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Introduction

"Vie a Heen Zol Ich Gayn" and *"Mein Yiddishe Momme"* are two songs that Borscht Belt singers could count on to bring down the house.[1] If you wanted to leave your bungalow or hotel audience on their feet, stomping, applauding, shouting for more, end your 1950s or 1960s act with on of these workhorses. *"Mein Yiddishe Momme"* ("My Jewish Mother") evoked the image of the self-sacrificing, presumably immigrant, Jewish mother bathed in the warm glow of Sabbath candles. *"Vie a Heen Zol Ich Gay"* ("Where Shall I Go") struck an even more elemental chord among Jews as a popularized version of the saga of the wandering Jew. "What place shall I choose, one that is destroyed or one that is going to be destroyed?"[2] After lamenting that "to the left, to the right, all doors are closed to me," the song ends on a note of glory celebrating the new State of Israel. Putting aside this last message, many American Jews used the title *"Vie a Heen Zol Ich Gayn"* as a rhetorical question on more trivial occasions. The answer might be to Miami Beach, to Lakewood, or to the Catskills. If "the Catskills" was chosen, more specific answers were needed: to a hotel, to a *kuchalein*, or to a bungalow colony; and then to the Frank Villa, to the Sunshine Colony, or even to Richman's, my family's place.

The immigrant Jews who came to the United States in several waves in the

nineteenth century were greeted by the xenophobia that fed the nativist movements. The American Party, The Anti-Masonic Party, and the Know Nothing Party were anti-foreign and by extension anti-Catholic and anti-Jewish. Many of the new arrivals had been tradesmen in Europe and many became peddlers in America. For a number of old-stock Americans, their first interaction with a Jew was with a man with a pack on his back. Many, though not all, Jews prospered, some as merchants and bankers. As Jews became more numerous and more visible—and richer—animosity grew. One of the earliest public expressions of the desire to restrict Jewish access to recreation came in 1877 when Judge Henry Hilton barred the important German-Jewish banker Joseph Seligman, a friend of Ulysses S. Grant, from registering as a guest at the Grand Union Hotel in Sarasota Springs, New York, which Hilton managed. Seligman was prevented from staying at the hostelry even though he and his family had spent previous summers there. Two years later, Austen Corbin, president of the Manhattan Beach Corporation, announced that he would not allow Jews in his exclusive Coney Island hotel because, "We do not like Jews as a class."[3]

Barriers were clearly going up to separate Jews, no matter how refined they might be, from 'the better elements of society.' Jews were to be excluded from the workplace, if possible, restricted in their access to private universities, and kept out of resorts. Some Jews hid, or tried to hide, their identities in order to go to Christian-only vacation spots. Some changed their names. Steinbergs became "Stonehills" and Schwartzes became "Blacks." More Jews, however, reacted by purchasing or creating their own resorts.

In 1883, the Fleischmann family, Jews of Hungarian origin, bought sixty acres of land near the town of Griffin's Corners, soon to be renamed Fleischmanns, New York. The family leader, Charles F. Fleischmann, was the Cincinnati yeast and distilling magnate. Fleischmann and his relatives and friends soon built homes of unheard of luxury in the Catskills of Ulster County, the northern Catskills. Fleischmann's own home even boasted an artificially heated, spring-fed, outdoor swimming pool. The door was now open. Less affluent Jews bought boarding houses, and soon the nearby towns of Hunter and Tannersville were also Jewish resorts.[4] Their potential clientele was enhanced when a nativist nightmare came true. About 2,378,000 Jews, mostly from Eastern Europe, emigrated to America between 1880 and 1924 (when restrictive legislation halted the flow). Most were driven out of their homelands by grinding poverty and harsh anti-Semitic governmental policies. Nearly all of them settled in big cities, and over half chose New York City. Most of them came from small

towns, or *shtetlen* or *shetlach,* fewer came from big cities like Lodz, Vilnius, Warsaw, and Odessa.[5]

For the most part, these Jews were not nature lovers, but they appreciated the fresh air to be found away from the crowded, malodorous cities. Small numbers, however, did relish nature. A selection of Catskill-based naturalist John Burroughs's widely read essays, glorifying nature, were even translated into Yiddish.[6] Some of these Jews were farmers in the old country, and a few wanted to re-create their old-world ways in America. Because of its proximity to New York City and its cheap land, the lower Catskills, especially the Neversink Valley of Sullivan County, were very attractive.

