

The documentation of what happened to the settlers at the Atwood Colony is piecemeal and sporadic. One of the reasons can clearly be seen by the following personal accounts of several of the former residents of the Jewish Colony at Atwood.

Personal account from Mary Fine Fishman, excerpt from the book: Pioneers, Peddlers, and Tsadikim by Ida Uchill, (page 177-)

According to Mary Fine Fishman, who at sixteen was the colony's secretary, a group of sweatshop workers, tailors, and small businessmen, who had met at landsmanshaft gatherings in Philadelphia, had heard that there was land in the far west suitable for farming. All of them were poor and had suffered greatly in the Panic of 1893. They met together in 1894 to discuss what possibilities were for them to form a colony and acquire land. Mrs. Fishman relates that a member of the group, Mr. Silver, was sent to Baron de Hirsch with the idea of the philanthropist financing a colony. Since the Baron had established the fund named for him in New York in 1891, with the purpose of aiding immigrants in establishing themselves through the United States the delegate was surprised the the Baron refused.

Thereupon, the group, most of whom couldn't neither speak nor right English adequately, sent Mary to her school teacher asking that she write an advertisement to the effect that a "group of twenty-five families want to be settled on farm land." The advertisement brought responses from California and Colorado. The Colorado answer came from T. C. Henry, who may have envisioned just such a project when he made his proposal. Silver, the delegate, was sent to investigate the Logan Valley in the area around Sterling, land Henry had under contract.

Finding the land favorable, and the price of three or four dollars an acre within its means, Silver notified the group in the East of these facts. Two groups of men left of Atwood to organize the colony, the first coming into the region by way of Galveston, arriving at the site in March, 1895. Louis Fine was chosen director of the colony. Together with Henry, the men made all of the living arrangements and outlined the agricultural plans. Henry allotted the cattle, horses, and lumber. In addition, one ex-colonist reported that Henry was to supply flour and potatoes for six months. Although all accounts agree that he carried out his part of the agreement, he could not meet the demands of the group from the first.

The land was excellent, the neighbors not only sympathetic but helpful as well, and the prospects appeared bright. Despite this by September more than half of the colonists left. A look at the composition of the colony offers a partial reason. Four distinct groups joined the Atwood Colony. They came from Philadelphia, New York, Argentina,

Baltimore, and New Jersey and represented all parts of Eastern Europe. There was even one who had been in a Palestinian colony. He was known in Atwood as “Yankel Koloneist.” It is said that the colony included about sixty families and about 300 individuals. Apparently there were too many bachelors for a stable community. The respectable members were shocked by the behavior of the “roughnecks” with whom they had to work and live. Some of the bachelors who shared a cow with a family demanded an equal amount of the milk, no matter how many children the latter included.

Religious dissension rent the community further apart. The young people were confused and anxious to drop the burdensome ritual. Some of the group kept the Sabbath and others did not. Many of the elders wore beards and held religious services daily to the annoyance of the non-religious element, which was additionally disgusted with the necessity of having kosher meat shipped by wagon or rail to the colony. Poultry was shipped from Atwood to Denver to be slaughtered and then shipped back. The kosher chickens were thrown from the freight cars to the waiting colonists. The first complaint was voiced when some of the members found that they were more than a hundred miles from Denver. When a son was born, one family took the baby to Denver for the b’rith and remained there. After breaking their first Yom Kippur fast with watermelon, the food in greatest abundance, most of those who had a trade either left for Denver or returned to the East.

Some of the ex-sweatshop workers had to be taught such elementary facts as how to hitch a team of horses. To make it more difficult, the hundred horses sent in by Henry were said to have been broncos which took a year to break, but the colonists had to farm with them immediately.

Personal Comments by Meyer Forman, ex-colonist: excerpt from *Pioneers, Peddlers and Tsadikim* by Ida Uchill

Before he died, Meyer Forman, an ex-colonist was interviewed by Dr. Morris, whose notes give a different version from that of Mrs. Fishman. According to him, one response of the colony’s advertisement came from the Bevan Company of Colorado, offering agricultural land to the prospective settlers to be paid for in small installments. Eighteen members contributed the sum of ninety dollars to their delegate, not Silver, but a man named Yedevitz, who left for Colorado early in August 1894. His reply by letter was that “Everything is of the finest, good land, and wonderful opportunity.” But, “His

report was not so optimistically received as it was given.” Many of the members expressed doubts and asked the delegate to return with a detailed report. Forman, who had been a farmer in Bessarabia, only the year before, was impressed. He decided to investigate before the delegate returned. He arrived in Denver in 1895. The notes are not clear, but apparently the first delegate was not delighted to see him.

