

**Same Origins, Different Perspectives: Russian Jewish Immigration to
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
1882-1917 and 1989-1995**

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The subject of Russian Jewish immigration to the United States and especially to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania is one that touches me on two levels. First of all it is interesting because it is a specific field of immigration that has not been studied in depth. More importantly it is the story of my family: their journey, trials, tribulations, what they left behind and what they have found.

The approach that I took to this work was somewhat different from what most people think when they hear the often dreaded word “research.” Although over half of the paper represents traditional research, the other is something unique. Piecing together the history of the Russian Jews in first the Russian empire and then in the Soviet Union took hours culling data from books, journals, the internet and various statistical sources. The sources were often confusing and no one of them offered the complete picture of the situation of the Jewish people in the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union for the last 250 years.

When the first wave of Jews left the Russian Empire in 1882, (First Wave: 1882-1917; Second Wave: 1963-1964; Third Wave: 1972 – 1982; Fourth Wave: 1989-1995) Pittsburgh was the center of steel production in the United States. Because of this factor, it attracted thousands of immigrants from all over the world. The complete records for the influx of Russian Jewish immigration into Pittsburgh at that time do not really exist. What does exist, however, is the Oral History Project conducted by the Pittsburgh Chapter of the National Organization of Jewish Women in 1968. This collection was my primary source and a key to understanding the

mentalities of the early immigrants as well as offering me a portrait of their lives. Through that I gained the information about the first wave of the Russian Jewish immigrants to settle in Pittsburgh.

If there is little printed information about those who arrived in Pittsburgh at the end of the 19th and beginning of 20th centuries, there is even less published about those who arrived at the end of the 20th century. The *Jewish Chronicle*, a local newspaper, would occasionally at the beginning of the 1990's offer bleeding-heart stories of Russian immigrants these contained no actual facts and would only speak about a particular individual or family.

I ended up using as my primary sources for this project answers to a questionnaire that I distributed to immigrants from the former Soviet Union and, after its disintegration, from Russia to the US between 1989 and 1995. The questionnaires were exact duplicates of the ones handed out by the Pittsburgh branch of the National Jewish Federation of Women for the *Oral History Project* in 1968.

Although the historical aspect of this project was fascinating, the personal aspect of the project became even more important. When I speak of the fourth wave of Russian Jewish immigration I am in fact speaking about my family.

My family and I immigrated to Pittsburgh in 1989, when I was nine years old. We all went through a period of adjustments that was fairly difficult. The basic way that we saw life, meaning our mentality and attitudes, slowly changed after we immigrated to the United States. That is why, in this paper, through the analysis of attitudes and opinions, I would like to describe the process of adjustments of those Russian Jews, who arrived to Pittsburgh at the same time when my family did, and to compare this

experience with that of immigrants from Russia who settled in Pittsburgh a century before.

Russian Jewish immigration to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania first peaked in 1882 and steadily continued through 1917. These immigrants practiced many trades and came from an array of different social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. The next largest wave of Russian immigration to Pittsburgh was the influx of Soviet Jewry between 1989 and 1993. Recurring political turmoil in Russia and later in the Soviet Union throughout the late 19th and 20th century had a significant impact on the Jewish community there. The changes in the political situation in Russia and how it affected the Jewish population created two different types of immigrants looking for liberty in the United States. The early and recent waves of Jewish immigration from Russia and the Soviet Union differed from one another in attitudes, religious observances, and adaptations to a new life in the United States.

Jews in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union

Jews first penetrated into the area that first became the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union in the border regions of the Caucasus Mountains and the shores of the Black Sea in approximately 586 B.C.E. Clearer information about Jews in this region, however, comes from the Hellenistic period through ruins and inscriptions of tombstones. Religious persecutions in the Byzantine Empire, caused many Jews to move to the coastal communities. During the seventh century wars between Muslims and Persians, many Jews emigrated to the Caucasus and further into the land and established communities

there. These communities maintained contact with the centers of Jewish learning in Persia and Babylon.

The presence of Jews in the Russian Empire had not been tolerated since the Middle Ages. They were considered an enemy by the Russian Orthodox Church as well as by the Czars who had the role of Protectors of Faith and on a regular basis even refused entrance into Russia to Jewish merchants. After Poland was partitioned in the 18th century and then partitioned again by the Congress in Vienna in 1815 several million Jews became prisoners in the Russian Empire. The Russian government began to talk about “the Jewish problem” that needed to be solved by either assimilation or expulsion. This artificial “problem” had two important aspects.