Easily accessible by the Midland Railroad and its successor—the New York, Ontario, and Western Railroad—the region was publicized by the railroads in their annual publication *Summer Homes,* which first appeared in 1878. Railroad influence, here as elsewhere, led to more picturesque local names. Think of the poetic names along the Main Line of the Pennsylvania Railroad as it runs from Philadelphia to Paoli: Bryn Mawr, Swarthmore, Ardmore, and so on. These were bestowed by the railroad. So, too, in New York. Centerville became Woodridge. Sandburg emerged as Mountaindale. Sheldrake's Pond became Loch Sheldrake; its body of water became, redundantly, Loch Sheldrake Lake. Pleasant Lake became Lake Kiamesha.

Thanks to the railroads, New Yorkers flocked to Sullivan County. Gentile farmers soon took in boarders, and boarding houses and hotels grew in importance. Some were semielite, most were not. Most simply catered to working-class Irish and German immigrants. Jews first entered into this Christian world of farms and summertime resorts "as early as 1892 in the person [of] Yana 'John" Gerson recognized . . . as the first Jewish farmer in the area." The Gersons began with an abandoned farm in Glen Wild, near Woodridge, and soon built a successful dairying operation and a boarding house.[7] Others followed.

Jews were not welcomed, but they persisted. Former hotel owner Cissie Blumberg recalls that when her father bought land for a resort in Lake Huntington he had to contend with a "Ku Klux Klan and a thriving German American Bund, . . . as well [as] a Property Owners' Association whose charter included a covenant restricting the sale of property to Jews."[8] The Sha-Wanga (later Shawanga) Lodge, near Wurtsboro, is an early example of a major Christian hotel that was sold to Jews. "It was poetic justice . . . that the Dan family, Jewish purchasers of the Sha-Wanga, had brochures printed that were identical

to those their Christian predecessors had, except that they replaced 'No Hebrews Accommodated' with 'Kosher Cuisine Featured.' "[9]

For a variety of reasons—including its closer proximity to New York City, the railroad, and Sullivan County's warm embrace of the road and the automobile (which the predominantly gentile, nature-loving resort communities of Ulster County abhorred)—Sullivan County's resorts flourished. Jews flocked there and Christians yielded to them, with more or less grace. As Sullivan County flourished, it drained Jewish summer trade from the older resort areas of Ulster County north of Ellenville.

From the 1920s through the 1960s, Sullivan County became the preeminent summer resort for American Jews. Its hotels became the models for those in Miami Beach and, indeed, those built later in Las Vegas. There were also less celebrated aspects of the Jewish resort industry that, while they served more people, were less influential than were the hotels. These were the *kuchaleins* and the bungalow colonies that dotted the countryside. The tale of their rise and fall and transformations is the substance of this book, which, in some degree, is also a study of the Jewish American quest for both separation and assimilation. It is my story, my family's story, and the story of at least hundreds of thousands of American Jews who have a bungalow colony in their past.

Many of us live lives very different from those of our childhood. It's been said that Archie Leach reinvented himself as Carr Grant. I and many thousands of Jewish adults who grew up in the period from 1920 to 1960 have, to one degree or another, reinvented ourselves. We are in our thirties, forties, fifties, sixties, and seventies; some are even in our eighties and nineties. With few exceptions, we are not the often chronicled show business types, but we are corporate CEOs, small businessmen and businesswomen, public servants, accountants, doctors, dentists, lawyers, teachers, and professors. Most of us are at least solid middle class. We're all over the United States. You might not find many of us in Nebraska, but California, Florida, and New York are full of us—and there's a large contingent in Nevada. What we share together is a childhood of summers spent in the Catskills of Sullivan County, New York. We didn't go to hotels; we stayed in the lesser known, but far more numerous, resorts of the region. It's not a past people boast about, but it is a past people will reveal with prodding, and they will probably have some semisweet nostalgic memories. Unlike former President George Bush's feelings toward Kennebunkport, Maine, we don't feel tied to our ancestral summer places. In fact, most of us reject them. Few who now summer at East Hampton willingly discuss their earlier

summers in Mountaindale or Woodridge. My roommate in undergraduate school, and a future physician, always laughed at the "dungalow colonies."

As I read Stefan Kanfer's *A Summer World* (the best book to date about the Catskills, the 'Jewish Alps'), I looked for information on rooming houses and bungalow colonies—the *kuchalein* (literally "cook for yourself")[10] resorts—which, without any doubt, catered to more people than did the hotel industry, especially the two hotels that get the most attention, Grossinger's and The Concord. Relatively little information is included on the less-renowned resorts. Furthermore, some of it (i.e., on bungalow colony pricing) is wrong.[11] I believe the reason Kanfer's book falters in its treatment of the *kuchaleins* and the bungalow colonies is the same reason it gives too much attention to Jennie Grossinger; it concerns the availability of primary research materials. Bungalow colony owners, like most hotel owners, were not writers; many were illiterate immigrants. They left few, if any, memoirs.

