

Winter

From the Shavei Tzion Archives

Judith Temime December 2013

Truly with the sweat of their brows, the founders of **Shavei Tzion** built our moshav. We all know that. They had to adapt themselves to hard labor in a climate that was both strange to them and harsh; they had to learn to live with the threat of attack by hostile neighbors; they had to adjust themselves to foods that seemed odd and even unpalatable; and they had to acclimate to a way of life that was challenging in every way. All this is known to us in general terms, but the present text is meant to open a small window on life here in winter: the everyday obstacles and troubles and the occasional joys.



Shavei Tzion, February 1951.

From left: two unidentified children, **Miriam Weiss**, **Siegfried Schwarz**, **Susanne Schwarz**, **Shlomo Linver**, **Hannah Scheuer**, **Dr. Manfred Scheuer**, **Shulamith Schindler**, **Ruth Pless**.

From the collection of the **Shavei Tzion Archives**. (30'ט)

Elkana Fröhlich (later **Elkana Ron**), a boy of 11 when he arrived in Palestine with his family in 1938, wrote in his memoirs that his first visit to **Shavei Tzion** took place at Rosh Hashanah that year: "On the holiday, the first rain of the season fell in the crowded little camp and soaked everyone and everything. Even the religious (*members*) ran about in the rain that night, in order to salvage (*their*) belongings."

In his journal recording the first months of settlement in **Shavei Tzion**, **Dr. Manfred Scheuer** wrote on November 6, 1938, when construction of the first permanent housing was well underway: "The rain is terribly bothersome to the builders." And he added, "In this rain, people can't stand in the open guard posts at night." The following day, he wrote "Storm and unending rain. Part of the stockade wall collapsed with the sound of an explosion. People had been sleeping next to it. A motorcycle was buried beneath the wall." That winter in the encampment was a trial. A month later, **Dr. Scheuer** wrote: "Our projector light (*used at the top of the watch tower*) has twice burned out, the first time followed immediately by the second. An expensive pleasure. Was there an electrical overload? Were the burnouts caused by the rain?"

"The builders" who found the rain so troublesome were constructing the first family houses here. Until the families could be reunited upon completion of those houses at the end of 1938, the settlers' very young children lived in Haifa, and the older children in Kiryat Bialik where they began learning Hebrew at the "Ahava" school. On December 24, 1938, **Dr. Scheuer** wrote: "Shabbat Chanukah—our housewarming! That's the last Sabbath spent in the barracks where we'd lived for more than eight months. We'd gotten used to it." And yet, what happiness! Of course, we need to understand that the family's new house wasn't exactly a palace, nor was **Dr. Scheuer's** workspace. This is what he had written in May 1938, a month after the moshav was founded: "When I returned from Haifa, I found my room," (*and here he means the barracks space allotted him as manager of the settlement*) "which is 4 x 3 meters like all of the rooms, with its door open and laundry baskets blocking both the entrance and the path to the physician's table and the typewriter table and, inside the room, foodstuffs and canned goods and so on. First off, I had the baskets of laundry

removed. Then, the foods were moved to the little storage shed near the kitchen. In that way, the physician and I could do our work, after a fashion. (*But*) in the long run, it won't be possible for the two of us and two beds as well, to share a space that's 12 meters square."

In a *Beineinu (Between Us)* newsletter published in the moshav in 1982, **Fanny Berlinger** wrote about the life of women in **Shavei Zion** in those early days of the late 1930s and early 40s, when they worked around the farmstead and their housework was accomplished only in the late evenings and she and the other young mothers collected firewood on the beach in order to boil their babies' diapers in kettles over open fires in the yards. **Fanny** recalled her job in the village vegetable garden: "We sowed seeds in the nursery of the garden in special wooden frames set in the ground and when the seeds had sprouted we thinned them out. The work was physically demanding. We spent the whole day on our knees."



"The nursery": cultivating seedlings in the vegetable garden. **Shavei Zion**, 1939.

