

The Cotopaxi Papers - 15

Excerpt from Jewish Agricultural Colonies in the United States

Cotopaxi. On May 5, 1882, twelve families were sent by the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society to Cotopaxi, Colorado, and on May 12 they arrived at their destination.⁸⁵ It was the intention of the society to equip each family with a house and necessary implements. The management of the colony was entrusted to Julius Schwarz of New York, while Leon Tobias of Odessa was appointed his assistant; in the meantime E. H. Saltiel of Denver arrived in the colony and volunteered his services to work with Schwarz.⁸⁶

At the outset the colony's affairs followed a normal course. Each colonist was given 160 acres, and it was agreed that part of this land was to be cultivated in common and the crop apportioned accordingly among the colonists. Forty acres were allotted to each colonist for common cultivation, and on this land potatoes were planted. The colonists were at first housed in log cabins, but later the committee ordered that houses be built.⁸⁷

The immigrants worked hard and hoped to succeed in their efforts. In the words of Schwarz, "only one who knows what it means to break up virgin ground with a common shovel, can appreciate the industrious efforts of the refugees. They have broken up the ground with a shovel, they have done the hardest part of the work required to make a wagon bridge, they have filled the ditches with big rocks, which they were compelled to cut and hew from the mountains; they went up to their throats in the swift Arkansas River to make a foot bridge to enable them to reach their lands. . . . They carried lumber on their shoulders to speed the erection of their houses."⁸⁸ According to Schwarz, the colonists elicited praise from their neighbors, because they cultivated their farms as if they were trained farmers.

The colonists did not neglect the education of their children. They attended the public school in Cotopaxi, and arrangements were made by Schwarz to organize special English classes for the adults. The colonists held Friday night and Saturday services in the public school building, and through the efforts of the Reverend Dr. Herman Baar, superintendent of the Hebrew Orphan Asylum, presented the colonists with a scroll. Kosher meat and other products were imported from Denver. By December 1882, most of the houses were built, and satisfactory progress was made.⁸⁹

The progress in Cotopaxi was impeded by internal conflicts which arose between Schwarz and Saltiel, who accused each other of mismanagement. This prompted the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society to send its agent, Morris Tusk, to investigate the situation there. He spent some time in Cotopaxi, and, upon his return submitted to the society the following report:

Immediately on arrival, I called on Julius Schwarz, the General Manager of the Colony, whom I found master of the situation, and who willingly gave me all the information required as to the doings of E. H. Saltiel, in whose care the colony was entrusted.

The general condition of the colony is, considering the many difficulties that arose from the mismanagement of Saltiel and from his omission to furnish the colony with necessary funds, a favorable one.

Owing to the indefatigable perseverance of Mr. Schwarz, who rendered himself worthy of the trust put

in him, the refugees were settled on government land of one hundred and sixty acres for each family. . . . Mr. Schwarz told me that although there is no water for irrigation, he is confident that the farmers will in the winter be able to secure a supply of water to be used by next season. . . . Mr. Schwarz assured me that he repeatedly requested Mr. Saltiel to give him the means to sow a large quantity of potatoes, as they are salable and greatly wanted, but Mr. Saltiel did not give him the funds required. . . . Had Mr. Saltiel used the money so readily put at his disposal for the purposes of the colony, . . . the colony not only would have been self-supporting, but been able to repay every cent that has been spent for their sake. As matters stand at present, the colonists will be able to pull through; they must, however, be provided with the necessary implements.

The facts are that Mr. Saltiel used the money put in his hand for his own purpose, and left several bills unpaid, which he said were paid by him.⁹⁰

This open accusation elicited an immediate reply from Saltiel. In it he categorically denied that conditions in the colony were gratifying. "I regret to state," he said, "that the farming experiment is a failure and if attempted further in the Far Western Mountain States, will cause both loss of money and great misery. The training and taste of our Russian colonists are against Western farming customs, and if the experiment should be repeated here, the only persons that will be benefited will be the clerks and managers."⁹¹ Both statements, however, give due credit to the colonists for their diligence and perseverance.

The controversy and the hardships that arose because of it prompted the Jewish community of Denver to call a special meeting. Both Saltiel and Schwarz were summoned to testify. At that meeting Saltiel stated that the land was not fertile, only 100 acres being fit for cultivation. He openly accused the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society of complete indifference. The clothing and provisions were scant, and houses poorly constructed. The immigrants, he said, had contributed three times as much as the society.