The first was the Jewish cultural and religious autonomy which contradicted the ideology expressed in the 1830s and 1840s by a group of Russian intellectuals who called themselves the Slavophiles, They believed that because the Jews did not speak Russian and were not Christians, they did not fit into the task of “forming a single people out of all the nationalities based on a common language, common religion and the Slavic Mir”¹.

The second aspect had an economic nature. In the first half of the 19th century the majority of the Jews in the Russian Empire still lived in villages, playing a vital role in the village economies. This posed a problem for the Feudal Order of the Empire that stated that free people were not allowed to live in villages or on land that was private property of wealthy nobility or of the state. The order was in place until the emancipation of serfs in 1861. Polish nobility wanted to regain the economic power and functions in villages which they had previously delegated to the Jews.

Both problems, the Jewish cultural and religious autonomy and Jewish residence, were addressed multiple times by Imperial decrees but remained largely unsolved throughout the 19th century. In the “Statute Concerning the Organization of the Jews” in 1804, czar Alexander I formulated the dual policy of forced assimilation and expulsion of the Jews from villages. The aim of the policy was to draw Jews into the general economic and cultural life. For the first time Jews were allowed to attend public schools. To undermine the Jewish village economy, Jewish residence in villages was prohibited and expulsion started soon afterwards. They were also forbidden to distill or sell alcohol to peasants, or continue leasing land in the villages. Most Jews resisted assimilation into a society that would only accept them if they denounced their religious and cultural beliefs and most preferred living in villages to overcrowded cities.

In order to keep Jewish merchants out of the mercantile centers the Pale of Settlement was created in the Russian Empire. In the Pale provinces, Jews made up approximately one-ninth of the population. Numbers increased due to high birth rate and available medical care. As restrictions on professions and trade increased there was professional competition due to the growing numbers of people². At the end of 19th century half of world Jewry lived in the Russian Empire. Based on the first Census in Russian history in 1897, the Jewish population of Russia was 5,189,400, about one percent of the total population of the Empire; four percent of the Jews in the Pale lived in towns, thirty-three percent in townlets, and eighteen percent in villages³.

Within the Pale the number of artisans was three times higher than anywhere else. The main occupations of Jews were commerce, crafts and industry (seventy-four percent of the total Jewish population)⁴. The government encouraged the Jews to play a role in

agriculture, and allotted special settlements for this purpose in Southern Russia. These settlements however, could not absorb the tens of thousands who were being driven out of the villages.

During the reign of czar Nicholas I (1825-1855) the position of Jews deteriorated significantly. To isolate them from their roots, starting in 1827 Jews were conscripted into the army for periods of up to twenty-five years. The Jewish communities themselves were made responsible for supplying the required number of recruits called *Cantonists*, who were aged between twelve and twenty-five. Kidnapping by Russian Jewish *khapers* was often necessary in order to fill the quota. The boys were re-educated with compulsory Christian education and physical pressure was used to induce them to convert. In twenty-nine years, between 30,000 and 40,000 Jewish children served as *Cantonists* ⁵.

In 1843 Jews were expelled from Kiev where they had lived for centuries. New laws forbade Jews to live 50 versts (about 33 miles) of the western border of the Pale. Even the government officials considered the conditions in the Pale horrible. The governor of the Kiev province in 1861 urged the government to lift the restrictions to ease the congestion. Outside of the cities, the typical Jewish community was a *shtetl*, a tiny town which had a few thousand inhabitants and was centered around a synagogue and a market place. The Jews earned their living as petty traders, middlemen, shopkeepers, peddlers, and artisans.

The reign of Alexander II (1855-1881) brought important changes to Russian society. The most fundamental change was the emancipation of the serfs in 1861. For the Russian Jews this period was one of great expectations because the most oppressive

measures were relaxed. On the first anniversary of Alexander's coronation, the *Cantonist* system was repealed. Over time small groups of Jews whom the Government considered "useful", for example, merchants, medical doctors or artisans, were allowed to settle outside the Pale.

The Jewish communities in big cities like St. Petersburg, Moscow and Odessa began to grow rapidly, and some Jews started to participate in the broader Russian intellectual and cultural life. The industrial development of the 1860's and 1870's, following the Crimean War, gave a small group of Jewish entrepreneurs in the areas of banking, export trade, mining, and construction of railroads, new opportunities. But the sudden appearance of Jewish lawyers, journalists, and entrepreneurs cause a strong reaction among Russian nationalists. After the suppression of the Polish uprising in 1863, the position of all minorities weakened and the movement for Jewish emancipation suffered a serious hindrance. A new wave of Slavophile nationalism in the 1870's led to anti-Semitic agitation expressed in newspapers like *Novoye Vremya* (New Time). Jews were accused of forming "a state within a state" and seen as foreigners trying to dominate Russia⁶. Even the myth of the Blood Libel, according to which Jews use the blood of Christian children to make Passover matzos, resurfaced back in Kutais, Georgia in 1878.

