reflect the community’s recent demographics. (Other Lynn Jewish cemeteries are found in Wakefield and Danvers.) One notices rows with hundreds of distinctive, shiny, often modernistic shapes and fonts on highly polished stones, often with inset colored portraits and bearing distinctively Russian-Jewish names. Even the memorial pebbles are a special, lovely, rounded quartz, perhaps gathered on a beach. These are the resting places of Soviet Jews, who came to Lynn in large numbers around 1980.

Often religiously unaffiliated, many Russian Jews still cluster in Lynn: the doors of Ahabat Sholom, a couple of blocks in back of the beach in tree-filled, well-kept East Lynn advertise chess lessons, Russians is heard in some apartment buildings, and Russian stores are to be found in the center of town. (Many Russian Jews, not surprisingly, now live in Swampscott and Marblehead, having come up in the world.)

Lynn is located on the Atlantic shore, about 15 miles north of Boston, surrounded by Saugus, Lynnfield, Peabody, Salem, Swampscott, and Nahant and across the Saugus River from Revere. Saugus originally included Lynn, and Lynn—until the 1850s—included both Nahant and Swampscott. Lynn lacked a deep-water port and its soil was often marshy or rocky, so Lynn residents turned early to shoemaking, first in home-based shops, then—after the invention of sewing machinery—in factories.

Lynn’s first known Jews arrived before the American Civil War. They were Solomon Wyzanski and the Weinberg family, who were storekeepers. Soon after, Lewis Wolf arrived and opened a clothing store on Monroe Street. A number of additional families appeared before 1880. By 1886, the Weinbergs had helped organize the Lynn Hebrew Benevolent Association and founded the Litvishe Shule, which became Ahabat Sholom. Three synagogues were listed in the city directory of 1910.

### Jews and Shoes

By the time Jews were settling in the area, Lynn offered many opportunities to immigrants who brought shoemaking or sewing skills. Chapter 3 of Stephen G. Mostov’s excellent monograph on the website of the North Shore Jewish Historical Society ([tinyurl.com/ShoeFactories](http://tinyurl.com/ShoeFactories)) shows how a disproportionate number of Jewish shoe workers were directed to Lynn and how many of them made their living as shoemakers or allied businessmen, some eventually becoming owners.

Many shoe workers were union members. They also belonged to the Workmen’s Circle (initially a mutual-aid society for Eastern European immigrants that quickly turned into a political organization) and to other socialist or anarchist associations. Two leading anarchists, Emma Goldman and Alexander Berkman (who attempted to kill Henry Clay Frick), both spoke in Lynn in 1907. Abraham Rogosa, who became a congregant of Rabbi Zaitchik (see below), later told the rabbi’s son Alan about Berkman’s Yiddish speech.

An FBI raid in 1920 swept up and jailed 58 supposed communists, the majority of whom were Yiddish-speaking attendees at a Russian Workingmen’s Association meeting, on suspicion of

plotting to overthrow the government. Most were released after convincing police that they were actually meeting about a cooperative bakery, not about overthrowing the government. However, some were sent to the Deer Island Prison (in Boston Harbor, no longer in existence) and may have been deported.

Some of the shoe workers eventually became businessmen. They started out dealing in retail shoes, retooling surplus leather or defective shoes, or supplying the many components, materials, and machines the industry needed. The A. Jacobs and Sons shoe factory, founded in 1910, began by buying shoe remnants and then moved into making infant shoes. Around 100 Jewish shoe businesses (most short lived) were started between 1915 and 1930.

Ron Newburg's aunt sewed shoes, while his grandfather trekked around northern New England all week long buying back burlap bags from stores for resale. Ron's father, although he had trained and started out as a lawyer, found a niche in the shoe industry, working for years for Cats Paw Rubber before American Biltrite Rubber Company bought them out. According to long-time Greater Lynn resident Paul Aronson, some local Jewish families still own shoe companies, although their work has moved offshore.

## Other Lynn Enterprises

Jews also worked at General Electric, Lynn's largest business. The first jet engine was built there. Today, GE's employees number only a third of what they were even as recently as 1985. Some engine work is still done there, but their large gear box business is gone. (It was just announced that Massachusetts has successfully lured GE into moving its headquarters to Boston.)

Many immigrants opened businesses to supply the needs of factory workers. Goldberg Furniture, established in 1903 by Goldbergs and Aronsons, became a lasting success because of its reliably fair policy towards their customers, workers who mostly bought on time. Goldberg's, Paul Aronson told me, inhabited a space formerly housing William Filene's first store. The Goldberg Furniture warehouse, along with many other buildings in the shoe factory district, was destroyed in the huge 1981 fire, ending the city's plan to rehabilitate the district.

Other immigrants were junk or rag dealers, and many were tailors. Of course, kosher butchers (there were 12 in the 1940s), poultry slaughterers, and grocers appeared among their numbers to serve the particularly Jewish needs of Lynn and other North Shore residents.

