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I beheld my grove at last in full-grown state. All through the depression I had managed to send money for its upkeep, and last season there had been a first crop, but Arab vandals had destroyed it, and they had also burned my packing shed. This year as I arrived I was greeted with news of a local hailstorm which had ruined half my crop. Alas, my dreams of sometime living here in modest ease and writing epics on the proceeds from my grove were like the dreams of all genteel buyers of chicken farms in New Jersey and little ranches in California. There was just then a glut of oranges on the market because of too-rapid expansion of the citrus industry, and many groves were being abandoned. So I crammed myself with oranges during my week in Nathanyah, as the sole return of my seven-year investment.

Meyer Levin, In Search: An Autobiography

In the 1920s and 1930s, several American groups and a number of individuals whose motivations were pragmatic rather than ideological were involved in rural development in Palestine. However, some of their projects and initiatives were influenced by social and Zionist considerations—including Jewish redemption of land and its amelioration through agricultural development; the expansion of the Jewish economy through growth in production and employment of Jewish labor; and the establishment of workers’ settlements, often adjacent to plantations that provided an income for the inhabitants. These private projects differed to some degree from those of the ahuza companies and the American Zion Commonwealth. These companies had established constitutions that laid out well-defined directions for their activities; their mode was a kind of quasi-investment—upbuilding the land, but with no desire for excessive profits. By comparison, planting as a private investment was based on the premise of reaping high returns.

The Gan Haim Corporation, with a capital of £P100,000, was founded in 1927 to create large citrus plantations in Palestine. Its founders included Canadians, British, Australians, Americans, and local inhabitants. Among
the more prominent backers were Asher Pierce of Montreal, David Dunkelman of Toronto, Max Shoolman of Boston, and Sir Alfred Mond (later Lord Melchett). Other Americans included Nathan Goldberg, a construction engineer from the Bronx who served as chairman of Gan Haim in 1933, and Israel Matz, a New York Zionist and Hebraist who settled in Palestine in 1926. The corporation's ultimate objective was to divide the groves, once they were fully developed, into various sized plots to be sold to settlers on easy payment terms.

In 1927 negotiations began for the purchase of 2,500 dunams in the area of Miske (today the area of Ramat Hakovesh). By 1928, 975 dunams had been transferred and registered in the company's name. On this site the large estate of Gan Haim was founded, honoring Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann, a personal friend of some of the investors. (The corporation also initiated negotiations for the purchase of 8,000 dunams extending southward from Birket Ramadan [the swamplike depression of the Poleg River] toward Herzlia, but this transaction was not realized.) By spring 1928 about 220 of the 975 dunams were planted with orange groves; by 1936, 892 dunams had been planted. In addition, large nurseries were created for the future development of the company's land.\(^1\)

Abraham Revusky, commenting on the success of Gan Haim, noted: "The largest and most important of these groups, the Gan Haim, owns extensive orange plantations in the Sharon to the north of Kfar Saba. It has proven to be highly successful from the investment point of view. It has pursued a liberal labor policy, encouraging the permanent settlement of their workers on small holdings adjoining the large plantations. Owing to this policy it forms the base for rapidly growing settlements in the vicinity."\(^2\)

Asher Pierce, one of the more active investors in this group, applied his experience in Western Canada and his business acumen to this and other endeavors in Palestine. In late 1929, without consulting the corporate directors, he decided to expand Gan Haim, believing this would be beneficial to the development of the estate as well as to the workers. But coming as it did after the stock market crash, such an investment was regarded by the shareholders as a breach of confidence, and Pierce's initiative created an unbridgeable rift between company owners who supported the expansion and those who opposed it.\(^3\)

As of 1929 Gan Haim consisted of 3,500 dunams, of which 1,000 were planted with orchards, 5 dunams had forests and public gardens, and 500 dunams were ready for planting orchards. The estate structures were spread over 25 dunams. The infrastructure and machinery consisted of eleven houses, five shacks, two public buildings, a workshop, four irrigation wells, and two tractors. There were sixty-five inhabitants, of whom fifty were Jewish workers. By 1933, 1,700 dunams of citrus groves had been developed. Part of the plantation had reached the fruit-bearing stage, and
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that year 12,000 cases of oranges were harvested. The number of workers increased to between sixty and sixty-five. At that time, two packing houses were under construction, and during the following years production would increase greatly.  

