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New Odessa, 1882-1887: United we stand, divided we fall

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AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF Helen E. Blumenthal for the
Master of Arts in History presented October 1, 1974.

Title: New Odessa, 1882-1887

United We Stand - Divided We Fall

APPROVED BY MEMBERS OF THE THESIS COMMITTEE:

Frederick J. Cox, Chairman

Basil Dmytryshyn / 101

Michael M. Passi

Joshua Stampfer 110

The Oregon Territory and later the State of Oregon
have had a well deserved reputation for encouraging free
thought and liberal ideas. By tradition, Oregon has been
the scene of rugged individualism, a proving ground for
ideas and movements. The commune of New Odessa was one of
the lesser known attempts of a group of immigrants coming
from persecution in Russia to a new way of life in America.

This thesis is a study starting with the background of Russian Jewry, the social climate in the United States and particularly Oregon which allowed for the development of communes, the story of New Odessa, and the reasons for its disappearance.

New Odessa was unique in Oregon as it was a Marxist commune founded by Russian Jews. The portion of the thesis on New Odessa was based on original research: the studying of periodicals of the time, original documents, and field research in the geographical location.

The more accepted and productive New Odessa became, the faster the disintegration. The geographical and cultural isolation of Oregon proved to be too great for the members of the community, most of whom had been students and urban residents in Russia. A difference in ideology between the two leaders resulted in a gradual decline in membership. By 1887, the community had been declared bankrupt.

NEW ODESSA, 1882-1887
UNITED WE STAND - DIVIDED WE FALL

by
HELEN E. BLUMENTHAL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
in
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1975

TO THE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH:

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May 23, 1975

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Going back to college after twenty-eight years was a difficult thing to do, but it was something I had always wanted and after a few summer classes, I enrolled full time. The pressures of daily living in form of family, home, and community commitments continued on but added to them were the conjugation of Hebrew verbs and the number of coup d'etat in the Arab world.

If I wanted it badly enough, the only way to do it was to get on with it. But, I needed tremendous doses of encouragement. My family always thought of my going back to school as another one of "Mother's Crusades," but they offered me understanding and compassion. My husband whom I helped through Dental School many years ago, encouraged me to accomplish that which I had set out to do. To all my family, including my first grandson who waited to be born until I had at least finished my B.A., I offer my grateful appreciation.

My professors made me feel comfortable and were of utmost compassion. Even the younger students offered encouragement. To the members of my committee I owe a special note of thanks. Doors were opened for me and while I knew time could not go backwards, I often wondered what my life

would have been like if I had had the advantage of a college education.

To Dr. Basil Dymytryshyn a special thanks for the time he spent giving me a better understanding of Russian history. To Dr. Michael Passi who opened the door on Social History for me. He was my connection to the younger generation and seeing him with the younger students and how he instilled the idea of making them think, gives me hope for the future. Rabbi Joshua Stampfer proved to be a man of exceptional patience in helping a non-linguist with the study of Hebrew.

None of this would have been possible without the help and understanding of Dr. Frederick Cox. His enthusiasm, concern, and interest saw me over many a rough spot. His desire to see me succeed made me feel I could and would do it.

At a very low period, I received two grants, one from the Oregon Historical Society and one from the Endowment Committee of the Jewish Welfare Federation. These grants enabled me to do research in Roseburg but more important, they gave me the feeling that I was doing an academically acceptable piece of research. I appreciate their faith in me.

How does one thank the many people who have helped in known and unknown ways? The clerk at the Douglas County Courthouse who helped me search in a dusty basement for old

records. The young man at the Douglas County Title Company became so interested in what I was doing that he spent his own time going over survey and title records with me. Mr. George Abdill of the Douglas County Museum let me spend time going through his files. To all these, I offer my appreciation and gratitude.

Mr. and Mrs. Olger Sether have become friends of mine. Mr. Sether's family owned the land on which New Odessa had been located. He had recently been ill, but he consented to talk with me and gave me a feel for rural pioneer Oregon.

Unknowingly, my brother and sisters are also responsible for me going back to school. There had always been great sibling rivalry between us and I was the only one without an academic degree. I thank them for throwing down an invisible gauntlet.

It's taken a long time from having been a pre-med student in the days before women's liberation to finally finish as a History Major. I offer my deepest thanks to family, professors, and friends who helped me to achieve a belief in myself.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The American historian has many ways in which to approach the recording of the American experience. Traditionally, school children have been told of the heroic deeds of the Founding Fathers, not understanding that this was the story of a few members of an elitist class and not a history of the American people.

In recent years, the discipline of Social History has begun to examine the vast entity of the Americans only to realize that it is far from being a unified society but rather a pluralistic one that has evolved from all the vast segments of the people that have gone into the making of the American people. Each group of immigrants that came brought with it its culture and historical and social values, a sense of identity that did not disappear when it became part of the American heritage.

The era of greatest immigration beginning in the later half of the 19th century brought with it increasingly varied groups. The social historian by putting his emphasis on the study of these distinctive characteristics, has put new focus on the vast majority of the American people,

bringing to the study of American history a new dimension and interpretation.

Every corner of this vast country has had its own unique experiences, and it is the combination of all these characteristics that have formed the personality of the American people. The study of the Pilgrims and the Puritans, the Quakers, the Irish, the Blacks, the Jews has really just begun. In addition, along the many highways and byways, hidden away in forests and lost on vast tracts of prairie lands, are stories yet to be told and verified historically of individuals who also contributed to the American story by virtue of the fact that they existed at all.

This thesis is the story of one such group, hidden away deep within the forests of Southern Oregon near the present town of Roseburg.

To find the site of New Odessa, one follows Interstate 5 almost straight south from the city of Portland, Oregon. In the manner of all modern super highways, I-5 skirts the centers of population, well banked and curved to aid the driver in reaching his destination with the least amount of exposure to all that surrounds him. From Portland, which has the largest population in the state, to Salem which ranks second, and then on to Eugene it is possible to drive without a stop, never looking beyond the side of the road. I-5 may be the lifeline of the state,

but by its sterility and utilitarianism and identity with all superhighways in whatever state they may be, it bypasses those very communities which helped give the Oregon territory a significance and uniqueness in the settling of the United States.

The motorist who is aware of the history of the area finds familiarity in the cutoff signs marked Aurora and Champoege and Oregon City. The valley of the Willamette river gives way to the valley of the Umpqua and the valley of the Umpqua gives way in turn to the valley of the Deschutes. The farther south one goes, the more the exit signs read like a history book of the Oregon territory: Elkton, Wolf Creek, Oakland, Canyonville and then Roseburg, the seat of historical Douglas County. There is significance behind each name and each community has its place in history.

Thirty miles south of Roseburg the road winds its way through a mountain pass, the same route that the settlers of the area took when there was no road, only a trail for the dusty wagons and sore feet. The big heavily loaded log trucks struggled up the grade, where once horses and oxen gasped for a breath of cool air coming from the coast not too many miles away on the other side of the low coast mountains.

The exit sign marked Glendale suddenly appeared. Not Utopia or New Odessa or even Julia,¹ its original name, but Glendale. There, a sign pointing straight ahead, directly into the foothills, reads "Glendale - 7 miles." It is just a few miles north of the Josephine county line, but lies within present Douglas county.

The countryside is still rather desolate. There is little traffic, there are a few houses, there are no buildings on either side of the narrow road. The sign "Tunnel Road - left" appeared, and then the town of Glendale. There was a main street a few blocks long with only one store open, a schoolhouse, and a deserted railroad station. The tracks outside the station were in good repair and obviously still in use. There was the ever present logging mill, for this is timber country, with stacks of dry logs being watered down because of the dry weather and high fire danger.

Turning left on Tunnel road, there were a few small houses. One or two side roads branch off of Tunnel Road. At the end of the pavement, a narrow dirt road continued into a heavily wooded area, where it divided and became more of a path. On a slight rise there was a clearing and below, a railroad tunnel. Tunnel 8 near Cow Creek on the

¹The town presently called Glendale was originally called Julia after the wife of an early settler.

railroad line to Medford is still being used by the lumber companies. Underneath some brush were barely visible remains of a frame building. All that was left were some wooden markings along the perimeter but a few nails found on the site place it in the time period of the 1880's. From survey records, the site of New Odessa, was located on this property. A colony of young Jewish intellectuals who had taken a hard and lengthy route from Odessa, a seacoast city in southern Russia, arrived in August of 1881 by rail, by ship, by wagon, and by foot. They came to this corner of southwest Oregon with no money but with high ideals to start a Marxist commune which was to last from 1882-1887. Tunnel 8 had been built by Chinese workers on property belonging to the settlers and leased to the railroads, but the wood for the ties and the fuel for the engines was later supplied by the Jewish colonists.

Why did these particular people come to this particular spot from a foreign country? What were they looking for in this alien land, surrounded by people who did not look like them or talk like them or think like them and yet accepted and helped them in the manner of the frontier?

There is a push-pull theory in the history of immigration that states that not only must the conditions of the native country be inhospitable to the individual, but that there must be a host country able to provide the

conditions which are more satisfactory and allow the individual greater opportunities materialistically, physically, and spiritually.

Russia in the last quarter of the 19th century was the seat of virulent anti-semitism. Life for the Jews was harsh and many of them sought to leave or to find other solutions to their problems. America in the same century was the scene of great expansionism, conducive to Utopian colonization which flourished here more readily than in any other country of the time.

These two forces met head on. One result was the establishment of New Odessa. To understand the philosophy behind the colony, it is necessary to look at the forces at work among 19th century Russian Jews; at the United States during the same period of time which allowed for experimentation with Utopian societies; at the actual colony of New Odessa; and into the reasons which caused its disappearance.

In terms of United States history or even the history of the Pacific Northwest or Oregon or Douglas County, New Odessa lasted just a short moment in time, but it was a unique story that added one more piece to that kaleidoscope which is the American people.

This is the history of the ninety or so people who were at one time members of the New Odessa commune. It is

also the story of the Oregon territory which allowed them to exist culturally and physically, to work and love and dance, and then disappear into the American landscape.

CHAPTER II

RUSSIAN JEWRY - LAST HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY

The laws of Russia make a residence in that country for the Jews prolonged agony, a life in death, a death in life.¹

One of the significant ingredients of Russian civilization from the days of the tsars to the days of the USSR has been the great number of national minorities within Russian society. The Jews have always been a minority within the other minorities. In Poland, they lived among the Poles, in Lithuania among the Lithuanians, in Estonia among the Estonians. Even though minority groups have always suffered discrimination within Russia, the Jews were signalled out even further because among the minorities they were the only ones without a territorial designation, they spoke a different and distinguishing dialect, they differed in their religious beliefs, and they often practiced occupations which differed from that of the general population.

On August 16, 1772, Catherine II issued the first of many decrees which established a discriminatory Jewish policy to be followed by the tsarist rulers until their

¹From a speech by Congressman Samuel S. Cox, New York, May 21, 1880, printed in the Congressional Record 13, App., p. 651.

overthrow in 1917. Catherine's decrees were the result of the first partition of Poland in 1772, in which Russia inherited 200,000 Jews. The subsequent partitions in 1793 and 1795, adding the additional Polish-Lithuanian provinces, brought the number of Jews to 900,000.¹ For the first time the distinction was made between Jewish and non-Jewish subjects. The non-Jews were promised a continuation of the rights enjoyed under the former government throughout the Russian empire. The area in which Jews could claim former privileges was specifically limited to the territory in which they were living at the time of partition.²

The year of this decree, 1772, is regarded by some historians as the year of the official establishment of the Pale: the area in which Jews were confined to settlement. Other historians date the Pale from 1791, because the official decree was issued that year. The Russian scholar A. D. Gradovsky dates the Pale from 1769 when foreign Jews were permitted to immigrate into Russia on the condition that they settle only in the New Russian provinces.³

¹Simon M. Dubnow, History of the Jews in Russia and Poland (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1918), p. 307.