With an interpreter, a “Mr. Itzkovitz, a native, Forman appeared at the Bevan Company where he was given a “cool reception.” Mr. Bevan had refused to deal with him as an individual. Forman we then referred to J. S. Appel, who referred him to Rabbi Friedman. The rabbi showed interest, and in turn introduced Forman to attorney Alfred Muller, at the time a highly respected communal leader. Through Muller, Forma met Henry, who took Forman to the available land. Both agreed that the 6500-acre tract was sufficient for the hundred families. According to Forman, and contradicted by the other accounts, Henry then went to Philadelphia, where he made arrangements to finance the colony, the funds for which were sent to the district attorney in Sterling.

Among Forman’s memories were the visits by Dr. Spivak and Solomon Bloomgarden (Yehoash), who came to visit and eat watermelons; the kind treatment by the non-Jews, especially in Sterling, where “they were offered everything they needed” when Shavuoth came and that some of the men worked on the railroad rather than on the land.

Personal accounts of Nathan Schwartz, ex-colonist (excerpt from Pioneers, Peddlers and Tsadikim by Ida Uchill)

These accounts are augmented by that of Nathan Schwartz, who came with his father, older brother, and brother-in-law to the United States in 1894 from the forest country near Kremenitz.

His father, Samuel H. Schwartzburg, was holding a twenty-five year lease on the equivalent of 7800 American acres when the family was forced to leave everything under a new law, and to flee because a relative, an electrical engineer, had participated in the assassination of one of the Czar’s cruelest aides. The act was so serious that 10,000 rubles were offered for his capture.

Schwartz says that when he arrived, there was nothing but a still “of a mind to go onto the land.” In New York where men were getting about three dollars a week as pressers of coat makers, his eldest son fell sick while working and attending college at the same time. Schwartzburg bought into two Jewish colonies in New Jersey. Both failed. It was then that the family saw the Fine group’s advertisement. Schwartzburg invited the Philadelphia group to his home at 98 Suffolk Street in New York. There a decision was made to send three delegates to Colorado.

Schwartz said that when he arrived there was nothing but a railroad station sidetrack called Atwood, and that the first house was built of sod. Scharzburg bought his own land, separating himself from the non-observance and rowdy element as soon as possible. His son, Nathan, who shortened the family name, believes that what doomed the colony was the conditions resulting from the Panic of 1893. With alfalfa worth two dollars a ton, the colonists burned the crop. Eggs sold for ten cents a dozen and all the colonists could do with the abundant watermelons, cantaloupes and muskmelons was eat them. Nevertheless Schwartzburger remained with his land, meanwhile homesteading more in the state. His sons worked in Denver during the winter while he built a herd of thirty-two head from one cow.

Account by Louis Rossman (excerpt from *Pioneers, Peddlers and Tsadikim* by Ida Uchill, page 180)

The fourth account, offered by Louis Rossman, who was a child in the colony, consists of his memories of the tanks of fresh milk brought to the colonists in Galveston by local Jews. He remembers arriving in Atwood where there was nothing but prairie and waiting stacks of lumber. The Rossman's house was the last one built and until a building was set aside for worship, it served as the shul, housing the Sefer Torahs and a cantor named "Naphtali."

According to Schwartz, Henry drew up a contract to allot each family sixteen acres of land and the privilege of buying up to sixty acres at either \$38 or \$42 an acre. The three and four dollar acres he believes was for dry land. Each family was to put \$90 into the colony, \$50 to Henry and \$40 for travel expenses. The land was owned by Henry and no deeds were drawn up.

