

Chapter 3

The Work of the Mariampoler Aid Society After the Holocaust

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INTRODUCTION

The Mariampoler Aid Society was founded in 1907 by Jewish immigrants from Mariampole, Lithuania.* The original mission of the society was helping immigrants from Mariampole who were having difficulties getting established in Chicago. Later, as the society members grew and prospered, direct aid to persons and institutions in Mariampole was provided. Then, in 1941, soldiers from Nazi Germany occupied Mariampole and, with the help of local sympathizers, murdered some 8000 Jews living in the town and surrounding area. When the full realization of this disaster became known, in 1945, the Mariampoler Aid Society redirected its efforts to the needs of Mariampole survivors and the grief and loss of the society's own membership.

The story of the Mariampoler Aid Society during this critical period is worth telling, not only for the descendants of its many members, but also for those who are interested in looking at effective organizational responses to tragically changed circumstances.

The Mariampoler Aid Society newsletter, the *M.A.S. Bulletin*, contains evidence of the impact of the massacre at Mariampole, the society's efforts to deal with collective grief and loss, and the program to find and aid survivors. In addition, there are notices and articles relating to the organizational necessities of fundraising, outreach, and maintenance of member interest and involvement. These newsletters are the major source materials for this review.

BACKGROUND

As new immigrants came to America during the 19th and early 20th centuries, they frequently settled in neighborhoods inhabited by others from their towns and villages in the old country. There was comfort in joining family and friends, and safety in numbers during times when ethnic and religious minorities were subject to discrimination. The newcomers found people who could speak their language and provide essential

* Mariampole was under the control of Russia from 1813-1918. Then it was part of an independent Lithuanian state until it was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940.

information about life in their new country. They could attend religious services and social events with their fellows, and raise their children in an atmosphere that supported their traditional cultural values.

Family and friends who were already established in America offered new immigrants tangible assistance such as housing, money, and employment. This story, which illustrates such informal assistance, was recounted by Lester I. Paradise, in the *M.A.S. Bulletin*.^{*}

“It was in July, 1903 – I arrived in Chicago from a small town about 55 miles from here on a Sunday afternoon and while I was waiting for a street car on the corner of Canal and Adams Streets, someone touched me on the shoulder and called me by my name. I turned around and recognized Mendel Reb Shlemi dem Dian’s son from Mariampole. I inquired where he came from, and he replied from New York where he had landed on his arrival from Europe. On my inquiry whether he had eaten, he replied ‘No’ and that he had only 6 cents in his pocket. He had spent the night in a rooming house on West Madison Street. So we went to a restaurant and from there to a barber shop. Then we went to Mildred Lyon, the daughter of Eiser Wittenberg from Mariampole. He stayed there until he procured a position in Joseph Philipson’s Department Store on Jefferson Street.”¹

Supplementing such informal efforts were assistance societies composed of persons from particular geographic areas in the old country, ethnic and religious groups.

As early as 1870, a number of Yiddish speaking immigrants from Mariampole had settled in Chicago. In keeping with trends common to other Eastern European Jews, the Mariampolers established their own religious and service organizations. In the summer of 1870, Mariampolers separated from the Bais Medrash Hagodol congregation and founded their own congregation, Ohave Sholom Marimapol, following a dispute precipitated by a Mariampoler wearing a straw hat to services in the Bais Medrash Hagodol synagogue. The original Mariampoler Aid Society (M.A.S.) was also established in 1870.²

The Mariampoler Aid Society was one of many *landsmanshaften*, or benevolent societies, formed by Yiddish speaking immigrants from particular hometowns in Eastern Europe. These organizations provided assistance to fellow *landsleit*, individuals coming from the same hometown. Assistance might include housing, employment, and train and boat tickets. Some *landsmanshaften* also offered health services and loans for

* All excerpts from the *M.A.S. Bulletin* have been transcribed as written, including spelling and capitalization. An exception is the substitution of single for double quotation marks within the transcribed excerpts.

members. Meetings and sponsored activities provided opportunities for socializing and reminiscing about life in the old country.³

The original Mariampoler Aid Society was no longer in existence by 1903. A new Mariampoler Aid Society, the subject of this article, was founded on Friday, June 7, 1907.⁴

At the Mariampoler Aid Society 50th Reunion in April, 1957, a presentation on the society's history was given by the president, Albert Margowsky. It was reprinted in the *M.A.S. Bulletin*.

"Believe it or not, it was due to a horse that our Society became organized. The story goes like this: A Landsman-Peddler lost his horse, and the poor man was deprived of earning his living. Gedaliah Wolf heard about it, and he immediately called several Mariampolers to his home on Newberry Ave. Together they talked the thing over. A sufficient sum was given by them for the purchase of a new horse. But this needy Landsman was then not the only one. There were also many others who were unable to make ends meet here. For some it meant the paying of a gas bill, rent, or even the bare necessities of life. So the group decided to found a permanent unit to help out Landslite in need. The name of 'MARIAMPOLER AID SOCIETY' was chosen for the new organization."⁵

It should be noted that the money for purchase of the horse, amounting to \$25, was provided in the form of a loan. The borrower repaid in installments, and after his untimely death, his widow completed the payments. The names of this couple were kept confidential.⁶

The Mariampoler Aid Society held regular monthly meetings. These meetings had an important social component, along with a focus on charity work. This is how Albert Margowsky described the benefits of meetings:

"MANY OF OUR MEMBERS find pleasure and relaxation at our meetings. After a hard day's work, business worries, war strain, it's quite a tonic to spend a few pleasant hours among friends and landslite. Our gatherings have brought out quite favorable comment from those present. They are sociable, enlightening, pleasant and above all TOGETHER we can DO THINGS in CHARITY, which otherwise would be denied to us as INDIVIDUALS."⁷

The society also sponsored special events and activities which helped bring members together, while raising funds for charity. The annual Reunion get-togethers, in particular, attracted members from far and wide.