There simply was no bungalow-oriented book equivalent to the Jennie Grossinger inspired—and no doubt subsidized—*Waldorf-in-the-Catskills.*[12] The primary sources for the bungalow story are memories of people who were there and a few novels and tapes—no literary or cinematic gems, nothing celebrated. There is no mention of bungalow colonies in Oscar Israelowitz's *Catskills Guide,*[13] but plenty on the hotels. Most people who spent their summers in the Catskill *kuchaleins* and bungalow colonies never thought of it as a noteworthy experience. Some of us with a Catskill background were perhaps a little ashamed of the ghetto in the hills where we spent our summers. I've written about Pennsylvania German culture, but—except for one article on "The Jewish Drinking Glass" written for *The Journal of Popular Culture*—I have not written about my culture.

In the 1990s, a critical mass of Catskill alumni reached the age of nostalgia. Scholarly conferences now explore our past.[14] Catskill childhoods are being reevaluated and revealed. New York's trendy *Village Voice,* for example, ran an article entitled, "The Lost Daughters of Zion Return to the Catskills: A Journey to the Source of Jewish Identity, Featuring Geffite Fish, Matzoh Ball Soup, Boiled Chicken, Pot Roast, Corned Beef, Potato Kugel, and Memories."[15] The author, Donna Gaines, had grown up in the Jewish tradition and had gone to a *yeshiva,* but she rejected it all. She not only became a rock groupie, she also consciously and defiantly had herself tattooed—a serious violation of Talmudic law. Now in middle age, after a weekend at The Concord, she has come to a realization: "In the Catskills I'd [be able to] celebrate the eternity of Jewish

life."[16] At about the same time, the more normative Jews and gentiles who read the resolutely middle-class-oriented *Lancaster (Penn.) Sunday News* are invited to immerse themselves in Sullivan County's living nostalgia: "At Resorts in Catskills, Everyone Is Family."[17] The message that the Catskills are worthy of another look also resonates with the young. A *Newsweek* article, "Young Fogies," reports on a "Generation X" that is uneasy about the future and nostalgic about the good old days. The article notes that in some New York City circles "nothing says, 'Let's get serious' like a trip to the Catskills."[18] Sullivan County is a reconsidered promised land.

I grew up in, and with, the bungalow colony industry. My grandfather, Abraham Richman, was a well-known personality in the resort community. He knew everybody—and they knew him: from the famous Malke Grossinger down to many an obscure *kuchalein* owner. He was a *macher,* a mover, in the community. One of his favorite causes was Congregation B'nai Israel in Woodbourne, New York, which he helped to found, and which he served as president for many years. I was born in 1937 and, as a little boy, I would go with him on his fund-raising trips on behalf of the *shul* (synagogue). We visited hotels and bungalow colonies throughout Sullivan County. Grandpa was gregarious, a charmer and raconteur. It was the rare resort owner who didn't offer him and his driving buddy (Grandpa never learned to drive a car) at least a *schnapsel* (a drink) or two, a piece of cake, and some fruit; some offered a banquet. These were always occasions of reminiscence and nostalgia, as well as successful fundraising. On one of these forays, I learned that "Old Lady Grossinger" (Malke) used to carry her money in a garter that held up her stocking. "That's where she went to get the money for a contribution," Grandpa told me. He was proud that he got a contribution from her—right after he extracted one from her husband. "Don't tell Selig," she cautioned Grandpa. It's first-hand experiences such as these, combined with my education, that make me uniquely able to write the story of the *Borscht Belt Bungalows*. Stated simply, as an elderly Jew once observed: "By myself, I'm a book."

The Bungalow Colonies

We don't know who first used the word bungalow for these rentals that evolved from shacks, but he or she had a "country club mind" because the name took. Why bungalow colony? I feel this is a borrowing of allusion thanks to the

movies. “Arts colony” and “Hollywood colony” were both well-known terms in the 1920s and 1930s. The term “bungalow colony” is a perfect one for people aiming toward assimilation, yet living in overcrowded apartment-laden neighborhoods. The young Jewish adults tasting delicious assimilationist freedom at adult Kamp Kill Kare in the 1930s centered much of their social life around their bungalows.[19] Just combine the suburban good-life image of “bungalow” with the exclusive image of “colony” and you have a natural for a resort area that had always made extravagant boasts.

