

Oil City Jewish Community

To set forth one's impressions and ideas of an ambitious Pennsylvania town with a Sunday visit as the basis of observation, needless to say, does not do justice to Oil City, Pa. Sunday in a Pennsylvania community (thanks to the famous or infamous Blue Laws of old) generally is about as lively a time as 3:00 A. M. in Pukville, Mo. So all the excitement we found in this promising city was of our own imagination and creative power.

Despite the distasteful suggestion in its name, Oil City is far from being oily, interpreting the word in its accepted sense. The atmosphere is as clear and wholesome as that which envelops Boston. (We have never been there but our conclusion is based on meteorological and other reports.) Only for the fact that its title is so

oil-hunters from all over the world spent years of their lives, seeking their fortune. The foreign-born now live in them. It is almost foreign in its appearance, that street once known as the Oil Street of the World. The street is narrow and uneven in its course, a silent reminder that fifty years ago no valuable time was wasted in road-construction. It is to be wondered that the street and its buildings have not been obliterated by Time. One block away on Seneca Street there are spacious, artistic stores and office buildings, an avenue modern in all respects. The contrast is fascinating! A world of fifty years ago within fifty yards of a first-class city thoroughfare!

Yet, it is to be hoped that it will remain so. It will always be a silent memorial to the sacrificing toilers of 1860, who cheerily and bravely fought on in search of the coveted treasure—oil. They were the founders of Oil City, they helped to make it big and wealthy, they won it a place among the cities of the world, and for these achievements they will ever be remembered.

The population of Oil City today is approximately 22,000, it is said. Seven branch railroads connect it with the outside world. Its yearly tonnage reaches the gratifying figure of 1,500,000. It houses four of the largest refineries of the country, namely the Pan-American, Continental, Crystal and Independence. The National Transit Company, formerly a subsidiary of the Standard Oil Company, employs 1,500 men. The Oil Well Supply Company, Imperial Plant, employs 1,200 men, and the Joseph Reed Company, 800 men. There are more than ten other oil companies of smaller capacity. Oil City also has foundries and machine shops, tubing and casing works, boiler and engine shops and manufactories of oil-well supplies.

There are four banks—Oil City Trust, Oil City National First National and Citizens National. During the war a war chest was organized to gather and distribute \$350,000 for all war relief appeals. The campaign was over-subscribed, the Jewish residents of Oil City playing no little part.

Joe Levi, who established the largest shoe store in Oil City fifty years ago, served as president of the Chamber of Commerce. There are two newspapers published in Oil City, one of them, the Derrick, having been established in 1873. Among the most prominent buildings are the Y. M. C. A., the Federal Building, City Hall, old Opera House, High School and Carnegie Library. The Federal Building, Y. M. C. A. and Carnegie Library are particularly attractive.

There are numerous large churches, including the synagogue on Plumer Street, a short block from the center of the town. It is a red-stone structure, erected at a cost of \$20,000 some years ago. The congregation was organized 18 years ago, and at present has a membership of eighty. I. M. Mintz, Abe Brodi and Sam



DR. C. A. MINTZ

Prominent manufacturer and former president of Tree of Life Synagogue, Oil City

suggestive, oil would be one of the last guesses a stranger would advance as its chief product and excuse for existing.

So before going ahead with our story, it would be well to wholly obliterate from our minds the conviction that Oil City has an oily atmosphere and speaks the language of the ancient Oilers. On the contrary there is every evidence that the good people of Oil City, or the Oilites, think of numerous other things besides oil. But this near-essay on oil must cease, so we may give some space to the original purpose of these observations.

Scribes and near-scribes before us have visited this old historically-interesting town on the Allegheny River, at the mouth of Oil Creek, and some 130 miles by rail north by east of Pittsburgh. It is prettily situated, this center of the celebrated petroleum fields of Western Pennsylvania, the scene of the founding of fortunes and many a reward for years of toil and suffering. There is pathos as well as good-fortune in the progress of Oil City. One may see the squalid, collapsing shacks on Main Street, where more than a half century ago

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Lewis are among the charter members. The late M. Braunsweiger, Jr., was one of the principal organizers.