Mariampoler Aid Society officers Albert Margowsky, Sonia Kurs, and Louis Lieberman

**REPORTING ON
THE MARIAMPOLE
MASSACRE**

began publishing the *M.A.S. Bulletin* in November, 1944. This was well into the period of World War II, when there was much anxiety about the fate of family members and friends in Mariampole, but before the full story of the Mariampole Massacre was known.

This monthly newsletter became an important means of communication for Chicago-based and distant Mariampolers and an invaluable record of the Mariampoler Aid Society's activities from 1944-1997. Original copies of the bulletins are housed in the Chicago History Museum.

After the German army invaded Mariampole in 1941, Mariampolers in Chicago could only wait and wonder at the fate of relatives and friends. Reports of individual survivors, "who had saved themselves," raised fears for the rest. The full extent of the disaster, however, was only discovered after the Russians took control of the area.

This excerpt from the *M.A.S. Bulletin* of February, 1945 shows the continuing state of uncertainty about the fate of Mariampole residents who were still living in the town when the Germans invaded.

"Mrs. Esha Goodman from Ramath Chavron, Palestine writes to her brother, Joseph Bobinsky, that she, her husband, Berel, and their children are getting along fine on their farm there. Like all of us she wants to know the fate of her people who were left in Mariampole. Wish we could tell her."⁸

By the following month, this early report of the massacre and subsequent call to action appeared in the *M.A.S. Bulletin*:

"SAD NEWS: Ever since this War began and the contact with our loved ones in Mariampole was disrupted, we were in hopes of some day being reunited with them. But according to recent reports, this hope is now gone for many of us. In a report, Chicago Sentinel, of Feb. 14th, it reads that on August 30, 1944* and September 2, 1944, the Nazis have killed 8,000 of our people in Mariampole. Considering the size of our town including many new settlers who must have been there, that means, that ALL THE JEWS there have been massacred. The heart aches at this news, the eyes get filled with tears, the mind asks the question WHY, oh GOD WHY.....? But tears, sentiments, will not help any more. It is time for ACTION. This action at present could only be given by backing the WAR to the fullest extent. Let's increase our efforts towards VICTORY.... Towards REVENGE. The martyred blood of our dear ones calls us to AVENGE, AVENGE our innocent spilled blood. Let's increase our purchases of BONDS, let's give MORE BLOOD for plasma. Let's give freely of our shoes and clothes to those who are still among the living. Let's back AMERICA THE ONLY SHINING

* This and the following date are not accurate. The Mariampole Massacre occurred in 1941.

BEACON IN THIS WORLD OF DARKNESS. Let's back the UNITED NATIONS who together with our Armies are now crushing the cruel enemy. Let's back our boys, and let's pray that God may be merciful to the handful of our brethren still amongst the living."⁹

In October, 1945, there was further confirmation of the loss of Mariampoler Jews.

"A sad letter was received by our Secretary, Mrs. Sonia Kurs from Mrs. Ruth Landau, of New York. The writer tells in it of a letter received from a cousin Zlate Kahn, direct from Mariampole. Miss Kahn has returned to Mariampole to find NOT A ONE LIVING MARIAMPOLER JEW THERE. There is ONLY ONE JEWISH FAMILY LIVING THERE, which formerly lived in PILVISHOK. That is the SACH HAKOL (final) that is now known as the tragedy of Mariampole."¹⁰

This report of the massacre appeared in the January, 1950 edition of the *M.A.S.*

Bulletin:

"The secrecy which veiled the terrible tragedy that befell our people in Mariampole has somewhat been lifted by MR. HARRY SANDOWSKY.

"He was in Mariampole in 1946 coming there from U.S.S.R. Here is what he told the Kurs while he stayed there during a brief visit. 'All Jews from Mariampole, Kalvaria and Lidvinova were kept in the soldier barracks- Samankes. A ghetto was supposed to have been created there. However, they were all killed. After being assembled in groups of ten, they were led out and shot. 8400 of our people were thus killed. Music played during the shootings. Liquor was furnished aplenty to the executioners. The Germans would have spared some,' said Mr. Sandowsky, 'But, the local youths who did the killing, insisted on a thorough job. There were some decent Lithuanians who wanted to help the Jews, and some were punished for it. Belongings of the murdered Jews were taken over by the Lithuanian population. Thus, we find the 'heir' to the Fischelewits estate on Prenner Gaas, taken over by their former janitor. MR. SANDOWSKY 'Sold' his home to their former maid and when he needed a suit of clothes he bought them from a Lithuanian 'heir'. Warshaver and Politsei Gassen [Streets] are almost wiped out, however, many other streets are as a whole intact, and their homes not damaged."¹¹

**REMEMBERING
THE LOST**

The Mariampolar Aid Society sponsored ceremonies for the remembrance of Mariampolar Jews who had lost their lives in World War II. Descriptions of these ceremonies appeared in the *M.A.S. Bulletin* so that Mariampoler *landsleit* far and wide could share in the experience.

