Schwartz Cheap Grocery: Jews and the Live Poultry Trade, 1880-1945

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We don't really know why my great-grandfather Solomon Schwartz opened a food store on New York City's lower east side shortly after arriving in America in 1892. Before migrating, he was a prosperous fur merchant in Botoșani, Romania where his family had lived for at least two generations, having settled there in the first half of the 19th century following travels through the Jewish regions of the Ukraine and Moldova. I still have the silver candlesticks he carried with his wife Ernestine and four children on the boat that brought them here. Family lore has it that he was allergic to the fur here for unknown reasons and tried to do something else. The store

didn't work out for him, closing soon after this 1894 picture, and it was his son Charlie – my grandfather -- who brought prosperity back to the family.

The chickens hanging in the front window are easy to miss, overshadowed as they are by the picturesque family scene. Their presence tells us a great deal about the story I want to relate, the impact of Jewish immigrants such as my family on the place of poultry in American society. To Solomon and Ernestine, it would have seemed obvious why they should hang chickens outside their store to attract business. As Jewish immigrants found new homes in American cities, they delighted in the availability of the animals that they had come to prize before migration. Chicken – and other poultry – was an integral part of Jewish cuisine and culture, whether as part of the weekly shabbat dinner, a celebrity element of the Passover seder, or as prosaic chicken soup and everyday schmaltz for cooking. Selling chickens would bring in customers, guaranteed.

As it happened, the ready availability of chicken was one of the markers of opportunity in this new home for Jews. Access was such a sign of good fortune that it figures into Sholom Aleichem's popular lullaby, "Sleep my child." It was sung by a mother to her baby, seeking to calm them to explain why "Your father is in America." America is golden place she sings, with "such happiness" and for everyone, "a Paradise." And as proof, even on weekdays Jews can eat the "twisted loaf" (challah) along with "Chicken broth, I will make for you." As an expression of aspiration and longing for America it captures the special place access to chicken had for Jews as they looked on America as their new home.

The Jewish chicken comes to town

The Jewish immigrants brought their culinary habits – and animals – into the urban spaces they occupied in America. Jewish migration from central and eastern Europe grew

beginning in the 1870s and built steadily to around 20,000 annually in the 1880s, reaching 37,000 in 1899. Arrivals exploded in the early 20th century, peaking at 154,000 in 1906. All told, over 2 million Jews arrived in American between 1880 and 1920, with another million second-generation children adding to their demographic impact. And they all wanted to see if the nursery rhyme was true, if there was enough chicken, and at prices, such that they could have chicken whenever they wanted.

Befitting its place in Jewish cuisine and culinary imagination, a 1909 national survey found that Jews consumed poultry more consistently and in higher quantities than any other American racial or ethnic group. Jews earning between $750 and $1,000 annually ate 25.4 pounds of poultry, approximately once per week, probably as part of the Friday Sabbath dinner. As incomes increased so too did poultry consumption. Families bringing in $1,000 to $1,500 consumed slightly over 30 pounds per person, while those earning over $1,750 ate almost 40 pounds per year. [1]

Jewish proclivity for poultry is especially striking in comparison to other immigrant groups. The same 1909 survey found that Irish, Italian, and German ethnics earning between $750 and $1,000 consumed just 6 to 7 pounds of poultry annually, approximately once per month. A close ethnography of New York's West Village (dominated by Irish and Italians) similarly found very low poultry consumption levels. Most immigrant households did not consume any poultry; those that did at all were Italian and did so at minimal levels. The study's author disdainfully described the one family that routinely ate chicken as "extravagant" for such

[1] Great Britain Board of Trade, *Working Class Rents, Housing, and Retail Prices…in the Principal Industrial Towns of the United States of America* (London: 1911).

purchases. While its ethnicity was not recorded, this might have been the only Jewish family in the survey. For most whites, chicken was not part of their regular diet. [2]

African Americans were the only group whose poultry consumption approached Jewish levels. In 1909 northern African Americans earning the same $750 and $1,000 annual income ate 18.1 pounds annually, while southerners consumed 13.6 per person each year. Since African Americans comprised a much smaller proportion of New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia's population in 1910 than Jews, their higher consumption levels did not have the same ripple effects on the poultry market.

Elements of Jewish immigrant cuisine drew naturally on European practices, especially as the tenement apartments relied on wood or coal stoves not too dissimilar from the equipment in *shtetl* homes. Slow-cooking meals – soups, stews – were reliable and well-suited to stoves that were heated for much of a day to supply warmth and warm water. Hinda Amhanitski's 1901 Yiddish cookbook, *A Manual on How to Cook and Bake*, offered recipes that relied on boiling chicken, such as chicken soup (12) and fricassee (18-19), to soften the meat before other cooking stages. [3] For those dishes Jews could buy hens, chickens kept by farmers to lay eggs until their productivity declined. These were older birds with tough flesh that needed time to cook in wet heat so that the flesh would be palatable. Old hens also were the easiest chickens to obtain, as before 1920 farmers predominantly focused on eggs as their principal product and generally did not raise chickens principally for meat consumption.

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[2] Louise Bolard More, *Wage-Earners Budgets: A Study of Standards and Cost of Living in New York City* (New York: Henry Holt), quote p. 209.

[3] Hinda Amhanitski, *Lehy-bukh vi azoy tsu kuken und baken* (New York: Amhanitski, 1901), translation by Susannah Berger. This book is discussed in Annie Polland, "'To Jewish Daughters': Recipes for American Jewish Life, 1901-1918," in *Global Jewish Foodways: A History*, eds Hasia Diner and Simone Cinotto (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2018), 266-290.

