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Panic Emigration: Jewish Agricultural Settlements in Bolivia and the Dominican
Republic, 1935-1960

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by

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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Professor Stephen Andrew Bell, Committee Chair

Although Jewish agricultural settlements have had a long history in Latin America, particularly in Argentina and Brazil, those founded as a result of the panic emigration out of Europe on the heels of World War II are unique. Never before in the history of mankind had the leaders of thirty two nations gathered together in one location to collectively discuss the fate of countless Jewish people. Indeed, the 1938 International Conference at Évian-les-Bains in France, would give rise to the idea of having Jewish refugees settle as agricultural pioneers in lands distant from the turmoil that unfolded in Europe. Jewish refugees were given the opportunity to start life anew as agriculturalists, an occupation most unfamiliar to the Jew, who was, in the main, an urbanized professional or skilled craftsman. Torn from the relative comfort of their European homes by hostile Germans, the refugees attempted to build a new existence under the protection of host countries such as Bolivia and the Dominican Republic. The success, or failure, of the refugee colonies of Sosúa in the Dominican Republic and Buena Tierra in Bolivia, is still

being debated today, more than a half-century after their establishment, and in some ways provides a model for contemporary studies of similar crises that are currently unfolding in Africa and the Middle East.

The thesis of Anthony August Hoffman is approved.

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Dedication Page

This work is dedicated to the memory of Cleone Kellen Hoffman, 1933-2015, my dear and beloved mother, who passed away before this thesis was completed. Her inspiration lives on in those who had the fortune of having her friendship and who also shared in her boundless love.

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Abbreviations

AJC	American Jewish Committee
AJDC	Agro-Joint Distribution Committee, an arm of the JDC
CILCA	Cooperativa Industrial Lechera C. por A.
DORSA	Dominican Republic Settlement Association
Ganadera	Cooperativa Industrial Ganadera Sosúa C. por A.
IGC	Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees
JDC	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, a.k.a. The Joint
AJTA	Archives of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency
PACPR	President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees
REC	Refugee Economic Corporation
SOCOBO	Sociedad Colonizadora de Bolivia
SOPRO	Sociedad de Protección a los Inmigrantes Israelitas
UFC	United Fruit Company

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Introduction

Jewish Havens in the Dominican Republic and Bolivia During 1933-1960; Success and Safety in Latin America

Jewish immigration into Latin America has a long history, dating from the early Colonial period to the present. Indeed, Jewish people were among the first European settlers in the New World. This paper traces the establishment of Jewish agricultural settlements in the Caribbean island nation of the Dominican Republic, and Bolivia in South America. It is also a synthesis of the available literature concerning this little known subject. It is necessary to provide context as a means of a more complete understanding and appreciation of the complexities involved in the founding, administration and day-to-day operation of the Jewish agricultural settlements, circa 1933-1960. The year of 1933 marked an important shift in German politics as the National Socialists were handed control of the government. The ominous clouds that shrouded the horizon, turned into a full-blown storm that was the death knell for many European Jews. A virulent anti-Semitism was taking hold among the German Nazis, who placed the blame for the nation's ills squarely on the doorstep of European Jews. Certain events in Germany sparked a panic Jewish emigration out of Germany and into sympathetic European countries. However, many of the safe countries would also close their doors to Jewish immigrants due to multiple factors that are discussed in the following pages.

The decade of the 1930s ushered in a time of great international, socio-political upheavals which touched most every country in the world. On the heels of world-wide economic depression that included the collapse of U.S. stock market, the world witnessed a realignment of the powers. The effects of the Great Depression sent not ripples but tidal waves across the

oceans, forcing the making of a new world order. In many countries, particularly Germany, Japan, Russia and the United States, militarization, [the production of armaments, war vessels and vehicles, and the formulation of official state policy that supported such a buildup] proceeded rapidly. World War I had left Germany fractured and reeling under the penalties and stipulations of the Treaty of Versailles, which marked the end of the 'Great War.' Germany as a nation was in a state of flux and trending towards radical social change under the ascendant National Socialists. The National Socialist German Workers Party, or Nazis as they were known, were founded as a political party in 1919 and included the volatile anti-Semite Adolph Hitler. Their rise to power spelled the doom of many people, particularly the European Jews. Events such as Kristallnacht, an extremely violent anti-Jewish pogrom which occurred in many parts of Germany on the 8th and 9th of November, 1938, put into motion the panic emigration mentioned earlier, with Jewish people seeking refuge in other countries the world over.

Many events that occurred throughout Europe during the decade of the 1930s, contributed to a growing mood of despair of among European Jews. Indeed, they were rightly concerned about their very future as a cultural group. The once cherished status of being German, regardless of having a Jewish bloodline, disappeared. Panic ensued as German Jews started fleeing to countries not yet aligned with or occupied by the Nazis. Jewish mutual aid groups, charities and philanthropies, such as the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, usually known as the Joint, assisted Jewish refugees in getting to the relative safety of Nazi-free countries. The logistics that were involved in the effort are truly mind-boggling. One had first to obtain travel documents, then a transit visa, or entry visa into the host country, also fed and clothed along the way. Once arrived in the transit countries, the refugees would have to procure visas to remain there or ship out to friendlier countries. Many were entirely penniless, having had

their possessions stripped from them by the Nazis. This placed them at the mercy of the authorities of the transit countries-those that allowed safe passage to the refugees, and the beneficence and resources of the charitable organizations. The preferred countries to immigrate to, the U.S.A., Argentina and Brazil, had restrictive immigration policies in place, and were about to further tighten them. Indeed, most Latin American countries would eventually deny entry to the hapless, involuntary emigrants. The U.S., in particular, used diplomatic pressure and its influence to demand that other nations open the door to the Jewish refugees, without itself doing the same. In July of 1938, and just three months after the Nazis had annexed Austria, the U.S. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt called for an international conference of the heads of states of Allied-friendly nations, to deal with what Roosevelt knew was a problem of a magnitude which the world had never seen before. The setting for the conference was the idyllic lakeside town of Évian-les-Bains on the French side of Lake Geneva. In the analysis of some scholars, the conference was a bust from the start, despite its lofty humanitarian goals of rescuing and relocating millions of displaced people, mainly German and Austrian Jews fleeing the clutches of the ever encroaching Nazis. Then again, most of the heads-of states who attended Évian thought it a failure as well. Only one country attending the conference, the Dominican Republic offered to open its doors to the fleeing refugees. A critical examination of the Évian Conference itself would take volumes and therefore remains outside the limits of this work.

Since the beginning of the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt a new U.S. foreign policy was instituted in dealing with Latin American and Caribbean Basin nations. This formerly interventionist foreign policy was revised into a hands-off policy known as The Good Neighborhood policy. The U.S. would no longer interfere in the affairs of those nations which were aligned with the Allies and located in the Americas and the Caribbean Basin, hence the

term Neighbor. One of the nations that attended the Évian conference, the Dominican Republic, offered to take in at least 100,000 Jewish refugees. The Dominican Republic shares the island of Hispaniola with its poorer neighbor to the west, Haiti, and its dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina was a stalwart ally of the United States. Trujillo was a direct beneficiary of the Good Neighbor policy; he no longer had to worry about intervention by the giant to the north. Trujillo's generous offer was contingent upon the Jewish refugees establishing agricultural settlements, an idea that has a long history in the story of mass migrations the world over.

El Generalísimo Trujillo's image, one of a cruel, murderous tyrant, was further reinforced by the slaughter of innocent Haitians living in the border region in the west of the island. The man behind the Haitian Massacre, also known as the Parsley Massacre-or in Spanish 'El Corte', had the motive to improve his image in the international arena in the wake of the brutally violent massacre. Many Haitians, possibly more than seventeen thousand souls living along the common border, were hacked to death over a week's time in October 1937 by Trujillo's henchmen. Trujillo was in desperate need of help repairing his tainted image, and sought the support of the United States and F.D.R.. *The Benefactor* displayed his pseudo-humanitarian side via his offer at Évian of accepting Jewish refugees into the Dominican Republic, mostly as a means of repairing his negative image, yet also with the aim of 'whitening' the Dominican population through miscegenation. Trujillo cultivated U.S. support through a web of influential politicians and media connections, and was able to stem the rising tide of a negative publicity in the wake of the Parsley Massacre. By using slick public relations campaigns, coupled with funneling money to the right people whose influence he so needed, Trujillo the Strong Man solidified his complete control of the island nation.

Buying influence through bribery of public officials is not novel in the politics of any nation, yet Trujillo was a master of the technique and took the practice to new levels. Trujillo's grandiose promise actually shielded a dark, ulterior motive. As noted, the dictator intended to 'whiten' the island's population through intermarriage with the Jewish refugees. The dictator also was the owner of a 26,500 plus acre parcel that, out of his warped sense of generosity, gave to the Joint to distribute among the incoming refugees. The land was the former property of the United Fruit Company and located above one of the most picturesque bays the island nation could boast. The existing group of buildings and surrounding U.F.C. land comprised the settlement known as Sosúa, with sweeping vistas of the blue-green Caribbean framed by a crescent-shaped white sand beach. Sosúa is today a red-light tourist destination, and its history as a refuge for Jewish refugees is fast fading.

Another Latin American country that allowed, provisionally, entry to European Jewish refugees is Bolivia. The scholar Leo Spitzer has provided a somber account of a Jewish agricultural settlement located in the semitropical Yungas region of Bolivia. There is a great difference in the way the refugees thought about immigrating into the Dominican Republic and Bolivia. On the one hand they were welcomed with open arms into the Dominican Republic, and provided with all the natural and legal rights of a Dominican citizen. These rights included the ability to worship, vote, own land and businesses, all under protection of the government. A few, indeed, had plans to stay on as tropical farmers. The immigrant population of both nations included people of Jewish and white European descent. Then again, there had been a Jewish presence in the D.R. for many years, and Jews were visible in both the public and private sectors. Jews naturally felt more at ease amongst people of European blood, thus it follows that the transition from involuntary migrant to tropical farmer would not be as difficult as it proved to be

in Bolivia. In Bolivia, most of the refugees viewed their new home as a stepping stone to other even more desirable countries, such as the United States of America and Argentina. There was no collective desire amongst the refugees to put down roots and become naturalized Bolivian citizens. On the contrary, the culture shock was an extreme obstacle to overcome. The mainly urbanized and educated Jewish refugees felt completely out of place, although they were generally well treated by the mainly indigenous populace.

This paper will provide the reader with a broad survey of two different models of Jewish agricultural settlement in Latin America, Sosúa, the Caribbean paradise and Buena Tierra in the Yungas region of Bolivia. It is also important to give the reader some background into U.S. efforts to find a home for the millions of people who would be displaced by the war. F.D.R.'s Project M (M for Migration) managed by the geographer Isaiah Bowman, (1878-1950), also studied, among other Latin American countries, the Dominican Republic and Bolivia as possible settlement sites for the refugees displaced by World War II. Both of these countries were also visited by the geographer Henry J. Bruman, (1913-2005), of U.C.L.A. Bruman had visited both the Dominican Republic and Bolivia in 1951 to follow up on his unpublished work on Project "M". Bruman's contribution to the Project amounted to an almost three hundred page study which never saw the light of day due to its classified status. Sadly, the secret Project "M" was discontinued by FDR's successor, Harry S. Truman (1884-1972). The work of many scholars and specialists was shelved as World War II had ended, thereby terminating the massive undertaking. However, Bruman has left a rich and extensive archive at UCLA, including many field books, some of which provided archival material for this paper. Bruman's unique perspective and witty humor comes to life in the field books, as do his capabilities as a Latin Americanist and geographer.