Here is a description of the first such ceremony:

"On Tuesday, Sept. 11th, 1945, the members of the M.A.S. and their families have

gathered to shed a tear for the Mariampoler Jews who were brutally murdered by the Germans, in Mariampole, Lithuania in September, 1941. It was the first Communal Yahrzeit for our martyrs. An impressive Memorial service was carried out, at which Rabbi Benjamin Daskal spoke most eloquently. Mr. Jacob Zukerman chanted the prayers for the dead and Miss Fay Satton rendered 'Eli Eli' very skillfully. A sketch based on Ben Hechts 'Remember us' was enacted by the members, with the participation of Dr. and Mrs. Harry Winsberg, A. Hirsh, R. Rudnick, Miss F. Satton, Miss B. Dalkoff, L. Lieberman and your correspondent. * Candles were lit in memory of our departed members and for their relatives. The impressive Memorial Service was arranged and conducted by your President, Albert Margowsky. A short business session was held prior to the Service."¹²

In 1951 the *M.A.S. Bulletin* contains a description of a somewhat more elaborate memorial service.

"The hall was filled to capacity on the night of our Memorial Service, Tuesday, September 11, 1951. The entire service and program was arranged and carried out by your correspondent ALBERT MARGOWSKY. It began with the lighting of candles and a Solo by MRS. FAY NEWMAN nee Satton. The Memorial address was given by RABBI DASKAL. MRS. KOGAN touched everybody with her talk about her experience as a Nazi slave. She said: 'I weighed only 60 pounds when I was liberated, just skin and bones, what kept me alive I don't know. *As Es's Bashert Tzum Leben Lebt men*. People in America should be grateful that they were spared the fate of our people in Europe.' MRS. ALTA MANKOFF read a Eulogy to the Martyrs. A special tribute was paid by your correspondent to CHAEM YOSEF LURIE a teacher to many of us in Mariampole. Chaem Yosef had a special method. His teachings stuck with the student. So that after 50 years your correspondent still remembers chapters of Isaiah which he recited in memory of Chaem Yosef. The Services were concluded by the recitation of Kadish. The entire proceeds from the evening was given for the planting of trees in the 'Forest of Martyrs' in Israel."¹³

At various times the *M.A.S. Bulletin* included poems and remembrances for the lost. This poem, which appeared in the *M.A.S. Bulletin* in 1950, reflects upon that terrible event and the commitment to care for the Mariampole survivors.

"Greetings to all Mariampolars

Wherever they may be

* Albert Margowsky

Though no one is left to remember
But the dead...
Let's not forget the name and place
Where their blood was shed,
Give aid and comfort to those in whose veins
Mariampole Blood still remains.
--From Geo. I Levinson"¹⁴

**IDENTIFYING AND
ASSISTING
SURVIVORS**

After Lithuania was liberated from the Germans, the search for survivors could begin in earnest. The Mariampoler Aid Society sought to position itself as a clearing house for information on survivors. The *M.A.S. Bulletin* of April, 1945 contains the following plea:

"PLEASE LANDSLITE; We ask you if you get ANY INFORMATION about Mariampolers who have saved themselves, or if you get LETTERS from any of our people, LET US KNOW AT ONCE, come to our meeting, or get in touch with Mrs. Kurs. We want to help OUR PEOPLE, that's what we are working for. GIVE US the CHANCE to DO IT." ¹⁵

Early editions of the *M.A.S. Bulletin* contain information on the whereabouts of Mariampolers who survived, news of those who perished, and requests for information on individuals whose whereabouts are unknown. There are also requests of assistance from various parts of the world and acknowledgements of assistance received. The items below are examples from various editions of the *M.A.S. Bulletin*.

"A LETTER was received by Miss ADELE KAHN from her brother MAX RIBICKI, Vilno, Lithuania. Max says, 'that he has returned to Mariampole, found most of the buildings in town burned down, as there was no place for him to stay there so he moved to Vilno.' His mother, sister and brother are also saved and are with him." ¹⁶

"PACKAGES were sent to two Mariampoler survivors, now living in Russia. Mrs. Kurs and her sister-in-law Anna prepared the packages."

"WE ARE ANXIOUS TO SEND PACKAGES or help in any form possible to MARIAMPOLERS who need such help, whether ABROAD OR HERE. IF YOU KNOW of any such case, please get in touch with Secretary Sonia Kurs." ¹⁷

"Saved Ones: Landsman Julius Caplan, New York, informs us that he received a letter from Eliouh [Eliohu] Amsterdamski, now in Paris, France. Says Mrs. Amsterdamski: 'I saved myself due to the fact that I left Mariampole with my family a few weeks before the Nazi invasion and went to Kovno.' He further tells that he went through all the tortures of the concentration camps. His wife and daughter are also saved and they are

now in Kovno. Mandel Segal, son of Yudel Segal de Shteper and Yosel Slonimski, son of Chaim Slonimski and brother of Mr. N. Sloan are still in Germany.”¹⁸

“MR. A. GALPERT, relative of BROTHER JOE GOLDBERG, writes to him from Kovno, that he is safe. He asks to locate his friends EPHRAIM DAVIDSON AND CHONE DAVIDSON OF INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA (ATTENTION, MR. ISRAEL LEWIS). Mr. Galpert’s home was in Koslove Rudi.”¹⁹

“YEHUDIS GOLDSTEIN WISHTENETSKY, of BRUSSELS, BELGIUM, writes that her husband is working, her brother, YITSCHOK, wife and little girl are in Vilnius. She asks for packages of food and clothing for them. His address is I. Vishtenetsky, YASINSKO 6, KV 3, VILNIUS, LITH. S.S.R.”²⁰

“J. RABINOVITZ, Casella Postate 45, Roma, Nomentano, Italy, acknowledges packages and money. His wife Dora who is a granddaughter of Shmuel Linsky of Mariampole, inquires about Mrs. Mack in Chicago.”²¹