Arthur Lowentritt and Mr. Levi are members of the Board of Directors of the Oil City Trust Company. Samuel M. Rosenthal is secretary and editor of the Oil City Blizzard, the only afternoon newspaper.

Jews Are Active

Jewish life in Oil City keeps pace with the rapid trend of events elsewhere. In some cases, perhaps, it is noticeably ahead. With an apparent anti-Semitic spirit prevalent, according to some, the Jewish residents are doing the best they can under the circumstances. Many maintain they are not aware of any extraordinary anti-Semitism. Despite this, seemingly all are interested in the perpetuation of Judaism. Every effort is being put forth to inject more of the Jewish spirit in the activities of the young folks of the community. All, undoubtedly, have at heart the ideals and traditions of Israel. Despite a difference of opinion in the matter of formalities or policies—a condition to be granted—there is every reason to believe that the future of Israel in Oil City is safe, safe by reason of the fact that the belief in the superiority of the Jewish faith has a firm stronghold in the hearts of our co-religionists in that community. Closer co-operation is the most imperative need of the hour in the Oil City Colony. Whole-hearted and complete co-operation, with able and conscientious leadership, are the potent factors in building an organization that will perform its purpose effectively and everlastingly. With these things an assured fact, the minor obstacles will be wiped out, and Jewry the country over can look to the Oil City Colony as an example of true brotherhood and a guarantee of the permanence of all things Jewish.

New Year's Day, the Day of the Atonement, and the Feast of the Tabernacles were observed with the customary deep-feeling and sincerity by the Jewish residents of Oil City. The Jewish population, numbering about sixty families, were comfortably accommodated in the synagogue. Several special speakers were heard.

The majority of residents adhere to the Orthodox liturgy. Religion, all told, forms a large part of the activities of the Colony. The officers of the congregation are Max Levinson, President; M. Mogilowitz, Vice President; Herman Cohen, Secretary; H. L. Stahl, Treasurer, and A. Vinn, O. Slesnick, J. Solovey and B. Rosenberg, Trustees.

Charitably, the Oil City Colony has not failed in its duty. The eagerness and desire to help others, the less fortunate wherever they may be, is manifested on all sides. Perhaps there is no Jewish institution in Pittsburgh that has not been benefited by the benevolence of an Oil City Jew. They have contributed to the Jewish Home for Babies, the Jewish Home for Aged, Hebrew Institute, Irene Kaufmann Settlement and others. Within its own bounds, the Oil City women have organized a Relief Society, and this, together with the Council of Jewish Women, the Hadassah and others, take full care of the unfortunate of the community.

A B'nai B'rith lodge in Oil City was organized last Fall with Mr. Rosenthal as President. There are more than forty members. Albert Ullman is another officer. Indications point to a revival of work in this direction, and one of the banner lodges of District No. 3 is promised in Oil City.

The Jewish residents of Oil City are members of the local lodges of the Knights of Pythias, Elks, Masons and other orders. Many are also interested in the Zionist Organization, of which Mr. Rosenthal is one of the leading figures. It is expected that a meeting will be held in the near future. It is possible the committee will obtain Morris Neaman, of Pittsburgh, to make the principal address of the occasion. There are many supporters of Zionism in Oil City.

A Young Men's Hebrew Association was organized a number of years ago, but was disorganized during the war for lack of members. Efforts towards its re-organization are seen, and it is possible a meeting will be called. Nothing definite has been reached, however. The movement lacks a leader. Before its abandon-

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ment, the Y. M. H. A. was an extremely active organization, charitably, socially, educationally and religiously. Before the Jewish soldiers of the community left for overseas they were feted and given numerous gifts by the Association. With few young men at home, the "Y" fell to pieces. Everybody wants a "Y," apparently, but no one takes the initiative. However, all are hopeful.

