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**FROM COLONY TO COMMUNITY: STE-SOPHIE,
QUEBEC**

INTRODUCTION

Around the year 1880, events in Eastern Europe signaled the beginning of a large-scale movement of Jews to the west.¹ It was a migration away from hardship and persecution toward lands that offered endless challenges and a brighter economic future. One such destination in North America was Canada, with its economic opportunities and underdeveloped natural resources. One of the destinations of Jewish immigrants to Canada was the farm. In his book *Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880–1910*, Uri Herscher wrote of the Jewish farming colonies in the United States that of “all these East European immigrant colonizing efforts of 1880–1900...experienced the same vicissitudes: a premature birth, a brief struggle, and a abrupt death.”² Similar Canadian efforts experienced similar patterns. Canadian Jewish agricultural colonies were similar to the American ones in that they tended to be poorly organized and small in number.³

As Jewish immigration to Canada continued, organizations such as Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Mansion House Committee attempted to coordinate several settlements in the western part of the country (Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta). One such undertaking in 1884 occurred at Moosomin, Saskatchewan.⁴ In 1889, another settlement was attempted in Wapella, also in Saskatchewan. Similar problems emerged and

comparable results occurred. Even with the failures there were some successes, and farming colonies in both the western and eastern parts of Canada continued to be established.

In 1901 there were a total of 7,607 Jewish people in the Province of Quebec.⁵ The Jewish immigrant population was increasing and Montreal became one of the more popular regions for Jewish settlement. It thus seemed natural that farming colonies in the Quebec region be established. Ste-Sophie was one such location.

At a distance of about 35 miles to the north of Montreal, the proximity of Ste-Sophie to the metropolis seemed to be an influential factor in the decision to settle Jewish farming families in this area. In an early report on this “colony”, the Jewish Colonization Association [JCA] evaluated Ste-Sophie as a good location for several reasons. One of the important considerations was that the community was close to a major city, Montreal. Along with this was the availability of land that could be used for farming or lumber. Finally, there was a pre-existing multi-ethnic population residing in and around the village, which was comprised of French Canadians, Irish, Scottish and Ukrainian immigrants.⁶ In addition, the adjacent Village of New Glasgow was the location of a small Jewish community which became associated with Ste-Sophie’s Jewish community. Together, all these seemed to be important factors that would be helpful in the integration and settlement of Jewish immigrants in this area.

In the year 2000, the Village of Ste-Sophie probably has little if any meaning to those of the younger generations of Jewish people living in the city of Montreal. However, for almost 100 years this little Jewish community north of the city served as a good example of how what began as a resettlement program resulted in the emergence of a strong and successful Jewish community. During most of these years, the Jewish farmers of Ste-Sophie continued to flourish and move forward where most other Jewish agricultural colonies failed and disappeared in a shorter time.

THE EARLY YEARS: 1904 TO 1930

According to a brochure detailing the history of the Jewish Colonization Association, the first Jewish people began to arrive in Ste-Sophie in the year 1904. This date, however, is contradicted by Louis Rosenberg who records the year 1905 as the beginning of this settlement.⁷ Fortunately, there are documents that provide details on each of the colonists in Ste-Sophie, one section of the documents specifically referring to the date when the family arrived. The contradiction is thus resolved in a report titled "A Statistical Inventory and Financial Report" (1905).⁸ After reviewing all documents contained in this file, it would appear that two families; Nathan and Rachel Sakalov, with children, and Isaac and Sarah Albert, also with their children, were the first to arrive in 1905. Both families emigrated from Russia via Montreal.

In the years 1905 until 1912, a total of 32 Jewish families relocated to Ste-Sophie, based on related documentation found in the archives that provided detailed information regarding each of the families upon their arrival in Ste-Sophie.⁹ These personal reports which provide important details on each of the families settling in Ste-Sophie, clearly indicate that mostly all of the new colonists were Russian in origin. From this group, only one family was listed as originating from England, and a second from Austria.¹⁰ There exist two separate summary statistical reports on the overall community. The first report, from 1911, indicates that there were 14 farmers with a total count of 84 souls in the community.¹¹ Two years later, the number of farmers had increased to 20, with 122 souls.¹² On a separate piece of paper attached this document, additional statistics were listed that seem to be part of the 1911 report. According to these notes, there were a total number of 53 Jewish farmers scattered throughout the province of Quebec at that time. Furthermore, this document gives the total population of the Jewish farming community as 341 souls, again a probable reference to the Province of Quebec.

