

The Limits of Gender Equality in 19th Century American Jewish Colonies

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IN THE YEARS following the outbreak of anti-Jewish violence in 1881-2, large numbers of Russian Jews began to search for a way to solve their own "Jewish problem". Tired of waiting for Tsarist Russia to follow the path of the western European nations and emancipate them, Russian Jews increasingly sought ways to emancipate themselves. Through migration, nearly half a million Jews escaped Eastern Europe for a new life in the West or Palestine by the end of the century.

Yet many Russian Jews were not content to simply escape through migration. Such individuals hoped to change society in order to eliminate inequalities caused by religious hostilities and class differences—and, in some cases, gender inequality. Some of these reformers joined radical political groups, hoping to change Russia from within, while others strove to create model communities, either in Palestine or in the West, which would serve as examples of the ideal society and inspire the rest of the world. The *Am Olam* emerged in the Spring of 1881 as an organization committed to the establishment of communal, agrarian colonies in the United States. *Am Olam* members dedicated themselves to proving the productive capacity of Jews and to providing to the world a model community based on equality. While gender equality was not the centerpiece of their program, many looked to create communities in which men and women would be equal.¹

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1. As discussed below, the purely *Am Olam* colonies of Bethlehem Judea, South Dakota, and New Odessa, Oregon, both guaranteed equal rights for men and women in their constitutions.

Between 1881 and 1890, Eastern European Jews established approximately forty agricultural colonies in the United States.² Scattered in locations as diverse as the New Jersey pine forests, the swampy lowlands of Louisiana and Arkansas, the forested hills of southern Oregon, and the Great Plains of the Dakotas and Kansas, Russian Jewish idealists strove to establish model communities. Many of these were extremely short-lived, and little is known about them; but most of those which left records had ties to the *Am Olam*.³ While there was some variation both in the closeness of the ties and in the specific aims and priorities of the different settlements, most colonies embraced some degree of communalism and conceived of their mission in internationalist terms. As *Am Olam* pioneer and spiritual leader Monye Bokal wrote, "We Jews have given to the world its loftiest ideas of morality . . . perhaps we were destined to show the world that life could be established on the basis of the highest truth and justice."⁴

In establishing their communities, the *Am Olam* idealists faced many obstacles. Settlement after settlement succumbed to floods, fires, blizzards, and fiscal crises. Ideologically, the colonists faced other challenges. Despite the fact that they were among the only settlements populated almost exclusively by *Am Olam* adherents, Bethlehem Judea, South Dakota, and New Odessa, Oregon, were split by ideological infighting. Most of the other colonies were made up of more heterogeneous groups from the start, and the more ideologically committed settlers found that they would need to make compromises with non-ideological settlers if their colonies were to

2. Pearl Bartelt, "American Jewish Agricultural Colonies," presented at the annual conference of the National Historic Communal Societies Association, October, 1989. Bartelt's appendix contains a list of all of the known colonies. She lists an additional 37 colonies for the post-1891 period. A list of the more significant of these colonies can be found in Uri Herscher, *Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America* (Detroit, 1981).

3. The Oregon and one of the South Dakota colonies were pure *Am Olam* projects. The Arkansas colony included a number of organization members, including Moses Herder, one of its founders. The New Jersey colonies from this period all had founding settlers who were *Am Olam* members, including *Am Olam* founders Moses Herder, who settled in Carmel after the Arkansas colony was abandoned, and Monye Bokal, an Alliance colonist. My research on Alliance has demonstrated that, at a minimum, just under one-third of the founding families had ties to the *Am Olam*. Limited records for other colonies, such as the seven Kansas colonies and the short-lived North Dakota colonies, make positive identification of *Am Olam* members difficult. These connections to the *Am Olam* are explored in Ellen Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies in Southern New Jersey* (title tentative), Syracuse University Press (forthcoming).