“M. EPSTEIN, now in Munich, Germany, wishes to locate his brother BORUCH LEIB – possibly living in Chicago; his brother SHOLEM ELIOUH EPSTEIN, possibly living in New York; an uncle, SHMUEL RENSTEIN in Chicago, and an uncle, SHIEMEN RENSTEIN, possibly in Louisville, Kentucky. All born in Kalvarie-Mariampole. An uncle of his SHMUEL EPSTEIN, his father’s brother, born in Vilkovishki. A cousin of his is Dr. LEIB KABAKER, born in Kalvarie. ANY ONE KNOWING THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE PEOPLE MENTIONED, PLEASE COMMUNICATE WITH MRS. SONIA KURS.”²²

“Brother Sam Solomon received two cards from Pasha Bernstein and her son, who has saved themselves into U.S.S.R. Mrs. Bernstein writes that from all of her large family in Mariampole only four have saved themselves, the rest were either burned or sent away to hard labor by the cruel Nazis. It is indeed sad to hear of such brutalities in this so-called 20th ‘Civilized Century.’ Let’s hope that other more cheering letters will soon arrive. Mariampole is now liberated by the Russians. We sent a \$21.00 package to Mrs. Bernstein.”²³

“MAIMAN HELA is in a Camp at Bari, Italy. She and her three sisters are awaiting transportation to Israel. One of the girls broke a leg. All three are in need of winter clothes. They heard about our Society from other survivors and are asking our aid. ANNA KURS TELLS US THAT CLOTHES AND SMALL SUMS OF MONEY WERE SENT TO THE GIRLS THE VERY SAME DAY THEIR LETTER ARRIVED.”²⁴

“FAMILY REUNITED: The M.A.S. Bulletin, has proved its value. We are happy to announce that due to the notice in our last number about two young ladies who have saved themselves from the Nazi horror in Mariampole and are now in Palestine and

who were looking for their relatives in America – these relatives have been found. They are G. Nathanson and his family, members of our society. They had not heard from each other ever since the war started. They are now in contact with each other.”²⁵

The *M.A.S. Bulletin* of April, 1945 provided information on the resumption of mail service to Lithuania.

“Letter service is now open with LITHUANIA. The American Jewish Congress advises us that you may continue writing to your relatives at their old addresses, “MUNICIPALITY CONSUL” OF THE Jewish community in the town where your relatives used to live asking for information about them. Write on one page and one side only, BRIEF AND TO THE POINT. Do not mention the war or politics.”²⁶

**RAISING FUNDS
FOR CHARITY**

Providing assistance for those in need costs money. To finance their good works, members of the Mariampole Aid Society had always used a variety of activities as fund raisers, including an annual Yearbook, dinners, and shows. These fund raisers supplemented direct donations made by members, for whom charitable giving was a cultural value.

To address the expanded need for money, The *M.A.S. Bulletin* contains requests for assistance with fund raising, pleas for ads and subscriptions for upcoming yearbooks, and news of special events. The following are examples of such items:

“Mrs. Esther Engel received a letter from her sister Sonia Menczel from a liberated country in Europe that she, her husband and their daughter are all alive but in need of medicine and clothes. Lucky for Mrs. Menczel and her family that they have sisters and brothers like the Travis Family, who will provide for them. You can rest assured that they will be taken care of. But this brings to mind the many unfortunates who have no relatives here to look after them. They look to YOU, to US for help. That’s why, friends, it’s so necessary to double our efforts to build up a substantial fund, so that we may be in a position to render efficient aid to our landslites in distress. The early BENEFIT SHOW is the only source of funds. Help us make it a success.”²⁷

“TICKETS ARE NOW ON SALE FOR OUR NEW BENEFIT SHOW, which will take place on Tuesday evening, January 30, 1945 at the Douglas Park, Jewish Theater, Ogden and Kedzie Aves. Get your tickets at once, from your secretaries Sonia Kurs and Louis Lieberman. GET 'EM AND SELL 'EM. Also please get busy on ADS and GOODFELLOWSHIPS for our SOUVENIER PROGRAM. PLEASE BEAR THIS IN MIND that you are the only one who can H E L P make our BENEFIT A SUCCESS. Money derived from this SHOW goes to carry on our CHARITABLE work and to be of REAL AID to our stricken brethren in MARIAMPOLE, in Russia or wherever they are.

The time when we will be able to be of real HELP to our people is NEAR. LET US BE READY.”²⁸

“MR. AND MRS. JOE KURS donated a page in the year book in honor of their son Harry’s Wedding. MR. AND MRS. I. GANZER, donated a page in the yearbook in honor of their 25th WEDDING ANNIVERSARY.”²⁹

“HELP!

HELP!

HELP!

HELP US TO MAKE OUR 1950 REUNION AND YEAR BOOK A SUCCESS **** SOLICIT FOR ADS, GREETINGS, ETC. FOR THE ‘BOOK’ **** THERE’S TREMENDOUS WORK CONNECTED WITH AN AFFAIR SUCH AS THIS, AND IT REQUIRES THE HELP OF EACH AND EVERYONE OF US **** REMEMBER THAT THIS IS THE ‘ONE AND ONLY’ AFFAIR OF YOUR MARIAMPOLER AID SOCIETY--- REMEMBER THAT EVERY PENNY AND DOLLAR DERIVED FROM IT GOES TO HELP SOME ONE IN NEED **** THE ‘ONE’ MAY BE SOME RELATIVE OF YOURS NOW IN A CAMP OR IN ISRAEL **** YOUR SOCIETY HELPS THEM FREELY **** BUT **** THE AMOUNT OF THIS HELP **** WHETHER IT’S A PACKAGE OF CLOTHES---FOOD---MEDICINE---MONEY---OR EVEN A WORD OF CHEER DEPENDS ‘O N L Y’ ON YOU **** PLEASE---DON’T STAY AWAY---GIVE US A HAND---TOGETHER WE CAN DO IT ***.”³⁰