The reforms of the 1860's and of the 1870's led to a social instability in the country, which was used by anarchistic elements. In 1881 "The People's Will", a group of Russian populists, assassinated czar Alexander II. This assassination led to a period of intense legal and violent backlash against the Jewish population. The hopes for the improvement of their situation that the Jews might have had during the reign of

Alexander II disappeared. The assassination caused an atmosphere of great social unrest and the regime fell back onto a well-familiar recipe: blaming the Jews.

Beginning in Elizabetgrad, a wave of *pogroms* (an organized, often officially encouraged massacre or persecution of Jews) spread throughout the southwest region. There were more than two hundred in 1881 alone. The authorities condoned them through their inaction and indifference, and sometimes even showed sympathy for the pogromists. An investigation confirmed that the attacks were in fact sanctioned by the new czar, Alexander III. The same investigation blamed “Jewish exploitation” as the cause of the pogroms. According to American historian Martin Malia, pogroms, well publicized in the Western press, made many western liberals doubt that Russia was yet enlightened enough to join the West⁷.

In 1882, a new period of anti-Jewish discrimination and persecution began with what were called “Temporary Laws”. The Jews were again prohibited to buy or rent property outside the set areas, to live in villages, to hold jobs in the civil service, and to trade on Sundays and Christian holidays. This period of intense persecution of Jews, with the pogroms and the “Temporary Laws” led to a first wave of Russian Jewish immigration to the United States which was interrupted only by World War I and the Russian Revolution of 1917.

At the end of the 19th century as Jews became more assimilated, a Jewish secular culture began to develop and Jewish political conciseness started to awaken, leading to a greater anticipation about the positive potential of the state of political affairs. The early Jewish Revolutionaries saw themselves as Russians, fighting for the Russian people and believing that the Jewish “problem” could be solved by the liberation of the masses and

by assimilation. But the indifferent reaction on the part of the Russian intelligentsia to the storm of anti-Jewish violence in 1882 was a bitter disillusionment to these revolutionaries. Among the Jewish proletariat a belief grew that the economic pressure and social discrimination required a formation of their own Jewish workers movement. In 1897, a Jewish labor movement called the *Algemeyner Yiddisher Arbeter Bund* was founded in Vilna⁸. The *Bund* advocated national and cultural autonomy for the Jews but not in a territorial sense. It wanted to find a middle ground between assimilation and a separated territorial solution. The *Bund* developed various union activities and aid organizations.

Nicholas II succeeded Alexander III in 1894 and made it clear that he would guard the fundamentals of autocracy with the same strictness as his father. At this time, however, the movement for political reform, freedom of speech, and universal franchise had gained strength. Riots by workers and students that had previously been crushed by oppression became more successful. The government tried to deflect this revolutionary movement with pogroms at home and the initiation of the war with Japan (1904) abroad. After several months of violent anti-Semitic campaigns, a pogrom broke out in Kishinev in 1903. Forty-five people were murdered, and 1,300 shops and homes plundered⁹. The editor of the local newspaper, *Bessarabets*, for his paper's anti-Semitic agitation received funds from the minister of the interior, Viacheslav Pleve¹⁰. When the perpetrators of the Kishinev pogroms received only very light sentences it became clear that pogroms had indeed become instruments of governmental policy. In response, Jewish groups like the *Bund* began to form self-defense units.

During the war with Japan some Russian press openly blamed the Jews for conspiring with the Japanese. After the horrible defeat of the Russian army, these accusations culminated to a new wave of pogroms. “The Black Hundreds,” an anti-Semitic organization formed during the First Russian Revolution (1905-1907) following the war with Japan , declared the extermination of the Jews as its main program. The worst violence broke out after the Czar was forced to grant a new constitution in October 1905. Organized largely by the pro-monarchist, anti-Semitic “Union of the Russian People”, “The Black Hundred,” with the cooperation of local governments and the police, staged pogroms in more than three hundred cities. Almost a thousand Jews ended up dead and many more thousands wounded. A feeling of despair spread throughout the Jewish communities. Interestingly, after the Bolshevik revolution of 1917, former members of the pogrom-prone Black-Hundreds moved to Germany, particularly to Munich, where they soon became close collaborators with Hitler and his chief nazi ideologist Alfred Rosenberg¹¹ .