4. Abraham Menes, "The Am Oylom Movement," *YIVO Annual* 4 (1949), p. 15.

survive.⁵ Struggling colonists turned for financial help to established Jewish philanthropists, both in the United States and in Europe, who had their own agendas for colony development. The competing goals of ideologically motivated colonists, nonideological colonists, and philanthropic sponsors led to a transformation of the surviving colonies, from agrarian, communal settlements to mixed agricultural-industrial settlements based on private ownership.⁶

Among the "lofty ideas" that the early *Am Olam* colonists hoped to promulgate was a commitment to gender equality. While this was by no means the primary concern of the *Am Olam* or any of the colonies, it was embraced as part of their larger commitment to equality. From the founding of the organization, when groups of university students would gather for discussions in Odessa, women were included. Sidney Baily, one of the early Odessa *Am Olam* members, recalled that the group would gather "on Sabbath and festivals, young men and women, to read Russian and have discussions."⁷ Women were active in this organizational period, when options and ideologies were being discussed, and in the subsequent period of settlement—although they were always a small minority, perhaps because women were under-represented among those constituencies most attracted to the *Am Olam*, university students and craftsmen. Despite their under-representation in the organization, women were included in nearly all of the settlements for which records remain. In the New Odessa Colony in Oregon, the first group included 25 men and 9 childless (mostly single) women.⁸

Surviving documents of the pure *Am Olam* colonies in South Dakota and Oregon indicate the dedication of the members to the

5. Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies in Southern New Jersey*. The compromises reached in colonies with heterogeneous populations are explored in chapters 2, 4, and 5. Examples include the decision of irreligious or anti-religious *Am Olam* colonists at Alliance to support the community's religious institutions in the name of community solidarity.

6. Ellen Eisenberg, "Immigrant Origins and Sponsor Policies: Sources of Change in South Jersey Jewish Colonies," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 11 (Spring, 1992), pp. 27-40.

7. Sidney Baily, "Memoir," in Uri Herscher, *Jewish Agricultural Utopias in America, 1880-1910*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1981), p. 147.

8. Herman Rosenthal, "A History of the Communitarian Settlement Known as 'New Odessa,'" (1904), trans. Gary P. Zola, in *The American Jewish Farmer* (Cincinnati: American Jewish Archives, 1986). Another *Am Olam* colony, Bethlehem Judea, had only one female member, although it seems clear that they intended for women to be included in greater numbers later. As indicated elsewhere in this essay, their constitution included a guarantee of equal rights for women.

idea of gender equality. Members of the Bethlehem Judea Colony, founded in South Dakota in September of 1882, adopted the principle of gender equality by proclaiming in their constitution that "Women shall enjoy equal rights with men."⁹ Oregon's New Odessa colony also explicitly embraced this principle.

Just as the colonists experienced difficulties in fulfilling their communal goals, so too did they fall short of the goal of gender equality. Their inability to live up to this goal was typical of reformist settlements of the 19th century. For example, in studying the Owenite communities, Carol Kolmerten argues, "Owenite reformers could not, finally, disentangle themselves from the mainstream culture they sought to reform. They lugged with them to communal life some heavy ideological baggage. Their instincts were for and their habits were of a patriarchal system."¹⁰ While these Jewish idealists, too, brought traditional concepts of gender relations to their settlements, their efforts in this area were thwarted by external forces as well as by their own "ideological baggage". The influence of the competing agendas of non-ideological settlers and sponsors, as well as the impact of legal and economic forces, helped to transform the ideal of gender equality expressed by the Am Olam into more traditional gender relationships in the surviving colonies.

This ideology of gender equality went against the norms of the Jewish community from which these idealists came, as well as violating gender roles in 19th century Russian and American societies; yet they were in keeping with the communal ideologies to which these young people were attracted. Their vision of an ideal community stressed equality among all members and spoke of the colony as a large family. These sentiments are confirmed in the surviving documents and memoirs from the colonies. The Bethlehem Judea constitution explains that "All members of the colony form one family enjoying the same rights and privileges."¹¹ In New Odessa, colonists referred to each other as "brother" and "sister."¹²

The egalitarianism espoused by *Am Olam* activists included gender equality in work roles and in personal relations. Male and female settlers at Alliance Colony, New Jersey, worked side-by-side in the fields during the early years, as did settlers at many of the other

9. Menes, "The *Am Oylom* Movement," pp. 26-7.

10. Carol Kolmerten, *Women in Utopia*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), p. 12.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid. Also see "A Wedding Among the Communistic Jews in Oregon," (author unknown), *The Overland Monthly* 6 (December 1885), pp. 606-611.

colonies. Alliance Colony native Elizabeth Rudnick Levin recalled the hard labor of her mother and the other women of the first generation:

Clearly I can picture women . . . wearing, in the Old World fashion, a three-cornered scarf over their heads, bending low to the ground, slowly following their husbands along the long rows of corn or sweet potatoes. There was always weeding or hoeing or planting to be done, and the female of the species was well versed in such work.¹³