From left: **Betty Kann, Thea Lemberger, Rezi Pressburger.**

Photo by **Rudi Weissenstein.** Photo source: the Jewish National Fund Archives.

From the collection of the **Shavei Zion Archives.** (577)

"For women who were 'full-bodied', Fanny continued, "the work was even more difficult and more than once one of those who was less agile simply fell over onto the seedlings. We sowed and planted and harvested spinach, cabbage, Brussels sprouts, cucumbers, tomatoes, squash, beans, peas and even strawberries and asparagus. At that time, I worked in the morning from 7:30 to 11 and then in the afternoon from 2 until the work was finished. On Fridays, when it was necessary, we harvested vegetables in the afternoon, even in the winter with a steady rain falling, so that the produce could be sent to Tnuva (*the co-operative marketing enterprise*) on Saturday night, after the Sabbath ended."

The column titled "40 Years Ago Today" in the *Beineinu* issue of September 1981 cites a decision made in 1941 at a meeting of the moshav's management committee. The subject was rubber work boots. "The moshav will purchase some boots: one pair for the vegetable garden, one pair for the orchard, two pairs for the irrigation team. Later on, perhaps we'll buy more." **Pinchas Erlanger**, the editor of the column and translator of the original German-language record, added, "According to my calculations, there would have been enough boots for each member working in those branches to use a single boot and, I suppose, they'd trade off: one week a boot for the right foot and the next week, for the left." **Pinchas** quoted the rest of the protocol for that decision: "There'll be absolutely no further purchases of work clothing. Maybe next year."

In her reminiscences entitled "Moshav Candidate of 31 Years Ago," in the July 1981 issue of *Beineinu*, **Anita Bloch** intended, she said, "to share her memories with today's generation." Of course, a lot of time has passed even since 1981 and it's for us, now, to understand what we can. **Anita** recalled how she and her family (her husband **Hans** and their two year-old son **Menachem**) lived in a space of "one single room. We set up a washstand outside. The shower and toilet stood at some distance from our room and it happened sometimes that we were obliged to wait in the shower or in the toilet until there was a break in the rain before we could get back to our room."

Ya'acov Zeidenbandt, in the 1962 *Moshav Journal* published at Chanukah time, reported on the winter activities organized for members by the culture committee. Or rather, he reported the scheduled activities organized by the "Kulturkomission" in a journal written entirely in German. At the end of 1962, many members were already busy with preparations for the 25-year "half jubilee" celebration of the founding of the moshav that would take place in April 1963. Despite that, the committee offered members a variety of activities and **Ya'acov** duly reported the Hebrew lessons that had begun a month earlier, two concerts, an exercise class for men held every Tuesday and one for women every Thursday. A traditional, festive evening was planned for Chanukah week as well as a two-day outing to Ein Gedi. The committee was planning, **Ya'acov** continued, "evenings of recorded concerts, once every five weeks." And he closed his report with a plea that will sound familiar to anyone who's ever organized a community event: "Please," he said, "participate!"

Max Stern, who lived here from 1940 with his wife **Frida**, in the home of their son **Lothar** (along with **Lothar's** wife **Friedlise** and their children **Yehudit**, **Micha** and **Yochanan**), was an indefatigable promoter of **Shavei Tzion** in the descriptive letters he wrote in the 1940s, presumably all of which were addressed to family members who had remained in Europe after World War Two. In a letter written at the start of 1947, **Max** accompanied his readers on a virtual tour of the village. It was January 3, he wrote, and the weather was beautiful: "The temperature in the unheated house is 18 degrees (*Celsius*). That's called winter here. When it rains, it's sometimes cooler, but the temperature inside the house never drops below 10 degrees. Sometimes the temperature at night drops to 5 degrees (*outdoors*), and we think of that as very cold (*but*) that's like October in Germany. It never rains between April and October and despite that we have plenty of water flowing from the taps and the village does require a lot of water. Our water consumption would be enough for a town."