Millions of Jews arriving in a few years and buying chicken at higher levels than other residents taxed urban poultry supplies. At first Jews were able to obtain poultry from farmers living outside New York and other urban areas. American cities had a long tradition of relying on regional farmers to supply poultry for urban consumers. Farmers would bring their live chickens, ducks, geese, and eggs to the public markets and sell to individuals and butcher shops. For much of the 18th and 19th century New Yorkers, for example. relied on these local supplies from New Jersey, Brooklyn, Queens and Long Island to satisfy their taste for poultry. [4]

In the late 19th century, some entrepreneurial Jewish immigrants supplemented local suppliers by going into the poultry-finishing business themselves, recreating *shtetl* practices in the dense immigrant neighborhoods of American cities. There are documented cases in Boston and New York of Jews transferring confinement goose fattening practices from eastern Europe by penning dozens in the small tenement apartments where Jews lived. When there was a bit more room, Jews jammed chickens into small yards to fatten them before slaughter. [5]

Much as Jews tried to transfer the poultry business as they had known it, American cities were not *shtetls*. At the same time as Jews were raising poultry in immigrant neighborhoods the public health movement was seeking to clean up the nation's fetid municipalities. Eliminating livestock from residential areas was a prime agenda for these health professionals, whether the pigs owned by Christian residents allowed to forage amid the urban garbage, or the new threat of bird varieties preferred by Jews. While Jewish families may have been able to keep chickens on fire escapes and in basements, by 1900 the commercial poultry-fattening businesses were

[4] Thomas F. DeVoe, *The Market Assistant* (New York: 1867), 133; Roger Horowitz, *Putting Meat on the American Table* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), esp. chapter two.
[5] "A Sanitary Goose Chase," *New York Times* Sept. 29, 1887, 8; "Trouble for the Jews," *Boston Herald* April 17, 1890.

crushed by city inspectors. As urban demand now far outstripped local supply, the chicken needed to come from somewhere else.

The established meatpacking industry offered one option. In the 1890s the large Chicago-based packinghouse companies completed an extensive rail-based distribution system that anchored a web of cold storage warehouses in most cities created principally to sell beef, pork, and lamb. This massive investment consolidated the power of a few large firms over the nation's meat industry. With such a large overhead of refrigerated rail cars and urban meat warehouses, these companies sought other products to distribute to defray sunk costs. Poultry was a natural extension from their other animal products, and firms such as Swift moved aggressively after 1900 to acquire the capacity to handle large numbers that could be made available through the same distribution network.

These packers also emulated their technique used to reduce the cost of red meat – centralized slaughtering and chilling the animal carcasses. Drawing on farms in Illinois, Indiana, and other upper Midwest states, meatpackers turned local slaughtering operations into efficient chicken killing facilities, removing feathers and other parts before freezing the chickens for shipment. In doing so they sought to "annihilate space" for chicken much as they had for red meat. Even after the 1919 Federal Trade Commission report resulted in a consent decree that forced packers to give up efforts to expand into fruit and vegetable distribution, they were able to retain their poultry operations.

Not for my great-grandfather's store, however. These Midwestern frozen chickens were not kosher. They may have been a boon for the butchers supplying gentile customers, but Jewish immigrants (and their children) would not buy them. Moreover, the presence of the wholesale markets and distribution systems for live chickens offered a ready alternative. As Jewish immigration steadily grew in the 1890s and early 20th century, so too did the demand for chicken

that could meet kosher requirements – and, with that, the business that went through the urban poultry markets.

The new market of several million chicken consumers certainly caught the attention of the American countryside. Rail shipments commenced to eastern cities in the 1890s and peaked in the 1920s, with over 200 million live chickens arriving in New York in 1927. Railroad transportation, and sheer scale of demand, generated an ever-expanding provisioning basin reaching more than 40 states. Farmers as far away as Texas and South Dakota expanded poultry production so they could send their chickens by rail to New York City.[6] Northern Arkansas, for example, became an important winter supplier of chicken to New York's Jews, contributing 3 million to the city's total in 1927.[7]

The veritable avalanche of live chicken entered cities through the portal of bustling urban markets. Chicago's South Water Street market formed spontaneously due to its proximity to the Chicago River and the ease of transportation for sellers and buyer, with its role as a central market for poultry and many other products persisting long after railroads and trucks replaced the water as the principal transportation mediums. Philadelphia's Callowhill Market was an outgrowth of the city's Dock Street produce emporium and created by dealers who wanted a convenient place to do business in a location that had access to water and rail transport – and again, like Chicago, persisting after trucks displaced these other transport modes. New York City's West Washington Market was city-operated, unlike the other locations, an ancestor of the city's extensive public market system that predated American independence. These were

[6] Philip B. Reister, "The Live Poultry Industry of Metropolitan New York," (unpublished manuscript, 1935), 5-9, Municipal Reference Library, NYPL.
[7] N.Y. Department of Public Markets, "Source of Production, Receipt, Distribution and Consumption of Fresh Fruits, Vegetables, Meats, Fish, and Dairy Products in New York City during 1927," Municipal Reference Library, NYPL.

wholesale markets not meant for individual consumers that supplied the thousands of small businesses – like my great-grandfather's—that filled each city's pores.