Although determining the success of Sosúa and Buena Tierra will vary with whose version one may accept-there are several- it is claimed that none of the Latin American Jewish agricultural settlements established during the time frame of 1930-1945, would have been possible without the able hand of well-heeled Jewish philanthropies, and the complete and unprecedented cooperation of host governments. The philanthropies, together with the professional help of a trained agronomist such as the well-known Joseph Rosen, plus the legal services of the powerful New York corporate attorney James Rosenberg, meant that the Jewish colonies had a better-than-fighting chance for survival and eventual success. They were the Vice President and President respectively of the Dominican Refugee Settlement Association, known hereafter as DORSA. Both Rosen and Rosenberg had invaluable experience in settlement projects, having resettled an estimated 200,000 plus Jewish refugees in the Crimea and the Russian steppes during the 1920's. The success of those resettlement projects provided the DORSA team with a glimmer of hope that the model could be followed with a predictable and positive outcome in the Dominican Republic.

Jewish people have a long history of economic and demographic contribution to many Latin American countries; then again, Jews held high government posts in the Dominican Republic prior to the rise of Trujillo. Jewish settlers can be found in most every country throughout Latin America, with some having obtained wealth and high social status. The historian Alan Metz takes this a step further by declaring that importing Jews, or allowing their immigration into the Republic, can be traced to 1850 in the Dominican Republic, mostly as a means of providing agricultural workers and merchants, but also as a step towards securing the fluid border regions. The historian Marion Kaplan has provided a timeline that traces the beginnings of a Jewish presence in the Dominican Republic and one that meshes neatly with that

Metz. According to both, the importing of Jewish people was a stratagem employed by Dominican presidents past to deal with issues of demography and national safety, which included an aging population, shortages of trained agricultural workers, and domestic security issues such as sparsely populated hinterlands and under-protected, ill-defined border regions.

Although the industrialist Mauricio Hochschild, of German and Bolivian parentage, did not share Trujillo's plan of a demographic 'shaping,' or whitening of its populace, the country did indeed have Jewish emigrants, in fact it allowed more Jews to enter the country than any other of the Latin American countries prior to Évian. The topographical obstacles that the refugees encountered in this Andean country, such as the extreme altitude of the capital city of La Paz (11,010 feet elevation), coupled with a mostly indigenous population, helped place Bolivia at the bottom of the list of desirable countries in which to immigrate. However the Jewish refugee was in no position to choose where to settle; what was most important was to escape Nazi Germany alive. Again, the Indigenous cultures and forbidding topography of Bolivia proved to be obstacles that the Jewish immigrants could not overcome. This was in spite of their dire situation as a people without a country fleeing the ravages of war, and in desperate need of a place to safely call home. However, as in the Dominican Republic, the Jewish refugees had the financial support of wealthy, well-funded philanthropies that facilitated the move from European countries to Latin America. Hochschild, the Jewish businessman and mining magnate who had high placed connections in Bolivia, helped the incoming Jewish refugees with the necessary paperwork and financing to allow their entry into the Andean country. Hochschild was instrumental in developing agricultural projects within Bolivia for the Jewish refugees, and also the founding of the *Sociedad de Proteccion a los Inmigrantes Israelitas*, or the Society of Protection for the Jewish Immigrants.

Anti-Semitism within Latin America was another issue that had emerged. The Jewish refugees could not count on the help and protection of many governments, save the Dominican Republic, and were left to their own devices in a kind of quasi-legal limbo. The help that they received from German Busch Becerra, the sympathetic president of Bolivia in power during the period 1937-1939, evaporated into the thin air of the altiplano at the end of the 1930's. Bolivia was known to have a sizeable Nazi-sympathetic, expatriate population with well-placed connections, who behind the scenes lobbied hard for the exclusion of the Jewish refugees. However, the volatile president committed suicide in 1939 with a gunshot to the head, and with that the hopes of many Jewish refugees were dashed. We now move to the discussion of the settlement at Sosúa in the Dominican Republic.



Fig. 1: Map of the Dominican Republic Showing Administrative and Province Divisions.

Source: <http://www.infoplease.com/atlas/country/dominicanrepublic.html>

Part One: *Evian, El Generalísimo Trujillo, DORSA and the Founding of Sosúa*

The property at Sosúa amounted to 26, 000 plus acres that had been abandoned by its former owners, the United Fruit Company, or the UFC. During its time in the hands of the international company, the lands were part of a larger banana plantation, and through the dealings of the Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina; the massive property had become part of his vast business empire. It had some basic infrastructure that had been built for the UFC's operations, which included some outbuildings and "over twenty houses, miles of fencing, some electricity, a few roads, and some running water, including a 50,000 gallon reservoir."¹ There were the remnants of a pier that the U.F.C. had built to ship the bananas that it had, with moderate success, grown in the shallow soil at Sosúa. The property sported incredible views of the blue Caribbean just beyond a crescent-shaped, pristine white sand beach that stretched for about eight miles along the coast and inland for seven miles framing Sosúa Bay. Its waters, being mostly calm year round, were a most welcome sight and an invitation to take advantage of the diversions that ocean sports offered. One could take a leisurely stroll down one of the paths to the beach, take a pleasant dive or swim, and even fish within Sosúa Bay's placid waters. Indeed, there would be settlers who disdained farm work and spent the bulk of their time enjoying the warm tropical weather sunbathing at Sosúa beach. Joseph Rosen and others of his team had scoured the island looking for appropriate properties on which to resettle the refugees. Some of the properties that Rosen's team had surveyed proved to be less than desirable; however, the Sosúa tract held some promise. It had some cultivable land that the UFC had previously utilized as a banana plantation, and some very basic infrastructure. The American analysts, under Rosen's direction "explored lands, half of which Trujillo owned, that Dominican officials offered for settlement [that was] suitable for settlement of more than 28,000 families.

Because of the difficulties of starting new settlements and uncertainties about which crops settlers would produce, they recommended starting with a modest pilot project.”² Among the scholars who have written about Sosúa, there exist slight discrepancies in the data including the size of the plot. Some scholars such as Bruman listed the size of the settlement at 27,000 acres, while others such as Kaplan and Wells have pegged the acreage at 26,000. For the sake of consistency we use the figure of 26,000 acres because it is the figure most often used. Joseph Rosen’s analysts had, in all probability, located better plots for the establishment of refugee settlements, however, the sway of Trujillo, and the fact that he had ownership of the Sosúa property, dictated that Rosen choose Sosúa as the site for the Republic’s first agricultural settlement of Jewish political refugees.

The Sosúa site proved to have just a fraction of its land fit for cultivation. It had rocky outcrops and a lack of water, two obstacles to be dealt with should the settlement thrive. James Rosenburg, Rosen’s partner and the president of DORSA, incorporated in New York in December 1939, negotiated with Trujillo for the property. DORSA had as its mission the financing of the Jewish settlement at Sosúa. Together with other Jewish philanthropies such as the Joint, and the Agro-Joint, or the American Jewish Joint Agricultural Organization, DORSA collected funds and made studies of possible settlement sites. Rosenburg did not want to accept the property as a gift from Trujillo, insisting instead on purchasing it. The dictator claimed that he purchased the property from the United Fruit Company after the company had abandoned the former banana plantation. “Trujillo had allegedly bought the land from the United Fruit Company. He maintained that it had cost him \$56,000...that he had put another \$10,000 into it, but offered the land with buildings on any terms.”³ The historian Allen Wells, in his monograph *Tropical Zion, General Trujillo, F.D.R., and the Jews of Sosúa*, has stated that Trujillo had

purchased the property from the U.F.C. for the modest sum of \$50,000. The international company had sold the property to Trujillo “in appreciation for the protection he afforded when he was head of the army.”⁴ However, Trujillo had no intention of turning the plot into agricultural land and looked to turning Sosúa into a cattle ranch.⁵ According to Metz, “Trujillo had originally obtained the lands that were to become Sosúa in an ‘irregular way.’ The foreign impression was that he donated lands to Jews at Sosúa, whereas, according to the ‘Dominican version,’ Trujillo had inexpensively purchased the properties under United Fruit Company pressure and then sold them at a significant profit in cash and stock to DORSA. What is certain is that Trujillo collected from DORSA one million dollars for this land.”⁶ However, in a letter from James Rosenberg addressed to ‘His Excellency, Rafael L. Trujillo’, dated June 25, 1951, more than a decade after its founding, Rosenberg gave thanks to the President for the gift of land at Sosúa. “Never, as long as I live, will I forget the day when I received your letter at Sosúa in which you gave our Association your land now occupied by the settlers. Faithfully yours, James N. Rosenberg.”⁷



Fig. 2: View of Sosúa Bay. *Source:* Post Card, Private Collection of. Stephen Bell, Ph.D.

This is not the first reference that Rosenberg makes regarding the Sosúa lands as being a gift from Trujillo to DORSA. In another piece of correspondence from Rosenberg to ‘His Excellency, Generalísimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Dominican Republic’ and dated February 8, 1957, Rosenberg praised Trujillo for his “noble gift of the Sosúa property.”⁸ The friendship that developed between Rosenberg and Trujillo began much earlier, as is evidenced in a letter to Trujillo from Rosenberg dated May 20, 1940, almost two years after the international conference at Évian les Bains. Rosenberg addressed Trujillo as “My Dear Generalísimo,” and thanked him for “your service to the cause of humanity in these dark and tragic hours.”⁹ The two men were to become more than just collaborators; they became close friends and looked to each other for advice, diversion and guidance. The geographers Richard Symanski and Nancy Burley, in their 1973 paper published in the *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*; state that the purchase price of the land at Sosúa was \$100,000 in stock in DORSA.¹⁰ Then again, Rosenberg and Rosen did not want to accept the lands at Sosúa as a gift, but preferred that Trujillo exchange the land for a fixed amount of stock in DORSA. It was agreed upon that the Trujillo would be given shares which had a value of approximately \$100,000 U.S.D., in spite of his desire to present the land at Sosúa to DORSA as a gift without any strings attached. Rosenberg’s *Diary I* has details of the negotiations leading up to the signing of the contract that transferred the title of the property to DORSA in 1940. The negotiations transpired over a period of weeks with some of them taking place over cocktails at one of Trujillo’s many parties. Indeed, Rosenberg’s diary is replete with personal observations of these lively assemblies. Reading it one is left with a mental picture of elegant balls, luncheons and official state dinners. Then again, Trujillo had a reputation as a social carouser and loved to be at the center of attention.