The word bungalow, a legacy of the British Empire, is derived from the Bengali word meaning “a low house.”[20] The first American use of “bungalow” in this sense is found in an 1879 article in *The American Architect and Building News,* which describes a structure designed by Boston architect William Gibbons Preston and built on Buzzard’s Bay, Massachusetts, at the base of Cape Cod.[21] By the late nineteenth century in America, the word bungalow had become synonymous with an upper-class summer home. In subsequent years, popular culture embraced the word. Lines from the long poem “Bungal-ode” by Burges Johnson Johnson, appearing in *Good Housekeeping* magazine in February 1906, attests to this.

There’s a jingle in the jungle,
’Neath the juniper and pine,

. . .

And my blood is all a-tingle
As I count each single shingle
On my bosky bungalow.[22]

Never completely losing its relationship to a bosky (woodsy) retreat, the bungalow came to symbolize comfortable suburban domesticity. The American ideal of the “vine covered cottage” was transformed into a bungalow. Additionally, rural and seaside retreats, however modest, were often called bungalows. The only non-Catskill resort type that consciously used the term bungalow was the “Bungalow Camp,” a decidedly WASP institution that was no doubt, popular among those influenced by Baden Powell and Theodore Roosevelt. One such bungalow camp was operated by Dr. Fillmore Moore at Eliot, Maine. Here “campers were subjected to a regimen of living ‘as much as possible in the open air, [eating] the right food in the right way,’ [and

working] always to some purpose, with an eye for simple beauty, and with plenty of time for play." The so-called bungalows that "they inhabited varied from 9-by-12 feet to 20-by-32 feet in size, and the only solid parts were their framework, flooring, and a batten door, the roof and sides being of stretched canvas."[23]

It is hardly likely that this type of institution was known to the urban masses of European Jews, nor would it have appealed to them, Sullivan County's resorts always defined themselves in terms of hyperbole. When I helped edit my friend Manville Wakefield's *To the Mountains by Rail*, I was struck by the boarding houses—hotels of the 1870s—that described themselves in words suggesting they were on a par with the Waldorf Astoria. Monticello's Exchange Hotel assured guests in 1873 that it could "furnish first-class accommodations, [and] the table will at all times be furnished with the delicacies of the season, and the bar will be supplied with choice wines, liquors, and cigars."[24] Ironically, these resorts never catered to an upper-class clientele.

Later, in the golden age of the hotels, many places added "and country club" to their name, as in "Kutcher's Hotel and Country Club," conjuring up the elegance of an exclusive way of life familiar, if only in the movies, to most guests. In an episode of the television situation comedy *The Brooklyn Bridge*, set in the 1950s, the children of now-deceased parents decide to sell their parents' small bungalow colony in Mountaindale: "The Hollywood Country Club."

ALICE: Two immigrants from Germany who were never west of Prospect Park West. Where did they come up with the name?

GEORGE: They loved the movies. It's a good thing they didn't call it "Tara."[25]

George's parents would not have needed to be inhibited; there is a "Tara Acres" bungalow colony between Hurleyville and Monticello.

In post-World War II years, some more pretentious and amenity-enhanced bungalow colonies started to call themselves not "colonies," but "cottages"—thus, "Cutler's Cottages" in South Fallsburg.[26] However, whatever their owners called them, people went to the mountains to rent "bungalows." Interestingly, bungalow is a very Jewish word to people who grew up in the New York City Borscht Belt sphere, and its use and allusions are very different from those of mainstream America, and especially different from California, which has been characterized as "bungalow land." Film and television writer Sybil Adelman

Sage recalls trying to impress a visiting Israeli relative—one who had quickly gained a clear insight into Jewish-American New York culture.

> I circled around the Beverly Hills Hotel, a sprawling Spanish-style stucco structure with acres of unblemished lawn, a star-studded swimming pool and tennis courts, Los Angeles at its flamingo-pink brightest, to show my Israeli cousin Ronit the $3,100-a-night bungalow. Ronit, who had dismissed the city's top tourist attractions—the Farmer's Market, Rodeo Drive and the Venice canals—as clones of things elsewhere, was yawning. "Bungalows I saw in the Catskills," she said, continuing to lean, chin in hand, against the car window, the better to pooh-pooh everything.[27]

There is, indeed, a Monticello bungalow colony called the "Beverly Hills Country Club." Today, you rent a house in the Hamptons, a cottage in the Berkshires, and a bungalow in the Catskills.