“BETTER HURRY, OR YOU WILL BE SORRY. DON’T SAY THAT WE DID NOT TELL YOU. DON’T DISAPPOINT YOUR FRIENDS AND LANDSLITE, MAIL IN YOUR AD TODAY. SEND IT TO MRS. SONIA KURS, 314 N. LOREL AVE., OR TO MRS. LOUIS LIEBERMAN, 4914 N. ST. LOUIS AVE. PLEASE HELP MAKE THIS YEAR’S BOOK A SUCCESS.”³¹

Membership dues helped to pay for necessary expenses of the organization. This reminder and plea to pay up appeared in the February, 1945 *M.A.S. Bulletin*:

“DUES ARE NOW DUE: This is to remind our members that dues for 1945 are now due. You will all agree (and that is without question) that the sum of \$3.00 per year, or 25 cents per month is indeed little to pay for the real friendship and fellowship we enjoy in our society. Besides, it helps greatly to defray the cost of mailing, printing of the *M.A.S. Bulletin* and other incidentals. WON’T YOU PLEASE PAY UP?”³²

PREPARATION OF AID PACKAGES

In addition to cash, Mariampoler Aid Society members collected and packaged clothing and other necessities for Mariampoler landsleit who survived the war. This was a labor-

intensive effort led by Mrs. Sonia Kurs and her sister-in-law, Miss Anna Kurs.

“Mr. and Mrs. M. Edson members of Gary, Indiana, are showing a great deal of interest in our organization and we appreciate it. Mr. M. Edson is on the committee to send clothes and packages to our landslitter in Russia and with him on the same committee is our loyal sister Sonia Kurs.”³³

“We need a size 38 Men’s Suit, overcoat, underwear, etc. For a woman, size 40, dresses, coat, etc. For a 13 year old girl, dresses, skirts and other such wearing apparel. If you have any of the above-mentioned items, please bring same up to our meeting, or get in touch with Miss Anna Kurs, Crawford 6057. These clothes are needed for a destitute MARIAMPOLER Family.”³⁴

This article about the package program, which appeared in the October, 1952 *M.A.S. Bulletin*, gives some idea of the scope of the package program during the critical period during and after the war.

“JUST FOR THE RECORD---

THE KURS – ANNA AND SONIA – have from October 1945 to September 1952 packed and shipped personally FIVE HUNDRED AND NINETY PACKAGES. They also supervised the sending of 160 ‘CARE’ AND OTHER Gift packages. They also helped many members pack and send away many packages. That’s besides the regular secretarial work which Sonia does for the M.A.S. Also the hundreds of letters which she wrote with the packages. Many of our members also have sent packages of which we have no official record. Honorable mention should also go to SONIA LEWIS, SADIE LIEBERMAN, MOLLY STEIN, BESSIE TRAVIS, JACOB AND ELLA PASSMAN, NUCIE SATTON, ALTA MANKOFF, BESSIE TETER and many, many other UNSUNG Package Packers.”³⁵

**RECOGNIZING
DONORS AND
VOLUNTEERS**

Donor and volunteer recognition helps assure continuing support for charitable work. The *M.A.S. Bulletin* provided an effective vehicle for recognizing individuals who were making a contribution. Reports of donations and volunteer efforts published in the newsletter publicly acknowledged those who gave of their time and money, while reinforcing the community value of charitable giving.

This is an enthusiastic appreciation of two loyal Mariampoler Aid Society volunteers:

“AS WE SEE ‘EM.’ If greatness of an organization is to be judged by the caliber of its membership, then the M.A.S. is indeed blessed with GOOD members. FINER or MORE LOYAL workers for CHARITY will be hard to find ANYWHERE. Let’s take for an

example MRS. ANN SCHAEFFER ...A Lady, noble, kind and good natured ... As long as we know her, we have yet to hear her say a harsh word to or about anybody ... 'If I can't say anything good about a person, I choose to say nothing at all', is her often quoted quotation ... Her husband MR. NATHAN SCHAFFER is as Charitable as his wife – he never says 'No' when approached for a donation, or to help someone in need. Whenever 'their' Society runs an affair, you may be sure that the SCHAFFER'S are the FIRST to sell tickets, and get ADS. ARE WE PROUD OF THEM??? I SHOULD SAY, WE ARE."³⁶

Each month the *M.A.S. Bulletin* contained a report of cash donations received from members. Sometimes these donations were made to honor special events in the lives of the donors or particular persons. As can be seen in the first example below, donors were not confined to the Chicago area.

"The following have donated to our Society in the last month:

"Mr. and Mrs. Jacob Passman in honor of their 40th Wedding Anniversary; Mr. Julius Caplan, New York; Mrs. B. Rubinstein, San Antonio, Texas; and Mr. & Mrs. H. Panimon, Fargo, N. Dakota; Mrs. Rose Goldstein in honor of her daughter Lillian's forthcoming marriage; Mrs. A. Frankel in honor of her daughter Ray's 16th birthday; Miss Bertha Goodman in memory of Mrs. Ida Kirsner; Mr. Sidney Cohen, of Detroit, Michigan."³⁷

"Mrs. Rose Goldstein, our ardent worker raised \$95.00 last year for the Jewish National Fund and the Goldstein Family donated \$100.00 to the same cause in memory of Brother Sol Goldstein. The whole amount of \$195.00 was credited to our society. Thanks Rose and all the Goldstein Family."³⁸

The actions of volunteers in the clothing and food program were recognized, as well.