As the urban markets formed the hinge connecting rural food supplies with urban merchants, price governed relationships among the many businesses that operated within them. The markets funneled chickens from many parts of the farm belt into an urban location where local businesses could bargain over price and supply. Rural jobbers began the supply chain by assembling lots of sufficient numbers from farmers. They sold the chickens to commission merchants based in the east who either paid for the chickens immediately or promised payment after sales in urban markets. These merchants were the key players in the live poultry trade, bridging the countryside and the city and greasing chicken shipments with their capital and connections. Once the birds arrived in urban markets such as Chicago's South Water, Philadelphia's Callowhill Street, or New York's West Washington, the commission merchants sold the birds to wholesalers, generally slaughterhouses, who in turn furnished retail butchers with chickens for their customers.

Prices were visible and meaningful in this disaggregated, decentralized trade and guided the movement of chickens from one player to the next. New York City's prices dominated, as it was by far the largest market for live poultry, with newspapers as far away as Little Rock, Arkansas providing daily quotes for the varieties of poultry that were available. These prices in turn affected those of other urban areas, as well as those paid in the countryside for supplies, as the mobility of chicken generated a true national market. Dedicated "Poultry Palace" cars (named after their owner) traversed the nation's rail network and conveyed chickens from farms to city markets. Commission merchants used "Poultry Palace" cars to move their lots and could direct their movements to the urban markets offering the most profit, switching in rail yards from one freight train to another. A "car man" tended the chickens on the trip that easily could last a

week or more, feeding and watering them as needed. He had his own accommodations in the middle of the car, complete with a bed, stove, and small kitchen.[8] With the car man present, trips could be extended so that chickens originally destined for New York could be diverted to Chicago or Boston if prices warranted.

With a large national market keyed into the faintest of price variations, the commercial characteristics of animals in the flow of live poultry constituted them as "Jewish chickens." These birds were separate -- in market terms -- from those produced in the centralized operations of the large meatpacking companies and meant for the gentile market. Especially for poultry producers outside of the meat companies' Illinois and Indiana heartland, Jews were the consumers that gave them life and filled their pockets. Satisfying Jewish demand thus constituted the woof and warp of the live poultry trade.

Assimilating chicken

The dynamics of the live poultry trade likely were invisible to Jews shopping at "Schwartz Cheap Grocery" and similar stores, but they certainly were appreciated. With the explosion of supply in Jewish areas of American cities came a deepening of the place of chicken in Jewish cuisine. Culinary preferences originating in Eastern Europe remained with more Americanized recipes expanding options. Cookbooks created for an emerging Jewish American community in the 1910s and 1920s reflected how Jewish assimilation meant more chicken at the dinner table! Florence Kreisler Greenbaum's highly influential 1918 *International Jewish Cook Book* contained an abundance of poultry recipes with twenty-five chicken options gracing its

[8] Reister 17; John H. White, "Home to Roost: The Story of Live Poultry Transit by Rail," *Agricultural History* 63, 3 (1989), 81-94.

pages, double those included for beef. [9] These were, however, the tip of the proverbial iceberg, as many more recipes incorporated poultry products into their ingredients – as Jews had done in Eastern Europe. Chicken fat (schmaltz) appeared in dishes such as matzah meal balls (*kleis)* (381), potato plum knoedel (386), and apple pudding. (391) Chicken fat also served as the principal fat in recipes using meat. Making chicken paprika, for example, required not only a "fat chicken" cut into pieces but also 2 ounces of chicken fat in which to fry it. (95)

While chicken was by far the most popular bird, goose retained its place as a luxury meal. Greenbaum included recipes for classic Russian Jewish dishes such as stuffed goose neck and *gaenseklein* (which used the back, neck, wings, and internal organs), as well as specifying when to be sure to use a "*geschundene* goose" (a fat goose) for particular recipes. (98) Goose fat was its own specialty, as it had been in Europe. Greenbaum gave directions on how to render goose (and duck) fat and store it for later use by placing it in a "stone crock" that could be "set away in a cool place," advice reflecting reliance on ice boxes by Jewish kitchens at this time. (60) Recipes recommended using goose fat to make veal sweatbreads (69) and spring fried chicken (92) and added that "goose fat is very good" (74) to use for boiled tongue. Where goose schmaltz really stood out was to impart special flavor to Passover dishes. In her section on Passover, Greenbaum specified the use of goose fat for a wide range of Passover treats, including matzah with scrambled eggs (384) and potato flour pudding (393).

The encounter with America expanded the Jewish palate for chicken. Traditional dishes such as roast chicken and chicken soup persisted but were joined by many other forms of chicken cuisine without roots in Ashkenazi tradition. "Chicken a la Italienne" (96) offered Jewish cooks a

[9] Florence Kreisler Greenbaum, *The International Jewish Cook Book* (NY: Bloch Publishing, 1918). It was reprinted with few changes several times in the 1920s reflecting its popularity.

recipe employing olive oil. Another version of this dish included "several kinds of meats, poultry, brains, etc." while a Spanish variant instead included "all kinds of cold vegetables…fried in batter." Dishes for chicken curry and chili con carne also appeared in Greenbaum's collection, indicating that Jews were now using chicken more than in the past, and for meals that departed from Jewish tradition.

Some long-established practices faded as chicken displaced other poultry. Goose – and its byproducts – particularly fell out of favor among assimilating Jews. *The Center Table* cookbook, with recipes compiled by the "Sisters and Mothers' Club" of Boston-area Temple Mishkan Tefila, offers insight into the way the modernizing Conservative Jewish denomination was moving away from East European culinary practices even as its members remained kosher. [10] The 1922 cookbook retained traditional chicken recipes, as well as the use of chicken fat as a shortening for other dishes, such as stuffed peppers. Missing, however, was any mention of goose as a main meal, or goose fat as a desired ingredient. Indeed, its recipe for Hanukah potato latkis (pancakes) emphasized dropping the raw mixture "by spoonful into hot chicken fat" – not the goose fat prized by Aleichem's protagonists in "Benny's Luck." (247) The very availability of kosher chicken made it the dominant form of poultry in American Jewish cuisine.