²Louis Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 1 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944), p. 8 as translated from the Russian.

³*Ibid.*, p. 9.

By 1804, the Pale of Settlement was clearly defined. It consisted of the Lithuanian provinces of Vilno, Grodno, and Minsk; Vohlyn and Podolie in the southwest; Vitebsk and Mogilev in White Russia excluding the villages; Chernigov and Poltava minus the crown hamlets in Little Russia (Ukraine); Kherson, Ekaterinoslav, Taurida, and Bessarabia minus Nikolaev and Sevastopol in New Russia; the province of Kiev minus the capitol; and the Baltic provinces, present day Latvia and Estonia for old settlers only. Rural settlements in the 50 verst (1 verst equals 0.6629 mile) along the western frontier were to be closed to newcomers on the grounds that along the borders, they might engage in smuggling.¹

Within the Pale, Jews were constantly on the move, for even with the restrictions placed on them, their numbers grew as did the entire population of Europe in the 19th century. By 1880, the Jewish population in Russia had grown to four million from one million in 1810 despite the fact that by the later quarter of the 19th century, over one third of the Jews of Eastern Europe emigrated from Russia.²

In a decree issued August 26, 1827 Jews were made liable for military service and could be called up anytime

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 1, p. 11.

²Moses Rischin, The Promised City (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), pp. 24-33.

between ages 12 and 25. Whereas the proportion of Jewish recruits was 10 per 1000, among the general population it was 7 per 1000.

In 1835 the Pale of Settlement was redefined, 15 provinces in the west and south a number of districts excepted. Temporary permits were issued for other parts of Russia. Only certain Jews among the merchant class were permitted to visit the capitols, seaports, and the fairs of Nizhnii, Novogorod, and Kharkov. Jews were forbidden to employ Christians as servants. The Russian language, Polish, or German could be used for business but under no circumstances the Hebrew language.¹

Jewish schools were set up by the government on November 13, 1844. The Kahal (local Jewish government) was abolished on December 19 of the same year and brought the Jews under the same system of local government as the rest of the population. The tax on kosher meat which had been used by the kahal, was transferred to the provisional authorities.²

When Alexander II became tsar in 1856, the Jews hoped that some of the discriminatory laws of the 18th and early 19th centuries would be rescinded. Alexander II had

¹Hugh Seton-Watson, The Russian Empire 1801-1917 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), pp. 273-74.

²Ibid., p. 274.

instituted new reforms abolishing serfdom, granting of local government, and court and military reforms. For these reforms he gained the title "Tsar Liberator." The cantonist system which was virtually life service in the military was abolished August 26, 1856, the day that Alexander II was crowned.¹

The Haskalah (enlightenment) movement among Jews which had begun in the early part of the 19th century, received new encouragement. The atmosphere of hope that prevailed was welcomed by those Jews who felt that by receiving a secular education and civic emancipation, the question of anti-semitism would be solved.

The bomb that killed Alexander II ended an era that might have seen a different social structure for the Russian people. The new tsar, Alexander III, had not been trained to leadership and had been given a limited education. He was described as "lacking in mental keenness." He was sure of his own imperial destiny and regarded himself as appointed by God. By nature, he was against democratic

¹During the reign of Nicholas I, Jews were first inducted into the military service. "The Statute of Conscription and Military Service of August 26, 1827" provided that in addition to supplying recruits for the army for twenty-five years, Jews had to provide military conscripts from ages 12-25, these juvenile conscripts were called "cantonists."

institutions and the death of his father at the hands of revolutionaries strengthened his autocratic beliefs.¹

The reign of Alexander III was one of militant reaction. For Jews, it brought a reign of terror. Prior to his rule there had been only sporadic pogroms (anti-Jewish riots), all of which had occurred at Odessa, one in 1820, another in 1859, and the third in 1871.² During the reign of Alexander III, the pogrom became a regularly occurring event until the fall of the monarchy in 1917. The attacks upon Jews, although not directly ordered by the central government, were tolerated by it. The common pattern they followed shows that they were not spontaneous but planned and organized by some higher body.³ The rioting usually took place for several days before the government would take the necessary action to stop them.

On April 15, 1881 in Kirovo (Elisavetgrad) less than a month after the assassination of Alexander II, a pogrom took place which was allegedly organized by a gang sent for this very purpose. When a drunken Russian was thrown out of a Jewish owned inn, a mob that had been waiting nearby raised the cry that the Jews were beating Russians and they began attacking Jewish pedestrians. At this signal,

¹Louis Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951), p. 1.

²Ibid., p. 19.

³Ibid.

Jewish stores were smashed and looted. The riots were checked that night by the police, but the next day they were resumed with increased vigor and with the police remaining neutral.¹

In quick succession pogroms followed in Kiev (Sunday, April 26, 1881), Odessa (May 3-5) and spread throughout the country. The government waited several days until it offered protection to the victims on the theory that the anti-Jewish campaigns had been organized by revolutionary agitators. The Tsar stated "that in the criminal disorders in the south of Russia the Jews merely served as a pretext and that it is the work of anarchists."² In a statement issued after a pogrom at Pereyaslav on June 30-July 1, 1881, the Jews were condemned because Christian blood was spilt.

The pogroms were used as a pretext to further limit the economic and civil status of the Jews. Provisional committees were organized by the government to review the Jewish problem, with Jews being allowed to participate in these committees which varied from 10-60 members. In practice, however, the number of Jews serving on these committees was very small for no committee except that of Kovno had more than two Jewish delegates. While the mayors

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 20.

²Dubnow, Jews in Russia and Poland, p. 261.

of the chief cities were invited to sit on the committees, the mayor of Zhitomir was not included because his views differed from that of the authorities.¹ As a result of these practices, the Jewish point of view had little effect.

The Central committee of the government assigned to Jewish affairs recommended the complete revision of legislation concerning the Jews. In order to calm the allegedly aroused population, temporary measures were adopted. On May 3, 1882 the government adopted the following Temporary Rules often called the May Laws:

1. Non new Jewish settlers were allowed in the villages or hamlets of the Pale.
2. Jews could not own or manage real estate or farms outside the cities of the Pale.
3. Jews were not allowed to do business on Sundays or other Christian holidays.

These Temporary Rules remained in effect until the Revolution of 1917.²

The effect of these laws was that many Jews found themselves homeless. For example, a Jewish villager returning from a trip would be declared a new settler and forever barred from his home. Rural residents, who went to the big cities to worship in the synagogues, were forced to prove legal residence before they could return home.

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 26.

²Ibid., p. 30.

Moving from one house to another in the same village resulted in loss of residence rights.¹

Jewish employment opportunities became limited. They could not be employed, with rare exceptions, in any department of government services. The doors of educational institutions within the Pale remained closed to the vast majority. An official limitation of students in secondary schools began on July 1, 1887 and on July 10 it was extended to the universities. The admission of Jewish students to the schools was dependent on the number of non-Jewish students even in the areas populated predominately with Jews. In the secondary schools the chances of admission were even slimmer as a great portion of non-Jewish parents did not believe in giving their children a secondary education, lessening the educational opportunities for Jews.²

These laws were binding on the fifteen Russian provinces in the Pale of Settlement, but not in the Kingdom of Poland. The laws were interpreted with increasing severity and by the end of the 19th century, Jews in Russia had to face the reality that their old way of life was being modified by Russian law. The Jews of Russia were forced to

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 31.

²Ibid., pp. 33-37.

change, but the question of survival was paramount. The problem brought different responses from various Jewish communities.

At first the Jews resorted to traditional ways of prayer and fasting. Public fast days were held and special services given in the synagogues. In Odessa, a city not considered especially orthodox, when the cantor at a special service gave the prayer

'All the nations reside on their land but Israel wanders the earth like a shadow finding no rest, receiving no brotherly welcome,' the sobbing of the men and women in the synagogue was heart rending.¹

After it became obvious that the life of the Jews was impossible under the existing conditions, the Jewish community turned within itself to find alternate solutions for survival. Even though there was a widespread belief that Tsarist Russia was determined to rid itself of the Jews, none of the various government commissions and committees set up to deal with the Jewish question ever proposed expulsion or emigration as a possible solution. The statements made by high ranking officials expressing the wish that the country might be freed of Jews were never translated into official policy or legislation. The mass

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 55.

exodus of Jews across the western borders of Russia from 1880-1914 was in response to the pleas and initiatives of the Jews themselves.¹

Gradually four plans began to evolve: one, assimilation and acceptance of Christianity; two, revolutionary change, not just among the Jews, but as a part of modifying the structure of the existing Russian government; three, secularization of Jewish society (Haskalah); four, emigration primarily to Palestine (political Zionism) or to the United States.

The fourth solution, emigration, is the plan which the Jews who founded New Odessa adopted combined with a zeal of revolutionary idealism. This idealism, however, was not intended to apply to Oregon society in general but only to the Jewish immigrants. They had no desire to change the whole of society but only their specific group. The Oregon group believed the United States was large enough for them to isolate themselves and organize their own social structure.

To understand the motivation of the New Odessa emigrants, the other alternatives to survival must also be understood.

¹Hans Rogger, "Tsarist Policy on Jewish Emigration," Soviet Jewish Affairs, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1973, p. 26.

Assimilation is rather self-explanatory. The government had consistently maintained that they were against the Jews only because they were not Christians. Therefore, if the Jews lost their identity as a religion it should follow that there would no longer be a Jewish problem. In practice "of all the religious and racial minorities in Russia, the Jews were the only ones whose merger with the Russians was a prerequisite for civil equality."¹ Jews may have changed their religion but their nationality was considered to be Jewish and so in reality they could not be assimilated legally.

Among the Jewish intelligentsia, there was a strong strain of Russian nationalism. The generation of Jews living in the mid-nineteenth century became interested in the socialist and nationalist movements. These were the parents of the students of the late 19th century. As a result, the young people had grown up in an atmosphere and a home life that was conducive to interest and discussion of these movements. After the outbreak of the pogroms in 1881, they saw that self-defense was a matter of personal survival. Their return to Judaism was prompted more as a national rather than a religious sentiment. These were the young people who became interested in Haskalah which

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 29.

stressed secular rather than religious education.¹ It is impossible to determine the number of Jews that successfully converted as even today in the USSR, Jews are classified as a nationality as well as a religion.

Among the early revolutionaries there were surprisingly few Jews. The secret anti-government activism which had begun during the reign of Alexander II came about by the refusal of the Tsar to grant a constitutional regime and his failure to solve the land needs of the peasantry. Among all the heterogeneous groups within Russia, the Jews were most loyal to the government of Alexander II because of the minor reforms he instituted to help their economic and legal status and his abolition of the cruel anti-semitic laws of Nicholas II.²

Few Jews were active in the early revolutionary movements. Within the Pale, there was a tradition of abstinence from political affairs and of obedience to authority. The first socialist activity among Jews was their involvement in the Narodnik (Agrarian Populist) movement, begun by young intellectuals who would attempt to demonstrate kinship and work side by side with the peasants in the fields. The idea of the mir, the 19th century attempt at Russian

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 161.

²Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 1, p. 146.

communal living became the ideal for the young Russian revolutionary, non-Jew as well as Jew. The agrarian population was narrowly nativist and outbreaks of anti-semitism among the peasants frequently occurred.¹

With the growth of a Jewish student body in the 1870's there was increased contact between the Jewish and Russian intelligentsia. The students were concerned as Russians with the plight of the Russian people and not as Jews interested in Jewish rights. They maintained that the emancipation of the Jew would take place with the emancipation of the masses. Paul Akselrod, an eminent revolutionary who happened to be Jewish, dedicated himself to the redemption of the poor and humble people of Russia.²

By the early 70's, Jews were participating in every phase of revolutionary activities. They took seriously the slogan of the revolution "Go to the people!".³ They left homes and careers to live and work among the people.