Accounts taken from the 1896-7 minutes of the Denver B'nai B'rith Lodge (excerpts from *Pioneer, Peddlers and Tsadikim* by Ida Uchill, page 181)

In July, 1896, Dr. Spivak, as a guest of the lodge, reported that he had received an inquiry from a society in Philadelphia asking about the advisability of sending a colony of Russian Jews to Colorado to settle on farms. Since the Atwood colony was under way, there is a chance that this inquiry came from one of the four groups of colonists who may have come out later. However, because Dr. Spivak knew Louis Fine in Philadelphia, and visited the colony during its existence, the matter is puzzling.

Two months later, “Bro. Muller made a speech on the condition of the people in the Atwood colony who he said were in a starving condition. Their condition was so bad that a committee was appointed and a special meeting was called.

It was decided to restrict and appeal for the aid to the colonists to the city of Denver. After the sum of \$45 was raised and sent to the colony, the committee was instructed to write to the trustees of the Baron de Hirsch fund and ask for assistance for the colony. While the lodge was raising money for the colonists, the Jewish community was confronted with another problem of the colonists who had moved to Denver. In December the Republican published a news item:

Arapahoe County [to which Denver belonged] Will Sue Logan County for Support Given: The expense to the county occasioned by the Jewish colony sent here from Logan County will be charged to that county, and if not paid, Arapahoe will sue for the amount expended on the colonists.”

The lodge considered giving some of the money raised for the colony to the ex-colonists, but decided against it. In April, the Atwood committee received \$2000 from the Baron de Hirsch fund and paid \$100 to receive the “Townsite of Atwood.” From the money it received, the committee bought 680 acres of land. The deed was made out to the Atwood committee. At the same time the committee bought twenty-five cows and 70,000 shingles for roofing the homes of the colonists. In June, the \$2500 of the Baron de Hirsch Fund had been disbursed. In September, the Fund sent another \$740 for the colony. In spite of all this help, a year later, December 11, 1898, the minutes record:

The interest on the land is unpaid and there are no funds to pay it. The committee has written to the Baron de Hirsch committee advising them to pay the mortgage and own the land. They answered that they will not invest any more money in the Atwood Colony but would turn it over to the lodge.

The lodge decided to sell his equity in the land. Bro. Troyansky and others of the Atwood Colony were not discouraged by what had been called a failure. Troyansky presented the B’nai B’rith with a letter assuring them that the persecuted brethren of the pogroms in Rumania (1903) would be welcome in Atwood where the remaining Jews would make the persecuted brethren self-supporting with very little aid.

Personal Narrative of Herman Goodman, excerpt from *The Centennial History of the Jews of Colorado, 1859 -1959* Allen Breck, University of Denver: Hirschfeld Press, 1961, p.158

Comments by Goodman on their first days in Atwood:

Although matters were not altogether to our liking, yet the heads of the seventy-five families with a few women started for Colorado and arrived in Denver on March 17th. Mr. Miller and Mr. Henry met us at the Depot and told us everything was ready for us at our new home. We reached Atwood the next morning. Two feet of snow covered the ground. There were no houses provided by Mr. Henry to shelter us and no lumber to build them with. No food or fuel. For several days we slept around at the farm houses, and after eating up the remaining food we had brought along we began buying from our scanty funds. We inquired of the county clerk and he said Mr. Henry owned no land there. Our deplorable condition must have reached some good people, for the third of fourth day we were at Atwood we received a carload of coal, on which Mr. Tinesch, one of our number, paid the freight, thirty-four dollars.

Personal Narrative of Irving “Ick” Handleman
Taken from an excerpt of the Whistlewind Quarterly, Vol. 2. Issue 4
Spring, 1979, paraphrased by Naomi Johnson, compiler
Published in Sterling, CO



Irving, “Ick” Handleman was born in Atwood in 1905. His parents immigrated from Russia and helped found Atwood. In 1978 he was the only individual left in Atwood from the original founding Jewish families.

Growing up in Atwood, Ick said it was a warm, friendly and clean town full of immigrants from Russia, Germany and Mexico. He said there was a hotel, post office and a jail made by 2 X 4’s. There was a big lumberyard right on the corner where they could buy clothes, candy and medicine.

Irving’s father was in the cattle business. His brother William worked with their father. They didn’t have much money. He said he remembered that his mother once sold her watch and chain for a sack of flour so they’d have bread to eat. His father would go out in the frozen winter and skin the cows that had died and sold their hides to help support the family. At Christmas time he would go to church with gentile friends so he could get a stocking filled with fruit, candy and nuts.