Incidentally, there are many "real" bungalows in Sullivan County. These are textbook examples of arts-and-crafts style buildings. In Sullivan County, however, where new is always equated with better, most bungalows have been "improved with the addition of picture windows, aluminum siding, and other postwar treatments. Our Christian neighbors, the Ampthors, lived in a bungalow, and at least four other year-round houses near us are bungalows, I never knew what these people called their houses, but I bet it was never bungalow. One very assertive bungalow (now denatured) down the road was called "Tony's dollhouse" locals, after its Italian builder and because of its compact perfection.

Rental bungalows of the colony were, and are, architecturally simple. Oral tradition suggests that the first bungalows lacked kitchens and bathrooms. The tenants used outhouses and communal kitchens that were also used by the roomers in the main house. By the 1930s, virtually all bungalows were two- or three-room units, although a very few one-room and four-room bungalows were also built. At least 95 percent of the bungalows had two rooms (kitchen and bedroom) and a bath, or three rooms (kitchen, two bedrooms) and a bath. None had a living room, but many had a porch and, after World War II, frequently these porches were screened.

The exterior architecture was also simple—rectangular or square with gable roofs. They were never set on foundations, but rather on concrete or wooden

piers. At many colonies, the piers were hidden by panels giving the illusion that the bungalows had foundations. Often, bungalows were semidetached or double units. This was an extremely common form. In the later 1950s and early 1960s, Hollywood- or Floridian-type bungalows became fashionable. These have the same basic floor plan, but have angled flat roofs and, perhaps, picture windows. Some of these were constructed on concrete slabs instead of piers and were, therefore, lower to the ground. Also, some bungalows were built motel-style, that is, connected to form a row or a court. At Kassack's Bungalows in Woodbourne, the newest bungalows were called "The Floridians." These were court-shaped, had no front porches, and were the most expensive units. Within Kassack's small world of seventy-seven units, "the Floridians" (as the tenants called themselves) were the elite, as were "the Lakefronters" at the fictional Hector's Pond Colony described in the novel *Bungalow Nine.*[28]

Traditionally, bungalows are painted white with green trim. Some bungalows have black or blue trim. Lansman's, a large well-known colony turned co-op, paints the trim red and has adopted red and white as official colors. Their athletic teams wear red and white and their vehicles are red and white. This color coordination, however, is unusual. Knowing the bungalow business as I do, I believe the green and white scheme has to do 'with economy; white paint is cheapest and, for a long time, green paint was cheaper than other trim colors.

During the years of decline, especially in the 1970s (the "hippie" years), many a desperate bungalow owner tried painting the bungalows with "now" colors: pinks, purples, yellows, and reds, but the effect was akin to a seventy-five-year-old woman putting on Madonna-like makeup. My grandfather would have used the more colorful Yiddish phrase "*Dus kan helfin vie ein toten banchus*" ("this can help as much as cupping a corpse") to describe the futility of this process.[29]

Most bungalows were sheathed in wood clapboard siding, but others were covered in asbestos shingles. Kassack's Floridian units were covered in light green shingles. Sims Resort Colony (note that they dropped "Bungalow"), outside of Monticello, is sheathed in fake stone. I never saw a bungalow sided in wood shingles, the quintessential covering of the arts-and-crafts bungalow. Very few bungalows at ordinary colonies were built after 1960, although many Hasidic and New Orthodox places witnessed building booms in the 1970s and 1980s. When I asked Miriam Damico when the "new" bungalows were built at her well-maintained Moonglow Inn Colony, near Loch Sheldrake, she hesitatingly admitted that they dated from the 1950s.[30]

Most early bungalows were Spartan, but after World War II, there were changes. The first was the "Hollywood Kitchen." By the mid 1950s, there was scarcely a colony that didn't boast of "Hollywood Kitchens" on its sign. A Hollywood kitchen meant that all of the appliances were along one wall, the sink had drain boards, and there were hanging cupboards over the sink, range, and (ideally) over the refrigerator as well. In other words, this was a variant of the modern suburban kitchen. Classy kitchens had tile or pseudo-tile walls and Formica counter tops. Bathrooms also underwent a change. Prior to World War II, bathtubs were virtually unknown in bungalow bathrooms. In postwar bathrooms, tubs and tile walls were introduced, as were large mirrored recessed medicine cabinets and numerous, often fluorescent, lights. All rooms were provided with multiple electrical outlets to power the larger range of appliances of modern life. Traditionally, bungalows lacked heat. When cold snaps hit in August, most people would turn on the oven and open its door. After World War II, many tenants brought along electric heaters. By the mid 1960s, wall-to-wall carpet was common in the bedrooms of larger colonies, and, by the 1970s, some colonies were offering air-conditioning units in their bungalows as well. Air-conditioning and television cable had a phenomenal effect on the community life of the colonies since tenants no longer felt the impulse to leave their units whenever possible.