A contemporaneous contrast with East European Jewish food is striking. "For the Jews of Poland, the goose is a beneficent animal," Edouard de Pomiane explained in his 1929 book, *The Jews of Poland: Recollections and Recipes.* To him, the typical Warsaw Jewish restaurant "smells of oil and goose fat" (65*)*; goose fat is "used year round;" its liver and gizzards create "delicious dishes;" and the flesh "is considered the supreme 'delicatesse'." (160) Abundant amounts of goose fat appeared in many recipes, such as dumplings (96), crepes (107), cabbage

[10] *The Center Table* (Boston, MA 1922).

dishes (108), and beef cholent (140). Notable as well was the relative paucity of chicken recipes. A Polish Jew visiting New York in the 1920s might have been dismayed how far Jewish cuisine had changed from what it once had been. [11]

Transforming the Countryside

Far from the synagogues of New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, the gentiles engaged in the live poultry trade had to learn Jewish customs so they could better satisfy the preferences of this ethnic group with its peculiar culinary rhythms. Imparting this knowledge became a mission for the poultry industry trade journals and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, not out of liberal commitment to cultural pluralism, but instead from their core mission to secure larger shares of commercial markets for their rural constituency.

The innocuously titled *New York Produce Review and American Creamery* was a particularly influential trade journal that promoted awareness of how Jewish holidays should be attended to by the trade. Published by the Urner-Barry Company, it was the principal source for price and market information for poultry and other farm commodities; its prices were copied by newspapers and served as standard for transactions throughout the Midwest and east coast. A March 1906 issue, for example, included a schedule of "Hebrew Spring Holidays" and commentary on the sales opportunities each offered. Purim, the publication advised, would bring strong demand for "live fowls and prime hen turkeys" while Passover, a month hence, would find "heavy fowls, fat ducks, and geese" in "great demand" reflecting an appreciation for the importance of schmalz in Jewish holiday recipes. To ensure live poultry shippers sent sufficient

[11] Edouard de Pomiane, *The Jews of Poland: Recollections and Recipes* (Pholiota Press, 1989, org, published 1929).

supplies in time "for these feast days," the journal provided specific dates when arrivals should be scheduled. [12]

The *New York Produce Review* then closely followed the 1906 Jewish spring holiday season to advise the industry on its outcome and lessons that should be learned for the future. "Supplies have been exceedingly heavy" for Purim even though the holiday had not been "a large poultry-consuming day for the Hebrews" previously. A week later the *Review* could report that there indeed had been "an unusually good demand for that holiday" such that prices remained profitable for the trade, thereby suggesting greater attention to Purim in the future.

Much as Purim proved a surprising success, the journal stressed that Passover, a month hence, was an opportunity not to be missed. Seeking to educate its readership on well-established Jewish culinary practices, the *Review* advised that as "every Jewish family must have poultry for these holidays," they were willing to obtain their supplies "regardless of cost," in all likelihood leading to a "high market" – one with elevated prices.[13] Curtailment of supplies due to "impassable conditions of country roads" in farming regions shortly before the holiday would, it predicted, lead to even better outcomes, anticipating prices "advancing" to 16 cents a pound for fowls, well over the 13 ½ cents charged during Purim. [14] Great opportunities awaited poultry purveyors that heeded the culinary preferences of Jews celebrating Moses' escape from Egypt.

Yet, in the holiday's aftermath, the journal dejectedly reported that live poultry deliveries "have been larger than ever before" leading to an oversupply in the market. The unanticipated arrival of over 120 car lots (approximately 2 million chickens) the week before Passover did not

[12] *New York Produce Review and American Creamery* March 7, 1906 (21,19), 796.
[13] *New York Produce Review and American Creamery* April 11, 1906 (21, 24), 1032.
[14] *New York Produce Review and American Creamery* April 4, 1906 (21, 23), 992.

move as quickly as expected and prices fell to 14 cents/pound. [15] The error, it seemed, was an expectation that demand would peak for Friday's Jewish sabbath, instead of for the Passover Seders that took place on Monday and Tuesday that year in accordance with the Jewish calendar.

The *Review* – and the trade – learned from their error. It doubled down on efforts to orient the live poultry trade around the Jewish holiday schedule so that similar mistakes did not repeat. Every year it published a "Hebrew Holidays" schedule advising readers of the "Jewish holidays of importance to the live poultry trade" for the year. To make sure all sectors of the poultry trade knew this critical information other journals disseminated the schedule as well, including the *National Poultry, Butter & Egg Bulletin* and the *Dairy Produce Yearbook*. [16]

U.S. Department of Agriculture did its part to impart Jewish consumption patterns to farming regions. Its 1931 bulletin, *Marketing Poultry* (featuring a front-page illustration of farmers loading chicken crates onto a Model T car) painstakingly described how the "irregular" movement of live poultry from farm to city followed Jewish consumption practices. Charts carefully showed how the celebration of the Jewish sabbath influenced the timing of poultry deliveries to cities and the way that Jewish holidays would "bring an increased demand for live birds" and, crucially, "shipments in anticipation of them." [17]

