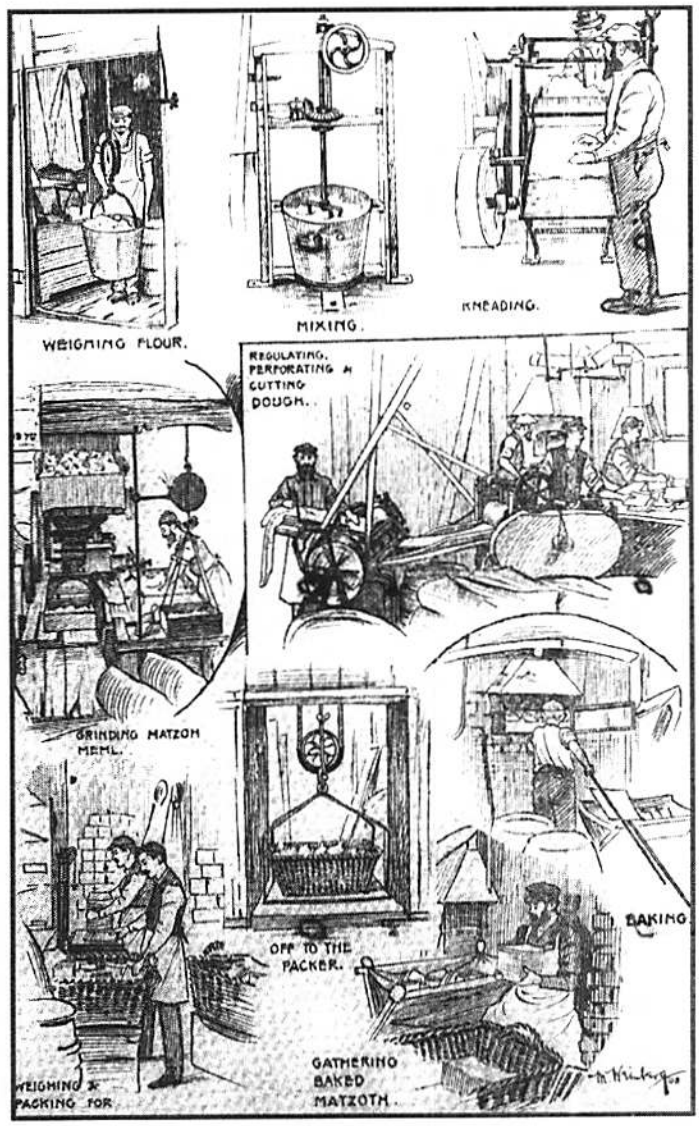
By 1950, *The New York Times* was running matza stories. On March 23, the newspaper disclosed that "Macy's, which has the largest Passover food department in the country, stocks four brands of matza, ranging in price from 24 cents for 12 ounces to 1.24 cents for 5 lbs. In the USA this year, 12,000,000 lbs of matza will be consumed. If laid one next to the other, the matza would stretch for 21,000 miles."

To end on a personal note: there a story about my grandfather, Rabbi Tobias Geffen of Atlanta, Georgia, and the redeeming power of matza. Shortly before Pessah 1933, my grandfather received a letter from an inmate of Reidsville Prison, which ran one of Georgia's most notorious chain gangs. The prisoner requested matza and a haggada since "this would be the first Pessah I am away from home."

My grandfather's response was immediate. He sent his unlikely correspondent a Pessah package, along with a letter asking him more about himself. He also asked his attorney son to inquire about the prisoner. They learned that the young man had been a bookkeeper in the north-eastern US. With jobs scarce because of the Depression, he had hitchhiked south hoping to earn money to send back to his family. In Carolina, however, he had been picked up by bank robbers, and taken hostage. They — and he — were arrested by the State Police as they crossed into Georgia, tried, convicted and sentenced to the chain gang.

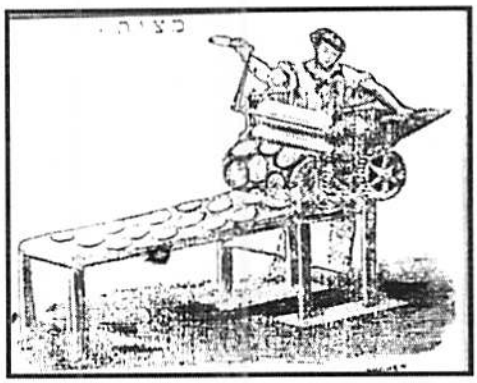
Convinced of the young man's innocence, my grandfather began working for his release. Rejected by the Pardons Board, the rabbi turned to Georgia State Governor Eugene Talmadge. Among his arguments for the prisoner's release was the request for matza, a demonstration, said my grandfather, of character and religious feeling. Over the vehement objections of his advisors, the governor freed the prisoner in what was dubbed a Matza Pardon.

By 1908, a New York bakery, housed in a Lower East Side tenement, was turning out an annual 2 million lbs of matza. The step-by-step process was sketched by English immigrant Mark Weinberg, and ran as a full-page illustration in *The American Hebrew*.



Matza was firmly in the mainstream, at least in the USA. In the 1880s, the non-Jewish mayor of Wilmington, Delaware, was advertising "Matzos Passover Bread" to its fewer than 100 Jewish families in *Every Evening*, the local paper. *Every Evening*'s headline of March 26 1888 declared: "Matzos and Peculiar Observances of Today." The paper noted: "Celebration of the Jewish Passover commenced at 10.30 o'clock this morning. The head of each household has taken care to provide himself with an eight days' stock of unleavened bread... This is in the form of large, thin, wafer-like biscuits, somewhat resembling sailor biscuits, about 10 inches in diameter and one-sixteenth of an inch thick. They are manufactured in Philadelphia, and sent here in long rolls of 60 or 100 in each package. They are called matzos and are made without leaven or yeast. They are entirely tasteless, being composed of flour and water."

