

# Epilogue

In this book I have tried to provide the reader with an important but much-neglected chapter in the social history of the Jewish people during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In most cases, the descriptions of everyday life in the particular town studied here, Mariampole, may also be valid for other Jewish Lithuanian communities of comparable size during the same period.

Ancestors from Mariampole persevered: They emigrated from their hometowns, crossed the borders between countries, gained documents for immigration, and survived long voyages by sea. They embarked on a new life, made a living in the best way they knew how, saved money whenever possible, and in many cases sent funds back home, often so that family members could follow them to a new life. In this way, the Jewish immigrant ancestors from Mariampole and nearby areas are no different than immigrants from other countries.

The brief biographies of descendants of Mariampole reveal a remarkable record of achievement. From this medium-sized town, a significant number of persons have been recognized in academia, the arts, business, medicine, politics, and other fields. Perhaps some of the contributing factors to the new immigrants' success were the Jewish cultural values that emphasized education and hard work. Because of East European social policies, Jews were barred from owning land and working in rural occupations. As a consequence, they moved into the so-called "liberal" professions (those without guild restrictions) and developed skills in business and trades. These skills were rewarded in the countries to which they emigrated, such as the United States, Great Britain, Israel, France, Canada, South Africa, and the Virgin Islands.

As immigrant, however, they often had only a limited command of their new country's language and they frequently spoke with a strong Yiddish accent. Yet, in many cases, they and their descendants succeeded in the new world notwithstanding the many challenges they faced. In part, the first generation of immigrants' success was aided by the operation of Mariampoler Aid Society (M.A.S) in Chicago. The activities of the Society, and the ability of the society to adapt to changing circumstances provides a model for a self-help community. The success of the M.A.S. can be attributed to the Jewish value of *tzedakah*, the value of financial contributions and volunteerism to maintain a viable community and care for the needy. The word, *tzedakah*, is derived from the Hebrew root meaning righteousness, justice or fairness, the performance of duty.

"The Jews of Mariampole and Vicinity" recreates a picture of what life was like in Mariampole, and notes some of the branches of that great Mariampole tree which have flourished in many places where the sons and daughters of Mariampole have settled and made vital contributions to society.

By the same token, this social history also reminds us of the branches that were cut off and never allowed to make their contributions to the world: the Mariampoler victims of the Holocaust—and their descendants who might have been.

How much the poorer is our world for the loss of those branches! But how much the richer thanks to those who survived, prospered, and contributed in so many ways to the life we enjoy today.