In 1935 the Jewish National Fund had leased land adjacent to Gan Haim to a group of twenty-five workers there. Each member of the group received 10 dunams for his home and a small farm. This new settlement was originally named Gan Haim Bet, but eventually it gave up its independent status and became part of Gan Haim.  

Among the employees at Gan Haim were a number of Americans. Pierce had solicited Americans with experience in citrus culture, particularly those employed in educational institutions in California, to manage the enterprise. Among these recruits was Mendes Sacks, who had completed his studies at the University of Maryland and Harvard University and then specialized in citriculture at the University of California. His wife Celia was also an agronomist. In 1932 they arrived in Palestine, where he began as technical manager of the estate and within a few years rose to become full manager of the Gan Haim holdings. Sacks and his wife built their home amid the orchards.  

Private investment also boosted development near Haifa. When the American Zion Commonwealth encountered financial difficulties, the PEC began to invest in land in Haifa Bay. For this purpose, the PEC established a subsidiary, the Bayside Land Company, in partnership with the Jewish National Fund. In 1928, following the final transfer of the Haifa Bay lands to their new owners, the company commissioned Patrick Abercrombie to create an outline plan for the area. As noted above in chapter 7, Abercrombie’s scheme differed from Richard Kaufmann’s. The new plan divided the parcel into three sections: an industrial area of 15,441 dunams located in the southern section of the tract adjacent to the harbor; a residential area of 21,015 dunams to the north of the industrial zone; and an agricultural zone to the north of the residential area.  

At that time an oil pipeline was planned from Iraq to Haifa. The Iraqi Petroleum Company purchased 4,685 dunams in the industrial zone for the pipeline and a refinery, as well as 73 dunams in the residential zone. In addition, a deal was struck with the government of Palestine, which acquired 1,285 dunams for an airport and railroad warehouses. According to the original agreement, the Bayside Land Corporation was to receive 5,000 dunams in the industrial zone, but instead it received only half this amount. To further the industrial development of this area, the Bayside Land Corporation constructed and offered for lease eight industrial buildings with a total area of 3,205 square meters. In exchange for relinquishing its share in the industrial zone, the Bayside Land Corporation received 2,400 dunams in the residential zone. The settlement of Kiryat Yam was established on this section in 1940.
Fig. 25. Water tower at Gan Haim, ca. 1935.
(CZA Keren Hayesod photograph collection)
In addition, the Bayside Land Corporation held (in partnership with the Jewish National Fund) 8,000 dunams of agricultural land.8

Adjacent to the Haifa Bay lands were the State Domains. In 1932 the Department of Lands undertook the division of this land into parcels that would be leased to small landholders. In a letter to the U.S. secretary of state (with a copy to Emanuel Neumann), the American consul in Jerusalem, Alexander K. Sloan, pointed out that “this might be an excellent opportunity to American citizens wishing to lease land for industrial or agricultural purposes.”9 But American investors did not take up the challenge.

The settlement of Haifa Bay was, however, facilitated by the PEC, which held 78 percent of the Palestine Mortgage and Credit Bank. This bank provided 200 mortgages of £P100 for new home owners in the workers’ neighborhood of Kiryat Haim, founded in 1933. The PEC’s interest was clear—as the area became developed, additional settlers and investors would be drawn to it and would, in turn, purchase land from the PEC.10 In all, the Palestine Economic Corporation contributed to the development of the Haifa Bay region through two types of initiative: participation in land redemption, and encouraging settlement of the area by providing lands for housing as well as mortgages.