With the revolution of 1905-1907 came *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, a czarist police forgery that explained the events of 1905 as a result of an international Jewish conspiracy to subvert Holy Russia. *The Protocols* were written by an anonymous author working for the *Okhrana*, the Russian secret police, stationed in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century. *The Protocols* purported to be the minutes of a conference of Jewish leaders planning to dominate the world. The “Elders of Zion” were accused of trying to corrupt the country by spreading liberal ideas, undermining the nobility, and stirring up social unrest and revolution¹². When published in Russia in 1905, the *Protocols* did not at first draw much attention. After the Revolution however,

the anti-Bolshevists pointed to them as an explanation for the sudden and radical changes in Russia and to justify the anti-Semitic violence during the Civil War (1918-1920). In 1921, evidence was produced that the *Protocols* were a forgery and that the author had plagiarized sections from a French publication from 1864. This publication was directed against Napoleon III and had nothing to do with the Jews.

Meanwhile, in February of 1911, liberal and socialist factions of the Third Duma, the Parliament born during the revolution of 1905-1907, introduced a proposal to abolish the Pale of Settlement. The right-wing and monarchist groups, such as the “Union of Russian People” and the “Congress of United Nobility,” reacted violently and after receiving secret subsidies from the government, started a campaign for increasing anti-Jewish policies. When the body of an 11-year old Christian boy was found in Kiev, the authorities seized this as an opportunity to revive the ancient accusations of ritual murder. Although they knew the real perpetrators, the authorities arrested Mendel Beilis, a Jewish superintendent of a brick kiln near where the body had been found.

Beilis was in prison for more than two years while the government tried to build a case against him by falsifying documents and pressuring the so-called “witnesses”. The case backfired and in 1913, a jury unanimously found Beilis not guilty. The Beilis case, however, did serve several functions. It drew the attention of the world to the plight of Jews in Russia and united the progressive Russian intelligentsia in opposition to the czarism¹³.

For the Jews, there were significant reasons for enthusiasm for the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Jews were given legal equality and for the next few years there was an upsurge of Jewish political and social activity. The restrictions that had previously

been placed on Hebrew and Yiddish literature were lifted. The Soviet government encouraged secular education for Jews and Yiddish became the second official language of Soviet Jewry. Classroom instruction in Yiddish was encouraged.

Although Jews were persecuted in Russia before 1917 in the form of pogroms and mass lynching, the type of persecution that they encountered after the Russian Revolution and during the Civil War was different. Because many prominent members of the Bolshevik Party, such as Leon Trotsky, Kamenev, Gregori Ziniviev, Iakov Sverdlov, and others were Jews, their enemies among nationalists and officers of the White Army spread charges that the Jews were largely responsible for the Revolution. This led to new pogroms and pushed the Jews to find hope in the Red Army as their savior; many joined the Red Army and spoke in villages promising a country where Jews would be full citizens¹⁴.

Through the first half of 1920's, under Vladimir Lenin's government, the Jews still prospered, as did all other ethnic groups. Lenin believed that the success of his government depended on being able to win the allegiance of all of these groups¹⁵. Jewish schools, synagogues and other elements of Jewish culture were not disturbed for a decade after the revolution. Through the mid 1920's the Communist leaders tried to create a nonreligious Jewish culture and led an assault on religion, but they encouraged ethnic groups to develop secular versions of their cultures¹⁶. The censorship of Jewish nationalist and religious literature began during this period¹⁷.

"The Terrible Years" is how Soviet Jews refer to as the period between 1937 and 1939. This was the period of Josef Stalin's purges. Jews were systematically persecuted¹⁸ and the majority of Jewish leading authors, poets, and actors were wiped

out. During this period, Jewish schools and many synagogues were closed. This was when Soviet Jews really started to lose the Jewish identity that most try to regain when they immigrate to the United States.

During the Second World War, many Russian Jews joined the Soviet Army. Due to Nazi persecution of the Jews, many including some of my relatives, died in the Holocaust and many others escaped to safe places. Many gentiles hid Jews in their homes; it was not unheard of for single gentile women to pick up wounded Jewish soldiers on the road and nurse them back to health. Many of these soldiers ended up marrying the women who saved them. This laid the foundation for the modern immigrant view on mixed marriages.

Soviet Jewish culture was completely annihilated between 1945 and Stalin's death in 1953. The Nazi ideology mixed with the Soviet ideology, and Jews encountered even more hostility even from those with whom they lived all their lives¹⁹. During this period there was also another official, government-sponsored wave of anti-Semitism. Jews were constantly arrested and many lost their jobs. Jews were even written out of Soviet history. In the 1952 edition of *Bolshaya Sovetskaya Entsiklopedia* (Great Soviet Encyclopedia) Jews were only listed in four columns²⁰. The last of Stalin's attacks on the Jews was what became known as the "Doctor's Plot" in which Jewish doctors were accused of trying to wipe out Soviet officials through lethal medical treatments.