The number of early Jewish terrorists was small. Aron Gobet of Vilno was the first Jew to be executed for his activities. He died in 1879 when his plot to assassinate Alexander II was discovered. Women students were

¹Howard M. Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History (Cleveland: World Press, 1958), pp. 287-88.

²Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 1, p. 148.

³Ibid., p. 149.

among the most active revolutionaries. A Jewish woman, Hessie Helfman, received a sentence to hard labor and died in the fortress of Petropavlovsk in Kamchatka.¹

Jews worked in the organizational phases of revolutionary activities. They also served as intermediaries between Russian and Western socialism as many Jewish students being denied a university education in Russia, went to schools in Germany and Switzerland, where they made contact with other student revolutionaries. Intellectually emancipated, these Jewish youths emerged among the leadership in the revolutionary movements in Russia in the two decades before World War I.²

Unfortunately, the Jewish revolutionaries whose aim was to solve the Jewish problem, complicated the situation by giving the government a specific group on which to focus its anti-revolutionary hatreds and activities.

It became obvious that Jewish Russification did not provide social and civil equality for the Jews. With an increase in anti-Jewish activities, there was a definite trend towards the belief that only by emigration could the Jew hope to survive. Jewish leadership was divided on whether or not to support mass emigration. The upper Jewish bourgeoisie was afraid that any attempt to organize or

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 1, p. 151.

²Rischin, The Promised City, p. 42.

encourage emigration would be considered unpatriotic. The majority felt that mass exodus would only increase the pogroms and undermine the struggle for emancipation. There was, however, a growing minority that did favor leaving Russia, including Dr. Max Mandelstrom of Kiev, who wrote:

Either we get civil rights or we emigrate. Our human dignity is being trampled on, our wives and daughters are being dishonored, we are looted and pillaged. Either we get decent human rights or else let us go where our eyes may lead us.¹

Without any specific Jewish or government pressure, after the pogroms of 1881, a spontaneous emigration began to take place. Thousands of Jews fled over the borders without funds or passports, and were often stranded in European cities, or formed large Jewish communities in border towns such as Brody on the Austrian border.²

As the Jewish people began to organize and collect pennies to aid in mass migrations, two countries emerged as the centers of refuge, Palestine, then under Ottoman control, and the United States. The United States because of economic opportunities and vast underdeveloped areas; Palestine because of the nationalistic feelings developing through the newly organized Zionist movement and its historical and religious significance.

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 62.

²The name Brody has become part of the Yiddish language, synonymous with legal red tape.

The question then follows, does Judaism and the Jewish way of life have a chance of survival in any land other than that associated with nationalistic aspirations or historical memories?

The Zionists believed that the history of Europe had shown the spread of anti-semitism from one country to another, across the continent from Spain in the 15th century as far as Russia. Would Jews ever be safe in a land which was not a Jewish homeland? The political Zionists believed not.

The Zionist movement attracted leaders who had tried other courses of action only to find they were not effective in solving the Jewish problem. Moses Leb Lilienblum who had in his earlier years followed Haskalah, advanced arguments which have become classic in Zionist ideology. He believed that all emigration efforts should be directed towards Palestine because "we need a corner of our own, we need Palestine, we need a real centre there . . . we need energy and activity."¹

Because of the difficulties imposed against the Jews by the Turkish government which controlled Palestine as well as the small absorptive capacity of the country in the 1880's, the actual numbers of those leaving for Palestine was negligible. Organizations such as Hobebe Zion (Lovers

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 68.

of Zion) were formed in many of the large cities to train and organize chalutzim (pioneers).¹

The mainstream of emigration was directed towards the United States, the promised land, where the Jews believed gold paved the streets and all men had equal opportunities, where "all men were regarded as human beings." The number of Jews emigrating to the United States from Russia in the years 1881-1890 totaled 135,003.²

Among young intellectuals, there were those who idealized the freedom of the soil. It should be remembered that according to the Temporary Rules, no Jews were allowed to own land outside the cities and the towns. Except for limited subsistence farming for family consumption or trade of products within the community, the number of Jews engaged in agriculture was limited. The opinion was held by some, that if Jews were allowed to engage successfully in pursuits other than trade or commerce, one of the deep roots of anti-semitism would disappear. The stigma of "money lender" and "merchant" would no longer be all inclusive and Jews would again become an agricultural people as in Biblical days.

Among the groups desiring to pursue farming, there were those who wanted to go to Palestine and those who felt

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 78.

²Ibid., p. 73.

America would be a better choice. Inspired by Hobebe Zion, a group called BILU from the initials of the Hebrew words meaning "House of Jacob, let us go," combined Marxist zeal with Jewish nationalism and in 1882 with a total treasury of a few hundred rubles, departed for Palestine. The BILUim found labor in the hot desert combined with malaria more than a challenge to their idealism. Though they lasted as a group only a short period of time, they were the forerunners of the First Aliyah (wave of immigration) into Palestine which founded the early agricultural settlements.¹

Paralleling this movement to Palestine was a group called Am Olam (eternal people) which had begun first as a self-defense organization in the city of Odessa. The city of Odessa was the home of many of the early nationalist movements. In the early 19th century, it had been the city for the movement towards Greek nationalism. Because of its geographical location on the Black Sea, it was an important center for trade and commerce. This allowed for contact and exchange of ideas between peoples who had come from many countries and brought with them new and developing ideas.

The Jews of Odessa were not particularly religious and there was no rabbinical college in the city.

¹Sachar, The Course of Modern Jewish History, p. 268.

Therefore, they were more open to the acceptance of new and different ideas than Jews who lived in a more orthodox atmosphere.

In 1881, Moshe Herder and Monye Bokai founded the movement. Initially, after the decision to emigrate was made, they could not decide whether to go to Palestine or to the United States but eventually came to settle in America, establishing cooperative colonies in the spirit of Robert Owen and Charles Fourier with a touch of Leo Tolstoy.¹

The primary ideological difference between Am Olam and BILU was that Am Olam regarded the Jewish problem as essentially socio-economic and political and not cultural and national. The leaders in America remained the same Russianized intellectuals they had been in their former home.

The name, Am Olam, and its emblem of a plow and the Ten Commandments was indicative of the movement's character and purpose. The plow symbolized the agricultural pursuits and the Commandments its Jewish identification and moral standards. The diary of one of its members expressed their philosophy

¹Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 166.

'Our motto is labor in the fields, and our goal is the physical and spiritual rejuvenation of our people. In free America, where people of various nationalities live in amity, we Jews too shall find a corner in which to rest our heads. We shall prove to the world that we are qualified for physical labor.'¹

The leaders of Am Olam who came from the revolutionary ranks, stressed not only agricultural work, but insisted that colonies in the United States be established on Marxist principles, modeled on the Russian mir rather than on private property. The predominant motive was socialist with the movement being closer to Russian radicalism and Russian culture than to Judaism.²

New Odessa in Oregon became the goal for a very small number of Jews who elected to come to America, interested not in settling in the big cities and established Jewish communities, but in applying principles of socialism to agricultural pursuits and living style in a hidden corner of the Pacific Northwest. Numerically, New Odessa was never very large. At its height it numbered about 90 persons. It was small in comparison to the vast numbers of Jews coming to the United States in the last quarter of the 19th century.

¹As translated from the Russian in Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 166.

²Greenberg, The Jews in Russia, 2, p. 167.

The ideology of New Odessa reached beyond its geographical borders. When the colony broke up in 1887, its membership dispersed throughout the country, and each in his own way made some slight impact on the totality of what is called American Judaism.

CHAPTER III

AMERICAN UTOPIAN SOCIETIES

The concept of utopian society is not unique to the present American generation. Ever since man first organized attempts to reach fulfillment of humanitarian dreams, people have endeavored to establish ideal communities. The roots of utopian thought go deep into religion, both eastern and western; into the rational philosophy of Plato's Republic; into Frourier, Saint Simon, and Comte; into Marxism and other various systems of socialism.

America in the 19th century was a country of great optimism, firm in the belief of its "manifest destiny." Vast areas of land had been opened with the Louisiana purchase and the door to immigration was wide open. The vast areas of uninhabited land offered room for experimentation with alternate living styles. America had been founded on religious utopian ideals and by the 19th century over 1000 various concepts of utopian communities had been established. New Odessa was one of these.

The word "utopia" is taken from Thomas Moore's work by that name. It translates literally into the word "nowhere." The concept of this definition is that nowhere on earth is there a perfect society. Man's quest for such

a society led him to dream of a heaven on earth. Since man's dreams are not limited by what is possible, utopian societies are planned by the dreamers.¹

Fourier, Owen, and Saint Simon believed that ideal societies could be created by moral persuasion. To Marx and Engels, the word utopian was a term of derision. Marxist radicals agreed with the earlier utopian thinkers that a new social order must be created for such societies to exist. The Marxist believed, however, that the bourgeoisie society must disappear before a "new man" could exist. All utopian thought was similar in that it was against the "status quo."²

A broader definition of utopia is given by the sociologist Rosabeth Moss Kanter who has written extensively on the subject:

The imaginary society in which humankind's deepest yearnings, noblest dreams, and highest aspirations come to fulfillment, where all physical, social, and spiritual forces work together, in harmony, to permit the attainment of everything people find necessary and desirable.³

Religion is not the only impetus for the utopian dream. Communitarian colonies have been based on

¹Ron E. Roberts, The New Communes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1971), p. 8.

²Ibid., p. 9.

³Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Commitment and Community (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 1.

politico-economic or psychosocial philosophies as well, or there may be a combination of all three.¹ If one accepts these principles, then it is possible to conceive of the origins of America as being based on principles of Christian religious utopias. As early as 1680, the Labadists, a group of Protestant mystics settled in Northern Maryland. On the basis of communal land ownership, Plymouth Bay Colony started as a joint stock company in which all profits and benefits were to be held in common for at least seven years.²

Not all utopian communities are necessarily communes. Plato's ideal Republic described an agrarian society. He placed emphasis on voluntary poverty or asceticism. Small size was also considered a criteria for Plato's Republic. Communes share many utopian ideals but they may be implemented in two different ways. The idea of utopia combines a hope for a better world and a refuge from the complexities of established society. There is a negation and rejection of conventional life for which is substituted an affirmation of a new way.³

¹Kanter, Commitment and Community, p. 3.

²John Fiske, The Beginnings of New England (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1889), pp. 86-100.

³Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Communes - Creating and Managing the Collective Life (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 4.

A commune is a voluntary, value-based, communal social order.

A commune seeks self determination, often making its own laws and refusing to obey some of the larger laws of the larger society. It is identifiable as an entity having both physical and social boundaries. . . . Its primary end is an existence that matches its ideals. . . . These ideals give rise to the key communal arrangement, the sharing of resources and finances.¹

America was a haven for numerous religious communities in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Shaker community led by Mother Ann Lee of England was founded in 1787. The Hutterian Brethren (founded in Germany in 1530 and since 1873 in the United States) has today 150 communities and 17,000 members.²

As population moved westward across the plains to the Pacific coast, new areas of the country were opened for settlement. The Oregon territory was the site of the Aurora colony founded by William Keil. This was basically a Christian religious commune populated by people of German descent. Keil emphasized separateness and rejected the dogmas and hierarchies of the established churches. He found the frontier welcomed him with his "'no title but Christian' and 'no rules but the Bible.'"³

¹Kanter, Commitment and Community, p. 2.

²Ibid., pp. 3-4.

³Ibid., p. 4.