As a young man he moved to California and got into the horse racing breeder trade. He was quite successful and moved back to Denver. He eventually moved back to Atwood and worked cattle since the farm was still in his family.

Also taken from The Whistlewind Quarterly:



"The first load of rock hauled from Pawnee Pass to be used for foundation for Christian Church in Atwood near 1906. 1. Julia Stratton; 2. Fannie Handleman; and 3. Ida Handleman."

From an article titled Ladies of Atwood in the Fall issue of Whistlewind Quarterly.

Ida (#3) was the first child born in Atwood in 1896 and her older sister, Fanny (#2).

Ida was the grandmother of Nina Judd of Boulder. Both sisters married brothers (last name Judd).

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Moses Katz –Personal Account, recorded and meeting of BMH study group of Colorado Jewish history at the home of Arnold Katz on Sunday May 20, 1979. (transcribed and paraphrased in 2013 by Naomi Johnson). Original tape is located in the Rocky Mountain Historical Society in the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Denver.

Mo Katz was born a few months after his family left Atwood.

Atwood is a “little town about 30 miles between Merino and Sterling in Logan County on the railroad [line] between Denver and Sterling. The foundation of the Atwood Colony got started in Philadelphia”.

Mo’s folks came from with a group of Landsmanschaft from L-___ Russia. Pedulsky got to the United States in 1892 because his mother had a brother who came to the United States before she did. They landed in Philadelphia. About 100 Jewish families left from Philadelphia around the gulf of Mexico into Galveston. They were put into a freight card and hauled from Galveston to Denver in 1896. Mo’s father was not a farmer – they were sofers in the old country and sewed buttons into knee pants in Phil but were convinced by promoters that they could farm in Colorado. His parents had four children three older brothers and a sister. His sister was a year old and the oldest brother was 7 or 8. Mo took his brother back two years ago (1977). There was only one building there and it is still there with some scattered houses. His parents and 4 children lived in a two rooms small farm house. When they got there was nothing there. Joe Goldstein went also. He sold horses there. They had nothing to do there and nothing that was promised, was available. The best history of Atwood that Mo heard was given by Allen Breck. Mo’s mother never wanted to talk about it. His father died in 1907 when he was 7 years old. She always resented coming to Colorado since her family was all in Philadelphia. They were in Atwood 2 years and forced to come down [to Denver] – around the panic of 1897, eggs were a nickel a dozen, a pullet was five or ten cents - no coal. His mother would send them out for buffalo chips to heat the living room with. For two years they suffered. The people from Denver sent up a carload of coal. They did start farming – his uncle Joe farmed there, then in Henderson, Brush, and Sterling and ended up in Chicago. Some of the families were -Philip Rossman (Harry Rossman father) Louie was in the insurance business – lived in Mo’s neighborhood - the Eleventh Street Colony (between Larimer and Market and Wazee between 9th and 12th street) was a Jewish colony and Mo wanted to connect Atwood with the Eleventh Street Colony. Some of them were Troyansky’s (from Philadelphia and Praskuroff (sp), Leb Fine,

Simon Fishman who married the oldest Fine girl who later became the ---- king of Kansas. They went to Sidney Nebraska, Liberal.

Moses's dad went to work for Nuka (sp?) Schwartzman (changed his name to Nathan Schwartz (Stanley Schwartz's father) in Denver in a clothing business that manufactured overalls. His father would make button holes for knee pants in his basement on Larimer Street for the company.

Other families from Atwood – Troyansky – Lizzie Schultz, Rose Weinshank's family (relative of Lester Weinshank). Weinshank lived on the top floor, Fine lived in the bottom floor, and Troyasnsky lived on the second floor. They all had a bunch of kids -Fine may have had 7 or 8 kids. Mo eventually acquired that property and tore it down and built a warehouse on the property – about 1904.

About 1904, Mo's father, Mr. Fine and Mr. Troy (Troyansky) became partners in a pop bottling business on 12th and Larimer. They made seltzer water and his gather would deliver it every Friday to the JCRS which was just starting. In those days people thought seltzer water was good for tuberculosis. Denver had many tuberculosis patients living there. You'd see skinny people all over the Larimer area (from 10th street up to 16th) carrying sputum cups until they were sent to the JCRS or the Nation [Jewish].