When Nikita Khrushchev came to power in 1953, he condemned the "Doctor's Plot." He was however also strongly anti-Semitic and stated that the Jews were "rootless cosmopolitans"²¹. He instituted quotas on how many Jews could serve in civil service positions, the quotas were based on the total Jewish population of each of the Republics.

Some quotas were instituted in institutions for higher education. The gates for immigration were briefly opened in 1963 and closed again in 1964, the Jews who immigrated during this time period went to Israel.

Starting in 1964, during the time of “thaw” in the USSR, Soviet Jews demanded their right to immigrate to Israel to be free to practice Judaism. The same year Brezhnev came to power and again restricted freedom of expression, thus restricting the right of Russian Jews to be Jewish. During this time there was also a growing sense of nationalism among young Soviet Jews. They celebrated Yom Kippur and Tisha B’Av and held memorials for Jews killed in the Holocaust. They wanted to be Jewish.

Those who wanted to leave were placed on lists and closely watched by the KGB agents who spied at Jewish gatherings. Under pressure from the West the doors opened **again** in 1972 and thousands of Jews applied to visas to leave²². Before 1975, Russian Jews only immigrated to Israel. In 1975, they started coming to the United States.

In 1982 the doors to the West were again suddenly closed for Russian Jews. This period was again marked by public persecution. Anti-Jewish programs were held on television, and published in newspapers and pamphlets. An active anti-Jewish ultra-nationalist group called *Pamyat* gained attention during this time²³. This group was fairly powerful and threatening. They blamed the Jews for the destruction of monuments of Russian history as well as for the persistent problem of alcoholism that existed in the Soviet Union. Those Jews that had contacts with the West during this time period were severely persecuted and often jailed²⁴.

In 1987 Mikhail Gorbachev enacted a new law that made leaving the Soviet Union easier. Jews really started to feel like they had no choice but to leave. What drove

them out was the same thing that drove out the first wave of immigrants in 1882. They were afraid for their lives. *Pamyat* had gained enough strength that its supporters murdered Jewish leaders. Soviet Jews no longer felt any degree of safety²⁵. They felt that they needed to leave. This is why 1989 is the year that Jews really started fleeing from the Soviet Union.

Therefore it is easy to see how the political situation in Russia and the treatment of the Jews by the government and anti-Semites caused the fourth wave of immigration to have different attitudes, lean more towards religion, and adapt in different ways than the first wave of immigration. Both of the waves left because they were afraid to be Jewish in Russia. The first group however was not denied their right to be Jewish. In fact, the majority lived surrounded only by Jews. The last wave was denied the right to be Jewish by the government of their country. Although they did not actively practice Judaism they were still punished simply for having Jewish roots. The immigrants' reaction to religion once they arrive in the US is different because the latest group of immigrants wanted to learn and uncover a part of themselves that they were not allowed to explore or express in the Soviet Union. The attitudes differ because they grew up in a more integrated environment, exposed to interaction with gentiles they are more likely to see as the people for who they are, rather than for what religion they are. When talking about adjustment to the United States, it is easy to see how this group is more likely to feel like outsiders; from a young age they were taught that they are outsiders. That state of mind is very difficult to escape.

Russian and Soviet Jews in Pittsburgh

The intense, systematic persecution of the Jews by the Russian authorities as well as by ordinary citizens between 1882 and 1917 caused thousands of Russian Jews to immigrate. In the three and a half year period between October 1882 and April 1886 50,000 people from Russia emigrated to the United States. Between May 1886 and December 1897, 90,000 more emigrated. The most intense period at the end of the 19th century for emigration from the Russian Empire to the United States was a seventeen month period (January 1888-May 1889) when an average of 26,000 Russian immigrants per-month arrived at the U.S ports of entry²⁶. Out of total 258,983 Russians who arrived to the United States between 1899 and 1924 91.5 percent chose the Northeast, Midwest, and the West as their places of settlement. The immigrants commonly felt that South was hostile towards foreigners, especially Roman Catholics and Jews²⁷.

The Russian Jews who arrived in the United States during this period settled primarily on the East Coast and in major cities of the country, where in 1900 59.6 percent found an occupation in manufacturing, 20.6 percent in trade, 8 percent in domestic and personal service, 7 percent in clerical and public service, 1.7 percent in transportation and communication, 0.5 percent in agriculture, fishing, forestry, and mining, and 2.6 percent were employed as professors²⁸. They were ready for improvements and had high expectations of social mobility. Many Russian Jews came and settled in Pittsburgh near established German-Jewish residents in sections and near the Lower Hill around Center Avenue²⁹.