Rosenburg wanted to avoid any negative perception that would certainly accompany any gift of Dominican property to DORSA. Both Rosen and Rosenberg wanted to foster an image of independence, that the Jewish refugees were not a charity case looking for free handouts and were able to stand on their own. It was widely believed that the Jew abhorred physical labor of any type, preferring the urban environs to the slow, seasonal rhythms of rural farms. Trujillo's sale of the Sosúa property would give the Jewish refugees the opportunity to prove that they were a hardy folk who could withstand the privations that came with an agricultural and rural life. Long periods of isolation and hard work were preferable to the alternative of imprisonment and certain death at the hands of the hated Nazis. Again, Trujillo wanted to allow only those refugees with an agricultural background into the Dominican Republic. A consensus was reached between Trujillo and DORSA which called for only strong and able young males and couples to begin the settlement at Sosúa. Indeed, many of the refugees who sought visas to the Dominican Republic "had no interest in working on less than fertile land [and] lacked the skills, inclination or physical capacity for farm work. Most refugees could not transform themselves into plausible farmers."¹¹ The recruitment of refugees with an agricultural background proved to be almost impossible. El Generalísimo Trujillo relaxed his previous stipulations which called for settlers with agricultural skill sets, writing that "no settler should become a financial burden on the state."¹² One refugee couple, who wished to immigrate to the Dominican Republic from their temporary residence in London, was told by an American, Solomon Trone, who "came to sign up people willing to settle in Sosúa that he could arrange for anybody willing to go to Sosúa to be released. In spite of their total lack of agricultural skills, the couple was told by one who had already made the journey to Sosúa that "Nobody in Sosúa knows anything. You just start applying for a place."¹³

The Rosenberg and Rosen Partnership: Past Experience in the U.S.S.R.

Rosen had a well-established track record regarding the founding of Jewish agricultural settlements, and the academic credentials to allow him access to the checkbooks of Jewish philanthropies and donors. Born in Moscow in 1877, Rosen came to America in 1903, landing in New York virtually penniless. Rosen worked at several different odd jobs to feed, clothe and house himself. He eventually went west in search of better opportunities, and found employment at a farm in Lansing, Michigan, where he worked for two years. In 1905, Rosen enrolled in the Michigan Agricultural College-now Michigan State University in East Lansing, as a special student. During his pursuit of an education at the school he worked as an assistant at the college library, and also wrote several articles on American agriculture for different Russian publications.¹⁴ Rosen wrote ten ‘comprehensive studies’ of American agriculture which totaled over 1,300 pages, which helped him earn his Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture in 1908. In that same year Rosen moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, and became a U.S. citizen on December 30, 1909. Rosen was, by then, an expert on American farming techniques and technology, knowledge that would serve him well in his capacity as an agronomist. Indeed, after Rosen had closed the Minneapolis office in 1914 and moved to New Jersey, he became an agronomist and principal at the Baron de Hirsch Agricultural School located at Woodbine. Rosen later resigned his position at the Agricultural School and moved to New York where he became the U.S. representative for a St. Petersburg bank.¹⁵ In the early 1920s Rosen traveled back to his native Russia as a member of the United States’ American Relief Administration, headed by the future U.S. President Herbert Hoover. The team assisted the Russians during the massive country-wide famine of 1919-1922. In Russia Rosen served as head of the Jewish Joint Distribution Service. It was in this capacity that Rosen ‘got his feet wet’ as an administrator of

the Jewish philanthropy. Hoover had nothing but fine praise for Rosen writing that he was a fine personality and superb administrator.¹⁶ Rosen later teamed up with his future partner Rosenberg, to administer Jewish settlement schemes in the Ukraine and the neighboring Crimean Peninsula.

Rosen's partner, James Rosenberg, was the business side of DORSA. Trained as a corporate attorney practicing in New York, Rosenberg was the chairman of the Agro-Joint, a Jewish philanthropy that channeled funds to various projects. Rosenberg was the grandson of a German rabbi who had immigrated to Pittsburgh. The Rosenberg family had moved to New York when James was an impressionable youngster. His mother and father had enrolled James in the progressive Society for Ethical Culture, "founded in 1876 to promote the advancement of social justice."¹⁷ Wells describes the mission of the Society as "one that was rooted in the intellectual mastery of nature, the glorification of life in art and with its consecration in morality."¹⁸ This grounding in ethics was to serve the future attorney well, guiding him in the decision making processes that occupied his professional career. Rosenberg later entered a 'Waspish' private boarding school before his acceptance into Columbia Law School, then considered among the very best universities in the United States¹⁹ After graduating from law school at Columbia University, New York, Rosenberg set about on the path to success as a corporate bankruptcy attorney, a profession which was soon to provide him with the funds and means to do charitable work. In truth, James Rosenberg was the quintessential American success story. A grandson of immigrants who arrived in America without the safety network of family and friends, he became widely successful in his chosen profession as a lawyer. Rosenberg's dogged determination served him well as he rose through the ranks of the corporate world as a young and brash attorney to become a member of what Wells termed a 'sophisticated and elite group.'²⁰

Joseph Rosen and James Rosenberg joined forces in the early 1920's to assist the Russian Government in resettling of Jews in the Crimea and Ukraine as agriculturalists. This experience gave them a firm grounding in the nuts and bolts of starting and running agricultural settlements. The estimates of Jewish refugees who were resettled in the Crimean Peninsula and the Ukraine during the years 1924-1938 differ among the available sources. Kaplan uses the figure of 250,000, who ultimately cultivated three million acres, and also imported approximately 1,000 American made tractors.²¹ Wells gives slightly different figures, pegging the refugees at upwards of 150,000 Jews, and the land at nearly two million acres. The amount of money that the Joint earmarked for the project was the astronomical sum of seventeen million dollars. The project was vast by any stretch of the imagination. The valuable experience that Rosenberg and Rosen gained through the Russian settlement scheme was crucial, and provided a model for the Dominican settlement at Sosúa.

The Crimea/Ukraine model that was developed by Rosen, and later put into effect at Sosúa, was based on a three-part plan: crop diversification, new 'superior' technology, and cooperative division of land, labor and resources. Rosen firmly believed that this plan could help transform the Jews from a parasitic bunch of rootless wanderers into productive members of society through the cultivation of land.²² Superior U.S. farm machinery, such as the tractor, translated into more acreage that could be put to use; and the cooperative nature of the settlements meant that all members could share the costs of fertilizers, seeds, and new equipment. The division of labor was in the main determined by gender, men doing the heavy work such as the plowing and clearing of fields, the women cooking, planting, sewing and caring for the kids. There were doubts, however, that the Crimea program would succeed at all. Rosenberg summed up most succinctly his thoughts regarding the project: "The Crimean scheme

had ended in ‘utter, complete, black tragedy.’²³ Again, the political scientist Allan L. Kagedan argued that the Crimea plan was one that seemed to have little chance for success. Many people that were involved in the project believed in the “clear likelihood that the scheme would fail.” The majority of Jews were not, in the main, people of the land but urbanites mostly involved in some form of commerce. Indeed, Kagedan, writing in the academic journal *Jewish Social Studies*, quotes Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, the Lubavitcher Rebbe who reminded the JDC in March 1928 “that agriculture is an economic branch which is foreign to the Jews who are neither physically nor spiritually adapted to it.” Kagedan was aware that “not all Jews would transform themselves into farmers, many would abandon the land in short order.”²⁴ The employment profile of the refugees was heavily weighted towards the professional ranks with very few of them having had any background or experience in agriculture. Yet the ultimate success of the Crimean and Ukrainian settlements gave both men high hopes of a repeat performance at distant Sosúa.

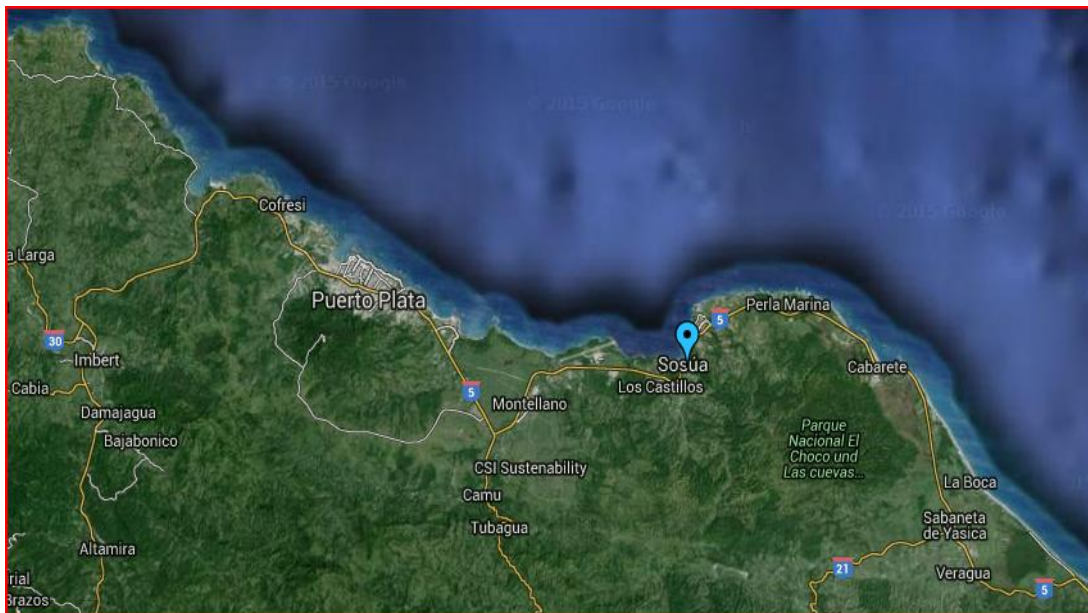


Fig. 3: Satellite Map with View of Sosúa and Puerto Plata. *Source:* Google Maps

A Change in U.S. Foreign Policy: Receivership, Sugar, and the Good Neighbor Policy

The Rosenberg/Rosen partnership endured throughout the 1920's and 1930's culminating in the founding of Sosúa in the Dominican Republic. Rosenberg drew up the documents of incorporation for DORSA in New York during December of 1939, with himself as President and Rosen as Vice President. Trujillo was anxious to get the project up and running as soon as feasibly possible. The dictator was in international hot water for the mass murder of Haitians in October of 1937. The Parsley Massacre, in Spanish *El Corte*, was a stain on Dominican history and needed to be reconciled before the tiny Caribbean nation would again be respected on the world's stage. Trujillo needed to remain in the good graces of the United States, its giant neighbor to the north, chief trading partner and principal benefactor. The dictates of the Good Neighbor policy of the United States provided that the U.S. not interfere in the affairs of its neighbors and satellite states. This foreign policy was central to F.D.R.'s presidency and "meant that the United States emphasized cooperation and trade rather than military force to maintain stability in the hemisphere."²⁵

The Good Neighbor Policy also gave Trujillo free reign to rule as he pleased, without the fear of further economic sanctions or military intervention from the United States. The Dominican Republic had been subject to crippling economic sanctions since the U.S. took control of the Dominican Republic's customs house. This was done to secure payment for its debt to bondholders. The receivership was a sore spot that severely strained relations between the two countries, and was something that El Generalísimo wanted to resolve immediately in favor of his economically strapped nation. Indeed, in 1905 the United States announced that it would "guarantee the territorial integrity of the Dominican Republic [and] assume responsibility for customs house collections...using 55% of receipts to pay outstanding obligations, turning over the remainder for Dominican governmental expenditures"²⁶ This policy was eventually

overturned on March 31 1941, and with its abolition the Dominican Republic now, after a long, humiliating thirty six years, finally controlled its domestic finances. Yet another point of contention involved the importation of Dominican sugar into the United States and its territories. Trujillo desperately wanted the U.S. to increase its import quota of sugar produced in the Dominican Republic, the U.S. instead favoring Cuba and Puerto Rico over the Dominican Republic. The dictator lobbied James Rosenberg for help in providing representation in Washington D.C.. Rosenberg could only promise Trujillo to do what he could to advance the Dominican cause in the U.S. press, thereby avoiding any possible conflict of interest that could derail efforts to reverse the crippling stranglehold that the sugar quota imposed on the Caribbean island nation's economy. The plan was to create a favorable public relations spin via press releases and the like, which would cast Trujillo in a positive light.