In 1912, his brother lived on 10th and Larimer right across from the Tivoli Brewery. There was a flood of 6 feet of water and photos of the old country and some that shows him as a 3 year old child with curls Much was ruined because of the 4 - 6 inches of water in their home on 12th and Market. The 10th Street Shul was started in that area. Jewish population in that area in Denver at that time - Mo recalls Dr. Morris Katzman – lived on the corner next to Mo. Dr. Katzman had two brothers who rented a soda fountain (two cents plain) was a fruit peddler. Also Sadie Simon who was Aaron Cohen's mother in law. The Wandel (sp?) family (not originally from Atwood) the Blum family, Chuck Davis (Davis delicatessen where the Masonic Temple was) Egal Grines (sp?), had his junk yard on 11th Street. Mo said, "We used to steal stuff from him on Saturday and sell it to him on Sunday!"

Lipschutz and Lormer (sp?) had a grocery store on 11th and Market and sold their grocery store to a woman by the name of Blum. They were competitors of Mo's mother who opened a little grocery store between 11th and 12th; They closed the pop bottling business after Mo's father died. In 1912 the flood cleaned them out.

1911 Mo was Bar Mitzvah in the 10th Street Shul. He was only 12 but received a dispensation because he was an orphan. Sometimes they would have 150 people attend. His mother would sometimes lead the women's service upstairs. When they prepared the shul for refurbishing, Mo's job was to clean up the shul. There was a pot of president and vice president wanted to see that Rodef Sholom would get most of the

\$10,000- \$12,000. Mo wanted to give the synagogue to the Allied Federation during the Tercentenary. There was an offer of \$6,000 and Mo offered \$7,000. Graham Sussman called and told him that there was someone else who would give \$10,000 for the building and Mo said he and his brothers would see if they could come up with more. They told him they needed to know “now” so Mo told them to “Go to Hell!” and forgot about it. He lived only 2 – three blocks from there and knew Mrs. Genger who lived next door and every time someone would break in they would call him. After they sold it to Patziba Bud Ziba?) (sp?) Mo got hold of Rabbi Edelman and told him to distribute the Sefer Torah to the other synagogues. Rodef Sholom, BMH, Beth Joseph, Beth Israel all got one and They split the money up accordingly, too. Graham Sussman’s brother in law (Herzgowitz (sp?) never attended the synagogue (his Sayda was there every Saturday) but he was a “macher”. Mo also took out the Siddurim Chumashim and put them in his warehouse and just recently buried them in Rose Hill Cemetery. He got a record book from Bill Zeltin in which was a list of contributions to the poor. The interviewer tried to convince him to donate his archives to them for preservation.

Some of these names from the 10th Street Shul in 1910: Jake Lieberman’s father Max Bronstein (Ben Bronstein’s father), Rabbi Kaba (sp?) 1910, Mrs. Irudi’s father, Mendel, Greenstein, Wandel. After they sold the building, there were not many Jews left. They had trouble making a minyan except for during the high holidays. Mo moved “uptown” to 1575 and Clay Street next to Dave Golden’s “palace”



Tenth Street Shul

(Shearith Israel)

Shearith Israel (Remnant of Israel) synagogue was located in the oldest surviving religious structure in Denver from 1903 to 1965. The small stone building was originally erected as the Emanuel Episcopalian Church in 1877 at Tenth and Lawrence Streets in Denver. The Shearith Israel congregation was established in 1899 as a traditional Orthodox Jewish house of worship. Shearith Israel synagogue was one of the small synagogues just to the west of downtown Denver. The “Tenth Street Shul” was convenient for Denver businessmen who were seeking a regular minyan for daily religious services and was packed for services during the Great Depression because it was always heated. But by the end of World War II, services were only held on special occasions. The congregation dissolved in 1958, although sporadic services continued until 1965. The building, which was named an Historic Landmark in 1976, was converted to the Emanuel Art Gallery and is now part of the Auraria college campus

(information courtesy, Beck Archives, Penrose Libraries, Denver University,

Panorama of Denver in 1898:



11th and Larimer in 2013:



Moses Katz's residence was torn down and replaced, years later by the stadium:

1575 Clay Street:

