

# Chelm's First Skyscraper

By Philip Fishl Kutner

It will be a towering THREE-story building, and loft over every other one in the shtetl. It will be the professional building. Only professionals will be permitted to rent space.

The original proposal for this project came from; the Leybl Lubinitsky Construction Company of Lublin. Leybl himself made a presentation before the Chelm Council. He presented a huge model with pretty landscaping of fruit trees and barns for the animals.

Everyone was really impressed when Leybl told them how much rent they could collect from the professionals. With all the money each councilman could get a raise.

The first problem arose when someone asked where will the skyscraper be located. Leybl said, "Of course it will be in the Chelm Central Square."

"Oh, no," said Moishe, "That is where the we have the Farmer's Market every Friday."

"That's no problem" said Leybl, "We'll make the building smaller and just go up to FOUR floors."

There was a sudden hush, for no one could imagine a tower like that in Chelm. So there was no more objections and all of the councilmen were thinking ahead about what they would do with all the extra money they would receive.

## The "Specs" of the *volkenkratser* (Skyscraper)

The specifications for the *volkenkratser* called for innovations that the Chelemers only could imagine in their dreams. There would be a hand-operated elevator lift to take the people to the upper floors. This would also be the dumb-waiter. All the food, furniture, people and garbage would be lifted up or taken down without having walking stairs! There was no need for a staircase. Since a lift takes less space than a staircase, there would be more room for rentals—and more money for the councilmen

A second innovation was automatic running water on call all the time. There would be a large water tower on the rood of the *volkenkratser*. Naturally the water would be lifted to the water tower by the hand-operated elevator.

"Who will bring the water to the *volkenkratser* and who will lift the water to the tower?" said Velvl der Vaser Treger.

"Of course you will," replied Mayer the Mayor. "You are used to carrying water from the river to everyone's home. Now that your six sons are growing up, they will have plenty of work carrying the water and lifting the elevator. You will be a rich man."

Finally, Shimon the Shames raised the last hurdle to be overcome. "Who is going to rent all this *volkenkratser* space and pay all this money?"

Leybl knew the astute Chelemers would raise this question. So he had a ready reply. "The professionals in Chelm will jump at the chance to rent space in this newest building with all the prestige that goes with it."

Leybl continued and said, "Now that Velvl will be making so much money with his six sons carrying the water to the *volkenkratser* water tower, he will be the major renter. In fact he will have the entire fourth floor."

Velvl's wisest and eldest son, Kluger, said, "Tate, when a farmer's horse, cow or goat strays away and everyone goes looking for it, there is much time lost. They could go to the top of the *volkenkratser* and look over dem gegnt (the countryside) and see for miles around. We would charge them a tenth the value of the animal.

Another Chelemer Councilman and professional, Shneyer the Shnyder stood up and announced, I will rent space only if it is on the ground floor. When the women come to market, they want to look their best. Since I am near the marketplace, they will come in, and my business will grow and grow."

Dear reader, when you visit Chelm today and get off the train, go directly to the Chelm Center Square. You will see the *volkenkratser* still standing, but it is empty.

Since there was no specs for a staircase built in the original design and since Velvl and his sons have long since left Chelm for America, no one is willing to do the heavy work of manning the pulleys to lift the elevator.

This is a wonderful opportunity for a small sum of money to install a modern lift and occupy the center of Chelm. The NYBC, YIVO and the Workmen's Circle could each take a floor.