Rosenberg goes into some detail in his Diary I regarding exactly what Trujillo wanted from the United States: the abolishment of the Receivership Convention, and an increase of the U.S. sugar import quota. This would then allow the Dominican Republic to increase its sugar exports to its chief foreign market and infuse much needed hard currency into the nation's coffers. Trujillo knew the value of having an attorney as well connected as Rosenberg firmly in his corner. Rosenberg notes that an American named Mr. Rickards who had been "working down here first for the Government and then the sugar institute of which he is now head, his title being "Secretary-General," paid him a visit on behalf of El Generalísimo."Mr.Rickards came around with heaps of papers, documents, records, etc. that Trujillo had sent him with...regarding the Convention, regarding sugar, regarding economic or legal problems confronting the country; that the General wanted me to have the facts." On one of Rosen's and Rosenberg's visits to the Generalísimo, the shrewd New York attorney relates that "Trujillo handed me the memorandum

and said he would like to talk to me about it later.”²⁷ The memorandum presented to Rosenberg spelled out the issues that Trujillo wanted resolved. Rosenberg promised the dictator that he would do everything in his power to effect a positive outcome through the use of politically connected people, mainly lobbyists, who Rosenberg knew well. Rosenberg was adamant that Trujillo needed elite representation in Washington, and told Trujillo that he would make recommendations as to who the Generalísimo should use to represent the Dominican Republic. The U.S. Receivership of Dominican Customs had long been a source of embarrassment to Trujillo, the nation, and its people. Rosenberg noted in his diary that “...this interference with [Dominican] sovereignty was a constant irritation,” and continued “1. There are two main problems—sugar---Convention...It would seem to me important that the Dominican Government ought to make itself heard,” and following this line of reasoning Rosenberg continued “because of the many legal, economic and problems as to the Convention, you need able counsel in Washington. You should also see to it that the American public understands something of these problems which confront you.” In spite of Trujillo’s insistence that Rosenberg represent the Dominican Republic’s interests in Washington D.C., Rosenberg bowed out by telling Trujillo that “it was utterly out of the question for me to be the lawyer.” Trujillo pressed Rosenberg to select the lawyer with Rosenberg again turning down the dictator’s request. Rosenberg would, however, recommend a lawyer should Trujillo send the ‘right man’ up to the States.²⁸

Tweaking the Demography: Trujillo’s ‘Final Solution’

Yet another reason that explains Trujillo’s magnanimous offer at Évian was his desire to ‘whiten’, in Spanish *blanquear*, the Dominican populace through miscegenation. Trujillo believed that bringing Jews to his country would prompt inter-breeding between Jews and

Dominicans, thereby creating a new, whiter breed of Dominican. This was an obsession of Trujillo and the Dominican people at large. The events of El Corte had generated world-wide, negative press, and prompted Trujillo to scramble to repair his damaged image through, among other means, diplomatic maneuvering and slick public relations campaigns. It is estimated that as many as 20,000 Haitians had lost their lives to roving bands of thuggish Dominicans, including some military officers and soldiers.²⁹ It is ironic that sugar was at the root of the massacre, as it was also the cause of Dominican embarrassment on the world's stage. The intensive labor involved in harvesting sugarcane was somehow beneath many Dominicans. However, Haitians gladly provided the necessary labor, which further fed the animosity that had always existed between the two neighbors. Public opinion in the Dominican Republic was that Haitians were taking jobs from needy Dominicans. This prompted Trujillo to unleash a fury, El Corte, which lasted several days and nights, with his blood thirsty troops brutally killing thousands of innocents. The end result was the reinforcement of the belief that the Dominicans were a different lighter skinned people than their black neighbors to the west. Trujillo's image, at least on the domestic side, was elevated to an almost cult-hero status, this despite international condemnation of El Corte. This 'ethnic cleansing' was a horrific crime against humanity that had little effect on Trujillo the dictator, who had promised just months before Évian that he would rid his country of the hated Haitians, once and for all. The UCLA historian Robin Derby referred to El Corte and other acts of terror perpetrated by the feared dictator and his henchmen as "highly public episodes of grotesque brutality...that could include chilling spectacles."³⁰ Then again, the Haitian massacre was widely publicized throughout the world. According to Metz, "Trujillo's belief in white superiority, led him to formulate a 'final solution' of his own, concerning the Haitian problem." Trujillo also encouraged the wholesale killing of Haitians within the

Dominican borders. It was speculated that Trujillo “as an obsessive Negrophobe, wanted to free the nation of blacks, and, simultaneously, wipe out his own Haitian roots. He was a mulatto proud of his white ancestry, despising his dark Haitian inheritance.”³¹ Rosenberg referred to the unwritten Dominican policy, literally the tweaking of the demographic profile in favor of whites as, “one of Trujillo’s chief desires.”³² It was no secret that the dictator favored whites over the despised and hated blacks, and looked to the Sosúa project as a means of putting this quasi-policy into motion. In fact, Trujillo was a mulatto whose mother was of Haitian descent, and was known to use makeup to hide his blackness. Rosenberg, a New York attorney, Jew, and Renaissance man, did not seem to be the least bit fazed by the events of October 1937, calling Trujillo his friend. The Parsley Massacre was a stain on the Dominican psyche that wounded the national pride, yet was soon forgotten in light of war breaking out in Europe. The mass exodus out of Europe of Jews, Gypsies and other unwanted peoples created by the ascendancy of the National Socialists in Germany, marked the beginning of another international crisis. The great ‘panic emigration’ had begun in earnest.



Fig. 4: Map Indicating the International Border and Location of the Parsley Massacre.

Source: genocidememorialproject.wordpress.com

FDR, Evian, the Intergovernmental Committee, IGC, and President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees, PACPR: A Protective Layer of Bureaucracies

Trujillo put into motion his strategy of cultivating the goodwill and support of the United States. Then again, the Good Neighbor policy dictated non-interference by the U.S. in the affairs of Central and South American nations, including those of the Caribbean Basin. F.D.R. basically looked the other way in regard to Trujillo's repression and violence perpetrated against Dominican nationals and Haitians alike when he proposed the Conference at Évian.

The main purpose of Évian was to find solutions to the looming humanitarian crisis occasioned by the restrictions on the Jewish population by the Nazis. F.D.R. used his power as leader of the free world to pressure the nations in attendance to accept the political refugees then fleeing the Nazis. Thirty two nations were invited to the summit at Évian les Bains, an idyllic lakeside town on the French side of Lake Geneva, soon to be the site of Trujillo's surprising announcement. Of all the nations in attendance the Dominican Republic was the only one which offered the political refugees a safe haven. Trujillo's representatives at Evian, Virgilio Trujillo Molina, diplomatic envoy to the Conference and brother of the dictator Rafael, accompanied by Salvador E. Paredes, country representative to the League of Nations, made the formal proposal to accept Jewish refugees as settlers, with the natural rights afforded Dominican citizens.³³ Rosenberg had made acceptance of the offer contingent upon the Dominican Republic's recognition of certain basic rights. The Jewish settlers must have equal protection under the law, or the deal was off the table.

The initial Dominican offer of accepting some Jewish refugees was later expanded to include up to 100,000 refugees. This was presented to the Intergovernmental Committee on Political Refugees in London in August of 1938 shortly after the conference at Évian had ended.

The United States was represented in London by Myron Taylor, elected as permanent president of the IGC by FDR in 1938. Taylor and the other members of the IGC were charged with the task of devising a workable plan to aid Jewish refugees fleeing Germany and Austria on the heels of total war. This entailed finding safe havens away from the violence that was gripping much of Europe.³⁴ FDR was kept informed of the crisis through, among other agencies, the President's Advisory Committee on Political Refugees, or PACPR, chaired by the career diplomat James G. McDonald, former head of the League of Nations Commission for Refugees from Germany. The able George Warren, who had experience helping political refugees through his work with the American Red Cross during World War I, was McDonald's right hand man. Formed in April 1938, PACPR consisted of "nine distinguished Americans," who functioned as a coordinating committee that assisted private agencies helping the refugees. Other members of PACPR included "prominent charities and church organizations," among them agents of the JDC.³⁵ The committee was, in some respects, a protective screen used to deflect criticism away from the president. It answered to Cordell Hull and Sumner Welles at the Department of State, among other U.S. agencies. FDR was not without his detractors, some of whom felt that the president was not doing enough to help the Jewish cause. However, effective stratification of certain bureaucratic agencies provided FDR with a layer of protection, shielding him from his political enemies, both domestic and international. Hull and Welles at the State Department did most everything they could to stymie PACPR's efforts aimed at helping Jewish refugees find safe havens in North and Latin America by doing nothing. PACPR was also responsible for coordinating efforts to obtain emergency visitor's visas for endangered political and intellectual refugees from Nazi-occupied territories. The historian and Israeli journalist Shlomo Shafir blames the inaction of Hull and Welles on the "misuse of the security psychosis by the

Department of State which was eager to prevent the admission [into the U.S. and Latin America] of refugees.” Despite the intervention of a sympathetic Eleanor Roosevelt, who without any shadow of a doubt had the president’s ear, FDR refused to challenge the position of the State Department.³⁶

The Choice of a Suitable Location: Sosúa or Alternative Sites

Trujillo provided the first group of refugees with his own land at Sosúa in the northwest of the island, some 26,000 plus acres of prime coastal land. He also sweetened the deal with an offer of 50,000 additional acres located in the Cordilleras Dominicanas to serve the Jewish settlers as a mountain retreat.³⁷ The tract at Sosúa also included existing structures and twenty-four houses worth approximately \$100,000. The fact that Sosúa had some existing infrastructure and buildings figured prominently in Rosen and Rosenberg’s decision to choose it over other tracts of land that were also available. Indeed, Rosenberg and his team had been considering other Latin American countries for settlement schemes, however “my first love for a large settlement project is the Dominican Republic because it made the first offer at Evian and because I am so greatly impressed by things like irrigation” Then again, the team was looking at properties in “Venezuela, which wants settlers, and Bolivia is taking them on a considerable scale.”³⁸ Indeed, FDR had instructed members of the Refugee Economic Corporation, known as REC, and PACPR to search every corner of the world for suitable locations on which to settle refugees. However, the vast tract at Sosúa won over both Rosen and Rosenberg, both of whom began the difficult task of planning the nascent refugee colony.³⁹

Project “M”: The UCLA Connection and Top Secret U.S. Efforts to Aid the Resettlement of Political Refugees

FDR's geographer Isaiah Bowman had done some preliminary studies of land in other Latin American countries during the pre-war and war years, 1935-1945, with the aim of finding adequate tracts of land for agricultural settlements. A widely rumored racist and anti-Semite, Bowman doubted the ability of Jewish people to become agricultural pioneers wherever they might be settled. Bowman had worked with the anthropologist Henry Field on FDR's Project "M" [for migration] which was a panel of some of the brightest minds of the time to assess settlement opportunities in countries not directly involved in the war.⁴⁰ The assemblage included anthropologists, geographers, cartographers and climate scientists among other related academic disciplines. Roosevelt was keenly aware of the impending crisis regarding displaced peoples due to World War II. The president had charged the top secret project with finding lands that were suited for colonization in virtually every area of the world. F.D.R. wanted to avoid any criticism that he was not doing enough to help the Jewish refugees find suitable, safe havens in which to permanently settle. Bowman had the requisite background and experience that F.D.R. wanted in the person whose job was to assess potential areas that were under consideration for settlement and report the findings directly to the president. A graduate of Harvard (class of 1905) with an advanced degree in geography from Yale (Ph.D. 1909) Bowman was Roosevelt's obvious choice as a presidential advisor on geographic matters of national and international importance. Indeed, Roosevelt had, among other reasons, chosen Bowman to head Project "M" after having read Bowman's *Limits of Land Settlements* and *The Pioneer Fringe*, both of which were comprehensive studies of frontiers the world over.⁴¹ Bowman's sterling credentials were put to good use by Roosevelt who, during his long administration from 1933-1945, would call on Bowman to compile geographic surveys of possible sites that might have the capacity to accommodate the droves of refugees envisioned. Bowman chose the expert consultants who in