Landlords were also expected to provide lawn furniture of sorts. Before the war and for a few years following, the predominant chair was an Adirondack type. These were heavy, ungainly to move, and had to be painted each year. Tables and benches were also made of wood. Tenants would often zealously guard the furniture placed near their bungalows and occasionally fought over the question of whose chair belonged where. After the war, metal-framed chairs with wooden slats became popular, and, by the 1950s, bent-metal chairs (popular once again, as *funky*) came into use, as did lightweight-metal umbrella tables. These were followed in short order by aluminum chairs with nylon webbing. Owners felt that heaven had come when these chairs became widely available. They were everyone's dream; they were cheap, strong, light, and cold be stacked easily.

Tenants brought their own furniture as well. Joey Adams recalls that everyone brought a hammock.[31] That may have been the case in the 1920s; however, although I do remember hammocks into the 1980s, they were always relatively unusual. The ownership of canvas and wooden folding chairs was more common, and army cots were very popular for sunbathing. This furniture was,

in turn, replaced with folding webbed-aluminum chairs and "chaise lounges." One advantage of renting at the same colony season after season, was that the tenants could leave their own stuff in one place over the winter, rather than schlep it all back to New York each year.

"What is a bungalow colony and who goes there?" asks Michael Straus in the *New York Times* in 1956. "A bungalow colony," he answers, "is usually, an oval cluster of cottages bordering a green sward at the opposite ends of which, more often than not, are a day camp for children and a social hall for mothers and the transient fathers."[32] This description is perhaps overly elegant and too restrictive, as subsequent chapters will illustrate. A more recent definition, slightly tongue-in-cheek, holds that "bungalow colony" is "the Catskills word for clusters of white cottages with a handball court and a pool that is always advertised as Olympic-sized even when it is no bigger than a hot tub."[33]

Literature of the Bungalow Colonies

Life in bungalow colonies was usually pacific, petty, and uneventful. It scarcely provided the background of tension and emotion that many authors would find attractive for their novels, and writers of memoirs, apparently, chose to overlook this aspect of their own pasts. One of the very few memoirists to recall a *kuchalein* in any detail is comedian-columnist Joey Adams, born in 1911, whose acerbic remembrances are especially valuable for their early date. He lived the Catskill summers from the 1920s, and *The Borscht Belt* (written with Henry Tobias) recalls a world of rapacious *kuchalein* owners and exploited tenants who, in turn, spent their time figuring how to sneak into the shows provided by hotels for their guests. He remembers the arduous train trips and "hacker trips" to the "Sour Cream Sierras."[34] Despite the early reminiscences, the bulk of his book is devoted to the hotels with which he is clearly smitten—and especially the bigger ones whose owners are usually depicted as being as warm-hearted and amiable as the small hotel and *kuchalein* owners were churlish and penny-pinching.

In 1987, Henry Tobias wrote his own recollections, *Music in My Heart and Borscht in My Blood*, which is even more star-struck than Adams's. It offers no bungalow stories but does provide insights into the peripheries, such as tales of state troopers and local police who specialized in speed traps designed to harass travelers on their way to the Catskills. He also includes several interesting anecdotes about Charlie Rapp, who played an important role in Catskill entertainment.[35]

The only novel I have located about bungalow colonies is Norman Ober's *Bungalow Nine*,[36] a tale set in a colony in Spring Valley of Rockland County, a bit closer to New York City than Sullivan County. Today this area is a New York City suburb, one from which many fathers could commute to their work daily, although in the 1960s most fathers were weekend visitors. Hector's Pond Colony has all the elements of the classic bungalow colony, including a greedy owner, Hector Mannheim, who rents to a semifashionable young couple, Jason and Ann Cutler. Jason works in public relations for a movie company, and he knows stars. His wife, a former school teacher, now devotes herself to their young daughter, Toddy. Together, Jason and Ann are intrigued and appalled by the social life they encounter at the colony. The lack of privacy and the social divisions between the ordinary renters and the "Lakefronters," whose more expensive units face Hector's pond, surprise them. News of occasional affairs surprises them even more. With them, we visit the casino for tenant meetings where summer rules are made, meet the day-camp staff, and go to Saturday night parties. Ultimately, and based on an actual disaster, we are faced with the single most cataclysmic event in bungalow, or more broadly, Borscht Belt history.