Zimman's—Greater Boston's mecca for fabric and upholstery—has undergone many revisions at the hands of four generations since Morris Zimman first opened it as a dry goods store (with a pickle barrel!) in 1909. His son Barry moved the business to Market Street, where it became a bargain department store. Grandson Michael edited the store back to specialize in fabrics (the variety is unbelievable), then furniture and accessories, and now—with the help of great-grandson Daniel—interior design, upholstery, and lighting. Last year the Zimman family held what might have been Lynn's largest family seder, 60 strong, on the store's second floor.



## Jewish Life in Lynn

By 1925 Lynn's Jewish population had reached about 8,000. When Rabbi Zaitchik came to Lynn in 1947, according to his son Alan Zaitchik, there were 14 kosher butchers in town and a Jewish day school (which later became Hillel Academy), as well as the Lynn Hebrew School and schools in almost every *shul*. There was even a *hachnoset orchim* (sheltering committee) for itinerant beggars. Quite a few, mostly older, Jews remained in West Lynn through the sixties. In the 1980s, as Soviet Jews began to arrive, many of them turned up at Rabbi Zaitchik's *shul*, and, having been born in the Soviet Union, he began giving sermons in Russian as well as English.

Through the 1950s, Lynn retained a strong Jewish character, with Jewish stores on Blossom and Church Streets. In 1955, about 5,000 Jews still lived in Lynn, split between East and West Lynn, but moving eastwards. Almost as many lived in Swampscott and Marblehead (more well-to-do suburbs). Jews from other towns came to shop, not only for Jewish supplies. Phyllis Wald tells of coming to have chickens killed for her uncle's wedding as well as to visit businesses such as Hoffman's Department Store on Union Street or Zimman's. Harold's Delicatessen was a favorite stop for pastrami.

Of course, there were two miles of beaches: for swimming, meeting friends, and Shabbat walks. There were seven movie theatres. The Jewish Community Center (JCC), which served the entire North Shore community, had a huge number of offerings for all ages.

There was even an after-school Hebrew High School, founded in 1922. Ron Newburg's Lynn-born parents moved back to Lynn when he was ten. The family lived in both ends of the city, first with grandparents in West Lynn and then in East Lynn. Almost all children went to public school, but the Jewish population in any given class was often very small. The trek to Hebrew High School was horrendous, he remembers, especially since the hours were late in the afternoon and the after-school-only bus made many stops. The JCC—where he boxed, played ping-pong, and hung out—was terrifically important in his life for a long time, well into high school. Ron still cherishes a tattered photograph taken with lightweight boxing champ Benny Leonard.

The town of Swampscott adjoins East Lynn's Kings Beach. It was easy to walk or bike between the towns, so the connection between the communities stayed strong. Paul Aronson recalls coming back to attend Lynn's Hebrew High School even after moving to Swampscott. The Jews of Salem, many of whom were also dribbling away to the more suburban towns, considered Lynn a shopping resource. Phyllis Wald recalls regularly biking between beaches—from Salem to Lynn to Swampscott.

Lynn and the nearby communities of Saugus, Lynnfield, Nahant, Swampscott, and Marblehead were treated as "Greater Lynn." A 1956 Jewish Community Foundation study determined that 50% of Greater Lynn's Jewish population of 10,000+ lived in Lynn, with most of the rest in Marblehead and Swampscott and some outliers in Saugus, Nahant, and Lynnfield.

## Lynn's Synagogues

By 1886 the Hebrew Benevolent Society had established a consistent *minyán* (informal group for prayer). The 1900 city directory lists a Rabbi Greenberg living on Blossom Street.

**Ahabat Sholom**, also known as the Lithuanian Shul, was chartered in 1901, and its Church Street building, south of the Common, was built in 1905. Rabbi Samuel Zaitchik served there for over 50 years and built a new synagogue and *mikveh* (ritual bath) in East Lynn. He kept the West Lynn





Congregation Ahabat Sholom, original building on Church Street  
Photo courtesy of Lynn Public Library

*minyan* going for years, before the Church Street building was torn down in the 1960s for urban renewal. Recently Chabad in Swampscott has taken over the Ocean Street Shul in East Lynn, which is also used for community purposes, and its future remains to be seen.

**Ahavat Achim/Anshei Sfard** (the Russian Shul) was established in 1899. It occupied a two-towered, red-brick edifice south of the Common and continued until 1999. A friend whose husband often led holiday services there in the later years remembers that few of its attendees lived in Lynn.

Rabbi Samuel Fox, known as a columnist for Jewish newspapers, came to Lynn as Ahavat Achim/Anshei Sfard's rabbi, then moved on to **Chevra Tehillim**, at the time located on Shepard Street. Ron Newburg told me he had two bar mitzvahs in one long day, since his observant grandfather would only attend one at Shepard Street. His second bar mitzvah took place later that morning at Lynn Hebrew School. In 1968 Chevra Tehillim took over the Temple Beth El building on Breed Street.

Founded in 1924, **Temple Beth El** constructed its building on Breed Street in East Lynn in 1927 but moved to Swampscott in 1968. Earlier, some of its members had split off to form Swampscott's Temple Israel. These two Conservative congregations reunited in 2005 as Shirat Hayam.