The religious communal movement continued to flourish in the early part of the 19th century, reaching its heights in the 1840's. As mobility increased and people moved from the farm to the town and city in response to increased industrialization of American society, a small socialist commune movement began to develop, hoping to bring a humanizing factor to the dehumanization of the individual brought about by urban living. Horace Greeley, whose ideas influenced many of the utopian experiments of the 1840's, believed "there should be no paupers and no surplus labor . . . only in unity can a solution be found for the problems of labor."¹

The impetus for politico-economic communities had come originally from abroad, from the thoughts of Robert Owen in England or from Charles Fourier and Etienne Cabet in France. The ideas may have been foreign but Americans seemed willing to accept various life styles within their midst and if they did not accept their doctrines themselves, they allowed these movements room in which to experiment and develop. New Harmony (1825-1827) was based on Owenite ideas. Over forty utopian communes based on Fourier's doctrines of association were established in the decade of the 40's. The North American Phalanx (1843-1856)

¹Kanter, Commitment and Community, p. 5.

and the Wisconsin Phalanx (1844-1850) were probably the best known and most successful. The Icarian communities based on Cabet's novel Voyage en Icarie lasted from 1848-1898.¹

John Humphrey Noyes, a radical graduate of Yale Theological Seminary from Putney, Vermont, attempted to combine religion, reform, and political idealism in founding the community of Oneida in New York in 1848. In the words of the Oneida song:

We have built us a dome
On our beautiful plantation,
And we all have one home,
And one family relation.²

Oneida was based on an economic communism, communal living, "complex marriage" or free love, communal child rearing, and government by mutual self criticism. The community generally maintained a good relationship with its neighbors. However, there was much controversy over the sexual practices within the community, and partly because of outside pressures and partly from some within the community in terms of personal dissatisfaction, the Oneida community dissolved into the Oneida joint stock company in 1881.³

¹Kanter, Commitment and Community, pp. 6-7.

²Mark Halloway, Heavens on Earth (London: Turnstile Press, 1951), p. 179, as quoted from the Oneida song.

³Kanter, Commitment and Community, p. 18.

Some of the ideas which were initiated at Oneida had an effect on the structure of the communes which followed. There was usually a charismatic leader as the instigator. At Oneida, it was John Noyes. While some of the sexual practices may have been modified, the family structure in most communitarian communities varied from that of the general societies. The idea of mutual self criticism took hold and became one of the characteristics identifying a commune. The division of labor at Oneida was well organized and all who were physically able "worked." Members had only a minimum of private property and the earning of money for subsistence was a function of the entire community. Oneida may not have been the "Kingdom of Heaven on Earth" that its founder intended it to be, but it was a peculiarly American type of commune which became a prototype for many that followed.¹

The waves of religious awakenings which occurred through the 19th century in America, tended to give to Americans the philosophy that this was a land of "new beginnings." The national consciousness was based on the idea of America as a land of manifest destiny, destined by God to be the site of a new and better world.

¹Pierrepont Noyes, My Father's House: An Oneida Boyhood (New York: Farrar and Reinhart, 1937), no specific pages but a first hand account of the Oneida community.

The 19th century communes developed basic principles concerning their organization. As the old ones either dissolved or evolved into other forms of social organization, there developed certain common characteristics within communal living. These criteria are not only applicable to the early communes, but persist until today wherever they may be or whatever they are called. The Bruderhof of Germany, the Shinkyō of Japan, and the Israeli Kibbutzim by virtue of their being communes have similar characteristics. Variations may certainly occur, but basically the principles and theories remain the same.

Dr. Rosabeth Moss Kanter of Brandeis University and Harvard Graduate School, has written extensively on the communal movements. Her book Commitment and Community has been invaluable in studying the communal movements of both today and yesterday. Her criteria of definition as well as her distinction between successful and unsuccessful communes is the basis for determining the effect of New Odessa. The following criteria are based on her work in Commitment and Community.¹

Common to all communes is an idealization of communal life. Primary to this belief is the concept of human perfectibility. Societies and not people are the cause of tensions. In a small isolated environment, small scale

¹Kanter, Commitment and Community, pp. 32-57.

controlled societies can be organized to create the perfect society and therefore the perfect human being. The religious communes thought of the perfect society as Heaven, Eastern mystics as higher incarnation, and socialists as the next step in human evolution. Confession and self criticism were means of achieving self improvement. Mutual criticism became an important part of a "perfect" society.

The utopian community is well organized in contrast to the disarray of the larger society. The chaos of the unplanned life style is replaced by a predicted society which follows a predictable pattern. Planning extends to all aspects of communal life--eating, sleeping, praying, loving, working--centrally coordinated by group leadership.

A third important feature of utopian communal belief is that of brotherhood. If societies can be brought into harmony with natural laws, then people can be brought into harmony with one another. Some of the names of the 19th century communes included the word "harmony" as part of their names, for example, "Harmony Society of Harmony, Pennsylvania" and "New Harmony, Indiana." It is from this concept that the idea of shared ownership of all property evolved. Private property was abolished and goods equally distributed. Work as well as property was shared, in some communities jobs were rotated with each person assigned daily or weekly tasks. Finally, the emphasis on brotherhood and harmony led to focusing relations within the

group so that eating, sleeping, and education became shared living experiences. All men and women were considered as brothers and sisters within a single family unit.

There was a sense of experimentation within the 19th century communes which is still characteristic of communes today. Many communities tried new forms of dress and appearance for women such as shorter dresses and hair styles. The shocking style of the bloomer was first worn at Oneida and was as outrageous a costume then as the hippie styles coming out of today's communes. Since a commune is a small social structure it serves as a social laboratory in which new ideas ferment and develop.

Return to the land is often associated with communal ideology but not necessary to its structure. Agricultural pursuits, however, offer the best way to fulfill a number of utopian ideals. The return to a simple life and an uncomplicated means of livelihood with more tasks that require unskilled labor and therefore offer work for more people including children, including the necessity of a communal effort in periods such as harvest time, all foster the feeling of brotherhood and family.

"Perfectibility, order, brotherhood, merging of mind and body, experimentation, and the uniqueness of community" were the ideals which gave the communes their identity.

These were the dreams. The practical realizations often forced the changing of these dreams in order to face harsh reality.

As the "push" against Jews residing in Russia reached new severity, the second part of the "push-pull theory" of emigration was being filled by the general acceptance of immigration to the United States.

The second part of the "push-pull" theory of emigration worked in America. America in the 19th century was psychologically and physically able to accept a Jewish Commune just as it had accepted and modified those mentioned as well as numerous others.

While the majority of Russian Jewish immigrants settled in the large eastern cities, there gradually extended across the country other Jewish communities as well as a handful of Jews who were interested in agriculture.¹ Foremost among these were the youthful students who were among the members of Am Olam from Odessa, Russia.

Efforts were made at Calcasieu Parish, Sicily Island, Louisiana; at Crimieux, South Dakota; and Cotopaxi, Colorado. For various reasons these groups lasted a very short time. The island in Louisiana was invested with malaria carrying mosquitoes and the colonists became ill and

¹The writer's grandfather was an early farmer in the state of Wisconsin. He had come to this country from Kishnev, Russia, in order to escape service in the army of the tsar.

disbanded within a year. In other instances, the climate was too harsh and the soil unproductive. New Odessa lasted from 1882-1887 and while not successful in reference to the length of its existence, it was the longest lived of the colonies of Am Olam. Abraham Menes wrote,

Established by the first Odessa group of Am Oylam, New Odessa in Oregon was more successful than its sister colonies. This colony had more socialist than a nationalistic goal. In all probability, it had the best human material for the purpose.¹

¹Abraham Menes, "The Am Oylam Movement," YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science, Vol. 4, 1949, p. 28.

CHAPTER IV

NEW ODESSA

"UNITED WE STAND - DIVIDED WE FALL"

By the California [a ship] arrived a colony of Russian Jews from Odessa, consisting of 28 men and some half dozen women. They have rented a building back of East Portland, where they are located for the present. The men are mostly young, only 2 or 3 being married. Several of them are well educated and are druggists, engineers, etc. by profession. They are in comfortable circumstances and it is their express intention to secure a tract of land and settle in a body as tillers of the soil.¹

Hidden in the back pages of the Douglas Independent was the above article announcing the arrival in Portland of a handful of young Russian Jewish immigrants who would be involved in a unique agricultural and social experiment.

The far corner of the Pacific Northwest was not the most likely place to find a group of Russian Jewish intellectuals in flight from the persecutions of Alexander III. However, from 1882-1887, the commune of New Odessa, 250 miles south of Portland, Oregon, near the present day town of Glendale in Douglas County, was the site of this experiment. Within those five years, the colony enjoyed relative prosperity and unity, followed by disunity from within and

¹Douglas Independent, September 9, 1882.

calamity from without, and finally ended in disillusionment and bankruptcy. This is the story of New Odessa, whose motto "United We Stand, Divided We Fall"¹ proved to be all too prophetic.

The first members of Am Olam left Odessa, Russia and arrived in New York in January, 1882. There were 65 people in that group who had traveled together from Russia by way of Austria and Germany. They had crossed the border at Brody, a town on the Russian-Austrian border which had become a stopping place and a clearing house for the thousands of Jews leaving Russia. The Jews would cross the border illegally and would have to remain in the town until either an organization or an individual would assume responsibility for them. The members of Am Olam were met by representatives of Alliance Israelite Universielle, an organization founded in France to aid Jews once they had left Russia.²

In May, 1882 an additional 400 members of Am Olam left Brody. Among these was Leon Swett who eventually arrived in Portland, Oregon. In a letter which Theodore Swett, Leon's son, wrote some years later to Abraham Cahan,

¹The motto of the commune as written in a letter from a commune member and translated in an article by Abraham Menes, "The Am Oylam Movement," YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science, Vol. 4, 1949, p. 29.

²Gabriel Davidson and Edward A. Goodwin, "A Unique Agricultural Colony," The Reflex, May, 1928, p. 1.

editor of the Jewish Daily Forward, he described his father's journey:

They took the train from Brody to Hamburg. . . . My father Leon Swett was treasurer of the Group of 400. It was his responsibility to handle all moneys. From the day we [Theodore was born in Russia before his family emigrated] left Odessa to the day our ship landed in New York, my father as treasurer concealed its gold in 2 money belts, leather, strapped around his body. He was always well guarded. At night my mother was always awake when my father 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.¹

Two additional groups followed within a month.

Among these were those who elected to come to Oregon.

Ninety per cent of them were former students at Russian universities.

New York City had become the destination for thousands of Jews fleeing from Eastern Europe. The already established Jewish population of New York had their origins in Western Europe and had come after the revolutions of 1848 or were descendants of Sephardic Jews who had come early in the colonization of America. The established

¹MSS, Letter from Theodore Swett Collection, Oregon Historical Society. From Theodore Swett to Abraham Cahan, editor of the Jewish Daily Forward, June 16, 1942. Conversation with Dr. William Swett, Portland, a grandson of Leon indicated there is a question as to whether Leon actually visited the site of New Odessa. After arriving in Portland, he decided not to join the colony as he was married and had 3 small children and felt that moving to the commune would be a hardship on his family. Instead, he obtained a homestead near Buxton, Oregon and farmed there until his death.

Jewish community had found a good life in this country and did not look favorably upon Jews from the isolated "shtetl"¹ of Eastern Europe with his quaint ways and customs.

The American Jewish community had been warned that among this new emigration of Jews, Am Olam in particular, there were young Jewish radicals with different political views and liberal attitudes in religious observation. Letters had actually been sent to Jewish leaders in America from individuals who were working with the emigrants in Europe, warning of these trouble makers who would undoubtedly work against the status quo.²

Among these leaders were two remarkable men who even though they did not necessarily agree with this new ideology, were in great sympathy with any movement of service to the Jewish people. Michael Heilprin, an author and scholar, already well advanced in years, became their staunch friend, advisor, and consultant. He devoted his time, often at the expense of his physical well being, to seek financial aid and other support for their undertakings. Associated with him was Dr. Julius Goldman, a

¹"Shtetl" is the Yiddish word for the Jewish small town of Eastern Europe. For a definitive study, see Zborowski and Herzog, Life Is With People (New York: International University Press, 1952). An anthropological study of the "shtetl."

