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FLASHBACK PHOTO: JEWISH FARMERS OF CONNECTICUT

17 comments

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a small farm in **Colchester, Conn.**, was a draw for many Jewish immigrants trying to eke out a living in the tenement slums of New York's Lower East Side. Colchester and other Connecticut towns attracted hundreds and hundreds of Jewish farmers.



Mary Dralick by Jack Delano, Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

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Land was cheap in Connecticut and help was available for Jewish immigrants who wanted out of the city.



A typical rocky Connecticut farm. Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

By the end of the 19th century, Yankee farmers were abandoning their farms in Connecticut. It was too hard to scratch a living out of the state's rocky soil, help was hard to find and farmers could earn more money in the cities. So many farms were on the market during that period the **Connecticut State Board of Agriculture** published catalogs of farms for sale.

Baron de Hirsch

Meanwhile, European immigrants were coming to the United States by the millions. Jews fled Russia and Eastern Europe to escape persecution, arriving in America with little money. Jewish relief societies in the United States then tried to help them. In 1889, a wealthy German Jewish banker named **Baron Maurice de Hirsch** donated \$2 million for resettling Russian Jews in the United States. The **Jewish Agricultural Society** in New York and the Baron de Hirsch Fund gave Jewish farmers small loans to establish farms.

Jewish farmers settled in clusters in Colchester, Norwich, East Haddam, and Newtown. By 1928, the Jewish Agricultural Society estimated Connecticut was home to 1,000 Jewish farms and 5,000 Jewish farm families.



Jewish farmers working in a small Colchester coat factory. Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

Life was hard on the farms, and many farmers worked part-time in small local industries. In the photo above, farmers worked part time in the Levine coat factory. Mary Dralick, pictured at the top of this page worked as a sewing machine operator at Levine & Levine Ladies Coats. She was shown on her father's farm, where she helped with the milking and the chores after a day of work at the shop.