Not all chickens were created equal, however, for Jewish consumers. As part of their education on the Jewish market, trade journals and USDA publications taught farmers about Jewish preferences for particular chicken varieties. Unlike contemporary chicken production, the

[15] *New York Produce Review and American Creamery* April 11, 1906 (21, 24), 1032. In a more typical week 35 carlots (about 600,000 chickens and other poultry) arrived for sale. *New York Produce Review and American Creamery* April 25, 2006 (21, 26), 1112.
[16] *New York Produce Review and American Creamery* August 24, 1915 (40, 19), 798. *National Poultry, Butter & Egg Bulletin* August 1922 (6, 11), 25. *Dairy Produce Yearbook* 1926 (Chicago, 1927), 178.
[17] U.S. Department of Agriculture, *Marketing Poultry,* Farmers Bulletin No. 1377 (Washington DC: 1931, org. published 1924), 3. F. A, Buechal, *Wholesale Marketing of Live Poultry in New York City*, Technical Bulletin No. 107 (Washington DC: 1927), 39.

poultry raised on American farms in the first half of the 20th century included many different breeds. White Leghorns were the most popular chicken because of their egg-laying capability, with farmers sending older hens to market once their egg production declined. However, this breed was not popular among Jewish consumers because Leghorns were relatively small, and most problematic, lean, and thus a poor source for the chicken fat heavily used in kosher kitchens. Since farmers were more familiar with relying on their chickens to produce eggs than meat, the live poultry trade devoted considerable effort to demonstrate the value of shifting to the breeds that Jews preferred.

The 1922 article, "What the Market Demands in Poultry Breeds" in the *National Poultry, Butter, and Egg Bulletin* used letters from "some of the most reputable receivers and sellers of live and dressed poultry" to convey to farmers what they needed to do. Numerous respondents denounced Leghorns as "light hens" that were "discriminated against" in the market as a result, in addition to having "a rather nervous temperament" that made them ill-suited to transport across the country. One described them as "altogether too small" for consumers "desiring fowl for food purposes" while another documented how the leghorns were worth less per pound than the heavier birds by 25 to 30 percent. For these reasons he concluded that White Leghorns could "not be readily sold to the Hebrew trade, unless they are sold at a great sacrifice in price." Writers contrasted the problematic Leghorn with the preferred "colored" species, especially Barred Plymouth Rocks that could weigh from four to eight pounds and were thus more attractive to the "Jewish" trade. [18]

Readers of the poultry trade press could trace the economic manifestation of Jewish preferences through the detailed price and market information conveyed in those pages. For late

[18] Everett F. Murphy, "What the Market Demands In Poultry Breeds," *National Poultry, Butter, and Egg Bulletin* September 1922 (6, 12), 7, 9.

May 1915, to take just one example, the *New York Produce Review* carefully explained the ebb and flow of chickens and consumer demand with the qualities of covering baseball's World Series. "On Thursday there was an active demand for fowls for Friday's killing for the Sabbath requirement," it reported, but added, with regret, that there were only 20 carloads of live ones available when triple that amount could have sold. After more than a decade of reading about the Jewish market readers would understand that the demand for fowl – the larger chickens weighing 6 to 8 pounds -- reflected the preference for heavy chickens that could feed a full table of family members as well as yield substantial amounts of chicken fat for other sabbath specialties. For the trade such a shortage was not all bad, as it meant the market was in "strong shape" – meaning higher prices could be charged, in this case 19 cents/pound, doubtless an excessive amount to shoppers. [19]

Then, early the following week, without such a large table to feed, Jewish shoppers were looking for small chickens; as it was now late spring, this put them into the market for spring chickens (also known as broilers) that usually were 2 to 3 pounds. While fowls were best served after boiling or stewing, the smaller, younger chickens were used for frying or fricassee dishes that took less time to prepare, a benefit for busy urban Jewish families during the week. *New York Produce Review* thus assured readers that "demand was active" for broilers on Monday and Tuesday and recommended they notice the price difference among available breeds. The colored broilers (likely Barred Plymouth Rocks) brought 28 to 30 cents/pound, while the much-maligned white Leghorns "rarely exceeded 24 cents." Such stark differences offered obvious lessons for growers.

[19] *New York Produce Review and American Creamery* May 29, 1915 (4, 6), 262.

As information about opportunities afforded by the Jewish market flowed into agricultural areas from trade journals and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, commercial poultry production expanded in the American countryside among Christian farmers. In this incremental process, the live chicken supply chain transmitted Jewish dietary preferences through price information, conveying the relative value of chickens that could be prepared for consumption. Farmers already had plenty of chickens, but they were principally intended for egg production, and with the older fowls sent to local markets once their egg-laying days were over. The emergence of the Jewish market, which only could be reached by shipping live chickens, encouraged farmers to shift to purposeful meat chicken production, and to breeds that could bring a better price.

By the late 1920s, the expansion in the live poultry trade's provisioning basin continued apace. Close to a majority of chickens shipped to New York came from the midwestern breadbasket states of Missouri, Kansas, and Illinois, but many travelled further, notably from Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas.[20] The spring Jewish holiday trade exerted a particular attraction for rural farmers. In 1929, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas supplied 7 million chickens to New York in March and April for Purim and Passover. [21]

The gravitational pull of the Jewish market brought new regions into the live poultry business. In 1921 a highway through central Delaware built by Coleman du Pont with his private fortune (and hence named DuPont Highway) allowed trucks from farming regions to reach Philadelphia and points north. It did not take long for Delaware's farmers to notice the Jewish market. With its agents on the ground in rural areas, the Cooperative Extension Service of the

[20] F. A. Buechtel, *Wholesale Marketing of Live Poultry in New York City,* Technical Bulletin 107 (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1929), 11.
[21] U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Freight Unloads of Live Poultry by states at New York During 1929."

