

SUMMARY

Saul Sorrin was born on July 6, 1919, in New York City. He was educated at the City College of New York and worked the Procurement Division of the Treasury Department. He was recruited to work for the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Agency (UNRRA) while in Washington, DC, and was sent to Europe because of his ability to speak Yiddish. He served as UNRRA director and field supervisor of displaced persons camps in the United States zone of occupation in Germany from 1946 to 1950.

The displaced persons (DP) camp he was assigned to was Neu Freimann in Munich, very close to Dachau. There were 3,000 residents in the camp. Many came from Dachau, others had been laborers in the nearby town of Mittenwalde, others had been Russian prisoners of war (POW's). He was responsible for integrating these people into a camp, and creating a system for assigning room, distributing food, clothing and blankets, and medical care. He was able to staff the camp with devoted international personnel. He set up a religious office that provided space and rabbis for different ethnic synagogues, a meekvah (facility for religious bath) and other religious requirements.

With his knowledge of the requirements of immigration, friendship with officials, and sympathy with the plight of the refugees, he devised and supported ways for refugees to get visas to go to the United States and Israel. He worked very closely with the Jewish agencies -- Joint Distribution Committee, HIAS, the Jewish Agency for Palestine, which processed applications to the United States and Palestine. Sometimes he risked being fired for using UNRRA trucks for unauthorized missions, that made it possible for Jews to get to embarkation points, such as Muehlhausen and Geretzreid.

In 1947, Neu Freimann was closed, and Saul was transferred to Fahrenwalde, where he served as director for about a year. He set up what he called a primitive justice system. He listened to the evidence and decided whether to dismiss the case, or get together and settle, submit the case to the rabbinic court. There was general agreement that the verdicts reached would be obeyed.

There were many marriages and births. Saul was able to convince the military authorities to allow them to continue using a hospital and railroad spur. Before currency reform there was a thriving black market, that was run by Jews and others that lived in the community. The existence of the black market was frowned upon by the United States government and investigations were held. However, with currency reform there was no longer a need for a black market.

The camp organized itself so that they published newspapers representing different movements within Zionism, and different points of view. People wrote about their experiences, and it was published by an arrangement with German printing firms. Saul had a theater built, and a wide variety of plays were presented.

Saul left in 1950, and was shocked to learn that it did not close until 1957.