Even though the numbers might suggest a strong Jewish farming community at the time, there was no reference to the considerable seasonal fluctuation in the Jewish farming population. Using the information found in these reports, it appears that not every family continued to live and work in the colony all year round. Because of such factors as farming problems, severe weather, and the inability to maintain a steady income, mostly during winter months, there was some movement back and forth to Montreal. Some left for the city and never returned. These were individuals who opted for occupations that were more stable and associated with labor skills they had already acquired. Based on the community records, the occupational backgrounds of the Ste. Sophie farmers included tailors, blacksmiths, teachers, cabinet-makers, traders, machinists, bricklayers, and shoemakers. All such individuals would have had a better chance to earn a living working in their profession in a larger community.

During the early period, many of the original settlers concentrated on commodities that could be successfully developed. Tobacco, potatoes, dairy products and chickens were some of the more popular examples. During the summer months farming activities were strictly devoted to the planting, maintenance and harvesting of the various crops. According to the statistical reports from 1905 to 1930, the number of practicing farmers fluctuated at around 20. Farming improved with the introduction of specialized machinery, and the settlers had to adjust if they were to be successful. Also, the quality of the soil and the realities of cultivation in Ste-Sophie forced many settlers to move away from the cultivation of crops and to explore other forms of agriculture. Considering their limited resources and possibilities, colonists were open to new ideas or suggestions from outside their community.

In a 1920 "Memorandum" dated January 20, a possible redirection was recommended.¹³ The writer of the report suggested that farmers give more attention and devote greater time to raising poultry, a form of livestock that seemed to be a develop-

ing industry with less troublesome consequences. Since the community was in reasonable proximity to a major city like Montreal, the report's author comments that a greater success rate was more likely if the poultry option was chosen. In a related matter, there is an inspection report from 1922, which clearly advises the colonists to discontinue the production of tobacco because of a drop in purchasing prices and other considerations.¹⁴ The difficulty in growing tobacco or harvesting certain kinds of crops was becoming more and more burdensome and the end results would often be disastrous. After many unsuccessful years trying to develop tobacco, the failures far exceeded the successes.

In addition to these difficulties, other minor obstacles were reported which affected the entire colony. One such problem was related to the acquisition of a shokhet (ritual slaughterer). It seems that there was a dispute as to who was and was not acceptable to the regulatory body for kashrut in Montreal. I was able to locate several letters in the archives referring to this situation in which the authors relate the numerous difficulties that occurred as a result. Another issue that emerged during this early period, was the problem of transporting milk products from the farms to a processing facility.¹⁵ This was a situation which might have caused the appearance of a dairy in Ste-Sophie, perhaps even operated by Jewish people. There is one report that makes reference to a Diamond's Dairy, which existed in Ste-Sophie during 1932.¹⁶ This facility might have been opened in order to resolve the problem or else could have been the source of the problem. Either way, details are so few that it would be difficult to clarify this situation at this time.

With all the difficulties, towards the end of the twenties, the population of the community continued to grow. There was now a synagogue, which was also a schoolhouse. There was a teacher who also had the duty of being the town shokhet. In 1927, it was recorded that 11 families were residing throughout the year, and that poultry was becoming the livestock of choice for the average farmer.¹⁷ Also around that time, a new trend of renting rooms to vacationers started to become more

prevalent among the residents, and was fast becoming the catalyst for a whole new industry. In later years, this trend would have a significant impact on the social and economic development of the area.

In a "Memorandum" from 1929, the writer records that the colony had experienced a number of considerable changes.¹⁸ Some of the old farmers had left and returned to the city, while there remained a core group which continued with the usual struggles. Names like Rabinovitch, Kahansky, Yarofsky, Zaritsky, Lagunov and Kaplan represented some of the farmers of this early period. These were all families that would become instrumental in establishing some of the more prominent and successful farms in the area.

THE MIDDLE YEARS: 1930 TO 1960

During the twenties and into the thirties, several new avenues of income were introduced. As mentioned previously, the growing popularity of renting rooms to people from the city was a needed economic boost for the area. The extra money that could be made from this activity influenced more and more people to become involved. This new trend, combined with the success of poultry farming, began to open up more opportunities in Ste Sophie.

