

## Traveling with Jewish Taste

### Always Something Going On in Northern New Jersey

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



Joel and I love to visit friends and family in the northern New Jersey area even though we have no family history there, because we always find something to do.

Jews have been an established presence in New Jersey since the middle of the 19th century, but even as early as the 17th century, Jewish merchants from nearby New York and Philadelphia plied their trade there. Today, approximately 300,000 Jews call northern New Jersey home. The state boasts the country's fourth largest Jewish population.

If you are interested in history, a good place to start your visit is the Jewish Historical Society of North Jersey, located in the Barnert Medical Arts Center in Patterson.

There you will find manuscript collections, personal and family papers, organizational records, and collections that include music, photographs, postcards, oral histories, and even high school yearbooks.

On another historical front is the factory complex of inventor and industrialist Thomas Edison. Since we first visited his Fort Meyers, FL winter estate, I have been in awe of the man's amazing creativity and productivity. The Florida house and lab are set amid a garden of plants and trees that the inventor imported expressly to exploit for medicinal and other uses. Inside are shelves arrayed with inventions in various stages of completion, including the light bulb. Edison was constantly inventing, even during his supposed winter vacation.

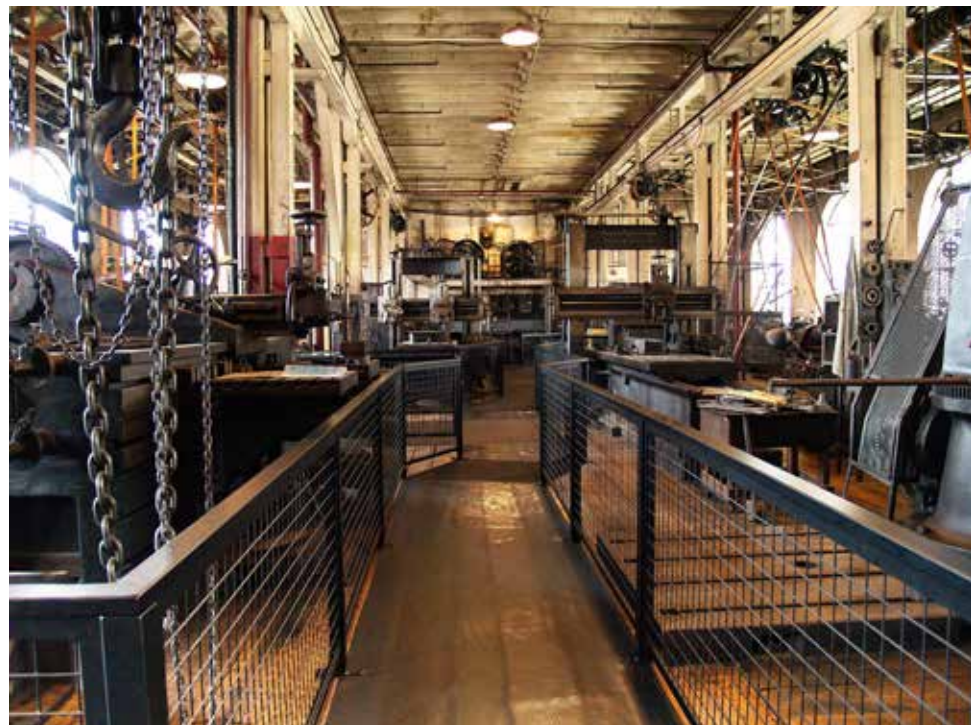
It wasn't until I saw Mark St. Germain's stage play, *Camping With Henry and Tom*, that I learned about Edison's relationship with the Jewish people. American naturalist and essayist John Burroughs was a regular attendee at the annual camping trips organized by the notoriously anti-Semitic Henry Ford, and while there, he took notes on the proceedings and discussions. Burroughs left out the worst of Ford's anti-Semitic tirades when he published his books, but what he did include is damning enough.

While some historians say there is little evidence that Edison himself was anti-Semitic, his friendship with Henry Ford, a virulent Jew hater, indicates that he was at the very least a passive listener, if not condoner, of the industrialist's bigoted speech and behavior.

Author Neil Baldwin, in writing about Edison, quotes from Burroughs's journals. He states that while the inventor was not nearly as nasty and strident as his close friend Ford, he most definitely expressed anti-Semitic sentiments. While giving credit to Jews for their accomplishments in the arts and literature, science, and music, he wrote: "While there are some terrible examples in mercantile pursuits, the moment they get into art, music, science and literature, the Jew is fine." He had mixed feelings about Jewish "cunning" in business. Regarding enormous German industrial productivity, he wrote, "dig up a Jew who furnished the ability and *that* made them



Jacob Landau's *Kingdom of Dreams* (1969)



Machine shop at Thomas Edison National Historic Park



Glatt Kosher BBQ chickens at Smokey Joe's in Teaneck

a success." But, he continued, "I wish they would all quit making money."