²Davidson and Goodwin, Reflex, p. 2.

young lawyer, who frequently neglected his own profession to give aid to the newly arrived immigrants.¹

On November 30, 1883, Mr. Heilprin wrote a letter describing the Jewish agricultural movement in America to Oscar Strauss of the newly organized Baron de Hirsch fund which had been founded in England to aid Jews particularly interested in agriculture. In an appeal for funds, Mr. Heilprin described the efforts being made by the members of Am Olam:

The whole of this movement, for self-regeneration, to which old degradation, disappointed hope of deliverance through freedom in the fatherland, and a barbarous persecution have given rise, is an entirely novel, a magnificent phenomenon in the history of modern Judaism. By strengthening and fomenting this movement grand results can yet be achieved. And is it not a duty, is it not commanded by the said circumstances of the time, which has witnessed such a terrible revival of medievalism, to make a vigorous effort to foster the good which so unexpectedly springs from a source of evil? And does not our Republic offer the best and broadest field for such efforts of Jewish philanthropy and foresight?²

Mr. Heilprin continued to aid in many ways. It was through his business association with Henry Villard, a prime developer of western railways and transportation,

¹Davidson and Goodwin, Reflex, p. 2.

²MSS Letter from Michael Heilprin to Oscar Strauss, November 30, 1883. Baron de Hirsch Collection, American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Mass.

that the decision was made to settle at the site of New Odessa.¹

The members of Am Olam established headquarters in New York in a house on Pell Street calling it the "Commune." Still wearing the Russian student's uniform of blue blouses and caps, they set about establishing a commune, experimenting with communal living in the heart of New York's teeming East side. Being without practical trades or even a basic knowledge of agriculture, they set out to learn jobs that would be useful to them, not only because of the financial necessity, but to gain practical experience.²

They did not confine their efforts to the New York area but went wherever they might gain valuable knowledge and experience. One young man, for example, went to Vincennes, Indiana. He was offered positions within the city but surprised the local Jewish community by not accepting them. He finally found a job on a neighborhood farm and worked for eight dollars a month. While these workers were in places away from New York, they held themselves in readiness to return as soon as they were ready to set up their own enterprise. An example of the strong communal

¹Davidson and Goodwin, Reflex, p. 3.

²Moses Rischin, The Promised City (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1970), p. 150.

feelings held by these immigrants was that when the call came to the young man from Indiana where he had worked only four or five months, even though he was without funds, he left immediately making his way back to New York by walking and hitching rides on passing wagons.¹

Not knowing what heavy labor they might have to do on a farm, they accepted all kinds of manual jobs. Some went to Boston as longshoremen while others worked on railroads rapidly being constructed across the country. Meantime, between 50 and 60 people remained in the house on Pell Street. They lived a communal life, dividing the household tasks and pooling their financial resources. Educational meetings were held at night where they learned English, discussed philosophy, and made plans for their future colony. Michael Heilprin was their constant advisor.²

Two scouting parties were sent to different parts of the country to look for possible sites. One group went to Texas and the Mid-west. The scouts worked for three months on farms in each area to test out the climatic conditions and the prospects in the area. They found the land in Texas and Kansas too arid and the heat depressing. The other group went to Oregon and Washington. After looking

¹Davidson and Goodwin, Reflex, p. 3.

²Ibid., p. 3.

over several possibilities, they recommended a section of land comprising 760 acres near Glendale, Oregon. Most of it was forest with about 150 acres cleared and suitable for cultivation. There were two modest houses on the property. The cost was \$4800. Two thousand dollars was needed for the first payment. Through the personal solicitation of Heilprin, the amount was raised among interested New York Jews.¹

The Glendale site was probably suggested by Villard. He had become a close personal friend of Heilprin as well as a business associate. Villard had recently taken over the bankrupt Oregon and California Railroad. The Glendale site was traversed by the new extension which was being built by O and C from Roseburg to Ashland. Arriving late in the summer, the colonists would not have an opportunity to plant the first year. Food, however, was available in the forests and streams. In addition, by working for the railroad, selling them timber for ties and fuel, they would have an income that would make them self supporting. It was at this time that the Chinese began to work in the area on the railroads and there is some question as to whether the colonists actually worked on the construction or just in the supplying of lumber.²

¹Davidson and Goodwin, Reflex, p. 3.

²Ibid.

Through the intercession of Villard who also had interests in a steamship company, transportation was arranged at \$20 per person for the entire trip. In July, 1882, twenty-five members of Am Olam left New York by steamer bound for Colon, Panama, crossed the isthmus on foot and wagon, boarded yet another steamer for San Francisco, and changed to yet another coastal steamer destined for Portland. Eight or ten set out for Glendale as soon as they arrived in Portland. They went by wagon and foot and 250 miles later, south of Portland, on 760 acres of land located east of Glendale, extending from Windy Creek south across Cow Creek and over the ridge to Wolf Creek, a cooperative colony destined to be called "New Odessa" finally sank its roots.¹

In general these non-conformist youths found acceptance in the area. By this time, Douglas County had several prominent Jewish families. Just as in the East, the first Jews to arrive in the Northwest were mainly those who had come from Western Europe. Some of them, particularly the merchants had worked their way up the coast from San Francisco after the California gold rush. The Am Olamites were accepted by both the non-Jewish community and the resident Jewish group in Douglas County. The Am Olamites were of particular interest not only because of their

¹Records at Douglas County Title Company, Roseburg, Oregon.

religion but because they were Russians and had adopted many Russian customs. There was plenty of land and the people settled in the area were helpful with their advice, particularly in agriculture, a knowledge that the Jews were sadly lacking. The colony of New Odessa became a meeting place for the community and the neighbors would gather there to join in the singing and dancing which the colonists dearly loved. A party at the commune became a special neighborhood occasion.¹

The original property of New Odessa was purchased by Samuel Krimont from Hyman Wollenberg and his wife Julia.² Records at the Douglas County Title Company record this sale on March 8, 1883. Further records show a bill of sale dated October 29, 1884 in which said property was mortgaged at 8% per anum by Peter Fireman, Moses Frie (Free), and Abraham Headman acting in the name of the corporation of New Odessa.³

The archives of the Department of Commerce of the State of Oregon possess the original articles of

¹Davidson and Goodwin, Reflex, p. 3.

²The town of Glendale was originally called Julia after Mrs. Wollenberg. The name changed when the Wollenberg family moved their residence from Canyonville, 7 miles north and the county seat at that time. When the county seat was later moved to Roseburg, some 30 miles distance, the Wollenberg family moved again.

³Records at Douglas County Title Company, Roseburg, Oregon.

incorporation of New Odessa. Dated "first of December in the year of our Lord one thousand and eight hundreds and eighty three," it clearly states the aims and purposes of the organization. Included are the following articles which express the voluntary membership within the corporation:

1. All members of said society do hereby voluntarily associate themselves under the name and style of New Odessa community.
2. The object of said corporation is mutual assistance in perfecting and development of physical, mental, and moral capacities of its members.
3. Said corporation has no capitol stock and no shares. The money and labor voluntarily offered by the members shall never be credited for the individual benefits of donators, nor claimed back by withdrawing members but used only to promote the object herein specified. The estimated value of the goods, chattels, land rights and credits owned by the said corporation at present is five thousand dollars.¹

The articles are followed by a legal description of the property, signed by Peter Fireman, president; Moses Free (Frie), secretary; and Abraham Headman, treasurer. The notary public who witnessed and signed this document was Solomon Abraham, a Jew who had extensive holdings in real estate in the area and was a well known merchant active in local politics. He not only signed his name to

¹Articles of Incorporation, Business Archives, Department of Commerce of the State of Oregon, Corporation Division, Salem, Oregon. New Odessa Community, #3308.

the document in his official capacity, but supported the colonists in their endeavors.

By 1882, the Jewish population in Portland was large enough to support two religious congregations. The city nor its Jewish population held no enticements for these youths who were interested in an alternate life style. There had been a sizeable and viable Jewish community in Jacksonville as early as the 1860's, encouraged to come during the boom years of the Oregon gold rush. The Jews of Jacksonville had closer kinship ties to San Francisco than to Portland. By the time the seat of Josephine county and the railroad had been located in Medford and the gold rush disappeared, the Jewish community of Jacksonville had declined in strength and numbers. Between Portland and San Francisco there were scattered Jewish families but no strong Jewish community. Of those Jews living in the area adjacent to Glendale, Samuel and Asher Marks had come from Poland in 1852-1853; Hyman Wollenberg had come to Oregon about 1860; Isidor and Simon Caro came from Colmer, Germany settling first in Jacksonville, then going to Ashland, and finally settling in Roseburg. There was no rabbi between Portland and San Francisco.¹

¹George Abdill, "New Odessa," The Umpqua Trapper, Vol. 1, No. 4, Winter 1965, p. 12.

Why then did the members of Am Olam seek to isolate themselves from formalized Judaism by settling in such a remote area? It must be remembered that these young people were Jews only by virtue of having been identified as such by the Russian government and whatever familial ties they maintained. They spoke mainly Russian and because of their socialist ideals they professed to no religion. They made a habit of staying away from all organized religion of whatever domination. They hoped to prove that in a communistic community without traditional religious affiliation and with the Tolstoyan tradition of return to Mother Earth, the problems which had haunted Jews over the centuries would cease to exist.

By the spring of 1883, there were between 40 and 50 people living in the colony. An additional frame building had been added to the two already standing. On the lower floor there was a kitchen, dining room, and an assembly hall. The upper story was for sleeping quarters. In one large room, where with the exception of two or three couples, all members slept. The bedsteads were made of boards nailed together and placed in rows on the long side of the room under the eaves with a rough table in the center of the room for writing.

In that first spring, the crops planted were wheat, oats, peas, beans, and a variety of vegetables for their

own use. An additional 40 or 50 acres of ground was cleared and broken in the first two years, making a total of 200 cultivable acres.¹

The forests proved to be the major source of income. In the records of the Gardiner Mill of Glendale, there is an entry made in 1882 of money paid to the colonists of New Odessa.² During the first two years, 4,000 cords of wood were sold to the railroad company. Between \$7,000 and \$8,000 was realized in this way and an additional \$1,000 was paid on the land contract. The wood was used by the Oregon and Pacific railroad for fuel and for ties, used in laying track for the railroad which traversed the property. The O and C offered the colonists an additional contract for more ties which would have necessitated the building of a sawmill. There is a difference of opinion as to why negotiations failed. One, building a mill would have meant additional funds which were difficult to raise. Two, the colonists decided by open discussion and consensus not to commit themselves for a specified number of years by having a written contract.³

The railroad had progressed as far as Glendale on Cow Creek 265 miles from Portland by May, 1883. An unknown

¹Davidson and Goodwin, Reflex, p. 4.

²Records of the Gardiner Mill Employees, 1882, Douglas County Museum, Roseburg, Oregon.

³Davidson and Goodwin, Reflex, p. 4.

writer wrote in a regional publication of taking a trip to Oregon and described this particular countryside:

Having traversed the greater part of the Pacific slope from Los Angeles to the Columbia river and from the Pacific ocean to the Rocky mountains, I can safely assert that no where can be found so equable and pleasant a climate, such diversity of scenery and production, more richness of soil or beauty of landscape than can be seen on this route.¹

Tunnel 8 on Cow Creek was completed in the summer of 1884 and celebrated by a picnic at New Odessa which was attended by neighbors from the surrounding farms.²

Life on the commune in the early days was austere but harmonious. An itinerant farm worker, a non-Jew, worked there for an entire year and commented on the remarkable quality of these young people, who never quarreled, were constantly cheerful, permeated with idealism and who "labored to save the world."³

Their fundamental philosophy was Marxist, "each man works according to his ability, each man receives according to his needs." There were fixed hours of labor and assigned tasks not only on the farm and in the forest, but also in the kitchen and in the house. The men and women shared all the tasks, field and house. As stated in their Articles of Incorporation, New Odessa had been organized as a

¹The West Shore, Vol. 8, No. 10, October 1882, p. 184.