Unfortunately, the 1930s were not the best of times economically in North America. It was a period when many Canadian farmers were losing their properties, and business in general was extremely difficult. The Jewish colony of Ste-Sophie was no exception. Although there were possibilities and minor opportunities, progress required investment in capital at a time when funds were in short supply and next to impossible to acquire. Economic times were tough and people did what was necessary to survive. Even though the number of vacationers was increasing slowly, there was a limited number of facilities. Still some confident residents envisioned a future

for this kind of endeavor and ventured into building larger accommodations in the area. Years later, The Pines, Cedar Villa, Kottenbergs and Goodz became some of the more popular locations in Ste-Sophie.¹⁹

Travelling to Ste-Sophie wasn't too difficult, which made this an ideal summer location for people who just wanted to get out of the city, according to Sol Goodz a long time resident.²⁰ It was closer than Ste Agathe and offered a similar environment. Whether by train to St. Jerome and then walking a few miles to Ste-Sophie or by car, this growing vacation playground became the choice of many Jewish people from Montreal. While the farming industry struggled, the income from boarding vacationers significantly helped.²¹

Receiving a boost from this secondary industry, the Jewish farmers in Ste-Sophie continued to maintain their agricultural activities. One family of early settlers following this direction was that of Moses and Sarah Goodz who originally arrived in 1926 with their children. Like other families of that time, they came to Ste-Sophie with high hopes and a strong desire to build a successful life.²² With no knowledge of farming, Moses Goodz began with the help of the JCA and purchased a section of land on what is now 2e rue (2nd Paisley). According to their son Sol who is still a resident of Ste-Sophie, "the whole family struggled to make it work."²³ Unfortunately after a few years of trying unsuccessfully with cattle and different forms of cultivation, the family packed up and returned to Montreal, still keeping the farm in their possession.

Sometime in the early 1930s, the Goodz family returned to Ste-Sophie and attempted to start again. As previously mentioned, renting rooms to boarders or visitors from Montreal was an expanding business. Because of this situation, the Goodz family decided to build a larger rooming house that could accommodate a considerable number of people. In addition to this, there was a greater involvement with raising chickens, the production of eggs and a different type of livestock that in the past had been a rare commodity amongst Jewish farmers.

Pigs were introduced as a viable form of livestock that had a high profit return. In the past, most Jewish farmers had been reluctant to raise pigs. However economics influenced many to consider seriously this type of livestock. One of the reasons pigs had been avoided in the past, besides the non-kosher aspect, was the amount it would cost to feed these animals. As the industry developed and with some innovations this situation changed and a cheaper option was available. Instead of feeding the animals a specially produced food, most hog farmers would use a combination of discarded products such as old bread and cheese mixed in with body scraps of processed pigs. Using this as a food source, costs were lower and the profits were higher. According to the Statistical Reports of the JCA, 1939 was the first recorded entry of pigs/hogs as a form of livestock on Jewish farms.²⁴ This same report acknowledges two reasons that influenced many local farmers to venture into this commodity. First, there was the proximity to the growing marketplace in Montreal. Most important for the farmer was the rather good price paid for this type of livestock. The report concludes that, "it might be expected that other farmers will overcome their aversion to hog raising and that this branch may be extended in the future".²⁵ Naturally it was these economic realities that influenced the Goodz family and others to venture into what was once the unacceptable.

During these years earning a living wasn't easy, according to Sol Goodz. People did whatever could be done to bring in enough money to survive. If it was necessary to venture into the non-kosher activity of raising pigs, then it had to be done. Furthermore the margin of profit was so much better than with other forms of livestock, that some Jewish farmers could not avoid becoming involved. Still there were others who were uncomfortable with the product and searched for different alternatives. Even though raising chickens was considered viable, it could only support so many farms before there would be an overabundance. Therefore other choices had to be made. One

such option was the sale of cut wood for heating, cooking and building materials. Because of the extensive forest area and availability of unprocessed lumber in the region, this option seemed to have a considerable potential. Unfortunately this was not a very profitable industry.²⁶ There were too many people involved in the same activity and this, combined with a low selling price, discouraged most individuals.²⁷ Still there were some colonists who tried their hand at this occupation and continued during the winter months even though it wasn't that profitable. Only those who were able to eliminate additional labor costs found it possible to earn something. This meant a solitary effort that was more demanding physically than the usual farming chores. Even so, it was a product that could earn farmers extra money when money was hard to come by.