March and April of 1939 investigated seven sites around the Dominican Republic. The team included a crop specialist, a forester, and a soil specialist, who, not surprisingly, passed on selecting Sosúa because of its lack of land suitable for plowing and planting. The consultants did find Sosúa “suitable for cattle and dairy production,” something that would be realized in the years after the first settlers set foot on the land.⁴²

Henry Bruman was one of the Project “M” geographers, and the author of a lengthy report on possible settlement locations for the project that amounted to almost three hundred pages. Bruman had an interest in Sosúa and its capacity to absorb and sustain refugees. In a letter from Bruman to Dr. Maurice B. Hexter of DORSA, dated August 3, 1953, Bruman related that he had been interested in the Sosúa settlement for almost ten years and that he had visited it for a week in October 1951. Bruman had plans to write an article for “one of our geographic periodicals,” which was to be a “factual appraisal of the project in terms of its initial promise both to the refugees and to the Dominican Republic.” Bruman requested from Hexter copies of maps and photographs of Sosúa, as well as written reports which he planned on including in his article.⁴³ While Bruman was in Sosúa he had met with the first settler to become its director, Alfred Rosenzweig, who availed Bruman of his services. Bruman compiled his observations and opinions into several field books which are archived at the University of California, Los Angeles, and used by the present writer to inform certain elements of this paper.

Sosúa: An Assessment

Estimates vary as to the size of the property at Sosúa; it comprised at least 26,000 acres of partly arable land located among the coastal lowlands in the northwest of the Dominican Republic. Trujillo bought the land from the United Fruit Company in 1937 for the modest sum of \$50,000 dollars, and claimed that he had invested an additional \$10,000 in improvements.

However, Wells makes the claim that Trujillo “never invested a centavo in Sosúa; he believed the philanthropy [the Joint] was flush.”⁴⁴ Rosen and Rosenberg thought the world of the property, both men calling it the most beautiful piece of property they had ever seen. Indeed, Rosenberg waxed poetic in one of his flowery descriptions of the property.

I admit that I am a bit of an enthusiast, but I am trying to measure my words and not overstate. I have seen many beautiful places [but] I have never seen a lovelier spot on earth than this. The brilliance of the waters, the delightful climate, the beautiful white beach, the really charming home that has been erected here, the brilliant sky, the gorgeous purple mountains, is pretty damn swell. Maybe you can find better places but I have never seen them.⁴⁵

Again, in a telegram to the Generalísimo, Rosenberg writes “I am delighted with Sosúa which is one of the most beautiful places I have ever visited. This trip is a wonderful experience.”⁴⁶ However, Richard Symansky and Nancy Burley have pointed out that the property at Sosúa was not first on a list of areas recommended for colonization, in spite of Rosen and Rosenberg’s glowing reports. Symanski and Burley continue to list the physical deficiencies of the Sosúa property, citing its “low rainfall, shallow soils and rocky terrain, containing sizeable areas of swamp, and it was estimated to have no more than 500 hectares of plowable land.”⁴⁷

Since each hectare is equal to approximately 2.47 acres, this represented just a fraction of the property’s estimated 26,000 acres, or 1,235 acres of ‘plowable’ land on which to farm.⁴⁸ The land was parceled out to the settlers in two hectare plots to be used for the maintenance of the settler family, and thirty hectare cooperative plots to be worked by the group to which the family or group belonged. There were stands of forest that included hardwoods which were ideal for building purposes, and among other things, the making of charcoal. Yet Sosúa’s beauty was its

real ‘drawing power,’ regardless of its perceived deficiencies. Sosúa had its downsides but beauty was not among them. Indeed, Bruman found Sosúa “beautiful... [and] whose beach is a countrywide attraction and serves both settlers and visitors as a welcome source of recreation.”⁴⁹

The existing infrastructure at Sosúa included buildings that could be put to immediate use as temporary housing by the first settlers. It had electricity, phone lines and a 50,000 gallon reservoir. In addition the parcel had ‘miles of fencing’ and “sufficient accommodations to temporarily house at least 150 people.”⁵⁰ In a diary compiled during his first stay at Sosúa, Rosenberg questioned Rosen regarding the existing infrastructure: Dr. Rosen, where we are now [Sosúa] is there running water? Yes. In all the houses. Is there electric light? Yes. Telephone connections? Yes. This meant that the first settlers to arrive would have their basic living necessities in place. Rosenberg, planning ahead to when the first refugees arrived, thought that the building would serve the settlement as a “community center and to some extent would furnish living quarters at the beginning.”⁵¹ Once the first pioneers were safely ensconced, new construction could begin. There were houses, barns, corrals and roads to build, as well as forest to be cleared in preparation of the land for planting. Then again, the Sosúa tract was not the best of possible sites for agricultural settlement in the Dominican Republic. During the inspection of other properties around the island Rosen and his team had the opportunity to visit other established farms. Yet Rosen was, somehow, stuck on the idea of Sosúa as the ideal place to start the ‘experiment,’ and listed for Rosenberg the benefits of Sosúa. To start with Rosen acknowledged that “the soil here is not as good as in Catarey or Fundación,” two sites that Rosen and Rosenberg had inspected during their trip around the island. However, Rosen remained steadfast in his estimation of the superiority of Sosúa for settlement. Rosenberg listened intently while Rosen gave the reasons why:

1. Four seasons in the year instead of two; Two dry; two rainy, with- much more fluctuations and changes in temperature, which from the point of view of climatization, Sosúa is a tremendous advantage. 2. The people coming here would be in a position to engage in a kind of farming they are used to, such as keeping cows, keeping chickens, raising vegetables. They would not have to immediately cultivate bananas, cocoa, coffee, all of which require special technique and special knowledge. This could be developed gradually after we have trained the people.⁵²

Rosen based his estimate on his team's brief inspection of the property at Sosúa, and his confidence that the coming refugees had prior experience as agriculturalists. This was not the case as most of the Jewish refugees who were fortunate enough to have made it to the relative safety of Sosúa had no prior experience as agriculturalists.

Finding the Right Fit; Choosing the First Pioneers

Choosing possible settlers among the refugees was meant to weed out those who lacked agricultural experience. However, this was not the case as many would be immigrants simply distorted the truth during the interview process. The historian Kai Schoenhals notes that "Trujillo's government and DORSA jointly worked out the criteria that were to be applied in the selection of the Jewish settlers for Sosúa. These pioneers were expected to be agricultural workers (or at least people accustomed to hard physical labor) between the ages of 20 and 35; 90 percent were to be bachelors." These criteria proved impossible to meet. Most of Central Europe's Jews had been barred from owning any land and, therefore, had no agricultural experience. Indeed, the majority of those chosen to be settlers originated from the cosmopolitan urban centers of Berlin and Vienna. Among these sophisticated urbanites were "textile merchants, artists, cobblers, carpenters tailors, lawyers, import-export traders, printers,

construction workers and engineers.”⁵³ This assembly of urban trades made up what Jonathan Dekel-Chen and Israel Bartal refer to as the New Jew, those that would be connected to the land as agriculturalists in a new world order occasioned by the disaster of World War II.⁵⁴ The difficulty in finding qualified people with the proper background in farming is best illustrated by the story of Solomon Trone. Trone was sent to Europe as one of several recruitment agents for DORSA and soon realized that he would have to tailor the requirements set by DORSA and El Generalísimo for would-be settlers. The minimum experience that the Jewish refugees needed to demonstrate was, now, only a familiarity with hard labor and, if possible some agricultural experience. Trujillo believed that the Jews could raise Dominican living standards by the introduction of new techniques in regards to agriculture and commerce, hence his easing of the strict requirement that all prospective settlers have at least some agricultural experience. In Europe Trone noted that recruiting the right Jews ‘required extreme effort’ so the easing of certain requirements would benefit both DORSA and Trujillo.⁵⁵ Trone was tasked with the impossible. He could not find the type of people that Rosen wanted as the first Sosúa settlers. Indeed, Rosen wanted “...groups of agricultural trainees from Germany and Austria who have known each other and have learned to work together” This represented an estimated two-percent of the total Jewish population of both countries. The prospective pioneers had an application to fill out as well, with the questions geared toward past agricultural experience, or ‘prior manual training’ in the words of Wells. The innocuous sounding ‘Application for Admission to the Dominican Republic’ had “straightforward clauses [that also] laid out the philanthropy’s and the government’s expectations.”⁵⁶ Trone was also instructed by Rosen to be on the lookout for the ‘problem cases’ that other refugee committees attempted to foist upon DORSA. Trone had visited other countries ‘of transit’ in Europe where he toured refugee camps in search of

qualified candidates that were a fit for Rosen's, hence DORSA's, model of the ideal pioneer. On his visit to Switzerland, Trone found Jews working on government sponsored tasks such as forest clearing and road building. These Jews were precisely the type of pioneer that DORSA had wanted to begin the settlement at Sosúa, people with a sense of community and a mission to accomplish. However, Rosen and DORSA would have to make do with whatever 'material' was available, regardless of qualifications that were real or imagined. Trone's difficulties meeting these criteria were magnified when he crossed into Italy and visited a refugee camp where the conditions were "much worse than we could have imagined in our wildest dreams." Trone referred to the desperate plight of these refugees as "a tragedy which can hardly be imagined. Everyone wants to get away-where-it doesn't matter."⁵⁷ Some of these desperate refugees, the lucky ones, would eventually call Sosúa home.

Getting There: A Logistical Nightmare

Once the pioneers had been chosen to be settlers at Sosúa, the next obstacle had to be overcome: getting there. This was a logistical problem that involved extensive paperwork. Exit and entrance visas had to be obtained from the governments involved. Those who were not fortunate enough to have made it to the transit countries; France, England and Switzerland among others, would languish in dreadful anticipation of being sent back to a violent death at the hands of the Nazis in Germany. Indeed, many refugees were returned, against their will, to Nazi concentration camps where their fate was sealed. Both Kaplan and Wells have written extensively regarding the logistical issues involved in getting Jewish refugees to Sosúa. The nightmare was in the main the same encountered by all refugees fleeing Germany and the occupied countries. Many refugees chose to cross illegally-without visas or proper documentation, into the so-called countries of transit, or those which were not yet occupied by

Nazis. Some even resorted to the bribery of corrupt border officials and port authorities to obtain the necessary visas needed to enter or pass through a country of transit. Then again, the refugees were required to procure exit visas from their countries of residence and transit visas from the countries through which they would travel. Kaplan relates the narrative of one of the refugees, Ernst Hofeller, who described in detail the ‘paper chase’ involved in obtaining the necessary documents to travel to the Dominican Republic. One had to proceed ‘backwards,’ at first by getting the Dominican visa first and foremost. Then one had to get both entrance and transit visas issued by the United States, followed by those issued by Portuguese authorities. Once these travel documents were in order, one obtained the Spanish transit visa and, finally, the exit visa from French authorities. One exited France, travelled through Spain, crossed the international border into Portugal, secured entrance visas and passage on transport ships to the U.S., then obtained exit visas from there to the Dominican Republic. Refugees faced other difficulties as well, including the closing off of escape routes and the purported lack of adequate shipping to be used as transport.⁵⁸ Attacks on merchant shipping in the Atlantic by German U boats, effectively reduced the amount of shipping available to transport the refugees from European ports to Latin America. Along the uncertain journey to safety one had to be clothed, housed and fed, which proved to be most difficult for those whose assets and currency had been confiscated when they departed their ancestral homeland. The Reich Flight Tax was particularly troublesome, as it provided the Nazis with the legal means to seize property and currency. The Tax became official German policy in 1931, was extended to Austria in 1938, and put a stop to capital flight, as well as dissuading wealthy Jews from leaving both countries.