Similarly, in the short-lived Arkansas colony where she spent part of her childhood, Kate Herder recalled that men, women, and children labored together.¹⁴ While the sharing of heavy labor in these colonies might have resulted from necessity rather than ideology, at New Odessa gender equality in work assignments was a conscious and principled choice. Women of the New Odessa settlement worked in the forest on the railroad lumber contracts that provided the financial basis of the community economy in the early years, while men took turns with laundry and kitchen duties.¹⁵

Among the *Am Olam* colonists, women played a role not only as field hands, but also in the colonies' educational programs. Educational programs were the centerpiece of colonies dedicated to "mutual assistance in perfecting and development of physical, mental and moral capacities of (their) members."¹⁶ The *Am Olam* colonists brought with them from Russia their penchant for endless philosophical discussions. One New Odessa colonist, reporting on the weekly schedule at the settlement, wrote, "... On Wednesday, current matters are discussed and on Saturday, the problems of the 'commune'. On Sunday we rise . . . and immediately a lively discussion begins on the subject of equal rights for women . . ."¹⁷ While gender equality was clearly a subject of discussion, it is impossible to determine the role of the women in these debates, since no records were kept. However, it is clear that a number of the *Am Olam* women had university training and took a leading role in the more formal educational programs. For example, Esther Mashbir, a highly educated woman who joined the *Am Olam* in Russia and settled first on a South

13. Elizabeth Rudnick Levin, "Pioneer Women of the Colonies," in *Yoval: A Symposium upon the First Fifty Years of the Jewish Farming Colonies of Alliance, Norma, and Brotmanville, New Jersey*. (Published for the Golden Jubilee and Fiftieth Anniversary Reunion, 1932), p. 31.

14. Kate Herder, "Memories of Yesterday," (unpublished memoir, 1946).

15. Menes, "The *Am Oylom* Movement," p. 31.

16. New Odessa Community, Articles of Incorporation, Douglas County, Oregon, December 31, 1883.

17. Colonist letter, quoted in Menes, "The *Am Oylom* Movement," pp. 29-31.

Dakota colony and later in Alliance Colony, was active in bringing secular German culture to the Sunday School established at Alliance.¹⁸

Not only in the area of work roles, but also in personal relationships, many of the *Am Olam* colonists attempted to shake off the traditional, unequal gender relationships of the outside world. In all available reports about marriage in the colonies, unions were created through love and mutual consent. One report of a wedding at New Odessa relates that during the ceremony the bride was reminded that she should not enter the union out of a sense of duty or obligation, but only for love:

Oh maiden, let no fear
Of aught now keep thee here,
Only confidence in him

As to bring both joy
Joy, joy, only joy¹⁹

This emphasis on the freedom of the couple to choose to marry is not surprising, given the demographics of the settlements. Most of the settlers of colonies like New Odessa and Bethlehem Judea were single people in their twenties. Having already broken with parental authority and undertaken the journey to America independently, the settlers considered their choice of whether and whom to marry their own prerogative.

In the *Am Olam* colonies, marriage was not the dominant pattern—and not only because of the gender imbalance. In several of the best known and most self-consciously radical settlements, like New Odessa and Carmel, New Jersey, there were reports of free love. In New Odessa, some blamed this openness in sexual relationships for the demise of the colony—although it is clear that the principle cause for the break-up was an ideological split in the leadership. Abraham Cahan, former *Am Olam* member and founder of the *Jewish Daily Forward*, wrote of New Odessa that some members "insisted that communism required literal togetherness: eating from the same bowl, sleeping in the same bedrooms."²⁰

Indeed, the physical accommodations at many of the early settlements would have made it difficult to maintain traditional gender relationships in colonies which were not dominated by married couples. While the Alliance, New Jersey, colony was founded by groups

18. Sidney Baily, "The First Fifty Years," in *Yoval*, pp. 16-18.

19. "A Wedding Among the Communistic Jews in Oregon," p. 611.