More evidence of Edison's proclivities is given by author Paul Auster, who wrote in his book *The Invention of Solitude* that his father had worked "for a brief moment" as an assistant in Edison's library "only to have the job taken away from him the next day because Edison learned he was a Jew."

So, it was with mixed feelings that on our most recent visit to New Jersey, Joel and I went to visit the Thomas Edison factory in West Orange, now a National Historic Monument smack dab in the heart of what is now a very Jewish enclave. Again, we were awed by the prolific nature of the man as we viewed room after room filled with his inventions, representing his astounding 1,100 patents. At the same time we pondered the contrast between the man in possession of a large library and an expansive, prolific mind, with the same man who hated Jews.

In fact, Edison's most successful competitors – in the phonograph and movie-making businesses – were Jews, so despite his outsize success and wealth, he developed the age-old habit of demeaning and denouncing those who had bested him, even if only on occasion.

Congregation Ahavas Sholom, a state and national historic landmark and the oldest continually active synagogue in Newark, is the home of the Jewish Museum of New Jersey. A special exhibition of paintings, "Jacob Landau and His Circle," will be on display from October 12th through December 7th. The show will also feature works by artists who studied under him, including Eleta Caldwell, Gladys Grauer, Joanne Leone, Jack McGovern, and Myron Wasserman.

Landau has an interesting background. Although born in Philadelphia, he lived and worked the majority of his life, according to the museum's publicity, "in a utopian agrarian and industrial cooperative established during the Great Depression by garment workers from New York City. There he worked closely with noted social realist painters such as Ben Shahn and Gregorio Prestopino."

On another artistic note is The Montclair Film Festival, an annual event whose mission "celebrates our region's diverse community and robust artistic heritage." Their slogan, "Like Sundance, Only Jersier," appears on hats and T-shirts and is emblematic of a proud, in-your-face New Jersey attitude.

One thing you won't have to worry about in visiting the northern New Jersey area is finding a kosher restaurant. Not only is there an abundance of eateries, some are downright great. On our most recent visit, we went with friends to Smokey Joe's Tex-Mex Barbeque in Teaneck, which claims to be "the first authentic, wood-fired, slow-cooked, pit smoked Glatt Kosher BBQ restaurant in the US of A." In addition to an extensive menu (heavy on the beef, but hey, when do you get to eat meat out?), the restaurant makes the hands-down best corn bread I have ever eaten. The owner would not, unfortunately, divulge his recipe.

Carol Goodman Kaufman is a psychologist and author with a passion for travel and food. She is currently at work on a food history/cookbook, tracing the paths that some of our favorite foods have taken from their origins to appear on dinner plates and in cultural rites and artifacts around the world. She invites readers to read her blog at [carolgoodmankaufman.com](http://carolgoodmankaufman.com) and to follow her on Twitter @goodmankaufman.

### Soul-Warming Tomato Soup

Adapted from one by Michael Chiarello

New Jersey is well known as the Garden State for a reason, growing vast quantities of delicious produce, including tomatoes. While botanically a fruit, tomatoes are widely known and used as a vegetable and are, in fact, designated as the state vegetable. Because they are grown so close to their distribution network, they are allowed to mature to their full, juicy and flavorful red-ripeness. However, now that winter is upon us, we are forced to choose between the pale supermarket tomato and its canned cousin. I prefer the deep red and flavorful canned tomatoes to make this soup that will warm you up on a cold Berkshire night.

#### Ingredients:

1 14-oz. can chopped tomatoes  
 ¼ c. extra virgin olive oil  
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper  
 1 stalk celery, diced  
 1 small carrot, diced  
 1 yellow onion, diced

2 cloves garlic, minced  
 1 c. pareve chicken broth  
 1 bay leaf  
 2 T. butter  
 ¼ c. chopped fresh basil leaves  
 ½ c. whole milk

#### Directions:

Preheat oven to 450 degrees F.

Strain the chopped canned tomatoes, reserving the juices.

Spread the tomatoes onto a baking sheet, season with salt and pepper, drizzle with ¼ cup of the olive oil.

Roast until caramelized, about 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, in a saucepan, heat remaining olive oil over medium-low heat.

Add the celery, carrot, onion, and garlic and cook until softened, about 10 minutes.

Add the roasted chopped canned tomatoes, reserved tomato juices, chicken broth, bay leaf and butter.

Simmer until vegetables are very tender, about 15 to 20 minutes.

Add basil and milk.

Puree with a hand-held immersion blender until smooth.

Enjoy! Serves 4