Prior to 1880, 75 percent of Western Pennsylvania's immigrants came from Northern Europe and the rest from eastern and southern Europe. In 1882, however, these immigration patterns began to reverse. Between 1890 and 1900 the number of

immigrants from Slavic countries more than doubled. The new immigrants were Poles, Italians, Austrians, Russians, Slovaks, and other Slavs. In 1920, there were 20,000 Russians living in Pennsylvania³⁰.

In 1968 the Pittsburgh branch of the National Council of Jewish Women conducted an *Oral History Project*. This fascinating work helped to collect and preserve a data on Jewish immigrants, who arrived to Pittsburgh from different countries, including the Russian Empire, starting from 1900. A special questionnaire (Appendix A) was designed to trace their lives in Russia, their journey to the United States, and their cultural and personal experiences in a new country. The questionnaire included seventy-eight questions which were divided among fourteen different sections. The section titles and the number of questions per section are as follows:

- I. European Life – ten questions;
- II. Reasons for Leaving Europe – three questions;
- III. Memories of Arrival to the U.S. – eight questions;
- IV. Early Years in the U.S. – three questions;
- V. First Home in Pittsburgh – three questions;
- VI. Occupation in Pittsburgh – nine questions;
- VII. Cultural and Educational Adjustment in Pittsburgh – nine questions;
- VIII. Religious Life in Pittsburgh – four questions;
- IX. Health in Pittsburgh – two questions;
- X. Organizations for Adjustment in Pittsburgh – six questions;
- XI. XI. Personal Patterns of Friendship for Adjustment – five questions;
- XII. Political Activism – four questions;

XIII. Marriage – eight questions;

XIV. XIV. Child Rearing – four questions.

Although the majority of respondents who arrived to Pittsburgh from the Russian Empire between 1900 and 1917 had received a Jewish education because non-Jewish schools were closed to them,³¹ when they arrived in the United States they became less religious. Many stated that they wanted to “rebel” against what they were raised to be³². Their religious participation ranged from attending synagogue occasionally, to full daily attendance but all of them said that they had strong convictions about the needs and rights of the Jewish people, as well as of the religion³³.

Although most belonged to synagogues they were not active members. They also chose to work on Saturdays and often on the High Holidays³⁴. They no longer kept kosher or any of the laws associated with Judaism. This surge of immigrants did not tend to donate money to any type of Jewish charities. This is interesting because most of them received some help, enrolled in language classes, or attended lectures at the Irene Kaufman Settlement House³⁵. As stated above, this group tried so hard to remove itself from religion, that very often it did not even offer its children any type a Jewish education. This lack of religious commitment is also stressed in *The Jewish Criterion*, the community paper of that time. The ads in the newspaper have nothing to do with Judaism; in fact, they advertise non-kosher restaurants and Christmas Shopping at Kauffmans³⁶.

Although most immigrants came from small *shtetls* and had never before actually lived in cities, they reported being “not surprised” by the city life³⁷. They said that they were happy to be reunited with their relatives but that the city itself did not impress them

much. Some, probably, had their own concept of the city, and smoky Pittsburgh did not fit well into the picture of their imagination.

Prior to the Revolution in 1917, Russian Jews often did not have serious interactions with gentiles. Most respondents stated that they had little or no interaction with gentiles, except for contacts on a business level, due to the fact that they lived primarily among Jews³⁸. But at this time there was active and violent persecution of Jews by non-Jews in the Russian Empire. It is not surprising that Jews, therefore, not only did not interact with, but also had hostile feelings towards gentiles. These attitudes did change upon arrival to Pittsburgh. Although most of the immigrants lived in primarily Jewish neighborhoods of Pittsburgh, most stated that they made strong and lasting friendships with gentiles³⁹.

Even those immigrants who had a fairly progressive attitude towards friendships with non-Jews expressed their negative reaction towards intermarriage. In Imperial Russia, because the Jewish and the non-Jewish populations were separated, a large sector of the Jews was not exposed to intermarriages until their arrival to the United States. The majority of those interviewed stated that they were absolutely against intermarriages⁴⁰. This fact is fascinating because most of the Russian Jews immigrating to Pittsburgh before the Bolshevik Revolution were not very religious. Therefore, their attitude toward intermarriage suggests that they saw Judaism as purely a culture. These new Americans wanted to preserve all aspects of Jewish culture and heritage, except for those that are directly religious.