Smaller *shuls* included **B'nai Jacob** on Flint Street, **Agudath Israel**, and **Agudath Achim**.

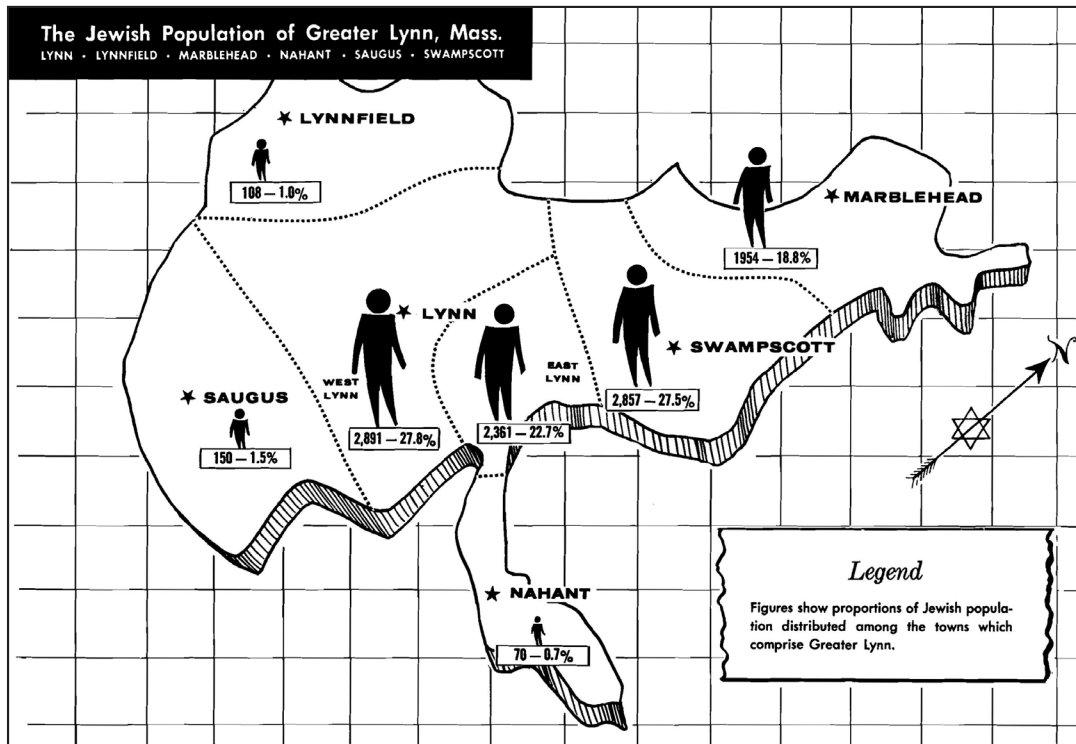
## Organizations

As would be expected in an active community, Lynn housed a huge number of Jewish organizations, plus a credit union, a Home for the Aged, and other services. You may read about them and see photos in the excellent publications of the Jewish Historical Society of the North Shore (now the Jewish Heritage Center of the North Shore): Allan Pierce and Avrom Herbster's *The Jewish Community of the North Shore* and Allan Pierce's *A History of Boston's Jewish North Shore*. Among the earliest were the Hebrew Benevolent Society, which owned a cemetery in nearby Wakefield, the Hebrew Helping Hand Society, and the Ladies' Hebrew Circle. Lynn's organizations had often developed into Jewish institutions for the entire North Shore, well before the institutions moved to Swampscott or Marblehead. Thus they provided a continuity that was largely lacking when my own Dorchester/Mattapan/Roxbury community was declining. The Lynn Jewish Associated Charities became the Jewish Federation of the North Shore (recently merged with Boston's Combined Jewish Philanthropies).

## The Future

Lynn, a comparatively tough town from the time it became a factory town, still has a reputation as a very tough town. It also has many strengths: its lovely beaches, many fine old buildings, rail connections to the center of town from Boston's North Station. Although the center of town and

## The Way We Were



From: *The Jewish Population of Greater Lynn, Mass.*, The Jewish Community Federation of Greater Lynn, 1956, ([tinyurl.com/Lynnpopstudy](http://tinyurl.com/Lynnpopstudy))

some in-town neighborhoods are very dense, others remain attractive, and there is plenty of open space inland with trails, conservation land, and several ponds. With plenty of Jewish resources within a short distance, perhaps it is ripe for a revival.



## Massachusetts Genealogical Council 2016 Seminar

April 16 & 17, 2016

Courtyard by Marriott Hotel, Marlborough, MA

**Day 1: A Variety of Talks in Three Tracks**

**Day 2: All Day Seminar with CeCe Moore,  
“Your Genetic Genealogist”**

For details or to register, go to [MassGenCouncil.org](http://MassGenCouncil.org)  
then click on the “2016 Seminar” tab (top right)

**One may register for one or for both days**