Also during the 1930s, the developing poultry business began to take serious shape. Charles Yarosky, who originally arrived in 1906, and, in later years, his son Harry were two individuals who participated in the growth of this endeavor. Based on the early recommendations of JCA, more and more farmers were encouraged to raise poultry. Nonetheless, it was the Yaroskys who went furthest. Harry Yarosky followed his father's lead but on a larger scale. He began his career by spending a short time at McDonald Agricultural College, in Ste. Anne de Bellevue. It was there that he learned the essentials of raising poultry and the effective management of this type of livestock. Following this period of training, Yarosky returned to Ste-Sophie and built the first modern chicken house in the area (on what is now 2e rue). The Statistical Report for 1939 states that "we did not press Yarosky to pay off his mortgage to us in order to enable him to proceed with this development..."²⁸ This was an important consideration in a time when every little bit was necessary to help these farmers continue. Even though Yarosky seemed to be operating a new and insecure business, the person writing the JCA report suggested that the success of one would lead to others feeling just as confident that they could achieve the same status.

Yarosky freely gave of his training to help others in the community and “encourage them to develop their poultry yards,” upon his return from Macdonald College.²⁹ With time and considerable effort, Yarosky and his father-in-law Lagunow became the largest poultry keepers in the colony with Yarosky raising 1500 birds and Lagunow 1200. Other local families such as Albert, Goodz, Resnikoff, Rudy, Zaritzsky and Simkin were among the twenty-three farms with small flocks of egg producing chickens in the late 1930s. In all there were a total of just a little over 8,000 laying hens in the region, with a good possibility for more in the future according to the speculations made in the JCA report for 1939.

In a period when more and more chicken farmers were open to increasing their profits, Yarosky introduced the idea of people raising their own chickens from baby chicks until the chickens were mature enough to start producing eggs. This new development would greatly influence the level of profitability for all farms in a similar situation. Taking this a step further, the next variable would be the cost of grain to feed the livestock, thus putting more control in the hands of the farmer. Controlling these kinds of factors became very significant for a farmer’s profitability in the long-term. Continuing along the same lines, farmers had to consider these factors and the size of production as two variables that either made them successful or bankrupt. The bigger the farm, the greater the advantage for the producer in determining costs. Even with all this considered, JCA and the Jewish settlers (now second generation) agreed that this business had considerable potential to expand in the future.

Among the reports found in the archives, there was one reference to the amount of profit earned from the sale of eggs. According to this report, one small farmer’s average income (from the sale of eggs), was \$22.50 a week with only 50% of his total production. Furthermore, it was stated that the average net income during that month was 8 cents a week, per chicken. Naturally farmers who were able to purchase their chicken feed

at a lower cost, had a higher income per chicken, a ratio that was critical in order to determine the profitability of this kind of livestock. However, it seems that the bottom line according to the report for 1939, was that the more chickens a farmer in Ste-Sophie would keep, the more profitable his economic position would be.³⁰ Confirming that this was the trend are the statistics from two reports. The number of chickens recorded in a 1913 register was 1198, as compared to 8005 in 1939.³¹ Clearly this increase in the number of poultry farms was indeed the result of the relative profitability of this livestock as compared to other agricultural options.

With the increase in egg production, a few smaller farmers ventured to Montreal to offer their products, usually by selling door to door. As for the larger producers, most of their production was sold to retail stores in and around the Saint Jerome/Ste-Sophie area. Long time resident Sol Goodz recalls how his brother would gather up all the unsold farm products, load them in his truck and head off to sell whatever he could in Montreal.³² Over time, he developed an established route where he would go to homes, primarily in the Jewish areas of the city, and sell eggs, cream, and butter. Still this was a seasonal activity. Travelling into Montreal during the severe winter season was often not possible.

Even with the possibilities of transporting products to Montreal, there continued to be problems with dairy products for farmers in Ste-Sophie.³³ Prices were low for fluid milk and issues of hygiene made the selling of milk products by local farmers very difficult. As a result, the private sale of these types of items gradually diminished and this without doubt affected the community in Ste-Sophie. For some, this situation would greatly influence the choice and direction of their farming activity while for others this situation was of little concern because they were not involved in the dairy business. Although this community was doing better than other colonies in Canada, economic and social forces had a significant impact in the direction that people of Ste-Sophie would take.