On 19 August 1955, Hurricane Diane hit the Northeast and widespread flooding engulfed many resort areas.[37] Hector's Pond is cut off by flood waters and some bungalows are washed away. Jason and Ann are ultimately impressed by 'the way the tenants, a mix of middle-class Jews, most in business, pull together to help one another. Jason, who prior to this had, with Ann, decided he never wanted to visit a colony again, even considers giving a deposit on a unit for next year. However, as his adrenaline level returns to normal, he decides that despite the well-run day camp and the colony's potential for emergency camaraderie, bungalow life is not for the Cutlers.

The storm also provides a dramatic focus for Sidney Offit's *He Had It Made*, a *roman á clef* about the Aladdin Hotel in Woodbourne, New York—a hotel that was part of my childhood. Offit married the daughter of the Komito family, which still owns the hotel. The fictional Sesame Hotel is run by Sam and Becky Mandheimer. Their daughter, Marsha, is alienated from the business, but has just divorced her husband and returns with her son to her parents' place. She becomes involved in a summer romance with an ambitious waiter, Al Brodie, who can't understand why Marsha doesn't love the Sesame, which represents to him security and wealth. Marsha's rage reflects the ambivalent feelings of many resort owners' kids, mine included:

> You think this is Paradise. . . . Well, to me it's a rotten, dirty, filthy place. It cheated me out of everything. You know how many times my cheeks were pinched, how many thousands of times I heard what a lucky girl I was, how they were doing it all for me? You know what my parents were doing for me? Nothing. When I got the measles, my father's biggest worry was that the guests would find out and all the children would go home and it'd ruin the season. How many times did she sit with me in the children's dining room? Wonderful meals! Three squares a day! All I ever heard day and night for twenty years was the hotel, the hotel—should we build a new casino and how much will it cost. She says yes, he says no. And how about the head counselor, he's got a following but he's such a slob. And the laundry man is robbing us blind and the butcher is cheating us on weight and on and on. Good old Mama and Papa, those poor over-worked Mandheimers, killing themselves, dead on their feet and doing it all for me? Well, I think it's ugly and I hate it all.[38]

The novel also details a few interactions between the local gentiles and their reactions to the Jews of summer. This theme is very important in Reuben Wallenrod's *Dusk in the Catskills,* which recounts the story of Russian-born Leo Halper who, with his wife Lillian, runs a small hotel in fictional Brookville, New York, in Sullivan County. The dynamics of their place share many of the same elements with the story of the Sesame, but this work also shows us the winter, or private life of the resort owners, which makes it a useful source. Many of the Halper's problems and life patterns are the same as those shared by bungalow colony owners.[39]

Harvey Jacobs's *Summer on a Mountain of Spices* is about life at Berman and Ferinsky's Willow Spring Hotel, a small family place, near Monticello. I can see many aspects of my resort childhood reflected in the story of the Bermans's nephew, Harry Craft. The book also gives rich glimpses of the often polyglot Sullivan County country' roads and the liveliness of Monticello, Sullivan County's county seat. For example, Harry experiences the very real Old Liberty Road:

> Old Liberty Road . . . a path of turns and hills, ruts and bumps, led to the Willow Spring, along with a heavy population of other hotels, kochalayns [*sic*] where the women cooked for their families in communal kitchens while the husbands and kids waited in bungalows without toi-

lets, and the high-hedged homes of early settlers who saw the neighborhood change. . . . The final mile to the Willow Spring went past Hammerman's Shady Rest, a nest of bungalows, the Elmsmere Arms Hotel, the class of the neighborhood, a colonial cottage with a red well and white latticework that belonged to a retired sheriff, a small forest waiting development, another bungalow colony, poorest of the poor, Wishninskiwitz Park, then, on the left, Mrs. Kar's battered house and chicken coops . . . her Feshtoonkana slum. . . . The hotel driveway was past a sign surrounded by colored Christmas bulbs. WELCOME TO THE WILLOW SPRING HOTEL. BERMAN AND FERINSKY OWNERS AND OPERATORS.[40]

