

The Press family in Alabama

Many Jews arrived in New York, and few left. They needed to be near other Jews, near a rabbi and a minyan and kosher food. But New York in the 1910s was filling with immigrants. There were labor unions, strikes, and sweatshop fires.

There was friction between the younger relatives (who were union enthusiasts) and Isadore Press, who as a foreman had to cross picket lines.

Menachem Plotka [brother of Isadore's wife Rebecca] wanted to send for his wife and children who were still in Kolodna [Russia]. About 1913, Menachem read in a Yiddish newspaper that a "colony" of Jewish families was being organized to farm some land in Bay Minette, Alabama. Menachem joined, and he sent for his son Morris to join him.

Isadore and Rebecca Press also joined. They brought their children Rachel, Joe, Harry, and David [born Feb 26, 1913].

About twenty Jewish families lived in a college building on Hand Avenue, six miles north of Bay Minette [Baldwin County, Alabama]. They cleared land and farmed for about a year. Unfortunately, the farm was not profitable. Most of the members returned to big city life.

The Press family bought a 25-acre lot on Hand Avenue, and had a house built there. During the World War (1914-1918) they lost contact with the rest of the family in Kolodno. Not until 1921 would Menachem's wife Miriam be able to join him in the US. She brought their children Celia, Phil, Rae, and Abe. [Rae later married Aaron Lubet].

By 1915 the colony had failed, and many returned to New York. The exceptions were the Press, Plotka, and Tobin families. Isadore Press opened a tailor shop in town, across the street from the Baldwin County Courthouse. The Plotkas moved to a 150-acre dairy farm in Mobile, 30 miles away. Mr. Tobin sold shoes and traded in beaver furs.

We will try to find more about the Industrial Removal Organization, which evidently arranged for this group of families to move to Alabama. The American Jewish Historical Society [Web site](#) states that:

The IRO was a US organization largely funded by the Baron de Hirsch Fund that sought to encourage new immigrants in the US to leave the large population centers on the East Coast and settle in the interior of the country. It received funds from several other sources, notably the Jewish Colonization Association.

Between 1904-1914, Jews were "removed" to 178 locations, including Mobile Alabama.