We have been trying to keep women's activities out of the article so far, purposely. We believe that their accomplishments and toil in behalf of the needy deserves a paragraph to itself. The women, in many cases, seem the "life" of the community. In fact, they seem to be more acquainted with the progress of events than the men folks. Two of their largest organizations are the Oil City Section of the Council of Jewish Women and the Hadassah, of course. Both organizations are tireless in their efforts of uplift and are unmistakably influential in the Colony's social, charitable and religious affairs. The Council was organized thirty years ago, and at present has forty members. The officers are as follows: Mrs. Arthur Lowentritt, President; Mrs. Albert Ulman, Vice President; Miss Hannah Silberberg, Secretary; Mrs. Benjamin Hershfield, Corresponding Secretary; Mrs. Max Jacobs, Treasurer; Mrs. B. Bear, Mrs. Joseph Levi and Mrs. Rachel Lowentritt, Board of Directors. The aim of the Council, according to its yearly book, is as follows:

"We, Jewish Women, sincerely believing that a closer fellowship, a greater unity of thought and purpose and a nobler accomplishment will result from a widespread organization, do heartily bind ourselves together in a union of workers to further the best and highest interests of humanity in fields Religious, Philanthropic and Educational."

Among its members are the following women: Mrs. Sol Abt, Mrs. Bernard Bear, Miss Sarah Braunschweiger, Mrs. Abe Broida, Mrs. Isaac Broida, Mrs. Jacob Broida, Mrs. Sam Cohn, Mrs. Seal Cohen, Mrs. Leopold Dannheiser, Mrs. Julius Dreyfus, Mrs. Sam Engle, Mrs. M. H. Freudenheim, Mrs. Charles Friedman, Mrs. A. A. Goldman, Mrs. Moses Gold-

stein, Mrs. B. Hershfield, Mrs. Joseph Heyson, Mrs. David Jacobs, Mrs. Max Jacobs, Mrs. Lowentritt, Mrs. Arthur Lowentritt, Mrs. Joseph Levi, Mrs. Sam Lewis, Mrs. Ludwig Mayer, Miss Hannah Manheim, Mrs. Abe Mintz, Mrs. M. Mogilowitz, Mrs. E. M. Kinsbursky, Mrs. Jacob Pitler, Mrs. Nathan Rosen, Mrs. Ben Rosenberg, Mrs. M. Rosenberg, Mrs. S. M. Rosenthal, Mrs. Abe Salkin, Mrs. Jacob Solovey, Miss Rachel Silberberg, Miss Hannah Silberberg, Mrs. Herman Stahl, Mrs. Albert Ulman and Mrs. Harry Zand.

The Hadassah was organized in 1918. Its present officers are Mrs. J. Broida, President; Mrs. B. Rosenberg, Vice President; Miss Esther Solovey, Corresponding Secretary; Miss Esther Cohen, Recording Secretary, and Mrs. E. Kinsbursky, Treasurer.

The Hadassah has sent supplies to Palestine, and have placed a poor box in every Jewish home in Oil City. Semi-annual visits are made and the money is sent to Palestine. The Red Cross donated yards of material to the society for sewing purposes. The Y. M. C. A. set aside a room where the Hadassah holds its regular meetings. The Hadassah maintained a Sunday School last year.

Under the direction of Miss Bertha Silverberg, the Council of Jewish Women, knitted 235 outfits, including two blankets for soldiers, during the war.

There is also the Jewish Sewing Circle, an active organization of women. Mrs. L. Becker is President of the Relief Society, and Mrs. Mogel, Vice President.

War Work

Twenty-five Jewish soldiers represented Oil City in the World War. Luckily none were injured. A Service Flag containing seventeen stars was presented to the synagogue early in the war. The flag was made and presented by the Council of Jewish Women. Local committees were appointed for all war relief drives. Dr. C. M. Mintz was chairman of the Jewish War Relief Drive.

Among the pioneer residents of Oil City are B. Bear, S. Solovey, L. Baker, Simon Cohen and A. Mintz.