"MISS ANNA KURS and MRS. SONIA LEWIS celebrated Chanukah by packing and sending packages of food and clothing to needy landslites abroad."³⁹

SUPPORT FOR THE WAR EFFORT

In common with other Americans, Mariampoler Aid Society families saw their young men go off to war. The early *M.A.S. Bulletins* provided news about particular servicemen.

"OUR BOYS IN SERVICE. The list of the sons of the Mariampolers who are distinguishing themselves, in the service of our country is growing. SGT. BERT RABINOWITZ, son of Mrs. And Mrs. Harry Rabinowitz, received a Presidential citation for his skill in putting damaged bombers into battle shape. The Sergeant is also the recipient of the 'Bronze Star' and good conduct medal. He has participated in the invasions of Italy and other places. To say that we are proud of Sergeant Bert

Rabinowitz, would be putting it mildly. Good work Sergeant. GO TO IT!"⁴⁰

"Capt. Joseph Levinson, son of Mrs. L. Levinson, was wounded in New Guinea and has recovered."⁴¹

The *M.A.S. Bulletin* of December, 1944 contained this notice requesting information about members of the service, so it could be published in the newspaper.

"ATTENTION! PLEASE! The M.A.S. wishes to honor your boy or girl now in service. We want their names inscribed in our Souvenir Program. Please give their names – AT ONCE – to our Recording Secretary, Louis Lieberman.

"Was your boy wounded, did he receive any medals for bravery? WE WANT HIS PICTURE, which will be reproduced in our program."⁴²

Once the war was over, the Mariampoler Aid Society began planning for a grand celebration for returning service people.

"WHEN JOHNNY COMES MARCHING HOME AGAIN --- Yes, Ladies and gentlemen, the Mariampoler Aid Society is ready with a great time for our returning boys and girls. A BANQUET will be held for them in due time, with all of our SONS AND DAUGHTERS as the GUESTS of our Society. WE ARE anxious to get all the names of our returning boys for a listing in the BULLETIN also for a FREE LISTING in the PROGRAM BOOK of 1946"⁴³

The Mariampoler Aid Society helped promote the sale of War Bonds, which were an important means of financing the expenses of the war.

"WAR BONDS Each BOND you buy means another nail in Hitler's coffin, and the quicker return of our boys and girls to our homes. Besides BONDS means a nest egg for a rainy day. BUY BONDS."⁴⁴

"We are again going to give away a \$25.00 WAR BOND, at our last meeting in December. Tickets will be printed soon for same."⁴⁵

OUTREACH AND MEMBERSHIP RECRUITMENT

Keeping a voluntary organization active and growing over the years requires considerable effort. The Mariampoler Aid Society had a long history of activity before World War II. With the decimation of the Jewish population of Mariampole, however, one source of new members for the organization, immigrants from Mariampole, was cut off. New efforts needed to be made to reach and involve Mariampolers who were living in other parts of the country. As noted in this item from the *M.A.S. Bulletin* of February, 1945, the recently instituted newsletter was viewed as an outreach tool.

"We would like to send this bulletin to our Mariampoler out-of-town Landslite. Also to our

soldier boys. Please give us their addresses. We believe that the M.A.S. Bulletin can be made into a strong medium, to keep the Mariampoler Family together.”⁴⁶

Landsleit from out of town were indeed reached by the *M.A.S. Bulletin*. Some, however, needed encouragement to pay their dues.

“Ever since our M.A.S was organized in 1907, it faithfully carried out its policy of HELP for the NEEDY LANDSMAN. Thousands of dollars were also sent to MARIAMPOLE to individuals and institutions. Other large sums were given to local and National institutions, here in the States. This GOOD work was carried on by a handful of Chicago Landslite. From time to time, also Landslite outside of Chicago have sent to us small contributions. MARIAMPOLER LANDSLITE are scattered all over this U.S. We feel that we have a right to ask these LANDSLITE to help the Chicago Group to carry the load. Our DUES are ONLY \$3.00 a year. (Larger sums are not refused.)”⁴⁷

The children and grandchildren of Mariampoler immigrants were a potential source of new members, though some of them needed encouragement to become active, as indicated in this piece from the *M.A.S. Bulletin* of March, 1946:

“WE NOTICED many a young descendant of Mariampolers at the Wolf Memorial... It's our new generation born and raised in this blessed country. TO THIS NEW GENERATION, sons and daughters of ours, an invitation is extended into the ranks of the Charitable Organization, which their immigrant parents have founded... The ranks in the M.A.S. are getting thinned out... Old timers are being called away... New blood is needed in order to carry on. YOU, SONS AND DAUGHTERS, CAN FURNISH IT... COME IN WITH US---JOIN.”⁴⁸

The planning of activities of interest to young people is one way to involve the next generation of members. This report of a 1950 Dance-Reunion indicates young people happily participated in the 42nd Annual Reunion.

“‘Just what we wanted’ was the Landslite’s comment about our recently held Dance-Reunion. The 42nd Annual Affair of the M.A.S. is now history... Landslite from far and near gathered on March 5, 1950 at the beautiful Florentine Ballroom of the Congress Hotel in Chicago. It was ‘everybody doing as they pleased’. The young ones danced to the tune of Goldberg’s orchestra... Those who wanted to reminisce had the chance. Sitting in groups they ‘chewed the rag’, ‘Remember so and so, or such and such occasion in Mariampole?’ were the usual topics. People who like a game of cards were also accommodated, as there were plenty of tables for everybody.

