

TEACHING AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT

Lesson Title – Local Immigration History From Dona Stratton

Grade-8

Length of class period-90 minutes

Inquiry-(What essential question are students answering. What problem are they solving, or what decision are they making?)

There are a lot of farms in Eastern Connecticut, and many of them were started by immigrants. Explore one group who farmed in this part of the state.

What were the reasons many Jewish Farmers emigrated to Eastern Connecticut from Russia in the 1880s? What attracted them to this part of Connecticut? How did they survive here? What groups or organizations helped them succeed?

Objectives (What content and skills do you expect students to learn from this lesson?)

Students will examine an excerpt from a doctoral thesis about Jewish farmers in Eastern Connecticut and understand how they were helped to succeed by various individuals and groups. They will also identify the ways farmers adapted to changing times and markets.

Materials (What primary sources or local resources are the basis for this lesson? – please attach)

A document excerpted from a doctoral thesis by the same name presented at Yeshiva University in 1975 by Morton L. Gordon (The complete manuscript is available at the Center for Judaic Studies, Thomas Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut.)

Activities (What will you and your students do during the lesson to promote learning?)

The students will read the document, either in pairs or by themselves. They will be identifying the groups and organizations which helped these farmers make a go of it, and the adaptations they made to the changing agricultural climate. We will have a class discussion identifying these items. Then they will choose an assignment to complete for homework. (The choices are attached.)

How will you assess what students learned during this lesson?

I will monitor their conclusions in a class discussion, and will evaluate their assignment. (I have included a suggested evaluation sheet.)

Connecticut Framework Performance Standards-

Explain the significance of globalization on the world's nations and societies (e.g., cross-border migrations, economic trade, cultural exchange)

Handouts and Worksheets attached.

The History of the Jewish Farmer in Eastern Connecticut
Excerpted from a doctoral thesis by the same name presented
At Yeshiva University in 1975 by Morton L. Gordon

When Russian Jewry was hit by a wave of pogroms during the 1880s, Jews were subjected to wholesale massacre and persecution and they began to leave Russia for friendlier lands. Two movements emerged, formed by the young Jewish intelligentsia of the day with the idea of rebuilding their lives through agriculture. One group was directed toward settlement in Palestine and the other had America as its destination.

Baron Maurice de Hirsch (1831-1896) was a German financier and railroad builder of the late 1800s. Hirsch felt that emigration was the salvation for Russian Jews and the Hirsch Fund that he established helped Jews to emigrate. Pouring into the cities of the Eastern seaboard of the United States, they arrived mostly penniless, jobless and hopeless.

In 1900 the Hirsch Fund and the Jewish Colonization Association founded the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society. The Society received its charter on February 12, 1900 and had as one of its principal purposes, providing mortgage money to immigrants who wanted to buy and settle on farms.

Connecticut was favored by the early Jewish settlers because of its proximity to New York. Many came to New York, arriving as peddlers. New London, Norwich and Eastern Connecticut were favorite spots because of their accessibility. It was a 12-15 hour trip by boat from New York to New London and then up to Norwich on the Thames River. The cost was a little over one dollar round trip. Since there were already several towns with established Jewish communities, the nearby farm lands became a natural attraction to prospective farm settlers. As time went on, the early Jewish farm settlers found themselves in every facet of farming, including vegetable, fruit and tobacco growing. Jews in Connecticut probably practiced more diverse farming than in any other state.

During the first decade of the 20th century, new settlers came to Connecticut farms not only as new emigrants from Russia and Central Europe, but also from the needle trades in New York City. They often came in search of a new life after escaping from the sweat shops and the stifle of the city. Most came with no rural background or agricultural knowledge. But this did not hinder the new Jewish farmer from making a success of his new life.

Most of the early Jewish farm settlers purchased poor, neglected dairy farms with old buildings housing cows which gave little milk. Some of the early farmers tried to combine farming with summer boarding for city folk in order to supplement their meager farm income. The fertile Connecticut River Valley around Hartford, Ellington, Somers and Rockville was conducive to tobacco growing. This was often combined with dairy farming by some of the early settlers. Ellington was one of the leading and most prosperous of the Jewish farm communities in Connecticut, as fortunes were made in the tobacco industry in the early 20th century.