²Davidson and Goodwin, Reflex, p. 5.

³Ibid.

voluntary community for the basis and purpose of mutual assistance in the perfection of and development of physical, mental, and moral capacities of all its members, making no differentiation between men and women.

The average age of the original settlers was very young. At the time of the signing of the Articles of Incorporation, the president, Peter Fireman was 20, Moses Free (Frie) the secretary was 22, and the treasurer Abraham Headman was 23. Among the original members arriving in Portland, there were 28 men and 6 women. The exact number of the original group varies with the account but it is known that the men were mostly young and single.¹

Under the leadership of the officers of the corporation and the idealism of Paul Kaplan who joined them in 1883, the community of New Odessa made a sincere and relatively successful attempt at a communitarian experience.

One of the most derisive and conflicting influences in the history of the community, was the ideology and effect of a non-Jew, William Frey, who actually was never listed as a member of the community but lived there by "personal invitation." Frey was a political emigré who had at one time been an officer in the Russian army and had served as a professor of mathematics at the Russian Military Academy in St. Petersburg. He was a religious

¹See Appendix.

positivist who believed in the religion of Humanity as proposed by the French philosopher Auguste Comte. During the 1870's he had attempted to establish several Religion of Humanity communes in Kansas.

When the Kansas colonies failed, Frey returned to New York. Because of his knowledge of Russian, he began working with the newly arrived Russian immigrants. While involved in this work, he met with the members of the Commune on Pell street. The residents of the Commune were impressed with his philosophy but he was not hopeful of their ideals as a basis for a successful community. He felt they were too nihilistic and unfitted for the tasks they had set for themselves to establish an agricultural community. However, he was willing to help them. He thought that if they failed in their experiment, they would be more willing to follow his leadership and build on the basis of a common religious faith. In the meantime, by association with them, he tried to influence them to accept his philosophy.¹

In 1882, Frey came to Oregon as one of the advance scouts. He was still, however, reluctant to join the group. He warned them that he would be difficult to work with. He had definite ideas and was not known to

¹Avraham Yarmolinsky, A Russian's American Dream (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 1965), pp. 99-100.

compromise. Being harsh with himself, he said, he tended to be harsh with others. He felt more like a judge than a teacher. One of Frey's ideas was the value of a complex family structure in which all members would become Brothers and Sisters by which the practice of sex would not be confined to conventional marriage patterns. This did not mean that he believed in promiscuity, but rather that individuals could have more than one marriage partner as part of an extended family. He himself had a complicated marriage situation, with a legal wife whom he had married in Europe and another woman also listed on the census as his wife, having two children. In March, 1883, William Frey, 45, Marusia (Mary) Frey, 36, Lydia Frey, 33, and three children came to live at New Odessa by the request and consent of its members.¹

Frey and the two women, Marusia and Lydia, were the only people over the age of 30 listed on the census of the community. The next oldest was Joseph Korvitt recorded as being 27 in the census of August, 1884. Frey had been reluctant to go to New Odessa because of his previous failures and the self knowledge that he was an uncompromising individual. To the youths of the colony, however, he was someone to look up to, the charismatic leader found necessary in many early communes. He had been exiled because of

¹Yarmolinsky, Russian's American Dream, p. 100.

his strong political beliefs and could be looked to as a man of strong conviction. He had evolved and lived with a philosophy which they felt would be compatible with their ideas. They felt that his age and experience would be of great help to them. His Religion of Humanity, ascetic ideals, and striking personality deeply impressed them. He spoke Russian and was a friendly voice in alien surroundings. He convinced them that they were pioneers in a true social experiment.

At the time the Frey family came to live at New Odessa, the community consisted of 36 males, four of them married, seven females, and four children. By the end of the year, the number had increased to 60 members and had achieved a semblance of economic stability. With the coming of Frey, a new regimen was established.¹

In addition to routine chores, the colonists studied mathematics under Frey and English under Marusia and Lydia. The day started at 6 o'clock with chores until 8:30. Breakfast was from 8:30 through 9:45. Back to work at 10:00 a.m. until 4:00 p.m. There was no break for lunch as Frey believed in only two meals a day. Between 4 and 5 o'clock dinner was served followed by a rest period and then on to intellectual pursuits. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday evenings were spent studying mathematics,

¹Abraham Menes, "The Am Oylam Movement," pp. 30-31.

English, and lectures by Frey on the philosophy of Positivism. Current matters were discussed on Wednesday and on Saturday they discussed the problems of the community. This description was taken from a letter from one of the colonists and continues:

On Sunday we rise at six o'clock and immediately a lively discussion begins on the subject of equal rights for women. In the beginning the women had demanded full equal rights. They had gone to work in the forest, with the men taking their turn in the kitchen and laundry. Soon, however, the women realized that they were not yet fit for that type of work and returned to their previous tasks. Now they assure us that they have acquired the necessary physical strength and endurance for work in the forest Thus the time passes till breakfast. This meal consists of rice, oatmeal, baked and raw apples, beans, potatoes, bread and milk After breakfast, one member goes to survey the farm, another reads the newspaper or a book, the rest shout, sing, and dance. At four o'clock dinner is served. Two men wash the dishes, the choir sings, the organ plays At seven o'clock the evening begins a session of mutual criticism; then the work for the week is assigned.¹

Since the majority of the members had been university students, their diversions remained mainly intellectual. The chief nightly entertainment was to gather in the assembly hall to discuss, argue, and debate. In addition to the study of mathematics and English, one night a week was spent in self criticism at which they were encouraged to pass judgment on one another and suggest ways in which to

¹Menes, "The Am Oylam Movement," p. 31.

improve the community. Their prize possession was an extensive library devoted chiefly to books on philosophy.¹

A simple pleasure that the commune members did manage to find time for and enjoy, was music. Even doing the most difficult tasks, the men and women would join in the singing, mostly Russian folk songs and songs of their student days. In the early days, having no instruments, they would dance to their own singing. Although they knew and danced Russian dances, their favorite became the American style quadrille. They later received a small organ and Marusia Frey, an accomplished musician, would play for them. They would give dances and invite the neighboring farmers and settlers. In this otherwise isolated frontier town, the neighbors would come eagerly and join in the festivities. As social happenings were so rare in frontier times, the settlers would often come from great distances.²

Frey continued to preach his Religion of Humanity. He never lost an opportunity to instill the Positivist note into the discussion hours. The Sunday discussions gradually turned into religious services. Marusia played hymns on her organ and the lectures turned into sermons. New Year's Day 1884, was celebrated as a Festival of Humanity.

¹George Abdill, "New Odessa," The Umpqua Trapper, Vol. 2, No. 1, Spring 1966, p. 16.

²Ibid., p. 18.

"The semitic race," concluded Frey, "having given the world three great religions, was now ready to give the world the faith of the future, the Religion of Humanity."¹

Although the land proved to be fruitful and the food in the forests and streams was plentiful, the colonists subsisted on a meager diet. Frey was a vegetarian and not only would he not eat meat, but refused to sit at the table with anyone who did. The theory of life of these communists forbade them to gorge themselves when there were millions of suffering and hungry people in the world. The daily food budget which they allowed themselves by 1882 prices was 5¢ per day per person and anything over 8¢ per day was felt to be extravagant. The total daily expense per person was figured to be 15¢. A visitor to New Odessa wrote:

Frey's idea of happiness is to eat two meals a day of crackers and raw fruit, to touch no kind of stimulant, to do all work between meals to be free to study, the evenings in his community to be devoted to study and moral and social evaluation in which all should join.²

In 1884, Frey drafted "An Agreement" which was to be signed by all members which dedicated them to the "achievement, at least within the limits of the association of the

¹Yarmolinsky, Russian's American Dream, p. 103.

²Ibid., p. 105.

principles of altruism, self perfection, common property, and moral cooperation that eventually will have to be practiced by all men."¹

He prepared a talk in 1884 which he delivered to the neighbors of the settlement for the purpose of acquainting them with its character and aim. He explained the commune's renunciation of all personal property. They had come not to make money but to share as "communists, pioneers in a social experiment." He assured the audience that the colonists abhorred sexual promiscuity and that they respected if did not practice monogamic marriage. He specifically used the word respected and not accepted.

Frey wrote to a co-religionist in 1884 that New Odessa had become the scene of a miracle through the introduction of a religion that enabled the members to create a true commune. This was a biased outlook as by no means all the members embraced his religious beliefs. Out of deference to Frey, those who respected him paid lip service to him. The more revolutionary under the leadership of Paul Kaplan, were actively against it. During discussions when Frey would take over, Kaplan, a small dark man would sit grinning at him and staring with dark penetrating eyes. Those few who regretted the absence of religion, felt that

¹Davidson and Goodwin, Reflex, p. 4.

if any religion was to be observed, it should be Judaism. The first seeds of discontent had been sown.¹

A happy occasion, a wedding, was described in much detail in the December 1885 issue of the Overland Monthly. It was called a "Wedding Among the Communistic Jews of Oregon." The unknown author was more interested in the fact that the community was Russian and that the members were communists rather than Jews. This attitude was reflective of the feeling toward religion in Oregon. America was considered large enough to accommodate members of many religions. The curiosity was directed towards the unknown customs of the Russians and the fact that these members were avowed communists, something rare and different on the American frontier. By getting to know these gentle youths, however, their neighbors accepted them as long as they did not try to impose their ideas of government on others.

The wedding described was between two of the early colonists, Anutta Glantz and Selig Rosenbluth. There is no document of the wedding as the Douglas county marriage records do not go back that far. According to a son Robert Owen Rosenbluth, who had been born after his parents left New Odessa, there was one brother born on July 28, 1883 while they still lived in the community. There is no other evidence that the wedding took place before Frey had come

¹Yarmolinsky, Russian's American Dream, p. 105.

to live there, so it probably took place in the early days of the community. There is no record on the census of August 1884 of either the bride or groom and it is known that they were among the first to leave.

The bridegroom had been smuggled out of Russia in the bottom of a wagon load of hay. He had been a veterinary student in Russia. After coming to America, he had worked on a farm in Pennsylvania to gain experience in agriculture. It is not known exactly when he joined the community. Communal law decreed that a man must serve as a cook on Sunday and it was Rosenbluth's lot to be assigned to the kitchen on his wedding day. The colonists were strict about keeping to their schedules and he could not change his duties. The women of the community voluntarily offered to help him prepare the wedding feast. Rosenbluth was not a vegetarian and so in the morning he shot a rabbit and cooked it as a ragout for the dinner. In honor of the occasion, pie was also on the menu, and the initials of the bride and groom decorated the crust of each pie.

Wild flowers were woven into wreaths to be worn by both the bride and the groom. The bride was a dark haired, dark eyed eighteen year old. She wore a close fitting black dress without any ornamentation. When she finished dressing, she tied a thick Russian towel embroidered with red silk on as an apron and went into the kitchen and baked more pies.

The Brothers and Sisters gathered at 6 o'clock, two hours later than usual, in the dining room, and when all were present the bride and groom entered. After prolonged embracing by all members in a "Russian" and "Jewish" manner, they had what for them was an enormous meal. At the end of the dinner, everyone helped in doing the dishes and clearing up. The entire assembly went upstairs where the hall had been decorated with flowers and green leaves. There was a service in English followed by a ball. A table was placed at one end of the room and decorated with wreaths and candlesticks. The bridal pair seated themselves on a bench behind the table.