Schwarz, on the other hand, persisted that conditions would have been normal had Saltiel not interfered. He accused Saltiel of building houses on land which did not belong to the colonists but to the Placer Mining Company. To substantiate his assertion, Schwarz submitted a statement from the mining company denying that Saltiel had leased the land.⁹²

After careful deliberation, it was decided to delegate a committee to visit the colony and get firsthand information about conditions there. The members of the committee spent several days in the colony, and, upon their return, they praised the colonists for their accomplishments. They placed the blame upon the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society for impeding their progress. It was their opinion that practical farmers and not clerks should be put in charge. They sent an urgent appeal for aid, but not enough was sent by the society to justify a marked improvement. Furthermore, lack of water for irrigation and the inability of the colonists to cope with the situation brought about the eventual liquidation of the colony.

Leo Shpall

Published in *Agricultural History*,
University of California, Berkeley, July 1950

Annotated by
Miles Saltiel

Acknowledgements and sources

This covers a set of documents intended to enable students of the Cotopaxi pioneers to examine the primary and secondary documents regarding the colony. They are provided with annotations, cross references and an index. In addition the "Cotopaxi Papers" include a summary of findings and a collection of quantitative material, including demographic and financial data, plus a paper on mining employment and a paper on historiography. These are identified and acknowledged as follows:

Document	Principal providers of source material
CP-1 Summary of findings	As below
CP-2 Quantitative material	Generally as below plus Adam Fagin and Leah Klocek, Denver, Colorado, on behalf of author; and Jenny Moore Lowe, Cañon City, Colorado as published at http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/cotopaxi/land.html ; and http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/cotopaxi/family-names.html
CP-3 Schwarz. 29 July 1882	Andrew Eason, at that time of Bristol, England; and Rivka Schiller, New York City, on behalf of author.
CP-4 Tuska. c5 August 1882	Professor Adam Rovner, University of Denver, Colorado, in correspondence with author.
CP-5 Saltiel. 19 October 1882	As CP-4
CP-6 Schwarz. 23 October, 1882	Moshe Shaltiel, Miami, Florida, in correspondence with author.
CP-7 Saltiel, 27 December 1882	Author
CP-8 Kohn and Wirkowski. 5 January 1883	Leah Klocek, Denver, Colorado, on behalf of author.
CP-9 Meyer Hart. 8 February 1883	As CP-6
CP-10 Henry. 15 February 1883	As CP-8
CP-11 Schwarz, 2 March 1883	As CP-8
CP-12 Nussbaum, 13 March 1883	As CP-8
CP-13 Roberts. 1941	As CP-6
CP-14 Satt. 1950	Published by Nelson Moore, Cotopaxi Colorado, at http://www.cotopaxi-colony.com/flora-jane-satt-thesis.htm
CP-15 Shpall, 1950	As CP-8
CP-16 Gulliford. 1953	As CP-6
CP-17 The Bardine Assignment	Jenny Moore Lowe, Cañon City, Colorado, in correspondence with author.
CP-18 Historiography	As above, plus Yehuda Aharon Horwitz and Stephanie Ginensky, Jerusalem, Israel.
Index to CP-3 to CP-16	Compiled by Nic Nicholas, London, England.

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Publication information on back cover.

Generally

Page 239 of the *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, September 1948 to June 1949 vol 34, 1-4 contains *Among Books and Periodicals - A list of selected items of American Jewish Interest in the Russian-Jewish Press, 1860-1932*, by Leo Shpall. This includes several items about Jewish agricultural settlements, including the Cotopaxi Colony.

Shpall went on to write an article concentrating on such settlements for *Agricultural History*, at that time published by the University of California, Berkeley. It appeared in the July 1950 edition, that is at almost exactly the same time as Satt delivered her thesis.

The present excerpt from Shpall's article deals with Cotopaxi and offers a mixed benchmark. He was able to turn up sources which Roberts and Satt missed, specifically CP-4, CP-6, and CP-7. Like everyone else, Shpall worked with a version of CP-8, but he grossly misread it. He himself missed much in the New York, Denver and American Jewish press, including CP-3, CP-5, CP-9, CP-11 and CP-12.