Another investment project was initiated by a single individual—Meyer L. Rosoff. A report of the activities of the Rosoff Group Plantations described how “Already in 1926, after his first trip to Palestine, Dr. M. L. Rosoff started to think about possibilities of making investments in some constructive enterprises undertaken along agricultural lines in that land.”11 Dr. Rosoff (1886–1948), an oral surgeon from New York City, investigated several possible means of achieving “a successive realization of smaller individual investments.” With the advice of social workers and the assistance of Mr. M. Cohen, Rosoff envisioned creating agricultural colonies in Palestine that would unite individual investors into groups “which would have to be constructed in such ways as to have possibilities of controlling all the work, no matter how small, and every cent which is to be invested in such an enterprise.”12 This plan for oversight was drawn up in reaction to the sometimes unaccountable and dubious business practices of various companies engaged in work in Palestine.

Beginning in 1927 and continuing until 1935, six corporations were organized under the umbrella of the Rosoff Group: Gan Rashal, Gan Hadar Corporation; Gan Hadar Beth, Inc.; Tel Hadar, Inc.; Pri Hadar, Inc.; and Reyem, Inc. These corporations engaged the Yakhin company to plant and tend their orange groves. Gan Rashal was developed on a 700-dunam tract bordering on Herzlia. The other five corporations purchased and developed the land of Naane in the vicinity of Rehovot. The majority of corporate members in each of these groups resided in the United States, but there were also some European owners. Under Rosoff’s direction, these investors
sought land of special quality; they understood the importance of thoroughly investigating soil quality and water availability before the land was purchased and planted. The corporations ventured to select “healthy trees of a desirable variety and uniform fruit”; to engage “a reliable contractor for development work”; to select “a supervision management, consisting of experts”; and to construct a well. At the same time, Rosoff deemed it cardinal to carefully select the investors. He realized that investors needed to be able to bear the financial burden for at least five years before seeing any return. This apparently was a reaction to problems encountered by ahuza companies and the American Zion Commonwealth. Investors, excited by the prospect of owning land in Palestine, often made an initial down payment but did not follow through on the following payments, nor did they uphold their commitments to pay taxes and subsidize improvements. To remedy this situation, Rosoff stressed that it was “very important to study the financial possibilities of every prospective investor before he undertakes such an obligation.”

As noted above, the first project was Gan Rashal in the Sharon. This name was an acronym, constructed from the initials of the biblical matriarchs: Rachel, Sarah, and Leah. Five American investors purchased 700 dunams in 1927, of which 200 were planted in the spring of 1928. As of 1 January 1933, the total investment had reached $109,000. The settlement included a “first class” well connected to a “California system of water irrigation.” The inventory also comprised “a special iron tank for additional water supply, a house built on the well, a packing house and a large nursery and other subtropical plants.” As of 1929, twenty Jewish workers and a guard were employed at Gan Rashal. The estate was later included under the jurisdiction of Herzlia.

The Gan Hadar Corporation was organized in 1928, and the following year it purchased 600 dunams near Rehovot. Though the climatic conditions of the location were considered quite suitable for plantations, there was apprehension about the availability of water. Development work was postponed until the spring of 1931, when the boring of an appropriate well was completed. Initially, 350 dunams were planted and irrigated by utilizing the California system. Here, too, the project was supervised by Yakhin and employed members of the 125-strong Kvutzah of Hanoar Haoved that was settled nearby.

Plans for additional settlements were made in 1931, but these were hindered by the difficulty of acquiring a large enough tract in the possession of one owner. One tract that seemed feasible comprised approximately 2,000 dunams of undeveloped land lying between Gan Hadar and the railroad station at Naane. The Land Settlement Department of the Mandatory government had completed its survey and division of lands in the area. Local villagers owned small parcels, few of which exceeded 10 dunams (this was in
contrast to other areas, where large tracts of land were owned by urban Arab effendis). Thus, if these American groups wanted to continue purchasing land, it would be necessary to proceed cautiously, buying tract after tract from villager after villager. Negotiations had to be discreetly conducted with each owner so as not to inflate land prices. Local landholders had been unsuccessful in their attempts to drill for water, but if they believed water was available, they would raise the price of their acreage. The Rosoff companies purchased a 150-dunam tract from an Arab owner who had bored a 215-meter well that came up dry. After completing the transaction, the American owners continued drilling until they struck water at a depth of 237 meters. The Rosoff group kept the discovery a secret so they could continue securing land in the vicinity. By February 1932, 200 dunams had been purchased for Gan Hadar Beth, bordering Gan Hadar.16