A member of the community, it is not known who, announced that he would marry the couple. He began to recite poetry in English:

What day is it: dark or fair?
Brings its future joy or care?
What ray this morn broke through the night?
Did the ray herald black or white?¹

The poem was lengthy but after the reader finished there was no further ceremony and the festivities began. The waltz, the polka, and particularly the quadrille were danced to the numbers being called in Russian.

The new couple retired quite early to a crude cabin which had been assigned to them. The ball continued

¹Unknown writer, "A Wedding Among the Communistic Jews in Oregon," Overland Monthly, Series 2, Vol. 6, December, 1885, p. 610.

through the night. The writer of the article awoke in the morning after having retired late, only to find that the festivities were still continuing with a final repast in the kitchen.¹

The colony prospered and was relatively harmonious for about two years. At its height, it had a population of 65. Two of the four single women became wives of male members. Other male members looked for wives in Portland and the surrounding areas. One colonist died of unknown causes and was buried on the colony's property but the gravestone has never been found.²

The lack of privacy was especially trying to the married couples and the single men found the lack of young unmarried women to be a difficult and unnatural situation. One of the members complained that there were comrades who confused communism with eating from the same plate and sleeping in the same bedroom.

In early 1884 the membership began to polarize around the leaders Paul Kaplan and William Frey. Kaplan, one of the founders of the community, was a radical communist in complete opposition to Frey's concern with religion. Frey, true to his own self evaluation, would not compromise with his principles. The exact date of his leaving is not known

¹The information about the wedding comes from the article in Overland Monthly, pp. 606-11.

²Abdill, The Umpqua Trapper, Vol. 2, p. 18.

but he is still listed as of August, 1884 and it is estimated that he stayed about a total of two years. Frey and about 15 members elected to leave the community of New Odessa by 1885. For a few months they remained in the area trying to farm, but lack of capital hindered them and they returned to New York. Marusia returned to New York with Frey, but Lydia, who was referred to in the colony as his sister-in-law, remained behind with her child and married one of the members. The marriage ceremony was conducted by Frey before he left.¹

Among the colonies established in the United States by Am Olam, New Odessa proved to last the longest, and be the most successful. Dr. Judah Wechsler, a rabbi of St. Paul, Minnesota, who had been instrumental in establishing the colony at Painted Wood, North Dakota, visited New Odessa in its early days and expressed his admiration.

The colonists are the most intelligent Russian immigrants I have encountered. They are men and women who have attended a university or a similar institution of learning in Russia. . . . Whereas in our colony [Painted Wood] there is discord to this very day, here [New Odessa] all live in peace, and the will of one is the will of all.²

He was amazed to see the large well-organized library and hear all the members participate in discussions on different problems. Dr. Wechsler did not approve of all aspects

¹Yarmolinsky, Russian's American Dream, p. 106.

²Menes, "The Am Oylam Movement," p. 32.

of the community, however. He was against its communist principles and was shocked at the absence of all Jewish observance. He felt that the isolation from a center of Jewish population would prove to be detrimental.

Frey's leaving did not solve the disunity in the colony. Shortly after he left, there was a fire in the community building and the treasured library was completely destroyed. Marxism was practiced even more rigorously, but the idealism had begun to wear off. Ambitious and ideologically orientated members worked harder, but others shirked their responsibilities. As long as they worked, income was not a problem.¹ Additional payments in the amount of \$3500 had been paid on the original mortgage, but there was an outstanding balance of \$2,276.²

The members of New Odessa were well thought of in the outside communities and the mortgagee did not threaten to foreclose. On the contrary, Simon Krimont was willing to extend payment for an additional 15 years. Local Jewish merchants and some from as far away as Portland, offered to extend credit to them as an inducement to stay. The neighboring farmers had been impressed with the idealism and the

¹Abdill, The Umpqua Trapper, Vol. 2, p. 19.

²Foreclosure records, Douglas County Courthouse, Roseburg, Oregon.

spirit of the original group, and continued to offer them the use of equipment which the colony did not possess.¹

Members began to leave singly and in groups after the departure of Frey and the property began to fall into neglect. Olger Sether, a present resident of Glendale now in his 80's, whose family had purchased the property on which the colony stood, recalled coming to the Glendale area as a boy. None of the members had remained in the area but he remembered talking to some of the older residents of Glendale. As a boy, he loved to hear stories of New Odessa. In a conversation with him, he told of how the members were first respected but after 1885 when the group had split into two, they were remembered primarily for lying around all day, sleeping, reading, and discussing.²

On March 16, 1887 action was instituted by R. S. Bean, Circuit Court Judge of the Second Judicial District of Oregon stating "Defendants non-resident and cannot be found - suit made upon the defendants." On October 18, 1887 a bankruptcy suit was filed in the Circuit Court of Douglas County by S. Marks and H. Wollenberg vs. Simon Krimont, Peter Fireman, Moses Frei (Free) and Abraham Headman, trustees of the New Odessa Community.³ The

¹Abdill, The Umpqua Trapper, Vol. 2, p. 20.

²Personal conversation with Olger Sether, July, 1973.

³Records at the Circuit Court of Douglas County, Roseburg, Oregon, Basement Box 56.

Roseburg Review duly carried the public notices of the foreclosure but there was no word heard from the defendants or their representatives. Foreclosure proceedings were recorded in February, 1888 and the lands of New Odessa were returned to the original holders. It was not until December 31, 1945 by action of the Corporation Commission of the State of Oregon that the community of New Odessa was officially dissolved.¹

New Odessa has been referred to by Abraham Menes as a "short lived experience rather than a true experiment in communal living." What makes the difference?

¹Articles of Incorporation, Department of Commerce, State of Oregon, Corporation Division, New Odessa Community #3308.

CHAPTER V

SUCCESS OR FAILURE

The town of Wolf Creek is six miles from Glendale on the old stagecoach route from San Francisco to Portland. The Wolf Creek Inn is a large frame building, once white, which was an overnight stopping place on this route. In 1883, when New Odessa was a functioning community, this was still the "wild and wooly" West. On Saturday, August 11, 1883 the Wells Fargo Stage was robbed eight miles from Glendale. The three passengers were unharmed and \$10 was stolen.¹

In 1974, there is a community of young people living in the Inn, making an attempt at communal living. Are they aware of the proximity of just such an attempt at an alternative style of living which took place almost a hundred years ago? Do they recognize the successes and failures of what preceeded them or do they think they are isolated in time and space, historically and sociologically from the rest of Oregon society?

The word success is an amorphous term whose meaning changes every time it is used. It is a qualitative achievement that cannot be determined by quantitative

¹Douglas Independent, Roseburg, Oregon, August 11, 1883.

measurement. The obsolete meaning is outcome or result, implying neither good or bad. Today, the dictionary defines it as "the attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence." This definition may also be considered obsolete, for what may be considered a success by one person may just as certainly be considered of as a failure by another.

Dr. Kanter in Commitment and Community¹ classified utopian communities from 1780-1860 as successful or unsuccessful by the length of time of their existence. In order to be successful a community had to exist for twenty-five years, the sociological definition of a generation. On this basis, New Odessa would be considered unsuccessful as it lasted for only five years (1882-1887).

If the success of New Odessa is measured in relation to its having achieved Utopia in its basic meaning of heaven on earth, the answer becomes a qualified yes, again depending upon one's definition of heaven. Margaret Mead, a supporter of Utopian thought and communal living has written "descriptions of heaven are always much less interesting than descriptions of hell." Once a Utopia has been achieved, there is nothing left to strive for.²

¹Rosabeth Moss Kanter, Commitment and Community (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 245.

²Margaret Mead, "Towards More Vivid Utopias," Science, 126, November 8, 1957, pp. 957-61.

For a short period of time, life in New Odessa was secure and fulfilling. The young Russian Jewish immigrants had found a haven from religious persecution. They were allowed to practice their beliefs that agriculture was a means to Jewish survival. As long as they kept their political ideologies within their community, they were not restricted or hampered in their style of living. Life was secure on the basis of physical necessities for they had adequate shelter. The community had an income from its wood cutting and they had ample food which grew in their fields or took from the woods and the streams. Once the physical needs were met, however, the spiritual idealism took on a greater importance. The physical isolation was not as great as the cultural.

Their desire for furthering their education was evident by the studies which they pursued regularly among themselves. Their library was a large and extensive one and when fire destroyed the community building, the library which was housed in it, was completely consumed by the flames. This was a blow from which they never quite recovered.

It is difficult to know exactly what went wrong, as there is little written evidence. The fact that not one member remained in the immediate area or even in the Pacific Northwest, proves that the members felt isolated from the large centers of education and thought. William

Frey and the members which left New Odessa with him, remained in the area for only a short period of time and then went to New York. When the remainder of the community finally broke up, eight or ten members went to San Francisco and found jobs in the newly established steam laundry business. They later returned to New York City and established a communal laundry on Essex street and lived in a commune in a house on Suffolk street. They remained together for four or five years.¹

The lack of educational facilities is also quite evident as a reason for dissolving the community. The great majority of the members had been students in Russia. Some of them had left the universities because they were forced to. They came to America where education was available to them even if they were Jews. By settling in the sparsely populated Northwest with few educational facilities, they were denied an education not because of religion, but because of geography. When they returned to New York, the evidence shows that most of them returned to universities.

William Frey became a physician and practiced in New York. The bride described in the wedding in Chapter IV, after having three children, two of them born in New Odessa, returned to the university and also became a

¹George B. Abdill, "New Odessa," The Umpqua Trapper, Roseburg, Oregon, Vol. I, No. 4, 1965, p. 20.

physician. Her son, Robert Rosenbluth, in a letter to George B. Abdill, director of the Douglas County Museum, wrote that his mother became known as the "petticoat doctor." She practiced among the very poor of New York. When she needed bandages and she couldn't afford them, she would take off her starched white petticoats and tear them into bandage strips.¹ Robert Rosenbluth was not born in New Odessa but his brother and sister were. He wrote in the letter that the only other child born in New Odessa, Helen Horvitt, became a dentist.

Paul Kaplan, idealistic leader of the community, also returned to New York and studied medicine. He finished his studies in Berlin and returned to work on the East side of New York in the poorest neighborhoods. He was active as an advisor for the Baron de Hirsch Fund which helped those interested in agricultural colonization. Kaplan remained active in the Communist Party in America. At the time of the 1917 Revolution in Russia, he was appointed Secretary of the Russian Revolutionary Party in America. He became known as the "Father of the Russian Revolution in America." As he grew older, he became less revolutionary but remained a socialist all his life. He was a friend of Felix Adler and Lillian Wald, and with them was a pioneer in the progressive social work movement. When he died, his plain

¹Letter from Robert Rosenbluth to George B. Abdill, August 14, 1965, MSS collection at Douglas County Museum, Roseburg, Oregon.

casket was covered with a simple wreath inscribed "From His Comrades."¹

The last known survivor of New Odessa, Peter Fireman, became a chemist and later a millionaire on the basis of his discoveries. Fireman also maintained his interest in communism. After the Revolution in Russia, he returned to his native country (1917-1920). He believed that the first priority of the peasants was an education. For the cost of a million dollars, he built a pencil factory in Russia, hoping to give everyone the tools of writing. As soon as the factory was in production it was confiscated by the Soviet government and a disillusioned Fireman returned to the United States. He lost his interest in the Party and died without heirs in 1950 at the age of 94²

Not only did the members of New Odessa finish their studies, but their basic ideologies remained the same. They had a tendency to be reformers, to be concerned and interested in the social welfare of their fellow men. Even Fireman, who became wealthy, in his own misguided way, showed his concern for others.