COMING OF AGE AND MOVING ON: 1960 TO 2000

Around 1960, there was a growing trend in agriculture toward greater modernization. Innovations in machinery influenced both the labor and processing sectors of the farming industry. Consequently, Jewish farmers in Ste-Sophie had to adjust. Agriculture was fast becoming more automated which meant a reduction in the number of work hours necessary for what took a great deal more time in the past. Furthermore, more efficient equipment with increased potential all pointed to expansion and greater possibilities. What were once small family owned and operated farms, were now evolving into larger centrally controlled operations responding to the demands of the marketplace. As a direct result, the smaller farms were no longer profitable. Residents of the community were confronted with two choices: continue along the path of growth and expansion, or close down and sell. For some of the older colonists, the demands were too much. Slowly they began to move away, and only a few of the younger generation continued. Though this marked the beginning of the reduction in the community, there was still a substantial core of families that maintained their presence. Also related to this situation was a new influx of Jewish farmers who decided not to live in the area. These were people who owned operational farms but decided to reside in communities closer to Montreal. Agriculture was changing and so was the Jewish community of Ste-Sophie.

As the number of small farms slowly began to disappear, there was still a strong core of Jewish Farmers who remained in Ste-Sophie. According to a general community file stored in the archives, I was able to find a hand written list containing the names and occupations of most of the community for the year 1959, which included twenty-six farmers.³⁴ Also mentioned on this paper were references to six other families (non farmers), and one junk dealer, as the combined composition of the Jewish community. Simple in form, this document also described the type of farming or business that each individual was involved in.

Whether they were also raising cattle, milk cows, hogs, turkeys, or growing cucumbers, it seemed that most of the residents were involved in the poultry industry. Strangely enough it appeared that little had really changed over the years. The only exception was the size of some of the farming operations at the time. More often than not, the family name remained the same and it was the children or grandchildren of the original settlers who were running the farms. Based on an article found in the *Canadian Jewish News*, I was able to determine that there were 18 Jewish families living in Ste-Sophie in 1973. By 1981, this number had decreased to 12 families of a total population of approximately 6,000.³⁵ These statistics illustrate the deterioration of the community's membership.

One individual whose family was part of the group of early settlers was Benny Goodz, a second generation resident who came to Ste-Sophie during the middle of the 1920s. As a young adult during the 1940s, he began cutting lumber, keeping milk cows, pigs, and raising chickens for egg production.³⁶ At some point during this time, Benny ventured into an arrangement to grow cucumbers for a local food processor. Unfortunately the individual reneged on his part of the deal and left Mr. Goodz with hundreds of bushels of cucumbers. Unsure what to do, Benny's father suggested he try pickling them while at the same time look to develop some kind of market for this product. Since making pickles was something that Goodz had done with his family in the hotel business years before, he chose this option seeing that he really didn't have a choice. Using old herring barrels and careful planning, he began pickling and storing the barrels in the basement of his house. Eventually he was able to find some customers and the pickles began to sell. It took many years of hard work to establish kosher pickles as a well-known product available in many stores around Montreal. Surprisingly, what began as a serious problem, was an introduction into what would become a profitable industry. Over the years, Benny began to expand into other products of a similar nature and developed a popular following. Although there were

others who made similar products, Putter's (or Goodies) Pickles was one of the original local commercial items of this nature. Later, what had begun as a small husband and wife part-time business in the basement of their home, gradually became a major enterprise.

In the 1970s, the pickling business matured, and became too large for its original facility. A new structure was built to accommodate the growing demands and expanding business. During that time, other aspects of Benny's farming operations were also experiencing the demands of modernization. The ever-changing egg business was experiencing fluctuations in processing and the regulation of sales and pricing. It was a difficult period for egg farmers with regard to the distribution and sale of their eggs. Gradually the situation improved and the farmers gained back a greater control of this aspect of the business. In the early 1990s, Benny Goodz retired from his regular farming duties while his son Alvin and grandson now carry on the family's business and presence in Ste-Sophie. Today, what remains is an expanding pickling business, which is currently expanding into a larger facility. Unfortunately, this is one of the few remaining companies remaining active in Ste-Sophie today that employs local residents.