In March 1933, a 150-dunam tract at the Naane railroad station became available for purchase. This section would be strategically important for the development of plantations, for it could be the site of transportation services to all the investment groups in the area and allow the transit of produce by rail to the port of Haifa or to Egypt—the second largest market for Palestinian citrus fruit. After the tract was acquired, it was decided to utilize it for the benefit of all the companies in the area. Pri Hadar obtained 497.5 dunams by October 1933, of which 334 were planted. Tel Hadar acquired 300 dunams, which were planted with 10,000 trees.17

At first no thought was given to establishing a settlement for the American owners. Indeed, these plantation groups did not expect to create any continuous zone of ownership. It was assumed the company would only obtain noncontiguous and dispersed tracts of land. If owners did consider immigrating to Palestine, they could settle nearby in some existing Jewish colony. With the accumulation of some 1,500 dunams near Naane, however, foundations were laid for a 200-dunam settlement for American landowners, located near a workers’ settlement that had been established on Jewish National Fund land. The tract would be parcelled into 2.5-dunam plots. Half a dunam of each parcel would be set aside for roads and public buildings. The settlement was called Ramot Meir, in honor of Meyer Rossoff, but it was also known as Ganei Hadar.18

The company reported in January 1933 that during the coming year many of its American owners were expected to settle permanently in Palestine. If they did, it appears they did not settle at Ramot Meir, for the 1936 Census of Jewish Agriculture reported that 1,825 of the 4,000 dunams had been planted with citrus trees; the colony was divided into 95 plots of 20 or more dunams, but no one lived there. The plantations of the Rossoff Group did provide employment and thus financial support for the workers’ colony at Naane. In 1931, 69 Jewish workers resided there, and by 1936 their number had increased to 472. They were settled on 1,079 dunams belonging to the
Map 10. Rosoff group settlements between Rehovot and Naana, ca. 1935
Fig. 26. Orchards at Ramot Meir, 1940.
(CZA photograph collection 6,895)

Jewish National Fund. Agricultural use was divided: plantations comprised 100 dunams, of which 70 had citrus orchards; 795 dunams were farmed with field crops, of which 49 were irrigated. These workers also had 35 head of cattle as well as poultry.19

All in all, the Rosoff Group succeeded in redeeming a substantial amount of land. The amelioration of the land increased Jewish agricultural production. It also provided employment for Jewish workers and income for adjacent workers’ settlements.

During this period, Americans also channeled investments through Jewish land development companies in Palestine. In 1905 Aharon Eisenberg, an agronomist and founding member of Rehovot, organized a stock company—Agudat Netaim (Heb., planting association)—to purchase and plant lands. On the eve of World War I the company had purchased five tracts totaling over 18,000 dunams at Sedjera, Rehovot, Atta, Zeita, and Hefzibah—the latter three in the vicinity of Hadera. Of Agudat Netaim’s 102 listed investors, four were Americans, including Dr. Harry Friedenwald of Baltimore.20

Dr. Friedenwald (1864–1950), a professor of ophthalmology, was also an ardent Zionist who had visited Palestine in 1911. He purchased 100
dunams of the 1,800-dunam Hefzibah tract near Hadera and planted his land with almond trees. With the decline of this branch of agriculture, the trees were replaced with more lucrative orange groves. In 1947 Friedenwald transferred his land to the Jewish National Fund, and the village Yaar Shalom was established there. The scheme was to provide land and housing for Yemenites in the vicinity of the small town of Hadera; today it is known as Hefzibah. Friedenwald also purchased a second tract at Atta, near Hadera, which was improved with orange groves.  

