

by Vladimir Danilenko, Director

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# The Other Ellis Island

While the vast majority of our immigrant ancestors came through Ellis Island, from 1907 to 1914 thousands of East European Jews participated in a little-known episode in American Jewish history.

They immigrated through the Port of Galveston where they were routed to towns throughout the Midwest where lodgings and jobs awaited them. Because of the concentration of immigrant Jews in New York City and rising anti-Semitism in Russia around the turn of the century, Jewish leaders such as financier Jacob Schiff and the celebrated English writer Israel Zangwill felt that Jews should enter the United States through a port other than New York. Because of his knowledge of the railroads, Schiff proposed Galveston, TX, which had good rail connections to points throughout the Midwest. He raised funds for the project, including \$500,000 from his own pocket.

In 1910, the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization investigated the "Galveston Movement" to discover whether it was engaged in the illegal organi-

zation of immigration. The transcripts of these examinations are revealing. In the examinations, the immigrants -- most of whom came from Russia -- answered questions about their family origins, reasons for emigration, expectations of America, and their experiences on the voyage.

Later, during interviews in their destination cities, they talked about their satisfaction (or lack of it) with conditions of employment.

In 1984, I participated in the first International Seminar on Jewish Genealogy in Jerusalem where I attended a lecture by Bernard Marinbach, author of "Galveston: Ellis Island of the West" (1983) Albany, NY. Dr. Marinbach referred to 84 files he had examined as part of the research for his book. You can imagine my surprise and delight to discover that the last name on the list was Hirsch Zukerman -- my grandmother's first husband! I quickly sent for a copy of the transcript and was mesmerized to read details of his voyage to Gal-

veston. Q: Where did you obtain the money to purchase your ticket? A: My wife's mother sold her home and gave me the money. Q: What arrangements have you made for the support of your wife and children in Russia until such time as you are able to send them money. A: I left her without money.

This three-page interview revealed the desperate situation of my grandmother and her four young children. They were not to join Hirsch Zukerman for three long years. It is difficult to imagine how they survived during that time. The interviews were conducted during the summer of 1910, both at the Port of Galveston and in the cities where the immigrants

settled; and they contain a treasure of information about the immigrant and the family left behind. According to Dr. Marinbach in "Galveston: the Island of the West," the Industrial Removal Office in New York hired Morris D. Waldman to help oversee the settlement of the Galveston immigrants. Dr. Marinbach

Although the plan was controversial and short-lived, in its seven years, 10,000 Jews came through Galveston where they were met at the dock by Rabbi Henry Cohen, Galveston's great humanitarian rabbi, and were welcomed personally by the Mayor of Galveston. The plan ended in 1914 because of new restrictions on immigration, rising anti-Semitism and the threat of war.

The transcripts for the people listed above are in immigration files (Record Group No. 85, Immigration

File No. 52), and copies are available from the National Archives Records Center in Suitland, MD.

The actual ship's manifest records for the period 1895-1921, Port of Galveston, are in the National Archives in Washington, D.C. Copies can be ordered from the National Archives, the Rosenberg Library in Galveston, Texas, and the Houston Public Library.

The Galveston Movement is the subject of a documentary film by Allan and Cynthia Salzman Mondell entitled "West of Hester Street" and has also been explored in numerous biographical works on Jacob Schiff.

(Editor's Note: Miriam Weiner, of Secaucus, NJ, is a certified genealogist specializing in Jewish genealogy and Holocaust research. 'Roots and Branches' is a periodic column on Jewish genealogy which appears in the Jewish Chronicle and other publications. Readers who are interested in exploring their family history may send their inquiry to: 'Roots and Branches,' c/o Miriam Weiner, 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094.)



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