

# Chelm Gets A Landsmanshaft

By Philip Fishl Kutner

To this very day no one really knows how the news was leaked—but leaked it was. *The Chelm Freiheit* headline read:

## CHELM TO GET A LANDSMANSAHFT

After an all night meeting, the CCCCCC (The Central Coordinating Council of Chairmen of Chelm Clubs) had agreed on the wording of a resolution to be presented to the Chelm Shtetl Council—the highest Governing Board of Chelm.

It was agreed 100% that no one would leak the news until the Chelm Shtetl Council first was informed of the resolution—es past nisht.

Was it one of the Chairmen who spoke in his sleep?  
Was it one of the Chairmen who had too much shnaps in shul?

Was it one of the Chairmen who told his wife who swore she would not tell a soul?

Was it the trusted watchman who closed the meeting hall?

Was it the secretary who took the minutes and accidentally left them out?

We may never, ever, know, but it was the talk of the shtetl. It was in each of the shternbucks kavehayzer. Women spoke of nothing else as they hung the Wednesday wash on the clotheslines. Men mumbled after minkhe all about the latest news.

How did this matter ever come to be?  
Why would Chelm want or need a landsmanshaft?  
They asked, "What is a landsmanshaft?"

These were the questions, and discussion swirled all over. Even the kinder in kheyder whispered these questions.

Because Chelm had suddenly been thrust into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, radio, telephone and a visitor had brought news of the outside world. This led to Chelmers visiting nearby Lublin, distant Warsaw and even the planet Amerike on the other side of the Great Ocean.

When the Chelmers returned, they were different, and spread all kind of rumors about what life was like outside of Chelm. They became like foreigners in their own shtetl. They were mocked and were not permitted to attend any of the club meetings or hold office. Soon these *outsiders* banded together for health, cemetery, unemployment, and social benefits. They formed the Chelm Landsmanshaft

At the initial meeting of the newly-formed Chelm Landsmanshaft, it had been agreed unanimously to have all meetings transacted in the language of their folks—Yiddish. Polish, Russian, Ukrainian, German, French or even English could be used for the rare need to cuss.

After debate concluded on the writing of a constitution and the bylaws for the first Chelm Landsmanshaft, it further was decided that on the shtetl outskirts they would build a beautiful meeting place—the CCC (Chelm Country Club).

Then attention turned to how they would raise the large sum of money needed to purchase the land and build Chelm Landsmanshaft's own Chelm Country Club.

Abie the Accountant turned to Lemke the Lawyer and asked, "Can we incorporate and get a 999c non-profit status." Lemke responded that 999c was for a not for profit status, but that an 888c could be used for no-profit status, but it would necessitate that all of the wives needed to agree to be held responsible for any of the unpaid debts created by the men of the Landsmanshaft.

It was decided not to go for a 999c or even an 888c status. Since the Landsmanshaft would be for men only, another form would be needed that would permit them to get the best return on their fundraising. Shmuel the shoykhet/shatkhn who also was the shtot mohel came up with the brilliant idea of having the wives form their own CLA (Chelm Landsmanshaft Auxiliary). Its sole purpose was to do fundraising to build the Chelm Country Club.

A special secret meeting was held in which the wives of the members of the Chelm Landsmanshaft were invited and Shmuel explained the wonderful mitsve the wives would do if they ran kugel baking parties as fundraisers for the men's Chelm Landsmanshaft building fund. It was further explained that the women could have their own CLA, the men would even allow the CLA to have its meetings at the CCC.

Needless to say the wise women of Chelm did not fall for this ruse; however, on your next visit to Chelm, if you go to the very northeastern edge of the shtetl you will find a sign that says—Future Site of the Chelm Landsmanshaft Country Club.

Every few weeks the sign needs to be straightened out, for the boys use it as a target for their stone-throwing on their way home from kheyder.