Limitations on the Settlers: Land Condition, Tropical Diseases and the Will to Work

Sosúa was known to have spotty, therefore highly variable, rainfall and was subject to frequent and punishing droughts. Indeed Symanski and Burley noted that the region had low rainfall, something that should have ruled out Sosúa as a choice for an agricultural settlement.⁵⁹ The geographer John P. Augelli has also pointed out the region's "inaccessibility and low rainfall" as a reason for the Dominican Government's increased emphasis "on both irrigation and transportation" to insure a certain degree of success for the fledgling agricultural settlements within her borders.⁶⁰ Bruman, quoting a report of Walter E. Sondheimer dated July 1944, provided a breakdown of the amount of land at the settlement site and its uses or limitations. "The total area of Sosúa property of 8,952.33 ha. is divided into a) cultivated land 294.36 ha., b) cultivable land 299.68 ha., c) pasture 2,378.51 ha., d) agricultural land suitable for reclaiming 750.00 ha., e) land useful for semi-urban settlement and industrial purposes 284.63 ha., 3. forest, swamp and the other lands reclaimable only in spots, 4,945.15 ha." for a total of 8,952.33 hectares.⁶¹ The existing reservoir, however, was sourced with water that "originated in a polluted stream... [and] carried all the pollution to be expected from a tropical river used as a laundry and as a bath for man and beast."⁶² This was problematic as hygienic sources of water were crucial to the success of the endeavor. The tropical swampland also represented a health hazard as mosquito and water-borne illnesses were rampant. Indeed, "malaria was ubiquitous throughout the country; its incidence was higher along the coast."⁶³

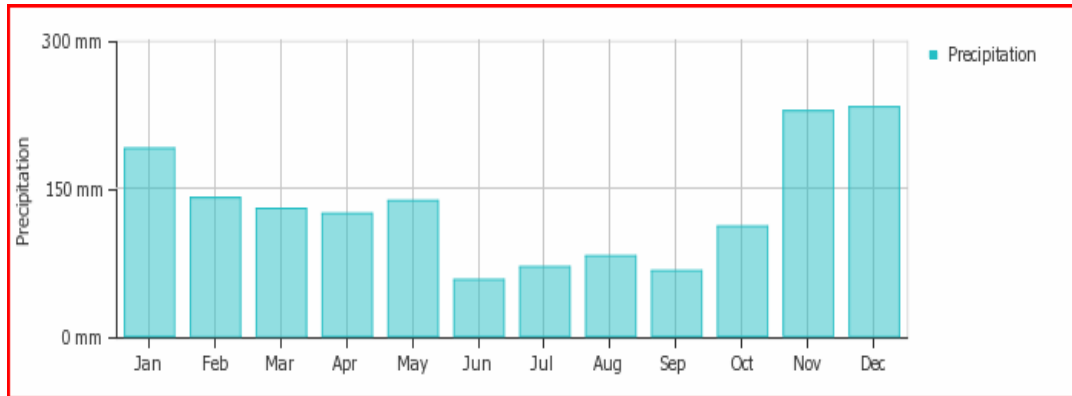


Fig. 5: Histogram of Annual Precipitation Totals at Sosúa. *Source:* weather-and-climate.com

Sosúa’s location in the Caribbean tropics put the European settlers at high risk for diseases not encountered in Europe. The settlers lacked built-in immunities to the new, exotic diseases of the tropical regions. Indeed, the historian Simone Gigliotti, quoting a 1942 report titled ‘Refugee Settlement in the Dominican Republic’ compiled by members of the widely known Washington D.C. based think tank The Brookings Institute, claimed that by the end of the colony’s first year there were 40 cases of malaria.⁶⁴ This represents a high percentage of pioneers infected by the potentially fatal tropical disease. Wells quotes another source, Andrew Balfour, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, who claimed that “the hot and humid tropics are not suited for white colonization and never will be” regardless of just how adaptable white people may be. The advancements in the field of tropical medicine may have produced new medications such as quinine, used to immunize against, and prevent the spread of malaria, yet “whites in the tropics [are like] a wilting plant that has been carried beyond its natural habitat.”⁶⁵ Even with the development of medicine and treatment regimens, tropical diseases such as yellow fever, hookworm, malaria and dysentery remained a real and constant threat to the Jewish settlers. Kaplan notes that “Visiting experts found the health conditions at the settlement ‘good’ with only 40 cases of malaria reported up to July 1941 and no dysentery or typhoid fever.” The health clinic at Sosúa was then treating upwards of 40 people daily for

diseases such as malaria and gastro-intestinal ailments. Then again, “Malaria appeared to be the worst health issue, although venereal disease and tuberculosis would also present challenges.”⁶⁶ The Illustrious Generalísimo Trujillo wanted to rid the country of the dreaded malaria and other tropical diseases, and began aggressive eradication campaigns to achieve this end. Then again, Trujillo’s vision for the future of the island included banishing malaria from its shores, thereby enhancing his ‘humanitarian image’ in the public’s eye.⁶⁷ Bruman, quoting a report dated 1950 by Alfred Rosenzweig, who was the first settler to run the colony, states that the hospital at Sosúa reported only “two new cases of malaria in 1950 against 4 in 1949.” This illustrates that Trujillo’s war on malaria had positive results for the settlers at Sosúa. Again, “at its inception in 1940, Sosúa was malaria infested, but the disease has been [by 1950] almost eliminated.” The overall physical health of the Sosuaners was “excellent, especially that of the children.”⁶⁸ There was also the assertion that people who lived in the tropical regions of the world were susceptible to ‘tropical inertia,’ which acted as a handicap and “diminished the capacity to fight off disease.” Tropical inertia was believed to weaken individual resolve thereby stripping an individual of ‘moral vigor.’ Other disorders that affected those living in the tropical regions, especially whites, were “nervous system disorders, such as insomnia, irritability, chronic fatigue, and nervous exhaustion.” These ailments, diseases and disorders, were part and parcel of life in the tropics, a life that brought out “man’s most lascivious and debased urges.”

Yet, contrary thought posited that “the white race was inherently aggressive and migratory [and] Caucasians could survive in the tropics, but only as a master race.”⁶⁹ Those colonists who embraced hard, physical labor, tailored their diet to the new, debilitating tropical climate, and “took special sanitary precautions... had a reasonable chance of adaptation to the climatic conditions.” Josef Rosen was a firm believer that physical activity was a key to

adaptation for the Jewish refugees who were, in the main, an urbanized lot. Indeed, in his optimistic opinion, “the key to success was for settlers to remain active.”⁷⁰

Sosúa had attracted malcontents despite the fairly rigorous pre-screening of settlers. Recall that both Rosenberg and Rosen had warned DORSA recruiters such as Trone, to be aware of “problem cases” that were likely to be among the potential recruits. In spite of the efforts to keep the colony free from unproductive or ‘lazy’ charity cases, some had fallen through the cracks. Known to DORSA as “nonsettlers,” they never “had any intention of becoming farmers,” which created a “combustible combination that had a pernicious effect on morale.”⁷¹ Division among the members, and inherent differences of opinion, were an inevitable consequence of life at the colony.

Life on the Farm; the Making of the “New Jew”

The life of the Jewish refugee at Sosúa was by no means an idyll. The hard work of the farmer began in earnest after a short period of adjustment that allowed the newly arrived to acclimate to the tropical climate. Indeed, the settlers were given “all of three days to get accustomed to their new surroundings.” Well noted that “For the great majority, enervating manual labor was the norm during the first year.” This included “clearing land with tractors, building and repairing roads and constructing houses.” Building houses right away meant that the settlers could leave the group barracks and move “onto homesteads as soon as possible.”⁷² The newly arrived rookies were given a brief tour of the settlement and then provided with basic supplies such as quinine pills for malaria, some work clothing, mosquito netting and bedding. According to Rosen all arrivals had to abruptly alter their habits, “particularly eating and drinking.” Yet it was the tropical climate that most concerned Rosen. The refugees were coming from the temperate climates of European countries and would inevitably suffer from the

debilitating climate which was ‘fiercely hot’ during the day. The ability of Jewish people from the cool, seasonal climate of Europe to adapt to the tropical climate of the Dominican Republic was put to the test at Sosúa and, for the most part, the settlers did adapt despite some initial difficulties. A radical alteration to the European diet was also an inevitable hurdle that would have to be overcome. Gone, at least for a while, was the bread and meat diet of the European, substituted by the ubiquitous Latin American staples: rice and beans.⁷³ Recall that the settlement’s water supply, from both the Sosúa River and wells on the property, were already polluted to the extreme. All potable water had to be at first boiled to make it safe for human consumption.

The first settlers to come to Sosúa, a small group of about ten ‘Pioneers’ were already in the capital city, Ciudad Trujillo, and were relocated to the opposite end of the island on March 16, 1940. DORSA had found them in the city “living among other new refugees eking out a living,” and transported them across the island to Sosúa.⁷⁴ The families of Jakob Weinberg, accountant, and Max Sichel, civil servant, began life as the first European Sosuaners. They were joined in April by Marec Morsél, merchant, all of whom “would serve as an unofficial welcoming committee for the first group from Europe.”⁷⁵ It is significant that all were professionals, as both DORSA and Trujillo wanted people with some degree of agricultural experience. Later that year on the 8th of May, some 37 “hapless” refugees arrived at Sosúa to begin life anew as tropical farmers. They were at first housed in barracks and divided into groups that were given names such as the ‘Swiss Group’ or the ‘Drucker Group’ that identified either their leader or their original locale. Symanski and Burley note that the land allotment was proportional to the size of the group and the “average amount was approximately 30 hectares for

each family or unmarried male within a group.” The groups were part of “communal units who were expected to grow crops sharing the work and profits equally.”⁷⁶

Individual families were given an additional two hectares that were for the exclusive use of the family. These plots which, invariably, grew crops that were familiar to the European diet such as spinach, eggplant and beets. In addition each family was given barn animals, livestock farming implements, some cash and a line of credit at the colony store. Symanski and Burley note that “a horse and mule, a number of dairy cattle, other small livestock,” were given to each family.⁷⁷ Farm implements and tools given to the settlers included the basic hoe and shovel, yet as time went by and the colony matured, machines such as the farm tractor were introduced. It should be recalled that the use of farm machinery- superior U.S. technology, was part of Rosen’s three part plan to ensure success of the colony as an agricultural concern. However, many of the novice farmers shied away from the labor necessary to get Sosúa up and running and “seem to have an inborn fear and mistrust of tools, and certainly lack all too often a pride in owning and using them.”⁷⁸

