

"Ephraim Catz: The First Pioneer of the Haifa Bay"

At the farm, Catz built a dairy barn, a goat shed, stables and two cabins, one for the family and one for the laborers and watchman. He planted a grove of eucalyptus trees in order to drain the swamps because malaria was rife. In addition, he planted an orange grove, a vineyard, a banana orchard, a vegetable garden, and lemon, grapefruit, guava, peach, walnut, apple, and pear trees. He raised cows, chickens, goats, and horses. From America, he imported threshing machines and sophisticated harvesting equipment. In 1927 Catz leased 10,000 dunams of land from the Palestine Land Development Company and established at the Kishon farm, not too far from Sabinia. Here he grew sunflowers for the cooking oil industry in Haifa, wheat and barley for the large four mills in Haifa, and flax.

In 1929, politics intruded on Sabinia. Arab national and Moslem religious feeling flared up in murderous outbreaks against the Jewish population which were incited by agitation over Arab and Jewish holy places in Jerusalem. When the riots started, two British policemen were stationed in Sabinia in order to protect the farm. When Catz discovered that the Arabs planned to attack the farms, he knew that the two British policemen were not enough to protect both farms; therefore, he asked the British army and police for additional assistance. They declined, refusing "to send a score of soldiers to fight against thousands." As soon as Catz realized that the British authorities would not come to his aid, he immediately went to Haganah (the Jewish defense organization in Palestine) to ask for protection. They also refused, saying that they barely had enough men or arms to protect the Jewish population centers. They said that it would be useless to send one or two men to protect the farms, since everyone would probably be slaughtered. The Haganah suggested that Catz move to Haifa, where it was safer.

That August, in order to supply the four mills and the oil industry in time before the attack, Catz frantically harvested his crops, and in a few weeks the entire harvest, stored in silos, was ready for delivery. On Saturday, August 15th, 1929, Arab attackers destroyed the entire harvest. At the Kishon farm, they set all unharvested fields on fire. At the Sabinia farm, they destroyed all the agricultural equipment and set the farm, its livestock, its groves, and various structures on fire. The family, which was supposed to spend that Saturday on the Sabinia farm, happened to be in Haifa at the German Colony house because one of the daughters (my grandmother) was

ill; thus they were all saved. Ephraim Catz, whom the British authorities prevented from rushing to his farm, stood on the roof of his Haifa home, watching his lifelong effort burn to the ground. He went into a state of shock and suffered from amnesia for an entire year. On August 17th, the Arab attackers returned to finish what they had started and cut down whatever trees remained. A British plane fired at the attackers, killing three while the others fled. Had the British intervened two days earlier, such destruction would not have occurred. The damage was assessed at 16,000 Palestine liras, which at that time was equivalent to approximately 80,000 dollars. As a result of the attack, the Catz family was completely destitute and remained in the German Colony until 1930, when they moved to the Jewish part of Haifa, Hadar Hacarmel. The causes for the move were the 1929 riots and the Nazi orientation of young Germans in the German Colony.

When Catz recovered from his illness in 1930 he decided to go back to farming. He could not restore the Kishon farm, where everything had been destroyed, because he had too many debts and could not afford to lease the land. Sabinia, however, belonged to him, and he decided to rebuild it, proving to himself that once again he could grow citrus and other fruit in the sandy soil. Catz obtained the money to rebuild the farm by selling his wife's jewelry. His new home, which still stands today, was constructed like a fortress, with heavy stones, bars on each window, a cellar, and an attic. Catz restored the farm by planting new orange groves, banana groves, and grapefruit, lemon, apple, pear and eucalyptus trees (which in time became "The Catz Forest"). He built a dairy barn, stables, laborers' dwellings, and cement irrigation channels to irrigate the trees. He raised 200 cows and some leghorn chickens. The Catz cellar served as an incubator for the farm's chickens as well as for those of surrounding kibbutzim (collective farms).