Another vividly descriptive novel is *Thunder over the Bronx* by Arthur Kober, which provides insights into the lives of those who went to the resorts and has some wonderful vignettes abut the adult camps of the Borscht Belt, where young unmarrieds went to mix. Kamp Kill Kare is nominally in Connecticut, but from the description it could be in Woodbourne or any other place in Sullivan County. At Kamp Kill Kare, "bungalow" was used in the Beverly-Hills-Hotel sense of the word, but on a less classy level. When Bella from the Bronx arrived, she received a "rowdy welcome from Harry Horowitz, who was at the desk and who assigned her to the same bungalow she had been in last year." After she let "one of the waiters take her suitcase to her bunk," she quickly opened it and removed "a pair of canary colored trunks, a pair of pale blue socks, her yellow sandals, a fuzzy blue sweater, a pair of long yellow earrings and a length of baby-blue hair ribbon."[41]

Later she went to a pajama party at Benjie's bungalow, the accommodations of a new-found friend. "There was an odd collection of people assembled in Benji's bungalow. The men, resplendent in gaudy bathrobes, wore scarves which were intricately knotted in the latest Hollywood fashion. Although most of the girls were in pajamas, there were one or two in negligees of a sickly pink hue."[42]

Lastly, there is Martin Boris's novel *Woodridge 1946* in which the author, himself the son of a bungalow colony owner, characterizes the region very nicely. Speaking through his character Phil, Boris puts the cart before the horse when he describes the hotels that by the 1940s "had grown to a business rivaling the best that Miami Beach had to offer."[43]

Then there was those farmers who wished to be more than debtors to the land yet less than hotel owners. These middle-roaders developed

> their own way of life, becoming summer landlords instead of grandiose innkeepers. They built multiple-dwelling rooming houses and individual bungalows all with kitchenettes to permit light housekeeping. Each major hotel had its satellites of these kinds of units, and there was as little rivalry between bungalow colony and hotel as there was between the Earth and Moon.[44]

The mountains had an uniquely diverse clientele:

> Between the Fourth of July and Labor Day the mountain ghetto swelled a hundredfold. Jewish life and character then was more rich and varied than at any other time since the days of King Solomon. The new high priests were the hotel owners. Low priests were the rooming-house landlords whose forte was pacifying half a hundred Brooklyn and Bronx matrons for ten weeks. Enriching the mix was the variety of summer help that staffed the hotels: busboys, waiters, bellhops—college boys—each one of them gawkier, hungrier and hornier than the next.[45]

The action in *Woodridge 1946* takes place in a typical but fictional resort luncheonette, "Ourplace," run by Phil and his wife Arlene, in the real town of Woodridge, New York. Phil was worried about the future. Could the Borscht Belt last another five years?

> Once the airlines got wise and brought the fares down, people would discover a whole new world out there. GIs returning home, like knights from the Crusades, would tell tales of the wondrous places they'd been to. And the offspring of the present vacationers were a new breed: children of post-Depression America, they were the first generation not worried about saving money. Restless, hard to please, quick to bore and certain never to return to what had satisfied the three generations before them. It was just a matter of time.[46]

The descriptions of the luncheonette ring true to the memories of my life in the Catskills, Phil and his wife Arlene share a troubled marriage and work hard over the long hours of the summer season. Luncheonettes in resort towns are often open until two or three every morning. The summer of 1946 was good, but Phil, amazingly prescient with all the benefits of an author writing in

the late 1970s, is afraid that all of his work is probably wasted as far as the future is concerned. "All he wanted was five more good years to salt away a bundle then sell out for whatever he could get and semi retire to a liquor store. Hopefully, a fresh start with her, if she were willing to let bygones be bygones."[47]

All of these books present a remarkably unified image of a resort area that held great allure for a first generation who were overjoyed to be in the country. Reuben Wallenrod muses as the Holocaust looms:

> Who are you and what are you Leo Halper, who was born somewhere in a little village in Russia, came to America as a youth, worked in New York sweat shops and walked now amidst these beautiful Catskill Mountains. Who are you, Leo Halper, who strolled about these grounds so beautiful with trees and flowers and a lake and playfields and a casino, while hundreds of thousands of people had no place to lay their heads? You had her wide peaceful spaces and blue skies and green trees, while over there old men, women and children were pressed into filthy boxcars with black fear hovering over them and cruel eyes peering from every corner.[48]

These characters were typical of the people who were the builders and the early tenants. They often brought their children into the business, although some, or many, like Marsha, rebelled. The tenants still rented. Then came the third generation and the fourth, and the ties were broken as society opened up for New York's Jews and as family and social conditions changed. It is a world of fond memories that is shared in the documentary *The Rise and Fall of the Borscht Belt*, which, although hotel-oriented, includes interviews with bungalow people.[49] It is a world now gone.