Thus the beginning of the settlement at Sosúa was indeed, a slow, steady, trial-and-error process, and a baptism by fire for those fortunate few who now called it home. DORSA sought solutions to the problems that arose, experimenting with “crops and agricultural innovations and also encouraged a mixture of projects such as animal husbandry, banana cultivation, intensive truck and garden farming, tomato crops and cash crops.”⁷⁹ Yet all efforts to establish a profitable crop-based economy failed almost from the beginning,” with construction of houses for the homesteaders, barns, schools, irrigation systems, road building and repair, continuing as the colony grew in size and importance.⁸⁰ In less than two-year’s time the colony was a functioning entity that could “boast some notable accomplishments: 60 houses, 9 dormitories, 12 shops and

warehouses, a small clinic, and a schoolhouse had been constructed.” Plots of land were ready for planting and pasturage.⁸¹ Expansion of the colony necessitated additional infrastructure that Sosúa lacked, although one should recall the reasons that Rosen chose Sosúa over other, more suitable tracts, was because it had some infrastructure already in place such as electricity and running water. The only obstacles to building new and modern infrastructure were sufficient capital and a workforce. Rosenberg in New York would press wealthy donors who were also ‘shrewd business leaders,’ for additional funding. These efforts were, for the most part, successful, considering that the donors had other equally worthy causes to support.⁸² The able and willing workforce was in the main staffed by local Dominicans. Indeed, many refugees disdained physical labor. Dominicans worked all jobs at Sosúa, particularly as domestics and farmhands, but also as builders of roads and structures. This ran counter to an agreement that each prospective settler signed before leaving Europe. The “Rules for the Establishment of the Settlement” strictly limited the employ of native workers to “cases of emergency or when the additional labor is needed during harvest time.” DORSA however, caved in to the demands of the settlers, so that whenever one needed labor he could hire local Dominicans without any repercussions from DORSA. According to Wells the local workforce was an ‘elastic and inexpensive’ source which was immediately available for hire. Certainly, there were upwards of several hundred Dominicans who worked at Sosúa at any given moment.⁸³

Relations between the natives and the refugees were at first congenial, but this friendly posture changed into a strained tolerance as time progressed. Wells noted that the divide between the two groups was sufficient to warrant one settler to write to Rosenberg complaining that “Our settlers do not behave very civilly to the working population. They consider themselves a higher race. They consider the natives peons.” In fact, “some colonists were arrogant, and believed *los*

muchachos, as they referred to them, inferior.”⁸⁴ Symanski and Burley further stated that “The Jewish view of the Dominican was that he was lazy, had little sense of investment or hard work, and multiplied much too quickly.”⁸⁵ The insularity of the colony, compounded with the language barrier, ‘perpetuated misunderstanding’ between the two. Most settlers spoke German, a few Hebrew, Yiddish and English and all had yet to learn Spanish. Aside from everything else that DORSA provided the settlers: food, lodging, and tools, was instruction in the Spanish language.⁸⁶

Entertainment at the colony took the form of the occasional movie shown in a barracks ‘theater’ at the ‘urban center’ known as El Batey. El Batey was the hub of social life at the settlement and was also home to the general store known as *El Colmado*. One would travel by horseback, burro or buggy to El Batey “to go to a dance, sponsor an occasional Dominican concert, or dine with friends.” Residents would catch up on the news, both international and national, through the colony’s bi-lingual newspaper, *The Voice of Sosúa* which, over time, was printed under several other banners. *The Voice* was a source for poetry in German and also a source for free Spanish language lessons. Settlers could check out a book at the small library which was subsidized by DORSA.⁸⁷ Communal Sunday beach outings were where the settlers could frolic and enjoy sunbathing, diving, swimming and other ocean sports. Despite its rural and isolated location, Sosúa offered plenty of diversion for those who knew how to take advantage of what was immediately at hand.

The education of children took place at Sosúa’s elementary school, at first located in a barrack and later moved to its own two room building in El Batey. The aptly named Christopher Columbus School included a kindergarten and a primary school that served both the settler and Dominican children, who “benefited from the extraordinary qualifications of their teachers.”

Many of the settlers were professionals, some of whom served as faculty. The children were taught math and science by a former surgeon, Dr. Bruck, and liberal arts instruction was done under a former professor of languages at the Sorbonne, Mr. Ferran. Religious instruction consisted of lessons in Jewish History and the Hebrew language. The polyglot settler and instructor of language for DORSA, Luis Hess, also taught language and served as the principal for 33 years. Instruction in the fine arts and music was provided by the Viennese trained Felix Bauer, who was later to become a professor in the U.S. These notable talents were among the “six full and part-time teachers employed by the school, five settlers and one Dominican.”⁸⁸ In 1943 there were 30 children at the school, and by 1945 there were 60, with 40 of them in kindergarten. Again, Bruman has given some figures culled from the 1950 Report of Mr. Rosenzweig that pegged the attendance of the elementary school at 50: 33 children of settlers and 17 Dominicans. The Rosenzweig Report pointed out that a “Deficiency is felt in the lack of educational films, as well as in material and equipment for experiments in physics and chemistry.”⁸⁹

Health care in the colony was of high standards and quality given its rural location and distance from any sizeable city. Sosúa had its own hospital which treated both Dominicans and settlers. DORSA paid the salaries of most medical personnel that included Dominican doctors acting as consultants. The Dominican physicians were experts in tropical diseases, many of which the settlers had never heard of. In what Kaplan termed DORSA’s ‘small social welfare state,’ medical treatment was free to both settlers and local residents.⁹⁰ The hospital clinic treated major tropical diseases such as malaria and yellow fever, but also “established a VD clinic, prenatal services, and a baby clinic.”⁹¹ However, those who needed “x-rays or other special treatment were sent to Ciudad Trujillo or Santiago.”⁹² Religious life at Sosúa revolved around

the colony's small synagogue which held semi-regular Friday evening services. The settlers participated in organized, communal holiday events such as Hanukkah, Purim and the annual Passover Seder. There were bar and bat mitzvahs that celebrated the coming of age of Jewish boys and girls, as well as funerals that honored those who passed. Indeed, settlers had "established a religious burial society and created a small Jewish cemetery" that served the colony.⁹³ The 1950 figures, again culled from the Rosenzweig Report in Bruman's Field Book III, divulge that DORSA allocated monies totaling \$7,900.00 to subsidize various functions and administrative arms at the colony. This included \$400.00 for 'Religious Purposes,' but also \$3,500.00 for the school and \$1,000.00 for the Hospital. The Sosúa Council had responsibility for administrative oversight at the colony, and the settlers made monthly contributions to the Council that were from 1% to 3% of their income. Cash came in the form of low-interest loans from the settlement loan cooperative. Bruman noted that the Loan Cooperative filled the basic banking needs of the Sosúa settlers. The cooperative functioned as a bank and clearing house for all financial transactions at the settlement. Indeed, all "money transactions of the Sosúa Cooperative were made through the Loan Cooperative."⁹⁴

Sosúa also had its entrepreneurs who began private enterprises at the colony. One of Rosenberg's key goals for Sosúa was the establishment of small crafts and niche businesses to create revenue streams aside from a farm-based income. They included a turtle-shell business that made arts and crafts goods, which were then sold throughout the country, a haberdashery which made shirts and pants, a cobbler who also made slippers, several restaurants, and a cinema which had its own 'Cine bar' selling refreshments. Also included among the fledgling businesses were a plumber and a dentist whose services were not paid for by DORSA. The colony's reliance on agriculture as its primary source of income did not pan out, and showed that a shift to dairy

products was necessary if the colony was to become self-sustaining and profitable. That change came with the addition of cattle, dairy cows, and pigs. In about four years since its first refugees arrived in May 1940, Sosúa's dairy industry had grown into a thriving business with national importance. The new emphasis on dairy and meat products, made it clear that Sosúa's initial focus on agriculture had been a failure. Sondheimer wrote that "It was soon seen that the best source of cash income was from milk production. The original plan was revised," and the economic focus shifted to dairy products and meat processing. Each settler who joined the Cooperativa Industrial Lechera, C. por A. or CILCA by its initials, founded in late 1941, and the Ganadera meat cooperative (Compania Industrial Ganadera, C. por A.) founded in 1945, became shareholders with one share in each of the enterprises. The Ganadera "slaughtered meat, tenderized beef and ham, and produced bologna, frankfurters, and sausages."⁹⁵

Both CILCA and Ganadera became award-winning anchor businesses that drove the economy of Sosúa. Indeed, their products were sold throughout the island with CILCA butter "in constant demand [because] it is considered the best butter produced in the Republic." Rosenzweig noted that "out of the 27,000 total acres of the settlement, 18,000 were judged suitable for grazing. Sondheimer's report of 1944 noted that the improvement in the breeds of animals was done through "the judicious introduction of [imported and superior] breeding stock." The inferior, native breed of cattle was cross-bred with imported Holstein, Zebu and Senegal bulls, which translated into heartier and heavier calves, and increased yields of milk and meat.⁹⁶ The CILCA C. por A. is, at the time of this writing in 2016, still in business, although no longer wholly owned by Jewish settlers/stockholders. It remains a visible reminder of Sosúa's success as an agricultural colony founded by Jewish refugees fleeing the violence of war torn Europe more than half a century earlier. The Ganadera, Compania Industrial Ganadera C. por A.

also enjoyed phenomenal success, with their meat products sold throughout the island and elsewhere. Indeed, from its inception as a small, local Jewish co-op, it experienced increased sales and profits throughout its life. By 1950 it had an annual turnover of an impressive \$200,000, whereas in the preceding year, 1949, its receipts were \$164,000. The turnover at CILCA C. por A. was equally impressive. In 1949 the receipts totaled \$198,000, and by 1950 they jumped to over \$245,000. The hapless Jewish refugees who arrived in Sosúa in 1940, built a business empire that is today valued at over millions of dollars, this in spite of the tremendous odds that were stacked against them. People without a country and land to call their own, a people who had their personal possessions and wealth confiscated, and who were involuntarily pushed out of their homeland, were the success of an experiment happening leagues away from the madness then infecting most of the world.