In addition to providing a means of direct investment by American Jews, Agudat Netaim served as an agent for the American Zion Commonwealth before it purchased land in Palestine. An example has been found in which Hirsh (Harris) Skakolsky of New York received land at Hefzibah in 1921, consisting of a 4-dunam plot for his house and 40 dunams for agriculture, cereal, and plantations. (This purchase is discussed in greater detail in chapter 7.) No other American purchasers from Agudat Netaim have been identified, however. During the years prior to World War I, the company marketed lands mainly to Eastern European Jews and Jews in Palestine. There appear to have been only limited attempts by Agudat Netaim to draw on the potential market in the United States.  

American investment was also directed through the Bnai Binyamin organization, founded in 1921 by sons of established Jewish farmers in Palestine to further “cultural and agricultural aid for its members; the successful building of the land by establishing new colonies; the making possible a self-supporting livelihood on the land.” These men had been raised on moshavot founded prior to World War I, most of which lacked a reserve of land for settlement by the second generation. The Jewish Colonization Association was able to establish only a few second-generation settlers in its colonies of Binyamina and Pardes Hannah. Thus a grassroots movement was created to find a solution for the landless farmers. To further this purpose, Bnei Binyamin established two institutions, a bank and an agricultural contracting company. The bank allowed for the accumulation of capital for land purchasing, and loans for housing and infrastructure development. The contracting company provided employment for some farmers, particularly in developing tracts for absentee owners. As of 1928, the organization and its affiliated institutions had financed the settlement of twenty-eight families at the American Zion Commonwealth colony of Herzlia and twenty families at Kfar Aaron. Assistance was also provided to allow 228 families to settle in various established settlements, including Petah Tikvah, Rishon Lezion, Binyamina, Yesod Hamaalah, Kfar Tavor, Nes Ziona, Ekron, Kfar Saba, Zichron Yaakov, and Rosh Pinnah.  

The Co-operative Bank Bnai Binyamin was established in 1923 with initial capital of $100,000. Among the shareholders were Americans Mary Fels and Nathan Straus, and Baron Felix de Menashe of Alexandria. Hanoteah,
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the Development of Plantations and Colonization of the Bnai Binyamin organization, was a private contracting firm organized on strictly capitalistic lines. The first project developed, not exclusively for the settlement of Bnai Binyamin members, was Netanya. Land was offered abroad, and the planting would be conducted by Hanoteah.23

The Bnai Binyamin organization also distributed brochures in the United States promoting various avenues for American participation and investment. In 1928, Hanoteah attempted to promote “orange groves for private investors.” This idea was conceived during a trip to Greece by Oved Ben-Ami and Ittamar Ben-Avi. There, these two key figures in Bnai Binyamin observed the employment of peasants in maintaining lands owned by wealthy Greek expatriates. They hoped that a similar arrangement could be reached between Diaspora Jews and Jewish laborers in Palestine. Hanoteah advertised the possibility that people of moderate means could profitably rebuild Palestine and some day settle there. It emphasized that it was the only profitable business in Palestine that gave workers permanent employment. An additional selling point was that it would offer employment to many of the Eastern European relatives of American Jews who could not enter the United States because of new immigration restrictions. Netanya, a 10,000-dunam colony on the coast of the central Sharon, was named in honor of the American Jewish philanthropist Nathan Straus. The plan allotted 1,200 dunams for orange groves and 300 dunams for homes of foreign investors. Each unit comprised ten dunams of groves and two-and-a-half for building, at a cost of $4,400 payable over five years.24

Among the investors were Dr. Isaac Berkson, Alexander M. Dushkin, and Dr. Israel Kligler—Americans resident in Jerusalem who spent some of the summer months at the coast. Owners in America included Israel Chipkin; Miss Eudice Elkin of New York; Al P. Schoolman, director of the Central Jewish Institute in New York; and Rabbi Morris M. Schusheim of New York. Indeed, Schoolman had organized this particular group of Jewish educators. No information has been found regarding their total holdings, but details have been located specifying the planting of 120 dunams with citrus trees by Hanoteah. In addition, some of the owners leased from the Jewish National Fund two-dunam plots on the shoreline cliffs for their homes. American owners specified that “only a certain and definite percentage of Arab labor is to be used on our groves.”25 The entire project was named Gan Berakhah (Garden of Blessing), a reference to Berakhah, the Hebrew name of Bertha Schoolman.