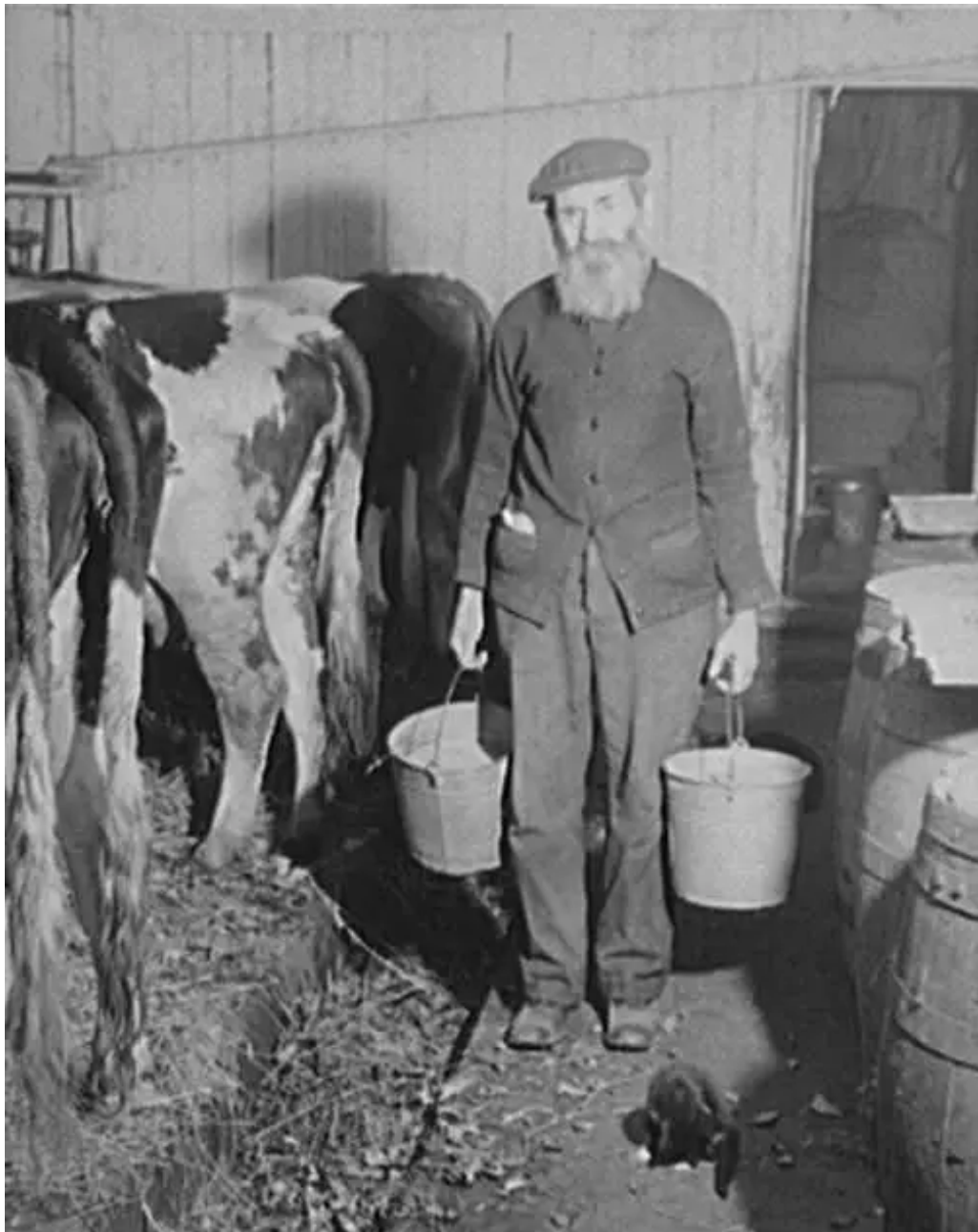


Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Lapping. Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

Picturing Jewish Farmers

In 1940, Farm Security Administration photographer **Jack Delano** went to Colchester to photograph the Jewish farmers. He was Jewish, and he wanted to illustrate the plight of the part-time farmer. During the Depression, people who both farmed and worked part-time in light industry weren't eligible for federal relief programs aimed at helping farmers.

When Delano went to Colchester in November 1940, one-quarter of the town was Jewish – down from half in 1920. Colchester's Jews ran dairy and poultry farms, clothing factories and retail stores. Delano took the photo of Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Lapping, Jewish poultry and dairy farmers. "They run a small farm and take in tourists during the summer," wrote Delano.



Abraham Lapping. Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

Delano also took photos of Colchester's synagogue and Hebrew School, below.



One of the Jewish residents of Colchester after the services in the local synagogue. Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

Below, children at the Hebrew school examine a map of Palestine.



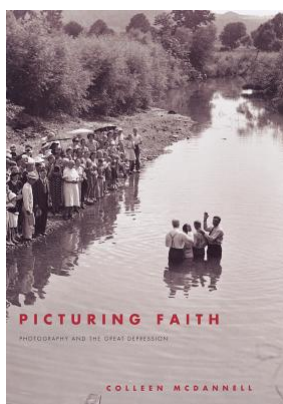
Photo courtesy Library of Congress.

Connecticut was close enough to New York that its Jewish farmers and small businesspeople could maintain family and social ties with the city. Some found a market for their products in New York.

Alphonsine and Jacques Makowsky fled Germany and then settled on a poultry farm in northeastern Connecticut to raise African guinea hens. A fire destroyed their henhouse and so they began to cross breed Cornish gamecocks with hens. The result: the Cor game hen. The Makowskys then sold as many as 3,000 a day to New York restaurants like the 21 Club.



Levine and Levine, Colchester, Conn. Photo courtesy Library of Congress.