The End of the Colony and Postwar Flight

The end of the colony paralleled that of World War II. Many refugees had arrived at Sosúa with no intention of staying on as farmers or ranchers. Some did not want to remain in the Dominican Republic at all, and were among the first to flee the colony when they had the chance. Some who had connections and/or family in the United States, moved there directly after the war. A few chose to return to their European homeland, still reeling from the effects of more than six years of conflict. Then again, some migrated into other Latin American countries such as Brazil, Argentina and Chile. Some remained at Sosúa, yet moved from the homestead farm to the administrative hub at El Batey to be closer to ‘downtown’ and its attractions. Today only a small museum resides at the site of the original colony, reminding those who now come in search of tropical dreams, that this was once a Promised Land for some ‘hapless’ Jewish refugees who

had escaped the Nazi terror. “*It remains today, quiet and remote at the end of a rough road, dreaming under trade winds moving softly through palm and sea grape.*”⁹⁷

Part Two: Bolivia: A Brief Look at the Jewish Agricultural Colony of Buena Tierra

Rosen had developed a successful agricultural settlement model in Crimea based on the three-point plan discussed earlier. However, what worked so well in the Crimea failed miserably at Sosúa. It must be noted that the Bolivian haven for Jewish refugees at Buena Tierra in the Yungas region was, according to the historian Leo Spitzer, also an abject failure. Such failures, on the other hand, can be considered as successes given that they had achieved their original objective: saving lives. Buena Tierra was cobbled together from three formerly profitable but now derelict haciendas: Charobamba, Santa Rosa, and Polo Polo in the semitropical Yungas region to the northeast of the capital city of La Paz. As with Sosúa, Buena Tierra included a professional agronomist who did detailed surveys of available tracts of land on which to settle the Jewish refugees. Bolivia also had, as in the Dominican Republic, a president, Germán Busch Becerra (1904-1939), who came from the ranks of the military. After a military coup, Busch seized the presidency in July of 1937. Busch was born in the Beni Province to a physician father who had emigrated from Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century and a Bolivian mother of Italian heritage.⁹⁸ Busch also wanted to establish agricultural settlements in Bolivia, some years before the conference at Évian took place. Busch’s chief reason for supporting agricultural settlements was that Bolivia was held hostage by fluctuations within the international commodities markets where it had to purchase essentials. Bolivia, under Germán Busch, struggled to become self-reliant and feed itself. Busch’s strategy was to avoid any of the pitfalls inherent in the international commodities markets.⁹⁹ The Bolivian president’s ally, Mauricio Hochschild (1881-1965) was a billionaire mining magnate and naturalized Bolivian. Both men

saw the wisdom of having “European immigrants as agriculturalist colonists to cultivate and exploit the vast, potentially rich, but largely undeveloped semitropical and tropical areas of the country.” The recruitment took place through Bolivian Consular officials stationed in Europe, who “were instructed to attract prospective agricultural immigrants with an offer of free land, free transportation within the country, and a one-year maintenance allowance.” This experiment resulted in the founding of the Colonia Busch. The colony failed from the start, yet it also provided a model for future colonization of the Yungas by Jews who had fled war-torn Europe in droves.¹⁰⁰ In early 1940 Hochschild and officials from the Joint founded the Sociedad Colonizadora de Bolivia, or SOCOBO, which oversaw the development of Jewish agricultural settlements, including the training of the would-be settlers. SOCOBO functioned much like its Dominican twin DORSA. It was a legal corporation that entered into agreements and contract negotiations with government officials. It also handled, along with officials from the Joint, the logistics involved in getting Jewish refugees into Bolivia, and then supplying them with the necessary funds, housing, seeds and farming equipment to begin life anew as Bolivian farmers.

Much faith was put in the word of Felipe Bonoli, the Italian agronomist and naturalized Argentine who had past success in Argentina establishing a settlement of Italians on the land. Bonoli had gone to the Yungas region to report on the state of the land and the feasibility of purchasing the properties. The plan was to combine the three derelict haciendas into one large settlement and rename it Buena Tierra. The Yungas region is in the lush semitropical Andean lowlands, an area with plenty of rivers for irrigation. The three haciendas were once thriving farming concerns “on which coffee, cocoa, mangoes, oranges, tangerines, bananas and coca had once been cultivated,” yet had been abandoned by their former owners.¹⁰¹ Bonoli had deemed the properties suitable for settlement as their fertile soil could be recycled and put into cultivation

and pasturage. Bonoli was also taken by the physical beauty of the semitropical, lush Yungas, as were investigators for the REC. Echoing the sentiments of Rosenberg and Rosen about the natural beauty of Sosúa, REC investigator Walter Weiss gushed with praise for the Yungas site; “Not only is the soil long-rested and fertile with mountain streams running in sufficient quantities [but] nowhere in our far West have I seen more wonderful panoramas.”¹⁰²



Fig. 6: Contemporary Map of Bolivia Showing Administrative Divisions, Provinces and Yungas Region. *Source:* Maps of the World: Vidiani.com

Members of the REC and the Joint believed that Buena Tierra would be attractive to the refugees as a sight for settlement. The pioneers would have land, low-cost housing and opportunities not available elsewhere on the continent. Recall that most Latin American countries closed their doors to Jewish refugees who came in search of a safe haven, so the list of places in which to immigrate was very short indeed. In addition to the difficulties one encountered fleeing Europe, were the difficulties of getting to the extremely isolated colony. The trip from the capital of La Paz was a ‘terrifying one.’ One left La Paz, altitude 11,000 plus feet,

ascended an additional 3,000 feet to La Cumbre, and then began the hair-raising descent into the Yungas and its 'green, lushly vegetated valleys.'¹⁰³ In a masterful bit of understatement, Spitzer noted that "travel on this road is not an easy journey to undertake." This was aptly illustrated by the numerous crosses that dotted the narrow road, put there to mark the spot of the frequent, fatal crashes that happened to careless travelers.

The lack of a network of passable roads accessible by automobile or truck further enhanced the colony's isolation. It was essential to build a network of roads that would connect the colony with the outside world, one which would facilitate access to domestic markets and ports. Bolivia was in the main dependent on imported goods and foodstuffs for clothing and food. Bolivians consumed rice from India, drank coffee grown and processed in neighboring Colombia and Brazil, and used wheat grown in Canada and Argentina to bake their bread and pastries.¹⁰⁴ It was hoped that agricultural colonies such as Buena Tierra could put Bolivia on the path to feeding itself and, in the process, become self-sustaining. The money saved by reducing costly imports would be invested in settlement schemes such as Buena Tierra. Money would also come from the Jewish philanthropies such as the Joint, and the recently founded protection society known as the Sociedad de Protección a los Imigrantes Israelitas, or by its acronym SOPRO.

The SOPRO had offices in several large Bolivian cities, including one in the famous silver mining center of Potosí, that provided aid to Jewish refugees, many of whom had arrived with just the clothes on their backs. It may be recalled that the Nazis had imposed the onerous Flight Tax on Jews emigrating from Third Reich lands beginning in the 1930s, causing the financial ruin of many. So, as in the Dominican Republic, the majority of the Jewish refugees who made it to the safety of Bolivia were penniless. Those with no money whatsoever were

given an allowance and low interest loans subsidized by SOPRO, and housing that the society had leased provided the refugees with much needed shelter. Society funds also paid for the establishment of a twenty-bed hospital and a small home and kindergarten for the children in the capital city. To the southeast of the capital, in the city of Cochabamba, elevation 8,500 feet, SORPRO established a home for the elderly and a sanatorium for those seeking relief from the extreme altitude of the capital.¹⁰⁵ Agricultural training centers were set up to teach refugees the rudiments of farming in a semitropical and tropical environment. Many had no notion of what it meant to work the land; their ranks were filled with professionals such as chemists, engineers, lawyers and physicians. Indeed, in a letter to Hochschild, the Joint's Paul Baerwald emphasized the importance of success, yet Baerwald also had his deep-seated doubts. "Jewish farm settlement is a much more difficult problem than settlement of peasants." The Jewish refugee needed both acclimatization and 'psycho-physiological retraining and readjustment' Baerwald emphasized. Indeed, besides acclimatizing, one also had to acculturate to a largely indigenous populace, people whose customs and food were exotic in the extreme. Relations between the indigenous and refugee varied from friendly to outright hostile. There existed elements of the Bolivian population who viewed the newcomers as trespassers who took work from the native, that the displaced refugee was creating the displaced native. Yet there were those who also proffered the hand of friendship in the dynamic relationship between foreigner and native.

The Failure of Buena Tierra

However, cordial relationships between the refugee and the native could not make up for the shortcomings of the settlement plan. The scholar León E. Bieber lists the factors that led to the abandonment of Buena Tierra, and notes that a combination of reasons was responsible for its ultimate failure. Among them were the "negligencia en la selección de los inmigrantes." Many of

the refugees were professionals, and during the interview process had lied about their backgrounds and level of experience as farmers. The pressure to escape the Nazis and save one's life was just too much; hence there were physicians, engineers and other professionals who had falsely claimed an agricultural background. Other key reasons that Bieber noted were the "factores topográficos, la calidad de las tierras, la precaria estructura vial boliviana y la falta de adecuado apoyo." The sheer isolation of Buena Tierra and the Yungas was due to a paucity of roads and railroad lines into the region. Had this transportation network infrastructure been in place, Buena Tierra may have prospered.¹⁰⁶ The quality of the land and soil at Buena Tierra was hyped by the agronomist Bonoli, who, it turned out, "was profoundly mistaken."¹⁰⁷ Bieber cited the lack of sufficient government help as another factor that contributed to Buena Tierra's demise. To achieve success it was essential to have, besides aid from Jewish philanthropies, the full support of the Bolivian Government. Finally, most of the refugees viewed Buena Tierra, and the host country Bolivia, as a stepping stone to other, more enticing locales such as the United States or Argentina, two American countries with thriving Jewish communities.

Conclusion

We can debate the failure of the 'experiments' at Sosúa and Buena Tierra, yet there was for sure relative success. Both colonies were founded as places of refuge for thousands of involuntary emigrants fleeing the violence of their homeland. The fact that some refugees were able to escape the Nazi death-grip and begin life anew as farmers in distant lands underscores that very success. In retrospect, both projects had achieved their original goal of saving lives, and have left a model from which one may draw conclusions regarding their failure or a success. The model of agricultural settlement that Rosen successfully used for the Ukraine and Crimea,

proved to be difficult to transfer to Bolivia and the Dominican Republic. In spite of Rosen's agronomist background, Rosenberg's well-placed connections and professional experience as a lawyer, Hochschild's wealth, and the help of the military man and Bolivian president Germán Busch, the success of these Jewish agricultural colonies was never assured. It all came down to the individual efforts of a few hardy souls and the collective will of many others behind the scenes. Although the same development model was used among the settlements discussed herein, it is clear that what had worked at one site failed miserably at others. Competent administration, experimentation with different crops, a willing and able work force, along with the use of cutting-edge technology did not, by any stretch of the imagination, guarantee success. A fascist megalomaniac, a couple of third world dictators, a beloved U.S. President, a Jewish mining magnate and a cast of others, made for some very strange bedfellows indeed. Remove one of these historic figures from the equation, and neither Sosúa nor Buena Tierra would have seen the light of day.

Notes

- ¹. Marion A. Kaplan, *Dominican Haven, The Jewish Refugee Settlement in Sosúa, 1940-1945* (New York, New York: The Museum of Jewish Heritage –A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, 2008), 18. Kaplan gives a complete account of the Sosúa Settlement and the events surrounding its founding.
- ² Richard Breitman and Allan J. Lichtman, *F.D.R. and the Jews*, (Cambridge: Massachusetts, and London, England, (The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 131.
- ³. See Kaplan, *Dominican Haven*, 34.
- ⁴ Allen Wells, *Tropical Zion, Trujillo, F.D.R., and the Jews of Sosua*, (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2009), 78-79
- ⁵. Ibid.
- ⁶. Allen Metz, "Why Sosúa? Trujillo's Motives For Jewish Refugee Settlement In The Dominican Republic." *Contemporary Jewry*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (March 1990), 3-28.
- ⁷. Personal Correspondence between James N. Rosenberg and Dominican dictator Rafael L. Trujillo, June 25, 1951.
- ⁸. Personal Correspondence between Rosenberg and Trujillo, February 8, 1957.
- ⁹. Personal Correspondence between Rosenberg and Trujillo, May 20, 1940.
- ¹⁰. Richard Symanski and Nancy Burley, The Jewish Colony of Sosúa, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Sep., 1973), 368.
- ¹¹. See Breitman and Lichtman, *F.D.R. and the Jews*, 132.
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