20. Abraham Cahan, *The Education of Abraham Cahan*, (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), pp. 341-343.

of married couples, colonies in Oregon and South Dakota were made up primarily of men, with a sprinkling of single women, and at several of these, all shared one house. A visiting journalist at New Odessa described the colony's accommodations in 1884:

Nearly all the members eat and sleep and stagnate—for I can hardly speak of it as living—in a large hall of their own construction: a wretched edifice built of rough boards and unplanned planks, and containing only two apartments, the lower story being the dining-room and kitchen both in one, and the upper story a large sleeping room without partitions. In the sleeping room the Community, with the exception of the two or three families who live in small shanties, not only sleeps but lounges . . . reads, debates and dances . . .

. . . At one end of the sleeping apartment occupied by the men, there is a little separate nest of maidenhood—a corner fenced with shawls.²¹

Given these accommodations, the isolation of the settlement, the overwhelming proportion of single young people in the colony, and the emphasis on marriage as an commitment based on free choice and mutual love, the reports of "free love"—or at least deviance from traditional courtship—should not surprise us.

Despite the evidence of a commitment to a revision of traditional gender relationships in the colonies, efforts in the direction of gender equality were limited by the legal requirements of the outside world, by economic realities, and by the influence of more traditional sponsors and non-ideological colonists. As much as *Am Olam*-inspired colonists might have advocated gender equality, it was a fact that by law or by convention, women in 19th century America were limited in their ability to purchase property, borrow money, or enter into a contract. Thus, when members of the New Odessa Colony legally incorporated their community, the signatories for the community were all male. Colonists in need of loans found lenders (whether commercial or philanthropic) unwilling to loan funds to anyone other than a male head of household.²²

Even in personal relationships, 19th century legal restrictions on women's rights limited the ability of the colonists to challenge convention. For example, while colonists viewed marriage as a union formed out of mutual consent and love, they also knew that the state limited the rights of women once they entered into such a relationship. Thus, in the New Odessa marriage ceremony, while the free-

21. "A Wedding Among the Communistic Jews in Oregon".

22. Loan records for the Baron de Hirsch Fund and the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society are available at the American Jewish Historical Society, Waltham, Mass.

dom of the bride in making her choice is stressed, it is also explicitly recognized that, in marrying, she will be giving up her freedom: "Maiden, shall he thy husband be? Yes? Then thou ceasest to be free."²³ This sacrificing of freedom for marriage was a legal fact which the colonists could hardly ignore.

The economic realities of the male-female wage differential in 19th century America also might have played a role in reinforcing traditional gender roles and worked against the attempts of colonists to strive for gender equality in work roles. For example, when an *Am Olam* group established a commune in New York in order to earn money to purchase land for a new colony, "one of the women stayed in the apartment during the day, doing all the housekeeping chores. The other commune members went to work."²⁴ Similarly, when the New Odessa colonists arrived in Portland, the men fanned out to earn money with which to purchase the land for the colony, but the women did not.²⁵ While these arrangements might have been due to adherence to traditional gender roles, it is important to also recognize that men could earn more than women in the labor market. Given the object of earning as much money as possible in order to purchase land, the colonists' decision to have as many men working for wages as possible, and to allow women to take care of unremunerated labor such as household tasks, might have been driven by economic considerations as well as by tradition. Sicily Island, Louisiana, colonists recognized the economically vulnerable position of women by pledging themselves to support female colonists who should become widowed.²⁶

Once in the colony and outside of the wage system, some groups found that women's previous experience ill suited them for the difficulty of "men's work". For example, in New Odessa, one colonist wrote that

In the beginning the women had demanded full equal rights. They had gone to work in the forest, with the men taking their turn in the kitchen and laundry. Soon, however, the women realized that they were not yet fit for that type of work and they returned to their previous tasks. Now they assure

23. "A Wedding Among the Communistic Jews in Oregon," p. 611.

24. Abraham Cahan, *The Education of Abraham Cahan*, p. 245.

25. Herman Rosenthal, "A History of the Communitarian Settlement Known as New Odessa," p. 14.

26. Joel Geffen, "Jewish Agricultural Colonies as Reflected in the Russian Hebrew Press," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 60, (June, 1971), p. 358. Also see Richard Singer, "The American Jewish in Agriculture, Past History and Present Condition". (Hebrew Union College Prize Essay, 1941), volume I, p. 328.

us that they have acquired the necessary physical strength and endurance for working in the forest.²⁷

There is no evidence that the transition of women back into the more physically demanding jobs occurred before the colony's demise. However, observers' reports indicate that the men did continue to take turns in the kitchen: "... it is the Community law that on Sunday there must be a man cook. In Russia, R ____ had been a student of veterinary science; now he is a communist and a cook."²⁸

While many practical factors might have limited the colonists' ability to establish equality in gender relationships, the governing bodies of the colonies seem to indicate the strength of traditional gender roles—the "ideological baggage" referred to by Kolmertén. Thus, virtually all of the important leadership roles were filled by men. Repeatedly, we find that the officers of colonies, from Oregon, to South Dakota, to New Jersey, were all males. Again, this might speak in part to the need for these leaders to function as liaisons to the outside, male-dominated world; but it still seems odd that in communities which were devoted to the ideal of equality, there was apparently no effort to ensure representation of women in the governing bodies.

