

## Twentieth Century Settlers in the Blackstone Valley

Museum of Work & Culture, Woonsocket, Rhode Island

### Aliens Fight for Citizenship

In 1917, at the beginning of World War I, a war emergency act to curb illegal immigration created the American Citizenship Campaign Committee. This semi-public organization encouraged citizenship for all immigrants in America. In its two-year existence, the Committee created detailed lists of more than 60,000 aliens living in Rhode Island's towns and cities. These lists were forwarded to the Draft Board. Immigrants who served in the U.S. armed forces automatically became citizens, a policy still in effect today. Committee members strongly urged foreigners to apply for naturalization and offered education programs to local organizations to help them prepare for the citizenship test. Robert Levine, a member of the Jewish community in Woonsocket, joined up and fought in World War I to gain his citizenship.



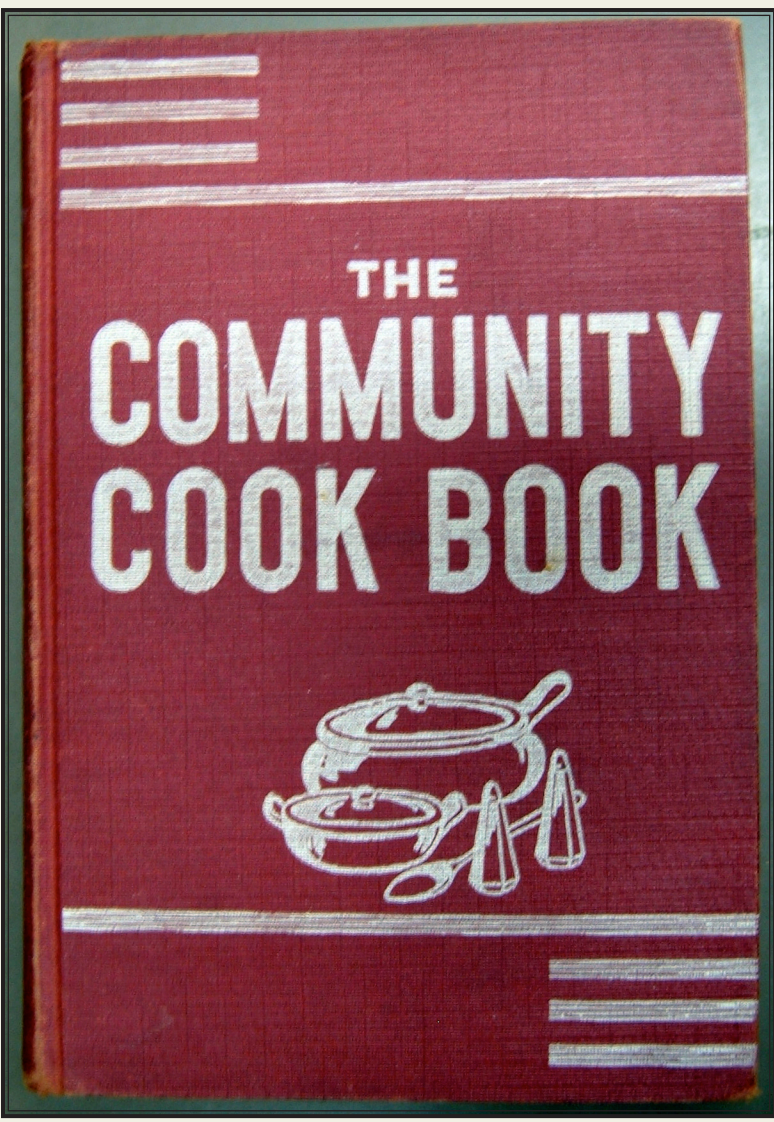
Robert Levine, US Army, 1917, courtesy of George Levine

### Food Fuels Community Project

The Jewish community in Woonsocket became quite active after World War II. In 1947, the Sisterhood of Congregation B’Nai Israel published and sold *The Community Cook Book* as a fundraiser. Organizers collected kosher recipes from Jewish women who lived all over the East Coast. Most Jewish families from the Blackstone Valley contributed at least one recipe. The fundraiser was extremely successful for the Sisterhood, which went on to reprint the book five times. Many Jewish families still use the book, and it is often passed from one generation to the next.



Sisterhood of B’Nai Israel Congregation Kitchen Committee, Collection of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Society



The Community Cook Book, courtesy of Shirley Kirsh

Shirley Kirsh received this copy as a young bride. Her mother, Beck Levin, had contributed to it. Since many of the women cooked from memory instead of measurement, Shirley’s copy contains handwritten notes about the correct amount of ingredients to add. In addition to ambiguous measurements, some recipes also call for items not found in modern supermarkets.

### Woonsocket Home to New Synagogue



B’Nai Israel Congregation choir members, 1958, courtesy of Arthur Robbins

In addition to a shared language and ancestry, communities were often formed around a shared religion. Within Woonsocket and the surrounding Blackstone Valley, Jewish people from many nations throughout Europe gathered to worship at temples, or synagogues. In 1960 members of Woonsocket’s Jewish community broke ground for an impressive new temple for Congregation B’Nai Israel. Prominent businessmen and community members, Samuel J. and Israel Medoff played a vital role in raising funds for the building and also served as religious leaders for the community.



Medoff Family, courtesy of Arthur Robbins