In summary, his version was as imperfectly sourced as Roberts or Satt: it would be hard to say which was worse on this score, though Shpall's conclusions are less misleading.

Cotopaxi. On May 5, 1882, twelve families were sent by the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society to Cotopaxi, Colorado, and on May 12 they arrived at their destination. It was the intention of the society to equip each family with a house and necessary implements. The management of the colony was entrusted to Julius Schwarz of New York, while Leon Tobias of Odessa was appointed his assistant; in the meantime, E.H. Saltiel of Denver arrived in the colony and volunteered his services to work with Schwarz.

At the outset the colony's affairs followed a normal course. Each colonist was given 160 acres, and it was agreed that part of this land was to be cultivated in common and the crop apportioned accordingly among the colonists. Forty acres were allotted to each colonist for common cultivation, and on this land potatoes were planted. The colonists were at first housed in log cabins, but later the committee ordered that houses be built.

The immigrants worked hard and hoped to succeed in their efforts. In the words of Schwarz,

"only one who knows what it means to break up virgin ground with a common shovel, can appreciate the industrious efforts of the refugees. They have broken up the ground with a shovel, they have done the hardest part of the work required to make a wagon bridge, they have filled the ditches with big rocks, which they were compelled to cut and hew from the mountains; they went up to their throats in the swift Arkansas River to make a foot bridge to enable them to reach their lands...They carried lumber on their shoulders to speed the erection of their houses."

Lines 7 to 18

These passages are based upon CP-4 and CP-6, subsequently quoted directly, but they get details amiss and Saltiel's identity completely wrong.

Line 16

Shpall misconstrues Schwarz, who wrote that
"...a number of acres [have been] cultivated in common, and the crop to be raised thereon apportioned according to the size of each family. Thus about forty acres have been cultivated..."
CP-6, page 12, lines 9 to 12.
In other words the 40 acres were common to the colony as a whole, not allotted to each colonist.

Lines 22 to 28

This comes directly from CP-6, page 15, lines 6 to 13.

1 According to Schwarz, the colonists elicited praise from their neighbors, because they cultivated
2 their farms as if they were trained farmers.

3
4 The colonists did not neglect the education of their children. They attended the public school in
5 Cotopaxi, and arrangements were made by Schwarz to organize special English classes for the
6 adults. The colonists held Friday night and Saturday services in the public school building, and
7 through the efforts of the Reverend Dr. Herman Baar, superintendent of the Hebrew Orphan
8 Asylum, presented the colonists with a scroll. Kosher meat and other products were imported
9 from Denver. By December 1882, most of the houses were built and satisfactory progress was
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13 Saltiel, who accused each other of mismanagement. This prompted the Hebrew Emigrant Aid
14 Society to send its agent, Morris Tuska, to investigate the situation there. He spent some time in
15 Cotopaxi, and upon his return submitted to the society the following report:

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18 whom I found master of the situation, and who willingly gave me all the information
19 required as to the doings of E.H. Saltiel, in whose care the colony was entrusted.

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22 the mismanagement of Saltiel and from his omission to furnish the colony with
23 necessary funds, a favorable one.

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25 Owing to the indefatigable perseverance of Mr. Schwarz, who rendered himself worthy
26 of the trust put in him, the refugees were settled on government land of one hundred
27 and sixty acres for each family... Mr. Schwarz told me that although there is no water
28 for irrigation, he is confident that the farmers will in the winter be able to secure a
29 supply of water to be used by next season... Mr. Schwarz assured me that he repeatedly
30 requested Mr. Saltiel to give him the means to sow a large quantity of potatoes, as they

Lines 4 to 9

These two sentences are largely based on a report by Joseph Raphael, originally published in the *American Hebrew* on 7 July 1882; and reprinted elsewhere.

Lines 12 to 13

Shpall got the conflict between Schwarz and Saltiel dead right - the only matter where he was decisively more accurate than Satt - but the nuances defeated him: see page 3, lines 19 to 29.

Line 17 to page 3, line 9

These passages are taken from (or a gloss of) CP-4, including page 1, lines 1 to 13; lines 21 and 22; 27 to 30; page 2, lines 8 to 17; and 21 and 22.