Because the manner of rearing children in the United States was different than in Imperial Russia, the way that these immigrants chose to raise their children was also very

interesting. The preponderance of those questioned stated that the way they raised their children greatly differed from the way that they themselves had been raised⁴¹. They did not force any type of a Jewish education upon their children. The children were also raised with less pressure and more freedom of choices.

Any person who abandons the place of his or her birth goes through a certain period of adaptation to a new surrounding which occurs on many levels: adjustment to the physical place itself, to ones new role in society, and to those who around. This period for both two groups of immigrants will be defined as the first five years in Pittsburgh.

The most important aspect of this process is not feeling like one is being ostracized for being different. This is the profound and difference in adjustment between the two sets of immigrants. Those that arrived in Pittsburgh between 1882 and 1917 stated that they felt fine as immigrants. They did not feel any type of discrimination, or discomfort because of their status⁴². This is probably best explained by the fact that at this point immigrants from all over Europe were still flooding to the United States, the land of opportunity. These immigrants did not feel any different because they were surrounded by other groups of immigrants that were adapting to a new life and had similar problems. These immigrants felt like they were part of something bigger, not like they were different from the rest of the surrounding society.

The last or the fourth “wave” of immigration to the United States began with a policy of *glasnost* or openness, starting in 1985, when Mikhail Gorbachev, the last President of the former Soviet Union, opened the gates for Jews to leave the country. The first families of this last wave began settling in Pittsburgh in 1989. They immigrated

to the United States during the most turbulent time in the history of the Soviet Union, when, under economically devastating conditions, the country started its slow disintegration and, as always under difficult circumstances, the Soviet anti-Semites blamed the Jews and threatened them for all the failures of the socialist society.

This researcher asked immigrants of this area to fill out the same questionnaires developed more than 30 years earlier for the *Oral History Project* by the Pittsburgh branch of the National Council of Jewish Women. Their answers are emotional accounts of the struggle for economic and cultural adjustments of the new members of Russian Community in Pittsburgh.

Many American Jews who came to meet the new arrivals at the Pittsburgh airport "expected them to look like the memories of their relatives who had come out of the *shtetles* in the 1880s, 1890s, and early 1900s. They expected the refugees to be grateful and thankful for the advice and economic assistance they received"⁴³. But Soviet refugees did not arrived to the United States with a hat in hand and a heart full of gratitude. Up to the end of 1980s, the majority of Soviet Jewry was made up of well educated, trained and highly urbanized professionals. The majority of these new immigrants arrived to Pittsburgh from the big and mid-size Eastern European cities of Ukraine and Byelorussia, and a few from Moscow and Leningrad. In addition, on their way to the United States, they spent some time (from a couple of months till a year) in Austria and Italy, waiting for a visa to enter the United States⁴⁴. Newcomers were surprised to learned that the majority of Pittsburgers, like the population everywhere in the United States, prefer to live in private houses. This was highly unusual for apartment-dwellers from the cities of the former Soviet Union.

The way of life in the old country significantly broke barriers between people of different religions. From the end of 1920's there were no special Jewish or any other kind of religious schools in the former Soviet Union. During these first "romantic years" in the history of Soviet Russia, many young Jews, inspired by the Party's promises to build a new and better life for all working peoples, moved from the *shtetls* to big industrial cities and began to work at the socialist factories and plants or to study at the *rabfaks*, special workers' departments of universities which were established during the First Five Year Plan (1928-1933). A new socialist industrial environment forced young Jews, as well as representatives of other religions and nationalities, into a cultural and linguistic assimilation with the Russians. Such assimilation was supported by the state which, under Josef Stalin, made Russian the official state language of the USSR.

All new Russian immigrants like their predecessors, developed close friendships with gentiles⁴⁵. None of those who were interviewed had been isolated from interaction with gentiles in the Soviet Union. Due to the fact that we are dealing with the end of the 20th century, it is natural that people no longer live in secluded communities as they did eighty or ninety years ago. Friendships with non-Jews developed from a young age, and therefore it was not a big step for this group of immigrants to develop close and lasting friendships of the same kind when they arrived in Pittsburgh.

The attitude towards intermarriage for this group is completely different when compared with that of the first generation of Jewish immigrant from Imperial Russia. More than seventy years of the Soviet regime in Russia, when intermarriage became a common practice of the socialist way life, influenced several generations of people. The prevailing position of those interviewed was that it might be easier, if the religion of both

parties in a family is the same, but it really does not matter⁴⁶. Each one of the individuals has at least one friend or a family member who is married to someone of a different religion. Like those who fled Russia between 1900 and 1917 the “new” immigrants are not deeply religious. Being raised in a predominantly atheistic society, these people continue to believe that love and happiness, but not religion, should play the most significant role in a marriage.