In 1932 a pamphlet in English and Yiddish, An Orange Grove on the Mediterranean: Nathanyah, An Ideal Plan for American Settlers, did not stress the profitability of the investment, but rather emphasized the idea of the actual settlement of middle-class Americans at Netanya. It pointed to the geographic advantages of Netanya that would make it a new regional center.

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Instead of splitting their energies in "mushroom" plantation-settlements of a few hundred dunams each, scattered over Palestine, whenever a land bargain offered, far from centers of Jewish population and roads and transportation services, the experienced members of Hanotaiah, with an eye to the future, regarded Nathanyah as a nucleus and proceeded to expand in accordance with a preconceived plan for bringing their work in line with a scientific regional plan for the ultimate development of the whole Jewish orange belt. Nathanyah is already developing into the natural center of the entire Plain of Sharon. All other settlements in the Plain will eventually resort to Nathanyah for their social life and avail themselves of its beach facilities, making it the Tel Aviv of the Sharon.26

The promoters of Netanya promised sound prospects of a safe income and pleasant living conditions for middle-class Americans. Possible investors were assured that the plan was highly approved by Palestine's outstanding agricultural experts, including Moshe Smilansky, Mordechai Chefetz, P. Pascal, and T. Z. Miller. The size of a holding was 10 dunams; fully planted, this represented an investment of £P800 (about $3,000) spread over a five-year payment period. Net annual income was estimated at £P150 per annum, approximately 19 percent of the investment cost. Hanoteah promised to deliver a complete orange grove in fruit-bearing condition after five years. An added stimulus was that payments were to be made in Palestine currency—and the Palestine pound had recently been devalued. Compared to the previous year's price, in 1932 the cost of an orange grove in American currency was between 25 to 30 percent less. In 1933 Hanoteah began to develop the shoreline land designated for residential use, selling parcels at a rate of £P300 per dunam (£P200 to American grove owners). Few Americans were able to procure land at this time, however, since the United States was in the midst of the Great Depression.27

In 1929 Netanya consisted of 10,000 dunams, of which 500 dunams were set aside for building plots. Twenty houses, one shack, and two public buildings had been constructed. It had been planted with 500 dunams of orchards, 30 dunams of vineyards, 100 dunams of forests, and public gardens. An additional 1,000 dunams were ready for planting orchards. By 1936 the 4,734 dunams of the 11,414-dunam total were covered with citrus plantations, and 800 dunams were under field crops. The land was subdivided into 227 units—133 of less than 20 dunams, and 94 of 20 or more dunams.28

In 1947 the Jewish National Fund asked the American owners of these plots to sell their land so that a workers' settlement could be constructed for the growing town of Netanya. The owners agreed: It was for the good of Palestine. Moreover, while the owners had gained personal pleasure from their property over some fifteen years of investment, they had received no profit.29
At one point Hanoteah attempted to expand its activities into the area of Judaea. It advertised an additional tract for development near Naane. In the end, however, its sole achievements consisted of the colony of Netanya and providing contracting services to American orange grove owners.\(^\text{30}\)

To the north of Netanya, Pardes Hagdud (the Legionnaires' Plantation) was launched for the settlement of a number of former members of the Jewish Legion. Instrumental in this process were American Sam Friedlander and local resident Avraham Freidman, who had met at the military training base at Windsor, Nova Scotia. These men shared the belief that a land worth fighting for was worth settling. They conceived the idea that after the war the Legionnaires should remain together, and no better way could be found to achieve this than through a special project of their own postwar Jewish Reconstruction of Palestine.\(^\text{31}\) (See chapter 9 for a detailed discussion of the settlement of Jewish Legionnaires.)

Friedlander returned to America in 1920. A builder with experience in finance, he attempted to raise capital for the project. Freidman, an agronomist
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by training, remained in Palestine and searched for suitable land. He obtained
an option for land in the Jezreel Valley, but by the time the funds reached
Palestine, the tract had already been sold. In 1926 efforts began for the
purchase of a 600-dunam stretch of land in the vicinity of the village
Um-Haled in the Sharon plain. Friedlander urged former Legionnaires in
the United States to buy sections of this land, and Friedman did likewise
among the Legionnaires in Palestine. Together they formed a company and
registered it in the United States as “Pardes Hagdud Inc.”

