

Passover in Camp: A Reminiscence of the Civil War

The following description of an improvised seder during the Civil War comes from the reminiscences of J. A. Joel, written in 1866 in the *Jewish Messenger*:

In the commencement of the war of 1861, I enlisted from Cleveland, Ohio, in the Union cause. . . . While lying there, [in the mountains of West Virginia] our camp duties were not of an arduous character, and being apprised of the approaching Feast of Passover, twenty of my comrades and co-religionists . . . united in a request to our commanding officer for relief from duty, in order that we might keep the holydays, which he readily acceded to. Our business was to find some suitable person to proceed to Cincinnati, Ohio, to buy us *matzos* [sic]. We were anxiously awaiting to receive our [maz-zot] and about the middle of the morning a supply train arrived in camp, and to our delight seven barrels of *matzos*. On opening them, we were surprised and pleased to find that our thoughtful sutler had enclosed two Hagodahs [sic!] and prayer-books. We were now able to keep the [seder] nights, if we could only obtain the other requisites for that occasion. We obtained two kegs of cider, a lamb, several chickens and some eggs. We had the lamb but did not know what part was to represent it at the table; Yankee ingenuity

prevailed, and it was decided to cook the whole and put it on the table, then we could dine off it, and be sure we had the right part. The necessities for the *choroutzes* [sic] we could not obtain, so we got a brick which, rather hard to digest, reminded us, by looking at it, for what purpose it was intended. Horseradish or parsley we could not obtain, but in lieu we found a weed, whose bitterness, I apprehend, exceeded anything our forefathers "enjoyed." The herb was very bitter and very fiery, like cayenne pepper, and excited our thirst to such a degree, that we forgot the law authorizing to drink



3607-1876

CHOICE GROCERIES FOR PASSOVER,

פסח

AT D. BEHRMAN'S NEW STORE,
172 BOWERY
Opposite Delancy Street, NEW-YORK

Which will be Superintended by L.M. RITTERBAND.

The subscriber begs to inform you, that he has made the necessary arrangements for the ensuing holydays, and will keep a full assortment of Groceries, also, every other article suitable for the occasion; and guarantees the same to be of the most superior quality, and at the lowest market prices, delivered free of expense to any part of the city. The goods will be ready for sale on the 8d of April, to which the subscriber respectfully solicits your custom.

D. BEHRMAN,
 172 BOWERY, Opposite Delancy Street.

Orders received immediately if required.

פסח פסח In Hebrew and English For Sale.

Groceries für nos.

Der Unterzeichnete eröffnet am 8ten April seine Niederlage von Groceries, von besser Qualität für die zukünftigen Festtage nos, unter der Aufsicht von L. M. Ritterband.

Es wird alles zum billigsten Preise verkauft und kostenfrei zu irgend einem Theil der Stadt gefahrt.

D. Behrman,
 172 Bowery, gegenüber Delancy Street.

Orders werden fest angenommen wenn man es verlangt.

JACKSON, Cheap Printer, 108 Houston Street, and 203 Bowery.

only four cups, and the consequence was we drank up all the cider. Those that drank the more freely became excited, and one thought he was Moses, another Aaron, and one had the audacity to call himself a Pharaoh. The consequence was a skirmish, with nobody hurt, only Moses, Aaron and Pharaoh, had to be carried to the camp, and there left in the arms of Morpheus.

There, in the wild woods of West Virginia, away from home and friends, we consecrated and offered up to the ever-loving God of Israel, our prayers and sacrifice.

Matzah on Both Sides of the Conflict

Another Union soldier, Myer Levy of Philadelphia, wrote his family that he was strolling through the streets of a Virginia town and noticed a little boy sitting on the steps of a house, eating matzah. When he asked the boy for a piece, the child fled indoors, shouting at the top of his lungs, "Mother! There's a damn Yankee Jew outside!" The boy's mother came out immediately and invited the soldier to the seder.

As we can see, Jewish soldiers on both sides of the conflict had to go out of their way to obtain matzah.

Until the 1840s, American Jews would buy matzah directly from their synagogues; there special committees were given the job of shaping them by hand into round or rectangular forms. As bakeries went into the matzah business in the mid-1800s, observant Jews wrote to the chief rabbi of Gleiwitz in Prussia to inquire whether it was lawful to use machinery to manufacture matzah. His affirmative response was published in the New York *Asmonean* on February 28, 1851.

Because of the lack of religious unity, advertisements appeared in the Jewish press throughout the country proclaiming the kashrut of one matzah over another.

After the Civil War many food businesses sprang up, including matzah bakers. In the early 1800s, Augustus Goodman, the scion of a family of matzah bakers in Posen, Poland, settled in Washington, D.C., where he became a baker for the Union Army. In 1865 he moved to Philadelphia where he opened a bakery which eventually became A. Goodman & Sons, Inc.

After the Civil War, editorials appeared in the Jewish press encouraging northerners to forget their ill feelings towards the south and provide their Jewish brethren there, many of whom had lost everything, with matzah for the seder.