In Chapter III, Dr. Kanter's work on the criteria of communal living was discussed. How did New Odessa fit

¹Henry Moskowitz, "Paul Kaplan: An East Side Patriot," The Outlook, January 16, 1918, pp. 108-09.

²George B. Abdill, The Umpqua Trapper, Vol. 1, p. 21.

into these patterns? The first was the concept of human perfectibility within a small isolated environment. Confession and self criticism were means of achieving perfection. Certainly, New Odessa with its weekly evenings devoted to mutual and self criticism met this requirement.

The orderly life of New Odessa with its assigned tasks, planning of living space, meals, and studies, also fits into the pattern. The third ideal of brotherhood was so basic that it was included within the Articles of Incorporation. The members were called Brothers and Sisters. Shared ownership was also laid out in detail in these same articles. Not only was shared ownership fundamental to the community but also a shared living experience.

Kanter includes the presence of a strong charismatic leader as essential for the success of a community. William Frey with all his eccentricities, was a forceful personality and was influential in the arrangements within the community if only for a short period of time. It was his leaving that began the ultimate breakup of the commune. Paul Kaplan was also a strong leader but of a very different character than Frey. While Frey remained at New Odessa, there was friction between them. When Frey left, it was Kaplan who took over the responsibilities of leadership. Perhaps it was the presence of two strong personalities of different persuasions that speeded the process of breakup.

In trying to find the answer to the question of success or failure, New Odessa and the Am Olam movement might be compared to the Kibbutz movement in Israel. One of the alternate solutions to the survival of the Jews in the late 19th century in Russia, was the establishment of Palestine as a National Home for the Jewish people. The BILUIM attempted to establish an agricultural movement in Palestine at the same time that Am Olam made its decision to settle in the United States. The agricultural movement, begun in the 1880's in Palestine, developed into the Kibbutz movement after 1907 and is still flourishing in Israel today.

Religious attitudes were similar to a certain degree between the BILUIM and the members of Am Olam. While some of the Kibbutzim were orthodox in their attitudes towards religious Judaism, others accepted Judaism as a nationality. For them to be in Palestine was proof of their Jewishness. They did not seek the ritual and observances. Am Olamites accepted Judaism as a nationality without religious ties.

A strong religious bond between the scattered colonies of Am Olam in the United States may have served as a cohesive force and lessened the sense of isolation of the communities. The members of New Odessa, however, had no interest in religion of any denomination. They had been classified as Russian Jews and the cultural ties they

maintained were more closely associated with Russia than with Judaism. This was one of the anomalies of their situation. In Russia they had been denied the rights of citizenship because they were Jews; in this country they chose to glorify their Russian heritage. There is no evidence to show that after leaving New Odessa, the members sought to renew their religious ties or whether they became totally assimilated.

Similar to Am Olam communities, the Kibbutzim were situated in isolated areas, but they maintained contact with each other and worked and planned as a network in providing services for their members. There were and are great differences between Kibbutzim, but the pioneer leadership thought and planned for the education of the children, mutual protection in hostile territory, medical care, etc. At New Odessa, there was little if any but casual contact between the widely scattered communities. There was no planning for the future. In Oregon, the neighbors of New Odessa were friendly and often helpful to the community and its members.

In Palestine, it was necessary to strengthen the tenuous ties between Kibbutzim for survival rather than to ignore them as it was possible to do in the United States. The geographic isolation in a hostile country of the Kibbutzim forced them to maintain contact with each other.

Once the immediate question of survival was solved by the Am Olam communities, they tended to set themselves apart and sought to pursue their own spiritual and ideological ways. There was great truth in their motto "United We Stand, Divided We Fall." The days of greatest strength and harmony were also the days of greatest unity and hardest work. As the members grew acclimated to the American way of life, of being allowed to make choices, the community began to break up.

New Odessa was important not only as a single social experiment but it was a challenge to its contemporary ways of life.

The Utopian community itself represents a model for a different kind of community organization, one from which community planners can derive a different set of options. . . . Utopias strive to implement ideals of a better way of living and relating, to consider options and alternatives, to become structurally inventive, and to experiment with wholly new social worlds. Utopian communities are society's dreams.¹

New Odessa was an attempt to bring out the best ideals in man, a willingness to sacrifice and to share. Too often American Jewish history is the story of Jews who stayed in the big cities, surrounded by co-religionists in a cultural environment which they brought with them and did not change for several generations. There were Jews who were pioneers. There were Jews who ventured away from

¹Kanter, Commitment and Community, pp. 236-37.

the big cities and towns and tried to find a new style of living.

New Odessa was not successful in terms of length of existence. But, among those who were members and their descendants who have been traced, it is evident that there was instilled a strong sense of social obligation, of man's responsibility to man. America is made up of many diverse groups and even among ethnic classifications there can be no one person or organization that speaks for all.

Outside of the intrinsic value in the study of history, an analogy can be made between New Odessa and the present. At first recreating the history of New Odessa was like putting the pieces of a giant jigsaw puzzle together. The bits and pieces began falling into place and even though there were pieces missing, a picture began to emerge. This picture had many similarities to the scene of the Jews in Russia today. What gradually appeared was a story that is as applicable today as it was in the 19th century.

Anti-semitism is as rife today in the Soviet Union as it was in Tsarist Russia, yet in spite of the officials trying to deter them by various methods, Jews are leaving now as they did then. Again there are the two choices: Israel or the United States. The great differences between then and now, are that in the 19th century there was no

independent state of Israel. In the 19th century Marxism was looked at as a utopian ideal. Today's Jews in Russia are the product of a Marxist society and in leaving Russia, leave for ostensibly different ideals than their forefathers who preceeded them. Basically the same issue is at stake, the right to remain Jews without prejudice or penalties.

The history of the Jewish people has been recorded for a great many centuries, but in some respects it never changes. The Jews of New Odessa saw their utopia as a solution to the plagues which have followed them from time to time and country to country. Each generation seeks to find its own solutions and sometimes they are not even aware that they have been tried before.

The train left Tunnel 8 near Glendale. Except for the trees that still are standing and the creek that runs swiftly across the property, there are no living witnesses to New Odessa. The story of New Odessa is a footnote in the history of America, a story of 65 people who were not content to follow the usual immigrant path but who sought instead to find their own way in the wilderness, fortified by their dreams and for a short period of time, a willingness to make them live.

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APPENDIX

Statistics from a letter to Michael Heilprin from the Brothers and Sisters of New Odessa, August 10, 1884. This letter is included in the Leah Eisenberg-Julius Barnstein Collection, YIVO Institute of Social Sciences, New York.

List of persons living in New-Odesa Community.

* Put before the name indicates that person is on member
on probation. - ~~Abolished~~ [except minors] # indi-
- cates persons living ^{temporarily} on special invitation. All the
rest [except minors] are active members of the Com-
munity.

	age.		age.
Max Brandt	22	Paul Kaplan	26
William Brandt	19	# Alexander Kislik	22
John Brown	22	* Charles Kalmonovsky	21
Peter Fireman	21	Simon Krimont	27
Moses Free	23	Sophia Krimont	20
# { William Frey	45	Nicholas Lee	28
# { Mary Frey	36	Moses Litvinsky	22
# Lydia Frey	33	Jacob Louis	22
children of Frey { Isabella Frey	15½	{ Israel Mandelkern	23
Walter Frey	8½	{ Fannie Mandelkern	20
Willie Frey	4.	{ Cornelia Mand. baby.	6 weeks
Jacob Goldenberg	20	* George Rosenson	22
Leon Green	24	Martin Sand	24
{ Abraham Keadman	24	John Secord	24
{ Folia Keadman	22	Samuel Smith	21
{ August Keadman	16 months	John Umanaky	28
* Joseph Korovit	27	Samuel Waller	21.
* Sophia Korovit	21		

An account
of all our receipts and expens
the last 12 months [from July 1883 till
August 1884.]

The receipts.

<u>Received</u> From Mr. M. Heilprin - -	7900	2900
ditto - - - - -	90	250
ditto - - - - -	150	
From Herlin committee -	1000	
	4300	
<u>Borrowed</u> from Mr Wollenberg (provision) -		434.16
Mr. Abraham (provision)		90
Thompson & Co (hard ware)		109.23
Mr Levins (for farm machinery)		185.
North Western Manufacturing Co. (for a wagon) - - - -		145
Mr. Marks (money)		100
Mr. E. Jacks (mines)		150.
	1213.39	

<u>Earned by</u> <u>work</u> For cords delivered - - -	2970.95
Selling vegetables - - -	28.50
	2999.45

Whole amount \$ 8512.84.

expenditures.

I

To the am. for land	2000.
The other expences in buying farm	83
The expences in search after land	120.
	<u>2203</u>

II

2 pair of horses	450.
1 " of oxen	110
5 cows	220
2 wagons	290
2 pairs of harness	45
3 plows	50
2 cultivators	12
2 harrows (material)	12
1 reapers	} --- --- --- 150
1 mowed and	
1 hay rake	
1 threshing machine	} --- --- --- 35
1 horse power	
Tools, and hardware (material)	360
6 stoves	75
Dishes and Kitchen ware	100
A flour mill (iron) with materials	
4 built water ^{wheel} power wheel	75
Building materials (boards.)	<u>200</u>
	2184.

III

Books and newspapers	—	50
Clothing and bedding	794	542.57
Food, light, stationery, and postal expenses and sundries	—	1637.50 ^(*)
		<u>2230.07.</u>

IV

Hay	—	417.10
Oats	—	147.75
Hiring horses	—	50.
Buying seed wheat 50 bush	—	50
— " " oats 100 " —	—	70
— " " barley 25 " —	—	18
— " " potatoes 50 bush —	—	50
Buying ^{and plants} seeds for Kitchen garden	—	45
		<u>847.85</u>

V

To support Kaplan	100.
to pay New-York debts through Kaplan	150
To pay debts made by Kislick & others	35
To pay Mr. Fickheimer	100
	<u>385.</u>

* Counting in average 30 persons ^{during whole year} in a Community it
will make 15 cents per day for a man.

VI

Transportation of Shütz	30
" of Wtransky	30
" and doctor's bill of Abraham Korovit	80
" of Zilia Korovit	30
Doctor's and midwife's bills in community	10
	<u>180.</u>

VIIHelp to arriving members.

20 members of N.O. Com. from Portland	150
Frey's family & Kislik from S. Franc.	60.
Joseph & Sophia Korovit from Portland	29.10
Moses Litvinsky from Portland	10.25

Help to withdrawing.

William Grinstein	25
S. Kislik	20
Shapiro	10
Levitin	10
Finkelstein	30
Rosenblith	32.57
Karsan	16
Gaskin	30.
	<u>422.92</u>

Whole amount of expenses. 8452.84
 Money on hand — 60.

An Inventory of the property of New-Odessa Community

5 cows	\$200	40 cords not delivered -	\$100
2 pair of horses	450	Clothing and bedding - and	500
1 pair of oxen	60	bedding sundries	
8 heads of young cattle	75	Kitchen ware and sundries	
3 wagons	250	Estimation of harvest	
2 pairs of harness	45	Hay 25 tons -	\$200
3 plows	50	Oats & barley 500 b.	300
2 cultivators	12	Wheat 600 b.	360
2 harrows	12	Potatoes 400 b.	200
A reaper, a mower and a hay rake	150	Corn and vegetables	250
A threshing machine with a horse power	250	Whole amounts	4299.
Blacksmith's and locksmith's tools	125	if we add -	\$2000
Sawblades, hammers and iron wages	50	put for the land.	
Farm & garden implements	35	Our property amounts	6299
6 stoves	50	Besides we have a	
A small flour mill with a water wheel	75	library of volumes.	
For New building increasing the value of farm at least	200		
12 thousand rails at 2 cents.	240		

Continuation on the second column.