If the colonists in the early *Am Olam*-dominated settlements like New Odessa and Bethlehem Judea met with difficulties in redefining gender relationships, the challenges for their brothers and sisters in the New Jersey colonies were even greater. The New Jersey colonies were the largest and longest lasting of the Jewish agricultural colonies of this period. The Alliance, Carmel, Rosenhayn cluster in New Jersey reached a peak population of between 2000 and 2500 in the first decade of the 20th century and survived intact for a total of over 40 years. Their success was largely due to their accessible location, near the Jewish population centers of Philadelphia and New York. This accessibility made them an object of both philanthropic aid from these Jewish communities, and of migration by recent immigrants who chose to pursue a country life. The influence of these two groups—Jewish philanthropists and non-ideological migrants—tempered radicalism in the New Jersey colonies.²⁹

Alliance, the colony which received the earliest, greatest, and most consistent amounts of aid, was also the settlement which at-

27. Abraham Menes, "The *Am Oylom* Movement," p. 31.

28. "A Wedding Among the Communistic Jews in Oregon/" p. 609.

29. The New Jersey colonies are fully explored in Ellen Eisenberg, *Jewish Colonies in Southern Neiv Jersey*.

tracted the greatest number of non-ideological settlers. Just under one-third of the original 43 Alliance families can be positively identified as *Am Olam* members or as people who had a personal connection to members. While between 13 and 50 additional *Am Olam* families arrived during the next few years, many of them remained in the settlement only a short time, and they were outnumbered by other newcomers who had no connection to the organization.³⁰

Alliance received the aid of New York-based agencies such as the Hebrew Emigrant Aid Society, the United Hebrew Charities, and the Baron de Hirsch Fund, because sponsors hoped that the colony would attract immigrants from the overcrowded ghettos of New York. For this reason, they established and subsidized factories in the colony beginning in the 1890s, hoping that urban-industrial immigrants would be attracted by the healthful country environment. A new industrial settlement, called Brotmanville, was established at the north end of Alliance during this decade and was subsidized by the Baron de Hirsch Fund. While aid was slow in coming to neighboring Rosenhayn and Carmel in the 1880s, they too began to receive aid, particularly in the form of assistance to industrial enterprises in the 1890s. Sponsors attracted newcomers to the colonies with the promise of affordable farms and homes. Religiously observant immigrants were attracted to factory work in the colonies because colony factories were closed on Saturdays. The sponsors' efforts to establish industries in these colonies were rewarded by a substantial expansion of population in this decade.³¹

Where sponsors were most active and non-ideological immigrants most plentiful, the communal agrarianism that formed the centerpiece of the *Am Olam* program deteriorated most rapidly. Spon-

30. Since no comprehensive list of *Am Olam* members exists, identification of members is problematic. The numbers presented here (one-third of the original group, and at least 13 families in subsequent years) represent those individuals/families positively identified in memoirs as *Am Olam* members. The figure of 50 additional *Am Olam* members arriving comes from Moses Freeman's *Fuftzig Yohr Geshichte fon Yidishen Leben en Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Mid-City Press, 1929), but Freeman does not identify these 50 by name. Since the *Am Olam* disbanded by the mid-1880s, those settlers arriving in the second half of the decade were not *Am Olam* members. By the 1890s, sponsors were recruiting settlers in New York, including factory workers for the newly established industries; radicals like those who had formerly been attracted to an organization like the *Am Olam* were turning in increasing numbers to the labor and socialist movements in large cities.