If there is one name that has a long history in Ste-Sophie, it is Zaritsky. As one of the early colonists that settled in the area, the family has maintained a prominent presence ever since the founding of the Jewish community. Around the mid 1940s, Willie Zaritsky expanded his small in-house business of producing and selling processed chicken by building a new facility specifically constructed for this industry. What then became known locally as simply the "Plant," was the first facility of its kind in the region. It represented the beginning of a growing trend in this type of commerce that reflected an increased demand for processed chicken. Gone were the days at the Rachel Market of people choosing their own chickens and then preparing them there or at home. Willie having been a long time chicken farmer decided that raising his own chickens for both

consumption and egg production would be the most profitable direction to follow. Along with his two brothers (Issie and Jack), Willie continued to expand and build a larger facility that allowed for more processing and increased storage space. Operating under Willie's leadership, over the years this operation involved other members of the Zaritsky family that also included brothers-in-law, wives, and younger siblings.

Gradually this small family company would eventually become one of the most successful processors of chicken and chicken products in the region. As this operation expanded, this firm became a major supplier to wholesale and retail companies throughout metropolitan Montreal and the Laurentians. In the 1980s, Abattoir Laurentien once again moved into a larger building, approximately ten times the size of the original location. At its peak, this modern facility was processing chickens from local farms as well as the production from other farms from all over the province of Quebec and from parts of Ontario. According to a rough estimate, this facility processed over 200,000 chickens per week. As the business grew, there had been diversification into further processing of poultry and other aspects of the agriculture business. In 1999, this operation was the largest employer in Ste-Sophie and a major processing facility in this province. Ownership and control of this company still resides within the late Willie Zaritsky's family, with his daughter at the helm. Further details must be added to this story as I edit this paper. As of January 2000, the poultry farms, all the land and the processing plant have all been sold to a larger competitor. Unfortunately everything was subsequently closed down and the large processing plant now stands empty and a visible reminder of what once was a leading economic entity in Ste-Sophie that employed a few hundred local residents. This considerable turn of events has only had harmful consequences for the community of Ste-Sophie and the local farming industry.

As I have mentioned, raising chickens for consumption was a growing business in Ste-Sophie from the 1960s onwards.

One person who also arrived in Ste-Sophie to pursue this was venture was Jack Wolinsky, who was then working in Montreal. Originally a butcher by trade, Wolinsky arrived in Ste-Sophie during the late 1950s. At that time, he began to raise an assortment of livestock that included chickens, turkeys and hogs. As a newcomer, Wolinsky purchased his farm and worked towards producing different kinds of livestock that yielded the best return. In later years, part of his poultry production went exclusively for kosher processing and could be found throughout Canada in kosher sections of food stores. In the late 1980s, Wolinsky's farm was sold and Jack retired from the farming business.

During the 1970s and 1980s, it was more evident than ever before that agriculture was changing. In order to continue in agriculture, farming practices had to be modernized, otherwise one could not compete against the growing number of bigger companies. By then, most of the families who were descended from the original settlers were gone. Either they had moved away or passed on. Modernization was now confronting a new generation. As mentioned earlier, there was now a new type of Jewish farmer establishing roots in Ste-Sophie. Jack Wolinsky was probably the first to represent this trend. They were people who were able to establish operational farms in Ste-Sophie and lived elsewhere, either the city of Montreal or in Laval. At that time, Chomedey, Laval (an off-island suburb), was just beginning to emerge as a strong Jewish community. Even though it wasn't easy to travel back and forth to Ste-Sophie, Jewish farmers residing at a distance did so because of the services available in a larger community as opposed to a somewhat isolated Jewish community in the north. Accordingly it was no surprise that the Jewish population (now into the 2nd & 3rd generations) was decreasing and there were no new families moving in.

Another representative of this new trend of Jewish farmers had once lived in the community during the 40s. After having finished nine years of employment as manager of a

poultry farm for Mt. Sinai Hospital in Prefontaine near Ste-Agathe, Louis Gontovnick purchased a section of what was once known as Kaplan's farm on Paisley (2nd road). It was on this land that he built his first chicken house for egg production in 1963. A few years later, he expanded with a second facility. With the help of a hired hand, the farm was maintained, the eggs were processed and then sold commercially and privately into the Montreal market. It is interesting to note that from the early 1960s to the mid 1990s, eggs produced on this farm would be the only fresh egg product found in almost every Jewish Hospital and in a number of nursing homes in the city of Montreal and surrounding areas.