USDA closely monitored the shifts in farming priorities occasioned by Jewish demand. "The production of poultry is still increasing rapidly in Delaware," the Extension poultryman reported in 1926. While some of the growth was in hens devoted egg production, "there is a still greater increase in the number of chickens raised for broilers." He also astutely charted the shift in breeds that accompanied the interest in the Jewish market, with farmers turning increasingly to the "Barred Rocks for broilers," using the common shorthand for the official breed name, Barred Plymouth Rock [22]

1926 was only the beginning. Reflecting their awareness of the Jewish market, the newly formed Delaware State Poultry Association pressed the state's newspapers "to quote daily" poultry prices in New York; its October 20, 1927 minutes proudly noted its success in this endeavor.[23] Readily availability price information accelerated commercial chicken production. Subsequent Extension Service reports describe a marked change in Delaware's agriculture as farmers shifted from White Leghorns to the Barred Rock breed best suited for meat production. The poultryman's 1929 report noted that while total chicken population increased, "there has been a greater increase in the number of barred rock chickens raised for broilers." A year later he reported an even greater shift, an actual decline in the size of egg laying flocks while chickens hatched for broilers grew 70% on the prior year. Little surprise then that in 1929, Delaware's Christian farmers sent one million pounds of live poultry to New York for Purim and Passover, benefitting enormously from the expectations of Jews to have chicken on their table for these spring holidays. [24]

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[22] "Program of Work for Delaware Extension Poultrymen" (1926) 1, Records of Cooperative Extension, Plan of Work, UD archives.
[23] Minutes, Delaware State Poultry Association, Jan. 20, 1927; Minutes, Delaware State Poultry Association, Jan. 20, 1927; both DPI Inc. collection, 41;3, Nabb Research Center, Salisbury State University.
[24] "Program of Work for Delaware Extension Poultrymen" (1929) 1; "Program of Work for Delaware Extension Poultrymen" (1930) 1, Records of Cooperative Extension, Plan of Work, UD archives. Records of Cooperative

By the mid-1930s the extension poultryman could claim that the Jewish market had triggered "revolutionary" changes on Delaware's farms. "The vast majority of poultrymen in southern Delaware has now shifted from [egg] layers to broilers" he reported, with the result that Sussex County (Delaware's southernmost) is the "largest broiler growing section in the United States." Indeed, increases in production had outstripped the capacity of local hatcheries (such as one operated by Arthur Purdue, future father of Frank) to supply Barred Rock chicks, forcing the importation of millions from New England breeding farms. [25]

Broilers and Jewish American Cuisine

The shifts in American agriculture to give Jewish homes the chickens they wanted pushed consumption to even higher levels. By the late 1920s per capita chicken Jewish consumption in New York City reached 53 pounds annually, twice as much as in 1909 and double that of all other New Yorkers. Contemporaries estimated that Jews consumed 80% of the live poultry market, with African Americans and Italians eating the rest. [26]

Within the live poultry trade chain, the growing number of broiler chickens headed to Jewish homes dynamically affected Jewish cuisine. Broilers were smaller than traditional hens and did not need to stew for hours to be palatable. They were suitable for recipes that anticipated shorter cooking time and more varied preparation methods, expanding the scope of chicken recipes for Jews and offering a wider range of flavors and meals while pushing more traditional recipes to the margins of Jewish food practices.

Extension, Plan of Work, UD archives; U.S. Department of Agriculture, "Receipts of Live Poultry by states at New York During 1929 By Truck."

[25] "Program of Work for Delaware Extension Poultrymen" (1935) 1, Records of Cooperative Extension, Plan of Work, UD archives.

[26] Department of Public Markets, *Source of Production, Receipt, and Consumption of Fresh Fruit, Vegetables, Meat, Fish and Dairy Products in New York City, 1927* (NY: 1928, NYPL Municipal Reference Library).

New kitchen technology reinforced the culinary shift to broilers. The cast iron coal and wood stoves of the 19th century faded away as gas became progressively more available. After 1900 the old stoves in the tenements briefly co-existed with double burner cooktop units fed from gas lights and placed on top of the old stoves. That dual system quickly faded as the prospering Jewish population moved out of these old neighborhoods and into newer middle-class apartments and suburban houses already connected to gas lines. By 1940, over 90% of New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia's residences relied on gas for cooking.[27]

Refrigeration similarly underwent dramatic changes. Most families relied on ice boxes through the 1910s to keep food cold. These devices were inefficient and, in the summer, expensive to keep cold enough to prevent food from spoiling. Mechanical refrigeration spread in the 1920s, especially in the new apartment buildings that urban Jews were moving into as their fortunes improved. While rural Americans would rely on ice boxes until after World War II. two-thirds of New York City homes used refrigerators by 1940, with Philadelphia and Chicago lagging a only little behind.[28]

Considered together, these new kitchen technologies intersected well with the culinary opportunities afforded by broilers. The gas stoves made stovetop cooking much more convenient, as chickens could be more easily cooked and for shorter periods on top of the gas ranges. If some oven cooking was required, the gas ranges also had the innovation of temperature controls that permitted greater control over cooking time. Reliable refrigeration made it easier to keep small chickens ready to cook on the gas stoves and to retain leftovers for additional meals.

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[27] U.S. Department of Commerce, *1940 Census of Housing: Volume 2, Part 4* (Washington DC: 1942), 291, 882, 777.