Following World War I, the period of Jewish farmer pioneering was over and the post war period brought with it a time of plenty and prosperity. Eggs, poultry and dairy products increased in demand and poultry farming began to flourish. Poultry farms did not require large areas of land and the farms could be purchased with relatively modest investment. Then came the depression. The impact on agriculture was devastating, bringing price declines, bankruptcies and unfavorable credit conditions. Jewish farmers suffered severely, but as a group, they weathered the depression better than the farmers in the country as a whole. Many Jewish farm families supplemented their income with summer guests and with part time employment in their original trades, such as tailoring or other crafts.

The Jewish farming community had just begun to recover from the crushing years of the depression when a new burden was thrust upon them. The community was called upon to help fellow Jews who came to the United States after Hitler came to power in Germany.

The first chose dairy farming in New London and Windham Counties. However, poultry farming soon became popular. As more displaced persons arrived from 1941 on, there was a tendency to move farther east in the State because of the lower cost of property.

The Jewish Agricultural Society provided small mortgages, but the families still did not have any working capital after they acquired the farm. This problem was alleviated by the good will of several feed mills in the area. The Dayville Grain Company, in particular, gave credit to many Jewish farmers, even to the extent of helping with groceries for the family as well as providing livestock feed until there was some income to make a payment. The feed mill also provided financing for new poultry houses and dairy barns to allow farm operations to grow to a profitable size.

The Jewish Agricultural Society helped with agricultural education and published "The Jewish Farmer." It was published in Yiddish to provide information to those farmers who could not read English. By 1959, practically everyone could read English and there was no longer a need for the magazine.

Several cooperatives were organized, the best known of which was the Central Connecticut Farmer's Co-op, organized in 1938 and still active at present. The Co-op built a feed mill in Manchester which supplied more and more of the farmers with feed. About 90% of the early members and customers were Jewish.

Poultry and dairy production continued to grow until the early 50s when egg prices began to drop. By 1956 competition had become so severe that a new type of business organization appeared - "Vertical Integration" - meaning that one operator owned the feed mill, the hatchery, the laying operation and perhaps a broiler production unit and a dressing plant. As an example, Julius Rytman, a displaced person in 1949, developed his poultry operation until in 1973 he owned his own feed mill, had over a million layers in production and operated his own egg grading plant.

However, as competition grew from other sections of the country more suitable for agriculture, many Jewish as well as other farmers have turned to different livelihoods and agriculture in general has become less important in Connecticut

The complete manuscript is available at the Center for Judaic Studies, Thomas Dodd Research Center, University of Connecticut.

THE HISTORY OF THE JEWISH FARMER IN EASTERN CONNECTICUT

Read "The History of the Jewish Farmer in Eastern Connecticut." Then, do one of the following activities.

1. Design an illustrated dictionary including the following terms; make sure you show the meaning as it is used in the excerpt. [NOTE: Remember that a dictionary is in alphabetical order!]

pogrom

emigrate

peddlers

"The Jewish Farmer"

financier

boarding

Depression

vertical integration

sweat shops

cooperative

intelligentsia

2. Construct a timeline which includes 10 important events or developments described in the excerpt. Provide a concise explanation of each event or development.
3. Make a map of Connecticut on which you identify each town, county or geographical area mentioned in the excerpt; include all information given - the kind of farm, the time frame, etc. Include a legend which explains the symbols you used.
4. Write a 2-3 page short story that reflects the history of the Jewish farmers. Be sure to incorporate:
 - Reasons (at least two) why Jews left their homeland
 - Reasons why Jews settled in Connecticut (vs. other states)
 - Descriptions of jobs/activities involved in here (at least three)
 - Challenges faced and how life changed over time (WWI, the Depression, WWII)
 - Activities of the Jewish Agricultural Society