Beginning in the 1970s what began as a small egg farm gradually became one of the major egg processing stations in Quebec, known as Mirage Ste-Sophie. Eggs from this farm whether under the brand "Super Lou", or "Ste-Sophie" were familiar products found in many Jewish homes. For that matter, it was Louis Gontovnick who first began to distribute specially packaged and separated eggs during the Passover season. Originally this was done for the Tash Hasidic community in Boisbriand, and later on for other individuals in and around Montreal. In 1994, part of this operation that involved the processing and marketing was sold. At the time of sale, this company was a major supplier to wholesalers, supermarkets, restaurants and the network of hospitals throughout metropolitan Montreal.

In the aftermath of this development, Louis Gontovnick continues to maintain his farm and daily production of eggs with the actual processing and sales done by an independent firm. Sadly, he remains the last of a long line of Jewish egg farmers who originated in an industry built and developed by a long list of Jewish people who first settled in the community of Ste-Sophie. Today, Gontovnick remains not only one of the very few Jewish farmers in Ste-Sophie, but also the last Jewish egg farmer in the Province of Quebec.

SOME CONCLUDING WORDS

At this moment, less than a handful of Jewish farmers still remain in business in Ste-Sophie. The Jewish residential population is small but still maintains a presence. Not surprisingly each year during the Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur holidays, the original little synagogue built in the 1920s is opened for services. Past residents, with their relatives and friends take part in maintaining the location and attending services during these occasions.

Unfortunately the Jewish cemetery is the only expanding facility in the community at this time. Divided into two sections, with the front section used and restricted to an orthodox community from Montreal, the back section remains the resting grounds of the residents of this once strong and vibrant community. Located in a small clearing surrounded by tall evergreen and pine trees, this small picturesque area contains the remains of people who struggled to build a life in a new and strange world. They were a group of people who built something from just about nothing. They were people who struggled to make the best of things and pursued a dream of a better life during times when survival was the name of the game. Ste. Sophie was a community that changed over the years but always remembered its roots and traditions. It constitutes a rich example of a Jewish farming settlement which existed longer than most and which became the home to many Jewish immigrants who had come to Canada in search of a better life.

This paper was based on research obtained from three sources of information; (1) documents stored at National Archive of the Canadian Jewish Congress in Montreal, (2) several personal interviews with current and past residents of Saint Sophie and (3) my own personal knowledge and experience of the region.

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ENDNOTES

¹Gerlald Tulchinsky, *Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community*. (Toronto: Lester, 1992), p.100

²Uri Herscher, *Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880–1910*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981) p. 31

³Tulchinsky, *Taking Root: The Origins of the Canadian Jewish Community*, p.126

⁴Theodore Norman, *An Outstretched Arm: History of the Jewish Colonization Association*.(London: Routledge, 1985) p. 95

⁵Louis Rosenberg, *Canada's Jews*. (Montreal: Bureau of Social & Economic Research / CJC, 1939).

⁶*Ibid*

⁷*Ibid.*, p.223.

⁸Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 82.

⁹Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Assoc. Collection, Series KC, 82 & 87

¹⁰Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Assoc. Collection, Series KC, 82,83 +104

¹¹Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 82

¹²Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 104

¹³Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 82 / 84

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 147/148

¹⁷Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 82 / 84

¹⁸Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 82 / 84

¹⁹Personal Interview with Sol Goodz, Ste-Sophie resident.

²⁰*Ibid*

²¹*Ibid*

²²*Ibid*

²³*Ibid*

²⁴Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 147/148

²⁵*Ibid*

²⁶Personal Interview with Sol Goodz, Ste-Sophie resident.

²⁷Personal Interview with Benny Goodz, Ste-Sophie resident.

²⁸Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 147/148

²⁹Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 147/148

³⁰Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 147/148

³¹Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 147/148

³²Personal Interview with Sol Goodz, Ste-Sophie resident.

³³Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Jewish Colonization Association Collection, Series KC, 147/148

³⁴Canadian Jewish Congress, National Archives Montreal. Community Files, Ste-Sophie, Series ZD.

³⁵Canadian Jewish News, November 12, 1981. Page 9

³⁶Personal Interview with Benny Goodz, Ste-Sophie resident.