It appears they had no clear preference for either geographical location
or any particular type of agricultural activity. However, it is certain that with
Freidman’s professional experience and knowledge, whichever tract was
chosen would be appropriate for cultivation and would probably provide an
income sufficient to maintain its owners. The initially considered Jezreel
Valley land was appropriate for cereal or mixed farming. By comparison,
the Sharon tract was in the citrus belt; this form of agricultural activity was
more profitable and becoming more popular. Furthermore, citrus farming
demanded a smaller commitment on the part of the investors. They need not
settle, but if they did, they did not have to have experience in agriculture. The
next year Friedlander arrived in Palestine to finalize the deal. The company
acquired 680 dunams, of which 114 were government-owned, at a price of
£P4 per dunam. The corporation issued six shares. Avraham Friedlander and
Noah Lipman each held half shares, and the remaining investors—Pesach
Kaplan and the Americans Sam Friedlander, J. Jonas Jacobs, Aaron Herr,
and Jacob Trachtenberg—each had a full share. Serving as the first manager,
Freidman arranged for the immediate preparation and planting of groves
in 1929.

On the southern edge of Pardes Hagdud, a two-storied building was
erected that included a water pump. This structure was used as both a
watchman’s lookout and a residence for the workmen. In the northern section,
a large, four-room residence with many American conveniences—including
a bathtub—was built for the Friedlander family. In 1931 Sam Friedlander
returned to Palestine with his wife and three daughters and took over the
post of manager. Until the lands were divided among the owners in 1935,
Pardes Hagdud was operated cooperatively.

In addition to various partnership arrangements, Americans invested in
private estates throughout Palestine. The concept of isolated or individual
farms and homesteads was somewhat alien to Palestine. Rural settlement was
generally concentrated in clustered villages, mainly for security reasons. This
concentration also made it easier for settlers to contract social and economic
services. An American member of the Zionist Commission, David de Sola
Pool, after consulting with Akiva Ettinger of the Settlement Department,
explained to an American intent on purchasing a farm in Palestine that
“Farms, such as are obtainable in America, do not come [o]n the market
in Palestine. The usual procedure, for anyone who wishes to take up country life, is to buy a piece of ground and start from the beginning, building the house and preparing the ground, according to his own plans."^{35}

In the early 1920s in Palestine there were only a handful of private estates. These were found in the coastal zone, particularly in the vicinity of Jaffa in the form of bayyarat (sing. bayyara—Arabic for watered orchard). No American private estates have been identified, though limited information and obscure references are available regarding the ownership of citrus plantations and other tracts in existing settlements by individual Americans. Ownership of private property is usually poorly documented in institutional repositories, and thus the descriptions are scanty and quite incomplete. Nonetheless, there are allusions to the private ownership and development of tracts consisting of a few thousand dunams of land.

For example, according to a 1932 article in the *Palestine and Near East Economic Magazine*, "The noted American Zionist worker, Mrs. Archibald Silverman, is reported to have decided to settle in Palestine and has acquired 180 dunams of orange-grove near Rishon LeZion, which will be planted next spring." Ida M. Silverman was vice-president of Hadassah, the Zionist Organization of America, and Young Judaea. Despite this report, Mrs. Silverman did not settle in Palestine. {^36}

Another non-settler was Zionist activist Samuel C. Lamport of New York, who owned 145 dunams in Kfar Saba. In 1929 he entered into negotiations with the Yakhin company for planting and maintenance. Eventually the lands were sold and developed into a neighborhood bearing Lamport’s name. {^37}