Everybody had a good time.”⁴⁹

**MAINTAINING THE
SENSE OF
COMMUNITY**

Throughout the history of the organization, Mariampoler Aid Society meetings and special events provided opportunities for old friends to meet and exchange personal and family news. The annual *Yearbook*, with its notices honoring milestones in the lives of members, extended the reach of community news. The initiation of the *M.A.S. Bulletin* in 1944 brought more frequent and widespread sharing of such personal news. Here are some examples:

“Miss Fay Satton, daughter of Mrs. L. Satton, is on a concert tour sponsored by the University of Kansas. She has traveled over 4500 miles and given 60 performances in the United States and Canada.”⁵⁰

“ANNIVERSARY GREETINGS! Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Goldstein celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary. The happy occasion was celebrated by the entire Goldstein family at the Palmer House. Mazel Tov.”⁵¹

“The grandson of Mr. A. GOLDMAN, President of the Lithuanian Farband, is laid up with Polio. We wish the youngster a speedy recovery.”⁵²

“ACCIDENTS: -- MRS. PAULETTE KALLOW is now totally recovered from a severe accident. She cut her wrists with a pyrex dish. HER AUNT, MRS. BESSIE TRAVIS, is also recovered from a bad fall on the icy streets.”⁵³

“MRS. JUDITH KRULEWSKY, a daughter of SHEINA BORUCH from Mariampole, has passed away. The deceased was an aunt of MRS. MAX KUSTNER.”⁵⁴

**REMEMBERING
OLD MARIAMPOLE**

On June 22, 1941, one day prior to the entrance of German troops into Mariampole, the city center was destroyed by aerial bombing.⁵⁵ The bombing was followed in the next few months by the murder of all Mariampoler Jews who could be found. This meant that Mariampoler landsleit had lost their spiritual home in the old country. Shops and houses that had been part of their youth were gone, along with friends and neighbors they had left behind. The Mariampole they had known now existed only in memory.

Albert Margowsky wrote about an additional loss resulting from the Mariampoler Massacre:

“Centuries of old Jewish culture and tradition was torn out by the roots...and an empty space is left in our hearts.”⁵⁶

The Mariampoler Aid Society helped to keep Mariampole history and traditions alive. The *M.A.S. Bulletin* provided a unique forum for sharing and preserving the memories of Mariampoler landsleit. As early as 1944, Albert Margowsky began including little vignettes about life and times in old Mariampole in the newsletter. Over the years Margowsky’s increasingly extensive recollections of life and times in Mariampole were

supplemented by those of other Mariampoler landsleit.

A companion article by Elaine “Sunnie” T. Gordon, *Everyday Life of Jews in Mariampole, Lithuania (1894-1911)*, is based upon information in the REMEMBER pieces. Some shorter examples of the original pieces appear below.

“CAN YOU RECALL a certain party in Mariampole who had a fruit and candy store and who traded his wares for ‘MITZVOS’???”⁵⁷

“‘Schar Liemud’ (Tuition fee) was the number one item on the family budget in Mariampole. Tuition fees were paid at two ‘Zmaniem’ (Periods) in the fall and in the spring. It often happened that ‘Hard times were a-knocking at the door’ at payment time, but by omitting other necessities, money was found and the boy went to the best ‘Melamed’ (Teacher) in Mariampole. Remember???”⁵⁸

“SHABBAS’ was a very much observed day in Old Mariampole. No one worked, all business was closed, but on special emergency occasions it was permitted to violate the SHABBAS. MRS. ROSE GOLDSTEIN recalls how her sister BASHE (MRS. BESSIE TRAVIS) TOOK SEVERELY ILL WITH AN APPENDIX ATTACK. It was on a Saturday. She was placed in a wagon and taken to Dr. Powalke. But her father, Reb Avrohom Yeverover wouldn’t ride on Shabbas, so he followed on foot all the way from TABUN, a village near MARIAMPOLE, to town.”⁵⁹

**SUPPORT FOR A
JEWISH
HOMELAND**

Although the Mariampoler Aid Society primarily focused on charitable assistance to landsleit, members of the society were also involved in political action, including support for the development of a Jewish Homeland in Palestine.

One political issue that critically affected the welfare of Jewish Holocaust survivors was the limitation upon the numbers of Jewish immigrants allowed into Palestine. The British administrators for the region had published a White Paper in 1939, which promulgated this policy. As a result, large numbers of survivors were left without permanent homes, instead of being allowed to begin life anew in Palestine.

The *M.A.S. Bulletin* contains this description of a demonstration held against the British policy of limiting immigration.

“An audience of 25,000 Jews and Christians filled the Great Stadium on the night of October 15th, to voice their protest against the White Paper, which shuts out Palestine to the homeless Jews. Speaker after speaker expressed their protests against this great

injustice and demanded that the White Paper be recalled and the Balfour Declaration[†] be enacted. Most powerful among the speakers were: Senator Barkley, Lt. Governor High [Hugh] Cross, Mayor Kelly, Rabbi Solomon Goldman, Max Bressler and others. The audience cried when the Old Rabbi Olswang chanted 'Ahl Naaroth Babel'. Many repeated the Kaddish with the Rabbi for their own dead in the Nazi Massacre. 'WHAT GOOD DO DEMONSTRATIONS SUCH AS THESE DO?' Some may ask. Well, at least it gives one a chance to cry out to the world that 'Justice is DEMANDED FOR THE SURVIVING JEW; OPEN THE GATES OF PALESTINE AND LET HIM ENTER THERE FREELY. 6 MILLIONS OF DEAD JEWS ARE ENOUGH....SAVE THE REST!!'!"⁶⁰

"Our society was well represented at this great Protest Meeting. Your correspondent[†] participated in the color guard with the Jewish War Veterans."⁶¹

Following the report on the White Paper Protest, there is a call to action for members of the Mariampoler Aid Society to become involved in the cause of expanded Jewish immigration to Palestine.