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Its well-known characters are included in the following list:

Mrs. Ben Rosenberg, publicity director for practically all Jewish welfare work in Oil City, Vice President of the Hadassah, and active in all forms of social and charitable work. Mrs. Rosenberg is an ardent Zionist and Jewess, being a firm believer in the religion of her forefathers.

Joe Levi, founder of the Levi Shoe Company, former President of the Chamber of Commerce, and a director in the Oil City Trust Company.

Dr. C. M. Mintz, manufacturer, and former President of the Tree of Life Synagogue.

Arthur Lowentritt, agent in Oil City for the Overland, Cadillac, Marmon, Hudson and other automobile companies, director of Oil City Trust Company, and a son of one of the pioneer residents of Oil City.

Samuel M. Rosenthal, editor of the Oil City Blizzard, President of the Zionist Organization, B'nai B'rith lodge, and active in religious and charitable work.

Dr. A. A. Feldman, only Jewish professional man in Oil City.

Sam Lewis, Vice President B'nai B'rith lodge.

There are a number of others who the writer failed to see.

A meeting of men of the Colony was held last Sunday afternoon to discuss the advisability of engaging an English-speaking Rabbi. The matter was approved and a committee appointed. The action was taken with a view of attracting to the synagogue the younger folk of the community, many of whom are unacquainted with Hebrew. The plan is to establish a Sunday School and possibly a Talmud Torah. Interest in the work of the synagogue and its possible extension to other lines of religious endeavor was shown in the large and enthusiastic gathering. Several meetings of the kind, and Oil City Jews will be well on the way to perfection in all matters that affect their welfare and futurity. Differences of opinion may exist, but true leadership and a sincere desire on the part of all to reach a certain goal will always triumph. True leadership and co-operation go hand in hand. The Jews of Oil City need not be discouraged. Each one but lend a helping hand, each one do his bit in the strenuous work, each one manifest a heart-felt desire to please all—with such co-operation a happy, glorious, triumphant ending is inevitable.

—H. Norman Shoop.

UKRAINIAN GOVERNMENT HAS
REMOVED TO PODOLSK

(Jewish Correspondence Bureau)
Vienna—According to advices received here, the Ukrainian government has established its headquarters at Kamenetz-Podolsk.

POLISH POST OFFICE BARS
PARIS "JEWISH TRIBUNE"

(Jewish Correspondence Bureau)

Warsaw—The local post office has received instructions from the government not to pass through the mails the "Jewish Tribune," a publication appearing in Paris in Russian and French.

For an article printed in the "Rabodnik" in connection with the detained Jewish soldiers in Jablons, the editor of this publication has been fined a thousand marks.

Jonah Rosenfeld, the noted Jewish poet, has left this city on his way to America.

GERMAN JEWRY TO BE REORGANIZED

(Jewish Correspondence Bureau)

Bremen—A congress in which all German "Kehillahs" will be represented is being called for November 17th, and will meet in this city. The purpose of the congress will be to reorganize German Jewry on a more unified and representative basis.

JEWIS IN LITHUANIA GIVEN IMPORTANT APPOINTMENTS

(Jewish Correspondence Bureau)

Vilna—Bernard Friedman has been appointed judge of the new court in this city and Moische Gluskin has been appointed the legal prosecutor for the same court.

SATISFACTORY FRONTIERS FOR PALESTINE URGED

(Jewish Correspondence Bureau)

London—Discussing editorially the settlement of Palestine, the "Manchester Guardian" urges that proper frontiers for that country should be established.

BECAUSE HE CONDEMNED ANTI-SEMITISM EX-MINISTER WAS REFUSED A HEARING

(Jewish Correspondence Bureau)

Vienna—Because he had previously declared that anti-Semitism was immoral, ex-Minister Gathern was prevented by anti-Semites from addressing a political gathering at Neurenberg.

JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN HUNGARY OPEN THEIR OWN SCHOOLS

(Jewish Correspondence Bureau)

Vienna—The Kehillahs of Budapest and Dbreozin have opened secondary schools, the Hungarian Legislature having recently adopted measures which restrict the admission of Jewish students to public educational institutions.



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