[28] *1940 Census of Housing: Volume 2, Part 4,* 288, 878, 775.

Recipes that assumed access to broilers and new kitchen technology dominated Jewish cookbooks published after 1935. The Westchester (New York) Ladies Auxiliary, for example, humorously named its 1937 publication *At Home on the Range* as commentary on the now standard cooking equipment in Jewish homes. Compiled to raise funds for the United Home for Aged Hebrews, the volume aspired to play a supplemental role on a homemaker's shelf of Jewish cookbooks, seeking not be a "treatise on the art of cookery" but instead a source of "unusual recipes, thoroughly tested, which might add to your household files." (1) Its chicken recipes offered ways to cook broilers in a variety of stovetop or quick oven dishes, eschewing any mention of stewing hens or slowly cooked soups. One Italian inspired dish, Chicken Cociatora, called for a 3 ½ pound broiler seasoned with salt and paprika and placed in a refrigerator before combining with mushrooms, carrots, and celery in a sherry and tomato sauce to cook for 45 minutes. A chicken chow mein recipe required the same size chicken, only shredded and fried (in chicken fat) with mushrooms, celery, and water chestnuts before adding Chinese brown sauce and Chinese noodles and cooked in the pot "until brown and very crispy." (25)

At Home on the Range assumed but did not stress kashrut, taking adherence for granted. Meat recipes specified either chicken fat or Crisco for shortening, while milk dishes relied on butter, adhering to the separation of milk and meat mandated by kosher law. It relegated traditional poultry dishes to the section on Jewish holidays: roast chicken and chicken soup for the Passover seder, boiled chicken for a "simple" dinner before the Yom Kippur fast, "roast goose and pancakes" as a meal "usually served" during the eight days of Hanukah. (98-99) Cordoned off as special holiday fare these were no longer recipes for the regular meal rotation in Jewish households. With its intent to fund "added comforts" for the "aged and infirm" through

its sales, the homemakers who created it looked to their homes and their culinary innovations that built on top of established Jewish preferences.

At Home on the Range was prescient. Other newly-crafted cookbooks followed the culinary trend for lighter and quicker chicken preparation, while continuing to treat it as a premium dish. During World War II the Hebrew Publishing Company decided it was time to update its 1914 Yiddish-language *Jewish Family Cook Book* to reach out to a "new generation" of women. The company recruited nutritionist Betty Dean for this task of assembling a cookbook "that would satisfy the present-day needs of women." (vii) Author of the *Jewish Day* magazine's "Food and Health" column for six years, the 30-something Dean typified the Americanized second-generation Jewish women that the company hoped to reach. The book's contrapuntal title, *The New Jewish Cook Book of Favorite Recipes,* telegraphed how it promised new culinary practices to enhance established Jewish food preferences. [29]

There were many traditional elements to Dean's book. She emphasized kosher practices along with the centuries-old responsibility of women to ensure their family's food satisfied Jewish ritual requirements. Dean envisaged continuity in provisioning practices, with Jewish women exclusively obtaining chickens from "Kosher markets that buy live chickens only" and performing the koshering tasks of soaking and salting at home. (135) Her weekly menus also followed long-standing Jewish practice of placing chicken and chicken soup as the central dishes for every Friday's shabbat dinner. Indeed, chicken was by far the most widely recommended dinner, paralleled only by a range of fish dinners, and far more frequent than beef, lamb, or veal.

As promised, though, Dean also sought to modernize Jewish poultry cuisine. Assuming the same kitchen technology and supply methods as the authors of *At Home on the Range*, almost

[29] Betty Dean, *The New Jewish Cook Book of Favorite Recipes by Betty Dean* (Hebrew Publishing Company, 1947).

all of her recipes called for young chickens. Only one of her two dozen chicken recipes –chicken with lima beans -- called for using a fowl. The remainder were equally divided among young chickens ranging from 2 ½ to 5 pounds in size that were fricasseed (pan fried), roasted, or placed in casseroles with a range of vegetables and spices for relatively short cooking cycles. Chinese food was a prominent option, both Chicken a la King and Chicken Chop Suey, along with more established elaborations on chicken dishes such as Chicken Cacciatore and Chicken Spanish Style that had appeared in earlier cookbooks. But more prosaic Americanized dishes grew in number. Dean's Chicken with Eggplant typified her Americanized approach. It specified using a "2 pounds broiler" with eggplant, sweet potatoes and tomatoes cooked in the stove's broiler. Similar dishes used almonds, tomatoes, potatoes, and orange juice to diversify the flavorings of a family's frequent chicken dinners. (77, 108, 136-45)

Dean eliminated any use of schmaltz – a sharp break in Jewish culinary practice. She favored vegetable oils, which as a parve item simplified meal planning, making it unnecessary to shift between milk and animal fats for cooking and reducing the fat content in Jewish diet. Eliminating schmaltz also influenced chicken buying choices. Absent were recommendations for "fat hens" for holidays that could generate schmaltz for ancillary items, such as potato pancakes, indeed for any advice on how to prepare schmaltz.