The British took an active interest in Catz's welfare. British authorities sent him a crate containing three rifles and a revolver which he was to use only during emergencies. The crate was always locked and, every three months, the British came to check whether the arms had been used and to clean the rifles.

Catz's hospitality and initiative contributed to the further development of Sabinia and the Haifa Bay area. One evening, the British manager of Palestine Railways spent the night at Catz's farm, because darkness

prevented his driver from continuing their journey across the Haifa Bay. Catz provided food, conversation, and lodging for the men. The following morning, before leaving, the manager wanted to pay for his keep; Catz refused to accept payment, but his guest persisted in wanting to repay the hospitality. Finally, Catz requested a railway station near the farm; the manager had it built, and it was named "Sabinia." (The railway line can be seen on the map in Appendix C.)

Between 1931 and 1932, new families from Rumania settled in the Haifa Bay area and bought or leased land from Catz. They first worked on his farm and then moved to their own lands. In 1933, the town of Kiryat Haim was established in the Haifa Bay area adjacent to the Sabinia farm, and the Catz family was no longer as isolated as in the past. After the establishment of Kiryat Haim, Catz himself installed an electric power line to the farm. A new asphalt road replaced the old road which in the past was long and tiring and had not road signs indicating where the farm stood.

During the first twelve years of the British Mandate, Jewish immigration was limited by the authorities in such documents as the two White Papers, one of which was issued in 1922 and the other in 1930. In 1934, however, a period of large Jewish immigration began as Hitler's barbarous persecution drove the Jews out of Germany, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and all of central Europe. Palestine was the principal "haven of refuge" in the world. Over 100,000 Jews were admitted between 1934 and 1935, leading to great developments in industry and agriculture. The urban Jewish population in the Haifa Bay area expanded with the establishment of Kiryat Bialik, Kiryat Motzkin, and K'far Bialik, reaching the Sabinia farm. Many people started visiting the farm, thus the family, which in the he past had lived in almost total isolation, started adjusting to the new conditions. In 1934, the British nominated Catz the "Muktar" (an Arabic word meaning the head or official representative of the village, the headman, the elder) of Kiryat Bialik and surrounding area.

The possibility that a Jewish majority in Palestine could exist within a relatively short period of time because of so much immigration provoked disturbances once again by the Arabs. These disturbances became particularly severe between the years 1936 and 1939. During these riots, the Arabs did not dare attack the farm, for Sabinia was surrounded by Jewish settlers and was not as isolated and unprotected as in 1929.

The area surrounding the farm became more and more urban in character, thus, my great-grandfather had to sell his lands and liquidate the farm, which was hampering urban growth. He kept only a much smaller operation: the house and some fields surrounding it. In 1940, Catz helped establish a bus line from Haifa to Kiryat Bialik. Refusing any profits offered to him from the operation of the line, he and his family were granted life-long free rides on the bus route with special attention to Mr. and Mrs. Catz, who were to be driven to their door.

In 1944 Sabinia Catz died of typhoid fever, having lived her last twenty years with her husband in Palestine. Catz later married a widow and lived in his house in Sabinia, surrounded by lush, thick greenery, until his death in 1957. Gradually, he gave up farming as his land was in the residential section of the developing Haifa Bay region; Catz parceled the land and lived on the income of the sales. His children, after his death, donated the building to the local municipality and council in order for it to become the cultural center of an ever-growing community. That it became and still is today. It is known as "Beit Catz" (or the "Catz House"), and thousands of people both young and old benefit from the many activities which take place there.

After the end of World War II, in 1947, Britain gave up the mandate and turned over the problem of Palestine to the United Nations which partitioned the country and created the state of Israel. Sabinia, a prosperous suburb of the city of Haifa, is one of many communities in the modern state of Israel. Its development would never have occurred the way it did without my great-grandfather, his vision, and his work. The turning point in Catz's personal life, moving to Palestine, becoming a farmer, and founding Sabinia, contributed to the taming of the wilderness in Palestine, which is one of the turning points in modern Jewish and Palestinian history.