31. By 1900 the Alliance population was 877 and the combined population of Carmel and Rosenhayn was 1154. These population figures come from the 1900 Federal Census.

sors, who believed it their duty to mold the colonists into independent and individualistic Americans, actively discouraged communalism by issuing loans only for single-family farms, and refusing to finance collective groups of farmers. Thus, in Alliance, despite the presence of a significant core of *Am Olam* members in the colony population, the colony quickly abandoned its cooperative farming patterns and became a community with an economy based on single-family farming and factory labor. In contrast, in Carmel, where there was less activity by sponsors in the 1880s, cooperative farming continued well into the second decade of settlement.³²

The influence of sponsors and non-ideological colonists had a similarly moderating effect on gender relations in these colonies. As a colony which was not made up of a unified *Am Olam* group but a mix of ideological and non-ideological settlers, Alliance was influenced by the more traditional, non-ideological settlers from the outset. For example, while western *Am Olam* settlements were made up primarily of young, single people, at Alliance all of the original settlers were married couples. While free love was reported practiced at several of the western *Am Olam* settlements and at Carmel, Alliance settlers in the first days all "slept in a great circle on the floor, with their clothes on, so that there would be no mix-ups between husbands and wives."³³ Partitions were promptly constructed to give each family its privacy, and within two years each family was established in a separate house on a single family farm—a reflection both of the policy of the sponsors and of the desire of many non-ideological migrants to own their own property.³⁴

While women worked together with men in the fields in the early years, men's and women's work became increasingly separate after the first decade. As the colonies became more prosperous with the aid of the sponsors, work opportunities increased due to the introduction of factory and "take-home" garment work. As these opportunities appeared, and as the proportion of non-ideological settlers increased, the work roles at Alliance increasingly conformed to traditional gender work roles. By the 1890s and early 1900s, many colony families felt it inappropriate for girls and women to work in the

32. This transition at Alliance and the differences between Alliance and Carmel are traced in Ellen Eisenberg, *Jewish Agricultural Colonies in Southern New Jersey*.

33. Arthur Goldhaft, *The Golden Egg*, (New York: Horizon Press, 1957), p. 35.

34. Report of the Immigration Commission, *Immigrants in Industries*, part 24, "Recent Immigrants in Agriculture", volume II (Washington, D.C., Government Printing Office, 1911), p. 90.

fields, especially as hired labor. Increasingly, women were confined to home and garden, and female wage earners, like their urban counterparts, labored at home or in factories, sewing.³⁵ Philanthropic sponsors, who provided shop and agricultural training for boys, and cooking and sewing classes for girls, helped to reinforce a gender-based division of labor. There are no accounts for Alliance which speak of men performing "women's work" such as laundry and cooking, as was common at New Odessa.

While gender roles at Alliance seem rather traditional, the women and girls of the New Jersey colonies did have options that their foremothers in Russia had not had. In all of the New Jersey colonies, it became common for young women to attend high school, and not uncommon for them to enter professional careers, although for the most part they were "female professions" like teaching and nursing.³⁶ In addition, the old-world system of matchmaking was never introduced to the colony, and young people expected to marry for love. While these patterns broke with the traditions of Eastern Europe, they were unremarkable for turn-of-the-century American Jews.

In the early *Am Olam* colonies, while there was clearly a dedication to greater equality and the rejection of traditional gender relationships was expressed in colony constitutions and ceremonies, practices were inconsistent. Evaluation of these practices is difficult because these colonies had few female members and there are few glimpses of women in the accounts of these colonies. The observations that are available demonstrate that, in the more isolated, purely *Am Olam* colonies, there were clear efforts to reassess and reorganize gender relations along egalitarian lines. However, these attempts were limited by the economic, legal, and social realities of 19th century America. In those colonies where *Am Olam* idealists mixed with non-ideological colonists, and where they had to contend with sponsor policies, the departures from societal norms in the area of gender relationships, as in socio-economic organization, were far more limited in scope.

The American Jewish colonies of the late 19th century present a picture of colonies in which experiments in gender equality were

35. In the early years it was common for women to work for wages as pickers, but the 1900 Federal Census indicates that, while many Alliance women worked at least part of the year in the garment industry, women had ceased employment in agriculture. Since women who worked on their own farms would *not* be listed in the census as agricultural laborers, it is difficult to determine the extent of unpaid female agricultural labor.

36. Elizabeth Rudnick Levin, "Pioneer Women of the Colonies".

limited by both internal and external factors. However, while they were limited by the economic, legal, and social norms of their day, and by the influence of more traditional sponsors and nonideological settlers, these *Am Olam* settlers were clearly questioning and attempting to reform the norms which dominated their society.