While Dean was at odds with most contemporary Jewish cookbooks that retained schmaltz, her culinary innovations paralleled trends elsewhere. In 1941 the Bloch Publishing Company issued a significantly revised version of its venerable *Jewish Cook Book* by Florence Kreisler Greenbaum (first published in 1918 and repeatedly reprinted) that had sold over 100,000 copies.[30] To revise it to conform to "modern ideas" the press turned to Mildred Grossberg Bellin,

[30] Florence Kreisler Greenbaum, *Jewish Cook Book* (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1918).

whose biography paralleled that of Betty Dean. Similar in age and sociology to Dean, Bellin was a Smith College graduate with dietary training. Observant, Bellin had used her own kitchen to develop recipes that combined "knowledge of modern American cooking with old Jewish dishes." (v). Appearing first in 1941, the overhauled and revised *Jewish Cook Book* was popular and republished every few years into the early 1960s.[31]

As the revised 1941 edition included many of the original recipes, the *Jewish Cook Book* was imbued with Jewish tradition and respect for kosher practices. Bellin even doubled down on the traditional use of schmaltz, highlighting the side dish "Potatoes Mashed with Chicken Fat" repeatedly in her recommended weekly menus. (eg 402) But many goose recipes once included by Greenberg disappeared, such as "Geschundene Gans" (96) and "Gaensklein," (97) and the traditional recipe of goose cracklings known as grieben changed from specifying goose in the 1918 volume (97) to "any kind of fowl" in Bellin's revised version. (96) While goose and duck recipes remained (similar to Dean's book) they were far reduced in number and complexity.

Chicken dishes of a decidedly American and Americanized-ethnic style grew. The total number of chicken recipes doubled and bespoke an assimilated palate. New recipes included Chicken with Spaghetti (89), Chicken Portola (92, baked with green peppers, canned tomatoes, corn, and coconut), and Chicken-Orange Fricassee (93), the latter similar to Dean's recipe. Again parallel to Dean were recipes for Chicken Chop Suey (92) and Chicken A La King (93) though Bellin included 3 tablespoons of chicken fat in the former and 5 in the latter, a decidedly Jewish twist to these popular American Chinese dishes. Befitting the shift in chicken supplies by the early 1940s, the new recipes dishes specified relatively short cooking times for chickens of 3 or 4 pounds often specified as broilers or fryer. But Bellin retained recipes for fowls in older dishes

[31] Mildred Grosberg Bellin, The Jewish Cook Book (New York: Bloch Publishing Company, 1941).

such as Chicken Fricasee (89), reflecting the continued value of refining chicken fat for use in a range of Jewish dishes and likely a more accurate reflection of chicken culinary practices among Jews at the time.

These culinary shifts only strengthened chicken's status in Jewish cuisine. One measure was the prominence of chicken in celebratory banquets organized the *Landsmanshaft* societies, Jewish fraternal organizations now several decades old. Originally constituted by the immigrant generation among those from the same village or town, they had paid benefits for funerals (often in cemeteries they had created), sickness, and loans to members in need. By the 1930s these benefits may have been less important than the solidarity the organizations offered Jew in an era where the places the immigrants had come from were under extreme anti-Semitic pressures. Their black-tie banquets with formal toasts and speeches included elaborate programs celebrating the organization's founders and accomplishments – and featuring poultry as the feasts' centerpiece.

Two examples suffice. The 37th annual "Dinner and Dance" of the Warschauer YMBA (Young Men's Benevolent Association) in 1937 was particularly elaborate. With its name indicating its members came from Warsaw, Poland, the festivities featured music by "Rudy's Orchestra" to support performances by Janet Adams ("The Sweetheart of Song") and "Dance Creations" by Arno and Arnette (to the tune of "Anything Can Happen"). The multi-course meal included white fish and beef tongue to whet appetites for the main course, a half-chicken with sides of asparagus and stuffed derma. The *Landsmanshaft* society from Częstochowa in southern Poland matched Warschauer's menu at its own 50th anniversary dinner and dance on December 25, 1938. For this "affair" that the program promised would surpass "in breadth, scope, and grandeur anything which we have heretofore attempted," the menu offered chicken consommé with kreplach immediately after the whitefish appetizer and followed by sweet breads to cleanse

palates for the main course, a "Half-stuffed spring chicken" and assorted vegetables. For these celebrations of Jewish accomplishments and solidarity, nothing tasted more of success than chicken. [32]

Conclusion

When my great-grandfather's son Charlie sat down for dinner in the 1930s, he was in far better circumstances than his father 40 years earlier. He had become a successful attorney active in the entertainment industry and lived in an upper west side apartment overlooking Central Park, a far cry from the family's original quarters on the lower east side. A Conservative Jew, Charlie and his wife Bertie had retained a commitment to kosher food, with the family eating the chicken sourced from the same live poultry trade that his parents had once drawn on to supply Schwartz Cheap Grocery. Broilers and fryers had replaced the hens of his father's era, and goose no longer appeared on the family's dinner table, but in other respects kosher chicken remained a central feature of their food.

Charlie and Bertie's commitment to kosher, and indeed the phenomenal size of the live poultry trade, suggests that Jews retained observant food practices far longer than many historians claim. While animals do not have a religion, these live chickens were, in essence Jewish chickens, a creation of the separate religious world of Jews that became embedded in American supply chains and the built environment. My grandparent's ample kosher chicken dinners depended on the increased chicken supply and expansion of the regions engaged in commercial chicken production occasioned by Jewish demand. Drawing on recipes from Jewish cookbooks of the 1930s and 1940s, their meals also benefited from the shift in agricultural

[32] *Landsmanshaft* collections, YIVO.

regions to broiler production that the Jewish market helped engender. The ready available of kosher chicken was both cause and consequence of the Jewish presence in major American cities and their retention of observant practices.

The live poultry trade did more than put food on the table: it also refashioned the cities in which it flourished, profoundly affecting law and politics along the way. It is to the urban world made by the Jewish chicken that we turn next.