"Our Father in heaven, Behold it is evident and known to Thee that it is our desire to do Thy will and celebrate the festival of Pessah by eating matza and observing the prohibition of *hametz*. But our heart is pained that the enslavement prevents us and we are in danger of our lives. Behold we are prepared and ready to fulfill Thy commandment: 'And ye shall live by them, and not die by then.' Therefore our prayer to Thee is that Thou mayst keep us alive and preserve us and redeem us speedily so that we may observe Thy statutes and do Thy will and serve Thee with a perfect heart. Amen."



The first major change in thousands of years of the matza production came with the invention of the matza machine in 1850. "It is something like a washer-wringer," reads a contemporary description, "and all that it practically does is roll out the roughly kneaded dough. The long strip is then cut into cakes with a big circular cutter used rapidly by hand — the same power, by the way, used for turning the rollers of the wringer." There was an initial hesitancy about using the new device, but once Britain's Chief Rabbi assured American Jews that machine-baked matza was acceptable, matza machines began appearing in the New World.

prayer books. We were now able to keep the Seder nights, if we could only obtain the other requisites for the occasion."

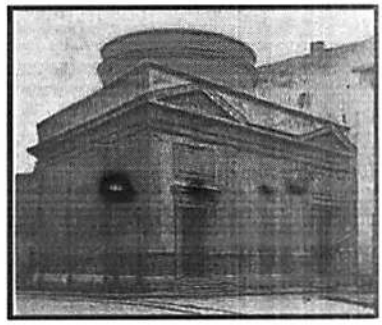
With Yankee ingenuity, they foraged two kegs of cider, a lamb, several chickens and some eggs. For the bitter herbs, they found a weed "whose bitterness exceeded anything our forefathers enjoyed." Unable to find any of the ingredients for "choroutzes," they chose a compelling replica. "We got a brick, which was rather hard to digest, but by looking at it reminded us for what purpose it was intended." On that Seder night of 1862 in the wilds of West Virginia, the matza the only fully legitimate ingredient!

Another soldier in search of matza was one of the thousands conscripted from Russia's large Jewish population for the Russo-Japanese War. "On arriving at Harbin [China] on *erev* Pesach in March 1905 at 2 p.m., we still had to eat *hametz* and did not expect to see matzas," he wrote. "Where could they come from?... All at once I heard our captain calling: 'Jews! Jews!' I leapt up, frightened, and ran to the officer as fast as I could. But what a welcome surprise! He gave me a 4 lb-box of matza, saying it was for the Jews in our company. There were 13 of us, and we sought out a quiet place where we could celebrate Seder. We couldn't do this in the soldiers' wagon, as our Christian comrades had their bread everywhere. After much begging, we were granted a corner in the horse wagon, where the captain gave us hay and straw to sit on."

For those who were not soldiers but nonetheless caught up in war, this prayer survives, written by World War II concentration camp prisoners without access to matza, and uncertain when Pessah fell.

perhaps it was based on Exodus 12:xxxix, which talks of *oogot mata — oogot* meaning both cakes and circles.

One busy and well-known medieval matza bakery was beneath the synagogue at Carpentras, a half-hour drive from Paris. Built in 1367, the synagogue is France's oldest and its bakery produced matza for centuries — until 1789. In that year, France's Revolutionary leaders demanded that the shul turn o for mixing matza dough. The pans, duly delivered, Tl munitions.



The synagogue at Carpentras, Jewish

Jewish communities usually provided their members with matza each Pessah. In 1819, for example, the three trustees of the She'arith Yisrael congregation contracted 120 lbs of matza to be baked, at a cost of $8.22, for synagogue members and those living in nearby communities. One of those three trustees was grandfather to Emma Lazarus.

Those who were away from their home communities had to fend for themselves. Joseph Joel of Cleveland, Ohio, was one. A soldier in the Yankee army, he was stationed at Fayette, Virginia, in the winter and spring of 1861/2. With Pessah approaching, he and fellow Jews in the Buckeye State's 23rd regiment obtained their commander's permission to send the suttler to Cincinnati "to buy matzos."

"We were anxiously awaiting to receive our matzos," Joel wrote, "and about the middle of the morning, *erev* Pessah, a supply train arrived in the camp with, to our delight, seven barrels of matzos. On opening them, we were surprised and pleased to find that our thoughtful suttler had enclosed two Haggadas and

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MATZA STORIES

by David Geffen

Today they are as accessible as the local grocery. You can find them traditional, whole-wheat and lo-cal, dipped in chocolate and made with honey, large and small, square and circular, handmade, machine-made and in giant economy packs. Matza has traveled a long way from the unleavened dough that baked on the backs of our forefathers as they left Egypt, its history reflecting that of the people for whom it's an essential food one week in every year.

Early matzas were often decorated, adorned with the shapes of doves, animals and flowers, with some even baked in the form of chains to evoke the Egyptian bondage. This was ended by the rabbis of Talmud times. The ornamentation and extra thickness could delay the baking process, they judged, thus allowing fermentation which would make the matza *hametz*. Other than in some North African Jewish communities where matza is so thick it must be crumbled before it can be eaten, thin and unembellished became the rule, the dough perforated with a toothed roller to ensure against its rising in the oven. Drawings of medieval matza bakeries show the roller and other tools used. The only differences in these bakeries across Europe are in the clothes worn by the workers. The matza was made in much the same way.

Matza made in medieval bakeries was circular, as it always had been and would continue to be until the 19th century. Perhaps this was for ease of preparation, or