 [New England Historical Society](https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.org/)

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Picturing Faith:
Photography and the
Great Depression

by [Colleen McDannell](https://www.colleenmcdannell.com/)

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With thanks to the Connecticut State Library, Jewish Farmers in Connecticut, and Picturing Faith: Photography and the Great Depression, by Colleen McDannell. This s was updated in 2022.

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17 COMMENTS



PHYLLIS SCHNEIDER WINKLER
🕒 December 18, 2014 - 12:05 pm

I can't open this. I keep getting a comment that I can't edit it. I just want to read this!

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NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

🕒 December 18, 2014 - 1:06 pm

So sorry! We posted the wrong link. Try this one: <http://bit.ly/1xsudc>



PHYLLIS SCHNEIDER WINKLER

🕒 December 18, 2014 - 3:33 pm

Thanks! I grew up on a chicken farm in Colchester and shopped at Levine and Levine.

New
England
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Society

NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

🕒 December 18, 2014 - 5:00 pm

You're kidding! If you do a search using the terms loc.gov delano and colchester you'll see about 90 photos of Colchester.



ELIZABETH S. TAYLOR

🕒 December 18, 2014 - 12:49 pm

I agree: passwords are ridiculously complex. Dear NEHS, please retract the password requirement.

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🕒 December 18, 2014 - 1:06 pm

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STEPHEN HENRY KARNEY

🕒 December 18, 2014 - 3:51 pm



Opened without issue on my phone. Trouble at the PC. Thanks for posting.
have a daughter-in-law who will treasure this.

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NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

🕒 December 18, 2014 - 5:00 pm

Wonderful!



STEPHEN HENRY KARNEY

🕒 December 18, 2014 - 5:08 pm

Opened also on the PC but not as easily. Good job.

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AHARON BERMAN

🕒 March 16, 2015 - 6:48 am

i live in israel

my father Samuel ob”m was a famer in colchester

his parents OB”M Aaron & Kate Berman

can anyone help with more info

WHY ARE ALL THE JEWS DISPROPORTIONATELY RICHER THAN CHRISTIANS? - CHRISTIAN FORUMS

🕒 March 16, 2015 - 8:38 am

[...] NEWSLETTER Federation of Jewish Farmers of America Convention Booklet | Jewish Women's Archive Flashback Photo: Jewish Farmers of Connecticut – New England Historical Society [bless and do not curse]Advertisement Sustainable Agriculture Rooted in Jewish Traditions - Jewish [...]

ADRIAN, THE HATMAKER'S SON WHO DRESSED AMERICA - NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

🕒 December 24, 2016 - 10:53 am

[...] born Adrian Adolph Greenberg on March 3, 1903. His parents, Gilbert and Helena Greenberg, both had Jewish immigrant parents: his father's were from Russia, his mother's from Bohemia and [...]

JEWISH FARMERS IN CONNECTICUT | THE BARON HIRSCH JEWISH FARMERS COMMUNITY

🕒 August 16, 2017 - 1:49 pm

[...] <https://newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/flashback-photo-jewish-farmers-colchester-conn/> [...]

HOW THE GREAT COLCHESTER MOLASSES SHORTAGE NEARLY RUINED THANKSGIVING - NEW ENGLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

🕒 November 10, 2017 - 2:03 pm

[...] such a starring role in the colonial New England Thanksgiving that a shortage of it in 1705 forced Colchester, Conn., to postpone the holiday for [...]

LEARNING THROUGH PLACES LESSON 7 – FAMILY FARMS: JEWISH FARMERS IN CONNECTICUT – WHERE I LIVE

🕒 November 17, 2018 - 3:21 pm

[...] <https://newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/flashback-photo-jewish-farmers-colchester-conn/> [...]

LEARNING THROUGH PLACES: FAMILY FARMS – WHERE I LIVE CT

🕒 August 5, 2019 - 10:28 am

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JEWISH FARMERS IN CONNECTICUT - THE BARON HIRSCH JEWISH FARMERS COMMUNITY

🕒 March 28, 2020 - 2:22 pm

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