In *Beineinu* in 1989, **Gadi Kuritsky** (then **David Temime's** energetic partner in the irrigation branch) told the editor-interviewer: "I measure rainfall for the meteorological station. There are several rain gauges placed around the moshav, including one near the grocery store and one in the avocado plantation." (*The reference, of course, is to the established plantation on the other side of Road 4, across*

from Regba's land.) "It's interesting," said **Gadi**, "that the amount of rain that falls inland, at some distance from the sea, for instance in our avocado plantation or at Kibbutz Eilon, is much greater than that which falls in **Shavei Tzion**. This is because of the warm air that rises from the sea. Sometimes, you can see how a group of clouds, heavy with rain, will simply pass over the moshav and move on without dropping any rain here at all." **Gadi** remarked that "the average yearly rainfall in **Shavei Tzion** is (or was) 550 mm, while in Eilon it's 1200 mm."



Ga'aton Regional Council school bus, leaving **Shavei Tzion** on the flooded entry road. 1960s (?). From the collection of the **Shavei Tzion Archives**.

And **Gadi** continued: "I'm not the only one in the moshav who measures rainfall. **Zvi Meir** does it as a hobby. I gave him a gauge which he's placed in his garden and every morning he carefully measures the amount of rain that's fallen. **Zvi** also has a barometer in his house that he uses to predict rain according to the drop in barometric pressure. Every morning, we have a cup of coffee together and share our measurements and opinions about the amount of rain that's fallen. I have to point out that **Zvi** not only takes an interest in the amount of rainfall but is also unusually

concerned with water use and conservation in the moshav. It's important to him that people not waste water and I wish there were more folks like him."

Rain is a blessing, is it not? If it weren't, we wouldn't pray for rain. But who prays for snow except for little children who beg their parents to make a family outing to the Hermon? In February 1951, so much snow fell on **Shavei Tzion** that several roofs collapsed. **Lothar Stern** happily skied around the moshav and the picturesquely snowed-over village reminded residents, for a short time, of a wintry European landscape.



Lothar Stern skiing past the grocery store, **Shavei Tzion**, February 1951.
From the collection of the **Shavei Tzion Archives**. (29 '1)

On December 24, 1938, **Dr. Scheuer** wrote "We brought a Christmas present to Ford in Akko." Ford was the British regional police supervisor in the service of the Mandate and it was his responsibility (or his prerogative) to issue licenses for weapons to the settlers. The management of **Shavei Tzion** enjoyed a friendly relationship with Ford and with other British officers who often came to the village for a chat and a glass of beer but these friendly relations weren't worth much in speeding up the release of

those licenses. The wait for another pistol or one more rifle was long, irritating and even dangerous for the little settlement. But if a Christmas present to Ford did no good, it certainly can't have done any harm.

As the manager and Mandate-appointed "mukhtar" of **Shavei Zion**, **Dr. Scheuer** was always very busy with negotiations with "Rassco" (the Rural and Urban Settlement Company), the Jewish National Fund (Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael) and other bodies, and a good part of his time was spent in wearying trips to Akko, Haifa, Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Because of his responsibilities and his position in the moshav and because of his limitations as an amputee, wounded in the service of his native Germany in World War 1, **Dr. Scheuer** might have been excused from the guard duty that members shared. But, in fact, he chose to take part and, with his wooden leg, he willingly climbed the steep ladder to the watch tower where, he claimed, guard duty afforded him a pleasant respite from his other burdens. He enjoyed the lookout position that let him see the Mediterranean and, he said, there was always something interesting happening down below in the encampment. On December 31, 1938, **Dr. Scheuer** was on duty beside the projector atop the tower. "During the night," he wrote, "**(Hermann) Gideon** brought some hot wine to me in the tower to mark the New Year." And **Dr. Scheuer** wondered, "Will 1939 bring us peace and blessings?"



The water tower, **Shavei Zion**, February 1951.
From the collection of the **Shavei Zion Archives**. (ב' 30)