It is difficult to identify an average outlook of this group towards raising children. Only a few of these individuals have children raised in the United States, although born in Russia. However, what the respondents state seems confusing: they feel like their children are torn between two cultures, one Russian and one American⁴⁷. These parents often do not know what position to take with their children. It is difficult for them because they cannot raise children who were born in the Soviet Union and left at a cognizant age in the same way that they were raised. Compared with a first generation of Jewish immigrants, they are more likely to give their children a sense of Jewish identity that they themselves lacked growing up in the Soviet Union⁴⁸. Looking to the American style of parenting, which gives a child more freedom of choices than did the Soviet authoritarian system, Russian immigrants want to raise their children differently, less strictly than they themselves were raised.

The question of religious observance among these new Americans continues to be a very important for discussion. If the majority of those who immigrated from Imperial Russia in the early part of the 20th century had some type of religion as an aspect of their lives upon entering the United States, the levels of religious observance among new Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union are naturally different today.

These people, due to the Communist government of the Soviet Union were not exposed to any type of religion when they were younger. So, unlike those that came before them, this group is interested in becoming more religious. That is not to say that these people are quickly turning Orthodox; in fact they are not. They are however, eager to learn more about Judaism. They eagerly participate in Jewish learning programs offered to them by the Jewish Community Center⁴⁹. Temple Beth Shalom in Squirrel Hill, like many synagogues across the United States⁵⁰, has a new Americans Club, and in 1990, many Russian Jewish couples renewed their wedding vows in a Jewish wedding ceremony at Tree of Life synagogue. Although, they attend synagogue rarely, generally on the High Holidays, they still attend more than those from the first wave of Russian Jewish immigration to Pittsburgh. And although members of this cluster work on Saturdays, they do not work on the High Holidays⁵¹.

Another important difference is the difference in giving *tzedakah*, or charity. Those interviewed stated that they regularly give money to a variety of Jewish charities, including the Jewish National Fund⁵². As these individuals are learning about being Jewish, so are their children, many of whom attend Jewish Schools, like the Community Day School, Hillel Academy, and Yeshiva. They also attend summer camps: Emma Kaufman, JNR, and NOAR. These children are receiving the Jewish childhood that their parents never had. They are active in a Jewish activities and many of them become Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

The issue of adjustment to a new life continue to be a very important theme for all generations of immigrants in the United States. Those that came at the end of the 20th century, however, had different experiences. Many Russian Jewish immigrants stated

that they feel like they are different and have been met with some form of hostility or discrimination because they act differently or because they do not speak the language completely fluently⁵³. The explanation for this is that at some point between 1917 and 1989, between the first and fourth waves of immigrants, the United States became less acceptable and open to an immigrant culture; therefore these immigrants do, in fact, feel less welcome than their co-religionists of a century ago. Due to the fact that the immigration policy of the United States has significantly changed in the past eighty years limiting number of immigrants entering the country, the new generation of Russian refugees feels psychological barriers in the process of adjustment to a new life⁵⁴.

Aside from this significant difference in their feelings of acceptance, both groups had very similar adjustment patterns. They assimilated into American life first of all by taking language courses. They also attended concerts, lectures, theaters, and celebrated American holidays⁵⁵. There is no difference in cultural adjustment patterns. Those that were interviewed in 1968 as well as those that were interviewed in 2000, both reported reading the *Pittsburgh Post*, or now, the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*.

Therefore the first and the fourth “waves” of Russian Jewish immigration had different attitudes, patterns of religious observance, and adjustment issues. The social and political changes that occurred in the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1989, had a significant impact on the lives of the Soviet Jews. Although these groups share the same heritage, their experiences as new immigrants to the United States were distinct. Seventy years of Communist rule made these two groups of Jews respond to their new American home in fundamentally different ways. It is however also important to keep in mind that the differences in the answers of the two waves of immigration were caused by political,

social, and economic changes world-wide, that impacted their lives prior to and after immigrating to the United States.

Appendix A

Sample of questions from the questionnaire that were asked to both waves of immigrants

2. Did you belong to some organizations that were set up to give charity?
Did any of these organizations give you boxes (pishkes) to save money?
Did you contribute in any other way?

omitted without permission.

2. Did you change any of your religious practices during your first five years in Pgh?

2. Was there any point during the first five years when you felt unjustly treated because you were an immigrant? If so, please explain.

Abbreviations

OHP – National Council of Jewish Women, Oral History Project

IBA – Individuals interviewed by author

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5. <http://www.friends-partners.org>
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