Private American investors also included Isaac Sacks, the owner of the Meshi textile and Argeman dyeing factories in Ramat Gan. Sacks (see chapter 10) purchased 450 dunams of orchards in the vicinity of Nes Ziona and Petah Tikvah. His expenses comprised £P46,200 for orange groves purchased from the Palestine Jewish Colonization Association, £P1,300 for transfer fees, £P5,000 for improvements, and £P20,000 in agricultural land. The purchase of these lands represented Sacks’s attempt at diversification: during the 1930s, the groves provided an income that subsidized his industrial endeavors. During World War II, with the interruption of marine transportation between Palestine and its European markets, the citrus industry collapsed. {^38}

Similarly, Samuel S. Bloom of Philadelphia, the owner of the American Porcelain Tooth Manufacturing Company (see chapter 10), invested in agriculture as well as industry. He purchased land for orange groves near Karkur, Bnai Brak, and in the Sharon near the site of a later settlement, Even Yehuda. {^39}

Another diversified investor was Meir Shapira, who was born in Lithuania in 1884 and immigrated to America in 1898. In the early 1920s, he settled
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in Tel Aviv, bringing with him a large amount of capital—approximately $950,000. Initially his investing activity focused on the urban real estate market in Tel Aviv, but in 1930 he extended his interest to rural areas. Shapira entered into an agreement to purchase 800 dunams at Latrun from the Trappist monastery. Envisioning this as an opportunity to develop a settlement between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, he intended to name it the Shapira Brothers Village. However, only 148 dunams were transferred to Shapira. He began legal proceedings over the transfer of additional land, and eventually the Supreme Court in London ordered the monastery to relinquish another 100 dunams to Shapira.

Zvi Arieh Binenfeld, also an American, was involved in negotiations for the purchase of land in the Judean Mountains between Bethlehem and Hebron. In 1934 he signed a contract for 3,300 dunams of musha land in the village of Nahalin with the promise of an additional 6,000 dunams. The price was £P7 per dunam—£P23,000 altogether. Binenfeld paid out £P12,000 and received a kushan for 441 dunams of musha land. The actual area was 1,762 dunams, however, because the kushan was issued during the Ottoman period when the villagers attempted to avoid taxes by registering a much smaller area. It is not clear what motivated Binenfeld—whether he wished to assist in the founding of an agricultural settlement for a group of Gur Hasidim or purchased the land solely for the sake of investment. Binenfeld passed away in the late 1930s without completing the transaction or settling ownership claims.

Binenfeld’s heirs offered this land to the Jewish National Fund in 1940. They were willing to absorb a substantial loss and receive payment over five years. Funding for this purchase came from the Nahalat Herzog Project, which the American Mizrachi organization had organized months earlier. This $100,000 campaign, launched in Baltimore in May 1940, honored Palestine’s Chief Rabbi Isaac Halevi Herzog. In the end, the money was used to secure another tract in the area, the site of the settlement Mesuat Itzhak. The Binenfeld lands and others tracts at Nahalin were transferred to the Jewish National Fund in 1947.

Information on other purchases by Americans is even more scanty and less reliable. Far more numerous than the actual purchases by American Jews were the proposals and plans for such. Before the opening of the tabu (land registry) in 1920 there was a race to organize the purchase of lands, particularly in the vicinity of Tel Aviv-Jaffa. Marcus Eastman, the American Zion Commonwealth representative, listed seven organizations active in 1920. Of the seven, one had a distinct American connection, at least in name. According to Eastman’s report, the Society of English and American Jews in Palestine—a registered organization—had thirty-five members. Their number, according to Eastman’s communiqué, increased at every meeting. The society wanted to purchase 100 parcels of land for a total
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of 1,000 dunams. Additional information about this organization has not been located.

Private American initiatives represented between 5 to 10 percent of American land purchases in Palestine in the period between the two World Wars. These purchases varied from small sections of larger settlement initiatives to tracts in the thousands of dunams. They also represented various points on a broad spectrum between fantasy and reality. Some purchasers were wholly unrealistic, while others regarded Palestine as a serious investment and took every measure to insure their success. Lack of available information has restricted the study of these private projects. Nonetheless, it is evident that they represent the diversity of American Jewry. These projects reflect attitudes based on a variety of ideological approaches, diverse regional origin, and different levels of business acumen.