"DID YOU SEND THAT LETTER TO PRESIDENT TRUMAN, thanking him for his noble effort to get England [to] open the gates of Palestine to the HOMELESS JEWS OF EUROPE? If you did not write yet, DO SO NOW, YOUR LETTER MAY SAVE A LIFE."⁶²

The Mariampoler Aid Society continued its support of Israel after it was proclaimed a Free Jewish State in 1948. According to this announcement, a major topic of the June, 1951 meeting was bonds for Israel.

"THE NEXT MEETING OF YOUR MARIAMPOLER AID SOCIETY WILL BE HELD AT THE HAMILTON HOTEL, 20 SOUTH DEARBORN ST. ON TUESDAY, JUNE 12, 1951. We will discuss plans for our part in 'Israeli Independence Bonds' which are now being floated in this country."⁶³

As time went by, support for Mariampoler and other refugees in Israel became a more important focus for fund raising.—The organization once again adjusted to a changed situation, as more and more refugees found new homes in Israel.

CONCLUSION

The Mariampoler Aid Society remained active for the greater part of the 20th century, outlasting many other organizations of this type. The Society's ability to adapt to changing circumstances, while continuing to meet the needs of its membership for meaning and community, no doubt contributed to its longevity.

* Balfour Declaration of 1917. This set out the original British policy supporting the development of a Jewish State in Palestine and declaring that the British Government will use their best efforts to facilitate this end, provided that the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish inhabitants of Palestine are preserved and the rights and political status of Jewish inhabitants of other countries are maintained.

[†] Albert Margowsky

In honor of the 50th anniversary of the Mariampoler Aid Society in 1957, Louis Lieberman, one of the leaders of the organization and a staff person for the *M.A.S. Bulletin*, offered a prayer, which is a beautiful expression of the spirit and purpose that made the society such a success:

“A PRAYER

By Louis Lieberman

“Tonight, our hearts are filled with gratitude for Your keeping us together in our wonderful Society for these past fifty years.

“We have kept up the ideals of ‘Tsodoka,’ help to the needy, to the best of our ability. We have given willingly to ourselves to this noble cause.

“We thank Thee, Oh God, for the pioneers who founded this group fifty years ago. They, with Your guidance have given to all of us a purpose in life. The purpose of helping our fellow men has enriched and made fuller our lives.

“We thank Thee, Oh God, for our new homeland, America, and for our children born and raised in this country. We have watched them mature with the ideals of democracy fresh upon them. We hope that soon they will take over our ideals, Charity, and be so enriched as we have been. As we are growing old in years our strength at times does fail, but the will to help remains. We pray that with Your help the Mariampoler Aid Society will flourish and continue to do its good work.

“We thank Thee, Our Father, for the friends and contributors to our Society enabling it to live on. We ask for their good health and continued interest in the M.A.S.

“And now, God, we recall with blessed memory, those of us that have departed. They have worked side by side with us as they are now, by Your side. We pray for their souls, that they may rest in eternal peace.

“We bow our heads in silent prayer. Amen”⁶⁴

Joan Burnett joanburnett@yahoo.com

¹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, May, 1951

² Sorkin, Sidney, *Bridges to an American City: A Guide to Chicago's Landsmanshaften, 1870 to 1990*. (American University Studies. Series IX History Vol. 102.) Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., New York, 1993.

³ Cutler, Irving, *The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb*. Urbana and Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1996. p. 88

⁴ Personal communication from David Passman, 18 Mar. 2007.

⁵ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, April, 1957

⁶ Personal communication from David Passman, 18 Mar. 2007.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, February, 1945

⁹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, March, 1945

¹⁰ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, October, 1945

¹¹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, February, 1950

¹² *M.A.S. Bulletin*, October, 1945

¹³ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, October, 1951

¹⁴ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, January, 1950.)

¹⁵ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, March, 1945

¹⁶ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1944

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, March, 1946

¹⁹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, July, 1946

²⁰ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, July, 1947

²¹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, September, 1947

²² *M.A.S. Bulletin*, May, 1946

²³ *M.A.A. Bulletin*, February, 1945

²⁴ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, January, 1950

²⁵ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, February, 1945

²⁶ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, April, 1945

²⁷ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1944

²⁸ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1944

²⁹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, October, 1947

³⁰ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1949

³¹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, January, 1951

³² *M.A.S. Bulletin*, February, 1945

³³ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1944

³⁴ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, April, 1945

³⁵ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, October, 1952

³⁶ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1949

³⁷ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, February, 1946

³⁸ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, January, 1945

³⁹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, January, 1951

⁴⁰ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1944

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

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- ⁴³ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, November, 1945.)
- ⁴⁴ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1944
- ⁴⁵ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, April, 1945
- ⁴⁶ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, February, 1945
- ⁴⁷ *M.A.S. Bulletin*. (The cover page with the date was missing from materials available to the researcher. There was not sufficient context to determine an approximate date.)
- ⁴⁸ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, March, 1946
- ⁴⁹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, April 1950
- ⁵⁰ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1944
- ⁵¹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, January, 1945
- ⁵² *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1949
- ⁵³ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, February, 1950
- ⁵⁴ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December, 1950
- ⁵⁵ Rosen, Joseph. "Mariampole (Marijampole) (Lithuania)" English editing by Fania Hilelson-Jivotovsky. <http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/mariampol/mariampol.html> Accessed February, 17, 2007.
- ⁵⁶ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, April, 1957
- ⁵⁷ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, December 1944
- ⁵⁸ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, September, 1947
- ⁵⁹ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, January, 1951
- ⁶⁰ *M.A.S. Bulletin*. November, 1945
- ⁶¹ *Ibid*
- ⁶² *Ibid*
- ⁶³ *M.A.S. Bulletin*. June, 1951
- ⁶⁴ *M.A.S. Bulletin*, April, 1957