1 are saleable and greatly wanted, but Mr. Saltiel did not give him the funds required...
2 Had Mr. Saltiel used the money so readily put at his disposal for the purposes of the
3 colony,... the colony not only would have been self-supporting, but been able to repay
4 every cent that has been spent for their sake. As matters stand at present, the colonists
5 will be able to pull through; they must, however, be provided with the necessary
6 implements.

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8 The facts are that Mr. Saltiel used the money put in his hand for his own purpose, and
9 left several bills unpaid, which he said were paid by him.

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11 This open accusation elicited an immediate reply from Saltiel. In it he categorically denied that
12 conditions in the colony were gratifying. "I regret to state," he said, "that the farming
13 experiment is a failure and if attempted further in the Far Western Mountain States, will cause
14 both loss of money and great misery. The training and taste of our Russian coreligionists are
15 against Western farming customs, and if the experiment should be repeated here, the only
16 person that will be benefitted will be the clerks and managers." Both statements, however, give
17 due credit to the colonists for their diligence and perseverance.

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19 The controversy and hardships that arose because of it prompted the Jewish community of
20 Denver to call a special meeting. Both Saltiel and Schwarz were summoned to testify. At that
21 meeting Saltiel stated that the land was not fertile, only 100 acres being fit for cultivation. He
22 openly accused the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society of complete indifference. The clothing and
23 provisions were scant, and houses poorly constructed. The immigrants, he said, had contributed
24 three times as much as the society.

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26 Schwarz, on the other hand, persisted that conditions would have been normal had Saltiel not
27 interfered. He accused Saltiel of building houses on land which did not belong to the colonists
28 but to the Placer Mining Company. To substantiate his assertion, Schwarz submitted a
29 statement from the mining company denying that Saltiel had leased the land.
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Lines 12 to 16

Shpall presents his sources out of sequence, as CP-6, Schwarz, 23 October 1882; CP-4, Tuska c5 October 1882; and CP-7, Saltiel 27 December 1882. He is silent about CP-5, the actual response to Tuska.

This quotation is taken from CP-7, Saltiel's letter to the *Jewish Messenger*. No follow-up correspondence has so far been discovered.

The letter has been overlooked by all later writers save Shpall himself and Robert Sutton in *Communal utopias and the American experience religious communities, 1732-2000*, Praeger, Westport, Conn., 2003 pp112-113

Lines 19 and 20

Something as dramatic as a "special meeting" at which Saltiel and Schwarz were to "testify" would have generated a local record. Nothing of the sort has been found. In any event, by the time the Denver community got involved Schwarz was back East. Perhaps Shpall mistook the "appeal for aid" which occurred during the week of 28 January 1883 (*Denver Daily Times*, 7 February 1883), presumably the "mass-meeting" of 30 January 1883 reported in the *American Hebrew* of 2 March 1883.

Lines 20 to 24

The remarks attributed to Saltiel are a mistaken reading of Kohn in CP-8, who wrote (page 7, line 29 to page 8, line 2) that

...the refugees have paid more than twice as much for what they received as an honest administration of the funds would warrant.

But this is Kohn criticising Saltiel, not Saltiel criticising HEAS.

Lines 26 to 29

This is the reverse of what Schwarz wrote in CP-11, page 3, lines 1 to 4, where he found himself defending Saltiel in this particular, so as to serve his more general purpose of defending HEAS and himself.

1 After careful deliberation, it was decided to delegate a committee to visit the colony and get
2 first-hand information about conditions there. The members of the committee spent several
3 days in the colony, and, upon their return, they praised the colonists for their accomplishments.
4 They placed the blame upon the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society for impeding their progress. It
5 was their opinion that practical farmers and not clerks should be put in charge. They sent an
6 urgent appeal for aid, but not enough was sent by the society to justify a marked improvement.
7 Furthermore, lack of water for irrigation and the inability of the colonists to cope with the
8 situation brought about the eventual liquidation of the colony.

Lines 1 to 8

This conclusion gets details wrong. The visit to the colony preceded any Denver meeting and it lasted for hours not days. No-one really tried to blame HEAS, though Kohn was certainly after its money - not so much to keep the colony going as to help his protégés move elsewhere.

On the other hand, Shpall touches accurately on the problem of irrigation and captures Kohn's demands for a "practical farmer" (echoing Saltiel) and the colony's eventual abandonment.

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